Emporia Gazette editor William Allen White and his wife Sallie enjoyed entertaining in their home and extended an “open porch” invitation to passersby. Guests at the White home included famous writers like Edna Ferber (author of Giant, Cimarron, and Showboat) and several U.S. presidents. Novelist William Dean Howells told John S. Phillips of McClure’s Magazine, “I do not know any pleasanter place to visit in the world.”

Now a state historic site, the White home and gardens are open to the public, allowing visitors to enjoy their beauty and welcoming warmth.
The rear garden is a significant architectural element itself, a sort of outdoor room, situated between Red Rocks and the house White built for his mother. Bordering the garden on the east is an iron fence between square brick piers and topped by a pergola. It and the wood fence on the west edge of the garden are of a strikingly modern design for the 1920s.

The inside of the home is in a Craftsman Tudor-style, characterized by natural wood finishes and plaster painted in a light color. Two key features are the entry hall staircase and the living room fireplace with its carved mantel.

The home in which the White family lived was built in 1889. The family rented the home before purchasing it in 1901. People in the community called it “Red Rocks” because of the red Colorado sandstone used for the first floor exterior. The Queen Anne design of the home featured elaborate carpentry around the porches and roofs.

A fire in 1920 destroyed the roof and top floor of the home, prompting the Whites to begin a previously planned renovation. They used the ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright to build the pergola and garden pond, but found his plans for the home too modern for their taste.

Instead they chose the design of a Kansas City firm, Wight & Wight, to create the Tudor-style home as it is today. It is characterized by a steep slate roof, prominent chimneys, half-timbering (a grid of dark wood set in light-colored stucco), and asymmetrical form. After remodeling, the main entrance was shifted from the east side to the north. What had been the front porch was incorporated into the south-facing rear porch.

William Allen White bought the land to the south of his property and built a residence for his mother, Mary Ann Hatten White. The form is “foursquare,” a popular type in the early 20th century. The exterior shows Prairie-style elements, with broad roof overhangs and square masonry piers supporting the porch. Of note is the high quality of the masonry, with the stone trim at the corners and around the doors and windows.