

CITY ANIMALS

A History of Our Changing Relationship With Other Hoboken Residents



Neighbors



Food and Clothing



Workers

A Hoboken Historical Museum Publication

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INTRODUCTION

[When man] is *being seen* by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him. His recognition of this is what makes the look of the animal familiar. And yet the animal is distinct, and can never be confused with man.¹

—John Berger, from his essay “Why Look At Animals?”

The idea for this exhibit began with Rex, a bull terrier, and a 1922 photograph of his wake in a Hoboken parlor.

A photocopy of the image—taken in the front room of Rex’s “master,” a dentist at 63 Newark Street—had been dropped off at the Hoboken Historical Museum several years before, along with a dozen unrelated images originating from the Bettmann/CORBIS archives.² I do not remember the other photos, but the tiny, grainy image of a dog laid out in a casket lined with white silk, surrounded by bouquets and wreaths of flowers, and accompanied by a white poodle the unidentified photographer described as a “friend” and “mourner,” provoked too many questions to be filed away. Was the image authentic? (It hadn’t helped that the dentist’s name was listed as “Dr. Hyde,” but a 1915 city directory easily confirmed that Arthur M. Hyde, dentist, had indeed lived and worked at 63 Newark.) Why did the doctor provide such an elaborate funeral for Rex? What was their relationship? The date of the photo was especially intriguing to me, as it challenged my belief that funerals for dogs and cats, along with burials in pet cemeteries, are a more recent historical development.³

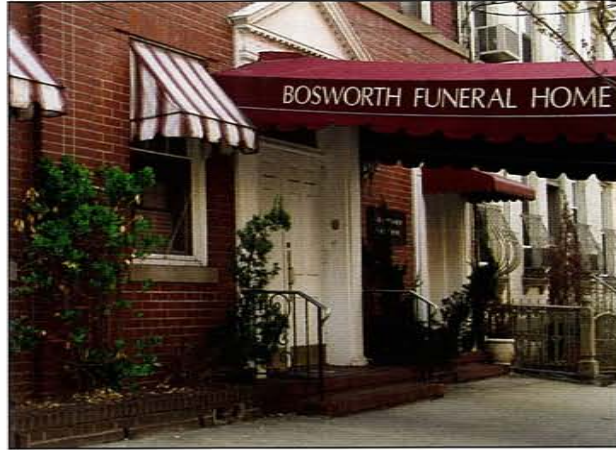
The photographer had penned some notes. Rex, he explained, was 16 years old, “had a host of friends and was a great pal of the doctor’s. Consequently, when the dog died, arrangements were made for a fitting burial.” It seemed that this photograph, if it *was* genuine, might depict an early, public expression of what veterinary associations now call “the human/animal bond.”⁴

Not exactly. A front-page article in the February 8, 1922, *Hudson Dispatch*, in addition to presenting an eyewitness account, offered another perspective on Rex’s wake. Featuring photographs of Dr. Hyde and Rex (in his prime), the article included multiple references to the expense of the embalming, casket, printed epitaph, and hearse—\$350 including flowers—and then offered Dr. Hyde’s explanation for the pricey display:

“I ought to be willing to spend at least that sum, when you consider that Rex in his sixteen years of life won twenty-two battles with other dogs. Altogether I won \$800 in bets that I placed on my dog in dog fights.”



Dog lying in a casket, Hoboken, New Jersey, February 7, 1922. © Bettmann/CORBIS.



Bosworth Funeral Home on Willow Avenue in Hoboken, 2004. Courtesy of McKevin Shaughnessy.

Dr. Hyde had—to the press, at least—justified the funeral based on Rex’s usefulness and commercial value, a conception of animals well established in earlier centuries. And Rex had also served as a form of entertainment (another enduring idea) for his master and others. Had he continued to do so, even in death? For after Rex’s body was embalmed at Bosworth’s undertaking parlors (a Hoboken mortuary that continues to this day) and was placed in a “costly casket,” the dog “lay in state before the front windows of the doctor’s office.” For a full day and night, the newspaper report announced, the casket could be “plainly seen from the street, which is in a busy part of the city, and literally crowds of persons congregated on the sidewalk below gawking up at the window. Many of them, although total strangers to the doctor, went upstairs to satisfy their curiosity.”

It seemed like a sideshow—or, at least, that’s the impression one gets from the *Dispatch* reporter, who, at the close of the article noted that Dr. Hyde had composed a few “one-step songs,” including one called “Prohibition You’re a Failure,” and that the doctor had teeth he’d pulled from patients’ mouths mounted into the handle of a gold cane.

And yet, waking a deceased loved one at home was still the common practice in Hoboken in 1922, notes Bosworth’s current owner, James Bosworth. Why *not* a beloved dog? So I asked: Had other dogs been waked in the city? James Bosworth could find no record of any dog funerals organized by the mortuary, not even Rex’s.

I investigated Rex’s burial. The *Dispatch* had claimed his body was to be “conveyed in an ordinary hearse to Woodlawn Cemetery, New York, where a section of the cemetery is reserved for dead dogs,” but such a section, I learned, had never existed at Woodlawn. Pet owners sometimes included their animals in family mausoleums, a Woodlawn historian told me.⁵ There was no Arthur Hyde interred there.

That’s when I began to research the origins of pet cemeteries in the New York/New Jersey area, thinking one might have been started by the 1920s, and learned the nation’s first pet cemetery, Hartsdale Canine Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York, was actually established in 1896. After discovering that local health laws prevented one of his clients from legally burying her dog in New York City, veterinarian Samuel Johnson had set aside land in his Westchester County apple orchard for the burial of dogs (and soon after, other domesticated animals as well). In that cemetery’s excellent records, I found Rex’s final resting place: Dr. A.M. Hyde of 63 Newark Street in Hoboken had interred his dog on February 8, 1922, in Plot Number 2064 in Hartsdale Canine Cemetery.⁶

But the story of Rex the fighting dog continued to prompt questions: Where were dog fights held in the county? Were they commonplace? Were other animals used? Were there any animal protection laws addressing fights, and who was meant to enforce them? When did Hobokenites begin to reject animal fighting as a “sport”?

Soon I was thinking about how humans view animals, how our relationship to one species or another has changed over time, and I realized (as one who has explored several features of my own

town's history over the past fifteen years) that if I could trace a century or two of Hoboken residents' interactions with domesticated, companion, wild and "exotic" animals, I might be able to provide an unusual local history—touching on changing modes of city transportation, land use, architecture, food production, recreation, employment, the health of humans and animals and education on humane treatment. Over the many years Hoboken has developed from a sparsely inhabited wetland to a densely populated industrial (and then post-industrial) city, animals have been variously viewed as **neighbors, workers, food, clothing, pests and strays, spectacle, companions and family**—and, often, more than one of these simultaneously. For *City Animals*, I used these categories of human perception to organize the photographs, maps, videos, documents, paintings, sculpture and artifacts I found in private collections and in the collections of the Hoboken Historical Museum, Hoboken Public Library History Collection, Hoboken Fire Department Museum, New Jersey Historical Society, New-York Historical Society and the Library of Congress—all of which provided insight into the way animals and people have lived in the city of Hoboken.

Several artifacts allowed for more than one interpretation, presenting the frequently conflicted, always complicated interactions of humans and animals. What is one to make, for example, of the *Chained Dog Under Car*, Robin Schwartz's 1984 photograph of a dog in a Madison Street lot? The dog is clearly perceived as a "worker," valuable and necessary enough to be chained (so as to remain on the job and, perhaps, to keep him from being stolen); and yet, the excessiveness of his shackling (a well-trained dog would serve as a guard without the need for chains) suggests that a vivid display of the dog's immobility is required by his keeper.

Predictably, much of the history that appears in *City Animals* relates how humans have laid waste the lives of other beings, but it also includes animals "that have profited from the rise of civilized humanity." Pigeons and starlings, for example, remain wild but are, as zoologist John C. McLoughlin explains in his illuminating book on city-dwelling inquilines, "bound to us in their dependence," having adapted to living within *our* nests.⁷ As urbanites, we are now linked to them, whether we like it or not.

Many city animals are *not* represented in this exhibit, as the potential scope of the project meant that limits had to be set. The animal kingdom, notes urban wildlife author Sarah B. Landry, ranges "from sponges to man."⁸



Robin Schwartz, *Chained Dog Under Car*, 1984. Courtesy of the photographer.

Had I unlimited time to research, I might have tracked down stories of Hoboken's ferrymen and ocean liner crews, and included in this history the many gulls still seen on our shores; or if I'd located studies documenting the destructive power of shipworms, they, too might have been in this text, given Hoboken's history of hosting shipyards. Bedbugs, silverfish, cockroaches and mosquitoes (the latter considered by many to be New Jersey's true State Bird) have made Hoboken's residents uncomfortable for generations, but I was more interested in the *changing* relationships between humans and animals: the "English" Sparrow, which went from pet in the 1850s to pest in the 1890s to threatened neighbor today; or the horse, which went from fundamental animal worker before the advent of "the horseless carriage," to meat (beginning in the Second World War, when many staples were going to troops engaged abroad, and continuing thereafter during hard economic times, horse meat was sometimes served in Hoboken restaurants in lieu of beef, leading the mayor and city council to pass an ordinance in 1959 requiring restaurants to identify such meals with the label: "This is horse flesh").⁹ I have assembled *a* history of city animals, one that is

necessarily (and even willfully) idiosyncratic. (Despite the statements made above, for example, rats, which we have *always* treated as vermin, *are* in *City Animals*. I simply could not resist the stories told about them, which seemed to reveal so much about our city and its human inhabitants.)

Similarly, a limit had to be set on the starting point for my research. Although I initially settled on 1855, the date Hoboken incorporated *as a city* (despite its semi-rural landscape), I moved the date back when I unexpectedly found in the New Jersey Historical Society archives a circa 1822 petition by John Cox Stevens and Robert Livingston Stevens, two members of Hoboken's "founding family," calling upon New Jersey State legislators to permit "a course for trails of speed *on the island of Hoboken*." That reference to Hoboken's original landscape—a marshy island adjacent to the western shore of the North (or Hudson) River—allowed me not only to investigate the Stevenses' failed attempt to bring horseracing here but to explore the



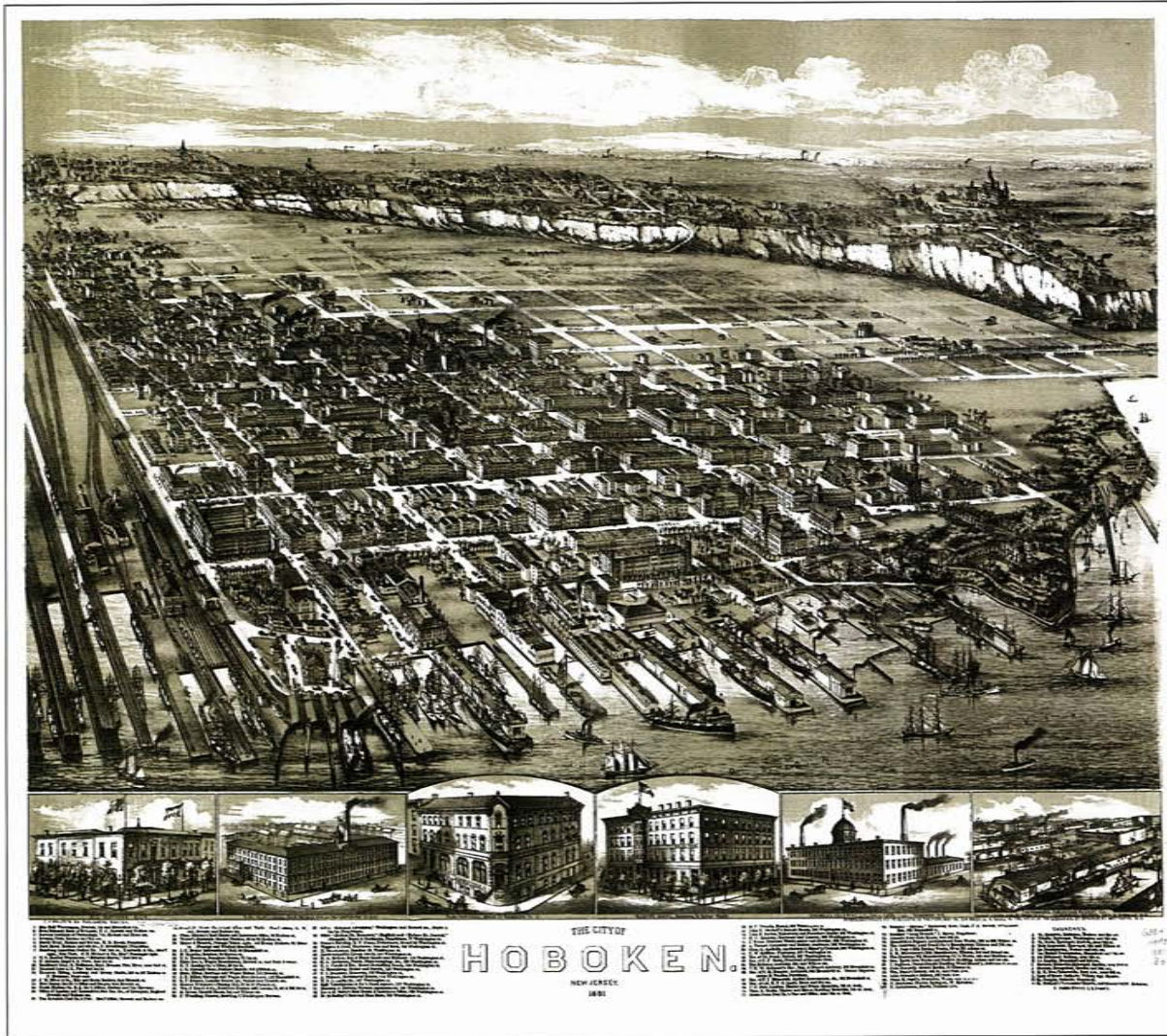
"View of Hudson River, From Elysian Fields, Hoboken, New Jersey," *Gleason's Pictorial*, 1853. From the collections of the New Jersey Historical Society.

wildlife found in Hoboken's pre-filled wetlands and undisturbed cliffs by area naturalists such as John J. Audubon and William Cooper, a founder of the American Museum of Natural History who later moved to Hoboken.

Location, entrepreneurs are often told, is everything; and Hoboken's nearness to Manhattan comes up again and again as one researches the smaller city's development. And so do certain names—most notably, members of the Stevens family. Colonel John Stevens (father of the aforementioned horseracing petitioners) bought at auction in 1784 most of the area today known as Hoboken. In 1814, after he inaugurated steam ferry service to Manhattan, he moved his large family from New York to the Georgian-style mansion he had built in Hoboken atop a promontory of serpentine rock (now known as Castle Point). Around 1820, he began to develop the waterfront as a resort, with the people of New York City his market, and his private ferry service their means of transport. In addition to the River Walk he constructed around the cliffs to the northern reaches of Hoboken, Stevens created the landscaped Elysian Fields for weekend visitors. New Yorkers, he advertised, could stroll along the river, taking in unobstructed views of Manhattan island and enjoy healthy rural air. Visitors could also take in various amusements, including several that featured "exotic" animals, and which are detailed in *City Animals*.

In 1838, Colonel Stevens created the Hoboken Land & Improvement Company to oversee the city's development, organize its street grid, build multi-family dwellings and encourage new industries to establish in Hoboken. Through "the Company" and its real estate holdings, members of the Stevens family continued for the next 100 years to have significant "economic control of the city they had created," so readers of this text will find references to several generations of Stevenses.¹⁰

The city's rapid growth from 1860 to 1910, and its role as a port for transatlantic shipping lines, brought waves of European immigrants to Hoboken—Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews from Eastern Europe—and, of course, more domesticated animals to work for and feed the city's burgeoning population. Animals and humans lived in close quarters: draught animals were stabled near homes and businesses and traversed the streets; period newspapers report pigs, goats, chickens and dogs in yards and at large. *City Animals* touches upon the way people lived *with* these animals, and includes related developments in (or the lack of) sanitation, medicine and animal

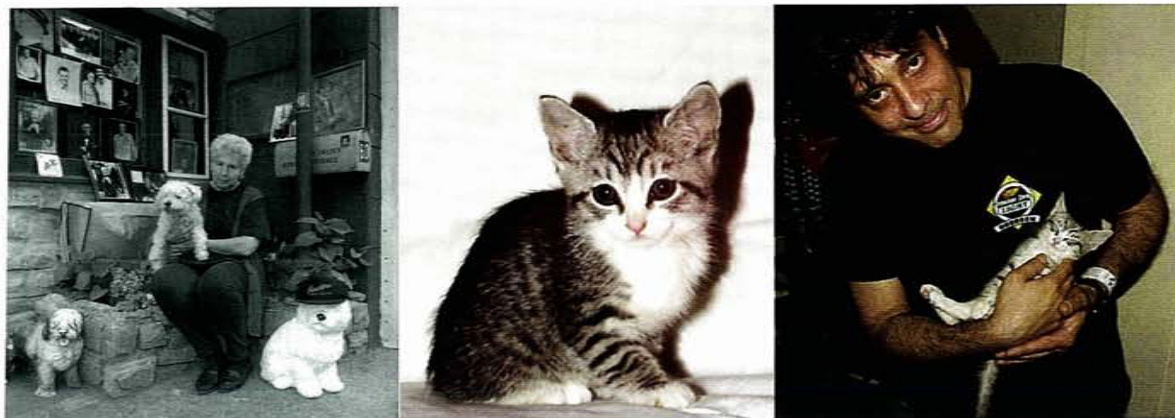


City of Hoboken, 1881, showing early industrialization. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. According to Stevens historian Geoffrey W. Clark, “manufacturing industries in Hoboken increased from 121 in 1879 to 289 in 1889 and then to a peak of 399 in 1899.”¹¹

control. A 1912 *Sanitary Survey* produced by the Robert L. Stevens Fund for Municipal Research in Hoboken, for example, makes clear that many city residents—human *and* nonhuman—lived and worked in harsh and filthy conditions during the early 20th century: The report includes accounts of manure heaped outside of stables along Court Street; tenements on Adams Street with backyard chicken houses but no heating system, no bathing facilities and no electricity; goats rummaging through street garbage and wraithlike girls emerging at dusk to dig through the city’s lowland dumping grounds to retrieve cinders for fuel.¹² In the process of researching *City Animals*, I learned how animals *and* children—both subject to ill treatment, exploitation and overwork during the 19th and early 20th centuries—gained legal protections through the efforts of the same set of advocates.

Hoboken’s position as the port of embarkation and debarkation for troops during World War I encouraged me to investigate the roles of horses, pigeons and dogs in the war effort, and their place in the public imagination on the home front. In addition to finding popular accounts of animal heroism such as *Ben the Battle Horse*, I found local newspaper photos of soldiers posing with a vast range of mascots brought back to Hoboken from the European front.

But as my research continued into the late 20th and early 21st centuries, when technology had mostly displaced animals, I found them increasingly marginalized—still present, but except for “pets,” receding from view, no longer perceived as living alongside humans. I began to focus on the ways in which animals sometimes draw people together, as city life becomes more fractured and faster paced, and Hobokenites are, more than ever, living alone.

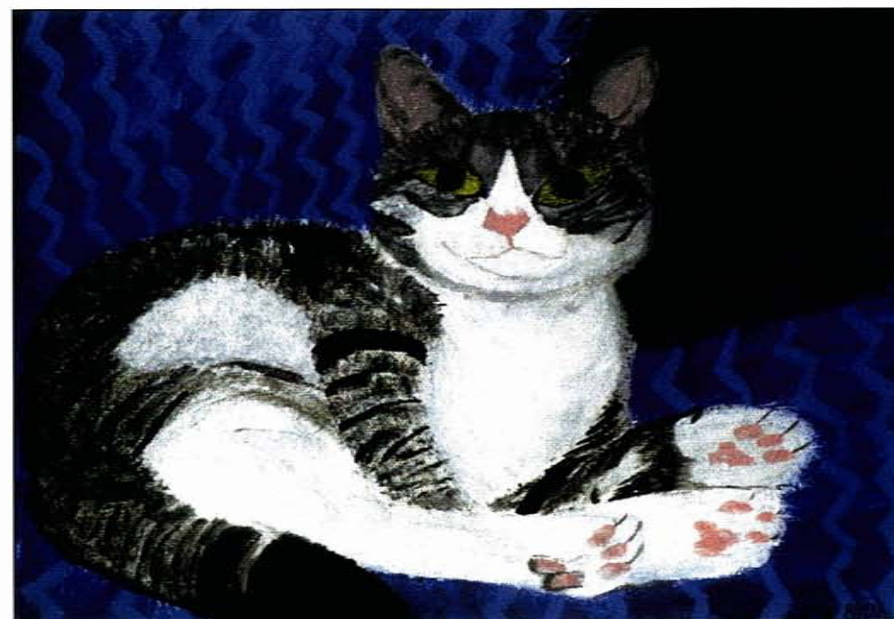


(The *average* household size in Hoboken, the 2000 U.S. Census tells us, is 1.92 persons; in 1950, the Census reported 3.21 persons per household as the city's average.) Hoboken birdwatchers post sightings to other birders on the Internet. In 2000, a small group of dog owners "dedicated to improving relations between local dog owners, the City, and the Hoboken community at large," formed the Hoboken Dog Association (HDA), which has worked with city representatives "to improve the city dog runs, modify existing dog regulations, and educate about responsible dog ownership in an urban environment." With membership "in the triple digits," HDA has its own logo, tee-shirts, stickers and hats, and maintains a website featuring a photo gallery, recommended books, recipes and local resources; it offers dog owners "a forum for sharing the unique experiences related to the special human/canine bond."¹³ Hoboken people draw together to rescue animals, too; and I hope members of the many local groups devoted to this work will come forward to contribute their stories, as time restraints kept me from collecting their histories.

As I talked about my research with Hoboken residents, I heard many stories of informal rescues, and chance street encounters involving animals that created a kind of chain reaction of caring acts among strangers. As one former resident, Elana Halberstadt, tells it, in the spring of 1999, she and her fiancé, Andy Turits, were summoned from the sidewalk of their apartment on Willow Avenue by a friend and neighbor. "Guys, you have to come see these kittens!" he called out to them. Holding the cardboard box was the animals' rescuer, Eileen "Honey" O'Leary, who has lived around the corner on

Willow Terrace for most of her life and who has long cared for neighborhood strays. O'Leary was trying to find homes for the kittens, born in her yard. She had never met Halberstadt and Turits before. The two peered into the box and were smitten. Halberstadt recalls how one kitten "stood out from all the rest in the cardboard box. She was about five weeks old and fit into the palm of my hand. Andy and I fell in love with her instantly and named her 'Ringo,' after the Beatle and because of the rings around her paws." A fully grown and quite contented Ringo became the subject of a Halberstadt painting four years later. Halberstadt's affection is unabashed. "Ringo came to us as a kind of healer during a difficult time in our lives and continues to be an essential part of our family," she says. "We think she is the best cat in the universe.

Left to right: Eileen "Honey" O'Leary holding Bogey in front of her Willow Terrace home, 1998. A lifelong animal lover, O'Leary became a Sinatra enthusiast later in life. Her changing window displays reflect her interests and celebrate special occasions and holidays. Photo by Robert Foster. Ringo at 5 weeks and Andy Turits holding Ringo, 1999. Courtesy Andy Turits and Elana A. Halberstadt. **Below:** Elana A. Halberstadt, *Ringo*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 9" x 12." Courtesy of the artist.





Above: Laura Alexander, *Bones 2*, 1995, oil on canvas, 24" x 32," courtesy of the artist. Below: Laura Alexander, *Teddy*, 1998, oil on canvas, 33" x 46." Courtesy of Joe LeMonnier.



She is a constant reminder that often the best things in life are free and can be received through unplanned and fortunate accidents. She also teaches us that love is where you look for it—and it is everywhere."

In his essay, "Why Look At Animals?" (from which I selected this Introduction's epigraph), John Berger considers the ways the animal "first entered the human imagination." In what may be "the first existential dualism," he writes, an animal could be perceived both as a mortal individual—"an animal's blood flowed like human blood"—and also as part of an undying species—"each lion was Lion, each ox was Ox." The animal offered us companionship, too, "but always its lack of common language, its silence, guarantees its distance, its distinctiveness, its exclusion, from and of man." In the 20th century, Berger argues, this "parallelism of separate lives" was destroyed, as "the autonomy of both parties has been lost," so dependent on us have animals become, so dependent are we on having them mirror us.¹⁴ And while I recognize the truth in Berger's assertion, I also know that the animal's essential silence remains, though perhaps unattended; and to some in this city, the animal is yet an individual and also Dog or Cat or Bird. I see it in the contemporary paintings of Hoboken artist Laura Alexander, with *Bones* depicted in a wolfish, guarded crouch, eager to eat the kibble just outside of our view; I see it in her painting of *Teddy*, his coat so vividly rendered it evokes the feel and smell of Dog. To me, these paintings recall works by the 20th century figurative painter Alice Neel, with their intense insight into the individual. And yet, without descriptive backgrounds, these companion animals stand near but separate, distinct from us. Their lives, and even their love, are not only for us. The history that follows this Introduction has as its title *City Animals*, but it is a history of how we see them; and in the margins is all we do not know.

—Holly Metz