

The Acadiana Way

Le Guime des Batille in Cajun Heritage and Historic Cultural Origins



The Gallic Rooster (*Guime Gaulois*), a Christian symbol of vigilance since the New Testament story of the Passion and a descendant of the Southeast Asian red jungle fowl first domesticated in India around 2000 B.C., has long been part of French national culture, as symbolic as the stylized French lily (fleur-de-lis), and has been used for centuries by folk artists. In the Middle Ages it was widely depicted in French churches as a religious symbol of hope and faith and is recorded in 14th century Germany in references to France. He and the expression through him, are not only of the French people, but of the French nation and history, in

addition to its land and culture and likewise just as powerful a symbol of expression of French Louisiana and the people. From the very roots of French history, his association with France came as a play on words in Latin between *Gallus*, meaning an inhabitant of Gaul, and *gallus*, meaning roosters. The symbolic use in France gained particular popularity during the French Revolution and has been a national symbol ever since. Roosters have played a role in the symbolism and folklore of many nations for thousands of years and for many people the rooster symbolizes bravery and boldness as he defends the flock against all comers, along with virility. The French resistance also used this symbol during the Second World War, to remind themselves of the resilience and bravery of the French people, urging the French to resist occupation and even today, many French farmyards, as well as farmyards in French Louisiana, still have a Gallic Rooster, Le Coq, or Le Guime des Batille, however he may be named.

"A chicken in every pot" is more than a political slogan – at the beginning of the 17th century, King Henri IV is claimed to have said "If God allows me to live, I will see that there is not a single laborer in my kingdom who does not have a chicken in his pot every Sunday" (*Si Dieu me prête vie, je ferai qu'il n'y aura point de laboureur en mon. royaume qui n'ait les moyens d'avoir le dimanche une poule dans son pot*)



The Gallic Rooster, Le Coq or Le Guime des Batille however called, is a strong symbol of expression of the people of France and Acadiana and a strong part of our cultural heritage and historic cultural origins. The symbolism of Le Coq and the expression of the community is so strong in France that even today French Law still protects traditional uses of the rooster and states that traditional fighting will be protected in localities where uninterrupted traditions are established. (*Elles ne sont pas non plus applicables aux combats de coqs dans les localités où une tradition ininterrompue peut être établie*). When the Cajuns migrated to Louisiana during *Le Grand Dérangement*, and those before and after who brought with them necessary implements and farm animals, no doubt included was Le

Guime des Batille in all forms including the resilience and bravery needed for the Cajuns to prosper in what was at the time a vast wilderness. The development of all agricultural use of the roosters, including meat and eggs, was conducted simultaneously for centuries with all other uses from the same parent stock. A hardy and thrifty farm chicken that could survive in adverse conditions in order to improve the quality of life was needed due to the surrounding forests, swamps and marshes containing all sorts of predators that enjoyed a chicken dinner just as much as the early Cajuns. Le Guime des Batille fit the bill, admired as much for their courage in fending off a marauding hawk or raccoon as they were for their prowess in a rooster fight.

The hens were not especially prolific layers as is the case with most heritage breeds, but free eggs was free food and what they lacked in volume they made up for with tenacity and survival skills. They were and are today much prized for

their use as "setting hens" in incubating the spring crop of "gumbo chickens" as well as duck, turkey, geese, and any other egg that would fit under them. Their instinctive "mothering" ability as well as other various abilities is well known and documented in Cajun folklore.

Chicken has become the number one species consumed by Americans today, but the Guime des Batille has always and is still highly valued by Cajun folk not just for a gumbo but as they always were and for all the same cultural reasons. Still today, when a small farmer needs a flock of low-maintenance, disease resistant, vibrantly healthy free range chickens for eggs or gumbo, nothing fits the bill like Le Guime des Batille, a gold mine of genetic diversity, a gold mine of cultural heritage and a symbol and conveyor of culture and expression of Cajun cultural origins.



Even in modern times, Le Coq and the "Batille de Guime" remains so important to the culture, cultural heritage and expression of the people of French Louisiana that two centuries after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of the United States in that United States Bicentennial year, a Cajun festival in St. Martinville, which is now within the Teche Region of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area and Louisiana State Heritage Area, was founded which included "Batille de Guime" artistic demonstrations of existing culture expressing the communities cultural heritage and historic cultural origins of the Cajun people through the art and artistry of the "Batille de Guime" presentations.

Sadly, despite the fact that nearly 80% of Louisiana residents believe that historic preservation and the arts are important and should be high priorities, Le Guime des Batille and the "Batille de Guime" artistic demonstrations have come under attack by "animal rights" groups. These groups with the goal of abolition of all animal agriculture, putting animals ahead of humans on their path of total animal liberation, or more accurately total animal elimination, in their extreme and radical goals have no respect for Tradition, Culture or Heritage and have even called Cajun Culture "backwards and ignorant". We at Acadiana Way beg to differ!!! We are PROUD of our Cultural Heritage and also believe like King Henri IV there should be a chicken in every pot if you want one. Our mission

statement reflects the promoting and preserving of Cultural Heritage and Historic Cultural Origins including the Guime des Batille and all the colorful and multi-use history that has been passed down from generation to generation of Cajun farmer, rancher and historical expert. Historical presentations of Cajun "Batille de Guime" demonstrations such as the St. Martinville La Grande Boucherie des Cajuns Festival held since 1976 are Art, Artistry, Expression, Cultural Heritage, Symbolism and the preservation of French Louisiana and the Cajun People's Cultural Origins and must be preserved.



Artistic Demonstration Of The Cajun Traditional Folklife "Bataille de Guime"

(Photo Courtesy La Grande Boucherie des Cajun Inc. - Saint Martinville, Louisiana - 1998)

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