CHAPTER FOUR

FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD

* Harry S Truman's Childhood In Independence
* David Willock Wallace
* The Wallaces Move To 219 North Delaware
* The Courtship of Harry and Bess, 1910 to 1918
* Lot One and the Two Wallace Houses, 1915-1916

Harry S Truman's Childhood In Independence

Harry S Truman, 33rd President of the United States, was not born in Independence. His parents, John Anderson and Martha Ellen Young Truman, were both born in Jackson County, but moved from farm to farm during their early married life. Both were uprooted during the hardships caused by Order Number 11 in the Civil War. The two were married on December 28, 1881, in Grandview, Missouri, a small town to the southwest of Independence in Jackson County. Soon after their marriage, they went to Lamar, Missouri, in Barton County, about 120 miles south of Independence. There John Anderson Truman worked as a mule trader when his wife gave birth to a son on May 8, 1884. They named the future President of the United States Harry S Truman. The child's middle initial, "S", was never intended to be the abbreviation for any particular name. By family tradition it stood for either "Solomon" or "Shipp," names honoring either of the childs' grandfathers.

In 1885, the Trumans moved from Lamar to Harrisonville, and on to another farm southeast of Belton, both in Cass County, Missouri. In 1887, they moved back to Grandview where they stayed until 1890. Harry S Truman was six-years-old when the family moved to Independence and occupied a house (no longer extant) at 619 South Crysler (Lots 4, 5, 6, and 7 of Ott

and Roberts Resurvey of Munn's addition, purchased December 12, 1890, and Lots 32 and 33, purchased July 11, 1892). It was at this same time, 1890, that Harry S Truman first saw and fell in love with Elizabeth Virginia "Bess" Wallace in Sunday school class at the First Presbyterian Church.

In 1896, the Truman family relocated to another Independence residence (extant; extensively altered) at 909 West Waldo (Lot 3, Woodland Place Addition, purchased November 21, 1895). There they lived until 1902. The move was significant because the family lived only a few blocks west of North Delaware and Harry S Truman and Bess Wallace attended secondary school together. The two often studied Latin together at the Waldo Street home of Truman's cousins, Mary Ethel and Nellie Noland. The childhood friends remained classmates until graduating from high school in 1901.[1]

David Willock Wallace

Bess Wallace Truman's father, David Willock Wallace, was born on June 15, 1860, in Independence to Benjamin F. and Virginia Willock Wallace. Having come to Independence in 1833, Benjamin F. Wallace was one of the earliest settlers of Jackson County, serving in 1869 as Mayor of Independence. At the time

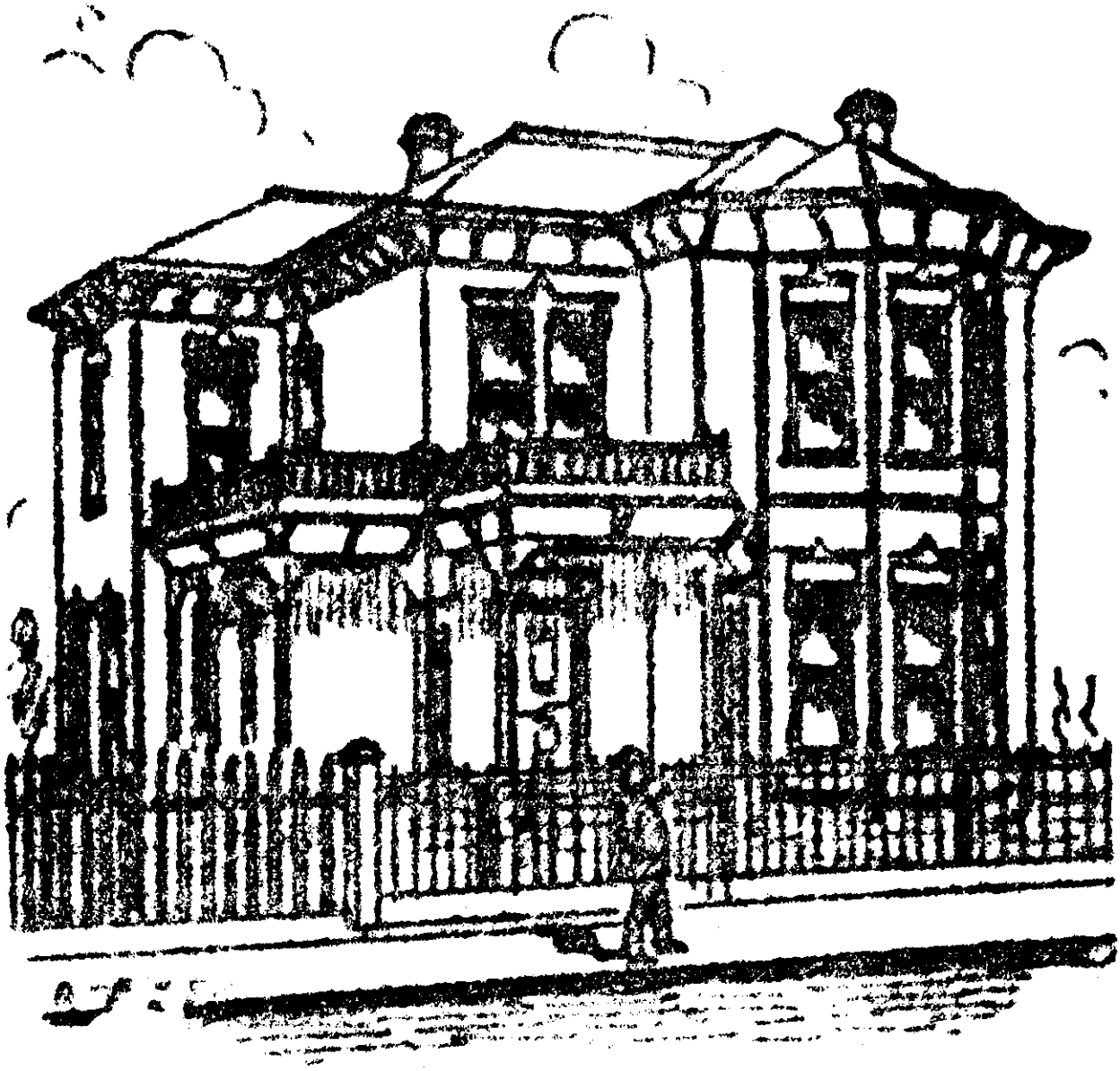
of Benjamin Wallace's death in 1877, he represented Jackson County for the First District in the Missouri Legislature.

His son, David, followed his example through a career in government. At the age of 14, David W. Wallace was the Assistant Docket Clerk of the Missouri Senate and, in 1877, became the Assistant Engrossing Clerk. On April 13, 1878, he was appointed Jackson County Deputy Recorder of Marriage Licenses in Independence.[2]

Despite David Wallace's apparently bright future, George P. Gates did not approve of Wallace courting his oldest daughter, Madge. Nonetheless, the two fell in love and eloped. David Wallace and Madge Gates were married on June 13, 1883.[3]

The couple moved nearby to a house at 117 West Ruby Street (See Figure 3). The house, which David Wallace purchased on July 28, 1882,[4] is extant. It was at 117 West Ruby that David and Madge Wallace's first child--Elizabeth Virginia "Bess" Wallace--was born on February 13, 1885. With the additional expense of starting a family, the couple's finances were strained. On November 14, 1885, the property at 117 West Ruby was conveyed to John A. Sea and Sarah E. Pugsley in trust to secure a $700 note. The Wallaces had one year to repay the loan at 10% annual interest.[5]

FIGURE 3



RESIDENCE OF D. W. WALLACE.

(The Independence Sentinel, January 2, 1886. Harry S. Truman Library and Jackson County Historical Society)

The Wallaces did not live in the Ruby Street residence long. The home was sold on April 11, 1887, to M.L. Hall.[6] David, Madge, two-year-old Bess, and newborn Frank Gates Wallace (born March 4, 1887) moved into a larger house at 608 North Delaware, two blocks north of the newly-constructed Gates mansion. The family moved into the Gates house for an unknown length of time in the late 1880s. The 1889-90 Independence city directory records 219 North Delaware as their address.[7]

The David Wallace house on North Delaware was a two-story Victorian structure marked by a large bay window topped by a cupola. It had no basement, but it did have several outbuildings: a carriage house, stable, washhouse, woodhouse, and a privy decorated with a trellis.[8] (This house was torn down in the early 1900s, and a modern home was built in its place and renumbered 610 North Delaware. A massive oak under which Bess Wallace once played still stands in the front yard).

It was at this house, two blocks from her grandparent's mansion, that Bess Wallace Truman grew up. Her two younger brothers, George Porterfield Wallace (born May 9, 1892) and David Frederick Wallace (born January 17, 1900), were probably born there. It was a common sight in the 1890s for neighbors to see Bess (or "Bessie") Wallace riding her velocipede to

Grandmother (or "Mama") Gates's house to the south. A childhood friend recalled:

> Mrs. Gates was the cutest, sweetest little old lady, and she used to have parties for Bess, children's parties; and I remember the best cake--ladies all had cooks, but they usually made their cakes; nobody bought them because each lady had her specialty and bakers cakes were inferior.[9]

By 1903, 18-year-old Bess had already been graduated from Independence High School for two years. Her father was well-liked and a respected community leader. He was described as "the most popular man in the county."[10] After high school, Wallace became the Deputy Jackson County Recorder. In 1889, he was elected Jackson County Treasurer, serving two two-year terms. He then moved from county government in Independence to the Federal Building in downtown Kansas City where he served as Deputy United States Surveyor of Customs under Port Surveyor J. Scott Harrison. Kansas City became an official "Port of Entry" in 1882. Wallace was a Democrat, a Presbyterian, and an active Mason. The Knights Templar elected him as Missouri's presiding official of the organization, the youngest man ever to hold the position.[11]

The popular David Wallace, however, was plagued by financial problems and alcoholism. To the profound shock of the family and the community, David Willock Wallace shot and

killed himself in the early morning hours of July 17, 1903.[12]

The Wallaces Move To 219 North Delaware

Madge Wallace later admitted that she "felt so humiliated" by her husband's suicide that she left with her four children to stay with relatives (most likely Frank E. Gates, an uncle) in Colorado Springs, Colorado, for nearly a year. When Madge Wallace, Bess and her brothers, Frank, George, and Fred, returned to Independence in 1904, they were welcomed into the spacious house at 219 North Delaware.[13]

The arrangement was ideal. Madge Wallace was able to care for her aging parents while Bess, then a day student at the Barstow School for Girls in Kansas City (a post-secondary, finishing school), continued her duty helping raise her brothers, most notably young Fred. When George P. and Elizabeth Gates could not negotiate the stairway and/or desired more privacy, they abandoned the second floor to the Wallaces and moved to the first floor bedroom which was supplemented with a bathroom (circa 1907-1910). These rooms and the front living room were considered the grandparents' quarters along with the south side porch where both spent the evening hours sitting. Madge and David Wallace's furniture was also moved

from 608 North Delaware into the Gates mansion and was incorporated into the existing decor.

Madge Wallace transformed the room above the kitchen into the sitting and sewing room for her own family. It was a place where the Wallaces and their friends could gather at night without disturbing the elderly Gates who usually retired early. They could enter the house through one of the kitchen entrances and walk up the rear stairway, all without bothering the grandparents.[14]

(For period photographs, see Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8).

The Courtship of Harry and Bess, 1910 to 1918

One of the frequent visitors to the upstairs sitting room at 219 North Delaware was Harry S Truman. Truman's friendship with Bess Wallace had lapsed since their 1901 graduation from Independence High School. Truman had held a succession of odd jobs in Independence and Kansas City before moving back in 1906 to the Truman family farm in Grandview. Their acquaintance was renewed around 1910 at the initiative of Harry Truman who was visiting his aunt and uncle, Joseph T. and Ethel Noland. The Noland house was across the street from the Gates mansion at

FIGURES 4 and 5

Truman Library Photo Archives, 82-59-104 and 82-212-2

Circa 1900

Two of the three earliest-known photographs of 219 North Delaware. Note the dark trim.

FIGURE 6

Truman Library Photo Archives, 82-59-114

Circa 1900

One of the three earliest-known photographs of 219 North Delaware. Two unidentified men stand in the backyard with the 1867 structure in the background. Note the steps for a rear porch with simple overhang cover. This configuration disappeared between 1907 and 1910 when the Gates converted the area into the first floor bedroom and bathroom.

FIGURE 7

Truman Library Photo Archives, 82-59-75

Bess Wallace on Front Porch

Circa 1905

The original porch balustrade, porch skirting, and light and dark color scheme are plainly revealed in this photograph. Note also the hanging plants and morning glories.

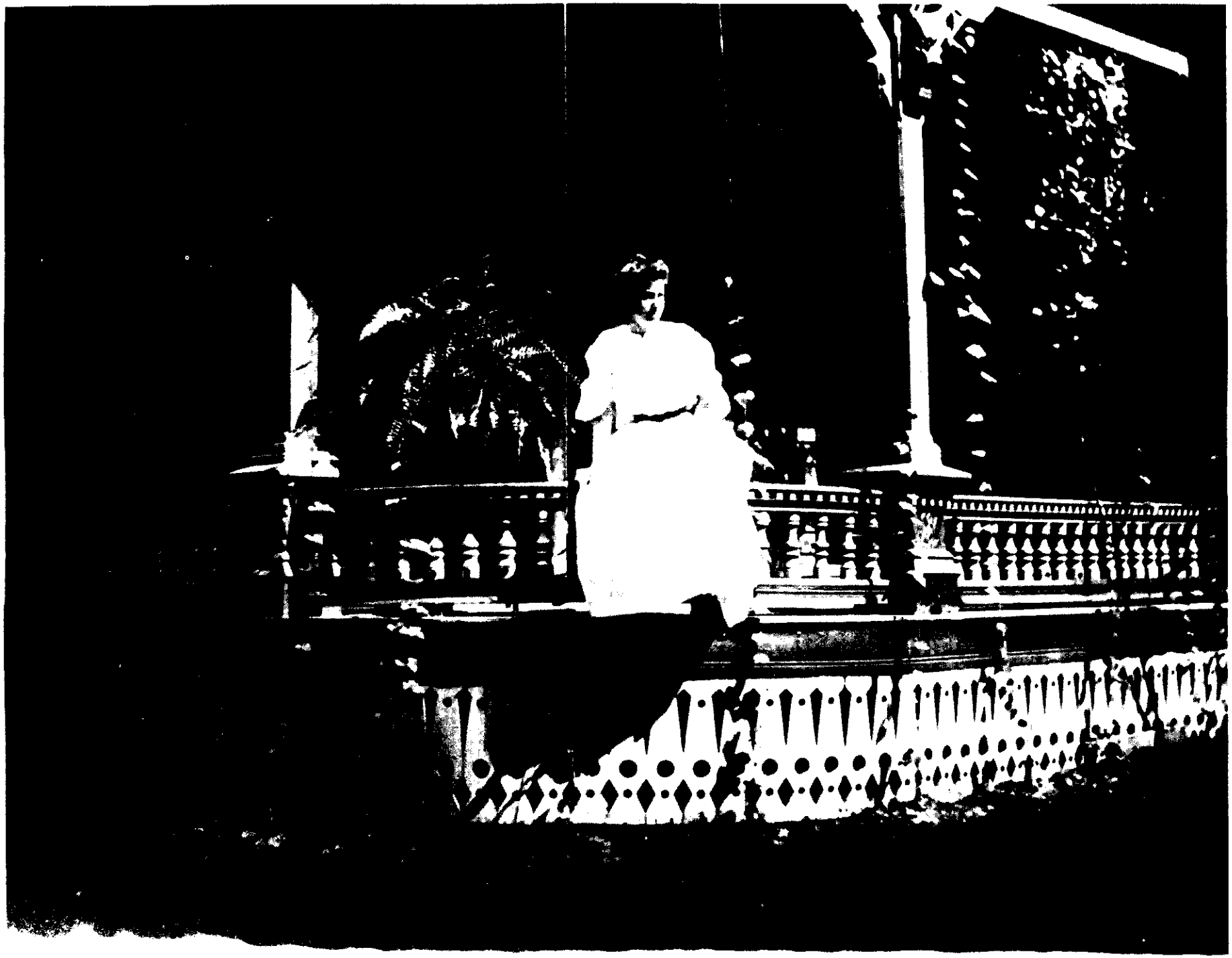


FIGURE 8

Truman Library Photo Archives, 72-3689

Driveway and Garden Area

Circa 1900-05

Faint writing on the photograph reads, "In Gates-Wallace backyard." In the background is the upaved driveway (probably dirt and gravel), and picket fencing where the garden and grazing area is located.

Source: Noland Papers

216 North Delaware. One day while Truman was visiting the Nolands, his Aunt Ethel announced that she had a cake plate to return to Mrs. Wallace across the street. Twenty-six-year-old Harry S Truman immediately volunteered to take the cake plate back. He was delighted when his old childhood sweetheart, Bess Wallace, opened the door.[15]

A period of intense, prolonged courting began. Harry Truman became a regular visitor of his aunt and uncle, staying in their home overnight on the weekends after spending the day with Bess. He did sleep at least one night at 219 North Delaware, however. In a January 21, 1913, letter to Bess, Truman wrote, "I sure did enjoy myself last Sunday and I certainly appreciate Frank's sharing his sleeping quarters with me."[16]

Truman worked hard at the Grandview farm during the week, keeping in constant touch with Bess Wallace in Independence through a barrage of letters. He traveled by train north to Kansas City, then east to Independence. Schedules changed often and transfer connections were often missed. Despite the rigors of the 30-mile trip, seeing Bess was the high point of his week as he wrote in 1913, "It seems like a hollow week if I don't arrive at 219 Delaware at least one day in it."[17]

The long train trips ceased in 1914, the year Truman's father died, when Harry purchased a Stafford automobile for $650. The car made his trips to Independence more frequent and easier. When he was not taking Bess for a drive or on a picnic, the car remained parked in the Gates's barn.[18] One of Bess's childhood friends recalls the Gates house during this courtship period:

> The house itself, always had in summer the coolness of a Victorian house, no matter how hot the day might be. There were several porches. If you walked uptown on a Sunday afternoon, and passed that way, you would see the Wallace family sitting out on the side porch; their most constant guest was Harry Truman, who would have driven over from Grandview to spend Sunday with Bess and her family.[19]

Truman's desire to make a more lucrative living than farming and Bess Wallace's family obligations kept the couple from getting married. She felt it was her duty to look after her elderly grandparents and chronically ill mother, and to help raise her youngest brother, Fred. Truman proposed marriage as early as November 4, 1913,[20] but dating continued on into 1917 at which time Truman enlisted in the Army. He was a member of the American Expeditionary Force to France and was commissioned on July 11, 1918, to take command of Battery D, 129th Field Artillery, 35th Division of Missouri, National Guard. During his service in France, Truman kept up his

voracious letter-writing to his fiancée on North Delaware Street in Independence.

Captain Harry Truman returned to the United States in the spring of 1919, reuniting with Bess after a victory parade in downtown Kansas City on June 1, 1919.[21]

Lot One and the Two Wallace Houses, 1915-1916

In the years prior to the United States entrance as a belligerent into World War I, George P. and Elizabeth E. Gates presented two of their grandsons with small parcels of land upon which to build homes. The principal section of Lot 1 of James F. Moore's addition immediately east of 219 North Delaware which served as the family's garden, was divided and given as wedding presents to the brothers of Bess Wallace.

Frank Gates Wallace, who married Natalie Ott, was given the east 50 feet of Lot 1 on March 15, 1915. George Porterfield Wallace, who married Mary Frances (May) Southern, the daughter of the publisher of the Independence Examiner, was given the west 50 feet of the east 100 feet of Lot 1 on August 22, 1916. The west 14.18 feet of Lot 1 remained in the Gates's possession. They also reserved "the right to maintain and use

the sewer that is now constructed across the... real estate."[22]

The Wallace brothers built their homes during the year in which they received their parcels. The bungalows, which can be seen today at 605 and 601 West Truman Road, are of similar design. Both Wallace families spent their married lives in these houses, and Mrs. George P. (May) Wallace, an excellent source of family history, currently resides at 605 West Truman Road.

Harry S Truman's Childhood In Independence

[1]"Residences of Harry S Truman, 1884-1972, Research Room Archival Listing, HSTL; and Oral History Interview with Mary Ethel Noland, Independence, Mo., August 23, and September 9, 16, 1965, by J.R. Fuchs, HSTL.

David Willock Wallace

[2]The History of Jackson County, Missouri, Containing A History of the County, Its Cities, Towns, Etc., Indexed Edition, 1881 (reprinted by Ramfre Press, Cape Girardeau, Mo., 1966), p. 881, Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Mo.

[3]Mary Paxton Keeley, Oral History Interview, Columbia, Mo., July 22, 1966, by J.R. Fuchs, HSTL, p. 27.

[4]Warranty Deed, Isaac N. and Natalie A. Rogers to David W. Wallace, July 28, 1882, Land Deed Record Book 130, Page 53. Documentation on the Ruby Street house were obtained from Pat O'Brien, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Independence.

[5]Deed of Trust, D.W. and M.G. Wallace to John A. Sea and Sarah E. Pugsley, November 14, 1885, Land Deed Record Book 144, Page 45. A marginal notation on the deed of trust acknowledged

satisfaction of the note on May 14, 1887, by G.M. Nichol, "Assignee and holder of note."

[6]Warranty Deed, David W. and Madge G. Wallace to M.L. Hall, April 11, 1887 (filed April 25, 1887), Land Deed Record Book 158, Page 98.

[7]Directory of Independence for 1889-90 (Independence: Don L. Walters), p. 73, HSTL.

[8]Mary Paxton Keeley, Oral History Interview, Columbia, Mo., July 22, 1966, by J.R. Fuchs, HSTL, p. 22.

[9]Ibid., p. 36.

[10]Henry P. Chiles, Oral History Interview, Independence, Mo., November 1, 1961, and August 14, 1962, by J. R. Fuchs, HSTL, pp. 20; 22.

[11]O.W. Price, The Federal Government in Greater Kansas City, Part I (Kansas City: Greater Kansas City Federal Business Association, 1939), p. 36, and, Missouri: Mother of the West, Vol. IV (Chicago: American Historical Society, Inc., 1930), p. 343.

[12]Robert Underhill, The Truman Persuasions (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), p. 39. The probate papers for the estate of David Willock Wallace are among 200-odd similar documents which are missing from the Jackson County Probate Court Office in Independence.

[13]Mary Paxton Keeley, Oral History Interview, p. 42, and, Mrs. H.H. (Ardis) Haukenberry, Interview, Independence, Mo., June 14, 1983.

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

Courtship of Harry and Bess, 1910 to 1918

[15]Mary Ethel Noland, Oral History Interview, Independence, Mo., August 23, September 9 and 16, 1965, by J.R. Fuchs, HSTL, p. 87, and, Mrs. H.H. (Ardis) Haukenberry, Interview, Independence, Mo., June 14, 1983.

[16]Robert H. Ferrell, Dear Bess (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1983), p. 112. Bess' brother, Frank Wallace, did not marry and move from 219 North Delaware until 1915.

[17]Ibid., p. 136. The letter from Grandview was dated September 2, 1913.

[18]Ferrell, Dear Bess, p. 162. The letter to Bess, dated March 24, 1914, reported he was thinking of buying the car with the money from the settlement of the family lawsuit over his grandmother's estate.

[19]Elizabeth Paxton Forsling, "Remembering Delaware Street," Jackson County Historical Society Journal, Vol. IV, No. 12 (November 1963), p. 10, appended to the Sue Gentry, Oral History Interview, Independence, Mo., August 30, 1971, by Dr. Philip C. Brooks, HSTL.

[20]Ferrell, Dear Bess, p. 141. Bess Wallace told Truman "she cared for him" the Sunday before, and Truman proposed in the letter that they "get engaged."

[21]Ibid., p. 288.

Lot One and the Two Wallace Houses, 1915-1916

[22]General Warranty Deeds: George P. and Elizabeth E. Gates to Frank G. Wallace (March 15, 1915; Land Deed Record Book 334, Page 354) and George P. Wallace (August 22, 1916; Land Deed Record Book 339, Page 360), Jackson County Courthouse, Office of Deeds, Independence, Mo.