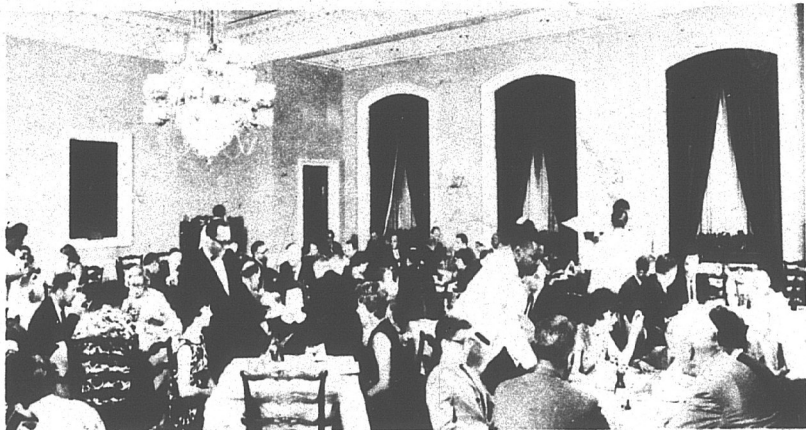


# America's Most Exclusive Restaurant



Only U. S. Senators and their guests are served in this beautiful, ornate dining room.

Bean soup and politics mix when legislators gather in the Washington dining room marked: "For Senators Only"

By BOB GAINES

**A**LTHOUGH NOT a cantankerous sort, Senator J. Glenn Beall of Maryland got to his feet during the last session of the U.S. Senate and, with a fierce look at his colleagues, cried:

"I rise to defend the fair name of the great, free State of Maryland against an insult. I resent having those crab cakes served in the Senate dining room called Maryland crab cakes."

While fellow Senators chuckled, Beall thundered that the crab cakes he had sampled were at least 80 percent cracker crumbs and tasted like sawdust. He growled: "These alleged crab cakes remind me of the rabbit stew that has some horse meat in it—one rabbit and one horse."

Senator Beall's ire over the crab cakes may have been colored with a certain amount of tongue in cheek, but his concern over the menu and the reputation of the Senate restaurant was genuine. For 103 years, American statesmen have been pushing hungrily through the dining-room doors marked "For Senators Only" in the Senate wing of the Capitol. Known to Washington reporters as America's most exclusive restaurant, it is one of the Senate's oldest and most affectionately regarded institutions.

Today the dining room looks much as it did 75 years ago. White-jacketed waiters still quietly serve the Senators and their guests beneath crystal chandeliers, ornately carved ceilings, and huge gleaming mirrors.

The dining room actually is split into two rooms, one for the Republicans and one for Democrats. Each room has a long, gleaming table.

"Sometimes we don't tell freshman Senators which room belongs to their party," says Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona. "So plenty of young Senators spend hours talking to men of the opposition before discovering their mistake."

In the privacy of these inner rooms, the Senators relax, gossip, and banter with one another. Often, the joking takes on a regional (and political) tang. Kenneth Keating, then Senator from New York, once was dining with a Southern Senator who, at the end of the meal, leaned over and commented, "Ken, that was the best piece of apple pie I ever had." With a wicked twinkle, Keating replied, "No wonder it tasted so good. The pie was made from Northern Spy apples!"

Until he died in 1962, Paul Johnson, the headwaiter at the restaurant, was a Senate fixture. He served nearly 60 years and took an almost paternal interest in the diet of some of the Senators. The late President Kennedy had a reputation for being a light eater while he served in the Senate, and Paul Johnson often chided the young man over this.

**C**ATERING TO THE SENATORS is, of course, the basic function of the restaurant. Its hours are geared to the hours of the Senate. If the Senate works late, the dining room stays open late. During the long civil-rights filibuster last year, the restaurant operated around the clock.

The Senate restaurant also serves the public. The public dining room has as many as 1,800 customers a day. "Our low-priced meals are famous in Washington," says Robert Sonntag, manager of the restaurant. "We serve the public the same food we serve the Senators."

One dish Sonntag is required to serve is the Senate's world-famous navy bean soup. This soup has been a favorite since 1907 when Senator Knute Nelson of Minnesota gave the Senate cook his own special recipe.

The soup was elevated to the status of a tradition a year later when Senator Fred Dubois of Idaho discovered the soup missing from the menu one afternoon. At the next meeting of the Rules Committee, Dubois brought the case of the missing soup to the attention of the members. In a historic action, the committee, which governs the restaurant, ruled that henceforth the soup always should be on the menu.

The Senate restaurant's navy bean soup has since been served all over the world (there's a restaurant in Hong Kong that charges \$1 a bowl), but connoisseurs of the soup say the best is served at the Capitol.

Senator George Smathers of Florida says, "The secret's in the pot. I suspect we haven't washed our bean pot in years." Then he adds with a grin, "I wouldn't be surprised if there were an old *Congressional Record* stewing around in there somewhere."

## How to Make the Senate's Famous Bean Soup

Wash 2 pounds of small Michigan navy beans and then run them through hot water until the beans are white again. Boil slowly 3½ hours in a covered pot containing 4 quarts of water and 1½ pounds of smoked ham hocks. Braise 1 onion chopped in a little butter and add it to the soup. Season with salt and pepper. (Serves 8 persons.)

## COVER:



On cold winter nights, many a lad, like the one on the cover, turns to his stamp collection and "travels to far places." Photograph is by L. Willinger.

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