

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

MAY WALLACE

JUNE 14, 1983

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY RON COCKRELL

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HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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ABSTRACT

May Wallace was the wife of George Wallace and sister-in-law of Harry and Bess Truman. The majority of her 3 part interview is a discussion about the relationships between the Wallace and Truman family members, particularly Madge Gates Wallace's relationship with family members. She briefly mentions domestic help, cooking, and Wallace-Truman family Christmas traditions, in addition to the weekly bridge club gatherings. Her walk through narration of the rooms in the Truman Home provides valuable first hand documentation as to the historic arrangement and use of the rooms as well as the history of some of the furnishings.

Persons mentioned: Professor Bryant, Rufus Burrus, Bill Carnes, John Carnes, Helen Crow, Claudine Ford, Vietta Garr, Frank Gates, Grandfather Gates, Grandmother Gates, Maud Gates, Myra Gates, Walter Gates, Edna Hutchinson, Mag Knoll, Valerie [LaMere], Lucy Peters, Mary Shaw, Mr. Shaupe, Thelma Pallette Sibel, Mr. Southern, Christine Wallace, David Willock Wallace, Frank Wallace, Fred Wallace, George Wallace, Madge Wallace, Natalie Ott Wallace, Bess Truman, Margaret Truman, Harry Truman.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
MRS. GEORGE P. [MAY] WALLACE**

HSTR INTERVIEW 1983-2

RON COCKRELL: Mrs. Wallace, this morning I wanted to talk to you about the Truman house, these two houses [601 and 605 West Truman Road], the garage, and the surrounding property. I thought perhaps the best way to start was to ask you about your earliest recollections about the main house. What do you remember about it?

MAY WALLACE: [Chuckling] I moved here when I was married in 1916. The house next door was built in 1915. At that time, both Mr. and Mrs. Gates, the grandparents, were living, and they lived in the bedroom downstairs which now is Mrs. Truman's bedroom and living room. Mrs. Wallace and her family lived mostly upstairs and in the back. The Gateses were older people and they wanted a life of their own. They didn't want to bother each other.

There is a back stairs which goes up out of the kitchen and that was the stairs we used to get up to the back room upstairs where we congregated at night.

I can remember the house before that, that is just casually, because when we were—let's see, if I was married in 1916, not much earlier before that—when we were in high school, Mrs.

Wallace had the group in for dinner a time or two, but I had no intimate connection with the house at that time until after we were married. Then, as I say, we didn't use the front part of the house. Don't ask me when Grandfather and Grandmother Gates died because, well, he died first. When was Mrs. Truman married? In '29?

COCKRELL: In 1919.

WALLACE: Well, then, he died in 1918, the year before. Of course Mr. Truman was in the Army and didn't get phased out as soon as he thought he would.

COCKRELL: You said you used to "congregate" on the upper floor using the stairway from the kitchen. Was there a sitting room up there?

WALLACE: Yes, there was at that time. It's just a junk room now with boxes and things like that. Mother Wallace had her little sewing machine out there and they had some books and things out there. We used to go up there at night so as not to disturb the older grandparents.

COCKRELL: I see. Was it kind of a living room then?

WALLACE: Yes. She had made a living room out of it. She had it so that we could just go over there and up the back stairs so we didn't bother anybody. So we did that for a number of years.

Mother Wallace, well shall I say, she was a very queenly woman. You can tell from Mrs. Truman that she was very much a lady, but she was very sweet. She was a mighty good mother-in-

law. We went up there on Sunday for dinner, and Thanksgiving and Christmas we traded back and forth with my parents. It was quite an intimate relationship. The older brother that lived over here was Frank Wallace. We used to picnic out in the back yard. People made their amusement in those days. They didn't just go to the picture show!

COCKRELL: Do you remember what the sleeping arrangements were? Which bedrooms people occupied?

WALLACE: Oh yes. Mrs. Truman's bedroom was always the south room that you go up same steps. You've been upstairs?

COCKRELL: Yes. That's not the one with the colored glass in it, is it?

WALLACE: No. That's just a little alcove, isn't it?

COCKRELL: Well, there's an alcove, but then there's a big bedroom with a big old picture window with the colored glass.

WALLACE: That faces onto the street. No, her bedroom was to the left of that. Mother Wallace must have had that big bedroom. Fred, the youngest brother, had the north bedroom. After Bess was married and they came back there to live. After Margaret was born, they cut a—after she was old enough to have a room of her own, they cut that passage across from their bedroom back to her little bedroom so that they could get to her at night.

COCKRELL: So that was right after Margaret was born that they did that?

WALLACE: Well, I suspect that it was several years because she was running back and forth for a while.

COCKRELL: So maybe it was two or three years . . . ?

WALLACE: Yes, a couple of years, I don't remember exactly. It was a convenience to them because they could get through there easily.

COCKRELL: I've read that the house was gray until President Truman became president and then they painted it white. Do you remember that?

WALLACE: I don't. After you change the color of something I never can remember it before, but it could well have been. I don't remember when it was painted and I don't know when that back porch was enlarged and made into a living quarters. It was in his lifetime of course because he sat out there and read at night. And they had that fan. Is it still up there?

COCKRELL: I believe it is.

WALLACE: A friend of Mr. and Mrs. Truman gave them that and had it installed because she thought they needed air on the back porch. That was quite a living porch. They really enjoyed it. I wish I could remember when that was extended. The porch originally was a narrow porch like the one in the front and just came on around.

COCKRELL: I believe it was built around the same time that the White House in Washington was undergoing renovation. It must have been in the late 1940s.

WALLACE: Yes, it must've been.

COCKRELL: He took a lot of criticism over how the White House was being changed, but he could do anything he wanted to on the “Summer White House” and no one could say or do anything about it.

WALLACE: Yes! Well, when he was in the White House, they had Secret Service men and they came back with Mrs. Truman and Margaret when they were here in the summers.

COCKRELL: Didn't they build a little security booth out there in the yard?

WALLACE: Yes, a little house.

COCKRELL: Where was that located?

WALLACE: Right at the side of the barn.

COCKRELL: Do you remember when that was removed?

WALLACE: No, but it must of been after he was out of the presidency, because they didn't require any Secret Service here then.

COCKRELL: So they didn't have any use for it after that?

WALLACE: No. He had Secret Service protection later over at the Library. There was an Independence policeman named Mike Westwood who used to walk with him in the mornings when he took his morning walk. Mike's been dead a number of years, too. They told a good story on Mike. They walked over toward the Catholic Church. They were there on the corner with a little girl who was going to school and she started to cross. Mr. Truman said something to her and she didn't respond. Mike said, “You didn't answer Mr. Truman.” She said, “My mother told me not to speak

to strange men.” Mike told her, “You’re perfectly safe with this gentleman.” We’ve always laughed about that.

He used to get up early in the mornings at about five o’clock. He had a stick with a nail in the bottom and he’d go out and pick up all the papers and things out in the yard. They didn’t have breakfast until about eight o’clock. I guess he read the paper and wrote and walked before that.

After they were married, they thought they were going to live out in Grandview, but that summer Mother Wallace became very ill. Bess came home; it was soon after they were married. She came home to take care of her mother and they never did establish any other residence. They just lived up there.

COCKRELL: Did they actually intend to live in Grandview?

WALLACE: Well, that was his home, and I suppose he had a place out there, and his sister lived out there and all. I don’t think that Harry was ever much of a farmer. I wouldn’t want to say that as a plain fact, but that is really what happened. They came back. Mother Wallace had a very serious sciatic rheumatism and Bess really had to take over the running of the house.

COCKRELL: So her mother never was in very good health?

WALLACE: She was up and around, but then she had this problem. I guess if you have sciatic you always have a pain or two. Of course the younger brother was at home then, Fred. Mother Wallace wanted

to keep her finger on all of us. She'd been left a widow at an early age and she had raised her children and she was sweet and good, but she did want to know what we were all doing all the time.

COCKRELL: You said these two houses were built in 1915 and 1916. Was the land given by Mr. Gates?

WALLACE: Yes. Grandfather Gates gave each one of the grandsons fifty feet—Frank Wallace fifty feet, and George Wallace, my husband, fifty feet. They were married in 1915 in the spring, but that house was not built until the summer of 1915. I wouldn't want to put an absolute date on it, but they lived—Mr. and Mrs. Frank Wallace—lived in an old house near the Baptist Church for a while. I know that this house was built in the summer of 1916 before we moved into it in October of that year.

COCKRELL: So the property line . . .

WALLACE: . . . went to the other side of that house [601 West Truman Road]. There's a fence there. Not too many years ago we made the entrance in there so the tenants there could come and go. There's never been a front entrance to my house and there wasn't any to that one. Of course the people who lived and rented there didn't want to go through this gate, so we made that driveway on the other side of the house. Mrs. Hecker, who lives in the house, has a station wagon that she keeps on the other side of the house. I've

always used the back gate to come in. I don't know what I'll do if they close that off.

COCKRELL: You called the garage a barn. Why is that?

WALLACE: Oh, it was a barn. Yes. Stylish writings about it call it the carriage house. But it really was not a barn. I mean, I don't remember it as a barn. It was always where they keep the cars. Mr. Gates, let me see if I'm right about this, he bought a car before his death, and Bess, and the younger brother. Fred, drove it. It was kept in there. Frank Wallace kept his car on this side where Mr. Truman's car is now. After I had a car, we built my little garage. It was an Essex. My parents bought it with the idea my mother would drive, but she didn't take to driving at all. So I had a car with all expenses paid.

COCKRELL: So the second garage was built sometime in the 20s?

WALLACE: I have to date by [when] my mother and father went to California to be with my older sister, when my nephew Bill, Bill Carnes, was born in California, when my parents went out there. She was driving, but she didn't care about it anyway. I was the family chauffeur and I drove her wherever she wanted to go. So that would have been around 1922, because they still had the big car then up at the house.

Have you seen that picture of the picnic that we were on with Frank Wallace holding the bucket out to the side and Mr. Truman driving the car? [see Appendix, number 1]

COCKRELL: Yes, I've seen it.

WALLACE: That was his old Stafford. He was the only one that had a car for a long time in the family. So whenever we went on a picnic we all piled into it. [See appendix.] That's too bad that young people don't have to make their own fun any more. We had so much more fun. But my garage must have been built in the early 1920s. My husband used to drive a county car. He used to work for the county and drove a county car for years and kept it out here under this tree.

COCKRELL: Do you remember any alterations on the big garage? Did it always look like it does now? Did it have different doors on it?

WALLACE: Yes. I think they put up those up and down doors on; I think maybe they were an improvement.

COCKRELL: Was that after he came home in 1953, or was it during his presidency?

WALLACE: Well, now you've got me. I don't know. Frank Wallace kept his car on that side of the barn and Harry kept his car on that side of the barn and Harry kept his car on that side of the barn because the big car was on the other side. I had my little garage so we had a lot of garage space than we knew what to do with. But I know those up and down doors were an improvement because I don't think they could have had them in the early days. That gate out there that

goes out of my yard, Mr. Truman always went out and locked that gate every night.

Woe be unto you if you were out. He always checked to see that everyone was in, but that was one of his jobs. That was at a time when people were very curious, coming in and seeing things.

I'll tell you a funny story about how curious people are. I was sitting here one day and a woman came to the door. She said, "I want to ask you something. Is that the Truman yard?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well, I'd like to get some dirt some soil. I collect soil from famous places." I said "Well, just take some out of my yard, it's all the same."

She said, "No, that won't do at all." So, I let her through the little gate out there and she took her little container and with a spoon, scooped. If it had been Roosevelt's house in New York or something like that I might have done the same thing, but the idea of collecting soil was too much for me!

COCKRELL: I've seen pictures of the back of the house where the little rose garden used to be with the big white trellises. Do you know the history of that? Was it always there?

WALLACE: It was there in Mrs. Wallace's time. She was a flower—lover and had flowers in the yard. There were steps that went out; I guess those steps are still there on the north side. You could go in and out

there. They had a croquet set out there in the side yard and we used to play croquet out there.

COCKRELL: Was the rose arbor built by Mr. Gates?

WALLACE: Oh, no. That was after Mrs. Wallace took over after they died. After the grandparents died, and their estate was divided, Mother Wallace took the house as part of her part of the estate because she wanted to continue living there.

COCKRELL: Did she have to pay for the interests in the house?

WALLACE: I have no idea of the business part of it, but they appraised the house and took that much off her part of the estate. I don't even remember what we got out of it, or the other three. The older brother was very much the businessman and a bookkeeper. He took care of all her business affairs. He worked down in his later years at the Waggoner-Gates Mill.

COCKRELL: Is the Waggoner-Gates Mill still operating today?

WALLACE: No. The house is still there, and it's been made an Independence landmark and we have tourists going through it. That hasn't been in business for a long time. Their product was Queen of the Pantry flour and it was a soft wheat flour. In my childhood, my mother just didn't think she could cook without Queen of the Pantry flour! I have—you might like to see it if I can lay hands on it—a poster that John Carnes got for me. It's a picture of the Waggoner-Gates product. Just hold everything while I look for it. [At this point in

the interview, Ranger-In-Charge Tom Richter enters the house; the tape recorder is shut off while Mrs. Wallace goes to find the Waggoner-Gates poster].

WALLACE: Here's the poster of the Waggoner-Gates Queen of the Pantry flour. Here's a picture when we were all at the White House, and this was when the Bridge Club was in Washington. The picture was taken while we were at Williamsburg.

COCKRELL: You said earlier that you didn't really remember what the original color of the house was; that you always remember it being white.

WALLACE: I don't remember that it was any other color, but if they say it was, then maybe it was a light color.

COCKRELL: You also said that the carriage house was called "the barn." Do you think the Gates ever kept animals in there?

WALLACE: No, no. It was just a carriage barn. They had a cow, Susie Dam! My husband, when we were courting, always had to go home and milk the cow so he always called it "Susie Dam" so he could cuss at it! But that was back when the place was fenced up. We picked asparagus in my front yard. This was the garden before Mr. Gates gave the two lots to his two grandsons.

COCKRELL: Where did they keep the cow then?

WALLACE: Well, this was pasture then and garden.

COCKRELL: Did the cow not have a barn then?

WALLACE: The cow must have had some kind of shed. I don't know about that. You see, there were no automobiles. In my time, they didn't have horses and carriage. In 1916, when I was married, they had the car for Bess and Fred to drive. This was Blue Avenue at the time. They had put the pipes in here across the road for drainage. When we built the house, it rained and it rained and it rained like Noah and the Ark. My sister and George, the man I was to marry, went uptown to pick up some things. We lived where the Carson's undertaking is now on fifteen acres. They were driving in Mr. Gates' car and it dropped down into the weakness of this where the pipes had been put in and the top was all loose, you know. So there the car sat. The family had to use cabs to get to the wedding. And it rained and rained. We picked the 24th of October because October in Missouri is always a beautiful time. And it rained and rained! Those things happen.

COCKRELL: This was called Blue Avenue. Was it also called Van Horn Road?

WALLACE: Yes, Van Horn Road, named after Mr. Van Horn. When it was paved, I don't know. Then they named it Truman Road.

COCKRELL: Has it always been this wide? Or have they widened it?

WALLACE: No, they've widened it. We used to have trees along both sides, and we lost our trees when they widened it. It was just like a double dirt road would be in those days.

COCKRELL: Do you remember when it was widened? It was after you were married, wasn't it?

WALLACE: Yes. A number of years after we were married. It was after we put Van Horn Road clear through to Kansas City, and I can't recall what that date would have been.

COCKRELL: Would it have been sometime after Margaret was born?

WALLACE: Yes, I imagine so. She was born in '24. We were married in '16, just before the ending of the war—that war! We lost all our trees there. We have to give way to progress. I guess. Evidently the maple trees were back further in the Truman yard because they didn't take them. The cyclone that we had two or three years ago took some of the trees. There was a big tree up there that crashed right across the driveway, an old soft maple.

They took the strip off the other side. They didn't take much off of our side, but they took quite a strip off the north side and took some trees up there on the corner. That lady was very indignant, too, but it was made a State Highway, so there wasn't anything anybody could do.

TOM RICHTER: You can't fight the state!

WALLACE: They just go ahead and do it!

COCKRELL: Do you remember when Van Horn Road was called Truman Road?

WALLACE: It was after he was in the White House.

COCKRELL: Was it before he came home to stay?

WALLACE: It must have been because it's been Truman Road awhile. [Pointing across the street]. There was another house there where that brick house is now before we were married. It might have been in the way of the road and that may be why it was taken down. It was for years the parsonage for the Baptist church so we had to behave ourselves! My husband was a heathen, and he liked to work on Sundays because he didn't have much other time. He was painting the house on Sunday morning. The rope broke, and trying to grab it, the thing and everything fell and the green paint went all over everywhere. The preacher said it happened because he was doing it on Sunday! He came right in the house and called a painter and gave him the job of painting the house. He didn't want to paint it anymore!

These house were always these colors, they were stained. But that green stain—I can remember how he looked with green stain dripping off of him. He was a great one. He was the one who did everything for the rest of the family. When Margaret was little, she was running down the driveway, and she was about two or three years old. The driveway then was gravel. She slid on the gravel and skinned her knee. She got up and she called my husband, "Da!" she said, "Da fix!" She wanted Da to fix her knee! He could fix everything else, so he could fix her knee.

COCKRELL: Do you remember when the driveway was finally paved?

WALLACE: I couldn't give you a date on that. Let's see, Margaret was born in '24, she was a pretty good sized girl at the time I'm talking about. I think it was after Mr. Truman was, well, I don't know. Dates are too much for me.

COCKRELL: Yes, they are for a lot of people.

WALLACE: It was after he was in the White House that this gate was put up for protection. He used to go out and lock that gate every night that goes out into the alleyway.

COCKRELL: Did he want the gate to be put up? Did he resist it for awhile?

WALLACE: No, he didn't care. We all had keys to the gate, and between the houses there was a fence that went clear across and there had to be a gate there because people could come in there and wander around just like the other place. You see, when that gate was closed and this side gate was closed, we were completely fenced in. You'd be surprised the silly people who would want to come in and wander around.

RICHTER: They're still here today!

WALLACE: I'm sure that's true.

COCKRELL: I don't quite understand. Are you saying there was another fence to separate these houses from the main house? Or was it a whole complex like now?

WALLACE: No, it was a whole complex. The Government did all this when he went into the White House to protect it from sightseers. We gained

the fence off of the Government anyway. The Frank Wallaces had a key to the gate so they could get out that way. There's a gate there with a key to it on my side, but I never did use it too much because it wasn't necessary, but the fence fences in the whole area. They had to do it to protect it.

COCKRELL: Was there a wooden fence in the back here where the alley is?

WALLACE: No. Well, there must have been some kind of.... No, that was open back there because they were talking once to moving the alley, of widening the alley and going clear across to the next [street], but there would've been no outlet there, just another dead end. They decided there wasn't any use doing that. So it was open space as I remember it. After they fenced in the whole thing, then they had a fence between our houses with a gate. Mrs. Frank Wallace had a key to that, and I guess I have a key to it, although that isn't my side of the property.

They died in, oh, when was it? They died within a couple of months of each other. Margaret was in Europe. The property was left so that Mrs. Truman and I—we wanted to own it—so we bought the house. The colored segment of Independence at that time was just about half a mile north of here. They'd come up the alley and we thought they might just creep into here, and if it was just sitting, and nobody owned it or cared for it, someone might sell it to colored people, and we didn't want that. We still own it—

Margaret and I own the house next door. We've always had nice tenants in it. Mrs. Heckler has been there about ten years and she's a great help and comfort to me. When I fell and broke my leg in '76, I called Doris. She had a key to the back door: she called an ambulance. Bess couldn't figure out what was going on down here. We didn't call her because we didn't want to worry her. Don't ever do that! Tell people! They'll worry anyway. She called the Presbyterian preacher across the street. He called Doris to ask what was going on, and she told him that I had fallen.

Margaret was born in '24 and it was during the awfulest snowstorm. It was one of those awful Februarys we have.

COCKRELL: She was born in the house, wasn't she?

WALLACE: Oh yes! Mrs. Truman wouldn't go to the hospital.

COCKRELL: Did the birth take place in the Trumans' bedroom?

WALLACE: Yes, upstairs in that south room which was always her bedroom, and then when Margaret was old enough to be in a room by herself, that's when they made that passageway. I'll never forget how cold it was that February. Of course that old house, at that time, it wasn't heated as well as afterwards—they put in two furnaces. The halls were cold.

COCKRELL: Was it heated by fireplaces and gas?

WALLACE: Oh, no. They had furnaces in the basement.

RICHTER: Were they coal furnaces?

WALLACE: Yes. I shoveled a lot of coal in this house, too. Of course our furnace was small as this house has only four rooms. Anytime we were away we had to hurry home and put coal in the furnace. Then, of course, we all put in gas heat.

COCKRELL: Was that all done at the same time for all of you?

WALLACE: Oh, no, no. I can't remember when they put it in up there, but it was wonderful because that house was cold.

COCKRELL: Do you remember when the slate roof was taken off?

WALLACE: No, somebody was asking me that the other day. Bill Carnes, my nephew, is sixty, and he said that when he was a boy about twelve years old, he shot pigeons. They had pigeons that would come and roost up in it and they had some of them bring their rifles and shoot a quantity of pigeons. They were just lying there and there was this n[...] man that came down the alley. He wasn't anybody that belonged to any of us. He said, "Mister, what are you going to do with those pigeons?" Bill said, "I guess we'll just throw them away." He said, "Oh, can I have them? They make good eating!" He came in and collected the pigeons. So if Bill was twelve, that was a good while ago. You see, the slate roof was on even then. Hasn't it always been on?

RICHTER: I think so. I think it was in the 50s when they took the roof off.

WALLACE: That's possible. As I say, time goes so fast, I can't remember.

RICHTER: When they made the passageway into Margaret's room, did that used to be part of a porch, or was the sleeping porch larger then?

WALLACE: Yes, they took part of the porch to make a passageway.

RICHTER: Yes. That's what it looks like. There's an old mirror in the music room over where the piano and fireplace is, do you remember that?

WALLACE: Now which do you call the music room?

RICHTER: The one with the piano.

WALLACE: That's over north, that was the parlor where the gas jets are.

RICHTER: Yes. Are there any family stories about the mirror? Does it go back to the Gateses?

WALLACE: That mirror has been there ever since I can remember, but now they've modernized their living room there on the other side. Will they want to put that back to the way it was?

RICHTER: We haven't decided yet.

WALLACE: You see, Fred Wallace was quite an architect and a designer. The mirror in the living room had the side things that went up like the one in the parlor, you know, the little things on each side. He took those down, had those taken down and modernized that fireplace on that south wall in the living room.

RICHTER: Yes, on the south side.

WALLACE: I was wondering the other day whatever became of those. Has anyone ever investigated the basement?

RICHTER: I'll have to look for that. It might be in the attic.

WALLACE: In the attic? Well, Mrs. Fred Wallace and I went through the whole deal just before you all took over. She was here for Mrs. Truman's funeral. She said, "Let's go up there and go from the attic to the cellar." She lived there for six years when her children were small. We went over the whole house, we went—we didn't go to the basement—but we went from the attic clear down to there, but I didn't see those in the attic, but I wasn't looking for them. So, they might be up there. There were a whole lot of his hats up there.

RICHTER: When you come in the front door, there's mirrors on the left wall. Two mirrors. They look old also. Have they been around a long time?

WALLACE: They have gold on them? Yes, they've been there a long time.

RICHTER: Did they go back to the Gateses?

WALLACE: Must've. Must've gone clear back to them because Grandfather Gates, when they lived there, the Gates, after Mother Wallace moved here from down the street, the Gateses practically lived in their quarters, that living room and the bedroom and they built on that bathroom in the back. Grandfather Gates had a big leather chair and before we were married, my husband used to tell me about it. He would sit down in his chair with change in his pocket. Some of it would spill out and go down, and the boys took turns. Each one of them had days which one of them could go down and hunt for Grandfather Gateses change.

He died in 1918. Bess and Harry were supposed to be married, I think, he didn't get back from the war as soon as he thought he would, and then after Mrs. Gateses death, they waited another year. He was quite a joker. Mr. Gates had a keen sense of humor. She was English. Mrs. Gates was sent over here. There was a plague in England at that time and her family died off. They sent her over to be with relatives in the East, in America. She was put in the charge of the captain of the ship and came across. She was only six years old, something like that. Now, Mother Wallace was born in Moline, Illinois, and I have never found out why they ever came to Missouri! But I do know that Mr. George Gates, who was the grandfather, had a brother, Ed Gates. They lived over here on.... And he had come West at that time, and the story is that he wrote to them saying it was nice and to come on out to Missouri.

I asked Mother Wallace one time how they ever got to Moline, Illinois. She was born in Moline, Illinois. She said, well, she guessed they were just edging back away from the coast and coming back this way. She was only two years old when the Gates moved out here. So her sister must've been born—let's see, the Gateses had five children. Mrs. Wallace was the oldest and lived the longest of any of than. She was ninety or ninety-one when she died.

COCKRELL: So when Mrs. Wallace died, did she leave the house to Bess, or to all of her children?

WALLACE: She left the estate, I don't remember exactly how it was divided, but as I told you, Mrs. Truman took the house as part of her share of the estate. Because she wanted the house and we [didn't care about it. We had our own houses]. [At this point in the interview, the tape cassette reached the end of the first side and was flipped over.]

[End #4061; Begin #4062]

COCKRELL: She [Bess Truman] took the house because she wanted to stay there?

WALLACE: Yes, that's right. As I told you, Mrs. Truman came back to take care of her when she had sciatic one time and they just lived there all their married life and Margaret was born there.

COCKRELL: What happened when the Trumans went to Washington when Mr. Truman was a senator? Did someone stay in the house?

WALLACE: Well, no. Mrs. Wallace went into an apartment. One of those little apartments over on Maple Avenue. I think maybe she spent one winter there. When they came back, then she came back and the next year I think they took her back to Washington with the.

COCKRELL: Why did she not live in the house? Why did she move into an apartment? Was the house too big for her?

WALLACE: Oh yes. It was too much for her and she wasn't physically able to do it. They didn't want her to do it; everybody had scattered by that time. When did they go into the White House for the first time? He was a Senator when they first went to Washington. That was when they closed the house and she went to live with them in that little apartment.

COCKRELL: And the house stood empty?

WALLACE: The house stood empty. All the pipes had to be drained and everything to keep them from freezing and then after—when did she go back to Washington?

COCKRELL: The Trumans went to Washington in 1935, in January.

WALLACE: Anyway, she went back and lived and died there in the White House. They used to come back here in the summers.

COCKRELL: What happened to the house when Mrs. Wallace was living with them in Washington? Was it empty the whole time?

WALLACE: It was just closed up.

COCKRELL: Wasn't there anyone here to look after it?

WALLACE: My poor husband had to go up and drain all the pipes. He was the fixer in the family. Like Margaret said, "Let Da do it."

COCKRELL: So did he have to go up and drain the pipes every time they went back to Washington?

WALLACE: Well, it wasn't very long because then she—well, yes, I guess he did. We went there for Christmas a time or two and I was trying to

think if they came back here for Christmas. I can't remember, but I know the house was closed up. It was after they came back that they built the porch on, I'm sure. There used to be a cistern there just as you came out the kitchen door. I wonder if it's still there.

RICHTER: I think it's still there.

WALLACE: It was supposed to be water that came from a park, Fairmont Park that we have over here. It was supposed to be very fine spring water. Mr. Gates always thought it was the same water that came out here that was over there. We used that system when we first lived here, but then they built so many houses that we felt like it could be contaminated, so they closed it.

COCKRELL: So you remember when the city of Independence hooked up their water system to the house?

WALLACE: No.

COCKRELL: Maybe it was after you were married, then.

WALLACE: Well, they had running water up there, before that. Because they had that bathroom upstairs. Oh yes, they had running water, I'm sure. Maybe as far back as the Gates' time. We had running water. I know when we moved over on Park Avenue in 1910, if you requested city water, you could get that hooked up.

COCKRELL: You had running water in this house when you moved in here?

WALLACE: Oh, yes, we had city water and all the comforts of home.

COCKRELL: Which means electricity, too!?

WALLACE: Yes, we had electricity! We had hardwood floors. My husband worked with wood all his life. We had a leak up there. That mirror, by the way, don't tell anybody, but it came from up there. It came from the big house. We had a leak from the chimney that we could not locate and he used to go up and sit up there when it was raining. He could not locate that leak. It was papered with wallpaper, and it stained and was so ugly, so he made a hole back there for the water to run out and paneled the whole thing. If we have one of our floods, you can still see some water. But that mirror, that must be the mirror that came out of the living room. Don't tell anybody because they might want it back!

RICHTER: Don't tell me!

WALLACE: Don't tell him because he might take it back. It has a wooden back and beveled glass on the front. It's a very fine mirror.

RICHTER: Did that hang where the portrait of Bess is now, over the fireplace?

WALLACE: Well as I remember there was the same thing that went up as the one that was in the parlor, and then this mirror was in the middle. That's the way I remember it. Are there any pictures left of the living room? Any Kodak pictures?

RICHTER: No. [Telephone rings; two-minute pause in interview].

COCKRELL: Do you remember when there was a fire in the attic?

RICHTER: Does that go back to the Gates?

WALLACE: I remember when we cleaned out the attic and threw a lot of things out the window, but I don't remember it having to do with a fire. What year was it?

COCKRELL: We really don't know.

WALLACE: I really don't remember any.

COCKRELL: Do you remember there ever being a fire?

WALLACE: Well, once they put too much firewood in the chimney, in the fireplace in the living room and they had sparks coming out. It scared us all nearly to death coming out when the chimney burned out, the soot and all up there.

RICHTER: Up in the attic, you can see where there was a fire at one time, up on the roof.

WALLACE: They probably did, but you don't have any year on it?

RICHTER: That's what we were wondering, how old the fire was. Were there any stories about an earlier fire? Back with the Gates?

WALLACE: Yes. Yes. That was when Auntie Myra put on her theater hat and coat. She wanted to save them. That was before, that was when the Gates lived there, they had a fire. That was when the Gates family lived at home. There were two sisters: Auntie Maud and Auntie Myra. They all began with an "M." There was Madge. Maud and Myra. They lost several children. There were several graves out at the cemetery where the Gates are. There were two brothers, so they evidently had eight or nine children. Never did count the graves

out there. She was a tiny person. He was tall and slab-sided like my husband. Frank Wallace was six feet, one and a half. My husband was six feet. She said she would look at all those big men and wonder how they all belonged to her.

Uncle Frank was an invalid. Uncle Walter was married twice; his son, Walter Gates who has a son who has a son, so that name is still in the State of Washington. He called me at the time that Bess died, Walter Gates did, and he said, "I'm not in good health." And he died just about the time Bess did. He was the last of that generation. He had a son, George Gates, who has eight children, so the Gates name is out there, but we never knew any of them except Walter. He used to come back. Mother had two brothers, Walter and Frank. All the Gates and Wallaces were great family people, clannish people.

I don't know about that fire in the attic. I remember seeing those burned things up there.

RICHTER: Yes, it must go back to the Gateses.

WALLACE: Oh, it could have been. I've forgotten it. Don't trust my memory back that far.

COCKRELL: Didn't Mr. Truman have a lot of reconstruction done up in the attic during the 50s?

WALLACE: Yes, he had the attic fixed up because he had a lot of stuff up there, and there's still a lot of his stuff up there. Mrs. Fred Wallace was

here for the funeral, and she said, "I've never been up in the attic." And I said, "Well, I have. Do you want to go?" So we went up in the attic. I had a key. Margaret had given me a key. That was before they [National Park Service] took it over and somebody told the Secret Service. That was when the Secret Service was still over there. Somebody told them there was a light up in the attic. So when we came back downstairs, there was this man pattering over wanting to know what we were doing. It was okay after we explained ourselves.

RICHTER: There's some old trunks up in the attic. Do they go back to the Gateses? They look real old.

WALLACE: They probably do. There probably are some Wallace things there. There's a lot of stuff up there. I suppose it will stay there as long as Margaret is concerned. She doesn't care anything about it. I think she just doesn't—I think it is so nostalgic with her that she just doesn't want to go back. I know when she was here she called and said, "Can I stay with you?" I said, "No, Margaret, I'm sorry." That was when I had the companion here. I said, "She's sleeping in your bed." Then she said, "Well, I'll sleep over here with the rest of the gang." That was during Truman Week in the spring. She came out, but she didn't want to go up there at all. I think it was too close to her mother's death; she just didn't want to. It was just

the nostalgia that she just couldn't. She'll get over that. We have to. We all do.

Did I tell you the story about the fat doctor?

RICHTER: No.

WALLACE: This doctor was a great big man. Margaret was little. When Mrs. Truman was sick one time, he went upstairs. Margaret followed him up the steps. He said, "What are you coming up here for Margaret?" She said, "Well, I wanted to wait and see the step that squeaks that it takes a heavy man to make it squeak. I wanted to hear it squeak!" And there is one. It's still there. I made it squeak when I was up there. He was a great big jolly old man. This was an old family doctor of the Wallaces, Dr. Crimmenger. I guess he borned Margaret because she was born there in the house. Bess wouldn't go to the hospital.

COCKRELL: She didn't trust hospitals?

WALLACE: She didn't want to go. When she set her head to do something one way or the other, it stayed set! It wasn't so unusual in those days. I was born at home, too. It sure was cold when she was born. Bess had lost one child, and she wouldn't buy any furniture or anything because she was superstitious about it. Margaret always told them they didn't think enough of her to have a bed for her. They put a pillow in a drawer and then put her in the drawer!

COCKRELL: Mrs. Truman had lost a child before Margaret?

WALLACE: Yes. You see, she was, they were married in 1919. Margaret wasn't born until 1924, so it was along in there. It was a miscarriage. It wasn't a full [term]. . . Of course, they weren't very young. I guess Mrs. Truman was forty when Margaret was born, wasn't she?

COCKRELL: Pretty close to it.

WALLACE: Yes, pretty close to it.

COCKRELL: Do you recall anything about the lamppost that sits in front of the house now next to the sidewalk before you get to the front gate? It hasn't been there for very long, has it?

WALLACE: I don't remember when it was put there.

COCKRELL: Are there any stories or anecdotes about the colored glass in the windows in front.

WALLACE: I don't remember anything about them. I suppose it was the fashion then to have colored glass. A lot of old houses in town had colored glass.

COCKRELL: So did the Trumans especially like the colored glass?

WALLACE: I suppose they did, I mean they left it like that. Mrs. Truman would have been hesitant to change anything very drastically. Of course, oh, how old would she have been when they moved up there? Fred was a baby. After their father died, they moved up there.

COCKRELL: She would have been about seventeen.

WALLACE: Yes, about that. It was home to her. I don't know. There were old houses all over town that had the colored glass in the windows. It was the style.

COCKRELL: Do you remember what was done to the kitchen when they modernized it?

WALLACE: [Chuckling] That kitchen was the coldest place in the world when we used to go out there in it. Yes, they modernized it. Of course, they put in a new sink and a new disposal and all in it in later years. There used to be a little stove. Is there still a little heating stove there?

COCKRELL: Yes, there still is.

WALLACE: That was the one warm spot in the kitchen.

COCKRELL: Was it the coldest room because the kitchen is the oldest part of the house?

WALLACE: It could be. It was always big, but of course they always had help. I know it was a fer piece from the kitchen into the dining room. The butler's pantry was in between the kitchen and the dining room. They modernized. They put in a new sink and a gas stove is comparatively new. They had that other little stove. We used to use those back steps. Of course you can't get up them now with all that stuff on them.

RICHTER: I've got to give a talk to the Kiwanis Club, so I've got to leave. Thanks a lot for having us.

WALLACE: That's okay. Anytime I can help you, just holler.

COCKRELL: See you later, Tom. Well, we've talked about nearly everything. Is there anything else about the house that we haven't talked about?

WALLACE: I can't think of it. Of course there's still those gas burners in the parlor. Lots of people when they put in electricity kept the gas burners because they weren't quite sure what the electricity was going to do!

There's some stuff down there in the barn, some wooden things, they must've come off of there someplace. As I remember, and don't trust my memory, but it seems to me that it was similar to the one in the parlor. When they modernized it, the living room, they took that down. Is the portrait of Mr. Truman still up over the mantle?

COCKRELL: Yes, it is. When you say they modernized the living room, do you mean just the mirrors?

WALLACE: Yes. Well, there wasn't anything else really to modernize. It was just a nice big room and I suppose it was repapered at the time and curtains and things like that. The only structural change was the mirrors. That's the way I remember it. I don't know where they could be.

COCKRELL: Then Mrs. Truman didn't really want her house to change that much, did she?

WALLACE: She didn't seem to object or she could have told them not to do it.

COCKRELL: Well, it seems to me that the house hasn't really changed from the time that the Gates had it.

WALLACE: No, it hasn't changed structurally very much because the dining room is very much the same. That old place that always fascinated me, the marble place where you kept the plates hot.

COCKRELL: Yes, that's still there.

WALLACE: But, of course, the furniture is different because Mrs. Truman brought a lot of her furniture back from Washington. I think that dining room furniture now is what she had, but that old built-in place over there . . . Are the silver things still on the . . .

COCKRELL: Yes, I believe it is. Is that Gates silverware?

WALLACE: No, I think that was Mrs. Wallace's. There's something about that. I'll have to ask Margaret about that, whether it was something Mrs. Truman had or, I don't know. Most of the things in the house, as I remember it, were Wallace things than Gates.

COCKRELL: Oh, really? When the Wallaces moved in, did they have a lot of furniture that they brought with them from their house?

WALLACE: Yes, they did. Of course the bedroom furniture upstairs, they [the Trumans] had. I think the buffet and the dining room table, that's the old dining room table. But they [the Trumans] brought back a lot of stuff. I have a lot of nice wooden boxes that I used to keep stuff in down in the basement.

COCKRELL: In your basement?

WALLACE: I just have the boxes. I won't throw them away. They were nice storage boxes. I said, "Can I have some of those boxes?" and Harry said, "Yes, we were just going to make kindling out of them." So we brought them down. They're nice. One always has junk that one has to keep. When they left the White House, they had accumulated a lot of things. He had all of his books, and most of them have been moved over to the Truman Library.

COCKRELL: Do you remember what the sleeping arrangements, the bedroom arrangements, were when the Trumans came back from Washington? Did they live in their same bedroom?

WALLACE: Oh, yes. They had the same bedroom, and then they used that room across the hall where he had his clothes, where they're still hanging. He got up early in the morning and he'd use that for a dressing room because he didn't want to disturb her because she didn't like to get up quite so early. So he'd go in there and dress and go out and walk around and pick up the papers out of the yard.

COCKRELL: What was done with those other bedrooms? Did they just stay empty?

WALLACE: Well, yes. You see, Mother Wallace by that time had moved downstairs, and Margaret used that north room. Isn't there stained glass there in that window?

COCKRELL: No, I don't think so.

WALLACE: Well, it's that big room...

COCKRELL: There in the corner...

WALLACE: Yes. The one with the steps going up to it. For the last few years, she's used that. I believe she slept in that, well, I can't remember. Mrs. Truman, of course, moved downstairs. I think it was when she fell.

COCKRELL: Was that the first time?

WALLACE: Yes. And it was very handy. Grandmother Gates had the bathroom built off the downstairs bedroom, too. The Gateses had built that for their own convenience.

COCKRELL: So that bathroom wasn't there before?

WALLACE: Originally, no.

COCKRELL: Would you know when that was built? Was that before you were married?

WALLACE: I can't remember. No, that must have been after. I think they built it, but I think Bess, Mrs. Truman, modernized it and put in new fixtures in it when she moved, when she had to stay downstairs.

COCKRELL: That bedroom then, was that always a bedroom?

WALLACE: Well, I think the Gateses used that downstairs. That was their quarters. The bathroom and the bedroom and living room. I'm pretty sure they built that bathroom.

COCKRELL: Probably after the Wallace family moved in? Because didn't they used to live upstairs?

WALLACE: Now you've got me. Did they used to live upstairs?

COCKRELL: I would think so at one time.

WALLACE: I don't know. My recollection of them is living downstairs. That was their bedroom and the living room was theirs. Mrs. Wallace made the sitting room upstairs where we used to congregate. The Gates went to bed early and they weren't used to having all our rattling around. That was back when we were married back in 1916, and it wasn't too long until he died in 1918.

COCKRELL: I remember seeing an early picture, I think it was in the early 1930s, of the front part of the house. It had, well, you've seen them, these window coverings that come over the windows and then there was one that hung over the front porch. It looked like there was a dark stripe and white stripes. Have you seen them?

WALLACE: Yes, they were wooden awnings, weren't they?

COCKRELL: Yes.

WALLACE: Yes, wooden awnings. That's what those were.

COCKRELL: Did they put those up every summer?

WALLACE: No, the wooden ones, I think they stayed . . .

COCKRELL: They stayed? Well, I think I've only seen one picture of them, the awnings, being on the house.

WALLACE: I don't remember. I know that later they had another kind of awnings on the house. I wouldn't know. I'm sorry that I have to end this, but I have another appointment. I have to go see my eye

doctor. He's going to give me some new glasses. I had a cataract operation.

COCKRELL: I certainly appreciate your time and patience in this interview, Mrs. Wallace. You've been a tremendous help to me.

[End #4062]

APPENDIX

Harry S. Truman Library photo #84-37. HSTL description reads: From left to right: Bess Wallace, Harry S. Truman, possibly Nellie Noland, and Mary Jane Truman riding in Truman's Stafford car, probably around the Grandview farm area. Mary Jane appears to be holding a fishing pole. Date ca. 1915.



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
MRS. GEORGE P. [MAY] WALLACE**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1983-4

RON COCKRELL: I thought we would start in this room since it is in the front of the house—the front living room. I was wondering if you could talk about some of the furniture in here, if you knew some of the background to some of it? Like this marble table here.

MAY WALLACE: I was trying to think where they got that marble. I believe they brought that marble from some other place and put it on that table. It makes a good, water-proof and liquor-proof [surface]!

Now, originally, as I remember this room, things went up to the ceiling [pointing to above the fireplace] and had those little notches where they put things. I could be mistaken, because there was a mirror. Is there one in the parlor?

TOM RICHTER: It's like this now.

WALLACE: There used to be a round mirror there. I have one of them down at my house because they gave it to my husband. But they used to have these wooden extensions and a mirror in there [above the fireplace]. That's what it was originally, but it's been a long time. Of course when they modernized the room.

We always had the Christmas tree here in the window and wired it down to the cold air shaft.

COCKRELL: There's a cold air shaft here under the sofa?

WALLACE: Yes, right underneath here. There's a big wooden cross down there in the barn I guess that they made for it. Margaret always wanted it to hit the ceiling. She had to have the biggest Christmas tree, so that was put on it and wired down because it was top heavy. We each had a chair to put our things on, and you never saw so much trash, tissue paper, and ribbons in all your life.

COCKRELL: You always had quite a roomful of people then?

WALLACE: Yes. Yes. The Frank Wallaces lived next door and that made four of us, and Mrs. Wallace was still alive, and Margaret. Then Vietta, the colored gal, always came in and looked around. Margaret Truman, when she was Margaret Truman, was chocolate crazy. Vietta, the colored maid, always got her a sack of chocolate buds. That was her present for Margaret. Margaret always called her "Pete" and I don't know why! Of course Margaret was real little when she first came to work here, but her name was Vietta, and maybe she just couldn't say "Vietta," so she just called her "Pete."

But we each had a chair and had our things on that and we commenced pitching then.

Originally, when I was first married—in 1916, and that was a good many years ago—the grandmother and grandfather were still alive. They had those apartments in there [pointing to the first floor bedroom and bathroom]. I don't know when that bathroom was built-on, under the porch upstairs. Do you have any idea?

COCKRELL: Not really. We're thinking that it was around World War I, or sometime in there.

WALLACE: Well, I think it was in the grandparents' time because that would have been the only access they had to a bathroom. They lived in here and Grandfather Gates had a big chair. He sat over there [pointing to the southeast corner of the living room]. He was a thin, skinny man, and he sat kind of back and the coins used to slide out of his pockets. The boys used to love going to get Grandfather Gateses coins.

COCKRELL: Has that bedroom where the Gates used to live changed very much over the years?

WALLACE: Well, yes. I would say that it has been completely renovated. Mrs. Truman, in her later years, lived in there. She and Mr. Truman had a bedroom upstairs. He's been dead ten years, of course.

RICHTER: How long has this wallpaper been here?

WALLACE: Well, they renovated this room. Fred Wallace, the younger brother, was an architect and quite a designer. I think he's the one who took those things down [the wooden extensions over the fireplace] and I always thought it was a shame. Let's see, my husband has been gone twenty years. I don't think it was papered. Mother Wallace died in '52. I don't think it's been papered since then.

She died in Washington and they brought her back here the ninth of December.

COCKRELL: How about the carpeting in here? Is it pretty old?

WALLACE: No, it's just mediumly old. It isn't real old. The old things are the clock, and I told you the story about the tin hands, didn't I?

RICHTER: I don't think Mr. Cockrell has heard that one.

WALLACE: My husband made them out of a pie pan.

COCKRELL: You're kidding! A pie pan?

WALLACE: No, I'm not kidding. He was a fixer. He was the one who fixed everything. He was on an enforced vacation between jobs one time so it worried him because the clock didn't go, it didn't have any hands. He took some real thin aluminum pie pans of mine and came up here and made a pattern. Then he made it out of cardboard and then he drew around it on the pans, cut them out, and painted them. He brought them back up here and put them on, and put a battery in down there. It hadn't run for a long time. Is that battery, does it still run?

RICHTER: Yes, we unplugged it because of the wiring. How did the hands get broken?

WALLACE: I don't know. They said that back, oh, quite awhile, that the young people were having—I wouldn't call it a wild party—but some boy was investigating and he went in there and took the hands off. They got lost some way.

That clock is dated, what did I tell you? 1732. It must have come out from the East when they came. Grandmother Gates came

over here as a little girl from England. The family as I understand it—now, this is the way it was given to me—there was a plague in London and a lot of her family died. They sent her to America to avoid this plague. She was in the East there, but who was there to take her, I don't know. Mrs. Wallace was born in Illinois. As I understand it, Grandfather Gateses brother, Mr. Ed Gates, wrote his brother and said this was a good place to come. Mother Wallace was born in Moline and so she was probably a baby when they came out here. They lived first—is that house still on Lexington Road where the family lived? There's a big house out there where they used to live. How they got into the milling business, I don't know.

There were three sisters—Maud, Myra, and Madge—and they all lived here. Now, the back end of this house burned at one time. Auntie Myra was trying to save her opera hat and coat, and she went out with them on! Was that when the extension was built on back there?

COCKRELL: Are you talking about the fire that was in the attic?

WALLACE: No, I don't think so. It might have been and come down there, but they said there was a fire and it burned off part of the old house. There's places in the attic where you can see where the fire was. Mrs. Fred Wallace went up there when she was back here.

Frank Wallace quit school so he never finished school, but my husband graduated from the Independence High School. We were going together, and I used to come up here. Every once in awhile Mother Wallace had a group of us come up here for dinner and I was terribly shy about that because—and she turned out to be my mother-in-law, and she was a lovely lady, I'll say that for her.

This is where the Gates lived in the bedroom and bathroom when I was first married. Grandfather Gates died in 1918, and Grandmother Gates stayed here and with an unmarried brother, Frank, who lived in Denver someplace.

COCKRELL: Was he an invalid?

WALLACE: Yes. He had weak lungs and he lived in Colorado a good deal of the time for that. There was Uncle Frank and Uncle Walter, and Maud, Myra, and Margaret—there were five of them. There are other plots [in Woodlawn Cemetery] where they'd lost small children. Auntie Maud married a very wealthy man over in Platte City, Missouri. That was a coincidence, too, because he was an intimate friend of my father, Strother Wells. My Grandfather Proctor was the minister of the Christian Church here from '60 to a hundred [1900], forty years. They lived in a big brick house. Do you know where the Carson Funeral Home is out on Lexington?

COCKRELL: Yes.

WALLACE: Well, that whole area, fifteen acres in there, was where they lived. We went up to Platte City, the whole tribe of us, for Thanksgiving the year of the flu, 1918. when Harry was still in Europe. After we came back, Bess had terrible flu and my husband had flu. It was just an epidemic that came through here. She was sick all winter.

COCKRELL: Do you remember the time that the Gates lived here, was all of this living room carpeted or was it all hardwood floors?

WALLACE: I wouldn't think so. I think wall-to-wall carpeting has come in since then. They must have had rugs in here.

Grandmother Gates was a very small woman, but very much of a person.

COCKRELL: Did they use the fireplace much?

WALLACE: We caught the chimney on fire once! We decided to make a fire in it one day and the chimney hadn't been cleaned out. The sparks commenced coming out the roof. Yes, they used it! This house was cold. It was always cold in here, until they got that double furnace in down there in the basement, then it began to get heated up. Then they made over that bathroom upstairs when Mr. and Mrs. Truman used the upstairs more.

COCKRELL: Did the Trumans use the fireplace much?

WALLACE: Yes, they used it.

COCKRELL: Even after they got their new heating system?

WALLACE: Yes, it was cozy. Then there's a fireplace in the parlor.

COCKRELL: Did they use that one, too?

WALLACE: Yes, that's more of a parlor and we didn't sit in there much. There's gas light and electric light both in there. That mirror in there was the same as in here, and I don't know where they ever got to.

COCKRELL: Those were all taken down when the rooms were modernized in the early 50s?

WALLACE: They must have been, yes. I'm surprised, because this brother, Fred, who was the architect, was quite a lover of old things. So why they took those pretty things down . . .

COCKRELL: Is Fred Wallace gone now?

WALLACE: Yes, he's been gone quite a number of years. His widow was here last fall at the time of Mrs. Truman's death and stayed with me. Fred was quite a visionary person. He was always going to do something. He's buried out at Woodlawn, and Mother Wallace is buried out there, and that's where Mrs. Truman had her place all picked out, but they took her over to the Library. She didn't have anything to say about that.

When Mr. Truman was first elected senator, they just had a little apartment there. Mrs. Wallace didn't go back there. I don't think she lived with them in the apartment.

COCKRELL: Do you know much about some of the other furniture in here, how old or recent they are?

WALLACE: These chairs with the wood trim around them are the old, old ones. Those stuffed chairs are modern ones they bought for comfort.

COCKRELL: The blue and yellow ones.

WALLACE: I have one of these chairs down at my house. Margaret wanted me to keep one for her. Are those chairs out in the hall still there?

COCKRELL: Yes.

WALLACE: Those are what are called a “parlor set” in those days. There was a settee and four or six chairs. Grandmother Gates gave me a chair and gave Mrs. Frank Wallace a chair, and I made needlepoint for it. It’s down at my house now.

COCKRELL: So those chairs all used to sit in the parlor?

WALLACE: I think they did, but I don’t remember them anyplace but in the hall. That bookcase [pointing to the east living room wall] was Mrs. Truman’s.

When they came back here, they had quite a bit of their own things that they brought here. Mother Wallace had died. So that secretary is something Mrs. Truman had.

I know that I’m a very queer person in a number of ways, and when things change, it’s hard for me to look back and see the way they were before!

This sofa has been recovered.

COCKRELL: This sofa [in front of the bay window] is an old one?

WALLACE: Yes. I think it was part of the set that goes with those old chairs.
Now don't quote me on that, but I believe it is.

COCKRELL: These lamps here built onto the walls, do they work?

WALLACE: I think those were part of what Fred Wallace did when he redid this room. They're too modern to have been in here originally, aren't they?

COCKRELL: Well, they look like it. Yes, they do look new. They do work.

WALLACE: There was a chandelier in here originally. We always used to have a chandelier hanging in the middle of these rooms. Then, when we put all these side lights in, we took all of them out.

COCKRELL: It looks like there are quite a few cracks here through the wallpaper and in the ceilings. While the Trumans were here in the 50s and 60s, would they usually repair things like that? If they saw cracks in the walls or the ceilings, were they pretty quick to repairs things?

WALLACE: I don't remember that the walls were cracked then.

There used to be green curtains. You see the brass things where there used to be a rod across there? When you were heating a house of this size with more or less primitive heat, you had to have something to get cozy with, and there used to be green portieres that hung down. You could pull those over when it got too cold.

COCKRELL: It looks like those brass holders are on all the door openings in this room. Would all of them have had the portieres?

WALLACE: Yes. They were green, as I recall.

COCKRELL: They haven't hung that up since the new heating system was installed?

WALLACE: I can't remember that they have.

COCKRELL: Do you know anything about these tables in here, the endtables at the ends of this couch?

WALLACE: All these tables are modern. I think Mrs. Truman had them in Washington. Those are too modern to have been the Gateses.

COCKRELL: How about these lamps in here; the gold one with the shade and the one here on the table?

WALLACE: I think these are all Mrs. Truman's. I guess they had an overhead light, they must have had in here. I wish my memory were better, but when you get to be a hundred, you can't remember like you used to.

COCKRELL: Well, you're not quite a hundred!

WALLACE: I'm getting there. I had a birthday last week. I was eighty-nine.
[Mr. Richter re-enters the room]

COCKRELL: Mrs. Wallace was saying there used to be a chandelier here in this room.

WALLACE: Wouldn't there have been? They must've had one because they didn't have all these fancy lamps and things in those days.

RICHTER: Did Mr. Truman have a favorite chair in here?

WALLACE: Mrs. Truman sat in that one when she lived in here in her last years.

COCKRELL: The yellow [gold] chair.

WALLACE: I don't think they did. They really lived pretty much upstairs. They had the bedroom fixed pretty well.

COCKRELL: Do you recall when this couch was recovered? Has it been long?

WALLACE: Yes, it's been years. This is an old piece. There used to be a smaller one.

RICHTER: There's one in the music room.

WALLACE: Well, let's go look. [Moving into the foyer, by the staircase]. This chair with the needlepoint is an old chair.

COCKRELL: Did Mrs. Truman ever do needlepoint?

WALLACE: No, she didn't. That's mechanically done, it's not handmade. As children, we used to run across this area here and slide and it would just spark!

COCKRELL: This decorative statue lamp here on the end of the banister, did there used to be a globe on the lamp?

WALLACE: Yes, there was one of those round clear white ones. I mean, not clear glass, but one of those milk glass ones.

Now, Mother Wallace had I don't know how many of these tables [examining the drop-leaf table beneath the portrait of Margaret Truman in the central hallway]. I have one, and she gave

the Fred Wallaces one. So many of these drop-leaf tables around here. And that mirror is old [pointing to the mirror near the portrait].

COCKRELL: Do you recall what was hanging behind this portrait of Margaret before?

WALLACE: No, I don't know. There may have been an old wall picture. Now this is old [pointing to the wainscoting].

COCKRELL: What do you call that?

WALLACE: I couldn't tell you now. That was quite the style. They did it because I expect it was because the chairs were pushed against it and it was more practical to have something there to withstand it.

COCKRELL: Or even with little kids around it might have saved the wallpaper.

WALLACE: Yes. We always used this door over here and went over the back way [pointing to the door beneath the staircase]. When the Gateses were alive, Mother Wallace had that room over the kitchen because it was nice and light, made into a sewing room. She had a little automatic machine up there. We used to come in at night when the Gateses were alive—we couldn't bother this end of the house—we'd come up that back stairway from the kitchen. That was when Fred was still in school.

COCKRELL: Did Mrs. Wallace do a lot of her own sewing then?

WALLACE: Yes, she did. She did the curtains and she helped me make curtains for my house. She was a very sweet person. I told her once,

“You’re so good to us,” and she said, “Well, you’re taking care of my boys.” Mr. Wallace’s death was tragic, and she had been a widow so long that she had just devoted her life to her children. She really was a little too “wantin’” to know what we were “doin’” sometimes. [The group enters the parlor/music room].

COCKRELL: Do you know much about this fireplace? It looks like these tiles surrounding it are North African.

WALLACE: That was just the style at the time. I’ve gone through a lot of old houses in the East and they nearly all have a little story going around the fireplace.

COCKRELL: I’ve talked to one of the workmen and he seems to remember in the early fifties that there was a different tile on here.

WALLACE: There might have been.

COCKRELL: He seems to remember that there was a little boy going fishing.

WALLACE: Probably so.

Now, I know that in here and the living room, above the fireplaces used to be extensions with shelves like down below here [pointing to the decorative wooden shelves surrounding the tile around the hearth]. I know there used to be mirrors here because I’ve got one of them down in my house. After they were renovating, they took it down and it has a wooden back.

COCKRELL: They don’t make them like that any more.

WALLACE: No, they don’t make them like that no more!

COCKRELL: Did Mr. Truman play piano much in here?

WALLACE: No, just when somebody would ask.

COCKRELL: So he didn't practice everyday then?

WALLACE: Oh, no, but he would come in here and sit down. Margaret was a little thing and they gave her this piano for Christmas; she wanted an electric train. She was so disappointed. She didn't care anything about the piano. A cousin over in the city had this marvelous electric train in the attic of the house that went all over with all these tunnels and lights. She was just fascinated with it. She wanted one. She had lots of ill-health. They carried her downstairs to see the piano, but she wasn't interested in it!

COCKRELL: How about the library in here? Has it changed?

WALLACE: Yes, it's changed.

COCKRELL: Was it always used as a library?

WALLACE: No.

COCKRELL: I know that the shelves were added.

WALLACE: Yes, that was a Truman addition. Mrs. Truman made a work room out of it, really, and they built these bookcases after the Trumans lived here because there was no room for all of their books.

COCKRELL: So, before it was made into a library, what use did the room have?

WALLACE: That's some kind of music thing, isn't it? A record player. It was probably something that was given to him.

COCKRELL: This was never used as a bedroom or guest room was it?

WALLACE: No.

COCKRELL: It was always a reading room, then?

WALLACE: The den, we called it. We called it the den. In later years, Mr. Truman used it as a study.

COCKRELL: Did he ever have a desk in here instead of this table? Did he have a desk with a chair? Or was it always like this?

WALLACE: He had something that he used to write on. I don't think it was a desk, it may have just been this table that he used because he did quite a bit of work in here.

That's another one of those old chairs from the same period [pointing to the wood trim chair in front of the east wall bookshelves].

COCKRELL: Was this his favorite easy chair here by the window?

WALLACE: Yes, that's the one he sat in. He had a good light there, of course his eyesight was never very good.

COCKRELL: Can you negotiate the steps okay so that we can go up the steps?

WALLACE: Oh, yes. I can go anyplace as long as I'm careful. [Looking at the door off its hinges]. What does this door go to?

COCKRELL: I think it goes here on the doorway to the dining room. I don't know why it's off its hinges. [The group moves into the dining room].

WALLACE: [Looking into the built-in china cabinet. That pattern is what they used in the White House [china with presidential seal]. These vases

on the upper shelves are Wallace, that's a Gates tirade; I'd like to have one of those old pitchers.

COCKRELL: These green-stemmed glasses?

WALLACE: Those were Mother Wallace's. We used them for sherbet on the table. That table has had twenty people at it. This is not the old table; this was Mrs. Truman's table. We had an old table here at first. We often had twenty-two people when we had the Platte City people, and all of them and a huge turkey.

COCKRELL: Would everyone get together here at Thanksgiving?

WALLACE: Yes, at Thanksgiving, but sometimes we went over to Platte City for Thanksgiving dinner, but after they all got families, we preferred to be here.

Now Margaret sent that fixture from New York, and I know that we had to wash all those prisms when it came and unpack it. Uncle George had to do that. She bought it in some place after they moved back here. It was just a very ordinary fixture that was up there before.

COCKRELL: What about these silver pieces?

WALLACE: They're modern. They belong to Mrs. Truman. I think that's her silver set, too. Yes, that was [for] coffee and tea.

COCKRELL: So these aren't family heirlooms then?

WALLACE: This is. This is old. It's a caster, they call them. It's vinegar and olive oil.

COCKNELL: That's real handy. A place for salt and pepper and mustard.

WALLACE: I have one that's old too that has "Wallace" on it, that Mother Wallace gave me.

COCKRELL: Did Mrs. Truman just buy these things in Washington?

WALLACE: Yes, she brought these back from Washington.

COCKRELL: So, the Gates had that?

WALLACE: Yes. I don't know how much that chair goes back.

COCKRELL: It looks like it has had quite a bit of wear.

WALLACE: Yes. It's an old, old child's chair. And that thing is a heater. There's a register in there and you can keep things hot on that marble.

COCKRELL: So you could set bread and other things on top of that?

WALLACE: Yes.

RICHTER: Even inside, there's a little platform inside.

This is a wedding gift to Mrs. Wallace. Do you know what this is?

WALLACE: It's called an epergne "e—p—e—r—g—n—e." An epergne was a fancy dish that you put fruit in. This is an old table that it's on.

COCKRELL: Is that another of Mrs. Wallace's drop-leaf tables?

WALLACE: It must've been. Those old pictures are very valuable. There were six of them.

RICHTER: There's some in the attic.

WALLACE: Well, they can stay there as far as I'm concerned! They were very fine things, but I'm not an artist enough to appreciate them.

COCKRELL: Whose pictures are they? Are they Wallace or Gates?

WALLACE: They were the Gateses.

RICHTER: And this chandelier is from Margaret?

WALLACE: Yes, that was the one that we had to wash all the prisms and everyone helped to put it together. We all stood around here and told my husband what to do.

The paper in this room is fairly new.

COCKRELL: This room has been redone recently?

WALLACE: Yes, I imagine this all was papered at one time.

What is this called, the covering that goes all around here by the stairs? It has a name.

RICHTER: Wainscot.

WALLACE: Wainscoting, yes. I think that mirror is old [pointing to the mirror on the first landing on the staircase]. This is a beautiful old stairway. Is that walnut? It's not red enough for mahogany.

COCKRELL: Were these steps always carpeted, or were they wood?

WALLACE: No, they were wood. Here's the step that squeaks.

COCKRELL: Yes, the second one from the top, before you get to the second landing. Whose desk is this?

WALLACE: I imagine that's one the Trumans had. Mrs. Truman used to sit here and do quite a bit of work here.

COCKRELL: Did she used to answer her mail here?

WALLACE: Yes. She never got caught up. These are all modern books here on this cabinet. Christmas paper and Christmas cards are inside here. A lot of old junk that's been sent to them. They didn't know where to put it so they put it in here. Everything [is] in here, but the kitchen stove. [The group goes into the Trumans' bedroom].

WALLACE: This is a good place to fall down if you don't know the steps are here. You come out of there and pitch.

COCKRELL: Is this a common thing to do, to have these steps here into the bedroom?

WALLACE: No, I think the house was built at different times. It burned, and it was built, and I imagine it just got that way. And that was cut [pointing to the passageway to Margaret's childhood room]. When Margaret was a baby, the Trumans—this was their bedroom—and when she got big enough to sleep by herself, she had a little bedroom there. That's when they cut that passage so they could get to her without going clear around the vinegar jug.

COCKNELL: So this used to be just a solid wall then?

WALLACE: Yes. There's a little step there, too, that could throw you.

COCKRELL: Is most of this furniture here in the bedroom things that the Trumans had in Washington? Or do these go back to Mrs. Wallace?

WALLACE: No, these were things that were put in here. She originally had an entirely different set.

COCKRELL: Did these rooms have carpeting?

WALLACE: No, they were all just boards painted with rugs on them.

COCKRELL: Painted floors?

WALLACE: Yes, it was painted. Probably it was originally carpeted and then taken off and painted because there was an era there when it was considered that was the way to have your floors.

COCKRELL: Would the color of the floor match the color of the walls, or would it be a different color?

WALLACE: It would be just brown, like an oak floor.

COCKRELL: This sink, what about it? When was it added?

WALLACE: It was added. They had a white one, and I don't know when that blue one was put in.

COCKRELL: This wasn't here when the Gates lived here, was it?

WALLACE: Well, it was a white marble. Of course there were so many people and only one bathroom. He could shave here or things like that.

She had this furniture, I imagine, came back from Washington, the two beds and the dresser and the mirror. This picture on the wall [Margaret Truman and the President with big smiles] was taken at the airport one time when she went to meet him. Someone snapped the picture. I always liked it. [The group goes into the northwest bedroom].

This is Margaret's white furniture that she had in Washington. She fixed this room up with all her white things. The last time I was in here, there were a bunch of Mrs. Truman's dresses hanging up in the closets. They're not here now.

COCKRELL: Did Margaret come and take them away?

WALLACE: She gave them—Valerie [LaMere] or someone came and took them to the Salvation Army. She said she didn't want to see them. Now that's a robe of Harry's. That's a shoehorn.

COCKRELL: How about this chair? Is it recent?

WALLACE: That's an old chair, you can see that it's been recovered. It has that wood underneath it. They have old chairs with new covers put on them. She used to do quite a bit of writing in here.

COCKRELL: Mrs. Truman?

WALLACE: Yes. She would use this table to write at. I wonder where that other thing of Margaret's is that I made a cover for. It was a long thing. She wanted it quilted, so we had to mark it off and make it on the machine. That kid could think of so many things for somebody else to do! [The group goes into the alcove].

WALLACE: Books, books, books.

COCKRELL: It is kind of an odd little nook in here. Do you notice how the corner goes in to avoid the window?

WALLACE: Yes. That's an old chest; no telling what might jump out of that.

COCKRELL: What did this little alcove use to look like? Was it just for odds and ends?

WALLACE: No, it had curtains and a chair, maybe a little table or something like that. As I told you—see, there's steps every place—it was built at different times.

COCKRELL: Is that what the Gates said, that the house was built at different stages?

WALLACE: Yes. [The group moves into the large front bedroom with colored glass windows].

WALLACE: This secretary is real old. I imagine it was a Wallace desk. Margaret used this room some, so she had a television. There's all the dolls. Here's the bench [pointing to the vanity table adjacent to the colored glass windows]. It's faded and it matches the top of that. [Note: This is what Mrs. May Wallace had made for Margaret Truman]. She slept in here quite a lot when her mother was ill downstairs.

COCKRELL: This is a nice, big bed. Does this go back in the family?

WALLACE: No, no. That's new. That's an old black rocker. I've always wanted to have that clock [above the mantle]. The fireplaces downstairs were very similar to this style here. This cradle is an antique. I don't know who it belonged to.

COCKRELL: It's not one that Margaret would have used, would it?

WALLACE: Margaret slept in the bureau drawer!

COCKRELL: Surely not that long! Didn't she outgrow the bureau?

WALLACE: Yes. Mrs. Truman was superstitious. She had lost a child, had a miscarriage before Margaret was born, and she wouldn't buy baby bedroom furniture until Margaret got here. They just pulled out a drawer.

She always held that against them: "Didn't have anything for me, but put me in a bureau drawer!" [The group again moves into the second floor landing].

These attic steps caused my husband's badly broken legs. He and Harry...Somebody had given Harry a liquor serving thing and just before they went back to Washington one time, he and George decided they'd take it up to the attic. My husband was underneath it and when they got three or four steps from the top, Harry let go—his hands let go of it—and it came down and chased George down. It hit here [against the wall] and broke both of his legs, above the ankles. One of them never did regain its proper size. We thought the world was coming to an end when that thing crashed down! [The group stands by the linen closet at the base of the attic stairs].

WALLACE: This is a linen closet.

COCKRELL: That is a nice big closet.

WALLACE: And that's unusual because most old houses didn't have closets. [The group moves into Margaret Truman's childhood bedroom].

This was Margaret's room at one time and they could come through from there. They built that cabinet there for her.

COCKRELL: So these closets were added.

WALLACE: Yes.

COCKRELL: Were they here when she was a little girl?

WALLACE: They would have come later when she got big enough to want more space, I guess. It's full of hangers. She used this as a young girl.

COCKRELL: Is this the original furniture in here?

WALLACE: Yes, that's what she had. Of course it isn't old, but Margaret's fifty-nine. It's old enough. This chest is something valuable.

COCKRELL: That's a fine old piece. It looks like that's looked.

WALLACE: [Pointing to passageway] They opened this up when she was old enough to sleep by herself. They wanted to get to her.

COCKRELL: Were these doors the original doors that went into the sleeping porch, or were these added when the room was opened up?

WALLACE: They must have been added because this was a solid wall. That ceiling lamp was added; it's modern. [The group moves into the small, north bedroom].

COCKRELL: This was Mr. Truman's dressing room, wasn't it?

WALLACE: Yes. This was his dressing room. He got up early in the morning, about five o'clock and [would] come in here and dress, then go out in the yard and pick up the papers and walk around and take walks.

Mrs. Truman was not an early riser. They'd eat breakfast around eight o'clock.

There was a hole here someplace where there was a snake. My husband insisted that he saw a snake.

COCKRELL: Where would the snake have come from?

WALLACE: I think from his imagination, more than likely. But he insisted he saw a snake came up here because this was his room for awhile. They all graduated from room to room.

COCKRELL: Do you remember the wallpaper having been here for very long?

WALLACE: No, it's not new because it's cracked up there. [The group moves into the passage to the storage room].

This was Mrs. Wallace's sitting room. The back steps came up there and we would come up that way without disturbing the Gateses, the grandparents. Mrs. Wallace was very possessive. She wanted to know what her children were doing at all times. What a mess! What a mess! She had her sewing machine and chairs for all of us.

COCKRELL: Look at the old floor, how it's coming apart.

WALLACE: I can't remember if it was carpeted or had rugs. I think it was just painted. That's what they did with old floors when they took the carpets up, they painted [it].

COCKRELL: These boards in the wall, do you know why that's like that? [Boards nailed to the wall in the passageway to the bedroom].

WALLACE: A bad place maybe and they covered it over.

He had lots of ties; people always kept him in ties. He would give my husband and Frank Wallace the ties because he couldn't possibly wear all those ties that were sent to him. [The group moves into the second floor bathroom].

This bathroom was completely done—over.

COCKRELL: What color was it before this?

WALLACE: White.

COCKRELL: Isn't this where Mr. Truman fell?

WALLACE: Yes, he fell in the bathroom. They then put handrails all around the thing. [The group moves into the hallway, out of the bathroom]. That's fairly new paper, too. This upstairs must have been papered.

COCKRELL: Do you know if the Trumans have had that attic fan very long?

WALLACE: No, they haven't. Have you seen all you wanted to see?

COCKRELL: I think I have. I sure appreciate you taking the time to come over here for the interview. [After the tape recorder was turned off, Mrs. Wallace and Mr. Cockrell entered the kitchen. Mrs. Wallace said that the small box-like structure to the right of the stove with two round openings was used as a warmer or crisper. The round stones at the bottom of each container were heated and then lowered to the bottom of the containers. The heated stones helped keep whatever food was deposited in it from getting cold].

[End #4063]

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
MRS. GEORGE P. [MAY] WALLACE**

HSTR INTERVIEW 1984-2

COCKRELL: First of all I want to show you some pictures. There are just two of us. The first one is a little child inside one of the rooms [Truman Library Photo Archives Number 82—59—101].

WALLACE: That's David Wallace, the nephew. Or Fred. When was this taken?

COCKRELL: We think it was around 1905 to 1910.

WALLACE: Well, it's Fred Wallace, Mrs. Truman's brother.

COCKRELL: Good. Now these two gentlemen are out in the backyard and we don't know who they are. Do they look familiar? [Truman Library Photo Archives Number 82—59—114].

WALLACE: Yes, I think, well, let me get my reading glass to see better. The one is Frank Wallace, but I don't know who the other man is.

COCKRELL: It's an interesting picture of the house in the background because, if you'll notice, there are some steps there at the side.

WALLACE: Is that 219?

COCKRELL: Right. You can see the colors of the house are different.

WALLACE: Yes. I don't remember it when the steps were there.

COCKRELL: It might have been before that back bedroom was built.

WALLACE: I've been here since 1916, but before that, I don't remember.

COCKRELL: Last time that I was here, if you'll remember, I had a lot of questions about the house and how it changed. Today I'd like to deal in depth about the people, your family, your life. I'd like to start first of all with yourself, if you could give me some of your background and how you came to be married to George Wallace.

WALLACE: [Laughter]. Well, now the reason I'm laughing is that Sue Gentry is having something on television in a few weeks and she had me write my life history. So if I had it, I'd just give it to you!

I was born here in Independence. My grandparents were the Proctors on my mother's side. He was a minister here for sixty years in the Lutheran Church down on Pleasant Street. The Southern, my father's people, Mr. Southern was a newspaperman with the Independence *Examiner*, and the family lived out west of town. Do you know where the Carson Funeral Home is? That whole area west of that, there were fifteen acres that my grandfather and father owned. The big brick house that was in the center of it, across the street from the Woodson house which is still there, was where I was born and where my mother was born. I lived there until about 1910 and then my grandmother died. My grandfather died in 1900 and my grandmother in 1908. After my grandfather's death, my father wanted to move the family out because the house wasn't heated and it didn't have a bathroom. Anyway, grandmother, like a lot of us old people, didn't

want to be moved. After her death in 1908 or 1909, he built the house over on Park Avenue and we moved over there.

I went to school over at the Ott School across the street from where the Catholic Church used to be, then to Independence High School. That's where Mr. and Mrs. Truman went, where they graduated in the first graduating class. Then I went to the University of Missouri for one year and stayed home. In those days, girls didn't feel they had to go out and get a job. We just had a good time. My sister was interested in teaching and so she taught kindergarten. My mother thought one of us should stay home, so I stayed home.

Mrs. Truman was quite athletic as she had been raised with three brothers. For my sister's and my graduation present from high school, we got a tennis court instead of a diamond ring. Most of the girls were getting diamond rings. We got a tennis court down at the end of the park which is Park Avenue now. As I said, Mrs. Truman was quite an athlete, having had three brothers she had to defend herself, I guess. We all played tennis down there and went on picnics and just had a good time.

I was married in 1916 to George Wallace, who is Mrs. Truman's middle brother. There were Frank and George and Fred. We had been sweethearts for a long time. I suppose that is an old fashioned word. But Grandfather Gates, when Frank Wallace was married in 1915. He gave them the fifty foot lot on that side. This was all the

backyard and garden then. In 1915. They built this home. So George built this house before we were married and we moved into it in 1916 and I've been here ever since.

COCKRELL: Did they hire people to build these houses?

WALLACE: Oh, yes. There were in those days a man who was an extra good carpenter and he would take on the building of houses—a Mr. Shaupe, I think was the man who built this house. But my husband was always interested in lumber and building and doing things like that, so he superintended it. The house as was built was just a four-room house. This [pointing to the living room] was a living room and dining room, and that [pointing to the dining room] was the bedroom. And then the kitchen was back there and we had a little sleeping porch. Well, in 1928, we built on the west room and enlarged the west end of the house.

COCKRELL: It gave you a little bit more room.

WALLACE: Yes, there was a little maneuvering room. He died in 1963.

COCKRELL: How about the Frank Wallace house. Is that the original layout?

WALLACE: Yes, that's the original house.

COCKRELL: There were no additions to it then?

WALLACE: No, except in those days we didn't have air conditioning and Mrs. Frank Wallace was a great sufferer from the heat. One of those summers they put windows all around the back bedroom, but there's no difference in the structure.

COCKRELL: What was the background of Mrs. Frank Wallace [the former Natalie Ott]?

WALLACE: Her father was a banker in Independence at the Chrisman-Sawyer Bank and her mother died when she was a little girl. He married a Bryant. Professor Bryant was the head of schools here for years and lived out on Waldo. [His daughter] was Mrs. Frank Wallace's stepmother. She had a stepsister and a stepbrother. She was a small person and a very industrious person. She was an immaculate housekeeper. We lived here in peace and we got along fine. I helped her and she helped me. They both died the same summer. I never can remember the date of that. George died in '63 and it must have been in the late 50s because they both died before he did.

COCKRELL: They never had any children, did they?

WALLACE: No. We had no little ones until Margaret came along. She was born in the house up there.

COCKRELL: I had an opportunity to talk to Margaret last November for about three hours. She is a very interesting person.

WALLACE: Yes, she is, and spoiled because she was the only little one. The Trumans weren't young when she was born so she was a treasure. We all spoiled her, her uncles especially. She used to run down here. This driveway was gravel, and she ran down here one day and she fell and knocked the skin off both knees. My husband was the "fixer" of the

family. He did all the little jobs. She called him “Uncle Da.” So she got up and said, “Let Da fix!” As if he could fix her knees!

When they went back to Washington, she must not have been more than ten or twelve. I can see her now sitting out in the car holding Raggedy Ann. Raggedy Ann was her favorite doll. Raggedy Ann’s hair was yarn and it was pretty well bedraggled so I had to take a needle and yarn and fix Raggedy Ann’s hair. She went out holding Raggedy Ann! They never were as a family here until they came back [in 1953]. Of course Margaret went on to New York after Washington. She was back some, but it wasn’t quite the same.

She was crazy about chocolate ice cream. There was a place down at Lee’s Summit where we used to go where they had such good chocolate ice cream sodas.

COCKRELL: What do you recall about Margaret’s early childhood here? In the back yard, she told about her swings and toys.

WALLACE: She had swings and a slide. She knew some little girls who lived over on Maple Avenue, two sisters, and they used to play circus. I don’t know quite how they played circus, but they played circus. She was quite an imaginative person. You can tell that by the way she has imagined things afterwards—readers all of them, Mr. Truman, Mrs. Truman, and of course Margaret.

She liked to play shoe store. She loved shoes. That was when she was just a little thing. She used to come down here and we'd get all the shoes we had. She'd come in and buy shoes!

COCKRELL: Was she a pretty popular little girl?

WALLACE: Yes. You mean with boys?

COCKRELL: Well, with the little girls she played with.

WALLACE: Yes, lots of little girls. Her group didn't seem to have too much boy—partying. Of course when she went back to Washington, she had that kind of a social time, but here they just had girl parties.

COCKRELL: Do you remember the incident of the attempted kidnapping of Margaret Truman?

WALLACE: I remember that very well. She went to the school over here and fortunately the teacher was a girl that lived here on Delaware and was a personal friend. When this man came in and said that Mrs. Truman had sent for Margaret, she immediately sensed that there was something wrong. So she went out and called up and it was somebody that wanted to kidnap her. After that, they sent someone with her every morning to school.

COCKRELL: Who do you think would want to do that?

WALLACE: Well, crazy people who thought they might get one hundred dollars or something. It frightened us. My husband and Frank Wallace were very devoted. We all were; Margaret was just special to all of us. The Wallaces all were just very vehement people. They were just going to

go out with a gun and get the man who was going to kidnap Margaret!
That's a good thing, I guess.

Mrs. Truman had a lot of spunk, too, but then she didn't blaze out with it. I guess high-tempered people are just born that way. It. Wallace died in 1903, and that's when they moved up here with the Gates.

COCKRELL: What were the circumstances behind David Wallace's death, the cause of why he killed himself?

WALLACE: He committed suicide. Nobody ever knew the cause. It was not talked about. After that Mrs. Wallace, Mother Wallace, was almost a recluse. Back in those days, it was kind of a stigma, kind of a disgrace item people killed themselves. Now they just shoot!

My father knew him very well. He always thought it was money troubles. Mrs. Wallace had been a very rich woman and he just had a courthouse employees salary. Pop thought he just got in too deep with money and he liked to drink which is bad.

COCKRELL: Would you say he was an alcoholic?

WALLACE: No, he wasn't. In those days there was what they called the Courthouse Exchange. They had a bar as I understand it real close to where he worked that's just hearsay, I don't know.

COCKRELL: Your mother-in-law never really talked about it?

WALLACE: No. I think, personally, that nobody kills themselves when they're in their right mind. They lose it at least long enough to kill themselves. I

don't think anybody would take their own life unless they do. He was in so deep financially and at that time he just couldn't see any way out. That's just Mrs. George Wallace's opinion.

COCKRELL: That's probably pretty accurate.

WALLACE: That's as near as we'll ever get. My husband found him. He heard the shot and went in. He was born in '92 and he would have been about ten or eleven years old. He went in there. I think it affected his nervous system the rest of his life, it was such a shock. They were all, all of them were pretty high-strung people, geared-up pretty tight. My father always said that Mr. Wallace was more like my husband in disposition, more friendly, that kind of a person. I of course never knew him. I don't suppose he left anything but debts. I don't know about that, but they moved into the big house. At that time, the Gates grandmother and grandfather lived downstairs where Mrs. Truman had her bedroom and living room. That was the Gates'. The Wallaces lived upstairs and on the other side. Mrs. Wallace had the room over the kitchen, where the steps came up from the kitchen. We could go up there at night and go up the back steps and she had her little sewing machine there. That's where the family congregated at night because we didn't want to bother the older people.

COCKRELL: Were Mr. and Mrs. Gates fairly wealthy?

WALLACE: According to that time, yes. He was with the Waggoner-Gates Milling Company. They made Queen of the Pantry flour. My mother thought

she couldn't make biscuits without Queen of the Pantry flour. It was a soft wheat flour and most of the flour through Kansas and this part of the country was hard wheat flour. After the Gates family died, Mother Wallace received her part of the estate. She had two sisters and two brothers. There were five Gates. Mother Wallace was the oldest; she was Madge. And then Myra and Maud—they seemed to like M's! And then Frank and Walter. Mother Wallace outlived all of them.

COCKRELL: Was she able to live pretty comfortably?

WALLACE: Yes, they did. They always lived well and always kept their standards up. I mean even when she didn't have too much. After the Trumans were married, let's see. They were married in 1919 and they were engaged before that, but he had to go to war. The war interfered. After he came back, it was quite awhile before he got out of it.

COCKRELL: There have been some people who have said that Harry Truman and Madge Wallace never saw eye to eye. Is that true?

WALLACE: I've heard that too of course, but you'd have to know Mother Wallace to know that nobody that Bess married, no man was good enough for Bess. I don't think that she had anything against Harry and I think that she finally became fond of him. They had to move in when she had that severe illness that summer. Bess came home and then they just stayed. I still contend that it was a difficult place for Mr. Truman because it is for any man to move into somebody else's house, but you would have never have known it. He was just a perfect gentleman

always. When they went to Washington the first time Mother Wallace tried to stay here. Fred at that time was at Columbia [University of Missouri] at school and she went down there and stayed some and then she came back. She eventually went with them and she died in the White House.

Bess stayed home every summer when it was not so busy there and he would come and spend a month at a time.

COCKRELL: Did Bess want to come back in the summers or was it Mrs. Wallace who wanted to be here?

WALLACE: She felt like she was needed. Mrs. Truman never did, well, I won't say she didn't like Washington. She loved lots of the things about Washington, but it was too much. She didn't like the limelight. She didn't like it, but of course she did her part. We visited there several times and it was quite interesting. We spent one Christmas in the White House. No, I guess it was two Christmases. The last one was sad because Mother Wallace had just died that December. They came back after that. They had seven years there, three on the first term and four on the last one. In a way, I think Bess was glad to get back. When they built the library over here, that was another big deal.

COCKRELL: Would she come back for the entire summer?

WALLACE: She'd come back for a couple of months.

COCKRELL: Wasn't that hard for her to leave her husband in Washington and for her to come out here?

WALLACE: I'm sure it was, but she had a divided duty between her husband and her mother. Of course, Harry was busy and those letters that were published were from when he was there alone in Washington. I don't think they should published people's personal letters like that.

Bess was a very private person. She could be just as sweet and cordial and friendly, and she could just...Well, one night when the Bridge Club went to Washington we went to the circus. We were all in the box and she was down close. This clown went over and thought he'd be kind of cute, but she just froze him right up. She could put on that look!

COCKRELL: Who were the members of the Bridge Club? Can you recall?

WALLACE: Mrs. Frank Wallace and I were two of them. Then there was Edna Hutchinson; Mary Shaw; Lucy Peters, who is still alive; Thelma, then Palette, she's now Sibel and lives in Amarillo, Texas. There were ten of us. Mag Knoll who lived down here. I've got a picture of us somewhere. Have you seen the picture of the Bridge Club taken on the White House porch? Well, that's the outfit. I'm entertaining that Bridge Club next week and I'm the only one that's left—we've filled in for the several of them that died. Lucy Peters moved to California. Thelma moved to Amarillo, Texas. The Minors, who lived up here on Spring Street, Mrs. Grace Minor, lives in a retirement home.

COCKRELL: How did your Bridge Club operate? Did you take turns meeting in different homes?

WALLACE: Yes. We met about every two weeks.

COCKRELL: So you would alternate between homes?

WALLACE: We go alphabetically. So they're down to Wallace again! During the wars, I can't remember if we quit playing and made bandages or if we played and cut down on our refreshments. There were also Claudine Ford and Helen Crow.

COCKRELL: Would you simply play cards and talk?

WALLACE: Yes. Bess was a good card player. We went on the [presidential yacht] "Williamsburg" for a ride down to Mount Vernon. We did a lot of things.

The five of us drove. We took my car. I was driving a Hudson at the time. We drove. We got almost to the outskirts of Washington and these two men stopped us. We wondered what we had done, but it was two of the Secret Service men who had been here with Mrs. Truman and they came out to meet us and guide us into Washington so we would get to the White House. We wouldn't get stopped the next time, but we were kind of scared for a minute. We thought, "Oh, what have we done?"

We were there five days. Mrs. Truman who lives down the street was another one of them. She's an invalid now.

We used to play bridge up here on the enclosed porch. Harry never would play. He liked poker. He never would play bridge and

Frank Wallace never would play bridge. But my husband was a pretty good bridge player so if we could shake up four, we'd play bridge.

COCKRELL: So during good weather, you'd play on the back porch? How about when it was cold or windy?

WALLACE: Inside, yes.

COCKRELL: In the dining room?

WALLACE: And the living room. It was always a very useable place. That's where Margaret's Christmas tree always was in that front window that looks onto the street. It had to touch the ceiling. It had to be that tall, the biggest Christmas tree you could get! We all went up there on Christmas morning. I think she was about ten or twelve when she got her piano. She wanted an electric train because her cousin in Kansas City, this boy had one in the attic. She was just fascinated with this train. Mr. Truman wanted a grand piano. Of course he was very musical.

COCKRELL: Is that the same piano that's in there today?

WALLACE: That's Margaret's paino

COCKRELL: Was that taken to the White House?

WALLACE: No.

COCKRELL: It was always here then?

WALLACE: Yes.

COCKRELL: Did they like to do duets together: would he play and Margaret sing?

WALLACE: Yes. Some. Her musical career didn't begin until after they were away from here. She came back and had a concert in Kansas City. We went to it. She went to New York from there.

COCKRELL: When you had family gatherings, was it just the Wallaces and the Trumans or would his relatives from Grandview also come?

WALLACE: No. Not very much. One of Mother Wallace's sisters lived over in Platte City and they used to come over some. They'd come over for Thanksgiving and we went over there a time or two. I never saw so much food in my life. I have seen twenty-two at that dining room table. Not the table that's there now, but the other one. I don't know what they did with the old table that had leaves in it. Grandfather Gates sat down on one end. In later years we had Thanksgiving dinner there more and some of them had Christmas. I went to my own family for Christmas and went there for Thanksgiving. Had to divide myself!

COCKRELL: Was Madge Wallace the head of the household or was it Bess?

WALLACE: Well, she was head of the household until her health failed, but Bess was a strong right arm, always. She was a great help to her mother.

COCKRELL: Did she and her mother do most of the housework or did they have women come in and help them?

WALLACE: They always had help. They always had a n[...] woman in the kitchen and there was a n[...] man who worked for them. They could do it, but back then you could always get help. Vietta, the n[...] woman that Margaret always called "Pete" and I don't know why, but Vietta Garr

was there for years and cooked for them. Mother Wallace nearly always had someone. I don't think Bess ever liked to cook. I don't think Mother Wallace did. Now, I like to cook. It doesn't worry me. I cook because I like to cook. I guess because I like to eat!

Bess read a lot. She and Harry were always great readers. She liked whodunits and books like that.

COCKRELL: Were these hired black helpers treated like members of the family or just employees?

WALLACE: No, that hadn't come in. They were still "help." No, they didn't eat with the family or anything like that if that's what you're getting at. No, they loved them. Margaret loved Vietta when she was just a little thing. We all did. That was an understood thing. It's within my lifetime that they've begun to be socially acceptable. I still, well I wish them every good thing they have, but I don't particularly want to deal with them.

COCKRELL: Were they allowed to use the facilities in the house?

WALLACE: You mean the bathroom and things like that? There was a bath in the basement. No, they didn't use the upstairs bathroom.

There's an upstairs bathroom and a downstairs bathroom. The downstairs bathroom was built on for the Gates'. After Mother Wallace moved downstairs, it made it nice for her.

COCKRELL: And then there's the bathroom in the basement.

WALLACE: There's just a stool...is there?

COCKRELL: Yes, just a stool.

WALLACE: I don't think there's a tub down there, but there was water where the washing was done and I suppose you could have taken a spit bath!

COCKRELL: Was that always the laundry room then when you were first acquainted with the house? Was that always done in the basement?

WALLACE: Yes, it was in the basement. There's stairs from the kitchen into the basement. In those days when you hung things out in the yard, you could come out through that back door.

COCKRELL: Were there clotheslines out in the yard then?

WALLACE: Well, you could. I don't remember too much about that. Then, there was an arbor there. I can't remember what happened to the arbor. I guess it fell to pieces and they took it down.

COCKRELL: I believe Margaret said it blew down in a windstorm.

WALLACE: We had a croquet grounds out there, too, where we used to play croquet.

COCKRELL: How about badminton? Did you have a badminton court?

WALLACE: Yes. When was the porch moved out?

COCKRELL: It was in 1950.

WALLACE: I knew it had been a long time. After Mr. Truman was back here and they lived there. They just lived out there. I can see him now with his light over his book reading.

COCKRELL: So that was their favorite place to be?

WALLACE: Yes. They had an ice cream store fan on the ceiling. In those days we didn't have air conditioning. I think the first air conditioner was put in one summer that Harry had a very severe illness. He was taken ill out at the ball game [Note: Starlight Theater, Summer 1954]?

COCKRELL: Yes, his gall bladder.

WALLACE: Yes, I think one of his rich admirers put in an air conditioner in that downstairs bedroom and I think that was the first air conditioner that was put in up there. But the house was high-ceiling and cool. I know when Mother Wallace was sick, that was before Bess was married, she had a very severe thing in her back. She had to have an operation on her back. Some kind of a growth had to be taken off and it was such hot weather. Mrs. Frank Wallace was working down at the ice plant at that time running it. They brought some containers that the ice plant had and put cakes of ice in it and put [unintelligible] fan in back of it so that it cooled the room off real well. The house itself had high ceilings and I suppose they got up and did what they had to and pulled the shades down. We never thought about it being hot.

COCKRELL: You were used to it.

WALLACE: We were just poor in that way. We always had picnics down in Mrs. Frank Wallace's yard. She had a flat place over there where we always had family picnics. We couldn't put onion in the potato salad because Harry couldn't tolerate it.

COCKRELL: He didn't like onions?

WALLACE: No, he wouldn't eat anything with onion in it. The Wallaces all liked onions! My mother wouldn't let any onions on the place, but my father was real fond of them. So he got some onion salt.

COCKRELL: Did you have a lot of family picnics out here?

WALLACE: Yes, quite often in the summertime.

COCKRELL: Would you barbecue?

WALLACE: No, no, we never did. The men folk in the family weren't cooks. They wanted the women to do the work. We cooked our steaks and things in the house and then had a salad, potato salad and sometimes we had ice cream and sometimes we had something else. Well, there weren't so many things to do. You had to make your own amusements.

I have written for Sue Gentry a history of my life. I don't know what she's going to do with it; it's going to be on television, I suppose. It's on sometime at the end of this month. It's for the AAUW [American Association of University Women]. She said, "I want you to write a story of your life." And I said, "Sue! I can't write stories!" So I did, but she hasn't used it yet. I don't know how it's going to come out.

It's real interesting because I have lived through the most interesting [period]. I was born in '94, and I have lived all through the most interesting [periods]—more inventions, two wars, and all the things that have happened that I have lived through. I consider myself quite fortunate that I have lived through it. You tell a kid now that you

didn't have radios or automobiles and they look at you like they can't imagine living.

The first radio we had up there was a little transistor that Harry had with earphones. When you had a ball game, there were two of them, one of them would get one in here and listen to the ball game. But it really is, I consider, that I have lived through the most interesting time in the history of the United States. Because there've been more inventions. We didn't have...well. Mr. Gates finally bought an automobile. That was about the time I was married, about 1915 and '16. He would buy it, he said, if my husband and Mrs. Truman would drive it. So Bess learned to drive and then Fred afterwards, but he was too young then. Bess drove that. That was when we got stuck out here. Oh, that awful rainy day. When we got married, it rained all day.

COCKRELL: And you got stuck in the mud!

WALLACE: Oh, I got stuck in the mud, and the car stayed there. They couldn't get it out! They had been putting pipes in for the water, out across the street, and it was soft and the car dropped down in it. Mr. and Mrs. Gates were still alive and they came to our wedding. They had to get, well, there weren't even taxis. But there was one person who had a big six-passenger car that drove. It was considered a taxi: it was available. They came to the wedding, but, oh, it was a nasty night. We thought we would be so smart. We went to Kansas City. Have I told you all this before?

COCKRELL: No.

WALLACE: If I have, stop me. Hold up one finger! But, we went to St. Louis on that midnight train. We went to St. Louis so the kids wouldn't, we knew that they would come down here and throw rats and shoes at us. One friend took us to Kansas City and we got into the sleeper. George had a lightweight coat, a raincoat that would do as a topcoat, too. So we looked like we'd been married for years. We were in this big car. He got up to put his coat up into the top shelf up there and the rice just poured! Mother Wallace and Natalie had filled his pockets with rice! And the rice was all over that whole car! I was so embarrassed, I wanted to kill them! We had a nice family.

COCKRELL: What do you remember about Harry and Bess' wedding?

WALLACE: Yes, I remember it very well.

COCKRELL: What was it like?

WALLACE: It was over at the little church and it must have been in the daytime.

COCKRELL: It was in the afternoon.

WALLACE: Yes, and at that time—this is all in my memoirs that I wrote for Sue, too—we had a row of hollyhocks clear across the back of these two lots here. Bess was crazy about those hollyhocks. So, Mrs. Frank Wallace and I cut them and seared them. You have to sear the stem of a hollyhock if the juice comes out. We put them in umbrella stands and took them over to the church for decorations. I don't remember too much about the actual [ceremony]. Frank Wallace was in the wedding

and I guess my husband was an usher and Bess' two cousins, one from Kansas City and one from Platte City. And then Harry had...

COCKRELL: Ted Marks?

WALLACE: Yes, then they went on. Frank had a car then. He took them to Kansas City to the [train station]. [Telephone rings and Mrs. Wallace leaves the room]. [The interview resumes on a new tape. Mrs. Wallace shows the interviewer a picture of herself as a small girl].

[End #4063; Begin #4064]

COCKRELL: You've changed quite a bit!

WALLACE: Yes, but I still have my round face! Isn't that a sweet little picture? A friend of mine who is a photography bug found it at a friends. It's a queer thing about resemblances. My sister had two sons one is Bill Carnes who is so good to me and her other son lives in Joplin, Missouri. He has a daughter who looks very much like my sister. Isn't that funny how likenesses go through families? I look like I was mad.

COCKRELL: Yes, you were a pretty feisty little girl.

WALLACE: I guess I was feisty. Bill Carnes made that for me and gave it to me for my birthday. Well, have you learned all you want to know?

COCKRELL: Just a couple of more questions. First, about Harry and Bess' wedding...

WALLACE: Oh, yes. We were getting them married, weren't we? I suppose it was a straight Episcopal, just the regular, formal [ceremony].

COCKRELL: Was Mrs. Wallace there?

WALLACE: Oh, yes.

COCKRELL: Was Mrs. Gates?

WALLACE: No, Bess wasn't married until after Grandfather Gates died.

COCKRELL: He was dead, but Mrs. Gates lived until 1924.

WALLACE: Yes. I can't put her at the wedding so she may have been there or she may not have felt [well]. Of course we wouldn't have felt old at her age. But she was a little old lady. She was a very, very dignified little person, very small. She came over to this country as a child. She was English, and her people were all taken off in some kind of a plague that they had in England at that time. The captain of a ship took care of her and brought her over to some relatives in the East. Mother Wallace was born in Moline, Illinois, and I never have found out yet why they came to Missouri. I think that Grandfather Gates' [brother], Mr. Ed Gates, came out here first and maybe he told him it was a good place to start a flour business! But anyway, they ended up out here. She was a quiet, small woman. Grandfather Gates was in his years, before he got too old, he was full of fun. He was always teasing us about something.

COCKRELL: Didn't the Gates have two small little girls who died?

WALLACE: Yes, they're out in the cemetery. I think Mother Wallace lost one. Frank and Bess were about two and a half years apart and then there was five years until my husband. I think she lost at least one child, maybe two, in between. I think they were girls. She ended up with four

pretty nice kids. You know, the cemeteries are just full before they had all these wonder drugs and things, they had to have about six or eight kids to get just a couple going.

COCKRELL: That is kind of hard to go through, to lose some children.

WALLACE: Oh, my, yes. My mother lost one little girl. My father always wanted a boy, but he never did get one. Just before I was born, I was a big, husky baby, the doctor told him that finally he was going to get a nice, big boy. But it wasn't a nice, big boy. He loved his girls. My father was one of six, three males and three females.

COCKRELL: Did the Gates ever have a farm around here?

WALLACE: No. This was all garden around here before we moved in. They had a cow. Poor George named the cow Susie Damn. He hated it. When he was off on Sunday. we got to go home and milk Susie Damn! Cows had to be milked at certain times. I dug asparagus out of my front yard the first year after we were married. During the war, the first war, Bess and Natalie had a big, what do you call that, war gardens?

COCKRELL: A victory garden?

WALLACE: Yes. They grew a lot of beans and canned them. Bess loved to work outdoors. Mother Wallace nearly always had flowers out here.

COCKRELL: Wasn't Bess a Gray Lady, a nurse, during the war?

WALLACE: No, she wasn't a nurse.

COCKRELL: Or a volunteer?

WALLACE: Yes, she did some special kind of work when Harry was gone. We did Red Cross work but Bess did a lot of war work. I think it was more clerical work, the things she did.

COCKRELL: Didn't she have the influenza?

WALLACE: Oh, yes. I always think it was aggravated by, it was the year he was in the war and she was sick all winter that winter. That was the winter we had that virulent—1918 or '19. Oh, so many people died here. My husband had it and I have never had it. Bess was sick. She was puny all winter. I think it could have been worry about him because you never knew what the next telegram was going to be.

COCKRELL: I think Margaret told me that her mother was deaf in one ear from the influenza.

WALLACE: Well, I didn't know that, but it's conceivable. It did all kinds of things to you.

COCKRELL: Margaret also said that the influenza was what to her grandfather's death, Mr. Gates. Is that possible?

WALLACE: It may have been. I don't remember that. She'd know more about that than I would. They were both so old to me. I just thought they died of old age! They probably had something. I don't think Mother Wallace had it. Frank had it. Natalie had it. George had it. May didn't have it.

We were over in Platte City, it was at Thanksgiving, and we came back. That's when George and Bess got it. They either got it over there or had it when they went there. When we came home, we

had to come on a train line up to Kansas City and then caught a streetcar out here. We were standing up shivering. George came in and I knew he had a temperature. The doctor said, "Put him in bed and circle him around with hot water bottles." I said, "Doctor, I've got but one hot water bottle." He said, "Well, have you got some mason jars with good rubbers on them?" So, I filled them and just surrounded him to make him break out in perspiration. He was so sick. He said, "Doc, I've got to go to work tomorrow." This doctor was a good old family doctor. He was the one that Margaret wanted to try the step to make it squeak.

COCKRELL: You told me that.

WALLACE: He said, "All right George. if you feel like it." The next morning George couldn't even lift one finger. He said, "That old Doc knew I couldn't go to work!" I said, "Yes George, he did, but if he had of told you that last night you would have had a feverish night!" He was sick about a week. He had real bad influenza. Bess was sick. She had it real bad. That was a queer thing. Was that an Asiatic germ or where did we get it?

COCKRELL: I think it was.

WALLACE: They blamed it on that. They had a funny rector over at the Episcopal church. The churches even closed. He wouldn't close. He said the Lord wouldn't let anyone get influenza who went to church. I really think the Lord is too busy to worry about things like that!

COCKRELL: Now, Mr. Gates was a Presbyterian.

WALLACE: He and Mrs. Gates, yes. Mrs. Wallace was until...

COCKRELL: What made her switch?

WALLACE: Mother Wallace got mad. They let an old minister go. You can get into a church row over a preacher. They had an old man by the name of Dr. Madera that was the preacher over there. They thought it was time for him to retire and I expect it was and so did the younger members of the church. She got mad at them and left the church. Well Frank and Bess got interested in a young Episcopal minister that was here at the time. So Bess and Frank started going over to the Episcopal Church. Afterwards, I don't know how long it was, Mother Wallace went over there. Then my husband did. And then they all got into it. Well, Fred Wallace was a Catholic when he died because he married a Catholic girl.

COCKRELL: How did that go over in the family?

WALLACE: Lord, it's so close! As Harry Truman and I said one day, we were out there and he said, "There's not much difference, you go to the Episcopal Church or the Catholic Church." He said, "Henry VIII didn't do too much there." Harry and I used to have a lot of fun about it because he was a Baptist and I'm a Christian Church Cambellite. We had a lot of fun about it but they all ended up in the Episcopal Church over there. Natalie Ott Wallace was a Presbyterian.

COCKRELL: Did she still go there?

WALLACE: Yes. She never changed. Frank used to go with her to the Presbyterian Church. My husband would go occasionally. He lost interest in it along the way.

COCKRELL: Mr. Truman wasn't a very steady church-goer was he?

WALLACE: He told me one time, I said, "Harry"—he's a Baptist—"you don't go." He said, "I can't." This was after he was in a prominent position. He said, "It's just too much, everybody looking, 'Why, there's Mr. Truman!'" He couldn't get out without everybody wanting to speak to him. He almost just quit going.

COCKRELL: Wasn't his life a lot like that, too much public attention?

WALLACE: Yes. He took it, but neither one of them wanted the publicity of it. I think Harry enjoyed lots of it, but I think Bess Truman didn't. There were lots of things about it she enjoyed, too. I don't mean to say she didn't. They were just forced into a position and they did their best.

Margaret was confirmed in the church here. Margaret was married there. It was a pretty wedding. I guess it was in April. It was a nice day which was a good thing because they had a lot of people at the house afterwards and they spilled out into the yard because it was [a large crowd].

We've always been very fond of her husband. He's a very fine man. Have you seen her new book yet? Probably not. It's not due out until April. She sent me something on it.

COCKRELL: Is it, *Murder on Embassy Row*?

WALLACE: Yes, I think so. He has one coming out. Clifton has written about his experiences as a newspaper correspondent all over Europe. That will be intensely interesting. They both won't be until April.

COCKRELL: Does Mr. Daniel write any about his life married to Margaret Truman?

WALLACE: No. I don't think so. He mentions in one place that he'd met all these heads of state, among which was his father-in-law Things like that. He's never tried to take advantage of the fact, lie's quite a bit older than Margaret. He must be what? late sixties?

COCKRELL: Early seventies. Isn't he about thirteen years older than she is?

WALLACE: I think so. He must be seventy now.

COCKRELL: She's sixty now. How does she feel about being sixty?

WALLACE: I don't think she's stopped to worry about it. She's been kept busy with her boys. She still has the youngest boy that's still in school and the little one that had the birth problem. He's just behind himself and they have him in a school now which is the place for him.

COCKRELL: Did he have a physical defect?

WALLACE: Yes. We were there for Christmas one year, and in '63 I went back with Mr. and Mrs. Truman the year my husband died to spend Christmas with Margaret. She didn't have room for us so we stayed in that nice hotel right near her. We were over at the house a lot. He was just a little baby then. If he didn't look like a picked chicken, I'd never seen one. I think he'll always have to be taken care of, that's the idea I get.

COCKRELL: He is diminished mentally, then?

WALLACE: Well, he's slow. I don't think he'll ever get past a certain place in learning. He's in a special school now down in Carolina and they're giving him the things that he can do. Her oldest boy wants to be a newspaperman like his father and he's working in Carolina. I don't know what Will's doing. He graduated from Yale. Then the next one, and then Thomas. I think he graduates from high school this year.

COCKRELL: There have been a lot of people who have been critical of Margaret, within the past ten years or so when her mother was living here alone, that she didn't come back to Independence very often.

WALLACE: Not very much. She had her own life and her own things. If she came, it was just to stay a few days. They kept in constant touch over the phone. They were very close. They're not very demonstrative people at all like some people. I know I was up there after Mrs. Truman died. They had gone over to Holland to give the Queen Mother some kind of peace prize and that's when they got the news. Dr. [Wallace] Graham had told her over the phone to go on. Mrs. Truman was just at the place where she could go any minute or she could last a little longer. They were in Holland when they got the news and she came back. It was hard for Margaret to realize that her mother was gone. She just felt that she was still there and I felt awfully sorry for her. She couldn't go in the house the first time she came back at all. She stayed down here

with me. They're not a demonstrative family and they've never been, but they have very deep feelings.

COCKRELL: Was it Margaret's idea in her mother's will, the section that talks about the second floor being closed to the public? Was that Margaret's idea or Bess'?

WALLACE: I don't think so. I don't know. She may have told her mother that she felt like she'd always like to have a place to come upstairs. It was Mrs. Truman's idea to leave it to the Government, I'm sure, because her will was made when his was, wasn't it?

COCKRELL: Tom Richter wanted me to ask you a question. Do you know what pictures preceded the paintings on the walls of the music room?

WALLACE: I don't remember the pictures. They had those great big round pictures in the dining room. The things I miss, as I remember it way back in the early days, both of those fireplaces had the little things that went up the side. Did they find those in the attic?

COCKRELL: I think they found one in the garage or barn and the other one somewhere else.

WALLACE: Are they going to put them up?

COCKRELL: I don't think so. I think they're going to leave them there because of the portraits.

WALLACE: I know, but that's part of that house. It looks very handsome and it's his picture in the living room there, but that wasn't the way it was in the early days!

COCKRELL: You have to compromise somewhere.

WALLACE: It doesn't make any difference to me, but I wondered the first time I went up there, "Where were those?" They had pillow shelves, little what-not shelves, and they had little knick knacks all over than.

COCKRELL: I asked Margaret about that and she said they were taken down because the family thought they were ugly.

WALLACE: [Laughter].

COCKRELL: That's what she said.

WALLACE: Well, they were very attractive. Modern kids might have thought that, too. Now that fixture in the parlor is part gas. When people first put in electricity, they didn't trust it!

COCKRELL: Tom Richter also wanted me to ask you, when Harry and Bess were living here alone, where would they usually eat their meals?

WALLACE: In the dining room.

COCKRELL: In the dining room?

WALLACE: Oh, yes. Well, I think maybe they ate breakfast in the kitchen. But, oh yes, they ate their meals in the dining room.

COCKRELL: When I spoke to Rufus Burrus just the other day, he said he can recall going to the house around lunchtime and Mr. Truman would be sitting at the kitchen table having a snack or something and he would invite him Rufus to sit down and eat with him.

WALLACE: They didn't do much about breakfast and lunch, but they always had dinner in the dining room.

COCKRELL: Margaret also said that there were always a lot of tall plants around the house. Do you recall that? Live plants in big pots sitting around? She indicated that we should put some plants in there.

WALLACE: Yes. Well, Bess had boxes of them in the summertime out on the porch.

COCKRELL: How about in the house, around the windows?

WALLACE: I don't remember anything like that. They could have. She'd know more about it than I would. I never paid any attention to it. I don't think it's necessary. If you've got people going through there, they'll probably want to pull a fern leaf off! I've been through that.

COCKRELL: Right! A souvenir from the Truman home!

WALLACE: Did I tell you before about the woman who wanted some dirt?

COCKRELL: Yes.

WALLACE: That's my pet story.

COCKRELL: I think it's priceless.

WALLACE: I think so, too. She wouldn't take mine because that wasn't in the Truman yard! Is there anything else Tom wants to know?

COCKRELL: No. I think that just about does it. That does it for me too. I sure would like to thank you for your time and trouble today.

[End #4064]