

Oral History Interview

with

Hazel Graham

Leader of Girl Scout Troop, Bryant School; first Executive Director, Jackson County Historical Society; and friend of President and Mrs. Harry S. Truman.

Independence, Missouri

February 21, 1989

Niel M. Johnson

NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Harry S. Truman Library. A draft of this transcript was edited by the interviewee but only minor emendations were made; therefore, the reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written word.

As an electronic publication of the Truman Library, users should note that features of the original, hardcopy version of the oral history interview, such as pagination and indexing, could not be replicated for this online version of the Hazel Graham transcript.

RESTRICTIONS

This oral history transcript may be read, quoted from, cited, and reproduced for purposes of research. It may not be published in full except by permission of the Harry S. Truman Library.

Opened May, 1990

Harry S. Truman Library

Independence, Missouri

Oral History Interview with

Hazel Graham

Independence, Missouri

February 21, 1989

Niel M. Johnson

JOHNSON: Mrs. Graham, I'm going to start by getting some background. When and where you were born and what were your parents' names?

GRAHAM: I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, just up the hill from today's Plaza district, in 1913. My father was Ernest Brace, and my mother was Grace Brace. I started to school at the old Sweeney School, which is just beyond the Plaza a couple of blocks. I lived in Kansas City until shortly before high school age, and I had my high school training in Lee's Summit, Missouri.

JOHNSON: What was your father's occupation?

GRAHAM: He had been in charge of the storehouse for the Terminal Railroad, but he was a person who liked very much to be his own boss, and he wanted to have a small acreage where he could have a large strawberry patch and that type of thing. So we moved to the Lee's Summit area, just at the edge of town. Of course, it was not the time in history to make that kind of a move, but he did.

JOHNSON: That would have been about what year?

GRAHAM: Well, it would have been in the early twenties.

JOHNSON: Did we get the exact date on your birth?

GRAHAM: July 10, 1913.

JOHNSON: And then you moved to Lee's Summit.

GRAHAM: Just before high school age.

JOHNSON: So you went to high school in Lee's Summit.

GRAHAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you graduated from high school there?

GRAHAM: Yes, graduated from high school in Lee's Summit.

JOHNSON: And then what did you do?

GRAHAM: I went to Kansas City to earn enough money to go to college. I was extremely fortunate in being able to get a job at the Lucerne Hotel, which was a residential hotel on Linwood Boulevard, they hired me to be switchboard operator.

Very shortly after that, I started keeping books for the hotel, at the switchboard. Before too long, the property changed hands; this was in Depression days. An insurance company in Dallas, Texas took the property over on an unfulfilled loan. The Brookside Hotel in Kansas City was taken over the same day that they took the Lucerne Hotel over, and they wanted to take the manager of the Lucerne out to the Brookside immediately. They asked me if I would become the manager of the Lucerne Hotel. So, overnight I became manager of a hotel with 40 employees and, with their help, was able to succeed.

I called them all together the next morning and told them exactly what had happened and told them that I could not do it, but we could do it. And we did.

JOHNSON: What did that do to your college plans?

GRAHAM: Well, by the time I had enough money saved to attend college, which I was so interested in doing, college graduates were not making anywhere near what I was making, and I couldn't afford it. My parents were having problems at this time; their health was very bad, and it just simply was impossible for me to go on to college. So I never received any college work at all.

JOHNSON: During the Depression, then, you are manager of the Lucerne.

GRAHAM: The Lucerne Hotel.

JOHNSON: And how long did that last?

GRAHAM: I was there until 1939, when Kenneth Graham and I were married. We had not intended to be married the last day of June; we had intended an earlier wedding in June, but the building changed hands again, and they persuaded me to stay and train the new people. So the last month before I was married I trained a new group of people coming in to manage the hotel, and it was never managed as a luxury residence hotel after that.

JOHNSON: Is that still there, that building?

GRAHAM: The building is there, but it has been used for many things since then, including underprivileged housing. Of course, Linwood Boulevard today is not a desirable place.

JOHNSON: But in the twenties that was an upper-class area.

GRAHAM: It was the place to be.

JOHNSON: So you're married in 1939.

GRAHAM: We were married in 1939, and we moved to Independence in 1940, for Mr. Graham to become the manager of the Herald Publishing House.

JOHNSON: Was his background in business, as a business major?

GRAHAM: No, he majored in political science and journalism. He came to the publishing house from KMBC [radio station].

JOHNSON: Where did your husband graduate, what university?

GRAHAM: Kansas University, KU.

JOHNSON: So you moved over here to Independence to . . .

GRAHAM: We moved out to Golden Acres.

JOHNSON: Golden Acres, where was that?

GRAHAM: It was the subdivision at that particular time. It is just off of Noland Road at Gudgeon, two blocks east.

JOHNSON: And now you're a housewife, or are you doing . . .

GRAHAM: I did not work at all, outside the home, from the time we were married, until I went to the Historical Society. We raised two daughters and that covered a longer period of time than it would for some families because there's six years difference in the two girls.

JOHNSON: So you had two children, two daughters. And what are their names?

GRAHAM: Donnis Graham is the older one and Karen Graham Wade is the younger one.

JOHNSON: And one of them you mentioned is an architectural historian; she majored in architectural history and is director of a museum.

GRAHAM: Yes. And the other daughter followed more closely in her father's footsteps. She is employed at the University of Kansas.

JOHNSON: In the forties, during World War II and later on, you lived in Golden Acres, and then you moved to . . .

GRAHAM: We moved to Delaware [Street] in 1947.

JOHNSON: And what was the address there?

GRAHAM: 610 North Delaware.

JOHNSON: What impelled you to do that?

GRAHAM: Because Golden Acres at that particular time in history was not in the Independence school system, and we had our older child ready to go to school. I had helped establish, through the Independence Young Matrons, a kindergarten in the system of Independence, at Bryant School. They had never had kindergartens. So we were very anxious to move into the Bryant School area.

JOHNSON: That's where Margaret Truman went . . .

GRAHAM: That's where Margaret went to school too.

JOHNSON: Did both of your daughters then go to Bryant School?

GRAHAM: Yes, both of them went to Bryant School. I had a scout troop, all through the time that our younger daughter was in school, that became very active at the Jackson County Historical Society.

JOHNSON: Had either of you met the Trumans or known the Trumans at all by this time?

GRAHAM: Well, only like everybody else that knew them. I don't remember even what year it was, but my first intimate contact with him was when I took my Girl Scout troop, which were just Brownies at that particular time--they were in the second grade--up to the square in Independence. There was a library right in the center of town, just barely off the square at that time, and they had a story hour. I was walking there with my Brownie troop up to the library. Mr. Truman was home at that time, and he came out to pick up the paper just as we were walking by. He came out to the sidewalk to speak to the children. He knew some of them because some of them lived close to him, and he called them by name. Then, the ones that he didn't know he would say to me, "What's her name?" and I was supposed to supply the name for each one of them. He talked to every child in that group, and asked them where they lived and how was their family.

JOHNSON: When was this?

GRAHAM: Well, let me think. My daughter was born in 1947 and she was in second grade at this time.

JOHNSON: So it probably was 1954, or possibly '55.

GRAHAM: It was in that era. He was very cordial to them and there was absolutely no reason, nothing for him to gain by it, except just being nice to children.

JOHNSON: Well, now when you were living down there on Delaware . . .

GRAHAM: We were just a little over a block from their house.

JOHNSON: Once in a while there would be crowds gathering at the Truman home, while he was President, for instance on his first trip back home.

GRAHAM: The fence was not up at first.

JOHNSON: Right. That was put up I believe in '47; that would have been about the year.

GRAHAM: Well, at least it was not locked when the children and I were there. He didn't have to stop for anything.

JOHNSON: Do you recall being part of any crowds there at the home while it was the summer White House?

GRAHAM: Oh, yes. I remember when the crowds got so thick sometimes and they would go up and try to take splinters off of the house. We were all incensed in the neighborhood that people were so rude.

JOHNSON: That's why they put the fence up there. People were trying to get souvenirs, one way or the other.

GRAHAM: Yes. And then they would take things off the tree. They'd break little branches off the trees. This was one of the reasons why Mrs. Truman became so averse to going out in the yard.

JOHNSON: You didn't meet any of the Trumans then until after they had come back from the White House?

GRAHAM: We didn't get really closely acquainted with them until after they were home, after the White House years, because they were only here for short times and naturally they saw their close friends.

JOHNSON: Were you well-acquainted with Mrs. [Ardis] Haukenberry, or the Nolands?

GRAHAM: We worked very closely together because Mrs. Haukenberry was the secretary for the Historical Society for many years and she and I worked closely together. Mrs. Helena Crow was our Membership Chairman in the early days and she was a member of Mrs. Truman's bridge club. In fact, there is a rather interesting little story about that.

At the time they put the fence up and they had some guards there, Mrs. Crow had been in the habit of going down to see Mrs. Haukenberry. And she'd walk down through the alley to Mrs. May Wallace's home. Somebody on the loudspeaker said, "You are not permitted to walk down this place. This is not public property." Mrs. Crow said, "I was so taken aback that I just said out loud, 'I have been walking down this road for many years, and I intend to keep on.'" And she did.

JOHNSON: Did you ever meet the Nolands?

GRAHAM: Oh yes, oh yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk about genealogy? Mary Ethel Noland was a genealogist for the Truman family.

GRAHAM: Yes, that's right. She was very much interested in all history and of course contributed a great deal to the Historical Society. Mrs. Haukenberry gave things that the Nolands had left after they were gone and she was living in the home herself. When I first knew Mrs. Haukenberry, it was before she had moved into the Noland home; she had her own home.

JOHNSON: Were there any stories about the Trumans that you heard about while you were neighbors there, while you were on Delaware that perhaps are not on the record, or in black and white?

GRAHAM: Well, they've told me many stories, and I'm sure some of this is on the record. Mrs. Haukenberry has told me many stories when I would be there in her home about when Mr. Truman would come over there at the time he was courting Mrs. Truman and stay with them [the Nolands].

JOHNSON: She still had the piano in that house, did she not?

GRAHAM: Yes, he loved to play the piano. And she loved to tell the stories about those times.

JOHNSON: After Mr. Truman came back from the White House, was that your first meeting with him, when you and the Girl Scouts were there?

GRAHAM: That was the first time. I had not met him personally.

JOHNSON: You mentioned the Young Matrons. What organizations did you belong to at this time?

GRAHAM: I was very active in the Independence Young Matrons until I became so involved with the Historical Society that I really didn't have time. But the Junior Service League and the Young Matrons furnished a great number of the volunteers for the Historical Society. In fact, we could not have possibly progressed to the point that we did, had it not been for volunteers, and I was always very, very appreciative of everything the volunteers did.

JOHNSON: How about the bridge club? I believe you called it the Tuesday Bridge Club, or Bess Truman's Bridge Club.

GRAHAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever belong to that?

GRAHAM: Oh, no, no. This was older women and most of them had been girlhood friends. Several of them have talked to me about their trip to Washington, to the White House though.

JOHNSON: Yes, that was something.

GRAHAM: They told that with a great deal of relish.

JOHNSON: Okay, this is '54 or '55. What would have been your second, or next encounter?

GRAHAM: Well, I do not remember what year it was, but the first time that Mr. Truman really gave me advice was after we had started our tour of the early areas in and around Independence for the fourth graders. We had a tour that was set up with the supervisor of children of that age in the school system. Alberta Wilson Constant wrote the original script that we used to tell the children what they were doing and visiting. We took the children in their own school bus. They would arrive at the museum after they had just made their first appearance at school and taken their attendance. We would put a volunteer on the bus. That was when the Junior Service League and the Independence Young Matrons became so helpful, because they were the volunteers who took these children on their memorable trips.

JOHNSON: You're talking about the first year the Historical Society's museum was in operation?

GRAHAM: Oh, no, no. This was not the first year;, this was later than that. We didn't have this much going right at first. When I first went to the museum, I was the only employee they had. My Girl Scout troop felt that they had to come up and help me. The year I went there, it was their first year in junior high school.

JOHNSON: You're talking about the museum in the old jail, are you not?

GRAHAM: Yes, the jail house and the County Marshal's home. That's where my office was as the director of the Historical Society.

JOHNSON: Okay, we're talking about the sixties. What year did that operation start?

GRAHAM: We reopened the old jail museum in 1959, which was just a hundred years after it had been built in 1859. But I did not start until 1960. When I went to work they had gotten enough money to pay for the building, and some of the restoration that had been done. They were in the process of finishing the restoration when I started. I do not recall exactly how long it was before we had it sufficiently ready to go into the fourth grade program, but when I first was there, I was the only employee they had. I had nobody to sweep; I had nobody to clean. On weekends when I could not be there myself I hired high school seniors to stay at the desk; they were usually boys, and they made a great contribution. They helped me, as well as having a job that helped them. They took care of weekend visitors.

JOHNSON: This story about Harry Truman making a phone call . . .

GRAHAM: That was in 1959, when he made the phone calls.

JOHNSON: Right, to renovate the jail house museum. Do you want to relate that story again?

GRAHAM: Well, this is Mr. Truman's story to me, telling me what happened. He said that there was a whole battery of telephones set up in the jail. It had not been used as a jail for some time, but it had been used during the worst days of the Depression as a food pantry to give money and food to people that were destitute. It had been used during some floods to bring people in and even let them stay there, and it was very, very dilapidated, and run-down. So there was a great deal of work that had to be done on it, before we could even start making it a museum. First, they had to raise enough money to buy it, and keep it from being torn down. So they started out by having a campaign to raise enough money to do this. People were asked to come in and sit and make phone calls. They were going to make enough calls; to get the money that they needed.

Mr. Truman was to make the very first phone call, he was going to call Joyce Hall, of Hallmark, in Kansas City. This had all been set up ahead of time, and so Mr. Truman came in. They took photographs of him, and I'm sure you have photographs in the Library of that time, because there were many of them taken and they were in all the newspapers of the area. He made a call to Joyce Hall and asked him if he would contribute to this project. Joyce Hall said he would be glad to give \$1,000. So they finished that; the press left and the photographers, and Mr. Truman got

ready to leave. These other people then started taking over the phones; they had a whole battery of phones set up to make the calls, and Mr. Truman felt a little guilty. He said, "Well, I better make some calls myself; this was all set up for me." So his story to me was that he sat down to make some calls. He made three calls and each time he said, "This is Harry Truman;" without exception each time the person he was calling said, "I'll bet," and hung up on him. So Mr. Truman said, "As a fund-raiser I was absolutely no good unless it was all set up ahead of time."

JOHNSON: You mentioned some advice that he gave you . . .

GRAHAM: This was several years later. This was after Mr. Truman was staying at home, and I cannot give you the date on this at all; I really can't.

JOHNSON: You are "activities director." Is that the title you had up there?

GRAHAM: Executive Director. Right at first, they called me the coordinator. We were very unsophisticated for a few years; we were just laboring to keep going, and I was the coordinator of all of the activities at that particular time. Later they called me "executive director." But he knew that I was responsible for setting up the program with the school children, when they went on a tour, arriving at the museum in the morning, and a guide getting on their bus. The very first thing the guide said to them was, "Did you bring your 'best pretenders' with you this morning?" Fourth graders always had their best pretenders with them, so we always had a good response, lots of pretenders. They were told then, "Well, if you brought your best pretenders with you, you can go on a covered wagon trip today. Then later you can even start out on the Santa Fe Trail. You'll have certain provisions with you; you'll know how long it's going to take you to get where you want to go and you'll know some of the problems you're going to have on the way. Now, in order to do this we have to pretend that we don't see these cars that are going by out here at all. There may be a few covered wagons that we'll see on the way, but not very many even of those. But we don't see the cars at all." And the school children entered into this beautifully. We would take them to various sites, first starting out at the Missouri River. Our first stop, before we did anything else in town, was to go out to the place just above the old landing.

JOHNSON: Was that on River Road then?

GRAHAM: Yes, down at the foot of River Road.

JOHNSON: "Cement City," as they call it?

GRAHAM: Yes. We told them about the people coming in there. From that particular spot you also can see over to Kansas City, and if you're looking carefully, you can tell that the ground over there is a little bit different than this. There's a flat part before the hills start over by where Westport was later.

The reason that Independence did not remain the center for all this travel going West was that the landing for Independence was built on sand, and during floods it washed out frequently. People

would come and they couldn't make their landing until some temporary things had been put in for them to do that. They also had to go several miles into Independence. The first railroad in this part of the country was built from the landing down there on the river into Independence. They called it a railroad, it was some wooden tracks that mules pulled carts on to bring things into what is the Square in Independence today. We tell them this story and we tell them that there were Indians across the river there. Then we tell them to look to the west where the old Westport Landing was. For those who do not know this, Westport Landing was not where Westport is today. Westport Landing was quite a distance from Westport today, but it was the closest landing to Westport, so it was called the Westport Landing. It was built on solid rock; it didn't wash out when they had floods, and that was the reason the main traffic eventually went on down to Westport.

Then we would bring the children back in to Independence and tell them they're traveling on what was an old animal trace, and then the Indians used it as an Indian trace because it's on top of the hills and you can see in both directions. You're not going to be surprised by some predator suddenly appearing in front of you. They're traveling on the old, old trace that the Indians even used before the white man came. Today this street is North River Road.

JOHNSON: These are the guides that are giving them all of this information as they are on the bus?

GRAHAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did they ever get some of this information from Harry Truman?

GRAHAM: No, not at that particular time. Then the tour would come into town and we'd go by the historic things in town, any number of them. We would go by the Truman home. We'd always stop there and tell them about Mr. Truman and the important things that he had done. He was well aware of this tour because they stopped each day in front of the house.

The first time that I talked to him about it in detail was at a party at Bill Duke's home. Mr. Duke lived down the street, north about a block on the same side of the street as the Trumans, and across the street from where we lived. Mr. Duke's first wife had died and he had married, several years later, the lady that he was bringing to town. He wanted the neighbors to meet her. So Mr. Duke gave a party and the Trumans were at this party. Mr. Truman asked me to come over and sit on a little hassock type stool beside his chair so he could ask me. "What are you telling those kids out in front of our house?" I told him what we were telling them, and then he told me what I should be telling them. We added a lot of what he told us to what we were already telling the children.

One of the main things that he said was, "Now, you do need to tell them the history." He was very pleased that we were going back and telling them all of this history. He said, "There's one thing that maybe you can work in with the history, and that is to let them know how Government

works. If they understand how government works, they will grow up to elect the kind of people that will give them the government they want. I think we need to work this in, to what we're telling them," he would say. So we added that to our talk to the children.

JOHNSON: Did he ever say anything, or add anything to your information about the trails here and about the railroad from Wayne City Landing?

GRAHAM: I can't think of anything that he added to that. We talked about these things a number of times..

JOHNSON: Did he talk about his grandfather, Solomon Young, being a freighter on the Oregon Trail?

GRAHAM: No. Of course, that day [at the Dukes] we would stop and talk to other people; this was not an uninterrupted conversation that we had, by any means. But finally I said to him, "You know, Mr. Truman, I don't believe you'd have ever gotten into the White House if it hadn't been for the old jail." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, didn't you gain your first fame in politics for building such a wonderful hard-road system in Jackson County? Everybody knew when they got to the county line because the roads got better. Weren't you responsible to a great extent for that hard-road system?" He said, "Well, I guess so." And I said, "Well, who did the labor on those roads? Was it not the chain gang out of the old jail?" He said, "You're right." I said, "Well, you might not have ever been to the White House at all if it hadn't been for that old jail." He said, "You're right."

JOHNSON: I guess that's something I hadn't thought of, that they apparently provided much of the labor.

GRAHAM: Yes they did.

JOHNSON: Do you know the address of the Duke home?

GRAHAM: I don't know their address without checking.

JOHNSON: Were you in on the reorganization of the Historical Society in 1959?

GRAHAM: No. I did not go in until 1960, but I was the first full-time employee that they had.

JOHNSON: So you didn't work with the archives that they had in the Truman Library?

GRAHAM: Well, I sent many things over there, because people would bring things in. Of course, I was very, very close to Alberta Constant who was very active at that particular time. She was the main person who got them started.

JOHNSON: Well, you're much better acquainted with Harry Truman, I suppose, after this conversation with him at the Dukes. When did you have another chance or opportunity to meet with him?

GRAHAM: Every time we would run into each other, he would say, "What are you telling them today?" But there are some other things too.

There was a little boy who lived right next door to us; and this was after Mr. Truman came back from Washington, and the Library was already built, and he was going to the Library rather regularly. I had been to the Library that day to take something because we always worked back and forth. If they got something that should have been for us, they would give it to us, and if we got something that should be for them we took it to them. That was one reason why I was at the Truman Library so much. I had been to the Truman Library and was on my way home, and when I came to College Street crossing Delaware, Mr. Truman was sitting there, apparently headed toward the Library. It was just at the corner, and a little boy, Mikey Hahn, was sitting across the street, across Delaware, with his feet dangling down into the storm sewer. He was preschool age, and they were talking. Mr. Truman waved to me as I went by. I went on up and parked out in front of our home, because I was not going to stay very long, and went back out into the yard to pick up the paper. I looked down and there was Mr. Truman still sitting down at the corner talking to Mikey.

After a few moments, Mikey came running up the street, and I said to him, "Do you know who you were visiting with down the street?" He said, "Yep, a nice man." He had no idea other than, "a nice man." I told him who he was visiting with. This, I think, illustrates Mr. Truman's great interest in children, which I think is something that has never been picked up by people writing about him. I think there is something, though, they have blown all out of proportion, his use of foul language, because this was not a great part of him. I never heard any of it from him in any way.

JOHNSON: Did you get involved in guiding tours at the Truman Library?

GRAHAM: No.

JOHNSON: But you did meet Mr. Truman on occasion in the Library and you heard him give talks to the school children in the auditorium?

GRAHAM: I never heard him because we were so busy ourselves, but of course, I was very well aware that they did because many children from out of town would come to the museum and then would go out to the Library. I have another interesting experience about a young man that had been out to the Truman Library. He was a stranger in town, and he was of high school age. He came into the museum, and he was just beside himself with joy. He said, "I've got to talk to somebody; I've got to tell somebody what happened to me!" He had been out to the Truman Library and spent quite a little bit of time inside going around, and he wanted to take some

pictures of the outside of the Library. So he went outside and just about the time he got around to the side of the building, Mr. Truman pulled up to the back entrance, the north entrance. (They had a terrible time with me learning how to call it the north entrance instead of the back door, and then they changed it and called it the executive entrance.) But anyway, Mr. Truman pulled into the north entrance, and there were photographers and newsmen; something had happened in the world that they wanted his opinion of, and they were really after him, yelling at him questions as he was walking from his car up to the door. He stopped as he always did and talked to them, and then after a little while he dismissed them and they knew that they should just as well go on when he dismissed them.

Mr. Truman stood there for a minute, as they were all leaving, and there was this young man. I would judge he was not beyond the age of senior in high school, and he was trying to take a picture of Mr. Truman. Mr. Truman motioned to him, and the young man came over to him. Mr. Truman was standing on the steps at the door, ready to go in, and he said, "Young man, I saw these men giving you an awful lot of trouble. Did you ever get a picture?" And he said, "No, they just kept pushing me aside." And Mr. Truman said, "You come on in here." So the young man went in with him; Mr. Truman took him into the building and said, "I want to tell you I'm sorry for the way they treated you."

JOHNSON: So he took the young fellow into his office?

GRAHAM: Just took the young man into his office and said, "Now, you go ahead and take whatever you want in here." Well, Mr. Truman sat down behind his desk and the young man got a picture of him behind the desk, and Mr. Truman said, "Do you want to take anything else of the room? Just go ahead. Take whatever you'd like." The young man said, "I tried not to be too selfish and take up too much time, but he sure was nice to me." That, to me, is another example that he wasn't only kind to little children; he was kind to all young people.

JOHNSON: Especially those, I guess, when he felt were being shoved aside, or mistreated.

GRAHAM: Yes, and very helpful. Another incident was when they first started taping his answers to school children when he would appear there at the Library, when it was convenient for him to do so. He would come in and talk to school children and give them a chance to ask questions.

This story was told to me by one of the Library employees. One day, Mr. Truman had been talking to a group of children, a rather large group of children in the Library, where they saw the film program and then Mr. Truman talked to them. He gave them a chance to ask questions, and there were several questions asked. Then he said, "Now, has anybody else got a question?" There was a little boy, who looked very much smaller than the others, in the front row, and Mr. Truman said, "Did you want to ask me something?" Mr. Truman had felt that he wanted to ask him something, and he said, "Do you want to ask me something?" The little boy couldn't even talk; he tried to but he couldn't get it out. The boy next to him said, "Mr. Truman, this boy wants to

know if you ever get scared. He gets so scared he can't talk when people ask him questions and things, and he wants to know if you ever get scared when you have to talk to people." They told me that there was a silence on the tape, and then Mr. Truman said, "Young man, when you have to say something important to people, if you don't get scared, you better not say anything." There was another short pause, and he said, "One time I was making a very important speech, and I was so frightened,"--so scared, he really said--"that I thought I was going to be sick before I could get off the stage."

People there at the Library, at the time, said they felt like they must check into that further, and so they got out the film of the Inaugural address. The minute Mr. Truman finished his Inaugural address, they said he left the stage for a short time, and they feel that that might have been the time he was referring to. We don't know; at least I don't know that it was, but anyway Mr. Truman . . .

JOHNSON: Okay, any more anecdotes or stories about him?

GRAHAM: Well, Mr. Truman was always very anxious to speak to everybody in the neighborhood as he walked around, and if you didn't get out where he could talk to you, he often waved to you. Before he had to use the cane to lean on, he always had the cane and he waved with the cane. It was a normal thing to see Mr. Truman waving to somebody with his cane.

In those days we didn't have as much air-conditioning as we have today; so I have been awakened any number of mornings by hearing this "tap, tap, tap," [through the open window] because he swung his cane as he walked, and it would go tap, tap, tap.

JOHNSON: On the sidewalk.

GRAHAM: On the sidewalk. And I can remember looking out our bedroom window one morning, not thinking that I was going to be seen, but he did see me and he waved his cane to me.

JOHNSON: Yes, those morning strolls were sort of famous. In fact, the Park Service now, I guess, tries to follow that up.

GRAHAM: He and Mrs. Truman were interested in our particular home location because back on the double lot, which is bigger than it is today, Mrs. Truman's grandparents had their home and she had spent a great deal of time with her grandparents as a child. She's told me about playing under the old burr oak tree that was in our front yard, as a child, and she always was talking to me about the burr oak. Incidentally, the burr oak tree is registered as one of the two better examples of burr oak in the county.

JOHNSON: Well, in fact, wasn't that her childhood home at one time?

GRAHAM: Yes, she lived with them at one time.

JOHNSON: Where was that in relation to your house?

GRAHAM: I don't know what the address was. Our address was 610 North Delaware, but it was set back from us; the property went back further. She indicated one day that she thought it went clear back to Union, but then she said that maybe it didn't.

JOHNSON: But you were on the same lot then that she had lived on?

GRAHAM: The lot that her grandparents had had was larger than the lot we had.

JOHNSON: But you had a part of that large lot?

GRAHAM: Yes, and the tree was on our lot.

JOHNSON: I've heard about that oak.

GRAHAM: Mrs. Truman always asked me if we had any trouble with the oak tree.

JOHNSON: Is it still there?

GRAHAM: It's still there. It was struck by lightening a few years ago, and we lost part of it, but it is still there and it's still a handsome old tree.

I don't believe we've gotten on the tape how I happened to become acquainted, as closely as I was, with Mrs. Truman. Because of her not wanting to go out and be bothered by strangers talking to her, she would ask me to order things that we carried in our gift shop at the museum or that I could order special from our buyers, for her to give to her grandchildren. So I took many things down that were history-related because she was just as much interested in her grandchildren knowing about history as her husband was, and she was always getting things that she thought they might be interested in to send to them, and I would take them down.

JOHNSON: What kind of items were these?

GRAHAM: Books, maps, this type of thing.

JOHNSON: Souvenir, gift items too?

GRAHAM: Oh, some souvenirs. She usually had a pretty good idea what she wanted, and so . . .

JOHNSON: So local history was one of her interests too then.

GRAHAM: Yes. Well, history in general I would say, not just local history, but history in general she was very much interested in. There is another interesting thing about her. In the many times that I was there we started out every conversation one way. She remembered my grand-children; how many I had and what their names were, usually. So she would ask me about my grandchildren. That was the first thing we talked about. Then, of course, I was supposed to

ask about her grandchildren, so we talked about her grandchildren then. But we started out practically every conversation, anytime that I went and sat down with her, we talked about grandchildren first, and then went on to other subjects.

JOHNSON: In her house?

GRAHAM: Yes, in the house.

JOHNSON: In what room would you usually meet with her?

GRAHAM: Well, we sat very frequently, after he was gone, in the little room that he used as a kind of an office or study.

JOHNSON: Oh, in that library there, that library room with all the books?

GRAHAM: That has the bay window, right in the middle of the house on the north side; it's a bay window.

GRAHAM: That was where she liked to sit. Sometimes we sat in the south room.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk about her reminiscences of Washington, or of being a First Lady? Did she ever look back?

GRAHAM: No. Her sense of humor was well-known, you know. I remember one time I was there; in fact I was getting ready to leave, going out the front door, and she said, "I'm so sick and tired of this cover here on the wainscoting, the cover on the lower part. It's dark, and it's been on there all of my lifetime. I didn't like it when I was little." She said, "I think I'll just have it taken off; it'd look lots better with it off." So immediately I started saying, "Now, Mrs. Truman, it really is very appropriate to the house; it was put on the house early and it's a part of the house. Are you sure you want to take it off?" I could see the twinkle begin to come in her eye, and she said, "You sound just exactly like my family. I thought maybe I could get somewhere with you, but I can't, I see."

Another time, I came to bring something, and she said, "I was just sitting there on the stairway reading." I guess she thought I looked a little bit surprised about why she was sitting on the stairs reading. She said, "That was my favorite place from the time I was a child, because then of course, we didn't have any air-conditioning and there was always a nice breeze, a cool breeze blowing up the stairway. That's where I read all my books." She said, "I still read some books, sitting there on the stairway going up the stairs."

JOHNSON: So you've visited in that home quite a number of times?

GRAHAM: Yes, one time she gave me her christening dress, and that still is owned, I think, by the Jackson County Historical Society. It had very bad brown spots on it. She said, "I don't know whether you want this or not, because it really is pretty bad." I think that was the reason she

didn't want to give it to the Library because she thought it wasn't suitable to give to them. It had these big brown spots on it. But she said, "I've been fooling with it here, and you can kind of fold it so they wouldn't show, if you're going to put it in a display case or anything." So I took it home. The Negro lady that worked for us was a very good friend of the one that worked for Mrs. Truman. They had a bond of friendship, and I naturally showed this to Sallie Chrisman, who worked for us, and she said, "I know how to get that out." The way she got it out was by washing it gently by hand; then taking it out and laying it in the back yard on a sheet in the bright sun. She would squeeze lemon juice onto the spots, and then sprinkle salt on them. Then, if they got dry, she'd go out and squeeze some more lemon juice on and salt. She did this for several days. Then I washed it very carefully in Woolite to get all of this out and I spent two whole evenings ironing the dress. It is very, very intricate in embroidery and things. Before I took it to the museum at all, I took it down and showed it to Mrs. Truman, and she cried. I said, "I'm going to give it back to you, because I think now that you would like to have it." She said, "Oh, no, no, no; it wouldn't have ever been any good if I had kept it at all, and now it's nice."

JOHNSON: That would have been way back in 1885 wouldn't it; she was born in 1885.

GRAHAM: I believe that's right.

JOHNSON: So it was around eighty years old at that point.

The maid that worked for you was Sallie Chrisman, and Vietta Carr, I believe, is the one that worked for the Trumans.

GRAHAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that Mrs. Truman also did not go out of the house much because of sightseers. The public, I guess, was often out there and they wanted to have her in a picture and so on, and that kind of kept her confined to her house, is that right?

GRAHAM: Yes, that's right, and she disliked very much to be called to and to hear, "Let me take your picture Mrs. Truman."

JOHNSON: Even though she had flowers, she wasn't able to . . .

GRAHAM: One day when I went there I said, "Your flowers in the back yard are just beautiful." She said, "I wish I could enjoy them." I asked, "Well why can't you," and she told me that if she went out in the yard somebody would be sure to yell, "Come over here, Mrs. Truman, I want to take your picture." So I said, "I'll go out and pick the flowers; they won't yell at me." I did, and she enjoyed them.

JOHNSON: But neighbors could come in and visit them?

GRAHAM: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: But it would be harder for them to get out and visit neighbors, I suppose.

GRAHAM: If she went out into the yard even, she said she was most apt to be stopped, or try to be stopped.

There is an interesting story later about that, too. After Mr. Truman was gone, and she had the Secret Service always with her, one of them told me one day that they never took a hold of her arm. They always had an arm that she could take a hold of if she wished, but they never ventured to take a hold of her arm to help her up a curb or anything like that. I do not know why, but during one period, the Secret Service men nearly always wore dark glasses when they were with her.

One day I met her up on Maple Street, in front of a store, just barely off the Square, that sold office equipment, and writing material. She had a particular kind of writing pad she was trying to find. They were coming down the street, and I was going up, and we met right in front of the door. I was going into the store, but neither one of us knew that the other was intending to go in, so we visited for a few moments there in front of the store and then we both discovered that we were going in. There were more people in the store than normal, but nobody paid any attention to her. We separated then--we were not standing together--and a woman came over to me and said, "Could I take care of you?" I said, "Go over and take care of Mrs. Truman." She said, "Oh yes." And so she went over to find out. Well, they didn't have what Mrs. Truman wanted, so they left immediately and the woman came back to me and she said, "Oh, thank you. Thank you for telling me, I didn't recognize her at all. I just didn't know her." She said, "I really thought it was some nice lady helping that blind man." That man had on dark glasses.

JOHNSON: A Secret Service man.

GRAHAM: So I told that to Mrs. Truman the next time I saw her. She thought that was about the most interesting story she'd heard in a long time. Several members of her bridge club told me she told it repeatedly at the bridge club, that she was that nice lady helping the blind man.

JOHNSON: I bet she appreciated not being noticed right away and recognized.

GRAHAM: She did not look like her pictures. She had a great deal more life and twinkle to her than was in her pictures. I stood behind her one time at the old Milgram's store down on 24 Highway; she was buying something and we passed the time of day, just like any neighbor would in the grocery store. When she went on, I said to the clerk, "Do you know who you were taking care of?" She said, "No." I said, "Mrs. Truman." "Oh, my goodness, I didn't know that." But this was not uncommon. In fact, I think she worked at them not recognizing her at all.

JOHNSON: You did, of course, visit with Mr. Truman to some extent up until he became ill in June or July of 1966. He quit coming to the Library from then on, but had been regular there before that.

GRAHAM: I was not there as much because she was very concerned about keeping him resting and this sort of thing. I do remember being there one time when he was sitting in the study there. He had a large table, very much like what they had at the hospitals that you pulled up over a bed. It was rather long, an ample table that he could put a lot of things on. I was there not too long after he was gone, and she invited me to come into this room again, and she said, "I'm trying to fix it like he had it at the last." She still had the table there, beside his bed, and had the books that he liked, and all.

I have only been to the home once since Mrs. Truman died. It was very difficult for me to go. I really wanted to remember him and Mrs. Truman especially, as they had been when I saw them in the home, and I really shied away from going through the home as a tourist.

JOHNSON: But you did go once.

GRAHAM: I went with my daughter when she was here from California. She said, "Mother, that's a ridiculous feeling; come on and go." I felt very good about it after I had gone, but it's still something that . . .

JOHNSON: You didn't get out into the kitchen when you used to visit her?

GRAHAM: Not a great deal. I have been out into the kitchen because the kitchen, I believe, opens off that little hall.

JOHNSON: That gets a lot of comments, how primitive it was.

GRAHAM: Well, this was her mother's kitchen. I think she wanted to leave it just like that. She liked things the way she had remembered them. I don't think she had any intention of taking that covering off the wainscoting, for instance. She just wanted to see if she could get a reaction out of me. That was her intention.

In connection with the tour that we planned for the children to go by their home, we always asked the children after they got back to their school, if they wished, to draw a picture of what they had liked the best about their trip. Then, usually in the spring we'd put all the pictures up in the jail museum room and the walls would be papered with fourth grade pictures. Most of them looked like fourth grade pictures, of all subjects you could imagine. But one little girl drew a picture of the Truman home that was exceptional for a child that age. Her parents later told me that she didn't completely finish it at school; she talked her teacher into letting her bring it home, and then she had the folks take her by so she could check some other things on the house before she completely finished the picture. She finished it and sent it in then, and we had it on display.

Well, I called Mrs. Truman to say that I had this unusually nice picture that a fourth grader had drawn, and would she like to have it. She said, "Why don't you bring the girl down and let her give it to me." So we made arrangements on a Saturday for me to bring her down at a set time. She and the parents met me at the museum and we went in my car, to the Truman home. I was

always very careful not to impose. I felt very fortunate to have the experience that I had with both of them and I was very, very hesitant to do anything that seemed like I was imposing upon them. Mrs. Truman had said nothing about bringing the parents in, so I didn't. I was uneasy about it, because I felt they should go with the child, but she had not mentioned it and so I didn't mention it. They were sitting in the back seat of the car out in front. The child and I got out and again she fixed the gate so we could get in, and we got to the front door--we were still standing on the porch--and Mrs. Truman said, "Are those her parents in the car?" I said, "Yes," and she said, "Well, don't you think you ought to invite them in?" I said, "Yes, I'll go get them." I ran out to the car and brought them in. That day she invited us into the south parlor and we sat down. Mr. Truman came in from the back, and greeted them.

Both of them greeted everybody there, the parents and the child and me. After Mr. and Mrs. Truman greeted all, they talked exclusively to the child. The conversation was never with the parents at all, it was with the child.

JOHNSON: That's when Harry was there too, so both Harry and Bess were talking to this child.

GRAHAM: Yes. Again, I was always very careful not to overstay my welcome, so we didn't stay very long. They really just said hello and goodbye to the adults; the conversation was with the child--what did she want to do in school, what was she especially interested in, and it was really . . .

JOHNSON: They were encouraging her interest in history, I suppose.

GRAHAM: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: This would have been in the mid-sixties?

GRAHAM: I'm sorry I'm so bad on dates.

JOHNSON: But apparently Mr. Truman was in reasonably good health at this time.

GRAHAM: Yes, reasonably good health.

There is one thing I forgot to tell you earlier, another event that was much earlier. I don't know whether you have any records as to what year the gazebo came down or not. It was while Dr. Brooks was still at the Library. I was there one day and they were taking down the gazebo, or getting ready to.

JOHNSON: At the home?

GRAHAM: At the home.

JOHNSON: And where was that located?

GRAHAM: Out in the back yard, a little gazebo--out where they used to go to read. I started to say, "Are you sure you want to do that? Can't we fix it?" Mrs. Truman said, "We've fixed it so many times it isn't worth it." Anyway, I went home immediately and called the Truman Library and I said, "Dr. Brooks, you've got to do something." I don't know how quickly he got down there, but anyway, it was down by the time he got there.

JOHNSON: Is that right? So that was the end of the gazebo.

GRAHAM: That was the end of the gazebo. Something else kind of interesting; are you aware that they used to have a pattern in the roof, in the shingles, like some of the old houses did? I think you would see it if you can find some of the oldest pictures of the house, long before probably the Trumans lived there. Now, Mrs. Truman did not say this to me, but I was just having a fit, talking to some of her friends, some of the bridge club members, about why did they put a new roof on and not put those back. Mrs. Truman had said, "It cost too much money." Each one told the same story, so apparently it had been discussed at the bridge club. But they did use to have a design of the shingles on the roof.

JOHNSON: A design on the roof.

GRAHAM: Which was not too uncommon in those days.

Well, I think that's about all. One thing I thought you might be interested in too, Mrs. Truman was extremely careful and I think they're doing a better job now than they did at first, to keep all the window shades at the same distance down, at the same level.

JOHNSON: About half way down?

GRAHAM: Right at the mid-line as I recall. But if one changed, they all were changed, I have noticed.

JOHNSON: Uniform.

GRAHAM: She put out her Christmas wreath by the side of the door, the day before Christmas. I don't know why. I used to think, "Oh, my, they don't have any decorations," but the day before Christmas it always arrived.

JOHNSON: Did they put up a decorated Christmas tree in the house?

GRAHAM: Yes, but I've been told by other members of the bridge club that Margaret decorated it regardless of when she got there.

JOHNSON: She always made a point of coming home for Christmas then?

GRAHAM: I think she always did.

JOHNSON: You mentioned something about planning to bring something over to the home, and there's this huge crowd in front, and it turned out that President [Lyndon] Johnson apparently had stopped by unannounced.

GRAHAM: Unannounced on his way from Washington to his ranch.

JOHNSON: Yes, I think I've read about that.

GRAHAM: I was supposed to take something that Mrs. Truman had ordered, by the house, as I went home to lunch. I went by and didn't stop because there was such a huge crowd of reporters and photographers, all around. When I went back to the museum after lunch, they were still there, so I didn't stop then either. In the early afternoon, Mrs. Truman called me and said, "I am so sorry. We had no idea that the President was going to stop by here and I know that you couldn't have even gotten in, but we really do want to apologize." I said, "Well, no problem at all. I'll stop by as I go home." I did stop by with the package as I was on my way home that evening, and Mrs. Truman was apologizing again. I didn't go into the house. I just handed it to her at the front door. She was apologizing again and Mr. Truman came in from the back hall and he was apologizing; he kept saying, "I'm so sorry about that." And he said, "I thought he was never going to leave."

JOHNSON: Did Mr. Truman ever talk to you about the Historical Society and his feelings or attitude toward the Historical Society?

GRAHAM: Yes, he was very, very much interested to see that we always tried to include the entire county. He did not want it just Independence, just Kansas City, or just any other part of it. He said, "We will not be a true historical society unless we include the entire county and the activities of the entire county." He was very, very pleased. In fact, it was during the time we were negotiating to get the Wornall House that we had this conversation, and he was very, very pleased about that. He and Mrs. Truman contributed to that substantially, as well as they had done in the beginning, when we were doing the restoration work at the old jail. Of course, in the beginning, the Historical Society was the old jail.

JOHNSON: The archives were in the Library, the Truman Library, were they not?

GRAHAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did he ever talk about the archives operation, and what his feeling was toward that?

GRAHAM: He was very happy that we were doing it, because he knew that Dr. Brooks and the people under Dr. Brooks were giving guidance there. I think that had it not been for our guidance from the people at the Truman Library and also from the people at the Nelson Art Gallery, primarily; had it not been for them being so helpful to us, I don't believe we would have the quality of organization that was developed. The people at the Nelson Art Gallery were Ross Taggart and his wife Cathy.

JOHNSON: Yes, you mentioned something about involving Mr. Taggart, and how your daughter got so interested . . .

GRAHAM: I've said earlier in this that we had no help, no paid help to begin with, to do anything. Everything was done by volunteers. And when my Scout troop went into the seventh grade, junior high school, at that time they were meeting at a building very close to the old Jail Museum, and the girls would come up to see how I was getting along after school, many times. They always called me "Cracker," from the Graham cracker. My nickname was Cracker. Finally, they said, "Cracker, you're not going to make it if we don't help you." So they'd get the brooms and they'd sweep and they'd dust and do all kinds of things that they could see needed to be done. I thought, "Well, if they want to do something, we'll develop a Girl Scout badge for museum helpers," and Ross Taggart said, "I'll be glad to come over and give them training." My Girl Scout troop, from Bryant School, did the very first cataloging that was ever done of things that were given to the Society. Now, I'm not talking about books, and things like that; I'm talking about museum objects that they did the cataloging on. To this day, I have been told, more than once, by people working with those records today, "When we find those early records that the girls made, we know they're right. And they have never been anything but right." On a lot of the other things people were doing work without any training, and many times the records were flawed. But Ross Taggart told them how to do it and they did it, under his supervision.

JOHNSON: And your daughter got so interested . . .

GRAHAM: She became so interested in it that she went over and worked for Ross Taggart at the Nelson Gallery two summers while she was still in high school. She did the work on the cataloging of the slides that they used.

JOHNSON: What's her name?

GRAHAM: Her name is Karen Graham Wade today, and she uses that because she got her education under the name of Karen Graham and her masters is in that name, so she uses that officially in her work, as Karen Graham Wade.

JOHNSON: She's director of a museum. . .

GRAHAM: She's director of the Workman and Temple Homestead Museum at the City of Industry in California. The City of Industry is an interesting place; it's just outside of Los Angeles.

JOHNSON: The Jackson County Historical Society archives were moved out of the Library into the Court House; wasn't that during the sixties while you were executive director?

GRAHAM: Yes. First we moved the archives; then later we were given the negatives from the Strauss-Payton collection in Kansas City. We moved them in the rain, when they were first given

to us, to a building out in the county by the old county home. The county has always been very, very cooperative with us.

Another thing I should probably put down for the record is that the Historical Society was given permission, officially, by the County, to use the County Seal as our seal. We're the only organization that was ever given that privilege, and for many years it was on all of our stationery and documents. It is the county seal and we were given permission to use it for that.

JOHNSON: You're saying that the Strauss-Payton negatives were put in storage in a room, or building . . .

GRAHAM: A building.

JOHNSON: Out by the county home.

GRAHAM: Out by Little Blue Road and Lee's Summit Road.

JOHNSON: How about the archives, the papers themselves?

GRAHAM: The Archives were always in the Truman Library until they were moved.

JOHNSON: To the Court House.

GRAHAM: Yes, but the Strauss-Payton collection, we did not have room for them at all at that particular time, and so we placed them out by the County Home. Then we had to move them again in a rain and snowstorm, the second time.

JOHNSON: Did Mr. Truman ever tour the Old Jail museum, on a special tour, while you were director?

GRAHAM: I don't believe so.

JOHNSON: In other words, the last time you know that he was in the Old Jail museum was when they were phoning for contributions?

GRAHAM: I believe so. I could be mistaken about that, and of course, particularly after we acquired the Wornall House and all, I was not there continually. So I would certainly hesitate to say that he was never there, but he didn't do a great deal of that sort of thing.

JOHNSON: Did he talk to you about Charlie Ross at all, about having Charlie . . .

GRAHAM: Just to mention him, but no conversation in detail about that.

JOHNSON: That's where Charlie grew up.

Wouldn't that have been one reason for his special interest too, that it was associated with Charlie Ross?

GRAHAM: Yes, very much so.

JOHNSON: As well as with the old history of the county.

GRAHAM: Yes. It was one reason why he was so interested in having it not torn down.

JOHNSON: Is there anything else you want to add about the kind of lessons that he felt the younger generation had to know? Of course, you've mentioned that he said they ought to know how Government works. Any elaboration on that?

GRAHAM: That was what he normally was elaborating on, some form of that, and I can remember him saying to me, "They need to become interested in their local politics so that they get the kind of people at the local level that they want. It's not just the President, and that sort of thing. They need to have support from the local level to get the kind of government they want." He was always, in my estimation, very much interested, in not necessarily expressing what he thought, but what would be the best for the people.

JOHNSON: Well, apparently he was at that first organizational meeting, I believe in January of '58. Were you a member . . .

GRAHAM: We were members.

JOHNSON: But were you there at that meeting?

GRAHAM: No, not at that meeting.

JOHNSON: Did he ever attend any meetings after that that you know of, of the Historical Society?

GRAHAM: I think that he showed up at some. We used to have quite a few meetings. There were the once-a-year general meetings, at the Library, and I believe that, when he was in town, he came to that.

I personally have another interesting story about the Library and one of these Historical Society meetings. They were normally on Sunday afternoons and one Sunday morning I was there helping to get ready by setting the table and this sort of thing, for the serving after the meeting. I knew very good and well where I could operate and where I couldn't because of the alarm system, but I needed something quickly that was about to fall over on the table and I knew I could get what I needed over on the desk there in the front hall, so quickly I ran over to the desk and I inadvertently set off the alarm. I want you to know that instantaneously, not only was there the noise of the alarm, but the fire trucks and the police started arriving momentarily. They had a great time with me for a while, "Be careful Hazel's coming in."

JOHNSON: This was all hooked into the police station at that time?

GRAHAM: Yes, yes. But you wouldn't believe how quickly they came. This was right after the robbery when they lost their coin collection. And so they were especially careful and everybody was aware of it, and I really upset the whole town.

JOHNSON: Well, the Society got a terrific boost in membership, and I suppose that was partly because of Truman's association with the organization.

GRAHAM: I think so. Of course, Mrs. Helena Crow, whom I mentioned earlier was membership chairman, was an extremely active person. She was a member of the bridge club and very close to them; she visited in the Truman home many times. She made a fantastic effort to get members from all different classes of people, not any one type of person, but all classes. At one time, so far as we could find out, we were the largest county historical society in the United States. There was none registered with more membership.

JOHNSON: Is this when you were about 3,000. Did you reach 3,000?

GRAHAM: Well, again, I can't tell you exactly.

JOHNSON: But the membership has tailed off.

GRAHAM: It has dwindled drastically. There was great enthusiasm among the early people, and those people all got to the place where most of them were not able to do the things that they had done in the past.

JOHNSON: When did you retire as executive secretary?

GRAHAM: In 1982 I retired after 22 years.

JOHNSON: So you were right there in the formative years; you were at the helm.

GRAHAM: Yes. They have complained, some of the people that followed me, that it was my fault that the wages were no better than they were because I was not interested in the wages; that was really not why I was working. I was much more interested in getting the Historical Society on a sound footing. But they say if I had made it a little more evident that they needed to spend more money for employees, we might have been better off.

JOHNSON: Well, you gave them a lot of mileage for the money. That's always a problem, with not-for-profit societies; they don't have a tax base.

GRAHAM: That's right.

JOHNSON: Did they ever try to get a levy, a mill levy, for help to support it?

GRAHAM: Not to my knowledge.

JOHNSON: In Nebraska, I think at least half of the counties there have a mill levy to help their historical societies. But that's not common here in Missouri, is it?

GRAHAM: No, it isn't. Missouri is a little bit unusual, I think, in that all the little towns kind of want to have their own identity, and this is the thing that we've already talked about, between Kansas City and Independence. They each one fight for their own identity, and it's a lot more important that their particular city, town, or community be recognized than that the whole county be recognized.

JOHNSON: Are you saying that Independence has this feeling of being the first, or the oldest, and that Kansas City may have the feeling of being the biggest, and the wealthiest, I suppose?

GRAHAM: Yes, I'm sure. And to a certain extent, adding the Wornall House did become a divisive measure. I was able to work with both of them because I lived here but I knew these people in Kansas City. And it was a little easier for me to do that than it has been for some of the others who didn't know them.

JOHNSON: But the Trumans were aware of this historic division, and they wanted to bridge that?

GRAHAM: Oh, very much so. Mr. Truman was very much aware of it and told me that we would never really have a historical society unless we represented equally the entire county.

JOHNSON: And, of course, as Presiding Judge, he had to do that.

GRAHAM: He knew that.

JOHNSON: He had to bridge east-west; well, that's the way it was organized, Eastern Judge and Western Judge. So, politically, there was that division too.

GRAHAM: Some of this goes clear back, I believe, to the Civil War period, because the Union troops during the time of the worst conflict here in Jackson County, when Order Number 11 was issued, were housed in Kansas City. The people in Independence, however, were the descendants of the early settlers, who were all southerners. Their grandparents and parents had been from the South, and they'd heard this all of their lives. In fact, there's another little anecdote, story, that represents that.

Very shortly after I went to the museum, the women from the DARs [Daughters of the American Revolution] and the UDCs [United Daughters of the Confederacy] were helping do the guiding; this was before I had made contact with the Independence Young Matrons and the Junior Service League girls. They were all older women. One day I told them a funny little story that had happened to me. A young man from the South had been in, bought a postcard, and wanted to know if we sold stamps. I said, "We don't normally sell stamps but I'll be glad to let you have one of mine." So I handed him--and to let you know how long ago that was, it was a Lincoln

stamp--and I handed it to him and he handed it back to me and he said,. "I would not lick a Lincoln stamp." So, I was telling the three elderly ladies that were there sitting--supposedly to do volunteer guiding when people came in--this story. They did not think it was funny. One of them said, "Well, you don't need to think I would lick a Lincoln stamp."

This was bothering me. I worried about it. Well, Mrs. DeWitt, Mrs. J. Roger DeWitt, was president of the Historical Society at that time, a very, very fair-minded person. So I went to her and I said, "We're getting the wrong kind of interpretation by this kind of attitude; we've got to do something about it." Then I said, "What causes this feeling in this part of the country about that?" I told her an example. When our younger daughter was in the third or fourth grade, I told her the story that my grandfather had been a boy that ran away from home to be with his father, who was an officer in the Union Army. He was allowed to stay and become a drummer boy so he could be with his father. He was in Sherman's march to the sea. Now, this child, who was in third or fourth grade, after I got through with the story, which I thought she would be very much interested in, said to me, "Momma, you won't tell anybody that will you?" She had already absorbed that much--that she was not proud of the fact that her great, great grandfather had been in the Union Army and on Sherman's march to the sea. I told Mrs. DeWitt this, and I said, "I don't understand why we have that feeling in Independence." She said, "I think maybe I can help you."

She went upstairs and she brought down what had been a beautiful old quilt, but it had dark stains all over it. She laid it down on the floor; she went to the cupboard and brought out some beautiful crystal and china and laid it in the middle of the quilt. She said, "I grew up having my grandmother tell me when Order Number 11 was issued, and they had to leave the territory, their house was burned, and the only thing they saved was this quilt and these things because they wrapped the dishes in the quilt and buried it in the ground. It was still there when they came back, and this is all our family had from a lovely home, when they got back." She said, "If you grow up hearing that, some people can't take that without becoming very bitter about it." She said, "I know why it happened, and all that sort of thing. But some people have not had the opportunity to get out and mingle with other people."

JOHNSON: Well, of course, Mr. Truman's own mother reputedly wouldn't sleep in the Lincoln bed. That kind of makes me wonder, too, about the fact that Truman had liberal New Deal-Fair Deal policies. Was it your impression that even his neighbors here and the old families of Independence did not appreciate his political policies?

GRAHAM: I think so. I think everybody was very tolerant because they did not feel that she came from that kind of a background. Of course, her family had been very well-known here, but I think some people felt that way. Now, they're not very vocal about it.

JOHNSON: Could you sense that they felt he was a liberal, too liberal, and that his civil rights program did not necessarily impress them?

GRAHAM: Not all of them. Now there is a great change. I was dealing, when I first went there, with this group that represented the older establishment that had been here since the Civil War. I can see how they felt, because you know how Order Number 11 was enforced by these people that were brought over from Kansas, and they looted and burned and everything else. Of course, the ones from here were not any better. I always tried to impress upon our guides, and interpreters, particularly the ones that talked to the children, that we should let them know that the things that the people on this side did were no better than what was done on the other side.

JOHNSON: That was kind of a challenge for you, it seems, to educate the local people, and those who came visiting.

GRAHAM: Well, I didn't try to educate the older ones, because I didn't think it was very much use to. And I didn't run into this with the younger. This is the reason I went to the younger women, because they had children and they were anxious to do that. We had hundreds of volunteers. After we did this tour, we brought the children to the museum, took them upstairs, to the back room upstairs and they saw a puppet show. The Junior Service League girls had made the puppets and everything, that told the history of the area.

JOHNSON: That was the regular field trip for virtually all fourth graders?

GRAHAM: It was available to any fourth grader in the area. The Independence group took more advantage of it than anybody else, but we did have them, even from Kansas City.

JOHNSON: Do they still do that, or how long did that go on?

GRAHAM: As long as I was there.

JOHNSON: That sounds like a very good program. Did Mr. Truman ever talk to you about the Civil War and its effects in this area?

GRAHAM: No, he really didn't.

JOHNSON: I guess it was his idea to teach more about government, how it came to be, what it is, and how to keep it.

GRAHAM: That was the main thrust of my conversations with him, that he wanted to have an input into what those children were being told.

JOHNSON: So you did.

GRAHAM: We tried. We tried hard.

JOHNSON: You added some information and ideas from Truman; well that's very interesting. I want to thank you.

Index

Bryant School, Independence, Missouri

Chrisman, Sallie

Civil War, influence on current attitudes

Constant, Alberta Wilson

Crow, Helena

DeWitt, J. Roger

Duke, Bill

Garr, Vietta

Graham, Donnis

Graham, Hazel:

- as Executive Director, Jackson County Historical Society

- and Truman, Harry S.

- and Truman home in Independence, visits to

Graham, Kenneth

Hahn, Mikey, and Truman, Harry S.

Haukenberry, Ardis

Herold Publishing House

Jackson County Historical Society:

- annual meeting, at Truman Library

- finances of

- guides in museum

- and Hall, Joyce

- and identity problem involving Independence and Kansas City

- and Truman, Harry S., as fund raiser

- and Truman, Harry S., interest in

Jackson County Historical Society museum, cataloging objects for

Jackson County (Missouri) history, and tours by school children

Johnson, Lyndon B., Truman home in Independence, visits

Junior Service League

Lucerne Hotel

Noland, Mary Ethel

Order No. 11 (Civil War)

Ross, Charles G.

Strauss-Payton photograph collection

Taggart, Ross

Truman, Bess Wallace:

- anecdote concerning "blind man"

- and bridge club

- "burr oak" in grandparents' lot

- christening dress of

- gift shop of Jackson County Historical Society museum, patronage of

- and Graham, Hazel, visits with

- and tourists at Truman home in Independence

Truman, Harry S.:

- and children, demeanor toward

- and children, education of

- and Graham, Hazel

- and Hall, Joyce

- Jackson County Historical Society, interest in

- strolls, in Independence

- and students, at Truman Library

Truman, Margaret

Truman home, in Independence:

- drawing of, by fourth grader

- gazebo, demolition of

- Johnson, Lyndon B., visits

- roofing on

- wainscoting in

Wade, Karen Graham