Supper

\sap-ar\ *n*: in France, an evening meal when dinner is taken at midday.

If Webster would have spent time in Mamou in the 60's his definition of "supper" would probably have been very different than the dull, boring thing listed above. It would probably have read;

"A frequent assembly of about 10-20 (men only) coming together for a joyful evening in someone's outdoor kitchen to share food, drinks, and fellowship, and to discuss farming, politics and women. The food is usually wild game and must be cooked in someone's great grandmother's big, cast iron pot. The outdoor kitchen is usually some ramshackle corrugated tin building near the main house. It is totally impossible for the party to function unless there are a few Cajun musicians with their little amplifiers. Although the amps are small, their size belies their fierceness and the volume makes it totally impossible for anyone to be heard unless shouting in each other's ear. Thus the reason for having this party in the outdoor kitchen, since the din would prevent the wife and children in the main house from sleeping.

This can go on for several hours with periodic trips by some chosen person to the nearest package liquor store to replenish the supply of refreshments. The refreshments consumed never seem to quite equal the amount initially brought by each invited member, making a shopping foray as frequent as 3-4 times in an evening. After all the food is consumed everything seems to quiet down and the entire assembly takes on a much more serious aspect. The cards are brought out! Its bouree time!

The intensity and seriousness of the card game would indicate to an outsider that the stakes were in the amounts of huge sums of money, when in reality the most someone could lose if very unlucky would maybe be 2 or 3 dollars.

This would proceed until way past midnight when some party pooper would remind everyone that in the morning important things were going to happen and everyone would best break up and go home. These important things could range from crop planting and harvesting, or maybe to another such evening as this one or maybe that the squirrel season was scheduled to open that morning and with enough luck they just might make it into the woods at daybreak."

Its important to mention that these "get togethers" were not limited to only one sole party but would probably be happening simultaneously with several other parties in the same area. Wednesday night was reserved by most everyone for dancing to the music of either Maurice Barzas or Jack Leger at John Vidrine's dance hall. That left only Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday of the work week to have a party.

It was because of this pressure of having only 4 days to get together with

comrades that caused all these parties to come about. Saturdays were for taking care of business, with Sunday reserved for church and family dinners. These were hard working, family providers who partied just as hard as they worked.

We always give credit to the musicians of Mamou for the cultural Renaissance that began in 1964, but their efforts would never have survived, much less flourished if it had not been for the "suppers". These suppers were the infrastructure that kept the musician count higher than in any other community in Acadiana. Cajun music was and is such an integral part of Mamou life that the concept of having any function without Cajun music is about as foreign as having Christmas without carols. It happened in Mamou because the general population for the most part supported and cultivated their music.

What Paul Tate and Revon Reed accomplished in Mamou in the 60's was so dynamic, monumental and unusual and of such a scale that the momentum of their work still reverberates throughout the world today. More Europeans have come to Mamou than to all the other small towns of Acadiana put together. And they continue to come even though, after Paul and Revon's passing, no one really did any promoting or cultivation to keep the exodus to Mamou a reality. What an amazing cultural foundation that Revon and Paul built!

The only weak pillar in the foundation would be that in their efforts to keep the music of Mamou "pure", they tried to prevent natural evolution from occurring. Their motive was not to "freeze dry" the culture and recreate the past, but rather to use the past to influence the future. By banning the steel guitar, or any other instrument not introduced in the era of the fiddle and accordion, it prevented many younger Mamou musicians from participating in subsequent festivals, music broadcasts and jam sessions. They had to leave their town to play their music in the manner they wanted. It was their generation's time, and not that of their grandfather. Perhaps if Paul and Revon had been musicians themselves they would have understood that it wasn't the instrument itself that was important, but rather the unique style that the Cajuns applied to the instrument. The style of the Cajun steel players in the 60's was as unlike Nashville as the Cajun accordion is to Lawrence Welk.

It was a special time with special people.

It is a changing time with different people.

Mamou – getting a little older, becoming more worldly, nevertheless still very much Mamou.

Marc Savoy