

**William Morris, Jr.**  
**Morris Barbeque - Hookerton, NC**

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Interviewer: Rien T. Fertel  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
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Project: Southern BBQ Trail - North Carolina

**[Begin William Morris, Jr. - Morris Barbeque]**

**00:00:02**

**Rien Fertel:** This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance continuing on the North Carolina BBQ Trail. It is a beautiful Saturday early morning, late morning, 10:00, November 26, 2011. And I am at Morris Barbeque in Hookerton, North Carolina. And I'm sitting here with Mr. William Morris, Jr. and I'm going to ask him to please identify himself.

**00:00:36**

**William Morris:** Well hello. My name is William Morris, Jr., and I am fifty-five and—

**00:00:46**

**RF:** And your birthday?

**00:00:46**

**WM:** —yeah; my birthday, I am—March 9, 1956.

**00:00:53**

**RF:** And what is your role here at Morris Barbeque?

**00:00:56**

**WM:** Well, there's many roles actually. I am the owner. I'm the cook. I'm the cleaner. I'm the server. **[Laughs]** I do some of everything and enjoy every bit of it.

**00:01:11**

**RF:** Okay; let's—how old is Morris Barbeque?

**00:01:15**

**WM:** Morris Barbeque is as old as I am. It was originated in 1956, and I don't know what month, but it was—it started in 1956, so it's fifty-five years old.

**00:01:29**

**RF:** And—and who is—who started Morris Barbeque?

**00:01:32**

**WM:** My granddad; his name was Willie McKinley Morris. He—he started it and expanded on the store, made it bigger and of course in this—we got what he—what he built today.

**00:01:50**

**RF:** And—and you said a store; what exactly do you mean?

**00:01:55**

**WM:** He actually started off as a—a little store out in the—we're way out in the country and you could go buy—and buy a Coca-Cola and a Nab, and that's kind of how he got started. He actually ran a small grill [in] downtown Hookerton when—that was when Hookerton was thriving and actually even had a movie theater. And we were one mile from downtown Hookerton. And so with the store he—he started selling barbecue on a horse and buggy, actually. And so from there it just—it grew and he started a—a sit-down restaurant. And then he moved

the store inside and the—and the store still operated up until just a few years before he passed away and he kind of—kind of phased it out. And—and of course we no longer do the store side; it's now room for people to sit.

**00:02:53**

**RF:** And tell me; you said he started selling barbecue by horse and buggy. Do you have any old pictures of that?

**00:03:00**

**WM:** No; I don't. That is what we remember him telling us and we have looked, but no, I'm sorry. I wish. He used to also sell ice. He would—he delivered ice to the old refrigerators, the big blocks of ice and I don't have any pictures, but I remember him talking about it.

**00:03:20**

**RF:** And where—what year was he born, where did he—where was he born?

**00:03:24**

**WM:** He was born around Bear Grass. And that—that's about all that—I don't know, and I do not know what year he was born. I'm sorry.

**00:03:36**

**RF:** And you were telling me he grew up on a farm or what—what was his—his life like?

**00:03:41**

**WM:** Yeah; well, when he was young, like I said, he run the soda shop in Hookerton and he ended up buying a farm. He married [Francis] Frankie Hartsfield Dail and she was fortunate enough to—family owned a farm and anyway they ended up buying the farm, and he started farming raising tobacco and pigs and—and row crops—corn and actually back then he had some cotton.

**00:04:15**

And that just continued, and with the barbecue store he raised his own pigs. And—and all the way from little pigs to big hogs and—and, of course, what he didn't cook he sold to market, etcetera.

**00:04:33**

**RF:** And—and you were telling me early this morning about—about him raising his own hogs for barbecue and slaughter. How exactly did that work back then, because no one can do that nowadays?

**00:04:45**

**WM:** Yeah; no it's—it's kind of—. Well actually, I think if you're doing some organic stuff it's starting to maybe come back a little bit, but anyway, the regulations have changed so much over the years it—it is basically prohibited.

**00:04:59**

But what he did, he had—he had a small hog parlor, and where he raised his pigs and fed them and—and then when they got a certain size about fifty pounds, he had another—we called it a hog parlor where they—they house them at—and he would take them from the—where they

were born at and then put them there and feed them, and they would be raised basically for market or for barbecue.

**00:05:29**

**RF:** And where was—where did he raise these pigs? Where was his farm?

**00:05:33**

**WM:** On—on his farm, which was located really right across from the barbecue store now.

**00:05:37**

**RF:** Okay; so we're sitting outside I should say, so right across the street from where we are.

**00:05:42**

**WM:** That is correct.

**00:05:42**

**RF:** Okay; and I want to say the—the street or highway that Morris Barbeque is on and that we're sitting right off of is called Morris BBQ Road. When did it get that name?

**00:05:54**

**WM:** Well not until just a few years ago; actually, being a rural community and county we finally got the 911-locating system, and when they did they renamed all the roads. And my understanding is really the way it got named was the guys at the Fire Department, when they'd

say if there was you know a fire down this particular road which used to be called 1430 they would say, “Yes down by Morris Barbeque.” And that’s how it got its name.

**00:06:32**

**RF:** And what did—what did you—when they were putting up those signs or you heard that they were going to name a street, highway even after your family and your family’s establishment how did you feel?

**00:06:47**

**WM:** Very proud; very tickled and very proud, yes.

**00:06:53**

**RF:** And let’s talk some more about your—about your grandfather. What did you call him?

**00:06:59**

**WM:** He was Pop to me.

**00:07:02**

**RF:** And what—what do you remember, what early stories do you remember of—of being a little boy around him?

**00:07:10**

**WM:** Well probably one that sticks out in my mind the most is he—he had a monkey [*Laughs*], and the monkey actually belonged to a circus. And there was a tree that was right across the road

from the barbecue store which is the—the house that's there now is where he used to stay and his daughter stays now.

**00:07:31**

And, but that monkey had a house up in the tree. And there was a pond beside the—the tree and he would actually get out, and people would come by and want to see the monkey, and he would—he had a ladder and he would put that ladder out by the pond. And the monkey's name was Joe. Joe would climb the ladder and jump off in the water and just swim and *[Laughs]*—and just had a—just had a good time. So the story about the monkey probably sticks with me the best.

**00:08:01**

**RF:** And I'm guessing the monkey doesn't eat—did not eat barbecue.

**00:08:05**

**WM:** No; the monkey didn't eat barbecue. *[Laughs]*

**00:08:08**

**RF:** So you—you grew up around here. Did you grow up across the street also, or were you born here?

**00:08:12**

**WM:** I grew up within—within seeing distance, right up the road. I grew up in an old two-story house that's now been torn down and a new brick home replaces it. But yeah; I grew right up—my dad's farm and my granddad's farm joined together, so we—we were raised right there and—



and I used to go with my granddad on Fridays to take—to go pick up the pig from slaughter and we would always go to the Kinston and he would always buy me a ham and cheese sandwich and a chocolate milkshake. And that was a treat for me because I was, you know—I was way young.

**00:08:59**

**RF:** What days would that—was that on the weekdays or weekends?

**00:09:03**

**WM:** Yeah; usually took the pig on—on a Wednesday and he picked him up on Friday and cooked him you know of course Friday night.

**00:09:11**

**RF:** What kind of—because I'm interested in all details—what kind of truck did your—did your grandfather drive? Do you remember what color it was?

**00:09:18**

**WM:** Yeah; my—my granddad loved red. And most of the trucks that I remember were red. The last one was not red. It was kind of a yellowish two-tone but the old ones that I really remembered, he had boards on the side of the back of the truck. It was just a regular Ford pickup, and he had boards on the back of it where he used to put the pig in the back because he had to load the pig that was live to take to the slaughterhouse. And so it had rails and he had Morris Barbeque on the—on the name of the rails.

**00:09:58**

**RF:** And do you remember, did you consider yourself as growing up in this establishment too?  
Did you spend a lot of time here when you were young around the barbecue?

**00:10:06**

**WM:** Yes; I did. When I was very small I used to come and every Saturday and chop barbecue and I chopped barbecue. That was—that was my job to help get the meat in, to get it chopped up, cleaned up and then I left while, you know, when they served. And I did all that. Usually it took maybe about three hours and I made for the whole day—I made—whole morning, I made \$3.50. And—and that’s kind of how I got started. And then of course it progressed to—as my granddaddy aged, I started helping him put the pig on and actually would help him load the pig sometimes and—and then put him on at night, and it just kind of went on from there.

**00:10:58**

**RF:** How old were you when you started working here?

**00:11:01**

**WM:** I don’t know. I was—I was young. I—I don’t remember, probably pre-teen. But I remember when I was a—a teenager riding my bicycle I would get off on Saturday and I would ride my bicycle to Hookerton so that’s been a long time. **[Laughs]**

**00:11:23**

**RF:** And do—do you remember how much a plate or a sandwich of barbecue cost back then?

00:11:26

**WM:** Well I don't remember the plates. I want to say—I want to say I remember the plates being \$3.50 but the sandwiches, we only started serving sandwiches really about—it's been about two years now. We always had people ask about sandwiches and we never did it. All we ever served was the simple menu of barbecue and ribs, and with—with all the people asking about the sandwiches we finally decided well we would just try it on a limited basis. It went over great; still continue the sandwiches.

00:12:13

**RF:** So sandwiches are brand new?

00:12:16

**WM:** Yeah; it is. Well my granddaddy always—he didn't want to—I guess maybe with the bread truck or whatever, but he always said, “Well, if they don't get a sandwich they'll get a plate.” *[Laughs]* And most of the time he was right.

00:12:30

**RF:** And do you remember any other stories about growing up here, in the barbecue establishment?

00:12:35

**WM:** Well, my grandmother actually perfected the slaw recipe that we use today. And I remember helping her cut the cabbage and mixing the slaw and—and her part in the—in the barbecue and if—and if—of course if it hadn't have been for her and that—that slaw recipe we

would have never—and actually the cornbread recipe was hers too. And we still use the—the very same recipe and the very same slaw recipe. And the sauce that we use is the same original recipe that he taught me how to—how to make and which we think is great.

**00:13:28**

**RF:** And tell me a bit—a bit more about your grandmother. Was she a—a cook outside of here? Did she cook at home?

**00:13:36**

**WM:** She was—she was a homemaker, very active in the church, but a cook—man that woman could cook.

**00:13:45**

**RF:** What do you remember best? What was your favorite?

**00:13:46**

**WM:** Uh, all the desserts. *[Laughs]* All the sweets. But she—she could cook. I'd come a lot of times early on Saturday morning and she would—she always prepared breakfast for my granddad, and eggs and sausage and toast. And I remember loving to get up on Saturday morning before I had to chop barbecue and going over and—and eating breakfast with them. She'd always fix me an egg and a piece of bacon or a piece of sausage, yeah.

**00:14:20**

**RF:** Did he come—your grandfather, did he come from a big family or was there a lot of family members around?

**00:14:24**

**WM:** Actually his—his—I think his—his family really was small. And he was from—he lived in Bear Grass but he was actually born—and I may have told you wrong; he was actually born around Black Jack and but I don't know a lot about his family. He moved—he left there and he moved here, and he had an uncle that would come by and visit with him at the store fairly often. We called him Uncle Jake, and that's all I remember is Uncle Jake. But I never had a lot of contact really with his family, I'm sorry to say.

**00:15:10**

**RF:** And—and tell me; you mentioned that Hookerton had a—kind of a boom period back in the day. What—what was going on in Hookerton back when he opened the Morris Barbeque?

**00:15:22**

**WM:** Well back when Hookerton was kind of—we call it thriving, and it does pretty good now but it had a—had a movie theater and had a Fire Department, had a soda shop, had several window stores and had a—they had a small café, a tire shop that used to sell tires all up—up and down the East Coast actually, had a bank; just had a doctor's office. It was a busy little town for—for the period.

**00:16:02**

And—and I think that’s what—and that’s one reason he had a customer base and when they delivered the ice and the food, etcetera, so—. You know Hookerton was a booming little town.

**00:16:14**

**RF:** And is it—is it a—is it a farm community and what do they farm here?

**00:16:19**

**WM:** Yes; this is all rural. It is—it is a farm community. All the—all this part of the State is agriculture-based, and its basic main crops are tobacco, and now it’s cotton, and years and years ago it was cotton and then cotton kind of phased out. But it’s come back. Corn, soybeans, and there’s a few local farmers that are very large in produce, such as sweet potatoes. And but yes; it—it is a farm community.

**00:16:51**

**RF:** And as I understand your grandfather cooked on a pit. How—what did he do; what was his practice?

**00:17:02**

**WM:** Okay; well, when he would get the pig back on Fridays it would come straight from the cooler from the slaughterhouse and they would—we would back up to the pit and he had a table made. He would put the pig on the pit and he would take a—he had a saw and a—and a old hickory butcher knife and he would go to work on the pig and get him to where he could put him

on the—on the coals. And they would lay them on the—on the—it was actually like an open pit inside the—inside of the—the building, and they used wood, in the beginning. He used oak wood. And—and that’s how he cooked it.

**00:17:51**

**RF:** And I’ve also read that he used corncobs as—as a—as coal for ashes. Why was that?

**00:17:58**

**WM:** That—that’s correct. I remember he used to have a big barn stored beside the pit and he would keep wood there and he had it full of corncobs. And what I—I think—I never cooked with corncobs, but what I think is that he used those to help supplement the fire because they would burn more readily to help get the oak wood hot, and he used it in combination as—and then later he even used charcoal.

**00:18:31**

**RF:** And, you let me read a bit of the family history inside, which was really great, and a lot of family members in some newspaper articles described him as this kind of entertainer. How so? We heard about the monkey. How—what—what else—who was he, like what—? [*Laughs*]

**00:18:50**

**WM:** He was quite a character. He—he loved to put a smile on people’s faces and he always had a—a good word and it was always the right word to make you smile. It was—he was

cheerful and he—he'd laugh and he'd joke and he always found time to shake your hand and speak to you.

**00:19:11**

Something else that I remember well about him was people used to come to him when they had a wart. [*Laughs*] And he could rub your wart and make it go away.

**00:19:31**

**RF:** What would he rub it with?

**00:19:31**

**WM:** His hands.

**00:19:33**

**RF:** So he had—I've heard of this. [*Laughs*] So he had kind of this miracle kind of thing?

**00:19:36**

**WM:** It's the truth; it is true. And he could also if you burned yourself he could rub the burn and the burn would—the fire would—the heat would go out of the burn. And I can tell you that's true from self-experience.

**00:19:53**

**RF:** Would he ever attribute this to anything?



**00:19:57**

**WM:** The Good Lord.

**00:20:00**

**RF:** That's amazing. So, we should say this; Morris Barbeque is only open one day a week. Did he always do this?

**00:20:10**

**WM:** That's correct, just on Saturday. He did do—one time he tried opening on Wednesdays, church night, and he used to sell tickets. You had to pre-order for a barbecue chicken and he did that for just a little while, and it just never really went over very well. So he just went back to the one day a week and—and that's what we have just continued ever since.

**00:20:43**

**RF:** And—and why do you think he chose Saturday or one day a week?

**00:20:45**

**WM:** Well, because of our location, because we are very rural, and it's probably not the easiest place to find [*Laughs*] as you probably can testify. But because everybody didn't have GPSs [*Laughs*], but anyway, it just—this would just support—I think the business just one day a week and—and that way he worked during the week farming and—and I guess this really was probably his play time, the barbecue.

00:21:18

**RF:** Did he ever tell you why he chose barbecue or why do you think he chose barbecue or barbecue chose him?

00:21:26

**WM:** No; no, we never had that conversation. All I ever knew—all I can ever remember people saying is when we would—I would ride with him when I was young and I'd hear them say, "There's the barbecue man." And—but no, never really had a conversation as to why.

00:21:50

**RF:** And did he groom you to take over the business or how—how did that happen, the transition?

00:21:57

**WM:** Yes; after—again after I got older and my granddaddy aged, he needed help to put the pig on because they're—they're heavy. And so I started helping him put the pigs on, and when I started he of course showed me his way, how he wanted it done and I did my best to do what he wanted and I learned, and that progressed from him—me helping him to just me doing it for him. **[Laughs]** And I did that for him for probably five or six years maybe before he passed away. And we had talked and we—or I knew that he wanted me to continue this and—and that's why we say that the tradition continues.

00:22:52

**RF:** Were you—were you excited? Were you nervous when he wanted you to take over?

00:22:59

**WM:** Uh both, excited and nervous; yes, and very proud—very proud.

00:23:07

**RF:** And—and tell me you—you worked during the week. You had a job before and you do now. What—what do you do?

00:23:14

**WM:** I am a landscaper. I actually farmed many years ago. And got out of farming and got into landscaping, which I did some all along while I was farming in the fall of the year. And I made it my—my primary income. And did some schooling and finally was fortunate to get—to be registered and now licensed in several different fields of landscaping and—and have been fortunate enough to have a successful landscaping company.

00:23:49

**RF:** Does—does your landscaping career play into running a restaurant at all?

00:23:59

**WM:** Well, from the business side, yes. I'd have to say it—one has helped the other. And—and I don't know that the—maybe the barbecue store actually maybe helped me be a better manager with the landscaping truthfully. But as far as being, I don't know how you say—compatible, I don't know that they're really compatible but—but they're—but with the—the landscaping it was kind of like farming. It was all outside work, and I enjoy the outside and—and then doing

what he did, because I actually helped him with his pigs and stuff, too. And I don't know; it just kind of—just enjoyable both of them. I enjoyed—I loved both of them.

**00:24:52**

**RF:** And tell me, I want to go over kind of a day in the life here of the establishment. And so I should say that you took us around. You were very—you showed us what goes on and we got here just before 6:30 in the morning this morning. And so tell us—and you know a day in the life of cooking or a day in the week because you're only one day a week, so it means you only cook one day a week, so tell us how it starts and what happens.

**00:25:23**

**WM:** Okay; well I have my pigs delivered and they—they are delivered on Friday and they're placed in a cooler. And I come in on Friday evenings and we start the—the process of cutting our cabbage in preparation for our slaw. So we—we come down and cut the cabbage and put them in the cooler, and then that night about usually about 11:30 come and get the pigs out and cut them up and put them on the grill, you know get the grill lit and get the temperature regulated and get it going.

**00:26:06**

And then I usually go in the store and do some little odd and end stuff to give the—the grill time to level out and make sure I'm on the—on the right path. *[Laughs]* And then I come back out and if everything's good I go home and most of the time I go home and try to catch me a little nap and I come back about 4:00 and I turn them over and make sure everything is going good. And then I usually go in and make the tea and do some other little final prep and if

everything is good then I'll—I'll go back and catch me another wink [*Laughs*]*—not very restful. But anyway then I come back around 6:00 and shut it down. And of course I've seasoned it along while it's going. And I shut it down and then we get started to get ready to chop it up. And the crew comes in about—generally from 6:30 to 7:00, and they come in and we get the pig up and start cleaning it up and separating the meat from the bones and then we—they chop it. And while they're chopping we're getting going with mixing cornmeal together and I have another one—another employee that's mixing slaw and generally have another employee that's cleaning. And so just kind of get it—that's kind of how we get it going.*

**00:27:41**

**RF:** And I have some specific questions now. What—you—you start off skin-side down?

**00:27:48**

**WM:** Actually on the shoulders I start off with the skin up and the hams I start off with the skin down.

**00:27:55**

**RF:** Okay; what—and so the pig is—is cut up into quarters.

**00:27:59**

**WM:** Yeah; he's cut into quarters and these pigs are fairly large pigs. These are not 100-pound pigs. They're very large pigs. And with this—we start with the ribs down so that the heat can penetrate the—the ribs better and so it doesn't burn your skin, because we have customers that

love our skin, and we try not to burn it sometimes. I try not to sleep too long and oversleep and burn it. But anyway, and the ham is—is cooked skin-side down first. And then when I come back down around 4:00 I turn the hams over and then the—I turn the ribs the other way, so it's right opposite.

**00:28:44**

And then at 6:00 I make sure that everything is skin-side down so that it can all be seasoned, so the meat can—will hold a seasoning.

**00:28:54**

**RF:** And that seasoning that you do throughout—is that just salt or dry seasoning or is it also vinegar?

**00:29:02**

**WM:** It is a vinegar base. It—it has a—a lot of ingredients that I prefer not to share. *[Laughs]* But it—it was the—it's the very same ingredients that my granddaddy shared with me and showed me and it's the very—we—we actually measure it out. It is measured; it is—it is prepped. We—we think that our prep time and the amount of time that we do this contributes to its flavor. So it's—it's—we call it like a family secret.

**00:29:40**

**RF:** And what's the importance of secrets? You mentioned secrets a few times.

**00:29:46**

**WM:** Well the—the secrets are—are what makes you I think the best, give you the edge so to speak, just this—our secrets are what makes our food so good.

**00:30:02**

**RF:** And—and what other secrets—do you consider—you talked about the secrets of the—the slaw and the cornbread and the—the sauce. Is the cooking technique a secret too?

**00:30:18**

**WM:** Not as—no, not as—not as much. Really, I think the key to any other cooking is just making sure that it's done. I—I really think the seasoning for us is really and truly is—is the key, the seasoning.

**00:30:40**

**RF:** And how many pigs do you do on a Saturday?

**00:30:44**

**WM:** Generally, we always do two and sometimes we do three, sometimes two and a half but between two and three.

**00:30:51**

**RF:** And—and where do you get your pigs from and—?

**00:30:54**

**WM:** They—they come—we buy our pigs from a fairly local company, and they're slaughtered from another local company that is government-inspected. All—all of your meat today has to be government inspected and—and—and it has a seal on it. When we get it it's actually stamped. And it—it is all kept refrigerated. I mean it's—it's—it's all just done from actually local companies.

**00:31:23**

**RF:** And I'm assuming the—the pigs are homegrown too.

**00:31:28**

**WM:** Uh, well, I don't know that there's really homegrown pigs anymore. It's all commercialized you know but they are—they are fairly local markets—within thirty miles of here.

**00:31:39**

**RF:** Okay; and—and tell me, you've talked to—I mean you've farmed pigs. Your grandfather farmed pigs. And you've barbecued a lot of pigs over your lifetime. Have you seen pigs change themselves?

**00:31:50**

**WM:** Yes; that's interesting that you would ask that question. I have. Pigs today are generally no ways as fat as pigs were when I first started. And—and when I say—I'm talking the same weight pig, the—the same weight pig today is so much leaner, whereas that pig many years ago would



have been a lot of—a lot of fat. And—and actually the pigs today are grown in more confined spaces, but you know it's—I guess it's the—the food, the—their diet that they have.

**00:32:40**

**RF:** And is this consumer preference that's led this?

**00:32:41**

**WM:** I don't know if it's consumer preference. I would say it's probably the people that raise the pigs trying to make money, you know, but—. It's just the way that it is.

**00:32:54**

**RF:** And if pigs are changing in fat content and size are—does—has the taste changed?

**00:32:59**

**WM:** Well, no, not really. And—and the reason for that is because you—the fat pigs you would always take away the—the excess fat.

**00:33:11**

**RF:** Before they went on the grill?

**00:33:14**

**WM:** Yes; you would—you would trim them and clean them up before you put them on the grill. But the—the deal was you're—you're paying for that, because you buy that pig per pound price and you're cutting fat off and you're throwing it away. So yeah; you would—you're

throwing money away is actually what was happening. So actually today it—it's more—more pig for your money but it does take a little bit of fat and a little bit of grease to make the barbecue. I mean you do have to have some to—to make it taste good.

**00:33:45**

**RF:** All right; so continuing with the process, how long are the pigs cooked for—the full time?

**00:33:51**

**WM:** We cook our pigs roughly about six hours—six and a half hours.

**00:33:57**

**RF:** Six hours. And tell me about the—the pit or the machine that you use. I think it's very—it's old and it's very unique looking.

**00:34:06**

**WM:** Yeah; it's—it's different. It—it was—it was the first—we cook with gas and it was the first machine that—and it's the only machine of its kind that I've ever seen. But it actually was built in Wilson, North Carolina by a company that's no longer in business. And it—it was very unique in its design because the burners are not located directly under the pig. And they're offset. But we've been using it. We've had this cooker; it was probably bought in the early '70s and we still use it today. It—it still works great. We—yes; we've had to do some repairs, etcetera but it does its job and does it very well.

**00:35:00**

**RF:** Okay; so you—so six hours on the grill and they're quartered. They're—they've already been quartered. They're brought inside, and you said the skin and bones are removed and the—and the meat is chopped. Let's talk about the meat. What kind of consistency do the choppers look for or do you look for? How—how far do you go, how fine?

**00:35:21**

**WM:** Well you—when you—when you chop it we use—we use whole hogs. So we use hams and shoulders. You know, and basically it's just a blend of each—each chopping has proportioned ham and shoulder meat. And when they chop it they're—what they're looking for is to make it fine enough you can eat it but coarse enough that it—that you can stick your fork in it and not be mushy. And my people have chopped [*Laughs*] so many pigs they can just look at it and chop it and—and yes, it—it varies sometimes because some pigs may even today may be a little bit fatter or a little bit leaner or whatever. But they—they've chopped so many pigs. They can look at it and tell just you know what it's supposed to be like.

**00:36:24**

**RF:** And do you try to get each kind of portion or plate, a mix of shoulder ham, everything?

**00:36:29**

**WM:** Oh yes; well, once they chop the shoulder and the ham that meat is then seasoned and is mixed and it is thoroughly mixed. And then—which that blends the ham and the shoulder

together and then it's—it's put in our containers to—to—to be kept warm for food safety purposes.

**00:36:51**

**RF:** And—and I watched them season it this—this morning which was really beautiful to watch [Laughs] because everyone kind of tasted, and there was a consensus is what I called it at the time. How—how does that work and—and—and who—is there a final say? Is it—is it group thought? What—what goes on?

**00:37:11**

**WM:** Well yeah; [Laughs] well, there's about three or four usually chopping and when they mix it together they—they season it basically by eye and then it's mixed and tasted. We taste every batch that—that we do because we know what it's supposed to taste like or they do. And it's supposed to be a consensus but my daughter Ashley sometimes kind of—she's the boss when I'm not around. [Laughs] So she kind of gets the final say, but generally it is a consensus because we want it to be the same.

**00:37:51**

**RF:** And—and tell me more about your daughter Ashley. How long has she worked here?

**00:37:55**

**WM:** My daughter has worked here for a long time. I do not know exactly when she started. But she—she worked here a long—long, long time and she's actually the manager here now.

Sometimes when I have—I can't be here, she—she takes over. She's actually—she's able to do everything on the inside. She has had some training on cooking the pig and after the first year she's going to get more involved in the cooking part, so that if something were to happen to me it just continues right on.

**00:38:36**

**RF:** So you want her to—and she wants to I'm assuming continue the cooking?

**00:38:43**

**WM:** That is correct; yes, sir, yeah. We want the tradition to continue. She's very proud and I'm very proud of her.

**00:38:49**

**RF:** And tell me; she has another role here I think that she's famous for that I read about online and what is that?

**00:38:58**

**WM:** That's her desserts. She—she—she can cook too. **[Laughs]** She can—she makes cakes and she sells cakes down here. She started off selling cake to supplement her income because she was going to college. And—and that helped her with her tuition and her books. And—and that's kind of continued on. And she generally has a variety of two or three different kinds of cake and if you come get some barbecue you can certainly buy a piece of cake.

**00:39:35**

**RF:** And let's talk about a few other items you sell. And I think you might be unique in this and you've mentioned it before a few times that you—you pull out the skins and bones and—and the ribs and you—you sell those. Well how are those plates made?

**00:39:54**

**WM:** Okay; the—the ribs, we take the ribs out and we have a—a portion size that we sell with plate and we have a lot of people that—that's all they want is ribs. It's a different meat than the barbecue. It's more on the—I would call it more on the pig pickin' line of—of the—of the barbecue part and—

**00:40:21**

**RF:** What do you mean by pig pickin' for those who don't know?

**00:40:24**

**WM:** Well pig pickin' is—is when you actually cook a pig and you don't chop it. You actually do season the—the pig while it's cooking but—but then you actually just go there and you take a—maybe a fork and you pick off of the pig what you want to eat and you put it in your plate and you eat it. And—and as you do that you learn maybe what's a little better and what's a little drier, you know what you like and what's your preference. But that's pig pickin'. And that's a—that's a very Southern country thing—pig pickin'.

**00:41:02**

But anyway then we separate the—some of the bones have a lot of meat attached to them and as you're cleaning them you leave a little bit of meat on them and we put them in trays. And

we have customers that—that love to—a lot of people like gnaw bones and—and they do. And they'll get slaw and some hushpuppies and—and that's what they make a meal out of. And the skin, we put the skin in trays. The skins are the first thing we sell out of every week. Some weeks we already have enough orders some weeks that we can't sell anymore when we open that Saturday. They've already pre-ordered and prepaid.

**00:41:44**

**RF:** And—and I think the first thing I—I saw when I walked in this morning into the actual restaurant was a list by the door for previous, the orders people had placed the previous Saturday for today. How—how does that work? How often do you sell out? How fast do things last?

**00:42:02**

**WM:** Generally the orders are like for skins people will come in and—and if they get skins today they'll prepay for next week so they can make sure they get a skin. You can call in during the week and generally the—the people call my cell phone during the week. And I'll take the orders and we put them on the board that you saw the list, and it's first come first serve. So if I were to take too many orders and heaven forbid I'd oversleep and burn the pig [*Laughs*] the—the—the first come first serve, or if you prepay you get it.

**00:42:40**

But as far as selling out, you know, a lot of people call so that when they get here their call-in orders are already prepared and—and we actually like that; that helps us. And most of the time by 1:00 or 1:30 we—we're out of barbecue.

00:43:03

**RF:** So people got to wait for the next Saturday.

00:43:08

**WM:** They look forward to the next Saturday. [*Laughs*]

00:43:10

**RF:** You just mentioned the—the—maybe the worst possible thing which is to burn, to oversleep and burn a pig. Has that ever happened?

00:43:16

**WM:** I would love to say no, but it has. [*Laughs*]

00:43:22

**RF:** What does that mean?

00:43:23

**WM:** That's bad. That is—that is terrible. I've never really burnt one up but I've—I've had it a little bit more brown than I'd love for it to have—and when you do that you have more waste.

00:43:35

**RF:** But you've never had to shut down because of a—?



**00:43:37**

**WM:** Oh no, no, never that bad; no.

**00:43:40**

**RF:** All right; and tell me about the customer base. We've—we've mentioned Hookerton and how it's a rural kind of farming community, but tell me who drives out here on a Saturday.

**00:43:49**

**WM:** The—the—most of the people that come out here on Saturday are—are people that have eat here before and know how good this barbecue is and they come from—from Hookerton, Snow Hill, a little further away. We have a really good customer base out of Kinston and Ayden and Greenville. And believe it or not, we have people that hear about us and maybe see us on—on our website, and last week we had some people from Wilmington. We have people that—that lived around here, moved off, and I had people come last week that are from Virginia. They called—called and I saved barbecue for them and—and when they come down to visit their family.

**00:44:44**

**RF:** And—and so what makes Morris Barbeque so good? How have y'all survived and stayed around for over—almost sixty years?

**00:44:53**

**WM:** Well, I'd have to contribute all that to my granddaddy and for—basically for us having enough sense to when you've got something that works leave it alone. And his—his barbecue was—is—it was good and—and we do it the very same way and we still think it's great.

**00:45:18**

**RF:** And you mentioned the word *consistency* a few times this morning. What—can you say something about that?

**00:45:23**

**WM:** I love to eat barbecue and I eat other barbecue places, as well as other food. And I think probably the one compliment that you can pay to any restaurant is to have consistency, and that's what we take pride in. That's why we sample every batch of barbecue that we put together and mix and chop up. And, so if you come this week, three weeks from now, or three months from now you're going to find pretty much the very same taste that you had when you come for the first time. So I—I think that's the greatest compliment you can have—*consistency*.

**00:46:12**

**RF:** And you just said that you've eaten barbecue in other places. How do you think they stack up to your barbecue, or in a bigger sense Eastern barbecue in North Carolina State?

**00:46:24**

**WM:** Well I love Eastern barbecue and I—I enjoy eating other places. No; they're not any that I can think of that are as good as ours, certainly not. But everybody kind of has their own little

niche and—and I think that’s—that’s—that’s good because I think that—well if—if everybody liked McDonald’s hamburgers there wouldn’t be any Burger Kings or anything else. The same way with barbecue places, so it—it—you know variety is—is—I think it’s very, very good. And I’m just glad they don’t do it as good as we do.

**00:47:08**

**RF:** And tell me what whole hog means to this part of the country. Why is whole hog so important here?

**00:47:14**

**WM:** Well, whole hog is his head, his shoulders, the hams, everything but the feet [*Laughs*] and it—and it takes that to make good barbecue. It—it—it takes it all; that’s the whole hog is what it takes to make it.

**00:47:36**

**RF:** Why do you think the State is so divided between, just an hour or two hours away west of here people won’t touch a hog or you know don’t cook whole hog, only cook shoulders and that’s what I’ve been eating the past couple weeks? Why do you think that divide is there?

**00:47:53**

**WM:** I don’t know why, but what I would love to do is invite them to come and eat barbecue here with us, so we could show them really what they’ve been missing. Maybe they’ve never had any of—of our barbecue and they really don’t know what they’re doing wrong.

00:48:09

**RF:** How long—how long do you want to cook barbecue for?

00:48:15

**WM:** As long as I can. I enjoy it; I enjoy what I do and I mean as long as I live.

00:48:29

**RF:** Is—are these—when these Friday nights when you put them on and the Saturdays where you work all day through the morning does it seem like a vacation from your normal work week or is it a—? Or, is it just one more day until Sunday? That’s what I’ve wondered about all day [*Laughs*]; is this—is this a break from your job or is this just a second job?

00:48:48

**WM:** Well, it’s a second job but it’s very enjoyable. I look forward to it. I’ll have to share with you, I enjoy every bit of it. On Friday night, I don’t—I can’t recall ever dreading getting up to come do what I do. I do look forward to it. I enjoy working on Saturdays and meeting the people and cooking or doing whatever I need to do. But now I really enjoy Saturday night when I go home and get a shower and go to bed [*Laughs*] because I can tell you; I really rest good.

00:49:30

**RF:** What—what’s the most difficult part about these Saturdays or about running a barbecue establishment?

**00:49:36**

**WM:** Um, the biggest thing is getting up and getting the—cooking that pig. It—it’s—it is a little challenge to—when you’re laying down and sleeping real good to get up and you got to go put him on or go check him or whatever you, you know your responsibility is.

**00:49:56**

**RF:** And I want to talk about the circle of employees. It was really cool when we showed up this morning and seemed like—I mean there’s some family members, but it also seemed like a little family. I should also note that—I always ask this question: “What’s the toughest part about running a restaurant?” And everyone says—everyone says, “Employees. Employees are impossible.” You didn’t say that.

**00:50:14**

**WM:** No; I didn’t say that. I have—we—the people that have worked here have been here for basically a long time. And we are like a family, and everybody takes pride in what they do. They’re tickled to death to be able to do what they’re doing, and I mean we just like it. It’s not like a job. You know what better job can anybody have than to do what you like?

**00:50:47**

**RF:** And does being open one day a week make Morris Barbeque a little more special or—or make that circle of employees work differently? I mean what would happen if you said, “Oh, we’re going to open three or four days a week?”

00:51:03

**WM:** Well, I—I think you're probably—what you're saying is probably right in the fact that being we are only open once a week; it is special. We don't see—some of—some of the employees we see a little bit more often than just once a week but—but generally when we get together we have stories we want to share with one another, what we did during the week and—and we just—I don't know. We just have a good time. If we were doing it on a daily basis or three times a week it would probably be even more business-like, and for us it's—it's just fun.

00:51:46

**RF:** And tell me; have you—we've talked about change in pigs. Have you see the whole hog industry change? Have you seen more or less restaurants or more or less people eat whole hog?

00:51:56

**WM:** Yeah; it seems like every day I open the paper and there's opened a new barbecue place somewhere, you know. [*Laughs*] I would have to say overall, yeah; I think there's—there is more barbecue restaurants than I used to remember when I was younger. And maybe not exclusive barbecue restaurants; we're pretty much exclusive barbecue. If you're looking for a hamburger or something with barbecue this is not the place, but in other restaurants that are open daily, certainly have to have a wider range of—of menu. And so for us just doing the barbecue once a week has just made us stand out I think from a lot of the other restaurants that—that have popped up over the—over time.

**00:52:55**

**RF:** And you told me that you are encouraging your daughter Ashley to take over the business, and she is sitting here next to us now. She just sat down a little while ago. What—what words would you—would you tell her to encourage her to—to keep Morris Barbeque successful and long-running?

**00:53:19**

**WM:** “Do just what we’ve been doing,” and she knows that. I—I do what my granddaddy did and I certainly hope she will do what we’re doing now—what I do. And—and I think if—if she—the tradition continues as it is, I think it will be—she’s already proud of it now. I mean you can look at her and see that big grin [*Laughs*]. But if—if she just continues the tradition like it is she’s going to be successful and it’s going to do good. She’s going to be proud. I’m going to be proud.

**00:54:04**

**RF:** So she makes four generations; do you foresee more generations? Would you encourage your grandchildren to go into the business also? I don’t know if you have children or not Ashley but—.

**00:54:14**

**WM:** Um, Ashley is—she doesn’t have any children yet and—and certainly if she does I certainly want them to—to work in the business. I worked when I was small. I think it’s very good. I think it’s good for young people to—to be a part of something and we have a young man

that's been with us since he was about—how old—fifteen years old and—and he's still with us.  
And he's nineteen I believe.

**00:54:48**

**RF:** And what is his name just so we have it?

**00:54:51**

**WM:** Colby Shirley, and Colby takes pride. He mixes the slaw for us. And man, if you say something about that slaw, he just perks right up, you know. So yes; I certainly would—I would encourage the grandchildren to—to participate.

**00:55:12**

**RF:** And what do you think your—Ashley was telling me that her—your grandfather passed away when you were young and what do you think he would say knowing that there's now a fourth generation managing the place?

**00:55:26**

**WM:** I don't know what he would say other than he would be one tickled man. He would really be proud of—of where we are today. He would really—there's no doubt in my mind he'd be tickled to death.

**00:55:42**

**RF:** Maybe just one final question unless Ash, do you want to say anything? [*Laughs*] What—what do you think Morris Barbeque means to the community of Hookerton?



**00:55:50**

**WM:** Well, for the people that love barbecue it means a whole lot. **[Laughs]** Well it's kind of like I don't know what to say. They named a road after it. I think that's probably the best thing I could say. It—it means a lot.

**00:56:12**

**RF:** All right; I think that's a good place to end unless you want to add anything else.

**00:56:16**

**WM:** No; that—I appreciate y'all coming out and—and taking time and I hope y'all enjoyed our barbecue.

**00:56:22**

**RF:** I did very much. I want to thank you and thank you for sitting down and doing this interview. This was wonderful.

**00:56:28**

**WM:** You're welcome; thank you.

**00:56:29**

**RF:** All right; thank you.

**00:56:33**

**[End William Morris, Jr. - Morris Barbeque]**