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Something a bit off the beaten track.

Asbury Park Press, New Jersey  
Sunday, June 26, 2005

>From Fala to Fido: Washington is gone on dogs

By BETTY LOWRY

EXTRACT: "Washington hotels are notoriously dog-friendly. The Madison devotes an entire floor to them, but only The Fairmont has a doghouse in the lobby. Marcie, a 6-month-old black Labrador retriever, was the first to live there while being socialized for a service career with Guide Dogs for the Blind. She was welcomed with a puppy shower in the elegant Colonnade Restaurant, where doggy bones were tied in the trees and an artist did caricatures of dogs."

CAPTION: Franklin D. Roosevelt's Scottish terrier Fala is immortalized with his master at the memorial to Roosevelt in Washington.

It's considered good luck to rub his nose. And the nose of Fala, the only dog to appear on a Washington presidential memorial, is

shiny.

The Scottish terrier, who was the constant companion of President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945), even has his own guided tour. In Fala's Footsteps, offered Fridays at the Roosevelt Memorial, covers the state of the nation during the Depression and World War II from the view of the ever-present First Dog.

"No one could imagine the president without him," says Carolyn Crouch, president of Washington Walks.

A variety of props, including photos, Roosevelt's report card from Groton School and a square dog biscuit, are taken from a vintage 1940s suitcase - Fala's traveling case - help trigger his recollections.

"I watched the kids collect all kinds of things - tin foil from the inside of a gum wrapper. Kids had to do their part," Fala says (via a letter read aloud by guides giving the tour), recalling the U.S. home front during the mid 1940s.

He also describes the pleasure of getting a morsel in the morning straight from his master's breakfast tray. At other meals, Roosevelt was known to keep heads-of-state waiting while he hand-fed his small friend.

The four rooms of the memorial cover the four terms of Roosevelt's presidency (1933-1945), and the times from the Depression through the New Deal and World War II. Fala sits at the president's feet

in the third room.

The Scottie was a 1940 Christmas gift from Roosevelt's favorite cousin, Daisy. His full name was Murray, the Outlaw of Falahill, Fala for short. He wasn't the only dog in the Roosevelt household. But from the beginning, he was his master's favorite. He was also the favorite of school children and received so many letters, he needed a full-time secretary to answer his mail.

Hounds by the dozen

Canine friends have long been in the households, if not always at the sides, of presidents. Early presidents owned hounds by the dozen. Abraham Lincoln may have introduced the first Fido, now virtually a synonym for pup. Ulysses S. Grant tellingly named his Newfoundland Faithful.

Warren Harding's Laddie Boy had his own chair at Cabinet meetings. Ronald Reagan called his dog Lucky. Teddy Roosevelt had a pit bull, a Chesapeake retriever, a terrier, a spaniel and a mutt. (His menagerie also included a zebra, barn owl, rats, roosters and a horned toad named Bill, but never mind.)

One of President Harry Truman's most quoted aphorisms is "If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog."

So, it's no surprise that Truman had at least two friends in Washington: a mutt and an Irish setter. Dwight Eisenhower followed the defeat of Germany

by adopting Heidi, a friendly Weimaraner. Lyndon Johnson was roundly chastised in the press for lifting his beagle by the ears.

Seeking a cozy political image and perhaps in imitation of Franklin Roosevelt, Richard Nixon invoked the name of his spaniel, Checkers, in a campaign speech. With a little help from first lady Barbara Bush, Millie, the springer spaniel in the White House of G.H.W. Bush wrote a book that outsold her master's autobiography.

Bill Clinton took thousands of suggestions from the public before naming his chocolate lab Buddy, and first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton compiled "Dear Socks, Dear Buddy," letters to the family pets. George W. Bush includes his dogs in photo ops, even descending the steps of Air Force One.

Long live Sgt. Stubby

Fala may be the only dog to appear in a president's memorial, but he is not the only dog to be memorialized in Washington.

Owney, the post office dog who bummed around post offices and on mail ships all over the world a century ago, has his own glass case as well as a bronze statue in the National Postal Museum opposite Union Station. Owney's travels began when he showed up at the post office in Albany, N. Y., in 1888.

Sgt. Stubby, the soldier dog of World War I, met three presidents, lived through 17 battles and was decorated by Gen. John Pershing. Smuggled

overseas on a troop transport, the pit bull mix soon became more than a friend, alerting troops to gas attacks and other enemy action. In retirement, Stubby became the mascot of Georgetown University's football team. He has been preserved and is on permanent display at the Smithsonian.

War dogs have been active throughout our military history, and there is action under way for a permanent National War Dog Team Memorial in the capital. Always Faithful, a life-size bronze of Kurt, a Doberman that served on Guam during World War II, was unveiled and displayed at the Pentagon before being shipped to Guam, where it stands in the U. S. Marine Corps War Dog Cemetery.

World's most famous dog

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Marcie, a 6-month-old black Labrador retriever, was the first to live there while being socialized for a service career with Guide Dogs for the Blind. She was welcomed with a puppy shower in the elegant Colonnade Restaurant, where doggy bones were tied in the trees and an artist did caricatures of dogs.

Of course, Fala was a working dog, too, diplomatically speaking. The little dog went everywhere: aboard ship, on trains and in the presidential limo.

He was present on fishing trips, as well as at military inspections and international conferences. He did tricks for foreign dignitaries; slept at the foot of the president's bed and starred in his own comic strip.

He even became a political icon when Republicans claimed erroneously that a destroyer had been sent at great expense to pick up Fala in Alaska ("As if I would be left behind," Fala says indignantly in the tour letter.)

"The Fala Speech" kicked off the successful presidential campaign of 1944. Roosevelt told the Teamsters that he and his family didn't resent personal attacks, "but Fala does resent them - his Scotch soul was furious - he has not been the same dog since."

In his day (1940-1952), Fala was called the "most famous dog in the world." His Secret Service code name was "The Informer" because his presence was a sure sign that Roosevelt was nearby.

So, perhaps immortality in the bronze sculpture by Neil Estern was inevitable, too. Crouch says that Fala's tour has turned out to be as popular with adults as with children.

"Go ahead," she says. "Rub his nose."

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