

# A RAT TRAPPED

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A popular publisher of the 19th century was a man from New York named Frank Leslie. He produced several magazines often with curious stories, including Frank Leslie's Ladies Journal and Frank Leslie's Pleasant Hours. The following story comes from the latter, which was published in October 1877. The only identification is that this occurred in Orleans County.

Under the title "The Last Style of Rat-Trap," we find: "One day recently a shopkeeper, hearing a rattling and squealing under his cellar, went down and discovered a large rat which, in running over a pile of clams, had been caught by the tail by one of the shellfish. The animal had dragged the bivalve to his hole, but was unable to pull it through, on account of its size, and was in that situation when it was captured and killed."

The accompanying



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

engraving depicts the large rat with its tail clamped which was used to illustrate our story. Clams and oysters were very popular years ago and are always to be found on 19th century menus locally. Naturally these shellfish were shipped up the canal from New York.

No doubt the above "shopkeeper" (grocer) was

using the cellar as a cool storage place for these bivalves. I must say rats are not stupid, because they go where the food is!

Supposedly my grandfather, Nahum Lattin, who very much enjoyed oysters, would order a barrel of them unshucked over a hundred years ago. They were shipped on the canal, and when he got them, he rolled the

barrel down into the cool cellar at home. He then took out the head of the barrel and into the liquid threw corn meal to feed them. When he felt like eating raw oysters he'd go to the cellar, shuck some and pour vinegar on them from the adjacent vinegar barrel. They must have been sooo good! My grandmother didn't like them that way and didn't want the mess upstairs.

Finally, to our rat illustration. It is an engraving done by an artist/illustrator employed by Frank Leslie. Engravings might be done on hard wood, a copper plate or other metal.

Before photos could be reproduced in newspapers or modern day computerized art work, illustrations had to be hand cut or drawn. An engraving is where the artist gouges into a plate making fine lines. When finished, the plate is inked and then wiped off. But ink remains in the grooves, which under pressure in a press, are pulled out to make a print such as you see here.