

Interview

with

MISS SUE GENTRY

Lifetime resident of Independence, Missouri and member of the staff of the *Independence Examiner*.

Independence, Missouri
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by Dr. Philip C. Brooks, Harry S. Truman Library

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NOTICE

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DR. BROOKS: This is to be an interview with Miss Sue Gentry of the *Independence Examiner*, and longtime resident of Independence, about houses and buildings in the Truman neighborhood. We are doing this on Monday, August 30, 1971. [This interview was tape recorded while Miss Gentry and Dr. Philip C. Brooks, then Director of the Truman Library, drove through the area discussed in this transcript.]

MISS GENTRY: 620 North Delaware was the Cook home, the James L. Cook home. They had a shoe store here in Independence. Yes. The Godfrey Twachtman family has been here about 25 years. He came to Lake City to work and Mrs. Twachtman, who had lived in France, was one of our important interviewees in the *Examiner* because she had lived in France and had done

volunteer Red Cross work there. He was in the French Army and they met and married there and came to America together.

This new house here (next north of 610 North Delaware) is the site of the John G. Paxton home. Mr. Paxton was a well-known attorney in Independence. The home, the property ran from Delaware back to Union Street. It had a beautiful flower garden and vegetable garden, which was the scene of many early day parties and festivities when the Paxton children lived there.

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The home that Mrs. Truman grew up in was on the site of the Graham home, 610 North Delaware Street. The Paxton girls refer to playing with Bess Truman under a large oak tree in the yard. The tree is still where the Paxton and Wallace children played.

BROOKS: And did that go clear through to Union Street, that property too?

GENTRY: I believe it did.

BROOKS: Do you know how long the Wallace family lived there?

GENTRY: Until Mr. Wallace died, which was, in 1903, I think. Then Mrs. Wallace took her children to the family home of her parents at 219.

BROOKS: And the house on the corner, the J. D. Sellers have it now.

GENTRY: The house on the corner was the home of the William Bostian family for a good many years. The Bostian family lived there from the turn of the century until about 20 years ago, when Mrs. Bostian died.

BROOKS: It is obviously one of the older and more interesting homes in this area, isn't it?

GENTRY: Yes. And across the street is the Jennings home, at 510 North Delaware, built by Aaron F. Sawyer, a well-known banker in Independence. Mrs. Sawyer continued to live there until about 30 years ago when

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she died and it was sold, and the Frank S. Jennings have lived there since.

BROOKS: That's the house that's said to have been designed by Stanford White, but I've heard people say that it wasn't true. Do you know?

GENTRY: No, not for sure. 511 North Delaware Street was the home of the William B. Duke family for a good many years. Next north of it was the home of the Pendleton family. Mr. P. D.

Bush, who is the father of the Bush twins (Mrs. Carl Sapper, Jr., and Miss Virginia Bush) lived there. His first wife, I believe, was a Pendleton.

503 North Delaware Street was the home of the Olney Burrus family for a good many years. He was the father of Rufus Burrus.

BROOKS: He lived there a long time?

GENTRY: The family lived there for more than 50 years.

BROOKS: Now, Mr. Truman, in his *Memoirs*, refers to the Burruses as neighbors. Was that when the Burruses lived there?

GENTRY: No, that was another family that Mr. Truman refers to playing with when he was a boy. The families were relatives. Olney Burrus came up here from Blue Springs.

The next house, at 500 North Delaware Street, was built by Roy Layland, who was later president of the Chrisman-Sawyer Bank. It is built on a part of the

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old Sawyer lot, which Mr. Layland acquired when the property was disposed of.

Mrs. Madeleine Etzenhouser lives at 426 North Delaware Street. Mrs. Etzenhouser was Margaret Truman's teacher when she was a student at the Bryant School. The family has always lived there many years. Mrs. Etzenhouser's parents, C. W. Kellys, bought that home a number of years ago and she has continued to live there since the death of her parents.

422 North Delaware Street is a home in which the W. H. Johnsons lived for a good many years. Professor Johnson was a pioneer school man in Jackson County. He was a former superintendent of schools at the Ruskin School District, and under his supervision the first consolidated school in Jackson County was organized.

The house at 423 North Delaware Street was built by Mr. Joe Bridges, who was a former president of the school board and a groceryman in Independence. Next door at 417, I believe it is, was the home of Mrs. J. Roger DeWitt, former Historical Society president. She lived there when she grew up. Her father was Bernard Zick, president of First National Bank and well-known Independence businessman.

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Mrs. DeWitt said her grandfather, Joseph Mercer, bought the house which was one of the "Walnut Park" houses and moved it to that site. Her aunt, Annie, and her first husband, Ben

Bartlett, lived there. After his death her grandfather gave the place to her mother on her marriage to her father, Bernard Zick, Jr.

The dark brown shingled house is the home of Mrs. Tom Twyman, widow of Dr. Tom Twyman, well-known Independence doctor. Dr. Twyman represented a fourth generation of doctors in Jackson County. Mrs. Twyman was the daughter of Chris Casper, an early day Independence merchant, who was in business with Mr. Walter Shimfessel. They had a store on the north side of the square. After Mrs. Twyman's father died, she and Dr. Twyman moved from over on North River Boulevard to this home to be with her mother, and she just continued to live here. The house was built by a Clark family who sold it to Casper.

408 North Delaware Street is the present home of the George McMahan. Mrs. McMahan was the wife of former superintendent of schools W. E. Matthews, and upon his death she married Mr. McMahan. The home was formerly that of the Bowdle family. I remember the girls were active in social events,

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and one of them was a piano teacher here in Independence.

BROOKS: We lived here, at 408 North Delaware, in the spring of '57 for a short time. I was then told that it was built in 1874.

The next one, 400 North Delaware, we call the Truman Library dormitory because I think at least seventy-five visiting researchers have roomed there. Mrs. Howard Carvin, the owner, keeps a register and corresponds with many of them after they are away. I don't know much about the history of the house or how long Mrs. Carvin has lived there.

GENTRY: Before the Carvins, Mr. Jordan lived there. Mr. Jordan was a school teacher at Northeast High School in Kansas City. The old house which stood there before the bungalow was built was the home of the J. W. Robinson family.

The present home of Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Compton (Mr. Compton is better known as "Polly" Compton), a spacious rock home at 308 North Delaware Street, was built, I believe, by Mr. Sollars. His daughter was married to W. C. Dunn, Jr. Mr. Dunn bought the home from Mr. Sollars when he went back to Warrensburg to live, and the Dunns continued to live there until the death of Mr. Dunn, I believe, then they went to

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Florida to live, and they have lived there since. Mr. Compton has owned it probably close to forty years now. A Miss Pittman, a school teacher, and her mother lived in the first small house there.

In the next home, the gray house at 403 North Delaware, the W. G. Charleton family, I believe, lived a good many years. Mr. Charleton sold real estate and insurance, and Mrs. Charleton was a well-known dressmaker in Independence. The two daughters both worked for Western Union here in Independence and in Kansas City. They sold the home about thirty-five years ago.

No. 319 belonged to the Triplett family. Who lived there before that, I don't know.

No. 315 North Delaware was the home many years of Dr. N. P. Wood, who was a well-known family doctor here in Independence. Following the death of Dr. Wood, Mrs. Wood sold the home to Mr. William A. Merrifield, who moved in from the country. His widow later married Rev. Lawrence Proctor, who was the pastor of the First Baptist Church here for a good many years.

No. 305 North Delaware Street, now belongs to the Presbyterian Church; it is the Presbyterian manse, occupied by Dr. Thomas Melton.

306 North Delaware Street is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Sapper, Jr. and Mrs. Sapper's sister,

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Miss Elizabeth Bush. The home had previously belonged to their parents, Mr. and Mrs. P. D. Bush. The Bushes acquired the home from the Buchanan family. An old home stood there before the Buchanans built the new Spanish-type home. The F. R. Allen family (Mr. Allen was a well-known real estate man here) occupied the old home there for a good many years before it was razed and this new home built.

304 North Delaware is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lucas Choplin. It formerly belonged to the McCullough family.

224 North Delaware Street is the house built about forty-five years ago, maybe a little longer, an older home there had belonged to the Slack family. The Slack family were well known in Independence, and merchants, I believe, up in the Square area.

The home at 220 is occupied now by Riley Winget. His sister, Miss Helen Winget, lives next door. The home in which Miss Winget lived was first owned by her aunt, Miss Mary O'Reilly. Miss Mary O'Reilly was a lawyer, and before she completed her law degree, was a secretary in the office of John G. Paxton, well-known lawyer in Independence. Miss O'Reilly worked in the office as secretary and then she earned her law degree and became a lawyer in her

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own right.

The J. T. Noland family have owned the house at 216 North Delaware Street as long as I can remember. Mr. Noland was an insurance man and realtor with an office up on the Square. He had

three daughters, Miss Nellie and Miss Ethel, who were both school teachers, and Mrs. Ruth Ragland, who was the mother of Mrs. Haukenberry, whom we know and who is active in the Historical Society. Mrs. J. T. Noland was Miss Truman. She was a sister of President Truman's father and was quite affectionately known as "the Truman aunt" all during Mr. Truman's administration. She was the center of much news activity. All the news people who came here went to see Mrs. Noland, and visited with her daughters. Miss Ethel Noland was the family genealogist, and she is the one who supplied the Truman family background when Mr. Truman suddenly became President.

BROOKS: I think that this house, in connection with Mr. Truman, is one of the most historically important houses in town. He has been there many times. As recently as six or eight years ago I was there with him at a meeting of the Browning Society.

GENTRY: The property at 200 North Delaware Street, now

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owned by the RLDS Church and the Center Stake Headquarters for the church, was formerly the property of the Watson Memorial Methodist Church. That church was there from the 1880s until about 1966, when the property was disposed of and the congregation joined with Christ Methodist Church here in Independence. The church which was razed was built about 1884. It was remodeled about 1903. Behind it was the Methodist parsonage. The old Methodist parsonage was on Maple Avenue, where there is now a parking lot. Later on the parsonage was moved around here on the Delaware Street side in the house which was on the corner of the alley here.

BROOKS: But when we came in 1957, the minister, Howard Woodruff, lived in a house on the Maple Street location.

GENTRY: The house next to the Truman home on the alley once belonged to the Winder family. He had a plumbing business here in Independence.

The home of Mrs. C. H. Allen and the late Dr. Allen, on the northeast corner of Maple and Delaware, was formerly occupied by Mrs. E. K. Crow and her late husband and son. This is the house referred to in Margaret Truman's book, *Souvenir*. She and the four Allen girls were near the same age, and she refers

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to the four girls and to the home, and the good times they had as children.

William Chrisman High School, on the south side of Maple Avenue, built in 1918, was named for William Chrisman because his daughter, the late Mrs. Logan Swope, gave the old Chrisman home, which stood next to the school where the Maple Wood Apartments now stand -- she gave

that property to the school board with the understanding that it be named for her father. The old mansion, the old Chrisman mansion was razed, and another addition of the high school was built there. Margaret Truman was a student there.

The large mansion-styled house at 522 West Maple Avenue was once the home of C. C. Chiles. C. C. Chiles was the president of the Bank of Independence. He died about 1920. The *Examiner* story of his death said he was the richest man in Jackson County. He owned thousands of acres of land in Jackson County. at the time of his death. One of his granddaughters lives up in Kansas City at Vista Del Rio. Her name is Hill. I've talked to her several times about a story and asked her if she had any pictures or anything. I haven't gotten with her yet, but I'm going to. Judge Henry Bundschu told me that Mr. Chiles did not build the house, that the first man who lived

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in it was an agent at the Missouri Pacific Depot -- the first agent when the depot came through here, which was some time in the 1880s.

Mr. C. C. Chiles was one of the older members of a large family. Judge Bundschu told me that Mr. C. C. Chiles, who I believe was a millionaire, had a reputation for being a little tight and he would try to take advantage of people. When some of his neighbors were watering their lawns, like Mrs. Mize or somebody, he would get them to water over on his side, if he could. The Chiles home once had an ornate iron fence around it. Judge Bundschu and I were wondering the other day what became of it, and he may have a little more information on it. It might be good to follow through on that.

Next door, where Dr. Hickerson has his office today, was the R. D. Mize home. R. D. Mize was a judge of the county court and a partner in the Mize Drug Store on the south side of the Square. Judge Mize, an uncle of Mize Peters', has a road named for him which runs out east of Independence.

The Wallace family were members of the Presbyterian Church at Lexington and Pleasant Streets, for a good many years, and Mrs. Truman grew up in the church and went to Sunday School there. Mr. Truman,

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who, at the time he lived out on West Waldo, for some reason or other went to the Presbyterian Sunday School, although he...traditionally the family were Baptists. I've heard him tell the story, and I'm sure the rest of you have, how he met the little girl with the golden curls and the blue eyes at Sunday School.

The Memorial Building, at Pleasant Street and Maple, was built by the City of Independence, as a memorial to the war dead of World War I. The American Legion, the Tirey J. Ford Post of American Legion, had its headquarters there. The American Legion boys were quite active in

decorating the building and furnishing it in the early days. The architect for the building was the late Lon Gentry, who was also an architect for the Truman Library and was a longtime friend of Mr. Truman's. The Memorial Building is important historically, too, because it was here that Harry S. Truman held the only presidential press conference the city has ever known when he came home for the first time as President of the United States, June 26, 1945. There is a table in the building that Mr. Truman used when he presided over the press conference.

BROOKS: Did you work in that building when you were with

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the Chamber of Commerce?

GENTRY: Yes. The Chamber of Commerce was the first organization to have its office in the Memorial Building. The American War Mothers, in those days the War Mothers Chapter was organized by the mothers of the American Legion boys -- all those original members are now gone.

BROOKS: I'm not sure how many people in Independence knew it, but from the fall of 1954, until the spring of 1957, the Truman papers, which are now the heart of the collection of this Truman Library, were in the basement and sub-basement of the Memorial Building. I thought it was a horrible firetrap.

GENTRY: The old Independence High School stood on the site of the present Palmer Junior High School. It was built some time in the late 1890s. The bonds for the new high school were voted some time in late 1898 or 9, and Mr. Truman and Charles Ross, who later became his presidential press secretary, were in high school then. They were sophomores, perhaps, or maybe freshmen. They went out, although they weren't old enough to vote, they went out and worked in behalf of the bond issue. They were mighty pleased when the bonds passed. The school was finished in time for Mr. Truman and Mr. Ross and Mrs. Truman, the former Bess Wallace, who was a member of this

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famous class of 1901, for them to finish their senior year and to graduate from that school.

BROOKS: Is that where the library was in which Mr. Truman said he read every book, the library that served the town as well as the school?

GENTRY: Yes. Attached to the school building on the north was the library, a two-story building. It housed, besides the library, the office of the superintendent of schools. The upper floor had space for the art and manual training classes. Miss Carrie Wallace, who was a cousin of Mrs. Truman, was the librarian in this library for a good many years, and Mr. Truman has often said that he had read every book in that library.

The old high school building was destroyed by fire in 1939 and was rebuilt. When the new high school was built, it became a junior high school, and was named for Professor W. L. C. Palmer and his wife, the late Mrs. W. L. C. Palmer, Ardelia Palmer, who was one of Mr. Truman's favorite teachers when he was in high school.

The First Baptist Church is one of the older buildings here in the community. It originally was built on this site in 1884 and was destroyed by fire and later rebuilt. The Nolands, Mr. Truman's cousins,

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were lifelong members here. Mr. Truman never was a member here, he never affiliated with this church. He attended a Baptist church in Grandview, and I don't know that he ever went to church here.

Now the site of the parking lot for the Baptist Church, north of the church on Pleasant Street, was the home of Dr. George T. Twyman, who was the father of Dr. Tom and Dr. Elmer Twyman, and the grandfather of Dr. Richard Twyman, who now practices in Kansas City. They were five generations. Dr. Richard Twyman represents the fifth generation of Twyman doctors in Jackson County.

407 North Pleasant Street was once the Compton home. Judge James C. Compton, who was a former county court judge, lived there. It has recently belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Garvin Dyer, who have remodeled it.

Next to that is the J. C. Noel home. The Noel family lived there a good many years. Before that it had been the home of Mrs. Noel's aunt and grandfather, Mr. Hearnese. Mr. Hearnese wrote a history of Independence that a number of people have inquired about. I have never seen one, but I have heard people inquire and is something the *Examiner* printed. If there are any copies of it, I have never seen it.

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406 North Pleasant Street was the home of Mrs. W. L. C. Palmer. The family still owns it. The Palmers lived there for a good many years, all the years that Mr. Palmer was superintendent of the Independence schools and while Mrs. Palmer was a teacher in the Independence High School.

415 North Pleasant Street is the home of Miss Bess Raymond. It belonged to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. O. J. Raymond. Her father was a well-known businessman here.

The house at 300 North Pleasant Street, at the corner of Truman Road, is the N. D. Jackson home. Major Jackson was a World War I veteran, a well-known Independence businessman. His

parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Jackson, I believe, had lived here before him. The home is still owned by Mrs. Jackson, who is now in a rest home in the St. Louis area, where her two sons, Lane and John Jackson live. Lane Jackson came here recently, just last week, and conducted a sale here, and a good many of the family pieces of furniture and glassware and interesting antiques were purchased by antique lovers throughout Independence and are now in other homes. Lane Jackson told me that he had some things to give to the Historical Society; among them, a Bingham print and a number

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of other papers and things that he would see that we got.

The homes at 601 and 605 West Truman Road were occupied by the late George P. Wallace, who lived at 605 and Frank D. Wallace, who lived at 601. Both are now deceased. Mrs. George P. Wallace, the former Mary Southern, still lives in the home at 605. The one at 601, which was occupied by the Frank Wallaces, is still owned by the family, I believe, but Mrs. Wallace is gone too. When the boys grew up and were married, I understand that they were given these lots to build their homes.

610 West Truman Road was formerly the Baldus home, and later it was purchased by the First Baptist Church and used as the parsonage.

At 821 West White Oak was the home of the Chiles family. Mr. Chiles, who was known as Buzz Chiles, I believe, came from the Fort Osage area and moved in to town here. He had a number of daughters and sons, among whom were Morton Chiles and Henry P. Chiles. In Mr. Truman's *Memoirs*, he speaks of playing baseball in the lot across the street (back of where the Trumans lived) with the Chiles boys. Miss Janie Chiles, who was one of Mr. Truman's teachers, lived here, and Miss Chiles was on a television program

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after Mr. Truman became President. She told about teaching Mr. Truman and remembering when they used to play here, on the north side of White Oak. Miss Chiles said that she never would have picked Mr. Truman out for a President in those days. Henry P. Chiles, who was the father of General John Chiles, or Jack Chiles, as he is better known by the home folks, lived next door there at 901 West Waldo.

909 West Waldo is the home Mr. Truman lived in when he was a young man attending the old Ott School. After he became President, one of his favorite walking places was West Waldo, where, when he walked up around the corner here, he always pointed to this house as one of his boyhood homes. This is where there was a vacant lot behind, and that's where the boys played a lot of baseball. Mr. Henry Chiles always said, "Well, Harry wore thick glasses and he didn't play with us very much. He always had his music roll, but sometimes he would surprise the boys and get into a baseball game."

At the Buckley home here at 820 West Waldo, the Flourney family lived for a good many years. The carriage house next door is now owned by Arthur O'Leary, or Pat O'Leary, who is a well-known decorator in the greater Kansas City area, and he made

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the carriage house into a very attractive home.

The Waldo Avenue Baptist Church is located on the site of a home occupied by a member of the McCoy family. It was razed to make room for the church.

Across the street here is the block which was once occupied by Woodland College, the whole block. The house at 800 West Waldo was built by Professor George Bryant, who was president of Woodland College for a good many years. His grandson, Albert M. Ott, Jr. lives next door now in the home that his parents, the Albert Otts, lived in. Albert Ott has a rather unique position in that both of his grandfathers have schools named for them. The Bryant Elementary School, which is now located on the Woodland College site and Ott School, which was first on the corner of College and Liberty Street.

The house at 826 North Delaware Street is on the site of the J. N. Hanthorn home. Mr. Hanthorn was a principal of William Chrisman High School here for a period of twenty years, and later served as assistant superintendent of schools. Before the Hanthorns lived there, a number of years ago, a family named Pippis lived there.

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NOTE: Miss Gentry suggests that valuable information about this neighborhood is given in a two-part article, "Remembering Delaware Street," by Elizabeth Paxton Forsling, *Jackson County Historical Society Journal*, Vol. III, No. 8, May 1962, pp. 7-12; and Vol. IV, No. 12, November 1963, pp. 6-11; with supplement by Lewis McCoy, Vol. V, No. 13, March 1964, pp. 13 and 16. There are also articles dealing with the Choplin house at 700 North Delaware, and with the Twyman family. Further information about the part of Delaware Street near U.S. 24 Highway could, perhaps, be obtained from Mrs. Leonard Trenchard, who is the daughter of J. N. Hanthorn.

Philip C. Brooks

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