

William Allen White has been an important and influential part of Kansas Journalism. Although he began as a small town newspaper publisher he went on to advise national leaders. His straight-forward and sometimes blunt writing style helped people discuss controversial issues concerning Kansas, the Republican party and the Nation, and made him the most quoted editorial writer in the nation.

William Allen White was born in Emporia Kansas on February 10, 1868. His father was a country merchant and doctor and his mother a teacher. He attended the College of Emporia and the University of Kansas, but never received a degree from either school. White has said it was pure luck that landed him in the journalism business. After college he sent out three letters asking for jobs, one to a grocer, one to a merchant and one to the El Dorado Newspaper editor T.P. Fulton. He is quoted as saying the grocer and merchant “knew my desultory ways and rejected me on suggestion, T.P. Fulton knew my father and gave me a chance.”

In El Dorado he learned about the newspaper business and later took a reporting job in Lawrence. In 1891, he got a position as an editorial writer for The Kansas City Star. On June 1, 1895 White borrowed \$3,000 dollars and purchased The Emporia Gazette where he worked for the rest of his life. White told his staffers that the best type of journalism was community journalism. He emphasized a focus on local news. He often told his staff to go out onto the streets of Emporia and just talk to people to get story ideas. His idea of a good front page was one that had at least a hundred names on it. He thought the more names you had on the page the better. Around the office he was called “The Boss” and he affectionately called his staff the “Gazette Family.” He had a private office, but he rarely used it. His other office was in between the editorial and business departments and he often urged his staff to cut through his office because he enjoyed being close to his employees.

While working in Kansas City at The Kansas City Star White met and fell in love with Sallie Lindsey. They were married on April 27, 1893. In 1901 the Whites purchased the home known as “Red Rocks” at 927 Exchange Street. The family lived in the house for 45 years and it remained in the family until 2001 when it was taken over by the Kansas Historical Society. In 1900 they had their first child William Lindsey White and in 1904 their second, Mary White.

White’s work first gained national attention when he wrote a sarcastic article arguing against Populism called “What’s the Matter With Kansas?” White wrote the article following an argument at the train station with a Populist about the McKinley/Bryan presidential campaign. White sided with the Republican McKinley. After the argument White was so mad he rushed back to the newsroom and wrote the editorial denouncing the Populist’s ideas. He didn’t print it, but then returned to the station to catch his train to Colorado. While White was gone the article somehow made its way to New York and Chicago where it was printed and then noticed by Republican National Chairman Mark Hanna. Hanna then used the article in Republican Campaign pamphlets. When White returned home from his vacation in Colorado he was famous. After McKinley won the election White became an adviser for national leaders, drafted republican national platforms, worked for the presidential campaign of Alf Landon and became chairman of the Republican Party’s resolution committee.

White was influential to politicians, because at the time politicians were interested in what people from the Midwest had to say and White was good at communicating what the people of the Midwest wanted. But, not only was White traveling with the nation’s leaders, they were also coming to visit him. White received telegrams and visits from Teddy Roosevelt and dined in his own home in Emporia with Herbert Hoover. White became so involved

in politics that he even ran for governor in 1924 because the Ku Klux Klan was backing the other two candidates. Although White lost the race he considered it successful because the Klan died out soon afterward.

In 1921, readers got to see a different style of William Allen White's writing. His daughter, Mary, died at the age of 16 after she fell from her horse when she was struck by a low hanging tree limb. Newspapers nationwide wrote about the death of his daughter. The Gazette ran a small announcement that day, but two days later they ran an editorial titled "Mary White" written by her father. White tried to capture the youth and spirit of his young daughter in the editorial about Emporia's most popular and well-loved little girl. The editorial is said to be one of White's most memorable works. Here is the last paragraph of the editorial: "A rift in the clouds in a gray day threw a shaft of sunlight upon her coffin as her nervous, energetic little body sank to its last sleep. But the soul of her, the glowing, gorgeous, fervent soul of her, surely was flaming in eager joy upon some other dawn." The White family later gave a 52-acre park called Peter Pan Park to the city of Emporia in her memory. White wrote in his editorial that Mary like Peter Pan just didn't want to grow up.

Just one year after the death of his daughter White gained national attention again with his editorial, "To an Anxious Friend." Once again, this editorial also stemmed from an argument, only this time the argument was with then Kansas Governor Henry Allen. They were arguing about labor rights and free speech when White was arrested. After the charges were dropped he wrote this editorial. This is the last paragraph: "So, dear friend, put fear out of your heart. This nation will survive, this state will prosper, the orderly business of life will go forward if only men can speak in whatever way given them to utter what their hearts hold - by voice, by posted card, by letter, or by press. Reason has never failed men. Only force and repression have made the wrecks in the world." In

1923, he won his first Pulitzer Prize for the editorial which appealed to the nation.

William Allen White not only influenced the nation, but also his own son. William Lindsey White followed in his father's footsteps and got his first job as a reporter for The Gazette at the age of 14. He attended Harvard and graduated in 1924. After his graduation Lindsey White became a war correspondent for 40 daily newspapers and CBS radio from Europe. In 1944, he took over as head Publisher of The Emporia Gazette after the death of his father. He remained publisher until he died in 1973.

William Allen White died on January 29, 1944 at the age of 76. His death was printed in newspapers all over the world. His Pulitzer Prize winning autobiography was finished and edited by his son and printed in 1946. After his death he was inducted into the National Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame. In 1944, the William Allen White School of Journalism was established and the William Allen White Foundation was founded.

Life Magazine said of White after his death: "He is the small-town boy who made good at home. To the small-town man who envies the glamour of the city, he is living assurance that small-town life may be preferable. To the city man who looks back with nostalgia on a small-town youth, he is the living symbol of small-town simplicity and kindness and common sense."

Along with The Emporia Gazette building, The Red Rock home, and Peter Pan Park many other monuments in Emporia are named after the White family. These parks, memorials and libraries can be found all over Emporia. They show just how much his writing influenced the people of Emporia, Kansas and the nation. These monuments are a symbol of how the town will forever be proud of the hometown journalist. William Allen White's legacy still continues in Emporia today. His great great grandson, Chris White

Walker, is the current publisher and editor of The Gazette. Walker says the staff still tries to uphold White's journalistic ideas of honesty and community.

In addition to the continuing tradition of The Gazette, White's memory is carried on in other ways as well. Medallions are rewarded every year to "An American Journalist who exemplifies William Allen White's ideals in service to his profession and his community;" through the William Allen White Children's book Award established by Emporia State University to encourage Kansas children to enjoy reading; and through the legacy of excellent journalism taught at the University of Kansas.