

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
LOLA MANN AND DONALD GORE

JULY 2, 1991

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1991-4

This transcript corresponds to audiotape DAV-AR #4320

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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Lola Mann, Donald Gore, and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Lola Mann and Donald Gore through their interview represent the majority of the Independence population. Lola Mann relates stories about seeing Bess W. Truman at various town locations, including the grocery store or beauty salon. Gore, who made a concrete eagle Bess Truman placed on her back porch, like many other Independence school children grew up passing Harry S Truman on his way to school. Mann and Gore, though not friends of the Trumans, provide examples of the average Independence resident's respect for the Trumans' attempts to be "regular" citizens after the presidency.

Persons mentioned: Donald A. Gore, Robert G. Gore, Richard D. Gore, David C. Gore, Roger K. Gore, Bess W. Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, Harry S Truman, and Doris Miller.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
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HSTR INTERVIEW #1991-4

JIM WILLIAMS: This is an oral history interview with Mrs. Lola Mann, and we're in her home on Winner Road in Independence, Missouri, on July 2, 1991. And her son is here also. I'm Jim Williams from the National Park Service, and Scott Stone is running the audio equipment. We always like to start out with a little bit of background information about you, so if you wouldn't mind, could you tell me where and when you were born and grew up?

LOLA MANN: Well, I was born not far from Independence, in Mosby, Missouri, and lived there for twenty-eight years, I guess, and then I moved to the Independence area.

WILLIAMS: When did you move to Independence?

DONALD GORE: Nineteen forty, forty-one.

MANN: Oh, no. Is he blacking out part of this, I hope. Well, David was nineteen months old. No, it's—let me think—fifty years ago, whatever that was.

WILLIAMS: Okay, it was about 1941.

MANN: That's right. Okay, 1941 then. And I had five sons and they all attended William Chrisman School.

WILLIAMS: Could you give me their names, for the record?

MANN: Yes, this was my second marriage. My first name was Gore. The first son was Donald A. Gore; the second one, Robert G. Gore; the third, Richard D.

Gore; the fourth is David C. Gore; and the fifth one is Roger K. Gore.

WILLIAMS: Which one of those sons made the concrete eagle?

MANN: Donald Gore made the eagle. And I have a son, the son that is David Gore, has been on the Independence Fire Department for about twenty-seven years. He's a captain on the Independence Fire Department.

WILLIAMS: When you first moved to Independence, did you really have much knowledge of the Trumans?

MANN: Well, I was born and bred a Democrat. [chuckling] I was a Democrat all my life. The first I knew of Mrs. Truman and saw her was . . . early years I saw them one time. Her and Margaret were Christmas shopping at the Woolworth's dime store up in Independence. That's the first time I ever saw Mrs. Truman. But Margaret was just a kid then, and they had come home for Christmas from Washington and they were Christmas shopping in the Woolworth's store.

WILLIAMS: On the Independence Square?

MANN: On the square, uh-huh.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever see Mr. Truman before he became president?

MANN: No, I never had seen him, only in the papers when he was a judge, of course, through the years.

WILLIAMS: What was your reaction when he became president?

MANN: Well, I of course was thrilled to death, . . . as being a Democrat, I was . . . But under the circumstances, it was a tragedy, I mean, because of the way he became president, you know.

WILLIAMS: Where were you living, at that time? Here, or someplace . . . another

house?

MANN: Oh, what year was that?

GORE: Nineteen forty-four or forty-five?

WILLIAMS: He became President in '45.

MANN: Well, I was living . . . yeah, we were in Independence. My husband worked for Missouri Portland Cement Company for probably thirty years, and we lived out on North River, and he worked for Missouri Portland, so I was in Independence at that time.

WILLIAMS: So how far was that from the Truman home?

MANN: Just about four miles.

WILLIAMS: Okay, so you were further out on River Road.

MANN: Yeah, we were out about four miles on River.

GORE: The road's closed now where we lived.

WILLIAMS: Why did it close?

GORE: The cement plant had the road, I think, closed because there was the possibility . . . it was along the bluff, and there was the possibility it would cave in, so they closed the road and tore all the houses down and vacated the land that was in there.

WILLIAMS: So you were really out there by the river then.

GORE: Yes, you could see the river from our back yard.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember anything in particular about when Mr. Truman was president? Were you ever around when he was in town, or . . . ?

MANN: Well, no, just the kids always would come home and say they saw him, and things like that, parades that they had up around the square. But that's as

far as . . . that's the only place I ever saw him.

WILLIAMS: And you said you went to school at William Chrisman. Could you talk about walking by the home?

GORE: I went to school for three years to the junior high, which is on the east side of their house, and then I went to William Chrisman for three years, graduated in 1950. So whenever he was home, that would be about the time when we'd be on our way to school, and he would be taking his morning walk, which there would be always a bunch of cameramen behind him, and maybe some Secret Service men. And he would wave at you or we would always holler at him or something, you know, yell. And he walked real fast. There was no getting along . . . He made the reporters work for their money. I can't remember specifically which years it was, but it seemed like I would see him all the time, especially in the summertime.

WILLIAMS: I've heard that school kids liked to cut through the yard and set off the security alarm there, before the fence was put up. Do you remember any of that?

GORE: I can't remember when the fence wasn't up there. I guess I just didn't pay any attention. I didn't cut through the yard. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: You weren't one of the troublemakers then.

GORE: No, I guess not, no. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Your mother will be glad to hear that.

MANN: Yes. [chuckling]

GORE: You could see the Secret Service men looking out the window in the house across the street on the corner, so I always figured they were watching

close, and we didn't need any trouble.

WILLIAMS: And after the Trumans came back from Washington and retired, how did you become acquainted with Bess Truman?

MANN: Well, the way I became acquainted with her, we went to the same beauty shop, the Crown Beauty Shop up on West Maple, and I would meet her there. It seemed like our appointments was always at the same time. That's when I have these letters that she had sent me, you know, that . . . So that's when I first knew her. We'd visit in the beauty shop.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember if that was immediately after the presidency, or was that . . .

MANN: Well, this was in, I think, 1975. The date on one of these letters is '75, so I don't know what year they came back.

WILLIAMS: They came back in '53.

MANN: Fifty-three. Well, see, this was '75, so she was quite aged when I knew her, you know, met her.

WILLIAMS: That was after Mr. Truman had died. He died in '72.

MANN: Yes. Yeah, he had passed away by that time.

WILLIAMS: Did Doris Miller do your hair also?

MANN: No, it was the girl that worked with her did my hair. Doris always did Mrs. Truman's.

WILLIAMS: Well, when you were in the beauty shop together, what was your impression of Mrs. Truman? Did she seem . . .?

MANN: She was very quiet. The Secret Service man usually came and brought her to the door, and he'd carry her purse and bring her in, and she'd sit in there.

But she was a very quiet woman. No fashion plate. You know, I mean she dressed very conservatively. I said I'd sit by the dryer next to her, and the shoes that she had on, I wonder sometimes, you know. I'd think, "Gee, she's had those shoes quite a while," because, you know, they weren't the latest styles. But she was a very gracious person.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever visit with her?

MANN: Yes, in the beauty shop is all.

WILLIAMS: What did you talk about?

MANN: Oh, just things that was going on in the country, what was going on at the time, you know. But she was quiet. She never talked too much. A lot of the time she'd just have her book with her, and she'd read her book.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember what she'd be reading usually?

MANN: Oh, usually mysteries, mystery books.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever talk about your family, or did she mention her family?

MANN: No. No, but after I gave her . . . would make her candy and stuff, and she always would say, "I like your divinity better than I do the fudge, but I love the divinity." And so when I'd make candy, I always tried to make both kinds for her.

WILLIAMS: Why did you decide to start bringing things to her?

MANN: Well, I think I gave . . . it was probably the first time about Christmas time, and I took Doris . . . and Shirley was the operator who worked on me, and I took them boxes of candy, and I just took Mrs. Truman a box of candy. So then she wrote the letter and thanked me for it [see appendix, item 1]. One of the letters is so amusing, I thought. It was returned to her because she

didn't have any postage on it. Did you see?

WILLIAMS: [chuckling] I have a copy, I think, that you'd given us.

MANN: Yeah. But it says: "This matter is being sent to you because it was found in the U.S. mail without postage affixed. This is contrary to Section 14611 Postal Service Manual, which requires that postage on all mail must be fully prepared at the time of mailing." And I always was amused at that. I thought, you know . . . [chuckling] And it says right on the corner, "Bess Truman."

WILLIAMS: Now, is that printed on there, or did she actually sign that? Can you tell?

MANN: No, I think it's her signature. It's put on with ink.

GORE: Yeah.

MANN: Uh-huh, she signed it.

WILLIAMS: So she may have dropped it in without signing it, and then they had to bring it back and have her sign it? Is that your impression?

MANN: Well, I would say it was on there to begin with, but I don't know. But, really, the ink on the signature on the corners are darker than the ink on her handwriting.

WILLIAMS: Well, when you made this candy for her, did you deliver it to their house?

MANN: No, I usually took it to the beauty shop when I would go. If I took it otherwise, why, I'd just give it to Doris and she would send it down there. And she told me one time, she said, "If you want to bring it to my house, all you've got to do is come to the front gate and ring the buzzer and somebody will come out and get it." And I only went one time, and they never answered the gate.

WILLIAMS: Oh, really?

MANN: Nobody. I don't know whether they were home, whether she was gone or . . . I don't know why they didn't come. They may have thought, "Well, there's the Avon lady out there selling Avon." Who am I to . . . But, you know, I didn't have her telephone number to call her, so . . . But she told me, she said, "If you ever want to bring me any, you just buzz that buzzer, and they'll come out and get it." But there was no answer.

WILLIAMS: So you missed your chance to see—

MANN: I missed my chance to go in the house at that time. But I have gone since, and I hadn't gone till this summer. It was the first time I ever visited in the home.

WILLIAMS: How many times would you make candy? Was it every year?

MANN: No, I just made it just now and then, every now and then, probably every . . . I don't know.

WILLIAMS: But she really liked it.

MANN: Oh, yeah, she said, "I love that divinity." [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And there's also a letter, I think, about some peas [see appendix, item 2]?

MANN: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: And bread?

MANN: Yeah, I made her homemade bread. I sent her some fresh peas, and she wrote the note that . . . how good they were with the new potatoes that she had.

WILLIAMS: But you would always just leave these at the beauty shop then?

MANN: Most of the time. Yeah, usually. If she wasn't there, I would leave it with

Doris, and Doris would . . . I think Doris really just called down there and the Secret Service man would come up and get it, is the way she got it.

WILLIAMS: Now, how did the eagle story begin?

MANN: Well, I'll let him tell you about the eagle.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

GORE: Well, I guess Margaret had written the book about her father, and we had . . . it seemed like we had two books, and they had signed . . . Margaret and her mother had signed these things for us. And I said, "Well, I'll just . . ." I made these concrete eagles as a hobby, and some other statuary, and I said, "Well, I'll just make her a statue and give it to her." And so I made it and sent it up, just like the candy, and she got it. And then one day I got this thank-you note, which I thought was amazing, in the mail from Mrs. Truman [see appendix, items 3 and 4]. And she said something to the effect that she didn't know that things like that could be so beautiful, or something, in it. You asked her what she was going to do with it, or something?

MANN: Well, when I gave it to her, I said, "What will you do with the eagle now?" And she said, "Oh, I'm going to sit it on my porch. I wouldn't put it in my yard. Somebody will steal it."

GORE: I doubt that. [chuckling]

MANN: You know, when I visited the home this summer, I thought, "Well, I'll check and see if the eagle is on the porch." Well, it wasn't. And that's when I asked, you know. I told the fellow that took us through that day. I said that I had given the eagle . . . my son had sent the eagle to her and I

didn't see it. And he said, "Well, if you'll give me your name and address, I'll check on it and see if I can find it." So, not too long after that, here come a picture through the mail. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: We found it.

MANN: With the eagle, a picture of the eagle on it, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Well, how did you deliver this eagle?

MANN: I just took it up there to the beauty shop, I think.

WILLIAMS: So you were the one who—

MANN: Yeah, I took it up, uh-huh. Of course, it's not but about that high, you know, and it's concrete.

GORE: It doesn't weigh much.

MANN: It doesn't weigh too much. But she was real proud of it.

WILLIAMS: I think your letter was postmarked the 18th of May 1973, that Mrs. Truman sent back to you. So this was in 1973?

GORE: Yes.

MANN: Yeah, that's the book over there with the letter in it.

GORE: With the letter that was there.

WILLIAMS: So you didn't speak to her personally?

GORE: No, not at all.

WILLIAMS: And she mentioned something about autographing the books.

MANN: Yes, she autographed the book, and there's two autographs of Margaret in there. Margaret was home at that time.

WILLIAMS: So did you bring the books along with the eagle for her to autograph? Or how did—

MANN: No, the book was autographed quite a while, wasn't it, before you sent the eagle to her?

GORE: Yeah, I made the eagle later.

MANN: He sent the eagle to thank her for signing the book and giving him the autographs.

WILLIAMS: How long did Mrs. Truman continue to go to the beauty shop? How long were you still—

MANN: I don't know, I guess until she was able to . . . you know, as long as she was able to travel up there. And I think Doris went down there quite a lot, maybe even did her hair at the house. But she was getting kind of . . . walked kind of slow and didn't get along too good at that time.

WILLIAMS: When she would come into the beauty shop, did people notice really, or did they just treat her . . .?

MANN: No, she was just like anybody else coming in. That was the thing about her, she was just . . . just Bess Truman walking in. That was it. I'd never seen anybody there that was even . . . I think most of us in there were accustomed to her, you know. They were regular customers, and so it didn't make any difference, really.

WILLIAMS: It didn't create a sensation.

MANN: No.

WILLIAMS: I think you said before we got on tape that you thought she seemed lonely. Could you repeat that?

MANN: She seemed lonely. I don't know, she was quiet and lonely. To me, at that age, I don't know. I said she's more like a . . . not the motherly type, like an

aunt type or, you know, something like that. No, I thought she was kind of a lonely woman.

WILLIAMS: Did she ever talk about Mr. Truman?

MANN: No, I never heard her mention his name.

WILLIAMS: What was it like going to school a block away from the president's house?

GORE: Oh, I always thought it was exciting, you know, to have the President of the United States live just a block from the school, and we'd always walk by and look at the house and look forward to seeing him take his walks.

WILLIAMS: Did they ever arrange any special assemblies or programs or organized walks by the house, or anything like that?

GORE: No, I don't think so, not that I ever remember. I don't remember that he was ever at the school or anything. He was in the first graduating class, and I was in the fiftieth of that high school, and the picture of their fiftieth class, as I remember, is in the back page of the . . . on the back cover and inside of my yearbook. So I was always proud that I went to the same school as President Truman.

MANN: My mother was the same age as he was, and so she was . . . I think she was more excited when he became president than anybody I knew of. My mother was a solid Democrat. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Was she from Independence?

MANN: No, she was from south Missouri and lived down by Excelsior, down at Mosby, Missouri, which is on the other side of Liberty.

GORE: The day that they dedicated the library, I live not too far from it, so I walked over there and took a roll of film. They had more dignitaries than you

could ever find together at one time, you know, in that kind of a situation.

And the film didn't work in my camera. [chuckling] I was really disappointed.

WILLIAMS: Well, that sometimes happens.

GORE: So I'll never have that opportunity again, you know. [chuckling] But I make sure now it's hooked in the camera right.

WILLIAMS: Did you follow those people down to the home? There was a big reception at the home.

GORE: No. No, it was a real hot day, and I had a real small child, and we were more interested in going back home.

WILLIAMS: Well, is there anything else you remember about the Trumans that might help us tell the story?

MANN: Well, right now I don't know as I can think of anything else.

WILLIAMS: Well, I'd like to thank you for letting us drop by, and I'd also like to take your picture if that's okay.

MANN: Oh, my goodness. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

## APPENDIX

1. Bess W. Truman letter to Lola Mann concerning gift of candy and bread.
2. Bess W. Truman letter to Lola Mann concerning gift of fresh peas.
3. Photograph of concrete eagle made by Donald Gore and given to Bess W. Truman. HSTR photograph. Eagle is HSTR catalog #2473.
4. Letter from Bess W. Truman to Donald Gore, 18 May 1973.

Photocopies of Bess W. Truman letters provided courtesy of Lola Mann.