Chapter 12

George and Mary Frances Southern Wallace Family and House

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George and Mary Frances Southern Wallace Family and House
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Introduction

George Porterfield Wallace was the second son born to David and Madge Wallace in Independence in 1892. After spending a year in Colorado Springs following the death of his father in 1903, the Wallace family returned to Independence where George, then twelve, continued his public school education. Eight years later, he graduated from high school at age twenty and soon afterward began working as a clerk at a door and sash mill. His courtship with Mary Elizabeth (May) Southern began around this time. May Southern, born in 1894 to the influential editor of the *Independence* Examiner, married George Wallace in 1916. They moved into their new modest Bungalow-style house, on the site of a former garden and grazing area behind the Gates-Wallace house at 219 North Delaware Street and beside the newly constructed Frank and Natalie Wallace house, when they returned from their honeymoon in the fall of 1916. George and May Wallace resided in their home at 605 Truman Road for their entire married lives.

Along with the Frank and Natalie Wallace house, George and May Wallace's house became an intimate part of the larger compound of dwellings and landscape features that encompassed the old George P. and Elizabeth Gates property. There was constant interaction between the residents of all three houses in the Wallace-Truman compound, including the Truman family, from 1916 until the death of Harry Truman in 1972 and Bess Truman in 1982. May Wallace moved out of her house in late 1990 at age ninety-six.

George Wallace
Birth and Childhood

George Porterfield Wallace, the third child of David and Madge Wallace, was born on May 1, 1892. He was probably born at 608 North Delaware Street (later renumbered 610), where the Wallace family lived for several years in the 1890s. George attended elementary school in Independence. He graduated from the old Independence High School (later William Chrisman High School) in 1912 at age twenty. The traumatic death of his father when George was only eleven years old, and his family's subsequent move to Colorado for a year, may have slowed his progress in school. Despite this tragic incident (or perhaps

because of it), as a young man George early on developed a reputation for his friendly, smiling public face.[423]

During high school, George developed an interest in working with wood. He took a "manual training" class in high school, May Wallace recounted. Sometime before he graduated in 1912, George made his sister Bess "a set of furniture," that included a double bed, in which she slept until she married Harry Truman in 1919. "It was just very straight, . . . very plain," May Wallace remembered. "He was quite a carpenter."[424]

As a small child George went to the Presbyterian Church with his parents and grandparents. George P. Gates had been an elder in the church for years. In 1901, however, his mother disagreed with the church congregation's decision to let go of a long-time minister, whose new wife was a divorcee. Madge Gates indignantly left the church. George's older brother, Frank, became interested in a vibrant young minister at the Trinity Episcopal Church, and started attending services there. Madge Wallace also began to attend services there. Eventually, George Wallace followed suit. (Later in life, George Wallace occasionally attended services at the Presbyterian Church with Natalie Wallace. "He lost interest in it [church-going] along the way," May Wallace later explained.[425]

George Wallace's working life began soon after he graduated from high school. By 1914, he was employed as an ordering clerk, probably at Hutig Mill Works Company, which manufactured sashes and doors at a plant in Fairmount, between Independence and Kansas City. He was working at Hutig Mill when he and May Southern married in 1916. He continued working at this lumber mill until the late 1920s.[426]

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[423] "George Wallace Dies," *Kansas City Times*, 25 May 1963; Sue Gentry, interview by Jim Williams, 18 June 1991, transcript of taped interview, 27, 31, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

[424] May Wallace, interview by Lisa Bosso and Steve Harrison, 20 December 1985, transcript of taped interview, 13, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

[425] May Wallace, interview by Ron Cockrell, tape-recorded transcript, 2 March 1984, transcript of taped interview, 55 and May Wallace interview, 20 December 1985, 61; both at Harry S Truman National Historic Site. Also see Mary Paxton Keeley, interview by James Fuchs, 12 July 1966, transcript of taped interview, 48-49, Harry S. Truman Library.

[426] *Independence City Directory, Vol. XLIX* (Kansas City, Mo.: Gate City Directory Company, 1914, 1920, 1924); *Polk's Independence City Directory* (Kansas City, Mo.: Gate City Directory Company, 1926, 1928); May Wallace, interview by Niel M. Johnson, 17 and 23 February 1988, transcript of taped interview, 46 and 94, Harry S. Truman Library; "George Wallace Dies," *Kansas City Times*, 25 May 1963.

Southern Family and Mary Frances (May) Southern

Southern Family in Independence

May Southern's paternal grandfather was John Nelson Southern, who became one of Jackson County's leading attorneys. Born on August 25, 1838, in Tazwell County, Tennessee, he attended schools there and then taught for two years before leaving at age twenty. He taught school for two years before studying law in Morristown, Tennessee. John Southern was admitted to the bar in the spring of 1860, just as the war between the North and South erupted. For about twelve months, he acted as the attorney for the State of Tennessee. After becoming connected with a Confederate supply camp on the Richmond & New Orleans Railroad, John Southern enlisted in Company I of the Fifty-ninth Tennessee Regiment in the Confederate Army. After serving on detached duty, Southern went into active service. He served with General Bragg on his march into Kentucky, and later under General Pemberton and with Generals Longstreet and Breckenridge. While carrying out an order of General Bragg's, Southern received a severe wound in the spring of 1864, and was unable to serve for the rest of the war. He remained disabled, walking with two canes for the rest of his life. At the war's end in April 1965, he was discharged from a hospital in Bristol, Virginia. Since the railroads had been completely decimated during the war, he made his way slowly home to Morristown, Tennessee, in an old buggy hitched to old army horse.[427] Eventually, he arrived home to his wife and one son, William Neil Southern.

John Nelson Southern had married Martha Allen, a native of Tennessee, on December 20, 1860. She gave birth to their first child, William Neil Southern, in Morristown, Tennessee, on November 4, 1864. Other children born later to their marriage included Ethel Southern, who became an artist; John N. Southern, who became a physician in Monroe City, Missouri; Mattie Southern, later Cortner of Florence, Alabama; Mabel Southern, who became a music teacher; and Allen C. Southern, who became a judge in the Jackson Circuit Court.[428]

In July 1865, three months after the Civil War ended, John and Martha Southern moved by boat to Lexington, Lafayette County, Missouri, with their small son, William. "He landed at

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[427] *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), 880; W. Z. Hickman, *History of Jackson County, Missouri* (Topeka, Kan.: Historical Publishing Company, 1920), 307-309.

[428] Judge Allen C. Southern and his wife Retta O. were the parents of James A. Southern, who married Josephine Ragland, the niece of Ethel and Nellie Noland. *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 880; *Hoye Independence, Missouri Directory* (Kansas City, Mo.: Hoye Directory Company, 1905).

Lexington, Missouri, with his two canes, a wife (and a baby son, my father), and thirty dollars," May Southern Wallace recounted many years later.[429] He taught school for two years. In 1866, the Southern family journeyed up the Missouri River to the Wayne City Landing, where they disembarked and made their way to Independence. John Southern worked for about ten years as an editorial writer for the *Kansas City Times*. In 1869 he also became the proprietor and editor of the *Independence Sentinel* newspaper, which he owned for nearly twelve years before turning it over to his brother, William Southern. During the 1870s, Southern also engaged in the stock business and in real estate. Around 1880, John Southern returned to practicing law. Over the next fifty years, John Southern and his associates won the most important cases tried in the courts of western Missouri, a few of which were appealed and won by Southern in the United States Court of Appeals and Supreme Court. By the early 1900s, John and his son Allen C. Southern practiced law together in the firm of Southern and Southern, located in the prominent Chrisman-Sawyer Bank building on the courthouse square. John Southern continued practicing law into his eighties. In addition to his law practice, Southern was active throughout his life in educational, religious, and fraternal groups. A great promoter of education, he helped found the Presbyterian Women's College. In 1920, he had been a member of the Presbyterian Church for fifty years and served part of that time as an elder. He was also the oldest member of the Masonic Lodge in Jackson County in 1920. John and Martha Southern lived on a farm east of Independence for thirty-five years, in an imposing Queen Anne-style farmhouse constructed of stone quarried on their property, before moving to Independence around 1905.[430]

William N. and Emma Procter Southern

William N. Southern, John and Martha Allen Southern's oldest child and May Southern's father, distinguished himself in the newspaper business and as a leader of commercial and political developments in Independence. Born in Morristown, Tennessee, on November 4, 1864, William Southern came to Missouri with his parents as an infant. William Southern grew up on his parents' farm, where he had responsibilities for daily chores, including delivering milk door-to-door. Church services and activities filled his Sundays. As a boy, William Southern

[429] May Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story, February 1984," handwritten, Sue Gentry Collection, Jackson County Historical Society.
[430] *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 880; Hickman, *History of Jackson County*, 308-309; Pearl Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers* (Independence, Mo.: Pearl Wilcox, 1975), 457-58; "Southern and Southern," *Independence Examiner*, 20 March 1974 (reproduced from a 1904 issue of the *Jackson Examiner*); "Independence," *The Illustrated World*, c. 1899, 16, 19, 26.

attended private schools in Independence—the Presbyterian Women's College and then Woodland College. He graduated from Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. Young William Southern began working as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star* in 1886, and began work for the *Independence Sentinel*, then owned by his father's brother, William Southern, in 1891. In order to distinguish himself from his uncle, young William Southern began to attach "Jr." after his name, and was known as William N. Southern, Jr., throughout the rest of his life. When the *Sentinel* changed hands, William Southern, Jr., left the newspaper. In February 1898, he founded the *Jackson Examiner*, a weekly. The *Examiner*, which first occupied an office in the Music Hall building on West Maple Street, became the third weekly newspaper published in Independence. Although generally supportive of the Democratic Party and its views, the *Examiner's* editor became known for his independent thinking and fearless editorial expressions. The *Independence Examiner* became a daily newspaper in 1905. The weekly *Jackson Examiner* continued publishing until 1928. The *Independence Examiner* still exists in the year 2000.[431]

Over the next several decades, Southern built up the circulation of his *Independence Examiner*, which eventually became the only Independence newspaper. His daily editorial, written under the pen name of "Solomon Wise" in plain Missouri language, became one of the most widely quoted newspaper columns in Missouri. Southern and his newspaper also became known for their policy of supporting worthwhile civic projects in Jackson County and of championing decent and honest government, regardless of political party affiliation. Later in his life, newspaper friends respectfully bestowed on him the title of "colonel," which was adopted by all who knew him. "No citizen ever started a business, changed jobs, or ran for public office without seeking the colonel's good ear," Sue Gentry, who began working for Southern at the *Examiner*, in 1929, wrote many years later. Harry Truman was no exception. Truman went to Southern for advice when he ran for Jackson County judge. Southern's *Examiner* supported Truman then and also when he ran for the U.S. Senate in 1934 and 1940. When Franklin Roosevelt's death gave Truman the presidency, Colonel Southern wrote in his "Solomon Wise" column: "the country is in the hands of an honorable man, not just a politician."[432] In addition to his newspaper work, William Southern often led worthwhile

[431] Hickman, *History of Jackson County*, 813; Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers*, 458-59; "May Southern Wallace (Mrs. George P. Wallace)," no date, " Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[432] Sue Gentry, "Southern Worthy Addition to Press Hall of Fame," *Independence Examiner*, 3-4 August 1996.

community projects. He also helped organize the Independence Chamber of Commerce and served as its first president.[433]

William Southern married Emma Procter on February 11, 1892. Emma was the daughter of Caroline Prewitt and Reverend Alexander Procter, born on March 22, 1867 in the large brick Procter home on Lexington Avenue. Reverend Procter, a native of Kentucky, came to Independence from Saint Louis around 1860, and served as the minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from 1860 to his death in 1900. Procter was considered one of the "great forward-looking men of his time," according to May Wallace many years later.[434] Emma Procter graduated from the Woodland College in Independence. She was a life-long member of the Christian Church. For twenty-five years, she organized and led the Good Samaritan Class in the church. Emma also became very active in Independence literary circles, including the Mary Paxton Study Class and the Saturday Club. After marrying, Emma Procter and William Southern lived in the Procter family home until shortly after Emma Procter's death around 1908. In 1910, the Southern family, then with two children, built their own home at 639 South Park Street. Unlike the Procter home, the Southern's new house had central heat and an indoor bathroom. The Southern couple raised two daughters: Caroline (later Mrs. Edward Carnes), born in 1892, and Mary Elizabeth (May), the future wife of George Wallace, born in 1894. Emma Southern gave birth to a third daughter, probably around 1895 or 1896, which didn't survive.[435]

Colonel Southern retired from the *Examiner* in 1951 at age eighty-seven, when Stauffer Publications of Topeka, Kansas, bought the newspaper. He died in Independence in 1956. Emma Procter Southern died in 1961 at age ninety-two.[436]

Mary Frances (May) Southern
Birth and Childhood

Mary Frances Southern, better known as May Southern, was born in the home of her maternal grandparents, Alexander and Caroline Procter, on Lexington Avenue in Independence, on

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[433] Pearl Wilcox, *Independence and 20th Century Pioneers. The Years from 1900 to 1928* (Independence, Mo.: Pearl Wilcox, 1979), 57-59.
[434] Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story, February 1984"; "Widow of Examiner's Founder Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 3 March 1961.
[435] Hickman, *History of Jackson County*, 813; Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers*, 459-60; Wilcox, *Independence and 20th Century Pioneers*, 58-59; "Widow of Examiner's Founder Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 3 March 1961; May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 41; May Wallace interview, 17 February 1988, 2-3.
[436] "Widow of Examiner's Founder Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 3 March 1961; Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story."

July 9, 1894. In 1904, at age ten, May Southern became a member of the First Christian Church in Independence. May Wallace attended the old Ott School on North Liberty Street in Independence. She graduated from the old Independence high school (later William Chrisman High School) in 1911. She spent a year at the University of Missouri in Columbia. She and her sister, Caroline, joined Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority. May remained a member of this sorority for more than fifty years.[437]

After she returned to Independence in 1912, May Southern very much wanted to work in the composing room as a linotype operator at her father's newspaper office. William Southern, however, insisted that that type of work wasn't suitable for a woman. May's father believed that library work or teaching was much more fitting for a woman. Prevented from going into newspaper work, May turned to other pursuits. She continued her informal education relating to the literary arts and culture, with the encouragement of her mother. On October 4, 1913, Emma Southern organized the Saturday Club for the purpose of broadening her daughters' and other interested women's cultural education. The group took its name from the famous Saturday Club in Boston, Massachusetts. May became a charter member of the group. An Independence High School English teacher, Matilda Brown, led the class for many years until her death.[438]

May (Mary Frances) Southern as a young woman, around the time she met George Wallace. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library

George Wallace and May Southern

Courtship and Marriage

May Southern, two years younger than George Wallace but one year his senior in high school, probably met her future husband in high school. They graduated only one year apart—May

[437] May Wallace interview, 20 July 1983, 25; Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story."
[438] Jon Taylor, "George and May Wallace House," no date, typed page, Historian's Files, Truman National Historic Site; "May Southern Wallace, (Mrs. George P. Wallace)."

Southern in 1911 and George in 1912.[439] May and George were probably dating by early 1911, when Harry Truman mentioned Miss Southern's name in a letter to Bess Truman.[440] May probably became even better acquainted with the jovial, six-foot-tall George Wallace at the tennis court that May's parents built in the spring or summer of 1911, just one year after they built their own home at 639 South Park Avenue. Located on Park Avenue, just south of the Southern home, William and Emma Southern had given May and her sister Caroline the tennis court as a high school graduation present.[441] "Frank and George were good tennis players and so was Bess," May recalled nearly seventy years later.[442]

A group of May and Caroline Southern's friends, including George, Bess, and Frank Wallace, gathered at the Southerns' tennis court at 639 South Park Avenue. From left to right: Jack Montague, Alden Millard, George Wallace, Bess Wallace (with hat), Emma Proctor Southern (head barely visible), Caroline Southern, Dorothy Patterson, Natalie Ott (head barely visible), Helena Crow, Frank Wallace, and Edwin Patterson (with tennis racket). Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

The court became a center of neighborhood activity. "We all played tennis down there," May later reminisced about her family and George, Frank, and Bess Wallace, "and went on picnics and just had a good time."[443] Occasionally, Madge Wallace invited a group of young people to her house for dinner.

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[439] "George Wallace Dies," 25 May 1963.
[440] Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry T Bess Truman, 1910-1959* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 22.
[441] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 15.
[442] May Wallace, "Dear Friends Cherish Memories of Bess Truman," *Independence Examiner*, 18 October 1982.
[443] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 41.

"I was terribly shy about that," May recalled. "And she turned out to be my mother-in-law, and she was a lovely lady."[444]

Harry Truman never played tennis, but joined George Wallace and May Southern on picnics, after he began spending time with Bess Wallace in 1910. The possibilities and the range of their picnic and other outdoor outings expanded greatly after Harry Truman bought his Stafford automobile in 1914. The three couples and others frequently went to such favorite picnic spots as the waterworks at Sugar Creek, the Little Blue River, and Cave Spring. Harry's Stafford became the center of photographic attention; often the young couples would pose for pictures in the car with Harry at the wheel. Harry was always good company, May Wallace later reported.[445]

George Wallace and May Southern had been "sweethearts for a long time," according to May Wallace, when they married on October 24, 1916. The following day, William Southern made sure that the Southern-Wallace wedding received front-page coverage in the *Independence Examiner*.[446] The Reverend L. J. Marshall, pastor of the Christian Church in Kansas City officiated at the wedding ceremony held at 8:30 in the evening in the home of William and Emma Southern at 609 South Park Avenue. The Southerns' house was tastefully decorated with autumn yellow chrysanthemums, palms, and ferns. The couple exchanged vows in the midst of a large number of relatives and friends. Many family members, representing some of Independence's most prominent citizens, received guests after the ceremony, including the bride's parents, Allen C. Southern and his wife, George P. and Elizabeth Gates, Madge Wallace, Frank and Natalie Wallace, and Bess Wallace.[447]

After their wedding and reception, George and May Wallace went to St. Louis on the midnight train in order to avoid being subjects of wedding pranks. "We knew that they [their young friends] would come down here and throw rats and shoes at us," May Wallace explained many years later.

> One friend took us to Kansas City and we got into the sleeper. George had a lightweight coat, a raincoat that would do as a topcoat, too. So we looked like we'd been married for years. We were in this big car. He got up to put his coat up into the top shelf up there and the rice just poured! Mother Wallace and Natalie had filled his pockets with rice! And the rice was all over that entire

[444] Ibid., 20 July 1983, 25.
[445] David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 93.
[446] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 41.
[447] "Southern-Wallace," *Independence Examiner*, 25 October 1916.

> car! I was so embarrassed, I wanted to kill them! We had a nice family.[448]

George and May Wallace returned to Independence a few days later to their new bungalow at 605 Van Horn Road, West (now 605 Truman Road).[449]

Transfer of Land and Wallace House Construction

On August 22, 1916, George P. and Elizabeth Gates sold the west 50 feet of the east 100 feet of lot 1 in Moore's Addition to George P. Wallace for $1 "and other valuable considerations." This deed gave the Wallace couple the right to maintain and use the sewer line to the Gates house, which ran across the Wallaces' property. In 1926, George and May Wallace bought, for $1, the western-most fourteen feet of lot 1 from Madge Wallace, who acquired the property after both of her parents died.[450]

The George and May Wallace house (as well as the Frank and Natalie Wallace house) was constructed on land once used by the Gates as pasture and a garden. As late as the early 1910s, the George P. and Elizabeth Gates family owned a single cow, called "Susie Dam" by George Wallace, who begrudged his responsibility of milking the cow every day. Many years later, May Southern, who was dating George Wallace at the time, recalled that a wooden fence enclosed an area east of the Gates-Truman house in which the cow grazed. A garden occupied a plot behind the big house and along Blue Avenue. "This was the garden before Mr. [George P.] Gates gave the two lots to his two grandsons [Frank and George]," May Wallace recalled many years later.[451] May Wallace remembered digging asparagus up in her front yard in the spring of 1917.[452]

A local Independence builder, a man named Shaupe, probably constructed the house. Work must have begun in late August or early September. (The house does not appear in the August 1916 Sanborn map of Independence.) George Wallace, always interested in lumber and woodworking, supervised its construction. The second Wallace house was built in the Bungalow style, popular and built by the hundreds in Independence and around the country at that time. A modest example of that style, the Wallace house had characteristic overhanging roof eaves with exposed rafters on the sides and knee braces on the gable ends. An open porch extended across the front of the house; an open recessed porch was at the southeast

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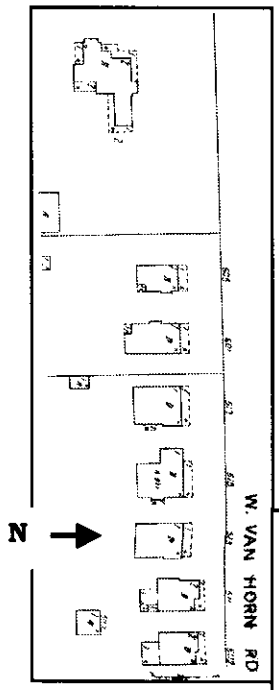
[448] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 51.
[449] "Southern-Wallace," *Independence Examiner*, 25 October 1916.
[450] "General Warranty Deed," No. 109271, and also "Warranty Deed," No. 219645, both in Vertical Files: "Gates Family," Harry S. Truman Library.
[451] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 7.
[452] Ibid., 7.

rear corner. A small square bay window projected slightly from the east side wall of the rectangular house form. Upon completion, the exterior siding was stained a deep pine green.

The George and May Wallace house was slightly smaller than the neighboring Frank and Natalie Wallace house, built the year before. It had only four rooms—a combined living and dining room, a bedroom (now the present dining room), a kitchen, and a small sleeping porch. Inside, the Wallace house consisted of four rooms. Floors were laid with hardwood. Madge Wallace, an avid seamstress, helped May Wallace make curtains for the new house.[453]

The new house was wired with electricity when the newlyweds moved into the house in the fall of 1916. A coal furnace initially provided heat for the Wallace house. "I shoveled a lot of coal in this house," May Wallace clearly remembered many years later. "Of course our furnace was small as this house has only four rooms. Anytime we were away we had to hurry home and put coal in the furnace. Then, of course, we all put in gas heat."[454] The new house was connected to city water.[455]

May Wallace, many years later, recalled how it "rained and it rained and it rained like Noah and the Ark" just before her wedding. After George and Carolyn Southern returned from a shopping trip to gather some things for the wedding, they parked George P. Gates's car near the wedding couple's new house on soft soil covering recently buried pipes between the house and the road. The car sank deeply into the water-saturated soil, and could not be used to take any of the Gates family to the wedding. "And it rained and rained!," May Wallace remembered.[456] Despite the deluge, George and May Wallace were able to move into their new



The August 1926 Sanborn fire insurance map of Independence shows the George and May Wallace house at 605 West Van Horn (later West Truman) Road just to the west of the Frank and Natalie Wallace house and to the east of the Gates (later Truman) house.

[453] Ibid., 8, 29.
[454] Ibid., 10.
[455] Ibid., 14.
[456] Ibid., 7

house after their wedding on October 24, 1916 and their honeymoon in St. Louis.[457]

The young couple furnished their new house with items that came out of the old Gates attic at 219 North Delaware. Other pieces of furniture were wedding gifts from the Wallace, Gates, and Southern families.[458] Madge Wallace made curtains for the couple's new house. Before her death in 1924, Elizabeth Gates gave May (and Natalie) one chair from her parlor set, which consisted of four to six individual chairs and a settee. May Wallace made a needlepoint cover for the chair's seat cushion.[459]

Life with George and May Southern Wallace 1916-1963/1993

Daily Lives: Work and Relaxation

After his marriage to May Southern, George continued to work as a clerk at the Hutig Mill Works Company, manufacturer of doors and sashes. Well known in the family for his ability to work with wood and also to fix nearly anything that needed it, George seemed well suited to work in an environment with wood and machines. For years, he rode the streetcar everyday to the mill in Fairmount [460]

At the end of the work day, George never stopped by the big house and visited with his mother Madge Wallace, as did his solicitous older brother Frank. George related to his mother very differently. George, remembered by Margaret Truman Daniel as "sharp-tongued and high spirited," seemed to resent his mother's smothering presence. Although he could not break away from her, "he seldom went near her, and when he did the result was frequently a quarrel."[461]

George, like his brother Frank, never enlisted in the armed forces during World War I. Their mother Madge Wallace's extremely protective nature may have kept George from even contemplating such a decision. When George was later put on the draft rolls, Madge Wallace erupted. The war ended before George was drafted.[462] In December 1918, however, George's work was suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted for another reason; he, like thousands of others across the United States and

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[457] Ibid., 2 March 1984, 41.
[458] May S. Wallace, "George P. Wallace Home," n.d., Sue Gentry's Collection, Jackson County Historical Society.
[459] May Wallace interview, 20 July 1983, 26.
[460] *Independence City Directory, Vol. XLIX* (Kansas City, Mo.: Gate City Directory Company, 1914, 1920, 1924); *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1926, 1928); May Wallace interview 17 and 23 February 1988, 46.
[461] Margaret Truman, *Bess W. Truman* (New York: Macmillan, 1986),110.
[462] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 60-61, 66.

Europe, came down with influenza. George and May, along with other Wallace family members, had just returned to Independence from Platte City, where they celebrated Thanksgiving with the family of Maud Gates Wells, Madge Wallace's sister, when George began shivering and developed a high temperature. Following the doctor's orders, May Wallace put her husband to bed and surrounded him with mason jars filled with hot water (in lieu of hot water bottles). After an extremely feverish night and a week of bed rest, George regained enough strength to go back to work. May Wallace never succumbed to influenza; however, Bess, Natalie, and Frank Wallace developed severe cases of it.[463]

George Wallace's job with Hutig Works Company came to an abrupt end around 1928 when the company closed down. "Hutig went broke and we went broke with them," May Wallace reported many years later.[464] This "enforced vacation between jobs," as May Wallace described it, probably lasted for several weeks.[465] By 1930, George Wallace was working as a salesman. However, like so many people during the Great Depression of the 1930s, it appears that he struggled to stay employed and started new jobs frequently in the early 1930s. In 1934, George Wallace worked as an assistant manager. By the end of 1934, before Harry Truman left his position as judge of eastern Jackson County, Truman helped George Wallace get a job with the Jackson County Highway Department. For the next twenty-seven years, Wallace worked as first an engineer and then maintenance superintendent for the Jackson County Highway Department. He retired from this position in 1961.[466]

When he was not employed, George often busied himself fixing things at home and for his extended family. During one involuntary vacation from work, he decided to try to fix an old clock in the Wallace-Gates house, dating from the 1700s, that didn't have any hour and minute hands. "He took some real thin aluminum pie pans of mine and came up here and made a pattern. Then he made it out of cardboard and then he drew around it on the pans, cut them out, and painted them," May Wallace explained many years later. He put the new hands on the clock and installed a battery. The Gates's old clock began running again. (Apparently, the clock was at some time also electrified.)[467] "He loved woodwork," May Wallace commented many years later.[468] Over the years, George Wallace built up a well-equipped workshop in the basement of the Wallace house at

[463] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 54.
[464] Ibid., 23 February 1988, 94.
[465] Ibid., 20 July 1983, 24; *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1928.
[466] *Polk's Independence City Directory*, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1938, 1940, 1942, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1857; "George Wallace Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 25 May 1963.
[467] May Wallace interview, 20 July 1983, 24.
[468] Ibid., 23 February 1988, 94.

605 Truman Road. His reputation as a skilled handyman grew over time. Those who knew him admired him and often commented on his ability as a "fixer."[469]

It may have been during the weeks between jobs, when George Wallace had time on his hands that he began imbibing more liquor. "He was one of these people that had to be doing something all the time," commented May Wallace in 1985, "which was real good when it was something useful. When it wasn't, why, it wasn't so good."[470] May Wallace hinted that her husband had a problem with alcohol when, in 1984, she assessed the affect of David Wallace's suicide on publicly friendly, always-smiling George Wallace. "I think it [David Wallace's suicide] affected his nervous system for the rest of his life, it was such a shock. . . . My father [who knew David Wallace] always said that Mr. Wallace was more like my husband in disposition, more friendly, that kind of a person."[471] Further evidence of George Wallace's struggle with alcoholism was found around the time the Park Service acquired the Wallace house. A sizeable cache of alcohol bottles filled a large niche in the basement wall.

George may have been like his father in other ways as well. Years after his death in 1963, those who knew George Wallace or who were able to observe his behavior told of his struggle with alcohol. Margaret Truman Daniel, George's flamboyant niece, wrote in 1986 that it was around 1930 that George Wallace "began displaying signs of instability. Every so often he would drink heavily. With him, Bess did not hesitate to unleash her temper. She gave George some lectures that would have turned Falstaff himself into a total abstainer."[472] In 1991, Sue Gentry, retired journalist for the *Independence Examiner* who reported on activities of the Truman-Wallace families for years, when asked about George Wallace, confessed that "some of them [Wallace family members] had a drinking problem." Gentry went on to explain further. According to Gentry,

> The only thing I ever heard from Colonel Southern [editor of the *Examiner*], he said, "You know I always said that I printed all the news. I didn't hold anything out. If it was on the police record, I put it there [in the newspaper]." He said, "The only time that I ever did that [withheld news from the paper] was my own son-in-law, and I did that for my daughter [May Southern Wallace].[473]

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[469] Sue Gentry interview, 18 June 1991, 27.
[470] May Wallace interview, 18 December 1985, 2.
[471] Ibid., 2 March 1984, 44. See also May Wallace interview, 20 December 1985, 22.
[472] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 118.
[473] Sue Gentry interview, 18 June 1991, 28.

In addition to working at his job and fixing things around the Wallace family compound, George Wallace worked for many years in eastern Jackson County democratic politics. In 1922, both George and Frank Wallace helped Harry Truman with his election campaign for judge of eastern Jackson County. For many years, George served as an election judge for eastern Jackson County.[474]

For relaxation, both George and May Wallace enjoyed playing golf during their younger and middle-aged years. George and May belonged to a golf club (no longer extant, south of Independence on Chrysler), where they played frequently.[475] George also occasionally played bridge with May and some of her friends.[476] Once in a while, according to May Wallace, he went downtown to a "gaiety picture or something like that" with a good man friend. On these occasions, George's mother, Madge Wallace would "stay up and wait till he got home because she didn't trust me to get him home," May Wallace said chuckling.[477]

After marrying George Wallace, May, known for her sociability and friendly, energetic nature, continued her active participation in cultural organizations and social groups. The Saturday Club took a prominent place in self-education in the literary arts. Throughout her life, May served in various offices of the Saturday Club. Following the death of Matilda Brown, who had led the club for many years, May eventually was chosen to direct the class. May also later joined the Mary Paxton Study Class, which, like the Saturday Club, encouraged the broad exploration of the literary arts through reading and group discussion.[478] May Wallace and her sister Caroline Carnes also continued their association, as alumni, with the Kappa Kappa Gamma (KKG) sorority, which they had joined when attending the University of Missouri. In 1962, May and Caroline both received fifty-year membership pins from KKG.[479]

Playing bridge with the Tuesday Bridge Club was one of May's life-long delights. The group of ten women generally met twice a month on Tuesdays in different members' homes. Each club member, including Bess Truman and Natalie Wallace, took

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[474] "George Wallace Dies," *Independence Examiner*, 25 May 1963; McCullough, *Truman*, 163.
[475] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes, interview by Gail Evans, 2 June 2000, transcript of taped interview, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[476] Sue Gentry, "Wallace Was Historic Woman," *Independence Examiner*, 21 May 1990; May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 48, 94.
[477] May Wallace interview, 20 December 1980, 9
[478] Jon Taylor, "George and May Wallace House," no date, typed page, Historian's Files, Truman National Historic Site.
[479] Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story, February 1984"; Sue Gentry interview, 18 June 1991, 20.

their turn hosting the games.[480] When May Wallace invited the bridge club to her home, she entertained them in her living room.[481] The group played two or three different kinds of bridge. In the spring of 1946, not long after Harry and Bess Truman had moved into the White House, Bess invited the Tuesday Bridge Club members to come to Washington for a long four-day weekend. May joined her sister-in-law Natalie Wallace and the other club members for the trip to the capitol city for sightseeing and, incidentally, bridge games in the White House. Many years later, Margaret Truman vividly described the good time had by all.

> Mother had a schedule lined up for them that would have wilted the iron campaigner, Harry S. Truman himself. They race from Congress to the Smithsonian to a luncheon in the State Dining Room to the circus. They had dinner each night at the White House, with Dad presiding, and played bridge aboard the *Williamsburg* as it cruised the Potomac.[482]

May, known as a shrewd bridge player, continued to participate in the Tuesday Bridge Club gatherings after Bess and Harry Truman returned to Independence in 1953.[483]

May Wallace continued her life-long involvement in the Christian Church. Having joined the church at age ten, she remained a member throughout her life. May also never hesitated to become involved in worthwhile or charitable causes. During World War I, May, along with Bess Wallace and dozens of other women in Independence, rolled bandages for the American Red Cross. She volunteered her time to the Red Cross again during World War II. She also crocheted needed clothing for American soldiers during the Second World War.[484]

May Wallace, like her sister-in-law Natalie, spent considerable time taking care of the Wallace home and close family members. She prepared meals, cleaned clothes and her house, and did some crocheting, embroidery, and other handicrafts. May most likely ordered groceries and had them

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[480] The original bridge club members included: Natalie and May Wallace, Bess Truman, Edna Hutchinson, Mary Shaw, Lucy Peters, Thelma Pallette (Sibel), Mag Knoll, Grace Minor, ? Minor, and Adelaide Twyman. Other women, including Ardis Haukenberry, Mag Noel, Linda King, and Sue Gentry replaced some of the original members of the Tuesday Bridge Club later. May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 46-47 and Sue Gentry interview, 18 June 1991, 22-23.
[481] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes, 2 June 2000, 13.
[482] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 285.
[483] May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 48-50.
[484] "May Wallace Dies at 98," *Independence Examiner*, 18 May 1993; "Wallace Was Historic Woman," *Independence Examiner*, 21 May 1993; May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 66.

delivered once a week, a common custom before World War II.[485] May probably did other shopping at Bunschu's general merchandise store on the courthouse square, since it had a large inventory of clothing and household goods and could accommodate many of her needs. Unlike Natalie Wallace who never learned to drive, May had a far greater array of choices for shopping and taking care of household business, since she drove a car. No doubt, May drove to Kansas City on occasion to take care of her household responsibilities. May Wallace often stopped by her father's *Independence Examiner* office on her outings.[486] May probably invited Natalie Wallace, as well as Emma Southern, to join her on shopping excursions in her car. Both May and Natalie helped their mother-in-law Madge Wallace do her shopping, especially after Fred Wallace and his family moved out of the big house at 219 North Delaware in 1943 and left eighty-one year-old Madge to take care of all her needs alone.[487] Many years later, May affirmed that her sister-in-law Natalie Wallace was a good neighbor. "I helped her and she helped me," May reported. "We lived here in peace and got along fine."[488]

George as well as May Wallace drove a car. May acquired her first car, an Essex, in the early 1920s. May's parents bought the Essex for her mother, Emma Southern. When she didn't "take to driving at all," the Southerns gave the car to May Wallace. "I had a car with all expenses paid," May recalled many years later. May Wallace became her family's chauffeur and drove her mother as well as her father, Col. William Southern, wherever they wanted to go. Around 1922, the Wallaces built a small garage for May's car, in the rear, southwest corner of their yard.[489] Later, she drove a Packard, about a 1932 model, according to Bill Carnes, May's nephew.[490] By the 1940s, May Wallace drove a Hudson. George probably didn't drive regularly until after he started working for the Jackson County Highway Department in 1934, which provided him a county car. He usually parked it under a large tree in the side yard.[491]

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[485] Christine Wallace and David Wallace, interview by Jim Williams and Carol Dage, 26 August 1991, transcript of taped interview, 25, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[486] Sue Gentry interview, 18 June 1991, 19.
[487] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 219.
[488] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 42.
[489] Both quotes from May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 5. The Sanborn Map Company map of Independence shows no garage in the rear of the George and May Wallace house in August 1916 and a small garage on its August 1926 map, confirming the approximate construction date of 1922 given by May Wallace. *Independence, Missouri* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1916 and 1926).
[490] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes interview, 2 June 2000, 14.
[491] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 5; Wallace and Wallace interview, 26 August 1991, 18, 17.

May and George Wallace had no children of their own. Margaret Truman, born in 1924, was like a daughter to them. Probably sometime after Margaret, Harry, and Bess Truman moved to Washington in 1935, May and George acquired a dog they named "Spot." May Wallace later remembered a comical incident involving Spot and President Truman. "One night [Truman, while visiting May and George] sat down in the dog's chair before I could stop him. His navy blue suit was covered with gray and white hairs of Spot, our very spoiled dog. I was so dumbfounded at the sight that I just kept talking and ushered him out without a word."[492]

Association with the Truman Family

1919-1935. Harry Truman's close association with George and May Wallace became more intimate after Harry married Bess Wallace in the summer of 1919 and became officially part of the Wallace family. Soon after the Trumans returned from their honeymoon, Harry Truman became physically closer to the Wallaces when he moved into the Gates house at 219 North Delaware, just a few feet west of the two Wallace brothers' homes. After Harry decided to enter politics by running for the eastern judgeship of Jackson County in the fall of 1921, George Wallace, like Frank Wallace, lent a hand in Truman's campaign effort.[493]

The Truman family's practice of sharing meals with May and George Wallace (as well as Natalie and Frank Wallace) in one of the Wallace or Truman houses or outside, probably began not long after the two Wallace houses were completed in the mid-1910s. Customarily George and May Wallace would have Sunday dinner, promptly at 1:00 p.m., every other week with the Trumans in the big house. The other Sunday dinners were shared with the Southern family.[494] Summertime picnics were a favorite activity of both Wallace couples and the Truman family. Although many of these outdoor gatherings took place in Frank and Natalie Wallace's backyard, May Wallace brought dishes to these family affairs.[495] These backyard picnics never included barbequed dishes. The women prepared steaks, potato salad, and other foods in their kitchens, since none of the men in the families could cook. Although the Wallace family liked onions in their potato salad, Harry did not. Onions were always left out, according to May Wallace.[496]

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[492] May Wallace, "Relative Recalls Christmas," no date, *Independence Examiner*, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[493] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 86-87.
[494] Steve Harrison, report of conservation with May Wallace on her ninety-first birthday, 9 July 1985, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[495] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 50.
[496] Ibid., 50.

Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays were always a time of festive celebrations for the Gates, Wallace, and Southern families. May and George Wallace alternated their holidays between the Southern and Truman-Wallace family. One year they would spend Christmas with the Truman-Wallace family and Thanksgiving with the Southerns. The next year, they spent Christmas with the Southerns and Thanksgiving with the Truman-Wallaces.[497] After first marrying, May and George Wallace spent their alternate Thanksgiving with the Wallaces in Platte City, Missouri, with Madge Wallace's sister, Maud Louise, and her husband, William Strother Wells. At other times, the Gates and Wallace families celebrated Thanksgiving in Independence, around an enormous dining room table at 219 North Delaware Street. After the Strother and Truman families began to raise their own children, trips to Platte City became less frequent, and Thanksgivings were more often spent in Independence. George and May Wallace (as well as Natalie and Frank Wallace) always took part in family Christmas meals in the dinning room at 219 North Delaware Street.[498] At Christmas, May Wallace often visited with her family, the Southerns as well as the Wallace family.[499] The celebration of Christmas took a special meaning for both Wallace couples after the birth of Margaret Truman.

The birth of Margaret Truman to Harry and Bess, in 1924, added a new dimension to the Truman's association with May and George Wallace. Since the Wallaces had no children of their own and lived on property adjoining the Wallace-Truman house, May and George treated Margaret like a surrogate daughter. They enjoyed constant contact with Margaret as she grew from an infant to a young adult. When Margaret was about four or five, she began paying visits first, to Natalie, and then, to May Wallace, in the late afternoon, asking for sweets at both aunts' houses. These little forays, unfortunately for Margaret, did not continue for long. Bess Truman, suspicious of her daughter's loss if appetite at dinner, soon learned about her sweet treats at both Aunt Natalie's and Aunt May's (or "Beufie" as Margaret called her) houses, and asked her two sisters-in-law to refrain from giving Margaret any food on her late afternoon visits. Shoes were another matter. Many, many times, Margaret, who loved shoes, was allowed to play shoe store when she came to visit May Wallace.[500]

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[497] Steve Harrison, report of conservation with May Wallace on her ninety-first birthday, 9 July 1985.
[498] May Wallace interview, 20 July 1983, 25, 31; May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 48; Sue Gentry interview, 18 June 1991.
[499] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 48.
[500] Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story."

George and May Wallace also enjoyed Margaret's dependency on George Wallace to fix anything that needed repairing in her life. When Margaret was a small child and fell on the gravel walk behind the Wallace-Truman house and skinned both of her knees, she tearfully went to George and pleaded: "Da Fix." ("Da" became Margaret's shortened pronounceable version of "George" when she was a child.) "She thought he could fix anything," May recalled.[501] A break in the close relationship between Margaret and both Wallace couples came in 1934, when Truman became a Missouri senator and Margaret was eleven years old.[502] "I can see Margaret now," May Wallace reminisced, "sitting in the back seat of the car, holding Raggedy Ann in her arms as they drove out of their yard on the first lap of their journey to Washington, D.C."[503] Her Aunt Beufie had recently sewed a new dress and some hair for well-used battered Raggedy Ann.[504]

Even after Margaret Truman lived in Washington with her parents, George and May Wallace continued their close and playful relationship with Margaret. In the spring of 1946, when Beth Truman invited her Tuesday Bridge Club to come to Washington, George Wallace went along on the trip with May. Twenty-one-year-old Margaret invited George, her "Uncle Da," to attend a formal party. When they both realized that none of George's typical brown shoes and brown suits would be appropriate for such an occasion, George assured Margaret that he would "fix it." After locating one of Harry's fancy dark suits that he could wear, George then went out and bought some black shoe polish. Upon his return, he sat on the floor of the White House and rubbed his own brown shoes with black polish just to please Margaret and go to her party. "Oh, they would have stood on their head for that gal," May Wallace later proclaimed.[505]

1935-1953

The ritual of sharing meals with the Wallaces continued through Harry Truman's years in public office and moved to Washington as senator, vice-president, and then president. Following the 1944 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where Senator Harry Truman accepted his party's nomination as Franklin Roosevelt's running mate, the Truman family drove home to Independence. May and George Wallace quietly

[501] May Wallace interview, 20 December 1985, 2.
[502] Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story."
[503] Ibid.
[504] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 134.
[505] May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 49.

welcomed the weary couple and served them dinner in their small house. They then relaxed with the Wallaces in their back yard.[506]

During the Truman presidency, the press often reported on the Trumans' visits to Independence and family gatherings over meals. In August 1946, the *Kansas City Times* reported that "President Truman, who since his county court days always has kept his home a place apart from politics and public life, last night held true to his tradition and relaxed with his family at a Missouri back yard picnic."[507] May and Natalie Wallace and Bess Truman all came from their houses with covered dishes, which were placed on white-clothed tables set with silverware, glass, and napkins. When the Trumans came to Independence for one- or two-day visits, they usually ate meals with the Wallaces. In March 1950, the press reported that the Trumans dined with Frank and Natalie Wallace in their home when they came home to hear Margaret sing in a concert in Kansas City and before the two Wallace couples and the Trumans went to Margaret's concert.[508] "Harry never brought his office problems to any of the family gatherings," May recalled years later. "Harry and I had lots of fun over the various religions in the family. The Wallaces were all Episcopalians, Harry was a Baptist, and I was a member of the Christian Church. . . . With his keen sense of humor, he was a very interesting conversationalist," May reminisced.[509]

After Harry Truman became the focus of public attention, the press also reported Wallace-Truman family gatherings that took place on the back porch of the Truman house and sometimes on the front porches of the two Wallace homes. The Wallace brothers often visited with Truman on the back porch at 219 North Delaware Street in the summertime. This was also the gathering place for Bess Truman's bridge club meetings, which included May Wallace (and also Natalie Wallace).

During the vice-presidential and presidential years from 1944 to 1953, George and May Wallace (as well as Frank and Natalie Wallace) became more than close family members and neighbors; increasingly they supported the life and activities of the Trumans when they came home to Independence to visit. When the Trumans returned to Independence for visits, George and May Wallace (as well as Frank and Natalie Wallace) often greeted the Trumans in Kansas City at the airport or at the Independence railroad station and accompanied them home. George and May Wallace also attended political functions in or

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[506] "Big Cheer for Truman," *Kansas City Star*, 22 July 1944";Truman of Missouri: A Vice-Presidential Candidate Comes Home to His Relatives and Friends in Independence, *Life* (August 21, 1944), 75.
[507] "Truman at Ease, *Kansas City Times*, 4 August 1946.
[508] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 47.
[509] May Wallace, "Relative Recalls Christmas," no date, *Independence Examiner*, Historian's Files, Truman National Historic Site.

near Independence held for Truman, such as the public meeting held for Truman in Independence after he announced he would run for another term as president. On June 27, 1947, George and May joined other Wallace family members and the Truman-Noland families on the front platform when Harry Truman spoke to a crowd of 10,000 assembled in the RLDS Saints' Auditorium.[510] When the Trumans came home to Independence from Washington for the last time in early 1953, George and May Wallace were in the "mob of well-wishers"[511] that greeted them "when they got off the train in Independence to begin another phase of their interesting lives."

When the Trumans came home for longer visits, George and May often took primary responsibility for preparing the "big house" at 219 North Delaware for the Trumans' arrival. They opened and aired the house out, sometimes brought in a few groceries, and closed up the house after the Trumans departed. George Wallace, the family "fixer," took care of draining all the water pipes in the big house in the fall when the Truman family was away in Washington, D.C.[512] George helped around the "big house" in other ways. George Wallace and Harry Truman had an unforgettable moving experience in the Truman house once when the Trumans where home from Washington for a visit. Together the two men were attempting to carry a unwieldy liquor serving cabinet up the attic stairs. "My husband was underneath it and when they got three or four steps from the top, Harry let go—his hands let go of it—and it came down and chased George down. It hit [the wall] and broke both of his legs above the ankles. . . . We thought the world was coming to an end when that thing crashed down!"[513] George went to the hospital for treatment of a fractured left ankle. He wore a cast for the next six months; his left leg never regained its full size.

After Harry Truman became president, May Wallace became a liaison between the Wallace family and the press. Although Truman depended on Ethel Noland to answer all questions relating to the Truman family genealogy, May became the principal Wallace family member to report on the Trumans' activities. [514] "After Mr. Truman became president, she was wonderful, because I could always find out what was going on," chuckled Sue Gentry, reporter for the *Independence Examiner*. "She was loyal to the *Examiner*, and I would find out some things that some other papers wouldn't."[515]

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[510] "To a Familiar Crowd," *Kansas City Times*, 298 June 1948.
[511] Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story."
[512] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 13; Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 233.
[513] May Wallace interview, 20 July 1983, 37.
[514] "May Wallace Dies at 98," *Independence Examiner*, 18 May 1993.
[515] Gentry interview, 18 June 1991, 20.

Holidays, especially Christmas, became even more festive for the Wallace couple after Truman became president May and George Wallace (along with other Wallace family members) nearly always spent part of Christmas Eve and Christmas day with the Trumans during the presidential years, either in Independence or in the White House. One Christmas Margaret Truman announced that she wanted a Christmas tree that was nine feet tall and would touch the ceiling in the Truman house. "We got a tree that touched the ceiling," May recalled, "and it left a spot on the ceiling, which Bess wasn't too happy about." It was placed in the bay window of the parlor, and on Christmas Eve everyone gathered around to help with the decorating. "Actually," May chuckled, "my husband and Bess did the real trimming, with much comment on the sidelines."[516]

On Christmas day, the two Wallace couples usually gathered around the stately Christmas tree in the morning and then the dining room table for a mid-day meal in the Truman home. "We all went up there [to the Truman house] and put our things around, and we had quite a commotion at one time," May Wallace reminisced many decades later.[517] May and George usually had Christmas dinner with May's parents, William and Emma Southern, and then came back to the Truman house for a late evening "pick-up supper."[518]

May and George Wallace (as well as Frank and Natalie Wallace) also traveled to Washington to celebrate at least two Christmases with the Trumans in the White House.[519] "Believe you me, Christmas in the White House is really something," May Wallace exclaimed many years later.[520] In 1947, Truman invited the Wallace and Truman family to spend Christmas in the White House. At the end of Christmas day, Truman recorded his impressions of the day in his diary.

> We have [had] a most happy and pleasant Christmas, with all the brothers of Bess present, Frank, George and Fred, with their wives, Natalie, May, and Christine. . . . My sister, Mary Jane, came on the 22nd, and I am sure spent an enjoyable time. My brother [Vivian] could not come. . . . He has four boys, all married but one, and a lovely daughter. I called him, and he said 22 sat down at his house. I am sure they had a grand dinner—a much

[516] Laura Rollins Hockaday and Henri Rix, "Warm Memories of Christmases Past," *Independence Examiner*, 21 December 1986.
[517] May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 59.
[518] Hockaday and Rix, "Warm Memories of Christmases Past."
[519] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes interview, 2 June 2000, 22.
[520] Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story."

happier one than a formal, butler-served one, although ours was nice enough.[521]

The relationship between George and May Wallace and Harry Truman's family was cordial, but not especially close. On one occasion, Harry Truman's mother and sister came to the Gates-Truman house at 219 North Delaware Street for a Christmas dinner. In 1945, Truman's arrival in Independence for Christmas was delayed due to bad flying weather. Since he was unable to get Grandview for a Christmas meal, Truman's sister and mother came to Independence for the Wallace Christmas dinner in the big house. Customarily, however, Madge Wallace rarely invited the Trumans to her home at 219 North Delaware. According to May Wallace many years later: "I think the Wallaces, all of them, were a little bit snooty about their things."[522] May and George Wallace also rarely went out to Grandview to visit the Trumans. And, although they had a social relationship with the Noland family at 216 North Delaware Street, they were not close. Years later, May Wallace's nephew Bill Carnes, suggested that the difference in age between the Noland sisters and the Wallace couple may have kept their relationship with the Nolands on a platonic level.[523]

When Harry Truman's mother, Martha Ellen Truman, died in July 1947, Truman could not be immediately present. Wallace family members supported the president by going to the home of Martha and Mary Jane, Harry Truman's sister, in Grandview, when ninety-four-year-old Martha's condition suddenly worsened. George Wallace joined Vivian Truman at the Truman cottage in Grandview in the late morning, around the time of Martha Truman's death. Bess and Margaret Truman arrived at Martha Truman's home in the early afternoon.[524]

Harry Truman's interest, concern, and devotion to the Wallace family were clearly expressed in numerous ways over the years. In late May and early June 1946, a year after Truman became president, Harry and Bess Truman held their first family reunion in the White House. The president's *Sacred Cow* airplane flew Mary Jane Truman, George and May, and the two other Wallace brothers and their families to Washington.[525] In early 1949, the Trumans invited May and George Wallace (as well as Frank and Natalie Wallace, Mary Jane Truman, Vivian Truman and his daughter Martha Ann, and Nellie and Ethel Noland) to

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[521] Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S Truman* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 120.
[522] May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 42.
[523] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes, 2 June 2000, 30.
[524] "President's Devotion to Mother Evident in a Remark," *Kansas City Star*, 26 July 1947.
[525] "Home in White House," *Kansas City Times*, 29 May 1946.

Harry Truman's inauguration. The Wallace couple spent several days in Washington, D.C. attending the inaugural ball and other inaugural festivities with the Trumans, and sightseeing in the capital city.[526] George and May Wallace visited the Trumans in Washington, D.C. on other occasions during their eight-year residence in the White House and the Blair House (when the White House was undergoing renovation during Truman's second term). Many years later, May Wallace remarked that she and her husband "had many exciting visits to Washington. To stay in the White House was really a great privilege, not granted to many."[527]

Also, when Truman received an over-abundance of a certain gift, he often gave the surplus to his brothers-in-law. "People always kept him in ties," remarked May Wallace. "He couldn't possibly wear all those ties that were sent to him." Frank and George Wallace became the recipients of Truman's overstock.[528]

When the Trumans were away from Independence, communication by letters and telephone calls between the president and George and May Wallace was friendly and frequent. May, more than George, wrote letters to Harry Truman in Washington. Probably the best-known exchange between May and Truman took place in April 1945. On April 9th, May mailed a chatty letter to Harry asking if he could do a small favor of sending his autographed photograph to the young son of a long-time friend. She went on to mention news of the household—listening to Harry's recent speech in Buffalo on the radio, George's anticipated heavier work load at his job for the Jackson County Highway Department, and the fattening of their dog Spot. Harry dictated and sent a letter to May four days later on April 12th. "I imagine Spott [*sic*] is getting fatter and fatter. I have gained nine pounds myself. . . . So Spot and I will be in the same class," Truman mused. Truman closed this typed letter with well wishes to all the Wallaces. In stark contrast to the light tone of this typed letter was Harry Truman's scrawled handwriting at the bottom of the page, communicating the sudden gravity of his situation after learning just hours before that President Roosevelt had died. "This was dictated before the world fell in on me." Harry wrote. "But I've talked to you since and you know what a blow it was. But—I must meet it."[529]

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[526] McCullough, *Truman*, 733
[527] Wallace, "Dear Friends Cherish Memories of Bess Truman."
[528] May Wallace interview, 20 July 1983, 38.
[529] May Wallace to Harry Truman, April 9, 1945 and Harry Truman to May Wallace, April 12, 1945, both in Senatorial Papers, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1944-45, Harry S. Truman Library.

Margaret Truman's Wedding

Following Harry and Bess Truman's return to private life in Independence, the most significant event for May and George and the entire Wallace-Truman family took place in 1956. On April 21st, thirty-two-year-old Margaret Truman married *New York Times* journalist E. Clifton Daniel, Jr. Before the wedding ceremony, the Truman, Daniel, and Wallace families ate lunch at May and George Wallace's house. Everyone feasted on ham with biscuits, chicken salad, tea, coffee, and milk. Margaret and Clifton were married in the Episcopal Church in Independence; the reception took place in the big house at 219 North Delaware Street. For George and May Wallace, Margaret's wedding was one of the great highlights of their adult life. It represented the opening of a new chapter in her life and also in George and May Wallace's lives—a chapter without Margaret's regular presence.[530]

Slowing Down

After George Wallace retired in 1961 at age sixty-nine as maintenance superintendent at the Jackson County Highway Department, he and May enjoyed relaxing and visiting friends. In December 1962, George became seriously ill. Over the next five months, he was hospitalized several times. In early April 1963, he entered the hospital for the last time. On May 24, 1963, George Wallace died at the Independence Hospital at age seventy-one.[531] "He killed himself with cigarettes," May Wallace concluded many years later, a habit he began around the time of his father's suicide, when George was eleven.[532]

Following George's death, May Wallace continued many of her past activities. She remained a loyal member of the Christian Church, which her grandfather had ministered from 1860 to 1900. Having joined the church at age ten, she remained a member throughout her life. By 1990, May had been a member of the church for over eighty-five years and was the church's oldest member at the time of her death in 1993. May also continued her active participation in several literary arts clubs, including the Saturday Club and the Mary Paxton Study Class. In 1984, on the centennial of Harry Truman's year of birth, the American Association of University Women honored May Wallace for her contribution to home-making and cultural interests. She also continued her avid pursuit of bridge and her participation in

[530] "Day for Remembering," *Kansas City Star*, 21 April 1956.
[531] "George Wallace Dies," *Kansas City Times*, 25 May 1963.
[532] May Wallace interview, 17 and 23 February 1988, 47.

the Tuesday Bridge Club. By the late 1980s, she was the last original member of the Tuesday Bridge Club still living.[533]

She also continued her role as family liaison to the press and anyone interested in the Truman and Wallace families. After the death of Truman family historian Ethel Noland in 1971 and the death of Harry Truman in 1972, May Wallace increasingly took on the role of family historian. She obliged research historians associated with the Truman Library, the National Park Service, and other institutions, and well as independent scholars and journalists. "She never refused a writer an interview," journalist Sue Gentry reported in the *Independence Examiner*, at the time of May Wallace's death.[534]

May Wallace traveled to many countries in her later years. She joined the Browning Tour (led by Dr. Herring, head of the Browning Library in Waco, Texas) to Europe, to Australia, and to the Holy Land. On other trips, May Wallace traveled to many parts of the United States, Canada, and Europe. She often went on tours with friends, such as Garnet Stall, Margaret Woodson, and Helen Berry. "I have many wonderful memories of the places I have been and the beautiful things I have seen," May Wallace reminisced in 1984.[535]

After Harry Truman died in 1972, May Wallace provided an important supportive role for Bess Truman, who continued to live in the big house next door. In 1986, Margaret Truman Daniel wrote of the two women's increasingly close and meaningful relationship as members of their family died and they both aged. "One of the happiest things about Mother's last years was the presence of her sister-in-law, May Wallace, who lived only a few dozen feet away in her house. . . . She visited Mother frequently and was a cheerful, attentive link to the past. On Mother's ninety-sixth birthday, in 1981, May was the spirit behind a festive party."[536] Bess lived another year and a half; May Wallace carried on alone for another decade.

May continued living at 605 Truman Road for nearly eight more years. When she was in her early nineties, May Wallace showed clear signs of aging. Her nephew, William Carnes, began attentively looking after her needs. Then in November 1989, at age ninety-five, May Wallace left her house for the last time, when she was hospitalized after a fall in her home. In the hospital she suffered a series of small strokes. Her family decided that it was no longer wise for her to live at home alone. Not long afterward

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[533] "Wallace Was Historic Woman," *Independence Examiner*, 21 May 1993";May Southern Wallace (Mrs. George P. Wallace), Historian's Files: Wallace Homes, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[534] Sue Gentry, "Wallace Was Historic Woman," *Independence Examiner*, 21 May 1993.
[535] Wallace, "May Wallace—Her Story."
[536] Truman, *Bess W. Truman*, 431.

she was moved to a nursing home. The expense of her nursing home care and the realization that May could never live independently again prompted Carnes family members to consider selling the May Wallace's house to the National Park Service. In early 1990, an assessment of the property's value was completed. The National Park Service acquired the Wallace house in 1991; they received the keys to the house in September that year. A year and a half later, on May 18, 1993, May Wallace died at the Independence Regional Health Center at age ninety-eight.[537] The Truman and Wallace famies kept a few items in the Wallace home. The National Park Service selected other pieces from the Wallace house that related to the life of Harry and Bess Truman and their home. The remaining contents of the Wallace house were sold at an auction.

Physical Evolution of the Property

Landscaping and Outbuildings

May and George Wallace planted trees, shrubs, and flowers on ground previously occupied by a garden and pasture behind the Gates-Truman house. Landscaping to accommodate the Wallace house began shortly after its construction in 1916. When May and George Wallace moved into their new house, several maple trees extended across the front yard along Blue Avenue (later Van Horn, then Truman Road). A few trees were planted in the side and rear yards to shade the house. Photographs taken in the 1950s, show that these trees had matured and reached a substantial height.

When Van Horn Road was widened and extended to Kansas City during World War II, road workers cut down the street trees along both sides of Truman Road, including those in front of the Wallace homes, May Wallace recalled. Many years later, in the early 1980s, a "cyclone" destroyed additional trees along Truman

Large trees and shrubs, behind Natalie Wallace, shaded the rear yards of both Wallace houses in the 1950s. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

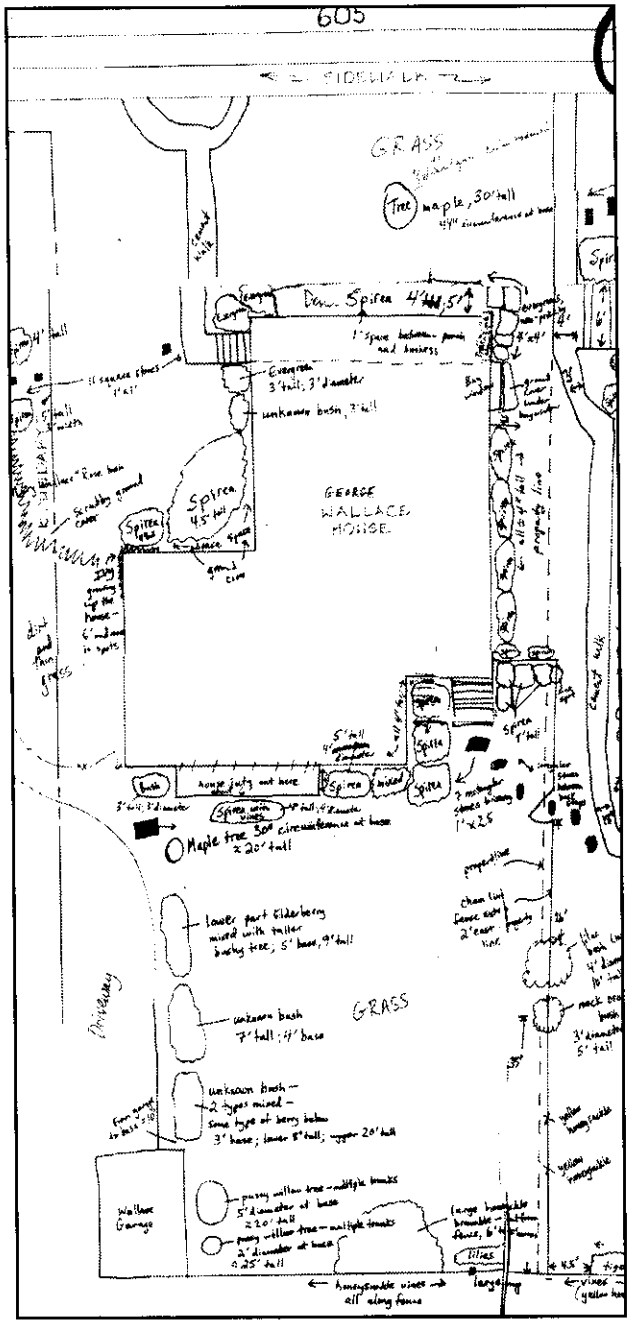
[537] "May Wallace Dies at 98"; "May Wallace Recalled as Helpful Source for Decades," *Kansas City Star*, 29 May 1993; "Acquisition of Wallace/Haukenberry

Road, according to May Wallace, including an old soft maple, which "crashed right across the driveway."[538]

Shrubs, vines, and perennials historically grew around the foundation of the house and along the property boundaries. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, a single row of hollyhocks ran along the rear backyards of both Wallace houses soon after they were built. At the wedding of Harry and Bess Truman in late June 1919, Natalie Wallace and May Wallace picked dozens of hollyhock flowers, seared their stems to keep the juice from running out, and placed them in umbrella stands in the Episcopal Church to serve as decorations.[539] In the 1920s and 1930s, several shrubs and flowers probably proliferated in the Wallace's yard. Pussy willows grew along the east side of the garage; they were probably planted soon after the garage was constructed in 1922. Bordering the east side of the driveway near the garage were several large bushes, including an Elderberry bush, which screened the drive from the yard. Peonies grew in great profusion along both the east and west sides of the driveway shared by the Trumans and May and George Wallace.[540] Yellow and white honeysuckle vines grew along a fence across the rear and east side property lines and on a trellis on the east end of the porch. Lilac, mock orange, and Euonymus (a brilliant red in the fall) bushes grew along the east side and south rear property lines that were shared with Frank and Natalie Wallace. Mint plants and lily of the valley grew on the east side of May's garage and in the southeast corner of the rear yard.[541] The spirea, which encircles the house foundation in 2000, may have been planted somewhat later, possibly in the 1930s or 1940s (and then replanted after work on the foundation was completed much later). May and George Wallace probably chose shrubs and perennial flowers that required little care; they apparently spent minimal time pruning and trimming their shrubbery.

Around 1922, the Wallace property acquired a gravel driveway and one outbuilding on the west side of the house. "After I had a car, we built my little garage," May Wallace remembered more than sixty years later. The original garage door was probably of wood and with two sections that opened outward in the middle.

Properties," c. 1990, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[538] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 8.
[539] Ibid., 2 March 1984, 51.
[540] Wallace and Wallace interview, 26 August 1991, 68.
[541] Jim Williams, record of communication with Doris Hecker, July 23, 1987; Jim Williams, memorandum to the file, July 31, 1987, Historian's Files, Truman National Historic Site. Some of the shrubs drawn on the map accompanying Williams's memorandum are large in height and diameter, suggesting that they (pussy willows, lilacs, mock orange, etc.) probably date from the 1920s or 1930s.



This sketch map of the George and May Wallace property shows the landscaping around the house in the 1970s, as Doris Hecker, long-time renter of the Frank and Natalie Wallace house, recalled it fifteen years later. Sketch map drawn by Doris Hecker and Jim Williams in 1987.

Much later, a more modern garage door that could be raised and lowered replaced the original two-leaf door.[542] Later, perhaps in the late 1940s or 1950s and around the time that a new door was installed, the garage was lengthened about eight or ten feet in the rear (south side) to allow longer cars of that time to fit into the garage.[543] This small extension is clearly visible in 2000.

A wood fence painted green "stood around George's house for a long time," in the 1930s or possibly earlier, on which the honeysuckle grew.[544] In 1949, both Wallace house properties were enclosed with a metal fence, after Harry Truman was elected president for a second term. According to May Wallace, this fence encircled the entire complex of three properties—the Truman house and the rear and side yards of the two Wallace houses—to protect the properties from curious uninvited visitors who wanted to wander around the houses. A section of this fence with a locked gate, which paralleled Truman Road, extended between the two Wallace houses.[545]

In more recent years, a few landscaping changes have taken place. A "May Wallace" climbing rose bush, a gift to May, was planted along the west side property line between the Wallace and Truman houses, probably sometime in the 1970s.[546] Around 1976, Bill Carnes, May Wallace's nephew, planted a maple tree in the backyard along the Wallace driveway. And at nearly the same time, May Wallace planted a maple tree in the front yard. Both trees remain standing in 2000. In the early 1980s, mint plants and lilies of the valley growing near the pussy willows along the east side of the small Wallace garage, were removed during a general thinning out of the bushes. Aside from these changes, no other vegetation was removed from the Wallace property between 1973 and 1987. In 1987, low bushes, vines, and weeds along the west wall of the bedroom wing were removed. Perhaps around the same time, honeysuckle growing on a trellis at the east end of the porch was also removed.

The yard work was accomplished by various people. David Wallace, the son of Fred Wallace, occasionally mowed the lawn around the big house and the Wallace house, before the Fred and Christine Wallace family moved out of 219 North Delaware around 1940. During the 1970s and early 1980s, May Wallace paid former President Truman's Secret Service men to mow her lawn. Around the same time, Reverend Edward Hobby began methodically trimming and pruning existing trees and

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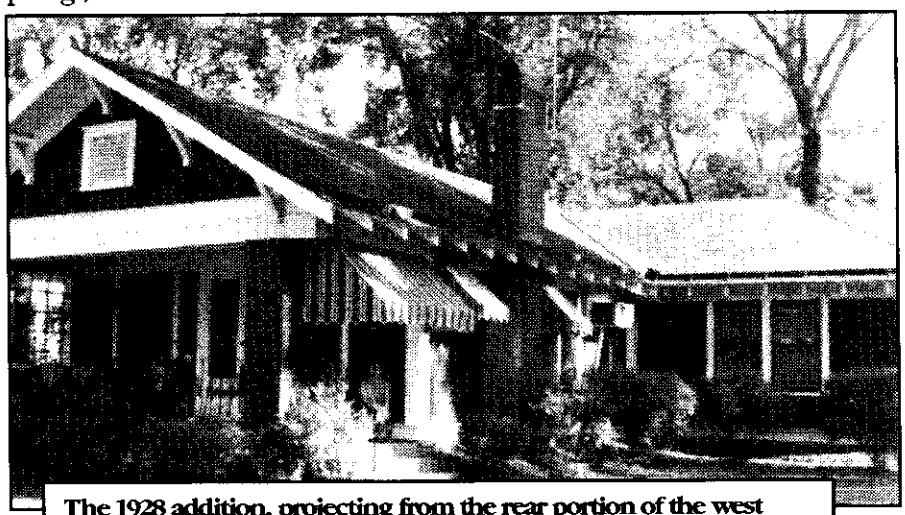
[542] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 5.
[543] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes interview, 2 June 2000, 15.
[544] Wallace and Wallace interview, 25 August 1991, 9, 55.
[545] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 9.
[546] Jim Williams handwritten note to Steve Harrison, c. 1987-1988, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

shrubs around the house and yard. Reverend Hobby was an African American Baptist minister with a congregation in Kansas City. He worked as a handyman part-time to supplement his salary as a minister. After the Secret Service left following Bess Truman's death in 1982, neighbor Doris Hecker oversaw yard maintenance for both her house at 601 Truman Road and May Wallace's house. In 1986, after webworms killed lawn in sections of the yard, Hecker hired Jensen Landscaping to rotor till and plant grass seed in both Wallace back yards. Hecker later reported that clover and weeds came up instead of grass.[547]

The House—Changes over the Years

The George and May Wallace House, completed in 1916, has received only minor exterior alterations since its construction. The original roofing material was probably wood shingles (similar to the roofing material on the Frank and Natalie Wallace house); the addition of composition shingles probably occurred after 1950. Exposed wood rafters under the eaves, and also window openings and nine-over-one, double-hung sash window frames on most of the walls date from the house's construction or 1928 when an addition was made.[548] Stripped canvas awnings, periodically replaced when old ones wore out, shaded the windows for decades. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Reverend Hobby hung May Wallace's green-stripped awnings every spring.)[549]



The 1928 addition, projecting from the rear portion of the west wall, can be seen in this 1950s photograph of the George and May Wallace house. Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library.

[547] Jim Williams, record of communication with Doris Hecker, July 23, 1987, Historian's Files: Truman National Historic Site.
[548] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes interview, 2 June 2000, 8.

The exterior wood shingle sheathing remains unchanged in 2000. It was stained a deep pine green when constructed (in 1916 and 1928) and has remained the same color green ever since, according to May Wallace. The trim color has always been white. "These house[s] were always these colors; they were stained," May Wallace reported, referring to both her house and the Frank and Natalie Wallace house.[550] George Wallace re-stained the house himself, at least once, until an accident occurred. May Wallace told the story many years later:

> My husband was a heathen, and he liked to work on Sundays because he didn't have much other time. He was painting the house on Sunday morning. The rope broke and, trying to grab it, the thing and everything fell and the green paint went all over everywhere. The preacher said it happened because he was doing it on Sunday! He came right in the house and called a painter and gave him the job of painting the house. He didn't want to paint it anymore. . . . But that green stain—I can remember how he looked with green stain dripping off him.[551]

In 1928, the George and May Wallace enlarged their four-room house by adding a bedroom and bath on the west side of the house at the rear. The front room, which originally served as both living and dining room, then became the living room only. The original bedroom became the new dining room. A very small sleeping porch next to the original bedroom was enclosed and enlarged into one bedroom measuring approximately 14.75' x 11.5.' A second new bedroom, approximately 17.75' x 10.75', and bath were also added onto the southwest corner of the house.[552]

Around 1950, the small recessed porch on the southeast rear corner of the house was enclosed and incorporated into the kitchen.[553] "Originally, which was sort of a practice years ago, their refrigerator set out there [on the porch]." recalled Bill Carnes, May Wallaces's nephew. "They did take in a little enclosed back porch and made it an all-weather room to make it sort of like a little breakfast room," Mary Ellen Carnes, Bill Carnes's wife added. When they created a small breakfast room, the electric refrigerator came inside. They "put regular double-hung windows out there and made it just weather-tight."[554]

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[549] Jim Williams, record of Communication with Doris Hecker, July 23, 1987.
[550] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 8.
[551] Ibid., 14 June 1983, 8.
[552] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 42; National Park Service, "George Wallace House," HABS drawing and description, 1992, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[553] May Wallace interview, 2 March 1984, 49.
[554] Bill and Mary Ellen Carnes interview, 2 June 2000, 10-11.

George and May Wallace completed this small porch alteration around the time that a "porch craze" took hold in the Truman and Noland families. Ethel and Nellie Noland, Mary Jane Truman, and Harry and Bess Truman all made porch additions or alterations around 1950.

Around the same time, the May and George's house began developing a serious problem in the basement. "The basement wall started giving way . . . from years and years of improper drainage on the outside," Bill Carnes reported. "They finally had to have a contractor bring a backhoe in and dig a large trench along that basement wall and re-pour it with a great big slab of concrete."[555] The edge of the slab of concrete along the east wall of the house is visible in 2000.[556]

Sometime after the addition of the bedroom addition in 1928, a balustrade with plain rails was later constructed on the roof of addition. By 1987, some of the 2 x 4 rails had rotted in places. In April or May that year, May Wallace had the entire balustrade replaced with pressure-treated (with a green tint) 2 x 4 rails.[557]

The interior of the house has retained much of its original integrity. Hardwood floors, decorative ceiling beams, built-in cabinets, a brick fireplace mantel and chimney remain intack in the living room. In the living room and elsewhere, the house still has its original wood baseboards. Gas heat replaced a coal furnace (in the basement), probably in 1940s.[558] Wall-to-wall carpeting has been installed recently in the two bedrooms.

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[555] Ibid., 2 June 2000, 27-28.
[556] In 1998, the National Park Service had the east basement wall further stabilized on the inside of the wall. This work included the installation of both I-beams for reinforcement and of masonry materials between the beams. "FY98 CRPP Accomplishment Reports," n.d. Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[557] Michael Shaver, memorandum to Chief Ranger, I&VS, November 1987, Historian's Files, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.
[558] May Wallace interview, 14 June 1983, 14.