



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

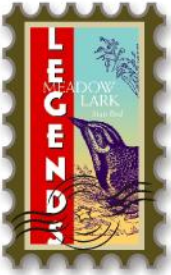
William Allen White (1868-1944)

Many people associate the name William Allen White with one of two awards: the William Allen White Medal, given to "An American Journalist Who Exemplifies William Allen White Ideals in Service to His Profession and His Community," or the William Allen White Children's Book Award, an annual award given to the author of a book selected as a favorite by young readers. But who is the man behind these awards? A journalist? An author? Both?



William Allen White was born in Emporia, Kan., and grew up in El Dorado, the son of a doctor and a teacher. White learned the printing and newspaper business in his teens. For college he first attended Emporia State University and then the University of Kansas but never received a degree. In 1885, he wrote three letters applying for jobs: one to a merchant, one to a grocer and the third to the El Dorado newspaper editor. The outcome changed the rest of White's life.

After working at the El Dorado paper, White became a reporter in Lawrence and an editorial writer for The Kansas City Star in 1892. The following year he married Miss Sallie Lindsay of Kansas City, and the couple would go on to have two children. In 1895, he returned to Emporia, where he used \$3,000 of borrowed money and bought The Emporia Gazette. He served as editor of the paper for the rest of his life, and the Gazette became the most well respected small-town paper in the nation under his leadership.



White engaged in a street corner debate in 1896 that led to the writing of his most famous editorial. White, taking the Republican stance, debated the McKinley-Bryan campaign with a Populist backer. Shortly after the engagement, White had to board a train for a vacation to Colorado. He penned "What's the Matter With Kansas?" and, although he never intended to publish it, returned from his vacation to find the editorial had spread across the nation and he was famous.

In 1923, White was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his editorial "To An Anxious Friend," which defended the right of free speech after White was arrested for defiance of an industrial court law. White was a big supporter of the Progressive party and helped fellow Kansan Alfred Landon in his presidential campaign. He also served as a confidant to a half-dozen U.S. presidents. Although he was very involved in politics throughout his life, he never served in office himself.



White passed away in 1944. Two years later, "The Autobiography of William Allen White" was published, earning White a second Pulitzer Prize posthumously. Today, White is the man for whom the School of Journalism is named at the University of Kansas and was inducted into the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame in 1977. He is remembered as "a living symbol of small-town simplicity and kindness and common sense," as written by Time magazine.

