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Section: Lifestyle

Presidential pets

Cats and dogs and a raccoon .. oh, my

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CANTON Sheep and raccoons aren't generally considered pets, but when their lodging is the White House their status rises.

The sheep that "mowed" the grass during the World War I Wilson administration and the raccoon that roamed the White House when President Calvin Coolidge and first lady Grace Coolidge lived there are part of a new exhibit at the National First Ladies' Library. "White House 'Tails': Pets of the First Families" includes nine of the 20 papier mache animal figurines - constructed by White House staff members - that first lady Laura Bush placed on display as a holiday exhibit in 2002.

"They were scattered all through the White House," said Pat Krider, executive director of the library, who called the chance to borrow the critters "exclusive" because White House items usually are not loaned out. "When the exhibit ends in October, we don't send them back to the White House. We send them to the storage facility for the George W. Bush Presidential Library, which obviously isn't built yet."

The papier mache pets have been placed in display cases in a hallway adjacent to the library's theater, where education director Lucinda Frailly will conduct related reading programs and puppet shows for young people throughout the summer. A program offering information on each of the pets is being distributed to those who visit the exhibit.

Included in the display are pets of the current president, including Scottish terrier Barney Bush and cat India "Willie" Bush. Pets of previous presidents include Mildred "Millie" Kerr Bush who "wrote" a book about her place in White House pet history, John F. Kennedy's Russian dog Pushinka, and the Coolidges' raccoon Rebecca.

"I've had people say the raccoon wasn't really a pet," said Krider, standing in front of Rebecca's display case, "but here you have Grace Coolidge in two different photographs holding the raccoon. She also posed for her official White House portrait with the family dog, Rob Roy."

The sheep?

"First lady Edith Wilson wanted to support the war effort," explained Krider. "So she purchased sheep and let them graze on the White House lawn to cut down on grass-cutting costs."

It was Frailly who was able to obtain the exhibit, said Krider. The education director went to the White House during the holiday season when the papier mache models were on display there. She expressed interest in eventually obtaining the loan. White House officials agreed earlier this year.

"Cindy has been doing White House pets programs for years," explained Krider, who noted that Frailly's interest in the presidential pets has been shared by those who have visited the exhibit.

"People have really enjoyed seeing the figurines because when we see the presidential families, the pets always seem to play an important part."

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ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

WHAT: "White House 'Tails': Pets of the First Families

WHEN: Through October 24

WHERE: National First Ladies' Library Education & Research Center at 205 Market Ave. S.

DETAILS: Tours are offered from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and (during the summer) 12:30 to 4 p.m. Sunday. Reservations are recommended. Call (330) 452-0876, ext. 301.

RELATED PROGRAMS

White House "Tails" summer reading program - presented by the First Ladies' Literary Society for children in kindergarten through fifth grade at the National First Ladies Library Education & Research Center at 205 Market Ave. S. Programs include "Wackiest Pets of the White House," 10 a.m. Tuesday; "Nellie Bly Investigative Reporter," 10 a.m. July 29; and "Vinnie Ream Teenage Artist," 10 a.m. Aug. 12.

Plus, special presentations of White House Pets puppet show will be presented at 10 a.m. Aug. 4, 5, and 6 at the National First Ladies' Library.

Call (330) 452-0876 for reservations.

Image associated with this article:



"MILLIE" The significant achievement of Mildred "Millie" Kerr Bush, the English Springer Spaniel that lived with President George H.W. Bush and first lady Barbara Bush, was the "writing" of "Millie's Book." Proceeds from the book when to Bush's charity.
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