



## 216 North Delaware

### Noland Family



NPS Photo

#### Introduction

Joseph Noland married Margaret Ellen “Ella” Truman on December 18, 1870. Ella was a sister of John A. Truman, the father of Harry S Truman. The Nolands moved to Independence in 1883 so their children could attend school. Joseph pursued a career in real estate and was active in city politics before his death in 1923. Ella raised three daughters, Ruth, Nellie, and Mary Ethel. The Nolands lived in several homes in Independence before moving to 216 North Delaware in 1900. Tragedy struck the Noland family in 1904 when Robert Ragland, Ruth’s husband, died. His widow and two children, Ardis and Robert, moved into 216 North Delaware. Another daughter, Josephine, was born later that year. When the Raglands moved in, a total of eight people occupied the Noland home until the early 1920s. At that time the Ragland family moved to another home in Independence.

#### Harry, Bess and the Noland Cousins

John A. Truman and his family moved to Independence in 1890 from the Young farm in Grandview, Missouri. Like the Nolands, the Trumans moved to Independence because of its educational opportunities. Shortly after six year old Harry Truman arrived in Independence he met five year old Bess Wallace at the First Presbyterian Church Sunday School.

Throughout grade school and high school, Harry continued his acquaintance with Bess. During their senior year they studied Latin at the Noland home. Nellie Noland, who was several years older than Harry

and Bess, helped with these lessons. Mr. Truman enjoyed these sessions because he liked to entertain. Ethel recalled years later, “I don’t know whether they got much Latin read or not because there was a lot of fun going on....”

After Harry and Bess graduated from Independence High School in 1901 their paths did not often cross. Harry went to work in Kansas City where he held several jobs. In 1906 his father called him to work the farm in Grandview. Despite the distance between Grandview and Independence, Harry found time to visit the Noland family.

#### A Cake Plate

One day in 1910, Harry called at 216 North Delaware. Madge Wallace, Bess’s mother, had sent a cake to the Noland home. The Nolands had finished the cake and Aunt Ella asked Harry to return the cake plate across the street. Truman, eager to renew his acquaintance with Bess, promptly complied with his aunt’s request. Bess Wallace answered Harry’s knock at the door and the return of the cake plate began a courtship that culminated in their marriage in 1919.

Their nine year courtship was complicated by the distance between Independence and Grandview. Even though it was only

twenty miles to Grandview, it took several hours to reach by street car and train. Occasionally, Mr. Truman would spend the night at the Noland home after a late date with Bess. In 1914, Mr. Truman purchased a 1911 Stafford automobile which enabled him to get to Independence much faster and reduced the number of overnight stays at the Noland home.

Courtesy of Truman Library



Truman and friends in his 1911 Stafford

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## A Cousin Moves to Delaware Street

In 1919, after Harry Truman and Bess Wallace married, they moved to 219 North Delaware. Nellie and Ethel Noland, who had begun teaching careers, were excited that their cousin was across the street. Harry remained a neighbor until he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1934. In December of 1934, Aunt Ella hosted Mr. Truman and his family at a farewell dinner held in the dining room of the Noland home. The Nolands watched Truman's

political star rise. When he made speeches as a Senator they listened to their radio. He wrote them from his office and they responded. After hearing one of his radio speeches in 1943 Ethel observed, "I am just writing to tell you how much we are enjoying hearing from you so often. We are just a part of the great silent audience that listens to you whenever you speak by radio or press."

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## The Family Genealogist



Courtesy Truman Library

Ethel Noland

While Mr. Truman was Senator he assigned Ethel Noland a special task. Harry referred all genealogy questions he received as Senator and President to her. She responded to these inquiries by telling the person whether or not they were related to the President. Ethel continued to answer inquiries after Mr. Truman left office in 1953.

Family was central to Mr. Truman's life and he missed them when he was in Washington. He enjoyed writing the

Nolands and wanted to stay in touch with them because he was concerned about their welfare. Harry's deep commitment to family was revealed in a letter written to Ethel in 1950. "Did you ever stop to think that the troubles of your own family are the troubles of every family? And that if you help alleviate your own you can and should help as many as you are able to help."

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## A Neighbor Becomes President

When Harry became President in 1945 his life and the lives of the Nolands changed. Mr. Truman was not able to return to Independence as often. The Nolands missed him but they continued to write as they had done when he was in the Senate. Occasionally he would be able to get away, usually at Christmas, and come home. These visits, though brief, were treasured events for the Nolands.

The Nolands often responded to questions from journalists about their cousin. They were usually cordial to the national media and even allowed the Mutual Broadcasting Company to cover the 1948 Presidential election from their living room. The early returns did not look promising, but as the evening unfolded, the situation improved.

In fact, the Nolands never went to bed that night and they went to their respective schools the next morning not knowing the outcome of the election. Finally, Ethel was able to take a break from her school duties and listen to the returns. The news she heard excited her. Harry had won! Reflecting on the 1948 election years later Ethel remarked, "An unbelievable victory, nothing short of a miracle to me."

The year 1948 also marked the passing of 99 year old Ella Noland. Unfortunately, Mr. Truman's Presidential duties prevented him from attending his aunt's funeral.



Truman leaving 216 North Delaware

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## Coming Home

When Mr. Truman left office in 1953, he returned to Independence. The Nolands hoped to see him more often. However, he was a busy man with speaking engagements to attend, memoirs to write and a library to build. The Nolands found it difficult to spend time with their cousin. Even the Christmas visits became rare. After 1956 the Trumans usually went to New York to visit Margaret's family. Harry accurately assessed the situation in a letter to Ethel in 1957. "As I have said time and time again, I am sorry that you and I have to transact our personal business by correspondence, but it simply cannot be helped."

In their later years the Noland sisters retired from teaching, but continued to be active in the community. Nellie died in 1958, leaving Ethel the sole occupant of the home. She continued her genealogical and civic activities until her death in 1971. Ethel's niece, Ardis Ragland Hauckeberry, the daughter of Ruth Noland Ragland, took possession of the home after her aunt died. She continued the genealogical research Ethel had conducted until her own death in 1986. In 1991, the National Park Service acquired the Noland home to preserve and interpret to the public Mr. Truman's relationship with the Noland family.

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## More Information

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