

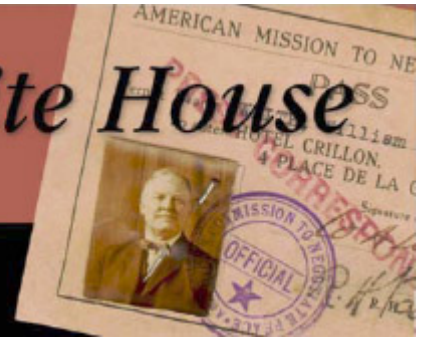


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Excerpts from "William Allen White's 1924 Gubernatorial Campaign"

by Jack Wayne Traylor

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In 1924, at the age of 56, William Allen White was a nationally known editor, author, and political observer. His early years, however, had provided no hint of certain future greatness. Born in Emporia, February 10, 1868, he grew up in nearby El Dorado, where his parents moved soon after his birth. His father, Dr. Allen White, was a restless man who moved from one business venture to another, often failing but always obtaining a comfortable living from stocks, bonds, and rental properties. William Allen, or Will as he was known during his youth and by boyhood friends the rest of his life, made satisfactory progress at the public schools, but never was an outstanding student. In the same way, his never completed studies at the College of Emporia and the University of Kansas marked him as an average student but a promising journalist, judging from his work on the university newspaper.

White had an intense interest in politics, but he lacked the hard-driving, manipulative nature that is characteristic of some politicians. He started many brisk controversies through his editorials, but he always maintained the semi-detachment of the country editor. In 1924, for the first and only time in his life, he found a cause that drew him into the active political arena.

The issue he brought to the front of the 1924 Kansas gubernatorial campaign by his entry into the race was the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan enjoyed a national rebirth soon after World War I. Its attack not only on Negroes but Catholics, Jews, and anyone not considered "100% American," appealed to a significant number of citizens who saw the changes in American life in the 1920's as a threat to traditional values. The secret organization emerged as a political topic in Kansas during Gov. Henry Allen's second term, from 1921 to 1923, although it was far from a leading issue.

The Klan was active in Emporia. A threatening note, later printed in White's newspaper, was sent to an Emporia man who allegedly had beaten his wife. The woman had reported the details of the incident to a man whom [*sic*] she mistakenly thought was a law enforcement officer. Shortly thereafter the husband received the note which boasted of a 500-man Klan membership in Emporia, stated the general aims of the organization, which ended with: "Beware! We warn once." Roland Boynton, local county attorney, then launched an investigation into the Emporia Klan.

A Klan-supported candidate was elected mayor of Emporia in 1923. When subpoenaed to testify about Klan activities at a bearing on a state ouster suit filed against the organization, the Mayor

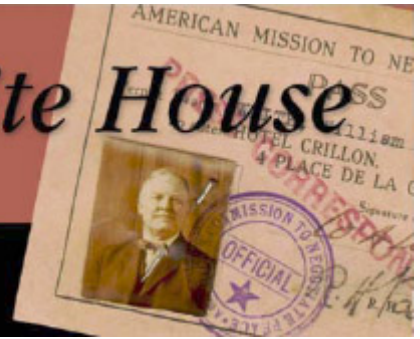


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admitted he took the Klan oath, attended Klan meetings, and participated in a national convention in Atlanta, Ga.

But he argued that he was not a Klan member since he had not paid any dues. Soon after taking office, the mayor appointed a man as chief of police whom Klan members had supported for the position.

Many Klansmen staffed the local police department. Their influence was so great that reporters from White's newspaper encountered difficulty in obtaining police news and information about Klan activities in Emporia. On several occasions Klansmen threatened reporters with violence or roughly ejected them from Klan meetings.

White began his anti-Klan attacks in July 1921, when the first organizer came to Emporia. He tried to expose the organization's members, thinking that publicity would strike a vulnerable spot in the secret order. On one occasion he sent a reporter, Frank Clough, who later became managing editor of the *Gazette* and one of White's biographers, to obtain a copy of the register from Emporia's newest hotel.

The hotel was filled with members of a foreign musical organization staying in the city to present a concert that evening, and with a group of Klansmen attending their state convention. White wanted to print all the names on the register since he thought readers could easily distinguish the foreign names from those at the Klan convention. As Clough was copying the names from the register, one of the Klan delegates attempted to take the list. A struggle ensued and continued until the hotel manager intervened and demanded that Clough relinquish his notes. This order was complied with although the reporter protested that the register was public property.

Upon hearing of the incident, White wrote a note to one of the hotel directors and sent Clough to deliver it. The note read:

If a copy of the Broadview Hotel register for today is not in our office by seven o'clock this evening, the name of the Broadview never again will be printed in the *Gazette* except in case of police raids and similar events. -- W. A. White