

# Arthur Bryant

Restaurateur  
1902-1982

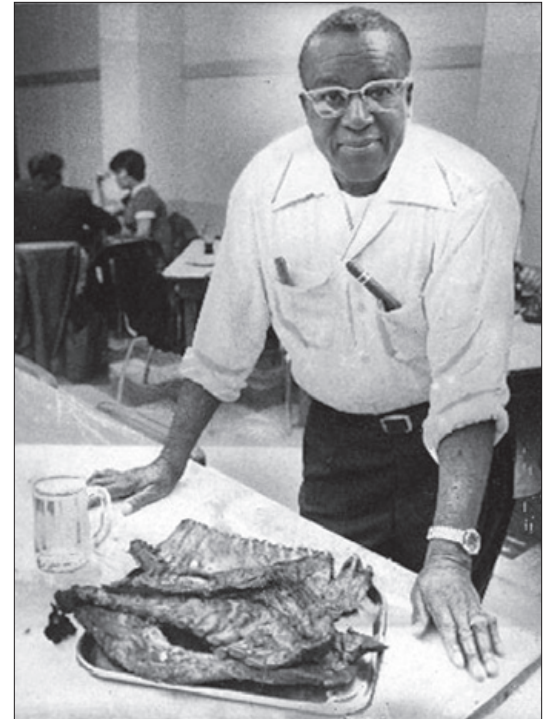
by David Conrads

Arthur Bryant operated what has become the best-known barbecue restaurant in Kansas City, a town internationally famed for barbecue. Indeed, Arthur Bryant's Barbecue is largely responsible for making Kansas City the barbecue capital of the world.

Born on a farm in Branchville, Texas, Bryant attended what was then Prairie View A&M College, an all-black school in Texas. He graduated in 1931 with a degree in agriculture and an offer to teach school. He wanted to travel first and got as far as Kansas City, where he went to visit his brother, Charlie, who was working for barbecue master Henry Perry. When Perry offered him a job, young Arthur took it and settled in Kansas City, where he lived for the rest of his life. Charlie Bryant assumed control of the barbecue operation in 1940 when Perry died; Arthur took over 1946 when Charlie retired.

Bryant's restaurant was, and is, the quintessential barbecue joint: plain, simple, and unpretentious. Located for many years at 18<sup>th</sup> and Euclid streets, it benefited greatly in the 1950s and 1960s from its proximity to the old Municipal Stadium at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Brooklyn. Bryant moved the business to its present location, 1727 Brooklyn, in 1958. In 1974, when journalist and Kansas City-native Calvin Trillin pronounced it the "single best restaurant in the world," Bryant's suddenly became trendy, a favorite dining spot for visiting celebrities as well as locals. Harry Truman was a regular customer and President Jimmy Carter made a famous, unannounced lunch stop at Bryant's in 1979.

Bryant never retired and was found dead of a heart attack in a bed he kept at his restaurant. He was buried in Branchville, Texas. His "grease house," as he proudly called it, was willed to his niece, Doretha Bryant. She leased the business to a restaurant management company that later, after lengthy legal wrangling, took ownership of it. A second restaurant was opened in a Kansas City-area casino in the late 1990s.



## Sources

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