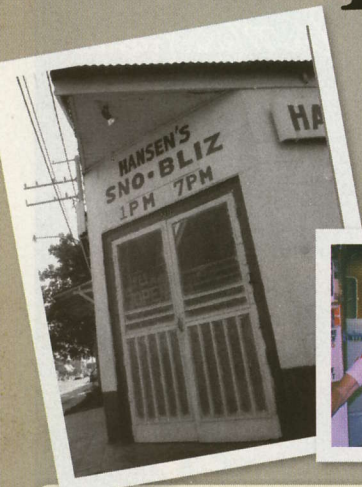


Fragile History

The Southern Foodways Alliance's oral histories remind us how fragile our food traditions can be.



We know what New Orleans would be like without Angelo Brocato. For 13 months after the storm, it remained closed and there were no ices, no gelato and no fig cookies on Carrollton Avenue. Fifteen or 20 years from now, it could close forever after a century of making sweets. Arthur Brocato will someday retire, and the younger Brocatos have other careers, other interests.

After reading the oral histories with 13 local chefs, restaurateurs and business people that food writer Sara Roahen recorded for the Southern Foodways Alliance, I realized that many of New Orleans' oldest institutions, like Angelo Brocato's, are fragile. The interview subjects, ranging from the Roman Candy Man and Ashley Hansen to Dot Domilise and Anthony and Gail Uglesich, were named Tabasco Guardians of the Traditions in 2005. Transcripts and recordings of the oral histories were posted over the summer. Lolis Eric Elie, the *Times Picayune* columnist and a founding member of the Southern Foodways Alliance, led the effort to honor people too often overlooked by glossy food magazines. "Certainly it's an incomplete list," he says, "but it's a real reflection of the depth and variety of our people and our food."

How many places on that list, such as Angelo Brocato's, might not be around for the next generation? It's a gift to the city when someone such as Ashley Hansen decides to carry on a tradition and keep a place like Hansen's Sno-Bliz alive, but who can blame Arthur Brocato's kids, or Anthony and Gail Uglesich's kids, for wanting to do something else? How many of us would want to take over our parents' jobs? And we can't expect them to do it for charity. Ron Kottemann wouldn't have taken over the Roman Candy cart in 1971 if selling taffy didn't pay the bills.

"People look at this thing and get all gaga," he says in the oral history, "and it's just a business. I'm out there doing what I do, trying to make a living."

It's hard to imagine not being able to cool off with a scoop of Brocato's chestnut or zuppa inglese gelato, just as New Orleanians have been doing for a century. Except, they haven't. Before Angelo Brocato moved from the French Quarter to Carrollton Avenue in 1979, they served only Italian ices and sliced ice cream, like spumoni and cassata. Arthur Brocato introduced the dipped gelato. Reading these oral histories, I also realize that our traditions aren't static. New foods are created. New restaurants open and become institutions. And even if some beloved places eventually close, New Orleans' food culture is strong enough to create new traditions.

WE ALL SHOUT FOR SORBET

The New Orleans Ice Cream Company knew the high standard it had to meet when it created the now-infamous Chocolate City flavor. "We wanted a product that was the best chocolate that my grandson had ever tasted," says co-founder Alan Dugas. Early attempts at other flavors were passed around Finn McCool's Irish pub in Mid-City to get the regulars' opinions. In New Orleans, a room full of drinkers is probably the best test market you could find.

Dugas and his partner Adrian Simpson are about to release five sorbets. Like their original ice creams, each one is inspired by a flavor we savor in New Orleans. "We have this whole menu in the city helping us," Simpson says. Keep an eye out at local stores for jazz mango, Ruston peach, cantaloupe, champagne and Louisiana lime sorbets. The sorbets will soon be joined by Cajun rum raisin made with the

Cajun spice rum from the Old New Orleans Rum distillery.

Since opening after the storm, the New Orleans Ice Cream Company has grabbed a growing share of local ice cream sales. At the moment, Dugas and Simpson are in talks with a national distributor. If things work out, this local ice cream start-up could become a national contender overnight. In the meantime, stop by their booth this month at Voodoo for a scoop.

OTHER NEWS

Chef John Besh (Restaurant August, Lúke) takes up his first challenge on Oct. 7 in his quest to join the cast of the Food Network's *Iron Chef America*. The new series *The Next Iron Chef* pits eight accomplished chefs from around the country in a culinary elimination challenge....Sucre has added sandwiches and soups for lunch....*The Wall Street Journal* named Dickie Brennan's Steakhouse one of the nation's "power tables."...Frenchman René Bajeaux, who ran René Bistrot before the storm, is now the executive chef at La Provence....Byblos Mediterranean Cuisine opened a new outlet in Tulane's student center....Table One has closed.

Angelo Brocato: 214 N. Carrollton Ave., 486-0078

Byblos Mediterranean Cuisine: Tulane Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life, McAllister Drive

Domilise's Po-Boys: 5240 Annunciation St., 899-9126

La Provence: 25020 Highway 190, Lacombe, (985) 626-7662

Lúke: 333 St. Charles Ave., 378-2840

August: 301 Tchoupitoulas St., 299-9777

Sucre: 3025 Magazine St., 520-8311

Hansen shop and family photos courtesy Ashley Hansen; Roman Candy and Angelo Brocato photos by Infrogmation of Wikipedia