

# Terlingua's First Chili Cookoff in 1967

## Texas Chili, the Dallas Press, and a Hot-Rod God

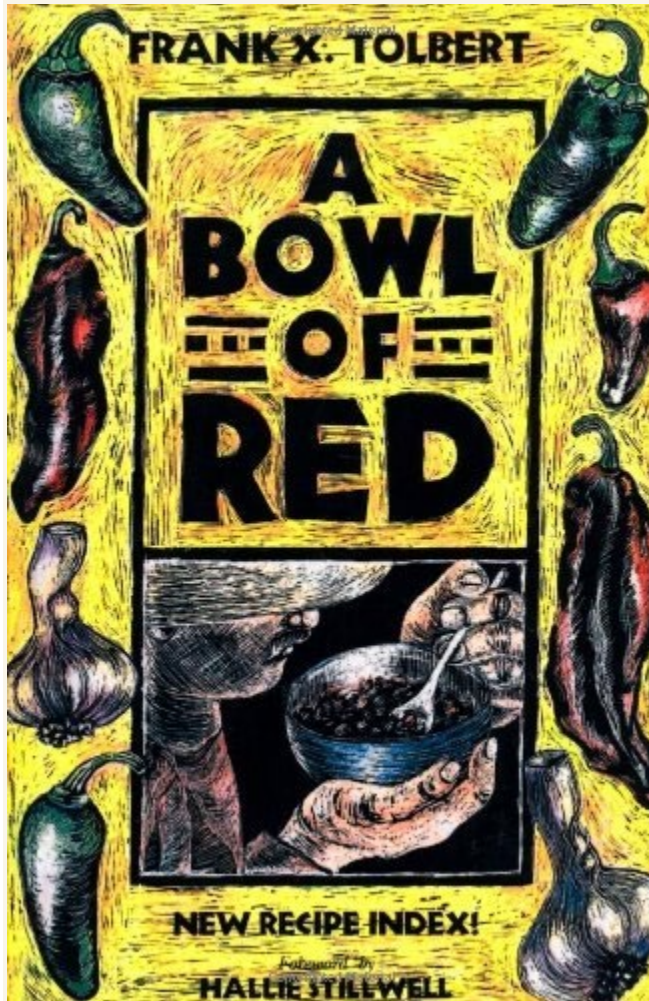
When it comes to chili in Texas, pride is well-known and celebrated for several reasons. But if you thought there's a conspiracy behind the formation of one of the largest exclusive chili groups, you're right! The Dallas press is directly involved in this crafty group. It began long before as a social group who were all chili enthusiasts.

*"This included a morning news columnist by the name of **Frank X. Tolbert**. He was writing about chili regularly as early as 1960".*



Although he wasn't present at the [1952 Chili Cooking World Championship](#) at the Dallas State Fair, he reported on it. He knew full-well who Joe E. Cooper was, and in appreciation of his book; had sought to pen his own.

*“Frank Tolbert began his famed work ‘A Bowl of Red’ as early as 1953. Later it was updated and new material was added in 1962 and finally 1966. The dedication of the revised editions of Tolbert’s book included his homage to Cooper”.*



Click for the famous [Terlingua red chili](#) recipe

He also cited that without the work of Joe E. Cooper, his book served as their Bible that formed CASI. [Their fabled group](#) had yet gone by an earlier name in Texas as the Chili Appreciation Society (CAS). Formed in Dallas around the 1940s, it was primarily press and magazine writers

George Haddaway and Wick Fowler. Others gathered together once a month to praise chili, writing songs, poems, and the vitality of chili. They were known as ‘Chiliheads’ and soon found international press.



What an odd fate that Carroll Shelby, a race car driver would also share such an avid interest in Chili. Not only did Shelby go on to design the classic Mustang Shelby GT500 and Shelby Cobra, and he also liked a hearty bowl of Red. In 1962, Shelby and a local Dallas attorney Dave Witts decided to purchase some land in south Texas including Terlingua. It was after that, the land changed over to Carroll Shelby exclusively. He then spent his time and money trying to develop the land in some way. He ultimately used it as a 200,000-acre ‘man cave’ hang-out.

## **The Bad Boys of Terlingua**



On many occasions, Shelby and a close friend including Tom Tierney, David E. Davis, and Bill Neale would regale in Terlingua.

*“Under their new racing team dubbed the **Terlingua Racing Team**, they would spend several days being real Texas Bad Boys! They would race bikes, hunt deer, drink, and eat chili like the lost boys’ they were”.*



On one occasion they happened to invite some fellow chili buddies that included Wick Fowler and Frank Tolbert.

From there the press influence began to give this new land a whole new title. Tolbert went on to write an article for the Saturday Evening Post called *That Bowl of Fire Called Chili*. It was among the first that sparked interest in Terlingua. It was followed with thousands of letters to the magazine that showed interest in chili recipes. Not only did this give-way to the emergence of chili con carne, but it also gave birth to the Frito Pie.

As interest was building-up, chili inside a bag of Frito chips became the favorite among Dallas football high school fans. Yet the wild parties at Terlingua began to get bigger and soon included some more influential characters. This led to the invitation of David Chasen and H. Allen Smith, who gave more influence later. However they weren't around for long, the members of CAS began to evolve.

In Mexico City on April 7, 1964, Wick Fowler attended a widely documented ceremony. He was acting as a war correspondent for the Vietnam War and made chili for the troops. It was at that time his chili group became known as CASI (Chili Appreciation Society International). By April 20<sup>th</sup> the group launched their first breakthrough statement announcing that Terlingua was the Chili Capital of the World!

This was with the help of Tom Tierney who was an excellent PR guy for the Terlingua Racing Team. They used their other buddies to gain official attention with Wick Fowler, Frank Tolbert, and Dave Witts. Of course, their attorney Dave Witts made the statement that was spread through the Dallas Press. Because of the press they received, it gave them the ability to organize officially. They essentially created their personas as a result.

## **Terlingua becomes a Chili Capital**

They proceeded to create fictitious posts as members of the city of Terlingua, using guerilla marketing to spread the word. Carroll Shelby became Social Director and Tom Tierney became Chief Justice of the Municipal Court. Frank Tolbert became the Water Commissioner and George Haddaway was the Airport Manager.

*“Bill Neale took on the post of Director of **the Museum of Modern Art** which was simply an outhouse”.*



Wick Fowler had the best title serving as Chief Chili Head among other things, yet they weren't done just yet. By 1966, it marked a big jump for Frank Tolbert who just got signed to Doubleday press. His new book *A Bowl of Red* was getting nationwide attention and ruffled his fellow press friends' feathers. To further promote his book he partnered with Shelby to organize a chili cookoff in Terlingua. Shelby was more than happy to help promote the event.

However, there were doubts that their investment in the Terlingua property was not going as planned. In 1964, Shelby was thinking of ways to sell off his investment by using the chili capital theme. They figured they could get one competition and lots of press to cover it and then sell-off their investment. The big press that came in 1966 was just what

Shelby needed to start his plan. With the help of his PR guy Tom Tierney, they did just that.

## The First Contestants are Chosen

The first of the selections chosen were obvious no-brainers. They selected Tierney and Tolbert against Wick Fowler.

*“They had expected to bring in Dave Chasen who owned a **Hollywood restaurant** and was famous for his chili. Dave’s chili had been renowned to be a favorite of Elizabeth Taylor, however Chasen dropped-out of the competition at the last minute. They had to choose a new contestant quickly, and Tolbert had a replacement ready”.*



By 1967, Tolbert was riding high in the saddle with his successful chili book 'A Bowl of red'. Upon visiting the Doubleday Press offices in New York, he received a letter from H. Allen Smith. He was also signed with Doubleday and had visited the Terlingua boys club in the past. He expressed his interest to show everyone how good a chili cook he was.

*“He furthermore drove this home with an article he wrote for **Holiday Magazine in 1967**“.*



# HOLIDAY

OCTOBER 1967 • 75c

*Crisp Fall Reading*

*The India of Today*  
*by Laurens van der Post*

*Yalta - Russia at Play*

*The Man of the Seacoast*

*Croquet & Spelunking*

*Annapolis - Geneva &*  
*Wiscasset, Maine*



*Samuel Machin*



This article titled *Nobody Knows More About Chili Than I Do* was a direct poke at the CASI group. It was decided in the end that Smith and Fowler

would compete against each other. By this time PR wiz, Tierney had begun to set the wheels turning and made his official announcement. They were going to have the world's first championship chili cookoff and only the press was allowed to attend.

As the event grew closer the group began to argue about the issue of beans. Should beans be allowed or not allowed was the big question. It eventually divided the CASI group forcing Carroll Shelby to form his group. They decided to call themselves the International Chili Society instead and still allowed CASI to hold their competition. On that day of the showdown, it was anti-climatic as it gets with both contestants given a tie decision.

### **What Became of the Bean Issue?**

One of the very first rules decided was that no beans shall be used for making chili. This rule holds-up at every Terlingua World Championship chili cookoff since then. Despite the splitting of groups, Tolbert fought to retain his rights to the CASI competition and later renamed the event. This then became *The Original Terlingua International Championship Chili Cook-off* and is often called the *Behind the Store* crew. ICS remains more lighthearted in the spirit of Shelby and his heyday of wild chili weekends.