

Breakfast at Brennan's – What's It All About? Jim Sikes for 061909

Most probably many of you have had Breakfast at Brennan's in New Orleans. It is an event – not just a meal. Their three-course offering will set you up for a great day in the city.

Now "breakfast" is a relative term. Brennan's opens at 9. So you won't be having breakfast at a traditional hour. But your meal is going to be more than just breakfast anyway.

Before talking about the food, let's look at Brennan's founder. Owen Edward Brennan founded the restaurant that eventually became known as Brennan's. He was the first in his family to get involved in the restaurant business in New Orleans. Subsequently his family has made a considerable contribution to the restaurant scene in that great food city.

Just like Aimée's dad, Owen Brennan was born in the Irish channel in New Orleans. That fiery heritage and his willingness to work served him well in the restaurant business.

Mr. Brennan had his first taste of the hospitality business working as a liquor salesman. After that he was a manager at The Court of Two Sisters restaurant.

In 1943 Owen bought an existing bar on Bourbon Street – The Old Absinthe House. Using his keen marketing skills and clever gimmicks, he turned this "oldest saloon in America" into a must-go spot. Locals, tourists and dignitaries alike filled the bar.

A few years later his friend and restaurateur Count Arnaud challenged him to open a restaurant. Owen took him up and leased a building across the street from his bar. He called his place Owen Brennan's French and Creole Restaurant. Eventually it came to be known as Owen Brennan's Vieux Carré.

In the early 1950's Owen hired his sisters Adelaide and Ella to help him at his restaurant. Ella is the one who eventually managed Brennan's, expanded to other locations and started the family's other flagship restaurant, Commander's Palace.

Owen Brennan positioned his restaurant perfectly. He became learned in food and wine. He used his personality to make friends – important

friends. The Hollywood elite came to his restaurant, as did the writers. The nation knew about Brennan's.

Thanks to Owen Brennan, the nation also knew about New Orleans. He was an untiring promoter of the city as a culinary destination.

The idea of "Breakfast at Brennan's" was inspired by a book. The late '40's novel "Dinner at Antoine's" did it. Owen declared if dinner at Antoine's was such a desired experience, why not breakfast at Brennan's. He was the first to promote breakfast as a gourmet event.

Soon his lease was expiring on the Vieux Carré. To renew the landlord wanted 50% of the business. Owen went looking for another location. He found one - the current spot on Royal Street. In the 1950's Royal Street was nothing. So this was a risk.

In 1954 Owen began work on the renovations to the Royal Street property. He was under great pressure to get into the new location on time. His plan was to open in the spring of 1956. In fact on the first of November 1955, he entertained friends in the already operating bar at the new location.

Just a few days later fate caught up with Owen Brennan. He attended a celebration dinner at Antoine's. It was replete with the finest gourmet fare and wine. That night he died in his sleep and never saw the new Brennan's come to life.

There's lots more to the Brennan's story that will be the subject of other columns. For now let's get to the food part of Breakfast at Brennan's.

The main focus of breakfast at Brennan's is a three-course feast that features mostly egg dishes for the main course. Now these eggs dishes aren't just eggs or some egg casserole. They are real creations.

Most of the eggs used at Brennan's are poached. Of course you'll find Eggs Benedict. The famous Eggs Sardou uses spinach and Hollandaise. Brennan's own Eggs Hussarde has Canadian bacon with Marchand de Vin sauce and Hollandaise.

Eggs St. Charles and Eggs Shannon feature trout. Eggs Ellen uses salmon and Eggs New Orleans uses crab meat. Eggs Owen had beef hash.

There's Shrimp Sardou and Oysters Benedict that don't use eggs at all.

For a first course you can choose from a baked apple or strawberries, both in double cream. There are also four soups: Gumbo, Turtle Soup, Creole Onion Soup or Oyster Soup Brennan.

Before your first course Brennan's suggests you have an eye opener. New Orleans favorites like Absinthe Suisse, Sazerac and Ojen Frappé are served. Their Creole Bloody Mary is a good one.

The most intriguing one to me is the Mr. Funk of New Orleans. It is named after the late cellar master at Brennan's. It is a combination of Champagne, cranberry juice and peach schnapps.

Brennan's has a world-class wine list. There is little you won't find in its 56 pages.

Before I forget, there is dessert as a part of the fixed-price offering. Two Brennan's creations top the list – Bananas Foster and Crepes Fitzgerald. You can also get Key Lime Pie, Creole Chocolate Suicide Cake or Louisiana Chocolate Pecan Pie.

If you want other fare for your breakfast, there is an a la carte menu available. That's where you will find that great New Orleans dish, Grillades and Grits. Grilled ham and beef steaks are also offered.

If you want seafood, Oysters Rockefeller are at the top of the list. Shrimp, red fish and trout round out the choices. My favorite is Trout Nancy. It's topped with jumbo lump crabmeat, capers and lemon butter.

Bread Pudding is also on this dessert list.

What did I have for my last breakfast at Brennan's? I opened my eyes with a spicy bloody Mary and followed that with Creole onion soup. This is a wonderful soup based on chicken stock.

My main course was Eggs Hussarde. It's their creation so why not? I followed that with one of their others: Bananas Foster. There was a glass of nice wine in there, too.

It's an interesting fact that fire has visited the building that houses Brennan's more than once. The last time was in 1975. The cause: the preparation of Bananas Fosters tableside that went awry.

If you haven't tried breakfast at Brennan's, you need to. Yes it's a tourist thing to do. But it's a great one. And you will have experienced a beautiful location, a wonderful meal and will have the memory of perfect morning. Not a bad idea.