

Oral History Interview
with
MIZE PETERS

Boyhood friend of Harry S. Truman and Bess Wallace Truman and a longtime close friend of the family; prominent Independence, MO druggist for many years; and, subsequently, an employee of the Federal Housing Administration and then of the Savings Bond Division, U.S. Treasury Department, in Missouri.

Independence, Missouri
August 8, August 21, 1963
and
March 3, 1964

by James R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
March, 1965

NOTICE

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Oral History Interview
with
MIZE PETERS

Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri
August 8, 1963
by J.R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

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FUCHS: Mr. Peters, how did you become acquainted with Harry Truman?

PETERS: Our first acquaintance was in the Noland School, which was known as the Southside at that time, in Independence, Missouri. At that time there were only two schools in Independence, the Southside, or what later became the Noland School and the Northside, later the Ott School. He and I were seatmates in the first grade. In those days two children sat together in an old bench with a dividing board that ran down the center. Possibly six or eight benches

were fastened together with a child on either side of each bench. Miss Myra Ewing was our teacher whom we loved very much. You have in

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your collection a picture of this first grade class arranged on the stairs. In this picture Mr. Truman is on the front row while I am four or five rows back. The year that Mr. Truman and I attended that school, he lived on South Chrysler Avenue. I remember that they were boring for a cistern or a well on the Truman property. Instead of water they struck natural gas. They cased it in, and for a number of years the Trumans furnished gas to their neighbors without charge. It was, I believe, the only natural gas in Independence at that time. When the Westside or Columbian School was completed Mr. Truman, living in that district, was transferred to it. If my memory is correct, he and I were together in the Noland School for only one year or perhaps a year and a half, although it has been so long I am not sure.

FUCHS: You don't recall being in the second grade with him?

PETERS: I don't recall being in the second grade at all with him. He was a boy who skipped grades. I wasn't; I played a little bit but he was always studious. I admired this in him. In fact, I suppose I envied him because I wasn't studious; but we got along well together.

FUCHS: You sat in the same seat together?

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PETERS: Same seat, yes. Although these seats were an improvement over earlier ones, they were still pretty crude. There was a desk attached to the back of the seat in front with a shelf under the desk for books.

I believe it was in his second year at Noland that Mr. Truman had diphtheria. I remember this because it was my first knowledge of diphtheria antitoxin, which they gave him.

In those days they gave antitoxin in small doses of from one hundred to two hundred and fifty units. Today fifteen hundred units are given as a preventive, even as much as twenty thousand units. Small doses, it was found, retarded the disease, but when the effect of the antitoxin ran out the disease came back with a stronger or more vicious attack.

While Mr. Truman was ill with diphtheria the Columbian School was completed, and he came back to that school. After that our lives separated for many years, but I always had a very very special spot in my heart for him.

When he got into politics the first thing I did was to tell him that I would do anything I could for

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him when he ran for eastern judge.

Later, while he was Vice President, I was riding with him in his car to Kansas City on one of his trips home when he asked me if I knew who gave him his first political appointment. I said I

supposed I had known but that I had forgotten. He said, "Your uncle, Judge R.D. Mize, who was eastern judge. He appointed me road overseer for Washington township." So that is another family connection we have had with him. My uncle admired him very much, especially his independence. My uncle was a very independent man, not afraid to tell anybody if he thought they were wrong, and always willing to back up what he felt. He felt that Harry Truman was cut off the same bolt of cloth.

FUCHS: Were you born in Independence?

PETERS: Yes, I was born at 209 South Main Street right across from the city hall where my grandmother lived. The original house bordered on the sidewalk, because in those days the streets were not paved. When they built the large house in which I was born, the two story house, it was built back of the original one. The cistern for

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water for the old house was in front of the new house. Over it was a big marble slab with holes punched all around to let in air. In the kitchen we had one of those old-fashioned hand pumps to bring in water. There was no basement under the old house or under the new house until many years later when a basement was dug and a furnace and electricity installed. Because there was no basement, in the wintertime the pump would freeze at night if we didn't take precautions. After saving out some water, we would take the handle of the pump and push it up. This would let the suction off so that the water would run back into the cistern where it would not freeze. Then in the morning we would put some water in the top to prime the pump. The handle would have to be juggled up and down to get the suction started. I was almost grown before we had running water in the house, but I never remember having coal oil lamps in that house; we had gas lights until later when we had electricity.

FUCHS: Was the gas piped into you by a city system?

PETERS: Yes. I don't remember the name of the company, but it was owned by two men whose names were Wait and Wert,

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or some similar names. I remember the W. and W.

FUCHS: Where there gas wells close there?

PETERS: No, it was manufactured gas. We did not have natural gas until many years afterwards.

FUCHS: You say, John Anderson Truman, Mr. Truman's father, furnished some gas for the neighbors. About how many would that have been?

PETERS: Of course there weren't so very many around there then, probably four or five. It wasn't thickly populated there.

FUCHS: Did he have to drill another well to get his water?

PETERS: Of course, as a youngster, the gas impressed me, but water wells were quite ordinary. I had never heard of a gas well before in my life. And a lot of people older than I was thought it was a very wonderful thing to have a natural gas well right there in town. I just don't remember about the water well.

FUCHS: Did you used to go over to his house to play?

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PETERS: Yes, I'd go over there and play and he'd come over to my house to play. Of course, it was quite a distance and we didn't do it very often. Usually he would come to my house after school because I lived closer to the school than he did. Then they moved to Waldo, but I am confused about when they moved to Waldo and when they went to the country.

FUCHS: They moved to Waldo in 1896.

PETERS: Was that from Crysler Avenue?

FUCHS: From Crysler.

PETERS: And how long did they stay on Waldo?

FUCHS: They stayed there until they went to Kansas City, although the story is that they lived for a few months, I believe in 1903, at 903 North Liberty.

PETERS: I had no contact with them when they went to Kansas City and I'd forgotten that. We went different ways then.

FUCHS: Do you remember whether he was in high school or...

PETERS: No, I don't remember that.

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FUCHS: Did you use to see him in the Clinton drugstore?

PETERS: No, I never went in the drugstore to see him there. I just don't know how long he worked there.

FUCHS: I think it was a short time. According to his *Memoirs*, his father suggested that he quit and study a little more, because it was pretty hard to work in the morning and again in the evening.

PETERS: I don't know whether he lived on Waldo or whether he lived on Crysler when he worked in the drugstore, but I think he lived on Waldo. I don't believe he was quite old enough when he lived on Crysler to work in the drugstore.

FUCHS: Well, I'm rather interested because if he left Crysler in 1896, he would have just been twelve and he says in his *Memoirs* that he was fourteen when he worked in the drugstore. One biographer says that he was eleven when he worked in the drugstore. I've been interested in the point of whether he was in high school or in grade school.

PETERS: I do not know this. My uncle owned a store and I

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used to go in when I was quite small and sell chewing gum or cigars or something like that, but I lived only a block or so from his store and I had more or less grown up in it. Working as Mr. Truman did would probably take someone older.

FUCHS: The Clinton store where he worked was where Goldman's Jewelry Store is now?

PETERS: Originally, the Clinton store was on the south side of the square right next door to where the First National Bank is now, or maybe the second door from there. Years later they moved to the corner where the jewelry store is.

FUCHS: In other words, on the north side across Main west of Katz Drug.

PETERS: Yes, on the corner there, the northwest corner.

FUCHS: Would it have been there when Mr. Truman worked there?

PETERS: I think it was because when it was on the south side of the square I was quite small and I'm sure he would have been too small to work then.

FUCHS: What year were you born?

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PETERS: 1885.

FUCHS: Then you're very close to Mr. Truman in age.

PETERS: Yes. I was born September 24, 1885, and he was born May 8, 1884. He was 79 last May and I'll be 78 this September.

FUCHS: Then you would have been just seven years old when you began school?

PETERS: Yes, I was seven years old.

FUCHS: Mr. Truman was eight years old, then, nearly eight and a half.

PETERS: Why he was in the same room I was, as smart as he was, I don't know. He was always smart but he didn't try to impress people with his smartness. He enjoyed studying and learning.

FUCHS: When you would go over to his home, what games did you play, do you recall?

PETERS: My goodness, I don't remember. Kids don't play the same games now that we did then.

FUCHS: I asked because the story is that he, because of

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his eyeglasses, didn't play shinny and some of the rougher games.

PETERS: No, he didn't. It was very unusual for children to wear glasses then. Kids had a tendency to make fun of people who wore glasses. They'd call him four-eyes. But it didn't seem to bother him to be called that.

FUCHS: Did you have bicycles to ride after school?

PETERS: In later years I had a bicycle.

FUCHS: Do you remember Mr. Truman riding one? I never heard that he did.

PETERS: No. But we had what were called velocipedes; they call them tricycles now. It was a three-wheeled affair. You couldn't ride it on the street but had to stay on the sidewalk. And because they had no gears you couldn't ride far on them. I particularly remember riding it on the sidewalk in front of our house. The sidewalk was made of those octagon flagstones. At the foot of the hill was a board crossing with the long boards laid parallel. Between the boards was a space and it seemed that every time I went down the hill I got the front wheel

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of my velocipede caught in the space. It would go over and I would hit my head. I had two knots on my head until I was grown.

FUCHS: Was Bess Wallace in that first grade class?

PETERS: No. She lived on the other side of town and went to Ott School. But her mother, Mrs. Wallace, and my mother were school girls together. They graduated together at the old Woodland College. They were very close friends. She is just a little older than I am. I hope she will not mind my telling this, and I don't think she will. Her mother brought her to see me when I was just a newborn baby. She was my first caller. So I've known her always. Later I sometimes took her to dances, and I always thought she was a very, very fine, wonderful person. I still think so. I don't think anybody has ever graced the White House with any more dignity than she has.

FUCHS: When did you renew your acquaintance with her?

PETERS: On the Woodland College property (where Bryant School is now) there was a pond where we used to skate in winter. She lived close, on Delaware Street, and...

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she was there a lot.

FUCHS: This was when you were in grade school?

PETERS: Yes. I don't remember just how old we were. Then, as I said, I have taken her to parties. We were always very good friends.

FUCHS: You were an early beau of hers.

PETERS: Well, I wouldn't say I was her beau, but I've taken her to dances. In those days there was a 3-story building on the south side of the square where Penney's is now (the Mercier building). On the third floor there was a big ballroom where Miss Dunlap ran a dancing school. We went to the dancing school and had dances there. Sometimes some of us boys would hire an orchestra. We had a time raising the money but we managed to now and then. The girls would bring their dancing slippers in a slipper bag and then put them on after they got there. They wouldn't walk in them, because usually we walked to the dance. If we felt right flush and the weather was bad, we'd hire an enclosed cab for a dollar and a half both ways. It was hard to raise the dollar and a half so we didn't do that very often. I don't remember

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Harry ever going to these dances. He must have lived out in Grandview then.

FUCHS: What years would that have been, when you were going to dances? Were you out of high school then?

PETERS: I don't remember.

FUCHS: Did you go to Ott High for a year or so?

PETERS: No. When I completed the school at Southside School, which was probably sixth or seventh grade, the high school was right across from the Memorial building; it later burned. I had a bad case of pneumonia and when I recovered, it seemed that everyone I knew was going to work for the railroad and making money. I decided I wanted to be a railroad man. A man named Haldeman who lived here in town was quite a big shot in the Kansas City Southern Railroad whose office was in the Temple Block on Grand Avenue, about 7th or 8th and Grand. Several of the fellows I knew had worked up to good jobs there -- \$75.00 a month. That was a lot of money. I got a job there at \$15.00 a month. I paid carfare on the electric line and lunch and I saved money out of that. My mother started my first bank account from that. I worked there a year

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and went from \$15.00 a month to \$20.00 and then to \$25.00 a month.

Then I decided I wanted to learn the drug business. I had lived close to the drugstore and all my younger life, whenever I wasn't in school, I would go there. I always liked to meet people and I had always associated with people older than myself. So in the year of the St. Louis World's Fair -- 1904 -- I quit my job with the railroad. I took a vacation and went to the Fair. Then from St. Louis another fellow and I took a river trip to Memphis, Tennessee, and back, on the Mississippi River. When I came back I went to work for Mr. Walker. My uncle had sold his store to Carpenter, and Carpenter sold it to Walker. (Later I bought the store from Walker.) I went to work for Walker for \$14.00 a month and I worked up to \$25.00, but I didn't particularly like it.

Then I bought a racket store about where the Firestone Store is now on South Main Street.

FUCHS: What is a "racket store?"

PETERS: It was about the same as a ten-cent store nowadays, but they were called racket stores. They had about the

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same things that Woolworth handles now, lamps, chinaware, kitchenware, most everything but drugs.

I had worked in this store at Christmastime and Fourth of July. The man who owned it died suddenly and the store was for sale. I borrowed the money and bought the store. Then I went to the College of Pharmacy in Kansas City and worked at the same time. In 1910 I passed the Missouri state board of pharmacy. In the same year I was married.

FUCHS: Do you retain any other impression of Mr. Truman in school as far as his scholarship?

PETERS: He was always the head of his class. Of course, we were separated in school after that short time, but I continued to admire him from childhood on, more than I have ever admired anyone else.

FUCHS: Do you remember anything about his mother, in the early years, when you went over there after school?

PETERS: No, I don't, except that she was always lovely to us and a lovely person to be around, motherly to all of us. My most vivid memory of her is in later years after her husband died. After I sold my drugstore I went with the Treasury Department. I used to travel all over the state.

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I would stop by her place, and if it was summertime I'd take her a carton of soda pop, or in winter I'd take her something else and visit with her for a little while. She was a very interesting person, very fine. I really knew her better than I did him. I don't remember what year he died.

FUCHS: November, 1914.

PETERS: I had the drugstore then. I bought it in 1912.

FUCHS: He was in Grandview then and acting as road overseer.

PETERS: You mean Harry's father?

FUCHS: Yes.

PETERS: Yes, he was a road overseer. Because of Independence being the county seat, the farmers came here, especially when court was meeting. Every township had a road overseer appointed by the county court, a farmer living in the district. John Truman, Harry's father, was overseer in Washington township. After he died my uncle, Judge R. D. Mize, then eastern judge, appointed Harry to fill the elder Mr. Truman's place.

FUCHS: When you were boys, did Vivian Truman play with you?

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PETERS: I just don't remember. You see, Vivian was younger than we were.

FUCHS: Did you see Mr. Truman then from the time you quit school until he entered politics? Did he ever come in your racket store?

PETERS: No, he lived out in Grandview, and then he had that haberdashery store in Kansas City.

FUCHS: After the service. Well, you really didn't see him much then until after he came back from the service.

PETERS: No, I didn't.

FUCHS: Do you remember anything else about his father?

PETERS: Oh, yes. He father was very quick-tempered and he didn't mind a good, honest fight.

FUCHS: Did you ever see him in a fight?

PETERS: Well, no, but I saw the results of one. It was when my father had his livery stable. My father was a stockman and he had a sales barn right across from the county jail in an old rock and frame building. Farmers north and east of Independence used to drive in and stand

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their horses at the hay, or feed. My father had attendants and they would put the buggies back in the room and feed the horses in stalls. It was 15 cents for hay and 25 cents for corn.

FUCHS: This was a livery stable?

PETERS: He had light livery, horses and single buggies to rent, no carriages like the ones we went to dances in, but you could get a surrey or a team. Harry's father was a stockman, and he rode a horse and carried a stub of a buggy whip with him. One day Rube ShROUT, a high-tempered, high-strung fellow came in to the barn to get his horse and buggy. He had a knot bleeding on his face and he was about to cry. My father asked him, "Rube, what's the matter?"

He said, "I got in an argument with John Truman uptown and he hit me with a whip."

FUCHS: About what year was that?

PETERS: Oh, I haven't any idea.

FUCHS: How old would you have been then?

PETERS: I was a good-sized boy. It was in the early 1900's

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because it was before automobiles. My father was a Kentuckian who loved horses and raised horses. When automobiles came in he said they would never take the place of horses. But he found out that they did. He afterwards owned an automobile.

FUCHS: Did you ever go in his store in Kansas City?

PETERS: Yes, I was in his store a few times, not many.

FUCHS: Did you ever talk to him in those days about how he happened to get started or about the way business was going?

PETERS: No, I never did. Really, our closest friendship was after he got into politics. Then when he ran for Senator we went different places together. I remember that Mrs. Peters and I went to Sedalia one time and another time to Pleasant Hill. It was at Pleasant Hill that he lost his voice from talking so much. Mrs. Peters and I took Mrs. Truman to Pleasant Hill. He was coming from somewhere else and we met at Pleasant Hill. He just could get through his speech and it was a terrible effort for him to do that. When he rode back with Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Peters and me in our car I told him, "I

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think Abbott's Calcidine tablets will help that. We can stop by my store on the way home." I went in and got him a few of those and they did help. He was able to go on then to his other talks.

FUCHS: I was wondering what your first reaction was, other than that you were for him? How did you feel about his entering politics?

PETERS: Oh, I thought it was fine, at least for politics. I thought it was wonderful for an administration to have a man like him.

FUCHS: Did you go to his wedding in 1919?

PETERS: Yes, we did, but for some reason I have a hard time remembering about it.

FUCHS: Do you know who Alden Millard was who served as an usher in the wedding?

PETERS: Yes, I remember him quite well, but I don't know what the connection was.

FUCHS: Was he from an old family in town? I've seen the list of people who participated in the wedding and one of

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them was this man that I didn't know about.

PETERS: Millard's grandfather was a Republican mayor of Independence years and years ago. His grandsons were all Democrats. I don't know whether their father was a Democrat or Republican.

FUCHS: You knew Charlie Ross didn't you?

PETERS: Oh, yes.

FUCHS: But he wasn't in your school class, was he?

PETERS: No, I don't remember what class he was in. I think he was ahead of me.

FUCHS: He graduated with Mr. Truman in the same class from high school.

PETERS: Charlie was another smart boy. They went on. I kind of stayed at first base. I never missed passing any grades, but then I didn't skip any as they did. Charlie was a very bright boy and a very likeable fellow but a hooky player. You know where May Grain Company is, right by the railroad track? There was an old flour mill there, and the kids used to play hooky and

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hide in there. Harry Truman didn't play hooky but there was quite a bunch of boys who used to, and Charlie was among them. I never was a hooky player, but I was an only child, and if I had a headache my parents let me stay at home. Then when the school bell rang I quickly got over the headache.

The janitor at the Southside School was a little old fellow named Speck who had chin whiskers. When it was time for school to begin he would get out on the steps -- where that picture of the class was taken -- and he would ring a great brass bell.

Once old man Speck heard that the boys were playing hooky. He went down to the mill where they were hiding. The boys ran down the railroad track trying to get away from him. Charlie Ross fell down and cut his nose. It just bled like the dickens and it left a scar for the rest of his life. He went home and his mother wanted to know how he hurt his nose. He told her that he went down to the spring on Spring Street (near the Waggoner-Gates Mill) and as he was leaning down to get a drink of water, a frog bit him. I wasn't with

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the boys; I only heard about it afterwards. Years later I told Charlie, "You've always had literary ideas; remember your story about the frog biting your nose?"

Charlie Ross was chief Washington correspondent for the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* and he was covering the Republican convention in Kansas City when Harding was nominated. We had a dinner at our home at that time and Mr. Truman came and Charlie Ross and Mr. Will Southern, editor of the Independence *Examiner*, and Lon Gentry, who was the architect for this building, the Truman Library. Next day, Charlie asked me if I'd like to go to the convention. I said, "Yes."

He said, "I'll give you a press pass. I'm not going today and I'll let you have my pass. Now don't tell anybody, you just walk in like you were me."

So I went in; I didn't have a pencil or a tablet. I sat in there with all those correspondents who were taking down notes and writing furiously. On my right was a fellow from Oklahoma covering some paper there. In a lull, he said to me, "Don't you ever take notes?"

I said, "Oh, no, I don't take any notes. I just

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listen to it and then I go over to the hotel room and just write up something and the paper takes it."

He said, "My God, I wish I could do that."

FUCHS: This dinner party you had. Do you remember anything that happened then? Did you discuss politics?

PETERS: I suppose they did. I don't remember except that we all had a very nice time.

FUCHS: I've seen where you called Will Southern in your papers "Uncle Willy." Did you call him that to his face?

PETERS: I never called him Uncle Willy. I believe it was when he was spoken of that they called him that, not when he was spoken to.

FUCHS: Was he frequently referred to that way?

PETERS: I think it was usually someone who didn't like something he had written. He was very independent of his friends. He'd criticize Mr. Truman many times although he still was an admirer of his.

FUCHS: What do you think the basis of that was, that he was

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sometimes up "on him" and sometimes down "on him" as I believe I saw in some correspondence?

PETERS: I knew Mr. Southern very, very well, and I admired him, but there were some things he was very set on. He was more or less a reformer. He was very "dry" for one thing. But he did admire Mr. Truman.

You know, many people speak out their admiration for him in unexpected ways. Recently we sold some antiques. Mrs. Peters put an ad in the *Examiner* and just the phone number, no address or name. A man called up to find the address, then he came out to see an old iron pot. When he got here he seemed to know me, although I'm not sure of his name. As he left he said, "'You're an old friend of Truman's, aren't you?'"

I said, "Yes, we were seatmates in the first grade in school and we've been close friends since."

He said, "Well, you know, people today are appreciating him more than they ever appreciated him when he was in the White House. They're still after his opinions on things. He did things when he was in the White House and that's something not all of them do. As time goes on, they're appreciating Truman more."

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Second Interview with Mize Peters, Harry S. Truman Library, August 21, 1963. By J. R. Fuchs.

FUCHS: In the last interview, I asked you why Mr. Southern sometimes opposed Mr. Truman and other times seemed to be strong for him, and you said that he was somewhat of a reformer; but you also mentioned prohibition in that connection. I wondered if you meant that, perhaps his ill will at times, so to speak, towards Mr. Truman, was because of the fact that Mr. Truman wasn't strong for prohibition?

PETERS: I have often wondered whether that was the reason or not. Mr. Southern was not a fanatic dry, or prohibitionist, but he had his ideas and he believed in them and regardless of what the other fellow thought, he was going to express his opinion. I don't think he ever had any serious thing against the former President. I didn't agree with Mr. Southern either on prohibition, but I think he respected Mr. Truman's feelings and

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my feelings. In his paper, however, he exercised his editor's privilege of expressing his opinion.

FUCHS: What was Mr. Southern's attitude towards machine politics, Pendergast in particular?

PETERS: Of course, that's been so long ago, I just don't remember his definite attitude; he was not a machine man, or he didn't believe in machine politics.

FUCHS: Do you think Colonel Southern had anything to do with Mr. Truman declaring his candidacy for the eastern district judgeship back in 1922?

PETERS: I can't say that he endorsed it, but I do not think he opposed it. I think the main thing was that he was against Pendergast; not against Truman but against Pendergast. Anyone in politics is bound to have some black marks against him at some time, and people against him. Take for instance the country road system. At that time everybody thought Mr. Truman was crazy because he was advocating

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paved roads. It turned out to be the most wonderful thing that ever happened to Jackson County. And even the Republicans admitted that it was done at minimum cost. There was no evidence of graft in any of the things that he was connected with, but in other things there was.

FUCHS: I saw where you took a trip to Hannibal, Missouri with Colonel Southern. Was that related to politics in any way?

PETERS: No. Mr. Southern wanted to go to the State Editors' Association which met there, but he didn't drive a car. He asked if I would drive him in his car if he paid all the expenses. I was glad to go, for he was a fine fellow to be out with. At that time I was having a hard time because the chain stores had come to Independence with too much competition for a small businessman like me. I was worried, and that may be the reason he took me, to take my mind off my business. Mr. Southern

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knew all the editors and I enjoyed the trip and meeting the men very much.

FUCHS: I think we've touched on your memories of Mr. Truman's parents, I wondered about Mrs. Truman's parents. Do you have recollection of them?

PETERS: Oh, yes. Mrs. Truman's mother and my mother were school girl friends together. They graduated together at the old Woodland College. I've known the family all my life. I always thought Mrs. Wallace was a beautiful woman. She was a lady, an aristocrat. I don't mean that she was highbrow, but she just looked and acted like a perfect lady and an aristocrat. I remember how glad she was to see me once when they were staying in Blair House while the White House was being

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revamped. She was always lonesome for her home in Independence when she was in Washington. I spent a little while with her that time when I was in Washington. I was always very fond of her.

Mr. Wallace was a handsome man. He was very active in the Masonic Lodge, especially the Knight-Templars. At one time he was the Eminent Commander. They are elected to that office for one or two years, and they have a gold-plated sword. I used to belong myself, but during the depression I dropped everything but the Blue Lodge. I got them to put Mr. Wallace's sword up at the Jackson County Library. I don't know if it is still there or not.

FUCHS: Your association, you say, picked up with Mr. Truman again when he got in politics. Did your social relationships become strong then, at that time?

PETERS: Yes, because whenever he would go around over the state to speak, we'd go. Then when he was campaigning for judgeships for the county court, we went to different meetings. My wife has never been active in politics, but she was always interested in anything that concerns the Trumans. She'd go with us to the political meetings.

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FUCHS: When did this Tuesday Bridge Club get started?

PETERS: Well, that's been going on for a long time; when it started it was much larger than it is now.

FUCHS: Did that start before he was Senator?

PETERS: Oh, yes. It's been a long time. What year did he first run for Senator?

FUCHS: '34.

PETERS: Oh, the bridge club began long before that. It's been going on much more than 30 years.

FUCHS: Were you seeing Mr. Truman on a social basis when he was first running for judge, say back in the twenties?

PETERS: Oh, yes. We lived on the northeast corner of Truman Road and Delaware Street, and they lived across the street. And, of course we were back and forth. Then several years later we bought another house farther down on Delaware Street where we lived for thirty-one years. When Margaret was a little girl we used to take her down to Blue Springs to get a chocolate

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soda. Did I tell you about that?

FUCHS: No.

PETERS: It was during the Second World War. Hansel Lowe ran a drugstore at Blue Springs. They put up the best chocolate soda in the country since I used to make them when I had my store. We used to take Margaret, and sometimes Mrs. Truman would go with us and take our daughters and go down to get these sodas. This must have been after Mr. Truman was President.

Because of the war chocolate syrup was hard to get; stores were limited in the amount they could buy. Lowe's store was a Rexall Store and he bought the Rexall people's syrup which was very good. Lowe had been trying to get the Rexall salesman to sell him some extra syrup. One afternoon we took Margaret down with us for sodas. While we were sitting at the booth I noticed a fellow take off his hat and lay it on the counter in the back of the store and walk up past us and then back. Later, Hansel Lowe told me that he had been telling the salesman that Margaret Truman was fond of his chocolate sodas because of the chocolate. The salesman wouldn't believe him. So that day when the salesman came in,

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Lowe said, "There's Margaret Truman now." The salesman had to see for himself, so he walked past. After that he sent Lowe twenty-five gallons of extra syrup.

FUCHS: Do you know if Mr. Truman and Charlie Ross remained good friends after he got out of school or did that pick up again later? How did that acquaintanceship grow?

PETERS: Originally, when they were in school together, I think each admired the other's intellect. Charlie was the chief Washington correspondent of the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* for many years. Then when his children were little he was a foreign correspondent. Even while Charlie was out of the country, they always had an admiration for each other. Each one appreciated the other one's intelligence. When Truman came into the White House he wanted Charlie for his press secretary. We all thought it was a wonderful thing for both of them.

FUCHS: Did you know Tom Pendergast personally?

PETERS: I've met him; I didn't know him well; I was only in his office once.

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FUCHS: How did you participate in politics?

PETERS: I've always supported the Democratic ticket both locally and nationally and what little I could do I always did. I never was a ringleader, but I was active in all the civic things here and I always had some influence around town.

FUCHS: You worked as a precinct worker?

PETERS: No, I wasn't a precinct worker.

FUCHS: You just, more or less supported him informally through your friendship?

PETERS: Through my friendship and anytime I could put a plug in -- whatever I could do -- and contributed what I could to the campaign fund.

FUCHS: Did you belong to a political club?

PETERS: Yes, I belonged to the Democratic clubs, whatever was in vogue at that time. They change, you know, with administrations. I never participated in them, though, because I was in the drug business and I had to work nights and Sundays and long hours, but wherever I could

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do Harry any good, why, I'd go out and do it.

FUCHS: You did favor a particular faction, then?

PETERS: Oh, yes, I was always considered a "Goat," and my uncle, Judge Mize, was a Pendergast man. In fact, Pendergast named one of his boys for him, Robert Pendergast.

FUCHS: Did you know Mike Pendergast?

PETERS: No, I've seen him but I never knew him. I knew Jim quite well, but I never knew Mike. The only time I ever remember seeing Mike was when there was a big political convention in St. Joseph, Missouri. He was sitting on the porch of the Robidoux Hotel watching a big parade.

FUCHS: Did you consider him the leader in Eastern Jackson County?

PETERS: He was in his time, before Tom.

FUCHS: Generally they say that Tom was more or less boss in Kansas City, and Mike was Tom's lieutenant, more or less, in Eastern Jackson County -- in other words, the

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county outside Kansas City. Well then, when Mike died in 1929, did you consider Truman as his direct successor as the chief of politics in Eastern Jackson County?

PETERS: Well, I never thought of it that way. To me, Truman was always the leader. Of course, I appreciated that those fellows were the head of the organization, but I always felt that Truman was just as much value to the organization as the organization was to him. I think they felt that way too.

FUCHS: In other words, you did consider him a power in Eastern Jackson County?

PETERS: Oh, yes, no question about it; he still is.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything particular about his candidacy for political office in 1922, about how he happened to run or how people felt about it?

PETERS: No, I don't. All I remember is, when he announced he would run, I was for him.

FUCHS: Do you remember anything about the Ku Klux Klan activities?

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PETERS: They were quite active.

FUCHS: Did you talk to Harry Truman about it?

PETERS: No, I never discussed it with him at all. There was a terrible to-do about it. One thing that put me against the Ku Klux Klan was when they turned against one of the most benevolent citizens of Independence, Mr. A. J. Bundschu because he was a Catholic. He did more for Independence than any one individual in his time that I know of. They were going to boycott him.

FUCHS: Do you recall Arthur Metzger?

PETERS: Oh, yes.

FUCHS: What was his background and how did he become associated with Mr. Truman?

PETERS: He was lawyer, a Democrat I suppose. Arthur's mother died when he was a boy and his father married Annie Sampson. The Sampsons had a haberdashery store on the east side of the square, where the Kresge store is now. There were several sisters and three brothers, Sol, Bob, and Port. Port sold papers on the street and also the brothers were

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bill posters. All the time they were pasting up their bills they would be arguing and fussing among themselves, so it seemed as if they were mad enough to cut each other's throats, but all the time they would be working like Trojans. When Kresge leased the Sampson building, it was one of the first long-term leases in Independence, a 99 year lease. Port went around saying, "I tell you, we're doing fine. We made a 99 year lease on our building and at the end of the 99 years we'll get the property back.

Well, anyway, Arthur's father and Annie raised Arthur and educated him to be a lawyer. I remember him as a great, big, fat man.

FUCHS: He was associated with Mr. Truman in the Community Savings and Loan Association. Do you recall...

PETERS: No, I don't know just how he was associated, possibly as attorney.

FUCHS: Do you recall much of Mr. Truman's activities with that Savings and Loan?

PETERS: Wasn't he county judge at the time?

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FUCHS: Well, he more or less got into it in between his defeat in '24 and when he was reelected in '26.

PETERS: I know they had an insurance business and I took out some insurance with him.

FUCHS: Was that called the Truman and Barr Insurance Company? I've seen an advertisement for "Truman and Barr Insurance."

PETERS: I knew Judge Barr quite well, but I'd forgotten that he was in that. It was just because Truman was in it that I took out insurance with them. Harry didn't ask me to, I just did it on my own.

FUCHS: You mentioned the story about the dedication of the county road system that was constructed while Mr. Truman was...

PETERS: That was down at the Sni-A-Bar Farm, owned by Nelson at Grain Valley.

FUCHS: This was about what year?

PETERS: I believe he was presiding judge at that time. I'm awfully poor on dates.

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FUCHS: You mentioned that you asked for a concession there.

PETERS: Yes, a concession for the Boy Scouts, that's right. He gave it to me, and nobody could sell anything there but this one stand the Boy Scouts had. We sold hot dogs and pop. I froze my hand from reaching down into the ice for soda pop. Had to carry it in a sling for three or four weeks. But we made several hundred dollars, I believe, for the Scouts.

FUCHS: Were you at the dedication of Colburn Road in 1930 when Mr. Truman declared his candidacy for reelection to the county court?

PETERS: I suppose I was. I usually went to all those things. But I just don't remember that particular one.

FUCHS: Do you recall the mention of Mr. Truman's name as a candidate for governor?

PETERS: Yes, I recall that it was done, but I don't know who did it or...

FUCHS: You didn't talk to him about it?

PETERS: I didn't talk to him about it, except to say something like, "If you want to be governor, I'm for you."

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FUCHS: Were you acquainted with Fred Canfil?

PETERS: Oh, yes. I knew Fred very well.

FUCHS: Do you know how Mr. Truman and Canfil became such close friends?

PETERS: I don't know, maybe during the war. Were they in the same company in the war?

FUCHS: I don't believe so.

PETERS: Of course, some people liked Fred Canfil and a lot of people didn't like him, but I think he was one of the most loyal friends Truman ever had. I believe if it had been necessary, he would have jumped off the Empire State Building, if it would have helped Truman. I think he was just that loyal. He did a lot of things I think hurt Truman, but he did a lot of things that were good.

FUCHS: What were some of them?

PETERS: Oh, just little things and big loyalty. I think that whatever he did that hurt him wasn't intentional, just his overzealousness to do something for his friend.

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FUCHS: You don't recall anything in particular?

PETERS: No, I don't recall anything in particular except he'd go out and put up posters himself, or any little thing that would help him.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything of the farewell dinner for Truman when he left Independence for the Senate in 1934?

PETERS: I don't recall any specific incidents. I was there, but I don't recall anything.

FUCHS: What about Spencer Salisbury and the enmity which developed between him and HST?

PETERS: I'm not going to comment on Spencer; I don't want to say anything about him.

FUCHS: You don't care to volunteer anything for...

PETERS: Well, he's never done anything to me, as far as that's concerned.

Third interview with Mize Peters, Harry S. Truman Library, March 3, 1964

FUCHS: In an earlier interview, you stated you had been in Tom Pendergast's office only once. I wonder if you recall why you were there and when that was?

PETERS: I remember making the call but it has been many years since and I have forgotten why I went there. I do remember that I was received very nicely; I had no trouble making the contact in the interview. I was there only a short time.

FUCHS: Was this when Mr. Truman was a judge?

PETERS: This was while he was judge, yes. That's been quite a while ago.

FUCHS: I noticed in the records that Perle Mesta, former minister, and Mrs. Peters were quite close friends. How did that come about?

PETERS: When Mrs. Peters first visited the White House she met Mrs. Mesta. When the Trumans were first in the White House, they invited the bridge club there for a weekend. They became well acquainted with Mrs.

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Mesta then. Later Mrs. Mesta invited them to visit her in Oklahoma. We still get a Christmas card every year from her brother down there.

Once when a special joint session of Congress had been called, I was in Washington. The President called it for some important message. When I got back to the hotel there was in my box a ticket which Mrs. Truman had sent over for me to go to this meeting. I sat in the box reserved for the President's family. Mrs. Mesta was there too. I sat by her and had a very pleasant conversation with her. The tickets were so much in demand that people were lined on both sides of the Capitol steps down to the foot of the hill. They were trying to get tickets from people going up. They'd offer almost any price for a ticket. But I wasn't going to get rid of my ticket. I held onto it. The session was very interesting. I've had the privilege of being in so many things that ordinarily you don't get to, by our close connection with the Trumans.

FUCHS: I believe you served on the Board of Election Commissioners?

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PETERS: Yes, that was in the '30's. It must have been about '32 when I first started on it. I was the Democratic clerk on it. The Board was right across the street from my drugstore.

FUCHS: You were the clerk to the board?

PETERS: Yes, clerk to the board.

FUCHS: How did you get that appointment?

PETERS: Through Mr. Truman. All the appointments I've ever gotten have been through him. I don't remember if this was a court appointment or a state appointment.

FUCHS: Was the Harvey Shannon who served as a clerk at the same time a relative of Joe Shannon?

PETERS: No, he was a Republican. I don't think he was any kin. I think I asked him once. He was a very fine fellow, though. I rather enjoyed serving with him. He was very cooperative. He's dead now.

FUCHS: What was your first Federal job that you obtained through Mr. Truman?

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PETERS: Federal Housing. I was with the Federal Housing seven years. I was financial field representative. My job was to meet with chambers of commerce and civic organizations of all kinds, make talks on the Federal Housing program and tell them how to take advantage of it. Then I would call on all the lending institutions such as banks, building and loan and mortgage companies, and get them to join so that they would have the authority to make the loan. The Federal Housing insured the loan, not with Government money, but insurance where you paid an insurance fee on it. This made it possible for people to own a ready-built home or to build one starting with a very small equity and a very reasonable interest rate. Later, of course, different branches of it were created for large housing projects.

After I was with the Federal Housing for seven years I was transferred to the Savings Bond Division. The work was practically the same, except that I sold bonds instead of the Federal Housing program. We sold E bonds and other bonds that individuals buy. They run from \$25 to \$100. You pay \$75 for a hundred

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dollar bond which in ten years will pay off at \$100. I traveled all over the state. I was Assistant State Director and western Missouri was my principal territory, but I did go over to St. Louis at different times.

When the war was over, Washington said that I'd have to get quarters (an office) rent free. My secretary and I were all that was left of the organization. I was kind of up in the air until I thought of my friend Robert Caldwell who was the chairman of the board of the Federal Reserve Bank in Kansas City, and Gavin Leedy, the president of the same bank. The Federal Reserve Bank, you know, is the banker's bank. Other banks have stock in it and keep their surplus money in it just the way we keep our money, if we have any, in our local banks. I told these two men my predicament. They said, "You find out when you have to move and we'll fix you up all right." So when the time came, they put me on the balcony. I had a private office in the west wing of the balcony. Then one day William Woolly, the vice president of the bank, came to me and asked me if I'd object to moving across to the other side in an open space right by

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the banister that looked down on the lobby. I told him I'd be glad to go anywhere they wanted to put me, however, there was one thing I said, "You don't have anything on the walls here, no pictures or anything, and I don't have a place to put the picture of my President." (I have a big autographed picture of President Truman which he sent to me right after he got in the White House. It goes everywhere with me.)

Bill said, "Well, you let me see it."

I said, "I don't want you to violate any rules, but I would like to have it up where I can look at it once in a while; it gives me courage to go on."

The next morning he came from his office, and he called up to me through the banister from below, "I'm sending one of the janitors up to hang that picture for you right on the wall there." It was the only picture on the wall. They were the finest people I ever was with. They did so much for me, and they said, "We want you to be one of us; we want you to eat with the officers. We'll bill you for it every month, and you sit at the round table with the officers of

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the bank. And if you want to bring any friends of yours to lunch anytime, we'd be glad to have them." All the head officers ate at this big round table. I used to take people I thought they'd be interested in. For instance, Judge Henry Bundschu was one they always liked to have. He always had a lot of stories for them and he's a good conversationalist.

Once I took some very prominent ballet dancers, world famous ones, who were guests of Blevins Davis when he was in his home. These men were foreigners and I took them there with Blevins.

Then, I wanted to show my appreciation for what these bankers did for me. There was no real reason why they should be so nice to me, and I appreciated it and wanted to do something for them. So once when the President was coming back from Washington, I asked some of them if they would like to go over to the airport with me and meet him. They all said they would like to, so I said, "Well, I'll start at the top and go down." The first time I took Bob Caldwell and Gavin Needy, John Phillips, Jr. and Henry Kopang.

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The bank has a Cadillac which they use when out-of-town bankers come to town and want to see something about the city. One of the guards acts as chauffeur. So this guard, Fred, drove us over to the airport.

On the way over, Leedy said, "You know, when the President was in law school here, I was his teacher, but he won't remember that, it's been so many years and so much has happened."

And I said, "I'll bet you he does."

So we drove over there. I knew the Secret Service men and they let us in. I always waited, though, until the family greeted him. Then when they kind of stepped away, I'd step out where he could see me, and he'd start towards me. I told these men to walk right behind me. Leedy wasn't quite as tall as I was, and the President couldn't see him behind me. "Mr. President, I've got an old friend of yours here, Gavin Leedy."

He said, "Where is he?" And when Leedy stepped out he said, "'Well, how's my old schoolteacher?" That was the first thing he said to him. It just tickled Leedy to death. Going back I said, "See

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what a memory he has?"

Before the plane came in, the young fellow who drove us over asked me, "Do you suppose there will be any chance of me getting to see the President?"

I said, "Unless Mr. Leedy wants you to stay with the car, "I'll see that you meet him, and the President will shake hands with you."

So, after he'd greeted the rest of the fellows, I said, "Mr. President, I've got nice young fellow here who's a guard at the Federal Reserve Bank. He acted as our chauffeur coming over here, and he said he'd never met a President or even seen one. I told him that this was his chance." So I introduced him to the President and he shook hands with him. That boy was really set up. When he went back to the bank he told the other guards, "Listen, I'm not going to wash that hand for a year and if you want to shake hands with me, it'll cost you twenty-five cents." John Phillips, who was then one of the vice presidents, was a Republican. He and I used to go back to Washington together. On our first trip

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back there together, I said, "John, I'm going to see if I can't take you in to see the President."

He said, "I'd certainly appreciate it."

So, I did. The President gave us each a package of book matches which said, "I stole this from President Truman. " Going back on the train (in those days we didn't fly) we came through Chicago with about two hours layover. John wanted to go to the Federal Reserve Bank there. So we went there and had lunch at the bank. John was full of his visit; he'd been to the White House, and he said to the president of the bank, a man by the name of Young, "Hap, see here what I got from the President." He pulled out these matches. He was interested, but Phillips hardly let him hold it, then he put it back in his pocket. Hap said, "By George, I'd like to have one of those. My daughter saves those things."

"Well, Hap," I said, "I can get them any time want. You take this one and give it to your daughter."

Then he said, "That's fine, but I have two daughters."

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John said, "Well, you're not going to get mine. That's all there is to it." So I guess he still has his.

On one of our trips back there we went to see John Snyder who was then Secretary of the Treasury. I knew him quite well and I used to always go to see him. Phillips knew him too. He took us in to watch them make postage stamps, and, gosh, they reel them off in great, big rolls. We watched them make the savings bonds, too, and called on the Secret Service men.

The last visit I made to Washington while the Trumans were there was while the White House was being renovated after Margaret's piano went partly through the floor. The Trumans were staying at Blair House and I went by to see them Sunday afternoon before my train left that night. John Snyder came by and they had the butler make some Old Fashioneds, and they were good ones, too, I'll tell you. Then when it came time for me to go Mrs. Truman insisted that they would send me.

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I says, "No, I'll call a taxi."

But she insisted that she would have the chauffeur bring the limousine up and take me to the station. I explained that I would have to go by the hotel and get my bag, but she said that didn't make any difference.

So, I got in the back seat of the limousine and with the Old Fashioned I'd had I felt pretty good. When we got to the hotel and the doorman recognized the car, and, doggone, he opened the door and I couldn't lift a thing or do anything for myself. They'd hardly let me pay my hotel bill, but they did. Then the chauffeur took me to the station. He went in a special way for the President's car. I guess he took me back there so the motley crowd wouldn't see me. It was quite an experience.

FUCHS: What year did you transfer to the Savings Bond Division?

PETERS: Well, let's see, he was senator when I got the Federal Housing appointment, and that was about '35, I think,

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so it was about '42 that I transferred to the Savings Bond Division. I really liked it much better. However, the work was practically the same, except you are handling a different commodity.

FUCHS: How long did you stay in that division?

PETERS: Well, my total service was eighteen years. So I guess that would be eleven years. In '53...

FUCHS: You left the division in '53?

PETERS: Yes. June the 30th, I retired. When the administration changed, why, of course I wouldn't have been surprised anytime that they'd have some excuse for putting me out. However, I was under Civil Service. So they sent a man out in April, '53. The state director at Jefferson City called me up and said that this fellow was coming out from Washington and wanted to meet us at the airport and to talk some things over. However, nothing was said to indicate that they were going to ask me to retire. We met him a little after twelve and he was supposed to leave at two thirty. We had lunch and talked about everything, and it got near time for his plane to leave. So finally I said, "Why don't you tell me what you're here for. You're not kidding me a bit. I know why you're here. I've been expecting it long before now."

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You're either going to ask me to retire or fire me, I don't know which."

And he said, "Because of your age and your physical condition the Secretary of the Treasury asked me to request you to file for retirement." (I was having this eye trouble you see.) "You're the only one in the state organization that's eligible both from years of service and age."

You see, 65 was optional and 70 was compulsory for retirement. So I said, "Well, this is April. As of June 30th, I'll retire."

He was surprised. Then former President Truman wanted me to fight it. He said, "They can't fire you. You just stick."

And I said, "Mr. President, I have this eye trouble and if I get worked up over anything and get excited it brings the pressure up. I've lost the sight of one eye and I have glaucoma in both eyes. I have to put drops in them every so often to keep the pressure down. I don't believe it's worth it. I'd rather not have a job and see out of one eye than to have the job and not be able to see at all."

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You know, they did everything to try to unseat Edgar Hinde as postmaster. They tried to accuse him of stuff that wasn't true at all. Edgar got a lot of preachers and others to sign petitions. It almost made Edgar sick but he fought it and he stayed up to the time he was of the compulsory age.

So, on June the 30th, I retired from that and July the 1st, '53, I became the pharmacist out at the county hospital. At that time it didn't amount to anything. They had no clinics, and an hour and a half was all the time I was supposed to spend there. Not over two hours -- just to get done whatever had to be done. Since that time, it just gradually grew and they changed the method of operation. They put in a clinic, first just once a month and then twice a month. Later they had it every week, then twice a week, and this past year they started having it every day. It finally got so heavy it was too much for me, so I retired from that the first of March, 1963. Now we're going to California to live.

There's one more thing I just happened to think of.

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In the Savings Bond department we worked all the time, of course, to promote the sale of savings bonds. About four times a year they'd have special drives, and we'd get the large companies to put on a drive within the company. Then we'd get an authorized agent that could issue the bonds and we'd go out to the company and issue them there.

We'd have to take the money back, you know, and it was a lot of money. The first time we did it, we went out armed to the teeth, but after that we didn't take any pistols or arms with us. Nobody knew we were going so we thought it was silly to go armed. I guess we were just lucky we weren't held up.

Anyway, once when we had a drive all set up at Remington, with Orrin Moon, the chairman for Eastern Jackson County, and Nat Jackson of the Independence Savings and Loan, the issuing agent, and myself, the man at Remington said, "I got a message from headquarters that we can't put on the drive."

I asked if there wasn't something we could do.

He said, "No, Mr. Dodge is the man; he's the kingfish

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and his word is law."

I said, "Isn't there somebody else in the country that's almost as powerful as he is?"

He said he didn't know. Not with his company anyway.

I said I'd see what I could do about it.

He said, "Don't you do anything to jeopardize my position."

I told him I wouldn't, that it wasn't his fault, but I blamed Mr. Dodge and I was going to see what I could do about it.

So, I got on the telephone and got the President and explained the situation to him. It wasn't but just a little while that the manager called me up and said, "Well, we're going to have the drive all right. Mr. Dodge has changed his mind."

FUCHS: Do you know why they had decided not to have the drive?

PETERS: I think it was political. I think it was against

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the administration. We had some trouble getting some companies to do it anyway. But they were getting so many Government contracts. So, I found somebody who was as powerful as Mr. Dodge after all.

FUCHS: Who was the state director of the FHA when you were there? You spoke of the state director.

PETERS: The state director of the Savings Bond Division.

FUCHS: Oh, the Savings Bonds.

PETERS: Yes, Earl T. Shackelford. His office is at Jefferson City. As far as I know he still is state director.

FUCHS: Was he friendly to you?

PETERS: Oh, yes. He was one of the finest fellows to work for.

FUCHS: Who was Maurice Carroll?

PETERS: Maurice Carroll was the director of the Federal Housing when I first went in. No, I believe there was another director at first, then Maurice Carroll. Jim Trimble succeeded Maurice Carroll, and Dave Powell succeeded Jim Trimble. Powell was never friendly to me, so don't ask me anything about Mr.

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Powell. I mean, he pats me on the shoulder and all like that, but he was a great big bunch of geraniums.

FUCHS: Why do you think he was unfriendly to you?

PETERS: I don't know. You see, Vivian Truman was in that office. Powell was just hell to both of us.

FUCHS: What was Vivian's position at that time?

PETERS: I was there first, then he came later. He and I used to travel together. I broke him in. Then he succeeded Dave Powell.

FUCHS: He became the director?

PETERS: The state director -- no, it would be...

FUCHS: Was it the district director?

PETERS: Yes, the district director, that's it. I don't even know that there was a state director.

FUCHS: Do you recall any criticism being made of Vivian because he was the President's brother?

PETERS: I don't remember that anything was said about it. I think Vivian made one of the best directors they had. He was fair to everybody and everybody liked

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him and there weren't any shenanigans with him. I think those two, the President and Vivian are two of the finest men that ever lived. I swear by both of them.

FUCHS: Do you know a Frank Lee? He published a newspaper.

PETERS: Yes. He was a newspaperman. I don't think he was Interstate Press. He had a paper in Joplin, I believe.

FUCHS: He had a paper called *The Southwestern*, but that's all I know.

PETERS: I think it was in Joplin. I knew him. Yes, now I remember. His paper wasn't as big as the Joplin *Globe*. He was quite a politician. He said what he pleased and didn't care whose toes he stepped on. As far as I knew, he was always for the President in whatever he ran for.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything of his boosting Mr. Truman for President as early as the '30's, late '30's?

PETERS: I don't know. You see, I met him probably sometime after Truman was elected senator. I don't recall any particular happenings that he was connected

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with, but I do know he was quite active in the campaign. The President's first secretary, when he was Senator, was Vic Messall. I think Vic Messall had some connection with Lee, but I'm not sure. Do you know whether Lee was ever a state senator?

FUCHS: I believe this is the Lee that was congressman and Messall was his secretary, for one term, I think.

PETERS: Then Messall was Truman's first secretary when he was senator. I remember we were back in Washington, D.C. when he was senator and Vic was his secretary. Mrs. Peters was with me, and Vic took us down on the wharf to dinner, to Hogate's, a fish and oyster house that's been there for many years.

FUCHS: Did just you and your wife and Mr. Messall go or was the Senator with you?

PETERS: No, he wasn't with us. As I remember, I was on business, and we had visited our daughter who lived in Baltimore at the time. The Trumans knew we were coming and although they were out of town at the time, they had asked Vic to see that we saw

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things.

FUCHS: Did you see Mr. Messall much after that?

PETERS: No, I didn't make many trips then. I think that was about my first trip to Washington, when I was with Federal Housing. I didn't make many trips with Federal Housing.

At this time Maurice Carroll was the director of Federal Housing and Rose Conway was his secretary. She knew I wasn't a Catholic, but she asked if she could give me a St. Christopher medal to take on my trip. I told her I'd like to have one. Mr. Truman always carried one in his car although he isn't a Catholic either. So she gave me the medal which she had had blessed. I

always carry it with me still. It was in a little leather case, but the case has long since worn out. I wouldn't take anything for the medal. Miss Conway later became President Truman's secretary.

FUCHS: She was, you say, secretary to Maurice Carroll and then subsequently to Vivian Truman?

PETERS: No, oh, no.

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FUCHS: She never served as secretary to Vivian Truman?

PETERS: No, because when Vivian and I were there, neither one of us had a secretary. We were out on the road almost all the time.

FUCHS: What about after Vivian succeeded to the directorship?

PETERS: Well, he had a secretary then, but Miss Conway went with President Truman when he was first elected. I'll tell you how that happened. He used to come back here when he was Senator and Vice President, and some of the Federal judges would let him use their offices while he was here. So he said to Vivian and me, "I have some correspondence that has to be answered. A lot of it is confidential and I'd like to know some good secretary." We both told him that Rose Conway would be just the one for him if Maurice Carroll would let her come. She never talks about what she sees and hears. So Vivian arranged it, and every time Harry came back to Kansas City, he'd call up there and she'd come over. He liked her and her work so well that when he got to be President, he got her appointed as his

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secretary. She's been with him ever since. She's a wonderful person.

FUCHS: What were your impressions of Victor Messall?

PETERS: I liked Vic very much. He used to come back here once in a while when the Senator came, but not often. But I liked Vic very much. I don't know whatever became of him.

FUCHS: Yes, he's still in Washington.

Do you recall Mr. Truman talking about the vice presidential nomination in 1944 prior to his being nominated, or subsequently?

PETERS: No, I don't.

FUCHS: Did you attend the vice presidential notification ceremonies at Lamar in 1944?

PETERS: Yes, I did.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything of that?

PETERS: Well, it was just a very big political meeting and his popularity seemed to be very high. Of course,

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it was a Democratic meeting and you naturally would see that. I don't recall anything in particular. That was when Bennett Clark was in the saddle, you know.

FUCHS: You used to hold open houses around Christmastime. Did Mr. Truman ever attend any of those?

PETERS: Oh, all of them. They've been to our house when he was eastern judge, presiding judge, when he was senator, when he was Vice President, and when he was President. Every time they were in Independence at Christmastime when he was President, they came. The first time they came while he was President, it was below zero and there was a very, very deep snow on the ground. Our open house was not exactly an invitation thing, but everyone knew they were welcome. This time, we didn't tell people that the President and the First Lady were going to be there, because we thought they'd all want to come at once instead of all along during the evening, and there just wouldn't be room for so many at once. But they all suspected it and the house was so doggone full we could hardly turn around. I was afraid the floors were going to break.

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They didn't and everyone had quite a thrill. There were two Secret Service men in the backyard and one or two in front and then the big car parked in front. We had two Negro women and a Negro man to serve, and they were in the kitchen and all excited over the President. I went out to the car and the Secret Service chief who had a terrible cold was sitting there with the car's heater turned on trying to keep warm. I asked if there was anything I could do to make his men comfortable.

He asked if his men in the backyard could come in on the enclosed back porch.

I said, "It's enclosed, but there's no heat in it. Tell them to come on in the kitchen."

So he went around and told them to come in. I thought those Negroes were going to turn white when those Secret Service men came in there.

Then, when we sold our house on Delaware Street, the man and his wife saw the autographed picture of Mrs. Truman sitting on the TV set, and the woman said, "Oh, are they friends?"

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When we told them we knew the Trumans very well, she said, "Have they ever been in this room?"

Mrs. Peters said, "Yes, I think they've sat in practically all of these chairs."

These people thought that was just wonderful.

FUCHS: Did the Secret Service inspect your place before you had one of these open houses?

PETERS: As far as I remember they never inspected, at least they didn't come inside to inspect. But I think the President told them, "Now, all these people I know." I never discussed it with him because whatever they wanted to do was perfectly all right with us, whatever the Secret Service did for his protection. The only time they were ever in our house was when they came with him and left with him. He always hated all that fuss about having to have them. After the guard was killed at Blair House in that attempted assassination of President Truman, he often said, "Just think, a man gave his life for me." That affected him a great deal.

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FUCHS: Did you go to William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, when Mr. Truman received his honorary degree there? If so, do you recall anything about that occasion?

PETERS: I recall it happened and I don't remember whether we went or not. What year was that?

FUCHS: 1946.

PETERS: I don't remember being there. You see, I traveled a great deal and was gone a week at a time usually, driving around over the state. I went from the north to the south part of the state, sometimes as far as St. Louis, although my territory wasn't supposed to go any farther east than Marshall, Missouri.

FUCHS: What about the homecoming dinner in 1953 for the President and Mrs. Truman. Were you there?

PETERS: Oh, yes, I was there.

FUCHS: Do you recall any incidents connected with that?

PETERS: No particular incidents. It was a very, very

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wonderful thing and everybody was happy to be there. Earl T. Shackelford, the state director of the Savings Bond Division from Jefferson City came up with his wife. We had them come by our house and then Mrs. Peters and I took them over in a taxicab. I knew it would be impossible to find a place to park if we waited until time to go to the dinner, so I had gone over early in the afternoon and parked the car in the parking lot so that it would be there for us to drive home. There were a lot of out-of-town people there.

FUCHS: You and Mr. Truman were both Masons. Do you recall any associations you had in that organization?

PETERS: I remember that when he was up for Grand Master, I drove down to St. Louis to the meeting because, as Past Master, I had a vote and I wanted to vote for him.

FUCHS: What lodge were you Past Master of?

PETERS: MacDonald, 324.

FUCHS: That's Independence.

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PETERS : Yes, in 1914. And when the lodge gave me my 50 year button (which my wife had made into a ring for me) Mr. Truman cancelled a speaking engagement in Indiana to be there at this dinner and make the presentation.

FUCHS: That was nice. Was there any opposition to his being elected Grand Master?

PETERS: He was at almost the height of his political career; I don't think he was President then. I don't remember just when it was.

FUCHS: I think he was still Senator.

PETERS: Still Senator, yes. And this was about as stiff a campaign as the senatorial race. It was all political, which shouldn't have been in any organization of the kind that Masons are. But it happens. There's politics in almost anything, even churches, you know that. He won out though.

FUCHS: The opposition was politically inspired?

PETERS: Yes, not obvious with speeches or anything like that, but it was there.

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FUCHS: I know you enjoyed hunting and fishing. Did you ever engage in these sports with Mr. Truman?

PETERS: No, we never fished together. He never cared much for fishing. He was always studious; I was the playboy and he was the studious fellow.

FUCHS: What about hunting?

PETERS: I never hunted with him. Vivian used to hunt, but as far as I know, Harry didn't hunt unless it might have been around the farm.

FUCHS: We frequently get questions about Mr. Truman's likes and dislikes, and I wondered, since you've seen much of him in a social connection, do you have any ideas about his likes and dislikes in food and drinks and so forth?

PETERS: Well, of course, he and I both like bourbon, but I don't think he ever takes over two drinks at a time. I sometimes take three, but neither of us hits it very hard. He is not a heavy eater. I don't know of anything that he particularly likes or dislikes as far as food is concerned. We have seen a

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lot of the Trumans at social affairs. In fact, we are seeing a lot of them right now. Since Mrs. Peters and I are moving to California, the number of farewell parties that have been given for us is just overwhelming. People are being just wonderful to us. The society editor of one of the newspapers told Mrs. Peters that the brides and grooms they write up don't have as many parties as we are having given for us. We went to one at Dr. and Mrs. Harry Lapp's Saturday night and the Trumans were there. Mrs. Peters was at the table with him.

FUCHS: With Mr. Truman, you mean?

PETERS: Yes, they took us over. Coming home I told them, "You know, there are not many people that have the President of the United States and the First Lady to be their chauffeur."

FUCHS: Who drove?

PETERS: He did. Mrs. Peters offered to drive. She thought that he didn't like to drive at night, but he insisted on driving. Then, Mrs. Truman is driving Mrs. Peters today to Blue Springs when the bridge

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club meets at the home of Mrs. Emery Wright and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Henry McCoy. Mrs. Truman said she would drive, but just before I came over here Mrs. Peters called her up to see if she wouldn't let her take her car since they had driven Saturday night. But Mrs. Truman said, "No, I'm going to drive and take you in my new car."

FUCHS: She has a new car?

PETERS: Yes, the President gave it to her for her birthday. It's a new Chrysler. I haven't seen it, because the other night we went in his car. Maybe she won't let him drive her new car.

FUCHS: What do you think of his driving?

PETERS: It was fine the other night. I have driven with him when I was a little uneasy. But I wasn't uneasy at all with him the other night.

FUCHS: Do you think she's a better driver than he is?

PETERS: I don't believe I've ever ridden when she drove the car. I don't think he likes to drive at night. He has never said so, but I don't think he does.

That's the reason Mrs. Peters wanted to drive that Saturday night, because she thought he didn't like to drive at night and it's quite a ways over to Dr. Lapp's and back, on Rockhill Road in Kansas City. But he insisted on driving.

FUCHS: Does he drive slowly?

PETERS: Well, I don't suppose he went over 40 miles an hour, maybe less than that, and I commented on that. One thing, he never crowds the other fellow, I complimented him on that. That's how a lot of accidents happen, you know, driving too close to the car in front.

FUCHS: I have one final question. In Mr. Truman's early political career, did you form an opinion of his ability as a speaker?

PETERS: Well, of course, when he started out there was room for improvement, like with any young politician, unless he's a gifted orator like James A. Reed. Now, Jim Reed was a gifted orator. He was a lawyer and then he was a senator. But President Truman even now doesn't pretend to be an orator, he just makes plain talk

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that most people understand. He always has good logic. I think that in all of his talks I can remember, even from the time he started in politics to the present day, there always was something in them. It wasn't just a display of oratory. Of course, I'll admit I'm a little prejudiced toward him and not against him. I think his talks are very good. They evidently got him to where he is.

FUCHS: Thank you very much.

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