

# Once Upon a Time in Prince William County...



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 Contributing Writer

White House bad dog "Pete" banished to farm in Prince William County. As described in the *Washington Post* of May 10, 1907:

"Pete, the prized bull terrier watchdog of President Roosevelt stirred up a ruckus yesterday morning, just before 9:00 by viciously attacking John T. Thomas, a clerk in the Navy Department, on the grounds of the White House. Mr. Thomas was on his way to

work, and being late, took a near route through the White House grounds (you could do that in those days if you knew that Pete wasn't patrolling—obviously, Mr. Thomas did not know). He was attacked and bitten painfully, and was placed at once under the treatment of Dr. Joseph Neller, who cauterized and burned out the bleeding wounds to prevent serious developments.

Apparently, Pete had not a particle of humor and little reverence for anybody except his master, President Teddy Roosevelt. As Mr. Thomas took his detour across the White House lawn, Pete lunged toward the unfortunate victim snapping wildly. Mr. Thomas could foresee a cyclone of unpleasantness and tried to outrun Pete, but he was not long in the lead. He tried first to dodge and then to pacify the dog, by throwing him a brand new spring hat, but Pete was in an ugly mood and not looking for pacification. One of the White House policemen started for the scene to rescue the hapless victim, but the quadruped had chased Thomas under the branches of a tree and buried his sharp teeth into the man's right leg. No little excitement was created by the

incident, as is always true when a watchdog goes on a rampage. Thomas saw his trousers had been torn in the melee and his wounds were bleeding. After seeking medical help from Dr. Neller, Mr. Thomas was able to limp to the Navy Department and tell his fellow employees what had occurred.

## Pete's Punishment

Pete was not to be seen around the White House last night. As punishment for his crime, he is said to have been chained and will be kept under guard for some time. He is a magnificent white dog, finely bred, and is the pet of the officers at the White House. In another earlier incident, Pete chased the French Ambassador, M. Jusserand, up a tree also on the White House grounds. Mr. Jusserand had to be rescued by several sturdy policemen who rushed upon the scene. Because of his bad judgment for his latest escapade, Pete was banished to Surgeon General (Admiral) and President Roosevelt's personal physician, John Rixey's estate, known as Ben Lomond, a large dairy, cattle, and horse-breeding farm in Prince William County located on the property that is now known as Ben Lomond House on Sudley Manor Drive, where he served penal servitude (we don't know exactly what this meant for a bad dog) for one year. He was later brought back to Washington to again serve as the White House guard dog."

It is said that President Roosevelt frequently visited Pete during his banishment and also hunted quail, pheasants, and rabbits on the farm. However, this writer thinks that Pete's punishment was a vacation in disguise as he most likely romped around the sprawling acres chasing squirrels and rabbits and having a doggy good time.

## Here's What Pete Got to Run Around in at Ben Lomond

A beautiful colonial residence with walls two feet thick with porch columns, spacious rooms, high ceilings, colonial fireplaces, hand-carved woodwork expressive of the antebellum architectural ideals, four bedrooms, reception hall, living room, dining room, large upstairs hall, two bathrooms, kitchen, and large basement with cement storage room, servant's quarters, dairy house, and meat houses. Also two large tile silos, large cattle shed, horse barn, two steel corn cribs, large sheep pen, grinding room and granary, implement sheds, pump house and tank, several tenant houses, poultry house, outdoor cellar, woodshed, garages, and acres and acres of beautiful farmland.

## Back to the Future...2003

This once magnificent plantation is now the scene of hundreds of townhouses and single family homes in the Sudley area. Through the intensive efforts of environmentalist and historical support groups, we in this county are extremely lucky and blessed to still have the original house (as it also has Civil War historical significance) although the main barn was destroyed in 1972 (historical preservationists were not able to save it). Some late evening, should you walk by Sudley Manor House, don't be surprised if you hear "Pete" at an upstairs window still guarding his Manassas domain and keeping an eye on that erstwhile rabbit or quail...or maybe he is keeping an eye on those Prince William County land developers and political leaders who are changing the countryside he once knew.

"Growl...snap...yap...bark"

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