

The First Thanksgiving Presidential Pardon

In 1926 President Calvin Coolidge received a live raccoon from a supporter in Peru, Mississippi. The raccoon was intended as a menu item for the president's Thanksgiving dinner.

If you think pleasuring your palette and raccoon meat doesn't fit in the same sentence, especially for Thanksgiving dinner, you'd be in agreement with Mr. Coolidge.

One Lucky Raccoon

President Coolidge was an animal lover who fell in love with the cute critter and granted it an indefinite stay of execution.



Source: The Presidential Pet Museum

"I haven't much of a taste for raccoon meat. Some people like it very much," Coolidge told reporters during a press conference. "But I have established him here in the south lot in suitable housing, and he seems to be enjoying himself very much ... I don't think he is quite grown yet. He is very playful, very interesting, and seems very well-trained and well-behaved," said Coolidge.

The president incorrectly identified the raccoon as a "he" during the introductory press conference. Soon after, the president named her "Rebecca."

The First Lady, Grace Coolidge, also fell in love with Rebecca and the animal's lifestyle reflected the privilege of those who reside at America's most famous home.

Rebecca was served shrimp and other delicacies fit for visiting heads of state. She roamed the White House and the grounds of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue at her leisure.



Source: The History Channel

Mrs. Coolidge wrote: "She was a mischievous, inquisitive party, and we had to keep watch of her when she was in the house. She enjoyed nothing better than being placed in a bathtub with a little water in it and given a cake of soap with which to play. In this fashion, she would amuse herself for an hour or more."

Rebecca became a celebrity, and her antics, including wandering from the grounds occasionally, were covered by the press.

She remained the official White House raccoon until the end of the president's term. Rebecca was then donated to a local zoo, where, it was reported, she adjusted just fine to her new surroundings.

Presidential Turkey Pardons

Groups from the country's poultry industry began presenting the president with a turkey in the late 1940s. The sparing of a turkey's life just before Thanksgiving didn't become a press event and annual White House tradition until 1989, under President George H. W. Bush.