Points on Pets: Horses common in White House history

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: I am aware that most of our presidents have had dogs and cats while living at the White House; however, I was wondering about how many had horses. Since horses have been an important part of our history, I would be surprised if our presidents didn't have a close relationship with horses.

A: Throughout the history of the United States, our presidents have depended on horses for transportation, sport and ceremonial uses. From George Washington to George W. Bush, most of our presidents have been accomplished horsemen.

President William Howard Taft, our 27th president (1909-1913), had the White House stables converted to a garage in order to house his fleet of four cars. It is also interesting that President Taft had the last cow, Pauline Wayne, at the White House. She was the president's personal source of milk.

President Warren G. Harding was the first president to ride to his 1921 inauguration in a motorized vehicle. Prior to that time, all of our presidents rode to their inaugurations on horseback or by horse-drawn carriages. Although Thomas Jefferson planned to ride in a carriage pulled by four horses to his first inauguration, he had to ride on horseback when the coach was late in arriving.

Many of our presidents rode horses as a leisure time activity to relax while living at the White House. John Quincy Adams often rode his horse before breakfast, while president Calvin Coolidge enjoyed morning rides on his horse, General. Coolidge even had a mechanical horse installed in the White House in order to ride on his busiest days or during inclement weather. Abraham Lincoln often took carriage rides about Washington in the evenings, and even during the Civil War.

Ronald Reagan was one of the most avid horsemen of our modern-day presidents. He often rode with his wife Nancy when home on his ranch in California. Many of our presidents' families also enjoyed riding horses. Macaroni, Caroline Kennedy's pony, often roamed freely around the White House grounds. President Grant's children had ponies as did Abraham Lincoln's sons.

Your local library and the White House Historical Association (www.whitehousehistory.org) are excellent resources for additional information about our presidents and their horses.

Q: I recently picked up a brochure at a pet exposition that said I can buy all of my dog's vaccinations direct from the company and give them myself at a great cost savings.

I have never given an injection and am wondering if doing this is a good idea. Of course, I would like to save money.

A: Trying to give your dog vaccinations is not a good idea. Whenever you pay your veterinarian for pet vaccination, you are not only paying for the actual vaccines but also for the knowledge and experience that your veterinarian has obtained through years of education and practice. Your veterinarian has been trained on how to maintain and administer vaccines safely. He or she has also learned how to handle adverse reactions following administration of vaccinations, should any occur.

While you might save a few dollars by vaccinating your dog yourself, you could actually spend more money if an adverse reaction happens, or if you injure your dog or yourself while giving the injections.

Your pets deserve to be properly vaccinated by an experienced, knowledgeable veterinarian or his or her technician after a physical examination. There is a lot more to administering a vaccination than just the injection procedure.

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