



**The
CRAYFISH TALE
By TRAPPER ARNE**

**LOUISIANA CRAWFISH
OR
WHAT CAJUNS AND SWEDES HAVE IN COMMON**

Winston Churchill, statesman and historian, once used the term 'The First World War' when referring to the Seven Year War. This war, 1756 – 1763, involved all the major European powers of the period. Among the many combatants were not only England, France and Spain but also Sweden.

France was a colonial power at the time and New France in the Americas included a part in Canada they called Acadia, established in 1604. (Not surprisingly, the name Acadia originated from the Greek Arcadia, an area where mythological nymphs frolicked blissfully while playing flutes and cavorting with each other.) In colonial Acadia, later called Nova Scotia (New Scotland), the French settlers found themselves repeatedly in the middle of conflicts between the British and the French but refused to take up arms for either side and remained staunchly neutral and Roman Catholic.

However, in 1713, France ceded that part of Acadia which is now Nova Scotia, to the British. In 1754, the British government, no longer accepting the Acadian neutrality previously granted, demanded that they take an oath of allegiance to the British monarch. The Acadians did not want to take up arms against family members who were in French territory and believed that the oath would compromise their Roman Catholic faith; so they refused. This led to the mass deportation of the Acadians from their colonial homeland, Acadia.

Before 1755 was over, an estimated 6,000 Acadians - approximately three-quarters of their total population - were rounded up as prisoners and forced onto ships bound for the British American colonies, Europe, and British prisons. Nearly half would die en route. By 1763, over 10,000 Acadians had been deported. Some were shipped as far as the Falkland Islands. The largest single group was returned to France where it was poorly treated and ostracized by French society. Many, however found their way to the French colony of Louisiana.

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a well known poem of this Acadian deportation. He named it Evangeline. That name also lives on as the name of a parish in Louisiana.

The relocated Acadians brought their French roots with them down to Louisiana, which had long been French territory. Unfortunately, when they arrived, they found to their dismay that it had changed hands in 1763, and now belonged to Spain. However, the Spanish authorities welcomed the Catholic Acadians as settlers, first in areas along the Mississippi River, then later in the crayfish rich Atchafalaya Basin and in the prairie lands to the west, a region later renamed Acadiana. During the 19th century, while French speaking Acadians reestablished their roots, the name Acadian finally turned into Cajun.

Among the many cultural traits the Cajuns brought with them were, of course, the love for crayfish, their beloved ecrevisse. The French Acadians had developed a taste

for ecrevisse long before they left their home country France. Apparently there were no fresh water ecrevisse in Acadia. But certainly there were plenty of lobsters, so the Acadians never lacked of crustaceans.

But how come the Acadians, now Cajuns, took so well to the Louisiana crayfish? Folk lore suggests that when the Cajuns left Acadia, the loyal local population of lobsters became so despondent that they also decided to migrate with them down to Louisiana. But the travel was so long and arduous that by the time they arrived to Louisiana's Cajun land, they had shrunk dimly down to the size of the now existing crayfish. Which of course are called crawfish in that part of our land.

In reality, crayfish had existed in Louisiana and other southern states for eons, before anybody ever heard of Cajuns. But the two would meet in the Atchafalya swamp in Louisiana, and here is where Swedes and Cajuns find their common cultural bond of loving crayfish, crawfish or whatever they decide to call them.

Long before the Cajuns started trickling into the Louisiana swamps, local Indians had found that crayfish were another source of food. It is well documented that they used reed sticks baited with deer meat to pull up large amounts of crayfish from the lakes and swamps.

Before long also the newcomers from Canada found that the area was full of these little 'lobsters' and soon they redeveloped their taste for them. By the 1930s, nets were introduced to catch crayfish, and by the 1950s, crayfish traps became common. The taste for crayfish, or crawfish as they are usually called in Louisiana, spread quickly and today, as we all know, Louisiana is well known to be the US center for crayfish farming and crawfish boils.

In 1983, the Louisiana governor approved a law designating the crawfish and alligator the state crustacean and reptile. Louisiana thus became the first state to adopt an official crustacean.

In Louisiana they became officially crawfish, not crayfish. (In Arizona, on the other hand, they are officially named crayfish.)

Over the years, the original Acadiens, the Cajuns, became intermarried with other ethnic groups and the Cajuns of today are not necessarily descendants of those of yesteryear. Some people even use the name 'Cajun' to identify anyone living in Louisiana.

What they all have in common in Louisiana, though, is their love for the crawfish. And this is where the Cajuns and the Swedes agree that they all have something very important in common.

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