
Bob Garner, the accidental “guru” of North Carolina barbecue, was the only one who could have written this book. *Bob Garner’s Book of Barbecue: North Carolina’s Favorite Food* reads very much like a series of stories told around a campfire, or barbecue pit. That Bob Garner “fell” into this career path was part accident and part fate. In the process of launching a career in journalism, Garner found himself doing regular feature spots at UNC-TV about barbecue. Those spots were exceedingly popular. As his reputation grew, he was invited to appear on various other television shows, including those with Paula Deen and Bobby Flay, and offered the chance to do projects of his own, like the UNC-TV special called *A North Carolina Pig Pickin’*. Coinciding with Garner’s growing professional experience, his personal life increasingly involved the world of barbecue. One of his earliest encounters with his future father-in-law, when he expressed his interest in marrying the man’s daughter, took place “smack in the middle of a pig parlor containing hundreds of malodorous, loudly squealing hogs.” Pigs would thereafter play an important role in his life.

Garner is an author of multiple other books, including *North Carolina Barbecue: Flavored by Time*, from which some parts of this current book were pulled. In this latest book Garner uses his gift of storytelling to walk the reader through a brief history of barbecue, focusing on North Carolina but not ignoring other states. He discusses barbecue techniques and the history of barbecue, and includes reviews of 101 North Carolina barbecue restaurants. Garner weighs in on the debate over eastern vs. western (or “Lexington”) styles of barbecue and bemoans the state’s “barbecue schizophrenia” which he sees as a kind of “mischievous family tussle.” Wherever one stands on the subject of North Carolina barbecue, Garner argues convincingly that the history of North Carolina and barbecue are intertwined; barbecue lent itself as the name for one church and played a central role in creation of a second.

One effect of this overtly storytelling approach is a feeling of winding one’s way through the experience, sometimes revisiting topics previously explored, but coming at them from a different perspective. Bob Garner takes the reader on a walk through the world of barbecue to help dispel some of the myths surrounding it (like the very origin of the word “barbecue”) and to help build support for the world that barbecue represents. The resulting book is one of broad appeal. It is a very approachable non-fiction book for adult readers, told through the prism of the author’s own extensive experience. Public library collections, especially, will find this a valued addition to the collection, as will any academic collection supporting culinary or North Carolina history topics.

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