

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

MARY SHAW BRANTON

JULY 9, 1991

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1991-6

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #4326-4327

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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ABSTRACT

Mary Shaw Branton has been a life long friend of Margaret Truman Daniel. Branton's mother was a member of the Tuesday bridge club. As children, Branton joined Margaret Truman in producing plays and playing at the Truman house. After her marriage, Branton visited Margaret in Washington on several occasions. Later, as part of Margaret Truman's wedding to E. Clifton Daniel, Branton provides background information about the wedding plans and her contact with Margaret since then.

Persons mentioned: Margaret Truman Daniel, Sue Gentry, Nancy Walter Shaw, Emma Robertson Gentry, Mary Gentry Shaw, Leslie Shaw, Edna Hutchison, Marie Allen Blank, Barbara Bundschu, Betty Ogden Flora, Alice Harrington, Harriet Allen Kellogg Thomas, Mona Allen, Ikie Lieberman, Coleman Branton, Madge Gates Wallace, Harry S Truman, Nellie Noland, Ethel Noland, Ella Truman Noland, Truman Noland, Natalie Ott Wallce, Frank Gates Wallace, George Porterfield Wallace, May Wallace, D. Frederick Wallace, W. L. C. Palmer, Hester Preston, Madeline Etzenhouser, Margaret Weltmer, Karen Kipp, Tish Duke Mehornay, Henry Ess, Alban Barkley, Drucie Snyder, Alexis Minotis, Thomas Washington Daniel, Clifton Truman Daniel, Harrison Gates Daniel, William Wallace Daniel, and Elizabeth Safly.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
MARY SHAW BRANTON**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1991-6

JIM WILLIAMS: This is an oral history interview with Mary Shaw Branton. We're at her home in Kansas City, Missouri, on July 9, 1991. The interviewer is Jim Williams, from the National Park Service, and Leslie Hagensen is running the audio equipment. Well, Mrs. Branton, I would like to start out by asking you a little bit about your background. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

MARY SHAW BRANTON: I was born November 15, 1920, in Kansas City, Missouri, old Christian Church Hospital, which then became a psychiatric hospital, and I don't know what's happened to it now.

WILLIAMS: I've never heard of that hospital.

BRANTON: Well, it was down . . . It was kind of the leading hospital in 1920, and it was . . . a "quick shot" from Independence.

WILLIAMS: So your family was living in Independence?

BRANTON: Oh, yes, they were living in Independence.

WILLIAMS: Where was the house then?

BRANTON: My grandfather had given my mother and father a house for a wedding present, and it was on Proctor Place. You're getting to why did I, how did I play with Margaret when I was little. Well, we didn't play from there because that was quite a distance. But my Grandmother Gentry died and my grandfather would not come and live with us, so we went to live with him, and that was up on Maple Street, just around the corner from the

Truman house. And the Trumans and my parents were friends, and in a little town, you were just friends of who your children's parents were. I mean, you had friends in school, but I mean, you also . . . There was an age difference. I'm older than Margaret a year or two, a couple of years. But we lived there with my grandfather until he died, then we moved back to Proctor and we were friends. She was going in and out of town all the time, going back to Washington as a senator's daughter.

WILLIAMS: Do you know the address of that house on Maple?

BRANTON: No, I've forgotten. Probably torn down by now.

WILLIAMS: But it was right around the corner?

BRANTON: It was close by.

WILLIAMS: I understand you're a distant relative of Sue Gentry?

BRANTON: Sue knows how we're related; I don't know. Yes, I claim her, certainly. Yes, we are. We have the same Revolutionary ancestor, and that's about as close as we come. Same name.

WILLIAMS: You mentioned a Grandmother or Grandfather Gentry?

BRANTON: Yes, that's the . . .

WILLIAMS: So that was your mother's side?

BRANTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And they lived there on Maple?

BRANTON: No, they lived in a wonderful old house over opposite what's now . . . you know where the old city hall is?

WILLIAMS: In Independence?

BRANTON: Yes, you know where the little log cabin . . .

WILLIAMS: Right.

BRANTON: Then right next to it is the old city hall, then across the street from that was a pretty, big old Victorian house, and that's where they lived. And I didn't ever know it was there until I began pulling together pictures for my children in sequence and I found a picture of my great-grandmother in the front yard of this house, and in back of it is the city hall. And, you see, houses were big and they liked to live close to the square. But a lot of those . . . then go right on out Main to Noland, there's some nice old houses out there. The Greggs and the Georgens . . . all out in there.

WILLIAMS: So how many of your grandparents did you know personally, do you remember?

BRANTON: I knew two. I knew three: my father's mother, and my Grandmother and Grandfather Gentry.

WILLIAMS: What were all of their names?

BRANTON: My Grandmother Shaw's name was Nancy Walter Shaw, and she was from Troy, New York, [telephone rings] and you're going to have to turn that off. Can you do it? [tape is turned off]

WILLIAMS: We were talking about your grandmother.

BRANTON: Yes, my grandmother was from Troy, New York, I think, my Grandmother Shaw. My Grandfather Shaw was a Canadian from Toronto. His ancestors founded Toronto. My Grandmother Gentry was from . . . Where was the town? Down in mid-Missouri, in Saline County—"the garden spot of Missouri," she always said. And her name was Emma Robertson, and she had a mother and a sister named Mary, and so she named my mother Mary

and then they named me Mary. And my grandfather was born around here in eastern Jackson County. I'm probably a sixth- or seventh-generation Jackson Countian.

WILLIAMS: How did those other people end up in Independence, the ones from Canada and New York?

BRANTON: My father met my mother at a party. [chuckling] The grandparents didn't ever live here.

WILLIAMS: Oh, they didn't?

BRANTON: Oh, no, no. You asked if I knew them, and I did, but they came to visit. No, they never lived here.

WILLIAMS: Then whose house was it on Maple that you . . .

BRANTON: Grandfather Gentry.

WILLIAMS: Oh, so he was the only one who lived here?

BRANTON: Yes. The Gentrys were the only ones.

WILLIAMS: I'm starting to get it all straight.

BRANTON: Yes, the Gentrys lived here; the Shaws did not.

WILLIAMS: I see. So your parents, what were their names?

BRANTON: Mary Gentry Shaw and Leslie Shaw, and Leslie Shaw was from Leavenworth. He was raised in Leavenworth, Kansas, and my mother and father met at a debut party at the old Rubidoux Hotel in St. Joe [St. Joseph, Missouri]. Then, after they were married, they lived in Philadelphia for a couple of years, where he was with the Curtis Publishing Company. And then they came back here and he was with an advertising company. And then he had graduated from K[ansas] State in property management, and

when my grandfather died, Grandfather Gentry died, he took over the management of my grandfather's property, which was quite extensive. And that was good.

WILLIAMS: How long did you live in that house on Maple?

BRANTON: Oh, I don't know, not very long, two or three years, you know.

WILLIAMS: But your family had known the Trumans before that?

BRANTON: Oh, sure. In fact, I was looking at my mother's bridal book, and they had signed it as being guests, but not together. They weren't in the line at the same time, which is kind of funny. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: That would have been before they [the Trumans] were married.

BRANTON: No.

WILLIAMS: If you were born in '20.

BRANTON: Oh, yes, that was 1917 or something like that, after the war, and . . . They were friends a long time. My mother's older brother and Mrs. Truman were one day apart in birthdays. I think Mrs. Truman's was on Valentine's or the day after.

WILLIAMS: February 13?

BRANTON: Was hers, and my uncle's then was the fourteenth.

WILLIAMS: Did your mother, was she in the Tuesday bridge club?

BRANTON: Oh, yes. During the war the girls all got together and started playing bridge, because all the boys had gone to war.

WILLIAMS: So that's when it all started?

BRANTON: So that's when it all started, yes.

WILLIAMS: Did she keep that up all through . . . ?

BRANTON: All through, yes, until she moved into Kansas City when my father died and she just stopped going. I mean, you know, she got older and . . .

WILLIAMS: About when was that?

BRANTON: I don't know. When did she move? She moved into Kansas City thirty years ago, but she had awfully good friends and she saw a lot of them. But I think she accommodated me by moving into town so that it wouldn't be hard to get back and forth to see her.

WILLIAMS: Because by that time you were living here?

BRANTON: I was here, married, and had some children, and she liked to be around those kids, you know.

WILLIAMS: I think Sue Gentry mentioned you have a scrapbook from the Tuesday bridge club?

BRANTON: Oh, yes, she's dying to get her hands on it. [chuckling] She wants me to give it to the library, and I will, I suppose, but . . .

WILLIAMS: They all kept scrapbooks?

BRANTON: No, that's funny, I started doing that when they went back to Washington. Not just a scrapbook, you know, but for the trip. And I did it. I'm a big scrapbooker. [chuckling] Then somebody saw that I was doing it, somebody else, and so they all ended up with scrapbooks.

WILLIAMS: But you were the instigator?

BRANTON: I really did start it. I hadn't thought of that, but I really did start it, and it was fun to do. Of course, it was well-covered all over the country—world, I guess—and they flew back, some drove back, and yes, I do have a scrapbook up there. Actually, I thought I'd given it to her, but I guess she

gave it back.

WILLIAMS: Well, she was just telling me all the members of the bridge club . . .

BRANTON: Yes, Edna Hutchison was one. Edna had no children and she left whatever she had to me and I have her scrapbook, too. And I'll give it to the library. I don't know what they'll do with eight scrapbooks, but . . . I just thought my children might like to have it for a while to look at, you know.

WILLIAMS: I didn't know that people were keeping these, so I just thought it was interesting.

BRANTON: Yes. Well, I don't know where the . . . I think some, several have given them to the library.

WILLIAMS: She mentioned some . . .

BRANTON: So that's fine, yes, and I'll pop with it, I expect.

WILLIAMS: When you were growing up, who were some of your friends in Independence?

BRANTON: Well, Marie Allen, who lived down on the corner . . . Well, you know, there's the Trumans and then the Allens, and then we lived . . . and Barbara Bundschu, and both of them are dead. There was a little girl named Ogden.

WILLIAMS: Betty or Flora?

BRANTON: Betty Ogden. Betty. And then there were Harringtons. Her father was a doctor. Alice Harrington. Her father was a psychiatrist, lived down on River Road. And . . .

WILLIAMS: Margaret?

BRANTON: Margaret. Margaret, though, as far as social . . . when I was in high school . . . Those were high school friends that I named. Marie Allen, Betty Ogden,

and Margaret and I played together, but the G.L. Harrington, the Harringtons, that was when I was older, and they had a wonderful playhouse out on River Road where you could have dances there, and that kind of thing. And Margaret, I don't think, came to those because she was that much younger. Two or three years is a lot when you're in high school. I did not go to high school in Independence. I came to Sunset to high school.

WILLIAMS: Oh, did you know any of the other Allen girls?

BRANTON: Oh, yes, Harriet and Mona and Barbara.

WILLIAMS: But Marie was . . .

BRANTON: Marie was my age, the oldest one, and Harriet then was Margaret's age, I expect, and then Mona and Barbara, and two of those girls have died.

WILLIAMS: Harriet and Barbie are still alive out in California.

BRANTON: They're still alive, yes.

WILLIAMS: They may be visiting here next month, so I could interview them.

BRANTON: Oh, I hope so! That would be fun. I haven't seen them in years!

WILLIAMS: Well, I'll tell them . . .

BRANTON: Tell them hello and tell them I'm alive and I'd love to see them. And their mother, I think, would know a lot. Have you talked to Mrs. Allen?

WILLIAMS: No, but she's definitely on the list.

BRANTON: Well, you better hurry up because she's old. She's got to be ninety-five or something.

WILLIAMS: What did you do for fun back then in Independence?

BRANTON: We didn't have to worry too much about fun, and you didn't have to worry

at all about safety or . . . You know, I had a good friend that was the son of the shoe repairman, a little Greek boy named George, whose name I can't tell you what it was, the last one, and we just had a good time. It was a healthy . . . Well, as a little kid, I would pick up bottles and sell them at the junk . . . Ikie Lieberman's, which much to the chagrin of my parents and grandfather who thought no grandchild of his needed to sell bottles. But I was an environmentalist even then, and I hated it in the gutters and all that stuff. I don't know what we did. The little boy across the street out on Proctor and I used to dig every Saturday for China. Hard! Big, deep holes! Yes. Because you'd say to your mother, "Where's China?" and they say, "Right down there," and you'd think, "Well, I'll get there today." And then Mrs. Montague, who lived on the corner, would call up my mother and say, "Mary, little Mary dug another hole,"—she owned this property in the back—"would you please send her out and have her fill it up?" And so we'd go fill it up, and then the next Saturday we'd dig another hole. And that bothered us that we never got to China. And in 1978 . . . early '78, Coleman and I went to China, the first trip after it was opened. And this boy—now a man—lived in St. Louis and called me and said, "Shawsie, you won't guess where I'm going." And I said, "Yes, I will. You're going to China." And he was going the next week, not on the same trip. But it had bothered us *all those years* that we'd never gotten to China, so we both got there. He just died, incidentally. He's younger than I, and was buried out in Independence a couple of weeks ago. But, you know, we did simple things. When you'd hear the fire engine, you could call the fire department

and find out where the fire was and you'd go to the fire. [telephone rings;
tape turned off]

WILLIAMS: Were you much into sports growing up?

BRANTON: I was. I loved sports.

WILLIAMS: What kind of sports?

BRANTON: I don't know, I really don't. Baseball and basketball. I played basketball all through high school and college, and hockey.

WILLIAMS: Where did you go to college?

BRANTON: I went to Bradford Junior College outside of Boston and then went to the University of Missouri [in Columbia].

WILLIAMS: Did you all have bikes and that sort of thing to ride?

BRANTON: Yes, I think so. No, they thought that Maple Street was . . . I can remember on Maple they thought it was too busy a street, and you know it wasn't busy at all. [chuckling] So I didn't have a bike while we lived there, but I had one when I lived out on Proctor.

WILLIAMS: During this time, did you ever play at the Truman home?

BRANTON: Sure. We played a lot in the yard, nice big yard. And there was a club, and I can't think of the name of it.

WILLIAMS: The Henhouse Hicks?

BRANTON: Henhouse Hicks, I think. I don't know that I was a member. I don't remember that, but I remember we had plays and we did that kind of stuff. And maybe I was and maybe I wasn't a Henhouse Hick.

WILLIAMS: I've heard that that yard had a reputation as being a good yard.

BRANTON: It was a nice big yard, and you were welcome there. Of course, there

wasn't any fence then, and it was a nice yard.

WILLIAMS: What did you think of Madge Wallace?

BRANTON: I liked her! I liked her, probably because she liked me. You know, that kind of works both ways. I liked that she was always well-groomed, she was always a lady, she was . . . I just liked her a lot. She was not a . . . I don't know, I started to say she was kind of austere, I think, but that was her generation.

WILLIAMS: Did she seem to like to have the children around?

BRANTON: It didn't seem to bother . . . I don't remember that she didn't. I don't remember. I just don't remember. She and my grandmother were the same generation. They wore the little narrow, black ribbon thing around their necks with the pin in the center [cameo] . . . And I liked her. I liked her . . . Well, she was doing what was right for her. I mean, you know, she wasn't trying to be modern and be . . . Of course, I don't even think we thought of that then, but the twenties were . . . you know, there were the flappers and all of that. She didn't bother with all of that, you know. She just ran her own show.

WILLIAMS: She has a reputation of . . . well, as you know, they say she didn't like Harry Truman.

BRANTON: Well, I don't know anything about that. I really don't know anything.

WILLIAMS: Of being stern and . . . The pictures you see, she looks, as you described her, sort of austere.

BRANTON: Yes, but she was raised to be that.

WILLIAMS: So she didn't have a reputation of being [unintelligible]?

BRANTON: I didn't remember. I don't remember that at all.

WILLIAMS: From a child's point of view she was just great?

BRANTON: Yes, she was just a grandmother.

WILLIAMS: Did you play inside of the house, too?

BRANTON: I don't remember. I suppose so.

WILLIAMS: I think one of the Allen girls said something about being locked in the basement.

BRANTON: Well, I never was there, but the basement, you know, was a walk-in, so I expect . . . I expect we locked her in there. You know, I don't know that, but, I'm not above it. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: How about up in the attic?

BRANTON: I just don't remember.

WILLIAMS: Well, the grandsons say they played there.

BRANTON: Oh, well, sure. Well, I'm sure the grandsons did, and should have, and playing in attics in those old houses was fun. I just don't remember their attic, but I remember our attic, and I remember the Woodsons' attic that was just absolutely big as a house. You know, it was wonderful!

WILLIAMS: Did you have any contact with the Trumans through church or any other. . .

BRANTON: No, we went to the same little Trinity Church, but at that stage, they just lived in Independence. I mean, he was senator or he was whatever he was out there in Independence, which wasn't too big a deal.

WILLIAMS: County judge.

BRANTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: They weren't celebrities?

BRANTON: No! I mean, they just lived out there and grew up and they got married and had a little girl and that was fine.

WILLIAMS: Did you know the Nolands at all?

BRANTON: Yes, Nellie and Ethel and . . . Was it Nellie Noland? Yes. I loved them. They were darling. I remember Ethel, I think, better than . . . I can't remember now which one it is that I remember—I mean, which name goes with who I remember—but my mother *loved* them.

WILLIAMS: I've heard Ethel described as the more outgoing.

BRANTON: Well, maybe it's Ethel, yes.

WILLIAMS: What particularly did you . . .

BRANTON: I don't know, she was just jolly and pretty and nice and gentle—you know, all the things that you admire in somebody, in a lady that was that age—and just a nice person. I don't remember her when we were playing or anything.

WILLIAMS: When would you come in contact with her?

BRANTON: I remember her mainly as an adult.

WILLIAMS: So she was never one of your teachers or anything?

BRANTON: No.

WILLIAMS: Neither one of the Nolands?

BRANTON: No.

WILLIAMS: Did you know their parents, Ella and Truman Noland?

BRANTON: No, I don't think so. Gosh, that house across from where they lived is just awful! Whoever owns that ought to be shot. Who owns it, do you know? I'll go tend to it.

WILLIAMS: Ardis's nephews, I think.

BRANTON: Well, where are they?

WILLIAMS: I think they live down by the Lake of the Ozarks or someplace.

BRANTON: Well, it's just terrible. There's just some kind of a tenement . . . a lot of families live in there.

WILLIAMS: We're negotiating to buy that house.

BRANTON: Oh, good.

WILLIAMS: Maybe this summer supposedly.

BRANTON: Good, good. All right.

WILLIAMS: And about the Wallaces, did you have much contact . . .

BRANTON: I knew Freddy. Yes, I knew Freddy, and I loved George and Frank and Natalie and May, and I just knew them because they were friends of my mother's and father's. And they had no children, so I never . . . But they were always nice and attractive people, yes.

WILLIAMS: They were in the bridge club?

BRANTON: Oh, yes, Natalie and May both were. I have lots of pictures of George and Frank and Natalie and all of them, and I'm going through all these photographs downstairs.

WILLIAMS: Because they didn't have children, did they welcome the neighborhood children?

BRANTON: They seemed to. I just don't remember not being welcomed in that block, or whatever you want to . . . compound, or whatever that is. I think I would remember if somebody said, "Get out of my yard," but I don't remember anybody saying that. They wouldn't say that anyway. It was a little town.

You know, you just kind of . . . I think probably when I grew up there were 8,000 people, 5,000 people maybe, and you knew them all.

WILLIAMS: You didn't go to high school in Independence.

BRANTON: No.

WILLIAMS: Did you go to grade school?

BRANTON: Ott School. Ott School, and then I went to junior high school, and then the year that I came in town, that school burned down. I was so mad. It was a year late. It could have burned down the year that I was supposed to go and then . . . [chuckling] Anyway, where the library was, up there on Maple.

WILLIAMS: Did you have Mrs. Palmer or Miss Brown?

BRANTON: No. [Mrs. W.] L. C. Palmer. No, I had Miss . . . oh, gosh, I haven't tried to think . . . Hester Preston. Miss Preston taught me history, and I took a test one time and knew I flunked it, and I passed it. I mean, I got a B or something, and I went up and I said, "I didn't know anything on this subject. How did I pass it?" She said, "It's your attitude." So I told Mother that and she said, "Keep your attitude." [laughter]

WILLIAMS: Mrs. [Madeline] Etzenhouser?

BRANTON: Oh, Mrs. Etzenhouser was my second-grade teacher, and in second grade you're losing all your teeth and . . . She was my second-grade teacher, and I would sit on her lap and she'd pull my teeth out. She was the only one who could get them out of my mouth. Mother and my family couldn't, but Mrs. Etzenhouser could. Oh, I loved her.

WILLIAMS: She's supposedly the one that sort of saved Margaret from the kidnapper.

BRANTON: Oh, I never knew much about that. I don't know.

WILLIAMS: That's how I hear it, and she lived on [426] Delaware Street.

BRANTON: She did, yes.

WILLIAMS: I suppose you remained friends with Margaret even though she was off in Washington?

BRANTON: Oh, sure, sure, and we kept up with each other. Then when I got married I asked her to be in my wedding, and then she asked me to be in her wedding, and that did that.

WILLIAMS: I have a picture, a newspaper article, I think, of your wedding. [see appendix, item 1]

BRANTON: Oh, yes, yes.

WILLIAMS: Was that in '47?

BRANTON: That was my wedding, yes. Yes, and she [Miss Margaret Weltmer] lives in Santa Fe. That's Margaret. She [Mrs. Dean Carl Kipp] lives in Dallas, and she's [Mrs. Charles William Mehornay] dead. She [Karen Kipp] lives in Singapore.

WILLIAMS: The little flower girl?

BRANTON: The little girl, married and has three grown children and her husband is head of Eastman-Kodak over there.

WILLIAMS: So were all of these Independence . . .

BRANTON: These were all Kansas City. She was Independence, lived on Delaware [511]. Tish Duke was her name. [Mrs. Charles W. Mehornay] lived down there across the street from Locke Sawyer's house [the Jennings house], and her mother and my mother had been in each other's weddings, and then we were . . .

WILLIAMS: What was the exact date of . . .

BRANTON: April 12 [1947]. And that was the date that Harry Truman became president the year before [actually, two years], and so he wouldn't come to the wedding because he said there'd be too much to-do over him and it was my day, our day, and he didn't want to intrude.

WILLIAMS: Well, I was going to ask if it created any commotion to have Margaret in the wedding.

BRANTON: Not much, although some of the pictures that the photographer took had some pictures of a woman that was not invited and none of us knew her, but she was there. [chuckling] It didn't, you know. Oh, it was fun for the paper, you know, and they had a good time and it was fun, but it wasn't any big to-do.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember Margaret adjusting your veil?

BRANTON: I don't know, they probably asked her to do that. I don't know.

WILLIAMS: A good photo for the paper.

BRANTON: Yes, that's right.

WILLIAMS: How did you meet your husband?

BRANTON: Blind date, here in town. He was a lawyer and went to Command and Staff School at Fort Leavenworth during the war, and his mother and Mrs. Devere Dierks, who was here in Kansas City, grew up on adjoining plantations in Greenville [Mississippi]. So when Coleman was here, he came to Kansas City and met Henry Ess. Henry Ess said, "When the war's over, come practice law." So that's what he did.

WILLIAMS: Is that the same Dirksen family that there's a senator or something?

BRANTON: I don't know. This is Dierks Lumber Company and Sutherland Lumber Company—they're all mixed up.

WILLIAMS: By that time you were living in Kansas City, or were you still . . . ?

BRANTON: I was living in Independence still. I was out of college and had a job working at the juvenile court system.

WILLIAMS: So, then after you were married, you moved to town?

BRANTON: Then after we were married we moved here. Yes, it was right after the war. You couldn't find anyplace to live. My uncle was an architect, and he had built the President Gardens Apartments, and because he knew the man, we got an apartment. That is absolutely the only reason. There wasn't anyplace. Didn't care what it cost, there just wasn't anyplace to live. So we got that done.

WILLIAMS: Were you invited to the White House?

BRANTON: Yes, several times.

WILLIAMS: Often?

BRANTON: Yes, we went back for Mr. Truman's . . . I went back when Truman was vice president, before we were married, and then we went back when Mr. Truman was inaugurated.

WILLIAMS: As president.

BRANTON: As president.

WILLIAMS: So you were at both inaugurations.

BRANTON: Both inaugurations, and then we went back a time or two in between. One time we were in Washington and Mrs. Truman found out about it and called, and we went over and stayed a day or two with them—Margaret was

in New York—at the White House, and then one time I went back and stayed maybe three or four or five days with Margaret in Blair House.

WILLIAMS: For the '44 inaugural—I guess it was in '45, actually—you wouldn't have stayed with the Trumans, is that right?

BRANTON: Oh, no. No, no, no. We stayed at the Hay Adams [Hotel]. We rode in their car to the inaugural with Alban Barkley and all that to-do. Yes, it was fun.

WILLIAMS: Did Margaret have many friends invited up?

BRANTON: Lots of friends. Oh yes, from here she had some friends. Allens, I remember, were there, but I can't remember others—I mean, I'm sure there were.

WILLIAMS: Did your mother or father go?

BRANTON: They were invited, I'm sure, but I don't think they went.

WILLIAMS: So Margaret invited some of her friends?

BRANTON: Yes, and then we had a good time at the parties that night.

WILLIAMS: I suppose you had to get a gown and everything?

BRANTON: Oh, sure, a big deal. [unintelligible]. [chuckling] It was fine. We had a good time. Millions of people.

WILLIAMS: Were you involved at all in Margaret's singing career? Did you ever see her?

BRANTON: No. We were living in San Francisco when she sang down in the Hollywood Bowl, and we did go down for that, and that was fun. But no, I didn't. Mrs. Strickler lived right up here on Ward Parkway.

WILLIAMS: Her teacher or coach?

BRANTON: Yes, 59th and Ward Parkway. But I wasn't involved in any of that. We

went to whatever came here.

WILLIAMS: Well, I have a few more questions but I think we need to change the tape.

BRANTON: All right, if you have a few more questions, then I have a few more minutes, because I . . .

[End #4326; Begin #4327]

WILLIAMS: What was Margaret's wedding like?

BRANTON: Well, it was a very simple . . . She, of course, could have had one in Washington, but showed extreme good judgment, since it is a religious ceremony, to have it in a little tiny church that meant a lot to them. It was pretty and it was nice and it was well-done, and the reception was at home.

WILLIAMS: How did she make all the arrangements, living in New York and you living here and that sort of thing?

BRANTON: Oh, I don't think that was a real problem . . . Well, we had a hard time getting the dresses done. She didn't pick out any bridesmaids' dresses. We had to pick out our own. So I picked out one that I thought was just great, not knowing what her dress was, and mine that I'd picked out was a good deal like what she'd picked out. So she said no, that wouldn't do, so zapped that. So, I don't know, I got something down at Swanson's, and I've really forgotten what it was. We had to send off for it for the color to be right, and mine, I think, was yellow, and I've given it to the library. Drucie's, I've forgotten what color hers was, maybe a soft green.

WILLIAMS: Did you know Drucie Snyder very well?

BRANTON: Yes. Well, just . . . you know, she stayed with my mother and father during all that to-do [Margaret's wedding]. But I was then married and living in

Kansas City.

WILLIAMS: Right, you'd been married for several years.

BRANTON: Along . . . Yes, had two little people, and . . . It was fun, but it was done so well and with such gentility that . . . You know, there wasn't any flashy, big show.

WILLIAMS: There was still a lot of attention by the press?

BRANTON: Oh, attention by the press, sure.

WILLIAMS: Did they hound you at all?

BRANTON: Not that I remember. I think when she announced who was in the wedding they came by, but no. When they gained prominence, we closed our mouths. They could say what needed to be known. And I never knew anything that was important enough to say about anything. If I did, I have that wonderful faculty of it going in one ear and out the other, being interested at the moment, and that's the end of it. No, they were such very private people.

WILLIAMS: What was Mrs. Truman like?

BRANTON: Oh, I loved her. When they'd go on trips, she'd bring me a little something every time, a little box or a little, you know . . . She was super. I did not see her the last couple years of her life because Margaret just didn't want me to see her. I think she'd had several series of strokes and was in a very debilitated state and she just didn't want me to see her like that, and that was fine. I wrote her a couple notes and told her I was thinking about her, but that was . . . I don't know even know at what state she was in.

WILLIAMS: Oh, you would go out and visit before that?

BRANTON: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Oh, sure.

WILLIAMS: And what about Mr. Truman? How well did you know him?

BRANTON: Well, I knew him quite well. I liked him a lot. My father died when he was about sixty, and I was married, but he called and said he would help in any way he could if I ever needed him . . . You know, just a nice man. He was fine, I liked him a lot, and he was smart and well-read and had a keen sense of humor and he was just a nice person. I know all of us were . . . I mean, the country seemed to be astounded how well he did, but those of us out here weren't too surprised.

WILLIAMS: When you would go to visit them, where would you spend your time in the house, usually?

BRANTON: In Independence?

WILLIAMS: Right.

BRANTON: Probably in the kitchen. We'd come in and out of the kitchen, but if he was there and Mrs. Truman was there, we'd either go in that little library or in the living room.

WILLIAMS: Does the house look very different?

BRANTON: It looks about the same, as I remember it, but, you know, you don't remember as a little kid what a house looked like. I remember it just as I did, you know, forty years ago, thirty years ago, but not sixty years ago.
[chuckling] I don't know what it looked like.

WILLIAMS: So you weren't in the house recently in the last . . . in the sixties or seventies?

BRANTON: Oh, sure, I can remember . . . That's what I'm saying, I can remember that,

but I can't remember when I was eight and ten what a house looked like.

WILLIAMS: But as far as the interior . . .

BRANTON: It looks fine. Oh, yes, it looks essentially the same.

WILLIAMS: Well, we know it didn't change much.

BRANTON: No, it's essentially the same.

WILLIAMS: Sometimes people say there's one thing that they've noticed that's different.

BRANTON: No, well, I can't see that it's changed anything. I went one time to see . . . Alexis Minotis from Athens, Greece, the director and the movie star and all in Athens, was in Kansas City [1968] and he wanted to meet the president, so I said . . . Because he lived right opposite the statue in Athens of Mr. Truman. At that point, Mr. Truman was failing and having a hard time getting up and down. As we walked in to the library, he kind of struggled to get out of his chair in that little library . . . whatever they called it, library, and I said, "Oh, please don't get up." And he said, "I never did not stand for a lady." [chuckling] Okay? In other words, "My mother told me to." [chuckling] Which was fine.

WILLIAMS: How much do you keep up with Margaret these days?

BRANTON: I talk to her a time or two, maybe once every two or three months.

WILLIAMS: So you've remained friends?

BRANTON: Oh, sure. Oh, sure, yes. She has no reason other than May [Wallace] to come back out here, and so . . . Of course, with her mother she came quite often, and often would just ease in and out and nobody would even know she was here. But May is in a nursing home, and I don't think is very well.

I love May.

WILLIAMS: Her birthday is coming up.

BRANTON: Is it?

WILLIAMS: It's on the fourteenth.

BRANTON: Is it? Well, I'll have to send her a card. I'll find out where she is. I used to go and see her, and then I gave her some pictures that I wanted her to identify who they were and she couldn't. I mean, then is when I knew that I'd waited a little long. Then I went to see her when she was out in the hospital, but I haven't been to the nursing home because she didn't know . . . She was just as nice and gracious and so glad to see me, and had not the vaguest notion who I was and . . . you know.

WILLIAMS: When the Trumans were ill, did they accept company, like in the hospital, from close friends like you?

BRANTON: Oh, I don't remember. I don't know that. I believe, and I guess I believe it because my parents believed it, that when you're in the hospital, if you're that sick, you don't need company.

WILLIAMS: Right.

BRANTON: And when I say I went to see May, she was in that kind of rehabilitation part, whatever that kind of a . . . not sick part, but in the kind of holding pattern till they decided where she should go.

WILLIAMS: So do you and Margaret share stories about your grandchildren and that sort of thing?

BRANTON: We have a good time, yes. [chuckling] Yes, exchange pictures.

WILLIAMS: We don't hear much about her family, for good reason, I guess.

BRANTON: Yes, well, they're fine. Thomas is married and lives up in Vermont, and he's gone back to finish college, which is great, at Bennington or Burlington? Not Bennington, he's not going to Bennington, but someplace up there.

WILLIAMS: He's the one in Vermont, and then . . .

BRANTON: Clifton is down in North Carolina . . . and Harrison will soon enter a school that they're trying to get him into in New Jersey, and Will is in New York City working with the homeless—very hard. He is my godson, Thomas is Coleman's godson, and Clifton is Drucie's, and I don't know who Harrison's is.

WILLIAMS: Well, I think we've about taken up all of your time.

BRANTON: That's all right. [chuckling] Are you through with what you wanted to ask?

WILLIAMS: I think so. Leslie, can you . . . ?

HAGENSON: Well, I was wondering when you were children if you ever played with Margaret when she did the Penny Ice Fund programs?

BRANTON: Oh, we all did Penny Ice Fund programs. Sure, we all did that. I haven't remembered that in years, in fifty or sixty years. But we all had Penny Ice Fund, sure. Sure, we'd put on little things, yes.

HAGENSON: I found a picture of Margaret with a bunch of children and they were dressed up in costumes and things [see appendix, item 2].

BRANTON: Sure. I'd love to see that because I might know who they are.

WILLIAMS: Okay, maybe we can send you a copy of it to identify.

BRANTON: Okay, that would be kind of fun. Yes, that'd be great. I've forgotten all

about that. Of course, we had the cards that you put up if you wanted twenty-five or fifty or seventy-five or a hundred, and you'd have to stick them up in the window. Then the ice wagon he'd come and chip the ice out of a huge block of ice, and you'd go put your hand down underneath the chipping and collect the chipped ice pieces . . . It was a horse and buggy, the ice wagon.

WILLIAMS: And the ice fund was for poor people?

BRANTON: For the poor people who had no ice.

WILLIAMS: And you put on plays and things?

BRANTON: We put on plays and made money and then gave it to the Penny Ice Fund. I had really forgotten that.

HAGENSON: And it was in the backyard of the Truman home, wasn't it?

BRANTON: Sure. It was kind of we could have it wherever we wanted, you know? [chuckling] Yes, it was in the backyard, or it was in the corner, or it was, you know, wherever you . . . We had lemonade stands and . . .

WILLIAMS: So that wasn't unusual to get involved in charitable things?

BRANTON: No, and I think that's because our parents taught us that, that we were lucky and that we needed to share.

WILLIAMS: I know you were involved, Margaret was too, in the Junior League.

BRANTON: I was kind of. Yes, I think I was one of the first ones in it, and then when I married I then kind of lapsed.¹

¹In Mary Shaw Branton's corrected copy of interview manuscript she stated, "I don't think we ever explained the Junior League bit. I don't think Margaret was ever in the Independence Junior Service League—she was, (and may still be), a member of the Junior League—I believe she joined in Kansas City and transferred to Washington, but I

WILLIAMS: I'm supposed to ask you about this, sitting in the drugstore in Englewood drinking sodas [see appendix, item 3].

BRANTON: Oh, do you know where that was? That was out in Englewood, at a drugstore in Englewood, and it was hot! It was like today. And they made us put on winter clothes because it was in the *Saturday Evening Post* in the winter, I think. And we nearly died! Yes, that's where it was.

WILLIAMS: Well, Liz Safly gave me this and she wanted to know what drugstore that was.

BRANTON: That's out there . . . It isn't there anymore, but it was a drugstore on the corner, on the south side of whatever that main drag—Winner Road—a real brick drugstore, and they had the best chocolate sodas in town there, and Margaret kind of had a thing about them and so . . .

WILLIAMS: She liked chocolate sodas?

BRANTON: Yes, and so we went there. Then we ended up learning that there was a good chocolate soda place out in Lee's Summit.

WILLIAMS: I guess this is the Junior League I was talking about. [see appendix, item 4]

BRANTON: Where are we now? Junior League . . .

WILLIAMS: Apparently Margaret came back and spoke.

BRANTON: Oh, we voted her in or did something. I look like I have curvature of the spine. I don't even remember that picture. Okay.

WILLIAMS: Well, you know how pictures are.

BRANTON: [chuckling] Yes, I do.

WILLIAMS: Which reminds me, would you mind if I took a picture of you to go along

could be wrong.”

with the interview?

BRANTON: No, that's fine.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. *Kansas City Star* photographs of Mary Shaw wedding.
2. Penny Ice Fund photograph. HSTR catalog #28148.
3. *Saturday Evening Post* article by Elise Morrow about Margaret Truman.
4. *Kansas City Star* article, 15 September 1946.