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## From the Pits to the People

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# FROM THE PITS TO THE PEOPLE

By

William John Robertson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
Graduation with Honors from the  
South Carolina Honors College

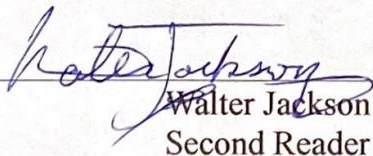
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### *Thesis Summary*

This thesis explores the current and future status of authentic barbeque in the State of South Carolina. It begins by introducing the topic, exploring the background of barbeque in the state, and then introduces the issues at hand – the importance of advertising the restaurants and the impending question of age of the restaurants’ owners, operators, and pitmasters. In the literature review, the issues are given background and the typical authentic barbeque restaurant is described. Five restaurants are examined in the methodology and research, selected due to their locations in each of the regions of South Carolina (Midlands, Lowcountry, Upstate, Pee Dee). In their examinations, a description of the restaurant, its history, its cooking processes, its sides, and general observations regarding the geographical location, the sourcing for the restaurant, gender roles, seating, issues of legislation, and advertising are detailed. Photographs are provided in the final pages of the thesis to provide context to both the locations and the offerings. The argument addresses the primary issues, offers potential solutions, and addresses counterarguments. The thesis concludes by putting the argument in perspective of the historical context of barbeque in South Carolina and proposing the changes that must be undertaken to continue the traditions of this style of cooking.

### *Introduction*

Barbeque and South Carolina seem to be eternally tied to one another – with four distinct regions and over two hundred and fifty individual barbeque restaurants in this state alone, how could they not be? South Carolina has perhaps one of the most diverse barbeque cultures of any of the fifty states. Mustard-based barbeque sauce stands out as a unique facet of South Carolina barbeque. Even when found in Georgia, it is still referred to as “Carolina Gold” sauce. Barbeque has been a staple in South Carolina since the 1700s, but it wasn’t always in the form in which we know it today. Lake E. High Jr. states in *A History of South Carolina Barbeque* that “social contact in the 1700s was simply not as it is today.... If a family wanted their sons and daughters to meet some other nice young people, then going to parties and balls was the way they did it. And, of course, there were the much less formal but more fun outdoor barbeques.” As much as barbeque was a mainstay in southern culture, it was never an easy task. The reason that barbeque is never the answer to the question of what’s for dinner is that “real barbeque takes hours and hours to cook... so no one fixes it for supper” (High, 58). Barbeque evolved from a social event to one found in political events sometime in the early 1800s. This brought barbeque out of the trappings of upscale society and introduced it to the masses. To prompt locals to vote, “candidates for office began offering free whiskey and pork flesh” (Shields). But large social events and voting only occurred a few times a year; what was one to do if he or she desired barbeque with greater frequency? Churches, ladies’ auxiliaries, and men’s clubs began holding more regular barbeques to raise money for one cause or another, and the public responded enthusiastically. By the 1920s, barbeque was gaining a greater foothold, and people demonstrated their desire for weekly barbeque. Because of its growing availability, barbeque

became the scene for competition – these vendors that were previously successful were realizing the need to expand their infrastructure to draw in the business over their competitors. As vendors established their reputations for their ability to cook barbeque, they were setting the stage for “the inevitable barbeque restaurants that were soon to follow” (High, 65).

Over the next ninety-plus years, barbeque has seen its share of changes, but is at its core quite similar to what it used to be. Although no longer the face of southern politics or social gatherings, barbeque still holds its own in South Carolina culture. For many restaurateurs, things are still done the old-fashioned way – low and slow over hot coals. But what has changed are some of the “in-between” processes. It has become more commonplace to see restaurants sourcing from mass distributors rather than locals. Fewer restaurants have the screened-in cinder block-constructed pits, and with as many restaurants as there are in South Carolina, competition must be taken into consideration. Authentic barbeque was never an easy task to undertake, and with new methods arriving in a steady stream, the capabilities of the long-standing barbecuists of South Carolina are being tested against the advancing methods of their new competitors. The age of the barbecuists must be called into question as well – many barbeque restaurants in South Carolina have been open for thirty, forty, some even over sixty years. With the original owners and proprietors passing the mantle on to their children, it is yet to be seen if this will continue to the next generation; the Millennials, the generation of job-hopping. Thus, the question must be asked: is the longevity of authentic barbeque in South Carolina faltering, and what can be done to revitalize/reinvigorate business?

Barbecuists in South Carolina have become limited in their ability to do things according to their traditional methods. Legislation has been introduced that limits long-standing

barbecuists' abilities to renovate facilities or expand their operations. Article 6-202.15 of regulation 61-25 on Retail Food Establishments of the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control states that "outer openings of a retail food establishment shall be protected against the entry of insects and rodents by...closed tight-fitting windows; and solid, self-closing, tight-fitting doors." Screens are only permitted "if the doors and windows of a retail food establishment...are kept open for ventilation or other purposes..." Solid, air-tight windows and doors must be available for use for any new restaurants. Many older restaurants have had their screened-in barbeque pits grandfathered in – they are permitted to keep them, but if they wish to do any major renovations or expansions, the entirety of the pit area must be remade to offer proper enclosure. For most, such renovation is not worth the investment since no one envisions extra custom arising from such enclosure. Thus, the restaurant remains as-is. Furthermore, the authentic, local ingredients are more difficult to come by. Small-scale farms that previously supplied the restaurants have been run out of business by mass producers. Restaurateurs are increasingly unable to feasibly access local ingredients. Local vegetables for sides and local whole hogs have become particularly scarce. Corporations like U.S. Foods and Sysco offer a one-stop shop for all their ingredients, from the pork to the sides.

This paper seeks to bring to light the issues that these restaurants face and question authentic barbeque's longevity in South Carolina. Many barbeque restaurants are located in small, rural areas far off the most well-traveled roads. It takes a customer's active participation to find them, much less travel to them. Because of their isolation, their challenges are not particularly visible to the majority of the population. Explicating these challenges systematically is the mission of this paper. To conduct this research, I began by reading literature about South Carolina's history and current status to gain background knowledge, then spent several weeks

visiting restaurants in each of the four regions of South Carolina – the Midlands, the Upstate, the Lowcountry, and the Pee Dee. I visited Hite’s Bar-B-Que in West Columbia, Price’s BBQ in Gilbert, Lonestar Barbecue & Mercantile in Santee, Mustard Seed BBQ Country Cooking and Catering in Woodruff, and Scott’s Bar-B-Que in Hemingway. During these site visits, I spoke to owners and managers at each of these restaurants to understand their businesses and to observe them in action. I sought to determine what issues they faced and what unifies them in their various challenges. I will go into deeper detail of my observations at each of these restaurants. At the conclusion of this paper, I will make a concise statement about the issues affecting these restaurants and offer suggestions about what could be done to meet the challenges they face.

### *Literature Review*

My two main sources for background knowledge were Lake High’s *A History of South Carolina Barbeque* and Rien Fertel’s *The One True Barbecue*. The former offers an in-depth look at South Carolina barbeque’s upbringing, and the latter looks at barbeque restaurants as they stand today. Through my reading, and later through my experience in speaking with the various owners and proprietors, there seemed to be a gap in the conversation regarding these restaurants’ future. In an era of urbanization, as more people move away from the country and into the city or are simply consumed into city culture by the rapidly growing urban areas, what happens to these restaurants that for so long have done things the old way? In Columbia alone, there are ten or more different barbeque restaurants, not to mention the twelve locations of Maurice’s scattered around the area. What happens as cities continue to expand? Atlanta, GA for example, saw a population increase of 24% between 2000 and 2010. The “metro Atlanta” area encompasses ten



counties, and its urban land area “expanded nearly 35 percent between 2000 and 2010, following a 47 percent expansion between 1990 and 1996 and a 25 percent expansion 1980 and 1990” (Kundell). Once-small towns surrounding Atlanta have been enveloped by its continuous expansion, and Atlanta’s urban sprawl has overwhelmed areas formerly rural and sparsely populated. Cities nationwide continue to grow, and the cities of South Carolina are no exception. According to the Columbia Planning Department’s 2008 *Comprehensive Plan for Columbia, South Carolina*, “South Carolina has experienced a 15% increase in the population statewide, while Columbia has seen a 19% growth rate during this time [between 1990 and 2000]” (Rutherford).

High and Fertel paint a remarkably similar portrait of the situation of the average barbeque house in South Carolina. The majority share numbers of distinctive characteristics. Sometimes these similarities are obvious and visible to the average customer. In the state of South Carolina, “barbeque” means pork. These restaurants are normally dependent on motor vehicles; thus, they are near well-traveled roads or roads that were once well-traveled but may not be so anymore, what with the expansion of the interstate highway system. Because of their reliance on motor traffic, they often make a display on their exterior in order to attract customers who will choose by sight. The structures themselves are often older, and with quite a bit of history to them. They tend to be in rural locations, specifically in small towns with a population of well under 20,000 people and many times fewer than 1,000. They tend to have limited seating; some outright make take-away the only option available. When seating is available, the tables are spartan, with little more than salt, pepper, and maybe a roll of paper towels – you won’t see the caddy of mustard, ketchup, and enumerated hot sauces that comes standard in so many

restaurants. Guests will have access to a few hand-selected condiments, normally not much more than the house-made sauce(s). Even the availability of public toilets is sometimes questionable. When there is seating, the cooking and the eating areas are distinctly separate from one another, and physically so. There will be either a wall or some amount of distance between the two. The older restaurants have their hand-built pits only a few steps away from the area of service. The pits themselves are normally constructed of cinder blocks or fire bricks with an access point on the front to allow for the introduction of hot coals to the lower portion of the pit. There is at least a foot of open space separating the coals from the meat, which rests on no more than a layer of chicken wire. This allows the heat to slowly cook the meat, and the smoke to imbibe its flavor under the skin of the pork. Covering the pits is some form of sheet metal – oftentimes, corrugated roofing material. Stepping across the threshold of the door and into the restaurant itself, your nostrils are met with a mixture of smoke, pork, and a thin layer of grease, grime, and well-kept age. Locals may visit a little longer to catch up with the owners and workers they’ve come to know so well, but visitors are encouraged to move through quickly to increase turnover as much as possible – especially during the busiest of lunch hours. To encourage this turnover, entertainment in the restaurant is limited. Televisions and bars are nonexistent, and conversations are friendly, but kept short.

Though the similarities are often obvious, there are plenty that are more difficult to spot. Often invisible to the customer, these similarities are much more visible to the rivals and the competitors of any particular barbeque stand. Sides are prepared in-house, but they are normally sourced through an industrial firm (i.e., U.S. Foods and Sysco). Whole hog barbeque is becoming increasingly rare, but those that stand by it simply won’t do it any other way. The rest have shifted primarily to a mixture of shoulders, hams, and Boston Butts that are chopped

together to form a cohesive blend of the varying textures of barbeque. The average consumer may not detect the difference, but the deepest fans of barbeque will know. The chop is the most common method of preparation in South Carolina once the barbeque is finished with its time in the pit. All the pork that is finished will be prepared in this manner, and that will be the only available option for the pork. The only sauces provided are the ones made in-house.

Traditionally, vinegar and pepper sauce were found primarily on the coast; tomato-based sauce was most often found in the upstate; ketchup or light tomato sauce was seen toward the west; and mustard sauce was available in the midlands. These days, however, there has been an invasion of sorts of different sauce techniques. There is more dispersion of the sauces, and they can be found all around the state no matter their traditional territory. The prices at the restaurants are relatively inexpensive, normally around ten dollars per person for a buffet or a few dollars fewer for a plate with a couple of sides. The sides themselves are perhaps disproportionately priced, meaning that the profit on a meal comes less from the pork than the sides. Drinks are available, but there is no sale of alcohol – not for the reason that it wouldn't be profitable, but either because it isn't worth the effort to acquire a liquor license, or because it combats the fundamental system of rapid turnover that many of these restaurants seek to achieve.

The owners and proprietors of the restaurants communicate something about the restaurant that may be visible to the customer and is certainly visible to a rival. Oftentimes, the restaurants are family-run operations. Typically, the matriarch is the face of the restaurant. Whether it be the mother or the grandmother, she oversees the front of the house, collects payment from the customer, and offers any assistance needed. Meanwhile, the patriarch takes on the back-of-house duties cooking the meat. In-between, the children and grandchildren fill in the roles where they are needed most. On particularly busy days, they can be seen helping on either

front of house or back of house, but there is still an implicit structure based on gender – the ladies of the family are usually seen assisting with front of house duties, while the gentlemen will be seen refilling the buffet line or helping shovel coals into the pits. The businesses they run tend to follow a standard model – they offer a cheap meal with cheap sides as the least common denominator designed to accentuate the meal and fill the customer’s stomach, and with everything designed for the meat to be the showpiece. Where the sides aren’t designed to steal the show, the meat is meant for the spotlight, offering the highest quality possible. It’s cooked in the “low and slow” method and falls apart on the fork, offering a spectacle for the guests’ eyes, noses, and mouths.

One matter not covered by High and Fertel has to do with the ethnic dimensions of barbeque: has the influx of Latino workers in the South led to a Hispanic inflection in barbeque in Latin enclaves such as Gilbert? What percent of the barbeques in the state are African American owned and operated? What is the racial make-up of the client bases of rural restaurants? Given the limited scope of my investigation here, and the need for extensive surveying to answer these questions adequately, this matter remains a foremost concern for future research in South Carolina’s barbeque culture.

The disproportionate growth of urban areas in combination with the decline of rural areas forces a unique challenge on barbeque. For it to survive, restaurants may be forced to consider relocation from the less traveled roads and into the more heavily populated cities. But will this urban setting provide barbeque with the influx of business it needs? Or could it degrade the traditional qualities of the South Carolina product? Neither High nor Fertel answer this question, instead focusing on the traditions in their current state. To understand the reality of barbeque in

the state of South Carolina, the history and authenticity of the product cannot be the sole focus. The challenges they face on a daily basis must be addressed.

### *Methodology and Research*

I visited five restaurants from the Midlands, the Upstate, the Low Country, and the Pee Dee (chronologically). I interviewed the owners and/or managers, I took time to observe the workings of the restaurants, and I sampled the wares offered. In my interviews, I intentionally chose not to record our conversations. The goal of this decision was to have a more genuine, honest conversation, to build trust and comfort, and so whomever I spoke with felt they could speak freely. I took notes on site. The notes typically included a summary of my conversations and notes on any topics of particular interest during our conversation (e.g., legislation issues, menu selections, etc.). I additionally elected to not schedule a meeting time with the subjects of my interview. The rationale behind this decision was for a couple reasons, the first being avoidance of preformulated answers. My goal was to get an honest, spontaneous reply to the questions I asked regarding the restaurant and its business practices, which I believed would be more difficult if I had allowed time to prepare answers. Second, I sought to get testimony of the things most on the person's mind. If there was a prevailing issue on the mind of the interviewee, I sought to explore that issue and give it genuine consideration. Instead of scheduling meetings, I introduced myself upon arrival at the restaurant, stated my intent to ask questions regarding research, and requested to speak with an owner or manager, depending on their availability.

Most of the questions I asked were preformulated. I started by asking about the history of the restaurant, including the past and the present status. I then asked about the cooking process.

This included what kind of wood was used, how it was prepared for use, construction of the pit room (if applicable), what kind of sauce was used, whether it was made in-house, and what cut of pork was used (whole hog, shoulder, Boston Butt, and/or hams). In our conversations, we spoke regarding three main topics: the history of the restaurant; their cooking process (often coupled with a demonstration); and the restaurant's offerings. Once our conversations were completed, I took time to sample the buffet line or menu, depending on the restaurant, and took notes on my observations of the restaurant as I ate. When I made my selections, I sampled the pork, hash and rice (if available) due to its major historical presence in South Carolina, coleslaw and/or potato salad which serve as acid to cut the lipids of the pork, and a sampling of the available vegetables to observe the prevalence of a "pre-made" taste or a "fresh/local" taste. No two restaurants had the same menu, so each decision was made based on the availability of the food items.

The question of the success of the businesses is one of necessary importance but is not one I asked during my interviews. The initial direction of this thesis was to explore the cultural impact of barbeque on the state of South Carolina. The question of success was not prominent until I had already had several conversations. Although the thesis began as an observation of the cultural impact of barbeque, the connections I developed with the restaurant owners and managers led me to a genuine interest and concern for the future viability of their businesses. As I progressed through my research and through my interviews, I began to recognize the trends and commonalities discussed in the argument of this paper. The concept of the thesis evolved as I reflected on my earlier discussions. Once I had determined the new direction of my argument, I chose not to ask the question in the remaining conversations to preserve consistency among my

interviews. Instead, I relied on my personal observations and media mentions to gauge the success of the restaurants and suggest ways to continue South Carolina's barbeque traditions.

My first visit was to Hite's Bar-B-Que (Hite's) located in West Columbia, SC. First opened by farmer John D. Hite in 1957, Hite's sits at the top of a small hill overlooking a bream-stocked fishing pond. A few clapboard and brick buildings are scattered around the pond, where the Hites of today reside – three generations of them. Built of white-painted cinder blocks, the building is small but distinct, with large red blocky letters spelling out “BBQ” across the front façade over the door. Stepping inside, there is no more than a small area for standing and waiting with a counter forming an L-shape occupying the back and right-hand walls. Down a narrow hallway and through a screen door, the screened-in barbeque pit room with three rows of pits is attached to the backside of the building. Through another screen door out the back of the pit room, six-foot high piles of hand-split oak and hickory wood line two sides of the back of the lot, the third occupied by the pit room and the fourth left open to allow for vehicle/equipment access.

A full-time minnow, hog, corn, and sweet potato farmer, John D. Hite opened Hite's Bar-B-Que with the intention of using it as secondary income. After only a few years in business, he sold the business to his son John Jr. because of health issues. After roughly fifty years in the business, he solidified the family tradition and sold the business to his son, David Hite, who remains the pitmaster today. A man of two incomes like his grandfather before him, David splits his time between the barbeque pit and the similarly difficult and laborious task of striping asphalt. He now raises his children in the business with the hope that he one day will have the chance to continue the tradition and sell the restaurant to them to continue the legacy of Hite's Bar-B-Que.

Hite's is only open Fridays and Saturdays, but the cooking process begins Thursday morning, so the pork has a full 24 hours to cook before Friday's sales. The oak and hickory logs are burned campfire-style on a metal grating suspended on four legs to allow the hot coals to drop straight through. Once enough have accumulated, the coals are carried by shovel into the pit room, where the fronts of the pits (made of corrugated metal roof, like the lids) are removed to allow an even spread of the coals to be distributed across the floor. Once a suitable layer of coals is in place, the pork shoulders are laid out almost, but not quite, touching on the chicken wire. This allows the smoke and the heat to circulate in the pit to make sure the pork is fully cooked. Once set in place, both sides of the shoulders are rubbed down with "salt – just salt", as David Hite put it. Shoulders were chosen over whole hog because they are the most affordable, are accessible through their supplier, and because they offer the general texture and flavor that most customers seek. The pork then cooks low and slow for a full 24 hours. Once finished, it is chopped and basted with their house-made mustard sauce, then prepped to be sold. The pork is sold by-the-pound at \$9.00 per pound, \$4.00 for a sandwich, and a plate with meat, hash, rice, slaw, and rolls is sold at \$8.00. Along with the takeout packages, a plastic fork and spoon are included in the bag.

The hash is the other major feature of Hite's. It's made the old-fashioned way in massive cast-iron pots built into their own corner of the pit room. There is an access point outside where used wooden pallets are broken down and burned in a space underneath the pots. Mr. Hite said they refrain from using the oak and hickory logs because "the smoke doesn't matter for the hash; we just need the heat". The only other sides offered at Hite's are green beans and baked beans. Both are sold at \$1.00 per ½ pint, which suggests that they are delivered via an industrial shipper. Spare ribs, the "rib cut", and chicken are all also sold at \$9.00 per pound, and a ham is



sold at \$9.50 per pound. The only sauce available at Hite's is the house-made mustard-based sauce, which can be purchased for \$2.00 per pint.

Hite's is located only about two miles from the center of West Columbia, a city that is on the verge of being swallowed up by the ever-expanding capital city of Columbia. However, the two are separated geographically by the Congaree, Saluda, and Broad Rivers, providing a physical barrier to mitigate the expansion of Columbia's urban sprawl. All this couples together to offer Hite's a unique advantage. They have easy access to a large pool of customers in a major urban hub who don't have to travel far, but the separation by the rivers allows it to retain its classic rural setting without being encroached upon by urban and suburban growth. But with this advantage comes the disadvantage of reduced access to local ingredients. Hite's sources many of its sides as well as its meats through U.S. Foods and/or Sysco. The processes are entirely home-bred, but the ingredients are more mass-produced. Despite the proximity of Hite's to Columbia, advertising is minimal, relying primarily on local newspaper articles, the sign outside the front of the restaurant, and informative leaflets available in the store. Even still, Hite's keeps busy – there was a constant stream of customers during the entirety of my visit. As I observed the operations of Hite's, I noted that it followed the traditional gender norms as could be expected from an older barbeque restaurant. At all times, at least one of the Hite ladies was stationed behind the L-shaped counter. Two more were present and the only time they stepped away from the counter was to retrieve a to-go box and a meal for a customer placing their order. Meanwhile, the men of the family manned the pits. Not once during my visit did David Hite step to the front of the restaurant, nor did any of the other various Hite men or their friends and coworkers stationed in the back depart from the pit room. This is a heavily family-oriented operation, with the majority of its employees living only steps away from the restaurant itself. The employees are not entirely

family, but the few who aren't are carefully selected and critiqued. For example, one of the ladies working the register had only been with Hite's for a few months. Mr. Hite made a point of mentioning her and, even with three months under her belt, stated that "she's starting to get the hang of things." Hite's has no indoor seating area. There are some picnic tables scattered around near the restaurant, but their menu lists in bold letters that they operate on a "Take Out Only" basis. Rapid customer turnover is inherent with this method. As is the case with other barbeque restaurants of its age, Hite's has a screened-in pit room. Due to the legislation and regulations on retail food establishments, Hite's would have to fully renovate its pit room if it sought to add on a seating area. The screens would have to be removed or tight-fitting windows would have to be installed; the cast iron pots would be removed as well. Essentially, Hite's whole way of doing business would be upended – thus, it isn't worth the effort and investment to add seating when the current modus operandi has worked for 63 years. Hite's remains under very much the same business structure as it has since its beginning but has taken the unavoidable changes in stride and continues to follow its history and serve authentic barbeque the best way it knows how.

My second visit was to Price's BBQ, located outside Gilbert, SC and only steps away from Lake Murray. Price's sits at the intersection of two lightly traveled roads, a short drive away from U.S. Route 378, the closest large road. Price's is a brick-red cinder block structure, housing a modestly sized seating area and a barbeque buffet. In addition to the buffet, Price's offers a Saturday morning brunch. Stepping in the squeaky front door, one is immediately greeted by the cashier standing behind the short counter directly in front of them. The cashier (one of the members of the Price family) quickly points out the restrooms to your left, and then invites you to step around to the right to partake in the two buffet lines, one laden with the meat

and sides, the other with a number of assorted desserts. Through a swinging door behind the cashier counter lies a small kitchen where the sides are prepared. Two cast-iron pots, a stove, and storage areas line the walls while a large prep table occupies most of the center of the room. Through another door and out the back of Price's leads to a pit room not unlike the one encountered at Hite's. Screened-in on three sides and with an exposed-beam ceiling leading directly to the peaked roof, the pit room has two rows of brick-and-concrete pits, hand-built by Hampton Price. Lifting the sheet metal lids reveals the chicken wire that suspends the pork over the coals, which are deposited via a sliding access hatch on the fronts of each of the pits. The coals themselves are prepped from oak and hickory wood in a burn barrel out a screen door to the back side of Price's. Most of the back of Price's is occupied by an open, grassy field. Not far from the pit room, however, a mountain of hand-split logs sits at the ready, waiting to be tossed in the burn barrel.

The original owner, Hampton Price, first opened Price's in 1964 as a way to pay for his daughter Beverly's college and earn a little extra money. Price's BBQ began as nothing more than an open-air pit area, where Hampton and his wife Dean would smoke the meats and sell them on the corner to travelers on their way to Lake Murray. Because of the nature of its customer base, Price's only sold barbeque on the weekends. Over time, and as Beverly moved on to start her teaching career, Price's shifted to operate only on holidays and sold only in bulk. In the mid-1980s, Price's returned to weekend operations after Hampton Price retired from V. B. Hook produce. It was around this time that the main structure of Price's was built, offering seating for around 50 people, and the all-you-can-eat buffet line was introduced. Price's operated in this manner until the mid-2000s, when Hampton's descendants took over operations. Beverly, now with the last name Adams, and her husband, Jim, took ownership of the Price's name as

supplemental income to their teaching and trucking company careers. Both have since retired from their primary careers, and their son, John, and his wife, Kat, now oversee most of the operations of Price's BBQ, which now opens Thursday through Sunday.

With an operation schedule similar to that of Hite's, it is unsurprising that Price's follows many of the same methods. Price's starts cooking its pork on Wednesday afternoons, starting by prepping the oak and hickory coals in the burn barrel. The barrel itself is literally that – a metal barrel, once an oil drum, that has been repurposed with steel bars crossing through its center to suspend the logs. Newspaper and cardboard are stuffed in the bottom and a match is struck to allow the fire to spread upward to the logs. A large hole has been cut out of the front side of the lower portion to allow the pit master to scoop up the fallen coals and shovel them into the pits. Once adequately laden with coals, the hams, shoulders, and Boston Butts are laid out on the chicken wire in the pits. They are then rubbed down on the top side with a heavy sprinkling of salt, then flipped over one by one and rubbed with salt on the other side. The lid is then placed over the pork and left to cook until ready for the following day's meal. Once removed from the pits, all three cuts of meat are chopped together to form a cohesive blend, and it all is basted with their house-made signature mustard-based sauce.

While the pork makes its way to the buffet line, the sides are prepped in the kitchen. The hash is made with the leftover bits of pork from the pit and cooked in cast iron pots, just as it has been since Price's first started operating its dining room. The hash and rice steal the spotlight in the sides department, with the other sides standing in primarily to fill the guest's stomach and limit the amount of pork they're able to eat. The restaurant sources all of its food from U.S. Foods – this includes not only the sides, but all of the cuts of meat. Thus, many of the sides simply need to be removed from their cans and heated up. Others, like the fried okra, take

minimal prep work. The sides are modified enough to where they no longer taste industrial and pre-packaged. Similar to the sides, the desserts, primarily banana pudding, appear to be pre-made. The red velvet and cream pound cakes, on the other hand, are homemade from old family recipes.

Price's is located about 7.5 miles from the center of Gilbert, meaning it is distant from the main hub of its nearest city. However, it sits right off of the shores of Lake Murray with numerous neighborhoods and boat ramps nearby. Not only does Price's have ready access to nearby developments, but Lake Murray is a hot spot for day tourists from Columbia and the surrounding area, meaning there is a natural attraction drawing crowds into the area. Price's has a unique advantage – despite its rural location, there is a force actively drawing people into Gilbert and onto Lake Murray. People coming to spend their weekends on the lake have an easy option when seeking nearby barbeque restaurants. Price's formerly sourced its meat from a local farmer, indicating their history of whole hog barbeque. However, when this farm shut its doors, Price's shifted its business to U.S. Foods, which it was already using to supply sides. This was done out of a place of convenience and financial sensibility – trying to find another local hog dealer was too steep of a challenge. Thus, Price's elected to purchase three cuts of meat from U.S. Foods rather than whole hogs from someone local. The hams, Boston Butts, and shoulders were chosen specifically because they carry most the hog's meat and they offer a diversity of textures. By implementing this technique, Price's could simulate the flavors and composition of whole hog barbeque without having to make the high-priced investment. Advertising is essentially nonexistent within Price's. Their reputation seems to precede them, as they have been featured recently on an episode of The Cooking Channel's "Man Fire Food" and continue to occasionally pop up in local newspapers, whose clippings are framed and hung around the

restaurant. Even at the turn off of U.S. Route 378, there is no signage to indicate the nearby restaurant. Only once you arrive at the restaurant will you see the black script-style lettering spelling out “PRICE’S” on a white sign at the top of the restaurant’s front façade. Across the parking area sits a yellowing roadside message board sign listing the hours of the restaurant. Interestingly, nowhere on either sign is there any mention of the word “barbeque” – in any of its spellings. A newspaper clipping from 1989 states that “[Hampton] Price tends to pit-cooking duties, while his wife leads the kitchen crew” (Price’s). Although the ladies of Price’s continue to man the kitchen duties today, it no longer seems that the men are solely responsible for tending to the pit-cooking. Stationed in the front of house is a mix of high school and college-age young men and women who cover the front register, refill the buffet line, and tend to the needs of the diners seated in the restaurant. The seating itself is compact, yet comfortable. Tables of all sizes fill the dining area, welcoming single diners or larger parties without an issue on either end of the spectrum. Simple tablecloths cover the tables, and there is not much more than paper towels and salt and pepper shakers available. Extra squeeze bottles of the house sauce are available at the buffet line. The seating itself introduces an interesting situation for Price’s with the legislation listed previously. At Hite’s, seating couldn’t be added to the restaurant. Due to the nature of the pit room, any form of expansion to the restaurant would require an intrusive and potentially destructive overhaul of the pit room. Price’s circumvented this challenge by introducing its seating area before the legislation was enacted. Thus, once the legislation was introduced, Price’s seating area was simply grandfathered in. But similarly, any sort of renovation or expansion would require a total restructuring of the pit room. The screens, which allow smoke to filter out, would have to be sealed off. Additionally, according to Kat Adams, one of the current proprietors of Price’s, the exposed-beam ceiling, which also helps with smoke

ventilation, would have to be made flat, whether by nature of drop-tile roofing or sheetrock. Price's is fortunate in its location that, even without extensive advertising, it enjoys steady foot traffic, especially during the summer months when lake-goers are in no short supply. The question must be raised, however, if this is enough. Columbia continues to expand, which could bring more visitors to Price's. With this, it also has the unfortunate potential to introduce even more restaurants to the area, which could overshadow Price's. The restaurant has enjoyed the relatively competition-free location of Gilbert for years, but Columbia's expansion could threaten this business model in the near future.

My third visit took me out of the Midlands and into the Low Country to Santee, SC, where I spoke with Calvin Strock of Lone Star Barbecue and Mercantile. Though it projects an air of old-fashioned barbeque, Lone Star wasn't opened for business until 2001. My intention with this visit was to step away from the older, well-established restaurants and instead take a look at the techniques and methods employed by a newer establishment. Pat Williams, Lone Star is an assemblage of four antique stores that have been fused together by short breezeways. On the drive in from Columbia, potential customers pass a simple white sign only a few miles away from the restaurant, directing them to its front doors. Lining the walls of all four buildings and the breezeways are numerous antiques and other collectibles, a few of which were in the buildings upon their purchase in the late 1990s and into 2000. The first building acts as the "mercantile" area with a variety of branded merchandise, old-fashioned sodas, and old-fashioned candies available for purchase, as well as the buffet and kitchen at the back. The front section of this building is original wood from floor to ceiling, but the back wall has been removed and a new, industrial-looking kitchen has been constructed behind the buffet line. Fluorescent lights

line the ceiling of the kitchen and large stainless-steel equipment fills the room. Out the back of the kitchen sits Lone Star's electric smoker, fired with oak and hickory wood chips. Back inside the restaurant, the cashier takes payment only steps away from the buffet line, and guests, directed from left to right, retrieve plates and help themselves to a wide assortment of dishes. At the end of the buffet sit numerous desserts, and guests are directed through the adjacent breezeway and into the second building, which houses seating and the public restrooms. The tables are set simply with thick plastic tablecloths. Napkins, a bottle of Texas Pete pepper sauce, salt and pepper shakers, and single-use sauce packets sit at the ends of each table. Once seated, one of the ladies on duty takes drink orders while guests help themselves to their first plate. This building and the third, through another breezeway, contain seating for guests, while the fourth is a dedicated event space. A now-defunct outhouse sits behind the restaurant, serving no more purpose than a novelty, and a run-down marquis sign and the restaurant's sign sit in front of the property.

The brainchild of Pat Williams, Lone Star first opened its doors in 2001, but had a few years of work to arrive where it was – quite literally. Williams purchased all four of the buildings between 1997 and 2000. The oldest of the four dates to the early 1890s, while the newest was constructed in the early 1920s. Once purchased, they were moved to their current site, where construction began to turn them into an operational restaurant. In order to retain the authentic feel, the breezeways between the restaurants were built with the lumber from a demolished tenement house. After about 17 years in business, Calvin and Susan Strock, Ed Shuler, and Shirley Toth, locals and farmers from around the Santee area, purchased Lone Star from Williams. The four had previously purchased a building and planned to open their own barbeque restaurant but remodeled their business plan when they ran into financial issues with the



installation of sprinkler systems that complied with code. Lone Star, which already was a fully functioning structure, seemed like the best option available, and the decision was made to enact the purchase. Although Williams took many of the antiques with him upon departure, the new owners have had no trouble retaining the air of the original restaurant by filling the walls with their own collectables. The new owners' first customer was "Troy Durden...He and his dining partner didn't seem aware of the ownership change" (Raskin), indicating that the change in ownership turned over smoothly. Lone Star now operates Fridays through Sundays, offering a different special each day and live music on weekends.

There is less to be said about the pork at Lone Star than there is about the pork at Hite's and Price's. Similar to the two, the cuts of meat are delivered through U.S. Foods and Sysco. Unlike Hite's and Price's, however, Lone Star has a much shorter history, thus not allowing it to enjoy the grandfathering privileges that Hite's and Price's have taken advantage of in their business models. Lone Star equips an electric smoker to prepare its pork, which means it only needs to cook for about four hours as opposed to twenty-four. Once finished, the pork makes its way inside, where it is chopped and basted with a mustard sauce. Once it has been delivered to the buffet lines, tomato-based sauce and vinegar and pepper sauces are available for use in addition to a squeeze bottle of the mustard sauce, all of which are made in-house.

The bulk of what can be said about Lone Star comes from what it offers in addition to its pork. Although pork is the first option available in line and is what many tend to come to Lone Star in search of, the buffet line is filled with almost countless sides and other entrees available for purchase. A customer spending his or her money at Lone Star will be met with not only the South Carolina standards of hash and rice, – which is *not* prepared in cast iron – coleslaw, and potato salad, but will also find dishes such as tomato pie, macaroni and cheese, fried chicken,

collard greens, butter beans, red catfish stew, hushpuppies, green bean casserole and a salad bar. On the dessert end, banana pudding, sweet potato casserole, and peach and blueberry cobblers wait to be piled on a guest's already-overflowing plate. When asked why Lone Star offers such a wide display of wares, Calvin Strock stated that it comes down to diversity in the market. He explained to me that not all the customers of Lone Star come for the pork. Some are vegetarian or simply aren't a fan of barbeque. Thus, Strock and his co-owners sought to diversify their menu in order to satisfy as many different market segments as possible. As with the pork shoulders, the supplies come in from U.S. Foods. Rather than heating the items and serving them directly as is, however, the kitchen at Lone Star works to turn the ingredients they purchase into a fresh meal item, as is the case with the green bean casserole, sweet potato casserole, cobblers, and so on.

Lone Star Barbecue and Mercantile is located only about two miles from downtown Santee and Interstate 95, just outside of Santee State Park, and immediately adjacent to three local churches. It's located right around the midway point between Columbia and Charleston, which could attract a broad customer base of travelers. Despite its close proximity to many major points of infrastructure, Lone Star feels very rural with a wide field directly across the road, a small pile of firewood being sold on an honor system in the gravel parking lot, and its farmer-by-trade owners. Lone Star's industrial supplier and its operational methods are a reflection of its status as a newer barbeque restaurant. The hand-built pits, hand-split logs, screens, and cast iron are nowhere to be found at Lone Star, where new methods of cooking reign. The electric smoker and the reflective stainless steel demonstrate not only Lone Star's newer techniques but demonstrate what is required by the same legislation that restrains restaurants like Hite's and Price's. Comparing Lone Star's advertising to these other restaurants does, however, indicate an

area where it has recognized a necessity – at least partially. While an older sign can be seen on the back roads as one passes through Santee State Park, the large, blue road signs indicating nearby restaurants exiting I-95 into Santee make no mention of Lone Star – but there is a sign for a nearby Maurice’s location. Lone Star’s advertising was a point of my discussion with Calvin Strock – he has recently been questioning whether or not it was worth the investment to rent a billboard in each direction on I-95. Additionally, he has been attempting to expand Lone Star’s social media campaign, which currently consists of a Facebook page. All this is an attempt to draw in a larger crowd to fill Lone Star’s large restaurant. The restaurant has seemed to be successful since the owners’ acquisition, according to Strock. In his words, “business is good, but [they’re] always looking for more”. Indeed, even at 3:30 in the afternoon, there was a steady flow of customers in and out of the dining room. The seating areas themselves occupy half of the real estate of Lone Star, while the event space occupies another quarter of it. The inclusion of the event space, while further expanding the property responsibilities of the restaurant, may prove beneficial. The proximity to three local churches makes Lone Star an easy choice for catering for events, such as weddings or funeral services. Additionally, Strock indicated that a local farmer’s meeting was to be held there later in the weekend when I visited. The gender norms practiced at Hite’s and Price’s seemed to function similarly at Lone Star, but perhaps less strictly. Although there was a singularly female presence in the front of house, ladies and gentlemen alike worked in the kitchen. Additionally, Mr. Strock can commonly be seen greeting local customers in the dining area. Overall, Lone Star has several advantageous facets working in its favor. But due to its lack of advertising and customer familiarity, it may be more difficult to get the I-95 travelers through the doors without some form of intervention to push them in that direction.

My fourth visit took me north into the Upstate to Mustard Seed Bar-B-Que Country Cooking and Catering in Woodruff, SC. A family-run business open for 17 years, Mustard Seed is located only about a mile off Interstate 26, a short drive away from Spartanburg and Greenville. The restaurant, a recently painted white cinderblock building, sits in the middle of a large gravel lot. Two signs stand in front of it near the road, one sporting their name and phone number, the other listing “Mustard Seed Restaurant: Daily Specials”, and their hours. After passing through a small entry room, the interior of the restaurant splits off to the left and right. Directly in front are a set of two counters stretching down to the left, where menus handwritten on poster boards of various colors advertise each day of the week’s offerings. Interestingly, this restaurant, named for a Christian parable, is open seven days a week. On the left side of the restaurant, the cashier stands behind the counter inviting guests over to the adjacent buffet line, and a small amount of seating. An old, boxy television is mounted over some of the booths. To the right side is a large room filled with tables and chairs, available both as standard seating and for events up to 135 people. The walls and ceilings are covered in wood paneling, mirroring the materials of the booths, tables, and chairs. The tables themselves are set with salt and pepper shakers, a roll of paper towels, and a two-page flyer advertising Mustard Seed’s catering options and event space, and several ads for local automotive and insurance deals. The kitchen, directly behind the counter, served only to prepare the sides and non-barbeque entrees. The pork is prepared at a location separate from the restaurant. A newer restaurant, stainless steel and fluorescent lighting fill Mustard Seed’s kitchen.

The pork was an interesting subject for my second newer restaurant visit and my first taste of Upstate barbeque. When I asked owner “Miss Vicki” about the pork’s preparation, she explained that they prepare it using only pecan wood coals. Smoking begins Wednesday and the

final smoking takes place Friday night. Mustard Seed, despite primarily advertising itself as a barbeque restaurant, only offers their barbeque buffet on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays – less than half of the week. Monday through Wednesday are devoted to different specials (fried chicken always being one of them), and Sunday is “Soul Food Sunday”, with no specifications of what is included on the menu for that day. The pork is also prepared off-site at an undisclosed location. By Miss Vicki’s description, the restaurant equips old-style preparation with cinder block pits, chicken wire, and a screened-in area. When I asked about the relatively recent legislations put in place that restrict the use of screens, Miss Vicki responded that “you have to have screens”. The barbeque itself is basted with a house-made vinegar and pepper sauce, which is contrast with the traditional standard of tomato-based sauce for the area. There is, however, a thick tomato-based sauce available for use in a squeeze bottle at the buffet line.

Mustard Seed’s sides are just as interesting as the remote preparation of the pork. In addition to a rotation of macaroni and cheese, green beans and potatoes, baked beans, fried chicken, fried okra, and coleslaw, Mustard Seed has both a salad bar and an offering of spaghetti. This salad bar was only the second I’d seen, the first being from Lone Star, which was the second newer restaurant I visited. The spaghetti was the most surprising of the offerings. First arriving in America with the Italians and gaining large popularity for its “low cost and high carb content” in the 1890s, spaghetti is a dish that is normally city-associated (Monte Bene). To see it in a rural barbeque setting was unexpected. According to soul food scholar Adrian Miller, the introduction of spaghetti into soul food began with what has been dubbed “The Great Migration” a time when a large population of southern African-Americans, suffering from “years of spiraling debt and unbearable racism and oppression...decided that the best solution was simply to leave” (Miller). This occurred between the 1910s and 1970s. Upon their arrival in cities with

large populations of Italian Americans, “African-Americans encountered global immigrants and were early adopters of Chinese...Italian (macaroni, pizza, spaghetti), and Tex-Mex...far before the mainstream public” (Miller). Even with this background in mind, it is still surprising to see spaghetti in a rural area in South Carolina.

Mustard Seed, with its locale approximately 30 or 40 minutes from Spartanburg and Greenville (respectively), has little chance at attracting the city business from this distance. Instead, they seem to rely primarily on travelers from I-26, locals, and churchgoers. Five churches surround the area near Mustard Seed. Although not immediately adjacent like at Lone Star, Mustard Seed is the nearest restaurant to any of these five churches. Its name seems to be more of an attractant for these guests than a reflection of its strongest values, as the restaurant is open from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM on Sundays. Similar to Lone Star, however, there is no signage indicating Mustard Seed’s presence as one departs I-26. This calls into question not only the number of customers that Mustard Seed regularly accommodates, but their decision to keep the restaurant open seven days a week. The extent of Mustard Seed’s advertising campaign appears to be devoted to a Facebook page, which repetitively posts the same images of food that doesn’t appear to have been served in their restaurant. In fact, a reverse image search on Google of several of the images indicates that these images are either stock photographs or ones pulled from other websites. One of the recurring photos of their pork, for example, yields search results for “pressure cooker pulled pork recipes”. Mustard Seed’s advertising campaign is not only limited, but it may be misleading to customers that do research online before they arrive. As with previous restaurants, Mustard Seed has its food delivered by U.S. Foods, from the sides to the pork. But with a rotating menu of items like meatloaf and chicken liver on Mondays, cube steak and gravy and chicken liver on Tuesdays, pork chops and turkey and dressing on Wednesdays,

and so on, the costs of keeping this assortment of food must be considered. It is unlikely that a restaurant of this size is receiving daily shipments of food, so the owners must buy in bulk and either refrigerate or freeze much of it. The pork's preparation at a separate location was interesting as well. A comment by David Hite of Hite's Bar-B-Que when speaking in regard to one of his competitors led me to believe that this was an illegal practice, but I was unable to find any supporting documentation for this claim. The gender norms that I had seen at the other restaurants were also less strict, where ladies and gentlemen both worked in the front and back of the house, seemingly swapping roles as one was needed in another area. Mustard Seed was among the more intriguing of my visits, partially because of its offerings, partially because of its practices. For a rural barbeque restaurant, there were several unexpected elements, most of which I would not have associated with barbeque as a whole. These business tactics, not unlike those practiced at Lone Star, may indicate a new direction for rural barbeque – or they could be the exception to an industry that does things largely the same.

My final restaurant visit was to Scott's Bar-B-Que in Hemingway, SC, the most renowned of any of the restaurants I visited. This restaurant, with an entire chapter devoted to it in Rien Fertel's *The One True Barbecue*, initially was located in a small white cinderblock building at the intersection of Hemingway Highway and County Road S-45-160, also known as Cowhead Road. Though this building still stands today, the restaurant has since moved next door, into a rustic blue-and-white painted house with a hand-painted sign over the door reading:

PIT COOK

SCOTT's B.B.Q.

Their phone number is written in much smaller print on a black-and-white painting of a pig standing between the words “pit” and “cook”. Cars and trucks of all years, makes, and models fill the shoulder between the road and the restaurant, the muddy lot outside the pit room, and even around the corner and down the street. Just a few steps away from the restaurant itself is Scott’s pit room, which may be better described as a pit hangar. A tin semicircle as large as the house next door to it, the pit room is lined with hand-built pits down both sides. A screen door and two screened windows occupy the lower half of the front and back ends of the building, and the upper half is nothing but screens. Ventilators on the roof help the smoke, which fills the room with a haze, escape the building from the top as well. This is not the original pit room – twice, most recently in 2013, Scott’s Bar-B-Que lost its pit room to grease fires. The new one shows the ingenuity of a new design while retaining the practices of an older pit. Through the back door, the Scott family’s burn barrel stands nearly six feet tall. The service area of the restaurant is accessed through a swinging door on the front of the house. Roosevelt “Rosie” Scott, the original owner and proprietor of Scott’s Bar-B-Que, sits in a rolling desk chair just inside the door or on one of the recycled church pews just outside, greeting the locals and observing the visitors. Rien Fertel states that Rosie’s outfit is more of a uniform, just as recognizable of a brand as the restaurant itself, saying “only his ball cap changes from day to day” (Fertel). Behind his chair inside is a rack of potato chips and snacks, relics from the restaurant’s past as Scott’s Variety Store, well before barbeque was the driving force of business. The chip stand directs customers to the counter, behind which a group of ladies, including Rosie’s wife Ella, take orders and prepare the food. Payment is cash only, as denoted by several signs covering this wall, one of which, handwritten on poster board, states:



CREDIT IS “DEAD”  
FUNERAL “NOON” SATURDAY  
PLACE COUNTY JAIL  
BURIAL IN “HELL”  
REV. “DEVIL” IN CHARGE  
THE MANAGER

The menu, also handwritten on poster board, hangs above the counter with adjustments either scribbled onto the board or added on separate pieces of paper stuck on both sides. A few small tables are squeezed in along the back wall, which is covered in photographs, plaques, and awards for the restaurant’s now-famous barbeque. Continuing to the left is a row of swinging-door beverage refrigerators filled with sodas and bottles of water. Another counter, this one with bar-style seating, is set on the front wall, where another lady prepares cups of lemonade and sweet tea for guests.

When Rosie Scott first opened the restaurant’s doors in 1972, it was known as Scott’s Variety Store, “a place to stop for a soda and a bag of chips, and sometimes, very sporadically for the first decade or so, barbecue” (Fertel). Over time, the whole-hog side of the business picked up and became the mainstay of the Variety Store, officially making it Scott’s Bar-B-Que. Rosie learned the whole-hog trade from his uncle and passed it along to his son, Rodney. Rodney helped around the restaurant from the age of six, but at eleven years old smoked his first whole hog entirely on his own. Since then, Rodney has become the face of Scott’s Bar-B-Que, carrying his skills and hog smoking ability around the world “alongside the cheffiest of chefs, smoking hogs from Uruguay to Melbourne, Australia” (Fertel). In addition to now being the pitmaster of the Hemingway restaurant, Rodney Scott has opened a second restaurant, Rodney Scott’s Bar-B-

Que, in Charleston, SC, home of the annual Charleston Wine and Food festival which, in 2019, welcomed more than 25,000 attendees (2019). Although Scott's Bar-B-Que has now been open for forty-eight years, little has changed in the way they do their pork.

Scott's is famous for its whole-hog barbeque, which has become increasingly rare not only in South Carolina, but in much of the world of barbeque. The process, as with any other authentic barbeque restaurant, begins with the coals. Pecan, oak, and hickory wood, hand-sourced, cut, and split by the employees of Scott's Bar-B-Que from around the Hemingway area, the coals are formed in the burn barrel behind the pit room. This massive barrel is a warped mess of metal with holes for ventilation cut in the sides and holes for truck axles, which suspend the logs above the base, cut through the barrel. The largest hole is at the bottom, where the coals are scooped out and carried inside to be laid at the base of the pits. Once the pits are ready, locally sourced hogs are unloaded from a refrigerated truck. They arrive disemboweled, are split with a reciprocating meat saw, and unfurled on top of the wire in the pits to allow maximum exposure to the heat. Cooking begins Tuesday for Wednesday's rush of customers. Hogs are laid out on the pits continuously until the final cooking takes place overnight on Friday. Because Scott's is closed from Sunday through Tuesday, no cooking takes place on Saturday except to remove what was finished overnight. While in the pits, the hogs are rubbed with salt. When finished, the pit masters add red pepper flakes, cayenne pepper, and black pepper before basting the hog with the restaurant's signature vinegar-and-pepper sauce. To add a little sweetness and acidity to cut through the heat, the sauce is prepared with orange slices. The finished pork then makes its way inside, where it is chopped together to create a diverse and cohesive texture and flavor and is made available for purchase via whole hog for \$500, a half hog for \$250, a quarter hog for \$150. "Ribbs", as the sign reads, are available for \$11 per pound, as is a pound of pork, spareribs are

\$11.77 per pound, a sandwich is \$5.50, and a plate with sides is available for \$7. Pigs' feet are also offered at \$1 apiece.

The only sides available at Scott's Bar-B-Que are coleslaw, potato salad, and baked beans, all of which are homemade and served in small Styrofoam cups. The sides are available for purchase either with a barbeque plate or separately in pint sizes. Little is to be said about the sides except that the coleslaw and potato salad offer a creamy acidity to cut through the lipids of the pork. The minimal consideration for an assortment of sides and the small serving size send a poignant message – the focus at Scott's Bar-B-Que is devoted to the meat. The restaurant does not however, devote itself entirely to pork. Whole chickens and turkeys are available for sale at \$9 and \$50, respectively, as are chicken sandwiches, chicken plates with sides, and gallons of sauce. Scott's also offers "to cook your hog" for \$125, inviting local pig farmers to bring their own wares in for preparation on the restaurant's legendary pits. For this restaurant, this is enough diversity in offerings to keep costs low and keep guests satisfied. Through the entirety of my time visiting Scott's, there was a constant stream of customers in and out the front door, even at 3:00 in the afternoon.

Scott's was the first and only restaurant I visited that sourced its food primarily on a local basis. The meat, which makes up the bulk of sales, is all sourced from local farmers. It only sources through an industrial provider for its potatoes, coleslaw, baked beans, chips, and sodas. The sweet tea and lemonade are surprisingly not homemade. They are made from the powders sold in large cans and poured over ice out of large drink dispensers. The tables were among the more heavily laden, but still quite spartan in comparison with many other restaurants. Salt and pepper shakers, paper towels, hand sanitizer, toothpicks, single packets of hot sauce, and a squeeze bottle of the restaurant's signature sauce are the only things on the small, rickety tables.

A mix of R&B, soul, and gospel music sing out from tinny speakers in the restaurant, but this is seemingly more for the staff as no other form of media entertainment is offered. The staff follow similar gender norms to the ones I'd seen at most of the other restaurants I visited. A large group of ladies were stationed behind the counter taking orders, preparing the to-go boxes, and pouring sweet tea and lemonade. The men were stationed on the pits, clambering in and out of the trucks to break down and unload the hogs, tending to the burn barrel, and stoking the fires underneath the hogs until they were ready to be carried in for sale. The screened-in pit room was built recently following the grease fire in 2013, but Scott's is also an Eastern South Carolina Heritage Region Certified Heritage Site, which helps protect the methods the restaurant employs. The restaurant proudly displays this honor on a post on the front porch of the restaurant, and on a plaque outside the pit room detailing the history of the location. Scott's is located only about two miles from downtown Hemingway with little in between it and the main streets of town. The nearest highway is Highway 378, which is still upwards of ten miles away. The closest major city is Myrtle Beach, a little more than an hour away. By all expectations, this restaurant should have had no chance at being much more than a roadside stand for a handful of locals. Even Rosie Scott, when I asked about any advertising campaigns, stated that they didn't do anything to advertise. Indeed, there were no signs indicating Scott's presence on the drive from Columbia, and no advertisements to be seen beyond the restaurant in downtown Hemingway either – and yet people from across the state travel in just to come and eat at this small restaurant. Not only were several locals in attendance during my time at the restaurant, as noted by Rosie's greetings as they entered the door, but customers visited from Columbia, from Myrtle Beach, and down toward Charleston. What Scott's success comes down to is its pit master, Rodney. According to Rien Fertel,

*The tourists flock here to meet Rodney, to shake his hand, and eat his barbecue. It's Rodney who has signed with a New York-based PR and media firm. It's Rodney...who joined the Fatback Collective, a team of progressively minded pitmasters...who donate their time and raise money to invest in community-rooted businesses and organizations that find themselves imperiled by change or catastrophe. It's Rodney who did not have a passport five years ago but now travels the world...*

Rodney is all the advertisement that Scott's Bar-B-Que needs. He has carried the reputation of his restaurant across the nation and across the world as he brings his expertise to new locations. Physical advertisements are seemingly unnecessary when an eclectic pitmaster like Rodney Scott can bring his barbeque to the world around him.

### *Argument*

As I progressed through my restaurant visitations, asked questions, and made my observations, there were two common threads among the restaurants that appeared to be either current or potential issues – the lack of consumer awareness of the product, and the age of the owners, operators, and pitmasters. Although both issues were not seen at all restaurants, at least one of the issues was present at each establishment. Consumer awareness is distinctly lacking at Hite's, Price's, Lone Star, and Mustard Seed. Scott's is the exception in that while it lacks physical advertising, Rodney Scott has largely served as both pitmaster and marketer. The restaurant's customer base knows it well and travels from across the region to visit. Age is a potential issue at Lone Star, Mustard Seed, and Scott's. Hite's and Price's are the exceptions because their current owners, operators, and/or pitmasters are only middle-aged, and they are

actively raising the next generation into the business. With these issues either currently present or looming on the horizon, the question must be asked – what can be done to stymie the issues facing authentic South Carolina barbeque restaurants?

The first issue to be addressed is that facing the majority of the restaurants I visited: the lack of consumer knowledge or awareness. At Hite's, Price's, Lone Star, and Mustard Seed, there was a degree of the unknown when visiting the restaurants. All are listed on the official South Carolina Barbeque Trail Map and on the website Destination BBQ, which devotes itself to knowledge of South Carolina Barbeque. However, the trail map is not infallible, as Destination BBQ mentions that there are “over 40 restaurants omitted from the official SC BBQ trail map” (Roller). Outside of the state-released information, little to no advertisement exists to promote these restaurants. All will occasionally appear in a local newspaper, but many haven't done so for a long time. Additionally, authentic barbeque restaurants are normally difficult to find by nature. They exist “off the beaten path” because of their local, rural roots. The simple fact of the matter is that a customer will not find any information on these restaurants unless they are actively looking for it. And for most consumers, the option they will choose will be whichever is the most readily accessible.

Another element of this issue is the declining population in rural areas. According to Bret Boyd, cofounder and managing partner of the Grayline Group, an Austin, TX-based analytics and advisory firm, “82% of North Americans live in urban areas and are increasingly concentrating in mid-sized and large cities” (Boyd). This thesis focused on restaurants located in small towns, defined as having a population of fewer than 20,000 people. Thus, these restaurants are located primarily in areas facing a declining population. The exception may be Hite's and

Price's due to their proximity to downtown Columbia. However, both restaurants operate in rural areas that see little traffic from the majority of Columbia's residents. With a reduction in potential clients, authentic barbeque restaurants face not only the challenge of informing but attracting. Without adequate consumer knowledge and awareness of the product, this is a particularly challenging task.

For restaurants near major roads, a simple answer would be to include signage, even just on the exit signs as vehicles depart from the highway. The issue is that this may be cost-prohibitive for the smaller restaurants that don't have the resources to afford this kind of expense. On top of that, many restaurants don't meet the requirements to be included on these signs. According to the South Carolina Department of Transportation, restaurants must meet the following parameters:

- *Located within three miles of the interchange*
- *Maintain a "Grade A" rating as defined by the [SC] Department of Health and Environmental Control*
- *Continuous operation at least twelve hours a day, six days a week*
- *Rest room facilities*
- *Indoor seating capacity for at least twenty persons and/or drive-thru service*
- *Public telephone*

Most authentic barbeque restaurants are not located within three miles of an interchange and do not operate within the required hours or days. For their inclusion on these signs, their operations would have to fully readjust their business models. In cases like those of David Hite and Calvin Strock, who uses their barbeque operations as secondary income, this kind of readjustment simply isn't an option.

With the restrictions these restaurants face, the solution for their lack of consumer awareness becomes a bit more clouded. There are two answers that may allow these restaurants to increase awareness without cost prohibitions or restrictions. The first of these answers lies in social media. An effective and active social media campaign has the potential to connect to customers otherwise unfamiliar with the product offered. A social media campaign holds value because “Empathica research shows that nearly 3 out of 4 customers (72%) have used Facebook to make restaurant or retail decisions, based on comments and images that have been shared by other users” (Edwards). To connect with a younger crowd which is using Facebook less than in years past, restaurants must expand their social media usage beyond Facebook alone. Instagram and Twitter are the two most popular social media sites for Millennials and Generation Z, two age groups of particular importance: “total consumption growth – the largest component of GDP – is projected to climb steadily...driven by Millennials, then Gen Z, moving through their prime working years” (Morgan Stanley). Hite’s, Lone Star, Mustard Seed, and Scott’s all have Facebook pages, but only Lone Star and Mustard Seed actively update their pages. Lone Star may face some confusion due to the fact that they currently have two Facebook pages. The first was opened under the original owners, and the second was opened when the new owners took possession of the restaurant. When searching for the restaurant on Google, the old page appears on page one of the search results – the new page, on the other hand, does not. Investment in analytics improvement may be required to generate business on the new page. Mustard Seed’s Facebook page, as stated previously, is misrepresentative of the product sold at the restaurant. A social media campaign in this method could potentially hurt the business; if guests arrive expecting what they’ve seen on the restaurant’s website, they may find themselves to be disappointed or caught by surprise at the final product. None of the restaurants have a Twitter or



Instagram account, thus alienating a major segment of their potential client base, one that is only predicted to grow. In addition to maintaining an active social media program, restaurateurs must invest in promotion of their pages. It is not enough to have a social media page without repetitive viewers. Outreach to the community must be included as a tenet of the campaigns restaurants undertake. Effectively, their social media serves as their version of a billboard or fliers posted around the area. The difference is an effective, accurate, and active social media campaign can reach people state-, nation-, and world-wide where paper advertising can't.

The second potential solution to lack of consumer awareness rests in the hands of the community. By participating in local events, barbeque restaurants can both connect to their communities and active customers, and they can connect to a customer base that may not have previously been familiar with their offerings. The most obvious event would be barbeque competitions. Restaurants would have the chance to compete and demonstrate the quality of their pork and the capabilities of their pitmasters. The issue with this type of event is that it caters to a very specific group of customers – ones who are likely already familiar with the restaurants in their area. Larger events, like Food and Wine Festivals, could present an opportunity for restaurants that have a high-quality product and want to connect to guests who value an experience. This may, unfortunately, be an expensive option with costs too high for most barbeque restaurants. A simpler method could be to acquire a mobile business license and take the restaurant directly to the customers. This method has worked for Rodney Scott, who “[launched] the Scott’s Bar-B-Que in Exile Tour in Charleston, where Rodney cooked a pair of whole hogs right on King Street” (Fertel). Of course, there would be costs associated, and coordination with city officials would be necessary, but this would serve as an opportunity for otherwise isolated restaurants to introduce themselves to people and allow them to taste the

barbeque without having to travel from their normal routes. All this would work under the hope that, once customers had a taste of the restaurant's wares, they would seek out the restaurant for another taste, and another, and another.

Authentic barbeque itself has seen its fair share of degradation – whole hog barbeque is becoming an endangered practice, food is sourced primarily from mass distributors, and sides are made increasingly from prepared items rather than from scratch. Scott's Bar-B-Que enjoys significant market differentiation in that it locally sources its food, it makes the majority of its sides, and it practices whole hog barbeque. Where other restaurants, some even older than Scott's, have relied on food processing companies for meat and sides, Scott's stands alone in its production methods. Scott's also has taken extreme steps to market itself outside of the Hemingway community and has expanded its business to welcome the younger generations and invite them to continue the legacy of authentic barbeque. The biggest issue that restaurants like Hite's and Price's, who used to do whole hog, face is the acquisition of whole hogs for use. Both restaurants formerly purchased whole hogs from a local farm, but the farm has since shut down, run out of business by the corporate food retailers. Hog farms, like Grubbs Farm in Elgin and Red Bank Farm in Rembert, are within feasible delivery distance of Hite's and Price's, but the cost likely outweighs the benefits. These restaurants, even if they converted to whole hog, don't have the marketing capabilities in place to broadcast their decision and invite guests to try the new-and-improved offering. Scott's, which has constructed its marketing methods over several years of tradition and hand-delivery, has a leg up on its competition. Rodney Scott has had an impressive level of foresight for his business and has taken the necessary steps over several decades to ensure the longevity of his restaurant and the continuation of a tradition that encapsulates the heart of South Carolina barbeque.

The second issue facing most authentic barbeque restaurants is the issue of age. Most barbeque owners, operators, and pitmasters are advancing in age, often at or above 70 years old. As they reach an age where they are preparing for retirement, they must make the difficult decision of whether to find a new generation of employees to run the restaurant, or to close the restaurant down. This question was recently answered by Cannon's BBQ of Little Mountain, SC. Brice Cannon, his two brothers, and his wife Gayle have operated the restaurant for fifteen years but decided in 2019 that it was time to close the doors. Brice Cannon cited the workload, saying "it was going to be just a side job, a past time and then it turned out to be a full-time job". The Cannons, all in their late 70s, noted their advancing age: "We're tired, we want to do a little traveling, a little living while we can" (Kurzyna). They had to make the decision of finding a new generation of employees or shutting down, and they chose to close up shop.

The restaurant industry is one of the least dynastic industries in the United States. Where "studies have shown about 35 percent of Fortune 500 companies are family-controlled", restaurants represent a much smaller figure ("Family"). There are a few well-known standouts, like Le Cirque in New York and Antoine's Restaurant in New Orleans, but the majority of restaurants are not family operated. Barbeque is the exception to this because it is largely composed of family operations. Due to its roots in rural towns, barbeque in South Carolina had a limited ability to hire workers outside of the family unit. There were few workers available to supply additional labor, so children were expected to help with the restaurant. It made more sense, financially and operationally, to keep the restaurants as a family-owned business. As a result, children were raised directly into the business of barbeque. Rodney Scott again serves as an example – taught by his father, Rodney worked in Scott's Bar-B-Que from the age of six and

smoked his first hog at age eleven. This was at a time where socialization and experience of the outside world was restricted to what was done firsthand and what was seen on the television. Today, with the advent of smartphones bringing worldwide connections directly into the hands of children globally, even in rural areas, a desire to travel and explore is exploding in Millennials and in Generation Z. Millennials “represent 25% of the world’s population and 80% of the workforce. This generation is known for shifting traditional paradigms of conventional business models, career paths, work styles and work environments, work-life balance, family models, definitions of success, and expectations of life” (Collette, et. al.). The Millennial generation is less likely than ever to stick to the norms of a family business. Rather than following in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents, they seek to completely change their lives and set out on their own. The likelihood that they and Generation Z will welcome the idea of taking over the family business is less likely than in any generation prior. In a particularly dynastic area of the restaurant industry with little supplemental labor and an aging workforce, barbeque restaurateurs must seek new opportunities to not only keep their businesses alive but also continue the tradition of authentic South Carolina barbeque.

Gentrification is defined as “the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste” (Oxford). Although heavily controversial and debated over whether it has more positive or negative effects, gentrification is a fact of life in many areas. Columbia, SC is one of the fastest-gentrifying cities in the United States. The middle class has exploded in population over the last two decades, with few signs of slowing down. With the gentrification of the city, once-near-extinct businesses are seeing a return. Butcher shops, which “started to suffer in the ‘80s as big box stores like Wal-Mart expanded”, have seen a growing return to communities (Day). In Columbia, butcher shops like Ole Timey Meats and New York

Butcher Shoppe have grown and expanded to where they now have multiple locations in and around the city. Independent bookstores are also seeing a return after a steep decline due to large chain stores like Barnes & Noble, Borders Books, and Books-A-Million. In an interview with NPR, Ryan Rafaelli, professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, connects their return to “community...Booksellers have always been heavily embedded in their communities, but they’re able particular [sic] over the last ten years to communicate the message of shopping local and localism.” Previously, Ed’s Editions in West Columbia was the only independent bookstore in the Columbia area. In February of 2020, a new bookstore, Odd Bird Books, opened on Columbia’s Main Street. Although perhaps a little slower than in other areas, independent bookstores are seeing a resurgence in South Carolina. Butcher shops and independent bookstores are only a couple examples of a return of old-style businesses to areas of higher populations.

The movement of barbeque restaurants from their rural locations into urban centers could prove beneficial to attracting customers and welcoming a younger generation of a workforce. Millennials and the oldest members of Generation Z are increasingly moving to gentrifying cities and seeking a unique area to call home. By bringing the traditions of authentic South Carolina barbeque out of the country and into the cities, restaurants could either retain their younger family members or welcome an entirely new era of pitmasters into the business. Although cost-heavy and labor-intensive, this kind of move could reinvigorate aging restaurants and usher in a young, enthusiastic generation. For evidence of this movement’s success, we again look at Rodney Scott, who expanded beyond Hemingway, SC and into Charleston. The website for the restaurant states:

*The work is smoky, difficult and satisfying but turning the craft into a business is a way to ensure the survival of an important part of history and a traditional cooking technique that imparts a very unique flavor into meats. With Rodney Scott's BBQ restaurants in Charleston, SC, Birmingham, AL, and a location to open soon in Atlanta, GA, there are pitmasters who are trained in the same way that Rodney Scott has been working the pits since he was a kid.*

The restaurant, which continues to expand its reach, focuses on maintaining the traditions of authentic (and specifically, whole hog) barbeque in areas with a growing young population. They are much more likely to be able to employ and retain a younger staff, training them to continue the traditions of authentic barbeque into the generations to come.

The evidence for the effectiveness of these potential solutions lies in the success observed in Rodney Scott's business. Of the profiled restaurants, Scott's is the only one to have undertaken efforts to combat the eventual degradation of its restaurant either through its age or its lack of advertising. Scott's is also the only one of the five restaurants profiled to have achieved some level of fame. Scott's has been profiled on Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown*, Andrew Zimmern's *Bizarre Foods*, and in any number of articles and books. There are plenty of other restaurants that cook with similar methods, that produce a similar product, or that have been in business just as long, but Scott's has seen great success due to its local sourcing, its hand-delivery method of advertising, and its expansion beyond its hometown and into the populous cities, delivering the traditions of South Carolina to the doorstep of Millennial and Generation Z lifestyles. The combination of all of these elements has created an ideal situation

for Scott's, ensuring that it not only will profit through its current generation, but will continue to profit for generations to come.

### *Conclusion*

Barbeque is a staple of the South Carolina culture and lifestyle. What began as family traditions and social gatherings for the wealthy has evolved into an industry and a profession that bridges financial, racial, and political gaps. Authentic barbeque restaurants, known for their old-style cooking methods and high-quality pork, span much of the state. Although most have been faced with decades of economic ups and downs among other trials and tribulations, they remained strong and largely continue to operate and maintain the traditions of the pits today. The technological explosion and the growth of the generations born into it have presented authentic barbeque with challenges it has never seen before. Children who were once expected to take over the family business after their parents are increasingly departing from the norms and moving into cities and rejecting their upbringings. Others of their generation no longer rely on physical maps and billboards to travel; the whole process is streamlined into one handheld device. These restaurants that once had a reliable, predictable source of labor are questioning the futures of their businesses. Customers that once could find the restaurants just by passing through the area no longer look to roadside banners and ads for answers to their next meal, and instead look to their cell phones for what is nearby. For Millennials and Generation Z, instant gratification is key, and the less work involved, the better. These restaurants that are rooted in an older generation must adapt and bring their business online and into the growing digital and physical hubs of the up-and-coming generations. Social media campaigns, local events, connecting to

major urban centers, and welcoming the growth of gentrification all can serve to improve and increase the longevity of authentic barbeque in South Carolina.



*Photographs*

Hite's Bar-B-Que:





Price's BBQ:





Lone Star Barbecue & Mercantile:





Mustard Seed Bar-B-Que Country Cooking and Catering:





Scott's Bar-B-Que:



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*\*Note: All photographs were taken by the author*