

A Very Brief History of the Four Types of Barbeque Found In the USA

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There are generally considered to be four types of barbeque in the country and they, by and large, are broken down by the type of sauce use in basting and also as a finish sauce, used when the barbeque is being served. Those four, in order of historical emergence, are Vinegar and Pepper, Mustard, Light Tomato and Heavy Tomato. And while there is always disagreement on the varieties of preparation, such as whether one should use a dry rub or a wet rub and various other culinary arguments, all of the many sauces used in America generally will fall into one of those four basic groups.

North and South Carolina share three of the four types of barbeque sauce that Americans normally use. But only South Carolina is the home of all four.

The "original" barbeque sauce, dating back hundreds (yes, hundreds) of years is Vinegar and Pepper, the first and simplest of the four. It is found on the coastal plains of both North and South Carolina and to a slight degree in Virginia and Georgia.

The second (in order of historic evolution) of the four sauces is the one that is distinct to South Carolina and the one that people most often think of as South Carolina style - Mustard Sauce. That sauce is the product of the large German heritage found in South Carolina.

Starting in the 1730s and continuing into the 1750s, the British colony of South Carolina encouraged, recruited, and even paid the ocean passage for thousands of German families so they could take up residence in South Carolina. They were a hard working, sturdy and resourceful people who were given to an intensive family-farm type of agriculture, as opposed to the plantation system favored by the English settlers. Those German families were given land grants up the Santee, Congaree, Broad and Saluda Rivers as they came in successive waves over a twenty plus year migration. Those rivers all flow into each other and fall from the South Carolina upcountry to the low country. The simplified map on the home page of the Carolina Q Cup (carolinaQcup.com) shows the location of mustard sauce in South Carolina.

The first German settlements were in present day Dorchester County, and then successive waves of settlers moved on up the rivers to the counties of Orangeburg, Lexington, Newberry and the northwestern part of Richland County. (The middle and southern parts of Richland were settled by English settlers.) These German settlers brought with them, in addition to their European farming style and the Lutheran Church, the common use of mustard.

South Carolina mustard sauce can be clearly traced to those German settlers and is still in abundant evidence today, even after 250 years, in the names of the families who sell mustard based sauces and mustard based barbecue to the public. The Bessinger family is the most prominent in the mustard based barbeque business, but other German names are legion in the

South Carolina barbeque business - Shealy, Hite, Sweatman, Sikes, Price, Lever, Meyer, Kiser, and Zeigler are other examples and there are many more. (There is even a Dooley's barbeque in Lexington County, which everyone generally thinks of as an Irish name, but which comes from the German Dula family [pronounced Doole], as in the infamous Thomas Dula who became "Tom Dooley" in the Kingston Trio's 1960s song, "Hang down your head Tom Dooley.")

The Scottish families who settled primarily in Williamsburg County in present day South Carolina low country are the most famous South Carolina preparers of Vinegar and Pepper barbeque. The most prominent present day Scottish barbeque family is probably the Brown family, but there is also McKenzie, Scott, McCabe and many others who have remained, like the German families, true to their heritage. This simple Vinegar and Pepper sauce is the first, and therefore the oldest, of the South Carolina basting sauces.

The third type of sauce found in South Carolina, in terms of the evolution of sauces, is Light Tomato sauce. This sauce is (or was) little more than Vinegar and Pepper with tomato ketchup added. This occurred after tomato ketchup became a readily available condiment around the turn of the last century; that is, around 1900. It was a simple thing to take the tried and true Vinegar and Pepper and add some ketchup, which brought a little sweetness and other spices to the mix. That style of sauce is most famous in North Carolina in the Piedmont region of which Lexington, North Carolina, is the acknowledged barbeque center. It is also popular in the upper middle part of South Carolina and in the South Carolina Pee Dee region which is the upper coastal plain area of the state.

The fourth sauce in South Carolina and, for that matter, the rest of the nation, is Heavy Tomato sauce. This sauce has evolved only recently, that is, in the last sixty or so years, and it's the last of the four major types. It has spread rapidly over the majority of the nation due to modern transportation, modern marketing, and the insatiable sweet tooth of the modern American.

Heavy Tomato sauce is most often seen in the type of sauce popularized by Kraft Foods and it is found on every store shelf, thanks to the miracle of twentieth century motorized transportation. It and its newer cousin, Kansas City Masterpiece and its many imitators, is the type of sauce that most Americans think of as barbeque sauce.

As more and more Americans heard about barbeque they wanted to have some for themselves. Since they had no real background in the preparation of real barbeque they were easily sold the idea that the "barbeque" sauce they had seen on TV and found at the local supermarket was just the thing they needed to do the job. And while a heavy tomato sauce is a legitimate type of sauce, it is almost always used by the average American incorrectly, that is, slathered over various meats that have been grilled over high heat.

The most unfortunate thing is that those Americans who live far away from the initial area where barbeque was first introduced by the native Indians to Europeans colonists (South Carolina) and who, therefore, don't really have any historic connection to the earliest barbeque, are actually being misled into thinking they are eating real barbeque. Regrettably, they are missing out on the true original and the very best types of genuine barbeque.

Another casualty of American television is the confusion over just what barbeque is. Hints to its true nature, however, can sometimes be found in the use of the word "barbeque" in the language. It has become popular to say that barbeque is a noun and not a verb. Well, barbeque is, most properly, used as a noun that refers to a specific thing but sometimes it can also be used as a transitive verb.

Unfortunately, most Americans who live outside of the South in general and North and South Carolina in particular, use it as a verb or, if they use it as a noun, use it incorrectly. Midwesterners or Yankees will say to friends, "I'm going to barbeque some hamburgers tonight." Or they will say, "Let's put some brats on the barbeque and break out some beer." And while everyone will be having a great time sitting around in the smoke, the use of the word in that way is incorrect. That neighbor is going to grill some hamburgers, not barbeque them. The cooker he is going to cook them on should be called a grill, not a barbeque.

The second proper use of the word, the transitive verb usage, can sometimes be seen in such usage as the term "barbequed chicken" or "barbequed beef." It is common to barbeque various meats with beef and chicken being probably the most usual but real barbeque can including lamb, turkey, goat and even possum and other exotic creatures. But those animals are termed "barbequed (insert the name of the animal)" where the term "barbequed" in that usage is a transitive verb describing the way the animal was cooked.

The incorrect use of the term barbeque on television, in movies and in magazines which is, more often than not, written or spoken by people who know nothing about real barbeque, has led to the misconception, for instance, that beef is barbeque. It's not. Don't forget, barbeque is more specifically a noun, a specific thing, and that specific thing is pork, not beef or fish, or beaver, or shrimp or anything else. It's quite possible to barbeque beef; tens of thousands of people out west do it all the time. And it's oftentimes delicious. But it's "barbequed beef" not barbeque. The term barbeque is always properly reserved for pork.

Indeed, it was the Spanish who first introduced the pig into the Americas and to the American Indians. The Indians, in turn, introduced the Spanish to the concept of true slow cooking with smoke. So, in that first fateful coming together, way back in the 1500s, the Spanish supplied the pig and the Indians showed them how to cook it. That is when authentic barbeque was first eaten.

The first true colony in the Americas, by the way, was in South Carolina. The very first Spanish adventurers that one reads about in the history books were actually Conquistadores, bent on gold and conquest, not on colonizing. The Spanish colonists, who came only slightly later but still in the early 1500s, came to South Carolina and they named their colony Santa Elena. It was established in the area that we now call Port Royal in Beaufort County. That colony lasted almost 20 years and it boasted a fort with several cannons, a church, a bakery, blacksmith foundry and shop, a pottery kiln and nearly 500 colonists including over 100 families. It was in that first American colony that the white man first learned to prepare and to eat real barbeque. So, people were eating barbeque in South Carolina even before that name had been applied to the area by the English.

If one wants to experience all four of America's styles of barbeque there is only one state in the nation where that can be done - South Carolina. The true barbeque aficionado can not say that he has completed his barbeque quest without a visit to South Carolina where the art of barbeque was invented and where it is still practiced in both its purest tradition and its most diverse styles.

So, y'all come to South Carolina and eat barbeque with the people who know the most about it and have the longest history of preparing it. There is a great culinary adventure waiting in store for you in South Carolina.

These two Theodore de Bry engravings below, which were copied from Jacques le Moyne drawings made in the 1500s, show two views of Native American cooking. These two drawings, and many others in a similar vane, were often found in the grammar school and high school history books we used back in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Please remember that the Frenchman le Moyne had to redraw most of his work from memory after the Spanish burned Fort Caroline the French fort in the mid 1500s. These drawings may not be perfect but they are, nevertheless, the best depictions we have of early Indian life.

The first drawing below shows Indians cooking with low heat and lots of smoke. Note that the food to be barbequed is deliberately placed high and away from the hottest source of the heat.

This drawing was often referred to as an "Indians smoking meat" by publishers and historians who were unfamiliar with true barbeque. But note that the source of heat in this first drawing is such that the heat source is clearly hotter than in a true "smoking" process. Also, in smoking, the meat being smoked is cut away from the animal. Smoking is such a slow process that whole animals cannot be smoked all at once or the interior would spoil. In barbeque the animal is often cooked whole as we do in "whole hog" barbeque today.

(Also note that Europeans were fascinated by alligators and La Moyne put them in as many of his drawings as he could, even if he did make them look like large lizards.)

There is only a very fine line between "smoking meat" and barbeque and that line is temperature. Smoke houses, which were common on every farm up until the 1940s, used a fair amount of smoke but only a very low heat. In a smoke house, smoke is the thing and the temperature inside of the smoke house is quite low compared to barbeque. Smoking meat takes days and days.

In barbequing temperature plays a larger role. Barbeque requires a temperature of between 210 to 250 degrees over a period of 10 to 20 hours (or more depending on the meat being cooked). In barbeque, cooking time is shorter and temperatures higher than "smoking."



Note that Native Americans as depicted by La Moynes also cooked their food directly over a high source of heat when needed. Native Americans used high heat when it was called for but they had also learned the art of true barbeque, which was lower heat over a longer period of time and the use of smoke as an airborne marinade. They, of course, also knew how to use even less heat than in barbeque over longer periods of time when they preserved their meat by the "smoking" method.

