Chapter 10

The Wallace and Gates Families in Independence

Introduction

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David and Madge Gates Wallace

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Part 2, Chapter 10

Introduction

The family of David Willock Wallace arrived in Independence in 1833, when the town was a bustling center of trade for Santa Fe Trail freighters. In mid-nineteenth-century Independence, the Wallaces witnessed first-hand the mounting tensions and outright conflict between federal and southern sympathizers preceding and during the Civil War. The family of Margaret Elizabeth (Madge) Gates moved to Independence from Illinois immediately after the Civil War. Both Wallace and Gates families contributed to the commercial and political up-building of Independence in the nineteenth century. David Willock Wallace, born in Independence, and Madge Gates, born in Port Byron, Illinois, met and married in Independence in 1883, when the town was experiencing a period of great prosperity and robust growth. Between 1885 and 1900, the Wallace couple had six children (two of whom died in infancy). Frank and George Wallace were the oldest sons, and the younger brothers of Bess Wallace Truman. Life for the David and Madge Wallace family changed dramatically and forever when David Wallace, plagued by debts and depression, took his life in June 1903. His widow, Madge Wallace, and her four children, ranging in age from three to seventeen, sought relief from the pain, shock, and shame of his suicide in Colorado Springs. After nearly a year there, the Wallace family returned to Independence in 1904 to begin life anew.

The Wallace Family in Independence

The father of Frank and George Wallace, David Willock Wallace, was the son of Benjamin F. and Virginia Willock Wallace, born in 1817 in Campbellsville, Green County, Kentucky.[260] He and three brothers (Reuben, John M., and J. Stamper) came to Independence from Kentucky in October 1833, just five years after the original townsite was surveyed and platted. Then a bustling trading center for caravans heading southwest over the Santa Fe Trail, Independence boasted a population of 250 residents. The Wallace family was among the town's pioneer

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[260] Benjamin Wallace's parents, Thomas and Mary Percy Wallace, came to Jackson County in 1833 with their family. They settled on a farm south of Independence (on what is now U.S. highway 40). They raised ten children: three daughters and ten sons, one of whom was Benjamin, Bess Truman's grandfather. Henry A. Bundschu, ""Harry S. Truman, The Missourian," *Kansas City Star*, 26 December 1948. For a more comprehensive history of the Wallace family, see: Ron Cockrell's *The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study* (Omaha, Neb.: National Park Service, 1985), 41-46.

settlers.[261] One brother, Rueben Wallace, took advantage of the mercantile opportunities in town and engaged in business, becoming the co-owner of a successful general merchandise store in Independence, which supported the construction of a palatial residence in town.[262]

Benjamin F. Wallace, like so many others at that time, made several trips across the Santa Fe Trail as a trader. When Independence began to lose its trading vigor to Westport Landing and other landings further upstream on the Missouri, Benjamin Wallace went into the mercantile business operating a store on the north side of the courthouse square. Eventually, Wallace went into banking and became a member of the firm of Waldo and Wallace bankers of Independence.[263] Benjamin Wallace, who was known as a quiet and thoughtful man with sound ethical judgment, was elected by Jackson County residents to represent them in local and state government. He served as the mayor of Independence in 1869. From then until his death in 1877, he represented Jackson County in the Missouri State Assembly (Legislature).[264] Later in life, Benjamin Wallace also became an active early member of the Old Settlers of Jackson County, a group organized in 1871 to recognize and record the early history of Independence and Jackson County. Benjamin Wallace died at age sixty in 1877, leaving his wife, Virginia, a widow for the next thirty years.[265]

In 1847, twenty-nine-year-old Benjamin F. Wallace had married the young Virginia Willock, a native of Green County, Kentucky, born on May 20, 1824. Virginia Willock's father, David Willock of Green County, Kentucky, had come to Missouri in 1830. He served as a captain in the Black Hawk War, and later became a general in the army. He died in Palmyra, Missouri, in 1854.[266]

Virginia and B. F. Wallace had two children: Mary Albina Wallace, who was born in May 1848 and died less than four years later, and a son, David Willock Wallace, born on June 15, 1860,

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[261] W. Z. Hickman, *History of Jackson County, Missouri* (Topeka, Kans.: Historical Publishing Co., 1920), 246-47; *Political History of Jackson County: Biographical Sketches of Men Who Have Helped to Make It* (N.p.: Marshall & Morrison, 1902), 14.

[262] Pearl Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers* (Independence, Mo.: Pearl Wilcox, 1975), 53, 158; *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Jackson County, Missouri* (Independence, Mo.: n.p., 1877), 61.

[263] Bundschu, "Harry S. Truman, The Missourian."

[264] *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), 182; Margaret Truman, *Bess W. Truman* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 3; "Services for Frank Wallace Monday," *Independence Examiner*, 13 August 1960.

[265] Hickman, *History of Jackson County*, 92, 188, 240-47.

[266] "Mrs. Wallace Is Dead," *Kansas City Star*, 5 December 1952, Newspaper Clippings, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Library.

three months after the declaration of civil war between the North and South. David Willock Wallace attended the Independence public schools, and took a classical course of classes at Finley's High School.[267]

Like his own father, David Willock Wallace earned a living from employment in government jobs. In 1874, when only fourteen, Benjamin Wallace used his influence to have David Wallace appointed an assistant docket clerk of the Missouri State Senate. Three years later, he became assistant engrossing clerk. In late April 1878, the year after his father died, David Wallace was appointed deputy recorder of marriage licenses in Independence.[268] He still held this position five years later, when, at twenty-three, he married Margaret Elizabeth Gates.

The Gates Family in Independence

Frank Wallace's mother, Margaret Elizabeth ("Madge") Gates, was the daughter of George Porterfield and Elizabeth Emery Gates, who came to Independence from Rock Island County, Illinois, in 1866, when Jackson County was recovering from the social scars left by the Civil War. George P. Gates had been born on April 2, 1835 in Lunnenburgh, Essex County, Vermont, and moved with his family to Port Byron, Rock Island County, Illinois in 1850. For about ten years, George Gates engaged in the lumber business there. Elizabeth Emery, his future wife, was a native of Rounds, North Hampshire, England, born on February 21, 1841. She had come to the United States at age seven. Elizabeth Emery and George P. Gates married in Moline, Illinois in 1860 and moved to Independence soon afterward.[269]

George and Elizabeth Gates arrived in Independence around the time that other Gates family members came to town, including George P. Gates's parents, George Washington and Sarah Todd Gates, and several of his brothers. The elder George W. Gates, who had served as a United States marshal in Vermont under President Van Buren (1837-1841), served as a presiding judge of the Jackson County Court (similar to today's county commission) in 1868-1869. Three years later, the elder George

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[267] *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 1881, reprint, 881; Bundschu, "Harry S. Truman, The Missourian."
[268] *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 1881, reprint, 881; Truman, *Bess W. Wallace*, 3; Bundschu, "Harry S. Truman, The Missourian."
[269] "Closed a Useful Life, *Jackson Examiner*, 28 June 1918; "Mrs. George P. Gates Dead," *Independence Examiner*, 20 June 1924. For a more comprehensive history of the Gates family, see Cockrell's *The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study*, 18-27.

W. Gates was elected to the Missouri State Legislature (1871-1872).[270]

George P. Gates's younger brother, Edward Payson Gates, was born in Lunnenburgh, Vermont in 1845 (March 5th). He graduated with high honors from Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1867. Arriving in Independence soon afterward, he entered the law office of Comings and Slover, and was admitted to the Missouri bar in 1868. In 1877, Gates formed a partnership with William H. Wallace, which became known as Gates and Wallace. John A. Sea and Theodoric Boulware Wallace later joined the firm. The firm was dissolved in early 1896. That year, Edward Payson Gates was nominated by the Democratic Party and elected by county residents to serve as circuit court judge of Jackson County. He also served as the Independence city attorney from 1886 to 1890[271]

George Porterfield Gates also distinguished himself in the community, becoming one of Independence's leading businessmen. After first arriving in town in 1866, he engaged in the lumber business, which milled lumber to satisfy the needs of the post-Civil War building boom. He also became active in local government, school, and church affairs. From 1867 to 1869, he served as one of three justices on the Jackson County Court. In 1869-1870, he was the Jackson County Superintendent of Schools. Gates also sat on the first board of trustees of the Independence Female College, founded by the First Presbyterian Church in 1871. George Gates was active in the First Presbyterian Church, where he served as an elder for many years.[272]

Around 1880, George P. Gates joined the flour milling company of Peter Waggoner and Son, when the Waggoners enlarged and modernized the mill. Nearly twenty-five years earlier, in 1866, Peter Waggoner had bought a sizeable flour and woolen mill in Independence (originally built in 1846 by Jacob Haller and later bought by John A. Overfelt), near present-day Pleasant Street and Pacific Avenue.[273] In 1883, William H.

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[270] Howard L. Conard, ed., *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri: A Compendium of History and Biography for Ready Reference, Vol. III* (New York: Southern History Company, 1901), 8; "Closed a Useful Life," *Jackson Examiner*, 28 June 1918; *Jackson Sentinel*, 8 December 1898.

[271] Conard, ed., *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri, Vol. III*, 8-9; *:Political History of Jackson County*, 13; "Judge E. P. Gates Dead," *Independence Examiner*, 22 April 1920, typescript, Vertical File: "Judge E. P. Gates," Harry S. Truman Library; "Closed a Useful Life," *Jackson Examiner*, 28 June 1918.

[272] *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 1881, reprint, 178; 236; Nancy M. Ehrlich, *Ask Now of the Days That Are Past: A History of First Presbyterian Church, Independence, Missouri* (Independence, Mo.: First Presbyterian, 1990), 123.

[273] *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 1881, reprint, 646. According to one source of information, John A. Overfelt, the owner of this mill, in 1857, on Spring Creek, bought milling machinery from E. A. Hickman, who had closed his mill

Waggoner, son of Peter Waggoner, and successful lumberman George P. Gates organized and incorporated as the "Waggoner-Gates Milling Company." George P. Gates became the company's secretary-treasurer. A few years later, the mill was again reorganized; Judge Edward P. Gates (George Gates's brother), C. C. Chiles, and Thomas L. Wilson joined George Gates and William Waggoner as the mill owners. Over the years, several enlargements were made to the mill and adjoining grain elevator. By 1903, the Waggoner-Gates Milling Company grain elevator increased its holding capacity from 75,000 bushels to 350,000 bushels. The mill produced 1,000 barrels of flour a day. The mill's twelve-story grain elevator and rolling mill, located less than a mile south of the courthouse square, dominated the Independence landscape. The Waggoner-Gates Company's "Queen of the Pantry" flour, a brand name used at least as early as 1867 (and a registered trademark since 1878), was distributed throughout the Midwest. The Waggoner-Gates Mill provided employment for hundreds of Independence families over the years, bolstered the economy of the community, and gave farmers in the area a place to sell their harvest and buy grain for their stock. Frank Gates Wallace, who with other Gates family members inherited stock in the company from George P. Gates, would later take part in the daily operation of the Waggoner-Gates Milling Company and, eventually, help direct it.[274]

Even before arriving in Independence in 1866, George P. and Elizabeth Emery Gates had begun raising a family. In Port Byron, Illinois, Elizabeth had given birth to three daughters: Margaret Elizabeth ("Madge"), born on August 4, 1862; Maud Louise, born on February 23, 1864; and Myra, born in 1866. After arriving in Independence, four more children were born to the Gates couple: George Walter, born in 1868; Frank E., born in 1871; Tillie, born in 1874 (who died in 1877), and Bessie, born in 1883 (who died in 1884).[275]

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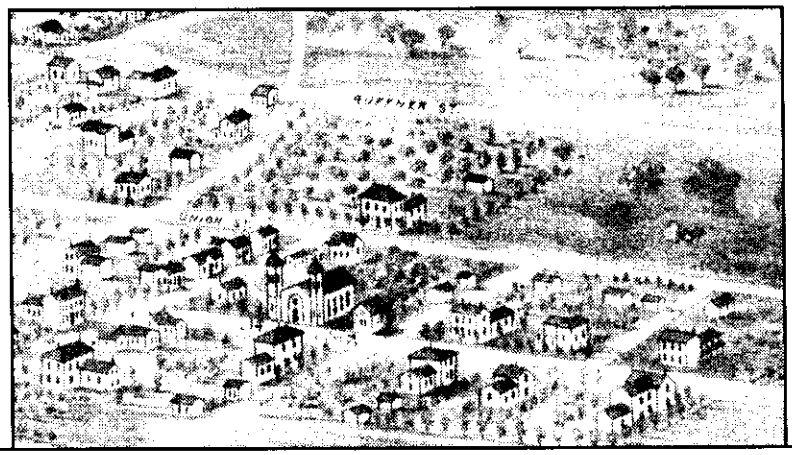
near Hickman Mills in southern Jackson County. Hickman sold the lumber from his mill to Solomon Young, who used it to construct a large barn on his property, the future Young-Truman farm near Grandview. "History Burns With an Old Barn," *Kansas City Times*, 1 November 1966.

[274] "Old Waggoner-Gates Flour Mill Threatened After 50 Years Life," c. 1933 and "Family Dynasty Ends With Waggoner's Death, *Independence Examiner*, 8 November 1976; both articles in Vertical File: "Waggoner-Gates Mill," Harry S. Truman Library; "Closed a Useful Life," *Jackson Examiner*, 28 June 1918; Pearl Wilcox, *Independence and 20th Century Pioneers: The Years from 1900 to 1928* (Independence, Mo.: Pearl Wilcox, 1979), 118-19.

[275] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, no page number (family tree); Cockrell, "A President's Private Domain," *Gone West* 2: 2 (Spring 1984), 2.

Gates Property—Site of the Wallace Sons' Future Homes

When the George and Elizabeth Gates family first arrived in Independence in 1866 with three young children, they may have lived for about a year with the elder George W. Gates, who had bought a farm about three and one-half miles southwest of the Independence courthouse square. In June 1867, George P. Gates bought lots 2 and 3 in Moore's Addition for $700. Historical evidence and a careful visual examination of the extant Gates-Truman house strongly suggest that a small house, dating from 1848-1850, stood on the Gates family's newly acquired property, at the corner of North Delaware Street and Tanyard Road (later renamed Blue, Van Horn, then Truman Road). No doubt in need of additional space for their growing family, George and Elizabeth Gates enlarged the diminutive dwelling by constructing a two-story addition on the west side of the existing structure.[276] An 1868 "Bird's Eye View of the City of Independence, Missouri," map depicts the new two-story addition with the older one-story ell. To the east side (rear) of the present



This enlargement of a section of the 1868 bird's-eye view of Independence depicts two small buildings on open land behind the two- and one-story Gates house (lower left), which would later become the site of the two Wallace brothers' homes on West Truman Road. A. Ruger, *Bird's Eye View of the City of Independence, Jackson County, Missouri* (1868), reprinted by the Jackson County Historical Society.

Truman house stood two small buildings, on the adjoining lot 1, that fronted on Blue Avenue.[277]

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[276] A comprehensive early pre-1867 history of the Gates property history can be found in Cockrell's *The Trumans of Independence: Historic Resource Study*, 11-18, 24-26.

[277] A. Ruger, *Bird's Eye View of the City of Independence, Jackson County, Missouri*, 1868, reprint (Independence, Mo.: Jackson County Historical Society, n.d.).

In November 1868, George P. Gates bought lot 1 as well as lot 12 (which adjoined lot 1) in Moore's Addition. By 1886 these two small buildings on lot 1 no longer existed. All of lot 1 and the eastern half of lot 2 were by then probably used for grazing a cow or two and for a garden.[278] Just one year earlier, the Gates house to the west had been greatly enlarged, acquiring the appearance of a grand mansion, a reflection of the prosperity of George P. Gates, part owner of the prominent Waggoner-Gates Milling Company.[279]

The Gates's eldest child, Madge Gates, grew from age five to young adulthood in the Gates house at 219 North Delaware Street in an atmosphere of relative ease and comfort, although she no doubt had some responsibilities caring for her five younger siblings that were born before she married and left home. As a young woman, she attended the Presbyterian Church's Female College in Independence, a popular women's boarding school in the area, which her father helped found when Madge was nine years old. Interested in music and proficient as a piano player, she studied for two years at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.[280]

David and Madge Gates Wallace

Madge Gates was not yet twenty-one years old when she married tall, handsome, popular, twenty-three year-old David Willock Wallace on June 13, 1883. Although George P. Gates took a dim view of the match because he feared that David Wallace might be unable to support his wife's expensive tastes, he consented to the marriage when the couple threatened to elope. The wedding ceremony took place in the Presbyterian Church in Independence. The Gates held a reception for the newlyweds at their home on North Delaware Street.[281]

Following the marriage, David Wallace continued working as the deputy recorder of marriage licenses in Independence. The young couple took up residence at 117 West Ruby Street, off of Chrysler Street and southwest of the courthouse square, about two miles from the Gates house. Their first child, Elizabeth Virginia (Bess) Wallace, was born February 13, 1885. Two years

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[278] G. M. Hopkins, comp., *Atlas of the Environs of Kansas City in Jackson County, Missouri* (Philadelphia, Penn.: G. M. Hopkins, 1886), Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Library.
[279] Cockrell, *The Trumans of Independence*, 26, 31-33.
[280] "Mrs. Wallace Dies in the White House," Vertical Files: "Genealogical, Madge Gates Wallace," Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri; "Mrs. Wallace Is Dead," *Kansas City Star*, 5 December 1952.
[281] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 3; Ron Cockrell, "The Summer White House," *Jackson County Historical Society* 26: 2 (Fall 1984), 11-12.

later, on March 4, 1887, Madge Wallace gave birth to her first son, Frank Gates Wallace.[282]

By that time, there were already ominous signs of financial strain in the Wallace marriage. In the first year of marriage, David Wallace mortgaged the Ruby Street house to secure a $700 loan. In 1885, the year of Bess Wallace's birth, David Wallace wrote to President Grover Cleveland, addressing him as "dear sir and friend," and asked him for a job in the customs house in Kansas City, which presumably paid a higher wage. Cleveland's secretary declined his request. Financial problems continued. The young Wallace family moved into George and Elizabeth Gates's recently enlarged house at the corner of North Delaware and Blue avenues, around the time of Frank Gates's birth.[283] In 1887, David Wallace sold the Ruby Street house for a profit. In the late 1880s, the Wallaces' financial situation may have improved slightly. In 1888 and again in 1890, he ran for Jackson County deputy treasurer and won both times. Perhaps somewhat encouraged by his political success and growing popularity, around 1890, David Wallace bought a large house at 608 (later renumbered 610) North Delaware Street, two blocks from the Gates house, in the town's most fashionable neighborhood. Financial problems besieged the Wallaces again in 1892, when David Wallace's second term as Jackson County treasurer expired, and the factionalized Democrats did not offer him another position. The Wallace's third child, George Porterfield Wallace, was born on May 1, 1892, just a few months before David Wallace became unemployed for nearly a year.[284]

Finally, in late 1893, Wallace managed to secure an appointment as a U.S. deputy surveyor of customs for the port of Kansas City, and left elective politics forever. His salary of $1,200 in 1894 was a respectable sum, but not enough to support three children and a wife with expensive tastes and little apparent awareness of her husband's financial straits. Added to continuing money problems were conflicted feelings of joy, increased financial burden, and grief when Madge Wallace gave birth to one more child in 1898, who died in infancy.[285] A

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[282] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 3; Cockrell, "A President's Private Domain, 3.
[283] The 1888 city directory for Independence shows both the George Gates and the David Wallace families living at 11 Delaware, at the corner of North Delaware and Blue (later Truman Road) avenues. *Independence City Directory* (Kansas City, Mo.: R. S. Dillon and Company, 1888-89).
[284] Jeff Wade, "The President's Mother-in-Law: An 'Impossible Old Woman?,'" *Newsletter from Harry S Truman National Historic Site* 14 (Winter 1998), 1; Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 3-4, 6-7.
[285] According to Margaret Truman Daniel, granddaughter of Madge Wallace, another daughter, Madeline, was born to Madge and David Wallace in the mid-1890s. She died when about three years old. Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 7;

daughter was born in early May 1898 but lived only a day, according to the *Jackson Examiner*. "The infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. D. W. Wallace, born Monday, died Tuesday night."[286] For David Wallace, who played with and adored his own children, as well as for his wife, the loss of two children within a year must have been a devastating tragedy.

Through this time of anxiety and grief, David Wallace's personal problems continued. Around 1900, when the Wallace's fifth and last child, David Frederick, was born, David Wallace attempted to start an importing business in Kansas City, a logical adjunct to his customs job. His efforts went nowhere and probably put him deeper in debt. In April 1900, the *Jackson Examiner* announced that the "D. W. Wallace family will in a short time move to the home of Mr. and Mrs. George P. Gates (at 219 North Delaware) and make their home with Mr. and Mrs. Gates." The A. C. Cowan family was to move from the nearby Paxton home, where they had been staying, into the Wallace house, which they could rent.[287] If this move actually did occur, the Wallaces probably lived in the Gates house for only a few months (perhaps while they were away with their ill son, Frank), and then returned to their home at 608 North Delaware. In great need of money, David Wallace tried to get a raise in his customs job. After one request for an increase failed, in 1901, David Wallace was given $200 of additional annual compensation. Another $200 increase came the following year, raising Wallace's total yearly income to $1,600 in 1902. These increases, however, could not cover the family's expenses and debts. In 1901, David Wallace was two years in arrears in paying his property taxes. The following year, he was unable to pay a collection agency, which contacted him repeatedly, about a $3.50 debt (equivalent to about $100 in 2000). Reluctantly, David Wallace turned to his father-in-law, George Gates for help. Gates paid the Wallace family's back taxes. Also in 1901, George Gates, paid several hundred dollars for some badly needed shingling and painting of the Wallace house on North Delaware Street.[288] George Gates probably rescued David Wallace, financially, on many occasions. In a series of faded letters, found in a box many years later by Margaret Truman in the basement of the Gates-Truman house,

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Christine Wallace and David F. Wallace, Jr., interview by Jim Williams, 26 August 1991, transcript of taped interview, 49, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

[286] *Jackson Examiner*, 7 May 1898.

[287] It is not known with certainty that the Wallace family actually moved to the Gates house, but this possibility suggests that the expenses of their own home may have been more than David Wallace could bear. *Jackson Examiner*, 20 April 1900.

[288] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 11-15.

David Wallace thanked his father-in-law again and again for "your many kindnesses to me and my family."[289]

As David Wallace's debts increased, so too did his drinking and his struggle to remain optimistic about the future. When not at his customs job, he spent time on the Independence Square, not in the courthouse, but in a saloon patronized by local politicians. Young Bess, Frank, and George Wallace must have known about their father's drinking; often David Wallace's friends carried him home and deposited him on his front porch. Known by everyone to have a sweet and cheerful disposition, David Wallace was uncharacteristically gloomy about his finances in a letter to his father-in-law, written in the early 1900s, when the Gateses were away from Independence. "To be frank with you," he confided in George P. Gates, "I get pretty *blue* [his emphasis] over matters. I do the very best that I can but it seems that little good results. I try to look on the bright side of things, but even then it is dark."[290]

An end to all of David Wallace's seemingly insurmountable problems finally came on June 17, 1903, four days after his twentieth wedding anniversary and two days after his forty-third birthday. Early that morning, he arose, opened the drawer of a writing desk in the bedroom, and reached for a revolver. He walked into the bathroom, placed the muzzle just behind his left ear, and pulled the trigger. "The ball passed through his head and out the right temple."[291] The explosion of the discharging gun broke the morning silence and awakened the household. Sixteen-year-old Frank Wallace ran down the hall to the bathroom. "Papa! Papa's shot himself!," Frank cried out in stunned disbelief and anguish.[292]

More than eighty years later, family members gave differing accounts of who found David Wallace after the shooting. Margaret Truman Daniel, who was twenty when she first learned from her Aunt Natalie about her grandfather's suicide, wrote in 1986 that Frank Wallace, Natalie's husband, had "found" his father.[293] In 1984, May Southern Wallace, George Wallace's wife, reported that her husband, then eleven years old, found his slain father.[294] There is probably some truth in both recollections. According to the local newspaper, which printed a front-page story about the incident two days after it took place, David Wallace "fell unconscious to the floor and died within thirty

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[289] Ibid., 13.
[290] Ibid., 16.
[291] "D. W. Wallace Dead," *Jackson Examiner*, 19 June 1903.
[292] Truman, *Bess W. Wallace*, 17.
[293] Truman, *Bess W. Wallace*, 234.
[294] Ibid., 17; May Wallace, interview by Ron Cockrell, 2 March 1984, transcript of taped interview, 44, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

minutes."[295] While help was being summoned and David Wallace lay motionless, both Frank and George, as well as others in the family, may all have witnessed his demise.

Regardless of who was present immediately after the shooting, David Wallace's suicide unquestionably had a profound affect on everyone in the family. Each responded to the tragedy in a different way. Bess Wallace never in her lifetime talked with her daughter, Margaret, about David Wallace's suicide.[296] May Wallace assessed the impact of the tragedy on George Wallace this way: "I think it [his father's suicide] affected his nervous system the rest of his life, it was such a shock."[297] Natalie Wallace may have no difficulty believing that her husband was the first one at the scene of the shooting, since she too understood what a devastating impact David Wallace's suicide had on her husband. Madge Wallace forever after remained extremely protective of all her children, encouraging Frank and George Wallace to build their homes in the Gates backyard (perhaps even insisting that they do so) and always keeping a watchful eye on their and their wives' every action.

The shock of David Wallace's death was even more profound since no one seemed able, at the time, adequately to explain why he had chosen to take his life. He left no note explaining his action. "Never did he appear despondent," the *Jackson Examiner* reported, "and his joke and ready sympathy always brightened those with whom he came in contact."[298] "It was not scandal, . . . nor pecuniary embarrassment; all who knew David Wallace would assist him if necessary; . . . it was not domestic trouble. . . . On the eve of the fatal deeds the neighbors heard his laugh as loud as any of the family circle as they all sat playing at games." Subtly suggesting the role that alcohol may have played in David Wallace's death, the article concluded that: "it was the insidious disease against which he battled for years, which slowly creeping upward toward the brain paralyzed the functions of the mind and directed them willfully against himself."[299]

Shattered, stunned, and even shamed and disgraced by her husband's suicide, Madge Wallace and her four children, who were instantly "flung from the top of Independence's social hierarchy to the bottom," took refuge in her parents' house at 219 North Delaware Street. The grief-stricken family, however, could not be comforted for long by retreating into George and Elizabeth Gates's house. Instead, the family decided to retreat from

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[295] "D. W. Wallace Dead," *Jackson Examiner*, 19 June 1903.
[296] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 235.
[297] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 44.
[298] "D. W. Wallace Dead," *Jackson Examiner*, 19 June 1903.
[299] "With Imposing Ceremony," *Independence Sentinel*, June 1903, Vertical File: "Genealogical File, David Willock Wallace," Harry S. Truman Library.

Independence. Within days, Madge and her children, Bess, Frank, George, and David Frederick, boarded the Missouri Pacific's *Santa Fe*. The next day they got off the train at Colorado Springs. For nearly a year, the Wallace family stayed with Gates family relatives in Colorado. Madge Wallace and her four children returned to Independence in mid-1904, and moved into the home of George and Elizabeth Gates at 219 North Delaware Street—permanently.[300]

Madge Wallace remained a widow for the rest of her life. Nearly all of her widowed years were spent in the company of Bess and Harry Truman, and within a few yards of the homes of Frank and George Wallace. In her elderly years, she moved to the White House with Bess Truman and Harry, where Bess could take care of her needs. Margaret Elizabeth Gates died in the White House on December 5, 1952, almost fifty years after the death of her husband, David Willock Wallace.[301]

[300] Truman, *Bess W. Wallace*, 19; May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 44.
[301] "Mrs. Wallace Is Dead," *Kansas City Star*, 5 December 1952.