



Presidential cats demand equal time

Description

Felines and other creatures who have resided in the White House

By Byron Toben

Thanks for the good reception to my recent article on U.S. presidential dogs. However, these barks aroused a few meows by cat lovers who felt their favourites were unduly omitted. As one who believes in equal treatment, I have prepared a similar list below.



Theodore Roosevelt's cat Slippers – Image: [Internet Archive Book Images](#)

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The dog list was organized in order of presidents keeping the most number of dogs. The smaller cat list is organized by chronology.

Abraham Lincoln (President #16) hosted two felines, Tabby and Dixie. He also owned a shy dog, Fido, who he left with friends back in Illinois as he felt Washington crowds would be too much for the pooch. He would also bring stray cats home. When his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, was asked if he had any hobbies, she replied, 'cats.'

Rutherford Hayes #19 kept a Siamese cat, name unknown. Its relationship with Hayes's three really-big dogs is also unknown.

Theodore Roosevelt #26 owned two, the six-toed **Slippers** and Tom Quartz, named after a fictional cat in Mark Twain's *Roughing It*. They apparently roughed it with Teddy's five dogs.

Woodrow Wilson #28 obtained two, Mittens and Muffins.



Pamela Turnure, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's press secretary, introduces the media to Tom Kitten, Jan. 24, 1961 – Image: Abbie Rowe/White House, courtesy John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

Calvin Coolidge #30 selected four: Bounder, Tiger, Mud and Blackie. He also had a Bobcat and two Lion cubs, gifts from South Africa, which he named Tax Reduction and Budget Cuts.

When his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, was asked if he had any hobbies, she replied, "cats.

John F. Kennedy #35's famous cat **Tom Kitten** was actually a gift to his daughter Caroline. It apparently got along with his nine dogs.



Susan Ford with Shan – Image: [David Hume Kennerly](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Gerald Ford #38's daughter Susan owned a Siamese, **Shan**, who lived with them.

Jimmy Carter #39's daughter Amy also owned a Siamese, Misty, who lived in the White House to match his one dog. Its full name was **Misty Malarky Ying Yang**, which inspired a song by **Gabor Szabo**.

Ronald Reagan #40 favoured two, Cleo and Sara, to match his two dogs.

Bill Clinton #42 kept one, **Socks**, who didn't get along with his dog Buddy but both were immortalized in Hillary's book of children's letters to the White House, *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy*.

George W. Bush #43 had one, **India "Willie" Bush**, to match his two dogs.



Amy Carter with Misty – Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Joe Biden #46 does not have a cat to match his two dogs – yet. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* surmised that Joe and Jill will be soon looking for one, which inspired a humorous piece in the December 15 *New Yorker* by Henry Alford. He posited a ‘first cat elect’ already getting hate mail from the ‘Doberbitches’ canine equivalents of the Proud Boys.

Thus, of the 24 U.S. presidents who had dogs in the White House, fifteen had dogs only, nine had both dogs and cats, and only one (Wilson) had only cats.

Twenty-two had no pets.

Other critters

Andrew Johnson #17, Lincoln’s vice president who succeeded him upon his assassination, was reputed to have treated several mice as pets of a sort.



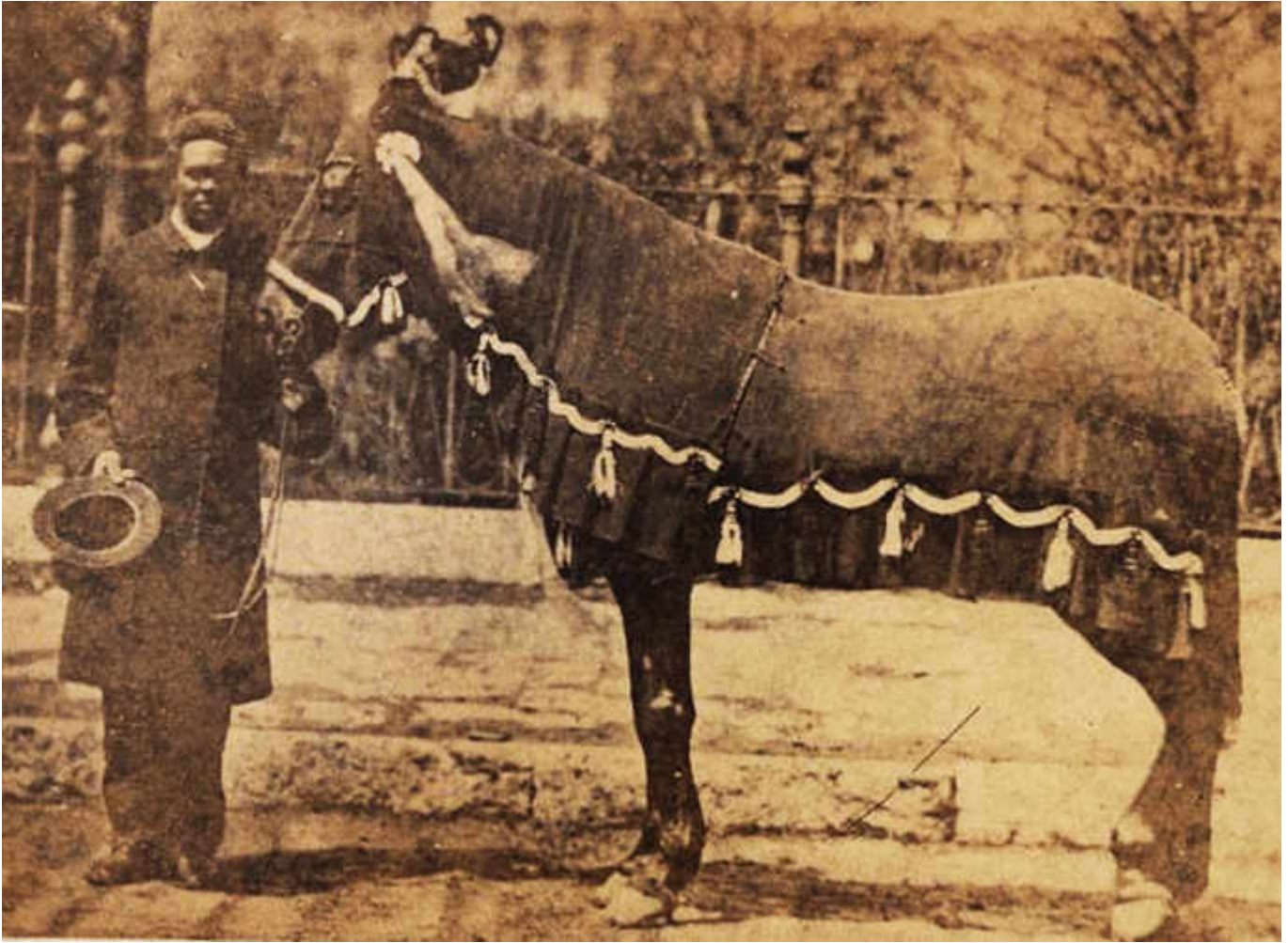
Bush family cat India – Image: [Paul Morse](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

I have not considered livestock as pets, although a few horses, cows, goats and sheep may have been treated specially. Likewise, I have not considered wild animals as pets. **Calvin Coolidge**'s wife's pet raccoon came close, but not the other exotics they maintained in what amounted to a private zoo: a black bear, an antelope, an alligator, etc.

Teddy Roosevelt also had a pony, a pig, a badger, a rabbit and (yech!) a hyena plus a lizard, daughter Alice's garter snake, and four birds.

Birds might be considered pets, but I have limited my lists to warm and cuddly dogs and cats.

However, in speaking of birds, I am reminded of the words of Illinois Governor **Adlai Stevenson** (who later ran twice against Eisenhower for the presidency) in vetoing a bill to require cat owners to have their cats leashed while outdoors, but not wishing to antagonize bird lovers. He said that the State of Illinois has enough to do without ending 'feline delinquency', capping the witty veto with "It is not that I love cats the more nor birds the less, but I must remove my approval from this bill."



Lincoln's horse Old Bob caparisoned in a mourning blanket at his funeral – Image: [F.W. Ingmire](#) , Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Follow up

As with my presidential dog list, viewers are welcome to submit their favourite presidential cat names or breed.

Feature image: Socks at the podium in the White House Press Briefing Room by [Barbara Kinney](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

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Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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Date Created

February 2021