

ELDERHOSTEL

Blomidon Inn, Wolfville, N. S.

October 29, 1996

Lucille Amirault, a member of "Les Amis de Grand Pré" was invited by Jim Lacey, owner of Blomidon Inn, to speak to the Elderhostal group on Acadian cuisine. (I was her invited guest.) The following is a copy of her text.

Lucille Comeau-Amirault introduced herself as a 10th generation Acadian:
- Lucille, daughter of Frank, son of Léon, of Basile, of Célestin, of Pierre, of Justinien, of François, of Pierre, of Pierre, plus six generations in France back to 1363.

Pierre, first Acadian, came to the New World at age 26 in 1632. From him stem all the Comeau's in Nova Scotia.....maybe 100,000 of them. You may open a phone book in just about every city or town in Canada and the United States and you will find a Comeau listed there--all of them descendants from Pierre Comeau and his nine children born in mid 1600's.

When my husband and I were in France last summer, we discovered that there are no Comeau's listed in the phone books. (There are some in Paris, apparently descendants of the Canadian (Acadian) Comeau's but none where Comeau originated, i.e., Dijon, Pouilly-en-Auxois and Créancy.)

Clothes:

The costume which I am wearing is not authentic, but is basically the same. Most clothing, i.e., chemise, skirt, hat, and vest were made from flax woven into linen and dyed with herbs and berries. Wool was woven from sheep for capes, vests, men's pants, etc. Wooden shoes were worn. Acadians learned to use leather boots, etc. from the Mi'kmaq Indians.

Food:

The Acadians boast of never having gone hungry from the moment they settled in Acadia, in spite of privateer or pirate raids which destroyed their crops, etc.

If one food was not available, they would invent something more delicious. The ocean, rivers, marshes and the forest provided abundant foods. One can only imagine the wild blueberries, wild strawberries, cranberries, etc. The Acadians lived poorly but never went hungry.

The Acadians would make a great study for the Johns Hopkins Society as their favorite foods contain lots of fat, salt, and sugar.

Food (Cont'd)

Cabbage was a good basic food among Acadians as it could be eaten fresh in the summer and salted in the winter.

- To preserve cabbage, prepare a brine in a big crock.
- To prepare brine, you add enough salt to the water to float a potato. If the potato floats, the water is salty enough to preserve the cabbage.
- Quarter the raw cabbage and place in the brine.
- Place a plate or board on top of the cabbage with a rock on top so that the cabbage won't float. Cover.

Note: You can preserve string beans this way too--fresh, raw, and into the brine.

Fish and meat were salted this way too--basically the same way.

- To use cabbage in a soup like tonight, it would be fresh and delicious in the summer but in the winter, you would take the cabbage out of the brine and soak it in fresh cold water for about 30 minutes before making soup.
- So-called Jiggs' dinners were popular too in the winter (or corned beef and cabbage). It would have salted pork or beef, salted cabbage, salted string beans, and vegetables from the root cellar--namely, potatoes, parsnips, turnips and carrots.

Salted Herbs: To make salted herbs, layer chopped shallots and coarse salt.

- You had some fresh shallots on your rappie pie. Shallots were salted too, to use in rappie pies, stews, and soups.

Other dishes consisted of:

- Cabbage soup with brown bread and molasses.
- Potato soup with brown bread and molasses or biscuits.
- Fish was served every Friday. It was fresh, salted, or dried.
- Pork with beans and bread.

The root cellar consisted of partitions in the cellar - bins.

Rappie Pie: Paté à la rapure. Rapure - grated, i.e., grated pie.

- There are at least 10 different Acadian regions in the Maritimes, and each region has its own way of making the rappie pie.
- This dish dates from 1768 and after, when Acadians were allowed back into their homeland.
- Potatoes grew very well in the Maritimes; they still do.

Rappie Pie (Cont'd)

- Before the Deportation in 1755, bread was the most important food.
- After the Deportation, potatoes were the most important.
- Tell story of Joseph Dugas, the first Acadian to move to Clare (1768 left his wife and two young children in the care of Indians in the spring of 1769 to return to Annapolis Royal to get potato seeds for first crop planted in Clare.

It is said that this is how the rappie pie was invented:

- To make starch - grate - leave water to set - white residue is starch. Acadians used starch for men's collars, church linens, and white blouses of school uniforms. Grandmother said that starched aprons stayed clean longer.

Recipes - Read from book, or

- 1) Cut up chicken, lots of onion, salt, pepper, salted herbs, and water. Cook, bone chicken, reserve all broth.
- 2) Meanwhile, peel and grate and squeeze water out of a pailful of potatoes, about 20 lbs.
- 3) Replace water taken out by boiling broth.
 - Mix well.
 - Spread in pan with chicken pieces between layers of grated potatoes.
 - Cook two to three hours.

(Show pictures. Potatoes turn that colour if left out in the air too long.)

- Rappie pie was served on special occasions, usually served by itself, plastered with sugar, butter, or molasses. Salted pork scraps were often added to the top before cooking to make it crust better.

At first, barrels of salt came from Europe.

Molasses and sugar came from Barbados, West Indies. Big trade of lumber to Barbados on tall ships built in Acadia.

Acadians taught by Indians how to make maple sugar.

Acadian Meat Pie: All areas of Acadia - different in each region.

- It is made with more than one and up to six kinds of meat.
- One layer of meat, one layer of crust - six pates i.e., beef, crust; chicken - crust
pork, crust; rabbit - crust
grouse, crust; porcupine - crust.....maybe bear, beaver, moose, cariboo, deer, pheasant.
- The meat pie to which I am familiar was usually a mixture of two types of meat topped with biscuit dough - baked in oven.
- Meat was precooked with lots of salted onions, fresh onions and seasonings.
- Served on special occasions, like réveillon/New Year's.
- Fresh meat was preserved in jars for meat pies - no salted meat here.

Apples: Apples were certainly the most cultivated fruit and most common fruit in Acadia.

Apples (Cont'd)

- Acadians brought the apple trees from France. They had thriving orchards. Their orchards were destroyed at the time of their expulsion but the Planters and Loyalists revived the industry to make it a leading industry in Nova Scotia today.
- Acadians had varieties of apples that would keep through the winter in bins beside the potatoes, turnips, and carrots.
- Popular varieties of apples were the espice, bellefleur, and the Belliveau. The Belliveau apple was very popular. Some party had taken a seed from a certain kind of apple in Boston prior to returning to the district of Clare. The Acadians named the fruit the Belliveau apple because it was a Belliveau (Anne-Marie's ancestor) who planted the seed, or sapling, and took care of it. (Note: Other apples were the "Paul" which was a bit on the sour side, and the "Marc à Marie" which was sweet and could keep until the month of February.)
- Dried apples. Peel, core, slice across and string in attic, sunny window, beside stove, etc.
- To use, hydrate in water, then use in pies, sauces and desserts.

Other fruits could be dried too--such as blueberries, cranberries, etc. Also beans, corn and peas.

Most homesteads that developed after 1768 had at least a few apple trees and, maybe, plums, pears and cherries.

- Apples were eaten fresh or simply boiled in a kettle with a little water and sugar...maybe molasses. This was eaten for breakfast, with bread, or for desserts.
- Apples were also roasted in the oven.
- Apple pies and Acadian apple dessert such as you had tonight (apples topped with flour, sugar, butter, spices and maybe raisins) were reserved for special occasions.

Bread:

Grist mills, wheat fields = bread, most important food (before Deportation)

= potatoes (after Deportation)

- buckwheat - corn meal.

Before 1850, bread was baked in outdoor ovens in summer, and ovens beside or over the fireplace in winter.

- Acadians fermented their own yeasts--it was nothing like the fast-acting yeast of today. (From what I understand, it was something like a sour-dough that you feed and ferment, etc.) Houblon=hops.
- Bread took almost 24 hours. Usually it was started in early evening. Dough was prepared and left to rise beside the stove. Before going to bed, around midnight, you would knead the dough and put it back in big pan or bowl overnight.

Bread (Cont'd)

- You had to get up really early to knead it again, around 5 a.m. (moms usually got up then, anyway, to stoke the fire and make breakfast).
- Bread would only be ready to bake in early afternoon, just in time to be eaten with baked beans, molasses.
- Molasses, raisins or other grains were eventually added to bread.

P.S. The invited guest noted on page 1 was Anne-Marie Belliveau.