Chapter 8

The Noland Family and House

1847-1923

Introduction

Joseph Tilford Noland

Margaret Ellen Truman

Joseph T. and Ella Truman Noland Family, 1870-1900

Noland Family at 216 North Delaware Street, 1900-1906

Noland House and Neighborhood
Noland and Truman Families Visit

Passages at the Noland House, 1906-1923

Noland-Ragland Families
The Noland Women
Harry Truman and the Nolands
Joseph T. Noland

Noland House over the Years

The Noland Family and House, 1847-1923
Part 2, Chapter 8

Introduction

The Noland family was supremely important in the life of Harry S Truman. Margaret Ellen (Ella) Noland, the sister of Truman's father, remained Harry Truman's favorite aunt throughout his life. Aunt Ella's daughters, Nellie and Ethel Noland, who were around Harry Truman's age, became his closest young playmates, school study partners, confidantes and friends, and observers and supporters of his political career. As teachers for half a century, Nellie and Ethel Noland contributed to the education of hundreds of Independence youth. Ethel Noland, the family genealogist and scribe, played an invaluable role in recording the Truman, Young, and Noland family histories for Harry Truman, for a curious news media during his years in the public spotlight, and for the general public interested in learning about the ancestors and the life of an uncommon ordinary man.

Although Harry Truman never seemed particularly close to his uncle, Joseph Tilford Noland provided for his family not only economically but also emotionally. He was a father not only to his own three daughters, but was also a surrogate father to his three grandchildren, who grew from infancy to adulthood in the Noland home. Engaged in real estate for over thirty years and actively involved in city government for six years, Joseph Noland contributed to the commercial, civic, and cultural vitality of the Independence community between the 1880s and the early 1920s.

The Queen Anne-style house at 216 North Delaware Street, directly across the street from the Gates-Wallace-Truman house, was, between 1900 and 1986, the home of three generations of the Noland family and a place of passages for Noland family members. It served as the site for spontaneous and planned Noland and Truman family gatherings and festivities. It became Harry Truman's base of operation for his courtship of Bess Wallace, as well as for his social and business pursuits in Independence, especially during his years as a farmer in Grandview. The Noland house provides an opportunity to re-create the Noland family history, the close relationship between the Nolands and Harry Truman, and the evolution of the Independence community over eighty-five years. This chapter tells the story of the Noland family, beginning with the births and marriage of Joseph T. Noland and Margaret Ellen Truman, continuing with the Nolands' move to 216 North Delaware Street, and closing with the departure of four Noland family members from the house and the death of the Noland family patriarch.

Joseph Tilford Noland

Like so many early residents of Independence and the surrounding area, Joseph Tilford Noland was born in Kentucky, in Estill County (35 miles southeast of Lexington), on November 27, 1847. His parents, Wesley Tilford Noland and Sarah Ann Scrivener Noland, who were married in 1844, named their second son after his maternal grandfather, Joseph Scrivener. Joseph had two older siblings, a brother William Noland, born in Estill County in 1844, and a sister Susan, born in Estill County in 1845.[83] (William Noland later fought and was killed in the Civil War in Kentucky). When Joseph was only a year old, his parents moved the family 630 miles to Jackson County, Missouri, where a Noland relative (a cousin of Francis Marion Noland), Smallwood Noland, operated a hotel on the Independence courthouse square (on the northwest corner of Main Street and Maple Avenue). In addition to Smallwood Noland, many other Nolands, some of whom were related to Joseph T. Noland, had come to the Independence area as early as the 1820s. Many years later, Mary Ethel Noland reported that, according to family folklore, men with the surname of Noland cast eleven of the forty-four votes cast in Independence's first election in 1827. The same year, at least three Noland family members were present and active bidders at the first sale of land in the Independence town plat.[84]

Soon after arriving in Jackson County, Joseph T. Noland's father, Wesley Tilford Noland, and his grandfather, Francis Marion Noland,[85] bought a large tract of land and farmhouse (now gone) on Lee's Summit Road. (Much later, part of their farm became transformed into the Crackerneck Golf Course.) Sarah Ann Noland returned to Kentucky in 1848 or 1849, around the

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[83] Vertical Files: "Genealogical Records, Noland Family," Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

[84] Smallwood Noland, who died in 1858, had married Nancy MacMonegal, a sister of Joseph T. Noland's grandmother. Following Smallwood Noland's death, his son, Jesse Noland, took over the operation of the Noland Hotel. Mary Ethel Noland, interview by James R. Fuchs, transcript of tape-recorded interview, 23 August 1965, 25-26, 33, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri; "Noland Home Once Used by Railroad," *Independence Examiner*, 11 August 1986; Eric Fowler, "Noland Name Traced to Revolutionary War," Vertical Files: "Genealogical Records, Noland Family; and Vertical Files: "Family History of Joseph Tilford Noland, Truman Family"; both in Harry S. Truman Library.

[85] Francis Marion Noland, born in North Carolina, was the son of James Noland, who had fought in the Revolutionary War, first as a private under the Virginia regiment of Colonel William Grayson, then, later, as a captain under Colonel Frank Locke's North Carolina troops. He reportedly also served under Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox." James Noland moved to Estill County, Kentucky in 1912 and died and was buried there in 1833 at age ninety-three. His widow later (1844) moved to LaPorte County, Indiana, to live with some of her children. Mary Ethel Noland, interview by James Fuchs, 23 August 1965, transcript of taped interview, 28, Harry S. Truman Library; "Independence Streets," Vertical File, Mid-Continent Library, Independence, Missouri.

time she gave birth to her fourth child, Nancy Noland. Sarah Ann Noland died in Jackson County in the summer of 1849, when Joseph T. Noland was two years old. Less than two years later, Joseph Noland's father, Wesley Noland, also died in Jackson County. Tuberculosis is said to have been the cause of both his parents' deaths. Young Joseph T. Noland continued to live on the Noland farm with his grandfather, Francis Marion Noland, until his early teen years.[86]

At age fourteen, in 1861, Joseph T. Noland joined the Confederate Army, perhaps around the time that martial law was declared in Missouri in August of that year. Noland served as a private soldier in Upton Hayes' Company, Shank's Regiment, in Sterling Price's Army. (Several other Noland family members likewise served in the Confederate Army, including Joseph Noland's relative, Colonel Thomas Pitcher, of Independence. General Joseph Shelby was the commanding officer.)[87] Young Noland fought in battles at Wilson's Creek (August 1861), and Lexington (September 1861), and closer to home, in the Battles of Independence (August 1862 and October 1862), and the Battle of Westport (October 1864). Badly defeated in the Battle of Westport, General Sterling Price, former Missouri governor and hero of the Mexican War, and his men, including Noland, retreated southward down the Kansas border into Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Louisiana. Although some Noland family members serving under Price fled to and began new lives in Mexico, Joseph Noland chose to remain in the United States. Following General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Virginia, on April 9, 1865, Joseph Noland and hundreds of other former Confederate soldiers were mustered out of service in Shreveport, Louisiana, and swore allegiance to the United States. When the eighteen-year-old Noland returned to St. Louis, Missouri, on a river packet with other Confederate Army veterans in 1865 or early 1866, Harrison Young, Noland's future brother-in-law (and Harry Truman's uncle), who was then attending Christian Brothers College in Alton, Illinois, greeted him at the river landing.[88]

Soon after his return to Jackson County, Joseph Noland joined a company of freighters and helped ship mining machinery

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[86] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 29, Harry S. Truman Library; "Joseph T. Noland Dead," *Jackson Examiner*, 2 February 1923. Also see footnote number 2 in this chapter.
[87] Genealogical Forms, Vertical Files: "Noland Family," Harry S. Truman Library.
[88] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 29-31, Harry S. Truman Library;Joseph T. Noland Dead," *Jackson Examiner*, 2 February 1923; *History of Jackson County, Missouri, Containing a History of the County, Its Cities, Towns, Etc., Indexed Edition*, 1881, reprint (Cape Girardeau, Mo.: Ramfre Press, 1966), 43-44, 277-94; W. Z. Hickman, *History of Jackson County, Missouri* (Topeka, Kan.: Historical Publishing Co., 1920), 202-208.

and supplies to Canyon City (near Denver), Colorado, by wagon train. Harrison Young's father, Solomon Young, who was still engaged in the freighting business at that time, may have encouraged Noland to take up freighting. But it was apparently not to his liking, for Noland only made one freighting trip before he went back to his birthplace in Estill County, Kentucky, and the home of many of his mother's family. Not long before, Noland's grandfather and namesake, Joseph Scrivener, had died; Joseph Noland was one of the heirs of his estate. During his several-week stay in Kentucky, Joseph Noland became well acquainted with his Scrivener relatives, whom he had never seen before. He also took care of family business matters and collected his share of his grandfather's estate. With the money he inherited, Noland returned to Jackson County in 1867 or 1868 and soon afterward bought a farm north of Hickman Mills, not far from the Solomon Young farm. In 1868 Joseph T. Noland joined the nearby Blue Ridge Baptist Church. Two years later, he and Margaret Ellen Truman married.[89]

Margaret Ellen Truman

Margaret Ellen (better known as "Ella") Truman, the older sister of John Anderson Truman, Harry S Truman's father, was born on May 6, 1849, on the farm of Dr. Johnston Lykins near Westport (in what later became part of Kansas City, Missouri).[90] Her parents, Anderson (known to his friends as "Andy") Shipp Truman and Mary Jane Holmes Truman, had married in Christiansburg, Shelby County, Kentucky, in 1846, and then moved to Westport. Mary Jane Holmes had traveled with her parents and lived for about a year, from 1845-1846, in Westport, where family relatives, including Christiana Polk McCoy and Martha (Patsy) Holmes Ford, lived. The young married Truman couple rented the farm owned by a Dr. Lykins and took up farming with five women slaves inherited from the Holmes family, who helped with myriad household chores. At the time of Ella Truman's birth in 1849, the Lykins farm was one of numerous farms that stretched across rolling hills between Westport and the Westport Landing not far away on the Missouri River. Anderson Shipp Truman's brother, John Thomas Truman, began living with the family around 1849. Two of Ella Truman's siblings were born

[89] Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 33-34, 39; "Joseph T. Noland Dead," *Jackson Examiner*, 2 February 1923.
[90] Dr. Lykins had moved to Jackson County in 1831. Much later in life, he helped organize the "Old Settlers Historical Society of Jackson County and was elected its vice-president." Hickman, *History of Jackson County*, 93, 240.

on the Lykins farm: an older brother, William Truman, born on April 24, 1847, and a younger brother, John Anderson Truman, born on December 5, 1851, and named after greatly beloved Uncle John Thomas Truman.[91]

In early 1852 (or slightly later),[92] when young Ella Truman was about three years old, the Truman family household, including the children's Uncle John Truman and the family's five female slaves, moved to a farm that Anderson Shipp Truman wanted to work on the north side of the Missouri River in Platte County, Missouri, between present-day Parkville and Barry in Pettis Township. Family relatives Lewis and Patsy Ford, who had moved to Parkville, as well as an abundance of neighboring farmers originally from Kentucky, lived in the area. In 1860 the Truman's Platte County farm was comprised of 160 acres valued at $3,200. (Uncle John left the family in 1855 to seek his fortune in the California gold fields, then returned to his native Shelby County, Kentucky, and married.)

Ella Truman's family remained in Platte County for the next sixteen years until 1868. During that time, she gained two new siblings: Emily, born on July 25, 1855, and Mary Martha, born on January 7, 1860. The Truman children, including Ella, attended Prairie Point Academy, a subscription school near Parkville. On the staff were teachers who had left Jackson County due to mounting tensions there over slavery. Ella Truman often rode horseback to what was then called the Line Creek Baptist Church.[93]

More than one hundred years later, Noland family members recalled some of the happy childhood memories that Ella Truman had shared with her children and grandchildren about her years growing up in Platte County. During the unusually harsh winter of 1855-1856, temperatures plummeted to below zero for several weeks and the Missouri River froze for nearly sixty-two days. From Christmas Eve 1855 to March 1, 1856, the encrusted Missouri River became a brittle glassy, highway of ice traveled by humans, horses, mules, and oxen

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[91] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 5-11, 13, Harry S. Truman Library; Mary Prewitt Mitchell, *The First Baptist Church, Independence, Missouri, 1845-1945* (Independence: First Baptist Church, n.d.), 84.

[92] Margaret Ellen Truman's granddaughter, Ardis Haukenberry, reported many years later that the Truman family was still living on the south side of the Missouri River as late as the winter of 1855-56. Helen Ardis Ragland Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Bank Safe Deposit Co." stationary, Sue Gentry Collection, Jackson County Historical Society. Also see "Rough Winter? Here's the 1855-56 Version," newspaper clipping, file for 216 North Delaware, Community Development Department, City of Independence, Independence, Missouri.

[93] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 11-16; "Noland Services," *Independence Examiner*, 1 October 1948; "Truman A 'Son' to Aunt," Clippings File, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

moving between the north and south banks of the river. Ella Truman vividly remembered her own adventures crossing the river on ice to visit relatives in Jackson County, according to Ella's granddaughter Ardis Haukenberry.[94]

Summers were a time of different delights for Ella Truman and her siblings living on their farm in Platte County. "Once the circus was coming through the country, going from Parkville to Barry, and the little children were all dressed up to go down the lane to the big gate on the road to see the circus go by, because there was an elephant, which they had never seen," Ella Truman had told her daughter, Mary Ethel Noland. For decades after the event, Ella Truman clearly pictured the scene of Mary, the family's African American nurse, leading Ella's favorite younger brother, John, down to the gate where the children all stood "with big eyes and open mouths," looking at the elephant and brightly painted circus wagons as they meandered down the road.[95] Another memorable event for young Ella Truman was the May Day tournament. During this annual social event for the neighborhood, inspired by scenes from Sir Walter Scott's stories, young men on their best steed galloped over a racecourse with spears used for plucking rings off an arm that hung out over the tournament course. The knight with the most rings on his spear was invited to crown the queen of the day.[96] Those "gallant young men made quite an impression on my mother," Mary Ethel Noland reminisced many years later. "I think she thought the people in Platte County were superior to the people in Jackson County," Ethel Noland conjectured, even "though she was born in Jackson County herself."[97]

The local and national tragic upheaval wrought by the Civil War didn't touch the family directly. Ella's father, Anderson Shipp Truman, who favored the Union cause, was too old to fight in the war. Ella's older brother, William, was too young to enlist as a soldier. Although the family's relatives, Lewis and Patsy Ford in nearby Parkville, were banished to Alton, Illinois, for the duration of the war under the infamous Order Number 11, the Truman family was not subject to the mandates of that order and lived peacefully on their farm while violence raged around them. Years after the war, Ella Truman Noland often talked of the war

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[94] Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Bank Safe Deposit Co." stationary, Gentry Collection; "Rough Winter?, newspaper clipping, file for 216 North Delaware, Community Development Department, City of Independence.
[95] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 14.
[96] Ibid., 13-16.
[97] Ibid., 19-20.

days when the Trumans heard of the ravages in counties all around them. Their farm was never raided.[98]

In 1867 or early 1868, about two years after the war ended, Ella Truman and her parents and siblings moved back to Jackson County, on the south side of the Missouri River, and took up residence in Holmes Park, then between the infant Kansas City and the small farming community of Grandview, about twelve miles away. Shortly afterwards, the Truman family, including Ella Truman, apparently moved to the Hickman Mills (then called Hickman's Mills) area, north of Grandview, where Anderson Shipp and Mary Jane Truman bought a farm. Ella Truman joined the Blue Ridge Baptist Church (which later consolidated with the Grandview Baptist Church) in 1868, the same year in which Joseph T. Noland joined the Blue Ridge Baptist Church. Reverend Lee, pastor of the church, baptized Ella Truman and Joseph T. Noland on the same day. Their courtship probably began not long after that. On December 18, 1870, Ella Truman married Joseph Tilford Noland at the home of Ella's parents in Hickman Mills.[99]

Joseph T. and Ella Truman Noland Family, 1870-1900

Ella (Margaret Ellen) Truman, favorite aunt of Harry S Truman, as she appeared around the time of her marriage to Joseph Tilford Noland in 1870. Courtesy of Harry S. Truman Library.

Joseph T. and Ella Truman Noland lived for nearly thirteen years on their farm near Hickman Mills. During that time, the Nolands built a new house and planted an apple orchard that became very profitable. At least four children were born to the Noland couple during their residence near Hickman Mills. William Noland, named after Joseph's brother who was killed in the Civil War and also Ella's brother, William Truman, was born in 1872. He lived only three days. A second

[98] Ibid., 23 August 1965, 2, 20; "Noland Services," *Independence Examiner*, 1 October 1948.
[99] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 20-21, 38; Mitchell, *First Baptist Church*.

child, probably a boy, may have been born in 1874, but only lived a short time.[100] Ruth Truman Noland, their first daughter, was born on August 3, 1876. Five years later, on July 26, 1881, Ellen Tilford Noland (better known as "Nellie") was born to Joseph and Ella Noland on their Hickman Mills farm. Their youngest daughter, Mary Ethel (known as "Ethel") Noland, named for her grandmother, Mary Jane Holmes Truman, arrived on October 23, 1883 (six months before her cousin, Harry S Truman, was born).[101]

In 1883, shortly after Ethel Noland was born and when Ruth was seven years old, Joseph and Ella Noland decided to move the family into Independence, which offered "educational advantages unsurpassed by any city in the [W]est."[102] Then regarded as a great center of learning and culture, Independence boasted the Woodland College (established in 1869 and located at Waldo and Union streets), the Independence Female College (incorporated in 1866 and a new building constructed in 1871 at North Liberty and Farmer and later known as the Presbyterian College), St. Mary's Convent School (opened in 1878), plus other smaller private subscription schools. There were two public schools, one with nine grades for Euroamericans and another with two grades for African Americans. Additionally, Independence heritage and the sympathies of many residents in the 1880s were decidedly southern. The Independence political and social environment may have seemed comfortable to Joseph Noland, a Confederate Army veteran.

Finally, Independence offered opportunities for economic enrichment at that time. The promise of a narrow-gauge railroad that was to be built from Kansas City to the Independence courthouse square, along Lexington Avenue, and then to be extended further out to the southeast, brought about a small boom in real estate and building and business developments in Independence. Here was an opportunity to earn a living and support a family.[103]

With all this in mind, the Noland couple decided to move to Independence in late 1883. They took up residence in a house on West Maple Avenue (formerly Rock Street until around 1887) near the site of the first William Chrisman School. Soon Joseph

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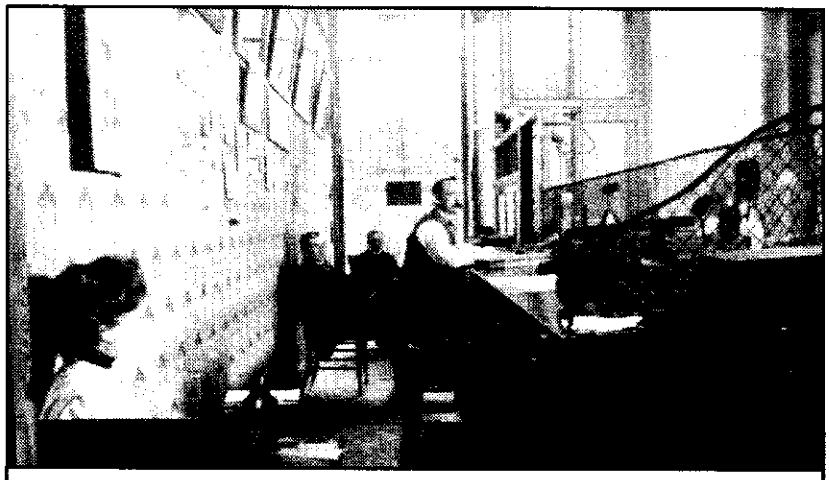
[100] Genealogical information at the Harry S. Truman Library notes that William Noland was born in July 1872, even though Ethel Noland reported, in a 1965 oral history interview, that he was born in 1874. It is possible that a second boy, not William, was born in 1874. The *History of Jackson County* notes that the Nolands had three children, two deceased, by 1881. *History of Jackson County*, 1881, reprint, 984; Vertical Files: "Genealogical Records, Truman Family," Harry S. Truman Library.
[101] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 38-40.
[102] *History of Jackson County*, 1881, reprint, 238.
[103] Ibid., 236-39, 661-62; Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 41-44.

Noland became fully engaged in real estate, buying land and building homes all around Independence, as well as outlying farming areas. In 1888, the Nolands lived at 92 West Maple Avenue, according to the *Independence City Directory* published that year. This same city directory listed Joseph Noland's business as real estate. For many years, he was associated with the Rider and Company Real Estate and insurance office, which occupied a long, narrow, high-ceilinged commercial space on the south side of the courthouse square in what certainly must have been an advantageous location on Lexington Avenue along the route of the new interurban railroad. For a few years, the Noland family benefited financially from Joseph Noland's real estate ventures. During the family's residence on West Maple Avenue, Ruth and Nellie Noland attended the Presbyterian College.



Joseph Noland, seated against the wall, worked for several years, during the 1880s and 1890s, in the Rider and Company Real Estate office on Lexington Avenue across from the courthouse. Courtesy of the Jackson County Historical Society.

While living on West Maple Avenue, the Noland family enjoyed visits from Noland and Truman relatives living in and near Independence. Years later, Ethel Noland remembered that Anderson Shipp Truman (her and Harry S Truman's maternal grandfather) came to visit the Nolands when they lived on West Maple Avenue before his death in July 1887. In 1888, Ethel Noland remembered that her Uncle John and Aunt Martha (known as "Aunt Mat") Truman and their two young children came to visit the Noland family from the Young farm near Grandview (where they lived from 1887 to 1890). Harry S Truman was four years old at the time; Vivian Truman was less than two years old; Mary Jane had not yet been born. Martha

Truman entertained the children by playing the piano and singing favorite children's tunes, like the "Little Brown Jug." It is likely that the Nolands lived in this West Maple Avenue house (now gone) until around 1890.[104]

The Noland family not only entertained the Trumans in Independence; they also visited the family on the Solomon and Harriet Young farm near Grandview. Ethel Noland remembered going to see the Trumans on the farm around 1890, not long after Mary Jane had been born in 1889 and shortly before the Truman family moved to Independence. The Nolands drove to the farm in a surrey pulled by a horse named "Doll" to spend a few days with the Young-Truman families. "I remember playing on the long veranda on the stately old home that the Youngs lived in. They had lived there since the early 1840s [*sic*, they did not move there until 1867], I think, and had hundreds, maybe thousands of acres of land, which took in the land between the two rivers, Big Blue and Little Blue," Ethel Noland recalled seventy-five years later. Noland remembered that the Young house was impressive, "very, very comfortable and roomy, because Solomon Young had a big family of daughters and two sons." The house had a "big parlor where the piano was and . . . a long veranda, on the side of the house where we played as children" and swung in the hammock.[105]

Life changed dramatically for the Noland family when the real estate market in Independence turned sharply downward around 1890. By then it had become apparent that the small rail line between Kansas City and Independence wasn't going to support the speculative growth that had brought about the 1880s boom: many people demanded that their invested money be returned. "Along with a great many other people the Noland family went very flat, indeed, financially," Ethel Noland remembered many years later. Joseph and Ella Noland could no longer afford to send their two school-age daughters to the Presbyterian School; instead they started attending public school at the brick ten-room Ott School on North Liberty Street (named in honor of Christian Ott, Sr., member of the school board).[106] "Out of the crash," Ethel Noland remembered, "we had only one house left. . . . It was a place out on West White Oak Street, . . . and we moved out there." The family resided in the small house on West White Oak Street perhaps only a year or two.[107] During that time, Solomon Young came to dinner once, Ethel Noland

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[104] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 24, 43-44, 46-47; Mitchel, *First Baptist Church*, 84; *Independence City Directory* (Independence: R. S. Dillon & Co., 1888-89).
[105] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 49, 52-53.
[106] Mrs. W. L. C. Palmer, interview by James R. Fuchs, 18 January 1962, transcript of taped interview, 6, Harry S. Truman Library.
[107] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 44, 60, 63, 66.

later recalled. (His visit took place before late January 1892, when he died.) By 1894, they had moved back to West Maple Avenue, where they took up residence in their second house; this one stood at the corner of Delaware Street and West Maple Avenue.

The Noland family's hard times preceded and then coincided with a great national depression in the 1890s. In mid-1893, a panic on Wall Street signaled the start of a depression that lasted for four years. By the end of 1893, nearly 500 banks and 16,000 businesses had failed. Of the five western transcontinental railroads, only two remained solvent. Human suffering was catastrophic. Estimates of unemployed family breadwinners in early 1894 ranged from 25 percent in the Rocky Mountain states of Montana and Utah to somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 in New York City. No one remained untouched by the grim years of depression. Even those people fortunate enough to keep their jobs saw their wages slashed by one-fifth or even one-half. In response to the severe human suffering, hundreds of unemployed men from all over the nation became part of a movement led by Jacob S. Coxey, a wealthy sandstone quarry owner from Ohio, to persuade Congress and President Grover Cleveland to create public works jobs and increase the money supply to stimulate the American economy. In 1894, several groups of unemployed protest groups, led by Coxey and others, made their way from points as far west as San Francisco and Seattle to Washington, D.C. where, on May 1, 1894, they demonstrated on the Capitol steps.[108]

In 1894, the Nolands not only suffered personally from the depression; they also became keenly aware of the suffering of others throughout the country. A segment of Coxey's Army, known as "Sanders' Army," marched through Independence on their way to Washington, D.C.. Although only ten years old at the time, Ethel Noland many years later clearly remembered watching this branch of Coxey's Army of unemployed "go up Maple Avenue over here and on to Washington." It was from the Nolands' second house on West Maple Avenue that Ethel Noland watched this small vignette of American history. The Nolands probably lived in this house for only a year or two.[109]

Not long after Ethel Noland had watched a segment of Coxey's Army marched down West Maple Avenue in 1894, the Noland family moved once again. This time they moved to North

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[108] Carlos A. Schwantes, *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).
[109] Ethel Noland's clear remembrance of seeing a segment of Coxey's Army while her family lived on West Maple Avenue helps confirm the Nolands' residence on West Maple Avenue in 1894. Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 45-46.

Liberty Street at the corner of White Oak Street.[110] Here they spent roughly six years, from the latter part of 1894 to August 1900.[111] During these six years, Ruth Noland grew to young adulthood and married, and Nellie and Ethel took part in all the school and summertime activities typical of Independence youth at that time. Both Nellie and Ethel attended the Ott School (no longer standing) at the corner of Liberty and College streets, a short distance from their home. Both grade school and high school classes were held in the Ott School. Nellie received most of her grade school and all of her high school education there. She graduated from high school in 1898 at age seventeen, after the nine to ten years of public schooling (normally received between the ages of seven and seventeen). Ethel began grade school at the Ott School and remained there until her last year of high school, probably her tenth year in school. Both Nellie and Ethel were considered excellent students, according to one of their teachers.[112]

During the Nolands' residence on North Liberty Street, from about 1894 to the summer of 1900, Uncle John and Aunt Matt Truman and their three children were living in Independence, first on South Chrysler Avenue (late 1890 to about 1896) and later, on West Waldo Street (1896 to 1903). Although Harry S Truman attended different schools (Noland School and the Columbian High School, completed in 1893) than Nellie and Ethel Noland, cousin Harry often came to visit the Nolands on North Liberty Street. Their close ages and residences helped the three youngsters develop a friendly relationship.[113]

At their home on North Liberty Street, the Noland family celebrated the first and only marriage among their three Noland daughters. In early May 1898, twenty-two year-old Ruth Truman Noland

Ruth Truman Noland, Joseph and Ella Noland's oldest daughter and the only child to wed, married Robert Verner Ragland in early May 1898. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

[110] Ardis Ragland Haukenberry, "Childhood Memories of North Delaware Street," typescript, no date, Historian's Files, Truman National Historic Site.
[111] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 68.
[112] Mrs. W. L. C. Palmer interview, 18 January 1962, 8.
[113] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 59-60, 62-63, 68; Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs, Vol. I, Year of Decisions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), 115.

married twenty-four year-old Robert Verner Ragland.[114] The groom's family had migrated from Kentucky to Westport, Missouri, many years earlier. Robert Ragland worked as a clerk in the Santa Fe Railroad offices in Kansas City when he and Ruth Noland married. The newlyweds took up residence in Kansas City (first on Spring Street off Broadway, then, on East 12th Street in the new district of Dixon Park). On August 4, 1899, the first of their three children, Helen Ardis Ragland, was born on Spring Street in Kansas City. A little more than three years later, on October 17, 1902, Robert Truman Ragland was born in the Dixon Park neighborhood of Kansas City. Their last child, Josephine Noland Ragland, arrived on December 24, 1904. Robert Ragland died before the birth of his third child.[115]

A year earlier, during the devastating Missouri River flood of 1903, Robert Ragland had stayed damp and chilled while marooned for several hours in the Santa Fe Railroad offices in Kansas City. He contracted pneumonia. By the spring of 1904, he had developed tuberculosis. In an effort to improve his health, Ragland and an aunt (a nurse) went west, first to Arizona, then to California. Following her husband's departure, Ruth Noland Ragland and her two young children went to live with her parents and two sisters. The devastating news of Robert's death reached the Noland and Ragland families in mid-November 1904. He had died on November 6, 1904, in Indio, southern California (southeast of Los Angeles and near present-day Palm Springs). Noland was thirty years old. About ten days later, his body arrived in Independence. Funeral services were conducted at the home of Joseph and Ella Noland. Six weeks later, on December 24, 1904, twenty-eight year-old Ruth Ragland gave birth to her third child, Josephine, in the Noland family home.[116]

Noland Family at 216 North Delaware Street 1900-1906

By 1904, the Noland family had moved to the two-story Queen Anne style house at 216 North Delaware Street, across the street from the Gates family residence at 219 Delaware Street. According to Ethel Noland, then sixteen years old, she and her

[114] *Jackson Examiner*, 14 May 1898.
[115] Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Bank Safe Deposit Co." stationary, Gentry Collection.
[116] Haukenberry, "Childhood Memories of North Delaware Street," typescript, no date, Historian's Files, Truman National Historic Site; Mrs. H. H. (Ardis) Haukenberry, interview by Ron Cockrell, 14 June 1983, transcript of taped interview, 1, 5, and Haukenberrry, interview by Cockrell, 2, March 1984, transcript of taped interview, 21; both at Harry S Truman National Historic Site. Also see *Jackson Examiner*, 25 November 1904.

parents and sister, Nellie, moved into the North Delaware Street house in August 1900. The immediate past renters had been a family named Taliaferro (or Tolivers), whose daughter had been a childhood friend of Ethel Noland. For the next eight years, Joseph and Ella Noland rented this house before Ella (Margaret Ellen) Noland bought it from Anthony and Maria Slack in July 1908 for $2,300. The aging Slack couple that lived next door in a rambling, ornately decorated Italianate style home at the corner of North Delaware Street and Truman Road (then named "West Blue Avenue" and soon afterward renamed to "West Van Horn Road") had owned the property since December 1865. They probably substantially transformed an older dwelling, around 1886-1887, into the modestly decorated Queen Anne style house that the Nolands rented in 1900. When the Noland family moved into the house, Joseph and Ella Noland were in their early fifties;

Nellie had just turned nineteen, and Ethel, almost seventeen, had just completed high school at the new Chrisman

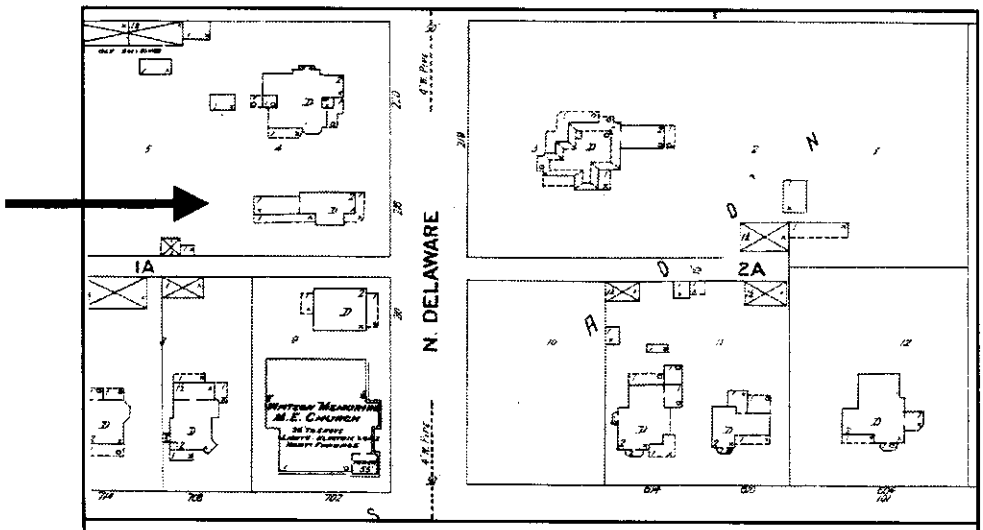
Nellie Noland (left) and Ethel Noland (right) as young women around the time that the Noland family moved into the old Slack house at 216 North Delaware Street. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

High School, built in 1898, about a block away (at the corner of West Maple Avenue and North Pleasant Street). Beginning in 1904 and continuing for the next seventeen years, the four Nolands shared the house with young widow Ruth Noland Ragland and her three small children.[117]

[117] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 63, 68; "Anthony T. Slack and Maria M. Slack, his wife, to Margaret Ellen Noland," warranty deed, July 20, 1908, Book 281, p. 416, Jackson County Courthouse, Independence, Missouri; Haukenberry, "Childhood Memories of North Delaware Street"; Haukenberry interview, 2 March

Noland House and Neighborhood

In the early 1900s, the Nolands new home on North Delaware Street stood in a residential neighborhood with gracious moderate- and large-sized gracious homes on 50- to 150-foot-wide lots that lined tree-shaded streets a few blocks north of the courthouse square. At the time, the majority of homes in the neighborhood probably dated from the 1870s and 1880s and displayed characteristic design features typical of the Italianate and Queen Anne architectural styles, popular at that time. Turned spindle work in the gable ends and on porches, decorative wood shingles and a variety of other wood and stucco siding materials, and porches that wrapped around irregular-shaped, one- and two-story house forms were characteristic features of the Noland house and other homes in the neighborhood.



The 1907 Sanborn fire insurance map shows the elongated form of the Noland house at 216 North Delaware Street, just south of the large 1885 Slack house, and across Delaware Street from the Gates (later Truman) house. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

Outbuildings of various sizes, including a few shelters for the new family automobile, stood in the rear yards of many homes in the area. In the fall of 1907, a Sanborn Map Company fire insurance map of Independence depicted the Noland house with a one-story porch that wrapped around the front and south side of the main two-story portion of the house. An elongated one-story section extended to the rear, with a second porch

1984, 20; *Independence, Missouri, City Directory* (Kansas City, Mo.: Gate City Directory, Company, 1924).

running along its south wall. (The small, two-story projecting section on the south wall had not yet been constructed.) A coal furnace in the basement heated the Noland house early on, according to Ardis Haukenberry; a hole was eventually cut in the ceiling of the first floor to allow heat to reach the upstairs bedrooms. Two small outbuildings stood in the rear yard of the Noland house along the alley.

Historic photographs taken in the first decade of the 1900s give more information about the Noland house. The exterior sheathing was horizontal clapboard, as it is in 2000. The house appears to have been painted two or three light shades. Although there are no shutters on the main two-story portion of the house; however, shutters did frame at least one window on the first floor of the rear elevation. The wrap-around front porch appears to have been encircled with a low railing with turned individual balusters and supporting porch posts (unlike the square porch posts that exist in 2000). The same decorative cutout patterned skirting that is present in 2000 encircled the porch below its floor in the early 1900s. Five or six wide wood steps led up to the porch. Luxurious vines covered the first-floor main facade of the house just north of the porch. A low pointed picket fence extended across the raised terraced front yard. Unpainted waist-high fences ran along the alley on the south and the rear and north side property lines. A concrete path led from the front yard, through the south side yard around the bulkhead; it probably ended at the open south side porch. Large shrubs encircled the house's foundation, and small trees shaded the front and south side yards. A wooden swing with two suspended benches facing each other stood in the south side yard next to the alley.[118]

Directly across North Delaware Street, in 1907, stood the expansive three- and two-story Gates house (later Wallace and Truman house) with wrap-around porches, which occupied a quarter of that block. Gnarled old fruit trees grew on a lot adjoining and just south of the Gates house. South of the Noland house was the new substantial red brick Watson Memorial Methodist-Episcopal Church, with its main arched entrance below a square bell tower, at the corner of North Delaware Street and West Maple Avenue.[119] Built in 1903, the church was illuminated with electric and gas lights. Around 1905-1906 the

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[118] *Independence, Missouri*, September 1907 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1907); Haukenberry interview, 14 June 1983, 13, 15; several historic photographs of the Noland house in the early 1900s, Harry S. Truman Library.

[119] The Watson Memorial Methodist-Episcopal Church replaced a brick church, probably known as the Rock Street Methodist-Episcopal Church and constructed around 1867, a few yards south of the alley bordering the Noland property. The name Rock Street was changed to West Maple around 1886-87. *History of Jackson County*, 1881, reprint, 657.

Methodist-Episcopal Church congregation had built a parsonage just north of the church and south of the alley that ran along the southern border of the Noland house property. A block away, at the northwest corner of West Maple Avenue and North Pleasant Street, stood the new two-story high school with its electric- and gas-lit classrooms, central auditorium, and library and manual training wing. Not far away, a tennis court at Woodland College (near the corner of West Waldo and Union Street) was a popular gathering place for the neighborhood children and young adults.[120]

Years later, those who lived or spent time in the North Delaware Street neighborhood in the early 1900s remembered it fondly as a grand place to grow up. For the Ragland children, who lived in the Noland house from 1904 to the early 1920s, there were exciting times spent in the large back yard of the Slack house (destroyed in 1924), investigating the barn where a cow and chickens were kept, and building tree houses with the Slacks' grandchildren who came with their parents, Lulu Slack and Columbus Brown, from Herrin, Illinois, to visit each summer. Many other neighborhood yards, including those of the David and Madge Wallace house further north on North Delaware Street, had enormous and inviting trees with outstretched limbs to perch on.

Ethel Noland, who helped raise Ardis Ragland, stands in the picket-fence-enclosed rear yard of the Noland house (with the rear of the Slack mansion visible in the background), around 1905. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

[120] *Independence, Missouri*, September 1907; (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1907); Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 72.

The three Ragland children also delighted in exploring the Methodist-Episcopal Church parsonage during its construction (built around 1905-06), after the workmen left at the end of the day. The luxuriant gardens of many of the houses on North Delaware Street north of the Noland house provided a wonderful playground for the young Ragland and other neighborhood children.

The beautiful gardens behind the Paxton house became the staging ground for summer operettas, in which all the children along North Delaware Street took part. There were birthday parties of other neighborhood children to attend.[121] At the north end of Delaware Street, a wooded area with abundant mushrooms (in the spring), birds, and wildflowers served as a nature park for summertime Sunday afternoon rambles of the three Ragland children and their grandfather Joseph T. Noland, known to the Ragland children as "Daddy." Closer to home and across the street on the Gates property, Ardis Ragland (Haukenberry) remembered spending many happy hours playing in the Gates house attic and their barn with young Fred Wallace, who, with his sister, Bess, two brothers, George and Frank, and mother, had moved into the house in 1904. Young Fred Wallace and Ardis Ragland, who were the same age, watched Halley's Comet through Fred's telescope from the roof of the Noland House. "Many hot croquet games were played on the north lawn" of the Gates house with Fred Wallace," Ardis reminisced many years later.[122]

Noland and Truman Families Visit

The Noland house itself became a gathering place for friends and family during these years, and a place where Nellie and Ethel Noland developed an endearing and enduring relationship, which continued throughout the years, with their cousin Harry S Truman. After the Nolands moved to 216 North Delaware Street, the Truman family, living then on nearby West Waldo, was only about three blocks away. "We saw each other very often," Ethel Noland recalled," because going uptown . . . and going to [high] school [located at Pleasant and West Maple] he had to pass here every day."[123] During the 1900-1901 school year, Harry and Bessie (as she was known by many) Wallace, who were in the same class and attended the same high school, would often meet in the Noland house to study with the Noland sisters, who had graduated just ahead of their cousin Harry.[124] "When it came

[121] *Jackson Examiner*, 24 November 1911, Vertical Files: "Noland Family," Harry S. Truman Library.
[122] Haukenberry, "Childhood Memories of North Delaware Street"; Ardis Haukenberry interview, 14 June 1983, 2.
[123] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 69.
[124] Mrs. W. L. C. Palmer interview, 18 January, 1962, 8.

to Latin," Ethel Noland remembered, "my sister was very good at it and they would come over here to read their Latin with Nellie. I don't know whether they got much Latin read or not because there was a lot of fun going on."[125] By his senior year in high school in 1900-1901, Harry had become interested in fencing, which he would sometimes practice at the Noland house with cousins Nellie and Ethel and Bessie Wallace. "We had the porch and had a room here to play and have fun, generally, which we did, with a little Latin intermingled, maybe . . . I'm afraid Caesar had a very slim chance with all that was going on," Ethel Noland reminisced.[126]

Looking back at the early 1900s, a half century later, Harry S Truman also recalled that he had spent a lot of time with his Aunt Ella and her three daughters. In his *Memoirs* Truman explained that he started going to his Aunt Ella's house to study algebra and Latin about twice a week with cousins Nellie and Ethel, who had both graduated from high school by the end of 1900. "We grew up and went to school with cousins Nellie and Ethel Noland. . . . Nellie would translate my Latin lesson for me when I was in high school, and I would escort Ethel to parties and learn how to be polite from her. Incidentally," Truman noted, "my beautiful young lady with the blue eyes and golden hair" joined in these playful sessions at the Noland house. "We [Nellie, Ethel, Harry, and Bess] were always just good playmates and good comrades," Ethel Noland characterized their relationship many years later.[127]

The Nolands always welcomed young Harry in their home and delighted in his visits. "Harry was always fun," and "he was a great peacemaker, surely," Ethel Noland remembered. "He was full of fun but he never seemed to get into the scrapes that the other boys did."[128] When the Truman family was still living in Independence (until 1903), Harry would sometimes come by the house and take his cousins to a party in a horse and buggy. "He and his sister, Mary Jane, were often at their Aunt Ella's home," Ardis Haukenberry remembered from her childhood growing up in the Noland house. They had great fun together. [Second] cousin Harry had a "special doorbell ring and whenever we heard it we rushed to the door knowing that we'd have fun and music." Haukenberry recalled that two of Harry Truman's favorite pieces were *Spring Song* and *Melody in F*, which he played with great flamboyance on the Noland's upright piano in the front parlor. When Haukenberry's younger sister, Josephine ("Jodie") Ragland,

[125] Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 70-71.
[126] Ibid., 23 August 1965, 71.
[127] Truman, *Memoirs, Vol. I, Year of Decisions*, 115, 122; Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 71.
[128] Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 71; Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 80.

was four years old (1908-1909), Harry Truman "set her on the piano bench with him and taught her to play *Chopsticks.*"[129] Mary Jane Truman played jacks with the children on the front room floor.

At one Christmas dinner that the Trumans shared with the Nolands, Nellie Noland forgot to add sugar to the dinner's cranberry sauce, causing everyone to pucker from its tartness. For years, Harry Truman teased his cousin Nellie about that cranberry sauce; his reminders not to forget the all-important ingredient of sugar came from far places as his career in politics took him further and further from Independence. His playfulness was not limited to cousin Nellie. He often joked with his cousin Ethel, who became the family genealogist, about quieting any discoveries she might make about unsavory characters on the family tree. "His sense of humor never left him," Ardis Haukenberry clearly remembered, and he never failed to share it with the Noland family.[130]

Harry Truman's visits to the Noland house became somewhat less frequent after, first, he took a job in a bank and moved to Kansas City in 1903 and, later, he moved with his family back to the Young-Truman farm in Grandview in 1905-1906. The Trumans and the fun shared by everyone who took part in gatherings and outings with them were no less memorable, however. When Harry Truman lived on East 29th Street in Kansas City with the family of Emily Truman Colgan, his father's sister, Harry's four Colgan cousins and two other boarders in the spacious Colgan house often gave parties and played practical jokes on each other. Sometimes Nellie and Ethel Noland were invited to attend these gatherings and take part in the merriment. Other times they learned second-hand from Harry of the practical jokes played by these young people.

Many years later, Ethel Noland recalled one of the most outlandish pranks ever played by Harry and others. One summer day while the young people in the Colgan house, including Harry Truman, went to the Missouri River for a picnic, two boys in the party (Fred Colgan and Edwin Green) decided it would be great fun to send their names and addresses in a bottle down the river, hoping it might be retrieved. Others in the group of picnickers saw this as a wonderful opportunity to play a hilarious practical joke on the message authors. Secretly they composed a letter, signed by two imaginary girls who supposedly found the bottle on the banks of the Mississippi River, and mailed it to the two boys

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[129] Ardis R. Haukenberry, "Younger Cousin Records Memories," *Jackson County Historical Society* (March 1973), 6; Haukenberry, "Childhood Memories of North Delaware Street."
[130] Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 82-83; Haukenberry, "Younger Cousin Records Memories," 7.

who had set the bottle afloat. Correspondence, including large self-portraits, between Colgan and Green and the pranksters pretending to be the two girls soon began. After several exchanges, Fred Colgan and Edwin Green became quite infatuated with the girls, and vowed to go and visit them. The charade continued for weeks, much to the delight of the pranksters, including Harry Truman, who posed as the two girls.

"You've just got to tell them that there's nothing to it," insisted Ella Noland one day when Harry Truman was visiting the Noland family. "It's a myth"! Very reluctantly the pranksters revealed their practical joke to Colgan and Green. "Yes, Harry was in on it," Ethel Noland recounted, "and enjoyed it!"[131]

Harry Truman's visits to the Noland house at 216 North Delaware Street continued after he left the Colgan house and moved to a Kansas City boarding house that was closer to his bank job. Harry made some close friends there. One of them that he brought to see the Nolands was "a young lady . . . [whom] he liked very much," Ethel Noland recalled.[132] One of these women may have been Casby Bailey or Ida Trow, both of whom he entertained with piano tunes and sometimes invited on picnics during his residence at the boarding house.[133] Harry Truman also brought some young men who worked at the bank to the Noland house. Sometimes he came by with James Wright, long-time friend whom he first met when the Truman family lived on Waldo Avenue in Independence. On these and other occasions, Nellie and Ethel Noland, Harry and his friend(s) might play a game called "high five." Other times they might go to the theatre together, especially after Harry Truman began ushering at the Shubert Theatre in Kansas City on Saturdays. Picnics were a favorite summertime activity of the Noland sisters, Harry, and their friends.[134]

Passages at the Noland House, 1906-1923

Harry Truman's relationship with the Noland family remained intimate during his years on the Young-Truman farm near Grandview and his years in the army, and afterward. During this period of renewed growth and optimism across the country and in Independence, members of three generations of the Noland family grew to adulthood, matured in their professions, aged, and died at 216 North Delaware Street. The

[131] Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 94-96.
[132] Ibid., 9 September 1965, 98.
[133] Jonathan Daniels, *The Man of Independence* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1950), 70.
[134] Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 97-100.

combined departure of the Ragland family and the death of Joseph Tilford Noland between 1921 and 1923 brought great change to the Noland house.

Noland-Ragland Family

For most of the seventeen years between 1906 and 1923, after first arriving in 1904, Joseph and Ella Noland's oldest daughter, widow Ruth Noland Ragland, and her three children continued to live in the Noland house at 216 North Delaware Street. Ruth Ragland's youngest daughter, Josephine Noland Ragland, spent most of her first nineteen years at the Noland House, attending the Ott School and graduating from the William Chrisman High School in Independence. Around 1921 she began coursework at the Kansas City Teacher's College; within the next year or two she started teaching the first grade at the Manchester School in Kansas City.[135] Ruth Noland Ragland's second child, Robert Truman Ragland, lived in the house from age four to age twenty-one during the same period. He, too, attended the Ott School and excelled academically. In the fifth grade, he won the prized McCoy Medal, given by the Independence school district for spelling and academic excellence. After graduating from William Chrisman High School in 1921, he began his adult working life as a collector at the First National Bank in Kansas City.[136]

Ruth Ragland's oldest child, Ardis Ragland, who had arrived in the Noland house at age five, also received the coveted McCoy Medal in grade 4 at the Ott School in 1910. ("Helen" had been dropped from her name two years earlier since there were so many teachers named "Helen" in the Ott School at that time.) At her high school graduation, in 1916, Ardis received another award, the English medal for an essay she had written about the Greek gods and goddesses. Following in the footsteps of her aunts Nellie and Ethel, who both were teachers, Ardis then entered Kansas City Teachers' College. She roomed with her Aunt Sadie Compton, sister of her deceased father, on Woodland (Burton) Avenue in Kansas City. Following graduation in 1920, Ardis began teaching the third grade in Longfellow School (at 29th and Holmes) in Kansas City. In 1922 she and a group of close friends attended summer school at the University of California at Berkeley. While there, Ardis delighted in exploring all the attractions of the Bay Area. She celebrated her twenty-third birthday in California, before returning to Longfellow School where she continued teaching for the next fourteen years, until

[135] "Mrs. J. A. Southern Dies" and "Death Summons Mrs. Southern, 32, of Independence," Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[136] Charles Burke, "McCoy Medal Will Honor Top Students," *Independence Examiner*, 18 January 1984; *Independence, Missouri City Directory* (Kansas City, Mo.: Gate City Directory Company, 1924).

1936. Finally, Ruth Ragland, after raising her three children, began working as a telephone operator in Kansas City, a job that her brother-in-law, John McCoy, helped her secure, probably in the late 1910s.[137]

The Ragland family moved out of the Noland house in the early 1920s, probably 1921, after the youngest Ragland child, Josephine, had graduated from high school in Independence. Around that same time, Ruth and her oldest child, Ardis, finished fixing up an old farmhouse in Fairland Heights (between Independence and Kansas City), bought with insurance money Ruth Ragland received after the death of her husband in 1904. The Ragland family soon moved into this house at 10105 East 18th (an address later changed to 9515 East 18th) Street in Fairland Heights. The Ragland family continued living on East 18th Street for the next several years.[138]

The Noland Women

Both Nellie and Ethel Noland, (Aunt Nellie and Aunt Ethel to the Ragland children), helped raise Ruth's three children and were intimately involved in their childhood activities and education during the Ragland family's residence at 216 North Delaware.

Joseph Noland holds his granddaughter, Josephine Ragland, on the south side of the Noland house. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

[137] Helen Ardis Ragland Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Bank Safe Deposit Co." stationary, Gentry Collection, Jackson County Courthouse.
[138] Ibid.; Ardis Haukenberry interview, 14 June 1983.

Between 1906 and 1923, Nellie and Ethel Noland were also establishing their respective teaching careers in the Independence and Kansas City school districts. As early as 1898, Nellie Noland had begun teaching as a substitute in the Independence school district. Before long, she secured a permanent teaching position at the Ott School (at Liberty and College) in Independence, where she taught into the mid-1910s. Around 1915, she began teaching at the Bristol School.[139] Two years younger than Nellie, Ethel Noland, who graduated from high school in 1900, probably also began teaching as a substitute by 1902 or 1903. By 1908, she had secured a full-time position teaching at the Noland School in Independence. She stayed there until the late 1910s, when she took a position at the Benjamin Harrison School in Kansas City. During this period, both Nellie and Ethel were active members of the Baptist Church in Independence (first located at Pleasant and Truman Road and, later moved to West Maple Avenue and Osage).

By the early 1920s, they both may have begun teaching Sunday school to adult church members, one of their long-term activities. They also both may have started quilting by that time. Always interested in cultural pursuits, Ethel may have taken up painting by this time, an artistic endeavor she continued for many years.[140]

Their mother Ella (Margaret Ellen) Truman Noland, who was fifty-seven when the Raglands arrived at the Noland house in 1906 and seventy-two when they left in 1921, oversaw the operation of the Noland house with its eight occupants. She continued all the myriad chores involved in keeping house, and she

Ethel Noland strolls along the path on the alley side of the Noland house. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

[139] "School Notes," *Independence Sentinel*, 10 December 1898; "Miss Nellie Noland, Retired Teacher, Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 8 August 1958.
[140] "Miss Mary Ethel Noland, Truman Cousin, Dies," *Kansas City Times*, 11 August 1971; "Club Section Dedicated to Mary Ethel Noland," *Independence Examiner*, 19 September 1971; *Independence, Missouri, City Directory* (Kansas City, Mo.: Gate City Directory Company, 1920); Ethel Noland interview, 23 August 1965, 59; Ardis Haukenberry interview, 14 June 1983, 11; Martha Ann Swoyer, interview by Jon Taylor, 1998, transcript of taped interview, 13, 21, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

maintained her long-standing reputation as an excellent cook. She always welcomed friends, neighbors, and family, including the Truman family, into her home. Outside her home, she pursued a number of cultural activities. She continued her activities in the Baptist Church in Independence, the Independence Pioneers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (eventually disbanded).[141]

Harry Truman and the Nolands

Harry Truman remained an extended member of the Noland family during his years from 1906 to 1917 on the Young-Truman farm about one-and-one-half miles from Grandview. Although he came to Independence less often after first moving to the farm, his visits became more frequent when he learned the farm routines and became familiar with the public transportation that circuitously linked Grandview and Independence, about fifteen miles apart. "He was in and out of here a good deal, and

Left to right, standing: Nellie, Harry S Truman, and Ethel; seated: William Truman, Joseph Noland, and Ella Noland during a 1910s family gathering at 216 North Delaware Street. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

just whenever he wanted to be," Ethel Noland remembered about his early years on the farm.[142] The Nolands also visited the Trumans on their Grandview farm. Nellie and Ethel sometimes came in the summer to see Aunt Mat and Uncle John, to help with some of the chores, and enjoy themselves with Harry and other relatives. The Noland family was often invited to the farm to celebrate holidays, like Christmas, with close friends and family

[141] "Noland Services," *Independence Examiner*, 1 October 1948.
[142] Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 87.

relatives, like the Colgans and Hornbuckles. The Noland family spent several days in Grandview during the Christmas holidays of 1914, according to Harry Truman in a letter to Bess Wallace.[143]

Visits to the Noland house took on a special meaning when 216 North Delaware Street became the base of operations for Harry's courtship of Bess Wallace, who lived directly across the street at 219 North Delaware Street. Harry's reintroduction to Bess Wallace, with whom he had little or no contact since they had graduated from high school together in 1901, began in 1910 with the infamous cake plate incident.

The Noland house provided the setting for this memorable story, which, over the years, reached almost mythic proportions in the annals of Truman family folklore. "Yes," Ethel Noland affirmed many years later, "that's one legend that's true." Noland went on to tell the story. Mrs. Wallace was very neighborly and she loved to send things. Oh, we did back and forth. . . . She would send over a nice dessert or something, just to share it, and here was a plate. We hadn't taken it back and I said [to Harry], 'Why don't you take that plate home; it's been around here a few days,' 'I certainly will,' Harry announced. And with that, he seized the cake plate "with something approaching the speed of light" and walked across the street to 219 Delaware Street, Margaret Truman wrote in her biography of her father.[144] Bess Wallace happened to open the door after hearing the front doorbell ring; their courtship began soon thereafter.[145]

Now the Noland house became not only a place to enjoy the conviviality and close friendship of his cousins and his Aunt Ella; it also became the staging ground for Harry's courtship of Bess Wallace. Harry now visited the Nolands much more often. Harry's Aunt Ella Noland later remembered that he composed a special piano piece, which he played at the Nolands, whose dominant theme sounded something like the special whistles that Bess Wallace and her friends used to signal each other.[146] "He could stay here very easily, which he did, sometimes two or three times a week," Ethel Noland recalled years later. "He'd come here first and get all freshened up before he went to see his lady love," Ardis Ragland Haukenberry remembered from her teenage years living in the Noland house.[147] "He would stay here all night [in the front parlor or on a sofa in the living room] if he had a date over there [at the Wallace house], because it was a long trip to go out there. . . . That was before he got the Stafford," Ethel

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[143] Harry S Truman to Bess Wallace, December 1914, Family Correspondence File, Harry S. Truman Library.
[144] Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 103.
[145] Margaret Truman, *Bess W. Truman* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 30.
[146] Alfred Steinberg, *The Man From Missouri: The Life and Times of Harry S. Truman* (New York: G. P. Putnams Sons, 1962), 28.
[147] Ardis Haukenberry interview, 14 June 1983, 6.

added.[148] Before he bought the Stafford automobile, Harry came to Independence on the Kansas City Southern and the "Frisco" (St. Louis and San Francisco) railroads, according to his cousin Ethel, "which came [through Grandview] to Sheffield [west of Independence], and then he could get on the streetcar and come on in to Independence."[149]

Harry Truman's overnight stays in the Noland house became less frequent when, in 1914, his mother gave him $650 to buy a used 1911 Stafford automobile. Truman's five-passenger Stafford, usually driven open, was one of about 314 manufactured by Terry Stafford in Topeka (and later in Kansas City). Truman was then able to travel between Grandview and Independence on Blue Ridge Boulevard whenever he pleased, not according to the train and streetcar schedules, and he could return to Grandview at night after a full day with Bess and others, taking care of farm business, or attending Masonic and other cultural activities.[150]

Summer outings in the Stafford became a regular occurrence. Over the next three years, Harry often invited Bess and Wallace family members, Nellie and Ethel Noland, and other family and friends to join him on adventures. In the warmer months, this cohort of young adults often went on picnics to the Missouri River waterworks near Sugar Creek, fishing expeditions on the Little or Big Blue rivers, and jaunts through the countryside in the "machine." Harry's good times with Bess, the Noland sisters, the Wallace family, and others continued until the spring of 1917, when the United States declared war against Germany and entered the Great War (World War I). Harry Truman enlisted in the army, sold his Stafford, and was away at war until the early summer of 1919.[151]

During Harry Truman's two years away in the army, he wrote to the Noland family often, as he noted in his frequent letters to Bess Wallace, to whom he was then engaged.[152] None of his letters to his favorite aunt and cousins, however, have apparently survived. A month after his return to Independence from the war, in June 1919, Harry and Bess were married, after a nine-year courtship. The Nolands attended the wedding. Many years later, Ethel Noland remembered well Truman's radiance that day. Not long after that, the newlyweds took up residence in the Gates-Wallace house across the street from the Noland house. Although greatly involved in the daily lives of the Wallace family—

[148] Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 86.
[149] Ethel Noland interview, 9 September 1965, 84; Jane Wall, "When Independence Knew Them as 'Harry and Bess'," *Kansas City Star*, 15 April 1945.
[150] Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Dear Bess* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 162.
[151] David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 92-93.
[152] Ferrell, ed., *Dear Bess*, 286.

Bess's mother, who lived with the Truman couple, and her two brothers who lived with their wives in separate Bungalow-style houses next door to the large Gates-Wallace house—Harry often dropped in on the Nolands. Holidays continued to be a special time for Noland family visits. Harry began his regular practice of walking across the street on Thanksgiving and Christmas to spend time with the Nolands at 219 North Delaware Street.

Between 1919 and 1923, the Nolands witnessed, first-hand, Harry Truman's three-year experiment with business, as co-owner of a Kansas City haberdashery, and his first venture into local politics, as the judge (county commissioner) for the rural eastern portion of Jackson County. The Noland family remained busy with their own full lives during these four years. Joseph Noland had by then retired from the real estate business and completed his final two-year term on the Independence City Council. Ruth Ragland and her three children, then adults, had finished their education in Independence schools and moved out of the Noland house. Nellie Noland was teaching at the Bristol School in Kansas City. Ethel Noland then taught at the Benjamin School.

Joseph T. Noland

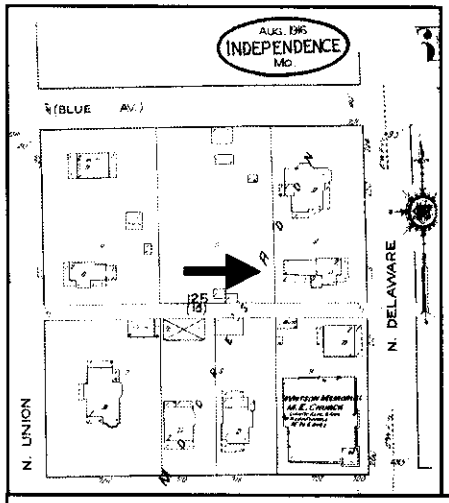
Ella Noland's husband, Joseph T. Noland, fifty-nine-year-old family patriarch in 1906 and the only man in the Noland house other than young Robert Ragland, became a surrogate father to his Ragland grandchildren. Joseph Noland's deep involvement with his daughter's children may have been spurred by Noland's poignant memory of losing both of his own parents at a young age. Outside the home, Joseph Noland continued to pursue real estate, acting as a department manager in the Walter Rider Real Estate Company around 1906. He may have started his own real estate business soon afterwards. In 1911 and 1914, Noland's real estate office was located in the First National Bank building on the courthouse square. Noland retired in the mid-1910s when he was in his late sixties. Joseph Noland became actively involved in city government late in his life. He served his first two-year term on the Independence City Council from 1910 to 1912, under Mayor Llewellyn Jones. He then served two additional two-year terms, from 1914 to 1916 and from 1916 to 1918, while Christian Ott, Jr., was mayor of Independence. Noland continued his active involvement in the Baptist Church, serving as a deacon. Joseph Noland gained a widespread reputation for his integrity, strong sense of justice, and service to the Independence community.[153]

[153] *City Directories of the United States, Kansas City, Missouri*, 1905, (microfilm, Reel 4) Woodbridge, Conn.: Research Publications, Inc., 1986; *Independence City Director*, (Kansas City, Mo.: Gate City Directory Company, 1911 and 1914); Pearl

Life in the Noland house changed dramatically in the early 1920s. Not long after the Ragland family moved into their own house, the Nolands lost their family patriarch. On January 30, 1923, Joseph Tilford Noland died at age seventy-five at 216 North Delaware Street. Not only the Noland family, but also the Independence community felt a deep sense of loss with his death. The community's high regard for Noland was expressed in his obituary.

> Joseph T. Noland is written in the minds of those who knew him well as a good citizen. He was always on the side of right and justice. His life was unostentatious and simple. . . . Mr. Noland gave his service to the community whenever called upon to do so and his long life in Independence helped to make the city a better place in which to live.[154]

Funeral services took place at the Noland home at 216 North Delaware Street.



This August 1916 Sanborn fire insurance company map of Independence depicts the Noland house after a small, two-story addition was made on the south wall, probably in the early 1910s when the house had eight occupants.

Noland House over the Years

In the early 1920s, the Noland house and yard had changed in only minor ways since the family moved to the property in 1900. By then a very small two-story flat-roofed addition had been built on the south side wall, immediately behind the stairwell. It contained a bedroom on each floor. Sanborn Company fire insurance maps show that this addition was made between 1907 and 1916. It may have been made around 1913 or 1914, when the house's eight occupants felt that the young teenage Ragland children should have their own bedrooms.

Wilcox, *Independence and 20th Century Pioneers. The Years from 1900 to 1928*, (Independence, Mo.: Pearl Wilcox, 1979), 269, 278-79, 351, 375.
[154] "Joseph T. Noland, Dead," *Jackson Examiner*, 2 February 1923.

The house may have been painted a different color on the outside; the cornerboards appear to be a darker color than they were in the early 1900s. Perhaps some of the rooms received fresh wallpaper around the time the small new addition was constructed on the south wall. The luxuriant vine framing the front porch and shrubbery and trees in the yard had matured and grown larger. But the low picket fence across the front property line and the higher slate fences encircle the side and rear yards were little changed since the early 1900s.

The Noland Family and House, 1923-1991
Part 2, Chapter 9