

Oral History Interview
with
PANSY PERKINS

Friend of the Truman family in Grandview; member of Mary Jane Truman's Sunday School class; member of Order of Eastern Star; former Vice President and Cashier, Grandview Bank.

and

PAULINE SIMS

Friend of the Truman family in Grandview; member of Mary Jane Truman's Sunday School class; member of Order of Eastern Star; public school teacher.

Grandview, Missouri
February 2, 1981 by Niel Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
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Oral History Interview
with
PANSY PERKINS AND PAULINE SIMS
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JOHNSON: Miss Perkins, I think we'll start with some questions for you. Would you tell me when and where you were born, and what your parents' names were?

PERKINS: I was born near Belton, Missouri, May 13, 1904.

JOHNSON: Near Belton, on a farm?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And when did you move to Grandview?

PERKINS: We moved to Grandview in 1916.

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JOHNSON: What were your parents' names?

PERKINS: John R. Perkins was my father, and Melvina Perkins was my mother.

JOHNSON: Then you moved to the Grandview area in 1916. That's when you first got acquainted with the Truman family, or had you known about the Trumans before that time?

PERKINS: No, I didn't know them. We moved to Grandview and started to high school that year in 1916.

JOHNSON: You moved here with your parents, right?

PERKINS: Yes, we lived on a farm east of Grandview.

JOHNSON: If we can pin down that location, about how far east would that be?

PERKINS: Well, it was about 3/4 of a mile east of Grandview.

JOHNSON: About how far would that be from the Truman farm?

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PERKINS: Well, it would be about a mile and a half.

JOHNSON: When did you first become acquainted with the Truman family? Do you recall the circumstances?

PERKINS: Well, we immediately moved our church membership to the old Grandview Baptist Church, and of course Mary Truman was very active in the church at that time. I became acquainted with her just right away. She was my Sunday School teacher. I don't remember the years, but she taught Sunday School.

JOHNSON: Do you recall her brother, Harry, ever being at the church?

PERKINS: Yes, periodically she would call or let it be known that she couldn't be there that Sunday because Harry was coming out and he wanted to come to church with her. So she had to miss Sunday School. So, yes, he came to church.

JOHNSON: Now what years are we talking about?

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PERKINS: We're talking about from 1916 on, to about 1918, because I think he went to war maybe in 1917. But it was during that year that he was...

JOHNSON: That year just before he went into the Army?

PERKINS: That's right.

JOHNSON: And he lived out here on the farm. His sister, Mary Jane, was your Sunday School teacher, and once in awhile she would give the class to someone else so that she and her brother could go to church together?

PERKINS: That's right.

JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about that year in regard to Harry Truman?

PERKINS: Well, no, except that I just knew that he was a man that she was very, very fond of. And everything stopped in their home when Harry was going to come because they thought so much of him.

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JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about Harry Truman's reputation in that year that you were acquainted with him back there in 1916-17? Did he stand out in any way?

PERKINS: Well, he was a very, very genteel and polite human being. He was the type of person that you just felt so at ease when you met him; he was so down-to-earth, and yet he was something else, too, even then.

JOHNSON: Do you recall when you first met him? Would it have been at church?

PERKINS: I think so; I'm quite sure.

JOHNSON: Do you remember him playing the piano?

PERKINS: Not at church. Mary played; she was our pianist for years.

JOHNSON: In the Sunday School?

PERKINS: Yes; at church too.

JOHNSON: Did they have an organ?

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PERKINS: No, not then.

JOHNSON: So she had what would now be the job of an organist?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: You're one of the few that I've talked to that did meet Harry Truman while he was still living on the farm. Of course, that was the last year that he actually worked on the farm and lived on it.

At this point, maybe I should ask Miss Sims the same kind of questions. Do you want to tell me when and where you were born and what your parents' names were?

SIMS: I was born on a farm near Versailles, Missouri and my father was Reverend J. Ben Sims, and my mother was Laura Ida Jones Sims. I was born July 8, 1906.

JOHNSON: You were born near Versailles?

SIMS: That's down near what is now the Lake of the Ozarks.

JOHNSON: When did you move to the Grandview area?

SIMS: I went to school at Southwest Baptist College and Hannah Clements Montgomery was one of my classmates. It was through her that I came to Grandview to teach in 1927. I was here three years and during that time I was also in the same Sunday School class that Pansy was talking about, and Mary was the teacher. I can remember at least once or twice going out to the old home and attending parties, Sunday School class parties, out there.

JOHNSON: At the Truman farm home. And what years was that?

SIMS: That was between '27 and '30. I was here three years. Then I left and was gone for 12 years and then I came back here in 1942. I've been here ever since. It was during that time that I renewed my acquaintance with Mary.

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JOHNSON: She was still teaching Sunday School from '27 to '30?

SIMS: Yes. Not all the time, I can't remember which years, but part of the time.

JOHNSON: What age level was that that she was teaching?

SIMS: Adult women.

JOHNSON: Miss Perkins, you would have been only twelve years old when you started in Mary Jane's class. So she was teaching the 7th-8th grade or 6th-7th grade then?

PERKINS: Well, I was ready for high school.

SIMS: Back in those days it was a small church and the age group wasn't just one or two years, it covered from teens up through early twenties or something like that.

PERKINS: But Mary taught, I would say, off and on from 1916 on.

SIMS: I think she was still teaching when I left here in 1930.

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JOHNSON: I don't know if they had any lay preachers in those days. Did you ever hear Mr. Truman speak in church before the dedication in 1950?

SIMS: I don't know where I got the information, but I either read it somewhere, or it might have been Mary told me, that back during the years that Harry was here on the farm he was active in what at that time was called BYPU, the Baptist Young People's Union, a youth organization. As I say, I can't verify that but I know that somewhere I have received that information.

JOHNSON: In 1917, of course, Harry Truman leaves the farm to enter the Army. Do you recall anything about the time that he was in World War I? Did you visit the farm home in that period when he was gone?

PERKINS: I can't remember the dates, but I've been out there several times. I'm sure I was there.

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SIMS: I can remember going out there at least once. It was in the wintertime; I can remember wrapping up to go. And we played tiddlywinks. I don't know why that comes to my mind.

JOHNSON: That would have been the late twenties you're talking about?

SIMS: That would be between '27 and '30.

JOHNSON: You played tiddlywinks on the farm.

SIMS: It was a Sunday School party, Sunday School class party. I think I recollect going in there another time or two, but that particular one stands out in my mind.

JOHNSON: Did you ever meet Harry Truman at the farm home at any time?

SIMS: No, I don't remember that I did. In fact, I don't know that I remember meeting him until after I came back in 1942. As I said awhile ago, I met him one night when he was the

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Installing Patron at Eastern Star and I was the Installing Organist.

JOHNSON: Organist?

SIMS: It was a piano but they called the office organist.

JOHNSON: You say you can't recall just when your first visit was to the farm home?

PERKINS: No, I don't.

JOHNSON: But was it before or after World War I? Would it have been that first year that you were here?

PERKINS: It must have been after; I've just been kind of hazy about that.

JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about the farm sale out there, the sale of the equipment and livestock in 1919 after Harry Truman came back from the Army?

PERKINS: No.

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JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about that sale?

PERKINS: No, I know they had one.

JOHNSON: Have you heard, or do you know of any equipment or items from that farm, who might own any, or where they might be located?

PERKINS: No.

JOHNSON: Mr. Truman apparently spent a few weeks out here at the farm and then of course did get married to Bess Wallace and decided to live in Independence at her mother's home. Do you recall when you first saw him again after he had gone away to the Army?

PERKINS: I just can't remember those dates. I know after he became Judge, I remember those Sundays that he would come out to see his mother and come to church with Mary.

JOHNSON: This would be in the twenties?

PERKINS: You see, his wife and daughter would be

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gone to their church, and he would come out here and visit his mother awhile. She didn't come to church, and he would just come to church with Mary. I remember those Sundays.

JOHNSON: So usually he came out here without his wife, without Bess or Margaret?

PERKINS: Yes, because they went to their own church. I don't think he went to church with them very often. I don't believe he did, except on special occasions.

JOHNSON: So we're talking now about the 1920s?

PERKINS: Yes; it was sometime in there.

JOHNSON: Did he come out rather frequently to visit on Sundays?

PERKINS: Well, it was not uncommon I'd say. He was very faithful to see his mother sometime during the week.

JOHNSON: Did you get a chance to talk to him at all

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then when he was here with his sister at church?

PERKINS: No, no, except just maybe to speak a few words to him or something like that. Then we didn't think too much about him, except that he was a County Judge. Like what was it his mother-in-law called him? I got the book *Bess and Harry* for Christmas and I am enjoying reading it so much.

JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about the farm itself, way back there in the early period? Do you recall anything about the kinds of crops they grew out there?

PERKINS: No; I was raised on a farm, but I'm the poorest farmer that ever lived. My father didn't believe in the womenfolks having anything to do about the farm.

JOHNSON: Didn't have to milk cows or anything?

PERKINS: Oh, we could have chickens, but we didn't

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have anything to do with the farm work or anything.

JOHNSON: Have you heard of Harry Truman's reputation as a farmer, that he was scientific, and practiced conservation, and raised pure-bred stock and that sort of thing?

PERKINS: No, I don't think so.

SIMS: All people heard was that he plowed a straight row.

PERKINS: I remember one particular thing. Mary Truman said that they didn't even have a cow, that they all hated to milk so. She said, "We bought milk."

JOHNSON: She said they didn't have cows, and the reason was that they just hated to milk?

PERKINS: They hated to milk. I thought that was the funniest thing, people living on a farm and not having a cow.

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JOHNSON: Well, they apparently had some cattle, but they must have been steers or beef cattle. I guess I hadn't thought about that. Did she say they bought milk for their use?

PERKINS: Yes, they bought milk. They bought milk at the grocery store.

JOHNSON: And that was a 600-acre farm, a lot of pasture land.

PERKINS: Yes. Well, I can understand. Just she and her mother, you know, and how well would they do, milking a cow?

JOHNSON: They may have had a few cows before he left for the Army, possibly.

PERKINS: Well, might have been.

JOHNSON: In the twenties at least. And apparently Vivian Truman was farming the land over there. I get the impression that a lot of that land was used for hay and for grazing in the twenties.

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PERKINS: There was a great big barn out there that burned several years ago.

JOHNSON: Yes, that was sure unfortunate wasn't it?

PERKINS: Yes.

SIMS: I read somewhere or heard that they had wonderful walnut lumber in it.

JOHNSON: From the Hickman Mills, the original Hickman Mills; that's the story.

Do you have any knowledge of the Trumans doing business here in Grandview? Do you recall Harry Truman ever here uptown, visiting uptown?

PERKINS: Well, I don't know, but I know he did business with our bank before I came there. When we moved the bank we were very careful to store some of those records and things that we had.

JOHNSON: Okay, I want to pick up on that. You went through high school here in Grandview?

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PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And then after high school what did you do?

PERKINS: I went up to the bank to work through the summer. They wanted summer help.

JOHNSON: What bank was it?

PERKINS: The Grandview Bank. It was called the Farmers Bank then. And that was in 1920.

JOHNSON: You went there just for summer help. Then what happened?

PERKINS: I just never did get away.

JOHNSON: That summer stretched out for a long time. How many years did you spend at the bank?

PERKINS: Almost fifty.

JOHNSON: What positions did you have up there?

PERKINS: Well, I started out as a flunky, and I wound up as Vice President and Cashier.

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JOHNSON: So you've retired from the bank?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: What year did you retire?

PERKINS: December 31, 1969.

JOHNSON: And you say you can recall Trumans doing business at the bank?

PERKINS: I know that they did business before I went there. In fact, Vivian Truman and his boys did a lot of business with Grandview Bank, especially the two young ones -- Harry and Gilbert.

JOHNSON: Do you remember Harry Truman being at the bank, ever?

PERKINS: No. But I know he had had business there because I remember seeing the old checks and some statements and things.

JOHNSON: Do you have any records with Harry Truman's signature on them up there?

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PERKINS: I have an idea those have been taken out.

SIMS: I have his signature on my Eastern Star receipt. The night that he was the Installing Patron everybody up there nearly had out their Eastern Star receipt showing they had Harry Truman signing his name on all of them. I think that everybody that was there that night must have his autograph. I know I do.

JOHNSON: Well, we do have some records from the bank that Mr. Truman worked for. We have the xeroxed records, the employment record, and the application form that he filled out to become a clerk, and later a bookkeeper at a couple of banks in downtown Kansas City. But you have seen some checks and other financial records at the bank that he had signed?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you're not sure what the status is of that?

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PERKINS: I'm just afraid to say about that. They may be all together somewhere in storage out there now; I can't say about that.

JOHNSON: They have some old retired records in the bank building as far as you know?

PERKINS: I just can't be real sure.

JOHNSON: I wonder if they would be considered confidential at this point. Would any of them be considered confidential at this point?

PERKINS: All bank records are confidential; that's the reason why I'm hesitant. Everything in a bank is confidential, and every person is just the same as any other person.

JOHNSON: You do recall him being Presiding Judge or Eastern Jackson County Judge?

PERKINS: Yes. I remember that.

JOHNSON: And the road program?

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PERKINS: Yes, I remember the road program particularly because some people thought it was so ridiculous, and other people were farsighted like Mr. Truman.

JOHNSON: So there were some people here that were not supportive of the road program. Is that right?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: For what reason? Why did they oppose it?

PERKINS: Well, I can remember when the Outer Belt was built. They thought that was just ridiculous because it seemed so far out. You know, it's right on the county line. There was a lot of controversy on that, I know that.

JOHNSON: How about the Blue Ridge Extension? Was that very popular?

PERKINS: I don't believe in this area there was so much objection to that, because the people felt like they might use that, but they couldn't see

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far ahead enough to see how important the Outer Belt would be.

JOHNSON: What did you think of Mr. Truman's association with Tom Pendergast? Do you recall any reactions to that?

PERKINS: That I don't know too much about. Of course Grandview used to be a very Democratic stronghold, and it wouldn't make any difference what a Democrat did. It would be all right.

JOHNSON: Well, I've met a handful of Republicans, surprisingly, in my conversations.

PERKINS: Yes. Since I happen to be a Democrat I can say that.

JOHNSON: Now, being in the bank, I suppose you're somewhat familiar with the problem of the mortgage and foreclosure on the farm mortgage in 1940?

PERKINS: Well, I heard about it, but I don't have any firsthand information on it. Mary always

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told me -- she said people think because we have all this land, that we ought to have a lot of money for everything, and she says, "We don't." She says, "We're just land poor; that's all there is to it." She always seemed to have plenty for everything though. I don't think she ever wanted for anything.

JOHNSON: That mortgage was foreclosed on in 1940 and then Mary Jane and her mother moved into town here.

SIMS: Right over here, on High Grove. We could watch their house from the west windows.

JOHNSON: Did you visit them then after they moved to town? Do you recall what they had to say about moving from the farm? Was it something that they wanted to do or did they regret moving into town?

SIMS: Did they move first over here or over there?

PERKINS: Oh, there was another little house over here somewhere.

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JOHNSON: I guess after Martha died, why, Mary Jane moved into this other house over here.

PERKINS: No, there was still another house.

SIMS: There was still another house, and then they lived over here when Grandma Truman died.

JOHNSON: Okay, they moved into a house when they came into town, and then they moved from that house over to the one by the railroad tracks?

SIMS: Yes. Then Grandma Truman died, and Mary moved over there on 13th.

JOHNSON: But the first one they moved into, they must have lived there just a short time. Is that correct?

PERKINS: I think they were waiting to get the paperwork on this one. I may be wrong. Where did Grandma Truman break her hip? Wasn't that over there? And they wanted to get in a house that didn't have any steps.

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SIMS: But it did have steps though.

PERKINS: Well, not in the house.

JOHNSON: Oh, she broke her hip not in that house by the railroad, but in this other house they first moved into?

SIMS: I can't remember, but I know they lived over here for a long time. They lived over here quite a lot of the time while Mr. Truman was in the White House because all the Secret Service men had a little house over there back of the building and we could watch them. In fact, when Grandma Truman died, they had Secret Service men clear up here to our corner and around to keep people from going in there.

JOHNSON: So did you ever visit her at that first house that they moved into?

PERKINS: I've been there. That was Neil Atteberry's house.

SIMS: Neil Atteberry's house is the one she lived

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in over here at 13016 13th Street. Then George Vest bought it, and then Miss Ella Hall bought it and moved it over there when they were going to put in Conn School. But that's not the one that they first moved into. That's the last house that Mary lived in.

JOHNSON: Do you have the address, or could we pin down that first house?

SIMS: Mary and Martha left the farm and moved to 1003 High Grove Road, Grandview, Missouri.

JOHNSON: Miss Perkins, did you visit them in that first house that they moved into, and then also in the other houses?

PERKINS: Well, I'm kind of confused on that.

JOHNSON: Do you recall any visits with Mary Jane and her mother over at the house before 1947?

PERKINS: I've been in their house.

SIMS: I remember going over to this house several times.

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JOHNSON: Do you remember any conversations or any comments about how her son, Harry, was doing in the White House? Did you ever talk about politics when you were visiting with Mary Jane and Martha?

PERKINS: Well, somehow we'd always get around to talking about Harry and what he was doing. You wouldn't be around them very long until they spoke of him. But there's one little incident I remember.

Grandma Truman realized that Harry had a lot of attention and maybe Vivian didn't. And one time -- it was her birthday -- and Vivian's family gave a tea for his mother. I can remember so well going out there and people were crowding in and saying, "Where's Harry?"

Grandma Truman said, "This is not Harry's party; this is Vivian's." They had come out there, a lot of them, thinking they'd get to see Harry Truman, and she put them straight.

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SIMS: Was that the time when somebody said, "Well, aren't you proud of your son?" And she said, "Well, I have two sons and I'm proud of both of them."

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: About when would that have been?

PERKINS: Well, I don't know, but it was while Harry was President, somewhere in those years.

JOHNSON: Of course, she lived only two years after he became President. She died in July of '47 and he became President in April of '45, so it was in '45 or '46. Was that before or after she visited her son in the White House? Do you recall anything about that, when his mother, Martha, visited him in the White House? Do you recall whether this had happened before or after this reception?

PERKINS: I don't know.

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JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about her visit to the White House? Did you get any reports or reactions after she got back? Did you ever talk to Mrs. Truman, that is Martha Truman, about her visit to the White House?

PERKINS: Well, yes, I heard her say something. I don't think she was too impressed. That is, she was just such a down-to-earth person; all of the Trumans were that way.

JOHNSON: Do you recall the story about her son, Harry, offering her the Lincoln bedroom?

PERKINS: Yes, I've heard that.

JOHNSON: Did you hear Martha ever say anything about the Lincoln bedroom?

PERKINS: No.

JOHNSON: Does that sound like a true story?

PERKINS: It does.

SIMS: I can really believe it!

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JOHNSON: She still remembered the Civil War pretty well; is that right?

PERKINS: Oh, yes. And she was very outspoken on that, on the Civil War and all their problems.

JOHNSON: Do you remember her talking about her experiences with the Red Legs? Anything other than what we've read about?

PERKINS: Not exactly.

JOHNSON: You say that Mr. Truman did visit on Sundays out here at the farm in the twenties?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Usually by himself?

SIMS: I think sometimes Bess and Margaret came, from what I've heard.

PERKINS: Well, yes, sometimes. But I know Harry came out. Those were the times that he came out to visit his mother.

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JOHNSON: His mother once said he learned all his common sense on the farm; he didn't learn it in town. What do you think she meant by that?

PERKINS: I picked up Margaret's book last night. She had quite a bit to say about Grandma Truman and her cooking. She said Grandma hated to cook; she didn't like to cook, and about the only thing she really cooked real well was fried chicken. And Margaret went on to say that every time we went out there, we'd go out to get some of her good fried chicken, but we didn't know that that was the only thing she could cook real well.

JOHNSON: Do you recall any dinners or lunches at the Truman farm home? Were you ever out there?

PERKINS: No. No.

JOHNSON: Were you out there for any other parties or meetings?

PERKINS: No, just in connection with church; that is all. I remember this Sunday School class going there.

JOHNSON: Okay, are we talking now again about 1916, that first year you were in Sunday School here?

PERKINS: Well, no, I'm sure it was later than that. I don't think he was there in 1916.

JOHNSON: Yes. He was living there until 1917.

PERKINS: Was he? Well, he wasn't there when I was there.

JOHNSON: Just didn't happen to be around when you were visiting?

PERKINS: Didn't happen to be there.

JOHNSON: Do you remember anything about the kitchen, like a wood cook stove, a gas stove...

PERKINS: Well, now, with my knowledge of antique furniture, I would say the house was beautifully furnished. Then, to my thinking, it was just ordinary farm furniture.

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JOHNSON: Was it what we would call Victorian style?

PERKINS: I don't know what we would call it, but they had some nice pieces of furniture.

JOHNSON: I think Mary Jane Truman has said that most of the furniture was moved into town when they moved off the farm. Do you have any idea where that furniture might have ended up

PERKINS: No, I don't know. I really don't. Of course, when you're younger you don't appreciate this solid furniture like you do now.

JOHNSON: It was quality furniture?

PERKINS: Yes. And to me it looked plain. Everything was always scrupulously clean and neat.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any kerosene lamps, or anything like that out there?

PERKINS: No. I don't remember that.

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JOHNSON: Perhaps they had electricity in when you were first there.

Anything else about the farm house that you might mention here? Was the water pump outside the kitchen door, on the south side?

PERKINS: Yes. There's always been one there as far as I can remember. We were out there that day that Senator [Thomas] Eagleton was there; somebody called us. They had a luncheon out in the yard. I asked either Gilbert or Harry, I don't know which one, if that was the same pump. He said, well, he just didn't know. He said it had been there ever since he could remember, and I said, "Well, it's been there ever since I can remember," but it might not be the same.

JOHNSON: The garage out there, do you have any idea when that was moved in? It has some old wallpaper on it, and Mr. [Sterling] Goddard says that that was the old Post Office here in town. Do you know anything about that?

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PERKINS: No.

JOHNSON: Once I heard a rumor that there had been a fire in the kitchen out there. Have you ever heard anything about a fire?

PERKINS: I kind of think there was, but I don't remember the details. I'd forgotten it until you mentioned it, but there is something in my mind.

JOHNSON: Well, is the house essentially the same now as it was when you first visited out there?

PERKINS: Well, I haven't been in it, but I looked at it that day we were out there. I was talking to the boys and I said, "Well, that house certainly has possibilities," and I said, "It looks just like it did the first time I ever saw it."

JOHNSON: Was the back porch enclosed the first time you visited out there, do you recall, or has that

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been one of the changes?

PERKINS: I don't remember. But that front porch is just like it's always been.

JOHNSON: So there are no changes at least in the exterior of the house as far as you can tell?

PERKINS: Well, no, I couldn't see it if it was.

JOHNSON: I've heard too that they had church picnics in the grove, in that maple grove.

PERKINS: Not that I went to.

JOHNSON: You were never at a picnic out there?

PERKINS: No, I never was.

JOHNSON: Any other recollections about the farm or any visits that you have made out to the farm?

PERKINS: No.

JOHNSON: You did visit periodically with Mary Jane and her mother after they moved to town?

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PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Any anecdotes? You mentioned this one about the reception with Vivian.

PERKINS: Well, everyone got such a kick out of that. I don't think anyone would forget that.

JOHNSON: Did the newspapers cover this sort of thing? Would there have been an item in the local paper?

PERKINS: I don't know.

JOHNSON: You haven't clipped the local paper?

PERKINS: All I can remember is her saying, "This is not Harry's party; this is Vivian's party."

JOHNSON: Well, how did the party go?

PERKINS: We had a nice time; there were a lot of people there.

SIMS: It was at Vivian's house wasn't it?

PERKINS: Yes.

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PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Oh, it was at Vivian's house, right next to the farm house?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you visited there a few times too?

PERKINS: Well, yes. I knew all of Vivian's family.

JOHNSON: When was the old Highway 71 put in? Do you have any idea?

SIMS: It was after '30 because there wasn't any 71 when I left.

JOHNSON: In 1930?

SIMS: There was no 71 then. I don't think there was a Blue Ridge Extension either.

JOHNSON: But was there a county road, or some kind of road that cut through the Truman farm?

[40]

PERKINS: I can't remember, because when we went to Kansas City we went up what is old Grandview Road.

JOHNSON: I've asked about the business here in Grandview and whether Saturday night was a big night, when all the farmers came into town. But I get the impression that since you were so close to Kansas City that there perhaps wasn't the hustle and bustle here on Saturday nights.

PERKINS: Oh, I think you've been misinformed! I can remember when the merchants of Grandview used to put on a Saturday night picture show, and we were living in this house then.

SIMS: You and your mother.

PERKINS: My mother and I. And this town was actually loaded with cars, parked everywhere, people coming in from all directions to that picture show.

SIMS: It was a free picture show, wasn't it?

[41]

PERKINS: Yes, free.

JOHNSON: Well, I can remember that in the late thirties myself in the town that we lived close to. But that would not have been until the latter thirties, would it?

PERKINS: Well now that might have been.

JOHNSON: Let's say in the 1920s, for instance; was Saturday night a big night in town, in the twenties?

PERKINS: Well, I think the stores, what few we had, at that time were busy.

JOHNSON: The farmers were getting their Model T's and getting their cars, and probably were doing more driving.

PERKINS: In this brick building up there was a big grocery and dry goods store.

JOHNSON: Whose store was that?

SIMS: Dyer and Long.

[42]

PERKINS: Dyer and Long; and then that building across the street right east of it where that antique car thing is now -- that at one time was a garage. Harry Wintermute had a garage and a sales office for Dodge cars.

JOHNSON: Yes, I've heard about that.

I have this picture of downtown Grandview in 1912. Admittedly this goes back pretty early, but you were here four years after this picture was taken. This is an ice cream parlor. I believe this is the Vanatta restaurant here on the corner, on the left, right?

PERKINS: Right.

JOHNSON: Could you identify, as we go up the street, could you tell me what businesses were along this side? This would be the north side of Main Street. I'm not sure what intersection we're at right here, but this is the Vanatta restaurant on the corner, and then going up, what would be the next store with the awning there?

[43]

PERKINS: Well, that was Uncle Dave's hardware store, isn't it? Clements Hardware store.

JOHNSON: Clements Hardware store with this brick front? What would be next to that, do you think?

SIMS: Couldn't Regna [Vanatta] tell you? She was here.

JOHNSON: Yes, I think we do have some information, but I wanted to add to it if I can.

SIMS: She ought to remember because I think that she was here then.

JOHNSON: Oh yes, she has given us some information. We can let that go for now.

SIMS: When was the bank organized?

PERKINS: 1907.

SIMS: Well, it was on the corner wasn't it?

PERKINS: Yes.

[44]

SIMS: Up on this other corner, right up here where the school's headquarters is now. It was where the parking lot is now.

PERKINS: The bank was on the north side, on the corner of what's now Eighth Street.

JOHNSON: So the bank would have been on this corner here?

PERKINS: Well, I was going to say this looked like the old bank.

JOHNSON: Okay, with that awning sticking out up here.

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, that's probably Eighth Street and that's the bank on the corner there. That would have been there, of course, in 1911 or '12.

PERKINS: Yes, it was. Well, it started in a hardware store in 1907, but they built this little

[45]

old building pretty soon after that.

JOHNSON: And how long were they in that building?

PERKINS: Well, let's see, they were in that building in 1920 because that's where I first started to work. But then they enlarged that and built the building right to the west of it.

SIMS: That's the building that's now the school headquarters. The school offices.

JOHNSON: Just to the west of it they built another large building and you moved into that building?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And that would have been about when?

PERKINS: Oh, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Are we talking about the thirties now, or the forties?

PERKINS: Well, you see, they enlarged that building;

[46]

they enlarged it twice. We moved out of the old building into the new building, and then in a few years they had to enlarge it again.

JOHNSON: Now you say it was west. Does that mean it was across the street then, on the corner?

SIMS: It was just west of the old building, and then they tore the old building down.

PERKINS: Yes, the bank owned that whole lot.

JOHNSON: Oh, I see, so they built on that lot right next to the old building.

PERKINS: And they enlarged after they built that building. They enlarged it once, and then the next time they enlarged it there just was no parking.

JOHNSON: Some people who have very nostalgic memories of the twenties think it was a good decade, but there were some groups that weren't doing so well, and I believe the farmers, many

[47]

farmers, were among them. That is, the recession which came in the early twenties and helped end Harry Truman's haberdashery also affected the farmers. Did you notice problems with farm foreclosures even in the twenties, and bank failures perhaps? Of course, you apparently didn't fail here. Your bank even survived the depression, is that correct?

PERKINS: We went through all of that. Grandview really and truly had some substantial businesses. The ground all around us was owned by people who had owned their land a long time, and they didn't have big mortgages.

JOHNSON: But there were some foreclosures. In other words, were the Trumans unique in having their farm foreclosed on them?

PERKINS: I don't know; they were foreclosed because of non-payment of taxes as I understand it. Is that the reason you know?

JOHNSON: There was a mortgage, plus taxes.

[48]

PERKINS: Was it? Well, I thought it was that the mortgage wasn't hurting as much as they weren't able to keep up the interest and taxes. Well, of course, when that happens the loan becomes delinquent.

JOHNSON: But were there other foreclosures that you know about?

PERKINS: No, I don't think so. There were the Botts out there who had a lot of land, and the Sheltons. They were all pretty well-to-do people -- I'd say maybe ten miles in every direction.

JOHNSON: Well, as I understand, the debt on the Truman farm arose as a result of settling claims with heirs.

PERKINS: Yes. Yes, that was it.

JOHNSON: Now was this a common problem where, say, the original pioneer built up quite a bit of holdings in land and then had a large family and when he died, then there were all these claims

[49]

from his own heirs. Either you had to split up the land, or the ones who received the land had to pay off these claims. Is this something that often happened as far as you know from your experience at the bank?

PERKINS: No, I'm thinking about the fact you said you had interviewed Robert Wyatt; now that land all came down through the generations of Wyatts.

JOHNSON: But were there large families though that would have claims against an inheritance?

PERKINS: Well, I suppose the Wyatts weren't a large family.

SIMS: Robert was an only child.

JOHNSON: See, that would make a difference, no doubt. You wouldn't have all these brothers and sisters to pay off, so to speak. But were there other farms where you might have noticed that happening -- that the pioneer of the family built up a large farm and then after he died

[50]

there would be claims against it, and either it would be split up or there would be a mortgage on the land to pay off heirs?

PERKINS: No. Of course, from what I read about the Truman's heirs, I think there was always some questions and problems in there, all down through the years.

JOHNSON: This is the Youngs that we're referring to, Solomon Young's children?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: This would be Martha's brothers and sisters?

PERKINS: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: Did Mrs. Truman, Martha Truman, ever talk about any of her brothers and sisters?

PERKINS: No, I never heard her, and Mary didn't either. I have no knowledge of that at all.

JOHNSON: And John Anderson Truman, Harry Truman's

[51]

father, died just a couple of years before you moved here.

PERKINS: I never knew him at all.

JOHNSON: Have you met people who knew him and have you heard anything about him, the elder Truman?

PERKINS: No.

JOHNSON: Miss Sims, you say you came back in 1942?

SIMS: '42, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you meet Mr. Truman after that time?

SIMS: Well, as I say, there was this one time that I referred to when he was the Installing Patron and I was the Installing Organist.

The one other time I remember meeting him was when four of us made a trip to Washington, and Mary made arrangements for us, through Miss Conway, to have a visit with him in the Oval Office. When we got there he was in conference and so Miss Conway took us into the Cabinet

[52]

Room and turned us loose in that great big long room and said we could wait there until Mr. Truman had finished his interview. So we wandered around in there and looked at all the pictures and things that he had. When he was ready we went in there and visited for about 15 minutes. Then he took us on a tour of the Oval Office and showed us who had given him this picture, and who had given him this, that, and the other.

I've forgotten who it was that had given him this beautiful picture, and he said, "But I got even with him," and he told us -- but I don't remember who it was.

JOHNSON: He had given him something.

SIMS: Something that was maybe of lesser value; I don't know.

JOHNSON: Was this one of the pictures, the portraits that hang...?

SIMS: That hung around the different walls.

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JOHNSON: By the fireplace there; perhaps one of those South American leaders?

SIMS: Right, some of those.

JOHNSON: Was he talking about the President of Mexico, do you think?

SIMS: I don't remember. He made reference to several of the different people that he had dealt with.

I don't know; you say you had already talked to Hannah [Montgomery]. Her father gave her a check made out to Harry Truman to be cashed, so when the check came back they would have Mr. Truman's autograph on it. And then he gave each one of us a pencil. So we still have those.

JOHNSON: Do you still have that?

SIMS: I sure do. She and her sister and Hannah and I were the four who went.

JOHNSON: Your sister? Now what's her name?

[54]

PERKINS: Elsie Perkins.

JOHNSON: So Elsie Perkins, Pauline Sims, Pansy Perkins, and Mrs. Hannah Clements Montgomery were the four visitors that day.

SIMS: We were just on a trip, and since we were going to be in Washington, we arranged it. I've forgotten what hotel we stayed in, but at that time had fair acquaintances with some of the Service men because Mary was a Worthy Matron of the State of Missouri at that time, she had to go around and do these at all these places, and one of the Secret Service men would always drive for her. She would usually take a whole carload of us, so we got to know them pretty well. So they told us what hotel to stay in.

JOHNSON: It wasn't the Willard?

SIMS: I don't remember.

JOHNSON: What is your recollection of that visit,

[55]

Miss Perkins?

PERKINS: She's pretty well covered it. Is that the hotel where...

SIMS: Somebody tried to get into our room.

PERKINS: Yes. We got into this hotel. The Secret Service men as she said told us where they stayed and it was not a big hotel. But they said it was nice and was all right. We got in there and we pushed the furniture over against the door.

SIMS: Because there was no key.

PERKINS: There was no key to that room. Can you imagine that, going to a hotel late at night? We all heard somebody coming in that door.

SIMS: It was a big room and we were all staying in the one room.

PERKINS: Generally I'm the coward of the bunch, but Hannah jumped up and said, "Who's there?"

[56]

I don't know, but I laughed since I'm the one that suggested pushing the furniture over the door since there was no key. And somebody sure enough was getting into the wrong room.

JOHNSON: What was the explanation for no key, for not having a key?

PERKINS: Well, when we got there we thought we had reservations there and we didn't. So here we were driving late at night, and we weren't thinking a thing about it.

JOHNSON: But you had made arrangements to visit Mr. Truman when you were out there?

PERKINS: Mary had made the arrangements for us ahead of time and so that part of it was all right, but it was at the hotel where our reservations were kind of loused up.

JOHNSON: Do you remember Miss Rose Conway?

SIMS: Oh, yes, wasn't she lovely?

[57]

JOHNSON: Who escorted you into the Oval Office?

SIMS: She did. Yes, we met her first.

JOHNSON: In her office there next to the Oval Office?

SIMS: Well, we waited out in the lobby or whatever it was, and she was the one who came out to get us and took us and put us in the Cabinet Room. And then she came and got us and took us in. And then after that was over they had Secret Service men give us, the four of us, a tour of the White House.

JOHNSON: Oh, the Secret Service men gave you the tour of the White House?

SIMS: Yes.

PERKINS: They locked us in that Cabinet Room, but we had fun. They called out, "Are the party from Grandview, Missouri here?"

And we'd say, "Yes." So they took us

[58]
and they locked that door, that great big Cabinet Room.

JOHNSON: Security?

SIMS: Yes. I don't know whether they were afraid of us or what.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Mr. Truman, President Truman, going around the room and talking about the various things in the room. Did he ever say anything about the things on his desk, about the little plow or that little artillery piece he had?

SIMS: I don't remember. If he did, I don't remember.

JOHNSON: Do you recall anything else, Miss Perkins, that he talked about while you were there, besides the pictures on the wall? Did he talk about Grandview, some of your acquaintances back here?

PERKINS: He talked to Hannah quite a little bit

[59]
about that, because he knew her dad. He had been in the hardware business all these years, you know. I don't recall, but I remember those pencils he gave us. I still have mine.

JOHNSON: Well, we'd like to have one for the museum. I don't know that we have one, but I've heard about them.

PERKINS: The Library doesn't have one?

JOHNSON: I haven't seen one.

PERKINS: I have mine here.

JOHNSON: That was the only visit that you had with Mr. Truman while he was President?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Now I believe I have the date of that somewhere.

PERKINS: I've kind of forgotten.

JOHNSON: Did you ever keep a diary?

[60]

PERKINS: No. We've made so many trips, I've often wished we did. We get to talking about when we were at such and such a place, and we didn't keep any record of it.

JOHNSON: How about letters? Do you have any letters? Did you ever get any letters from Mr. Truman?

PERKINS: No.

JOHNSON: Did you ever write to him?

PERKINS: Yes, we wrote to him after we got back and thanked him for the courtesy of letting us visit him, and so on and so forth.

JOHNSON: Here's the pencil: "From Harry S. Truman, the White House, Washington, D.C." And his portrait's here on the top of the pencil.

SIMS: I think it says "I stole it," if I'm not mistaken.

JOHNSON: Well, it may be here somewhere but I don't see it.

[61]

Do you have any other mementos?

SIMS: No. I don't remember.

JOHNSON: From the White House or from Washington when you were there?

SIMS: That's the only thing.

PERKINS: If you're going to see Brother [Welbern] Bowman he will probably tell you all about the deacons. I don't know how many went.

SIMS: I think Mr. Carr was there.

PERKINS: Yes, and Mr. Major; he was executive vice president of the bank.

When we were raising money for this church building out here, why, somehow or other Harry let it be known that he would like somebody to come and see him. And so the pastor of the church, Brother Bowman, went, along with the other two men who are dead now. Well, I don't think it's any secret; President Truman gave him

[62]

\$20,000. He said, "Now, I'd like to see some stained glass windows in that church." He said, "The churches that are being built now don't have them, because it costs them so much money," and he said, "I just like to go to a church that has stained glass windows."

JOHNSON: President Truman said it?

PERKINS: Yes, that was President Truman. And so that's why we have these beautiful windows out here.

Afterwards, after we moved into the building, why, we needed a new piano. So I was on the committee with Mary Jane and I don't know who else, but she called me one day and said, "You know, I think I can get Harry to come down and meet us when we go in and look at those pianos." She said, "You know, he is an authority on pianos."

So he did. He met us and we went to Jenkins, and I think he sat down and played every piano in that place. He had his eye on a Steinway.

[63]

He said, "I just tell you; I wouldn't buy anything but a Steinway." So we bought a Steinway and we still have it. We have had it rebuilt...

JOHNSON: Is it an upright or a grand?

PERKINS: No, it's a grand.

JOHNSON: Okay, the dedication was in '50.

SIMS: This was after.

JOHNSON: But he was still President?

PERKINS: Well, I'm not sure whether he was...

SIMS: No, I think it was after he was President.

PERKINS: He had just gotten back. Anyhow, the people in the store knew who he was and I'll tell you he played every one of them.

JOHNSON: Do you recall the pianos in the White House when you were there?

PERKINS: No.

[64]

SIMS: I think I remember seeing them, but we didn't stop to look at any of them.

JOHNSON: Now you have visited the Truman Library and Museum?

PERKINS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Does our Oval Office look just like what you saw there in Washington?

PERKINS: I think it does.

SIMS: Yes.

PERKINS: You almost feel like you're back there.

JOHNSON: And we've got two grand pianos too. Well, one of them was in the White House; the other is a replica.

PERKINS: Has anybody told you about the Bible that we have out at the First Baptist Church?

JOHNSON: Is this the Gutenberg Bible?

[65]

PERKINS: No.

SIMS: I've forgotten who published it, but it was a very limited edition; wasn't it just seven?

PERKINS: I don't know.

SIMS: I think it was just seven, and it was given to Mr. Truman and he gave it to Mary to present to the church in his mother's honor. It sits on our communion table over there.

JOHNSON: In his mother's honor?

SIMS: And it just sat open for awhile, but Brother Bowman arranged to have a glass frame, or some plexiglass or something, to protect it. It sits on the communion table in our church.

JOHNSON: Did you have any contact with President Truman to make arrangements for this dedication in 1950? Did either one of you have any involvement in that?

SIMS: I was the pianist at the dedication; my name's

[66]

on the program. We didn't have an organ at that time.

JOHNSON: I see. We have several photographs of that event. Maybe I could ask you, Miss Sims. These are the people up in front, and this is of course Mary Jane, turning to look at...

SIMS: Brother Bowman.

JOHNSON: Okay, Brother Bowman here. Who's the gentleman over here?

SIMS: Johnny VanAken, and he was the choir director at that time.

JOHNSON: Do you recall President Truman's little speech, his talk, up here and how it was received?

PERKINS: It was very well-received.

SIMS: There was a big crowd there.

PERKINS: Before he came, the Secret Service was

[67]

out here and I guess they covered every nook and corner of that church. But somehow, during the dedication ceremony, this real dark-complexioned man came in and walked up in the balcony. It seems as though no one recognized him at the time, but he turned out to be a big Baptist leader somewhere. But I know the Secret Service men -- they were going to find out who that man was.

JOHNSON: While were at it, this is a picture show ing Mr. Truman in the pulpit. Now these gentlemen on his right and on his left -- to his far right is...

SIMS: Reverend Whitcomb; he was the associational pastor at that time.

JOHNSON: Reverend Whitcomb; and then is this Brother Bowman again right here to his immediate right?

PERKINS: Must be.

JOHNSON: Okay, then to his left, the three people there?

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PERKINS: Brother Bowman will know who those people are, and he may have one of the originals that someone can identify a bit better. That's Mr. Whitcomb.

JOHNSON: I'll bring that up with him.

PERKINS: Brother Bowman will know if you care to ask him about it. The church has some old, old church records that might have something in it about the Truman family. I don't know.

SIMS: I think so. I believe at least at one time they were in a lock box down at the bank; whether or not they are available now or not, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's certainly something to ask about.

We have a painting of a previous church building.

PERKINS: Yes, there is a painting in the Library of that.

[69]

SIMS: Who painted that?

JOHNSON: Kitt Sapp. He did the painting of the barn, of the farm, the farm house.

Okay, is there anything else that might have come to mind as we were talking here that perhaps we could get on tape before we conclude? Any other recollections, or any other little anecdotes?

SIMS: If you'd like, you might be interested in going up to the church and seeing that Bible.

JOHNSON: Yes.

SIMS: Have you seen the plate that's in the foyer out there?

JOHNSON: No.

PERKINS: There's a picture of it in one of those folders that I gave you; it's on the wall in the foyer.

JOHNSON: Okay, if there's nothing else that comes

[70]

to mind at the moment.

PERKINS: If I think of anything I have your telephone number.

JOHNSON: Also I might add that as you're looking over this transcript, if something should come to mind that would be worth putting on paper, just go ahead and write it in and then we'll put it in the final draft.

PERKINS: How are they coming with this foundation up here; you know I haven't talked to Sterling [Goddard] lately.

JOHNSON: I don't know right now what the status is on it, but I think they've gotten a reasonably good start. I certainly hope and expect that they will get enough to do some restoration work on the house.

PERKINS: It would be a shame if they didn't, wouldn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes.

[71]

You were in the house sometime, well, that day when...

PERKINS: We didn't get to go in there. It wasn't open.

SIMS: I understand there was another ceremony a little later. We were out there when Senator Eagleton was there and announced it, but we weren't there when they actually made the presentation. We were there the day they had the barbeque, and Sterling's wife called.

JOHNSON: Well, like I say, if anything does come to mind, we'll be glad to get it from you, and I want to thank you very much, both of you, for taking part in this.

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