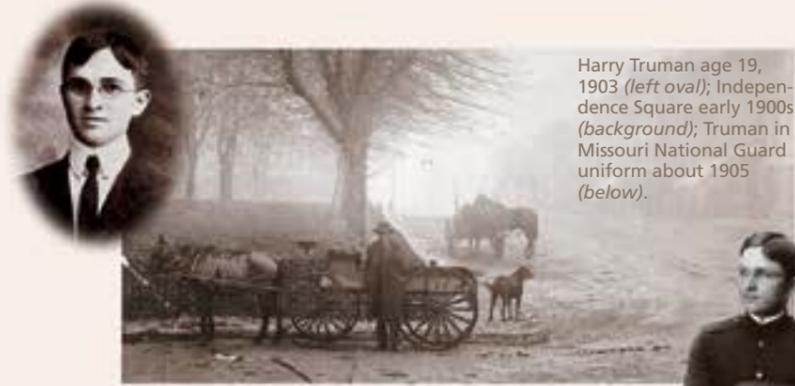


Harry S Truman, 33rd President. Portrait by Greta Kempton, 1947. WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOC.

I tried never to forget who I was and where I'd come from and where I was going back to. . . . After nearly eight years in the White House and ten years in the Senate, I found myself right back where I started in Independence, Missouri.

Harry Truman



Harry Truman age 19, 1903 (left oval); Independence Square early 1900s (background); Truman in Missouri National Guard uniform about 1905 (below).



HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY



Harry Truman rides a cultivator on the Grandview farm, 1910 (above); Truman sworn in as presiding judge of Jackson County, 1931 (right).

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY



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Daughter Margaret, Harry, and Bess in backyard of 219 N. Delaware, 1934, (second left); Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Gen. George Patton, and President Truman at ceremony, Berlin, Germany, July 21, 1945, (left).

The symbol of the United Nations, adopted in 1947, (below left) and a menorah, official emblem of the State of Israel (below right). On May, 14, 1948, Truman was the first world leader to recognize the new State of Israel.



NPS

A Most Uncommon Common Man

As a child he dreamed of being a concert pianist and of going to college. Instead, at 17 he had to start working full time. At 33 he deemed himself a failure. By 38 his clothing business was bankrupt. Determined to succeed at something he entered politics, eventually becoming a US senator. At 60 he was suddenly President of the United States, facing decisions that held worldwide consequences. Who was this common man abruptly thrust into this uncommon role?

Midwestern Values

Harry S Truman was born in rural Missouri but claimed Independence as his home town. The family moved there when he was six. That year Harry met five-year-old Bess Wallace, daughter of a prominent family. All his school years Harry adored Bess, the "beautiful young lady with the blue eyes and golden hair," a popular girl and an accomplished athlete. But the frail-looking boy with thick glasses did not appeal to Bess. It took years for Harry to overcome his shyness and strike up a true friendship.

Truman's mother, Martha, instilled in Harry a love of music and books. He practiced the piano before school and by 14 had "read all the books in the Independence Public Library." Truman's father, John, taught him the worth of hard work and of Midwestern values—honesty, courage, and perseverance.

In 1900 Truman got his first taste of politics when his father took him to the Democratic National Convention in Kansas City. Truman loved the excitement of the nominations and the promises of better times in the new century. But better times did not include young Truman. In 1901 his father dashed his dreams of college by losing the family savings in risky investments. Truman eventually found a good job as a bank clerk in Kansas City. He went to concerts and joined the National Guard. At 22 his life changed again when Truman's father summoned him to help on the farm in Grandview. Truman headed the call. He had never farmed before, and it was arduous work for someone used to city life.

Determination and Patience

In 1910 Harry and Bess crossed paths again. While visiting his aunt and uncle, the Nolands in Independence, Truman volunteered to return a cake plate to a neighbor, Mrs. Madge Wallace. Bess greeted him at the door, and their courtship began. He wrote Bess letters from Grandview and, in 1911, proposed marriage. She turned him down.

By 1917, 33-year-old Truman was in the midst of World War I as an officer in the US Army. Captain Harry inspired his troops in France with his courage and determination. He brooked no insubordination, and he lost no man in battle. Finally Truman felt successful. His persistence paid off too when Bess Wallace agreed to marry him on June 28, 1919. Truman opened a clothing store in Kansas City, and business thrived until a depression closed the shop. By 1922 Truman was looking for work.

Truman's next job, politics, turned into a lifelong career. "Boss" Tom Pendergast, whose nephew knew Harry from Army days, backed

Truman's run for eastern district judge (administrative position) of Jackson County. Truman campaigned hard, won, and loved the job. His reputation for integrity and hard work impressed voters enough to win him a US Senate seat. The Truman family moved to Washington, DC, in 1935 but all remained Missourians at heart. In January 1945 Truman became Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice president. Roosevelt died on April 12 and, at 7:09 pm, Harry S Truman became the 33rd US president.

The Buck Stops Here

The new president faced monumental decisions. First he carried on the drive to end World War II. He then turned to rebuilding war-torn Europe and halting Communist expansion. A series of crises, the Korean War in particular, kept Truman away from Independence even more than during his senate years. Truman did not seek a third term. "I have had all of Washington I want," he wrote. "I prefer my life in Missouri." Back home Truman enjoyed his walks and being with his family and friends once more.



Truman's official badge as presiding judge (above right) and his Missouri Democratic Convention pin, April 15, 1940 (above left); Bess Wallace age 12 (below).

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY



Harry S Truman: 1884–1972

1884 Born May 8 in Lamar, MO, to John and Martha Truman; named Harry S; given a middle initial only to honor his grandfathers Solomon Young and Anderson Shipp Truman.

1885 Bess Wallace, Truman's future wife, born February 13 in Independence, MO; christened Elizabeth Virginia.

1890 Family moves to Independence; Harry, six, meets Bess, five, at Sunday school.

1901 Harry and Bess graduate from Independence High School; his father loses savings in grain-futures speculation; Truman begins series of jobs in Kansas City area to help support family.

1904 Bess and brothers move with their mother into grandparents' house at 219 N. Delaware Ave.

1906 Truman moves to Grandview to help Grandmother Young and Truman family on 600-acre farm.

1910 Truman (in Grandview) and Bess Wallace (in Independence) begin nine-year courtship.

1914–16 Father dies; Truman dabbles, unsuccessfully, in mining, oil, and land ventures.

1917–18 Joins US Army; and fights in WW I; is captain of Battery D 129th Field Artillery, 35th Div.; serves in France.

1919 Harry and Bess marry June 28; he moves in with her family; opens men's clothing store with Army friend Eddie Jacobson.

1922 Business fails; is elected eastern district judge of Jackson County Court.

1924 Daughter Margaret born February 17; Truman loses reelection as eastern district judge.

1926–34 Elected presiding judge of Jackson County Court, serves two four-year terms; is active in Field Artillery Reserve.

1934 Elected to US Senate.

1938–41 Mortgage foreclosure of Grandview farm; Congress passes Wheeler-Truman Transportation Act (railroad reform); elected to second term, US senator.

1944 Elected vice president of US; Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) elected to fourth presidential term.

1945 Becomes 33rd president April 12 upon FDR's death; announces end of war in Europe on May 8; attends Potsdam, Germany, conference with Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill; authorizes use of atomic bombs; Japan surrenders on August 14.

1947 Issues Truman Doctrine; signs National Security Act that establishes CIA; mother dies.

1948 Desegregates the armed forces; orders airlift against the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin; is elected to second term as president; moves

to Blair House as White House renovations begin (lives there until 1952).

1950 Orders US forces to join South Korean troops in fight against invading North Korean Communists; proclaims state of emergency when China aids North Korea.

1951 Popularity ratings drop as US effort in Korean War grows; fires Far East commander Gen. Douglas MacArthur for criticizing Truman's foreign policies.

1953–57 Korean War ends; retires to Independence; dedicates Harry S. Truman Library.

1972 Dies December 26 at age 88; is buried at Harry S. Truman Library.

1982 Bess Truman dies October 18 at age 97; is buried next to Harry. December 8, Congress designates Harry S Truman National Historic Site to preserve the Truman legacy and its inspiration for future generations.