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How Old Was “Old Uncle Davie” Truman of Fayette County, Pennsylvania?

By Tony Burroughs

Oral histories' informants reporting a person's age as more than one hundred years probably did not witness the centenarian's birth. Records created closest to the alleged birth year portray a more accurate age at death.

David Truman was a freeborn son of a formerly enslaved father, David Truman, and an unknown mother. Son David was likely born in Washington Township of Fayette County, Pennsylvania. The Trumans lived along a bend on both sides of the Monongahela River from probably 1773 until after 1920. Other than brief periods in Allegheny and Washington counties, Pennsylvania, the Trumans lived primarily on the east side of the river in Jefferson Township, Fayette County.¹ David's ancestors probably migrated in 1773 from Prince George's County, Maryland, with their owner, Margaret Hutton. Hutton's 1795 will freed David's father in 1806.²

David died in 1903, reportedly at age 107.³ However no birth records survive to prove it. References to his age come from censuses, newspapers, an obituary, and oral histories. Records created closest to David's alleged birth year provide clues to his age at death.

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1. David's birth likely occurred in what became Washington Township, created in December 1783. As the population grew, Jefferson Township was created from part of Washington Township in June 1840. JoAnne Hottenstein and Sibyl Welch, *Incorporation Dates for Pennsylvania Municipalities* (n.p.: Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, 1965), 62.

2. Tony Burroughs, "The African American Truman Family of Fayette County," *Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine* 46 (Fall/Winter 2010): 311–26.

3. "Died at age of 107, David Truman of Jefferson Township Is No More," *Daily News Standard* (Uniontown, Pa.), 30 March 1903, p. 3, col. 2.

ORAL HISTORIES

The author's 2010 genealogical narrative identifies David's older brother, Samuel.⁴ In interviews in the late 1970s three of Samuel's great-grandchildren—Jim Truman, Harriett (Bell) Arnett, and Oliver "Ollie" Truman—told stories about David. All referred to him by his nickname, "Old Uncle Davie." All agree that he was advanced in age and that he walked everywhere. Their oral accounts show David's death age ranges from 107 to 114.

Jim Truman

Jim, only four when David died, was the son of Luella Truman.⁵ Luella Truman was David Henry and Annie V. Truman's daughter.⁶ David Henry was Samuel Truman and Mary Goe's son.⁷ Some of Jim's memories may be hearsay.

Question: Do [you] remember when you came to the Dixon farm?

Jim Truman: Well, the way I remembered, when we first went there, he [Uncle Davie] was there soon after, or at the same time.

Question: Right?

Jim Truman: Yeah, he was there. And duh—because he always said—he told people that he didn't care, he liked—he'd be satisfied to go pass away if—when I was able to take care of myself.

Question: Oh, yeah?

Jim Truman: Yeah. (laughter) I don't know why, but that's what he wanted to do. He wanted to live in the—he was—when I first knew about it, they said he was 109 years old then.

4. Burroughs, "The African American Truman Family of Fayette County," 323–24.

5. For relationship, James "Jim" Truman, 7120 Van Drive, Pittsburgh, Pa., interview by author, 17 April 1977; audio cassette tape and transcript privately held by author. For age, "WWI Draft Registrations Cards," digital image, *fold3* (<https://fold3.com/image/571708889>), card for James Henry Truman, serial no. 2484, Local Draft Board 3, Brownsville, Fayette Co., Pa.; from microfilm publication M1509, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington D.C., roll PA99. James of Newell, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, registered 12 September 1918. Clerical error says James was eighteen years old, born 19 October "1918." "Draft Registration Cards for Pennsylvania, 10/16/1940–03/31/1947," digital image, *fold3* (<https://fold3.com/image/544171602>), card for James Henry Truman, serial no. 912, Local Draft Board 5, Pittsburgh, Allegheny Co., Pa.; from Record Group (RG) 147: Records of the Selective Service System, 1926–1975: Box 2556; National Archives—St. Louis, St. Louis, Mo. James, born 19 October 1899. He was forty-two.

6. 1900 U.S. census, Allegheny Co., Pa., population schedule, Jefferson Twp., precinct 3, enumeration district (ED) 408, p. 228 (stamped), dwelling 63, family 66, David H. Truman household; NARA microfilm T623, roll 1368. Luella was born in February 1880.

7. Pa. Department of Health, death certificate, file no. 26706 (stamped), registered no. 453, David Truman (1916); Bureau of Vital Statistics, Division of Vital Records, Pittsburgh.

Question: He was 109. When you knew—when you first—

Jim Truman: When I first knew him, at the Dixon farm. And people was—he'd walk all—even then—he walked a lot. And people would pass him by with the wagon or buggy, they'd pick him up and take him everywhere he was going, or bring it home, something like that. But he'd walk.

Question: Where would he be going when he was walking?

Jim Truman: Well, just walking, more or less. Maybe he'd be going through some of the neighbor farmers that he knew, something like that, just to visit. Naturally didn't work. But he'd get out and walk.⁸

Harriett (Bell) Arnett

Harriett, born a year after David died, was the daughter of Hannah C. and George C. Bell.⁹ Hannah Cope Truman married George Clark Bell in 1901.¹⁰ Harriett's mother, Hannah, was the daughter of David H. and Annie V. (Smothers) Truman.¹¹ Hannah and Luella were sisters and granddaughters of Samuel Truman. It is unclear who told Harriett about David.

Uncle Davie was between 107 and 114 when he died. There was a picture of Jim Truman and Uncle Davie that Roxie had. I saw it at Roxie's. Uncle Davie was buried in Perryopolis or Newell [both in Fayette County]. He lived in the country, not in the city until his later years.

8. James "Jim" Truman, interview, 17 April 1977. John Dixon's farm was just east of Newell, Jefferson Township, Fayette County, Pennsylvania.

9. 1910 U.S. census, Allegheny Co., Pa., pop. sch., Elizabeth borough, ED 66, p. 21, dwell. 394, fam. 408, George C. Bell household; NARA microfilm T624, roll 1294. "Hattie" M. Bell was six years old. 1920 U.S. census, Allegheny Co., Pa., pop. sch., Elizabeth, ED 98, p. 13v, dwell. 254, fam. 285, George C. Bell household; NARA microfilm T625, roll 1512. Harriet was fifteen years old. "Ohio, Death Records, 1908–1932, 1938–2007," *Ancestry* (<https://ancestry.com/search/collections/ohdeath93-98>), Ohio death index, Harriett Mae Bell Arnett, born 28 January 1904, Pa., died 17 June 1989, Cleveland, Cuyahoga Co., Ohio. "Ohio, Cleveland Cemetery Interment Records, 1824–2001," *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1884183>) > Browse through 10,585 images > Digital Folder 004466662 > image 136, Cleveland, Ohio, Highland Park Cemetery, Register of Interments, vol. 10:132, interment no. 112807, Harriett Mae Arnett, died 17 June 1989, buried 21 June 1989. Harriett was buried in section 22, lot 1420, plot 2. She was eighty-five years old. "U.S., Social Security Death Index, 1935–2014," *Ancestry* (<https://ancestry.com/search/collection/ssdi>), entry for Harriett M. Arnett, 1989, SS no. 269-54-2847. Harriet was born 28 January 1904, died 17 June 1989 in Cleveland.

10. "Ohio, County Marriage Records, 1774–1993," *Ancestry* (<https://ancestry.com/search/collections/fsmarriageohio>) > Mahoning > 1901-1903 > image 27, Mahoning Co., Ohio, Marriage record, p. 53, Bell-Truman, 7 March 1901.

11. 1900 U.S. census, Allegheny Co., Pa., pop. sch., Jefferson Twp., precinct 3, ED 408, p. 228 (stamped), dwell. 63, fam. 66, David H. Truman household. "Ohio, County Marriage Records, 1774–1993," *Ancestry*, Marriage record, p. 53, Bell-Truman, 7 March 1901. Hannah Cope Truman's mother was Anna Smothers. Hannah lived in Redstone, Pennsylvania.

Uncle Davie was ninety years old walking from Brownsville [Fayette County] to Perryopolis to see his girlfriend. He never married. Uncle Davie always walked a lot. I don't think Uncle Davie was a slave because he lived too far from the South. Jim Truman knows when Uncle Davie died. It was about 1910.¹²

Oliver "Ollie" Truman

Oliver Truman was born three months after David died.¹³ Oliver was William and Anna Truman's son.¹⁴ William was the son of David Henry and Annie V. (Smothers) Truman.¹⁵ He was Hannah's and Luella's brother. They were Samuel Truman's grandchildren.

12. Harriett (Bell) Arnett, 3767 East 149th Street, Cleveland, Ohio, interview by author, 30 July 1976; notes privately held by author. Jim Truman and Uncle Davie's photo has not been located. Jim, born in 1899, was four or under when the photo was taken. Roxie Bell (Terrell) Phillips was the granddaughter of Uncle Davie's nephew, David Henry Truman. Harriett did not know sixty-four enslaved people lived in Pennsylvania in 1840. "1840 Census: Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States," *United States Census Bureau* (<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1841/dec/1840c.html>) > Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States > Pennsylvania, [and five more states]. Furthermore, Harriet did not know that Uncle Davie's father was enslaved, or that he was the first of the Truman family to be freed. Burroughs, "The African American Truman Family of Fayette County," 311–26, particularly 318. Harriett said Uncle Davie never married, which is incorrect. See, "A Venerable Colored Man, A Witness at Court, Who Claims to be 102 Years Old," undated clipping, probably 1898, from an unidentified newspaper. This newspaper article was obtained from Marlene Bransom, who obtained it from a clipping file in the Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Public Library. The original has not been located. Perryopolis's cemetery, called Mount Washington, has several Truman burials, but none for David. He might be buried in the Quaker cemetery close to Newell in an unmarked grave, consistent with early Quaker burial practices. Quaker records at Friends Historical Library in Swathmore, Pennsylvania, were searched, but contain no cemetery records with Fayette County names. David is not buried in Green Lane Cemetery, a predominantly African American cemetery in Brownsville, nor in Little Redstone Presbyterian Church Cemetery where his mother worked. Brownsville, Perryopolis, and Newell are in Jefferson Township, Fayette County. The distance between Brownsville and Perryopolis is about eleven miles.

13. "Draft Registration Cards for Pennsylvania, 10/16/1940–03/31/1947," digital image, *fold3* (<https://fold3.com/image/544171627>), card for Oliver Perry Truman, serial no. 1387, Local Draft Board 3, Ferrell, Mercer Co., Pa. Oliver, born 11 June 1903 in Charleroi, Pennsylvania, resided at 320 Adams in Farrell. He was thirty-eight. "Pennsylvania, Veterans Burial Cards, 1777–2012," *Ancestry* (<https://ancestry.com/search/collections/veterburialc>) > Series 4 (Cards and Lists from Revolutionary War to 2012) > Carton 05 > image 1444, Mercer Co., Pa. Veterans burial cards, Mercer County, Veterans Affairs, Veterans Graves Registration Master List, p. 704, Oliver P. Truman, born 11 June 1903, died 16 October 1981, buried in St. Elizabeth Cemetery. *Find A Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com>), memorial 97010716, digital image, 13 September 2012, by Andrea Grega, gravestone for Oliver P. Truman (Saint Elizabeth Cemetery, Mercer Co., Pa.). Oliver was born 11 June 1903; died 16 October 1981.

14. 1920 U.S. census, Mercer Co., Pa., pop. sch., Sharon, ward 4, ED 86, p. 35v, dwell. 707, fam. 736, William Truman household; NARA microfilm T625, roll 1602. Oliver was sixteen.

15. 1900 U.S. census, Allegheny Co., Pa., pop. sch., Jefferson Twp., precinct 3, ED 408, p. 228 (stamped), dwell. 63, fam. 66, David H. Truman household.

Ollie’s memories were probably from newspapers and family stories. Ollie said he “remembers” Uncle Davie living until about 107. Ollie thought Uncle Davie was Grandfather Truman’s [David Henry Truman’s] cousin. Ollie thought Uncle Davie was a slave. He said Davie walked everywhere he went.¹⁶

OBITUARY

David Truman’s obituary relates,

David Truman, the oldest man in Pennsylvania, died Friday, March 27, 1903, at the home of his nephew, David [Henry] Truman, Jr., near Elizabeth in Allegheny county. Mr. Truman was said to be 107 years of age and although the exact date of his birth was not known the proofs of his age were substantial. The late William G. Patterson, father of Ex-Commissioner S. S. Patterson, used to say that Truman was a grown man when he was a small boy and if Patterson were living now he would be about 90 years old.

Truman was born in Jefferson township and spent nearly all his life in Fayette county, moving a few years ago with his nephew to Allegheny county. In his later years he was in good health and his vigor was remarkable for a centenarian. He owned a little piece near the old Quaker meeting house in Jefferson township and was a faithful member of the M.E. church. Funeral Monday, March 30th.¹⁷

In 1900 nephew David H[enry] Truman, born in May 1853, headed a household in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, that included his wife, Annie V., born in January 1855, and five children. David Truman, who died in Allegheny County in 1903, was not present in David Henry’s 1900 household.¹⁸

The obituary does not indicate where David was buried, nor the name of the funeral home, the church, or the minister who handled the burial. It reiterates that he was 107 years old when he died—the same age Harriett and Ollie recalled. Their memories were surely based on David’s obituary.

16. Oliver “Ollie” Truman, Phillips-Truman family reunion, in Ferrell City Park, Farrell, Pa., interview by author, 29 June 1976; notes privately held by author. Uncle Davie was David Henry Truman’s (1852–1916) uncle.

17. “Died at age of 107, David Truman of Jefferson Township Is No More,” *Daily News Standard*. Uniontown is the county seat of Fayette County. David Truman was listed in the Uniontown Public Library obituary card index.

18. 1900 U.S. census, Allegheny Co., Pa., pop. sch., Jefferson Twp., precinct 3, ED 408, p. 228 (stamped), dwell. 63, fam. 66, David H. Truman household.

Searches in the sexton records and grave markers of Elizabeth Cemetery in Elizabeth and Round Hill Cemetery in Elizabeth Township, both in Allegheny County, did not find David.¹⁹ He belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.²⁰ The *Christian Recorder*, AME's newspaper, was published from 1852 to 1960. However copies do not survive for 1903, the year of David's death.²¹

DEATH CERTIFICATES AND DEATH REGISTERS

Pennsylvania's statewide death certificates began in 1906.²² Earlier Pennsylvania deaths were recorded sporadically by counties. Allegheny County death registers exist for years 1893 to 1905; county deaths were also recorded from 1852–1855. David was not located in the 1893–1905 death records.²³ *Ancestry* has Pennsylvania death certificates online beginning in 1906. Nothing exists there for David dying in 1903.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

David Truman's age and birthplace were mentioned in an 1898 article.

David Truman, an aged colored man from Jefferson Township, was attending court as a witness last week, and says he is 102 years old. He claims to have been born on the Capt. William Elliott Place in 1796. He was bound out to David Wells when five years old. When young he spent several years in Pittsburg, and says he remembers a murder

19. Sexton records for Elizabeth and Round Hill Cemeteries, Allegheny Co., viewed by author, 23 May 2007; notes in author's files. The sexton records are located at the cemeteries.

20. "107 Years have passed him by," *Pittsburgh Gazette* (Pittsburgh, Pa.), 5 January 1903, p. 2, col. 4. David attended the Allen Chapel AME Church in Elizabeth. Allen Chapel AME Church is "the oldest black church in Elizabeth, having dedicated its first building on . . . July 16, 1871. . . ." Eliza Smith Brown, *African American Historic Sites Survey of Allegheny County* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Diane Publishing, 1994), 195.

21. "History," *The Christian Recorder* (<https://www.thechristianrecorder.com/our-leadership/history/>); "*The Christian Recorder* is the oldest existing periodical published by African-Americans whose existence dated before the Civil War." Also, "About Christian recorder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. [microfilm reel] (Philadelphia, Pa.) 1852–1960," Library of Congress, *Chronicling America* (<https://www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn94090215>).

22. *A Compilation of Laws Relative to the Department of Health of Pennsylvania to Which Are Added Laws Relative to Boards of Health in Cities of the Third Class, Boroughs and Townships and Certain Sanitary Laws of General Application* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1907), 25.

23. A written request for a 1903 death record for David Truman was mailed to the Allegheny County Office of Register of Wills in Pittsburgh. A reply was received on 28 December 1995 from the Clerk of Orphan's Court that no record was found. The microfilm roll of the death register for Allegheny County was searched at the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh on 18 May 2009. Again, David Truman was not listed. Allegheny Co., Pa., Register of Wills and Clerk of the Orphan's Court, Register of Deaths, 1893–1905; microfilm 47.286, Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh, Pa.

having been committed there, a man having killed a beautiful young girl because she refused to marry him. He cut her throat from ear to ear, was convicted and hanged on Grant's hill in the presence of about 1000 people. He was 17 years old then and can not recall the names of the parties except that the girl's first name was Dora.

Mr. Truman has lived for the last 40 years in the Pleasant Valley community, near Charles Ford's. He says he was five years old when the first Little Redstone Presbyterian church was built, and his mother had charge of the building. This church was organized in 1797 and the building erected a few years afterwards. Mr. Truman says the records as to his birth, etc., were lost by the man in whose care they were placed. His wife and three children are all dead and he is left alone, living with his nephew, David [Henry] Truman. He was stopping in town with John Smothers, whose grandmother, Lydia Simpson, was Mr. Truman's sister. He once wagoned [*sic*] on the old pike for a Washington countryman. He has been a member of the Methodist church for 70 years.²⁴

A 1903 article says David was born in 1795.

David Truman of Elizabeth is perhaps the oldest resident of Allegheny county. He was born on the farm of James Elliott, near Redstone, Fayette county, in 1795, his father having been a slave for many years; but David was born free. He has been a farmer since his youth, and has been a member of the African Methodist Episcopal church since its inception. He now resides with his nephew D. H. Truman, on a farm near Elizabeth.²⁵

Reverend P. M. McGowan died on 7 June 1889 at eighty-five years. His obituary called one of his servants "Mr. Truman."

Rev. McGowan, after a long illness, died at his residence on Third Street on Friday last, in his 86th year. The funeral took place from the M. E. church on Monday, the services conducted by the Rev. J. B. Taylor, and the remains were taken to Brownsville for interment. Mr. Truman, an old colored gentleman, aged 82 years, and who was for many years a servant in Rev. McGowan's family, walked all the way from his home in Dawson, Pa., to this place, a distance of fifteen miles, to attend the funeral.²⁶

24. "A Venerable Colored Man, A Witness at Court, Who Claims to be 102 Years Old," clipping file, Uniontown Public Library. The article says Truman was "born on the Capt. William Elliott Place in 1/96." Truman was reported to be 102 years old, which means he testified in 1898. The murder story and subsequent hanging could not be verified.

25. "107 Years have passed him by," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, 5 January 1903.

26. "California," *Washington Daily Reporter* (Washington, Pa.), 18 June 1889, p. 1, col. 6.

CENSUS RECORDS

From 1840 to 1880 censuses name David Truman. He was probably one of the unnamed, living in his father's household in 1820 and 1830.

1820: Washington Township, Fayette County, Pennsylvania. The household of probable father, David Truman, included two free colored males under fourteen, one free colored male fourteen to twenty-six, two free colored males forty-five and older, and one free colored female fourteen to twenty-six.²⁷ David was probably one of two males born 1806–1820.

1830: Washington Township, Fayette County. The household of probable father, David Truman, included one free colored male ten and under twenty-four, one free colored male thirty-six and under fifty-five, two free colored females under ten, three free colored females ten and under twenty-four, and one free colored female thirty-six and under fifty-five.²⁸ David was probably the male born 1806–1820.

1840: Jefferson Township, Fayette County. David Truman's household included one free colored male under ten, one free colored male twenty-four to thirty-five, one free colored female under ten, one free colored female twenty-four to thirty-five, and one free colored female thirty-six to fifty-four.²⁹ David was the male born 1804–1816.

1850(a): Jefferson Township. The household included Samuel Truman, forty-five; Mary Truman, thirty; Mary E. Truman, thirteen; Rachel Truman, three; Samuel Truman, one; David Truman, forty; and George Truman, ten. All were born in Fayette County.³⁰ David was born about 1810.

1850(b): Buffalo Township, Washington County, Pennsylvania. The household included David Truman, forty, and Lucinda Truman, thirty. Both were Pennsylvania-born.³¹ David was born about 1810. Lucinda may have been David's wife.

27. 1820 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., pop. sch., Washington Twp., p. 116 (stamped), line 35, David Truman household; NARA microfilm M33, roll 103.

28. 1830 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., Washington Twp., p. 250 (stamped), line 23, David Truman household, NARA microfilm M19, roll 162.

29. 1840 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., Jefferson Twp., p. 281 (stamped), line 10, David Truman household, NARA microfilm M704, roll 281.

30. 1850 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa. pop. sch., Jefferson Twp., p. 276B (stamped), dwell./fam. 90, Samuel Truman household, NARA microfilm M432, roll 780. The visitation occurred on 24 July 1850.

31. *Ibid.*, Washington Co., Pa., pop. sch., Buffalo Twp., p. 440 (stamped), dwell. 72, fam. 73, David Truman household; NARA microfilm M432, roll 834. It appears David was enumerated twice. He and his wife divorced, she left, or she died. His son, George, was living with him after 1850. She is not listed in the 1850 mortality schedules. The visitation occurred on 14 September 1850.

1860: Perry Township, Fayette County. The household included Samuel Truman, a fifty-two-year-old laborer; Mary Truman, forty-seven; Samuel Truman, twelve; David Truman, six; David Truman, forty-nine; and George Truman, twenty-two. All were Pennsylvania-born.³² David was born about 1811.

1870(a): Jefferson Township. The household included David Freeman, sixty; Mary Freeman, fifty-four; Samuel Freeman, twenty-one; David Freeman, seventeen; David Holmes, thirty-six; Susan Holmes, twenty-six; Mary Holmes, eight; Rachel Holmes, three; and Mary Holmes, eighteen. All were Pennsylvania-born.³³ David Freeman was born about 1810.

1870(b): Perry Township. David was a fifty-five-year-old farm worker on J. W. Francis's farm. He was born in Pennsylvania.³⁴ David was born about 1815.

1880: Jefferson Township. The household included David Truman, sixty-seven, and Mary Truman, a sixty-seven-year-old sister-in-law. Both were born in Pennsylvania.³⁵ David was born about 1813.

Forty-year-old David Truman appears twice in 1850—once in Fayette County and again in Washington County. George Truman, ten years old, appears beneath David in the 1850 Fayette County census and was twenty-two, again below David in 1860. He is probably David's son. George Truman, a twenty-three-year-old, colored, married laborer from Jefferson Township, registered for the Civil War draft in June 1863.³⁶ He was likely the male under ten in David's 1840 household.

David was enumerated twice in Fayette County in 1870. His primary residence was probably in Jefferson Township, where he was listed David Freeman [Truman]. He may have been a temporary farm laborer in Perry Township.

32. 1860 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., pop. sch., Perry Twp., p. 646 (stamped), dwell. 170, fam. 161, Samuel Truman household, NARA microfilm M653, roll 1110. Perry Township was created on 7 June 1839 from Franklin, Tyrone, and Washington townships. Hottenstein and Welch, *Incorporation Dates for Pennsylvania Municipalities*, 62.

33. 1870 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., pop. sch., Jefferson Twp., pp. 223r-v, dwell./fam. 170, David Freeman household; NARA microfilm M593, roll 1342. David Truman was enumerated as "Freeman." This was probably an enumerator's error. Other Freeman family members—Mary, Samuel, and David—have similar calculated birth years in Samuel Truman's 1860 household.

34. *Ibid.*, Perry Twp., p. 34, dwell. 238, fam. 246, J. W. Francis household.

35. 1880 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., pop. sch., Jefferson Twp., ED 43, p. 261 (stamped), dwell. 24, fam. 25, David Truman household, NARA microfilm T9, roll 1130.

36. "U.S., Civil War Draft Registration Records, 1863-1865," *Ancestry* (<https://ancestry.com/search/collections/consolidatedlistofcivilwarreg>) > Pennsylvania > 21st > Vol 2 of 3 > image 189, Indiana, Westmoreland, and Fayette cos., Pa., Civil War Draft Registrations, folio 185r, entry 28, George Truman, June 1863.

David's 1870 Jefferson Township household included David Holmes and his presumed wife Susan. The author's 2010 genealogical narrative indicates Susan was David Truman's niece and daughter of David's sister Lydia.³⁷

In 1870 David's probable son, George Freeman [Truman], a thirty-eight-year-old, Pennsylvania-born laborer, headed a household in Jefferson Township four houses from David Freeman [Truman]. His household included twenty-six-year-old Hester, born in Maryland, and three-year-old George W., born in Pennsylvania.³⁸

George Truman had moved to Washington Township by 1880, when he was reportedly a forty-eight-year-old laborer born in Pennsylvania. His wife Esther, thirty-four, was born in Maryland. Pennsylvania-born children included W. George, thirteen; Jessie, five; and "Arther," two.³⁹

In 1880 Mary Truman, David's sixty-seven-year-old widowed sister-in-law, was likely the same forty-seven-year-old Mary Truman in Samuel's household in 1860. This confirms Samuel, fifty-two in 1860, was David's older brother. Samuel and David may have been the two boys under fourteen in their father's 1820 household. Samuel Truman, a Pennsylvania-born, sixty-seven-year-old married laborer, died of consumption in May 1870.⁴⁰

AGE DISCREPANCY STUDIES

Studies of elderly African Americans with varying ages reported in different records illustrate the inaccuracy of age listings. For example, Thomas Wilson is shown as a "63 year old Black laborer" in the 1850 Herkimer County, New York census. In 1860 he is seventy-seven. Wilson died five years later. His obituary in the *Little Falls Journal* says, "[Thomas] reached the ripe old age of 96 years and was universally known and respected. . . ."⁴¹ Between 1850 and 1865 he had aged thirty-three years.

37. Burroughs, "The African American Truman Family of Fayette County," 325–26.

38. 1870 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., pop. sch., Jefferson Twp., p. 223r, dwell./fam. 166, George Freeman household.

39. 1880 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., pop. sch., Washington Twp., ED 60, p. 572 (stamped), dwell. 176, fam. 200, George Truman household.

40. 1870 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Pa., mortality schedule, Jefferson Twp., p. 1, line 7, fam. 170, Samuel Truman; NARA microfilm M1838, roll 6.

41. "On the Subject of Determining Age," *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society* 5 (Summer 1984): 60–1.

In another example Sarah Pugsley is a “52 year old Black housewife” in 1850 Herkimer County. She is sixty-two in 1860. In 1870 she is eighty years old, having aged eighteen years. Sarah died six years later. A week after her death in 1876 the *Little Falls Journal* says, “Mrs. Sarah Pugsley, the old colored woman whose death was reported last week, is said to have been over 100 years old.”⁴²

A 1973 age-discrepancy study finds only 44.7 percent of African American males and 36.9 percent of African American females had the same birth year reported in death certificates as calculated from the 1860 census.⁴³

One demographic study compares the consistency of ages among elderly African Americans in death certificates with Social Security records. It finds only 63 percent of African Americans over the age of sixty-five have the same age reported in both the death certificate and their Social Security record. However, the differences were not great; 79 percent of the records differ by one year or less, and in 8.1 percent of cases they differ by more than four years. The study finds age reporting in Social Security records superior to that in death certificates.⁴⁴

Inaccurately reported ages are not limited to African Americans. Genealogist Stan Beck compares death ages in the Alpena County, Michigan, death book; death notices in a county newspaper; and grave markers in three local cemeteries. He finds few correlations and concludes that genealogists should not rely on only one source to prove genealogical events.

1. Courthouse and newspapers agree 50 percent of the time.
2. Courthouse and cemetery records agree 41 percent of the time.
3. Cemetery records and newspapers agree 32 percent of the time.
4. Records recorded in all three sources agree 25 percent of the time.⁴⁵

42. “On the Subject of Determining Age,” 60–61.

43. E. M. Kitagawa and P. M. Hauser, *Differential Mortality in the United States: A Study in Socioeconomic Epidemiology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 239.

44. Irma T. Elo et al., “Consistency of Age Reporting on Death Certificates and Social Security Records Among Elderly African Americans,” *Social Science Research* 25 (September 1996): 292–307.

45. Stan Beck, “Documenting Your Research,” *Family Trails* 6 (Winter 1979): 19–21. Beck’s study included 414 deaths recorded in Alpena Co., Mich., Death Book A (1871–9), Alpena County Courthouse, Alpena.

These studies show that records created closer to the time of the event, by a knowledgeable informant, are usually more accurate. Historically, Social Security applications were normally created when a person was young and applying for a job. The information was supplied by the applicant. Death certificates are created at the end of a person's life with information provided by the next of kin, an in-law, a friend, an associate, or a medical attendant. Family or nonfamily members may not know the deceased's age. Even Social Security data for older African Americans may be inconsistent. Demographers found lax procedures used to verify age for Social Security prior to 1965. The Social Security Administration did not verify proof of birth for people born near the turn of the twentieth century when many African Americans did not have birth certificates.⁴⁶

RECORD DISCREPANCIES

Resolving record conflicts requires consulting the most credible sources. The most reliable evidence usually comes from primary information chronicled in original records—information provided by a witness to the event and recorded close to when the event occurred. No primary information for David Truman's birth—from sources such as a baptismal record, a Bible record, a birth certificate, or a midwife's record—is available.

Correct ages in censuses hinge on reliable informants. Determining informant reliability in David's census records is impossible. Birth years in obituaries may be first- or secondhand information. Whether the informant witnessed the deceased's birth is usually unknown. David's obituary's author was not likely living when David was born. Similarly, sources for ages in late-twentieth-century oral histories were far removed from David's birth near the beginning of the nineteenth century. Newspaper articles often do not offer information from a reliable informant. Some sensationalize to sell papers.

46. Elo, "Consistency of Age Reporting on Death Certificates and Social Security Records Among Elderly African Americans," 301. The earlier years of the Social Security program would have had a much more varied roster of applicants, from the young working their first job to older workers on or past the cusp of receiving benefits.

Table 1 summarizes discrepancies in records pointing to David's birth year.

Table 1
Records for David Truman's Birth Year

RECORD	AGE	BIRTH YEAR
1820 census	0–14	1806–1820
1830 "	10–24	1806–1820
1840 "	24–36	1804–1816
1850(a) "	40	1810
1850(b) "	40	1810
1860 "	49	1811
1870(a) "	60	1810
1870(b) "	55	1815
1880 "	67	1813
1889 Rev. McGowan obituary	82	1807
1898 newspaper article	102	1796
1903 newspaper article	107	1796
1903 David Truman obituary	107	1796
1976 Harriett Bell interview	107–114	1789–1796
1976 Ollie Truman interview	107	1796
1977 Jim Truman interview	109	1794

Sources: See text. David was likely shown as a male in the home of his father David Truman, in 1820 and 1830. David may have been one of six black males in the 1810 census. No age ranges were reported for them.

CONCLUSION

The records closest to the time of David Truman's birth are censuses. Table 1 shows censuses provide a wide range of possible birth years from 1804 to 1820. Whereas David's inferred birth year is consistently 1810–11 when he headed a household or lived with family members from 1850 to 1870. Later records providing birth information move his birth year back in time.

Two 1850 censuses say David was born in 1810, the 1860 census suggests birth in 1811, and two 1870 censuses say he was born in 1810 and 1815. David's age given in his home in Jefferson Township in 1870 is likely more reliable than that given in Perry Township, an outlying township where David was working. Birth years inferred from the 1850–1870 censuses are within the age range reported in 1820 and 1830 censuses—when David probably lived with his father and the informant was likely a family member who knew David's age. The age range reported in 1840—when David headed the household—also agrees with later censuses.

Only after David was more than eighty years old was his age reported more than one hundred. If Truman died in 1903 and was likely born in 1810 or 1811, he was likely ninety-two or ninety-three years old when he died. This was still old enough to earn his moniker, “Old Uncle Davie.”

Borrowing the Baby

In the fall of 1878 Lorenzo Wood left his wife, Arloia, and children in Kalamazoo, Michigan. A year later, in December 1879, he reappeared in Kalamazoo, and evidently was welcomed home. “While she was getting him something to eat he took the child and ran through the rain to the depot and his wife after him. Some men on Burdick street saw the race and went for Wood, returning the mother her child.”¹

A happy ending ensued, sort of. Later on, Lorenzo persuaded her to let him take the child, promising to send for Arloia and the other children soon.² The local newspaper scoffed, but evidently he did. In 1880 the family was living in Marengo, McHenry County, Illinois, where he was employed a day laborer.³

Later records suggest that marital turmoil persisted. Lorenzo was called a widower in 1910, when his wife was still alive.⁴ Arloia was called a widow at her death in 1912, when her husband was still alive.⁵

Sources:

1. “Lorenzo Wood,” *Daily Gazette* (Kalamazoo, Mich.), 11 December 1879, p. 4, col. 2.
2. *Ibid.*
3. 1880 U.S. census, McHenry Co., Ill., pop. sch., Marengo, ED 142, p. 190A, dwell. 195, fam. 202, Lorenzo Wood household; NARA microfilm T9, roll 228.
4. 1910 U.S. census, Kalamazoo Co., Mich., pop. sch., Schoolcraft Twp., ED 164, p. 1A, dwell. 9, fam. 10, Robert Schreeve household for Lorenzo Wood, widowed; NARA microfilm T624, roll 655.
5. “Michigan, Death Records, 1867–1950,” *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60872/>) > certificates 1897–1920 > 169:Ingham–Grand Rapids 1912 > image 3211; Kalamazoo Co., Mich., death cert. 729, 20 November 1912, Arlone [Arloia] D. Wood. For Lorenzo's death, “Obituary: Lorenzo Wood,” *Kalamazoo Gazette* (Kalamazoo, Mich.), 22 June 1915, p. 12, col. 4.

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