

Harry S Truman

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historic Site
Missouri



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 S Truman, 33rd President. Portrait by Greta Kempton, 1947. WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOC.



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

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 US 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.



HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

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



HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY



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 Ave.

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, in mining, oil, and land ventures.

1917–18 Joins US 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.

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.

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 win him a US Senate seat. The Truman family moved to Washington, DC, 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 pm, Harry S Truman became the 33rd US president.

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.



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



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 US 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. His 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 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



HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

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*).

The symbol of the United Nations, adopted in 1947, (*below left*) and a menorah, official emblem of the State of Israel (*below right*). On May, 14, 1948, Truman was the first world leader to recognize the new State of Israel.

1934 Elected to US Senate.

1938–41 Mortgage foreclosure of Grandview farm; Congress passes Wheeler-Truman Transportation Act (railroad reform); elected to second term, US senator.

1944 Elected vice president of US; 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 US 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 US 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.



NPS

Grandview, Mo.
June 22, 1911

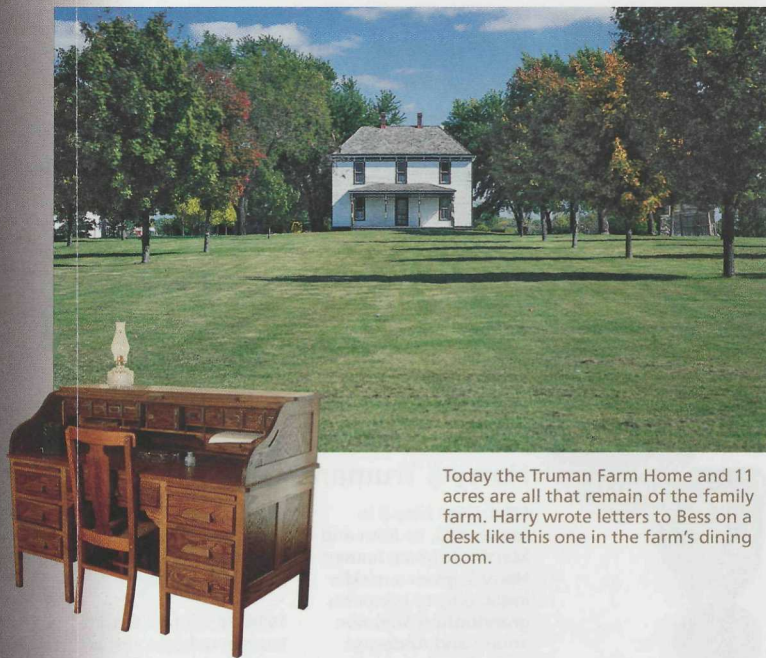
Dear Bessie:

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



FARM-HOUSE, DESK © JANET BONSALL

Today the Truman Farm Home and 11 acres are all that remain of the family farm. Harry wrote letters to Bess on a desk like this one in the farm's dining room.

The Truman Farm—Then and Now

Truman returned to Grandview in 1906 to help on the 600-acre family farm. The house had no electricity or indoor plumbing. Backbreaking labor began at 5 am 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 Farm Today

Harry S Truman National Historic Site includes the old Grandview farm house and 11 acres of the original 600-acre farm where Harry Truman lived from age 22–33 (1906–1917). These years represent a lesser-known period of Truman's life. Here he grew from a young man of modest ambitions into the person that would become the President of the US. A visit here can provide a more complete picture of this man who held the nation's highest office.

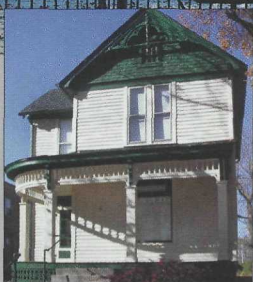
Touring the Farm

The grounds are open year-round, dawn to dusk. Explore on your own. Cell phone tour and brochures available. Buildings are closed. No restroom facilities. Located at 12301 Blue Ridge Blvd., Grandview, MO.



NPS / BRIAN HODUSKI

Harry and Bess Truman lived in this Victorian home for over 50 years (above). The home across the street is where Harry's favorite cousins, Nellie and Ethel Noland, lived (left).



NPS



© JANET BONSALE

This cozy study, filled with over 1,000 books, was a favorite room for Harry and Bess. He enjoyed biographies, histories, and political studies. She loved mysteries.



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

The Close-Knit Families of Harry and Bess

Harry had help in winning Bess' heart. By coincidence his relatives, the Nolands, lived across the street from the Wallaces. During a visit in 1910, Harry happily volunteered to return a cake plate to 219 N. Delaware, where Bess had lived since 1904. This encounter changed their lives forever.

Harry began regular visits from Grandview, and to save a round-trip, he often slept in the Noland parlor. In 1919 Truman married Bess and moved into the Wallace home. Bess' mother Madge lived in the home, and her brothers Frank and George had cottages behind the main house. The families enjoyed being together. The Trumans never allowed fame to come between them and their dearest friends—their family.

Viewing the Family Homes Today The Truman home at 219 N. Delaware Ave. is open by guided tour only. The Noland home at 216 N. Delaware and the Wallace homes at 601 and 605 W. Truman Road are not open to the public. 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' brothers and their wives lived in these homes. Frank and Natalie lived in the brown one; George and May in the green.

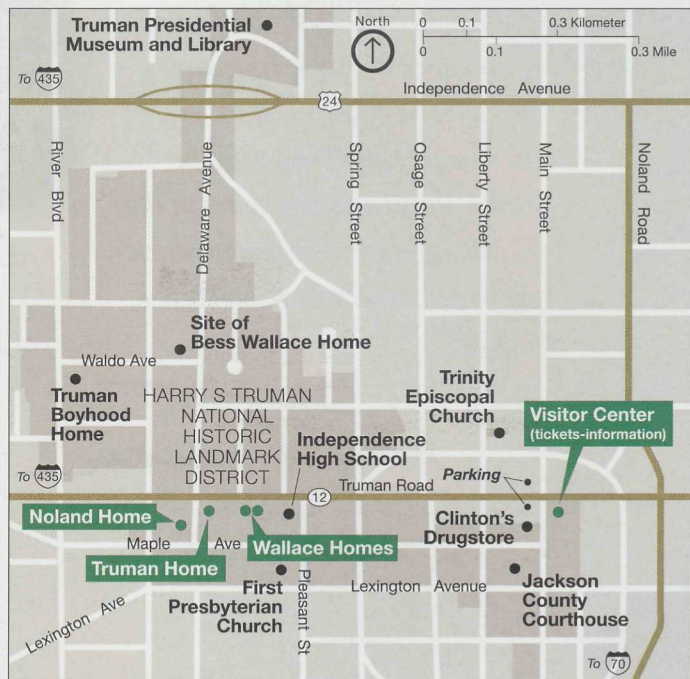
NPS

Visiting the Truman H

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.

Guided Tours of Truman's Home The Truman home is at 219 N. Delaware Avenue; guided tours only. Buy tickets at the visitor center (five blocks east). Each tour is limited to eight people; there may be a waiting period. There is an introductory film shown at the visitor center. View exhibits and browse the bookstore before your tour begins.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For infor-



Home and Historic Independence

mation go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Tips for a Great Guided Home Tour Get your Truman home tickets early! Tickets are sold the day of the tour, first-come, first-served (no advance reservations). • Tours begin promptly at the front gate of the Truman home 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, pets, chewing gum, and photography are not allowed on the grounds or in the home. • Restrooms are located in the visitor center only! • Please stay on the dark gray carpet, and do not touch walls, furniture, or objects.

• For firearms and other regulations ask a ranger or check the park website. • All historic and natural features are protected by federal law.

More Information

Harry S Truman National Historic Site
223 North Main Street
Independence, MO 64050
816-254-9929
www.nps.gov/hstr

Harry S Truman Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

Directions to the Truman Visitor Center (tickets and information) • From I-435, take Truman Rd. exit 60; go east 3½ miles to the 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 visitor center.

Seeing 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 over 40 years ago. Be sure to see Independence Square, Jackson County Courthouse, the Truman statue, and Clinton's Drugstore. Neighborhood highlights include the Noland, Truman, and Wallace homes on Delaware Ave. and Truman Rd. At the park visitor center get the free, self-guiding *Harry S Truman Walking Trail* brochure that tells you about over 40 sites in the historic district.

It is a short drive to the Truman Presidential Museum and Library, where Harry and Bess Truman are buried. US 24 and Delaware Ave. Independence, MO 64050 816-268-8200 www.trumanlibrary.org

Tourist information:
Independence Tourism Dept.
111 E. Maple Ave.
Independence, MO 64050
816-325-7111, 800-748-7323
www.ci.independence.mo.us



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. . . ."



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."