Chapter 9

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Introduction

The Noland family entered a new era at 216 North Delaware Street in 1923. Joseph Noland's death in January that year, and the recent departure of the Ragland family with three teenage children, had a profound effect on life in the Noland house. The volatility and uncertainties characteristic of a fluctuating real estate market, which had financially supported the Noland family in varying degrees of prosperity for over thirty years, probably now had little or no place in the family's concerns or even conversation. And the volatility and uncertainties that accompanied living with three growing children also disappeared.

This genesis in the Noland family occurred just as Independence experienced another boom in building construction and growth. During the first two decades of the 1900s known as the Progressive Era, prosperity spread to a larger segment of the Independence population. The construction of numerous small and large Bungalow-style houses in between and even replacing some of Independence's large older homes provided visible evidence of progressive growth. In 1924 the Noland family witnessed this change nearly on their doorstep when elderly Maria Slack, widow of Anthony Slack, sold her palatial Italianate style home next door at the corner of North Delaware Street and moved away from Independence to live with her daughter, Lulu Slack Brown, in Herrin, Illinois. Before the end of the year, the grand old Slack home was demolished and replaced with three small, closely spaced Bungalow-style homes constructed beside (north of) and a three-story brick apartment building built behind (northwest of) the Noland house on the old Slack property.

In the mid-1920s, the Noland house became and remained for more than sixty years the home of mature aging women. Three of the four Noland family women who lived in the house up until 1986 pursued careers as teachers. Their interests focused on public education, church activities, women's study groups, family and local Jackson County history, painting, quilting, gardening, and cultural activities that Independence and nearby Kansas City had to offer. Although the Noland family women made sure the aging Noland house and yard were maintained, the small household of three residents, then two, then one required no additions or substantial alterations.

Independence also underwent continued change between 1923 and 1986. Veterans who returned from World War I became leaders in the commercial and political life of the city in the 1920s and 1930s. Jackson County residents elected Harry S Truman county judge in 1922, 1926, 1930, and 1932. As county judge (similar to county commissioner), Truman helped develop improved and additional roads in the rural farming areas around

Independence at a time when the automobile had become popularized among a rapidly expanding segment of middle-class Americans. Truman also oversaw the renovation and expansion of the Jackson County Courthouse on the Independence central square, which symbolized the expanding role of all levels of government in planning, regulating, and providing social services to citizens. The Golden Acres Subdivision, the first planned community in Independence made possible by the automobile, came into being in 1931.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, which reached its height of human suffering in 1932-1933, the county and city governments took on an important role in developing and overseeing work relief programs for the unemployed. The Works Progress Administration, in particular, completed many public buildings in the Independence-Kansas City area. Further suburban development continued at an erratic pace. Missouri elected Truman to the U.S. Senate in 1934 and 1940. After serving as Franklin Roosevelt's vice president for only a few weeks in 1945, Harry Truman became the thirty-third president of the United State upon Roosevelt's death in April that year. In 1953 Truman returned to his hometown as a private citizen at the end of his second term as president.

The life and political career of Harry S Truman remained of great interest to all the Noland family women throughout their lives at 216 North Delaware Street. Ella Truman Noland remained Harry Truman's favorite aunt throughout her life. Cousins Nellie and Ethel Noland continued to be his dearest family members and closest confidantes. Truman, throughout his career and retired life, maintained an intimate relationship with the Nolands, by regularly exchanging letters and visiting them when he came home to Independence. Ethel Noland became the nationally recognized authority on Truman-Noland genealogy. Harry Truman routinely turned to Ethel with questions or information about their shared family history.

Independence experienced explosive post-World War II growth that continued for more than three decades. Between 1950 and the mid-1970s, the city's population grew from 37,000 to 120,000 and, during the same period, its land area grew to seventy-eight square miles. The construction of interstate highways and shopping malls began to take their toll on the economic vitality of the heart of old Independence in the 1960s. During this postwar period of booming growth, Noland family members whose own history was intimately linked to the 216 North Delaware Street property aged and died. Truman's favorite aunt, Ella Truman, died in early October 1948 on the eve of Truman's unpredicted re-election as president of the United States. Nellie Truman died just ten years later, in 1958, after

Truman had been back home living across from the Noland house for only five years. Ruth Noland passed away in 1968. Just as with their birth dates, Ethel Noland preceded Harry Truman in death by only a few months. Ethel's death came in August 1971, thus ending a life-long relationship between the Noland family and Harry Truman. Truman passed away in December 1972.

Ardis Haukenberry, Ruth Ragland's daughter and Truman's second cousin, who had grown up in the Noland house and witnessed young Truman's courtship with Bess Wallace, became the last Noland family member to live at 216 North Delaware Street. Her residence extended from 1973 to 1986. Ardis Haukenberry shared Ethel Noland's deep interest in local history, family genealogy, and Harry Truman. Haukenberry reportedly inherited many of her Aunt Ethel's accumulated family records, along with the Noland house after Ethel's death. Haukenberry, who came back to live in the Noland house, during the last twelve years of her life, delighted in recalling stories about Truman and welcoming visitors to the Truman house across the street at 219 North Delaware Street, which opened to the public in the mid-1980s.

Growing Older in the Noland House, 1923-1948

Ruth Noland Ragland Family

After moving from the Noland house in the early 1920s, when all three Ragland children had finished high school in Independence, Ruth Noland Ragland, then in her mid-forties and still widowed, moved with her three children to Fairland Heights west of Independence. All three children, Ardis, Robert, and Josephine ("Jodie"), launched their careers and married lives from their home at 10105 East 18th Street (the address later changed to 9515 East 18th). Ragland family members lived at this address in Fairland Heights for over thirty-five years. (Ruth Noland Ragland's grandson, John T. Southern and his wife, bought the Ragland house at 9515 East 18th after Ruth went to live with her daughter, Ardis Haukenberry, thus continuing family ownership of the house.)[155]

In 1924 Josephine ("Jodie"), Ruth Ragland's youngest daughter, completed her studies at Kansas City Teachers' College. In the fall of that year, at age nineteen, she began teaching the first grade in Manchester School in Kansas City. By 1928,

[155] Helen Ardis Ragland Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Safe Deposit Company" stationary, no date, Sue Gentry Collection, Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Missouri; *Polk's Independence City Directory* (Kansas City, Mo.: R. L. Polk & Company, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1938, 1940, 1942, 1946, 1950, 1954, and 1957).

Josephine had moved back to the Noland house at 216 North Delaware, possibly to be closer to her fiancé, James Allen Southern, who lived with his family on South Pleasant Street in Independence.[156] Josephine had completed her fourth year of teaching, when at age twenty-three she married James Allen Southern on September 22, 1928. Southern was the son of Retta Latimer and long-time Jackson County Circuit Court Judge Allen C. Southern, and the grandson of John Nelson Southern. John N. Southern had come to Independence in 1868 after serving in the Confederate Army during the Civil War; he soon became the owner and editor of the *Independence Sentinel* newspaper, which he eventually sold. William Southern, Jr., James Allen Southern's uncle, founded a new Independence newspaper, the *Independence Examiner*. James Allen Southern began his association with the *Examiner* as a young newspaper delivery boy. At the time of his marriage to Josephine Ragland in 1928, twenty-two year-old Southern had just graduated from the University of Missouri's School of Journalism and had begun working on the news staff of the *Examiner*.[157]

The September 22, 1928 marriage of Josephine Ragland and James Allen Southern took place at the First Baptist Church in Independence. Robert and Ardis Ragland, Josephine's older siblings, participated in the ceremony. Four-year-old Margaret Truman, Harry and Bess Truman's first and only child, carrying a basket filled with rose petals, served as the flower girl. Ella Truman Noland, Harry Truman's aunt, hosted a wedding breakfast at 216 North Delaware Street.[158]

The young Southern couple immediately settled down and began a family in Independence. In 1929 the newlyweds lived at 905 West Maple Avenue. James Southern continued in his position as a reporter for the *Independence Examiner*, in which he probably wrote of the political activities of Harry S Truman. Josephine became involved in Baptist Church activities, club work (the Saturday Club), and local history activities. In June 1929, she and her second cousin, Harry S Truman, attended a ceremony in Kansas City to unveil a bronze marker at the grave of their ancestor, Nancy Tyler Holmes.[159] Josephine's attention turned to her home when, on July 17, 1930, she gave birth to her

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[156] *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1928 and 1930.
[157] John Nelson Southern was the grandfather of both James Allen Southern, who married Josephine Ragland, and Mary Southern, who married George Wallace, thus linking Josephine Ragland and George Wallace by their marriages. W. Z. Hickman, *History of Jackson County, Missouri* (Topeka, Kan.: Historical Publishing Co., 1920), 307-308, 813; "Former Examiner Editor Dies Following Three-Month Illness," *Independence Examiner*, 29 December 1980.
[158] "Ragland-Southern," 22 September 1928, Vertical File: "Newspaper Clippings," Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.
[159] "Honor Memory of Pioneer Woman," *Kansas City Times*, 15 June 1929.

first son, Robert ("Rob") Allen Southern. Two years later, on May 9, 1932, John Tilford Southern was born to Josephine and James Allen Southern. At that time, the Southern family made their home at 224 North Delaware, renting one of the three small new Bungalow style houses constructed in 1924 on the site of the old Slack house. Located at the corner of North Delaware and West Van Horn (Truman Road), the young Southern family was just two doors north of the Noland house at 216 North Delaware and across the street from the Truman home at 219 North Delaware. By 1934, the family had moved to North Union Street and James Allen Southern had become the city editor of the *Independence Examiner*. Not long afterwards, the Southern family moved to North River Boulevard in Independence.[160]

Tragedy descended on the Ragland-Southern family in 1937, just as it had thirty-two years earlier when Josephine's father, Robert Verner Ragland, had died in 1904, two months before her birth. After becoming seriously ill with abdominal pain in late April 1937, Josephine was taken to the Independence Sanitarium (Hospital) on May 4th. The following day, she underwent surgery and, due to profuse bleeding, was given four blood transfusions. On May 13, 1937, Josephine Ragland Southern died of peritonitis at age thirty-two. Her two sons, Robert Allen and John Tilford Southern, were seven and five at the time. Southern, Noland, and Truman family members, including Senator Harry S Truman, crowded into the First Baptist Church where Josephine Southern's funeral services were held.[161]

After Josephine's death, widower James Allen Southern moved with his two young sons to his parents' home at 1207 South Main Street in Independence. He continued as city editor of the *Independence Examiner* for the next six years. In the early 1940s, he married again. Edith L. and James Allen Southern had no children of their own. Beginning in 1943, he worked at public relations jobs until in the mid-1950s, when he returned to the *Examiner* as managing editor. Later he edited newspapers in nearby Liberty, Clinton, Raytown, and Pleasant Hill. He entered the newspaper brokerage business near the end of his long career in journalism. James Allen Southern died in 1980 at age seventy-five.[162]

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[160] Sanborn Map Company, *Independence, Missouri*, August 1926 (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1926); *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1930, 1932, and 1934; "Truman Attends Funeral," *Missouri Democrat*, 21 May 1937.
[161] "Death Summons Mrs. Southern, 32, of Independence" and "Mrs. J. A. Southern Dies," Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library; Truman Attends Funeral," *Missouri Democrat*, 21 May 1937.
[162] *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1938, 1940, 1942, and 1954; "Former Examiner Editor Dies Following Three-Month Illness," *Independence Examiner*, 29 December 1980; "President's Aunt, 97, Monday Remembers His Birthday May 8," Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

The two young Southern boys remained close to the Noland-Ragland families, spending much time with them while they were growing up. On one occasion, when the boys were teenagers, Ethel and Nellie took Rob and John Southern on a vacation to Zion and Grand Canyon national parks for about ten days.[163] In July 1948, Rob, John, Nellie, and Ethel celebrated together the Democratic Party's nomination of Harry Truman for the presidential election.[164] On the eve of Robert Southern's marriage in 1952, Harry Truman referred to Nellie and Ethel Noland as "*loco parentis*" (in place of parents) to the two boys, suggesting the sisters' deep involvement in raising Josephine's children.[165] John Tilford Southern, in particular, maintained a long, enduring relationship with the families. He has recalled often visiting his great aunts Nellie and Ethel, and his great grandmother, Ella, at their home on North Delaware Street. John Southern likewise spent time with his grandmother Ruth Ragland and his Aunt Ardis Ragland Haukenberry on East 18th Street

Robert and John Southern, the grandsons of Ruth Noland Ragland, Nellie and Ethel Noland's older sister, spent much time in the Noland house after the death of their mother in 1937. Here they celebrated Christmas with the Noland family. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

Robert Truman Ragland, Ruth Ragland's second child and nephew of Nellie and Ethel Noland, lived with his mother and older sister, Ardis, at 10105 (later 9515) East 18th Street in

[163] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, Personal File: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[164] Nellie Noland to Harry S Truman, 20 July 1948, Personal File: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[165] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 11 May 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Fairland Heights, from the early 1920s through the 1930s. His job as a collector at the First National Bank apparently ended in the mid-1920s. He then worked as a clerk through the 1930s depression years. Robert Ragland married Helen Louise Miller around 1940, and the couple took up residence in Kansas City. In the late 1940s, Ragland lived at 4350 Rockhill Road; however, most of his life he lived at 602 West 40th Street in Kansas City.[166]

Ardis Ragland, Ruth Noland Ragland's oldest child, continued to teach the third grade at Longfellow Elementary School in Kansas City, after beginning her career there in the fall of 1920. She lived at home with her mother and brother at 10105 East 18th Street in Kansas City until the mid-1930s. For recreation, Ardis took up bridge and became a member of several bridge clubs. Like her aunts, she was a member of the Baptist Church. During the summers of 1935 and 1936, Ardis and a friend went to Denver, Colorado, for summer classes at Denver University and for a vacation in Green Mountain Falls. While in Denver in the summer of 1936, Ardis's long-time beau, Herbert Haukenberry, came to Denver with a wedding ring and proposed marriage to Ardis. Then thirty-seven years old, Ardis Ragland married Herbert Haukenberry in the home of a Baptist minister in Denver on August 20, 1936. They spent the remaining weeks of the summer touring the Southwest.[167]

When Ardis and Herbert Haukenberry returned to Independence, aunts Nellie and Ethel Noland presented the couple with a wedding gift of a handsome rug to lay in the front room of Herbert's home at 1811 South Overton Avenue in Independence. Ardis Haukenberry retired from teaching and devoted her time to housekeeping and cultural activities. She was active in the Baptist Church and a number of cultural and charitable organizations, including the Baptist Memorial Hospital (Medical Center), the Browning Society (founded by Ethel Noland and others in 1926), and the Women's City Club. Ardis was a charter member of the Jackson County Historical Society, and served as a regent of the Independence Pioneers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), as well as a national registrar and national vice chair of membership of the DAR. Herbert joined the Mount Washington Masonic Lodge and, eventually, became a master and teacher of new members. During the years of his marriage to Ardis, Herbert Haukenberry worked as a chief equipment operator and then a department superintendent for American Telephone and Telegraph (AT & T) in

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[166] *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1930, 1932, 1938, 1940, and 1942; "Truman a 'Son' to Aunt," Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[167] Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Safe Deposit Company stationary," Gentry Collection.

the late 1930s and early 1940s. He then clerked and worked as an engineer for AT & T in the 1940s and early 1950s. Herbert Haukenberry died on May 7, 1956 after twenty years of marriage to Ardis Ragland Haukenberry.[168]

Ruth Noland Ragland, Ardis Haukenberrry's mother and Nellie and Ethel Noland's older sister, may have continued working as a telephone operator in Kansas City for a short time after the Ragland family moved out of the Noland house in the early 1920s. By the mid-1920s, however, when all three of her children were employed and living at home, Ruth, by then nearly fifty years old, most likely stopped working and devoted her time to housekeeping for her children and participating in various cultural organizations. Like all the Noland family members, Ruth was a member of the First Baptist Church in Independence. She also continued the Noland family's personal link to the Civil War as a "Real Daughter" of the Independence Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Ruth was also an early member of the Jackson County Historical Society. By the early 1940s, the last of her children, Robert, had married, and Ruth lived alone at 9515 East 18th Street. She was in her early seventies in the late 1940s.

Nellie and Ethel Noland

In the fall of 1923, Nellie Noland, then forty-three, began her twenty-fifth year of teaching in both Independence and Kansas City school districts. In 1924 she may have still been teaching at the Ott School in Independence. However, she soon started teaching in Kansas City at the Bristol School (now gone). By the late 1920s or early 1930s, she was teaching at Kansas City's Woodland School, then associated with the Kansas City Teacher's College, where she received wide recognition for her work as a "demonstration teacher."

Ethel Noland in the 1930s, when she taught school in Kansas City. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

In 1937 Nellie Noland, then fifty-six, was named teaching principal of the Pinkerton School in Kansas City. Around 1944,

[168] Ibid.; Sue Gentry, "Ardis Haukenberry, Truman's Cousin, Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 4 November 1986.

near the end of World War II, she became principal of Kansas City's Gladstone School, where she stayed for five years.[169]

Her younger sister, Ethel Noland, also continued teaching between 1923 and 1948. By the early 1920s, Ethel, then in her late thirties, had moved from the Noland School in Independence to the Benjamin Harrison School in Kansas City. During the 1920s and 1930s, Ethel also taught at the Pinkerton School in Kansas City. During most of the 1940s, she taught at the Fairmount School, until moving to Northeast Junior High School in 1948.

During summer vacations from school, Nellie and Ethel Noland enjoyed traveling. Scenic places in the West seemed to be favorite destinations of the Noland sisters. In August 1937, for example, the two sisters and their mother, Ella, took a trip to Colorado.[170] Ten years later, when Ella was ninety-seven and could no longer travel, Nellie and Ethel took a trip in July to Zion and Grand Canyon national parks. Their teenage nephews, Robert and John Southern, went along.[171] The Nolands often took shorter trips to Kansas City and other towns around Missouri.

In 1945 Nellie (seated) and Ethel Noland (standing, center) honored their mother, Ella Noland, with a Browning Society award in the Noland home. Courtesy of the Jackson County Historical Society.

Both Nellie and Ethel extended their roles as educators (both teaching and learning) beyond public schools into other arenas between 1923 and 1948. During these years, the Noland sisters became known for their contributions to the study of the literary arts and history; the Noland house became a gathering place for local cultural activities. Both Nellie and Ethel Noland

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[169] "Miss Nellie Noland, Retired Teacher, Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 8 August 1958; *Independence Examiner*, 24 August 1987; Lisa Gutierrez, "Making Way for Progress," *Independence Examiner*, Vertical File: "Noland Family," Harry S. Harry S. Truman Library.

[170] Harry S Truman to Nellie Noland, 21 August 1937, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[171] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 10 July and 27 July 1946, Personal File: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.

remained active members of the First Baptist Church in Independence.

Ethel Noland began teaching the Euzalia (adult Bible study) class at the church after the death of the former class teacher, around 1945.[172] Nellie became a member and, at one time, served as president of the Missouri Branch of the Huguenot Society (a group that studied the history of the Calvinistic Protestant movement in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a movement which later spread to the United States). Both sisters became more active in study clubs as they matured in their teaching professions. In 1926 Ethel helped organize the Browning Club, devoted to studying the works of poet Robert Browning and his wife. The group met once a month on Monday. Both Ethel and Nellie served as its president several times over the next decades. In 1944 the group started meeting in the Noland house at 216 North Delaware Street and continued gathering there for the rest of its life.[173] Ethel Noland continued to pursue her love of painting. The sisters both enjoyed working in the Noland house gardens.

In memory and honor of their father, who fought under Upton Hayes in the Confederate Army, Nellie Noland was a charter member of the Upton Hayes Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (later disbanded); she and Ethel were "Real Daughters" of that organization since their father had been in the Confederate Army. Both women continued their involvement in the Independence Pioneers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Deeply interested in and supportive of local history efforts, both sisters became members of the

Nellie Noland enjoyed working in the garden behind the Noland house in the 1930s (after the 1924 construction of the brick apartment building and three bungalow houses on the adjoining former Slack property). Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

[172] Ibid., 31 March 1931, Personal File: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[173] "Club Section Dedicated to Mary Ethel Noland," *Independence Examiner*, 19 September 1971; "Miss Nellie Noland, Retired Teacher Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 8 August 1958; Sue Gentry, interview by Jim Williams, 18 June 1991, transcript of taped interview, 43, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

Jackson County Historical Society and the Missouri Historical Society, possibly in the 1940s, as they neared retirement.[174]

The two sisters' interest in both history and their cousin, Harry Truman, encouraged Nellie and especially Ethel Noland to become the "accurate and available source of information and background on Mr. Truman" and his ancestors for the press, particularly after Harry Truman became president in the spring of 1945. Genealogy became a fascinating hobby for Ethel. "Magazine writers, radio and television reporters and free lance writers have used her as one of their best sources since Truman became President," according to the *Independence Examiner* in 1965. "She has made friends with many writers over the world."[175]

Ella (Margaret Ellen) Noland

Ella Truman Noland remained the Noland family matriarch from 1923 through the 1940s. She continued to cook her favorite recipes and attend the First Baptist Church in Independence. She also continued to celebrate and applaud her favorite nephew's political successes. When Harry S Truman won election to the U.S. Senate in 1934, Ella Truman gave the senator-elect, Bess, and Margaret a family dinner at 216 North Delaware Street. The Noland dining room was the site of the victory dinner, according to Ethel Noland many years later.[176] Vietta Garr, the Truman's household helper, assisted with the dinner preparations. Sixteen people attended the special celebratory dinner, including Nellie and Ethel Noland and Martha Truman, Harry's mother.[177]

Ella Truman's relationship with Harry Truman, whom she considered a son, continued to be warm and close, even after the Truman family moved to Washington, D.C. after his election to the U.S. Senate. Truman nearly always dropped in to the Noland house when he came home to Independence to visit his favorite aunt as well as her two daughters, Nellie and Ethel. In July

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[174] "Miss Nellie Noland, Retired Teacher Dies"; "Outstanding Area Women Honored," *Independence Examiner*, 10 April 1965; "Miss Mary Ethel Noland, Truman Cousin Dies, *Kansas City Times*, 11 August 1971; "First Cousin of Truman Dies," *Independence Examiner*, Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[175] Quoted passages from: "Outstand Area Women Honored," "Miss Mary Ethel Noland, Truman Cousin, Dies"; "Miss Nellie Noland, Retired Teacher Dies"; "Forebears of President Truman Settled in This Country in 1666," May 1945, Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[176] Shirley Davis, "Trumans Stopped By to Welcome Them," Davenport, Iowa, *Democrat-Times*, 10 March 1968. Also see: Ardis Haukenberry, interview by Ron Cockrell, 2 March 1984, transcript of taped interview, 27, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

[177] "Family Dinner for the Trumans," Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

1944, in a letter to Bess, Harry wrote that he "saw Aunt Ella and the cousins. Aunt was feeling better than usual but was in bed. . . . She spent the time calling me Mr. Vice President."[178] Less than a year later, when the Nolands readied their house for President Harry Truman's first visit to Independence before traveling to Europe, ninety-six-year-old Ella Noland proudly remarked to her daughters, "My, aren't you proud of your cousin?" Although the anticipation of his coming tired her, she was so looking forward to the visit of her favorite nephew.[179]

The birthdays of Ella and Harry, on May 6 and 8, respectively, continued to be a time of special celebration and warm exchanges. Ella customarily gave or sent Harry Truman linen handkerchiefs for a birthday gift. Truman would send his Aunt Ella greetings on her birthday until his life became intensely hectic as president. Just a month after becoming president and just when World War II hostilities ceased in Europe, Harry wrote to Aunt Ella on May 9, 1945. "I certainly did appreciate the handkerchief which you sent me for my birthday. . . . You had a birthday yourself the day before and I did not even write you a letter. I am sorry that I did not do it."[180] Whenever possible, Truman came to Independence and stopped by 216 North Delaware Street for a special birthday visit. In 1946, on her ninety-seventh birthday, Ethel Noland noted that her mother's "real birthday present will be May 18" . . . when President Truman wrote "saying he will visit her that day."[181] These ritual birthday visits continued up to Ella Noland's last birthday.[182]

Ella Noland's health began to fail when she severely wrenched her back a month after her ninety-seventh birthday. After the accident, Ella Noland was rarely able to leave her bed. By early 1948, her weakened condition made it difficult for her to talk. President Truman made his "birthday visit" to Aunt Ella in early August that year when Truman came home to Independence to vote in the primary presidential election. This was the last time he saw her. In the early morning of October 1, 1948, Ella Truman passed away in her sleep at the family home at 216 North Delaware Street at age ninety-nine. Known throughout the country as President Truman's "favorite aunt," her death was announced in nationally circulated newspapers and news

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[178] Harry S Truman to Bess Truman, (?) July 1944, Family Correspondence File, Harry S. Truman Library. (Quoted in: Sharon Brown, "Noland/Haukenberry House, DRAFT," typescript, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.)
[179] "Just Rest and Visit a Bit," Vertical File, Harry S. Truman Library.
[180] Harry S Truman to Ella Noland, 9 May 1945, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[181] "The President's Aunt," no date, Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[182] "Her 93rd Birthday," no date, Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

magazines. Funeral services were held at the First Baptist Church on October 2nd. President Truman was unable to attend his Aunt Ella's funeral, however, the family of Harry's brother, Vivian and Luella Truman, attended the services. Four of their sons served as casket pallbearers. Ella Truman's death came twenty-five years after the death of her husband, Joseph T. Noland. It marked a transition from one Noland generation to the next and to a post-World War II period of explosive growth and physical development in Independence and across the nation.

The Nolands and Harry S Truman 1923-1953

The relationship between the Noland family and Harry Truman remained intimate throughout his years in government service and politics. Aging Ella Truman Noland remained Harry's favorite aunt. Harry Truman and Nellie and Ethel Noland continued to be as adults what they had been as children--the best of friends and comrades. Although Truman certainly enjoyed maintaining a close associate with many family members, the Noland family remained his dearest relatives. In 1949, then President Truman told Ethel Noland in a letter that he would be glad to have both Nellie and Ethel cast a critical eye over his speeches if they lived closer to Washington, D.C. "As President, I've found from tough experience, [I] can't have too much advice from real friends."[183] A month later he expressed stronger feelings of fondness toward his two cousins. "I can have no greater respect and affection for you & Nellie than I have for my first cousins."[184] Between 1923 and 1953, Truman continued his practice of dropping in on the Nolands as often as he could, even after moving to Washington. Beginning in 1934, a regular exchange of letters between the Nolands and Truman supplemented his visits. And as Harry Truman's political career advanced and the press began to scrutinize his family background with great intensity, Ethel Noland assumed the role of family historian. Beginning in the early 1940s, Truman came to rely heavily on his cousin's ability to research, record, and convey the family's historical background with great accuracy.

During Harry Truman's years as Jackson County judge in the 1920s and early 1930s, he no doubt continued to drop in on the Nolands regularly, just as he had up until then. And because Truman lived conveniently across the street from the Nolands in the home of Madge Gates Wallace, Bess's mother, during the

[183] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 13 August 1949, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[184] Ibid., 8 September 1949, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

1920s and early 1930s, his visits were probably quite regular, even though the Noland and Truman families shared few of the same daily activities and Truman's attention was extended to Wallace family members as well. Because few letters were exchanged during this period, the written record of the Truman-Wallace-Noland relationship is minimal and largely conjectural.

Harry Truman's life long-habit of writing about his activities and his thoughts helps historians and interpreters understand the relationship between the Truman and Noland families. Correspondence between Truman and the Nolands became regular in the mid-1930s, after the Trumans moved to Washington, D.C. as a U.S. senator, and it continued almost to the end of the cousins' lives (even after the Trumans moved back to Independence and became Noland neighbors again in 1953). The regularity of the letters, alone, conveys something about the intimate relationship between Harry S Truman and his Aunt Ella and his two Noland cousins. On average, Truman wrote at least once a month, and sometimes as many as four times a month to the Noland sisters. Often his letters told of his activities and private thoughts about his work as senator, vice president, and then president. Always, he expressed interest in the Nolands' lives and health, and sent greetings to family members, including the Raglands, the Southern boys, and the Haukenberry couple. He never forgot birthdays of the Noland family, particularly Aunt Ella's birthday, which was just two days before his in May. Nellie Noland's birthday, July 26th, was hard for Harry to forget as well; it came on "Turnip Day" in Independence, the day to sow turnips, whether wet or dry.[185] Also he reported the activities of Bess and Margaret and sent greetings from them. Truman customarily apologized if a letter, at least in part, was not written in his own hand. The Nolands delighted in receiving letters from Truman and were equally faithful letter writers. "I am just writing to tell you how much we are enjoying hearing from you so often," Ethel wrote in March 1943. "We are just part of the great silent audience that listens to you whenever you speak by radio or press."[186]

As time went by and Truman received more and more scrutiny by the press and questions from curious individuals, his interest in his family background became more than personal but politically expedient. Not long after he arrived in Washington, Truman began to ask Ethel Noland, who had already taken an interest in genealogy, questions about their shared family history. In early 1938, for example, Truman asked Ethel to send a

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[185] Robert H. Ferrell, ed. *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1980), 187.
[186] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 18 March 1943, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Truman cousin in Kentucky information about the family. "I put him in touch with the genealogical expert in our family," Truman wrote.[187] After becoming president in April 1945, Truman became even more reliant on his first cousin as the family genealogist. "You are going to have to keep track of all the family doings from now on," Truman wrote in early October 1945.[188] Ethel Noland received two more letters from Truman in quick succession asking for help with family record keeping. In a letter accompanying some genealogical information, Truman wrote: "The reason I am sending all these things to you is because you have been interested in the family situation and, it is my opinion, that they ought to all be consolidated in one place and when some body [*sic*] does make inquiry a proper answer can be made for their information. I hate to trouble you with this but you are the only one I know who can take care of it."[189] Less than two weeks later, Truman again expressed his desire for and appreciation of Ethel's help with the family genealogy. "I have no desire or inclination to join the ancestor worshipers but since they are doing a lot of digging around they ought to have the facts. I will sure appreciate it if you will give the facts to them."[190]

Ethel Noland was eager to oblige cousin Harry's request to research and record all genealogical information about the Truman family and respond to questions from the press and individuals curious to know if they might be related to the Truman family. Ethel immediately began to receive and respond to numerous queries about the family that Truman had diverted to 216 North Delaware Street. In December 1945, Ethel reported to Truman that "letters about our family history continue to come in. I haven't found the skeleton in the closet yet, though I suppose there must be one. We seem to have been models of respectability back to Adam and Eve from all accounts so far."[191] About ten days later, Truman, in a letter to Nellie Noland, reported that "reams of information on the family tree" continued to stream into the White House.[192] A day later, Truman expressed to Ethel some relief that "we have found no 'gibbets' in the family tree yet."[193] Five years later, Ethel and Harry Truman

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[187] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 15 February 1938, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[188] Ibid., 3 October 1945, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[189] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 4 October 1945, Truman to Noland Family, Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[190] Ibid., 20 October 1945, Truman to Noland Family, Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[191] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 6 December 1945, Ethel and Nellie Noland, President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[192] Harry S Truman to Nellie Noland, 18 December 1945, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[193] A "gibbet" is a type of gallows with a projecting arm at the top, from which criminals were formerly hung in chains and left suspended after execution. A

had still not found any gibbets in the family tree. "You know," Harry wrote to Ethel, "I do a lot of kidding about ancestry but I'm always as happy as you are when our progenitors turn out be honorable men and women. And so far as we know to date, our ancestors have all been good people."[194]

Harry Truman expressed similar sentiments in another letter written in the spring of 1950. "My immediate and recognized family have been tops in the trying five years just passed and I appreciate it. All the Presidents have had trouble with eager beaver relatives--particularly the Franklin Roosevelts. Thank God I haven't."[195] Delighted with Truman's compliment, Ethel wrote:

> Nellie and I loved your letter in which you said that your recognized relatives had never caused you any embarrassment. You never said a kinder thing than that. If we ever have caused you a moment's chagrin it was through ignorance and not intention. Whether it is true or not it makes pleasant reading. I am reminded of the song, 'I don't believe it, but say it again'.[196]

Always ready to chuckle with Ethel over the foibles of humans and of life, Truman lightly wrote to Ethel again about their family history later that year. "You're right when you say we knew not what was coming when we were having such a fine time 'relatively' speaking. I get a kick out of the folks who are so anxious to be akin to us now, don't you? . . . Mr. Shakespeare said in Midsummer Night's Dream, 'Oh what fools these mortals be!' But life wouldn't any fun if mortals were not what they are."[197]

Actual visits between the Truman and Noland families were far less frequent than the letters they exchanged after Harry, Bess, and Margaret moved to Washington, D.C. in early 1935. While a U.S. senator, Harry Truman may have visited the Nolands two or three times a year, in the summer and on special holidays, such Thanksgiving and Christmas. Between 1935 and 1953, Truman wrote to the Nolands many times expressing a plan or desire to visit them, but later apologizing for not being able to

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gibbet more broadly refers to someone or something held up to public scorn. Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 19 December 1945, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[194] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 16 June 1950, Noland Papers, Presidential Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[195] Ibid., 31 March 1950, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[196] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, undated (probably July 1950), Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

[197] Ferrell, ed. *Off the Record*, 185.

stop by.[198] Most often during his years as senator and president, Harry visited the Nolands alone or with Margaret. During Truman's September 1945 visit to Independence, for example, Harry and Margaret walked across the street to the Noland house with gifts for the entire family--a framed presidential portrait for Aunt Ella and three bottles of perfume from Germany for the three Noland cousins--Nellie, Ethel, and Ruth. Harry played the piano and Margaret sang during their brief visit with the Nolands. Bess often did not accompany Harry for his short jaunts across North Delaware Street to the Noland house, but participated in other gatherings with the Nolands.

Christmas day and dinner were a special time of celebration that nearly always brought the Noland and Truman families together. The Nolands looked forward with great anticipation to a visit from the Trumans on their first Christmas home after Harry Truman had become president. "We are delighted to learn," Nellie wrote to Truman in early December 1945, " that you will be able to be here for Christmas and as has always been the custom, will be with us for a part of the season. The cranberries are ready and I know will pass inspection for I have prepared them according to your chosen recipe."[199] Harry's Aunt Ella Noland had a dinner waiting for the Trumans when they arrived home in Independence that Christmas. In addition to cranberry sauce, Harry's favorite pound cake, made from a recipe that had been in the Truman family two hundred years, awaited his arrival. Soon newspapers around the country printed the recipe of Harry Truman's favorite pound cake, baked that Christmas by Nellie Noland.[200]

Two months before the Christmas of 1946, Nellie wrote of the lovely visit the Nolands had when Bess came home. "We enjoyed having Bess at home," wrote Nellie to Harry, "and had several delightful evenings with her. On[e] evening [there] was a trip to Vivian's to see some of the Texas [c]ousins that we had not seen before."[201] When Truman was unable to be home for

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[198] Harry S Truman to Ethel or Nellie Noland, 12 May 1941 and 22 June 1942; Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 13 August, 1947; all in Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[199] Nellie Noland to Harry S Truman, 13 December 1945, Ethel and Nellie Noland, Personal File, President's Secretary's File, Harry S. Truman Library.
[200] The pound recipe that appeared in many newspapers and recited by Nellie Noland is as follows. Ingredients: 1 lb. white sugar, 1 lb. butter, 1 lb. flour, 9 eggs, 1 tsp. lemon extract. Beat the egg yolks and blend in all other ingredients except egg whites; beat egg whites until stiff and fold into other mixture. Put in pan with flue in center. Bake in very slow oven about two hours. When cool cover with white icing and decorate with walnut halves (originally hickory nut meats, according to Nellie Noland). "Here's Truman's Favorite Cake," "Missouri Pound Cake," both in Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[201] Nellie Noland to Harry S Truman, 13 October 1946, Ethel and Nellie Noland Personal File, President's Secretary's File, Harry S. Truman Library.

Christmas in 1947, the Nolands expressed great disappointment. "We are so sorry you will not be at 219 for Christmas," Nellie wrote to Harry. "It will seem very unusual to miss that cheery part of the season. Bess said before she left it would be impossible for you to get back home. . . . We enjoyed seeing her before she left for Washington."[202]

The time spent with the Nolands was often only a few minutes during each visit, but seemed greatly enjoyed by all. "Glad to get to see you even if it was only for a little while," Truman wrote to Nellie in February 1947.[203] "Pleasure to see both of you and to get a chance for a short visit," Truman wrote to Ethel in a 1948 letter, "I am sorry that it couldn't have been longer."[204] Truman expressed similar sentiments in a September 1949 letter.

> It was a very great pleasure to spend a few minutes with you on the 6th. I wish there had been more time to spend. Being what I am—President of 149 millions of people and the representative to the world of the most powerful nation of all time—I find that I can't do what I'd like to do. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think or wish for such a position. . . . I've made all my family, including my sister, my cousins, and my 'aunts,' as much trouble as if I'd robbed the biggest bank in town, pulled a Ponzi, or taken the savings of all the widows and orphans in Missouri. But I'm still having a good time. [205]

Just a few weeks before Truman's second term ended and he went home to North Delaware Street, he expressed great regret about not being able to stop by the Nolands for a Christmas visit. "I am sorry that your door bell could not have the three rings [Truman's familiar door knock at the Noland house since childhood] on Dec. 25th. I hope Nellie put enough sugar in the cranberry sauce! I'll live to be 90 and not forget. I'm glad you had a 'high old Christmas," Truman continued. "Wish I could have 'dropped in' on that dinner." [206]

Always eager to see the Nolands, Harry Truman invited them to attend speeches or gala events given by or for him. In

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[202] Nellie Noland to Harry S Truman, 9 November 1947, Ethel and Nellie Noland Personal File, President's Secretary's File, Harry S. Truman Library.
[203] Harry S Truman to Nellie Noland, 26 February 1947, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[204] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 21 June 1948, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[205] Harry S Truman to Nellie and Ethel Noland, 8 September 1949, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[206] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 2 January 1953, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

May 1946, for example, the Noland sisters traveled to nearby Liberty to hear Truman give a commencement speech at William Jewell College.[207] Both Nellie and Ethel attended Harry Truman's presidential inauguration in February 1949. "It was a pleasure to have you here."[208] Ethel and Nellie Noland stayed with the Trumans for about a week in the Blair House during their visit to Washington.

Slowing Down and Continuing in the Old Home 1948-1971

The Nolands and Harry S Truman

The Noland sisters and Harry Truman continued their relationship as close friends and confidants after Truman returned to Independence in early 1953 as a private citizen. Even though they were neighbors once again, however, they visited each other far less than they had in the 1890s when the Truman family lived near the Nolands and Harry had spent many hours with Nellie and Ethel poring over his high school tales of Caesar and Cicero in Latin. The explanation is, perhaps, three-fold. As a former president, Truman (and his relatives) could never again be a "normal" citizen(s) and cross the street to visit each other without the likelihood of a crowd forming. Truman also found himself exceedingly busy when he arrived back in Independence, working on plans for the Truman Library, his autobiography, and numerous other projects and speaking engagements. And, finally, in the 1960s, both Ethel Noland and Harry Truman, then in their upper seventies, found it increasingly difficult, due to failing health and inclement weather, to walk across the street for visits.

After Harry Truman returned to Independence in 1953, he and the Nolands visited each other occasionally. "Tell Nellie it seems to me you both owe us a call--a visit or whatever close relations do," Harry wrote to Nellie and Ethel in October 1957. I'll be seeing you on one side of the street or the other. Was surely happy to see you yesterday."[209] Neighborly visits, however, were tedious because of the congestion caused by curious onlookers. "As I told Nellie," Harry wrote to Ethel in 1955, "we had to sit on your front porch a half hour to avoid the hand shakers and

[207] Ibid., 21 May 1946, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[208] Harry S Truman to Nellie Noland, 1 April 1949, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[209] Harry S Truman to Nellie and Ethel Noland, 22 October 1957, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

camera hounds!"[210] Visiting through the crowds became increasingly challenging as both families aged.

Often, instead of making frequent visits, Harry Truman and the Nolands continued their habit of writing letters to each other. Harry and Ethel wrote about twice a month through the 1950s; their correspondence diminished in the 1960s. Family genealogy was the subject of many letters, especially in the 1950s, when both Harry and Ethel were involved in helping gathering and organize material for the staff at the new Truman Library, completed in 1957. Harry and Ethel sometimes made light of their letter writing when they lived only a few paces apart. "Things have come to a pretty pass when neighbors and relatives who live within a hundred yards of each other have to write letters to have a conversation," Harry wrote to Ethel in September 1954. A year later, he quipped: "I think we are setting a record--next door neighbors, first cousins, and have to write when we talk."[211] By the mid-1960s, letters had taken the place of most all visits. In a letter to Harry in August 1965, Ethel noted: "Just heard on the news at 6:00 that you had come home. I'm glad that you are home again as I always am, though I seldom see you."[212]

Their letter-writing habit continued but slowed considerably by the late 1960s. In March 1968, eighty-four year-old Ethel laughed: "'Harry and I exchange letters. Had a letter from him just last week. And we talk by phone. Harry jokes about it, too, but we both have trouble walking and letter writing just seems easier. I've got filing case after filing case of correspondence from him.'"[213] By 1970, letters between the first cousins dropped off as both Harry and Ethel passed their eighty-fifth birthdays.

Ethel and Nellie Noland

During the Truman presidency, both Ethel and Nellie Noland entered their final years as teacher and school administrator, respectively. After serving as principal for five years at the Gladstone Elementary School in Kansas City, in 1949, at age sixty-eight, Nellie Noland became principal at the Bristol Elementary School. She retired from the Bristol School in 1951, just before her seventieth birthday, after teaching and administering in Independence and Kansas City public schools

[210] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 16 May 1955, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[211] Ibid., 22 September 1954 and 21 July 1955, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[212] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 23 August 1965, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[213] Quoted in: Davis, "Trumans Stopped by to Welcome Them," *Times-Democrat*, 10 March 1968.

for fifty-three years.[214] Ethel Noland continued teaching seventh grade at Northeast Junior High School until 1954 when she retired, at age seventy, after fifty-four years of teaching.[215]

The Noland home continued to be a local center of cultural endeavors and learning after the death of Nellie and Ethel's mother and after the both Noland sisters retired. After retiring, Ethel Noland joined the Mary Paxton Study Club, a group organized by Mary Paxton to study classical literature. She served as the club's secretary and later its president.[216] In the mid-1950s, Ethel confessed to Harry Truman that, even after long teaching careers, both she and Nellie enjoyed spending much of their time working on two study classes: the Mary Paxton Study Club and the Browning Society.[217]

The Noland sisters continued to open their house to Browning Society meetings, planned the group's discussions, and presided over the meetings. In 1957, cousin Harry Truman arranged a place for the Mary Paxton club to meet in the new Truman Library. In early October, Truman made opening remarks at the Paxton meeting in the Truman Library[218] In March 1964, after meeting in the Truman Library for a few years, the Mary Paxton Study Club donated money to the Library Educational Fund.[219] Near the end of Ethel Noland's life, the Browning Society nominated her the *Independence Examiner's*

Ethel Noland, retired from a fifty-four-year career of teaching in 1954, continued to devote much of her time to educational and cultural activities. Courtesy of the Jackson County Historical Society.

[214] Miss Nellie Noland, Retired Teacher Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 8 August 1958.
[215] "Miss Mary Ethel Noland, Truman Cousin Dies," *Kansas City Star*, 11 August 1971.
[216] "Outstanding Area Women Honored," *Independence Examiner*, 10 April 1965.
[217] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 20 January 1955, Family Correspondence: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," Post Presidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[218] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 31 July 1957 and 27 September 1957, and Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 22 July 1957 and 27 September 1957; all in Family Correspondence: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," Post Presidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[219] Harry Truman to Ethel Noland, 6 March 1964, Family Correspondence: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," Post Presidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library.

"Outstanding Club Woman" for the year. The two sisters, especially Ethel, also remained deeply involved in the First Baptist Church and dedicated to teaching a Sunday school class for women beginning around 1945. Ethel and Nellie also remained members of the Independence Pioneer Chapter of the DAR. Ethel served as its chaplain for a time. After completion of the Truman Library, DAR meetings were held in a meeting room there. On at least one occasion (in September 1959), Harry Truman was the speaker at a meeting.[220]

Ethel Noland continued her interest in local and family history. After the opening of the Truman Library in 1957, she worked closely with the library staff to answer questions about the Truman family. She prepared a genealogical record of Truman ancestors and connecting families for the Truman Library files. In 1965, Theta Sigma Phi recognized for Ethel Noland for her historical and genealogical work at the Truman Library in Independence; she was honored at that organization's annual dinner.[221] In March 1968, at age eighty-four, the Davenport, Iowa *Times-Democrat* reported that the "perky octogenarian, and avid club goer, spends a lot of time at the Truman Library." According to Ethel, "'Harry's secretary really loads me up with things concerning Truman history.'"[222]

Ethel Noland approached her retired years with humanity and humility, which she expressed with stark simplicity in sentiments clearly understood by her and cousin Harry's generation. "Stay where you are in the old home town . . . in the old home. Be satisfied with your income . . . no way to increase it . . . pay bills promptly. . . . Develop old skills and interests and new ones, too. Do not depend on people nor circumstances to make you happy. Joy is from within . . . And always remember love is the greatest thing in the world."[223] Her words captured her essential outlook on life and her approach to her own and her family's inevitable deaths.

In 1951, only weeks after Nellie Noland retired from teaching, she began showing signs of her seventy years when she started having a series of ailments and accidents. In the summer of 1951 she became ill with apparent gall bladder problems. (In a letter to Nellie in July 1951, Harry Truman mentioned that "the doctors found sand in one of your organs and took out

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[220] *Kansas City Star*, 30 August 1959.
[221] "Club Section Dedicated to Mary Ethel Noland," *Independence Examiner*, 19 September 1971; "Miss Mary Ethel Noland, Truman Cousin, Dies," *Kansas City Times*, 11 August 1971.
[222] Davis, "Trumans Stopped By," *Times-Democrat*, 19 March 1968.
[223] Quoted in: "Outstanding Area Women Honored," *Independence Examiner*, 10 April 1965.

another."[224]) She entered the Independence Hospital in early July for operations.[225] Ill health apparently took her back to the hospital again in early 1952. Truman wrote in mid-January: "It is a relief to know that you are back home and that all you have to do is to gain some weight."[226] Harry Truman continued to express concern for Nellie's health in a letter to Ethel in the late winter of 1952.[227] Only a few days later, Nellie had a bad fall that took her back to the hospital.[228] By March 21, 1952, Nellie seemed to be on the road to recovery from her fall.[229] However, about two months later, Nellie still wasn't well; Truman wrote again to Ethel, expressing his hope that Nellie was "well on the road to recovery."[230] But in July, Nellie was back in the hospital.[231]

By August 1952, Nellie was home again, but her recovery was slow and discouraging. "You tell her," Harry wrote to Ethel, "she'd better write to her cousin and may be [*sic*] he can cheer her up. As you know, that has been my role since we were eighteen."[232] A month later, Harry wrote to cousin Nellie expressing great pleasure that she would be walking again soon and exasperation over apparent incompetent medical care that had made her recovery so long and tedious.

> I am more than happy that you will be walking again soon. You have found out by awful experience what I have been working for in hospital and health care. Doctors are made up of a cross section of humanity as it is. There are good ones, honest ones, conscientious ones, false front ones, and plain incompetents. I am sure happy that you have found a good, competent, and conscientious one. That is what my health program means, to try to educate more honest, conscientious, and able doctors and arrange things so that they can be adequately paid for their work and knowledge.[233]

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[224] Harry S Truman to Nellie Noland, 11 July 1951, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[225] Harry S Truman to Vivian Truman, 12 July 1951, Family Correspondence, President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[226] Harry S Truman to Nellie Noland, 16 January 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[227] Ibid., 3 March 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[228] Ibid., 13 March 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[229] Ibid., 21 March 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[230] Ibid., 4 June 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[231] Ibid., 11 July 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[232] Ibid., 21 August 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[233] Harry S Truman to Nellie Noland, 14 September 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

By late September 1952, Nellie was getting around on crutches and Ethel was able to return to her teaching job at Northeast Junior High School in Kansas City.[234] Nellie, apparently, continued to have physical ailments through 1953, but by December that year, Harry Truman commented: "it looked to me as if you were just about back to normal."[235]

Despite Truman's comment, Nellie Noland probably never regained excellent health after her series of ailments between 1951 and 1953. Her struggle with illness apparently continued for the next five years. In July 1958, Nellie became critically ill. A few days later, on August 8, 1958, Nellie Noland died at the old Noland home at 216 North Delaware Street just after her seventy-seventh birthday.[236]

Ethel Noland began having health problems in the late 1950s. In early 1957, Ethel experienced dizzy spells. Attending to Nellie's health needs probably prevented her from seeing a doctor until June 1959. In a letter to cousin Harry, Ethel noted that she was beginning a series of daily treatments aimed at remedying her two- and one-half year-old problem of dizziness.[237] In response to a letter from Truman, Ethel's doctor explained that Ethel's problem had been caused by a small blood clot in the inner ear and that his prescribed treatments should dissolve the clot and cure the dizzy spells. "However, he added that he was "seriously concerned about her general health. Her blood pressure, especially the diastolic is much too high and she is about 20 pounds overweight. Another clot might form in the same or some other area of the body."[238]

Despite the doctor's concerns, Ethel Noland remained to be a curious learner and avid educator throughout most of her eighties. She continued to work on family history at the Truman Library. She also continued to organize and hold the meetings of the Browning Society in her home at 216 North Delaware Street up until the year of her death, at which time the group disbanded permanently. Mary Ethel Noland died on August 10th, 1971 in the Independence Hospital, at age eighty-eight.[239]

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[234] Ibid., 26 September 1952, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[235] Ibid., 19 December 1953, Family Correspondence: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," Post Presidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[236] "Miss Nellie Noland, Retired Teacher Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 8 August 1958.
[237] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 7 June 1959, Family Correspondence: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," Post Presidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[238] Sam E. Roberts, M.D. to Harry and Bess Truman, 1 July 1959, Family Correspondence: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," Post Presidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[239] "First Cousin of Truman Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 10 August 1971.

The Noland-Ragland Family

After Herbert Haukenberry's death in 1956, Ardis Ragland Haukenberry continued living at 1811 South Overton Avenue in Independence. Shortly after her husband's death, Ardis's nephew, John Tilford Southern, came to her home every evening for several weeks to teach her how to drive and successfully pass the driving test. Ardis Haukenberry continued her attendance in the Bible study class for women at the First Baptist Church. She also maintained her membership in the Saturday Club, the Mary Paxton Study Class, and in the Jackson County Historical Society while her mother was at home. Her association with the Browning Society ended in 1971 since no one was able to lead the group after Ethel Noland's death and the group disbanded that year.[240]

Ruth Ragland, Ardis's mother, remained in her long-time home at 9515 East 18th Street through the mid-1950s, when she was nearly eighty years old. Around the time of Herbert Haukenberry's death, she then went to live with her daughter, Ardis, at 1811 South Overton Avenue. "My time and interest was closer to home since Mother was not well," Ardis explained many years later.[241] Learning how to drive a car surely helped her care for her mother. At age ninety-one, Ruth Ragland's health began to fail. One year later, on September 7, 1968, she died at the Independence Hospital at age ninety-two.[242]

Ardis Haukenberry Comes Home to 216 North Delaware Street, 1973-1986

In November 1973, seventy-four year-old Ardis Ragland Haukenberry moved "'back home' in a house on North Delaware Street in which she had spent many happy childhood days," according to Sue Gentry writing for the *Independence Examiner*. "All the Noland family is gone now, the last daughter, Miss Ethel Noland, having died in 1971. A widow now herself," Gentry explained, Ardis Haukenberry "decided to move back into the house, which became hers in the settlement of the estate."[243]

Haukenberry soon settled comfortably into her childhood home, decorated with many Noland and Truman family pieces of

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[240] Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Safe Deposit Company" stationary, Gentry Collection, Jackson County Historical Society; "Mrs. Ruth Ragland," *Independence Examiner*, 9 September 1968.
[241] Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberry families on "First National Safe Deposit Company" stationary, Gentry Collection.
[242] Ibid.; "Mrs. Ruth Ragland," *Independence Examiner*, 9 September 1968.
[243] Sue Gentry, "She Returns to Live in Home of Childhood," *Independence Examiner*, 15 December 1973.

furniture and pictures. Ardis, actively involved in the Jackson County Historical Society and deeply interested in family genealogy, an interest she had inherited from Ethel Noland, immensely enjoyed being the second cousin of Harry Truman, who had died in 1972, as well as her close proximity to the Truman house across the street, where Bess Truman continued to live. "A special interest I've enjoyed since I moved back here to Delaware is visiting with [t]ourists. When I'm leaving or coming or digging in the yard, I can always stop and visit if they seem interested. . . . Many write back after they get home to tell me how much they appreciated my talking with them, and many also send Christmas cards," Ardis explained in a short autobiographical account of her life.[244]

With Ethel Noland gone, Ardis Haukenberry became the conveyer of local and family history and folklore on numerous occasions. In the mid-1970s, she provided James Ryan, who conducted an in-depth inventory of historic houses in Independence, information about the Noland house and family. She often shared information about local history with *Independence Examiner* journalists as well. She recorded her own personal history for *Examiner* journalist Sue Gentry. In May 1980, Haukenberry opened up her house to the public as part of the Truman Heritage Tour that year, sponsored by the Junior Service League for the benefit of the Waggoner Mansion renovation project in Independence. The Noland house was one of eight stops on the tour. Journalist Sue Gentry, who wrote a story featuring the Noland house, invited people to stop by and hear Ardis tell stories about "Cousin Harry's early years" and see some of the Truman furnishings, many of which came from Kentucky. "A downstairs bedroom is furnished with Truman family walnut furniture, a small bed cut down from a larger one, a dresser, and marble top table. The uniquely designed hatrack in the front hall is Truman furniture also," Gentry noted. "There are three chairs, now with needlepoint seats, from the family collection."[245] In addition, a love seat, a pie safe in the dining room, and a pie safe in the kitchen, were reportedly from the Truman family.[246] In 1983 and 1984, she described her recollections of the Truman house and changes to it in an oral history interview conducted by National Park Service historian Ron Cockrell. In early 1984, she shared her knowledge and

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[244] Haukenberry, handwritten history of Ragland-Haukenberrry families on "First National Safe Deposit Company" stationary, Gentry Collection: Sue Gentry, "Truman Cousin's Home Open to Guests," *Independence Examiner*, 8 May 1980.
[245]Gentry, "Truman Cousin's Home Open to Guests."
[246] "Noland House, January 23, 10:00 am," conversation with Mrs. H. H. Haukenberry, Shirley Holder, Barbara Parrino, Pat Burrus, Virginia Miller, and Mary Sue Luff present, typescript, no year, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

personal possession of the McCoy medal, given for academic excellence to Independence grade school children in the early 1900s, with an *Examiner* journalist.[247]

Ardis Haukenberry remained interested in education and history, even as her health began to fail in her eighty-sixth year. In February 1986, she left 216 Delaware Street for the last time to live with her nephew, John Southern and his wife Jane in Sunrise Beach, Missouri. Nine months later, on November 2, 1986, Ardis Haukenberry died in a nursing home in Versailles, Missouri, at age eighty-seven.[248]

The Noland Property over the Years 1923-1986

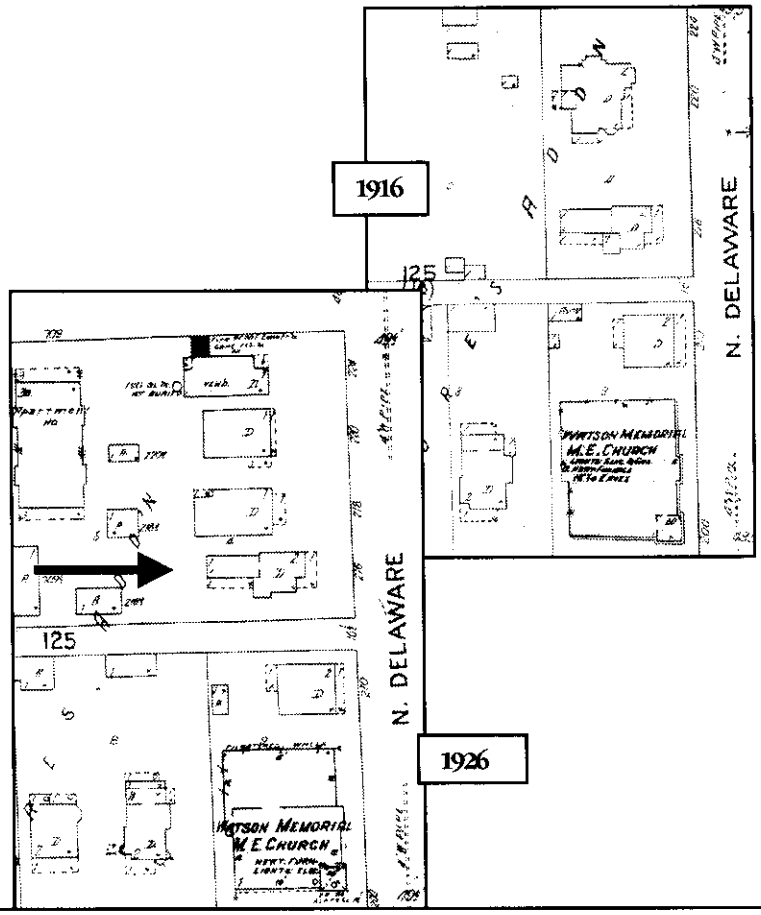
During the sixty-three years between 1923 and 1986, the Noland house property at 216 North Delaware Street underwent relatively few changes. The size of the family diminished during this period; thus, new additions would not have been needed. The only new "addition" to the family requiring cover (particularly in the winter) was the family automobile. Probably in the early 1920s, a garage replaced two small outbuildings (possibly old outhouses) along the alley to the rear of the house. Maps of Independence published in 1916 and 1926 by the Sanborn Company showing the Noland property record this change. Ethel Noland makes reference to the family garage in a letter to Harry Truman written in 1945. "The burglars broke into our garage night before last, took one look at the car, and wouldn't have the old thing, thank goodness!"[249]

In 1945, immediately after Harry Truman became president upon the death of Franklin Roosevelt, it seems that the Noland sisters felt it necessary to spruce up their house and yard for Harry's first homecoming in June that year and for the press and public. Both sisters were still teaching and at the peak of their careers as teachers, and so could better afford repair and maintenance work than in the 1950s and 1960s. It is probable that they had the house freshly painted in the spring of 1945 and the yard carefully tended.

The press described the Noland property on the eve of Truman's June 1945 visit. "Noland house is painted a gleaming white . . . and the grass in the yard is neatly cut. . . . The Noland home

[247] Charles Burke, "McCoy Medal Will Honor Top Students," *Independence Examiner*, 18 January 1984.
[248] Sue Gentry, "Ardis Haukenberry, Truman's Cousin, Dies, *Independence Examiner*, 4 November 1986; "Mrs. Ardis R. Haukenberry," *Kansas City Times*, 4 November 1986.
[249] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, 6 December 1945, Ethel and Nellie Noland, President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.

remains practically the same as when President Truman stayed there while courting Bess Wallace."[250] (The Truman house was painted that spring as well.)



These August 1916 and August 1926 Sanborn fire insurance maps of Independence show that the form of the Noland house remained unchanged during that decade, however, an automobile garage (marked "A") in the rear (west) yard replaced two small sheds. The Slack property to the north witnessed the demolition of that family's large home in 1924 and the construction of three dwellings and a brick apartment house with a multiple-auto garage.

[250] "Just Rest and Visit a Bit, 15 June 1945, " Newspaper Clippings, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Five years later in 1950, a porch addition was made to the Noland house. It is likely that the new porch replaced an older open porch on the south side of the house's rear wing. (A careful physical examination of the porch in 2000 revealed that this porch is relatively new in its construction materials and methods.) Construction of a Noland porch was recorded in letters between Ethel Noland and Harry Truman. "Everyone seems to have gotten 'porch fever,'" Harry wrote in early July 1950. "You built one, so did Lizzie, and Mary Jane [Truman, Harry's sister] is at it now."[251] Ethel responded: "Yes I agree that building porches has reached the epidemic stage. You started something when you built the White House porch. The rest of us are mere copy cats."[252]

Interior changes to the Noland house were probably also minimal between 1923 and 1986. Wallpapering (not painting) the walls probably occurred a little more often after Truman became president and before the Noland sisters retired from teaching. In July 1950, shortly after carpenters had begun work on the Noland porch, Ethel described their wallpapering adventure to her first cousin. "When we got the porch under way we decided to paper the house. When the paper was pulled off the walls a lot of plaster came with it so we had to plaster. We went through a nightmare of disorder, but tonight we are at peace and I was able to find pen and paper again."[253] Sympathetically Harry told Ethel that "I am sorry about the plaster but your experience with paper and plaster is like the experience at the White House" (during its renovation, which occurred at the same time).[254]

Richard Jaques, then a teenager who worked on the wallpapering job with his boss, Elijah Ellsworth Leatch, recalled the plaster incident in an oral history fifty years later. Jaques remembered that the plaster fell from the ceiling in the "living room" (behind the front parlor) with the fireplace and a hutch along the wall, or the dining room (west of the living room). Jaques was in the process of removing seven or eight layers of wallpaper on the ceiling when the plaster underneath, laced with horsehair that no longer held the aged plaster together, started coming down.

> Well, it came down around me on that duck board [between two ladders] and he—Mr. Leatch had gone to get paper from somewhere. And when he came back, boy, he

[251] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 7 July 1950, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[252] Ethel Noland to Harry S Truman, undated July 1950, Personal File: "Ethel and Nellie Noland," President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Harry S Truman to Ethel Noland, 20 July 1950, Noland Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

> wasn't happy at all because he thought he was going to have to pay for all that himself. . . . And he was reading me the riot act and Miss. [Ethel] Noland had come in. She let him know that it was not my fault. And his attitude changed right in a hurry.[255]

Jaques remembered that he and Elijah Leatch left their wallpaper job until after plasterers repaired the ceiling. They then came back to finish the job of wallpapering both the ceiling and walls of the dining room and possibly one other room in the house.[256]

One other interior change may have taken place in the early 1950s. Nellie's ill health, beginning in the summer of 1951, may have prompted the sisters to move Nellie's bedroom to the ground floor and to add a small bathroom across the hall from the bedroom. The addition of this bathroom would have slightly reduced the size of the dining room. This interior addition probably would have occurred between 1952 and 1954.

It is unknown but unlikely that other interior or exterior changes took place after Ethel's retirement in 1954. The income of both sisters would have been reduced and fixed. This was the case as well when Ardis Haukenberry, retired from teaching long before, came to live in the Noland House in 1973, when in her mid-seventies.

The landscaping around the house probably changed relatively little after the Nolands retired. Trees (maple and paw paw) and lilac bushes grew larger in the yard and at the edges of the property. Bulbs and other perennial flowers probably continued to bloom in flowerbeds along the rear (west) property line and at certain places along the house foundation. A chain-link fence replaced the wood picket fence enclosing the yard, possibly in the 1950s or 1960s. Honeysuckle became established along this fence along the west and south property lines. Ivy began to proliferate on the retaining wall along the sidewalk across the front yard.[257]

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[255] Richard Jaques, interview by Gail E. H. Evans, 26 May 2000 (in the Noland House), transcript of taped interview, 6, 9-11, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[256] Ibid., 11-12, 15.
[257] Michael Shaver, memorandum to superintendent, November 29, 1987, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

Renting the Noland House
1986-1991

After Ardis Haukenberry moved out of the Noland house, it sat vacant between February and July 1986, when it was rented. The renting couple separated during the next year; the wife moved out of the house in July 1987. The house was rented again, shortly afterward, for about $400 to $450 a month. By that time, Ardis had died and her nephew and his wife, John and Dawna Southern, had inherited the property.[258]

At the end of July 1987, a man in his forties with two teenage sons and a daughter moved into the Noland House. The family had recently moved from Texas to Independence. The renter was probably Michael L. Nissen, according to the Polk city directory for Independence in 1988. Frank Fry rented and occupied the house for approximately two years, 1989-1990.[259] John and Dawna Southern sold the Noland House to the National Park Service in September 1991. The Noland house keys were turned over to the Park Service on September 17th.

[258]Ibid.
[259]Ibid.; *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1988, 1989, and 1990.

The Noland Family and House, 1923-1991
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