

Oral History Interview

with

MRS. W.L.C. PALMER

Latin and mathematics teacher of Harry S. Truman and Bess Wallace Truman in Independence High School, Independence, Missouri, September 1898-June 1900; organizer and first president of the Jackson Democratic Club (for women) in Independence; first woman elected to public office (city assessor) in Independence; and a leader in literary and cultural activities in the area.

Independence, Missouri
January 18, 1962

by J. R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
March, 1963

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FUCHS: Well, Mrs. Palmer, would you state your maiden name for the record and then your husband's name?

MRS. PALMER: My name was Amanda Ardelia Hardin, before my marriage, (My husband's name, W. L. C. Palmer) and as this is to deal first of all with Harry Truman's school life in the high school in Independence, I will begin with a little of my background and how I happened to come to Independence as a teacher of Latin and mathematics.

I was raised on a farm about ten miles south of Independence. My father's Aunt Lizzie Beal McCurdy and her husband, John G. McCurdy, had come to Independence in 1848, interested in the Santa Fe trade (Uncle John was a blacksmith). Aunt Lizzie sent my father packages of food when he was in prison after Gettysburg, and it was through her influence that he came to Independence at the close of the War Between the States. My father, Hopkins Hardin, came out here from Virginia, and bought the old Joe Pritchett farm which joined the Ewin farm

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on which Miss Myra Ewin, who was later to be Harry Truman's first grade teacher in Independence, was raised. Miss Myra's mother was a Pritchett and perhaps that's why she and her husband, Mr. Ewin, were living on a farm adjoining the one my father bought from Joe Pritchett of Glasgow, Missouri. She was a sister of the famous educators who established Pritchett Institute in Glasgow in the early days when it was a flourishing river town in the trade of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, which originated principally at the great port of New Orleans. One of the Pritchetts later became head of M. I. T.

That Institute possessed the first telescope west of the Mississippi River, and when the famous old Institute died out, the telescope was sent to Fayette, Missouri. It is now the prized possession of Central College (Methodist) in Fayette and is housed in an observatory there.

Well, the Ewins sent their daughter, Miss Myra, to Pritchett Institute to receive her college education. When she would come home for summer vacation we country children thought her the most beautiful and stylish-looking person in the neighborhood. One summer she announced that she would conduct a "summer school" for the children of the neighborhood, and to our dismay, our father,

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Hopkins Hardin, decided we Hardin children must attend her summer school! She was a fine teacher--very methodical and exacting, and I've no doubt that she had a great influence on Harry Truman and her other pupils in the first grade when she came to Independence to teach.

Many years later she was a teacher of history in Independence High School and William Chrisman High School, now called William Chrisman, Division II. (Her picture is with the high school faculty of that famous *Glean* of 1901.)

When it came time for me to be sent away to school, my father said, "Well, Sis" (he always called me Sis), "where do you want to go?"

And, I said, "to Missouri University."

He said, "No, they play cards and dance down there. You can't go there."

So, he knew J. B. Ellis, President of Morrisville College, a little Methodist college down in the Ozarks, not far from Springfield, Missouri. That's where I was sent, and we did have a very fine faculty there. It was a small college. One professor I remember in particular was Professor J. T. Outen, a graduate of Princeton University, who didn't want classes larger than four or five pupils. He was our teacher in Greek. To graduate from

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Morrisville College, we had to have four years of Greek, four years of Latin and four years of mathematics, besides other subjects. So, of course, I took the Greek and Latin and mathematics and I had ambitions of becoming a teacher of Greek when I graduated in 1895 from Morrisville College. I had been there five years, from 1890 to 1895. When I graduated and came home, I found my father had secured a little country school for me which is now the Chapel School out on Blue Ridge Boulevard. I taught there from September 1895 to June 1896. Then I heard there was a teacher wanted in the Independence High School, of which W. L. C. Palmer was principal, and I applied for the position and was elected. I came here to teach in September 1896, and my cousin, Mrs. Lizzie Powell, who was Lizzie McCurdy, Mr. John McCurdy's daughter, had a boarding house on North Liberty Street where the Tindall home is now; she said, "Well, of course, you are going to board with me." And, I did, at the rate of \$3.50 a week for board and meals. I had only two blocks to walk to the high school. It was in the old Ott School, that was on North Liberty Street, right opposite the new Catholic Grade School. The old Convent has been torn down and a new one built on the west side of North Liberty Street.

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A recent article in the Independence *Examiner* says the now vacant lot on which stood the old Ott School is to be used again by the Independence School Board for two buildings--one an administration building and the other to house school supplies--at a cost of \$265,000. Do you want anything of the history of that Ott School?

FUCHS: Maybe you could tell us a little bit about when the school was first there.

PALMER: The first school that was there?

FUCHS: Yes, and about the physical set up there at the school.

MRS. PALMER: [*At this point in the interview, Mrs. Palmer read the portion here quoted from a publication entitled *Course of Study and Rules and Regulations of the Independence Public Schools, Independence, Missouri, 1909-1910*, written and submitted to the Independence School Board by the Superintendent of City Schools, W. L. C. Palmer.] “This lot and the building on it was purchased March 29, 1867, from Professor W. H. Lewis, by the school board--Independence School Board--for \$11,000. This

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building was generally known as the ‘Seminary, ‘ and had been the home of a private school conducted by Professor Lewis. It occupied the site where the Ott School is now located at the southwest corner of North Liberty and West College Street. After its purchase by the school board it furnished school accommodations for the white children of Independence for several years. Here, many of our prominent citizens, either in whole or in part received their education. The year 1885 marks an important date in the history of Independence schools. The old Seminary building having become entirely inadequate to the needs of the city’s growing population, as well as being considered unsafe, the district voted \$15,000 in bonds for the erection of a new building on the Seminary site, and for the purchase of a site and the erection thereon of a new building, also on the south side of the city. The old Seminary building was torn down and replaced by the ten-room brick building on North Liberty Street to be known henceforth as the Ott School, named in honor of the late Christian Ott, Sr.--at that time a member of the school board.” It is to that building that I came to teach in September 1896. The building was not only used for the high school--about four rooms for the high school--but also the rest of it was used

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for a grade school. I had the Latin and the mathematics classes. The library part is very important--we had a small library. Everyone knows that Harry Truman got a great deal of his education from libraries, maybe more than he did from his teachers. At that time the school board had purchased books from the old Independence Library Association, maybe 4,000 volumes. Is that too many?

FUCHS: That’s all right. You don’t have to.

MRS. PALMER: Well, I wanted to be accurate. Yes, 4,000 [Mrs. Palmer checked this figure in the School Board publication noted above] volumes had been purchased from the Independence Library Association and were housed in a part of the Ott School that was used as a library. Miss Sally Brown was appointed librarian and as she was teaching at the time, she could only be in the

library hours after school. But, you would find pupils in there drawing out those books although there was not much room there for reading.

Well, I had some very fine pupils in my classes when I first went to Ott School, in 1895. I remember two particularly--Harry Truman's cousins, Miss Nellie Noland and Miss Ethel Noland.

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They graduated just ahead of Harry's class, which was the 1901 class. I found in September 1898, that Harry Truman and Bess Wallace and Charlie Ross, who afterward became nationally famous too, were pupils in my classes. They were in my classes in the old Ott School from September 1898 to June 1899, and from September 1899 to June 1900. In June 1900, I married the Superintendent of Schools and was not allowed to teach any longer, as married women did not teach in Independence then. I have always regretted that I wasn't teaching from September 1900 to June 1901, because that was the year that these famous pupils graduated from the high school.

I made it a point, however, to be present on graduation night at the new Independence High School, which had been built in 1898 on the ground where Palmer Junior High School now is, but which burned in 1939. The school board had found the rooms inadequate at the old Ott School and built this beautiful new building, which was finished just in time for the class of 1898 to graduate--the first class that graduated there.

Then in 1901, I will always remember the historic setting of that beautiful auditorium in which this famous class graduated. The curtain was the first thing that

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you saw when you came in, and it had been designed and painted by two of the art students. Mr. Palmer had seen that art had been put into the high school, in 1897, and a very fine art teacher, Miss Amanda Whaley, was the teacher. Edward Sherman was considered very artistic but wasn't taking any lessons; my husband insisted that he take lessons from Miss Amanda Whaley. He won her approval and became valedictorian of her art class. But when it came time to design a curtain for the stage (a drop curtain) of the new high school, Ed Sherman, having won first prize in art, drew for it the "Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers," United States flags. That is the historic curtain that rolled up that night in 1901 for this famous class that was graduating with a future President and First Lady of the United States and his press secretary!

But I'll never forget that night! Charlie Ross had won the scholarship honors. Harry was always a very satisfactory pupil, always had his lessons. The teachers loved him. I notice in his *Memoirs* he said he never had a bad teacher, "they were the salt of the earth." We're very proud of his saying that and of the privilege that we had of teaching him.

FUCHS: Do you recall that at the time all the teachers thought he was a very good boy?

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MRS. PALMER: He was a satisfactory pupil all around, but Charlie Ross won the scholarship honors and was Miss Matilda Brown's prize English pupil. That night she rushed up on the stage after the program and grabbed Charlie, kissed him and congratulated him. Harry was standing by and said, "Well, don't I get one, too?"

Miss Brown said, "Not until you have done something worthwhile."

Years later, when Harry became President of the United States, he selected Charles Ross as his press secretary and the first night they were together, Charlie said, "Wouldn't Miss Tillie be glad to know we are together again?"

Harry just picked up the telephone and put in a call for Independence and Miss Brown and said, "Hello, Miss Brown, this is the President of the United States, do I get that kiss?"

She said, "Yes, come and get it."

FUCHS: That's a very interesting story.

MRS. PALMER: Years went on and I lost track of Harry right after...

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FUCHS: I wonder if we could go back just for a moment? What was your first recollection that you have of Harry Truman or can you recall anything that stands out in your mind?

MRS. PALMER: Well, now, I recall his studying Caesar. You know Caesar built some kind of a wall between France and Germany, and I can recall that Harry and Charlie Ross and some of them were trying to make a wall that would imitate that one that Caesar tells about in his *Commentaries*. But, I would like to talk to Harry about that to ask him just what that was they built.

FUCHS: As I understand it, you taught him in the old Ott School from 1898 until 1899 and then the following school year, 1899 to 1900. You had him for two years of Latin and two years of mathematics. How many years would he have taken Latin and mathematics?

MRS. PALMER: He would have had three years. He probably took the next year of Cicero from Miss Berta Entrekin who took my place.

FUCHS: It was customary to take Latin or a language all three years in high school?

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MRS. PALMER: Yes, they took it in those days; they don't seem to any more.

FUCHS: I wanted to ask you one thing. The Truman family moved from the farm to Independence in 1890, but he didn't start to school until 1892, when he was eight years old. Now, they didn't move there, as I understand it, until December 1890, so the school year would have already started. But, can you account for the fact that he didn't start school until 1892? Was it customary to wait until you were eight years old in those days?

MRS. PALMER: Well, I don't think so. I don't know. It seems to me I have heard that Harry had some trouble and that caused that defect in his eyes--was it scarlet fever?

FUCHS: When he was in the second grade he had diphtheria and he dropped out of school, and then he went to summer school--which brings up another question. He went to summer school to make up the second grade, but when he came back he had skipped the third grade and gone into the fourth. Was that a normal thing to do when you were making up one grade, to then skip a grade?

MRS. PALMER: I think they could. They weren't so particular.

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FUCHS: Perhaps the fact that he had entered school at eight? Do you know if students entered school much before eight in those days?

MRS. PALMER: I'm sure they were six years old, because in the country--my little country school--the rule was six years old when I was a child. But, my father was a member of the school board, and he took me to Pitcher School one day--he wanted to see how things were going. Old Mr. Stonestreet, a teacher from Kansas City, was there and I enjoyed the reading lessons so much, I said, "Can I come back tomorrow."

Father said, "No, you are not six years old yet." But Mr. Stonestreet had the say and said, "Yes, she is only five, but she can come." So, I went to school when I was five.

FUCHS: Oh, I see, that's very interesting.

MRS. PALMER: So, if that was the rule out in the country for six years old, I'm sure it was in Independence. I don't know how Harry happened to be late getting in that way. It may have been on account of his health. But, I didn't know Harry until he came to high school.

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FUCHS: Yes, of course. Because of your general knowledge of school in those days, I thought I'd ask you that question.

Would there have been any sort of graduation exercises for the grade school as there is now days?

MRS. PALMER: I don't think so. My husband was instrumental in putting in the eighth grade.

They had only seven grades up to the time he became superintendent, but he wanted eight grades. He put them in, but I don't think they had graduation exercises for the eighth grade for a year or two. Then I think he introduced that--the graduation exercises for eighth graders.

FUCHS: Would you know exactly when they started eight grades, because in trying to figure out Mr. Truman's schooling, I arrived at what I think is the fact that he went seven grades and three years of high? Would you know when they first started eighth grade?

MRS. PALMER: Mr. Palmer mentions the fact that an eighth grade was added and I don't know whether he gives the date or not, but I remember reading that this morning.

FUCHS: I see, then he probably instituted this eighth grade later than when Mr. Truman was in school.

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MRS. PALMER: They don't have eighth grade graduation any more, do they?

FUCHS: I really don't know, but I know when I graduated there was a graduation ceremony from grade school.

MRS. PALMER: Mr. Palmer put in this junior high school, too, during his administration.

FUCHS: I see. Well, those were just several questions that I thought you might be able to answer out of your general knowledge of the school system.

Do you have any recollections of Mr. Truman's personality and specific attributes of his character when he was in high school?

MRS. PALMER: Well, I do--I think his steadfastness in always having his lessons and his proclivity for reading and particularly reading history in the library, was indicative of something that was coming on in his life and character. And then always his respect for his teachers and for his mother. I didn't know his father, but I did know his mother. I think that respect and devotion shows you what a fine character Harry Truman is. Everyone who knows him knows what a fine man he is.

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FUCHS: Did he seem to be shy in those days or was he reticent about speaking out in class?

MRS. PALMER: Well, yes he was a little bit shy and not the aggressive type. I know his teachers all admired him. When Mr. Truman was judge of the county court and doing such wonderful work with the roads here in Jackson County, and got out the book, showing what he had accomplished, one of which he brought down to present my husband and one to me. He autographed the one to my husband as follows: 'To my good friend and preceptor, Professor W. L. C. Palmer, whose ideals were impressed upon me at the right time. Harry S. Truman.' My

husband was very proud of him and when he was gone, Mr. Palmer said, "That boy will be President of the United States some day."

Some people have asked me if I thought of that when he was going to school to me, I said, "Well, I never thought of it; but I should have!"

But, my husband realized what a power there was in Harry Truman. He didn't live to see him become President. He died in 1937.

FUCHS: If he was somewhat shy in those days, would you say his personality was still attractive?

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MRS. PALMER: Very.

FUCHS: It was, even in those days? Certain writers have said that he did have a bit of shyness about him; but others have said the one thing that advanced him in his profession has been his attractive personality. He seems to stand out.

MRS. PALMER: I know that. While he was in school, he didn't get to play and have games with the other boys because he wore such heavy glasses, but he was interested in sports. You could see him watching the boys play. He would put his books and "music roll" down on the ground--he'd usually hide that music roll by putting his books on top of it! I have understood that he did umpire some of the games; I never saw that, but he was interested. I can remember when they moved the library to the new high school building, it occupied a very nice, large room there (we had more room and a place for students to come in and read). I can remember going through and many times I would see Harry in there reading. That reminds me of how much he got from the library.

FUCHS: Did they have an opportunity to read during the school day or did it have to be after the school hours?

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MRS. PALMER: I think it was after school principally, because I can't remember seeing the students reading during the school days. I always remember one incident when he became President that made me think he read the *Encyclopedia Britannica*--you know they say he read it through. I don't know whether that's true or not, but he had a conversation with Chief Justice Vinson in Washington, D. C. about a Latin phrase--it was something going on in Congress that neither of them approved of--and Chief Justice Vinson said, "Well, like old Cato said in the Roman Senate, 'It ought to be destroyed--Carthage ought to be destroyed--Carthago delenda est.'" And Harry said, "You didn't say that right, you should have said, "Delenda est Carthago." "The reporters were standing there and they wondered if Harry Truman knew anything about Latin, and they went to the encyclopedia to look it up. They found out that old Cato said it just like Harry did.

I read that in the newspaper, and wrote Harry a letter congratulating him on his Latin. I said, "I don't suppose I taught it to you. You probably read it in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*." He sent me his photograph on which he says, "To Mrs. W., L. C. Palmer from her old Latin

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publicity man, with affectionate regards, Harry S. Truman." So, I know that he did read the encyclopedia through. He has always been a great reader. I think he is a self-made man in a great many ways.

FUCHS: About the school annual which they started, *The Gleam*, do you recall just who were the principal forces, the editors, etc. in that? The reason that I ask is that he has stated in his *Memoirs* that he and Tasker Taylor, Charlie Ross and one other boy were editors, but in looking in the *Gleam* I noticed that the editor was Charles Ross and the associate editors were all girls.

MRS. PALMER: I think Harry did have a good deal to do with it however, although his name, as you say, isn't put in the front. Mr. Palmer was instrumental in starting that *Gleam*. He wanted a high school paper so much and they had just been reading Tennyson in Miss Brown's class, so they decided, with Mr. Palmer's help, to get out one and call it the *Gleam*. Harry was very much interested--although his name is not in there as one of the editors. Tasker Taylor did most of the drawings for it and he made that beautiful drawing right in the beginning with the quotation:

Not of the sunlight,
Not of the moonlight,

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Not of the starlight,
O, young mariner,
Down to the haven,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And, ere it vanishes,
Over the margin
After it, follow it,
Follow the Gleam.

All the drawings are by Tasker Taylor, he was our artist in that class. He met a sad and tragic death and was drowned in the Missouri River shortly after his graduation--trying to swim across it. Anyway, that *Gleam* has gone on and on like Tennyson's, "The Brook," in which he says:

"Men may come
and men may go
But I go on forever!"

It has become one of the famous annuals of high schools throughout the United States. It has won first prize several times in contests and competitions, I noticed recently. I like to go over and over that first one, and I think that motto, "Follow the Gleam" has really

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been Harry Truman's motto throughout his whole life.

FUCHS: Yes--getting back to the library for a moment. Do you recall that it was heavily weighted in literature or in history or reference books? Do you have any specific recollections about the type of library it was in those days?

MRS. PALMER: In 1910, when this was gotten out. [At this point Mrs. Palmer read the quoted material from the publication cited above.] "The library contained 4,000 volumes including many valuable reference works. A number of the best current periodicals are received regularly by the library for the benefit of its members. Under the rules, all white residents of the school district are entitled to free membership on furnishing satisfactory guarantee of proper handling of books." There was no other library here in town, you see. "In its elegant new home in the Library Building, the library is doing much, not only for the pupils and teachers of the public schools, but its influence in the community life is far reaching and salutary. In the department of history, it is replete with valuable reference.

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Under the direction of thoughtful and careful teachers, the student received proper guidance in the use of this reference. The same may be said with reference to the department of literature. The shelves abound in the very best standard works and fiction, biography and miscellany; all of which may be of service to the teacher of literature in outlining work in this subject. The library is kept open every day except Sundays and legal holidays, and members and visitors are always welcomed and assisted by a careful and competent librarian."

FUCHS: The library served as the Independence Public Library, too, and, therefore, it was open on Saturdays. So he could have read on...?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, until the Jackson County Library was established in 1947? I understand all of the books of the Independence Public Library were turned over to it. You have seen the lovely picture of it, the School Library, in the first *Gleam* of 1901, haven't you?

FUCHS: Yes, I have.

MRS. PALMER: Miss Carrie Wallace had just been elected librarian there, you see? I thought you had that picture. That's where I remember seeing Harry reading.

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FUCHS: Do you have recollections of Bess Wallace in the class in school?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes, she was always just as independent in high school as she is today. She would come in--her desk was right in front of me when I taught that last year up here at the new high school. I can remember her walking in--her books were strapped up in one of those little straps--and she would put them down and take her seat and look at you as if to say, "Well, there they are."

But, she was always wonderful--and very interested in sports. Just the very thing that Harry couldn't be in, Bess was. I understand she would go anywhere to get into a game of tennis. I think we may have had in those days, one or two tennis grounds in Independence, but she went to a girls' school over in Kansas City. They say she was very expert at tennis there--Barstow--I think it was, a school for girls.

She always was a very lovely girl and a pretty girl--just as Margaret says in that book she wrote, *Souvenir*, "My mother has blue eyes, the bluest eyes I have ever seen." Well, we always noticed that too, about Bess when she was in school and she was always dressed in the very latest. I haven't any picture of Bess' graduation dress--(we didn't have the cap and gown in those days) but all the girls

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wore very beautiful dresses with lots of lace insertions and small tucks. The next year the *Examiner* had some pictures of some of the girls' dresses. Perhaps you have seen that article that they had on the way the girls dressed for graduation in those days?

FUCHS: Yes, I have.

MRS. PALMER: I kept that.

FUCHS: You had her, of course, for Latin and mathematics, too?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, Bess told me the night Mrs. Roosevelt came here (brought by the Business and Professional Women's Club) in 1960--I was seated by her--and Harry said something to Mrs. Roosevelt about I taught him and Bess Latin; Bess said, "Yes, all the Latin I ever knew, I got from her."

FUCHS: Would you say she was a better student than Mr. Truman or...?

MRS. PALMER: No, I don't think so. She wasn't interested in getting high grades or anything like that, but she always had her lessons, too.

You had no idea they were sweethearts, they were so circumspect, but in reading Harry's life later, he said

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ever since he met her when she was a little girl five years old, up here at the Presbyterian Church, she'd been his sweetheart.

FUCHS: But you don't think people were aware of it when he was in school?

MRS. PALMER: No, we didn't know it at all. Except--and this was later--his cousin, Miss Nellie Noland was telling about him coming up to her house ostensibly to get her to help him with his Latin. Well, I think that last year when Miss Entrekin was teacher, Harry had an excuse for coming to Nellie's, because she had graduated and knew her Latin, to get her to help him with his. She had a plate to send across the street, in which Mrs. Wallace had sent something over, and Harry wanted to return it. So, she had an idea that he wanted to see Bess more than take the plate home. So, I think--but nobody dreamed of them being sweethearts in the days when they were in high school.

I notice in his *Memoirs* he speaks of Bess as having been his sweetheart ever since he met her at the Presbyterian Church when they were just children. What he was doing going to the Presbyterian Church, I don't know, because he is a Baptist, but Bess' church at that time was the Presbyterian Church.

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FUCHS: How was Mr. Truman as a math student?

MRS. PALMER: He was very good. He always knew his mathematics lesson, and I can understand when he got into World War I and was ordering those guns so accurately, it was because of his knowledge of mathematics.

FUCHS: Do you have any memories of his family then; perhaps of John A. Truman, his father?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, I didn't know them in the early days, Vivian and Miss Truman, Miss Mary Jane, but later on, I was associated with Vivian in the Federal Housing Administration. He was head of it in Kansas City and Harry had appointed me woman representative for Western Missouri. Vivian and I came in contact with each other up there. Miss Rose Conway was his secretary in those days and a very fine one even as now.

FUCHS: What year would that have been?

MRS. PALMER: Right after Harry became senator. Now--he was elected senator in 1934--I guess that was 1935. Then, I had known his mother for a long time. We had a big dinner, to celebrate Harry's having been elected senator, down at the Christian Church; his mother was to talk about him as a

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boy, I was to talk about him as a pupil. We all had our places; I was sitting by Mrs. Martha

Truman that night.

I can remember her telling about how she had campaigned for Harry. Miss Mary Jane was there that night too, but I can't remember where she sat--of course, they all were there. I frequently saw Mrs. Truman and Miss Mary Jane--I used to go to Kansas City more often than I do now--and I often found them downtown and we would have a little visit together. His mother was proud of Harry, of course. As long as she was able to get out, she always said, whenever Harry was running for anything in the political line she was out campaigning for him.

FUCHS: Were you acquainted with Mrs. Truman, Harry's mother, the short time that they lived here after you came here?

MRS. PALMER: No--I didn't know her when they lived in Independence.

FUCHS: When did you first become acquainted with them?

MRS. PALMER: After they moved back to the farm and Mrs. Truman would come to Independence as to the senatorial dinner that we had in 1934--that's when I began knowing Mrs. Truman.

FUCHS: In other words you didn't get acquainted with them really

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until the 'thirties--after he was in politics and she would come to Independence?

MRS. PALMER: No.

FUCHS: Of course you wouldn't have taught Vivian or Mary Jane because they weren't in high school until after you were retired?

MRS. PALMER: No--the next I remember of Harry was when he came back from World War I and was running for judge of the county court. In 1926 I was elected city assessor for Independence, the first woman official that had ever been elected here. I always remember Mrs. John Paxton who came over to see me one Sunday and said, "We want to put your name up for city assessor." I thought that would be just wonderful.

In a few days Roger Slaughter, who later was our representative in Congress, came by (he had been taking a few private lessons from me on different high school subjects, preparing to enter Princeton University) and said, "Mrs. Palmer, I'm polling the district and I want to know how many "Rabbits" are in the district?"

I said, "Well, I'm not a Rabbit, Roger."

He said, "Well you are too. The Rabbits put your name up for city assessor."

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“Oh,” I said, “I’m whatever Harry Truman is, and he’s a ‘Goat.’”

I don’t know whether Harry was a Goat or not--you see they had two big factions in those days (1920’s), Democratic factions--the Rabbits and the Goats. They seem to be reviving them up here at the courthouse again, now.

FUCHS: Had you ever thought yourself affiliated with the Goats up to that time?

MRS. PALMER: I didn’t know anything about them. I didn’t know what a Goat was or a Rabbit. I wasn’t interested in the factions. I was just interested in school life, you know. Every now and then some of the pupils from the high school wanted a little coaching and they would come down here, and I gave private lessons at a dollar an hour. I had the Thomas Swope Jr. children--all five (four girls and one boy) for about five years. They paid me a hundred dollars a month and just came in the morning, sometimes didn’t show up at all. I couldn’t get them to come regularly. They would go to Kansas City, if Jaccard’s Jewelry Store had an auction and buy diamond bracelets--everyone of the girls would come back with a diamond bracelet to show me next day. So, no wonder I never could get them through school. Anyway, I had them for about five years. The first hundred-dollar bill I ever saw, Tom Swope paid me. He paid me with a hundred-dollar bill every month.

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FUCHS: Actually, you hadn’t become deeply interested in county politics and by the time Harry was running for presiding judge, you just associated yourself with whatever faction he did--you just felt that way?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, and in 1926 I knew there were at least two factions in the Democratic party, Rabbits and Goats, and when Roger Slaughter came by polling me as a Rabbit I said, “Well, I’m not--I’m whatever Harry Truman is.”

FUCHS: In other words you were following his career as...

MRS. PALMER: Judge of the county court--when Harry lost out in 1924 it was because the Democrats split and were fighting among themselves, but he came back in 1926.

FUCHS: He came back in as presiding judge in 1926 for a four-year term.

MRS. PALMER: Well, that’s what I thought.

Anyway, Roger was trying to make a Rabbit out of me and I didn’t know what the factions even meant, but I wanted to be what Harry was because I had always been for Harry Truman whatever he was in politics.

FUCHS: You sort of followed his career as a former pupil?

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MRS. PALMER: That first time that he ran for county judge in 1922, I got interested right away because he had been my pupil and Mr. Palmer did, too; and we wanted to see him elected, and whatever influence we had in this precinct we used it for Harry.

FUCHS: Did you campaign actively or was it just a matter of talking to your friends?

MRS. PALMER: Yes--I tell you--by that time women had the vote and Independence was a conservative old town. They kind of looked down on women who wanted to vote, but Mrs. John Paxton, who came out here from Virginia, and was very conservative, too--the lady who was on the city committee later and asked me to run for city assessor--said to me, "Well let's ring some doorbells--even though they will think it's awful of us--and get out the women's vote." We did--we went around ringing a lot of doorbells and when Harry ran for judge of the county court, I think we got votes for him.

FUCHS: They asked you to run in 1926, but in 1922, already, you were, with Mrs. Paxton, ringing doorbells?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, I was interested, because it was Harry Truman,

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my former pupil, you see.

Then, in 1926, I was elected city assessor and Harry was elected presiding judge of the county court. I had no place to write my books up at the courthouse--the city assessor didn't have any office--and Harry said, "You come on in to the county court's office and use our desks, because we are not there half the time."

So, I wrote my books up there in the courthouse in the office where Harry Truman was presiding judge, and when Harry would come over, if we ever had a minute together, he would want to talk. He wanted to talk about the "War Between the States" and about my father Hopkins Hardin, who was in Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. This centennial year (1962) brings back memories of my father's experiences in that war:

Misty shadows come creeping round the door
And as they spread their tents about,
The old lines march once more!

He was very interested in that battle. And he would want me to tell the whole story about father having been wounded three times in Pickett's Charge and left on the field as dead; and how three days afterwards, he was found by Catholic sisters going over the battlefield looking for

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wounded soldiers and was taken to Baltimore to be nursed back to health; and how after his recovery, and on crutches, the United States Government asked for his allegiance, which he wouldn't give; and how he was kept in prison from then until the end of the war. Harry always wanted to know all about that.

Father was, of course, in General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, and Harry is a great admirer of General Robert E. Lee. Once when Bess Truman had a trip East, she wrote me that she went to the Battle of Gettysburg field and thought about my father having been in the battle there. Several times my father was asked to come to the high school in those days and talk to Miss Margaret Phelps' history class about his experiences in the War Between the States. I can remember that Harry would tell me how he considered General Robert E. Lee a great hero. Well, Harry and I had some happy hours together at the courthouse when he was judge of the county court and I city assessor for Independence. I was city assessor from 1926 to 1936.

FUCHS: Were you elected each time for a two-year term?

MRS. PALMER: We were elected every two years. Then Harry was elected to the Senate in 1934 and got me this Federal job as FHA woman representative for western Missouri, and I

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thought I could still go on being city assessor. Then I found out that under the Hatch Act one couldn't hold two political jobs. I had to give up the city assessor's office.

FUCHS: You know, of course, that he operated a haberdashery. Do you recall anything about that?

MRS. PALMER: I didn't know anything about that. When he ran for judge, I began hearing about him having been in that business and how it failed, and that he was being urged to run for judge of the county court.

FUCHS: Did you get any objections, when you rang door bells in 1922, from people about his not being able to make a success in the haberdashery; that is implying, could he be a good county judge?

MRS. PALMER: Maybe some of them were against him, but they didn't let me know it. I think everybody I talked to voted for Harry.

FUCHS: Then, in 1924 when he ran against Henry Rummel because of the factional split between the Rabbits and the Goats. .

MRS. PALMER: We Democrats split up and Harry got defeated because there were two factions again.

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FUCHS: Did you campaign for him again that time?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes. And in 1928, I organized a little Democratic club for the women here. I wanted to work for Harry. I guess, as presiding judge, he had to be reelected in 1928, didn't he?

FUCHS: No, I believe there was a four-year term for presiding judge. He ran in 1926 and 1930.

MRS. PALMER: Anyway, I wanted to be sure that Harry kept on and that was the inspiration for my organizing a little Democratic club, and we called it the "Jackson Democratic Club." It took in just the women in Independence, not Eastern Jackson County.

FUCHS: Was it the "Women's Jackson Democratic Club" or just the "Jackson Democratic Club"?

MRS. PALMER: Just the Jackson Democratic Club; we didn't want the word "county" in it.

FUCHS: You didn't have the word "woman"...

MRS. PALMER: No--and--when the Women's Jackson Democratic Club organized about 1952 and took in the whole county, I asked them to absorb us, which they did.

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FUCHS: One thing, Henry Rummel was always referred to as "old man Henry Rummel" and yet I hear that he wasn't so very much older than those who were speaking of him as "old man." Do you know why they called him, "old man Rummel"?

MRS. PALMER: It seems to me he was an old man, too. He lived over on North Main close to my Cousin Lizzie McCurdy Powell whom I was telling you about. She moved there in 1910, and he was there, second house from her. He lived to be a real old man--died just a year or two ago.

FUCHS: It seems to me that he wasn't but, maybe sixteen or twenty years older than Mr. Truman, and they referred to him as "old man." Well, Mr. Truman in '24 was only forty, so Mr. Rummel would have been at the most sixty. I don't think he was quite that old. They called him "old man Rummel."

MRS. PALMER: Yes, we did. I think he must have been sixty years old.

FUCHS: I don't think he was that old. I think that perhaps he was in his fifties, and Mr. Truman was in his forties. It seems rather incongruous to me, but everyone apparently called him old man Rummel. I wondered if there was any

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special reason, was he old beyond his years, that you recall?

MRS. PALMER: I just can't remember. How old was he when he died?

FUCHS: I can't tell you, I'll look that up.

MRS. PALMER: Maybe we called him old man Rummel just because we didn't like him.

FUCHS: Well, that is what I wondered; if he was as old as they seem to make him out.

Do you recall any of Mr. Truman's jobs after he got out of school? Or did you sort of lose track of him until after the war?

MRS. PALMER: No, they said he worked up at the Clinton Drugstore, but I can't remember that. Then he was in a bank in Kansas City, wasn't he?

FUCHS: Yes, in Kansas City in the first decade of the century.

MRS. PALMER: No, I didn't catch up with him again after he quit school, until this political situation came up when he ran for judge of the county court.

Oh, of course I was interested when he was overseas in the terrible World War I and so glad he got back safe.

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FUCHS: Do you know of a club called the "Harpie Club"?

MRS. PALMER: I've heard of it. Met over here at Polly Compton's on Delaware Street, didn't it?

FUCHS: I really don't know. I've heard they met above a drugstore.

MRS. PALMER: Well, I've heard it sometimes met at Polly's--he sold that Polly's Pop, you know, sold out, but they still sell Polly's Pop. He lives not far from Harry, bought a beautiful home, and keeps it beautiful especially at Christmas time.

I've heard of the Harpie Club where they played poker a lot and that Harry was a member and Edgar Hinde and Polly Compton, and I don't know who else, maybe Mize Peters.

FUCHS: Do you recall just how he happened to be renominated for county judge in 1922--for eastern judge?

MRS. PALMER: Well, I have heard this that it was not Tom Pendergast that suggested him, but his nephew, James Pendergast (young James) --who is still in political activities in Kansas City, I understand he was in the same battery that Harry was across seas, and when Harry failed in the haberdashery business, Jim Pendergast was very much interested in seeing him get into politics.

So, he suggest-

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ed it to Harry. Now, whether this is true or not, I don't know; but I've heard that Jim asked his uncle, Tom Pendergast, who was very powerful in the political field in Kansas City at that time, that he urge Harry to run for judge. As I understood it, Tom Pendergast had somebody else in mind, but when Harry went to see him, to see if he could get his influence, I think Tom Pendergast changed his mind and got behind Harry.

FUCHS: You have heard the story then, but you didn't have any knowledge of it at that time?

MRS. PALMER: No, I have just heard that.

FUCHS: Then, in 1926 he ran for presiding judge, do you have any memories of that campaign or of the earlier one in 1924? Anything that stands out in your mind about either of those?

MRS. PALMER: Well, I know we worked hard to get Harry back in, and at that time the Democrats pulled together, and he went in as presiding judge and made a wonderful record.

FUCHS: In 1924 were you surprised that he was defeated?

MRS. PALMER: No, we were uneasy because whenever the Democrats

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stuck together, they usually got what they wanted, but just as soon as they got to fighting, we lost. We were uneasy about the split in the party.

FUCHS: In 1926, of course, when he became presiding judge he then started a road program. Do you recall anything specifically about that, such as opposition or complaints that there was going to be another "boondoggle" or graft deal?

MRS. PALMER: Oh yes, but our roads were in awful condition. I think Jackson County was about the muddiest county anywhere and by the time Harry got through with that program and had built all those wonderful roads, a national magazine said that Jackson County had the finest roads in the United States now with one exception and that was Westchester County, New York. Then Harry got out those beautiful books to show what he had done. Everybody was very proud of our roads. We have had good roads ever since. He pulled Jackson County out of the mud.

When he came down here and was showing my husband what had been done, my husband was so impressed that he then predicted that Harry would become President of the United States someday! He had accomplished a very outstanding and wonderful job. Harry presented Mr. Palmer one of the books with an inscription, as I mentioned

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before. He also presented me one inscribed: "To Mrs. W. L. C. Palmer, who taught me to try to be what I ought. Harry S. Truman."

What time was it that our beautiful courthouses were built in Independence and Kansas City?

FUCHS: They were built when he was presiding judge, but in the first part of the thirties, around '33 or '34.

MRS. PALMER: Well, that was after the road program was finished.

FUCHS: Yes.

MRS. PALMER: That's what I thought and that's how we got our statue of General Jackson, that's up here on the courthouse lawn in Independence and of course, there's a famous one in front of the Kansas City courthouse, too.

FUCHS: You don't recall any criticism of Mr. Truman over the road or the courthouse programs.

MRS. PALMER: No, I guess they wouldn't criticize him to me because I always take up for him.

I do remember one man coming here after he was President. He came from Colorado, Kiowa County. I had a little 160 acres out there that Mr. Palmer had owned for years, just sage brush, wasn't worth anything, I think

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somebody just gave it to him for a small debt he owed him. A man out there began writing to me and wanted to buy it. Well, it wasn't worth very much and so when he asked my price, I said, "A thousand dollars."

"Oh," he said, "it wasn't worth it."

So, I didn't hear anything more from him until next year he wrote again about it. I went up \$500 and I kept going up every time he would write me, so because I asked \$2500 I didn't suppose he would buy it. One day he wrote me to meet him at the State Hotel in Kansas City and he was going to make his final offer and if I didn't take it, that was the last time he was going to make an offer. I went over and met him--his name was Mr. Wear--and he told me that \$2500 was his limit and he would pay cash. I sold it to him. I found out later why he wanted it. He had 640 acres, all except that little 160, and he wanted to fill out that 640 acres. I think that maybe he would have paid me more if I'd known that.

Anyway, he was talking about President Harry Truman. Oh, he was just running him down about everything. It was about 1948. I said, "Now you can't say anything against Harry Truman to me.

I was his teacher.

He said, "What did you teach him?"

I said, "Oh, I had him in Latin." and he began rolling off a Latin sentence--he was evidently a cultured person.

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Then he said, "Now what's that." I didn't know it, he said it so fast. He said, "well, that's from Virgil."

I said, "Well, I didn't teach Harry, Virgil. We didn't have Virgil in high school, then. I remembered some of the words and went home and looked up that quotation. What do you think it was? It was, "How fickle women are." So, that was criticism from somebody out in Colorado.

But, here in Independence, I don't hear anybody talking against Harry. They don't do it to me anyway.

FUCHS: Then, in 1934, of course, Mr. Truman was nominated for the Senate. Do you know anything about how that came about? Were you more interested in the machine politics here by that time?

MRS.PALMER: Who was against him?

FUCHS: In 1934, he was campaigning in the primary against Jacob (Tuck) Milligan from Richmond. Then of course, the incumbent was Roscoe C. Patterson, a Republican. I was just wondering if you had any recollections of that campaign when he was campaigning for senator that first time.

MRS. PALMER: No. I just know how hard I worked in my

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own precinct for him, but I can't remember the out-state vote or anything about that.

FUCHS: Did you have much contact with him in his first term as senator, 1934-40? I believe you did say that he had you appointed to a Federal Housing job.

MRS. PALMER: Yes, that's right. Woman's representative--I was to visit clubs (women's clubs) throughout Western Missouri and inform them what the FHA was. It was something new, you see.

FUCHS: I believe you held a job with the Work Projects Administration, [After July 1, 1939, called Works Progress Administration] as a war service director of some sort later on. Is that correct?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, the women's part in the FHA was dissolved after two years. They felt like everybody had information about it. So, the women's division was taken out and Harry got me a place as supervisor of recreation for Eastern Jackson County.

FUCHS: I see, and that was under the WPA. That would have been about what year then that you received that job?

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MRS. PALMER: That ran till until the close of the war, when they didn't need WPA recreation anymore.

FUCHS: To the beginning of the war or the close of the war?

MRS. PALMER: Close of the war, 1943 or 1944. 1944, I guess.

FUCHS: It ran up that far?

MRS. PALMER: Yes. I had that quite a number of years. This FHA job lasted only about eighteen months, but this WPA job, I got immediately afterwards, lasted until the end of World War II, when we didn't have any use for WPA recreation anymore. We started Crysler Stadium for baseball and held band concerts in Slover Park band shell for WPA musician's orchestras.

FUCHS: You started the FHA job shortly after he went in, in 1935?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, I guess it was about 1935.

Under the WPA recreation job, we feel like we started all this recreation that Independence has. They had no place to play baseball and we got them to build the stadium down here on Crysler Street. We turned the first spade of dirt for that. But, we had no lights and couldn't

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play at night, was the trouble, but we did have some wonderful ball games down there; but when the WPA closed down, then the citizens of Independence voted money for lights. So they have been having baseball games down there ever since. So, we always claimed WPA started recreation in Independence, but I don't think we get any credit for it.

FUCHS: I assume you applied to Mr. Truman for assistance in getting such a job?

MRS. PALMER: Yes. I wrote him a letter, after he became senator, for something and that's what he got right away.

FUCHS: You didn't have to go through Mr. Pendergast's office?

MRS. PALMER: Oh no, I just got that through Harry.

FUCHS: Did you have any other contacts that you recall with Mr. Truman when he was senator?

MRS. PALMER: I have his letters--some of them written in longhand that I wouldn't part with for anything. When he first went to Washington he said he knew he was going to be a lonely man because you know your first year as senator you don't have anything to do. But I think they

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found out pretty soon how valuable Harry was. He was up early in the morning in his office and always at work. They soon gave him plenty to do. But he wrote me letters in those days, occasionally, in longhand.

I had a lovely letter from Bess, I guess that was when she was Harry's secretary, maybe as senator. I was looking at that the other day.

FUCHS: Then, you have no other recollections of contacts with Mr. Truman as senator:

MRS. PALMER: I don't believe so.

FUCHS: Did you ever see him when he came home?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes, when he was senator I remember when he came home, I wanted to see him and I found out his office was in the Federal Reserve Bank Building in Kansas City. I guess it was the next year, maybe, when he came home. I went in to see him; there he was in the room all by himself, and as I came in he rose and I thought he looked so nice--every inch a senator. But, I think nearly every time, when he came home, I used to go over to see him for a few minutes at a time, because he was a very busy man, just to talk about anything.

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FUCHS: Were there a lot of people there generally, people asking favors?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes, you couldn't stay very long because as soon as you left somebody else was going right in.

FUCHS: Did you generally make an appointment?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, I had an appointment.

FUCHS: I see. Did you ever meet Mr. Pendergast? Did you know Mr. Pendergast?

MRS. PALMER: I don't believe I ever met Tom Pendergast. I know I got mad when I went to see the Benton murals down at Jefferson City that are painted in the lobby of the Legislature

there, you know, and I had heard a lot about them. When I looked at them I thought, "Oh, couldn't he paint anything pretty about Missouri, looks like he just painted everything ugly down there that he could." I finally got around to that political meeting in Kansas City and the guide said, "There's Tom Pendergast." It looked awful. I didn't like it because Mr. Benton put Tom Pendergast in like that.

FUCHS: Did you ever get to Washington when Mr. Truman

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was President?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes, that was such a thrill. I didn't get to go to his inauguration in 1949-- Misses Nellie and Ethel Noland and so many Independence people went, but there was some reason that I couldn't go. So here the years went on and General Eisenhower was elected in '52. My granddaughter was living in Washington then. She had a job (Nancy Lee Thompson Duckworth from Waco, Texas) and had married a man who worked in Washington, D.C., too, with the Federal Communications or something, FCC, whatever that is?

FUCHS: Federal Communications Commission.

MRS. PALMER: Nancy wrote me, and said, "Bill and I think you ought to come to Washington before your boy gets out of the White House. We are sending you a plane ticket." Of course, I went right away; that was my first plane flight. Nancy and Bill met me at the airport and as they took me into their apartment, Nancy said, "Well, I'm going to call Miss Rose Conway, and tell her you are here, and see if you won't get into the White House." She called Miss Rose that night--I'd known Miss Rose in Kansas City (she was Vivian Truman's secretary when I

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was with FHA) and I always thought her a wonderful person and lovely person. She said, "Oh, why couldn't your grandmother come sooner. Why they are getting ready to move out. Inauguration day is tomorrow. But, I'll see what I can do." She called back in a little while and said, "Yes, Mr. Truman says you are to come to the White House."

Well, we went over (Nancy and I) at the very time Harry had set for us, and we walked right into the office. There was Miss Rose Conway. She went in and told Harry that we were there, and Harry came out and spoke to us, and then said for us to go into the White House, and somebody would receive us. Miss Conway took us right to the door and somebody took over and was showing us all through the White House. Oh, it was beautiful and finally she seated us in the little parlor, I think it is the Dolley Madison Parlor, a small room, and directly, Bess came in. I thought, "Oh, I'm not going to get to see any more of Harry than just to shake hands with him."

And, Bess said, "Can't take you into our rooms because we are all packed up ready to go out." They were leaving the next day, you know. Directly, Harry came in, and then Margaret came in. So, we had a nice visit with the White

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House family after all.

The next day Nancy and I were on the sidewalk pretty close to the inauguration parade. We had seats there and here came Harry riding down the avenue with Ike, going up to the Capitol where Ike was to be inaugurated. We said, “Goodbye, Harry, hello, Ike.”

FUCHS: I believe in 1952, India Edwards came to Independence and spoke?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes, that was such a thrill.

FUCHS: How did that happen to come about?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, that was ‘52 wasn’t it? She was campaigning for the Democratic party, of course, and that very club that I belonged to, “The Women’s Eastern Jackson County Democratic Club” put me on for the breakfast to introduce India Edwards. Yes, that was quite a thrill to meet India Edwards.

FUCHS: Did you have a conversation with her?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes, we sat right by each other all during the breakfast, and we had a wonderful time. We had no idea the Democrats were going to get defeated. Eisenhower

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was just too popular! Great general that he was.

FUCHS: Did you discuss Mr. Truman or his part in the campaign, if so do you recall any of it?

MRS. PALMER: Well, that morning we had his picture, of course, hanging right in the room. He was campaigning wasn’t he, that year?

FUCHS: Yes, he campaigned for Mr. Stevenson, of course.

MRS. PALMER: Oh, yes, that’s right, but I can’t remember seeing Harry doing the campaigning.

FUCHS: You can’t recall any part of your conversation with Mrs. Edwards, anything she might have had to say about the chances or...?

MRS. PALMER: I do remember one thing she said, “Now, remember, ‘just one heart beat between the presidency and Nixon.’--we were so down on Nixon, because of what he’d said about Harry and the Democratic party. I do remember that, “Just one heart beat between the President and Richard Nixon.”

FUCHS: Have you had social relations with the Truman family here in Independence over the years?

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MRS. PALMER: Yes, I can remember when Margaret was a child. She was sick so long--I think out of the first twelve years of her life, they said that she had spent about eight in bed.

My husband used to raise those great big Ponderosa tomatoes; and whenever the summer was on, and he knew Margaret was sick, he would always send over those tomatoes, and Bess would always speak about them.

We have had social relations with the Wallaces. I can remember way back when my children were little, and when the Wallace children were little, the Priest of Pallas Parade was in Kansas City--that was like the Veiled Prophets of St. Louis, and we always had to go. Bess' father was living then, Mr. Dave Wallace, and he and Mr. Palmer were both very close friends in the Masonic order. So, going up there that night we ran into Dave Wallace and his family going to the Priest of Pallas Parade, and Dave said, "Well, it is hard to see it from the curb, you come up to my office." He was a lawyer, I guess, and his office was right above where the parade would pass. So, we were all together that night for the Priest of Pallas Parade, a beautiful parade. Through the years we have always been friendly.

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FUCHS: About what year would that have been then?

MRS. PALMER: Let me see--that must have been about 1907... I don't know what year Mr. Dave Wallace died. That was just before his death, I remember. Let's see, my daughter Elizabeth was born, in 1902- -and I think she was about five years old--seems to me it must have been about 1907.

FUCHS: What type of man was Mr. Wallace?

MRS. PALMER: Oh, he was a wonderful looking man, a fine man. My husband thought so much of him. They were close together in the Masonic order. In fact, I think when Mr. Palmer came here from Georgia, Mr. Dave Wallace was pretty high in the order. He was putting Mr. Palmer forward for certain degrees. Somebody presents you, I suppose, I have forgotten. Anyway, Mr. Palmer--I don't know how they proceed--became a Knight Templar. I had his sword and uniform. When he died, my son Billie in Topeka, quoted from an old poem, "I let them take whate'er they would, but I kept my father's sword!" So he has that Knights Templar sword now.

FUCHS: What year did Mr. Palmer die?

MRS. PALMER: 1937.

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FUCHS: What did his initials stand for?

MRS.PALMER: W. L. C.--William Louis Collins Palmer. Three initials were very popular in Georgia. He was a native of Georgia, born at Thompson, Georgia, and a graduate of the University of Georgia. He was very proud of those three initials. Then they went out of style, but seems to me they are kind of coming back.

FUCHS: Did his close friends call him Bill or William or W.L. or...?

MRS. PALMER: Uncle Billie--yes, I can remember them calling him Uncle Billie.

FUCHS: His friends called him Uncle Billie?

MRS. PALMER: No, his nephews and nieces did down in Georgia. We had a trip to Georgia right after our marriage and everybody was talking about Uncle Billie coming back.

FUCHS: What did his friends around here call him or refer to him as?

MRS. PALMER: I never heard anyone call him Billie around here, just Mr. Palmer, or Professor Palmer--I remember the

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pupils used to call him Professor Palmer.

FUCHS: I wanted to ask you about a Latin inscription. Mr. Truman says in the drugstore where he worked there was a jar, an apothecary jar, and on it was a Latin inscription, "ici. toed. foet," an abbreviation. They called it "icy toad feet." Can that be translated?

MRS. PALMER: No, I don't recognize a thing in there. Doctors and druggists really have got them, haven't they? I can't read the prescriptions they write for me.

But a Latin inscription that I have heard Harry quote is one my husband selected for the new Independence High School in 1898; it was, "Juventus Spes Mundi." (Youth the hope of the world.) It was inscribed in the transom over the entrance door on the Maple Avenue side of the school.

FUCHS: Now, Mr. Truman worked on a railroad for a few months after he got out of high school--rather, he worked as a timekeeper for a construction company which was building a spur or double-tracking, for the railroad, I believe, from Sibley to Sheffield. Now, it said Sheffield was a small place near Independence, do you know where that

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was? Would that by any chance be...?

MRS. PALMER: You mean, where Sheffield is?

FUCHS: Yes.

MRS. PALMER: It's where the steel works are now--that Armco Steel factory here.

FUCHS: Was that a separate community in 1900?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, it was kind of an industrial community, like it is. You know, we thought Independence, I mean Kansas City was going to move east, and Independence was very proud of the fact that it was going to join Kansas City, but Kansas City went south, and business, all that industry came east. That was the Sheffield Steel works before it became Armco, it's a branch of Armco now. In earlier days, or at first, I think it was called "Kansas City Bolt and Nut Works."

FUCHS: Yes, I know Armco was Sheffield, but was there a little village there, which they called Sheffield?

MRS. PALMER: I don't remember that there was any village there, just an industrial district. I don't think many people lived around there.

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FUCHS: I see. Well, do you have any other recollections of Mr. Truman?

MRS. PALMER: It seems like I have told everything I know, haven't I? You brought that out, you had a good many very lovely questions.

I'm glad you asked me about my visit to the White House, because I had tried to get in the White House once before. Sue Gentry wrote it up in the *Examiner* when I got back, in 1953, that Mrs. Palmer finally saw the President in the White House. That was after I got to visit Harry, Bess, and Margaret, you know.

But, in 1898, Mr. Palmer and I joined the National Educational Association trip to Washington, D.C. I think Mr. Steve Barrett got up the party. He was superintendent of city schools for a year or two, and got Mr. Palmer and me to join this party; when we got to White Sulphur Springs--I guess we were going via Baltimore and Ohio Railroad--they told us all to get off and we could go down and see the springs and get a drink of the mineral water. We had to go down a steep hill. It was a beautiful place, and, well, we lingered along--Mr. Palmer and I were kind of falling in love, I guess. The first thing we knew, nobody was down there, but us, and there was

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Mr. Charlie Parker (who was a teacher in Kansas City) up there at the train waving wildly at us.

He said, "I'm holding the train for you. Come on." He always told me afterwards that he saved my life, more than once, and one time was at White Sulphur Springs.

Well, when we got to Washington, the Spanish American War was on--that was 1898. Some of Mr. Palmer's former pupils were out at Camp Alger (the Army camp at Washington, D.C.). We went out there to see Tom Lea and others who had gone to school to Mr. Palmer at old Independence High School.

Tom Lea afterwards lived in El Paso, Texas and became mayor of the city. His son (same name) became a famous Texas artist and writer--wrote the *Brave Bulls*.

We ate hard tack with them and everything else on the "army mess."

On Sunday we were sitting in Lafayette Square, which you know is right across the street from the White House, and Mr. Palmer proposed; I accepted--and that's when we became engaged.

We went to the White House to get in--the whole party did. Mr. McKinley was President, and all Government buildings were closed on account of the war. We didn't

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get in at all. I came home disappointed. So Miss Sue Gentry wrote when I did get in in 1953, "Mrs. Palmer finally got to see a President in the White House."

Miss Carrie Wallace--she and Mr. Palmer were associated very closely together as she was librarian in the new high school building--his office was right by the library--she always teased me about the year 1898, as "the year Miss Hardin went fishing." Mr. Palmer and I were married in 1899.

FUCHS: Well, I guess that about takes care of any questions I have at this time. If I think of any more, I'll come back.

MRS. PALMER: I can't think of anything else connected with Harry particularly. There was a big homecoming dinner after he was elected President. I remember we held it in the Latter Day Saint's auditorium, and Harry, of course, made a speech. He looked down and saw me, and said, "Well, one of my old teachers is here, Miss Hardin. I used to think she was lovely in high school, I still think she is."

I was very proud of that compliment.

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FUCHS: What do you think now, looking back on the curriculum in the latter part of the 19th Century? Do you think it was good? Do you think they had a good foundation in those three years of high school and seven or eight grades of grade school?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, I think they did. And we were so optimistic in those years: I like to quote from Tennyson's "Locksley Hall":

I doubt not, through the ages,
One increasing purpose runs, and
The thoughts of men are widened
As the process of the suns.

I'm still optimistic about it.

FUCHS: Do you think that the foundation they had in school then was as good as you might get now in high school?

MRS. PALMER: Seems to me like it was. To me, it's better, but of course, I'm partial. Seems to me that we had a deeper foundation in those days, but then that may be just because I was into that; I don't know enough about it right now. I suppose I get alarmed about the young people these days when I think about our Victorian manners, and how they have changed with these school

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children. It may be all right.

FUCHS: At least, Mr. Truman came out very well.

MRS. PALMER: Yes, he did, and that whole class of 1901, if you have gone over it, and know anything about them. That was a banner class. Maybe there are just certain years when this comes about.

FUCHS: Did you ever see Charlie Ross after he became press secretary?

MRS. PALMER: Yes, Charlie Ross came here after he was press secretary one year--I don't know what year that was--maybe about two years after Harry became President. They held a press conference to show us just how it was done in Washington. They held it at Memorial Hall, and all of us went there and I got to see Charlie again. That is the last time I ever saw him. Oh, no, I saw him once again. This is one thing I want to recall.

Among the first honorary degrees that Harry Truman received was one from Baylor University, about two years after he became President, about 1947. I had organized the Browning Society here in 1926, and by the way, Harry and Bess were charter members of the Independence Browning

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Society, although they never attended, they had their name down on the membership list and paid their dues--the first year, anyway. But, when I went to Waco in 1947 (I go down to Waco to

visit my daughter, Elizabeth Palmer Thompson), I kept talking to Dr. A. J. Armstrong, head of that Browning Library building, which he was building in honor of Robert Browning, about what a wonderful man was in the White House and that he was my pupil--Harry Truman.

Well, the next year, Baylor decided to confer an honorary degree on Harry. He was vacationing down at Key West and was to fly back to Washington, stopping at Waco to receive this honorary degree. It was in November. Dr. Armstrong told me later that I was influential in Harry receiving that degree. He said, "I was so impressed with your praise of Harry Truman that I began talking to the authorities," and said, "Why don't we confer an honorary degree on the President of the United States, he's a Baptist," and, of course, Baylor is a Baptist University. When they had it all arranged I received an invitation to the luncheon. Dr. Armstrong told me, "I gave up my place at the luncheon, so that you could be there." When we were seated, my little granddaughter, Martha Sue Thompson, six years old, came in (I didn't know she was going to do this) with a little

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box; she opened it and walked right up to the table where Harry was and said, "I have a flower for you." It was a gardenia.

Harry took it and put it in his lapel, and said, "Now put one right there." He wanted Martha Sue to kiss him on the cheek. So, she has always said Harry Truman is her favorite person. She was married last July (1961). I went to the wedding. I asked her, "Do you still think Harry Truman is your favorite person?"

She said, "Yes--he is!"

FUCHS: That's very good.

MRS. PALMER: Oh--I forgot to tell you about that honorary degree. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to see him receive it in the midst of all those literary folks--a far cry from the time in 1901 when I saw him receive his diploma from Independence High School! But, a snowstorm came up while he was seated at the luncheon table, and he had to take his plane for Washington before finishing the fine luncheon Baylor had prepared in his honor. Charlie Ross was with him. That was the last time I saw Charlie.

FUCHS: Well, I certainly thank you for your cooperation.

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MRS. PALMER: I think, I've told an awful lot. I don't know whether it's the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You didn't make me swear anyway, and hold up my right hand, did you?

FUCHS: No. Thank you very much.

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