

THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
**STORY**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S PERIODICAL FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

SUMMER 2018

VOL. 61  
NO. 1

# Mighty Mos in Montgomery County: *The Hot Shoppes History*

By Katie Dishman



## *The Story of the Hot Shoppes*





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# Mighty Mos in Montgomery County: The Hot Shoppes History

By Katie Dishman

Friday, May 20, 1927, was a momentous day. The world was following the historic flight of Charles Lindbergh as he left New York for Paris. Lindy was not the only lucky one that spring. At that same time more than 200 miles south, J. Willard “Bill” Marriott opened his first A&W Root Beer stand. Lindbergh’s journey ended in about 34 hours, while Marriott’s continued for decades.

How Marriott opened his first restaurant on the east coast requires delving into his life and that of his wife, business and life partner Alice. A Utah native, Bill Marriott was one of eight children. The Marriotts operated a small sugar beet and sheep farm in the Rocky Mountains, where Bill started a business when he was only 13 by farming unused land. He sold what he harvested and gave the profits to his family. At 14, Bill took 3,000 sheep to sell in California; Bill’s father told his son what he wanted accomplished, and it was up to the younger Marriott to figure it out. This dedication to hard work and self-reliance proved crucial for the boy’s future success.

Alice “Allie” Sheets, also a Utah native, was one of two children born to Edwin and Alice Taylor Sheets. Edwin, both a lawyer and a bishop of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City, died in the flu epidemic in 1919, when his daughter was just 12. With her mother working at a children’s hospital, Allie took on domestic responsibilities as well as tutoring students. She began college at 15 and graduated with honors four years later.

Bill and Allie had not yet met when a key component of their future came into existence: A&W Root Beer. Around 1920 Roy Allen, a developer of flavored syrups, created one from a variety of ingredients including wintergreen leaves, dandelion root, and sassafras bark. Allen and his partner, Frank Wright, developed a carbonating and cooling system for the new beverage they named with their initials. The men opened a few root beer stands around Sacramento, California, that gained popularity. Allen, who became sole owner within a few years, opened a shop in Salt Lake City in 1924.

While Bill Marriott courted Allie Sheets at the University of Utah from 1926–1927, the two enjoyed dates at the local A&W drive-in. They liked being served a cold beverage while sitting in the car. Learning that Allen had begun offering A&W franchises to sell his product across the country, Bill decided to start his own root beer business. He talked to A&W employees in Salt Lake City about their work and checked with his cousin in Indiana who had opened his own franchise.

Bill had been looking for a business venture; he had a variety of jobs at Weber Junior College, which he attended before transferring to the University of Utah. He majored in political science and history while nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit. He remembered the extreme heat when he passed through Washington, DC, the summer after completing his Mormon mission and thought ice cold root beer would sell well there.



## The Start of Something Big

Marriott's college friend Hugh Colton, in law school at George Washington University in DC, encouraged Bill to move east, so they could partner in the new venture. Each contributed \$3,000: the franchise agreement cost \$1,000, and A&W's Allen required \$2,000 for root beer concentrate and other supplies. The remaining money funded rent and store alterations, advertising, and other necessities for opening a business.

A baker offered to rent an 8-foot-wide storefront located in a shopping center at 14th and Kenyon Streets NW, a short distance from downtown Washington. While affordable, the space turned out to be too small to create a stand. Bill explained the circumstances to Allen, who sent a Mr. Berntsen to assist with installing items such as a huge crockery vat, the carbonating machine, and a long box containing 400 feet of aluminum refrigeration coils. The entrepreneurs also devised a pan to hold ice to cool the mugs, large ones for adults and a three-ounce size for children.<sup>1</sup>

Wanting to ensure interest in the new establishment, Bill printed a thousand tickets for a free A&W Root Beer to announce the grand opening day of May 20, 1927, at 3128 14th Street NW. High school girls were hired to distribute the tickets.

The morning of the opening, Marriott, Colton, and Berntsen made the first batch of root beer and, after chilling it, proclaimed it the best they ever tasted. The first customer entered at 10:02 a.m. and was treated to a free mug. For the rest of the day, people crowded into the small space and spilled onto the sidewalk; Bill had brought in a radio so customers could listen to accounts of Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic journey.



*Bill Marriott standing in doorway of his first Hot Shoppe in 1927; employee Robert Smice is seen through the window.*

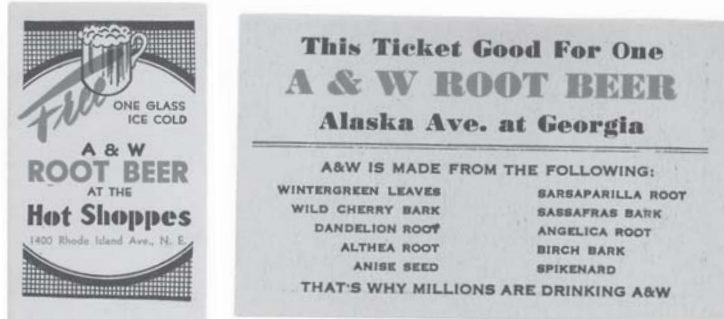


*Hot Shoppe workers inside the original venue on 14th Street in Washington, DC, ca. 1928.*

Bill Marriott had his own journey the following month when he returned to Utah to watch Allie Sheets graduate from college on June 8. The next day they married, got into a Model T Ford, and began an 11-day cross-country trip to Washington to start their life together. Allie helped with the stand as well as set up their home in the same apartment building where Colton, his wife, and other Utahns were living.

## Learning on the Job

Bill and Colton soon set up a second stand at 606 9th Street NW, a busier location near F and G Streets and close to government offices. The two entrepreneurs once again handed out tickets for free root beer to lure customers to the new venue. With 30 feet of storefront space, it could handle more patrons than the inaugural store.



Examples of the free A&W Root Beer tickets that were distributed in the late 1920s and early 1930s.



Bill Marriott stands in the doorway of his first drive-in Hot Shoppe on Georgia Avenue in Washington, DC, ca. 1929.

lot of expensive breakage, not to mention delays for the customers. Bill and Colton worked to change the DC law, speaking at health department hearings, until chlorine sterilization was allowed.<sup>2</sup>

The Marriotts also realized that once summer was over people would not want cold drinks; they decided to add food to keep their business afloat. So the fledgling franchisees requested and received special permission from A&W's Allen to go beyond selling root beer in order to stay in business during the winter.

Bill wanted something different from the usual restaurant fare; he liked the spicy food of the west. Alice's college degree in Spanish was helpful as the Marriotts trekked to the Mexican Embassy, where the chef, charmed by the young woman speaking Spanish, offered his hot tamale and Mexican chili recipes to her. Unfortunately, some ingredients could not be found at local grocers, so the newlyweds returned to the embassy and learned they could order from a supply house in Texas. Other items like hot dogs and barbecue sandwiches joined the menu.

The Marriotts and Colton did not want to close for any length of time to convert their stands. They were concerned that customers would think they had closed for the winter and not return. The owners purchased items needed for the conversion such as dishes, pans, and cutlery, and hired a carpenter to reconfigure the space in a brief period.

The Marriotts learned all aspects of running a business, which neither had done before. Bill and Allie were not accountants, but they bought a ledger for her to keep track of receipts and expenditures. One minor issue they encountered has become part of company lore. When customers paid their nickels for the drinks, the coins left on the counter became covered with root beer, making them stick together. Alice took these "sticky nickels" to the bank in a bag.

A greater challenge involved the glasses used to serve the root beer. The initial owners had bought crystal mugs that cost 25 cents each (in 2018 more than \$3.50). The District of Columbia required restaurant glasses to be sterilized for five minutes in boiling water; most states allowed restaurants to sterilize in chlorine and then rinse in cold water. Soaking glasses in hot water made it a challenge to cool the mugs, and hot glasses could crack when chilled. When sales were brisk, staff frequently rushed the process, causing a

# Marriott Timeline



J.W. "Bill" Marriott,  
1900-1985



Alice Sheets Marriott,  
1907-2000

**1927**

J. Willard "Bill" Marriott and business partner Hugh Colton open their first A&W Root Beer stand in Washington, D.C. After Bill marries Alice Sheets, the three open a second A&W stand on 9th Street; it is renamed Hot Shoppes after they begin serving food. Colton sells his portion after the first year.

**1930**

The fifth Hot Shoppe opens on Connecticut Avenue, becoming the company's flagship store. The Marriotts focus on opening restaurants along well-traveled roadways to attract a growing commuter population.



The Hot Shoppe on Georgia Avenue opens; it is the first drive-in restaurant on the East Coast. The wait staff, called "curbers," would run to cars to take orders.

Hot Shoppes, Inc. is officially incorporated.

**1929**

**1928**

They also struggled with a name for the new eatery. Inspiration came to Bill when a friend from Utah stopped by for a root beer in September 1927. He asked Bill when his "hot shop" would open, having heard from Colton about the upcoming menu of spicy food. Bill proposed the idea of "Hot Shop" to Allie and the Coltons but they scoffed, saying it was too plain. Bill suggested adding an extra "p" and "e" for some "class." Allie's reaction: "That's so bad it's good."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the A&W stands became "Hot Shoppes." Allie practiced cooking the embassy recipes in their apartment. The second stand, with more room, had a revolving spit in the window, and a man carved the meat while pedestrians watched.

## Going it Alone

By the end of the first year in business, the partners had grossed \$16,000. Colton, who graduated from law school, decided to return to Utah and sold his portion of the Hot Shoppes for \$5,000, leaving the newlyweds to continue running the business.

The Marriotts wanted to expand. Also, Bill wanted to make sure the third location was a drive-in like the one he patronized in Utah. They found an ideal spot, a corner lot on Georgia Avenue and Gallatin Street NW. Though farther from downtown, the growing neighborhood near Rock Creek Park would provide considerable family business.

However, another government regulation stood in the way. Since no drive-in restaurants existed on the east coast, local building officials did not want to issue a permit for young people to sit in cars where they might partake in lurid activities such as drinking. Bill had to convince the government that suspect behavior would not be tolerated, especially the drinking of alcohol during Prohibition.

Like the law regarding glass sterilization, an even larger obstacle surfaced. DC government would not permit a curb to be cut to allow cars to drive onto a parking lot; only gas stations could obtain curb cuts for businesses. Again, Bill needed permission from the local government. His persistence paid off. Reluctantly, the lawmakers agreed that curb cuts should be allowed for other commercial purposes besides gas stations.

## 1937

Hot Shoppes pioneers airline catering at Hoover Field by selling boxed lunches to passengers, eventually named In-Flite. Also, the first Hot Shoppe in Montgomery County opens in Chevy Chase.

## 1955

Hot Shoppes administrative offices consolidate in one headquarters building at 5161 River Road in Bethesda, Maryland.

## 1964

The company changes its name to Marriott-Hot Shoppes, Inc.; Bill Marriott, Jr. becomes President.

## 1967

The company changes its name again to the Marriott Corporation.

## 1979

A new corporate headquarters opens on Fernwood Road in Bethesda, Maryland.

## 1999

The last Hot Shoppe, in Marlow Heights, Maryland, closes its doors.

Hot Shoppes becomes a public company when stock is offered at \$10.25 per share and sells out in two hours of trading.

## 1953

The Mighty Mo hamburger is introduced.

## 1955

The Marriotts enter the lodging business when the first Marriott motor hotel opens at Twin Bridges in Arlington, Virginia.

## 1957

Hot Shoppes Jr. debuts in Washington, D.C. offering fast service and a limited menu.

## 1965

Marriott debuts Roy Rogers restaurants, renowned for its roast beef sandwiches.

## 1968

Marriott restructures by selling off its restaurant and In-Flite divisions.

## 1989

Marriott International breaks ground for a new headquarters building in downtown Bethesda, maintaining its ties to Montgomery County.

## 2018

Opening in July 1928, Hot Shoppe #3, at 5103 Georgia Avenue, DC, was an immediate success. With the building painted an eye-catching orange and black, the A&W colors, Hot Shoppes became popular with customers who liked to sit in their cars and have the 5-cent mug delivered to them by “curbers” or “running boys,” as dubbed by some local newspapers.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the food was popular. There was a “barbecue machine” outside, with the carver making sandwiches topped with Allie’s sauce and cole slaw for 15 cents. In addition, there was Mexican chili con carne, hot tamales, and hot dogs for 10 cents. The drink selection had expanded to include coffee and milk for 5 cents, and, of course, the root beer.



The Georgia Avenue drive-in with the Bar-B-Q machine on full display, ca. 1929.



The “running boy” logo was used by Hot Shoppes for decades. Running boys (and girls) were also known as a “curbers” who would deliver orders to the patrons in their cars.

Expansion continued for the Marriotts. Seizing on the idea of the “running boy,” Bill hired an artist to create a character in uniform holding a tray, running to deliver orders to customers in their cars. Patches embroidered with the drawing soon adorned the jackets of employees, making the running boy the Hot Shoppes logo for many years.



With the success of the initial three stands, the Marriotts had become too busy to do all the work themselves, so they hired people to handle chores such as accounting and purchasing food, all working from offices set up at the Marriotts' apartment.

Bill, however, continued to stop by the Hot Shoppes and meet with the employees to make them feel a part of the Marriott family. In addition, Bill frequently would engage with customers to show his appreciation and to hear what they liked, or didn't.

These visits allowed the "Big Tamale," as employees referred to Bill, to check if the Hot Shoppes were properly cleaned and organized. Bill's son Dick Marriott later noted that "My father was a great believer in the principle of 'management by walking around'.... He inspected each of his restaurants closely every time he visited them. If there was anything wrong, he wanted a complete explanation and a plan of how it was going to be corrected."<sup>5</sup>

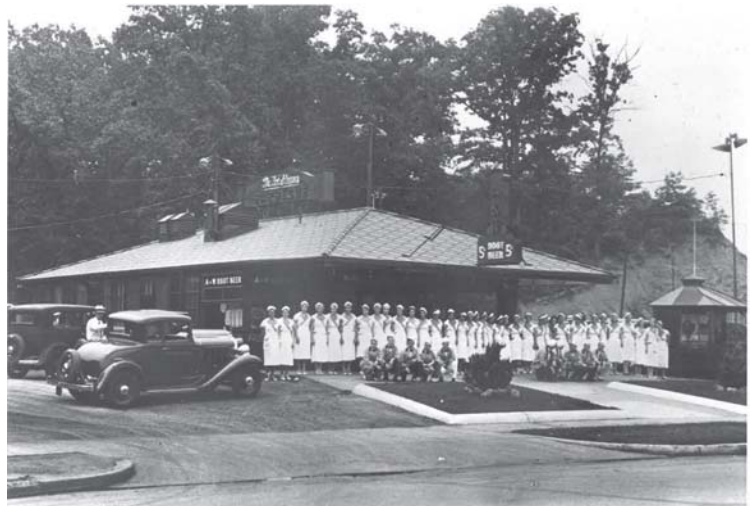
## The Market Collapses, but the Marriotts Do Not

After Black Monday, when the stock market collapsed in October 1929, the Marriotts assumed their business would take a hit. They employed approximately 80 people, who ensured that their three eateries stayed open 24 hours a day, staying open around the clock like some other big city diners were doing.

The slowdown never occurred, but the market crash had other repercussions. With the unemployment rate soaring, the neighborhood around the second Hot Shoppe on 9th Street deteriorated; it no longer teemed with government employees at lunchtime. Panhandlers loitered outside, and some people would order food and then leave without paying. Bill leased Hot Shoppe #2 to someone else although it was still making money.

Bill believed in the importance of having a pool of dependable workers to staff his Hot Shoppes. He thought expansion would be the best way to maintain a large number of employees. The Marriotts applied the mantra of the real estate industry, "location, location, location," to their business.

Bill hired boys to sit at certain intersections to be "traffic counters." He wanted to open eateries near plenty of auto activity. The boys sat on milk bottle crates with push-lever counters; for one hour they would count cars in one direction, and the next hour in the other direction.



*Employees in front of the Connecticut Avenue Hot Shoppe #5, which opened in 1930.*

Bill and Allie counted cars as well. To narrow down options, they traveled to possible locations at different times of the day to determine the traffic volume. This research let them see what side of the street would be better and which corner might be more beneficial. They found two locations they liked and decided to build on both. The fourth store opened in late 1929 at 1733 Rhode Island Avenue NE, a busy, urban area. In July 1930, the fifth store, which immediately became the flagship, opened at 4340 Connecticut Avenue NW.



The latter store sat far outside the downtown area, close to the Chevy Chase, Montgomery County, Maryland border, with a 150-foot-long front, a huge contrast from the 8 feet of the first location. The Connecticut Avenue drive-in proved to be particularly popular on Friday and Saturday evenings with local high schoolers and college students.

Just a few weeks after the latest Hot Shoppes opening, Bill found a place for the next one, on Florida Avenue near Rhode Island Avenue. It opened in August 1931. Hot Shoppes continued to grow throughout the 1930s, even though the country was suffering through the Great Depression. The Marriotts, too, endured hardships like many Americans. The owner of the Georgia Avenue property doubled the rent. And the bank where they had almost all their money, Park Savings Bank, closed as did almost a quarter of the depositories at the time.

Although his lawyer had warned Bill that he should get out of the restaurant business, since so many folded during the economic upheaval, Bill disagreed. He saw how profitable “chain-store merchandising” was for grocery and retail stores.<sup>6</sup>

As an entrepreneur learning a new trade, Bill used others as examples. Business pioneers such as Frank W. Woolworth, James C. Penney, and Henry Ford knew that to mass produce material quality control was necessary, and that meant standardization at the source. Bill figured by centralizing many of the processes to run a business, he could be successful. This would entail having the bulk of the food prepared at a commissary and then distributed to the restaurants. The recipes could be standardized so dishes would taste consistent at the various Hot Shoppes. Bill theorized if the food at one of the stores tasted bad, customers would assume it was bad at all of them and business would decrease, so he hired a kitchen and menu consultant to assist with the fare Hot Shoppes offered.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Bill wrote universal operations procedures for the Hot Shoppes managers to follow regarding many functions including accounting, general administration, and customer and employee relations. Most importantly, he thought all staff needed the same training to help instill in them a sense of pride in their work and loyalty to the company.



*Bill Marriott in the kitchen of the Universal Building cafeteria in Washington, DC, ca. 1960.*

Allie, too, did her part not only with the finances, but she frequently checked on the stores. In addition, she took interior design courses to assist with the nearly continual redecoration of the five restaurants. When in 1931 she became pregnant, Allie knew soon she would not be able to aid her husband like she had.

Bill's large family provided another pool of employees to tap. Brother Paul had moved from Utah the previous year to assist in managing the DC Hot Shoppes; he also helped with expansion plans. Although the Depression continued, the Marriotts knew

it would end someday. In 1932, Paul helped open and run the first Hot Shoppe outside DC in Baltimore. On March 25 of that year J. Willard “Bill” Marriott, Jr. was born. Although the arrival of Bill Jr. limited Allie's participation in the business, she and Bill Sr. were delighted to begin to grow their own family.

While many businesses did not survive the Great Depression, Hot Shoppes grew, in part, because of good but reasonably priced fare. In 1933, a Hot Shoppe opened farther north, in Philadelphia. In 1934, the menu expanded at the Connecticut Avenue Shoppe with the inclusion of full dinners.

Although Hot Shoppes were doing well, particularly since Bill invested so much time in the growing business, a life-threatening illness arose that could have upended everything. In 1933, Bill began to feel poorly and was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, cancer of the lymphatic glands. He went through radiation therapy, but it did not reduce the lymph nodes, and his doctors did not think surgery would be effective. Bill was given less than a year to live. He and Allie left the business for a few months and went on a long road trip, leaving Paul Marriott in charge.

Upon their return to Washington, they met with elders of the Mormon Church who anointed Bill and prayed for his cancer to go away. In short order, the swelling dissipated and by Christmas, the doctors found no sign of Hodgkin's disease.<sup>8</sup> This allowed Bill to return to work full force, continuing to tour the DC Hot Shoppes for cleanliness and order. In fact, he believed that orderly shops themselves were a form of advertisement.

In a company newsletter from 1937, a column asked, "Does it pay to advertise?" The "indisputable answer" was "yes." The company itemized in order of importance cleanliness, quality food, efficient service, moderate prices, and friendliness. From the beginning, the Marriotts emphasized these tenets. "Let us hold to our standards.... This is priceless advertising."<sup>9</sup>

Two noteworthy developments in Hot Shoppes history occurred in 1937. One was the introduction of a children's menu featuring, initially, two options for 35 or 45 cents. By offering three-ounce mugs for youngsters from the start, Bill implemented a new advertising pitch: Food for the Whole Family.



*Hot Shoppes introduced its children's menu in 1937.*



*Although in the midst of the Great Depression, Hot Shoppes kept many DC-area residents employed, ca. 1937.*

## A New Business Begins to Fly

The second notable development was expanding into the suburbs. The first Maryland Hot Shoppe opened at Wisconsin and Western Avenues in Chevy Chase in March 1937. In addition, on the other side of the Potomac River, Marriott built a store near Hoover Airport in Virginia. Initially considered a bad idea, the property – purchased from the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad – was located near several train tracks, and one side faced the airport. Store #8 would reap unforeseen benefits.

Marriott believed that cars would continue to be important for growth. People not only drove to his restaurants, with some staying in their autos to eat, but also they used their cars for recreational purposes. During the Depression, some families drove to the airport to watch planes take off and land as an inexpensive form of entertainment. Bill and his workers noticed people buying food to eat on the premises as well as many travelers and airline crews purchasing box lunches to take on their flights.

In the late 1930s, the majority of airline business involved the U.S. Postal Service; leisure and business travel on airplanes was nascent. Nevertheless, enough business existed for Hot Shoppe #8 to set up a small basement storeroom with a makeshift catering department for first Eastern and then American Airlines. Cardboard trays, specially created for airline use, held the meals. Initially, the airlines served complimentary food, delivered by Hot Shoppes panel trucks. Within a year, six full-time Hot Shoppes employees held jobs dedicated to airline catering. Paul Marriott soon took over running that division, which would be rebranded “In-Flite,” another initiative by the Marriotts.

The end of the decade had another significant event as the Marriotts completed their family when Richard “Dick” Marriott was born in 1939. Like his older brother, Bill, Dick would work in the family business performing a variety of jobs including running the restaurant division in the 1970s, which included Hot Shoppes.



*The Marriott family in 1943.*



*The company airline catering began in 1937 when food was prepared at nearby Hot Shoppe #8 and delivered to the planes at Hoover Airport. Photo is from 1953.*

In 1940 five more Hot Shoppes opened, for a total of 18 in Washington and the surrounding suburbs along with Baltimore and Philadelphia. The Marriotts wanted to make sure business would continue to grow by making the new restaurants attractive and recognizable through standard designs.

The restaurants and drive-ins were popular particularly with teenagers. A 1940 newspaper article highlighted the fact that after school and following dances, the venues served as convenient spots to eat and talk and perhaps spend time with the opposite sex.<sup>10</sup>

Remarkably, the Hot Shoppes not only survived but thrived during the Depression. The company had grown so much that a new commissary opened at 1234 Upshur Street NW in Washington in 1941. At the new building, the company focused on consistency in quality, portion size, and taste.



*Hot Shoppes truck, sporting one of the the company slogans, outside the commissary on Upshur Street in DC which opened in 1941. Photo is from 1947.*



*Hot Shoppe at 7501 Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda, Maryland, ca. 1950; it opened in 1941. (Photo from Montgomery County Historical Society.)*

By January 1941, restaurant #16 at East-West Highway and Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda quickly became a popular hangout for people of all ages. It was the last Hot Shoppe to open before U.S. entry into World War II. No new Hot Shoppes opened for the duration for a variety of reasons. While the peacetime draft started in September 1940, once Pearl Harbor was attacked in December 1941, the vast number of enlistees and draftees not only reduced the number of employees, but also brought in fewer customers.

Moreover, rationing limited the amount of meat, butter, and sugar available. Long-time employee Iva Savage continued to develop new dishes in the commissary. Due to the shortages, she devised recipes that did not require meat but instead used more vegetables. Also, the Marriotts had to discontinue curbside service when the government limited driving by rationing gasoline and encouraging car pools.



*Hot Shoppes began managing cafeterias like this one at the Treasury Building, ca. 1943.*

While wartime restrictions created some challenges, the Marriotts expanded beyond their traditional restaurants and drive-ins into cafeteria management. In 1943, with the DC area filled with government war workers, the company began running the cafeteria at the Naval Communications Annex.

In addition, Hot Shoppes served defense plant workers at five different locations. Lunch wagons would travel to the Engineering and Research Corporation in Riverdale, Maryland, for example, and provide food for all three shifts."



## Postwar Progress with the Pantry House and More

When peace came in September 1945, it took several months for all rationing to end. Business escalated as the majority of troops headed home. Not only did the men need work, but gas was available so people resumed driving and eating out. Picking up where they left off, the Marriotts opened new stores and operated more cafeterias. Before the year ended, the company ventured into Florida with Hot Shoppes airline catering in Miami.

Another component to Hot Shoppes growth was expansion into retail sales. Bill saw a market for take-home food, so the company conducted a survey in 1946 to determine interest in a Hot Shoppes-type bakery. With positive results, plans went forward for the “Pantry House.” The first one opened in March 1947 adjacent to the Rosslyn Shoppe #12. It sold ice cream, cakes, pastries, and other baked goods. Within a year, six more Pantry Houses were launched; the newly remodeled and updated Upshur Street commissary was kept busy and made good use of the larger ice boxes particularly for the ice cream that was popular with patrons. Marriott adopted a variation of the current company slogan: “Take Home Food for the Family.”



*Pantry House, a Hot Shoppes-type bakery for takeout food, first opened in 1947; this is the Colesville Road location in 1954.*

In fact, the Upshur Street Commissary in the 1940s reportedly became the largest purchaser of beef in the United States, just after the military.<sup>13</sup>

Besides additional drive-ins and restaurants, the company operated some industrial and private cafeterias. Expansion headed west with airline catering at Chicago's Midway Airport in 1947. New roadways developed nationally as suburbs continued to burgeon; the war and expanding federal government had brought many new residents to the area.

Postwar expansion continued into a new state as the Hot Shoppes airline catering headed farther north into Newark, New Jersey. Paul Marriott, who had become Executive Vice President, discussed the status of Hot Shoppes 20 years after its founding: “Expansion, new fields, improvements and new opportunities have been characteristic of our 20th Anniversary Year. Twenty years of cooperation and hard work have brought 33 food production and sales operations, including drive-in restaurants, retail sales stores, airlines catering, industrial feeding and distribution. This means profitable employment for 2,300 Hot Shoppe staff members, serving the public 75,000 meals per day at the peak of the season.”<sup>12</sup>



*Sign announcing another Hot Shoppe opening soon, indicative of the growth of the business, ca. 1940s.*

## The Fifties Frenzy

The postwar population explosion continued into the next decade. By 1950 there were almost 1.3 million people in the D.C./Maryland/Virginia metro area, and by 1960 the population increased to more than 1.8 million. While still primarily an east coast phenomenon, Hot Shoppes came to national prominence with an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* published in June 1950, “Good Mormons Don’t Go Broke.”

The Marriotts had always been devoted to their church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Some of its tenets, although not exclusive to the denomination, helped shape Bill and Allie’s path to success. For instance, hard work and constant improvement were a key part of their makeup. Bill worked hard at his family’s farm as a youth, and Allie began college early to help support her family after her father’s death. These traits followed them as they grew their business in DC. Moreover, in their pursuit of excellence, a core value of the company, they expected employees to perform at their highest levels as well. Other principles stemming from the church embraced by the Marriotts included believing in the Golden Rule of treating others fairly and kindly, acting with integrity, and serving their communities to make them better.

In 1950, Bill and Allie opened a Hot Shoppe in Salt Lake City, Utah, where they originally enjoyed root beer at an A&W drive-in. In Montgomery County, Maryland, the Colesville Road Shoppe opened in Silver Spring in January 1952 with a large ballroom, for company events and large parties, as well as a test kitchen with the latest equipment to develop new recipes. Food Supervisor Savage created a recipe card system to further aid with standardization in food preparation.

This, too, helped the menu grow, including the addition of iconic items such as the Orange Freeze, orange juice with orange sherbet, in 1952, and in 1955 the Mighty Mo hamburger, the first triple-decker hamburger in the Washington area. The Teen Twist came along in 1957; originally made with ham, corned beef, and liverwurst, the following year it evolved into more of a traditional ham and cheese sandwich on a twist roll, “a real taste treat” according to the menu. Both sandwiches were named by winners of company contests. “Mighty Mo” was chosen in honor of the battleship U.S.S. *Missouri*.<sup>14</sup>



Curbette delivering a tray at the Connecticut Avenue Shoppe, ca. 1955.



Two of the more popular Hot Shoppes menu items were the Orange Freeze, introduced in 1952, and the Mighty Mo, the first triple-decker hamburger in the DC area, which was created in 1955.

During this massive growth spurt the Marriotts decided to take the business public. In March 1953, Hot Shoppes stock went on sale, selling out within two hours at \$10.25 per share. At the time more than 3,000 employees and 45 eating establishments comprised the business. This influx of money helped with expansion into more industrial and institutional food operations for the government, military, and private sectors. Hot Shoppes ran the cafeterias at the Securities & Exchange Commission, Treasury Department, Ford Motor Company, and General Motors in various cities. In early 1954, a company newsletter announced that Hot Shoppes was the seventh largest restaurant chain in the country.<sup>15</sup>

Good food and reasonable prices helped Hot Shoppes restaurants expand as well as the growth of roadways beginning in the late 1940s. The establishment of the Interstate Highway System, authorized on June 29, 1956 by the Federal Aid Highway Act, substantiated Bill's belief in the importance of the automobile.

In the mid 1950s, the chain expanded not only in the DC area, but also along the New York Thruway system, starting in 1954 with restaurants opening in the service plazas. The thruway helped connect New York with neighboring states. Bill also secured a few Hot Shoppes locations along the Sunshine Parkway in Florida. Moreover, Mighty-Mo drive-ins were created in 1957 to capitalize on the popularity of the burger.

Bill Marriott and his staff kept the restaurants running well and periodically would introduce innovations. The Silver Spring store received the first "butterfly canopy" for protected curb service in 1955. The canopies shielded customers in their cars as well as the curbers and curbettes from sun and rain.



*Hot Shoppes expanded their reach on the roadways, first along the New York Thruway system in 1954. Photo is from early 1960s.*



*The butterfly canopy, named because of its shape, protected patrons and staff from the elements. First introduced at the Silver Spring Hot Shoppe in 1955, this photo is from ca. 1960.*

Also helping the wait staff with duties was the Teletray, first implemented in 1955. Patrons ordered through a microphone next to their cars; a switchboard employee on the receiver wrote down the request. The microphones, too, functioned as radios through which music was piped. Food was delivered on trays by the curbers. For those drive-ins that did not yet have canopies, the new ordering system kept staff out of the weather a bit longer.<sup>16</sup>

Today, many Hot Shoppes patrons, particularly in the DC area, continue to repeat favorite stories. The chain "was known for its curb service, which attracted teen-agers by the droves for Mighty Mo burgers and Orange Freezes. Inside, families enjoyed the chicken croquettes or liver and onions, maybe with some buttermilk biscuits on the side."<sup>17</sup>





YEA, TEAM! Hot Shoppes has long been the favorite meeting place of the younger set. Romance has been born and school victories celebrated under the sign of the Running Boy. That we are still a mecca for minors is gratifying. In this shot, Brownie Greene, Curber at our Silver Spring Shoppe,

joins hands with two groups of pretty football rooters. On the left, Wheaton, and on the right, Montgomery Elair. Sworn enemies on the football field, they became friends again over a milkshake and Mighty Mo.

*The Silver Spring Hot Shoppe hosts two rival schools, as detailed in the company newsletter, Hot Sauce, in October 1955.*

With such a large, sprawling company and offices in different buildings, Bill looked to consolidate. A new headquarters building opened on River Road in Bethesda in 1955. In that year's annual report, Bill wrote that such great company growth was possible because of the "high standard of performance of our employees at all levels" which was largely responsible "for the customer good will and repeat patronage that have made Hot Shoppes, Inc. successful. We value highly the spirit of loyalty and diligence that exists throughout our organization."

One of the employees at this time was his youngest son, Dick, who turned 16 in 1955 and began working in maintenance at Hot Shoppes. The following year, the younger Marriott washed dishes and made Mighty Mos and other items at the Silver Spring and Bethesda stores. Even while getting his bachelor degree in Utah he worked at the Salt Lake City Shoppe. Following Harvard Business School, Dick managed the Williston, Wheaton, and Langley Park Hot Shoppes before moving on to other positions within the company.

Another employee who, no doubt, Bill had in mind when praising the staff was John Randolph who started working for Hot Shoppes in 1930, just three years after the company began and at the start of the Great Depression. Beginning as a dishwasher, Randolph quickly took other jobs. By 1948, he was appointed the "goodwill ambassador" for the company, "a position which was a progressive step forward for my [African-American] race," he noted. In 1952 he was promoted to "personnel representative," a job he held until his retirement in 1980.<sup>18</sup>



*The aerial view shows the Marriott headquarters and warehouse at 5161 River Road in Bethesda, Maryland, first opened in 1955. Photo is from 1965.*



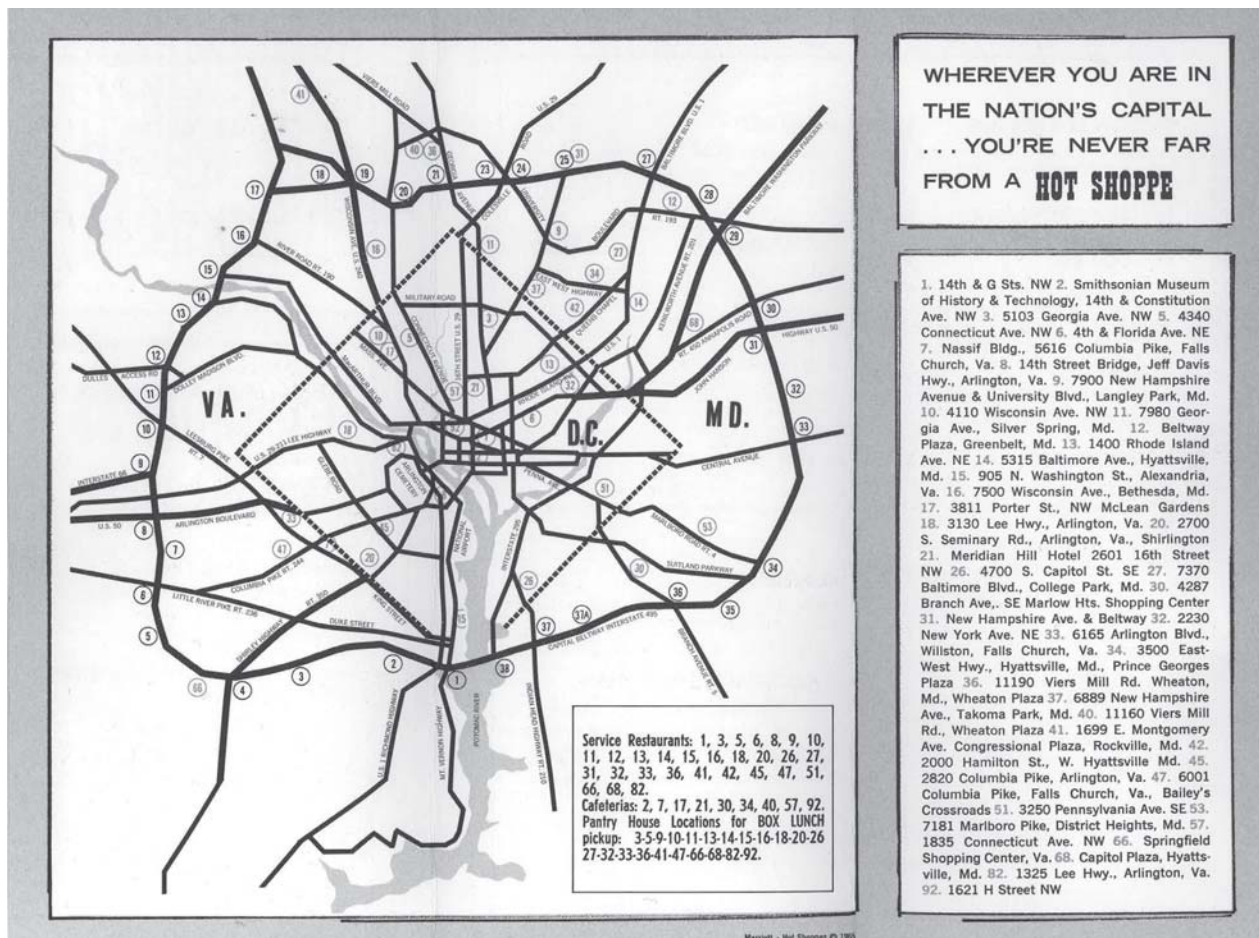
This appreciation of good employees remained true as the Marriotts entered the next phase of their company: lodging. Bill had developed land in the 1930s near Hoover Airport for Hot Shoppe #8 that, in turn, spawned the airline catering business. The purchase of that railroad land, once considered undesirable, would again be instrumental for company growth. Although the restaurant took up a portion of the property, Bill thought the remaining space might be suitable for another commissary or warehouse.

## Motor Hotels Move In

After construction of the Pentagon building 1941-43 on the site of the former Hoover Airport, Bill envisioned growth in this area, including new roads for more cars. A Marriott executive suggested the idea of a motor hotel, and soon with great fanfare the Marriotts announced they would enter the hotel business. Until that time, primarily three types of lodging existed: roadside motels, traditional downtown hotels, and resorts. The Twin Bridges Marriott Motor Hotel – opened in January 1957 – offered the best of all three as the largest motor hotel in the world.

The new hotel, near the renamed Washington National Airport, was expected not only to benefit business travelers, but also families who drove to the nation's capital for vacation. A second motor hotel, also in Arlington, Virginia, opened in 1959 at Key Bridge. Hot Shoppes restaurants, adjacent to both, continued to do good business with guests close by.

While the 1950s provided robust economic growth for Hot Shoppes, the early 1960s brought more diversification for the company, including opening eateries such as Sirloin and Saddle steak houses and Char-Broilers, a new type of drive-in to complement existing Mighty Mo drive-ins.



This 1965 map shows the locations of the Hot Shoppes restaurants, cafeterias, and Pantry Houses that blanketed the DC area.

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By 1964, more than 70 Hot Shoppes restaurants, cafeterias, and turnpike stops existed, but only five hotels. Nevertheless, in November that year the company was renamed Marriott-Hot Shoppes, Inc., partly because of the burgeoning hotel business and partly because of other food establishments within the company. Another change that year was the appointment of Executive Vice President Bill Marriott, Jr. to be company president; his father stayed on as chairman of the Board of Directors.

In early 1965, after a study of the ever-changing restaurant industry and in hopes of competing against McDonald's and similar fast food businesses, Hot Shoppes created its own spinoff in the form of Hot Shoppes Jr., a scaled-down version of the full-serve restaurant, featuring primarily hamburgers and Pappy Parker Smoky Mountain Fried Chicken. The first one opened in Hillcrest Heights, in Prince George's County, Maryland. These "Juniors" proved popular enough to expand quickly. Within 15 months, the fifth Junior opened along Rockville Pike in Rockville, Maryland, on May 1, 1966, the first one in Montgomery County.

Just three years later, as the hotel business became more prominent, the company changed names again to the Marriott Corporation, no longer including Hot Shoppes as part of the business appellation. But that did not mean that food was not important. The restaurant division expanded in 1967 with the purchase of California-based Bob's Big Boy. Also, Marriott partnered with movie and television cowboy Roy Rogers to open a fast food eatery initially called Roy Rogers Western Roast Beef Sandwich Shoppe. The first one opened in April 1968 in Falls Church, Virginia.

Like Bill Marriott starting his company with an A&W franchise, Roy Rogers opened dozens of franchises within the year in different parts of the country. Many were local; Marriott kept control of those in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. The first in Montgomery County launched on March 31, 1970, at Congressional Plaza, 101 Halpine Road, in Rockville.

Hot Shoppes management of cafeterias had evolved and expanded, too, moving into other venues such as hospitals and colleges, the first being American University in 1955, along with businesses like The Washington Post. In addition to airline catering, the company served food on Amtrak trains leaving Union Station in Washington.

Hot Shoppes continued to be popular into the 1970s, although the company had begun to focus on the more profitable hotel business. Also, as malls became increasingly prominent nationally, teenagers had a new place to hang out, and going to the local restaurant may not have been as appealing. Several Hot Shoppes Jrs. were converted to Roy Rogers in the late 1960s, although the Juniors remained in business through the early 1980s.

As that decade continued, Marriott concentrated more on lodging and divested most of its non-hotel businesses, including selling Roy Rogers to Hardee's in 1990. While Hot Shoppes were still popular in the region, the cost of running them did not make as much financial sense given the higher returns of the lodging industry and its long-term growth potential.

In 1989, four years after founder Bill Marriott passed away, the company announced that the chain slowly would be closing. President and Chairman of the Board Bill Marriott, Jr. noted factors such as competition from other chains and people staying home, ordering pizza, and watching videos.<sup>19</sup>

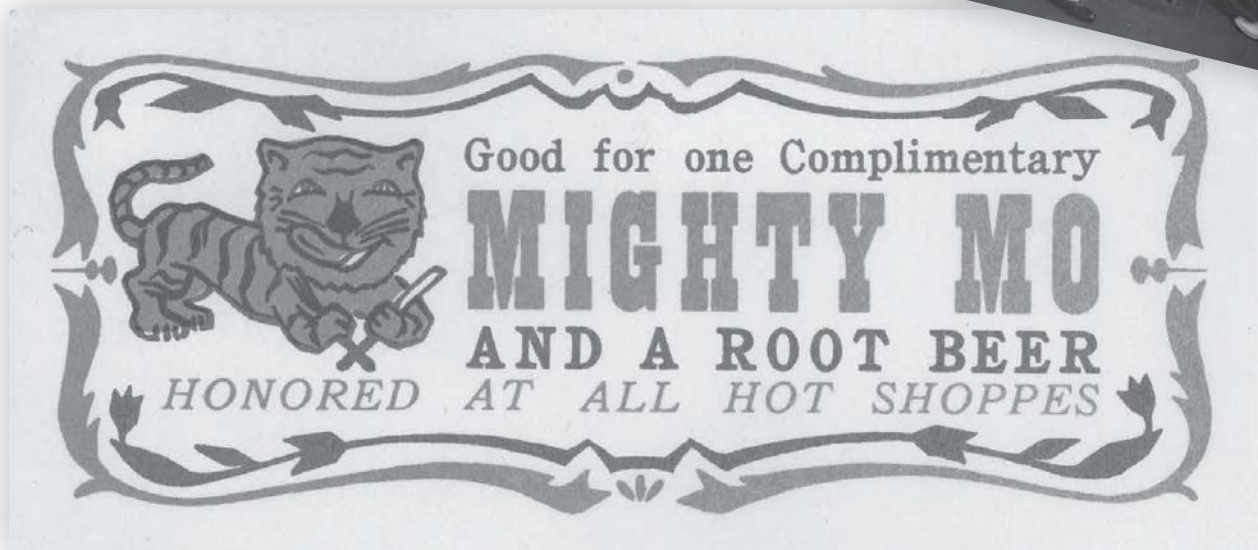
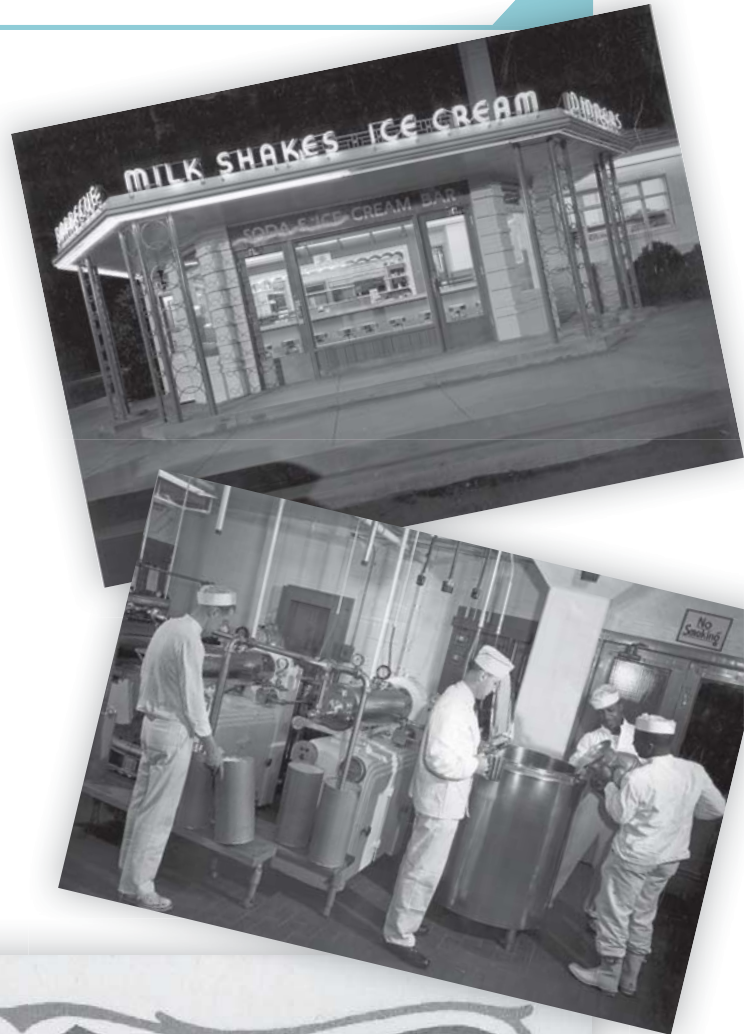
With much fanfare, on December 2, 1999, the last Hot Shoppe, in Marlow Heights, Prince George's County, closed. While the legacy of the Marriotts remains in the form of thousands of Marriott-branded hotels globally, Hot Shoppes are remembered fondly by many in Montgomery County, particularly those who grew up in the Washington, DC area. Long live the Mighty Mo!

## About the Author

**Katie Dishman** is the corporate archivist for Marriott International. Prior to moving to Bethesda, Katie was an archivist at the National Archives and Records Administration in Chicago. She also served as an archivist at General Mills and Anheuser-Busch. She has a Master of Arts in Public History and a Master of Library and Information Science, and is a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists.

## Notes

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Top: Although Hot Shoppes started with A&W Root Beer and Mexican food, it quickly expanded to include desserts as promoted here in neon, ca. late 1930s.  
Middle: In its shakes and other desserts, Hot Shoppes served a lot of ice cream. Here some employees are preparing more, ca. late 1930s.  
Bottom: Free Mighty Mo ticket, ca. 1956.



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