

Cats Throughout the Ages

CatChannel humor columnist Peter Gerstenzang tells his version of feline history.

By Peter Gerstenzang

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Every so often, when I see Gracie doing something that seems to hark back to her ancestors, I wonder what cats were like thousands of years ago. Of course, it's usually when she's hopped up on the stove, turned a knob and just re-enacted the discovery of fire! Anyway, I did some research and I found out about how our cats went from their earliest days to when they started practicing sophisticated stuff. Like practicing writing notes to the authorities stating, "If the place goes up in flames, it was all Peter's fault."

Evidence found recently in Cyprus dates indoor cats back about 7,500 years. This was when they were first domesticated. Considering Gracie's recent behavior (like turning on the stove) this is probably the last time cats were domesticated. Should my kitty get crazy again, I'm going to try saying, "How would you like to go back to Cyprus? Being domesticated is a requirement there. And you have to take math." That should cool her out.

Moving ahead, the Vikings, apparently, used cats as rat catchers and companions. Except the near-sighted Vikings kept the rats as companions and sent the cats out to play. When the cats returned home, though, boy were they incensed. And they made the rats pay for it dearly. So anytime after that, when the Vikings said to the rats, "Come child and be my companion," the rats looked at them like, "I know how this ends. The cats come and drop us into the fjord again. Forget it, Sven."

In the Middle Ages, it became a popular superstition among men that cats were in league with Satan and responsible for various diseases. But then a lot of these same guys met their mothers-in-law and cats immediately started looking good to them again. Plus, the cats told everyone it was the rats causing disease. Considering what soon befell them, the rodents then wished they could simply be dumped in the fjords again.

So what about the modern day cat?

Scholars seem to trace the American love for cats to a movement some years ago in Japan. This is based on Maneki Neko, a legendary feline, who once waved a hand at a landlord. The landlord came over to the Maneki and just missed being hit by a bolt of lightning where he had been standing. OK, so maybe this wasn't the best person for the cat to save. But then there's my Gracie. I know she's the kind of girl who'd beckon my landlord over so he could be hit by a lightning bolt. And on the day the rent was due, too. Hey, we all love our cats, right? But what we each get from them is our own personal business. That's what makes America great.