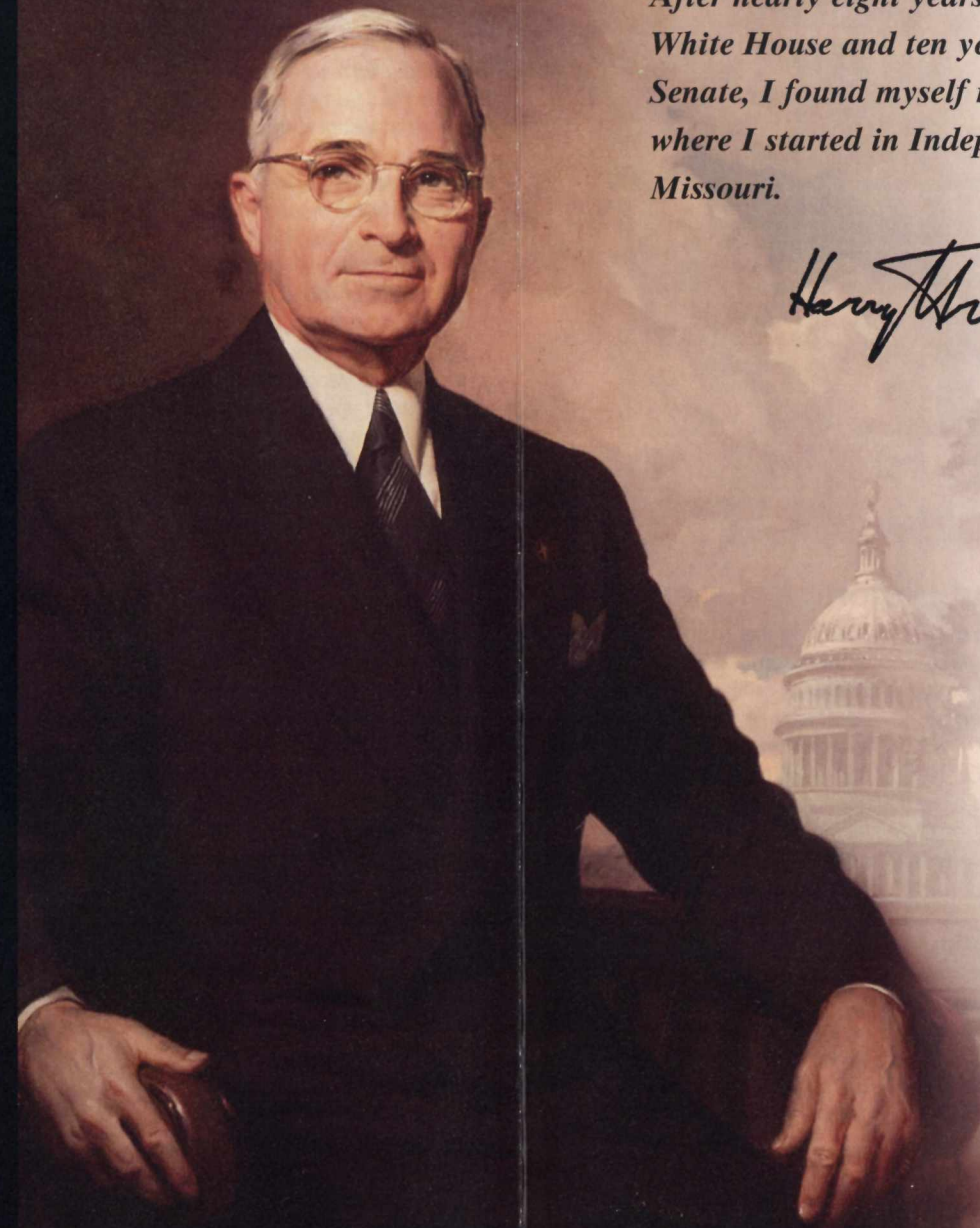




Harry S Truman,  
33rd President.  
Portrait by Greta  
Kempton, 1947  
White House Historical Assoc.

*I tried never to forget who I was  
and where I'd come from and  
where I was going back to. . . .  
After nearly eight years in the  
White House and ten years in the  
Senate, I found myself right back  
where I started in Independence,  
Missouri.*

*Harry Truman*



Harry Truman age 19,  
1903 (left oval); Independence  
Square early 1900s  
(background); Truman in Missouri  
National Guard uniform about 1905  
(below).  
Harry S. Truman Library

## A Most Uncommon Common Man

As a child he dreamed of being a concert pianist and of going to college. Instead, at 17 he had to start working full time. At 33 he deemed himself a failure. By 38 his clothing business was bankrupt. Determined to succeed at something he entered politics, eventually becoming a U.S. senator. At 60 he was suddenly President of the United States, facing decisions that held worldwide consequences. Who was this common man abruptly thrust into this uncommon role?

### Midwestern Values

Harry S Truman was born in rural Missouri but claimed Independence as his home town. The family moved there when he was six. That year Harry met five-year-old Bess Wallace, daughter of a prominent family. All his school years Harry adored Bess, the "beautiful young lady with the blue eyes and golden hair," a popular girl and an accomplished athlete. But the frail-looking boy with thick glasses did not appeal to Bess. It took years for Harry to overcome his shyness and strike up a true friendship.

Truman's mother, Martha, instilled in Harry a love of music and books. He practiced the piano before school and by 14 had "read all the books in the Independence Public Library." Truman's father, John, taught him the worth of hard work and of Midwestern values—honesty, courage, and perseverance.

In 1900 Truman got his first taste of politics when his father took him to the Democratic National Convention in Kansas City. Truman loved the excitement of the nominations and the promises of better times in the new century. But better times did not include young Truman. In 1901 his father dashed his dreams of college by losing the family savings in risky investments. Truman eventually found a good job as a bank clerk in Kansas City. He went to concerts and joined the National Guard. At 22 his life changed again when Truman's father summoned him to help on the farm in Grandview. Truman heeded the call. He had never farmed before, and it was arduous work for someone used to city life.

### Determination and Patience

In 1910 Harry and Bess crossed paths again. While visiting his aunt and uncle, the Nolands, in Independence Truman volunteered to return a cake plate to a neighbor, Mrs. Madge Wallace. Bess greeted him at the door, and their courtship began. He wrote Bess letters from Grandview and, in 1911, proposed marriage. She turned him down.

By 1917, 33-year-old Truman was in the midst of World War I, as an officer in the U.S. Army. "Captain Harry" inspired his troops in France with his courage and determination. He brooked no insubordination, and he lost no man in battle. Finally, Truman felt successful. Truman's persistence paid off, too, when Bess Wallace agreed to marry him on June 28, 1919. Truman opened a clothing store in Kansas City, and business thrived until a postwar depression closed the shop. By 1922 Truman was looking for work.

Truman's next job, politics, turned into a lifelong career. "Boss" Tom Pendergast, whose nephew knew Harry from Army days, backed Truman's run for eastern district judge

(administrative position) of Jackson County. Truman campaigned hard, won—and loved the job. His reputation for integrity and hard work impressed voters enough to eventually win him a U.S. senate seat. The Truman family moved to Washington, D.C., in 1935, but all remained Missourians at heart. In January 1945 Truman became Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice president. Roosevelt died on April 12 and, at 7:09 p.m., Harry S Truman took the Presidential oath of office.

### The Buck Stops Here

The new President faced monumental decisions. First, he carried on the drive to end World War II. He then turned to rebuilding war-torn Europe and halting Communist expansion. A series of crises—the Korean War in particular—kept Truman away from Independence even more than during his senate years. Truman did not seek a third term. "I have had all of Washington I want," he wrote. "I prefer my life in Missouri." Back home Truman enjoyed his walks and being with his family and friends once more.



Harry Truman rides a cultivator on the Grandview farm, 1910 (above); Truman sworn in as presiding judge of Jackson County, 1931 (right).



Truman's official badge as presiding judge (above right) and his Missouri Democratic Convention pin, April 15, 1940 (above left); Bess Wallace age 12, (below).  
Harry S. Truman Library



## Harry S Truman: 1884-1972

1884 Born May 8 in Lamar, Mo., to John and Martha Truman; named Harry S; given a middle initial only to honor his grandfathers Solomon Young and Anderson Shipp Truman.

1885 Bess Wallace, Truman's future wife, born February 13 in Independence, Mo; christened Elizabeth Virginia.

1890 Family moves to Independence; Harry, six, meets Bess, five, at Sunday school.

1901 Harry and Bess graduate from Independence High School; his father loses savings in grain-futures speculation; Truman begins series of jobs in Kansas City area to help support family.

1904 Bess and brothers move with their mother into grandparents' house at 219 N. Delaware.

1906 Truman moves to Grandview to help Grandmother Young and Truman family on 600-acre farm.

1910 Truman (in Grandview) and Bess Wallace (in Independence) begin nine-year courtship.

1914-16 Father dies; Truman dabbles, unsuccessfully, at mining, oil, and land ventures.

1917-18 Joins U.S. Army and fights in WW I; is captain of Battery D 129th Field Artillery, 35th Div.; serves in France.

1919 Harry and Bess marry June 28; he moves in with her family; opens men's clothing store with Army friend Eddie Jacobson in Kansas City.

1922 Business fails; is elected eastern district judge of Jackson County Court.

1924 Daughter Margaret born February 17; Truman loses reelection as eastern district judge.

1926-34 Elected presiding judge of Jackson County Court, serves two four-year terms; is active in Field Artillery Reserve.



Daughter Margaret, Harry, and Bess in backyard of 219 N. Delaware, 1934, (second left). Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Gen. George Patton, and President Truman at ceremony, Berlin, Germany, July 21, 1945, (left).

1934 Elected to U.S. Senate.

1938-41 Mortgage foreclosure of Grandview farm; Congress passes Wheeler-Truman Transportation Act (railroad reform); elected second term as U.S. senator.

1944 Elected vice president of U.S.; Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) elected to fourth Presidential term.

1945 Becomes 33rd President April 12 upon FDR's death; announces end of war in Europe on May 8; attends Potsdam, Germany, conference with Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill; authorizes use of atomic bombs; Japan surrenders on August 14.

1947 Issues Truman Doctrine; signs National Security Act that establishes CIA; mother dies.

1948 Desegregates the armed forces; orders airlift against the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin; is elected to second term as President; moves to Blair House as White

House renovations begin (lives there until 1952).

1950 Orders U.S. forces to join South Korean troops in fight against invading North Korean Communists; proclaims state of emergency when China aids North Korea.

1951 Popularity ratings drop as U.S. effort in Korean War grows; fires Far East commander Gen. Douglas MacArthur for criticizing Truman's foreign policies.

1953-57 Korean War ends; retires to Independence; dedicates Harry S. Truman Library.

1972 Dies December 26 at age 88; is buried at Harry S. Truman Library.

1982 Bess Truman dies October 18 at age 97; is buried next to Harry. December 8, Congress designates Harry S Truman National Historic Site to preserve the Truman legacy and its inspiration for future generations.



Grandview, Mo.  
June 22, 1911

Dear Bessie:  
Would you wear a solitaire on  
your left hand should I get it?  
... You know, were I an Italian  
or a poet I would commence  
and use all the luscious lan-  
guage of two continents. I am  
not either but only ... [an]  
American farmer .... I've been  
crazy about you ever since we  
went to Sunday school together.  
But I never had the nerve to  
think you'd even look at me.

More than sincerely,  
Harry



Bradley Smith



Paint: NPS, photo: National Geographic



Today the Truman Farm Home and five acres are all that remain of the family farm. They evoke, with imagination, what the farm was like when Truman worked here. Harry wrote letters to Bess on a desk like this one in the farm's dining room.

## The Truman Farm—Then and Now

In 1906 Truman returned to Grandview to help on the family's 600-acre farm. The house had no electricity or indoor plumbing. Backbreaking labor began at 5 a.m. and lasted 12 to 14 hours. "There is always something the matter with a crop," he wrote to Bess in 1913. "It's either too dry or too wet or too short or too long or too much or not enough. *If* is the largest word in a farmer's language." Truman's father died in 1914, and the full responsibility for running the farm fell upon 30-year-old Harry. Truman accepted the challenge, and it taught him what became his best-known quality—common sense. "It was on the farm that Harry got his common sense," his mother Martha once said. "He didn't get it in town."

**Visiting the Truman Farm Today** Over time friends of Truman fought to spare the farm from developers. In 1994, Congress saved it for all Americans by including it in Harry S. Truman National Historic Site.

**Farm Home Tours** A self-guiding brochure is available at the farm. Rangers offer guided tours of the farm home Friday through Sunday from May through August. Each tour is limited to six people, first-come, first-served. Contact the park for information: 816-254-9929, [www.nps.gov/hstr](http://www.nps.gov/hstr).

**The Grounds** You are welcome to relax and explore the grounds on your own. The outbuildings are closed, and there are no restrooms or facilities. The park is open year-round from dawn to dusk.



Photo: NPS, photo: National Geographic



NPS

In 1885 Bess Wallace's grandparents George and Elizabeth Gates added a large addition to the home. The sterling silver epergne (centerpiece) was a wedding gift to Bess's parents in 1883. It was decorated with fruit, flowers, or candles.

## The Close-Knit Families of Harry and Bess

Harry had help in winning Bess's heart. By coincidence his relatives, the Nolands, lived across the street from the Wallaces, and cousins Nellie and Ethel became accomplices in his quest to woo Bess. To save a roundtrip to Grandview on weekends, Harry often slept in their parlor. Ethel recalled that he "would stay all night [with us] if he had a date over there." In 1919 they became neighbors when Truman married Bess and moved into the Wallace house. Harry also acquired a new family. Bess's mother Madge lived in the home, and her brothers Frank and George had cottages behind the main house. The families enjoyed spending time together. The Trumans never allowed fame to come between them and their dearest friends—their family.

**Viewing the Family Homes Today** Only the Harry S. Truman Home (former Gates-Wallace mansion) is open to the public; guided tours only. The Noland and Wallace homes, now part of the national historic site, look much as they did when the families lived here. Please enjoy viewing them from the sidewalk.

**216 N. Delaware Avenue** The Nolands—Truman's aunt, uncle, and cousins—lived here. For nine years it was a vital link for Harry between the Grandview farm and Independence as he courted Bess.

**601 and 605 W. Truman Road** Bess Truman's brothers and their wives lived in these bungalows. Frank and Natalie lived in the brown one; George and May in the green.

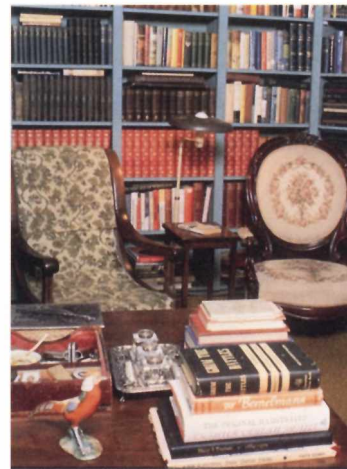


Photo: NPS, photo: National Geographic

The family library has more than 1,000 books. Harry enjoyed biographies, politics, and history. Bess loved mysteries.



**Directions to Grandview Truman Farm** •From I-435, take U.S. 71 exit; go south 2.2 miles; turn right (west) onto Blue Ridge Blvd.; farm is 0.6 mile on left. •From U.S. 71, proceed as above. •From I-70, take exit 8A onto I-435; exit onto U.S. 71 (left lane exit); proceed as above.

## Visiting the Harry S. Truman Home and Historic Independence

**Truman Visitor Center (tickets-information)** Begin your visit at the park visitor center at 223 N. Main Street. It has ticket sales for the Truman home tour, information, a film, exhibits, and a bookstore. It is open daily except Thanksgiving day, December 25, and January 1.

**Guided Tours of Truman's Home** The Truman home may surprise you, for it is much as Harry and Bess left it. The rooms are inviting and restful, filled with the presence of the man remembered as "the people's President."

The Truman home is at 219 N. Delaware Avenue—guided tours only. Purchase tickets at the park visitor center (five blocks east). Each tour is limited to eight people,



and there may be a waiting period. You may watch the film or stroll around Truman's historic neighborhood until your tour begins. The home is open Tuesday through Sunday from Labor Day through Memorial Day; it is closed Thanksgiving day, December 25, and January 1. It is open daily in the summer.

**Accessibility** The park visitor center is accessible for people with disabilities. Ask about accessibility to the Truman home.

**Tips for a Great Guided Home Tour** •Get your tickets early! Tickets are sold daily, first-come, first-served (no advance reservations). •Tours begin promptly at the time stamped on your ticket. Allow 10 minutes to walk from the visitor

center to the Truman home. •Be extra careful on stairs. •Smoking, drinking, eating, chewing gum, pets, and photography are not allowed on the grounds or in the home. •There are no restrooms; use the facilities at the visitor center. •Stay on the dark gray carpet, and do not touch walls, furniture, or objects. •All historic and natural features are protected by federal law.

**For More Information** Harry S. Truman National Historic Site 223 North Main Street Independence, MO 64050 816-254-9929 [www.nps.gov/hstr](http://www.nps.gov/hstr)

National Park Service: [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

**Directions to the Truman Visitor Center (tickets-information)** •From I-435, take Truman Rd. exit 60; go east 3 1/2 miles to the park visitor center at Truman Rd. and Main St. •From I-70, take Noland Rd. exit 12; go north four miles; turn west onto Truman Rd.; go two blocks to the park visitor center.

**Exploring Independence** Strolling around Independence is like stepping back in time. Its small downtown area and historic neighborhood are largely unchanged from the time when Truman walked these streets more than 40 years ago. Not to be missed are Independence Square, Jackson County Courthouse, the Truman statue, and Clinton's Drugstore. Neighborhood highlights include the Noland, Truman, and Wallace homes along Delaware Avenue and Truman Road. To fully enjoy your visit, get the free, self-guiding *Harry S. Truman Walking Trail* brochure that tells you about 43 sites in the historic district. Brochures are available at the park visitor center.

It is a short drive to the Truman Presidential Museum and Library, where Harry and Bess Truman are buried in the courtyard. U.S. 24 and Delaware Ave. Independence, MO 64050 816-833-1400, 800-833-1225 [www.trumanlibrary.org](http://www.trumanlibrary.org).

For tourist information contact: Independence Tourism Dept. 111 E. Maple Ave. Independence, MO 64050 816-325-7111, 800-748-7323 [www.ci.independence.mo.us](http://www.ci.independence.mo.us)

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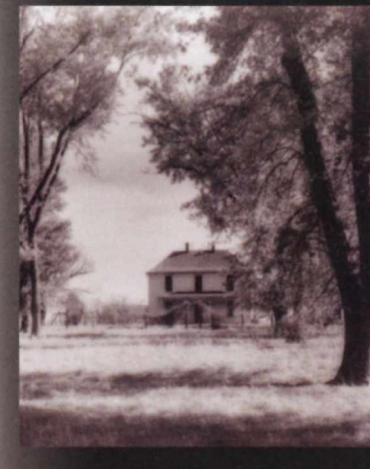


Photo: NPS, photo: National Geographic

In 1940 creditors forced the sale of the farm. A sheriff ordered Truman's mother and sister to leave. Truman lamented to Bess that his mother "has been calling that farm home since 1868. She helped her father set out those maple trees in the fall of that year. ..."



Photo: NPS, photo: National Geographic

Young Bess Wallace poses on the railing of her home at 219 N. Delaware. Years later, on the eve of their 23rd wedding anniversary in 1942, Truman wrote that his sweetheart is "as good looking and lovable as when she was sixteen."