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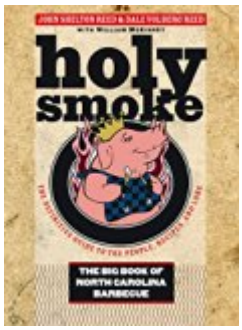

John Shelton Reed, Dale Volberg Reed, William McKinley. *Holy Smoke: The Big Book of North Carolina Barbecue.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 328 pp. $30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-3243-1.

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Commissioned by Judkin J. Browning (Appalachian State University)

Americans have definite opinions on barbecue. They vary regarding what to prepare (pork, beef, mutton, chicken), how to cook the meat (open pit, closed, wood, gas), and what goes in the sauce (vinegar, mustard, ketchup, brown sugar, and even mayonnaise in northern Alabama!), among other things. It is difficult enough to find consensus across the Barbecue Belt on these matters of importance related to smoking meats, so the authors have limited their investigation to North Carolina barbecue. The text is divided into three sections which each complement the others (just like freshly chopped pork and slaw). The introductory section, "The Lore," defines North Carolina barbecue (pork cooked low and slow over wood with a vinegar-based sauce or dip), traces the history and evolution of barbecue within the state, clearly establishes the regional preferences (eastern style vs. Piedmont) and details the rise of the barbecue restaurant. The following section, aptly entitled "The Food," grants insight into the main course of fine swine and other customary additions found on a plate (or sandwich) in the Old North State such as slaw, dip, hush puppies, banana pudding, and sweet tea. The last section, "The People," is a compilation biography of notable contributions to the Tarheel barbecue tradition.

Throughout the work, the text is interspersed with colorful anecdotes, poetry, quotes, songs, and mouth-watering illustrations. The text is lively and presents various interpretations of a matter in an unbiased and informative manner. The authors do admit to not being native North Carolinians; the Reeds hail from across the western boulder in the mountains of Tennessee and Mr. McKinley is originally from South Carolina, and they claim that this allows them to present an objective opinion on all matters related to barbecue.

The roots of North Carolina barbecue can be traced back to the Croatan Indians (circa 1585) cooking their fish over an open fire. Once pork was introduced in the region, the inhabitants of North Carolina developed a strong affinity for it. In the early 1700s, the Virginia aristocrat William

Byrd II made a trip across the border into North Carolina and proclaimed the population to be "porcivorous people" who consumed so much swine they were "extremely hoggish in their Temper, & many of them seem to Grunt rather than Speak in their ordinary conversation" (p. 23). Mr. Byrd's assessment continues today as barbecue restaurants dot the landscape from the lighthouses to the mountains and pigs still outnumber people.

Of particular interest to barbecue purists is the discussion of the eastern North Carolina barbecue tradition featuring whole hog and a sauce devoid of ketchup. Following the end of World War I, barbecue pioneers in the Piedmont region, particularly in Lexington and Salisbury, began to serve pork that their kin to the east would find blasphemous. The new style, breaking eastern tradition in Martin Luther fashion, featured only shoulders and added ketchup to the vinegar-based dip. The authors connect this deviation to the lineage of the Piedmont pioneers. Early barbecue families from this region shared a common German heritage, which the authors suggest led to the modification of barbecue style as immigrants transplanted the German tradition of smoking pork (especially shoulders).

This section is littered with colorful quotes in support of the two types of barbecue prevalent in the state. Dennis Rogers, a reporter with the Raleigh *News and Observer*, defends eastern style sauce--"somebody who would put ketchup on barbecue and give it to a child is capable of pretty much anything"--and renowned pit master Ed Mitchell states his case for cooking the whole hog: "from the rooter to the tooter.... If you cut 'em up ... you've deviated from the real deal" (p. 38). Wayne Monk, the proprietor of Lexington Barbecue, counters, "there are some parts of the hog that I would just as soon not eat" (p. 39). In recounting the lively debate, which rivals in passion the contests between UNC and Duke on the hardwood, the authors make a case that the east-west feud is actually healthy and only adds to the legend of North Carolina barbecue.

Tarheel barbecues are mentioned in conjunction with several notable events in the state's history, including the Revolutionary War, Reconstruction, and the armistice following World War I. Barbecue is such an important piece of North Carolina's history; it has become entrenched in every aspect of society, even the conversationally taboo topics of politics and religion. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, worshippers have enjoyed pork as part of their "dinner on the grounds" gatherings and have also used barbecue as a means of raising funds for the church. Following the Civil War, politicians used the social stage at community barbecues to stump for votes and connect with the electorate.

By the early 1900s pit masters chose to go beyond political rallies and church meals for business. They began to sell their barbecue from the backs of wagons or under tents; portable set-ups that allowed them to bring barbecue to the people in places like the courthouse square or the tobacco warehouses following an auction. The first barbecue restaurant in the state followed soon thereafter in 1924, Bob Melton's Barbecue in Rocky Mount.

In their discussion of the institution that is the BBQ joint, the authors guide the novice in locating an authentic barbecue establishment by listing some distinguishing features. They advise readers to look for signs such as "sagging screen doors, smoke-blackened walls, toothless proprietors, and flies" (p. 67), adding that a "B" score from the county health inspector and the sheriff's car out front are often clues to finding quality 'cue.

The section entitled "The Food" features tips and insights on cooking pork (with separate sections for whole hog and shoulders, of course), including the selection of wood (hickory, oak, or fruit trees are recommended), using cardboard to

shelter the meat from ash, and even how to construct your own pit.

Sauces and dips are granted a healthy portion of the chapter, for good reason. The vinegar-based sauce (sometimes referred to as "dip") is one of the most distinguishing factors of North Carolina barbecue. There are a few theories regarding the origin of the vinegar-based dip, including one in a recent article proclaiming where the best barbecue sandwiches can be found in Dixie. Guy Martin, who located the "vinegar belt" between North Carolina and northern Alabama, posits, "The sauce is so tart because the region was settled exclusively by mean-ass Protestants who thought that drinking vinegar and red pepper might help purify them of their many real and imagined sins" (p. 52).[1] Regardless of the origin, dip recipes are usually closely guarded secrets on the same level as the location of "your fishing hole or duck blinds" (p. 106).

The Piedmont sauces feature most of the same ingredients in addition to sugar and the aforementioned controversial ketchup. As this section progresses, each integral piece of the Tar Heel barbecue meal is discussed in thorough detail including the universal accompaniments, cole slaw, hush puppies, corn bread (or corn pone), and the bun, if the 'cue comes on a sandwich. The authors caution against getting too fancy with the bun and losing sight of the pork: "The bread's role is mostly structural. It's just a medium; the barbecue is the message" (p. 129).

Next come chapters on Brunswick Stew and other popular side dishes, followed by a discussion of desserts typically found at a barbecue restaurant, including banana pudding. Finally, attention is given to the proper drink to serve with barbecue. Due to the tart vinegar taste of the meat, the drink is often a sweet contrast. The most frequent choice is the house wine of the South, sweet tea. The popular beverage has been recognized in North Carolina for its strength. One journalist stated, "Carolina sweet tea coats the back of a spoon. Left undisturbed, rock candy will form in the glass. Were it much thicker, you could pour it on waffles" (p. 192). If the diner opts for other choices, native Pepsi Cola and the regional cherry soda Cheerwine are recommended.

After tracing the history of barbecue in the Old North State and exploring the nuances of regional differences in pork, slaw, and dips, the authors complete their review of North Carolina 'cue with succinct biographies of the pioneers and personalities that have shaped their state's famous dish. Although the people and stories are quite distinct, many of the same principles and values reappear in the narrative, including working with wood, taking pride in the product, the importance of family, valuing the customer, and doing things the old-fashioned way, even when it requires extra time, effort, and money.

The depth and breadth of research completed on the topic will allow readers to deepen their understanding of the topic while learning about the significance of barbecue in North Carolina. The book is an enjoyable read, interwoven with religious, political, and military history that puts the fine swine in its proper place in the Old North State's story.

Note

[1]. Guy Martin, "The South in a Sandwich," ***Garden and Gun*** (June/July 2011): 52-60.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-nc

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