White in his Emporia Gazette office.

Later editorials focused on international concerns, but still conveyed his Midwestern values. In America most of us are Emporians in one way or another. Some of us live in towns ranging from five thousand to a quarter of a million, others were born in or around these towns, and still others of us cherish golden dreams of going back to some Emporia, there to see life in the sunset.

You can read all of White’s editorials by visiting the Kansas Historical Society’s State Archives in Topeka.
For half a century, Emporia newspaper editor William Allen White had something to say on virtually every topic that had anything to do with Kansas or the nation. Born in Emporia in 1868, he grew up in El Dorado, attended the College of Emporia and the University of Kansas and worked on newspapers in Topeka and Kansas City before buying The Emporia Gazette in 1895.

Thereafter until his death in 1944 he wrote countless editorials as well as articles and books that earned him the title of the “Sage of Emporia.”

During White’s time, newspaper editors often would influence public opinion and champion causes for hometown America. With his well-articulated editorial style, White came to embody the Kansas spirit and he had great faith in his home state, writing:

*When anything is going to happen in this country, it happens first in Kansas.*

Photos are from the Kansas Historical Society and the William Allen White Collection, Emporia State University Archives, Emporia State University, courtesy of Chris Walker.

White and his staff in front of The Emporia Gazette office, 1935.

Emboldened after attending the Republican National Convention in 1896, White returned to address the Populists who were gaining control in Kansas government. “It came out pure vitriol,” White said of his editorial, “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” The editorial, also critical of the Democrats and presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, was reprinted in the thousands by sympathetic Republican presses around the country.

*Go east and you hear them laugh; go west and they sneer at her; go north and they “cuss” her; go north and they have forgotten her. Go into any crowd of intelligent people gathered anywhere on the globe, and you will find the Kansas man on the defensive.*

White soon became a well-known and influential political writer. Through his wider base of contacts and interests, his perspective began to shift and he became an advocate for the Progressive Movement. White’s editorials embraced the Reform Movement and he brought a voice of caution and reason to the war hysteria that preceded World War I.

When White’s daughter, Mary, died after being knocked off her horse in 1921, he responded with a touching eulogy. This editorial was carried in newspapers around Kansas and the nation.

*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.

In the early 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan began to establish a presence in Kansas and worked on getting involved in state politics. In 1924, White decided to run for governor as an independent candidate because he feared that the Klan was supporting both the Republican and Democratic candidates. Through his campaign message and a series of editorials, White blasted the organization. He lost the race, but his anti-Klan message was spread across the nation. Kansas became the first state to outlaw the Klan.