

Notes 174N, Copy 2

Harry S. Truman

Kansas City, Missouri

May 7, 1957

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Some notes on chat with Harry S. Truman, former President, at his office in the Federal Reserve Building, Kansas City, Missouri, May 7, 1957, by F. C. Pogue.

(As in the case of my chat with Mr. Truman in December, I did not have an interview. We chatted about a number of things. I am putting down a few things which happened.)

The former President was seated in a fairly large office which one enters through a narrow passageway which is lined with photographs. The floor is carpeted with a Persian rug, gift of the Shah of Iran, which is to hang in the Museum. On the walls one notices in particular paintings of Bolivar, Saint Martin and Hidalgo. On my first visit my mention of these men started a discussion about them as well as the fact that the first two were Masons and that Masons had played an important role in the battle for independence. Mr. Truman looked well and, perhaps because his suit fit him better, not quite as heavy as he had the time before. His color was excellent. He exudes confidence and good will, although occasionally the politician comes out and now and then the small boy who can't believe that he ever played in the big leagues comes out. A large globe sat beside him and he turned to it from time to time. He looks directly at you; shows great interest in what you are saying; is likely to go off on any tangent you give him. At the same time he keeps in mind the passage of time. He still has lots of guests and he recalls that he has to get his caller out. There was none of this business of getting garrulous and running overtime. At the same time he makes you feel he wants to see you and is willing to talk all day.

He repeated what he had said before that Gen Marshall was the greatest American of our time and that he wanted to do anything he could to help the Marshall Foundation project. He asked about our plans and showed interest as well as making suggestions. We said he had instructed Dr. Brooks of the Truman Library to show me everything and give me every help possible. He reeled off a lot of names of people I should see concerning General Marshall: John Snyder, McCloy, Lovett, Acheson.

He showed me a photograph of what appeared to be a mural of Pershing dedicating a building in Kansas City (?) in the 1920s. Gen Marshall is present in the crowd.

He said he first knew Gen Marshall when the general was a major in France. He was one of the top brain trusters so I didn't get to talk with him, but I knew who he was. He along with Craig, Drum and Fox Conner was one of the big operations people.

After he became Chief of Staff we became well acquainted. I went to see him one day and asked to be put back in the Army. He said I was too damned old. I said you are older than I am. He said Yes but I am already in. We need you where you are.

When I got my Committee going I went to see Marshall and FDR. Both of them were doubtful. I said I was not hunting headlines but was trying to help. After that we had no trouble.

(Mention was made of some letters from Gen Marshall to Truman. The one in Gen M's handwriting which came after Truman was elected in 1948 was very warm and affectionate. Mr. Truman had it framed. Mr. Truman said "Don't use that one General's permission, but you have my permission to use any of nine you want.")

When Gen Marshall retired as Chief of Staff we talked. I told him I hoped he would have a chance at rest. Not long afterwards Hurley came to see me. He indicated he was going to return to China. An hour and a half later he denounced me. I called Marshall about 1 o'clock. I said will you go for me. He said yes and hung up. Later I asked him why. He said we were unpacking and Mrs. Marshall was happy to get home. I was afraid she would hear. However she heard it on the radio.

If they had cooperated with him he would have settled the China business. Chiang Kai-shek brought trouble on himself. He let the Communists take the stuff we had given him.

When the Korean War came I ran out of a Secy of Defense. Marshall was fishing up north. I called him and he had to go five miles to a country store. I said I have to have a secretary who knows the military, situation. He said yes and hung up. When he saw me he said I imagine you wonder why I hung up this time. The store was full of people who wondered why I was getting a call and I didn't want to talk in front of them.

Marshall was one of my greatest assets in the Presidency. Dean Acheson gave a speech at Cleveland, Mississippi, for me. Then Marshall followed up at Harvard.

Marshall and I were like brothers.

A day or two after the Greece and Turkey things became bad, I asked Marshall to come in. He was not familiar with the details. He sat by me. He was not briefed but he said he thought what I wanted was correct.

Factual story of relief of MacArthur is in my book. If you will trust my account, I need not recount it.

The two men with brains and fundamental intellectual honesty of this period were Marshall and Acheson.

We mentioned McCarthy who had died a few days before. He said McCarthy was mentally sick. Spoke as if he thought Jenner was worse. And then Eisenhower had the nerve to shake hands with Jenner on the same platform and didn't rebuke Jenner for his remarks about Marshall. I don't like that and I ate Eisenhower out for it.

Somewhere along here we got off on the Presidency and Mr. T. spoke of his plans to give lectures on the Presidency which is not understood enough. Important to teach people. (I spoke of the fact that an Air Force Academy officer had told me of problems in getting them to teach enough history and government to their people. I said with some of the officers going to the Presidency, they needed people who understood government. He agreed heartily). He talked about plans in museum for explaining Presidency.

Also talked about five great senators. He repeated that you couldn't pick five. Then attacked the choice which had just been made. Agreed only with the selection of Clay who had kept an uneasy peace for 30 years.

Said Webster willing to take money from the head of the National Bank. Webster a politician who is remembered only for his reply to Hayne and because the New England historians dominated our history book writing for so long. Calhoun did everything he could to destroy the Union. If they want someone who stated that kind of argument, why not pick Hayne. LaFollette was a great progressive, but he was more an attacker than a builder. Norris introduced more great legislation than nearly any of the people. Thomas Hart Benton was a constructive leader. Taft not as great as some of the others, although an able man. Lewis Cass a man of great ability and constructive efforts. Disagreed with proposal of Douglas because of his advocacy of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Said confidentially he hoped to change the selections when they appeared on the floor.

As I got up to leave, he said again we will help any way we can with your writing. He went over to book shelves which lined the wall and began to show me books which had been autographed by their authors. He pointed out affectionate statements by Churchill, Leahy, Eisenhower, Bradley and others. (He said be sure and see Bradley about MacArthur). Then he called my attention to photographs signed by Churchill and others.

He apologized for his language (he had been mild this time) but said he was an old army man. The General would understand, he said, he uses some army language himself sometimes.

As he took me to the front door, I saw Drew Pearson waiting. He told Pearson what I was doing and said he has a project which should interest you. Pearson said indeed it did and he would be glad to help.