Death of a Legend

Arthur Bryant died on December 28, 1982, while working in the restaurant that he turned into a world-famous barbecue joint. Bryant was born in 1902 in Branchville, Texas, and attended Prairie View A&M, an all-black agricultural college. After declining to teach agricultural classes, he moved to Kansas City in 1931 to join his brother, Charlie, who worked for local barbecue magnate Henry Perry.

Perry, who worked on steamboat kitchens along the Mississippi River around 1900, brought his knowledge of southern barbecue with him to Kansas City in 1907. In the city’s thriving Garment District downtown, he served smoked meats, with a pungent pepper sauce, from alley stands, a barn, and finally a restaurant to blacks and whites alike. When Perry died in 1940, Charlie Bryant took over the business and then sold it to Arthur Bryant in 1946. Today Perry is best remembered as the “father” of Kansas City-style barbecue and an early business leader in the black community.

When Arthur Bryant inherited the business, it was respected but not exactly a local legend. Arthur Bryant toned down the barbecue sauce to have wider appeal and renamed the business “Arthur Bryant’s.” In 1958 he moved it to 1727 Brooklyn Avenue, near Municipal Stadium, where he lovingly referred to the unassuming joint as a “grease house.” The distasteful nickname hardly kept the diners away though. Presidents Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter dined there; as did journalist Calvin Trillin, who wrote in 1974 that Arthur Bryant’s was “quite possibly the best restaurant in the world.”

On a routine work day in 1982, Bryant succumbed to a heart attack in a rest area of the restaurant. Under new ownership, Arthur Bryant’s continues to serve the same famous recipes that helped make Kansas City-style barbecue nationally renowned. Barbecue did not originate in Kansas City, but the city has embraced barbecue to an inordinate degree and is widely considered the barbecue capital of the world. The area hosts more than 90 barbecue restaurants as well as the Kansas City Barbecue Society, a non-profit organization that claims 8,000 members, and annually sanctions 300 barbecue contests across the nation.

Read full biographical sketches of Arthur Bryant and Henry Perry, prepared by the Missouri Valley Special Collections, The Kansas City Public Library.


View images of Kansas City barbecue that are a part of the Missouri Valley Special Collections.

- Fiorella’s Jack Stack Barbecue Restaurant
- Unidentified Women Cooking Barbecue

Check out the following books about Kansas City barbecue and Arthur Bryant.

- Smokestack Lightning: Adventures in the Heart of Barbecue Country, by Elie Lolis; chapter nine discusses the history of Kansas City barbecue, pp. 140-153.
- Wild about Kansas City Barbecue, by Rich Davis.
- Take Up the Black Man’s Burden; Kansas City’s African American Communities, 1865-1939, by Charles Coulter; contains biographical sketches about Henry Perry and other African American leaders in Kansas City, pp. 120-121.
- The Tummy Trilogy: American Fried—Alice, Let’s Eat—Third Helpings, by Calvin Trillin; explores the culinary delights of America and reiterates Trillin’s love of Arthur Bryant’s.

View "Cooking Barbecue Kansas City Style," videocassette, by Charlie Podrebarac; instructions on Kansas City-style barbecue.

Continue researching Kansas City barbecue history using archival material from the Missouri Valley Special Collections.
Interview with Ollie W. Gates, son of George Gates and later the owner of Gates & Sons barbecue. George Gates and Arthur Pinkard opened the restaurant in 1946 using recipes learned from Henry Perry.

Vertical File: Gates, Ollie.

* "American Fried: Adventures of a Happy Eater," in The New Republic, September 13, 1975; one of Calvin Trillin’s articles about great restaurants in Kansas City, including Arthur Bryant’s.

References:
Daniel Coleman, Biography of Henry Perry (1875-1940), Restaurateur, Missouri Valley Special Collections.
David Conrads, Biography of Arthur Bryant (1902-1982), Restaurateur, Missouri Valley Special Collections.
Charles Coulter, Take Up the Black Man’s Burden: Kansas City’s African American Communities, 1865-1939 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 120-121.

About the Author

Jason Roe is a digital history specialist at the Kansas City Public Library, content manager and editor for the Civil War on the Western Border website, and the author of the Library’s popular "This Week in Kansas City History" column. Prior to joining the Library, he earned his Ph.D. in American history from the University of Kansas in May 2012. While at KU, he was named the 2011-2012 Richard and Jeanette Sias Graduate Fellow at the Hall Center for the Humanities, and he received the History Department’s 2012 George L. Anderson Award for Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation for his work, "From the Impoverished to the Entitled: The Experience and Meaning of Old Age in America since the 1950s." He enjoys tackling a wide variety of projects relating to U.S. and local history.

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The Library shares the stories of several remarkable women in Coloring Kansas City: Women Who Made History, a coloring book produced by the Missouri Valley Special Collections.)
Death occurs when a champion takes sufficient damage to be reduced to zero health. Upon dying, the summoner’s screen is shaded gray, a death recap and death timer are displayed, gold is rewarded to champions who earned a kill or an assist, and other champion or situation-specific events may occur, as detailed below. The death of all five members of a team simultaneously is referred to as an ace; it is possible for both teams to be aced at the same time, and no champions to be present on the Field of Death of a Legend was the first of three documentary films by Bill Mason about wolves, helping to dispel the image of wolves as “evil” and demonstrating their role in maintaining the balance of nature. Released in 1971, Death of the Legend was the first documentary to feature footage of wolves being born in the wild, and their first year of life. The film was followed two years later by Mason’s feature length theatrical documentary on wolves, Cry of the Wild. Both films were produced by the National.
The legend of the Lee family curse came to light 20 years after the famous martial artist’s death, when Bruce Lee’s only son, Brandon Lee, was following in his father’s footsteps as both an actor and martial artist. In 1992, Brandon Lee was a star on the rise—the 28-year-old had just landed the biggest role of his career. But perhaps Lee, ebullient and dramatic, wouldn't mind a little mystery around his last hours, a fitting end for the legend who inspired so many to join the fight. After learning about Bruce Lee’s death, read these 40 Bruce Lee quotes that will change your life. Then, check out the strange death of Edgar Allan Poe. Stony: death of a legend. 1.4K Reads 39 Votes 1 Part Story. By marvelstars Completed. Get notified when Stony: death of a legend is updated. Continue with Facebook. Continue with Google.