

Interview
with
JAMES R. FUCHS

Independence, Missouri
June 20, 1979
by Dr. Monte Poen

POEN: Well, Jim, you came out here with Phil Lagerquist and you were the team that oversaw, I guess, the transference of the papers from Washington to the Federal Reserve Bank Building in Kansas City. Isn't that right?

FUCHS: Actually, the papers were already here when I got here. Lagerquist came out in September of '53 to start to organize the papers. Mainly it was checking the White House index and dividing the index up into subject, name, and of course, they already had the numerical. Getting better indexing was what we were working on initially, and then doing any service on any papers that Mr. Truman wanted. But the papers were moved to the courthouse in Kansas City--incidentally, the one which

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Mr. Truman oversaw the building of--provided for the building of--when he was County Judge and dedicated in 1934,

At that time they did not finish all of the courtrooms and so there were large high-ceilinged rooms in which shelving could be erected to house the papers of former President Truman; and they remained there until they wished to finish these courtrooms around the end of 1954, shortly after I got out here, which was August of '54. So we then, at the end of '54, moved the records to the Memorial Building in Independence, Missouri.

Mr. Truman--and you mentioned the Federal Reserve Building--had his offices there, but the presidential papers came from Washington directly to the courthouse.

POEN: Right. I noticed from the file that you kept David Lloyd pretty well briefed by sending him clippings of the local newspapers and he appreciated that. The clippings file is a good source, really; that correspondence file is a good source for showing how the Library progressed in its construction stages.

FUCHS: I've always been a great one for clipping news papers.

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POEN: Have you? You lived on North Cottage I noticed.

FUCHS: Yes, I did.

POEN: Did you observe Truman using his records in the early days? I know there's a story about him triggering off an alarm. Were you here when he did that or was that at the very beginning?

FUCHS: I think that was prior to my coming to Kansas City to work on the papers and Lagerquist, of course, knows about that story.

Mr. Truman, as I have it from Phil, and in my experience, did not use his papers to a great extent. There wasn't a constant flow of requests for documents.

Phil could, as I say, tell you more about that; he knows. I believe by the time I got out here the Memoirs were much further along, and the first volume, I believe, was published in '55 and that was the main usage, I believe, of the documents. So, before I got here there was, I assume, considerable more requests than after I got here.

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POEN: Well, in writing of the Memoirs do you recall hearing whether Truman had research assistants that went into the papers and did a lot of the field work for them?

FUCHS: I don't think they went into what we know properly as the Presidential Papers. I think that was primarily effectuated through requests to Lagerquist, who got documents for them. They did keep, of course, his personal secretary's files, his immediate office files, and those I think contained a lot of the documents that he wanted. He built up a series of documents that he used. Now, that's my understanding. Phil might be able to correct me.

POEN: Yes. Well, I think you've pretty much answered the question whether he showed up very often.

FUCHS: I might mention that there was a request, that I remember doing any kind of a research project on, in connection with the trial of Matthew Connelly. The lawyers that he had hired--the Lashley firm, I believe it was, in St. Louis--they wanted to know what appointments he had, I believe it was, with those various

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people, primarily Schwimmer, Harry Schwimmer, maybe Sachs. I doubt if Sachs was one of the persons accused of evading the income tax, receiving favors. But it was in that connection with the trial of Matthew Connelly that I recall doing some work for these--and I can't remember--I think it was for the criminal lawyers; I don't think I did anything for the Government case.

POEN: Well, I came across something in the file about Truman wanted to make sure that Connelly had a real good lawyer, in that connection.

FUCHS: I guess he didn't have a good enough one.

POEN: Did they find him guilty?

FUCHS: Well, of course, you may know. Yes, Connelly was sentenced and served jail time along with Lamar Caudle. Lamar Caudle I believe at that time was in the Anti-trust Division of the Department of Justice. But it was largely, in my opinion, a political thing and they convicted him on failure to give best services to the Government; but it kind of ruined Matthew Connelly.

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POEN: As you observed Truman's coming and going in the early days when he was still in the Federal Reserve Building, did anything strike you as being unusual? When did you first see Truman?

FUCHS: Well, I didn't see a great deal of Mr. Truman prior to his taking up offices in the Library, which was, of course, early in '57 when we moved in there; before the Library was completed. But I met him, oh, I suppose it was within a week or so, or a couple of weeks, when I first came to Kansas City, and that was, of course, a courtesy visit since I was working on his papers and Phil thought I should at least meet the man. I was struck immediately by his vigorousness and his look of good health, and his friendliness. He was much more impressive in person than he came through on radio certainly, which was only his voice, or even on TV.

POEN: I'm struck by the fact that he personally responded to requests for autographs, pictures, if someone even sent in a one dollar bill to the building fund for the Library that he would see to it that he got a letter with his signature on it, thanking them.

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FUCHS: Yes, he was very kind about that. I suppose some collectors felt he overdid it because there is such a clutter of Truman autographs, but he was a friendly man and he liked to be accommodating to people. He took stands sometimes. If he felt that they were going to be used commercially he was adamant in not doing it; if he sincerely felt that he was being taken advantage of. Although he knew that people would want his autograph, just an ego thing, and they'd think well eventually it would be worth something, that's just common human nature, and I'm sure he realized that. It was a different sort of thing.

There was one person, I guess in the early sixties or maybe later fifties after we were in the Library, that his office, and probably he, recognized was sending in a great number of documents, and they were later appearing on the autograph, or manuscript, market, although they were presented as being because of this man's great love for Truman. Of course, once they discerned this, they no longer complied with the requests. I believe that's right.

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POEN: When you moved up to the Library and he had his office in the Library, you oftentimes took people in to see the President. Was that restricted just to scholars, or were you involved in taking others in to see him?

FUCHS: Well, I did as you mention, take scholars in, although I don't have a clear or vivid recollection of that as I don't of most of this. But that was a matter in which I simply took them in and introduced them and told Mr. Truman what their interests were, and then he and the scholar took over and I was an interested bystander. I did, of course, take in dignitaries in my capacity as Acting Director, in the absence of the Director, for a long period of years.

POEN: Did Truman have sort of a performance? I was just reading a book, a new one that's come out, in which the author said that Harry put on a show, it was sort of an act, when he was meeting people and so on. Did you see any changes in his character from one time to another?

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FUCHS: Well, it's difficult for me to delineate what the act might have been. I feel that like all of us we're slightly different when we meet a stranger and we're inclined to, I won't say assume a stage voice, but talk in a little different tone than you would to your wife or friends that you see every day. I'm sure that Mr. Truman did that, too; but I don't recall any great difference.

POEN: Was he, do you think, helpful to scholars, in general? Making a generalized observation here, did they come away feeling he had been able to help them?

FUCHS: Well, in all frankness, I think that many scholars-I say many, I don't know how many that is--felt that he had not really given them a great deal of new information or facts for their project. He was inclined to say, "Read your history books"--you've probably heard this before--"It's in the book there." And I think this was in part due to the fact that so much water had been over the dam and a lot of these things were no longer clear in his mind. They wouldn't have been in mine. And rather than saying,

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"I don't know anything about that," he's telling them, "Well, I did know something about it and I've written that down and you had ought to read that first" In other cases I think that he felt that he would just rather not be quoted on something that he wasn't completely up to snuff on, and he didn't want to say the wrong thing either.

POEN: What was the shortest interview and what was the longest interview that you might recall between a scholar and Truman? Was there any occasion in which Truman cut off an interview abruptly?

FUCHS: I am sure there was, and it sticks in my mind very definitely that there was one, but I can't for the life of me picture who it was, or what it was about. I just have a vague memory that one time he seemed a little bit miffed at the person and he cut it rather short, and I even think he .

POEN: How would he cut it short, Jim?

FUCHS: I was trying to think whether he was abrupt, you know, almost rudely abrupt, about it, or whether he used a transparent excuse. I am inclined to

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think it was the latter.

POEN: The transparent excuse.

FUCHS: Yes. But it isn't clear in my mind; it's just sort of something that I have a feeling occurred. I know there were some more extensive interviews, when he warmed to a certain individual, which anyone naturally does. People would turn them off and other people would turn them on, and it depended what the subject would be. If it was a subject he was greatly interested in or had more knowledge of, why, it went on to considerable length. I feel, that, as you no doubt do, that a lot of scholars, felt that they had an opportunity to meet him. They could gauge the man, the personality, and they could project, or, rather, regress a little bit, back to what he might have been as President, and so it wasn't a total loss. But as far as adding a great deal of new grist for the thesis, or dissertation, or whatever, it wasn't all that important. Others felt that certain things that he said and what they could infer from it was very worthwhile and they came away entranced.

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POEN: You don't recall any incident in which he liked the person so much that he was invited to spend more time with the President?

FUCHS: No, I don't; there must have been. I just don't have too good a memory.

POEN: Okay. Now, I recall him in my interview, in which you took me in to see him, that he used very explicit language; and of course he leaned forward first to make sure that Rose Conway was not within earshot and the secretary out in the other office was not listening either, and then he really let go about this official of the American Medical Association. What is your recollection about his willingness to use colorful language, language that he is remembered for and in these popularized dramas like "Give 'Em Hell Harry," or "Plain Speaking?"

FUCHS: Well, I don't think that he did it nearly to the extent--at least not in mixed company--to the extent as they indicated in the popularization of the character. But I'm sure, being a former farmer, artillery officer, or like all of us, he acquired

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the earthy language of the military and certainly . .

POEN: But he did use it?

FUCHS: And he used it in what I would consider "proper company," with men; but with women he was more, almost chivalric, protective of women, you know. He didn't use it to any extent that I recall. in mixed company. And Miss Conway, his secretary, always said that was a bunch of

balderdash, because he didn't use that kind of language around her. And certainly he could have been very familiar with her the number of years he spent with her, and I think she was inclined to believe he never used it.

POEN: What about his sense of humor?

FUCHS: Oh, I think he had a delightful sense of humor. He liked to laugh and he liked to tell jokes.

PQEN: Do you recall any jokes? I remember one.

FUCHS: Oh, I remember some he told to other dignitaries. I don't remember ones he told me.

POEN: Well, yes, I remember one that he was telling to

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some other dignitaries. What are the ones that you remember?

FUCHS: The ones I think about are in connection with documents. I think this has been told before. I believe that in going through the museum he would point out the colored photograph of all the statesmen around the table at Potsdam, and he'd say, "You can see it is signed by Churchill, and it's signed by myself, and it's signed by," I don't know who all. But he said, "But we never sent it to Joe Stalin, because we were afraid we wouldn't get it back." That was one I recall. It's hard for me, he had so many.

POEN: That's good.

FUCHS: He had a sense of humor and he enjoyed life.

POEN: Do you remember the one about his painting, or his portrait in the Research Room concerning himself in the Masonic regalia?

FUCHS: There was a joke he told about someone touring the South and about the Pope, but I couldn't repeat it; I don't remember jokes.

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POEN: I remember that, yes.

FUCHS: Yes, he told that frequently.

I kind of got a kick out of him. I used to have a portrait of Chief Frank John, who was a Paiute Indian. And Greta Kempton who did the numerous Truman portraits, the White House portrait of Truman, and Mrs. Truman, and the one of the family in the State Historical Society of Missouri at Columbia, had done this, and for some reason gave it to President Truman.

POEN: This is a portrait by whom?

FUCHS: By Greta Kempton, who was the artist who did, what you might call the official White House portrait of Mr. Truman, with the Capitol in back and so forth. I'm sure you know of it. And they had it hanging in Mr. Truman's reception room for awhile and then he passed it on, and I, having an interest in the West, took it and it hung in my office for many years. He frequently would come through the hallway there with guests and stop in my office and point

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him out as Osceola and everybody under the sun; and he had more Indian names for him. I think he got a kick out of that. I'm not sure he knew exactly who the Indian was, but I think he did, sort of, you know--whoever he thought they would be interested in knowing it was, that was who that Indian was. Mostly it was Osceola, Florida tribe, Seminole.

POEN: And it actually was . . .

FUCHS: It was actually a Paiute Indian, and I think it was the Uintah Mountains in the background.

POEN: And the portrait was actually of . . .

FUCHS: Chief Frank John was his name, as I understand it. I don't know how I came by this information, but he had some pretty good tales about that Indian that I thought were funny.

POEN: Well, he'd go on and not only say that's Osceola, but he would also embellish a story around it?

FUCHS: Yes, he would tell something historical of the

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Florida battles and Andy Jackson, whom he liked, and about Osceola; but I can't remember exactly what they were. But I did get a kick out of that. I wasn't going to say, "You're wrong, Mr. President." And then he had . .

POEN: Well, maybe he actually thought that that was Osceola.

FUCHS: It might have been so in his mind, but with a big Western Indian headdress and total dissimilarity between them--what I think Florida Indians look like. I may be wrong, I don't know. He knew the history of Osceola, but I don't think he knew . . .

POEN: Well, did he refer to the portrait as some other Indian at some time?

FUCHS: I'm quite certain there was at least one other occasion or two where he referred to him as some other Indian, Or he called him Osceola but connected him with some other Indian history than Florida; but it's not clear in my mind.

POEN: It sounds as though he knew he was putting one

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over, that it was sort of a private joke.

FUCHS: I'm not sure of that; but I sometimes got the impression that he's just telling them what occurs to him right now about that Indian. I may be wrong.

You know, he used to take people into that conference room of his where there hung this picture of a southern mansion.

POEN: Is that behind the stage?

FUCHS: No, it's the conference room that he had, that his tax consultants and speech advisers, writers used, which had a big round table. See, he had the reception room--his reception room--and then he had the confidential file room, and then he had a conference room, called it a conference room, and then beyond that the last room was used for storage and then by the Secret Service for quite a few years. But in that conference room this picture hung of a southern mansion, and he would say, "That's my old Kentucky home," and tell about his forebears living there. I don't even think it was an actual painting of a home, of a specific home. It may

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have been. But I got a kick out of that because he'd go on with this story, and I don't know whether there was any basis in fact at all, but it was a pretty good story about it.

There was another picture that hung in there, he never said much about it though. But it was a photograph of the front as it was where he was at the Armistice, where he was fighting. Where was that--I can't think of that area of France. A note hung for many years there, he had written in his handwriting, that this was the photograph of the front on November 11 when they ceased fire. Somebody lifted that.

POEN: Oh, really? The note or the picture?

FUCHS: It wasn't there that long, but . . .

POEN: The note?

FUCHS: Yes, it was in his office suite and nobody went back there and told them what to do, but it should have been suggested that that be put away, because it was in his handwriting and it was an important historical item. I can remember that hanging there.

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Oh, he had stories about various things in the museum but it's just hard to think of them. But he did have a sense of humor, I'm sure of that.

POEN: Did he walk to the Library?

FUCHS: I don't specifically remember him walking, although I understand that for a little while, or for a few days, he did until he found it was inconvenient. The story goes that people bothered him, or he was slowed up, and that it was more convenient to drive. I'm rather inclined to think that his feet hurt him. He took a walk in the morning, but after that he didn't want to walk any further. I don't know; that's just my own opinion.

POEN: I understand he had office hours at the Library up until about 1966.

FUCHS: Yes.

POEN: As you recall, what was his routine? Was it rather regular or irregular?

FUCHS: Well, I think it was somewhat regular in the

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beginning, but then irregular, because of the many contingencies; things he might be going to, direct, and so forth, but he, as I recall., as a general rule got there quite early, often before his staff. In the early days when he was more healthy and as I've told you before, he came in a lot on Saturday. He would show up, of course, on Sunday now and then, and if guests were coming he might be there on Sunday, or later on Saturday, but he kept quite long hours initially Monday through Friday.

POEN: What long hours would you . . .

FUCHS: Well, I think that generally he was there in the beginning anywhere from 7:30 to 8:30 or 9, like we came in at 8:30 and to 5 o'clock.

POEN: That long?

FUCHS: Four thirty, 5 o'clock, I don't know exactly what time he did leave. It gradually diminished, and then he may have come in as early, but left earlier. Then after several bouts with falls and illnesses, he cut back his hours, he wasn't coming in every day, and

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his hours weren't as long and then, of course, he worked less frequently on Saturdays and Sundays. Then eventually he started to spend more time at home and then I recall only a couple

more occasions that he came to the Library, although there were probably some that I don't know of.

POEN: I recall him in 1964, seeming to have trouble with his balance; that when he walked, he would come through the Research Room there from his office and then go into the hallway, I saw him sort of run his hand along the bookshelf as he walked.

FUCHS: Yes, I believe I've seen that.

POEN: Did he have an inner ear difficulty that gave him some problems with his balance?

FUCHS: I think I have heard that he had some difficulty that way, although I read that in one of your interviews so maybe that's where I picked it up. I vaguely recall hearing something about that one time, but I think I just felt that he was unsteady on his feet though, you know, advancing age. I also,

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and I don't know whether I should say this, but I think he had a problem with his feet. I don't know where I gathered that information but it seems like I heard one time he had, I don't know whether it was corns or calluses. I have difficulty walking myself and I know--through another problem--but I know that you tended to favor a callus, because you're not 18 years old, and sometimes you're anticipating the way it's going to hurt, so you set your foot down a little bit gingerly. And I think that Mr. Truman was just--your legs weaken and you get lack of muscle tone, and he was reluctant--although he was depicted with a cane and got many canes--I think he was reluctant to use a cane, although he did later on occasions use a cane going down the hall.

POEN: I had that interview with Colonel Burrus, and he told me as you--I don't know if you had a chance to look over that interview?

FUCHS: I've read it.

POEN: He told me about this getting together with Eisenhower story, Were you around when Eisenhower came

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out to the Library that time? I guess Joyce Hall had . . .

FUCHS: I don't recall anything about it except I think I heard he was coming. I don't think I saw Eisenhower on that occasion. A lot of times I didn't bother nosing around because I had a lot to do and wasn't an autograph collector. I just don't have any recollection of that.

POEN: Okay. How accessible was Truman to scholars, and how was it set up by, I guess Phil Brooks, whoever made the decision as to when or where the scholar could see the President, or when especially. How did this function?

FUCHS: Well, as I recall generally a researcher would request of either the director, or he might mention it to one of the archivists, or myself, or generally and more commonly he would approach the proctor, whatever you call it, the librarian, the book collection individual in the Research Room. They have a desk in there which in recent years was Elizabeth's but at an earlier date it was Betty Herscher's and Phyllis

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Boldra's; and they would come to one of the archivists or the director and say so and so would like to talk to Mr. Truman. Then we would go to Miss Conway and tell her, and then she would arrange a time for the scholar to see Mr. Truman. Then one of the archivists, the director, or whoever, would go in with the scholar to talk with Mr. Truman.

I think that he was quite accessible for these specific requests. Now, they just couldn't wander in and knock on the President's door and see him, naturally. I think probably over the years there were some who had several appointments with him. I don't recall him refusing any requests that I made to Miss Conway.

POEN: He never refused. There was no one that was persona non grata?

FUCHS: There probably was, I think after they saw him once, but not the first time. I can't think of any that he said he didn't want to talk to.

POEN: Did the word come to you or to Phil Brooks that he would be unavailable for another interview with that

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person?

FUCHS: I personally don't recall that ever happening; it may have. I don't think they would put it that way, You would make a request, if he remembered why, he would--I don't remember it ever happening, but I have an idea it might have.

POEN: Did Bess ever come out to the Library?

FUCHS: She came out now and then. Being way down the hall there, yon didn't see many of these goings on. But I understand she came over to pick up mail now and then. On occasion I happened to be up in the north reception area and would see her leaving. I suppose she came over like any wife now and then to find out something. She shopped, you know, on the corner up there quite a bit, at North River and 24. I guess at that time it was Kroger or Safeway, Kroger I believe.

POEN: Milgrams?

FUCHS: I understand she shopped at Milgrams, but I personally bumped into her up in that store which

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is now a Thriftway, but for years it was something else, and I can't recall which. Kroger, I believe, or Safeway.

POEN: Now getting back to Truman and his habits, I've picked up the impression that he varied his routine, that he did not depend for legal counsel, for example, just upon one person. He sort of scattered his needs; that he was not the type of man to follow a set regimen, and that he had sort of a secretive nature about his personal affairs. Did you pick up any of that in your observation?

FUCHS: Well, I think it was probably true, in the sense he was a private person like all of us are, to a degree; maybe he was a more private person in personal matters, of his family, than a lot of us are. And he did, you know, use Rufus Burrus, who was one time I believe a county counselor or city counselor, and also advised Mr. Truman back in the 1920s when he was in the savings and loan business--Community Savings and Loan. And then, of course, he had gotten into the Reserves and active to military affairs as Mr.

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Truman was, and Masonic, and so they had an affinity there. But he also felt, I suppose, that there were certain areas of experience Mr. Burrus, or Colonel Burrus as we call him, was not perhaps the most knowledgeable about, so he employed other legal firms, such as that of Arthur Mag in Kansas City; and then, of course, he had a good relationship with Charlie Murphy, who had been his counsel, and special counsel, in the White House.

POEN: And then there was Sam Rosenman.

FUCHS: And then Samuel Rosenman, who of course worked with President Roosevelt, and then he had worked with Truman and had been a counselor to Truman over the years and took a tour of Europe for a week or so with Mr. Truman after his leaving the White House. He had always been good friends with Sam Rosenman, and I think he used these people in various capacities.

POEN: Did you ever hear why Truman decided finally against the Grandview location for the Library? He told Bob Weatherford that the utilities would be too costly out there, but that doesn't sound like a very good

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reason, or that's what Weatherford remembered him saying.

FUCHS: I would only want to speak off-the-record. I wouldn't want to be quoted on it, especially since Margaret Truman and Mrs. Truman might have feelings towards each other, I wouldn't

want to change it. And I don't know whether this has ever been--I think maybe it's been--I have heard that there were certain family differences about giving up this valuable farmland for that purpose. And of course his brother Vivian was living at the time and Mary Jane, his sister, and they had interest in that property out there. I don't know what the degree of that interest was, the size. But I have heard this, I don't know how authoritatively I've heard it, so I don't want to be quoted, that there were other considerations than the utility picture. And then also I suppose that he came to realize that he did want to spend time at the Library, because it would be office space furnished him, and that's expensive. He wasn't a man of means, of great means certainly. You know

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there are a lot of things that come to making decisions, that you maybe don't even realize that you are using them. I feel, he thought that would be a long drive and he didn't want to move out there.

POEN: I came across an item where they sold--and by they I'm talking about Vivian and Harry and I guess Mary Jane--sold a portion of the property to a church, Assembly of God Church up in Grandview, and that the money was sent to the Library Corporation and directed toward partial payment of the Benton mural that was being painted in 1958.

FUCHS: I suppose that they did that through the Institute, the director of the Institute. The common story is that the mural was paid for by the Abbey Foundation, which fosters such--and I don't know anything about the Abbey Foundation--fosters such activities, public murals in public buildings or something like that, and the Harry S. Truman Library Institute. I don't know whether it was a 50-50 deal or what. The plaque up there may even say but I haven't read it that recently.

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POEN: Well, there was something like twelve or sixteen thousand dollars, a check, sent by Burrus to David Lloyd, I believe, that was put into the fund and were to help pay for the mural. That's what I came across in the papers.

FUCHS: Well, that may be correct.

POEN: Do you know anything about Truman's relationship with Thomas Hart Benton? Early on he wrote a memo while he was still President, when Benton's name was submitted to him along with a list of others that might be on his advisory committee to set up the Library, to David Lloyd saying that "Thomas Hart Benton is a crackpot."

FUCHS: I vaguely recall something about that. Of course, Truman had a dislike for what he used to call the "ham and eggs art" but Benton wouldn't come under that. I don't know whether he once didn't like the type or style that Benton had. That may have come out of his feelings about the mural that Benton painted in the State Capitol, in which Pendergast was depicted, and of course Benton was

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a subject of considerable controversy, and the mural was the subject of considerable controversy. But, of course, Benton was the subject of controversy wherever he had been, and he was also I believe removed--dismissed--from the staff of the Kansas City Art Institute; I think that's correct. But I think maybe Truman had made a peremptory judgment against Benton. But then, you know, he wasn't all that much artistically inclined. I feel that all his judgments weren't completely accurate, and I think that you hear something about a person, it sort of sticks in your mind, and you never really sit down and analyze it. You say, "Well, I don't like that old son of a bitch," but you meet the guy and see what he really is and what he's actually done, you know you forget all about never having liked him,

POEN: That's right.

FUCHS: I can't say I remember Benton coming in, but I know that Benton back in the early--and I saw this on my calendar, and I noted it, several people, Mayor Weatherford, I believe it was, and a couple of others, came into the Library when it was in its formative stages, after we moved in but before it

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was dedicated, and Benton and his wife, Rita, came out then. I don't know what the occasion was because this was long before they were considering a mural; that wasn't considered until after the Library was dedicated and built. So I don't know how it came about that Benton was up here, but certainly they developed some sort of a good relationship after they started the mural, and I think then that they were admirers of each other.

I think sometimes all of us like to shoot something off for effect, if we think it will look good or sound good, and you don't consider the words too much. Of course, he has a reputation of shooting from the hip, but why he would say Benton was a crackpot, I don't think it was a considered judgment, and I don't think he had that throughout his life.

POEN: Oh, I don't think Benton served on the advisory committee. I think his name was dropped.

FUCHS: Benton was certainly idiosyncratic, if you want to use that word. He was a curmudgeon; sort of like Harold Ickes.

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POEN: Yes, right. Are there any other personalities that stick out in your mind during the years that Truman was still around?

FUCHS: Well, of course, Tom Evans was very close to him as you may know--a Kansas City millionaire and one-time drugstore magnate, and then . . .

POEN: Was that the Katz chain,?

FUCHS: Crown Drug. And then owner of KCMO radio and TV. There is a story of his acquiring that franchise, I guess you'd call it, but I think it's been refuted, I don't think it was anything in connection with Mr. Truman.

I might be mixing up some of my privileged information from oral history with what I've heard otherwise; but, anyhow, they were very good friends; and I believe I was a very good friend of Tom Evans, because over the years he was around a lot, being treasurer of the Library Corporation that built the building, and very close to Mr. Truman. He was at the Library a lot and a friend of the Library, and then having interviewed him in quite a few sessions and

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going to luncheon with him quite a few times, I knew Mr. Evans and know he had a terrific sense of humor. He was utterly devoted to Mr. Truman and yet he was one who I think had his likes and dislikes, and I think there was a group of people who were around Mr. Truman who influenced him, influenced our various directors, probably influenced me; and, so, he was a factor in Mr. Truman's life in the post-Presidential years. He had an affinity towards people and towards propositions of things that they might want to undertake. I think Evans, in certain areas, was a great influence on Mr. Truman.

POEN: What about David Lloyd. He worked from long distance didn't he?

FUCHS: Yes, David did. He was a very nice man, and astute, I think--scholarly, both literary and artistic; and died at a pretty young age, I feel, at 52.

POEN: I didn't know that,

FUCHS: He had a heart attack when he was 52. He loved

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Mr. Truman naturally, and he was very devoted to him and devoted to the Library. He had a lot of influence, probably was responsible for the establishment of the Institute, the concept of it. He was out here quite a bit, of course being executive director of the Foundation--the Corporation, as they called it--that built the building; planned a great many of the fundraising dinners.

POEN: Did they set up a sort of an office for Truman when the Library was being constructed in the shelter at Slover Park? Burrus told me about him being on the site as the construction was going on and he'd be there and he knew all the working men by their first name.

FUCHS: I've heard that, but now I don't recall it. Now Jerry was "clerk of the works"--I can't remember his last name. [O'Brien, I believe – J.R. Fuchs] It was, of course, a park. A portion of the Library grounds was a park. The remains of Slover Park is still there. Of course, they took part of it for the college, too, and so there isn't too much of the park left. But there

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was a shelter house there and they used that for the construction office and I was in there many times. I took pictures of the site when they were tearing down the buildings and that kind of stuff, and I used to go around and talk to Jerry, clerk of the works. I don't recall President Truman having an office there. They might have said, "Well, here's a desk you can use." But he did drive up around there and I think in most cases he was up early and around before--I was married at the time--I would be around; and I got to work early myself, but he was often there. He got up early and took walks and I guess he drove up around the Library a lot. But he did meet--because I know very specifically one individual who was sort of a foreman, and I don't know whether he was primarily on concrete construction, the man has done steel work and he's done a lot of types of construction work and was strong as a bull. His name was John Mautino, and he introduced me to duck hunting in Missouri; and we've been friends for 25 years. He was kind of on a first name basis with Mr. Truman, believe it or not. He was just a good old Italian, and, hell, he was 65 years old then and still working.

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POEN: My goodness.

FUCHS: And he tells a tale about Mr. Truman coming up here, and telling them, "Come on up here and take a break," you know, out of the pit so to speak. And so Truman was around there and did get friendly with at least one I know of, anyway. I've heard of others. So there's some truth to it. But so far as him having what you might call an office prior to his moving in there before the building was completed, into his present office, or, rather, the office he occupied, I don't know. He went in there rather early around March when we started to move the museum objects in there from the vault in the old bank building, the Federal Office Building.

You know the Federal Office Building in Kansas City was originally built as a bank and it failed, and they had that big vault in there, and I've never seen it, but that is the story I get. I don't think I ever went down there.

That's where they stored all the museum crates, the crates of museum objects that came from Washington, and I don't think they were ever in the Federal

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Reserve Building because their vaults would have been used for current business, but it was in the old Federal Office Building. Phil knows for sure, but I'm not positive.

POEN: Now, when Truman had his office downtown he would go down what is now called Truman Road?

FUCHS: Yes. It was 15th Street in Kansas City; out here it was originally Van Horn, and then was made Truman Road and rerouted. I guess years ago it was known as Blue, or something like that in the early days of the city.

POEN: Does that take you right down to the Federal, Building? Pretty close?

FUCHS: Well, 15th Street went in south of the old Federal Building, this was 911 Walnut, the Federal Reserve Building was right around in there, too. The new Federal Building, of course, is at 601 E. 12th, so it is south of there.

POEN: The building that Truman had his office in, is it still standing?

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FUCHS: It's the Federal Reserve Building. Oh, yes , it's still standing, it is the Federal Reserve Bank Building. They had a lot of office space in there, and I believe he was on the fifth floor. I was only in it several times, I guess. I went down there, incidentally, with a man named Yeghishian, who was an Oriental rug dealer, to pick up the Persian rug that the Shah of Iran gave him, which was on Mr. Truman's office floor in the Federal Reserve Bank Building. He picked it up with me and carried it out over his shoulder. It was quite light although quite large, and he took it to be cleaned and repaired and mounted, you know, a hanging rod put on it.

POEN: And that hangs in the museum then?

FUCHS: And that's in that special niche that was built for it in the museum. But that had been on Mr. Truman's office floor.

That was one occasion on which I was in that office and then when I went to meet him there, was introduced to him there.

POEN: You were not headquartered there?

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FUCHS: No, no, we were in the courthouse, as I say, and from the time I came out here in August, '54 and Phil in September of '53, were working in the courthouse until late in the former year; I only worked there a couple of months, but we soon started to move the material over to Maple Avenue, or the Memorial Building in Independence, which incidentally is cater-cornered from the Presbyterian Church where he was supposed to have met his little lady with "the golden hair and the blue eyes."

POEN: Is that the Presbyterian Church just a couple of blocks from his home?

FUCHS: Yes. On the corner of Pleasant and Maple Avenues. The Memorial Building is there between Pleasant and Spring, but it's on the corner of Pleasant and Maple, and then there's a church next to it.

POEN: I see.

FUCHS: Southern Baptist M.E. south or something, I believe. There's just the two buildings in that one block there.

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We were quartered in an old handball court there, which was completely wooden-lined, and had the papers there from late in '54 until 1957 when we moved them into the Library. It's a long story about that moving of the papers; it could have been a catastrophe.

POEN: Why?

FUCHS: Because the quarters were old, the handball court was all wooden-lined and dried out, and here we had all the Presidential papers in there on shelving. It was the only high ceilinged room like that that we could put them in in the Memorial Building; and Mr. Truman, or whoever found this building when we had to move out of the courthouse, had to move the papers someplace, wanted to move them to Independence and that was the only place they could find to move to. And Phil and I worked there from the end of '54 until '57 in this room with the papers; we had two desks in there.

POEN: A little scary.

FUCHS: Yes.

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POEN: There's been some major thefts at the Library since you've been there.

FUCHS: Yes.

POEN: Was the first one the coin collection?

FUCHS: The first one that I recall of any dimension, was the coin collection that John Snyder had built up as Secretary of the Treasury. He was a good friend of Mr. Truman's, and had given to the Library--really placed it on loan, really didn't give it as a donation, assumed it would later be; but it was his collection of all the coins--one of each coin issued under each President was what it was, not the most valuable coins, but by the very nature there were very valuable coins included in that.

POEN: Was Truman still around during that time?

FUCHS: Oh, this theft was . . .

POEN: Back in the sixties.

FUCHS: I was trying to think. I remember I was going duck hunting and I think it was around '62 or '63.

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I remember I had just hit the highway and I could just go left to the Library and right to go duck hunting, and I felt, "Well, what the hell could I do?" I heard it on the radio, and I said, "What can I do to help?" And the Director was on the job, so I went duck hunting. They took the coins, and then we replaced that.

POEN: What other thefts?

FUCHS: Then they had this other major theft--there were a number of other minor thefts--then this major theft of the swords that were given to him by the King or Crown Prince, or whatever, of Saudi Arabia. King Ibn Saud, I guess it was.

POEN: That's just in the last year or two.

FUCHS: Yes, that was just two years ago, three years ago. George Curtis was here when it occurred. I was the first one that was called because we then had an assistant director, but they didn't have his name on the emergency number list, so they called me, and I couldn't reach the Director--I believe he was out of town--so I went up there and looked into it until the

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Assistant Director came, as, of course, Acting Director.

POEN: Well, Jim, who, if you were writing a book about Truman's retirement years and the formative years of building up the Library and the collection, who would you recommend that I talk to? I haven't talked to Sue Gentry; I have her on my list. I understand the fellow that was the curator is now working out of Liberty.

FUCHS: Milton Perry, the Curator of the Museum, as he had the title then.

POEN: Anyone else?

FUCHS: Of course so many of them are dead; Tom Evans is dead; and David Lloyd is dead; and Wayne Grover would have been excellent, of course, factual policy and so forth, he is dead; Karl Trever

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