

BBQ&A: H. Kent Craig, BBQ Blogger & Author

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For ten years North Carolina native H. Kent Craig ran the most visited website dedicated to NC barbecue, “Kent’s North Carolina-Style BBQ Page.” In 2008, Craig moved out of state and stopped adding content to his website. In late 2009, he shut the site down entirely, leaving a large grease-stained void in cyberspace.

That’s the bad news.

The good news is that Craig has compiled the information from his website, and added some new content, and recently published *Kent’s Carolina Barbecue Book*, [available at Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Not long ago we “sat down” with Craig (in the very modern, virtual sense where we are not within 500 miles of each other) and discussed his book, his exile in Oklahoma, and plumbing. Oh, and we talked barbecue too.

BBQ Jew: Let’s start with a tough question. Rumors are flying that the “H.” in your name stands for “Hog.” Care to confirm or deny this rumor?

H. Kent Craig: The “H.” stands for “Harold” which a couple of people have been shot for addressing me as (just kidding, they were just wounded a little!). Actually, the “H.”/Harold was my father’s first name and mainly to keep from being called “Craig Jr.” or “Harry” (guaranteed death!) I started to use “Kent” as a small child as my given name and it stuck and it suits me.

BBQ Jew: Okay, we’ve put that rumor to rest but we’ve now determined that you have three first names—Harold, Kent and Craig. Never mind, moving on... Where were you raised? And when and where did you first sink your teeth into North Carolina barbecue? Was it love at first bite?

H.KC: I was raised in what was then a small hamlet outside of Raleigh called Cary [Editor’s note: population 3,400 in 1960], which has since become a much larger burg with around 130,000 residents and has the distinction of being the bedroom community for Research Triangle Park. My mother’s parents moved to Cary in the 1920’s so I somewhat proudly call myself a 3rd-generation Cary-ite. Because all of Cary’s population boom has been caused by scientists and researchers and others adjunct to all the R&D facilities immigrating to Cary from other parts of the country, it’s an old but true joke amongst the dozen or so actual natives that are left that “Cary” is an acronym for “Containment Area for Relocated Yankees.”

My first memories of NC BBQ were from Johnson’s BBQ in Cary on E. Chatham St., now long gone. I

remember eating there when I was just two or three and yes, they would have been given a “4 pig” best-of-the-best rating.

BBQ Jew: Wow, talking to a 3rd generation native of Cary is a bit like talking to a brontosaurus. Speaking of ancient history, there were few NC barbecue-focused websites around back in the dark ages of the 1990s when you debuted your site. Why did you decide to start a website about NC barbecue?

H.KC: I decided to start my NC BBQ Page mainly because I thought, with sincere respect to [Dave Lineback's personal site](#) where, like mine, he had an NC-BBQ-centric section within and which was a good site and Shinola's site which was done very primitively but homespun folksy, that I simply could do a better job. Also, original content always being king on the Internet, I thought that by doing an excellent BBQ Site that I could drive traffic to my personal website overall and, this being the pre-blog and pre-social networking website (Facebook, etc.) days, drive traffic to the other also interesting categories within my website.

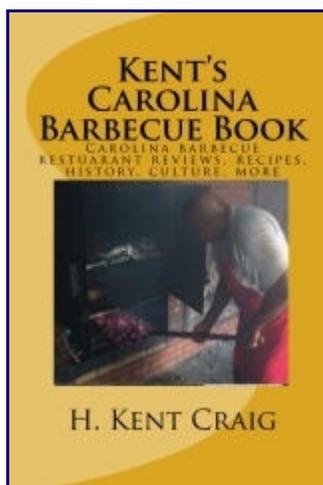
BBQ Jew: What are a couple of your favorite memories from maintaining the website for a decade?

H.KC: I'll always treasure the great and true friends I made because of the site, the “brotherhood of barbecue” as I like to call it. And the fact that around a dozen or more families from out-of-state that I know of actually planned and did “barbecue vacations” where they would spend a week or so going around to different barbecue joints based solely/mostly on my recommendations was very flattering indeed.

BBQ Jew: Why did you decide to stop adding new content to your website in 2008 and, very recently, to take the site down entirely? And how did you end up deciding to write your book?

H.KC: I moved to Oklahoma in November of 2008 and had been thinking about taking my site down for a couple of years before that anyway so it was simply time to do so. The reality is also that maintaining the site was a true labor of love, not that I ever expected much of any revenue from my efforts, but even with Google AdSense ads/click-throughs I never even made enough to cover my website's hosting fees.

I decided to do the barbecue book through CreateSpace's/Amazon.com's publish-on-demand service because it essentially was pre-written anyway and I wanted those interested to have a chance to obtain the content of the website if they so choose to do so.



BBQ Jew: Speaking of making/losing money, now is the portion of the interview where you look into the camera and pitch your book. Tell me about it. What kind of content does it include and why should I spend \$17 on it? That's two barbecue trays, a peach cobbler and a tea, you know!

H.KC: The entire content of anything barbecue-related from my website is included in the book including some surprise “bonus” stuff thrown in for good fun, from my classic NC BBQ-related recipes to history and perspectives on The Culture Of NC ‘Cue to the many reviews of selected barbecue restaurants written by myself and a great bunch of guest reviewers to an interesting collection of bar-b-q related emails received over the years.

BBQ Jew: Although this fact may surprise you, Porky LeSwine is not my real name; it’s just my nom de swine. If your publisher told you that your book had to be published under a pen name, what name would you have chosen?

H.KC: The Barbecue Protestant.

BBQ Jew: So you’re a wise guy, eh? Well then, how do you earn a living? I’m assuming that royalties from writing a barbecue book will not allow you to retire young unless your real name is [Bob Garner](#).

H.KC: My day job is that of being a senior-level Project Manager & Estimator for the mechanical (heating, air conditioning, boilers, plumbing, medical gas) trades, a job I’ve done my entire thirty-some-year career. I grew up in the family plumbing/boiler business with Craig Plumbing Co., Inc. in the forementioned one-caution-light-town-in-1956 of Cary, NC. I’ve also been “Contributing Editor For Project Management” for *Contractor* magazine (Chicago, IL) since 1998, *Contractor* being the pre-eminent publication for mechanical contractors. To read a small but representative sample of some of my past columns, please go to [my author’s archive at the magazine](#).

BBQ Jew: As if we have time to read about subjects other than barbecue. Now that you live out of state, you can honestly answer a couple of controversial questions without too much fear of reprisal: 1) Eastern-style or Lexington-style? 2) What’s your favorite BBQ joint?

H.KC: If I had to absolutely on penalty of Jack Bauer torturing me pick either Eastern or Western-NC-Style barbecue to eat only for the rest of my life, it would have to be Eastern. [Editor's note: [Jack Bauer](#) is evidently a fictional character who works around the clock to try and find good barbecue to keep the world from ending.] As much as I love Lexington-style, the meat of Eastern-style simply has to be cooked and served perfectly since there’s no sauce to cover up even the tiniest of mistakes with. And if I had to pick one place and one place only to eat Eastern ‘cue at for the rest of my life, it would be B’s in Greenville.

BBQ Jew: More honesty needed. Is there any barbecue worth eating in Oklahoma? And have you been tempted to drive to Texas for some brisket, or would that be like cheating on North Carolina?

H.KC: Yes, there is, and I included a combined review of three of my local (Oklahoma City area) favorites in the book. In times past when I was traveling a lot I had a lot of beef brisket barbecue in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, etc., I found few if any truly lousy places, most being good to excellent just like any other kind of ‘cue. Truth is, if you’re not consistently making and serving a quality product you simply won’t stay in business long, period.

BBQ Jew: Thanks for your time, Kent, and remember that there’s always a chopped plate with your name on it if you visit NC.