

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

DORIS MILLER

DECEMBER 10, 1985

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY PAM SMOOT

ORAL HISTORY #1985-11

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #3093-3095

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



**National Park Service photographs
of Doris Miller taken during her interview**



Doris Miller in her beauty shop
HSTR slide #282



Doris Miller in her beauty shop
HSTR slide #3624



Doris Miller in her beauty shop
HSTR slide #3625

EDITORIAL NOTICE

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Doris Miller and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2001. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

RESTRICTION

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ABSTRACT

Doris Miller was Bess W. Truman's beautician from 1953 until Mrs. Truman's death in 1982. Miller discusses the development of her beauty shop and her husband's barber shop, where Harry S Truman had his weekly trims. As Mrs. Truman's health declined, Miller shifted the services she performed to the Truman home. Miller describes several events that occurred while working in the home, her part in Margaret Truman Daniel's wedding, and preparation of Harry S and Bess W. Truman for their respective funerals.

Persons mentioned: Bess W. Truman, Harry S Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, George Miller, Joanne Miller Sellars, May Wallace, Thomas Hart Benton, Jimmy Carter, Mary Kay Lockwood, Valeria LaMere, Geraldine Peterson, Mary "Peaches" Lightfoot, Frank LaMere, Trudy Johnson, Ardis Haukenberry, Madge Gates Wallace, Jacqueline Kennedy, Mary Paxton Keely, George Lubin, Sharon Lubin, E. Clifton Daniel, Effie Hart, Louis "Polly" Compton, Sam Rayburn, Jim Thirkles, Edward Hobby, Mike Westwood, and D. Frederick Wallace.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
DORIS MILLER**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1985-11

STEVE HARRISON: This is a recording of an interview with Doris Miller, being conducted December 10th, 1985, by Pamela Smoot, historian with the National Park Service in the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha. Interview is being conducted at Mrs. Miller's beauty salon at 417 West Maple, Independence, Missouri. My name is Steve Harrison. I'll be operating the recording equipment. [preliminary conversation not transcribed]

PAMELA SMOOT: Mrs. Miller, would you please tell us your full name, address, and birth date, please?

DORIS MILLER: I'm Doris Miller. My birth date is September 15th, 1923.

SMOOT: And your address?

MILLER: 417 West Maple.

SMOOT: Are you a native of Independence, Missouri?

MILLER: No, I'm not.

SMOOT: Where are you from?

MILLER: Arkansas.

SMOOT: What part of Arkansas?

MILLER: The northeast section, near Salem.

SMOOT: Is it a real small town you don't want to tell us the name? We may know where it is.

MILLER: Camp.

SMOOT: Okay. Are you self-employed?

MILLER: Well, I guess I am.

SMOOT: And what is your occupation?

MILLER: I'm a beautician.

SMOOT: And where's your business located?

MILLER: 417 West Maple.

SMOOT: When was your business established?

MILLER: Hmm . . . About thirty-four, thirty-five—good gracious, it must be near thirty-seven years ago.

SMOOT: Has your business always been located at the same place?

MILLER: No, no, we were on North Main. Urban renewal took our place there, and we built here.

SMOOT: So do you remember—

MILLER: We've been—yeah, it was—no, I really don't. I hadn't thought about it. 214, I think, North Main.

SMOOT: And how many operators do you have working in your salon?

MILLER: At the present, none, because of my husband's illness. But my daughter works some with me and she is taking over the barbershop the first of the year.

SMOOT: And what type of services does your salon provide other than hair?

MILLER: Just the usual—manicures, tinting, and hairdressing of all types.

SMOOT: Did you know Bess Truman?

MILLER: Yes, I did.

SMOOT: What was your association with her?

MILLER: I did her hair from the time that she came back from the White House until she died.

SMOOT: How did you meet her?

MILLER: Well, she came in first—I think I had an operator that had done her hair in the past when she was here, and she was only—she only worked for me for a short time, but Mrs. Truman continued to come to me after she left. However, I had done her hair when I worked at Bundschu's.

SMOOT: And where is that located?

MILLER: That was on Main Street.

SMOOT: And what was the operator's name that did hair before you started to do it?

MILLER: Oh, gosh. Pearl. I don't remember the last name.

SMOOT: Do you know if she was from Independence?

MILLER: Yes, she was—I guess. I don't remember that, even. See, that was—I did her hair about thirty years.

SMOOT: Do you remember how old you were the first time you did Mrs. Truman's hair?

MILLER: I can't remember that. Don't think that made much difference [chuckling].

SMOOT: So, did you know Mrs. Truman prior to being her hairdresser?

MILLER: Only when . . . No. Just—

SMOOT: Did she wear her hair in a particular style?

MILLER: Well, pretty much so. It took her a long time before she'd ever even allow it to be backcombed when that came in, you know. She pretty much knew exactly what she wanted and, you know, she was a definite person. Lovely.

SMOOT: What do you mean when you say "definite"?

MILLER: Well, I mean she knew where she was and where she was going. She didn't . . .

SMOOT: Okay, other than doing Mrs. Truman's hair, did you do any other types of services?

MILLER: Just did her manicure. I did her hair twice a week for most of those years, and a manicure once a week.

SMOOT: When you did her hair, were there ever any other customers here in the salon?

MILLER: Yes.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman sort of act any different or did the customers act any different?

MILLER: Probably at first, but most of my trade are people that I've had for so many years, you know, and she was friendly with the other people. They sort of became beauty shop friends, you know.

SMOOT: And when Mrs. Truman would come to the salon, did the Secret Service ever come in with her?

MILLER: Well, for many years, until Mr. Truman died, they didn't come in with her. After he passed away, they came in. Sometimes. They usually would sit in the barbershop while she was having her hair dressed.

But when I first began to do her hair, she was driving her own car and she went wherever she wanted to by herself. And, of course, at that time I guess she didn't, they didn't have Secret Service—don't remember what year they came.

SMOOT: Do you remember what color the car was?

MILLER: She had a white Chrysler. I think she gave that to Margaret. I remember her telling me when she gave that car to her daughter, she said she was not going to drive any more. And I said, "Oh, why? You love to drive. Why aren't you going to drive?" and she said, "Well, I think I'm getting past that. I'm getting too old to." I said, "Of course you're not." And she said, "Well," she looked up and smiled and she said, "I hit the garage." And I said, "Well, everybody has an accident once in a while, Mrs. Truman," and she said, "But I've been going—" she told me how many years, I don't recall now, "in and out of that driveway and for no reason at all I hit it." She says, "I want to stop while I'm ahead."

SMOOT: Do you remember how Mrs. Truman dressed when she would come to the salon?

MILLER: Always very neat and very unpretentious, you know. She was . . . I never felt like that she thought clothes was the most important thing in her life, you know. She always looked nice and . . . but didn't seem to dwell too much on that. I recall her telling me one time, I wish I could remember who the lady was, but they had gone to some function in, I think Washington, and a certain person had on the same identical style of dress

as hers, you know. She didn't seem to think that was too bad. They probably had good taste.

SMOOT: Well, when the Secret Service would bring Mrs. Truman to your salon, did they ever come in and sort of look around and then leave?

MILLER: No. No. They didn't.

SMOOT: Have you ever been in the Truman home before?

MILLER: Lots of times.

SMOOT: Could you give me some examples of when you went down there?

MILLER: Well, I think the first time that I recall—maybe I was there before, but the first thing that I really remember was when Clifton was born, their oldest grandson. And we had prepared ahead so she'd be sure to have her permanent done before the baby came, you know. And, of course, he came sooner than they had expected and she called and said she couldn't make it because Clifton had called and Margaret was in the hospital and that they'd be leaving the next morning on the train, 'cause generally they went by train, you know.

And I said, "Well, could I, would you like for me to come down to the house and do it this evening?" And she said, "Oh, I'd never ask you to do that." And I said, "Well, you didn't; I offered." And she said, "Well, I'd be forever grateful if you did." And so I went down and gave her her permanent in the bathroom downstairs.

And I always jokingly tell—this was the first time I ever really visited with Mr. Truman was in his bathroom, because he came in and talked to us, you know, and they were lovely people. They were our

neighbors after, you know, they were just good friends and good neighbors. When I had any illness in my family, she was the first to call and the first to bring something. Always so loving and thoughtful.

SMOOT: When Mr. Truman came down into the bathroom, what sorts of things were you talking about?

MILLER: Well he, of course, passed the time of day with me and then he said—I believe he called her—isn't that funny? I think he called her "Mother." Anyway, he said, "I'm going to set the alarm. What time should we get up?" I remember that, you know, and he had the clock in his hand because they were going to leave early the next morning.

But I visited with him many times thereafter, you know, because at that time I believe he was still going to the city to his office. He came—if I recall, he came out here as soon as the building was near enough completed. He moved his office in before it was opened. And from that time on, then George cut his hair and took care of him, you know. And, of course, lots of times then I visited with him in the barbershop and here.

And then, through the years, when Mrs. Truman fractured her leg, ankle, I went to the home and did her hair, and when she was ill I went.

SMOOT: Could you tell us who George is, please?

MILLER: My husband.

SMOOT: When you went to the Truman home, what entrance to the house did you go into?

MILLER: I generally went through the back door. I came down across the back yard and went in through the back.

SMOOT: Did the Secret Service sort of escort you in or did they know that you were coming?

MILLER: No, she always told them that Doris would be there, and of course they knew me from coming in the shop and she'd say, "Just come right on in," so nobody opened the back door or anything. I went in through the kitchen or hall and dining room and into the living room where she was.

SMOOT: Did you always do Mrs. Truman's hair in the downstairs bedroom?

MILLER: In the kitchen, lots of times. If she could get into the kitchen.

SMOOT: What days—you said that Mrs. Truman got her hair done twice. What days of the week?

MILLER: She generally came in on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

SMOOT: Was there a particular time that she would come every Wednesday and every Saturday?

MILLER: Usually about 1:30.

SMOOT: Did she ever call you to confirm or cancel an appointment?

MILLER: Occasionally, but not very often.

SMOOT: Okay, would she call or would someone else call?

MILLER: She did.

SMOOT: When Mrs. Truman became very seriously ill, did she still get her hair done?

MILLER: Yes. I broke my hip in July before she died in October, so I was not able to take care of her but our daughter is a beautician and, by the way, she was her first visitor when we brought her home from the hospital and she loved her just like she was her grandmother, you know, because every, twice a

week she was here and she played at her knee. And so she did her hair while I was ill and she also did her hair for her funeral.

SMOOT: So I trust that Mrs. Truman was satisfied with the service that the Millers had given her? Did she ever complain about the way her hair looked?

MILLER: Oh, no. She was . . . she was satisfied, I'm sure, because if she hadn't have been she would have complained [laughing].

SMOOT: That's true. Did you know Mrs. Truman's mother, Madge Wallace?

MILLER: No, I didn't know her.

SMOOT: Well, overall, what was your impression of Mrs. Truman?

MILLER: Loved her like she was one of my family.

SMOOT: Did she ever tell you any stories of any sort?

MILLER: Occasionally.

SMOOT: Would you care to share any stories with Steve and I?

MILLER: No. No, I wouldn't, because she generally told me that if I repeated it that she'd deny she said it, and she probably would wherever she is, you know.

SMOOT: Steve, do you have anything that you'd like to ask Mrs. Miller?

HARRISON: What kinds of things though . . . what kinds of things would you talk about? I mean, was it just—

MILLER: Well, through the years local things and of course I knew a lot of the people here that she knew, and her sister-in-law, both sister-in-laws at one time. The one that is living now is a customer of mine, you know, May. And, oh, this little shop, you know, is very homey and everybody was passing around their favorite recipes and discussions of that sort, you know. And she entered into those conversations, though she wasn't a

very—you know, she wasn't such a talkative person. She always had a book to read. She loved to read. But she always inquired about our family and of course our children. She was with them so much, you know. I think she always compared the little tots with her grandchildren to see what age and what level they were because she didn't see them too often, you know.

HARRISON: Would she bring her own book, or—

MILLER: Usually, but if she didn't happen to have one or she'd lend me one and I'd loan her one, you know, and we shared our books. We shared our watermelon because I loved watermelon and she did too, so she'd send up half of one to me or I'd send one down to her, you know. And she was one fine lady and a real lady. Everyone loved her that knew her.

SMOOT: Do you remember what you fee was the first time you did Mrs. Truman's hair?

MILLER: I just don't remember, but it wasn't very much. And she was as interested as everyone else was when I had to raise it, you know. She wasn't—she didn't throw her money around, you know. She was careful but always so fair and sweet.

I remember one time when she came in and she parked her car out here. There's a cutout right here, you know, so she went up that way and backed up. So one of the operators said to me, "Come look. Mrs. Truman's car is sitting all the way up on the sidewalk." And it was, the back end of it, you know. And I walked over and I said, "Ms. Truman, Shirley said your car is setting on the sidewalk. Would you like for her to go park that back down on the street?" She frowned and she got up and

went over and looked out the door. “Sure,” she said, “I’d be glad for her to.” She gave her her keys, went back and sat down and opened her book up and she says, what she thought was under her breath that nobody’d hear, she said, “I thought I did a perfectly beautiful job parking.” [chuckling] Of course we got a kick out of that, you know, ’cause . . .

I haven’t been in the Truman home since they opened it.

HARRISON: You should come down there some time.

MILLER: Do they still have the picture in the corner of Margaret and the Chase Manhattan?

HARRISON: Yeah, the bank?

MILLER: In the corner?

HARRISON: Yeah.

MILLER: Well, I hung that picture there, so I just wondered if they still had it there. She received that, you know, in the mail and I happened to be there that day, later that day, and she was showing it to me, and I said, “Oh, why don’t you put it up so you can see it.” And she said, “Where would I put it?” And I said, “Well, you’ve got some places around here.” Of course, she couldn’t get up to do it herself. And she said, “Would you hang it someplace?” And so I took Thomas Hart Benton’s picture—I don’t know where that one is, it was a small picture, off the wall, and hung that picture over in the corner and put that picture underneath the bed in the bedroom. I don’t know what ever happened to it. I told her, I said, “Now, when someone comes to clean, you tell them to take care of it, but I’m going to

put it underneath there so nothing happens to it.” So I’ve often wondered if they still have the picture over in the corner where I hung—

HARRISON: So you took down the Thomas Hart—

MILLER: Uh-huh, and put up Margaret’s picture.

HARRISON: With the—

MILLER: Chase Manhattan, uh-huh.

HARRISON: —bank board in its place and then put the Thomas Hart Benton picture under—

MILLER: Uh-huh, underneath the bed and so I often wondered if that was still there.

HARRISON: Both of them are up now.

MILLER: Are they?

HARRISON: Yeah. The Thomas Hart Benton may be back in its original place. I’m not sure. And then Margaret’s picture is, as you would go into that downstairs bedroom it’s to the right.

MILLER: To the right, that’s where I hung it.

HARRISON: ’Cause that’s where it is. Thomas Hart Benton is, if you were facing the fireplace in the living room, it’s just to the left.

MILLER: Oh, well then they—the door.

HARRISON: Yeah.

MILLER: So someone rehung that picture. It wasn’t there through the years. I always intended to ask her, “What did you do with that picture?” you know, so somebody I guess later on put that picture up.

HARRISON: We’ve tried to keep the house pretty much the way we found it, National Park Service has. That’s just the way we do things.

MILLER: I have so many people say to me—should I tell this?

HARRISON: Oh, yeah.

MILLER: I have so many people say to me, “Oh, they couldn’t imagine the kitchen being as it was,” and I said, “Well, that was far from Mrs. Truman’s worry, you know. It was nice and clean and comfortable,” and I said, “it really was more serviceable than it looked,” because everything was handy from the pantry for, you know, for cooking, and she just was busy with other things. That didn’t worry her.

HARRISON: Did she ever have any complaints about the house, either while you were there or she—

MILLER: No, but we used to discuss the windows, because I have long windows, not quite as old and long as those tall ones are, you know, and it became so hard to get curtains, you know, the panels long enough, you know, and we used to—she’d tell me where she had happened to find them, you know, so that I could . . .

SMOOT: Were there ever any visitors to the home while you were there?

MILLER: Yes, I was there when President Carter came. In fact, I have some pictures that were made at that time. I had asked him if I might take one, and he said, “How about having a photographer come in and take yours too,” and then he sent one to me.

And I was there when Mr. Truman passed away, you know, I was there and did she and Margaret’s hair for the funeral. But I was there a couple of times a week for a long, long time.

HARRISON: During what period of time were you there? Did you go to the home regularly?

MILLER: I've forgotten when she became ill, but I'd say for really not so long in comparison to time and age, you know, that she was—she came to the shop when she didn't go anywhere else for so long there, you know, but probably a year and a half. I'm not real sure.

HARRISON: That'd be 1980, probably like '80, '81 then?

MILLER: Probably somewhere around that time, '80. We used to have little birthday parties for her. Probably Val told you that, didn't she? I don't know if there's anything here that—

HARRISON: Oh, that's nice [looking at photographs. Editor's note: The National Park Service did not obtain copies of the photographs discussed in this interview.]

MILLER: This was on her birthday and these were flowers that she received. This is one of the nurses that helped take care of her. This is my husband, George, and myself and Mrs. Lockwood, and Mrs. Truman. Val and I cutting up here.

SMOOT: Do you remember what year that birthday party was?

MILLER: I don't recall now. This was in the living room. We were all . . . She had so many beautiful flowers. She said—do you still have this? When they came back from the White House, she wanted to change that and she said Mr. Truman didn't want it changed, he wanted to keep it sort of leather-like.

HARRISON: That's in reference, let me just say so it's on the tape, that's the Lincrusta
Walton is what that's called. It's kind of a textured wallpaper.

MILLER: Uh-huh. See, she was quite up in years there and she was—

HARRISON: Her hair looks nice.

MILLER: This is Mrs. Wallace.

SMOOT: And who is this other lady?

MILLER: This is Valeria LaMere, and this was another nurse. Now this was an
earlier time, I believe here. And here's Bob Lockwood and Mrs.
Lockwood and George and I. And, I don't know, these are kind of . . .
there's Mrs. Wallace. Val. And this was even earlier, I don't recall. She
was not very well in that one, I don't think. This is the lady that used to
work there. Josephine?

SMOOT: I don't know. That may have been Peaches?

MILLER: No. Peaches was a nurse.

SMOOT: Okay.

MILLER: And she was only there for a short while.

SMOOT: Geraldine?

MILLER: Geraldine, I think it—yeah, Geraldine. Uh-huh. And this is here in the
beauty shop one day. I think most of these were just birthday pictures at
different times, but several on the . . .

SMOOT: Valeria [inaudible].

MILLER: Oh well, she always had a good time. This is my husband. This is Val's
husband, Frank.

SMOOT: Yes, we met Frank. Do you know who did those decorations?

MILLER: You talked to her.

SMOOT: It must have been Trudy.

MILLER: Trudy.

SMOOT: Trudy Johnson?

MILLER: I think Trudy did these, and then Mr. . . .

HARRISON: Talge.

MILLER: . . . Talge sent the cake, and then I had a customer that—I don't know, she brought these to me that she had made. I never cared too much for this kind of thing, but then she brought these to me at the complete funeral, you know. The family here. Maybe those don't interest you. But there's several of Margaret and her family. This is—

HARRISON: Is that Mrs. Wallace? Is that Mrs. Wallace?

MILLER: No, this is, this is the la—his cousin across the street.

SMOOT: Mrs. Haukenberry.

MILLER: Uh-huh, Ardis, and this was her brother. That's my family and our daughter there. I was still on my walker during this time and had to go in through the back. I think that's all of those.

SMOOT: Well, did you ever do Margaret's hair other than—

MILLER: Yes, she used to come in to the shop.

SMOOT: How often did she get her hair done?

HARRISON: The phone . . . [interview interrupted by the telephone]

MILLER: It's my phone.

[End #3093; Begin #3094]

HARRISON: —I think more sensitive and I think they would have wanted it. Can you tell that story that you just told us, about Madge Wallace, that comment she made about—

MILLER: Oh, about the home? Well, I just always felt like that the home was—she felt, Mrs. Truman felt like it was, you know, her mother's home, and she kept it that way. She never told me that but just through my association with her, I think—and I think she rather enjoyed it like her mother had the home. She and her mother, you know, they both together there, and I think she was contented and happy and they enjoyed one another so much, you know. They'd sit out on their back screened-in porch, you know, and they were friends as well as loving one another, I'm quite sure of that, because they both appreciated one another a lot.

I remember one time when she was in the hospital at Research and I think that might have been when she had her leg broken. I went over to do her hair, always went to the hospital while she was there, and did her hair. And I went in, got her ready to go underneath the drier, and I thought I'd go back out and sit with the Secret Service. They had a room. "Oh, no," she said, "you're going to sit down—" this was when he was living, you know, and they had the Presidential Suite, they called it, over there—and she says, "You're going to sit down here. I have a book I'd like for you to see I think you'd enjoy." It was Jacqueline Kennedy's book.

So I went over and sat down and he came in, Mr. Truman came in, and I thought, you know, I don't have anything really that would be of interest to say to him, but we passed the time of day and I started looking

at the book and he came over and pulled a chair up and explained all the things and the pictures and the different rooms in the White House.

He was the type of person that you just sort of lost yourself when you began to talk with him. You felt just like he was your very best acquaintance, you know, and the next thing I know we're talking about world affairs, of which I'm not very up on, you know, and they were having so much—it must have been in the '60s, because they were having so much turmoil on the campuses of the colleges and so forth, and I said, "Do you think that it'll ever be back to normal again?" "Oh," he said, "definitely, definitely." He said, "If you recall history," he said, "in my opinion, the Civil War days, before and after, were the worst times that our country really ever faced." He said, "We weren't so greatly populated, but no one was safe, you know. They didn't feel safe in their homes or anything, and," he said, "we had a lot of great men then that wanted our country to be great and they worked at it and," he said, "they made it that way." And he said, "I think we'll see the time when we'll be back to normal again." And I often thought that had he been younger so he could have lectured to the young people, how much good he could have done because he felt it and believed it, you know.

We used to laugh. One of our very—well, I'd say most staunch Republicans we had on our street and in our neighborhood here was Henry Bundschu, and they used to be in the shop together, Mr. Truman and Henry, you know, and they would leave here arm-in-arm, going down the street just a chatting, you know. And, 'cause everybody liked Mr. Truman.

I don't mean that everybody felt his politics was maybe what they liked, but they liked him.

SMOOT: Did you have very much contact with Margaret at all?

MILLER: I did her hair quite often. That was mainly my contact with her, you know. I didn't grow up here, so . . .

SMOOT: So did she talk a lot when you did her hair?

MILLER: Well, she generally talked quite a lot, but really I couldn't—nothing special that I'd—

SMOOT: In your association with Mrs. Truman, did she ever mention anything, any objects in particular that—

MILLER: That were in the home?

SMOOT: Yes.

MILLER: I wish I could remember the things she told me. I remember the blue and white Delft that was on the cabinet next to the bedroom. She told me about those. Was that the Queen of Netherlands that gave those?

HARRISON: I think so.

MILLER: Then, the jade that was on the—are those pieces still on the fireplace? She told me about those.

HARRISON: What did she tell you about them?

MILLER: I wish I could remember that, too, but you know she—lots of things that she told me about. She gave me a gift one year that I particularly was fond and happy to have. It was a set of their glasses with the presidential seal from the White House days, with a little note telling me she thought I'd enjoy those, you know, from their White House days.

SMOOT: Any other objects?

MILLER: Oh, lots of things that she'd mention, but I can't—the chandelier in the dining room, you know, it's a beautiful chandelier. Margaret gave that to them, I believe, one year for Christmas, if I remember right. That may be wrong, but it seems to me that she told me that.

SMOOT: On your visits to the home, after you did Mrs. Truman's hair, did you ever have coffee or tea or—

MILLER: Oh, she used to always ask me the first thing when I got there, "Wouldn't you like to have a cup of coffee or a Coke or something?" And any time I ever went to the hospital, that was the first thing she asked one of the Secret Service men, would they please get something for me to drink. Always very gracious and nice.

I think really it was always my opinion that they didn't really think, when she couldn't talk as much as she had in the past, that she didn't really know what was going on, but she knew everything. If she could tell you what she was hearing and thinking, you'd probably be surprised. At that time, I know they didn't want to tell her about her best friend had—one of her best friends had passed away, Mary, and I said, well, I felt like they should because she was very—she would like to have known that. But I didn't tell her.

But I used to briefly look over everything in the paper that had happened around Independence to be sure before I went down, so I could just talk to her. I never put her in a position she had to answer me, but just

tell her little things that I'd heard or knew about, people that she knew and that I knew, you know.

And I know one time George Lubin, who was one of the Secret Service group, you know, and he's in Georgia, he's on Carter's detail, and he was back, and she was particularly fond of George and his wife, and Sharon had been quite ill and they came back to visit and they had been here to see me first, and I said, "Well, I'm going down right now. Would you like to go down with me?" So they did. And so I just sat back in the chair in back of the group, you know, while they visited with her and waited to do her hair, and George asked me, he said, "Does the corpsman ever come that used to take care of Mr. Truman? Does she ever see him?" And I said, "Why, I think so. I believe so. But why don't you ask her?" And he kind of wondered, you know, if she'd be able to tell him. And so he asked her. She sat there for just a few seconds and she nodded her head big, you know, for him. And, but she got so she couldn't speak plainly. Now, my husband has this trouble with the stroke, and people would have to ask her to repeat and that just really seemed to bother her a lot, so I think she just quit trying to talk.

She was a very smart woman, well educated, a great help, I'm sure, to Mr. Truman during his years. I think she had the reputation of being a tomboy as she was growing up because of the boys. She could play ball. She used to tell me when she'd bring her little transistor radio, "What are they doing? What are they doing?" She'd get her radio out, "How's the ballgame going?" I'd say, "Mrs. Truman, you know I don't know anything

about ball games.” She said, “I just really think they cut your education short,” you know. She loved ballgames, baseball.

HARRISON: Do you feel like those characteristics of hers were just things that she was—and you may not be in a position to answer this, either—but things that she was just born with? I mean, is that just the way she was or was some of that, like her graciousness, was that something that maybe her mother taught her because of the social class they were in or because the fact that she’d been the first lady?

MILLER: I think that was just Mrs. Truman. I don’t think she ever was anything or tried or attempted to be or wanted to be anything that she just wasn’t. She was herself, White House or wherever. That’s my opinion, you know.

HARRISON: Did she ever indicate how she felt about, I guess, the limelight, having been the first lady or maybe if she ever recalled any things while she was in the White House?

MILLER: Nothing that I’d care to talk about that she ever told me. I’m sure she enjoyed it to a certain extent, you know. I’ve heard and read where she was glad to be out and I’m sure most everybody is because that’s quite a strain, has to be. But I never felt that she didn’t, that she felt out of place there. I think she was very capable and I think she felt so, too.

SMOOT: During the time that you were in the house, did Mrs. Truman ever talk on the telephone?

MILLER: Occasionally.

HARRISON: Do you remember where telephones were in the house?

MILLER: Well, after she was ill, I think always there was one sitting by her chair.

SMOOT: Which chair?

MILLER: You know which one she used? The big gold chair that sat right here as you walk in? There was a phone there. There was a phone in the bedroom. Now, I don't know whether that had always been there or not. It seems to me maybe that they put that in later.

SMOOT: And which bedroom are you referring to?

MILLER: Downstairs. Of course, when I started doing her hair, for years, you know, she still used the upstairs bedroom. It was a long time before she would move down.

SMOOT: Do you remember when she moved down?

MILLER: I think some time after Mr. Truman was ill.

HARRISON: Were you ever on the second floor at all?

MILLER: Uh-huh, I've been all through the house. I did Margaret's hair in her bedroom upstairs during the time that—Mr. Truman's death, you know.

HARRISON: Which bedroom was that?

MILLER: It's the—what is it, south and west corner was her bedroom. And when Margaret was married, she invited me to come down and see Margaret's gifts. They had those on display in the northwest bedroom upstairs. They took everything out and put shelves up there, and I went down to the house.

HARRISON: Was that before the wedding or after?

MILLER: That was after, I believe. I'm pretty sure it was. I think they were so busy before the wedding, and that was my first experience with the press, you know, when she was married. I remember the day of her wedding. I had so

many that came to the shop, you know, and wanted to come in and interview Mrs. Truman and I'd say, "Well, my car's setting out in front if you'd like to sit out there and wait until she's through. I can't blame you for wanting to see her, you know, but I'm sure she doesn't have time right now."

And I recall that this is—I don't know why I remember this, but I recall the day that while I was doing her hair they had the operator that I was telling you about was on TV as her hairdresser, and that was years after, you know, that I'd been doing Mrs. Truman's hair, but I remember her being on television being interviewed as her beautician.

And that made me stop and think about when I started doing Mrs. Truman's hair. She called me and asked me if I would take her and I said, "Sure, when would you like to come in?" She said, "No, I mean will you be my hairdresser," she said, "I want you to take me all the time." And I said, "Sure, I'd be delighted to," you know.

HARRISON: How did the Trumans feel about Margaret getting married and about Clifton?

MILLER: Well, they liked him. I remember they liked him real well, and they seemed to—that seemed to just be all right, and I think they enjoyed her coming back here to be married, you know, and everything. They were so delighted over their grandchildren, you know, each one of them as they came along.

HARRISON: Did Mrs. Truman bring in photographs of them and—

MILLER: Yes, she'd have a new one, you know, to show to me and she'd be so thrilled and tell me little things about what they were doing. Like, she one time was telling me about them going out to dinner, some real nice restaurant, you know. I think it was the second grandson, undressed his feet and was barefoot sitting in the chair, you know, at the dinner table. She'd gotten such a kick out of that, telling me about it. But she was—

We had a lady here, maybe you don't want me to tell this on this, but she was—her name was Effie Hart, she was an old schoolteacher, retired, and she was lonely and she stopped everybody on the street and she'd talk by the hour, you know. She was very smart, interesting old lady, but sometimes got to be a nuisance, you know, when you were in a hurry.

So one day Mrs. Truman was underneath the dryer and Effie came in and she said, "Oh, is that Bess Truman underneath the dryer?" And I said, "Yes." So she sashays right over, you know, and sits down by her and starts talking to her. Well, Mrs. Truman answered, answered for a while, and finally she said, "I'm sorry, I've got to get dry," so Effie left. When she came out from underneath the dryer, she said, "Who was that lady?" And I said, "Gee, I don't know, I thought she was a friend of yours." And she said, "I don't think I ever saw her in my life." And I started laughing because I couldn't keep my face straight, and I said, "Well, I thought you knew Effie, because everybody does, but . . ." "Never saw her before in my life."

HARRISON: Would she take things like that pretty—

MILLER: Mhm, she chuckled, you know.

HARRISON: So you did Margaret's hair the day of her wedding?

MILLER: No, I didn't. No, I didn't. I did Mrs. Truman's.

HARRISON: Okay, Mrs. Truman's. Okay.

MILLER: No, I don't recall—seems to me that she came the night—I don't remember how long she was here before she was married, but seemed like it was not long, you know. She was . . .

HARRISON: Did you have any meals or anything with them at the home?

MILLER: In the years after she became ill, we used to have a sandwich or something, you know. We'd all, we'd be there. She loved to have us. See, she wasn't able to have her friends in, and be with her—well, fact of the matter is, most of them were ill or gone, you know, and so on special occasions we all, the group that took care of her and everything, used to try to have some little something special for her, you know, and she enjoyed it. But she wouldn't probably have enjoyed having someone in from her past days, you know, because it was hard for her to communicate with them, you know.

SMOOT: How often did these little special activities take place?

MILLER: Well, for her birthdays, always, and at Christmas and Thanksgiving and things like that.

SMOOT: Were the same people always—

MILLER: The Secret Service people that were there were just great with her because they loved her, you know, and they, I'm sure lots of things that they didn't have to do as far as their jobs were concerned, were so glad to do for her.

SMOOT: Why do you think that was?

MILLER: Well, special little things with getting her in the car and taking her places and doing things, you know, that they thought she'd like.

SMOOT: But for what reasons would you think they'd sort of do things that wasn't part of their duty?

MILLER: Well, I just always felt like I could see that they really cared for her.

SMOOT: It sort of makes you wonder if other Secret Service agents on other details sort of had the same relationship that maybe these Secret Service agents had with Mrs. Truman.

MILLER: I don't know. Maybe not as apt to because I think she was sort of special. Maybe that's just because I knew her so well, you know.

SMOOT: During the time Mrs. Truman was ill, approximately how many times did you visit with her during the week?

MILLER: At least a couple of times a week, uh-huh.

SMOOT: Were there any times when you just went by to visit and not to do her hair?

MILLER: Occasionally I'd have something I wanted to take to her or something and I'd go down to see her, and sit and talk to her for a little while, you know.

SMOOT: What sorts of things would you take her?

MILLER: Oh, if I had something I thought she'd like to eat, you know—

HARRISON: Half a watermelon [chuckling].

MILLER: Yeah, a watermelon. [chuckling] Mr. Truman didn't care for watermelon, but she loved it.

HARRISON: Were there other things that she was fond of?

MILLER: Well, of course when we'd have fresh vegetables and things in season, you know, that I'd have. My customers bring me so many things, you know, from their gardens and when I'd have more than I needed, I'd take to her. And Polly Compton, you know, always kept her—he just died this last week, you know?

HARRISON: No, but I heard about that.

MILLER: He always brought her ice cream because he made homemade ice cream, you know, so . . .

SMOOT: What kinds of sandwiches did Mrs. Truman like, or what kind of sandwiches did you eat when you were there?

MILLER: I don't remember that too much, 'cause after she had help with the nursing care, well they had someone to cook, you know, did the cooking. And she'd make special things, you know. They all tried to do everything, you know. She just had wonderful care. I was so happy that she could be kept at home, you know, where she could have that kind of care.

SMOOT: Did she ever talk about Mr. Truman a lot?

MILLER: Well, she always called him "Harry," you know, and yes, she would mention things about him and things that happened when they were in Washington, too. I remember one time they had a—there was an amendment that was going to be passed and our daughter was in junior high and she came home and asked if she might call Mr. Truman and I said, "No, I don't think so." I had their phone number, but we didn't use it unless we needed to, you know.

And she said, “Mother, I get extra credit if I know this and I don’t even know how I can find out.” And I said, “Well, I guess in that case probably he would like it, he wouldn’t mind at least if you called.”

So she called and Mrs. Truman answered the phone and she said, “Harry,” she said, “this is Joanne. She wants to know about an amendment.” And he said, “Well, there are two that’s just about ready to be passed,” and he said, “I don’t know, really, which one will be first.” He said, “Tell Joanne to call me in the morning at the library. I’ll call Sam Rayburn in the morning and I’ll find out.” So she did, and she was I think the only one in the class that got the—but he would have did that for any child that was interested, you know. He was, this his way.

SMOOT: Do you recall a gentleman by the name of Jim Thirkles?

MILLER: Thirkles. Was he a Secret Service—?

SMOOT: No, I understand that at the wedding he was, you know, sort of like a butler.

MILLER: No, I don’t. I don’t. I knew Reverend. Did you talk to Reverend Hobby?

SMOOT: Yes, I talked to Reverend Hobby.

MILLER: I like him. He was a great fellow, always . . .

HARRISON: Was he around there often when you were there?

MILLER: Mhm. Mhm.

HARRISON: What kinds of things would he be doing?

MILLER: Polishing the silver or doing everything. I used to tell him if I ever got my house clean enough I’d like to have him clean it once. [laughing] He was great. I tell you. No one had to tell him what to do. Of course, he’d worked

there for so long, but Mrs. Truman didn't have to tell him what to do. He started at the top of the ceiling and he did everything.

HARRISON: Did you ever happen to be there if Mrs. Truman would ask him to do something, or comment on something or would he just kind of go about his business?

MILLER: I think that he just pretty well went on and did. He knew what was to be done and he had a certain way he did it, and he kept the silver just beautifully polished. He didn't do it all in one day. He did certain pieces in certain times, you know, I think. And everything was taken care of. He noticed a step that needed to be taken care of, whatever, you know, he was right there to do it.

I was kind of surprised that he didn't stay on. They don't do that with the . . . ?

HARRISON: Usually not.

MILLER: No? He knew so much about the house, you know, and about everything about it. I don't really know what she would have done without him. She'd have had to have four other people, probably.

SMOOT: So was Mrs. Peterson, Geraldine Peterson, ever around the house—

MILLER: I didn't know her too well, but I'm sure she was really quite capable, you know, and I think she quit. I would see her occasionally, but you know I didn't really know her that well.

We knew a lot of the men that worked there as Secret Service people because they came, you know, in the shop and a good many of them were George's customers too, you know.

SMOOT: In some of your visits to the Truman home when Mr. Truman was still alive, what was he usually doing when you were there?

MILLER: Well see, I wasn't in the home as much when he was still alive. I was there several times, but it was after he was gone.

Mike Westwood, you know, was his—well, the only person he had—the City of Independence, I think, furnished him as a protection, you know, and so forth with him, and they were good friends of ours, Mike and Mary Kay. Have you talked to Mary Kay?

SMOOT: No, who's Mary Kay?

MILLER: This is Mike's wife. She lives out on East 23rd Street, just there off of Kiger, I think. Of course, Mike probably knew as much about the family as anyone else did, you know.

HARRISON: Do you think that she would be a good person to talk to maybe, or maybe we ought to just contact her?

MILLER: I think she would, because she knew a lot, and she was to their home a good many times and Mrs. Truman thought a lot of Mary Kay; she always called her Mary Kay.

[End #3094; Begin #3095]

[Editor's note: In the interview file is the following information from Steve Harrison:

“While going back through original tapes, I accidentally erased the first part of the third tape. Here is my recollection of what was on that part of the tape:

“1. Mrs. Truman would drive but Mr. Truman was driven by Mike Westwood. One time though, there was a shower at their salon when it

was still on Main Street. Mr. Truman drove Bess to the shower and waited in the car for her. A lady at the shower had a similar car to the Trumans and when she left the shower, she started to get into the car with Mr. Truman before she realized her mistake.

“2. Mr. Truman would sometimes stop in the barber shop to visit. He slipped away from the Secret Service and Bess one time and went to the barber shop and told Doris who called Bess but told her not to tell Mr. Truman that she had called to report him.

“3. Mrs. Truman called Doris and asked her if George Miller would do Mr. Truman’s hair for his funeral. Doris said yes. Then Mrs. Truman said, ‘I’d like you to do the same for me when the time comes.’ That was the last said about it and Doris did do Mrs. Truman’s hair for her funeral.”]

HARRISON: —that was on Main. That was the Bundschu’s?

MILLER: No, no. I worked at Bundschu’s before I bought the shop on North Main. My husband worked in the barber shop there and later bought it. And—

HARRISON: What was the address?

MILLER: Crown Beauty Shop. I think it was at 114, I’m not real sure, North Main. Right across the street from Sudora’s Beauty Shop.

HARRISON: So that would have been—

MILLER: The parking lot, uh-huh. Our place was one of the first ones taken for urban renewal, so we looked and looked for a place and couldn’t find anything suitable for a barber and beauty shop, so we took our front porch off and bulldozed the front yard out and put the building up here, twenty-two years ago.

HARRISON: So you opened here twenty-two years ago. You had been living here, then in the house?

MILLER: Uh-huh, this was our home.

HARRISON: And so Mrs. Truman and President Truman went to the shop—

MILLER: Uh-huh, both of them, up on North Main. From the time they came—she came to me from the time she came back from the White House, but he only came to George from the time that the office was ready over at the—he no longer went back downtown and she asked me if Mr. Truman wanted to know if George would take care of him from then on, and he did.

HARRISON: Do you have anything else?

SMOOT: No, I don't have anything else. Mrs. Miller, we appreciate you taking off your valuable time. I guess you could have been watching soap operas or—

MILLER: I don't watch the soap operas. I watch my husband, and I've just been listening for him. He's been so terribly ill.

HARRISON: Well, thanks for taking time.

MILLER: You're welcome. I don't really feel like I have too much to offer to the—

HARRISON: Well, no. Again, it's kind of—it's as hard for us, because the Trumans had, I think, a pretty private life in their home, because I think that was really the only place that they had any privacy.

MILLER: Probably I saw Mrs. Truman more her latter years than anybody, and I would have never, which I never gave an interview, because her privacy

meant a lot to her and she meant that much to me, you know, and so I never did. She was a very private person.

HARRISON: And I think because of that, again, it's difficult for us to have—

MILLER: It is, I'm sure it is because—

HARRISON: —to want to present them as real people but yet we don't know that, because most of the information that we have is about their public life and what they were doing in Washington or something like that, but we're not worried about that. We're worried about 219 North Delaware Street and there's really no place to get the information except for, you know, visiting with people who knew them.

MILLER: Well, I think they were a very private family. There were times, you know, when both the Mr. and Mrs. the Trumans and I believe Fred and his family lived there also, all of them in the big house together, and of course the other two sons lived back of the home, and so they had a family life more than a lot of people do, right together. That probably is one of the reasons it's hard, because you don't spread out with other people when you have your own family close like that. You're together a lot.

As May tells me a lot of times, she doesn't know how Margaret ever grew up to be worth anything. They all spoiled her terrible. She said if it hadn't been for Bess she would never have known how to mind. [laughter] They all just adored her, you know; none of them had children.

SMOOT: Well, again, we would like to thank you.

MILLER: You're sure welcome.

SMOOT: If you'll let . . . Steve, he'd like to take your picture.

MILLER: Oh, I—

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. "Keeping Groomed," *The Examiner* (Independence, Mo.), January 19, 1984, p. 56.

56 — The Examiner — Thursday, January 19, 1984

Sidelights

Keeping Groomed

Both barber, hairdresser felt love, affection for Trumans

By Sue Gentry
Centennial Edition Editor

Doris and George Miller were like family to Boss and Harry Truman during their retirement years.

Mrs. Miller was Mrs. Truman's hairdresser and her husband took care of the former president's bimonthly tonsorial needs.

And they were never importuned in all those years to talk about their intimate association with the famous couple whose activities still made news after they left the White House.

The modest Miller shops are side by side at 417 W. Maple Ave., just a few blocks from the Truman home.

The Millers found nothing pretentious about the man who had been leader of the world's greatest republic and the woman who had been by his side in so many of the great ceremonial moments in history.

"They were both so practical — so down to earth," Mrs. Miller said.

The Millers' first Independence business was the Crown Beauty and Barber Shop in the 200 block on North Main Street. When they were uprooted by Urban Renewal work in the Square area in 1964, they built the twin shops onto the front of their home on West Maple Avenue.

Mrs. Truman came twice a week to Mrs. Miller's shop as long as she was able and then Mrs. Miller went to the Truman home for the appointments. Margaret Truman

other customers in the shop — in fact, he liked them," Miller recalls. "He had good rapport with Bob Rayburn, the shoeshine boy, and my other barbers, Bill Ware, James Henry and Jerry Quick. He was a good conversationalist and was interested in what we all were doing."

Mrs. Truman was not only a good customer, but she was also a good friend, Mrs. Miller said. "She was never demanding and didn't want to be any bother."

Mrs. Miller said Mrs. Truman was especially considerate of her children, Joanne and Mary, as they grew up in the shop.

"Joanne (now Mrs. Jim Sellars) was only 5 when Mrs. Truman started coming to the shop. When Mary was born in 1960 and I came home from the hospital, Mrs. Truman was her first visitor. I remember her visit well because it was a March snowstorm and Mrs. Truman was still driving her own car."

Mrs. Truman didn't like cats, Mrs. Miller recalls, but she didn't seem to mind when Mary played with Missy and her litter on the floor at her feet.

"Once when we were going on a vacation, Mrs. Truman asked if there was anything she could do for me. I teased her by asking if she would take care of the cats."

Miller had the same affection for his famous customer as Mrs. Miller had for Mrs. Truman.

He remembers one day in April 1968 when the president arrived for a "trim on his own."



Examiner Photo
own." Mike Westwood, his chauffeur and walking companion, was "tipped off" and came to escort him home. He was 84 years old at the time.

Mrs. Miller recalls the time Joanne was in junior high school and was given a special civics class project. Joanne wished she could ask Mr. Truman a question about her assignment. Mrs. Truman assured her it would be all right to call him at the library. She did.

"The president said he would have to call his friend, Sam Rayburn (speaker of the House) to see if a certain amendment Joanne was interested in had passed. It had, and Joanne got a good mark on the paper." Miller remembers that as Mr. Truman came to the shop in his later years he would pass him a coin every now and then, Mrs.

Former President Harry S. Truman chuckles as he tells his barber, George Miller, how he slipped away from home and strolled up to the barbershop on his

Another time when the president was in the barber chair and plainly visible to passers-by on Maple Avenue, two servicemen strolled by. They did a "double take" Miller said when they recognized Mr. Truman. Not wishing to gawk, they moved on.

"The president sent Westwood out to invite them in and he visited with them, asking where they were from and where they had served."

Mrs. Miller said she always marked off time for a visit with Mrs. Truman when she went to the house.

"She loved to visit and I loved to hear her

was a customer on occasions when she was home.

Mrs. Miller said she first served Mrs. Truman when she worked at the old Bundschu Beauty Shop after the Millers moved to Independence in 1950, and then at the uptown shop. She said she did her hair continuously after Mrs. Truman came home from Washington.

The president continued to patronize his barber in downtown Kansas City until his "retirement" from his office at the library in 1966.

As long as he was able, the president liked to stroll to the Miller barbershop, cutting across a neighbor's yard from his own back door and heading up Maple Avenue. And when he couldn't do that, Miller went to the home for the trims.

"The president never seemed to mind

Mrs. Truman was busy with a yardman and Mr. Truman was feeling good and didn't require any special attention. No one noticed when he headed up Maple Avenue to the barbershop.

An observer said the former president, cane in hand, walked steady but not sprightly as he once did on his morning constitutional.

In Miller's barber chair he was jovial and chuckled about the way he was "out on his own." He looked well and had a good tan, Miller recalls, because he and Mrs. Truman had just returned from Key West, Fla.

"Doris was afraid Mrs. Truman would be worried when she missed him. We called her and made her promise not to tell Mike Westwood, his chauffeur and walking companion, soon 'found' him and escorted him home."

talk," she said. "She used to tell me fascinating stories about the furnishings — the vases, pictures, things I admired — and their origin. It is such an interesting house with so many lovely things and I am so glad it is being preserved and opened to the public."

Mrs. Miller remembers Mrs. Truman's kindness to a young girl who had followed her into the shop.

Miller remembers visiting Mrs. Truman when she was in the hospital. Mrs. Truman motioned for him to come to her bed and held his hand.

"After her long illness, when Mrs. Truman didn't speak and was unable to read, always a favorite pastime, I would always talk to her," Mrs. Miller said.

"Although she didn't respond, her eyes told me she understood."

Miller realized these coins belonged in a special matched set she had seen at the home. "The president never knew," Miller said, "but we gave them to the Secret Service to return."

When Mrs. Miller suffered a broken hip in a fall at her home in July 1982, her daughter, Mary Miller, whom Mrs. Truman had seen grow up in the shop, went to the home for the weekly appointments.

And when Bess Truman died in October 1982, Mary (Mrs. Truman always called her Mary Elizabeth) gave her a final hair dressing as she had promised.

Mrs. Miller went to Mrs. Truman's rites, using a walker.

"Our family had a great love and admiration for the president and Mrs. Truman," Mrs. Miller said, "and we had a feeling it was mutual. We believe they loved us, too."