

**MARY HARDEN**  
**Beatty Street Grocery - Jackson, MS**  
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Location: Beatty Street Grocery - Jackson, MS  
Interviewer: Rien Fertel  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
Length: 48 minutes  
Project: Jackson's Iconic Restaurants

**[Begin Mary Harden — Beatty Street Grocery]**

**00:00:00**

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. Check, check, this is Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance, in Jackson, Mississippi, and it is Friday, March 7, 2014. I am at *Bee-ty* or *Bea-ty* Street Grocery.

**00:00:20**

**Mary Harden:** Beatty. It's spelled like Warren Beatty but pronounced *Bea-ty*.

**00:00:22**

**RF:** So pronounced Beatty Street Grocery and I'm here with Mary Harden. I'm going to have her introduce herself.

**00:00:29**

**MH:** I'm Mary Harden and I was born October 9 of 1958 and we're at Beatty Street Grocery.

**00:00:36**

**RF:** Thank you. So what's your role here at Beatty Street?

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**MH:** I'm co-owner but I do act as the Manager now, along with my parents upon the occasion, or my mom rather, upon the occasion, but primarily everything is on me.

**00:00:49**

**RF:** So as I understand it you're a third-generation owner; let's go back to the beginning: What's the history; what are the origins? What's the first year of this place that we're in?

**00:01:00**

**MH:** Well my grandpa was a Colonial Bread man and he actually delivered bread to the store that was sitting here. It was an old corner grocery store before Kroger's and all the supermarkets. And he actually decided to buy the place and he turned it into the sandwich shop that it is today, but that happened over about a fifty-year period of time. So it actually sold groceries and he delivered groceries all in the neighborhood and they worked here from 6:00 in the morning until ten o'clock at night delivering the groceries and selling them. And they actually cut meat. They had sides of beef that they would purchase from Jackson Packing that used to be up on the hill around the corner from us, and they just developed it into what it is today, the wonderful eatery that it is today.

**00:01:43**

So my parents worked for them. My dad work—started working when he was about in the seventh or eighth grade. He had to quit school to support his family, so my grandparents hired him, and he and my mother fell in love, and so he took over when my grandparents became too old to work and they kind of cut back and then they passed away in '78 and '80. So my parents had it and now I'm running it after Dad. So I'm a third-generation.

**00:02:11**

**RF:** I want to kind of dive into a few of the details there. What was your grandfather's name?

**00:02:15**

**MH:** It was Mack and Irene Baldwin. They were from Smith County, Mississippi and they drove up from Smith County everyday, after they moved out of Jackson. They originally were from Jackson and they lived here for a few years and then moved back down to Smith County where they had been born, their birth place.

**00:02:32**

**RF:** What year were they born in, just to kind of get their generation?

**00:02:35**

**MH:** Okay; my grandfather was born in 1905 and my grandmother was born in 1911 and they purchased the store in 1940. So they actually were married, what, about twenty years and then they purchased the store.

**00:02:50**

**RF:** So it was a grocery store you said in 1940 when your grandfather bought it. Do you know when the grocery store was established here?

**00:03:00**

**MH:** There was a small grocery store here. We're not sure how long it was prior to; we have pictures of it like it was when he purchased it because it was only a fourth of the size it is now. So but we're not—none of us are—we're not clear on exactly how long it was prior to that. It was gravel roads all around us at that time and there were only houses because people were reliving around here, rather than being industries around it. So back in the 1960s it started industrializing the area and that's about the time that we started selling sandwiches.

00:03:30

**RF:** And do you know who he bought it from, the name of the individual?

00:03:33

**MH:** There is a bill of sale that he bought it, back in the back on the wall there. We can look and see what the man's name was. I know he purchased it with the fixtures that were in it for \$250, July, I think the 8<sup>th</sup> of 1940.

00:03:47

**RF:** Wow; and you said it was a fourth of the size where it is now. Can you describe the building and describe what's original and then how it was built?

00:03:57

**MH:** The only original thing that's here is actually what's in the very front, so it's only a fourth of the size. The checkout, the railings where you checkout, all of that is a part of the original building. We have a picture over there that we can show you. It was totally different but then he expanded it and put in the countertops, that are here today, in 1948. So and about three years ago I decided that it would be kind of cool for people to be able to eat on these old countertops so I had a carpenter come in and he took the shelves off the bottom parts and he maintained the integrity of the top parts of the counters so that people can eat off of them, eat on the counters. And then we bought stools so that we could kind of make it into a sit-down and eat restaurant rather than just a takeout only. But we kept the meat market, just the same old meat market that it was when we were cutting meat up that I used to stand on the old wooden Coke boxes when I

was six, seven, five years old and stood on those—my Papaw would stack up two wooden Coke boxes and he would let me put the beef down in the grinder to make hamburger meat out of it, so it was really kind of cool because he had the different settings that he could make what I would think of as macaroni and then he'd make spaghetti. So one was smaller and one was bigger and he would let me look down into it. I think now probably they would not let children do it but I could look down and see the thing going round and round that would grind the meat up and it was kind of cool.

**00:05:19**

And then I was five I was putting up the soup cans with him and we had the old stampers that would do the ink marks on the top of the soup cans. And he and I would race to see who could put the soup cans up the quickest. So I grew up doing this.

**00:05:32**

**RF:** And so you said it transitioned or he added sandwiches or food, hot food eight years later, did you say, or five years later?

**00:05:40**

**MH:** No; he actually—well it stayed a grocery store probably until the early '60s somewhere mid to early '60s, maybe late '50s, but he had cans of Rick's Sausage and he sold smoked sausage. And he would open the cans of Rick's Sausage and the guys down at Jackson Iron and Metal, it is now, the metal processors, they would come down and they would be hungry and he would just make a few sandwiches along. And then he would slice some bologna because we still sell the cold-cuts. We sell, and still do sell, bologna, lunchmeat, salami, we had boiled ham, we had all the different eateries, the sliced meats like that. He would slice them and we would

sell cold bologna, thin cold bologna sandwiches for a dime a piece. And they would come down and they would buy these dime sandwiches that sit on the front stoop where the windows were on the windowsills and they would eat their sandwiches outside or they'd sit along the same counters that are here today, but they had like groceries on them, and they would just sit on the edges of the counters. And I remember—have vivid memories of there being fifty, sixty men in here at the same time would be eating their sandwiches inside the store, or if they had a truck, they'd just park in the parking lot, and the parking lot was gravel at the time and we had trees in the parking lot. And they would sit on the tailgates of their trucks and eat them.

**00:06:53**

But even that was later because initially, when they first started selling sandwiches, we still had houses around us. So, you know, people would come in and get the sandwiches and just sit in—around wherever they could find a spot to eat.

**00:07:06**

**RF:** So they were cold sandwiches for the most part?

**00:07:08**

**MH:** Primarily for the most part they started out being cold. Then when they decided this was going to be a viable option they put in a stove and—back behind the meat market. And they started with an old stove top and old griddle. They would fry the burgers or fry like the bologna and they would make them in the—what was the storage room behind the meat market. They cut a hole through the wall of the meat market, which is still there today, and would put the sandwiches through the hole and sell them over the meat market. Then the Health Department came in and they saw what we were doing and they said, you can't do that; you've got to have a

total separate spot to do this. So at that time we took the other half of the back of the store, the storage area, which was also a storage room for drinks and things, and I can remember—I was—you know how when you're small everything looks a lot bigger, and I remember seeing stacks and stacks of drinks and they would walled up what was the delivery door, where you can still see on the side of the building where the delivery was, you know, through the curbs. But they walled all that up and that's when we started selling sandwiches from the area that it is now.

**00:08:13**

**RF:** I have to ask this: he was a Colonial Bread salesman, were the first sandwiches sold on Colonial bread do you know?

**00:08:20**

**MH:** I'm sure they probably were. Now I will say he was actually a delivery man. He wasn't up to salesman yet. **[Laughs]** So he was the delivery guy for Colonial and, yeah, we have the old bread rack that's got Hardin's on it but at one time, you know, the bread companies were separate and then they'd get—they'd merge together and things, so—but he did deliver the bread down here, long years ago.

**00:08:45**

**RF:** Where did your grandparents live? Did they live within walking distance of the store?

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**MH:** Yes; initially they did live—they lived over past George Elementary School, off Silas Brown on Evergreen Street, and that's where Mom grew up. She grew up over there. But there

originally had been—they—my grandparents grew up in Smith County down below Puckett at White Oak and so they always—my grandpa, rather, wanted to go back down there; my grandmother not so much. She wanted to stay a city girl. But I know she told me she didn't even come to Jackson from Smith County until she was seventeen years old.

**00:09:17**

So, but my grandpa drug her back down there when my mother must have been in the tenth grade; so that would have been about 1956 they moved back to White Oak. And then they commuted back and forth from Smith County and White Oak to Jackson then, so it was kind of amazing that she never came to Jackson from the White Oak area until she was seventeen but then wound up moving back down there and commuting back and forth—how far they had come from not having vehicles basically at all to come to town to coming every day.

**00:09:44**

And I—there were lots and lots of times; I spent a lot of time with them down at Smith County and there were lots of mornings that they would get up before daylight and they'd get ready and they'd—I'd ride in the backseat, laying down in the backseat, to come to work with them to open the store. And they'd stay here until ten o'clock at night working really hard and really long hours, six days a week, Monday through Saturday. But my Papaw never would open on Sunday. Sunday was the Lord's Day and he would always close on Sunday. Never; he didn't believe on working on Sundays.

**00:10:14**

**RF:** Can you describe your grandparents just maybe—? I like asking this question often, just, you know, what they look like or how you remember them or how they dressed or just anything—how you remember them or how would you describe them and maybe their voices?

00:10:27

**MH:** Wow; I've never had anybody ask me that question. I was really, really close to my grandparents. I was their first grandchild and I spent a tremendous amount of time with them. I guess the first word that comes to mind is *faithful*, but then the second word would be *hard-working*. And I guess they instilled in me a really great work ethic so I don't have a lot of patience with people that don't want to work hard. So I—they were giving people and my Papaw could be gruff. He could be scary. I worked—started working in the kitchen when I was nine years old and then I clerked up front with him when I was thirteen. And because he was kind of gruff I was always kind of afraid of making a mistake with him but my Mamaw was always gentle and kind and I have vivid memories of going to church with her and putting my head in her lap. And I just think they instilled in me the want to do good to—for the sake of doing good, so I tried to instill that in my children.

00:11:22

So, but my grandpa would give you the shirt off his back and I think the people that—the older people that remember him from around here remember him in that regard. So we still have people that come in and ask about Mr. Mack and I never can—I have to ask them because my grandpa's name was Mack, but my dad's name was Malcolm, and sometimes they would confuse the two and they would be thinking of the same one and I'd say, "Now are you talking about my dad Malcolm or my grandpa Mack?" And we'd have to get it straight. But they all—they think the world of both of them because they were both giving people.

00:11:50

**RF:** So you do have customers that have come here for decades?

00:11:54

**MH:** Oh, without a doubt. We have people that have been coming in here since 1940. I mean since the beginning and quite often I have them come in and say, “I’ve been coming in here a really long time. I started coming here in 1985.” And I’m thinking, “Oh Lord, that’s just yesterday to me.” **[Laughs]** You know, when you start saying, “I was coming in here in 1955,” now that begins to be sort of back there in that time, but, yeah, we have people that come in upon the occasion and say, yeah, “You remember when it was Harper Foundry across the street?” And I’ll say, “Yes, I do. Very vividly.” And I know that they’re really somebody that’s been here maybe since 1960, so but yeah; upon the occasion I do have somebody that comes in and says, “I’ve been coming in here for a really long time.” And I have to say, “What’s really long to you?” “Oh, 1962 or 1963.” And I’m thinking, “Yeah, you’ve been here loyal and true.” **[Laughs]**

00:12:42

**RF:** So I was just kind of walking around the building and looking at the neighborhood and you said it was residential, or more residential than it is now. When did the neighborhood start to change from residential to industrial?

00:12:53

**MH:** It started changing back in the late, probably, ’50s—more the early ’60s and even until I was in high school, in the later ‘70s, there were houses around here, some, interspersed. I mean, you know, they were rentals for the most part. I can remember there being a church across the

street just right opposite corner here, and I remember I was probably in high school when they finally moved that church. They brought in the trucks and they put it up on the rafters and they moved it to another location. So there was a store across the street, down the street, and it's been here but now since the local gentlemen's club, if you will, and—but there was actually a house next door to us and Miss Lily lived there. And when she passed away and that was probably about 1968 or '70, my grandpa bought that property. And they ultimately tore the house down. But even as far as ten houses down the street there was a few houses there until the, probably, the late '70s.

**00:13:53**

And my dad grew up and lived right in this neighborhood; he lived on this side of the railroad tracks from my mom. The railroad tracks literally run between here and the neighborhood my mom lived in, so she was from the other side of the railroad tracks over where George Elementary and Silas Brown is and then Dad lived over here on Beatty Street in a couple of different houses actually. And then he lived up on Rankin Street in another house, too, so he grew up right here in this neighborhood, too.

**00:14:21**

**RF:** And was this neighborhood always a part of Jackson, or was it a part of a Jackson in 1940, or was it considered a suburb or was it—?

**00:14:29**

**MH:** It was a part of—it was a part of Jackson from the get-go, but now having said that, in 1940 it was much more removed. It was on the outskirts of town and the streets were all like I said gravel. There was—it was—and I think it ended. My dad could tell you a little bit more

about where it actually ended right around the curve here. But it was on the outskirts of town then.

**00:14:51**

**RF:** So I'm guessing when—if the area was industrialized in the 1960s I'm guessing the workforce was probably both white and black? Were—was the grocery, when it became a sandwich shop, was it integrated? Were—did you have both white and black customers?

**00:15:08**

**MH:** Uh-hmm; I have never remembered it being anything but integrated from the time—from the very beginning. My grandparents delivered to white and black alike. My dad grew up down here with white and black alike. He will tell you readily that he grew up and that we all lived together and never thought anything of it. I don't have any memories of anything but black and whites being here together, working, eating, living, the—I mean it was—that's always the way it's been. I never have any memory of any—being any other way here for us.

**00:15:40**

**RF:** So I want to ask about the next generation, your father's generation. You—tell us about how he started here and why he started at such a young age. You mentioned that earlier and that's a very young age.

**00:15:52**

**MH:** Uh-hmm; my grandfather was not a part of my dad's life. And so he was not there to help the family, and my dad was the oldest of five children. So my mother—my grandmother could

not make a good enough living to support all five of her children. And the—her husband was not on the scene most of the time. My grandpa barely knew him at all and only met him a couple times. So my dad, being a giving person, at middle school age he had to go to work, which was not just super uncommon in the 1950s, if you will, I mean in Mississippi. And he had to find a way to support the family, so he worked odd jobs. He worked for my uncles at a different store that they had working in their meat market. So he kind of learned a little bit about butchering there. And so my grandfather kind of felt sorry for him. He knew he had siblings that were much younger than he was because my dad is, let's see, almost twenty years older than his youngest brother. And so he basically had to be the father-figure for them. So he started working wherever he could. And at that time there weren't as many, if there were any at all, child labor laws, so it was just a matter of survival for them. There wasn't the aid that there is today, so to eat and put food on the table it was up to my dad.

**00:17:08**

And so my grandparents felt sorry for them and so they helped him along by hiring him and giving him an opportunity to work.

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**RF:** So your father is not the son of the man who started this?

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**MH:** No.

**00:17:23**

**RF:** Okay.

**00:17:24**

**MH:** It's my mother—it's on my maternal side that this—the store comes into play. So my dad was working here, and then my mom and he fell in love and so it was one of those where they ran off and eloped and got married.

**00:17:39**

**RF:** Okay; they just happened to have similar names, Mack and Malcolm?

**00:17:42**

**MH:** Correct. It's Mack and Malcolm; that is correct. They just have similar names and that's why they get confused sometimes but most people that knew them know the difference. They just can't pronounce it correctly so—but I have to get it clear as to which one they're talking about. But yeah; my dad worked here most of the time. My mom helped out, but she was more of a stay at home mom. She would help during the lunch hour. I can remember when I was really small, at five and six, my mom would say—because we lived around here not very far when I was young until I was ten years old; we lived probably half a mile away. And I went to George Elementary and George Elementary was integrated at that time, so I never knew really anything much different at the age—you know, we worked in that environment, my mom and dad had lived that, my daddy especially living on this side of the railroad tracks, and so we would go back and forth pretty readily, you know. So it was easy.

**00:18:38**

**RF:** What is your mom's name and did they meet—they met here or did—have they told you about how they started dating or how they met?

**00:18:46**

**MH:** They haven't told me a lot about how they started dating, but now they did meet here at Beatty Street, because they kind of grew up together with her being the owner's daughter and him being helped out by the owner. It was sort of kind of they met each other—. Actually, when she started getting older, they thought she would be with his brother, but she wound up with my dad. So, anyway, they have not given me a lot of the details, so all I know is that they fell in love and ran off and got married, so—. And it worked out; they've been together for almost sixty years now. So it's been a good thing.

**00:19:23**

**RF:** And what is her name?

**00:19:24**

**MH:** Carolyn Massey. He was Malcolm Massey and she's Carolyn Massey so we went from Mack and Irene Baldwin to Malcolm and Carolyn Massey. And now my husband I, because I make my husband help me sometimes [*Laughs*], Ed and Mary Harden.

**00:19:38**

**RF:** And when did your parents kind of take over the business?

**00:19:40**

**MH:** Hmm; I—you know, it's a hard thing to say when they actually took over because I guess it's again like my parents. They just grew older and it became more difficult to work, but I would say my grandparents passed away in—my grandmother in '78 and my grandfather in '80, and I would—probably the early '70s when my parents—late '60s. My grandpa was at the point when it really began to be difficult in this area to sell the sandwiches and you were like at a point where you're thinking, “Do we really want to do this or do we want to wait or do something else?” And when—that was probably in the early-'60s and my grandfather was about ready to sell it and my dad said, “No, no, no, no,” that they would make sure it worked. So they did; my dad stepped in when he started working full-time. So I would say, you know, I can remember when I was probably twelve and thirteen my dad was down here every day, six days a week, and all day, and I would say probably in the early '60s to late-'60s my parents pretty much were taking over.

**00:20:47**

**RF:** And what were the difficulties? Was it because there were so many new places to eat then?

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**MH:** I think it was just the—trying to make a transition from being a grocery store to a sandwich shop, you know, making it work. Who are you going to market it to? You know, my parents were not college-educated people, you know. They—nor my grandparents; they were just hard workers. So it was a question of are you going to market to the blue collar workers or to the upscale people? What kind of—I mean you're selling a dime sandwich, you know. How many do you have to sell to make ends meet? It's not, you know, it wasn't where they started a business and started from scratch. They *evolved* into what it is. So I guess that's why sometimes

we've had two former Governors in here at the same time. You know, Waller and Wallace were both in here at the same time and—or Winter, and so just the other day Governor Winter, former Governor Winter was in here and he's a wonderful man and a good customer, good friend. And so we have Supreme Court Justices, we have people from the Legislature here, who have been several times over the last few weeks, so—when it's in session, so, you know, we have everybody that—from the sanitation workers to the former Governors that eat with us, and some side-by-side, you know. They're all eating on the same countertops and just enjoying the same ambiance and atmosphere, if you will. *[Laughs]*

00:22:09

**RF:** Yeah; when—and I'm guessing the biggest or the best seller is hamburgers, or, you know, burgers. What—when did that come about? When was that added?

00:22:21

**MH:** The burgers were added very early on. You know, it started with the cold sandwiches because—out of necessity and need, so the cold-cut sandwiches came first. And then the burgers were added pretty much immediately after. And we got our meat from Jackson Packing, as I was saying, it was just right around the corner and up the hill here. It's where the Pilot is now. And so they were added gosh knows early '50s, and then it just—everything else sort of evolved from it. We added Po-Boys, but fried bologna has always been a staple from the time that we could start frying on the stove top, so—the griddle top, so I would say the hamburgers and the fried bologna would be the first hot sandwiches and the sausage, the link sausage. That was one of the very—the red link smoked sausage again came from Jackson Packing on the hill. So, you know,

whatever we could get from them, fresh from them, we pretty much added pretty quickly.

Lunchmeat, fried lunchmeat, the fried salami; those were pretty easy add-ons.

**00:23:17**

Now, other things we've added as the years have progressed; we didn't start with a deep fryer until much later. We had been a business a long time before we even added that. So, you know, things that might be put in a deep fryer were added much later.

**00:23:31**

**RF:** Okay; you mentioned the meat packing place on the hill that is no longer there, you said. Did that change your business or hurt your business? What did that do? I've seen that a lot in the kind of small businesses like this that used to have a meat packing place or meat distribution place almost next door and then it's gone and that's—it usually happened in the '80s or '90s and did it change your business at all or change the way you have to buy meat?

**00:23:59**

**MH:** For a while there we were going with the frozen patties, so I guess you could say, yeah, it did change, because we started with the fresh and then we went to a frozen, which was a—it was a good frozen patty but not everything is all about fresh. So I would say the US Foods we started—we originally we were doing business with Bill's Commissary and US Foods has changed hands numerous times through the years. They stepped in and, as our business grew, they became a vital part and a big partner for us in taking care of everything and making sure it was—that we had what we needed and then adding on. We had salesmen through the years with them that would suggest things, because we were naïve. My parents didn't—again they didn't grow up with this; they just grew into it and not up, you know, they weren't taught how to do these things. You just learn by doing.

00:24:45

So they—the salesmen would suggest things to add and it might be a good fit and it might not. Some things flew; some things didn't. So we just kind of went with whatever worked over the years. So I wouldn't say Jackson Packing was a hurt, because I remember going up there with my Papaw and just going up there to get meat and watching the guys in their long white coats come out, and they'd bring out whatever he wanted to buy. Just like I remember where Hal and Mal's is now that's where the grocers were, where—and I would go up there with him and he would—the various groceries, and now it's just right—you think it's just a mile up the street. Then it was like a whole other part of the town, you know, it was not even that close to us seemingly. It just seemed so much further away than it is now. But that's where he would go to get a lot of his groceries. So but I guess US Foods and then the advent of the bigger grocers have helped us out with that, so that's—it's been an okay transition. It's been fine.

00:25:42

**RF:** And I was just watching one of the workers, a lady, portioning out hamburger patties. Can you kind of explain maybe how much they weigh and what kind of meat it is and just what she's doing?

00:25:55

**MH:** It's 100-percent beef; it's eighty/twenty. I understand that that's the best hamburger meat that you can get is the eighty/twenty. And she patties them out and right now we're doing a six-ounce. We at various times have eight-ounce patties, but we do the six-ounce right now and we can do double that for a twelve-ounce burger or like I tell some people if you want to pay for it

I'll do a twenty-four-ounce. I'll put four of those patties on there. I haven't had anybody take me on that.

**00:26:19**

Now I have had the bologna. We had a Super-Bologna and it had I think four pieces of bologna on it and five or six pieces of bread, and it was over a pound of bologna and I've had several people buy it and eat it, I mean eat the whole thing at one time. And I'm like I've got to get a wall of pictures of people that could eat that super bologna sandwich. So, but like I tell people we can fix you whatever you want if I have to go requisition my mama's jar of peanut butter, I'll put it on a burger if that's what you want. But generally speaking the standard Beatty Burger is six-ounces; the Super-Beatty Burger is twelve-ounces, so it would be two pieces of meat.

**00:26:53**

**RF:** Okay; and how are they cooked?

**00:26:55**

**MH:** Whatever way you want, but most of the time we try to cook them at least well-done and I don't try to cook them well-well-done but we cook them on a fried griddle. It's not a char-grilled but it's our old, same old griddles that we've been using for about forty years now. I keep thinking and saying I'm going to have to buy a new griddle but, you know, until I see a whole in the thing and it—I can see daylight through it, from the top to the bottom, I might just try to fry them on the same old griddle. So it is the epitome of what you would call a greasy spoon. What can I say?

**00:27:24**

But we have healthy things. We have salads. I have deli turkey that's wonderful; it's a smoked deli turkey. And our smoked ham, you can eat it cold. It's excellent cold. We have roast beef that we cook ourselves, we put it in the oven like you do at home, cook it, chill it, and if you eat it cold you're not getting a lot of the grease and the bad part, you're getting the beef with the protein. So there are healthy options. It's just like everywhere else; you've just got to choose those options.

**00:27:52**

You know, I have a recipe for vinaigrette dressing that's fat-free and only has forty calories per pouch. So, you know, it's—there again, you know, you've got to choose what you want to eat, but a lot of people come in here saying, "Oh no, I came to Beatty Street for a burger." And I'm like, "Well, you could try the turkey. The turkey is really good." And it's a good healthy option.

**00:28:10**

**RF:** What was I gonna—? Oh you still have some groceries on the shelf, right?

**00:28:17**

**MH:** I do keep a few sundry items. I do keep the Rick's Sausage. And sardines; I sell a lot of sardines. I think people come in wanting the sardines for the fish oil. I sell various things that people want, you know. I think there's some mayonnaise jars back there, mustard, some—we sell crackers, just, we sell gloves to the workers that work down the street. We sell a lot of little bottles of Dr. Tichenor's, not big bottles but little bottles, so there's various sundry items, yeah. We even had a movie set that came—come in here about, oh, ten years ago, and they were taking pictures of a few things that I had, old hair nets, we used to have curlers; curlers used to have

pins that would stick through them, you might not be old enough to remember it. And I had even packages until about five years ago, I had packages of those old pins over there. We have the King Edward, the one in the can, the tobacco in the can. I still have the OCB, the old, old, it's probably fifty years old where the cigarette papers are dispensed from it. We still have that dispenser with some of those cigarette papers in it still. So we still sell a few items like that; uh-hmm.

**00:29:24**

**RF:** And I'm looking where we're seated toward the front of the store and I'm looking directly at speaking of kind of like antique items I'm looking directly at a cash register and it looks like it's still in operation but it looks—

**00:29:36**

**MH:** This one that you're seeing here was in my uncle's store, actually, in Laurel. We do have the one that is set up here. I've got it at home. My dad would fix it until he had a stroke two years ago; he would fix it. It has an old pull arm that still operates. And we were using it until about I would say three years ago, and loved it. It had the push buttons and I still need to bring it down here like I have these old scales that have been here for seventy years. And it—about right—not long before he had a stroke it had some issues with the register and he took it home and he wasn't quite able to get it up and running, and so I've still got it at the house and I still say I'm going to find somebody that can fix it for me, because I really like it. Because I've been through—in the fifty years that register was here my dad bought it at the old register company out in North Jackson and it—he would fix it upon the occasion and bring it back down here and it would rock right on and it would work right on. And these that I've been buying at Sam's I've

been through at least three in as many years. And one of them only lasted three months and my mom said, “These aren't lasting.” And I said, “No, they're not.” So definitely the old register lasted a long, long time.

**00:30:44**

**RF:** And you said you started kind of helping out or you remember helping out your grandfather here when, you know, when you were very young. When did this become a full-time position or job for you?

**00:30:56**

**MH:** I started, yeah, I started working in the summers and holidays when I was probably nine and worked every summer and holiday until the time I finished college. And I worked in a retail place here in Jackson for about five years. But then I decided I was going to go back to school and I did for about two years. And then I would say probably in—close to 1986 I came back to work here full-time. And I just worked. But the beauty of it was that I could be off when I needed to when my children were small. So I would say probably about 1986 I started working what you would say full-time here.

**00:31:35**

**RF:** And let's talk about the next generation. You do have children. Did they start working here when they were young? Do they work here now, holidays or whenever?

00:31:45

**MH:** I have two daughters; Blaire is my oldest, twenty-five. She's a law school student at Ole Miss. And then Skylar is twenty and she finished high school two, three years ago, and the Lord had a different path for her. She was scheduled to go to nursing school but American Idol came along and she placed fifth on the eleventh season of American Idol. And then Blaire is going to be finish law school in May and going to New York to law school for an additional degree this next year. So I know she's already working—going to be working a job at Butler Snow when she finishes total school. Now with Skylar, she's in Nashville trying to make it in music, country music, and only the Lord knows the master plan on that one. I'm not sure whether she'll make it in music or have to choose to do something else, but I think, well, her backup plan might be Beatty Street Grocery. What can I say? **[Laughs]** So Skylar is backup plan might be that. But I have two nephews that might be interested in it; I don't know. I know one; the younger one is interested in culinary school, so, you know, hey. This isn't exactly what you would call fine dining but, you know, he might again be interested in taking over. But I don't know. Only the Lord knows what exactly is going to happen with that. I don't know if it will wind up being with one of my girls. It might be something that one of my girls would be interested it but they would like to have somebody else run it, you know, and maybe they'll be in a position do that. Who knows? I just know that I'm going to be here as long as I can. I laugh and tell people that they'll probably bury me under the table back there. **[Laughs]**

00:33:10

**RF:** You mentioned your younger daughter. Does—is it a musical family that you come from? Do y'all sing? How did she get into music?

00:33:21

**MH:** Well when she was three years old my mom could hear her. You knew she was on pitch. I can sing a little bit and I knew that she could sing. And my mom kept saying, “You’ve got to do something; the kid is really good.” And I was like, “What do you do with a three year old that can sing?” Nobody really cares. They just want them to be cute, you know.

**00:33:36**

So she started performing just in local places, nursing homes, show choirs and things like that, when she was five, doing competitions. She did her first one at the fair, the Mississippi State Fair, and when she got done she placed second out of seven kids and I was just happy she did it because I was afraid she was going to look at the audience and go, “No, I’m not about to do this,” and walk off at the ripe old age of five. And she just went from there; it was just something that God had given her this gift, and she went with it and, you know, he obviously had the plan to do something besides going to nursing school because he put American Idol on her path. And she’s done everything from the little show choirs that she started in to the professional—she started professionally at seven and then the national tour of Annie and Les Misérables. She did that for almost three years. So, she’s been very, very blessed with everything that’s she’s been able to do at the ripe old age of twenty. So, who knows though, she might wind up at Beatty Street singing in the corner at Beatty Street. I told Ryan Seacrest—she made Top 40—that if she did make Top 40 that I’d put a corner for her just to do music in, in the store and I still got to live up to that promise. So, who knows, I might be winding up that doing that with her.

**00:34:43**

**RF:** So that's my one American Idol question. I mean she must have—and probably you too but she was definitely on live and recorded TV dozens of times. Did she get to mention the grocery and ever talk about it with Ryan Seacrest or anyone else?

**00:34:57**

**MH:** Oh, they came to Beatty Street. When she auditioned, let's see, she auditioned on, I forget the day of the week, I think it was a Wednesday and the—by the time she got done auditioning and had gotten her golden ticket and was going to Hollywood we had the producers that were there. Megan is one of the producers and she was talking about coming to Beatty Street for a fried bologna sandwich. And I said—because I told them, I said, “Well now you know it's not fancy dining.” This is—we're talking fried bologna. “Oh, that's exactly what we love.” They were here within less than week. They were here the Tuesday after that Labor Day holiday; they were here and they were filming and getting ready to put the store on national television. So, and it has been such a God-send because people that had never heard of Beatty Street Grocery came—that lived in Jackson, you know—came and they were—I was in Los Angeles with—when this was happening but they were extremely overwhelmed here while I was out there that everybody that I had working—my parents were really, really overwhelmed but they loved it. You know, they loved it because they saw people they hadn't seen in years, people they used to go to church with, people they grew up with; I think my mother's old boyfriend came to see her because she was Skylar Laine's grandmother.

**00:36:06**

So, yes, it was a God-send. And they showed the store on TV on more than one occasion and it's been shown on local TV, on numerous occasions, so it's been a blessing, a huge blessing.

**00:36:19**

I'll be honest with you; I'm going to tell you: In 2006 before Idol came along things were not looking great, and then in 2008 it really hit rock bottom. So when she went on Idol and, I forget what year am I in now, but 2011, 2012, it really, really has helped because people that like I said again did not know we were even down here have come seeking us out because of the show. So it's been a huge help.

**00:36:47**

**RF:** That's amazing. Was it—I'm guessing it was national and local economics, just the downturn?

**00:36:51**

**MH:** Oh yeah; when—in '06 I didn't get touched too bad. And I thought, well, I had this attitude of I'm going to get away from this, okay, because, you know, we sell cheap sandwiches and I'm going to be all right. But then in '08 it started a downhill slide and it had been on a downhill slide until probably the last year or two, since Idol ironically, that is the—and not a huge upswing now, mind you. I'm still not where we were even five—six years ago. But at least I'm not going down every month. It is beginning to—with an upward swing so it's going to help. I think it was just the economy and then Jackson is changing so much. You know, it's just the whole city has changed. It changed, you know, when everything started industrializing in this area that was a change. But we stayed the same; this whole area stayed the same until about in

2008 and then I think it was just a combination of the economy and then Jackson struggling so hard. So, but now this has helped so much and hopefully the whole city will take a turn around and begin to have an upswing.

**00:37:56**

I noticed on the news this morning that Fortification is going to be finished and, I think it's May, so that will help them. I did have a young man come in just about three days ago. I think it was Monday or Tuesday of this week. And he was telling me, he said—I could tell he was new. He said, "I've never been here before." So I was telling him how we do things. And he said I didn't realize it was far, this far, downtown. And I kind of laughed and I thought, "Well, okay; so you must be coming from the other, other side of Capital Street somewhere." But he sought us out and found us, so I hope he was happy and he'll come back down again because I've always—I thought before Idol I thought, "I want to be the cool place," you know. And then with Idol it was sort of like, "Okay, Lord, you heard that prayer." So it kind of made you a little bit more of a cool place if you will; so just a place that people want to come to see.

**00:38:43**

**RF:** Why do you—what do you think the importance of the Grocery is to Jackson and the greater area? Why do you think it matters and has stuck around this long? I mean you're at seventy-four years now, right?

**00:38:56**

**MH:** Yeah; we're at seventy-four and in 2015 it'll be seventy-five years. I think it's just symbolic of Jackson making it through. You know, black or white; you know, together we make it—made it through and are making it through and hopefully we'll be here for another seventy-five years. That's what I tell people. People will say, "Why don't you move to Madison? Why don't you come to Rankin County? Why don't you move wherever?" And I'm like, you know, "This is home for us. This is where we were. This is where I plan to stay." For me, I know this is where I'll stay. And, you know, I have a friend that's in—at a business in Madison and she's like, "Oh, come out there; come out there." And I'm like "No, that's just not home." You know, that's not where—it doesn't have the same meaning. It's cool to have people come in and look around and say, "This was really an old grocery store." So it's kind of neat to know that we can make it through and it'll be okay.

**00:39:43**

I may not be rich and I may nickel and dime myself to old age but then I think, "Oh, wait, no, wait, I'm already there," you know. But it's okay. I've been blessed. I count my blessings every day. Every day.

**00:39:55**

**RF:** Do you have anything planned for the seventy-fifth anniversary?

**00:39:59**

**MH:** Not yet; we had a huge—Coca-Cola came and did a painting on the side of the building for the fiftieth anniversary. And then when we turned seventy, I put balloons up and put all kinds of decorations in the store. WWT came and did a spot on us. They were really great to us. So that helped a whole lot. And again that was prior to Idol. But, you know, with the seventy-fifth I

might do some advertising for the first time. We've always just depended on word of mouth. I've not done a lot—I don't have the budget to do a lot of TV advertising, but that's why WWT helping us out was just coming down and doing spots about us helped tremendously. But, you know, hey, we might spring for something special for the seventy-fifth. Who knows? We might contact all the people in City Hall with Jackson to say, "Whoa, do you know it's our seventy-fifth anniversary? What can we do to make this a really wonderful thing?" So—.

**00:40:52**

**RF:** I mean there's not many eating establishments that are seventy-five years old in the nation.

**00:40:56**

**MH:** And still have the old building and the wonderful ambiance. What am I saying old building? The wonderful ambiance that Beatty Street has today; everybody needs to come out and experience it at least one time in their lives.

**00:41:09**

**RF:** I just have a couple more questions. I want to ask about the fried bologna sandwich first. How is it prepared? Is it on a bun? Is there barbecue sauce? Is it spiced? How—what happens?

**00:41:19**

**MH:** It's just your basic fried bologna. It's about a half-inch thick. It's a lot of bologna now. And we usually put it in the deep fryer and fry it in the deep fryer. Now we can put it on the

griddle top and put—and fry it on the griddle but it’s a lot quicker to put it in the deep fryer, and it gets that really nice brown color on the outside when you put it in the deep fryer. I personally like mine really well-done and a lot of people do. But we can do it either way and then we serve it either on a bun or a bread, whatever the customer wants, with all the fixings, mayonnaise, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, pickles, mustard, ketchup, cheese. And we can add anything they want. I can add pimento and cheese. I can, as I said, requisition my mama’s peanut butter and add that to it. I haven’t had anybody take me up on that offer yet, but I can.

**00:41:59**

But generally standard would be with the fixings of mayonnaise, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, pickles, mustard, ketchup, and cheese on whatever choice bread they want. So, and it’s a huge seller. We go through a lot of bologna every week. [*Emphasis Added*] Pounds and pounds and pounds of bologna; so there’s a lot of people eating a lot of fried bologna.

**00:42:15**

**RF:** What brand is the bologna?

**00:42:17**

**MH:** It’s Morrell; uh-hmm.

**00:42:20**

**RF:** And how—do you spice the hamburgers before the griddle or after?

**00:42:25**

**MH:** We have a secret seasoning that the ladies came up with, and my ladies actually created it and they know—they have it written down back there and they come up with those spices. They

add them all together and come up with a big bucket of it every week. And then they—as they fry the burgers, while they’re on the griddle top, they season them on both sides as they’re frying them; so people will ask, “No salt.” And I’m like, “We season it as we cook them,” you know. So that’s sort of a done-deal if you order the burger. But you can get it with no salt or pepper added after you cook it, but that’s what we season them with as they cook.

**00:42:54**

**RF:** And you just mentioned the ladies; have some of them been here a long time?

**00:42:57**

**MH:** Yeah; I have one gentleman and he’s retired but he does work three days a week. He and another lady that’s been working here for about forty years. They worked for my grandparents actually and then my parents—my grandparents for a short period of time, really more my parents, and now for me. They—I say they work for me; they really help me. They’re not—they’re really co-workers with me. And then I have ladies that have been with me; I have one that just retired and she had been with me for about thirteen years and then I’ve got several that have been with me over ten years. So I’m very, very blessed in that regard. They’re very, very loyal.

**00:43:30**

**RF:** You said—what year did your grandfather pass away?

**00:43:35**

**MH:** He passed away in 1980 and my grandmother in 1978.

**00:43:40**

**RF:** What do you think they would say—so that's thirty-four years ago—what would they say walking in or knowing that Beatty Street is still around, you know, after several scares and of closing?

**00:43:54**

**MH:** Oh, I think they would be extremely proud. I know they would be. I spent a lot of time with both of them before they passed away, so I know that they would be surprised. And they would be gratified that not only that it's still here but yet there are changes but it's kind of the same, too. It's—you walk in and you can still see the same fixtures and same countertops but yet it's—you know, it has done some changing. You know, but they're—it's—they could still recognize it for what it is. I think they would appreciate that and they would be proud. I know they would be proud because I've worked hard, you know, and my parents worked hard. So I know they would be proud that it's still here and it's still going—it's still making a third-generation—our living. And we've done okay.

**00:44:41**

**RF:** And do you see this place as distinctly Jackson? Or could it be anywhere or is there something very Jackson about it, or what is Jackson? If someone from New Orleans or from

Louisiana I'm still trying to understand what makes Jackson, Jackson. So what makes Beatty Street Grocery, Jackson?

**00:45:00**

**MH:** I think people are good wherever you go. And there are good people that come in here and good customers. I think it is distinctly Jackson because it has the history of Jackson people. I have an old picture of downtown Jackson; people come in and they say, "Wow, that's Jackson?" And I'll say, "Yeah." I—you know, "I'm kind of old. I remember that being on Capital Street."

**00:45:19**

But it's distinctly Mississippi and distinctly Jackson because of what we serve. You know, it's just—where else in the South do you find a combination of fried bologna and smoked link sausage sandwiches with the burgers that we have, with the fried lunchmeat and the salami? And it has that distinctive flair of country mixed with—country folk that come in mixed with the black people, with the—just the Governors and the Legislators. Where else can you find that kind of eclectic mix if you will of people? And I think it's definitely reflective of Jackson with the Southern cooking, if you will, and not necessarily soul cooking but just country cooking, just basic inexpensive, easy, fast, cheap cooking that you can still—that's still good, you know. It's still good. So I think it's reflective of Jackson, just the years that it soaked up here in this same location with the same countertops. You can almost feel Jackson in the walls because there's so much history that's gone around and of it, it's just a part of the whole city. So yeah; I would say it's distinctly Jackson.

**00:46:27**

I guess that's why I don't want to move, you know. It's just a part of—it's kind of like saying you have the eyes you have or you have the hair you have or you have—whatever has

happened in your life has made you who you are. Well in the same token Jackson has made Beatty Street what it is. Does that make sense?

**00:46:45**

**RF:** Oh, I think that was wonderfully said. Was there ever a discussion or an opportunity to move the building or move the business? Was that even considered ever?

**00:46:53**

**MH:** I think my dad opened a store in Clinton in the '80s and it ran for a while but there was a business over there that was supporting it that failed, that was a failure, and it didn't—he did not fly. So at that time they thought they might be able to open another place, but they had to kind of shelve that idea. I don't think they ever thought really seriously about closing this one and opening another one. They might have opened a satellite. So that has been in my mind thinking, well, maybe I should try that, but I haven't been quite brave enough to do it yet.

**00:47:31**

**RF:** Okay; well I think that's a good place to stop. I want to thank you.

**00:47:35**

**MH:** Thank you very much; I appreciate it.

**00:47:38**

**[End Mary Harden — Beatty Street Grocery]**