

“EVERYONE HAD A PLACE AT HER TABLES”:

WOMEN RESTAURANT OWNERS OF “MEAT & THREES” IN GEORGIA, 1940-1960

by

HOLLIS YATES

(Under the Direction of Cari Goetcheus)

ABSTRACT

“Meat and threes”, restaurants that serve a main dish of meat with the option of two vegetable sides and various breads, are a staple in many southern towns. The societal factors that let places like “meat and threes” develop and remain popular are indicative of a changing society, hence these restaurants have historical significance.

Yet the interplay between food, place, race and women in the South has not been fully researched. These restaurants are relevant to the evolution of women (black and white) in two main ways: they served food that was typically prepared by women at home; and provided women with the opportunity to own a business, a venture that was previously unavailable to them. Looking at female restaurant ownership of “meat and threes” during the mid-20th century can assist in providing a better understanding of a southern woman’s experience at that time, as well as inform experiences today.

INDEX WORDS: Southern foodways, Southern food, Meat and three, Women, Gender, Race, Restaurant, Southern cities, Atlanta, Macon, Savannah, Post-World War II, Intangible cultural heritage, Cultural tradition, Foodways

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HOLLIS YATES

Major Professor:	Cari Goetcheus
Committee:	Scott Nesbit
	Shelley Cannady
	André Gallant

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2017

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Peggy Bell.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Every region of the United States has its own cuisine based on available resources, ethnic groups and tradition. Born and raised in the South, I have had a longstanding interest in southern food; not merely as a means of sustenance, but also its cultural implications, social influence, and relationship to gender, race and class. Food plays a large role in the lives of southerners, and I want to understand why.

Food can be the great equalizer given that we all must eat to live. By investigating the nuances of the social constructs surrounding food, we come to the idea of foodways, which provides a helpful perspective from which to study our traditions and the places we live in. In the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, John T. Edge defines foodways as, "...study of the procurement, preparation, and consumption of food. Put another way, foodways is the study of what people eat and why they eat it."¹ Foodways bring together seemingly disparate topics that allow this perspective to exist. Southern foodways warrant attention for many reasons.

While the South is not the only place to have a distinct culinary tradition, it is arguably one of the first "fusion" cuisines to develop in America. John Egerton, the founder of the Southern Foodways Alliance at the University of Mississippi, credits the

¹ John T. Edge, "Foodways: Overview," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified August 3, 2016, accessed Feb. 16, 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/foodways-overview>.

South's culinary tradition to "climate, culture, the seasons, the soil – but none of these is as convincing as the cumulative body of evidence to be gleaned from the long and tangled skein of southern social history."² To study southern food is to study a confluence of issues concerning class, race, gender and politics. These issues affected every aspect of life in this region, not merely the public facilities associated with the Civil Rights Movement (restrooms, schools, and stores, for example). Southern foodways is a method for viewing and comprehending their influence.

The South is a place of both poverty and abundance, and within those extremes cooks were forced to be creative with food in ways not seen elsewhere in the country. Edge succinctly explains, "African Americans reinterpreted European cookery and Native American ingredients, applying African-inspired techniques and constructions."³ While ingredients and preparation methods change over time, there are aspects of southern food that have remained the same. In the age of consumerism, one way to consume this kind of food is at a restaurant.

This is where meat and threes come into existence as a place to eat southern food outside of a private home. Prior to the consumerism and urbanization of the early to mid-20th century, this kind of eating establishment would not and could not have existed in the South. A woman's place was considered to be in the home and owning a restaurant was uncouth and therefore improbable. Perhaps the reason this food culture has remained is because it was one of the first aspects of southern culture to develop,

² John Egerton, "Foreword: A Gallery of Great Cooks," in *The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African-American Cookbooks*, by Toni Tipton-Martin (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), ix.

³ Edge, "Foodways: Overview," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed Feb. 16, 2017.

and is therefore more deeply ingrained.⁴ Having a deeper knowledge of our foodways legitimizes the region and allows for a better understanding of the South, especially an understanding that is void of outdated and incorrect stereotypes.

Race and gender issues have and continue to plague this country, but the 20th century South highlighted these issues more so than other regions of the country. Restaurants, and being served a meal in public, are constructs of a modernizing world, one that began in urban settings and later grew due to a consumer culture in which people were comfortable taking their meals outside the home and could afford to do so. Women and cooking have been connected for ages, therefore it comes as no surprise that the fight for social change for both black and white southern women would minimally play out in a restaurant setting. The lunch counter sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement are perfect case studies for examining the tensions surrounding gender, race, and food, but what happened leading up to that time?

I became interested in this topic when I realized the extent to which food influences our lives beyond basic sustenance. Food defines and shapes how we identify ourselves, how we connect with our immediate environment, and becomes part of our culture. Studying foodways allows for an opportunity to see the broader picture of the influence of food on our lives. Approaching southern culture and our history from this perspective allows for new inferences and a better understanding of otherwise

⁴ Beth A. Latshaw, "The Soul of the South: Race, Food, and Identity in the American South," in *The Larder: Food Studies Methods from the American South*, ed. by John T. Edge, Elizabeth Engelhardt, and Ted Ownby, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 103.

seemingly disparate topics, and seeing these connections helps us to understand ourselves and our culture.

Southern culture and southern food are not new areas of study, but it is important to understand how they constantly inform each other. In her essay, *The Soul of the South*, Beth Latshaw writes of southern food, “Most certainly, its sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and touch are thought to evoke childhood, stir up emotions from the past, and aid southerners in creating new memories around the modern dining table.”⁵ Admittedly, Latshaw’s description could work as a definition of comfort food from any region, but her next comment clarifies how this idea is interpreted by southerners. She continues,

“Indeed, when reflecting on the severe economic hardships that the majority of the region’s residents experienced, black and white southerners often interpret southern food in a metaphorical sense as symbolizing the perseverance of “the southerner” and his/her homeland or the ability to create an artful cuisine out of mere scraps.”⁶

Bearing these metaphorical senses in mind, I am also taking a simple approach to defining southern food, which is that it is a cuisine native to this region⁷ and sourced from an agrarian culture. I am intentionally not using the phrases “soul food” or “country cooking” as those are limiting terms. The *New Georgia Encyclopedia* notes that “soul food” is “arguably a politicized renaming of the foods long savored by black

⁵ Latshaw, 101.

⁶ Latshaw, 110.

⁷ Numerous definitions of what constitutes the South exist, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will use the same states Latshaw references in her study: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina (the Deep South), Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (the Peripheral South). Latshaw, 108.

southerners.”⁸ To refer to southern food primarily as “country cooking” negates any potential iteration of southern food served in urban areas, so likewise, the phrase will not be used.

This thesis will focus on a food served in a specific context, that of a “meat and three” restaurant. The term “meat and three” can refer to the structure of the menu, but also can be used in a general sense to identify the restaurant as one that offers many options of southern dishes that are presented such that the customer can pick and choose what they would like to eat. These restaurants might use different serving methods, but all include the option of a meat (often country-fried steak, fried chicken or fried fish), plus three sides. Two of those side dishes will generally be a choice of vegetable, and the third side will be the choice of a bread (usually rolls or cornbread). The choices for drinks usually include sweet and unsweet iced tea, lemonade and soft drinks.

The structure of this menu does not appear to be intentional, but has evolved to be the way southern food is often served in restaurants in the South. The restaurant’s serving organization may vary between regular table service, cafeteria-style service or family-style service. In a family-style setting, a flat rate will be offered for a meal. In other settings, the meat and three arrangement is the preferred method for how food is served. In the latter instance, the option to order more side items or dessert is available,

⁸ Edge, “Foodways: Overview,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed Feb. 16, 2017.

but for an extra charge. The common element however, is the option of a meat protein, with various options for sides and dessert.

It is important to note that southern food has been around much longer than meat and three restaurants. Though it is nearly impossible to give an exact time, meat and three restaurants appear to have evolved during the 1930-40s. This was the time when middle class dining establishments (i.e. not cafes, bar rooms, sandwich stands, or roadside barbeque stands) became more commonplace, especially in cities. This kind of food is often thought of as “comfort food” since it is what was served at home, or for younger generations, what was served by a grandparent or elder in the community.

Owning a restaurant was one of the first occasions southern women could step out of their roles as cooks at home, and make a living in regards to food and cooking. By choice, they could embrace new responsibilities of owning and running a business, building upon their pre-existing collective knowledge of southern cuisine. Prior to the ability to own a restaurant, women affected foodways differently, though that is not to say their influence was unfelt. Women typically did the cooking and grocery shopping. In the early part of the 20th century, many middle class southern homes employed a black domestic servant. In these instances, the white woman prepared the menus for the family and did the shopping, while the black woman prepared and served the food. Once ladies’ groups and church clubs began publishing cookbooks, a woman’s influence on recipes and foodways could spread further than an individual’s hometown. To transfer this collective food knowledge to a restaurant setting brings women’s influence on foodways into the post-World War II period and beyond.

Studying how these women interacted with one another in a segregated society is an important part of southern history, and also has bearing on southern foodways.

Egerton writes that black and white women,

“...lived lives tightly circumscribed within hailing distance of the region’s domestic kitchens. To them fell the overarching responsibility for the feeding of the South, as well as the duty of birthing and nurturing replacement generations. Practically all the latitude accorded to black women in that society, and a major share of white women’s liberties as well, were limited to those tasks – cooking, housekeeping, child rearing.”⁹

This quote brings together the essential elements of race and gender roles for women in the mid-20th century South. The experience of miscegenation and segregation, coupled with a tradition of a high level of food knowledge, put southern women in a unique position to alter how southerners consumed food as they moved out of the domestic sphere and into the public one by way of owning restaurants. Egerton continues, “That the domestic encirclement of black and white women down through generations of life in the South has had a positive bearing on the quality and distinction of the region’s food is an irony of classic proportions.”¹⁰

Historically, Georgia has been the center of the southeastern region and is consequently one of the first places to see or enact change. By 1860, due to its large area (east of the Mississippi River, it was second only to Virginia) and its role in industrialization, the state became known as the “Empire State of the South”. The cities researched for this thesis indicate the effects of reputation into the 20th century.¹¹ As

⁹ Egerton, “Foreword,” *The Jemima Code*, ix.

¹⁰ Egerton, “Foreword,” *The Jemima Code*, x.

¹¹ James C. Cobb and John C. Inscoe, “Georgia History: Overview,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Aug. 3, 2016, accessed Feb. 28, 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/georgia-history-overview>

the state capital, Atlanta has been the center of state commerce since the New South period;¹² Macon has been a site for agriculture, industrial and military facilities since its founding;¹³ and Savannah is one of the oldest cities and ports in the nation.¹⁴ Therefore, social, political or economic change that began in Georgia typically led to change elsewhere in the South. This position of influence is something that needs to be acknowledged in foodways research, especially in regards to women's history and the importance of place. These restaurants are a crucial part of the fabric of southern culture and warrant acknowledgement for their contribution to southern history.

Research Question

Based on the combination of women leaving the private home to work in the public sphere, society accepting the role of 'home cooked' food served in a restaurant, and the evolution of women-owned restaurants, I want to consider how these elements coincided and influenced each other. Given these various factors interplaying with one another, the question I am posing is: What role did women restaurant owners play in popularizing the cultural tradition of meat and threes in Georgia? The various factors that allowed these places to come into existence were indicative of a changing society and these locations have historical significance as a consequence. A southern woman's experience in these places is particularly worthy of closer inspection because of what it

¹² Andrea Jill Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 12.

¹³ Nancy B. Anderson, "Macon," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified November 30, 2016, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/macon>.

¹⁴ Buddy Sullivan, "Savannah," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified October 25, 2016, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/savannah>.

may reveal about women's history, southern history, and southern foodways. The intangible cultural heritage, seen in the form of the food served at these restaurants, and the experiences of eating and working in them offer insights into southern foodways during the post-World War II period. This period of great change warrants attention and the cultural resources that stem from that, the southern food and the meat and threes, warrant preservation as testimony to these stories.

Impact of this Research

The study of this topic is important to the field of historic preservation because it greatly informs the sense of place and the understanding of cultural traditions in the southeastern United States. What makes a place special is how people interact with it and the meanings they attribute to it. If we can better understand our connection to our environment, we can better understand ourselves and where we come from. In turn, we, as a people, can make more informed decisions about the future of our region. Cultural traditions are ephemeral and often intangible, but they are what ground us in reality. Intangible cultural heritage provides a context for understanding our past, so that future generations can progress in a positive and conversant way. The National Park Service defines cultural heritage as “a fairly broad term that can apply to both the tangible – physical places and objects we can touch – and the intangible – stories, songs, and celebrations we experience in the moment.”¹⁵ In the case of this thesis, the tangible

¹⁵ National Park Service, “Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage,” accessed April 11, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/tangible-cultural-heritage.htm>.

aspect is the food and the intangible aspect is the experience of eating at a meat and three and the food knowledge that was passed down to make that food.

This thesis offers a greater understanding of why it is important to know our history and celebrate what makes a certain place or region unique via food. Eating at a meat and threes is a unique part of the experience of living in the South. Over the course of the 20th century they became a way for southerners of all classes, race, age, and sex, to engage with the food of their region in a public setting. Restaurants alone are fascinating venues for social interaction, and have been studied as such. Meat and threes, let alone those owned by women, have not had the same attention and thus warrant being researched as to how they created a sense of place while simultaneously effecting social change.

Methodology

My methodology to answer my research question consists of three phases: background research, case study identification and analysis, and assessment of key findings. Background research will consist of researching southern food and foodways, gender and race issues during 1940-1960, the role of women in foodways, and the importance of place in understanding cultural heritage. I expect to find this information in tangible books, cookbooks and journal articles related to those topics. As a part of the case study background research, I will look for information at the physical library, digital online archives, City Directories and maps that may show growth around a particular restaurant location. I anticipate that these sources will have information on menus, life

in the post-World War II period but prior to the Civil Rights Movement, accounts of women's experiences, and accounts of anyone's experience in a restaurant of this kind.

The time period I am examining is 1940 to 1960. This span of years was chosen partly for the sake of brevity, but mainly because framing the discussion around this 20-year span catches modern society in a phase of great social change, especially in the South.¹⁶ It should be noted I am intentionally avoiding an in-depth analysis of food establishments during the Civil Rights Movement given the amount of research that has already been performed on that subject and the magnitude of social implications that stem from it. My choice of case study sites is based partly on wanting to keep these locations within a reasonable driving distance to Athens, Georgia, yet I also wanted to look at locations in urban areas, thus narrowing my choices to some extent.

Visiting real world examples of women-owned meat and three restaurants will offer insight to my background research. I intend to visit three Georgia restaurants that have remained in operation for many years, were opened by women, and are located in urban settings. The three sites—Mary Mac's Tea Room in Atlanta, H&H Restaurant in Macon and Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room in Savannah— all have similar, but not exact histories. By performing background research on each site and conducting oral history

¹⁶ World War II ended in 1945 and the economy improved steadily into the 1950s. The Civil Rights Movement began in 1954 with the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark case that forced racial integration of the nation's school systems. The Civil Rights Movement, which called for equal rights and protection under the law for all Americans would continue until 1968 with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Lunch counter sit-ins were an important part of the Civil Rights Movement, as they addressed issues concerning blacks being allowed to eat in public with whites. The first lunch counter sit-ins were held in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960. "African-American Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968)" last modified March 13, 2017, accessed March 13, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_\(1954%E2%80%931968\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_(1954%E2%80%931968)).

interviews with key figures connected to each restaurant, I will gain insight on the development of southern women operating meat and three restaurants in Georgia.

Limitations and Delimitations

While it would be ideal to research every women-owned meat and three in Georgia, it would not be a practical endeavor. The sites I have chosen are varied enough within their own right given their locations in their individual neighborhoods, the circumstances under which they opened, their ownership histories, and their methods for restaurant operation. These variations will provide a broad context within which to better understand meat and threes owned by women in Georgia. While I do have access to many resources for this research, I am limited by the fact that material resources and human subjects from the past are not always available.

Thesis Organization

This thesis contains five chapters. This introductory chapter provides a basic overview of the key issues, the research question and my methods for completing my research. The second chapter reveals a breadth of background research that discusses foodways and how they connect women and the cultural tradition of meat and threes, the history of race and relations in the South and how they pertained to restaurants, and the role of place when considering intangible cultural heritage. Chapter Three provides background information on my research methodology and my case study sites, which illustrates various aspects of the research topic in a real world setting. Chapter

Four collectively analyzes findings from the background research, the case study research, and oral history interviews, noting whether my findings support my earlier hypotheses. The concluding chapter summarizes the key findings of this thesis, further articulating why this research is important to the field of historic preservation.

CHAPTER 2

Background Research

This chapter seeks to understand the different aspects that have influenced the popularity of meat and three restaurants in the South, specifically urban areas of Georgia. It is surmised that this popularity can be attributed to a combination of specific elements: distinctive southern foodways, shifting gender roles seen in the rise of women in the workforce, racial tensions leading up to the Civil Rights Movement, the importance of restaurants as places, and the role of women in foodways. Each of these elements will be discussed individually to reveal what the South was like during the post-World War II period. It is the ways in which these different aspects influence each other that will provide supporting evidence and background context for my thesis.

The best place to begin this explanation is with a solid understanding of food and foodways. Food has many functions in our culture outside of basic nourishment: from spiritual uses, to class, racial and cultural identity. The act of consuming food is still something we share in common with those whom we feel otherwise separated. This basis is one of the reasons why studying food important in understanding the human experience.

Foodways

Foodways are “the study of why we eat, what we eat, and what it means.”¹⁷ The implications that can be drawn from tracing the effects of food on our personal lives, our bodies, our societies, our economy and cultural identity are endless. Applying this lens to the southern United States provides an opportunity to see the South in a different way that strings together otherwise unrelated elements and allows for further growth and understanding of the region.

Famous southern chef Edna Lewis eloquently captures the essence of Southern cooking and foodways in her posthumous article, “What is Southern?” She says, “Cooking is hard and demanding. It was then, and still is now. What began as hard work became creative work. There is something about the South that stimulates creativity in people... It is also interesting to note that the South developed the only cuisine in this country.”¹⁸ While it is unwise to make an absolute statement that the South is the only unique cuisine in this country, Lewis’ words are helpful in calling attention to the many disparities the South has dealt with throughout its tumultuous history. Those disparities can be seen in our foodways.

Simply put, southern cuisine is born out of a combination of African and European recipes and techniques making use of local ingredients.¹⁹ It should come as little surprise then that the specifics of the ownership and origins of southern food are

¹⁷ Elizabeth Engelhardt, “Redrawing the Grocery: Practices and Methods for Studying Southern Food,” in *The Larder: Food Studies Methods from the American South*, ed. by John T. Edge, Elizabeth Engelhardt, and Ted Ownby, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 1.

¹⁸ Edna Lewis, “What is Southern?,” *Gourmet*, January 2008.

¹⁹ Latshaw, 121.

still contested today. Despite this, in terms of consumption, southern food is relatively devoid of boundaries amongst race or class. Beth Latshaw explains in her in-depth study on southern food consumption that poverty (among other factors) is what unifies blacks and whites.²⁰ Indeed, in her cookbook on Southern food, Lewis' contemporary, famous chef Nathalie Dupree, says, "These foods are frequently thought of as soul foods and considered ethnic-black oriented. In truth, during the lean times everyone cooked the same thing... You could walk down the streets of any small town and find a similar meal in every pot, rich or poor."²¹ These factors of race, poverty, and location have continuously combined through the decades to produce what is known as southern food.

Studying foodways of any region provides a more thorough interpretation of that area and the people who live in it. But due to the South's contentious history, food can have a heightened importance in the life of a southerner for various reasons. For many, factors such as poverty, racism, war, and monoculture have not made the South an easy region to live in. In spite of these factors, similarity in food choices has remained consistent for many Southerners.²² Taking these reasons into consideration, it makes sense that an organization such as the Southern Foodways Alliance (SFA) would develop. The SFA is an academic unit within the Center for Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi that began in 1999, and has provided much background

²⁰ Latshaw, 110-111.

²¹ Nathalie Dupree, *Nathalie Dupree's Southern Memories: Recipes and Reminiscences*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 54.

²² The similarity in food choices referenced here can be seen in a study analyzed by Latshaw on what southerners ate and how often. Results were positively trending that native southerners were both familiar with the concept of southern food and consumed it with some degree of regularity. Latshaw, 103.

information and generated many ideas for this thesis. The center's mission statement reads, "The Southern Foodways Alliance documents, studies, and explores the diverse food cultures of the changing American South. Our work sets a welcome table where all may consider our history and our future in a spirit of respect and reconciliation."²³ The SFA's presence is indicative of the growing interest in Southern food and it is appropriate to use this interest to further understand women's roles in Southern cooking and how that translated to consumerism in the form of owning a restaurant, specifically a meat and three restaurant. Before this discussion can begin, an understanding of the restaurants that predated meat and threes is needed.

A Brief History of Tea Rooms

Though peer-reviewed academic research on tea rooms does not appear to exist, subjective histories of tea rooms are available and provide helpful information on female-owned restaurants. According to Jan Whitaker in *Notes from the Blue Lantern Inn*, a tea room was a restaurant that catered primarily to upper class women and was owned by women, and likely evolved as a response to the hotel restaurants, bar rooms and taverns that were geared more for men and where liquor was allowed. Respectable women were not permitted in these establishments, but the rise in car culture and the advent of prohibition changed things.²⁴ Whitaker writes,

²³ "About Us," Southern Foodways Alliance, accessed October 1, 2015, <https://www.southernfoodways.org/about-us/>.

²⁴ Jan Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America*, St. Martin's Press: New York, 2002, 2.

“Put a woman in a car – often in the driver’s seat – ban alcohol from public establishments, and voila! Dotted across the American landscape of cities and towns of the teens and twenties spring up little eating places serving light lunches, simple suppers, and dainty afternoon tea to her and her friends rambling about in small automobile touring parties.”²⁵

While the image of well-to-do ladies enjoying tea, salads, and small sandwiches is the prevailing theme of tea rooms, other tea rooms opened that were relatively informal, and welcomed the middle class and college students.²⁶ Tea rooms were usually stand-alone businesses, but it was not unheard of to find them inside hotels or department stores.²⁷

Whitaker seems to credit prohibition with being the largest factor in allowing women to open restaurants. She only briefly references the legal or financial barriers that might also explain why women up until this point did not own their own restaurant businesses, but she does offer some social context that warrants attention:

“The absence of the liquor industry on the restaurant scene made it much easier for newcomers, often women, to find a niche in what had once been an intimidating business... Furthermore the restaurant business was closely associated in many people’s minds with catering to appetites of all kinds, including sexual appetites. For a woman to enter this business at the turn of the century, even as an unescorted patron, was a risk to her reputation.”²⁸

It appears once it became acceptable for women to own tea rooms, they were exceedingly popular, both to own and frequent as a guest. The list of tea room owners included enterprising women with college degrees from the new domestic science programs at major universities, schoolteachers looking for a way to earn money during

²⁵ Whitaker, 2.

²⁶ Whitaker, 4.

²⁷ Whitaker, 8.

²⁸ Whitaker, 4-5.

the summers, mother-daughter and sister teams,²⁹ and members of the elite class who saw the tea room as a charitable way to employ their “less fortunate sisters.”³⁰

As much as Whitaker emphasizes what a boon tea room ownership was to a woman’s place outside of the home, this was only the case for white middle and upper class women. She writes that people of color were not allowed as guests in tea rooms, unless the tea room was created for them in the first place. Tea rooms in Harlem would be an example.³¹ As was standard in restaurants across the country, “if black women were found anywhere in the tea room, [they] were most likely in the kitchen cooking and cleaning up. A minority of tea rooms also employed black women as waitpersons.”³²

Whitaker goes back and forth describing the popularity of tea rooms in urban versus rural areas, so it is unclear if one location category was more prevalent than another. However, she does seem confident in her assertion that the Northeast region had the highest concentration of these establishments. Whitaker suggests this is due to newly paved roads that made weekend trips to the countryside a popular recreational activity for the upper classes. Their popularity steadily spread across the nation over the coming decades. Whitaker writes, “Throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, roadside tea shops and tea houses spread across much of the United States, even making it to the South, an area supplied with relatively few restaurants until after the Second World War.”³³ Her broad statement about the small number of restaurants in the South is

²⁹ Whitaker, 6.

³⁰ Whitaker, 19.

³¹ Whitaker, 27.

³² Whitaker, 27.

³³ Whitaker, 12.

unsupported, but her statement is probable given the poor economic conditions in the South that began after Reconstruction and continued through the Depression. She does list a few tea rooms that opened in the South, many of which developed a loyal clientele and remained open for many years.³⁴ One of these establishments was the Frances Virginia Tea Room in Atlanta.

The Frances Virginia Tea Room

The Frances Virginia was one of the more traditional, “proper” tea rooms; it opened in the 1930s (exact date is unknown) and closed in 1962. Its overlapping years of operation and close proximity to Mary Mac’s Tea Room (one of the case study sites) warrants a brief overview of the restaurant’s history to provide context on women restaurant owners in Georgia that predated World War II. Frances Virginia Wikle Whitaker opened her tea room on Poplar Street, and despite the Depression, the restaurant reportedly had a booming business from the beginning. In order to have more space, she moved the restaurant to inside the Collier Building at the corner of Peachtree and Ellis Streets in the 1930s.³⁵ Early customers included downtown shoppers, businessmen and socialites. Once World War II began, government officials, soldiers, and others employed by the war effort became regular customers, and by 1943 the tea room was serving 2,000 meals a day.³⁶

³⁴ Whitaker, 111, 114.

³⁵ Millie Huff Coleman, *The Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*, Peachtree Publishers Limited: Atlanta, 1981, 5.

³⁶ Coleman, 7.

It is not written why Frances Virginia Wikle wanted to open a tea room, but in the available history of the restaurant, a husband is never mentioned. What is mentioned however, is Frances Virginia's education in dietetics and home economics and her reliance on her sisters and mother as her support staff. These factors suggest she was unmarried or a widow, as many tea room operators were, and the support of her immediate family was essential in getting the business up and running. As the restaurant grew in popularity, other Wikle family members and friends were brought in to help. All had backgrounds in either secretarial work, banking, or home economics. It was within this group of women that ownership of the restaurant would pass down over the years. First, Frances Virginia sold her shares to her sister, Mrs. Hooper Wikle Beck, who in 1940 turned ownership over to Louise Nabell, Ruth Pannell, and Agnes New.³⁷ These three women operated the tea room until its closing in 1962, when they retired. Agnes New oversaw the kitchen, and her niece, Millie Huff Coleman, collected her aunt's recipes and wrote the prevailing history of the restaurant in *The Frances Virginia Cookbook*.

Coleman is eager to retell the traditions and stories of the Frances Virginia, and her account is in line with Whitaker's social history of tea rooms. Coleman writes, "There were no written rules of behaviour, just years of admonitions from mothers and grandmothers. And for some reason, when you walked into the dining room, you immediately took pleasure in sitting properly, crossing your legs at the ankles, keeping

³⁷ Coleman, 7.

one hand correctly in your lap, and saying, “Yes, ma’am.””³⁸ She also writes of the loyal relationships many regular customers formed with their wait staff. It was common for customers to wait to sit in their favorite waitress’s section³⁹ and during the war, wait staff would hide away the few desserts available (due to rationing) for their favorite customers who were expected to visit that day.⁴⁰ Children were also given special treatment and made to feel welcome. Their menu could be folded into a mask and, upon completing their meal, children would receive a box of animal crackers.⁴¹

The Frances Virginia took pride in cooking food to high standards. Agnes reportedly had a desk in the kitchen, wore a white starched uniform, and always kept two pencils in her hand. No dish left the kitchen without her inspection and two check marks from the pencils, one on the meal ticket to approve the dish and one to tally the balance. Coleman quotes her Aunt Agnes as saying, “We don’t put any cheap fillers in our seafood salads or use our sauces to disguise poor-quality meat. When we can’t afford to do things right, we’ll just stop serving.”⁴² Desserts became a specialty at the Frances Virginia. Alcohol was not served at the restaurant, so “Topsy Trifle” and gingerbread served with “Fluffy Wine Sauce” were offered. The “Sherry Chiffon Pie” became one of the biggest sellers, even though it was expensively priced at 20 cents a

³⁸ Coleman, 9.

³⁹ Coleman, 24.

⁴⁰ Coleman, 25.

⁴¹ Coleman, 25.

⁴² Coleman, 84.

slice.⁴³ Wartime rationing forced a certain creativity in recipes and “War Pies”, which used maple syrup in place of sugar, became popular.⁴⁴

It is important to note that the menu of the Frances Virginia was not quite the same as that of a meat and three restaurant. Coleman does not provide a copy of the menu, so it is unclear how many different dishes were available at any given time, but the recipes provided are for relatively involved dishes that are not quite as simple as those offered at meat and threes. Coleman tells about her first trip to the Frances Virginia on her own, where she and a friend made the conscious decision not to get fried chicken, since that was what young children ate. Instead, they ordered shrimp salad.⁴⁵ This choice highlights a point of difference between the food served at meat and threes versus traditional tea rooms. While they were not exclusively different from one another, meat and threes offered relatively simple fare (in the opinion of a young Coleman, better suited for children). Tea rooms offered more involved and varied dishes, such as various kinds of salads, casseroles, aspics, various kinds of meat loaves, sauces, and desserts.

Staff was held to the same high standards as the quality of food. Coleman gives examples of how management and employees were “like a family” and treated better than staff at other restaurants.⁴⁶ They were given free uniforms, laundry, yearly bonuses, food for their families at Christmas, two daily meals, and allowed to keep their

⁴³ Coleman, 94.

⁴⁴ Coleman, 94.

⁴⁵ Coleman, 65.

⁴⁶ Coleman, 25.

tips. In later parts of the history though, Coleman writes of the interview standards for kitchen staff and inadvertently reveals a certain level of distrust for those employees. Perhaps due to fears of scarcity stemming from the Depression and war rationing, every morning and evening, “all supplies were checked before departments made withdrawals for the day’s preparations.”⁴⁷ If quantities did not check out and an item was found to be missing, it was grounds for firing the employee. An inability to perform accurate measurement conversions on the fly was also an acceptable reason for dismissal, an obvious (but perhaps unnecessary) reliance and veneration by the Wikle sisters on their education in domestic science. It is worth mentioning that Coleman never discusses the race of her aunt’s employees or guests. While it can only be surmised, it is probable given the time period that if blacks were present at the restaurant, it was as kitchen workers only.

Tea rooms like the Frances Virginia provided a restaurant model that was easily transferable for women opening meat and threes in the decades after World War II. Though they began as upscale dining establishments, by the 1930s tea rooms had evolved into more casual places that were more accessible for the white middle class. This increased informality became a model for many meat and threes that opened in the subsequent decades.

⁴⁷ Coleman, 128.

Meat and Threes

“Meat and three” is a relatively new term used to describe a model of serving southern food in a restaurant setting. The words “meat and three” specifically can refer to the meal itself and its composition: a protein (meat) and choice of two vegetables and choice of a bread (the three sides). Not inferred by the phrase itself, but always included as options in the meal are choices of a drink and the option for dessert. It is unclear exactly when these restaurants became a standard fixture in the South, but they were likely an evolution of early cafes and eateries in urban centers.

The list of actual foods that can be served in the capacity of a meat and three is long, but it does function as an excellent example of what can be considered in general terms as “southern food”. For the meat, this list may include country-fried steak (a beef steak fried in batter and served with gravy), country ham (cured with heavy salt), fried chicken, and fried fish (often catfish), and chicken and dumplings. The list for sides is even longer, but may include baked apples, macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes (with and without gravy), corn, greens (collards or mustard), coleslaw, carrot salad, baked beans, lima beans, field peas, black eyed peas, okra (stewed or fried), stewed tomatoes, various casseroles, squash, and cabbage. Bread options generally involve corn bread and yeast rolls. Outside of the typical carbonated beverages offered in most modern American restaurants, drink options usually include sweet and unsweet iced tea and lemonade. Options for dessert are kept limited as well, generally offering no more than two. Examples include banana pudding, cobbler (often cherry or peach), sheet cake, or pie (often pecan and apple). The menus are typically limited within their

options, and changed based on the day and the season. For example, Fridays are often reserved for fried fish, and vegetables change based on what is in season.

Often these restaurants are cafeteria style, where the many food options are presented all at once. Sometimes customers are waited on via standard table service; other times customers order at a window and their plate is brought to them when it is ready. It should be noted that cafeteria-style service is not unique to meat and threes or the South, as this kind of service appears frequently across the country in other casual dining establishments. However, it is the emphasis on multiple options that is also a part of the definition of a “meat and three”. Even at locations that serve their food by the strict definition (meat and three sides plus a drink), other side items and dessert are available for purchase with an extra charge. The point is that each guest is able to build their own meal based on which protein or side items they choose.

Unlike burgers and milkshakes at fast food restaurants, which evolved out of the suburbanizing car culture of the mid-20th century,⁴⁸ the food served at southern meat and threes has a different history. The dishes that later found themselves on menus of meat and three restaurants began with what was prepared in the private home, based on the ingredients on hand. Psyche A. Williams-Forsen describes this process,

“...when recipes were adapted to southern tastes and palates, though derivative of another country, they became southern by way of their modifications. These recipes, which were borrowed and modified by African and African American female cooks to include their own creative twists, were readily acculturated into the cuisine of the South. Yet because these foods are not embodied by linguistic variations and are relatively indistinguishable from white (particularly poor

⁴⁸ Andrea Jill Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 90.

white) culinary habits, they have been left out of the cultural forms identified as “distinctly” African American...”⁴⁹

Certainly preparation methods and ways of sourcing those ingredients has (and will continue) to change over time. But the references are still present and traceable in modern day meat and threes. It has been difficult to research meat and threes as a restaurant type, perhaps due to their ubiquity in the South. Southern style cookbooks exist, and many meat and three restaurants of particular renown have their own cookbooks available for purchase (two of the case studies for this thesis being included). Often cooks that prepare these kinds of foods are featured in publications for their knowledge or skill in preparing a particular dish. (The SFA’s quarterly publication *Gravy* offers fine examples of these types of stories.) But as a venue for serving these foods, meat and threes have not been given singular attention.

What is important to understand at this juncture is that the food served at meat and threes reflected what was served at home, before the practice of “eating out” in public was something common to the middle class. Even though these kinds of foods were enjoyed by both black and white southerners, that commonality did not stop racism and segregation from infiltrating every aspect of life in the South. As Andrea J. Cooley states, “No institution – not even the family kitchen – was too sacred to consider upending in the broader interest of reestablishing white supremacy in the urban

⁴⁹ Psyche A. Williams-Forsom, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food & Power*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 169.

foodscape.”⁵⁰ White supremacy had become a way of life, especially in the South, but as America reached the mid-20th century, change was coming.

Race Relations in the South during the Post-World War II Period

The societal changes that occurred in the United States following World War II were a slow but steady progression away from white male dominance that had become routine in this country since its beginning. The Jim Crow systems that had been put in place after Reconstruction, when Southern whites felt compelled to exert their power over blacks in ways other than slavery, were beginning to break down. The *New Georgia Encyclopedia* summarizes the origin of the Jim Crow era:

“In 1908 an amendment to the state constitution established literacy and property requirements to supplement the poll tax, effectively barring voting by blacks, and many poor whites as well. This disenfranchisement, along with legislatively mandated racial segregation of public facilities, defined the Jim Crow era that would prevail in Georgia and the South for more than half a century.”⁵¹

Thus by the 1940s, segregation and Jim Crow were routine in both law and social construct⁵². Hale describes the situation by saying, “The solidification of the culture of segregation... created the space... within which middle-class whites could begin to disagree about the nature of their regional identity. For many of these whites, race had become curiously disembodied as segregation left them with little contact with southern blacks outside the increasingly sentimentalized rituals of domestic service.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 13.

⁵¹ Cobb and Inscoc, “Georgia History Overview,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed Feb. 28, 2017.

⁵² “Many white proprietors called on their constitutional and providential rights to discriminate based on race.” Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 103.

⁵³ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 243.

White supremacy as a way of life began to break down for several reasons, but perhaps its most consistent foe was the rise of consumerism and the black middle class. Indeed, as Hale phrases it, “The culture of segregation was always a process, never a finished product.”⁵⁴ Efforts made by whites to control blacks were certainly pervasive, but never reached the ultimate separate social order that was envisioned. Consumerism was a large part of why the culture of segregation never actually worked. For one, consumerism allowed for the rise of the black middle class that had purchasing power (i.e. making purchases through mail order catalogs, or blacks owning their own businesses). Secondly, consumerism allowed for the intermingling of races in physical spaces while making purchases. The simultaneous rise of the car culture is an important undercurrent in this development. Blacks in mid-century America had a literal mobility that they had not had in the previous generation. The *Negro Motorist Green Book*, a directory of African-American friendly facilities, was published from 1936-1966 to inform blacks traveling long distances by car where it was safe for them to stop to eat, use the restroom, or get a hotel room.

Simply put, whites could not control the movement of blacks, despite the construction of “separate but equal” facilities. Even though many black communities had their own businesses to prevent the need for shopping or paying for services at a white-owned establishment, the races crossed paths in public. White supremacy tried to control how and where black people could operate in society by way of saying, “These are inferior people, therefore they must exist in inferior spaces.” Hale explains, “To

⁵⁴ Hale, 200.

make order within the seeming fragmentation of their world some Americans elaborated spatial mediation of modernity... In effect, they translated the specific and individualized linkages between identity, place, and power that had reigned in an earlier, smaller world into connections between categories of people and imagined spaces that moved far beyond local boundaries.”⁵⁵ It was understood inherently that in certain venues, particularly public ones, the races were not supposed to mix, even though in reality, they did.

It is important to understand the significance of this assumption. Hale goes on to quote famous Southern writer Lillian Smith, who brought to light the absurdity and ultimately the ineffectiveness of the signage that directed the races to their separate spaces: “White southerners needed what Smith called ‘these ceremonials in honor to white supremacy’ because the southern spaces of consumption remained racially ambiguous despite the signs.”⁵⁶ The signs made whites feel more comfortable, but this was merely a perception. The signs did not actually keep the races from interacting with one another in public settings.

The influence of consumerism on the disassembly of segregation cannot be underestimated.⁵⁷ Hale quotes a 1938 New Dealers⁵⁸ report on economic conditions in the South indicating this influence, “As the young liberal New Dealers... said of even the poorest white and black southerners, ‘the people of the South need to buy, they want

⁵⁵ Hale, 6.

⁵⁶ Hale, 193.

⁵⁷ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 107.

⁵⁸ The New Dealers were a group of government officials who were early proponents of FDR’s New Deal plan. “New Deal,” last modified Dec. 18, 2016, accessed Dec., 21, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal.

to buy, and they would buy if they had the money.”⁵⁹ Consumerism was the ultimate basis for change at the federal level that ended the Jim Crow era (the *Katzenbach v. McClung* case, 1964⁶⁰), thus its importance for this research. To understand consumerism in regard to gender and racial mores provides a good framework within which we can study foodways and restaurants, particularly those in the South.

This basis of consumer culture also has bearing on a practical flaw within segregation: the need for people to physically move about and cross paths to make their purchases. This was seen in the most basic sense in department stores, where blacks were begrudgingly welcomed as shoppers, but were not permitted to eat at the in-store cafes.⁶¹ Even though restaurants were formally regulated by law,⁶² often blacks worked as employees (cooks and servers) in establishments where they could not be seated to eat, or were seated separately. In the private white home, blacks could cook the meals, and take home the leftovers, but not actually eat with the white family.⁶³ Hale writes, “Since southern black inferiority and white supremacy could not, despite whites’ desires be assumed, southern whites created a modern social order in which this difference would instead be continually performed... African Americans dined at blocked-off, racially marked, and inferior tables, or, as was often the case with department stores that otherwise welcomed their dollars, they did not eat at all.”⁶⁴ This fundamental

⁵⁹ Hale, 142.

⁶⁰ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 3.

⁶¹ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 105.

⁶² Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 2.

⁶³ Katherine van Wormer, David W. Jackson III, and Charletta Sudduth, *The Maid Narratives: Black Domesticity and White Families in the Jim Crow South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012). 85.

⁶⁴ Hale, 285.

conflict (are blacks allowed in this space or not and if so, in what capacity) is one of many small sparks that occurred throughout the South in the post-World War II period that conflated to create the Civil Rights Movement.

Miscegenation

Despite significant efforts to control it, segregation and white supremacy simply could not keep the races from intermingling outside of sanctioned occasions and places. Segregation might have kept blacks in inferior roles (both perceived and real), but the fact remained that blacks and whites still shared physical spaces, both in public and private. This fact, in conjunction with the rise of consumerism and the black middle class, is a basis for why systemic segregation could not be maintained. Many public places were segregated, but restaurants were one of the most heavily regulated sites due to the strong, but silent fear of the races mixing in inappropriate ways.

During the turn of the 20th century, the pressures stemming from the fear of miscegenation, any kind of mixing between racial groups, including sex,⁶⁵ was a burden felt most strongly by women of both races, but enforced by white men. The virginity and sexual fidelity of white women was given a high premium as they were instrumental in maintaining a pure race. In order to protect that purity, white men considered black women to be an available sexual alternative for sexual “practice” or out of wedlock urges.⁶⁶ This supposed need for protection of white women is also the source of the

⁶⁵ “Miscegenation,” Dictionary.com. (Random House, Inc.) Accessed October 14, 2016, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/miscegenation>.

⁶⁶ van Wormer, Jackson III, and Sudduth, *The Maid Narratives*, 181.

“black rapist” myth, that black men due to the excitement of emancipation, could and would have their way with white women if given the chance.⁶⁷ The result, as described by van Wormer, et al was that, “Elite white women thus were closely monitored in their comings and goings, while young black women were extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse.”⁶⁸

Simply put, women could not be expected, nor were allowed, to have agency or autonomy over their own bodies. This is where the preparing and sharing of food creates a problem, given that women were usually the ones providing meals for a family. Andrea Jill Cooley explains, “Both activities [sex and eating] involve a foreign substance entering the human body and potentially contributing to the development of flesh... As purveyors of both sex and food, women played important roles in perpetuating race.”⁶⁹ The notion of blacks and whites consenting to sexual relationships was unthinkable and any interaction outside of the established racial etiquette was frightening to consider. This fear was strong enough that white supremacists called for formal regulation and social sanctioning of racial interactions.⁷⁰ This step was the source of separate, but equal, facilities and had particular bearing on restaurants.

Eating in public was still a relatively new activity for Americans in the early 1900s, and its newness caused some discomfort. Since the late 1800s, upper class men and women who had discretionary wealth could dine in upscale restaurants and cafes.

⁶⁷ Williams-Forson, 48.

⁶⁸ van Wormer, Jackson III, and Sudduth, 41.

⁶⁹ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 11.

⁷⁰ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 47.

The lower classes with less means could have meals included with a beer in saloons. While no lawful regulations existed at that time, the classes and genders remained separate while dining in public.⁷¹ To then introduce the factor of race into what is already considered an uncomfortable and intimate affair was almost too much to handle:

“[I]f the government can compel black and whites to engage in as intimate an activity as eating together, it may compel even more intimate interactions. This is another manifestation of the white supremacist myth that food consumption, like marriage, is a purely private transaction and that if compulsion can be applied in one case, it can be applied in the other one as well.”⁷²

We all must eat, but ingesting food in the presence of an inferior person (an African-American) was a doorway into other kinds of ingestion, and one that was too close for comfort for a culture and government controlled by white men. Therefore, restaurants were a highly regulated place, both in actual law and social construct. This makes the emergence of meat and threes even more significant given the strict social paradigms surrounding public eating places. The role of women in this scenario, both black and white, adds another layer to the experience of eating in public that warrants further inquiry.

⁷¹ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 46.

⁷² Cooley, *To Live and Dine in*, 140.

Southern Female Experience during the Post-World War II Period

The post-war period was one of strict social rules for both black and white women throughout the country, especially in the South. Hale describes how these rules specifically played out for both races in the private and public spheres:

“White southerners associated black women with all the sentimental values of middle-class womanhood – mummies nurtured children, loved unconditionally, and lived for others. White women, then, could leave their home and still be ladies not only because African-American domestic workers performed the labor there but because they also absorbed the celebrated yet constricting gender conventions associated with motherhood.”⁷³

Both races of women found themselves in some kind of service role, primarily centered around the home, though in differing contexts. The white middle-class woman oversaw the social calendar, planning meals, and the care of her children. However, it was often the black hired help that performed the day-to-day tasks established by these white women. They actually cooked the food, cared for the children, and cleaned the house. The domestic labor taken on by the black woman often allowed her white counterpart to engage in charity work and public philanthropic organizations.

The book *The Maid Narratives* explains the tiers of power: “For the white woman who was subservient to her husband, the likely breadwinner, having a servant helped boost her status and self-esteem. The role that the domestic worker played in the household in some ways echoed the role of the housewife vis-à-vis her husband.”⁷⁴ From the turn of the century into the 1950s, this kind of arrangement was taken to be normal and appropriate. Given that formal slavery was outlawed, whites, particularly

⁷³ Hale, 105.

⁷⁴ van Wormer, Jackson III, and Sudduth, 38.

southern whites, worked hard to find ways to control blacks in other ways, either through social or legal enforcement.

In a similar book, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South*, Susan Tucker interviewed women who were white female employers of black domestic servants during the period of segregation. In her efforts to comprehend their experiences Tucker learned that, “The memories, for example, often showed me that in the past, white and black women did not speak to each other about race and class, and yet both of these were key factors involved within their lives and their interactions with other people.”⁷⁵ Tucker goes on to explain that it was not proper to explain racial codes to children either, thus further embedding the notion that segregation was implicitly accepted. The silence surrounding the issue made it easier to hide the inferior experiences of the black women and enabled this relationship dynamic to play out the public sphere for years to come.

The strict definition of gender and racial roles amid the mixing of races in public spaces and the rise of technology and transportation all contributed to the growing tension and realization of segregation’s inherent impracticality. Also, given the war effort, the nation’s men were often literally absent from their homes and the country. With the advent of World War II, it was suddenly necessary, and therefore acceptable, for women of both races to engage in paid occupations outside the home. This break from traditional roles provided an unanticipated opening for women to begin working in

⁷⁵ Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South*, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge), 3.

the public sphere in a greater capacity than had previously been available to them.

Women could, and often had to, become business owners. With increasing frequency, they began to open restaurants (a natural progression from cooking and serving food from a kitchen in a home), thus beginning the breakdown of racial segregation.

Role of Women in Foodways

Historically, women have controlled what we eat due to their role as mothers and as servers. This often, but not always, pertained to food. Psyche A. Williams-Forson describes at length: “Mothers, by and large, control and determine the foodways - obtainments, preparation, distribution, and even consumption - within the family... In their ability to control the “symbolic language of food” and to dictate what foods say about their families, women often negotiate the dialectical relationship between the internal identity formation of their families and the externally influenced medium of popular culture. In this way, they protect their families against social and cultural assault as well as assist in the formation and protection of identity.”⁷⁶ Women served their families, and they served their employers. This focus on service and food made them the gatekeepers for much of southern cultural identity. Numerous times throughout the interviews in *The Maid Narratives*, it is mentioned that although blacks and whites could not eat together, it was usually the black woman who prepared the meal,⁷⁷ and they usually ate the same foods.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Williams-Forson, 92.

⁷⁷ van Wormer, Jackson III, and Sudduth, 85, 130, 158.

⁷⁸ van Wormer, Jackson III, and Sudduth, 85, 91, 112, 124.

Psyche A. Williams-Forson has drawn attention to a small group of female entrepreneurs in the South known as “waiter-carriers”.⁷⁹ These black women would prepare boxed meals to sell to train passengers traveling through southern towns during the late 1800s when railroads were expanding into rural areas. The group studied by Williams-Forson operated out of Gordonsville, Virginia and worked in that town for approximately fifty years. Rules existed about how and where the waiter carriers could operate, as train stations were heavily segregated. They would sell these boxed meals from the platform to passengers through the window of the train. The meal was generally fried chicken, either bread or a biscuit, fruit pie, a hard-boiled egg and coffee, with different prices for different cuts of meat. This small group of women were able to support themselves financially by selling food. Their domestic servant counterparts later in the century did not make much in the way of income either, but the ability to make money off services involving the preparation and serving of food to others is a skill many black women had and could use to make money.

The role of white women within foodways is different from black women, but that is not to suggest that they did not play a part. While white women often left the cooking to their black hired help, they still would do the grocery shopping or menu planning. Lower income white women certainly would have cooked for their families. White women generally did not have to resort to the kind of creative entrepreneurship seen with the black waiter-carriers, but as women, their role as server to the family was still present. White women were permitted to eat out alone, though it was generally in

⁷⁹ Williams-Forson, 32-34.

female-centric cafes⁸⁰ that were intended for middle class women who were out running errands and might need an intermediary space for respite from the bustling city before returning home.

Perhaps white women most influenced foodways through the production of cookbooks. Producing cookbooks became a favorite activity among the philanthropic church-going crowd and could be sold for a profit to benefit a charity or church group. The history of recipe collection, authorship, tone, and theme is a fascinating look at the early days of racial stereotypes and the romanticizing of the antebellum south. Andrea J. Cooley gives attention to this in her book, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*. In it, she describes a few different cookbooks from the South, primarily from Virginia.⁸¹ Some of the cookbooks delve into the realm of progressivism and scientific cooking, while others celebrate the art and intuitiveness of southern cooking, as best produced by blacks. Either vein allowed for white women to stake a claim over their purview of food and the kitchen. Many of these books reproduce recipes from the families of George Washington and Robert E. Lee (some with more credible sources than others), and recipes for foods cooked on the farm, that were unlikely to be reproduced in a suburban kitchen. Many include illustrations of the “good ole days” including Confederate veterans and black mammies tending to children. These kinds of materials proliferated throughout the South during the post-World War II period and probably reflect what

⁸⁰ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 45-47.

⁸¹ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 80-83.

many white middle class women considered valuable in their role as providers of food, and therefore culture.

The influence of cookbooks on modern cooking and foodways warrants further examination from another aspect: the emergence of “scientific cooking”. The interest in “scientific cooking” was a natural result of post-World War I advances in technology and New Deal efforts towards greater government standardization of food.⁸² Home economic programs promoted new appliances that required electricity, a utility that by the 1930s was finally becoming standard even in poor rural areas. Given that much of the South was in fact poor and rural, these changes had a clear impact on southern life.⁸³ With the advent of electric stoves, the expertise needed to operate a temperamental gas stove was no longer needed. It was now common to use measuring cups and spoons and follow recipes to the letter. Black women could certainly learn these new ways of cooking, but the dissemination of information was directed at middle-class white women. Cooley says, “The new food routines took on racial and gendered meanings that helped to establish white supremacy in the new century. Despite the deep African American roots of southern foodways, many white advocates of modern eating practices attempted to redefine southern food as “white” by standardizing recipes and mandating the preparation instructions for even the simplest foods.”⁸⁴

⁸² Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 71.

⁸³ “New Deal projects encouraged funding for electricity, indoor plumbing, modern homes, and extension services for southerners who had previously lacked access to modern amenities.” Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 77.

⁸⁴ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 20.

Ironically, by the time we reach the 1940s, a shift away from “scientific cooking” occurs. Due to supposed social reform and a burgeoning and strong nostalgia for the “old days”, (i.e. the antebellum South), it became popular again to think of cooking as an intuitive art form rather than a noble science experiment in the kitchen. On the surface, cooking as an art form celebrated black cooks, with their supposedly innate skills in the kitchen. The celebration of the mammy image and perpetuation of the stereotype that blacks could only be good at domestic endeavors, such as cooking, was merely the latest iteration of modern-day racism. As Andrea Jill Cooley explains, “Nostalgia for an imagined past of grand white ladies who offered recipes for yeast and mincemeat, as well as for the servile black cooks who prepared such dishes, gave credence to the notion of Jim Crow as an ancient institution.”⁸⁵ Blacks, as Jim Crow laws presumed, could not grow and change as a race, so whites constructed social systems to control and manage them, and felt principled for having done so.

Toni Tipton-Martin’s bibliographic book *The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African-American Cooking*, fills in an important gap in the history of southern foodways, that of African-American authored cookbooks. Her listing of these books provides context for how the black community identified itself through years of slavery, segregation and blatant and racist misinterpretation of their image.⁸⁶ Tipton-Martin explains the Jemima code as:

“The encoded message assumes that black chefs, cooks, and cookbook authors – by virtue of their race and gender – are simply born with good kitchen instincts;

⁸⁵ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 76.

⁸⁶ The fictional character of Aunt Jemima used by the Quaker Oat Company being one such image. Tipton-Martin, 40.

diminishes knowledge, skills and abilities involved in their work, and portrays them as passive and ignorant laborers incapable of creative culinary artistry.”⁸⁷

While the presence of black cooks in southern kitchens is well known, their influence on southern foodways has often been ignored, and the listing of cookbooks written by blacks over the last 200 years is an attempt to correct that.

Tipton-Martin begins in the mid-1800s and continues up to the present day outlining these cookbooks and explaining how their contents inform southern black culture. She claims, “Historians and scholars recognize recipes and cookbooks as important research tools for understanding women and their work.”⁸⁸ This reasserts how cookbooks play an important role in foodways as pieces of cultural heritage, especially as these books provide more than just recipes. They also provide a context through which to understand the experiences of southern black women.

African-Americans, some men, but mostly women wrote most of the books. Some authors were invented characters by whites attempting to capitalize on the “mammy image” made infamous by the Aunt Jemima character, some authors were black philanthropic groups, and others yet were by white women recording the recipes of their black servants, the idea being that if you employed the woman, then you owned her recipes.⁸⁹ Each authorship situation had different implications.

In the instance of a white woman co-opting her black domestic servant’s recipes, the black cook’s ownership and knowledge of foodways was lost. One example is a

⁸⁷ Tipton-Martin, 2.

⁸⁸ Tipton-Martin, 4.

⁸⁹ Tipton-Martin, 40.

cookbook written by a northern mistress, Antoinette Hervey. Hervey recorded her black servant Katherine's recipes in vernacular dialect that was difficult to follow. Tipton-Martin explains the consequences of this choice when she writes, "Although Katherine possessed the knowledge of a specialist, Hervey and a generation of southern ladies set in place a harsh and false impression that misled the public: the black cook may have cooked excellently, but she was too ignorant to translate that experience into scientific formulas, much less into print."⁹⁰ As the push for integration intensified, black philanthropic groups often used the funds raised from their cookbook sales for Civil Rights activities. Tipton-Martin says, "Their unique acts of defiance emboldened everyday folks to do something powerful in the face of adversity: cook."⁹¹ Through *The Jemima Code* it is easier to see how black southern women's voices have been diminished or left out of the story of southern foodways, despite their significant contributions to it.

Thus, through the efforts of black and white southern women (some more honest than others), food traditions were passed down through the years. The preference for local dishes, seasonal dishes and specific ways of preparing said foods became a real part of the cultural fabric. In this case, southern food became one thing blacks and whites *could* have in common. While this system of passing down traditions within a culture is readily understood,⁹² the case for the movement of southern foods

⁹⁰ Tipton-Martin, 40.

⁹¹ Tipton-Martin, 67.

⁹² "But one should not be lulled into taking the continuation of things and places for granted. Powerful phenomena are involved in making it possible, and trying to imagine a world without these phenomena helps one appreciate their magnitude." Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 29.

appearing in meat and three restaurants is still not totally clear. Women undoubtedly played a part, but their presence is so pervasive that it becomes difficult to define. More research is needed to determine exactly what shifts occurred to allow (culturally speaking) women of both races to apply their cooking skills to a business setting in the form of a restaurant, as a defined place.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as, “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”⁹³ This general provision goes on to list examples of this kind of heritage, including social practices, rituals, and traditional craftsmanship. Foodways, food preparation, recipes, and the sourcing of ingredients are all ways food can be viewed as intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, food viewed as intangible cultural heritage is a valuable resource. It reveals a wealth of information about specific cultures, their traditions, and how they navigate their local environment. Place plays an important role as it is the site for intangible cultural heritage to exist and maintain its relevancy, both in the present and into the future.

In 2003, UNESCO published the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, stating that “Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and

⁹³ “Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” UNESCO, accessed Dec. 13, 2016, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>.

collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce crafts.”⁹⁴ Much weight is placed on the importance of community, and if intangible cultural heritage is to be kept alive, it must remain relevant within the culture.⁹⁵ Place is an essential element in this equation. Without a place for these activities to occur, there would be no culture or heritage to be had.

ICOMOS’ definition of intangible cultural heritage echoes the same themes as written by UNSECO. The ICOMOS-UK organization also outlines their recommendations for how to preserve these resources in their “A Cultural Heritage Manifesto”. That document states,

“In its 50th anniversary year, ICOMOS-UK calls for a new approach to the way we all sustain, promote and benefit from cultural heritage. Cultural heritage must be seen as a cross cutting theme, embedded in all aspects of human activity and sustainable development. It must be acknowledged as a key source of resilience for communities and wider society. The profile of cultural heritage should be enhanced as a major economic activity comparable to those of the natural environment or the arts.”⁹⁶

These directives indicate how cultural resources can and should be valued in the 21st century. They are diverse, dynamic resources that bring communities together and can provide economic stability for those communities. A restaurant could easily fall within

⁹⁴ “Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” UNESCO, accessed Dec. 13, 2016.

⁹⁵ “Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” UNESCO, accessed Dec. 13, 2016.

⁹⁶ “A Cultural Heritage Manifesto,” ICOMOS-UK, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://www.icomos-uk.org/uploads/sidebar/PDF/A%20Cultural%20Heritage%20Manifesto.pdf>.

these parameters as a positive asset for a community as a cultural resource and as a site to experience intangible cultural heritage, not only as a source of sustenance.

In the book *Preservation of What, for Whom?* Roger C. Kennedy writes, “Without a story, nobody cares. Without a story, there will be no places kept. If nobody cares, there will be no places kept, however significant.”⁹⁷ This quote speaks to the essential nature and importance of intangible cultural heritage- without stories, our places and objects have no life beyond their immediate function. As humans, we imbue this meaning onto the world around us. Cultural heritage speaks to the concept of foodways as well, in the form of preparing certain foods certain ways based on the methods and techniques of our ancestors. These definitions of intangible cultural heritage support the notion that the experience of consuming southern food in a meat and three restaurant is a cultural experience that is made possible through place (the restaurant and the southern region at large) and cultural resources (food, recipes, and food traditions).

Importance of Place

Studying place as a subject offers many opportunities for understanding how humans interact with and value the physical world around them. In discussing basic theory of place attachment, psychologist Maria Vittoria Giuliani writes, “It is the emotional significance that geographic spaces are able to take on in human experience

⁹⁷ Roger C. Kennedy, “Crampons, Pitons, and Curators,” in *Preservation of What, for Whom?: A Critical Look at Historical Significance*, ed. Michael A. Tomlan (The National Council for Preservation Education, 1997), 25.

that transforms them into *'places.'*⁹⁸ The different objects and activities that can occur in a physical space, combined with human interaction, creates the world we see around us, and produces culture. This combination is what makes intangible cultural heritage.

Not all of the meaning attributed to place is positive, however. Often sites and objects are reminiscent of negative events that must be put into an appropriate context for future generations. Giuliani writes, “There is perhaps no feeling of mutual affinity, community, fraternity among persons, whether formal or informal, institutionalised or not – nor feeling of diversity, aversion, hostility – that is not in some way related to matters of place, territory, and attachment to places. For better or worse, this has far-reaching implications.”⁹⁹ Preservationist Ned Kaufman speaks to this when he writes, “...places can mean very different things to different people... the difference lies in what each person brings to the encounter...the place doesn’t stand alone: even if a man has never been there.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the interwoven nature of place and intangible cultural heritage is integral to our understanding of the world around us.

Kaufman goes on to discuss the primary ways of interpreting place: sensory perception and memory. Both can easily be applied to the experience of visiting an eating establishment. Sensory perception refers to what your body can perceive through its five senses (in the case of a restaurant, the feel of your seat, the smell of cooking food, the taste of your meal, etc.). Memory refers to what happened in that

⁹⁸ Maria Vittoria Giuliani, *Theory of Attachment and Place Attachment*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), ResearchGate chapter, 146.

⁹⁹ Giuliani, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Kaufman, 27.

place during your time there (you enjoyed a wonderful meal, or were denied service based on the color of your skin, or returned to the restaurant regularly because you enjoyed the atmosphere and it was in your neighborhood).

In *The Restaurants Book: Ethnographies of Where We Eat*, the authors state, “From the sensual to the local, to the symbolic and global, restaurants, we believe, constitute ideal total social phenomena for our post-modern world.”¹⁰¹ Given the understanding we have now of the importance of place, and the knowledge of how contested public eating spaces once were, it is unsurprising then that the social phenomena surrounding restaurants has changed much over the course of the last century. “Eating out” as a social activity was still a relatively new activity at the turn of the 20th century.¹⁰² Restaurants were not always stand-alone operations, but were often part of a saloon or hotel and were frequented by men. Women generally were not permitted. Eventually women-only cafes were created as areas for respite while traveling or shopping.¹⁰³ It should be made clear that except for the saloons and bars, restaurants and cafes were for wealthy white patrons. Minorities, and in the South blacks, could work as servers or cooks, but not patronize such an establishment.

The social rules that sprung up around eating food in public were to some degree a reaction to the stresses of engaging in an intimate and private activity in public.¹⁰⁴ This

¹⁰¹ David Beriss and David Sutton, *The Restaurants Book: Ethnographies of Where We Eat*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 1.

¹⁰² Andrea Jill Cooley, “The Customer is Always White,” in *The Larder: Food Studies from the American South*, ed. John T. Edge, Elizabeth Engelhardt, Ted Ownby, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 244.

¹⁰³ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 45-47.

¹⁰⁴ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 62.

anxiety contributed to the strict gender rules that sprung up in conjunction with the racial rules already in practice. Who, and who could not, be employed as a waitress is a great example of this. Once integration was required, many whites took issue with the possibility of white women serving black men. In some instances, white women were fired from waitressing jobs so blacks could be hired in their place.¹⁰⁵ Prior to integration, blacks often could not work as wait staff. Those jobs were reserved for white women, but blacks could work as bussers.¹⁰⁶ Yet again, white authorities used the fear of miscegenation between white women and black men to enforce policies ensuring whites remained in positions of power.

Ultimately, it was the argument between public and private activities that led to the final reasoning in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that was later reaffirmed in *Katzenbach v. McClung* in 1964. The ruling in that case dictated that private businesses could not deny service to customers based on race, because no business could operate without interstate commerce. Interstate commerce relied on federal regulation and infrastructure, and the federal government was desegregated. Therefore, no longer could the law view private businesses as purely private institutions (like the home). If a private business had a public component, such as a restaurant would, then that business was beholden to federal government jurisdiction.

Along with the many other elements of modernity changing the South and the rest of the country during the post-World War II period, was increasing urbanization.

¹⁰⁵ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in*, 61.

¹⁰⁶ van Wormer, Jackson III, and Sudduth, 164.

People of all races and classes moved to cities for better job opportunities, and advances in transportation made the transition that much easier. In cities, the races mixed more than they would have in small rural towns. The influx of people had a dual effect; it made strict segregation more difficult and it increased the feasibility of opening a small café or restaurant. Hale writes,

“These new, increasingly less rural, more closely settled places, then, asserted an influence far beyond even the growing proportion of the southern population leaving the farms. Villages, towns, and cities became the hothouses of the new culture of segregation. Cross-race interactions there had not had time to groove paths that whites could use and blacks could stand. Families were not entangled. People were not known.”¹⁰⁷

This anonymity between races made it easier for blacks to form their own neighborhoods, with their own schools, churches and businesses. This increased presence gave them greater leverage in ending segregation in the years to come. Place is a constant element in these racial interactions and is consequently an essential point that needs to be understood when exploring cultural heritage.

Indeed, as seen in the domestic sphere, Tucker found that many of the black and white women she interviewed for her study were conscious of the role of place in their understanding of one another. She writes,

“Many of the interviews speak of strongly felt divisions in southern society. Yet, what joins these women together is that they are from the same place and have lived at roughly the same time... Many of them recognized the importance of this place, the South, in their dealings with and memories of each other. They recognized their connections to one another by geography.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Hale, 124.

¹⁰⁸ Tucker, 12.

The connection to place is clearly a complicated one, but is nonetheless one that is shared. Tucker goes on to say, “Thus for both black and white southern women, place and race are among the most obvious defining circumstances. And for both, place and race have meanings for their roles in the domestic sphere, meanings that both separate them from, and connect them to, each other.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Increasingly in the post-World War II period, southern women and blacks found ways to earn income and gain some modicum of freedom from a world regulated in law and social construct by white men. The research undertaken for this chapter provided information on the context of southern food, gender and race issues in the south during the post-World War II period (particularly the issues that resulted from the practice of employing black domestic servants), the role of women in foodways, and the importance of place. All these factors interlace to describe the South from the 1940s to the 1960s. It was in this environment that the foundations for the popularity of meat and three restaurants was shaped. However, the information available is not without some holes.¹¹⁰ The importance of women in foodways is undisputed, but the specific roles of black and white southern women in southern foodways has not been fully researched. Furthermore, general research on the philosophy and history of restaurants and eating out is available (as seen with the history of tea rooms), but little to no

¹⁰⁹ Tucker, 16.

¹¹⁰ Cooley, “The Customer is Always White,” *The Larder*, 241.

information is available on southern meat and threes specifically. I have chosen to look in detail at three meat and threes located in urban centers in Georgia, to begin to understand the popularity of meat and threes in the South.

CHAPTER 3

Case Studies

In researching southern meat and three restaurants, as seen in the previous chapter, I found much literature on southern food and some information on southern dining establishments, but not necessarily information on how these two subjects are interrelated. While some of the information to support this research can be found by traditional means (books, journal articles, newspapers, etc.), it is pertinent to also have stories, voices, and opinions from those “on the ground” who previously or currently operate meat and three restaurants. Learning about the experiences of those involved first-hand with this kind of restaurant is necessary to fully understand the role of women in the history of meat and threes and how they are interpreted today.

Thus, case studies are necessary. Case studies are a helpful method for gaining new data on a subject when other sources of information are not readily available. They provide “real time” analysis that can be placed into background research to further the understanding of a subject.¹¹¹ The case study process can be broken down into a few basic steps: “designing the study, conducting the study, analyzing the results, and disseminating the results.”¹¹² These results can be used for educational purposes, continuing research and practical application.

¹¹¹ Mark Francis, “A Case Study Method for Landscape Architecture,” Washington, DC: Landscape Architecture Foundation, 1999, 13.

¹¹² Francis, 21.

As part of designing the study, it is necessary to define parameters for the kind of case study sites that best meet the intended research, and can be completed within a reasonable time frame. The criteria established for this thesis to determine which sites to study include that each case study site be a meat and three restaurant in the state of Georgia, within a reasonable driving distance from Athens (i.e. the destination could be reached within five hours or less), be located in an urban area,¹¹³ originally owned and operated by a woman, opened between 1940 and 1960, and currently still in business. These qualifiers are the most likely to provide appropriate information on the history of female-owned restaurants and how they worked to popularize meat and threes in southern cities.

The restaurants chosen as my case study sites based on these criteria are Mary Mac's Tea Room in Atlanta (opened in 1945), H&H Restaurant in Macon (opened in 1959), and Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room in Savannah (opened in 1943). All three establishments are still in operation today (though all have briefly closed at some point), were originally owned by a woman, are located in urban downtown areas in Georgia, were opened during the mid-century period, and fit the description of a Southern meat and three restaurant.

Studying the role of restaurants in popular culture has been discussed, but the specifics of my thesis, the role of women in the popularity of southern meat and threes, has not been fully researched. The case study method is a useful way to gain the

¹¹³ This qualifier was deemed necessary as cities usually see social change before rural areas do, thus narrowing the selection field and increasing the likelihood of my being able to prove my hypothesis.

information needed first hand from primary resources to begin to flesh out this inadequately researched area of women's history, the importance of place, and southern foodways. Following the basic case study framework and making additions where necessary for my research is an appropriate way to obtain the information I need to further the body of knowledge on this subject.

Case studies are a useful research tool in all kinds of subject areas.¹¹⁴ In "A Case Study Method for Landscape Architecture", Mark Francis writes, "Case studies often serve to make concrete what are often generalizations or purely anecdotal information about projects and processes. They also bring to light exemplary projects and concepts worthy of replication or broader dissemination."¹¹⁵ Studying cultural institutions like meat and three restaurants requires assimilating data from different subject areas (women's history, food history, geography, etc.) while performing a case study assessment provides a singular opportunity for those different elements to come together and be studied simultaneously. This flexibility is essential to the process and enabling new knowledge to develop in a field.

The value of case studies can be found in their potential future uses: the information and data can be used for teaching, further research, practice, theory building, criticism, and communication and outreach.¹¹⁶ Applying this method to the study of restaurants and their importance within a community is particularly helpful, as

¹¹⁴ Francis, 8.

¹¹⁵ Francis, 9.

¹¹⁶ Francis, 13-15.

Francis writes, “where real world context tends to make more controlled empirical study difficult.”¹¹⁷

Mary Mac’s Tea Room

With the advent of World War II the city of Atlanta saw an influx of industry and new residents.¹¹⁸ Per the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, “[b]y 1954, there were 800 new industries in Atlanta and almost 1,200 national corporations with offices in the city. Rapid population growth accompanied this postwar economic activity, and Atlanta expanded its borders to accommodate the growth. In 1952 the city annexed an additional 82 square miles, adding 100,000 new residents.”¹¹⁹ This growth would continue through the 1960s. Always a transportation hub, the city made efforts to expand Hartsfield Airport and the highway system even before the federal interstate highway program was implemented.¹²⁰ Mid-century Atlanta retained its position as the economic and political center of Georgia, and by extension, the site of progress in the 20th century South.

De facto segregation was a part of life, and Atlanta was no exception. As Richard Leon Thornton writes, “Housing segregation had actually made neighborhood integration common in Southern cities. Implicit norms kept blacks on one street and whites on another. This pattern was very vulnerable to a situation where whites

¹¹⁷ Francis, 13.

¹¹⁸ Cobb and Inscoe, “Georgia History: Overview,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed Feb. 28, 2017.

¹¹⁹ Andy Ambrose, “Atlanta,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified August 4, 2016, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/atlanta>.

¹²⁰ Ambrose, “Atlanta,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed Jan. 4, 2017.

preferred new suburban housing and blacks need for housing overcame the pressures ‘to keep them in their place.’”¹²¹ As the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the home to some of the first African-American institutions of black higher education, Atlanta’s black population had a strong presence in the city. Due to racial housing codes, Atlanta’s black population lived in high density pockets throughout the city. One classic example was Buttermilk Bottoms, a neighborhood on the south side of Ponce de Leon Ave., and near Mary Mac’s Tea Room. This neighborhood would change drastically in the years that Mary Mac’s was in operation.¹²²

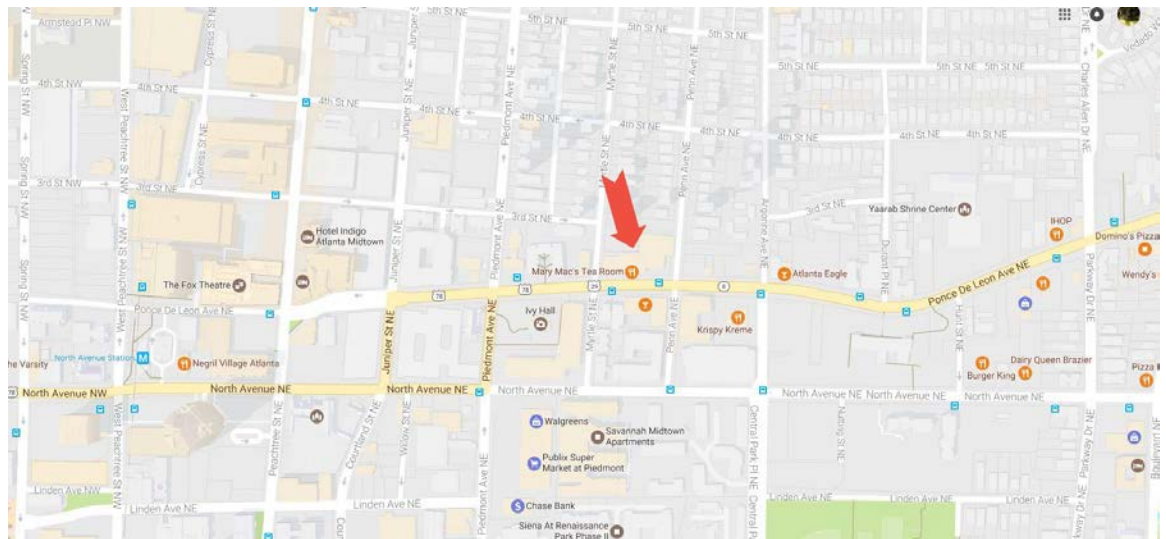


Figure 1. Current map showing the location of Mary Mac’s Tea Room. (Google Maps, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Mary+Mac's+Tea+Room/@33.7727509,-84.3818734,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x88f5046c25254a81:0xc83a97db2139189f18m2!3d33.7727509!4d-84.3796847>, accessed March 3, 2017)

A growing city like Atlanta meant there was a need for in-town dining establishments to feed the politicians, businessmen, students and families that lived and

¹²¹ Richard Leon Thornton, *Blight in an Urban Corridor: Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta*, (Georgia State University: Atlanta, 1976), 32.

¹²² Thornton, 29.

worked nearby. By the 1940s, 16 tea rooms operated throughout the city¹²³ and Mary MacKenzie's¹²⁴ restaurant was one of them. As discussed in the previous chapter, tea rooms were an institution in the Northeast during the 1920s, and eventually made their way to the South. Margaret Lupo, the second and longest owner of Mary Mac's, claims the word "restaurant" was "too pedestrian" and "tea room" simply sounded better,¹²⁵ perhaps suggesting she and MacKenzie were less held to the traditions seen at fancy, upper crust tea rooms elsewhere, such as the Frances Virginia. A Mary Mac's assistant manager claims "tea room" indicated ownership by a woman, one who was likely a widow and in need of business patronage.¹²⁶ Many other tea rooms existed in the downtown area, and it was common for ownership and locations of these establishments to shift frequently and such was the case with Mary Mac's.

¹²³ Margaret Lupo, *Southern Cooking from Mary Mac's Tea Room*, (Cherokee Publishing Company: Atlanta, 1993), ix.

¹²⁴ A note about the spelling of Mary MacKenzie's name: The spelling of the original "Mary Mac" is unclear. Histories of the restaurant give two different spellings, while a history panel in the restaurant's foyer uses yet a third spelling, "MacKenzie". I have chosen to use that spelling since information included on the panel came from MacKenzie's niece, and presumably, the family spelling would be the most accurate.

¹²⁵ Lupo, ix.

¹²⁶ "Get Some Southern Comfort at Mary Mac's Tea Room," YouTube video, 4:29, from 1st Look interview, May 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw3LqD8NzoQ>.

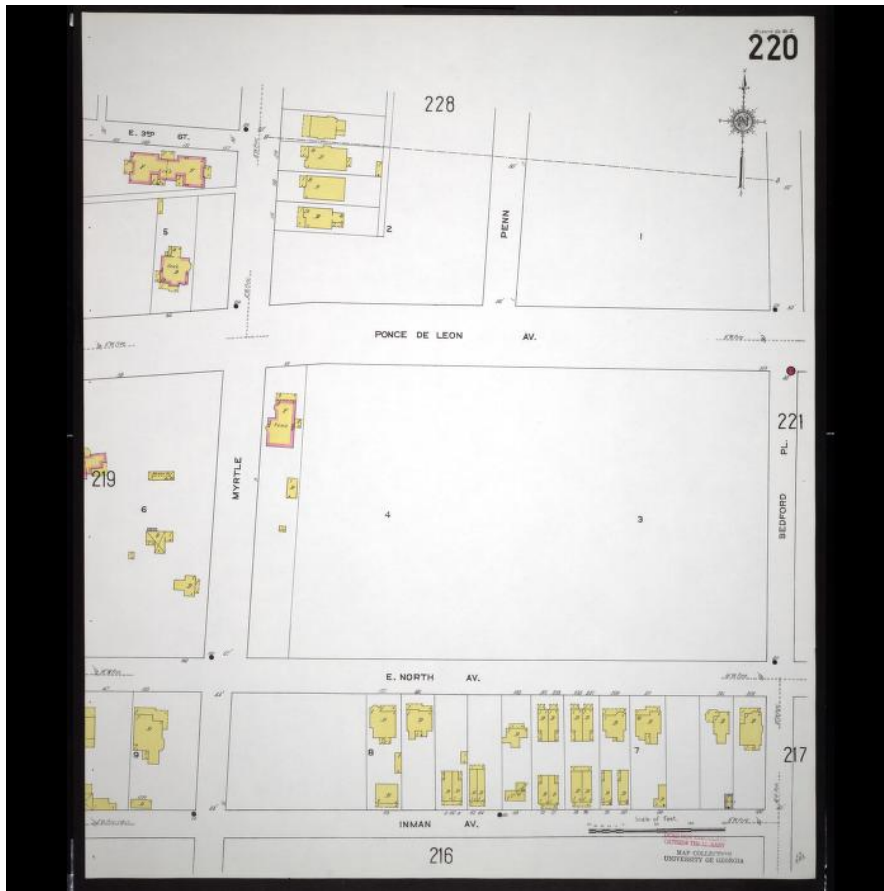


Figure 2. The empty block of Ponce de Leon between Myrtle St. and Penn Ave. would be the site of new storefronts built in 1915 that would later house Mary Mac’s Tea Room. (Sanborn Map of Atlanta, 1911, Vol. 2, Sheet 220.)



Figure 3. Mary Mac’s Tea Room today. Note the many windows from the multiple storefronts that the restaurant expanded into over time. (Google Map, Street View. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/224+Ponce+De+Leon+Ave+NE,+Atlanta,+GA+30308/@33.7725389,-84.3798626,3a,60y,327.62h,91.65t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1so5HHHybcKkmAYMQ7q1-hEQ!2e0!7i13312!8i6656!4m5!3m4!1s0x88f5046c25254a81:0x18af5056781c4390!8m2!3d33.7728589!4d-84.379878!6m1!1e1>, accessed March 13, 2017.)

Mary Mac’s location on Ponce de Leon Ave. is an important part of its history, given that the street itself is a prime example of how much Atlanta has changed since the early 20th century. An urban studies thesis written by Richard Leon Thornton in the 1970s defined the avenue in this way, “...Ponce de Leon’s most singular feature is its historic use as a wall or defense line – physically against a firestorm and psychologically against racial transition.”¹²⁷ For much of the 20th century, the neighborhoods to the south of Ponce de Leon were historically high-density, poor and black, and to the north were low-density, middle and upper-middle class white neighborhoods.¹²⁸ By the mid-1940s numerous factors began a slow, but steady decline of the Ponce de Leon corridor, the paving over of the street car lines (i.e. decreased walkability), increased vacancy

¹²⁷ Thornton, 4.

¹²⁸ Thornton, 26.

rates for commercial buildings, and early white flight away from the Buttermilk Bottoms neighborhood being a few examples.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, the area boasted a variety of businesses and immigrants: “In addition to the ball park and Sears store [the Atlanta Crackers stadium and the Sears regional headquarters, now known as Ponce City Market], there were nine gas stations, seven grocery stores, eleven restaurants or cafes, four flower shops, and three bakeries, plus many other shops and offices in the Corridor. Of particular interest were the many ethnic stores and restaurants, including Kosher, Italian, and Greek.”¹³⁰

Clearly the area was vibrant and diverse in terms of businesses, residences and racial make up, but due to the nation and region’s problems with racism and segregation, this diversity was not enough to sustain the economic health of the Ponce de Leon corridor indefinitely. The 1950s saw a steady movement of white churches and residents leaving the area for the suburbs and the overall vacancy rate increased.¹³¹ Despite these problems, Mary Mac’s continued to thrive. In fact, Thornton makes special note of Mary Mac’s while describing his own impressions of Ponce de Leon Ave., “Mary Mac’s Tea Room at the corner of Ponce de Leon and Myrtle St., also left a strong impression. It is a ‘family style’ restaurant begun in the twenties, that became enormously popular in the early seventies; so popular in fact, that it expanded several times into adjacent stores. My school friends and I went there many a Sunday evening to get an inexpensive meal and discuss the agonies and ecstasies of being

¹²⁹ Thornton, 27.

¹³⁰ Thornton, 27.

¹³¹ Thornton, 33.

‘Techmen.’”¹³² Based on evidence from various City Directories and restaurant history, we know Thornton to be mistaken in dating Mary Mac’s to the 1920s, as 224 Ponce de Leon Ave. was a series of stores and other tea rooms before Mary MacKenzie took over in 1945.

Nonetheless, Thornton’s love for Mary Mac’s, couched within his research on the Ponce de Leon corridor, is a great example of the importance of the restaurant to the local neighborhood. Located in the middle of downtown, guests have included employees and students from area businesses and schools and also by whomever lived in the neighborhood at the time. The state Capitol building is not far away, and the restaurant has been a meeting place for politicians for years. (Jimmy Carter has had his own named pudding since his political career began.) During the late 1960s the hippie movement took hold of the Midtown neighborhood to the north of Ponce de Leon¹³³ and by the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the same area became home to the local gay community. Georgia Tech students and professors are still regular customers, as well as employees and audience members from the Fox Theatre, which is around the corner on Peachtree St. Mary Mac’s commitment to quality food and welcoming atmosphere is perhaps part of the reason for the restaurant’s continuous success throughout the years and a contributing factor in its popularity.

In the early 1940s, city directories list the current Mary Mac’s address, 224 Ponce de Leon Avenue, as either vacant or the location of Royal Laundry Inc. The simple,

¹³² Thornton, 50.

¹³³ Thornton, 40.

one-story brick building, one amongst a line of storefronts, dates to 1915,¹³⁴ suggesting this section of Ponce de Leon Ave. was a popular commercial district for some time.

Current owner John Ferrell states,

“Ponce has been a thriving street for many years, with popular businesses and rooming houses dotting both sides of the street. Mary Mac’s is actually made up of 5 different storefronts that were purchased over the years to make one restaurant. The Ferrell Room was once a drug store, and even a hair salon. The Ponce room was Central Electric Lighting, and the Skyline room was once a bar. We also believe the current entrance was once an IGA store.”¹³⁵

During the early 1940s, Mary MacKenzie also owned the Rose Bowl Tea Room on nearby 17th Street¹³⁶ while a woman named Mrs. Fuller operated her tea room at nearby 985 Piedmont Ave.¹³⁷ Mary Mac’s history and city directories claim that at some point Mrs. Fuller moved her business from Piedmont Ave. to 224 Ponce de Leon Ave. and was eager to sell the business.¹³⁸ Others purchased it from her, only to close a short time later. This shifting ownership is supported by City Directory evidence, which lists the location as Young’s Tea Room in 1945, Ponce de Leon Tea Room from 1947-49, and then presumably in a return to Mrs. Fuller’s ownership, Fuller’s Tea Room from 1950-52. Ferrell also claims others tried to run Mrs. Fuller’s Tea Room at the Ponce de Leon location, but Mary MacKenzie was the only one to succeed. She purchased the business

¹³⁴ “Fulton County Board of Assessors,” accessed March 3, 2017,

http://qpublic9.qpublic.net/ga_display_dw.php?county=ga_fulton&KEY=14+004900100325.

¹³⁵ John Ferrell (owner, Mary Mac’s Tea Room) and Elizabeth Thompson (manager, Mary Mac’s Tea Room), in discussion with the author, Jan. 23, 2017, Atlanta, GA.

¹³⁶ John Ferrell, *Mary Mac’s Tea Room: 70 Years of Recipes from Atlanta’s Favorite Dining Room*, (Andrews McMeel Publishing: Kansas City, MO, 2010), 3.

¹³⁷ *Atlanta City Directory Co.’s Greater Atlanta (Georgia) city directory ... including Avondale, Buckhead ... and all immediate suburbs ...* Atlanta [etc.]: Atlanta City Directory Co. [etc.] for 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944.

¹³⁸ Ferrell, 5.

from Mrs. Fuller in 1951, but did not change the name to Mary Mac's Tea Room until 1953.¹³⁹

Little is known about Mary MacKenzie, though Margaret Lupo says she was a particularly hard-working woman who lost her husband, a Navy man, in the war and needed to find a way to support herself.¹⁴⁰ It is unknown how she financed the purchase of the business from Mrs. Fuller, but perhaps the transition was eased by the possibility that Mrs. Fuller left behind the necessary restaurant equipment and furniture. Most of the available history of Mary Mac's centers around the time of the second owner, Margaret Lupo. Lupo too, had previously owned her own tea room, Margaret's Tray Shop, and became friends with Mary MacKenzie through their similar occupations. At the time that Lupo owned Margaret's Tray Shop, she was a single mother looking to support herself and her son through owning a restaurant. During the 1950s she remarried, and closed the Tray Shop when the local business that supplied her regular lunch crowd moved to a new location. She took a few years off to spend time with her new family, but in 1962 MacKenzie was ready to retire, and Lupo was the perfect candidate to take over the business.¹⁴¹

In terms of business practices and general operation of the restaurant, the transition between Lupo and MacKenzie was seamless. However, getting the bank loan to purchase the restaurant was another matter. Due to Lupo being a woman, local banks refused to provide her a loan. She was fortunate enough to be able to turn to

¹³⁹ Ferrell, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Ferrell, 6.

¹⁴¹ Ferrell, 27-28.

other women in her family for financial help,¹⁴² but the practice of denying loans to women, and Lupo turning to her family instead, was something that would occur again as Mary Mac's expanded over the years. Lupo's daughter, Marie Lupo Nygren noted the irony: "All the bank presidents ate with her every day, but wouldn't lend her money!"¹⁴³ Eventually Lupo's husband, Harvey, would join her on staff at Mary Mac's as a host and produce buyer, but it is clear that this was Lupo's enterprise.¹⁴⁴

Under Lupo's ownership, Mary Mac's became a local institution. Throughout the 1960s-70s she would purchase the adjacent businesses as they became vacant, eventually expanding Mary Mac's to occupy seven dining rooms in the former storefronts. The Atlanta Room is the original dining room which sat 75 people; today the restaurant has seven dining rooms and serves 1,000-2,000 people a day.¹⁴⁵ The walls are covered with memorabilia of famous diners, famous regulars and newspaper clippings chronicling the restaurant's history. In the Atlanta Room in particular, is a painted mural of the downtown skyline from the 1990s. During that time, the neighborhood changed and declined somewhat,¹⁴⁶ but Mary Mac's business remained steady.

The restaurant went through two new, brief ownerships when Lupo retired in 1991, both of which failed.¹⁴⁷ The restaurant closed in late 1993, but was reopened in February of 1994 by John Ferrell, an old college friend of Marie Lupo Nygren. Ferrell has

¹⁴² Ferrell, 28.

¹⁴³ Ferrell, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Marie Lupo Nygren, "My Life in the '60's", Serenbe Style & Soul, last modified 2013, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.serenbestyleandsoul.com/category/margaret-lupo/>.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Thompson. Interview by Hollis Yates. Personal interview. Atlanta, Jan. 23, 2017.

¹⁴⁶ Thornton, 26.

¹⁴⁷ Ferrell, 62.

operated the restaurant ever since. His ownership was contingent upon Lupo's support and guidance, and her presence enabled him to mend the bad feelings resulting from the abrupt closings in the early 1990s. Much of the longtime kitchen and wait staff returned, and the daily operations and recipes that had been in place during Lupo's tenure were restored.¹⁴⁸ Ferrell is clear that the changes made under his ownership were primarily updates to the building's interior and furnishings.¹⁴⁹

When Lupo purchased the business, she changed little from MacKenzie's original operation, thus we can assume MacKenzie's influence over time. Ferrell writes of Lupo,

"Afraid that the customers wouldn't take to her as they had to the feisty redhead Mary McKinsey, Margaret made sure that all the day-to-day details of the restaurant remained unchanged. She kept the same cooks, used the same favorite recipes, and nurtured customers just like Mary McKinsey had. In her own gentle style, Margaret took to calling almost everyone "darlin'" or some other affectionate nickname."¹⁵⁰

MacKenzie's custom of requiring guests to fill out their own orders by pencil and paper, and providing a complimentary serving of cornbread and pot likker (the calcium-rich broth leftover from cooked greens) with every meal are two more ways MacKenzie's influence has remained for 70 plus years. Today the restaurant has a large menu, as customers began calling ahead to see if their favorite items were available before coming in. Ferrell decided to make all menu items available on all days. Historically lunch was the most profitable meal time, but in more recent years, dinner on nights and weekends has become more popular.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ferrell, 64.

¹⁴⁹ Ferrell, 64.

¹⁵⁰ Ferrell, 28.

¹⁵¹ John Ferrell and Elizabeth Thompson, discussion.

Regular table service is provided by a wait staff, many of whom have been working for Mary Mac's their entire adult lives. Ferrell writes, "We are blessed with cooks who have been with Mary Mac's for a long spell: who have ensured that the food is dependably good on a daily basis. After all, what good is comfort food if it doesn't taste like your memory of it?"¹⁵² Ferrell goes on to reference many of the cooks who have worked at Mary Mac's for more than 35 years, including Flora Hunter, who cooks the heavier dishes like meatloaf, soufflés, chicken and dumplings, and bread pudding; Shirley Mitchell, who specializes in baking breads, pies, cakes, and cinnamon rolls;¹⁵³ and Flo Patrick, Evelyn Stewart and Martha Evans, three of the long-time servers with regular customers that request to sit in their sections.¹⁵⁴ (For the record, all of the women mentioned in this paragraph are black.) The restaurant does not advertise. Ferrell says, "We do not advertise, but operate on a "word of mouth" basis – and it works well! [A]rea hotels, taxi and Uber drivers, are some of our greatest ambassadors to our newcomers."¹⁵⁵

Recipes have remained unchanged over the years, and freshness of products and simplicity of ingredients are the main ways that the kitchen upholds its standards. Throughout her cookbook, Lupo gives hints and tips for how to cook good southern food, encouraging creativity in the kitchen and saying, "Vegetables are my favorite food, and I love to try new recipes. But I always come back to these simple ways, southern

¹⁵² Ferrell, 122.

¹⁵³ Ferrell, 122.

¹⁵⁴ Ferrell, xii.

¹⁵⁵ John Ferrell and Elizabeth Thompson, discussion.

ways, of cooking vegetables... these recipes are basic, and your own taste can do the rest.”¹⁵⁶ Mary Mac’s has a large menu, but for the most part, all of the dishes offered fall within the general bounds of southern cuisine. Meat/entrée options include cheeseburgers, seafood, pork chops, ten different kinds of chicken (two fried versions), and more. As is customary at many meat and threes, a vegetable plate (four sides) is offered. The list of sides is 36 items long, and the dessert menu comparably short, but offers southern staples like key lime pie and different varieties of cobbler.¹⁵⁷

Mary Mac’s commitment to fresh food is matched by its longstanding message of inclusiveness, though it’s unclear how this message played out in practice. MacKenzie was the eldest of four sisters, and the mission of treating everyone as family began with her. A panel on the early history of the restaurant posted in the front waiting area reads,

“Mary Mac’s Tea Room has been a family refuge for decades, to all races genders and ethnicities across the broad spectrum of life, providing fresh, made-from-scratch Southern recipes to comfort the body, uncompromised Southern Hospitality to comfort the soul and an underlying, ever-present spirit of family to comfort the heart.”¹⁵⁸

Margaret Lupo continued this tradition without question, and the restaurants’ histories claim she made a point to treat every customer the same. Ferrell’s history notes,

“During the 1960s in the South, this was quite an unusual – some might say a courageous – style of hospitality. At a time when segregation was still the prevailing and accepted practice, Margaret’s daughters recall, it was forbidden inside the doors of Mary Mac’s. Judy Lupo Wold remembers, ‘She treated everyone exactly the same. They all got patted on the back.’ White and blacks always sat in the same dining rooms at Mary Mac’s. It was a good business decision. Marie Lupo Nygren recalls, ‘She believed money was the same color,

¹⁵⁶ Lupo, 117.

¹⁵⁷ “Menu,” Mary Mac’s, <http://www.marymacs.com/menu>, accessed March 3, 2017.

¹⁵⁸ Author unknown, History Panel from Mary Mac’s Tea Room, date unknown, Atlanta, GA.

whether they were white or black.’ But Marie also recalls with a laugh, ‘She never did have a white cook.’”¹⁵⁹

As mentioned irreverently by her daughter, Lupo regularly employed African Americans. In a YouTube interview, two of Mary Mac’s long time servers, Martha Evans and Evelyn Stewart, supported these statements. Both began working for Lupo in the 1970s after moving to Atlanta. Evans says that while walking up and down Ponce de Leon looking for employment, Lupo stepped outside to ask her if she was lost. Evans said she was, but that she was also looking for a job. Lupo said to go home and change, come back, and that she would hire her. Evans began working in the kitchen, but after two years, became the first black server at Mary Mac’s. She says of the experience, “I was nervous, but I got into it.”¹⁶⁰ While it appears from Stewart’s experience that Lupo was more colorblind than her peers, Stewart’s experience also falls in line with the white female employer/black female employee relationship that defined many southern women’s’ working relationships for much of the 20th century.

Nygren, Lupo’s daughter, writes fondly of growing up in the neighborhood and at the restaurant. She writes, “When Mother bought Mary Mac’s in the early sixties, Ponce de Leon was already an eclectic and colorful mix of businesses and homes. It was an interesting area to explore.”¹⁶¹ Nygren writes of her mother’s stories of Miss Bessy, the owner of a brothel across the street saying, “Mom always had a cordial relationship with Miss Bessy- no judgements. She said Miss Bessy was providing a service just as she was.

¹⁵⁹ Ferrell, 28.

¹⁶⁰ “Mary Mac’s Tea Room: a journey behind the soul food – Oxford African American Studies Center,” YouTube video, 12:40, from Oxford Academic (Oxford University Press), March 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=mary+mac%27s+atl.

¹⁶¹ Nygren, “My Life in the ‘60’s”, Serenbe Style & Soul, accessed Feb 13, 2017.

Mom always had a welcoming atmosphere for all of Atlanta’s colorful characters. In her dining room, everyone had a place at her tables.”

Ferrell draws together many of the themes present in southern foodways and history, including the black and white female experience when he writes,

“Most of the cooks are African-American, and that’s not unusual for Southern food or Southern kitchens. Many of the white women in the South learned to cook from the black help that were employed by families for generations. This meant that many of the same food traditions were passed down through both the black and white communities. Food is a shared experience in Atlanta, and the racial makeup of the dining guests at Mary Mac’s has always reflected an appreciation of the same types of dishes.”¹⁶²

Mary Mac’s message of inclusivity, real or overstated, coupled with high standards for fresh and quality food are part of what have enabled it to remain in operation for so long. There are as many long-time, regular guests at Mary Mac’s as there are long-time servers. Evelyn Stewart, the other server interviewed, said her regulars were one of her favorite parts of the job.¹⁶³ Miss Jo Carter, a white woman and another Mary Mac’s mainstay, has a unique role at the restaurant as Goodwill Ambassador. Her job is simply to check in with each table and ensure they are enjoying their meal, feel welcome, and offer them a backrub.

The feeling of family is as important to the mission of Mary Mac’s as the quality food and traditions of southern cooking. These factors have contributed to Mary Mac’s becoming something of a tourist destination in Atlanta. Indeed, Resolution 477 by the Georgia House of Representatives named the restaurant “Atlanta’s Dining Room” in

¹⁶² Ferrell, 121.

¹⁶³ “Mary Mac’s Tea Room: a journey behind the soul food – Oxford African American Studies Center,” YouTube video.

March of 2011, making official the importance of this place in Atlanta's history.

Elizabeth Thompson estimates that about half of their customer base is tourists¹⁶⁴ and Lupo and Ferrell's cookbooks, t-shirts, and homemade hot sauce are available for purchase in the lobby as souvenirs. Mary Mac's appears to take the tourism in stride, and are grateful for the business, but their commitment to quality comfort food appears to supersede any desire to be a tourist destination.

H & H Restaurant

Much like Atlanta, Macon experienced a considerable impact from World War II, from the many military facilities in the surrounding area including the reactivation of the Camp Wheeler Army Base, the Macon Naval Ordnance Plant, a British Royal Air Force training site, and the opening of Robins Air Force Base in neighboring Houston County.¹⁶⁵ The longtime agricultural economy expanded to include the farming of new crops (peanuts, tobacco, etc.) that northern companies invested in and mechanized. This brought new jobs to the area and with it many non-southerners and blacks to the city. According to the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, "industrial employment soared from 6,500 in 1940 to 16,000 in 1949".¹⁶⁶

Segregation between the races was standard in Macon, and as seen in other urban areas, the downtown district became the site of increased racial intermingling and tension during the post war period. Written histories of Macon take pride in the fact

¹⁶⁴ John Ferrell and Elizabeth Thompson, discussion.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, "Macon," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 4, 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Anderson, "Macon," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 4, 2017.

that desegregation occurred in their city without any bloodshed or property damage,^{167,168} but this should not make light of the fact that integration was still a slow and arduous process. Andrew M. Manis writes, “Thus in Macon, as in America more generally, success in desegregation is more visible than successful integration.”¹⁶⁹ Through the 1930s Jim Crow policies made it difficult for Macon blacks to vote, despite their relatively large population numbers.¹⁷⁰

The war effort, while economically good for Macon, also promoted greater organization on the part of black and white progressive committees. Manis writes, “Fighting a war against Hitler’s Nazi ideology... accentuated the final irony of an America fighting a racist ideology while trying to keep its own racist ideology intact.”¹⁷¹ Blacks in Macon, and undoubtedly elsewhere, picked up on this irony and used the opportunity to continue to push for equal rights and integration. Manis goes on to refer to the post-World War II period as “the forgotten years” of the struggle to end segregation and writes, “Macon provides a serviceable test case for the thesis that the war itself became a catalyst in immediate postwar years for the beginnings of racial change.”¹⁷² Through the efforts of many committees, integration in Macon slowly took place. There was pushback to desegregate the school system in the 1950s, and in the 1960s, President Kennedy’s administration inspired renewed efforts to desegregate businesses and

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, “Macon,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 4, 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Andrew M. Manis, *Macon Black and White: An Unutterable Separation in the American Century*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press and The Tubman African American Museum, 2004), 7-8.

¹⁶⁹ Manis, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Manis, 112.

¹⁷¹ Manis, 139.

¹⁷² Manis, 140.

facilities downtown. Unlike the other two cities studied for this thesis, since the mid-20th century Macon enjoyed a popular music scene that included black and white artists such as James Brown, Otis Redding, Little Richard, and the Allman Brothers Band. The support of the local black music scene from Macon's youth contributed to the dissolution of racial barriers during the 1950s and 60s.¹⁷³

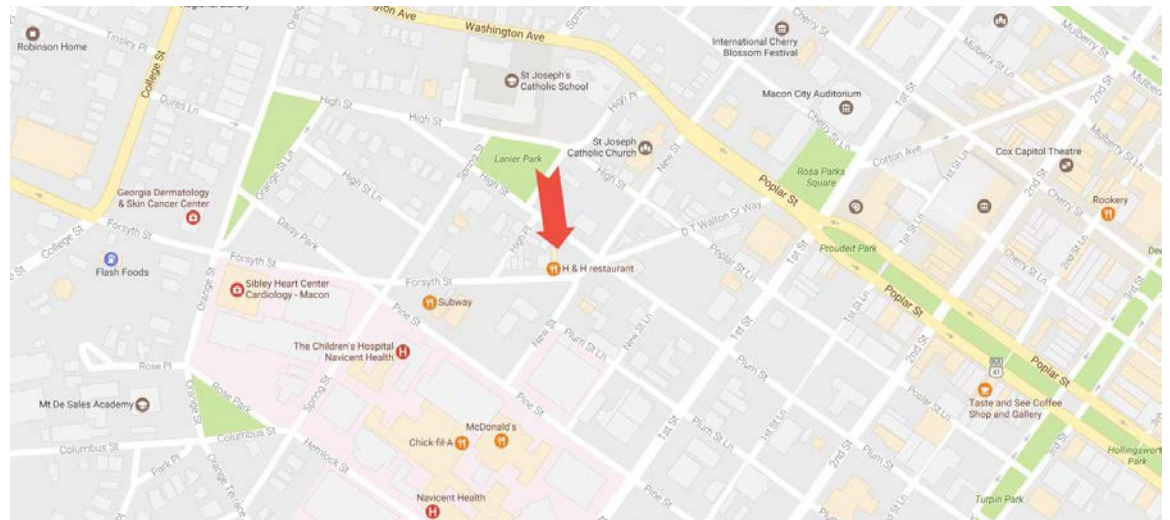


Figure 4. Current map showing the location of H & H Restaurant. (Google Maps, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/H+%26+H+restaurant/@32.8357081,-83.6370194,17z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x88f3fe7d801b90a7:0x1ce73aeb2cf0b94c!8m2!3d32.8357081!4d-83.6348307>, accessed March 13, 2017.)

The epicenter of black activism and business in Macon was in the Cotton Avenue District in downtown Macon. The Historic Macon Foundation writes, “In the midst of the twentieth century, Jim Crow laws forced African Americans to establish separate business districts. Cotton Avenue became one of those districts and grew into a major center for business with entrepreneurs working as everything from barbers and

¹⁷³ Anderson, “Macon,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 4, 2017.

shoemakers to lawyers and dentists.”¹⁷⁴ During the early 20th century, numerous churches, a government building, medical buildings, and private homes were constructed in the area. As the century progressed, some of these businesses would have direct or tangential connections to H & H restaurant, which is located at 807 Forsyth St., one of the main thoroughfares.

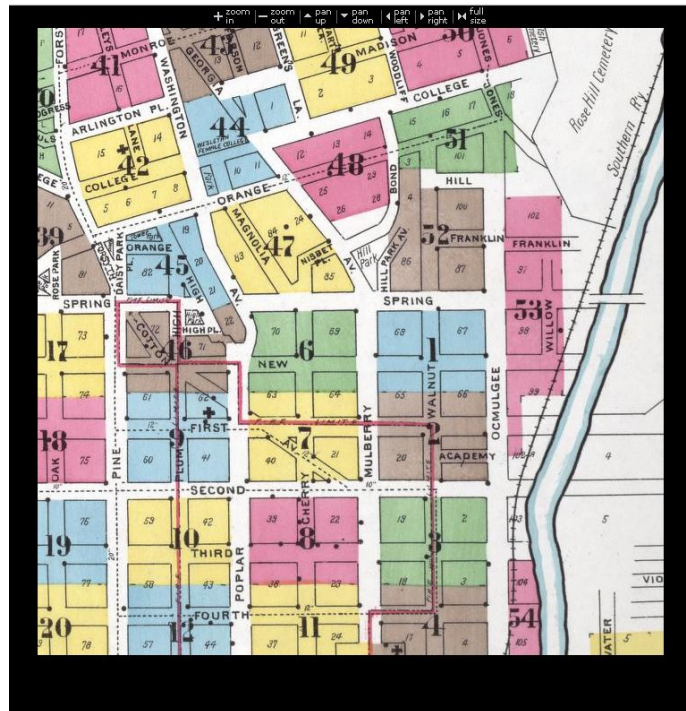


Figure 5. This is a close up of a Sanborn Map of downtown Macon from 1908. The Cotton Ave. District is roughly contained within the red outline, which indicated as the “fire limit”. The building that would later house H & H is in the beige block, number 16. (Sanborn Map, Macon, index sheet, 1908)

¹⁷⁴ Author unknown, “Walking Through History: Cotton Avenue District,” Historic Macon Foundation, Macon, GA.



Figure 6. The arrow points to what would later be 807 Forsyth St. and the current location of H & H Restaurant. Eventually Cotton Ave. was renamed Forsyth St. to the South and D.T. Walton Sr. Way to the North. (Sanborn Map of Macon, 1908, Sheet 46.)

The opening of H & H in 1959 by Inez “Mama” Hill and Louise “Mama” Hudson

predates the opening of Capricorn Records down the street by almost a decade, but their histories became entangled early on. The Historic Macon Foundation writes,

“In the late 1960s, Otis Redding and the Walden brothers set up shop as Redwal Music Co. in the right side of the building... This site, in a black business district, was picked intentionally since this was the first integrated office in Macon. At its height, Redwal, a R&B and soul producer, employed more African American musicians than MoTown. However, Redding’s death in 1967 left the brothers questioning whether or not they could continue without him. To move on, Capricorn Records was established, [and] the genre of Southern Rock was born.”¹⁷⁵

It is plausible H & H’s early customers were primarily black and middle-class, given their location in the Cotton Ave. District, ownership by two black women, and the social

¹⁷⁵ Author unknown, “Walking Through History: Cotton Avenue District,” Historic Macon Foundation, Macon, GA.

norms of a segregation in a racially tense city. However, the proximity to Capricorn Records and the burgeoning Macon popular music scene would eventually change that. The Allman Brothers Band, a local southern rock group, sometimes ate at H & H in between recording sessions down the road. Upon noticing that the group of hippies were so short on cash that they had pooled their money to share two plates of food, Mama Louise allowed them to eat for free and pay her back when they could. Thus a long relationship between the band and the restaurant began. As the band grew in popularity, they never stopped dining at H & H and Mama Louise became known as their second “mama”.¹⁷⁶ Eventually the restaurant became known as a welcoming place for musicians and members of the sixties counterculture in Macon.

The building at 807 Forsyth St. has housed a number of businesses before the arrival of H & H Restaurant. According to the Historic Macon Foundation, the c. 1900 brick two-story building was the location of a funeral home owned by C.H. Hubbard and C. H. Hutchings, Sr. In 1910, Hutchings left the partnership to start his own business with his sons a couple of blocks away on New Street.¹⁷⁷ Old photographs of 807 Forsyth St. show a two-story, brick building with a typical, pressed-metal frame decorative cornice around the front door and front window of the building. Brick crenellation can be seen across the roof line, indicating a vernacular Italianate design. The building as it stands today has lost most of these decorative features. With the exception of a single leaf

¹⁷⁶ Author unknown, “Walkthrough Guide, The Allman Brothers Band Museum at the Big House,” Macon, GA.

¹⁷⁷ Author unknown, “Walking Through History: Cotton Avenue District,” Historic Macon Foundation, Macon, GA.

motif on the second story, the façade is simple brick with non-descript windows and door. The sign out front identifying the restaurant is white with black lettering and a black mushroom, a simple symbolic connection to the Allman Brothers who have used mushrooms on their album artwork and memorabilia since the early 1970s.

It is unclear if the restaurant ever changed locations, but collective memory suggests it has always been at its current location. City Directory research for H & H provided much less information than the other two case studies. The restaurant does not show up in the directory at all until 1972, where it is listed at its current location at 807 Forsyth St. Cross checking that address prior to 1972 lists the location as either vacant (1965), the site of Dudley Hughes Vocational School (1966-68), or curiously, the street address is skipped altogether (1969 and 1970). Interviews with the current owners indicate confusion over plats in this section of downtown, which could explain the lack of public information. Indeed, tax records give a different address for the lot, putting the address on the reverse side of the building, 820 High St.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ "Bibb County, GA," qPublic.net, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=702&LayerID=11410&PageTypeID=4&PageID=4868&KeyValue=Q0740545OC72%207B>.



Figure 7. H&H Restaurant today. Note the black and white mushroom sign out front, a nod to the Allman Brothers Band. (Google Maps, Street View.

https://www.google.com/maps/place/807+Forsyth+St,+Macon,+GA+31201/@32.835628,-83.6347728,3a,75y,339h,90t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1skRljql1_PSmtw0rU7MSnvQ!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo2.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DkRljql1_PSmtw0rU7MSnvQ%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dsearch.TACTILE.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D86%26h%3D86%26yaw%3D339.96667%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656!4m5!3m4!1s0x88f3fe7d7fe32265:0x9a3546ca9b0446a6!8m2!3d32.8357081!4d-83.6348307!6m1!1e1, accessed March 13, 2017.)

Inez Hill and her goddaughter, and cousin, Louise Hudson opened H & H Restaurant in downtown Macon in 1959. Both Hill and Hudson are known by their southern salutations, “Mama Hill” and “Mama Louise” respectively, and were known to be more like mother and daughter than merely cousins.¹⁷⁹ Mama Hill, the elder of the two, moved to Macon in 1950 with her husband who had found employment at the Robins Air Force Base. Mama Hill passed away in 2007 after collapsing at H & H, and at the time her great-grandson was quoted as saying, “She never took a day off. She worked every day, even Sundays... She used to say she loved work.”¹⁸⁰ Indeed the local

¹⁷⁹ Phillip Ramati, “H & H co-owner Inez Hill dies,” *The Telegraph*, Dec. 18, 2007.

¹⁸⁰ Ramati, *The Telegraph*.

Macon newspaper quotes Hill as saying, “I look forward to coming to work every day... I’m going to do it as long as the Lord keeps me going. I’ve been working all my life. When I hear others talk about how hard it is, I tell them it’s nothing compared to plowing behind a mule all day.”¹⁸¹

The restaurant continued to operate with Mama Louise at the helm until December 2013. At that time the restaurant briefly closed. The Moonhanger Group, a hospitality firm run by Maconites Chad Evans and Wes Griffith, had recently taken over ownership of a local, popular dive bar and was in the process of turning that business around when they were contacted about H & H. Chad Evans says, “We actually got a phone call from the Allman Brothers Museum. They said Mama needed some help keeping it up, and the community wanted it to remain there and working in the community. So Wes and I bought it.”¹⁸² They remodeled the kitchen and reopened H & H in August 2014. The duo has been credited with starting the economic revival seen downtown. Since 2009, they have opened or reopened four restaurants and the Cox Theatre in the downtown area, including H & H. A restaurant industry article profiling the two writes, “Just a decade or two ago, Macon was a sleepy Southern city that many passed by while traveling elsewhere. Today, however, it’s a thriving community with a vibrant downtown... Its urban core has more than 600 occupied storefronts and counting, including about 40 restaurants.”¹⁸³ No doubt the author of the article was not

¹⁸¹ Ramati, *The Telegraph*.

¹⁸² Chad Evans (co-owner, H & H Restaurant) and Brad Evans (friend, business associate of C. Evans) in discussion with the author, Feb. 4, 2017, Athens, GA.

¹⁸³ Kevin Hogencamp, “Macon Mojo – Moonhanger Restaurant Group,” *Restaurantinformer.com*, Sept. 15, 2016.

fully versed in Macon's history and calling it a "sleepy Southern city" is an easy cliché to lean on. But the numbers provided suggest an improving downtown economy thanks to the Moonhanger Group and others in the community.

When H & H reopened in 2014, the Macon *Telegraph* article covering the event made a point to say, "Mama Louise has been working with the new owners to make sure the recipes stay the same even though they're now cooked in a renovated kitchen."¹⁸⁴ The article reports positive reviews of the food and a large lunch crowd. The restaurant has remained in regular operation since. A local music history guide was quoted separately as saying, she was proud of what Moonhanger did with H&H: "Not only did they rescue the establishment, they retained its dignity and flavor, in everything from the food to the well-worn décor."¹⁸⁵

H & H currently is open from Tuesday through Saturday for lunch and Sunday for brunch. They do not serve dinner. Each day has a different menu with two to three meat choices, three to four sides, and as is customary, the choice between cornbread and a roll. The restaurant consists of one room with the kitchen in the back, and regular table service by a wait staff is provided. Framed memorabilia from Southern rock and Macon music history covers both walls. Chad Evans makes efforts to make the food healthier by *not* cooking with lard, moving away from canned ingredients and using fresh produce and ingredients. He admits this does drive up the price he charges for food.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Mark Vanderhoek, "H & H Reopens to packed house, positive reviews", *Macon Telegraph*, Aug. 13, 2014.

¹⁸⁵ Hogenkamp, Restaurantinformer.com.

¹⁸⁶ Chad Evans and Brad Evans, discussion.

Today H & H maintains a regular lunch crowd of locals and tourists from the Rock Candy Music Tour of Macon. A trip to the Big House, the Allman Brothers Museum a few miles down the road, includes a special section of memorabilia dedicated to Mama Louise and H & H. The display includes one of the original Formica tables from the restaurant, a black and white photograph of the band eating in the restaurant, and a signed bill from Mama Louise comping one of their meals. The connection to the Allman Brothers and other local musicians is important to the history of H & H and desegregation in Macon. H & H appears to get a certain degree of its business from guests on local music history tours that include the restaurant on its list of important sites. The connection between the restaurant and the Big House Museum appears to be mutually beneficial.

When food and travel website Thrilist.com named H & H the most iconic restaurant in Georgia in 2015, the H & H general manager was quoted in the *Macon Telegraph* as saying, "I do understand the significance of a restaurant like this... Being that it was owned by an African-American back in '59 was iconic in itself."¹⁸⁷ Indeed when Mama Hill passed away, her daughter and granddaughter were quoted as saying, "She never met a stranger," and "She was everybody's mother. She fed everybody's children."¹⁸⁸ This combination of quality food and treating everyone as family are major reasons why H & H has remained so popular through the years.

¹⁸⁷ Jennifer Burk, "Macon's H & H named most iconic restaurant in Georgia," *The Telegraph*, Jan. 5, 2015.

¹⁸⁸ Ramati, "H & H co-owner Inez Hill dies," *The Telegraph*.

Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room

Savannah's history as a port city has long outlasted its reputation as a tourist destination. In the 1920s and 30s major paper-pulp and food processing industries were developed in response to the cotton industry's devastation by the boll weevil. These new goods needed to be transported, and the Savannah River was the place to do it. This pre-existing economy and its coastal location made Savannah an obvious choice for increased military operations at the onset of World War II. During this period it became the nation's most active shipyard in the production of Liberty Ships.¹⁸⁹ The opening of Hunter Army Airfield within the city in 1929 and the influx of personnel at nearby Fort Stewart made Savannah a growing military town. Many people moved to the city to fill these positions and those not directly affiliated with the military often stayed in boardinghouses in the city.

Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room, located at 107 West Jones St., is part of Pulaski Ward, which is anchored by Pulaski Square. The square is one of the original 24 laid out by Oglethorpe in 1733 and both the square and ward are in honor of Cazimir Pulaski, a Polish Revolutionary War hero. Pulaski Square is bisected by Bernard St., and West Jones St. is one of the four boundary streets.¹⁹⁰ According to online sources, Pulaski Ward was, "...at its time, the largest redevelopment project of the Historic Savannah Foundation. It is said that at one time, the homes in this ward could not be sold for even \$2,000 and that the Georgia grey bricks used in their construction were worth more

¹⁸⁹ Buddy Sullivan, "Savannah," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 4, 2017.

¹⁹⁰ "Historic Pulaski Square," Visit Historic Savannah, <http://www.visit-historic-savannah.com/pulaskisquare.html>, last modified 2016, accessed March 4, 2017.

than the homes and the land that they sat on.”¹⁹¹ This information coincides with Marcia Thompson’s interview, in which she said her grandmother was one of the first to restore a historic building in Pulaski Ward, but wanted to wait until the timing was right and it was financially prudent to do so.¹⁹²

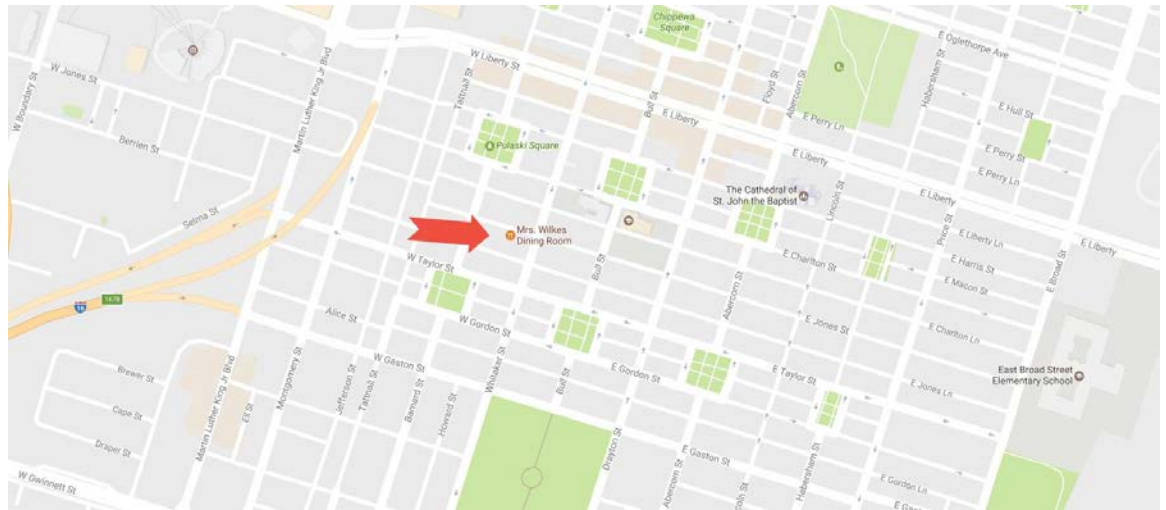


Figure 8. Current map showing Mrs. Wilkes’ Dining Room. (Google Maps, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Mrs.+Wilkes+Dining+Room/@32.0727589,-81.0981617,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x88fb9e69bca0eacb:0xbac585eb4bd24bc6!8m2!3d32.0727589!4d-81.095973>, accessed March 13, 2017.)

Like many historic urban areas, downtown Savannah experienced a period of decline during the mid to late 20th century. Attention from residents and city planners was directed at the newer areas of town surrounding the original squares. A November 1971 profile of Mrs. Wilkes’ Dining Room in *Esquire* magazine (one of the first Mrs. Wilkes’ agreed to¹⁹³) provides some history, “The old city became a slum. The lovely

¹⁹¹ “Historic Pulaski Square,” Visit Historic Savannah, <http://www.visit-historic-savannah.com/pulaskisquare.html>, last modified 2016, accessed March 4, 2017.

¹⁹² Marcia Thompson (manager, Mrs. Wilkes’ Dining Room), in discussion with the author, March 1, 2017, Athens, GA.

¹⁹³ Sandi Klein, “Marcia Thompson, Restaurateur,” podcast, 24:45, from Sandi Klein’s Conversations with Creative Women, posted Dec. 27, 2016, <http://sandikleinshow.com/podcast/marcia-thompson-restaurateur/>.

houses, completely neglected, gradually decayed and disintegrated. Then, in the 1950's, real-estate developers began planning to raze the old city and "modernize" the top of the hill [the historic downtown area]. At this crucial moment, a few citizens realized that something of the deepest value in terms of American history would be irrevocably lost."¹⁹⁴ The formation of the Historic Savannah Foundation in 1955 by concerned locals can be credited with turning around the downtown area. The foundation immediately established a revolving fund, purchasing the dilapidated historic homes and reselling them to new owners with strict caveats for thoughtful façade restorations made within a timely fashion.¹⁹⁵ The gray brick townhome at 105-107 West Jones St. (with Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room in the basement) drew headlines in 1965 when the Wilkes family formally purchased the building. John T. Edge writes, "To buy a home in the historic district was a bold move at the time, one that the family had not entertained before the establishment of the Historic Savannah Foundation, recalls Mrs. Wilkes. [She said,] 'We had never purchased the house because this area was fast becoming a slum.' Indeed, it was a bold enough move that... the local news media were there to cover the event."¹⁹⁶

The Wilkes have restored the upstairs quarters of the house twice; once in the mid-1960s when they purchased the entire property¹⁹⁷ and again in the mid-2000s when Marcia turned the downstairs parlors into two vacation rental apartments.¹⁹⁸ This

¹⁹⁴ Roy Andries de Groot, "Mrs. Wilkes's Boarding House: Culinary Savannah culminates in the \$1.50 table d'hôte," *Esquire*, November 1971, 202.

¹⁹⁵ "The Story of Preservation in Savannah," Historic Savannah Foundation, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://www.myhsf.org/about-us/the-story-of-preservation-in-savannah/>.

¹⁹⁶Sema Wilkes, *Mrs. Wilkes' Boardinghouse Cookbook: Recipes and recollections from Her Savannah Table*, (Ten Speed Press: Berkely, CA: 2001), 52.

¹⁹⁷ Wilkes, 52.

¹⁹⁸ Klein, 11:24.

brings the total number of apartments upstairs to six, increasing the economic vitality of the building and in turn the rest of the neighborhood, which has made a steady comeback since the 1950s. The downtown historic center is now a major tourist destination. The story of Mrs. Wilkes' plays an important role in this revitalization.

The house at 107 West Jones St. is typical of the neighborhood. Many of the homes are row houses, town houses, two to four stories tall, and for the bigger homes, employ a center-hall, two over two plan.¹⁹⁹ Italianate and Greek Revival styles are predominant in the neighborhood, though the Wilkes' house is a simple Italianate design and uses traditional Savannah gray brick. It was constructed in 1880,²⁰⁰ with two upstairs levels used for housing and the basement area used as a dining and kitchen area.

¹⁹⁹ "Pulaski Ward", <http://www.visit-historic-savannah.com/pulaskisquare.html>, last modified 2016, accessed March 4, 2017.

²⁰⁰ "Property Record Cards," Chatham County Georgia Board of Assessors, accessed February 24, 2017, <http://boa.chathamcounty.org/DesktopModules/ChathamCounty/BoardofAssessors/PropertyRecordCard.aspx?RollYear=2016&PIN=2-0032-17-007>.

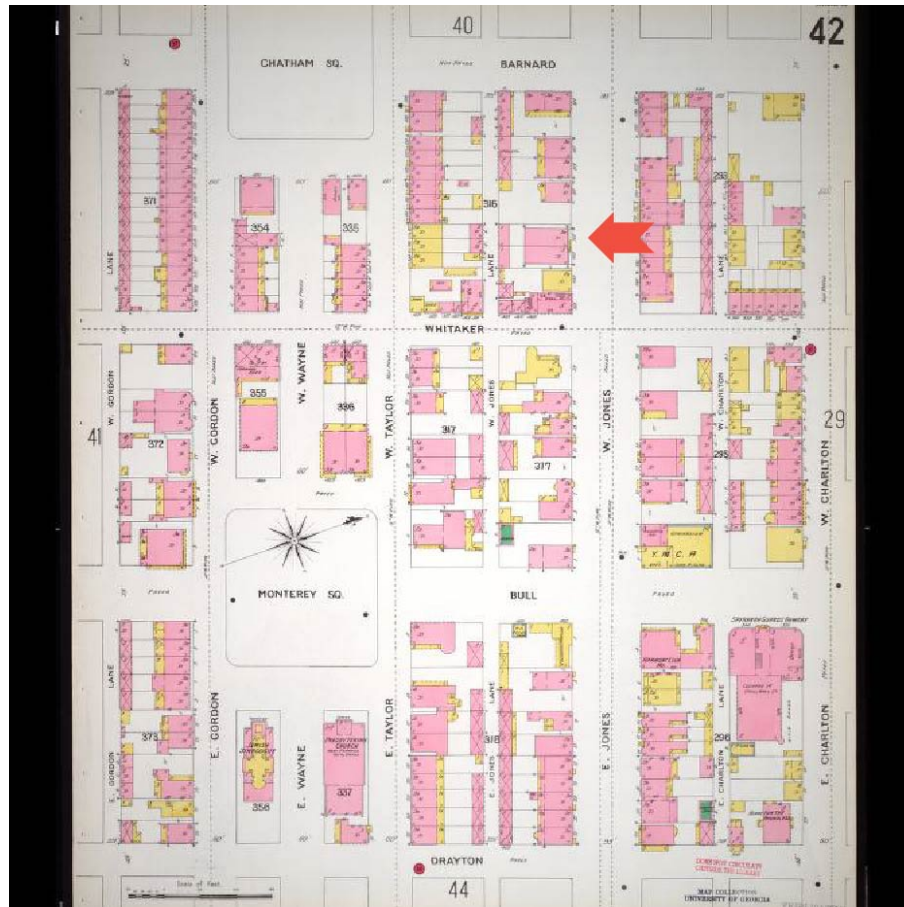


Figure 9. The earliest Sanborn map to show the row house at 107 West Jones Street that would later house Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room in the basement. (Sanborn Map of Savannah, 1898, Sheet 42.)

Mrs. Dennis Dixon's boardinghouse was one of many such businesses in the area.²⁰¹ This was the "golden era" of boardinghouses, when numerous brownstones in the historic district were used as lodging for the middle-classes working in service and industry jobs. Mrs. Dixon's Boardinghouse had been in operation for almost 30 years when Lois H. Wilkes became a boarder in the early 1940s. His family farm in Aimwell, Georgia (near Vidalia) was purchased by the government for use as an airfield for the war effort. Lois Wilkes came to Savannah looking for work in the shipyards, but

²⁰¹ Wilkes, 32.

ultimately found employment with the railroad. On the weekends, his wife Sema would visit him and eventually she began helping Mrs. Dixon in the kitchen. By 1943, Mrs. Dixon was ready to retire and Mrs. Wilkes was ready to step in and purchase and operate the business.²⁰²

City Directory research on Mrs. Wilkes' supports her simple history of ownership and no advertising. In 1942, the 107 West Jones St. owner is listed as Dennis H. Dixon, presumably a relation to Mrs. Dixon, and perhaps her husband. We know from the histories of Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room that she took over operations in 1943. Indeed, in 1950 and in 1951, the address is listed to Lois H. Wilkes, but gives no indication of any business. The restaurant is never listed under the "Restaurants" section, and for earlier years, no section for boardinghouses existed. We can summarize, then, a clean line of ownership at that address for the Wilkes family. Note that for both Mrs. Wilkes and Mrs. Dixon though, that a male family member was considered the head of household and therefore of that address was listed under his name. This suggests that these women owned the business in question, but not the building.

²⁰² Wilkes, 36.



Figure 10. Current image of 107 West Jones St. The line is for people waiting to eat at Mrs. Wilkes' in the basement. (Google Maps, Street View,

Mrs. Wilkes served breakfast, lunch, and dinner in addition to providing boardinghouse accommodations. According to restaurant history, Savannah had 50 or more boardinghouses at the time of the war, with five alone on West Jones St. Some were reportedly nicer than others, and Mrs. Wilkes' became known as the one with the best food.²⁰³ Eventually, Mrs. Wilkes was able to give up the boarding arm of the business and operate only as a restaurant, offering meals for 50-75 cents.²⁰⁴ Since then, the business has stayed in the family. The fourth generation currently owns and

²⁰³ Wilkes, *Mrs. Wilkes' Boardinghouse Cookbook*, 38.

²⁰⁴ Klein, "Marcia Thompson, Restaurateur," 9:15.

operates the dining room. Mrs. Wilkes changed the name of the dining room to its current eponym and began using her own recipes, but otherwise kept daily operations the same.

Mrs. Wilkes learned to cook from her mother who cooked for family and employees on their family farm in South Georgia. Her mother passed away when Mrs. Wilkes was seven, and her father at age nine, so it became her responsibility to make sure she and her siblings were fed.²⁰⁵ She married young at age 16 and adopted her younger brothers before making the move to Savannah. Though her life was difficult, an understanding of hard work and the knowledge of how to cook in large quantities made for an easy transition into the restaurant kitchen later.²⁰⁶

Mrs. Wilkes died in 2002 at the age of 95. The restaurant closed for a few months while the family decided whether to reopen. Eventually Ryon Thompson, Mrs. Wilkes' great-grandson, took over operations and reopened in February of 2004. He made few changes from his great-grandmother's operating practices. "We try to keep things as close to the way we have always done them as possible because it was what had always worked. It made the place what it was."²⁰⁷ At the time, Ryon was also quoted in a local magazine interview as saying he kept the same cooks that were previously employed, as it helps to "maintain consistency in the quality of food."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Klein, "Marcia Thompson, Restaurateur," 8:08.

²⁰⁶ Klein, "Marcia Thompson, Restaurateur," 9:30.

²⁰⁷ James C. Bryant, "New Life for a Savannah Tradition," Savannah Magazine, Feb. 2006, 117.

²⁰⁸ Bryant, 117.

The restaurant consists of two dining rooms, each with a few large oval tables that seat 10. Guests are admitted in two waves beginning at 11 a.m. until 2 p.m., and it is customary for a line to form outside in anticipation of the restaurant opening. Guests file in and are often seated with whomever they met in line, and the friendly nature that develops as a consequence is a part of the experience of eating at Mrs. Wilkes. Until her death in 2002, Mrs. Wilkes gave the blessing before mealtime to the first wave of diners every day at 11:00 a.m. Now her great-grandson Ryon gives her same blessing. As seats become available at the tables, new guests sit down. There is no printed menu at Mrs. Wilkes. Food is served family-style, meaning large plates and bowls of various entrees and sides are placed on each table. Diners choose from the options available on the table to eat and a flat rate is paid for the meal. The kitchen decides daily what will be on the menu. Mrs. Wilkes' is an example of a restaurant that does not serve its food in a strict "meat and three" format, but the wide availability of menu items that fall within the bounds of southern food makes the term meat and three generally applicable to this business.

Originally, Mrs. Wilkes' served three meals a day, including dinner from 5:30 to 7 p.m., but in the early 1970s, dinner became "too much"²⁰⁹ and she cut back to only breakfast and lunch service, including take-out service for lunch. After Ryon took over ownership, the family decided to put all of their efforts into making lunch.²¹⁰ Today lunch is only served (no take out) Monday through Friday.

²⁰⁹ Klein, 19:37.

²¹⁰ Klein, 21:33.

The restaurant did not advertise for many years, as they were able to rely on word-of-mouth recommendations. Mrs. Wilkes did not place a sign out front until 1987. Taxi drivers knew where it was and would drop tourists off, after finding them wandering around the neighborhood searching for the restaurant because they did not know where it was located.²¹¹ Business is still steady and Marcia Thompson says, “We like to say we have 200 people for lunch every day.”²¹² She says the business employs four to five cooks, four to five additional kitchen staff, and four servers who “have been there forever” and whose mothers were servers before them.²¹³

At the time of the writing of a 1971 *Esquire* article, the dining room was still largely a place for locals. The words of author Roy Andries de Groot are telling: “Dinner on my last evening in Savannah was an experience – an eating place almost totally unknown, except to a few local cognoscenti, who refer to it in whispers as ‘Mrs. Wilkes’s Boarding House.’ ...In its proper context, one could hardly praise the food too highly. It was the exact equivalent, in regional Savannah terms, of the food in a first-class *pension* in a French provincial city. It was like dining at home with Mrs. Wilkes.”²¹⁴ De Groot goes on to describe his brief encounter with Mrs. Wilkes upon leaving, saying she shook his hand and, upon realizing he was a visitor to the area, apologized for having to recently increase her prix fixe dinner from \$1.35 to \$1.50 due to inflation.

²¹¹ Wilkes, 54.

²¹² Klein, 10:16.

²¹³ Klein, 23:22.

²¹⁴ de Groot, 204.

Originally, Mrs. Wilkes sourced her ingredients from the famous city market in downtown Savannah. (It was this building's demolition in 1954 to make way for a parking deck that spurred the historic preservation movement in the city.²¹⁵) Mrs. Wilkes would visit the market daily to select produce, seafood and meat.²¹⁶ She carefully scrutinized her purchases. If something she did not choose ended up in the delivery, she would send it back and ask that it be removed from her bill. When the city market closed, Marcia Thompson says she and her grandmother would travel in Mrs. Wilkes' station wagon to buy produce at the Bargain Corner market on Bay St., or farmers from the area would deliver produce directly to the restaurant. Chicken came from a distributor in Statesboro, which was purchased by the Savannah company Ambos. Ambos now supplies all of the seafood and meat for Mrs. Wilkes'.²¹⁷

Mrs. Wilkes describes her regular customers during the early years: "young, working-class laborers, spinster schoolteachers, widowed bankers, washerwomen, and middle-aged, idle-class merchants."²¹⁸ Additionally, many of Lois Wilkes' co-workers from the railroad became regular clientele. Mrs. Wilkes was firm in her commitment to keep the restaurant as a haven for local Savannahians.²¹⁹ As seen with both Mary Mac's and H & H, the list of regular customers, spanning decades, is quite long, and memories and stories of them are included in restaurant lore.²²⁰ Over time of course, tourists eventually discovered the dining room, and a long list of celebrities have made

²¹⁵ "The Story of Preservation in Savannah," Historic Savannah Foundation, accessed Feb. 22, 2017.

²¹⁶ Wilkes, 85.

²¹⁷ Marcia Thompson, discussion.

²¹⁸ Wilkes, 11.

²¹⁹ Wilkes, 12.

²²⁰ Wilkes, 54-55.

appearances. Her daughter, Marcia Thompson, says, “I have to tell you, my grandmother, and I mean this sincerely, every person was important to her. She was not overwhelmed by celebrity.”²²¹ It bears mentioning that in the available information on Mrs. Wilkes’ the race of the clientele, currently or previously, is not discussed.

The importance of family is significant to Mrs. Wilkes’ establishment. Marcia Thompson says up until three weeks before her death, her mother was still coming to the dining room regularly to greet customers and autograph cookbooks.²²² Daily management has shifted as needed between generations, but as Ryon Thompson says, “We’ve always been a close family, partly because there are so few of us. We work together every day, and we get along very well.” Marcia echoes the sentiment when describing how she and her husband Ronnie were brought back into the business in the early 1970s to pitch in when her mother broke her ankle. “That’s how it is with a family business. Once we started, we never left.”²²³ Lois Wilkes, Mrs. Wilkes’ husband, was her longtime companion at the restaurant, though it was understood the dining room was her operation.²²⁴ He was a regular fixture at the restaurant who originally gave the blessing to the first wave of guests and enjoyed the company of his former railroad co-workers who often came to visit for lunch.²²⁵

The written history of Mrs. Wilkes’ acknowledges the debt owed to her African-American kitchen staff: “To be sure, Mrs. Wilkes has always ruled the roost... But the

²²¹ Klein, 24:15.

²²² Klein, 10:15.

²²³ Klein, 14:49.

²²⁴ Klein, 17:15.

²²⁵ Wilkes, 55.

tasks of frying chicken, punching out biscuit dough, stripping collard leaves and peeling potatoes have long been assigned to black women... Always have, always will.”²²⁶ Edge goes on to list the names of many of these women, but some degree of romanticizing the relationship between black and white women and food still occurs. In acknowledging the tradition of slavery and black women in the kitchen Edge writes,

“There is much to regret, many wounds to heal. And yet, in the kitchens south of the Mason-Dixon divide, there has always been a camaraderie unsuspected, a bond between black and white that confounds logic and spans generations. Young and old, rich and poor, we Southerners are united in our love of good food and our respect for those cooks whose hands have been ever on the Southern skillet.”²²⁷

Indeed, it appears the sense of family extends beyond the blood relations of the Wilkes. Longtime black cook Cassandra Johnson says, “We taught one another, and Mrs. Wilkes was always there, too. In that kitchen we’re a family. We squeeze by one another carrying pots and pans. We get in a hurry, but we always say, ‘Excuse me,’ and ‘Thank you.’ And we always give praise to the Lord.”²²⁸ Linda Wright, an employee since 1973 and also black, says... “This place is home; they’re family, sure as my own. I work in the dining room too – I’m the one that introduces Mrs. Wilkes when it’s time for the prayer. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. You know it’s hell working with a bunch of women. We fuss and fight, but when it’s all over we love each other same as we did when we started the day.”²²⁹ Despite these women’s comments, it appears that the

²²⁶ Wilkes, 70.

²²⁷ Wilkes, 70.

²²⁸ Wilkes, 72-73.

²²⁹ Wilkes, 75.

black female employee/white female employer relationship has been in effect at the restaurant for some time.

Mrs. Wilkes' renown eventually brought attention from outside Savannah. In 1986 she was chosen to represent the South at a dinner at the Kasteel Belvedere in Belgium and in 1989 the Georgia Department of Industry and Trade sent her to Japan for an exposition on southern cooking. On both occasions, her family joined her for the journey, bringing southern cooking to the far reaches of the world. The restaurant also won a James Beard America's Regional Classics Award, a major honor in the food and restaurant world. Edge credits the longtime success of Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room to the ability of the restaurant to stay relevant long enough to "tap into nascent Southern nostalgia for the old ways."²³⁰ Even though Mrs. Wilkes resisted becoming a tourist destination for many years, the "nostalgia" proved too strong to ignore. Today, Marcia Thompson says their clientele is a mix of tourists and local regulars.²³¹ Like Mary Mac's, the commitment to consistent quality food appears to supersede a desire to be a tourist destination, but cookbooks and other gift items are available as souvenirs nonetheless.

Conclusion

Already, similarities and differences can be seen in the three case study sites, and interviews with personnel from each location will provide additional information to consider. The state of Georgia greatly benefited from the economic effects of World

²³⁰ Wilkes, 13.

²³¹ Marcia Thompson, discussion.

War II²³² and all three original owners of the case study sites were directly or indirectly influenced by the activities of the war. Mary MacKenzie of Mary Mac's was a war widow in need of new income; Inez Hill moved to Macon when her husband found employment at Robins Air Force Base; and Sema Wilkes followed her husband to Savannah after their family farm was turned into a military airfield and he found work in the shipyards supporting the war effort. Two of the restaurants were originally owned by white women (Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes), while H & H was owned by two black women. All three restaurants have always been located in downtown urban areas and have endured neighborhood decline and renewal common in historic urban cores. Female ownership, a post-World War II opening date, and a location in a Georgia city, made these case study sites ideal for furthering my research. Interviews with those close to the businesses will give greater context to the continued viability of these restaurants, and will foster a greater understanding of southern food and why it remains popular today.

The issue of segregation is not directly addressed in any of the available histories of the case study sites. But, based on a knowledge of social norms in the South during this time, one can surmise that the two white-owned restaurants, Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes', were in fact segregated businesses. The stories told by the owners today of inclusivity and hospitality are kinder, but ultimately incorrect, versions of what occurred and the inclusivity and hospitality likely only extended to whites. Indeed, Hale writes,

“[T]he plantation romance as entertainment and escape played a specific role in the creation of a new southern racial order... The passage of time did more than

²³² Cobb and Inscoe, “Georgia History: Overview,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed January 4, 2017.

free the white southern historical imagination from the burden of recorded events and conflicting memories. Distance also provided whites with an opportunity to conflate individual and regional childhoods.”²³³

Segregation was a normal and accepted part of life for southerners during the post-World War II period. Hale later writes, “Consuming food combined a similar touching of the product to lips and the intimate routines of human maintenance. Because they made public the decidedly home-centered rituals of eating, cafes, restaurants, and diners usually served only one race.”²³⁴

As described in *The Maid Narratives*, during segregation it was acceptable for blacks to prepare food for whites, but they were never allowed to consume food with whites. This scenario was duplicated in public restaurants, where a black kitchen and wait staff served a white customer base. At Mary Mac’s, Margaret Lupo’s daughter Judy Lupo Wold claims her mother did not discriminate amongst her clientele, that “everyone’s money was green,” but it is improbable that the local black community took that claim seriously during the years of routine segregation. Likewise at Mrs. Wilkes’, even though the kitchen staff preparing the food was black, it is probable that the clientele consisted of local whites also. In any case, it appears that knowledge of southern food was equally shared amongst the owners and kitchen staff of all three restaurants, though at Mary Mac’s and Mrs. Wilkes’ the white female employer/black female employee relationship and its ensuing implications was present for quite some time and might still be today. Cooley writes, “But in spite of the great changes that

²³³ Hale, 53.

²³⁴ Hale, 187.

followed World War II, or perhaps because of them, white southerners worked hard to maintain segregation culture in public eating places... For many reasons, dining among them, African-Americans did not get to enjoy all the benefits of middle-class status.”²³⁵

²³⁵ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 102.

CHAPTER 4

Case Study Interview Results and Analysis

Background research on the three case study sites provided essential information on each restaurant's history and location, but interviews with current owners and management were necessary to fill in missing details and answer specific questions about what it means to own a meat and three and to have a female owner of a restaurant business. This chapter will summarize the results from those interviews, then compare and analyze the responses. Finally, the results from the case study interviews will be analyzed within the context of the background research presented in Chapter Three.

The questions posed to restaurant owners/management were broken into seven topical sections, covering different aspects of the restaurant, its history, its current state, and the cultural implications therein. Since many of the questions were answered by background research, not all questions were asked or answered. Of the three case study sites, I interviewed a total of four people: Elizabeth Thompson, a manager and the daughter-in-law of the current owner at Mary Mac's Tea Room; Chad Evans and Brad Evans (no relation), the owner and a business associate (respectively) of H & H Restaurant; and Marcia Thompson, a granddaughter of Mrs. Wilkes of Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room, and a manager of that establishment. Her son is the current owner. It should be noted that at Mary Mac's, Elizabeth Thompson showed my questions to the

current owner, John Ferrell, before our meeting, so his responses were available for some of the questions. The information gleaned from these interviews added a greater depth of understanding of what it takes to run these restaurants and the effort it took to open them many years ago, along with the desire to keep the traditions alive today. Greater context was provided for the cultural understanding of a meat and three restaurant and why that kind of food has remained popular. An inclusive and hospitable atmosphere was a central theme that emerged as well.

Results of Case Study Interviews

The first section of the interview questions asked basic information, including the interviewee's name, connection of the interviewee to the business and for how long, and questions that were intended for the original owner ("What made you want to own a restaurant?" and "How did you learn to operate the business?"). Since I was unable to speak to any of the original owners, because those women are deceased, the answers to these two questions were either left unanswered or inferred from the knowledge base of the current owners.

The second section asked seven questions about the restaurant itself, such as the year it opened, its location and whether other locations ever existed, if the original building was ever expanded or lost space, who the current owner is, and former owners are, how the restaurant is operated (i.e. table service, cafeteria style), and where the original source of funding came from to open the business. Two of the restaurants, Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes', opened in the 1940s; H & H opened later, in 1959. All

three have remained in the same location since opening, but Mary Mac's is the only one that has expanded into neighboring storefronts over the years. None have lost space, although Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes' have cut back on their to-go order business over the years. All three businesses use table service, but Mrs. Wilkes' is a somewhat different in that it uses family-style seating.

The question of ownership varies for all three locations. Mary Mac's has had the most owners, five total. It is worth noting however, that the second and fifth owners (Margaret Lupo and John Ferrell) have owned the restaurant for a considerable amount of time and had financial or labor assistance from their family. H & H was started by two women, Inez Hill and Louise Hudson, who were related. Mama Hill passed away a few years ago and Mama Louise no longer owns the business, but is still present at the restaurant on a regular basis, much the way Margaret Lupo remained on board to slowly turn the Mary Mac's operation over to John Ferrell. The current owners of H & H, Chad Evans and Wes Griffith, are in control of management and daily operations of the restaurant under the auspices of the Moonhanger Group, which owns other local restaurants and bars in downtown Macon. Mrs. Wilkes' Dining Room has remained entirely within the Wilkes family since its opening. It is currently owned by Ryon Thompson, Mrs. Wilkes' great-grandson, and Marcia Thompson, his mother and Mrs. Wilkes' granddaughter, works in a management role and greets customers.

The question of where the original funding originated to open the restaurants was difficult to answer. For Mary Mac's and H & H, no clear answer is available on the source of funding used by Mary MacKenzie, Inez Hill, and Louise Hudson. It is known

that Margaret Lupo had to ask for financial assistance from her family since the bank would not provide loans to women. (Lupo is credited with making the most expansions to the restaurant.) When asked this same question about her grandmother's restaurant, Marcia Thompson was adamant that Mrs. Wilkes did not spend any money that she didn't have. She said she was "very thrifty and never borrowed money."²³⁶ Purchases (such as new furnishings and the ownership of the building) were not made until her grandparents had saved enough money first and they never bought on credit.

The third section asked many questions about the menu and the food served: how the menu is structured, whether and how it has changed over time, if the recipes have changed and where they came from, if the sourcing for the ingredients has changed, whether they think of this food as "southern," how the original owner learned to cook and if there is a particular dish for which the restaurant is recognized. Many of these questions were not answered in full, especially as the background research already provided answers. That said, Elizabeth Thompson and John Ferrell at Mary Mac's gave the most insight. The general sense is that not much changed from the time Margaret Lupo owned the business. When Ferrell took over operations, there was a different menu every day. But, with so many customers calling to ask about the availability of their favorite dish, he decided to make all sides and entrees available all the time. Ferrell also started opening the restaurant on weekends and for the first time ever, on Thanksgiving Day, albeit with a special menu. Elizabeth Thompson says the recipes are unchanged, partly because the same women have been preparing them for

²³⁶ Marcia Thompson, discussion.

40 years. During the summer, they source their ingredients from neighboring southern states in an effort to maintain freshness; in the winter they sometimes go as far as California for quality produce. She says the four-piece fried chicken is the most popular item, but a more recent addition, tomato pie, has become quite popular. The sweet potato soufflé, mac and cheese and collards have remained popular side options as well.

At H & H, the sourcing of ingredients is slowly changing, although Chad Evans says he has kept Mama Louise's recipes. As part of his work with other restaurants in the area, Evans already had a supplier list of vendors that "were pro-downtown or pro-Macon."²³⁷ He says, "...the H & H, which sort of had this post industrial, post world war canned good recipe origin... A lot of that we're kind of re-imagining." Evans goes on to describe an effort to move away from cooking with lard and using fresh produce (instead of canned), but admits this has upped his price point from when Mama Louise had sole ownership.

Marcia Thompson at Mrs. Wilkes' says they also buy their produce locally at the Bargain Corner market on nearby Bay St. Her grandmother had been a regular customer at the famous City Market in downtown Savannah before it closed in the 1950s. At that point, Marcia would accompany her to the Bargain Corner market. Their meat purchases are now made through Ambos Seafoods, a distributor originally based in Statesboro, but was later purchased by a Savannah company. All three restaurants get their meat and produce from buyers that are as local and as fresh as reasonably possible.

²³⁷ Chad Evans and Brad Evans, discussion.

Although unintentional, the answers to questions in the fourth and fifth sections were quite similar, as they dealt with interrelated topics. The fourth section asked questions about the restaurants' proximity to the immediate surrounding neighborhood, how that affected the clientele, and why people were attracted to the restaurant. The fifth section pertained to the original customer base and how it has changed over time. Given the age of these businesses, tourists inevitably became a part of the customer base at some point. All three restaurants are still located in their original locations, for a considerable amount of time. Mary Mac's has been in place for 72 years, H & H for 58 years, and Mrs. Wilkes' for 74 years. It should come as no surprise then that the neighborhoods around them have changed over the years, but not so much as to be unrecognizable. All three properties have other historic buildings around them, though Mrs. Wilkes' is the only one in an officially designated historic district and is consequently surrounded entirely by historic buildings. All three are located in urban areas (by design of this thesis), thus all three have always had clientele based on the residential neighborhoods and businesses surrounding them.

Ponce de Leon Ave. is a major thoroughfare in the Midtown Atlanta neighborhood where Mary Mac's is located. Elizabeth Thompson commented on this, saying, "He [John Ferrell] said that the neighborhood itself has undergone many changes and ups and downs through the years." She also says, "As far as Mary Mac's is concerned, originally the clientele... was predominantly Caucasian and there were a lot of politicians, business people who worked downtown and would come to Mary Mac's. A lot of college professors. A lot of those are still even regulars today." She touches on

the locals and tourists as well, saying, “I would say that our clientele is ever changing with more and more people coming to visit Atlanta... I would say maybe half of our business is tourists and half locals.”²³⁸ She also comments on the gentrification of Midtown, acknowledging it is good for business, but she hopes it does not force some of their longtime regulars who live in the neighborhood to leave.

Chad Evans and Brad Evans both credit Macon’s music industry for the clientele that have frequented H & H over the years, though for different reasons. Chad says, “I think it’s gone from conservatives and older folks who are just wanting comfort food and had sentiments towards the music industry, to folks wanting a more relevant food experience in the theme of old soul cooking.” Brad Evans elaborates, “The way I understood it, my dad grew up in town when all the bands were in town and you wanted to go to H & H and see somebody. You wanted to see the Marshall Tucker Band. You wanted to see Gregg or Duane or any of the guys in the Allman Brothers Band. It’s kind of like you’re eating with people you really look up to. That was a unique opportunity in a small town like Macon... Plus the food was good apparently.”²³⁹ In other parts of their interview Brad and Chad reference the deep racial tensions in Macon that contributed to white flight into neighboring counties and an abandonment of businesses downtown in the 1970s, though it appears H & H was somewhat insulated from these problems due to its connection with the music industry.

²³⁸ John Ferrell and Elizabeth Thompson, discussion.

²³⁹ Chad Evans and Brad Evans, discussion.

Like Mary Mac's, Marcia Thompson also says the 1960s saw a shift in the clientele at Mrs. Wilkes'. Original customers were also boarders upstairs, but over time, businessmen in the area and other locals came only to eat. In the 1960s, locals were still coming but she says, "It wasn't the same as before."²⁴⁰ This would have been the period that downtown Savannah was in decline, but efforts from local preservationists (the Wilkes family included) helped to turn the area around and make it the tourist destination it is today. Currently much of her business is from tourists, but she still has regulars and locals who work in downtown Savannah businesses. She says if families come to eat, it's often because they have made a special trip in from the suburbs to go downtown and dine at Mrs. Wilkes'.

The sixth section asked questions about meat and threes and what that term means to the interviewee, whether or not they think their restaurant qualifies as a meat and three, what they like about the kind of food served and why it has remained popular for so long. In short, all interviewees knew the term meat and three referred and agreed positively that their restaurant fit that description. Everyone also came to the same conclusion that this food has remained popular simply because it's good and simple, and perhaps more importantly, everyone *knows* it to be good. Elizabeth Thompson and John Ferrell said a meat and three is "a restaurant serving home cooked, Southern Food. Typically meals consist of one meat (usually chicken, pork, or beef) and 2-3 sides. These restaurants are not fancy, but they focus on fresh, quality ingredients

²⁴⁰ Marcia Thompson, discussion.

and hospitality!”²⁴¹ They go on to say that yes, Mary Mac’s definitely qualifies as a meat and three. In response to what they like about this kind of food, they said, “The food reminds us of home, something our mother’s and grandmother’s prepared for us with love! Many of us grew up eating meats and vegetables for lunch and dinner.” They recall watching their mothers and grandmothers cook, learning from them, and also attending church functions where the ladies of the church brought their special dishes of southern fare to share. When asked why they think this kind of food has remained so popular they said, “We believe Southern fare has remained popular because it is wholesome, comforting, and something we can all understand. Our food is simple, typically seasoned with salt, pepper, butter, and occasionally some sugar. It is honest, simple, and ‘stick to your bones’ good! We believe it should be fresh and the ingredients should be readily available.”

When asked about their thoughts on meat and threes, Chad Evans and Brad Evans offered an interesting twist on the term, saying that in the Vicksburg area of Mississippi, meat and threes are referred to as “hot lunches” and that “[t]he nomenclature is specific to the region.”²⁴² Marcia Thompson at Mrs. Wilkes’ was direct in her response. When asked to give her definition of a meat and three she chuckled and said she knew what I meant, but that Mrs. Wilkes’ was more like a “meat and twenty,” that they regularly keep three meats and twenty sides on the menu. But she also said of the term, “I know what you mean [by it] and I know it’s good.”²⁴³

²⁴¹ John Ferrell and Elizabeth Thompson, discussion.

²⁴² Chad Evans and Brad Evans, discussion.

²⁴³ Marcia Thompson, discussion.

The seventh and final section posed questions about the impact race and gender have had on the function of the restaurant, specifically does the interviewee think that having a female owner influenced the function or success of the restaurant, has the local community ever expressed an opinion about the restaurant being owned by a woman, and were other women-owned restaurants in the area that might have affected the development of the restaurant in question. Answers were not provided for the last question, but we know from the tea room history and the restaurant histories of Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes' that other similar establishments preceded them in their current locations. Thus, we can positively assume the answer to the last question, which is that there may have been others.

Elizabeth Thompson and John Ferrell said having a female owner definitely impacted Mary Mac's operation. In referring to Lupo, Elizabeth Thompson says, "She actually came from a very strong line of women who knew how to operate a business, who had that drive and desire to do something. During that time period, women were typically the household cooks. They were also kind of loving and hospitable, but they had to raise a family, so they still had that strength that was needed to operate a business. Someone who knew how to cook and knew about hospitality- who better to run a restaurant?"²⁴⁴ Regarding the question about the community's reaction to a woman owning a restaurant, Ferrell says he is not aware of an opinion ever being expressed, only that "many people loved and supported Ms. McKenzie as she opened the restaurant, and Ms. Lupo's endeavor to expand the restaurant."

²⁴⁴ John Ferrell and Elizabeth Thompson, discussion.

Chad Evans also agreed that having female owners had implications for the business at H & H. His response referred to Mama Louise specifically: “Absolutely. Mama herself and her kindness... there’s almost a loaves and fishes story there when she fed the band. It was her generosity, almost her matron femininity that is part of the story. You know I say we are keeping soul food the same. Yeah, it’s a place where people cook from their heart and they embrace the community and we reach out. That part of the story is always there.” Marcia Thompson answered affirmatively too, saying her grandmother had a hard life from an early age, but learned to become a “very good cook and a hard worker who was very tough and very business smart.”²⁴⁵ She said that legacy has since been passed down to the family and that her husband and son have been equally successful in running the business, but that success began with her grandmother.

The results of the case study interviews uncovered more detailed information on the three restaurants’ methods of operation, menu and food, location, and customer base. It also provided greater understanding of what the term “meat and three” actually means, as well how southern food is defined. The interplay between race, gender, and what it means to be a female restaurant owner was also explored, and brought about themes regarding the necessity for hard work, a strong character, and business acumen to own one of these restaurants.

²⁴⁵ Marcia Thompson, discussion.

Case Study Findings Analysis

Following the framework from the previous section, I will analyze the findings of my case studies based on the seven sections of questions that were asked in the interviews. Unsurprisingly, many similarities, differences, and singularities emerged among the three case study sites. The similarities went beyond the basic criteria established for the case study sites (i.e. owned by a woman, opened between 1940-60, located in urban areas in Georgia, and still presently in operation) and overall, outnumbered the differences and unique elements that were discovered.

The first section dealt with preliminary information about the restaurants, mostly gaining identifying information about the person I was interviewing and that person's connection to the restaurant. Although I was not able to interview any of the original owners, the available histories of the restaurants and knowledge given by the current owners helped to fill in this gap. In the interest of clarification, the original owners were, and all subsequent owners of both Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes', are white. The original owners of H & H were black. Based on the available history of all three establishments, it appears the wait staff and kitchen staff of all three businesses has consisted of both black and white employees for quite some time.

An unexpected similarity shared amongst the three restaurants was the original owner's connections to World War II and the military. Mary MacKenzie was a war widow looking for income, Inez Hill (Mama Louise's godmother and cousin) moved to Macon when her husband began working at the nearby Robins Air Force Base. Sema Wilkes followed her husband to Savannah in the early 1940s, when their family farm in

south Georgia was sold to the military to build an airfield. All three restaurants are located in cities that saw an influx of military personnel during wartime and after, so the subsequent population increase made running a restaurant a profitable endeavor.

The second section of questions concerned basic operations of the restaurants, their locations, and some history of the business. All three sites are located in their original buildings at their original addresses. Mary Mac's is the only site that has expanded into neighboring storefronts and also opened other locations, though they did not last. Mrs. Wilkes' is the only site that had another component to the business, that of the boardinghouse upstairs. It is unclear where the original sources of funding to open each of these restaurants originated.

The third set of questions concerned the menu and information on the actual food served. Menus at all three restaurants were different in terms of their organization and presentation. Mary Mac's offers all entrees and sides, every day, except on holidays when a special menu is provided. H & H has different offerings depending on the day, which is how Mary Mac's structured their menu until John Ferrell took over ownership. Mrs. Wilkes' does not provide a printed menu at all. Each day's offerings are written on a chalk board in the restaurant. The menu is decided in the morning by the kitchen staff based on available items and the space required on the stove to prepare the items. It is stated repeatedly in the histories and in the interviews that the recipes have not changed at any of the three case study sites. The ingredients and the sourcing of ingredients have shifted over the years. All three restaurants thought of the food they served as being southern.

The fourth set of questions concerned the location and how that affected the clientele. As in the previous section, the information gleaned from background histories and interviews easily blends with the information received in the queries from the fifth set of questions concerning the customer base. Conclusions from these two sections are presented together. As previously established, all three businesses are still at their original locations. All three have weathered positive and negative economic transitions in their neighborhoods and the accompanying changes in clientele that came with those transitions. Thus the original clientele for all three case study sites was local.

Mary Mac's claims to have always catered to whomever was living and working in the neighborhood and has become somewhat of a tourist destination for visitors to Atlanta in more recent decades. H & H's initial customers are assumed to be black professionals who worked in the Cotton Ave. District. But eventually, per Chad Evans' interview, white businessmen who worked nearby became customers as well. In more recent years, the connection to local music history has made H & H a tourist destination as well. Mrs. Wilkes' clientele has followed a similar pattern to the other two case study sites, though perhaps more in line with what has been observed at Mary Mac's. Their original customers were locals who lived and worked in the area, though it is unclear how they were affected by segregation during the 1950s and 1960s. Mrs. Wilkes prided herself on serving primarily locals for many years, and would not advertise so as not to seek tourists. But eventually tourism became a factor there as well, and it is now a major part of the daily business. In all cases, it appears that customers were attracted to

the locations simply because the food was known to be good and would likely fill a need for comfort fare sold at a reasonable price.

The sixth section of interview questions covered the definition of a meat and three and questions asking why the food served at those kinds of restaurants has remained so popular. On this topic, all interviewees from the three case study sites had similar responses. All three knew what a meat and three restaurant meant, and agreed that their establishment fit that profile. They all referenced the nostalgia associated with southern food; that it is comforting, simple, and familiar.

The final section asked deeper questions about race and gender and how those factors influenced the restaurant and how the restaurant was perceived by others. All three agreed that having a female owner had a positive impact on the restaurant's operation and success. The research and interviews on the three case study sites repeatedly revealed the hard work of the original owners.

Another similarity in the three case study sites was the racial makeup of the kitchen and wait staff. Summarizations must be made for H & H, but at Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes', it is made plain that most of the staff is black. Given that H & H was owned by two black women for most of its existence, and their location in the black business district, one can make a similar assumption of the racial breakdown of their staff as well. This is not to say any establishment employed exclusively black employees for these positions though. Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes' interviews and histories make frequent reference to some of their long-time employees. Some are wait staff and some are kitchen staff, and some are white and some are black, but all of these long-time

employees have worked for 30 – 40 years. Amongst the kitchen staff, many specialize in a certain dish as well. It appears that the white female employer/black female employee relationship was in effect at Mary Mac's and Mrs. Wilkes' for some time though.

On the whole, the three case study sites shared more commonalities than differences. The similarities centered on having a strong, hard-working female owner, and serving standard, southern food typically associated with a meat and three restaurant using original recipes. All three are located at their original sites and have weathered periods of transition in their respective neighborhoods. They accomplished this by presenting a welcoming atmosphere, and an ability to adjust to changing neighborhoods, which allowed these businesses to remain popular with a wide range of clientele. That clientele has changed for all three restaurants from local working people to a mix of locals and tourists, and it seems all three sites have used tourism to their advantage as well.

Differences emerged in how each site operated and its "historical" precedent. Mary Mac's, for example, uses regular table service and has the same menu items regularly available, but uses paper and pencil order forms for the kitchen. The restaurant is still called a tea room, an allusion to the proper female-centric cafes of the early 20th century. H & H is probably the least formal of the three case study sites, and uses regular table service, but has a different menu each day. Mrs. Wilkes' began as a boardinghouse where three meals served daily was part of the cost of room and board. It was only after a period of time that the business became solely a restaurant. Today, they serve their food family-style where all options are available on the table at once.

All three case study sites have different ownership histories, but this is unsurprising given how long these businesses have been in operation. Mary Mac's is unique in that it has retained its central mission of southern hospitality and quality food under five different owners. H & H is distinctive in that it is the only case study site to be owned by black women, and it also opened later than the other two sites. Mrs. Wilkes' is rare in that the business has remained in the same family for four generations. Again, despite the years and different owners, all three have remained viable institutions in their respective cities.

Final Analysis

A final analysis entails combining the information gleaned from the background research with the added information from the case study interviews and history to answer the original research question of, "What role did women restaurant owners play in popularizing the cultural tradition of meat and threes in Georgia?" The broad topic areas covered in the background research chapter were food, gender and race in the post-World War II period, the role of women in foodways, and the importance of place. This section will analyze how the information learned from the case study sites supports and expands upon those topic areas. Already, a couple of new areas of insight have emerged, specifically the frequent commentary made about the strength of character among the original owners and how inclusivity and hospitality in the workplace and towards the clientele coalesced with other factors to allow these restaurants to remain popular.

The first topic area covered was the broad subject of food. This section pertained to the kind of food meat and three restaurants served, how the menus were structured, the restaurants' operation, and most importantly, what it means to be a meat and three. The three case study sites supported the evidence gained from background research. Meat and threes serve what broadly constitutes southern food: multiple meats are available, though they were all beef, chicken and fish based dishes; sides are primarily cooked vegetables; the breads are exclusively rolls or cornbread. The desserts offered more variety than previously anticipated, but were still within the bounds of normal southern fare such as pies, cobblers, cake and puddings. Like other modern day restaurants, soft drinks and sometimes lemonade were available to drink, but sweet tea was the staple beverage. Everything prepared was relatively simple. Even though menu options are presented in different ways amongst the three sites, the presence of multiple different entrees and sides to choose from to construct the guest's meal existed throughout. Freshness was important as well, and all three current owners adhere to that quality as best as they can through their choice of ingredient suppliers.

It was anticipated that meat and threes often have different menus every day and are set up to serve food cafeteria-style or family-style. These variations in menu structure and restaurant operation are typical and were exemplified in the case studies. It appears these variations are ultimately at the discretion of the restaurant owner and what works for that establishment. The hours are determined by what is both manageable for staff and the most profitable. Lunch time is the only time all three

restaurants are open. To summarize, the menus, operation and hours of these restaurants are dictated in part by practical concerns of the business and kitchen.

It is important to note that all three restaurants were familiar with the term “meat and three” and felt their business qualified as one, suggesting that a meat and three is a definitive kind of restaurant. That said, variations are accepted within the type, as the three case study sites have shown. A commitment to quality, a variety of menu options, and food that is recognizable as “southern” appear to be the hallmarks of what constitutes a meat and three.

The second topic area covered focused on how gender and race roles from the post-World War II period played out in the functionality of these restaurants. These factors affected the female owners, but also were revealed in the realm of the wait staff and kitchen staff. More often than not, these groups of employees were made up of women, usually black women. This suggests an extension of what was learned from the history of domestic hired help in Chapter Two. In middle class homes, white women prepared the menus and did the grocery shopping while the black hired help did the cooking. This basic scenario played out in the kitchen and dining rooms of many meat and threes, including the case study sites.

The history of tea rooms mostly pertains to the white women who owned them, but more implications can be drawn from that history. In the early 20th century it was improper for a woman to eat alone in public, and businesses like restaurants were generally owned and frequented by men. Tea rooms became a way for women to exist in the public sphere as both business owner and guest without the oversight of a man

and also became an early example of an eating establishment that welcomed the middle class. Without this initial step into the restaurant industry in the form of tea rooms, the women-owned meat and threes that came later in the century may never have opened.

The longevity of many employees seen at all three case study sites is an interesting point worth noting. Most of the employees with this permanency are women and of those quoted in the available histories, all had positive things to say about their experience. Many claimed their friendship with their fellow staff and their regular customers was one of their favorite aspects of their job.

The third topic area discussed the role of women in foodways; specifically for the purposes of this thesis, the role of women in southern foodways. It was in this section that the background research and interviews offered a new and emerging theme, which was how hardworking and strong these women had to be to run a restaurant when women typically did not engage in formal business ventures. Of the few things known about Mary MacKenzie, her hardworking nature in opening Mary Mac's is one of them. Mary MacKenzie was a war widow in need of income and Margaret Lupo at one time had found herself a divorcee with a child to support. Regardless though, their work ethic enabled them to be successful business entrepreneurs.

For Inez Hill and Louise Hudson of H & H, this was even more significant given that they were black women. We know from prior research how they worked daily, and despite her elderly age, Mama Louise still works at H & H today. Similar statements have been made about Sema Wilkes as well. When asked what made her grandmother want to own a business, Marcia Thompson says, "She never doubted that she could do

anything she wanted to do... She was never timid about anything." Marcia goes on to list the many things other than cooking that Mrs. Wilkes excelled in, adding that she often told Marcia she needed to "toughen up".²⁴⁶ Ryon Thompson seems to have been inspired by his great-grandmothers' work ethic and devotion to her family. Upon her passing, a longtime friend and neighbor was quoted in the local news as saying, "It is amazing. She never even thought about quitting. Most everybody else looks forward to the day when they can retire. That was the last thing in her mind was retiring."²⁴⁷ In the interview, Marcia Thompson repeated what a hardworking, tough, smart business woman Mrs. Wilkes was. She also made an interesting comment, "that part of southern charm is a southern woman"²⁴⁸ and that charm is part of their success.

The fourth topic area covered the importance of place and the many factors that contribute to that. These factors include information on the restaurants' location, the surrounding neighborhood, the clientele, the effects of tourism, and the sense of community that results when these factors are combined. All three restaurants have weathered a downturn in their local economy at some point, but their inner-city location has ultimately been a favorable attribute. In this sense, the high traffic of guests resulting from a location in a high-density area has helped these restaurants to stay in business. A prime location is not the only necessary trait to running a successful business though, and it appears that the sustained quality of food and service at these

²⁴⁶ Klein, 11:36.

²⁴⁷ Erin Rossiter, 'Everyone just loved that lady,' *Savannah Now: Savannah Morning News on the Web*, Nov. 1, 2002, <http://old.savannahnow.com/stories/110102/LOCWILKESOBIT.shtml>.

²⁴⁸ Marcia Thompson, discussion.

meat and threes has also contributed to these businesses remaining viable and consequently over time, becoming institutions and important destinations for the local community and for tourists.

The factors that support the theme of the importance of place were crystalized in an unexpected and interesting finding: the theme of inclusivity and hospitality towards customers that was part of each restaurants' story and mission. Granted it makes good business sense to be inclusive, and it is possible the efforts made to be inclusive have manifested over time to account for segregated practices of yesteryear. Nonetheless, themes of family and hospitality repeatedly were mentioned in the histories and interviews performed for the case study sites.

Conclusion

In short, based on this research, women played a role in the popularity of meat and three restaurants and their continued cultural importance. The background research provided essential context for understanding the world black and white women found themselves in during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Owning a business was a new venture for women, but race relations were changing at the same time, and the evolution of meat and three restaurants offers a unique lens through which to view these shifting situations. The importance of food in southern culture cannot be discounted and since emerging businesses and commerce have been shown to drive social change, it makes sense that the evolution of meat and threes would involve the story of women and race. The three case study sites provided real-life examples of how

these factors played out and presented newer details that enhanced the story further. These details are the positive strength of character seen amongst all of the women restaurant owners and the mission of inclusion towards all guests. These two factors strengthen the idea that not only are meat and three restaurants important cultural traditions in the South, but it is those establishments owned by women that offer one of the best insights into southern women's history and foodways.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In 1964, Atlanta witnessed its own companion case to *Katzenbach v. McClung*, the case that sustained the public accommodations provision of the Civil Rights Act.²⁴⁹ In the *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States*, the challenger claimed it had the right to continue refusing rooms to blacks based on race and that this decision was local and outside the bounds of federal jurisdiction. However, the court determined that private businesses, such as hotels, motels and restaurants, engaged in such a high level of interstate commerce that they were not above the law. The *New Georgia Encyclopedia* explains,

“In effect, the Court reasoned that race discrimination by even very localized businesses, when viewed in the aggregate, had such far-reaching negative effects on the interstate movement of people and products that Congress could remove these impediments to commerce whether or not its true motives centered on a moral condemnation of racism.”²⁵⁰

Granted, this case only dealt with overt forms of discrimination seen in private businesses that had a public function, and gender was not a factor in the ruling. Nonetheless, the importance of race and place in public eating areas is demonstrated. It is important for a case like this to be heard in the South, where food has always been an essential part of the culture and women have always been an essential part of the food

²⁴⁹ Dan T. Coenen, “Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States (1964),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Last modified Oct. 6, 2016, accessed Jan. 4, 2017. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/gouvernement-politics/heart-atlanta-motel-v-united-states-1964>

²⁵⁰ Coenen, “Heart of Atlanta Motel v United States (1964),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed Jan. 4, 2017.

culture. At the beginning of the post-World War II period it was still a new concept for a woman to own a business. As seen by the ruling of this case, by the mid-1960s it was unlawful to prohibit a black person from eating in a white restaurant. The scope of change seen in this 20-year span is significant. Meat and threes played an important role during that period.

Part of my curiosity in wanting to better understand the appeal of meat and threes was noting the diverse clientele at Matthews Cafeteria, the meat and three in my hometown. I recall it being a friendly, run down place with all of the southern food staples. A fairly equal representation of the town's residents at there, and in suburban Atlanta, that meant mostly middle-class blacks and whites of all ages. As a child I remember most of the staff being black, and the cashier was an older white woman. As I got older I noticed the staff became mostly Latino. The food never changed though. I recently ate at Matthews for the first time in years and little about the place, the food, the racially diverse staff, or its clientele, has changed. Admittedly, I am unsure if Matthews is run by a woman or not. But through my own anecdotal observations of that restaurant, and the formal observations and research undertaken for this thesis, I believe evidence exists that food has the potential to bring together otherwise disparate groups of people.

Impact of my Research

My research has shown that women play an important role in the business and production of southern food. Repeatedly in the background research and interviews, it

was stated how this food was comforting, and elicited nostalgic remembrances of childhood and grandmothers. If southern food has this many positive connotations, it stands to reason that its popularity would remain throughout the years, even as other southern traditions have fallen away. Clearly southern food, meat and threes, and the women who made their living this way were a potent amalgamation of cultural initiatives, changing times, need for employment opportunities, etc.

Food plays an enormous role in everyone's life. Food is often what draws southerners together, across race and gender lines. This is not to suggest that food and foodways are the band aid that will solve the racial and economic problems that plague the South even today. But, as seen through the evolution of meat and threes, change is possible and in this case, change came for black and white women through the employment and ownership of these restaurants. Admittedly, the effects of segregation can still be seen in the racial breakdown of the employees versus the owners, but is important to acknowledge the opening meat and threes gave women of both races to have employment outside the home.

This thesis has demonstrated how race and gender have played enormous roles in the cultural experience of being a southern woman, black or white. Southern foodways are the nexus of where business acumen, gender expectations, job necessity, and cooking and food knowledge merge. To take these factors out of the private kitchen and position them within the context of a meat and three restaurant offers an interesting viewpoint into southern culture. The importance of place informs the need for a restaurant such as a meat and three and keeps it viable at the same time. These

restaurants act as relics from our past, but also function as modern businesses. Without them we lose elements of context and connections into what southern food is and what southern culture is like. This is not to say the issues with racism should be ignored, but rather that the food served in meat and threes and the experience of eating in one is a unique part of life in the South, and that warrants consideration and preservation.

The physical locations of these restaurants are the places where the developments described in this thesis occurred. Thus, the role of place must be recognized in terms of intangible cultural heritage and historic preservation. The three case study sites exemplify how the tangibility of food and physical locations coupled with the intangibility of foodways come together to define our culture and allow us to better understand the South. Considering the history of meat and three restaurants is to also deliberate women's history, black history, and foodways. These elements can certainly be considered individually, but framing them within the context of a physical place, the meat and three restaurant, makes for a more cohesive interpretation.

Question of Relevancy

Aside from the continued success of Mary Mac's, H & H, and Mrs. Wilkes', southern food has become popular outside of the South, though it is often an updated, trendy version of what constitutes traditional southern fare. A 2016 *Wall Street Journal* article profiles a few meat and three restaurants that have opened outside of the

South.²⁵¹ The differences and similarities are enlightening; all offer a variation on the meat with two sides and a bread formula, but the recipes are more complex, and usually with expensive and non-traditionally southern ingredients. Case in point, at Brenda's Meat and Three in San Francisco, guests can order "pepper-jelly-glazed pork belly and oyster dressing along with healthier options like kale-feta salad."²⁵² Similarly, at Harold's Meat and Three in New York guests can order from a double-decker salad bar that includes twice-baked avocados. The article seems to attribute some of the meat and threes' success to the many menu options available, claiming, "While the appeal of customization seems to be driving the new restaurants up north, for Southern chefs the format is more often a return to their roots."²⁵³ The article goes on to highlight meat and threes in the South that have reopened based on a predecessor's formula (e.g., Johnny's Homewood in Birmingham) and others that are mainstays, including H & H.

Throughout the readings for this thesis I found as much literature suggesting meat and threes and southern food were fading away into history and homogeneity as I did other sources suggesting the opposite. As seen with any long lasting cultural tradition, I think this is indicative of nothing other than natural change. Southern food, and meat and threes, will continue to develop. Indeed in their materials that offer recommendations for "Safeguarding a living heritage" UNESCO had this to say: "Just like all culture in general, intangible cultural heritage is constantly changing and evolving,

²⁵¹ Jay Cheshes, "The Meat-and-Three Makeover: Southern Cooking Rethought," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 2016.

²⁵² Cheshes, *The Wall Street Journal*.

²⁵³ Cheshes, *The Wall Street Journal*.

and being enriched by each new generation... Preserving this heritage and pressing it on to future generations strengthens it, and keeps it alive while allowing for it to change and adapt.”²⁵⁴

New Reflections

For this research to continue, I feel the obvious next step would be to investigate meat and threes owned by men. They are likely as plentiful in numbers as the women-owned ones, but their origination stories might be different. I suspect there is a woman involved somewhere, either a mother or grandmother, who imparted her food knowledge to her male family member. This warrants verification of course.

In looking for case study sites, I did not seek out specific racial backgrounds from the original owners. I was primarily concerned with their gender. In retrospect though, I wish I had more voices from black women owners. Their experiences are similar, but different enough, to merit further inquiry.

I found the idea of comfort food and the deeper questions of why some people enjoy this kind of food to be particularly interesting. My interviewees seemed to think there was no deeper motive; the food tastes good, so of course you will want to eat it. But, I would still like to have a deeper psychological understanding of what makes comfort food so comforting. It is this love of comfort food that brings about questions of relevancy and authenticity. I feel this thesis has outlined what kinds of dishes constitute

²⁵⁴ United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 6.

traditional southern food, but as with any creative endeavor, the boundaries and definitions are easily blurred.

Recommendations

The southern food served at the establishments studied for this thesis are preserving a foodway that has existed for centuries. The food itself (including the ingredients and preparation methods) is the primary intangible cultural resource that necessitates preservation in the name of understanding our regional's cultural history. That said, the negative social and historical implications tied to that food must be honored and recognized, but not perpetuated. The need to preserve "traditional" southern cooking should not discount or discourage the new iterations of southern food seen throughout the rest of the country. I am only suggesting that southern food as it is presented in the kind of meat and three restaurants researched for this thesis (decidedly not fancy with simple ingredients) should be preserved as an essential element of southern culture. The documentation and sharing of recipes is one way this has and will continue to be accomplished.

The role of place is a secondary, but supporting element to the importance of food as cultural heritage. Based on the research performed for this thesis, I believe that the best platform for this food to be consumed in that will allow it to maintain authentic historical connections is either at home or in a meat and three restaurant. To consume this food in any place that is somehow *not* comforting and familiar somehow takes away from the experience. Southern food will of course be consumed outside of those

parameters and still be thought of as “southern”, but I do not think the connections to southern culture and history will be as deeply felt.

For the case study sites, I support their adherence to not changing their recipes and to maintaining high standards of quality in their choices of ingredients and cooking methods. Given that these restaurants have been open for 50-70 or more years, it would seem unwise to change those aspects from a business standpoint anyway. My point is that traditional southern food appears to be something people want to consume, despite the many other food options available today. To remain consistent with current business practices, a welcoming atmosphere and an adherence to quality food would enable these restaurants to remain viable economically and also in their community, as suggested in the ICOMOS-UK manifesto.

While the preservation of the food as a part of a larger foodway and as a cultural resource is paramount, some attention must be given to the physical places as well. The buildings and neighborhoods that these restaurants are located in are a part of the story as well, and should be maintained such that they are not upgraded or transformed past the point of recognition. The photographs and memorabilia posted on the walls of all three case study sites add to the nostalgia factor, that undoubtedly draws attention from visiting tourists, but also provides a visible testimony to how many different people have enjoyed a meal at these places over the years.

In 1993, Margaret Lupo said, “Atlanta has become such a cosmopolitan city that it has restaurants with ethnic menus from African to Asian. I’m sure, though, that there

will always be a place for southern food, because it's good food, and healthy food."²⁵⁵

John Ferrell offers in kind, "You never really own a timeless place like Mary Mac's, you just take care of its legacy and treasures."²⁵⁶ Ferrell understands the impermanence of the cultural traditions found in a place like Mary Mac's, but also sees the value in keeping these traditions alive for future generations.

Chad Evans of H & H is the youngest owner of the three case study sites, and perhaps that contributes to his forward-thinking viewpoint on the matter. He says, "I have a young company, and even though I bought what was kind of a museum... I want to pay respects to that, but I'm not interested in maintaining that... I'm not interested in anything that's not continually trying to be relevant and living and breathing."²⁵⁷

Perhaps Mrs. Wilkes put it best when she said, "If you've got good food at a fair price, you don't need all that other stuff."²⁵⁸ Traditional southern cooking has a certain appeal, its long history notwithstanding. Black and white women have influenced southern foodways since their inception, and we can experience the result of that historic influence through the cultural institutions of modern day meat and threes.

²⁵⁵ Lupo, appendix.

²⁵⁶ Ferrell, x.

²⁵⁷ Chad Evans and Brad Evans, discussion.

²⁵⁸ Wilkes, 27.

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APPENDIX A

Case Study Sites Interview Questions IRB #00003343

Basic Information:

- What is your name?
- How long have you lived in the area?
- What is your primary connection to this establishment and how long have you worked here?
- What made you want to own a restaurant?
- How did you learn to operate the business?

Questions about the restaurant itself:

- When did this restaurant open?
- Has it always been at this location? Have there ever been other locations?
- Has this always been a restaurant or was there some other component to the business?
- Has the main location/site ever expanded (or conversely, lost space)?
- How is this restaurant structured? (i.e. is there table service or is it cafeteria style)
- Who owned this restaurant previously and who owns it now?
- Where did the original source of funding/financial backing come from?

Questions about the menu and food served:

- How is your menu structured?
- How has your menu changed over time? How does it compare now to what it was in the past (from time restaurant opened until now)?
- Have your recipes changed? Where did they come from?
- Have the ingredients changed?
- Has where you source your food from changed?
- Do you think of the kind of food you serve as “southern”? Why or why not?
- How did you learn to cook this kind of food? Was there a particular dish you started with and grew from there?
- Is there a particular dish this restaurant is known for?

Questions about location:

- Why was this location chosen?
- How do you think your location affected who ate here?
- Why do you think people are attracted to this place? (i.e. welcoming atmosphere, good food, good location, or word of mouth)
- Have there ever been other similar restaurants in the area?

Questions about customer base:

- What was original customer base like? (i.e. tourists, locals, people who work in town, but live elsewhere, people who live in the neighborhood, rich, poor, families, individuals, white, black, women, men, younger or older people, etc.)
- Have the kinds of people who frequent this restaurant changed over time? If so, how?
- What is it like currently?
- How much is tourism a factor in your restaurant's business today?

Questions about meat and threes:

- How do you define "meat and three"?
- Do you refer to your restaurant as a meat and three? What do you think about that term (i.e. is it accurate for how you think of what you serve)?
- What do you like about this kind of food, beyond it presumably tasting good?
- Why do you think this kind of food has remained popular?

Questions about impact of race and gender on function of the restaurant:

- Do you think having a female owner had implications on the function or success of the restaurant?
- Has the local community ever expressed an opinion about this restaurant being owned (now or previously) by a woman?
- Were there other women-owned restaurants in the area before this particular business opened? If so, did their presence affect the development of this restaurant?

Is there anything I've missed that needs to be considered?

If I have more questions how can I contact you?