



The Farm Years



Self-sufficiency. Determination. The ability to work hard. Taking responsibility for oneself. Facing frustration and difficulties with optimism and courage. These are all essential qualities for a president—and qualities that Harry Truman possessed as 33rd President of the United States. But he did not learn them in the White House in Washington, D.C. He learned them in another white house—a small farm house owned by his grandmother in Grandview, Missouri.

Hard Work and Common Sense

It was perhaps the most important learning experience in the life of future president Harry S Truman. For eleven years (1906-1917) Truman worked on the family farm in Grandview. The long hours and hard work forever molded his character.

During Truman's years on the farm, he matured from a shy twenty-two year old into an outgoing and self-confident leader. He later wrote, "I thought maybe by cussing mules and plowing corn I could perhaps overcome my shyness and amount to something." His mother who witnessed firsthand the life-changing transformation, said it best, "it was on the farm that Harry got all his common sense."



Harry's parents, Martha and John Truman, taught their children the virtues of hard work, honesty, and common sense. *Truman Library*

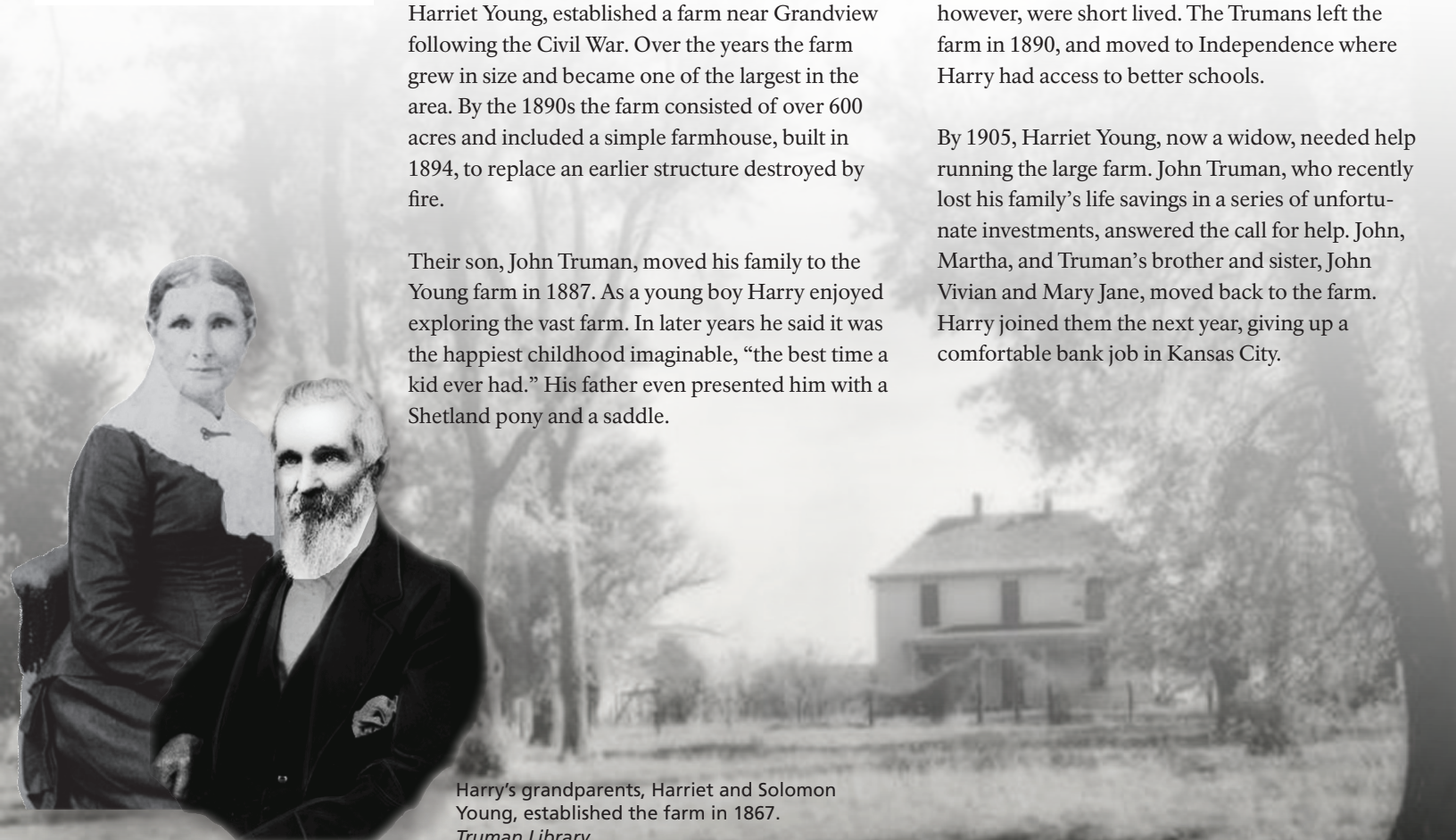
The Family Farm

Harry Truman's grandparents, Solomon and Harriet Young, established a farm near Grandview following the Civil War. Over the years the farm grew in size and became one of the largest in the area. By the 1890s the farm consisted of over 600 acres and included a simple farmhouse, built in 1894, to replace an earlier structure destroyed by fire.

Their son, John Truman, moved his family to the Young farm in 1887. As a young boy Harry enjoyed exploring the vast farm. In later years he said it was the happiest childhood imaginable, "the best time a kid ever had." His father even presented him with a Shetland pony and a saddle.

These "wonderful days and great adventures," however, were short lived. The Trumans left the farm in 1890, and moved to Independence where Harry had access to better schools.

By 1905, Harriet Young, now a widow, needed help running the large farm. John Truman, who recently lost his family's life savings in a series of unfortunate investments, answered the call for help. John, Martha, and Truman's brother and sister, John Vivian and Mary Jane, moved back to the farm. Harry joined them the next year, giving up a comfortable bank job in Kansas City.



Harry's grandparents, Harriet and Solomon Young, established the farm in 1867. *Truman Library*

Life on the Farm

Harry Truman had never farmed a day in his life. His friends were convinced that he would not last a week. Harry saw it as a challenge and set out to prove them wrong. The work was tough and the days were long. The farmhouse had no electricity or running water.

His room, which he shared with his brother and the hired hands, was like an oven in the summer and an icebox in the winter. But the difficult times made family bonds even stronger. Evenings were spent relaxing together at the dinner table, singing songs, playing the piano, or sharing stories.

Personal Growth

The death of John Truman in 1914 was a particularly hard blow for Harry. With his father's death, Harry assumed responsibility for running the farm. He became a careful administrator, deciding what to plant and when to take livestock to market. Production steadily increased as he practiced the careful rotation of crops. Under his care the farm was a modest success, but the devastating effects of weather and unsure profits took their toll.

While farming occupied most of his daylight hours, Harry still managed to find time for other activities. He became a Mason in 1909, and enjoyed the fellowship so much that he organized a new lodge in Grandview. Meanwhile, he continued his service in the Missouri National Guard, joined the Farm Bureau, and became postmaster of Grandview. His favorite pastime, however, was spending time

with his childhood sweetheart, Bess Wallace. Their courtship began in 1910, and though she lived in Independence, they kept in close contact. They wrote often, and on weekends Harry typically went to visit her.



Bess Wallace was the childhood sweetheart of Harry Truman. They married in 1919 after a nine-year courtship. *Truman Library*



The purchase of a 1911 Stafford automobile made trips to Independence easier, and made it possible for the couple to enjoy picnics, fishing trips, and other excursions. *Truman Library*

The End (and the Beginning)

Truman left the farm in 1917 to join the fighting in France during World War I. Upon his return he married Bess and lived in Independence. Mamma Truman and Mary Jane continued to live on the farm, but financial difficulties led to foreclosure of the farm in 1940. Harry and his brother, John Vivian, purchased some of the land back in 1945. A decade later the family sold the property to developers, transforming the farmstead into shopping centers and housing developments. "Progress pays no attention to individuals," remarked Truman.

Truman never returned to farming, but the experience molded him into the man he later became. Above all, it taught him the value of common sense and hard work, virtues that he carried with him the rest of his life.

Starting in 1994, the National Park Service acquired the remaining part of the farm. Today, only eleven acres of the once sprawling property survives, but the old house still stands and helps to preserve an important chapter in the life of Harry S Truman.



The farm home experienced a new beginning in 1994 when it became a unit of Harry S Truman National Historic Site. *NPS Photo*



The parlor (top) and the dining room illustrate the farm's simple lifestyle preserved today by the National Park Service. *NPS Photos*