

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

DWAIN REYNOLDS

DECEMBER 13, 1985

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY PAM SMOOT

ORAL HISTORY #1985-12

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #3098-3099

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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## **RESTRICTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Dwain Reynolds (b. 1921) visited the Wallace-Truman home in the 1930s and 1940s when he was a child helping his father replace broken slate roof shingles. Late in Bess Truman's life, Reynolds was called to repair a door lock inside the Truman home. Reynolds discusses minor changes to the home over the years, including the roof materials, interior door locks, and windows. At Bess W. Truman's funeral, Reynolds served as a pallbearer. Reynolds discusses Madge Gates Wallace and Bess W. Truman as he knew them from his time spent in the home doing repair work.

Persons mentioned: Harry S Truman, Bess W. Truman, John Reynolds, Madge Gates Wallace, May Wallace, Valeria LaMere, Margaret Truman Daniel, David Condit, and Vietta Garr.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
DWAIN REYNOLDS**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1985-12

STEVE HARRISON: This is an interview with Dwain Reynolds. It's being conducted on December 13, 1985. Conducting the interview is Pam Smoot, historian with the National Park Service in the Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, Nebraska. We're conducting the interview today in an office at the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. My name is Steve Harrison. I'll be operating the recording equipment. [pause] . . . usually get up that early or wake up that early?

DWAIN REYNOLDS: Oh yes. Yes, that's one thing about it, I don't, I don't sleep much. It's not good, but then that's one of those things.

PAM SMOOT: Mr. Reynolds, will you please tell us your full name, address, and birth date, please?

REYNOLDS: I'm Dwain W. Reynolds. I was born April 27, 1921. I live at 666 North Spring, in apartment 301.

SMOOT: Are you a native of Independence, Missouri?

REYNOLDS: Yes, I am.

SMOOT: And what is your occupation?

REYNOLDS: Well, at the present time I have a funeral director's license and I'm working part-time.

SMOOT: Okay, and what funeral home are you working for part-time?

REYNOLDS: Well, I'm working at the one that took care of both Harry and Bess, Carson Funeral Home.

SMOOT: Prior to that, did you have a business of your own?

REYNOLDS: I had a part-time business that I worked at, and then I worked full-time at Standard Oil, later known as Amoco.

SMOOT: Okay, what kind of business did you have, your part-time business?

REYNOLDS: I had a storm door and storm window business. I tried to help out some of my friends and it snowballed. [chuckling] So I got into it almost full-time that way, too.

SMOOT: What was your association with the Trumans?

REYNOLDS: Well, that goes back a number of years. The nearest I can remember was when I was quite young and my father John Reynolds worked on the . . . well, then the Wallace place. He would take me with him in the summertime whenever he would go and work on the different houses in town, and that's how I got acquainted with the old Truman home, or the Wallace home, whichever you prefer.

SMOOT: Did you know Madge Wallace at all?

REYNOLDS: Just vaguely. No, not really. I remember—now, you speak of Madge Wallace. You mean, Mrs. Wallace?

SMOOT: Yes, Madge Wallace, Mrs. Truman's mother.

REYNOLDS: Yes, Mrs. Truman's mother. Yes, I did. I knew of her and I saw her around the place quite a bit. She was quite a woman.

SMOOT: Can you tell me some of the things you might remember about her?

REYNOLDS: The main thing I remember about her, she was aristocratic. No matter whether it was 10 below in the wintertime or 110 in the shade in the summertime, I always saw that woman in a long, full-length dress with full-length sleeves, a velvet collar, or whatever you call them, with a brooch on it. I never saw her otherwise. Ramrod straight, she never bent a fraction of an inch. But she was truly an aristocrat.

SMOOT: Do you remember whether the colors were light colors or dark colors, the colors of her dress? I realize this was a long time ago.

REYNOLDS: Well, they were more of a darker type of color, not real dark, grays and blues, light brown, but it tended more to grays and blues. Of course, this goes back quite a ways. I was just a youngster when I remember her.  
[chuckling]

SMOOT: Did you ever do any work for the Trumans?

REYNOLDS: Yes, Dad worked for them quite a bit, and I went with him most of the time. I've been all over that old house from the dirt floor in the sub-basement clear on to the slate shingles on the roof. And I notice there's no more slate shingles. I miss that. Now, Dad used to go up inside the attic and spot the shingles that were split, and he'd poke a little rod out through there so I could see it—I'd be out on the roof. Then I'd take metal shingles and slide up under the slate shingles so that it would stop the leaks. So I ran all over that roof. I know that very intimately.

SMOOT: Do you remember where any of the leaks were specifically?

REYNOLDS: They were mostly over the area that . . . As I remember it, Margaret's

bedroom was in the front of the upper story, and it was over the bedroom areas there that we seemed to have the most leaks, and some over the kitchen, but mostly over the bedroom areas. That's where I remember it mostly. But when you go back fifty years or better, why, [chuckling] it's a little difficult to remember exactly.

SMOOT: So what types of things did you do on the house?

REYNOLDS: Well, mostly were minor repairs. We didn't do anything major. And all this was during the time that President Truman . . . well, when he was still a senator. Of course, when he became president, why, we no longer were able to do any work on the place because mostly it was all done by union carpenters and union labor.

SMOOT: Okay, could you give me some examples of some of the minor repairs that you and/or you and your father made?

REYNOLDS: Well, the most recent repair that I remember was the day before Bess broke her hip. Valerie [LaMere] had called me to see if I could come and repair the lock on the bedroom door, the bedroom that Bess was occupying at that time. They had tried several times and they couldn't get the lock to stay the way it should. And since we had worked on the old house for so many years and had been intimately acquainted with some of the old-fashioned types of locks, there was no problem there. I was called by Valerie and went up. Five minutes after I was there, why, it was all taken care of. And that was the day that I had a chance to visit with Mrs. Truman a little bit. I was so sorry to hear that she fell the next morning, because I told her to be

careful and pay attention to her nurses. [chuckling] It didn't seem to work.

SMOOT: Were you paid on the spot, or did you send Mrs. Truman a bill for the little work that you did on the door?

REYNOLDS: I never presented a bill. I never was paid for anything there, because that was just one of the things that I could do. I didn't expect to be paid, and didn't want to.

SMOOT: Why not?

REYNOLDS: I liked Bess, I liked her real well, and I felt just a little closer to her perhaps than maybe some. Because I remember . . . oh, it's been several years ago when Mike Westwood was her chauffeur and she was up at what was then the Bank of Independence. I walked in there and I saw her sitting in a chair. So I went over and introduced myself, and I said, "You probably won't remember me, but my dad and I used to work on your place." And I said, "His name was John Reynolds." And she said, "Oh, yes, you must be Dwain!" Now this was forty, fifty years before that she had known me, but still she called me by my first name, and I couldn't get over that. Now that was something. When I was called to do a little something for her, I didn't want pay for it. I was glad to go and do what I could to help.

SMOOT: So would you say that she was a very special kind of person?

REYNOLDS: Very much so. I was so amazed, in a way, at the difference between her and her mother. Bess was my type of person. She was just down-to-earth, a very common sort of person, no airs, no trying to put on anything. She was just plain Bess, and that's the way I remember her. But I really appreciated her,

and Harry, too. Now, I didn't know him as well because Harry was gone most all the time. He'd drop in for a few minutes, it seemed like, and then be gone for weeks, months, and never see him. But I did get to see Mrs. Wallace and Bess every once in a while, and Margaret.

When I was still quite young, why, Margaret came out in the yard one day and we got to talking about trees. She was somewhat of a tomboy, and we ended up with me climbing up a tree to show her how to climb it. I got up in that tree, and about that time my dad called for me, and there I was stuck up in that tree and I had to shinny down that thing real quick and run to see what he wanted. I don't know whether Margaret ever did climb that tree. [chuckling] I still don't know.

SMOOT: Can you tell me things you might remember about the inside of the house that you thought was very distinctive or something that really stood out in the house?

REYNOLDS: Well, there were a number of things. I remember the stairwell leading up to the second floor and the way it was made. Of course, I'd naturally be drawn to that because being in kind of a carpenter's trade, why, I'd look for those things. But mainly what I looked for, especially when I went up to work on the lock, was the grandfather clock that is in the front room. I'm not sure, but I would like to examine that someday to see . . . I believe that that must be the same clock that many years before my grandfather had taken an old cherry bedstead that they had and had cut it up and made the grandfather clock from this bedstead. And I would like to check that sometime just to

see. I'm interested because I remember how hard he had to work on that. It's all hand done.

Then I remember the old zinc top worktable that they had in the kitchen with the double doors there where the little pantry was. You had to go through those to get to the kitchen. For some reason or other, every time we worked on the old place we always came in through that back door through the kitchen, never through any other door that I can remember. But those were great big, old dark doors, and I really was surprised that they were still just like they were. They hadn't seemed to change one bit, not even the table. But those are a few of the things that I remember about the place.

Yes, I do remember, too . . . it seems to me like there was two steps up into Margaret's bedroom at both doorways, the one in the front and the one in the hallway. And I often wondered about that, that she had to step up from the bedroom and step down again to get out into the hallway or on the stairs.

SMOOT: For the record, Mr. Reynolds, what is a bedstead?

REYNOLDS: The bedstead was the head, the frame of the beds, as they were known in those days. You had a framework with your slats across the bottom to hold the box springs or whatever that they used to hold up the big, thick feather mattresses. Usually your, well, in those days your headboard was high, anywhere from five to six feet tall, and a lot of times they had a footboard. Of course, that was just about the height of a mattress. But he took the

headboard of this bedstead and used that to make the grandfather clock.

SMOOT: And what was your grandfather's name?

REYNOLDS: His name was David Condit.

SMOOT: Is there any particular reason why you and your father always came through the kitchen door?

REYNOLDS: No, not particularly, except that was the most accessible door for us with the work that we did upstairs. Rather than come in through the side entrance or the front, it was just easier to go through the back door, or the kitchen door.

SMOOT: Okay, and you mentioned earlier that the Trumans . . . well, things didn't change. Did you mean things didn't change in the house?

REYNOLDS: Yes. Yes, that's what surprised me; it seemed like everything stayed just the same. Of course, my mother-in-law was that way. She'd set a piece of furniture, and that's where it stayed. I believe that . . . didn't they have the piano in the main parlor?

SMOOT: I believe so.

REYNOLDS: On the left as you went in the front door. It was on the left-hand side. Yes, I thought I remembered that.

SMOOT: Well, it's still there.

REYNOLDS: Still there.

SMOOT: Have you ever had coffee or tea with either Bess or Mr. Truman?

REYNOLDS: No, we weren't on that kind of a basis with them. We were strictly workmen, even though they knew who we were, but we were still on one

level, they were on another. Now, the cook used to see that I had a little something once in a while. She was awfully good that way. You mentioned her name the other day, and I've forgotten what it was.

SMOOT: Her name was Vietta Garr.

REYNOLDS: Vietta Garr, yes. She was a wonderful person. I really enjoyed her. The way she took care of them is fantastic. Then, of course, Valerie. Later on, after Harry was gone and Bess was by herself, then Valerie was in there to help take care of her and look after her. Valerie was the one that called me to work on the door. I had done some work for Valerie, and one day they were talking about the door and Mrs. Truman said to her, "Well, why don't you get that young man"—and I appreciated the fact *young man*. [chuckling] She said, "Why don't you get him to come and look at this door? He would know something about it." And so that's the way that I was called back to the house to work on the door.

SMOOT: You just mentioned the name Carrie. You said Carrie was gone?

REYNOLDS: No, I don't remember mentioning a Carrie. Harry.

SMOOT: Oh, Harry was gone.

REYNOLDS: Harry was gone. I was trying to get that straight in my mind. No, Harry was gone.

SMOOT: Okay. Do you remember how often you and your dad worked on the house? Was it on a regular basis? Were you always called?

REYNOLDS: We were called most of the time for the little minor repairs. That's really what he did all over Independence. We've worked on all these big houses

around here, and it's interesting to go back and look at the hundreds of different places that we've worked on, both of us. Even after he was gone, why, I still continued some. But no, we did, we worked on the old place there a number of times when I was younger.

SMOOT: Where was your grandfather from?

REYNOLDS: He was from up in the Dakotas. They came down here . . . well, long before I was even born, and settled here in Independence.

SMOOT: You wouldn't happen to remember which street they may have lived on?

REYNOLDS: Well, the place that I remember was Hocker. They lived on South Hocker. In fact, he built the house there. I remember when they were building that he had the concrete poured. At that time, they didn't have these big trucks; they wheeled everything by wheelbarrow. And I remember watching them go up on these ramps, pouring those wheelbarrow loads of concrete in that form. It took a lot of work, but he built the whole house himself.

SMOOT: When you were called by the Trumans, or when your dad was called, can you remember whether it was Harry or Bess who did the calling?

REYNOLDS: Mostly it was Mrs. Wallace, because that was during her time there. Then Bess called once in a while. Harry very seldom ever called. He didn't have the time to take care of the minor things, so the two women more or less did that.

SMOOT: Did you and your dad just basically work together? Were there any other people involved in what you were doing at the Truman home?

REYNOLDS: No. No, I would go after school. I went to Chrisman High, and after school

I would go to wherever he was working at the time and work with him until after . . . well, until it was time to go home. So that's how I got around the Truman home so much, because he'd usually try to plan what work he had to do there in the afternoons so that I could go and be with him. And it was close to school, so it made it handy for me.

SMOOT: When you and your dad were repairing the roof, could you give me an estimated time of how long it took to make the repairs? I know it was a long time ago.

REYNOLDS: Well, usually, when we'd go and work on the roof, and this was quite frequent because those slate shingles would break. They'd snap, and weather conditions would cause some of that. It would be on a . . . oh, you might say a fairly regular basis that we'd work on that roof, and sometimes it would take a couple or three hours because there was quite a bit to cover. And then I was doing all the running on the roof, so that got to be a little bit rough. [chuckling] But then there'd be other things that he'd do, just little minor repairs of all sorts. It's too numerous to really tell. Because he was just . . . well, you might call him a jack-of-all-trades, and really that's what happened. We worked on everything—it didn't make any difference what it was—because it just came natural.

SMOOT: Did your father or did you ever fix any doors other than the door on the downstairs bedroom?

REYNOLDS: I have an idea we fixed a lot of them. [chuckling] Because those doors were getting old and they were the old-fashioned type, and they were always

requiring something. In fact, the day that I went up there to work on her bedroom door, I noticed the door in the pantry was sticking, and I asked Valerie at the time, I said, “Well, why in the world don’t you have that fixed?” She said, “We just haven’t gotten around to it.” And as far as I know, they never did, because they never closed that anymore, so they just left it stick. But I remember that I noticed that and I mentioned it at the time, but I was never called back to see if I could do anything about it.

SMOOT: Okay, when you say “the old-fashioned type of doors,” exactly what is it that you mean?

REYNOLDS: Well, the doors, as you have seen, are quite tall. Of course, they had high ceilings, and a tall door was just natural. Then your locks are entirely different than they are nowadays. They had to be taken out and springs replaced or your spindles worked on. Sometimes they would break and you’d have to put a new spindle through the lock that the handles attach to, just various things. Because when you get into the . . . well, I suppose nowadays they’d be antiques, because they’re quite old, but they still work. That’s more than I can say for some of these new-fangled things that they have. When they made them then, they made them to last. But it was a common pastime to replace the springs in these latches, because those were the one things that would break.

Then, of course, your windows . . . Now, windows we repaired quite a bit because they were the old type that your weights . . . ropes and weights on them. So, every so often, you’d go in and replace ropes, and

that's something we became quite adept at.

SMOOT: You wouldn't happen to remember which windows, would you?

REYNOLDS: Oh heavens! I wouldn't begin to remember. There's too many of them. No, whatever had to be done, we did. I wouldn't remember any of the windows; there were just too many that we worked on.

SMOOT: So would Mrs. or Mr. Truman tell you exactly what it was that they wanted done?

REYNOLDS: They'd call and say, "Well, such and such isn't working. Could you come and fix it?" And that's the way we'd get started. Now, after we'd get there, well, then they'd always find something else that needed to be done and they had forgotten about. So we ended up doing quite a little bit. But then it was quite frequent that we were up there.

SMOOT: So did you and your dad ever make suggestions as to some other things that may have needed repair?

REYNOLDS: I don't remember. I really don't, because most of that was up to him. I don't know whether he ever made any suggestions or not. Knowing him, I would have an idea he probably did.

SMOOT: Do you know if there was ever a contractual agreement for any of the work that was performed on the Truman home?

REYNOLDS: No, no, everything was verbal. In those days we didn't have contracts. [chuckling] I don't think he ever signed a contract in his life, because he was what you'd call a handyman and people would have little things that would go wrong. They'd call him and say, "Well, we have this and that and

the other wrong. Could you take care of it?" And we got into everything; we did everything. We repaired light fixtures; in fact, we may have repaired some in the Truman house, I don't remember. But whatever there was at that time to be done, little minor things, because we didn't get into major work. He preferred to stay on the lighter level, and I did, too. Of course, all this was back when I was pretty young. There are so many things that I can't remember, as far as the way he worked with them.

I know that with my grandfather there was no contract signed on that for the grandfather clock. I remember that distinctly because there was some question later about the cost of the clock, and they had to sit down and figure it out because there had actually been no real contract or estimate made, just they wanted it done and he did it.

SMOOT: Did Mr. Truman or Mrs. Truman ever stand in the yard and watch you and your dad work?

REYNOLDS: Bess would come out every once in a while and see what we were doing; or if we were working in the house, which we did an awful lot of, why, she'd come around and watch once in a while and kind of visit. Now, Mrs. Wallace was different. She might walk by, but she would never stop and visit. Now, that just wasn't . . . it wasn't done. [chuckling] It was interesting because I noticed her. She was so tall and stately that it impressed me. Of course, I think because of my youth that was probably the reason why. I wasn't used to that. I was used to these down-to-earth people; that's why I felt more comfortable with Bess.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Wallace ever walk by and at least say hello?

REYNOLDS: Oh, yes, yes, but that was about the extent of it.

SMOOT: Do you remember any other things about Mrs. Wallace that you might care to share with us?

REYNOLDS: No, I really don't. Those were the things that impressed me at the time.

SMOOT: Could you again go over the procedure that you and your dad used to fix the roof?

REYNOLDS: The roof?

SMOOT: Yes.

REYNOLDS: Dad would go up in the attic and look for these cracks where the shingles had split. Then he would use an ice pick or a small metal prod of some sort to slip out through that crack, and I'd be out on the roof watching to see where it came through. Then I'd go up to that spot and take a metal shingle, oh, about six by eight, and slide up under the slate shingle so it would take care of the crack, and this, of course, would stop the leak. And I have an idea that when they . . .

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REYNOLDS: Well, on the roof, we were talking about that, and I have an idea when they finally fixed that old roof that there were probably more metal shingles up there than there were slate, or as many anyway, because those slate shingles were very, very, very old. And if I remember correctly, they left some slate shingles on a little dormer there at the back of the house when they replaced the roof, just so there would be a little reminder. But I notice that even now

those are gone, so they've replaced the whole roof. I was hoping they'd put slate back on there, but I guess they don't even have slate anymore.

SMOOT: So do you remember where your dad purchased his supplies from to repair the Truman home?

REYNOLDS: Well, we'd get the metal shingles probably from Wilson's Lumber Company. That used to be right up there near the square. In fact, we had two lumber companies up there near the square, Crick's, I believe it was Crick's, and Wilson's. Of course, they both later moved, but we dealt there most of the time. Sometimes, you know, you'd have to go to the hardware store. Oh, I can't even remember the names of the hardware stores now. There have been a lot of changes made in this town.

HARRISON: Where did you and your family live during the time that you first started working on the home?

REYNOLDS: Well, we were living on Hocker at the time, right next to the house that my grandfather built. We had lived just down the street there, but then we moved up into this brick house next to them. In fact, they had lived there for a while while they were building. Then, when they had finished, why, we moved in, and that's where we lived when we did some of the building. Later, we moved over on South Dodgion, 1339 South Dodgion, and Dad built the place there. That, I have an idea, was the time that we did most of the work on the Truman home. Because I was perhaps ten by that time, and we were quite active in the labor end of it then, so I have an idea that's when most of the work was done. When I worked on the Truman home, or

when I fixed the door, I had built my own home out on 1931 South Osage, and that's where I lived when I was called. Of course, when my wife became ill, why, we finally sold the place and moved to North Spring.

HARRISON: So what time periods, approximately, did you work on the house with your father? What kind of year span are we talking?

REYNOLDS: Well, I have an idea that that was probably in the middle thirties and forties; that's most of the time there.

HARRISON: Do you recall doing any work on the house while the Trumans were in Washington?

REYNOLDS: Well, of course Harry was a senator most of the time when we were working on the place, so he was gone an awful lot and they were gone there in Washington. But like I said before, when he became president, why, we were no longer used because . . . well, we had to be, you know, they had to have a different set-up. Of course, a lot of the repairs then were major repairs, and so we couldn't get into that. That was the one advantage of being just an individual, because you could just do little minor things. And that was mainly his livelihood, was minor, not major, and that I kind of continued the same way because I didn't care to get into anything heavy. I didn't have the equipment, I didn't have the help to do major. Everything was done individually. It was done on a very intimate, one-to-one basis, you might say, and that's more or less the way it was with Mrs. Wallace and the Trumans. It was strictly a one-to-one basis. They'd call, "Can you fix such and such?" "Sure," and so we'd go up and fix it.

It didn't make any difference what it was. Even if it was to repair a coffee pot or something, he's done that. I know what it is. I've fixed many of them. But those are just minor things that we'd get into. The little things that the average person doesn't understand or doesn't want to do, that's what he'd get called for and what I'd get called for.

HARRISON: Did you do other jobs by yourself in later years, say, during the 1970s or anything, or was it just that one time fixing that lock?

REYNOLDS: Just the one time, yes.

HARRISON: And you indicated that was probably because of the work maybe you'd done for Valerie?

REYNOLDS: Yes, and the fact that I had worked on the old house so many years before, and Mrs. Truman remembered that. That was one of the things that she remembered, and she remembered that I had done some work for Valerie. So that's when she said, "Well, why don't you get your friend to come and work on it," because she remembered that.

She had a remarkable memory—that I just couldn't believe. Because she still remembered me, although she wasn't able to talk very well at the time. It was very difficult for her to get the words out. She knew what she wanted to say, but she wasn't able to express it fluently. It was a real chore for her to express herself at all. And I remember that so well at the time, and when I left, why, I told her, I said, "Now, you be a good girl and pay attention to your nurses." And then she tries to get up the next morning, by herself, and fell and broke her hip. I had a notion to call her

later and tell her, “I told you now . . .” [chuckling] But I never got around to that. And I felt like I could have. I felt like that she was the type of person I could have said that to, and she would have accepted it totally. That’s why I appreciated her as much as I did.

Harry was good as far as the business end, but that’s pretty much the way it ended. Because he was so busy and active in other things, he didn’t have time to worry about the minor things, and so that’s why we didn’t have too much to do with him, as much as we did with the ladies.

SMOOT: How did you address Mr. and Mrs. Truman?

REYNOLDS: Really, we didn’t actually . . . Well, there was no formal talk. Usually he’d call them Mr. Truman or Mrs. Truman, or Mrs. Wallace. We weren’t on a first name basis. Of course, I feel this morning that it’s easier to refer to Bess or Harry as it was Mrs. Truman and Mr. Truman and so forth.

HARRISON: You mentioned that when you went to fix the lock that you visited with Mrs. Truman then.

REYNOLDS: Yes.

HARRISON: Where did you visit with her?

REYNOLDS: She was lying on the settee there in her bedroom while I was working on the lock. She wasn’t able to get around too much. She stayed mostly in the bedroom there on the lounge, and she was lying there while I was working on the lock. Then afterwards that’s when we had a little chat.

HARRISON: So that was in the downstairs bedroom?

REYNOLDS: That was in the downstairs bedroom, yes. It’s the door leading off of that . . .

. . what is it, the living room on that side? I can't remember what they call it.

HARRISON: Realizing that this is going back a long ways, do you remember what rooms people were using in the house in those earlier years?

REYNOLDS: I remember that Margaret used the room right at the head of the stairs on the south side of the hallway. But just as you came up to the landing, before turning in to the hallway, she had a doorway there, and she went up two steps. But there was also a doorway on the hallway side, too. As I remember, and I'm not quite positive, it seemed to me like that Mr. and Mrs. Truman had the bedroom on the north side. Now, I'm vague on that, but I can remember Margaret's room because I had seen her go up to her room a number of times. Of course, the others were back further in the hallway, and I didn't really notice. Of course, Margaret and I aren't too far apart on age, so I would naturally be more . . . would pay more attention, you might say, to someone my own age, and that's how I happen to know that that's where her room was. Then we had worked in there a time or two, so it was something that I could remember and relate to.

HARRISON: Let's see, getting back to Mrs. Wallace, did you ever see her around town?

REYNOLDS: No, I never did. She wasn't much to get out and go anywhere. If there was anything to be taken care of or done, why, either Bess would do it or one of the people that worked there. But she never, I don't think she did any of the shopping. I'm sure she didn't. That just wasn't her part. That wasn't the role that she had. She was the matriarch of the house, and she made it that

way. So others did those things.

HARRISON: And were there people working for them during, say, the thirties and forties?

REYNOLDS: I think they had someone that was doing the yard and the gardens and the flowers and so forth, if I remember correctly. Of course, I remember Miss Garr.

HARRISON: Any other help in the house besides Vietta Garr?

REYNOLDS: I can't remember any. As far as I can remember, that's the only person that worked there at that time—I mean, in the house—and she ran it with a pretty good hand.

HARRISON: Another thing, too, since you went to the kitchen door, who would usually answer?

REYNOLDS: Oh, it was always [Vietta]. Oh, yes.

HARRISON: So was there a routine then? Would you say, "Well, here we are," and she would say, "Well, just a minute. Let me go get so and so . . ."?

REYNOLDS: Oh, no. No, we'd come to the door, and of course she knew us very well because we'd been there a number of times. And she'd [say], "Oh, yes, we need this and that and the other done. It's in here." And she'd take us and show us where it was or what needed to be done, and that was it. She pretty well ran the household because that was her responsibility.

SMOOT: During the time that you were in the house, did you ever see Mrs. Wallace walking around, or did you see her in a particular place?

REYNOLDS: Oh, yes. Well, that's the odd part about it. I never saw her sitting. I don't

remember her ever sitting. The times that I remember her, she was always standing or walking. Now, I know that sounds strange, but I cannot remember her ever sitting down.

HARRISON: Can you describe the attic for us, as you recall it when you were up there doing the roof work? Well, first of all, did you go out to the attic through that hatch that's up there, or did you go from the outside of the house?

REYNOLDS: No, we'd go up from the inside. Well, I'd go up on a ladder from the outside. We had a large ladder that we put up on the outside because it was too much of a hassle to try to get out on that roof from the windows, so it was much easier to put the ladder up. But Dad would go up on the inside and go up through the hatch into the attic. I don't remember too much about the attic because I wasn't up there too many times myself. He would always go, and I would work on the outside. I can remember running around on that old roof and different ones would wonder whether or not I was going to fall off, but at my age nothing bothered me. [chuckling]

HARRISON: We could use somebody to do some work now. Do you want to come back this summer? [laughter]

REYNOLDS: I'm afraid not. I don't think my knees would take that climbing anymore like it used to. No, those days are over. Well, after all, no one's there now that I remember. No, since they're [buried] here, I'll just come over to visit them over here. I helped Bess when she was laid to rest. I assisted in that. I was one of the pallbearers, and I remember all the TV cameras they had up on the roof and around here, came in through the back door [while] we

were there. It was quite impressive. I think that's the first time that I ever upstaged the first ladies. In the church the pallbearers sat on the front row, and then the first ladies sat on the second row. [chuckling] And I thought about that several times. I thought, now, that should have been changed around, but . . .

SMOOT: How was it that you were one of the pallbearers?

REYNOLDS: When Bess died, I was working for Carson Funeral Home. The Carsons had taken care of Harry and was called to take care of Bess. Margaret didn't want to be forced to use the ones that she knew as pallbearers because there were so many that would have liked to have been pallbearers and it was a difficult choice. So, rather than to hurt anyone's feelings, she just had Carson's furnish the pallbearers. So those that were working there at the time were given the opportunity to assist in this, and so that's how I was able to be one of the pallbearers. I thought it was rather appropriate that I be allowed to carry her the last mile, you might say. And I appreciated it because I felt quite close to her, even though we never really had any direct contact, as far as one-on-one was concerned. But still, the fact that she could remember and was able to go ahead and tell some of the things that had happened, that she actually noticed me enough that she knew who I was, and I thought it was very nice.

HARRISON: Do you recall anything else about her funeral that you were involved with? That might have not, oh, I don't know, just any little anecdotes or stories about that?

REYNOLDS: Well, there was one incident that happened, and it was, in effect, when they were discussing pallbearers. One woman, and I don't remember her name and I wouldn't give it anyway, but she came into Carson's and she said, "Now, we know the Trumans quite well, and my husband doesn't have a black suit. But he is going to get one because he would like to be one of the pallbearers." And she almost insisted that he be used as one of the pallbearers. But Margaret had already specifically requested that all the pallbearers be from the Carson Funeral Home. And so there was a discussion two or three times about the idea of him being a pallbearer, but it didn't work out. And that's what Margaret was afraid of. She was afraid of the fact that if she picked any particular ones that she knew, that someone's feelings would be hurt. This way, why, there was no one that could say, "Well, you were used and I wasn't." So I could understand her feelings in that case.

HARRISON: You mentioned, I believe, that you were working for Carson's during President Truman's funeral?

REYNOLDS: No, no, I wasn't working there at that time. I was still working for Standard Oil, but I remember when it was. No, I was . . . I went there in 1979 and worked part-time for them, and then went back again in 1980 and worked there several years then. That's how I happened to be there at the time that Mrs. Truman died.

HARRISON: Pam was asking you earlier about this clock that your grandfather had made. Do you remember what period of time that was?

REYNOLDS: Well, that would have had to have been in the thirties, late thirties, I think. Now I don't remember, I was going to say . . . When was he elected to the senate, do you remember? That's what's concerning me now. But anyway, I'm not even sure whether he was . . .

HARRISON: It was in the thirties, the late thirties.

REYNOLDS: Well, I wasn't sure whether it was in the thirties or the forties that he built that clock. I know he was in his new home. Now, this is my grandfather. I know he was in his new home at the time. So that had to have been in the late thirties or the early forties. But I don't remember whether that's the same clock or not. I haven't had a chance to look at it closely enough.

HARRISON: How did he come to build the clock?

REYNOLDS: That's something I really don't know. I have an idea it's probably because he may have been working for the Trumans before that, and that's, I think, probably what had happened. But I was so young at that time that I really don't remember. Well, he had to have been, though. He had to have been working for them. So it just kind of continued on down the line. I hadn't thought about that. So it had to have been even before he was a senator that my grandfather worked there; otherwise, they wouldn't have asked him to take the headboard of that bedstead to make the clock.

SMOOT: Considering your age at the time, do you think that maybe if you saw this clock again you would recognize it?

REYNOLDS: I don't know. I would have to look it over and see, because I know a little bit of the way he worked and how he handled his tools, and it may be that

some of that will show up on the clock. I don't know. I'd just have to see it.  
I couldn't tell otherwise.

HARRISON: So the question that I just got was—and if you don't know any of this or aren't sure, be sure to let us know, because I'm curious—that he would have used a headboard from the Trumans, or he would have used one of his own headboards?

REYNOLDS: Oh, no. No, it was the Truman headboard. It was one that they had him take and make this clock. So it was their property.

HARRISON: And they would have ordered it? They would have said . . .

REYNOLDS: Yes.

HARRISON: “Mr. Condit . . .”

REYNOLDS: Condit.

HARRISON: Condit, C-O-N-D-I-T?

REYNOLDS: That's right.

HARRISON: “Take this headboard and make us a clock, and we'll pay you . . .”  
whatever, “a hundred dollars or whatever.”

REYNOLDS: I don't know what they decided, as far as . . . I can't tell you how that was because I was too young to understand those kinds of things. I just remember that he did take the headboard from the Truman home and took it out to his home and made it. And all this was done with very basic tools. He did have a table saw, and I think he had a lathe, if I remember correctly, and so all of that was done by hand. Of course, this may not be the same clock.

HARRISON: Do you remember anything about it? I mean, is it just kind of squared or did it have any little . . . ?

REYNOLDS: No, I really don't. I don't remember because I just saw the pieces, parts of it. I don't remember ever actually seeing the whole clock put together. Because at that time—we lived right next door for a while, and then we moved over on Dodgion, and then I wasn't around him near as much as I was before. So consequently what he did or so forth . . . like I say, I just saw bits and pieces of it.

SMOOT: Mr. Reynolds, I think this will conclude our interview. We are really grateful for the information you have provided us with.

REYNOLDS: Well, there isn't a whole lot, but if there's anything that helps, well, that's fine.

HARRISON: You've been a big help. We don't expect anything too earth-shattering from anybody, but it's nice to get little bits and pieces of the story and so on.

REYNOLDS: Well, you get little tidbits.

HARRISON: Yes, and some things start to . . . you know, somebody will tell us one thing, somebody will tell us another thing, and they start to kind of create a picture, which is real helpful for us, because the National Park Service, which manages the home now and is responsible for preserving it, none of us knew the Trumans or were around when they were alive. So the only way for us to get this kind of information is from people like yourself, and we appreciate you taking the time and being willing to share it with us.

REYNOLDS: Well, I enjoyed it because it's brought back a lot of memories. In fact,

things I had forgotten, just like my grandfather working for the Trumans. I hadn't even thought about that. I remember my father did, but it had to be . . . so these things kind of brought it back to me. I'll have to check with my mother now and see what she remembers.

HARRISON: Because that would have been her father?

REYNOLDS: Yes.

HARRISON: And she's still alive then?

REYNOLDS: Oh, yes, very much so. Eighty-seven in February. Just got back from Hawaii here about three months ago.

HARRISON: Is that right? [chuckling]

REYNOLDS: Went out to Vegas and lost her money. [laughter] But, oh, she gets around.

HARRISON: That's great. She lives here in Independence?

REYNOLDS: Yes, she lives in Heritage House where I do, there on North Spring.

SMOOT: I might have to move to Independence; people seem to live a long time out here. [chuckling]

REYNOLDS: They certainly do.

END OF INTERVIEW

