

Just like the Old Dame comic strip, this damaging stereotype was propagated by pop culture over the years. Kate Benjamin, the founder of the design-conscious Hauspanther website, highlighted characters like Dr. Eleanor Abernathy

from *The Simpsons* and the Beale ladies from the 1970s documentary *Grey Gardens* as supposedly unhinged women living with an overabundance of cats.

Then came kitty culture

But around 10 years ago, something began to change in the perception of cat ladies — and it's a shift that ties in with the Internet's emergence as a part of daily life. Hannah Shaw, the stylishly tattooed daughter of rock star Tommy Shaw from the band Styx, fosters newborns under the guise of the "neonatal kitten warrior." She points out that before social media, "Cat people were very much out of public view,

and this made it harder for people to connect. Think of it this way: Dog people have the dog park, and cat people have social media."

When Kate "committed publicly to being a leading cat lady," she received some "pretty harsh comments" on her blog, but she soon discovered that she wasn't alone in reclaiming the cat lady honorific. (She's since had "cat lady" tattooed on her right forearm.)

Kate reels off a list of factors that acted as a tipping point in turning the cat lady concept into a positive plaudit: The proliferation and popularity of cat videos on the Internet; pop stars like Taylor Swift and Katy Perry — along with hip indie musicians such as Bethany Cosentino and Shura ("I'm very much a fully fledged crazy cat lady!") — sharing their infatuation with cats to hundreds



1600s-1700s

Cats were linked with witches (many times women without social power) and both were burned at the stake



1891

Professed cat lover and San Francisco millionaire Kate Birdsall Johnson commissioned Austrian artist Carl Kahler to memorialize her cats (she had more than 350). The painting, called "My Wife's Lovers," displayed at the Chicago's World Fair and the San Francisco Palace of Art Salon, sold for \$826,000 in 2015. It is referred to as the greatest cat painting.



1890

Comic strip *Old Dame Trot* and *Her Comical Cat* mocked the cat lady stereotype

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