

Here we are moving toward the end of another Mardi Gras season. In New Orleans people start celebrating Mardi Gras right after Christmas. But the big parties happen within a couple of weeks of "Fat Tuesday."

Mardi Gras or Carnival has a long history in the American South. It happened that the famous explorers Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and his brother Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville were "looking around" for the mouth of the Mississippi at the end of the 1600's. Their real goal was to establish a French colony in what was to become Louisiana.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March in 1699 – Mardi Gras Day that year – his group made camp on the banks of the Mississippi. They named the place Mardi Gras Point.

The first real Mardi Gras celebration took place in 1703 in Mobile. New Orleans wasn't founded until 1718 and began celebrations after that.

It is interesting that both Iberville and his brother were born in Canada. Their father, Charles Le Moyne, was on assignment there. He had 14 children by the way.

It's also ironic that the older and more experienced Iberville died of yellow fever a few years later in Cuba. His younger brother Bienville went on to be Governor of the Louisiana Territory for many years.

In New Orleans people decorate for Mardi Gras. Wreathes adorn doors and purple, green and gold are all over. Not many of us go down that road. Just in case you don't know, purple symbolizes justice, green faith and gold power.

Where we do go is food and celebration. With that in mind, here are a few special foods that you often see during Mardi Gras. You can have them all year long. But make sure to try one or two this week or next.

Nothing is more traditional than the King Cake. They are made for the Feast of the Three Kings in January and are eaten throughout Mardi Gras.

A King Cake is a brioche cinnamon coffee cake. They are made plain, filled with cream cheese or filled with fruit like apples. The ones we

have at Jimmy's are the cream cheese variety. We get Gambino's in New Orleans to bake them for us and we ice and decorate them here.

The cakes traditionally contain a small statue of a baby. Sometimes it is a bean and maybe both. There are lots of different rewards and obligations for the person getting the baby in their slice.

In any case, King Cakes are a sweet delight so fitting for the Mardi season.

There's no more festival libation than a Hurricane – New Orleans style that is. The key to making that drink is passion fruit purée or syrup. Without that, it's not the real thing.

To make one you mix orange juice, lime juice, passion fruit purée or syrup, sugar syrup and Grenadine. Add light and dark rum. Shake it with ice and pour over more ice. Garnish with an orange slice and a cherry.

The nice thing about a Hurricane is that is good without alcohol, too. Mix up all the other ingredients and add soda or more light sugar syrup or orange juice. You can be the life of the party and not be a bit tipsy.

What about more food? In a piece by WWL-TV's Phil Johnson, he got it right. He said, "Thank God the French got here first. If the Pilgrims had landed in New Orleans, we might be burning witches instead of Café Brulot and eating boiled beef and potatoes instead of Pompano and Gumbo."

Gumbo is truly a great soup or stew. Some is made with seafood and others are not. It's true one-pot cooking. You put in what you have and simmer for a while. Then you taste it and fix what's wrong. You pour it over a little rice and doctor with hot sauce if you like. That's it. And every one of them is good.

Now Pompano is on the fancy side. But it is one of the world's great fishes. You have to be careful with it. We cook the filets in a foil pouch with herbs and seasonings, white wine and butter. When it bakes about 15 minutes, you have beauty on your plate and joy in your mouth.

Jambalaya is another traditional dish. It's a rice dish that usually has chicken, sausage and shrimp in it along with some tomato. Its origins

are rooted in Paella. Just like gumbo, you use what you have and let the rice absorb all those flavors.

Café Brulot is spiced chicory coffee that is spiked with brandy and orange liqueur like Grand Marnier. It's heated with swirls of orange and lemon peels. If you are really good or those Hurricanes have made you think you are, you can ladle the hot liquid over the peels while holding them over a bowl. You light the whole thing and it looks really impressive. Be warned - this is basically one of those "don't try this at home" activities.

You can't talk about Mardi Gras food without mentioning Bread Pudding. This is another one of those put in what you have dishes. Left over bread is mixed with eggs, cream, sugar and cinnamon. Some folks add some spirits, too. You bake it and serve with a sauce of some sort. It probably has some spirits in it as well.

Give a couple of these a try. Make them yourself or go out and order them. I bet I know just the place.