



The Noland Home



The Noland Home at 216 N. Delaware (left), Ethel and Nellie Noland with the Wallace Home, later Truman Home, behind them. *Truman Library*

Harry's Favorite Cousins

Harry Truman's favorite cousins, Nellie and Ethel Noland, lived at 216 N. Delaware. Nellie, four years older than Harry, was like a big sister to the future president. Ethel was just six months older than Harry. Growing up they spent countless hours together after school, reading Shakespeare aloud, practicing their Latin, and sharing stories. Terribly shy around other girls, Harry always felt at ease with Nellie and Ethel. "Harry was always fun," Ethel later recalled. Their strong friendship lasted a lifetime.

The Nolands



Nellie and Ethel Noland were close friends to Harry Truman. Like Harry, they were known to be good-natured, well read, and interested in everything. *Truman Library*

Truman's uncle and aunt, Joseph and Ella Noland, and their three daughters, Ruth, Nellie, and Ethel, moved into the Queen Anne style cottage at 216 N. Delaware around 1900. Joseph made a living selling real estate. Ella was a sister of Harry Truman's father, John Anderson Truman.

The Nolands, like the Trumans, moved to Independence from a farm in order to be near good schools. "We saw a lot of [Aunt Ella] and her three daughters after we moved to Independence," Truman remembered. "We grew up and went to

school with cousins Nellie and Ethel. . .Nellie would translate my Latin lesson for me when I was in high school and I would escort Ethel to parties and learn how to be polite from her."

After high school, Harry moved to Kansas City and later to the family farm in Grandview twenty miles from Independence. After the move to Grandview, he still managed to visit his cousins nearly every weekend. The two-hour trip required him to catch a train to Kansas City and then a streetcar to Independence.

The Cake Plate



The Noland Home at 216 N. Delaware, ca. 1900. *Truman Library*

By a happy coincidence Harry's childhood sweetheart, Bess Wallace, lived across the street from Nellie and Ethel. Although Harry had not seen Bess in years, fate would smile on him during a visit to Independence in 1910. A borrowed cake plate needed to be returned to the Wallace home. Harry volunteered. He grabbed the plate "with something approaching the speed of light," Ethel later recalled. He rang the doorbell at 219 N. Delaware. He stood waiting. And then Bess answered the door. Two hours later he returned to the Noland Home, face aglow, and announced, "Well, I saw her!" No one could possibly realize it at the time, but this meeting marked the start of a nine-year courtship between Harry and Bess.

The courtship may have been impossible without the help of the Nolands—and the use of the couch in their parlor. Whenever possible Harry would catch the train from Grandview on Saturday mornings, stop by the Noland home to freshen up, and then trot across the street to see Bess.

On Saturday nights he would sleep in the Noland parlor so he could visit with Bess again on Sundays without having to make another long round trip from the farm in Grandview. The Noland Home was Harry's link between Grandview and Independence.



Bess Wallace lived across the street from the Nolands. Bess, Nellie, Ethel, and Harry often studied together at the Noland Home. *Truman Library*

Old Friends and Neighbors

When Harry and Bess finally married in 1919, Harry moved into 219 N. Delaware—and thus became neighbors with Nellie and Ethel. They remained a close-knit family, even during the long periods of separation when Harry and Bess lived in Washington, D.C. When personal visits were not possible, Harry, Nellie, and Ethel stayed in touch by writing numerous letters back and forth.

The Noland sisters never married. They taught for many years in the Kansas City and Independence School Districts. Ethel passed away in 1958, Nellie in 1971. Their home at 216 N. Delaware passed to relatives.



Ethel Noland (right) was the family genealogist and scribe. She played an invaluable role in recording the Truman, Young, and Noland family histories for Harry Truman. *Truman Library*

The Noland Home Today

Harry S Truman National Historic Site acquired the Noland Home in 1991. The home, which was built in three stages between 1858 and 1910, was in need of repair. Extensive planning and rehabilitation were necessary. Beginning in 2006, the home was raised and placed on a new foundation.

The interior of the home was completely gutted. All of the windows were repaired. New plumbing and electrical systems were installed. On the exterior, rotten siding was replaced and the home received a

new roof and a fresh coat of paint. Historic interior features like woodwork and stained glass were preserved. Original fixtures, samples of wall coverings, and exterior architectural elements became part of the museum collection.

A borrowed cake plate set off a chain of events that forever changed the life of Harry Truman. This simple object and the courtship that it helped to launch, marked a major milestone for this future President of the United States.



The Noland Home underwent an extensive renovation and restoration project beginning in 2006 with the replacement of the foundations. Additional work included the preservation of historic interior features like woodwork and stained glass, installation of a new roof, interior and exterior painting, and finally the installation of exhibits highlighting the Nolands and their Truman connections. *NPS Photos*