

The Story of a Cat - Mascot for Maine Libraries

by Sarah Sugden, Director of Waterville Public Library)

A blizzard blew in one cold winter night in Maine. The wind cried and howled across the lawn in front of the quiet State House. Inside, the rooms were cold and empty; everyone had gone home.

Across the lawn, in front of the library, the statue of Samantha Smith was white with snow. Under the statue crouched a small furry ball.

“Meow,” the kitten said, but nobody was there to hear – just the wind and the snow and the cold, cold air. The kitten pulled in tighter to its fur and waited. “Meow.”

The sky grew lighter, and soon cars came- red, blue, black, and yellow. People began to walk about, but nobody noticed the kitten crouched small under the statue.

A kindly man in big boots, big hat, big coat, and big mittens walked along the path by the statue. His big boots made noise as they crunched the squeaky snow. “Meow.”

“Oh, my goodness!” said the man. “My word! It’s a kitten.” He crouched down and looked at the kitten. “Meow,” said the kitten again. “Oh, you poor puss,” the man cried. “Let’s get you inside the library.”

He scooped the kitten up in his big mittens, smoothing snow and ice off the kitten’s fur and tucked the kitten into the pocket of his big coat. His pocket was warm and soft and filled with keys and paper and little bits of things.

“Off we go, cat!” said the man. They walked into the library together.

Inside, the library was quiet and warm. Nobody was there yet to look at the books or use the computers. The man’s big boots squeaked snow as they walked across the floors.

“Hmm,” said the man, taking the kitten out of his pocket. He walked into his office and set the kitten on a chair. The kitten began to lick a snowy paw. The man carefully poured a bit of cream into a dish and broke off a piece of his tuna fish sandwich and set the piece on another dish. He set both dishes on the floor by the kitten.

“My word,” the man said again. “I’m not quite sure what to do with a cat like you, but I do know where to find out!”

After the kitten’s tummy was full of cream and fish, the man and the kitten walked down to the second floor of the library. The man clicked away at the keyboard of a computer and wrote down some numbers on a little piece of paper.

They found a special section of books all about cats! The man looked through three books and took some notes. He put the books back and said to the kitten, "I'm just going to check a couple of sites to make sure we've got all of the information we need!"

He clicked some more on the keyboard at the computer and wrote some letters and more numbers on another little piece of paper. The man then scooped up the kitten and walked back to his office.

He talked to someone on the telephone who knew about cats and kittens. He asked lots of questions and wrote everything down. He said, "Thank you," and hung up the phone.

Part of the man's job at the library was to visit and help libraries all over the state. He had a very busy week planned visiting libraries in three different counties! The books he had read and the helpful person at the humane society had told him that it was a good idea to keep this kitten close to him. So the kitten came along.

The man and the kitten drove and drove and drove. Every once in a while, they stopped at a library. At each library, the kitten poked its head out of the pocket of the man's big coat. The kitten carefully sniffed the air two times and then two times more. The kitten climbed out of the coat pocket and began to explore. The librarians at the libraries never minded; they were busy talking and working with the man. Besides, librarians are happiest when libraries are being explored!

None of the libraries looked just the same. Some had high ceilings and big staircases that were just right for scampering up and down. Some libraries had special rooms where children sang songs and listened to stories. Most of the libraries had rows of computers at which lots of different people were working very hard. Some libraries didn't have any books! Others had floors upon floors of stacks filled with books.

All of the libraries had friendly librarians who had treats for the kitten or knew just the right spot to scratch.

Each night, the kitten drove home with the man. While they were driving, the man told the kitten stories about libraries and lots of other things.

Soon the kitten was too big to fit in the pocket of the man's big coat. In fact, the kitten was a cat and getting **REALLY** big! Maybe there was something special about those treats from librarians, or maybe this was a special cat.

The man didn't notice how big the cat was getting. The man was happy to drive and drive and drive with the cat and visit libraries along the way. The cat was happy, too. Someday, the man and his library cat might visit **your** library, too!

The Maine Coon Cat, Baxter, is the mascot for Maine libraries. He is named after Baxter State Park and Governor Percival Baxter. One person described the mascot and the name as a "*...a very resilient type of feline – rough & tough, like Maine, the mountains, and Baxter State Park.*".
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