Tommy Moore
Moore's Olde Tyme Barbeque - New Bern, NC
*** * ***

Date: November 28, 2011
Location: Moore's Olde Tyme Barbeque - New Bern, NC
Interviewer: Rien T. Fertel
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: One hour, four minutes
Project: Southern BBQ Trail - North Carolina

[Begin Tommy Moore-Moore's Old Tyme Barbeque Interview]

00:00:01

Rien Fertel: All right; this is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm on the North Carolina BBQ Trail. It is a Monday morning, just after nine o'clock at—well it's 9:25 and that's November 28, 2011. I'm at Moore's Old Tyme Barbeque and I'm sitting here with Mr. Tommy Moore and I'm going to have him introduce himself.

00:00:27

Tommy Moore: Hello; how are y'all doing? My name is Tommy Moore, and I'm about sixty years young and I was born on February 27, 1951 and I hang around Moore's Barbeque here quite frequently and I endeavor to be the coordinator and the owner, the manager, and—and run this fine establishment.

00:00:54

RF: And—and how long have you been running, owning, associated with Moore's Barbeque?

00:01:01

TM: Okay; Rien I started with my dad. He was here initially with us when we opened this restaurant in 1972, so I've been here roughly about thirty-nine years. And it's been quite enjoyable. It's very rewarding. It's a lot of work. But it's a restaurant.

00:01:16

RF: And **[*Laughs*]**—but it's a restaurant. Tell me—we'll get into that. Let's talk about your dad. Give us his full name, please.

00:01:27

TM: Okay; my dad's name was Leonidas John Moore and many of his friends referred to him as LJ or either John. And he was about eighty years old when he passed away in 1989.

00:01:40

RF: And where was he from? Where was he born?

00:01:42

TM: Dad was born just about ten miles from the location where the restaurant is. He traveled the world, not on a sightseeing tour, but he was in the basement of a big oiler ship traveling around the seas. And but he was born in very humble origins down in a little town called Pollocksville, North Carolina which is about ten miles south of where we're at. And he had a total—there was eleven children in his family all together.

00:02:12

RF: Uh-hm; and what year was he born?

00:02:14

TM: He was born in 1909, July 31st I believe was the date.

00:02:21

RF: And you said he—he traveled around the world as a young man in an oil tanker. Has—did he ever tell you stories about that and is there one story that sticks out?

00:02:28

TM: Oh—oh yeah; he said he was in this oil tanker and he would be in the bottom. And the way you'd build more steam up is you'd throw more coal into the boiler real quickly to try to build steam up. And he said this—I won't tell you what he called him, but this gentleman upstairs who kept hollering down there at him, says, "Full steam ahead; full steam reverse; stop." And he said he figured he just couldn't handle that much coal that quick, so that job didn't last very long. He retired.

00:02:57

RF: And so, at what age did he retire?

00:03:00

TM: From that particular job he probably retired at the age of twenty-one or two.

00:03:07

RF: So he—he moved kind of back home, back here and tell me about his parents. What was his family like—came from a big family?

00:03:14

TM: Yeah; there were eleven kids. One of them ended up being a Methodist Minister; one of them ran a service station here in town. One of my aunts was a genealogist, and she was very good at it. One of my other aunts worked in motels as a desk clerk. One of them married a man who sold marine outfitting parts; and I think one of the siblings died rather young. And but they all struggled and they were all very good folks and they worked hard.

00:03:49

RF: And what did your father's parents do?

00:03:52

TM: My dad was—my dad's dad was a judge. He was a lawyer. And he was a mechanic. But he said he preferred the mechanic-ing part a whole lot better. And one of the little stories that my dad did tell me about his father was when he was practicing law, this man had stole a pig and he knew that—he carried—his friends figured he had quite a bit of integrity, my—my grandfather. So what he told that man to do was to go take that pig and cut it from the head to the tail and split it exactly in half. And then he told him to put half of that pig on his back porch and for the man to keep half of the pig.

00:04:34

So when the time came to go to trial he told the judge, he said, "Your Honor, I can swear to you that—that man has no more of that pig than I do." So the man was acquitted.

00:04:45

RF: So this is like the biblical judgment?

00:04:48

TM: Yeah.

00:04:48

RF: With a pig?

00:04:49

TM: Yeah; he split the pig in half, and the Judge was happy, the man was happy, and my dad—my granddad was real happy because he got a client off.

00:04:57

RF: And your grandmother was she a homemaker; what did she do?

00:05:02

TM: Yeah; she was busy raising kids and of course she was older by the time I met her, my grandmother, but she was a real sweet lady and she'd make my dad buy a box of Hershey's candy bars and every Sunday after church we would go over to her house and she—all the grandkids. She wanted a candy bar to pass out to them. And she was a real sweet lady, from the memories I have of her.

00:05:24

RF: And so how many children did your—did your father have?

00:05:29

TM: My dad had five children total. He had one by his first wife, who died shortly after childbirth; and then I have one older brother, seven years older than the rest of us; and then I've got a brother who is a pharmacist; I've got a sister who is a retired dental hygienist and I just have myself, who works here at the restaurant and that's—that's the sum total of them.

00:05:57

RF: And before we get into your dad opening the original Moore's Barbeque what did he do leading up to those years?

00:06:06

TM: At one time, Dad worked with the North Carolina Wildlife and Game Department and he was sent to work up near a place called Lake Mattamuskeet, and the reason why his superiors sent him up there is because he had a reputation for enforcing the law and that's what they wanted. And while Daddy was up there he arrested some folks that the State preferred he not arrest. They were kind of friends of the political cronies, and he told them not to go hunting unless they bought a license from him. And they didn't. He heard about it. He arrested them.

00:06:45

During that time he had an appointment that was coming up and he was going to be the first Special State Game Warden in the State of North Carolina, which meant he could travel anywhere in the State he wanted to—to work whenever without an assignment. They canceled his appointment. Shortly after that, Dad handed them the badge back and he said, "I can tell that this is not going to get any better." He said, "I'll let you have your own stuff."

00:07:08

RF: And you were telling me he also—he took the Bar. He tried to go into law.

00:07:14

TM: Yeah; Dad—he was a very smart individual. He took the Bar Exam here in North Carolina, and I think they offered the Bar Exam twice a year. And when he took it, he—you know he didn't pass it, but he did a lot of preparation and studying and whatnot. And some of our even more celebrated individuals in this country took the Bar Exam five and six times before they passed it. But Dad—there was a statute that was passed in the State after he took it the last time that said you had to be a high school graduate before you could take the Bar Exam. And he asked the Judge if he would waive that requirement for him, so he could take it again and the Judge said no. So that was the end of—of that.

00:07:59

RF: And so after that he—he went into the barbecue business?

00:08:05

TM: Yeah; sometime after that as the kids started coming along, he needed something to do. And back during those days in the '40s it was pretty tough to find a job or anything to do and my dad loved to eat because when he was growing up he had very little food. With all those kids you can imagine.

00:08:24

So he got into the restaurant business, and I wasn't there at the time, so I don't know exactly how many places he had, but of some of the stories he did tell me, in about 1945 he

borrowed thirty-five dollars from one of his good friends. And that was a lot of money at the time, so I don't how good a friend my dad was to that man but that man was a good friend to my dad. Loaned him the money; he headed out to the country and located a pig and paid the man thirty-five dollars for the pig and he took his rifle to shoot the pig with because it was no, you know, standardized way of getting the pigs in other than just shoot them. And he shot the pig. The pig took off, went across the field, and through the woods, and I tell folks there went the future of Moore's Barbeque. But as history points out he caught up with the pig. And he had to shoot the thing again and drag it back to the car, bring it to town, get it butchered, get it cooked, chopped up, and sold.

00:09:26

RF: Did your dad ever tell you why he went into the barbecue business?

00:09:31

TM: No; he didn't elaborate on it a whole lot. One of the biggest things I remember about my dad was just that he would get up and he would go to work every day and he was very faithful to his business and he knew that if he didn't take care of it nobody else would take care of it the way he needed to. And he was always on the job, and in the restaurant business you get very little time off if you run the place, because my friends will ask me sometimes, says "Do you run Moore's Barbeque?" And I said, "Well, not really; I say it runs me."

00:10:01

RF: Hmm; and do we need to stop? All right; we're back. We had to take a short, short break. We were—we were talking about your father and why he—he might have went into the barbecue business. And let's see; where can we start again? Let's—tell me; did he have any stories about those—those first years in business? I mean was it tough running a—starting off in the restaurant business?

00:10:38

TM: Yeah; he—of course I was there during some of the later years and into the late '60s and the year of '65 and whatnot I was of age enough where he could drag me into the restaurant and then put me to washing dishes and mopping the floors, filling up the drink cooler with bottles of drinks and that kind of stuff. And it basically you know your goal simply is to go to work every day and get the business cranked up, get your product ready, sell it, try to make a profit, try to take care of your employees, pay your bills, your taxes, and that kind of stuff, and that's basically what the goal is you know even today.

00:11:20

He just elaborated sometimes on how difficult it was because he didn't have anything when he started. And over the years through his hard work and his dedication to his business he was able to, you know, accumulate some possessions and that kind of stuff. But so much of the money that you make in the restaurant business you would plow right back into it, and he was always refurbishing his place, redoing the coolers, buying new equipment, and in an effort to be able to take care of his customers. And that was the one thing that I think Mother and Dad's mantra was—was, you know, *take care of your customers*. You know, make sure you provide

them with a—. And the restaurant business and this is true anywhere; if you provide your customers with a good service and good food at a fair price that will always keep you successful. And that's something he endeavored to do over the years. It was difficult doing that sometimes with some of the employees you had to work with, and just with, you know, trying in difficult circumstances because the restaurant business is—is just that way.

00:12:25

It appears a lot of times people have a romantic notion about running a restaurant, being able to talk to the clients and walk around and that kind of stuff, and that's great and you get to do that occasionally. But there's a lot of work involved.

00:12:38

RF: Yeah; let's talk about that. Is—is the—the restaurant business overly romanticized and how do you feel about that?

00:12:45

TM: Well, I think it is overly romanticized and if I was going to be in any type of business I'd rather be in a specialty business like we are—the barbecue business. We see folks come in here; we read reviews online about—about Moore's Barbeque and how much folks enjoyed it, and I think sometimes when folks don't enjoy our barbecue it's simply a matter of they're not used to this type of—of food product.

00:13:08

A lot of barbecue places especially, you know, in the Western part of our State and the Western—and west of here towards the middle of the country and even into Texas, a lot of

barbecue places will cook a meat product and they season it with a sweet either mustard-based or a ketchup-based sauce. And that's where a lot of the flavoring comes in.

00:13:32

So, you know, if somebody didn't enjoy our stuff they simply say this is not what they're used to and I have had a lot of customers who have said they have eaten our barbecue when they didn't think they would enjoy it. And we have made—or they've become good customers and they're getting where they really enjoy the stuff. And the way we cook the meat out back, smoking it and whatnot and—and seasoning it mildly with vinegar, salt, and pepper, many times because of the—the whole-hog meat that we use which is where the sweet, you know, bacon comes from and that belly-fat meat, it tends to give the barbecue a little sweet flavor sometimes.

00:14:11

And one barbecue critic we had come in one time mentioned in his book that we put some sugar in the barbecue. And I said that is not correct; that is not correct. We don't put any sugar in the barbecue. But it's just that sweet belly meat out of the pig that provides a lot of that sweet flavor; of course, you know, the product we use.

00:14:29

RF: And you mentioned barbecue around the country and other people coming in who have eaten at other places. Have you eaten barbecue in other places, and what do you think about other types of barbecue whether in West Carolina or other places in Carolina or anywhere else—Tennessee?

00:14:46

TM: Yeah; I do enjoy barbecue and it has got to be really, really bad stuff before I don't enjoy it because I'm just one of them aficionado guys when it comes to eating barbecue. I just love the stuff. And a lot of times, today one thing I think a lot of folks miss out on when they're cooking pork butts or shoulders is the meat is so lean they have to develop some sort of means to keep that moisture in there. If you don't it dries out and ends up kind of like sawdust if you're not careful.

00:15:17

A good friend of mine and I, we had been through Columbia, South Carolina and eating at Maury [Maurice] Bessinger Piggie Park. I probably shouldn't mention the name of the restaurant, but he got a barbecue sandwich and he said when he opened it up and looked inside he said he seen a baby diaper look very similar with that yellow mustard based sauce in there. And it had a good flavor, but it just—it looked a little bit different from what we were used to eating.

00:15:43

RF: Right; so you don't like the yellow—the mustard sauce?

00:15:43

TM: Well the—yeah not the looks of it but even that—that sweet mustard based sauce, the barbecue was flavored with sugar in the sauce. And that's the one thing I think that—that distinguishes Eastern North Carolina barbecue from a lot of those other places that, you know, sauces that have sugar in it. Most of the flavor we get comes from the wood and the smoking and cooking over those live oak coals.

00:16:10

RF: So you—let's talk about that. You—there's a big woodpile in the back. Do you use only oak?

00:16:18

TM: Oak and hickory is the two preferred hardwoods that we use, and they seem to produce some of the hotter coals and give you a better flavor. And of course we probably could smoke them with mesquite but it doesn't grow in this part of the country. And occasionally you can use a little pecan in there just to provide coals, but you wouldn't use gum or ash or anything like that. And the wood that we have we always purchase in the fall and dad always told me that you do not want to purchase the wood unless you're going to burn it immediately if it still has the sap in the tree. So normally after the leaves fall off the sap goes down and what will happen, the wood will rot a whole lot faster if you cut it with the sap in the tree because the bark will fall off and it'll—it'll rot three times faster than just sitting there seasoning like it normally should.

00:17:09

RF: And so you get your wood in the fall. Where do you get it from? Who provides the wood?

00:17:15

TM: Individuals from various sorts; they'll start calling in the fall because they know we always buy it in the fall. They don't want to cut wood in the summertime when it's so hot and sticky so they tend to be prepared to cut wood in the fall and we'll just start getting phone calls. And folks will come in and what we do, we bring a tape measure and we pay them for it by the cord. A cord

of wood by weight, I think, hardwood weighs about 5,200 to 5,300 pounds per cord when it's good green wood. But what we'll do, we'll measure it and a cord of wood measures 128 cubic feet whether you're getting a stick four-foot long, two-foot long or one-foot long. You just measure all your—your measurements and multiply it out and it should come up to a 128 cubic feet.

00:18:04

And typically right now we're paying about $125 for a cord of wood. So this time of year we'll end up buying you know $4,000, $5,000, $6,000 worth of wood that we have to stockpile on that should carry us through until the next season.

00:18:18

RF: And before we were talking about the—well one more question about wood. What is the importance of smoke to barbecue, just that—the fundamental kind of simple question?

00:18:30

TM: Well, where a lot of the flavor comes from with cooking with wood, when the grease from the pig starts dripping on those red hot coals you'll see these little curls of smoke go up everywhere—everywhere. And that smoke when it rolls back up around the meat that seems to be what imparts, you know, that—that wood flavor to it.

00:18:49

If you cook the pigs and use the heat off the wood as it's burning to cook the pigs with you'll end up with too much of a smoky flavor, whereas when it drips on the coals it just tends to flavor the pigs with the—the smoke from the pigs. And there's a big difference because one year

Dad had built a furnace and he wanted to use the heat from the wood as it was burning. But the barbecue had that overwhelming smoke flavor to it, so that was the only time we built a pit like that and we had to redesign it.

00:19:22

RF: And how overwhelming is it? Does it—what does it taste like?

00:19:27

TM: Well, I think there's a product out on the market called Liquid Smoke, and if you pour that on barbecue to try to make it smoky flavored tasting it just is—all you taste is smoke, and it's hard to get you know to the meat flavoring and that kind of stuff. And it—that Liquid Smoke stuff or if it's too smoky it seems to overwhelm, you know just the meat product itself.

00:19:52

RF: All right; and before we were talking about your father and you mentioned your mom. What was her name and did she have any role in the early years in the business?

00:20:00

TM: Yeah; my mom's name was Dorothy and her maiden name was Easter. So she was Dorothy Easter Moore and she was from Winston Salem, North Carolina originally, and Dad met her in Rockingham, North Carolina. And he decided that was the woman he wanted to marry.

00:20:18

And they were married a good number of years. And my dad occasionally mentioned that he and my mother only had one argument, but he was afraid she was going to win it. And but

mother would come down to the café and she would—she would stay glued to that cash register. She was the guardian of the till and she protected that money. And but she would stay right here and she was a very sweet lady. People would come in and mention something about a relative that had died or was sick and she said, "Well, let me get your—let me get your address." And after she would get through working at night she would go home at nine, ten, eleven o'clock at night and start writing out thank you notes, get well cards, and even the day that she—she died on Valentine's Day in 1995 and prior to that death day she had my aunt and my brother prepare Valentine cards for everybody, and we got them on Valentine's Day, on the day that she died on. She wanted to make sure we all got a card and she was always thinking about the kids and their friends.

00:21:23

RF: And back to the—the first days in the business, what—where was that original location?

00:21:31

TM: Dad had several locations over the years, and the one location here in New Bern most people remember the most was located in what we call the Five Points area of New Bern. He had one business, a little block building right at the Five Points area, and the next area was just about a half mile west of that location. But that seems to be the place that people remember the most; as they were growing up their parents would bring them in there during that—that timeframe. And so many of my friends that are my age, you know, that's the place they remember. And they remember when their parents carried them in there.

00:22:10

Had one little incident where one of our customers came in and they said, you know, "When we got married we had our wedding day meal at your dad's restaurant." I said, "Oh, really?" He said, "And we carried the little guest check home and we framed it." I said, "Why did you do that?" They said, "Your daddy wrote *NC* on there; it meant no charge." And I said, "Oh, that is amazing." And then I found out that they had a fifty-year anniversary coming up, and I managed to sneak their address out of somebody and I sent them a gift certificate for their free fifty-year anniversary meal, which they enjoyed. And over the years you get a chance to make and meet—relationships with people in that regard and you are able to meet a tremendous amount of people.

00:22:58

Like Mr. Rien Fertel for instance—Fertel is that correct?

00:23:02

RF: Oh Rien, me?

00:23:04

TM: Yeah.

00:23:04

RF: Oh, Fertel.

00:23:05

TM: Rien Fertel, you get the chance to meet people like Rien Fertel and people from all over the country. We have people from California. I've had people buy barbecue and ship it over to Afghanistan, and it used to go to Vietnam years ago. People would buy it and they'd give it to a Marine. They'd put it on an airplane and carry it all over the place. And we have people, whenever they come home for the holidays they always buy frozen barbecue and pack it up, pack it on ice and take it home with them.

00:23:32

RF: And you mentioned this great story about your dad. Did he often do things like that? Was he known for providing for other people?

00:23:40

TM: Yeah; Dad over the years, he was very generous. And Daddy would never tell you what he did. And somebody else told me one time that a young lady in Fayetteville, North Carolina—house burned down. And Dad when he grew up he knew what it was like to live without and the necessary things. And he would send a check over to the Mayor of the town and he would say, "Would you see to it that this woman gets this money."

00:24:07

And over the years here at the restaurant, Daddy explained to me about you know his generosity, and over the years we have helped organizations, people with medical needs, raised thousands of dollars by providing them at our cost with, you know, food that they could make up into plates and sell. And it's very rewarding to be able to help people like that, and I'm very

thankful that we have the resources to do that kind of help. And I'm thankful of the mindset that we enjoy helping people.

00:24:44

RF: And tell me—tell me how you remember your dad, like what he looked like? How did he dress? There's one picture of him in here and he's wearing a hat and a bow-tie. Did he always dress like that?

00:24:56

TM: Yeah; Dad was—he was quite colorful. He was a little rotund. He was about five-foot, eight and he weighed about 250 pounds at his—at his largest. And a lot of times his customers would come in and they'd say, "John, John, how you doing today?" They said, "How you getting along?" And he said, "Well, I'm not getting longer anymore; I'm getting rounder." **[*Laughs*]** And but Daddy was quite the politician. He enjoyed politics. He enjoyed talking to people. And over the years he—he forged tremendous relationships and friendships with people from neighboring counties and whatnot and a lot of times he helped some Congressmen get elected. And there was tremendous benefit to that; when he needed answer to a question he could call him up and the—and the Congressman would talk to him and sometimes there were different military and political issues in the-in the area here that needed to be handled. And but being in the barbecue business it afforded you the privilege of meeting so, so many people like that. And that's one thing that's very rewarding about the restaurant business is the—the people and the friendships that you make over the years.

00:26:07

RF: And—and would your father prepare the pigs himself? Would he watch over the cooking process?

00:26:13

TM: There were times initially when he had to cook the pigs himself. But that made his job doubly hard because not only did he have to cook the pigs which was an eight or nine-hour process, but then when you get through doing that you got to bone it out, get it prepared for sale, and then you get the privilege of running the restaurant then the rest of the nine hours.

00:26:35

So as soon as he was able to find a cook who would maintain the process that he—he wanted them to cook, you know, the pigs with, firing the pigs up properly, not overcooking them, not scorching them, he would hire a cook to cook the pigs. And—and that was a very tough job. But it was hard to cook the pigs and run the restaurant at the same time, so as soon as he would find a cook he'd let them cook the pigs. Here at this restaurant occasionally, our barbecue cook would get sick, because it's a pretty tough job being a pit master at any restaurant. Those hours are very arduous and—and the summertime it's just hard to explain the extreme heat because you're having to stoke that furnace up and you start sweating when you get to work and you don't quit sweating until you leave. And—and it was just tough. And most of the time we would wear the cooks out and then they would have to quit.

00:27:28

RF: Do you remember any longtime cooks from your dad's era?

00:27:33

TM: Yeah; I have a picture too right here in the dining room of a gentleman named Manly Dubrule and they called him Polly—was his nickname. There was a gentleman that helped my dad named Herbert Boone, and he was a black gentleman. And Dad generally did not like talking to them a whole lot because most of the time when dad talked to them he would—the man was complaining about how hot it was. And Dad knew it was hot. So he figured the further he could stay away from the cook the better off the cook would be and he would be.

00:28:02

And Herbert Boone, Polly Dubrule; our current cook has been here about twenty years. His name is Scott Singleton and—and of course I have cooked the pigs here some myself and it—it was not fun. It was hard cooking the pigs and then going home and getting cleaned up and then coming back and working in the restaurant the rest of the day. So it's—the barbecue business is a tough business and Dad always mentioned to me, he said Tom, you'll never have much competition. I said why is that? He said because they just can't stand it. He said it's just too hard.

00:28:35

RF: Have you seen a lot of places come and go in the area, in the New Bern area, people who thought they could run a barbecue establishment?

00:28:42

TM: Oh yeah; I've had a couple different folks. I think what happens, a lot of people ride past our restaurant and they see the cars lined around the restaurant and they say, "Oh, man if I

opened a place up we can do the same thing." And it's taken us forty years to build our—our clientele and our business up over these years. And a lot of times folks who have never been in the restaurant business have no idea what they're getting into and what is going to be required. And sometimes I wonder if I still remember because—because it's tough.

00:29:12

We had one local barbecue place down the road that was only in business for a couple years. And you know sometimes restaurants have this unique way of catching on fire and burning down during unique times of the day or night. And that's how one of them ended up. Another gentleman friend of mine was kind of a flash in a pan. He thought he could run a barbecue restaurant and, you know, it was just too tough for him and he quit. And currently there's another little barbecue place here in town that's opened up called [Taylor's] Texas [Style] BBQ and he does cook beef brisket. And I've had some of it before and it's quite good. But he's in a bad location and doesn't have adequate parking for his customers. And to run a restaurant today you need a certain amount of turnover, you know, to keep the thing going. And he's kind of shot in the foot right there to start with.

00:30:04

RF: And you just mentioned your pit master, Scott Singleton is his name. Tell me a bit about him; you said he's been here twenty years.

00:30:10

TM: Yeah; Scott started when he was young. The cook that I had before him—

00:30:17

RF: Is he the gentleman I met back there?

00:30:18

TM: No; uh-uh. That's Larry Kuntz and Stephanie Moore, no relation, and she's the black girl and then the white girl's name is Jamie Summerall and they have all been working back there for at least ten years. And so they know how to handle the ropes back there.

00:30:34

Scott has been with us about twenty years and he—he's very faithful and he comes three times a week. We cook the pigs every other day, and he'll cook on Sunday and bone it out Monday morning, and we'll cook on Tuesday and bone it out Wednesday morning, and we'll cook on Thursday and bone pigs out Friday morning. And one of the little extra items we have when we cook the pigs is the pork skins which we fry out, and they—we generally sell them from about ten to ten-thirty in the mornings because there's a little crowd of people that comes out here that just cannot hardly live without those things. And in fact we had to start putting a limit on how many bags you could get because there was a big argument about the skins, so—.

00:31:15

RF: What was that argument? **[*Laughs*]** Can you detail what happened?

00:31:20

TM: Oh yeah; the argument was: "I was here first. I want two bags of skins. You got three; I need one of them." And because they're quite good and—and they—when they're gone, they're gone, and they have to wait to the next day. And people call us up and want us to save skins for

them, but generally what happens, we end up saving the skins, they'll come in when we have some of the skins left and they get those skins and buy them and then we end up with a bag of skins left over every day. So we don't save them. It's a first come first served situation.

00:31:47

RF: And you told me what days Scott works. Can you tell me kind of a day in the life of him when he puts—starting with when he puts the pigs on?

00:31:58

TM: Well it's somewhat easier. A lot of barbecue restaurants today have had to trim down their operation. We used to cook the pigs 100-percent with the oak wood and the coals and that's what provided the heat. Then after a while I began to realize that electricity or either gas could provide some of that heat initially when we were just trying to get the pigs cooking and getting them to start dripping.

00:32:26

And what we do now, Scott will come in about lunchtime, about noon, and put the pigs on and cut the pigs up in quarters because they're a lot easier to handle like that when you take them off the pit. We sprinkle a few shoulders in there on the pit also. And then he'll leave the pigs for a while and they're out there cooking for several hours right by themselves and they don't have to be tended to like in years past. And then he'll come back later on; he's got the wood in the fire. We'll light the fire up and then once those coals start dropping we'll pull the drawers open on the sides of the pit, the stainless steel pits we had special made, and we'll sprinkle the coals in those drawers, slide them back in and by this time the pigs are dripping. And

that grease will drip down on those coals, and you'll get that little curled smoke from the grease to come up and that's what helps to season the barbecue these days.

00:33:19

RF: Is there still a risk of fire?

00:33:22

TM: The fire risk is quite minimal these days and one of the main reasons why is because of the —the lid that's on the—the pit is very durable. It's a stainless steel lid and oxygen, a fire has to have oxygen to burn. And once those pigs get to smoking and dripping those—those coals in there, the oxygen is displaced somehow, and when the pigs do catch on fire they'll burn up whatever available oxygen is in there, and the fire puts itself out because the more of that smoke that gets in there the more it robs the atmosphere, you know, the oxygen that's in the pit.

00:33:58

And occasionally we'll see a little brown spot there where one shoulder might have gotten burned out but the pig—the fire goes out.

00:34:05

RF: And when did you make this change from all wood to the machine?

00:34:08

TM: Probably about ten years ago we started using these electric pits and mainly because the availability of the wood and the price was getting so intense, and I think a lot of barbecue places in conjunction with their wood use today they probably use charcoal, which charcoal will hold

heat, you know for about two hours, whereas the oak coals probably fifteen or twenty, maybe thirty minutes. And then the heat starts dying down.

00:34:38

So that's one reason why we went to using some electricity and some of the supplemental heat is because the cost of the wood and—and that way you don't have to—the cook doesn't have to fight quite so hard you know getting the pigs smoked up.

00:34:54

RF: And talking about the price of wood, you were also telling me, earlier this morning, about the price of—of hogs. Can you—can you go into that?

00:35:02

TM: Yes, sir. The price of pigs last week which was Thanksgiving week, this year 2011, I paid $1.29 for hogs dressed, which is the most we have ever—ever paid for them in the history that we've been here. Of course we live in different tough economic times; the price of pork has gone up. The reason why is because the price of food for the pork has gone up. Corn is—is high; wheat is high, and that directly affects the price of pork.

00:35:38

And our blessed government has a really neat unique program where they're subsidizing the cost of ethanol fuel to the tune of a dollar a gallon and so there was a $5 billion subsidy this year paid to ethanol production companies to help them out, and when you have the—the government meddling in corn prices that never helps any.

00:36:00

There's also a gentleman named Mr. Joe Luter who runs Smithfield Foods out of Smithfield, Virginia, and he does a lot of contract growing of hogs these days, and the hog market is somewhat controlled to make sure there's always a production of pigs. But sometimes you have the little situation of supply in demand and apparently right now there's a pretty big demand for pork from overseas. And that puts a strain on the market and of course we have supply and demand, you know, the price goes up.

00:36:36

And that's one thing that's very difficult especially in the pork barbecue business is dealing with those increased prices, because your customers can only stand you know to pay so much for—for a product. And so it puts a squeeze on—on the profit end.

00:36:50

RF: And you were telling me about other changes you've seen in the pork industry. You said you recently bought a different kind of hog. Can you—can you tell me about that?

00:37:01

TM: Yes, sir. Recently I purchased three or four hogs and I refer to them as *groundhogs* because they were actually grown on the ground the way hogs used to be. And as opposed to these production hogs that we purchase today that are grown in hog parlors. They have concrete floors. They never touch a piece of dirt. And from the cradle to the grave, they're always on concrete and they're fed a production line of food, it's corn, it's a mixture of antibiotics, supplements to—so that the hog will gain the greatest amount of weight in the shortest amount of time with more

usable meat on the pig. They have through selective breeding they have managed to breed a lot of the fat out of the hogs, because solid muscle weighs more than fat does and they've engineered that grain that they've got, if they can get just two or three more pounds of solid meat ,which will provide extra weight out of each hog that amounts to a lot of money.

00:38:09

But those groundhogs are fed processed cooked scrap foods which have to be handled in a certain manner according to the State, but it does provide for a much more flavorful pig. And the two or three pigs that I cooked I kept and boned out separate and the texture of the meat was much better and the quality of the meat just had a much, much better flavor to it instead of being so bland.

00:38:38

RF: Did any customers say anything? Did they notice a difference?

00:38:41

TM: They did. I ate some myself. I said, "Man, this stuff is just really different!" And I had give some to several of my friends and said, "Try this; try this." And they said, "Boy, that tastes a whole lot different!" I said, "Well, enjoy it today." I said, "Because I don't have many of these hogs on hand. And we'll be back to the regular concrete floor hogs in a short while." And those two or three hogs that we cooked were very, very flavorful and there was a definite distinct difference in the taste of the meat.

00:39:09

RF: If the price was comparable between the groundhogs and the concrete hogs over a long period would you go to groundhogs?

00:39:15

TM: I—we—we definitely would switch from these production hogs to the ground grown hogs, simply because of the quality of the meat that we had there and it's much, much better, much more flavorful.

00:39:27

RF: And let's talk about other aspects of the food that you sell. Tell me about your sauce.

00:39:33

TM: We do sell a vinegar based sauce, which we have bottled for us with our recipe and they bottle a lot of barbecue sauces for a lot of other customers. But, we have this Eastern-style vinegar based sauce, and we keep it on the shelves, as much as we're able to. And we go through quite a—a supply of that stuff. We also have bottled the rib sauce that we use on our pork ribs, which is a St. Louis style rib, and we cook those on the same pit that we cook the hogs on, only on Saturdays just because it's so intense and it's so much trouble dealing with them.

00:40:12

There's a chicken sauce that we use, and we actually bake the chickens in the oven, aluminum pan and we put a little of this sauce diluted over the chickens when we cook them. But that sauce is a recipe that my daddy came up with about fifty years ago and they still make all the sauces today that we use to mix together. One of them by itself is really too tart; one of them is

too sweet; one of them is super-sweet. But mixing them all together they tend to tone each other down, and people come in just to buy that sauce and use it. My grandkids, yeah my grandkids and my dad's grandkids love to dip their French fries and the hushpuppies in that sauce and just eat it like that and a lot of customers want that chicken sauce just spread over their—over their French fries.

00:40:59

RF: Hmm; and you were telling me a story right when we showed up this morning. You were telling me a story about—about what you've heard about why East Carolina doesn't use tomatoes.

00:41:08

TM: Initially, years and years ago, I think in England a lot of times tomatoes were put on pewter plates, which I understand contains lead. And many times that lead will make people sick and cause them to go into comas sometimes. And I think there was a stigma in East North Carolina somehow since the North Carolina was developed from the coast and then inland about put—using tomatoes in any type of food because they—people thought they were poisonous.

00:41:36

And hence that's one of the reasons why this vinegar based sauce was used in Eastern North Carolina to flavor the pigs with. People were afraid of tomato based sauces and whatnot. And it was just a stigma that people had in their minds from situations and that they had heard about with tomatoes on pewter plates.

00:41:56

RF: And have you heard any other—any similar stories about the beginnings of whole-hog barbecue in North Carolina?

00:42:04

TM: Well, yeah; I think most of these guys that started these barbecue places that have any age on them, folks were looking for something to do, some way to make a living. A lot of folks they were—didn't have any skills. I won't say they were uneducated but they just did the best they could by their wits to try to make a living for themselves and their family. And one thing that really kind of I think spurred the barbecue business on years ago was the tobacco industry in the State.

00:42:36

I remember years—in years past when tobacco used to be a tremendously big agricultural product here in our State, in the fall whenever guys would finish up with the crop, they would always come to dad and get ten pounds of barbecue with the slaw and the hushpuppies. They'd carry it back home and feed it to their—to their farmhands as a thank you for working during the summer and everything. And then a lot of times tobacco farmers when they sold, the money—then they had money in their hands. And always in the fall Daddy's business would pick up when a lot of the agricultural money started flowing around.

00:43:11

And a lot of barbecue places in East North Carolina developed and sprang up around tobacco markets. In Wilson, North Carolina, Goldsboro, North Carolina, New Bern, Daddy had the longest running barbecue place down here which was not a tobacco market, but people still

enjoyed eating barbecue and there were a lot of farmers around. And then we had our first competitor come into town probably twenty years ago. And my dad told me not to be concerned about a competitor. He says you let them take care of their business, and we'll take care of our business. But New Bern never really was a barbecue town, and I think for that reason is why you don't see as many barbecue places here in New Bern and east of here as there is in the western part of the State.

00:44:00

RF: Tell me about where we are in New Bern.

00:44:03

TM: In New Bern, a little bit of history? New Bern has just celebrated its 300th anniversary a couple years ago, and New Bern originally was the capital of the State, before it was moved to Raleigh. New Bern is the second oldest city in the State and Bath, North Carolina over near Little Washington is the first city that was founded in the State.

00:44:28

I think the—the Noose River and the Trent River has helped out tremendously with economic growth because a lot of lumber products especially were moved up and down the river.

00:44:41

And like I say, New Bern did celebrate its 300th anniversary the year before last.

00:44:47

RF: Yeah; and let's talk about that. How were you involved with the 300th anniversary?

00:44:51

TM: Well I—I tend to tell folks that New Bern is a great place to live and over the years many, many people have come to town. In 2010 New Bern celebrated its 300th anniversary and one of my high school buddies, who was a girl, happened to mention to me; she said, "Tom, how—what would you like to do this year in conjunction with that?" And I said, "Well, I don't really think I want to do anything." But after a while my mind conceded and we decided to do a Guinness World Record Event in conjunction with New Bern's 300th anniversary. And the purpose of that event was to bring as much attention to New Bern as possible and what better way to do it than with a Guinness World Record Event. We were able to produce a—an open-faced barbecue sandwich which met the criteria that Guinness had set out for us. They said as long as it weighed more than 500 kilograms which is about 1,100 pounds they would issue a certificate, because nobody had ever done that before, but they wanted it to be of some significant size. And we were able to do that. And when we finished with the—the big bun, Guinness sent us a certificate, and on that particular day we had the Health Department certify that the barbecue was safe to eat. We wanted the people who came to witness the event to be able to be a participant, you know, in a Guinness World Record Event.

00:46:22

The only other thing we had in New Bern here that qualified for a Guinness World Record Event was there was a married couple that lived here, a black couple, and they had been married for, I believe, eighty years. And they were able to document that with their paperwork. And so Guinness issued them a certificate for being the oldest living, documented married couple alive at the time. And one of the—the spouses died earlier this year in 2011, and it was a Mr. and Mrs. Fisher and we actually had invited them to participate in our Guinness World

Record Event, which I thought would have been rather unique. But as is understandable they were kind of tired. And they weren't able to make it that day.

00:47:09

But it really was a successful event. It took a lot of coordination from a lot of friends; family members helped. We had the Governor on hand to help us celebrate. We had invited about twenty Marines that we served also. And I made mention of the fact that those guys serve us every day; we can serve them today. And we wanted to give them some honor and recognition for what you know they do for us and for our country. And so it—it was quite a memorable thing. And we have a little shadow-box thing on the wall here in the restaurant, and a lot of folks stop and take a peek at it, and it's really quite, quite interesting. And it was quite rewarding but it was a—it was a lot of work, too, almost worse than the restaurant business.

00:47:52

RF: [*Laughs*] Well would you do it again?

00:47:55

TM: Oh, no; definitely, I would not do it again. It just required so much effort and there was so many variables and a lot of times you just didn't know how things was going to work and, you know, fortunately I had enough good, qualified help where we were able to pull it off. And because that's something like that you can't rehearse. You don't want to make a—a big bun sandwich that you know costs in excess of probably $2,000 or $3,000 just for the meat. So it was just a one-shot deal. We had to construct a special oven to cook the bun in. The bun had to be in a single piece and we didn't want to put a top on the bun because that would have qualified as a

bona fide sandwich and we would have had to beat a weight that was done up in Michigan, which was about 5,000 pounds. And I didn't think I could get my hands on enough money to purchase that many pigs, so we just went with the open-faced sandwich.

00:48:53

RF: And what do you think your dad would say about this?

00:48:55

TM: Dad probably would have said, "Son, are you nuts?" **[*Laughs*]** My mom would have said, "Oh, Tom, that was great; that was great." But Dad was not much for frills and you know entertainment and that kind of stuff. He just said you just need to take care of the business. And Mom would have been real tickled to death and I wish they could have seen it. And my—my kids, I had my son and my daughter were down there. My grandson helped serve the barbecue and we even got a little—a spot in the *Guinness World Record Book* this year, probably two-by-two inches which took probably about $25,000 to $30,000 to secure that little spot right there. And, but it was quite enjoyable and I'm—I'm glad I did it and—and it helped—I hope it helped put New Bern on the map a little bit.

00:49:45

RF: So how many different locations have there been of Moore's Barbeque?

00:49:49

TM: Over the years, as far as I could document, there was at least seven locations that I knew of. And I think dad probably had two or three other places prior to that. And there are some folks around that have a little age on me and they happen to remember some of those places. There was a little log cabin over across the river, and I think he operated a place out of there at one time. And then there was a place down near where Barbour Boat Works is and Barbour Boat Works built some World War II ships and whatnot, some stuff for the government, a lot of the ferries that are used here in the State; he had a little spot down there. And had a little small block building in one section of town and then he converted a used—or a garage later and adapted it to the restaurant, the place that people remember the most. And then during the '60s he had an opportunity with the Federal government over a restaurant issue, and he tore that restaurant down, and built one at a different location and he ran that for six or seven years. And somebody wanted to buy it worse than he wanted to own it, so he sold it. And he said it was just quite difficult; he said the labor situation just was about to drive him up the wall.

00:51:06

And then he had built a place out near a Weyerhaeuser plant and had—ran that for four, five, or six years. And then he sold that to Weyerhaeuser and then we built this spot here at our current location, which I believe is about the seventh one that I can remember. We started off just with a small, you know, kitchen area and the cook shack building out back. Then over the years we added on one dining room and we added on another dining room and then we finally expanded and added on a bunch of bigger dining rooms, which cost more than the whole rest of the restaurant put together.

00:51:36

But we needed it over the years because of the growth and quite frequently during the week we'll fill up all of the dining rooms. So business has been good to us. It's grown over the years. And—and it's quite rewarding.

00:51:53

RF: And when did this—when did you open this spot and how did you become involved in it?

00:51:57

TM: I had been—I worked for the State at one point. I rode around with a man, and we buried the road kill, and I did that in the interim while I was waiting to go in the Service. And I joined the National Guard. This was during the Vietnam Era; I went to Basic Training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and Advanced Individual Training there, and then when I got home after my six month stint I said, "Dad, I need something to do." I said, "Can we build another barbecue place?"

00:52:25

And little did I realize, he was going to let me build it. I provided a lot of the labor. Daddy was the brains. He understood a lot about construction and a lot of different things. And so we—we built this place here and we opened it up in January of 1972, and over the years it has grown to where we added the additional dining rooms and all that stuff. But we still have some of the same customers, even though they're older, that ate with us back in the '70s, they're still eating with us today. And one of them is our—our retired County Bookkeeper and she kept our books for probably fifteen or twenty years. She's in her 90s. She's very spry. She comes in every

Friday night with her friends and they sit at a special little table. And—and we expect to see them on Friday nights and they expect to be here on Friday nights. And so we enjoy seeing them.

00:53:22

RF: And—and we're sitting at a table in one of the dining rooms and I'm—I've been looking down the whole time, and there's a little plaque that says, *"Reserved for Zoot Saunders—5:30 to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday*." What—who is Zoot Saunders?

00:53:35

TM: Well, Zoot is a retired fire investigator here in New Bern and he is eighty-five years old. He's very spry, very healthy, and he's very observant. And this particular table we're sitting at here has a view back across the counter area where people line up to get waited on. And Zoot likes to sit in a spot where he can see what's going on. And this spot here he can see the dining room we're sitting in. He can see back across the counter area. He can see the dining room here behind him. And Zoot, because of his age, he has a lot of good friends also, so he likes to sit here where he can spy them out and if he comes in and somebody is sitting in his spot here he'll sit at the next table and just stare at them, to where they can't stand the pressure. And after a while they —they say, "Okay; it's time to go."

00:54:21

And Zoot slides right over here quick. And he—he takes care of his spot and he's kind of a special sort of fellow and, you know, those are the kinds of guys that we will have fond memories of you know when their time has passed.

00:54:34

And there's an attorney named Blackie Stiff that comes in and sits with him a lot, and they just enjoy telling stories, stories of the past, things that are going on currently, and—and that's one thing people enjoy doing in barbecue places, is just hanging out.

00:54:50

RF: Tell me what is it about Moore's Barbeque that has made it last a long time, since 1945 and —and almost forty years in this location.

00:55:04

TM: Yeah; well I think one thing in any restaurant business and in the barbecue business you develop a clientele and you try to provide them with that good food at a fair price with reasonable service. And I think as long as you have the good food at a reasonable price the service may or may not be that great all the time, sometimes you can have really good food with great service and the price sometimes won't affect that much, but if you can get all three of those elements together I think that lends towards, you know, providing you with tremendous success.

00:55:38

The food has got to be palatable; otherwise the price and the service won't make any difference. And the folks that we have made friends with over the years, a lot of times they'll walk in; I say we got you. You know, they'll put their thumbs up. We go get their food; we know what they want. And I think just, you know, one of the biggest things I think is that customer service and appreciating your customers. And any business has to have that customer base, but

the people who run that business have to understand that the customers is what makes them what they are, because if the customers don't come to the door you don't have anything.

00:56:16

And so you learn in any business to appreciate the people that enjoy your product and I think that's one thing that lends towards, you know, any successful business. You got to appreciate your customers. You need your customers and you treat them with respect and friendliness. And that's one thing my mother and dad were able to do over the years. And I think that's one area that we have recognized, since Dad has been gone the last twenty years, is to continue just to take care of your customers.

00:56:43

RF: And how long do you plan on running Moore's Olde Tyme Barbeque?

00:56:49

TM: Well, Moore's Olde Tyme Barbeque? A lot of times people when they get tired they finally have to retire. My dad was eighty years old and he was walking across the back as he was having his heart attack. And he had tremendous pain and pressure but he—he didn't want to leave the place, because he felt like once he walked out of the door to go to the hospital that may be the last time. And as long as I'm healthy and of a sound mind and I can move and talk to customers and help coordinate stuff I'll probably be here.

00:57:18

And the other reason is if you owe too much money you got to keep working. **[*Laughs*]**

00:57:23

RF: Do you plan on encouraging any family members to continue in your lineage much like you did with your father?

00:57:29

TM: Oh—oh yeah; I think my son who has worked with me a couple times and we've had little disagreements about things, I think that he's looking forward to the opportunity to come back, you know, to running the restaurant. And—and it's difficult. When you have twelve employees you got twelve different sets of problems that come to work every day.

00:57:46

And they're good employees, but there's situations and opportunities that you know occur all the time. And that's part of, you know, being the manager, you have to understand that you can't just be a dictator; you have to learn to be a—lack of words here—an encourager, you have to teach the employees that they have to work with each other because they spend more time here with each other than they do with their own families, so they have to be able to get along and there's opportunities and situations that come up all the time. But that's just something you have to deal with. And you have to have that type of, you know, personality to be able to handle everything from your employees to your customers to your vendors, and—and then you end up being well-liked in the community which is always, you know, a pleasurable thing.

00:58:37

RF: And what does—just to wrap this up what does *Olde Tyme* mean to you and in terms of this business?

00:58:42

TM: Well we adopted that term several years ago, and I say we call it Moore's Olde Tyme Barbeque because we still endeavor to do things the old-time way. We wish we could still cook the pigs 100-percent with the wood, but market forces, economic situations just don't allow that.

00:59:05

And the workload probably would at least double or triple if we went that route. But I think the old-time hospitality that we try to offer along with the barbecue and the seafood that we sell might be where the words *olde tyme* might come more into use.

00:59:29

RF: And maybe just one more question; what does whole hog mean to Carolina, to community, to the identity of North Carolinians?

00:59:39

TM: Yeah; in East North Carolina most barbecue places try to use the whole hog. And that's a term that you use, the whole hog, and I think the word *barbecue* has a unique word like—you may be familiar with it, Rien, or I think it's the barbecue or something like that—it means cooking from the head to the tail. And so, in East North Carolina, the whole hog was—we never had those special cuts of meat that were really available and the whole hog has that sweet belly meat where the bacon comes from. And we just feel like that belly meat adds so much more flavor, you know, to the overall, you know, barbecue scene.

01:00:25

A lot of places use just butts, shoulders, and hams. Hams are very dry. Shoulders tend to be a little bit darker. Butts are a little bit darker yet. They're a lot easier to bone out because you just shake two bones out of the meat. When you've got the whole hog you got to clean off every rib, go down to the shoulders, the hams, pull out all the bones and the gristle and everything. And it's a lot more trouble deboning the whole hog, but in my opinion it's definitely worth you know that extra effort.

01:00:54

RF: Do you think—you mentioned there was a brisket place that just moved in town and you have all these places. Do you think whole hog will ever disappear or is it here forever?

01:01:04

TM: Not—I think the whole-hog barbecue places will still be around. We can still obtain the hogs. There's still a market for the whole hogs out there. It's definitely easier with the—with the cuts of meat but that whole-hog stuff adds so much flavor. And a lot of the restaurants, I think that are starting to use just cuts of meat are—are doing more harm to themselves than what they realize because it tends to leave you with a—a barbecue that's just not that flavorful. That—that bacon meat in there, that sweet belly meat makes such a tremendous difference. And, of course, that's my opinion; that's what I'm sticking to and that's what we're going to go with is using the whole hog.

01:01:48

RF: All right; maybe that's a good place to end with—bacon which is—which is always a good place to go. **[*Laughs*]** So unless you have any other comments I'd like to thank you.

01:01:56

TM: Well no; we just appreciate what y'all are doing to keep this barbecue history alive and a lot of these older barbecue places have—have quite a bit of history behind them. And they were—a lot of them I think were started in very meager times and they had just grown through the years; a lot of children have taken over the barbecue places and—and endeavored to run them. Some of them have run them in ground. Some of them have continued to run them to where they're continuing to be successful and more successful. And we try to do stuff to promote the restaurant. We have a special cooker we're having built now, where we can carry out and smoke anything out on the field, and I think a lot of times, it's like log cabins; people love log cabins because it reminds them of times in the past, when things seemed to be more comfortable. I think when you carry stuff out and cook it over oak coals and that kind of stuff, it reminds people of stuff they used to eat in the past. And like I say, the past in people's minds is very comfortable, because they don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. And if they can do something that reminds them of the past, it seems to provide them with a certain comfort level.

01:03:06

And—and that's one reason I think maybe too why barbecue places, and especially older ones, people remember what it was like in the past, and I think they feel like if I go eat at that barbecue place I can have a taste of the past, it'll remind me of the past, and we'll just sit down and eat some good old barbecue and chow down with our friends and enjoy some fellowship.

01:03:27

RF: I think that's a great place to end. All right; well I want to thank you, sir.

01:03:30

TM: You're certainly welcome. I appreciate what y'all do and appreciate Denny and the pictures he's going to provide and thank y'all for stopping in today.

01:03:38

RF: Thank you.

01:03:42

[End Tommy Moore-Moore's Old Tyme Barbeque Interview]