



Foreword



HILL COUNTRY BARBECUE—like Bowie’s knife, Crockett’s hat, the Lone Star, J. R. Ewing, and a landscape dotted with oil derricks—is a widely accepted part of Texas lore. So it follows that when the owner of an iconic establishment for Hill Country barbecue writes a tome, collecting all its vast knowledge and history, he would ask a Jewish guy from Brooklyn to write the foreword.

Kidding aside, that is kind of the point. The Salt Lick restaurant, in all its glory, is so far from my world yet somehow immediately accessible. I have no touchstone for that kind of culinary craft in my own life. But from the moment I sampled its food, looked at the sprawling grounds, and took in the amazing Hill Country itself, I was filled with wonder and a sense of home.

That is due in no small part to owner Scott Roberts’ vast culinary expertise and also to the environment he works in. Once you hear the engaging stories about the restaurant’s conception—like Scott’s father deciding where he wanted the pit by marking the spot in the ground with his boot, and Scott and his relatives actually constructing it—you know there is real history and legend in every bite. I could rhapsodize for hours about my first glimpse of the open pit at the Salt Lick. There are, of course, the succulent hanging sausages, the remarkable ribs, the near life-changing turkey (an anomaly at most barbecue establishments), and, naturally, the crown jewel of Texas barbecue, beef brisket.

Jews don’t bring all that much to the lexicon of cooked meat. But Grandma’s and Mom’s brisket is the stuff of legend on the lips of every good Jewish boy. Every good Jewish boy thinks his grandma’s or his mom’s brisket is the best. And up until my first bite of the Salt Lick’s brisket, I, too, was a good Jewish boy. But one bite of the pecan-smoked, oak-fired, spice-rubbed brisket from Driftwood, Texas, had me questioning both faith and family. Both taste buds and allegiances.

As lofty as that sounds, the greatness of the Salt Lick’s menu cannot be overstated. The experience of going to the Salt Lick is absolutely transporting. The food is truly one-of-a-kind, and I never have had its equal. It is the apex of culinary skill plus personal history plus great ingredients. It’s a story told in every laugh shared at the restaurant, in every “ooh,” “aah,” and “mmm,” in every look of wonder as people stroll the grounds of vineyards, low-lying brambles and bushes, and decades upon decades of history. The story owes as much to Japan as it does to Lockhart and is as much about live oak as it is about quite possibly the best habanero sauce ever.

There is no place in the world like the Salt Lick, and there is no food in the world like the Salt Lick serves. It is with great pride that I am part of this book, of Scott and his team’s giving you the keys to the kingdom, opening up a world of tradition and excellence, history and flavor. I am a better food TV personality for having eaten there and a more educated and appreciative eater.

Scott Roberts knows the story of where he’s from and the story of Texas barbecue, and he knows the Salt Lick’s place within that. You’ll find more than just recipes in this book, certainly more than just the tale of one establishment. It is truly the tale of what an iconic food from an iconic place can be. And without question, it is a story worth reading and learning from. The food is out there, the flavor is out there—all you have to do is turn the page.

With joy and with respect—and looking forward to my next burnt end.

ADAM RICHMAN

Author, *America the Edible*

Host and Executive Producer, *Man v. Food Nation*, *Adam Richman’s Best Sandwich in America*



*CHICKEN-FRIED STEAK
WITH RICE AND GRAVY*



THURMAN LEE ROBERTS, SR.
27 October 1908 – 29 April 1981
U.S. NAVY

★ ★ ★

Thurman's Mansion

★ ★ ★

MY FATHER was a hardworking man who was loyal to his family. He worked hard throughout his career in the Navy, as a bridge construction contractor, as a truck farmer, and as the owner of the Salt Lick. He never really took a vacation—except for one time. He had a fascination with the American gold rush and had always wanted to go to Alaska. So in 1970 he took my mother and me to Alaska for a month. At the time we were the only employees at the restaurant, so we had to close it while we were gone. He bought a big 4 x 8 piece of plywood and painted on it: “Tired. Gone to Alaska. Will reopen in September.” Apparently someone really liked the sign and stole it while we were gone. When we got back, our business was nonexistent. Everyone thought we had closed down. It took about six months for people to realize we were still around. He didn’t take any more vacations after that.

In the late 1970s, after the Salt Lick had been open for a good while, my father decided he wanted to build my mother a new home. We had a perfect spot at the top of a hill that overlooked the entire Driftwood valley. You can see for miles. I told him he should build a house there, and he agreed. He worked on the house for four years, crafting it with just a little help from his staff. He quarried rock from the property and used it to create the foundation and eight large concrete columns. He then started building rock walls and finally added the roof.

Late one afternoon he was walking through, inspecting the house, and he sat down on a windowsill, taking in the view. I don’t know what he was thinking about, but my mother told me he was out there for a long time, maybe two or three hours. When he came home, it was night. He told my mother good night and went to sleep, but he never woke up.

The strange thing is that he had just been to the doctor for a checkup that very day and received a clean bill of health. The doctor told him he would probably even outlive him. To celebrate the good news, my mother had bought a lobster for dinner that night. But thinking it was too much of an extravagance for that evening, she ended up freezing it for another occasion. After he passed away in the night, she held on to so much guilt for not having made that special lobster dinner for him. It would have been his last meal.

The mansion my dad began stayed unfinished for more than 20 years. My mom was running the restaurant, and I was working in another career and taking care of my wife and daughter. Over the years, the mansion was vandalized and ignored. In 2005 I finally got it in my head that I needed to finish what my father had started. By that time I was running the restaurant and had expanded the business in a number of ways. We added an outside addition and completed the mansion within the year. The second floor houses our main offices. On the first floor we host special events, including weddings, private parties, and meetings. Though my dad never saw his great home completed, I know he would be proud of what it has become. Today I often stand out on the second story balcony just outside of my office and take in the view he once saw. Sometimes I wonder what he thought about on his last day here.



☞ **BREAKFAST AND DESSERTS** ☜

I TALKED ABOUT how hot the summers would get when growing up in Driftwood, especially since we didn't have air-conditioning. We didn't have heating either. So when it was hot, it was really hot. And when it was cold, it was really cold. In the winter, when I'd wake up sometimes in the morning the room would be so cold that I could see the vapors of my breath. On some of those mornings, Hisako would have already been up and she would be making French toast, cinnamon toast, fresh pastries, or fresh blueberry muffins. The smell of her baking was the only thing that could get me out from under the warm covers on one of those cold winter mornings.

BLUEBERRY MUFFINS

WHEN BLUEBERRIES came into season, my parents would go to Hyden Grocery Store on South Lamar in Austin and buy a whole wooden crate of them. Mom would freeze most of them for later use, but for about a week every morning we ate wonderful yellow muffins filled with blueberries. They would come out of the oven hot and soak up all the butter I could put on them.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon double-acting baking powder
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup blueberries, frozen is okay
- 3 tablespoons flour, for dusting blueberries

Grease 12-muffin pan with 2½-inch cups. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Mix flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder with a fork in a large bowl. In another large bowl, beat egg slightly then stir in milk and oil.

All at once, add egg mixture to flour mixture, and stir until just moistened. Then coat blueberries with flour and gently fold into batter. That will prevent the blueberries from falling to the bottom of the muffin. *NOTE: Over-mixing causes toughness; batter should be lumpy.* Spoon batter into muffin pan, wiping up any spills.

Bake muffins 20 to 25 minutes, until they are well risen and golden and a toothpick placed into a muffin center comes out clean and dry.

You can always use frozen blueberries for this recipe if fresh ones aren't in season. But when they are in season, you'll be able to taste the delicious difference.

SEASONING

To season brisket, you can play with different seasoning recipes. Some people just use salt and pepper. Others use a lot of spices. For the Salt Lick, we keep it to a simple three ingredients: salt, pepper, cayenne pepper. Now you can simply buy the rub at Texas area grocery stores, online, or at the Salt Lick restaurants. But when my dad was doing this years ago, he had a method that helped him make sure the quantities were just right.

Also, it's important that you WAIT to season your meat until your fire is ready. Once the meat is seasoned, you need to immediately put it on the fire. Otherwise the salt in the rub will begin to draw moisture from the meat. Salt your meat only when you are ready to put it on the fire.

[1] First, my dad would set out his brisket and three separate bowls with pepper, salt, and cayenne each.

[2] Next, he would take the salt and sprinkle liberally all over the surface of the meat. [3] Then, he sprinkled an equal amount of pepper all over the brisket.

[4] Finally, he would take just a pinch of the cayenne and sprinkle it in a single line down the center of the meat. [5] With his hands, he would rub the spices uniformly and firmly into the meat to make sure they adhered.

[6] Flip the brisket and repeat the same steps on the other side. [7] A good tip to keep in mind is to always season the meat a little more than you think you need to. It is a big piece of meat and will take a lot of time to cook. You want to make sure those spices meld during the cooking process.

[8] Make sure your meat is at room temperature before putting on the fire. This will help ensure a good sear. [9] Always season a little more than you think you need to.



SEARING AND SLOW COOKING

THIS IS WHERE the time and patience come in. You have to watch your meat, watch your smoker temperature, and watch your smoke. Whatever you do, always keep the thicker part of the meat closer to the heat source. It takes the longest to cook, and you want your thinner meat to cook in as uniform time as possible with the thicker part.

We like to sear our meat at a higher temperature first before letting it slow cook over the fire. When you fire up your smoker, get it to 225 degrees to begin the searing process. We sear the meat for 1 hour and then start the slow cooking process.

Once you begin slow cooking the meat, you will need to bring the temperature to 195 degrees. The rule of thumb is that it takes 75 minutes for each pound of meat that you are cooking. That's about 17 1/2 hours total for a 14-pound brisket.



It is crucial that you wait to season your brisket just before you're ready to put it on the smoker to sear. Be sure the meat is also at room temperature.



Place your brisket on the smoker, being sure to place the thicker side (loin side) of the meat closer to the heat box and the deckle away from the heat.



Sear the meat at 225 degrees consistently for about an hour. The brisket should turn almost gray in color, and the seasoning should have really adhered to the meat.



Once the meat is seared, remove and bring the temperature of the smoker down to 195 degrees.



Replace brisket, meat-side up, and baste for the first time with sauce and let cook at that lower temperature. Baste every 4 hours, giving special attention to the end points.



About 3 hours before estimated cooking time is reached, check the brisket's internal temperature at the thickest part of the meat. Once the brisket has reached an internal temperature of 165 degrees, it is ready for removal. If it isn't, check the temperature in 30-minute intervals.



We begin harvesting our grapes in late summer; assuming the season has gone well. Everything is hand picked and sent to a winery to be pressed and made into beautiful Texas wine.