



# TRUE 'CUE NEWS

## From the Campaign for Real Barbecue

November 2015

This is the third issue of *True 'Cue News*. If you missed an earlier issue and would like a copy, drop us a note at [TrueCue@gmail.com](mailto:TrueCue@gmail.com). 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 that same email address.

### The True 'Cue Challenge

Nineteen months and counting. We are still offering 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. Although the Challenge pertains only to North Carolina establishments, it has received some press elsewhere, thanks to two of our campaign’s patrons. Daniel Vaughn weighed in with [“Barbecue Fallacy: The Grandfather Clause.”](#) in his blog for *Texas Monthly*, and Robert Moss wrote an article in the Columbia *Free Times* called [“The Myth of Health Departments, Wood Cooking and Grandfathering.”](#)

### The South’s Top Fifty Barbecue Restaurants

As barbecue editor for *Southern Living*, Robert Moss has also fearlessly provided his readers with a provisional list of [the South’s 50 best barbecue places](#) far more plausible than most such lists. Robert tells us that the top ten are all 100% wood-cookers, and so are the next forty except for three or four that use hybrid cookers responsibly. In other words, smoke from wood or charcoal is a feature of all fifty.

Robert’s top ten, in alphabetical order, are:

Allen & Son Barbeque, Chapel Hill NC	Louie Mueller Barbecue, Taylor TX
Franklin Barbecue, Austin TX	Martin’s Bar-B-Que Joint, Nolensville TN
Fresh Air Barbecue, Jackson GA	Old Hickory Barbecue, Owensboro KY
Helen’s Bar BQ, Brownsville TN	Scott’s Bar-B-Que, Hemingway SC
La Barbecue, Austin TX	Skylight Inn, Ayden NC

## Our 15 Minutes of Fame

In the November 2 issue of the *New Yorker*, in an article entitled [“In Defense of the True ‘Cue.”](#) Calvin Trillin reported on a North Carolina barbecue trek that covered some 700 miles in four days, taking in the Nahunta Pork Center, Conrad & Hinkle Grocery in Lexington, a neighborhood pig-picking in Chapel Hill, and twelve restaurants, evenly divided between eastern and piedmont. John Reed and Dan Levine got to serve as his hosts and guides, and Trillin had some nice things to say about our campaign.

By and large, the response has been favorable, with a flood of new signatures for the True ‘Cue Pledge and even some tee-shirt and bumper sticker sales. A few barbecue cooks who employ hybrid gas- or electric-assisted cookers evidently felt disrespected, however, and we had to reassure them that we’re not saying their barbecue isn’t “real.”

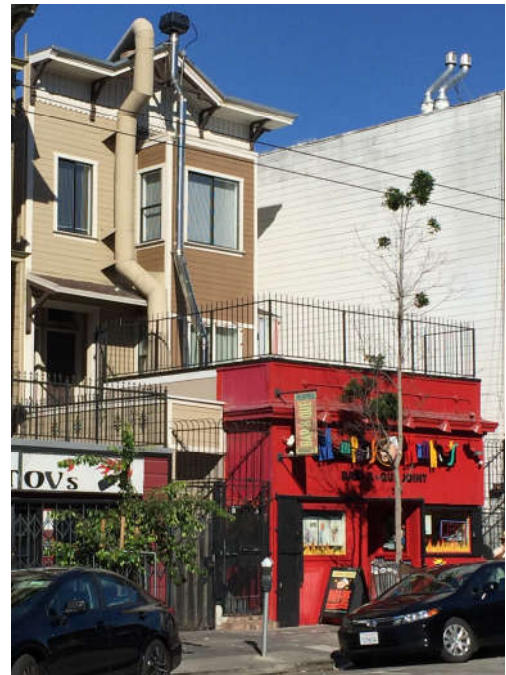
For the record: We exist to honor barbecue’s wood-cooking heritage. We work to identify and to encourage 100% wood-cookers. But we acknowledge that great “real barbecue” can be cooked with hybrid cookers. We apply the label “faux ‘cue” only to so-called barbecue cooked entirely without wood smoke.

## Wood-Cooking on Haight Street

Most East Coasters who hear “Haight Street” probably think of going to San Francisco and wearing flowers in their hair. A few of us, however, think of **Memphis Minnie’s**, an unprepossessing joint that cooks some of the best barbecue west of Texas, *entirely with wood*. (Note the chimney arrangement in the photo below.) At Minnie’s they don’t even use gas for ignition; they start the fire with a chimney-full of charcoal briquettes.

Minnie’s was the baby of Bob Kantor, a Brooklyn guy who made a real study of the Southern barbecue tradition and brought it to the Bay Area, with a few of his own touches like sake, vegan collards, and pastrami once a week. (Dan Levine [interviewed](#) Bob in 2010.) Since Bob’s untimely death in 2013, Minnie’s has been owned by his widow, Gail Wilson, and it is now run by Tom and Jackie Campbell, a terrific young couple who are faithfully continuing Bob’s legacy, sake and all.

Whenever someone tells us that they’re not allowed to cook with wood, we tell them that if Minnie’s can do it in downtown San Francisco, it can be done anywhere. Given that, we have chosen to certify Memphis Minnie’s as a purveyor of 100% wood-cooked Real Barbecue. Anyone who knew Bob, or has eaten at Minnie’s, will understand why we are bypassing the Campaign’s ordinary certification procedures.



## True 'Cue North Carolina

The bad news:

To anyone who doubts that the Campaign for Real Barbecue is needed: We just learned that the “North Carolina barbecue” served at the U.S. Open in Pinehurst last year was faux 'cue, entirely gas-cooked.

And another wood-cooker has closed. **The Fire Pit** in Wake Forest has gone out of business, replaced by a “gourmet grilled cheese restaurant” called Gooley's American Grille, serving gumbo, chili, and “award winning Cajun Mac.”

When we announced the opening of **Speedy Lohr's Barbecue** on Highway 8 south of Lexington we were delighted to report that although the previous owners of the building switched to cooking with gas, the old pits were still in place and Randy and Amy Lohr had gone back to wood. Unfortunately, the place burned down last summer (a danger with wood cooking). The Lohrs are determined to reopen, but the damage is extensive and we hear that it may not be until next spring.

The good news:

Thanks to Brownie Futrell of Little Washington for helping to certify wood cookers in eastern North Carolina. Brownie's first two finds are in *far* eastern North Carolina: (1) **Ocracoke Oyster Company** on Ocracoke Island is surely the easternmost place in the state (and the only oyster restaurant) to cook traditional barbecue. It's probably also unique in cooking with fig wood, which is very common on the island. (2) **Martelle's Feed House** in Engelhard, on Pamlico South, used to cook whole hogs but the supplier no longer delivers that far east, so Martelle now cooks shoulders, served with a very traditional eastern NC sauce.

**Southern Smoke BBQ** in Garland and **Buxton Hall** in Asheville are places at opposite ends of the state that have opened recently to serve utterly traditional whole-hog barbecue with decidedly non-traditional side dishes cooked up by innovative chefs. There are rumors of others yet to come, notably **Picnic** in Durham, which will feature the joint efforts of Pig Whistle whole-hog caterer Wyatt Dickson and the former chef of Durham's high-toned Piedmont restaurant.

Meanwhile, in Greenville, Sam Jones has opened **Sam Jones Barbecue**, serving a more extensive menu than his family's **Skylight Inn** in nearby Ayden, but one most definitely including the whole-hog barbecue, yellow slaw, and cornpone that has made the Skylight Inn world-famous. Sam will divide his time and energies between the old place and the new.

## True 'Cue Kentucky

Wes Berry reports:

True 'Cue Kentucky recently certified **Hickory Hill Barbecue** of Scottsville and **Jimmy D's Real Pitt Bar-B-Que and Self Storage** of Bowling Green. Hickory Hill specializes in deeply smoked Boston butts and pork ribs cooked on small cinderblock pits over hickory and oak. Jimmy D's smokes a variety of God's creatures on a big Brinkman smoker fired by 100% hardwoods.

We estimate approximately 70 True 'Cue certifiable barbecue places in Kentucky in need of site visits.

## True 'Cue South Carolina

**Melvin's Barbecue** (founded in 1939, now with locations in Charleston and Mount Pleasant, South Carolina) has returned to [100% wood-cooking](#). Melvin Bessinger, of the famous South Carolina Bessinger barbecue dynasty, tells *Southern Living's* Robert Moss that he's had to add a third shift to make it work, but he's had good feedback from customers and "I believe using the all wood smokers . . . has made a big difference in the flavor of the meats."

Thanks to Lake High, Campaign patron and president of the South Carolina Barbeque Association, we now have a [listing of restaurants](#) in the Palmetto State that are believed to serve 100% wood-cooked barbecue.

Certificates have been presented to three so far: Hite's Bar-B-Que and True Barbecue, both in West Columbia, and Jackie Hite's in Batesburg-Leesville.