

Longhand Note of Judge Harry S. Truman

[page 1]

Politics Life etc.

I have always "believed in Santa Claus" I guess. It was my opinion until my association with Barr Vrooman and Bash that most men had a sense of honor. Now I don't know "The Boss" says that, instead of most men being honest most of them are not when they are put into a position where they can get away with crookedness. I guess I've been wrong in my premise that 92% are not thieves but it is a certainty that 92% are not ethically honest. I've

[page 2]

got a Counselor who is thank God, but he is a dammed crab along with it. He finds fault with everyone from Christ on down. His honesty has turned in on him and soured him. But I'm glad he's associated with me. If I'd had a crook in that office or if Veatch & Stayton had been crooks my career as a public official would have been the usual scandal.

The poor old "taxpayer" the boy with the mustache and derby hat in the cartoon has about as much show as a snowball in hell if the executives he hires have ambitions to get rich and prohibition has lessened the show he had.

[page 3]

I have had two wonderful associates in addition to my West Pointer to deal with.

The first one from the Western District, is and still is I guess the most accomplished host I've ever met; an all round good fellow. He never did learn what it was all about; but he raped my West Pointer. They would get down behind the bench and roll the bones while I sighed and transacted business. They both loved the ladies and if a skirt asked a favor I had no chance to refuse her. Both had

[page 4]

daughters and telephone girls on the pay roll. The Western Associate loved the ladies so much his good wife and her three children left him and "busted" him. I liked him and he liked us. His political faction thought he liked me too well and rolled him for a member of the force of the Power Trust. This representative of the Power Trust got his "stand in" through "Doc Johnson," the City Manager's Director of Fire. Then said "Doc" is the little Dem. Boss's "fere-de-shaiaben." I'll say this for the big boss he has no feminine "connections."

This second associate from the west of K.C. is sort of wooden headed but has a complex for money and his faction. He tried to take my West Pointer by storm

[page 5]

but as usual got nowhere. He want P. & L. to own the county and he'd like to make a profit from every county transaction if he knew how! He got rolled too and now they are going to give me a meat cutter. Well before he learns how maybe I can put the County where none of the crooks can profit. I wonder if I can.

All this gives me headaches and my private business has gone to pot so that I'll be worse than pauper when I'm done. I was a Battery Commander in 1918 and I made a partner of another one in the same outfit; who used me

[page 6]

for his own ends, robbed me got me into a position where I couldn't shoot him without hurting a lot of innocent bystanders and laughed at me. It nearly makes me a pessimist. When I got done, and I'll be done when I finish this term I'll have a lovely wife a sweet daughter and no finances. I almost believe that money or the goods of this world, whether it be stone clubs and cases are gold and palaces is all that we struggle for after all. But according to Plutarch, Moses, Buddha and the other ethical enthusiasts it isn't all. I wonder.

We've spent \$7,000,000.00 in bonds and 7,000,000 in revenue in my administration I could have had \$1,500,000.00; I haven't \$150.00. Am I a

[page 7]

fool or an ethical giant? I don't know. The Boss in his wrath at me because his crooked contractors got no contracts said I was working to give my consulting engineers a nationwide reputation and that my honor wouldn't be a pinch of snuff. I don't care if I get honor if the taxpayers money goes on the ground or into the buildings its intended for. I hope that there are no more bond issues and no more trouble until I'm done and then maybe I can run a filling station or something until I've run my

[page 8]

three score & ten and go to a quiet grave.

I wanted to simplify the administration of city & county gov't and make a routine of procedure that would be simple for the general public but the Republican who runs the Chamber of Commerce for K.C. said no. Someday it will have to be done or cause a complete new deal in local government. I think maybe that machines are not so good for the country. We'd rather have more people at work and pay more for things; but not in government. There are "machines" & machines.

Tammany, Bill Thompson, Mr. Cox of Cincin, Ed Butler they all have but one end-fool the taxpayer, steal the taxes. The "people" are dumb.

[page 9]

I have been doing some very deep and conscientious [sic] thinking. Is a service to the public as one's country worth one's life if it becomes necessary to give it to accomplish the end sought? Should a man in public office see that his family and offspring are provided for even though ethics and honor have to be thrown overboard? One of my predecessors answered that in the affirmative.

Since a child at my mother's knee I have believed in honor ethics and right living as its own reward. I find a very small minority who agree with me on

[page 10]

that premise. For instance I picked a West Pointer, son of an honorable father, a man who should have had Washington, Lee, Jackson, Gustavus Adolphus for his ideals, to associate with me in carrying out a program and I got-a dud, a weakling; no ideals no nothing. He'd use his office for his own enrichment, he's not true to his wife (and a man not honorable in his marital relations is not usually honorable in any other). He'd sell me or anyone else he's associated with out for his own gain but for lack of guts. He worried about the front, in the army in 1918 until he made himself sick enough to stay at home.

I am obligated to the Big Boss, a man of his word; but he gives it very seldom and usually on a sure thing. But he's not a trimmer. He, in times

[page 11]

past owned a bawdy house, a saloon and gambling establishment; was raised in that environment, but he's all man. I wonder who's worth more in the sight of the Lord?

I am only a small duck in a very large puddle but I am interested very deeply in local or municipal govt. Who is to blame for present conditions but sniveling church members who weep on Sunday, play with whores on Monday, drink on Tuesday, sell out to the Boss on Wednesday repent about Friday and start over on Sunday. I think maybe the boss is nearer heaven

[page 12]

than the snivelers.

In 1922 I was accidently elected to public office and served two years on Jackson County's executive board with the present city manager of Kansas City and E.W. Hayes, a good old man who didn't know what it was all about. The present city manager ran the Court with my help and we succeeded, thanks to the brother of the present Big Boss, who was my political mentor in separating the Shannonites from the pie counter and getting ourselves gloriously licked in 1924. The present city manager is still sore about it.

I learned a lot about govt as she is executed in those two years. They were invaluable in my education. I learned the machinery of operation and I also found out who really ran things locally.

[page 13]

In 1924 I was ingloriously defeated by the rabbits who bolted the Democratic ticket because of a lack of pie and I spent two years thinking and trying to make some bread and butter for my sweetheart and our small daughter who came shortly before my licking.

In 1926 I was put on the Democratic Ticket by the Big Boss as a candidate for Presiding Judge. I wanted to be County Collector which pays a handsome profit to the holder but the money power in the Party upset that ambition, much to the disgust of the brother of the big Boss, said brother being my political daddy and mentor. He's dead now-God bless his soul-I loved him as

[page 14]

I did my own daddy.

After the land slide which made me the key man in the County Govt. I began to take my job seriously and to try and live up to my good mother's teachings and be a real public servant, all the time thinking that my associate, whom I had pitched had the same ideals.

My county needed something to straightened out its condition on roads. While I had been on the court with the present city manager of K.C. we had employed R.R. Ash now dead and considered a bad man by the present Highway Engineer of the County; and the Colonel of the 110th Engineers to make a survey of the County Roads. This gave me an idea. In Jan. of 1927 I suggested to my associates, still not knowing the man I'd picked that we appoint a couple of non-

[page 15]

partisan or bipartisan engineers to make a survey of the County Road system. Both Associates agreed. We appointed the Col. of the 110th and a Republican who had been associated with him in a K.C. Sewer project. One of them was Rep. & one was Dem. both good and nationally known engineers. The Republican Engineer of the county had made a recommendation in 1925 that this be done after the present city manager and I had suggested it and been defeated. The men who succeeded us had been dumb bells and didn't see its

[page 16]

necessity. These men with my assistance laid out a system of roads estimated to cost \$6,500,000.00. I had gotten the assurance of both Democratic bosses the Big one and the other one that they would be for it. I had been to see all the "purported" leaders of the Republican Party including the present county chairman and the one who divorced his wife after three days as well as the Y.M.C.A. leader and former Mayor of K.C. I had taken the Taxpayers League represented by my former Major in the Army of 1918 & its Secretary to see the County Roads.

On May 8, 1928, my birthday, the issue was voted on and only the

[page 17]

roads, the County Hospital and the Park and Hospital Bonds of the City Council. The county carried \$7,000,000.00 the city \$700,000.00. The Manager had said to me that he wished the County was out of it. I was a gentleman and didn't rub it in on him when the result was announced.

After the issues carried my troubles began. The Boss wanted me to give a lot of crooked contractors the inside and I couldn't. He got awful angry at me but decided that my way was best for the public and the party. But I had to compromise with him

[page 18]

because my West Pointer thought he was going to sell his Henry county farm to a Jackson county millionaire as soldiers say a S.O.B. This sweet associate of mine my friend, who was supposed to back me had already made a deal with a former crooked contractor, a friend of the Boss's who had robbed Jackson County under the gentlemen I spoke of in the first paragraph. I had to compromise in order to get the voted road system carried out all because of my associate. I had to let a former saloon keeper and [illegible], a friend of the Big Boss steal about \$10,000.00 from the general revenue of the county to satisfy my ideal associate and to keep the

[page 19]

crooks from getting a million or more out of the bond issue! Was I right or did I compound a felony? I don't know.

The Boss tells me that in Kansas City they doctor every bid so that the inside gentlemen get the contract. I know that my former associate is honest but he must be circumvented by his surroundings. Anyway I've got the \$6,500,000.00 worth of roads on the ground and at a figure that makes the crooks tear their hair. The hospital is up at a less cost than any similar institution in spite

[page 20]

of my drunken brother in law whom I'd had to employ at the job to keep peace in the family. I've had to run the Hospital job myself and pay him for it. "It's a great life if you don't weaken." Even at that the per bed cost is one half the city's and St. Luke's and any others you want to name.

Am I an administrator or not? Or am I just a crook to compromise in order to get the job done? You judge it, I can't.