CHAPTER EIGHT

A TALE OF TWO HOMES: INDEPENDENCE AND WASHINGTON, D.C.

* An Extended Family Occupies the Wallace House, 1934
* Harry S Truman, Senator from Missouri
* Harry S Truman, Vice President of the United States

An Extended Family Occupies the Wallace House, 1934

Fred Wallace, the youngest son of Madge Wallace, was married in 1930 and brought his new wife, Christine, to live in his mother's house at 219 North Delaware. To them was born a son, David, in 1934. Madge Wallace, 72, had abandoned her second floor west bedroom in the mid to late 1920s in favor of her late parents' first floor room. Because of her advanced age and chronic sciatica, she could no longer negotiate the stairway. Madge Wallace's former bedroom then became a nursery for David Wallace, with his parents' northwest corner bedroom nearby. In 1937, he shared his room with a new sister, Marian.

The Fred Wallace family lived with Madge Wallace and the Trumans from 1934 to 1942.[1] An architect and engineer, Fred Wallace and his family moved to Denver in 1942 where he became the regional manager of the War Production Board in April 1945.[2] The family later moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Harry S Truman, Senator from Missouri

With the support of his family and political friends, Truman won the 1934 Democratic nomination and election for U.S. Senator after a hard-fought, whirlwind campaign throughout the

State of Missouri. After his election on November 6, 1934, the Trumans made preparations to move to Washington, D.C. Leaving behind their family and friends, the Senator-elect, Bess, and Margaret left for their new life in the nation's capital shortly after noon on December 28, 1934. They drove away from 219 North Delaware in two cars bound for St. Louis. There they boarded a train for the remainder of the trip, while their cars loaded with personal possessions, were driven east to their new home.[3]

For the next decade, the Trumans lived in a series of apartments in the District of Columbia. Madge Wallace would come to visit often, remaining for long periods of time. Bess and Margaret Truman did not spend as much time in Washington as their famous husband and father did. They preferred to spend the summers away from the capital, traveling by train back to Independence and the Wallace family home. There they stayed through the fall while young Margaret went to the local public school from September through January. From January through May, she attended Gunston Hall, a private girls school in Washington.[4] Senator Truman also came home often, especially when the Senate had adjourned. His sojourns in Independence were always balanced with trips around Missouri visiting with political leaders and making speeches.

Moving from apartment to apartment usually required the purchase of additional furnishings. In a letter to his wife on November 30, 1937, Truman wrote about an unfurnished apartment which he had taken beginning January 1, 1938. He wrote that they needed to purchase living room furniture and a rug; dining room furniture and a rug; twin beds, a rug, and a single bed for the two bedrooms.[5] He did not wait for his wife to come to Washington to begin shopping for the new furniture. He wrote on December 5 that he had selected most of what they needed, but, that "I don't want to make any purchases until you see whether you like them or not."[6] Two weeks later he wrote, "I may put in the bedroom outfit and you and Margey can sleep in the beds and I can sleep on the floor the first night."[7]

Before 1940, the second floor bathroom at 219 North Delaware was renovated. The old fashioned, legged bathtub was removed and the present blue porcelain tub, stool, and sink were installed. Plastic floor tiling was added but later was covered with first a red, then the present blue, carpeting.[8]

In November 1940, Harry S Truman was again elected Senator from Missouri, to serve another six year term from 1941 to 1947. Life changed very little for the family as they continued their frequent trips back and forth from Independence to Washington, D.C. (See Figure 12). World War II and the

FIGURE 12

Truman Library Photo Archives, 64-1528

The Trumans in the Dining Room

August 7, 1940

Senator Harry S Truman and his family sit at the dining room table reading congratulatory telegrams following late election returns. The returns indicate Truman's Senatorial primary victory over Governor Lloyd Stark and Maurice Milligan. Note the flowered wallpaper pattern and the plant behind Bess Truman. Also, note the identical positioning of the epergne (to the far right), a wedding gift to Madge and David Wallace.

Source: Roger Reynolds, Acme Photo.

impending involvement of the United States changed not only the course of the country, but the daily lives of the Trumans as well. The U.S. was slowly repealing its isolationist neutrality legislation as a potential showdown with Japan loomed. The Congress decided to remain in session for the duration of the world crisis. For this reason, in early September 1941, the Trumans decided to become full-time residents of Washington, D.C., returning to Missouri only for the summer, vacations, and holidays. Margaret Truman, therefore, was enrolled year-round in Gunston Hall.[9]

It was in the early 1940s that the electric attic fan was installed. The huge fan made the sultry summer days and nights less oppressive.[10]

The Fred Wallace family moved to Colorado shortly afterward in 1942, leaving Madge Wallace alone in her large house. Physically unable to care for the home herself, she closed up 219 North Delaware and moved into a small apartment on nearby Maple Avenue. She spent one winter there, came back to the home with the Trumans in the summer, then moved back to Washington with them in the fall.[11] For the next decade, the house at 219 North Delaware stood closed and empty for extended periods of time, open only during the summer months and holidays.

Harry S Truman, Vice President of the United States

Blessed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the movement within the Democratic Party to dump Vice President Henry Wallace from the party's 1944 ticket was in full swing at the July Democratic national convention in Chicago. There, Missouri's junior Senator, who had gained national respect for his committee's effort to halt waste and corruption in defense contracts, reluctantly accepted his party's nomination (See Figure 13).

On July 23, 1944, Harry, Bess, and Margaret Truman drove home from the Chicago convention. The following day, the vice presidential candidate and his family held an open reception in the backyard where they greeted more than 3,000 local well-wishers and neighbors.[12] The Trumans stood inside the pergola for several hours and shook hands with people who formed a seemingly endless line[13] (See Figure 14).

Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman won the November 1944 national election, defeating Republican challengers Thomas E. Dewey and John W. Bricker. After spending the Christmas holidays in Independence, the Trumans and Mrs. Madge Wallace again closed up 219 North Delaware and returned to Washington for the inauguration. They settled back into their small

FIGURE 13

Truman Library Photo Archives, 77-75

Appearance of the Wallace House at Truman's Vice-Presidential Acceptance

July 22, 1944

This is the neglected and unkempt appearance of 219 North Delaware the day Harry S Truman was nominated for Vice President of the United States by the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Source: Truman Wing Collection, Acme Photo.

FIGURE 14

Truman Library Photo Archives, 63-1499-19

The Trumans of Independence

August 1944

The Trumans pose on the front lawn of their home shortly after the 1944 Democratic National Convention. The photograph was taken for the August 21, 1944, edition of LIFE Magazine in an article titled, "Truman of Missouri."

Source: Taken from the album Mr. President, His Family and Friends.

apartment unaware that Vice President Harry S Truman would serve in that office less than three months.

An Extended Family Occupies the Wallace House, 1934

[1]David Wallace, "A Nephew Remembers Bess Truman and His Childhood In A Gingerbread Dream House," People (November 8, 1982), p. 47.

[2]"A Tremendous Job To Do," Kansas City Times (April 13, 1945), p. 3, folder-Truman, Harry S April-June 1945, Research Room Vertical File, HSTL.

Harry S Truman, Senator from Missouri

[3]"Trumans Leave For Washington," Examiner (December 28, 1934), p. 1, folder-Truman, Harry S 1934, Research Room Vertical File, HSTL.

[4]Margaret Truman, Souvenir: Margaret Truman's Own Story (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1956), p. 38. In Independence, she attended Bryant School, Independence Junior High School, and William Chrisman High School.

[5]Ferrell, Dear Bess, p. 406.

[6]Ibid., p. 407.

[7]Ibid., p. 410.

[8]Cockrell, "Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman," p. 42.

[9]Margaret Truman, Harry S. Truman (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1973), p. 137.

[10]Cockrell, "Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman," p. 36.

[11]Mrs. George P. (May) Wallace, Interview, Independence, Mo., June 14, 1983.

Harry S Truman, Vice President of the United States

[12]Margaret Truman, Souvenir, p. 68.

[13]Sue Gentry, Interview, Independence, June 22, 1983.