



TRUMAN, THE ELDER STATESMAN



Historic Resource Study,
Harry S Truman National Historic Site,
Missouri

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Introduction

“Former President Truman today defined an elder statesman as a ‘defeated politician’ and said that he does not consider himself one.”

—International News Service, November 1956

Harry S Truman was born on May 8, 1884, in Lamar, Missouri, in the home of his parents, John Anderson Truman and Martha Ellen Young Truman.¹ He was the eldest child of his parents, followed by his brother John Vivian and sister Mary Jane. When Harry was ten months old, his parents moved to Harrisonville, Missouri, then Belton, Missouri, and then to his grandparents' farm in Grandview, Missouri. At age six, young Harry and his family moved to Independence, Missouri, so that he could attend a more formal school system than the one that existed in rural Grandview. It was there that he first met the young lady who would become the love of his life, Elizabeth Wallace, commonly known as Bess or Bessie. After graduating from high school in 1901, Harry moved away from Independence to take on several jobs in Kansas City and at the family farm in Grandview. Harry and Bess began a courtship in 1910 after Bess opened the door of her home to Harry, who was returning a cake plate from his Aunt Ella Noland. The First World War took him to France in 1917. During the war, Harry rose to the rank of captain in the United States Army, serving as the commanding officer of Battery D, 129th Field Artillery Regiment, 35th Division. Following the war, Harry returned to Independence, where he married Bess on June 28, 1919, at Trinity Episcopal Church.

¹ Throughout his life, Truman inconsistently placed a period after his middle initial. Enabling legislation for the Harry S Truman National Historic Site intentionally omits the period, and the Department of the Interior adopted this practice.

After a bad economy forced the closure of Harry's haberdashery business in 1922, Mike Pendergast, the brother of Jackson County political boss Tom Pendergast, persuaded Harry to run for Eastern Jackson County Judge. During this campaign, Harry developed the trademark honesty, forthrightness, and plain-speaking for which he would be known for the rest of his life. With the support of Bess, Harry was elected to the United States Senate in 1934, where he led an investigation of railroad finances. He won reelection in 1940 and became chairman of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, which became known as the Truman Committee for the committee's strong association with its chairman. His reputation as a hard worker and loyal Democrat raised his profile to the point where President Franklin D. Roosevelt chose him as his running mate during the 1944 presidential election. After winning the election, Harry served as vice-president until Roosevelt's sudden death on April 12, 1945, when Harry became the thirty-third President of the United States.

As president, Truman acted decisively to navigate a long list of geopolitical crises while attempting to shepherd a progressive domestic political agenda. Not long after he assumed the presidency, Harry oversaw the end of the Second World War and the reconstruction of Europe through the European Recovery Program, widely known as the Marshall Plan. The United States quickly transitioned from a shooting war with Germany and Japan to a cold war with the Soviet Union. In response to this new threat, the Truman administration reformed the structure of the Armed Forces, adopted a policy of containing international communism, issued the Truman Doctrine, and formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Truman also responded to a series of crises by ordering a massive airlift to counteract the Soviets' blockade of Berlin and a United Nations-backed military intervention following the North Korean invasion of South Korea. At home, President Truman pushed his Fair Deal, a progressive legislative program that aimed to make structural changes to the American political economy, such as ensuring full employment and creating a national health insurance program. Harry also worked toward the economic and political equality of African Americans by desegregating the military and federal government and upholding the equal rights of Black people in the workplace. Although many of these initiatives were unsuccessful, they served as the basis for President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society reforms nearly two decades later.

Despite running and winning a stunning campaign in 1948—from which came the iconic slogan, "Give 'em hell, Harry!"—the unpopularity of the Korean War, postwar economic downturns, and the Second Red Scare dogged Harry's second term. These issues dragged down his approval rating to historic lows, leading to Truman's decision not to run for reelection in 1952. Instead, he decided to help Governor Adlai Stevenson II run as the Democratic nominee for president against General Dwight D. Eisenhower,

all the while planning his life after the presidency. While he would no longer be “Mr. President” but instead “Mr. Citizen,” he could use his acquired knowledge and experience to continue serving his country in an official capacity, and as an educator who would teach the American youth about the importance of American history and government. His desire to be Mr. Citizen while being irrevocably tied to the presidency would serve as the primary tension of his post-presidential period.

Although Truman personally rejected the title of elder statesman, he had determined that he would continue to play a vitally important role in public affairs. After he and Bess returned to Independence in 1953, the former president set out to complete two significant projects that he believed would best serve the country and his legacy: the completion of his memoirs and the development of the Harry S. Truman Library. Truman was a firm believer that the American people were entitled to know and have access to the historical record, including that of presidential administrations. In his memoirs, he sought to provide his accounting of the major decisions of his presidency with the documentary evidence to support them. He envisioned his library as simultaneously a research repository for the records of his presidency, as well as a center for learning about the office of the presidency, not merely the Truman presidency. Even after the completion of both undertakings, Harry continued to devote his post-presidency toward educating young people through speaking engagements and question and answer sessions.

Although Harry was not willing to give up work even in his retirement, his post-presidential life was not work only. As the former president, Harry witnessed the marriage of his only daughter, Margaret, and the birth of his four grandsons. As the first president of the television age, he came into the living rooms of the American people through television appearances on the national networks. He conducted informal diplomacy by returning to Europe to survey the continent’s progress since the end of World War II. And, most importantly to the elder statesman, he lived the remainder of his life in partnership with his first and only love, Bess.

CHAPTER 1

Harry S Truman's Final Months in Office

INTRODUCTION

By early-1952, public approval of the Truman administration had waned. Mired in an unpopular war in Korea, fresh off his firing of war hero General Douglas MacArthur, and stymied by a hostile Republican-led Congress, President Harry S Truman accepted the fact that he should not and would not seek re-election for a full second term.

With that difficult decision made, Truman set out to find a successor who shared his values and his policy aims. After considering possible candidates starting in 1951, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Truman ultimately backed Adlai Stevenson II, the Democratic governor of Illinois. But despite Truman's best efforts to drum up support for Stevenson, he lost in the general election to Eisenhower, who eventually ran as a Republican.

Undeterred by the personal attacks exchanged with Eisenhower during the 1952 presidential campaign, Truman used his final months in office to accomplish two main goals: confer his wisdom as president to the American public and ensure an orderly and peaceful transfer of power to the new presidential administration, all while grieving the death of his mother-in-law in December 1952. To accomplish the first task, Truman gave speeches and wrote letters that emphasized the values of service and loyalty to the country he loved. To the latter's end, he inaugurated a new political tradition of inviting the new president-elect to the White House, regardless of party, to give the next administration the information it needed to be successful. Once he officially left office on January 20, 1953, Truman, along with his wife Bess, boarded a train back to

Independence, Missouri, where he would start his new life as an ordinary citizen.

For Truman, the burden of three decades of serving in political office had been lifted. His presidency and Fair Deal agenda had come to a swift end. But he felt elated about returning home to live peacefully among family, friends, and neighbors. Moreover, he had big plans in mind—a monumental undertaking to build a presidential library to house his presidential papers and the papers of other prominent political figures. The building blocks for what became a world-renowned research institute on the study of the American government and its executive branch took shape during Truman's last few months in office.

Truman's focus on preserving the traditions and sanctity of the presidency was evident in his speeches, demeanor, and actions leading up to President-elect Eisenhower's inauguration. Although Truman's chosen candidate and his political party had been roundly defeated, the departing president still embraced the transfer of power. He understood that the presidency was much larger than the president himself. With that frame of mind, he took pains to ensure and exceed the standards set forth in our constitutional process, all the while preparing for what would become a very active, self-rewarding, and historically significant retirement as an elder statesman.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1952

In February of 1952, a Gallup poll showed Truman had an approval rating of only twenty-two percent, the lowest of any president in the poll.¹ Truman saw the writing on the wall. When Truman informed his staff of intentions not to seek reelection, one of his top military aides, Major General Harry Vaughan, asked, "Who else is there?"²



Harry Truman greeting General Eisenhower and Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower at the Washington National Airport on January 31, 1951.

Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service

¹ "Presidential Approval Ratings—Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends," *Gallup*, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-Gallup-Historical-Statistics-Trends.aspx>.

² Journal of Roger Tubby, October 15, 1951, Roger Wellington Tubby Papers, Yale University Archives.

As the de facto leader of the Democratic Party, Truman took it upon himself to recruit a candidate who he thought could successfully win the Democratic nomination and be competitive against a Republican in the general election. He reportedly approached General Dwight Eisenhower, who served as Supreme Allied Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), at a private luncheon in late 1951. Eisenhower had been quietly hinting about running for president. Truman recognized the popularity of the man who led the forces that liberated Europe in World War II and felt that, if he could recruit Eisenhower to run as a Democrat, his party would likely maintain the presidency. In early November 1951, Truman approached Eisenhower about running



Adlai Stevenson at the 1952 Democratic Convention. July 1952.

Credit: Thomas J. O'Halloran, Library of Congress

as a Democrat. Eisenhower wrote to Truman on January 1, 1952, stating that he would not seek the presidency. Much to Truman's dismay, however, Eisenhower changed his tune five days later and formally announced that he would run for president as a Republican.³ Truman felt slighted, and the bitter feud between these two political giants thus took root.

Truman next turned to Governor Adlai Stevenson II of Illinois. In his memoir, Truman expressed an admiration for both Stevenson's political acumen, as well as his deep knowledge of policy matters.⁴ Stevenson had all the progressive credentials of a Fair Deal Democrat and was a popular governor of a large, populous state. Initially, Stevenson turned Truman down. But in the weeks leading up to the July 1952 Democratic National Convention in Chicago,

Truman continued to hold out hope that Stevenson would accept his invitation to run for president. On the first day of the convention, though, Stevenson called Truman and asked him if it would embarrass the president if Stevenson announced that he would run for president. Truman replied, "I have been trying since January to get you to say that. Why would it embarrass me?"⁵ From that point on, Stevenson had Truman's full support, and he would do everything he could to get Stevenson nominated.

Through a rapid course of events initiated by Truman, Stevenson was able to lock up the nomination on the convention's third ballot. In front of the crowd at the International Amphitheatre at the Chicago Stockyards, Truman took the stage with Stevenson, well after midnight, to formally announce his support for the Illinois governor. Truman told

³ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 888–889.

⁴ Harry S Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 491–492.

⁵ Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 496.

the crowd, “I am going to take my coat off and do everything I can to help him win.”⁶ Later that morning, Truman wrote a letter to Stevenson, signaling that he was ready to help elect his successor, an opportunity which President Roosevelt and then-Vice President Truman did not have:

Dear Governor:

Last night was one of the most remarkable I’ve spent in all my sixty-eight years. When thousands of people—delegates and visitors—are willing to sit and listen to a set speech and introduction by me, and then listen to a most wonderful acceptance speech by you, at two o’clock in the morning, there is no doubt that we are on the right track, in the public interest.

You are a brave man. You are assuming the responsibility of the most important office in the history of the world.

You have the ancestral, political and educational background to do a most wonderful job. If it is worth anything, you have my wholehearted support and cooperation.

When the noise and shouting are over, I hope you may be able to come to Washington for a discussion of what is before you.⁷



Group of Truman supporters listening to a campaign speech in favor of Stevenson in Helper, Utah. October 6, 1952.

Credit: Edwin Roth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

After months of effort, Truman had finally gotten the candidate he wanted to succeed him as president, one who he believed would be willing and able to finish the job of

⁶ Quoted in Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 497.

⁷ Harry S Truman to Adlai Stevenson, July 26, 1952, in *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 263.

his administration. However, Stevenson did not see himself as merely an extension of Truman's aspirations. George Ball, Stevenson's friend, remembered that Stevenson "was affronted by the indifferent morality and untidiness of the Truman Administration and was frantic to distance himself from Truman."⁸ Stevenson also gave off a negative view of the Truman administration in a letter to the *Oregon Journal* wherein he addressed his ability to "clean up the mess in Washington" by comparing it unfavorably to the condition of the State of Illinois when he became governor. Stevenson never pushed back against this interpretation, giving Republicans ammunition to attack the decades-long policies of Democrats.⁹

Stevenson's slights toward the president did not escape Truman. After praising Stevenson for his eloquence and truthfulness on the campaign trail in his memoirs, Truman outlined all of mistakes that Stevenson made in the 1952 election, a number of which implied a lack of deference to Truman's own political leadership. Truman wrote that Stevenson's first mistake was firing the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Frank McKinney, who Truman handpicked for the position in 1951. Second was the *Oregon Journal* letter, in which the nominee implied that Truman had created a "mess" in Washington. Third, Truman charged Stevenson with failing "to coordinate and give proper recognition to existing Democratic organizations in the major population centers." Truman was surprised at Stevenson's supposed missteps along the campaign trail, primarily because he "attributed to him [Stevenson] realistic political judgment as governor of Illinois. I [Truman] had thought some political instincts had filtered down to him from his very astute grandfather of the same name."¹⁰

On the night before Election Day, Truman made one last campaign speech for Stevenson, broadcasting on radio and television from a studio in Kansas City. After thanking his own vice-president, Alben Barkley, for his help and service to the country, Truman spoke plainly about the stakes of the election as he saw them. "This election may decide whether we shall go ahead and expand our prosperity here at home or slide back into a depression," he stated. "It may decide whether we shall preserve and extend our civil rights and liberties or see them fall before a wave of smear and fear. Above all, it may decide whether we shall finally achieve lasting peace or be led into a third world war." After casting aspersions on the Republicans running for president and Congress, Truman introduced Stevenson and his running mate John Sparkman. "You can trust these men," Truman assured the nation, "because they are men of courage and integrity. You can trust them because they know our problems—because they are experienced in civilian government," a subtle knock on Eisenhower's lack of experience outside the military. Tying the current Democratic ticket to Truman's administration, he continued,

⁸ George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 119.

⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, 906.

¹⁰ Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 498.

“You can trust them because they stand for the great programs of the Democratic Party—the programs that have made us a strong and healthy Nation, the programs that are turning the tide of the world against Communist aggression.”¹¹ Truman then handed the broadcast over to Stevenson and Sparkman, convinced that he had done all he could do for the Democratic candidate, the party, and his own legacy.

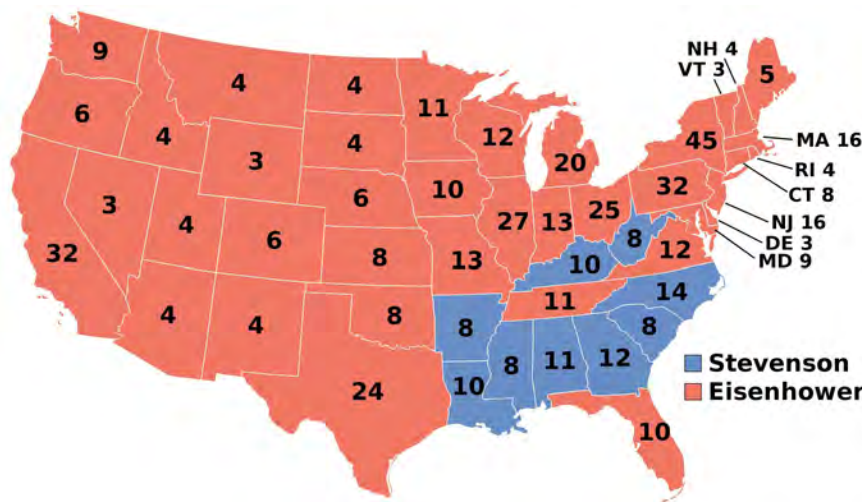


Truman family casting their vote in Independence, Missouri, in the 1952 election. November 4, 1952.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

When Election Day finally arrived, Truman, who always traveled home to cast his vote, followed a familiar pattern: he walked from his home to Memorial Hall in Independence, his polling place for many years. But Truman recalled in his memoirs that there was one aspect of this election that felt strange to him: for the first time in a long time, his name did not appear anywhere on the ballot. From the polling place, Harry and Bess Truman boarded the presidential train back to Washington. Onboard for the long ride back to the White House, Truman attended to official business and was seemingly unbothered by the impending results

of the election. Although he went to bed at the usual hour, Truman wrote in his memoirs that, before falling asleep, he knew that Stevenson had lost the election. Around midnight, someone on the train woke the president to inform him that Eisenhower was well on his way to winning.¹²



Eisenhower's landslide victory carried thirty-nine states, including Stevenson's home state of Illinois and Truman's home state of Missouri. Eisenhower's overall share of the popular vote was, in fact, the largest in the history of American presidential elections. Truman wrote in his memoirs, "I was disappointed, but I was not surprised . . . Throughout our history there has always been a handicap of waging political battle against a military man who was also a war hero."¹³ On November 5, Truman sent a message to Eisenhower congratulating him on his "overwhelming victory."¹⁴ The same day, Truman released a statement on the results of the election, where he acknowledged the will of the people and committed himself to an orderly transfer of power. Truman stated that he stood "ready to do all that lies within my power to facilitate the orderly transfer of the business of the executive branch of the Government to the new administration." He continued, "We shall have other elections in the future. There we can again present our views and our differences for the decision of the American people. In the meantime, it will be in the best interest of all of us to close ranks and work together for our country."¹⁵ On the same day, Truman invited Eisenhower to the White House to discuss the pressing issues facing the country, inaugurating a tradition that signified the start of a peaceful transition of power.

President Truman still had three months left in office, but he wasted no time in preparing for the incoming administration and for his immediate post-presidency plans back home. When he assumed the presidency, Truman did not have the benefit of a smooth transition because Franklin Roosevelt died suddenly and did not keep his vice-president abreast of the administration's affairs. Truman knew that a Republican administration and a Republican House of Representatives and Senate would likely mean the end of his domestic policy goals and a reorientation of his objectives in foreign policy. But he committed himself to closing out the remainder of his term honorably by carrying out the remaining tasks before him and helping to smooth the way for the incoming president for the benefit of the country. Perpetuating the traditions of the seamless transfer of power from one president to the next figured high on his agenda for the remaining weeks in office.

LETTERS FROM TRUMAN'S SUPPORTERS

In November and December of 1952, as he prepared to leave office, Truman received an outpouring of admiration from his supporters. Citizens from across the country wrote to

¹³ Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 504.

¹⁴ Quoted in Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 505.

¹⁵ Harry S Truman, No. 325, "Statement of the President on the Election of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President of the United States," November 5, 1952, *Harry S. Truman: 1952–53: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the Presidents*, 1048.

the president expressing their deepest appreciation for his leadership. They reflected on his administration with kindness and respect and thanked the president for defending America's interest at home and abroad. Some pondered his legacy in American history.

Truman's supporters reconciled the challenges of the recent election, as the nation prepared for a transition to the new Eisenhower administration. Julia McCarthy, a supporter from Wisconsin, stated, "We are also grateful for the part you had in the selection of Governor Stevenson, who, in defeat, won a great moral victory by his inspiring campaign and his fearless honesty—in your fine tradition."¹⁶

The Republican landslide victory aside, Americans congratulated President Truman for his many accomplishments during his presidency. Citizen Peter Berger listed the successes that he felt were critical to the future of the United States:

"the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance, the unhesitating response to aggression in Korea, as well as the strengthening of the United Nations, the unification of the Armed Forces, the creation of the atomic energy program and [Truman's] championing of basic human rights for all our people."¹⁷

Berger's comments represent a long-standing list of accomplishments often associated with the Truman administration, a legacy that Truman himself championed in his final months as chief executive. Others appreciated the role Truman played as a world leader and for his efforts to contain the spread of communism, while avoiding another global conflict.¹⁸

Truman supporters tended to speak of the president's achievements in general terms, yet Frank Crosswaith focused on Truman's efforts to promote racial equality and to advocate for improved labor rights at home. As chairman of the Negro Labor Committee in New York City, Crosswaith had a unique perspective on Truman's accomplishments:

As a Negro, I am most grateful to you for your tireless efforts to secure for my people those rights and those privileges guaranteed to us by the Constitution of our Country. Under your Administration we have made our greatest gains in that direction. As

¹⁶ Julia McCarthy to Harry S. Truman, November 17, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, November 1952, "Best Letters" [4 of 4], Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁷ Peter Berger to Harry S. Truman, November 17, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, November 1952, "Best Letters" [4 of 4], Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁸ William Hays to Harry S. Truman, November 14, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, November 1952, "Best Letters" [4 of 4], Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

a worker, I am also grateful to you for the gallant, courageous and inflexible stand you have always taken in the Nation's efforts to win for labor its rightful place in the economy of the United States and the World.¹⁹

President Truman's correspondence secretary, Beth Campbell Short, replied to Crosswaith's letter: "Your understanding and appreciation of his efforts on behalf of our country meant a great deal to him, I can assure you . . . He believes that all men have the same rights, and that these rights must be respected. Therefore, it is indeed encouraging to him to learn that his efforts are being fruitful."²⁰



Harry Truman and Margaret Truman campaign for Adlai Stevenson and John Sparkman in the 1952 election.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

In these letters, Truman's supporters declared that he was a "grand and courageous" person.²¹ Some considered Truman to have a more subtle strength, attributing his success as president to his "good heart" and "strong sense of justice."²² Repeatedly, supporters described Truman as honest and fair, with some going so far as to say that Truman acted "fearlessly" throughout the course of his presidency.²³ Six-year-old Thomas Uvegi showed his confidence in Truman's leadership abilities in a brief but endearing letter to the president: "I would like you to be president again [then] I will be sure I will have a [good] future."²⁴

A few citizens wondered about Truman's future role as a leader and statesman. Marvin Rintala, who would not be eligible to vote until 1956, wrote, "I very sincerely hope that you will continue after January to give the American people the benefit of your wise and

¹⁹ Frank Crosswaith to Harry S. Truman, December 5, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, December 1952, "Best Letters," Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁰ Beth Campbell Short ("Mrs. Joseph Short") to Frank Crosswaith, December 5, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, December 1952, "Best Letters," Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²¹ Elizabeth Nash to Harry S. Truman, November 14, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, November 1952, "Best Letters" [4 of 4], Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²² Unknown to Harry S. Truman, November 11, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, November 1952, "Best Letters" [4 of 4], Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²³ William Hays to Harry S. Truman, November 14, 1952.

²⁴ Thomas Uvegi to Harry S. Truman, November 28, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, November 1952, "Best Letters" [4 of 4], Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President's Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

experienced counsel.”²⁵ Fellow Missourian Elizabeth Nash stated that she would ask God to “bless and take care” of the president’s future.²⁶ A citizen from Milwaukee gave her “very best wishes” to Truman and his family and hoped that the president would have a “good rest” and “a long and happy life.”²⁷ Another supporter wrote, “May your future be as eminent as your past.”²⁸

What would Truman’s legacy be? What was his place in the history of the United States and among the nation’s presidents? These were questions at the forefront of the minds of the American citizens writing to President Truman during his final months in office. In their laudatory letters, citizens compared Truman to the esteemed Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.²⁹ William Hays, an attorney, wrote: “It is my hope and the hope of many Americans that historians will properly record you in the place, which you have certainly earned: That of a great and loyal American, Statesman and Chief Executive.”³⁰ Another enthusiastic supporter added, “The unfailing judgment of history will, I feel sure, be your final vindication.”³¹

DEATH OF TRUMAN’S MOTHER-IN-LAW

Amidst the backdrop of their final months in the White House, a deathly cloud hung over the First Family. As Truman somberly reflected in his diary on the morning of November 24—“The White House is quiet as a church . . . Bess’s mother is dying across the hallway.”³²

Margaret “Madge” Gates Wallace, Truman’s mother-in-law, had suffered from steadily declining health over the past seven years and twice been in critical condition. Despite a history of remarkable past recoveries, ninety-year-old Madge slipped into a coma around Thanksgiving. The White House medical staff notified the Trumans that she would not recover. Still, hopes persisted among the family that she would survive until Christmas, “our last as President,” Truman remarked.³³ Mother Wallace, however, passed away in the White House on December 5, 1952, of a cerebral thrombosis, with Bess by her side.

²⁵ Marvin Rintala to Harry S Truman, November 18, 1952, Short, Beth Campbell, November 1952, “Best Letters” [4 of 4], Box 5, Subject File, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Office of the President’s Correspondence Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁶ Elizabeth Nash to Harry S Truman, November 14, 1952.

²⁷ Julia McCarthy to Harry S Truman, November 17, 1952.

²⁸ Peter Berger to Harry S Truman, November 17, 1952.

²⁹ Peter Berger to Harry S Truman, November 17, 1952.

³⁰ William Hays to Harry S Truman, November 14, 1952.

³¹ Peter Berger to Harry S Truman, November 17, 1952.

³² Diary Entry, November 24, 1952, Truman, Harry S: Transcripts of Diary Entries and Longhand Notes 1945–1953, Box 10, Harry S. Truman File, Thomas Fleming Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³³ Diary of Harry S Truman, November 20, 1952, in *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, 275.



A smiling Madge Wallace poses with granddaughter Margo Wallace in the home she shared with Harry and Bess Truman. December 1948.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Madge's death was a deeply personal loss for the Trumans, who had spent much of their married life living with her. Shortly after their marriage in 1919, newlyweds Bess and Harry moved into the so-called Gates Mansion on 219 North Delaware Street in Independence, which would later become their permanent residence upon leaving the White House in early 1953. After winning Missouri's Senate seat in 1934, the Trumans relocated to Washington, DC, and Bess's mother eventually followed. She stayed through most of Truman's Washington, DC, political career and became a permanent resident of the White House following her son-in-law's ascension to office in 1945. She returned to Independence most summers. Because of the frequent visits by the Trumans, Madge's home became known as the "Summer White House."³⁴

Cohabiting with Bess's mother, however, was rarely a peaceful experience. It is well documented that Madge carried a vocal disdain for Truman. While staying at the White House, she was known to passively remark to servants and staff that Mr. Truman—she refused to refer to him as president—was still not good enough for her daughter.³⁵ In spite of that treatment, Truman never reciprocated this animosity and was documented to have never said anything critical about his mother-in-law. In fact, he showed an utmost devotion to Madge, especially when it came to her health. "My good old mother-in-law is very, very sick," Truman wrote in his diary on November 28. "We've had nurses and doctors with her day and night for almost a year. She has had the best of treatment I'm happy to say."³⁶ At his behest, Truman's personal doctor and White House physician General Wallace Graham oversaw Madge's care. Truman wrote on December 5, the day of Madge's passing, "She was a grand lady. When I hear these mother-in-law jokes I don't laugh," carrying a respect for Bess's mother that went far beyond the grave.³⁷

The Trumans and their daughter, Margaret, who had last seen her grandmother that Thanksgiving, attended a private funeral for Madge on December 6. Services were later held in the parlor of her Independence home. She was buried beside her parents in the nearby Woodlawn Cemetery, the future resting place of most of her children. Having lived through the Civil War, two world wars, and now a brief glimpse of the atomic age, Madge had witnessed a national evolution that had thrust her daughter and son-in-law

³⁴ "Harry S Truman's Mother in Law," <https://www.nps.gov/hstr/blogs/harry-s-trumans-mother-in-law.htm>.

³⁵ McCullough, *Truman*, 914.

³⁶ Diary Entry, November 24, 1952, Truman, Harry S: Transcripts of Diary Entries and Longhand Notes 1945–1953, Box 10, Harry S Truman File, Thomas Fleming Papers, Harry S Truman Library.

³⁷ Diary of Harry S Truman, December 6, 1952, Ferrell, ed., 279.

into the Presidency right until the end.

TRUMAN'S FINAL SPEECHES AND LETTERS

Truman did not shy away from the duties of his office during his last months as president, instead he kept a busy calendar of final speaking engagements and public appearances. Reportedly in good spirits, Truman seemed happier than ever in the twilight days of his presidency.³⁸ His valet, Arthur Prettyman, noted that “you’d have thought the President won the election the way he acts.”³⁹ In spite of the election loss, Truman relished his final days. His enthusiasm for the coming of post-presidential life back in Missouri seemed to overshadow any misgivings he may have had about the recent referendum on his presidency. He made sure, though, to caution the American public about the continuing threat from communist aggression and about the flaws he perceived in the incoming Republican administration’s stance on foreign and domestic policy issues.

December 1952 brought several ceremonial duties to attend to, and Truman took these opportunities to speak about his favorite subject: history. After deciding to forego a third term, Truman planned to spend his retirement teaching and spreading the knowledge and experience he had gained as a statesman. In fact, the origins of many of Truman’s eventual lectures on American government can be gleaned from some of these final speeches. Truman spoke to the importance of the Constitution as a living document—an argument largely expanded upon in his future lecture series *Truman Speaks*—during an address at the National Archives dedicating a new shrine for the United States’ foundational documents:

You can read about the Constitution and you can study it in books, but the Constitution is not merely a matter of words. The Constitution is a living force—it is a growing thing.

The Constitution belongs to no one group of people and to no single branch of the Government. We acknowledge our judges as the interpreters of the Constitution, but our Executive branch and our Legislative branch alike operate within its framework and must apply it and its principles in all that they do.

The Constitution and the Declaration can live only as long as they are enshrined in our hearts and minds. If they are not so enshrined, they would be no better than mummies in their glass cases, and they could in time become idols whose worship

³⁸ McCullough, *Truman*, 917.

³⁹ Simeon Booker, “Sobbing in the White House? No! You’d Think Harry Won,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 1953, M19.



The Trumans at the Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on December 24, 1952.

Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service

mission as he lit the National Christmas Tree on the White House lawn for his last time as President:

And as we go about our business of trying to achieve peace in the world, let us remember always to try to act and live in the spirit of the Prince of Peace. He bore in His heart no hate and no malice—nothing but love for all mankind. We should try as nearly as we can to follow His example.

Our efforts to establish law and order in the world are not directed against any nation or any people. We seek only a universal peace, where all nations shall be free and all peoples shall enjoy their inalienable human rights. We believe that all men are truly the children of God.⁴²

Truman and his advisers had worked tirelessly to ensure this “universal peace,” although it was often a thankless endeavor. Critics of the president had long charged

would be a grim mockery of the true faith.⁴⁰

Truman, through rigorous self-education, had long been a dedicated student of American history and especially the presidency. He hoped to inspire a similar zeal in young people. He believed that only through historical understanding of how liberty has been protected, and more importantly, how it has been left unprotected, could one become an effective steward of a just and lasting peace.

Peace was at the forefront of Truman’s mind during his final months. As he had stressed to upcoming graduates of the National War College, “Our national policy, the policy you are studying, in all its aspects, is simply a policy designed to reach that objective. It is a policy for peace.”⁴¹ His pursuit of global peace had obvious political origins, but, as a devout Christian, Truman was grounded, too, by his Baptist faith. Truman took a moment to inflect this religiosity upon his political

⁴⁰ National Archives Address, December 15, 1952, Speech Files: December 1952, Box 5, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Official Reporter Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴¹ National War College Address, December 19, 1952, Speech Files: December 1952, Box 5, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Official Reporter Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴² National Community Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony Address, December 24, 1952, Speech Files: December 1952, Box 5, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Official Reporter Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

his administration's policy of peace as being "soft" on communism, and even lobbed trumped-up charges that the State Department and his Cabinet harbored "traitorous communists" among their ranks.⁴³ Truman, however, remained resolute and unfazed by this fearmongering, standing by his colleagues throughout the so-called "Second Red Scare."

At the farewell dinner for his Cabinet, Truman praised his advisers' commitment to seeing through the world-changing challenges of their time. His Cabinet had been a revolving door of appointments and dismissals, but nonetheless, Truman deeply respected the service of all who had worked with him. Humble as ever, Truman stressed his great reliance on his advisors:

If there has been any contribution made by this occupant of the White House, it has been due to the fact that he has had men and women such as you as his advisers; and you have kept him on the straight and narrow path. I will always, as long as I live, remember pleasantly the associations I have had with all of you. I can never forget the things that each and every one of you have done to make it possible for a man to carry on in the most powerful and the greatest job in the history of the world.

Following this speech, Truman received admiration from his political colleagues. Chief Justice Fred Vinson lauded Truman's resolve and, in a rebuttal of critiques popular at the time, avowed that Truman had run "a great administration." As he remarked in a toast to the outgoing President, "In my view, history will record that Harry S. Truman, as President of the United States, sometimes almost singlehanded, so molded the affairs of the world so that the civilization we love will be preserved."⁴⁴

Truman also honored the individual efforts of his closest advisers. Secretary of State Dean Acheson tendered his official resignation weeks before Eisenhower's inauguration, and Truman responded in kind with a farewell letter to his friend:

Dear Dean:

I have your letter of resignation, effective at the end of my term, January 20, 1953, and I accept it with warm thanks for a job well done. I am glad I've had you with me all the way.

You have been my good right hand. There is no need for me to go into detail about all that you have accomplished. Certainly no man is more responsible than you for

⁴³ Alonzo Hamby, "Harry S. Truman: Domestic Affairs," Miller Center, October 4, 2016, <https://millercenter.org/president/truman/domestic-affairs>.

⁴⁴ Farewell Cabinet Dinner, December 4, 1952, Speech Files: December 1952, Box 5, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Official Reporter Files, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library.

pulling together the people of the free world, and strengthening their will and their determination to be strong and free.

I would place you among the very greatest of the Secretaries of State this country has had. Neither Jefferson nor Seward showed more cool courage and steadfast judgment.

Our association has been a grand experience, from start to finish. I hope Mrs. Acheson prevails on you to take a good long rest. You deserve it.

Sincerely yours,

HARRY S TRUMAN⁴⁵



Portrait photograph of Dean Acheson taken in January 1948.

Credit: Harris & Ewing,
Harry S. Truman Library and
Museum

On paper, Truman and Acheson's friendship seemed unlikely—Truman, the son of a Missouri farmer, who had never graduated college; Acheson, a Yale and Harvard educated lawyer and longtime Washington insider. Regardless, the two men developed a highly productive working relationship and together laid the foundations of US foreign policy that shaped the Cold War. They remained close friends long after the presidency, continuing frequent correspondence and personal visits as private citizens. In fact, the Achesons were the only couple to stay at the Truman Home overnight. Acheson served as an active board member for the Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., and worked tirelessly to raise money for that cause. He was one of the first high-ranking government officials to donate his papers to the Truman Library once it opened.

Having bid farewell to his inner circle, Truman directly addressed the public with his eighth and final State of the Union message on January 7, 1953. Rather than deliver the address personally, Truman sent a copy to be read before Congress in his stead. A retrospective of his time as president, Truman's speech charted the historic course of the past eight years. True to form, Truman balked at taking credit for the "real and very great" accomplishments of his tenure, instead placing them squarely on the shoulders of "our country and all the people in it." Truman highlighted his well-known foreign policy successes—the Marshall Plan, United Nations, NATO, and the Berlin Airlift—and defended his less popular actions in containing communism in Korea and Eastern Europe and failing to prevent Mao Zedong's Communist Party from taking control of

⁴⁵ Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, January 16, 1953, Shapell Manuscript Foundation, <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/truman-accepts-acheson-resignation/#transcripts>.

mainland China. Controversy surrounding these decisions had frequently outshined the liberal domestic policy of the Fair Deal, but, as Truman reported, there was much to celebrate. As of 1953, over sixty-two million Americans were gainfully employed—an increase of approximately eleven million jobs since Truman took office in 1945. Social security coverage had expanded to include ten million more people and insurance benefits themselves had increased twofold. Not a single federally insured bank had failed, eight million veterans had attended college thanks to the GI Bill, and Congress increased the minimum wage. With respect to race relations, Truman boasted that executive actions like the integration of the Armed Forces under his watch had sparked “a great awakening of the American conscience on the issues of civil rights.” Standards of living in the United States had never been higher, but Truman insisted that “the Nation’s business is never finished,” contending that maintaining this progress or even propelling it forward amidst future challenges would require an American public united behind their President. Truman, soon to be a private citizen himself, led this charge of unity, ending his speech with a pledge of support for Eisenhower’s administration and calling upon fellow Americans to do the same.⁴⁶

TRANSFER OF POWER AND INAUGURATION

As President Truman responded to letters from well-wishers, attended events, and coped with the death of his mother-in-law, he focused on the particulars of the transfer of power, culminating in the inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower on January 20, 1953. As committed as Truman was to helping his successor, whom Truman had once counted as a friend, the process was jarring owing to several snubs by Eisenhower. Unlike Truman, Eisenhower was less concerned about continuity on issues moving forward, often assuming a stand-offish posture toward his predecessor and former commander-in-chief. In this midst of the ongoing Cold War with the Soviet Union, the transition period in late January provoked somewhat of a “cold war” between President Truman and President-elect Eisenhower.

Although inspired by good will and bipartisan cooperation, the first meeting between the two leaders during this awkward transition period signaled a truly frosty relationship. In response to Truman’s November 5 personal invitation to join him at the White House to discuss an orderly transition, Eisenhower replied the next day agreeing to such a meeting. During the afternoon of November 18, Eisenhower arrived at the White House along with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., and Joseph M. Dodge, a chairman of Detroit Bank and Eisenhower’s future Bureau of the Budget director. Truman described Eisenhower as being “unsmiling” and looking “tense.” Truman attempted to cut the

⁴⁶ State of the Union Message, January 7, 1952, Speech Files: January 1953, Box 5, Staff Member and Office Files: White House Official Reporter Files, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library.

tension by discussing the paintings hanging in his office and offering to leave behind the globe Eisenhower gifted to Truman during the Potsdam Conference, but such actions were not enough to break through Eisenhower's supposedly dour mood.⁴⁷

At the forefront of Truman's mind for this visit was to get Eisenhower up to speed on issues of the country's foreign relations, considering the war in Korea still raged on, and to signal to America's allies and the rest of the world—especially the Soviet Union—that there would be some level of continuity with this new administration. Truman also assured Eisenhower that he was not trying to force the incoming administration into any policy pigeonholes. "We will tell you about these issues and would welcome concurrence if you want to give it," Truman said to Eisenhower. "But we will not press for it. This is a matter on which you will have to make up your own mind based on what is best for America."⁴⁸ Whereas Herbert Hoover used the transition period to hamstringing the incoming Roosevelt administration into agreeing to certain policy positions that blunted Roosevelt's progressive vision, Truman appeared to respect Eisenhower's right to chart his own path, regardless of Truman's preferences or what he thought was best.⁴⁹

After discussing several issues in the Cabinet Room with several members of Truman's administration and Eisenhower's representatives, the uneasy visit to the White House ended with mounting tension. Truman and Eisenhower released a joint statement that informed the public of the purpose of their meeting, that the Truman administration shared with Eisenhower information about the "most important problems affecting our country in the sphere of international relations." The statement went on to make it clear that the meeting was for Eisenhower's knowledge only and not to press him with carrying out any functions of the presidency before he took office.⁵⁰ Concluding, the statement assured that cooperation between the outgoing and incoming administrations would continue, providing "additional proof of the ability of the people of this country to manage their affairs with a sense of continuity and with responsibility."⁵¹

In the final days of his administration, Truman turned his attention toward saying goodbye. On January 15, 1953, he held his final press conference, the 324th of his presidency. Truman delivered two statements to the press. First, he thanked the reporters for their relationship during his time as president and reinforced the importance of the press in a free and open society. Next, he read a statement of support for the men in the Armed Forces, despite the people who "charge them with

⁴⁷ Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 514.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 514.

⁴⁹ See Eric Rauchway, *Winter War: Hoover, Roosevelt, and the First Clash over the New Deal* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

⁵⁰ Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 520.

⁵¹ Quoted in Truman, *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope*, 520–521.



*Televised 1953 Farewell Address.
January 15, 1953.*

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and
Museum

extravagance, mismanagement, carelessness, and a host of other offenses.”⁵² With that opening, Truman took questions from reporters. These questions ranged from asking Truman’s opinions on future press conferences to national oil reserves to the type of hat he would wear at the inauguration. He also gave some insight into what kind of ex-president he would be. One reporter asked Truman if he could see himself campaigning for candidates. Truman replied, “You see, I will be a private citizen. I will have to be—as I was in this last campaign—I will have to do what the chairman of the National Committee asks me to do, and of

course I am going to help the Democrats all I can, every time I can.”⁵³ Reporters asked Truman about the pension of a president and whether Truman could see himself taking a salary at a private company:

Q. Mr. President, if you don’t mind this question—as a result of what has been done about the President’s salary, will you be in a position so that you won’t have to—oh, say, join an insurance company or become an editor, or something like that?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes, Eddie, but I wouldn’t do that under any circumstances. I think—as I told you time and again, this Presidential Office—now remember I am talking about the office—is the greatest and most powerful office in the history of the world. It’s the greatest honor that can come to any man in the world. And no man, I am sure, would want to exploit it. And under no circumstances would I do anything that would appear to use the great office which I have had the honor to hold as a means for exploitation.⁵⁴

Finally, one reporter pressed Truman on what service an ex-president could render to the country. “I think the ex-President can always be of service to his country,” Truman responded.⁵⁵ With his answers, Truman made it clear that he revered the office in which he had been privileged to serve and did not wish to taint it for personal benefit; rather, he wished to use the wisdom and knowledge he had accumulated for the benefit of his country.

⁵² Harry S. Truman, No. 377, “The President’s Last News Conference,” January 15, 1953, *Harry S. Truman: 1952-53: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the Presidents*, 1190.

⁵³ Truman, No. 377, “The President’s Last News Conference,” January 15, 1953, *Harry S. Truman: 1952-53: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the Presidents*, 1195.

⁵⁴ Truman, No. 377, “The President’s Last News Conference,” January 15, 1953, *Harry S. Truman: 1952-53: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the Presidents*, 1195-1196.

⁵⁵ Truman, No. 377, “The President’s Last News Conference,” January 15, 1953, *Harry S. Truman: 1952-53: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the Presidents*, 1196.

Later that evening, Truman said goodbye to the public during a radio and television address. In his speech, Truman said that, come inauguration day, he would be a “plain, private citizen of this great Republic.” Invoking one of his famous mottos, he expounded on the role of the president as one who ultimately must decide: “The greatest part of the President’s job is to make decisions—big ones and small ones, dozens of them every day . . . The President—whoever he is—has to decide. He can’t pass the buck to anybody. No one else can do the deciding for him. That’s his job.” As Truman recounted in his address, he had committed the United States to joining the United Nations, oversaw the surrender of Nazi Germany, drafted Europe’s future with Churchill and Stalin at Potsdam, authorized the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan, and began planning the world’s transition from war to peace, all within his first four months in office. Truman understood that the promise and peril of these decisions would not disappear with the end of his administration; instead, it was paramount that his successors continue along a similar path. While his relationship with Eisenhower soured, Truman firmly believed that the new administration could continue the United States’ current global agenda if informed and supported. “Such an orderly transfer from one party to another has never taken place before in our history,” Truman hopefully surmised.⁵⁶ He went to such great lengths to strengthen his political rival because he believed that only through conviction could the United States withstand the ever-present threat of the rise of communism.

Truman then gave the final assessment of his administration: “So, as I empty the drawers of this desk, and as Mrs. Truman and I leave the White House, we have no regret. We feel we have done our best in the public service. I hope and believe we have contributed to the welfare of this Nation and to the peace of the world.” Truman closed the speech by thanking the American public for their support through trying years and for assuring them that, whatever the successes of his administration, it was only with the help of the people.⁵⁷ Truman’s farewell speech brought forth the characteristics to which many of his supporters had been attracted—forthrightness, decisiveness, accountability, and, perhaps most of all, humility.

On Inauguration Day, January 20, Truman woke up to a mild and sunny winter morning. Dressed in his formal attire for the historic event, he combed the halls of the White House saying final goodbyes to staff and Secret Service agents. He attended a reception with Cabinet members and their wives in the Red Room of the White House and met with the children of staff members. The Eisenhowers arrived at the White House at 11:30 am and, despite the Trumans’ invitation to come in for a cup of coffee, remained in the car. The couples shared cordial greetings as the Trumans entered the limousine for the

⁵⁶ Harry S Truman, No. 378, “The President’s Farewell Address to the American People,” January 15, 1953, *Harry S. Truman: 1952-53: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the Presidents*, 1197.

⁵⁷ Truman, No. 378, “The President’s Farewell Address to the American People,” January 15, 1953, *Harry S. Truman: 1952-53: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the Presidents*, 1202.



President Truman and President-Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower travel by limousine to the Capitol on the day of Eisenhower's inauguration. January 20, 1953.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

had sent for you, you would have come.”⁵⁹

traditional ride to the Capitol. Along the way, they had tense conversation, the contents of which varied depending on who told the story. Truman recorded in his diary that they stuck to general topics, such as the size of the crowd, the weather, and the peaceful transfer of power.⁵⁸ Later, Truman wrote that Eisenhower said to him, “I did not attend your Inauguration in 1948 out of consideration for you, because if I had been present I would have drawn attention away from you.” Truman replied, “You were not here in 1948 because I did not send for you. But if I

At the Capitol, waiting for the inauguration ceremony to begin, Truman and Eisenhower had an awkward exchange over the presence of Eisenhower's son, John, who had been deployed to Korea as a major in the Army. Truman, in one of his final acts as commander-in-chief, ordered John Eisenhower to Washington, DC, so that he could witness the swearing in of his father. According to Truman in his book, *Mr. Citizen*, President-elect Eisenhower said to Truman, “I wonder who is responsible for my son John being ordered to Washington from Korea? I wonder who is trying to embarrass me?” Truman replied, “The President of the United States ordered your son to attend your Inauguration. The President thought it was right and proper for your son to witness the swearing-in of his father to the Presidency. If you think somebody was trying to embarrass you by this order then the President assumes full responsibility.”⁶⁰ The only explanation that Truman could give for Eisenhower's question was “a manifestation of hostility towards me.”⁶¹

Regardless of the nature of conversation or precise wording, it was clear that Truman felt injured by Eisenhower once more. The deep animosity between them unfortunately overshadowed the historic moment. Perhaps naïve in his judgement of their equal respect for each other, Truman hoped that Eisenhower would encourage him to be a vocal and supportive elder statesman in retirement. Truman would have been more than willing to serve the country at Eisenhower's bequest, just as the outgoing president had once asked of Herbert Hoover to lead the famine assistance program in 1946. Despite their political differences, Truman and Hoover became friends as a result, and Truman believed firmly

⁵⁸ McCullough, *Truman*, 921.

⁵⁹ Harry S Truman, *Mr. Citizen* (New York: Geis Associates, 1960), 20. This quotation from Truman incorrectly states that the inauguration was in 1948. While the election was in 1948, the inauguration was in 1949.

⁶⁰ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 15.

⁶¹ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 16.

that Hoover's experience as president made him a valuable asset as a private citizen.⁶² Instead, Eisenhower had only offered, from Truman's point of view, snub after snub, despite all of Truman's invitations toward bipartisanship.



Eisenhower and Truman outside the White House before Eisenhower's inauguration. January 20, 1953.

Credit: Library of Congress



President Harry S. Truman arriving at Eisenhower's inauguration on January 20, 1953.

Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service

Following the inauguration, the Trumans went to the Georgetown home of Dean Acheson for a luncheon with the outgoing Cabinet, his first visit as an ordinary citizen. Margaret later recalled:

After the ceremony we all piled into a White House limousine and headed for a luncheon at Secretary Acheson's house. As we rolled through the crowded streets, I was suddenly struck by a wild thought. I turned—I was sitting on the jump seat—and looking straight at Dad said, "Hello Mr. Truman."

He got the joke immediately, and I loved it.⁶³

Outside of Acheson's home was a group of 300 supporters who chanted, "We want Harry!" After the gathering, and while the inauguration parade rolled on through the capital, the Trumans left for Union Station to begin the long train ride back home to Independence, Missouri. To Truman's surprise, when he arrived at the station, "a crowd

⁶² James Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2, Separation of Powers and the Power to Govern: with Particular Reference to the Truman-Eisenhower Legacies (Spring 1982): 240.

⁶³ Margaret Truman, *Harry S. Truman* (New York: William Morrow, 1973), 557–558.

of more than nine thousand people jammed the waiting room and the platforms between the tracks.” Truman said, “I thought that this would be the last big crowd I would see greeting me anywhere. The people were friendly and warm, and I was deeply moved as they sang, ‘Auld Lang Syne’ and ‘For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow.’”⁶⁴ Once the Secret Service ushered the Trumans through the crowd, they boarded the presidential railcar, which had been afforded by President Eisenhower. After a short visit to the coach cars, Truman went to sleep for the first time in many years as an ordinary citizen.⁶⁵ The thoughts of personal accomplishment, duty to country, and the excitement of starting a new life must have flooded his mind, as the squeaky train rolled west through the night.

CONCLUSION

Realizing that he likely did not have a viable path to reelection—indeed, even having lost the New Hampshire primary in March 1952—President Harry S Truman committed himself to finding a suitable successor who would continue the initiatives of his administration and lead the country down the path of prosperity. After taking part in a tumultuous presidential campaign for Governor Adlai Stevenson II, Truman realized that General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican nominee, would be difficult to defeat. What shocked Truman, however, was the lengths to which Eisenhower would go to criticize his administration’s policies and insult him personally. Nevertheless, once Eisenhower won the election, Truman spared no effort to ensure an orderly transfer of power to the new administration and to make it well-known that he would be available for service once Eisenhower took office. In his last months of office, Truman continued to pound home to the press and the public the themes of honor, loyalty, and service. In his final speeches, he reaffirmed and continued to defend the decisions he made while in office, and implored people of all demographics to continue to fight for a free and just society. When he left office on January 20, 1953, he was no longer “Mr. President,” but he was sure that he could apply all the lessons he had learned during his presidency toward his new life as “Mr. Citizen.”

⁶⁴ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 22.

CHAPTER 2

Ordinary Citizen

INTRODUCTION

The morning after arriving home in Independence, Truman woke at 7:30 am, about two hours later than normal. According to him, he never slept that late, except on vacation. Although Truman did not think of himself as being on vacation, he found himself in a kind of liminal place between the stressful work of being the country's chief executive and complete carefree leisure. After waking, he got ready for the day and opened the morning paper in the living room, his preferred spot for morning reading during the winter. Predictably, much of the front page was about his return to Independence the prior evening. "He will always be Mr. President to us," Mayor Robert Weatherford said to the press.¹ In *Mr. Citizen*, Truman wrote that the label of "Mr. President" made his transition to an ordinary citizen all the more difficult. "I faced the problem of making the change from Mr. President to Mr. Citizen," Truman wrote. "Now it said in print that I was always going to be Mr. President."² The same morning, Truman pondered that same topic in an interview with NBC's Ray Scherer. In the interview, Scherer asked Truman about the first thing he would do now that he was back home. Truman replied, "Carry the grips [suitcases] up to the attic."³

This duality of wishing to be "Mr. Citizen" but still being recognized as "Mr. President" shaped much of Truman's post-presidency. He wished to lead a normal life following his time in office, but he could not divorce himself from having been President of the United States, a member of a highly exclusive fraternity that brought with it experience

¹ Quoted in Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 24.

² Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 24.

³ Author's interview with Ray Scherer, in McCullough, *Truman*, 930.



Leather suitcase made by Mark Cross and embossed with the initials “H.S.T.”

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

and knowledge that so few could claim. Moreover, his tenure coincided with some of the most pivotal years of the country’s history, which only served as the prologue for issues facing the nation in the years to come. As such, he attempted to carry on many of the hallmarks of his private life in Independence, which ordinary people often enjoyed—morning walks, engagement with the community, home renovations—but still understanding that his former position not only provided him extraordinary notoriety, but also a responsibility to continue to serve his country in retirement in whatever capacity he chose.

RETURN TO INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

On the thousand-mile-long train ride home aboard the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, Harry Truman began his transition from President of the United States to an ordinary citizen. But the American public had other ideas. All along the route, people turned out in droves to see the former president. In a letter to Dean Acheson, Truman wrote that at every stop, all throughout the night and early morning hours, “people wanted to look at the old ‘Ex.’” In St. Louis, Truman reported that 3,000 to 4,000 people stood on the platform to see him. “Same all across Missouri,” wrote Truman.⁴ Aboard the train was no different. As Truman moved about the rail cars, passengers promptly stood up at attention when he entered and walked through the car. “I was soon to find that people would insist on standing up wherever I appeared,” Truman wrote in *Mr. Citizen*, “and I began to realize that I would have to accept this special courtesy as a mark of respect for the office I once held.”⁵ Although he tried to discourage such acts, Truman was irrevocably associated with his former office, regardless of his new self-bestowed moniker of Mr. Citizen.

The train carrying Harry and Bess Truman back home arrived at the Missouri Pacific depot in Independence on January 21, at 8:05 p.m. Their arrival was fifty minutes late, a delay caused by the throngs of well-wishers gathered at each of the whistle stops along the route from Washington to Independence. The delay did not prevent an estimated 8,500 people from assembling around the train depot to welcome the Trumans back home. A billboard sat beside the track that read, “Independence—Home of President

⁴Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, February 18, 1953, Acheson-Truman Correspondence, 1953, Box 161, Acheson-Truman Correspondence File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S Truman Library.

⁵Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 23.

Truman,” but someone had written “Ex-,” with unknown intentions, in large letters next to the word “President.”⁶ As the Trumans debarked the presidential railcar, the city’s American Legion band played “The Missouri Waltz,” and the former president acknowledged the crowd by waving and doffing his gray felt hat. Greeting the Trumans at the platform were Robert P. Weatherford, mayor of Independence, and his wife, LaPrelle, along with Truman’s sister Mary Jane Truman, his brother and sister-in-law John Vivian and Louella Truman.⁷ Also present were members of Battery D, the unit Truman commanded during World War I, and the color guard of the Tirey J. Ford Post of the American Legion, of which Truman was a member.⁸ He shook hands and spoke with supporters as he made his way down the platform. LaPrelle Weatherford presented Bess Truman with a bouquet of long-stemmed red roses.⁹



Harry S and Bess W. Truman’s arrival in Missouri after finishing his time as President. January 21, 1953.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Making their way to a set of microphones, Mayor Weatherford gave his official greeting to the Trumans on behalf of the city. “It’s a real pleasure to welcome you both home,” Weatherford stated. “You are home folks to all of us, and you’ll always be Mr. President to us. Welcome home, neighbors.” The crowd erupted into applause with shouts of “Hurrah for Harry!” and “Hi, Harry!” once Weatherford ended his greeting. Truman then approached the microphones with, as the *Kansas City Times* reported, “a sharp twinkle in his eyes.” Addressing the crowd, he said, “I can’t tell you how much we appreciate this reception. It’s magnificent—much more than we anticipated. It’s a good feeling to be back home.” After allowing for laughter from the crowd, Truman continued, “I’m in the army of the unemployed, now. It’s a small army, however. I’ve got a job to do though—for Mrs. Truman. She has appointed me the official unpacker of all our goods and chattels. It took seven or eight men several months to pack all our stuff, so it will take me some time to get it all unpacked.”¹⁰ Next, Mayor Weatherford asked Mrs. Truman up to the microphone to add to her husband’s speech. Bess, who had much less affinity for the limelight than Harry, said simply, “This is certainly a wonderful welcome.”¹¹ Making their first public statements upon arriving back in Independence, the Trumans both demonstrated their appreciation to all of those in the crowd and found comfort among their neighbors.

⁶ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 24.

⁷ “Home to Cheers,” *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1953, 1.

⁸ “Home to Cheers,” *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1953, 2.

⁹ “Home to Cheers,” *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1953, 1.

¹⁰ “Home to Cheers,” *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1953, 1.

¹¹ “Home to Cheers,” *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1953, 1–2.

The comfort Truman displayed was not simply the result of seasoning after thirty years of holding elected office. Instead, he experienced a true sense of familiarity with and fondness for his community. In an interview for the *American Weekly*, Truman stated, “It was not a difficult situation for me to adjust because my family, my friends and the people I had been raised with were residents of the town and while the town had grown to three times the size it was when I left there, it was still the same old town, same people and my relatives and friends were just the same as ever.” Yet, despite all of the community connections, he never expected to be greeted so heartily. “I admit that was a surprise to me because I had thought that after the connection with the Presidency had ceased there would not be any interest in Mr. Truman as an individual.” But after seeing the size of the crowd at Union Station when he left Washington and the mass of hometown fans in Independence, Truman realized that there was no lost interest at all.¹² In fact, Mrs. Jack Totty, an 86-year-old woman who was among those greeting the Trumans at the train station, had maintained an interest in this hometown hero ever since she knew him as a little boy. Truman shook her hand and said to her, “I’m awfully glad to see you, Mrs. Totty. It was very nice of you to come out to see me.”¹³

Following the warm reception, the Trumans and the Weatherfords eventually made their way to a waiting car. Escorted by police from the City of Independence and the Missouri State Highway Patrol, they began the five-minute drive to 219 North Delaware Street, where another 1,500 people were gathered in front of the Trumans’ home. Supporters lined the sidewalk in front of the house and on the terrace across the street. The neighborhood scene also featured a dozen police officers for security and a 54-piece band from William Chrisman High School. When the Trumans stepped out of the car, the band played “Ruffles and Flourishes” and called out, “How do you do, Mr. President!” When the band finished, Truman said to the group, “That was mighty fine. It sounded as good as the marine band.” Upon reaching his front door, Truman addressed the crowd once more before entering the house, stating, “I never saw anything like this in my life. If I had been elected to something, I could understand something like this, but this is hard to understand.”¹⁴ According to *Mr. Citizen*, Bess Truman remarked, “If this is what you get for all of those years of hard work, I guess it was worth it.”¹⁵

With the immediate excitement of their return to Independence over, the Trumans tried to find the rhythms of their new lives as ordinary citizens. However, a few last events remained before the thrill faded entirely. During his homecoming, Truman mentioned lightheartedly that he and Bess would have to get started on the long

¹² Interview with Harry S Truman, June 9, 1953, *American Weekly* [2 of 4], Box 5, *Mr. Citizen* File, William Hillman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹³ “Home to Cheers,” *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1953, 2.

¹⁴ “Home to Cheers,” *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1953, 2.

¹⁵ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 24.



All of the Trumans' personal belongings were packed into crates like this one.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

process of unpacking all their belongings from the White House. They were able to begin that task on January 26, when a US Army tractor-trailer arrived at their home on North Delaware St. from Washington, DC. The truck carried Margaret Truman's baby grand piano, along with furniture and other personal belongings loaded into large wooden crates marked "Independence House."¹⁶

On February 5, the City of Independence hosted an official homecoming dinner for the Trumans, including Margaret, who was visiting from her new

home in New York City. Approximately 650 friends, family members, public officials, and political associates attended the dinner at the Laurel Club dining hall. The crowd gave Truman a standing ovation when Mayor Weatherford introduced him by stating, "We say to you, Mr. Truman, Mrs. Truman, and Miss Margaret, Missouri has cradled you, and you have done her honor. The people of the United States called you to their service. Your response to that call has brought to you the affection and gratitude of both the free and enslaved peoples throughout the entire world."¹⁷ Following the introduction, Truman gave a speech that, according to the *Kansas City Times*, was "flecked with tints of humor, occasionally resembling his light-veined whistle-stop quips."¹⁸ Throughout the



Mr. and Mrs. Truman at the homecoming luncheon held at the RLDS Auditorium's Laurel Club dining room on February 5, 1953.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

speech, Truman recounted events from his thirty-year political career, including being told late on April 12, 1945, that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died, making Truman the thirty-third President of the United States. But most of all, the speech was full of gratitude. Truman said that there had been many difficult times during all his years of service, but "that hometown reception was worth all the efforts—all the trials. Never has there been anything like it in Independence or any other ex-President's home town. I can never express to you adequately the appreciation of this family."¹⁹ With tears in his eyes, Truman concluded:

¹⁶ "Truman's Piano is Home," *Kansas City Times*, January 27, 1953, 1; Ron Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service, 261.

¹⁷ "Joy in Being Back," *Kansas City Times*, February 6, 1953, 2.

¹⁸ "Joy in Being Back," *Kansas City Times*, February 6, 1953, 1.

¹⁹ Harry S Truman, Homecoming Dinner Speech, February 5, 1953, Truman, Harry S.—Remarks on Return to Independence, Box 20, Memoir File, Harry S Truman Library.

“There never is and never will be anything like coming home.”²⁰

When Truman departed from the nation’s capital on January 20, he intended to return to Independence as an ordinary citizen. But the reception he received from the people of his hometown and from the rest of the country indicated that, to them, he was anything but ordinary. Instead, all along the journey from Washington to Independence, Harry Truman was met with enthusiasm, gratitude, and best wishes from tens of thousands of Americans. If he were ever concerned about fading into obscurity, the events following his leaving office proved otherwise.

SETTLING BACK INTO HOME

While Truman’s return to Independence was indeed triumphant, ironically, he and Bess were technically homeless. Before Truman’s political ascension had brought him to Washington, DC, the couple lived with Bess’s mother Madge Gates Wallace and an assortment of in-laws in the home built by Bess’s grandfather in the nineteenth century on 219 North Delaware Street. As newlyweds, the couple moved into the home in 1919. By the end of Truman’s presidency in 1953, they had never actually owned a home in which they lived. It had been understood that Harry and Bess would stay in the Wallace family home following the presidency, but the Trumans did not become official homeowners until the final settling of Madge’s estate some six months later.

Madge had died without a will, leaving division of her assets to be handled by an executor. The family appointed Bess’s older brother, Frank Gates Wallace, to oversee this settlement, and, with all four siblings in agreement, Madge’s estate was split equally among the Wallace children: Bess, Frank, George, and David (known as Fred). The matter of who would inherit the family home, however, had been long settled. “The whole family had agreed that Mother and Dad should live here. This should be their house,” Margaret Truman later recounted to historians. “But they insisted on buying, assuming that everybody had a quarter share, and paying everybody what a quarter share was worth.”²¹ Appraised at a total value of \$25,000, Truman purchased the remaining three shares of the house from Bess’s brothers for at least \$18,750, with full ownership of the house deeded to the Trumans from Frank Wallace on July 25, 1953.²²

Little had been done to maintain or renovate the house while Madge was alive, as all

²⁰ “Joy in Being Back,” *Kansas City Times*, February 6, 1953, 1.

²¹ Margaret Truman Daniel, interview by Ron Cockrell, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, November 17, 1983, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/margaret-truman-daniel-oral-history-interview.htm>.

²² Ron Cockrell, “Historic Structures Report: History and Significance,” 1984, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service, 177.

improvements had to first go through her. Remembered as “a woman who didn’t like things to change much,” she rarely approved of any alterations.²³ Bess was different. Now owner of the house she had lived in for nearly fifty years, she set out to “modernize” her home. The home was by no means dilapidated, but Bess still wanted every room in the house to be redone with her personal touch (pending Harry’s concurrence, of course). Redecorating the old home, however, proved to be quite the undertaking, so the Trumans hired local painter Robert “Bob” Nickell to oversee the decades-long project. Bess’s sisters-in-law, May and Natalie Wallace, recommended Nickell to the Trumans, having hired him for similar work at their respective homes. From 1953 to 1973, Nickell redecorated every room in the Truman home except the living room and the second-floor bathroom. Today, visitors can experience the house just as the Trumans did during their retirement, each room unchanged from Nickell’s renovations. Only the kitchen underwent additional renovation in 1954, 1963, and 1971.²⁴

Nickell kept meticulous notes of his work at 219 North Delaware Street in a collection of diaries. The following timeline of his work has been reconstructed from these personal records, correspondence with researchers, and existing secondary sources:

January 27–31, 1953: Replaced the wallpaper and repainted the woodwork in the storage room above the kitchen, Madge Wallace’s former sitting room.

February 3–5, 1953: Repainted the woodwork in the front (west) bedroom.

April 28, 1953: Painted the interior of the rear porches.

May 2, 1953: Painted the porch floor.

June 4–8, 1953: Painted the walls and trim of Truman’s first floor library and study.

March 1954: Constructed closets in the second-floor bedrooms on either side of the bathroom.

March 8–19, 1954: Decorated the pantry and kitchen with a fresh coat of light green paint and wallpaper, patching up minor cracks as they appeared. Margaret had initially painted the kitchen light green while on break from the 1948 campaign.

April 1954: Painted and wallpapered Madge Wallace’s former first-floor bedroom and bathroom to convert the space into a guest bedroom.

November 22–29, 1954: Painted and wallpapered Margaret Truman’s northwest corner bedroom. The new color scheme of mauve pink and soft blue was approved by

²³ Cockrell, “Historic Structures Report: History and Significance,” 185.

²⁴ Cockrell, “Historic Structures Report: History and Significance,” 186–191.

Margaret.

November 30–December 6, 1954: Painted and wallpapered the Truman's bedroom with a new blue color scheme.

February 27–March 8, 1956: Removed striped wallpaper from the first-floor music room and replaced with the current floral design.

April 14–19, 1960: Painted and wallpapered Margaret Truman's childhood bedroom.

August 29–September 3, 1960: Replaced old wallpaper, patched cracks, and sanded and sized the walls of the dining room.

May 16–17, 1963: Re-wallpapered the kitchen and pantry.

November 17–23, 1971: Painted the pantry and trim, and re-wallpapered the kitchen and pantry with the current red and white pattern.²⁵

Beyond redecoration, the Truman Home underwent several major structural additions. Almost immediately after moving in, the Trumans had separate dressing rooms constructed upstairs and installed wall-to-wall carpeting across the entire first floor, save for the kitchen. Charles E. Anderson, a local carpenter, built floor-to-ceiling bookshelves for the former president in his first-floor library in early 1954.²⁶ Both Harry and Bess Truman had accumulated thousands of volumes of books throughout the years and needed to expand their home library to accommodate their extensive personal collections. Some of these volumes had been in the family for years, including those owned by Bess's father. Truman's favorite books to read were those on American history or biographies of historical figures, but he also enjoyed lighter fare, especially whodunnits and mystery novels, as did Bess. Always keeping abreast of current affairs, Truman read around half-a-dozen newspapers daily, from the *New York Times* to the *Congressional Record*, to parse through media bias and reach an opinion that he believed could be closest to objective truth.²⁷

The Trumans contracted Anderson again that same spring to begin a much-needed remodel of their attic. They had amassed a veritable treasure trove of priceless gifts over the many years of political service and worried that the damp, drafty attic was ill-equipped for the long-term preservation of these precious belongings—many of them gifts from foreign dignitaries. A “dust tight and more secure” remodel, Anderson

²⁵ Cockrell, “Historic Structures Report: History and Significance,” 186–191.

²⁶ Charles E. Anderson, interviewed by Ron Cockrell, Oral History Interview with C.E. Anderson, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, June 20, 1983, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/c-e-anderson-oral-history-interview.htm>.

²⁷ Taped Interviews with President Truman Conducted by David Noyes and William Hillman, 1959, Box 617, Mr. Citizen File, Harry S. Truman Post Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

reinsulated the attic space, built storage closets, repaired glasswork, and added several fire-retardant measures. Downstairs, Anderson reinforced the support beams under the first floor of the house, needed most noticeably in the music room where the piano's weight had caused the floor to sag. Anderson completed the final structural change to the house, a complete remodel and resurfacing of the basement, in 1954.²⁸

While the interior of the house now blended historic and modern features, as well as updated wall and floor coverings, the exterior remained exactly the same, including the five-foot tall steel fence that surrounded the property. Since Truman had often stayed at the home during his presidency, particularly during holidays, the Secret Service insisted on building security infrastructure to protect the president and his family. As such, the Trumans reluctantly agreed to the construction of a security booth but initially rejected the idea of a protective fence, wanting to leave the property as unobstructed as possible. Only after receiving advice from former President Herbert Hoover, who had developed a close friendship with Truman, did they consent to the additional security fence. As Hoover was reported to have said in a meeting with then-President Truman, "May I insist that you put up a fence before the American public walks off with your house? They did with mine in Palo Alto. They walked up to it and cut hunks out of it with a penknife until I put a fence around it." Truman had already had issues following his election victory in 1948, with crowds willing to take "anything for a souvenir," so heeding Hoover's advice, Truman had the fence erected in 1949 and kept it up throughout his retirement. The Secret Service removed an electric eye system upon Eisenhower's inauguration, but the fence still stands to this day.²⁹

FINANCES

In his 1960 book *Mr. Citizen*, Truman wrote that upon becoming a private citizen, he had to find a new occupation to "make a living."³⁰ In the months following his return to Independence, and even in the weeks leading up to his exit from the White House, Truman received various job offers. He explained these opportunities in a 1953 interview: "There have been offers of teaching jobs at Universities and colleges, television offers, broadcast proposition, positions with Oil Companies and things of that kind—all of which I have turned down."³¹

For Truman, it was quite clear that he could not accept the sundry positions offered to him. "I could never lend myself to any transaction, however respectable, that would

²⁸ Anderson, Oral History Interview with C.E. Anderson, June 20, 1983.

²⁹ Daniel, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, November 17, 1983.

³⁰ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 25.

³¹ Interview with Harry S Truman, June 9, 1953.

commercialize on the prestige and the dignity of the office of the Presidency,” he wrote.³² The corporations that reached out to him had an interest in Truman the former president rather than “Harry Truman the person,” he felt.³³ When people did approach him at his office to ask for job advice or referrals, he often sarcastically remarked, “I’m sorry, but I am out of a job myself.”³⁴

Long before retiring from public service, Truman decided that he would dedicate his post-presidential life to the education of young people and the teaching of America’s founding principles. He sought to educate students in the United States and abroad about the “meaning of democracy.”³⁵ Despite no longer being directly involved in politics, Truman still portrayed himself as an ambassador for American democracy and a stalwart in the fight against communist aggression worldwide. If, in his capacity as an educator, lecturer, or author, he could generate additional income, then so be it. But taking a position with a company or as a faculty member at an institution was out of the question.

As with most retired public servants, Truman kept a low profile about his finances. He and Bess lived a modest lifestyle and rarely splurged on lavish material things. The Trumans’ financial situation in the early post-presidential period has been a topic of debate in recent times, as journalists and historians examine surviving documents to try to assess their net worth. Truman grossed \$600,000 (approximately \$6.8 million in 2023 dollars) for the publication of his memoirs, which was paid out over several years and taxed at 67.5 percent, leaving him with \$37,000 (approximately \$419,876 in 2023 dollars).³⁶ He also continued to earn a monthly pension of \$111.35 (approximately \$1,200 in 2023 dollars) from his time as a servicemember in the National Guard and Army reserves.³⁷ And in 1958 he began receiving an annual retirement pension of \$25,000 (approximately \$260,000 in 2023 dollars) through an act of Congress that Truman supported. In 1955, Truman claimed an adjusted gross income of \$122,195.99 (approximately \$1.2 million in 2023 dollars), many times higher than the average income (\$4,200) for families.³⁸ Truman, along with his siblings Vivian and Mary Jane, also cashed in on the sale of his modest-sized family farm and property, with a portion of the

³²Truman, Mr. Citizen, 58.

³³Truman, Mr. Citizen, 57.

³⁴Truman, Mr. Citizen, 58.

³⁵Truman, Mr. Citizen, 26.

³⁶Harry S Truman to John W. McCormack, January 10, 1957, Sam Rayburn Correspondence, Box 72, President’s Personal File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁷Clarence A. Johnson, “Truman Works Long Hours in Role of Ordinary Citizen,” Atlanta Journal and Constitution, May 31, 1953, 8-F, 1953—East Coast Trip, June–July, Box 739, General Correspondence, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S Truman Papers, Truman Library.

³⁸“Harry Truman,” Presidential Tax Returns, Tax Notes, <https://www.taxnotes.com/presidential-tax-returns?from=0&name=tr>; “Income of Persons in the United States: 1955” and “Family Income in the United States: 1955,” Publications, US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications.html>. For Harry and Bess Truman’s 1953, 1955, 1957, and 1959 tax returns, see Appendices B–F.

proceeds dedicated to the Harry S. Truman Library Fund. As a popular public figure in his retirement, Truman had finally managed to build up a substantial retirement nest egg for his family that allowed him to pursue his impactful goals and accomplishments as an elder statesman.

PERSONAL MILESTONES OF MR. CITIZEN

Retirement had by no means been an entirely private affair for the Trumans. On April 21, 1956, the eyes of the world once again turned to Independence for the wedding of Margaret Truman. Margaret and her fiancé, Elbert Clifton Daniel, Jr., had announced their surprise engagement a month prior. The pair were introduced to each other by mutual friends in New York City and kept their romance private. Margaret had made



Margaret Truman Daniel and E. Clifton Daniel, Jr., leaving Trinity Episcopal Church on their wedding day, April 21, 1956.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

a name for herself, not just for being a First Daughter, but also as a performer, author, and television and radio host. Albeit not a household name like Margaret, Daniel was himself mildly famous—a foreign correspondent turned assistant foreign editor at the *New York Times*. Margaret's parents had known of her engagement for weeks prior to the official announcement, but it came as a complete shock to the news media, igniting a frenzy. Newspapers, radio stations, and television programs from around the world celebrated their engagement and buzzed with anticipation for the upcoming wedding.

The hours leading up to Margaret and Clifton's marriage were some of the liveliest ever in Independence. Police blocked off the roads leading from the Truman Home to the wedding venue, Trinity Episcopal Church, but onlookers assembled undeterred. Crowds in front of 219 North Delaware Street scrambled to catch any glimpse of the former First Family's wedding preparations. Journalists visiting Independence to cover the wedding had arranged with the Trumans' neighbors to use their phones or even put in special phone lines to relay any developments to their corporate offices. As the wedding party's motorcade made its way to the church, so too did the crowd, the neighboring streets filling with people and camera flashes. Arriving by limousine around 4:00 p.m., Truman escorted Margaret up the steps of the church and down the aisle, his daughter wearing an exquisite ankle-length gown made from 200-year-old Venetian lace.³⁹

³⁹ "Extra-Special Saturday in Independence, MO," *LIFE*, April 30, 1956, 28–35.

In contrast to this surrounding pomp, the wedding itself was a deeply intimate affair. Fewer than seventy-five guests packed into the small church where Margaret's parents had wed thirty-seven years prior. In addition to the bride and groom's parents, guests included family members, such as Mary Jane Truman and Vivian Truman, Harry's sister and brother; Nellie Noland and Ethel Noland, Harry's cousins; Frank Wallace and George Wallace, Bess's brothers and their wives. Other guests outside the families included Sam Rosenman, former New York Supreme Court justice and Truman administration special counsel; John W. Snyder, former Treasury secretary; and Vietta Garr and Leola Estes, the Trumans' housekeepers.⁴⁰ The ceremony was incredibly brief, lasting only twelve minutes.⁴¹ A small reception was held at the Truman Home following the wedding, as it had been when Bess and Harry were married in 1919 and Bess's parents were married in 1883. This time, the party needed to be held indoors to escape the prying eyes of reporters and photographers.⁴²



On their wedding day, bride Margaret Truman and groom E. Clifton Daniel pose alongside their respective parents. April 21, 1956

Credit: Sammie Feeback, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

According to news reports, Truman appeared unhappy and visibly worried throughout Margaret's wedding day. Although he thought highly of Clifton, thinking him to be "a very nice fellow," Truman was still highly protective of his only child and worried for her future. After Margaret's engagement, Truman turned to Dean Acheson, who had quickly become his closest confidant during retirement, to allay his fears. He asked his friend, "As every old man who had a daughter feels, I'm worried and hope things will work out all right. Can't you give me some consolation?"⁴³ Acheson responded with nothing but praise for Clifton, whom he had met in New York months prior, assuring Truman that his daughter had made the right choice. He also spoke to the unenviable position of being the father of the bride, that he "is a pitiable creature . . . always in the way—a sort of background child—humored but not participating in the big decisions." Acheson

⁴⁰ "52 Guests Attend Wedding of Margaret Truman," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 22, 1956, 4.

⁴¹ "Extra-Special Saturday in Independence, MO," *LIFE*, April 30, 1956., 28–35.

⁴² Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 297.

⁴³ Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, March 26, 1956, Harry S. Truman Library.

prescribed two remedies to Truman: to accept that he had no control over the situation, and when that proved too difficult, to find a “bottle of good bourbon.”⁴⁴ Given Truman’s noticeably happier mood at the wedding reception, it seemed that he had followed Acheson’s advice.⁴⁵

Margaret’s wedding was not the only marriage to grab headlines that week—two days prior, Hollywood starlet Grace Kelly had married Prince Rainier III of Monaco in a lavish royal wedding. Naturally, comparisons between the two star-studded events captured headlines. The April 1956 issue of *LIFE* featured both weddings prominently in side-by-side articles, but only Margaret and Clifton were chosen as the cover photo.⁴⁶ Outlets like the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wished nothing but luck upon both couples and surmised that millions of people wished the same.⁴⁷ Andrew Tully of the *New York Times*, however, made his opinion quite clear on which wedding he favored. “In the romance department, you can have Grace Kelly. My girl is Margaret Truman,” he opined. “She is not going to become a princess like Miss Kelly, of course—but she doesn’t have to. For in my book, Margaret was always something a lot nicer.”⁴⁸ The media had long praised Margaret for



A delighted former President Truman is photographed with his two young grandsons, Clifton Truman Daniel and William Wallace Daniel, while babysitting. April 16, 1960.

Credit: United Press International Photo, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

her poise and commitment to living a normal life amidst her family’s fame, and, clearly, her wedding was no exception.

After a honeymoon in Nassau, Bahamas, the newlywed Daniels settled permanently in New York. The following year, June 5, 1957, Margaret gave birth to her son, Clifton Truman Daniel. The very next day, Bess and Harry left from Independence to meet their first grandchild and stayed to help around the Daniels’ apartment after Margaret and her baby returned home from the hospital. Truman eagerly awaited the birth of his first grandchild. “What I want to be now is a grandfather,” Truman said, relaying his retirement goals to reporters. “That will make me feel my life has been worthwhile.”⁴⁹

When time finally came for Truman to meet his grandson, however, he was charmingly flustered. As the senior Clifton remembered:

⁴⁴ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, March 27, 1956, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁵ McCullough, *Truman*, 872.

⁴⁶ Extra-Special Saturday in Independence, MO, *LIFE*, April 30, 1956, 28–35.

⁴⁷ To Margaret: Best Wishes, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 21, 1957, Truman-Daniel Wedding, Box 43, Correspondence File, 1953–1982, Bess W. Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library.

⁴⁸ “Margaret a Swell Kid,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1957, Truman-Daniel Wedding, Box 43, Correspondence File, 1953–1982, Bess W. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁹ Andrew Tully, “Life is Now ‘Worthwhile’ for Truman,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1957, Margaret—Correspondence Concerning Grandchild, Box 608, General Correspondence File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Library

As a grandfather the president was alternately delighted and ill at ease, having come to the job late in life. The first time his grandson, Clifton, was taken to visit him, I got up at 6 a.m. to give the baby his bottle. Grandpa, as usual, was already up and dressed and reading the paper. I dumped Clifton in his lap and went into the kitchen to warm the bottle. When I came back the former president of the United States looked like a man with a time bomb with no place to put it.⁵⁰

Truman, one of the most powerful people in the world, was reduced to an anxious mess by a cooing newborn. It did not take long, however, for him to get used to his new role as Grandpa. By the time Margaret's second son, William Wallace Daniel, was born two years later, Truman was an old pro, cradling his grandchildren with nothing but smiles on his face. Beyond this, the simple act of being a grandfather signified a powerful return to life as an ordinary citizen. He hoped that life could stay this "normal" for his grandchild, free from the public scrutiny and politicking that had defined his own, declaring in an interview with *This Week* magazine, "I don't want my grandson to be President!"⁵¹ When pushed further about what the "role of the Truman grandchildren in society" should be, he answered with the following statement:

Well . . . all I wanted them to do is be good citizens and do their part in the community and, if the country came to an emergency, to furnish their services necessary to show that they are citizens of the country. I don't care about trying to tell them what they ought to be or what they have to be or anything of the kind. That's going to be up to them.⁵²

Truman, who had attained the summit of American politics, was not interested in creating a political dynasty; rather, he wanted his grandsons to follow their own course in life.

SOCIAL LIFE

Since Truman's return to Independence, it had become a tradition among his closest friends to host an annual birthday luncheon for the former president in the ballroom of the Hotel Muehlebach in Kansas City. Henry J. Talge, a local industrialist and longtime friend of Truman, financed and planned these increasingly elaborate events year after year. When Talge first began hosting the luncheons in 1953, the guest list amounted to a modest twenty-two guests. A decade later, guests numbered in the hundreds, ranging

⁵⁰ Clifton Daniel, "My Father-in-Law, the Ex-President," *Kansas City Star*, August 20, 1984, 3B.

⁵¹ "I Don't Want My Grandson to Be President," *This Week*, Margaret—Correspondence Concerning Grandchild, Box 608, General Correspondence File, Post- Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵² Taped Interviews with President Truman Conducted by David Noyes and William Hillman, 1959.

from former cabinet officers, sitting vice-presidents, and foreign dignitaries to Truman's childhood friends and chauffeur.⁵³ Truman attended each luncheon and personally greeted every guest until failing health precluded him from the event in 1968. Each year, the ballroom rang with music and singing. Friends recited hymns in Truman's honor and foreign exchange students attending the University of Kansas sang "Happy Birthday" to Truman in their native languages.⁵⁴ Those who could not attend in person often telephoned their regards; sitting Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson never missed an opportunity to call Truman on his birthday.⁵⁵

Guests showered Truman with countless gifts. For his seventy-third birthday, he received a commemorative golden plaque; an oil painting of his daughter and grandson on his seventy-fourth; and an orthopedic rocking chair in the style of President Kennedy's own for his seventy-seventh.⁵⁶ For Truman, however, the true gift of these birthday gatherings was spending time with friends. Truman had resolved to live a relatively private life among family and friends following his presidency, but the reality of his retirement proved to be quite different. Beset with speaking and writing engagements, political patronage and advising, and dogged questions from the press, Truman remained incredibly busy—busier than he was as president, he frequently joked. Although lively affairs, the birthday luncheons gave Truman rare moments alone with the community he so loved. Truman was reported to be visibly touched and overwhelmed with appreciation at every celebration. Ever the comedian, with humility and humor, he remarked at each gathering that "I wish they'd quit reminding me of my birthday . . . they only make me one year older!"⁵⁷

Long before attending these birthday celebrations, Truman could also be found at the Hotel Muehlebach every November 11 for a reunion very near to his heart—the annual gathering of his World War I regiment, Battery D of the 129th Field Artillery. During the early stages of the war, the outfit had been euphemistically referred to as the "Dizzy D," a reference to its eccentric and unruly soldiers who had "consumed" three former captains and first sergeants that had tried, unsuccessfully, to lead. Truman became captain of Battery D in 1918, and, unlike his predecessors, earned the respect of his men, leading the outfit to success across the French front line.⁵⁸

As Battery D consisted primarily of soldiers recruited from Kansas City, many returned home to the Missouri area following the war, and their friendships persisted during

⁵³ "Truman Has 82nd Birthday Celebration," *Oroville Mercury Register*, May 9, 1966.

⁵⁴ "At 74, Truman Will Cut Down His Travels," *Kansas City Times*, May 9, 1958.

⁵⁵ "LBJ Leads Tribute to Truman on 81st Birthday," *St. Joseph News-Press/Gazette*, May 9, 1965.

⁵⁶ "Lauds Truman for UN Role," *The Kansas City Star*, May 8, 1963.

⁵⁷ "Happy Birthday, Says JFK," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 9, 1963.

⁵⁸ Program from 1968 Battery D Reunion, Post-Presidential File, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/program-1968-battery-d-reunion?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1>

peacetime. One year after returning from Europe, the outfit's veterans, including then Captain Truman, gathered at the Hotel Muehlebach for a reunion. Since that first 1920 meeting, the gatherings quickly became annual affairs and Truman seldom missed reuniting with his brothers in arms. Truman was particularly fond of the reunions and often delivered speeches at these events, reminiscing about his wartime experiences, and catching up with his former comrades. He even attended several reunions while serving as President, only missing when official duties made travel back to Kansas City impossible. Truman continued to attend the reunions in his retirement. As time went on, he became one of Battery D's last surviving members, his attendance taking on added significance as a link to the outfit's past. Worsening health in 1968 forced Truman to



Former President Harry Truman surrounded by fellow Battery D veterans at a reunion in Kansas City. March 21, 1955.

Credit: Sammie Feeback, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

stop attending his beloved unit's reunions, but his comrades were determined to honor their former commander. From then on, a stop at Truman's home to pay respects was added to the reunion itinerary.⁵⁹

Annual gatherings like these were important grounding rituals for Truman. Politics had taken him far away from the community he felt had made him, so Truman took great joy in the fact that he could spend his retirement reconnecting with friends new and old. This abiding sense of camaraderie and brotherhood had long defined Truman's life, rooted in his decades-long membership in the various Masonic Lodges of Missouri.

Masonry for the Trumans had been a family affair. Truman's grandfathers on both sides of his family were active members of the now defunct lodges in Westport and Raytown, Missouri. His uncles belonged to Lodge 450 in Belton and inspired Truman to petition for membership. Truman's sister, Mary Jane, was a member of the Order of the Eastern Star, an auxiliary order of the Freemasons, for many years and served at the state level in the Grand Chapter.⁶⁰ Truman was elected to membership in 1909 at the age of twenty-four, and his younger brother Vivian was accepted the following year. Truman remained at the Belton Lodge for only two years, orchestrating the creation of a new chapter, Masonic Lodge 618, in Grandview in 1911. His Freemason brothers elected him the lodge's first master, and Truman served consecutively as the lodge's secretary and second

⁵⁹ "Army Comrades of HST to Gather at Independence," *St. Joseph Nes-Press/Gazette*, November 3, 1968.

⁶⁰ Viola Zumault, interview by Jon E. Taylor, Oral History Interview with Viola Zumault, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, March 14, 1996, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/viola-zumault-oral-history-interview.htm>.

master throughout the 1910s.⁶¹ Truman had struggled with shyness in his youth, but all his anxieties seemed to melt away in his new role as a leader. Reveling in his success, he wrote to Bess following his first election to master: “I have the big head terribly.”⁶²

Truman took a brief hiatus from the lodge when military service sent him to France during World War I. While he served in Europe, the Grandview lodge sadly burned down along with all its records. Truman, with his beloved lodge now gone, committed to serving the larger fifty-ninth Masonic district for the next twenty years upon returning home. After a heated election in 1940, Truman reached the crowning achievement of his Masonic career—he was elected Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Missouri. Some in the lodge worried that Truman, now a second term US Senator, would not have time to fulfill his Masonic duties. Yet, although Congress was in session for almost the entirety of his tenure, Truman completed his duties without reproach. He commuted frequently between Washington, DC, and Missouri, a round trip of over 2,000 miles, to visit nineteen different lodges, six district associations, and several important conferences and ceremonies in Kansas City. Truman was incredibly proud of his Masonic service, stating that:



President Truman wearing Masonic regalia while attending an event at the Geroge Washington National Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia. February 22, 1950.

Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service

Although I hold the highest civil honor in the world, I have always regarded my rank and title as Past Grand Master of Masons as the greatest honor that has ever come to me. I value it above all others because to be a Grand Master of Masons one must be more than a good public relations man—he must have a background based on the noblest of principles, and he must bear the respect and esteem of the good men who make up the Craft.⁶³

The pace of Truman's Masonic activities naturally slowed throughout his presidency, although he still found time to personally preside over the installation of successive grand masters of the Grand Lodge of Missouri. As his busy schedule continued even in

⁶¹ *Special Issue—The Royal Arch Mason*, Spring 1973, *The Royal Arch Mason*, Spring 1973, Box 22, Harry S. Truman and Truman Family File, Rufus Burrus Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶² Grandview Masonic Lodge 618, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/student-resources/places/grandview/grandview-masonic-lodge-618>.

⁶³ *The Royal Arch Mason*, Spring 1973, Box 22, Harry S. Truman and Truman Family File, Rufus Burrus Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

retirement, Truman's duties in the lodge never again reached the heights that they had in previous years. Nevertheless, Truman remained intimately tied to his Masonic brothers while living in Independence and often returned to the lodge to visit with old friends and give speeches. In retirement, Truman would always assist with the installation of new officers, even traveling to the Grandview lodge to do so.⁶⁴ His overwhelming respect for his fellow Masons was mutual; Truman received numerous honors from the Masons following his presidency.⁶⁵ In 1959, the Masons held a ceremony at the Ivanhoe Masonic Temple in Kansas City to celebrate Truman's fiftieth anniversary of membership. The event attracted a large number of Masons, including the Grand Master of Missouri. During the ceremony, the Grand Master told those gathered,

This occasion is historic and unique because never before has there been a fifty-year button presentation to a brother who has achieved the combined public and Masonic careers which our brother has attained; and so far as can be ascertained, not until this day has any man who has been President of the United States and Grandmaster of his Grand Lodge completed a half century of membership in our beloved fraternity.

Upon reaching the fifty-year mark, Truman received a coveted button and was made exempt from paying membership dues.⁶⁶

Another meaningful tribute to Truman was the laying of the cornerstone and dedication of the Truman Library by the Grand Lodge of Missouri.⁶⁷ On the morning July 6, 1957, a large parade of both local and visiting Freemasons arrived in force at the completed library to support their fraternal brother, culminating with then Grand Master Harold M. Jayne officiating the cornerstone laying ceremony. Over 1,000 Masons took part in the cornerstone laying, and they all marched to the Truman Home following the dedication.⁶⁸ Truman had long planned for his library to also be his final resting place and had arranged for a Masonic funeral in the event of his death.⁶⁹

While more formal events like Masonic meetups, military reunions, and birthday parties did provide Truman with a fulfilling social calendar, he felt closest to being an "ordinary citizen" in the minutiae of his daily schedule and impromptu meetings with Independence citizens. For over fifty years, Truman started every morning with

⁶⁴Walt Schneider, interview by Jim Williams, Oral History Interview with Walt Schneider, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, July 11, 2003.

⁶⁵*The Royal Arch Mason*, Spring 1973.

⁶⁶Walt Schneider, Oral History Interview with Walt Schneider, July 11, 2003.

⁶⁷In the Masonic tradition, the cornerstone ceremony is an important and deeply symbolic rite. The ceremony indicates the sacrifices of labor and time necessary to build moral structure. The cornerstone itself symbolizes several traits important to Freemasonry, including sturdiness, morality, and truth.

⁶⁸Allen E. Roberts, *Brother Truman: The Masonic Life and Philosophy of Harry S. Truman* (Highland Springs, VA: Anchor Communications, 1985), 200–201.

⁶⁹*The Royal Arch Mason*, Spring 1973.

a brisk, miles-long walk at around 120 steps per minute, a habit carried over from his days in the Missouri National Guard.⁷⁰ Truman humorously preached that “legs were put on us to use,” and by all accounts, this daily exercise had made him quite spry, even in his advancing age. Over time, his daily walks became a fixture of city life in Independence, so much so that the city eventually erected banners and signs depicting a “walking” Truman silhouette around the turn of the twenty-first century. Truman’s neighbors respected his desire to live a private life and never intentionally “butted in” on his personal affairs. In fact, many Independence locals joked that they were perhaps protective of their famous neighbor to the point of being rude, pranking tourists looking for the Truman Home by saying, “You can’t get there from here. The bridge is out.”⁷¹ These walks, however, often led to moments where the lines between Truman’s private and public lives blurred, much to his amusement. Truman put his gregarious personality on full display when walking about town, tipping his hat to passersby, visiting favorite haunts, and greeting strangers and friends alike. Reverend Thomas Melton, the Trumans’ neighbor and local pastor, remembered fondly these run-ins with “Mr. Citizen” while walking on their street:

I never tried to manage to walk with him. But quite often it would be by accident that we would come out of the house at the same time, we’d meet at the same time, we’d walk along with his Secret Service man that always walked with him. And we would talk about many things, and he was a rather fast walker which I enjoyed, and he would comment about a lot of things we went by. And he would comment about the people that lived here, the people who lived there, or he remembered this.⁷²

Truman not only greeted the people of Independence, but the trees as well. Melton remarked that Truman frequently walked by a stately ginkgo tree down the road from his house on Maple Street, famous among residents for its beautiful autumn foliage. Reportedly, Truman would thank this old ginkgo tree when passing by; he stopped at the trunk and said, “You’ve done a great job.” Truman was enamored with the natural world and had for a time even wanted to retire and build his presidential library in the open land of his family’s farm in Grandview. When that did not come to pass—Truman and siblings sold the land to shopping center developers, who built Truman Corners Shopping Center—Truman maintained his connection to nature through these ritual walks about town.⁷³

⁷⁰Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 87.

⁷¹Reverend Thomas G. Melton, interview by Andrew Dunar, Oral History Interview with the Reverend Thomas G. Melton, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, August 18, 1989, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/reverend-thomas-g-melton-oral-history-interview.htm>.

⁷²William and Annette Curtis, interview by Jim Williams, Oral History Interview with William and Annette Curtis, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, July 22, 2003.

⁷³Melton, Oral History Interview with the Reverend Thomas G. Melton, August 18, 1989.

After coming home from his daily walk, Truman sat with Bess and ate his usual breakfast—toast, eggs, and bacon—before heading out to work at his office, first in Kansas City and later at the Truman Library approximately a mile up the road. Truman returned home from the office around 5:30 p.m., ate dinner, and spent the rest of his night reading through letters and other documents that had accumulated throughout the day. He sometimes watched television, “particularly if Margaret is on it.”⁷⁴

Aside from walking and working, Truman noted that he and Bess “hardly ever go out anywhere.”⁷⁵ Despite Truman’s assessment, both Trumans maintained active social lives. They remained avid players of card games and met with their respective clubs. Truman had been playing cards since the 1890s, learning first from his aunt and uncle, Ida and Harry Young, while staying at their farm. Poker quickly became the young Truman’s favorite game, and throughout his life, he leaned on poker as both a social outlet and form of personal expression.⁷⁶ His famous motto for accepting responsibility as president, “The Buck Stops Here,” was in fact a reference to the “dealer’s button” that denotes which player is the card dealer. On the dealer’s turn, all betting stops. Historically, a buckhorn-handle knife had stood in place of the dealer’s button, hence the reference to “buck.”⁷⁷ Even while president, Truman frequently played cards, his table attracting famous political figures like Chief Justice Fred Vinson, then-Senator Lyndon Johnson—Truman’s favorite poker companion— and even Prime Minister Winston Churchill.



Former President Truman enjoying a poker game with friends at the home of A.J. & Mildred Granoff. February 22, 1956.

Credit: Loeb Granoff, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Back home in Missouri, Truman routinely played poker with two groups of longstanding card companions during his retirement. One group, headed by Truman’s close friend and politically active entrepreneur Tom Evans, had been part of Truman’s social schedule since the 1930s. Held in a cigar smoke-filled suite in downtown Kansas City at the exclusive 822 Club, a primarily Republican watering hole that only made Truman a full-time member after becoming president, these games were boisterous but intense affairs. Contrarily, Truman would get together with Eddie Jacobson, his former haberdashery partner, and play lighthearted games with their friends in the Kansas City Jewish community at

⁷⁴Taped Interviews with President Truman Conducted by David Noyes and William Hillman, 1959.

⁷⁵Taped Interviews with President Truman Conducted by David Noyes and William Hillman, 1959.

⁷⁶Raymond H. Geselbracht, “Harry Truman, Poker Player,” *Prologue* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2003), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2003/spring/truman-poker.html>.

⁷⁷James McManus, “Bluffing at the Highest Levels,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2009.



Former First Lady Bess Truman outside her church, Trinity Episcopal Church. April 18, 1965.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Bess Truman's Kansas City Athletics jacket.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

fan of the Truman family, occasionally doing some fishing at an indoor trout pool or watching a wrestling match on television. Bess also rooted for the Kansas City Athletics baseball team, which had just moved there from Philadelphia in 1955.⁸²

Jacobson's house on Seventy-Second Street. Truman felt alive at the card table: cheekily taunting friends by showing them his hands and saying, "I got you beat already," trying to make his friends break their poker faces by telling funny stories, and staying in every round of betting even when it was clear he had no chance of winning.⁷⁸ Poker let Truman embrace the lively, informal sides of his personality that he had often masked during his career as a politician.

While Truman met with his poker buddies, Bess also maintained her social life in Independence after participating in a number of women's groups while living in Washington, DC. She rejoined her cherished Tuesday Bridge Club. Since her teenage years, Bess had gathered weekly with a group of friends to chat and play bridge. The club started by playing for favors but eventually began to play for money, a change of which Bess disapproved.⁷⁹ She rarely missed a game, even bringing her bridge club friends to play at the White House during her residence there.⁸⁰ Initially, though, the bridge club was not enough to fill Bess's time, leaving Bess alone too often in the home. And for the first time in fifty years, her mother was not there.⁸¹ Bess attended Trinity Episcopal Church, where she had once been an active member of the Altar Guild in her youth. She was also the sports

⁷⁸ Geselbracht, "Harry Truman, Poker Player."

⁷⁹ Sue Gentry, "'Summer White House' a Home of Warm Memories," *Kansas City Star*, October 18, 1982, 8A

⁸⁰ Margaret Truman, *Bess W. Truman* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987), 463.

⁸¹ Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 652.

⁸² Sue Gentry, "'Summer White House' a Home of Warm Memories," *Kansas City Star*, October 18, 1982, 8A; Margaret Truman, *Souvenir: Margaret Truman's Own Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 347.

WORK LIFE

Before the fanfare of his homecoming died down, Harry Truman began his work as Mr. Citizen the day after he arrived back in Independence. After his morning routine and one last interview with NBC, Truman rode in a state highway patrol car with Sergeant Art Bell, who was Truman's temporary driver and a former Battery D member, to the Federal Reserve building at Tenth and Grand in downtown Kansas City.⁸³ Truman's initial post-presidential office was a three-room suite on the eleventh floor on the southwest corner



Press conference for Truman's book Mr. Citizen. August 21, 1959.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

of the building. The suite consisted of a reception room, secretary's office, and private office, as well as a great number of filing cabinets that held Truman's presidential papers.

These papers remained under Truman's control until the completion of his library.⁸⁴ During the busy days of writing his two-volume memoir, Herbert Lee Williams, one of the ghostwriters on Truman's memoirs, also used a makeshift library on the floor below Truman's office.⁸⁵ The office came furnished. As with the salaries of his staff,

Truman was responsible for paying the lease on the office space, as well as any necessary supplies. His brother, Vivian Truman, negotiated for the space, which was formerly the home of the Federal Reserve Bank's examination division for state member banks. Along with Truman's office suite, the eleventh floor was also home to a Reconstruction Finance Corporation office, the national bank examiner, and the Federal Reserve building's barbershop.⁸⁶

It is somewhat unusual that a person would need such office space in retirement, but Truman held an unusual position and was retired in name only. He was still as energetic as always and ready to tackle the work of being an elder statesman. When asked if he ever got tired, Truman replied, "I never get tired—I always wear the other fellow out."⁸⁷ In 1953, Truman justified his need for office space—and the associated expenses—because of the large volume of correspondence that needed a response, the numerous visitors who came to see him, and the tireless task of writing his memoirs.⁸⁸ Generally, Truman

⁸³ McCullough, *Truman*, 930.

⁸⁴ "Truman Has Suite Here," *Kansas City Times*, January 21, 1953, 1.

⁸⁵ Francis H. Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 1, The Economy in Presidential Policy (Winter 1983): 82.

⁸⁶ "Truman Has Suite Here," *Kansas City Times*, January 21, 1953, 1.

⁸⁷ Interview with Harry S. Truman, June 9, 1953.

⁸⁸ Harry S. Truman, "Article 1," 8, July 24, 1953, *American Weekly*, *American Weekly—Correspondence*, 1952–1953, Box 5, William Hillman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

also believed he should make himself accessible to the public because “[m]any people feel that a President or an ex-President is partly theirs—and they are right to some extent—and that they have a right to call upon him.”⁸⁹ The office was also for political and legal business, which were strictly off limits at the Truman Home. Such business was reserved exclusively for the office.⁹⁰



Former president Truman autographing copies of his memoir. Ca. 1955.

Credit: Sammie Feedback, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

When Truman arrived at his new Kansas City office on the first day, his longtime personal secretary Rose Conway, who had served in the same capacity at the White House, joined him. Truman had already received thousands of letters in Independence and Kansas City, and by July 1953, he had received an estimated 70,000 letters, of which he had answered nearly all in roughly six months. Among these letters were best wishes from friends and other supporters, invitations to “everything from national conventions to church suppers,” an offer from a cult leader to join his

group, and a request from a boy to help recruit seventy-five new Cub Scouts. Only receiving letters occasionally from “cranks,” Truman’s mail also contained contributions to the fund for his library, job offers, and frank but well-intentioned disagreement on matters of policy.⁹¹ What surprised Truman, though, was that people looked to him to help them sort out their troubles. In some cases, they expected Truman to use his experience or influence to help with their difficulties, but Truman held that such influence no longer existed now that he was out of office. He was also reticent to use what remained of his influence to display favoritism for fear of any perceptions of improper behavior.⁹² Truman understood the status of a former president, but he was concerned with maintaining the honor of his former office and of himself.

A typical workday for Truman began around 5:30 a.m., a wakeup time engrained in him since he lived on the farm in Grandview. After getting dressed, he took a walk around the neighborhood, greeting community members as he encountered them. Once finished with his walk, Truman read up to five newspapers daily from around the country, including the *Independence Examiner*. Then he ate breakfast around 7:00 a.m. and traveled by car to his Kansas City office. Sergeant Arthur Bell drove him to work

⁸⁹ Clarence A. Johnson, “Truman Works Long Hours in Role of Ordinary Citizen,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 31, 1953, 8-F, 1953—East Coast Trip, June–July, Box 739, General Correspondence, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Truman Library.

⁹⁰ Cockrell, “The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study,” 317.

⁹¹ Harry S. Truman, “Article 1,” 9–10, July 24, 1953, *American Weekly*, *American Weekly*—Correspondence, 1952–1953, Box 5, William Hillman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹² Interview with Harry S. Truman, June 9, 1953.

some days; other days Truman drove himself in his Dodge sedan. When he switched offices to the new Harry S. Truman Library in 1957, he sometimes walked approximately one mile to and from work. While at work, Truman usually spent the morning hours answering correspondence and meeting with visitors. During the writing of his memoirs, Truman frequently met with his writing consultants, David Noyes, William Hillman, Herbert Lee Williams, and Francis Heller, to review the latest drafts.⁹³ At noon, Truman took his lunch, usually eating at the Muehlebach Hotel or the Kansas City Club while in Kansas City. Once the library opened, he almost always went home for lunch.⁹⁴ Truman enjoyed eating lunch out, which gave him an opportunity to socialize with the city's business and political leaders. "The fact is," Truman wrote in *Mr. Citizen*, "I do like to have lunch at the Kansas City Club. There is no conversation so sweet as that of former political enemies." Regarding both his friends and enemies, Truman wrote, "The way I look at it, I have been blessed in both my enemies and my friends. And, of course, there are not many pleasures to compare with sitting down to lunch at the Club or at the Muehlebach or anywhere with close friends." After lunch, Truman returned to the office to address the telephone calls and correspondence that had come in since the morning. He typically ended his workday between 3 and 4 p.m., returning home to take a nap before dinner.⁹⁵

In his daily work activities, Truman generally tried to avoid commenting on partisan politics. On many occasions, individuals would write him asking for his opinion on a certain policy issue. But Truman often shied away from speaking out on a position, at least in his first few months of retirement. "I'm not commenting on anything in the way of national or international affairs," Truman stated in May 1953. "I want to be as charitable in this period of adjustment for the new administration. I know what it is to be in that situation myself."⁹⁶ But that grace period did not last long. The following month, Truman issued his first political statement about how he assessed the prospects of the Democratic and Republican parties. "The Democratic party not only is a going concern today, but always will be because it represents the common people and not the party of the special interests." Of the Republicans, Truman said, "The Republican party has demonstrated it is the party of special interests."⁹⁷ Although retired from public office and attempting to remain above the fray, Truman was still a political animal who was willing to lend aid to his party when necessary.

⁹³ Herbert Lee Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2, Separation of Powers and the Power to Govern: With Particular Reference to the Truman-Eisenhower Legacies (Spring 1982): 258.

⁹⁴ Johnson, "Truman Works Long Hours in Role of Ordinary Citizen," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 31, 1953, 8-F.; Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 316.

⁹⁵ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 53.

⁹⁶ Johnson, "Truman Works Long Hours in Role of Ordinary Citizen," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 31, 1953, 8-F.

⁹⁷ George K. Wallace, "Truman Ends Silence," *Kansas City Times*, June 18, 1953, 11.

Truman remained busy in the time after his presidency, keeping a consistent work schedule filled with correspondence, appointments, visitors, memoir-writing, and other activities. He maintained that he was still useful in his retirement from public office and continued to serve his community, country, and party with his accumulated knowledge and experience. Truman refused, however, to enter every partisan fray, believing that, as a former president, he was required to uphold the dignity of the office he once held. When he did wade into politics, he always did so from his office, refusing to bring such business back home, keeping a strict delineation between business and family life.

AN ORDINARY CITIZEN ON TELEVISION



Former President Truman and former First Lady Bess Truman during the filming of a "Person to Person" segment for CBS. May 27, 1955.

Credit: United Press Associations, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

By the end of the 1950s, Truman had become no stranger to television appearances. On May 27, 1955, CBS filmed an episode of the *Person to Person* talk show at the Truman Home. The show had pioneered the concept of a casual celebrity interview by interviewing famous figures from the comfort of their homes to capture genuine slices of life moments. Although somewhat private and always humble, the Trumans agreed to participate in this novel television production. It was the first time the Trumans had allowed their house to be filmed, giving the American television-viewing audience their first peek into the homelife of the former First Family. Over forty technicians equipped with four cameras and two tons of additional equipment filled the usually placid home with a frenetic energy. The program's usual host, Edward R. Murrow, was unavailable, on assignment in London covering parliamentary elections. Producers from CBS approached Margaret Truman to conduct the interview on Murrow's behalf from a network studio in New York City. The resulting thirty-minute segment, broadcast live, highlighted Harry and Bess's lives as retirees. Margaret and her parents held an

easygoing, personal conversation, with topics ranging from political discussions and stances on current events, to the pleasantries of weather, sports, and domestic life. The broadcast began with the Trumans sitting on their back porch, as per their wishes. Cameras then followed the couple as they walked through the first floor of their house. The pair stopped along the way to greet Vietta Garr, their housekeeper, who was baking brownies in the kitchen. As they strolled through the modest home, the guest stars reflected on gifts given by foreign dignitaries, including an original painting by Winston Churchill. The cameras rolled as Truman played an excerpt of Paderewski's "Minuet" on the family piano in the music room. The broadcast was the first time the American public had seen Truman in such a casual setting—truly living as an “ordinary citizen”—and, moreover, the first time in history that “such a telecast has been conducted in the home of a president or a former president.”⁹⁸ This broadcast was an invaluable product, given that it highlighted Bess's sense of humor and was one of the few times Bess had her voice recorded for the public. The Trumans' interview on “Person to Person” also gives modern audiences a glimpse into what the Truman Home looked like in 1955, important for establishing the historical record surrounding the house.⁹⁹

Following the success of this broadcast, Truman considered appearing on the NBC documentary series *This is Your Life*, a program in which guests would be shown a retrospective of their lives in front of a live audience. The host, Ralph Edwards, would often surprise guests, but in Truman's case, he was made aware before filming was set



Former president Truman with television personality Edward Murrow on a boat outside of Islamorada, Florida, before Truman's appearance on Murrow's show. ca. February 1959.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

to begin. Truman read the script in advance and decided “the best thing in the world would be not to do it.” Truman did not elaborate on his reservations, but his refusal was apparently absolute. As he relayed to his assistant David Noyes, “The final answer is ‘No’ with a capital ‘N’.”¹⁰⁰

Three years later, Truman reappeared on television screens for a special broadcast entitled *Precinct to President: Some Reflections by Harry S. Truman*. Unlike Truman's previous CBS appearance, Edward R. Murrow was available to conduct this interview himself. Filming began in Key West, Florida, in 1957. Murrow and co-

⁹⁸ Cockrell, “The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study,” 289–294.

⁹⁹ See Bo Pike, interview by Andrew Dunar, Oral History Interview with Bo Pike, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, August 24, 1989, <https://home.nps.gov/articles/000/bo-pike-oral-history-interview.htm>, for an account of the production of this interview.

¹⁰⁰ Harry S Truman to David Noyes, Chronological File, 1953–55, Box 1, Chronological File, David M. Noyes Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

producer Fred W. Friendly developed the feature episode with historic preservation in mind, believing that their filming was the same as “transcribing a primary source,” capturing the likeness, voice, and ideas of Truman for study by future historians. A decidedly political discussion, Truman and Murrow recounted the defining moments of Truman’s presidency—dropping the atomic bomb, prosecuting the Korean War, dismissing General MacArthur, and others. Truman spoke about these events in his characteristic blunt and casual tone. Save for perhaps his later publication, *Mr. Citizen*, no other piece of media quite so accurately captured Truman’s famously direct manner of speech, a verbal frankness celebrated as “candor” by supporters and decried as “caustic” by opponents. Upon initial release on February 2, 1958, some footage had been cut due to a mutual agreement between Truman and producers; these clips were not to be shown during Truman’s lifetime.¹⁰¹

MR. CITIZEN AND CONGRESS

Despite his retirement from government, Truman was not wholly disconnected from the happenings in Washington, DC. In some cases, he was indirectly linked to the pressing work of the federal government, and in other cases he was front and center. In particular, he engaged with the legislative branch on two important issues: an ongoing investigation into alleged subversive activities in the Truman administration and the enactment of a pension program for former presidents. Although Truman never went to Washington, DC, to discuss these matters, he remained intrinsically tied to both.

During the 1940s and 1950s, conservatives in and out of government, such as Senator Joseph McCarthy and his allies exploited Americans’ fears about the threat of Soviet espionage in the United States to charge their enemies with being crypto-communists and intentionally subverting the interests of the United States. This so-called “Second Red Scare” led to the infamous hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, popularly known as HUAC, that hounded witnesses about their alleged affiliations with communist political groups. Right-wing claims that Soviet spies had infiltrated the ranks of the federal government, perhaps including such high-profile figures as General George C. Marshall and Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Conservative anticommunists argued that the US Civil Service Commission had been lax in screening potential employees that allowed for such infiltration. In response, Truman created a loyalty program in 1947 by expanding existing procedures for weeding out federal employees suspected of being subversives. These procedures led to approximately five million federal workers undergoing loyalty screening, with at least 25,000 undergoing “full field investigation” by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

¹⁰¹ Lawrence L. Murray, “Interviews with Former Presidents,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 5, no. 2 (1975): 40–41.

During the program's peak between 1947 and 1956, these screenings led to the dismissal of an estimated 2,700 federal employees and the resignation of about 12,000 federal employees.¹⁰²

Truman initially hesitated to approve a loyalty program, for fear that a program of this nature would infringe on the civil liberties of federal employees. However, after congressional Republicans successfully campaigned on the issue of "communist infiltration in government" in the 1946 midterm elections, and at the urging of advisors like Attorney General Tom Clark, Truman agreed to have a commission study the issue that fall. Following that report, in March 1947, Truman issued Executive Order 9835, directing each executive department to establish a loyalty board. Truman hoped that instituting a loyalty program would undercut the mounting accusations of him being soft on communism. However, a series of events, such as the Chinese Communist Party seizing control of China, the high-profile espionage convictions of Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs, and Truman's veto of the McCarran Internal Security Act, further fanned partisan flames and raised the credibility of conservative anticommunists. As a result, Truman made it easier to remove federal employees for disloyalty in April 1952 with Executive Order 10241, which lowered the evidentiary standard needed for dismissal.¹⁰³

One might expect that politicians would exchange partisan shots surrounding this volatile issue during Truman's tenure in office. But the criticisms of Truman from his political opponents continued into his post-presidency. Once Eisenhower took office in January 1953, his administration took steps to broaden the loyalty program, all while proclaiming the failure of the Truman administration to properly address the threat of communist infiltration. On April 26, 1953, Eisenhower's attorney general Herbert Brownell, Jr., stated in a radio interview that the Truman administration's loyalty program was "completely unsuccessful." "There was a pussyfoot attitude adopted by certain departmental heads of the former administration," Brownell continued, "and this was a major reason for the failure of the old loyalty program."¹⁰⁴ Congressional Republicans also conducted investigations into the Truman administration's controversial loyalty program, which some claimed did not go far enough in rooting out suspected communist spies.¹⁰⁵

Truman's critics pointed to the case of Harry Dexter White to argue negligence on the part of the administration. White, an assistant treasury secretary in the Truman administration, had been nominated by the president in 1946 to head the new

¹⁰² Landon R. Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁰³ Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, 110–111.

¹⁰⁴ "New Loyalty Program will be Ready Soon," *Kansas City Times*, April 27, 1953, 2.

¹⁰⁵ William Moore, "Red Grip Bared," *Kansas City Times*, November 27, 1953, 1–2.

International Monetary Fund. However, congressional Republicans and Attorney General Brownell asserted that Truman did so knowing that the FBI believed White to be a Soviet spy.¹⁰⁶ Brownell stated that the FBI had given “full and adequate notice . . . of spying activities” by White to the White House, four cabinet secretaries, and “four other top men.”¹⁰⁷ Although Truman claimed that he had no recollection of any such report, James F. Byrnes, who was Truman’s former secretary of state and now a political enemy of Truman’s, argued to the contrary.¹⁰⁸ “The President stated he had read the [FBI] report and that he also was surprised,” Byrnes said. Truman, seeming to push the accusation aside, said that he would check his personal files for evidence of any such reports.¹⁰⁹

Under these circumstances, the House Un-American Activities Committee issued a subpoena to Truman on November 9, 1953, ordering him to testify before the committee on November 13. The subpoena, signed by HUAC chairman Harold H. Velde of Illinois, did not mention the reason for summoning Truman. However, newspaper coverage made it clear that the summons related to the White issue.¹¹⁰ Truman’s scornful response, given on November 11 in the form of a letter to Velde, stated that, on both constitutional and historical grounds, he would not be forced to comply with the subpoena. Truman was an ardent student of political and constitutional history and he fully understood and articulated his rights as a former president under the principles of the separation of powers:

In doing so, I am carrying out the provisions of the Constitution of the United States; and am following a long line of precedents commencing with George Washington himself in 1796. Since his day, Presidents Jefferson, Monroe, Jackson, Tyler, Polk, Fillmore, Buchanan, Lincoln, Grant, Hayes, Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, Coolidge, Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt have declined to respond to subpoenas or demands for information of various kinds by Congress.¹¹¹

He then went on to provide evidence from constitutional law professor Charles Warren, President Andrew Jackson, and a House of Representatives report stating that Congress could not compel the executive to turn over any records without the consent of the president. Truman concluded by saying that the rights that protect the president from congressional intrusion on any of his acts while in office must also extend to a former

¹⁰⁶ “Spy Probers Call Truman,” *Daily Times*, November 10, 1953, 1A–2A.

¹⁰⁷ “Spy Probers Call Truman,” *Daily Times*, November 10, 1953, 2A.

¹⁰⁸ “Spy Probers Call Truman,” *Daily Times*, November 10, 1953, 1A–2A.

¹⁰⁹ “Spy Probers Call Truman,” *Daily Times*, November 10, 1953, 2A.

¹¹⁰ Summons to Appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, November 9, 1953, The Truman Administration’s Loyalty Program, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/summons-harry-s-truman>.

¹¹¹ Harry S. Truman to Harold H. Velde, November 11, 1953, The Truman Administration’s Loyalty Program, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/harry-s-truman-harold-h-velde?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1>.

president. “The doctrine [of separation of powers] would be shattered, and the President, contrary to our fundamental theory of Constitutional Government, would become a mere arm of the Legislative Branch of the Government,” Truman wrote, “if he would feel during his term of office that his every act might be subject to official inquiry and possible distortion for political purposes.”¹¹² Although he was willing to appear to discuss any acts taken while a private citizen, Truman made it clear that he would not discuss with Congress any actions taken while president.

Truman also made this justification to the American public in a press release issued on November 16. In his straightforward and plain-spoken manner, he laid out in clear terms why he refused to appear before HUAC. Truman believed that by simply responding to these “scurrilous charges” made against him would be undermining the constitutional rights of the presidential office. Turning to the question of whether a former or sitting president could be forced to testify, he wrote, “In either case, the Office of President would be dominated by the Congress, and the Presidency might become a mere appendage of Congress.” Truman also went on to frame Congress’s interest in his testimony as a purely political stunt. Calling out Attorney General Brownell by name and identifying him as the former head of the Republican National Committee, Truman attempted to blunt the charges that he had knowingly promoted a communist sympathizer. He stated that, after reviewing his files, it was clear that he had been briefed that White was under an FBI investigation, but there was no clear-cut evidence that White was a spy. After consultation with Secretary of the Treasury Fred Vinson and Secretary of State James Byrnes, Truman and his cabinet secretaries decided to allow White’s nomination to take its usual course through the Senate. Once the Senate confirmed White, Truman allowed him to serve on the board of executive directors of the International Monetary Fund. “Thus, what this new administration has attempted becomes clear,” Truman continued. “It has distorted a decision that enabled an investigation of great importance to proceed—as it did—unembarrassed, and with ample safeguard to the public interest, into an alleged harboring of communists. This is shameful demagoguery.” After accusing the Eisenhower administration of partaking in McCarthyism for his own political advantage, Truman concluded, “This [McCarthyism] is not a partisan matter. This horrible cancer is eating at the vital organs of America and it can destroy the great edifice of freedom.”¹¹³ Throughout his statement, Truman simultaneously answered the questions surrounding his handling of the White affair and charged Republicans with engaging in a witch hunt purely for political gain, even if it meant eroding the civil liberties of all Americans.

¹¹² Harry S Truman to Hard H. Valde, November 11, 1953.

¹¹³ Statement of Harry S Truman, November 16, 1953, The Truman Administration’s Loyalty Program, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/18-6.pdf>.

Ultimately, Truman did not appear before Congress to testify about the White matter or any other. Republicans, nevertheless, continued to investigate alleged infiltration by communists in the federal government, conveniently focusing on the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. Truman, who promulgated the doctrine of containment and initiated a war in Korea to prevent communist expansion, was never ambivalent toward communism, though. In spite of his strong anti-communist stance, he was unwilling to upend Americans' constitutionally protected civil liberties to combat an amorphous and ill-defined threat.

Regarding the investigation into the federal loyalty program, Truman went on the defensive, trying to stave off what he believed was an unconstitutional encroachment by Congress. Yet Truman welcomed an encounter with lawmakers when it came to addressing his lack of pension from his time as president. Since before leaving office, he spoke openly about the fact that, unlike generals and members of Congress, former presidents received no pension or funding allowance for office space, staff, and office supplies. "He doesn't even rate free postage," a White House spokesman told the press in November 1952.¹¹⁴ Truman's military pension was not sufficient to cover these expenses, he claimed. Having turned down ample opportunities for employment, he believed that being a former president was itself another career, one that should be supported by a nominal salary.

The idea of a post-presidential pension did not originate with Truman. By the end of the nineteenth century, the American public challenged the notion that former presidents could use their status for personal gain. Eliminating opportunities for ex-presidents to earn a living in the private sector, accordingly, led to calls to create a presidential pension. In 1912, Congress began discussing this possibility after industrialist Andrew Carnegie offered to fund a \$25,000 annual presidential pension until Congress enacted a federal program. Unsurprisingly, Congress deemed it inappropriate for a former president to accept private funds. Members of Congress then introduced two bills granting a pension that same year, but both bills failed to receive a vote. Decades later, in 1955, the Senate passed legislation to provide retirement benefits to former presidents, but the House of Representatives never acted on the bill.¹¹⁵

In his first years of retirement, Truman undertook private and public campaigns to push Congress to legislate a pension for former presidents. On January 10, 1957, Truman wrote to John W. McCormack, the House Majority Leader, about the former's financial predicament. He informed McCormack about the costs associated with "the business of

¹¹⁴ "Truman Pension of \$95.66," *Kansas City Star*, November 6, 1952, 1.

¹¹⁵ Wendy Ginsberg and Daniel J. Richardson, "Former Presidents: Pensions, Office Allowances, and Other Federal Benefits," Congressional Research Service, March 16, 2016, 19–20.

writing the Memoirs and to meet the tremendous burden of handling the largest volume of mail in the State.” In the letter, he referenced a tax break he had afforded Eisenhower on the income from selling books, but the current president never reciprocated the offer. Truman further explained the necessity of selling property that he, his brother, and sister had inherited from his mother to remain financially afloat. “I don’t want a pension and do not expect one but I do think 70% of the expenses or overhead should be paid by the Government—the 30% is what I ordinarily have been on my own hook if I hadn’t tried to meet the responsibilities of being a former President.”¹¹⁶ Truman went on to remind McCormack of the bill, passed during the Truman administration, giving all five-star generals and admirals funding for clerks and other emoluments upon retirement. “It seems rather peculiar that a fellow who spent eighteen years in government service and succeeding in getting all these things for the people he commanded should have to go broke in order to tell the people the truth about what really happened.”¹¹⁷ Shortly thereafter, Senator A. S. Mike Monroney introduced a pension bill in the Senate, while McCormack proposed a companion bill in the House. In August of that year, Truman wrote to Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, inquiring about the pension legislation. He told Rayburn that, if the bill passed, he would go on a tour of educational appearances, giving lectures to students at small colleges at no charge. “Sam,” Truman wrote, “I’m not lobbying for the bill.” However, if the bill did not become law, he would have to “go ahead with some contracts to keep ahead of the hounds.”¹¹⁸ Writing to members of Congress, Truman walked a very thin line between openly advocating for a pension and casually demonstrating his need, but not desire for, such a program.

Truman then took his position on post-presidential pensions to the American public. In February 1957, Truman filmed an interview for Edward R. Murrow’s television program *See It Now*, an appearance for which Truman commanded a \$25,000 fee. Murrow asked Truman a question about his finances, and Truman was forthright about his desire for a pension. “You know,” Truman answered, “the United States government turns its chief executives out to grass. They’re just allowed to starve.” Truman continued, “If I hadn’t inherited some property that finally paid things through, I’d be on relief right now.” He continued, saying that both individual states and the federal government should take care of their chief executives so as not to have to “go out and beg people for money.”¹¹⁹ For years, Truman had been alluding to the fact that he received no pension to the public, but his appearance on Murrow’s show was perhaps his most direct public advocacy for such a federal program.

¹¹⁶ Harry S. Truman to John W. McCormack, in *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, 346–347. For the full text of this letter, see Appendix I.

¹¹⁷ Harry S. Truman to John W. McCormack, in *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, 347.

¹¹⁸ Harry S. Truman to Sam Rayburn, quoted in Marie B. Hecht, *Beyond the Presidency* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 187.

¹¹⁹ Harry S. Truman, *See It Now*, Motion Picture 66-3, Motion Picture Collection, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/movingimage-records/mp66-3-through-66-14>.

The Murrow interview aired on television in 1958, and just six months later, Congress passed the Former Presidents Act, on August 21, 1958.¹²⁰ The act appropriated \$75,000 total per year to former presidents. Of that total sum, \$50,000 was designated for staffing an office and \$25,000 was income for the former president. In addition, a president's spouse would receive \$10,000 a year once a former president died. While Truman's television appearance may have had some impact on the passage of this legislation, he had significant help from his political friends. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, who was majority leader in the Senate, argued that the president "remains a public figure after he retires from office . . . the American people still look to an ex-President for advice, for counsel and for inspiration in their moments of trial." The Former Presidents Act, according to Johnson, was "a modest recognition" of a former president's services to the country.¹²¹ John McCormack said in the House that the proposed pension would demonstrate recognition and gratitude to former presidents, whose service was not coterminous with their terms in office.¹²² Former President Herbert Hoover also endorsed the bill, stating, "In recent years, former presidents have had to take on a lot of public duties. They are semi-public servants . . . About the only person who doesn't now have a pension is a former President."¹²³ Once the legislation passed, however, Truman's only comment about it was that he had no comment.¹²⁴

Even in retirement, Truman remained tightly connected to the actions of Congress. In the case of investigations into his handling of alleged spies, he was in the crosshairs of Republicans, defending his actions as president and upholding his anticommunist credibility without ceding any of the constitutional rights he believed he retained as a former head of the Executive Branch. But Truman was more than willing to lobby Congress, both directly and indirectly, to extend him and all former presidents an annual pension. In both cases, his correspondence with congressional members demonstrated his continued relevance in Washington, DC, even as an ordinary citizen.

CONCLUSION

Truman's new life as an ordinary citizen alternated between an average retirement to a stark reminder that he was not an average retiree. For every moment that he savored being separated from the office of president, including the birth of his grandchildren or attending reunions with his fellow World War I veterans, Truman welcomed the national

¹²⁰ For the full text of the Former Presidents Act, see Appendix H.

¹²¹ Excerpt from Congressional Record enclosed with Letter, Lyndon Johnson to Charles Murphy, February 19, 1957, Allowances for Former Presidents and their Widows, Box 17, Advisor to Former President Harry S. Truman, 1953–1978, Charles S. Murphy Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²² "Retirement, Clerical Assistants, and Free Mailing Privileges for Former Presidents," House debate, *Congressional Record* 104, part 15 (August 21, 1958), 18940–18941.

¹²³ "Hoover Indorses Pensions Plan," *Baltimore Sun*, August 7, 1958, 4.

¹²⁴ "Hoover's Pension to Public Service," *Kansas City Star*, August 27, 1958, 1.

spotlight as he sat for television interviews or responded to congressional subpoenas. As Mr. Citizen, he could draw on his years of experience to teach the country about its history and civic responsibilities. As a former president, still with outspoken views, he would dictate his notoriety on his own terms. By the same token, the consequential nature of his presidency meant that the elder statesman would from time-to-time be called upon to defend his actions and statements as president, and to call into question policies that he felt jeopardized world peace that he helped solidify. For Truman, especially in these first years of retirement, the lines between Mr. Citizen and Mr. President were often blurred.

CHAPTER 3

Harry S. Truman Library

INTRODUCTION

During a 1957 interview on *See It Now*, Edward R. Murrow asked former President Truman whether he thought it was appropriate for an ex-president to have to go about raising funds to house his official papers. Truman responded:

The presidential papers of the people of the United States are the most valuable adjuncts, in addition to the history of the country, in addition to the *Congressional Record*, which is taken care of and stored in the Library of Congress . . . and the records of the Supreme Court, which are kept in that beautiful mausoleum up there that they built for the Supreme Court in Washington. All of those records are kept as they should be . . . [Presidential records] are just as valuable for historical purposes as any other records of the history of the country . . . I ought not have to go around the country and make speeches to get money to give something to the government of the United States.¹

Truman strongly believed that it was his duty, as a former president, to provide the American public unfettered access to his presidential papers and related records of his administration. He believed that the federal government had a role to play in this initiative, but if the federal government would not provide the funding or the facility necessary to house such a valuable collection of material, then Truman himself would lead the effort. For Truman, developing a state-of-the-art presidential library would be an important gift to the American people. What is more, such a research facility

¹Harry S. Truman, *See It Now*, Motion Picture 66-3, Motion Picture Collection, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/movingimage-records/mp66-3-through-66-14>.

as Truman envisioned would solidify his legacy. With that educational initiative and duty-to-country in mind, Truman set out to build a team of supporters and fundraisers around the country to bring this historical project to fruition.

The path to creating the Truman Library was winding and complex. Such an undertaking required the simultaneous efforts of working on agreements and legislation with the federal government, raising funds from private donors, acquiring and developing an appropriate site for the library, and developing the scholarly and educational programs of the institution. To generate funding for this monumental effort, Truman turned to his wide network of friends, acquaintances, and admirers. Truman initially planned for the library to be built near the Truman family farm in Grandview. There, he hoped to erect a building that resembled the house of his grandfather, Solomon Young, whose home he remembered fondly. Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., the organization created to help fund and plan the Truman Library, purchased the land necessary to build the library, but, owing to Grandview's distance from the major hub of Kansas City, the Truman Library was ultimately constructed in the City of Independence on thirteen acres of public space, a mile away from the Truman Home.

Once complete, Truman gifted the nearly \$2 million library to the federal government. The transfer placed the facility under the auspices of the professional archivists within the National Archives and Records Service, a bureau of the General Services Administration (GSA). After the library opened in 1957, the research room opened in May 1959, quickly becoming a popular site for scholars to conduct research on the American presidency and life and career of former President Truman, who led the nation and world through the tumultuous post-World War II period. Moreover, Truman wished that the library could be a place where young people could visit and learn about history, government, and their civic duties. The former president often engaged with students actively, seeking out visiting school groups whenever possible. Truman maintained an office at the library, where he would walk to work each day, reinforcing his image as a plainspoken man from small-town Missouri.

THE CONUNDRUM OF PRESIDENTIAL RECORDS

Prior to the 1978 Presidential Records Act, enacted after President Richard Nixon attempted to destroy his presidential records after resigning in 1974, presidents were allowed to retain full control over their papers after leaving office. Historical precedent, dating back to President George Washington, established that these papers were the property of the president and not automatically public documents. Therefore, while many considered it a laudable goal, former presidents were under no imperative to make their papers available for public use. To make matters worse, former presidents received

no support, financial or otherwise, from the federal government to process these vast collections. Former presidents were therefore burdened with using their own funds to hire expert archivists. Former presidents received no pension for their service, so the financial obligation to professionally archive their own papers could be overwhelming.

Under these constraints, presidential paper collections could become fragmented, with portions or the entirety of the collections unavailable to the public. By the time Truman left office in 1953, the unprocessed papers of twenty-three presidents were held by the Library of Congress; seven were incomplete collections. Truman agonized over the possibility of any presidential papers being lost to history. “Too many Presidential papers in the past have been widely scattered and, in some instances, destroyed and lost,” Truman wrote. “The federal government is now trying to acquire substantial collections of Presidential papers that were gathered by former Presidents but not kept intact by the Presidents’ descendants.”² Such a problem could be solved by officially placing presidential papers in the custody of the federal government. But not all former presidents consented to this novel concept, which some considered a breach of privacy. David Lloyd, who served in Truman’s administration and became the first executive director of Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., argued that the president’s constitutional rights required the privacy of some of the president’s papers. If presidents simply surrendered their papers to some agency, they could be subpoenaed by Congress or made public by the succeeding administration. Moreover, according to Lloyd, few people would write to the president if they knew that their correspondence could be revealed indiscriminately, thereby handicapping the amount or quality of information the president might receive.³ “And as a consequence,” wrote Lloyd, “the ability of the President to function as an independent officer of the Government would be curtailed, if not crippled, and our constitutional framework would be damaged.”⁴

Another problem concerning presidential papers is the sheer volume of material. In addition to processing, former presidents were required to take away and store a vast number of records, all at their personal expense. Any repository would also need to be equipped to ensure the proper housing and preservation of large number of records in various types of media—textual, sound, motion pictures, still pictures, and objects. One suggestion to deal with this problem at the time was to divide presidential papers into two categories: personal or political records and official records. The first category would allow the former president to claim them as his personal property. The second category would be left to the successive administrations to handle. Lloyd, who advised Truman about his papers, however, opposed this solution. He felt it was often difficult to distinguish between personal and official records and that breaking up a presidential

²Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 257.

³David D. Lloyd, “The Harry S. Truman Library,” *American Archivist* 18, no. 2 (April 1955): 101.

⁴Lloyd, “The Harry S. Truman Library,” 102.

collection would be a disservice to scholars. Lloyd wrote, “We must realize that in the presidential collection we have a rare and unique deposit of various kinds of evidence, which does much of the historian’s work for him. The totality of the collection is one of its greatest advantages.”⁵

Given the bulk of presidential collections, and the practical and principled objections to dividing them in any way, questions remained about the best way to treat these records that were both personal property and vital to understanding the country’s past. The most obvious answer was to create facilities specifically for the storage, processing, and researching of presidential papers. The Hayes Memorial Library, named after President Rutherford B. Hayes, was the first of this type, developed with the cooperation of his estate and the state government of Ohio. The next library to open was the Hoover Library on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University. But this presidential library was limited in scope and did not house all of Hoover’s papers. Not until 1962 did the entirety of Hoover’s papers become available with the opening of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum in his hometown of West Branch, Iowa. The third presidential library to open was the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York. Whereas the collections housed at the Hayes and Hoover libraries were still privately-owned, the Roosevelt Library became part of the National Archives and Records Service, the predecessor agency to the National Archives and Records Administration. The federal government henceforth took ownership of Roosevelt’s papers, processed the collection, and made it fully available to the public.⁶ Yet, the problem remained that no statutory law or historical system of presidential libraries existed before 1955. All previous libraries were funded with private donations or by a public-private partnership. Only the Roosevelt Library had real investment from the federal government. Up until the establishment of the Truman Library, no presidential library had been created by a former president himself as a public good and maintained by taxpayer dollars.

In the past, presidents often left it up to confidants to weed out materials that they did not want available to researchers. But this method proved to be onerous and delayed the availability of the papers for years—even decades. For example, President Chester A. Arthur ordered his son to burn his papers, losing them to history forever.⁷ Robert Todd Lincoln, President Abraham Lincoln’s son, also burned some of his father’s papers. Lincoln later left it to his father’s two most trusted secretaries to purge the remaining collection of confidential material. Lincoln, who was not trained in archival work, eventually deposited the collection in the Library of Congress but with the caveat that

⁵Lloyd, “The Harry S. Truman Library,” 102-103.

⁶Lloyd, “The Harry S. Truman Library,” 99-100.

⁷See Thomas C. Reeves, “The Search for the Chester Alan Arthur Papers,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 55, no. 4 (Summer 1972): 310-319.

they not be opened for another two decades, eighty-two years after his father's death.⁸ Handing authority for processing a collection to a former president's confidants had its obvious ethical problems. They could subjectively cull or organize the collection in such a way as to portray every decision of that presidency in the best possible light, thereby distorting historical facts. While this would serve to bolster the legacy of that president, it would be a disservice to future researchers.

The best method of handling presidential papers, and the one eventually exemplified by the Truman Library, involved integrating the entire collection into a national system operated by a professionally trained staff. Handing the papers over to professional archivists, even when a former president technically retained rights over the papers, provided some assurance to the public that the collection would be processed objectively and according to best archival practice with respect to cataloguing and findability. Furthermore, entrusting papers to the archivists of the National Archives had clear advantages. It allowed former presidents to leverage the agency's regional record centers and nationwide administration to set up presidential libraries where the former president intended to live, thereby fulfilling the mission of making the papers available to the public quickly, while offering the former president convenient access to his own records.⁹

Two years prior, when Truman left office in 1953, no such system existed to deal with presidential papers, which, at the time, were the president's personal property. While some former presidents had made their papers available for public research, whether through the Library of Congress or a private library, not all did. Some collections were divided, and the government only made attempts to reassemble them many years later, often imperfectly. The Franklin Roosevelt and Truman libraries ultimately served as models of a new system that placed their respective records in the trust of the National Archives and deposited them in regional facilities managed by professional, impartial archivists. The Presidential Libraries Act further ensured that future presidents could follow Truman's lead.

THE IDEA EVOLVES

By 1950, Truman had decided privately that he had no intention to run for president again. With his political career coming to an end, Truman set in motion the defining project for this next chapter of his life—the creation of his own presidential library.

The idea for an institution dedicated to Truman had been brewing since as early as July 1945, only three months into his first term as president. R. B. White, director of

⁸Lloyd, "The Harry S. Truman Library," 106.

⁹Lloyd, "The Harry S. Truman Library," 108.

the Kansas City Museum, proposed the creation of a “Harry S. Truman Room” at the museum as a future home for his documents and personal artifacts. Truman fancied the idea and even met with White on a trip to Kansas City, but the president ultimately resolved that such a site should be in Independence. In 1946, Truman sent a letter to then-mayor of Independence, Roger Sermon, stating that of the “things accumulating which will be of some historical value . . . Independence has the first claim, if they are interested.”¹⁰ Sermon clearly took these words to heart, presenting Truman with a new proposal in 1949 to raise over \$5 million from friends in the Independence and Kansas City areas to build a “Truman museum” in his home town.¹¹

Convincing Truman of any plans to build a monument in his honor, however, proved to be difficult. “I do not believe that monuments any more than memorials should be erected to a living person,” Truman reflected in *Mr. Citizen*. “I think it only fair, not to say prudent, to wait until his life has been completed before we decide whether or not to put up a monument to him.”¹² As Truman confided to his military aide and friend, Harry Vaughan, if such a museum were to be built, he would “almost be in the class with Franklin D. Roosevelt who dedicated a National Shrine to himself,” referring to FDR’s presidential library in Hyde Park, New York.¹³ While Truman would later come around to emulating Roosevelt’s model of a presidential library, he privately ridiculed the “shrine” for its inflated self-importance and indulgence. Nevertheless, Truman eventually relented to Sermon, who began to raise funds through an organization called the “Harry S. Truman Foundation.”

Unfortunately, the museum plan barely got off the ground before Sermon died in 1950. His successor, Robert Weatherford, did not possess Sermon’s creative vision, souring Truman on the proposal. Later that year, Truman pivoted to his own library development project, enlisting the help of trusted colleagues to begin the foundational work. In the summer of 1950, he approved the creation of Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., a private corporation headed by his close friends to begin the process of securing funding for the library.¹⁴ Truman lent his full support for the development plan under two conditions. First, he wanted the library to be built on his family’s farm in Grandview, Missouri. Truman planned to revitalize this farmland in his retirement, as well as rebuild the farmhouse of his grandfather, Solomon Young. Truman’s library would be an integral

¹⁰ Harry S. Truman to Roger T. Sermon, January 10, 1946, Sermon, Roger T., Box 228, Truman Library Foundation File, 1946–1953, President’s Secretary Files, 1945–1953, Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹¹ Raymond H. Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” *Public Historian* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 38.

¹² Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 188.

¹³ Harry H. Vaughan to Tom L. Evans, January 18, 1949, 1949, Box 7, Washington Correspondence, Tom L. Evans Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁴ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 39.

part of this larger project.¹⁵ His second stipulation defined the true intent of the proposed research institution: under no circumstances could the library be a personal memorial to Truman, at least while he was alive. “If the Truman Library in Independence had been conceived as a memorial to me personally,” Truman wrote in *Mr. Citizen*, “I would have done everything I could to prevent its establishment during my lifetime . . . I encouraged the building of the Library only because it was to be a center for the study of all the Presidents and the Presidency as well as the history of the United States.”¹⁶ Although many in Independence were disappointed that the library would not be built there, the officers of the library corporation ultimately consented to Truman’s demands. With these initial concerns now addressed, attention shifted towards the arduous task of transferring Truman’s presidential records.

Truman turned to his trusted White House staffer and assistant, George Elsey, to oversee this process. Elsey had worked with Truman as a speechwriter during his 1948 presidential campaign. Prior to that, Elsey helped President Roosevelt transfer his presidential papers to his library in Hyde Park. Elsey had also developed a close partnership with Wayne Grover, the Archivist of the United States, and together they advised Truman on legislation that would ensure permanent housing for his records. In 1949, the Hoover Commission, an advisory body created by Truman and headed by former President Herbert Hoover, recommended several administrative changes to the federal government, including a proposal for new legislation—the Federal Records Act—to regulate and codify the federal government’s record management system. Congress eventually passed the act in 1950, and Elsey and Grover helped Truman insert, through leverage of his presidential powers, an amendment to the act that allowed the National Archives to accept “the personal papers and other personal historical documentary materials of the present President of the United States, his successors, heads of executive departments, and such other officials of the Government as the President may designate, offered for deposit under restrictions respecting their use specified in writing by the prospective depositors.”¹⁷ Under this provision, the bulk of Truman’s papers, approximately eighty percent, would be transferred to the National Archives in Washington, DC, for preservation and study, with only the papers of the “small office file” going to the proposed Truman Library.¹⁸

Problems followed Elsey’s plan, however. The proposal left both Truman’s records and the proposed library in a dilemma. The National Archives, overseen by the GSA, would be the permanent home of Truman’s records, but the GSA would not be able to manage

¹⁵ For correspondence and sketches concerning the Solomon Young house, see Appendix J.

¹⁶ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 188.

¹⁷ Ellis Lyons, “Draft Memorandum on the President’s Papers,” April 6, 1951, Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/olc/page/file/1542791/download>.

¹⁸ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 40.

the library. Both GSA officials and the Secretary of the Interior agreed that the proposed library would be under the purview of the National Park Service, sparking much debate among Elsey, Grover, and National Park Service officials. This confusion as to which entity would become the caretaker of Truman's records greatly delayed the records transfer. The delay forced Elsey to leave the project entirely in 1951 for a new position at the Mutual Security Agency. But before he left, Elsey handed the existing plans for the library to fellow presidential assistant David Lloyd.

Choosing Lloyd to head the library project had powerful ramifications, not only for the Truman Library but also for the character of all future presidential libraries. His opinions differed greatly from his colleagues, emphatically rejecting the proposal that the bulk of Truman's records should stay in Washington, DC. As Lloyd relayed to the president in a 1952 letter, "It seems to me that if you follow this point of view you will be limiting, if not endangering, the future growth and usefulness of the Truman Library."¹⁹ To Lloyd, the only way the library could become a true center for presidential and American studies, as Truman wished, was if *all* of Truman's records made their way to the library. Impressed with the new plan, Truman wholeheartedly agreed and scrapped his effort to transfer papers to the National Archives.²⁰

This decision set a new precedent for the management of presidential records. If Truman had held to the original plan, presidential libraries would arguably be nothing more than small museums. Instead, the new plan instilled his institution with a vital spirit, ensuring that it could persist as a regional center of scholarship while preserving the entirety of the momentous history of the Truman era. This confluence of research, community, and preservation became the standard foundation upon which all presidential libraries are now built.

Although a boon for the future, this new plan presented an immediate problem: without the storage capacity of the National Archives, Truman needed to take all his records back to Missouri at the end of his term and find a place to safely store them until the completion of his library. As the massive collection contained over three million documents, this was not a small undertaking.²¹ In fact, the pressure of this move became so great that it caused Truman to suffer from bouts of intense anxiety. A month before leaving office, Truman confided to Lloyd that he had been unable to sleep, sick with worry over the fate of his records. "In all my experience with him, his official problems,

¹⁹ David Lloyd, Memorandum for the President, February 23, 1952, Neild, Edward F., Box 228, Truman Library Foundation File, 1946–1953, President's Secretary's File, 1945–1953 Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁰ Geselbracht, "Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years," 43.

²¹ "The Harry S. Truman Library," Gen. Library Info 1958–1966, Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

grave as they were, had not, to my knowledge, disturbed his faculty of being able to relax completely and sleep soundly,” Lloyd later recollected.²² With his departure from Washington getting closer by the day, Truman’s focus shifted obsessively towards his library plan.

Truman’s worries proved to be unfounded; his records arrived back home without a hitch. On the morning of January 12, 1953, twelve trucks arrived in Kansas City loaded with the complete collection of his presidential records.²³ The Jackson County Courthouse in Kansas City agreed to be the temporary home for most of his papers until the library was completed. While boxes piled up in the courthouse’s offices and eventually had to be moved to the Memorial Building in Independence, Truman kept one collection—the White House office files—in his personal care, bringing it to his new office in the Federal Reserve Building.

Although his papers had been given official White House codes and specific index arrangements, these classifications, when amassed together in a full collection, were ultimately unhelpful for public viewing and thus required a top-to-bottom reprocessing of all of Truman’s papers.²⁴ Prior to leaving Washington, Truman entered into a loose agreement with the GSA over the future custodianship of his records. In a January 17, 1953, letter addressed to Jess Larson, head of the GSA, Truman made a conditional offer to deposit his papers in the National Archives under the provisions of section 507(e) of the Federal Records Act. He stressed that this offer was not concrete, especially if new legislation also accepted a gift of a library of his design.

As has been indicated, this letter is not to be construed as a definitive offer for deposit within the meaning of section 507(e) of the Records Act, but only as a preliminary offer or proposal to deposit. It is my firm intention, however, to offer the great bulk of my personal papers for deposit under the cited section or under whatever similar provision is included in the acceptance legislation in the event that the proposed library at Grandview is constructed and is accepted by the Congress. Alternatively, if the project for construction of the library should be abandoned or fail of accomplishment within a reasonable time, I intend to make an offer for deposit under section 507(e), and to make appropriate provision therefor in my will.

Larson immediately accepted the offer and promised to provide Truman with the necessary archival staff to begin processing his collection. Truman’s tentative promise did not upset the GSA but rather deeply excited the staff. “Not only historians and

²² David Lloyd, “The Papers of the Presidents” (draft article), May 26, 1953, RG 64: Case 054-115.

²³ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 45.

²⁴ Memorandum: The Harry S. Truman Library, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., 1953–1957 [1 of 3], Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

archivists, but all the people, are indebted to you for your interest in seeing your papers properly preserved and made available in due time for scholarly research, so that the complete story of today's events may serve as a guide to future generations," Larson noted in his response.²⁵

Truman also received assurances that National Archives staff would help in this massive archival undertaking. Truman waited, however, on presenting any official legislation for the government to accept his library. Fears emerged among Truman's advisors that amid the current climate of increasingly vitriolic partisanship and Truman's fraught personal relationship with Eisenhower, federal support could become politicized. Senator Clinton Anderson of New Mexico, who was leading the early fundraising efforts for the library, had warned Truman not to submit any concrete legislation concerning his library until immediately before Eisenhower's inauguration. Republicans in Congress had been circulating rumors that Truman intended on creating tourist attractions near the library site, accusing his plan of being nothing more than a callous cash grab.²⁶ Truman's special counsel, Charles Murphy, also advised Truman to refrain from pushing library legislation through in the last days of his presidency. If they did not wait until the passions of the 1952 election died down, there was no guarantee that Truman's rivals would not take a final stab by killing the bill.²⁷ Heeding this counsel, Truman paused any further legislative efforts until he left the White House. He gambled that the next administration would honor his agreement with the GSA and pass future legislation to accept his library.²⁸

And this patience paid off—on September 28, 1953, the GSA announced that it would “supply archival assistance to President Truman for the task of arranging, classifying and selecting the papers for ultimate deposit within the United States.” General Services Administrator Edmund F. Mansure, newly appointed by President Eisenhower, put to rest any future conjecture that the library could become a political lightning rod. In his words: “High among the axioms of Americanism is that there can be no partisanship in preserving intact the facts which are the fabric of our history.”²⁹ Preserving this history fell to a pair of federal archivists assigned to Kansas City, Philip Lagerquist and J. R. Fuchs. After first conferring with the Director of the Roosevelt Library, Herman Kahn, the archivists set about the herculean task of preparing the millions of documents for eventual deposit in the Truman Library.³⁰

²⁵ Harry S. Truman to Jess Larson, January 17, 1953, Library—Transfer of Presidential Papers [1 of 2], Box 29, Secretary's Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁶ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 44.

²⁷ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 44.

²⁸ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 44.

²⁹ Memorandum: The Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁰ Phillip D. Lagerquist, interview by Niel M. Johnson, Oral History Interview with Phillip D. Lagerquist, Harry S. Truman National Historic Site, February 16, 1988.

PLANNING FOR THE LIBRARY

While Truman and his advisors were making inroads toward realizing his dream of a presidential library with the federal government, it was necessary to begin the simultaneous work of planning and funding the library. Two of the biggest tasks included fundraising and finding a suitable site for construction. To oversee these projects, Truman and his partners formed Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., in Jackson County. The officers of the organization included Judge Ernest M. Tipton of the Missouri Supreme Court, as president; Tom L. Evans, a Kansas City businessman, as secretary; and George E. Allen, a lawyer and political insider, as treasurer. The incorporation application described Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., as a “benevolent, religious, scientific and educational” corporation.³¹ Over the next several years, the members of the corporation carried out a campaign of vigorous fundraising and site planning activities.

On May 5, 1951, the corporation’s board of trustees held its first significant meeting at the Hotel Muehlebach in Kansas City. There, the board reviewed initial plans for a library to be constructed on the Truman family farmland in Grandview. Although a final selection for the site had not yet been chosen, the board expected that the library would be built on a spot with the highest elevation on the farm. The board expected the cost of the library to be between \$700,000 and \$1 million, all of which would be raised through gifts from Truman’s friends. Owing to the proposed library’s proximity to Kansas City, the board estimated that the library would receive about one thousand visitors daily, about two hundred more than Franklin D. Roosevelt’s library in Hyde Park. Once completed, the board expected that the corporation would donate the library to the federal government.³²

The fundraising objective of the corporation was crucial to the larger project. Truman was certainly a wealthier-than-average American when he left office in 1953, yet he alone could not supply the estimated \$1 million to build the library. Fortunately for Truman, he had many friends, associates, and admirers who wanted to lend financial support to fund his vision. On October 2, 1953, Truman wrote to Dean Acheson that Truman was “having more interest displayed in the proposed Library than I ever had since it started. Two or three of the great Foundations are now anxious to become interested in it.”³³ Acheson responded, “One of the pleasant experiences which I have had in the last few months is the response of friends with whom I have talked about it.” Acheson went on to name several people who had recently donated money to the library through

³¹ “Seek a Truman Library,” *Kansas City Star*, July 11, 1950, 3.

³² “Review a Library Plan,” *Kansas City Star*, May 5, 1951, 1.

³³ Harry S. Truman to Dean G. Acheson, October 2, 1953, Acheson-Truman Correspondence, 1953, Box 161, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

him. “More will come,” he assured the former president.³⁴ David Lloyd, the executive director of the corporation, was similarly optimistic, writing, “The climate of opinion seems to be changing and shifting to President Truman’s favor—and it is really not very difficult to get our friends to contribute, once they know what the project is and if they have definitely been asked to give.”³⁵ People of all backgrounds continued to donate to the library fund. Prominent figures like Walter Gifford, former president of AT&T and ambassador to the United Kingdom, and not-so-prominent figures like an unnamed New Hampshire Republican, contributed sums large and small.³⁶ By September 1953, the corporation had already received \$513,011 in contributions with \$36,634 of that in the form of stocks and land. The cost to run the fundraising campaign during that same period totaled just over \$25,000.³⁷

Truman went to great lengths to raise money for the library. He attended dinners, made speeches across the country, and wrote thousands of letters soliciting donations. During one notable event at the National Guard armory in Independence, an auction went on for seven hours. Truman realized that without any support from the federal government, he would have to be totally devoted to the fundraising initiative to reach its lofty goals. After only a year and a half, the campaign drew in more than \$1 million in donations, thanks largely to Truman’s dogged efforts.³⁸

As the fundraising continued, the issue of where to locate the library remained. After the City of Independence failed to offer a site initially, Truman wanted the library to be in Grandview, where the Truman family farm was located and where he lived from 1906 to 1917 prior to serving in World War I. Before even leaving office, Truman dispatched advisor George Elsey, his brother Vivian, and architect Edward Neild to the Truman farm to scope out a suitable plot for the facility. On January 5, 1953, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., purchased a five-acre tract on the Truman farmland for one dollar and “other valuable considerations.”³⁹ Shortly after returning home from President Eisenhower’s inauguration, Truman visited Grandview to survey the site for himself. Despite the freezing temperatures that day, Truman and a small contingent of local press walked the site and discussed the importance of the library to the young people of America. With respect to the design for the library building, Truman wanted to replicate the house of his grandfather, Solomon Young, a place for which Truman had fond

³⁴ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, October 8, 1953, Acheson-Truman Correspondence, 1953, Box 151, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁵ David D. Lloyd to Bill Foster, October 8, 1953, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., 1953–1957, Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁶ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, December 3, 1953, Acheson-Truman Correspondence, 1953, Box 151, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library; Harry S Truman, *Mr. Citizen* (New York: Geis Associates, 1960), 57.

³⁷ Minutes of Annual Meeting of Harry S. Truman Library, Inc. Members and Trustees, September 19, 1953, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., 1953–1957 [1 of 3], Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁸ McCullough, *Truman*, 943.

³⁹ “Truman Library to be Near Grandview Farm,” *Daily Standard* (Sikeston, MO), January 6, 1953, 1.

memories.⁴⁰

By 1954, however, plans for the site of the library had still not materialized. In January, the University of Missouri offered to house the library on its campus, adjacent to the university library. The university's board of curators indicated that the institution would help find funding for the library, if it were in Columbia, Missouri. But at roughly 125 miles away from Independence and Kansas City, Truman and others realized it would be difficult for tourists to reach Columbia by rail and other means.⁴¹ Another offer came from the University of Kansas City, a small, relatively new university. It did not yet have a research library but offered to provide the necessary land for the Truman Library free of charge and to help raise funds for the construction of the building. The City of Independence presented a third option. The city offered 13.2 acres of land north of Highway 24, known as Slover Park, approximately five blocks from Truman's home on North Delaware Street. This site would be accessible by both rail and bus transportation, being only ten miles from a major hub in Kansas City.⁴² According to the minutes from a board of trustees meeting,

This site . . . has the advantage of being near Mr. Truman's home, and associated with the background of his life and his home town. Ample facilities are available in Independence and in Kansas City to provide living quarters and other conveniences for the staff of the Library and for visiting scholars. Other details of the offer, including the assurance of adequate parking areas and the continued interest of the City in protecting the site from encroachment were contained in the correspondence laid before the Board.

In all three instances, the corporation would offer the library to the United States government, and the National Archives would maintain the facility. Truman believed that all three of these sites would be preferable to the rural Grandview site. But in the end, he favored Independence for all its many conveniences and historical significance. He thought that the sentimental and historical associations of the site in his hometown surpassed all other options. Although a library in Independence would not have the benefit of a close association with a university, Truman believed the many advantages associated with Independence far outweighed any drawbacks. At their special meeting in June 1954, the corporation's board of trustees voted unanimously to accept the City of Independence's offer. The board also authorized the library's architect, Edward Neild, of

⁴⁰ "Truman Leads a Chilly Tour of Memorial Sites," *Blackwell Journal-Tribune*, January 23, 1953, 1-2; "Truman in Guide Role," *Kansas City Star*, January 23, 1953, 2.

⁴¹ Truman Views Missouri U. Sites for His Papers," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 10, 1954, 6D; Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., July 7, 1954, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., 1953-1957 [1 of 3], Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴² Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., July 7, 1954, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., 1953-1957 [1 of 3], Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Neild-Somdal Associates, to begin preparing plans for the design of the building.⁴³

By accepting the city's offer, the 13.2 acres of available park land increased the library's footprint. It also provided the opportunity to purchase additional land adjacent to the park. In September 1954, the corporation provided a check of \$103,755 to the city "for the purpose of exercising options now held by the City on certain properties located on the south side of Highway 24 across from the proposed Truman Library site."⁴⁴ The corporation purchased this land from the city to "prevent the exploitation of this land by unsightly commercial enterprises and to provide an area for access roads and an underpass to the site from the east-bound lanes of the highway." Basil O'Connor, the president of the corporation, expected that the State Highway Commission would use this additional land to build an underpass and approach roads for access to the library. Once completed, the State Highway Commission agreed to reimburse the corporation for purchasing the additional property.⁴⁵

Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., oversaw the difficult work of turning the idea for a presidential library into reality. Not having the means to finance the project himself, Truman relied upon his friends and acquaintances to help him plan and raise funds for his vision of a national research center. Through donations from friends, friends of friends, and strangers alike, the corporation succeeded in raising the appropriate funds. Although Truman had initially envisioned his library in Grandview, he, along with his advisers, ultimately agreed to bring the library to Independence. This decision forever solidified Truman's iconic image as a hometown hero.

THE CONSTRUCTION

The board of trustees for the Truman Library had a clear purpose: "to preserve the papers of Harry S Truman, thirty-second President of the United States, and make them available to the people in a place suitable for study and research."⁴⁶ Construction began in 1955 and lasted until the summer of 1957.

The corporation hired local Kansas City contractors Henry Massman and Salvador Patti to take on the million-dollar project. The former president remarked that he

⁴³ Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., July 7, 1954.

⁴⁴ W. J. Waller to Robert Weatherford, Jr., September 15, 1954, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., 1953–1957 [1 of 3], Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁵ Basil O'Connor to Dean Acheson, November 5, 1954, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., 1953–1957 [1 of 3], Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁶ Minutes of Annual Meeting of Members and Trustees of the Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., September 19, 29, 1953, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: General, 1953–1957 [1 of 3], Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library. Truman frequently stated that he was the thirty-second president and not the thirty-third because he did not believe that President Grover Cleveland should be counted twice.



*Groundbreaking ceremony for the library.
May 8, 1955.*

Credit: Vernon Galloway, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

“had every reason to rely on the ability of these contractors and every confidence in their desire to erect the building as a public service.” Massman and Patti had offered to construct the library at cost, not charging the usual contractor fee, which was typically fifteen percent of the total cost of construction. On May 8, 1955—Truman’s seventy-first birthday—Massman and Patti broke ground at the site adjacent to Slover Park.⁴⁷ Following the groundbreaking, the Trumans hosted a reception at their home at 219 North Delaware Street. 150 guests attended, making this event the largest gathering held at the Truman Home in some time. The Trumans served *hors d’oeuvres* of biscuits, olives, crackers, cheese, and nuts, as well as a turkey and ham. The reception caused such a commotion, with motorists stopping on the street to spectate, that the police were forced to reroute traffic.⁴⁸



*Construction of the groundfloor of the library.
Ca. 1955.*

Credit: Randazzo & Morrison, Inc., Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

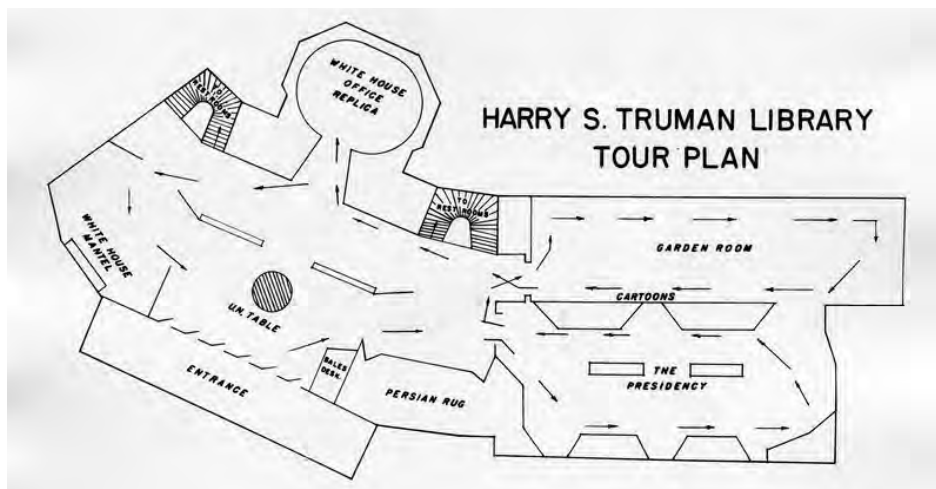
By December 1955, the project costs had increased to \$1.7 million, exceeding the board’s original estimate of \$1.375 million. This increase stemmed largely from the decision to up the quality of building materials and features in the construction. As a result, the project’s timeline extended to account for delays related to landscaping, furnishings, and the addition of an auditorium.⁴⁹ These additional components came after the completion of the building and the opening of the library.

⁴⁷ Minutes to the Meeting of the Building Committee of the Board of Trustees of the HST Library, April 16, 1955, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: General, 1953–1957 [2 of 3], Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁸ “To Truman Home,” *Kansas City Times*, May 9, 1955, 6.

⁴⁹ Memo for the Building Committee, Feb. 11, 1956, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: General, 1953–1957 [2 of 3], Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

The crescent shaped building was constructed using Indiana limestone. Standing at one-story with a basement, the entire enclosed facility measured 70,000 square feet at opening. This includes archival and exhibition space, as well as an auditorium and photographic laboratory. The library came complete with numerous offices to house the staff. One of the larger suites became Truman's main office, which he used daily as a base of operations until declining health limited his work schedule some years later. The library bore several personal items that honored the former president's international reputation. Hanging in the lobby as part of an exhibit of state gifts was a Persian rug that the Shah of Iran gifted to Truman on a visit to the White House in 1949. A dining room set, including a large table and chairs, from the Philippine government highlighted one of the many priceless artifacts from Truman's career.⁵⁰ The prominence of these gifts provided visuals of Truman's devotion to diplomacy and the strong international relationships that he and his administration had developed over the years.



Tour plan of the museum of the Harry S. Truman Library. September 26, 1957.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Exterior photograph of the library. May 3, 1960

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

⁵⁰ "The Harry S. Truman Library," Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, etc., 1958–1966, Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library; "President Truman and the Shah of Iran," November 16, 1949, Photographs, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/96-1050>; "The Carmine Briguglio, Sr. Family Tours the Harry S. Truman Library," March 23, 1963, Photographs, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/63-1435-05>.

Improvements and additions to the Truman Library continued after its opening. In the spring of 1958, the library hired muralist Thomas Hart Benton to paint a colossal mural in the lobby with the recommendation of David Lloyd and Archivist of the United States Wayne Grover.⁵¹ Benton had done other high-profile murals, including one at the New School for Social Research in New York City and another at the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City. As a native of Missouri and great-nephew of one of the state's first two US senators, his ties to the Midwest region ran deep. He served as the director of the Department of Painting at the Kansas City Art Institute for several years.⁵² At first, Truman rejected the notion of allowing Benton to paint the mural at the Truman Library. Truman disliked Benton's artistic style and his portrayal of political boss Tom Pendergast in the State Capitol mural. But after Lloyd and Grover arranged a personal meeting between Truman and Benton in 1957, the two Missourians became fast friends.⁵³



Full view of “Independence and the Opening of the West” in the main lobby of the Harry S. Truman Library. This mural was painted by artist Thomas Hart Benton, a fellow Missourian. April 1961.

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration

The mural at the Truman Library measures 470 square feet and was painted directly opposite the entrance.⁵⁴ “Independence and the Opening of the West,” the title of Benton’s creation, reinforced the library’s connection to the town and its unique place in American history. Benton captures Independence as the “jumping off” point for westward expansion, depicting American Indians, mountaineers, and French *voyageurs* throughout the landscape. Rather than painting a specific event, the scene is meant to present a generalized history of Independence and its role as a trading post at the confluence of the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California Trails where

multiple groups came together to conduct business between 1817 and 1847.⁵⁵ With

⁵¹ Memo from Executive Director to members of the Executive Committee, May 29, 1958, “The Harry S. Truman Library,” Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, etc., 1958–1966, Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library; McCullough, *Truman*, 967.

⁵² Thomas Hart Benton, “Harry S. Truman Library Mural Painting ‘Independence and the Opening of the West’,” Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, etc., 1958–1966, Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵³ McCullough, *Truman*, 967–968.

⁵⁴ Memo from Executive Director to members of the Executive Committee, May 29, 1958, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, etc., 1958–1966, Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁵ Thomas Hart Benton, “Harry S. Truman Library Mural Painting ‘Independence and the Opening of the West’,” Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, etc., 1958–1966, Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Truman's approval of the design, the library thus commissioned Benton to paint the mural for \$60,000. This masterpiece took three years to complete.⁵⁶

At the dedication ceremony for the mural, Chief Justice Earl Warren gave an address. In his speech, Warren drew on the mural's focus on westward expansion. "Independence, Missouri—and the man from Independence to whom the institution is dedicated," Warren stated, "symbolize for all of us the energy, the vision, the sturdy self-reliance, and the love of liberty which opened up our western frontiers." Looking to the future, Warren continued, "It is to this same spirit that we must look today to keep our Nation in the forefront of man's race to conquer the new frontiers of our own dangerous and exciting age."⁵⁷ The mural depicts an idealized version of America's history, emphasizing Independence's significance in the movement west, connecting the perception of pioneers as rugged explorers and the new challenges of the mid-twentieth century. This message mirrored Truman's own romanticized notions about the country's history, namely that the story of the United States has been one of unrelenting progress, despite various spasms of conflict.

BUILDING A LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Truman's "earnest desire" had long been to gift his papers to the American people, preserved in perpetuity as a part of the National Archives.⁵⁸ As Truman was leaving office, he agreed to wait to take up legislative efforts to provide for his library until the political heat of the election year had cooled off. Yet, with planning and fundraising underway, there was still no legal framework for such a gift, or at least in the way he envisioned. Thus began a years-long series of promises, proposals, and legislative maneuvering to bring the Truman Library under the supervision of the federal government.

Since 1952, David Lloyd had drafted several versions of new legislation that would allow the GSA to receive both the records and the physical library of President Truman, as per his restrictions. After years of deliberation, edits, and a thorough review conducted in partnership with Wayne Grover, Lloyd presented the final draft of his proposed legislation before Congress on June 2, 1955. The bill intended to offer an alternative to the more restrictive provisions of the Federal Records Act of 1950. It amended the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 to accept a receipt of a

⁵⁶ Memo from Executive Director to members of the Executive Committee, May 29, 1958, and Presidential Report from the Annual Board Meeting, September 6, 1960, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, etc., 1958-1966, Box 6, Political and Governmental File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁷ Address by Earl Warren, April 15, 1961, Warren, Earl [1 of 2], Box 113, Name File, 1953-1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁸ Harry S. Truman to Jess Larson, January 17, 1953, Library—Transfer of Presidential Papers [1 of 2], Box 29, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

President's papers, along with "any land, buildings, and equipment offered as a gift to the United States for the purposes of creating a Presidential archival depository," and "maintain, operate, and protect" such donations as a part of the National Archives system. The amendment also greatly increased the power of a donor to restrict certain materials to the public, thus preventing records from being subpoenaed or deemed official records by future presidents. This ensured that any use restrictions Truman placed upon his records would remain intact and that the papers would fully belong to the public, at least in theory.⁵⁹ Importantly, the language of the bill, as per Grover's input, was universal, setting a legal precedent for all future presidential libraries.⁶⁰

In June 1955, Congress considered a bill to "provide for the acceptance and maintenance of Presidential libraries and for other purposes." According to a report by the House Committee on Government Operations, the resolution sought to give the Administrator of the General Services Administration, the parent agency of the National Archives at that time, the authority to accept for preservation the "papers and materials" of a president or former president, as well as papers any other official or former official of the United States who served with that president. The committee report discussed the country's need for a new system of presidential libraries, stating that a lack of systematic arrangement for such documents "has resulted in irreparable loss or dispersion of important bodies of Presidential documents during the 166 years of our Nation's existence." Additionally, the report stated:

[The legislation] would enable our Presidents and former Presidents to plan for the preservation of their papers at the place of their choice with the knowledge that the Government has made provisions to receive them in the archives of the Nation with adequate provisions for their preservation, with proper safeguards for their administration, and with restrictions on their use that recognize and protect the President's rights.

The report further noted the bill's goal of "housing within one establishment . . . all types of materials that help to explain the history of a President and his period." It also mentioned the bill's requirement to decentralize the collections, permitting each president or former president to decide where in the United States his records would be located—"a highly desirable objective at any time, particularly in this atomic age," the report concluded.⁶¹

⁵⁹Draft Joint Resolution to Amend the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, Library—Transfer of Presidential Papers [1 of 2], Box 29, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶⁰ Geselbracht, "Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years," 47.

⁶¹ US Congress, House Committee on Government Operations, *Presidential Libraries*, report to accompany H.J. Res. 330, 84th Cong., 1st sess., June 29, 1955, H. Rept. 84-998 (Washington: GPO, 1955), 2.

That summer, Congress voted in favor of the Presidential Libraries Act. On August 12, 1955, President Eisenhower signed the act into law. This act authorized the Administrator of the GSA to do the following: accept the records of any president, former president, or other government official whose papers were related to any president or former president; accept and take title to land, building, and equipment offered as a gift to the United States to be used as a presidential library; enter into agreements with individual states, municipalities, or institutions to use their land or equipment for a presidential library; maintain, operate, and protect presidential libraries as part of the National Archives system; and accept monetary or material gifts for the purpose of maintaining, operating, protecting, or improving any presidential library.⁶² The Presidential Libraries Act gave Truman and future presidents an avenue through which to donate their papers to the government and codified the place of presidential libraries within the National Archives system.

With this legislative victory under their belt, Lloyd and Grover began outlining Truman's official donation letter to the GSA in January of 1956.⁶³ The final draft gifted the library, the surrounding land, and a collection of "mementos, objects of art and other memorabilia" acquired during Truman's terms in office.⁶⁴ Donation of his papers, however, was not as simple. While the letter provisioned a transfer of all the papers held in the Memorial Building, Truman would keep the papers from his White House file and only donate these documents over time.⁶⁵ Lloyd and Grover reasoned that since these papers were believed to be the most valuable in the collection, Truman could obtain a sizable tax deduction by releasing them in smaller annual installments.⁶⁶ Truman was also hesitant to release his records too quickly, for fear of betraying the personal confidences of his correspondents.⁶⁷ In agreement with these provisions, Truman sent his donation letter on February 12, 1957, and within days, the GSA eagerly accepted. After years of tireless work, Truman had finally succeeded in bringing his beloved library under the supervision and protection of the federal government.

LIBRARY'S ACQUISITION POLICY

While the primary objective of the Truman Library was to store, process, and make available Truman's presidential papers, this was not the full extent of the Library's mission. The library also sought records from all aspects of Truman's life, even outside of his time in office, and from former cabinet members and staff of his administration.

⁶² 69 Stat. 695; P.L. 84-873.

⁶³ Geselbracht, "Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years," 48.

⁶⁴ Harry S Truman to Franklin Floete, February 12, 1957, Library—Transfer of Presidential Papers [1 of 2], Box 29, Post-Presidential Papers, Secretary's Office Files, 1953–1972, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶⁵ Geselbracht, "Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years," 48–49.

⁶⁶ Geselbracht, "Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years," 49.

⁶⁷ Lloyd, "The Harry S. Truman Library," 101-102.

As such, the library pursued records from individuals and organizations to bolster the institute's holdings. The Presidential Libraries Act set the framework for the library's acquisition policy. The policy dictated that "the primary objectives of this depository are to preserve the papers and other historical materials of former President Harry S. Truman and to make them available to the people in a place suitable for study and research." The policy also outlined two categories of acceptable records: The papers and other historical materials of presidents and officials serving under such presidents, as well as any recording, including motion pictures, still images, and sound recordings, "from private sources that are appropriate for preservation by the Government as evidence of its organization, functions, policies, decisions, and transactions."⁶⁸

Guided by the Presidential Libraries Act of 1955, the acquisition policy laid out several core principles regarding the types of records the library sought to collect. Regarding papers, the library sought to acquire documents "relating to the life and career of Mr. Truman both before, during, and after his Presidency, including papers collected by Mr. Truman and reflecting his personal interests; papers of his family and of personas who were his close friends and associates in public or private life; and records of business, religious, political, or other organizations in which he participated actively." As an institute dedicated to the study of the Truman presidency, anything related to his national and international affairs met the standard. These included papers of cabinet members, White House aides, other members of the Executive Branch, members of Congress, and people outside of government "whose activities importantly affected the course of the domestic and foreign policies and programs of the United States during those years." In addition to collecting records related to the Truman presidency, the library also served as a subsidiary repository of the National Archives "by preserving selected permanently valuable records of Federal agencies that have functioned or are now functioning in the Middle West, especially those records that importantly reflect the history of that region."⁶⁹

The library collected published materials as well: books, periodicals, and published government documents. These fit into five categories: 1.) The Truman administration, 2.) The life and career of Mr. Truman, 3.) The nature and history of the presidency since 1789, including the history of the exercise of the executive power by former presidents, 4.) The history of American foreign policy and diplomatic relations during the twentieth century, and 5.) The history and organization of federal administration in the Midwest. In fields one through four, the library set a goal of attaining "relatively complete coverage." In field four, the library also included "significant publications" related to

⁶⁸ Acquisition Policy of the Harry S. Truman Library, c. 1958, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, 1958-1966, Box 6, Political and Governmental File, 1933-1971, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶⁹ Acquisition Policy of the Harry S. Truman Library."

American foreign relations before 1900. For the last category, acquisitions were limited to only works necessary to understand and use the federal records in the library. Notably, the acquisition policy stated that the library would not attempt to take in works reflecting Truman's personal interests in biblical literature, the Masonic Order, the American Civil War, and Missouri history. Finally, the library welcomed "such bibliographies and general references works as are normally needed in any special library" and "publications in the fields of archival, library, and museum administration required by the professional activities of the staff."⁷⁰

Recognizing that a modern research facility would have to deal with mixed media, the library set acquisition policies for such materials as still images, motion pictures, and sound recordings. For microfilm reproductions of materials in other institutions, the library placed "special emphasis on the acquisition of those relating to the Truman administration, the history of the Presidency, and the history of United States foreign relations with a lesser emphasis on the acquisition of those relating to Federal administration in the Middle West."⁷¹

As a bona fide history museum, the acquisition policy covered materials for exhibition along the walls and in the halls of the Truman Library. Most of the objects used as museum exhibits came directly from the Trumans. The family donated significant objects from Truman's life and career, including valuable gifts from other heads of state. Although many of these objects were displayed in the library, some remained at the Truman Home at 219 North Delaware Street. Additionally, the policy allowed for the library to accept donations of materials that "have significant commemorative or historical values as Truman memorabilia or as mementos illustrating the nature and history of the Presidency or other activities of the Federal Government." The policy did not allow, as a general rule, for the purchase of museum items.⁷²

The Truman Library was the first presidential library to open since the enactment of the 1955 Presidential Library Act. As such, it was the first to become part of the National Archives system. The acquisition policy, guided by the act, provided the framework for seeking materials, whether they originated from Truman himself or from other closely related individuals and organizations. Notably, the acquisition policy indicated an additional goal of documenting the history of the federal government's actions in the Midwest. Overall, the library aimed to acquire materials that gave an accurate picture of the historical record, with supplemental materials that detailed and graphically illustrated the life and career of Truman within the broader context of American history.

⁷⁰ Acquisition Policy of the Harry S. Truman Library."

⁷¹ Acquisition Policy of the Harry S. Truman Library."

⁷² Acquisition Policy of the Harry S. Truman Library."

DEDICATION: JULY 6, 1957

After four years of hard work and dedicated planning, the Harry S. Truman Library opened on July 6, 1957. The Trumans had been deeply involved in the project, both in terms of the actual building and the crafting of the museum. Throughout the 1950s, Truman was engaged in a relentless cross-country fundraising effort. When he was in Independence, he often checked in on the progress of the library's construction during morning walks. His visits became so frequent that, according to local lore, Truman knew the name of every construction worker at the site.⁷³ While Truman focused on the physical construction of the building, Mrs. Truman managed its intellectual development, often making the final selections for museum exhibits.⁷⁴ As the dedication day drew closer, Truman's visits to the construction site increased, as did his excitement and anxiety over the building's completion and subsequent dedication.⁷⁵



Members of the library board visiting the construction site in February 1955, including Truman and Dean Acheson.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Harry Truman visits the construction site on April 21, 1956.

Credit: Sammie Feeback, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

When that day finally arrived, the community of Independence and library supporters held a grand celebration to mark the historic occasion. The events kicked off in the morning with a Masonic cornerstone laying, with several high-ranking Missouri Freemasons present. At noon guests attended a luncheon served in the auditorium at the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Independence. Admittance to the event was five dollars per ticket. Following lunch, selected groups were invited to tour the presidential library. The dedication ceremonies and formal transfer of the library to

⁷³ Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 303.

⁷⁴ Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 306.

⁷⁵ Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 303.

the federal government began that afternoon.⁷⁶ Over four hundred people were invited as special guests, with ten to fifteen thousand expected to join the festivities as spectators.⁷⁷



Handing over of the deed to National Archives at the dedication ceremony. July 6, 1957.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Dedication ceremony of the Harry S. Truman Library. July 6, 1957.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court Earl Warren gave the dedication speech, connecting the presidential library to the long history of Independence. He likened the opening of the library to the town's pioneer days when it was a trading post for the major trails of westward migration and a stop for prospectors on their way to California during the Gold Rush. Warren connected the former president to this historic place. "Mr. Truman's presidency naturally reflected this daring spirit of pioneer days," he said to a massive crowd, "as well as his own character as a man of action: tireless, fearless, and decisive." Warren applauded Truman for confronting the many complicated events at home and abroad, in which the former president had "little or no time to sit, ponder and mull over historical precedents." Concerning the Korean War, Warren believed that Truman had demonstrated strength and conviction as a world leader: "Aggression was repelled. The war was successfully contained," he stated firmly.⁷⁸ According to Warren, there was no better venue than the Truman Library to serve as a testimony to the historical importance of the early Cold War era.

The underlying message of Warren's speech linked together the future of the new institution and its adopted city. To Warren, the Truman Library represented a national trend of educational growth and improved access to informational resources. "Independence will become even more distinguished as a center for the cultural

⁷⁶ Schedule of Events at the Harry S. Truman Library, July 6, 1957, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: General, 1953–1957 [3 of 3], Box 6, Political and Governmental File, 1933–1971, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁷ "Truman in Gay Mood for Library Dedication," *Evening Star*, July 6, 1957, A-3.

⁷⁸ Address by the Honorable Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, at the Dedication Ceremony of the Truman Library, Independence, Missouri, July 6, 1957, Warren, Earl [1 of 2], Box 124, Name File, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.



Harry Truman, Basil O'Connor, Herbert Hoover, and Earl Warren at the dedication luncheon held in the RLDS Auditorium on July 6, 1957.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

before and since.



Herbert Hoover at the dinner reception held at the Truman Home after the official dedication of the Harry S. Truman Library. July 6, 1957.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

seems of great importance that the history of the American people be brought closer and closer to the people." Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn said, "[Truman] has proved himself to be a great leader of all free peoples on the earth."⁸¹ The dinner capped off a full day of celebration and ceremonies that captured both regional and national attention.

development of our country than it was for its geographical expansion," he stated. Like the frontier families who ventured to Independence at the dawn of western expansion, the students and scholars working and learning at the Truman Library would be pioneers for education. Warren stated that the Truman Library would "safeguard, exhibit, and facilitate the use of its valuable resources that the American people, and all the peoples of this earth, may gain their wide and wise understanding of ourselves and our times, and wisdom to choose the right paths in the years that lie ahead."⁷⁹ These uplifting words captured the mission that presidential libraries and historic sites have aspired to fulfill both

Following the formal ceremony, the Trumans held a dinner at their residence on North Delaware Street, one of the few times that they used their home for statesmanship. The guest list included a "who's who" of major public figures: former President Herbert Hoover, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Chief Justice Earl Warren, and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson, among others. To accommodate all the guests, the Trumans set up seating on the back porch and the back lawn.⁸⁰ Throughout the day, the distinguished guests had lauded their host and the new library dedicated in his honor. Herbert Hoover declared, "We do not concentrate our history in Washington. It

⁷⁹ Address by Earl Warren, July 6, 1957.

⁸⁰ "Reception at Home to Follow Dedication," *Examiner* (Independence), July 5, 1957.

⁸¹ "Key to Dynamic Period," *Kansas City Star*, July 7, 1957, 8A.

The dedication received ample press coverage. The *New York Times* celebrated the opening of the Truman Library as a bipartisan event, “as leaders of both major political parties united to praise the former President and the library he has labored for several years to establish.” The *Times* noted that the library’s archives consisted of 3,500,000 documents and included a reproduction of Truman’s Oval Office as an exhibit.⁸² The *Kansas City Star* ran three pages of coverage, describing extensively the scenery, speakers, and facilities.⁸³ A prominent Washington, DC, news outlet described the library dedication as a “love feast” with Truman, which stood in stark contrast to the written statement of President Eisenhower, read by GSA administrator Franklin G. Floete.⁸⁴ In the message, Eisenhower lauded the “treasure of presidential papers and exhibits” and the fact that “scholars and visitors will have ready access to a vast store of significant material,” but his message failed to mention Truman specifically.⁸⁵ According to a reporter from the *Evening Star*, Eisenhower’s words “achieved complete and chilling impersonality.”⁸⁶ Despite the intrigue in the personal relationship between Truman and Eisenhower, the press noted the affection for Truman from politicians of all stripes. The *St. Joseph News-Press* quoted Republican congressman Charles Halleck, who displayed personal respect for Truman, despite their politics being as far apart as “the Hatfields and the McCoys.”⁸⁷ Much like the library itself, the press recognized the dedication as very much a commemoration of Truman himself.

DAY TO DAY OPERATIONS

Following the celebration, Truman wasted little time in transitioning back to his regimented desk life with pen and paper in hand. He and his secretary, Rose Conway, had earlier that year started relocating the bulk of his materials from his old office in the Federal Reserve Building in Kansas City to a private office suite in the north wing of the new library. Truman reveled in his new office environment and adopted it as a second home. He worked just about every day at the library, including most weekends. He threw himself into his occupation: greeting visitors, responding to letters, drafting speeches, and overseeing the organization of his voluminous post-presidential papers. A team of four aides assisted Truman with these mundane duties, managing his tight daily schedules. Every morning, he walked the mile-long route from his home to the library, arriving sharply at 7:30 a.m.—sometimes hours before all other staff came to work.⁸⁸ As more and more onlookers came out to greet and observe the former president for what soon became his iconic walks through the neighborhood, the always punctual Truman

⁸² Donald Janson, “Warren Praises Truman Library as a Milestone,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1957, 1.

⁸³ “Key to Dynamic Period,” *Kansas City Star*, July 7, 1957, 1A, 7A–9A.

⁸⁴ Doris Fleeson, “The Truman Library Love Feast,” *Evening Star*, July 9, 1957, A-11.

⁸⁵ “Key to Dynamic Period,” *Kansas City Star*, July 7, 1957, 1A.

⁸⁶ Doris Fleeson, “The Truman Library Love Feast,” *Evening Star*, July 9, 1957, A-11.

⁸⁷ “Harold M. Slater, “Chief Justice Cites Value of Truman Gift to Nation,” *St. Joseph News-Press*, July 7, 1957, 1.

⁸⁸ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 33.

found himself arriving *late* to work. To escape this pressure, Truman began driving to the library.⁸⁹ As time went on, he used one of his trusted drivers, Paul “Mike” Westwood, to take him to and from work. The retired president kept up this rigid work routine for over ten years, until health issues gradually slowed him down.

The Truman Library, which opened to great fanfare, represented the former president’s crowning achievement as an elder statesman. His grand vision, which first surfaced while still in the Oval Office years before, had come to fruition. Yet Truman had never wanted his library to be a monument to his memory or to his career. The purpose had always been to preserve the history of the presidency. As such, Truman strove to maintain a distinction between his work-life and the mission of the institution that bore his name. Library Director Dr. Phillip Brooks reported on this dichotomy in a 1962 retrospective of the library’s first five years: “[Truman] encourages a clear delineation between his suite and the Library proper—a wise policy that keeps our staff from being involved in his current personal business and leaves us to manage the Government operation.”⁹⁰ Truman rarely interfered with the management of the library, save for encouraging the staff to “handle the Library and its holdings on a purely professional basis,” free from any clouding sentimentality for Truman himself.⁹¹



Harry Truman speaking to students in the auditorium of the presidential library. June 1960.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

“All this forbearance does not mean any disassociation from the Library,” Brooks qualified, however.⁹² Truman was indeed the beating heart of the library during his years there, setting a “contagious example of energy and happy devotion to work,” as Brooks noted.⁹³ Truman felt content with the monotony of office life, but what really got him charged up was visiting with young people and showing them around his library. Truman entertained large crowds of students in the auditorium, teaching them about American government, inspiring civic engagement, and answering their questions. Each spring, during the height of the school-tour season, these speaking

appearances with school groups exceeded half a dozen per week.⁹⁴ Students from all over the United States, and even from different countries around the world, visited the library’s museum. For instance, in 1963, seventy-two American Field Service exchange

⁸⁹Truman, *Mr. Citizen*. 190.

⁹⁰Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 34.

⁹¹Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 28.

⁹²Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 34.

⁹³Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 33.

⁹⁴Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 34.

students from thirty separate countries had the ear of the former president after he found them on a tour of the library. Truman told the group that he hoped they learned “what the government of the United States is and what it stands for.”⁹⁵ During the first five years of operation, more than 80,000 students from elementary school through college came to the Truman Library with hopes of potentially meeting the famous “President in residence.”⁹⁶ Truman wholeheartedly believed that talking to young people was the single most valuable contribution he could make in his retirement, and these early lectures at the library foreshadowed future speaking engagements at universities across the country.⁹⁷



Researchers working in the research room at the Harry S. Truman Library. Standing in the center is Library director Dr. Philip C. Brooks. September 1959.

Credit: J.W. Porter, Kansas City Star, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Students had always been the intended principal guests of the library, albeit a specific kind. From the beginning, serving the “research student” had been the ultimate purpose of the library, at least to director Phillip Brooks.⁹⁸ Throughout his tenure (1957–1971), Brooks endeavored to fulfill the library’s educational mission: preparing records for public viewing. At his core, Brooks was an archivist, concerned mostly with the library’s documents and providing access to researchers. According to the library museum’s first curator, Milton Perry, Brooks had been quite “averse” to expanding museum and educational programs, allotting nearly all the library’s funding towards supporting scholarship.⁹⁹ And in this regard, Brooks succeeded—on May 11, 1959,

the research room of the Truman Library was opened to the public after years of tireless review by the staff archivists. Brooks celebrated that this “early access” to presidential records “so soon after the close of an administration” was unprecedented, and a clear marker of the success of the presidential library system. Archivists had processed over 90 percent of Truman’s White House Central File by the time of the room’s opening.¹⁰⁰ By 1962, 150 researchers, primarily university professors and students, had worked with those records, leading to the publication of theses, articles, books, and curricula. These researchers came from across the United States and worked on a wide variety of projects, including “civil rights, policy, the St. Lawrence Seaway, labor strikes, antitrust problems, Presidential press conferences, economic controls, the Marshall Plan, the senatorial

⁹⁵ “Inquisitive Tone to Student Visit,” *Kansas City Star*, July 2, 1963, 4.

⁹⁶ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 30.

⁹⁷ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 34.

⁹⁸ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 56.

⁹⁹ Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 60.

¹⁰⁰ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 30–31.

career of Mr. Truman,” among many other topics.¹⁰¹

As the self-proclaimed Mr. Citizen and the ever-present ambassador of his own presidential library, Truman had opened much of his life and career to public viewing. But even as the largest donor to the archives, Truman still held off releasing a chunk of his presidential papers until many years later. Specifically, his donation to the GSA stipulated that he would retain his “Office File,” a collection of highly sensitive personal and political documents—including records relating to the country’s national security. Truman pledged that he would dole out these records in future installments. However, Truman held onto all these documents until his death in 1972. He was plagued by persistent worries that opening such papers could harm or embarrass individual people or even the government itself, restricting their access to just about everyone, including his staff.¹⁰² Limiting access to these important papers drew criticism from several researchers and threatened to raise doubt about the scholastic goals of the library. Despite this pressure, however, Truman never acquiesced. These particular papers, containing Truman’s confidential correspondence and since-declassified national security documents, only became available for public viewing in 1982, ten years after his death.

While Truman hoped for broader interest in midwestern history as a topic among the visiting scholars, most of the first groups of researchers came specifically to study Truman’s own history and policies. With the end of World War II still fresh in the minds of the public and the Cold War conflict heating up around the world, researchers saw the golden opportunity to delve deep into the trove of newly released primary sources on these important topics. As Truman’s presence at the library slowly waned, especially in the late 1960s, operational focus shifted to include an expansion of the museum and public education programs that had long been underdeveloped due to Truman’s adamant refusal for anything to be explicitly dedicated to the study of his own history. Subsequent directors of the library have continually expanded these Truman-focused endeavors, transforming the museum’s once meager offerings into definitive exhibitions on both Truman’s personal and political history. The educational mission of the library has evolved and indeed flourished throughout its history, albeit modified from time to time from Truman’s original vision.

¹⁰¹ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 31.

¹⁰² Geselbracht, “Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years,” 57–59. A major exception was Francis Heller, who claimed to see classified documents while working on Truman’s memoirs.

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The founders of the Truman Library had more to offer the public than just an archive of papers and museum exhibits. Shortly after the grand opening, they took the proactive step of establishing the Harry S. Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs. The library established the institute, later known as the Harry S. Truman Library Institute, in 1957 as a nonprofit corporation to serve as a “national center for study and research.”¹⁰³ The institute’s board of directors included prominent individuals from government and academia, such as Dean Acheson, Chief Justice Earl Warren, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and several university administrators.¹⁰⁴ To encourage and enable scholars to conduct research at the library, the institute provided research grants to scholars, promoted scholarship that used materials from the library, and offered opportunities for fellowships, lectureships, and seminars. The institute also received a \$48,700 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1958 to provide for the purchase of books, microfilm, and microprint to bolster the library’s collection of materials on the history and nature of the presidency, the Truman administration, and the twentieth-century foreign policy of the United States. Overall, the institute was meant to “promote a better understanding of the nature and history of the Presidency of the United States” by giving scholars the opportunity, monetary resources, and materials to achieve this end.¹⁰⁵

The library first opened its doors to scholars on May 11, 1959, when the processing of the Truman papers was complete. Once these papers became available, the library hosted a cadre of scholars from all over the country. Among these researchers were graduate students, professors, and federal historians working on projects as diverse as Truman’s senatorial career, civil rights, the unification of the Armed Forces, press conferences, the atomic energy program, and labor disputes.¹⁰⁶ The library’s collections also gained interest from outside the United States. Professor Sven Henningsen, of the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), expressed interest in conducting research at the library regarding the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute.¹⁰⁷ For David D. Lloyd, the executive director of the institute, the jam-packed research schedule met all expectations. “I think it should be a great satisfaction to the officers and members of the Board of Trustees,” Lloyd wrote in a letter to Dean Acheson, “that the Library is beginning to serve so successfully one

¹⁰³ “The Harry S. Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs,” Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, 1958–1966, Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁰⁴ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 35.

¹⁰⁵ “The Harry S. Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs.”

¹⁰⁶ Schedule of Researchers at Harry S. Truman Library, July 9, 1959, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, 1958–1966, Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁰⁷ Dean Acheson to Joseph E. Johnson, January 30, 1959, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, 1958–1966, Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

of the primary purposes for which it was created.”¹⁰⁸ By 1960, the institute had provided grants-in-aid to approximately more than two dozen scholars.¹⁰⁹ Three years later, the institute had provided ten grants to researchers, bringing the total to forty between 1959 and 1960. The institute limited these grants to \$1,000 per person for costs associated with travel. Following Lloyd’s untimely death in 1962, the institute created the David D. Lloyd Prize, a biennial book prize for the best published contribution to research dealing with the period of Truman’s presidency. By offering this book prize and a hefty \$1,000 award, the institute hoped to encourage new research in the archives.¹¹⁰

To broaden scholarly interest and expand the scope of research materials, the institute encouraged “prominent individuals whose activities have been related to the Truman Administration” to donate their private papers to the library.¹¹¹ In 1960, Dean Acheson agreed to give his papers to the library, becoming one of the first to donate personal papers to the library. In February of that year, Philip Brooks wrote to Acheson expressing his appreciation for the gift and acknowledging that former secretary of state’s papers would showcase “our success in building up the Library’s collections.”¹¹² Other administration officials who served under Truman, such as former Vice President Alben W. Barkley, Ambassador George V. Allen, Secretary of Agriculture Clinton P. Anderson, and Secretary of the Air Force Thomas K. Finletter, all donated their papers to the library. But for the Truman Library to become a first-rate research institution, it would need more than just a handful of collections related to the Truman era. By 1963, the library had acquired a total of fifty-five collections from prominent members of the Truman administration and the private sector.¹¹³

Papers of prominent individuals who witnessed key events could provide valuable and voluminous sources for scholars, but gaps in the historical timeline still existed. To fill these holes, the institute started an oral history program. As Brooks wrote in 1962, “As the work on the papers and on acquisitions progressed, it became increasingly evident that we were not obtaining documentation of many important aspects of the Presidential story.” Rather, Brooks noted, “The frequent visits to the Library of those who took part in the complex affairs of the Truman administration reminded us that there were still at hand witnesses to much of what went on.”¹¹⁴ For this reason, in 1961, the institute’s board

¹⁰⁸ David D. Lloyd to Dean Acheson, July 21, 1959, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, 1958-1966, Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁰⁹ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 35.

¹¹⁰ Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting, Harry S. Truman Institute for National and International Affairs, March 30, 1963, Library—Institute Meetings, Box 29, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹¹¹ “The Harry S. Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs.”

¹¹² Philip C. Brooks to Dean Acheson, February 12, 1960, Harry S. Truman Library, Inc.: Directorship and Trusteeships, 1958-1966, Box 6, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹¹³ Groups of Historical Materials, April 1963, Library—Institute Meetings, Box 29, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹¹⁴ Brooks, “The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality,” 35.

of directors established a program to interview as many witnesses to the workings of government and the presidency as possible. Based on oral history programs at Columbia University and other places, the institute planned to have staff members interview individuals in the Kansas City area, throughout the United States, and even in foreign countries. The library employed rigorous historical methodologies to these oral histories, engaging critically with their sources and contextualizing them with other materials.¹¹⁵ However, one fundamental shortcoming of the Truman Library's oral history program was that, after producing transcripts of interviews, the library would discard the original tapes, losing the key context of the interviewee's voice and inflection while speaking. In 1963, the oral history program staff included Chief Oral Historian J. R. Fuchs and Charles T. Morrissey—who founded the Oral History Association in 1966—as an additional oral historian. The two conducted oral histories of dozens of acquaintances of Truman and his White House staff.¹¹⁶

Much of the successful programming developed at the library can be attributed to its first director, the renowned archivist Dr. Philip C. Brooks. Brooks was a veteran of the National Archives having joined the agency in 1935. He became a founding member and president of the Society of American Archivists. In this capacity, he oversaw some of the first transfers of government records to the new National Archives building in downtown Washington, DC. Brooks later became a chief archivist and assistant to the Archivist of the United States. After working at the National Security Resources Board and the Federal Record Center in San Francisco, Brooks took the prestigious job as director of the Truman Library and the Harry S. Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs. That year, he was given the Distinguished Service Award from the GSA.¹¹⁷ Brooks continued to serve as director until his retirement in 1971. During his tenure, Brooks had a rocky relationship with the Truman family. According to Brooks's successor, Benedict Zobrist, Brooks was a career-long federal employee, and his adherence to government procedure occasionally caused friction between him and the Trumans. Brooks was "very, very strictly bound by government regulations, and when you're dealing with a president and a presidential family, you just don't do it that way," said Zobrist.¹¹⁸ But there was no doubting Brooks's credentials or zeal for maintaining public records. From its conception, the founders of the Truman Library set about recruiting top professional archivists who could guide the institution forward and elevate its reputation as a premier research facility. Few archivists at the time had the pedigree and qualifications to match Brooks.

¹¹⁵ Brooks, "The Harry S. Truman Library—Plans and Reality," 35–36.

¹¹⁶ Sixth Annual Report of the Secretary, Harry S. Truman Library Institute, Library—Institute Meetings, Box 29, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹¹⁷ "Philip Brooks, Truman Library Archivist, Dies," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1977.

¹¹⁸ Benedict K. Zobrist, interviewed by Jim Williams, Oral History Interview of Benedict K. Zobrist, August 30, 1990, Harry S. Truman National Historic Site, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/ooo/dr-benedict-k-zobrist-oral-history-interview.htm>.

In just its first few years, the Truman Library's grant offerings grew tenfold, largely through the efforts of the Truman Library Institute. Between 1957 and 1963, the institute supported a broad spectrum of researchers, established a biennial book prize, hosted conferences, and expanded the holdings in the archives through the acquisition of personal papers and oral histories. By the close of the library's first decade, it had developed into a top-notch research center for the study of the American presidency and the Truman administration.

IMPACT OF THE LIBRARY ON THE IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY

While the newly opened library sat on land donated by the City of Independence, the land that the city gave up for the library was not remote or barren, however; it had people living there. Nestled around the Truman Library site was a predominantly Black neighborhood known as "the Neck." Bounding this community was Highway 24 to the north, Spring Street to the east, McCoy Street to the west, and College Street to the south. Settled in the late nineteenth century by formerly enslaved people, the Neck was a tightly knit working-class community that suffered from the practice of redlining. This discriminatory practice by financial and insurance companies led to a denial of credit, loans, and insurance to residents within the redlined area, primarily based on its ethnic or racial composition.¹¹⁹ With strict reconstruction and financing limitations within the Neck, the neighborhood became crowded and dilapidated. On top of these structural disadvantages, the City of Independence did not provide water or sewer utilities to the Neck and allowed businesses to dump waste there without restrictions.¹²⁰

Unfortunately for the people living in this neglected community, they would face mounting pressure to relocate with the coming of the Truman Library and the government-supported urban renewal project that followed. With the library situated upon a hill, much of the Neck was within clear sightlines of the front of the building. While the homes and other buildings remained in place when the library opened in 1957, changes to the neighborhood began in earnest soon thereafter. In February 1959, the City of Independence applied for urban renewal funds to develop 520 acres of the city, including the neighborhoods surrounding the Truman Library, the Truman Home, and the nearby Independence Square. The federal program that provided these funds was established under the 1949 Housing Act, which Truman signed into law.

¹¹⁹ On the practice of redlining, see Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017) and Gregory D. Squires, "Racial Profiling, Insurance Style: Insurance Redlining and the Uneven Development of Metropolitan Areas," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 25, no. 4 (December 2016): 391–410.

¹²⁰ Alversia Pettigrew, interview by Jim Williams, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, https://www.nps.gov/hstr/learn/historyculture/oral-histories_p.htm.

In 1960, the city created the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) to oversee the redevelopment process. The LCRA split the redevelopment efforts into two separate projects: the Northwest Parkway Project, which addressed the residential area immediately south of the Truman Library and Highway 24. The second project, known as the Jackson Square Project, focused on improving the Independence Square.¹²¹

As a result of the library's proximity to the Neck, people affiliated with the library, including Truman himself, were strongly in favor of the Northwest Parkway Project. Philip Brooks, the library's director, worked with the Jackson County Historical Society to make their support for the project publicly known.¹²² Truman wrote to the city council: "Since this plan involves the improvement of the area adjacent to the Harry S. Truman Library, I hope that it can be accomplished as soon as possible."¹²³ Despite his full endorsement of the redevelopment of the Neck, Truman repeatedly opposed the renewal of the Independence Square.¹²⁴ Truman did not publicly state his reason for supporting the redevelopment of the Neck, but those who represented the interests of the library did. In December 1964, Philip Brooks wrote a letter to the editor in the *Independence Examiner*, stating, "This kind of development should move with deliberate speed to provide sound progress and to avoid the cheap and the tawdry." Brooks continued, "One of the attractive features of the Northwest Park project is that it will provide a convenient and attractive link between the Library and the Square." It would not, Brooks stated, require visitors traveling to the library from the square to travel through the "eyesore" of the Neck, a clear benefit in Brooks's mind.¹²⁵ Residents of the Neck attributed to the library their neighborhood's dispersal. According to Alversia Pettigrew, who grew up in the Neck, "I'd hear old folks sit and say, 'Oh, well, the Truman Library's going to be put there and we gotta get out of here. They're not going to have us.'"¹²⁶

When the redevelopment project began, the city planners had not yet decided on what would replace the Neck. The first step was to acquire the land. Beginning in 1962, the LCRA acquired 208 out of 345 structures in the area and then demolished 167 residences and buildings. A total of 179 families, both white and Black, were forced to move without any assistance from the city or developers. "I'd hear things like, 'They're putting us out.' Everybody was really just kind of self-absorbed in, 'Where am I going to go?'" Pettigrew recalled.¹²⁷ Black residents of the Neck spoke out in their opposition to the project. They

¹²¹ Jon E. Taylor, *A President, a Church, and Trails West: Competing Histories in Independence, Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 101–102.

¹²² Taylor, *A President, a Church, and Trails West*, 102.

¹²³ Harry S Truman to Members of the City Council, December 10, 1963, Independence, Box 262, General Correspondence File, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²⁴ Taylor, *A President, a Church, and Trails West*, 103–104.

¹²⁵ Philip C. Brooks, Letter to the Editor, December 1964, Independence (Mo.) Local Affairs, Box 10, Community Affairs File, Philip C. Brooks Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²⁶ Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

¹²⁷ Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

held a demonstration against redevelopment on July 4, 1966, in front of the Truman Library.¹²⁸ According to Pettigrew, many Black residents relocated to Kansas City, where the racial divide was already stark. Those who decided to remain in Independence scattered throughout the city, taking housing wherever they could find it.¹²⁹ The LCRA continued to acquire property and raze homes until 1968.

Deciding on what should replace these homes created friction and angst among interested parties. While some advocated for new residences to replace the old ones, others called for commercial development. In 1966, Rufus B. Burrus, Truman's long-time attorney, argued in favor of building neither. Burrus wrote a letter to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, stating, "To me it would be an affront to the people who helped build the Library, which includes thousands of persons from all over the world, as well as Mr. Truman, to permit a commercial development of this area directly across from the Library." Comparing the proposed development to the surroundings of the other presidential libraries, Burrus continued, "These institutions are national shrines and should not be detracted from by motel, shops or even housing developments when it is possible to keep them for all of the people as beautiful parks and open spaces."¹³⁰ Although Truman never made his opinions on what should replace the Neck known publicly, as Truman's attorney, Burrus represented Truman's interests. Both the Independence City Council and the LCRA eventually agreed with Burrus and approved an eighteen-acre park on the land. According to the *Independence Examiner*, the LCRA's decision to back the building of the park was because it would create an attractive view for the Truman Library.¹³¹ By 1969, the LCRA had removed all the Neck's original residents and constructed the Northwest Parkway—later known as the Bess Truman Parkway—connecting the Independence Square to the library, avoiding altogether the commercialization of the area around the Truman Library.¹³²

INFLUENCE OF THE LIBRARY

When Wayne Grover testified before Congress in 1955 to support the Presidential Libraries Act, he spoke with an impressively far-sighted vision. If passed, he predicted that twelve to fifteen presidential libraries would be built in the next hundred years. As of 2023, in less than seventy years, fifteen presidential libraries have been built, surpassing Grover's projection.¹³³ Without Truman's steadfast mission to canonize

¹²⁸ Taylor, *A President, a Church, and Trails West*, 102.

¹²⁹ Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

¹³⁰ Rufus B. Burrus to US Department of Housing and Urban Development, April 7, 1966, Urban Renewal Park Across from the Truman Library, 1966, Box 22, Chronological Subject File, Harry S. Truman and Truman Family File, Rufus B. Burrus Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹³¹ "Board Approves Park, but with Reservations," *Independence Examiner*, November 11, 1966.

¹³² Taylor, *A President, a Church, and Trails West*, 110.

¹³³ Geselbracht, "Creating the Harry S. Truman Library: The First Fifty Years," 73.

presidential libraries as an American tradition, this impressive development of presidential libraries would not have been possible. Although Franklin Roosevelt's library was indeed the first modern presidential library, the circumstances of its creation were entirely unique, as it was built under a joint resolution that did not apply universally to founding future libraries. Truman helped create the modern legal framework for the presidential library system, thereby ensuring that every president henceforth could build their own. By setting the precedent for the mission of presidential libraries, how they are created, and how they are administered, Truman, the elder statesman, set the standard for keeping and making available the country's documentary and material history. The former president also insisted that the library not be a personal monument; rather, he wished for the exhibits, artifacts, and programming to reflect a broader appreciation for the government and its institutions. The Truman Library—and the man for which it was named—set a benchmark that succeeding presidents aimed to meet after they left office.

This was true not only for future presidents, but for past presidents as well. On August 10, 1962, Herbert Hoover returned to his hometown of West Branch, Iowa, on his eighty-eighth birthday to preside over the dedication of his own presidential library. After leaving office in 1933, Hoover had planned to gift his papers to his alma mater, Stanford University, but held personal reservations regarding such a donation throughout his retirement. Thanks to the passage of the Presidential Libraries Act, however, Hoover was able to expand existing plans for a historic birthplace museum to include a new library, inspired by Truman's. In his dedication speech, Hoover offered gratitude to those that had made his library possible, declaring that "when the members of the Congress created these presidential libraries, they did a great public service. They made available for research the records of vital periods in American history."¹³⁴ Truman joined the chorus at the event, extolling Hoover as a "great American," praising his commitment to public service as "unequaled in the history of our country."¹³⁵

Truman and Hoover's friendship had always risen above the party lines that had once divided them. Their support for each other's libraries further cemented this mutual admiration, but also signified something even deeper—that partisanship had no place in the preservation and study of America's history. Every president since Truman, regardless of political affiliation, reputation, or critique, has established a presidential library, so that the American people can study the compelling histories of their presidential epochs.

¹³⁴ Herbert Hoover, Address at Dedication of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, August 10, 1962, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070829191024/http://www.ecommcode.com/hoover/hooveronline/HooverCRB/CRBIntro.html>

¹³⁵ "Truman's Praise High for Hoover," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 11, 1962, 1.

CONCLUSION

Believing that the records of American presidents ultimately belonged to the American people, Truman and his allies worked diligently to plan and complete the Truman Library by 1957. Making good on his promise to gift the library to the federal government, Truman left the library and its contents in the capable hands of the National Archives and Records Service, whose archivists would be able to process and make available presidential records. Over time, the library acquired more resources, including the personal papers of government officials, thus attracting many researchers from all over the country with a wide variety of interests. The Truman Library also changed the physical landscape of the area between the Independence Square and Slover Park, where the library was built. The library's construction disrupted the lives of many in the Neck area of Independence who lost their homes in the name of urban renewal. But the library also created economic stimulus to the community, bringing visitors to Independence. Lastly, the Truman Library initiated a lasting tradition of presidents providing public access to the inner workings of their administrations and the difficult policy decisions that shaped the country's past.

CHAPTER 4

Memoirs (1955 and 1956) and *Mr. Citizen* (1960)

INTRODUCTION

In the preface to his memoirs, Harry Truman wrote, “The presidency of the United States carries with it responsibility so personal as to be without parallel.”¹ Indeed, when Truman left office, he believed that the presidency had left a mark on his very being. He felt that his time as president had conferred upon him knowledge and experiences so unique that no one in the world could comprehend. Only he had the full understanding of the decisions he made as president, and only he knew what it was like to be president in such a time.

Much in the same way that Truman devoted his library to enhancing the public’s understanding of American history and the presidency, Truman took on two major writing projects during the 1950s. The first was his memoirs. Holding firmly that he had a responsibility to contribute to the historical record of his time in office, Truman wanted his memoirs to be a full accounting, with documentary evidence, of the problems he faced as president and the reasoning behind his decisions. Truman understood the magnitude of his era as president and wanted to defend his actions to the American public. His second major project was *Mr. Citizen*, a collection of essays on private and public matters. In part, *Mr. Citizen* expounds on what he saw as his role post-presidency and his desire to continue serving the country he loved. Truman took the opportunity with *Mr. Citizen* to educate readers on issues facing a president and what his audience could learn from his time in that role.

¹Harry S Truman, *Memoirs: Year of Decisions*, ix.

Both his memoirs and *Mr. Citizen* served two important objectives. First, he wished to stay involved in politics by teaching the public about the defining decisions of his presidency and his view of the presidency in general. Second, he wanted to serve the historical record by shaping the public interpretation of his years as president. Short of having any defined role as a former president, Truman dedicated much of his time to serving the country in the way he believed he was best suited: by leveraging his knowledge and experience to give Americans a glimpse into the inner workings of the presidency and the role of history in gauging their leaders' decisions. In doing so, Truman made a strong argument for changing the way that the United States used—or simply did not use—former presidents. He asserted the value in giving former presidents an official public outlet so that they may continue to use their accumulated knowledge to continue serving the people, even after the end of their terms.

MEMOIRS

Following the transition to an ordinary life in Independence, Truman embarked upon his first major project: the publication of his memoirs. These memoirs served two of Truman's goals: First, the memoirs provided a significant source of income for the retired statesman. At the time, ex-presidents did not benefit from a pension after serving the nation. Second, Truman wanted to provide a full accounting of his presidency from his perspective. To that end, his memoirs would serve both his interests and those of his fellow Americans.

As a student of American history and government, Truman recognized that he had a responsibility to be a steward of the historical record. Facts were important to him. Up to that point, only a handful of presidents had written presidential memoirs. Truman understood that only he could provide a clear window into the recent past by narrating his time in office through a memoir. "I should like to record, before it is too late, as much of the story of my occupancy of the White House as I am able to tell," Truman wrote in the preface to the first volume. "The events, as I saw them and as I put them down here, I hope may prove helpful in informing some people and in setting others straight on the facts."² Indeed, there is a difference between the work of a memoir and a work of history. As Herbert Lee Williams, one of the ghost writers on the memoir project, wrote:

A volume of memoirs, it should be noted does not constitute *per se* a history book. Rather, it is a narrative of the writer's recollections of experiences through which he or she has lived . . . The historian, who must begin where the memoirs leave off, faces the more tedious and more demanding task of filling in the chinks, verifying and

²Harry S Truman, *Memoirs: Year of Decisions*, ix.

amplifying the data. Memoirs can be quite legitimately what the author chooses to remember.³

Through his library, Truman wanted to let researchers access his papers to come to their own conclusions, but only after he had his own say in the form of his presidential memoirs.

Hampered by the fact that he did not have a substantial steady stream of income after leaving the presidency—and by the fact that he did not think it would be appropriate to join a private enterprise as a former president—Truman saw an opportunity to publish his memoirs as a way to earn a large sum of money during retirement. Soon after Truman left office in 1953, he signed a contract with Time, Inc., for nearly \$600,000 (approximately \$6.8 million in 2023 dollars).⁴ Truman did not receive an advance on that contract, which meant that he had to continue to pay all of his expenses from his existing funds, including the fees owed to his ghost writers. For his efforts, Truman paid Herbert Lee Williams alone \$6,500 (more than \$73,000 in 2023 dollars) for less than a year's work.⁵ In 1982, Williams claimed that the contract was for one million words of copy. Francis Heller, another researcher and writer on the memoir team, later claimed that the original contract was for 300,000 words but was increased to 650,000 without a commensurate raise in Truman's compensation.⁶ Time, Inc., paid the fee over five years, so as to reduce Truman's tax burden, but taxes ultimately brought the net amount to only \$37,000.⁷ Regardless of the contracted amount, writing the memoirs came at a significant cost to Truman, especially considering the scope of the work.

Truman had been thinking about his memoirs for years, but the actual writing of the manuscript took less than two years. The memoirs project began in the spring of 1953 shortly after the Trumans returned home from their vacation to Hawaii. Unable to take on the project alone, Truman first reached out to William Hillman and David Noyes, who both worked at the White House under Truman, to shepherd the book along. Although Hillman and Noyes did not play a day-to-day role in writing the memoirs, Truman looked to them for high-level oversight. Both men flew into Kansas City from their respective hometowns once a month for about three to five days. Hillman served as Truman's literary agent. Noyes provided guidance on the political ramifications of

³ Herbert Lee Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2, Separation of Powers and the Power to Govern: With Particular References to the Truman-Eisenhower Legacies (Spring 1982): 257.

⁴ Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," 256.

⁵ Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," 259.

⁶ Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," 256; Francis H. Heller, "Harry S. Truman: The Writing of His Memoirs," in *Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory*, ed. George Egerton, 257-273 (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1994), 263.

⁷ Harry S. Truman to John W. McCormack, January 10, 1957, Sam Rayburn Correspondence, Box 72, President's Personal File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

the memoirs. Both were exceedingly loyal to Truman, protective of both the man and his legacy.⁸ Hillman fact-checked the manuscript for accuracy and thoroughness, while Noyes made sure it represented Truman's image in a positive light.⁹

Hillman and Noyes hired the first two ghost writers, Robert E. G. Harris and Morton Royce, to write the memoirs. Harris, a journalism professor at the University of Southern California, was a part-time speech writer for the Truman White House. He brought along two young assistants, Bob Goe and Dean Schedler. Harris's primary instrument of research was an audio recording machine supplied by Time, Inc. He used the machine to record numerous interviews with Truman. Harris's assistants would then fact-check the interviews, and Harris would begin writing the sections covered in the interviews.¹⁰ In an October 1953 memorandum, Harris demonstrated a clear understanding of the task at hand: a focus on the presidency from Truman's point of view. "It is the story told not by others but by Harry S. Truman himself," Harris wrote, "a story in the first person, with narrative 'swing' and 'go'—for these attributes of 'swing' and 'go' are essential Truman attributes." He also recognized that Truman had a distinctive style, pointing out that the former president was not "a 'literary' kind of man, given to Churchillian rhetoric; in his formal communications . . . he expresses himself simply, clearly and plainly, with a minimum, if any, of the sophisticated phrases of, let us say, an Adlai Stevenson."¹¹ Harris took pains to transpose the spirit of his interviews with Truman into a written format and to convey his ideas with as much authenticity as possible.

By November 1953, Harris had written approximately 150,000 words. However, Truman was not pleased with the product. He wanted his memoirs to be a serious accounting of his time in office that discussed the various world-altering issues and decisions that his administration faced. But according to Francis Heller, Harris had only used his voluminous interviews with Truman to "come up with a series of pleasant tales." Truman referred to the draft manuscript derisively as "My Life and Happy Times in the White House."¹² On top of a draft, Truman wrote, "Good God, what crap!"¹³ With only about a year to go before the memoir was due for publication, Truman fired Harris. He looked instead for someone who would treat his memoirs as more of a history rather than a string of lighthearted anecdotes.

Because Noyes had hired Harris, Hillman took his turn to find a suitable writer for such

⁸Francis H. Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 1, The Economy in Presidential Policy (Winter 1983): 81.

⁹Heller, "Harry S. Truman: The Writing of His Memoirs," 264.

¹⁰Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 81.

¹¹Robert E. G. Harris, Memorandum on Policy and Procedure: Mr. Truman's Memoirs, October 31, 1953, Topics to be Completed—Suggestions [2 of 2], Box 19, Memoir File, William Hillman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 81.

¹³Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 81, n. 9.

a serious undertaking. He chose Morton Royce, a professor at Georgetown University who was working on a massive history of the world but had not yet published any scholarship. Royce brought the necessary research and writing experience to the project, but he did so at the expense of speed. He often insisted on prying detailed answers from Truman about the topics covered in the book before writing any content. It took him thirty-five pages just to document the three-month period between Roosevelt's death and the Potsdam Conference. With the June 1955 deadline drawing closer, Truman, Hillman, and Noyes decided to bring in a new writer to pick up where Royce had left off.¹⁴



Harry Truman poses with Dr. Francis Heller and a group of University of Kansas students during their visit to the Harry S. Truman Library in June of 1962. As one of the main writers of Truman's memoirs, Heller developed a personal relationship with the former president.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Having given Hillman and Noyes each an opportunity, Truman took it upon himself to find the next writer. Truman called Lloyd Middlebush, the president of the University of Missouri, and Franklin Murphy, chancellor of the University of Kansas, to find suitable replacements to finish the memoirs.¹⁵ As a result of these inquiries, Herbert Lee Williams, a doctoral candidate from the University of Missouri, and Francis H. Heller, a political science professor from the University of Kansas, joined the project.¹⁶ In the Federal Reserve building in Kansas City, Williams and Heller took up separate posts. Williams began working in the library one floor below Truman's office suite, mainly because Royce had not yet left and

was still working upstairs. Heller, who started later to finish teaching his spring semester classes, used Royce's old office, which was next to Truman's private office. This location put Heller in closer proximity to the former president's files and the former president himself.¹⁷ Initially, Williams served as the primary writer, with Heller as a researcher.

Williams and Heller did not have much previous work upon which to build. The pair only used Harris's draft for reference, and reworked Royce's short manuscript.¹⁸ Hillman and Noyes had created the general arc of the memoirs but had not filled in the details.¹⁹ Although Williams and Heller were charged with writing a draft, Truman was extensively involved in the editorial process to ensure that the manuscript reflected his wishes and carried his authoritative voice. Periodically, Hillman and Noyes set

¹⁴ Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 82; McCullough, *Truman*, 937.

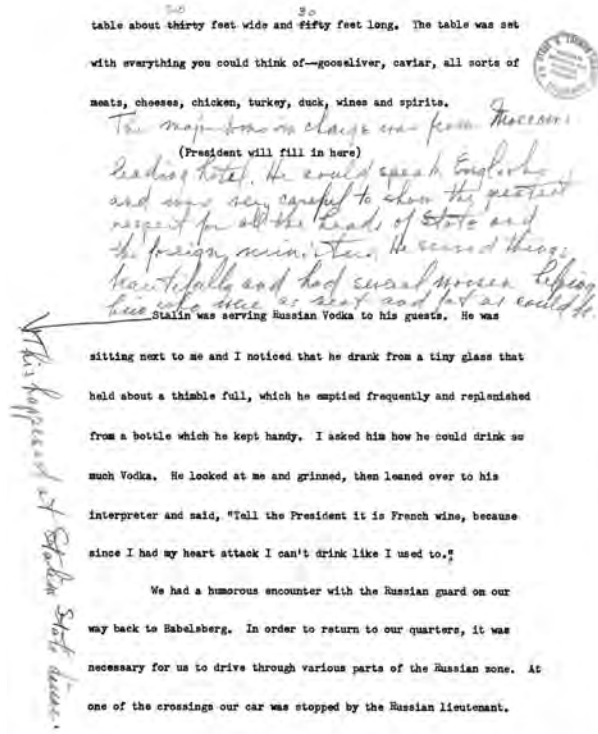
¹⁵ Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 82.

¹⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, 938.

¹⁷ Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 82–83.

¹⁸ Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 83.

¹⁹ Heller, "Harry S. Truman: The Writing of His Memoirs," 263.



A page of a draft of Former President Truman's memoirs. Truman's comments and additions have been personally written onto the page. June 2, 1954.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration

up conferences with Truman and a stenographer in their boss's well-decorated office, which Williams referred to as a "microcosm of the national capital." During these meetings, Hillman often read the draft aloud, allowing Truman to give his input along the way. As Williams wrote in 1982, "The whole idea was to jog the memory of the man who had been there, to add the auto to the biography."²⁰ Of Truman's oversight, Heller stated, "[T] here simply is not a word in his memoirs that he did not personally review."²¹

From time to time, members of Truman's administration attended these conferences to add further depth to the manuscript. Once a conference adjourned after two to three hours, Williams received a verbatim transcript of the discussion, and he set off to the library to incorporate feedback into a new draft. With each new draft, Truman brought a copy home to Bess, who had final editorial input. Although Truman rarely marked these drafts up, he occasionally changed words to suit a broader audience.

Williams wrote that Truman often questioned the accuracy of a date or cleaned up the profanity that Truman may have used in an original document.²² "It was my job to put it down the way I found it; his prerogative, of course, was to put it the way he wanted it left," Williams said.²³

Williams and others had a trove of source material from Truman's presidential papers with which to produce a manuscript. Truman's personal and official papers contained transcripts of 2,003 public speeches and 324 press conferences, copies of more than 31,000 dictated letters, and almost countless memoranda, directives, executive session minutes, and handwritten notes. Each of these files were serialized and placed in chronological order. However, according to Williams, one file series kept in a safe was

²⁰ Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," 258.

²¹ Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 84.

²² Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," 258–259.

²³ Williams, "I was Truman's Ghost," 259.

off-limits, still awaiting declassification.²⁴ Heller claimed to have seen these records, which seemed possible given his security clearance as an officer in the US Army Reserves and his close proximity to the storage area that housed these materials.²⁵ Heller wrote, “On one occasion I ran across material that was so highly classified that I called Mr. Truman’s attention to it. He called Dean Acheson in Washington and within hours a high official of the Atomic Energy Commission arrived in Kansas City to take possession of the file.”²⁶

Although Williams and Heller had the task of producing Truman’s memoirs, they found it difficult to work in concert with each other. They worked on entirely different floors, and Heller smoked tobacco, which Williams found offensive. “Williams was the first person I ever encountered . . . who was not even polite about his dislike of tobacco smoke,” said Heller. What is more, Williams disapproved of drinking alcohol. As such, he shied away from meeting one-on-one regularly with Truman, who was known to drink in the morning and at lunch. Because of these distractions, Hillman and Noyes had to deal with the two ghost writers, not as a single unit, but individually.²⁷ Over time, Heller developed a more personal relationship with Truman; Williams kept it more formal.²⁸ Williams nevertheless developed a personal appreciation for the former president, pointing out several of Truman’s fine attributes: his boyishness, “unashamed of his cursing, drinking and poker playing habits,” but still not above apology; his folksiness, displayed by Truman’s “old-fashioned” home and cordial visits; his humor, which he exercised with a quick wit and self-deprecation; his naturalness, being at ease enough to tell stories about his boyhood; his politics, which he preached, believed, lived, and worshipped; and his humility, never giving in to the temptations of self-importance.²⁹ Irrespective of the true nature of the relationships among Williams, Heller, and Truman, it was clear that both ghost writers had a personal affinity for the former president.

In addition to Williams and Heller, other team members filtered in and out during the writing process. After Ed Thompson, a senior editor from *Life*, visited Truman’s office in Kansas City to find out that the manuscript was nowhere near completion, Thompson suggested that Ernest Haveman, a staff writer for the magazine, join the memoirs team. Haveman only stayed for about a month and spent most of that time editing what Williams and Heller had written. At another point, Doubleday, the publisher of the memoirs, sent Hawthorne Daniel, a writer, to assist with narrowing down the voluminous pages of text. But Daniel’s contribution to the project was limited by his poor health. When Williams left the project for “an unusual opportunity,” Heller stayed

²⁴ Williams, “I was Truman’s Ghost,” 257.

²⁵ Heller, “The Writing of the Truman Memoirs,” 83, 84.

²⁶ Heller, “The Writing of the Truman Memoirs,” 84.

²⁷ Heller, “Harry S. Truman: The Writing of His Memoirs,” 263.

²⁸ Heller, “The Writing of the Truman Memoirs,” 84.

²⁹ Williams, “I was Truman’s Ghost,” 259.

on as the main contributor.³⁰ As the memoirs neared completion, Truman sent drafts out to trusted advisors, notably Dean Acheson and Sam Rosenman, for their thoughts on the entire product. Of course, Bess played perhaps the most important editorial role, weighing in as Truman brought new drafts home each night. Ken McCormick, Doubleday's editor-in-chief recalled that Truman seemed to make better editorial judgments on the manuscript after having talked with Bess at home. "She was his true North, I think," said McCormick of Bess's role.³¹ After years of effort by numerous writers and editors, the team completed the memoirs in September 1955.



Former President Truman holds a press conference at his office in the Federal Reserve Bank to announce the upcoming publication of his memoirs. Advance copies of the two volumes, *Year of Decisions* (Vol. 1) and *Years of Trial and Hope* (Vol. 2) can be seen on Truman's desk. November 6, 1955.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Based on the substantial page count of the memoirs, Doubleday decided to publish the manuscript in two separate volumes. The first volume, subtitled *Year of Decisions*, dealt with the first sixteen months of the Truman presidency. Volume two, subtitled *Years of Trial and Hope*, covered the remainder of his time in office from 1946 to 1952. Truman submitted the first 500,000-word volume on July 4, 1955, and received the first \$110,000 check of his total \$600,000 compensation for the memoirs. The final installment was not set to be paid until January 1960. To gin up anticipation before publication, *Life* ran a series of excerpts from the first volume, which included Truman's first eighteen days as president following Roosevelt's death. On the magazine's cover for that issue was a photograph of Harry and Bess Truman

standing in front of their home in Independence. On November 2, Truman participated in an autograph session in the grand ballroom of the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City. Truman was surprised to find that over four thousand people had come to have him sign a copy of volume one.³² After five and a half hours of autographing, Truman told the *Kansas City Times* that he was "very much pleased with it." When Truman autographed the final book for the day, for a junior high school student named David Nasaw, the remaining crowd "broke into spontaneous, standing applause."³³ Several weeks later, *Year of Decisions* hit bookshelves across the country; Doubleday published *Years of Trial and Hope* the following spring.

³⁰ Heller, "The Writing of the Truman Memoirs," 83.

³¹ Ken McCormick, interview with author, in McCullough, *Truman*, 946.

³² McCullough, *Truman*, 947–948.

³³ "Hand Firm to the End," *Kansas City Times*, November 3, 1955, 1.



Former President Truman at an autograph party celebrating the publication of Volume One of his memoirs at the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri. Over four thousand people attended the event to get their copy signed. November 2, 1955.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Former President Truman autographs copies of his memoirs for a basketball team upon their visit to the Harry S. Truman Library in 1959.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Publication day meant that his work would be scrutinized by the public, including the people discussed within the memoirs. Clement Attlee, Winston Churchill's successor as prime minister, wrote a positive review in the London *Times*. In a letter to Dean Acheson, Truman responded, "It is simply out of this world. In fact, the reviews in England are even better than those in this country."³⁴ Other subjects in the memoirs were less complimentary. Unsurprisingly, Truman criticized General Douglas MacArthur, explaining the necessity of removing him from command in Korea. In response, MacArthur, who received an advance copy without Truman's permission, wrote an article for *Life* that rebutted Truman's claims. After listing the prominent American officials who took umbrage with Truman's portrayal of events, such as former Secretary of State James Byrnes and former Vice President Henry Wallace, MacArthur wrote, "Even so, I would not join in such an arraignment were it not that Mr. Truman's narration does such violence to the truth that to remain silent would be a disservice to the nation." Throughout the article, MacArthur attempted to provide factual refutation for Truman's charges against him for incompetence and insubordination. MacArthur alleged that Truman distorted the historical record because of his "petty instincts based upon spite and vindictiveness which have so frequently led him into violent and vulgar public controversy."³⁵

Adlai Stevenson also received criticism in the memoirs. Truman specifically called out Stevenson for the way he ran his 1952 presidential campaign, namely choosing a personal friend as chair of the National Democratic Committee, setting up his campaign headquarters in Springfield, Illinois, inadvertently referring to Truman's administration

³⁴ Harry S. Truman to Dean Acheson, December 9, 1955, Acheson-Truman Correspondence, 1955, Box 161, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁵ Douglas MacArthur, "Gen. MacArthur Makes His Reply," *Life*, February 13, 1956, 95.



A smiling Truman holds up an excerpt of his memoirs printed in LIFE. September 21, 1955.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

as a “mess,” “alienating” influential Democratic political leaders, and coordinating poorly between Washington and Springfield. In a personal letter to Truman, Stevenson attempted to defend each of these actions, at times giving justification and in others showing contrition. “Well! I feel better!” Stevenson wrote. “I know you will realize that this letter is not animated by vexation, but by the hope that giving you my understanding of these things may diminish a little your own feeling about them.” Stevenson continued, “I know there were mistakes. I know, too, that you will share with me the consolation I got the other day from an advertisement

headline: ‘Everybody has 20-20 Hindsight.’”³⁶ Having been in politics for so long, Truman was not unaccustomed to criticism, and he surely believed it unlikely that his recounting of this divisive time would escape such feedback.

The press also had their say about the memoirs. Historian Allan Nevins wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that volume one was “written in precisely the way we would expect: crisp, vigorous, honest, sometimes a bit over-simplified, and with his own appealing mixture of modesty and self-confidence.” Although Nevins did not believe that it was written well enough to “achieve a place among the best memoirs of our time,” he did think it was a “frank depiction of Mr. Truman’s mind and character.”³⁷ *The New Yorker* wrote that Truman’s memoirs provided “a more detailed report on life at the summit of American politics than a President has given since the early days of the Republic.”³⁸ The London *Times* noted that, while Truman’s memoirs did not tell us anything new about the history of certain events, it filled in the important gaps about Truman’s personal thoughts. “The President was bound to write a valuable and authoritative book,” the *Times* wrote. “The man makes it enthralling.” The memoirs did not draw high marks from reviewers for style, but most did appreciate Truman’s attempt to provide a thorough and thoughtful accounting of his time in office.

In undertaking the task of producing his memoirs, Truman sought to contribute his point of view, along with ample documentary evidence, to the historical record. Knowing, as a student of history, that many presidents had never been willing or able to

³⁶ Adlai Stevenson, II to Harry S Truman, January 10, 1956, Chronological File, 1956, Box 1, Chronological File, David M. Noyes Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁷ Allan Nevins, “That First Year, Those Fateful Days,” *New York Times Book Review*, November 6, 1955, 52, Truman, Harry S. Clippings and Book Reviews, Box 20, Memoirs File, William Hillman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁸ Quoted in David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 948.

publish their perspectives on their presidencies, Truman believed it would benefit the country to include his voice in the discussion of such a consequential historical period. Having secured a handsome payment for his efforts—but only after the memoirs were published—Truman fronted substantial financial resources to complete this project. With so many different personalities involved in producing the memoirs, complications arose. Two writers hired to craft the memoirs' prose did not deliver what Truman wanted in substance or pace, so an already labor- and time-intensive task was compressed into a little over a year. Nevertheless, Truman was able to deliver to his publisher the first volume of his lengthy memoirs by July 1955 and the second volume by September of the same year. The two-volume work was finally published in the fall of 1955 and spring of 1956, respectively, during which time it received positive reviews from the media. Not surprisingly, however, Truman's memoirs received harsh repudiation from those who were targets of his written criticism. Never one to please everybody, and assured of the forthrightness of his work, Truman was glad to have his say.

MR. CITIZEN

When Truman left office in 1953, no contemporary precedent existed as to what role former presidents should have in American society. Truman was one of only two living former presidents at the time, the other being Herbert Hoover, a man whose retirement had been highly unenviable. Remembrance of Hoover's presidency had been long marred by the devastating poverty of the Great Depression and harsh critique of his ineffective policies and executive management. As a private citizen, Hoover faced a public that held him in contempt and was summarily cast out as a political pariah for over fifteen years, although his public image improved somewhat through his work within the Truman administration. As for Franklin Roosevelt, who died in office, one could only guess as to what his retirement would have looked like. With no modern examples of a "normal" post-presidential life to emulate, Truman was indeed entering uncharted territory when he retired, and it appeared that all were watching. Truman's approval ratings were dismally low when he left the White House, but the public, the press, and the Democratic Party remained deeply interested in his future. Only days into his retirement, he was already constantly prodded by reporters, admirers, and critics alike, and it seemed that the spotlight would forever be on the "Man from Independence." Clearly, Truman had amassed influence and prestige much greater than his ratings would have projected. This then begged the question, for both himself and eager onlookers: what would Harry Truman do next?

Some answers came easily: building a presidential library, writing memoirs, spending time with friends and family. Yet, one of Truman's primary retirement goals remained ever elusive. "Long before I had even the remotest notion that I would become President,"

Truman recalled, “I had felt that the Nation was wasteful in not making use of the unique experience of our Chief Executives who survived their term of office, sound of mind and body.”³⁹ Truman frequently bemoaned the “long neglect in not making available to our country the counsel and knowledge of former Presidents,” and endeavored to change this.⁴⁰ When food shortages threatened a war-torn Europe in the aftermath of World War II, Truman called upon Herbert Hoover to oversee humanitarian aid efforts in the region, leaning on Hoover’s expertise as both a former president and seasoned philanthropist. Truman hoped that these temporary returns to public service could become standard for all future ex-presidents.

As the early months of Truman’s retirement passed by, however, President Eisenhower made no such overtures. This was perhaps no surprise, seeing as the pair’s relationship had become quite strained after their campaign-trail sparring in 1952. They had traded explosive verbal barbs, almost always personal. Truman once said of Eisenhower that “the General doesn’t know any more about politics than a pig knows about Sunday.” Truman accused Eisenhower of suffering from an acute “moral blindness,” as the latter failed to condemn Senator Joseph McCarthy’s flagrant allegations against General George C. Marshall, who was Truman’s secretary of state, secretary of defense, and close friend. Eisenhower, unfamiliar with this more caustic side of politics, took these attacks quite personally and began cutting all ties with Truman. When Truman attempted to advise Eisenhower on current affairs and to prepare him for the upcoming presidential transition at a briefing on November 18, 1952, Eisenhower rebuked him. As Eisenhower noted privately, Truman’s advice “added little to my knowledge, nor did it affect my planning for the new administration.”⁴¹ This dismissal typified their relationship moving forward, and Eisenhower never once called upon Truman’s counsel during his eight years in office.

It is important to note that Truman’s desire to advise the country was unmotivated by a potential return to political power. In fact, Truman believed wholeheartedly in the importance of a former president’s return to civilian life.

How does it feel to give up the power and the great heights of the Presidency and once again be just a plain citizen?

This is one of the questions most persistently asked me by people curious about what goes on in the mind of a man who, in a matter of a few minutes, moves from the spotlight at the center of the world’s greatest power to retirement and designed

³⁹Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 9.

⁴⁰Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 10.

⁴¹Daniel Vermilya, “Ike and Truman’s Strained and Tumultuous Relationship on Inauguration Day, 1953,” *Eisenhower Dispatch*, January 5, 2021.

obscurity. In the time that it takes for the Chief Justice of the United States, on Inaugural Day, to administer the oath of office to the new President, a transfer of power takes place that is unparalleled in all history.

Whatever my personal feelings were at the moment I ceased to be President, the thought that was foremost in my mind was how orderly and simple was the transference of this great power vested by the people in their Chief Executive. This event, which takes place every four years except when a President dies in office, reaffirms the soundness and reality of our great Republic.⁴²

Truman was extremely proud of his new role as “Mr. Citizen,” as it proved, in a time of great uncertainty about America’s future on the global stage, that the fundamentals of the American democratic system remained resolute. He delighted in the fact that after a career that brought “a fellow who started on a farm” all the way “from precinct to Presidency,” he could return to a private life; of course, this was never as simple in practice.⁴³ Amidst the revelry and parades that welcomed Truman home to Independence, it became clear that he would remain “Mr. President” to many. While flattered, Truman remarked that such comments embarrassed him: “From that evening on I did everything I could to discourage such things by explaining that I was now just plain Mr. Citizen,” he remarked.⁴⁴

That is not to say that Truman planned on removing himself entirely from the world of politics. His hopes endured that he could advise future presidential administrations, and he “had known all along that [he] could never and would never detach [him]self from the active interest and participation in the affairs of the nation.”⁴⁵ Truman now had to contemplate what the nature of this future involvement would be. The mounting confluence of circumstances—Eisenhower’s stonewalling, Truman’s desire to share his expertise and ideas, and his firm posturing as a private citizen—offered a possible solution. While his memoirs reflected upon his time in office, Truman had yet to say anything at length about his ruminations, both political and personal, since entering retirement. He remarked that this long silence stemmed from a fear that any admissions would appear “self-serving.”⁴⁶ But by 1959, enough time had passed to share the thoughts he had gathered since leaving office. If the current administration would not call upon Truman as an elder statesman, he would exercise his rights as a private citizen and give advice freely to the American people by way of his own plain speaking.

So resolved, Truman began preparing his next manuscript, *Mr. Citizen*, in the fall of

⁴²Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 9.

⁴³Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 27.

⁴⁴Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 23.

⁴⁵Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 26.

⁴⁶Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 10.



Former President Truman announces the upcoming publication of his new book, *Mr. Citizen*, at a press conference on August 21, 1959.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

folksy demeanor and manner of expression.⁴⁹ Since the central goal of *Mr. Citizen* was exploring Truman's life as a common citizen, it needed to convey a more personal tone. Thankfully, achieving this authentic "Truman-ness" was not as painstaking and fruitless as it had been with his previous memoirs.

1959.⁴⁷ The scope of his new book, as Truman coyly noted in its preface, was to present "something of what happened to one former President after his return to private life."⁴⁸ Truman again employed William Hillman and David Noyes to help write and compile the project, but the trio believed that it should capture a decidedly different tone from Truman's presidential memoirs. *Year of Decisions* and *Years of Trial and Hope* had come under fire by critics for lacking Truman's unique voice. The volumes felt overly academic and stuffy, a far cry from Truman's

The solution proved to be quite simple—let Truman speak. Starting on September 9, 1959, Hillman and Noyes recorded a series of conversations with Truman that formed almost the entirety of the book.⁵⁰ These interviews covered a broad range of topics, from the existential plights of former presidents to what Truman usually ate for breakfast. Unlike his previous memoirs, *Mr. Citizen* took a limited approach to ghostwriting and editing that preserved more of Truman's unfiltered opinions. Take, for example, Truman's answer to a question about what he wished for the futures of the Truman grandchildren, which became part of the chapter, "Reflections of a Grandfather":

HST: I don't care about trying to tell them what they ought to be or what they have to be or anything of the kind. That's going to be up to them. It doesn't do any good for the old folks to interfere in the raising of a family of the next generation. That's the job of the mother and father of that generation and, of course, grandparents have a special interest in the grandchildren, but they ought to keep their noses out of the raising of the children.⁵¹

Compare that line of questioning to Truman's thoughts as they appeared in the published

⁴⁷ Interview with Harry S Truman, September 8, 1959, Truman Interview Transcript—Tape No. 1, September 8, 1959, Box 6, *Mr. Citizen* File, William Hillman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁸ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 10.

⁴⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, 948.

⁵⁰ Interview with Harry S Truman, September 8, 1959.

⁵¹ Interview with Harry S Truman, October 23, 1959, Truman Interview Transcript—Tape No. 14, October 23, 1959, Box 7, *Mr. Citizen* File, William Hillman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

version:

I do not think grandparents should interfere in the business of raising grandchildren when the parents are perfectly capable of doing it . . . Parents cannot do what they have to do if they get undue interference from their “ancestors.” We are not going to meddle.⁵²



Harry Truman autographing multiple copies of his newly published book Mr. Citizen. June 9, 1960.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



A Jones Store window in Independence, Missouri, decorated with Truman memorabilia, including books and photographs. Truman's newly published book, Mr. Citizen, is also being advertised. June 1, 1960.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

The published version is not a verbatim retelling of Truman's initial interview response, as Hillman and Noyes made small but noticeable changes and added a few flourishes. Yet, these edits did not come at the expense of diluting Truman's distinct voice and direct manner of speaking.

In further contrast to his memoirs, the primary and secondary source material used for *Mr. Citizen*, save for the oral history interviews, is sparse. It is safe to assume, however, given Truman's previous work with Hillman and Noyes, that the drafting likely continued along these lines: Hillman and Noyes combing over hours of recorded dialogue, compiling and lightly editing Truman's raw opinions, and presenting drafts for comment and approval. It appears as well that this lean approach facilitated a much less dramatic creative exchange and greatly expedited the book's publication. As a result, *Mr. Citizen* was published in May of 1960, less than a year after work began on the volume.

The book received a mixed reception from critics. Promotional materials leading up to the book release promised that in *Mr. Citizen*, Truman would “answer all the questions you’ve wanted to fire at him since he first took office,” and “take you behind the headlines and into his uniquely active life.”⁵³ To some, it read exactly as advertised. A glowing review from the *Sunday Gazette-Mail* in West Virginia touted that the book “succeeded in bringing the Presidency off

⁵² Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 201.

⁵³ “Mr. Citizen By Harry S. Truman,” *Kansas City Star*, June 11, 1960, 7.

of its pedestal and getting it down where everyone can take a good look at it.”⁵⁴ Several reviewers, however, felt that *Mr. Citizen* had been oversold as a meaty confessional. “Advance publicity for the book gave every indication that the author intended to get a few things off his chest,” wrote critic Haines Colbert of the *Miami News*. “Mr. Truman is a fine old man. But he’s written a very dull book.”⁵⁵ The public had eagerly awaited admissions from Truman about his numerous personal feuds, but the final publication was far from the tell-all for which many had hoped.

Yet Truman *did* address two of his most sensationalized personal disagreements, beginning *Mr. Citizen* with a diatribe on Eisenhower’s Inauguration Day slights. As Truman recalled:

We had prepared, on Inauguration Day, to receive the President-elect and his family at an informal lunch at the White House. We were disappointed when the invitation was refused and the custom ignored. The President-elect chose to arrive at the White House when there was only enough time to go to the Capitol for the taking of the Presidential oath.

As a result of that snub, Truman cancelled all plans for a lunch with the Eisenhower family to avoid further embarrassment and made himself ready to receive his successor at the White House. The traditional ceremonial reception of the president-elect at the White House had been skipped just once in American history.

It had been the custom for the President-elect to call on the outgoing President before going to the Inauguration ceremonies . . . The exception was Thomas Jefferson, and he could not very well have called on President Adams at the White house on Inaugural Day—because Adams had left in ill temper at midnight the day before just to avoid riding with Jefferson.

Thus, it came as quite the surprise when Truman was informed that the president-elect “declined to come in” and “remained in his car at the portico of the White House,” forcing Truman to come to Eisenhower instead.⁵⁶ “I have but one purpose in telling of these Inaugural Day incidents,” Truman later qualified in *Mr. Citizen*. “What was on my mind on that Inauguration Day, and since, has been regret that relentless grudges should so color the thinking and actions of men in trusted leadership.”⁵⁷ He argued that “there is no sense in carrying political animosity into personal affairs.”⁵⁸ Until the release of *Mr.*

⁵⁴ James F. Dent, “Mr. Truman and the Presidency,” *Sunday Gazette-Mail*, June 19, 1960, 64.

⁵⁵ Haines Colbert, “Truman’s ‘Mr. Citizen’ Diplomatic and Dull,” *Miami News*, June 5, 1960, 22.

⁵⁶ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 19.

⁵⁷ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 20.

⁵⁸ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 21.

Citizen, Truman had yet to speak in detail about the pair's interpersonal feud. These admissions in his new book grabbed headlines and furthered the wedge between the two leaders.

Truman had also refrained from sharing his complaints about Adlai Stevenson. As the Democratic nominee for president in 1952, Stevenson had been trounced by Eisenhower. Truman, fearing his rebuke of Stevenson might lead to a repeat landslide in 1956, was "prepared to contribute to party unity" and support Stevenson even though he "wished that some other national figures might . . . come to the fore."⁵⁹ But with the end of Eisenhower's second term looming and other Democratic hopefuls in line for the 1960 nomination, Truman felt compelled to finally share the concerns he had about Stevenson in a tell-all chapter, "Concerning Adlai Stevenson."



*President Truman meeting with Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson and Alabama Senator John Sparkman on August 12, 1952. Stevenson and Sparkman had recently accepted the Democratic nominations for president and vice president. Truman recounts his painstaking attempts to convince Stevenson to accept the nomination in his book *Mr. Citizen*.*

Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service

the campaign.⁶¹ But Truman later regretted this, believing that Stevenson "conducted a campaign that was not in support of the Democratic program of President Roosevelt and myself," and thus felt uneasy at the prospect of a second nomination for Stevenson in 1956.⁶²

Truman lamented further that Stevenson was embarrassed to be politically associated with "this farmer from Missouri," and began taking strides at the 1956 convention to

Reflecting back on the 1952 election, Truman wrote of the arduous task of first convincing Stevenson to run for president. After three failed attempts to persuade him to accept a nomination, Truman received a fateful call "out of the clear, on the day when the Presidential candidate was to be nominated" from Stevenson asking if Truman "would object" to his presidential bid.⁶⁰ In *Mr. Citizen*, Truman wrote about his explosive response to Stevenson. "Well, I blew up," Truman wrote. "I talked to him in language I think he had never heard before. I told him that for months I had been trying to get him to be the candidate. Now at the last possible moment, he had changed his mind." Although angered by his indecision, Truman still believed Stevenson was "the best prospect we had" and pledged support to him for the remainder of

⁵⁹ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 79.

⁶⁰ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 76–77.

⁶¹ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 77.

⁶² Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 78.

sever their perceived association, no matter the reputational risk.⁶³ Truman publicly supported the candidacy of Averell Harriman, Governor of New York, for the Democratic nomination that year. Truman was passionate about this decision, one that critics from his own party decried as a total loss of “all political judgement.” Some in the party felt that Truman’s “usefulness in Democratic politics [was] over.” To Truman, this controversial move served to galvanize the party around Stevenson, a unifying “thunderbolt” that would force Stevenson to fight for the nomination and thus prove his presidential credentials. Moreover, Truman recalled that after the smoke cleared from his rhetorical bomb, “one thing was certain: Any ties that Stevenson thought he had had with me, or thought it expedient to have with me, were now effectively severed. Any political liability he fancied I represented to his cause was now removed.”⁶⁴

Again, Stevenson won the nomination with Truman supporting his candidacy. In his book, Truman noted that he “undertook one of the most exhausting schedules of personal appearances I had ever assumed,” to get Stevenson elected.⁶⁵

Truman soon realized that Stevenson still could not overcome his own indecisiveness. At a meeting in Chicago, Stevenson continued to ask of Truman: “What is it I am doing wrong?”⁶⁶ In response, Truman pointed out the window to a random man standing at their hotel’s entrance and answered, “The thing you have got to do is to learn how to reach that man.” He recounted in *Mr. Citizen*: “I was trying, as gently as I could, to tell this man—so gifted in speech and intellect and yet so apparently uncertain of himself and remote from the people that he had to learn how to communicate with the man in the street.”⁶⁷

Truman avowed in his narrative that he “never carried over any grudges” from his years in politics. But as a syndicated critic from the *New York Herald Tribune* noted in their review of *Mr. Citizen*: “President Eisenhower, whom he virtually accuses of discourtesy, and Adlai Stevenson, whom he found lacking in the decisiveness required of a President, might question this generosity.”⁶⁸ The fact that Truman devoted chapters to his tiffs with these two men, both of whom he had once respected, seems to evince a clear inconsistency in Truman’s thick-skinned posturing. While this contradiction was perhaps unintentional, the remainder of the book quite purposefully examines the “perfectly natural contradiction” of being both a former President and a private citizen.⁶⁹

⁶³ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 80.

⁶⁴ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 81.

⁶⁵ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 82.

⁶⁶ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 74.

⁶⁷ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 74–75.

⁶⁸ John K. Hutchens, “Citizen from Independence,” *Decatur Daily Review*, June 14, 1960, 6.

⁶⁹ Haines Colbert, “Truman’s ‘Mr. Citizen’ Diplomatic and Dull,” *Miami News*, June 5, 1960, 22.

In fact, the most poignant passages of *Mr. Citizen* find Truman lamenting what he believes to be the failings of this dual existence. To illustrate this point, Truman again turned to President Hoover and his treatment after leaving the White House.

I shall never be able to understand the long neglect of Herbert Hoover, no matter what the events and circumstances of his Administration were. How history may eventually assess his Administration we ought to leave to history . . . Like all men who occupied the office of President, Mr. Hoover was just like the rest of us. He wanted to do exactly what was right.⁷⁰

Truman reminded his readers of the virtue of wisdom of former presidents and that the country would ultimately benefit from their continued public service long after leaving office.

President Hoover's contributions again impressed me with the fact that a man who has had the experience of a President, or a Vice President, or a Speaker of the House, gets a chance to become much more familiar with our government than any one else. These are the men to whom we must look for help and counsel. That is why we must not shelve or thrust into obscurity men with such unique experience. And least of all, our former Presidents.⁷¹

Although Truman repeatedly referred to President Hoover in this context, he wanted his readers to know that he, too, could serve the country in some capacity as an elder statesman. He desperately wanted to remain relevant in the public eye, but Truman found it hard to "speak his mind" and share his ideas productively.

As a private citizen, I had hoped to be able to talk as freely as any private citizen is entitled to speak, or at least as freely as some people thought I did as President. But I had to adjust myself soon after returning home to the fact that I had to be very careful about what I said publicly, and sometimes even privately, on any subject, be it how to bring up children or what to do about Russia.

When a former President speaks, people continue to pay attention to what he has to say, even if they pay no attention to the advice he gives.⁷²

In the chapter "What to Do with Former Presidents," Truman offered some ideas for how retired leaders could share their opinions to the broader public.

⁷⁰Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 118.

⁷¹Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 121–122.

⁷²Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 107.

Congress should pass enabling legislation designating former Presidents of the United States as *Free Members of the Congress*.

These Free Members would have the right to sit on the floor of the Senate and of the House on all occasions.

They would have the right to take part in debate, subject, of course, to the parliamentary procedures in each house.

The Free Members *would not have the right to vote*.

They *would* have the right to sit in on any meetings of any committee, subcommittee or joint committee of both houses and take part in discussions. Here, too, they would not have the right of vote.

Free Members would be assigned suitable office space in the congressional buildings.⁷³

With the publication of *Mr. Citizen*, Truman had come to recognize that the only way to ensure a continuity of presidential knowledge and advising was to enshrine it in legislation. From its very first pages, *Mr. Citizen* argued that there must be a decisive change in the way our nation uses its former presidents. Amid its collection of personal and political reflections, this argument remained central to the book, every anecdote and story supporting this fundamental point of view of a very outspoken elder statesman.

CONCLUSION

After leaving office, Truman often lamented that he did not have a defined role to which he could dedicate himself. Rather than slipping into quiet retirement, he instead used his unique experience as President of the United States to contribute what he could to Americans' understanding of their own history and government. To accomplish this goal, he worked on publishing two works during the 1950s, *Memoirs* and *Mr. Citizen*. Through these publications, he sought to illuminate the inner workings of his administration and provide insight into the major challenges and decisions he faced as commander-in-chief. He also used his books to give the American public his perspective on his life, the presidency, and where he thought his administration fit into the greater context of American history. Although he held no official title after exiting the presidency, he grasped firmly the mantle of being an elder statesman who imparted to the country his accumulated knowledge about history and the presidency.

⁷³ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 123–124.

CHAPTER 5

Politics, Speeches, and Lectures

INTRODUCTION

“I want to continue as a politician for a long time,” Truman once told students at Columbia University.¹ “I like being a nose buster and an ass kicker much better,” he confided in Dean Acheson.² Truman was emphatically opposed to the term “elder statesman,” especially when applied to him, and he did not see his post-presidential period as a time to simply rest on his laurels and reflect on a career well-spent. Rather, he viewed his time out of office as an opportunity to help the country and his beloved Democratic Party.

Although he ruled out running for office again, except with an occasional joke, Truman sought to advance issues that he held as important. Chief among these concerns was Truman’s dedication to the Democratic Party. He was a staunch party man who believed that the common good of the country was best served when Democrats were in office. As the only living Democratic former president, Truman attempted to assume the role of party leader and move the party in ways he saw fit, including perhaps the most important party decision, nominating a presidential candidate. Truman also used his stature and frequent speaking invitations to critique the Republican Party generally and President Eisenhower specifically. Not confined to partisan activities, but concerned about American politics nonetheless, Truman dedicated a good deal of time to educating young people through lectures and informal seminars at various colleges and universities. These lectures were ultimately compiled in the volume *Truman Speaks* in 1960.

¹“Truman Lecture a Hit,” *Kansas City Star*, April 27, 1959, 4.

²Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, February 19, 1959, Harry S. Truman Library.

TRUMAN AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Even though Truman was out of office, he remained an important force within the Democratic Party. As the most recent Democratic president, Truman took on the role of a proven leader within the party with experience that far outweighed any other member, elected or not. Democrats initially lauded Truman as a valued elder statesman who had done much for the party and could still be a true asset on the campaign trail. But as his presidency drifted further in the past, so too did Truman's clout within the party. A new generation of Democratic hopefuls pushed Truman to the side, blunting his influence on party decisions, including the nominating conventions in 1956 and 1960. Nevertheless, Democratic officials remained respectful of Truman and continued to hold him in high regard.

Despite having no further political ambitions, he found it difficult to stay out of the political scrum. He was only able to refrain from attacking the Eisenhower administration for less than a year, commenting on what he thought were Eisenhower's and the Republican Party's deficiencies. However, Truman's power and influence were greatly diminished upon leaving office. He only won one presidential election in 1948, and when he left office in 1953, he did so with a low approval rating and with the executive and legislative branches firmly in Republican control.³ Despite his weakened standing within the political landscape, Truman was determined to continue playing a major role in American politics. He kept up to date on the news and the workings of government by digesting several national newspapers and the *Congressional Record* daily, and he stayed in the public eye. Furthermore, Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic presidential nominee in 1952, was reluctant to take the mantle of national party leader, leaving room for the more assertive Truman to take that position.⁴

A true believer in the link between the national success of the Democratic Party and the welfare of the American people, Truman committed himself to campaigning for Democrats across the country, not just for the presidential candidates. Given his first opportunity in 1954, Truman hit the campaign trail to rally support for congressional candidates, only abandoning this effort when he had gall bladder surgery. Absent a medical emergency, Truman refused to sit out a campaign in the 1950s. He gave stump speeches for senatorial candidates like Wayne Morse of Oregon and Steve Young of Ohio, and gubernatorial candidates like Averell Harriman of New York and G. Mennen Williams of Michigan.⁵ In a letter giving thanks to Truman, Young wrote that "except for

³ James Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2, Separation of Powers and the Power to Govern: With Particular Reference to the Truman-Eisenhower Legacies (Spring 1982): 243–244.

⁴ Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," 244.

⁵ Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," 244.

you I would not have come to Washington in 1959 as United States Senator, nor would I have been reelected to a second term over Mr. Taft, Jr.”⁶ In the 1958 midterm elections, Truman gave twenty-five major speeches on behalf of congressional candidates in twenty-five different states.⁷ For many, Truman’s bulldog attitude on the campaign trail throughout the 1950s resembled his “Give ‘em hell, Harry!” presidential slogan of 1948, where Truman conducted an aggressive whistlestop campaign across the country.

The former president also believed that electing Democratic candidates would not mean anything if the party did not remain unified. In the mid-twentieth century, the Democratic Party was diverse ideologically and geographically, largely owing to the coalition that Truman’s predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, had created in the 1930s. This coalition included northern racial and ethnic minorities and labor unionists, western farmers, southern conservatives, and a large portion of the American intellectual class. As such, tension among the groups with varied viewpoints and interests made Democratic unity delicate and uneasy. Truman was an ideological, but practical, man. On one hand, he supported the need for structural reform, as shown by his Fair Deal program. On the other, he cautioned against going too fast or too far, thereby potentially upsetting the more conservative elements of the party. Similarly, Truman championed civil rights reform as president, but that position often clashed with southern Democrats.⁸ As a national leader, Truman believed that he possessed the unique insight necessary to balance these competing interests necessary to maintain party cohesion.



A smiling Former President Truman exits the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City alongside New York Governor-elect Averell Harriman (left) and Democratic National Committee Chairman, Paul M. Butler (right). Harriman, a former Truman administration official and diplomat, would be Truman’s preferred choice for Democratic Presidential nominee for the 1956 Presidential Election. December 8, 1954.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

⁶ Stephen Young to Harry S. Truman, September 16, 1965, Young, Stephen M., Box 42, Secretary’s Office File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷ Giglio, “Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency,” 244.

⁸ Giglio, “Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency,” 244.

All three of these facets—Truman’s assertiveness, partisanship, and pragmatism—played into the 1956 presidential election, his first since leaving office. After arriving home from his tour of Europe in June 1956, Truman dove straight into the contest for the Democratic nomination for president. Adlai Stevenson once again appeared to be the frontrunner for the nomination, but, unlike 1952, Truman wanted someone else to run. In the years following the 1952 election, Truman criticized Stevenson, writing in his memoirs and *Mr. Citizen* that the former Illinois governor mismanaged the campaign, alienated key Democratic politicians, and failed to connect with the common person. No less important to Truman was his belief that Stevenson had tried to distance himself from the sitting president throughout the campaign. Four years later, Truman felt compelled to oppose Stevenson’s party nomination. He instead chose Averell Harriman, a diplomat, former Truman administration official, and the sitting governor of New York. Truman considered supporting Harriman in 1952 but believed he was too inexperienced in elected politics at the time. But now that Harriman had served half a term as governor, Truman thought he was ready.⁹

Despite his private support for Harriman, Truman maintained public neutrality on the matter of the nomination until the Democratic National Convention in August 1956. Initially, Truman’s hope was that Stevenson and Estes Kefauver, the other leading Democratic candidate, would come to the convention deadlocked. At that point, Truman believed that he could broker a compromise that would allow Harriman to step in as the party’s nominee, despite not having entered any primary elections. But Stevenson won a big primary victory in California, causing Kefauver to drop out of the race. Truman still hoped that he, as a major force within the party, could tip the scales in Harriman’s favor.¹⁰ In doing so, Truman was taking a significant risk—first by attempting to buck the will of primary voters and second by exposing himself as an ineffective power broker, should Stevenson be nominated despite Truman’s opposition.

Before the convention even started, Truman attempted to take a commanding role. Arriving in Chicago four days before the start of the convention, Truman wanted to have an active role in the political jockeying behind the scenes. His first goal was to have significant influence over the drafting of the party platform at the convention. Truman was in close contact with the members of the Resolutions Committee, especially Congressman John McCormack, the Democratic leader in the US House of Representatives and the chairman of the committee. According to the press, Truman was especially concerned with the civil rights plank of the party’s platform. Although Truman supported a strong commitment to civil rights reform, he was worried that the party would adopt an “extremist” position on the issue, potentially jeopardizing party

⁹ Giglio, “Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency,” 244–245; McCullough, *Truman*, 959.

¹⁰ Giglio, “Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency,” 245.

unity and giving southern Democrats the opportunity to run a separate candidate in the general election.¹¹ During committee meetings, Truman put his mark on the platform. The committee drafted a civil rights plank that supported the US Supreme Court's 1954 ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* to desegregate public schools but did not commit the party to enforcing the decision. A liberal minority wanted the party to take a stronger stance on the issue. Speaking for the majority position, Truman said, "This is a good civil rights plank and I'm the greatest civil rights president the country ever had."¹² Shortly thereafter, the committee voted down the minority resolution. Lyndon Johnson wrote to Truman on the matter: "[Y]ou took the heart out of the extremists who were itching for the fight. I am sure that if they had won the fight, the South could not have gone along."¹³ For Truman, the value of the party was the ability to win elections, not to express personal convictions. If the party could not stick together, then it would lose all purpose—even at the expense of a stronger stance on racial discrimination.

Truman's primary concern, of course, was the selection of nominees for president and vice president. Up until the convention, Truman claimed to be neutral, although many knew of his support for Harriman. Then on August 11, 1956, Truman publicly voiced his support for Harriman. To announce his support for the candidate, Truman held a press conference with about 800 reporters at the Sheraton-Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. He argued that Harriman was the best man for the nomination, given his wide breadth of experience, including in foreign affairs, which Stevenson lacked. "But against the mounting crisis in the world, I know that this convention must name a man who has the experience and the ability to act as President immediately upon assuming office without risking a period of costly and dangerous trial and error," Truman said. He continued, "In the light of my knowledge of the office of the President, I believe that the man best qualified to be the next President of the United States is Governor Harriman, of New York."¹⁴ Truman later repeated his support for Harriman on the floor of the convention, stating, "Democrats come to [the] convention to decide their differences and then go out and win, and never in the history of the country has it been as necessary for the Democrats to win an election as it is now. I am supporting Averell Harriman for President of the United States."¹⁵

Despite Truman's efforts, Stevenson won the nomination easily. Truman attempted to exercise his influence as the only living Democrat to have been president, but he

¹¹ Robert S. Allen, "Truman Planning Strong Role," *Winston-Salem Journal*, August 1, 1956, 4.

¹² Rowan, "Harry Truman and the Negro: Was He Our Greatest Civil Rights President?" 44.

¹³ Lyndon B. Johnson to Harry S. Truman, August 23, 1956, Johnson, Lyndon B.—Correspondence, 1955-1958, Box 24, Secretary's Office Files, 1953-1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁴ Gerald Griffin, "Truman Gives Full Support to Harriman," *Baltimore Sun*, August 12, 1956, 2.

¹⁵ Statement of Harry S. Truman on the floor of the 1956 Democratic National Convention, Stevenson, Adlai [2 of 2], Box 116, Name File, 1953-1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

miscalculated the party's desire to see Stevenson run against Eisenhower for a second time. As biographer David McCullough noted, it seemed to many that "Truman had succeeded only in making himself a contradictory, even pitiful figure who confused his popularity with real power."¹⁶ But Truman was a party man, and Stevenson's nomination would not deter him from supporting Stevenson in the general election. Following Stevenson's nomination, Truman spoke in front of the entire convention, stating, "Governor Stevenson is a real fighter, and I ought to know. Any man who can take this convention the way he did should be able to take the Republicans next fall." Addressing his public doubts about Stevenson's chances of winning against Eisenhower, Truman said, "It is reliably reported that some fellow—whom I shall not name—has said that Governor Stevenson will have trouble winning in November. Don't let that worry you. That's what almost everyone else was saying about me in 1948. And this fellow I'm talking about today can be just as wrong this year as everyone else was in 1948."¹⁷ Exhibiting his trademark self-deprecating humor, Truman cast away any doubt about whether he would support Stevenson and gave the party a shining example of how to lose an argument gracefully while being committed to victory.



At the 1956 Democratic National Convention, Former President Harry Truman prepares to speak before a bank of microphones and a crowd of newsmen. Truman, smiling, is looking over his shoulder into the camera and showing his pages of handwritten notes. August 1956.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Former President Harry Truman and Democratic Presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson shake hands at a Democratic rally a few months before the 1956 Presidential election. While not his preferred candidate, Truman provided wholehearted support to Stevenson's campaign after he secured the Democratic nomination. September 27, 1956.

Credit: From Chicago Sun-Times. © 2018 Sun-Times Media. All rights reserved. Used under license.

True to his word, Truman campaigned for Stevenson vigorously after the convention. The elder Democrat crisscrossed the country, campaigning in Milwaukee, Texas, Boston,

¹⁶ McCullough, 960.

¹⁷ Harry S Truman, Democratic Convention Speech, August 17, 1956, Reading Copies: 1956, Box 714, Speech File, 1953–68, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

New York, San Francisco, Indiana, and Pittsburgh. Truman described his campaign activities as “one of the most exhausting schedules of personal appearances I had ever assumed, and I was just as unsparing of myself as if I were campaigning for myself.” He believed that, in politics, it was common and desirable to have disagreements about candidates and policies, but ultimately everyone must work for the betterment of the party. “This is the way I think a man must act in politics,” Truman wrote. “He must close ranks and forget personalities. This is the very heart of our Republic—to debate the issues as vigorously as we can and then, after the people have spoken, carry on and work together.”¹⁸ But Truman never backed down from his initial critical assessment of Stevenson in private, holding firm that Stevenson did not possess the talent to connect with the common person. Truman wrote to Lyndon Johnson after Stevenson lost in another landslide to Eisenhower: “I have never wanted to pose as a prophet, nor do I intend to be one now, but I do want to keep the Democratic Party a party of the people. We can never win unless it is.”¹⁹

Even after bucking Truman the powerbroker at the 1956 convention, the Democratic Party remained devoted to Truman the man. The Democratic National Committee held a national celebration to celebrate Truman’s seventy-fifth birthday on May 8, 1959. The committee put on a television program featuring appearances by Adlai Stevenson, Eleanor Roosevelt, comedian Jack Benny, composer Leonard Bernstein, violinist Isaac Stern, journalist H. V. Kaltenborn, and many personal friends. Guests lauded Truman with a series of speeches and musical tributes. The celebration also featured a \$100-a-plate dinner for Truman at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City.²⁰ Although the 1956 convention had demonstrated that Truman’s real influence on the party had waned, Democratic leaders still had a personal affection for him, as evidenced by the grandeur of his birthday celebration.

In the same year, people began talking about the upcoming election in 1960. This time, the Republican Party’s nomination would likely go to Vice President Richard Nixon. Unlike the popular Eisenhower, Nixon was an uncharismatic hardliner who would face an uphill battle in a general election. If his party could select a strong candidate, Truman believed, Democrats had a good chance of winning the election in 1960. This once again, however, put Truman at odds with his party. Democratic National Committee chairman Paul Butler, of whom Truman was not fond, was likely to back Adlai Stevenson once again for the nomination. “What can we do?” Truman wrote to Dean Acheson. “If we don’t have a nominee this time, it will take another FDR to put the country on the right track. We are on a switchback now . . . If Butler has his

¹⁸ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 82.

¹⁹ Harry S Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, December 11, 1956, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

²⁰ McCullough, *Truman*, 969.



A moment of levity between Former President Harry Truman and Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, who are grasping hands at the celebration of John Nance Garner Day in Uvalde, Texas. Truman and Johnson had developed a friendship and Johnson was one of Truman's preferred candidates for the 1960 Democratic presidential nominee. November 22, 1958.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

way we'll nominate a loser and elect Nixon for President."²¹ Privately Truman believed that Lyndon Johnson or fellow Missourian Senator Stuart Symington represented Democrats' best chance of winning. Truman and Johnson, of course, had served together in government and were good friends. Truman and Symington also corresponded frequently, with Truman believing that Symington was the rare liberal who could manage not to alienate the southern wing of the party.²²

As with the 1956 election, though, Truman and the party were again out of step in their thinking. The young US senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, made a run for the nomination and had many Democrats behind him. Truman did not think it was Kennedy's time to run for several

reasons. Being that Kennedy was only in his forties, Truman believed that Kennedy was much too young and inexperienced to take on the complicated job of the presidency. Kennedy also carried with him certain baggage: his religion and his father. Throughout American history, many people have called into question the loyalties of Catholics, arguing that, because Catholics view the pope as the head of the Catholic Church, Catholics have a greater allegiance to the pope than their country. For some, this raised the question whether a Catholic president could ever serve the nation independent of the wishes of the pope.²³ Al Smith, the Democratic nominee for the presidency in 1928, was dogged by such speculation and ultimately lost the election to Republican Herbert Hoover. Truman claimed that he had no personal issue with Kennedy's religion, but he was concerned that Kennedy would face the same treatment as Smith, hurting his chances at being elected. Truman was also distrustful of Kennedy's father, Joseph P. Kennedy, who was willing to spend a great deal of money to buy influence in American politics. Regarding Joseph Kennedy, Truman often said, "It's not the pope I'm afraid of, it's the pop."²⁴ In contrast to Kennedy, Johnson and Symington were experienced politicians without the attached concerns of religion or corruption.

²¹ Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, August 22, 1959, Acheson-Truman Correspondence, 1959, Box 161, Acheson-Truman Correspondence File, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²² Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," 246–247.

²³ See John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

²⁴ Miller Tapes, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.



Former President Harry Truman stands in his office in the Harry S. Truman Library alongside Representative Newell George (left) and Senator John F. Kennedy (right). Kennedy had met with Truman a month earlier at the Truman Library to discuss Kennedy's desire to be the 1960 Democratic Presidential candidate, and perhaps to gain Truman's support. November 19, 1959.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Sensing Truman's reticence to support him in the primary, Kennedy contacted Truman on at least two occasions to meet in person. On September 19, 1959, Kennedy wrote to Truman, stating that he "would like very much to have an opportunity to visit with you if you plan to be in Independence that time."²⁵ The two met at the Truman Library one month later, where Kennedy and Truman chatted privately for thirty minutes. Although neither Kennedy nor Truman divulged the contents of their discussion, Kennedy was in Missouri to shore up support for a run at the Democratic nomination. Truman remarked, "I have always liked this young man, and he once gave me a check for \$28,000 to help build this library."²⁶ When asked if he would support Kennedy for the nomination, Truman replied, "I'm not supporting anyone yet. When it gets close enough to the convention you fellows will know."²⁷ Kennedy officially entered the race in January 1960; he asked Truman not to declare support for any candidate during the primaries. Kennedy then suggested that, if there were no clear-cut winner

by the time of the convention, Truman could intervene with a unity candidate. Truman apparently agreed to this arrangement and told Kennedy that he would not do anything to hurt the young candidate's campaign.²⁸ Although Kennedy likely realized that Truman would not support him in a primary outright, he recognized the impact of Truman coming out against him could be devastating. For this reason, Kennedy took the initiative to show deference to the former president and negotiated somewhat of a truce.

Truman, ever the political pugilist, seemed eager to be in the thick of battle once again. His arrangement with Kennedy suited him just fine because, as with the 1956 convention, Truman believed that he could influence the nomination for his preferred candidate, Stuart Symington. Truman advised Symington to sit out the primary elections, hoping that Kennedy and US Senator Hubert Humphrey, of Minnesota, would enter the convention without either having a commanding lead in the primaries. Then Truman could broker a deal that would allow him to push forward Symington for the nomination.²⁹ Although Truman was pleased to be back in the fray, his closest adviser,

²⁵ John F. Kennedy to Harry S. Truman, September 16, 1959, Kennedy, John F., Name File, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁶ "Kennedy Sees Truman," *New York Times*, November 20, 1959.

²⁷ "Kennedy Attacks Hesitancy, Doubt," *Chattanooga Times*, November 20, 1959, 8.

²⁸ McCullough, *Truman*, 970.

²⁹ Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," 247.



A smiling Former President Truman stands beside Missouri Senator Stuart Symington (left) at the breaking ground event for the Harry S. Truman Library. The two men shared a strong relationship, and Symington was one of Truman's preferred candidates for the 1960 Democratic Presidential nominee. May 8, 1955.

Credit: Vernon Galloway, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Bess Truman, was not. “She refused to get excited about the Democratic party and told Dad he was crazy if we went to another convention at the age of seventy-six,” Margaret Truman recalled. “Let the next generation fight it out among themselves—that was her attitude.”³⁰ Bess believed that her husband was beyond his prime and so, too, was perhaps his influence, despite Truman’s grand plans for being a major power player in the upcoming convention.

Truman’s friend and confidant Dean Acheson also had concerns about the elder statesman wading into the nomination process. Namely, Acheson was worried that Truman would attack Kennedy and his stance on civil rights activism, which Kennedy supported and Truman thought went too far. To head off potential harm to both Kennedy and civil rights reform, Acheson wrote to Truman on June 27 with a list of “don’ts.” Acheson’s letter got to the point right away: “As the Convention approaches we partisans are likely to become, shall we say, emphatic in our statements to the press. Could we make a treaty on what we shall *not* say?” The first article of Acheson’s “treaty” covered how Truman should talk about other

Democratic candidates aside from Symington. Acheson cautioned that, while no one would fault Truman for speaking in support of his favored candidate, it could hurt the common cause to come out too vehemently against any of the other Democrats. “[S]ounding off is sure to be wrong . . . And such attacks can do a lot of harm when they are quoted in the election campaign,” Acheson wrote. Regarding civil rights activism, such as sit-ins and strikes, Truman had come out in speeches, statements to the press, and correspondence that he was against such activities. Acheson implored Truman not to say that they were inspired by communism or state his disapproval. Acheson’s reason for this was that Truman’s views were “wholly out of keeping with your public record. The discussion does not convince anyone of anything. If you want to discuss the sociological, moral and legal interests involved, you should give much more time and thought to them.” Lastly, in regard to foreign policy, Acheson asked Truman not to say that Americans must support the president when talking about foreign policy. “This just isn’t true,” Acheson wrote. “One might as well say ‘Support the President,’ if he falls off the end of a dock. That isn’t a policy. But to urge support for him makes his predicament appear to be a policy to people who don’t know what a dock is.” Acheson closed by appealing to Truman’s sense of loyalty to the party and the belief that any Democrat,

³⁰ Quoted in McCullough, *Truman*, 970.

no matter who, would be better than a Republican: “We have got to beat Nixon. We shall probably have to do it with Kennedy. Why make it any harder than it has to be.”³¹ Acheson’s letter showed great respect for Truman but also bounded the limitations of Truman’s influence as a Democratic booster.

Although Truman had hoped and planned for a contested convention where he could exert his influence on the proceedings, the reality was that Kennedy had dominated the Democratic primaries and was all but assured the nomination going into the convention. Although Johnson and Stevenson had some chance to trump Kennedy, Symington had almost none. Truman’s confidants David Noyes and William Hillman reported from Los Angeles, where the convention was to take place, that Truman had no prospects of making any difference. “Your coming here is considered routine and not calculated to make any significant change,” they wrote. “This is the judgment of even those who are partial to you.”³² They urged him, however, not to speak out about the convention or to call it “rigged.”³³

Truman was incensed. He opposed the notion of a predetermined convention perhaps as much as he was against a Kennedy or Stevenson nomination. On July 2, Truman called a press conference at his library to speak out against what he saw as a “pre-arranged affair.” He resigned right then and there as a delegate. Truman stated, “A Convention which is controlled in advance by one group, and its candidate, leaves the delegate no opportunity for a democratic choice and reduces the convention to a mockery.” Truman made sure, however, to remember his treaty with Acheson. Although he decried the actions of Kennedy’s party supporters, he did not attack Kennedy himself. “I want to make it clear that my disappointment at the manner in which some of the backers of Senator John F. Kennedy have acted, involves in no way, in my own mind the person or qualifications of the Senator himself.” But Truman, addressing Kennedy directly, questioned whether Kennedy was ready for the job “or that the country is ready for you.” Asking Kennedy to put his ambition aside for the good of the country, Truman instead offered a number of other Democrats he thought were better suited for the presidency, among them Symington, Johnson, Governor Chester Bowles of Connecticut, Governor Robert Meyner of New Jersey, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, and Senator Albert Gore, Sr., of Tennessee. Absent from this list was Adlai Stevenson.³⁴ In a test of his influence, Truman took a tremendous risk by criticizing the convention and his

³¹ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, June 27, 1960, Acheson, Dean—Correspondence, 1960–1963, Box 43, Name File, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³² Memorandum from William Hillman and David Noyes to Harry S Truman, n.d., Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³³ McCullough, *Truman*, 973.

³⁴ Harry S Truman, Statement at Press Conference, July 2, 1960, General File: 1960, July 2—Resignation as Delegate to the Democratic National Convention, Box 731, Chronological File, 1953–1974, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

party's leading candidate—he risked damaging his reputation and the prospects of the Democratic candidate in November.

Truman's gambit did not pay off. His speech did nothing to change the proceedings of the convention, and it reflected on him negatively. Kennedy won the nomination handily, with Johnson as his running mate. After the convention, Acheson wrote to Truman: "I listened to your press conference and regretted that you felt impelled to say anything, though what you said was better than what you first told me you intended to say."³⁵ James Reston of the *New York Times* wrote, "For in his savage and vindictive statement today, he hurt all causes he wanted to help; he hurt the Presidency, he hurt his party, he hurt himself, and he helped the Republican Party."³⁶ One Kennedy supporter said, "Harry is like a relay runner who won't give up the baton." Stephen Mitchell, the former head of the Democratic National Committee, called Truman's charges of convention rigging "a sad spectacle of the old order protesting the new." Mitchell continued, "Now it sounds as if he has concluded that his candidate would be defeated and he doesn't want to be there. He isn't able to take it graciously."³⁷ Despite Truman's best efforts, he had failed to sway any delegates at the convention. Many perceived him to no longer be an effective party leader.



Former President Harry Truman attends a fundraising dinner in St. Louis, Missouri, for the Kennedy-Johnson Presidential campaign. Although not his first choice for the 1960 presidential candidate, Truman wholeheartedly supported Kennedy's campaign after he won the Democratic nomination. October 2, 1960.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

However, just as had been the case in 1956, Truman did not sulk; instead, he did whatever he could to help the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. After a meeting between Johnson and Truman in Independence, Truman told the press, "I will do all I can to help the Kennedy-Johnson campaign."³⁸ Truman traveled to nine states and delivered thirteen speeches. Although he insisted on a midday nap, Truman filled the remainder of his time on the campaign trail holding press conferences, riding in parades, and trying to make himself useful.³⁹ He also called on each Democratic member of Congress to do all they could to help the ticket. "Now, as ever before," Truman wrote, "it seems to me, there is a need for us to submerge whatever differences may exist among us within our own Party and fight for Democratic victory, National, State and Local." Addressing his own opposition to Kennedy initially,

³⁵ Dean Acheson to Harry S. Truman, July 17, 1960, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁶ James Reston, "The Tragedy of Harry's 'Last Hurrah,'" *New York Times*, July 3, 1960, E6.

³⁷ "Doubt on Significance of Views by Truman," *Kansas City Star*, July 3, 1960, 2A.

³⁸ "Truman Pledge of Full Help," *Kansas City Star*, July 29, 1960, 1.

³⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, 974.

Truman wrote, “As you know, Jack Kennedy was not my first choice for the Presidential nomination. However, he is a very able young man, and, in my opinion, a man of integrity and honor.”⁴⁰ As was the case with Stevenson, there seemed to be no personal issue too great to prevent Truman from campaigning for a fellow Democrat.



Former President Harry Truman, in formal attire and with Bess by his side, exits the Inaugural stand at the Inauguration of President John F. Kennedy. Surrounded by a crowd, Truman can be seen greeting an unidentified man. January 20, 1961.

Credit: United States Army, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

to be with you in this campaign.”⁴³ Recognizing Truman’s place in the Democratic legacy, Kennedy wrote to Truman asking him to attend the inauguration. “It will give me particular pleasure to have you present at the swearing-in ceremony at the Capitol. You are one of the very few Americans who thoroughly understands the significance of this solemn occasion,” Kennedy wrote.⁴⁴ Truman agreed to attend, replying, “and I will have my high hat and my long tail coat,” perhaps winking toward the controversy over the attire for Eisenhower’s inauguration in 1953.⁴⁵ Truman took his lumps along the way, but he was satisfied that a Democrat was once again president. He hoped that Kennedy would fulfill the promise so many saw in him.

The efforts of Truman and the Kennedy-Johnson campaign paid off on election day, with Kennedy defeating Nixon in the general election and Democrats retaining both houses of Congress. And nothing was more soothing to the wounds of political battle than a win. Johnson wrote Truman to thank him for his help. “My deepest gratitude goes to you for taking the campaign to Texas. As always you were a vigorous, effective campaigner,” Johnson said in a telegram.⁴¹

Truman responded, “I sincerely hope that you and Jack will have an administration that will be for the welfare and benefit of the whole country and I am sure that will be the case.”⁴² On the same day, Truman wrote to Kennedy: “My congratulations and best wishes for a successful administration, which I know you will have. It was a pleasure

⁴⁰ Harry S. Truman to Members of Congress, October 1960, Kennedy, John F.—Campaign of 1960, Box 26, Secretary’s Office Files, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴¹ Lyndon B. Johnson to Harry S. Truman, Johnson, Lyndon B., 1958–1963, Box 25, Secretary’s Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴² Harry S. Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, November 10, 1960, Lyndon B., 1958–1963, Box 25, Secretary’s Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴³ Harry S. Truman to John F. Kennedy, November 10, 1960, Honorable John F. Kennedy, Box 84, Outgoing Correspondence File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁴ John F. Kennedy to Harry S. Truman, December 9, 1960, Kennedy, John F.—Inauguration, Box 27, Secretary’s Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁵ Harry S. Truman to John F. Kennedy, January 3, 1961, Honorable John F. Kennedy, Box 84, Outgoing Correspondence File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

During the Kennedy administration, Truman was not overly fond of Kennedy's actions or his administration's preoccupation with optics, but Kennedy seemed to respect Truman and endeavored to remain on good terms. Although Truman was appalled by the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, Kennedy sent Vice President Lyndon Johnson to Independence to brief Truman personally.⁴⁶ But the next year, when the United States and the Soviet Union nearly came to armed conflict during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Truman was vocal in his support for Kennedy's actions. After Kennedy spoke to the American public in a televised address, Truman said, "The President made a wonderful statement that had to be made and I endorse it."⁴⁷ Kennedy also personally phoned Truman to brief him upon hearing that the Soviets agreed to withdraw their intermediate range ballistic missiles from Cuba.⁴⁸ In addition to keeping him apprised of major events, President Kennedy was also willing to help a former Truman Committee and Truman administration staffer at the former president's request. Matt Connelly had been convicted of tax evasion in 1960, but Truman believed that Republicans had targeted Connelly unfairly. After several entreaties to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy of increasing assertiveness, President Kennedy pardoned Connelly in November 1962.⁴⁹ Truman was certainly not a devotee of Kennedy's, just as he was not during the 1960 campaign, but Truman recognized that Kennedy gave him a chance to have influence once again and had the potential to be a transformative Democratic president.

For Truman, retiring from elected office did not mean retiring from politics. He understood his role as the party's elder statesman to mean that he would wield real power and influence among Democrats and not just be a figurehead brought out for special occasions. He attempted to play a decisive role in the 1956 and 1960 Democratic primaries, where he wanted to buck the will of primary voters and negotiate for his preferred candidates. But that is not the scenario that played out in reality. Instead, Truman defied the power base of the party—sometimes dramatically, as with his July 1960 accusations of a rigged convention—without any payoff. His actions instead revealed that his power had been much diminished since leaving office, as a new generation of politicians made their ways to the top of the party. Truman nonetheless remained loyal and committed to the Democrats, even if they were not his chosen candidates. He campaigned tirelessly for Stevenson and Kennedy, among other congressional candidates, even at his advanced age. For Truman, the most important thing was winning. He truly believed that the Democratic Party was a force for good in the country, but he knew that Democrats could not work toward progress if they did not win elections.

⁴⁶ Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, May 3, 1961, Harry S. Truman Library; "Truman Greets Johnson," *Kansas City Star*, April 25, 1961, 1.

⁴⁷ "Truman Backs Move by JFK," *Kansas City Times*, 10.

⁴⁸ Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 110.

⁴⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, 981.

POLITICAL PUNDITRY

Riding the wave of Eisenhower's staggering presidential victory in 1952, Republicans won majorities in both houses of Congress. This federal government trifecta had eluded that party since 1929 with Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal coalition presenting a seemingly unbeatable adversary. Truman had shouldered Roosevelt's liberal legacy proudly throughout his presidency, but the election of the Republican Eighty-Third Congress served as a stinging and public rebuke of Truman, the Democratic Party, and the progressive ideology that had dominated American politics for twenty years.



Senator Joseph McCarthy speaking in front of a microphone with two other men standing by. June 1954.

Credit: Thomas J. O'Halloran, Library of Congress

Firmly in control of the reins of power, the Republicans wasted no time in pushing forward their “dynamic, progressive, forward-looking” agenda, as Eisenhower described it. By the end of its first session, Congress scaled down government appropriations and spending, and, fueled by Senator Joseph McCarthy’s “Red Menace” rhetoric, enacted a bill that outlawed the Communist Party in America. With only a slight majority in both houses, however, succeeding in this legislative program beyond the formative stage was a costly battle. Ultimately, legislation proved to be milder and more bipartisan than staunch conservatives had hoped. Eisenhower appealed broadly to curry favor for his agenda, exemplified by his attempted rebalancing of the strict Taft-Hartley Act, a law that severely undercut the bargaining power of labor unions in favor of employers. Yet, even with a Republican majority, the bill was forced into a stalemate and left unresolved until years later. Despite these bipartisan overtures, the major success of Eisenhower and his first Congress were decidedly conservative revisions to the internal revenue code. Congress passed legislation to reduce federal excise taxes by \$1.4 billion and to give tax relief to corporate stockholders and corporations, reforms that clearly targeted New Deal tax increases. This was the first general cut in consumption taxes since 1920 and the first complete rewriting of tax laws since 1876. The Democratic minority in the House and Senate vocally derided these measures, with Ways and Means Committee members declaring that “the average taxpayers that are benefited are literally few and far between and the relief provided for them in these few instances is negligible.”⁵⁰

Although hundreds of miles away from the nation's capital, Truman did not remain

⁵⁰R. M. Boeckel, “Record of the 83rd Congress (Second Session), *Editorial Research Reports* 1954, no. 2, 1954. <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1954082100>.

silent on these important issues. He often condemned this new Republican-led Congress, going so far as to call it the “worst in American history.” The “second-worst” Congress, Truman contended, had been the Eightieth Congress from 1947 to 1949, the only other Republican majority Congress since 1929.⁵¹ He charged the Eighty-Third Congress with a litany of misdeeds: cutting back Armed Forces spending amid the Cold War, passing a “rich man’s” tax bill, “plundering our natural resources,” and helping bankers and tycoons increase profits while small business bankruptcies quadrupled. “The Eightieth Congress,” Truman remarked, “was a ‘do-nothing’ Congress; the Eighty-Third was a ‘do-wrong, give-away Congress.’” For all this venom, however, Truman stopped short of criticizing Eisenhower directly. Instead, in a 1954 letter to Democratic National Chairman Stephen Mitchell, Truman asserted that “we can save him [Eisenhower] from the misdeeds of his own party,” only if the American people elected a Democratic Congress in 1954. In order to “go down in history as a successful President, who helped to save the free world,” Eisenhower would need a liberal legislative policy, Truman hypothesized. He went as far as asserting that Eisenhower “should be secretly wishing” for a Democratic Congress, since he was “pledged to a foreign policy of co-operation with other free nations, but a majority of his party leaders [were] against it.”⁵²

Conservative pundits mocked Truman’s call for a Democratic Congress, deriding it as “the biggest political laugh in a long time.” Republican critics remembered the Truman administration as one riddled with “widespread corruption,” and culpable in “comforting Communists and subversives,” thus making his charges of mismanagement against the Eisenhower appear comically hypocritical. An editorial in the *Shreveport Times* captured this conservative sentiment: “Perhaps the most devastating criticism that could be made of Mr. Truman’s charges is simply to remind people that it is none other than the same old Harry S. Truman who is making them.”⁵³ But vindication for Truman’s statements would come in November of 1954—Democrats won back control of both houses of Congress. Although now they only controlled a slim majority, their grip on the legislature would only widen. Two years later, in the 1956 general election, Eisenhower won a second term as president, but both chambers maintained a strong Democratic majority. By 1958, the Democrats had won an additional fifteen seats in the Senate and fifty seats in the House of Representatives. This nearly two-thirds majority was due in no small part to Truman’s relentless campaigning; he delivered twenty-five rally speeches in at least twenty states during the election cycle.⁵⁴

After the congressional victory in 1956, Truman laid bare his frustrations to Eisenhower in a draft letter. Although never sent, the letter seethes with Truman’s scorn:

⁵¹ “The Same Old Harry,” *Shreveport Times*, September 19, 1954, 15.

⁵² “Truman Declares Ike Needs Democratic Congress,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 18, 1954, 4.

⁵³ “The Same Old Harry,” *Shreveport Times*, September 19, 1954, 15.

⁵⁴ Giglio, “Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency,” 244.

You are elected again and this time without a Congress of your own choosing. A record with only one precedent, back a hundred and eight years ago—1848 when old Zack Taylor another professional general was elected with Millard Fillmore, who was the Know Nothing Candidate in 1856. Your V. P. [Richard Nixon] is not that far advanced.

I am sincerely hoping you'll pray as loudly and as long as you did in 1953—Jan. 20th. I also hope you'll go to Egypt and Palestine and perhaps to Hungary and Poland in order to surrender to the Kremlin as you did in Korea in 1953. By all means consult [Frank] Lausche of Ohio, [William C.] Revercomb of West Virginia and your two boys from old Kentuck. With that crew you should be able to wreck T. V. A., give away the balance of our national resources, completely ruin our foreign policy and set the country back to 1896 and 1929.

Best of luck and may the honest Democrats and liberal Republicans save you from disaster.⁵⁵

The fact that Truman never sent this letter underlines the split public and private postures that he maintained throughout the Eisenhower era. While he privately criticized Eisenhower's foreign policy as "vacillating" at best and dangerously inept at worst—exemplified in the letter above—he never openly shared these opinions. Rather, Truman publicly advocated for bipartisanship and felt that he needed to support the new administration's foreign policy. He believed that a divided America served only to bolster Soviet influence both domestically and internationally. Truman proved his loyalty many times over, urging congressional enactment of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, a policy that promised aid to any Middle Eastern country threatened by "overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism."⁵⁶ He supported the doctrine's first formal enactment as well, defending the controversial deployment of over 14,000 US Marines to Lebanon in 1958 to support the administration of the pro-American Lebanese president Camille Chamoun. Some speculated that Truman's reasons for doing so were self-serving, that he hoped he would be sent on a "good will trip" throughout the Middle East in appreciation for his support.⁵⁷ But Truman avowed that his backing was simply intended to send a message to "those who are trying to destroy the free world" that "we will unanimously support . . . the President of the United States."⁵⁸

On the other hand, Dean Acheson, whose foreign policy expertise the Eisenhower administration also ignored, had always been vocally critical of Eisenhower's State

⁵⁵ Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," 241.

⁵⁶ "The Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957," *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, United States Department of State, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine>.

⁵⁷ Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," 241.

⁵⁸ Giglio, "Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency," 241–242.

Department. “Ike is presiding over something which is corruptive on a really great scale,” Acheson wrote to Truman in a 1953 letter. “The studied appeasement of the Hill which is now going on at the expense of the best civil servants we have—certainly in State—is not only criminal but frightening in what it may mean regarding the quality of advice which the Secretary of State, and ultimately the president, will receive.” Throughout Truman’s second term, Joseph McCarthy and his Republican colleagues had on several occasions called for the removal of Acheson and select staff members on trumped-up charges of communist sympathies and harboring Soviet spies. Acheson believed that Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had now bent to these congressional pressures and were committed to firing any personnel that had worked intimately with Acheson. “This seems to me plain cowardice and utter folly,” Acheson wrote.⁵⁹ It is perhaps no surprise then that Acheson thoroughly disapproved of Truman’s public support of Eisenhower’s foreign policy platform. Beyond his personal frustrations, Acheson believed that these policies were reckless and unwise, and he urged Truman in a 1958 letter to not “be hooked on one of those my country right or wrong gambits.” He maintained that if Democrats did not remain critical, “Foster [Dulles] can always drive us like steers to the slaughter pens.”⁶⁰ Heeding Acheson’s counsel, Truman noticeably withheld his public support for Eisenhower’s foreign policy in the final years of Eisenhower’s presidency.



Former President Harry Truman pictured with former Secretary of State Dean Acheson during a press conference. Acheson remained an important advisor and friend for Truman during his post-presidential years. February 17, 1955.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Truman did, however, remain resolute in his stance on atomic energy and weapons. “There is nothing more urgent confronting the people of all nations than the banning of all nuclear weapons under a foolproof system of international control,” he declared in 1960. “But the biggest mistake we could make would be to delude ourselves into believing that the danger of war would be eliminated if we merely abolished nuclear weapons.”⁶¹ Truman was pragmatic. He bargained that while general disarmament “cannot come too soon,” the immediate pressure of the rapidly advancing Soviet nuclear program had to be addressed.⁶² Until Russia agreed to “a system of international inspection and control

⁵⁹ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, April 14, 1953, Acheson, Dean—Correspondence, 1953–1955, Name File, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶⁰ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, September 16, Correspondence—Dean Acheson, 1956–62, Box 881, Materials from Harry S. Truman’s Desk in the Harry S. Truman Library, 1918–64, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶¹ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 267–268.

⁶² Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 267.

of armaments,” proposals for which both Stalin and Khrushchev had flatly refused, the United States needed to continue atomic development or risk falling behind its Communist rivals.⁶³ Truman deplored the nuclear arms race, calling it “the most dangerous weapons race in history,” but viewed it a necessary evil in service of our national defense.⁶⁴ He continually argued to end the United States’ self-imposed ban on nuclear testing, stressing the importance of resuming atomic research for both military and energy uses: “If we allow ourselves to fall behind in scientific nuclear development, we will compromise our security and possibly jeopardize the peace.”⁶⁵ Truman pushed for increased defense spending and research sharing with Britain and other allies. He believed that military strength was the only deterrent potent enough to match Soviet aggression, asserting that the United States must be prepared “to use force to meet force.”⁶⁶

MAJOR SPEECHES BY TRUMAN

Truman’s orating went far beyond campaign rallies and Democratic conventions, however. He delivered keynote addresses at a variety of events throughout his retirement that struck a chord with his political adversaries at home and abroad.

On June 26, 1953, six months after leaving the White House, Truman gave his first official speech as an ex-president at the Reserve Officer’s Association (ROA) convention in Philadelphia. He was characteristically folksy, shaking hands with nearly all 700 guests, including former political rival and opponent for the 1948 Democratic presidential nomination, Strom Thurmond.⁶⁷ This “common man” charm, however, had always been but one element of Truman’s political acumen. In the same breath, he could unload a flurry of rhetorical jabs that flustered opponents and energized supporters. His speech that night was no different. Truman flung into a condemnation of the Eisenhower administration’s tax cuts and defense budget reductions, warning his audience to not be misled by their desire for lower taxes “into cutting corners for our national security.” Truman cited that his administration alongside the Joint Chiefs of Staff had developed a “balanced program” of military goals, the Mutual Security program, that could check Soviet aggression if achieved as soon as possible after 1954.⁶⁸ “Because it was about that time,” Truman said, “that they expected the Soviets to have amassed a stockpile of atomic bombs that would put this country in the gravest kind of danger.”⁶⁹ Even Eisenhower agreed with this prognosis, reporting himself that “our government sees no

⁶³ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 271.

⁶⁴ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 267.

⁶⁵ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 310.

⁶⁶ Giglio, “Harry S. Truman and the Multifarious Ex-Presidency,” 241.

⁶⁷ “Truman Charges Tax Cuts Peril Security,” *Redwood City Tribune*, June 27, 1953, 1.

⁶⁸ “Flays ‘Reckless’ Wing of GOP for Security Slash,” *Newark Advocate*, June 27, 1953, 1.

⁶⁹ “Truman Charges Tax Cuts Peril Security,” *Redwood City Tribune*, June 27, 1953, 1.

reliable evidence of any modification in the fundamental Soviet aim of world dominion.” Truman thus stood firm in his belief that the United States “must be able to negotiate from strength,” a position made possible only through conscious military spending. “If they [the Soviets] are tempted to make war, we must be able to deter them by our strength,” Truman declared at the ROA convention.⁷⁰



At the Reserve Officer's Association convention after delivering his first post-presidential speech, Former President Harry Truman and Strom Thurmond share a highly publicized handshake. The two men were once political rivals, competing against each other in the 1948 presidential election, but their friendly encounter here demonstrates Truman's ability to mend bridges. June 26, 1953.

Credit: AP Photo/Bill Ingraham

But Truman charged the newly elected Republican Congress with hindering these efforts. “Unfortunately, however, the elections last fall have strengthened the irresponsible element in the Republican party. The grave burden of national leadership has apparently brought about no change in the attitude of the reckless and isolationist wing of the Republican party.”

Republican representatives had “by the score, deserted their leaders,” by voting for cuts in the Mutual Security program, or so Truman believed.⁷¹ Although ostensibly a non-political event, Truman’s chastising of the new administration made his appearance a decidedly political one. To those that worried a retired Truman would fade into political obscurity, and even to those who had wished for his silence, this speech made abundantly clear that Truman had no intention to stay on the sidelines.

In fact, this partisan posturing would set the standard for the bulk of his future public appearances. Less than a year after his ROA convention speech, Truman presented another indictment of the current administration at a lecture at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. In April 1954, the former president

spoke to a tightly packed crowd. Over 1,650 people in Westminster College’s gymnasium listened as Truman delivered remarks as a guest speaker for the school’s John Findley Green lecture series, a program dedicated in memorial to the eponymous St. Louis lawyer and Westminster graduate. The foundation’s deed of gift stipulated that the lectures needed to “promote understanding of economic, political and social problems of international concern,” and had attracted famous speakers such as Winston Churchill, JC Penney (department store chain founder), and Charles H. Malik, former US Ambassador to Lebanon.⁷²

⁷⁰ “Flays ‘Reckless’ Wing of GOP for Security Slash,” *Newark Advocate*, June 27, 1953, 1.

⁷¹ “Truman Hits Defense Cuts; Draws Ire of GOP Leaders,” *Delaware County Daily Times*, June 27, 1953, 1.

⁷² “Store of US History,” *Kansas City Star*, April 13, 1954, 3.

In his first of two lectures, Truman took aim at the “crude and sinister men” responsible for stirring communist hysteria in the United States. He recounted infamous fits of paranoia throughout American history, from the notorious Salem Witch Trials of the 1690s to the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. He labeled contemporary fearmongers as the next in a long line of opportunistic hysterics. “Witch-hunters are on the loose again,” Truman declared, “cloaked with immunity and armed with subpoenas and the cruel whiplash of unevaluated gossip.” He singled out “one among them whose torrent of wild charges is calculated to damage the faith of Americans in the integrity of their government, army, schools, churches, their labor unions and the press.”⁷³ Clearly, Truman was referring to Senator Joseph McCarthy but did not refer to him by name on purpose. This tactic had been a mainstay in Truman’s rhetorical arsenal, as he stated, “I found it best not to mention any of my opponents by name, which deprived them of any publicity I could give them.”⁷⁴ He added that these demagogues had “no more respect for the due process of law and order than the Communists they say they hate, but whose methods they copy.”⁷⁵ To Truman, this blatant hypocrisy underlined that the hunt for the “Red Menace” was never intended to serve national interests but rather the political ambitions of a few. “They are playing on our fears to further partisan political ends,” Truman accused the red baiters.⁷⁶

He broke from this grave tone in his concluding statements, ending the lecture on a much more hopeful note. Truman urged his audience to trust both in each other and in the long arc of history, as all other “hate movements” were “ultimately wiped out by the common sense of the American people.” A brief question and answer session followed with Truman fielding questions about his thoughts on the fairness of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the Vietnam conflict. The audience asked whether he “believed American boys should be sent to fight” in Vietnam, to which he responded that only the current president could answer that question. Before Truman departed, he set aside his prepared statements and left his listeners with this impromptu comment: “Just nine years and two hours ago I was sworn in as President of the United States. There always are a lot of Monday-morning quarterbacks, but I would not do anything different if I had to do it all over again.”⁷⁷ In retirement, Truman always took the opportunity to defend his past political decision-making. His speeches were not only soapboxes for his new opinions, they were also critical to repairing his reputation. Those public podium appearances allowed Truman to fire back at the relentless Republican attacks that dragged his name through the mud.

⁷³ “Truman Assails Witch-Hunters,” *Kansas City Times*, April 13, 1954, 1.

⁷⁴ Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 21.

⁷⁵ “Truman Assails Witch-Hunters,” *Kansas City Times*, April 13, 1954, 1.

⁷⁶ “Truman Assails Witch-Hunters,” *Kansas City Times*, April 13, 1954, 8.

⁷⁷ “Truman Assails Witch-Hunters,” *Kansas City Times*, April 13, 1954, 8.

Truman countered this constant criticism at a May 1954 luncheon sponsored by the National Press Club. He spoke at length of the need for President Eisenhower to disavow the “lunatic fringe” of the Republican Party. These new charges came after McCarthy accused the Roosevelt and Truman administrations of committing “twenty years of treason.” McCarthy’s accusation was “dug from the cesspool of Hitler’s writings,” clearly inspired by a quote from the former Nazi leader accusing Germany’s Weimar Republic of “fourteen years of shame and treason.”⁷⁸ Truman found this use of Nazi messaging as a “weapon of political assassination” deeply shameful and intolerable.⁷⁹ He asserted that Eisenhower must rebuke McCarthy’s claims and “need not tolerate political assassins within his executive branch.” He believed inaction only threatened to deepen growing neglect of bipartisan policymaking. Truman noted that if the situation were reversed, he would do otherwise: “If I were head of the Democratic party and we had a demagogue in the Democratic party, I’d take care of him.”⁸⁰ Truman continued to present comparisons between his leadership and Eisenhower’s, albeit never explicitly. An audience member asked Truman how the Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policy differed from the “disastrous” program of his own administration. Rather than directly criticize his successor, Truman spoke to the merits of his own foreign policy, “a policy which was vital and which was understood by the people of the world.” This implied that Eisenhower’s foreign policy was unclear by comparison. Truman doubled down, stating that “there was nothing disastrous” about his administration and that these policies “kept us out of a third world war.”⁸¹

Like nearly every other speech Truman gave in his retirement, he ended with a touch of levity. Truman, who had turned seventy years old three days before this National Press Club speech, closed by reminding those in attendance that his public service as an elected official had come to an end. “I have no intention of running for office anymore,” Truman said, only to sarcastically follow up with, “until after I’m ninety.”⁸² The crowd naturally applauded and laughed at the comment, as Truman intended. This had been a long running joke throughout his public appearances until 1958. When giving a speech at the Fraternal Order of Eagles convention in Chicago, Truman “drew a big laugh” when he revised this statement: “I’ve agreed to run for President when I’m ninety years old and, believe it or not, some damn fool found out that when I’m ninety, it’ll be an off year and I can’t run then.”⁸³

It was also at this 1958 convention where Truman’s rhetoric began to change, at least for these non-party affiliated speeches. In the period immediately following the 1954 speech

⁷⁸ “Truman to Ike: End GOP Lunatic Fringe,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, May 11, 1954, 15.

⁷⁹ “Truman Asserts McCarthy Republican Party Problem,” *News and Observer*, May 11, 1954, 2.

⁸⁰ “Truman Asserts McCarthy Republican Party Problem,” *News and Observer*, May 11, 1954, 1.

⁸¹ “Truman Asserts McCarthy Republican Party Problem,” *News and Observer*, May 11, 1954, 2.

⁸² “Truman Asserts McCarthy Republican Party Problem,” *News and Observer*, May 11, 1954, 2.

⁸³ “Summit Won’t Ease World Tension: HST,” *Fort Lauderdale News*, August 7, 1958, 15.

above, McCarthy had been censured by the Senate, the Democrats had retaken control of Congress, and the wrongs, as Truman saw them, of the 1952 election had been righted—at least most of them. Now, Truman was less compelled to speak about the domestic enemy of McCarthyism and chose to focus on what he always believed to be the greatest existential threat to the United States: the Soviet Union. When speaking to the Fraternal Order of Eagles, a liberal social organization of which Truman was a member, he spoke out against the looming communist threat. “There is a world power in existence today which is opposed to our own system of freedom. We are watching that world power grow stronger and stronger as the years pass. There is a real possibility that unless we take bold action, that world power may become stronger than we are,” he declared “If that should come to pass, we might lose our freedom; and we might lose it—not suddenly in a great war—but slowly by degrees, over a long time, without a shot being fired.”⁸⁴

In this speech, Truman laid bare his doubts that a proposed summit conference with Russian leaders would alleviate this growing tension and would amount to little more than “a propaganda meeting.” He recounted to his audience that during his presidency, a year after Potsdam, the Soviets broke all thirty-two agreements they had promised: “I wouldn’t trust them outside or around the corner,” said Truman.⁸⁵ He had always argued that the largest deterrent for Soviet aggression was a robust military, and, at this juncture in the Cold War, he believed this could only be achieved by maintaining a strong economy. Russian production had begun to outpace the United States, and the launch of Sputnik and the Soviet space program revealed a growing technological sophistication in Moscow. Many worried that the Soviet-style command-control economy appeared far stronger than the American system. It was imperative to Truman that the US economy needed to grow: “In the long run, our economic growth, at home and abroad, is more important than any shifts and turns in the diplomatic or political struggle with the Russians.”⁸⁶

While 1953 marked the end of Truman’s official political career, the former president did not remain silent on political issues. His speeches evinced his commitment to helping steer the course through challenges facing the United States and the world, and if given the platform, “give ‘em hell” Harry would speak.

LECTURE SERIES

One thing that Truman made clear when he left office was that he intended on using

⁸⁴Speech to Fraternal Order of Eagles, Chicago, Aug. 6, 1958, Acheson-Truman Correspondence 1958, Box 161, Acheson-Truman Correspondence File, 1947–1971, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁵“Summit Won’t Ease World Tension: HST,” *Fort Lauderdale News*, August 7, 1958, 15.

⁸⁶Speech to Fraternal Order of Eagles, Chicago, Aug. 6, 1958..

his retirement to advance the education of young people on the topics of United States history and government. Truman wrote to one educator, “I’m spending the short remainder of my life trying to give the rising generation a clear idea of what they have and what they have to do to keep it.”⁸⁷ As a former president, Truman had a unique collection of knowledge and experiences that made him eminently qualified to speak to students and instill in them a sense of civic duty and leadership. The future of the country depended on it, he believed. One way that Truman set out to accomplish this task was to meet with college students and give a series of lectures at institutions of higher learning and publish a book, entitled *Truman Speaks*, based on his lectures at one of these institutions, Columbia University.

On May 1, 1957, Truman made his first university stop at Columbia University, on his way to Washington, DC, to address the Democratic National Committee. At Columbia, he met with sixty School of Journalism students for a half-hour informal question and answer session. Although Truman kept his conversation with the students off the record, the *New York Daily News* reported that among the topics discussed were Eisenhower’s press conferences, the president’s recommended budget cuts, and the US Senate Hall of Fame.⁸⁸

The next day, Truman gave a more formal speech on the presidency to several hundred graduate students at New York University. He described the office of commander-in-chief as “one of the most unusual, most important, and least understood constitutional offices in the history of the world.”⁸⁹ In his speech, Truman laid out the powers of the president and how the office was distinct from the legislative and judicial branches. He asserted that “if you take the powers of the President as enumerated in Article Two of the Constitution, and the duties that have been given to the President by the growth and development of our institutions, and add them up, you will conclude that the President has the most difficult job in history.” Despite all of its difficulties, however, Truman held firm to the idea behind his famous presidential motto, “the buck stops here,” saying, “While the President can and must delegate certain of his executive functions, he cannot dodge the ultimate responsibility. In all the executive branch he is the only elected official, and he alone is responsible to the people.” After detailing the major responsibilities of the president, Truman concluded by stating, “To be President of the United States is the greatest honor that can come to any man. I am grateful to the people of this great Republic for that honor. Now, I am trying to

⁸⁷ Harry S Truman to James I. Robertson, Jr., December 19, 1959, Correspondence—General, 1918–1964, Box 881, Materials from Harry S. Truman’s Desk in the Harry S. Truman Library, 1918–1964, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁸ Arthur North, “Truman at Columbia Behind Glass Curtain,” *New York Daily News*, May 2, 1957, 8.

⁸⁹ Harry S Truman Speech on the Presidency at New York University, May 2, 1957, Reading Copies: 1957 [1 of 2], Box 715, Speech File, 1953–1968, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

make a contribution in a manner that will show that I am grateful.”⁹⁰ Following the address, student representatives presented Truman with a plaque for his “independence and forthrightness . . . in the great tradition of our American democratic heritage.”⁹¹ Truman gave a similar speech on a number of different occasions, including at Southern Methodist University, Harvard University, Drake University, and Oklahoma A&M.

Later in 1957, Truman finally accepted a longstanding invitation from Dean Acheson to visit Yale, Acheson’s alma mater, as a Chubb Fellow. The fellowship was intended to bring public figures to Yale for several days to speak and meet with Yale students.⁹² In a letter to Acheson, Truman asked what he could he do while visiting Yale. He had in his repertoire speeches on “Hysteria,” the presidency, and the Bill of Rights. “Do you think any one of these would be right and proper for us to use at the time you suggest?” he asked Acheson. “I’ll be glad to do everything I can to keep you from being embarrassed by this old retired farmer from Missouri.”⁹³ Truman visited Yale for three days in the spring of 1958. Truman did not, in fact, embarrass Acheson; rather, Truman was well-liked by students and faculty. Yale’s librarian, a Republican who had openly acknowledged his own disdain for Truman, was even taken by Truman’s breadth of knowledge.⁹⁴ During his time on campus, Truman had informal talks with students on such topics as American political parties. He conducted seminar classes with Acheson and participated in several formal banquets held in their honor.⁹⁵ Truman enjoyed his interactions with the Yale community and the adulation that many from the proud institution offered him. Writing to Acheson after the visit, Truman said, “I have never had a better time anywhere.”⁹⁶

The following year, Truman undertook another three-day engagement back at Columbia University where he gave a series of formal lectures as an invited guest of the Williams Radner Lecture series. Evoking his previous lectures, Truman gave lectures on the presidency, the Constitution, and hysteria surrounding what he called political “witch-hunting.” After each lecture, Truman took questions from a panel of six students pre-selected “because of their high academic standings.”⁹⁷ They questioned Truman on myriad topics, including the responsibilities of young people, the relationship between the president and his country, and the importance of civilian leadership of the military. In addition to his lectures, Truman conducted a seminar with selected students in the

⁹⁰ Harry S Truman Speech on the Presidency at New York University, May 2, 1957, Reading Copies: 1957 [1 of 2], Box 715, Speech File, 1953–1968, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹¹ “Truman Lectures Law Pupils on ‘World’s Toughest Job,’” *Springfield News-Leader*, May 3, 1957, 29.

⁹² McCullough, *Truman*, 964.

⁹³ Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, December 18, 1958, Acheson-Truman Correspondence, 1957, Box 161, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 964–965.

⁹⁵ “Truman, Acheson to Visit Yale for Informal Talks,” *Hartford Courant*, April 6, 1958, 12A.

⁹⁶ Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, April 16, 1958, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹⁷ “Harry Truman Begins Lecture Series at Columbia University,” *Wilmington Daily Press Journal*, April 27, 1959, 2.

history and government programs. This seminar consisted of a frank question and answer session between the students and Truman. Questions ranged from the use of the atomic bomb, the Korean War, and the achievements of the Truman administration, to the 1948 presidential election.⁹⁸



*Former President Harry Truman delivering a lecture to a full audience at Columbia University. Truman spent three days at Columbia University as a guest of the Williams Radner Lecture series. Recordings and transcripts of these formal talks would later be compiled into the book *Truman Speaks*. April 28, 1959.*

Credit: Manny Warman, Columbia University

In each of these sessions at Columbia, Truman's words were recorded on tape or transcribed by a stenographer. A year after the lectures, in 1960, the transcripts of Truman's speeches and conversations with students were published in the book *Truman Speaks*. "As the record indicates," wrote Columbia president Grayson Kirk, "President Truman's primary purpose was to impress upon his youthful audience the nature of their political heritage and their responsibility to preserve it for the future." Kirk continued, "He spoke to them out of a lifetime of political experience and out of a profound knowledge of American history."⁹⁹ In the introduction, Truman outlined the necessity of the information contained in his lectures to maintain a liberal American society: "I hope these informal talks at Columbia . . . will stimulate the young people of our country to take a greater interest in the study of government and to gain the necessary knowledge on how to maintain a free government."¹⁰⁰ *Truman Speaks* was ultimately a democratic project. Undoubtedly, students at the country's most prestigious institutions, such as Columbia University, were going to receive ample instruction in the history and workings of American government. But *Truman Speaks* made such information available to everyone because it would take more than a mere 400 Columbia undergraduates to inherit and maintain a democratic system of government.

Truman held true to his goal of devoting a portion of his time after leaving office to educate young people. His lectures struck at the heart of what he believed was required

⁹⁸ *Truman Speaks* Lectures, April 1959, *Truman Speaks*, Box 41, Secretary's Office Files, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Truman Speaks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), viii.

¹⁰⁰ Truman, *Truman Speaks*, xi-xii.

for a quality civic education. As a former president and student of history, he thought he was uniquely qualified to help provide such a foundation. Truman did so not only through formal lectures in front of large audiences, but he also gave considerable time to informal interactions, such as taking questions on any topic directly from students in small group settings. He extended the potential reach of these lectures and seminars by publishing them in *Truman Speaks*, so that anyone interested in his words of wisdom could benefit.

CONCLUSION

After retiring from elected office, Truman was not content to sit on the sidelines. He played a prominent role in the business of the Democratic Party, serving as the *de facto* figurehead during the Eisenhower years. Truman's desire for the position and Adlai Stevenson's reticence to claim it, gave the former president command of his party—albeit temporarily. Truman was a vigorous campaigner for congressional and gubernatorial Democratic candidates across the country. During the 1956 and 1960 presidential cycles, Truman attempted to wield his influence within the party to engineer the conventions in favor of his preferred candidates. But he was thwarted on both occasions by the will of the convention delegates. Rather than stay in Independence and lick his wounds, he hit the campaign trail to support Adlai Stevenson and John F. Kennedy, respectively. When not campaigning, he took part in politics by other means. Namely, he used his speaking events as opportunities to hit Republicans on what he perceived to be failed or dangerous policies. Some of these occasions were political but not strictly partisan. Carrying out one of the main goals of his post-presidency, Truman traveled to various colleges and universities to deliver lectures on the presidency, the Constitution, and the dangers of demagoguery. He spread his message to thousands of college students across the country. In 1960, these lectures and various informal seminars with students were published in *Truman Speaks*, a book meant to educate young people about their civic heritage and responsibilities. Truman disliked the term “elder statesman” because it connoted a lack of action. In that case, no one could consider Truman an “elder” in anything more than age.

CHAPTER 6

The Johnson Presidency

INTRODUCTION

Standing in front of the Truman Home at 219 North Delaware Street in 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson told the press, “The country is made up of Harry Trumans. He’s so much like all of us.”¹ Although Johnson was remarking on Truman’s disposition as a common man, Johnson was also unwittingly providing commentary on how Truman handled the tumultuous decade of the Johnson administration: often hopeful, sometimes troubled, and often bewildered, just like many other Americans across the country. The 1960s was a decade of profound upheaval and promise, two characteristics that challenged elder statesmen and everyday Americans alike.

Following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, Truman participated in Kennedy’s funeral services at the invitation of his friend, President Lyndon B. Johnson, and shared a limousine with his former rival, Dwight Eisenhower. The new President Johnson had been a longtime ally and friend of Truman, and Johnson called on Truman for help and advice during his time in office. Johnson made it a point to reassure Truman of their mutual friendship, and Truman provided him counsel when needed. The civil rights activism of the 1960s replaced the predominant legal strategy of previous decades, resulting in demonstrations and marches, some of which resulted in violence against civil rights activists. Despite being a staunch supporter of civil rights reform as Mr. President, Truman, as Mr. Citizen, made critical statements about the movement in speeches and correspondence, which at times contradicted his strong record on civil rights while in office. Meanwhile, as the Johnson administration

¹ “Gains Advice from a Visit,” *Kansas City Times*, May 4, 1968, 1A.

significantly increased American military presence in Vietnam, the societal turmoil at home rapidly divided the country. Through it all, Truman remained an ally of Johnson, ready to help the sitting president and calm the nerves of the country by issuing a supportive statement when called upon. He wholeheartedly supported Johnson's domestic program, known as the Great Society, which had its roots in Truman's own Fair Deal. The elder statesman remained tied up in many of the defining features of the 1960s, until a fall in 1964 caused serious injuries that forced Truman to slow down considerably and become less involved in national endeavors.

THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

On November 22, 1963, Truman was at an afternoon luncheon at the Hotel Muehlebach in Kansas City when he heard the devastating news over the radio—John F. Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. Less than an hour later, driving home to be with Bess, Truman learned that the president had been pronounced dead.²

The news shook Truman to his core, as he himself had almost been assassinated while in office. In 1950, two members of the Puerto Rican independence movement attempted to kill Truman while he was napping in the upstairs bedroom at the Blair House. Secret Service and White House police thwarted the assassination attempt. The trauma of this event, however, clearly impacted his own feelings about Kennedy's death. "Having come so close to that fate himself," Margaret Truman remembered, "Dad was terribly shaken by it. For the first time in his life, he was unable to face reporters."³ Local journalists immediately flocked to 219 North Delaware Street to receive a statement from Truman regarding the tragedy, but he declined all questions. Truman was unable to comment publicly for the next four hours, and when his statement did finally come, Bess addressed the public in his stead, as her husband was still "shocked beyond words." Choking back tears, she read a statement that he had prepared: "The president's death is a great personal loss to the country and to me. He was an able president, one the people loved and trusted. Mrs. Truman and I send our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Kennedy and the family."⁴

Not long after being sworn in as president, Johnson called all three of the former presidents—Hoover, Truman, and Eisenhower—to "give the world a picture of stability and confidence" and to ask his predecessors for advice.⁵ In later writings, Truman recollected that his phone call with Johnson was brief, the president telling Truman that

² McCullough, 982.

³ Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 418.

⁴ "Slaying of President Leaves Truman Stunned," *Fresno Bee*, November 23, 1963, 5.

⁵ "The Longest Weekend," *Texas Monthly*, September 1980, 204.



Former President Harry Truman and President Lyndon B. Johnson meet while Truman was in Washington, DC, for President Kennedy's funeral. Truman lent crucial support to Lyndon Johnson after he was suddenly thrust into the presidency following Kennedy's assassination. November 1963.

Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service

a plane would be sent for him so he could arrive in Washington the next day to prepare for the funeral. Truman flew to the capital on November 23 without Bess, who was unable to make the trip due to an illness. Margaret and her husband Clifton came down from New York to be at Truman's side.⁶ Upon arrival at the White House, with head bowed, Truman silently reflected in front of President Kennedy's casket before offering condolences to Kennedy's widow, Jacqueline Kennedy. "I found her as expected, remarkably self-possessed and poised," Truman recalled, "but to me the deep sadness in her eyes came through. She said to me her husband, the President, spoke of me often and with much feeling and understanding of what we tried to do, and I found myself choked up with emotion."⁷ He met with President Johnson in the Executive Office across the street and offered his support to his longtime ally and friend. "President Johnson will do a good job. There is no doubt about it," Truman avowed to the press on his

trip back to the Blair House.⁸ The day had taken a visible emotional and physical toll on Truman, his noticeable distress worrying Margaret enough to call for a doctor. Truman remained bedridden for the remainder of the day.⁹

His condition improved by November 25, and he was able to attend that morning's funeral services at St. Matthew's Cathedral. Truman was not the only former president to attend. Eisenhower drove in from his new home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to also pay his respects, marking one of the rare occasions since Eisenhower's inauguration that he and Truman had been in the same room. Although the circumstances of their meeting could not have been worse, it appeared that Truman and Eisenhower were finally ready to squash their now decade-long feud. Eisenhower and his wife Mamie invited Truman and Margaret to join them in their limousine for the motorcade procession to Kennedy's burial site at Arlington National Cemetery.¹⁰ The Trumans agreed, and following the graveside service, Margaret invited the Eisenhowers to join them inside the Blair House for some light fare and tea.¹¹

⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, 982.

⁷ Quoted in McCullough, *Truman*, 982.

⁸ John R. Cauley, "Truman Trust in Successor," *Kansas City Star*, 1.

⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, 982.

¹⁰ "2 Ex-Presidents Friendly Again," *New York Times*, December 6, 1963, 20.

¹¹ "Cool Relations Thawing Between Eisenhower and Truman," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 6, 1963, 3.



Former President Harry Truman and former President Dwight Eisenhower leave St. Matthew's Cathedral together after President John F. Kennedy's funeral service. Truman and Eisenhower reconciled their decade-long feud after this somber event. November 23, 1963.

Credit: AP Photo

Over the next half hour, Truman and Eisenhower talked like old times, swapping tales from their equally storied pasts. Tom Gavin, a public relations counselor from Kansas City and close friend of Truman who accompanied him to Washington for the funeral, was in the room with the pair during their conversation. He described the two former presidents, their chairs pulled close together, as looking like “two old soldiers recalling the times and the people they’d known.” Gavin did not hear all the details of their conversation, but reported that Eisenhower at one point recalled a mission Truman had sent him on, to which Truman replied, “and you did a fine job on that.”¹²

It had appeared over the past decade that a pleasant exchange like this between Truman and Eisenhower could only exist in fantasy. Both scarred from the venomous rhetoric of the 1952 and 1956 elections and the personal and professional slights now too many to count, Truman and Eisenhower seemed committed to seeing their feud through to the very end. But this conversation signaled that the pair would ultimately make amends with their differences. Perhaps due to their advancing age—both were almost eighty years old in 1963—or from

a shared sense of grief over losing a fellow president, their strained relationship finally began to heal. After reminiscing “about happy times,” at Kennedy’s funeral, the chilly air between these two political titans appeared to finally thaw.¹³ They parted ways with a handshake, and “you could see the warmth in their eyes,” a reporter from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted.¹⁴

In the wake of Kennedy’s death, President Johnson pushed a bill through Congress to expand Secret Service protections to include all former presidents.¹⁵ Shortly after the bill was enacted in 1965, agents arrived in Independence to provide protection for the Trumans. The elderly couple, however, was quite resistant to this change, seeing the new security detail as an unwanted intrusion into their private life. Mike Westwood, Truman’s long-time driver, bodyguard, friend, and Independence police officer, remembered the change being abrupt and total. According to Westwood, Truman was not consulted before Secret Service arrived at his home.¹⁶ “The Secret Service took

¹² “Cool Relations Thawing Between Eisenhower and Truman,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 6, 1963, 3.

¹³ “2 Ex-Presidents Friendly Again,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1963, 20.

¹⁴ “Cool Relations Thawing Between Eisenhower and Truman,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 6, 1963, 3.

¹⁵ For the full text of this legislation, see Appendix H.

¹⁶ Paul Mike Westwood, by Jerald L. Hill and William D. Stilley, Oral History Interview with Paul Mike Westwood, Harry S. Truman Library, December 30, 1975, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/westwood>.

complete charge and just took over the house,” he said. The agents installed new phone lines and requested to rebuild the old security shack that had stood on the property until 1962. All of these security protocols deeply annoyed the Trumans.¹⁷ When an agent told Truman that Mike Westwood would be relieved of duty, as his role would now be performed by the Secret Service detail, Truman fired back, saying, “Well I no longer have a need for you, so get out of here.”¹⁸ Truman stuck to his word, and within three days of being assigned Secret Service agents, he had them all withdrawn from his home. Truman had learned that “the courtesy of protection provided in the bill made the service available and not mandatory.”¹⁹ He wasted no time in calling Westwood—who had been reassigned to the Jackson County Court as a bailiff—back into service. Truman called the courthouse telephone and said, “Well, I just relieved all the Secret Service . . . you want to pick me up in the morning?”²⁰ Westwood quickly resumed his duties thereafter.



Paul “Mike” Westwood (left), Truman’s dedicated bodyguard poses alongside Former President Harry S. Truman, Chief Justice Earl Warren, and Dean Acheson. The four are standing together in the Harry S. Truman Library. March 31, 1962.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

But President Johnson persisted. He personally telephoned to convince Truman, and more so Bess, that they needed to accept Secret Service protection. Truman consulted with Westwood who agreed with President Johnson and told Truman that he thought it was “a good idea, because . . . the Secret Service can chase down anybody.”²¹ The Trumans eventually relented and reinstated the Secret Service agents they had turned away, but not without some firm restrictions. First, Mike Westwood would be retained as Truman’s chauffeur and continue to accompany him alongside the new agents—this was non-negotiable. Second, the Secret Service could by no means construct a guard house on

the Trumans’ property. Bess had despised the security shack the Secret Service had installed while Truman was president and strongly opposed building another one. The Secret Service’s “Truman Protective Division” instead established their command post at the Truman Library a mile north. Agents remotely monitored the property through a series of surveillance cameras installed around the outside of the house.²²

Over time, the Trumans grew to accept the Secret Service as a fact of their retired lives, eventually letting the agents move their guard station to a vacant house across the street

¹⁷ “Aide Recalls Trips,” *Kansas City Star*, October 1, 1973, 2.

¹⁸ Author’s interview with Robert Lockwood, in McCullough, *Truman*, 982–983.

¹⁹ “Truman Declines Secret Service,” *Tennessean*, September 23, 1965, 58.

²⁰ Paul Mike Westwood, Oral History Interview with Paul Mike Westwood, December 30, 1975.

²¹ Paul Mike Westwood, Oral History Interview with Paul Mike Westwood, December 30, 1975.

²² “Truman and the Secret Service,” Harry S. Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service.

(nicknamed “Tranquility Base” given the comparative ease of the assignment). While the Trumans were no doubt reticent about the Secret Service’s return, they by no means disliked their agents. Truman and Bess admired their agents and treated them with great respect. “They got along with them very well and knew all of them by name. They were kind of like family,” Margaret recounted. Rex Scouten, an agent in the detail, described that Truman would “treat us almost like sons,” and his fellow agent Floyd Boring noted that Truman “never came on as being superior” and relished having casual conversations with his agents.²³ The Secret Service detail in Independence served Truman until his death in 1972 and remained to watch over Bess for the following ten years.

TRUMAN AND JOHNSON’S FRIENDSHIP

By the time Johnson ascended to the presidency following Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, Truman had already seen two other men become president. But he felt differently about Johnson who had been a staunch ally in Congress during Truman’s presidency. A rare southern progressive, then US Senator Johnson had accompanied Truman during his famous whistlestop campaign in 1948. As Senate majority leader, Johnson, at Truman’s request, helped to pass the Former Presidents Act, which gave Truman and future former presidents a government pension. Throughout Johnson’s presidency, he and Truman exchanged numerous letters and telephone calls, and Johnson made several personal visits to Truman in Independence. If, in his post-presidency, Truman was looking for respect and deference to his experiences as president, he surely received it from Johnson, who was not sparing with his admiration for his predecessor.



Former President Harry S Truman celebrates his 78th birthday, complete with a multi-tiered cake. Truman and Henry Talge (right) look up at the cake’s large candle as Truman prepares to cut it, while a smiling Vice President Lyndon Johnson (left) looks on. May 8, 1962.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

²³ “Truman and the Secret Service,” Site Bulletin, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service.

Prior to becoming president, Johnson already corresponded with Truman frequently and had visited him on several occasions. Johnson was among the distinguished guests who attended the opening of the Truman Library in 1957. During the 1960 presidential campaign, Johnson visited with Truman in Kansas City, where the two had dinner with Democratic leaders.²⁴ He later returned as vice president in April 1961 to brief Truman on the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba. The *Kansas City Star* ran a picture of Truman and Johnson embracing at the airport, with the caption “Big grins and a friendly hug.”²⁵ Johnson visited again in 1962, this time traveling to Independence to meet Truman at the library.²⁶ By the time he became president, Johnson had racked up several trips to Missouri to visit and consult with Truman.



Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson looks fondly at a smiling Former President Truman during a visit to the Harry S. Truman Library. April 25, 1961.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



President Lyndon B. Johnson shakes the hand of a young nurse at Research Hospital in Kansas City, MO. President Johnson and First Lady Lady Bird Johnson traveled to Research Hospital to visit Former President Harry S Truman, who was hospitalized there after a fall in his home. October 21, 1964.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Johnson took his first trip to Missouri as president following Truman’s bathroom fall in October 1964. He traveled from the airport by motorcade to the Research Hospital in downtown Kansas City, where Truman was staying. Once at the hospital, Johnson visited Truman for about half an hour, talking about a range of topics, such as geopolitics and Truman’s grandchildren. Because Johnson was amid his 1964 presidential campaign, the conversation also included the election. “Mr. Truman said he wanted to see me elected even more than he wanted to be elected in 1948,” Johnson told the press. Truman offered

²⁴ Elmer Kelton, “Trumans Greet Johnson after Nebraska Speeches,” *Abilene Reporter-News*, September 23, 1960, 11-A.

²⁵ “Truman Greets Johnson,” *Kansas City Star*, April 25, 1961, 1–2.

²⁶ “Johnson and Truman Review Political Wars,” *Kansas City Times*, October 19, 1962, 3B.

to help Johnson in any way he could, despite his infirmity.²⁷ Before leaving the hospital to return to the airport, Johnson said that he was going to invite the Trumans to visit Washington, DC, and spend the night at the White House. He also stated that he would call Truman in a few days to check in on him.²⁸ During the short visit, Johnson did not take any meetings with political leaders or attend any rallies in the midst of the last stretch of his presidential campaign; rather, he made the stop only to see his friend in a period of ill health and, having accomplished that, went back to the business of being president.

Johnson spoke with Truman again on November 4, 1964, the day after Johnson defeated Republican Barry Goldwater to win his first full term as president. Upon hearing his predecessor on the line, Johnson greeted Truman by saying, “Mr. President, I love you as everybody in America does, and I’m just so honored that you would take the time to call me.” Archival records of the telephone conversation captured the two leaders flattering each other. Truman stated that Johnson had set a record as president that no one would beat; and Johnson listed all of Truman’s accomplishments that “makes all of us look like pygmies.” Johnson continued by telling Truman that whenever Truman wanted to come visit, that there would be a bedroom and doctors available to him at the White House. Johnson also offered to send a plane to pick up Margaret and the grandkids to fly them all to Washington, DC. After discussing the campaign and the tactics of the Goldwater campaign, Johnson spoke with Bess Truman, stating:

Anything that he [Harry Truman] wants or he needs or that somebody suspects would be good for him, from doctors to planes to coming to the White House for a few days, bringing his grandchildren, going any place, anybody that you want to consult with that we have, all you need to do is drop me a postcard.²⁹

The effusive praise exchanged between Johnson and Truman evoked a true sense of friendship between the two, with Johnson’s offers of assistance belying a concern for Truman’s well-being.

Several months later, on February 15, 1965, Johnson called Truman to discuss the broadening conflict in Vietnam. After Johnson told Truman that he was “having hell,” Truman, with real concern in his voice, asked, “What’s the trouble?” Johnson explained that he was having issues with Congress, with Indochina, and “a little bit all over the country.” Remarking that Truman had handled the many problems during his presidency

²⁷ “Brief LBJ Visit to Truman,” *Kansas City Times*, October 22, 1964, 1A.

²⁸ “Brief LBJ Visit to Truman,” *Kansas City Times*, October 22, 1964, 6A.

²⁹ Telephone conversation between Harry S Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson, November 4, 1964, Telephone Conversation #6166, Recordings and Transcripts of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/tel-06166>.

very well, Johnson acknowledged that he called “to try to get a little advice and a little inspiration.” Drawing on Truman’s experience with Korea, Johnson asked him for some insight on handling the war in Vietnam. “All I know what to do out there is what I am doing,” Johnson admitted. “I think when they go in and kill your boys, you got to hit back. And I’m not trying to spread the war.” Truman interjected, “You bet you have. You bump them in the nose every time you can. They understand that language better than any other kind.” Johnson renewed his invitation to Truman once again to visit the White House, offering to send a plane to pick up or to bring Margaret and her family. “I’ll always want you to know that I need your counsel and I love you,” said Johnson. “Well, that’s mutual,” Truman responded, “and I’m glad to give you whatever experience I have.”³⁰



President and First Lady Johnson visit Former President Harry Truman and Bess Wallace Truman at their home in Independence, Missouri. The group stands on a porch, with Truman and Johnson engaged in a serious conversation while a smiling First Lady Johnson and former First Lady Truman look on. May 3, 1968.

Credit: Yoichi R. Okamoto, White House Photo Office, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Throughout the 1960s, Johnson visited Truman in Missouri a dozen times. His last visit occurred on May 3, 1968, when he and Lady Bird Johnson made a special trip to the Trumans’ home on North Delaware Street. During the one-hour visit, Johnson briefed Truman on the Paris peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese government. Johnson told the press outside the home that he asked for Truman’s advice, and Truman gave Johnson his suggestions “with the bark off.” Concerning his visit, Johnson stated:

I’m leaving refreshed and reinvigorated and happy at what I have seen and what I have heard and eternally thankful that Mrs. Johnson and I have been privileged to know greatness and to witness it again here today in this typically American home with these typical American people.”³¹

Before leaving, Johnson gave Truman an autographed picture, a pair of presidential cuff links, a tie clasp, and a watch. On the picture, Johnson wrote, “For my dear and true

³⁰Telephone conversation between Harry S Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson, February 15, 1965, Telephone Conversation #6847, Recordings and Transcripts of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/tel-06847>.

³¹“Gains Advice from a Visit,” *Kansas City Times*, May 4, 1968, 1A.

friends, Bess and Harry S. Truman, with affection and great respect, Lyndon B. Johnson, May 1968.”³² Later that year, the American public elected Richard M. Nixon as president; Johnson, like Truman, thus became a former president.

With the exception of Johnson’s historic trip to the Truman Library to sign the Medicare Act on July 30, 1965, when the Trumans were given their applications to be the first two registrants for the service, Truman and Johnson did not create much fanfare surrounding their friendship. Truman’s ill health, beginning in the spring of 1964, prevented him from participating in many political events with Johnson during the 1960s, including trips to the White House. Nevertheless, Johnson found the time during his presidency to consult with and check up on his aging friend from Missouri. Truman did not have much to offer Johnson except his counsel and encouragement, and yet Johnson always kept the former president in his highest regard.

THE GREAT SOCIETY

On the evening of November 22, 1963, only hours after the traumatic assassination that had thrust Lyndon Johnson into the presidency, he confessed to his aides an unfortunate truth about the problems their administration faced. “You know, when I went into that office tonight and they came in and started briefing me on what I have to do,” Johnson told assistants Bill Moyers and Jack Valenti, “do you realize that every issue that is on my desk tonight was on my desk when I came to Congress in 1937?”³³ Johnson felt that the liberal legacy of his predecessors had been left largely unfinished, through no fault of their own. By 1939, a coalition of disgruntled Republicans and conservative Democrats opposed further expansion of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal policies, and with the United States’ entry into World War II, new domestic reforms fell by the wayside. Truman had championed his own “Fair Deal” during his two terms, proposing sweeping improvements to American health care, civil rights, and workers’ wages. But with a Republican majority in Congress and defiance from conservative Democrats, few of Truman’s domestic policy proposals succeeded.

During a speech at Ohio University on May 7, 1964, Johnson announced his plan to make complete this long arc of modern American liberalism. His so-named “Great Society” platform was envisioned as an expansive program to raise the standards of living for all citizens. Johnson declared an “unconditional war on poverty,” believing that a country as large and rich as the United States must strive to be “a society where no child will go unfed, and no youngster will go unschooled.”³⁴ He remarked that this “war” was one that

³² “LBJ Calls Couple Typical,” *Kansas City Times*, May 4, 1968, 13A.

³³ Joshua Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society,” *Politico Magazine*, January 28, 2018.

³⁴ Joshua Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society.”

“we cannot afford to lose,” and his administration would not stop until it had achieved the total elimination of poverty and racial injustice. Antidiscrimination and civil rights rhetoric served as the agenda’s philosophical backbone, its success eventually enshrining protections for all Americans in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act a year later. Johnson’s domestic policy proved to be immensely popular during his time in office. It contributed to his landslide election victory in 1964 and the staggering liberal wave that took control of the Eighty-Ninth Congress that same year.

Historical comparisons have often been made between Johnson’s Great Society and Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, as both aspired to restructure American society and increased the federal government’s direct involvement in citizens’ welfare. Most of Johnson’s inspirations, however, were much farther reaching. Newspapers claimed that more than half of the proposals made by Johnson were either extensions or revisions to programs already created by Truman, Eisenhower, or Kennedy, while many more were renewed attempts to enact legislation drafted by these earlier presidents that had been defeated in Congress. Johnson’s approach, “more of a rifle than a shotgun,” targeted problems narrowly rather than the all-encompassing reforms of his predecessors: his education plan was aimed at poor schools, not all schools; his health insurance plan only for the very young and very old.³⁵

While the Great Society was indeed the “spiritual descendant” of the New Deal, it was perhaps more accurately the “direct offspring” of Truman’s Fair Deal.³⁶ Passage of civil rights legislation would have not been possible without the initial steps Truman took during his administration to desegregate the Armed Forces and government departments and create an advisory committee on civil rights. One of the other enduring reforms of the Great Society, the Medicare Act, which guaranteed healthcare for citizens aged sixty-five or older, was clearly inspired by Truman’s unfulfilled quest for single-payer healthcare during his presidency. In 1945, and again in 1947 and 1949, Truman had lobbied Congress to establish a federally funded healthcare system but was struck down in each instance. Conservatives denounced his plan as a descent into “socialized medicine,” and private insurance providers and the American Medical Association joined this chorus to eventually kill the bill.³⁷ By 1965, however, the political landscape had become much more amenable to healthcare legislation. With over a two-thirds majority vote in both houses of Congress, Johnson was able to easily pass his Medicare Act in 1965 as an expansion of the Social Security Act initially set by the Roosevelt administration three decades before.

³⁵ Robert Boyd, “LBJ’s ‘Great Society’: What Is It?” *Miami Herald*, January 17, 1965, 128.

³⁶ Robert Boyd, “LBJ’s ‘Great Society’: What Is It?” *Miami Herald*, January 17, 1965, 128.

³⁷ Howard Menkel, “How Medicare Came to Be, Thanks to Harry S. Truman,” *PBS News Hour*, July 30, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/president-johnson-signs-medicare-law>.



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Medicare Bill alongside Harry and Bess Truman at the Truman Library. July 30, 1965.

Credit: White House Photo Office, National Archives and Records Administration

The Medicare bill was signed into law on July 30, 1965, at a special ceremony at the Truman Library in Independence. Johnson wanted to share “this time of triumph” with Truman, who he had frequently called the “real daddy of Medicare.”³⁸ Johnson was effusive with praise for Truman at the ceremony, again avowing that this legislation would have never been possible without him: “It was Harry Truman of Missouri, who planted the seeds of compassion and duty which today flower into care for the sick and serenity for the fearful.”³⁹ After signing the bill into law, Johnson enrolled Harry

and Bess Truman as the first official Medicare beneficiaries. Johnson provided the couple with their Medicare applications and witnessed the signing of their forms. Truman then declared that the passage of Medicare was a “step from charity to security with dignity” for millions of elderly Americans.⁴⁰

Health Insurance	
SOCIAL SECURITY ACT	
NAME OF BENEFICIARY Harry S. Truman	
CLAIM NUMBER 488-40-6969A	SEX M
IS ENTITLED TO Hospital Insurance	EFFECTIVE DATE 7-1-66
Medical Insurance	7-1-66
SIGN HERE	

Medicare card of Harry S Truman. 1966.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

Health Insurance	
SOCIAL SECURITY ACT	
NAME OF BENEFICIARY Bess W. Truman	
CLAIM NUMBER 488-40-6969-B	SEX F
IS ENTITLED TO Hospital Insurance	EFFECTIVE DATE 7-1-66
Medical Insurance	7-1-66
SIGN HERE	

Medicare card of Bess W. Truman. 1966.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

Following the historic event, Truman sent a touching tribute to Johnson. “In my opinion, there is good reason for you to expect that you will be ranked with our great Presidents,” he wrote to his old friend.⁴¹ Johnson’s savvy command of Congress led to the enactment of many of Truman’s old proposals, for which he felt an immense gratitude. When

³⁸ “LBJ Joins HST to Make Medicare Law,” *Central New Jersey Home News*, July 31, 1965, 1; Menkel, “How Medicare Came to Be, Thanks to Harry S. Truman.”

³⁹ “LBJ Joins HST to Make Medicare Law,” *Central New Jersey Home News*, July 31, 1965, 1.

⁴⁰ Harry S Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, March 15, 1966, Johnson, Lyndon B.—Personal Correspondence, Box 25, Secretary’s Office File, 1953–1972, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴¹ Harry S Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, March 15, 1966.

Truman first proposed his ambitious Fair Deal to his advisers, he had been cautiously optimistic that even if he could not achieve all these reforms during his tenure, someone would: “We’re gonna do it boys, we’re gonna do it. We may not make it today but someday we will.”⁴² Twenty years later, Truman’s dreams of instituting a federal healthcare program that targeted the nation’s most needy had been realized.

TRUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

During his presidency, Harry Truman championed civil rights reform, perhaps more so than any other president up to that point. While his predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt appealed to many Black voters, the passage of his New Deal programs through Congress hinged on the votes of southern Democrats who opposed any legislation that might expand the rights of African Americans or allow equal access to public accommodations. Truman, on the other hand, set out to use the powers of the executive branch to improve the lives of minorities in both civilian and military life. For these initiatives, Truman earned a reputation for standing up for civil rights reform and racial integration. But as the strategy of civil rights leaders shifted from legal battles to activism, Truman became more critical of their methods and public protesting.

When Truman assumed the presidency in April 1945, one of his first domestic initiatives was to address the civil rights of Black people in the United States. After World War II, racial violence directed at African Americans across the country continued, and, at times, escalated. The case of Isaac Woodard, Jr.—a Black World War II veteran who was beaten by South Carolina police for insisting on being able to use the restroom during his bus trip home after being discharged—particularly incensed Truman. Truman ordered a federal investigation of the assault when authorities in South Carolina refused to do so. To address these issues and find ways to strengthen civil rights protections for racial and religious minorities, Truman established the President’s Committee on Civil Rights in late 1946. He tasked the committee with studying ways to overcome racial discrimination in the workplace and to lobby for legislation to enshrine those protections into law. “In the Executive Order creating the committee,” Truman wrote in his memoirs, “I pointed out that the nation was losing ground in civil rights and that the preservation of the liberties was the duty of every branch of government and every public official—state, federal, and local.”⁴³ He told the members of the committee in January 1947 that he wanted the Bill of Rights “implemented in fact.” He continued, “We have been trying to do this for 150 years. We are making progress, but we are not making progress fast enough.” Later that year, the committee released its report containing recommendations that called for: instituting permanent civil rights offices and committees in the

⁴² “LBJ Joins HST to Make Medicare Law,” *Central New Jersey Home News*, July 31, 1965, 1.

⁴³ Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope*, 180.

Executive Branch and Congress, strengthening of existing civil rights legislation, federal protections against lynching and for voting rights, fair employment practices, colorblind naturalization laws, home rule and suffrage to residents of the District of Columbia, statehood for Hawaii and Alaska, and compensating Japanese Americans for internment during the war. To codify these recommendations into law, Truman advocated for civil rights legislation in his annual address to Congress in February 1948.⁴⁴

Truman's stance on civil rights as president was truly remarkable, considering his family's history. Although his home state of Missouri remained part of the Union during the Civil War, Missouri was still a slave state until 1865. But even after the abolition of legal slavery, Missouri enacted strict segregationist laws, along with the rest of the former slave states. Naturally, Truman's family was not divorced from this history. His paternal grandfather, Anderson Truman, owned five enslaved people. His mother, Martha Ellen, had vivid memories of poor treatment by troops of the United States Army and her family's forced internment in Kansas City under General Order No. 11.⁴⁵ In fact, when she visited her son, then president, in Washington, DC, she became upset when Margaret teased her about having to sleep in the Lincoln Bedroom. "Mamma [Martha Ellen Truman] replied that she was ready to sleep on the floor, before she made such a concession to her Southern principles," Margaret recalled. "Dad finally had to shush me and calm her down by assuring her that she was going to sleep in the Rose Room, where visiting queens and other prominent female VIPs stayed."⁴⁶ Despite these entrenched family memories, as well as social and cultural pressures, Truman forged ahead with a slate of real and proposed civil rights reforms.



President Harry Truman delivers a speech at the 38th annual conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Truman is the first president to address the NAACP, and this moment is seen as a crucial moment in Truman's support for civil rights. June 29, 1947.

Credit: National Park Service

Truman took the message of equal economic and political rights directly to the people he was trying to aid, becoming the first president to address the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In a June 1947 speech broadcasted nationally on radio, Truman stated, "It is my deep conviction that we have reached a turning point in the long history of our country's efforts to guarantee a freedom and equality to all of our citizens." Asserting that it was more important than ever to ensure all

⁴⁴ Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope*, 181.

⁴⁵ McCullough, *Truman*, 32–33.

⁴⁶ Truman, *Harry S. Truman*, 244.

Americans enjoy civil rights, Truman emphasized, “And when I say all Americans—I mean all Americans.” He proposed reorienting the way Americans thought about their rights vis-à-vis the government, namely that the great documents outlining American civil liberties provided protection against oppression perpetrated by the government. “We must make the Federal Government a friendly, vigilant defender of the rights and equalities of all Americans,” he reiterated. “And again I mean all Americans.”⁴⁷ In this speech, Truman laid out a truly progressive view on civil rights for its time. During the twentieth century the federal government had mostly stayed above the fray of civil rights debates, allowing local and state governments to deal with those issues independently. But Truman understood the need to move the country forward on race issues and proposed that the federal government take action to ensure that all people enjoy the civil rights afforded to them.



President Harry S Truman shakes the hand of US Air Force Staff Sergeant Edward Williams. Williams had been serving in the Air Force for the past nine years, so he experienced the effects of Truman's Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the US Armed Forces. October 12, 1950.

Credit: Bettmann Archive/Getty Images

Before the 1948 presidential election, one in which southern Democrats bolted from the party over Truman's pro-civil rights stance, Truman called for the end of racial segregation in the military and civil service. In July 1948, he signed Executive Order 9981, which created a policy of “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.” With it, he established the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services to identify discriminatory rules and procedures that needed to be changed.⁴⁸

The same day, he desegregated the federal civil service with Executive Order 9980, which prohibited discrimination based on race in the federal hiring process. These policies effectively integrated the Executive Branch of the federal

government and won a major milestone for the civil rights movement. Truman took these provocative, but prudent, steps during the campaign for his first full term as president—a period of heightened political vulnerability—during which he faced a revolt from his own party. His hard stance in support of civil rights threatened to torpedo his reelection.

⁴⁷ Harry S Truman, Address before the NAACP, June 29, 1947, Truman Library Institute, <https://www.trumanlibraryinstitute.org/historic-speeches-naACP/>.

⁴⁸ Executive Order 9981, “Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services,” July 26, 1948, Memos and Press Releases re: Executive Order 9981, Desegregation of the Armed Forces, Official File, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/memos-and-press-releases-re-executive-order-9981?documentid=NA&pagenumber=4>.

Despite Truman's contributions toward Black political and economic equality as president, his support for efforts to bring about social equality wavered. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, holding that segregation of students in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, regardless of the condition of segregated schools. During a political rally in New York in 1958, Truman praised the Supreme Court's decision as the law of the land, expressing that it was also "morally right." He then criticized Eisenhower for not taking a stand on the decision, failing to give "proper leadership at the proper time" amid violence "by extremists and crackpots" over desegregation. Although Eisenhower did move to force desegregation, Truman charged that it was too late, and opposition had already "solidified" and "the poison of hate had already spread."⁴⁹ According to J. Frederick Neal, a Black state lawmaker, pharmacist, and civil rights leader from Kansas City, Truman said that he would have jailed Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas for stopping integration efforts in Little Rock and federalized the Arkansas National Guard to keep Faubus from using it.⁵⁰

Undoubtedly, Truman often put great moral force behind his words when speaking out about *Brown*, carrying over his rhetoric as president to his post-presidency. Truman was not entirely consistent with the intensity of his support for desegregation, however. During the 1956 Democratic convention, Truman agreed with the party's platform that supported the "full rights to education in all publicly supported institutions." The plank, however, failed to mention the desegregation of those publicly supported institutions as a Democratic goal.⁵¹ By downplaying desegregation, the party hoped to placate southern Democrats, many of whom still opposed desegregation efforts. After Truman declared the platform's statement a "good civil rights plank," one Black politician stated, "Well, even old Harry sold us out. It was worse than finding out that there really is no Santa Claus."⁵² Truman went a step further and proposed a gradualist approach to desegregation that allowed southern school districts to opt out of the integration order by the Supreme Court. He praised a scheme to allow white children to transfer to majority-white schools if they were attending a majority-Black school, which would have effectively upheld the segregation.⁵³ In an interview with *Ebony*, Truman walked back his tough talk on Faubus. "I think we'd better let Faubus alone," he said, "for nobody wants to make him a hero in the South. If you want to make him a martyr, censure him or kick him out of the party. I learned a long time ago that the man you attack gets just as good a

⁴⁹ John H. Fenton, "Truman Charges Leadership Lag," *New York Times*, October 24, 1958, 27.

⁵⁰ Rowan, "Harry Truman and the Negro," 54.

⁵¹ Democratic Party Platform, August 13, 1956, *American Presidency Project*, University of California at Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/1956-democratic-party-platform>.

⁵² Rowan, "Harry Truman and the Negro," 44.

⁵³ Statement on Civil Rights, December 1, 1958, Civil Rights, Box 14, Secretary's Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

headline as you do.”⁵⁴

In a speech delivered in Chicago in 1955, Truman had talked about civil rights reform: “Some people are so afraid of rocking the boat that they stop rowing.” This line referred to politicians who were so terrified of political blowback that they stalled in their commitments to racial equality. Clarence Mitchell, the director of the NAACP’s Washington bureau, wrote to Truman to congratulate him on his frank statements about civil rights. “Your forthright declaration on civil rights made it possible to talk about the evil of segregation openly,” Mitchell wrote. “Previously, many people seemed to regard it as a subject that was taboo in polite society.”⁵⁵ But the emerging strategy of nonviolent protest among civil rights leaders in the 1950s and 1960s was a bridge too far for Truman and appeared to keep him from rowing. When, in 1960, Black activists began sitting in at segregated lunch counters across the South, Truman responded, “If anyone came into my store and tried to stop business I’d throw him out . . . The Negro should behave himself and show he’s a good citizen.”⁵⁶ Leaders of the Detroit branch of the NAACP wrote Truman to voice their dismay about his statement and invited him to a private meeting so that he would clarify his position. “We believe you may not have been properly informed on the issues and facts involved in the lunch counter protest movement against racial segregation,” they wrote, “especially in light of the way police and southern state government power are being used to crush the peaceful demonstrations that have taken place so far in various sections of the South.”⁵⁷ Truman responded, “I would do just what I said I would do . . . If I were in Detroit I would say the same thing to you personally for all the newspapers and televisions in the country.”⁵⁸ Even Truman’s close friend Dean Acheson chided him for his inconsistent views on civil rights activism: “What is all this anti-sit-down attitude of yours? Missourians are confederates at heart and while they . . . accept the Constitution and even defend it vigorously, they won’t go a step further.”⁵⁹ It seemed that Truman disliked the challenge to polite social order that nonviolent demonstrations—and, by extension, the often-violent backlash to such demonstrations—encouraged. Perhaps in his view, laws and executive orders were neat and orderly, but direct action in the public square was far too messy and difficult to temper.

Truman later claimed that the sit-ins might be orchestrated by the Soviets, just as

⁵⁴ Rowan, “Harry Truman and the Negro,” 52, 54.

⁵⁵ Clarence Mitchell to Harry S Truman, April 28, 1955, Colored—NAACP, Box 189, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁶ Edward M. Turner and Arthur L. Johnson to Harry S Truman, March 22, 1960, Civil Rights, Box 14, Secretary’s Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁷ “Truman Lambasted in Racial Sitdowns,” *Detroit Times*, March 21, 1960, 1.

⁵⁸ Harry S Truman to Edward M. Turner and Arthur L. Johnson, March 24, 1960, Civil Rights, Box 14, Secretary’s Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁹ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, April 14, 1960, Correspondence—Dean Acheson, 1956–62, Box 881, Materials from Harry S. Truman’s Desk in the Harry S. Truman Library, 1918–64, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

the Senate had found that communists engineered the 1937 protests in American automobile factories. “You never can tell,” Truman stated, “where you’ll find their fine Italian hand, and its not Italian—it’s Russian.”⁶⁰ Truman put much faith in Federal Bureau of Investigation director J. Edgar Hoover’s assertion that many of the civil rights demonstrations, including sit-ins, were, in fact, organized by communists.⁶¹ This accusation received a response from Martin Luther King, Jr. “Like many other Negroes I have deeply appreciated your civil rights record,” wrote King. He continued:

But I must confess that some of your recent statements have completely baffled me, and served as an affront and disappointment to millions of Negroes of America . . . The more you talk about the sit-ins the more you reveal a limited grasp and an abysmal lack of understanding of what is taking place. It is a sad day for our country when men come to feel that oppressed people cannot desire freedom and human dignity unless they are motivated by Communism.⁶²

Truman did not respond to King’s letter, but he did clarify his position at a talk at Cornell University. Although he had “no proof” that communists were organizing the sit-ins, he was still suspicious. “I know that usually when trouble hits the country the Kremlin is behind it,” Truman said.⁶³

Truman again generated controversy over civil rights remarks in August 1963 when he criticized Martin Luther King, Jr.’s March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. During a television interview, Truman called the march “silly.” “There’s no sense in it,” he said. “What do you accomplish when you make Congress mad and they’ll be worse against them than they are now? That’s what would happen to me if I was still in the Senate.” He had a similar message in June 1963: “This civil rights thing is being promoted by a bunch of demagogues,” Truman said. “Their rights are set out in laws that have been on the books since 1868, and if they go at it in a common sense, honorably [sic] way, they won’t have any trouble getting their rights.”⁶⁴ Truman’s feelings on civil rights marches did not change in 1965 when Martin Luther King, Jr., led a series of marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. In fact, he called King a “first-class troublemaker.”⁶⁵

Having done much to tackle the issue of Black access to civil rights, Truman said this knowing well the extent to which segregationists would block the way, irrespective of the laws or executive orders put in place. A decade before, Truman complained to

⁶⁰ Clayton Knowles, “Truman Believes Reds Lead Sit-Ins,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1960, 21.

⁶¹ McCullough, *Truman*, 971.

⁶² Martin Luther King, Jr., to Harry S Truman, April 19, 1960, Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/harry-s-truman#fn1>.

⁶³ “Truman is Asked to Prove Charge,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1960, 24.

⁶⁴ “Harry Says March is ‘Silly Gesture,’” *Springfield News-Leader*, August 24, 1963, 1.

⁶⁵ “Press Conference: On the Avenue,” *Time*, April 23, 1965, 73.

NAACP leader Walter White that the Navy was still setting up segregated facilities, despite his executive order barring such actions. “And this after all the fight we have been making and victories we’ve won,” he told White.⁶⁶ Truman therefore was well aware of the impediments to progress on civil rights reform, yet he seemed to be asking Black activists to stay the course.

In the summer of 1963, the former president received a great deal of correspondence regarding his statements about civil rights activism. Some writers were supportive of Truman’s comments. Nellie Tayloe Ross wrote, “There is so much fanatical concern that the Negro should have privileges far beyond his civic rights it seems to me the civic rights of us white people are being threatened.”⁶⁷ Truman responded to Ross, “I think most of the people who have been through the mill with me, as you have, understand the situation perfectly. You don’t know how very much I appreciated your writing to me as you did.”⁶⁸ Mary Ball, of Washington, DC, wrote, “You were a great President; why can’t you be a great ex-President? It is simply incomprehensible to me how a man who has been President of all the people of the United States can even think, much less publicly announce, that the Negro march on Washington is ‘silly.’”⁶⁹ Truman provided no response. A third category of writer supported Truman’s statements but blamed him for what they perceived as the problem. “I was in service when it was integrated by you,” wrote an anonymous “Former GI” from Mobile, Alabama. “Negroes were moved into already crowded barracks. Beds were so close you could lie on your bed and touch the bed of a negro, if you were unlucky enough to have one assigned next to you . . . In reference to the negro march on Washington as you termed ‘silly,’ didn’t you sow the seed?”⁷⁰

Truman went on the offensive against what he viewed as overreach on civil rights reform. At an event for Senator Stephen Young of Ohio, in September 1963, Truman criticized recent social turbulence started, as he saw it, by “Northern busybodies.” Perhaps channeling his family’s Confederate sympathies, Truman said, “The argument on civil rights has been stirred up by Boston and New England demagogues, just as the War Between the States was brought about by Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Lloyd Garrison.” He claimed that southerners would be willing to abide by civil rights laws

⁶⁶ Walter White, “Harry is Not a ‘Has-Been,’ White Finds at Visit with Ex-President,” *Defender*, July 9, 1953.

⁶⁷ Nellie Tayloe Ross to Harry S Truman, September 25, 1963, Civil Rights Data, Box 182, General Correspondence, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶⁸ Harry S Truman to Nellie Tayloe Ross, October 1, 1963, Civil Rights Data, Box 182, General Correspondence, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶⁹ Mary Ball to Harry S Truman, August 26, 1963, Letters re President’s Statements on March on the Capitol Civil Rights Data, Box 299, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁰ Anonymous to Harry S Truman, August 26, 1963, Letters re President’s Statements on March on the Capitol Civil Rights Data, Box 299, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

if “the Northern busybodies would stay at home and clean up their own backyards.”⁷¹ According to the press, the crowd of 1,200 people did not applaud these remarks, but Judge TC Almon of Decatur, Alabama, wrote Truman to congratulate him. “No one knows any better than you do how stubborn and hardheaded some of them [southerners] can be when they want to . . . they can be persuaded, and it is going to take persuasion and education to solve the race problem in the South,” Almon wrote.⁷²

When James Earl Ray assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, Truman did not issue a public statement, despite saying that he was “shocked and horrified by this tragedy” after the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, whom Truman previously claimed to dislike, only two months later.⁷³ Truman made no secret of the fact that he opposed King’s strategy of nonviolent demonstration to draw attention to racial injustice, but he also made little condemnation against the violence perpetrated against nonviolent protestors. The Harry S. Truman Institute did host a pre-scheduled conference on civil rights on April 5 at the Truman Library. During the conference, participants, many of whom were friends of King, expressed sadness at the death of King and sympathy for his family.⁷⁴

Truman’s relationship with Black people in his own community was as complicated as his views on the national discussion about race. Some in the Black community blamed Truman for the urban renewal efforts in “the Neck” neighborhood that forced many homeowners to relocate. “The Truman Library was the cause of it,” said Nancy Copridge Harris, who grew up in the neighborhood before it was bulldozed by the city. “Truman used to walk down in our neighborhood just about every other morning and, I guess, watch them as they were building his library. And while he was walking and enjoying his glory over at the library, we were suffering trying to figure out where we going to live and how we were going to pay for it if we got something.”⁷⁵ Harris’s mother, Thelma May Copridge charged that Truman “was a racist sure enough,” and that despite his civil rights campaigns as president, his efforts in Independence to support the Black community were paltry. She remembered a ceremony at the Moore Building in Independence to celebrate the desegregation of the Armed Forces where Black attendees were required to sit in a roped-off section away from white guests. Speaking for herself and others, Copridge felt that Truman, as president, “could have told them, ‘I don’t want this.’ He could have told them that, but they went on with it,” and the event was

⁷¹ “Blunt-Spoken Mr. Truman,” *Decatur Daily* (AL), September 18, 1963, A-4.

⁷² T. C. Almon to Harry S Truman, September 23, 1963, Civil Rights Data, Box 182, General Correspondence, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷³ “Missouri Residents Voice Shock, Dismay at News of Shooting,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, June 6, 1968, 6A; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 214..

⁷⁴ “Rights Parley Debut Hushed,” *Kansas City Star*, April 5, 1968.

⁷⁵ Savannah Hawley-Bates, “The Neck was the Heart of Independence’s Black Community, until the City Demolished it,” St. Louis Public Radio, February 1, 2023, <https://news.stlpublicradio.org/2023-02-01/the-neck-was-the-heart-of-independences-black-community-until-the-city-demolished-it>.

segregated. She further reflected that she and other Black citizens “made up our mind, all of us, [that] we’re not going,” reporting that only one Black man did not boycott the event.⁷⁶

Other stories, however, offer a different interpretation of Truman and Bess’s relationships with the Black community. Alversia Pettigrew remarked that during her childhood, her father “just loved Mr. Truman.” She remembered that “whenever President Truman was seen walking around, he would tip his hat and speak to the Blacks,” saying that she “never heard anything bad about Truman” while growing up in the Neck. Pettigrew’s husband, Lorenza Evan Pettigrew, had been “run out” of Delaware Street as a child by homeowners who felt that Black people “didn’t belong” in their white neighborhood. He eventually moved into a home on Delaware across from the Trumans in 1966 and was welcomed personally to the neighborhood by Truman himself. Truman reportedly stopped by on one of his morning walks with Mike Westwood and saw Pettigrew in the yard. Truman approached, shook Pettigrew’s hand, and after a brief conversation said, “Mr. Pettigrew, glad to have you as a neighbor.” Mrs. Pettigrew reported that this had a deeply emotional effect on her husband, a feeling that “he had come full circle . . . he had been asked off the street as a child and then welcomed to the street by the President.” Bess also acted in a genial way with Independence’s Black community. Pettigrew reflected upon a brief interaction between her mother and Bess at the local drugstore called Katz’s: “My mother was getting ready to be waited on, and Mrs. Truman walked up. The salesperson said, ‘Just a moment. I have to wait on Mrs. Truman.’ And Mrs. Truman said, ‘Wait on her first. She was here first.’” Pettigrew noted that an interaction like this was quite uncommon “for white folks” in the Independence area.⁷⁷

Truman’s record on civil rights was as complicated as the man. In defiance of the views of his family and the social order of his home state, Truman acted aggressively as president on civil rights reform, using the powers of the presidency to initiate policy and advocate for legislation that would allow Black Americans access to their political and economic rights. Risking a split within his party over civil rights before a tough presidential election in 1948, Truman took the steps to desegregate the military and the federal civil service. After winning the election, he continued to propose new legislation that would strengthen civil rights protections. Truman was much less supportive of all efforts to secure access to civil rights after his presidency, however. While explicitly approving of the Supreme Court’s decision to desegregate public schools in 1954, Truman nevertheless helped to blunt his party’s commitment to enforcing the decision. By supporting a watered-down civil rights plank at the 1956 Democratic convention

⁷⁶ Roxanne Copridge Robinson, Norman Robinson, and Thelma Copridge, interview by Jim Williams and Kristen Stalling, Oral History Interview with Roxanne Copridge Robinson, Norman Robinson, and Thelma Copridge, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, June 17, 2004, Harry S Truman National Historic Site Archival Collection.

⁷⁷ Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

and providing cover for state governments and local school districts that refused to desegregate their schools, Truman invited controversy and backlash. Likewise, he opposed civil rights demonstrations, such as sit-ins and marches, that disrupted what he viewed as proper social order. But at home in Independence, Truman was known for his personally friendly relations with Black people, despite his library's association with the dismantling of the Neck neighborhood. History will record that the elder statesman remained steadfast in his conflicting views on one of postwar America's defining social issues.

THE VIETNAM WAR

The manifest friendship between Truman and Johnson gave the former something he had hoped for since he left office in 1953, to be consulted, trusted, and called upon as a bona fide elder statesman to further serve his country. To this point, the Democratic Party had used Truman as a bulldog on the campaign trail, but no one had truly asked for his input or assistance on matters of policy. The bitter rivalry between Truman and Eisenhower made a role in the Eisenhower administration nearly impossible, and, while Kennedy paid a certain level of deference to Truman, the former leader of the party played no part in that administration. Johnson, however, did ask for Truman's help with a particularly thorny issue: the Vietnam War. On a number of occasions, Johnson prodded Truman to provide his public endorsement of the war.⁷⁸ While Truman publicly provided support for the war, he privately held reservations about continuing presence of the United States in Southeast Asia.

Truman issued his first statement on Johnson's handling of the Vietnam conflict on February 16, 1965, amid a deteriorating situation. In August 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving the president the power to use military force in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war. Attacks on American air bases in South Vietnam led Johnson to approve retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese positions. These attacks led to a rapid escalation of American military operations and full-scale war in Vietnam. Releasing his statement at the beginning of the initial air raids against North Vietnam, Truman placed full responsibility on Johnson's shoulders. Truman stated, "First of all, responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy is vested in the President by the Constitution, and all available information on that situation has to come from him." Truman added that, while no president was beyond criticism, neither the president nor the country benefitted from "irresponsible critics, or side-line hecklers who neither have all the facts—nor the answers." Truman went so far as to endorse American presence in Vietnam. "For my part," Truman stated, "I have reason to believe that our presence in South Viet Nam . . . has but one purpose, and that is to help

⁷⁸ McCullough, *Truman*, 985.

keep the peace, and to keep ambitious aggressors from helping themselves to the easy-prey of certain newly formed independent nations.” He then warned that abandoning these nations to “the new marauders” and the “Little Caesars” would mean that “we are again headed for deep trouble.” Claiming that the United States sought no territorial gains from stationing troops in South Vietnam, Truman couched his views in terms of universal freedom, peace, and security, claiming that American involvement in Vietnam was necessary for securing the world against those willing to exploit or subjugate their neighbors. He concluded with one last vote of confidence for Johnson, stating that the commander in chief had the responsibility of finding a solution. Truman assured the American public that President Johnson would do just that.⁷⁹

There were limits to Truman’s endorsement for Johnson’s war in Vietnam, however. First, at the time Truman issued his statement, the United States was not yet engaged in a protracted ground war in Vietnam with a large-scale troop deployment to the region. Nor had the three-year strategic bombing campaign known as Operation Rolling Thunder begun. Therefore, Truman essentially endorsed a defensive and advisory role for American troops and limited bombing operation without knowing that the conflict would see a major escalation the following month. Second, it is possible that Truman himself did not actually issue this statement of support. Truman’s accident in the fall of 1964 limited him severely, and historian Robert Ferrell claims that one cannot be certain that any statements on the war were actually issued by Truman. According to Ferrell, the signatures on statements regarding the war did not appear to be written by Truman.⁸⁰ In the case of Truman’s initial statement, it was only handed out to the press and not read by Truman, as he would do normally.⁸¹ Whatever the case, it is almost certain that Truman did not know the extent to which the conflict would expand into widespread war in just a few months.

In the fall of 1965, a few years before the raging antiwar movement galvanized the nation to wide-spread protest, Truman received a telegram from Hugo E. Rogers, a former Manhattan borough president. The telegram quoted a message from James W. Hardiman of Los Angeles, asking Truman to help organize a counterprotest against an antiwar march on Washington, DC, planned for November 27, 1965. The telegram read:

A committee of great Americans is being organized which will embrace Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, Black and white business and labor, for the purpose of demonstrating to our troops in Vietnam and to the people of the world that, while we may disagree on individual

⁷⁹ Harry S Truman, Statement on Vietnam, February 16, 1965, Reading Copies: 1965, Box 718, Speech File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁰ Robert H. Ferrell, “Truman’s Place in History,” *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 1 (March 1990): 1.

⁸¹ Harry S Truman, Statement on Vietnam, February 16, 1965.

matters, we are united in support of our government, our Armed Forces, and freedom.

According to the telegram, the committee planned to petition Congress to declare the day of the protest “American Re-Dedication Day” and to call upon all American mayors to “organize huge patriotic parades of our Armed Forces, veterans groups, youth organizations, business, labor, and ethnic groups, and to ask all of our people to turn out *en masse* to witness these parades to demonstrate to the world our support of our troops in Vietnam.” Hardiman invited Dwight Eisenhower to co-chair the committee with Truman and invited several other nationally-recognized leaders, including AFL-CIO president George Meany, industrialist Henry Ford II, Bishop Fulton Sheen, Protestant clergyman Norman Vincent Peale, Rabbi Joshua Goldberg, NAACP president Roy Wilkins, New York Stock Exchange president Keith Funston, the national commanders of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Jewish War Veterans, the presidents of various civic organizations, and several celebrities to join the committee.⁸² Truman’s response to the call for action was not encouraging to those who led the initiative. On the telegram, Truman left a handwritten note for Rose Conway, his secretary: “These are self-appointed crusaders. They should not expect the President himself to associate with them. This is a serious problem that should be handled by the Government.”⁸³ While Truman certainly would not have joined every event to which he was invited, he did not appear to be entirely sympathetic to the mission of the committee.

On January 25, 1966, another prowar organizer asked for Truman’s aid. Gerald A. Brumm, the executive co-chairman of the Students for a Responsible Stand on Vietnam, invited Truman to speak during a “week of lectures and other activities to show support for our policy in Vietnam” at the University of Illinois. According to Brumm, Truman’s lecture would be covered by the news media to “insure that all may share your views with us.”⁸⁴ Atop the letter, a handwritten note from Rose Conway read, “Mr. N. said file. No ans—delicate area.”⁸⁵ Presumably “Mr. N.” was David Noyes, Truman’s longtime advisor, who may have been coordinating the response to Truman’s mail amid Truman’s declining health. However, Noyes’s rationale for not responding was not because Truman would likely have been unable to attend but because of the nature of the war itself. It appeared that the controversial nature of the war was cause enough to disregard this call to support the war.

⁸² Hugo E. Rogers to Harry S Truman, October 20, 1965, Vietnam Data [1 of 2], Box 123, General Correspondence, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸³ Marginal note of Harry S Truman on Hugo E. Rogers to Harry S Truman, October 20, 1965, Vietnam Data [1 of 2], Box 123, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁴ Gerald A. Brumm to Harry S Truman, January 25, 1966, Vietnam Data [1 of 2], Box 123, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁵ Marginal note of Rose Conway on Gerald A. Brumm to Harry S Truman, January 25, 1966.

During his 1966 Fourth of July speech in front of the Truman Library, Truman did make another statement about the war, though it was hardly a ringing endorsement. “There are always liabilities you have to meet,” he stated. “Today people are fighting and dying in Southeast Asia. The mettle of a people, the mettle of a nation are on trial before the world. I don’t think we need to worry about the result. I think we’ll come out fine.”⁸⁶ His statement noticeably left out support for Johnson’s prosecution of the war, however, as well as Truman’s view of the stakes. In the past, Truman had tried to support the foreign policy of the sitting president—including Eisenhower—in public, so as not to project weakness or division to the adversaries of the United States. But this time, Truman merely offered vague optimism.

Truman’s most explicit backing for the war since his initial statement in 1965 came in March of 1967 as President Johnson was on his way to Guam to meet with Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky of South Vietnam. There, Johnson and Ky were to discuss the newly drafted South Vietnamese constitution and Ky’s desire to further expand US military operations in Vietnam. In early March 1967, Johnson asked through several intermediaries that Truman issue a statement of support for Johnson’s trip to Guam and his handling of the war in general.⁸⁷ Truman obliged, stating that Johnson’s mission to Guam was “of vital importance to the United States.” He characterized the war as a “stand against aggression in Vietnam,” which was “a threat to the liberties of all mankind, including our own.” Providing an unequivocal endorsement of Johnson’s leadership on the matter, Truman concluded, “Lyndon Johnson has met these problems with wisdom and courage and much patience. As President, he alone can bring us to a successful conclusion of this struggle. Our hopes and prayers are with him.”⁸⁸ Although this statement was not of his own initiative, Truman willingly lent his approval of the war and its execution at Johnson’s request.

Truman had always been a team player, especially to help fellow friends and Democrats, but his willingness to do so was not inexhaustible. In fall 1967, Johnson asked another favor: for Truman to join the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, a pro-war organization, as its honorary co-chair, along with Eisenhower. According to a memorandum from Rose Conway, Truman only “reluctantly” accepted the request.⁸⁹ Around this time, the Johnson administration faced increasing calls from government

⁸⁶ “‘We’ll Come Out Fine’ in Viet, Truman Says,” *Daily Mail* (Hagerstown, MD), July 7, 1966, 18.

⁸⁷ Harry H. Vaughan to Harry S Truman, March 19, 1967, Vietnam—Truman Statement on March 20, 1967, Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library; Harry S. Truman to Harry H. Vaughan to Harry S Truman, March 24, 1967, Vietnam—Truman Statement on March 20, 1967, Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁸ Statement Issued by Former President of the United States Harry S Truman, March 20, 1967, Vietnam—Truman Statement on March 20, 1967, Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁹ Rose Conway, Memorandum, 1967, Vietnam—Support for Administration Policy (Citizen Committee), Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

officials, the press, and the public to dramatically scale back the American campaign in Vietnam, if not stop it entirely. A bipartisan group of prominent American leaders in government, business, science, and academia formed the Citizens Committee to present the American public with the case for continued hostilities. On October 26, the committee released a policy statement to the *New York Times*, outlining its defense of continuing the war. “We believe in the great American principle of civilian control and a civilian Commander in Chief,” the statement read. “And we strongly support our commitment in Vietnam and the policy of noncompromising, although limited, resistance to aggression.” The committee claimed that it represented the “silent center” of the American public that supported the war and likened calls to end the war as tantamount to the appeasement of Adolf Hitler and Mao Zedong. Notable figures listed among the signatories were Dwight Eisenhower, Dean Acheson, General Omar Bradley, George Meany, Kermit Roosevelt, and Harry Truman.⁹⁰

Truman, in fact, never endorsed this statement, nor had he even seen it before its appearance in the *New York Times* with his name attached to it. A memorandum about the misrepresentation, likely authored by David Noyes, said that it was improper for Truman to “join in a statement involving a great many people of divergent views with whom the President may not wish to associate himself in a public declaration of policy.” Instead, the memorandum contended that Truman should express himself in his own right, given that his position, “unlike that of General Eisenhower, differs in that he was the architect of an historic American Foreign Policy that his successors have not always understood or sustained.” Moreover, the memorandum took issue with that fact that Truman was only asked to join the committee through an intermediary, whereas Eisenhower had been asked personally. Without question, Truman would be happy to lend his influence, “which outranks that of any living American,” to support the war in Vietnam if he were asked to do so and allowed to write his own statement, which he had done when asked to endorse Johnson’s trip to Guam in 1967. “I realize that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to decline a request of the President of the United States,” the memorandum concluded, “but this matter also involves the historic position of President Truman in his relation and responsibility to his own people and those of the free world.”⁹¹ The memorandum concerning the committee’s *New York Times* statement indicated that Truman was willing to defend the Johnson administration’s Vietnam policies but remained concerned about his own legacy, especially in relation to statements attributed to him.

⁹⁰ “Text of Policy Statement by Committee Seeking Peace with Freedom in Vietnam,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1967, 10.

⁹¹ Regarding Statement—National Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, Vietnam—Support for Administration Policy (Citizens Committee), Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Two months later, Charles Tyroler II, a Democratic political operative, wrote to Truman asking him for his reaction to a second statement from the committee, this time regarding calls for the Johnson administration to suspend the American bombing campaign against North Vietnam. The statement was not only sent to Truman but also to Eisenhower, Acheson, Bradley, and former Harvard president and ambassador James B. Conant.⁹² The statement, titled “A Balance Sheet on Bombing,” provided the pros and cons of stopping the bombing in North Vietnam, so as to provide a “realistic appraisal” of the risks and rewards.⁹³ Truman’s camp was no less dissatisfied with this new statement than the first. However, a memorandum to Truman, again likely drafted by Noyes, took issue with Eisenhower’s involvement, in large part because of the major policy differences between the two. “The President should not be asked to participate in a joint statement in which he equates his foreign policy philosophy with that of the Eisenhower-Dulles performance and reputation,” the memorandum read. For example, Eisenhower had publicly called for the pursuit of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong fighters across the border into North Vietnam, an issue which Truman had rejected during the Korean War and would be hypocritical of him to support during the Vietnam War. “How can the President advocate for Vietnam a policy he rejected for Korea?” Truman’s office responded. The memorandum suggested that if Truman were to continue to give public support for the war, he should do so on his own and not as part of group action so as to preserve his “great prestige and authority.” Finally, the memorandum recognized that “the situation” had become “extremely delicate and sensitive to highly placed pronouncement” and that it was “no time to be risking added complications by letting loose with the pros and cons of aerial bombing.”⁹⁴ On January 18, 1968, Truman replied to Tyroler with a curt letter: “It is my wish not to be included hereafter in any joint statement issued by the Committee. For the record, I did not approve of the draft of the statement dated December 21, 1967.”⁹⁵ As a result, Truman disengaged from the committee and issued no more major statements about the war in Vietnam, other than to continue to say he supported Johnson and that draft dodgers should be punished.⁹⁶

Truman was pleased to once again be consulted on matters of foreign policy, but he

⁹² Charles Tyroler II to Harry S Truman, December 21, 1967, Vietnam—Support for Administration Policy (Citizens Committee), Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹³ Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, “A Balance Sheet on Bombing,” December 21, 1967, Vietnam—Support for Administration Policy (Citizens Committee), Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹⁴ Memorandum on the proposed draft of statement to be issued with the participation and approval of President Truman, Vietnam—Support for Administration Policy (Citizens Committee), Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹⁵ Harry S Truman to Charles Tyroler II, January 18, 1968, Vietnam—Support for Administration Policy (Citizens Committee), Box 123, Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹⁶ “Harry S. Truman’s News Conference,” March 20, 1968, SR78-18, Sounds Recordings Collection, Harry S. Truman Library.

questioned the conditions under which such requests were made. Shortly after releasing a statement supporting Johnson and American involvement in Vietnam in early 1965, the conflict escalated as a result of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Over the ensuing years, Truman made various statements about the war, but they always came with caveats. The elder statesman felt that his opinions were still relevant and that American leaders could benefit from his advice, but he rejected the idea of joining a chorus of big-name supporters, particularly those whose views on foreign policy differed from his. Truman was willing to help President Johnson on the matter, but he was unwilling to risk his reputation by lending his name to statements he believed to be reckless and harmful.

TRUMAN'S FALL AND DECLINE

Despite his old age, Truman was renowned for his vigor. As physician and medical historian John R. Bumgarner qualified in his study of presidential health: “Truman had very few health problems in his lifetime—mostly minor. [But] he had a tendency to ignore his illness until it either went away or floored him.”⁹⁷ The former president had some minor hospital visits in his first decade of retirement. He had surgery in 1954 to remove his gall bladder and a hernia repair in 1963.⁹⁸

The biggest hit to his health came on October 14, 1964, when the eighty-year-old elder statesman slipped and fell getting into his upstairs bathtub. The bathmat slid out from underneath him, and he collapsed forward over the washbasin, first hitting his head and then his right side against the bathtub. His glasses shattered and severely lacerated his right eyelid, and he also fractured two ribs. Arletta Brown, one of the Trumans' maids, heard the fall and called the police, who rushed Truman to the emergency room by ambulance. Truman's longtime personal physician, Wallace Graham, saw to his care and reported from the hospital that Truman's condition was “satisfactory,” his patient fully conscious and “in good spirits.”⁹⁹

Although quickly released, Truman never fully recovered from these injuries, and his health declined precipitously. His daily walks became shorter and slower, and he began losing an unhealthy amount of weight. As Truman's sister, Mary Jane, commented on his increasingly enfeebled appearance: “He doesn't look like he used to. He always had a full face and always looked well. He takes a miserable picture now, he is so thin. He's always

⁹⁷ John R. Bumgarner, *The Health of the Presidents: The 41 United States Presidents Through 1993 from a Physician's Point of View*, (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Company, 1994), 220. For documentation of Harry and Bess Truman's medical histories, see Wallace H. Graham Papers (especially boxes 20 and 21), Harry S. Truman Library. Several digitized medical reports may be found at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/4712541>.

⁹⁸ Bumgarner, *The Health of the Presidents*, 223.

⁹⁹ “Truman Breaks Ribs in Fall at His Home,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1964, 41.

taken such a nice picture.”¹⁰⁰ Old friends wrote to Truman to offer their sympathies. Herbert Hoover, who himself had been dealing with health problems, responded with some needed levity. “Bathtubs are a menace to ex-Presidents,” he wrote in his telegram, “for as you may recall a bathtub rose up and fractured my vertebrae when I was in Venezuela on your world famine mission in 1946. My warmest sympathy and best wishes for your speedy recovery.”¹⁰¹ As a result of the fall, Truman ceased many of his favorite activities—he read less, rarely went to his office at the library, and could no longer write his own letters, needing to dictate them instead.¹⁰²

The worst effect of his bathtub accident, at least to Truman, was his near complete exit from the world of politics. Prior to his fall, Truman had been an undeniable force within the past three presidential elections, campaigning tirelessly for Democratic candidates. Even up to the month before his accident, Truman was hitting the campaign trail: on September 15, 1964, he escorted vice-presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey to a Democratic rally in Kansas and spoke to reporters about the upcoming election in November. Pictures from the event show an aged but beaming Truman smiling astride a crowd of reporters and police officers. An officer even remarked, “I hope I’m as spry as that at eighty.”¹⁰³ This comment took on a tragic irony given that Truman took a hard fall only a month later. Now increasingly immobile and weak, public political appearances to support candidates came to a complete halt. When Truman did appear in public, spectators expressed dismay at his frail visage.¹⁰⁴

While Truman did virtually no campaigning during the next presidential election in 1968, his presence still hung heavy over the political conversation. Then Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey was losing handily in the polls to Republican challenger and longtime Truman foe, Richard Nixon. In response, Humphrey fashioned himself as a political underdog akin to Truman in 1948, who had proved the polls and pundits wrong with an upset victory over Republican Thomas Dewey. “We’re trying to hang on to your coattails,” Humphrey told Truman in a campaign visit to the former president’s home. After the visit, reporters asked Truman for a statement regarding his thoughts on the election. In a scraggly, barely audible voice, he offered cryptic praise of both Humphrey and his running mate, Senator Edmund Muskie: “They’re all right. They’re the kind we’ve hoped for all the time. This time I think we’ve done a good job in getting them. And I’m

¹⁰⁰ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Modern American Presidency*, Oscar Handlin, ed. (Boston: Little Brown, 1983), 159.

¹⁰¹ Telegram from Herbert Hoover to Harry S Truman, October 14, 1964, Hoover, Herbert C. [1 of 3], Box 23, Secretary’s Office Files, 1953–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library. This was Hoover’s last communication with Truman, as Hoover died on October 20, 1964. Truman’s recuperation prevented him from issuing a public statement or attending Hoover’s funeral.

¹⁰² McCullough, *Truman*, 984.

¹⁰³ “Truman Supplies Humphrey with Some ‘Give-Hell’ Hints,” *Daily Item*, September 15, 1964, 17.

¹⁰⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 984.



President Richard Nixon, seated at the piano, plays “The Missouri Waltz” while visiting Former President Harry S Truman and Bess Wallace Truman. March 21, 1969.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

for them.”¹⁰⁵

Humphrey’s attempt to channel Truman proved to be unsuccessful, and Nixon narrowly won the 1968 presidential election. The newly elected President Nixon visited Truman in 1969, bringing with him the concert grand piano that Truman had had installed at the White House. One of the few things these two rivals had in common was their love of the piano, although Truman could no longer play. After a brief speech filled with praise for Truman, Nixon played “The Missouri Waltz,” a song associated with Truman that he famously disliked.¹⁰⁶ The moment was “difficult” for those in attendance. When Nixon stopped playing, Truman did not respond with a quick-witted joke or even a comment on Nixon’s choice of song. Rather, he sat near expressionless and confused, and asked Bess what Nixon had just played.¹⁰⁷ It was a clear sign that declining health had worn down the once vibrant, publicly active, elder statesman.

CONCLUSION

The 1960s were an uneven decade for Harry Truman. Initially riding high on having another Democrat in the White House since his own presidency, he was devastated by the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. After flying to Washington, DC, to pay his respects and attend Kennedy’s funeral, Truman was able to bury the hatchet with his longtime political rival, Dwight Eisenhower. Truman was fond of the new president, Lyndon Johnson, who visited, called, and wrote Truman often, demonstrating a true affection for the elder statesman. When Truman fell in his bathroom in 1964, Johnson bent over backwards to help the aging former president in any way possible. Throughout the tumultuous 1960s, Truman remained loyal to Johnson. Johnson showed his admiration to Truman by making a public connection between Johnson’s Great Society reforms and Truman’s Fair Deal. He offered advice and support during the Vietnam War by issuing statements of support at crucial moments at Johnson’s request. To demonstrate this link, Johnson signed the Medicare Act at the Truman Library in 1965 and presented Harry and Bess Truman with the first two Medicare cards. Despite

¹⁰⁵ “Truman Counsels Humphrey,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, September 22, 1968, 10.

¹⁰⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, 985.

¹⁰⁷ McCullough, *Truman*, 986.

all the progress he witnessed with Kennedy and Johnson in office, Truman was still dismayed by the evolving nature of the civil rights movement. Having been a staunch supporter of civil rights as president, he criticized public demonstrations and called for a gradual approach to reform. After being on the outside looking in during the Eisenhower years, Truman was once again thrust into the public eye over his opinions—some controversial—on such important matters as race relations and the Vietnam War. He remained engaged in the ever-changing political discourse in America—often turning heads with his independent, and sometimes controversial, viewpoints—even as his health gradually deteriorated.

CHAPTER 7

Family and Vacations

INTRODUCTION

“I like to take trips—any kind of trip,” Harry Truman once wrote. “They are about the only recreation I have besides reading.”¹ In his retirement, Truman tried to take full advantage of his newfound freedom away from the White House and the Secret Service by taking several lengthy vacations domestically and internationally. These trips gave him the opportunity to recuperate from many years of public service and to experience other parts of the country and the world. But Truman did not go on these trips alone; family was central to these journeys, either as members of his travel party or as a reason to travel. Family and travel were key to Truman’s post-presidential years—he was always eager for a good excursion with the ones he loved.

Despite having served the nation in Washington, DC, as a senator, vice president, and president, Truman remained rooted to his family and communities in Independence and Grandview. When the Trumans retired to Independence, they did not shut themselves away. Instead, they held onto the bonds of family, acquaintances, and longtime employees to create an atmosphere of congeniality around them, regardless of race, class, or station. While on his walks around Independence, Truman would often greet the people he encountered. Truman took the same habit with him on his vacations, sharing a handshake with people from Hannibal, Missouri, to London, England. Truman’s friendly and down-to-earth nature at home and away underscored the humility and decency of the elder statesman.

¹Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, 61.

HARRY AND BESS

The history between Harry Truman and Elizabeth Wallace, commonly known as Bess or Bessie, was long. The Wallaces lived about two and a half blocks from the Trumans in Independence, and from fourth grade onward, the alphabetical seating arrangements of their classes placed Bess in the desk directly behind Harry's. Bess was popular and confident, whereas Harry was shy and reserved by comparison.² Despite their differences in personality and social standing, Harry and Bess commenced their courtship in 1910. Harry would often visit Bess on weekends, traveling from the Grandview farm where he was then living, to Independence. He would spend the days with Bess and the nights with his relatives, the Nolands. When the two were not together, Harry wrote volumes of letters, confiding in her his every thought.³ Harry's willingness to share his aspirations, desires, and worries with Bess foreshadowed much of their future together. Throughout his journey to the top of American politics and throughout his retirement years, Harry went to Bess for advice and counsel on nearly every decision he had to make.



Wedding photo of the newly married Harry and Bess (Wallace) Truman. June 28, 1919.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

After several more years of courtship, a rejected proposal, and Harry's military service in the First World War, the two finally married on June 28, 1919, at Trinity Episcopal Church in Independence. Harry had initially suggested that Bess come to New York City so that they could get married once he returned from Europe, but she rejected that notion.⁴ On the day of their ceremony, the *Independence Examiner* reported, "A wedding of unusual beauty and interest was that of Miss Bess Wallace and Capt. Harry Truman at 4 o'clock today at the Trinity Episcopal Church."⁵ Following a reception at Bess's home on 219 North Delaware Street, Harry and Bess Truman left Independence to honeymoon in Chicago, Illinois, as well as Detroit and Port Huron, Michigan. Harry moved into the Gates-Wallace home with Bess's mother and grandmother so that Bess could continue to take care of them. An added benefit was that the newlyweds would not have to search for their own home while Harry looked for gainful employment.⁶

² McCullough, *Truman*, 49.

³ Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 74–75.

⁴ Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 88. See also Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman* (New York: WW Norton, 1983).

⁵ "Wallace-Truman," *Examiner*, June 28, 1919, 1.

⁶ Cockrell, "The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study," 89, 90.



Harry S Truman (first on the left) poses with friends inside the Truman & Jacobson Haberdashery in Kansas City, Missouri. Opened in 1919, the clothing store was owned and operated by Harry Truman and friend Eddie Jacobson until the business failed in 1922. Ca. 1920.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

To earn a living, Truman and his friend Eddie Jacobson opened a haberdashery in Kansas City in November 1919. In 1922, during a period of postwar price deflation that forced the store to close, Truman decided to run for Eastern Jackson County Judge at the suggestion of Mike Pendergast, brother of Jackson County political boss Tom Pendergast. During the campaign, Harry displayed his trademark honesty and forthrightness, often sharing with voters his own financial troubles at a time when many had also fallen on hard times.⁷ “Many people were broke,” he wrote in his memoirs, “and they sympathized with a man in politics who admitted his financial condition.”⁸ Although Harry was diligent in his duties as county judge—which was an administrative, not a

judicial position, despite the name—the county, too, fell on hard times during the Great Depression. Many residents fell behind on their taxes, and Harry was forced to fire two hundred county employees to cut back on payroll. As a result, the future president became mentally stressed and physically ill trying to keep the county government in order and its workers employed. In 1933, Harry confided in Bess his troubles: “While it looks good from the sidelines to have control and get your name in both papers every day and pictures every other day, it’s not a pleasant position.”⁹ In another letter to Bess, he wrote, “Politics should make a thief, a roué, and a pessimist of anyone, but I don’t believe I am any of them.”¹⁰

Bess remained steadfast to Harry as his political career progressed, at times worrying that his devotion to the duties of his elected offices would hurt his health. After winning election for United States Senate in 1934, he was overburdened with work. In addition to contending with President Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation and proposal to pack the Supreme Court with New Deal friendly justices, Harry also worked doggedly on the Public Utility Holding Company Act and assumed the role of vice-chairman of a subcommittee of the powerful Interstate Commerce Committee, playing a lead role in investigating railroad finances.¹¹ Bess worried that Harry would overextend himself

⁷ Cockrell, “The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study,” 95.

⁸ Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Decisions*, 137.

⁹ Harry S Truman to Bess Truman, August 27, 1933, in *Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman*, 358.

¹⁰ Harry S Truman to Bess Truman, May 7, 1933, in *Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman*, 353.

¹¹ McCullough, *Truman*, 218, 225–227.



A pensive Senator Truman heads a session of the “Truman Committee” hearings. 1942.

Credit: Office of War Information, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

during one oppressively hot summer. “H. is worn out and is not well and will simply have to have a good rest or he will be really ill,” Bess wrote to Harry’s cousin Ethel.¹² Although Harry’s reputation improved during his second term in the Senate, his difficulties did not. He was given more responsibility and named chairman of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, also known as the Truman Committee. Harry complained about headaches and fatigue to Bess frequently, causing her to again worry that he would collapse from exhaustion.¹³

Harry’s responsibilities only multiplied from there, especially after assuming the presidency, as did Bess’s worries that his wellbeing would never

be able to match his dedication to the offices he held.

Despite her concerns about the potential tolls elected office might have on her husband, Bess was perhaps just as emotionally invested as Harry. Facing a tough Senate reelection campaign in 1940, Harry’s prospects for winning looked bleak as the votes were counted. According to their daughter, Margaret Truman, that evening was one of the worst nights of Bess’s life. Both she and her husband sat by the radio crying and listening to the returns before retiring to bed.¹⁴ Harry won that election by a narrow margin, which allowed him to continue the upward trajectory of his political career. When President Franklin Roosevelt was searching for a new vice-presidential nominee to replace Vice President Henry Wallace on the 1944 Democratic ticket, Roosevelt preferred Truman. During the Democratic National Convention that year, Bess and Margaret sat beside Harry in a box behind the main podium. Harry trailed Wallace for much of the voting for the vice-presidential nomination, but Harry survived the first ballot. During second ballot voting, Harry began to carry more support, creating a surge of excitement in the convention hall, to which Bess was not immune. Although she had looked grumpy throughout the first ballot, she started to smile broadly and pose for pictures with her husband as he drew closer to winning.¹⁵ When Harry became president after the death of Roosevelt, it was again Bess who was at his side, attending the funeral service with him in the East Room of the White House.¹⁶ Although she always supported Harry in his career, Bess could also not contain her emotions when it was clear that Harry’s political

¹² Bess W. Truman to Ethel Noland, n.d, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹³ McCullough, *Truman*, 281.

¹⁴ Truman, *Harry S. Truman*, 133.

¹⁵ McCullough, *Truman*, 320–321.

¹⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, 358.



President Harry Truman, smiling and waving at the camera, stands alongside First Lady Bess Truman at the annual Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. At this event, President Truman announced that he would not seek reelection to the presidency. March 29, 1952.

Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service



Bess Truman responds to correspondence alongside Senator Harry S. Truman around 1940.

Credit: Bettmann/Getty Images

career was coming to an end. When he made the official announcement at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in 1952 that he would not seek reelection to the presidency, Harry Vaughan, one of Harry's military advisers, noted Bess's stifled elation. "When you made your announcement," Vaughan told the president, "Mrs. Truman looked the way you do when you draw four aces."¹⁷ In fact, Bess had advised Harry not to run again. Worried about the assassination attempt on Harry's life, his health, and having to spend four more years in the limelight, Bess greatly preferred that they return to Independence to live a quiet retirement.¹⁸ Owing to the closeness of Bess and Harry's partnership in marriage and politics, she was also emotionally fixed to the fortunes of her husband.

Part of Bess's emotional investment was likely tied to the fact that she was not a helpless bystander during Harry's career; rather, she was an integral part of it. Harry would sometimes say that he, Margaret, and Bess would have made a great Vaudeville act. Harry could play piano, Margaret could sing, and Bess could be their manager.¹⁹ In fact, Harry had long taken to calling Bess "the Boss." Margaret referred to her mother as the family's "spark plug."²⁰ Harry rarely made an important decision without her input. Such was their arrangement that, in the early days of Harry's presidency, Bess was put off by how little he consulted with her, particularly about his decision to order the use of atomic weapons against Japan in August 1945.²¹ But Margaret revealed the extent

¹⁷ Journal of Roger Tubby, April 3, 1952, Roger Wellington Tubby Papers, Yale University Archives.

¹⁸ Marianne Means, "What Three Presidents Say about their Wives," *Good Housekeeping*, August 1963, 191.

¹⁹ Jonathan Daniels, "The Lady from Independence," *McCalls*, April 1949, 18.

²⁰ McCullough, *Truman*, 573.

²¹ Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 272–273.

of her mother's influence over Harry: "Have you ever noticed Father when he's with Mother at any sort of public gathering? He's always trying to catch her glance to see if she approves of what he is saying or doing," Margaret remarked.²² He continued to confide in her about the business of the presidency, telling her about issues like the cost of the Marshall Plan, the European food program, and all other matters of state.²³ According



Harry and Bess Truman stand outside near the back porch of the Truman Home. Harry Truman is holding a walking cane that he used frequently after his fall in 1964. Unknown date.

Credit: Claire Stone, Harry S Truman National Historic Site

to Harry, the final decision on such issues was always the president's, but he would always discuss them with Bess. "Why not? Her judgment was always good. She never made a suggestion that wasn't for the welfare and benefit of the country and what I was trying to do," Harry once told *Good Housekeeping*. "She looks at things objectively, and I can't always."²⁴ Harry and Bess appeared to be perfectly complementary to one another. Many years separated from their school days, their personality traits had flipped; Harry was now the gregarious one, and Bess was more reserved, rarely granting an interview or overtly involving herself in public functions. But they relied on one another for strength and insight. Marquis Childs, a reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* remarked, "I think her whole life was Harry Truman."²⁵ When an old friend back in Independence asked Bess what the most memorable aspect of her life was, she responded, "Harry and I have been sweethearts and married more than forty years—and no matter where I was, when I put out my hand Harry's was there to grasp it."²⁶

MARGARET TRUMAN

Before the birth of his daughter, Margaret, Truman had always wanted a son. But as he wrote to Dean Acheson, "I wouldn't trade her for a houseful of boys."²⁷

Born in 1924 and named after Truman's sister Mary Jane, Mary Margaret Truman—more commonly known as "Margaret" or "Margie" (pronounced with a hard "G")—was the center of attention in the multi-generational Wallace-Truman house, doted on by family and friends alike. "I was an only child and I had lots of aunts and uncles with no

²² Quoted in McCullough, *Truman*, 579.

²³ McCullough, *Truman*, 579–580.

²⁴ Means, "What Three Presidents Say about their Wives," 184.

²⁵ Author's interview with Marquis Childs in McCullough, *Truman*, 574.

²⁶ Means, "What Three Presidents Say about their Wives," 184.

²⁷ Harry S Truman to Dean Acheson, January 11, 1955, Harry S. Truman Library.

children. And everything went to Margaret. It was lovely,” Margaret later recalled about her place in the family. Her mother was the primary disciplinarian in the family, and she expected a much softer touch from her father. “I could twist *him* around my little finger,” she said of Truman.²⁸ But she nevertheless hated to disappoint him. “He could do more by just giving a look, like ‘How could you do that’ . . . Boy, I was decimated when he did that.”²⁹

Although sickly for parts of her early childhood, Margaret grew to develop a lively personality and penchant for performing. After her father’s senatorial victory in 1934, Margaret split her education between public school in Independence during the fall semester, and Gunston Hall, a private school for girls, in Washington, DC, during the spring semester.³⁰ It was during this time that Margaret began to understand her father’s draw to politics. “At sixteen, I was able to feel for the first time the essential excitement of American politics—the struggle to reach those people ‘out there’ with ideas and emotions that will put them on your side,” Margaret wrote in her biography of her father.³¹ She attended George Washington University, majoring in history. There, she joined the Pi Beta Phi Sorority and was elected to Phi Pi Epsilon, an honorary Foreign Service fraternity. Margaret joined the Canterbury Club, an Episcopalian organization, and, considering her great interest in vocal performance, she sang with the University Glee Club.³² She graduated from George Washington University in 1946 with a bachelor’s degree, but her passion remained singing. Only a year later, on March 16, 1947, Margaret made her concert debut as a soprano with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, sparking a globetrotting vocal career.³³

Meanwhile, Margaret had also established a distinct voice as a journalist. Upon leaving the White House in 1953, Margaret moved to New York City and began working with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), eventually switching full-time to journalism after her marriage to Clifton Daniel. Beyond her famous “Person to Person” interview with her parents, she hosted the daily radio program “Weekday” in 1955 and 1956, interviewing guests with her characteristic “warm personality with a sense of humor and a down-to-earth attitude about life.”³⁴ Following “Weekday,” in 1956, she began the radio program, “Authors in the News,” a daytime talk show broadcast across over 100 stations that featured prominent modern writers. In February 1965, she appeared as a co-host on

²⁸ Author’s interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, in David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 188.

²⁹ Margaret Truman Daniel, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, November 17, 1983.

³⁰ “Biographical Sketch: Margaret Truman Daniel,” Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/trivia/margaret-truman-daniel>.

³¹ Truman, *Harry S. Truman*, 127–128.

³² Margaret Truman, *Souvenir: Margaret Truman’s Own Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 2.

³³ “Biographical Sketch: Margaret Truman Daniel.

³⁴ “Miss Truman Is Heard on N. B. C. ‘Weekday,’” *New York Times*, November 8, 1955.

a half-hour special events program broadcast live from Philadelphia.³⁵

While the Truman Home drifted into a retired calm, the Daniels' apartment in New York City was abuzz with excitement and life. The couple had four children: Clifton Truman, born June 5, 1957; William Wallace, born May 19, 1959; Harrison Gates, born March 3, 1963; and Thomas Washington, born May 28, 1966.³⁶ The frequent visits of the Daniel children to Independence brought a youthful energy to their grandparents' home, and Truman and Bess cherished these moments shared with the newest members of their family, often purchasing gifts for their grandchildren. One of these gifts even put the Trumans' Secret Service detail on high alert. With weapons drawn, agents inspected what appeared to be guns hidden in the bushes. Agents found these "guns" to be the Truman grandsons' toys, and when one of the grandsons held his toy gun up to the responding agents, they playfully "surrendered."³⁷



Margaret Truman Daniel and husband E. Clifton Daniel pose with their four sons for a Christmas photograph. December 1966.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

After Truman's death in 1972, these visits became fewer in number, and the Daniels relocated in 1973 to Washington, DC, where Clifton was promoted to the chief of the Washington bureau of the *New York Times*. Margaret became devoted to preserving her father's legacy, publishing a biography of Truman in 1973. After Clifton retired from the *New York Times* in 1977, the Daniels moved back to New York City. From 1977 until her death in 2008, Margaret served as the secretary to the board of trustees of the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, a congressionally funded scholarship dedicated in Truman's honor to support college students with aspirations for civil service. She reinvented herself with a new career yet again in 1980, beginning her long-running Capital Crimes novel series, a string of murder mystery books set in Washington, DC.

³⁵ "Biographical Sketch: Margaret Truman Daniel."

³⁶ "Biographical Sketch: Margaret Truman Daniel."

³⁷ "Truman and the Secret Service," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service.

She published over thirty books in her lifetime.³⁸ After her husband died in 2000, she remained in New York City. Beginning in 2007, Margaret began experiencing ill health and lost considerable weight over the course of six to eight months. Tests conducted on December 30, 2007, indicated that Margaret had cancer in her colon, pancreas, liver, and lungs. Although it seemed initially that Margaret was improving under care, doctors put her on a ventilator on January 9, 2008. An air ambulance flew her to Chicago on January 18, where she stayed at Kindred-Chicago-Lakeshore, a hospice facility. Despite best efforts to build up her strength so that she could be taken off the ventilator, Margaret passed away in the early hours of January 29.³⁹ Hailed as a “Missourian and so proud of it,” the ashes of Margaret and Clifton were interred alongside her parents on the grounds of the Truman Library on February 23, 2008. At a memorial service of nearly 240 mourners, her eldest son, Clifton, eulogized her by saying, “She seemed to regard the role of president’s daughter as a worthwhile job. She gave it her all, but believed you should be able to turn it off at the end of the day.”⁴⁰ He continued, “She was around the rich and famous, but she treated them like everyone else.”⁴¹



Ethel and Nellie Noland, Harry Truman’s paternal first cousins, pictured around 1911. Harry and Bess Truman would maintain a close, lifelong relationship with the two Noland relatives.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

THE TRUMANS, THE WALLACES, AND THE NOLANDS

Family was one of the most important fixtures of the Trumans’ retired life in Independence. Relatives on both Harry and Bess’s sides continued to live in the immediate vicinity and provided the Trumans with the warm sense of kinship, community, and connection that they had missed during their years in Washington, DC. Indeed, these near daily interactions with family were some of the greatest joys of the Trumans’ retirement.

Directly across the street from the Truman Home at 216 North Delaware lived Ethel and Nellie

Noland, Truman’s first cousins on his father’s side. Truman had maintained a lifelong friendship with these “favorite cousins” since childhood, having spent countless hours in his youth at the Noland home practicing fencing, reciting Shakespeare, and studying Latin.⁴² After graduating high school in 1901, working as a railroad timekeeper along

³⁸ “Biographical Sketch: Margaret Truman Daniel.”

³⁹ Brian Burnes, “Daniel’s Early Life Steered Service to Truman Library,” *Kansas City Star*, February 23, 2008, B3.

⁴⁰ Gene Mayer, “At Rest in Her Roots,” *Kansas City Star*, February 24, 2008, B1.

⁴¹ Gene Mayer, “At Rest in Her Roots,” *Kansas City Star*, February 24, 2008, B1–B2.

⁴² “The Noland Home,” Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/hstr/planyourvisit/noland-home.htm>.

the Missouri River, and then working at various jobs in Kansas City, Truman moved back to Grandview at the request of his father to help run the family farm.⁴³ During his time in Grandview, Truman traveled two hours by train to visit the Nolands almost every weekend, in no small part due to his sweetheart Bess living across the street. Throughout his political career, Truman kept a routine correspondence with the Noland sisters, who worked in the Kansas City area as educators, and would visit their home on his yearly summer stays in Independence while president. Neither sister ever married and remained an integral part of the tight-knit Truman family until their deaths—Nellie

in 1958 and Ethel in 1971. Ethel spent long hours with Truman in his post-presidency to stitch together their family history and genealogy, writing letter after letter to her cousin to help Truman respond to the litany of people claiming to be related to the president.⁴⁴



Frank Wallace, brother of Bess Wallace Truman, and his wife Natalie in front of their home in Independence, Missouri. Neighbors of Harry and Bess Truman, the in-laws were life-long friends and a support system for the Truman family. September 1954.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Some family, however, lived even closer to the Trumans. Bess's brothers Frank Wallace and George Wallace, along with their wives Natalie Ott Wallace and May Southern Wallace, respectively, lived in two bungalows directly behind the Truman Home. The Wallace siblings' grandfather, George Porterfield Gates, had gifted each couple a fifty-foot lot of land behind the then Gates Mansion, as wedding presents.⁴⁵ In 1915 and 1916, respectively, the couples built two small houses; Frank and Natalie moved into the brown bungalow at what is currently 601 West Truman Road, while George and May lived in the green bungalow next door at what is currently 605 West Truman Road.⁴⁶ Later, Margaret called the high concentration of Wallace residences in this area "Wallaceville."⁴⁷

In marrying Bess, Truman had truly gained a second family in the Wallaces. He had always been close with his in-laws. The three couples spent long afternoons together fishing and playing sports, and Truman would pile everyone into his "great big two seated" Stafford automobile and meander through the countryside on laughter-filled drives.⁴⁸ As time progressed,

⁴³ Truman, *Memoirs: Year of Decisions*, 122–125.

⁴⁴ "The Noland Home."

⁴⁵ "The Wallaces," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service.

⁴⁶ "The Wallace Homes," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/hstr/learn/historyculture/wallace-homes.htm>.

⁴⁷ Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 124.

⁴⁸ May (Southern) Wallace, interview by Ron Cockrell, Oral History Interview with May Wallace, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, June 14, 1983, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/may-southern-wallace-oral-history-interviews.htm>.

the couples became a tightly knit family unit, and helped each other where they could. While the Trumans and Madge Wallace were living in Washington, DC, the Wallaces looked after the house on 219 North Delaware and oversaw work conducted there by domestic staff or contractors. George was the family handyman, reported by his wife May to have been able to “do anything with his hands,” and Truman secured him a job at a county garage as a maintenance supervisor that he held for over thirty-five years.⁴⁹ As Truman’s political influence grew, his in-laws provided him and Bess with enduring support and a sense of grounding calm. May became the Trumans’ unofficial family spokesperson during his presidency and kept reporters and locals abreast of the goings-on of the Truman household. On short trips home from Washington, DC, the Trumans would stay at one of the Wallace homes, and their bungalows quickly became favored refuges away from the political world.⁵⁰ Frank Wallace, Bess’s “serious” older brother, served as executor of his mother’s estate, facilitating the Trumans’ purchase of 219 North Delaware.



A group of Truman relatives and friends piled in and gathered around Harry Truman’s famous Stafford car. Included in the group are Bess Truman’s brothers Frank and George with their respective future wives Natalie and May. ca. 1914.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

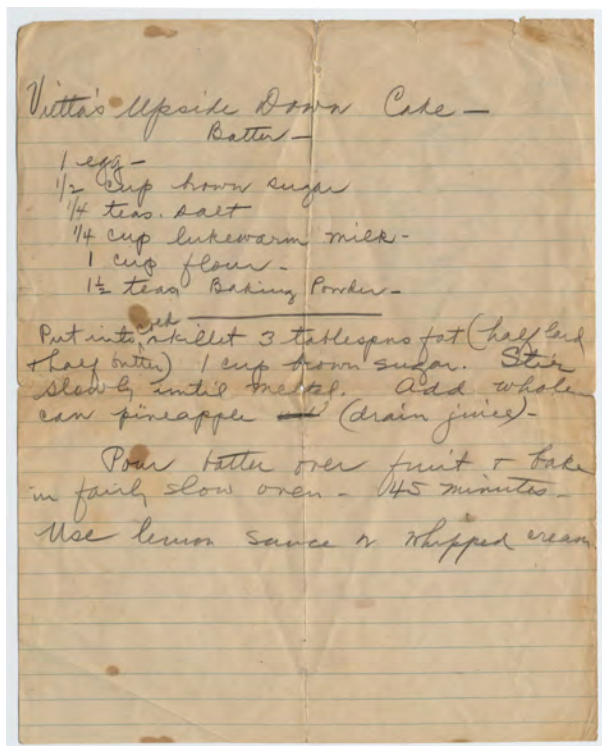
The Wallaces remained an integral part of the Trumans’ inner circle throughout their retirement. The couples played games together, like bridge, and every night, Truman would walk down to George and May’s backyard and close the gate between their two houses, securing their family compound.⁵¹ Frank and Natalie Wallace continued to live next door to the Trumans until they both passed in 1960. George Wallace passed away in 1963, while his wife May continued to live in Independence for the first eight years of the National Park Service site’s existence, until her death in 1993. The Wallace homes as well as the Noland home became part of Harry S Truman National Historic Site in 1991, symbols of Truman’s lifelong commitment to his friends and family. These historical

⁴⁹ May (Mary Frances) Wallace, interview by Niel M. Johnson, Oral History Interview with May (Mary Frances) Wallace, Harry S. Truman Library, February 17, 1988, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/wallacem>.

⁵⁰ “The Wallaces.”

⁵¹ May (Southern) Wallace, Oral History Interview with May Wallace, June 14, 1983.

dwelling are still used today as offices and housing for staff of the Harry S Truman National Historic Site.⁵²



Vietta Garr's upside down cake, part of Bess Truman's recipe collection. Undated.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

DOMESTIC STAFF

Domestic labor at the Truman home did not fall squarely on one family member. Rather, the Trumans had long employed predominantly Black domestic servants, cooks, and groundskeepers to help around the house and maintain their property. This had been the case in the Wallace-Truman home since the time of Bess's mother, Madge Gates Wallace, who had grown up with servants working in the home. Her parents, George and Elizabeth Gates, employed several live-in servants during the late nineteenth century, and the family continued to rely on Black domestic employees throughout the twentieth century, although they no longer lived with the family.⁵³ Any understanding of the Trumans' life in Independence would be incomplete without highlighting the stories of the employees that supported the family throughout their lives.

Ione Vietta Garr, a native of Independence and well-known figure in the local Black community, served the Trumans for longer than any other employee. Her family's history with the Wallace-Truman household went back to her father, Benjamin Garr, who was said to have been employed at 219 North Delaware Street by Bess's grandfather, George Porterfield Gates, during her youth. Black laborers faced severely limited employment options in Missouri during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Vietta, as she was known, grew up watching the women in her family work as maids and cooks. By 1920, she had started working in private households and was eventually hired by the Trumans as a housekeeper and cook in 1926, a position she held for nearly forty years, save for a brief two-year break when the Trumans lived almost full time in

⁵² "The Wallaces."

⁵³ "Vietta Garr," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service.



Two of the Trumans' domestic staff, Vietta Garr and Leola Estes, arrive at Margaret Truman's wedding. April 21, 1956.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Washington, DC.⁵⁴ In 1945, she came to work at the Trumans' residence in the White House at Bess's request and continued to work at the White House, serving as Madge Gates Wallace's primary companion. Although never officially the White House chef, Vietta frequently prepared food for the Truman family and even taught the kitchen staff to cook steam-fried chicken, sweet potatoes, and angel food cake in Truman's favored "Missouri Way."⁵⁵

Beyond cooking and cleaning, Vietta was integral in Margaret's upbringing. Their relationship got off to a humorous start when Vietta began working at the home, and Margaret, only four-years old, could not pronounce "Vietta," calling her "Petey" instead.⁵⁶ Over the years, she and Vietta grew quite close, Vietta becoming something of a second mother to Margaret in her youth. "I couldn't get away with anything," Margaret recollected, "But she wouldn't tell on me. She knew exactly if anything had gone wrong where it had come from."⁵⁷ The pair developed a lifelong friendship that went long into Margaret's adulthood. Margaret helped Vietta select and decorate a new home, with financial help from Harry and Bess Truman, and Vietta frequently accompanied Margaret to her vocal performances and can be seen beaming in photographs from Margaret's wedding.⁵⁸

Although so many things had changed in the Trumans' lives since leaving the White House, one thing remained the same—Vietta's presence. She stayed on staff at 219 North Delaware Street throughout almost the entirety of the Trumans' retirement, eventually retiring herself in the mid-1960s. Margaret reported that Vietta's increasing age had made her work more difficult, getting "tired and tired and crankier and crankier" until Bess and Harry "retired her on pay, on a good pension."⁵⁹ In 1957, the Trumans had created a trust in Vietta's name endowed with \$5,200 from their estate.⁶⁰ She remained a dedicated member of her congregation at the Second Baptist Church, playing piano, singing in the choir, and even referring fellow churchgoers for employment at the Truman Home. Vietta was widely influential and well-known in the Black community,

⁵⁴ "Vietta Garr," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service.

⁵⁵ "Miss Vietta Garr," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/miss-vietta-garr.htm>.

⁵⁶ "Miss Vietta Garr."

⁵⁷ Margaret Truman Daniel, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, November 17, 1983.

⁵⁸ "Vietta Garr."

⁵⁹ Margaret Truman Daniel, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, November 17, 1983.

⁶⁰ "Vietta Garr."

with some referring to her as the “First Black Lady of Independence” due to her connections with the Trumans and general social prestige.⁶¹ She was one of few guests invited to the intimate funeral for Truman in 1972 and passed away herself a year later after sustaining serious injuries in a kitchen fire.⁶²

While Vietta Garr was undoubtedly the most well-known employee of the Truman household, she was by no means the only one. Her time overlapped with another mainstay of the Truman household domestic staff, Leola Estes. Like many domestic workers at the time, Leola was recommended to the Trumans through word of mouth. She served as a housekeeper in the Truman Home for twenty-four years, starting work while Madge Gates Wallace was still living in the home. According to Leola, she started working primarily on the laundry but then took on the responsibilities of helping with the cooking, cleaning dinnerware, and tending to Madge. And when Margaret would visit, in the years after Truman left the presidency, Leola would help mind the children. “Then when Miss Margaret would come home, why, that was a full-time job,” she recalled. “Then she started having the babies, and I would look after the babies, and still cook.” Regarding her relationship with the Trumans, Leola said, “And you know, the Trumans were . . . oh, they were such lovely people to work for.” Even when he was president, Leola remembered Truman as cordial and personable.⁶³



Leola Estes and Vietta Garr hold Clifton Daniel, Harry and Bess Truman's first grandchild in the kitchen of the Truman Home. 1957.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site

Unfortunately, like the histories of domestic servants across the United States, many of the stories of the Trumans' employees have been lost to history. By no means exhaustive,

⁶¹ Alversia Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

⁶² “Vietta Garr.”

⁶³ Leola Estes, interview by Jon Taylor, Oral History Interview with Leola Estes, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, November 8, 1996, Harry S Truman National Historic Site Archival Collection.

the following list encompasses the known domestic servants of the Truman Home, their dates of employment, and the roles they served in the household:

Violet White, Servant

Dates of Employment: ca. 1880

Benjamin Garr, Houseman

Dates of Employment: pre-1918

Carrie Pool, Cook

Dates of Employment: ca. early 1920s

Ruth Fisher, Launderer

Dates of Employment: ca. 1930s-1942

Vietta Garr, Cook

Dates of Employment: ca. 1926-mid-1960s

Harrison Irving, Yardman

Dates of Employment: ca. 1937-1946

Leola Collins Estes, Launderer and Server

Dates of Employment: ca. 1942-1964

Blurette, Cook and Maid

Dates of Employment: ca. 1951

James (Jim) Thirkles, Doorman

Dates of Employment: ca. 1930s-1940s

Menefee Moses, Handyman

Dates of Employment: ca. 1945-1955

Rev. Cornelius Scott, Yardman

Dates of Employment: ca. 1954

Tamar Randall, Server

Dates of Employment: ca. 1954

Geraldine Peterson, Maid

Dates of Employment: ca. 1952-1969

Rev. Edward Hobby, Yardman and Handyman

Dates of Employment: ca. 1955-1982

Arletta Brown, Maid

Dates of Employment: ca. 1964-1966, 1972⁶⁴

Most of these employees were either members of the Second Baptist Church or personal friends of Vietta.⁶⁵ Much like other private houses in the area, positions in the Truman household were filled through word-of-mouth recommendations and were rarely permanent. Full-time employment like Vietta's was far from the norm at the Truman Home and domestic employees often worked part-time positions at several houses as the need arose.⁶⁶

So was the case with Reverend Edward Hobby, a minister for a church in Tonganoxie, Kansas, who worked part-time at the property as a handyman. He had been referred to the position by Cornelius Scott, another employee of the Trumans and pastor at Second Baptist—Vietta's church. Working only for the church rarely paid enough to make a living, so it was not uncommon for ministers like Hobby to take side jobs at private homes to support themselves and their families. According to Alversia Pettigrew, Black citizens of Independence did “whatever it took, whatever you could do” to make ends meet, and became “jack[s] of all trades.”⁶⁷ Hobby's role at the house, then, was characteristically multi-faceted: trimming bushes, cleaning the grounds, tending to Bess's rose garden, and even serving holiday meals to the Truman family.⁶⁸

The Trumans' specific relationships with their Black employees have been similarly difficult to trace in detail. Alversia Pettigrew, a native of The Neck and eventual neighbor to the Trumans, reflected that, “All I heard was that the Trumans treated whoever worked for them well.” A pervading sense of allegiance to the household and a need to protect the family's privacy defined many of these employer-employee relationships. As Pettigrew qualified, “It was really kind of, you know, you work for this family and I work for maybe next door, but we didn't even talk about what was going on in each other's house.”⁶⁹ Few detailed accounts exist of the daily lives, relationships, and tasks carried out by the employees of the Truman Home. William Curtis, an Independence local historian and author, corroborated this reluctance of former employees to share information about the goings-on of the Truman Home. Yet, in his conversations with Black community members and friends, Curtis did discover differing attitudes towards Bess and Harry. “I will say this, that I don't believe I'm betraying any confidences,”

⁶⁴ “Truman Household Staff,” Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Cultural Resources Historical Files, National Park Service.

⁶⁵ Alversia Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

⁶⁶ Ann Taylor, interview by Jim Williams and Mike Hosking, Oral History Interview with Ann Taylor, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, July 18, 2003, Harry S Truman National Historic Site Archival Collection.

⁶⁷ Alversia Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

⁶⁸ Reverend Edward Hobby, interview by Pam Smoot, Oral History Interview with Reverend Edward Hobby, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, July 2, 1985, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/ooo/reverend-edward-hobby-oral-history-interview.htm>.

⁶⁹ Alversia Pettigrew, Oral History Interview with Alversia Pettigrew, July 12, 2003.

Curtis confided during an interview with staff at the Harry S Truman Historic Site, “that the people who worked for the Trumans kept their mouths shut. It was a matter of professional dignity and ethics and all.” Given that Bess was the head of the household with her husband often occupied elsewhere, she often directed the domestic staff. “I will say that the people who worked for Truman idolized Harry Truman and found Bess very difficult at times,” Curtis recalled.⁷⁰ Beyond these vague anecdotes, however, little else sheds light on these private relationships.

The Trumans were known for treating their domestic staff well, and the core members of that staff became just like family to the Trumans. The Trumans demonstrated their loyalty to select staff by employing them over long periods of time, including them in family functions, and supporting them beyond a regular paycheck. In return, domestic workers demonstrated their loyalty by working diligently and with discretion, rarely talking about their work with the Trumans. Although anecdotal evidence about the relationship between the Trumans and domestic staff suggests that the Trumans were demanding but kind and down-to-earth employers, the overall silence of Black domestic workers in American history suggests that there are many stories yet to be uncovered.

DOMESTIC TRIPS

Having just left one of the most difficult jobs in the world, it is no wonder that Truman decided to take two extensive vacations just months after leaving office in January 1953. The first was a month-long vacation to Oahu, Hawaii. The second was a road trip from Independence to Washington, DC, New York City, and back. Both trips demonstrated that Truman was eager to assert his newly acquired independence from the restrictions of the presidency, but that, even as a private citizen, he would be unable to escape the limelight entirely.

To begin their Hawaiian vacation, Harry, Bess, and Margaret Truman left Independence at the end of March 1953. The first leg of their journey was a trip to San Francisco by way of Averell Harriman’s private railroad car. Once in San Francisco, Truman lunched with twelve members of Battery D. The Trumans then boarded the luxury liner SS *President Cleveland* of the American Presidents Line.⁷¹ Several thousand people came out to Pier 154 to see the Trumans off. When the ship left its dock, a Cuban band performed the “The Missouri Waltz” in honor of the former president on board. The Trumans moved to the ship’s bridge to wave goodbye to the crowd gathered on the dock, as they made their

⁷⁰William and Annette Curtis, interview by Jim Williams and Kristen Stalling, Oral History Interview with William and Annette Curtis, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, July 22, 2003, Harry S Truman National Historic Site Archival Collection.

⁷¹McCullough, *Truman*, 932.



Former First Lady Bess Truman, followed by a smiling Margaret, shakes the hand of an unidentified Marine during their visit to the Marine Corps Air Station in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. Former President Harry S. Truman can be seen in the right-hand corner disembarking from a boat. April 18, 1953.

Credit: United States Marine Corps, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Truman arranges suitcases in the backseat of his car before embarking on a roadtrip.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

way under the Golden Gate Bridge and out to the Pacific.⁷²

The ship carrying the Trumans arrived in Honolulu on March 29 and was greeted by well-wishers, a host of reception committees, and government and military officials. The Trumans stayed on Coconut Island in Kaneohe Bay as the guest of oil tycoon Ed Pauley. While there, they did what one might expect a group of weary tourists to do: read, relax, visit friends, and see the sights. Truman also had the opportunity to receive an honorary degree from the University of Hawaii.⁷³ Prior to leaving for Hawaii, Truman had received a great deal of correspondence with various offers for activities and meetings. Likely not wishing to infringe on his time for relaxation, he turned nearly all of them down.⁷⁴ Before long, a month had passed, and the Trumans were set to board the *President Cleveland* once again, this time for the voyage back to San Francisco. During the return trip, other passengers of note were Congressman Chester B. Bowles of Connecticut and his family.⁷⁵

When Truman returned to Independence, he still had the major tasks of writing his memoirs and planning the Truman Library. But by June 1953, Harry and Bess were again ready for another vacation. This time, the Trumans hit the road to Washington, DC, and New York. Back in February, Truman had purchased a brand-new Chrysler New Yorker at the Haines Motor Company in Independence, judging the top-of-the-line Chrysler Imperial to be “a little too swanky

⁷² “Trumans Sails for Hawaii; Big Crowd Waves Farewell,” *Daily News* (Los Angeles), March 25, 1953.

⁷³ McCullough, *Truman*, 932.

⁷⁴ See five folders on Hawaiian vacation in Box 739, General Correspondence File, 1953-72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁵ Guest List, 1953, 1953 Hawaiian Vacation Data, Box 739, General Correspondence File, 1953-72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

for me.”⁷⁶ This car was meant to be the family car, whereas Truman’s Dodge coupe, purchased later that spring, was to be his ride to work.⁷⁷ Truman was planning to give a speech at the Reserve Officers convention in Philadelphia that June, and he thought that he and Bess could drive to give the new Chrysler “a real tryout.”⁷⁸ He proposed that the couple drive to the East Coast—stopping first in Washington, DC—then give his speech in Philadelphia before visiting Margaret, who was now living in New York. Although the former president was certain the couple could undertake their journey in relative anonymity, Bess had her doubts. She eventually consented with one stipulation, that her husband drive no faster than fifty-five miles per hour.⁷⁹ Truman spent the next several days meticulously planning out the route they would take.

After getting an early start on June 19, the Trumans stopped in Hannibal, Missouri, for lunch. Despite Truman’s belief that the couple could make their way without being noticed, those hopes were dashed on this first stop. While eating at a roadside restaurant, a pair of old county judges entered and noticed Truman. Greeting him by name, they tipped off all the patrons and waitresses that he was indeed the former president, causing all those in the restaurant to ask for handshakes and autographs.⁸⁰ It became even more apparent that he would not go unrecognized when the Trumans stopped again in Decatur, Illinois. While having the car’s gas tank filled, the old attendant asked whether he was Senator Truman. “I admitted the charge,” Truman recalled.⁸¹ Truman then asked the attendant to recommend a motel because they had never stayed at one and wanted to give it a try. As Truman was pulling away from the gas station, both Bess and the attendant sprung into action: Bess recorded the purchase on a small card kept in the glove compartment to track the Chrysler’s gas mileage; the attendant called the newspapers to alert them to Truman’s presence.⁸² Having heard that Harry and Bess Truman were traveling in his jurisdiction alone without any protection, Decatur’s police chief dispatched two officers to stay with the Trumans around the clock until they were out of the city limits. Despite protests from Truman, the officers stayed in the motel parking lot overnight and ate breakfast with the Trumans in the morning.⁸³ In addition to being recognized at various stops along the way, Bess’s fifty-five miles per hour mandate allowed the surrounding traffic to see inside their car and offer shouts of “Hi, Harry!”⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Quoted in Matthew Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure: The True Story of a Great American Road Trip* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 27.

⁷⁷ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 28.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 34.

⁷⁹ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 34–35.

⁸⁰ McCullough, *Truman*, 933.

⁸¹ Quoted in Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 60.

⁸² Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 61.

⁸³ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 61–62.

⁸⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 934.

On June 21, the Trumans arrived in Washington, DC. As they pulled up to the Mayflower Hotel, reporters lobbed questions at the elder statesman about various political issues. To each question, Truman responded, “No comment.”⁸⁵ Margaret had come down from New York to stay with her parents and acted as their unofficial press secretary.⁸⁶ Truman was happy to share details about one subject, though: the gas mileage of his new Chrysler. He beamed with pride when telling reporters that the car got sixteen to seventeen miles per gallon.⁸⁷ Truman was true to his word that this trip was for pleasure and not business. He hosted myriad friends and acquaintances inside and outside of government, likening his Mayflower suite to the White House.⁸⁸ Not on the list of personal calls was President Eisenhower. “I see no necessity for it,” Truman told a reporter who asked if he would be visiting the president. “He’s too busy to see every Tom, Dick, and Harry that comes to town. I don’t know any reason he’d want to see me. I’m just a private citizen.”⁸⁹

After five days in Washington, Truman took the train for an overnight stay in Philadelphia, riding a private railcar loaned to him for free while Bess and Margaret drove the Chrysler to New York. Later that evening, Truman attended the Reserve Officers Association meeting, where he was photographed shaking hands with Strom Thurmond, the segregationist senator from South Carolina who bolted the Democratic Party in 1948 to run against Truman as a Dixiecrat.⁹⁰ Introduced as “a colonel, US Army, retired, and the former President of the United States,” Truman then gave his speech during dinner at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. During his speech, Truman went on the offensive against Eisenhower and the Republicans, decrying their proposed cuts to defense spending. His speech was well-received, earning a standing ovation of several minutes in length.⁹¹ At 10:30 that evening, he headed back to the private Pennsylvania Railroad car and spent the night there before heading to New York in the morning.⁹²

Reuniting with Bess and Margaret at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City—where Herbert Hoover, Cole Porter, and Douglas MacArthur were living—Truman found that people were no less enthralled with him than anywhere else he had been recently. During a stroll on the city sidewalk, people came up to him repeatedly to shake hands, ask questions, and offer compliments. One reporter said to Truman, “It must be heartening to a man getting out of public office to have everybody so friendly on the street and people calling you Harry as if they were your old friends.” Truman responded, “I hadn’t expected it, really. I’ve been such a controversial figure.”⁹³ During a performance of

⁸⁵ McCullough, *Truman*, 934.

⁸⁶ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 111.

⁸⁷ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 113.

⁸⁸ McCullough, *Truman*, 934.

⁸⁹ “Truman Breezes into Washington,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 22, 1953.

⁹⁰ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 133–135.

⁹¹ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 136.

⁹² Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 137.

⁹³ HD Quigg, “Kindly Looks He Didn’t Expect Hearten Harry in New York,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1953.

Wonderful Town at the Winter Garden Theatre, the entire audience rose and applauded as Truman entered.⁹⁴ Like a true New Yorker, Truman took taxi cabs everywhere he went in New York. While traveling to the Carlyle Hotel, where Margaret lived, one cab driver purposely took an illegal turn right in front of a traffic cop. “I want a ticket,” the driver said. “A ticket riding President Truman. So my wife’ll know.”⁹⁵

The Trumans enjoyed their time socializing, visiting their daughter Margaret in her new home, and celebrating their thirty-fourth wedding anniversary. Truman met with Basil O’Connor, president of Harry S. Truman Library, Inc., to discuss fundraising efforts. He visited the new United Nations headquarters and celebrated the Fourth of July with the matinee showing of *My Three Angels*.⁹⁶ But the Trumans were ready to head home bright and early on July 5. On the return trip, the Trumans passed through Pennsylvania—where Truman was pulled over by a state trooper for cutting in front of too many cars—Columbus, Ohio, Richmond and Indianapolis, Indiana, and St. Louis, Missouri. They reached 219 North Delaware Street on the evening of July 8, 1953, having driven nearly three thousand miles.⁹⁷

In November 1956, the Trumans embarked on another road trip, this time to Hot Springs National Park in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas. Although Truman stayed in Hot Springs frequently while serving in the United States Senate, this was his first visit since 1943. The couple stayed at the Arlington Hotel for a week-long vacation of rest and rejuvenation, and Harry addressed the Arkansas White and Red River Basins Inter-Agency Committee. With the hotel at the northern end of Bathhouse Row, Harry and Bess soaked in thermal baths within the building.⁹⁸

Despite hoping not to attract much attention, Truman was unable to avoid reporters altogether. Greeting reporters waiting for him in Hot Springs, he held an impromptu press conference in the Arlington Hotel lobby upon his arrival on November 14. During this press conference, Truman answered questions about the failure of the Adlai Stevenson-Estes Kefauver ticket in the 1956 general election, the role of the United Nations in the Middle East following the Suez Crisis, and his own role in the Democratic Party.⁹⁹ The former president also commented on possible Eisenhower administration plans to close the Army and Navy Hospital in Hot Springs, where he once stayed as a

⁹⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 934.

⁹⁵ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 143.

⁹⁶ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 153–164.

⁹⁷ Algeo, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure*, 217.

⁹⁸ Ron Cockrell, “The Hot Springs of Arkansas — America’s First National Park: Administrative History of Hot Springs National Park,” Hot Springs National Park, National Park Service (2014), 411.

⁹⁹ “Truman Describes Elder Statesman,” *Daily Oklahoman*, November 15, 1956, 8; “Truman Says UN Must Act Strongly,” *Daily News-Democrat* (Louisiana), November 15, 1956, 6; and “Truman Doesn’t Want to Be Boss of Democrats,” *Daily World* (Arkansas), November 14, 1956, 4.

patient. As president, Truman had already prevented the hospital's closing once before.¹⁰⁰ He argued that the hospital, which was only operating at a 150-bed capacity out of a total of 450 beds, should be operated at full capacity, "like it was before."¹⁰¹ Truman visited the hospital two days later, showing up unannounced and spending thirty-five minutes touring the facility.¹⁰² Following their stay in Hot Springs, Harry and Bess Truman returned to Independence by way of Harrison, Arkansas, where they had lunch and Springfield, Missouri, where they spent the night. They arrived in Independence the next day, November 18, 1953.

PRESIDENT AND MRS. TRUMAN'S EUROPEAN TRIP			
MAY - JUNE 1956			
NOT FOR PRESS RELEASE			
Friday May 11	New York	Sail S. S. UNITED STATES	11:00 a.m.
Wednesday May 16	Le Havre	By boat train to Paris	
	Paris	HOTEL BRISTOL 112 Faubourg St. Honore', Paris 8, France CABLE: BRISTONORE TELEPHONE: Elysee 23-15	
Thursday May 17	Paris	Leave by train for Rome at 7:50 p.m. - Rome Express	
Friday May 18	Rome	Due Rome 2:10 p.m. HOTEL HASSLER (S. W. to telephone Vatican for hour of audience with The Pope on either 19th or 20th)	
Saturday May 19	Rome	Dinner at American Embassy	
Sunday May 20	Rome		
Monday May 21	Rome	12:30 - Appointment at Viminale for Pres. Truman with Signor Segni, President of Council (Prime Minister) 1:30 p.m. - Luncheon at Quirinal with President Gronchi. Leave Rome by train for Naples at 4:15 p.m. Due Naples at 6:54 p.m. HOTEL EXCELSIOR - Naples	
Tuesday May 22	Naples	Automobile drive to Paestum (Greek ruins) - Luncheon and rest at Salerno on return from Paestum to Naples	
Wednesday May 23	Naples	No fixed program, but Pompeii or Herculaneum, Vesuvius or combination suggested	
Thursday May 24	Naples	Leave Naples for Rome by train at 12:12 p.m. Due Rome at 2:53. Luncheon on train Rome - Hotel Hassler - overnight	
Friday May 25	Rome to Assisi	By automobile via Viterbo, Terni, Spoleto and Foligno. Overnight at Assisi	

First page of the official itinerary for the Trumans' 1956 trip to Europe. Ca. 1956.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site

The Trumans enjoyed their trips throughout the United States, traveling within and outside the Midwest region. Now that Harry was no longer in office, it freed him up to travel at his leisure. It also became clear to the Trumans, even though the strictures of the presidency, most notably the watchful eye of the Secret Service, were gone, they would never quite return to their lives as they had lived it. Although Truman had preferred to be known as Mr. Citizen, he would not be able to shake the fame that came with being the chief executive of the United States.

¹⁰⁰ "Truman Arrives for Ark. Speech," *The Times* (Louisiana), November 14, 1956, 5-A.

¹⁰¹ "Truman Doesn't Want to Be Boss of Democrats," *Daily World* (Arkansas), November 14, 1956, 4.

¹⁰² "Truman Makes Surprising Visit to A-N Hospital," *Sentinel Record*, November 17, 1956.

EUROPEAN TRIP



Former President Harry S Truman and wife Bess Truman departed for their trip to Europe on Truman's 72nd birthday. Children who were part of the crowd gathered at the Independence Train Depot to see the couple off were treated to birthday cake, served by the former president himself. May 8, 1956.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

116-116 SHEET EIGHT TRUMAN NO. 8 XXX THAN THEN.

THE RECOVERY IN BELGIUM AND HOLLAND IS JUST AS REMARKABLE AS IT IS IN THE OTHER COUNTRIES WE HAVE VISITED. EVEN ROTTERDAM, WHICH HITLER'S AIRFORCE VIRTUALLY DESTROYED IN MAY 1940, HAS BEEN REBUILT. OUR TRAIN WENT THROUGH ROTTERDAM SLOWLY ON ELEVATED TRACKS SO WE HAD A GOOD VIEW. AN OLD STONE CHURCH IS STILL UNDER REPAIR AND THERE WERE A FEW OTHER EVIDENCES OF WAR DAMAGE, BUT VERY FEW THAT WE COULD SEE FROM THE TRAIN. AND, REMEMBER, ROTTERDAM HAD BEEN SOMETHING OF A SYMBOL OF THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF THE LUFTWAFFE.

BUT EVERYWHERE I HAVE BEEN VERY MUCH IMPRESSED WITH THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND THE JOB THE EUROPEANS HAVE DONE TO CLEAN UP AFTER THE WRECKAGE OF THE WAR. I AM PROUD THAT WE AMERICANS HELPED THEM, BUT IT WAS THE EUROPEANS WHO HAD TO DO THE MAIN JOB.

AS I HAD VISITED BELGIUM AND GERMANY IN 1945 I COULD SEE THE GREAT PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE IN THOSE TWO COUNTRIES. I WAS NOT IN FRANCE AND HOLLAND AT THE END OF THE WAR SO I CAN MAKE NO COMPARISONS THERE, BUT THEY APPARENTLY HAVE MADE A VERY REMARKABLE RECOVERY.

THERE IS AN AIR OF PROSPERITY IN ALL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WHICH WE VISITED THAT MAKES ME BELIEVE THAT THE MARCH TOWARDS COMPLETE RECOVERY IS REAL.

PEOPLE SEEM TO BE HAPPY, WELL FED, WELL CLOTHED. THERE ARE IMMENSE NUMBERS OF AUTOMOBILES IN ALL THE COUNTRIES WE VISITED. HERE IN THE HAGUE, IN ADDITION TO AUTOMOBILES WHICH CROWD THE STREETS, THERE ARE WHOLE PARADES OF BICYCLES. IN THE MORNING WHEN THE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO WORK THE MAIN STREETS ARE FILLED WITH HUNDREDS OF CYCLISTS, MEN AND WOMEN, RIDING TO SHOPS AND OFFICES.

MORE CG835PED

In this excerpt from Former President Truman's eighth dispatch detailing his observations of Europe's post-war reality, he praises Belgium and Holland's impressive recovery efforts. June 17, 1956.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

only a decade earlier.

The trip of a lifetime got off to an inauspicious start, though. On the morning of May 8, 1956, as Truman was carrying the suitcases from the attic, he tripped on the attic stairs,

In May 1956, Harry and Bess set out for their first international trip since leaving the White House. The couple spent seven weeks in Europe. This trip was to be the third trip to Europe for the former president but his first as a private citizen. Bess had never been overseas, and she regarded the trip as somewhat of a honeymoon.¹⁰³ The tour of Europe included France, Italy, Austria, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and England. In England, Truman received an honorary doctorate from Oxford University. This trip, however, was no private affair. The Trumans took part in dinners in their honor, met with heads of state and government, and toured major cultural sites as part of a well-publicized event. Truman received lauds from Europeans throughout his trip, and he reported back home on the rebuilding of a continent that had been destroyed by war

¹⁰³ McCullough, *Truman*, 952.

twisting his ankle. The injury was bad enough to cause Truman's ankle to swell, forcing him to use a shiny black cane for the first few days of the trip. Despite the ankle injury, the Trumans departed Independence from the railroad depot at 7:15 a.m., sent off by a crowd of well-wishers. Before leaving, friends and family cut and passed out a birthday cake in honor of the elder statesman's seventy-second birthday. The train brought the Trumans to New York City, where they boarded the SS *United States* along with Stanley Woodward, his former chief of protocol, and Woodward's wife, Sara.¹⁰⁴

In addition to the vacation of a lifetime for the Trumans, the trip also served as an opportunity for Truman to survey the fruits of his efforts to rebuild Europe while president. During his administration, the United States government directed a massive rebuilding effort—the Marshall Plan—to help Western Europe recover from the Second World War. Truman wished to relay his findings back to the American people, whose tax dollars had funded this monumental effort. The *Journal American* paid Truman to “write about his impressions of people, places and events in Europe, on his first post-war trip abroad.”¹⁰⁵ These dispatches were published in the *Journal American* exclusively, with Truman providing updates on his activities in Europe and his perception of the reconstruction process.

The SS *United States* arrived at the French port of Le Havre, where the Trumans and Woodward disembarked. From Le Havre, they took a train to Paris, spending their first full day there on May 17. Truman had been to Paris before but under dramatically different circumstances. He passed through during the First World War as a US Army officer amid German artillery shelling that drove most people out of the streets and caused many buildings to be boarded up. “This time everybody seemed to be well dressed, well fed, and very gay,” reported Truman. By contrast, on his last tour there in 1918, the French were somber and mournful.¹⁰⁶ Whereas Truman was an anonymous American artilleryman to the French before, he was now a former American president known around the world. As Truman was sitting at the Café de la Paix, Parisians stopped to stare and greet him. Dozens of reporters followed him, taking his picture and asking him questions.¹⁰⁷ Before departing France, the Trumans visited the American cemetery at Suresnes to lay a wreath at the burial site of twenty-four unknown American soldiers from World War II. They also took an automobile tour around Paris, and Bess did a good deal of shopping, according to her husband. “I haven’t received the bills yet,” he

¹⁰⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 952.

¹⁰⁵ “A Series of Direct Reports from Europe by Harry S. Truman,” *Journal American*, May 19, 1956, European Trip 1956—Articles on Trip, Box 776, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁰⁶ Harry S. Truman, “Harry Truman’s Exclusive Report on Europe Today,” *Journal American*, May 20, 1956, European Trip 1956—Articles on Trip, Box 776, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁰⁷ McCullough, *Truman*, 953.



Former President Harry S. Truman and Bess Wallace Truman are pictured with Pope Pius XII. The couple met with the pope in Vatican City during their 1956 trip to Europe. May 20, 1956.

Credit: RealyEasyStar/Fotografia Felici/Alamy Stock Photo

reported.¹⁰⁸

The next stop for the Trumans was Rome. A crowd of hundreds greeted Truman's train as it pulled into the station with shouts of "Viva Truman!" and "Hi, Harry!"¹⁰⁹ About this reception, Truman wrote, "The greeting in Rome, in fact, was so enthusiastic that I had to go back to my return to Washington in 1948 to recall an equal."¹¹⁰ While in Rome, Truman toured the monuments of ancient Rome with American magazine publisher Henry Luce as his tour guide, with Luce's wife, Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce, having taken ill.¹¹¹ Not unaware of the large crowd that had gathered to see him, Truman was his usual affable self. In front of a statue of Marcus Aurelius, Truman introduced himself to members of the crowd and shook their hands.¹¹² All along the way, people regaled Truman with praise. "It's their way of saying, 'Thank you,' for what the American people have done in the way of help," wrote Truman.¹¹³

Other highlights of his time in Rome were meetings with several important individuals. One such visit was an audience with Pope Pius XII, the first time a man who had been the American president met with a pope since Woodrow Wilson's audience with Pope Benedict XV in 1919.¹¹⁴ Some newspapers had reported that Truman and the pope discussed nuclear weapons, but Truman maintained that "[Pius XII] is not interested in weapons of war and is only interested in the peace of the world." Truman also met with the Chief Justice of the Italian Constitutional Court, with whom he discussed the United States Constitution.¹¹⁵ In addition to sites in Rome, the Trumans surveyed a number of other cities in Italy, including Pompeii, Naples, Florence, Venice, and Salerno. Truman, ever the history buff, took in the ancient ruins and historical locations with delight. But among the most impressive collections of Italian historical artifacts was at the villa of Bernard Berenson, one of the world's most renowned experts on Renaissance art.

¹⁰⁸ Truman, "Harry Truman's Exclusive Report on Europe Today."

¹⁰⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, 953.

¹¹⁰ Truman, "Harry Truman's Exclusive Report on Europe Today."

¹¹¹ There was certainly no love lost between Truman and Ambassador Luce. During Truman's presidency, she was one of only two members of Congress banned from the White House for making derogatory remarks about the First Lady. It is possible that this history may have contributed to Luce's illness.

¹¹² McCullough, *Truman*, 953.

¹¹³ Truman, "Harry Truman's Exclusive Report on Europe Today."

¹¹⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 953.

¹¹⁵ Harry S. Truman, "Harry S. Truman Looks at Europe Today," *Journal American*, May 24, 1956, European Trip 1956—Articles on Trip, Box 776, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Truman was taken by not only Berenson's personal art collection but also his mental alertness and intellectually stimulating company.¹¹⁶ Although he was no longer president, Truman was nonetheless treated like a visiting dignitary throughout Italy.

Having soaked up the cultural heritage of Italy, the next leg of the tour brought the Trumans to central Europe, first to Salzburg, Austria, and then Bonn, West Germany. Salzburg, the birthplace of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was a fitting destination for Truman, who was a fan of music from the Classical period. There, the organist of the Salzburg Cathedral performed Mozart's Ninth Sonata on a centuries-old organ, and Truman was able to play a Mozart sonata on Mozart's personal clavichord at Mozart's home.¹¹⁷ Despite being a serviceable pianist, Truman found playing the instrument difficult compared to the modern piano. Truman's immersion in music continued at the palace of the Governor of Salzburg, where an orchestra and vocalists performed various works by Mozart. He reported that the "two young men and three young ladies who sang had fine, lovely voices and knew how to use them."¹¹⁸

While in Austria, Truman reflected on the conditions of the country following the Second World War. Having met the American ambassador in Vienna, Llewellyn Thompson, Truman discussed with him the Soviet occupation after the war. "The Austrians are very lucky that the Russians are gone," wrote Truman. "The Russians robbed the country of everything they could get their hands on and forced a reparations agreement from them for more loot." On the other hand, Ambassador Thompson was "of the opinion that the American, British and French forces made a favorable impression on the Austrians." In further contrast to the Soviet treatment of Austria, Salzburg's governor acknowledged the aid that the United States provided to Europe, thanking Truman for the Marshall Plan and the Point Four technical assistance program, which gave underdeveloped countries aid in agriculture, health care, and education. The people of Austria continued to pour on Truman the adulation to which he had become accustomed during his trip throughout Europe. He estimated that he signed at least 150 autographs at just one local inn before he had to depart, leaving many still without his signature.¹¹⁹

Traveling next to West Germany's Cold War capital city, Bonn, Truman met with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Together they discussed the economic and political integration of Western Europe and the diplomacy necessary to prevent a third world war. Truman was thoroughly impressed with Adenauer, who was then aged eighty. "He

¹¹⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, 954.

¹¹⁷ McCullough, *Truman*, 955; Harry S Truman, Pre-publication copy of fifth article from Europe, June 7, 1956, European Trip 1956—Articles on Trip, Box 776, General Correspondence File, 1953-72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹¹⁸ Truman, Pre-publication copy of fifth article from Europe.

¹¹⁹ Truman, Pre-publication copy of fifth article from Europe.



Yearbook photograph of Cadet John F. Uncles. 1922.

Credit: United States Military Academy



A Delft jar from the garniture set gifted by Queen Juliana of the Netherlands from her visit to the White House in 1952. The set is displayed in the Truman Home living room.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

is a most impressive man, and to my mind one of the select few who will be described by history as the great statesman of Western Europe during the troubled post-war years,” Truman wrote. Likewise, Adenauer was complimentary of Truman, thanking the former president for his assistance after the war.¹²⁰

During his visit to West Germany, Truman also had occasion to catch up with Major General John F. Uncles, the Army’s chief of staff in Germany. Although Uncles was a high-ranking staff officer at this meeting, he was not so distinguished when the two first met in 1918. At that time, Uncles was a private in Truman’s Battery D. Following a call for all the division officers to nominate enlisted men for appointments to the United States Military Academy, Truman nominated the private. Uncles was selected as only one of seven within the division to earn an appointment. His breakfast with Uncles was the first time he had seen him with the rank of major general, which gave Truman much joy. “I have to admit a feeling of pride, here,” Truman said, “for I am most fond of this outstanding young man who certainly has made good in his chosen profession.”¹²¹

After a trip to Munich and a tour through Beethoven’s home back in Bonn, Truman’s travels took him back to France. His travel party visited French castles and palaces, including that of Catherine de Medici, one of Truman’s favorite historical figures. Truman also toured Versailles, the palace constructed by King Louis XIV. Truman was, however, not very fond of this site, given the price extracted from the French people to build it.¹²² “While the ‘Grand Monarque’ of France was spending the revenues of his country on small wars here and there,” Truman opined, “he was also squandering the hard-earned savings of the people, squeezed from them by virtual bloodletting methods, in palaces for mistresses and this most famous of

¹²⁰ Harry S Truman, Pre-publication copy of sixth article from Europe, June 10, 1956, European Trip 1956—Articles on Trip, Box 776, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²¹ Truman, Pre-publication copy of sixth article from Europe.

¹²² McCullough, *Truman*, 955.

palace gardens.”¹²³ Decidedly not on the itinerary in France were visits to the Vosges Mountains, the Argonne, or Verdun, the sites of great World War I battles in which Truman had participated.¹²⁴

As in his previous stops, the French people Truman encountered flattered him with praise, but the feeling was not universal. While walking through a small village, an old Frenchman followed Truman around, appearing to want to talk, and the chief of Truman’s security detachment served as an interpreter. The old man told Truman, “Monsieur le President, All Frenchmen love Americans and always will.” But France also had its fair share of anti-American sentiment. Truman was told that that viewpoint was merely communist and French isolationist propaganda, designed to prevent a lasting partnership between France and the United States. They told Truman that “the rank and file of the French people loved us and always would as a result of our cooperation with them in both world wars.”¹²⁵ The Trumans then went on to Brussels, Belgium, and the Hague and Amsterdam in the Netherlands. In Belgium, Truman met with Prime Minister Archille van Acker, Foreign Minister Paul Henri Spaak, and other government officials, where they discussed economic and defense matters. Harry and Bess Truman later met with the twenty-six-year-old King Baudouin. Truman had expected a simple courtesy call from the young king, but King Baudouin was interested in a much more substantive conversation. “He asked me some most intelligent questions about my experiences in the presidency,” Truman stated. “And he impressed me as a young man who is very anxious for world peace and is particularly concerned with the welfare of his own country.”¹²⁶ In the Netherlands, Truman had lunch with Queen Juliana, who had visited President Truman in 1952. During that visit to the White House, Queen Juliana gifted Truman a five-piece Delft garniture set that is displayed in the Truman Home’s living room today.¹²⁷ Of course, Truman was sure to take in the culture, visiting the Rijksmuseum and seeing the world’s largest collection of Rembrandt paintings in the world.¹²⁸

The final destination in Europe was England, which Truman was looking forward to most of all. He received a very hearty welcome from the English, as he had in most places. The British foreign secretary explained that, according to Truman’s paraphrase,

¹²³ Harry S Truman, Pre-publication copy of seventh article from Europe, June 14, 1956, European Trip 1956—Articles on Trip, Box 776, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 956.

¹²⁵ Truman, Pre-publication copy of seventh article from Europe.

¹²⁶ Harry S Truman, Pre-publication copy of eighth article from Europe, June 17, 1956, European Trip 1956—Truman Harry S.—Articles on Trip (Folder 1), Box 783, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²⁷ “Delft Jar,” Harry S Truman National Historic Site, https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hstr/image/obj/delftjar_exb_HSTR1488.html.

¹²⁸ McCullough, *Truman*, 956.



The academic hood and cap worn by Harry S Truman when he received his honorary degree from Oxford University. June 20, 1956.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Museum Collection, NPS

“the reason for all this demonstration is for things that happened in the past that seemed to Britons to have been the salvation of the world.” Truman was adamant, as he had been elsewhere, that he could not take credit for the actions of the American people. “The expression of gratitude is due the American people, not me as an individual.”¹²⁹

While in London, Truman had a dinner with several British officials, but, for him, the big event was the reception of his honorary degree from Oxford University on June 20, 1956. Wearing the crimson robe and black velour hat of the university, Truman entered the Old Sheldonian Theater to a raucous round of applause from

the thousand spectators.¹³⁰ During the ceremony, which was conducted in Latin, the public orator introduced the elder statesman by his Latin name, *Harricum Truman*. Lord Halifax, the university chancellor and a friend of Truman’s, then awarded Truman the honorary degree *Doctoris in Jure Civili*, Doctor of Civil Law.¹³¹ Lord Halifax described Truman, in Latin, as “Truest of allies, direct in your speech and in your writings and ever a pattern of simple courage.”¹³² Following the three-minute ovation, Truman became emotional. “My eyes filled with tears and I had to pull out my handkerchief to cover my emotion,” he admitted.¹³³

Later that night, Truman was honored at a white-tie dinner with 400 alumni of Christ Church College. He addressed the attendees, speaking of a new Magna Carta and Declaration of Independence, that afforded people with the inalienable rights of “economic well being and security,” “health and education and decent living standards.” He also bemoaned the fact that many in the world were not yet given the full benefit of democratic citizenship, including in his own country, where “some of our citizens [are] still living in an intellectual and moral dark age.” As he was departing campus, students yelled down from their dormitory windows, “*Harricum! Harricum!*” and “Give ‘em hell, *Harricum!*”¹³⁴ Although he was but a simple man from Missouri and had never attended college, he was honored with a triumphant appearance at one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world.

¹²⁹ Truman, Pre-publication copy of ninth article from Europe.

¹³⁰ Truman, Pre-publication copy of ninth article from Europe. The cap and hood from this ceremony is held in the museum collections of the Harry S Truman National Historic Site, https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hstr/image/obj/etcacademicitems_exb_HSTR3590.html.

¹³¹ McCullough, *Truman*, 956.

¹³² *New York Times*, June 20, 1956.

¹³³ Truman, Pre-publication copy of ninth article from Europe.

¹³⁴ “Goal by Truman,” *Kansas City Times*, June 21, 1956, 2.

With this personal honor out of the way, the Trumans finished their stay back in London. They sat in the gallery during Home Affairs Day in the House of Commons, where the opposition was able to ask questions of the governing ministers, and they listened to a “boresome” speech in the House of Lords. The couple also dined with Winston Churchill at Chartwell, the Churchill family estate. The two wartime partners greeted each other fondly, sharing drinks, a tour of the house, and a stroll through the gardens.¹³⁵ Truman saw Churchill again during his visit to Number Ten Downing Street, where three prime ministers—Churchill, Clement Attlee, and Anthony Eden—gathered for dinner. The next afternoon, Truman had lunch with Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, her husband, at Buckingham Palace. “We found her just as gracious and unassuming a queen as we had found her when she visited us in Washington as princess,” Truman wrote.¹³⁶

After a bit more sightseeing, the Trumans boarded the ship at Southampton docks for New York. During the two-month trip, the former president had taken Europe by storm. He was lauded wherever he went and thanked continuously for his contribution to the recovery and rebuilding of the continent. But true to form, Truman deflected the praise for himself and consistently emphasized that they should be thanking the American people. The *Washington Star* wrote that the Europeans had paid tribute “with spontaneous cheers loud and affectionate enough to make clear that they’re still wild about Harry over there.” And for Truman’s part, he had “responded to all this with that warm human touch, an appealing down-to-earth simplicity, that is so much a part of his character . . . he has rendered excellent service to our country as a good-will ambassador.”¹³⁷ Dean Acheson wrote to Truman: “The trip was very clearly a great success. One could see that you were having the time of your life and it was a fair inference from this that Mrs. Truman was, too.”¹³⁸ The trip was such a great success that Truman initially planned to tour Australia in the fall of 1956, but he was ultimately unable to do so.¹³⁹

The 1956 tour through Europe served two main purposes. First, it allowed Truman the personal satisfaction of traveling the continent on the trip of a lifetime as a private citizen, where he would be saluted for his personal contributions to Europe’s new vitality. Second, it gave him the opportunity to survey the results of the major programs he helped to organize—the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Point Four Program—following the Second World War. As reported in his ten

¹³⁵ McCullough, *Truman*, 958.

¹³⁶ Truman, Pre-publication copy of tenth article from Europe.

¹³⁷ “Harricum Heads Home,” *Washington Star*, June 28, 1956.

¹³⁸ Dean Acheson to Harry S Truman, July 17, 1956, Acheson-Truman Correspondence 1956, Box 161, Acheson-Truman Correspondence File, 1947–1971, Dean G. Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹³⁹ Harry S Truman to JB Davies, October 18, 1956, European Trip 1956—Australia (proposed visit), Box 776, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library. Correspondence regarding this proposed trip does not state a reason for the cancellation.

dispatches in the *Journal American*, he was gratified to see that Europe was mounting a tremendous comeback from the darkness and destruction of war. But, despite the personal praise ordinary Europeans and government officials heaped upon him, Truman always redirected the credit to the United States as a whole. Leaving Europe, Truman remained sure that the democracies of the West needed to stick together to fight the specter of Soviet Communism, and he was more hopeful than ever that such a task was possible.

CONCLUSION

Like many retirees, the Trumans spent a portion of their time traveling to destinations near and far. The Trumans took long trips to Hawaii, the East Coast, and Europe, accompanied by family and friends. These trips also demonstrated that, though he was gone from office, Truman was still in the hearts and minds of the people. Wherever he went, he was greeted by crowds who were happy to lend him praise and adulation. Happy to return the favor, Truman often acknowledged the attention. Truman received the same treatment back in Independence, where neighbors and friends looked for him on his daily strolls. Some of his neighbors played a bigger role in the lives of the Trumans. Longtime employees, such as Vietta Garr, were like family. Although the elder statesman was best known for the offices he held at the federal level, the roots he had placed in his community ran deep. For this reason, he was best-known to the people of Independence for being a pleasant neighbor.

CHAPTER 8

Celebrity, Death, and “Trumanmania”

INTRODUCTION

“In the first place, I do not consider that I have done anything which should be the reason of any award, Congressional or otherwise,” Harry Truman wrote in 1971, responding to calls for him to be awarded the Medal of Honor.¹ Throughout both his presidency and post-presidency, Truman believed that, whatever his accomplishments as president, he was no hero for having served the American people to the best of his ability; rather, it was his obligation to do so. He held true to that commitment to serve and inspire right up until his final days, nearly twenty years after he retired from public office.

Unsurprisingly, Truman left office as a *bona fide* celebrity. The public and the press still wanted to know about his daily life, his whereabouts, and his views on current events. They wanted to meet him, shake his hand, and ask him to pose for photographs. Because of his celebrity status, authors wrote volumes of biographies about him. He even appeared on television programs. The former president had academic and research institutes named after him and was considered for some of the most prestigious awards around the globe. While Truman accepted much of the adulation he received, he did not deem himself worthy of all of it. Ironically, in death, Truman received more appreciation and adulation from the public than he could have imagined. This post-life renaissance of popularity, a phenomenon referred to as “Trumanmania,” surfaced in the wake of the Watergate scandal and followed his widow, Bess, until she died a decade later.

¹Harry S Truman to William J. Randall, April 8, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

HARRY S. TRUMAN CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PEACE

As discussed in Chapter 3, Truman and his associates took on the difficult task throughout the 1950s of establishing a presidential library dedicated to understanding the life and career of its namesake. Truman wished for his library to be a first-class research center for all scholars, but he was particularly proud that the institute for learning would be the first facility of its kind in the Midwest. The Truman Library was intended to be a national research center with regional significance, but in the 1960s, a new undertaking bearing Truman's name was in the works. The Harry S. Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace, to be built in Jerusalem, was meant to be an institution for studying the means of international cooperation. Truman's formal relationship with the center ended before it officially opened, but its conception spoke to Truman's reputation and esteem beyond the borders of the United States.

Truman's involvement with the center began in 1965 when "a group of prominent citizens" approached him about lending his name to a new research center established in the Holy Land. Each of these members pledged to donate \$100,000 toward a goal of \$2 million, under the condition that the center bear Truman's name. "The project is to be broad in scope and will concern itself in all areas that have a bearing on the stresses of peace," Truman wrote to Lyndon Johnson.² The center was to be affiliated with the Mount Scopus campus of Hebrew University in northeastern Jerusalem and become the first research institute of its kind in the Middle East. Truman was a logical choice for the center's namesake, given his early support for and diplomatic recognition of the State of Israel while president. The developers of the center lent praise to the former leader of the free world and expressed "profound respect and gratitude which the Jewish People everywhere, especially the Jewish Community of the United States, owe to the American President."³

The initial plans for the center included a broad range of research endeavors, teaching positions, and research prizes. The center sought coordination with Hebrew University to establish endowed chairs in departments dealing with "subjects relating to International Relations and other subjects which can contribute to a better understanding and cooperation between peoples." Among the included departments were comparative religion, international law, international relations, sociology, education, psychology, political philosophy, and political theory, as well as at the university's Institute of African

² Harry S. Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, November 9, 1965, Johnson, Lyndon B.—Political Correspondence, Box 25, Secretary's Office Files, 1952–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³ "Preliminary Plans for the Harry S. Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem," 1966, Center for Peace—Requests for Autographs, Box 14, Secretary's Office Files, 1963–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

and Asian Studies. The faculty holding these chairs would focus on the key themes of physical and cultural integration of peoples, the emerging states in Africa and Asia, and the advancement of peace through science. The center would also hold symposia, scholarly retreats, and teacher and student exchanges to encourage the sharing of research and ideas. Finally, plans for the center included the establishment of an international peace prize called the “Harry S Truman Peace Prize.”⁴ Although planning was in its early stages, the founders of the Truman Center aimed to create a robust intellectual life centering on world peace at Hebrew University and provide opportunity for scholars around the world to engage.

Truman was enthusiastic about the prospect of a research center dedicated to peace. He wrote that “peace in our time is my one greatest concern. It is something I would like to see significantly advanced before I pass on.” With a dedication ceremony set for early 1966, Truman asked President Johnson to speak at the ceremony to be held in the auditorium of the Truman Library. “I know that the case of peace is closer to your heart than other areas of responsibility,” Truman wrote to Johnson. “If it meets with your approval, I would like the announcement of the founding of the Center for the Advancement of Peace to come from you as President of the United States, and the leaders of the free world.”⁵ Johnson responded, “I am delighted to accept this invitation, and I want you to know that I am greatly honored to be included in an undertaking which so fittingly honors your great service to peace.”⁶



Former President Harry S Truman, former First Lady Bess W. Truman, and President Lyndon Johnson attend a ceremony announcing the founding of the Harry S. Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The event took place at the Harry S. Truman Library. January 20, 1966.

Credit: Robert L. Knudsen, The White House, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

The ceremony was held on January 20, 1966, with a number of dignitaries in attendance, including President Johnson, Hebrew University president Eliahu Elath, president of the American Friends of Hebrew University Nathaniel Goldstein, Chief Justice Earl Warren,

⁴ “Preliminary Plans for the Harry S Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.”

⁵ Truman to Johnson, November 9, 1965.

⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson to Harry S Truman, November 15, 1965, Johnson, Lyndon B.—Political Correspondence, Box 25, Secretary’s Office Files, 1952–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

a representative of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and several local faith leaders.⁷ During his speech, Elath praised Truman for his “lifelong concern for and dedication to international peace and cooperation, to which he, as President of the United States of America, made [a] lasting contribution.” Elath continued:

It is also an expression of the profound respect and gratitude which the Jewish people everywhere, and we in Israel in particular, owe to the 32nd [sic] President of the United States who was responsible for his country’s support of the new State of Israel before its proclamation of Independence and during the most critical period of its fight for survival and progress . . . This historic act of President Truman will remain forever inscribed in golden letters in the four thousand years’ history of our people.⁸

President Johnson also referred in his speech to Truman’s work for global progress while president. In particular, Johnson referenced Point Four of Truman’s 1949 inaugural address, which called for the proliferation of technical, scientific, and industrial assistance to the developing world. Along these lines, Johnson used the occasion to announce a major new effort from his administration “to help improve the life of man.” To achieve this end, Johnson detailed several new initiatives, including the International Education Act to “help build partnerships between American and foreign schools.” On the theme of peace, Johnson also announced that his administration would begin peace talks to conclude the Vietnam War. “If the aggressors are ready for peace, if they are ready to return to a decent respect for their neighbors, ready to understand where their hopeful future really lies, let them come to the meeting place and we will meet them there,” said Johnson.⁹ In many ways, from passing Medicare to waging war in Asia, Johnson saw his own presidency as a logical extension of Truman’s, and he made it apparent by tying his administration’s new initiatives to their ideological roots in the Truman administration.

For his speech, Truman focused on the dichotomy of war and peace, the stakes of that dichotomy, and man’s role in choosing one or the other. He lamented the fact that, despite efforts to prevent them, hot and cold wars still waged across the globe. For him, the stakes were dire: “But the next time, it will not be merely a third world conflict—it could well be the last folly of man—likely the last of man on this earth. There will be no Noah’s Ark to save and repopulate the species—the waters will be deadly as well—for any life to

⁷Truman Center Dedication Program, January 20, 1966, Center for Peace—Requests for Autographs, Box 14, Secretary’s Office Files, 1963–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸Elihau Elath, Speech at the Inaugural of the Harry S Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace in Jerusalem, January 20, 1966, Center for Peace—Requests for Autographs, Box 14, Secretary’s Office Files, 1963–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁹Lyndon B. Johnson, Remarks at a Ceremony in Connection with the Establishment of the Harry S. Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace, January 20, 1966, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-independence-mo-ceremony-connection-with-the-establishment-the-harry-s-truman>.

survive.” It was therefore up to humanity to stop the wars that could destroy it, Truman stated. He pointed to the United Nations and the Marshall Plan as two instruments used to help build a lasting peace, instruments he played a direct part in establishing. “But, it all seems to have been in vain,” Truman regretted. “Memories are short—and appetites for power and glory are insatiable.” Nevertheless, he placed hope in those who championed a mission with the center: “I hope that the Center for the Advancement of Peace will bring to each and every one of the Founders the enduring satisfaction of having participated in an undertaking designed to save us from ourselves.”¹⁰ Truman expressed a sincere desire to expand peace throughout the world, not just because he was the namesake for a new center devoted to that end, but because, having lived through two world wars, he did not think humanity could survive a third.

The next major milestone for the center was the groundbreaking at Hebrew University in Jerusalem in July 1966. Truman had great hopes of attending this event in person, but his doctor advised against making the trip, owing to Truman’s declining health.¹¹ Truman at first requested that Vice President Hubert Humphrey act as his personal representative at the event, but Humphrey was unable to attend because of prior commitments.¹² Instead, Truman designated his close adviser, David Noyes, to attend in his place. Truman thought that Noyes was the sensible choice to attend the ceremony in Jerusalem. “I know that you will, as has been our practice over the years, confer and consult with me on all important decisions to make sure that my views are fully considered before they become effective,” Truman wrote to his trusted confidant.¹³ Noyes delivered Truman’s message to the 400 people gathered at the ceremony in Jerusalem, stating that, despite the failed efforts to create peace after the Second World War, the Truman Center offered a new chance. “So we meet here,” Truman’s message read, “to try to make a fresh start. Here we will give serious consideration to any new practical approach that could help to advance the cause of peace.” Thurgood Marshall, then US Solicitor General, gave the keynote address, stating, “Not only is the occasion unprecedented but the undertaking is audacious. In a smoldering world we here give physical embodiment to our faith in the capacity of reason and science to bank the fires of violence, to seek out the causes of war, to lay out paths to peace.” Rose Conway, Truman’s longtime personal secretary, also attended this milestone event on his behalf. According to Noyes, Conway had never been out of the United States, but Truman

¹⁰ Harry S Truman, Statement at the Inauguration Ceremonies of the Harry S Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace, January 20, 1966, Center for Peace—Requests for Autographs, Box 14, Secretary’s Office Files, 1963–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹¹ Harry S Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson, June 9, 1966, Johnson, Lyndon B.—Recent Correspondence, Box 25, Secretary’s Office Files, 1952–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹² Lyndon B. Johnson to Harry S Truman, June 30, 1966, Johnson, Lyndon B.—Recent Correspondence, Box 25, Secretary’s Office Files, 1952–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹³ Harry S Truman to David M. Noyes, April 14, 1966, Chronological File, 1966, 1970, and Undated, Box 1, Chronological File, David M. Noyes Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

insisted that she make the trip.¹⁴

For several years after the dedication, there was no significant progress on the center, save for appointing an international Board of Overseers, chaired by Chief Justice Warren, in 1969. Among other notable members of the board were Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Canadian prime minister Lester Pearson, Prince Mikasa of Japan, and Justice Arthur Goldberg.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the following year, the prospects for the center collapsed altogether. According to David Noyes, the major point of contention between Truman and Hebrew University was control: Truman desired to have a greater say over the workings of the center than the university was willing to allow. Noyes alluded to the possibility of donors to the university having undue influence: “It must be obvious that the Truman Peace Center is no place for amateurs to impose their judgment or the intrusion of the contributors on how or by whom it is to be conducted or how it could benefit through a backdoor connection with the Hebrew University,” Noyes wrote. He continued, “The Truman Center was not intended, and never would have been permitted to function as his in name only. Rather, it was from the outset promulgated as a Truman Peace facility, and to be conducted in conformity with his established historic position.”¹⁶



The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace on the campus of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. July 12, 2022.

Credit: The Truman Institute

From the Board of Overseers' perspective, the only option was to break off ties from Hebrew University entirely. Initially, the board planned to simply take the funds raised for the center and reappropriate them toward an independent center in the United States. But the agreement between Truman and the university tied the money raised to a center affiliated with Hebrew University exclusively; other funds were tied up in Israel government bonds, which Warren believed endangered the center's objectivity. “I really think, Mr. Noyes, if we are to serve President Truman as you and I would both like to do,” Warren wrote, “that there should be a

complete separation and a new start made with whatever American dollars and pledges can be obtained without beclouding the situation by having intricate and hard to explain relationships.”¹⁷

¹⁴ James Feron, “Truman Center is Begun in Israel,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1966, 11.

¹⁵ Harry S Truman International Center for the Advancement of Peace Board of Overseers, 1969, Center for Peace—Letters Given to David Noyes, Box 14, Secretary's Office Files, 1963–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁶ David M. Noyes to Nathaniel L. Goldstein, November 16, 1970, Noyes, David [1 of 3], Box 32, Secretary's Office Files, 1963–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹⁷ Earl Warren to David M. Noyes, November 16, 1970, Noyes, David [1 of 3], Box 32, Secretary's Office Files, 1963–1973, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

The Harry S. Truman Center for the Advancement of Peace, as Truman perceived it, never did come to fruition in Israel or in the United States, given Truman's frail health and death just three years after the board decided on separation. Truman continued to allow Hebrew University to affix his name to a research institute, but he had no affiliation with it. The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace still exists to this day at Hebrew University, with no connection to Truman or his family, but in name only. Truman was gratified, though, that he was chosen for the honor of having his name attached to such an institution as originally conceived. The honor was a testament to his efforts to establish a new era of global peace in the wake of World War II.

CELEBRITY STATUS



Even after leaving the presidency, Former President Harry S. Truman continued to maintain a strong celebrity status. During a walk in New York City, Truman was recognized and stopped to chat and sign autographs for fans. Ca. 1962.

Credit: George S. Zimbel, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

For much of the twentieth century, being President of the United States made a person one of the most recognizable in the world. Celebrity status does not, however, disappear after leaving office. After his presidency, people often identified Truman on the street or in a restaurant. They would greet him with shouts of “Hi, Harry!” or request a handshake or autograph. Likewise, his attention was in great demand in other areas. He appeared on popular television shows, was asked to lend his name to institutions, and was considered for awards. As the first former president of the television age—indeed, the first president to give a televised address from the White House—Truman’s celebrity was unique from all others.

Truman’s status initially put him in the conversation for one of the world’s most prestigious awards just months after he returned to Independence. In March 1953, the United Press newswire reported from Oslo, Norway, that Truman was at the top of a list of twenty-five nominees for that year’s Nobel Peace Prize. Typically, the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Parliament published the list of nominees ahead of the final award, but in 1953 the committee kept the list secret, returning to a pre-war tradition. United Press’s sources claimed that President Call Bayar of Turkey and Prime Minister Alexander Papagos made strong recommendations to the Nobel Committee on Truman’s behalf, citing the “numerous contributions Mr. Truman had made toward peace among nations.” Papagos wrote that Truman’s “only thought during office was the maintenance of peace, which he also extended to Greece.”¹⁸ This was Truman’s second nomination for

¹⁸ “Report Truman Nominated for Peace Prize,” *Paterson Evening News*, March 21, 1953, 22.

the Nobel Peace Prize, having received the same consideration in 1950. Ultimately, it was Truman's secretary of state, George C. Marshall, who won the prize that year for his role in the Marshall Plan following World War II.



During filming of “The Jack Benny Program” at the Harry S. Truman Library, Former President Truman and comedian Jack Benny pose with a bust of Abraham Lincoln. September 3, 1959.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

In 1959, Truman made a mark on American popular culture after appearing on comedian Jack Benny's popular television show. Truman and Benny were good friends, and Benny had visited Kansas City and Independence for benefit shows and personal calls.¹⁹ Benny had also participated in the Democratic National Committee's nationwide extravaganza thrown in honor of Truman's seventy-fifth birthday.²⁰ On the 1959 episode of “The Jack Benny Program,” television cameras brought Truman into Americans' living rooms for a humorous and lighthearted visit to his presidential library. During the episode, Benny visited the Truman Library, where he filmed a sketch with the character “Miss Conway,” fashioned after Truman's personal secretary Rose Conway and played by

Eleanor Audley. Then Benny met with Truman, who provided his guest with a tour and some insight into the exhibits displayed. All the while, Truman cracked jokes at Benny's expense.²¹ While Truman's delivery was relatively dry compared to a professional comedian like Benny, the former president showed Americans the lighter side of his personality.

Naturally, members of the public had their own opinions about Truman's appearance. The author O. Henry wrote that “it was quite a treat” to see Truman on Jack Benny's show, but he made a quip about the loud squeak of Truman's desk chair in the episode.²² Mayor O. S. Metcalf of Troy, Ohio, wrote, “Your participation with Jack Benny's television program was not only most interesting but very instructive. I am sure that thousands of other fellow citizens also enjoyed the ‘tour of the Truman Library’ under your personal guidance.”²³ But not all correspondents were pleased with Truman's performance. George Randall from Palo Alto, California, wrote, “Whatever humor content [the

¹⁹ Cockrell, “The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study,” 325–326.

²⁰ McCullough, *Truman*, 969.

²¹ For a complete copy of this episode of “The Jack Benny Program,” see “The Jack Benny Program,” MP75-2, Motion Picture Collection, Harry S. Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/movingimage-records/mp75-2-jack-benny-program>.

²² O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) to Harry S Truman, October 18, 1959, TV Show Jack Benny, Box 286, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²³ O. S. Metcalf to Harry S Truman, October 21, 1959, TV Show Jack Benny, Box 286, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

episode] had, seemed to me to be quite stale and unworthy.” Randall hoped that “any future television appearances that you make will be more in keeping with the dignity of a former President of the United States.”²⁴ Another writer sent a telegram: “How undignified can an ex-president become. I for one was completely disgusted last night.”²⁵ To this writer, Truman sent no response but did write in the margin, “Very glad you were. It was good [of] you to be that way!”²⁶ Truman, as much as anyone, knew that it was impossible to please everyone, but his appearance on Jack Benny’s show—a first for a former president—surely elevated Truman to a new level of celebrity.

Some years later, Truman received another honor in Independence, though of a decidedly more local nature. In 1964, the Independence School District opened a new high school at 3301 South Noland Road. The school district named this new school Truman High School to honor Harry and Bess, both of whom graduated from high school in Independence. On December 13, 1964, the school held a dedication ceremony in the new gymnasium, with the Trumans in attendance.²⁷ At the ceremony, the elder statesman spoke in front of 1,700 attendees, urging students to continue their educations. “The more you know, the better off you are,” Truman stated. On having the city’s new school partly named after him, Truman said, “I’ve received many honors in my lifetime, but none equals this one.” During his speech, Truman also recognized Mrs. W. L. C. Palmer, who taught Harry and Bess mathematics and Latin when they attended Independence High School. “I feel good that I have lived long enough to see a school named for them,” Palmer said. “They are both such wonderful people.”²⁸

For the most part, Truman was happy to partake in the fruits of his celebrity, but there was one aspect for which he had a great distaste. He believed that statues and monuments should not be erected in honor of the living. In fact, it took some convincing to get Truman to name his library after himself.²⁹ Truman took the same view toward the prospect of installing a Truman National Monument at Kansas City’s riverfront. Alexander Barket, chairman of Civic Plaza National Bank, proposed the idea in 1965, stating that “Kansas City should honor [the Missouri River] and its foremost citizen. I believe our national government should get behind this. It is my intention to pursue this in Washington vigorously.”³⁰ In response, Truman thanked Barket but noted that he was “not very strong for setting up a monument to a man who is still alive, for you never can

²⁴ Randall Metcalf to Harry S Truman, October 20, 1959, TV Show Jack Benny, Box 286, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁵ Charles W. McDonnell to Harry S Truman, October 20, 1959, TV Show Jack Benny, Box 286, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁶ Margin note on McDonnell to Truman, October 20, 1959.

²⁷ “Mr. Truman Will Speak at Truman School Fete,” *Kansas City Star*, November 13, 1964, 4.

²⁸ “Truman Issues Call to Youth,” *Kansas City Times*, December 14, 1964, 3.

²⁹ See Chapter 3.

³⁰ Alexander J. Barket to Harry S Truman, January 26, 1965, Truman Monument (Riverfront Project), Box 389, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

tell what he will do, and the monument might have to be torn down, judging from the experience I have had in the past with this sort of thing.”³¹ Barket tried in subsequent correspondence to change Truman’s mind, but the honoree remained steadfast in opposition.

Truman did, however, consent to the use of his name for an objective near to his heart, the education and training of the country’s next generation of government leaders. In mid-1969, the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) broached the idea of naming its newly conceived Center for Governmental Affairs after the elder statesman. University leaders conceived of the center as a place to provide training for new government workers. “State legislatures are badly in need of adequate staffs and a place to train them,” Missouri State Senator A. M. Spalding, Jr., wrote to Truman. “The demand far exceeds the supply. By the establishment of this Center at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, we are going to be supplying to government, whether it be the state or federal government, persons who are schooled in this most important profession.”³² Truman was very receptive to this idea. “The purposes stated in your proposal are closely related to those that I had in mind when The Harry S. Truman Library was established,” he wrote to Dr. James C. Olson, chancellor of the University of Missouri system.³³ By July 1, 1969, the Board of Curators of the University of Missouri voted to establish the Harry S. Truman Center for Governmental Affairs at UMKC. “The Board was most grateful for your generosity in permitting the use of your name in connection with this Center,” Olson wrote to Truman.³⁴ As of 2023, the center remains a thriving non-partisan center for education of young, engaged citizens through lectures, awards, internship opportunities, and scholarships.

In cases like the new center at UMKC, Truman gladly approved the use of his name for causes that aligned with his own. Yet there were also instances where he did not approve of an honor because he did not believe he lived up to the standard required to receive it. In March 1971, Democrats in the US House of Representatives considered a bill permitting and directing President Richard Nixon to award the Medal of Honor to Truman for his time as commander-in-chief. Initially, the idea came from ABC radio personality Paul Harvey, who made several on-air suggestions that Congress take up the matter, citing Truman’s decision to remove General Douglas MacArthur from command during the Korean War. Harvey encouraged his listeners to contact their congressional

³¹ Harry S Truman to Alexander J. Barket, January 29, 1965, Truman Monument (Riverfront Project), Box 389, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³² A. M. Spalding, Jr., to Harry S Truman, June 13, 1969, Harry S. Truman for Governmental Affairs—UMKC, Box 389, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³³ Harry S Truman to James C. Olson, n.d., Harry S. Truman for Governmental Affairs—UMKC, Box 389, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁴ James C. Olson, July 1, 1969, Harry S. Truman for Governmental Affairs—UMKC, Box 389, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

representatives to give Truman the Medal of Honor.³⁵ In response, Congressman Richard Fulton of Tennessee introduced a bill exempting Truman from the requirement of being an active-duty officer or enlisted service member during the war for which the medal was awarded. This arrangement was not unprecedented. In the past, Congress made exceptions for individuals like Charles Lindbergh, Thomas Edison, Wilbur and Orville Wright, Amelia Earhart, Irving Berlin, and Truman's own vice president, Alben Barkley.³⁶

This proposal received significant support from people inside and outside government. In a letter, Truman's own congressman, William J. Randall, tried to convince him to accept the Medal of Honor. "We all know you have been a modest person. We know you have reluctantly consented for certain landmarks such as highways, reservoirs, stadiums, and airports to carry your name," wrote Randall. "As to the award of the Medal, Paul Harvey is so eminently correct when he says that you were called upon to make the most agonizing decisions of any President. When faced with the unprecedented decision [to use atomic weapons against Japan], you did not procrastinate."³⁷ One writer from New Jersey wrote, "The courage of one's own convictions has indeed gone out of style, but you demonstrated it and did it with a flair. There are many people in politics today, but very few men, and I am proud to say that I lived in an era where our country had a man of decision."³⁸ Congressman G. Elliot Hagan stated on the floor of the House, "I personally remember with warmth and pride the outstanding qualities of leadership demonstrated by a most engaging, earnest, and dedicated President—the Honorable Harry S. Truman."³⁹ Another writer from California wrote to Truman, "Please accept our most heartfelt appreciation for your being our best president . . . We love you and honor you as the 'true Father of Our Country.'"⁴⁰

Despite all the ink used to convince Truman to accept the Medal of Honor, he refused. Truman believed in the original purpose of the award: to recognize the heroic acts of servicemembers in combat. "This is as it should be and to deviate by giving it for any other reason lessens and dilutes its true significance. Also, it would detract from those who have received the award because of their combat service," he wrote.⁴¹ Truman's

³⁵ Larry King, "The 'Liberal' Paul Harvey," *Miami News*, March 2, 1971, 84.

³⁶ William J. Randall to Harry S. Truman, March 30, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁷ Randall to Truman, March 30, 1971.

³⁸ Jerrie Buckland to Harry S. Truman, May 6, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁹ Hon. G. Elliott Hagan, speaking on Recognition and Honor in His Time, May 4, 1971, 92nd Congress, 1st sess., *Congressional Record*, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁰ Mary L. Pimpel to Harry S. Truman, May 20, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴¹ Harry S. Truman to William J. Randall, April 8, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

stance also received much support from letter writers. “As a former Marine,” one person wrote, “we didn’t think too much of you, but, in turning down the proposed Medal of Honor I frankly think you would have made a good Marine.”⁴² A World War II veteran wrote to Truman, “Your service to this Country deserves recognition even beyond that which has already been accorded you, but the Medal of Honor should retain its restriction to, ‘Valor above and beyond the call of duty.’”⁴³ Ruell M. Gumm of Texas wrote, “You need no piece of metal to indicate the high honor most of us have for you.”⁴⁴ This correspondence demonstrated beyond any doubt the public support and appreciation for Truman’s service to the country. What is more, his refusal to accept the nation’s highest honor for military veterans seemed to further endear him in the eyes of the public.

Truman also provided some pushback on another federal government effort to commemorate his presidency: the designation of his home and neighborhood as a National Historic Landmark. The idea of preserving the Truman Home first came to light in 1949, when National Park Service Associate Director Conrad Wirth raised the idea with Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman. This attempt went no further, especially considering Truman’s focus on his library and aversion to building monuments to the living.⁴⁵ But after he successfully arranged for the Truman Library to come under the auspices of the federal government, he began to wonder if his home could follow a similar path.⁴⁶ In 1964, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall approached Truman about the National Park Service’s effort to create a National Historic Landmark to honor each president.⁴⁷ Udall wrote, “We would welcome from you an evaluation of which site or building you judge to possess the strongest historical identification with your life and services.” He enclosed two leaflets about the National Historic Landmark program with a request for Truman’s response.⁴⁸ Although Truman promised to think through the proposal, this initiative also made little progress because of ongoing issues with the ranch of Lyndon B. Johnson.

By the late 1960s, developments in Independence caused the notion of preserving Truman’s neighborhood to pick up steam. In the mid-1960s, the Center Stake branch of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints acquired and demolished the Watson Memorial Methodist Church across the street from the Truman Home,

⁴² Roy J. Battersby to Harry S Truman, May 12, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴³ Edward D. Murphy to Harry S Truman, May 10, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁴ Ruell M. Gumm to Harry S Truman, May 10, 1971, Congressional Medal of Honor, Box 302, General Correspondence File, 1953–72, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁵ Harvey and Harvey, “The Ordinary Home of an Extraordinary Man,” 18–19.

⁴⁶ Memo: Truman Library to National Archives regarding Truman Home, August 25, 1960, Home—219 N. Delaware Independence, MO [2 of 2], Vertical File, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴⁷ Harvey and Harvey, “The Ordinary Home of an Extraordinary Man,” 18–19.

⁴⁸ Stewart Udall to Harry S Truman, December 24, 1964, Cabinet—Stewart Udall, Box 13, Secretary’s Office File, Post-Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

constructing an office building in its place. Several years later, the Center Stake branch attempted to purchase the homes next to the office building, which included the Noland Home, to build a parking lot. The Center Stake branch developments coincided with another redevelopment effort near the Truman Library, which would have allowed high-rise apartment buildings in the area. Facing these pressures, Truman Library director Philip Brooks and Benedict Zobrist, Brooks's eventual successor, pushed Truman to accept the neighborhood's designation as a National Historic Landmark. These discussions also included Margaret and her husband, Clifton.⁴⁹ In September 1971, Truman wrote to Clifton stating his approval of the neighborhood's designation, as long as it did not "have any effect upon our use or disposition of the [Truman] home."⁵⁰ Hoping to ward off any potential opposition to the plan, the National Park Service chose to keep the news secret until they could finalize the National Historic Landmark designation. Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton approved the designation for the Harry S Truman Historic District National Historic Landmark on November 11, 1971, and the National Park Service made the public announcement on February 11, 1972.

Ultimately, the National Historic Landmark district encompassed the neighborhood containing the Truman Home, the Wallace and Noland homes, the Truman Library, and nearly eighty properties that ranged in age from the late nineteenth century to the early 1970s.⁵¹ The district included all of the homes on Delaware Street and Maple Street between the Truman Home and the Truman Library, as well as the structures just to the east and west of Delaware. Whereas previous landmarks connected to presidents only included structures closely related to that president's life—perhaps one or two structures—the Truman Historic District was the first National Historic Landmark to include an entire neighborhood of buildings.⁵² The Truman Farm in Grandview was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 after a group of Grandview Chamber of Commerce members were unsuccessful in raising enough funds to purchase the Truman Farm. By early 1980, the Harry S. Truman Farm House Foundation became active, lobbying Jackson County to purchase the property with a grant from the United States Department of the Interior. By September 1983, the foundation raised enough money to pay for the restoration of the Truman Farm and assisted the National Park Service in preparing a national historic landmark nomination for the Young-Truman Grandview Farm. On April 4, 1994, Jackson County donated the site to the National Park Service and is now part of the Harry S Truman National Historic Site.⁵³ From its conception, Truman wanted his library to be a monument to the American presidency,

⁴⁹ Harvey and Harvey, "The Ordinary Home of an Extraordinary Man," 21–22.

⁵⁰ Harry S Truman to E. Clifton Daniel, Jr., September 3, 1971, Historic Preservation Data, 1968–1972 [1 of 2], Box 1, Independence Heritage Commission File, Benedict K. Zobrist Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵¹ Harvey and Harvey, "The Ordinary Home of an Extraordinary Man," 22.

⁵² Taylor, *A President, A Church, and Trails West*, 116–117.

⁵³ Gail E. H. Evans-Hatch and Michael Evans-Hatch, "Farm Roots and Family Ties: Historic Resource Study," Harry S Truman National Historic Site, National Park Service, 93–109.

not the Truman presidency. However, the practical realities of Independence's changing landscape—and perhaps Truman's sense of mortality—convinced the former president to accept an entire historical district in his hometown devoted to his legacy.

Other sites within his home state also honored the former president.⁵⁴ In 1957, the State of Missouri created the Harry S Truman Birthplace State Historic Site in Lamar, Missouri, where Truman was born and spent the earliest part of his life. The facility holding Arrowhead Stadium, home of the Kansas City Chiefs football team, and Kaufman Stadium, home of the Kansas City Royals baseball team, was named the Harry S. Truman Sports Complex in 1970. In the same year, Congress renamed Kaysinger Bluff Dam and Reservoir, located between Clinton and Warsaw, Missouri, the Harry S Truman Reservoir (also commonly known as Truman Lake). The state opened a new natural resource, named Harry S Truman State Park, in Benton County, Missouri, in 1976. The state also completed a new state government office building in the state capital of Jefferson City in 1983, which it called the Harry S Truman State Office Building. Although Truman himself never attended college, two institutions of higher learning used his name in rebranding efforts. First, in 1986, the University of Missouri renamed its Bengal tiger mascot “Truman the Tiger.” Ten years later, Northeast Missouri State University, which was transitioning from a teachers college to a liberal arts school, took on the name Truman State University.

Truman was a common namesake not only in Missouri but also for several other federal entities outside of the state. In 1975, Congress established the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, a prestigious federally funded public service scholarship granted to graduating college students for their demonstrated leadership potential, academic excellence, and a commitment to public service. The United States Navy commissioned the USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75), a new *Nimitz*-class nuclear aircraft carrier, in 1998. The *Harry S. Truman* participated in both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2001 and 2003, respectively. The ship's battle flag incorporates the guidons of the 129th Field Artillery Regiment, whose Battery D Truman commanded during World War I, and the slogan “Give ‘em hell” after Truman's 1948 presidential campaign slogan. In 2000, the Department of State renamed its headquarters, previously known as “Main State,” as the Harry S Truman Building. At the ceremony to unveil the new name, President Bill Clinton credited Truman for “creating the architecture of postwar internationalism in politics and economics.”⁵⁵ For decades, Truman has been a popular namesake for new and renamed facilities, largely in part because of his dogged service to his community, state, and country.

⁵⁴ For a more exhaustive list of sites named after Truman inside and outside of Missouri, see Appendix B.

⁵⁵ “State Department Headquarters Named for Harry S. Truman,” CNN.com, September 22, 2000, accessed via Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20041208101632/http://archives.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/09/22/truman.building.ap/index.html>.

Despite wishing to retire to a relatively quiet life in Independence, Truman did not shy away from his celebrity status. He associated himself with projects that aligned with his personal objectives. But he did not lend his name or reputation to every opportunity that came his way, even if these proposed projects honored him. He believed that neither he, nor anyone, was worthy of a monument in their name while they were alive. Likewise, he was unwilling to accept awards that he believed he did not earn. Regardless of the occasions in which Truman had to demonstrate his celebrity, such status rarely changed his understanding of his own accomplishments and limitations.

DEATH AND FUNERAL

After his fall in 1964, Truman's health steadily declined. He was unable to do much traveling and he handled less and less of his correspondence. Because of his infirmities, he could not contribute to the 1964 and 1968 presidential elections compared to his past involvement. Artist Thomas Hart Benton, who had painted the mural at the Truman Library, sketched Truman at his home in 1969, but the man in the picture appeared old and frail. Truman wrote to Dean Acheson in May 1971, thanking Acheson for his good wishes on Truman's eighty-seventh birthday, but Truman's signature was shaky and nearly unrecognizable.⁵⁶ During the summer of 1972, Truman was hospitalized on two occasions after another fall and due to gastrointestinal issues.⁵⁷ The elder statesman was becoming more frail.



The elderly Former President Truman is sketched by artist Thomas Hart Benton as he reads at his desk. Hart Benton created the mural for the Harry S. Truman Library. Ca. 1971.

Credit: Randall Jessee, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Truman left his home on December 5, 1972, for the last time, when he was taken to Research Hospital by ambulance for difficulty breathing. At 7:50 a.m. on December 26, 1972, Harry Truman passed away at the age of eighty-eight. Wallace Graham, Truman's personal physician, treated the former president with antibiotics, but his condition quickly deteriorated, moving from "fair" to "critical" during the night. His temperature

⁵⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, 986.

⁵⁷ McCullough, *Truman*, 987.

spiked to 103 degrees, his blood pressure plummeted, and he was placed on oxygen and intravenous medicine.⁵⁸ Truman's health had rarely faltered throughout his life, and, save for having his gall bladder and appendix removed in 1954, a hernia repair in 1963, and his highly publicized bathroom fall in 1964, he had maintained a remarkable heartiness throughout his retirement. During this final hospitalization, however, time had caught up to the aging statesman. Over the course of December, he suffered from bronchitis, heart irregularity, kidney blockage, and digestive failure. Bess remained at her husband's side day and night while Margaret traveled back and forth from her home in New York to her father's hospital room in Kansas City. On December 23, Truman slipped into a coma, and by Christmas Day it became clear that nothing more could be done. Worried about her mother's fatigue, Margaret convinced Bess to spend the night at home and get some much-needed rest. Wallace Graham phoned early the next morning with the inevitable news—Truman had died.

As Dr. Graham wrote in his final summary of Truman's condition, the cause of death was a multitude of bodily deteriorations:

In spite of occasional rallies, it seemed destined that this was the termination of all events. He gradually deteriorated. Acute renal necrosis became more apparent. He developed congestive heart failure, lapsed into hypotensive phase of shock. And that, coupled with the neurogenic problems of cerebral syndrome, was an overwhelming disastrous phenomenon, which although very difficult to accept, culminated in his final exodus.⁵⁹

Word quickly broke to the press, the final public statement citing that Truman died of a "complexity of organic failures causing collapse of the cardiovascular system."⁶⁰

Before his death and despite his steadily deteriorating health, Truman had managed to outlive all other former presidents, except for Johnson. Of course, John F. Kennedy died in 1963 after his assassination in Dallas, Texas. Herbert Hoover died at age ninety in 1964, while Truman was recovering at Research Hospital after his fall in the bathroom. In a telegram to Hoover's two sons, Truman wrote, "I was deeply saddened at the passing of your father. He was my good friend, and I was his. President Hoover was a devoted public servant, and he will be forever remembered for his great humanitarian work. Please express my sympathy to all the family."⁶¹ Truman's ongoing recovery from his

⁵⁸ Brian Burnes, "Truman's Death," Truman Library Institute, December 26, 2022, <https://www.trumanlibraryinstitute.org/the-passing-of-a-president/>.

⁵⁹ Wallace H. Graham, Final Summary by Dr. Wallace Graham for Former President Harry S. Truman, December 26, 1972, Wallace H. Graham Papers, Subject Files, Truman, Harry S.—Medical Records, 1972, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/195990285>.

⁶⁰ Burnes, "Truman's Death."

⁶¹ "World Praises the Character, Contributions of our 31st President," *Buffalo News*, October 21, 1964, 81.

fall meant that he was unable to attend Hoover's funeral. In 1969, Truman's immediate successor and political foil, Dwight Eisenhower, passed away at age seventy-eight while the Trumans were vacationing in Key West. Truman issued a public statement through the Truman Library:

General Eisenhower and I became political opponents, but before that we were comrades in arms, and I cannot forget his services to his country and to Western civilization.

He led the great military crusade that freed Western Europe from Nazi bondage and he commanded the Allied Forces that stood guard over the liberated lands while they regained their strength and self-reliance.

For these achievements, which brought him the highest office and the highest honors in the land, he must be long and gratefully remembered.⁶²

The Trumans also sent a telegram to Eisenhower's widow, Mamie.⁶³ Truman's ongoing poor health kept him from attending Eisenhower's funeral.

Now it was Truman's turn to be memorialized by the only two living men who knew the burden of the office Truman once held. Lyndon Johnson, now the only surviving former president, remarked that "a 20th century giant is gone," and that "few men of any times ever shaped the world as did the man from Independence." President Nixon joined this chorus of praise and addressed the nation shortly after Truman's passing. Truman and Nixon's feud was second only in recent political memory to Truman's icy relationship with Eisenhower, yet Nixon spoke with a sincere reverence and respect for his predecessor. "Confronted during his Presidency with a momentous series of challenges, his strength and spirit proved equal to them all. His fortitude never wavered, and his faith in America never flagged," Nixon proclaimed. "The Nation to which he gave so much will honor his memory in admiration and respect, and the other countries for which he helped keep freedom alive will remember his name with gratitude."⁶⁴ Nixon then declared December 28, the date of Truman's funeral, a National Day of Mourning.⁶⁵

Newspapers the country over published obituaries and tributes that reflected on Truman's remarkable presidency, the decisiveness with which he governed, and his personal character. The *Washington Post* described Truman as "the man from Independence who set an example of personal courage in making the critical decisions

⁶² "Truman Gives Praise for War Role," *Kansas City Star*, March 28, 1969, 10.

⁶³ "On Key West, Truman Hears of Ike Death," *Kansas City Times*, March 29, 1969, 8.

⁶⁴ "Harry Truman Belongs to the Ages," *Sioux City Journal*, December 27, 1972, 1.

⁶⁵ Richard Nixon, "Announcing the Death of Harry S Truman," December 26, 1972, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-87/pdf/STATUTE-87-Pg1146.pdf>.

that shaped the post-World War II world.” After listing several of the key geopolitical and military emergencies of the Truman administration, the *Post* continued, “In all these crises, the blunt, plain-talking Missourian won the respect not only of his fellow citizens but of the international leaders—Churchill, Stalin, Adenauer and the rest—who had at first been skeptical of his mettle.”⁶⁶ The *Wall Street Journal* pointed out the low approval rating with which Truman left office but said, “Yet now, these 20 years later it grows increasingly hard to remember what Harry Truman did wrong, and increasingly hard to dispute that he did most of the big things right.”⁶⁷ The *New York Times* wrote, “His fellow citizens trusted him, however much some may have disagreed with him, because they could be confident that the ‘image’ of the President reflected the true character of the man.”⁶⁸ Nowhere better was this sentiment captured than in a poetic tribute from the *Indianapolis Star* entitled “Nobody Wanted Little Missouri Haberdasher (Except the People).”

It hit the emotions like a thunderclap. The reefs behind and the shore clearly seen, the sure hand of the skipper suddenly was torn from the wheel.

And a numb world nearly went into shock with the realization that the flamboyant star had been replaced by a little man who resembled a character out of James Thurber.

He was dull and he wore rimless glasses and he spoke with a singsong twang. His speeches sounded like recitations of fifth-grade essays. And worse still, he seemed awed—even frightened—by the cruel twist of fate that had thrust him into the public consciousness.

OH LORD, we prayed that he would surround himself with wise men and at least keep the ship from sinking until the democratic processes would return him to the oblivion he seemed to desire—and deserve.

He looked so easy that politicians in both parties and across the ocean could hardly wait to get a piece of him.

But when the jackals moved in, the little man, back to the wall, hunched his shoulders and showed a backbone of steel. He took ‘em on, one at a time and all at once.

In 1948, they had him set up to star in a political drama called “Born to Lose.” But he fought back with Washington’s first multiple offense. Strutting like a bantam rooster shouting defiance, he took his case to the people. He was St. George, he was Don Quixote, he was Horatio—he was “Everyman” battling the interests.

⁶⁶ “David S. Broder, “Former President Truman Dies at 88,” *Washington Post*, December 27, 1972, A1.

⁶⁷ “Harry S. Truman,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 27, 1972, 6.

⁶⁸ “Man of Independence,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1972, 38.

AND WHEN THE results of the most startling American election of the 20th Century were tabulated, it turned out—as he had predicted—nobody wanted him but the people.

No American president since Lincoln was called upon to make as many frightening decisions and no American president played so large a role in shaping world history.

And yesterday, when his great heart finally stopped, Harry S. Truman left this world a respected and beloved figure.

His life was the stuff of folklore. For we now know that the Lilliputian—the little haberdasher from Missouri—had been a giant in disguise.⁶⁹

While many in the press had criticized Truman throughout his presidency, their treatment of Truman after his death indicated a deep respect for the man.

As the country continued to grieve, the highly choreographed, multi-day process of Truman's funeral began taking shape in Independence, arrangements for which extended back more than a decade. In the early 1960s, Truman had signed off on *Operation Plan Missouri*, more commonly known as “O-Plan Missouri,” a 600-page plan by the US Army that apportioned thousands of soldiers to serve ceremonial roles, alongside nine black horses and a week's worth of events for his funeral. Rather than lay in state in the rotunda of the Capitol Building in Washington, DC, or be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Truman insisted to his funeral planners that his body remain in Missouri. At a meeting with officers of the US Fifth Army, responsible for his funeral arrangements, Truman pointed outside his office window at the courtyard of his library, saying, “I would like to be buried out there . . . I want to be out there so I can get up and walk into my office if I want to.” Reportedly, the meeting ended with an uncomfortable silence after reviewing a slide show of the planned funeral service. To lighten the mood, Truman broke the silence and commended the plans, joking, “I sure wish I could see it myself.”⁷⁰

Although Truman approved of this elaborate service, he had provisioned that changes could be made per the wishes of his family. As such, the actual funeral was decidedly simpler, in large part out of respect for the exhausting ordeal Bess had endured alongside her husband during his final days. Some felt too that this more intimate affair was indeed more “Truman-like” in character, free from the frills of pomp and self-importance that he famously detested. Instead of a horseback military procession, a motorcade drove through the streets of Independence on December 27 to the Carson Funeral Home where

⁶⁹ Bob Collins, “Nobody Wanted Little Missouri Haberdasher (Except The People),” *Indianapolis Star*, Correspondence, 1973, Re Death of Harry S. Truman, Box 22, Harry S. Truman and Truman Family File: Chronological Subject File, 1924–98, Rufus Burrus Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁰ Burnes, “Truman's Funeral.”

Truman's body had been taken after his death. Eight military pallbearers, flanked on either side by forty-four other soldiers, carried Truman's mahogany casket to the hearse and the procession continued along the fifteen-block route to the Truman Library. A total of 856 servicemembers, each standing ten steps apart, lined the streets along the motorcade's path, saluting the hearse as it passed by. When the funeral convoy passed the Truman home, every window shade but one had been pulled closed, from which Bess watched her husband's motorcade. The procession arrived at the Truman Library at 1:15 p.m., greeted by a booming flyover of twenty-one Air Force jets. For the next 24 hours, Truman laid in state in the front lobby of the Truman Library, a forty-eight-star flag—the number of states when Truman took office—draped over his casket. Mourners traveled *en masse* to pay their respects, waiting for two-hours on average in a line that snaked for half a mile from the library lobby to US Highway 24 down the road. Among the first of these visitors were Lyndon Johnson and President Richard Nixon, who prayed before Truman's casket only minutes apart before both departed Independence. 26,000 people had visited the library by 4:15 a.m. By noon, an estimated 75,000 had paid their final respects to Truman.⁷¹



A shot of the George C. Carson Funeral Home as the hearse carrying the body of former President Harry S Truman arrives. December 26, 1972.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



After Former President Truman's death on December 26, 1972, thousands came to the Harry S. Truman Library to pay their final respects. This crowded line extends out the door, snaking down the library's entire driveway and continuing down United States Highway 24. December 27, 1972.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

⁷¹Burnes, "Truman's Funeral."



President and First Lady Nixon pulling up to the Harry S. Truman Library in the presidential limousine to attend the funeral of Former President Harry S Truman. December 27, 1972.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Former President Lyndon B. Johnson and his family pay their respects to the late Harry S Truman as his body lies in state at the Harry S. Truman Library. The two former presidents had been close friends. Johnson himself passed away less than a month later on January 22, 1973. December 27, 1972.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Members of the public pay their last respects to Former President Harry Truman in the lobby of the Harry S. Truman Library. The casket, draped with an American flag, is protected by an Honor Guard. December 27, 1972.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



Members of the honor guard carry the casket bearing the body of Former President Harry S Truman. A crowd gathers in the foreground to watch the pallbearers. December 27, 1972.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Once the final visitors had been escorted away from the library, the funeral service began in the small, 250-seat auditorium in the museum building. The intimate nature of the auditorium stood in stark relief to the fact that the funeral was televised live by the national networks, highlighting the duality of Truman's post-presidency: wishing to be Mr. Citizen, yet still always Mr. President. Funeral guests from the highest echelons of the Washington, DC, elite, such as Averell Harriman, Hubert Humphrey, and Stuart Symington, sat alongside hometown friends, employees, and former colleagues. These

guests included: Robert E. Sanders, the Independence resident who had painted the Truman home; George Miller, Truman's barber; Thomas Hart Benton, the artist who had rendered the mural in the Truman Museum's front lobby; William Story, a library guard; Vietta Garr, the Truman family's longtime cook and assistant; Rose Conway, Truman's personal secretary; Mike Westwood, the Independence police officer who served as Truman's bodyguard and companion for nearly twenty years; and about thirty members of Battery D.⁷² Seated behind a yellow-green curtain stage was Bess Truman, along with Margaret, Clifton, and their children. They remained just out of view of the audience to preserve their privacy.

At 2:00 p.m., the service began with a brief speech from W. Hugh McLaughlin, the Grand Master of Missouri Masons, a position that Truman had held in 1940. McLaughlin began by sharing that the over 108,000 Masons in Missouri shared in "the grief and sorrow" for the Truman family. Speaking of Truman, McLaughlin extolled the former president's "magnificent life" and good conduct. "We as Masons, extoll his many virtues, not the least of which was his recognition of the high level of individual dignity," McLaughlin eulogized. "May we emulate him in his simple, sincere, sturdy, and forthright conduct." He then led those gathered in a Masonic prayer.⁷³

Truman had long believed that a person's life should speak for itself. Fittingly, he had designed his service to be devoid of long celebratory speeches.⁷⁴ As such, pastor John



Aerial view of the burial procession for Former President Harry S. Truman as he journeys to his final resting place on the grounds of the Harry S. Truman Library. The procession is led by a military trio carrying the American flag, followed by Father John H. Lembecke and the Honor Guard bearing Mr. Truman's casket. December 28, 1972.

Credit: Cecil H. Schrepfer, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

H. Lembecke of the Trinity Episcopal Church, where Bess and Truman had married in 1919, immediately continued the service with a series of prayers, leading the congregation through Psalm 27 ("The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear") and Psalm 46 ("God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble"). Reverend H. M. Hunt, a retired Baptist minister, then followed with his own succinct eulogy: "We lift our thanks to Thee for the inspiring life and national leadership that President Truman furnished all of us in a terrible time of crisis during and after World War II. We are grateful that with foresight and faith, in a period fraught with danger to our nation and the world, his decisions were courageous and wise." After this speech, Hunt concluded the service with several

⁷² Burnes, "Truman's Funeral."

⁷³ "Truman is Buried in Library Yard," *New York Times*, December 29, 1972, 10.

⁷⁴ Burnes, "Truman's Funeral."



The courtyard of the Harry S. Truman Library, the site of the former president's grave.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site



The flag is flown at half-staff at the Trumans' residence at 219 North Delaware Street on the date of his death. December 26, 1972.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library & Museum

prayers, parting with a prayer for "the President of the United States and all in civil authority." Altogether, the service was incredibly brief, lasting only thirty minutes.⁷⁵

The funeral guests gathered outside in the library's courtyard, and at 3:00 p.m., pallbearers approached carrying Truman's casket, with Bess and Margaret following. Walking with a cane in her right hand and aided to her seat by a military escort, this was the first time the former first lady had been seen in public since her husband's passing. Pastor Lembecke led the above ground rites, placing Missouri soil on top of Truman's coffin. The pallbearers then presented Bess with the flag, now folded into a triangle with only the stars showing, that had been draped over Truman's casket. Battery D fired a ceremonial twenty-one-gun salute from six howitzer cannons positioned on the library's front lawn to end the service.⁷⁶ As guests dispersed, Truman's body was lowered into his grave.

BESS TRUMAN, WIDOW

After Truman's death, Bess continued to live for the remainder of her life at 219 North Delaware. As provisioned in a July 1953 property deed, full ownership of the home transferred to Bess following her husband's passing. She inherited Truman's estate, which totaled \$747,682, and continued to receive the Secret Service and pension benefits that had been provided to her husband.⁷⁷ Moving to a new home had been out of the question—Bess had lived in her home for nearly seventy years by 1972 and flatly refused to consider living elsewhere. As she reportedly told her neighbor, "I was born here and hope to die here. Unfortunately, these days not too many people are in a position to do that."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ "Truman is Buried in Library Yard," *New York Times*, December 29, 1972, 10.

⁷⁶ Burnes, "Truman's Funeral."

⁷⁷ "Mrs. Truman Gets a Pension of \$20,000," *New York Times*, December 29, 1972, 10.

⁷⁸ "Bess Truman: A Life Portrait; Phase V: Living Alone," *Examiner*, October 18, 1982, 6B.



Bess W. Truman and nephew David Wallace sit together in the study in the Trumans' home. June 8, 1973.

Credit: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum



President Gerald Ford and First Lady Betty Ford are accompanied by Margaret Truman Daniel, Clifton Truman Daniel, and E. Clifton Daniel after a visit to widow Bess Truman. May 8, 1976.

Credit: Harry Barth, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Living without her husband, however, was not easy. Bess mourned the loss of Truman deeply. The couple had often spent long nights reading in the downstairs library, but with Truman gone, Bess stopped sitting in the library altogether, the visible absence of her husband too much to bear. “She missed him in the big chair,” Margaret remembered.⁷⁹ Save for welcome visits from Margaret and her sons, few guests made their way to Bess’s home, as news sources reported that by 1976, she declined “all invitations, even those from her beloved bridge club, since people might be hurt or offended if she accepted one invitation and could not accept them all.”⁸⁰ Most days, Bess spent her time in the living room, sitting in her gold chair listening to a music box or reading.⁸¹ She left the house at least once a week to visit the hairdresser, the supermarket, or the Mid-Continent Public Library to replenish her reading material.⁸²

While life at 219 North Delaware had been generally calm throughout this period, it did not start that way. Bess approved a series of final modernization and construction projects for the house in 1973. She had waited until after Truman’s passing to begin these projects since the “noise and mess” would have likely disturbed the infirmed and bedridden Truman.⁸³ Partnering again with local contractor Robert Nickell, work began on repainting the trim of the first-floor guest bedroom on March 29, 1973. Until the mid-1970s, Bess continued to sleep in her upstairs bedroom. But after hearing pleas from Robert Lockwood—the head of her Secret Service detail—and Margaret to sleep downstairs to avoid a potentially catastrophic fall down the stairs, Bess relented and

⁷⁹ Margaret Truman Daniel, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, November 17, 1983.

⁸⁰ “Bess Truman: A Life Portrait; Phase V: Living Alone,” *Examiner*, October 18, 1982, 6B.

⁸¹ Margaret Truman Daniel, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, November 17, 1983.

⁸² “At 90 Mrs. Bess Truman Looks Toward the Future,” *Kansas City Star*, February 12, 1975.

⁸³ Robert Nickell to Ron Cockrell, July 28, 1983; and Robert Nickell, *Diary 1983*, personal papers of Robert Nickell, Independence, MO.

began sleeping in the bedroom Nickell had painted.⁸⁴ Nickell finished his final addition to the house on April 27, 1973, a re-wallpapering of the foyer, central hall, stairway, and second floor hall, completing the now twenty-year modernization project inside the home.⁸⁵

Although her husband was gone, Bess by no means lived alone. Her already close relationship with the Secret Service only deepened during her final years; her agents became a more constant presence as her health deteriorated. They placed panic alarms and transmitters around the house so that, if she suffered from a significant fall or medical event, the agents could respond immediately. Over time, the agents moved from their monitoring station across the street to stay in the house overnight, their shift starting when Bess retired to her bedroom around 7:00 p.m. Agents on Bess's detail found their assignment to be incredibly pleasant, jokingly referring to their command post at 224 North Delaware as "Tranquility Base." Perhaps most indicative of this ease of assignment, a dozen agents earned master's degrees in criminal justice administration over the course of their service.⁸⁶



Bess W. Truman pictured with her nurse, Valeria LaMere. LaMere was hired to supervise Bess's medical care and developed a close relationship with the former First Lady. February 1981.

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site

By 1976, Bess's health had declined to the point where she required in-home assistance, as she was now bound to a wheelchair. Many nurses and aides provided companionship and care for the former First Lady in the final years of her life, tending to her twenty-four hours per day and seven days per week. One of such aides was Valeria LaMere, who took care of administrative tasks around the home, like paying the bills. The pair developed a close friendship and LaMere became one of Bess's most trusted confidants. According to LaMere, she would take Bess to see her hairdresser every Wednesday and afterward they would share a meal, always at a new restaurant to avoid the press. LaMere remembered Bess as a cheerful woman, except for when Christmas approached, as the holiday also marked the coming anniversary of Truman's death. One holiday, Bess received a touching gift from one of Truman's colleagues that brought her to tears, and LaMere, who had never seen Bess cry before, tried her best to comfort her.

"So I went back in and I put my arms around her, and I said, 'Ms. Truman, I don't want to see you weep, honey. I want to see you happy.' And I said, 'I know that you don't have too much to be happy about right now at this time of the year, but try, honey, to be happy

⁸⁴ Margaret Truman Daniel, Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman Daniel, November 17, 1983.

⁸⁵ Nickell to Cockrell, July 28, 1983; and Robert Nickell, Diary 1983.

⁸⁶ Mark Peterson, "Secret Service Agents Have a Tranquility Base," *Kansas City Star*, August 25, 1981, 3A.

and not cry,” LaMere recalled. “And she put her arms around me, and she said, ‘Valeria,’ she says, ‘I love you,’ she says. ‘Don’t you ever leave me.’”⁸⁷

One of the nurses who tended to Bess Truman was Marcia Armstrong, starting in 1980. Before working for Bess Truman, Armstrong knew of the Trumans as “kind and down-to-earth.” According to Armstrong, the Secret Service worked to hire private duty nurses for Bess. When she was assigned the job of working with Bess, her company explained that she was to be a “companion and a nurse to monitor all of [Bess’s] medical conditions,” which included providing care and having her meals with Bess. While Armstrong counted herself among the nurses whose company Bess enjoyed, Bess was less thrilled to see others. “She was extremely uncooperative with anybody she did not like,” Armstrong recalled. “She would do nothing for them. She would not help them in transferring her from chairs or anything else if she did not like them.” A common activity for the two women on warm afternoons and evenings was to sit on the back porch and watch the Kansas City Royals baseball team on the portable television. During the wintertime, they sat in the Truman Home’s parlor instead to read or watch television.⁸⁸ Long-time Truman family employee Rev. Hobby also took on a greater role in these years. He became responsible for trimming Bess’s rose bushes, occasionally serving meals, and even playing Santa Claus for Bess and her nurses. “She just laughed,” Hobby recalled, “She got the biggest kick out of that.”⁸⁹

Help for Bess in her home became increasingly more necessary as her health started to fail. She was hospitalized first for arthritis on July 12, 1976, which began a steady decline that brought the increasingly frail Bess to the Research Hospital in Kansas City numerous times.⁹⁰ She suffered a fall in 1977, a urinary tract infection in 1980, and a broken hip in 1981, among other ailments.⁹¹ Bess celebrated her ninety-sixth birthday on February 13, 1981, hosting a small “valentine-themed party” held with close friends at her house, before suffering from another series of medical complications. During this time Margaret worked with Benedict Zobrist, the Truman Library’s director, to conduct a partial inventory of the Truman Home. This inventory, led by Liz Safly, then a research librarian at the Truman Library, was done without Bess’s knowledge to keep from upsetting her.⁹² She was last hospitalized on September 2, 1982, with internal bleeding from an intestinal ulcer. Her doctors said that her condition stabilized only due to her “indomitable will.” Although frequent hospitalizations had come to define these

⁸⁷ Valeria LaMere, interview by Pam Smoot, Oral History Interview with Valeria LaMere, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, November 18, 1985, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/valeria-lamere-oral-history-interview.htm>.

⁸⁸ Marcia Armstrong, interview with Jim Williams, Oral History Interview with Marcia Armstrong, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, August 13, 1991, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/marcia-armstrong-oral-history-interview.htm>.

⁸⁹ Jan Smith, “Handyman Cherishes Truman Memories,” *Independence Examiner*, October 21, 1982, 16.

⁹⁰ “Bess Truman In Hospital,” *Kansas City Star*, July 15, 1976.

⁹¹ “Mrs. Truman In Hospital After Fall,” *Kansas City Times*, June 18, 1977.

⁹² Harvey and Harvey, “The Ordinary Home of An Extraordinary Man,” 48.

later years, Bess remained at home following this visit until her death a month later. On October 18, 1982, Bess passed away due to congestive heart failure in her first-floor bedroom, only months shy of her ninety-eighth birthday.⁹³

After living nearly ten years after the death of her husband, Bess Truman was laid to rest on October 21, 1982. A private funeral was held at Trinity Episcopal Church, with Rev. Robert Hart presiding. Once the roughly 135 attendees—including First Lady Nancy Reagan and former First Ladies Rosalynn Carter and Betty Ford, among other dignitaries—were seated, pall bearers brought Bess’s casket into the church and down the center aisle, followed by Margaret and Clifton Daniel and their four sons. The Daniels’ eldest son, Clifton Truman Daniel, read from the Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Romans during the service.⁹⁴ No eulogies were given because the Episcopal Church did not allow them, but Rev. Hart noted, “All of us, here today, are Mrs. Truman’s eulogy.” A public ceremony, without the presence of Bess’s casket, was also held at the First Presbyterian Church, where Harry and Bess first met at Sunday school. About 150 people attended the service, during which the Truman High School choir sang a hymn. Rev. Thomas Melton said at the service, “The Truman name makes our community what it is, and nothing will separate us from the memory of the dignity and quiet of the lady of Delaware Street.”⁹⁵ Bess was interred around noon in a mahogany casket identical to her husband’s and draped with one hundred yellow roses. Her final resting place was in a grave beside the former president in the Truman Library’s courtyard. Throughout their long lives Harry and Bess had always been at each other’s sides, and they would remain that way even after they had both passed away.

Now that Harry and Bess Truman were gone, the Truman Home changed hands. In her 1974 will, Bess had specified that upon her death, the house should pass to the United States of America, “to be held and operated by it under the direction of the Archivist of the United States in conjunction with the Harry S. Truman library.”⁹⁶ While Bess’s commitment to offering public access to her home was well received, her donation presented significant problems. The General Service Administration and the National Archives and Records Service—the agencies given managerial responsibility as per Bess’s wishes—did not have the facilities, staff, or even interest in managing such a property, as historic site management fell to the National Park Service. So began a nearly year-long process of transferring ownership of the Truman Home to the NPS. The conservative politics of the time advocated for a shrinking of the federal government, especially when it came to land acquisition. Impassioned speeches in both houses of Congress, however, pushed a bill into law that provided the necessary funds to take over the home.

⁹³ “Bess Truman Remains in Serious Condition; Internal Bleeding Stops,” *Kansas City Times*, September 4, 1982.

⁹⁴ “Services for Mrs. Truman a Fitting Final Chapter in Life of Quiet Dignity,” *Kansas City Star*, October 21, 1982, 1A.

⁹⁵ “Services for Mrs. Truman a Fitting Final Chapter in Life of Quiet Dignity,” *Kansas City Star*, October 21, 1982, 8A.

⁹⁶ Harvey and Harvey, “The Ordinary Home of An Extraordinary Man,” 23.

As Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton pled to his colleagues, “I feel it is important that Congress give the Truman home the proper respect it deserves by officially designating the site, and providing generations to come an opportunity to glimpse one of America’s greatest heroes at his best—at home in Independence.” The bill passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on May 23, 1983, as “An Act to establish the Harry S Truman National Historic Site in the State of Missouri.”⁹⁷ Thanks to the generosity of Bess Truman and the dogged efforts of the National Park Service, the Truman Home is preserved to this day as a National Historic Site.

NOTABLE BIOGRAPHIES OF TRUMAN

When Truman left office in 1953, one of his main goals in the near term was to draft his memoirs. Through his memoirs, he wished to tell the story of his presidency from his own perspective. But when a man attains high office, as Truman did, others will surely want to tell his story as well. Since 1945, authors have released myriad Truman biographies. These books varied in completeness, credibility, and geniality toward their subject, but they have all revealed important aspects of Truman’s life and, perhaps more importantly, the public’s attitude toward him.

The first batch of Truman biographies were published during his presidency, written primarily by people who knew Truman in one capacity or another. The first was *Harry Truman: Son of the Soil*, published in 1945. Its author, Edward R. Schauffler, knew Truman in the 1930s when both men were reserve officers in the US Army. This initial biography was short and with some inaccuracies but overwhelmingly complimentary of Truman.⁹⁸ Other biographies followed soon thereafter: from journalist William P. Helm (1947), to *Time* writer Frank McNaughton and Truman’s Senate staffer Walter Hehmeyer (1948), and to children’s author Cornelia Spencer (1949).⁹⁹ Jonathan Daniels, a White House staffer in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, wrote the first authorized Truman biography in 1950.¹⁰⁰ Truman allowed Daniels to complete the task in part because the former president had been besieged by a mountain of bad press and wanted someone who was not a reporter to provide a reliable narrative. He gave Daniels permission to interview friends and family in Independence and Grandview and granted him access to some of his private papers, which were not yet available to the public.¹⁰¹ Truman did not enjoy great popularity throughout much of his presidency, but the biographies produced during the same period belied popular opinion, presenting a highly

⁹⁷ Harvey and Harvey, “The Ordinary Home of An Extraordinary Man,” 27.

⁹⁸ Robert H. Ferrell, “Truman’s Place in History,” *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 1 (March 1990): 2.

⁹⁹ See William P. Helm, *Harry Truman: A Political Biography* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1947); Frank McNaughton and Walter Hehmeyer, *Harry Truman: President* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948); and Cornelia Spencer, *Straight Furrow the Biography of Harry S. Truman for Young People* (New York: J. Day, 1949).

¹⁰⁰ See Jonathan Daniels, *The Man of Independence* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1950).

¹⁰¹ Robert H. Ferrell, “Truman’s Place in History,” *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 1 (March 1990): 3.

favorable picture of Truman.

Following the publication of his own memoirs, Truman saw a resurgence in his reputation, a status upheld in the biographies written in the 1960s. Two biographies, one by Alfred Steinberg, a professional writer, and the other by Cabell Phillips, a reporter with the *New York Times*, held Truman in high esteem.¹⁰² But neither had the kind of access that Daniels enjoyed—to Truman's family and friends or private papers—which detracted from their works. Truman bemoaned the lack of authority in Steinberg's writing; he scribbled in the margins about the "lies" contained therein. Phillips's work also suffered from a lack of access to Truman's private papers, which were still not available to the public.¹⁰³

One biographer who did not hurt for private access to the thoughts and experiences of Truman was his daughter, Margaret. She published a book the year after her father's death.¹⁰⁴ Margaret, with the aid of historian Thomas Fleming, drew on research in Truman's personal papers and her own recollections to produce perhaps the most personal depiction of the former president up to that date. Unlike other biographers, Margaret obtained her father's input. To conclude her work, she asked her father for a statement that summed up his life in politics. Drawing on the lives of Presidents Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and Andrew Johnson, who were reviled in their times but, in Truman's eyes at least, vindicated in later years, Truman said, "Do your duty and history will do you justice."¹⁰⁵

Through the 1960s and early 1970s, biographers were forced to rely on papers that were available publicly or provided only with the special permission of Truman himself. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, most of Truman's private papers became available to public researchers at the Truman Library. Up to that point, most considered political scientist Harold F. Gosnell's 1980 biography on Truman to be the most complete study of them all. However, his book did not incorporate any of the newly opened personal papers. With the treasure trove of records now available, a new generation of biographers flocked to the Truman Library to mine his papers and to develop new insights.¹⁰⁶ These papers served as the basis for updated Truman biographies written by Robert J. Donovan (1982), Donald R. McCoy (1984), and Richard Lawrence Miller (1986) respectively.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² See Alfred Steinberg, *The Man from Missouri: The Life and Times of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Putnam, 1962); and Cabell Phillips, *The Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession* (New York: MacMillan, 1966).

¹⁰³ Ferrell, "Truman's Place in History," 3.

¹⁰⁴ See Margaret Truman, *Harry S. Truman* (New York: William & Morrow, 1973).

¹⁰⁵ Truman, *Harry S. Truman*, 581.

¹⁰⁶ Ferrell, "Truman's Place in History," 4.

¹⁰⁷ See Harold F. Gosnell, *Truman's Crises: A Political Biography of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Robert J. Donovan, *Tumultuous Years: 1949-1953* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1982); Donald R. McCoy, *The Presidency of Harry S. Truman* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1984); and Richard Lawrence Miller, *Truman: The Rise to Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986).

These three publications—the first ones to utilize the newly opened personal papers—were highly critical of Truman during his presidency. Despite the groundswell of public adulation for Truman beginning in the 1970s, these later biographies challenged Truman’s foreign and domestic records while in office and made critical judgments about his personality.¹⁰⁸ A biography by William E. Pemberton, published in 1989, went further, characterizing Truman’s domestic affairs record as an utter failure and blaming Truman for either creating or exacerbating the enduring problems of the Cold War.¹⁰⁹ The outliers in this trend were the biographies written by Robert Ferrell, written in 1983 and 1984, which were both laudatory of Truman.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the *magnum opus* of Truman biographies came in 1992 with the publication of David McCullough’s sweeping treatment of the life and career of the former president.¹¹¹ Whereas most biographies discussed Truman’s time in politics, McCullough also wrote at length about Truman’s early life and post-presidential years. In addition to the full array of Truman records, McCullough was able to draw upon Bess Truman’s newly accessible records and oral histories of Truman confidants conducted by the Truman Library. McCullough himself also conducted interviews of more than 125 people, with some of these sessions stretching for several days.¹¹² McCullough’s biography often straddles criticism and adoration of its subject, balancing the praise of defenders with the critiques of his detractors. McCullough’s biography presents Truman as neither hero nor villain, instead crafting a picture of Truman as a flawed but well-intentioned man.

Biographies are often political projects, with their contents extensions of political campaigns waged for or against the subjects of those studies. Biographies of Truman were no different. The earliest Truman biographers were in some way connected to Truman, whether it be through association or access. Hence, those biographies produced were overwhelmingly complimentary of Truman. Later biographers no longer needed Truman’s favor to conduct research in his private papers. This access allowed for biographers with diverging viewpoints to make their own critical analyses of the former president. Contemporary biographies often continue in this tradition, with some biographers wishing to preserve Truman’s good reputation and others wishing to cast doubt on his political career and his administration.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Ferrell, “Truman’s Place in History,” 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ferrell, “Truman’s Place in History,” 5–6.

¹¹⁰ See Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Modern American Presidency* (Boston: Brown & Little, 1983) and Robert H. Ferrell, *Truman: A Century of Remembrance, 1884-1972* (New York: Viking Press, 1984).

¹¹¹ See David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

¹¹² McCullough, *Truman*, 994.

¹¹³ See, for example, Algeo Matthew, *Harry Truman’s Excellent Adventure: The True Story of a Great American Road Trip* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009); Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); William Lee Miller, *Two Americans: Truman, Eisenhower, and a Dangerous World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); and Elizabeth Edwards Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2006).

“TRUMANMANIA”

Achieving popularity had never been a goal of Truman’s, and if anything, it seemed that he would be remembered as largely *unpopular*. Famous for his low approval ratings at the end of his second term, Truman retired from politics an embattled figure who was loved by some but hated by many more. Yet, his image slowly rehabilitated during his retirement—the domestic and international policy he laid during his presidency had started to take real and positive effect, memoirs and books offered new perspectives into Truman’s life, and political figures from presidents to presidential hopefuls celebrated Truman’s career.



*Standing to the right of former President Harry Truman is author Merle Miller. Miller had conducted extensive interviews with Truman between 1961-1962, which became the basis of Merle’s book about Truman, *Plain Speaking*. The book became quite popular after it came out in paperback in October of 1974 and is credited as being a major contributor to “Trumanmania” that followed the former president’s death. October 24, 1961.*

Credit: Harry S Truman National Historic Site

The largest increase in his popularity, however, would not come until August of 1974, nearly two years after his death, when the Watergate scandal shook public faith in the presidency. Faced with cold hard evidence of his deep involvement in the scandal, President Nixon resigned in disgrace. With his departure, many felt that the bonds of trust between the government and the American people had been irrevocably shattered. Amid this fallout, Truman emerged as a popular foil to the dishonesty of the Nixon administration. While Truman’s characteristic blunt and candid manner of speaking had drawn criticism during his lifetime, it was for this very reason that he drew such wide appeal post-Watergate. As political scientist Sean J. Savage noted: “The Watergate scandals and Nixon’s forced resignation from office led more Americans to yearn for a president who was scrupulously honest and ethical in his personal life, clear and straightforward in his public statements, and humble and patriotic in his



Actor James Whitmore signs Mary Shaw Branton's program for "Give 'Em Hell, Harry." 1975

Credit: Wilborn and Associates, Kansas City

respect for the office of U.S. president."¹¹⁴ At the same time, Merle Miller's *Plain Speaking*, a published collection of personal, candid interviews with Truman, hit bookstore shelves in the wake of Watergate and compounded this public praise of Truman. The content of the book was not necessarily groundbreaking, largely consisting of Truman's autobiography. But the book's earthy, forthright tone came as a refreshing break from contemporary feelings of presidential mistrust.

Thus emerged the so-called "Trumanmania," a movement that celebrated Truman's honesty as a counterpoint to the political disillusion of the era. Truman's face and quotes were plastered on bumper stickers, T-shirts, books, and more. Playwright Sam Gallu premiered his one-man play *Give 'Em Hell, Harry!* on Broadway in 1975, featuring actor James Whitmore who portrayed Truman as a fiery and

<p>"So Long Harry Truman"</p> <p>Performed and Written by Danny O'Keefe</p> <p><i>I can't stand to read the papers seems like all the news is bad and an empty anger keeps me from being really sad.</i></p> <p><i>These are strange times we live in and hard games we play wager very carefully and play 'em as they lay.</i></p> <p><i>Don't play no cards ain't in your hand Don't play no cards ain't in your hand</i></p> <p><i>So long Harry Truman goddamn it's hard to find an honest man</i></p> <p><i>No longer sure of waking No longer sure of sleep</i></p>	<p><i>A prisoner bound by promises He knew he could not keep And someone said 'let's hang him For he is a fool' Ah but tell me just how was it That he came to rule?</i></p> <p><i>Don't play no cards ain't in your hand Don't play no cards ain't in your hand</i></p> <p><i>So long Harry Truman, goddamn it's hard to find an honest man</i></p> <p><i>So long, Harry Truman, goddamn it's hard to find an honest man</i></p> <p><i>So long Harry Truman So long Harry Truman</i></p> <p><i>Goddamn it's hard to find an honest man</i></p>	<p><i>Never trust an enemy and never cheat a friend Just doing what you think is right Usually works out in the end And the president thought of Truman When he knew the end was near You can pass it on for quite a while But it's true the buck stops here Don't play no cards ain't in your hand Don't play no cards ain't in your hand</i></p> <p><i>So long Harry Truman goddamn it's hard to find an honest man</i></p> <p><i>So long, Harry Truman, goddamn it's hard to find an honest man</i></p> <p><i>So long Harry Truman</i></p>
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¹¹⁴ Sean J. Savage, "Truman in Historical, Popular, and Political Memory," in *A Companion to Harry S. Truman*, ed. Daniel S. Margolies (New York: Blackwell, 2012), 10.

quick-witted man of action and integrity. The rock band Chicago released a song entitled “Harry Truman,” looking back on the Truman era with a wistful nostalgia—as the song famously refrains, “America needs you, Harry Truman!” In the same year, Danny O’Keefe released the song “So Long Harry Truman.” Both songs were inspired by the loss in confidence with presidential leadership amid the Watergate scandal and evoked the honesty of Truman. While this “mania” peaked in the 1970s, Truman’s popular image as a quintessentially honest everyman continued to steadily grow. David McCullough’s Pulitzer Prize-winning biography inspired a highly fictionalized HBO miniseries of the same name.

Back home in Independence, community members began in 1973 to gather annually for “Truman Week” celebrations, week-long festivities dedicated to honoring the memory of Truman. Every year, from May 8 to May 15, celebrants from within and outside of Independence gathered to watch parades, memorial concerts, and speeches in honor of the former president’s birthday. Each week is capped-off with a presentation of the Harry S. Truman Public Service Award, given to those that embody the political spirit of the late Truman and the early recipients of this award, which include Henry Kissinger, Stuart

<i>“Harry Truman”</i>	<i>From men who'd sell us out</i>	<i>Oh, Harry, is there something we can do</i>
Performed by Chicago Written by Robert Lamm		
<i>America needs you, Harry Truman</i>	<i>To get themselves a piece of power</i>	<i>to save the land we love?</i>
<i>Harry, could you please come home?</i>	<i>We'd love to hear you speak your mind</i>	<i>America's calling, Harry Truman</i>
<i>Things are looking bad</i>	<i>In plain and simple ways</i>	<i>Harry, you know what to do</i>
<i>I know you would be mad</i>	<i>Call a spade a spade</i>	<i>The world is turning round</i>
<i>To see what kind of men</i>	<i>Just like you did back in the days</i>	<i>And losing lots of ground</i>
<i>Prevail upon the land you love</i>	<i>When you would play piano</i>	<i>So, Harry, is there something we can do</i>
<i>America's wondering,</i>	<i>Each morning walk a mile</i>	<i>to save the land we love?</i>
<i>“How we got here?”</i>	<i>Speak of what was going down</i>	<i>Oh! Harry, is there something we can do</i>
<i>Harry, all we get is lies</i>	<i>With honesty and style</i>	<i>to save the land we love?</i>
<i>We're getting safer cars</i>	<i>America's calling, Harry Truman</i>	<i>Harry!</i>
<i>Rocket ships to Mars</i>	<i>Harry, you know what to do</i>	<i>Harry, is there something we can do</i>
	<i>The world is turning round</i>	<i>to save the land we love?</i>
	<i>And losing lots of ground</i>	

Symington, and Hubert Humphrey.¹¹⁵

Perhaps the most enduring facet of “Trumanmania,” however, was the consistent channeling and praise of Truman’s political and personal life by future presidents and presidential candidates. Nixon’s immediate successor, Gerald Ford, ordered a bust of Truman to be placed in the Oval Office as well as a portrait to be hung in the Cabinet room.¹¹⁶ Although a Republican, Ford evinced a deep respect for Truman the Democrat and frequently referenced him in official speeches and public comments. Ford’s Democratic successor, Jimmy Carter, saw much of himself in Truman, remarking that he “felt kind of a kinship with him. We both came from a kind of community that was similar in some ways, and we went back home after the election and the service in the White House.”¹¹⁷ Carter further qualified his abiding love of Truman:

As far as Harry Truman was concerned, I thought he was the greatest president of this century. He was always the one that I mentioned when I was asked that question, never anyone else. I thought about him often when I was in the White House. He was honest. He told the truth even when it was painful. He didn’t try to shift blame for disappointments or failures to other people. He was courageous, and he never ducked an important issue because it might cost him a few points in the public opinion poll.¹¹⁸



President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton on a tour at the Harry S. Truman Library. The Clintons were visiting Independence, Missouri, to gather support for the president’s universal healthcare bill. July 30, 1994.

Credit: George Curtis, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Throughout the more conservative 1980s, presidential hopefuls continued to channel Truman during their campaigns. For example, in 1984 Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale hoped to prove pollsters wrong and repeat Truman’s 1948 historic upset against the highly popular Ronald Reagan. In the 1990s, President Bill Clinton drew “some magic from the lodestar of political scrappers”—Truman—when he visited Independence to help push his universal healthcare bill over the finish line.¹¹⁹ Even Republican George W. Bush, who faced backlash for his unilateral military action in the Middle East, invoked the memory of Truman as another president who was forced to make difficult

¹¹⁵ James Kindall, “Award to Humphrey to Top Truman Week,” *Kansas City Star*, April 28, 1977, 35.

¹¹⁶ Cockrell, “The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study,” 383.

¹¹⁷ Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter, interview arranged by Jim Williams, Oral History Interview with Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, October 1991, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/ooo/jimmy-carter-oral-history-interview.htm>.

¹¹⁸ Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter, Oral History Interview with Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter, October 1991.

¹¹⁹ David McCullough, “Clinton & Congress; A Touch of Harry in the Night,” *New York Times*, December 2, 1994.

wartime decisions.¹²⁰ When President Joseph R. “Joe” Biden took office in January 2021, he included a bust of President Truman in the Oval Office. While it became commonplace for American politicians to admire and emulate Truman, few could match his titanic popularity. A 1980s poll of 960 leading American companies asked executives, “Which one of the eight presidents since World War II do you admire most and least?” Far and away, Truman was easily the most admired:

	Admire most	Admire least
Truman	36.0%	0.0%
Eisenhower	21.8	0.0
Kennedy	8.6	4.1
Johnson	0.5	14.7
Nixon	3.6	14.7
Ford	0.5	2.0
Carter	0.5	44.7
Reagan	14.7	4.1 ¹²¹

For many years, Truman was in the top five of C-SPAN’s Presidential Historians Survey. But in 2017, he was ranked sixth, edged out of the top five by Dwight D. Eisenhower.¹²² Future historical scholarship may change or reinterpret this largely favorable image of Truman’s personal and political life, but a positive memory of Truman continues to shape the American public’s perception of the thirty-third president.

CONCLUSION

Being president of the United States in the modern era instantly catapults a person into a level of recognizability beyond any other occupation. With that recognition comes celebrity status that continues to give former presidents public attention. Truman, who was the first former president of the television age, was no different. He welcomed much of the attention he received, even if it put a damper on his hopes of ever truly becoming plain old “Mr. Citizen.” The mountains of books, newspaper articles, and films devoted to Truman in his post-presidential period kept him in the spotlight for all manner of reasons. He did, however, have boundaries. His humility prevented him from accepting recognition, such as a national monument or the Medal of Honor, that he did not believe he had earned. But he did add his name to worthy projects, such as a center for peace or the training of new government workers, that aligned closely with his own post-

¹²⁰ Savage, “Truman in Historical, Popular, and Political Memory,” 10.

¹²¹ Ferrell, “Truman’s Place in History,” 9.

¹²² Presidential Historians Survey (2017), C-SPAN, <https://www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2017/?page=overall>.

presidential goals. Truman would have no say in how much credit he received upon his death, nonetheless. Tributes of all kinds and from all spheres flooded Independence, in remembrance of the former president, resulting in an extended period of Trumanmania, which brought about a renewed appreciation for the elder statesman. His widow, Bess, who actively shunned public exposure, now became a person of interest, and she did her best to carry on her husband's legacy, in large part by donating her home and its contents to the United States government. In life, Truman did not seek special recognition; he only looked for new ways to serve his country. In death, he continues to provide such service through his example, his care for the historical record, and his family's investment in his legacy.

Conclusion

In his retirement from public office, former President Harry S Truman had to contend with the fact that, despite his desire to be nothing more than “Mr. Citizen,” many would still consider him “Mr. President.” As Mr. Citizen, Truman believed that he had an opportunity to serve the country beyond the office of the presidency by drawing on his vast experience. He endeavored to teach young people about their history and government, imparting to them the knowledge to maintain their constitutional democracy. He expected that subsequent administrations would ask him to advise on important policy matters or charge him with some official executive business, as he had done with former President Herbert Hoover when Truman asked him to lead the postwar famine relief effort. And he strove to guide and work on behalf of his beloved Democratic Party, campaigning vigorously for party candidates and attempting to orchestrate the nomination of his preferred candidates. But as Mr. President, Truman’s influence and fame were fixed to his time in office. This meant that his sway over his party diminished as time marched further away from his presidency and that, despite his attempts to act as an ordinary citizen, he was frequently approached for autographs and handshakes. The often-simultaneous intertwining of these two identities defined his post-presidency.

A major part of Truman’s plans for his retirement years was to be an educator. He aimed to accomplish this goal with three main efforts. First, he wanted to write his presidential memoirs, which he wanted to be a full accounting of his time in office, providing documentary evidence to support his major decisions. He believed that the American people deserved to have the full truth about their leaders’ actions, and he wanted his memoirs to be his side of the story. Second, Truman planned his presidential library, where scholars and students from around the world could conduct research into his presidential papers and all others who chose to deposit their personal papers

there. He often greeted students personally, engaging them directly about the history and government of the United States. Although the Truman Library bore his name, Truman did not want the library to be a memorial to him; rather, he wanted it to be an institution that taught people about the American presidency as an institution. The creation of the Truman Library also ensured that generations of Americans could learn about former presidents by serving as the blueprint for federally owned and operated presidential libraries across the country. Last, Truman took his knowledge directly to the young people. He traveled to colleges and universities across the country to speak to young Americans about the Constitution, the office of the presidency, and the major issues facing the United States. Question and answer sessions with students often followed these lectures, where Truman would answer students' questions with his famed directness and honesty. The former president compiled these lectures in the book *Truman Speaks* so that young people everywhere could learn from his perspectives on these important topics.

Just as Truman believed that his experience in office made him uniquely qualified to teach about government, he also thought that same experience would make him a good fit to lead some administrative undertaking. As president, Truman took pride in exercising decisive leadership and decision making, so much so that his famous "The Buck Stops Here" sign became forever linked to his presidency. Likewise, he hoped that future presidents would call on him as an adviser, particularly on foreign affairs, or to lead a commission or investigation. The acrimonious presidential campaign of 1952, however, meant that President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Truman's immediate successor, was unwilling to use Truman in any capacity. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson would brief or seek Truman's counsel, but Truman's role was limited to giving informal advice or providing public reassurance of policy goals. The 1965 Medicare Act, signed by President Johnson at the Truman Library, though, was a vindication of Truman's failed effort to move a national health insurance program through Congress during his presidency. Nevertheless, future presidents often cited Truman as a role model of good and able leadership in times of crisis. While Citizen Truman attempted to continue his public service in government, he did not succeed in this capacity during his post-presidency.

Although Truman had retired from holding public office, he was by no means out of the political arena. He wanted to continue playing an active role as the Democratic Party's de facto leader and the party's only living former president. In doing so, he lived up to his reputation as a bulldog campaigner, crisscrossing the country for not only Democratic presidential candidates but congressional and gubernatorial candidates as well. Truman's adherence to party unity, despite sectional differences, put him in high demand to appear for campaign stump speeches in all corners of the United States. Despite his potency and

popularity on the campaign trail, Truman was less effective as a party leader. In both the 1956 and 1960 Democratic presidential elections, Truman attempted to engineer the party conventions so that his preferred candidates would receive the nominations. But his power was limited in this area, with the party rebuffing his efforts on both occasions, signaling that, while the party's respect for him would never diminish, Truman's real power ended when he left office in 1953.

Even as Truman's political power faded, his celebrity as a private citizen did not; in fact, the opposite occurred. Truman was the first president to give a televised speech from the Oval Office, and it was fitting that he made several appearances on popular television programs in his retirement. He came into the American public's living rooms on shows like *Person to Person*, *The Jack Benny Show*, and others. Wherever Truman went, inside or outside the United States, he was greeted by passersby with adulation. Even in death, his reputation and celebrity status only prospered. "Trumanmania," beginning in the mid-1970s after the Watergate scandal, washed away what little doubt the public had about Truman's legacy. In the face of a crisis about the country's executive leadership, Americans fondly recalled the plainspoken honesty he exhibited as president, manifesting in popular music, movies, and other media. The value of the Truman name is also apparent by the array of commemorations attributed to him, from federal and state properties, to institutions of higher learning, and to aircraft carriers. Although his fame came from being president, the value of his stock rose exponentially from the humility and geniality with which he responded to his celebrity status.

Despite all the professional, political, and cultural developments facing Truman outside of his home on 219 North Delaware Street in Independence, none of that mattered to him as much as his family life. Throughout his post-presidency, he remained devoted to his wife and most trusted adviser, Bess Truman. He relied on Bess throughout his career, depending on her for support and advice in all things. Likewise, Truman was smitten with his and Bess's only child, Margaret, who inherited her parents' easygoing natures, and their four grandsons. Outside of the immediate family, Truman took comfort in his social life, whether it be the regular reunions of Battery D, his regular poker group, or his lunches at the Kansas City Club with old political rivals. Even though the community around Truman was obviously well aware of his importance outside of Independence, they often treated him as a simple, beloved city elder who was trusted and valued. In this regard, very few locals or contemporaries seemed to have anything negative to say about Mr. Citizen, regardless of any political differences they might have had with him.

Like all people, Harry Truman was a complicated man with a complicated legacy. He was known for his willingness to make tough decisions as president, but that did not mean that all his decisions would turn out to be popular or correct. True to form, he

neither hid from those decisions nor denied his own fallibility. These personality traits did not change once Truman finally left political office in 1953, after living a political life for three decades, primarily because they were authentic characteristics. As a former president, he retired to the same small community in which he spent much of his life and lived in the same house he had called home since 1919. Truman endeavored to treat everyone fairly and with respect. As everyone does, he failed on occasion. Even after leaving office with the lowest approval rating in history, people continued to gravitate toward the former president over the years because he never aspired to be more than a good neighbor and good American, regardless of whether people called him Mr. Citizen or Mr. President. Aside from having occupied arguably the most powerful office in the world, Truman lived and acted like most people, which was at the root of his popularity.

APPENDIX A

List of Harry S Truman Namesakes

“Truman’s Own” 129th Field Artillery Regiment, Missouri National Guard—Designated in recognition of Truman’s command of Battery D during World War I

Truman Road (1949)—Formerly known as 15th Street, Blue Avenue, and Van Horn Avenue, running from Baltimore Avenue in Kansas City to eastern Jackson County

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum (1957)—Home of the records of President Truman, Bess Truman, and various other individuals

Harry S Truman Birthplace State Historic Site (1957)—Missouri state historic site related to the birthplace and childhood home of Truman in Lamar, Missouri

Truman High School (1964)—School for grades 9–12 in the Independence School District¹

Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace (1966)—Research institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem dedicated to advancing peace in the Middle East

Harry S. Truman Center for Governmental Affairs (1969)—Center dedicated to providing programming and educational activities on public policy issues at University of Missouri—Kansas City

Harry S. Truman Sports Complex (1970)—Site of Arrowhead Stadium (home of the Kansas City Chiefs) and Kauffman Stadium (home of the Kansas City Royals)

Harry S Truman Reservoir, also known as Truman Lake (1970)—Manmade lake and dam in Benton, Henry, Hickory, and St. Clair Counties, Missouri

Harry S Truman Historic District National Historic Landmark (1971)—National Historic District encompassing historic sites related to Truman in Independence, Missouri

Truman Medical Center (1972)—Built with the help of Judge Truman near downtown Kansas City

“Harry Truman” (1975)—Song by the band Chicago, appearing on the album *Chicago VIII*

¹ Numerous other schools across the United States have been named after President Truman.

“So Long Harry Truman” (1975)—Song by the singer-songwriter Danny O’Keefe, appearing on the album *So Long Harry Truman*

Harry S. Truman Scholarship (1975)—Federally funded public service graduate fellowship

Harry S Truman State Park (1976)—Missouri state park in Benton County, Missouri

Harry S Truman College (1976)—Community college in the City Colleges of Chicago system

Harry S Truman Farm Home National Historic Landmark (1978)—Added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Jackson County donated it to NPS on April 4, 1994

Harry S Truman State Office Building (1983)—State government office building in Jefferson City, Missouri

Harry S Truman National Historic Site (1983)—National Park Service unit that includes the Truman Home, Truman Farm Home, Noland Home, and George and Frank Wallace Homes in Independence and Grandview, Missouri.

Truman the Tiger (1986)—Official athletic mascot for the University of Missouri Tigers

Harry S. Truman Little White House (1991)—State historic site and museum dedicated to the Little White House in Key West, Florida

Truman (1995)—Television film based on David McCullough’s 1992 biography and starring Gary Sinise as Truman

Truman State University (1996)—Formerly Northeast Missouri State University

USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75) (1998)—*Nimitz*-class United States Navy aircraft carrier

Harry S Truman Building (2000)—Headquarters of the United States Department of State in Washington, DC

Harry S. Truman School of Government and Public Affairs (2001)—Government affairs school in the College of Arts and Science at University of Missouri—Columbia

President Harry S. Truman Fellowship in National Security Science and Engineering (2004)—Three-year postdoctoral fellowship at Sandia National Laboratories

APPENDIX B

1953 Income Tax Return of Harry S and Bess W. Truman¹

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY
Papers of Bess W. Truman

U. S. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RETURN
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1953

1953

or taxable year beginning 1953, and ending 1953

Name **Harry S. and Bess W. Truman**
(PLEASE PRINT. If this is a joint return of husband and wife, use first names of both)

HOME ADDRESS **219 North Delaware Street**
(PLEASE PRINT. Street and number or rural route)
Independence, Missouri
(City, town, or post office) (Postal zone number) (State)

Social Security No. **488-40-6969** Occupation **Writer - Farmer**

Do not write in these spaces
Serial No. (Cashier's Stamp)

1. List your name. If your wife (or husband) had no income, or if this is a joint return, list also her (or his) name.
A **Harry S. Truman**
B **Bess W. Truman**
(Your wife's name—do not list if she is filing a separate return or if she had income not included in this return)
C. List names of your children (include birth date and last name received)

Check below if at the end of your taxable year you or your wife were—
65 or over ☒ Blind ☐
65 or over ☒ Blind ☐

On lines A and B below—
If neither 65 nor blind write the figure 1
If either 65 or blind write the figure 2
If both 65 and blind write the figure 3
Number of exemptions for you 2
Number of her (or his) exemptions 2

Form W-2
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

WITHHOLDING STATEMENT — 1953
FEDERAL TAXES WITHHELD FROM WAGES

EMPLOYEE'S COPY (DUPLICATE)

Form W-2
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

WITHHOLDING STATEMENT — 1953
Federal Taxes Withheld From Wages
Amended Feb. 25, 1954

EMPLOYEE (Print employee's name, and full address below)
**Mr. Harry S. Truman
Federal Reserve Bank Bldg.
Kansas City 6, Mo.**

SOCIAL SECURITY NO. **488-40-6969**

F. I. C. A. employee tax withheld, if any

U. S. INCOME TAX WITHHOLDING INFORMATION
(TO BE REPORTED ON EMPLOYEE'S INCOME TAX RETURN)
Total wages (before payroll deductions) paid in 1953 **\$5,416.69**
Federal income tax withheld, if any **\$1,061.14**

FEDERAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS ACT
(FEDERAL OLD AGE AND SURVIVORS INSURANCE)
*If your wages were subject to F. I. C. A. taxes, list amount shown below your F. I. C. A. wages pay but not more than \$3,000.

TOTAL F. I. C. A. WAGES (before payroll deductions) paid in 1953

STATE, CITY OR OTHER TAX

EMPLOYER (Print employer's identification number, name, and address below)
**U.S. EXECUTIVE OFFICE
c/o TREASURER, U.S. DIVISION OF
DISBURSEMENT, ROOM 244, ANNEX 1
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.**

53-W002449

EMPLOYEE: Detach this copy and keep it as part of your tax records. Do NOT send it to the Director of Internal Revenue with your income tax return.

due or refund (B) By payments on 1953 Declaration of Estimated Tax (or any overpayment on your 1952 tax not claimed as a refund) **\$6,460.00**

7. If your tax (item 5) is larger than payments (item 6), enter balance of tax due here. This balance must be paid in full with return **\$7,516.27**

8. If your payments (item 6) are larger than your tax (item 5), enter the overpayment here **\$2,610.03**

Enter amount of item 8 you want \$ (Credited on 1954 estimated tax) (Refunded)

Do you owe any prior year Federal tax for which you have been billed? (Yes or No) **No** Is your wife (or husband) making a separate return for 1953? (Yes or No) **No** If "yes," write her (or his) name
If you have filed a return for a prior year, state latest year **1952** Where filed? **Baltimore, Md.**
To which District Director's office did you pay amount claimed in item 6 (B), above? **Kansas City, Mo.**

I declare under the penalties of perjury that this return (including any accompanying schedules and statements) has been examined by me and to the best of my knowledge and belief is a true, correct, and complete return.

Robert P. Myers 3/3/54
(Signature of person, other than taxpayer, preparing this return) (Date)
Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.
1325 Commercial Bank Bldg.
Kansas City, Missouri

(Signature of taxpayer) (Date)
(Signature of taxpayer's wife or husband if this is a joint return) (Date)

10-09192-1

Original Retired for Preservation

¹ 1953: Income Tax Return, Box 13, Financial Affairs File, 1917–1983, Bess W. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

Papers of Bess W. Truman

FORM 1040
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

U. S. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RETURN
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1953

1953

or taxable year beginning _____, 1953, and ending _____, 1953

Name **Harry S. and Bess W. Truman**
(PLEASE PRINT. If this is a joint return of husband and wife, use first names of both.)

HOME ADDRESS **219 North Delaware Street**
(PLEASE PRINT. Street and number or rural route.)
Independence, Missouri
(City, town, or post office) (Postal zone number) (State)

Social Security No. **488-40-6969** Occupation **Writer - Farmer**

Do not write in these spaces

Serial No.

(Cashier's Stamp)



1. List your name. If your wife (or husband) had no income, or if this is a joint return, list also her (or his) name.

A **Harry S. Truman**

B **Bess W. Truman**
(Your wife's name—do not list if she is filing a separate return or if she had income not included in this return.)

C. List names of your children (including those legally adopted)

Check below if at the end of your taxable year you or your wife were—

65 or over ☒ Blind ☐ Number of exemptions for you **2**

65 or over ☒ Blind ☐ Number of her (or his) exemptions **2**

On lines A and B below—
If neither 65 nor blind write the figure 1
If either 65 or blind write the figure 2
If both 65 and blind write the figure 3

Your exemptions

Form W-2
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

WITHHOLDING STATEMENT — 1953

EMPLOYEE'S
COPY
(DUPLICATE)

FEDERAL TAXES WITHHELD FROM WAGES		U. S. INCOME TAX WITHHOLDING INFORMATION	
FEDERAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS ACT		(TO BE REPORTED ON EMPLOYEE'S INCOME TAX RETURN)	
FEDERAL OLD AGE AND SURVIVOR'S INSURANCE		TOTAL WAGES (BEFORE TAXES AND DEDUCTIONS) PAID IN 1953	
TOTAL F.I.C.A. WAGES (BEFORE PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS) PAID IN 1953		FEDERAL INCOME TAX WITHHELD, IF ANY	
1,298 16		5.13	

EMPLOYEE (Print employee's social security account number, name, and full address below)

HARRY S. TRUMAN
INDEPENDENCE
MISSOURI

EMPLOYER (Print employer's identification number, name, and address below)

FINANCE OFFICE U S ARMY
2ND AND R STS S W
WASHINGTON 25 D C

EMPLOYEE: Detach this copy and keep it as part of your tax records. Do NOT send it to the Director of Internal Revenue with your income tax return.

*If your wages were subject to F.I.C.A. taxes, but are not shown above, your F.I.C.A. wages are the same as wages shown under "U. S. INCOME TAX WITHHOLDING INFORMATION," but not more than \$3,600.

6. How much have you paid on your 1953 income tax?

(A) By tax withheld (in item 2, above). Attach Original Forms W-2. **\$ 1,066.27**

(B) By payments on 1953 Declaration of Estimated Tax (include any overpayment on your 1952 tax not claimed as a refund) **6,450.00**

7. If your tax (item 5) is larger than payments (item 6), enter balance of tax due here. This balance must be paid in full with return. **7,516.27**

8. If your payments (item 6) are larger than your tax (item 5), enter the overpayment here **2,610.03**

Enter amount of item 8 you want \$ (Credited on 1954 estimated tax) (Refunded)

Do you owe any prior year Federal tax for which you have been billed? (Yes or No) **No.** Is your wife (or husband) making a separate return for 1953? (Yes or No) **No.** If "yes," write her (or his) name _____

If you have filed a return for a prior year, state latest year **1952** Where filed? **Baltimore, Md.**

To which District Director's office did you pay amount claimed in item 6 (B), above? **Kansas City, Mo.**

I declare under the penalties of perjury that this return (including any accompanying schedules and statements) has been examined by me and to the best of my knowledge and belief is a true, correct, and complete return.

Robert L. Myers 3/3/54
(Signature of person, other than taxpayer, preparing this return) (Date)

Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.
(Signature of taxpayer's wife or husband if this is a joint return) (Date)

To assist in the preparation of this return, the preparer has included all their income and, even though only one has income, BOTH MUST SIGN. 16-60192-1

Kansas City, Missouri

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

FORM 1040
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue ServiceU. S. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RETURN
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1953

1953

or taxable year beginning 1953, and ending 1953

Do not write in these spaces

Name **Harry S. and Bess W. Truman**
(PLEASE PRINT. If this is a joint return of husband and wife, use first names of both.)HOME ADDRESS **219 North Delaware Street**
(PLEASE PRINT. Street and number or rural route)**Independence, Missouri**
(City, town, or post office) (State)Social Security No. **488-40-6969**Occupation **Writer - Lecturer - Farmer**

Serial No.

(Cashier's Stamp)

Your
exemptionsYour
in-
comeHow to
figure
the taxTax
due or
refund

1. List your name. If your wife (or husband) had no income, or if this is a joint return, list also her (or his) name.

A. **Harry S. Truman**B. **Bess W. Truman**
(Your wife's name—do not list if she is filing a separate return or if she had income not included in this return.)

- C. List names of your children (including stepchildren and legally adopted children) with 1953 gross incomes of less than \$600 who received more than one-half of their support from you in 1953. See Instructions.

D. Enter number of exemptions claimed for other close relatives listed in Schedule I on page 2

E. Enter total number of exemptions claimed in A to D above **4**

2. Enter your total wages, salaries, bonuses, commissions, and other compensation received in 1953, before pay-roll deductions. Persons claiming traveling or reimbursed expenses, see Instructions.

Print Employer's Name	Where Employed (City and State)	Total Wages	Income Tax Withheld
Schedule Attached		6,654.85	1,066.27

3. If you received dividends, interest, or any other income (or loss), give details on page 2 and enter the total here
- 27,521.85**
-
4. Add amounts shown in items 2 and 3, and enter the total here
- 34,176.70**

(Unmarried or legally separated persons qualifying under Schedule J as "Head of Household," check here ☐.) IF YOUR INCOME WAS LESS THAN \$5,000.—Use the tax table on page 4 unless you itemize deductions. The table allows about 10 percent of your income for charitable contributions, interest, taxes, medical expenses, etc. If your deductions exceed 10 percent, it will usually be to your advantage to itemize them and compute your tax on page 3. IF YOUR INCOME WAS \$5,000 OR MORE.—Compute tax on page 3. Use standard deduction or itemize deductions, whichever is to your advantage.

5. (A) Enter your tax from table on page 4, or from line 13, page 3.
- \$ 10,045.30**
-
- (B) Enter your self-employment tax from line 35, separate Schedule C.
- 81.00**

6. How much have you paid on your 1953 income tax?
-
- (A) By tax withheld (in item 2, above). Attach Original Forms W-2.
- \$ 1,066.27**
-
- (B) By payments on 1953 Declaration of Estimated Tax (include any overpayment on your 1952 tax not claimed as a refund).
- 6,450.00**

7. If your tax (item 5) is larger than payments (item 6), enter balance of tax due here. This balance must be paid in full with return.
- 7,516.27**

8. If your payments (item 6) are larger than your tax (item 5), enter the overpayment here →
- 2,610.03**

Enter amount of item 8 you want \$ (Credited on 1954 estimated tax) (Refunded)

Do you owe any prior year Federal tax for which you have been billed? (Yes or No) **No**. Is your wife (or husband) making a separate return for 1953? (Yes or No) **No**. If "yes," write her (or his) nameIf you have filed a return for a prior year, state latest year **1952**. Where filed? **Baltimore, Md.**
To which District Director's office did you pay amount claimed in item 6 (B), above? **Kansas City, Mo.**

I declare under the penalties of perjury that this return (including any accompanying schedules and statements) has been examined by me and to the best of my knowledge and belief is a true, correct, and complete return.

Signature of person, other than taxpayer, preparing this return **Robert R. Myers** 3/3/54 (Date)Signature of taxpayer **Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.** (Date)Signature of taxpayer's wife or husband if this is a joint return **1325 C. Street** (Date)
To assure that income tax returns are filed and include all their income and, even though only one has income, BOTH MUST SIGN. 16-09192-1

Kansas City, Missouri

Original Retired
for Preservation

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

Harry S. and Bess W. Truman - 1953 Federal

Schedule A.—INCOME FROM DIVIDENDS				Page 2			
Name of corporation declaring dividend	Amount	Name of corporation declaring dividend	Amount				
	\$		\$				
			Enter total here →	\$			
Schedule B.—INCOME FROM INTEREST							
Name of payer	Amount	Name of payer	Amount				
U. S. Bonds	\$ 1,170.00		\$				
			Enter total here →	1,170.00			
Schedule C Summary.—PROFIT (OR LOSS) FROM BUSINESS OR PROFESSION, FARMING, AND PARTNERSHIP							
1. Business profit (or loss) from separate Schedule				Schedule Attached \$27,473.16			
2. Farm profit (or loss) from separate schedule, Form 1040F							
3. Partnership, etc., profit (or loss) from Form 1065, Schedule K, Column 3							
4. Total of lines 1, 2, 3				\$27,473.16			
5. Less: Net operating loss deduction (attach statement)							
6. Net profit (or loss) (line 4 less line 5)				27,473.16			
Schedule D.—NET GAIN OR LOSS FROM SALES OR EXCHANGES OF CAPITAL ASSETS, ETC.							
1. From sale or exchange of capital assets (from separate Schedule D)							
2. From sale or exchange of property other than capital assets (from separate Schedule D)							
Schedule E.—INCOME FROM ANNUITIES OR PENSIONS							
1. Cost of annuity (amount you paid)		4. Amount received this year					
2. Cost received tax-free in past years		5. Excess of line 4 over line 3					
3. Remainder of cost (line 1 less line 2)		6. Enter line 5, or 3 percent of line 1, whichever is greater (but not more than line 4)					
Schedule F.—INCOME FROM RENTS AND ROYALTIES							
1. Kind and location of property	2. Amount of rent or royalty	3. Depreciation or depletion (explain in Schedule H)	4. Repairs (attach itemized list)	5. Other expenses (attach itemized list)			
	\$	\$	\$	\$			
Schedule Attached							
1. Totals					\$		
2. Net profit (or loss) (column 2 less sum of columns 3, 4, and 5)					(1,121.31)		
Schedule G.—INCOME FROM OTHER SOURCES INCLUDING ESTATES AND TRUSTS							
1. Estate or trust							
2. Other sources (state nature)							
Total income (or loss) from above sources (Enter here and as item 3, page 1)					27,521.85		
Schedule H.—EXPLANATION OF DEDUCTION FOR DEPRECIATION CLAIMED IN SCHEDULE F							
1. Kind of property (if buildings, state material of which constructed). Exclude land and other nondepreciable property	2. Date acquired	3. Cost or other basis	4. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) in prior years	5. Remaining cost or other basis to be recovered	6. Life used in accumulating depreciation	7. Estimated life from beginning of year	8. Depreciation allowable this year
		\$	\$	\$			\$
Schedule I.—EXEMPTIONS FOR CLOSE RELATIVES OTHER THAN WIFE AND CHILDREN—(See Instructions)							
1. Name of dependent relative. Also give address if different from yours		2. Relationship		3. Did dependent during 1953—		4. If answer to either 3(b) or 3(c) is "No" enter amount spent for dependent's support in 1953 by—	
				(a) Have gross income of \$600 or more?		(b) Reside in your home?	
				(c) Receive more support from you?		You (and your wife if this is a joint return)	
						Others, and by dependent from own funds	
						\$	
						\$	
Enter here and as item 1D, page 1, the number of other close relatives claimed above							
Schedule J.—HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD (See Instructions)							
(Not applicable where wife or husband died during taxable year)							
List name(s) and relationship to you							
If all of the following questions are answered "Yes," you may determine your tax as Head of a Household:							
1. Were you unmarried (or legally separated) at the close of your taxable year? (Yes or No)							
2. Was your home occupied during the entire taxable year as the principal residence of both yourself and (a) a person for whom you are entitled to an exemption, or (b) your unmarried child, grandchild, or stepchild, even though not a dependent? (Yes or No)							
3. Did you furnish more than one-half of the cost of maintaining the household during the taxable year? (Yes or No)							
If you did not furnish the entire cost, state total amount furnished by you \$; by all others (including those sharing your home) \$ Deductions on page 3 are to be determined without reference to this schedule. 18-70102-1							

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

SCHEDULE C (Form 1040)
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

PROFIT (OR LOSS) FROM BUSINESS OR PROFESSION
(For Computation of Self-Employment Tax, see Page 3)

1953

For Calendar Year 1953 or taxable year beginning 1953, and ending 1953

Name and Address (from Form 1040) Harry S. Truman
219 N. Delaware - Independence, Missouri

(Partnerships and joint ventures should file on Form 1065)
(I) Principal business activity (see instructions) Writer - Lecturer - Farmer
(Retail trade, wholesale trade, lawyer, etc.) (Principal product or service)

(II) Business name Harry S. Truman (III) Number of places of business One

(IV) FICA employer identification number, if any (see instructions) 44-0571386

(V) Business address (see instructions) 1107 Federal Reserve Bank Bldg. - Kansas City, Mo.
(Street and number or rural route) (City, town, post office) (County) (State)

(VI) Were you the sole proprietor of this business in 1952? Yes ☐ No ☒ If "No," check whether this business in 1953 became a successor to a corporation ☐, a partnership ☐, another sole proprietorship ☐, or started as an entirely new business ☒. Where applicable, give name of such predecessor

Do NOT include cost of goods withdrawn for personal use or deductions not connected with your business or profession

1. Total receipts from business or profession	\$	
COST OF GOODS SOLD		
2. Inventory at beginning of year	\$	
3. Merchandise bought for manufacture or sale		
4. Cost of labor		
5. Material and supplies		
6. Other costs (explain in Schedule C-2)		
7. Total of lines 2 to 6	\$	
8. Less inventory at end of year		
9. Net cost of goods sold (line 7 less line 8)		
10. Gross profit (line 1 less line 9)	\$	
OTHER BUSINESS DEDUCTIONS		
11. Salaries and wages not included in line 4	\$	
12. Rent on business property		
13. Interest on business indebtedness		
14. Taxes on business and business property		
15. Losses of business property (attach statement)		
16. Bad debts arising from sales or services		
17. Depreciation and obsolescence (explain in Schedule C-1)		
18. Repairs (explain in Schedule C-2)		
19. Depletion of mines, oil and gas wells, timber, etc. (submit schedule)		
20. Amortization of emergency and grain storage facilities (attach statement)		
21. Other business expenses (explain in Schedule C-2)		
22. Total of lines 11 to 21		
23. Enter net profit (or loss) (line 10 less line 22). Also enter on line 24, page 3, and on line 1, Schedule C Summary, Form 1040		\$27,473.16

Schedule C-1. EXPLANATION OF DEDUCTION FOR DEPRECIATION CLAIMED ON LINE 17							
1. Kind of property (if buildings, state material of which constructed). Exclude land and other nondepreciable property	2. Date acquired	3. Cost or other basis	4. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) in prior years	5. Remaining cost or other basis to be recovered	6. Life used in accumulating depreciation	7. Estimated life from beginning of year	8. Depreciation allowable this year
		\$	\$	\$			\$

Schedule C-2. EXPLANATION OF LINES 6, 18, AND 21					
Line or Column No.	Explanation	Amount	Line or Column No.	Explanation	Amount
		\$			\$

16-69943-1
Original Return

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

Papers of Bess W. Truman

Page 3

COMPUTATION OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX
(For old-age and survivors insurance)

Name of self-employed person Harry S. Truman

State nature of business, if any, subject to self-employment tax Writer - Lecturer - Farmer

24. Net profit (or loss) shown on line 23, page 1.....	\$ 27,473.16	
25. Losses of business property shown on line 15, page 1.....		
26. Total of lines 24 and 25.....		27,473.16
27. Less: Net income (or loss) from excluded services or sources included in line 26..... Specify excluded services or sources.....		
28. Net earnings from self-employment (line 26 less line 27).....		27,473.16
29. Net earnings (or loss) from self-employment from partnerships, joint ventures, etc. (from column 10, Schedule K, Form 1065).....		
30. Total net earnings (or loss) from self-employment (line 28 plus line 29)..... (If total of net earnings is under \$400, do not make any entries below)		27,473.16
31. Maximum amount subject to self-employment tax.....	\$ 3,600 00	
32. Less: Wages paid to you during the taxable year which were subject to withholding for old-age and survivors insurance. (If such wages exceed \$3,600, enter \$3,600).....		
33. Maximum amount subject to self-employment tax after adjustment for wages..	\$ 3,600.00	
34. Self-employment income subject to tax—Line 30 or 33, whichever is smaller.....		\$ 3,600.00
35. Self-employment tax—2½ percent of amount on line 34. Enter here and as item 5 (B), page 1, Form 1040.....		\$ 81.00

GPO 16-09243-1

IMPORTANT—FILL IN ITEMS BELOW COMPLETELY BUT DO NOT DETACH

Schedule C-a (Form 1040)
U. S. TREASURY DEPARTMENT
INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

U. S. REPORT OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT INCOME
(For Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance)

1953

For calendar year 1953 or fiscal year beginning, 1953, and ending, 195.....

State nature of business subject to self-employment tax Writer - Lecturer - Farmer

ENTER HERE THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT
NUMBER OF THE PERSON NAMED BELOW

488 40 6969

Enter total net earnings from self-employment shown on line 30 above. \$ 27,473.16

ENTER BELOW, NAME OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON AND BUSINESS ADDRESS

Harry S. Truman
(Name)
219 N. Delaware Street
ADDRESS (Street and number, or rural route)
Independence, Missouri
(City or town, postal zone number) (State)

Enter wages shown on line 32 above. \$ None

Enter self-employment income shown on line 34 above. \$ 3,600.00

16-09243-1

Original Return
for Preservation

Harry S. and Bess W. Truman - Federal 1953

ITEMIZED DEDUCTIONS—FOR PERSONS NOT USING TAX TABLE ON PAGE 4 OR STANDARD DEDUCTION ON LINE 2 BELOW— Page 3
If Husband and Wife (Not Legally Separated) File Separate Returns and One Itemizes Deductions, the Other Must Also Itemize

Describe Deductions and state to whom paid. If more space is needed, attach additional sheets.

Contributions		
Schedule Attached		
Total Contributions (not more than 20 percent of item 4, page 1).....		\$ 588.00
Interest		
Total Interest.....		
Taxes		
Schedule Attached		
Total Taxes.....		2,098.53
Losses from fire, storm, or other casualty, or theft		
Total Allowable Losses (not compensated by insurance or otherwise).....		
Medical and dental expenses (if over 65 see Instructions)		
Schedule Attached		
Net Expenses (not compensated by insurance or otherwise)....		
Enter 5 percent of item 4, page 1; subtract from Net Expenses....		
Allowable Medical and Dental Expenses. See Instructions for limitation....		83.94
Miscellaneous (See Instructions)		
Total Miscellaneous Deductions.....		
Total Deductions.....		\$ 2,770.47

TAX COMPUTATION FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1953 (For Other Taxable Years Attach Form 1040 FY)

1. Enter amount shown in item 4, page 1. This is your Adjusted Gross Income.....	\$ 34,176.70
2. If deductions are itemized above, enter total of such deductions. If deductions are not itemized and line 1, above, is \$5,000 or more: (a) married persons filing separately enter \$500, (b) all others enter 10 percent of line 1, but not more than \$1,000.....	2,770.47
3. Subtract line 2 from line 1. Enter the difference here. This is your Net Income.....	\$ 31,406.23
4. Multiply \$600 by total number of exemptions claimed in item 1E, page 1. Enter total here.....	2,400.00
5. Subtract line 4 from line 3. Enter difference here. (If line 1 includes partially tax-exempt interest, see Instructions).....	\$ 29,006.23
If line 5 is not more than \$2,000 —	
6. Enter 22.2 percent of amount shown on line 5 and disregard lines 7, 8, and 9.....	
If line 5 is more than \$2,000 —	
7. And you are a single person, a married person filing separately, or a head of household — Single persons and married persons filing separately use Tax Rate Schedule I on page 12 of Instructions to figure tax on amount on line 5; heads of household use Tax Rate Schedule II.....	
8. And you are filing a joint return — (a) Enter one-half of amount on line 5.....	\$ 14,503.12
(b) Use Tax Rate Schedule I on page 12 of Instructions to figure tax on amount on line 8 (a).....	5,022.65
(c) Multiply amount on line 8 (b) by 2.....	\$ 10,045.30
9. If alternative tax computation is made, enter here tax from separate Schedule D.....	
Disregard lines 10, 11, and 12, and copy on line 13 the same figure you entered on line 6, 7, 8 (c), or 9, unless you used itemized deductions	
10. Enter here any income tax payments to a foreign country or U.S. possession (attach Form 1116).....	
11. Enter here any income tax paid at source on tax-free covenant bond interest.....	
12. Add the figures on lines 10 and 11 and enter the total here.....	
13. Subtract line 12 from line 6, 7, 8 (c), or 9. Enter difference here and as item 5 (A), page 1..	\$ 10,045.30

APPENDIX C

1955 Income Tax Return of Harry S and Bess W. Truman¹

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

Papers of Bess W. Truman

Form 1040 U.S. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RETURN For Calendar Year **1955**
U. S. Treasury Department Internal Revenue Service

or other taxable year beginning _____, 1955, and ending _____, 1955
(Please type or print plainly)

NAME (IF THIS IS A JOINT RETURN OF HUSBAND AND WIFE, USE FIRST NAMES OF BOTH)
Harry S. and Bess W. Truman

HOME ADDRESS (NUMBER AND STREET OR RURAL ROUTE) (CITY OR POST OFFICE) (ZONE) (COUNTY)
219 North Delaware Street Independence Jackson Missouri

YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NO. AND OCCUPATION WIFE'S SOCIAL SECURITY NO. AND OCCUPATION
488-40-8969 Lecturer-Writer-Farmer Housewife

If Income Was All From Wages, Use Pages 1 and 2 Only. If Such Income Was Less Than \$5,000, You May Need to Use Page 1 Only. See Page 3 of the Instructions.

Exemptions

1. Check blocks which apply.
Check for wife if she had no income or her income is included in this return. Regular \$600 exemption ☐ Yourself ☐ Wife
65 or over at end of taxable year ☒ Yourself ☒ Wife
Blind at end of taxable year ☐ Yourself ☐ Wife

2. List names of your children who qualify as dependents; give address if different from yours. Enter number of boxes checked **4**

3. Enter number of exemptions claimed for other persons listed at top of page 2. Enter number of children listed **4**

4. Enter the total number of exemptions claimed on lines 1, 2, and 3. **4**

Income

5. Enter all wages, salaries, bonuses, commissions, and other compensation received in 1955, before payroll deductions. Outside salesmen and persons claiming traveling, transportation, or reimbursed expenses, see instructions, page 5.

Employer's Name	Where Employed (City and State)	Wages, etc.	Income Tax Withheld
Schedule attached		1,469 34	22 53
Enter totals here		\$ 1,469 34	\$ 22 53

6. Less: Excludable "Sick Pay" in line 5 (See instructions, page 5. Attach required explanation.)

7. Balance (line 5 less line 6) **\$ 1,469 34**

8. Profit (or loss) from business (from separate Schedule C) **80,959 70**

9. Profit (or loss) from farming (from separate Schedule F)

10. Other income (or loss) from page 3 **29,766 95**

11. ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME (sum of lines 7, 8, 9, and 10) **\$ 112,195 99**

Special computation

Unmarried or legally separated persons qualifying as "Head of Household," see instructions, page 14, and check here ☐ Widows and widowers who are entitled to the special tax computation, see instructions, page 14, and check here ☐

Tax due or refund

IF INCOME ON LINE 11 IS UNDER \$5,000, AND YOU DO NOT ITEMIZE DEDUCTIONS, USE TAX TABLE ON PAGE 16 OF INSTRUCTIONS. IF INCOME WAS \$5,000 OR MORE, OR IF YOU ITEMIZE DEDUCTIONS, COMPUTE YOUR TAX ON PAGE 2.

12. Enter tax from the Tax Table, or from line 9, page 2. Please check if you use Tax Table ☐ **\$ 50,406 08**

If income was all from wages, omit lines 13 through 16:

13. (a) Dividends received credit (line 5 of Schedule J) **\$**

(b) Retirement income credit (line 12 of Schedule K) **\$**

14. Balance (line 12 less line 13) **\$ 50,406 08**

15. Enter your self-employment tax from separate Schedule C or F **126 00**

16. Sum of lines 14 and 15 **\$ 50,532 08**

17. (a) Tax withheld (line 5 above). Attach Forms W-2 (Copy B) **\$ 22 53**

(b) Payments and credits on 1955 Declaration of Estimated Tax (See instructions, page 13.) **1,000 00**

\$ 1,022 53

18. If your tax (line 12 or 16) is larger than your payments (line 17), enter the balance here **\$ 49,509 55**

Send this balance with your return to "Internal Revenue Service." If less than \$1.00, do not remit.

19. If your payments (line 17) are larger than your tax (line 12 or 16), enter the overpayment here **\$**

If less than \$1.00, it will be refunded only upon application. See instructions, page 15.

Enter amount of line 19 you want: Credited on 1956 estimated tax \$; Refunded \$

Is your wife (husband) making a separate return for 1955? ☐ Yes ☒ No If "Yes," write her (his) name.

Did you pay or agree to pay anyone for assistance in the preparation of your return? ☒ Yes ☐ No If "Yes," enter his name and address.

Do you owe any Federal tax for prior years? ☐ Yes ☒ No

I declare under the penalties of perjury that this return (including any accompanying schedules and statements) has been examined by me and to the best of my knowledge and belief is a true, correct, and complete return.

(Your Signature) (Date) (If this is a joint return, wife's signature) (Date)

● To assure split-income benefits, husband and wife must include all their income and, even though only one has income, BOTH MUST SIGN.

I declare under the penalties of perjury that I prepared this return for the person(s) named herein; and that this return (including any accompanying schedules and statements) is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, a true, correct, and complete return based on all the information relating to the matters required to be reported in this return of which I have any knowledge.

(Individual or Firm Signature) (Address) (Date)

Preparer (other than taxpayer) sign here

¹ 1955: Income Tax Return, Box 14, Financial Affairs File, 1917-1983, Bess W. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Harry S. and Bess W. Truman - Federal 1955

Page 2

EXEMPTIONS FOR PERSONS OTHER THAN YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN

Name	Relationship	Did dependent live in your home?	Did dependent have gross income of \$600 or more?	Amount YOU spent for dependent's support. If 100% write "All"	Amount spent by OTHERS including dependent from own funds
				\$	\$

Enter on line 3, page 1, the number of exemptions claimed above.

→ If an exemption is based on a multiple-support agreement of a group of persons, attach information described on page 5 of instructions.

ITEMIZED DEDUCTIONS—IF YOU DO NOT USE TAX TABLE OR STANDARD DEDUCTION

If Husband and Wife (Not Legally Separated) File Separate Returns and One Itemizes Deductions, the Other Must Also Itemize

Describe deductions and state to whom paid. If more space is needed, attach additional sheets. Please put your name and address on any attachments.

Contributions	Schedule Attached		
	Total Contributions (not to exceed 20 percent of line 11, page 1, except in special cases described on page 11 of instructions)	\$ 3,537	00
Interest	Schedule Attached		
	Total	1,250	01
Taxes	Schedule attached		
	Total	732	27
Medical and dental expense (If 65 or over, see instructions, page 12)	Submit itemized list. Do not enter any expense compensated by insurance or otherwise. 1. Cost of medicines and drugs, in excess of 1 percent of line 11, page 1	\$ 245.85	
	2. Other medical and dental expenses	Schedule Attached	
	3. Total	\$	
	4. Enter 3 percent of line 11, page 1		
	5. Allowable amount (excess of line 3 over line 4). (See instructions, page 12, for limitations.)	245	85
Child care	Expenses for care of children and certain other dependents not to exceed \$600 (See page 13 of instructions and attach statement)		
Losses from fire, storm, or other casualty, or theft	Total losses (not compensated by insurance or otherwise)		
Miscellaneous			
	Total	5,765	13
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS (Enter on line 2 of Tax Computation, below)		\$	

TAX COMPUTATION—IF YOU DO NOT USE THE TAX TABLE

Enter Adjusted Gross Income from line 11, page 1	\$ 112,195	99
2. If deductions are itemized above, enter total of such deductions. If deductions are not itemized and line 1, above, is \$5,000 or more: (a) married persons filing separately enter \$500; (b) all others enter 10 percent of line 1, but not more than \$1,000	5,765	13
3. Balance (line 1 less line 2)	\$ 106,430	86
4. Multiply \$600 by total number of exemptions claimed on line 4, page 1	2,400	00
5. TAXABLE INCOME (line 3 less line 4)	\$ 104,030	86
6. Tax on amount on line 5. Use appropriate Tax Rate Schedule on page 14 of instructions.	\$ 56,663	15
7. If you had capital gains and the alternative tax applies, enter the tax from separate Schedule D	\$ 50,406	08
8. Tax credits. If you itemized deductions, enter: (a) Credit for income tax payments to a foreign country or U. S. possession (Attach Form 1116)	\$	
(b) Income tax paid at source on tax-free covenant bond interest and credit for partially tax-exempt interest	\$	
Enter here and on line 12, page 1, the amount shown on line 6 or 7 less amount claimed on line 8	\$ 50,406	08

104-10-71900-1 GPO

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

FORM 1040
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue ServiceU. S. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RETURN
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1953

1953

or taxable year beginning 1953, and ending 1953

Do not write in these spaces

Name **Harry S. and Bess W. Truman**
(PLEASE PRINT. If this is a joint return of husband and wife, use first names of both)HOME ADDRESS **219 North Delaware Street**
(PLEASE PRINT. Street and number or rural route)**Independence, Missouri**
(City, town, or post office) (Postal zone number) (State)Social Security No. **488-40-6969** Occupation **Writer - Farmer**

Serial No.

(Cashier's Stamp)

Your
exemptions

1. List your name. If your wife (or husband) had no income, or if this is a joint return, list also her (or his) name.

A. **Harry S. Truman**B. **Bess W. Truman**
(Your wife's name—do not list if she is filing a separate return or if she had income not included in this return)

- C. List names of your children (including stepchildren and legally adopted children) with 1953 gross incomes of less than \$600 who received more than one-half of their support from you in 1953. See Instructions.

D. Enter number of exemptions claimed for other close relatives listed in Schedule I on page 2

E. Enter total number of exemptions claimed in A to D above

2. Enter your total wages, salaries, bonuses, commissions, and other compensation received in 1953, before pay-roll deductions. Persons claiming traveling or reimbursed expenses, see Instructions.

Print Employer's Name	Where Employed (City and State)	Total Wages	Income Tax Withheld
Schedule Attached		6,654.85	1,066.27
Enter total →		6,654.85	1,066.27
3. If you received dividends, interest, or any other income (or loss), give details on page 2 and enter the total here		27,521.85	
4. Add amounts shown in items 2 and 3, and enter the total here		34,176.70	

- (Unmarried or legally separated persons qualifying under Schedule J as "Head of Household," check here ☐)
IF YOUR INCOME WAS LESS THAN \$5,000.—Use the tax table on page 4 unless you itemize deductions. The table allows about 10 percent of your income for charitable contributions, interest, taxes, medical expenses, etc. If your deductions exceed 10 percent, it will usually be to your advantage to itemize them and compute your tax on page 3.
IF YOUR INCOME WAS \$5,000 OR MORE.—Compute tax on page 3. Use standard deduction or itemize deductions, whichever is to your advantage.

5. (A) Enter your tax from table on page 4, or from line 13, page 3.	\$ 10,045.30	
(B) Enter your self-employment tax from line 35, separate Schedule C.	81.00	
6. How much have you paid on your 1953 income tax?	Enter total here →	\$ 10,126.30
(A) By tax withheld (in item 2, above). Attach Original Forms W-2.	\$ 1,066.27	
(B) By payments on 1953 Declaration of Estimated Tax (include any overpayment on your 1952 tax not claimed as a refund).	6,450.00	
7. If your tax (item 5) is larger than payments (item 6), enter balance of tax due here. This balance must be paid in full with return.	Enter total here →	7,516.27
8. If your payments (item 6) are larger than your tax (item 5), enter the overpayment here →		\$ 2,610.03
Enter amount of item 8 you want	(Credited on 1954 estimated tax)	(Refunded)

Do you owe any prior year Federal tax for which you have been billed? (Yes or No) **No**. Is your wife (or husband) making a separate return for 1953? (Yes or No) **No**. If "yes," write her (or his) nameIf you have filed a return for a prior year, state latest year **1952**. Where filed? **Baltimore, Md.**To which District Director's office did you pay amount claimed in item 6 (B), above? **Kansas City, Mo.**

I declare under the penalties of perjury that this return (including any accompanying schedules and statements) has been examined by me and to the best of my knowledge and belief is a true, correct, and complete return.

Signature of person, other than taxpayer, preparing this return **Robert R. Myers** 3/3/54 (Date)Signature of taxpayer **Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.** (Date)Signature of taxpayer's wife or husband if this is a joint return **1325** (Date) 16-50192-1

To assist in the income tax return, husband and wife must include all their income and, even though only one has income, BOTH MUST SIGN.

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Harry S. and Bess W. Truman - Federal 1955

Harry S. and Bess W. Truman - Federal 1955

(See instructions below for filling in lines 5 through 9)

Page 2

	Apr. 15, 1955	June 15, 1955	Sept. 15, 1955	Jan. 15, 1956
5. Total amount paid or withheld as shown on line 3 (a) from Jan. 1 through the date indicated.....	1,005.64	1,011.27	1,016.90	1,022.53
6. Exception 1. 1954 tax \$ 938.24 (Line 9, page 1, Form 1040 for 1954)	\$ 234.56	\$ 469.12	\$ 703.68	\$ 938.24
7. Exception 2. (Attach computation.) Tax based on 1954 income, 1955 rates and exemptions \$.....	\$	\$	\$	\$
8. Exception 3. (Show computations on separate sheet and attach.)	17 1/2% of tax on annualized income	35% of tax on annualized income	52 1/2% of tax on annualized income	X X X X X X X X
9. Exception 4. (Show computations on separate sheet and attach.)	90% of tax (Jan. 1 through Mar. 31)	90% of tax (Jan. 1 through May 31)	90% of tax (Jan. 1 through Aug. 31)	X X X X X X X X

On line 5 fill in the cumulative totals of the amounts shown on line 3 (a), page 1, which were paid or withheld from January 1, 1955, up to and including the appropriate installment date.

For each date on which an underpayment is indicated on line 4, page 1, fill in the information called for on any one of the lines 6 through 9 which you believe will relieve you from the additional charge. For each installment on which an underpayment is indicated, only one exception need be shown. A different exception may be applied to each of the underpayments.

For each period compare the amount on line 5 with any amount shown on line 6, 7, 8, or 9 for the same period. If the amount on line 5 is equal to or more than the amount shown on any one of these lines, there is no additional charge for the underpayment indicated on line 4, page 1, for that date.

Computation of Additional Charge

If you show an underpayment of estimated tax on line 4, page 1, for any of the installments and one or more of the exceptions is not applicable, you should compute the additional charge by completing the portion(s) of this schedule applicable to the installment(s).

	Apr. 15, 1955	June 15, 1955	Sept. 15, 1955	Jan. 15, 1956
10. Amount of underpayment (from line 4, page 1)	\$	\$	\$	\$
11. Date of payment or April 15, 1956, whichever is earlier ¹				
12. Number of days from due date of installment to date of payment				
13. Additional charge (6 percent per year on the amount on line 10 for the number of days shown on line 12) ..	\$	\$	\$	\$
14. Total of amounts on line 13. On page 1, Form 1040, show this amount in the bottom margin as "Additional Charge" and increase line 18 or decrease line 19 accordingly	\$	\$	\$	\$

¹ If you made more than one payment for a given installment, attach statement showing separate computation for each payment. If you filed your return and paid the balance of tax due by January 31, 1956, such balance shall be considered paid as of January 15, 1956.

PART II.—FOR FARMERS

It is not necessary to file this form if your return is filed and tax due paid by February 15, 1956

Computation of Underpayment

1. Income tax shown on line 14, page 1, Form 1040 for 1955.....	\$
2. 6 2/3 percent of the amount on line 1 (the minimum amount due on Jan. 15, 1956)	\$
3. Amount paid, credited, or withheld by Jan. 15, 1956	\$
4. Underpayment of estimated tax (line 2 less line 3). (If none, do not file this form)	\$
5. Exception 1.—Income tax liability on line 9, page 1, Form 1040 for 1954.....	\$
If the amount on line 3, above, equals or exceeds this amount, the additional charge is not applicable.	
6. Exception 2.—Generally, this exception is effective only if the number of your personal exemptions increased from the number to which you were entitled in 1954 or if you were entitled to use a different tax rate schedule. In such case, using a Form 1040 for 1955 as a guide, compute a tax on your 1954 income with your 1955 personal exemptions and appropriate 1955 tax rate schedule. Enter such tax here.....	\$
If the amount on line 3, above, equals or exceeds this amount, the additional charge is not applicable.	

Computation of Additional Charge

Number of days from Jan. 15, 1956, to date of payment or Apr. 15, 1956, whichever is earlier.....	
Additional charge (6 percent per year on the amount shown on line 4, above, for the number of days shown on line 7, above). On page 1, Form 1040, show this amount in the bottom margin as "Additional Charge" and increase line 18 or decrease line 19 accordingly	\$

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Number of days from
Additional change
(line 7, above)
Decrease line 18 or

SCHEDULE C
(Form 1040)

U. S. Treasury Department—Internal Revenue Service
PROFIT (OR LOSS) FROM BUSINESS OR PROFESSION
(For Computation of Self-Employment Tax, see Page 3)

1955

Attach this schedule to your Income Tax Return, Form 1040 — Partnerships, Joint Ventures, Etc. Must File On Form 1065

For Calendar Year 1955, or other taxable year beginning , 1955, and ending , 195

Owner's Name and Address

Harry S. Truman - 219 North Delaware, Independence, Missouri

Item (see instructions—page 2)

A. Principal business activity: Writer - Lecturer - Farmer

(Retail trade, wholesale trade, lawyer, etc.)

(Principal product or service)

B. Business name Harry S. Truman

Business address: 1107 Federal Reserve Bank Building - Kansas City, Missouri

(Street and number or rural route)

(City, town, post office)

(County)

(State)

• **IMPORTANT**—If you had more than one business, a separate page 1 of Schedule C must be completed for each business.

Line (see instructions—page 2)

1. Total receipts \$....., less allowances, rebates, and returns \$.....	\$.....
2. Inventory at beginning of year	\$.....
3. Merchandise purchased \$....., less any items withdrawn from business for personal use \$.....	\$.....
4. Cost of labor (do not include salary paid to yourself)	\$.....
5. Material and supplies	\$.....
6. Other costs (explain in Schedule C-2)	\$.....
7. Total of lines 2 through 6	\$.....
8. Inventory at end of year	\$.....
9. Cost of goods sold (line 7 less line 8)	\$.....
10. Gross profit (line 1 less line 9)	\$.....
OTHER BUSINESS DEDUCTIONS	
11. Salaries and wages not included on line 4 (do not include any paid to yourself) ..	\$.....
12. Rent on business property	\$.....
13. Interest on business indebtedness	Schedule Attached
14. Taxes on business and business property	\$.....
15. Losses of business property (attach statement)	\$.....
16. Bad debts arising from sales or services	\$.....
17. Depreciation and obsolescence (explain in Schedule C-1)	\$.....
18. Repairs (explain in Schedule C-2)	\$.....
19. Depletion of mines, oil and gas wells, timber, etc. (attach schedule)	\$.....
20. Amortization of emergency and grain storage facilities (attach statement)	\$.....
21. Other business expenses (explain in Schedule C-2)	\$.....
22. Total of lines 11 through 21	\$.....
23. Net profit (or loss) (line 10 less line 22). Also enter on line 24, page 3 of this schedule, and on line 8, page 1, Form 1040	\$ 80,959 70

Schedule C-1. EXPLANATION OF DEDUCTION FOR DEPRECIATION CLAIMED ON LINE 17

1. Kind of property (if buildings, state material of which constructed). Exclude land and other nondepreciable property	2. Date acquired	3. Cost or other basis	4. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) in prior years	5. Method of computing depreciation	6. Rate (%) or life (years)	7. Depreciation for this year
		\$.....	\$.....			\$.....

Schedule C-2. EXPLANATION OF LINES 6, 18, AND 21

Line No.	Explanation	Amount	Line No.	Explanation	Amount
6		\$.....			\$.....
18					
21					

cat-16-71901-1

COMPUTATION OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX
(For old-age and survivors insurance)
(See Instructions—Page 4)

- If during the taxable year you received \$4,200 or more of wages described on line 31 below, do not fill in this page.
► If you have more than one business, a separate page 1, Schedule C, must be completed for each business. However, only one page 3 is to be completed and filed showing the combined net profit from such businesses.

NAME OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON (a separate schedule must be filed for each self-employed person)

Harry S. Truman

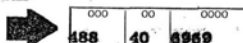
STATE EACH BUSINESS ACTIVITY SUBJECT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX (for example: Restaurant, Building Contractor, but not Partner or Owner)

Writer - Lecturer - Farmer

Line

24. Net profit (or loss) shown on line 23, page 1 (Enter combined amount if more than one business).....	\$ 80,959 70	
25. Add to net profit (or subtract from net loss) losses of business property shown on line 15, page 1		
26. Total (or difference)	\$ 80,959 70	
27. Net income (or loss) from excluded services or sources included on line 26		
Specify excluded services or sources.....		
28. Net earnings (or loss) from self-employment—		
(a) From business (line 26 less any amount on line 27)	\$ 80,959 70	
(b) From partnerships, joint ventures, etc. (attach statement)		
(c) From services as ministers, members of religious orders and Christian Science practitioners.....		
(d) From farming reported on separate Schedule F (Form 1040)		
29. Total net earnings (or loss) from self-employment reported on line 28	\$ 80,959 70	
(If total of net earnings is under \$400, you are not subject to self-employment tax. Do not fill in remainder of this page.)		
Maximum amount subject to self-employment tax.....	\$ 4,200 00	
31. Less: Total F. I. C. A. wages paid to you during the taxable year. (See your Withholding Statement, Form W-2).....		
32. Maximum amount subject to self-employment tax after adjustment for wages.....	\$ 4,200 00	
33. Self-employment income subject to tax—Line 29 or 32, whichever is smaller.....	\$ 4,200 00	
34. Self-employment tax—3 percent of amount on line 33. Enter here and on line 15, page 1, Form 1040.....	\$ 126 00	

IMPORTANT—FILL IN ITEMS BELOW COMPLETELY BUT DO NOT DETACH**SCHEDULE SE (Form 1040)**
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service**U. S. REPORT OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT INCOME**
(For Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance)**1955**

1. CHECK <input type="checkbox"/> Calendar Year 1955 <input type="checkbox"/> Other Taxable Year Beginning, 1955, and Ending, 1955	Please do not write in this space	
2. State Each Business Activity Subject To Self-Employment Tax Writer - Lecturer - Farmer		
3. Business Address (Street and Number, City or Town, Postal Zone Number, State) 1107 Federal Reserve Bank Building - Kansas City, Mo.		
4. PRINT BELOW NAME AND HOME ADDRESS OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON Name as shown on Social Security Account Number Card Harry S. Truman HOME ADDRESS (Street and Number, or Rural Route) 210 N. Delaware Street (City or Town, Postal Zone Number, State) Independence, Missouri	5. ENTER HERE THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT NUMBER OF THE PERSON NAMED ON LINE 4 	
6. Enter Total Earnings From Self Employment Shown on Line 29 above..... \$ 80,959.70		
7. Enter Wages Shown on Line 31 above		
8. Enter Self-Employment Income Shown on Line 33 above... \$ 4,200.00		

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

SCHEDULE D
(Form 1040)U. S. Treasury Department—Internal Revenue Service
GAINS AND LOSSES FROM SALES OR EXCHANGES OF PROPERTY
Attach this schedule to your Income Tax Return, Form 1040**1955**

For Calendar Year 1955, or other taxable year beginning , 1955, and ending , 195

Name and Address **Harry S. and Bess W. Truman,**
219 North Delaware - Independence, Missouri**(I) CAPITAL ASSETS****Short-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Assets Held Not More Than 6 Months**

a. Kind of property (if necessary, attach statement of descriptive details not shown below)	b. Date acquired (mo., day, yr.)	c. Date sold (mo., day, yr.)	d. Gross sales price (contract price)	e. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) since acquisition or March 1, 1913 (attach schedule)	f. Cost or other basis and cost of subsequent improvements (if not purchased, attach explanation)	g. Expense of sale	h. Gain or loss (column d plus column e less sum of columns f and g)
1. _____			\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	
2. Enter your share of net short-term gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries.							
3. Enter unused capital loss carryover from 5 preceding taxable years (Attach statement)							
4. Net short-term gain (or loss) from lines 1, 2, and 3.							\$ _____

Long-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Assets Held More Than 6 Months

5. _____			\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	
Schedule Attached							60,453.09
6. Enter the full amount of your share of net long-term gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries.							
7. Net long-term gain (or loss) from lines 5 and 6.							\$ 60,453.09

Gain or Loss To Be Taken Into Account

	a. Gain	b. Loss
8. Enter net short-term gain (or loss) from line 4.	\$ _____	\$ _____
9. Enter net long-term gain (or loss) from line 7.	\$ 60,453.09	\$ _____
10. Enter short-term gain (line 8, col. a) reduced by any long-term loss (line 9, col. b).	\$ _____	
11. Enter long-term gain (line 9, col. a) reduced by any short-term loss (line 8, col. b).	\$ 60,453.09	
12. Enter 50 percent of line 11.	\$ 30,226.54	
13. Enter here and on line 1, Schedule D Summary, Form 1040, the sum of lines 10 and 12.	\$ _____	
14. Enter the excess of losses over gains on lines 8 and 9.		\$ _____
15. Enter here and on line 1, Schedule D Summary, Form 1040, the smallest of the following: (a) the amount on line 14; (b) taxable income computed without regard to capital gains and losses and the deduction for exemptions; or (c) \$1,000.		\$ _____

COMPUTATION OF ALTERNATIVE TAX
(See instructions on other side as to when the alternative tax applies)

16. Enter the income from line 5, page 2, of Form 1040.	\$ 104,030.86
17. Enter amount from line 12, column a, above.	\$ 30,226.54
18. Balance (line 16 less line 17).	\$ 73,804.32
19. Enter tax on amount on line 18 (Use applicable Tax Rate Schedule on page 14 of Form 1040 Instructions).	\$ 35,292.81
20. Enter 50 percent of line 17.	\$ 15,113.27
21. Alternative tax (line 19 plus line 20). If smaller than amount on line 6, page 2, Form 1040, enter this alternative tax on line 7, page 2, Form 1040.	\$ 50,406.08

(II) PROPERTY OTHER THAN CAPITAL ASSETS

a. Kind of property (if necessary, attach statement of descriptive details not shown below)	b. Date acquired (mo., day, yr.)	c. Date sold (mo., day, yr.)	d. Gross sales price (contract price)	e. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) since acquisition or March 1, 1913 (attach schedule)	f. Cost or other basis and cost of subsequent improvements (if not purchased, attach explanation)	g. Expense of sale	h. Gain or loss (column d plus column e less sum of columns f and g)
1. _____			\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____
2. Enter your share of gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries.							
3. Net gain (or loss) from lines 1 and 2. Enter here and on line 2, Schedule D Summary, Form 1040.							\$ _____

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Harry S. and Bess W. Truman - Federal 1955

Page 3

IF INCOME WAS ALL FROM SALARIES AND WAGES, TEAR OFF THIS PAGE AND FILE ONLY PAGES 1 AND 2.

Schedule A.—INCOME FROM DIVIDENDS

1. Name of qualifying corporation declaring dividend (See instructions, page 6, for definition of qualifying corporation):	Amount
	\$
2. Total	\$
3. Exclusion of \$50 (If both husband and wife received dividends, each is entitled to exclude not more than \$50 of his (her) dividends)	\$
4. Enter excess, if any, of line 2 over line 3	\$
5. Name of nonqualifying corporation declaring dividend:	
6. Enter total of lines 4 and 5	\$

Schedule B.—INCOME FROM INTEREST

Name of payer	Amount	Name of payer	Amount
	\$		\$
Schedule Attached			

Enter total here → 2,700.00

Schedule D Summary.—GAINS AND LOSSES FROM SALES OR EXCHANGES OF PROPERTY

1. From sale or exchange of capital assets (from separate Schedule D)	30,226.54
2. From sale or exchange of property other than capital assets (from separate Schedule D)	

Schedule E.—INCOME FROM PENSIONS OR ANNUITIES (See instructions, page 8)

Part I.—General Rule

1. Investment in contract	\$	4. Amount received this year	\$
2. Expected return	\$	5. Amount excludable (line 4 multiplied by line 3)	
3. Percentage of income to be excluded (line 1 divided by line 2)	%	6. Taxable portion (excess, if any, of line 4 over line 5)	

Part II.—Where your cost will be recovered within three years and your employer has contributed part of the cost

1. Cost of annuity (amounts paid in)	\$	4. Amount received this year	\$
2. Cost received tax-free in past years		5. Taxable portion (excess, if any, of line 4 over line 3)	
3. Remainder of cost (line 1 less line 2)	\$		

Schedule G.—INCOME FROM RENTS AND ROYALTIES

1. Kind and location of property	2. Amount of rent or royalty	3. Depreciation (explain in Sch. I) or depletion	4. Repairs (attach itemized list)	5. Other expenses (attach itemized list)
	\$	\$	\$	\$
Schedule Attached				

1. Totals	\$	\$	\$	\$
2. Net profit (or loss) (column 2 less sum of columns 3, 4, and 5)				(3,159.59)

Schedule H.—INCOME FROM PARTNERSHIPS, ESTATES, TRUSTS, AND OTHER SOURCES

1. Partnership (Name and address)	
2. Estate or trust (Name and address)	
3. Other sources (state nature)	

Total income (or loss) from above sources (Enter here and on line 10, page 1) \$ 29,766.95

Schedule I.—EXPLANATION OF DEDUCTION FOR DEPRECIATION CLAIMED IN SCHEDULE G

1. Kind of property (if buildings, state material of which constructed). Exclude land and other nondepreciable property	2. Date acquired	3. Cost or other basis	4. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) in prior years	5. Method of computing depreciation	6. Rate (%) or life (years)	7. Depreciation for this year
		\$	\$			\$

see-16-71000 1

1957 Income Tax Return of Harry S and Bess W. Truman¹

Original Retired

270 | The National Park Service

Form 1040-1957 EXEMPTIONS FOR PERSONS OTHER THAN YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN

Page 2

Name	Relationship	Number of months dependent lived in your home. If born or died during year also write "B" or "D"	Did dependent have gross income of \$500 or more?	Amount YOU spent for dependent's support. If 100% write "All"	Amount spent by OTHERS including dependent from own funds
				\$	\$

Enter on line 3, page 1, the number of exemptions claimed above.

→ If an exemption is based on a multiple-support agreement of a group of persons, attach information described on page 5 of instructions.

ITEMIZED DEDUCTIONS—IF YOU DO NOT USE TAX TABLE OR STANDARD DEDUCTION

If Husband and Wife (Not Legally Separated) File Separate Returns and One Itemizes Deductions, the Other Must Also Itemize
State to whom paid. If necessary write more than one item on a line or attach additional sheets. Please put your name and address on any attachments.

Contributions	SCHEDULE ATTACHED		
	Total paid but not to exceed 20% of line 11, page 1, except as described on page 8 of instructions...	\$	2,629 00
Interest	Total interest		
Taxes	SCHEDULE ATTACHED		
	Total taxes		2,334 64
Medical and dental expense (If 65 or over, see instructions, page 9)	Submit itemized list. Do not enter any expense compensated by insurance or otherwise. 1. Cost of medicines and drugs, in excess of 1 percent of line 11, page 1..... \$ 2. Other medical and dental expenses \$ 3. Total \$ 4. Enter 3 percent of line 11, page 1 SCHEDULE ATTACHED 5. Allowable amount (excess of line 3 over line 4). (See instructions, page 10, for limitations.)		280 27
Other Deductions (Including child care and casualty losses)	Enter child care expenses paid but not to exceed \$600. Enter casualty losses which are not compensated by insurance or otherwise. See page 10 of instructions and attach information required.		
	Total		
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS (Enter here and on line 2 of Tax Computation, below).....		\$	5,223 91

TAX COMPUTATION—IF YOU DO NOT USE THE TAX TABLE

1. Enter Adjusted Gross Income from line 11, page 1.....	\$	120,226 70
2. If deductions are itemized above, enter total of such deductions. If deductions are not itemized and line 1, above, is \$5,000 or more: (a) a married person filing separately enter \$500; (b) all others enter 10 percent of line 1, or \$1,000, whichever is smaller.		5,223 91
3. Balance (line 1 less line 2).....		115,002 79
4. Multiply \$600 by total number of exemptions claimed on line 4, page 1.....		2,400 00
5. TAXABLE INCOME (line 3 less line 4).....		112,602 79
6. Tax on amount on line 5. Use appropriate Tax Rate Schedule on page 11 of instructions.....		63,092 09
7. If you had capital gains and the alternative tax applies, enter the tax from separate Schedule D.....		57,944 23
8. Tax credits. If you itemized deductions, enter: (a) Credit for income tax payments to a foreign country or U. S. possession (Attach Form 1116)..... \$ (b) Tax paid at source on tax-free covenant bond interest and credit for partially tax-exempt interest.....		
9. Enter here and on line 12, page 1, the amount shown on line 6 or 7 less amount claimed on line 8.....	\$	57,944 22

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

Page 3

COMPUTATION OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX
(For social security)
(See Instructions—Page 4)

- ▶ Each self-employed person must file a separate schedule. See instructions, page 4, for joint returns and partnerships.
▶ If you had wages of \$4,200 or more which were subject to the deduction for social security, do not fill in this page.
▶ If you have more than one business, a separate page 1, Schedule C, must be completed for each business. However, only one page 3 is to be completed and filed showing the combined net profit or loss from such businesses.

NAME OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON (as shown on social security card)

Harry S. Truman

STATE EACH BUSINESS ACTIVITY SUBJECT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX (for example: Restaurant, Building Contractor, but not Partner or Owner)

Writer - Lecturer - Farmer

Line			
24. Net profit (or loss) shown on line 23, page 1 (Enter combined amount if more than one business).....	\$	95,778	95
25. Add to net profit (or subtract from net loss) losses of business property shown on line 15, page 1			
26. Total (or difference)	\$	95,778	95
27. Net income (or loss) from excluded services or sources included on line 26			
Specify excluded services or sources.....			
28. Net earnings (or loss) from self-employment—			
(a) From business (line 26 less any amount on line 27)	\$		
(b) From partnerships, joint ventures, etc. (other than farming)			
(c) From service as a minister, member of a religious order, or a Christian Science practitioner. Enter only if you elect Social Security coverage by filing Form 2031 (See instructions, page 4).			
(d) From farming reported on line 12 or 13, separate Schedule F (Form 1040)			
29. Total net earnings (or loss) from self-employment reported on line 28	\$	95,778	95
(If line 29 is under \$400, you are not subject to self-employment tax. Do not fill in rest of page.)			
30. Maximum amount subject to self-employment tax.....	\$	4,200	00
31. Less: Total wages, subject to deduction for social security, paid to you during the taxable year. (For wages reported on Form W-2, see "F. I. C. A. Wages" box.)			
	\$	4,200	00
32. Balance (line 30 less line 31)	\$	4,200	00
33. Self-employment income—line 29 or 32, whichever is smaller.....	\$	4,200	00
34. Self-employment tax—take 33 1/3% of the amount on line 33. (You can do this by multiplying the amount on line 33 by .03375.) Enter this amount here and on line 15, page 1, Form 1040.....	\$	141	75

IMPORTANT—FILL IN ITEMS BELOW COMPLETELY BUT DO NOT DETACH

SCHEDULE SE (Form 1040)
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

U. S. REPORT OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT INCOME
For Crediting to Your Social Security Account

1957

Indicate year covered by this return (even though income was received only in part of year): 1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Calendar year 1957 <input type="checkbox"/> Other taxable year beginning 1957, ending If less than 12 months, was short year due to (a) <input type="checkbox"/> Death, or (b) <input type="checkbox"/> Change in accounting period, or (c) <input type="checkbox"/> Other.		PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE	
2. BUSINESS ACTIVITIES SUBJECT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX (Grocery Store, Restaurant, etc.) Writer - Lecturer - Farmer			
3. BUSINESS ADDRESS (Number and Street, City or Town, Postal Zone Number, State) Harry S. Truman Library - Independence, Missouri			
4. SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT NUMBER OF PERSON NAMED IN ITEM 5 BELOW <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;"> 488 40 6960 </div>			
PRINT OR TYPE NAME OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON AS SHOWN ON SOCIAL SECURITY CARD Harry S. Truman		6. ENTER TOTAL EARNINGS FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT SHOWN ON LINE 29 ABOVE... \$ 95,778 95	
5. PRINT OR TYPE HOME ADDRESS (Number and Street or Rural Route) 219 N. Delaware Street (City or Post Office, Postal Zone Number, State) Independence, Missouri		7. ENTER WAGES, IF ANY, SHOWN ON LINE 31 ABOVE..... \$ None 8. ENTER AMOUNT SHOWN ON LINE 33 ABOVE..... \$ 4,200 00	

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

SCHEDULE D (Form 1040)		U. S. Treasury Department—Internal Revenue Service GAINS AND LOSSES FROM SALES OR EXCHANGES OF PROPERTY Attach this schedule to your Income Tax Return, Form 1040					1957
For Calendar Year 1957, or other taxable year beginning , 1957, and ending , 195							
Name and Address as shown on page 1 of Form 1040 Harry S. and Bess W. Truman - 219 N. Delaware Street, Independence, Missouri							
(I) CAPITAL ASSETS							
Short-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Assets Held Not More Than 6 Months							
a. Kind of property (if necessary, attach statement of descriptive details not shown below)	b. Date acquired (mo., day, yr.)	c. Date sold (mo., day, yr.)	d. Gross sales price (contract price)	e. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) since acquisition or March 1, 1913 (attach schedule)	f. Cost or other basis and cost of subsequent improvements (if not purchased, attach explanation)	g. Expense of sale	
1.			\$.....	\$.....	\$.....	\$.....	
2. Enter your share of net short-term gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries.....							
3. Enter unused capital loss carryover from 5 preceding taxable years (Attach statement).....							
4. Net short-term gain (or loss) from lines 1, 2, and 3.....						\$.....	
Long-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Assets Held More Than 6 Months							
5.			\$.....	\$.....	\$.....	\$.....	
SCHEDULE ATTACHED						43,361.77	
6. Enter the full amount of your share of net long-term gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries.....							
7. Net long-term gain (or loss) from lines 5 and 6.....						\$ 43,361.77	
8. Combine the amounts shown on lines 4 and 7, and enter the net gain (or loss) here.....						\$ 43,361.77	
9. If line 8 shows a GAIN—Enter 50 percent of line 7 or 50 percent of line 8, whichever is smaller. (Enter zero if there is a loss or no entry on line 7).....						21,680.89	
10. Deduct line 9 from line 8. Enter balance here and on line 1, Schedule D Summary on page 3 of Form 1040.....						\$ 21,680.88	
11. If line 8 shows a LOSS—Enter here and on line 1, Schedule D Summary, Form 1040, the smallest of the following: (a) the amount on line 8; (b) taxable income computed without regard to capital gains and losses and the deduction for exemptions; or (c) \$1,000.....						\$.....	
COMPUTATION OF ALTERNATIVE TAX.—Use only if the net long-term capital gain exceeds the net short-term capital loss, or if there is a net long-term capital gain only, and you are filing (a) a separate return with taxable income exceeding \$16,000, or (b) a joint return, or as a surviving husband or wife, with taxable income exceeding \$36,000, or (c) as a head of household with taxable income exceeding \$24,000.							
12. Enter the amount from line 5, page 2, of Form 1040.....						\$112,602.79	
13. Enter amount from line 9.....						21,680.88	
14. Balance (line 12 less line 13).....						\$ 90,921.91	
15. Enter tax on amount on line 14 (Use applicable Tax Rate Schedule on page 11 of Form 1040 Instructions).....						\$ 47,103.78	
16. Enter 50 percent of line 13.....						10,840.44	
17. Alternative tax (line 15 plus line 16). If smaller than amount on line 6, page 2, Form 1040, enter this alternative tax on line 7, page 2, Form 1040.....						\$ 57,944.22	
(II) PROPERTY OTHER THAN CAPITAL ASSETS							
a. Kind of property (if necessary, attach statement of descriptive details not shown below)	b. Date acquired (mo., day, yr.)	c. Date sold (mo., day, yr.)	d. Gross sales price (contract price)	e. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) since acquisition or March 1, 1913 (attach schedule)	f. Cost or other basis and cost of subsequent improvements (if not purchased, attach explanation)	g. Expense of sale	
1.			\$.....	\$.....	\$.....	\$.....	
2. Enter your share of gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries.....							
3. Net gain (or loss) from lines 1 and 2. Enter here and on line 2, Schedule D Summary on page 3 of Form 1040.....						\$.....	

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

Form 1040-1957

Page 3

IF INCOME WAS ALL FROM SALARIES AND WAGES, TEAR OFF THIS PAGE AND FILE ONLY PAGES 1 AND 2**Schedule A.—INCOME FROM DIVIDENDS** (Income from Savings (Building) and Loan Associations and Credit Unions should be entered as interest in Schedule B)

1. Name of qualifying corporation declaring dividend (See instructions, page 12):
(Indicate by (H), (W), (J) whether stock is held by husband, wife, or jointly)

Amount

\$

2. Total
3. Exclusion of \$50 (If both husband and wife received dividends, each is entitled to exclude not more than \$50 of his (her) own dividends)
4. Excess, if any, of line 2 over line 3. Enter here and on line 1, Schedule J
5. Name of nonqualifying corporation declaring dividend:

\$

\$

6. Enter total of lines 4 and 5

\$

Schedule B.—INCOME FROM INTEREST

Name of payer	Amount	Name of payer	Amount
	\$	SCHEDULE ATTACHED	\$
		Enter total here→	

6,998 59

Schedule D Summary.—GAINS AND LOSSES FROM SALES OR EXCHANGES OF PROPERTY

1. From sale or exchange of capital assets (from separate Schedule D)
2. From sale or exchange of property other than capital assets (from separate Schedule D)

21,680 88

Schedule E.—INCOME FROM PENSIONS AND ANNUITIES (See instructions, page 13)**Part I.—General Rule**

- | | | | |
|---|----|--|----|
| 1. Investment in contract | \$ | 4. Amount received this year | \$ |
| 2. Expected return | \$ | 5. Amount excludable (line 4 multiplied by line 3) | |
| 3. Percentage of income to be excluded (line 1 divided by line 2) | % | 6. Taxable portion (excess of line 4 over line 5) | |

Part II.—Where your cost will be recovered within three years and your employer has contributed part of the cost

- | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|
| 1. Cost of annuity (amounts paid in) ... | \$ | 4. Amount received this year | \$ |
| 2. Cost received tax-free in past years .. | | 5. Taxable portion (excess, if any, of line 4 over line 3) .. | |
| 3. Remainder of cost (line 1 less line 2) .. | \$ | | |

Schedule G.—INCOME FROM RENTS AND ROYALTIES

1. Kind and location of property	2. Amount of rent or royalty	3. Depreciation (explain in Sch. I) or depletion	4. Repairs (attach itemized list)	5. Other expenses (attach itemized list)
	\$	\$	\$	\$
1. Totals	\$	\$	\$	\$
2. Net income (or loss) from rents and royalties (column 2 less sum of columns 3, 4, and 5)				

Schedule H.—OTHER INCOME

1. Partnerships (name and address)
2. Estates or trusts (name and address)
3. Other sources (state nature)

SCHEDULE ATTACHED

(6,410 49)

Total income (or loss) from above sources (Enter here and on line 10, page 1) \$ **22,268 98****Schedule I.—EXPLANATION OF DEDUCTION FOR DEPRECIATION CLAIMED IN SCHEDULE G**

1. Kind of property (if buildings, state material of which constructed). Exclude land and other nondepreciable property	2. Date acquired	3. Cost or other basis	4. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) in prior years	5. Method of computing depreciation	6. Rate (%) or life (years)	7. Depreciation for this year
		\$	\$			\$

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Form 1040-1957

Page 4

IF INCOME WAS ALL FROM SALARIES AND WAGES, TEAR OFF THIS PAGE AND FILE ONLY PAGES 1 AND 2**Schedule J.—DIVIDENDS RECEIVED CREDIT** (See instructions, page 15)

1. Amount of dividends on line 4, Schedule A.....	\$	
2. Tentative credit (4 percent of line 1).....		
LIMITATION ON CREDIT		
3. Tax shown on line 12, page 1, plus amount, if any, shown on line 8(b), page 2.....		
4. 4 percent of taxable income.....		
<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> Taxable Income Means </div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; margin-left: 10px;"> (a) If tax is computed on page 2, the amount shown on line 5, page 2. (b) If capital gains alternative tax applies, the amount shown on line 14, separate Schedule D. (c) If Tax Table is used, the amount shown on line 11, page 1, less 10 percent thereof, and less the deduction for exemptions (\$600 multiplied by the number of exemptions claimed on line 4, page 1). </div>		
5. Dividends received credit. Enter here and on line 13(a), page 1, the smallest of the amounts on line 2, 3, or 4, above.....	\$	

Schedule K.—RETIREMENT INCOME CREDIT (See instructions, page 15)**This credit does not apply:**

1. If you received pensions or annuities of \$1,200 or more from Social Security or Railroad Retirement,
2. If you are under 65 years of age and had "earned income" of \$2,100 or more, OR
3. If you are 65 or over and under 72, and had "earned income" of \$2,400 or more.

If separate return, use column B only. If joint return, use column A for wife and column B for husband—→

Did you receive earned income in excess of \$600 in each of any 10 calendar years before the taxable year 1957? Widow or widowers see instructions, page 15.....

If answer above is "Yes" in either column, furnish all information below in that column.

	A	B
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
1. Retirement income for taxable year which is included in line 11, page 1, of this return:		
(a) For taxpayers under 65 years of age: Enter only income received from pensions and annuities under public retirement systems, including retirement pay from Armed Forces.....	\$	\$
(b) For taxpayers 65 years of age or older: Enter total of pensions and annuities, including retirement pay from Armed Forces, interest, gross rents, and dividends.....		6,093 18

LIMITATION ON RETIREMENT INCOME

	\$ 1,200 00	\$ 1,200 00
2. Maximum amount of retirement income for credit computation.....		
3. Deduct:		
(a) Amounts received in taxable year as pensions or annuities under the Social Security Act, the Railroad Retirement Acts, and certain other exclusions from gross income.....		2,787 60
(b) Earned income received in taxable year: (This line does not apply to persons 72 years of age or over)		
(1) Taxpayers under 65 years of age, enter amount in excess of \$900.....		
(2) Taxpayers 65 or over and under 72, enter amount in excess of \$1,200.....		
4. Total of lines 3(a) and 3(b).....		2,787 60
5. Balance (line 2 minus line 4).....		None
6. Line 5 or line 1, whichever is smaller.....		None
7. Tentative credit (20 percent of line 6).....		

8. Total tentative credit on this return (total of amounts on line 7, columns A and B).....

LIMITATION ON RETIREMENT INCOME CREDIT

9. Amount of tax shown on line 12, page 1.....	
10. Less: Dividends received credit from line 5, Schedule J, above.....	
11. Balance (line 9 less line 10).....	
12. Retirement income credit. Enter here and on line 13(b), page 1, the amount on line 8 or line 11, whichever is smaller.....	\$

APPENDIX E

1959 Income Tax Return of Harry S and Bess W. Truman¹

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

Copy to be retained by TAXPAYER

FORM 1040
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

U. S. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RETURN—1959

or Other Taxable Year Beginning _____, 1959, Ending _____, 19____
(PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT)

Name **Harry S. and Bess W. Truman**
(If this is a joint return of husband and wife, use first names and middle initials of both)

Home address **219 North Delaware Street**
(Number and street or rural route)

Independence, Missouri
(City, town, or post office) (Postal zone number) (State)

Your Social Security Number
488 40 6969

Occupation
Writer - Lecturer

Wife's Social Security Number
Occupation

Exemptions

1. Check blocks which apply.
 (a) Regular \$600 exemption ☒ Yourself ☒ Wife Enter number of exemptions checked **4**
 (b) Additional \$600 exemption if 65 or over at end of taxable year. ☒ Yourself ☒ Wife
 (c) Additional \$600 exemption if blind at end of taxable year. ☐ Yourself ☐ Wife
 2. List first names of your children who qualify as dependents; give address if different from yours. Enter number of children listed **4**
 3. Enter number of exemptions claimed for other persons listed at top of page 2. **4**
 4. Enter the total number of exemptions claimed on lines 1, 2, and 3. **4**

Income

5. Enter all wages, salaries, bonuses, commissions, tips, and other compensation before payroll deductions (including any excess of expense account or similar allowance paid by your employer over your ordinary and necessary business expenses. See instructions, pp. 5-6.)

Employer's Name	Where Employed (City and State)	(a) Wages, etc.	(b) Income Tax Withheld
Schedule Attached		\$ 26,599.34	\$ 4,065.96
Enter totals here		\$ 26,599.34	\$ 4,065.96

6. Less: Excludable "Sick Pay" in line 5 (See instructions, page 7. Attach required statement.)

7. Balance (line 5 less line 6) **\$ 26,599.34**

8. Profit (or loss) from business from separate Schedule C. **\$ 88,651.22**

9. Profit (or loss) from farming from separate Schedule F. **\$ 45,315.66**

10. Other income (or loss) from page 3 (Dividends, Interest, Rents, Pensions, etc.). **\$ 160,566.22**

11. Adjusted Gross Income (sum of lines 7, 8, 9, and 10) **\$ 160,566.22**

Check if unmarried "Head of Household" ☐, or "Surviving Widow or Widower" with dependent child ☐. (See instructions pp. 7-8)

12. TAX on income on line 11. (If line 11 is under \$5,000, and you do not itemize deductions, use Tax Table on page 16 of instructions to find your tax and check here ☐. If line 11 is \$5,000 or more, or if you itemize deductions, compute your tax on page 2 and enter here the amount from line 9, page 2.) **\$ 80,202.13**

If income was all from wages, omit lines 13 through 16:

13. (a) Dividends received credit from line 5 of Schedule J. **\$ 80,202.13**

14. Balance (line 12 less line 13) **\$ 180.00**

15. Enter your self-employment tax from separate Schedule C or F. **\$ 80,382.13**

16. Sum of lines 14 and 15. **\$ 80,382.13**

17. (a) Tax withheld (line 5 above). Attach Forms W-2, Copy B. **\$ 4,065.96**

(b) Payments and credits on 1959 Declaration of Estimated Tax (See page 8, instructions.) **\$ 55,800.00**

District Director's office where paid **\$ 20,516.17**

18. If your tax (line 12 or 16) is larger than your payments (line 17), enter the **BALANCE DUE** here **\$ 20,516.17**

19. If your payments (line 17) are larger than your tax (line 12 or 16), enter the **OVERPAYMENT** here **\$**

20. Amount of line 19 to be: (a) Credited on 1960 estimated tax \$_____, (b) Refunded \$_____

Did you receive an expense allowance or reimbursement, or charge expenses to your employer? ☐ Yes ☒ No (See page 6, instructions.)

If "Yes," did you submit an itemized accounting of expenses to your employer? ☐ Yes ☒ No

County in which you live **Jackson**

Is your wife (husband) filing a separate return for 1959? ☐ Yes ☒ No. If "yes," enter her (his) name and do not claim the exemption on this return.

If you owe any Federal tax for years before 1959, enter here the Internal Revenue District where the account is outstanding.

I declare under the penalties of perjury that this return (including any accompanying schedules and statements) has been examined by me and to the best of my knowledge and belief is a true, correct, and complete return. If the return is prepared by a person other than the taxpayer, his declaration is based on all the information relating to the matters required to be reported in the return of which he has any knowledge.

Sign here: (Taxpayer's signature and date) (If this is a joint return, BOTH HUSBAND AND WIFE MUST SIGN) (Wife's signature and date)

Clinton B. Carrier **PEAT, MARWICK, MITCHELL & CO.** **APR 7 1960**
(Signature of preparer other than taxpayer) (Date)

1325 Commerce Building
Kansas City, Mo.

e70-16-75313-1

¹ 1959: Income Tax Return, Box 17, Financial Affairs File, 1917-1983, Bess W. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Historic Resource Study, Harry S Truman National Historic Site | 277

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Form 1040-1959 EXEMPTIONS FOR PERSONS OTHER THAN YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN

Page 2

Name	Relationship	Months lived in your home. If born or died during year also write "B" or "D"	Did dependent have gross income of \$500 or more?	Amount YOU furnished for dependent's support. If 100% write "All"	Amount furnished by OTHERS including dependent
				\$	\$

Enter on line 3, page 1, the number of exemptions claimed above.

→ If an exemption is based on a multiple-support agreement of a group of persons, attach the declarations described on page 5 of instructions.

ITEMIZED DEDUCTIONS—IF YOU DO NOT USE TAX TABLE OR STANDARD DEDUCTION
If Husband and Wife (Not Legally Separated) File Separate Returns and One Itemizes Deductions, the Other Must Also Itemize State to whom paid. If necessary write more than one item on a line or attach additional sheets.
Please put your name and address on any attachments.

Contributions	Schedule Attached	
	Total paid but not to exceed 20% of line 11, page 1, except as described on page 8 of instructions . . .	\$ 5,278 45
Interest		
	Total interest	
Taxes	Schedule Attached	
	Total taxes	2,382 52
Medical and dental expense (If 65 or over, see instructions, page 10)	Submit itemized list. Do not enter any expense compensated by insurance or otherwise 1. Cost of medicines and drugs IN EXCESS of 1 percent of line 11, page 1 \$ 2. Other medical and dental expenses \$ 3. Total \$ 4. Enter 3 percent of line 11, page 1 Schedule Attached \$ 5. Allowable amount (excess of line 3 over line 4). (See instructions, page 10, for limitations)	2,153 19
Other Deductions (See page 10 of instructions and attach information required)		
	Total	
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS (Enter here and on line 2 of Tax Computation, below)		\$ 9,814 16

TAX COMPUTATION—IF YOU DO NOT USE THE TAX TABLE

1. Enter Adjusted Gross Income from line 11, page 1	\$ 160,566 22
2. If deductions are itemized above, enter total of such deductions. If deductions are not itemized and line 1, above, is \$5,000 or more, enter the smaller of 10 percent of line 1 or \$1,000 (\$500 if a married person filing a separate return)	9,814 16
3. Balance (line 1 less line 2)	150,752 06
4. Multiply \$600 by total number of exemptions claimed on line 4, page 1	2,400 00
5. Taxable Income (line 3 less line 4)	148,352 06
6. Tax on amount on line 5. Use appropriate tax rate schedule on page 15 of instructions. Do not use Tax Table on page 16	91,005 17
7. If you had capital gains and the alternative tax applies, enter the tax from separate Schedule D	80,202 13
8. Tax credits. If you itemized deductions, enter: (a) Credit for income tax payments to a foreign country or U. S. possession (Attach Form 1116) \$ (b) Tax paid at source on tax-free covenant bond interest and credit for partially tax-exempt interest (c) Total Enter here →	
Enter here and on line 12, page 1, the amount shown on line 6 or 7 less amount claimed on line 8(c)	\$ 80,202 13

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

(c) Total
Enter here and

1040-1959

Page 3

INCOME WAS ALL FROM SALARIES AND WAGES, TEAR OFF THIS PAGE AND FILE ONLY PAGES 1 AND 2

Schedule A.—INCOME FROM DIVIDENDS (Income from Savings (Building) and Loan Associations and Credit Unions should be entered as interest in Schedule B)

1. Name of qualifying corporation declaring dividend (See instructions, page 11): (Indicate by (H), (W), (J) whether stock is held by husband, wife, or jointly)	Amount
	\$
2. Total	\$
3. Exclusion of \$50 (If both husband and wife received dividends, each is entitled to exclude not more than \$50 of his (her) own dividends)	\$
4. Excess, if any, of line 2 over line 3. Enter here and on line 1, Schedule J	\$
5. Name of nonqualifying corporation declaring dividend:	
6. Enter total of lines 4 and 5	\$

Schedule B.—INCOME FROM INTEREST (This includes interest credited to your account)

Name of payer	Amount	Name of payer	Amount
	\$		\$
Schedule Attached			
Enter total here→			
14,505 25			

Schedule D Summary.—GAINS AND LOSSES FROM SALES OR EXCHANGES OF PROPERTY

1. From sale or exchange of capital assets (from separate Schedule D)	39,336 57
2. From sale or exchange of property other than capital assets (from separate Schedule D)	

Schedule E.—INCOME FROM PENSIONS AND ANNUITIES (See instructions, page 12)

Part I.—General Rule

1. Investment in contract	\$	4. Amount received this year	\$
2. Expected return	\$	5. Amount excludable (line 4 multiplied by line 3)	
3. Percentage of income to be excluded (line 1 divided by line 2)	%	6. Taxable portion (excess of line 4 over line 5)	

Part II.—Where your employer has contributed all or part of the cost and your contribution will be recovered tax-free within three years.
If your cost was fully recovered in prior years or if you did not contribute to the cost, enter the total amount received in line 5 omitting lines 1 through 4.

1. Cost of annuity (amounts you paid)	\$	4. Amount received this year	\$
2. Cost received tax-free in past years		5. Taxable portion (excess, if any, of line 4 over line 3)	
3. Remainder of cost (line 1 less line 2)	\$		

Schedule G.—INCOME FROM RENTS AND ROYALTIES

1. Kind and location of property	2. Amount of rent or royalty	3. Depreciation (explain in Sch. I) or depletion	4. Repairs (attach itemized list)	5. Other expenses (attach itemized list)
	\$	\$	\$	\$
Schedule Attached				
1. Totals	\$	\$	\$	\$
2. Net income (or loss) from rents and royalties (column 2 less sum of columns 3, 4, and 5)	(986 86)			

Schedule H.—OTHER INCOME

1. Partnerships (name and address)	
2. Estates or trusts (name and address)	
3. Other sources (state nature)	Oil operations Schedule Attached (7,539 30)
Total income (or loss) from above sources (Enter here and on line 10, page 1)	\$ 45,315 66

670-10-70313-1

Form 1040-1959

Page 4

IF INCOME WAS ALL FROM SALARIES AND WAGES, TEAR OFF THIS PAGE AND FILE ONLY PAGES 1 AND 2**Schedule I.—EXPLANATION OF DEDUCTION FOR DEPRECIATION CLAIMED IN SCHEDULE G**

1. Kind of property (if buildings, state material of which constructed). Exclude land and other nondepreciable property	2. Date acquired	3. Cost or other basis	4. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) in prior years	5. Method of computing depreciation	6. Rate (%) or life (years)	7. Depreciation for this year

Schedule J.—DIVIDENDS RECEIVED CREDIT (See instructions, page 14)

1. Amount of dividends on line 4, Schedule A.....	\$	
2. Tentative credit (4 percent of line 1).....		
LIMITATION ON CREDIT		
3. Tax shown on line 12, page 1, plus amount, if any, shown on line 8(b), page 2.....		
4. 4 percent of taxable income.....		
Taxable Income Means (a) If tax is computed on page 2, the amount shown on line 5, page 2. (b) If Tax Table is used, the amount shown on line 11, page 1, less 10 percent thereof, and less the deduction for exemptions (\$600 multiplied by the number of exemptions claimed on line 4, page 1).		
5. Dividends received credit. Enter here and on line 13(a), page 1, the smallest of the amounts on line 2, 3, or 4, above.....	\$	

Schedule K.—RETIREMENT INCOME CREDIT (See instructions, page 14)

This credit does not apply if: 1. If you received pensions or annuities of \$1,200 or more from Social Security or Railroad Retirement; 2. If you are under 65 years of age and had "earned income" of \$2,100 or more; OR 3. If you are 65 or over and under 72, and had "earned income" of \$2,400 or more.	
If separate return, use column B only. If joint return, use column A for wife and column B for husband.	
Did you receive earned income in excess of \$600 in each of any 10 calendar years before the taxable year 1959? Widow or widowers see instructions, page 14.....	A <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If answer above is "Yes" in either column, furnish all information below in that column.	B <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
1. Retirement income for taxable year: (a) For taxpayers under 65 years of age: Enter only income received from pensions and annuities under public retirement systems and included in line 11, page 1, of this return.....	\$
(b) For taxpayers 65 years of age or older: Enter total of pensions and annuities, interest, and dividends included in line 11, page 1, and gross rents included in column 2, Schedule G, page 3, of this return.....	14,505 25
LIMITATION ON RETIREMENT INCOME	
2. Maximum amount of retirement income for credit computation.....	\$ 1,200 00
3. Deduct: (a) Amounts received in taxable year as pensions or annuities under the Social Security Act, the Railroad Retirement Acts, and certain other exclusions from gross income.....	2,076 80
(b) Earned income received in taxable year: (This line does not apply to persons 72 years of age or over) (1) Taxpayers under 65 years of age, enter amount in excess of \$900..... (2) Taxpayers 65 or over and under 72, enter amount in excess of \$1,200.....	
4. Total of lines 3(a) and 3(b).....	2,076 80
5. Balance (line 2 minus line 4).....	None
6. Line 5 or line 1, whichever is smaller.....	None
7. Tentative credit (20 percent of line 6).....	
8. Total tentative credit on this return (total of amounts on line 7, columns A and B).....	
LIMITATION ON RETIREMENT INCOME CREDIT	
9. Amount of tax shown on line 12, page 1.....	
10. Less: Dividends received credit from line 5, Schedule J, above.....	
11. Balance (line 9 less line 10).....	
12. Retirement income credit. Enter here and on line 13(b), page 1, the amount on line 8 or line 11, whichever is smaller.....	\$

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

Form 2210
12. Retirement income is smaller

U.S. Treasury Department—Internal Revenue Service
**STATEMENT RELATING TO UNDERPAYMENT OF
ESTIMATED INCOME TAX BY INDIVIDUALS**
(To be filed with Form 1040 or Form 1040W)

1959

Name **Harry S. and Bess W. Truman**
Address (Number, street, city, postal zone, and State)
**219 North Delaware Street
Independence, Missouri**

Declarations of Estimated Tax (Form 1040-ES) and payments of estimated tax are required to be made by individuals whose income taxes are not sufficiently paid throughout the year by means of withholding from wages and salaries. The law imposes an additional charge for failure to pay estimated tax in the amounts and by the installment dates specified by law.

This form is intended to help taxpayers to determine whether, on each installment date, their payments were equal to 1/4 of 70 percent of the tax liability shown on their returns. If any payment was less than this amount, the form also provides for: (a) determining whether a taxpayer qualifies under any of the four statutory

exceptions to the application of the additional charge, and (b) figuring the amount of such charge, if any.

The form is designed for the usual situation in which a taxpayer files his return on a calendar year basis, and is required to pay his estimated tax in four equal installments. Your computation will be different if you were not required to file a declaration until a date later than April 15, 1959, or if you amended your declaration. In this case you may obtain advice at your nearest Internal Revenue Service office.

If your return is not on a calendar year basis, change the installment dates below to correspond with your fiscal year.

PART I.—FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS EXCEPT FARMERS (Farmers Use Part II)

Computation of Underpayments

By filling in lines 1 through 4 below you can determine whether by each installment date you paid less than 17 1/2% (1/4 of 70%) of the tax liability shown on your return. If you paid at least 17 1/2% by each installment date, it will not be necessary to file this form.

1. Income tax shown on line 14, page 1, Form 1040 for 1959 ¹	\$ 80,202.13			
	Due Dates of Installments			
	Apr. 15, 1959	June 15, 1959	Sept. 15, 1959	Jan. 15, 1960
2. Enter in each column 17 1/2 percent of amount on line 1.	\$ 14,035.37	\$ 14,035.37	\$ 14,035.37	\$ 14,035.37
3. (a) Amounts paid, credited, or withheld ² for each period.	\$ 14,966.49	\$ 14,966.49	\$ 14,966.49	\$ 14,966.49
(b) Overpayment of previous installment ³	X X X X X X X X	931.12	1,862.24	2,793.36
(c) Total of line 3.....	\$ 14,966.49	\$ 15,897.61	\$ 16,828.73	\$ 17,759.85
4. Underpayment (or overpayment) (line 2 less line 3(c)) .	\$ (931.12)	\$ (1,862.24)	\$ (2,793.36)	\$ (3,724.48)

¹ For Form 1040W use the amount on line 11, page 1, minus the amount on line 12(c) of that form.

² The amount of tax withheld for the year may be considered withheld in four equal installments, or you may use the amounts actually withheld for the period. If your return was filed by January 31, 1960, and the balance of tax paid in full, include such balance on line 3(a) for the January 15, 1960, installment.

³ Any overpayment of an installment on line 4 in excess of all prior underpayments should be applied as a credit against the next installment.

There is no additional charge imposed on an underpayment shown on line 4 for any installment date if by that date you made the minimum payment determined under any one of the four following exceptions (see table at top of page 2 for summary of computations):

Exception 1.—This exception applies if the total amount paid equals or exceeds the total amount which would have been due if the estimated tax were the tax shown on your 1958 return. This exception may apply if you had a substantial increase in income over the previous year. The 1958 return must cover a taxable year of 12 months and must show a tax liability.

Exception 2.—This exception applies if the total amount paid equals or exceeds the total amount which would have been due if the estimated tax were a tax based on the facts shown on your 1958 income tax return but computed at the 1959 tax rates and with the personal exemptions for 1959. Use a Form 1040 or Form 1040W for 1959 as a guide in making this computation.

Exception 3.—This exception applies if by the installment date there was paid at least 70 percent of a tax which would have been due by the installment date, computed by placing on an annual basis the taxable income for the months ending in the taxable year before the month in which the installment was required to be paid. This exception may apply in cases in which smaller amounts of income are received in the earlier part of the year than in the later part.

To make this computation, figure your income⁴ from the first of the year to the end of the month before the applicable installment date. Divide this amount by the number of months and multiply by 12. Then figure what your tax would have been if this had been your income for the year.

Exception 4.—This exception applies if the total amount paid by the installment date equals or exceeds 90 percent of a tax computed on the basis of the actual taxable income for the months ending in the taxable year before the month in which the installment was required to be paid. This exception generally applies when large amounts of income are received late in the year.

To make this computation, figure your income from the first of the year to the end of the month before the applicable installment date. Then figure what your 1959 income tax would have been if this had been your income for the year.

⁴ Income for this purpose is the adjusted gross income if you used the standard deduction, or the taxable income computed without the deduction for personal exemptions if you itemized your deductions.

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Papers of Bess W. Truman

1. Number of days in
Addition to charge
(above line 7)
Decrease line 18

U. S. Treasury Department—Internal Revenue Service		1959
SCHEDULE D (Form 1040)		GAINS AND LOSSES FROM SALES OR EXCHANGES OF PROPERTY
Attach this schedule to your Income Tax Return, Form 1040		
For Calendar Year 1959, or other taxable year beginning		, 1959, and ending
Name and Address as shown on page 1 of Form 1040		
Harry S. and Bess W. Truman, 219 North Delaware, Independence, Missouri		
(I) CAPITAL ASSETS		
Short-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Assets Held Not More Than 6 Months		
a. Kind of property (if necessary, attach statement of descriptive details not shown below)	b. Date acquired (mo., day, yr.)	c. Date sold (mo., day, yr.)
d. Gross sales price (contract price)	e. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) since acquisition or March 1, 1913 (attach schedule)	f. Cost or other basis and cost of subsequent improvements (if not purchased, attach explanation)
g. Expense of sale	h. Gain or loss (column d plus column e less sum of columns f and g)	
1.		
2. Enter your share of net short-term gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries		
3. Enter unused capital loss carryover from 5 preceding taxable years (Attach statement)		
4. Net short-term gain (or loss) from lines 1, 2, and 3		Schedule Attached
		\$ 528.91
Long-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Assets Held More Than 6 Months		
5.		
6. Enter the full amount of your share of net long-term gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries		
7. Net long-term gain (or loss) from lines 5 and 6		Schedule Attached
		\$77,615.32
8. Combine the amounts shown on lines 4 and 7, and enter the net gain (or loss) here		\$78,144.23
9. If line 8 shows a GAIN—Enter 50 percent of line 7 or 50 percent of line 8, whichever is smaller. (Enter zero if there is a loss or no entry on line 7)		38,807.66
10. Deduct line 9 from line 8. Enter balance here and on line 1, Schedule D Summary on page 3 of Form 1040		\$39,336.57
11. If line 8 shows a LOSS—Enter here and on line 1, Schedule D Summary, Form 1040, the smallest of the following: (a) the amount on line 8; (b) taxable income computed without regard to capital gains and losses and the deduction for exemptions; or (c) \$1,000		\$
COMPUTATION OF ALTERNATIVE TAX.—Use only if the net long-term capital gain exceeds the net short-term capital loss, or if there is a net long-term capital gain only, and you are filing (a) a separate return with taxable income exceeding \$18,000, or (b) a joint return, or as a surviving husband or wife, with taxable income exceeding \$36,000, or (c) as a head of household with taxable income exceeding \$24,000.		
12. Enter the amount from line 5, page 2, of Form 1040		\$ 148,352.06
13. Enter amount from line 9 above		38,807.66
14. Balance (line 12 less line 13)		\$ 109,544.40
15. Enter tax on amount on line 14 (Use applicable tax rate schedule on page 15 of Form 1040 Instructions)		\$ 60,798.30
16. Enter 50 percent of line 13		19,403.83
17. Alternative tax (line 15 plus line 16). If smaller than amount on line 6, page 2, Form 1040, enter this alternative tax on line 7, page 2, Form 1040		\$ 80,202.13
(II) PROPERTY OTHER THAN CAPITAL ASSETS		
a. Kind of property (if necessary, attach statement of descriptive details not shown below)	b. Date acquired (mo., day, yr.)	c. Date sold (mo., day, yr.)
d. Gross sales price (contract price)	e. Depreciation allowed (or allowable) since acquisition or March 1, 1913 (attach schedule)	f. Cost or other basis and cost of subsequent improvements (if not purchased, attach explanation)
g. Expense of sale	h. Gain or loss (column d plus column e less sum of columns f and g)	
1.		
2. Enter your share of non-capital gain (or loss) from partnerships and fiduciaries		
3. Net gain (or loss) from lines 1 and 2. Enter here and on line 2, Schedule D Summary on page 3 of Form 1040		\$

16-75306-1

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

Papers of Bess W. Truman

Line 13—Interest—
business income
paid to yourself on or
for your business

Page 3

COMPUTATION OF SOCIAL SECURITY SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX
(See Instructions—Page 4)

- ▶ If you had wages of \$4,800 or more which were subject to the deduction for social security, do not fill in this page.
▶ Complete only one page 3; if you had more than one business, combine profits (or losses) from all of your businesses on this page.
▶ Each self-employed person must file a separate schedule. See instructions, page 4, for joint returns and partnerships.

NAME OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON (as shown on social security card)

Harry S. Truman


24. Net profit (or loss) shown on line 23, page 1 (Enter combined amount if more than one business).....	\$	88,651	22	
25. Add to net profit (or subtract from net loss) losses of business property shown on line 15, page 1				
26. Total (or difference)	\$	88,651	22	
27. Net income (or loss) from excluded services or sources included on line 26 (See "Exclusions," page 4)..... Specify excluded services or sources.....				
28. Net earnings (or loss) from self-employment— (a) From business (line 26 less any amount on line 27)	\$	88,651	22	
(b) From partnerships, joint ventures, etc. (other than farming)				
(c) From service as a minister, member of a religious order, or a Christian Science practitioner				
Enter only if you elect Social Security coverage by filing Form 2031 (See instructions, page 4). (d) From farming reported on line 12 or 13, separate Schedule F (Form 1040)				
29. Total net earnings (or loss) from self-employment reported on line 28. Enter here and on line 6 below..... (If line 29 is under \$400, you are not subject to self-employment tax. Do not fill in rest of page.)	\$	88,651	22	
30. The largest amount of combined wages and self-employment earnings subject to social security tax is	\$	4,800	00	
31. Total wages, covered by social security, paid to you during the taxable year. (For "Covered" wages see "F. I. C. A. Wages" box on Form W-2.) Enter here and on line 7, below				
32. Balance (line 30 less line 31)	\$	4,800	00	
33. Self-employment income—line 29 or 32, whichever is smaller. Enter here and on line 8, below.....	\$	4,800	00	
34. Self-employment tax—take 3¾% of the amount on line 33. (You can do this by multiplying the amount on line 33 by .0375.) Enter this amount here and on line 15, page 1, Form 1040	\$	180	00	

Important.—The amounts reported on the form below are for your social security account. This account is used in figuring any benefits, based on your earnings, payable to you, your dependents, and your survivors. Fill in each item **accurately and completely**, but do not detach.

SCHEDULE SE (Form 1040)
U. S. Treasury Department
Internal Revenue Service

U. S. REPORT OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT INCOME
For Crediting to Your Social Security Account

1959

Indicate year covered by this return (even though income was received only in part of year): 1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Calendar year 1959 <input type="checkbox"/> Other taxable year beginning 1959, ending If less than 12 months, was short year due to (a) <input type="checkbox"/> Death, or (b) <input type="checkbox"/> Change in accounting period, or (c) <input type="checkbox"/> Other.		PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE 	
2. BUSINESS ACTIVITIES SUBJECT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT TAX (Grocery Store, Restaurant, etc.) Writer - Lecturer			
3. BUSINESS ADDRESS (Number and Street, City or Post Office, Postal Zone Number, State) Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri			
4. SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT NUMBER OF PERSON NAMED IN ITEM 5 BELOW 488 40 6969		ENTER TOTAL EARNINGS FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT SHOWN ON LINE 29 ABOVE... \$ 88,651 22	
PRINT OR TYPE NAME OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON AS SHOWN ON SOCIAL SECURITY CARD Harry S. Truman		ENTER WAGES, IF ANY, SHOWN ON LINE 31 ABOVE..... \$ None	
5. PRINT OR TYPE HOME ADDRESS (Number and Street or Rural Route) 219 North Delaware Street (City or Post Office, Postal Zone Number, State) Independence, Missouri		ENTER AMOUNT SHOWN ON LINE 33 ABOVE..... \$ 4,800 00	

448-16-75307-1 GPO

APPENDIX F

Public Law 85-745, Former Presidents Act (1955)¹

AN ACT

To provide retirement, clerical assistants, and free mailing privileges to former Presidents of the United States, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That (a) each former President of the United States shall be entitled, as long as he shall live, to receive a monetary allowance at the rate of \$25,000 per annum, payable monthly by the Secretary of the Treasury

(b) The Administrator of General Services shall, without regard to the civil service and classification laws, provide for each former President an office staff. Persons employed under this subsection shall be selected by the former President and shall be responsible only to him for the performance of their duties. Each former President shall fix basic rates of compensation for persons employed for him under this paragraph which in the aggregate shall not exceed \$50,000 per annum. The rate of compensation payable to any such person shall not exceed the maximum aggregate rate of compensation payable to any individual employed in the office of a Senator. Each individual appointed under this subsection to a position on the office staff of a former President shall be held and considered to be an employee of the Government of the United States for the purposes of the Civil Service Retirement Act, the Federal Employees' Compensation Act, and the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance Act of 1954.

(c) The Administrator of General Services shall furnish each former President suitable office space appropriately furnished and equipped, as determined by the Administrator, at such place within the United States as the former President shall specify.

(d) Each former President shall be entitled to conveyance within the United States and its Territories and possessions free of postage and of all mail matter sent by him under his written autograph signature. The postage revenue shall be reimbursed each fiscal year out of the general funds of the Treasury in an amount equivalent to the

¹ Former Presidents Act, 3 USC § 102 note (1958). This Former Presidents Act has since been amended several times. This is the text as originally enacted in August 1958.

postage which would otherwise be payable on such mail matter.

(e) The widow of any former President of the United States shall be entitled to receive a pension at the rate of \$10,000 per annum, payable monthly by the Secretary of the Treasury, if such widow shall waive the right to any annuity or pension under any other Act of Congress.

(f) As used in this section, the term “former President” means an individual who shall have held the office of President of the United States, and whose service in such office shall have been terminated other than by removal pursuant to section 4, article II, of the Constitution.

APPENDIX G

Public Law 89-186 (1965)¹

AN ACT

To provide continuing authority for the protection of former Presidents and their wives or widows, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the second clause of title 18, United States Code, section 3056, is amended to read as follows: “protect the person of a former President and his wife during his lifetime and the person of a widow and minor children of a former President for a period of four years after he leaves or dies in office, unless such protection is declined;”.

¹ Amendment to Act July 16, 1951, 18 USC § 3056 (1965).

APPENDIX H

Harry S Truman to John W. McCormack Regarding Pension for Former Presidents¹

Dear John:

I can't tell you how much I appreciated your letter of the sixth.

It certainly was a pleasure to have the opportunity to sit with you and Sam [Rayburn] again and discuss things that are for the welfare of the country.

I was taking to Sam about the difference in the net result of the sale of my Memoirs and sale of Eisenhower's book. As you remember, we obtained for him a capital gains tax which gave him a net return, including the State Tax, of \$437,000.00 for his book.

When my program came up the Internal Revenue, without any interference from the President, wanted to take 80% of the same figure that Eisenhower got for his book. Sam Rosenman and two or three tax experts finally worked the thing so it was paid over a five year period and a 67 ½% tax was charged, which included the State tax.

In order to be able to transact the business of writing the Memoirs and to meet the tremendous burden of handling the largest volume of mail in the State, I had to rent an office in Kansas City and the total overhead for the period from February 1953 until about November of last year, 1956, amounted to a sum over \$153,000.00. Had it not been for the fact that I was able to sell some property that my brother, sister, and I inherited from our mother I would practically be on relief but with the sale of that property I am not financially embarrassed. However, it does seem to me in all fairness that part of the overhead should be met. I would say 70% of the \$153,000.00 that I have been out for office help, rent, postage, telephones and everything else that goes with the expense of an office for a former President should be paid.

I don't want a pension and do not expect one but I do think 70% of the expenses or overhead should be paid by the Government—the 30% is what I would ordinarily have been out on my own hook if I hadn't tried to meet the responsibilities of being a former President.

¹ Harry S Truman to John W. McCormack, in *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 346–347.

As you know, we passed a Bill which gave all five star Generals and Admirals three clerks, and all of the emoluments that went with their office when they retired.

It seems rather peculiar that a fellow who spent eighteen years in government service and succeeded in getting all these things done for the people he commanded should have to go broke in order to tell the people the truth about what really happened. It seems to me in all justice a part of this tremendous overhead should be met by the public.

I don't want any pension and never have wanted any because I'll manage to get along but I am just giving you the difference in the approach between the great General [Eisenhower] and myself on the Memoirs. My net return will be about \$37,000.00 total over a five year period! It was a package deal. I receive no royalties.

I would never have given you this information if you hadn't asked for it.

Sincerely yours,

Harry S. Truman

APPENDIX I

Truman Sketches of Solomon Young House¹

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
November 20, 1950



Memorandum for: Edward Neild

From: The President

The attached rough - very rough drafts show the house restoration I want to make on the farm at the same time we are building the Library and Museum we contemplate.

The location will be a few yards in front of the present house and will front west, facing the Library, which will face east.

The old house, which burned in 1893 was of wooden construction. I want to reconstruct the new one of native stone, concrete and steel, so it will be fire proof.

The first floor plan shows, in front two large rooms with a center hall. These rooms were about 18x20 and the hallway was about 12x20. So that would make the width of the front about 50 feet. There was a porch in front about 10x18 with a deck on top which we called the "portico."

The stairway went up on the left side of the hallway facing east. It went up about 15 steps to a balcony across the east end of the hall and then about four or six more steps on the right of the hall to another balcony between the two upstairs rooms. The door to the "portico" opened from the center of the top balcony. These upstairs rooms were full height in the center for half their width but sloped with roof on each side for the other half - 1/4 on each side. There were windows in the south and north ends of these rooms but none east and west. I want to put a couple of dormer windows in the west side of each of these rooms and one on the east side and have a bath and toilet over the porches on each side on the S.E. and N.E. corners of each room.

The dining room opened from the east end of the center hall. It was about 20x20 and had a fireplace on its east side. The door to the kitchen opened on the right or south side of the fireplace.

¹ Harry S Truman to Edward Neild, November 20, 1950, Box 1, Subject File, 1950-1965, Neild-Somdal Associates Records, Harry S. Truman Library.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



The kitchen was about 20x20 and had a south door to the porch marked latticed kitchen porch. This porch ran from about ten feet east of the back kitchen wall all the way along the south side of the house. In the middle of it was a small room about 10x10 known as the cooks room. That part of the porch along side the dining room was a latticed porch too and there was a door from the dining room opening into it. That part of the porch back of the kitchen was entirely enclosed and a stairway ran up to the back bedroom from this enclosed porch.

As you see I have made an opening from the front hallway and placed a hall alongside the two rear bedrooms, ending at this rear stairway.

On the north side of the house was a long open porch about 10x40 that ran square out to the end of the enclosed back porch, but there was no entrance because the kitchen pantry, about 10x10 occupied the north end of the enclosed porch and the stairway to the cellar went down under the back stairway.

I want the chimneys on the front section to be on the hall side of each room with fireplaces in the lower rooms and "grate" or small fireplaces in the upper front rooms.

I want the rear chimney between the kitchen and dining room with a big fireplace in the dining room but none above.

We'll dig a basement under the whole house and while we'll have the old stairway go down as it did originally, I think we should have another decent from the back of the front hallway under the front stairway to the upper floor. We'll put in a modern heating plant, laundry and storage rooms in the basement and a deep freeze, independent electric plant, etc.

I want to move the present house to a foundation south and east of its present location and use it as a tenant house.

Back of the restored house about forty or fifty feet I want to build or rebuild the old smoke house with storage wings on each side and back of that the old ice house.

In the southeast corner of the yard I want an ash hopper and in the northeast corner a hen house.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



I'd like to restore the old garden back of these buildings with its asparagus bed, grape arbor and peach trees too. Then I want to plant a sycamore tree east of the old barn, restore the old wheat granery, and the red hay barn as they were - and I'll be satisfied - maybe!

There were green shutters on all the windows and the door that led to the "portico." We'll make the new ones of steel or metal painted green - and they won't be dummies. I want them so they can be fastened open or closed and fastened if that is necessary.

There was a door from the dining room to the north porch, and one from the parlor, too. We must have them too.

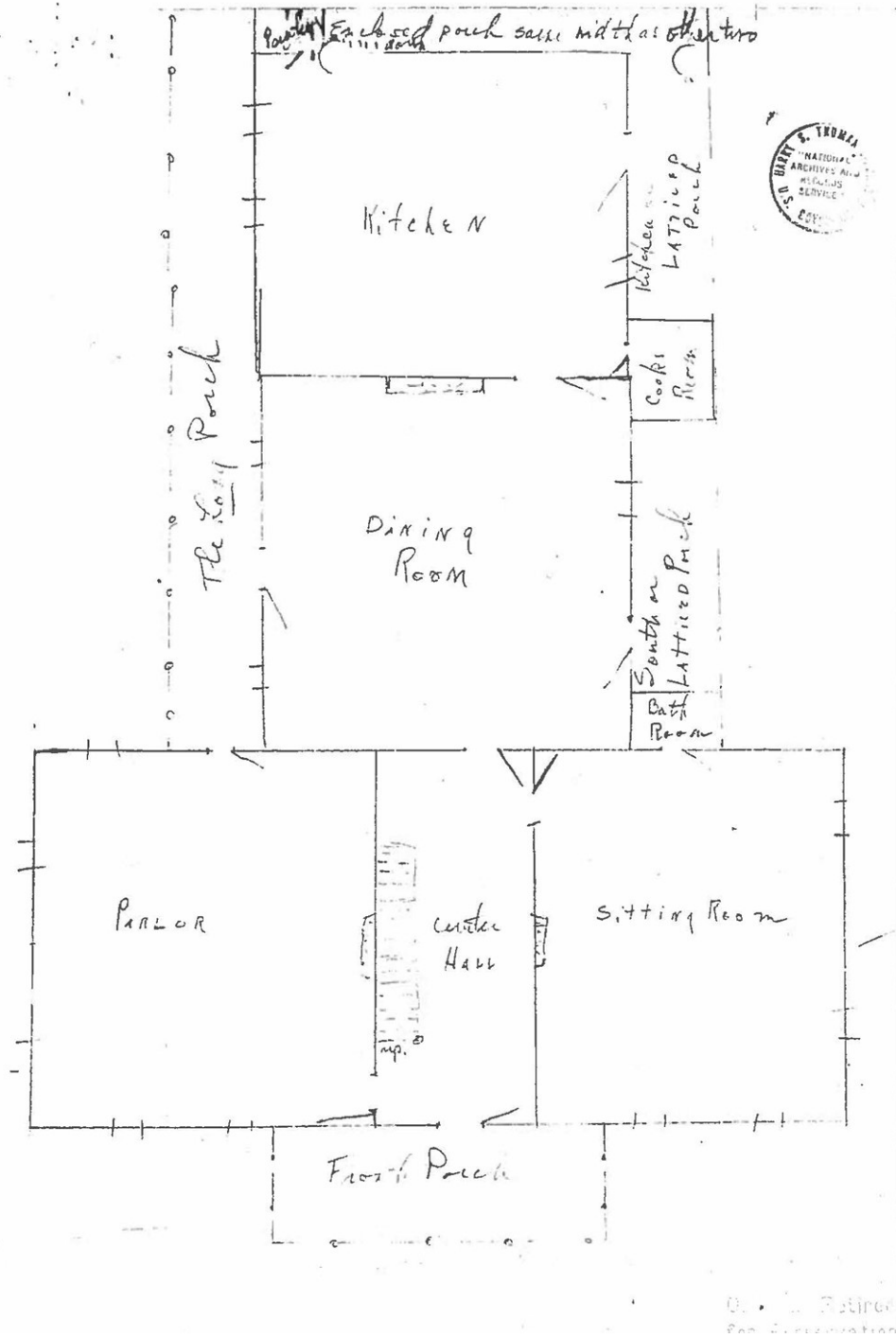
Want old fashioned lightening rods north and south of the chimney on the front and east and west of the dining room chimney.

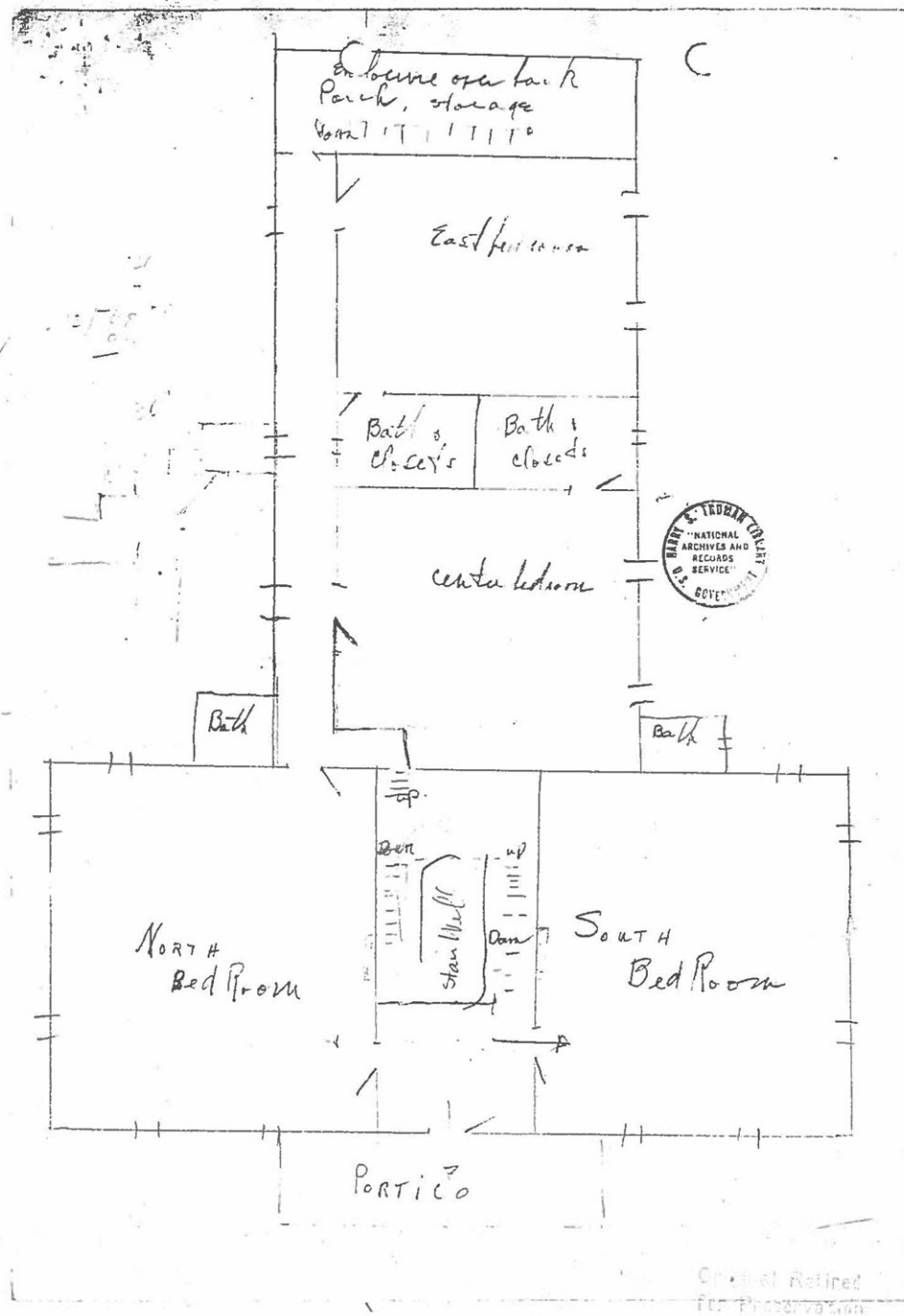
Sincerely yours,

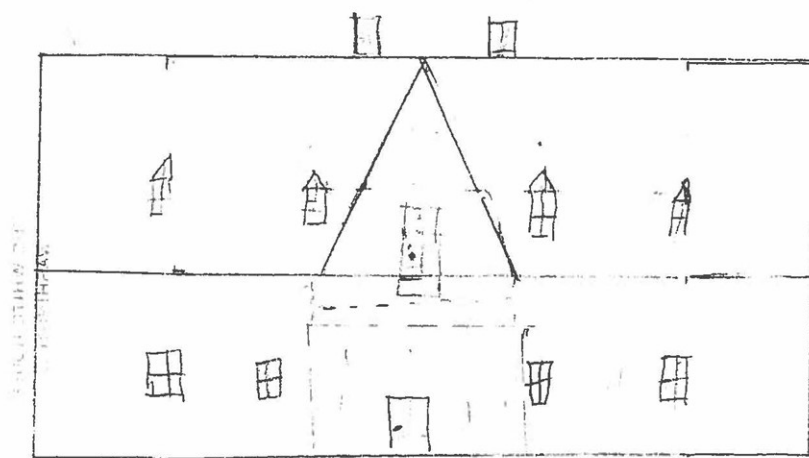
Mr. Edward F. Neild
Texas Eastern Building
Shreveport, Louisiana

Ed:- I don't know whether you
can do any thing with this set of
drawings or not. I wish you'd try
and then we'll talk about them. If
we are successful in getting both jobs
done I intend to give the whole works
to the U.S. Govt. H.S.T.

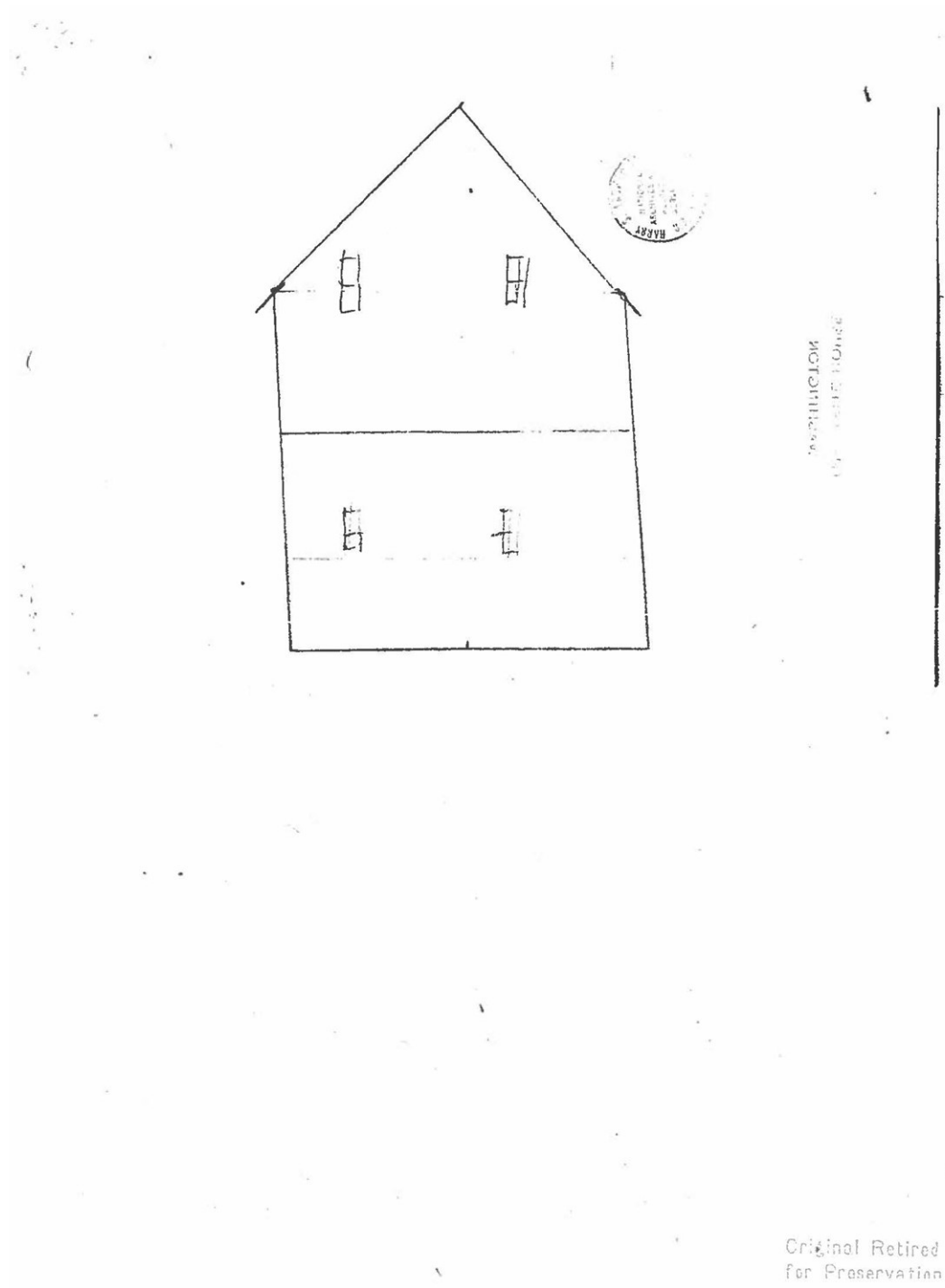
Original Retired
For Examination







Original Plan



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Ed: Let's turn the kitchen around, put sink and cabinets between north window (where door is now), put lock up pantry on east side over cellar stairs.

I want old fashioned wood stove hooked up to chimney and a modern electric and gas combination along side it.

You really made something out of those rough plans.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Ed: How would it do to
have the two east bedrooms
each two feet narrower that is
14x13 instead of 16x13 and
take the rear stair down inside
instead of outside and then
put pantry deep freez etc on the
^{north} side of kitchen and have
cellar stairs go down under in-
side stairway from pantry. We
could still have butler's pantry
as you now have it.

Original retained
for documentation

APPENDIX J

Truman Deed to 219 North Delaware Street

FORM No. 2-Gen. 609418

Missouri Warranty Deed 1934 PAGE 631

This Indenture, Made on the 25th day of July A. D., One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifty-three by and between

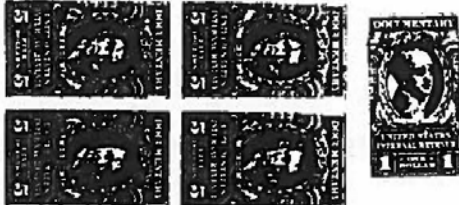
FRANK G. WALLACE and NATALIE O. WALLACE, his wife,

of the County of Jackson, State of Missouri parties of the first part, and HARRY S. TRUMAN and ELIZABETH (Boss) TRUMAN, husband and wife, as an estate by the entirety with right of survivorship,

of the County of Jackson, State of Missouri parties of the second part,

WITNESSETH: THAT THE SAID PARTIES OF THE FIRST PART, in consideration of the sum of ONE (\$1.00) DOLLAR, and other valuable consideration - - DOLLARS, to them paid by said parties of the second part (the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged), do by these presents, Grant, Bargain and Sell, Convey and Confirm unto the said parties of the second part their heirs and assigns, the following described lots, tracts or parcels of land lying, being and situate in the County of Jackson and State of Missouri, to wit:

All of Lots Two (2) and Three (3), MOORE'S ADDITION in and to the CITY OF INDEPENDENCE, Jackson County, Missouri.



TO HAVE AND TO HOLD The premises aforesaid with all and singular, the rights, privileges, appurtenances and immunities thereto belonging or in any wise appertaining unto the said parties of the second part and unto their heirs and assigns forever; the said Frank G. Wallace and Natalie O. Wallace hereby covenanting that they are lawfully seized of an indefeasible estate in fee of the premises herein conveyed; that they have good right to convey the same; that the said premises are free and clear from any incumbrance done or suffered by them or those under whom they claim; and that they will warrant and defend the title to the said premises unto the said parties of the second part and unto their heirs and assigns forever, against the lawful claims and demands of all persons whomsoever

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, The said parties of the first part have hereunder set their hand and seal the day and year above written.

Frank G. Wallace (SEAL)
Natalie O. Wallace (SEAL)

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