



## The Wallace Homes at 601 & 605 West Truman Road



May Southern, Harry Truman, Bess Wallace, Natalie Ott, and Frank Wallace on a picnic, 1915. Photograph probably taken by George Wallace. Credit: Truman Library

### Friends, Relatives, and Neighbors

In the 1910s, George Wallace and May Southern, Frank Wallace and Natalie Ott, and Bess Wallace and Harry Truman were three couples, all in their 20s, all in love, and all close friends. None of them knew it at the time, but they were destined to spend the rest of their lives together. Frank, George, and Bess were siblings, and after the three couples were married, all six members were related to each other. After Frank and George built small homes in their sister Bess's backyard, they became neighbors as well, part of an extended family that drew upon each other for help and support.

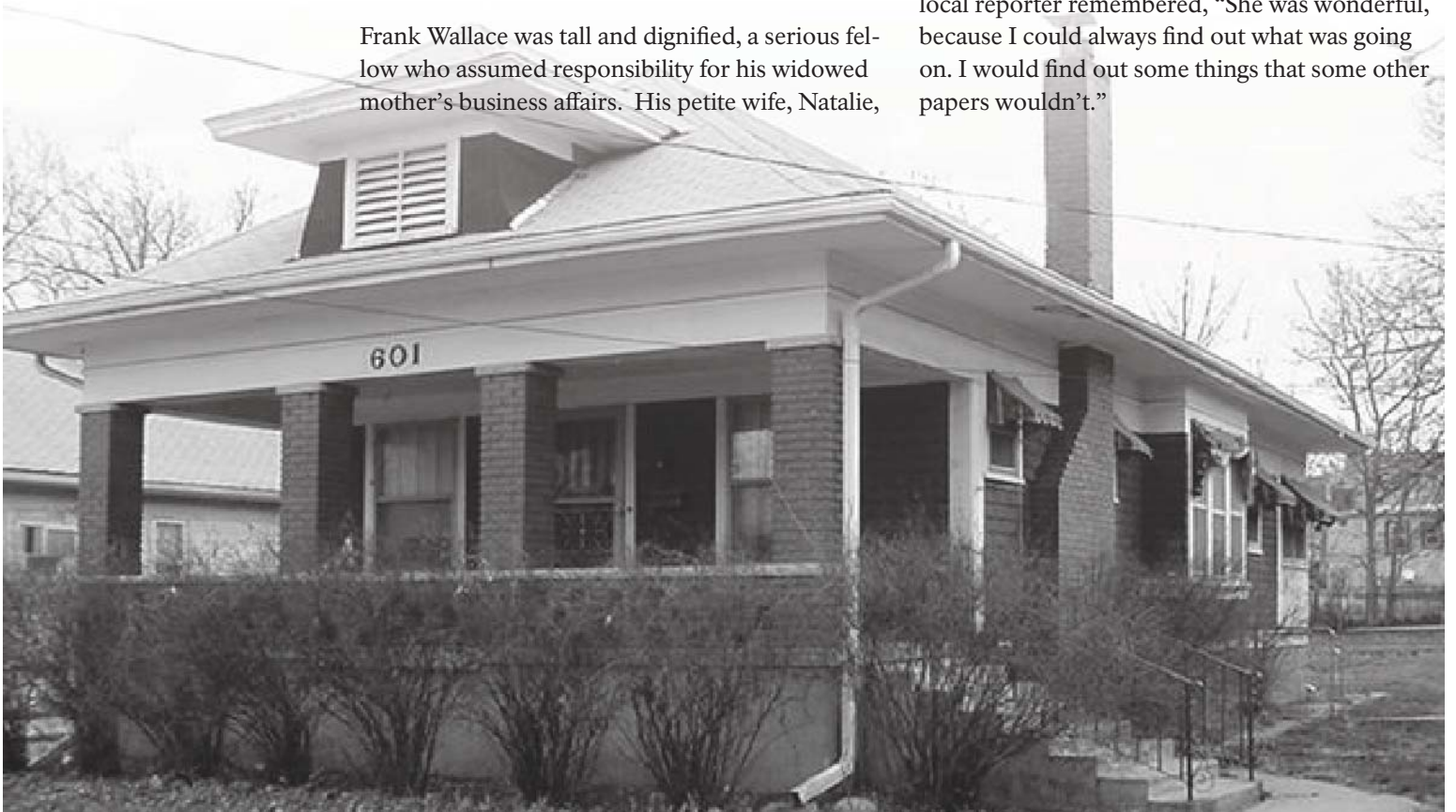
### The Wallace Boys and Their Homes

George Gates, grandfather to Bess, Frank, and George, was a flour mill owner and built the big house known today as the Truman home. The three Wallace siblings had lived there with their mother and younger brother since shortly after their own father's death in 1903. Upon Frank's and George's marriages in 1915 and 1916, their grandfather subdivided the back 100 feet of his property into two 50-foot lots and gave them to his grandsons as wedding gifts. The boys' homes were constructed on these lots shortly afterwards.

Frank Wallace was tall and dignified, a serious fellow who assumed responsibility for his widowed mother's business affairs. His petite wife, Natalie,

was the daughter of a banker and had traveled widely. When she was 20, Natalie was able to take a nine-month trip to Europe – something few Independence residents would have had the opportunity to do.

George Wallace was the handyman; if something needed fixing, they took it to George. His plump wife, May, eventually found herself the family spokesperson after her brother-in-law Harry became the President of the United States. One local reporter remembered, "She was wonderful, because I could always find out what was going on. I would find out some things that some other papers wouldn't."



The Frank Wallace home at 601 West Truman Road. NPS photo.

---

## Harry Truman Joins the Family

Harry and Bess were married in 1919. Frank gave away the bride and drove the newlyweds to their train after the ceremony. After returning from their honeymoon, Harry moved into Bess's family's home and became a neighbor as well as a relative to his friends. Frank worked at his grandfather's mill and loaned Harry money to open a

haberdashery in Kansas City. Both Frank and George were politically active and assisted Harry when he decided to enter politics. When Harry was unable to be with his mother during the hours before her death, George attended the bedside vigil along with Harry's brother and sister.

---

## The Day Harry's Life Changed

On the day that his life changed, April 12, 1945, before he learned of Franklin Roosevelt's death, Harry dictated a lighthearted letter to his sister-in-law, May Wallace, about her dog. "I imagine Spot is getting fatter and fatter. I have gained nine pounds myself. . . . So Spot and I will be in the same class," Truman wrote. Only a few hours later, Harry was President of the United States. Later that evening, the letter crossed his desk for a signature. He scrawled at the bottom, "This was dictated before the world fell in on me. But I've talked to you since and you know what a blow it

was. But—I must meet it."

May responded philosophically, "Dear Harry, or should I say, "Mr. President" – anyhow I am not going to. . . . Of course I did not dream what the week would bring forth. Neither did you and I suppose it was a good thing. We could not stand things sometimes if we knew they were going to happen. . . . No use telling you how much George and I wish for you the best of everything. I know you know – or should by this time."

---

## A Haven for the Trumans

The Truman home has a large yard, but because it is on a corner lot, there's very little privacy - especially for a President. The Wallace homes, on the other hand, provided a familiar, relaxing atmosphere that served as a refuge for the Trumans during their Washington years.

Late one summer night in 1944, a weary Harry and Bess arrived in Independence straight from the Democratic National Convention where Harry had been nominated as Roosevelt's vice president. After the long trip, they were too tired to cook, so George and May fed them dinner and they spent the night sleeping at Frank and Natalie's. Opening the big house was a chore for short trips home, so the Trumans often found themselves dinner and overnight guests of their Wallace relatives. When the Trumans came home for longer visits, George

and May helped out by opening and airing out the big house and closing it up after the Trumans departed. George, the fixer, drained the pipes in the fall.

The Wallaces were more than relatives, friends, or neighbors; they were part of a tightly-knit support system to the President of the United States. They provided him with domestic calm and balance in the midst of the storm of politics, government, and celebrity. The Wallaces were valued people in Truman's inner circle and caretakers of his private life. The Frank and George Wallace homes represent President Harry Truman's close, lifelong relationships and his commitment to home, family, and community. For this reason and others, the homes became part of Harry S Truman National Historic Site in 1991.



The George Wallace house at 605 West Truman Road. NPS photo.