

HEARSAY AND IMPRESSIONS -- The Alex Sachs Family and Harry S. Truman

In 1931 or early 1932, Presiding Judge Truman asked his engineering consultant, N. T. Veatch, if he could suggest a qualified engineer for the Democratic nomination for Jackson County Highway Engineer. The incumbent, Leo Koehler, was a Republican, elected in the Hoover landslide of 1928. Tom Veatch, also a Republican, talked to Dad, Alex F. Sachs, a 42-year old civil engineer who was also a builder at times when the construction industry was not closed down by hard times. Sachs then had an office in the Scarritt Building adjoining the offices of the architects, Greenebaum, Hardy & Schumacher. His mother-in-law died that November, and the first floor duplex apartment at 5215 Rockhill Road was apparently a little too much (at this time in the Great Depression) for the Sachs family-- wife Rose, 5-year old son Howard (author of these notes) and cook- maid Rose Lee Porter (Sosa). They moved that winter to the second story duplex at 312 West 51st Street Terrace, above the young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Francis W. Bartlett.

After talking to Veatch, Sachs was eager for the challenging work and the safe, \$7,000 salary.

Alex Sachs had not been active in politics, although he was a committed Wilson Democrat. During his courtship of Rose Lyon in 1920, he had taken her to hear the Vice Presidential candidate, Franklin Roosevelt. That is another story. At any rate, he talked to Truman, and with Truman's aid he ultimately obtained the support of T. J. Pendergast and the acquiescence of Congressman Joseph B. Shannon. (This incident is referred to in Jonathan Daniels, Man of Independence.) With "Goat" and "Rabbit" support, he had little trouble winning the Democratic nomination in August, 1932. The November election was also an easy one.

For two years Sachs worked closely with Truman, whose County Court controlled budgeting. Truman's county road program was the first great success of his political career, and he took a considerable personal interest in future plans and maintenance. The mutual admiration between Sachs and Truman, acquired during those two years, remained steady for the rest of their lives. Sachs frequently said that the County Court was never the same after Truman left. When Truman became United States Senator in 1935, he was and remained the most prominent friend of the Sachs family.

Though there was hardly a close social relationship, Senator Truman once had dinner on 51st Terrace. I do not remember the occasion, but do remember discussing it with Rosa after her guest became President. I also remember weeping and complaining on an August night in 1940 when the primary election returns at bedtime showed Senator Truman losing to Governor Stark. The reaction seems too childish and too emotional for a boy almost 15, but may be connected with a sense of trouble in the family during the previous year or more, as the Pendergast machine scandals became an embarrassment to all who were connected with the Democratic organization.

The point of the tantrum was that it was unfair for the public to blame Senator Truman for events in Kansas City.

I was later told a story by Dad, that he and Harry Truman did have a close brush with the machine scandals on one occasion, on an election day in 1933 or 1934. A ward leader insisted on taking Truman and Dad to a polling place, to show what he was doing for the ticket (conceivably, but improbably, this was on primary election day in 1934, when Truman received the Senate nomination). My recollection of the story is that the two rather strait-laced

politicians saw a circle of voters, casting ballots and getting in line to vote again. The story was told as though two prim gentlemen had been taken to a house of ill repute, and sat in the parlor, somewhat embarrassed.

My principal recollection of the first Senatorial term of Harry Truman was that the Senator and his office staff had assisted Dad in obtaining visas for Jews trying to escape from Germany. Several distant cousins were so assisted, beginning probably with Dr. Arthur Sachs, who came to the United States in about 1935. (Closed files from the Senator's first term have been lost or destroyed, so there is no record of this at the Truman Library.) Other names, such as Ucko, were heard at home about 1940, but forgotten until I checked the papers of Senator Truman in 1977, and found more than a dozen "immigration case." files, which were never closed, in which Alex Sachs' name had been used to obtain help from the Senator. (See attached index.) The other Truman friend whose name was used about equally to help refugees was Eddie Jacobson. Both Jacobson and Sachs also had correspondence files in their names, among the Senate papers. Apparently Alex Sachs was second only to Eddie Jacobson as a Jewish friend of the Senator's during this period, if consideration is limited to the Senator's home county. (Dad would not care to be singled out as a Jew, but what else should you say?)

There are almost 100 immigration case open files from the Kansas City area alone. The Truman office maintained an active correspondence with consular officials all over the world, attempting to expedite these cases (although I find no suggestion of heavy-handed pressure). A few items of Senator Truman's correspondence with constituents (mostly Jewish, but including political contacts, up to and including "Mr. Pendergast") show impatience with State Department red-tape, which delayed what was later seen as a life-or-death rescue effort. It is my surmise that Truman personally, and his small office staff, obtained biases against the State Department diplomatic corps and sympathy for Jewish refugee efforts (perhaps even some feeling of guilt for not fully realizing the desperate need) which had considerable impact on President Truman's actions in 1945 and thereafter, in connection with the creation of the State of Israel as a place of refuge.

An exchange of correspondence in September, 1945, with Alex Sachs (a non-Zionist who wrote a letter favoring greater Jewish immigration to Palestine) is published in *Roots in a Moving Stream*, by Frank J. Adler (1972).

There is no other Sachs correspondence of great moment, I believe, although at the bottom of a Ucko inquiry and response in April, 1939, there is reference to the indictment of Pendergast ("Hellzapoppin" in Kansas City).

My first recollection of a meeting with Senator Truman was at the time of the Christmas vacation in 1942, when I returned home from Williams College, and went with Dad to call on Truman at his office in the Federal Courts Building on Grand Avenue. I remember the Senator's eyes, greatly magnified by glasses. I told the Senator that Professor Max Lerner had commended the work of the Truman Committee, in a political science lecture.

This illustrates how we in Jackson County have always been surprised that our friend should be so well thought of by Great Figures like Professor Lerner. It apparently reflected Harry Truman's self-appraisal, also, at least part of the time. My most striking illustration of this phenomenon dates from Christmas-time in 1953. Dad and I delivered a framed photograph to the Trumans (said to show a "good lay-out" of the Grandview farm), and waited in the sitting room with Margaret and Mrs. Truman for a few minutes until the President came in. "I've been

talking to Sam Rosenman" said the President, in a name- dropping tone. Less startling, perhaps, is a story from 1944. Alex and Rose Sachs took the Senator to dinner at the Westport Room in Kansas City's Union Station. Joe Maciel was impressed that the Senator was a guest, which rather surprised Rose. The Senator himself said, unbelievably, "You know, they are talking about me for Vice President".

Which takes me to our Byrnes story. Dad visited the President at the White House shortly after Potsdam. He had occasion to refer to the new Secretary of State, saying "He's a smart man". HST: "Too smart". I am aware of no stories of strain or sniping between Byrnes and Truman which date back that early.

This leads to our Acheson story. In about 1969, Dad told Mrs. Truman that we had been reading Present at the Creation.

Dad said that Acheson sounds as though he has a high opinion of himself. Mrs. T: "Well, he should." Apparently we couldn't say the right thing about the Secretaries.

In January, 1949, President Truman was advised, probably by Postmaster General Donaldson, that Alexander Graham, the Kansas City postmaster, was dying of cancer. Truman initiated a search for a successor (Donaldson has said that this and the Kansas City, Kansas, postmastership were the only ones discussed at a Cabinet meeting). The White House asked Vivian Truman to talk to Fred Canfil (U. S. Marshal, picked by Truman) and then suggest some names. They came up with one name--Dad's. The President reportedly said, "I should have thought of him myself." Truman telephoned Dad to confirm his willingness to serve; a secretary at Arthur Fels Company, where Dad had an office, said "I suppose that was the President". It was, but Dad couldn't say so.

Perhaps we should have more stories from a relationship of more than 35 years, but unfortunately my memory is not the best, and Dad rarely articulated revealing comments about the President.

I was away from 1942-1950, when Dad might have commented more about the amazing developments in his friend's career. But it also seems that Harry Truman was not much given to quotable remarks and observations. Regarding the President's personality, Mother in particular generally mentioned his gentle, quiet manner, so much in contrast with the current public image. One supposes that the Senator-President sometimes put on an act, so that none of the "boys" would think he was a sissy.

I attach notes on an Alex Sachs visit to the White House with Vivian Truman in the closing days of the Truman Presidency and on a visit to the Truman Library in the early 1960s, in which Dad and I were accompanied by June and Dan Dustman of Mediapolis, Iowa.

Having mentioned Vivian, I should say that Dad reported that Harry Truman frequently said that Mary Jane Truman was the smartest of the three.

Howard F. Sachs 816 West 68th Terrace Kansas City, Missouri January, 1978. 363-1066