



CITY OF GRANDVIEW

INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands

FROM: Mayor Harry O. Wilson

DATE: July 13, 2004

SUBJECT: Testimony on the Harry S Truman National Historic Site

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak with you today concerning the purchase of additional property for the preservation and enhancement of the Harry S Truman Farm Home in Grandview, Missouri.

Originally platted in 1880 as a “whistle stop” town on the Kansas City Southern and San Francisco-St. Louis Railroad lines, Grandview was a mostly rural, farming community when it was incorporated in 1912 as a village of just over 1,000 residents. Today, the city of Grandview is a fully developed, bustling suburb of Kansas City, with a population of approximately 27,000 residents. Having experienced much of its growth in the decades following the Second World War, Grandview is now a diverse community in both the make-up of its residents and the make-up of its economy. Situated along U.S. 71 Highway, just south of Interstate 435, Grandview offers an ideal balance of manufacturing, commercial and retail, and safe, quiet neighborhoods with good schools and parks for its children.

The Truman Farm Home has been an important component of Grandview’s history as well as a source of pride for the citizens of Grandview. Harry S Truman’s maternal grandfather, Solomon Young, was one of the original settlers of Grandview and the first to own the property, staking his claim to the original 80 acres sometime in the early 1840s. This was a time when there was no U.S. 71 Highway, or shopping centers or suburban housing. Over time, Solomon Young would acquire additional land, expanding his farm to over 2,000 acres.

The home that now stands on the property is actually the third home. The first being heavily damaged during the family’s forced eviction under the infamous

Order Number 11 during the Civil War, and the second being destroyed by fire shortly after Solomon Young's death in 1892.

It was not long after the death of Solomon Young that his daughter Martha Truman, mother of Harry S Truman, moved back to the farm, with her husband and children to manage the property. In 1906, Harry Truman moved to the farm to help his father with the operations. He would not leave until he entered the First World War in 1917.

It was these years that Truman spent living and working on this farm that many historians feel were the most formative in developing the character of this future United States President. As Mr. Truman remarked years later, "...Riding one of these plows all day, day after day, gives one time to think. I've settled all the ills of mankind in one way and another while riding along seeing that each animal pulled his part of the load..."

Not only did he spend time managing the farm, but he became Grandview's Postmaster, sorting mail in the back of a one-stall garage that still stands on the property; a founding member of the Masonic Lodge; a school board member; and a Jackson County road overseer. It was also during this period that he courted Bess Wallace, a young woman from Independence, and his future wife. The family continued to live in the farm house after Harry left in 1917 to join the Army. Mary Jones Truman, Harry's sister, lived in the home with their mother until 1940, when they moved into another home in Grandview. The children inherited the farm upon the death of Martha Truman in 1947. By this time, Grandview was no longer the quiet, little farming community that it had been. The City was experiencing rapid growth as World War II America began to suburbanize.

Portions of the original farmstead were sold over time to those interested in developing commercial property to support the rapidly growing area. One tract of land became Truman Corner's Shopping Center, one of the first post World War II suburban shopping centers in the Kansas City area.

Lined on both sides with fast-food restaurants, strip shopping centers and other commercial property, today Blue Ridge Boulevard cuts through the front half of the original farmstead. In fact, the original gates to the Truman Farm are still standing in the back parking lot of a Western Sizzlin' Steak House.

Upon the death of Mary Jane Truman in 1978, community leaders in Grandview recognized the need to purchase the remaining property and farm home to preserve

it for future generations. The Truman Farm Home Foundation was formed, and with help from Jackson County, the property was purchased from the Truman heirs. After years of petitioning the federal government to purchase the Truman Farm Home site and make it part of the National Parks System, Congressman Allan Wheat was able to pass legislation which eventually evolved into the Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

Recently, we became aware that we could purchase the Iowa Paint Store, which is immediately south of the Truman Farm Home Site, as well as land adjacent to the Iowa Paint Store and the Truman Farm Home site. The purchase of these two pieces of property would enhance the Truman Farm Home site considerably. In addition, with 100 percent commercial development around this site, acquiring this land would stop any further commercial development that would infringe upon the boundaries of this property. It is the desire of the citizens of the city of Grandview and the state of Missouri to complete this site with a visitor's center that would tell the story of Truman's formative years on this farm, as well as provide a more permanent presence on the site for the National Park System.

There have been discussions at the Missouri State level to provide a visitor's center for the south Kansas City/Grandview Truman Farm Home area. We hope there would be funds available from the state and local community, along with funds provided by the federal government, to complete this transaction. By having federal, state and local involvement, as well as citizen involvement, this site could become a reality before development encroaches upon it. With starter funds from the federal government, we feel this site is a feasible venture.

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