

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest days of the White House, a variety of animals have been kept as pets. Most of these animals were not different from those generally found in American households, although a few White House families have kept unusual pets. White House pets have provided companionship to presidents and their families, and they also sometimes have played important roles in humanizing the president's political image and promoting important issues in the United States.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

There are many amusing and remarkable stories of animals at the White House. One of the first animals to live at the White House was President Thomas Jefferson's favorite pet, a mockingbird named Dick, who was often freed to roam outside his cage in Jefferson's office. The bird would sit on his desk and sing or perch on Jefferson's shoulder, taking food from the president's lips (**Image 1**). Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and Zebulon Pike sent a variety of animals to Jefferson at the President's House from their expeditions to the West, including grizzly bear cubs that were placed in a cage on the White House grounds.



Image 1

President Abraham Lincoln allowed pet goats Nanny and Nanko freedom within the White House, and on at least one occasion this led to much excitement, as his youngest son Tad hitched them to a chair to ride around the State Floor. The president included news of the goats' well-being in a telegram to Mrs. Lincoln when she was away traveling with Tad (**Image 2**).

President Benjamin Harrison and his extended family lived at the White House with several animals, including a rambunctious goat named His Whiskers. One day, while pulling the president's grandchildren around in a cart, His Whiskers took off through the White House gates, forcing the

president to chase after them and bring them back to safety. A photograph of President Harrison's family with His Whiskers became one of the most famous White House images of the nineteenth century (**Image 3**).

President Theodore Roosevelt and his young family cared for a menagerie of animals at the White House, including dogs, cats, guinea pigs, a macaw, a snake, kangaroo rats, horses, and more (**Images 4 & 5**). Countless photographs and stories of the Roosevelt family and their many pets appeared in periodicals and newspapers of the day.

Some first pets were received as gifts from well-wishers, friends, and foreign officials, becoming minor celebrities and ambassadors. First Lady Lucy Hayes's well-publicized love of animals inspired David B. Sickels, the U.S. Ambassador in Siam (now Thailand), to send her a kitten as a gift. Named "Siam," it was the first Siamese cat to be sent to the United States and became the pet of First Daughter Fanny Hayes. Rebecca the raccoon was initially given to President Calvin Coolidge and First Lady Grace Coolidge as a contribution to their Thanksgiving meal, but she was instead kept as a pet (**Image 6**).



Image 7

When Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited the United States in 1961, he presented First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy with a dog named Pushinka, which means "fluffy" in Russian, as a goodwill gesture toward the United States. Some Americans were suspicious of Pushinka, believing that perhaps the Soviets had placed a listening device on the dog, but she quickly won over those skeptics. Her puppies, born at the White House, were nicknamed "pupniks" (**Image 7**).

Pets have played a significant role in representing, humanizing, and shaping public perceptions of presidents. President Warren G. Harding’s photogenic Airedale terrier, Laddie Boy, was viewed by many as an extension of Harding’s campaign slogan, “Return to Normalcy” (**Image 8**). Laddie Boy had his own cabinet chair, sat in on meetings, and greeted official delegations to the White House. He also “hosted” the 1923 Easter Egg Roll while the Hardings were away. Perhaps one of the most famous pets to live in the White House was President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Scottish terrier, Fala. The dog came to live in the White House in 1940 and served as a constant companion to the president during the difficult days of World War II. Fala contributed to the war effort by donating his rubber toys to the nation-wide scrap rubber collection campaigns (**Image 9**). He also starred in two MGM short-subject films, one at the White House about the home front during the war and the other a tour of the Roosevelt family home at Hyde Park (**Image 10**).



Image 9

Pets of recent presidents have continued to capture nationwide attention. When George H. W. Bush was elected president in 1988, Millie, the Bushes’ Springer spaniel moved to the White House and had six puppies the following year (**Image 11**). Millie and her puppies would appear on the cover of *Life* magazine with First Lady Barbara Bush, who later published *Millie’s Book*, a bestseller that earned almost \$900,000 in royalties. The funds were donated to the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. First Lady Hillary Clinton published a book of children’s letters to the Clinton family pets, *Socks and Buddy*, which raised money for charity and encouraged young people to write (**Image 12**). In 2002, First Lady Laura Bush selected *All Creatures Great and Small* as the theme for the holidays at the White House, honoring past presidential pets and featuring 25 papier-mâché animal sculptures. Part of these festivities included the first installation of the “Barney Cam,” a holiday video featuring their Scottish terriers, which would become an annual tradition (**Image 13**). Mrs. Bush explained that she chose the theme because presidential families have been comforted and entertained by their animal companions.

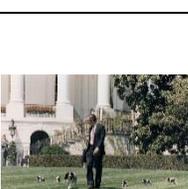
IMAGES

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Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	A Bird That Whistles: In Jefferson's Cabinet, 1803	Ca. 2008	Peter Waddell	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5039-Fine%20%26%20Decorative%20Arts/Main%20Index/Presidents/Thomas%20Jefferson/9309.tif.info
2	Letter from President Abraham Lincoln to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln	1864	Abraham Lincoln	National Archives and Records Administration		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Abraham%20Lincoln/1112755.tif.info
3	Baby McKee and "His Whiskers"	Ca. 1890	Frances Benjamin Johnston	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Benjamin%20Harrison/1078.tif.info
4	Teddy Roosevelt, Jr. and Eli Yale	1902	Frances Benjamin Johnston	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/1077.tif.info
5	Quentin Roosevelt on Algonquin	1902	Frances Benjamin Johnston	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/724.tif.info

FIRST PETS



6	Mrs. Coolidge with Her Raccoon, Rebecca	Ca. 1923 - 1929	National Photo Company	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Calvin%20Coolidge/1080.tif.info
7	Pushinka and her Puppies on the South Lawn	1963	Cecil Stoughton	John F. Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/John%20F%20Kennedy/8393.tif.info
8	President Harding and Laddie Boy Pose for a Photographer	1922	Herbert E. French	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Warren%20G%20Harding/1689.tif.info
9	Fala Donates Toys to the War Effort	1942	Unknown	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/8819.tif.info
10	Fala's Second Birthday - Photographing the Photographers	1942	Unknown	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/8392.tif.info
11	President Bush, Millie, and Puppies on the South Lawn of the White House	1989	Michael Sargent	George Bush Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/George%20H%20W%20Bush/1094.tif.info

FIRST PETS



12	Hillary Clinton with Buddy and Socks in the East Garden	1999	Unknown	William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Bill%20Clinton/8394.tif.info
13	The Bushes' Dog Barney at White House Christmas Tree	2005	Shealah Craighead	George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/George%20W%20Bush/8321.tif.info



SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Imagine you are moving to the White House. What pets would you bring with you? What would you and your pets like to do at the White House? Draw or write your response.
- Choose a famous pet that has lived at the White House and write a story about their time at the Executive Mansion.
- Some presidents have been convinced by the public or other members of the first family to get pets. Write a persuasive letter to a president asking the White House to add a particular animal.
- Politics play an influential role at the White House, and sometimes the presidents' pets get mixed into that. Using the Contextual Essay and/or other research, create a class discussion about the relationship between first pets and politics. Consider how these pets are perceived by the media.