

Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT WYATT

Longtime acquaintance of the Truman family in Grandview; farmer south of Grandview, Missouri.

Grandview, Missouri
December 3, 1980

by Niel Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
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JOHNSON: I'd like to begin, Mr. Wyatt, by asking for some background information on yourself. Could you tell us when you were born, where you were born, and what your parents' names were?

WYATT: Joe Wyatt was my father, and Emma Wyatt is my mother. I was born September 13, 1909.

JOHNSON: Where were you born?

WYATT: Right there in that old two-story house.

JOHNSON: The two-story house that's just south of us a few rods?

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WYATT: Yes.

JOHNSON: And that's about how many miles from Grandview?

WYATT: About a mile and a half from downtown. We're in Grandview, as far as that goes, now.

JOHNSON: So you lived south of Grandview, and the Trumans lived north of Grandview about a mile?

WYATT: Yes.

JOHNSON: How long did you live there?

WYATT: All my life; I never lived anywhere else.

JOHNSON: And your parents had lived on that land for a number of years?

WYATT: My granddad bought this land a few years after the Civil War.

JOHNSON: What was his name?

WYATT: Wylie Wyatt.

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JOHNSON: He came here and kind of homesteaded, or bought a farm, right after the Civil War you say?

WYATT: Well, he was up north of the river after the war, and then came down in 1886, wasn't it Mom?

MRS. WYATT: I think so.

WYATT: Somewhere along in there I know. He owned part of this property here, and he owned some Kansas property and that was sort of off limits, you know, since he was from the South. So he came over to Missouri, and ended down here. As I remember the story, they had a little piece of property over at Lee's Summit and he swapped that around and got this piece of ground here.

JOHNSON: Do you know if he was acquainted with Solomon Young, Harry Truman's grandfather? Was your grandfather acquainted with him?

WYATT: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever hear him speak about or talk about Solomon Young?

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WYATT: I didn't hear him do much talking about anything because he died when I was just two or three years old.

MRS. WYATT: Yes, three.

JOHNSON: Was your father acquainted with Solomon Young? Solomon Young died in 1892, and so your father was probably pretty young at that time.

WYATT: He was pretty young. I expect some of the older boys knew him well, but they're gone too.

JOHNSON: Have you ever heard any stories or any information about Solomon Young?

WYATT: I don't recollect.

JOHNSON: What could you tell us that you've heard about Solomon Young? Any impressions that they had of him about his personality or what kind of person he was?

WYATT: No, I really don't. I've heard the name but I don't know too much about that.

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JOHNSON: He was known as a rather large landowner; that was one of his reputations.

WYATT: Oh yes, Solomon Young, and...

JOHNSON: How about Harry Truman's father, John Anderson Truman? You were very young

when he died, in 1914, but was your father well acquainted with John Anderson Truman?

WYATT: Grandfather was, yes. Yes, he knew them both.

JOHNSON: Do you recall some stories or information that your father has passed down about John Anderson Truman?

WYATT: Well, they were good farmers.

JOHNSON: They had a reputation of being good farmers?

WYATT: Oh yes. Always trading in horses, mules, cows. Back during World War I--of course, I just rode Shetland ponies--why, dad was in with Doug Cottingham, a big mule trader over in Kansas City, where they started an old mule auction. As a matter of

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fact, two of my uncles and my dad did a lot of mule trading. They got orders to buy mules for the Government, and so they went over and bought some from Harry, and they were pastured up there where Truman Corners shopping center is.

JOHNSON: You pastured some mules there?

WYATT: For a short time. I don't remember whether it was dry or what, but I know that we had to have a little pasture.

JOHNSON: These were being sold to the Army?

WYATT: Most of them, yes.

JOHNSON: You mentioned another story, earlier, about a bridge down here that was to be built while John Anderson Truman was overseer. Could you tell us what happened there?

WYATT: Well, that old gentleman was on the job. Now, this is just a story; I don't remember him doing it. He rode up there over the hill, and he could see that the men were trying to take it a bit too

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easy, and he canned the whole bunch. Then he got sick and died and didn't get the bridge finished. So Harry took his place as road overseer, and, of course, he came out here, and dad and him got together and they got the neighbors and they went in there then and built this approach to the bridge. The old bridge is still down there.

JOHNSON: Where is this bridge located?

WYATT: Right southwest of here where we are sitting.

JOHNSON: On Arrington Road?

WYATT: Yes. It's on 139th Street.

JOHNSON: His father canned the whole bunch you say? Fired them on the spot?

WYATT: Mr. Truman did. I understand he canned them right there and then; that was it.

JOHNSON: Was he known to have kind of a short temper, or being kind of hard-nosed, or what kind of reputation did he have?

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WYATT: No, just a straight shooter.

JOHNSON: Straight shooter.

WYATT: He didn't mind them resting a little bit, but he didn't want them to take the whole time off. That's the way I understand that; I don't know.

JOHNSON: I think you were mentioning too that you could work on the roads in lieu of taxes?

WYATT: Yes, pay your school tax.

JOHNSON: By working on the roads?

WYATT: By working on the road, or county work of some kind. All of our neighbors around here did that, different ones at that time. I don't think there's any of them left anymore that were in that bunch, but they brought their teams and wagons. Of course, the county had the old wheelers and they built the old rock wagons over there in the blacksmith shop at Grandview. I never will forget them. They got some 2 x 6's and put them on each end. They would pull out the sides and then pull the

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rocks off, and that's the way they dumped them down there. Then they'd take these old wheelers and haul the dirt down there to dump on the rock. It was kind of like a big slip I guess you'd call it.

JOHNSON: They'd dump the rock down and then earth on top of that?

WYATT: Yes. And they tamped it down and smoothed it up so the horses and mules could walk over it. Eventually they put a little cap of dirt over it, not very deep.

JOHNSON: It wasn't quite like modern gravel roads then?

WYATT: Oh, no; it was all dirt roads, mud roads.

JOHNSON: But it had a rock base?

WYATT: But we had rock in this fill, and they laid a rock wall up on each side, and rocks in the center. They then capped this over with dirt. Now, it's all got oil on it. I guess that was Harry's first

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job on the County. And then he got from there into judge and so forth.

JOHNSON: Do you recall him being on the school board, on the Grandview school board?

WYATT: No, I wasn't in the Grandview school district at that time. I started in at the old Green Valley School up here. It's the Maryville farm now. But later on we consolidated with Grandview.

JOHNSON: Do you recall your first meeting with Harry Truman, or first seeing Harry Truman? Do you recall when that might have been?

WYATT: The first was on this bridge deal down there, because he was in here, and out of here, and dad was over there seeing him and one thing and another.

JOHNSON: You have a vague recollection of him being here? You were very young at the time, of course.

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WYATT: Yes. We lived across the road in that other little house over there at that time.

JOHNSON: That's still on the farm that you've had since the 1880s?

WYATT: Yes. I was born over there, and then the folks, in the first part of their married life, built this house over here. And we moved into it. Then I got married, and his folks were gone so dad moved back over there. Then I lived in the house my folks had had. Then I lost my dad, so I built this one. Rather than fool around and make the older house modern, I built this one.

JOHNSON: What happened to the old farmhouse over there then?

WYATT: It's still there. I've still got it.

JOHNSON: You mentioned pasturing some mules for the Government in World War I.

WYATT: They were our mules; that is, my dad's mules, but they were bought with the viewpoint of selling

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them to the Government, and my father said most of them were.

JOHNSON: So your father was well acquainted with Harry Truman?

WYATT: Oh yes, we'd go over there and feed the mules. We'd stop there at the house and talk with Grandma Truman and Mary Jane. I don't think Harry was there at the time.

JOHNSON: He left in 1917 and entered the Army.

WYATT: I think it was around '18 or '19 we had that pasture. We just had them for a short time.

JOHNSON: After Harry Truman came back, in 1919, they had a sale of farm implements and so on and livestock at the Truman farm.

WYATT: Well, I don't remember that.

JOHNSON: In the twenties, how did they farm that farm?

WYATT: Oh, with horses and mules.

JOHNSON: Vivian had moved away hadn't he after he was

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married and Harry Truman was moving to Independence, so I'm wondering who was farming the Truman land up there north of Grandview. Do you recall?

WYATT: I don't remember. Vivian was running it when I got to remembering it.

JOHNSON: Vivian was farming the land?

WYATT: Harry had something to say about it, but Vivian was out there. He built that little house on Blue Ridge there. And the old threshing crew; they threshed with L.C. Hall.

JOHNSON: Yes, that reminds me, I've got a picture here; maybe you've seen this of the threshing machine on the Truman farm.

WYATT: Oh yes, I've seen the picture.

JOHNSON: I guess several copies were made, and John Strode identified some of these people

that are in the picture. Were you acquainted with L.C. Hall?

WYATT: Oh, yes, I know him. He threshed for us a few times.

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JOHNSON: The same rig that he had here?

WYATT: Well, they had a steam rig anyhow. I don't know whether it was the same one; he had two. They lived down there, just west of High Grove Road in Grandview.

JOHNSON: They say the man operating the thresher is believed to be Gene Adams. Did you know Gene Adams?

WYATT: Yes, I knew Gene Adams; sure I knew him.

JOHNSON: Was he a neighbor of the Trumans, a farmer?

WYATT: No, he lived there in Grandview, a little house just north of Main Street.

JOHNSON: So he hired out maybe as a kind of hired hand?

WYATT: Yes; just worked for Hall.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any threshing being done on the Truman farm?

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WYATT: Oh, I've seen them threshing over there, yes. I wasn't in on the threshing though.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea where this might have been done, where they threshed there on the farm?

WYATT: The field I imagine; the pasture there somewhere.

JOHNSON: Well, they're going to have a big mound of straw there; I wonder where they would have done that. It wouldn't have been too far from the barnyard, I wouldn't think, would it?

WYATT: Out there in that big pasture to the east of the house, I think, is where they did their threshing. That's where the cattle could lay around the straw stacks. That's what we did and I think they did too.

JOHNSON: Just beyond the barnyard?

WYATT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Would it be west of Highway 71?

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WYATT: Yes, I think so. I could be wrong on that, but I think that's right. You're getting me back quite a little.

JOHNSON: I'm trying to get you back there as far as I can. Have you heard about Harry Truman's reputation as a rather scientific kind of farmer, one who practiced conservation, vaccinated the livestock, and had purebred stock? Was that common, that kind of farming?

WYATT: I guess they all did that. Oh yes, we had vaccination; then they had good horses and mules, I know that.

JOHNSON: Rotating crops was the common thing?

WYATT: Oh yes, they rotated crops; no doubt they did. I wasn't here to know that, but...

JOHNSON: He kept good records, they say too. He had been a bookkeeper.

WYATT: I imagine they did.

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JOHNSON: And businesslike?

WYATT: Yes, all business.

JOHNSON: And a helpful neighbor?

WYATT: Everybody traded work in those days. You had to get good teams and wagons. I know we did here; the neighbors around here would bring in their wagons, different kinds of wagons, and if they had men to help them, why, they'd bring them too. We all traded work. Nobody would pay anybody anything. That is, the neighbors didn't; of course, you paid the help. What I'm getting at--you sometimes had to hire a few extra hands.

JOHNSON: They had several hired men, I guess, on the Truman farm with its 600 acres.

WYATT: I don't remember just who they all were. I've heard different ones talk about them working out there.

JOHNSON: Were most of the farms around Grandview large enough to have hired men back in those days?

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WYATT: Oh, most anybody that had a very big farm had one or two men. You had to have, because you didn't go out and plow four days and forget about it, as you do now.

JOHNSON: Harry Truman was farming there before the First World War and that sometimes has been called "the golden age of farming" because farmers did rather well in those years.

WYATT: They did pretty good.

JOHNSON: How would you compare farming before World War I with farming in 1920s? Did it go from good to bad, or did you notice any difference?

WYATT: Well, it was all pretty good along in there; the best times of course was during the war. They paid well for the crops. Wheat and stuff was high then.

JOHNSON: But some farmers mortgaged land in order to expand their farms and then prices went down,

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is that...

WYATT: That's right; they got caught, a lot of them did. Then when the war was over, why we had that recession and after that depression; boy, I'll tell you, it was hard times then.

JOHNSON: So the twenties were not too good for farming I guess. Did the prices tend to remain low?

WYATT: The twenties was bad, clear up into the thirties.

JOHNSON: The Truman farm carried a mortgage.

WYATT: I know it did.

JOHNSON: And then it was foreclosed on in 1940. Were there other farmers that experienced the same thing?

WYATT: Most farmers did.

JOHNSON: But you managed to avoid foreclosure, right?

WYATT: Yes.

JOHNSON: But there were quite a number of foreclosures?

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WYATT: There were a lot of farms foreclosed on in those days. And the bigger you were, the harder it hit. We weren't too awful big; we made it through.

JOHNSON: Before we get into that foreclosure situation at the end of the thirties, maybe I could ask you about the road building program. In the late twenties, early thirties, when Harry Truman was Presiding Judge, do you recall the kind of road work that went on while he was Presiding Judge and how people here reacted to his road building program?

WYATT: Well, Grandview Road, you know, was a rock road originally. That and Holmes Street was a rock road into Kansas City.

JOHNSON: Were they paved during Truman's period as Presiding Judge?

WYATT: Right along in there somewhere was when they built the Outer Belt; it was a rock road too.

JOHNSON: The Outer Belt?

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WYATT: Yes; it went down there and hit Holmes Street and then went on into Kansas City, but...

JOHNSON: It was paved, though, eventually?

WYATT: It was paved. As I say, an old rock road is just crushed rock. You roll that old stuff in there with big steamrollers.

JOHNSON: Were they able to pave over that, or did they have to dig all of that out when they put the concrete down?

WYATT: They did a lot of grading in there. Some of it was dug out and some of it wasn't. They just graded up to some of it, and then rolled it all out, depending on how it was filled in.

JOHNSON: The Blue Ridge Boulevard was newly extended, and it split the Truman farm didn't it?

WYATT: That's right; it did split it.

JOHNSON: Why did they lay it out like that? Harry Truman might have been able to prevent it.

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Couldn't he have prevented it if he had wanted to?

WYATT: I expect he could have but I don't know; I imagine he wanted it instead of getting rid

of it.

JOHNSON: Do you think it was helpful to him?

WYATT: If they ever went to develop it, they'd have good frontage anyhow.

JOHNSON: It's been said that the Trumans did not accept payment for the right-of-way for that road that came through their farm. Did any of the farmers, as far as you know, get any money for right-of-way when they were building these roads, or when they put in a new road?

WYATT: Yes, some of them.

JOHNSON: Some of them did, you think?

WYATT: Some of them did. No doubt there would be some of them that got paid.

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JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about Truman's involvement with the farm Bureau? He was one of the very early members of the Farm Bureau in this area. Do you remember anything about his involvement with the Farm Bureau or 4-H Clubs?

WYATT: No, I've heard about it, but I didn't know anything about it, actually.

JOHNSON: Were the people of Grandview very much behind Truman while he was Presiding Judge?

WYATT: Oh, yes; everybody was and they still would be, if he was still around.

JOHNSON: Did you ever hear of Mr. Truman being an investor in an oil drilling company? They drilled in Kansas and didn't reach oil, and so he lost his money there.

WYATT: No, I never heard that.

JOHNSON: Have you heard that he was an investor in zinc mining?

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WYATT: No; never heard too much about anything like that.

JOHNSON: I'm wondering too about leisure time activities of the Trumans. Of course, you were very young when Harry Truman moved away.

WYATT: I couldn't tell you about that.

JOHNSON: Do you recall anything about the church building that was moved into town from

near the Truman farm?

WYATT: The only Baptist Church I remember was on Main Street and Grandview Road. I know when they dedicated the new church up here, I was there.

JOHNSON: Yes, in 1950.

Did you know or hear anything about his Grandmother Harriet Young, that is, Solomon Young's widow? Have you heard anything about her or know anything about her? She died about the time you were born, so it would have been through your father or grandfather.

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WYATT: I think Grandma and Granddad Wyatt knew her, but I didn't.

JOHNSON: Or Harrison, who is...

WYATT: Harrison, I've heard them talk about him, but that's all. I can't remember what it was all about. I know I've heard them talk about it. I know grandma used to go there once in a while, but not very often.

JOHNSON: Your grandmother used to go over to...

WYATT: Drive a horse and buggy and go over to the house when they lived there.

JOHNSON: We mentioned the farm finances, the mortgage problem. Did you hear anything about the foreclosure of the farm, any stories about that? Of course it was repurchased by some friends of the Trumans so they could get it back. Do you have any information about the foreclosure?

WYATT: Well, I know it was foreclosed at one time and

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then they got it straightened up; that's about all there is to know about it.

JOHNSON: You don't know why this mortgage remained so large?

WYATT: No; I don't know what happened there.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any information or stories about the Trumans through their neighbors, such as the Arringtons and the Slaughters?

WYATT: No, I really don't. There's no doubt in my mind that O.V. Slaughter and them knew each other real well. I know Steve Slaughter did.

JOHNSON: Did you know the Babcocks? We have an interview with Gaylon Babcock.

WYATT: That rings a bell, the name does, but I never actually knew him. I suppose sometime or other I had met him, but that's about all.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea what kind of equipment they used on the farm, the implements? Mr.

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Truman refers to riding an Emerson gangplow, so we know he had an Emerson gang plow. We don't know what the brands were on other equipment. Do you have any idea what kind of equipment they may have used on that farm besides this Emerson gang plow? They had a grain drill...

WYATT: Oh, no doubt they had a grain drill. I didn't know about the make of the plow, but they had a plow they pulled with four horses, or four mules. Sometimes they had different hitches we used extra mules on. They cultivated the corn with an old single row cultivator and two mules. I say two mules, horse-drawn, but kind of a slow process. Still it got the job done. You'd start early in the morning and stay late at night, and you'd get a little bit done.

JOHNSON: I can remember that myself back in the thirties. Of course, they had the threshing done for them. Apparently, they had their own corn planter.

WYATT: Oh yes, and they always said Harry could drive

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the straightest rows of corn planting a going.

JOHNSON: Do you recall if they were that straight?

WYATT: I don't remember about them being straight, but I know that was always the conversation.

JOHNSON: His mother always claimed that he could plow the straightest furrows and plant the straightest row of corn. As far as you know that's true; is that right?

WYATT: I imagine so.

JOHNSON: He apparently was one of the first farmers around Grandview to have a hay stacker; this was back before World War I.

WYATT: Yes, I kind of remember the old hay stackers. I don't know about their particular stacker; I think he had one at one time.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea where one could find some pieces of old farm equipment like a hay stacker or an old grain drill, or corn planter

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that would resemble what was used on the Truman farm? Do you know any farmers that have held on to some very old equipment like that, sort of like antiques?

WYATT: I've got the pieces of one.

JOHNSON: You have the pieces of what?

WYATT: An old grain drill. I've got an old sod plow down here, a horse-drawn sod plow sitting down here, and an old one-row cultivator; two or three of them are laying around here yet.

JOHNSON: You do?

WYATT: There were several different makes of those.

JOHNSON: We have a picture, a photograph, of Harry Truman riding a cultivator. It showed up in the 1950s. His back is kind of to the camera, but he was shown the picture and he claimed that was him. Sometime we'll have to show that to you and see if you've got one that's like it. You say you do have an old cultivator and you have at least

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parts for a grain drill?

WYATT: Yes. One of the old grain drills is sitting down there in that old machine shed.

JOHNSON: And a sod plow. Is that one of those plows that help break virgin sod?

WYATT: We had two different molds for it, one for sod, and then alfalfa. If you're plowing alfalfa, it has a tendency to roll back, so they had a longer moldboard for it.

JOHNSON: And this was horse-drawn?

WYATT: Horse-drawn.

JOHNSON: And how many horses were used with that?

WYATT: Four.

JOHNSON: Is that a gangplow?

WYATT: No sir, a single. They had all they wanted to pull that.

JOHNSON: They had a seat on top, where you sat, and

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you had a lever here to...

WYATT: Yes, a seat, and an old lever on each side to raise or level the plow.

JOHNSON: Do you have any pictures of those, photographs?

WYATT: I don't think I have any pictures but I've got the plow. We can get one.

JOHNSON: Well, don't give it away. We some time might want something like this for the museum.

WYATT: I've got an old one down here; a tree has grown up through it. A friend of mine wanted to have an artist to draw a picture of it. He got a couple of pictures, but he never liked them. He said he was going to come out and have another drawn, but he hasn't done it yet.

JOHNSON: You say the tree grew up through the...

WYATT: Right through the old cultivator.

JOHNSON: Is it still out there, like that?

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WYATT: Yes, part of it is. I think I took the wheels off of it; I'm not just sure. It's still down there. I know I never cut the tree down.

JOHNSON: Would this resemble the equipment that was used on the Truman farm before World War I?

WYATT: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: We're interested in this.

WYATT: An old New Century cultivator was what we had. But there were two or three more makes that was a little different, but similar.

JOHNSON: Yes, we're interested in these kinds of objects. Some time if we want to work up a display on Harry Truman on the farm, we'd need something like this to help.

WYATT: I'd be glad to let you have it.

JOHNSON: Okay. Glad to know about that.

I guess Harry Truman was known as an early riser, but were all farmers early risers in those days?

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WYATT: Well, the majority of them, I guess, was. You had to start early. Sunup to sundown, that's the way a lot of them worked. Sometimes we got started a little ahead and a little after too.

JOHNSON: I suppose you remember seeing Vivian Truman in Grandview on Saturday nights?

WYATT: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever see Harry Truman in Grandview?

WYATT: I've seen him in Grandview, yes, but that was quite a while later on. He was in there to install the Masonic Lodge in Grandview. He'd come around up there to those meetings, I know.

JOHNSON: This was when he was Senator, as well, in the thirties?

WYATT: I imagine so; he always stuck to Grandview.

JOHNSON: Did he look at Grandview as his hometown?

WYATT: I think so.

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JOHNSON: Do you think he would be very much in favor of the efforts now to preserve and restore the farmhouse?

WYATT: You mean Harry would be?

JOHNSON: Yes.

WYATT: Yes, I think he would have been; no doubt.

JOHNSON: Fortunately, it looks like that is going to happen doesn't it?

WYATT: I guess they've got it; if they ever get it restored, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Have you been in the farmhouse?

WYATT: Not recently.

JOHNSON: Do you recall the first time that you visited out there, or were in the farmhouse?

WYATT: Well, that was along about the first time I was there--around 1918. I don't know whether I was over there with Grama before or after that,

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but I remember one time we went over there and bought the mules. We had these mules there and they had pasture. I say we--my dad and uncle went over there and we bought the mules and then we rented that pasture and run the mules in there for so many days. I know we had to have more grass; sometimes we had a lot of mules on our hands.

JOHNSON: Is this the same episode you mentioned earlier, during World War I?

WYATT: Yes, the same time, World War I. We stopped there at the house, and went in there on that old screened-in porch on the south side and talked to Grandma Truman.

JOHNSON: That was screened-in even then? It wasn't just an open porch?

WYATT: No, it was kind of a screened-in porch as I remember.

JOHNSON: Has that house changed at all that you can

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tell from outside?

WYATT: I don't know much about the entire house. I've been in the kitchen and I was on that screened-in porch.

JOHNSON: So that building hasn't changed that you know about?

WYATT: The outside looks the same as it always did to me.

JOHNSON: Did you visit out there at all during the twenties and thirties when Mary Jane and her mother, Martha, lived there?

WYATT: Oh, we were in there a few times for something, but I can't remember what; we were in there a few times.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea when they got electricity out there at the farmhouse?

WYATT: No. I don't know when they got it. They had it long before we got it out here.

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JOHNSON: Were they still burning wood and coal, when you visited the first time?

WYATT: Oh yes, wood and coal stove, kitchen range.

JOHNSON: How long did it take for you to get electricity out here?

WYATT: Oh, good grief, I don't know. We like to never got it in here. That was after World War II.

JOHNSON: Were you rather well acquainted with Harry Truman's mother, Martha?

WYATT: No; I wasn't. I knew Mary Jane.

JOHNSON: How did you get acquainted with Mary Jane?

WYATT: Oh, she went up there to the Baptist Church and she worked in the Post Office with Josey Idol, two darn good post people who worked there. Yes, they were pretty nice people.

JOHNSON: When were you married? When did you get married?

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WYATT: Gosh, I'd have to look it up and see; I don't remember. It was thirty-some years, I know, when I lost my wife.

JOHNSON: What was your wife's maiden name?

WYATT: Mildred Daffenbaugh.

JOHNSON: Was she local?

WYATT: Raymore. Raymore, Missouri.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any stories about Harry Truman when he was a haberdasher?

WYATT: Well, I don't think he did so good in that. That's how the stories went.

JOHNSON: Do you know of anybody around Grandview that patronized Harry Truman and Eddie Jacobson?

WYATT: I don't think I do.

JOHNSON: What was the explanation for them losing the store? How was that understood out here by his neighbors?

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WYATT: I really don't know.

JOHNSON: He blamed it on a Republican recession.

WYATT: Well, it might have been; that recession sure knocked the socks off of a lot of people.

JOHNSON: Yes, it sure did. Did it affect business in Grandview?

WYATT: They all were. Everybody was hurt.

JOHNSON: You say you met Vivian Truman in Grandview; they traded in Grandview and so did you, I suppose.

WYATT: Oh yes. Oh yes, he used to come up there and kind of visit around. Harry Wintermuth had a garage up there--it used to be old Bill Wyatt's garage. Vivian used to sit up there and talk; do a little cow trading.

JOHNSON: You say this was the Bill Wyatt garage?

WYATT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was he related to you?

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WYATT: Kind of a distant relation there. He sold Dodge cars.

JOHNSON: Had he been in the livery stable business before that? You know some of these car dealers had been.

WYATT: I don't think so. Harry Wintermuth had the livery stable at one time. He had two old livery barns for a while; finally got it down to one.

JOHNSON: Did Harry Truman ever get out to Grandview on a Saturday night? I guess that was the big night in town wasn't it?

WYATT: About everybody went to town on a Saturday night. I don't know whether he made it out there on a Saturday night; I don't remember that. But he was around.

JOHNSON: How about his politics? After he became Senator, did everybody around here favor his politics? He was quite a liberal.

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WYATT: Well, I don't know; I suppose most of them did. There's always got to be somebody who'd be against him. There's bound to be someplace.

JOHNSON: He got a lot of support from labor unions. Did that bother the local farmers?

WYATT: A friend of mine over in Kansas went to Washington; I think he went for some Masonic...

JOHNSON: Who was this?

WYATT: Bob Sharp. He's dead now, but he went up there and, of course, that was during the depression, and boy she was rough then. Somebody told Bob, "When you get up there, you tell Harry to get the hog prices up, and cattle prices up." So he came back and they said, "Did you tell Harry that?" He said, "Yeah, but he said the unions are bigger than we are."

JOHNSON: The unions were bigger than he was?

WYATT: Yes, and he couldn't do it.

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JOHNSON: Did you hear of any other stories about people who saw Truman in Washington either as Senator, or Vice President or President, from this area? Do you know of anybody else that went to visit him in Washington?

WYATT: I guess there were several around here who went up there to see him. I didn't, and none of my folks did that I know of.

JOHNSON: Did the farmers around here support the New Deal farm programs, like AAA?

WYATT: Oh, a lot of us got in it; I never did follow it too well. I didn't think too much of it. Some phases of it I liked, and some I didn't. I didn't go for it.

JOHNSON: But most of them did get subsidies, didn't they?

WYATT: Well a lot of them did. I was in two or three times. I didn't do any good in it, I didn't think. I got out and just ran my own affairs.

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JOHNSON: How many acres of land were you farming in the thirties?

WYATT: We had 350 acres here in the place; we didn't till all of it. A lot of it was pasture or grass land.

JOHNSON: You were farming with other members of the family?

WYATT: Dad and I.

JOHNSON: I see you are looking at a kind of a diary here, or at least a small book. What is your marriage date there?

WYATT: Married June 26, 1944; married 32 years.

JOHNSON: And your father died in the fifties or the sixties?

WYATT: Oh, he's been dead about 21 or 22 years, but I don't find the date.

JOHNSON: That would be back about 1960.

WYATT: I've got it over home; I know darn well I've

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got it over there.

JOHNSON: Well, that's close enough.

So you just kept farming with your father then through those years, the thirties and the forties?

WYATT: Oh yes; never done anything else.

JOHNSON: What was your reaction when Harry Truman became Vice President, and then even more notably when he became President suddenly in April 1945? Did people have confidence in him here locally?

WYATT: He was all right. I liked Harry; he was plain spoken. A little too plain, sometimes, Vivian said.

JOHNSON: In other words, thinking that maybe he got some enemies or adversaries that he didn't need?

WYATT: He didn't need to advertise so hard.

JOHNSON: What were their personalities like? Was there quite a difference in personalities between

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the two brothers or did they have quite a bit in common?

WYATT: Well, yes, I knew Vivian a lot better than I did Harry. I might just say I spoke to him a

few times and that's about it as far as Harry was concerned. But Vivian, I visited him a lot of different times.

JOHNSON: Do you recall any of your meetings with Harry Truman? Anything that was talked about?

WYATT: No; he did more talking to the boys in Grandview than he did to me. When he got up there he did a lot of talking--to Wade Dyer, and Long, and Wintermuth and them. They all talked. I wasn't around when it happened.

JOHNSON: Were you in the Masons?

WYATT: No.

JOHNSON: Of course, he was back when his mother was ill in 1947 and stayed in the house there.

WYATT: Landed up here a lot of times.

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JOHNSON: Oh, at Richards Gebaur?

WYATT: Just a runway; wasn't like it is now. I know he did that.

JOHNSON: Did you get to see him when he came back here while he was President?

WYATT: Several times.

JOHNSON: Did you get to talk to him?

WYATT: No, no, no. I was on the lookout; that was my job. I can't tell you anymore about it, but I was there.

JOHNSON: Did the Mayor and the Council here in Grandview have to help make arrangements whenever the President came back? Supervise traffic control and all that sort of thing?

WYATT: Not too much for the City of Grandview, if he landed up here. Sometimes he would land in Kansas City and sometimes he was going to land in Kansas City and decided to land out here; if there was too big a crowd down there, he would come down here. If there was

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a big crowd out here, he would land in Kansas City. We didn't know just where he was going to set, unless you were in touch with the plane and that wasn't put out until pretty near before they hit down. But I'd always get word when they were coming.

JOHNSON: Then he came back to dedicate the church up here, and you said you were there to hear him speak.

WYATT: Yes, I was there.

JOHNSON: What did you think of Harry Truman as a speaker?

WYATT: He was all right, all right.

JOHNSON: It is said he was not an orator.

WYATT: No, but he talked; he wasn't tongue-tied.

JOHNSON: He got the message across?

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WYATT: You understood it, too, sometimes, if it was the right kind of deal.

JOHNSON: In 1948--you mentioned this election--did the people around here expect Harry Truman to win in '48, or did they believe the pollsters?

WYATT: Oh, I don't know whether they expected him to win or not; they kind of wanted him to. I think most of them voted for him.

JOHNSON: You say the farmers around here did favor the Democrat farm program?

WYATT: They went along with it, yes; they pretty near had to, some of them.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the grain bin issue in 1948? One of the arguments that Truman had was the Republicans had cut money back so the farmers weren't able to build enough grain bins, and so they had this big crop in '48 and a lot of it had to sit out on the ground. They blamed the Republicans for that, the Republican Congress. Did

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that make an impression on the farmers? Do you recall anything about the grain bin issue of 1948?

WYATT: I heard some talk about it and they had these grain bins, storage areas, where they put up a lot of these Butler tanks. They stored wheat in there I know that. I didn't have any in it, but then I didn't raise any wheat after they got to messing with it. I just quit the wheat and went to corn.

JOHNSON: Did you have enough storage space yourself for corn in '48?

WYATT: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: You didn't have to put any out on the ground?

WYATT: No.

JOHNSON: Did they have Government bins out here in the countryside?

WYATT: Not here. They were over northeast, somewhere over in there. In Buckner and over there, they had plenty of them I guess.

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JOHNSON: Did they have an elevator here in Grandview?

WYATT: Well, they just had a little feed mill, an elevator. I guess May Milling Company had it at that time.

JOHNSON: If the farmers were going to take their corn to the elevator, where would they take it?

WYATT: There was an elevator in Martin City. They could take it down there; they're on the railroad. They could just put it in there. You couldn't store it there, but you could sell it. They were buyers, wheat buyers, and they stored some there, but not much. It wasn't that big an elevator.

JOHNSON: I know Mr. Truman was rather unpopular in 1952, the last year of his Presidency. The Korean war was still going on; that was the main thing, and then there were people complaining about Communists in Government, and corruption and so on. Were any of the people around Grandview

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willing to believe things like that?

WYATT: Oh I suppose some did, and some didn't; I don't know.

JOHNSON: Did they seem to think he was being unfairly criticized?

WYATT: I kind of thought some of it was exaggerated, yes. I did; I don't know what other people thought.

JOHNSON: Your neighbors didn't...

WYATT: A lot of people blamed him for using that atomic bomb, too, but I didn't. I thought it

saved an awful lot of our lives; it was kind of tough on the Japs. But there would have been a lot of people getting killed anyhow, so I guess it didn't make much difference.

JOHNSON: Yes, there would have been a lot of people killed all right, either way.

Anything else that you can recall about the Trumans, any stories that perhaps wouldn't be in

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print somewhere? You mentioned this one episode with the road building. Do you remember any other stories about him after he was Presiding Judge or after he was Senator or President?

WYATT: Well, they built Richards Gebaur up here, and the Government took it over finally, you know. I guess they had it twice. It was a training base, originally, nothing there but a runway. Didn't take too many people to fill it up; it was a mighty small place. That was all there was there at that time. They trained for World War II up there.

JOHNSON: When was that built? Was that when Truman was Senator, before 1945?

WYATT: It must have been somewhere in there.

JOHNSON: Do you recall if it was his influence as Senator that got the base built out there?

WYATT: It helped. It helped; I know it did.

JOHNSON: Did any local people complain about it?

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WYATT: We thought it was a pretty good thing a long time ago, and later on we got to where we didn't think about it too much.

JOHNSON: Because of...

WYATT: Well, it was just the war was over and we just really didn't need it.

JOHNSON: And it got noisier maybe than they expected?

WYATT: Oh, it was noisy, yes.

JOHNSON: Were there any complaints about it being noisy, or dangerous?

WYATT: We didn't realize there was too much danger to it. Always heard there was going to be, though.

JOHNSON: You're a victim of that.

WYATT: I am that.

JOHNSON: Are you the only one that...

WYATT: As far as I know I am.

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JOHNSON: One of the airplanes actually hit your house here, four years ago.

WYATT: Yes, it hit the house. I saw three of them hit. One didn't hit on my place; my place is not square up there east of that hedge. A good many yards east of there is the center of the flight pattern. The first one hit in the wheat field down here. I was down on the Outer Belt planting corn when that one hit; I saw it hit the ground. I had run out of seed and just needed a little bit more corn to finish planting that day and I was in a hurry. I went to Belton and got some corn and come back and saw it hit and hurried up and got over there. That pilot died.

JOHNSON: That was a fighter plane, as you recall?

WYATT: T...

JOHNSON: A T-33 trainer?

WYATT: Yes, something like that.

JOHNSON: That was back, what, in the fifties or sixties?

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WYATT: I don't really know what year it was. I lost those pictures in the fire; I had all the pictures of that.

JOHNSON: The other accident involved what kind of airplane?

WYATT: They were all trainer planes that wrecked.

JOHNSON: The other one--was that the crash landing? Were there any fatalities with the other?

WYATT: The first one got burned awful bad. I helped take him out of the plane, but...

JOHNSON: When was that?

WYATT: I don't remember what year.

JOHNSON: The real tragedy of course was when a third airplane hit your own house and your

wife was killed and the two aviators died.

WYATT: Then four years ago they hit here at this house. Don't need any more.

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JOHNSON: No, for sure.

WYATT: There have been several wrecks around, and I have had my share of them.

JOHNSON: Haven't they transferred most of the operation to Illinois?

WYATT: Now they don't have too many planes in here, nothing but the old bombers. One big old bomber, a four-engine job, crashed just south of 58 Highway, at Prospect and 58 Highway, on the west side of the road there, and several men were killed.

JOHNSON: This was very peaceful countryside at one time, but it hasn't been has it since World War II?

WYATT: Well, the airplanes kind of changed matters around.

JOHNSON: World War II changed things. And in the postwar period you had the Truman Corners shopping center built up here. What were the reactions to that locally?

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WYATT: Oh, everybody thought everything was on the boom when they got that, and it hasn't done too had either, really.

JOHNSON: Were the businesses in the old downtown section hurt by the shopping center?

WYATT: It was hurt with all the shopping centers around. I know some of the main stores have moved completely out.

JOHNSON: What happened to Wyatt's Dodge garage?

WYATT: Well, Bill sold his garage and Harry Wintermuth bought it. He didn't sell automobiles; he just ran a garage and gasoline filling station. He had a mechanic in there that worked on cars.

JOHNSON: Did you ever get a chance to talk to Harry Truman about farming?

WYATT: No. No, I never did. I didn't play politics much, and once he got up there I just let him go.

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JOHNSON: Did they have a Democrat organization here locally, of Grandview Democrats?

WYATT: I think so; I don't belong to any of them. I just stay here. If I've got to be something, I'm a Democrat, but that's...

JOHNSON: Well most of the farmers around here are still Democrats aren't they?

WYATT: I think most of the people used to be. I guess they're getting pretty well mixed up around here now.

JOHNSON: Martha Truman, Harry's mother, said that Harry had learned all his commonsense on the farm, he didn't learn it in town.

WYATT: That might be.

JOHNSON: Do you think that his farm experience had something to do with his personality and what they call his commonsense?

WYATT: Wouldn't be surprised a bit if it did have something to do with it.

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JOHNSON: What kind of qualities do you think that farming encourages in a person?

WYATT: Well, you've got to be on your toes; if you don't, you lose your britches.

JOHNSON: You've got to have initiative, self-reliance, willingness to work?

WYATT: Well, if you don't work, you don't make it; that's it. You may do a lot of work and not make it too, but you've got to do it or you won't make it.

JOHNSON: You met Martha Truman a number of times. What was your impression of her personality, of Martha Truman's?

WYATT: Oh, I guess she knew what she wanted. I'll just put it that way; I don't know what else to say.

JOHNSON: I've heard that she had strong opinions, and she expressed them.

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WYATT: Oh, yes. Hard to change her mind too.

JOHNSON: It was hard to change her mind?

WYATT: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: Once it was made up.

WYATT: Once she made up her mind, it was made. That's the way I understood it. I had no dealings with them; I had met them, yes, but that's all. Mary Jane--I knew her better than I did the rest of them.

JOHNSON: You may know of the stage show, "Give 'Em Hell Harry." It kind of emphasizes the sharp and aggressive part of his personality. Do you think that sometimes is overdrawn, the sharpness of his speech and those kind of qualities? Do you think it's been exaggerated, or do you think he really was that way?

WYATT: Oh, I imagine some of it was kind of exaggerated, but if Harry decided to say "Damn it," he said it, and that was it. He wasn't backing off of it

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either, I don't think.

JOHNSON: Do you think this is maybe what he got from his mother, this quality?

WYATT: It might have been. I think he was hard to change his mind about that too.

JOHNSON: I think once he said, "Do what is right and history will do you justice."

WYATT: Well, I think he got to be better respected after he was dead than he did while he was a President really. Like I heard a fellow say one time, you have to die to get to be famous.

JOHNSON: Did you see Harry Truman after he came back following the Presidency, after he left the Presidency? Did you get to see him?

WYATT: Yes, I saw him two or three times.

JOHNSON: Have you been to the Truman Library?

WYATT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you get to see him at the Truman Library

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or did you ever visit him in his office there?

WYATT: No. He wasn't there the day I was there. I had an invitation from him and I went. The school was taken over there. I kind of think I took some of them over there. My wife was a

teacher at Grandview. I don't know how I got an invitation to come over there, just right at the beginning when I don't think it was really open to the public too much. I was there I know that.

JOHNSON: Have you heard about the hand plow that belonged to the Trumans that's at the Agricultural Hall of Fame in Bonner Springs?

WYATT: I know where you're talking about, but I don't know about that.

JOHNSON: There is a hand plow there that Vivian Truman donated to them.

WYATT: Oh, a little walking plow, you're talking about.

JOHNSON: Yes.

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WYATT: I've seen that. Well, that's the way we used to plow until we got those gangplows that you were talking about awhile ago.

JOHNSON: Or even maybe when you were plowing gardens, they'd still use a hand plow.

WYATT: Well, yes. Originally they didn't have riding plows; you had to walk behind them. With the old New Departure cultivator, you walked and plowed corn too.

JOHNSON: Do you remember when the barn burned over at the farm?

WYATT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you know of anybody that salvaged anything from that barn after it burned?

WYATT: Not that I know of; they might have but I don't know.

JOHNSON: Do you think there would be some things underground there? Would there be iron, or at

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least parts of harness, or other hard or iron objects, that might still be there underground?

WYATT: Oh around these old barns, you could find most anything. That's been so long; I don't know.

JOHNSON: There would probably be some remnants, I suppose, wouldn't there?

WYATT: There might be some metal of some kind. As I remember, that barn burned up pretty clean.

JOHNSON: Well, I'm glad to know about you having some of this equipment that could be used perhaps if we wanted to set up a display. We'll keep that in mind.

If there's nothing else that comes to mind, we will conclude this interview.

WYATT: I think I've come to about the end of my line.

JOHNSON: If you should think about something in the meantime, you can either call me or you can add it to the transcript of this copy that we send

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out to you. If something comes to mind that you think should be in there, you can write it in. We appreciate very much your taking the time to talk to us.

WYATT: Well, I'm glad to talk to you.

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