

Socks Clinton (2005) and other presidential felines

(page checked February 2026)

Socks was arguably the first superstar cat — written about in printed media and internationally known at a time when the internet was still in its earliest years (the first official White House website went online during his tenure), and many years before the advent of social media. He received masses of letters, all answered by his staff, there was a fan club, and a whole merchandising industry existed because of him. It did no harm that he was a very photogenic cat, and by all accounts an equable one.

These Purr 'n Fur pages didn't exist until after he'd retired, but he was still living when this page was first put together in 2005 and it was still possible to obtain information about him. The page has been added to since then for further White House feline (and canine) residents, the most recent update being for Willow Biden in early 2022.

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When Bill and Hillary Clinton moved into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC, on 20 January 1993, it took a few days before their cat **Socks** came to join them; he had to endure a two-day car trip from Little Rock, Arkansas — but at least that gave time for his bed and litter-box to be made ready for him. There hadn't been a cat in the White House since Amy Carter's Siamese 'Misty Malarky Ying Yang', and Socks was only the fourth cat there since Calvin Coolidge left office in 1929 — but he wasted no time in imposing his personality on the place. And it was not long at all before he became an internationally known celebrity.



Before Socks . . .

But there had been presidential felines in the past, long before the White House became the official residence of the president, so before telling Socks' story we'll give them a mention.

As far back as Martha Washington's time, she kept cats at Mount Vernon — and even had a special door put in for them to come and go (the precursor of the cat-flap?). However, the first president known to have brought felines to the White House was Abraham Lincoln (in office from 1861 to 1865), who was given two kittens by his Secretary of State William Seward. They were named **Tabby** and **Dixie** and Lincoln was very fond of them; he would talk to them and play with them as a way to relieve stress, and is quoted as saying, 'Dixie is smarter than my whole cabinet. And furthermore, she doesn't talk back.' He's said also to have fed Tabby from the table during a formal White House dinner. Lincoln is also known to have rescued some strays. For more about Lincoln and his cats, see [this link](#) (undated). His youngest son Tad, who lived to be only 18 (1853–71), had a cat too (also called Tabby?). Rutherford Hayes, nineteenth president (from 1877 to 1881), had a cat called **Piccolomini**, and also a Siamese kitten that was actually the first of the breed to be brought into the United States, in 1878 — a gift from the US consul in Bangkok to Hayes' wife Lucy. It was named, somewhat unimaginatively, **Siam**. But the following year, in 1879, she became ill, and despite trying all manner of diets, and the intervention of the president's personal physician, she died a few days later. Her gentle ways had endeared her to all at the White House and she was much mourned. Her body was supposed to have been preserved, but despite

searches it has never been found. William McKinley (president from 1897 to 1901, when he was assassinated) and his wife Ida had an Angora cat. When it had kittens, they were named after prominent figures. To the president's amusement, the runts of the litter were named Weyler and DeLome, after two Spanish dignitaries; however, these unfortunate kittens were the first casualties when war broke out between the US and Spain, and Ida promptly ordered them to be drowned.

Theodore Roosevelt, president for two terms from 1901 until 1909, seems to have had quite a menagerie of various pets, which included two cats, a six-toed (polydactyl) grey called **Slippers** (*below left*), and a feisty kitten known as **Tom Quartz**. A letter exists, dated January 1903, from Roosevelt to his son Kermit in which he describes some of the kitten's antics: 'Tom Quartz is certainly the cunningest kitten I have ever seen ... an exceedingly playful little creature.' He goes on to describe how Tom had 'ambushed' Jack, the long-suffering dog. As for Slippers, she, as is the way of her kind, wasn't going to move from the spot she had chosen, even for the president of the USA! The story is told of an evening when Roosevelt, after a formal dinner, was leading an ambassador's wife out of the dining room towards the East Room, when they encountered Slippers, stretched out across the centre of the hallway. Instead of holding everyone up by waiting for the cat to move, or be moved, the President led the woman around the purring feline — and all the dignitaries behind were obliged to follow suit.



'Slippers' with Quentin Roosevelt



*Calvin Coolidge
& 'Timmie'*



*Officer Fink & 'Tiger'
March 1924*

Woodrow Wilson, in office from 1913 to 1921 (including WW1), had a cat called **Puffins**. Calvin Coolidge (president from 1923 to 1929) had a range of creatures to rival Roosevelt's, among which were a bobcat called Smoky and a pet canary named Caruso. The bird is said to have 'fallen in love' with a cat named **Timmie** (*above centre*), belonging to Washington journalist Bascon Timmons; Coolidge ended up giving the bird to Timmons. (I haven't been able to establish whether this story had a happy ending or not! – but apparently Timmie loved birds.) Coolidge himself kept domestic cats as well; various names crop up in different accounts, including **Tiger** (nicknamed **Tige**), **Smokey**, **Blackie**, **Marmie** and **Bounder**.



*Timmie and Caruso, ca. 1929
(for more about Timmie see [this link](#))*

All agree that Coolidge liked to walk around the White House with a cat draped around his shoulders, and most accounts say it was Tiger (*above right*). He was a grey-striped tabby, who apparently was quite destructive to furnishings, causing the loss in particular of a valuable antique bedspread. His destructive ways led to his banishment after a while to a new home, leaving Blackie as 'top cat'; he apparently loved

to ride in the White House elevator (lift). However, another account has it that Tiger would go wandering and, with the aid of a collar, giving his home, was returned until one day he disappeared for good.



Blackie & Tiger as kittens



Tom Kitten with Pamela Tumure, press secretary



Following Coolidge, from 1929 to 1933, was Herbert Hoover, who had a Persian cat called **Kitty** (*above right*). Although President Harry Truman (in office 1945–53) was not an animal lover, one cat made determined attempts to move in with him at the White House. 'Mike the Magicat', 'psychic' pet of famous seer Jeane Dixon, arrived uninvited one day and was offered a meal before being driven home by limousine to the address on his collar. Thereafter he had to be collected regularly from the White House gardens by his owner. President Eisenhower (president from 1953 to 1961) apparently loathed cats, to the extent of issuing an order to his staff that any found around the White House were to be shot!

Later on, Caroline Kennedy and her brother John-John had **Tom Kitten** (*above right*), who came via Jackie Kennedy's mother in January 1961 and who adored their father, JFK. Unfortunately, though, the President proved to have an allergy to cats, and so Tom had to be found another home; he went to live with White House staffer Mary Gallagher, and she occasionally brought him into work so Caroline could see him. Sadly Tom had only a short life and died in August 1962; it isn't clear what caused his death. Although he hadn't spent much time at the White House, he nevertheless merited an obituary in the Washington-area newspapers. One of them said, 'Unlike many humans in the same position', wrote the paper, 'he never wrote his memoirs of his days in the White House and never discussed them for quotation, though he was privy to many official secrets.' There's an interesting article about Tom Kitten [here](#) (Feb. 2016). Susan Ford (Gerald Ford's daughter; he was president from 1974 to 1977) had a miniature Siamese seal-point called **Shan Shien** in the White House (*below left*). Apparently Shan's favourite sleeping place was in the Lincoln bedroom. Ford was followed in 1977 by Jimmy Carter's administration and, as mentioned before, daughter Amy's **Misty Malarky Ying Yang** (*below right*) took over from Shan as resident feline. On one occasion Misty Malarky made a 'grand entrance' when the Carters were hosting a formal state dinner for the president of Mexico. The two presidents were about to descend the Grand Staircase to the event, the Marine band started playing; everyone waited expectantly ... and Misty Malarky padded down the stairs!



Susan Ford & 'Shan Shien'



Amy Carter & 'Misty Malarky Ying Yang'



Ronald Reagan was very fond of animals and had several tortoiseshell strays, although they were at his ranch, Rancho del Cielo, and not in Washington. Some didn't have names, but two of them were **Sara** and **Cleo**.

There are some good photos of former presidential felines, as well as Socks, [here](#) (Jan. 2022).



And so to Socks . . .

Socks, a black-and-white or 'tuxedo' cat, joined the Clinton family when Bill was governor of Arkansas; the much loved family cocker spaniel Zeke had been run over in the autumn of 1990, and it was not planned to get another dog for a while. However, one day the following year when Chelsea went for a piano lesson, there were two little kittens playing in her teacher's garden. The teacher had been trying to trace their mother, without success; but when returning to the car after the lesson Chelsea reached out to greet the kittens — whereupon the little black-and-white one promptly jumped up into her arms. Thus Socks became a member of the family: and a good home was also found for his sibling, **Midnight**. Their exact birth date seems to be a little hazy: when answering questions about Socks in February 1993

Chelsea said he would be 'three years old in July', thus 1990; but his commemorative plaque has 1991.

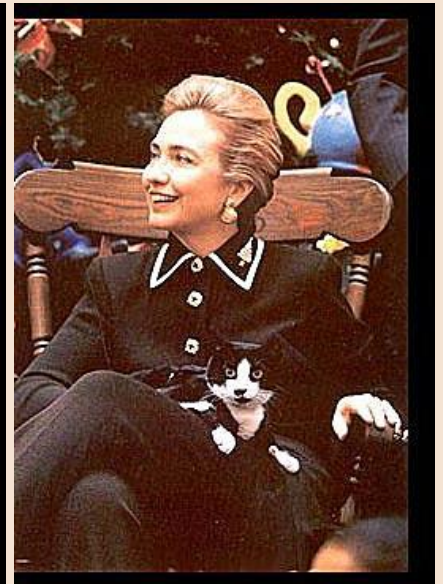
Socks goes to Washington

Socks soon made himself at home at the governor's mansion and proved to be a great explorer. When Bill made his successful bid for the presidency in 1992, it was decided that the cat should accompany the family to the White House — and so he became the 'First Cat-elect'. One day in November 1992, leaving the mansion for his usual rounds, a crowd of press photographers lured him into range with some catnip, and so he got his first picture in the papers (*photo at top of article, above*). The Clintons, unused at the time to this level of publicity, were said not to be pleased by the intrusion.



When they moved to Washington, it was decided that, for his own safety, it would be better if Socks was not left to roam free over all 18 acres of White House grounds, doubtless to return with 'trophies'; there was only an iron fence as boundary in parts, which he would have been easily able to slip through into traffic and crowds. He was therefore, somewhat reluctantly, confined to a long leash on the South Lawn when he was outside. However, that didn't prevent him from following with interest the comings and goings of squirrels, birds and other wildlife in his territory; and for some months he also had a stray tabby cat as a friend — dubbed '**Slippers**', she shared his food and water during her visits.

At first he spent much of his time by a window heater in the ushers' office, but Bill would stop by to see him each morning. Later Socks spent most of his time just outside the Oval Office itself, near his friend and Bill's personal secretary, Betty Currie.



Life at the White House

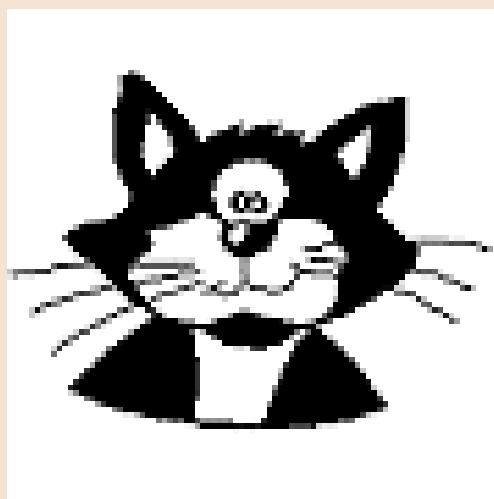
Socks' favourite outdoor spots included the garden outside the Oval Office, under one of the commemorative trees, when it was sunny; in summer, as it became very hot and humid, he took refuge in the thick hedge near the swimming pool. In cold or rainy weather he retreated indoors and although, understandably, he didn't have the free run of the White House either, he naturally had his favourite spots. The Visitors' Office in the East Wing was one, where high-backed chairs provided a good vantage point to view goings-on, but also there he had a fantastic three-storey cat house, handmade by a Florida fan, into which he could retreat to 'get away from it all'.



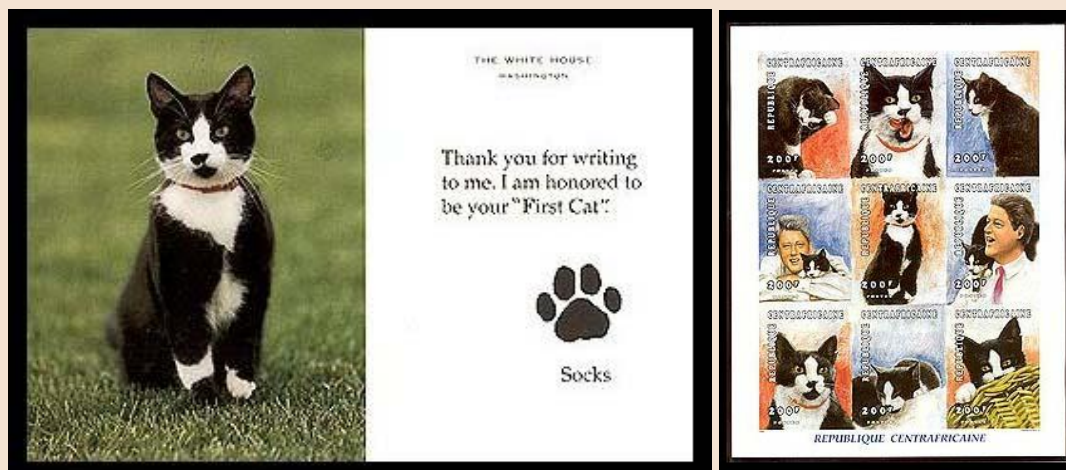
A wing chair in the receiving room in the West Wing, just outside the Oval Office, was a favoured spot for a catnap. As time went on, he forged a particular friendship with Betty Currie, President Clinton's personal secretary, and spent a lot of time on a chair in her office. His permanent bed was in the engineers' room, where there was always someone around if he wanted company. But judging from the photographs accompanying this article, Socks made his presence felt in various areas and had many friends among the president's staff, so there were plenty of people willing to care for him when duties took the Clintons away from home. It also became evident that he was a cat of great character!

Visits, stamps and fan mail

Socks didn't appear to be particularly keen on publicity — but of course he got plenty! He was quite often taken round on visits to children, or senior citizens, in the local hospitals, orphanages and nursing homes (*below left*), and seemed to be happy to oblige; he would sit on Hillary's lap and purr, enjoying the attention. For these visits he travelled in his own smart carrying basket, complete with presidential seal; on occasion he travelled in a limo and in several motorcades. During the Clinton administration it was a cartoon 'Socks' (*below right*) that guided visitors around the *White House for Kids* section of the website, launched on 19 January 1996, and that proved very popular.



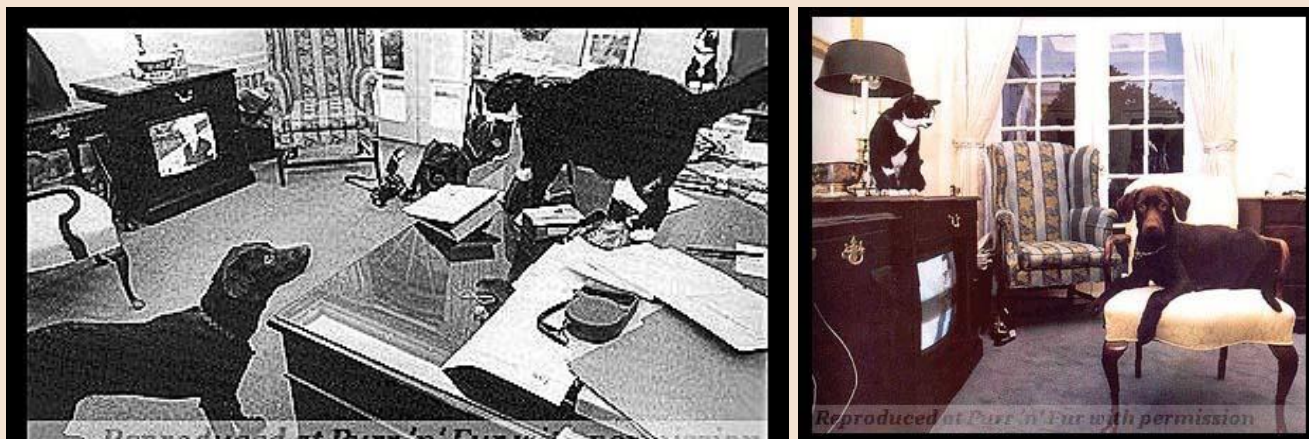
Both he and, later, the dog (*see below*) received huge amounts of fan mail, especially from children, and special efforts were made to answer them all. To the left below is an example of the card that was sent to children who wrote to Socks. The retired service personnel who live at the US Soldiers' and Airmens' Home in Washington helped out a lot with dealing with all the mail and replying to it; sometimes Socks would visit them to express his appreciation. Socks himself was featured on a great sheetlet of 9 stamps issued by the Central African Republic in 1996 (*below right*).



That Labrador

But Socks' pleasant lifestyle was to be upset. When Chelsea Clinton went to college at Stanford in California, and Bill had been elected president for a second term, the family decided to get another dog. Chelsea wanted a small one she could pick up and carry, but Bill said he would like a big one that he could run with. It was felt a Labrador would be suitable in size and temperament: and so, at about 3 months

old, Buddy erupted onto the White House scene, in December 1997. He and Bill hit it off straight away; but unfortunately, no one had consulted Socks . .



In Hillary Clinton's words, Socks 'despised Buddy from first sight, instantly and forever'. He had had all the family attention for some years and found the dog's presence hard to deal with. He refused point-blank to be friends with this boisterous and intrusive canine, despite everyone's best efforts. If they were left together, Socks would be found hissing, fluffed up and with back arched, while Buddy tried to chase him under the sofa. Although the cat had clipped claws, he never lost an opportunity to take a swipe at the dog.

End of the presidential term — and of Buddy

When Bill Clinton's second presidential term was coming to a close early in 2001, Socks' future had to be considered. Relations with Buddy had not improved. Several options were considered, including keeping him in Hillary's new Senate office, or having him in the new Clinton residence in Georgetown while Buddy stayed at the Chappaqua house. However, Betty Currie, who was taking retirement, expressed an interest in having her feline friend go to live with her, and in the end that was thought to be the best solution for Socks — especially in view of Hillary's new commitments in the Senate, meaning she would have less time at home. It isn't true that the Clintons simply 'got rid' of the cat, as some of their detractors would have us believe.

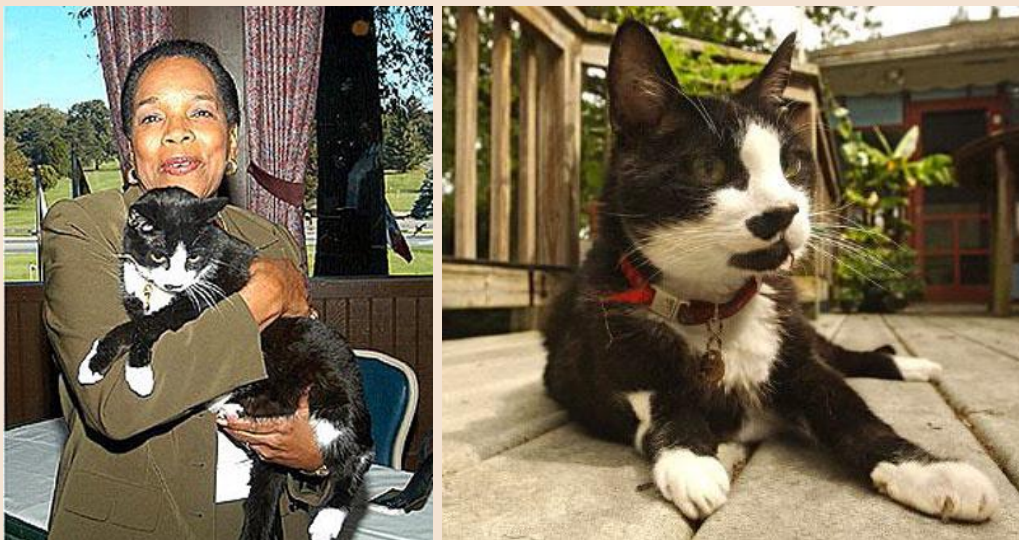
It so happened that Socks' rival, Buddy the chocolate Labrador, was run over by a car and killed on 2 January 2002, while the Clintons were on vacation in Mexico. He was apparently chasing after a contractor's van leaving the premises of the Chappaqua house and in doing so ran out into the busy road that passes the cul-de-sac where the house is located. See [New York Times](#) article (*Jan. 2002 – archived copy*) reporting the incident. Buddy was only 4½, and it must have been very upsetting for his owners, particularly as their earlier dog Zeke had died in the same way (see *above*).

One website seen remarked that 'Socks did not attend the funeral and did not send a representative.' Later the same year Bill was given another chocolate Labrador, which he named Seamus, which in 2012 he still had.

Socks moves to Maryland

For a time the Clinton Press Office in New York maintained a dedicated telephone extension for enquiries about Socks. In mid-2006 it was reported that he was in good health and enjoying life with Betty and her husband in Hollywood, southern Maryland, about 80 miles (130 km) from Washington. In October 2004 he made a rare public appearance when Betty was guest speaker at an Officers' Spouses Club luncheon at Andrews Air Force Base. Socks accompanied her and took part in the 'photo op.' (*below left*)

A couple of years later, in June 2008 it was pleasing to hear that Socks continued to enjoy a relaxed retirement in Maryland with his best friend. He was still making the occasional public appearance, but his age was starting to show (at this time he was thought to be almost 19 years old) and he had age- and health-related issues, with a thyroid condition and incipient kidney problems. Southern Maryland Newspapers Online ran an excellent article about him at this time, with photos, entitled [Socks Still Rocks](#) (*June 2008 – archived copy*).



Socks' last public appearance was at a fundraiser for local animal welfare groups on World Animal Day, 4 October 2008, at Leonardtown, Maryland, where he 'signed' photographs and books. Someone involved and who knew him well has since said he 'still had his Presidential bearing and drew quite the crowd'. A visitor to the event remarked that Socks 'graciously let everyone pet him' and commented, 'O what a cat: a once-in-a-lifetime cat.'



'Things just aren't the same since Socks left the White House'

Farewell, Socks

Reports in mid-December 2008 brought the unwelcome but not unexpected news for a cat of Socks' age that he had cancer and was said to be close to death. For his many fans the world over this was sad news indeed. The cancer was in his throat and jaw region, and while treatment would have been possible it was felt that, with his existing health problems and given his age, it would be better to let him enjoy his final days while he still had a reasonable quality of life rather than to put him through stressful treatment.

[US News & World Report](#) | [NYDailyNews.com](#) (*archived copy*) | [ABC News](#) (all Dec. 2008)

Old trouser that he was, Socks battled on till mid-February 2009 and was still able to enjoy a reasonable quality of life. But it was a battle he couldn't win; he was rapidly losing weight and by the middle of the month he was hardly able to eat. Betty took him for a final walk, but when next day, on Friday 20 February, he could no longer stand up, she knew that his time had come. She took him on the final sad journey to his long-time veterinarian; and was heartbroken.

It was reported that Chelsea Clinton contacted Betty later that same day, as did the former President; and Bill and Hillary issued the following statement: 'Socks brought much happiness to Chelsea and to us over the years, and enjoyment to kids and cat lovers everywhere. We're grateful for those memories, and we especially want to thank our good friend, Betty Currie, for taking such loving care of Socks for so many years.'

Commemoration

It's understood that Betty either buried or scattered a portion of Socks' ashes at one of his favourite spots overlooking the river near her Maryland home. She sent another portion to his hometown at Little Rock, and in March, during a private ceremony at the Governor's Mansion, the ashes were scattered in the west garden. The First Lady of Arkansas, Governor's wife Ginger Beebe, read a piece she had composed to honour Socks, and a commemorative plaque was put in place — it's believed not far from the back porch near the kitchen. The occasion wasn't reported in the press until July, when Mr Ron Maxwell, the mansion's administrator, was quoted as saying, 'That's where Socks hung out, on the back porch there.' The wording reads: *Socks. 1991-2009. First Cat of Arkansas 1991-1993. First Cat of the US 1993-2001*. The small urn which contained the ashes is now at the Clinton Presidential Library, Little Rock.



And so it was that Socks returned home. Warm thanks go to the First Lady who gave permission for her words to be reproduced here, and we are also most grateful to her assistant, Natalie Smith, for responding to our enquiry and arranging a photo of the commemorative plaque.



Socks 1991-2009

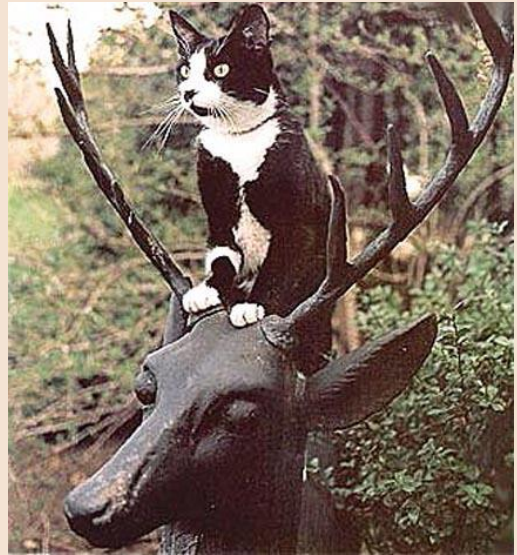
*God sends some of us a special mission
To take in stray kitty cats,
To feed them and give them a permanent home,
To love them and make them our very own.
That's how it was for the cat named Socks,
Socks was very smart to have jumped
In the arms of little Chelsea,
For now Socks had a home at 1800 Center Street
The Arkansas Governor's Mansion.*

*While his time here was short
The move to the White House brought him
More family, fame and the envy of cats around the world.
Socks became a household pet name with his picture in
Magazines and image on posters.
He wrote a book that brought smiles to many a face,
Then retirement it was with his companion and friend
From his White House days.
Socks was loved by many and will forever be a part of the
History of this place, the Arkansas Governor's Mansion.*

Socks' legacy

Socks had a great life for a stray kitten from Arkansas, and became arguably the most famous cat of his time — not only in the US but throughout much of the world, and not just because of his high-profile residence earlier in his life, and the fame that went with it, but because he was a cat of such character. He was greatly mourned by his legion of fans, but fortunately left an excellent legacy of photographs.

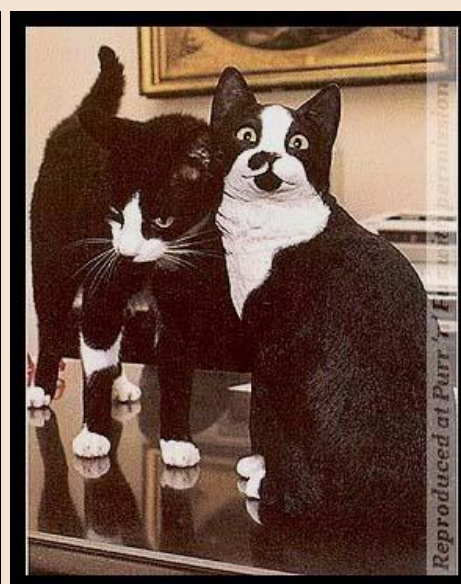
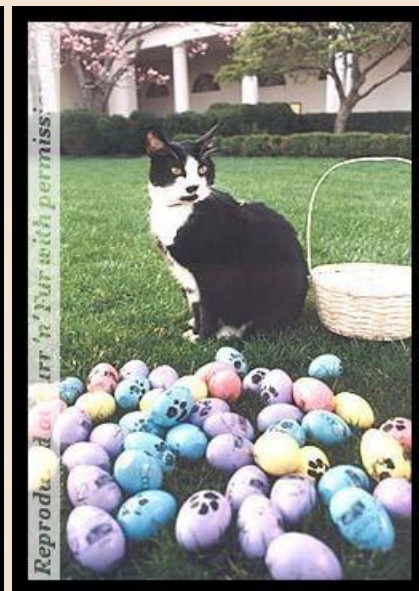
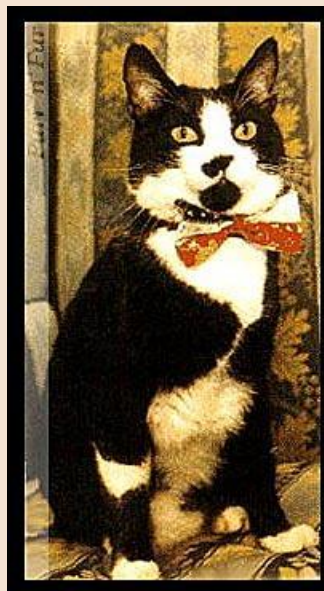
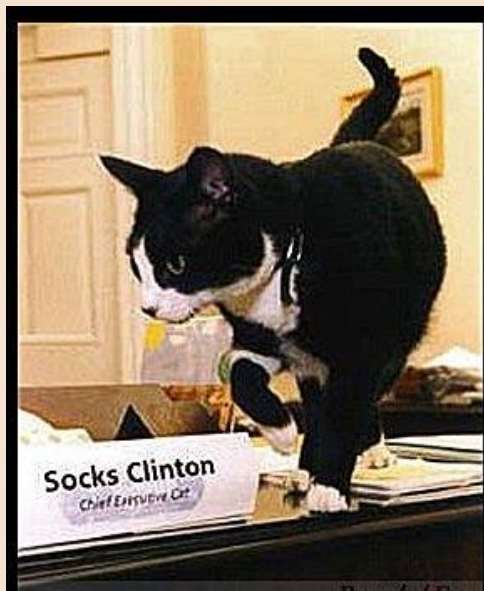
The White House website of the Obama administration featured a slideshow of presidential pets that included most of the well-known pictures of Socks, but it's no longer available and not archived.



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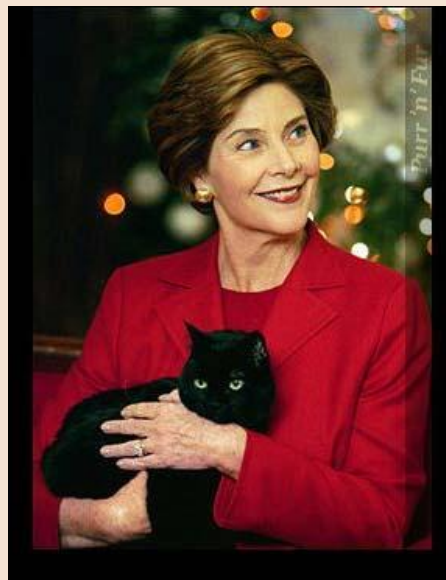


After Socks left the White House . . .

George W Bush had three cats in Texas. The favourite was **Cowboy**, who died of kidney failure in 2000 aged 12. The remaining two animals Bush claimed to feed himself every morning when he was governor, and said how he missed them when he was campaigning for the presidency — but still he didn't bring **Ernie** to the White House, and instead gave him to a family friend. Ernie was a six-toed, ginger-and-white stray who had been rescued from a tree at the governor's Texas mansion in Austin, and was named for Ernest Hemingway who also had a six-toed cat. The remaining feline, who was at the White House throughout the Bush administration but was fairly reclusive, was a black female called **India** (after a former Texas Ranger baseball player nicknamed 'El Indio'; although the name was also said to be short for 'India Ink', presumably because of her colour). She had been with the Bush family for many years and for some reason gained the nickname 'Willie', and was also referred to as 'Kitty'. India died on 4 January 2009 aged 18, and the family [issued a statement](#) expressing their sadness. A [photo essay of India](#) is included in the archived pages of the Bush administration. There were initially two dogs: a Scottie called Barney, and an English springer spaniel named Spot (or Spotty) that died in 2004. The family's ornaments of all three animals were pictured in a collection of [presidential pet sculptures](#) displayed in the East Room of the White House. A further Scottie was presented to Laura Bush early in 2005 and named Miss Beazley ('Beazley-Weazley').



Ernie on the settee

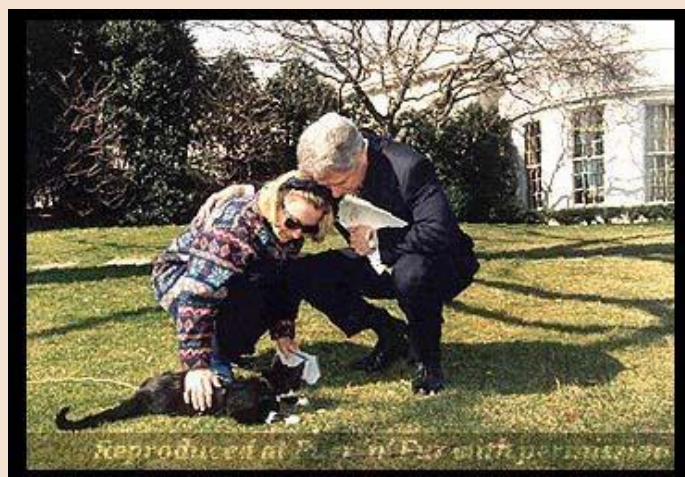


Barbara Bush & India

On 14 April 2009 the Obamas' Bo, a 6-month-old Portuguese water dog, made his debut for the press corps; see the UK's [Guardian](#) newspaper. A comprehensive listing of presidential pets can be found at [Wikipedia](#).

Acknowledgements

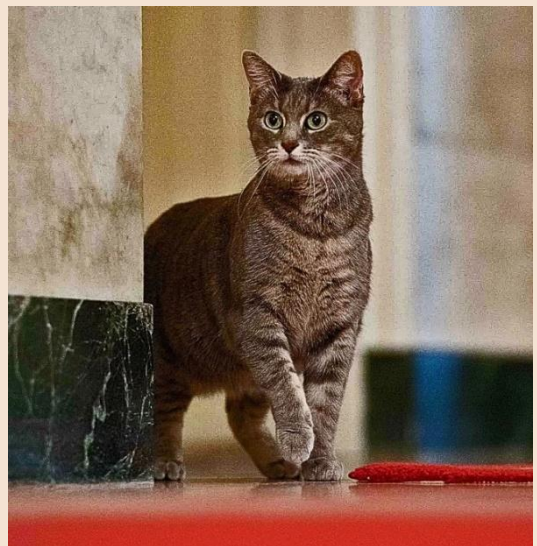
For the account of Socks, and many of the photographs of him, I have drawn heavily on information in Hillary Rodham Clinton's book, *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy*, published in 1998 by Simon & Schuster, New York, which presents a representative sample of the children's letters written to the White House pets. I'm indebted also to Deborah Bush, Archives Specialist of the [Clinton Presidential Library](#) in Little Rock, for her help (and for sending some extra photos); and to the Office of the First Lady of Arkansas as noted above.



There's an interesting article about all the White House cats from the [Washington Post](#), and see also [The Week](#).

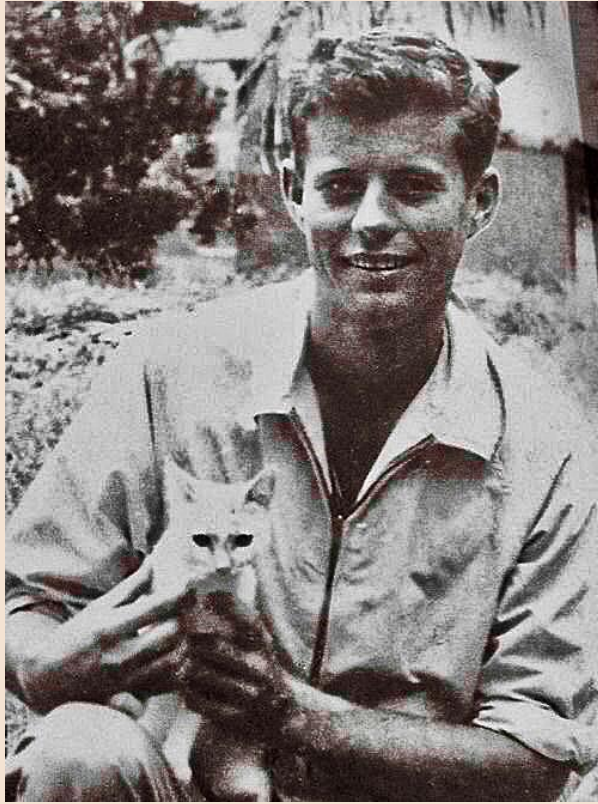
Update, January 2022

After 13 years, a new feline made her appearance at the White House in late January 2022. After India Bush died in 2009, the Obamas had a dog, and Donald Trump had no pets – but then came **Willow**, named after First Lady Jill Biden's birthplace of Willow Grove. Originally from a farm in Pennsylvania and born in January 2020, the kitten jumped up onto the stage and interrupted proceedings while Mrs Biden was at a campaign event in 2020, and the farm owner felt that the cat had bonded with the First Lady. For various reasons it wasn't possible for her to be welcomed at the White House until later, so she lived with a fosterer, but upon arrival in Washington she soon began to settle in and started to explore her new home. She has her own [Twitter](#) account as 'Catmancer in Chief', and there's an [Instagram](#) account, but it seems to be no longer used in early 2026..



There's a short video clip of Willow checking out the Christmas decorations in December 2022 [here](#).
in June 2024 Jill Biden published a children's book about Willow and her adventures in the White House.
See [here](#) (March 2024). [Instagram](#) | [Wikipedia](#) | [YouTube](#) |

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Apparently this is JFK holding a kitten in the Solomon Islands. He liked cats but was allergic to them, so a cat couldn't be kept in the White House when he was president..

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