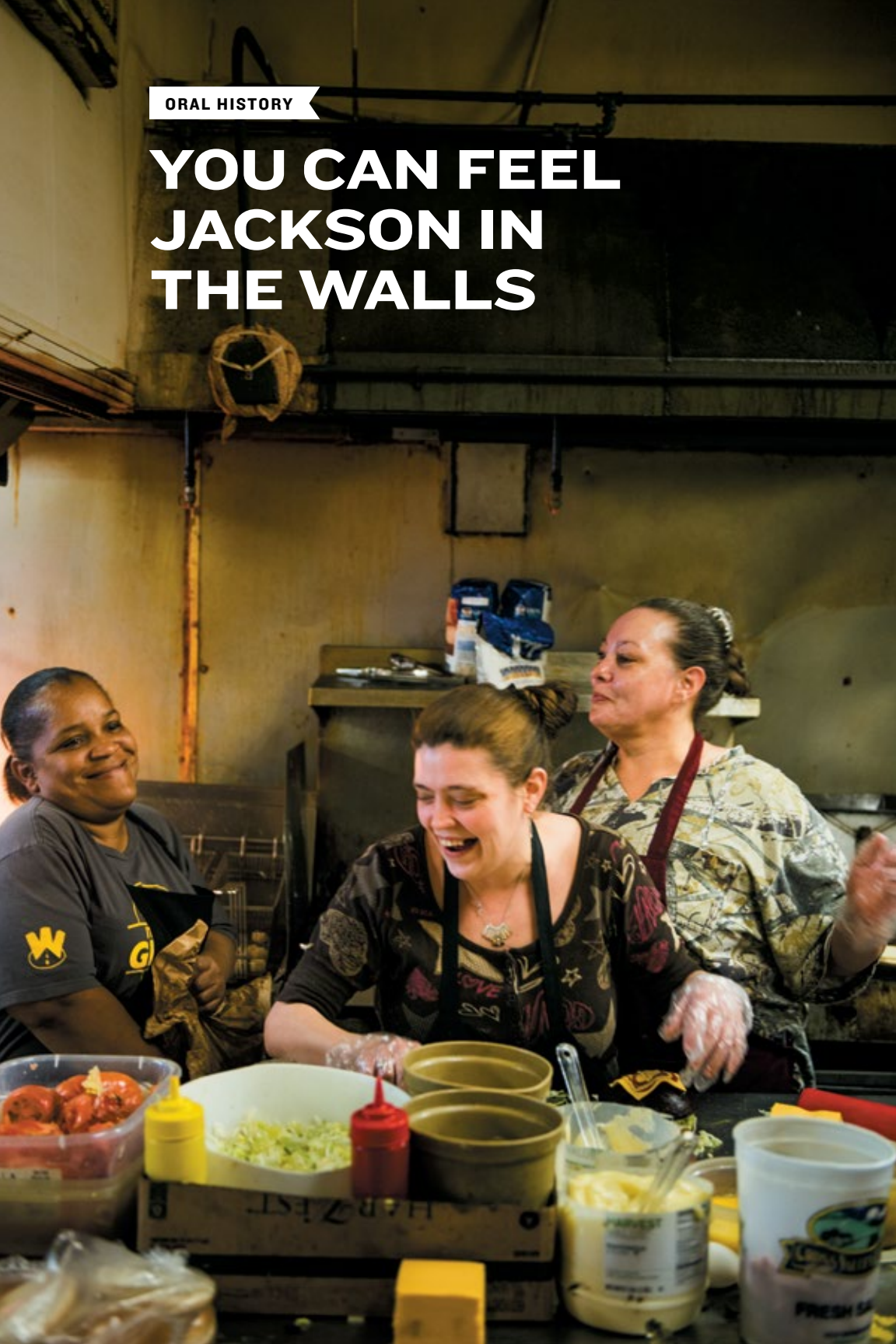


ORAL HISTORY

YOU CAN FEEL JACKSON IN THE WALLS



BEATTY STREET GROCERY, JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

As told to Rien Fertel by Mary Harden

MY GRANDPA WAS A COLONIAL BREAD MAN and he delivered bread to the store that was sitting here. It was an old corner grocery store before Kroger's and all the supermarkets. And he decided to buy the place and he turned it into the sandwich shop that it is today. That happened over about a fifty-year period of time.

My grandfather was born in 1905 and my grandmother was born in 1911. I know he purchased the store with the fixtures that were in it for \$250 in July 1940. In 2015, it'll be seventy-five years. This neighborhood was a part of Jackson from the get-go, but in 1940 it was much more removed. It was on the outskirts of town.

There were gravel roads all around at that time and there were only houses, because people were living here rather than being industries around it. The checkout, the railings where you check out, all of that is a part of the original building. My grandfather expanded it in 1948 and put in the countertops that are here today. Back in the 1960s the area started industrializing, and that's about the time that we started selling sandwiches.



It stayed a grocery store probably until the early 1960s. My grandfather had cans of Rick's sausage, and he sold smoked sausage. He would open the cans of sausage and the guys down at Jackson Iron and Metal, the metal processors, they would come down and they would be hungry and he would just make a few sandwiches along. And then he would slice some bologna and he would sell thin cold bologna sandwiches for a dime apiece.

They would come down and they would buy these dime sandwiches and they would eat their sandwiches outside, or they'd sit along the same counters that are here today. They had groceries on them, and they would just sit on the edges of the counters. I have vivid memories of there being fifty, sixty men in here at the same time, eating their sandwiches inside of the store. Or if they had a truck, they'd just park in the parking lot. And they would sit on the tailgates of their trucks and eat them.

I have never remembered it being anything but integrated. My grandparents delivered groceries to white and black alike. I don't have any memories of anything but black and white being here together—working, eating, living.

My parents worked for my maternal grandparents. Dad started working when he was about in the seventh or eighth grade. He had to quit school to support his family so my grandparents hired him, and he and my mother fell in love. He took over when my grandparents became too old to work—they kind of cut back and then they passed away in 1978 and 1980. So my parents had it and now I'm running it after Dad. I'm the third generation.

In the 1960s, my parents were trying to make a transition from being a grocery store to a sandwich shop. Neither my parents nor my grandparents were college-educated people. They were just hard workers. It was a question of, are you going to market to the blue-collar workers or to the upscale people? I mean, you're selling a dime sandwich, you know? How many do you have to sell to make ends meet? It evolved into what it is.

When my parents decided this was going to be a viable option, they put in a stove back behind the meat market. They would fry the burgers or fry the bologna and they would make them in what was the storage room behind the meat market. They cut a hole through the wall—

still there today—and would put the sandwiches through the hole and sell them over the meat counter.

About three years ago I decided that it would be kind of cool for people to be able to eat on the original counters. So I had a carpenter come in and he took the shelves off the bottom parts and he maintained the integrity of the top parts of the counter so that people can eat off

of them. Then we bought stools so that we could kind of make it into a sit-down-and-eat restaurant rather than just takeout.

We have everyone from the sanitation workers to former governors that eat with us—side by side. They're all eating on the same countertops and enjoying the same ambiance and atmosphere.

My grandparents would be extremely proud. They would be gratified not only that it's still here but that there are some changes, yet it's kind of the same, too. You walk in and you can still see the same fixtures and same countertops, but yet it has done some changing. They could still recognize it for what it is. I think they would appreciate that.

It's distinctly Mississippi and distinctly Jackson because of what we serve—fried bologna, smoked link sausage sandwiches, burgers. It's just

basic, inexpensive, easy, fast, cheap country cooking that's still good. It's reflective of Jackson. You can almost feel Jackson in the walls. Whatever has happened in your life has made you who you are. By that same token, Jackson has made Beatty Street what it is. 🍷



PHOTOS by *Rush Jago*.