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PETS

Pets at the White House: 50 Years of Presidents and Their Pets
Jennifer B. Pickens
Fife & Drum Press
978-0-615-58063-0
Five Stars (out of Five)

In *Pets at the White House*, Jennifer Boswell Pickens offers a delightful series of anecdotes and photographs of our nation's First Pets, creating an endearing volume that will appeal to animal lovers and presidential theorists alike.

Although her account officially starts with the Kennedy years, Pickens also provides background details on the animals kept by earlier presidents, from Washington's donkeys to Zachary Taylor's horse, which was often spotted grazing on the White House lawn. From President Taft's cow, Pauline Wayne, to Tad Lincoln's turkey, forerunner of the annual Thanksgiving pardoned turkey, seemingly no animal has been overlooked. Pickens shares both legends and documented tales of an astounding variety of animals that have made their homes with our nation's First Families. She reveals details about pets whose presence helped humanize presidential hopefuls and ensure election, and those whose constant companionship became part of their owners' public images.

"If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog," President Truman famously commented. Pickens agrees. Her theory that "Animals have played a role in forming perceptions of the character and personalities of our Presidents" is supported by both the stories and the photographs she includes in her book. The Kennedy family's "menagerie of animals, ranging from dogs, cats, birds, and hamsters to ponies, parakeets, ducks, and more," for instance, is iconic. Few who remember the early 1960s are unfamiliar with photos of Caroline sitting atop her pony, Macaroni. Perhaps less familiar are the Kennedy's dogs and Jacqueline Kennedy's essay contest, the winners of which received puppies from a litter those dogs produced. Similar tales about other First Families provide more charming and warm-hearted particulars that reveal the often hidden personalities of the many famous people who have occupied the White House.

That the Nixon family's poodle ate some of the fish from Lady Bird Johnson's small goldfish pond or that the Ford family's cat did not like Henry Kissinger are not matters of great national import, but they certainly are entertaining details, and readers are invited to draw their

own conclusions about their significance. Whether President Reagan's Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Rex, was the political asset some claim, "helping him dodge questions from the press," does not even matter. The fact that Rex reacted to the rumored ghost in the Lincoln Bedroom and received substantial fan mail from the public is far more telling.

George and Barbara Bush's dog Millie wrote her own book and raised more than a million dollars for literacy causes, and the Clinton's cat Socks not only had his own books, but also starred on the White House's web page. No one believes that either Millie or Socks actually wrote anything, yet people relate to the famous pets much as they do to their own less-celebrated special friends. America is a pet-friendly nation whose citizens seem to expect their leaders to share their love of animals.

Pickens has created a delightful book. Its photos, many taken by White House staff photographers, are wonderful, and the accompanying text, although brief, is revelatory and entertaining. *Pets at the White House* is sure to be enjoyed by America's millions of pet lovers and appreciated by those who follow the the lives of the nation's First Families.

Cheryl Hibbard