

## Note to the Obamas: Please, No Alligator

The menagerie of White House animals has included some odd ducks (literally)

BY CARRIE ALLAN

**T**he last vote hadn't even been counted on Nov. 4 when President Barack Obama mounted the stage in Chicago's Grant Park and addressed the throngs. He thanked his family, his advisers, his campaign manager, and set off a storm of furious (should that be "furry-ous"?) speculation when he informed his two daughters that they had earned the puppy who'd be joining them in the White House.

In a time of economic panic, two wars, and an ongoing health care crisis, many pundits seemed surprised by the resulting frenzy. Animal groups from Best Friends Animal Society to the AKC rushed to advise the prez-elect on everything from breed to source to the legitimacy of claims that certain animals are hypoallergenic. The Humane Society of the United States circulated an online card for people to sign, thanking the president-elect for choosing a shelter dog (a plan Michelle Obama had mentioned during an appearance on *Entertainment Tonight*). Web polls asked readers what kind of dog they thought the new first family should get, and where they should get him. And Obama gave shelter dogs a sweet boost when he noted, in his first post-election press conference, that many of them "are mutts, like me."

Among the weirder news tidbits generated by the Obamas' search for a pet, The Friends of the Peruvian Hairless Dog Association offered the family a male puppy who, the group's representative said, would meet the family's need for a dog who wouldn't cause daughter Malia to sneeze. "Dog Whisperer" Cesar Millan advised Obama (via *People* magazine's website) that any dog the family gets "won't know he's Barack Obama and won the presidency," and that therefore Obama must make sure to exude "calm assertiveness" when he first meets the new pooch.

Odd as these developments were, the history of White House pets is a medley of the peculiar. Here's a chronological rundown of some of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue's more interesting political animals.

- John Quincy Adams kept an alligator given to him by a member of the French aristocracy. His wife Louisa kept silkworms. Cuddly ...
- Millard Fillmore was not just the president of the U.S., he was also a founding member and later vice president of an SPCA chapter in Buffalo—now the SPCA Serving Erie County.
- Abraham Lincoln not only freed the slaves and saved the Union, he was the first president known to have a cat. (A house cat, that is—Martin Van Buren had the first felines, a pair of tiger cubs presented to him by the Sultan of Oman.)
- James Garfield named his dog Veto as a tongue-in-cheek warning to Congress.
- Woodrow Wilson kept sheep, who grazed on the White House lawn and kept ground-keeping costs down.
- Franklin Roosevelt's Scottish terrier Fala received lots of mail from fans. He attended FDR's funeral, and the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C., depicts the dog sitting with the president.
- "If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog," said Harry Truman. Funny line—especially coming from Truman, who gave away a puppy he'd received as a Christmas gift in 1947. The cocker spaniel, named Feller, was passed on to the White House physician to a naval aide to a quartermaster, and on down through a line of lackeys before finally finding a permanent home—six years later—at the Ohio farm of a staffer's father. Feller's note to the press: "If you want a friend in Washington, don't get a Truman."
- The Kennedys had multiple pets, including a flock of ducks belonging to daughter Caroline.
- In 1964, Lyndon Johnson outraged many dog lovers when he picked up his beagle, Him, by the ears and claimed it was good for the dog.
- President Richard Nixon's more famous dog was Checkers—credited with rescuing Nixon's political career when, accused of taking illegal campaign contributions during his vice presidential candidacy in 1952, Nixon denied the financial accusations but admitted to having taken one gift: the family dog, Checkers. Nixon also had an Irish Setter named King Timahoe. Once, when Prince Charles was visiting, Nixon instructed White House staffers to simply call the dog Timahoe so the prince wouldn't be outranked.
- The Millie Bush Dog Park in Houston was named after the first President Bush's springer spaniel.
- When the Clintons' chocolate Lab Buddy was neutered in 1998, Jay Leno joked, "The dog will never have sex again. Overnight, they've turned Buddy from a Democrat into a Republican."
- George W. Bush's dog Spot is one of Millie Bush's puppies. The departing president also had a cat and two Scottish terriers, one of whom bit a Reuters reporter in 2008. No word on whether he was angry about bad coverage. The Bushes also have a cow, man; their longhorn, Ofelia, lives on their ranch in Crawford, Texas.



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