

= Beefsteak (banquet) =

A beefsteak is a type of banquet in which sliced beef tenderloin is served to diners as all @-@ you @-@ can @-@ eat finger food . The dining style originated in 19th @-@ century New York City as a type of working @-@ class celebration but went into a decline in the mid @-@ 20th century . Resurrected by caterers in New Jersey , the beefsteak banquet style is now popular in that state 's Bergen and Passaic counties , and is enjoying a revival in New York City , where the style originated , due to the reemergence of a biannual beefsteak in Brooklyn .

= = Origins = =

Beefsteak banquets originated among the working class of New York City in the mid @-@ 1800s as celebratory meals or " testimonials " . The meal would generally be set up by an organization wishing to laud or raise money for politicians , newly promoted friends , or celebrities . Tammany Hall regularly threw beefsteaks as political fundraisers , often enough that it was a large portion of beefsteak business in New York and " when Tammany Hall [got] a setback , beefsteaks [got] a setback " . Sophie Tucker and Bill Robinson had beefsteaks thrown for them in the 1930s .

Early beefsteaks were held in a relaxed , men @-@ only atmosphere , with diners sitting on crates and eating with their fingers off of rough , improvised tables in saloons , rental halls , or residential basements . Food and drink were the focus of the evening , and entertainment often consisted simply of those present telling stories and singing amongst themselves . Brass bands were sometimes hired .

= = = Early organization = = =

Though the centerpiece of beefsteak culture was indisputably the frenzied consumption of beef and beer , with diners eating with their fingers and drinking with abandon , serving styles varied . 1930s @-@ era beefsteaks could be grouped into two styles , referred to by Joseph Mitchell in a 1939 The New Yorker article as " East Side " and " West Side " and roughly corresponding to the geographic separation of New York City into the same @-@ named areas . Each group claimed to Mitchell to have originated beefsteak banquets and to have the most authentic serving and eating styles .

" East Side " beefsteaks were largely patronized by the working @-@ class and immigrants , and the center of the East Side beefsteak world was at First Avenue and Nineteenth Street in Manhattan . East Side beefsteaks were heavily meat @-@ centered , with courses consisting of items like sliced beef short loin , beef kidneys , and ground beef trimmings (referred to as " hamburgers ") . One East Side beefsteak was reported to have consisted of " 3 @, @ 000 pounds (1 @, @ 400 kg) of steak , 1 @, @ 500 pounds (680 kg) of lamb chops , 425 pounds (193 kg) of hamburger and 1 @, @ 300 pounds (590 kg) of kidneys wrapped with bacon . "

" West Side " beefsteaks , on the other hand , were often thrown at " gentlemen @-@ only " establishments centered on Eleventh Avenue and 23rd Street . West Side beefsteaks tended more toward expansive menus , with courses including crab meat , lamb chops , and baked potatoes to go along with the beef loin . Diners at West Side beefsteaks were allowed to use disposable forks for some courses , but were expected to eat the beef course with their fingers .

= = = Dining style = = =

Both schools of thought in New York agreed that eating with one 's fingers and not being afraid to get messy were integral to the culture of the beefsteak . No matter which type of beefsteak a diner attended , the main course was beef loin dipped in butter @-@ based sauce and served thinly sliced on rounds of bread (day @-@ old bread , at East Side beefsteaks ; fresh toast , at West Side) . Napkins were considered unnecessary ; diners generally wore aprons with which they could wipe the grease off their hands . Food was dispatched from the kitchen laid out on trays and waiters continued bringing out trays until diners could literally eat no more (In his New Yorker article ,

Joseph Mitchell quotes one man as saying , " I 'm so full I 'm about to pop . Push those kidneys a little nearer , if you don 't mind . ") . Beer flowed freely during banquets in pre @-@ prohibition years .

= = Evolution = =

With the passing of the 18th and 19th amendments to the U.S. Constitution , in 1919 and 1920 , respectively , the traditional men @-@ only , beer @-@ soaked format of the beefsteak began to change . Politicians began including newly enfranchised women voters in their beefsteak banquets after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment , and with the attendance of women came corresponding social niceties . Cocktails , popularized by illicit drinkers during Prohibition , replaced pitchers of beer , and " fruit cups [,] and fancy salads " were soon added to beefsteak menus . Orchestras were hired in place of old @-@ fashioned brass bands and storytellers , and the long @-@ forbidden knives and forks began to appear on beefsteak tables . By the 1930s , according to Joseph Mitchell , beefsteaks were no longer the manly , messy affairs they had once been ; they were now closer to formal meals in which beef and bread happened to feature heavily . The cheerful gluttony of the past was tempered by female sensibilities ; " women , " Mitchell reported , " do not esteem a glutton , and at a contemporary beefsteak it is unusual for a man to do away with more than six pounds of meat and thirty glasses of beer . "

In 1938 , " Hap " Nightingale , a butcher in Clifton , New Jersey , began catering parties in his area according to the old @-@ time beefsteak formula . He offered a set , all @-@ you @-@ can @-@ eat menu of French fries and sliced beef tenderloin on bread . His business thrived locally , and the company has since been passed down through ensuing generations of Nightingales , all of whom continued to adhere to the tried @-@ and @-@ true formula .

= = Current practice = =

The modern beefsteak banquet hews fairly closely to the early @-@ 1900s model , although the expansive selections found at an old @-@ fashioned " West Side " beefsteak have been tapered down to beef , fried potatoes , and tossed salad . Butter is sometimes replaced by margarine , and a pasta course makes an occasional appearance , but attendees at beefsteaks still expect to be fed mostly abundant quantities of beef tenderloin . Modern beefsteak attendees often follow an unspoken protocol to leave their bread slices uneaten . Piling them up in front of one 's plate instead of consuming them " saves valuable stomach capacity for more beef while simultaneously serving as an informal scorekeeping system " .

= = Modern distribution = =

Beefsteak banquets have largely vanished from New York City , where they originated , but remain widespread in Bergen and Passaic counties in New Jersey . The institution is now almost entirely limited to these areas , save for a popular biannual beefsteak held in Brooklyn ; while residents of Bergen and Passaic counties consider them an ingrained part of regional culture and regularly stage beefsteak fundraisers (caterers interviewed in a New York Times article stated that they " put on about 1 @, @ 000 of them in the region [in 2007] ") , across the county line in Essex County , for example , they remain nearly unheard of .

Regis High School (a Jesuit school on the Upper East Side) hosts an annual alumni affair (Jug Night) featuring traditional East Side beefsteak fare .

Political fundraiser beefsteak banquets are no longer common in New Jersey ; beefsteaks now usually raise money for fire departments , policemen 's benevolent associations , and other charitable organizations . Nostalgia for beefsteaks among foodies continues , and gourmet beefsteaks are sometimes staged by New York @-@ area restaurants .

Since 2009 , two Wesleyan University graduates , Andrew Dermont and Derek Silverman , have thrown a biannual " beefsteak for beefsteak 's sake " in Brooklyn , to revive the tradition of the

beefsteak banquet in its place of origin , New York City .