

WENDELL RORIE

OCT. 2, 1997

FIRST DOGS

With the advent of Hopkinsville's new leash law, our attention has been focused on our canine friends, their confinement and freedom to romp. As the author of our city's first dog leash law, recently repealed and declared "vague and unenforceable," by the City Council, I have ventured elsewhere and assembled a barrage of trivia of Presidents and their pooches.

"If you want a friend in Washington," Harry Truman once said, "get a dog." Indeed, from George Washington, who bred foxhounds and who returned British General Howe's dog, a POW, under a flag of truce to George Bush, whose spaniel Millie's book outsold his own autobiography, our harried chief executives have found friendship and solace in dogs.

From Sweetlips (George Washington's foxhound) to Millie (George Bush's spaniel), dogs have been at the side of American Presidents wherever they went. In this lighthearted romp through American history, I have tried to put a human (or rather canine face) on the dignified statesmen and their families who have lived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. No effort has been made to cover all the Presidential Pooches and my selection has been highly arbitrary and dogmatic in the interest of time. In preparing this paper, I am indebted to the Smithsonian Magazine and a new book, FIRST DOGS, written by Roy Rowan and Brooke Janis, fresh in from Amazon.com. and Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, just in the nick of time for tonight. I have shown no partiality in selecting the dogs, regardless of their political affiliation, and in compliance with

the Athenaeum's long-standing rule against political papers.

The cast of characters include every breed from wolfhounds to beagles, Airedales to poodles, plus a generous helping of affectionate mutts. Of course, there has been a downside--a spot of wee-wee on the White House carpet, the occasional nip at a visiting diplomat's trousers, the tendency of Jefferson's dogs to dine on his sheep, but on the whole, dogs have enhanced the image of the Presidency.

It's impossible to think of FDR without thinking of his inseparable companion, Fala. Richard Nixon probably saved his Vice Presidential candidacy--an ultimately his ascendancy to the highest office --with his impassioned speech about his wife's cloth coat and his cocker spaniel, Checkers. Lyndon Johnson got himself into trouble with dog lovers when he lifted his pet beagles, Him and Her, by their ears, for photographers. His special friend was Yuki, a stray mutt that his daughter, Luci found hanging around a Texas gas station. Yuki was said to talk with a Texas accent. Johnson was apt to yowl duets with Yuki in the Oval Office to his appreciative audiences. Of course, Little Beagle Johnson had the same three initials as all family members.

During our Republic's history there usually have been two top dogs at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue--one with two legs, one with four. The occupants, as we all know, usually leave us their memoirs before passing from the scene. Bush's springer spaniel, Millie, the most recent First Dog, was no exception. Millie's book, dictated to Barbara Bush, was her own heart warming account of a dogs life

in the White House. Millie's book was a source of embarrassment to the President, outselling his own memoirs. And her stature as a best selling author did not succeed in helping him defeat the dogless Clinton in 1992.

For four years now the White House has been the domain of a white-pawed cat named Socks. But one of the dark secrets of Bill Clinton's days as governor of Arkansas concerns the mysterious death of Zeke. The cute cocker spaniel escaped from the governor's mansion and was run over by a car several years before Clinton's presidential bid in 1992. The circumstances surrounding his death is unclear and so far, the Whitehouse Special Counsel has not investigated them. By coming dogless to the White House, Clinton as defying not only tradition, but also the warning of Calvin Coolidge who said that "...Any man who does not like dogs and want them about does not deserve to be in the White House."

Many Americans seem to share Coolidge's view. Since the first days of the Union, our presidents have been measured in part by the canine company they kept. In fact, some presidential dogs, like FDR's Fala, appeared to have wagged the tail of U. S. policy, during World War II. Yet this Scottie celebrity was a canine nobody named Big Boy, watering trees and burying bones in Westport, Connecticut, before he was presented to Roosevelt. Fala witnessed the signing of the Atlantic Charter aboard the USS Augusta becoming a shipboard pal of Churchill's poodle Rufus. He rode in a limo with Roosevelt past cheering crowds along Pennsylvania Avenue. And so the story goes, Roosevelt ordered a destroyer sent back to fetch

Fala after he was mistakenly left behind in the Aleutian Islands. Political opponents carped that this naval rescue operation cost the taxpayers \$15,000. "These Republicans have not been content with attacks on me, my wife, or my sons," exclaimed Roosevelt in one of his famous fireside chats. "no, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala."

Canine diplomacy goes back to the founding of our country. Several of the hounds that George Washington had were French imports, which explains why they had such sexy names--Sweetlips, Scentwell. Lafayette, the Revolutionary war comrade, gave them to Washington to cement relations between France and the newly independent United States. Years later, these diplomatic relations needed patching, as did the stripped pants of the French Ambassador, after Teddy Roosevelt's bull terrier, Pete, chewed a hole in them at a White House Reception.

Other foreign leaders have used the canine approach to curry favor. When U.S- Soviet relations were at a low ebb following the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, Premier Khrushchev sought to reduce tensions by presenting Caroline with a white Russian mutt named Pushinka. Daughter of one of the Russian space dogs, she promptly fell in love with Caroline's Welsh terrier, Charlie. Not even the cold war could keep them apart or prevent Pushinka from producing a litter of four "pupniks," as President Kennedy referred to them. Kennedy had an early predilection for pups. While touring Europe during a summer vacation from Harvard, twenty year old Jack Kennedy, picked up a stray in the Netherlands, which he named

Dunker. However, Dunker was eventually given up because he was too much trouble and quarantine regulations would make it difficult to take the dog out of the country. The Kennedys had a personal K-9 corps including an Irish spaniel, a German shepherd, in addition to Charlie, Pushinka and her pups.

Some presidential dogs were given official positions during their master's term of office. Faithful, the Newfoundland pup of Ulysses Grant's son, was appointed White House steward in order to intimidate the servants, who the President suspected of poisoning his children's pets. A White House dog named Veto got his name when James Garfield wanted to remind the rambunctious Congress of 1881 that he might not sign all the bills it passed. An airedale named Laddie Boy posed with Warren Harding for a poster repeating his campaign pledge of "back to Normalcy with Harding." What could be more normal than a president assuming his lofty duties with "man's best friend" at his side? As soon as Laddie Boy moved into the White House he was given his own hand-carved high-backed chair to sit in during cabinet meetings.

Gerald Ford used his frisky female golden retriever Liberty to break up Oval Office meetings that lasted too long. Liberty was no lady when it came to sticking to the tight schedule. Gerald Ford would simply whistle for the dog who happily rushed in and pounced on those visitors overstaying their leave.

Dogs have been used as foils to divert political blame. Early television viewers will remember how the 1952 vice-presidential candidate Richard Nixon, after being chastised for accepting gifts

of \$18,000, held up a small black and white cocker spaniel named Checkers in front of the cameras. "The kids love the dog," which he admitted was also a gift. "And we're going to keep it!" He won instant sympathy, though he failed to mention whether he was going to keep the money. While President, Nixon rarely appeared with Vicky, Pasha or Timahoe and these dogs in the end, were victims of the Watergate scandal too, although their behavior was unimpeachable.

During the Revolutionary War, a hungry hound wandered into General Washington's headquarters at Pennibecker's Mill, Pennsylvania. The dog was lost and one of Washington's officers noticed the dog collar with the name of General Howe, the British commander. Washington proclaimed that the dog must be returned to Howe under a flag of truth. An avid fox hunter, Washington understood the close bond between a man and his dog. Washington, a student of genetics and a breeder of fox hounds, had more than thirty foxhounds, including the wobbly sounding trio of Drunkard, Tipler, and Tipsy. Seven French hounds had been sent to Washington by Lafayette aboard a ship under the care of young John Quincy Adams.

Thomas Jefferson originally disliked dogs because of the way they harassed and sometimes ate sheep at Monticello. He forbade his slaves from owning dogs. To a friend he wrote: "To secure wool enough, the negroes' dogs must all be killed." Wild dogs had become such a danger to the sheep that drastic action must be taken. Jefferson came out publicly for enactment of a law "making the

owner of a dog liable for all the mischief done by him, and requiring that every dog shall wear a collar with the name of the person inscribed who shall be security for his honest demeanor." Apparently, Jefferson was the originator of the dog license.

Andrew Jackson--or " Old Hickory," as he became known, was a self made man who rose from the piney hills of South Carolina to a plantation near Nashville to the White House. As a country boy with little education, he grew up with dogs, probably mutts. "A dog is one of the most affectionate of all the animal species and is worthy of regard," he wrote.

William Henry Harrison, hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe during the war of 1812, ran against the dogless Martin Van Buren in 1840. According to a Whig campaign lithograph, Harrison was the first presidential candidate to be accompanied by a dog as he greeted voters. The caption stated that his dog "repeats the welcome" extended by the general "with a cordial and significant shake of the tail." Tragically, the victorious Harrison caught pneumonia while delivering his inaugural address and died a month later.

Dogs were employed in a whole flurry of political cartoons dealing with slavery during the administrations of Zackary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan. Martin Van Buren, Millard Fillmore, and Woodrow Wilson were dogless, along with President Clinton. James Buchanan, the first bachelor president, had a giant Newfoundland named Lara, "remarkable for his immense tail and his attachment to his master." Because Buchanan

was a bachelor, his niece, Harriet Lane, served as First Lady. She was the recipient of a tiny toy terrier named Punch, a gift from the U. S. consul in England.

The first recorded photograph of a presidential dog came with the election of Lincoln. Fido, a yellowish-brown mongrel, was taken to Ingmire's studio in Springfield, Illinois, just before Lincoln left for his inauguration in 1861 for Fido's Official Portrait. The picture now can be found in the Illinois State Historical Library. Lincoln sensed that Fido would not be happy in Washington and he was left behind in the care of his barber in Springfield. This pleased Mary Lincoln who hated pets but Lincoln instructed his caretakers never to tie the dog up, or to scold him for entering the house with muddy paws. After the assassination of Lincoln, the President's body was returned to Springfield for burial and it was said that Fido forlornly watched the funeral procession with Old Bob, Lincoln's horse and Fido's four legged pal.

The high spirited Teddy Roosevelt family, with all their pets, practically turned the White House into a zoo. Their canine contingent came with and without pedigrees, in assorted sizes, from Rollo, the enormous St. Bernard down to the tiny Manchu, a black Pekingese, presented to daughter, Alice Roosevelt, by the Empress of China. There was Sailor Boy, the Chesapeake retriever, who swam behind the presidential yacht. Then Tip, Edith's mongrel, and a Manchester terrier named Blackjack. The bull terrier, Pete, was

notorious. He nipped the leg of a naval officer, snapped at a few cabinet members and was banished to Sagamore Hill after ripping the pants of the French ambassador. However, Skip, a mongrel picked up in the Grand Canyon, was Teddy's favorite. He accompanied TR on his hunting expeditions out West and the press followed in fascination. Skip's short legs made it difficult for him to keep up and Teddy would scoop the little dog up onto his saddle.

William Howard Taft, the heaviest president to serve at 350 pounds, brought not only a dog, but his own cow,, Mooly Wooly, to the White House. However, the name of the old family dog was not recorded for posterity.

As a dog fancier, Herbert Hoover, enjoyed a whole pack of animals around him. In his campaign, he circulated autographed pictures of himself holding up the paws of his police dog, King Tut, as if to suggest that candidate and canine alike were begging for voter support. Mrs. Hoover was presented an Irish wolfhound generally considered the "lord of dogs" by the American Kennel Gazette. These aristocratic hounds date back to the days of the Roman Empire.

Eleven canines romped FDR's White House. There was Blaze, who, when locked in the library one day, chewed up all the towels. Blaze's greatest fame came when he bumped a homeward-bound soldier off a plane. Bad manners and unpredictable behavior seemed to be the mark of the Roosevelt's dogs. Winks gobbled up eighteen plates of bacon and eggs that had been laid out in advance for early morning dinners in the White House mess. Of course, Fala, the

Scottie, was trained to shake hands, so he would be prepared to greet dignitaries, and to stand at attention on his hind legs when the national anthem was being played. Major, the police dog, made headlines by biting VIP's. The White House maids used their dust mops and brooms to fend off Major before he was banished to the Roosevelt Estate in Hyde Park, after a passerby was bitten by Major when he was being petted.

The story of these presidential pooches has taken us through a brief lighthearted romp through American history. Ignoring his need for a First Dog, President Clinton has reportedly flirted a few times with the idea of getting a golden retriever. But so far this is merely one of those White House shaggy dog stories pounced on by the press. All in all, it's enough to make one wonder if Bill Clinton shouldn't change his Socks. If he doesn't, then I want to reserve my next Athenaeum paper: "All the President's Pussies."

Wendell H. Rorie

October 2, 1997