

**ELIZABETH SCOTT** | 2007 Keeper of the Flame



Elizabeth Scott, far right, pictured with her daughters Loretta (l) and Marie (c)

Scott's Hot Tamales  
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“My husband, Aaron Scott, got the recipe in Texas and we started making tamales. But the recipe we had we just had to continue adding ingredients until we got it where it is now today.”

~Elizabeth Scott

In 1941, Mississippi natives Aaron and Elizabeth Scott called San Antonio, Texas, home. Aaron served in the U. S. Army. During their time in Texas, Elizabeth developed a taste for hot tamales. Rather than keep buying them, Aaron decided they should try making them at home, so he bought a tamale recipe from a local Mexican man. The first time they tried making tamales in their own kitchen, Elizabeth and her husband worked for sixteen hours through the night. They didn't even have a dozen hot tamales when they were finished. When they moved back home to Mississippi in 1950, they had perfected their recipe and their craft enough to start a side business selling them on Nelson Street in downtown Greenville. Aaron Scott passed away in 1987. Elizabeth retired from the tamale business in 2001 at age seventy-eight. But six of their nine children—and even some grandchildren—are carrying on the

family business. Today, Scott's Hot Tamale stand can be found on Martin Luther King Boulevard in Greenville. The location has changed, but their corn shuck-wrapped beef brisket hot tamales remain the same.

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Below is an excerpt from the interview with Elizabeth Scott. To view the entire transcript, hear an audio clip, and see photos visit [www.southernfoodways.com](http://www.southernfoodways.com)

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**Subject:** Elizabeth Scott, owner, Scott's Hot Tamales-Greenville, MS

**Date:** June 30, 2005

**Location:** Scott's tamale kitchen - Metcalf, MS

**Interviewer:** Amy Evans

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans on Thursday, June thirtieth, 2005 and I'm in Metcalf, Mississippi, with Elizabeth Scott at her home. And it's a tamale-making day here [the Scott family makes tamales in a special kitchen adjacent to Mrs. Scott's residence]. And they have the Scott's Tamale Stand in Greenville. Mrs. Scott would you mind saying your name, and also if you don't mind sharing your birth date for the record, so we can have it?

Elizabeth Scott: Elizabeth W. Scott; my birthday is July 11, 1923.

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**Are you from the Delta originally?**

Yeah, I was born in Benoit, Mississippi...And I moved here in 1950 in Metcalf. And I've been here ever since. We started the business—my husband [Aaron Scott] got the recipe in Texas and we started. But the recipe we had we just had to continue adding ingredients until we got it where it is now today.

**Yeah, changing it and making it your own.**

Change and make it today's. So we've been in business ever since we moved here—and started the business in Greenville, and we've been there ever since. And we make them here in Metcalf.

**Did your husband get the recipe after y'all had already been married?**

Yeah, we married in [nineteen] forty-one. He got the recipe in [nineteen] forty-five.

**What military service was he in?**

In the Army...Well, he was stationed in San Antonio when he got the recipe, but he was moving around in different areas. He went overseas and everything.

**So what made him even want a tamale recipe, do you remember?**

Because I loved them and bought—he had to buy so many. And I was pregnant, so he said it would be best to make them than continue to buy them. So that's where we started off making hot tamales then.

**And so had you grown up eating hot tamales in Benoit?**

No, I started eating hot tamales after I got married in [nineteen] forty-one. And then when he got out of the service in [nineteen] forty-five, and we started with the recipe and started making them.

**So the first hot tamale you had was in Texas, then?**

Yeah.

**So were you aware of hot tamales in the Delta at all before?**

Yeah, I knew about the hot tamales because there was a couple of people in Greenville that used to sell them and we used to go to the movie in Greenville and get the hot tamales. I would eat hot tamales during the movie, and we'd get hot tamales to take home.

**Do you remember where in Greenville those stands were back in that time?**

Well, at that time it was on North Street in Greenville.

**Would you happen to remember the names of the places at all?**

No, because it was a man named Charlie, but all—all the people what I knew them has done passed on.

**Okay. And were they all African Americans who served them back then?**

Yeah, they was African Americans.

**Do you remember how much they cost back then?**

Well, back then they wasn't but twenty-cents a dozen. [Laughs] So they—you know they improved a lot since then. But that's the way it was back then; it was back in the [nineteen] forties.

**So were the tamales that you had in Texas, how were they different, if at all?**

Well in Texas they was—they was okay, but you didn't see no meat in them. You just seen the meal and a red streak down the center of them. So but they—the flavor was good. But they wasn't like the—the ones we make now.

**Were they pork tamales out there [in Texas]?**

Well I don't know what kind—they didn't have no meat them; it was just a red streak down this—. *[Laughs]* But it didn't look like none—taste like no meat, so I don't know. I guess they just seasoned some kind of sauce in it.

**So what did your husband have to do to get his hands on a recipe?**

Well he bought it from a man, but I didn't know what his name was 'cause I had done come back home during the time he got the recipe. And so he brought it, and we sit down and tried it out, and then we continued to add ingredients and fixing it up. So it didn't taste like the Mexican hot tamales.

**Is the man that he bought the recipe from, was he Mexican?**

Yeah, he was a Mexican.

**Do you have any idea how much he paid for the recipe, or would you be willing to share?**

No, I don't because I wasn't—you know I didn't ask all those questions. I was just happy to get the recipe to start making the hot tamales.

**So when you got the recipe, do you remember the first time that you tried to cook them?**

The first time we tried to make them it was taking us from twelve o'clock that day until four o'clock the next morning, and we didn't make a dozen. *[Laughs]* So it's taken us a long time, but we worked with it and worked with it until we got the—like we wanted it...And so now the children has continued it on. I done retired from it.

**Well when you perfected the recipe and learned how to make them and got all that straight, and you were making them to satisfy your craving that you were talking about, then was it soon after that you decided that it could be a business?**

Yeah. Yeah, when he was—he started to sell them in Benoit [Mississippi] and Scott [Mississippi]. And Lamont [Mississippi]—around in the area in Bolivar County.

**Your husband, would he have like a truck that he would take around to all these places?**

Well, he had a station wagon and a cart, like that over there *[points to an old wooden push-cat in the corner of the room]*. That's one of the first carts; we're still using it...And so after then, he had carts with—with wheels on it. And then we decided to buy a place—a stand; so

that's where we at now—with a stand. But we moved from Nelson Street to Martin Luther King Drive.

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**And when you and your husband came back here and had the stand, was that all y'all were doing or was that just supplementing other income?**

No, he was a carpenter. He worked for Greenville Lumber Company. And myself and the children carried the business on and all, until he got of [retirement] age, and then he decided to stop and help. So he helped a while until he passed.

**And how many children do you have?**

Well, I have nine children...And all of them working in the business but three.

**So they just grew up knowing everything about hot tamales?**

Grew up with—with making hot tamales. They would go to school. When they'd come from school, I'd have the ingredients, and they'd pitch in and help me finish them.

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**When did you retire from [making tamales yourself]?**

About four years ago.

**Do you miss it at all?**

No, I don't miss it. *[Laughs]* No, I don't miss it.

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**Did you ever think you'd be making this many hot tamales?**

No, I didn't. When we first started, I didn't think, you know, it would continue on. So it's up to them to keep it going.

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