

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Keeping Cool in the Crescent

William Tudor was a wealthy Boston lawyer who had studied in the law office of John Adams. After providing Commander-in-Chief George Washington legal advice, he was appointed Judge Advocate General of the Continental Army. But children have a way of not always taking advice from their parents, and William's son, Frederic Tudor, was no different. He spurned the chance to be educated at Harvard (like his father) and embarked upon a life of business when only thirteen years of age.



Frederic Tudor c. 1830 by Francis Alexander

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Frederic Tudor formed the Tudor Ice Company, specializing in shipping ice from New England ponds to Martinique and other ports in the Caribbean. The first ice went from Massachusetts to the tropics and by 1817 to New Orleans. Always devising better ways to insulate his product, the "Ice King's" ships ultimately sailed to Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Tudor's company owned property there, as well as icehouses in Jamaica, Havana, Charleston, Savannah and New Orleans.



Harvesting Ice, Scribner's Monthly, 1875

Tudor ice made its way to New Orleans, after its journey from Boston, from Southwest Pass up the Mississippi River. Southwest Pass has been the main shipping channel in the Mississippi River Delta since the early 1850s. An 1866 announcement in the *Picayune* below mentions "ice consigned to the Tudor Ice Company" on a "bark" from Boston.

SOUTHWEST PASS, July 23.—The revenue cutter Hugh McCulloch went to sea at 9:30 last night. The ships Artesian and Rival went to sea yesterday afternoon, and the schooner Genevra in the forenoon. Arrived this morning and went up in tow, bark Pleiades, thirty-two days from Boston, with a cargo of ice, consigned to the Tudor Ice Company.

Weather fine. Wind southeast, fresh.

Tudor ice was harvested at Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, and Henry David Thoreau had a few things to say about it:

"The sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well ... The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges."

A sip of an iced nineteenth century New Orleans cocktail could surely be a moment most transcendent, i.e., "lying beyond the ordinary range of perception."

Not long after the ice ships the icebox was invented, and with it came the iceman. Some people in New Orleans still say icebox instead of refrigerator, just as they say streetcar instead of trolley. And one of their most beloved characters, Momus Alexander Morgus, lurks in his laboratory above the old city icehouse. New Orleanians also grew fond of mixing ice with sugar to make any number of traditional local frozen concoctions. The historic origins go back to Europe and beyond.



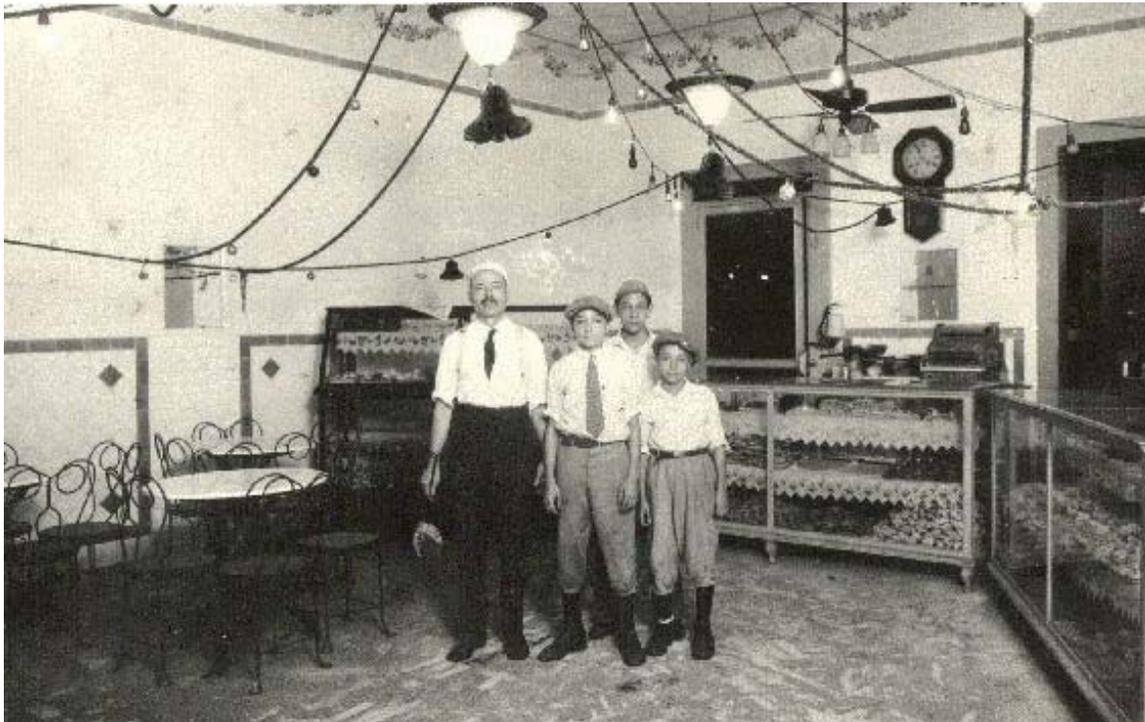
"Morgus the Magnificent" in his laboratory above the old city icehouse

Egyptians had icehouses for shipped ice. Greeks added crushed ice to their wine. Romans did the same to theirs, sending slaves up into the *Alpi Piemontesi* to collect it. Even Nero was said to have savored an early form of ice cream flavored with honey and fruit. Arabs enjoyed a drink called *sharab* (blended from a number of possible fruit, berry or pomegranate syrups, spices and blossoms and water to which was added snow or ice). This word we know today as *sherbet* was called *sorbietti* in Italy. It has long been believed that Catherine de' Medici brought recipes for these ices (and other Italian confections) to France from Italy when she married the Duc d'Orléans (later King Henry, II) in 1533. The first recipe in French didn't appear until 1674, and Louis XIV was a fan. At one of the king's grand *fêtes* in 1704, pink, green, yellow and white *sorbets* were served.

Since great ices and ice creams came from Italy, early ice cream

vendors in this country were of Italian descent. *Hokey pokey* became a slang term for ice cream, either from the Italian *oche poco* ("oh how little"), *hoco uno poco* ("try a little") or *ecce pocce* ("behold, it's cold"). The street vendors became known as *hokey pokey* men. The Crescent City had its own Italian connection, and that brings us to 1905.

In that year both the *popsicle* and the *daiquiri* were invented, and Angelo Brocato opened his first ice cream parlor in New Orleans. Galatoire's began its first year of operation, as well, and at least until the mid-1990s its customers loved the hand-chopped ice prepared for their cocktails. New Orleans would later pioneer marketing via drive-through branches the frozen version of the *daiquiri*, the rum and lime masterpiece created in Cuba by American mining engineers.



Angelo Brocato and Sons, Angelo Jr., Joseph and Rosario (Roy)

Angelo Brocato, of Cefalù, Sicily, was apprenticed from the age of twelve to several Palermo *gelaterias* and pastry shops and learned his trade well. The original Angelo Brocato Ice Cream and Confectionery was opened in 1905 on Decatur Street right off Ursulines, and is today located on Carrollton Avenue in Mid City and run by his grandson. Damaged by floodwaters in Hurricane Katrina, the beloved purveyor of "*Spumone* and *Cassata*" was back in action in 2006. *Spumone* is a molded ice cream, and *cassata* an ice cream cake – each layered.

Angelo's first ice cream was a *torroncino*, a cinnamon and almond flavored ice cream. Today's ices come in wonderful flavors, and Brocato's parlor is nostalgic in its décor and its offerings. Brocato's came years before the natives went wild for K & B's "Creole Cream

Cheese" ice cream. Brown's Velvet (another local brand now owned by Kemp's) continues to make their version of this favorite today.



And then there's that New Orleans original classic, the sno-ball. Once made by hand with ice shavers, sno-balls were covered with any of a number of sweet syrups and provided joy to countless warm weather friends. In 1934, machinist Ernest Hansen invented a more sanitary device than the hand plane shaver. It was his Sno-Bliz machine that didn't crush but shaved the ice. The sno-balls first went on sale for two cents, starting with chocolate and strawberry. Soon the local favorite, nectar, was added. By 1939 he and his wife had a shop on Valmont, and in a few short years they moved to Tchoupitoulas (where Hansen's is today). George Ortolano ran a grocery and perfected his own machine, the "SnoWizard" in 1937.



Everyone in town has their favorite sno-ball stand. There's Williams' on Plum and Burdette where Chinese food containers called "pails" are used to contain the exquisite desserts. There's Sal's on Metairie Road, Pandora's near the Park and Tee-Eva's (with her pralines, savory pies and other "Creole Soul Food") on Magazine. She once sang backup to the late, great Ernie K-Doe. Lakeview fondly recalls Mr. Frank's stand in front of the shoe repair shop on Harrison Avenue. Kids would descend *en masse* after the 25 cent kiddie matinee at "The Beacon" across the street. One could order a "Batman", "Bubblegum" or "Morgus" flavor, and a special metal sleeve went up the cone to give the sno-ball a "flat top" (just like the kids' haircuts of the day). But only out-of town visitors would ever call them sno-cones ... plus local shaved ice was superior.



Flavors galore at William's-Plum Street Sno-Balls

Other local kids loved Hucklebucks (or Huckabucks), frozen Kool-Aid in Dixie Cups. The Dixie-Cups were also the name of a cool and sweet local trio of young ladies that recorded "Chapel of Love", "Iko Iko" and "People Say". Sisters Barbara and Rosa Lee Hawkins and their cousin, Joan Johnson, had a great sound. "People Say" the sounds of New Orleans (like its tastes) are indeed the coolest.





Colorful Huckabucks above, Hansen's below

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