

A Chicken Is a Kid's Best Friend?

You either like them or you don't. But whatever your personal feelings are towards furry, feathered or finned friends, you can be sure that others before you had their own opinions about pets and reasons for having them.

People have kept animals for centuries. The kind of creatures depended not only upon the owners' personal tastes but also on where the owners lived and in what time period.

Today people think nothing of going to a nearby pet store and bringing home animals our ancestors had probably never heard of or seen. Even if they had, few would have dreamed of having a boa constrictor, parrot or tropical fish as a pet.

Instead, as both our front and back covers show, farm animals, necessary for a family's food and living, were pets, of a sort. The chicken on the front cover, held by Millard Bosworth, a little boy from Berlin, Vermont, in 1913, is just such a crossover between a domesticated farm animal and a family pet. The same is true of the pig pictured on our rear cover, eating an ear of corn. No doubt, come fall, the girl's fat friend became dinner for the family.

Most of us today think of pets as amusing and dedicated companions. Some, however, purchase animals like ferrets or even alligators for their novelty. Others buy creatures like tropical birds for their beauty. But for the struggling Vermont farmer in the

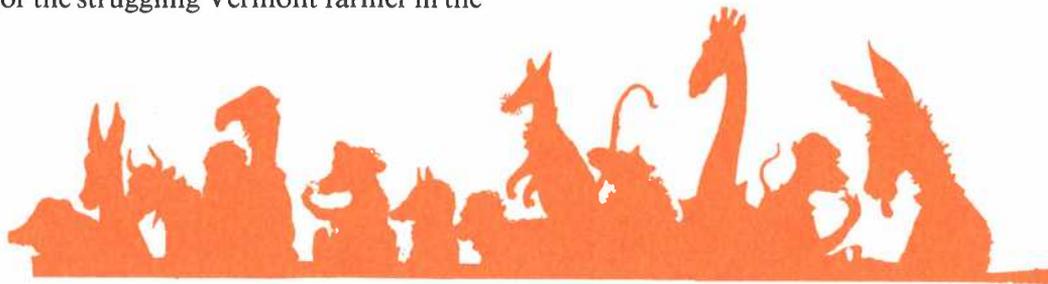
1800s novelty and prettiness were not important. Even if he had wanted to, getting his hands on a cockatoo or an iguana would have been difficult. Pet stores as we know them today did not exist. What was important was an animal that did a job.

Dogs protected the home from intruders. They also helped to round up sheep and cows from the fields and bring them back to the barns. Horses hauled loads, mowed fields, and took the family to Sunday meeting. Cats caught the mice who could gnaw holes in grain sacks and eat up precious crops.

Of course, our dogs still, in many cases, help to keep thieves away from our houses with their barking. And cats still eat mice unless we feed them too well with canned cat food from the supermarket. But, unlike our ancestors, these are usually not the main reasons we buy animals today.



If you do share your house with a pet, whether a turtle or a Great Dane, it probably now seems like a member of your family. So it was for all the children pictured on page 5. These old photographs show that our attachment to animals is not new. It predates our lives. It predates the cameras that captured the images you see here. Our passion for pets will continue when all that is left of us is a picture in a descendant's desk drawer showing a cat or a favorite chicken perched on our lap.





TOP LEFT:
Unknown girl on a fence hugging her horse's head, circa 1900



MIDDLE:
Londonderry girl with her pet dog on September 20, 1902



TOP RIGHT:
Unknown boy in uniform with Civil War cap shaking his dog's paw in 1898

BOTTOM LEFT:
Unknown girl with cat and boy feeding hens, circa 1900



BOTTOM RIGHT:
Unknown child with kitten, circa 1890



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AN AFTERNOON VISIT WITH AN OLD FRIEND

