

Berkshire Pork: The Breed Of Kings

words by Mikayla Wehrle

For hundreds of years the British Royal Family kept Berkshires at Windsor palace. The quality of their meat was so unmatched and rare that only rich families in England could afford to raise them. They even named a famous Berkshire boar Windsor Castle, having been farrowed and raised within sight of the towers of the royal residence.

This boar was imported to the U.S.A in 1841, creating a stir in the rural press. English writings suggest that the first Berkshire hog was discovered by Oliver Cromwell's army, in the county seat of the shire of Berks in England. After the war, they carried the news of these amazing pigs to other parts of England. These pigs were larger than any other swine of that time and produced higher quality hams and bacon. The original Berkshire was a reddish or sandy colored hog, sometimes spotted. Later this original breed was refined with a cross of Siamese and Chinese blood, which gives the color pattern we see today along with the quality of more efficient gains. This was the only outside blood that has gone into the Berkshire breed during the time of recorded livestock history. For 200 years the Berkshire bloodstream has been pure, according to today's records.

The first Berkshire pigs were brought to the The U.S.A. in 1823. They were quickly absorbed into the general hog population because of the improvement they created when crossed with early American stock. In

1875, a group of Berkshire breeders and importers met in Springfield, Illinois, to establish a way of keeping the Berkshire breed pure. These agricultural leaders of the day felt the Berkshire should stay pure for improvement of swine already present in the United States and not let it become only a portion of the "Common Hog" of the day. On February 25 of the same year, the American Berkshire Association was founded, becoming the first Swine Registry to be established in the world. This society drew forth an enthusiastic response from men working with the breed both in this country and in England.

The first hog recorded was the boar, Ace of Spades, bred by Queen Victoria. So the next time you sit down to a bite of Berkshire pork remember you are eating the pork of royalty. •

