

Round Up



COURTESY OF STARR RESTAURANTS



CAROLYN WYMAN



COURTESY OF MARTIN'S FAMOUS PASTRY SHOPPE, INC.

On a Roll

How Pennsylvania's favorite hamburger and hot dog buns became world-famous

by Carolyn Wyman

THE OUTLINE OF THE MARTIN'S FAMOUS Pastry Shoppe story is evident within a few moments of stepping into the company's visitor center in Chambersburg, Franklin County. The one-car garage that served as the company's first bakery and the 1954 Dodge Coronet that was its original delivery truck are displayed in dramatic contrast to the sprawling 30-acre factory building and dozens of 18-wheelers just outside.

The visitor center tells the story of how the little local bakery grew to produce the country's best-selling brand-name supermarket hot dog and hamburger rolls. Martin's rolls have become world-famous since they were adopted by the hugely popular Shake Shack burger chain in 2004 and are the darling of such online food sites as Serious Eats and upscale burger, barbecue and lobster roll restaurants here and abroad.

The Origin of an Icon

MARTIN'S BUILT ITS GOLDEN ROLL Visitor Center to be a mecca for its customer-fans but also "to keep us grounded," says Julie Martin, a third-generation family owner who is Martin's

social media director and visitor center guide.

Sign up for a tour, and Martin herself will explain that the bun making up more than half of the company's sales has its roots in baking techniques that her great-grandma learned while working as a housekeeper for a wealthy Shippensburg family and an old family recipe for potato-containing cloverleaf rolls. When finances improved, Ruth Wenger and her husband, Laban, opened a bakery featuring a tweaked version of that roll. Their daughter, Lois, worked there alongside her parents, and by 1955, so did her husband, Lloyd Martin, a young man with big ideas.

"My great-grandparents were content with having a neighborhood bakery, but Lloyd kept saying, 'We should expand,'" Martin explains. "Then one Saturday he said, 'I want to sell in other towns.'"

When he showed up for work that Monday, his father-in-law had already hired another guy to do his job, expecting that Lloyd would be pursuing expansion. So, he went home to hatch a business plan with Lois, and Martin's bakery business was born.

Initially, Lloyd and Lois sold their baked goods, including potato rolls, at farmers' markets far enough away not to compete with the Wengers'. Their son Jim met his future wife, Donna, of the Gibbles

Potato Chip clan, while both were working their family

(top) A sausage sandwich at Frankford Hall in Philadelphia is served on a Martin's long roll. (above) A restaurant menu from Martin's is displayed at the museum. (bottom) Lloyd Martin holds up a batch of rolls at the farmers' market stand.





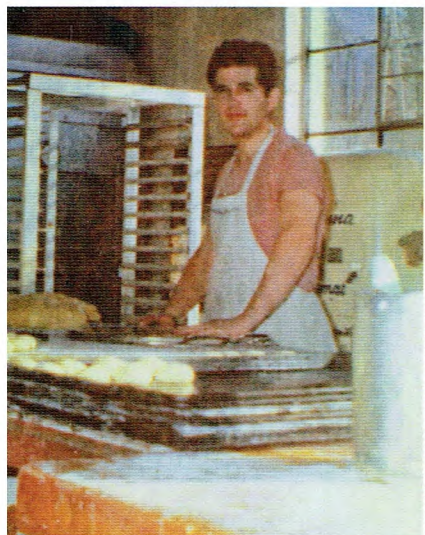
CAROLYN WYMAN (4)



(top) Julie Martin, granddaughter of Lloyd and Lois Martin, sits on the 1954 Dodge Coronet that served as the original delivery vehicle for Martin's products. (above) The Golden Roll Visitor Center houses the relocated original garage bakery where the products were first produced. (right) An original mixer is on display in the museum, as well as (left) a financial ledger, rubber stamps and newspaper clippings.



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stands at one of those markets. The Gibbles brand eventually made a successful transition from farmers' markets to grocery stores, and Lloyd agreed with Jim's suggestion to try doing the same thing at Martin's.

From 1968 to 1987, Martin's operated a popular bakery-restaurant (its 130 bakery items are the source of the "Pastry Shoppe" in its name), but the family eventually decided the surest path to success was to focus on selling the company's signature bread and rolls to supermarkets, first in central Pennsylvania and then Philadelphia and nearby New York.

Expanding Beyond Pennsylvania

"OUR EFFORTS FOLLOWED THE population centers," explains company finance vice president Scott Heintzelman. As a result, company sales doubled annually for almost a decade.

Jim's son, Joe, who is vice president of production operations,

proposed selling the rolls in Florida, which is now the company's second largest market.

"So many ex-New Yorkers who are familiar with our product live there," sister Julie says, "and they grill year-round."

In 2008, Martin's built a second plant in Valdosta, Ga., to service its growing southern and western business. Recently they announced that they are going to almost double the size of the plant, responding to demand in that market.

Although supermarkets purchase most of Martin's prod-

ucts, the rapidly expanding Shake Shack burger chain and other trendy restaurants swear by the rolls. The accompanying online buzz means that Martin's can rely on word-of-mouth promotion and does not need to do much traditional advertising.

Chef Jason Goodman of Frankford Hall, a Philadelphia German beer hall owned by 2017 James Beard Award-winning restaurateur Stephen Starr, uses Martin's products. "Their rolls absorb the juices from our sausages really well," he says, and the moistness from the potato "gives them the rich quality of a brioche."

Despite such endorsement, the only food celebrities you'll see on display at Martin's visitor center are company founders Lois and Lloyd. Two mannequins sport their wedding outfits, and a display case houses a seascape Lois painted and an early company financial ledger open to the first page.

"We have ledgers like this for every year, and in every one, the first page details their charitable giving," says

(left) A young James Martin pauses for a photo in the bakery. (right) Today, the bakery and offices have expanded, as seen from an aerial view. (below) Lloyd and Lois Martin pose for a wedding photo. Lloyd wanted to expand beyond his employer's ambitions, so he struck out on his own in 1955, beginning the potato roll story.



Julie Martin, noting that her grandparents' generosity is a powerful witness to the family's Brethren in Christ faith. The company continues to donate 10 to 20 percent of its profits to charity.

Through her social media role, Martin is regularly alerted to roll sightings, such as when former First Lady Michelle Obama ate one at a Shake Shack.

Standing in her grandparents' tiny garage/bakery beside the homemade bread proofer, Martin reflects on the journey of her family's famous rolls.

"It's pretty unbelievable when you think of how we started," she says. ♣

—Carolyn Wyman, the author of seven food books, lives in Philadelphia.

WHEN YOU GO

Martin's Golden Roll Visitor Center is located at 1000 Potato Roll Lane off I-81 in Chambersburg, Franklin County. Free guided tours are offered to groups of any size, only by reservation, on weekdays between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., call 717-263-9580; potatorolls.com