



TRUE 'CUE NEWS

From the Campaign for Real Barbecue

May 2016

No. 5

New Patrons

We are delighted to welcome six newcomers to the Campaign's distinguished [company of Patrons](#):

Elizabeth Engelhardt, professor of Southern studies at UNC-Chapel Hill and author of [A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food](#), was formerly at UT-Austin, where she wrote [Republic of Barbecue: Stories Beyond the Brisket](#) with eleven of her graduate students.

Marcie Cohen Ferris is professor of American Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill and the author of [Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South](#) and [The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region](#).

Dotty Griffith teaches journalism at the University of North Texas and is the author of eight cookbooks, including [Celebrating Barbecue: The Ultimate Guide to America's 4 Regional Styles](#).

Gene Hamer is the owner and co-founder of Crook's Corner in Chapel Hill, which honors great barbecue houses across the Carolinas by serving their [barbecue every Wednesday](#) from October through April.

Tim Miller, author of [Barbecue: A History](#), teaches at Labette Community College in Parsons, Kansas, and writes about all aspects of American food history on his blog [Grog to Grits](#).

Joe York is a Senior Producer at the University of Mississippi's Southern Documentary Project whose [many films](#) include several about iconic barbecue places, in partnership with the Southern Foodways Alliance.

The Campaign now has patrons in sixteen states and the District of Columbia.

TrueCue in the States

Although the Campaign for Real Barbecue began in North Carolina and is still headquartered there, it is well on the way to becoming at least South-wide, if not nationwide. [TrueCue North Carolina](#) has now been joined by [TrueCue South Carolina](#) and [TrueCue Kentucky](#). (You can click on those links to see lists of certified 100% wood-cookers in each state.) South Carolina is in the good hands of Jim Roller and Patron Lake High; Kentucky is under the supervision of Patron Wes Berry.

And now it appears that **True 'Cue Georgia** will soon be a reality. Patron Jim Auchmutey will take the lead, with a strong assist from Craig Pascoe of Georgia College and State University. (Craig, incidentally, is curating a long-awaited barbecue exhibit coming to the Atlanta History Center in 2018. More on that when the time comes.)

Stripping the Epaulettes

We have it on reliable authority, alas, that a True 'Cue certified North Carolina establishment is now cooking mostly with gas, which raises a question: What should we do about a place that has fallen from grace?

We do not propose to retrieve the certificate or to rip the True 'Cue decal from the restaurant's window. (Anyway, what the certificate says is still true: the place was cooking 100% with wood as of a certain date.) Upon reflection, we have decided that we will simply remove any apostate from the list of certified places on our website, and hope that such cases rarely arise.

"Viandes Fumées & Barbecue Géant"

An addendum to the note in our last issue about [The Beast](#), a new wood-cooking place in Paris: We mentioned that owner Thomas Abramowicz apprenticed with Texas barbecue men Wayne Mueller and Wes Jurena. We did not know that Abramowicz credits True 'Cue Patron Daniel Vaughn with "changing his life" by introducing him to them. Well done, Daniel.

Worth a Look

Patron Kathleen Purvis writes in *The Bitter Southerner* on "[The Testosterone Takeover of Southern Food Writing](#)," about the "barbecue-entranced, bourbon-preoccupied and pork belly-obsessed horde" of men who have not just joined the party, but taken over the invitation list. (If you're curious, after the additions mentioned above, six of the Campaign's 31 patrons are women.)

Speaking of *The Bitter Southerner*, a recent issue includes a nice [photo essay on Texas barbecue](#) by Robert Jacob Lerma.

Belatedly : Last spring the First We Feast food blog empanelled a half-dozen sages, including Patrons Robert Moss, Jim Shahin, and Daniel Vaughn, for a conversation

on [The State of the BBQ Union](#). Not surprisingly, they offered many wise observations, including this one from Shahin, in response to a question about traditional barbecue capitals “in danger of falling out of the pantheon”:

Gas has made many inroads into North Carolina barbecue and the authentic wood-only barbecue there is in some jeopardy. But . . . the state still enjoys a clear identity that comes immediately to mind, and enough places serve good versions that if the worst were to happen and every joint in North Carolina went to gas, it would be less like falling out of the pantheon and more like the lost city of Atlantis.

North Carolina’s *Our State* magazine has a fine article on Chapel Hill [wood-cooker Keith Allen](#). At the bottom of the page are links to profiles of other Tar Heel barbecue legends, nearly all of them True ‘Cue certified. *Our State*’s [February issue](#) is largely devoted to what Patron Dennis Rogers calls the “Holy Grub,” but you’ll have to pay to read it.

If you’re not familiar with the Southern Foodways Alliance’s Southern Barbecue Trail, check it out [here](#). Several of our Patrons were involved in this worthy project.

When it comes to barbecue, it seems that the customer is not always right. In fact, to judge by the results of *Conde Nast Traveler*’s Reader’s Choice Awards for 2015, the customer isn’t even usually right. The magazine’s bizarre list of “[The Best BBQ Cities in America](#)” will bemuse anyone who actually knows anything at all about barbecue. Critiquing a list like this is like stomping on a cockroach – there’ll be plenty more where it came from – but this one is unusually egregious.

Conde Nast Traveler makes partial amends, however, with an article about [Real Barbecue\(정통 바베큐\) in Seoul](#), where Linus Kim, a Korean-American from Birmingham, runs Linus’s Bama Style Barbecue.

Do We Tell Restaurants How to Run Their Business?

As Nathan Bedford Forrest is supposed to have said, “I done told you twice already goddammit no!” But the accusation persists: Most recently, J.C. Reid took us to task for it in the [Houston Chronicle](#). So once more: We aim simply to identify and honor places that cook old-school. You got a problem with that?

Look, there are many restaurants, especially in the Carolinas, that cook entirely with gas or electricity. We try to avoid them (“except when courtesy requires it,” as the [True ‘Cue Pledge](#) puts it) and it’s true that we refer to their smoke-free product as “faux ‘cue,” but we don’t tell them how to run their business. In fact, we don’t even name them. (See below.) Places like [Homegrown Smokehouse & Deli](#) in Portland, Oregon, which cooks “pulled pork-style soy curls” —them we *will* name, but even them we don’t tell how to run their business.

Barbecue Institutions

One reason we don't name restaurants that serve roast pork untouched by wood smoke and call it "barbecue" is that some of them are among the oldest and best-known places around and have earned some respect for their history and their role in their communities. A long-established small-town barbecue place with pictures of the high-school football team on the wall, the kind of place where the after-church crowd goes, the Lions Club meets, couples court and celebrate anniversaries—a place like that deserves some silence, even if its food is mediocre, or worse.

Alton Brown has talked about this. "Sometimes it's not the best food," the host of the Food Network's *Good Eats* observed, "but you have to look at its place in the community. It's funny with barbecue, because the most beloved barbecue places in the South, by and large, serve the shittiest barbecue." OK, an overstatement, but he was on his way to making an important point:

Places that people will drive hours to get to, barbecue's not that great, but it's still there. It's been there. My mom brought me here. My grandparents are from here. I love this place. In the end, authenticity and a sense of place are more important than taste and flavor. That's something that we forget in our Instagram craze—that place and authenticity, history, all matter. That's what really connects us to a place. Good food isn't always the most important.

We at the Campaign are concerned with good food, but we wouldn't argue with that.

A Safe Space for the Weaker Sex

In January we heard that a place called "Das BBQ" was fixing to open in a former Pizza Hut in Atlanta. The name was chosen to honor "German and Czech settlers who first brought smoked meats to [Central Texas]" —which seems a little odd since owner Stephen Franklin intends to "help define Georgia barbecue," not to cook Texas-style, but it sounds as if the food will be the least important part of the Das BBQ "experience." Franklin wants "to be remembered for our people, our place, and then our products. That's what the best brands on the planets [sic] do."

"Our one-liner, mission statement," Franklin told [Atlanta Magazine](#), "is to reinvent the barbecue experience and to make it accessible for everybody. That includes women, children, and men, in that order." Women, he says, have a "threshold anxiety" when "they see a bunch of smoke going into a place," so he is emphasizing "decor, the color schemes, the type of material being used—the actual experience of the place itself we want to pair with the personality of our people." (*Atlanta Eater* comments: "Finally, a barbecue restaurant that will be a safe place for those of the fairer sex and their little babies.")

This supposedly female-friendly model was pioneered by [Shane's Rib Shack](#) (also originally an Atlanta-area enterprise, but now franchised in 10 states). Shane's was definitively pilloried by Patron Jim Auchmutey in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* in 2006 and [again](#) by Patron Robert Moss two years later. The owner, Shane Thompson, unapologetically chose to use electric smokers, Moss reported, "so that his barbecue would have *less* smoke flavor, believing that women not only prefer clean restaurants to smoky old BBQ joints but also like a lighter smoked flavor than men. With their electric cookers, you'll never find a red smoke ring on

Shane's barbecue, but that's intentional. 'We don't want people thinking the meat isn't done,' Thompson said. 'A lot of people are uneducated about barbecue.'"

(But we're not telling these people how to run their businesses.)

The True 'Cue Challenge

Last month marked two years since True 'Cue North Carolina issued the [True 'Cue Challenge](#), which offers a "No Faux 'Cue" apron and a ball cap to the first person who can identify (1) any statute or regulation that forbids any North Carolina barbecue restaurant to cook with wood or charcoal, or (2) any official—federal, state, county, or municipal—who has made a North Carolina barbecue restaurant stop cooking with wood or charcoal, or who has forbidden one to start.

Anyone? . . . Anyone?

Preach It

From the Book of Revelation, the ninth chapter, the second verse:

"And there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit."

Earlier issues of *True 'Cue News* can be found on-line [here](#).

You can also follow us on [Facebook](#).

If you have anything of interest to supporters of Real Barbecue—old places closing or turning to gas, new places opening, obituaries of barbecue legends, whatever—please send it along to TrueCue@gmail.com.