

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Unusual Origins of Popular Dishes

A crabmeat dish popular in New Orleans since the 1920s is still on the menu at restaurants such as Clancy's and Emeril's Delmonico. What is the history of this local favorite?

An enormous bomb composed of roughly one hundred pounds of TNT was placed in an old single-top, horse-drawn wagon and strategically positioned near 23 Wall Street, the offices of J. P. Morgan & Co. Stockbrokers and other clerical workers were departing for noon lunch on September 16, 1920, when the explosion occurred. 500 pounds of weights stacked up around the bomb propelled glass and shrapnel into the crowd. Thirty people died instantly and two hundred lay wounded, of which ten would later die. No one was ever brought to justice for this act of terrorism, but circulars collected from a nearby post box strengthened the suspicion of anarchist terrorists. The circulars read:

"Remember we will not tolerate any longer. Free the political prisoners or it will be sure death for all of you. American Anarchists Fighters."



Aftermath of the September 16, 1920 bombing on Wall Street

World-Telegram photo:

After the explosion, William H. Remick (1866 – 1922), then president of the New York Stock Exchange, suspended trading (the first time in the Stock Market's history that trading was suspended for the day).

New York would experience other acts of terrorism, but not before Mr. Remick was honored with a special culinary creation, popular both in New York and in New Orleans, known as "Crabmeat Remick".

"Crabmeat Remick" was created circa 1920 at the Plaza Hotel in New York by Chef Nestor Lattard. Lattard often named dishes after his customers, such as "Alligator Pear Joseph" and "Eggs Scrambled O'Connor." But this splendid creation was named after William H. Remick, president of the New York Stock Exchange from 1919 to 1921. Served in a ramekin, it contained lump crabmeat with bacon in a mayonnaise-chili sauce, spiced up with Tabasco. Other ingredients often consisted of celery salt, dry English mustard, paprika, pepper and vinegar.

Another historic restaurant in New York was Delmonico's on South William Street in lower Manhattan, founded in the 1830s by John, Peter, and Lorenzo Delmonico (of Switzerland). Famous for offering an *à la carte* menu to lunching businessmen, this eponymous restaurant claims to have invented "Lobster Newburg," "Delmonico steak," "Baked Alaska" (at least the name) and possibly "Chicken à la King". It is also believed that "Eggs Benedict" originated there, but numerous others have professed to be the dish's creator.

A New Orleanian named Anthony Camarda (anglicized to Anthony Commander) is said to have worked at Delmonico's in New York. His father, Pietro Camarda, had come to New Orleans from Ustica in 1852. Anthony's brother Emile founded in 1880 what is today known as Commander's Palace. The turreted Victorian building at the corner of Coliseum Street and Washington Avenue was once home to a saloon and a bordello, but is today an internationally acclaimed restaurant run by one branch of the Brennan family (bought in 1969 by Ella and her siblings Dick, Dottie, Adelaide and John). Mark Twain once dined at Commander's, as well as Delmonico's in New York, entertained in the Garden District restaurant by George Washington Cable.

Anthony Commander (who was working as a bartender at Thomas H. Handy's Sazerac Saloon in 1888) was also proprietor of the Bon-Ton Café at 36 Magazine Street in 1889 and the founder of Delmonico's on St. Charles Avenue in 1895. To use the name of New York's celebrated dining establishment, Delmonico's, Anthony had received permission.



Mark Twain dining at Delmonico's, New York, on his 70th birthday



1889 advertisement for the original Bon-Ton

The Bon Ton had its start in 1877 when Edward Percival Prophet moved his "St. James Saloon" from 42 to 26 Magazine Street and renamed it the "Bon Ton". The LaFranca family later took over the ownership of Delmonico's in 1911, when Anthony Commander sold the restaurant to Anthony LaFranca. When LaFranca's daughters made the decision to sell in 1997, acclaimed chef Emeril Lagasse bought the restaurant, embraced its history, refurbished the place and reopened it as Emeril's Delmonico, still located at 1300 St. Charles Avenue.

The Pontchartrain Hotel in New Orleans began operations in March, 1927. On St. Charles Avenue, it was named for the *comte de Pontchartrain*. Notable guests of the Hotel Ponchartrain included José Ferrer, Rita Hayworth and George H. W. Bush. Playwright Tennessee Williams worked on "Streetcar Named Desire" while a guest at the

hotel. Suites were named for various celebrity guests, such as Richard Burton, Mary Martin, Joan Fontaine, Carol Channing and Helen Hayes.

"Crabmeat Remick" first appeared on the menu at the Pontchartrain Hotel in the 1920s. The Caribbean Room restaurant is also renowned for its "Mile-High Pie" (three types of ice cream layered beneath a thick crown of meringue). According to the intro to Emeril's "Crabmeat Remick" recipe, "attesting to the stylishness and longevity of the dish," it was also "a favorite of the celebrity-filled Stork Club and the Eden Rock in New York" over a half-century ago.

The Syracuse (NY) *Post-Standard* of April 27, 1958, offered "Crabmeat Remick," one of "The Pontchartrain's Best Recipes":

- 1 tablespoon celery salt
- 1 tablespoon dry mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1 quart mayonnaise
- 3/4 cup chili sauce
- 1/2 cup tarragon vinegar
- 1 1/2 pounds cooked crab meat
- 3 slices broiled bacon, halved

Combine celery salt, mustard, paprika. Add to mayonnaise, blend well. Add chili sauce and vinegar, mixing well after each addition. Place crab meat in a 2-quart greased casserole. Bake at 450 degrees F. for 10 minutes. Arrange bacon halves on top. Add sauce. Broil for 5 minutes. Yield: 6 portions. Crab Remick Casserole as we do it here makes a rich and elegant dish for the evening buffet. If it's a luncheon for the "girls," prepare the dish by individual portions in heat-proof pottery bowl. A green tossed salad, please, a foil against the utter richness.

Emeril's recipe for this classic crabmeat appetizer was on the Emeril's Delmonico menu when the restaurant first opened in 1997. "Simple to prepare; it also can be made several hours ahead, refrigerated, and then baked just before serving." It follows:

"Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 teaspoons unsalted butter
- 1 cup homemade mayonnaise, or good quality store-bought mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup chili sauce
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped green onions

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1 teaspoon dry mustard
1 teaspoon tarragon vinegar
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon hot red pepper sauce
1 pound lump crabmeat, picked over for shells and cartilage
7 strips bacon, crisply fried and crumbled
6 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiana-Reggiano
Large croutons, recipe follows, or toast points, accompaniment

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Grease 6 (4-ounce) ramekins with the butter, place on a baking sheet, and set aside.

Combine the mayonnaise, chili sauce, green onions, lemon juice, garlic, mustard, vinegar, paprika, and hot sauce in a large bowl and mix well. Fold in the crabmeat and mix until well coated with the sauce, being careful not to break up the lumps. Divide the mixture among the prepared dishes and top each portion with 1 tablespoon each of the bacon and cheese. Bake until the crabmeat is hot and the cheese is golden brown on top, 8 to 10 minutes.

Carefully transfer the ramekins to six plates and serve immediately with croutons on the side."

Another unusual dish is one still served and sought out in Nashville, Tennessee. It is raved about till this day, created by a transplanted New Orleans chef born in France. His café can be seen in the center of this old photo of Union Street in Nashville. His name was Xavier Faucon and his specialty was the "Faucon salad".



Faucon's Café at 419 Union Street in Nashville, Tennessee

In an article published in the *New York Times*, April 6, 2003, Julia Reed (who was with Bobby Harling, author of "Steel Magnolias") wrote about a dining trip they made to Nashville's Belle Meade Country Club that serves "(the kind of food that doesn't really exist anymore but that used to be found on ocean liners like the Andrea Doria and in hotel restaurants like Washington's late, lamented Jockey Club) spiked with a dose of (black) Southern soul." There, she wrote, "you will find ladies enjoying a cup of vichyssoise and nibbling on a canned pear stuffed with cream cheese and a date-nut-bread finger sandwich, but also scarfing down fried hot-water corncakes dripping with butter." She continued, "Bobby and I ate platefuls of those same fabulous corncakes, along with the Faucon salad (iceberg and romaine lettuce topped with chopped hard-boiled egg, crumbled bacon and homemade 'bleu' cheese dressing)". The "Faucon salad" they enjoyed at the country club in Nashville actually had its birth in New Orleans.

Xavier Francis Faucon (1850 - 1930) was born at Nay-Bourdettes, of the *ancienne commune des Pyrénées-Atlantiques, France*. He arrived in the United States in 1864. He wed his first wife Adèle at New Orleans, and they had six children: Octave Faucon (b. 1876); Leon Paul Faucon (1877 - 1926), Louise Faucon Maumus (1878 - 1962), Adèle Faucon (b. 1879), and Marie Faucon Lucas (d. 1963). Xavier Faucon later married Marie Madeleine Pons (1867 - 1947).

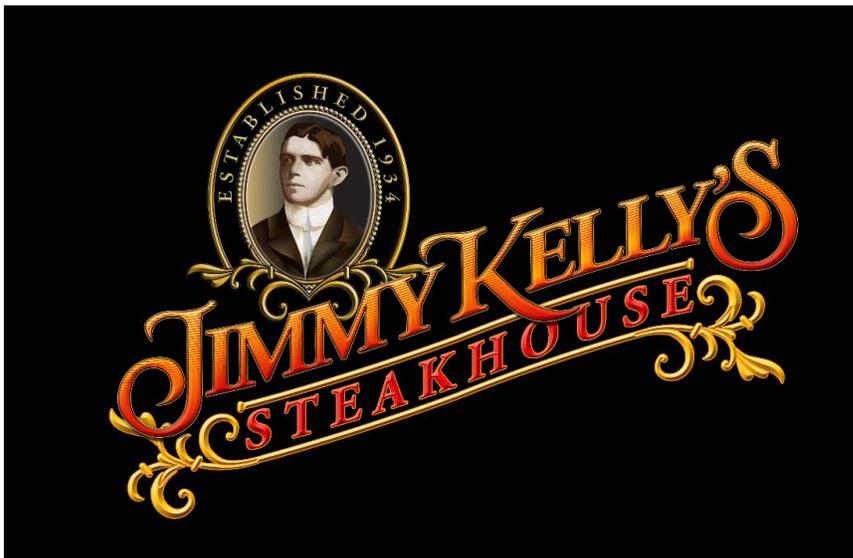
The 1887 New Orleans City Directory lists Paul Faucon as a cook at the Cosmopolitan Restaurant, residing at 96 Ursulines. Xavier Faucon, residing at 441 N. Rampart Street, had an establishment at 134 Canal

Street (with Xavier Faucon and René Lubeug listed as proprietors).

After gaining a reputation as an exceptional cook running a restaurant in New Orleans in the 1880s (he also owned a restaurant in Biloxi, Mississippi), Xavier Faucon moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where he and his son, Leon Paul Faucon, ran a café. People were captivated by the "Faucon salad". It was the dressing's ingredients that were so satisfying. When Leon became ill in 1925, he returned to Biloxi, where he died on January 6, 1926. Xavier left Nashville for Biloxi, as well, retiring in 1926. In a farewell interview with Faucon, it was mentioned that an acquaintance once followed Faucon all day in his restaurant but was unable to uncover the salad's secret.

Back in New Orleans at a recent meeting of the New Orleans Cultural and Culinary Preservation Society (aka Tales of the Cocktail) held at Arnaud's Restaurant on Bienville Street in the French Quarter, Arnaud's Chef Tommy Digiovanni's classic Creole menu included a choice of "faucon salad" or onion soup *en croute*; gulf fish pipérade or roast pork tenderloin with smoked onion and apple marmalade; custard tart; Herbsaint liqueur; and coffee. Kevin Faucon claims his great grandfather was a master chief at Arnaud's restaurant in the 1920s and 30s, or perhaps earlier before moving to Nashville.

Immensely popular in Nashville, the "Faucon salad" is still served there - apparently in only three or four places: J. Alexander's, Jimmy Kelly's (since 1934) and the Belle Meade Country Club. Jimmy Kelly's Steakhouse menu lists "The Original Faucon Salad" as "mixed salty bacon, hard boiled eggs and bleu cheese served on our iceberg lettuce - \$6.75". It is also served at the Cumberland Club, a private club (established 1957) situated atop a Nashville skyscraper (the City Center with a view over the state Capitol).



Jimmy Kelly's Steakhouse, still offering the "Faucon salad"

By 1964, a motivated Junior League member had managed to either obtain the recipe for the salad from Faucon's descendants or imitate the dressing. It appears in the old "Nashville Seasons" Cookbook, attributed to Mrs. Jack Bond:

"Faucon Salad Dressing

1 lemon, juice of
1 cup oil
1 tbsp. vinegar from pickled onions
1 tbsp. Tabasco
1 tbsp. sugar
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 clove garlic
2 hard boiled eggs
1 small green pepper, minced
1/4 lb. Roquefort cheese
2 eggs uncooked lemon, juice of
1 tbsp. mayonnaise, optional
6 Heinz pickled onions

Add oil to uncooked eggs for mayonnaise. Add lemon juice and other seasoning to this mixture. Put toothpick in garlic clove so it can be removed. Mash hard boiled eggs, onions and cheese together. May add 1 tablespoon bought mayonnaise if desired (helps keep it from separating). Let stand 24 hours and then remove garlic."

Seems like removing the garlic is more of a Nashville thing than a New Orleans thing.

On a recent trip to Clancy's, uptown at 6100 Annunciation, corner Webster, we were recommended the "Crabmeat Remick" by waiter extraordinaire Daniel, a "dish made popular at the Pontchartrain," he said. It is truly a wonderful appetizer, perfectly executed there. If only we could have followed it up with a "Faucon salad"!

P. S. Recently, Tom Fitzmorris visited Wayne and Debbie Pierce, owners of the Bon Ton Café and discussed "the true age of the Bon Ton". Tom said, "Apparently the Pierces didn't know, either, until local historian Ned Hemard (who was at Jesuit when I was) found some new artifacts. The most interesting was a newspaper ad for one Commander's Bon Ton, on Magazine Street in the 1890s." The 1889 ad is shown earlier in the article. It was featured in the *Business*

Guide of New Orleans and Vicinity – Baltimore, 1889.

Tom continued, “We knew that Emile Commander was the founder of Commander's Palace, and that his brother opened the original Delmonico. Now we have a third brother running the Bon Ton in the 1890s and beyond. It would change hands in the 1920s (which we thought was when it originally opened), and yet again when Wayne’s uncle Alvin Pierce took it over.”

“That jumps the Bon Ton, said Tom, “ahead of Galatoire’s, Arnaud’s, Broussard’s, Pascal’s Manale, the Acme Oyster House, Casamento’s and perhaps Delmonico for the honor of being the fourth-oldest extant restaurant in New Orleans. (Behind Antoine’s, Tujague’s, and Commander's Palace.)”

According to the evidence (an earlier ad in the *New Orleans Item* dated November 2, 1877), the Bon Ton is actually the third oldest, behind Antoine’s (the oldest) and Tujague’s (the second oldest). Commander’s Palace is no longer in third place. The third brother Tom mentioned is actually the same brother that opened Delmonico’s: Anthony Commander.

Before Alvin Pierce took over the Bon Ton, it was owned and run by master bartender Albert Martin. Legendary mixologist “Trader Vic” learned a great deal from him, writing about Martin in 1946, “His rum cocktails were the finest obtainable.”

Albert Martin invented the signature cocktail of the Bon Ton, the “Rum Ramsey”. You must try one.

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