

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Episode 10: "Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum"

Guest: Mark Adams

Air Date: February 11, 2019

KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. With this year's Missouri Conference on History coming up in March, many scholars will soon be going to Kansas City. To help prepare for the conference, the *Our Missouri Podcast* invites listeners to explore the City of Fountains from the confluence of two mighty rivers near the downtown skyline to the Plaza, the Paseo, and the intersection of 18th and Vine. This five-part series entitled "Going to Kansas City" focuses on several projects and institutions that document and define Kansas City's history and identity. Today, we are speaking with Mark Adams. A history educator with more than twenty-five years experience at the high school and university level, Mark presently serves as the Education Director at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum. Prior to joining the Truman Library, he was affiliated with the Kansas Museum of History in Topeka. In addition to his present role as Education Director, Adams also serves as a coordinator for National History Day programs and workshops at the state and regional level. Welcome to the *Our Missouri Podcast*, Mark.

MARK ADAMS: Well, thank you. Thank you for having me.

SEAN ROST: Now, Harry S. Truman is remembered in many ways in the state of Missouri as really Missouri's president. Yet, since the presidential library is located Independence, tell us a little bit about his connection not only to that community but also to the larger Kansas City area.

MARK ADAMS: Yeah. As people probably know, he wasn't actually born in Independence. He was born in Lamar, Missouri. But, as a very young child around the age of kindergarten, his family moved to Independence. And really outside of living in Washington D.C., he lived in Independence for the majority of his life. His mother wanted to move the family to Independence for the public school system there, and he went to elementary school and high school in Independence. He did spend some time in Grandview working on the farm after he graduated from high school. But then after World War I, he moved back to Independence, got married, and

lived there until he died in 1972, except for those years as a senator and then in the White House as president. So, the majority of his life was spent in Independence. And then Kansas City not being too far away, he did work in Kansas City both as a banker, and then after World War I as a haberdasher. So, Kansas City was certainly a close connection to him as well.

SEAN ROST: Now, in thinking of Independence, there have been discussions where presidential libraries are located. Recently with Barack Obama between Hawaii and Chicago. How did the Truman Library come to be located not just simply in Independence—you mentioned the kind of connection there of where he lived—but also in its location today?

MARK ADAMS: Yeah. It is interesting. Hawaii wasn't on the table for Harry Truman, but Grandview, Missouri certainly was. That's where his family farm was and his brother, John Vivian, really pushed for Grandview at some point in the mid-'50s. But, the city of Independence came forward and basically donated the land where the Library is built now. So, they did look at some plans for Grandview and then also Independence. And Independence kind of—it wasn't like a bidding process or anything like you might have today. But, Independence won out. I think that was always going to be Harry Truman's preference, even though his brother was pushing for Grandview itself. The Library itself opened in the summer of 1957, which if you think about it, he left the presidency in January of 1953, it was actually a pretty fast turnaround in the summer of '57 to have the Library open here in Independence.

SEAN ROST: At the time, it was being built close to downtown Independence, correct?

MARK ADAMS: That's right. Not too far away. About six blocks from downtown Independence. Yeah.

SEAN ROST: Since that establishment in 1957, certainly the facility has grown to be not just simply a library and museum, but it encompasses many different areas both on-site and online. Could you tell us a little bit about all that there is in the Truman Library & Museum?

MARK ADAMS: Absolutely. I mean, it is confusing because the word "library" is kind of misleading. We have a public library across the street from us, so some of our local residents get that confused. But, we do have a research room for our archives. That's the majority of our collection. We have an archival collection of about fifteen million documents. And then photograph collection and museum collection on top of that. In addition to the archives and the research room, we have two floors of museum exhibits. So, those are for general visitation for people to use and school groups and things like that. And then there's been a couple of different expansions in the '80s and in the 2000s where we've added the White House Decision Center in the early 2000s for education programs and classrooms. We have meeting spaces that different groups can rent out as well as the Decision Center which is available for high school students. In addition to that, since President Truman died in 1972, we have two grave sites here in our courtyard in the center of the building where we have Truman's grave site but also Bess Wallace Truman, his wife, was buried here in 1982. In 2008, we added a grave marker for their daughter Margaret Truman and her husband who were interned in 2008. So, we have kind of a family plot, so to speak, but also a presidential burial site in the center of our courtyard within the building.

So, quite a lot of different functions. Both library, museum, classroom spaces, meeting spaces, our Decision Center, which is a whole separate area in our basement, as well as the grave site.

SEAN ROST: People can access a lot of things online, too. Not just simply visiting, but also online. Right?

MARK ADAMS: Right. So, since the mid-'90s, or 1998 to be specific, we started our website in June of 1998, trumanlibrary.org, in cooperation with the University of Missouri-Columbia. They host our website and have done for about twenty years. On that site over the years, we've digitized many of our collections. So, we have about 50,000 documents online. About 50,000 photographs as well. All available. All in public domain for researchers, for the public, for students to use. Along with lesson plans and exhibits and all of the information about the various functions of the library. Special events and programs and those kind of things. The highest part of our online visitation is those digital documents that have been scanned from our online collections. So, those are available globally for people to use to look at those documents on various Truman decisions as president, but also some information about his early life, his time as a soldier in World War I, and his family life. So, most of the information about his presidency, but there is also information about his other areas of his life and times available online as well. They're all searchable. They're all in databases and respond to keyword searches and things like that. Particularly, I really enjoy our photograph collection that's online. There's about 50,000 photos that people can scour through and you never know what you're going to come across in those photos. A variety of topics related to Truman.

SEAN ROST: I recently used a lot of the oral histories that are online, and making them keyword searchable is fantastic for finding key people and key subjects and things like that to kind of look through, especially students when they're doing projects on his life and his career.

MARK ADAMS: Right. All of our oral histories are online. With the documents, we have a long way to go because we've got 50,000 documents online but we have sixteen million in our collection. But, the oral histories, all of them are online in their entirety. They are keyword searchable, and they even have indexes within them. So, if there's somebody who's got a particularly long oral history but you're interested in one particular aspect of their involvement in the Truman administration, you can look at the index for those particular interviews and then find the particular page that you need that might reference your research question that you're trying to ask. So, that's a really helpful resource that we have. Sean, those have been online for quite some time and are very heavily used by researchers and students for sure.

SEAN ROST: Now, as the Education Specialist at the Truman Library, what are some of your main responsibilities?

MARK ADAMS: So, kind of the overview of that is, of course, I oversee all of our K-12 education programs. That breaks down into a number of different program areas. I mentioned our White House Decision Center that we have for middle school and high school and also adults, actually. So, that's a program that we have, essentially, in our basement which was renovated around 2000 [and] 2001 where we have a replica of the West Wing of the White House. Students come in for four to five hours to do a simulation of Truman decision making activity that they

do. We have a program specifically for third graders in the Independence School District. So, every third grader in Independence—which is about 1,200 students—comes through the museum in a three hour program that we do with them. In February to April is usually when they come in. And then, of course, we do our regular school tours. We do, actually, a lot of teacher development, professional development for teachers. So, we have a number of classes every summer, mostly, but also workshops throughout the year. We do classes for teachers. We have a week-long class that we've done for about fifteen years for teachers in the summer on various themes. And then, as you're talking to me from the State Historical Society in Columbia, we are the regional host for National History Day, and I know the State Historical Society runs the state program. We've been the regional host for National History Day since 1998, so we've been doing that for a long time and have a very strong History Day program. You mentioned the online feature [of] the library, trumanlibrary.org, we also have a number of lesson plans online. We have more than 400 lesson plans online created by teachers. That's part of our education program, but, of course, it's also part of our website development. So, we have a variety of programs both on-site. Outreach programs in the classroom. We have a footlocker that we loan out to teachers—a Truman footlocker that talks about his whole life and times that we loan on two week loans. We also have lots of curriculum devoted to or related to various exhibits that we have. We have curriculum related to all of those that go out to teachers and students as well. And that's just with two full-time educators.

SEAN ROST: You mentioned National History Day. So, the library has been the regional host you said for several years now. When do you usually host those events on-site?

MARK ADAMS: So, our competition is in the first Saturday in March. This year it will be March 2nd. So, we'll be sending the first and second and third place entries from History Day in the Kansas City region to the state finals there at MU in April. So, we host the first weekend of March is when we have our competition. Last year we had 500 students, so we have a very large program here in the Kansas City area for History Day.

SEAN ROST: That is quite substantial. You also do work with the national competition as well, don't you?

MARK ADAMS: The last couple of years I've been very fortunate to go with Maggie Mayhan, our state coordinator there at the State Historical Society. I've been able to go the last couple of years. That's been an incredible experience because we've had quite a bit of success with the Kansas City students in the last number of years. So, that's been a great feather in our cap for having such success with students in this area.

SEAN ROST: Before we return to our conversation, let's take a step back in time with Bob Priddy to an event from this week in history in a "Missouri Minute."

BOB PRIDDY: I'm Bob Priddy with this "Missouri Minute" about Governor Thomas Reynolds who one day after breakfast left a note to a close friend, William Minor. Reynolds was one of the most popular men in the state, but he felt he'd been slandered and abused by his enemies. Those things, and bad health, are considered the reasons that a governor of Missouri shot himself to death on February 9, 1844. Thomas Reynolds, born in Kentucky, went to Illinois, became the

Clerk of the Illinois House of Representatives, Attorney General, Speaker of the House, Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court. Then, he came to Missouri as a lawyer, Methodist, slave owner, newspaper editor in Fayette. He believed in state rights, an improved education system, internal improvements, a low public debt, a strong currency, and a secret ballot. His biggest issue was imprisonment for debt. He signed the act ending that practice in Missouri, and later that same year issued the first public proclamation for a Day of Thanksgiving. But despite all those successes, Thomas Reynolds killed himself. I'm Bob Priddy for the Center for Missouri Studies.

SEAN ROST: Now thinking about back to the museum, what are some of the current exhibitions—both on-site and online—we've mentioned a few of them with some of the oral histories and other learning resources—that are on display currently that people can access through the Truman Library?

MARK ADAMS: Right. So, let me talk about what we have physically in the building first, then I'll get to online after that. Physically in the building we've got two main permanent exhibits. One is the Life & Times of Harry Truman. So, that looks at his early life and his later life, but, really, that exhibit deals everything other than the presidency. So, his time as a child, his school years, his relationship with Bess Wallace Truman and their daughter Margaret, and then his time in World War I, and then his time as a haberdasher and the various jobs that he had, his time on the farm, and then as a senator and eventually vice president. It touches a little on becoming president, but then we leave that for a separate exhibit upstairs and we have a whole exhibit that deals just with his presidency. The theme really of that Presidential Years exhibit is really looking at the decisions Truman made in those seven-and-a-half from 1945 to 1953 that he was president. And so, those are the two permanent exhibits that we have in our museum right now. We do have a special exhibit that we've held over from last year—and I'll explain why about that in a second—but that special exhibit right now is on the World War I years that Truman spent as a soldier in World War I in 1917 and 1918. And the reason that's been held over is—and I know you're going to be asking me about this—but we are facing a museum renovation here soon where we are going to be renovating the museum. So, we've kept that open for a few more weeks. It was due to close the end of December. We've kept that open as we start our renovation plans. We've got as much of our exhibit open as long as we can before we start our museum renovation. In terms of online exhibits, we actually have many of our previous temporary exhibits. We have digital versions of those online. There's about ten to fifteen of those special features online. So, exhibits that were in place physically we have digital versions of those available on our exhibits on our website. And they're a very wide variety of exhibits whether it's civil rights or recognition of Israel. A lot of them focus on anniversaries or particular decisions that Truman made. There's one on George Marshall. There's one on civil rights. There's one on Israel. There's many more. One about Truman's family called Tracing the Trumans that looks kind of more into Truman's genealogy and family history. So, those are all available on our website, trumanlibrary.org, on our exhibits page.

SEAN ROST: Okay. You mentioned the renovations there so tell us and walk us through a little bit about what's coming up in the future for the library and museum.

MARK ADAMS: Yeah. So, the plans right now are for us to close in mid-May. Truman's birthday is May 8th, so we're going to open through that period. In mid-May, our goal is to close the library for about a year [or] about eleven months to renovate the entire museum, both floors. The idea is to actually have the whole Truman life story from birth to death all on one level. As I mentioned previously, right now we have his early life and time outside of the presidency downstairs, and then his presidency itself upstairs. The goal of the new exhibit is to tell that entire story on one level in a more or less chronological fashion. The museum has not been renovated since 2001, so it is time to update the technology and update the exhibits that we have. It's a very exciting project. We're working with a number of different companies in terms of exhibit fabrication and design and multimedia upgrades and things like that. As you can imagine, the digital media explosion in the last decade makes some of our existing exhibits look a little out of date. So, updating all of the technology and media will be important. As well as reinterpreting the Truman story and making Truman a lot more relevant to our younger visitors. That's a big part of the renovation plans as they speak. We are in the middle of a fundraising campaign to raise money for this, but we're in really good shape for that at the moment but we're still continuing to raise money in the local community to do this renovation. The plans right now are to close in May of this year and then re-open in April 2020 is the plan with brand new museum exhibits that will showcase more of our museum artifact collection and more of our Truman archive collection so the visitors can see those. And then, expand our changing galleries downstairs so we'll have flexibility to do two different changing galleries downstairs. We always have a temporary exhibit. Right now, we just have one changing gallery. So, when that exhibit comes down, that gallery remains empty. Now, we'll have the flexibility to have two of those galleries, and one will always be populated. So, giving us a little bit more flexibility for temporary exhibits and for programming in those spaces. The other main thing about that renovation is we are completely reorienting the building. So, we're actually going to be closing our main entrance and building out on our east side some additional square footage and making that the new entrance to the museum. That's going to be hard to describe over a podcast, but when you come out here in April of 2020 the traffic flow will be different. The parking lot that people park in is actually closer to where our new exhibit entrance will be. Our gift shop will also shift on to that side as well. So, there's some interesting changes in terms of the orientation of the building and making the traffic flow within the museum, the walking flow of the exhibits, a little more logical and go from beginning to end in terms of the Truman life story once you're inside the building.

SEAN ROST: But, you all will be open again for Truman's birthday in 2020, right?

MARK ADAMS: The plan is to be open for both—[laughs]—that's the plan, right. You're always dealing with weather and construction and fundraising and all of those things. But the plan right now is to stay open through his birthday in [2019] and then be re-opened by his birthday in 2020. Yeah. We don't want to miss a birthday party, so we're trying to stay open for that if we can. April 2020 is also the 75th anniversary of when Truman became president on April 12, 1945. So, we're hoping that we can commemorate that anniversary when we re-open in 2020. So, there's a reason for that April date that we're looking at.

SEAN ROST: Well, since this will air in the run-up to Presidents' Day, is there any interesting facts about Harry Truman that you want to share with the listeners that they might not know about him?

MARK ADAMS: For Presidents' Day. Well, I'm sure we've got some very knowledgeable listeners, but there's always trivia around Truman. A couple of things that come to mind. One is that President Truman was the last president not to go to college. He did not have a college degree. [People] always kind of find that fascinating. The other is more kind of trivia. There is always a debate about Truman's middle name. It's probably one of the most frequently asked questions we get by our email and phone from researchers about the "S" and whether there should be a period after the "S" and all of those things. Our answer to that most often is that the "S" probably stood for two names—two different grandfathers—Shipp and Solomon. Solomon Young and Shipp Truman. So, one side of the family thought that the "S" stood for Shipp, and the other side of the family—his two grandfathers—stood for Solomon. So, they were kind of playing nice to both sides of the family, but really didn't choose one or the other. And the interesting thing is that the Harry S. Truman Library that I'm speaking to you from, we include the period after the "S". Our neighbors down the street at the National Park Service at the Truman Home they don't include the period after the "S". So, that debate rages on about whether there should be a period after the "S" or not. So, the Truman Library does, and the Truman Home does not. We kind of tease each other down Delaware Street here. We're about four blocks from each other. So, that's kind of an interesting one that people will debate for a long time about whether there should be a period after his name. But, just to let people know that there's two names—Solomon Young and Shipp Truman—is what the "S" really stands for. They just didn't want to upset one side of the family over the other, I guess.

SEAN ROST: Okay. Well, that's interesting. I didn't know that. That's interesting. I didn't know about the period debate either. I had always considered there to be a period after the "S" so that's fascinating as well.

MARK ADAMS: Yeah. Sometimes we'll get an irate email of, "How dare you put that period on the website name," or something like that. We have a little explanation that we offer for people just to let them know which side of the fence we are on that debate, which is kind of a fun one.

SEAN ROST: Alright. Well, thanks for joining us on the podcast today.

MARK ADAMS: Well, thank you for the invitation. I really appreciate it.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh. If you are interested in more of the people, places, culture, and history around our Missouri, check out the following upcoming events:

On February 19th, join Debra Foster Greene, professor emerita of history from Lincoln University, at Memorial Student Union's Stotler Lounge on the University of Missouri's campus for a presentation entitled, "To Educate and Elevate: The African American Press in Missouri." This fascinating presentation highlighting several prominent African American newspaper editors and publishers from the Show-Me State is part of the African American Experience in

Missouri Lecture Series and is sponsored by the Missouri Humanities Council, the University of Missouri's Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, and the State Historical Society of Missouri.

If you're in the mood for a little bluegrass music to kick off your summer, Rolla is the place to be on May 19th for Ozark Pickin' Time. This afternoon of music and memories will be held at the Cedar Street Palyhouse in Rolla and features Jimmie Allison and Midnight Flight, Jerry Rosa and the Rosa String Works Band, and Marideth Sisco and Accomplices. This event is free and open to the public, though registration is appreciated. While you're there, be sure to check in with staff from the State Historical Society of Missouri to learn how the Historical Society is preserving the state's rich musical history.

With the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center slated to be closed from spring to midsummer 2019 for the move to the newly constructed Center for Missouri Studies, you only have a few weeks left to view three featured art exhibits. In the corridor gallery, the exhibit "Work Artwork" consists of art by staff members and volunteers from the Historical Society's six research centers across the state. In the Main Gallery, visitors will find two exhibits, "Benton's Perilous Visions" and "The Aesthetic of the Monumental Figure." To learn more about these, and other, exhibitions, please visit shsmo.org/art/exhibits/.

National History Day in Missouri is looking for educators, historians, writers, filmmakers, museum staff, and community members to join them at this year's state contest to judge student projects. The state contest will be held on April 27, 2019 at the University of Missouri-Columbia. To thank you for your essential participation in National History Day in Missouri 2019, the State Historical Society of Missouri will provide a light breakfast and lunch, plus a travel stipend of up to \$50 for judges whose round trip mileage exceeds 75 miles. National History Day in Missouri is a unique opportunity for middle and high school age students to explore the past in a creative, hands-on way by producing a documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website on a topic of their choosing. To learn more about National History Day in Missouri, including judge orientation and how to start a program at your own school, please visit shsmo.org/nhdmo/.

On March 2, join Joan Stack, Curator of Art Collections for the State Historical Society of Missouri, at the Arrow Rock State Historic Site Visitors Center for "United We Stand" a public presentation on how George Caleb Bingham's Election Series paintings showcased his views of America's constitutional democracy in the mid-19th Century.

The sixty-first annual Missouri Conference on History, hosted by the University of Missouri-Kansas City and Park University and sponsored by the State Historical Society of Missouri, will be held March 6–8, 2019, at the Holiday Inn Country Club Plaza in Kansas City. For more information about the Missouri Conference on History, please visit shsmo.org/mch.

If you are interested in learning more about Missouri's upcoming bicentennial in 2021, there will be two opportunities in March to hear from bicentennial coordinator Michael Sweeney. On March 12th, Michael will be at the Friends Room of the Columbia Public Library. On March 16th, Michael will be joined by senior archivist Claire Marks at the Jefferson County Library's

Northwest Branch in High Ridge. To register and learn more about these events, please visit the State Historical Society of Missouri's website at shsmo.org/events.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.