

## **OLD # 33 or #32?**

**Harry S. Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri on May 8, 1884, the son of John Anderson Truman and Martha Ellen (Young) Truman. The family, which soon included another boy, Vivian, and a girl, Mary Jane moved several times during Truman's childhood and youth - first, in 1887, to a farm near Grandview, then, in 1890, to Independence, and finally, in 1902, to Kansas City. Young Harry attended public schools in Independence, graduating from high school in 1901. After leaving school, he worked briefly as a timekeeper for a railroad construction contractor, then as a clerk in two Kansas City banks. In 1906 he returned to Grandview to help his father run the family farm. He continued working as a farmer for more than ten years.**

**From 1905 to 1911, Truman served in the Missouri National Guard. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, he helped organize the 2nd Regiment of Missouri Field Artillery, which was quickly called into Federal service as the 129th Field Artillery and sent to France. Truman was promoted to Captain and given command of the regiment's Battery D. He and his unit saw action in the Vosges, Saint Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne campaigns. Truman joined the reserves after the war, rising eventually to the rank of colonel. He sought to return to active duty at the outbreak of World War II, but Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall declined his offer to serve.**

**On June 28, 1919, Truman married Bess Wallace, whom he had known since childhood. Their only child, Mary Margaret, was born on February 17, 1924. From 1919 to 1922 he ran a men's clothing store in Kansas City with his wartime friend, Eddie Jacobson. The store failed in the postwar recession. Truman narrowly avoided bankruptcy, and through determination and over many years he paid off his share of the store's debts.**

**Active in the Democratic Party, Truman was elected a judge of the Jackson County Court (an administrative position) in 1922. He became a Senator in 1934. During World War II he headed the Senate war investigating committee, checking into waste and corruption and saving perhaps as much as 15 billion dollars.**

**Official records designate Mr. Truman as the thirty-third President, but he said he was the thirty-second since Grover Cleveland was elected President for nonconcurrent terms.**

**"If you count the administrations of Grover Cleveland twice because another President held office between Cleveland's first and second term," said Truman, "you might try to justify the designation of me as thirty-third President. But then why don't you number all the second terms of other Presidents and the third and fourth terms of President Roosevelt, and where will you be? I am the thirty-second President."**

**Despite this argument, the official proclamation, dated April 13, 1945, issued by President Truman on the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt referred to Mr. Roosevelt as the thirty-second president.**

**During his few weeks as Vice President, Harry S Truman scarcely saw President Roosevelt, and received no briefing on the development of the atomic bomb or the unfolding difficulties with Soviet Russia. Suddenly these and a host of other wartime problems became Truman's to solve when, on April 12, 1945, he became President. He told reporters, "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."**

**As President, Truman made some of the most crucial decisions in history. Soon after V-E Day, the war against Japan had reached its final stage. An urgent plea to Japan to surrender was rejected. Truman, after consultations with his advisers, ordered atomic bombs dropped on cities devoted to war work. Two were Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese surrender quickly followed.**

**In June 1945 Truman witnessed the signing of the charter of the United Nations, hopefully established to preserve peace.**

**Thus far, he had followed his predecessor's policies, but he soon developed his own. He presented to Congress a 21-point program, proposing the expansion of Social Security, a full-employment program, a permanent Fair Employment Practices Act, and public housing and slum clearance. The program, Truman wrote, "symbolizes for me my assumption of the office of President in my own right." It became known as the Fair Deal.**

**Dangers and crises marked the foreign scene as Truman campaigned successfully in 1948. In foreign affairs he was already providing his most effective leadership.**

**In 1947 as the Soviet Union pressured Turkey and, through guerrillas, threatened to take over Greece, he asked Congress to aid the two countries, enunciating the program that bears his name--the Truman Doctrine. The Marshall Plan, named for his Secretary of State, stimulated spectacular economic recovery in war-torn western Europe.**

**When the Russians blockaded the western sectors of Berlin in 1948, Truman created a massive airlift to supply Berliners until the Russians backed down. Meanwhile, he was negotiating a military alliance to protect Western nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, established in 1949.**

**In June 1950, when the Communist government of North Korea attacked South Korea, Truman conferred promptly with his military advisers. There was, he wrote, "complete, almost unspoken acceptance on the part of everyone that whatever had to be done to meet this aggression had to be done. There was no suggestion from anyone that either the United Nations or the United States could back away from it."**

**A long, discouraging struggle ensued as U.N. forces held a line above the old boundary of South Korea. Truman kept the war a limited one, rather than risk a major conflict with China and perhaps Russia.**

**Deciding not to run again, he retired to Independence; at age 88, he died December 26, 1972, after a stubborn fight for life.**

**The Oval Office at the Truman Library was designed to replicate President's Truman's White House Oval Office as of August 28, 1950. On that date several photographs were taken from several angles to portray the scene around the 360 degrees of the room. The ear of corn, located on top of the television, appears in the photographs, but its significance is currently unknown. The explanation for the corn's significance may very well lie in the archives' vast store of documents (about 15 million pages), awaiting discovery by an intrepid researcher.**

**The sign "The Buck Stops Here" that was on President Truman's desk in his White House office was made in the Federal Reformatory at El Reno, Oklahoma. Fred M. Canfil, then United States Marshal for the Western District of Missouri and a friend of Mr. Truman, saw a similar sign while visiting the Reformatory and asked the Warden if a sign like it could be made for President Truman. The sign was made and mailed to the President on October 2, 1945.**

**The saying “the buck stops here” derives from the slang expression “pass the buck” which means passing the responsibility on to someone else. The latter expression is said to have originated with the game of poker, in which a marker or counter, frequently in frontier days a knife with a buckhorn handle, was used to indicate the person whose turn it was to deal. If the player did not wish to deal he could pass the responsibility by passing the "buck," as the counter came to be called, to the next player.**

**On more than one occasion President Truman referred to the desk sign in public statements. For example, in an address at the National War College on December 19, 1952 Mr. Truman said, "You know, it's easy for the Monday morning quarterback to say what the coach should have done, after the game is over. But when the decision is up before you -- and on my desk I have a motto which says The Buck Stops Here' -- the decision has to be made." In his farewell address to the American people given in January 1953, President Truman referred to this concept very specifically in asserting that, "The President--whoever he is--has to decide. He can't pass the buck to anybody. No one else can do the deciding for him. That's his job.**

**Harry S. Truman, 33rd President, 1945 - 1951, made a Mason March 18, 1909, in Belton Lodge No. 450, A.F. & A.M., Belton, Missouri. He served as the Grand Master of Masons of Missouri in 1940. Initiated: February 9, 1909, Belton Lodge No. 450, Belton, Missouri. In 1911, several Members of Belton Lodge separated to establish Grandview Lodge No. 618, Grandview, Missouri, and Brother Truman served as its first Worshipful Master. At the Annual Session of the Grand Lodge of Missouri, September 24-25, 1940, Brother Truman was elected (by a landslide) the ninety-seventh Grand Master of Masons of Missouri, and served until October 1, 1941. Brother and President Truman was made a Sovereign Grand Inspector General, 33°, and Honorary Member, Supreme Council on October 19, 1945 at the Supreme Council A.A.S.R. Southern Jurisdiction Headquarters in Washington D.C., upon which occasion he served as Exemplar (Representative) for his Class. He was also elected an Honorary Grand Master of the International Supreme Council, Order of DeMolay. On May 18, 1959, Brother and Former President Truman was presented with a fifty-year award, the only U.S. President to reach that golden anniversary in Freemasonry.**

**Harry Truman was a different kind of President. He probably made as many important decisions regarding our nation's history as any of the other 44 Presidents. However, a measure of his greatness may rest on what he did after he left the White House.**

**The only asset he had when he died was the house he lived in, which was in Independence Missouri. His wife had inherited the house from her mother and other than their years in the White House, they lived their entire lives there.**

**When he retired from office in 1952, his income was a U.S. Army pension reported to have been \$13,507.72 a year.**

**Congress, noting that he was paying for his stamps and personally licking them, granted him an 'allowance' and, later, a retroactive pension of \$25,000 per year.**

**After President Eisenhower was inaugurated, Harry and Bess drove home to Missouri by themselves. There was no Secret Service following them.**

**When offered corporate positions at large salaries, he declined, stating, "You don't want me. You want the office of the President, and that doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the American people and it's not for sale."**

**Even later, on May 6, 1971, when Congress was preparing to award him the Medal of Honor on his 87th birthday, he refused to accept it, writing, "I don't consider that I have done anything which should be the reason for any award, Congressional or otherwise."**

**As president he paid for all of his own travel expenses and food.**

**Modern politicians have found a new level of success in cashing in on the Presidency, resulting in untold wealth. Today, many in Congress also have found a way to become quite wealthy while enjoying the fruits of their offices. Political offices are now for sale.**

**Good old Harry Truman was correct when he observed, "My choices in life were either to be a piano player in a whore house or a politician. And to tell the truth, there's hardly any difference!"**

**Ref:**

**Presidential Library  
Harry S. Truman Library and Museum**