

this as the start of the cat hoarder problem.)

As far back as the 1800s, comic strips mocked the stereotype: *Old Dame Trot And Her Comical Cat* starred a hunched over woman hobbling around with a feline atop her shoulder. The jokes that ensued were *on* Old Dame, not *with* her. (If you're curious, you can buy the kindle version on Amazon.com)

Tracing the origin of the cat lady cliché, Clea said it "runs through history." She mentions ancient Egyptian and Nordic cultures as focusing on felines. "When cats became domesticated," she explained, "they would often live in the kitchen because that's where the rodents were. Cats became linked with the people who worked most in that area — women."

When it comes to casting the cat



For years, the term "crazy cat lady" was used to insult women and usually applied to so-called lonely, single, elderly women with a bunch of kitties.

lady in a negative light, Clea said "you have to look at witchcraft." With the rise of Christianity in Europe, witches were labeled as harmful characters. Jeannette Loakman, a producer on the 2009 documentary *Cat Ladies*, put it this way: "I think it has to do with the association between cats and women as bad women, from witches to seductresses. The cat is

aloof and untrainable and independent yet enticing and sexy — a woman that doesn't conform can be easily dismissed as a cat."

Back in the 17th century, a women's domestic duties included brewing beer in cauldrons while wearing a

"witches" hat (a tall hat that stood out at the marketplace) as cats skittered around the kitchen. These "brewsters" were blamed when a batch of beer came out badly — sometimes with fatal consequences. "Women and cats were seen as colluding in the dark arts," Clea said. "You could say it was an attempt by the patriarchy to put down women. In an extreme case in Massachusetts, not only were women killed as witches, but they hanged and burned cats."

ELENA RAY: ANN HARTONENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK

THE "CAT LADY" MYSTIQUE THROUGH THE AGES

Throughout history, the "cat lady" has been associated with women who were considered strong, independent, sassy, eccentric, creative, old, young, single, crazy, evil and sexy.

BY MELISSA L. KAUFFMAN



7500 BC

Cats first lived with humans on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus



Check out this cat mummy!

Cats hang with the Egyptians of the 12th dynasty; associated with strong feline goddesses Mafdet, Mehit and Bastet

**1976-
1793 BC**



JIRI FLOCEL: BARTKOWSKI; ANDREA IZZOTTI/SHUTTERSTOCK; MACADY/SHUTTERSTOCK