

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND ANIMALS

Did you know.

Legends say that while living at Knob Creek, Kentucky, young Abraham Lincoln found a dog with a broken leg. He made a splint and took care of the dog, naming it “Honey.” According to his childhood friend Austin Gollaher, Abraham also had a pet crow, raccoon, and a goat named “Billy.” (From Resource Guide Material: Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site)

Mr. Lincoln’s step-mother recalled that he loved animals and children very much. He was even compassionate to insects. (Sarah Bush Lincoln’s interview with William H. Herndon) As a young boy he preached his own sermons to his family declaring that he was against cruelty to animals. His step-sister remembered him saying that an ant’s life was to it, as sweet as ours. (Richard N. Current in *The Lincoln Nobody Knows*)

His long-time friend from Kentucky, Joshua Speed, told about a trip he took with Mr. Lincoln and two other gentlemen in 1839 back to Springfield, Illinois. While riding along a country road through a thicket of wild plum and crabapple trees, the group had stopped to water their horses. A severe storm had occurred previously. Mr. Lincoln disappeared for a while. He caught two little birds in his hand which had been blown from their nest and was hunting for the nest. He finally found the nest and placed the birds back within it. The three other travelers laughed at him, but he earnestly said that he could not have slept that night if he had not given the two little birds to their mother. (Kenneth A. Bernard, *Glimpses of Lincoln in the White House*)

As President, Mr. Lincoln continued to be fond of animals including cats, dogs, and at least two goats named Nanny and Nanko. The goats were favorites of Mr. Lincoln’s younger sons, Tad and Willie, and they sometimes slept in the upstairs bedroom! Tad once scattered a group of White House visitors by driving a goat-pulled chair through the regal East Room and yelling, “Get out of the way there!” (a memory recalled by Treasury official Maunsell B. Field in *Personal Recollections: Memories of Many Men and Some Women*)

(Mr. Lincoln loved reading to his boys and roughhousing with them. Those times must have helped the President temporarily forget the problems facing him as president.)

The two goats knew the sound of President’s Lincoln’s voice, and they would come to his side when he called. Mrs. Lincoln’s seamstress, Elizabeth Keckley, recalled that on warm, bright days Mr. Lincoln and Tad would sometimes play in the White House yard with the goats for an hour at a time. He remarked to the seamstress that he believed his goats were the kindest and best goats in the world.

Tad took to heart unlucky animals (like his father did for unfortunate human beings) and often protected them. Jack the Turkey found a way to Tad’s heart before he became food for his stomach. On Christmas Eve, 1863, President Lincoln reasoned with Tad that the

turkey was sent to the White House to be killed and eaten during Christmas. Tad interceded for the turkey to his father arguing that the turkey had as good a right to live as anybody else. His plea was accepted by the President, and Jack the Turkey's life was spared. Soldiers on duty around the White House made a pet of the bird. (recorded in *Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks* edited by Michael Burlington)

President Lincoln had a horse named Old Bob which was in the President's funeral procession on May 4, 1865. Old Bob was draped in black with reversed boots at his side in tribute to the President.

(From Resource Material Guide: Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site)