

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

HAZEL GRAHAM

AUGUST 23, 1989

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY ANDREW DUNAR

ORAL HISTORY #1989-5

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HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR





HAZEL GRAHAM

IN THE MUSIC ROOM
OF THE TRUMAN HOME

August 23, 1989
HSTR Photograph

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ABSTRACT

Hazel Graham [1914—16 January 1996] served as the executive director of the Jackson County Historical Society in Independence, Missouri. Graham recalls the support given by the Trumans to the historical organization and other movements in Independence and throughout the Kansas City area to preserve historical structures. Graham relates stories about Harry S Truman's interaction with children, the tearing down of the gazebo, and Bess W. Truman's shopping at the historical society museum gift shop, the fourth grade art winner, Polly Compton, and the Reverend Thomas G. Melton.

Persons mentioned: Bess W. Truman, Harry S Truman, Joyce C. Hall, William B. Duke, Mikey Hahn, Philip C. Brooks, Benedict K. Zobrist, Margaret Truman Daniel, Helena Crowe, Sue Gentry, Ardis Haukenberry, Thomas Hart Benton, Thomas G. Melton, Polly Compton, Grace Carvin, May Wallace, Mary Shaw Branton, Coleman Branton, Henry A. Bundschu, George Porterfield Gates, Natalie Ott Wallace, Howard Adams, J. Roger DeWitt, Nate Jackson, Rufus Burrus, Linda King, Adelaide Twyman, Lucy Peters, Grace Minor, Eleanor, Sally Chrisman, and Hiram Young.

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ANDREW DUNAR: Today is August 23, 1989, and we're seated in the living room of the Truman home. Today we're interviewing Mrs. Hazel Graham. And to start out, Mrs. Graham, if you could just tell us a little bit about your own background and about the first meeting you had with the Trumans, if you can remember that.

HAZEL GRAHAM: I don't know that I can remember exactly the first one, but we lived on Delaware, at 610 North Delaware, in a home that was built on the property that Mrs. Truman's grandparents had lived on. In front of that house is one of the two oldest trees in this part of the county—or in this part of the state, I guess—a burr oak tree, and Mrs. Truman and I talked many times about the times she played under that tree as a child visiting her grandparents. Now, the house is not the same, because the property that the house was on that she visited in went clear through to Union Street, and that has long ago disappeared.

But I had not worked since our marriage. I had managed the Lucerne Hotel, a residential hotel in Kansas City, before we were married, and then I had not worked outside the home until our younger daughter entered junior high school here in Independence. In fact, they waited until the end of the summer for me to come up there, and I became the first director of the Jackson County

Historical Society after it was revitalized, 100 years after the building had been built. It was the old 1859 jail and museum. Mr. Truman did visit in the home that was provided at the front on Main Street for the marshal and his family, because his good friend lived there. But at that time, I went to be the executive director for the Historical Society. At that time, they had not been meeting and they had only the one property there that they had acquired to rehabilitate, in order to save it from being made into a parking lot. [chuckling]

DUNAR: A common thing in Independence. [laughter]

GRAHAM: Yes, I'm afraid so. There's a very interesting story about their getting enough money to do this restoration that involves Mr. Truman, and I imagine you probably have this someplace else. But for publicity purposes it was arranged that Mr. Truman would call Joyce Hall, of Hallmark Cards, and ask for a one thousand dollar contribution to set off the campaign to raise the money, and this was to run nonstop until they had got enough money subscribed to do the work that had to be done immediately. So the cameras were there, the newsmen were there with their cameras and the reporters and so forth and all set up. They had a whole row of telephones set up, a table with telephones on it, quite long, two or three tables put together. Mr. Truman came to make the first call and sat down and called Mr. Hall. Of course, Mr. Hall knew he was going to do this and was appropriately in his office. [chuckling]

DUNAR: Near the phone.

GRAHAM: And Mr. Hall said he'd be delighted to give one thousand dollars. So they took all their pictures then, and Mr. Truman got up and started to leave and he

said, “Say, you guys are going to sit here and call for hours probably. This is silly, I’d better make some calls on my own.” His story is—and I don’t know, I have no way of proving this, but it was a good story anyway—that he made three calls, and the minute he said, “This is Harry Truman . . .” they said on the other end, “I’ll bet!” and hung up on him. [laughter] So, anyway, he got up and he said, “I am no good as a fund-raiser unless it’s all set up ahead of time!” [laughter]

But he was very, very interested, as was Mrs. Truman, in the work that we were doing. This was the beginning of trying to save some of the historic properties of Jackson County, and he was very, very helpful many times. He would ask me how things were going. And he was aware, because of his own background in Jackson County politics, that there was a great cleavage between Kansas City and the eastern part of the county, Independence being the largest part of that, and he said, “We will never be a success until we learn to work together.” I heard him say that several times and it made its impression upon me very, very deeply.

The thing that has struck me so very, very strongly, and the things that I have read about Mr. Truman in the books that have been written, is that there is one thing that I think was an outstanding characteristic that he had that has not been more than lightly touched upon, and that is the rapport that he had with young people and his affection for young people. My first experience with that was long before the fence went up out here. He was in Washington, but I had a Brownie troop at Bryant School over here where his daughter went to school. The public library at that time was on the square, and I was

walking with the Brownie troop up to the square to a reading hour that they were sponsoring for children. Just as we got in front of the house, Mr. Truman was home for the weekend or something and he came out to pick up the paper. He came out to the front sidewalk, knowing some of the children because they were neighborhood children, and he spoke to all the children that he knew, talked to them individually about Granddad or something, so that they knew that he knew who they were and this sort of thing. The ones that he didn't recognize, he would say to me, [muttering] "What's her name?" On the side, I was supposed to supply. [chuckling] "You remember Susan so-and-so . . ." But he spoke to every one of those children personally, and this was long before he was the public figure that he became later. But then I talked to them, of course, about who he was and the ones that didn't already know who he was.

DUNAR: This was while he was a senator?

GRAHAM: Yes. Well, I'd have to go back and check, but it was before the fence went up. Now, that's about as close as I can pinpoint it as to the year, because the fence had not gone up at that particular time.

But another interesting thing about his earlier days before he had to have an escort for his walks and all, when he was able to go out by himself when he would be home, he had an interesting habit that I am unaware that has been talked about or recorded. He always carried his cane long before he needed it to lean on, but he waved with the cane. That was a regular occurrence in the neighborhood. If you went by in the car or he walked by your house, he waved the cane.

One morning—this was before we all had air conditioning and so we slept with our windows open—and it was not an uncommon occurrence in the summertime for me to be awakened by this tap, tap, tap, because he swung his cane as he walked, and so it was a very rhythmic . . . He walked very fast and he swung it. One morning, [chuckling] I guess it must have been one of the first mornings, I looked out the window from the second-floor bedroom and he waved his cane to me. So I was a little more discreet after that. [laughter] But this went on until he had to use the cane as a help for him to get around.

DUNAR: Just as an aside on that issue, did he need the cane to walk before the accident that he had in 1964?

GRAHAM: I'm not sure about that, but he did . . . Obviously, when he was walking and swinging it, he didn't need it very badly. Now, he might have had some problem at curbsides or something like that.

DUNAR: But he didn't really need it until 1964?

GRAHAM: He wasn't really using it as a cane at that particular time.

I'll tell you now a few things about Mrs. Truman. After she was in the White House, I'm sure that you already know that she did not like the publicity and the people stopping and talking to her. Also, I don't know whether anybody has ever said this to you or not, but in person she did not look like her pictures. She was always very sedate in her pictures, and in person she had a lovely smile and was very congenial. They really didn't look the same. It looked almost like . . . Because her personality was very vibrant when you really saw her. She just sort of bubbled, her eyes did, and so forth. I have stood in lines at the grocery store when she would be in front of me,

and when she had gone on out I would say to the clerk, “Do you know who you just waited on?” Many times they would say, “No, who?” And I would tell them who they had just waited on. But she didn’t really look in person like she did in her pictures. Her pictures did not do her justice, in other words.
[chuckling]

DUNAR: When did she stop going to the grocery store on her own?

GRAHAM: Well, I wouldn’t know when, but of course, after they had the security that lived across the street, this cramped her style terribly. But one time I was bringing something to her . . . The way this all started, our friendship started, was that we had a gift shop at the museum and I could order things that we didn’t even carry. After she had discovered that it was difficult to go out in public without a problem sometimes to her, she would have me order things—even though I didn’t carry them, I had access to getting them—for her for the grandchildren and this sort of thing. So I would be bringing things to her lots of times. She had an interest in maps and I used to order maps for her. She wanted the boys to know about these things, too, so that was . . .

One time when I was bringing her something—and this was very early in our visits—I said to her, “The flowers out in your backyard are gorgeous!” She said, “I wish I could enjoy them.” I said, “What do you mean?” I believe they were daffodils. She said, “Well, if I go out . . .” And this was before the fence, too. She said, “If I go out to pick them, somebody is going to call [out], “Oh, Mrs. Truman, let us take your picture! Won’t you turn around and let us take your picture?” So she said, “I’d just rather stay in here.” [chuckling] I said, “Okay, I’ll go out and pick them for you,” which I did. [chuckling] And

she had a nice bouquet of daffodils.

DUNAR: She very much just stayed in the house then, didn't she?

GRAHAM: Yes, she did, after it became evident that she was who she was and that sort of thing. [chuckling] One thing, too, that you probably would be interested in that I don't think anybody else would have ever told you, whenever I came, regardless of how many times or how close they were together, we had one subject that we started our conversation with: grandchildren. She remembered how many I had and their approximate ages, and so she wanted to know about each one of them. And then, of course, you know what I was supposed to do. I was supposed to ask about hers and how each one was getting along and all this sort of thing. But we started any conversation with, "How are the grandchildren?" and took that through to its conclusion. [chuckling]

You asked about when I first became acquainted. One of the first times that Mr. Truman started giving me advice was at a party in the neighborhood. Mr. Bill Duke, who lived down the street one block, on the corner—well, just beyond the corner, the second house—they had been friends for a long time, and his wife had been dead for several years and Mr. Duke had married again, a woman from the New England area, and he had an open house for her when he brought her home and the neighbors were invited in. Mr. Truman was already there when Kenneth and I arrived and he motioned for me. There was a hassock sitting kind of beside his chair and he wanted me to come sit down on that, and I knew what I was . . . [chuckling] I was going to be quizzed on what I was telling those children. But anyway, we

had quite a conversation about it, and that was one time that he did say something that I know you have a record of because it's in some of his writings. He didn't want me just to tell them the history, and he wanted to kind of know what kind of history we were telling them, and this sort of thing. And he said, "Tell them about how government works. Tell them what they have to do to get good government, how it works so that they understand it. And if they really understood it, they would grow up to elect the kind of people that would give them the government they want." And that was in that conversation.

DUNAR: Do you remember anything else that he told you specifically to tell the children?

GRAHAM: Oh, if I missed something in history, and maybe we were telling them but I had not detailed that, he would ask me, "Are you covering such and such?"

DUNAR: Would he really quiz you?

GRAHAM: Oh, yes. He wanted to know what we were telling those children, if we were telling them the right things. [chuckling]

Another thing that I think is interesting. One day I came and Mrs. Truman had been sitting on the stairs. She had her books around her there on the stairway. I guess I must have looked a little surprised or something, because she let me in and went back to pick up something that she had had there on the stairway, and she said, "I've been sitting here reading." Then she said, "I've been doing this all my life. In the summertime, when I was growing up, this was the coolest place in the house; in the wintertime, it was always the warmest place in the house. And I just got in the habit, so I still sit

in the stairway to read lots of times.” [chuckling] That’s something that I thought was a little bit unusual that you might not have . . .

DUNAR: Would she have a pile of books then next to her in the stairway?

GRAHAM: Oh, yes.

DUNAR: Would she talk to you about what she was reading?

GRAHAM: Sometimes. I have, it wasn’t something we talked about every time. But she enjoyed reading, and she read other things besides books, too. She read newspapers and . . .

DUNAR: You always hear about the mysteries that she read. Were there other things?

GRAHAM: Yes, she read that. Well, she kept up on current events. She knew what was going on and all that sort of thing.

Another thing about Mr. Truman and children. There’s a couple of stories there about different aged children. The first one is about a little boy, Mikey Hahn, who lived down the street in the 600 block on Delaware, a closer neighbor of ours than the Trumans. One day, I was coming . . . I’d better back up just a minute. We had an arrangement with the Truman Library. The directors of the Truman Library were always on my board. Dr. Brooks was extremely helpful and anxious to help with the Historical Society and was always a member of the board, as was Ben Zobrist. So we had the arrangement that anything that was brought to the museum, that should appropriately be at the Truman Library, I took to them. Anything that they received, that should appropriately have been placed in the Historical Society archives, they sent to me. So one day, I was again coming home from my lunch, had been to the library and was coming up Delaware. And when I got

to College Street, Mr. Truman was sitting in his car . . . This was when he was still driving back and forth to the office by himself. He was sitting in his car on the corner, talking to a little boy that was sitting across the street with his feet dangling down into the sewer . . . the street, you know how they go down, and they were just talking and they both waved to me. I went on up the street, the next to the last house on the block, to stop and pull in our driveway, and I needed to turn on the water to water in the yard. So, after I got in the house and I went out to turn the water on, I looked down the street and they're still sitting there talking. I did two or three things around the yard there, picked up some things and that sort of thing, and finally Mr. Truman drove off and Mikey came bounding up the street. I said to him, "Do you know who you were talking to down there for so long?" He said, "Yep!" And I said, "Who?" "A nice man." [chuckling] He had no idea who he was talking to. Now, I made sure that his parents knew who he was talking to so they could tell him the story, and he loves to tell that story today. [laughter] But this is just typical of the man, as I said before.

Then later, a young man, probably a senior in high school, came into the museum one day. And it happened I often relieved whoever was on the desk while they would go to lunch or something, and I was on the desk. In fact, I missed that very much after we got big enough and had two or three things going, the Wornall House in Kansas City and the archives was moved out of the Truman Library and had their own places and so forth. I missed the contact with the people that came through the museum. And this young man came in, and I asked him to sign the register, and it was obvious that he was

so excited, and finally he said, "I've just got to talk to somebody. I've just got to tell. I can't hold it any longer." And he had been out to the Truman Library and had spent, he said, an hour or more going through inside, and was taking some pictures outside. And he had gotten around to the . . . I started to say it again. They had an awful time with me. I used to call that the back door. [chuckling] And Dr. Brooks would say, "Hazel, it is the north door." [chuckling] So I finally learned to say the north door. Then Ben Zobrist comes, and one day I said to him something about the north door, and he said, "Hazel, that's the executive entrance." [laughter] It was hopeless!

But anyway, whether it's the back door or the north door or executive entrance, this young man had gotten around to that spot with his pictures when Mr. Truman pulled up with several cars of reporters behind him. And as was his custom, he stopped just before he went into the door to turn around and give them a small chance to ask questions and so forth. And after several minutes, the young man said he dismissed them and said, "Now that's all for today," and they started to leave. And he motioned like this to the young man, who had been at the edge, trying his best to get a picture of Mr. Truman. The boy came up to him and he said, "I saw those fellows giving you a rough time and pushing you around and always standing in front of you when you wanted to take a picture. Is that what you wanted to do? Did you want to get a picture?" And he said, "I surely did, but they didn't give me much chance." He said, "I know, I saw it. You just come on in and we'll take some pictures in here." And he took him into his office and he said, "Now you just take anything you want. I'll be here and you can just take any picture you want."

So he got several pictures of Mr. Truman in his office. And I have been very, very sorry that I did not make a record of this young man's name and address, because I didn't. [chuckling]

DUNAR: That is a great story.

GRAHAM: But anyway, again it illustrates his interest in people that he knew had no influence to help him in any way, and to me that's a real true picture of the man.

Are you aware that the roof on the house is not anywhere like the original roof on the house here?

DUNAR: We know a little bit about that, but tell us more.

GRAHAM: Well, the original roof—and I'm sure there's plenty of pictures that you can see the . . .

DUNAR: The slate?

GRAHAM: The design, the slate made a design. That was rather common in the time that this house was built to put designs in the roof.

DUNAR: With a pattern in the slate?

GRAHAM: Yes. I do not remember exactly the pattern, but the pictures do show it. I've seen pictures that show it, if you're interested in that. But Mrs. Truman didn't want it put back that way because it was too expensive. That was the only reason I ever . . . was because it was too expensive.

Also, I happened to bring something here one day, and they were tearing down the gazebo out in back. This was when Dr. Brooks was still at the Truman Library. I just about had a fit! And I didn't say too much to her, but I said, "Oh, dear, are they just going to repair it?" [chuckling] And Mr.

Truman walked through about that time and he said, “We’ve repaired it four or five times.” I’ve forgotten how many times, he had the exact number. “We’ve repaired it and there’s just no point in it. We don’t use it anymore.” So I ran home, got home as quick as I could and called the library and I said, “Is there anything you can do? They’re tearing down the gazebo!” And later Dr. Brooks said, “We tried, but there wasn’t anything we could do.” [laughter] So the gazebo is lost to us.

SHAVER: We have some plans in the works, maybe not soon . . .

GRAHAM: You have plenty of pictures of it to . . .

SHAVER: To make _____.

GRAHAM: Yes. Another thing that you might want to know. She never put up the Christmas wreath after we lived here. We moved here in 1948, I guess, to Delaware. We lived in Golden Acres before that. She never put up the Christmas wreath out on the front porch immediately to the right of the doorway, as you go out at the right, until the day before Christmas. Now, this might have been because she didn’t do any decorating until Margaret got home to do the decorating, after Margaret was grown and so forth. They had the tree set up and all that, but Margaret put the things on after she would get here.

DUNAR: Where did they have the tree?

GRAHAM: Well, I think usually in there. However, her friends have told me, members of her bridge club, that they didn’t always have it in exactly the same spot.

DUNAR: Usually in the music room or in the entryway?

GRAHAM: No, in the music room is where I have seen it, happened to be here and see it.

But some of them have said to me that it was in other places besides that. And she always—and I mean always—had the shades all at exactly the same height. There was never one here and one here, they were always exactly the same height, and usually halfway. But if they weren't halfway, they were all the same. And those were two things that she did herself when she was here.

A story that I was involved in, but some of her bridge club members who helped me at the museum . . . Mrs. Crowe was the membership chairman for many, many years for the Historical Society, and she was very close to Mrs. Truman, told me this. The story starts with me. I was going into a little shop that sold office supplies and things like that, up just one block off the square. Mrs. Truman—and this was after she had to have the Secret Service men with her—was coming down the other side toward me. We were both on the same side of the street, but we were facing each other. When we got to the door, we stopped and chatted for a few minutes, not knowing that each one of us was going to go in. But she wanted to get something that she was particularly looking for, and so the Secret Service man was with her. At that particular time, the Secret Service men were wearing dark glasses. They didn't do that all the time, but this time they were. And when we went on inside then, after visiting out on the sidewalk, there was a large crowd in there and there normally wasn't a big crowd in there, and Mrs. Truman stood around and stood around, as did I. Finally, one of the salespeople came up to me before they did to her, and I said, "Go over and take care of Mrs. Truman, please!" And the girl, very flustered, went over and . . . They didn't have what Mrs. Truman wanted, so they went on out and she came back to me and

said, “Oh, thank you, thank you for telling me. I am so sorry. I didn’t, I had no idea that was Mrs. Truman. I thought it was a nice lady helping that blind man.” And, I told this [laughter] to Mrs. Truman, and she just laughed, and laughed, and laughed. [laughter] And Mrs. Crowe, who’s a member of her bridge club said that that was her favorite story. She told it, and told it, and told it. Because she hated having to have the Secret Service men. So the Secret Service men told me . . .

[End #3596; Begin #3597]

GRAHAM: Ready for me? The Secret Service men had told me that anytime they took her anyplace they dare not take a hold of her arm when they would come to a curb or anything like that, but they always had an arm of theirs out that she could take a hold of if she felt she needed to, but that they didn’t ever take a hold of her arm, they waited for her to take a hold of their arm.

And they did used to take her with them sometimes into some of the kind of unusual little restaurants. There was one over in Sugar Creek which I don’t think very many Independence people, particularly their age, would have even gone. [chuckling] Nothing wrong with it, but it was just a little tiny place. But they would take her there. She preferred it because she didn’t see so many people that wanted to talk to her.

DUNAR: What restaurant was that? Do you remember what it was called?

GRAHAM: No, I don’t remember the name of it. I never was there. [laughter] And it, I understand, is no longer there either.

The other story that I had forgotten to make a note on was we were going to put a display of clothing on up at the museum at one time. We had

written something in the journal about it, and so one time when I was here she said, “I have my christening dress . . .”

I should back up and tell you that they have a christening dress out at the Truman Library that they say is her christening dress. But the Historical Society has one, too, that she told me was her christening dress. [laughter] And it’s very likely that there were two christening dresses in the family. I mean, you really would have expected there to be, and maybe she was giving me the one that she thought was the least valuable. But anyway, she said, “I’ve got one that I’ve been fooling around with here. It’s got . . . oh, those old brown spots that you get on them when you put things away in a trunk, but I think you can fold it like this . . .” and she showed me exactly how we could fold it to lay it in the case so that the brown spots wouldn’t show. So I thanked her very much and took it home.

Our lady that helped me, [Sally] the black lady who helped me at home, was a good friend of the maid here who helped them, and so she was very much interested, and so I showed her the dress and she was very much interested in it. I told her that I was going to wash it in Woolite and see if I could get some of the stains out. And she said, “Oh, Mrs. Graham, I know how to get the stains out.” And what she did was to . . . Well, what I did, I washed the dress in the Woolite, and then the next morning when she came, we dampened it again—it was in the middle of the summer—and laid it out in the backyard on a white sheet so that there would be a reflection from the white sheet. She squeezed lemon juice on the spots and brought the salt shaker along and put the salt on the lemon spots. And all day long she would

go out every little while and put more lemon juice on it as it dried. As the lemon juice dried, she'd put more lemon juice on the salt. I think we did this for two or three days, washing it out at night and then starting all over again, but we got them all out. And I spent two evenings ironing that dress, because it is full of little tiny tucks and embroidery and all this sort of thing, and not being at home through the day and Sally didn't see well enough to trust her to do it, and so I worked with it myself.

After I had gotten it all finished—and it did look gorgeous—I brought it up to [Mrs. Truman]. I called her one morning and said, “I want to show you something.” So I brought it by as I was going to the museum. I told her what I had done, or what Sally had done to get it that way. She knew Sally. Sally would come up here and help them on parties and things like that. [chuckling] And she cried. She said, “I didn't think it would ever look like this.” I said, “Well, now, I want you to see it because I want you to know that I think you should keep it if you want to.” And she said, “Oh, no, no, no! It would never have been any good at all if I had kept it, because I didn't know how to get the spots out, and don't know as I would have had the patience to do it anyway.” But she said, “I wouldn't have known what to do with it, it would have just been ruined, and I don't want to take it back.” Of course, that may have been why there was another one in the family, anyway. [chuckling] But anyway, she was very, very touched that we had taken [such] pains to take care of the dress. But they were both wonderful people.

Oh, I have one more story, but I have to show you something about it. In the hallway, underneath the chair rail, you are aware of what kind of

covering there is, that kind of embossed [lincrusta]. One day when I was here and I was just getting ready and I was standing in the hallway to go out, she said, “You know what I’m going to do? I have looked at that dark stuff all my life. I’m sick and tired of it. I’m going to have it all taken out.” And I said, “Oh, Mrs. Truman . . .” and I started in, you know. “Think about that now. That’s just part of the building. That’s the way it was built and it really wouldn’t look like it.” She said, “Well, I’m sick of it.” She let me go on, she led me on, but pretty soon I noticed that there was a twinkle in her eye. But she led me on for several minutes of me thinking of everything I could think of as to why she shouldn’t take it off and still not be too nosy, you know. [chuckling] Finally, she laughed and she said, “You sound just exactly like the rest of my family. I’ll leave it there.” [laughter] But it’s these little things that make them just like other human beings that I cherish, the things that make them more than just dignitaries.

DUNAR: Would she tease like that occasionally? Can you think of other times?

GRAHAM: Oh, yes, she had a terrific sense [of humor]. Any of her club members would have told you that she loved to do that sort of thing. Yes, she was quite a hand to do that. In intimate company, not that I was an intimate friend, but it was under the circumstances. She knew from what I was interested in that I would have a fit about it, and so . . . [laughter]

DUNAR: You reacted the way [she was expecting you to].

GRAHAM: I performed perfectly. [chuckling] Well, there’s one more story, too, and I think this is the end. In connection with this fourth-grade program that we had, we always asked the children if they would like to draw a picture of what

they liked the best about the trip and send it to us, that we would have an exhibit at the end of the school year and we would put up the whole museum back in the back of pictures that they had sent, with tape, you know, and put them up. This one little girl . . .

These were all fourth-graders. We took all the fourth-graders in the area through the museum. They would come in their own bus, their school bus, and we would put a volunteer guide on the bus and they would take a tour going clear out to the landing at the Missouri River where they would come in past all the . . . And we started out by asking them if they'd brought their best pretenders with them. And fourth-graders always have their best pretenders with them, so yes, they did. "Well, if you did, you can go on a covered wagon trip today, you can go to Santa Fe, and we're going to have lots of fun. Now, those cars out there are going to suddenly turn into horses and wagons. There's no cars out there. They're just horses and wagons and buggies and some things like that—they're not cars." So, if some child through the time would get to talking about cars or anything like that, one of them would always say, "What's the matter with your best pretender?" [chuckling]

But they did send lots of pictures, and this little girl sent one that was just unbelievably good about the house, just from what they had seen. Well, her parents later told me that they had brought her back and that she didn't want to turn in the picture that she made when she first got back, and the teacher let her do this, so she had given this some study. It was so lovely that after the exhibit was over we were going to give it to the Truman Library.

And the thought just struck me that [the Trumans] should see it before I took it out to the Truman Library, and so I called [Mrs. Truman]. Well, certainly they'd like to see it. So I said, "Well, can I bring the child to give it to you herself? I think that would mean something to her." "Why, I think that's an excellent idea."

So we made arrangements on a Saturday, and I met the family up at the museum. I always was very hesitant to impose in any way on Mr. and Mrs. Truman, to assume anything. She had not said anything about bringing the family in, and so I was very hesitant to, also. We came in my car then, I parked over where I am now, and the little girl and I got out to come into the house. We came up on the porch, and she was standing in the door waiting for us because she knew we were coming. And she said to me, "Is that her mother and father out in the car?" And I said yes. She said, "Well, don't you think you ought to ask them to come in?" In just that tone of voice. [laughter] And so I ran back to the car and got them. They both greeted everybody who was there and talked to them for just a moment.

Then we came into this room and sat down in the chairs around and on the divan over there. We were not here very long, but the rest of us did not enter into the conversation to speak of at all. Mr. Truman talked to the little girl, said what did she want to do when she grew up, and he had some advice for her as to what she might . . . be sure and study your history, and that type of thing. But the conversation was with the child, not with the adults at all.

Then, when we left, we were standing in the hallway out here just ready to go out the door, and Mr. Truman said to the father, "Isn't that a

camera you have?” and he said yes. [chuckling] They must have been as hesitant as I was to ask, because he said, “Well, did you want to use it?” [laughter] So they stepped out on the front porch, I stepped away, and the little girl has a picture of herself with Mr. and Mrs. Truman.

DUNAR: That’s great.

GRAHAM: I think that’s the end of my stories. [chuckling]

DUNAR: I have two questions that I’d like to ask.

GRAHAM: Okay.

DUNAR: Could you tell us about any other involvement that they had with the Historical Society? I know they were very interested in it.

GRAHAM: Well, Mr. Truman at least was just about as interested in our acquiring the Wornall House in Kansas City as he was in restoring the properties here, because this went along with what he said: We needed to be a unit. The county needed to be a unit. They contributed the same amount of money—which I don’t think I want to say exactly, but it was sizeable—that they did in the beginning when we bought the Wornall House. Of course, our archives for quite a long while were housed at the Truman Library, and he used to go down and talk to them and help them down there to get things . . . I don’t know this, but I always felt that he probably had some influence to get us into the courthouse then up there when we got that property. To use, I mean. We don’t own it, but to use it.

DUNAR: Right, to the old courtroom that [unintelligible]?

GRAHAM: Yes. Well, to take the archives up there.

DUNAR: Yes, for the archives.

GRAHAM: But they were always interested in anything, and would question me about things that we were doing.

DUNAR: What sort of things were they concerned about?

GRAHAM: Well, other than that we covered the entire county Mr. Truman was very much interested in, she used to ask me about the trips. I used to take them on tours frequently, and she never went along but she always wanted to know where we were going and what we were going to do and always showed interested in what . . . Of course, she was a very good friend of Sue Gentry's. This woman that I was telling you about that was one of her close friends, Mrs. Helena Crowe, worked so much up at the . . . and Ardis Haukenberry was very, very active in the Historical Society, and she got quizzed, too, about what we were doing. [chuckling] Ardis Haukenberry was the secretary for many, many years for the Historical Society. I couldn't tell you how many years.

DUNAR: You mentioned the christening dress before. Were there other things that they gave to the Historical Society?

GRAHAM: Well, I think we have some books and things like that. I do not remember any furniture or anything like that. Of course, they would not have given anything that would rightfully go to the Truman Library. I mean, that wouldn't have been sensible to do that. Phil Brooks would have been the kind of person who would have cooperated under any circumstances, but he certainly had Mr. Truman's pleasure that he was contributing to it and so forth.

DUNAR: I know you mentioned something to Mike when you talked to him before, and Mike takes very good notes. He mentioned about a doll that Mrs. Truman gave you for the Historical Society?

GRAHAM: Yes, she did give us a doll that was again, as she said, not in very good condition, but it was very, very lovely and we had it on display for a long time. I don't know that I have done the right thing, but when I left after twenty-two years it had grown so much from the time when I did go . . . When I went to the Historical Society, there was no employee but me, nobody to sweep the floors, nobody to do anything. And I probably would not have stayed and made it, but I had the same [Girl] Scout troop that by that time had just gone into junior high school, and they would come up to the museum and help. It was not a part of the national program, but we gave badges for their work at the museum.

The first Christmas that they were active there, they said, "Well, let's decorate for Christmas." They came up after school. The junior high school was very close to the museum, and they could walk up there after school, and they came up to check on me and offer to help. They did, really, some of the very first cataloguing that was ever done up there, under the direction of the senior curator at the Nelson Art Gallery. He also was on our board and came out and trained these girls as to how they should do it and that sort of thing. But when they wanted to decorate for Christmas, I told them, well, we'd have to do it authentically, they'd need to do some research. So they went and talked to all the older people that they could think of to find out how they did Christmas in the early days. We went out to the Girl Scout camp and cut down a little tree there in the Girl Scout camp and brought it in. It happened to have a bird's nest in it, which we placed at the front, and made the paper chains and strung the popcorn and all this sort of thing that they would do.

DUNAR: I know that Mr. Truman often addressed groups of children in the library. Did he ever address the Girl Scouts?

GRAHAM: It was mostly . . . [chuckling] I said I was through with my stories. But they were younger when they were painting the mural in the library. I would take them up many times during their meeting, because Bryant School was so close that we'd walk over there, and we always went in and sat down on the floor back in the corner and were very, very quiet. After the third or fourth time . . . Mr. [Thomas Hart] Benton was up on his ladder most of the time working. And an interesting thing that you might be personally interested in is that he kept taking out what looked like a magnifying glass and looking at it when he was up there. Do you know what it was? It was a reverse magnifying glass that made it look like what the people standing on the floor were seeing. You get me?

DUNAR: Yes, so he could see further away.

GRAHAM: But he never talked to us or anything, except one . . . He was almost finished, and one day he climbed down off his ladder. [whispering] And we were getting up very quietly . . . [talking in normal tone] trying to get out, you know, without making any disturbance. And he said, "I don't know why you girls are so noisy!" [laughter]

DUNAR: Was he joking?

GRAHAM: Oh, yes! Yes, he was teasing, very definitely. [laughter]

DUNAR: But he never talked to them other than that? That was the only thing?

GRAHAM: No, he'd been all business. All business.

DUNAR: If I could go back, because you had mentioned something in connection with a

doll, that Mrs. Truman had told you at the time that since Margaret wasn't going to give her any grandchildren . . . ?

GRAHAM: No, I have given the wrong impression if that was the impression you got. In the doll collection, they were just gifts to us from various people in the neighborhood. A lady came in who . . . In fact, the two dolls sat together in the carriage at the museum. But this lady would not even sign the register when she came in; she had the doll clutched in her arms and she gave it to me. And I always had them sign, you know, and she refused to sign it. She said, "No, I don't want to." I said, "Well, I'm almost afraid to take it unless you'll tell me why." And she said, "Well, I cherished this doll all my life, and I asked my daughter if she would like to have it and she said she wasn't interested, and I don't want her to change her mind after I'm gone and come back and ask you for it." But no, that was not the Truman doll. No, but they did sit together in the carriage.

SHAVER: Well, that also sounded like something she would say, too. That's why I remembered . . .

GRAHAM: No, she didn't say that, but she had other dolls, too, that I'm sure Margaret has. Again, I think in our journal we had said we were going to put on a display of dolls, and so she wanted to contribute to that. That had even slipped my mind for the moment. But you're right.

DUNAR: There's one other thing, too. I'm not sure how much you were involved, but it would probably be logical if you were to some extent, and that's the whole question of the Truman Historic District and the preservation of the neighborhood.

GRAHAM: [chuckling] I was on that commission from the very beginning.

DUNAR: Okay, well, I suspected you might have been.

GRAHAM: In fact, I was also on the commission that chose the statue and put it up. This has really nothing to do with Mr. Truman, and I don't know that you even want this on the tape.

DUNAR: Oh yes, we do definitely.

GRAHAM: But I was fascinated . . . They had asked all of us who were going to be on the platform the day that it was dedicated to wait inside and all go out together. And spouses of members of the commission were seated behind us, they didn't sit with us, so I was in there alone in the room while we were all gathering. And when they came in and announced that they would be ready in two minutes or something like that, for us to come out, every woman from Margaret Truman on down, all of them whose husband was there, went over and straightened their husband's tie and brushed off their shoulders. [chuckling] We all do the same thing. Regardless of what station we were in life, we all do the same things. But I was by myself and I had no husband to dust off, so I could watch the others. [chuckling]

DUNAR: You watched all the others.

GRAHAM: But it was so interesting, they all did exactly the same thing.

In fact, as I sat out here waiting for my appointed time to arrive, I was thinking about the curbing. One of the things that the commission did, the curb was in very bad condition. We got rock from out of town. It's slipped me now where we had to get it, I knew at the time, but we got special stone to put in. It's in pretty good condition now, but some of that stone that we

replaced through the years I have noticed has crumbled, and then they've had to replace sections of it.

DUNAR: You said they [unintelligible] pieces [unintelligible]?

GRAHAM: Yes, which is the curb. No, I'm talking about the curb.

DUNAR: The curb itself? Okay.

GRAHAM: Yes, which I never could quite understand. Sometimes I think we historians kind of go to foolish extremes, but it might have been greater protection to have put in a concrete curb, but we were very careful to buy the stone. To try to replace what had been here was the reason for buying the stone. But some of it deteriorated rather rapidly at first, but it looks in very good condition today.

DUNAR: You mentioned that you were on the committee to select the statue for the courthouse?

GRAHAM: Yes.

DUNAR: Could you describe a little bit about how that process went?

GRAHAM: Well, we interviewed a lot of people and had many, many meetings. Tom Melton was on the committee. [chuckling] Before we chose the artist to do it, we interviewed some others, which I do not remember now who they were. But I have been very disappointed that the cane has had so many problems. They have stolen the cane so many times and broken it off and so forth, because we thought that . . . That was one of the questions we asked. We thought that it was pretty secure, that this was not very apt to happen. I'm not complaining about the City because they have had good surveillance and it has an alarm system on it and all that sort of thing, but this was something we

certainly had not anticipated would be done.

It's very difficult to enforce the regulations that you have on a historic district. As an example, down the street here there's a house that's in fairly good condition today compared with what it was, that had a person in it, an owner, that we would go through the process of saying that you must do something about the porch, which was decaying and falling off and different things. The law prohibits us from doing anything to enforce that. If they so much as go out and buy one board and put it in, they're working on it according to the law. It really does not serve the purpose that I think most of us envisioned it serving in the beginning.

DUNAR: Yes, it's a loophole in the law.

GRAHAM: Yes, very definitely, and it's just a little bit like the grandfather clause in laws, that you can't change them.

DUNAR: Did the Trumans express interest in the historic district or involvement in any way in that project?

GRAHAM: I do not remember that they did. They would have probably felt that they didn't want to involve themselves in that, particularly when it was called the Truman Historic District.

DUNAR: Right. Were they at all concerned with the issue of the Baptist Church perhaps turning some of the territory into parking lots? Did they express a position on that one way or another?

GRAHAM: No. I don't think that they would have, because even though the weddings, both of them, were in the Episcopal church and all that, Mr. Truman always was a Baptist. I never knew of him attending, never heard of him attending.

Maybe he did, I'm not saying he didn't, but I think that they both would have felt like some other Presidents have felt, like it disrupted church for everybody when they went, all the things that had to be done ahead of time and everything. It's what I would have imagined they would have felt.

SHAVER: Let's take a break.

DUNAR: Okay.

[End #3597; Begin #3598]

SHAVER: Ask questions about other neighbors up and down the street . . .

DUNAR: Yeah, that's right.

SHAVER: . . . if we have the chance.

GRAHAM: Well, Tom Melton came later, but I can't think of another one that's still here.
[chuckling]

DUNAR: Before we forget, could you repeat the story again about your husband on the elevator with Mr. Truman?

GRAHAM: Yes, Kenneth was downtown at the Muehlebach Hotel one day and happened to get on the elevator on an upper floor that Mr. Truman was on. They greeted each other and visited on the way down, and very common conversation. But the minute they were on approximately, I believe, the third floor, some of the cronies from his earlier days in politics stepped onto the elevator, and Kenneth said that his [Mr. Truman's] personality changed completely. He became one of the boys, and the conversation that went on from there on was absolutely nothing like the one that had gone on before they picked up the rest of the boys. [chuckling] But he didn't say anything about what was said or anything of that kind.

DUNAR: Just that the manner had just . . .

GRAHAM: It was more just that . . . And he noticed the same thing that we talked about, that he made everybody feel comfortable. He didn't want to intimidate anybody.

DUNAR: We had mentioned a little bit about a few of the neighbors in the vicinity. Do you remember Polly Compton?

GRAHAM: Oh yes, very much so. Very much so. Polly Compton was . . . Now, you do know who Polly Compton was? He had the bottling company and this sort of thing, Polly's Pop, which was very popular at that time in the earlier days. But after he was retired, he had a little motorized snow removal . . . a little tiny tractor that he could drive right on the sidewalk, and he cleaned all of our sidewalks very faithfully. If you tried to do something to say thank you to him, like giving him some little gift or something to say thank you, in a day or so you got a little gift, too. So there was never any getting the record even. [chuckling] You were always in his debt. But they enjoyed each other. I don't remember ever being with the two of them together, but they were certainly the type that would have been . . . and I know they did enjoy each other very much.

DUNAR: You must have gotten to know Reverend Melton quite well, since he worked on the commission.

GRAHAM: Oh, yes, we did several things together, civic activities of that kind, of being on the commissions.

DUNAR: What was his roll on the commissions generally?

GRAHAM: Well, he was the chairman for a while of the historic district, I do not

remember how long. I am not a true historian by any means. When I have been asked questions, either on the phone or in person, many times the best I can do is to say, “Well, I can tell you where you can find out.” [chuckling] Or, “I’ll find out for you.” But I’m not good at dates. But that was one of our wonderful blessings at the Historical Society, that I did know many, many people who were willing to help us in whatever field we were in.

DUNAR: Did you know Mrs. Carvin?

GRAHAM: Slightly, but not intimately by any means.

DUNAR: How about May Wallace? Can you tell us a little bit about her?

GRAHAM: Oh yes, May Wallace is a lovely lady. She primarily just came to functions that we had, and of course was a very close friend of Mrs. Crowe’s and Ardis Haukenberry and those . . . In fact, there is an interesting little story about Mrs. Crowe and Mrs. Wallace. When they first put in the surveillance around the house here, Mrs. Crowe had had a habit for many years of stopping to see either the Nolands or Ardis Haukenberry over here, and then she’d walk down the alley to see May Wallace. So one day she started to do this, and she got about halfway down and a recorded voice said, “You are on private property. Please return to the street.” [chuckling] The story Mrs. Crowe told was she said to the voice, “I’ve been doing this for years and I’m going to keep on doing it.” [laughter]

They used to tell me about [how] she and Margaret were very close to each other. She was very . . . Having no children of her own, she was very anxious to have the close companionship. Margaret would go over and paint her kitchen for her sometimes when she’d be home and do all kinds of things

for her. They were very close and she always kept track of her aunt.

DUNAR: Did you get to know Margaret at all?

GRAHAM: Not intimately. I've seen her many times, been with her a few times. But I think you should talk to Shawsie Branton, Mrs. Coleman Branton, who was her bridesmaid. Both Mrs. Branton and her husband Coleman Branton were past presidents of the Historical Society, and Mrs. Branton lives in Kansas City. They lived all their married life in Kansas City, but she grew up down on Proctor Place here in Independence, and she and Margaret were in school together. So I think she could tell you more things like that than I could.

DUNAR: Are there any other individuals who you could suggest that are people we ought to talk to?

GRAHAM: Well, again, so many of those people are gone. [pause] Judge Bundschu, of course, was a very good friend who lived right over here, and he was one of the Bundschu brothers. They had a Bundschu Department Store here for many, many years, and he was a close friend. It was an interesting friendship because he was a staunch Republican, but they were good friends. He and Mr. Truman were very good friends.

SHAVER: He always claimed he was the first Republican to be allowed to desecrate the White House when [unintelligible]...

GRAHAM: [chuckling] Yes, I remember that. He was a most interesting person. He was a person who I knew I could get help from for anything we needed at the Historical Society, if I would document it well; and I always went with all my ammunition, which I would read to him and show him what I had written and so forth. Then, before he would say yes, that he would give it to me, though,

he started telling me some of the stories that I had heard over and over and over. [laughter] One day I said to him after a little bit of it, “Judge Bundschu, I’ve got people waiting for me back at the museum, and we talked about that last time I was here. Don’t you remember?” And I said, “I really need to go back.” And he said, “Sit down.” [laughter] I sat down. When you can get whatever you need by documenting it, you sit down when you’re told to. [laughter]

SHAVER: It seemed like he served kind of an unusual function, too, in that he would keep the New York press corps well-entertained and well-liquored.

GRAHAM: Yes.

DUNAR: I remember reading that he would always have a reception for newspaper people who were covering the Trumans.

GRAHAM: Yes, he loved to do that. Again, I’m stymied for a date, but there was a newspaper photographer and a reporter, primarily a photographer, here taking pictures one time, and off the top of my head I can’t even tell you their names, it was husband and wife. They came to the museum when they first got in town. They were a fairly young couple and they sort of made our house their home. They were here for any number of days because they were trying to get pictures to represent a story that had already been written and they wanted particular pictures. One of them was . . . and I could look these names up if that was important to you later . . . One day, one of the pictures that they wanted to particularly get was of him coming out to pick up the paper. They had sat over there across the street morning after morning after morning, evening, late afternoon, time and time again, trying to get this particular

picture, with no success. They were sitting there one day and a car full of tourists who had been ambling around had just gotten into their car, pulled out from the curb and were in the middle of the street when Mr. Truman came down the steps to get his paper. So the car stopped and they all climbed out of the car with their cameras, yelling at Mr. Truman, “Mr. Truman, wait a minute! We want to get your picture! Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” And these two young people were so upset about it. They didn’t get their picture, of course, but that was really not the thing that they were the most upset about. They were upset that the public would be so rude to somebody like that, because he was older at that time. He didn’t stop for them; he just sort of did like that and turned around and went in the house. But they were really upset. They came down to our house right after that happened and she was in tears. [chuckling] She said, “I just don’t understand it.” But they did get their picture. Mr. Truman was aware that they were here trying to get their picture, because they’d been out at the Truman Library and all that, and so he saw that they got their picture. [chuckling] Later.

DUNAR: I wonder if there might be anything in the house maybe that Mrs. Truman talked to you about that you might want to say something about.

GRAHAM: The only thing was after Mr. T was gone she took me one time into the little library. Was that what they called it? Over there that has the windows . . .

DUNAR: The study. I’m not sure what they called it, the study or the library.

GRAHAM: And she said, “I have this just exactly as Mr. Truman left it when he left us.” And beside his chair, which at that time at least was sitting facing about this direction, beside it here was a table very much like they have in hospitals, to

go out over the bed, you know, and it was full of books. It was laden with books and magazines, a few papers, and that sort of thing. Now, whether it stayed that way, I have no way of knowing. She didn't say anything about leaving it that way for posterity, but she said to me, "This is the way he left it and I haven't had the heart to change it."

DUNAR: Could we maybe go back there, and maybe you could just . . . [tape is turned off]

GRAHAM: His chair was sitting right here where he could see out the window, and then the long bedside table, which is not the normal bedside table, but a hospital-type table.

DUNAR: So it was near the entryway coming in from the music room?

GRAHAM: Yes.

DUNAR: And his chair, again, was positioned more at an angle than it is . . .

GRAHAM: Yes, more out into the room a little bit.

DUNAR: Oh, okay. Was the desk out further then?

GRAHAM: It was not here.

DUNAR: Oh, the desk wasn't here?

GRAHAM: I do not recall whether it was over there or not. And she indicated that this was not the way the room was normally, but she had left it this way because this was the way he used it last.

DUNAR: I see. I see, okay.

GRAHAM: So I think probably she was thinking that it was different than it had normally been.

DUNAR: Were there piles of books on the floor, do you remember?

GRAHAM: No, I don't remember any on the floor, but there certainly were piles of books on the table, that long table that was beside him. And what I'm sure he did . . . Now she did not say this, but what I'm sure he did was to pull that around in front of him when he would be using it.

DUNAR: Right. Somebody mentioned that one of the things that he would do is he'd have a pile of books, of unread books, to his left, and then when he finished them he'd look through them and decide if he was going to read them or not and maybe read a little bit of them, or if he finished them, whatever, then set them on a pile to the right.

GRAHAM: Yes. Yes. Yes.

DUNAR: And then eventually somebody would come and take those back to the library, if they were from there.

GRAHAM: [chuckling] Sure.

DUNAR: Do you remember piles on either side like that at all?

GRAHAM: No, I don't. This was maybe after he was not as active.

DUNAR: Right, this might have been earlier that he did that.

GRAHAM: Yes, because, you see, this was at the end.

DUNAR: Right.

GRAHAM: The piles were on the . . . But it was a big one. It was big like they used to be. It would go clear across the bed, practically. Now, the ones that they use now . . . My husband is in the hospital right now, and so they're much shorter than the old ones used to be.

SHAVER: Did you visit with her in this room at any time? It seems like the last time you had come here for [unintelligible].

GRAHAM: Yes, I have visited with her in here. Kind of going along with what I told you, her face was so . . . There was so much expression in her face that I was not really looking at the room, I was looking at her.

SHAVER: Well, you know, that's fine. That's not unusual. The thing is, we had always gotten the impression that she'd stayed out of this room for a long time, and you were one of . . .

GRAHAM: Well, I have sat in this room with her alone.

SHAVER: . . . one of several people who said, "Yes, I did visit with her in this room after he died."

GRAHAM: It might have been that she didn't use it. It was his room while he was alive.

DUNAR: Where would you sit when you came in here with her?

GRAHAM: Well, I sat several times in the room we've just come from.

DUNAR: When you came back here to the study, where would you sit when you visited in here with her?

GRAHAM: Well, I sat over here in a chair. Now, I don't remember it being that chair, but . . . [chuckling]

DUNAR: Yes, and where would she sit? On the other side?

GRAHAM: She was sitting on the other side.

SHAVER: Which one of these?

DUNAR: Did she have a preferred chair over here?

GRAHAM: Not to my knowledge.

SHAVER: You sat in a historical chair. That's one her parents got for their wedding.

GRAHAM: Is that right?

SHAVER: From Mr. Gates.

DUNAR: Did she talk about any of the books in here when you visited her here?

GRAHAM: No, as I say, we frequently talked about grandchildren. [chuckling]

DUNAR: Even in here, that was still the main topic? [laughter]

GRAHAM: It seemed to be the main topic of conversation, was grandchildren. [laughter]
I think that was our closest tie.

DUNAR: Is there anything else in the house that she may have talked to you about, any other items perhaps that she talked about or mentioned to you?

GRAHAM: I really hesitate to say this because I don't remember for sure, but it seems to me like there was a picture of Margaret at one time in here.

SHAVER: There's one in the living room.

DUNAR: This one here? Is this the one?

GRAHAM: No, that's not the one. It was not nearly that large.

SHAVER: Okay, there's one . . .

DUNAR: There is another one in the . . . [pause while they go to retrieve picture]

GRAHAM: Yes, I think that's it.

SHAVER: That's the one?

GRAHAM: I don't believe it's always been in that particular spot, but I don't know that. Because I did sit in here, and as I say, I was more interested in her than in the room at that particular time. I don't remember ever even thinking I should take note of this for history.

DUNAR: Right, of course.

GRAHAM: And I would have been the first one to tell somebody else they should do that.
[chuckling]

SHAVER: Did she have any comments to say about that picture, that you can recall?

Were there any stories?

GRAHAM: No.

DUNAR: Or about the boys? You heard a good deal about them, I guess.

GRAHAM: Well, we always talked about the boys, and again not personal things that she wouldn't want retold. You know, never anything like that ever.

SHAVER: But the kind of stuff that grandmothers brag about.

GRAHAM: Yes.

DUNAR: Just what they were doing.

GRAHAM: Yes, what they had accomplished and their newest interest and this sort of thing was what we would talk about.

DUNAR: Sure. Would Mrs. Truman serve you tea or anything of that sort?

GRAHAM: Usually I was on my way either home . . . or sometimes we just stood in the hall and talked without even coming in to sit down. But no, I don't remember ever . . . I remember her offering, but I don't remember that we really did because my schedule was so tight, and she recognized that.

DUNAR: One other thing you had mentioned before we started the recorder again when we first came up, the way that she always greeted you. Could you just repeat that for the tape?

GRAHAM: Well, she just always was standing at the door watching so she could open the gate.

DUNAR: And she pushed a buzzer, was there, to open the gate?

GRAHAM: There was something, because it did buzz when the gate came open so that I could get in.

DUNAR: And you'd always call her then, is that right?

GRAHAM: I always telephoned her when I was coming, because I couldn't get in otherwise. So I always would say, "I'm leaving the museum," or "I'm leaving home and I will be there shortly."

DUNAR: Was that, again, do you think, because of her reluctance to go out in the yard because of the possibility of tourists? Or why would she always stay inside, do you think, rather than maybe coming out?

GRAHAM: Well, after the fence was put up, I think she felt that she was vulnerable to the tourists.

DUNAR: Do you think the Secret Service had suggested that to her, or that was her decision?

GRAHAM: She never really talked about that. I really wouldn't know. I wouldn't know that. Because she was not real young by then herself.

DUNAR: Sure.

GRAHAM: And going up and down the steps and all would not have been too easy for her to do.

DUNAR: Right.

GRAHAM: But she was a lady, first degree.

DUNAR: Yes, that seems to be a universal opinion. Could you elaborate a little bit by what you mean by that exactly? What is a lady?

GRAHAM: She would never, I think, knowingly have done anything to make anyone uncomfortable. She was gracious always in her contact with people. Even as I mentioned that I had seen her in grocery stores, very gracious even to people who had no idea who she was or anything. She was just a gracious, thoughtful person in every way. There is one more little story. [chuckling]

DUNAR: Okay, do you want to sit down for a minute?

GRAHAM: This was told to me now by one of the club members, and I'm not sure which one it was even. When Mr. Truman died, she dismissed the Secret Service immediately. She did not need them, she was not going to have them. Well, from what I have heard, not really from her but from her friends, was that if she at any time thought that Margaret wasn't doing what she should, it as that Margaret wasn't staying home with the children enough, that she was not at home with them all the time, which Mrs. Truman would have thought was pretty necessary. So, when she dismissed the Secret Service, Margaret was here and she told her that she was not going to have them anymore. I guess Margaret knew better than to argue too much with her, so she said, "Well, all right, Mother. I'll have to come back. If I can't get here every week, I'll have to come every other week." She said, "All right, tell them they can stay." [laughter] Margaret was just as sharp as she was. [laughter]

DUNAR: As time went on, she became more accepting of the Secret Service, didn't she?

GRAHAM: Oh yes, and I think that they had a delightful time with her, very much so. I don't think she . . . And I see this in other older people that I'm responsible for. You'd better not act like you think that they are not as capable as they always have been. It hurts their pride.

DUNAR: Oh, sure, of course.

GRAHAM: And I think that's primarily what it was. Probably ladies weren't dependent on somebody else. [chuckling] Because she was certainly a delightful person.

DUNAR: Did she take the same interest in children? The reason I ask, somebody has

told us that she used to stand at the window here, or even later when she was in the wheelchair she would go to the window and wave at the school buses as they went by. Can you think of any instances when she might have shown interest in children as well?

GRAHAM: No, not like the ones that I had with him. Other than our grandchildren, that's the only thing, but she was very much interested in children's literature and things that they read. That was one of the main things that I ordered for her was books for the children and things like that that she felt that they would enjoy as well as would be something that they should have.

DUNAR: Right. Mike, do you have any questions?

SHAVER: A couple. Did you ever know Miss Natalie Wallace? Did you ever have any occasion to meet her or know her?

GRAHAM: No, not intimately at all.

SHAVER: There are several personalities that enter into the Truman lives.

GRAHAM: Yes, that's right.

SHAVER: She is one of those folks that we don't know a whole lot about, other than what Mrs. May Wallace has told us. Another person who I'm somewhat interested in, just from the story of Truman, is Dr. Brooks. For a fellow who never had a chance to meet him, what could you say about him?

GRAHAM: A wonderful person, a wonderful man. A wonderful man. Well, he again had that same graciousness about him. He was a very, very intelligent, trained person in his field, but I think that he would have done a good job in most anything where he had to deal with people. He was really . . . and a very wise person. And he always made himself available. I could call him day or night

if I needed anything. He was a very . . . you wouldn't say common, but he was never too busy to talk to anybody that would approach him, ask him something. And again, a most gracious person in his personality. I was extremely fond of him and he was very, very helpful to me. Because when I went into this job, I had had absolutely no experience. The only experience I ever had in this sort of thing before I got into it was a little idea of where to go to get the answers I needed. [chuckling]

DUNAR: That's the important thing. That's the key.

GRAHAM: And he was certainly one of those places that I went to get answers.

DUNAR: Who were the key people in the Historical Society?

GRAHAM: Well, of course, Howard Adams, of the Adams Dairy, who went on to be very much involved with historical things in Washington, D. C., as well as New York. He was the president at the time I went to work for them. I have already mentioned Ardis Haukenberry and Helena Crowe, who were very active, and Judge Bundschu, who I don't remember ever seeing in a meeting, but he was active in the way it was needed. Mrs. J. Roger De Witt, who gave the Vaile Mansion to the city, was also a president who I worked under very closely. She was the president immediately after Howard Adams. She had grown up here, knew the Trumans intimately, and was very, very concerned and helpful to us throughout her entire life, to the Historical Society and to preserving history for present and future generations. Mr. Wornall from Kansas City was another person very, very active in the Society throughout the entire life of the Historical Society. I have already mentioned to you the Brantons, both Coleman and Shawsie Branton. They both served as

presidents of the Society at . . .

[End #3598; Begin #3599]

GRAHAM: . . . than just being what we have normally thought of as slaves.

SHAVER: Was Mr. Nate Jackson a president of the Historical Society under your tenure?

GRAHAM: No, he was past his . . . Now I think he had been earlier. There had been an Historical Society that had been inactive for much over ten years at the time it was reorganized in 1959, and I believe he had been president in the old Society, but he was not able much to do anything like that after we were active.

SHAVER: Well, the reason why I ask, his house, I guess, is over here on the corner.

GRAHAM: Yes.

SHAVER: And in the early seventies, somebody purchased the property and had plans to put an apartment house or something there. I don't know if you were living in the neighborhood at the time, but I remember there was a petition [unintelligible], and Mr. Truman signed it.

GRAHAM: Yes, well, he would.

DUNAR: Did Mr. Truman or Mrs. Truman express interest in some of the other historical sites in Independence, like the Bingham Wagner Mansion or the Vaile Mansion, or any other relative to the history?

GRAHAM: Well, they both knew and mentioned . . . talked about when Mrs. De Witt bought the Vaile property and it was always intended to be given to the city. It had a nursing home in it at the time she bought it. But no, as I have said, we were not intimately acquainted with them. That is, we didn't go to groups . . .

dinner parties. We were younger than they were and we just simply were not in a group that would have met where you just had casual conversations. But I do know that they were very much aware and pleased with her purchases of the Vaile Mansion property.

SHAVER: Another thing, at least with Mrs. Truman, we knew from some conversations with Colonel Burris, she was always interested in what was going on in the community.

GRAHAM: Oh, yes.

DUNAR: Did she quiz you about things that were going on in later years when she wasn't able to get out?

GRAHAM: Not particularly. She kept up. She knew pretty well what was going on by reading and this sort of thing. I don't think that you would have come here and found her not being aware of anything if it got published.

SHAVER: Was she using you as a source?

GRAHAM: No, I don't think so. I don't think so, no.

DUNAR: Anything else you want to ask?

SHAVER: Well, I'll try this one. This is about your vintage. I say vintage so I don't insult anybody. To give you an idea of how important it is . . .

GRAHAM: Now, I did not grow up here, you see, so I . . .

SHAVER: It comes out of her bedroom, and it was a bridge club. Could you see if you can recognize some of the ladies in the bridge club and see if you can recall anything? When you started talking about Mrs. Crowe, I just had to bring that down and see if you could recognize other folks.

GRAHAM: This is Mrs. Crowe. Well, this Mrs. Shaw is Shawsie Branton's mother. And

I only knew Mrs. King slightly. I knew Mrs. Twyman.

SHAVER: She lived down the street here.

GRAHAM: Yes, right over here. In fact, her son still lives in the house, and I'm afraid she'd be very upset with the way he keeps it. And Lucy Peters, of course, moved away a long time ago. They lived down on Delaware, too.

SHAVER: I didn't know that.

GRAHAM: But no, that's about it.

SHAVER: Did you know either of the Miner sisters? [unintelligible]?

GRAHAM: Yes, I was aware of both of them. And when you turn off your tape I'll tell you something. [laughter]

SHAVER: Don't you love these stories? [tape is turned off]

GRAHAM: Heritage Commission . . . No, excuse me, this was started during the time that I was on the Urban Renewal Board. We were sent a young black man to work, who was a delightful person, very, very intelligent, and he became so interested in Independence because he said, "All the places that I have been, the black families do not go back a long way; but in Independence many of them have gone back as far as the town has gone back." For instance, this Sally that I mentioned who would help up here for parties and helped me for many years at the house, her name was Chrisman. She was married to a man who was a descendant of the slaves that came with the Chrisman family that moved here in the early days. And this was true of many of the families that they had been here as long as the white people had been here. He thought this would be such a wonderful thing to write a book about, and so he was going to do research, and he came up many times to talk to me, other than when we

would be in meetings. He finally came back very, very discouraged one day, and he said, "I cannot get any material to really document what I want to do, because all of the records, almost without exception, do not give any identification in the census records of the names of families in the black community." The slaves would be listed as "black, heavysset male," "light-complected female," with nothing that you could pin to the family; and of course they did not take the names of their masters until after the war was over. So he was very disappointed and he said, "I cannot get enough material to do any kind of writing that would be . . ." In fact, he wanted to use it as part of a dissertation. But also, which was one of the things that I told him, many of the black families, it seems, from what we can gather, were helping the Underground [Railroad], helping people. They were keeping the slaves as they went through, and their masters knew they were doing this. But they were not unhappy with their masters, the ones that were living here. They didn't leave, but they would help the ones who were dissatisfied get through, and the masters knew they were doing this and didn't do anything to stop it. Which tells you again something about the background of the black population here, that the reason they did stay was because they really were treated well enough that they were not unhappy. And many of them did go into businesses. In fact, the Young School was named for Hiram Young. I had this same Brownie troop—they were [Girl] Scouts by that time—the first year that we had desegregation in Independence. The black people were very, very unhappy that they had to go to the other schools, because the Young School was the newest school in the whole system. It was one of the better.

They were permitted to use it for all of their . . . They had potluck suppers there. Any public meeting where they wanted to get all the black people together, they had in the school. And they really were upset that they were being deprived of the things that they had had when they were forced to give up their own school and be integrated into the other schools.

DUNAR: Do you remember when that was? Was that late fifties or was that in the sixties?

GRAHAM: No, but again, we could find out when it was done in Independence. That would be the best way I could tell you when it was. [chuckling]

SHAVER: Probably one parting question. I would like to hear Hazel Graham's interpretation, or at least her views, of the preservation crisis that they had back here in 1984. Were you part of that, or were you on the sidelines, an observer?

GRAHAM: No, I was not. I started to tell you a while ago. When I left after twenty-two years, going in 1960, I felt that that had become so much a part of me, and I had had nobody looking over my shoulder telling me what I should do, so I said to the people who took over, "You know where I am. I'll try to help you in any way." And I had calls, I had some calls to come to look at certain things and so forth, and at first, quite a few phone calls about where were things and all this sort of thing. But I made a very definite point of not sticking my nose into what was done, because I did need to get away. I needed to, and they felt very hard at me because I had not demanded the kind of salary that they felt they deserved. We have another cute story about that. [chuckling]

When I went back to visit our older daughter when her first baby came and they were living in the East, the lady next door had told my daughter that she surely wanted to meet me because what I was doing sounded so interesting to her, and that was all she had said to our daughter. When she came over then when I got there to visit with me, she said, “The reason I want to know about this and how I might get involved in it is that I have a son who is going to start to university this fall and I want to help pay for his university education.” An I could see the wheels turning in my daughter’s mind, so I just kept still. Pretty soon Donna said, “Well, you know, Mother couldn’t afford to work if Daddy didn’t have a good job.” [chuckling] That’s the way I worked. I worked for the love of it.

SHAVER: When the Baptist Church and their interest in the district . . . Do you remember?

GRAHAM: Oh yes.

SHAVER: Were you a part of that?

GRAHAM: No, I did not enter into any of that sort of thing. I was still on the commission that was unhappy about it. I tried to soften things, because I didn’t have any idea that Mr. Truman would have been unhappy.

DUNAR: Why do you think he wouldn’t have been?

GRAHAM: Well, he was very much for progress. Now, when they first started talking about taking the building down, that was another story. I was very much opposed to that. But when they didn’t remove the building, simply added onto it, and I had mixed feelings about the parking lot. But again, what is more important? Keeping old houses or having a place for church people to

park?

SHAVER: Well, that's a question I always bring up to people who I take on the walking tour, and I let them wrestle with it. You know, what is the important thing here?

GRAHAM: I was not always the . . . probably the one on the commission that stood up for keeping everything historic. I think you have to use good judgment in all of these things and weigh what is really going to hurt a community and what is not. I think many times we get too dictatorial in what we do and probably cause more problems than if we'd have been a little bit more lenient.

SHAVER: It's always interesting because it seemed like throughout . . . at least from my reading of the controversy and what I've heard, of course, it appeared to be polarized, you know, great polarization, but I guess those are the only folks who really make the noise.

GRAHAM: That's right.

DUNAR: Did you have anything to do with Mr. Truman signing the petition to save the house on the corner?

GRAHAM: No. I understand why he would have. [chuckling] Very much.

DUNAR: Sure. Do you have any knowledge of him ever participating in any other civic campaigns of that sort? I mean, even just by signing a petition, certainly not leading one.

GRAHAM: I do not remember. But from the stories I've told you, I think you would realize that I think he was very much more person-oriented than just saving buildings.

DUNAR: Sure, right.

GRAHAM: Now there are some buildings that it would be a crime to take down.
[chuckling] But just because they've been there forever might not be the best reason.

SHAVER: You said you were on the Urban Renewal Board. At the time that they were doing all of the block grant stuff there and providing parking lots for the square, was there a . . .

GRAHAM: I was on the very first Urban Renewal when we cleared out what is the park across from the Truman Library, and that was almost exclusively black people. I was very concerned at the time, and I guess gave the rest of them a little problem, because I insisted that we never move anybody out until we knew where they were going and that they had a place to live.

Another thing that is of interest, and I couldn't take credit for this because the others went along with it. The Urban Renewal was given a right to pay the average price between three separate appraisals. We never possessed anything without three appraisals for it, and we were permitted to pay the average, the median between what those three were. We did not buy anything without paying top price in that area, because these people needed it. And I was very, very pleased, before our Sally had her stroke—she was not working for us at that time—but she told me that she and some of her friends had been going over the people who had lived down there that were dispossessed, and that they had counted . . . made a list. And every one of them was better off now than they had been at the time we bought them out. But we made a conscious effort to try to do this, to not do anything, because these were people from old, established families. And at the time, you see,

the people who lived down the hill came up the hill to help us who lived on the hill. [chuckling] So we'd better help them.

SHAVER: What was the name of the neighborhood, at least as you remembered it? Did they have a name for that neighborhood at that time, the folks on Delaware Street?

GRAHAM: I don't remember.

SHAVER: I've heard them refer to "the neck" at certain times.

GRAHAM: I never heard that.

SHAVER: You never heard that?

GRAHAM: No.

DUNAR: The houses that you were just speaking about that were moved for the library, was that all part of Slover Park, was it called? Or was there another area there?

GRAHAM: All of that cleared area in there now was small homes.

SHAVER: Where the park and the parkway is.

GRAHAM: Yes. That was across from the Truman Library.

DUNAR: Yes, that's [unintelligible]. Was there a name for that neighborhood, that you recall?

GRAHAM: Not that I know of.

DUNAR: It wasn't part of Slover Park then?

GRAHAM: Oh no, Slover Park was across . . .

DUNAR: Where the library itself is, right?

GRAHAM: Yes, where the library itself is. And it was a community park with a shelter house up there approximately where the library is. But this was the area

where the working black lived.

DUNAR: Right.

SHAVER: Was it a local decision to do a project there, or did Washington advise it, or . . . ?

GRAHAM: No, I think it was sought, because of wanting to make the surroundings for the Truman Library more desirable. You imagine, any neighborhood that has very rundown, small houses, you know what they look like. This was not what you would want directly across from the Truman Library, and I don't think anybody wanted that.

SHAVER: Were you on the board when they started doing urban renewal downtown?

GRAHAM: No, I was not at that time. I never was on that board.

SHAVER: That's an interesting part of the story. I've never heard that. I knew of the project, but now we've got a board member here. [laughter]

GRAHAM: But it really was . . . Many of the black people would come to me, and one of the main things that they said was, "We don't want to be stacked up." You see, Kansas City had already had urban renewal in that area where they built the high-rises that they have taken most of them down by now, or at least part of them, the worst ones. But this was their terminology: "We don't want to be stacked up." And this was one reason why . . . Because I was not the only one that was approached, that we felt so strongly that we had to help them find some suitable place to live.

DUNAR: Well, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW