

RIGHT ON 'CUE



WHAT IS ARKANSAS BARBECUE? IT'S NOT TEXAS BRISKET, AFTER ALL. AND IT'S NOT MEMPHIS DRY-RUBBED RIBS. IT'S NOT KC BURNT ENDS OR SOUTH CAROLINA WHOLE HOG. IT'S SIMPLE. UNASSUMING, EVEN, WITH A LITTLE BIT OF THIS AND A LITTLE BIT OF THAT. AND IT'S UNABASHEDLY DELICIOUS. WHICH IS WHY WE OFFER THIS CELEBRATION OF TRIED-AND-TRUE ARKANSAS BARBECUE—FROM THE FIRST MORSEL OF HICKORY-SMOKED PORK TO THE LAST CRUMBS OF THAT FRIED ELBERTA-PEACH PIE ———

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RETT PEEK

LEGEND HAS IT

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A LOT, ACTUALLY. IN THE CASE OF THESE FIVE LOCAL INSTITUTIONS, A NAME—MCCCLARD'S, SIMS, WHAT HAVE YOU—MEANS GENERATIONS OF FINE BARBECUE FINESSE



MCCCLARD'S
HOT SPRINGS

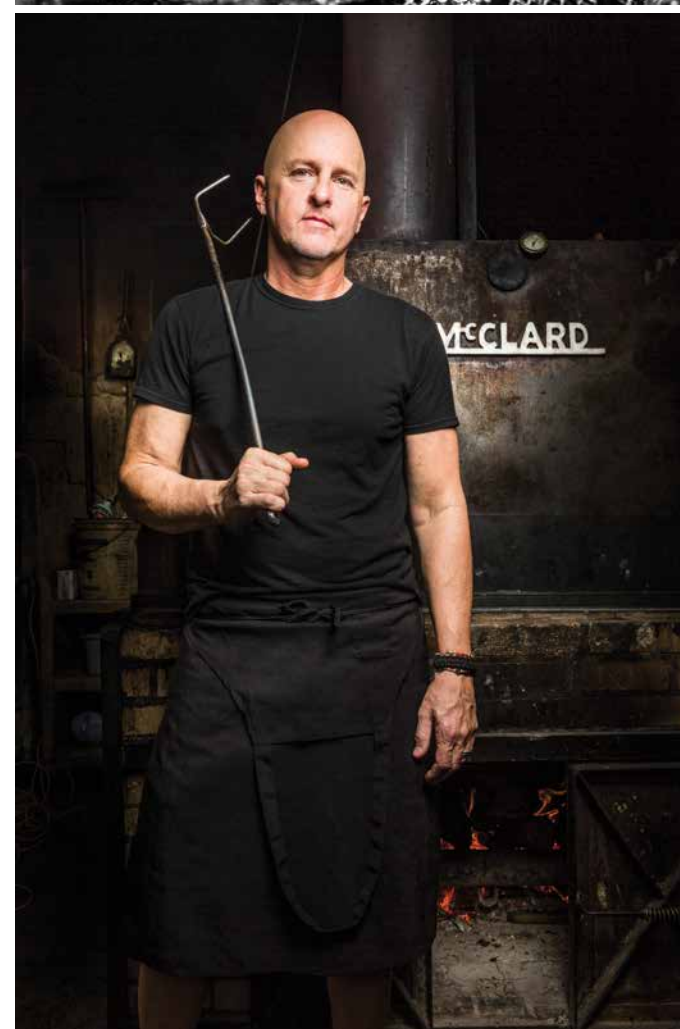
The story that a traveler gave Alex McClard the recipe for his famous sauce in exchange for a place to stay? It's not a hoax, Scott says. The recipe is still in a bank lock box.

- YEAR FOUNDED: 1928
- FOUNDERS: ALEX AND ALICE MCCCLARD
- CURRENT OWNERS: PHILIP AND SCOTT MCCCLARD AND JOHN THOMASON
- GENERATIONS: 4

“IT would be nice to turn this over to the kids and go live my life, but there’s no way it would succeed without us being here. My uncle Philip comes in at 2 a.m. every morning. He makes the sauce, gets the fire going, gets the meat on. When he leaves at 11 a.m., my other uncle, John, and I step in. We trim the meat, make sure the food is cooked right, the plates look good, and the employees are happy.

“We also take care of the pit all day. It’s OK in the wintertime, but around July and August, the temperature can get to about 115 degrees. So my uncle and I take turns. It’s an arduous task.

“People tell me, ‘Oh, you own McClard’s.’ I say, ‘No—it owns me.’ There is a huge sense of pride. This was my great-grandfather’s. It was my grandfather’s. It was their whole life. I’m just doing my best to keep it going. My greatest pride is when a longtime customer comes in, sits at the bar and says, ‘You know, this sandwich tastes just like when your grandfather used to make it.’ It doesn’t get any better than that—keeping things consistent with who we are. People tell us to branch out, to get bigger. If we got bigger, we wouldn’t be McClard’s.” —*Scott McClard, as told to Mariam Makatsaria*



The key to McClard’s decades-long success, Scott stresses, is consistency. The menu, for example, has remained the same (save for the sausage added last year).



Although many hands come together in making Sims what it is, cook Leroy Williams (shown here), who's been with the restaurant since 1984, kicks off the process each morning at 7 a.m.

SIMS BAR- B-QUE

LITTLE ROCK

- YEAR FOUNDED: 1937
- FOUNDERS: ALLEN AND AMELIA SIMS
- CURRENT OWNER: RON SETTLERS
- GENERATIONS: 2

“WELL, I’ve always been told by my mother and everybody that this place was started back in 1937 by my uncle Allen Sims. He bought this little shotgun building down here on 33rd, and he started it like a cafe: Sim’s Cafe. Uncle Al used to get to work around 11, 12’o clock, and he’d stay open till 12 at night, five days a week. More or less, it was labeled as a beer joint that sold good barbecue.

“Back in the ’40s, ’50s, part of the ’60s, black people were contained to their own areas. And even back in the ’50s, Sims was the hot spot on Friday and Saturday nights. You know, people would be down there dancing and drinking beer, and—what do they call it—brown-bagging. You couldn’t hardly get through the little streets before they widened it out and everything.

“Then in 1976, Uncle Al and Aunt Amelia decided they wanted to retire. And at first, didn’t anyone want to take it over. I went and asked about it, and told ’em that’s what I wanted to do. And we reopened on Oct. 2, 1976, a Saturday morning. And it’s been rolling ever since.

“It’s a challenge because you’re given something on a silver platter. I was given an already-established business, just had to restart it. And keep up the image and keep up the quality and stuff. That’s a job. That’s something you have to have in your heart, something that kind of grows in you, that you want to do.” —Ron Settlers, as told to Jordan P. Hickey

Being featured on the Travel Channel’s *BBQ Crawl* has brought even more customers to the joint, Chris says. To this day people say, “Hey! We saw you on TV and came!”



STUBBY’S HOT SPRINGS BAR-B-QUE

- YEAR FOUNDED: 1952
- FOUNDER: RICHARD “STUBBY” STUBBLEFIELD
- CURRENT OWNER: CHRIS DUNKEL
- GENERATIONS: 2

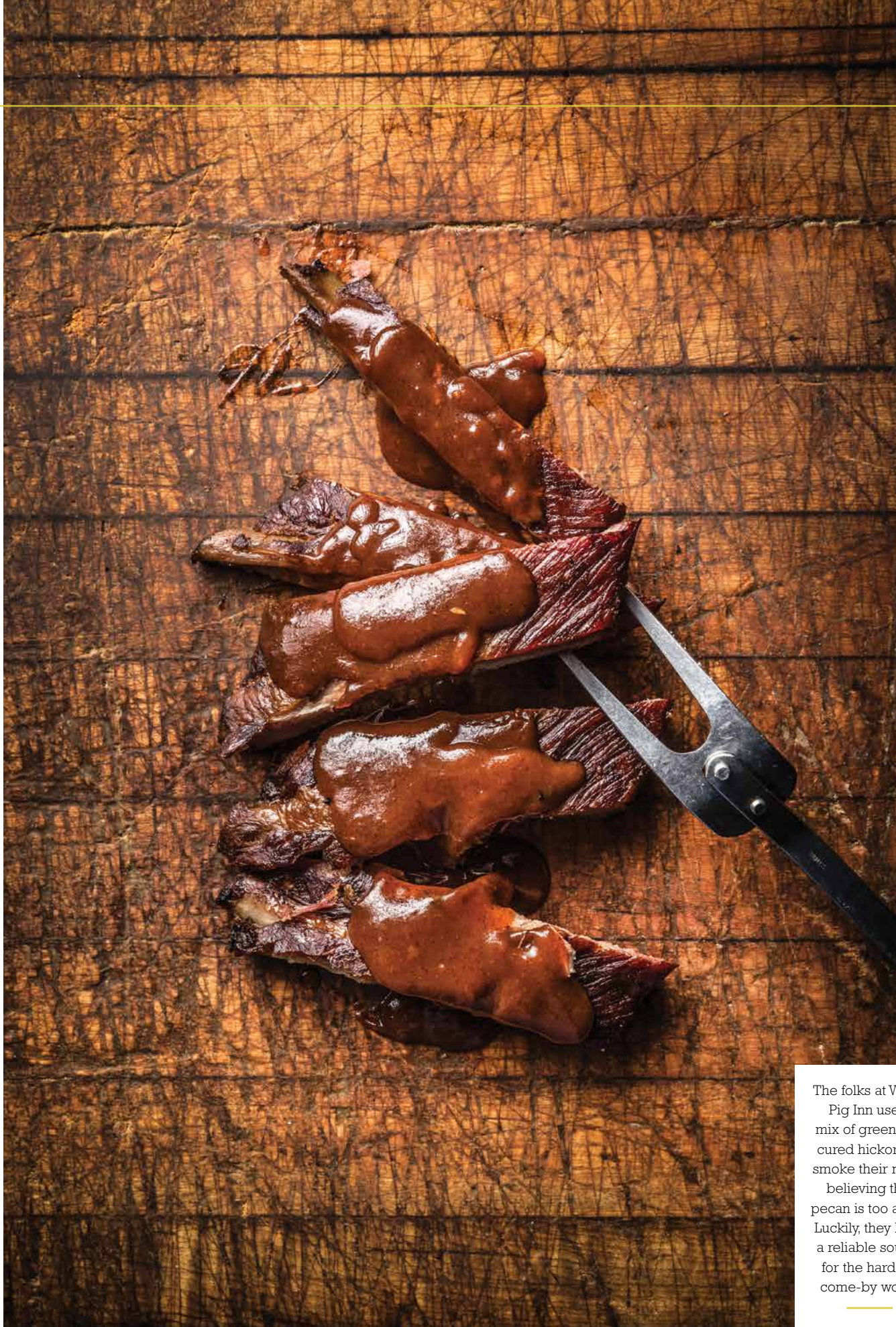
“BACK when it first started in the ’50s, Stubby’s was north of the Arlington Hotel. My family bought it in 1976. I was 3 years old. In 1978, we changed locations and opened up on Central, right across from the Oaklawn racetracks.

“But my first memories were probably at the original joint. That’s where I first cut my teeth. I was just this fat little kid running around with an apron bussing tables. That’s where I first learned how to prep, make slaw and beans, and chop meat. I did cut myself a few times. It was there that I honed my skills, saw how the pit worked.

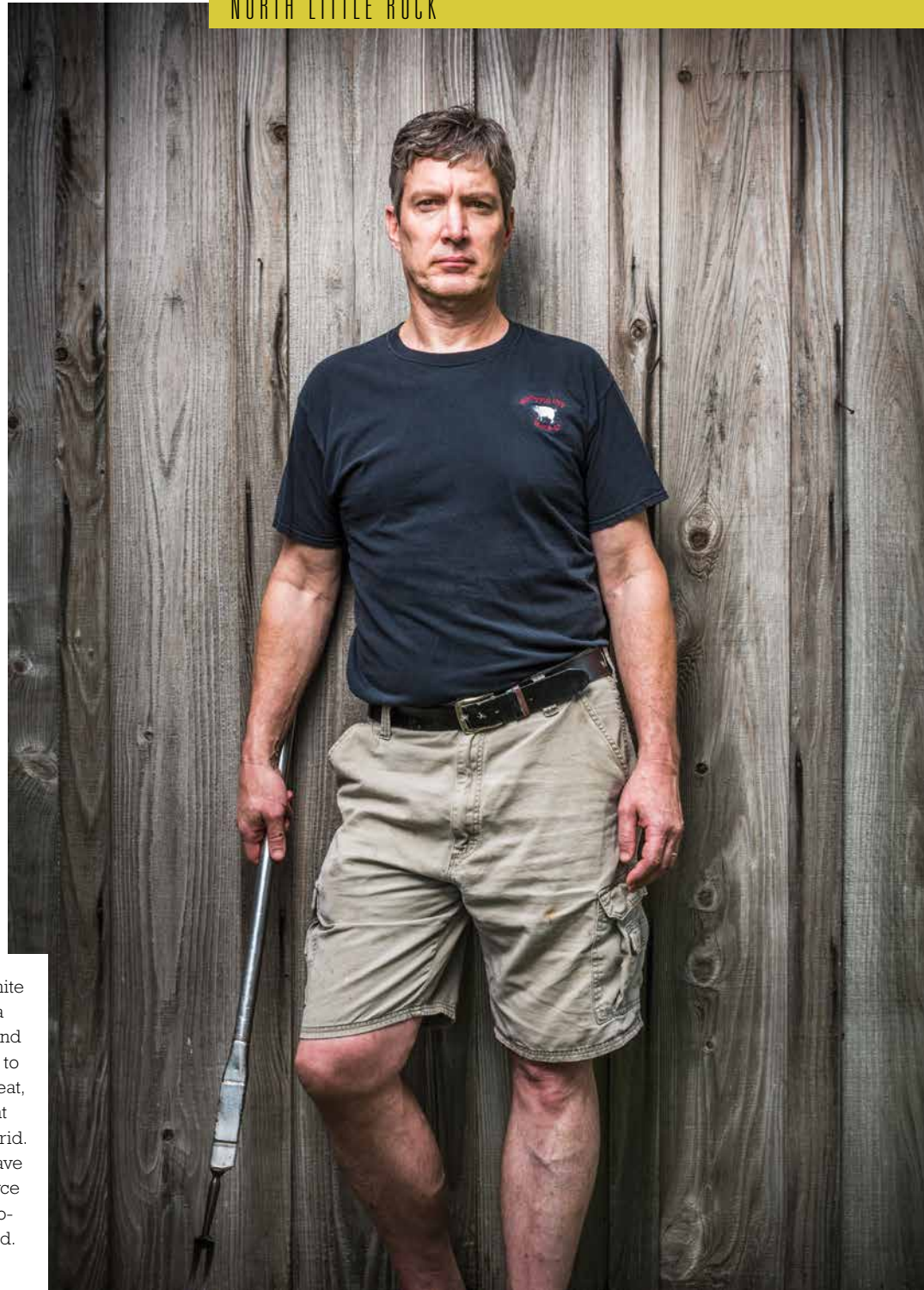
“There’s not much that’s changed since. Our recipes are the same as they were back then. The cafeteria line, too, is a tried-and-true concept that originated in the ’50s, and we continued with it. If you’re a vegan or a vegetarian, you’re going to hate us. You walk in, and you see what we have right there—all this meat. It’s simple. And that’s how Stubby’s began.” —Chris Dunkel, as told to Mariam Makatsaria

WHITE PIG INN

NORTH LITTLE ROCK



The folks at White Pig Inn use a mix of green and cured hickory to smoke their meat, believing that pecan is too acrid. Luckily, they have a reliable source for the hard-to-come-by wood.



“MY grandfather didn’t have any set hours back in the early days. He closed when people quit coming, and many, many times, when someone would pull up and beat on the door, he would open up again.

“You have to understand, Highway 70 was a major east-west corridor back then. So for anyone coming from the East Coast to California, it’s very likely they passed by the old White Pig Inn. It was an interesting collection of people passing through over the years.

“In 1984, we moved into the new building. It probably took 30 minutes to bulldoze the old one. I say that with a chuckle. The old building actually had a barbecue pit in the dining room. It was quite a dining experience with the hickory smoke in the air. You could watch my grandfather or my father come out and turn the meat right next to your table. It had a lot of character—and I still have dreams about it—but its day had come and gone.

“You’re talking to the end of the road, as far as I know. The restaurant business has been really good to me and my family, but I am going to encourage my girls to go on and seek and do something else.

“The average life span for a restaurant is 8 months, so I think White Pig has done very well. At times, it has not been easy, but the restaurant has given me a life of experiences. I have friends from the restaurant I’ve accumulated over the years that are just—there is no value that could be put on that.”—*Greg Seaton Jr., as told to Nicholas Hunt*

- * **YEAR FOUNDED:** 1920 (PURCHASED BY THE SEATON FAMILY IN 1940)
- * **FOUNDERS:** THE BOYER FAMILY
- * **CURRENT OWNER:** GREG SEATON JR.
- * **GENERATIONS:** 3



DIXIE BLYTHEVILLE PIG

- YEAR FOUNDED: 1923
- FOUNDER: ERNEST HALSELL
- CURRENT OWNER: BUDDY HALSELL
- GENERATIONS: 3

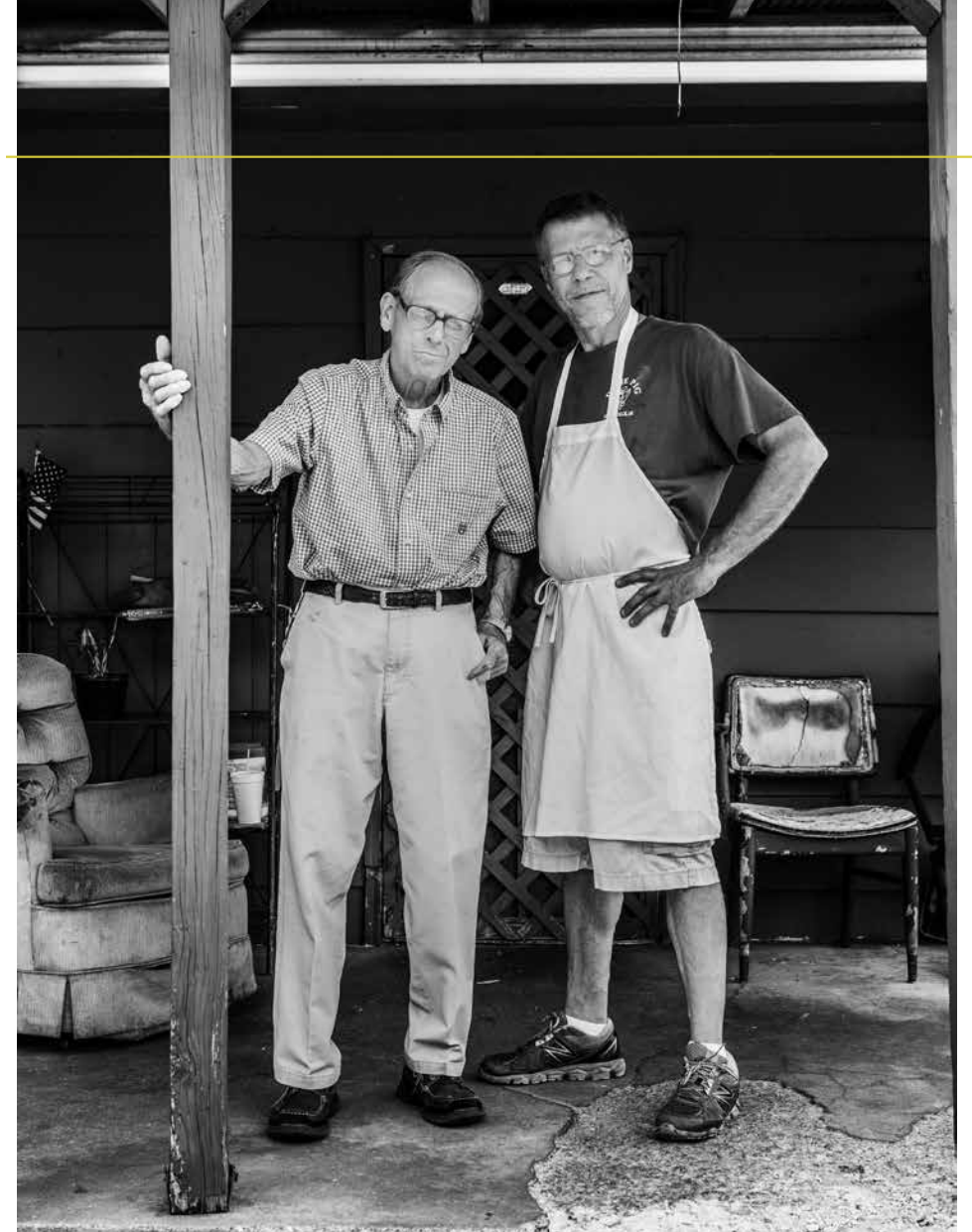
“WELL, of course, my dad started all of this back in 1923. It was a log cabin with a sawdust floor in it. He’d moved up here from Mississippi about that same year. People were moving into this part of the country for the new farm land. He just knew how to work. You can know a lot of things, but if you don’t know how to work, you can’t do nothing. “He built this place in 1950, and

when I got out of the service four years later, I started working for him. We had car hops out there, and we used to stay open till 11, 12 and 1 o’clock at night. We close about 8:30 p.m. now.

“We cook our meat with hot fire. Personally, I don’t like the smoked taste. You’ll belch it for three days! People always say, *How do you make that hot sauce?* And I say, *Well, I’ll tell you how I make it. I make it by the gallon.* Dad developed it. The only thing it’s not good on is ice cream. We send it all over the country.

“I’m 86, and all I do around here now is try and keep out of everybody’s way. I might clean off a few tables and greet people when they come in the door. But I am out here every day, and I am just happy I have a place to go.” —Buddy Halsell, as told to Nicholas Hunt

RIGHT: Though Buddy Halsell can still be found at the restaurant daily, his son, Bob, now runs the show, opening and closing the restaurant each day.



ABOVE: Bob Halsell puts a day’s worth of Boston butt in the pit each morning at 8:30 a.m. It’ll only be turned once during its 8-hour cook.