

Historical Series by Anne DeRousie

Devon Beef and the U.S. Senate

Did you know that the entire United States Senate once dined on Devon beef? It all started with a bet – a political bet. It seems that Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, a progressive of the Wisconsin LaFollette mold made a number of bets with two of his former republican colleagues concerning the presidential election of 1952. It seems that Morse left the Republican Party just before the election in protest over Eisenhower’s choice of Richard Nixon as a running mate. He bet Senators Margaret Chase Smith of Maine and Robert Hendrickson of New Jersey that the Democrats would win the White House and control of Congress. Of course Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican, won the Presidency and a Republican Congress and Morse lost his bet..

The newspaper article noted of the senators, “All three were a little hazy as to how many bets were involved” because as Senator Smith explained, “Mr. Morse came around and taunted us about our bad bets and offered to double them. As loyal Republicans we had to accept.”

When it was all over, the three agreed that Senator Morse owed \$150 which he would pay with a butchered Devon beef steer from his prize-winning herd. Smith and Hendrickson decided to “give all the senators a feed” and the beef was delivered to the senate dining room freezers to await the feast.

Wayne Morse was not new to the world of Devon cattle. He was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1900 and grew up on the family farm in nearby Verona. Morse’s grandfather John William Morse was raising Devon cattle around 1860 and his son Wilbur continued to keep Devons through the early 1900s. The Senator stated that his great grandfather traveled from Vermont to Wisconsin in a covered wagon pulled by Devon oxen. Morse himself raised Devons in both Oregon and Maryland and was well known in Devon show circles in the 1950s and 60s.

Reported in Albany NY Knickerbocker News, January 22, 1954, A-13 “Betting in the Upper House—96 Senators to Dine on Beef – Morse Was High on Democrats.”

By Anne DeRousie

