

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The thesis, *Mary Katherine White*, is an in-depth description of the life of Mary White, the daughter of William Allen White. The biography shares with the reader a brief background of the White family before Mary Katherine's birth and the events that occurred during her childhood in Emporia, Kansas. Mary White's adolescence is described at length. Included in this section are such topics as her experiences at high school, the relationships between Mary and various family members, her community activities, her greatest love, and her untimely death. The biography reveals the energy, independence, and determination exhibited by Mary Katherine White while growing up in the shadow of her father and older brother. It also shows Mary White, during the last few years of her life, with a definite agenda - social reform. The last portion of the thesis outlines the impact that Mary Katherine White's life and death had on her family, her community, and the nation as a whole. The legacy of her brief life has lingered from her adolescence to the present time.

**MARY KATHERINE WHITE**

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Division of Social Sciences

**EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Gary Dean Flippin

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Approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

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understanding that this paper would not last forever. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Mary Katherine for allowing me to write her story.

## PREFACE

It was a typical fall afternoon in Emporia, Kansas. Trees were losing their leaves of red, orange, yellow, and brown. The sun, giving what little warmth it could, was shining in an almost cloudless, blue sky. People were busy. Businessmen were making deals, merchants were selling their goods, children were going home after an exciting day at school, and Mary was getting into her khakis, black shirt, cowboy hat, and boots.

After spending hours confined in classrooms at the high school, Mary was ready to get some fresh country air. She loved to ride her horse, 'Liza Jane. Mary found riding refreshing and felt it prepared her for whatever she had to do next. Mary placed the bridle on 'Liza Jane, situated and tightened the saddle on her spirited horse, and mounted 'Liza Jane for her afternoon ride. Negotiating the streets of Emporia, Mary waved to the townspeople as she rode through the town of Emporia. At times, she would stop and talk to a few of the townspeople who recognized her. As Mary neared the northern edge of town, she urged 'Liza Jane into a gallop. They went faster and faster. Now Mary was riding 'Liza Jane fast and hard. She always went fast, sometimes too fast. But she did not care; she wanted to feel the wind blow across her face, and she wanted to feel free. As Mary approached the turn at 12th and Commercial streets, she quickly realized that she was going too fast. Mary decided to let the horse go straight instead of turning. But 'Liza Jane, perhaps familiar with the route, turned and slipped. Horse and rider fell,

slightly injuring both. Mary rode the horse back to her home, but when she got there, she had to be carried into the house. The horse's thigh was badly bruised. Mary was sore too, but not as sore as she would be when her mother and father got home.

William Allen and Sallie White, Mary's parents, had gone downtown to watch a picture show at one of the theaters on Commercial Street. After they looked at Mary and saw that she was not badly injured, her father said, "Mary, you cannot ride that horse until Spring!" Mary's heart sank.<sup>1</sup>

Mary hated the fact that she could not ride 'Liza Jane. To Mary, 'Liza Jane represented freedom. What could she do? How could she sway her parents' decision? Mary did the typical teenage thing; she assumed the role of an actress and began pretending. Mary moped around the house; acting sullen and devastated, she told her mother that she was sorry for her actions. Finally, after days of "... looking mournful and martyred, [her] mother told ..." her that she could ride 'Liza Jane, but there were conditions to her "freedom": Mary had to ride more slowly and she had to have a friend ride along with her.<sup>2</sup>

Mary Katherine White was a special young lady from Emporia, Kansas. Yes, she was the daughter of William Allen White, the distinguished and world renowned newspaper editor from Kansas during the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries. She was also the sister of William Lindsay White, a famous journalist of the twentieth century

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<sup>1</sup>Mary White, Emporia, to Elizabeth O'Conner, Emporia, Fall 1919, Transcript in the hand of Barbara Walker, *The Emporia Gazette*, Emporia, Kansas.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

But Mary Katherine was her own person. She spent her entire life attempting to prove that point to the people who knew her, especially those who lived in Emporia, Kansas. This is a biography about Mary Katherine White's short, but full, life.

The thesis is divided into four areas: background, pre-adolescence, adolescence, and the effects of Mary's death. The first chapter, "Background," gives a brief account of the history of the White family from Mary Hatten White to the marriage of William Allen White to Sallie Lindsay and the events leading up to the birth of Mary Katherine White. The second chapter, "Pre-Adolescence," defines the problems Sallie and Mary Katherine experienced during the birth of Mary as well as the experiences and events that confronted the White family from the birth of Mary to her teenage years. Chapters three through eight discuss Mary as an adolescent and explains Mary Katherine's relationship with her friends, acquaintances at school, with her family, her plans to attend Wellesley College, her love of and experiences with horses, and her sudden death. The ninth chapter "The Effects of Mary's Death," describes how Mary Katherine's death affected her family, the city of Emporia, the nation, and the world. Mary Katherine's life, and death, continues to affect people today.

It seems as though this project has been one of the most difficult challenges of my college career, but I believe the task has been worth the challenge. In the last two years, I have eaten, drank, slept, dreamed, and read Mary Katherine White, and I am glad I had the opportunity to discover who she was and the accomplishments she made in the realm of social reforms that were uncommon during the time in which she lived. I hope that you, the reader, will discover the real Mary Katherine White.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
PREFACE .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
<b>Chapter</b>	
1. BACKGROUND .....	2
2. MARY KATHERINE: PRE-ADOLESCENCE .....	17
3. MARY KATHERINE AND SCHOOL .....	38
4. MARY KATHERINE AND HOME LIFE .....	60
5. TURMOIL AND CHANGE .....	74
6. WELLESLEY COLLEGE .....	85
7. MARY KATHERINE AND THE COMMUNITY .....	94
8. MARY'S GREATEST LOVE .....	103
9. THE EFFECTS OF MARY'S DEATH .....	118
REFERENCES .....	141

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
FIGURE ONE .....	1
FIGURE TWO .....	16
FIGURE THREE .....	27
FIGURE FOUR .....	32
FIGURE FIVE .....	36
FIGURE SIX .....	37
FIGURE SEVEN .....	42
FIGURE EIGHT .....	43
FIGURE NINE .....	44
FIGURE TEN .....	45
FIGURE ELEVEN .....	46
FIGURE TWELVE .....	47
FIGURE THIRTEEN .....	81
FIGURE FOURTEEN .....	102
FIGURE FIFTEEN .....	112
FIGURE SIXTEEN .....	113

FIGURE SEVENTEEN ..... 117  
FIGURE EIGHTEEN ..... 128



**Figure One** - Mary Katherine White in Front of Plumb Hall, ca. 1919. (Courtesy of Mary White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.)

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND**

In order to understand who Mary Katherine White was, why she was extraordinary, and how she became a well-known individual, one must look at Mary's background. Where does one begin? With a person who influenced Mary Katherine's behavior, ideals, and life immensely, her grandmother Mary Ann Hatten White.

Mary Ann Hatten White, whose parents, Frank Hatten and Annie Kelly Hatten, were born in Ireland and migrated to Canada after their elopement, was born in a log cabin near Quebec, on January 3, 1830. Mary's father, a stone mason, worked in Quebec and was forced to leave his wife and child alone for long periods in a primeval forest inhabited by ". . . bears and wildcats, and other beasts . . ." as well as Indians.<sup>3</sup> Six years later the family, which now had grown from three to five members, moved to Oswego, New York. While living in Oswego, Mr. Hatten built houses and erected the lighthouse on Lake Erie near Oswego.

Mary Hatten observed the many changes that occurred in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century as she grew up in New York. She saw:

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<sup>3</sup>Laura M. French, "A Biography by L. M. F.," *The Emporia Gazette*, 7 May 1924,  
4. Everett Rich, *William Allen White: The Man from Emporia* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1941), 5,6.

. . . the first railroad come into town and heard the first woman preacher who occupied a pulpit in Oswego. Very often she went to hear Susan B. Anthony preach the doctrine of women's rights. . . .<sup>4</sup>

[Mary Hatten also] . . . signed a temperance pledge and was an ardent advocate of prohibition. She saw Mormonism and Spiritualism rise and fall in Oswego and she learned the dressmaking trade there by hand.<sup>5</sup>

While living in Oswego, Mary Hatten participated in one particular temperance meeting where some mischief followed the "service." After the address by the speaker, Mary and about twelve other girls began to tear down the Oswego saloon. Their endeavor to curb alcohol consumption and promote prohibition was met with outrage and the girls were forced to stop the "remodeling" of the Oswego saloon.<sup>6</sup>

Mary Hatten's father died a few years after arriving in Oswego (probably 1840) and her mother died in 1846, when Mary was sixteen. After the death of her parents, Mary Hatten went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wright, close friends of the Hattens. When the Wrights moved to Chicago, Illinois in about 1854, Mary was invited to accompany them. She accepted the offer and had the opportunity to attend college, something she had dreamed about for a long time. The Wrights, who were devout Congregationalists, had become interested in Knox College, in Galesburg, Illinois, an institution founded by ". . . a band of New England preachers to carry on Puritan ways in

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<sup>4</sup>Walter Johnson, *William Allen White's America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), 16.

<sup>5</sup>French.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* According to Rich, Mary Hatten manifested many of the characteristics attributed to the Irish. Mary was ". . . quick-witted, quick-tempered, and volatile," 6.

the heart of the Illinois prairies. . . .”<sup>7</sup> At Knox, Mary attended revivals and tent meetings where the preachers taught “. . . their converts that their duty as Christians was to rid the nation of such sins as slavery.”<sup>8</sup> Mary Hatten devoted herself to anti-slavery and the Republican party. During her stay in Galesburg, Mary Hatten had the opportunity to hear Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas debate on October 7, 1858 and became “. . . personally acquainted with Mother Bickerdyke, the Civil War nurse, whose home was in Galesburg.” Mary also experienced both the thrill of cheering men and boys as they ventured into battle for the preservation of the Union and depression because “. . . she had no one to send” off to the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> Mary Hatten commented that:

. . . her grief was as real as if she had been parting with [her] father or brother, instead of rejoicing that she had “escaped” the sorrow of such parting.<sup>10</sup>

Before Mary Hatten left Illinois for Kansas, she had already become “. . . a strong-willed, powerful reformer” as well as a school teacher.<sup>11</sup> While living in the northeast, Mary Hatten had become an advocate of woman suffrage and temperance, and a person who believed in equality for everyone. Her early encounter with reform and war would continue to be a driving force in Mary Hatten’s life in Kansas. Those experiences would

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<sup>7</sup>French, 4. Johnson, 16. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 6.

<sup>8</sup>Johnson, 16.

<sup>9</sup>French, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>11</sup>Johnson, 16-17.

turn into values, values that many people living during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considered radical, and Mary Hatten would one day instill in her granddaughter the same radical values in which she believed.

Mary Hatten arrived in Council Grove, Kansas in late 1864 or early 1865 and taught school in both Council Grove and Cottonwood Falls. Although Kansas had been declared a "Free State" in 1861 and the Civil War had just ended, racial prejudice was still strong. Mary Hatten was in Council Grove only a short time before she was confronted with the issue of equality for all races. The Wrights had moved to Council Grove in 1860 on a business venture and evidently found a job for Mary in the community. Mary Hatten told her friend, Laura French, that she ". . . got into trouble my first Sunday in Council Grove." That Sunday Mary attended the Congregational Church, she was asked to teach a girls' Sunday School class. She enthusiastically did so and at the end of class invited all the girls to attend school the next day. She added a special invitation to a darker-skinned girl who had demonstrated intellectual ability.

When conversing with the Wrights, Mary Hatten discovered that she had unknowingly created a volatile situation in her small community. The dark-skinned girl was an African American and ". . . no colored children were allowed to go to school in Council Grove." Mary stated, however, that she was not opposed to teaching ". . . a colored child . . ." and that she would if it were at all possible.

Overnight, news of Mary Hatten's error had spread through the community. Mary arrived at the schoolhouse expecting to hear the shouts and see children playing games. Instead, the schoolyard was filled with groups of closely cloistered children. Shouts had

been replaced with hushed whispers. The school's bell had been removed by a concerned member of the school board, so Mary pulled out the small bell she carried and rang it to begin the day. She assigned seats to the students, leaving no one out. She included the African American girl whose seat-mate, a white girl, asked to sit next to the darker-skinned girl.

Suddenly someone knocked on the door. "I want to talk to you—come outside," the man said to Mary. "No, come in," Mary said. "There's not much talking to do," he said. "I've come to put out that damned nigger—show her to me." Mary Hatten refused to identify the girl, and he was unable to ". . . pick her out among the other children. He was chagrined when he found out his own child was sitting by the 'nigger.'" Throughout the morning, other board members and parents arrived at the school and removed their children, reducing the number of students from seventy to twenty by midmorning. The primary teacher advised Mary that she was not there to teach "niggers." She also went home after Mary Hatten told her that she had to teach the colored students. The primary teacher never returned.<sup>12</sup>

Mary Hatten continued to stand by her convictions as the pro slavery townspeople continued to harass the new school teacher. On her second day as teacher, Mary arrived to find ". . . the windows of the school nailed down and the front door locked." With the help of Mr. Wright, a school board member, Mary Hatten opened the school, rang the bell, and classes were held.

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<sup>12</sup>French, 4.

The tension continued to grow in Council Grove. Knowing that the community would not change their views concerning the inclusion of African American students into the “white” school, Mary Hatten began to talk to the townspeople, urging them to at least provide a place for African Americans to learn in a nonviolent atmosphere. She

... nagged them till they did it. They rented a room, hired another woman to teach the colored children, and that was the start of the school for the colored children in Council Grove. I’ve always been proud of the fight I made. I visited the school many years later, and the children knew the story, and they gave me a grand welcome.<sup>13</sup>

In 1866, Mary Hatten taught school at Cottonwood Falls and boarded with Sam Woods and his family, whose home was near Cottonwood Falls.<sup>14</sup> She planned to attend the Normal School in Emporia as soon as she found a place to board there. Mary Hatten first met Dr. Allen White while attending a dance at Emporia in 1866 at the Robinson house. At the time, Mary showed little interest in Dr. White because she was more interested in her career as an educator and continuing her education, but before that could happen, she received news that her sister in Lapeer, Michigan was seriously ill. Mary

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<sup>13</sup>French, 4. David J. Aspelin, “A Biography by ‘L. M. F.’,” [Mary Ann Hatten, William Allen White’s Mother], 1998, 2-4, Special Collections, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University.

<sup>14</sup>Mary Hatten met Sam Woods and his family when she stayed with the Wrights in Council Grove. Woods was a Colonel in the Union Army before the Civil War, an avid abolitionist, and a lawyer who moved to Kansas from Ohio in 1854. Mr. Wright called Mr. Woods when the issue with the colored children attending school occurred and pro slavery townspeople attempted to stop Mary from teaching the colored children. David J. Aspelin, “Col. Sam Woods, William Allen White’s Mom, Civil Rights, and Council Grove—A Volatile Mix,” 1998, 1, Special Collections, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University.

Hatten went to her sister's home and spent the winter helping her sister through her illness.

While Mary Hatten was in Lapeer, Dr. White sent numerous letters to her and a long distance relationship developed. In early Spring in 1867, as Mary's sister's health continued to improve, Dr. White made his annual trip back east to acquire supplies for his store in Emporia. On the return trip he detoured through Lapeer and Mary Ann Hatten and Dr. Allen White were married in Lapeer, Michigan, in April 1867. After their marriage the Whites returned to Emporia, living in the house known as the Riggs property, located at the corner of Seventh and Merchant. It was at this location that Dr. Allen and Mary Hatten White's only surviving child, William Allen White, was born on February 10, 1868. The White family remained in Emporia for less than a year after William Allen's birth before moving to El Dorado, Kansas, which became their home for the next twenty years (1869-1889).<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Allen White was involved in several activities which provided his family with a comfortable living while living at El Dorado. He continued to operate a dry goods store, kept up with his medical practice, ran a hotel, and owned and rented real estate in the country and town. Dr. White purchased bonds and had a sizeable bank account as a result of his hard work. He planned to use part of his income to send his son to either Yale or the University of Michigan, but two years before William Allen White's graduation from high school, Dr. White died. But a bank failure shortly after Dr. White's death, eliminated

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<sup>15</sup>French, 4. Aspelin, "Col. Woods, William Allen White's Mom . . .," 6. Aspelin, "A Biography by "LMF," 3.

the funds that were set aside for William Allen's education. William Allen White, through his mother's insistence, would attend college, but not at Yale or the University of Michigan; he would enroll at the College of Emporia, sixty miles from home.<sup>16</sup>

William Allen White became interested in journalism and newspapers while he was an adolescent. It is possible that his interest in newspapers was inspired by his mother's friend, Sam Wood, who was the editor of two newspapers, the *Kansas Greenbacker* and its successor, the *National Era*.<sup>17</sup> William Allen White's career as a journalist started in 1885 while he and his mother were still living in El Dorado; William Allen was an editor for the *El Dorado Democrat*. In 1890, William Allen began working at the *El Dorado Republican*, where he was the assistant editor.<sup>18</sup> In 1891, he went to work for the *Kansas City Journal* and, between 1892 and 1895, he worked for the *Kansas City Star*. His dream of owning and editing his own newspaper would not become a reality until 1895, when he would purchase a small town newspaper in Kansas, *The Emporia Gazette*.<sup>19</sup> William Allen White was a man who believed in moderate, liberal, Midwestern middle-class morals; he became the ". . . self-appointed teetotalist Conscience of the

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<sup>16</sup>Rich, 14, 25.

<sup>17</sup>Aspelin, "A Biography by 'L. M. F.,'" 3.

<sup>18</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 68.

<sup>19</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 68, 109, 130, 148, 176-77, 198, 199, 230. E. Jay Jernigan, *William Allen White*, Twayne's United States Authors Series (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12.

Midwest. . . .”<sup>20</sup> He was described as “. . . an author of regional short stories, a novelist of promise, a leading Progressive Republican, a magazine free-lancer of authoritative political and social commentary. . . .”<sup>21</sup> During his career as a journalist, William Allen White wrote articles for *McClure’s*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Collier’s Magazine*; he interviewed presidents Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland for biographical sketches in *McClure’s*; he covered the opening of the Native American lands in Oklahoma at the turn of the twentieth century for the *Saturday Evening Post*; he was the winner of two Pulitzer Prizes and authored twenty-five books and hundreds of magazine articles, reviews, and speeches.<sup>22</sup>

William Allen White met Sallie Lindsay, a twenty-three-year-old Kansas City elementary school teacher, in 1892, while he was working for the *Kansas City Journal*. She was “. . . intelligent, pretty, and . . . quietly level-headed.”<sup>23</sup> Sallie’s family was originally from Kentucky. Her father, Joseph Lindsay, had owned a small plantation and between seventy-five and one hundred slaves before the beginning of the Civil War. Mr. Lindsay joined the Confederate army during the war and became a member John Morgan’s brigade, known as “Morgan’s Raiders.”<sup>24</sup> Sallie was the oldest of ten children of the

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<sup>20</sup>E. Jay Jernigan, *William Lindsay White 1900-1973: In the Shadow of His Father* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>21</sup>Jernigan, *William Allen White*, np.

<sup>22</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 6, 15.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>24</sup>Rich, 66, 67.

former Confederate cavalry captain and his wife, Fannie. After the Civil War, Sallie's family moved to Kansas City, Kansas where her father worked as a yard superintendent at Fowler's Packing Company, a meat packing plant in the city, for a moderate wage. Sallie and William Allen White were married on April 27, 1893 at the Lindsay's home in Kansas City.<sup>25</sup>

Joint family allegiances were a fact of married life for William Allen and Sallie White. E. Jay Jernigan, who wrote biographies of both William Allen and William Lindsay White, describes a particular incident that reveals the White's family loyalty:

. . . after the second week of their honeymoon . . . in New Mexico, they [William Allen and Sallie] met his mother in Santa Fe, then the three of them went to Manitou Springs, Colorado, where his maternal aunt, Kate, ran a small hotel. There they were joined by Sallie's thirteen-year-old brother, Milt Lindsay. Like Mary Hatten White, one or more of the Lindsay family could be found at 927 Exchange.<sup>26</sup>

After their honeymoon, William Allen and Sallie made their home in Kansas City where William Allen continued to work for the newspaper as a journalist; Mary Ann Hatten White, now long a widow, went to live with the newlyweds in their new home.<sup>27</sup> Sallie was a great influence on William Allen. She always encouraged him in his work and his dream of owning and editing his own newspaper. Finally, it happened. In 1895, the

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<sup>25</sup>Rich, 66, 67. Jernigan, *William Allen White*, 6. Jernigan *William Lindsay White*, 16. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 214, 241.

<sup>26</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 16.

<sup>27</sup>According to Laura French, Mary Hatten White lived with William Allen and Sallie from the time they were married until 1904, when a house was built for her on the lot adjoining the White's residence at 927 Exchange, Emporia, Kansas. French, 4.

*Gazette* had been sold to William Allen White by its owner, W. Y. Morgan, for three thousand dollars. He had to borrow the money from Major Calvin Hood, president of Emporia National Bank and a leader of a Republican faction in Emporia, the estate of former United States Senator Preston B. Plumb, and the governor, Edmund N. Morrill. To guarantee the loan, William Allen used his mother's properties in El Dorado and the persuasion of Cy Leland, a friend of the family and an influential person in the Republican party of Kansas.<sup>28</sup> By 1899 the *Gazette* was financially stable and William Allen's outside income from books and short stories provided the means for the Whites to purchase their first home in Emporia.<sup>29</sup> The house, at 927 Exchange, would become a mecca for many politicians, diplomats, and celebrities who knew the White family during the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Edna Ferber, a friend of the White family wrote of this house that:

When your world is awry and hope is dead and vitality low and appetite gone, there is no ocean trip, no month in the country, no known drug equal to the reviving quality of twenty-four hours spent on the front porch or in the sitting room of the White's house in Emporia.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Frank C. Clough, *William Allen White of Emporia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1941), 70. Jernigan, *William Allen White*, 7-8. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 256-257. David Hinshaw, *A Man from Kansas* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1945), 65. Governor Morrill, Major Hood, and other members of the same Republican faction in Emporia, wanted a newspaper to voice their views on politics. The men supported White's venture in order to oppose the other Republican newspaper that supported the rival faction of the Republican party.

<sup>29</sup>Jernigan, *William Allen White*, 13.

<sup>30</sup>Hinshaw, 161. Johnson, 245.

<sup>31</sup>Johnson, 245.

The White's new home was an old fashioned, sturdy mid-Victorian mansion in the East side of Emporia that had been built by a pioneer cattle monarch and lawyer. It was, according to William Allen White, ". . . warted all over with bow windows, and towers and gables and fibroid tumors, [and] acute angles. . . ." <sup>32</sup> The nineteenth century structure was made of the same type of red stone that can be found in the Garden of the Gods, a scenic tourist park near Colorado Springs, Colorado. <sup>33</sup> The yard was never fenced and the door was always open; everyone was considered a neighbor and a friend of the William Allen and Sallie White family. David Hinshaw, in his biography of William Allen White, *A Man from Emporia*, made the following comment about the Whites:

Success never robbed them of their human quality of neighborliness. As though symbolically, they never fenced their yard, and the latchstring of the house was an easy one . . . the poor and humble visited it on the same terms. . . . <sup>34</sup>

In June of 1900, William Allen White, who had planned to show his support for Theodore Roosevelt as the candidate for vice president as well as report on the national convention, canceled his plans to cover the Republican convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for *McClure's*, a national newspaper syndicate, to be home with Sallie, who was experiencing difficulty during the last month of pregnancy. William Allen was concerned because they had previously lost a baby under similar circumstances. Sallie had

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<sup>32</sup>Sally Foreman Griffith, *Home Town News: William Allen White and the Emporia Gazette* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 225. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 582.

<sup>33</sup>Rich, 115. Hinshaw, 161.

<sup>34</sup>Hinshaw, 161.

a difficult labor, but on the seventeenth of June William Lindsay White entered the world.

William Allen, in buoyant spirits, as a proud father, wrote John Phillips, the associate editor of *McClure's*:

There is a little baby boy 24 hours old in the White household. His name is Bill. If anyone calls him Willie, or William or Will, Boxers [Chinese revolutionaries] will organize and wipe that person off the face of the earth.<sup>35</sup>

William Allen's mood quickly changed when he realized Sallie's condition was grave. A week later he wrote to Maude Johnston, a friend of the White's from Kansas City that his wife "... has gone into the valley of the Great Shadow and has come up and is getting well and strong."<sup>36</sup>

William Allen White has missed the Republican Convention. Sallie's slow recovery also forced him to delay his trips to New York and Paris for *McClure's Magazine*. He informed both John Philips and Auguste Jaccacci (art editor for *McClure's*) that he was unable to go to Paris. He wrote to Jaccacci:

You do not know how it pains me and how disappointed I am, not to be with you now, but the call to come home was imperative, and I had to give it up. . . . My wife has been very low with Malarial

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<sup>35</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 12. The reason William Allen did not want anyone to call William Lindsay Will, William, or Willie was because William (Will) Jennings Bryan was also campaigning for the U.S. presidency in 1900 against President McKinley and Vice President Roosevelt. Bryan and White disagreed on several issues. In his biography of William Allen White titled *William Allen White's America*, Johnson remarks that William Allen had commented that "... anyone who calls him Willie or Will is going to be put out on the first ballot," 120.

<sup>36</sup>William Allen White, Emporia, to Maude Johnston, 27 June 1900, Transcript in the hand of William Allen White, William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

fever; but is now recovering. . . . I hope that I have not disarranged your plans.<sup>37</sup>

As far as William Allen was concerned, there was not a better child than his young

Bill. In his autobiography, William Allen remarked,

. . . there never was a better little boy or a more satisfactory baby than he. . . . He was so gentle and considerate that his mother and I were afraid that God might be shy of angels someday and send for him. But he was a robust youngster and full of joy and mischief and insatiable curiosity, and most affectionate.<sup>38</sup>

After the birth of William Lindsay and the recovery of Sallie, William Allen, in 1901, met with Vice President Theodore Roosevelt to help with a 1904 presidential campaign. But Roosevelt's opportunity for the presidency came sooner than most Americans had anticipated; William McKinley was assassinated in late 1901 and Theodore Roosevelt immediately became president of the United States and completed McKinley's presidential term. William Allen White continued to be one of Theodore Roosevelt's most ardent supporters and closest political confidants for the remainder of Roosevelt's life.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 12.

<sup>38</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 372.

<sup>39</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 15.



**Figure Two** - Mary Katherine White, ca. 1908. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.)

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **PRE-ADOLESCENCE**

William Allen White continued to be heavily involved with politics the year his second child was born, in 1904. William Allen's magazine articles and newspaper editorials, picked up in newspapers and journals around the country, captured the nation's interest. White was not hesitant to let the people of America read his opinion about who the next president of the country should be. Unquestionably, Theodore Roosevelt was the only man qualified for the job. "The people are for Roosevelt and the politicians know it and obey," White commented. Roosevelt, according to William Allen, was the perfect candidate to eliminate corruption in politics and would investigate and stop corporation bribery for political favors.<sup>40</sup> William Allen traveled to Chicago and St. Louis in June to cover the Republican and Democratic conventions for *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. He returned to Emporia just in time to be with Sallie when their daughter, Mary Katherine White, named after her grandmother, Mary Ann Hatten White, was born June 18, 1904.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Johnson, 143.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 138, 143, 144. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 16. White's articles are titled "The Dollar in Politics," 2 July 1904, "Seconding the Motion," 23 July 1904 (*Post*), and "The Great Political Drama at St. Louis," 12 July 1904 (*Collier's*)

Mary was a sickly child when she was born. Sallie was sick too. Sallie experienced the same difficulties with this pregnancy that she had encountered with previous pregnancies. During Sallie's pregnancy, the doctor had given her a stimulant to strengthen her heart; the medication poisoned Mary's system. Fannie Lindsay, Sallie's mother, along with Mary Hatten White and a nurse were given the responsibility of caring for Mary while Sallie recovered from her illness. Both grandmothers, who lived either in Emporia or near Emporia, were destined to have a great deal of influence on Bill and Mary; Grandma White, according to some, had more influence on the White children than Grandma Lindsay.<sup>42</sup> Apparently there had been some hesitation about the two grandmothers caring for the children, because William Allen White later rationalized the family's decision in his autobiography. William Allen wrote:

One grandmother will spoil a baby. Two working together will bring [them] up in the way [they] should go, for each will suspect the other of spoiling [the children] and will check it.<sup>43</sup>

In the summer of 1904 Mrs. Lindsay, the nurse, and Mary Katherine traveled to Galveston, Texas where the climate was thought to be healthier for Mary.<sup>44</sup> After some time in Galveston, Mrs. Lindsay fired the nurse because she believed the nurse was poisoning her granddaughter. It was rumored that Mary's nursemaid had continuously given Mary the wrong medication so that she (Mary) would remain ill and the nurse could

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<sup>42</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 13.

<sup>43</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 347.

<sup>44</sup>Rich, 114, 115. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 16-17.

remain employed.<sup>45</sup> For the first few years of her life Mary would continue to be in frail health. Mrs. Lindsay and Mary returned to Emporia later that summer when William Allen and Sallie decided to leave the Kansas heat and take the two children to a cooler climate.

During his college days at the University of Kansas, William Allen had spent some summers in Colorado, and he and Sallie had also spent several summers in that state after their wedding.<sup>46</sup> William Allen and Sallie decided it would be better for Mary, with her poor health, to spend the summer in Colorado. Sallie and Mary moved to Colorado while William Allen and Bill (William Lindsay) spent the summer living with his mother at Emporia. The Whites had purchased a cabin near the small town of Manitou Springs, Colorado and within sight of Pike's Peak and Long's Peak, in Estes Park. The cabin, in Moraine Park, Colorado, was just inside the Rocky Mountain Reserve, and had been previously owned by Frank Hodder, a professor from the University of Kansas. The cabin would become the summer home for the Whites until William Allen's death and the vacation home for Bill and Mary throughout their youth.<sup>47</sup> It was here that both children were shown the joys of nature and life, without some of the modern conveniences of society, while living near the friendly summer settlement primarily consisting of faculty

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<sup>45</sup>Rich, 115. Kristen Roberts and Karen Broucek, "As We Remember Mary White," Topeka West High School Oral History Project, 1978, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

<sup>46</sup>Jernigan, *William Allen White*, 4.

<sup>47</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 372, 391. The last time anyone from the White family stayed at the cabin in Colorado was the summer of 1950, prior to Sallie White's death on December 19, 1950. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 226, 231.

members from the University of Kansas and their families.<sup>48</sup> Moraine Park, on the slopes of a mountain, overlooks a valley with a magnificent view of Long's Peak to the south. During the early twentieth century, telephone service was nonexistent at Moraine Park and the news from the outside world came from the area's only newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain Post*. Mail service and groceries for Moraine Park residents were found at Sam Service general store in Estes Park, a village near Moraine Park.<sup>49</sup>

The Whites' summer home was a two-story, log cottage that had a porch which wrapped around the house. After the first summer that Sallie and Mary spent in the cabin, both William Allen and Bill, as well as other numerous guests, both family and friends, could be found spending their summers at the White's cabin near the Rocky Mountains. William Allen spent most of his summers at the cabin. In a small niche on the porch he could frequently be found pecking away on his typewriter. (Another reason Mr. White purchased the cabin, other than getting Mary into a cooler climate, was because he wanted to get away from the pressures of the newspaper, magazine articles, and politics, and begin preparing his thoughts for another novel). As the children grew older and Mary's health improved, the mountains of Colorado became a summer retreat for William Allen, Sallie, Bill, and Mary.<sup>50</sup> Before long Mary had become an active, energetic, healthy,

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<sup>48</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 20.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>50</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 372, 391, 592. Between 1911 and 1920, the White family purchased a second cabin that was used primarily for William Allen's writing studio. The second cabin was approximately one hundred feet above the main cabin. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 592.

and daring child, due in part, according to William Allen White's autobiography, to her outdoor activities near the cabin<sup>51</sup>

Sources do not reveal what occurred in Mary's life between the Fall of 1904 and March 1909. What is known about Mary is that her health was poor during the years 1904 through 1906. However, information concerning William Allen White reveals some of the activities the family was involved with during those years. When the Whites were not at their summer cabin in Colorado, they, William Allen and Sallie, were visiting friends and business acquaintances in New York City and Washington, D.C.; Young Bill and Mary stayed with one of their grandmothers whenever Mr. and Mrs. White traveled out of town. William Allen spent his time in Emporia writing his editorials for the *Gazette*, short stories for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*, and writing or rewriting a fictional novel about a prodigal son and his Kansas pioneer mother. He and Sallie also entertained local, state, and national dignitaries at their home at 927 Exchange, something both of them enjoyed. William Allen White was also active in state and national politics between 1904 and 1909. He attended and promoted campaign rallies in Kansas for state and national candidates for various elected positions, and he traveled to Washington, D.C. to discuss political concerns with President Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>52</sup>

In March 1909, after returning from Theodore Roosevelt's last presidential reception and William Taft's inauguration, William Allen and Sallie took the children and

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., Rich, 115.

<sup>52</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 372-73, 374-75, 381, 388-89, 392-402, 404-05.

Mary Hatten White on a long-planned six month tour of Europe. Bill was eight years old, Mary was five, and Grandma White was a stouthearted seventy-nine years old. Everyone was excited and was looking forward to their first trip across the ocean.<sup>53</sup> William Allen and Sallie had put money into a savings account for ten years. Finally, the bills were paid and they had three thousand dollars for the trip to Europe. Some of William Allen and Sallie's friends thought the children might be too young to go, but William Allen believed that Bill and Mary were old enough to "... get something out of the trip. . . ."<sup>54</sup>

William Allen, Sallie, Bill, Mary, and Grandmother White left Emporia and traveled to New York by train. Bill and Mary found their delight and joy in the train's dining car. William Allen said that Bill and Mary

. . . ate a wide swath down the menu card, and she [Grandmother White] insisted that we give them what they wanted on the theory that naturally we were stingy, cruel parents who would starve our children but for her.<sup>55</sup>

The travelers reached New York City with eager anticipation. They made their way to the docks and found their ship, a small White Star liner named the *Cretic*. The ship, according to William Allen, was "... as long as an Emporia city block, [he] . . . was

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<sup>53</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 406. Rich, 114.

<sup>54</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 406.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 406.

tremendously impressed by the size of the little tub.”<sup>56</sup> Embarking for Naples, Italy, William Allen told their friends they would return in six weeks, or six months.<sup>57</sup>

After two days on the *Cretic*, Mary knew more of the people on the little vessel than the rest of the White family; she talked, played, and visited with everyone who looked her way. Mary was not afraid to make new friends. She loved people, a trait she had gleaned from her father. With her flashing black eyes and her hair in pigtailed tied with red ribbons, Mary was a cute little girl with unending energy. She played quoits with the other children and won a Teddy Bear at the children’s tournament.<sup>58</sup> Bill took on the challenge of being Mary’s chaperone. He kept a watchful eye on his “. . . wiggling and vigorous sister who adored him openly, shamelessly, ” while he read his books.<sup>59</sup> It was not hard to notice that Mary idolized her older brother. William Allen spent the first few days of the cruise in his berth. He could not handle the rolling waves and “gentle breezes” of the Atlantic Ocean. While the rest of his family enjoyed “. . . new food every day . . . ” and breakfasts that included “. . . sausages and buckwheat cakes, fried potatoes, hot bread and coffee, . . . cereal and . . . fruit,” William Allen was staring at the geometrical patterns of the springs of the berth above his bed. He was unsociable, refusing the

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<sup>56</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 406-407. The White Star was a company that owned several steam ships, including the *Titanic*.

<sup>57</sup>Rich, 144.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>59</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 408.

comforts of human society and solid foods, until one afternoon just before they reached Madeira.<sup>60</sup>

That afternoon William Allen experienced an incident that the White family never let him forget. Sallie placed Mary on her berth, above her father's bed, for her afternoon nap. After some time, while William Allen was staring at the springs, something starting leaking from Mary's berth. "She wet the bed and it leaked on me," William Allen said. "That was my last daylight hour in the berth. It made a man of me, and Mary-- aged five-- claimed credit for my recovery," William Allen commented. Mary took great joy in her achievement and success.<sup>61</sup>

William Allen, Sallie, Bill, Mary, and Grandmother White, full of excitement and anticipation, stepped off the *Cretic* and onto Italian soil. While they were in Europe, the White family

. . . did a full version of the grand tour, staying in pensions or modest tourist hotels and taking in the galleries, shops, and sights of Europe. [They] . . . did all the tourist things indicated in the guide book.<sup>62</sup>

As the Whites toured Europe, they visited Rome and saw the Pope greeting the masses during their visit to St. Peter's Basilica. They saw the Beatification of Joan of Arc as well as other pieces of sculpture and art. Making their headquarters in Paris, they toured the various cities and numerous sites of France such as the Eiffel Tower and the

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<sup>60</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 407.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 409. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 18.

Palace of Versailles, the paintings of Michelangelo in Florence, and the artwork of Duher. Other countries the White family visited on their European vacation included Germany, England, Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, and Italy. The trip to Europe, according to William White, was an adventure for all of them, one that no one in the family would forget for a long time.<sup>63</sup> Like most middle-class Americans, the Whites journeyed to Europe for cultural insight and refinement. European travel during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a way for middle-class Americans to gain respectability and social superiority.<sup>64</sup>

When the Whites returned home to Emporia, six months later, they received an unexpected celebration that began at the Sante Fe Railroad station. While they were in Europe, William Allen White's new book, *A Certain Rich Man*, had become a national bestseller. White had been unaware of his success until his return. The novel, in addition to his widely copied European travel letters to the *Emporia Gazette*, had aroused the newspaper staff and the citizens of Emporia to unrestrained pride in their editor and fellow townsman. In September, when the train carrying the Whites pulled into Emporia from New York, people from the community, from all classes, stood at the station with signs and banners to welcome the White family home. Emporia's brass band, the Silver Cornet

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<sup>63</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 411. Hinshaw, 17, 41, 42. While the Whites were in the Ireland, Mary Hatten White was able to see the town where her parents lived, the house in which her mother was born, the little church where her parents were married, and the parish books containing the entry of her parent's marriage ceremony.

<sup>64</sup>William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 5, 7, 8, 13, 32, 34, 43, 262.

Band, played *Hail the Conquering Hero* and an Emporia quartet sang two of the White's favorite songs. A welcoming committee escorted them to open hacks filled with flowers and paraded the Whites home past the *Gazette* office and down Commercial Street to the bandstand in Humboldt Park (near the train station), where they were entertained with a program in which citizens of the town assumed the roles of the residents of Sycamore Ridge, the setting for *A Certain Rich Man*. After the celebration at the park the townspeople escorted the Whites to their home.<sup>65</sup>

The Whites had enjoyed their excursion to Europe but were glad to be back in Emporia, near their friends and family.<sup>66</sup> Many years later, while on his deathbed, William Lindsay White recalled the homecoming from Europe when he was a young boy of nine years. He remarked that “. . . we did occupy a kind of God-like position in this little town.”<sup>67</sup>

Bill and Mary were as different as night and day. In his biography of William Allen White, Walter Johnson said. Bill was “. . . shy, quiet, and retiring.”<sup>68</sup> Bill did not make

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<sup>65</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 422. Griffith, 182. *A Certain Rich Man* was the novel William Allen White published in March 1909, just before he and his family left the United States for Europe. The novel was highly praised by literary critics of the early 1900s. Rich, 148. .

<sup>66</sup>Griffith, 182. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 18-19.

<sup>67</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 19.

<sup>68</sup>Johnson, 245.



**Figure Three** - William Lindsay and Mary Katherine White, ca. 1909. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.)

trouble for anyone. "He is a good boy . . . ," his father said. Bill always looked after Mary; he was her protector.<sup>69</sup>

Mary was a fun-loving tomboy. She loved to play outside with all of the children of Emporia. Mary ". . . whistled like a thrush," when she was happy; she learned at a young age that life could be an adventure and was determined to enjoy life to its fullest.<sup>70</sup> This was partly a result of William Allen and Sallie encouraging their daughter to be an outdoor girl during her early years of poor health. Through exercise Mary ". . . had shaped 'a strong, muscular body'" No longer frail or fragile, Mary was short and stocky with ". . . big brown eyes, [an] oval face . . . [and] beautiful, auburn hair, . . . [worn as she grew older, in] a long, single braid down her back or double braids. . . ."<sup>71</sup>

William Lindsay White's biographer, when comparing the two children of William Allen and Sallie White, said:

In contrast young Mary was no angel. After her initial sickness she became a nervously vibrant tomboy, rambunctious and rebellious, fearless around horses, a frequent trial to her parents. Unlike Bill she was not a warm, considerate child but expressed her spirits by flagrant teasing and flamboyant recklessness. That led to many childhood arguments, of course, but they grew up very close, with Bill the somewhat pompous big brother and Mary the bedeviling gamin of a little sister.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>70</sup>Griffith, 239. Rich, 211.

<sup>71</sup>Griffith, 239. Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>72</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 17. The word "Gamin" is defined as "a street urchin; . . . a Tomboy; [or] a saucy girl." *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (Chicago: The English Language Institute of America, 1975).

When Mary was old enough to go to school, her parents sent her to Century Elementary, the same public school that Bill White attended. The school, built in 1900, was three blocks from the White's home on Exchange Street. Mary's grades at Century were above average.<sup>73</sup>

Century Elementary was also the elementary school for the African American children of Emporia. Sometime before 1906, the school that the African American children had attended partially collapsed, forcing the members of the school board to make the decision to have the African American students attend Century Elementary along with white children. The school was selected because it was nearest to the African American community in Emporia.<sup>74</sup> The White's residence, at 927 Exchange, was also "... next to "nigger-town." Negro children were common playmates with both Bill and Mary, although their mother would never invite the African American children into their home.<sup>75</sup> It is possible that Mary learned about the inequality and the poor treatment of African Americans while she attended Century Elementary at Emporia as well as from her own mother. Century, however, was not the only elementary school that Mary and her brother attended. This was due to frequent bouts of illness and depression suffered by both their parents. Several times William Allen and Sallie White broke down so completely that they

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<sup>73</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>74</sup>"Us Colored," *Emporia Gazette*, 19 September 1966.

<sup>75</sup>Rich, 212. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 16.

had to take months off to recuperate, and these lapses of sickness affected the childrens' schooling, especially when Sallie suffered from bouts with ill health and depression.<sup>76</sup>

In the Fall of 1912, Sallie suffered from one of her illnesses, a nervous collapse. By December, William Allen had decided to take Sallie to California for a rest. The Whites left Emporia in January 1913 and rented a beach house in La Jolla for five months. William Allen and Sallie also took Bill, Mary, Grandma White, and Martha, their "hired girl." It is very likely that the Whites chose California because they had relatives living in that state. Catherine Boynton, William Allen's cousin and Grandma White's niece, lived in Los Angeles, where she had trained and practiced as an osteopathic physician.

During their stay in La Jolla, Sallie rested and walked the shoreline while William Allen worked on his second novel, *In the Heart of a Fool*. Bill completed the seventh grade and Mary completed the third at the local school. After school, both Bill and Mary combed the beach's tidal pools for "treasure" and played in the ocean waves that rolled onto the beach as the elder Whites kept a watchful eye on their children. Eventually, Sallie's health improved and the family returned to Emporia via their summer cabin in Manitou Springs, Colorado. Every member of the family was glad to be home and go about the daily tasks of an American middle-class family in the Midwest.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>William Allen White, Emporia, to Edna Ferber, New York City, 25 March 1916, Transcript in the hand of Edna Ferber, Ferber Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. William Allen White, Emporia, to Edna Ferber, 24 May 1920, Transcript in the hand of Edna Ferber, Ferber Papers. Both William Allen and Sallie suffered from depression and nervous breakdowns.

<sup>77</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 21. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 592.

Dignitaries and celebrities from the nation and around the world seemed to find pleasure, relaxation, friendship, and advice at the White's home on Exchange Street. One of the first dignitaries that Mary met was Theodore Roosevelt. He quickly became her friend and hero. Theodore Roosevelt had also been a sickly child, and Mary quickly identified, and became close friends, with the "Rough Rider." He visited her father in Emporia on several occasions. Mary also traveled with her father back East to visit Mr. Roosevelt. In 1912, when Mary was eight, Roosevelt came to Emporia to discuss his presidential campaign with Mary's father. William Allen, Sallie, Bill, and Mary entertained Roosevelt as he worked and relaxed at the White's home during the autumn of 1912. One Sunday, after taking Roosevelt to the German Lutheran church for morning worship, William Allen, his guest, Sallie, and Bill sat down at the dinner table for a meal of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and creamed gravy. Everyone at the table had ravenous appetites, but Mary refused to come to the dinner table. William Allen said that Mary ". . . would not come to the table because she thought she could get more fried chicken, without being noticed, by staying in the kitchen."<sup>78</sup> That was Mary! She was trying to get the best out of life, even if it was for more fried chicken than the others could eat, and even if it meant missing dinner with Theodore Roosevelt!

Mary's personality was similar to the personality of her hero. Everett Rich, in his dissertation, stated that "Mary had the Roosevelt joy in life, his zest for living, his unbounded energy, his love for the outdoors."<sup>79</sup> Her love for the outdoors quickly caused

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<sup>78</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 494.

<sup>79</sup>Rich, 168.



**Figure Four** - The White Family with the Roosevelts, ca. 1910. *Bottom, Left to Right:* President Roosevelt's nephew, W. L. Mary, and Sallie White. *Top, Left to Right:* William Allen White and President Roosevelt. Courtesy of William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

Mary to develop a love for horseback riding and the freedom which it brought. Mary became “. . . a wild, carefree horseback rider.”<sup>80</sup>

Mary had ridden horses from the time she was old enough to get into a saddle.

Her riding adventures were begun on a burro; then she was given a Shetland pony.

The pony, like the burro, belonged to all the neighborhood children; and since the Whites lived next to “nigger-town,” Negro children were always riding the pony. When it came to choosing between getting dinner on time and letting a youngster ride his turn, Mary was late and endured the punishment. Her parents were never able to devise any scheme to get Mary to her meals when a group of children were playing with her pony.<sup>81</sup>

Though Mary’s parents supported her horseback riding, it was something her father and mother feared. It was not the fact that she loved to ride, but the fact that Mary loved to ride fast, as fast as the pony would go. She had several accidents while riding her pony during her youth. Although many of the accidents were not serious, they could have been serious, if not tragic. When Mary was ten years old, she ran into a car with her pony.

Mary was out riding

. . . and some people came along with an automobile and honked and made a loud noise and the pony sidestepped and threw her off. She got up . . . and they came back and making a loud noise and honking the pony bucked her off again. Her mother asked, “Well, Mary, didn’t they stop and see what was the matter?” And Mary said, “No mother, but what would you expect? They were riding in a Ford!”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Johnson, 245.

<sup>81</sup>Rich, 212.

<sup>82</sup>Johnson, 245-246. Mary was quick to come up with replies that would catch her listeners off-guard. She was independent and quick-witted, things she had learned at a young age from her father and Grandmother White.

Mary and the pony were bruised, but she got back on the pony and rode away. Her parents took the Shetland pony away from her several times because they believed Mary needed to pay attention to what she was doing and not ride so fast. Mary told her parents that she would be more careful, but within days of getting the horse back Mary was riding as fast as before. Such was Mary's attitude about life.

Mary loved books as well as horses. Her grandmother White and her mother would set Bill and Mary in their rockers and read to them for hours when they were growing up. Mary loved the classics, books written by Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, and Mark Twain. She read all of their books before she was ten years old and was above her peers' reading level. One of Mary's favorite books was *Huck Finn*, but she also perused newspapers and magazines.<sup>83</sup> Mary also enjoyed "... bloodcurdling ghost stories."<sup>84</sup> The ghost stories sometimes made life frightening for the young women who worked for the Whites, as Mary had a knack for bringing them to life. One of the hired girls returned to the White's home

... one Sunday night to find a man standing on the porch. She spoke to the stranger, then let out a scream when she saw that he was pointing a gun at her. Mary and Bill watched the show from the shrubs; and it took the whole family to convince the girl, who had run across to grandma White's, that the murderer was a dummy with a toy pistol.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Johnson, 247. Rich, 115. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 593.

<sup>84</sup>Rich, 115.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 115.

Mary continued to be full of energy and zeal during her youth. She spent her summers in Colorado playing in the brooks and meadows near the White's cabin. In those days, Mary was always easy to find. William Allen and Sallie could easily spot her a mile away with field glasses. Her "... red-ribbon topknot on her towhead ..." let them know where she was playing, her father remembered.<sup>86</sup> Mary tried fishing during the summer months in the mountains of Colorado, but she had no patience with waiting for fish. She had to be busy doing something.<sup>87</sup>

By the time Mary was twelve, she had become a successful businesswoman. During the summer vacations in Colorado, Mary, wearing "... overalls, galluses, and [a] black shirt . . . ," and in pigtails, would take three or four of the White's tame burros, corral them, feed them, care for them, and rent them out to tourists and townspeople who wanted to ride a burro in Estes Park (vacationers from Kansas, especially acquaintances of the Whites who had summer cabins in the area, were eager supporters of Mary's business endeavors).<sup>88</sup> Mary Katherine was quickly becoming a young woman; how would she deal with adolescence and additional responsibilities? Would her attitude about life and social inequalities change? Would she become the daughter her parents would be proud of?

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<sup>86</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 592.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 592.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 592, 593. "Galluses," according to the dictionary, are trouser suspenders. "Gallus," *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (Chicago: The English Language Institute of America, 1975).



**Figure Five** - Mary Katherine Riding One of Her Burros.  
(Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)



**Figure Six** - Mary Katherine White. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)

poor.<sup>89</sup> One of Mary Katherine's classmates, when asked about Mary and her attitude toward school, commented:

Whether she was a good student (or not) I don't know, she had the brains to be a good student. Whether things attracted her (or not), that she would apply herself, I don't know. She had the brains to be an excellent student.<sup>90</sup>

School work was not difficult for Mary, but the discipline of school life was a challenge for her.<sup>91</sup> She struggled through general education requirements typical for a student who lived during the early twentieth century. Courses such as grammar, government, history, Latin, mathematics, and sciences were subjects most students had to endure while attending high school, in Emporia and elsewhere, and it is assumed that Mary, as other students, endured these requirements.<sup>92</sup>

Mary Katherine's friends and classmates from high school described her as having beautiful, auburn hair, that she would not wear up. Mary "... wore here hair with a long, single braid down her back or double braids. . . . She would not wear the styles of the day." Mary "... was more charming with the plain hair than the girls with the puffed out hair." Her stature was short (five feet-three inches) and stocky, and she had an oval face,

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<sup>89</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 594.

<sup>90</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>91</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 594.

<sup>92</sup>Mary White, Miscellaneous school assignments and grade cards, Mary White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

big brown eyes, and a deep voice. Mary “. . . always wore a middy blouse (the style of the day), except for her riding pants.”<sup>93</sup>

Mary Katherine was actively involved in several clubs and was on the yearbook and newspaper staff at Emporia High School. She was a member of the Knockers Club, the Shakespeare Club, the Sodalites Latinas Club, and a member of the executive committee of the school’s Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). The Knockers Club was organized because people complained or “knocked” the school due to its shortages and inadequacies. Members of the club promoted the positive aspects of the school and endeavored to improve the school’s image in the community. Mary also worked for the *Echo* and the *Reecho*, the school’s newspaper and annual respectively. She began working on the high school newspaper as a freshman in 1918. The *Echo* had a total of twenty-five staff members. Mary’s brother and Cecil Carle, one of William Lindsay White’s friends, had been co-editors of the paper during their senior year.<sup>94</sup>

When Mary was fourteen, and a freshman in high school, she took a mail-order art course to learn how to sketch. She quickly learned that she had a hidden talent and began to sketch caricatures of people that she met at school, in town, or on her travels with her family. Some of the sketches included people she had met at Estes Park, “ugly” girls she had met on her excursions with her parents to Colorado and the east coast, members of

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<sup>93</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>94</sup>Roberts and Broucek. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 24. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 607.

the school orchestra, and individuals visiting local businesses.<sup>95</sup> Mary had become so skillful and engrossed in her caricature drawings that she decided to enroll in an art class at the high school during her junior year, but Mr. Rice Brown, the high school principal, blocked her enrollment.<sup>96</sup> Some years later, one of Mary's former high school teachers recalled the incident.

The art teacher [Mrs. Hill], who was a very gentle and beautiful girl, very well-bred, quite a young woman taught art and Mary wanted to enroll in her class. Russ [Mr. Brown] would not let her because he told Mrs. Hill that she would just be a trouble-maker to you. . . . He would not let her take the art class.<sup>97</sup>

Mary, interested in why Mr. Brown refused to allow her to take the class, went to the principal's office. She showed Mr. Brown some of her sketches, but was unsuccessful in changing his decision about her enrollment in the art class. Mary Katherine did, however, have the last word, or "sketch," in the art class ordeal. One of the drawings Mary had taken to Mr. Brown was a sketch of ". . . ballet girls with the fluffy skirts on tiptoe, with [their] arms out. . . ." Mary Katherine took the drawing and pasted a picture of Mr. Brown's face on it then proceeded to show it around. Everyone in the school, and the community, thought the caricature drawing was hilarious, except Mr. Brown.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 607. Mary White, Caricature Drawings, Mary White Collection. Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>96</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.



**Figure Seven** - Mary Katherine White, ca. 1918.  
(Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)

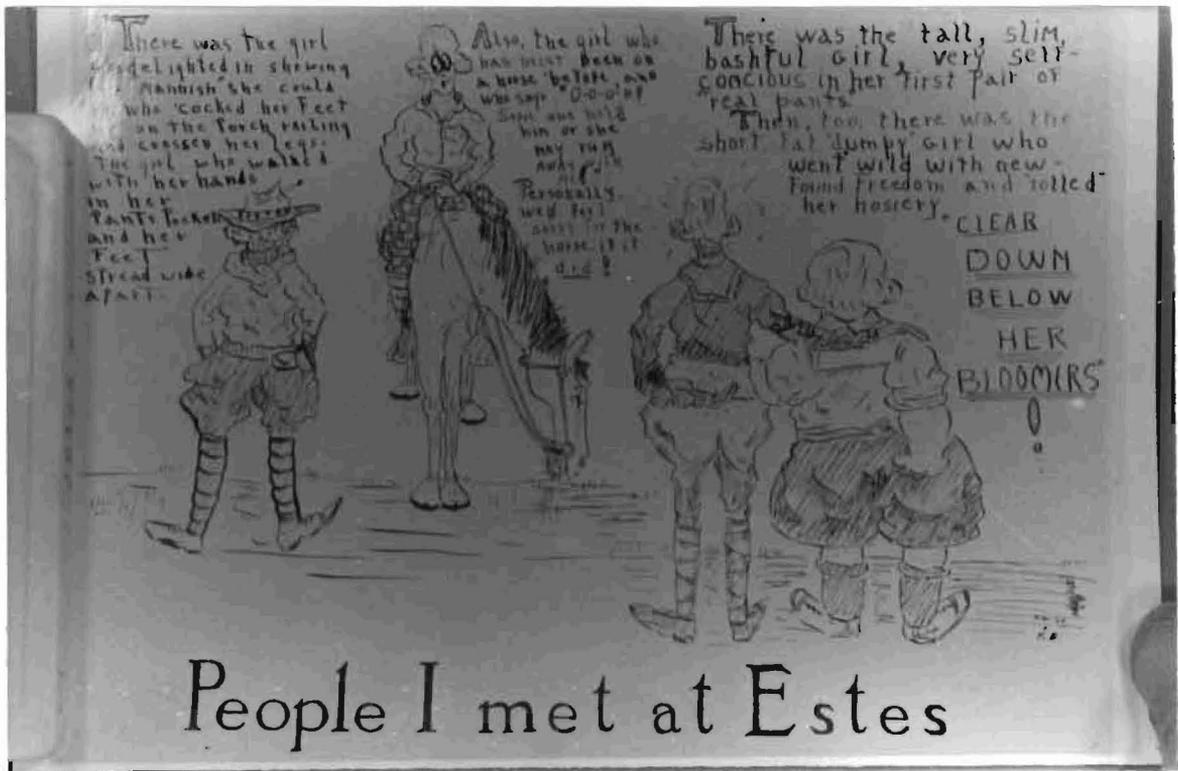
"SOME GIRLS ARE BORN UGLY --



OTHERS BOB THEIR HAIR."



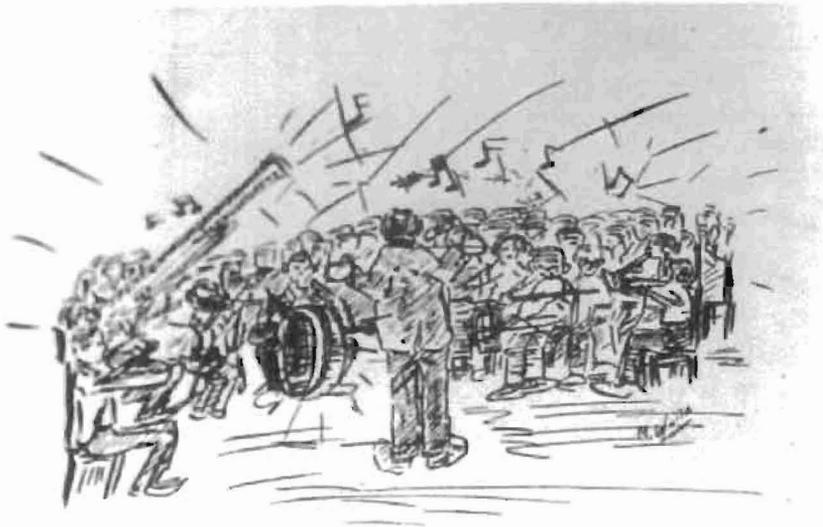
**Figure Eight** - Caricature Drawing by Mary White  
(Courtesy of Mary White Collection)



**Figure Nine** - Caricature Drawing by Mary White. (Courtesy of Mary White Collection.)

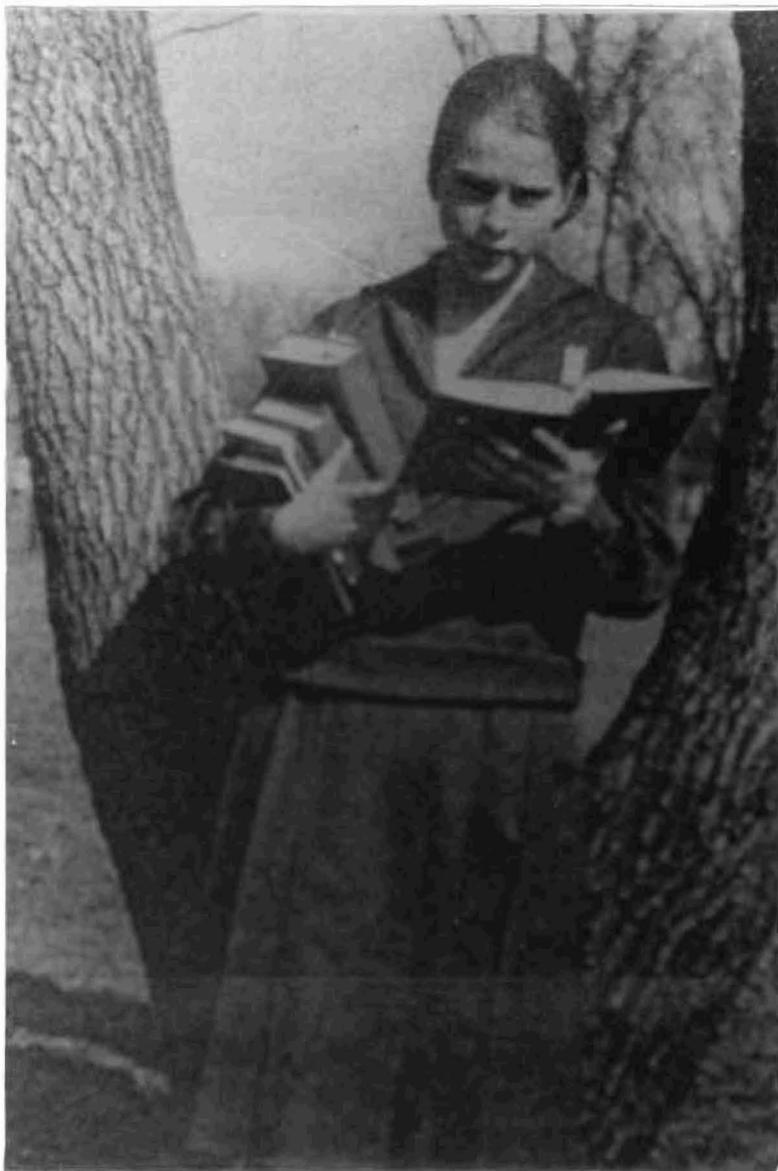


**Figure Ten** - Caricature Drawing by Mary White.  
(Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)



Orchestra Plays in Chapel.

**Figure Eleven** - Caricature Drawing by Mary White. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)



**Figure Twelve** - Mary Katherine White, ca. 1917-1919.  
(Courtesy of Mary White Collection)

Although Mary Katherine was not allowed to enroll in an art class, her talent as a caricaturist allowed her to become the cartoonist for the school's annual, the *Reecho*. During that same year, she also served as the assistant editor of the annual. Mary was elected editor of the yearbook for her senior year, a position she looked forward to with great anticipation. Mary's drawings were accepted by the High School Annual and she also produced caricatures for the 1921 *Sunflower*, the teachers' college annual.<sup>99</sup>

As far as Mary Katherine's schoolwork is concerned, there are limited sources for exploring her academic life. However, there is one location that provides some sources on this subject. The Mary White Collection, at the William Allen White Memorial Library, on the Emporia State University campus has some of Mary Katherine's English II homework papers, history notes, and several titled sketches. Some of her English Composition papers are relevant for discerning her ideas and attitudes concerning certain subjects.

Although Mary Katherine did not date boys during her early high school years, she had a definite philosophy about who was responsible for paying for the date. In one of Mary's English themes she mentions that girls should be allowed to "bear the expense" of going out for ice cream or going to the theater. She felt that, on many occasions, girls would do more on their own if there were a way to keep them from embarrassing their date ". . . who might not have money to pay."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Fred E. Shuler, editor, *The Sunflower*, 1922 (Emporia: Emporia Gazette, 1921), 224, 226, 228, 235. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 607.

<sup>100</sup>Mary White Collection.

Another of Mary's essays was written in letter form and berates Mary for cheating and dishonesty in academics. She approaches the theme as if written by an authority who has the right to caution another person. Reading the essay for the first time, the reader is drawn to an illusion. It appears to be written by a friend who has seen the "fruits" of dishonesty and wants to caution Mary Katherine about its inappropriateness. Instead, it is her conscience speaking. The letter was signed, "Yourself."

Other letters in Mary Katherine's English Composition papers reveal her concerns for the well-being of students and improvements for the school. Included in the collection are letters on behalf of the students to school board officials requesting the enlargement of the gymnasium and discussing the possibility of making Washington's birthday a holiday (Mary was in favor of this).<sup>101</sup>

Mary Katherine was better known in high school for her practical jokes, pranks, and foolishness than for her studiousness and excellent grades. One of her favorite challenges was to leave one class and enter another without the first teacher knowing that she had successfully accomplished her feat. Mary took a course in commercial work in which the teacher was a man by the name of Mr. Nichols. He was described as ". . . a very nice gentleman with just one flaw: he thought every student was a nice student."<sup>102</sup> Mary would slip out of the classroom, enter the corridor, and slip into another classroom several doors down the hall. One of Mary's teachers explained that

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

... she [Mary] would come in [to the classroom] and come up to the desk (this desk was on about an eight-inch platform) and right back of my desk was always hanging a calendar with quite large figures and she would scribble her initials on the date that she had slipped out of the classroom. . . .<sup>103</sup>

Mary Katherine continued this game of transferring from one room to another until her last day at Emporia High School.

Mary was “. . . a constant worry to her teachers and principals, who felt her antics disrupted the general order of education.”<sup>104</sup> Some of Mary’s favorite antics included filling fountain pens with skunk oil, a practice that almost caused her to get expelled from school. On another occasion she took some “. . . foul-smelling acid from the school laboratory . . .” and then released it into some of the department stores downtown, causing employees and patrons alike to run into the streets to escape the horrible odor.<sup>105</sup> Mary’s father considered her to be “. . . mischievous without malice. . . .”<sup>106</sup> But the skunk oil and foul-smelling acid incidents were minor shenanigans when it came to Mary

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Clough, 220.

<sup>105</sup>Rich, 211. Skunk oil is used for medicinal purposes. It is extracted from the seeds and roots of the *symplocarpus foetidus* plant, commonly known as “skunk-cabbage.” Skunk oil is used as an “. . . antispasmodic, diaphoretic, expectorant, narcotic.” It has been used to treat asthma, chronic catarrh, chronic rheumatism, chorea, hysteria, epilepsy, convulsions, and dropsy. The medicine has an acidic taste and an offensive odor. Judy Kramer, pharmacist at Transplant Pharmacy, Wichita, interview by author, 19 March 1999, Dearing, Kansas, telephone, Vis Christi, Wichita, Kansas. .

<sup>106</sup>William Allen White, “Mary White,” *The Emporia Gazette*, 17 May 1921. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 607.

Katherine and her other “extracurricular” experiences at school. The other incidents could be classified as major violations of school conduct.

One of Mary’s first dangerous incidents during high school occurred when Helen “Pug” Whitig and Mary White first met at Emporia High School. Mary was from the east side, Exchange Street School, and Helen was from the west side, Walnut Street School. They were self-appointed captains from their respective sides of “town.” Both Mary and Helen believed it their duty to decide which side of town would be the master of the high school. So they set a time for a wrestling match in the girls’ gym after school. There would be no referee, but each girl had her own cheering section. The match was under way with loud support from the cheering sections when Ethyl Ireland, the physical education teacher, appeared. After the girls explained it was just a little test for valor, Ireland insisted that they shake hands. Someone reported the “wrestling match” to Rice Brown, but by the time Brown made his way to the gym, the two girls had smoothed their hair down, and had their arms around each other, and assured him that it was only in fun.<sup>107</sup>

Another prank Mary participated in occurred in another section of the high school and also involved the same girl mentioned in the previous incident. One required course in high school was sewing; a class that Mary might have been uncomfortable with because she had seldom had a needle in her hand before this class. The class assignment for each girl was to make a corset cover. Neither girl had experienced the wearing of a corset nor did they ever intend to. They spent much time in the fitting room making sure that the fit

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<sup>107</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

would be just right. There was much laughter with each fitting. Then came the time to stitch the seams on the sewing machine. The machine proved to be too much for Mary, so Helen offered her services. Helen was intently leaning forward in her chair at the machine, with the back legs of the chair off the floor, when Mary Katherine happened to walk by and catch her foot on the chair leg and stumble. Helen landed on the floor, corset cover in the air. The commotion led to much laughter and disorder and both girls were sent to the principal's office. Mary Katherine and Helen soberly assured Mr. Brown that the event was an unavoidable accident. Miss Williams, the teacher, refused to accept the girls' account of the mishap and would not allow the two girls in the sewing class until they had been disciplined in "study hall." The two girls soon learned to "adapt" to one another and became close friends during their first year of high school.<sup>108</sup>

During Mary Katherine's sophomore year of high school, the pranks and practical jokes, and trouble-making escalated. Some of Mary's escapades were more serious than others, but the majority of the practical jokes were light-hearted and not meant to harm anyone. That fall, Helen Whitig decided to take a domestic science course. Mary Katherine, being the tomboy that she was, could not understand Helen's interest in housework. It was a well-known fact at school that Helen was terrified at the sight of a mouse. That meant it was no secret to Mary Katherine. In the early twentieth century, students in the domestic science class were required to wear large, white aprons trimmed in rick-rack. When class was over, the apron was hung in the locker. One day, in the foods class, Helen put her hand into her pocket and immediately fainted when she realized

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

she had touched a dead mouse. After Helen had been revived, she was sent to the principal's office. There sat Mary Katherine. The question from Mr. Brown was, "Do you think Mary put that mouse in your pocket?" Helen replied, "Now where would Mary get a dead mouse? Well, you know this building is full of mice. It's just crawled in there and died."<sup>109</sup>

It might be said that Mary Katherine, during her high school years, was only following in her brother's footsteps when it came to pranks and practical jokes. There was one major difference between the siblings when it came to mischief. Cecil Carle mentions the dissimilarity in his manuscript.

The only difference between the excursions toward minor sins indulged in by Bill and me and the Mary White skulduggery was that we males cloaked our transgressions in secrecy while Mary let hers hang out boldly. The whole student body knew about the hours she spent in the outer area of the principal's offices awaiting lectures on proper behavior. W. A. White once told me after I became a full-time Gazette reporter a few weeks following Mary's death, "Sallie and I never knew about the devilments in which Bill was involved until after he had finished high school. With Mary, it was a different matter."<sup>110</sup>

In his autobiography, William Allen White reminded his readers about some of Mary Katherine's escapades as a fighter. As he recalled the incidents, he remarked that Mary, even during her high school years, was "no angel."<sup>111</sup> When Mary was a freshman,

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Cecil Carle, *Mary White's Brother Bill: Growing Up in Kansas, 1920-1922*, no date, [original manuscript], William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, 12-13.

<sup>111</sup>William Allen White, "Mary White," *The Emporia Gazette*, 17 May 1921. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 603.

the Whites suffered some embarrassment due to her behavior. Mary threw a boy twice her size down one of the school halls, jumped on his chest and pummeled him until she was pulled off by the older boys of the school. Later that day she told her parents, after being interrogated about the incident, "Well, he'll never pinch me again!" . . . And that sort of thing never was repeated.<sup>112</sup>

Another incident, in which Mary Katherine was involved in a fight with a male student, occurred two or three years later while Mary was attending high school. Her father, in his autobiography commented:

For a girl of seventeen, she was intellectually fairly well developed. She was a born tomboy. When Bill, who was gentle and maybe a little shy, went to the common schools in Emporia wherein were a dozen colored children, among them the usual number of bullies as among white boys, we were a little sorry that he had to take rough treatment on the school grounds from these colored boys who had not the environmental restraints of the white boys. But when Mary went to the same school, we were sorry for the colored boys. For Mary was a scrapper. She would slap twice her weight in trousers and had the skill in combat to defend herself after she had made an assault.<sup>113</sup>

Mary also must have realized that she was a tomboy, and perhaps destined by her father to remain that way for the rest of her natural life. William Allen White seldom discouraged or disciplined Mary Katherine fighting; it appears that he encouraged Mary to be a "scrapper." Perhaps the thoughts and images of Mary's frail health during early childhood caused William Allen to encourage his daughter's tomboyishness. One of Mary Katherine's friends remarked that she [Mary] said in her low-pitched voice, "Dad put

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<sup>112</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 604.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 603.

pants on the wrong one.”<sup>114</sup> Mary Katherine’s activities reveal that she was the type of person who would take charge of a situation and make sure the situation was resolved, one way or another. She was assertive, daring, and outspoken. Mary’s brother was just the opposite; young Bill White was amiable, bashful, and non-confrontational. But Mary Katherine was not only aggressive when it came to pranks, practical jokes, and fighting. Her aggressiveness could be channeled into assertiveness and determination when it came to providing aid to those at school who were considered the underdogs. Yes, Mary Katherine was known as a fighter in her school. A fighter for the causes she believed in. She treated all people, old or young, black or white, as equals. She was always a champion of the underdog. Whether Mary had a right to be or not, she was their champion. Mary Katherine was always a person who was very much aware of the fact that she was more privileged than some of the other students and people she knew. Mary was self-conscious about that fact and she wanted to share her privilege with others. Mary Katherine, throughout her childhood and adolescence, wanted other children to have some of the advantages that she enjoyed.

One of Mary Katherine’s main projects during her last year of high school was to make arrangements for a restroom, or a lounge, at the high school for the African-American girls. They had no place to go between classes but the toilet. Mary felt something had to be done and she worked very hard on the project. One day Mary Katherine found an African American girl reading a book in the “toilet.” When Mary asked the girl why she was reading in the toilet, the girl told Mary that she did not feel like

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<sup>114</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

the white girls wanted her to “. . . use the school’s only restroom [lounge] for girls.”<sup>115</sup> Mary was outraged, she believed in human equality and believed that everyone should have the same rights and privileges. She began crusading for the rights of the female African American students in her high school. Mary Katherine drew up a petition showing the need for a new lounge for African American girls in her school. She gathered signatures from students and individuals of the community who agreed with her petition. Strengthened by her father’s advice on how to approach the school officials, Mary “. . . hounded the school officials for such a room.”<sup>116</sup> The lounge was built for the girls in 1922 due, at least in part, to Mary’s strong campaign and determination. When the lounge became a reality, Mary’s mother made sure that it was properly furnished.<sup>117</sup>

According to one of her high school friends, Mary Katherine was a radical, one of those “. . . people that fight for causes. . . . They get in groups and [then] they get carried away. . . . She was a great one for causes. . . .” Her classmate continued, “I think she had something to contribute to the world, I truly do . . . I think she was a very special person.”<sup>118</sup> Mary Katherine’s concern for others reveals that she was truly growing up

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<sup>115</sup>Clough, 220. Clough does not inform his readers whether the African American girl’s response was due to a school policy or an unwritten policy by the community. It is evident, considering the time period (1910-1921), that the community had an unwritten policy concerning the “Separate but Equal” issue. This policy did not permit African Americans and whites to use the same restrooms. Emporia history reveals that the community had an active KKK branch during the late 1910’s and 1920s.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 220. Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>117</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

and becoming an adult, and a person who would make a difference in the world. It is interesting to note that though Mary was interested in equal treatment of human beings, she did not, however, campaign for the inclusion of African American girls into the lounge to which other female students had access.

Equal treatment of African Americans and the idea of the inclusion of African Americans into early twentieth century American society were two issues that were avoided by many white Americans of the era. Although progressivism was popular, it did not, for the most part, include African Americans. Equal treatment of African Americans was required by all states and their citizens since the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision made in 1896. "Equal," however, was not meant to denote inclusion into the white man's society. The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation laws, or Jim Crow laws, were legal, and therefore, the law of the land. The Supreme Court's decision became more popularly known as the "Separate but Equal" ruling.<sup>119</sup> A white newspaper editor, at the beginning of the twentieth century, expressed his opinion about the separate but equal decision in the following manner:

God Almighty drew the color line and it cannot be obliterated. The negro must stay on his side of the line and the white man must stay on his side, and the sooner both races recognize this fact and accept it, the better it will be for both.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, third edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 746. Lewis W. Diuguid, "'The Chains of Denial Hold Fast,'" *The Kansas City Star*, 20 February 1999.

<sup>120</sup>Tindall and Shi, 747.

Americans living in Emporia were treated much the same as or similarly to African Americans in other towns in America.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Griffith, 176-177. Pitts. Rich, 212. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 16. Caryl Ledner, *Mary White* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1977), 5-6, 8-9.

## ***CHAPTER FOUR***

### ***MARY KATHERINE AND HOME LIFE***

Mary Katherine's relationship with her family members varied. As she grew to adulthood, Mary's attitudes about life, people, politics, and the future could have possibly influenced the relationship she had with her family members, especially if Mary Katherine's views differed from the opinions of a particular member of the family. Was she happy with her family? Was she happy with where they lived? Was she happy with their status in the community?

Mary Katherine's behavior may have been an outward expression of the frustration she felt about being William Allen White's daughter. She did not always appreciate the treatment she received as the daughter of a prominent newspaper editor. Fame tends to bring special treatment to the people that it touches. Mary said, "I am so tired, so darn tired of being William Allen White's little girl!"<sup>123</sup> Mary Katherine was not afraid to express her feelings about her status in Emporia to those she called her friends. One afternoon while in the White's automobile, Mary Katherine spoke of her predicament to Cecil Carle. Cecil Carle, in his manuscript, related the following conversation.

That afternoon in the White auto with Mary, I learned much about the road to fulfillment that she was traveling under handicap

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<sup>123</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 604. Roberts and Broucek.

because she was the editor's daughter and Bill's sister. Teachers and others expected her to match images that were not within her desired reach.

I understood. I said that my younger brothers had complained that they were constantly being reminded of what brother Cecil had done in high school. Particularly in the matter of good grades.

Her head bobbed. "I got it double. I'm not just William Allen White's little girl. I'm also Bill White's kid sister. Folks won't forget that. I envy your brothers because they had a way out. They have become stars on the football and basketball teams. What's my alternative?"<sup>124</sup>

William Lindsay White had also found that being William Allen White's son was, at times, a heavy burden. That heavy burden existed because his father was the "... teetotalist Conscience of the Midwest . . ." and that made William Lindsay the focus of much scrutiny, similar to that which minister's children must endure. Because of this fact, he was unable to live a carefree child's life.<sup>125</sup> Most assuredly the same was true for Mary Katherine. What could she do? Mary had to live up to the expectations of those around her. Or did she? Her father was a journalist, her brother was preparing for a career in journalism, and it was just assumed that Mary Katherine would do the same. But Mary wanted to be a veterinarian; undoubtedly her love for horses had influenced this decision. However, most people who knew her, including her parents, and especially her father, believed that Mary Katherine would, one day, become a brilliant journalist or writer. Her friends assumed that Mary would follow in her illustrious father's footsteps and one day

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<sup>124</sup>Cecil Carle, 15-16.

<sup>125</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 4.

would work side-by-side with her brother as co-owner and journalist-editor for the *Emporia Gazette*.<sup>126</sup>

The strain and stress placed on both Mary Katherine and William Lindsay as the children of a famous journalist was also due to the fact that their father had a busy work schedule. Their father was out of town conducting business several times during the year and routinely entertained national and state dignitaries at his home. William Allen White's chaotic schedule quite possibly caused friction, tension, and strain on his relationship with his children. There were many times that William Allen White was too busy to give the attention and time to his children that they desired. This is evident when one looks at the comments of Mary's brother several years later. William Lindsay White, in 1938, told Cecil Carle, ". . . your father talked to you and paid more attention to you than my father did to me."<sup>127</sup> William Allen White's position as a nationally-known author and journalist placed some strain on the relationship with his children, but, between father and daughter, the relationship was also at times pleasant, and contained trust and confidence.

When Mary Katherine was sixteen, an event occurred that revealed the trust and confidence of this relationship between her and her father. A girl at Emporia High School had to drop out of school and get married because she was pregnant. The event caused an enormous scandal in the community. A few days after the scandal William Allen and Mary were walking together downtown. Nonchalantly, William Allen said, "Mary, don't ever

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<sup>126</sup>Roberts and Broucek. Carle, 14-15.

<sup>127</sup>William Lindsay White, Emporia, to Cecil Carle, Emporia, 1938, Transcript in the hand of William Lindsay White, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 16.

be afraid to come to me, no matter what happens to you, good or bad. You can depend on me.” He hesitated for a moment and continued, “Don’t forget this, Mary, ever!” Mary Katherine, with her quick-wittedness, shot back, “Do you mean if I’m ever going to have a baby?” Both giggled and laughed, which removed the tension from the seriousness of the conversation.<sup>128</sup>

A major controversy between Mary Katherine and her father had to do with Mary’s growing older. Mary was an extrovert, but she struggled to attain an identity of her own. She was described as an “. . . individual [with] a strong personality, so vibrant, so alive. [She was] so full of energy, enthusiasm, and fun, and mischief.” But Mary Katherine’s father viewed her zeal and lively activities at times as childish. William Allen, during Mary’s adolescence, came to the conclusion that his daughter was a “Peter Pan,” a person who did not want to grow up. Yet many of her friends and acquaintances believed she was mature for her age. Others who also knew her thought she acted like a child at times, and as an adult at other times. Reflecting on the volatility of a teenager’s behavior, one of Mary’s friends recalled that Mary Katherine was “so open, so frank about everything. She wanted everyone to be as happy as she was. And still her mind was so mature.”<sup>129</sup> Another friend, at a later time, said that she did not see Mary as a Peter Pan

. . . because she showed so many signs of maturity. The challenge for the room for the [African American] girls was a mature thing. This business of interceding on the behalf of discriminating people

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<sup>128</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 593.

<sup>129</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

was a mature thing. In many ways she was ahead of the community.<sup>130</sup>

Ignoring the fact that Mary Katherine was growing into a young adult, and was often thinking as an adult, her father continued to view his daughter as a Peter Pan.

In retrospect, after Mary's death, William Allen White mentioned that there was some heartache concerning his relationship with his daughter. In a letter to his family, William Allen wrote that he regretted the fact that Mary had never touched him, or given him a hug, while she was growing up. According to Mrs. Barbara Walker, the granddaughter of William Allen and Sallie White, the lack of physical contact disturbed William Allen immensely.<sup>131</sup> Was Mary Katherine's lack of affection due to the fact that her father was away so much, or was she not showing emotion because the Whites were a family that did not show emotion outwardly? Is it possible that both father's and daughter's personalities so closely mirrored each others that it caused an invisible wall between them? Regardless of the answer, one must remember that Mary Katherine White was her own person. She would not allow her father, an influential man, who possibly wanted his daughter to remain a little girl, impede the goals and dreams she had planned for her life.

Mary Katherine was independent, quick-witted, strong-willed, a freethinker, and a radical reformer; all traits she had absorbed and learned from her family. These impulses quite possibly affected Mary's relationship with not only her father, but also with her

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Barbara Walker of *The Emporia Gazette*, interview by author, 26 September 1996, Emporia, personal interview, *The Emporia Gazette*.

mother.<sup>132</sup> After all, Sallie Lindsay White had grown up in the South where independence was common among most middle-class women. Though little is known about Mary Katherine's relationship with her mother, the relationship had to be somewhat better than her relationship with her father. Sallie and Mary undoubtedly had disagreements and arguments, especially when it came to Mary Katherine's horses, her tomboyish actions, and her clothing. But the relationship between mother and daughter was good, a relationship that consisted of trust, confidence, and almost no strain or tension.<sup>133</sup> Sallie White was the one who cared for the children when William Allen was away from home. There were times, however, when even the mother of two needed assistance.

Sallie White, with the help of her mother, Francis Lindsay, and William Allen's mother, continued to care for the children during their teenage years. There were times that Sallie White became quite ill. Bouts of depression, ill health, and nervous breakdowns placed the care of the children in the hands of both grandmothers more often than any would have desired. In addition to the grandmothers, other people from Emporia sometimes took care of William Lindsay and Mary Katherine when Sallie went with William Allen on business trips or when the Whites needed some time alone away from Emporia and the *Gazette*.<sup>134</sup> In general, except when she was away from home, Sallie

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<sup>132</sup>Walker. Rich, 6. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 7. Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>133</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 593.

<sup>134</sup>Mary White, Emporia, to Elizabeth O'Connor, Emporia, Fall 1919, Transcript in the hand of Mary White, Mary White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas. Walker. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 16. Johnson, 245-46. Roberts and Broucek. William Allen White, Emporia, to Edna

White was the person responsible for the upbringing, discipline, and care of the Whites' son and daughter.

Mary Katherine's relationship with her brother is another affiliation within the family about which little is known. However, the siblings apparently managed to get along well even though their personalities were quite different. In his biography of William Lindsay White, E. Jay Jernigan made the following observation about Mary Katherine and William Lindsay White:

In contrast young Mary grew up no angel. After her initial sickliness [as an infant] she became a nervously vibrant tomboy, rambunctious and rebellious, fearless around horses, a frequent trial to her parents. Unlike Bill she was not a warm, considerate child but expressed her spirits by flagrant teasing and flamboyant recklessness. That led to many childhood arguments, of course, but they grew up very close, with Bill the somewhat pompous big brother and Mary the bedeviling gamin of a little sister.<sup>135</sup>

Mary Katherine and William Lindsay also worked together for the school newspaper during high school, went to social gatherings together in Emporia and Colorado, and even enjoyed pranks and practical jokes together.<sup>136</sup>

On one occasion, Sallie White requested young Bill to take Mary to a dance at the Wigwam, a gathering place for teenagers. The evening of the dance, Mary Katherine was

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Ferber, New York City, 25 March 1916, Transcript in the hand of Edna Ferber, Ferber Papers.

<sup>135</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 17. Other words for "gamin" include waif, ragamuffin, foundling, and urchin. An individual who is a gamin is "a street urchin; a neglected boy. Tomboy; a saucy girl." "Gamin," *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*.

<sup>136</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 24. Johnson, 332. Roberts and Broucek. Walker.

dressed in a “. . . Chinese robe-type thing . . . looking stoic and whistling through her teeth(that was a trick of hers). . . .” She walked into the building behind her brother and they danced. After one dance, Mary gave up and brother and sister went home. Peg Soden, one of Mary Katherine’s friends, said later in an interview, “I guess Mrs. White was satisfied that she went to one dance and classed it as a colossal failure.”<sup>137</sup>

Mary went to a few dances, but dancing was not one of her favorite pastimes. Besides horseback riding, practical jokes ranked high on Mary Katherine’s list of favorite things, even if she was the person the prank or practical joke was being played on. She continually tried to outdo her brother at practical jokes. Barbara Walker, Mary’s niece, said that one summer young Bill pulled a stunt that surpassed Mary’s practical jokes. While his sister was sleeping on the enclosed porch, he went outside and gathered several jars full of lightening bugs and let them loose in Mary’s summer sleeping quarters. The room became so bright that Mary Katherine could not sleep until the bugs were removed. Bill and Mary never forgot the lightening bug caper!<sup>138</sup>

Mary Katherine’s room, other than the porch during the summer, was upstairs. Her room was not filled with dolls, dresses, or lacy curtains. Mary’s room definitely did not appear to be a girl’s bedroom. Her room looked more like a boy’s bedroom. It had crossed swords on one of the walls and on another hung a huge stuffed horse’s head. Mary Katherine discovered the horse’s head in a downtown store window display; she

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<sup>137</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>138</sup>Walker. Roberts and Broucek. One of the people interviewed by Roberts and Broucek thought the insects released in Mary’s room were June Bugs.

thought she just had to have it and asked the store owner for the head when the display was taken down. Mary's room was also unkept, which was just the opposite of her brother's room. William Lindsay's room was always tidy. There were also books and magazines stacked in various places in her room. Books in Mary Katherine's room included the following titles: *O'Henry*, an adventure story by Morgan Robertson; *Winesburg, Ohio*, a novel by Sherwood Anderson which Mary's mother thought was inappropriate reading material for Mary's age; and *The New Republic*, and the *Nation*. She also had books by such authors as Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, and Jane Addams, books on popular science, and poets of the early twentieth century. Mary's favorite magazines were *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Mary Katherine had enjoyed reading since a small child. Her love of books and reading resulted in an increased reading comprehension level, and as is apparent by the reading list, she was reading books meant to be read by people much older than she.<sup>139</sup> During the early months of 1919 there was some question about why, at age fourteen, Mary Katherine was reading children's books like *Joan and Peter*, books far below her reading comprehension. Edna Ferber, then editor of the *New York Tribune*, was sent a letter by a reader of the *Tribune* concerning this "problem" and replied:

Sir: When Mary White (aged 11, though you're wrong, it's 14) reads "Joan and Peter" it's because she feels the need of mental relaxation. Two years ago, when I was sitting on the Whites front porch in Emporia, talking to Brock Pemberton and quoting airily from the classics, Mary set me right with, "That isn't Shakespeare.

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<sup>139</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 593, 603. Roberts and Broucek.

It's Montaigne." And it was. Mary, in 1949, will be Presidential Timber.<sup>140</sup>

The Whites also had a "play room" on the third floor of their home; it was a favorite spot where Mary took her friends when they visited her. The room faced south and had bay windows; Sallie White's room was below these windows. One day, Margaret, one of Mary Katherine's friends, was visiting Mary when a strange thing happened. Mary Katherine double-dared Margaret to go down the rope that hung outside one of the windows (the rope which hung alongside the middle window was used for a fire escape). The girl accepted the dare and began her journey to the ground. For Margaret, going down the rope was a not a problem, but getting on it was because surrounding the rope, and on the house, ivy was growing. Eventually Margaret got on the fire escape and began her descent. Suddenly something happened. Margaret was discovered going down the rope and Sallie White met her at the bottom of the rope and sent her home with the words "Don't ever come back!" That evening, Margaret was called back to the White home at Mrs. White's invitation to eat dinner.<sup>141</sup>

On another occasion, while Margaret was visiting Mary Katherine, challenged her to a waffle-eating contest. The visitor accepted the dare and both girls began eating waffles by the mouths-full. Abruptly, and without warning, Margaret choked on a mouth-full of waffles. When Mary saw what was occurring, she did not slap Margaret on the back to dislodge the waffles and she did not call out for help, all the hostess could do was

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<sup>140</sup>Edna Ferber, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Tribune*, 6 March 1919, Mary White Collection.

<sup>141</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

laugh uncontrollably. Mary Katherine thought it was hilarious when Margaret got choked while eating the waffles too quickly. Margaret survived the challenge and would undoubtedly face more challenges by Mary Katherine White, and accept them.<sup>142</sup>

Another of Mary's enjoyable activities was playing the ukelele. Whenever her friends came to her home, the ukelele would almost always appear when Mary Katherine and her guests went up to the playroom. Mary loved to play the instrument, and while she played the ukelele, her friends sang. When Mary Katherine was sixteen, one of her friends visited the White house and expressed an interest in the ukelele. She told Mary that she would like to learn to play the instrument. Mary proceeded to teach the girl, even going so far as lending the instrument to her. The friend took the ukelele to her home and played and practiced the instrument in the privacy of her room.<sup>143</sup>

Friends of Mary Katherine continued to enter the White's home at 927 Exchange. Everyone was welcome and enjoyed their times with Mary. But, it should be noted that there were always adult visitors at the Whites' residence, whose visits helped to develop Mary into a young woman. These distinguished visitors were, for the most part, guests of her father, the impressive and notable William Allen White.

Having a famous father had its compensations. Mary Katherine had the pleasure and opportunity of meeting many politicians, authors, writers, generals, and presidents. William Allen White was an important man and people came from all over the country to 927 Exchange for dinner parties and a time of relaxation or advice. William Lindsay

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

White, in a letter to Herbert Hoover III, in 1969, commented that his father “. . . was the best-known citizen of our state, far more in the limelight than any Governor or Senator. . . .”<sup>144</sup> One of William Allen White’s biographers stated that generals of the armed forces of the United States, presidential cabinet members, influential politicians, literary sages, and family members of the industrial statesmen sat at the Whites’ dinner table on Exchange Street in the small rural community of Emporia, Kansas and visited with the editor of the *Emporia Gazette* and his family.<sup>145</sup> Sallie White, who had been raised to show Southern hospitality, was an excellent hostess and also required this type of hospitality from her daughter. Mary Katherine learned well. One evening when she was sixteen, and her mother was away on business, Mary made quite an impression on the dignitaries that her father was hosting. Herbert Hoover had come to Emporia on a campaign tour for the Republican party. Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas and other local notables were also present.

Mary sat at the head of the table and her father swelled with pride. “You should have seen your daughter,” White wrote Sallie, “. . . dressed for her party--the prettiest thing in the world.”<sup>146</sup>

Mary Katherine was definitely growing up and expanding her horizons. As she gained a wealth of knowledge from the dignitaries she had become acquainted with through her father, Mary became a defender for the rights of others, a nascent reformer. The White

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<sup>144</sup>William Lindsay White, Emporia, to Herbert Hoover III, 25 August 1969, Transcript in the hand of William Lindsay White, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>145</sup>Jernigan, *William Allen White*, 14.

<sup>146</sup>Johnson, 333.

family was exposed to cultural and social experiences that many Kansans were unaccustomed to encountering. Mary was shaped by seeing Broadway shows in New York City and, meeting, politicians and dignitaries from the United States and around the world - novelists and syndicated columnists, actors and actresses, and reformers, such as Jane Addams, who were working to eliminate or ease the social ills of society.<sup>147</sup>

In 1919, Mary Katherine traveled with her father and mother to the east coast. Mary spent most of her time on the train watching people and writing letters to her friends. One friend that she wrote to was Elizabeth O'Connor, or "Shorty." On September 3 she described the train ride on the Santa Fe Railroad. Mary wrote Shorty about the people and sights she saw as they left the depot at Osage City, Kansas. She observed a sailor, whom she did not know, and, liking the way he wore his sailor's cap, she drew Shorty a picture of him "... wearing his cap in his special way."<sup>148</sup>

Mary told Shorty about an incident that occurred later while she and her parents were on the train. Her father, after everyone had reached the stage of exhaustion, finally asked for two sleeping berths so the family could rest before they arrived in Chicago. She told her friend, "Father and mother are going to sleep in one [berth] and I'm in the other. Can you imagine Dad in an upper berth? I want to see him climb in!"<sup>149</sup> Mr. White was a very dignified and portly man of medium height. His shape would have presented a

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<sup>147</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 591-92. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 4.

<sup>148</sup>Mary White, Emporia, to Elizabeth O'Connor Hashfield, Emporia, 3 September 1919, Transcript in the hand of Barbara Walker, *The Emporia Gazette*, Emporia, Kansas.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*

challenge for him to climb into the top berth of a Pullman car. Such was Mary's style of writing -- blunt, honest, and not too respectful.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **TURMOIL AND CHANGE**

As the year 1920 arrived, the White family experienced an ordeal that most families would consider an extreme burden and hardship. During the month of January, the White's home at 927 Exchanged was gutted by a fire. The blaze had started in and engulfed the third floor of their home one evening during dinner. The Whites were forced to move their belongings out of their home of more than twenty years in less than an hour. A major undertaking loomed on the horizon for the Whites. William Allen had recently increased his homeowner's policy and he was afraid that some individuals would suspect arson. The insurance company, however, did not suspect arson and gave the Whites a check for the damages the fire had caused. While their home was being remodeled, William Allen White and his family moved into their temporary home at 915 Exchange.<sup>150</sup>

Five years earlier, William Allen White had consulted the famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, of Chicago, about renovating the Whites' home. White told Mr. Wright that the house was

. . . one of those old fashioned houses, warted all over with bow windows, and towers and gables and fibroid tumors, acute angles,

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<sup>150</sup>Mary White Collection. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 582. Carle, 18. Cecil Carle, in his manuscript, states that the fire occurred in the summer of 1920.

meaning nothing and merely serrating the sky line . . . it is about as discouraging a proposition as you can imagine.<sup>151</sup>

William Allen and Sallie did not want to build a new house, although financially they could have easily done that. The Whites favored renovating their house because it was their home. William Lindsay and Mary Katherine had been born there, and the house had sentimental value. Frank Lloyd Wright advised them that the renovation might be “. . . too devastating on the old house and destructive. . . .”<sup>152</sup> The Whites chose to wait on the renovation, but when the fire gutted the house in 1920, they had no choice but to renovate their home. William Allen and Sallie, instead of choosing Frank Lloyd Wright’s plans for the renovation of their home, chose the renovation plans of Wight and Wight, an architectural firm from Kansas City.<sup>153</sup>

Another task facing William Allen, Sallie, and Mary during 1920 was making the decision about which college Mary Katherine would attend following her graduation from high school. After considering all avenues, William Allen and Sallie decided, and made plans, to send Mary Katherine to Wellesley College, a girls college fairly near Harvard in Massachusetts. To prepare her for that experience, the Whites were considering enrolling Mary in a girls’ preparatory school during her senior year of high school. Mary Katherine

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<sup>151</sup>Griffith, 225.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 225. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 582.

was willing to attend a preparatory school, but she wanted to go to a coeducational school in California.<sup>154</sup>

Clothing was another concern for the Whites when it came to Mary and her approaching adulthood. Mary Katherine had always been different from the other children as she was growing up, and now that she was almost an adult, her differences became more and more evident, especially when it came to clothing. Between 1919 and 1920, Mary told her parents, as well as others, the type of clothing she despised. Mary Katherine did not like to wear dresses, she hated women's hats, she did not wear jewelry, and she cared nothing about make-up. Before the Whites' annual trip to Colorado during the summer of 1920, Sallie White had to almost drag Mary Katherine, kicking and screaming, into a dress shop to purchase a dress for her to wear.<sup>155</sup>

Women's fashions at the turn of the century reflected a more liberal attitude than did the fashions of past centuries. Dresses and skirts that were cumbersome, voluminous, and awkward, the prevailing style from 1850 to 1900, made way for dresses and skirts that were "... lighter, slimmer, [and] more form-fitting ..."; a style that better suited "... the more active lives of twentieth century women."<sup>156</sup> Women's clothing placed importance on the natural figure of the women, instead of hiding or corseting the female

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<sup>154</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 39-40.

<sup>155</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 592, 608. William Allen White, "Mary White," *The Emporia Gazette*. 17 May 1921.

<sup>156</sup>Joseph Schroeder Jr., *The Wonderful World of Women's Fashions, 1850-1920* (New York: Harper and Row Publisher's, Inc., 1971), 208.

figure.<sup>157</sup> This new fashion, however, did not occur overnight; fashions gradually changed to the new style with skirt lengths remaining long and blouse sleeves continuing to be tightfitting to the elbows and ending in “. . . volant or puffed cuffs.”<sup>158</sup>

Popular fashions for women during the first twenty-years of the twentieth century included the slim tunic, lampshade tunic, draped skirt, and full skirt (which was considered a short skirt because its hem was eight inches off of the ground) as well as the peg-top skirt, hobble skirts, and empire gowns.<sup>159</sup> By 1921 longer skirts came back into popularity, but not for long; hem lines of skirts moved upward to the knees by the early to mid twenties. In addition to these fashions, school girls also wore a shirtwaist blouse and skirt. Three styles became popular during this period: the middy blouse, or sailor suit; the Russian tunic with a pleated skirt; and the jumper dress which was worn over a lingerie blouse.<sup>160</sup>

Mary Katherine's favorite style of clothing, other than her riding clothes, was the middy. The middy blouse was a loose-fitting tunic that was worn with a skirt or pants. Its length varied from just below the waist to just below the knees. Middy blouses with sailor collars were worn by females when participating in strenuous activities such as lifting

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<sup>157</sup>Schroeder, 208. R. Turner Wilcox, *Five Centuries of American Costume* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 160. Alan Mansfield and Phillis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 1900-1950* (Plays Inc., 1973), 57.

<sup>158</sup>Mary S. Bigelow, *Fashion in History: Apparel in the Western World* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1970), 276.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 232. Wilcox, 160.

<sup>160</sup>Wilcox, 162, 190.

dumbbells and Indian clubs, but middies intended for street wear were primarily worn by younger girls.<sup>161</sup>

For some unknown reason Mary never grew out of the "middy stage." One afternoon Mrs. White attended a church meeting where the women were sewing as they listened to the program. Sallie brought several beautiful dresses for Mary that she had been working on. Sallie White remarked, "I don't know why I'm doing this, she won't wear it."<sup>162</sup> Mary Katherine was satisfied with wearing only those clothes that "fit" her; Mary was Mary, and nothing, nor anybody, could change that. In an age when the media's predominating female figure was the flapper, Mary settled for khakis, a cowboy hat, riding boots, her middies, and her progressive values.

The summer of 1920 was a memorable time for the Whites at their summer cabin in Colorado. William Allen, Sallie, both grandmothers, one of Sallie's sisters, and young Bill and Mary Katherine had traveled to the cabin in Estes Park. According to William Allen, that summer was pure joy. William Allen wrote part of an upcoming book as well as magazine articles for various journals. During the evening, young Bill and Mary Katherine went to parties and dances that were taking place in the surrounding communities; dancing was also popular in the living room of the White's cabin as the family listened to new phonograph records William Allen had brought from their home in Emporia. On more than one occasion William Allen and Sallie made their daughter dress

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<sup>161</sup>Roberts and Broucek. Bigelow, 221. Schroeder, 245. Linda Martin, *The Way We Wore: Fashion Illustrations of Children's Wear, 1870-1970* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 7.

<sup>162</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 593. Roberts and Broucek.

up for the dances. This veered from the norm and was difficult for Mary because she disliked dresses or dressing “. . . up like a Christmas tree.” Her riding clothes suited her just fine!<sup>163</sup>

Friends, as well as relatives, also visited the Whites at their cabin in the summer of 1920. They “. . . had loads of company, an average of seven guests eating meals with them every day,” while they were on their vacation in Colorado.<sup>164</sup> One of the guests was settlement leader Jane Addams, a woman who may have contributed to Mary’s progressive spirit. The Whites gave Jane Addams a tea and invited high school and college faculty members from the communities in the valley to the social. Summer was an extremely busy time at the cabin.<sup>165</sup>

William Lindsay, after attending the University of Kansas for a year and a half, was transferring to Harvard because his father’s alma mater “. . . was not intellectually demanding enough.”<sup>166</sup> Mary, who was sixteen, was pre-enrolled in Wellesley College for the fall of 1922 and decided she needed to spend some of her summer vacation preparing for admission to the school. Mary Katherine had been carefree about her studies in the past, but by 1920 she was reading more books to enhance her education and trying

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<sup>163</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 593.

<sup>164</sup>Johnson, 332. Griffith, 225. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 591-92.

<sup>165</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 591-92.

<sup>166</sup>Griffith, 225. Johnson, 332. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 591-92.

desperately to improve her grades in school.<sup>167</sup> “She reads all sorts of tremendously serious highbrow stuff. . . has an ambition to make grades and is tremendously impressed with the idea of going to Wellesley,” her father told Edna Ferber.<sup>168</sup> William Allen and Sallie were noticing the fact that their little girl, who still wore her hair in pigtailed, was becoming an adult.<sup>169</sup>

The White family returned from their summer in Colorado ready to face new adventures. William Allen and Sallie returned to the tasks that were set before them. One of the tasks that faced the White family was the continuation of the remodeling project at 927 Exchange. The renovation was a major undertaking and was not completed until sometime after 1921. William Lindsay, excited about attending Harvard, continued to prepare for his trip and bid his friends goodbye. Mary Katherine, leaving childhood behind, believed that she had a role to play in reforming society and she continued her studies in preparation for Wellesley.<sup>170</sup>

That fall, Mary Katherine returned to Emporia High School to face the new challenges set before her as a member of the junior class and a member of both the yearbook and newspaper staffs. But also during that school year, Mary and her father had

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<sup>167</sup>Clough, 222.

<sup>168</sup>Johnson, 332. William Allen White, Emporia, to Edna Ferber, New York City, 17 September 1920, Transcript in the hand of Edna Ferber, Ferber Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>169</sup>Griffith, 239. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 592.

<sup>170</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 603.



**Figure Thirteen** - Mary Katherine White at Estes Park, Colorado, ca. 1920. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)

some time to become better acquainted with each other; she had the opportunity in late 1920 or early 1921 to travel to the east coast with her father. They went to New York to see the film based on William Allen's novel *In The Heart of A Fool*. It was a story based on the idea, according to William Allen White, ". . . that there are no material rewards for spiritual excellence, and no material punishment for spiritual dereliction." The two characters in White's novel, a suffering saint and a well-to-do sinner, are constantly confronted with choices that are not positively right or wrong, but choices that occur in the gray shaded areas of one's life: a story about deep moral and social problems.<sup>171</sup> The producers of the film had managed to mutilate the entire theme William Allen had in mind for his novel. Mary Katherine sat by her father in the theater and, according to a letter he sent to Sallie, Mary ". . . chuckled and giggled and made the funniest running comments you ever heard." Mary asked her father, "Why did you take their money? They haven't used your story."<sup>172</sup> The trip to New York marked the time when both father and daughter began to understand each other. William Allen was an editor, novelist, politician, and dignitary; Mary was an independent young lady who had her own outspoken ideas about how things ought to be done in the world.

Mary Katherine and her parents were still discussing Mary's options for a preparatory school for her to attend during her junior year of high school. Evidently several family members had given their opinion concerning Mary's options. Mary Katherine was in favor of the coed school in California, while other members of the family

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<sup>171</sup>Johnson, 343-344. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .* , 446.

<sup>172</sup>Johnson, 343-344.

wanted her to go to an all-girls preparatory school in the east. Two of her aunts were definitely not in favor of Mary Katherine attending a “dude” ranch in California.<sup>173</sup> William Lindsay sent a letter to his mother trying to give the family an ivy league perspective on Mary Katherine’s predicament. Young Bill, according to his letter, was concerned about Mary’s social defiance and outward indifference concerning her reforms and her appearance. In the letter, dated May 7, 1921, William Lindsay said:

I am glad Mary is doing well on the Annual, and I hope in the name of heaven she is going to boarding school next year. You don’t get much sympathy with the family from your scheme of sending her to California. She needs to go someplace where she can get social poise more than anything else, for she does not know anything more about it than a hog does about Sunday. . . . I suppose the work on the Annual looks good to her, but it won’t get her nearly as far in Wellesley as will the ability to handle herself socially and not be a gawk, which is what she is now.<sup>174</sup>

William Lindsay was clearly familiar with the situations and differences that would confront his sister when she began life at an ivy-league college. Although he was not as “independent” as Mary Katherine, he was keenly aware of the differences between life in a rural Kansas community and life on an ivy-league campus in the eastern United States. Mary would not fit into this new environment because her “social graces” were not “polished” enough to suit the ivy-league world. She detested wearing dresses, and she would not fit in at tea parties, dances, or other social activities at a school such as

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<sup>173</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 40. Professor of English E. Jay Jernigan of Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, interview by author, 8 January 1997, Emporia, telephone. Jernigan stated that there was a huge controversy over Mary wanting to go to California. Her aunts believed Mary was trying to get her own way and continue her apathy about school and school work.

<sup>174</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 40.

Wellesley. Mary Katherine was outspoken, she was accustomed to wearing middy blouses, skirts, and riding clothes, and, those would be a style of dress considered too casual for everyday wear. As her parents were preparing Mary for college life at Wellesley, they told her she would have to give up her middies. Mary became upset and told her mother and father, "Then I won't go to Wellesley!"<sup>175</sup>

Mary Katherine did have some unusual ideas about reform and the ways to change society. But those ideas were progressive ideas, ideas that most sixteen or seventeen-year-old young adults do not consider. And the best place for Mary to learn more about her philosophy concerning social reforms was in a college environment. Mary Katherine was happy with her family, her community status, and her home life. But she realized things were going to change, especially with college about to become the next major challenge in her life.

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<sup>175</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **WELLESLEY COLLEGE**

Wellesley College was founded in 1875 and was one the women's colleges known during the nineteenth century as the Seven Sisters; the other women's colleges belonging to this elite group were Mount Holyoke (1837), Vassar (1865), Smith (1875), Radcliffe (1879), Bryn Mawr (1885), and Barnard (1889).<sup>176</sup> The founder of Wellesley, Henry Fowler Durant, was born in 1822, in Hanover, New Hampshire. He was educated at Harvard where, according to his fellow classmates, he was known for his “. . . refined and luxurious tastes . . . “ rather than his studious nature.<sup>177</sup> After graduating from Harvard, Durant became a brilliant and successful trial lawyer in Boston, married his first cousin, Pauline, purchased a country estate in West Needham (near Boston), and reexamined his profession as a lawyer.

During the early 1860s, Durant observed that the law was incompatible to the Scripture. He became an evangelical minister and began preaching at religious meetings in the New York area. In 1865, his preaching took him to Mount Holyoke Seminary, one of

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<sup>176</sup>Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s*, second edition (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 3,5,6. .

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

the women's colleges. He acted as the school's minister conducting the morning devotions, weekly prayer meetings, and preaching sermons at the Sunday services. It was during Durant's tenure as minister at Mount Holyoke that he became a trustee for the school. He became acquainted with Mary Lyon's philosophy of higher learning for women and devoted himself to the Christian education of women. Both Lyon and Durant "... envisioned the woman teacher as the agent of national reformation."<sup>178</sup>

Mary Lyon, at Mount Holyoke, had developed a unique pattern for discipline, housing, and education. Her goal was to "... offer her students the highest education then available to women, the curriculum of the seminary, [and] ... alter their consciousness." In order for Lyon to accomplish her goal she combined two ideas: an immense congregate building and the mother-daughter bond, re-creating an atmosphere of familial bonding between students and teachers at the college. Lyon hoped the students would imitate their revered teachers and become "... rational, disciplined women oriented to the external world." All that the students needed was contained in a single building: a place to eat, sleep, and learn.<sup>179</sup>

Durant began the process for establishing Wellesley Female Seminary on his country estate, outside of Boston, in 1870 (in 1873 he petitioned the state legislature and changed the name of the school to Wellesley College). He patterned the school's discipline and building on forms Mary Lyon had developed at Mount Holyoke. His estate at West Needham embodied three hundred acres of divergent terrain: hills, woods,

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 42-43, 44.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 4.

meadows, and a lake. Durant, however, had somewhat altered his view of women's education. He viewed the education of, and the goals for, women of the nineteenth century more zealously than did Lyon. In addition to the discipline and building style, Durant added greater importance to the reformation of the nation through women, but not just any women. The founder intended Wellesley for the "'calico' girls, the hardworking daughters of modest means, each one of whom in his mind was worth 'two velvet girls.'" He stated that

... the real meaning of the Higher Education of Women is "revolt." We revolt against the slavery in which women are held by the customs of society—the broken health, the aimless lives, the subordinate position, the helpless dependence, the dishonesties and shams of so-called education. The Higher Education of Women ... is the cry of the oppressed slave. It is the assertion of absolute equality. ... It is the war of Christ ... against spiritual wickedness in high places.<sup>180</sup>

When one reviews Durant's commitment to the college, one will observe his determination to make his vision of higher education a reality, to stress religion as well as intellect, and to interlace the two in the education of women who entered the halls of Wellesley.

Wellesley's original statute announced that

The College was founded for the glory of God and the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, in and by the education and culture of women. ... It is required that every Trustee, Teacher and Officer, shall be a member of an Evangelical Church, and that the study of the Holy Scriptures shall be pursued by every student throughout the entire college course under the directions of the Faculty.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 44, 53.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 54.

Wellesley, at its birth, consisted of a single building. College Hall, was finally a reality for Durant's vision of a school for women. College Hall contained all of the necessities for learning and living according to the requirements established by Mary Lyon at Mount Holyoke. The building included classrooms, laboratories, museums, a chapel, a library, drawing room, and housed and fed the faculty and students. In addition to the facilities at Wellesley, Durant also set forth a policy that was not implemented at Vassar or Mount Holyoke. As founder of Wellesley, Durant insisted that the president and faculty of the college be only women. Wellesley felt the effects of his decision well into the twentieth century.<sup>182</sup>

Within a few years of its opening, Wellesley began to increase the number of buildings on the country estate. In 1880-81, two buildings were added to the university, Stone Hall and Music Hall; Farnsworth Art building was added by 1890; Dana Hall, a building in the small town to house students who required residence. Five self-contained cottages, placed in serene areas of the campus, were added during the late 1880s and early 1890s for both faculty and student residences in order to separate the instruction from domesticity. At the turn of the century, Wellesley added four dormitories to the campus; the dorms were known as the Quadrangle and were designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr. Then, in 1896, a new chapel was endowed in memory of William S. Houghton, a former trustee, by the Houghton family.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 5, 48.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 83, 87, 88, 89, 204, 205.

Fire destroyed College Hall in 1914 and the new focal point of the campus became the new academic quadrangle that sat on top of Norumbega Hill. The renovation program that followed the fire created a new campus for Wellesley. College Hall, located on College Hill, was torn down and a complex of three dormitories was constructed on College Hill.<sup>184</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the evangelical spirit of Wellesley, as well as other women's colleges, was almost gone; college life created a different standard. The spirit of evangelism was replaced by secularization and most students placed little importance on instruction, education, and religion and gave greater importance to clubs, sports, dramatics, teas, spreads, all-female dances, and festivals. Along with the importance students placed on activities, they also created their own standards of success. Women who attended the colleges were divided into four different groups, two of the groups were admired by the students and two were rejected. The "swells" and the "all-around girls" dominated the college. These groups tolerated the unoffensive "grinds," but considered the "freaks" as beyond toleration. The women with natural-born intelligence, known as "brains," were potentially a fifth group. The "brains" drifted throughout the four divisions, depending upon how they employed their natural gifts.<sup>185</sup>

The first group, the swells, was not only expected to be wealthy, but was also required to be ". . . debutantes attuned to society and its rituals." The swells, according to

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid., 213, 262-263.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 150.

one student, were “. . . a clan, loyal to itself, sufficient to itself, yet admired by the ‘Utlanders,’ the leader of all the good times, of all the society.”<sup>186</sup>

The second group, the all-around girls, monopolized campus organizations and set the public tone of student life. Both the swells and the all-around girls competed for dominance in the campus organizations, but it was, almost always, the all-around girls who controlled the various campus organizations. One reason for this was because the all-around girls were the ones who labored for the college. All-around girls filled their days with “. . . service to the class, campus organizations, and the college as a whole.”<sup>187</sup>

The third group of students came from a modest background; they were quiet mannered and studious. They were labeled as grinds or digs. Women in this group were constantly studying, working on their homework, and trying to improve their grades. To them nothing was as important as school and their studies. One student who was considered a grind, in a letter home remarked,

I can't stand my life here. I'm not like most of the girls, I don't care for parties, or athletes, or the class, or any of the things they get so excited about. I just want to study.<sup>188</sup>

The fourth group of students who attended women's colleges during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was known as freaks. Freaks were considered outsiders, girls that did not fit in or were different by the standards established by the first

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<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 156. One might surmise from William Lindsay's letter dated 7 May 1921, that he hoped Mary Katherine would join either the swells or the all-around-girls group.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 156.

two groups. The most dominant members of this group included people who were African Americans, Roman Catholics, Jews, and the economically deprived.

Wellesley was the only college of the Seven Sisters colleges that did not discriminate against admitting African American women to the college in the early twentieth century. Vassar, Smith, Mount Holyoke, and Bryn Mawr did not knowingly admit African American students, as a matter of fact, administrators at Bryn Mawr advised Black students who had applied for admission to find another college to attend “. . . on account of the student herself and on account of the life at the College Halls.” Although Wellesley officially admitted students who were black, white students often made fun of the outsiders by mimicking the African American dialect and singing and playing “Coon songs” whenever black students were present.<sup>189</sup>

One might wonder at this juncture what group Mary Katherine would have been placed in when she arrived at Wellesley. She would not have been a freak although she would have fought for their equality in classes, sports activities, and organizations. One must remember that Mary was a reformer and was willing to fight for change. Mary would not have been a grind either because her past had shown that she did not care to do that much school work; she would study only when it was necessary or if she found an instructor that she favored. Besides, Mary enjoyed life; she wanted to have fun, she was a tomboy, she liked to play and participate in practical jokes. Nor would Mary be a swell; she would not fit into a group of girls who were wealthy or a member of the elite class. Mary Katherine, if she fit in any group at all, would have been an all-around girl. Why?

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 155-156.

She would have agreed with their responsibilities and duties. When one observes campus life in the early 1900s, one would discover that three areas dominated campus life: organizations, athletics, and dramatics. Each area had certain lessons to teach the students. The all-around girl was involved in all three areas, and these areas would have appealed to Mary Katherine's sense of responsibility and duty.

In college organizations the "all-around girl" first learned how to serve and then how to lead. She conducted meetings according to parliamentary procedure, debated in public, handled money, made decisions, solicited advertisements. Emphasis went to group loyalty---to the class, the college, the literary magazine--- whose needs took precedence over personal routine or self-cultivation.<sup>190</sup>

As independent and active as Mary Katherine White was, it is the opinion of this historian that Mary would not have joined any of the four groups, but would have started her own group. It would have been a group for everyone, no exceptions and special treatment. All students would be equal regardless of their status or background.

William and Sallie White were adamant about Mary Katherine attending college. Of course this was what was expected of daughters of middle-class families of the early 1900s. Attendance at college was not only expected, but most young women of the era desired to attend college in order to become an integral part of the world in which they lived.<sup>191</sup> Mary Katherine was no exception. She wanted to attend Wellesley College

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 264. President William Allan Nelson of Smith College remarked that students of the 1920s were a "... handful of eager souls, brought into this place because of their appetite for intellectual things," 284.

because the school was a progressive college and she was a progressive individual with a definite goal in mind.

Although some of her relatives believed Mary needed to become more "cultured," and that college would give Mary Katherine that perspective in her life, she was already improving in the area of "culture." In the winter of 1920-1921, her interests continued to expand: she became interested in music. Mary Katherine listened to classic symphonies and sonatas on the phonograph. It was music that her father said was "good music"; Wagner, Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky. Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* and Tchaikovsky's first movement of the *Pathetic Symphony* were her favorite pieces of music. Her love of music had in part been fostered by her close friend, Dr. Frank Beach, a music professor at the teachers college.<sup>192</sup>

Mary Katherine expected to attend school at Wellesley College in 1922, but in the meantime, she would continue with her ideas about reform and changes in society that she had learned from her family and Jane Addams. People, no matter who they were, would have to accept Mary Katherine White for her convictions and attitude about reform; people would have to accept Mary for who she was. And the best place for Mary Katherine White to try her reforms and ideas about making society better was in her own hometown, Emporia, Kansas.

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<sup>192</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 603, 608. Griffith, 236.

## *CHAPTER SEVEN*

### *MARY KATHERINE AND THE COMMUNITY*

Mary Katherine was quite involved in her community, especially in 1920 and 1921.

Yes, Mary was still an individual who liked having fun; life was always an adventure for her. She was a child growing up in a world full of problems, however, and, though young, she wanted to be an integral part of her community. From giving people rides in the family car to performing community service at various places in Emporia, Mary was happiest when she was sharing with others and continuing in her quest to enlarge her horizon.<sup>193</sup>

When Mary Katherine was not playing practical jokes, reading at home, or riding her horse, she was driving the family's Dodge Touring car. She was an excellent driver, according to her father, and after William Lindsay had gone off to college in Lawrence, Mary would drive her parents wherever they wanted to go. Mary's love of driving turned her into an amateur chauffeur, as she ". . . never drove a block in her life that she didn't begin to fill the car with pickups!"<sup>194</sup> One of the many people that constantly rode with Mary Katherine was her close friend Helen "Pug" Whitig. Helen was Mary's "navigator."

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<sup>193</sup>Griffith, 239.

<sup>194</sup>Roberts and Broucek. Clough, 203, 220. William Allen White, "Mary White."

Mary Katherine, due to her smaller stature, was unable to peer over the steering when certain manual functions had to be performed while driving. Whenever she had to use the clutch to shift the car's transmission into another gear, "... Helen took over the steering while Mary maneuvered the mechanics and they would cover the town from the east side to the west side.<sup>195</sup> But Helen was only one of the many passengers in the Whites' car. "Nearly everyone she [Mary] saw walking on the street she picked up until the car was filled. She picked up young and old and black and white."<sup>196</sup> Mary Katherine never had a real date with a boy, she was not interested in boys in that way, but she was always seen around town with boys and girls crowded into her car.<sup>197</sup> Her father said that Mary could have started a taxi service, as she was known to give rides to small children, teens and adults of all ages. "She used the car as a jitney bus. It was her social life."<sup>198</sup>

Ted Woodbury, a school friend of Mary Katherine's, during an interview concerning Mary, mentioned the taxi service provided by the teenager. Woodbury and several boys played football in the parking area of one of the fraternity houses near the Whites' home on Exchange. Several times while the boys played football,

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<sup>195</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>196</sup>Clough, 220.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 221. Roberts and Broucek. According to Roberts and Broucek, Mary had not reached the "romance stage" yet. One of the interviewees remarked that she was always "... walking around, whistling through her teeth with a blank look on her face. ... Can you imagine a college man going for a girl like that?"

<sup>198</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 607. William Allen White, "Mary White."

Mary would come tearing out of the alley . . . in that old car. And she would come around . . . where we were. . . . She'd always say, "Can I pick you up? Can I take you somewhere?" . . . and we would run along and jump on the running board, or get in the car if we were going to town and she was heading that way. But it didn't matter who it was, when Mary wanted to load up the car, then she did.<sup>199</sup>

At times, when Mary Katherine had a car load of friends, pranks would occur, and those pranks could, at times, terrify onlookers. One evening, while driving the streets of Emporia, Mary Katherine and her friends took another "friend" with them on their journey through town. That friend was Sallie White's headless dressmaker's mannequin. Mary and her friends made a head for the figure, dressed it up, and placed their "new friend" in the car for an evening of enjoyment. When the carload of people knew they had an "appropriate" audience, they would toss the mannequin out of the car to the horror of the casual observers and passersby. Someone, not knowing the figure was a mannequin, would call the police and report that a carload of teenagers had just thrown someone out of a moving car. According to her friends, Mary Katherine had ". . . no thought of consequences or results of her sense of humor" when it came to her practical jokes.<sup>200</sup>

Mary Katherine was happiest when she was surrounded by people. Mary viewed everyone as equals and enjoyed the company of all people; placement in the community, or economic status of a person, or which side of the "tracks" an individual came from or lived mattered little. In *William Allen White, The Man from Emporia*, the authored stated that Mary ". . . defied the conventions of her own social group and made a friend of every

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<sup>199</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid.

yellow dog in Emporia.”<sup>201</sup> Mary Katherine, according to many of her friends, teachers, and townsmen, was a true friend to all who lived in or near Emporia. She did not concern herself with a person’s name; she cared about people, not names. If you were a human being, then you were among Mary Katherine’s friends.<sup>202</sup> According to Sally Foreman Griffith, in *Home Town News*, Mary

... was friendly to “everyone in town,” including the police judge, the traffic cop, and “all the girls,” regardless of race or class. She was active in school and civic organizations. Lacking formal piety, she nonetheless joined the Congregational church because she believed it could help people.<sup>203</sup>

Among Mary Katherine’s special friends was Charley O’Brien, the only traffic officer in Emporia. Officer O’Brien, who was usually assigned the busiest intersection in town, Sixth and Commercial, would, at times, walk Mary home from school on the days that she walked; Mary liked to tease him when she drove around in the family’s car.<sup>204</sup> Although she was notoriously famous for her pranks and practical jokes, Mary “. . . had a heart of gold and was always ready to do something to help someone who really needed help.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup>Rich, 168-69. The phrase “yellow dog” is evidently a phrase denoting the less fortunate people of society; someone who is thought of with disdain or one who is looked down upon.

<sup>202</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>203</sup>Griffith, 239.

<sup>204</sup>Rich, 211.

<sup>205</sup>Clough, 219.

During her last years in high school, Mary Katherine became acquainted with a boy who had gotten into trouble for theft. The boy pled guilty, was sentenced to the reformatory and then paroled. He was avoided by many high school students so Mary instantly became his friend. She drove him around in her car “. . . more than she did any other individual.” Mary Katherine would fill up the car with people and then pick up this special friend. Everyone knew better than to insult Mary’s friend as long as she was around.<sup>206</sup>

Yes, Mary Katherine had many friends, and those friends included the African Americans in her community as well as those who were less fortunate. Mary was kindhearted and always interested in the poor people.<sup>207</sup> During an interview in the 1970s, Helen Hirschler remembered Mary Katherine’s empathy for those in the community who needed help. Hirschler recalled that Mary, aware that she was privileged due to her social status, wanted to share those privileges with those who were less fortunate. One of the things Mrs. Hirschler recollected most about Mary was her willingness to share.

Mary’s father had given her a charge account at an ice cream parlor and she was always loading up her old Ford [Dodge] and taking kids there for treats after school. . . . I remember one time . . . two little black youngsters were along. They kind of held back; there was still some question then as to where they could get service. But she insisted they come along, telling them, “and this is for everybody . . . for all of you.”<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>207</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>208</sup>“Broadcast A Moment For A Friend of Family,” *The Kansas City Times*, 19 November 1977. Mary White Collection.

One community project of Mary Katherine's was her campaign to feed the poor and elderly at the Poor Farm. Emporia, in the early twentieth century, did not have retirement homes or centers for the elderly. Mary focused her contribution to the residents of the Poor Farm on the holidays. For at least two years, she took it upon herself to manage Christmas dinners for the elderly at the Farm. Mary convinced some of the women from the Congregational Church to help her. One year the Christmas dinner included turkey, coleslaw, jam, preserves, oranges, pies, and cakes.<sup>209</sup> After the meal was prepared and placed in baskets, she packed the baskets into the family car and delivered them to the ". . . poor, old forgotten people . . ." at the Poor Farm.<sup>210</sup> Mary Katherine became so dedicated to her community project at the Poor Farm that she ate Christmas dinner with the elderly. A friend of the family stated:

I remember that one Christmas Mrs. White called and asked whether we would come and eat dinner with them because Bill wasn't home and Mary wasn't going to be there because she was with the old people at the Poor Farm. . . . [William Allen and Sallie] were alone, so we got there in time to see Mary get packed up and hustle and bustle around. [Mary Katherine got] herself [and the baskets of food] into [the] cars, and . . . [went] off to the poor farm happy as a lark.<sup>211</sup>

Mary told her father after one of the dinners that organizing the Christmas dinner for the people at the Poor Farm ". . . was the most fun she ever had in her life."<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>Roberts and Broucek. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 608. William Allen White, "Mary White."

<sup>210</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid.

<sup>212</sup>Griffith, 239.

While serving meals at the Poor Farm, Mary Katherine became acquainted with an elderly African American gentleman who was blind. The only pastime he had was to make rag rugs from scraps of material. Mary, having compassion on the elderly man, enlisted the help of her school friends and provided the rug maker with sufficient rags to “. . . keep him busy for a season.”<sup>213</sup>

Mary Katherine was very supportive of people who were unsure of themselves also. Cecil Carle remarked that “Mary was someone who was worth knowing,” especially when it came to moral support.<sup>214</sup> In the spring of 1921 Carl was cast as a lead actor in a drama club presentation. Partially through the first act, he was assaulted by the idea that perhaps he was doing the wrong thing (acting jitters). Cecil Carle began searching in the audience for a friendly face to instill confidence in his acting abilities. He spotted Mary Katherine and knew that he would see in her eyes the reflection of his abilities on stage. She smiled and gave Carle the “O” for “okay” with her hand. “She was telling me that everything was just fine from her point of view.”<sup>215</sup> Mary Katherine was someone worth knowing and most people living in Emporia during her lifetime were aware of that fact.

Another of Mary’s activities in the community involved her horse. She enjoyed giving the children in the community, who did not have horses, rides on her horse. While riding through town, Mary Katherine would see children playing along the streets where she rode. Sometimes a child would ask Mary for a ride. She stopped, got off of her

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<sup>213</sup>William Allen White, “Mary White.”

<sup>214</sup>Carle, 20.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 21-22.

horse, then placed the children on her horse and let them ride alone. This was something that Mary Katherine had done since her early childhood when she was given her first burro and Shetland pony.<sup>216</sup> Mary trained her horse, so that if she believed the horse was traveling too far, all she had to do was whistle and the horse would return to its owner. Some people might wonder, "How well did the children of Emporia know Mary Katherine White and her horse?" The following account tells of just one little boy that knew Mary Katherine. His mother once said,

. . . my little boy at the time was about two or three years old and she [Mary] would come down [to our house] . . . on Twelfth Avenue . . . and she [and her horse] would come clop, clop, clop. . . . And her horse would come at a certain speed and he [the son] recognized that and he would sit up and say "May White! May White!"<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup>Rich, 212. Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>217</sup>Roberts and Broucek.



**Figure Fourteen** - Mary Katherine White, ca. 1921. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)

## ***CHAPTER EIGHT***

### ***MARY'S GREATEST LOVE***

Throughout Mary Katherine's adolescence she proved herself to be an exceptional young woman. It has been shown that she was an individual who was almost always happy; she was carefree, excitable, and a prankster. Mary also had a serious side; she was concerned about social reform and an improved quality of life for the less fortunate people of society. People knew they had at least one friend in Mary Katherine White. But Mary Katherine's greatest love was centered around her horses. Her favorite pastime was not playing jokes or taking part in pranks. Her focus was not directed toward school or editing the high school annual. A friend of Mary's commented that "She was happiest when riding her horse. If she wasn't in her Dodge car, she was on her horse."<sup>218</sup> Mary Katherine's heart was filled with her horses.

Many of Mary Katherine's family members believed that Mary had more Lindsay blood flowing through her body than White blood. After all, her Kentucky ancestors had always owned horses, and Mary, since a small child, had owned either a pony or horse.

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<sup>218</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

Mary Katherine's brother once told their mother, "You'll never be a grandmother of a child; you'll be the grandmother of a horse!"<sup>219</sup>

Mary Katherine's horses were usually kept near the White's home at 927 Exchange or on her uncle's (Charles Lindsay) farm near Americus, a small town approximately ten miles northwest of Emporia.<sup>220</sup> The farm was also the home of Mary Katherine's grandparents, Joe and Francis ("Fannie") Lindsay. Mary would visit the farm almost every day, saddle and bridle her horse, and ride the horse with feelings of freedom and openness.<sup>221</sup> She rode her horses so often, and for so long that her riding clothes were prone to smell. Her mother insisted that Mary Katherine change her clothes as soon as she got home, otherwise, she would have kept them on until bedtime<sup>222</sup>.

During Mary Katherine's teenage years, or as one writer has stated, her "reckless age," she was given a black-satin, high-spirited horse by her parents. "Black Satin" and Mary were kindred spirits.<sup>223</sup> Both horse and rider were always ready for adventure. As a

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<sup>219</sup>Rich, 211-12.

<sup>220</sup>William Allen White, "Mary White." Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 21. Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>221</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 21-22. Joe Lindsay retired from the Kansas City stock yards and moved with his wife to their son's farm while Mary was in her last years of elementary school.

<sup>222</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>223</sup>No evidence could be found pertaining to the name of Mary's horse. Therefore, this writer has chosen the name "Black Satin" to distinguish it from Mary's other horses.

matter of fact, it was on this horse that Mary Katherine narrowly escaped severe injury on more than one occasion.<sup>224</sup>

One day, when Mary was riding Black Satin, they raced across the Santa Fe railroad tracks on Exchange Street. She failed to see the oncoming train, and the horse reeled and ran with the locomotive. On another occasion, with the same horse, Mary Katherine and two of her friends decided to race down a dirt road. The riders soon found themselves in a slight predicament. They were fast approaching a bridge that was too narrow for the three of them to cross abreast. Mary's horse bypassed the bridge and jumped the ravine. These narrow escapes, as well as many more, led William Allen and Sallie White to find a horse for Mary that was "... a safer, quieter horse."<sup>225</sup>

Even with a more gentle horse, accidents and narrow escapes still occurred. On one particular occasion a serious, if not tragic, accident almost occurred when a car struck Mary's horse while she was riding on the streets of Emporia. In a letter to William Lindsay dated April 1920, William Allen White told his son that

Mary's horse ran into an automobile the other day and cut her hind leg [Mary's] and the horse is in the stable for general repairs, otherwise Mary is all right. This is the regular monthly toot that Mary has.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup>Rich, 214.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 211. 212.

<sup>226</sup>Johnson, 326.

Mary Katherine was “. . . a veritable daredevil” and she would accept a dare at the drop of a hat.<sup>227</sup> One such dare led Mary into an accident when her “safer” horse, ‘Liza Jane, slipped and fell on the street car tracks. Mary had been riding the horse without a bridle down Commercial Street because someone had dared her to.<sup>228</sup> Regardless of which horse she rode, Mary Katherine almost always rode her horse as if she were going to a fire. Several Emporia citizens commented that she “flew” from place to place when she was on her horse.<sup>229</sup>

Pranks and practical jokes were included in Mary’s horseback riding experiences. During one of her rides with her friend, Helen Richter, a boy threw a dirt clod at Mary which hit Mary’s horse instead. Immediately, Mary chased the boy all the way to his house and did not stop the chase until the boy had run into the house and closed the door.<sup>230</sup> Another incident was related by an eyewitness, a child at the time of the incident. Her family received a permanent reminder of Mary’s playfulness.

The girl’s family, who lived in the same neighborhood as the Whites, had installed new linoleum in their kitchen. There was an entrance to the kitchen from a back porch which was approximately twelve inches off the ground. One day, when Mary Katherine was out riding, she began chasing the children in the neighborhood. Suddenly, Mary

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<sup>227</sup>Roberts and Broucek. Rich, 211.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., 212. Mary White to Elizabeth O’Connor Hashfield, Fall 1919.

<sup>229</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>230</sup>Doxie Hoover, “Mary White’s Friendly Ways Are Memories of Those Who Knew Her,” *The Emporia Gazette*, no date, White Collection, Lyon County Historical Museum.

“... rode her horse right into our kitchen!” Hoof marks were left on the soft linoleum as a reminder of the incident. The mother became angry and wanted to inform the Whites about the damage Mary Katherine’s horse had done to her new linoleum. But the incident was never mentioned to William Allen or Sallie White. The girl’s father would not allow the girl’s mother to call the Whites.<sup>231</sup>

Cecil Carle remembered a prank that Mary participated in during the fall of 1920. Mary Katherine rode her horse to a high school football practice one evening and “... just happened to bring along flags from the Normal school’s football field.” Football players from the college chased Mary to the high school football field and attempted to take the flags away from the prankster, but the Emporia High School football team intervened and a small fight ensued. Mary Katherine, and the colors, were saved.<sup>232</sup>

Besides pranks and practical jokes, good deeds were included in Mary’s horseback riding experiences. Another friend of the Whites tells of another neighborhood family, the Wades, who lived on the corner of Sixth and Exchange. The Wades had daughters who were some of Mary’s friends. Mary Katherine would ride up to their back porch, take her whip and rap on the porch. When one of the girls came to the door, Mary would ask for a drink of ice water. Ada Wade told a friend that Mary rode over to their house on several mornings and left vegetables on their back porch.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup>Ibid.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid.

<sup>233</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

Everyone in Emporia knew Mary Katherine White and her horse. As she rode along the streets of Emporia, she waved at friends, neighbors, and small children. Parents knew Mary could be trusted to care for their children and allowed their children to ride on Mary's horse. It appears that the children of Emporia looked forward to Mary Katherine's daily excursions because Mary's horseback rides also meant a horseback ride for them on many occasions.<sup>234</sup> But those horseback rides were soon to stop.

During the month of May in 1921, William Allen White was called away on business. He was asked to make speeches in the east and also needed to contact some business people about projects he was working on. Mary and her mother drove William Allen to the train depot. They watched as the father and husband waved to them, and he in return watched his wife and daughter standing at the station ". . . with the background of the sunset behind the roundhouse . . ." as they smiled and waved back until the train went out of sight.<sup>235</sup>

On Tuesday, May 10, a week after William Allen's departure, Mary walked home from school with one of her friends, Mary Brooks. Both Mary Katherine and Mary Brooks had entered elementary school the same year and had progressed through all of the grades at Emporia together. Classes were dismissed early that day because the school year was almost over. Mary White and Mary Brooks walked together to the place where

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<sup>234</sup>Ibid.

<sup>235</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 604. William Allen White, in his autobiography, commented that picture of his wife and daughter remained with him always.

each went to her own home.<sup>236</sup> Mary Katherine arrived at home, changed into her khakis and paid a visit to 'Liza Jane. She was anxious to go riding, as it always refreshed her. The spring countryside and the fresh air beckoned.

Mary began her ride through town by urging her horse to a trot. Mary's long braid, tied with the familiar red ribbon, bounced down her back. She waved to everyone she met, as no one was a stranger to Mary Katherine.<sup>237</sup> She met a friend who was going to town and asked if she could take the woman's daughter for a ride. The mother said, "No, not today, I need to get to town." Mary Katherine continued her trek through town and greeted those who crossed her path including Irene Morris who was out in her yard at Tenth and Market when Mary past. Mary then rode on to Merchant Street.<sup>238</sup> She dismounted and walked 'Liza Jane as she passed the Kansas State Normal School Library. Meeting another familiar face, Mary waved and was rewarded with the same gesture. Then she climbed back on 'Liza Jane and continued her ride to the grassy fields on the outskirts of town. Much like a princess in a modern day parade, she only went a short distance before another friend of hers, living at the sorority house located just west of the Kansas Normal School, whistled at her and asked Mary to come in. But Mary continued on her journey to the countryside, waving to those she met.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup>Mary White Collection, untitled article, *The Emporia Gazette*, 21 November 1977.

<sup>237</sup>William Allen White, "Mary White."

<sup>238</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid. William Allen White, "Mary White." William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 604.

Traveling north on Merchant Street she

. . . took off her cowboy hat, and the horse swung into a lope. She passed the Triplets and waved her cowboy hat at them, still moving gaily north on Merchant Street. A *Gazette* carrier passed --a High School boy friend -- and she waved at him, but with her bridle hand; the horse veered quickly, plunged into the parking where the low-hanging limb faced her and, while she still looked back waving, the blow came.<sup>240</sup>

Dazed, Mary slipped off of 'Liza Jane. She staggered, and dropped into a semiconscious state. Several people who had seen the accident crowded around Mary Katherine to see if they could help her. Mary Brooks, who had not gone directly home that day, saw the crowd gathering as she approached her home on the corner of Tenth and Merchant and learned of the accident.<sup>241</sup> Adeline Hunter ran out with her father and grandfather to where Mary was lying. They loaded Mary into their car and took her to the Whites' home. (An Emporian remembered that "our hospitals weren't too much at that time; they tried to keep the sick at home.")<sup>242</sup> After Mary was put to bed and Dr. Frank Foncannon, the family's doctor, was called. The streets around the Whites' residence were barricaded to eliminate traffic noise, making the neighborhood ". . . perfectly quiet."<sup>243</sup> Not only was

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<sup>240</sup>White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 606.

<sup>241</sup>Mary White Collection, untitled article, 21 November 1977.

<sup>242</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid.

traffic stopped, but the telephone company also cut off all incoming telephone calls into the White home.<sup>244</sup>

Later that day, William Allen received a telegram from Sally. The telegram stated,

Mary has had another tumble from horse. No scars but severe shock. Horse absolutely to go. Mary may stand it but I can't.<sup>245</sup>

The following day, Dr. Foncannon ordered x-rays for Mary Katherine; the x-rays revealed that Mary's skull had been fractured.<sup>246</sup>

A second telegram was sent to William Allen telling him that Mary's condition had worsened. William Allen and William Lindsay, Mary's brother who was attending Harvard, hurriedly began the trip home. Three days after Mary's accident, William Allen White was met in Chicago by two friends, Harold Ickes and Edna Ferber. Harold Ickes had been sent a telegram from Sallie White asking him to meet William Allen when he arrived in Chicago. The telegram read,

Mary White died this morning from injuries received from fall from horse last Tuesday Will is in the East will reach Chicago about three o'clock this afternoon on Pennsylvania train number twenty three please meet him also ask Edna Ferber at Hotel Sisson Fifty Third and Michigan to accompany you he only knows her condition critical has not been advised of her death as a precaution wire me acknowledging receipt of this wire also wire at earliest moment number of train he will take from Chicago.<sup>247</sup>

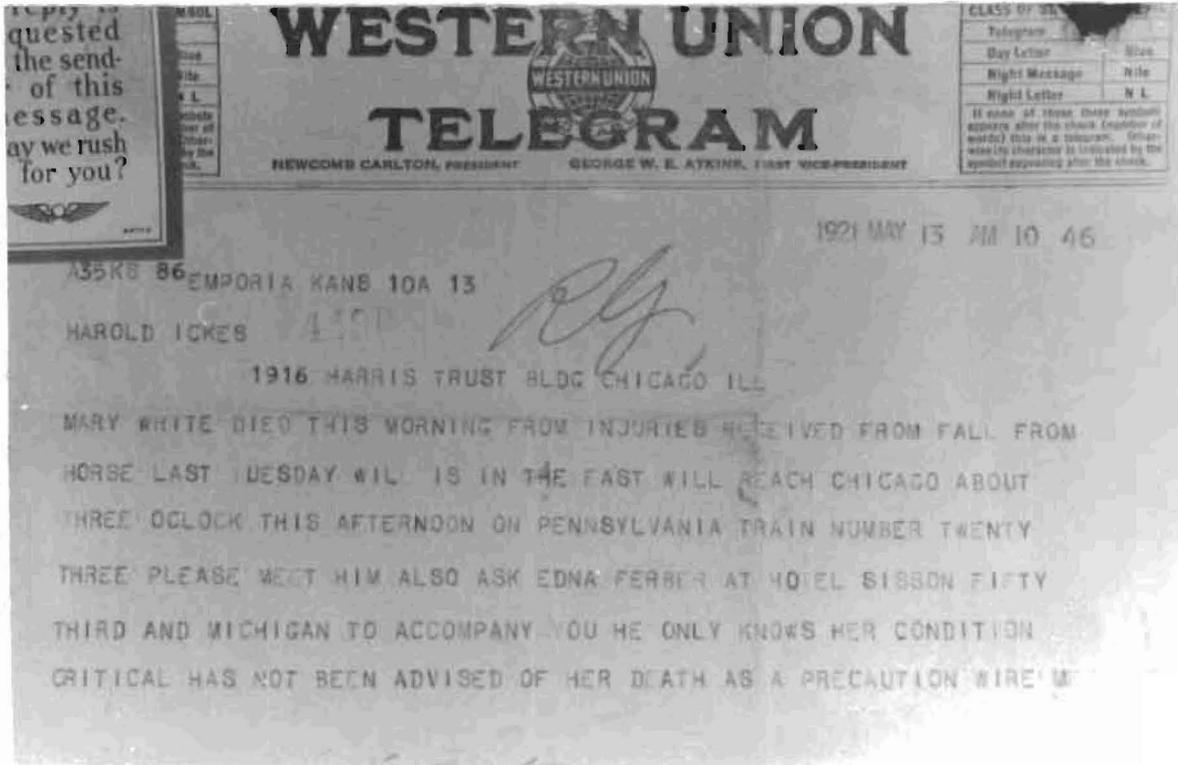
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<sup>244</sup>Rich, 212.

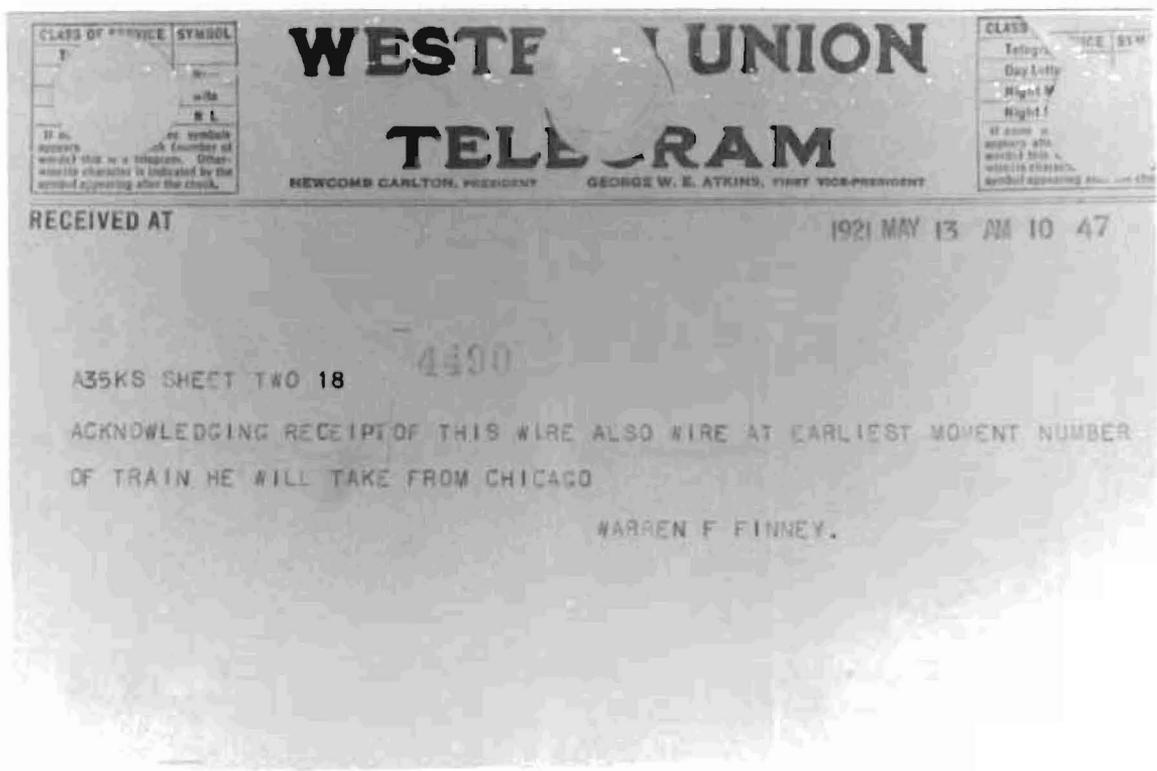
<sup>245</sup>Johnson, 350.

<sup>246</sup>Mary White Collection. The information came from an undated obituary notice in an unknown newspaper.

<sup>247</sup>Sallie White, Emporia, to Harold Ickes, Chicago, *Western Union Telegram*, 13 May 1921, Mary White Collection.



**Figure Fifteen** - Telegram from Sallie White to Harold Ickes, page 1 of 2.  
 (Courtesy of Mary White Collection.)



**Figure Sixteen** - Telegram from Sallie White to Harold Ickes, page 2 of 2.  
(Courtesy of Mary White Collection)

Mary Katherine, the independent, strong-willed adolescent, who enjoyed life and never met a stranger, struggled to live until early Friday morning; Mary Katherine's life ended at 5:30 a.m. on May 13, 1921.<sup>248</sup>

William Lindsay White did not find out about his sister's death until he arrived in Kansas City the next morning. When his train stopped in Kansas City, he "... picked up a newspaper and read with disbelief the Associated Press dispatch announcing Mary's death at age sixteen from a cerebral hemorrhage."<sup>249</sup> Cecil Carle met William Lindsay at the Emporia depot. According to Carle, it was difficult for Mary's brother to believe that his sister was dead. Cecil Carle remembered the day he picked up his friend from the train station and the ride to the White's home.

The natural aversion of man to accept the reality of tragedy made him [William Lindsay] ride the rest of the way home in mentally agonizing a denial of the truth. Trained as he was in the need for accuracy in hard-news reporting, he kept telling himself: "It can't be true . . . , is it?" He could believe my nod. I was his best friend. He had been afraid to ask strangers on the train anything.<sup>250</sup>

William Allen and William Lindsay White had arrived at Emporia. Almost immediately they began to help Sallie with the arrangements for Mary Katherine's funeral.

The evening of the homecoming for William Allen and young Bill was one of disbelief and grief. It was difficult for the Whites to believe that Mary was gone. William Lindsay asked Cecil Carle to spend the night and Cecil accepted the invitation. In his

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<sup>248</sup>Mary White Collection. The information came from an undated obituary notice in an unknown newspaper.

<sup>249</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 38-39.

<sup>250</sup>Carle, 10.

manuscript, Carle stated that as he stayed with William Lindsay that night, he heard Mary's brother cry for the first time in all the years they had known one another.

I heard him begin to cry. "Poor little girl," he sobbed. If there was regret in those words for some of the big-brother meanness heaped on Mary through practical jokes, I shared his quiet. Neither Bill nor I ever were proud of our "games" that sometimes got Mary into mild hysterics. . . . When Bill started to weep that night, I instinctively reacted as I never had before. I took him in my arms. There was no embarrassment or shame for either as he sobbed against my shoulder. And that is how we went to sleep.<sup>251</sup>

A gray clouded sky overshadowed Emporia as the funeral for Mary Katherine White began. The funeral was held at the Congregational Church at Emporia on May 16, 1921. Everyone from Mary's hometown attended the funeral. The service began with Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. It was a simple ceremony;

. . . no singing, no flowers except the big bunch of red roses from her brother Bill's Harvard classmen . . . and the red roses from the *Gazette* forces, in vases, at her head and feet.<sup>252</sup>

A short prayer was given, the essay on love from I Corinthians 13 was read and the Reverend H. J. Rice, pastor of the Congregational Church, told about Mary's democratic and free spirit. Carl Nau, one of her friends, sent a prayer which was read during the service. Mary's funeral ended with ". . . the joyously melancholy first movement of

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<sup>251</sup>Carle, 11-12.

<sup>252</sup>William Allen White, "Mary White." William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 608. A friend of the Whites remembered that William Allen and Sallie did not want any flowers. But William Lindsay's classmates had sent a large spray of roses that were placed on Mary's coffin. "Mrs. White said at the time, "How proud she [Mary] would have been to know that Bill's Harvard friends thought enough of her to send her those roses." Roberts and Broucek.

Tchaikovsky's *Pathetic Symphony*."<sup>253</sup> Mary's pallbearers included the following men: W. L. Holtz, her Latin teacher; Rice Brown, her high school principal; Frank Foncannon, her doctor; W. W. Finney, a friend; Walter Hughes, from the *Emporia Gazette* office; and William Lindsay, her brother. Charlie O'Brien, the traffic officer who used to walk a short distance with Mary when she came home from school, was transferred from Sixth and Commercial to the corner nearest the church to direct her friends who came to say goodbye. He cried.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup>William Allen White, "Mary White." William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 608.

<sup>254</sup>William Allen White, "Mary White." Johnson, 353-54.



**Figure Seventeen** - Mary Katherine White's Senior Picture, ca. 1921. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)

## ***CHAPTER NINE***

### ***THE EFFECTS OF MARY'S DEATH***

What effect does one person's life, or death, have on family members, a community, a nation, or even the world? Many people may feel that one person's life or death may have some effect on the family members, but not much effect, if any at all, on the community, nation, or the world. If one's life and death are thought to make an impact on the world, many individuals might well assume the person has lived a long life, making a contribution to society due to the wisdom he or she has gained through education or life experiences. But what about the life and death of an adolescent? Can a young girl of not quite seventeen years old have an astounding effect on the world? In the case of Mary Katherine White, the answer is yes. Her short life and untimely death had an amazing impact and effect not only on her family, but also on the city of Emporia, the United States, and the world.

William Allen and Sallie White immediately began to deal with their grief over Mary Katherine's death by writing an editorial about Mary. The day after the funeral William Allen and Sallie got up without having slept. They ate breakfast out of routine but lacked the appetite to enjoy it. William Allen looked at Sallie and said, "Get your things, Sallie, we must go to the office and take care of Mary."

Sallie replied, "I can't do it, Will, I can't do it."

He said, "But you must, dear, you must. We always have done everything together and we must do this together. Besides, I need you. I can't do it alone."

When they reached the *Gazette* office, William Allen closed the doors and began to write. After some time he gave Sallie the manuscript and asked her if it was okay. Sallie read it and told him, "Yes, it's all right, but don't forget . . . Mary's dinner for the folks at the poor farm." William Allen replied, "That's one reason why I had to have you Sallie." He continued with his writing and showed Sallie the manuscript again. She suggested some of Mary's other accomplishments. Finished at last, William Allen called for Calvin Lambert, the city editor of the *Gazette*, and presented him with the manuscript, four typewritten pages on newspaper copy. Several words were crossed out and penciled-in words were added to make the editorial a work of art. Lambert brought the proofs as soon as they were set.<sup>255</sup>

The article, which appeared in the *Emporia Gazette* on May 17, 1921, was titled "Mary White." It deeply moved the townspeople and was picked up by *The Kansas City Star* within a few days. Soon it was reprinted in the *New York Tribune*. It spread across the country and was read over the radio.<sup>256</sup> An excellent example of how deeply William Allen and Sallie White's editorial affected people comes from *The Ohio State Journal*, May 27, 1921, ten days after the article was first published in the *Emporia Gazette*.

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<sup>255</sup>Hinshaw, 216-17. Nona Brown Thompson, "William Allen White: The Women in His Life," *Kanhistique, Kansas History and Antiques*, Ellsworth, Kansas, June 1988, 4.

<sup>256</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 607. William Allen White, "Mary White."

We have just read the greatest editorial of the year, have wiped our eyes and shall try to write a line or two about it, though we hope to reprint it on this page within a few days. It was written by William Allen White and appeared in his *Emporia Gazette* and the subject is the sudden death by accident of his only daughter. . . .

Some people surrender to their great griefs, are overwhelmed by them, make everybody else miserable about them. Some even seem in a melancholy way to enjoy parading their deep sorrows; there is much evidence of this, though it seems a cruel thing to say. Surrender to personal grief is weakness; parade of it is egotism. Mr. White handles the matter in a different way. In what he has written, . . . there is not a note of sorrow, not a hint of complaint against the eternal plan of things as it has affected him, not the faintest suggestion of weakness under heavy trial or self-pity under a terrible and sudden blow. He merely tells in his free-flowing Kansas language the circumstances of Mary's death . . . with just a line at the very end to show he knows she is not really dead.

Mary was a hard girl to lose but her father takes the blow standing up. Mary, though it may seem to be all over for her, will live long in Emporia and so will Bill. These honest, simple, courageous lives are the ones that count, be they short or long.<sup>257</sup>

Although the editorial was the first step William Allen and Sallie took to cope with the death of their daughter, the Whites continued to be tormented by the loss of Mary Katherine. In a letter to one of his childhood friends, Karen Redden Smith, William Allen evaluated the loss of his daughter. A portion of that letter reads:

Mrs. White and I have none but joyous memories of Mary. She gave out humor and sunshine as beaten steel gives out sparks, and all of our recollections of her are merry ones. It is hard to think of her without smiling, and the shadow of her face across our hearts brings laughter. We are not deceiving ourselves about the blow. It was a terrible stroke and we are infinitely lonely. . . . Mary is net gain. To have had her seventeen years, joyous and rollicking and wise, and so tremendously human in her weakness and in her

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<sup>257</sup>“William Allen White’s Daughter,” *The Ohio State Journal*, 27 May 1921, Mary White Collection.

strength, is blessing enough for any parent, and we have no right to ask for more.<sup>258</sup>

Friends and strangers alike sent letters to the Whites concerning Mary's death and describing how deeply touched and moved they had been after reading the editorial written by both William Allen and Sallie.<sup>259</sup> In a letter dated May 28, 1921, to J. J. Duncan Jr., from Estes Park, Colorado, William Allen commented that he and Sallie had received letters from ". . . all sorts of people - from members of the President's Cabinet and from the wife and daughter of Colonel Roosevelt. . . ." <sup>260</sup> Many of Mary Katherine's friends also wrote to the Whites to show their support and kindness to the family struggling with the pain of death. Some of Mary's friends returned sketches that Mary had drawn, or other memorabilia that once belonged to Mary Katherine. Bessie Powell sent a letter to the Whites that included several of Mary's drawings. Sallie White, in a letter to Bessie Powell, thanked her for the sketches and discussed that things were not any easier for her and William Allen; they still waited to hear her come into the house. Sallie commented, "the heart grows sick when she doesn't come in . . . she [Mary] lives so

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<sup>258</sup>Johnson, 355.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 354.

<sup>260</sup>William Allen White, Emporia, to J.J. Duncan Jr., Estes Park, 28 May 1921, Copy of transcript in the hand of Mike Printz, Topeka West High School Library, Topeka West High School, Topeka, Kansas. Evidently Mr. Duncan, in a previous letter, had inquired about what to do with Mary's donkeys. In this letter the Whites told Duncan that since he had been responsible for them, they were giving him Mary's favorite donkey, Cricket, saying, ". . . nothing would make Mary more happy than to know Cricket was in good hands."

long as you girls love her.”<sup>261</sup> Both William Allen and Sallie White took the time to reply to the letters written to them by friends.<sup>262</sup>

Mary Katherine’s death continued to haunt William Allen and Sallie and caused life to be, at times, unbearable for them. The summer after Mary’s death, William Allen and Sallie refused to take their annual August vacation to the cabin in Colorado; the Whites, after a period of mourning, went on a one week automobile tour of the Ozarks with two of their best friends, the Warren Finneys, of Emporia.<sup>263</sup> Whenever the Whites were in Emporia, for several years after Mary Katherine was buried, they would drive to the cemetery every afternoon at five o’clock to visit her grave.<sup>264</sup>

Sallie White never fully recovered from Mary Katherine’s death. She remained in emotional shock for several months and could not repeat Mary’s name without tears swelling up in her eyes. For years afterward, she suffered periodic bouts of depression, with Mary never far from her thoughts. One of the things Sallie insisted on was keeping Mary’s bedroom just as it had been before her death. In late 1921, or early 1922, when the Whites moved back into their home at 927 Exchange, after the renovation from the fire damage, the appearance of Mary Katherine’s room was an exact image of her

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<sup>261</sup>Sallie White, Emporia, to Bessie Powell, Emporia, 20 June 1922, Transcript in the hand of Sallie White, Mary White Collection.

<sup>262</sup>Johnson, 356.

<sup>263</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 41.

<sup>264</sup>Roberts and Broucek. According to a resident of Emporia who lived near the cemetery. “It was just as sure as the day would dawn that they [the Whites] would be by here at five o’clock to visit Mary.” Mary Katherine was interred at Memorial Lawn Cemetery.

bedroom at the White's temporary home south of 927 Exchange. All of Mary's belongings, at the insistence of Sallie, were kept in Mary's bedroom until her own death in 1950.<sup>265</sup>

William Allen White's reaction was not as emotional as his wife's, at least not outwardly. He continued his daily duties at the *Gazette*, writing editorials and managing the newspaper, but William Allen had to struggle with completing other writing responsibilities he had agreed to do for his publisher and various magazines. Two years prior to Mary Katherine's death, Mr. White had begun writing an account of his relationship with Theodore Roosevelt, who had died in 1918, that he had titled *A Friendly Chronicle*. While William Allen was writing the manuscript, his daughter, on many occasions, would enter the study and the two of them would discuss the book and reminisce about Mary Katherine's hero and William Allen's close friend. After Mary's death, White abandoned and never completed the manuscript.<sup>266</sup> Another project William Allen White failed to complete, due to Mary's death, was a series of amusing short stories about family life for *Saturday Evening Post*. Both projects reminded William Allen of his daughter and caused him to recall the many memories he had of Mary Katherine. Mary

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<sup>265</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 39. Johnson, 356. Walker.

<sup>266</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 39. E. Jay Jernigan, Professor of English at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, interview by author, 20 October 1996, Emporia, telephone. Johnson, 356.

Katherine's death affected William Allen White so greatly that he never wrote fiction again.<sup>267</sup>

Another effect of Mary Katherine's death on her father involved politics. After the death of his daughter, William Allen's interest in national politics waned until 1928. This was unusual for the man who had been involved in politics, local, state, and national, since his entrance into the newspaper business. The man who seemed to know the current trends and attitudes about the political situations in Kansas, and the nation, rarely filled his editorial page with his opinions about state and national politics during this ". . . extremely low point . . ." in his life.<sup>268</sup>

Even as late as 1941, twenty years after Mary Katherine's death, William Allen White kept his daughter's memory close to his heart. A widow and her three children were taken to Mr. White's *Gazette* office by Grace Moore, a neighbor of the Whites. Mrs. Moore believed that William Allen White could help the woman, who had been unsuccessful in obtaining relief from the local relief board. William Allen looked at the woman and said, "You are about the age of my Mary, thirty-seven, aren't you?" The middle-aged woman nodded and Mr. White continued, "I just robbed a man of a ten-dollar check; here you take it."<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 39. Jernigan, interview by author, 20 October 1996.

<sup>268</sup>Hinshaw, 225, 250.

<sup>269</sup>Johnson, 356. Mr. White also called the local relief authorities about the woman; she was immediately added to the relief rolls. The author assumes that the "ten-dollar check" was received by White for services rendered to the individual.

In late 1941, another incident occurred that reminded William Allen of his daughter. The Whites' son had recently returned from an assignment in London, England, where he was covering the horrendous horrors of World War II. While in London, William Lindsay discovered a way that he could relieve some of the pain and suffering of the war from at least one orphan of the war. William Lindsay White and a four-year-old girl, orphaned by the blitz, boarded an airplane and flew to New York to meet William Lindsay's wife of ten years, Katherine Klinkenberg White. William Lindsay and Katherine White formally adopted the young girl from England in November. The little girl's name was Barbara.<sup>270</sup> When William Allen met his granddaughter, and throughout the remainder of his life, many of his references about Barbara were in terms of comparing her with Mary Katherine, his only daughter. Yes, William Allen White missed Mary, and he missed her immensely.<sup>271</sup>

Three years later, William Allen White died. And even in the editor's death, Mary Katherine White was remembered. The funeral of William Allen White, on January 29, 1944, was hauntingly similar to the funeral of his daughter in 1921; the same two scriptures were read, the same Tchaikovsky musical score was played, and Sallie White gave the minister who officiated the funeral a copy of the sermon delivered in 1921. The minister was told that essentially everything that had been stated about Mary Katherine White, the daughter, could be stated about William Allen White, the father.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay*, 6, 138-39. Johnson, 356.

<sup>271</sup>Johnson, 356.

<sup>272</sup>Hinshaw, 295.

Although William Allen and Sallie White immediately began to deal with their grief over Mary's death by writing the editorial about Mary Katherine the day after the funeral, William Lindsay White could not release his pain as easily. Bill and Mary were close, as close as any brother and sister could be, and Bill could not express his grief openly. In the letters that he later wrote, and in various other writings, William Lindsay seldom mentioned the death of his sister. He did, however, write a letter to his parents a year after Mary's mishap. William Lindsay told his parents,

Since I have left Emporia, where the thing is around me, the fact of Mary's death easily slips from my mind. I find myself thinking naturally of her opinions on different things, of plans for the future which naturally include her. Then it comes back with a dull wrench.<sup>273</sup>

Another member of the family deeply affected by Mary Katherine's death was Mary's own grandmother, Mary Hatten White. An Emporian, who knew the Whites quite well during their time of tumultuous pain, remarked that Mary Hatten White missed Mary Katherine ". . . more than anybody." After Mary's accident and death, the Whites had to keep the grandmother confined to her home south of 927 Exchange. From time to time, Mary Hatten White would be seen at one of the windows of her house as if looking for someone special. If she saw anybody, she would call out and ask them if they had seen Mary.<sup>274</sup> Mary Hatten White truly loved her namesake.

Mary Katherine's death affected the whole community. Shortly after her death, the Emporia School Board set aside a room for the African-American girls at the high

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<sup>273</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 40.

<sup>274</sup>Roberts and Broucek.

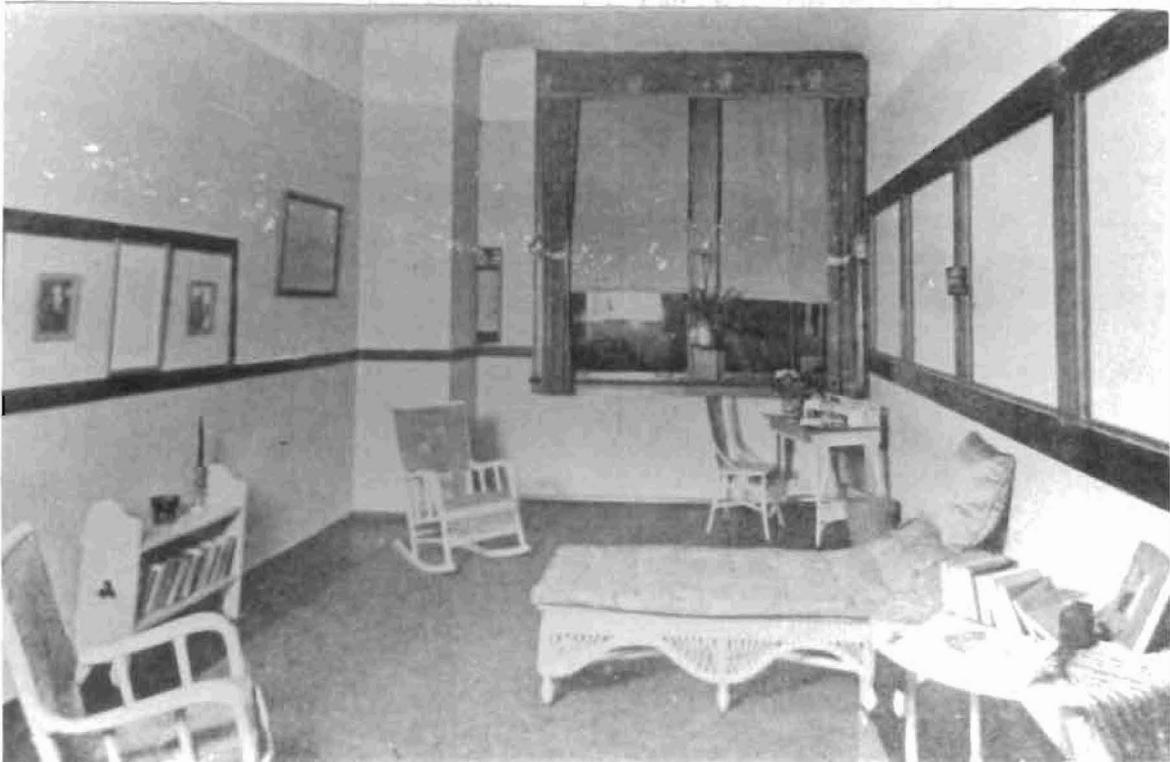
school. The room at the school was designated “. . . as a YWCA restroom [lounge] . . .” where the African American girls could freshen up and also work on their studies and read. The board declared in a letter to the Whites that the room was established as a result of the suggestion and efforts of Mary Katherine White, “. . . who had been to the principal of the high school and the superintendent of schools calling their attention to the fact that the colored girls had no meeting in the high school building.” The room was dedicated to the memory of Mary White and, according to members of the school board, “. . . would please her more than anything else that could have been done in the High School.”<sup>275</sup>

In 1954, the superintendent of schools in Emporia announced that the African American students at the high school would no longer use the Mary White Room. The room once used for reading and studying would be converted and used for other purposes.<sup>276</sup> African American and white girls would use the same facilities from now on. The announcement made by the superintendent may have been in keeping with the new integration laws based on the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision of 1954. Many people wondered if this decision would ruin the efforts and damage the memory of Mary Katherine White. But according to William Lindsay White, in an interview concerning the removal of the room honoring his sister’s dedication to reform, the abandonment of the original purpose of the lounge “. . . is the fulfillment of Mary White’s

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<sup>275</sup>*The Emporia Gazette*, no date, Mary White Collection.

<sup>276</sup>“The World of Mary White,” *The Hutchinson News-Herald*, 1955, White Collection, Lyon County Historical Museum.



**Figure Eighteen** - The Mary White Room at Emporia High School, ca. 1922. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.)

ideas - a fulfillment she never dreamed would come so soon, if at all." Mary Katherine's solution to inequality in 1920 did not solve the problems between the races, however, it was a step toward equality for all races of humanity.<sup>277</sup>

On the south side of town, another memorial was established to honor Mary White. The memorial is a park known as Peter Pan Park. The park was a fifty-two-acre plot of land that William Allen and Sallie White gave to the city of Emporia between the years 1928 and 1930. Peter Pan Park was one of the last gifts that the Whites gave to the community of Emporia and a recreation space for all the town's residents. The land was designated to become a playground for the children of Emporia. After Mary Katherine died, the Whites began purchasing land at what was then the southwestern city limits of Emporia. After they had accumulated fifty acres, between 1928 and 1930, the Whites landscaped the park and gave it to the city as a memorial to their daughter.<sup>278</sup>

At the time the park was given to the citizens of Emporia, it was described by biographer David Hinshaw as follows:

Its trees and gullies, artificial lake, camp and supper sites, walls and benches, tennis courts, its natural amphitheater accommodating thousands of people for outdoor plays, its flowering shrubs and decorative trees, make this the most beautiful spot of its kind in the Middle West.<sup>279</sup>

William Allen and Sallie White placed stipulations on their gift to the city and the community. The terms of the gift to the city included the following requirements: First,

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<sup>277</sup>Ibid.

<sup>278</sup>Hinshaw, 191. Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 226.

<sup>279</sup>Hinshaw, 191.

the land must always be used as a park and the park must never be commercialized; second, the White's name must never be used in association with the park; third, for a period of five years, William Allen and Sallie had the right to spend as much of their own money on improving the park as they chose to spend in order to accomplish the park plans that had been submitted to the city by Hare and Hare, a landscaping firm from Kansas City.<sup>280</sup>

In 1947, a bronze bust of William Allen White was cast by artist Jo Davidson; the bust had been commissioned by the White Memorial Foundation as a commemorative symbol of the town's famous citizen. The bust was placed in storage until 1950, then, on July 11, 1950, it was dedicated and placed next to the lake in Peter Pan Park.<sup>281</sup> Although not kept up as it once was, the memorial to Mary Katherine White, known to local Emporians as Peter Pan Park, is still used and visited by many people.

A third area of the community that Mary Katherine affected was the Kansas State Normal School, now Emporia State University. Thirty-seven years after her death, an area of the William Allen White Memorial Library was dedicated to William Allen and Sallie White's daughter. On October 16, 1958, the Children's Division of the newly constructed library was named the Mary White Room. The room, located in the lower

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<sup>280</sup>Johnson, 355-56. Hinshaw, 191. Mr. Hinshaw states that there was only one stipulation that William Allen and Sallie placed on the gift: "... no plaque or marker of any kind stating their purpose or carrying the White name should be placed there."

<sup>281</sup>Jernigan, *William Lindsay White*, 226. Apparently the White family gave their permission for this memorial to be placed in the park as Sallie White and William Lindsay White were present at the dedication.

southwest corner of the building, filled with all manner of children's books, was named after her to honor the memory of Mary Katherine's love of books and literature.<sup>282</sup>

The dedication ceremony was held before a group of townspeople who knew Mary Katherine, members of the Emporia State faculty and library staff, members of the Kansas Board of Regents, and visitors to the community who were either friends or acquaintances of the Whites. According to Ruth Hanson, the administrator of the School of Libraries at the college, the inspiration for naming the room after Mary White came from the editorial "Mary White." Hanson, in the opening ceremony, stated,

Mary is representative of the vitality, courage, and love for life that characterizes youth. It was felt that this part of the library, which is for youth, should be Mary White's. . . .<sup>283</sup>

Another speaker at the dedication ceremony was Drew McLaughlin, Sr., a member of the Board of Regents, a newspaper editor for the *Miami Republican* from Paola, Kansas, and a contemporary of William Allen White. Mr. McLaughlin spoke of fond memories he had of the White family and concluded his recollections of the Whites with a conversation he once had with William Allen about Mary's death. McLaughlin said that the twinkle disappeared from Mr. White's eyes as he referred to the years without his

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<sup>282</sup>Ruth Gagliardo, *The Dedication of Mary White Room*, "Children's Library Dedicated to Mary White" (Emporia, Kansas: Kansas State Teachers College, November 1958), Mary White Collection.

<sup>283</sup>*Ibid.*

daughter with, "Boy, all the years are hard."<sup>284</sup> At the conclusion of his message,

McLaughlin made a profound and remarkable statement, He said,

A youthful life of beauty, that never will be erased from memory. A life that was spent in the environment of literature. A life that prompted a classic. It is fitting that the Children's Room of a library in the home town be dedicated to this life.<sup>285</sup>

During the ceremony, the original draft of the "Mary White" editorial, that was given to the library years earlier, was placed in the Mary White Room and a bronze plaque was read and hung over the doors of the Mary White Room; the inscription on the plaque reads:

The Mary White Room  
"This is the immortality that Mary would love-  
to live in the hearts of her own people." - W.A.W.  
Dedicated October 17, 1958<sup>286</sup>

Later, some of Mary's personal books, favorite books that she often read, were given to the library of Emporia State; the collection of books was placed in a bookcase near the Mary White Room where visitors to the Mary White room can observe firsthand many of Mary Katherine's books.

The Mary White Room is still an integral part of Emporia State University, the Teachers College (now a division of the university), and the William Allen White

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<sup>284</sup>Ibid, Drew McLaughlin, Sr., "Address for Mary White Dedication Ceremonies."

<sup>285</sup>Ibid.

<sup>286</sup>Gagliardo, "Children's Library Dedicated . . .". The quote from Mr. White was taken from a footnote in the 1937 reprint of the *Gazette* editorial "Mary White. Hinshaw, 217.

Memorial Library. Students of Emporia State who major in elementary education frequent the Mary White Room every semester to examine children's books and learn about Mary Katherine and William Allen White. Elementary school children, from various locations in Kansas, and their teachers, visit the Mary White Room yearly. Visitors from neighboring states, as well as visitors from countries around the world, have come to Emporia to receive a tour and brief informative speech about Mary White and the Mary White Room.

Throughout the decades of the twentieth century, Mary Katherine has had an effect on more than just her family and the little community of Emporia. Mary Katherine White, in some way, has had an effect on the people of the United States and the world. Whether people have been reached by the editorial written by William Allen and Sallie White, or have learned from an individual or a teacher about the young, energetic, and independent girl from Emporia, Kansas, the effects of Mary White's life and death still continue.

Within a month of its first appearance in the *Emporia Gazette*, "Mary White" had been copied by newspapers all over the United States. According to a letter from William Allen White to a former classmate, dated June 3, 1921, the editorial had reached more than two and a half million people, "... a wider circulation than anything that has ever been published in the *Gazette*."<sup>287</sup> On what would have been Mary Katherine's seventeenth

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<sup>287</sup>William Allen White, Emporia, to Walter Armstrong, Salt Lake City, 3 June 1921, Copy of transcript in the hand of Mike Printz, Topeka West High School Library, Topeka West High School, Topeka, Kansas.

birthday, an editorial entitled "A Birthday Present" appeared in the *Emporia Gazette*, addressed to the citizens of Emporia. Mr. White told his readers:

Her Emporia friends may be pleased to know how far the influence of the child is going in a great world which her living childhood could not have touched.<sup>288</sup>

Through the editorial, Mary Katherine White entered the homes and hearts of the nation; she comforted and calmed those individuals who faced sorrow and pain and who permitted her to enter their residences as a silent guest through the words of a family who had experienced sorrow, pain, and joy.<sup>289</sup>

The editorial quickly became a popular essay, and according to the *Kansas City Times*, is "probably more famous than Mr. White's 'What's the Matter With Kansas?' editorial."<sup>290</sup> *McClure's Magazine* was the first magazine to print the editorial; the article appeared with a picture of Mary Katherine during the summer of 1921. Christopher Morley was the first editor to publish the editorial in a book for the literary public; Morley included the piece in *Modern Essays* during the same year. Some years later Alexander Woolcott read "Mary White" over the radio to an invisible audience that cried with him as

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<sup>288</sup>William Allen White, "A Birthday Present," *The Emporia Gazette*, 18 June 1921. Ruth Garver Gagliardo, "Address for William Allen White Award Dinner," *Bulletin of Information* (Emporia Kansas: Emporia State Teachers College) November 1958, volume 38, number 13, no page.

<sup>289</sup>Gagliardo, "Children's Library Dedicated. . . ."

<sup>290</sup>"Mary White's Last Horseback Ride," *The Kansas City Times*, 10 February 1944. White Collection, Lyon County Historical Museum, Emporia, Kansas.

Mary Katherine once again touched the lives of people.<sup>291</sup> Biographer David Hinshaw wrote that William Allen White's journalistic masterpiece was "Mary White." The editorial

. . . swept the country without any of the preliminary advertising that precedes a book or a magazine article. . . . It is already a classic. . . . It is unique in the literature of the English language.<sup>292</sup>

Three years after Mary Katherine's death, the Whites were approached by individuals and publishers wishing to publish the essay "Mary White" in high school and college textbooks. In a letter to William Allen White from L. W. Payne, Professor of English at the University of Texas in Austin, dated June 24, 1924, Mr. Payne wrote:

I am preparing an addition of about 150 pages to my "Selections from American Literature," published by Rand McNally & Co., Chicago. The plan of the original book was such as to include only the major writers of the earlier periods. I am continuing this plan in the additional selections. I shall probably have about six or seven short stories and prose selections, and I very much desire to include in this material your piercing editorial called "Mary White." I think it appropriate to perpetuate in a high-school book the memory of what seems to me an ideal American high-school girl. . . .<sup>293</sup>

William Allen and Sallie White accepted the invitations to have "Mary White" published in high school and college textbooks, readers, and anthologies. The editorial became a

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<sup>291</sup>William Allen White, "The Immortality of Mary White," *The Emporia Gazette*, 1941, White Collection, Lyon County Historical Museum, Emporia, Kansas. Hinshaw, 209. Johnson, 354-55.

<sup>292</sup>Hinshaw, 209.

<sup>293</sup>L. W. Payne, Austin, to William Allen White, Emporia, 24 June 1924, Transcript in the hand of Sallie White, William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

“ . . . standard selection for high school and college reading” and was published in more than twenty-five textbooks and numerous anthologies throughout the country in the early and mid twentieth century; it has been reprinted more than anything else William Allen White has published.<sup>294</sup> Thousands of people have been, and still are, touched by this tribute of a father to his daughter that undoubtedly will survive throughout time. The last paragraph of “Mary White” reads as follows:

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.<sup>295</sup>

Although Mary Katherine White was no longer living, William Allen White, through his editorial, made it possible for his daughter to remain alive by telling others of her energy and love of life, her practical jokes, and her outstanding reforms. Mary’s death could be viewed as a mere step to the finality of the grave; however, through his editorial of June 17, 1921, William Allen White has allowed Mary Katherine White to become immortal.

Mary Katherine White affected a region of the United States other than the Great Plains; Mary’s life and death impacted the young women who attended Wellesley College, located in the northeastern region of the United States, particularly the young women who were in the class of 1926, which would have been Mary Katherine’s graduating class. One of the textbooks at Wellesley College included the essay about Mary White. While reading “Mary White,” the class of 1926 discovered that Mary had been entered at their

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<sup>294</sup>Clough, 222. Rich, 216. Thompson, 4.

<sup>295</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 609.

school for the 1922 school year. The young women enrolled Mary as a member of their class and kept her as a member from 1922 through 1926.<sup>296</sup>

William Allen and Sallie White were unaware of what the Wellesley students had done until they received an invitation to the commencement exercises. The Whites were notified that during the commencement, Mary White would be honored in the school's annual, *The Legend*, which was dedicated to her memory. After hearing what the class of 1926 had done, the White's paid Mary Katherine's class assessment and requested that Mary's name be ". . . entered as a contributor to the memorial fund . . ." at Wellesley. The loan fund, known as the Daughter's Fund, had its name changed in 1941 to the Mary White Daughter's Fund in memory of the absent and loved member of the Wellesley graduating class of 1926.<sup>297</sup>

During the last thirty years of the twentieth century, there was a resurgence of interest in Mary Katherine White when Robert Radnitz, a movie producer, read "Mary White" and decided to produce a film about Mary Katherine based on the editorial by her father and mother. After the leading characters were cast for the film, Radnitz chose the small community of Florence, Kansas, located west of Emporia, to depict the city of Emporia during the early 1920s.<sup>298</sup> The made for television movie was first shown in Emporia on October 20, 1977, at the Petite Twin Theatre before an audience of invited

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<sup>296</sup>"One Who Has Lived," 1926, White Collection, Lyon County Historical Museum, Emporia, Kansas. Clough, 222-23.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid. William Allen White, "The Immortality of Mary White."

<sup>298</sup>"Stranger Might Be Shocked By Goings On In Florence," *The Emporia Gazette*, 10 May 1977.

guests from the community.<sup>299</sup> The television movie aired November 18, 1977 and portrayed Mary Katherine as “. . . a strong-willed, free-spirited girl, ‘with the intelligence of a woman and the heart of a child’.”<sup>300</sup>

With any film, whether made for television or as a big screen production, movie producers and film writers often exercise their “right” to embellish facts to make a film “more attractive.” The production of Mary Katherine’s life was no exception. One who views *Mary White* will observe several discrepancies in the movie. For example, the film shows Mary Katherine, along with a friend named Tom, trying to interrupt a Ku Klux Klan rally being held on a street in Emporia; there are no records available to prove the accuracy of this episode. Another portion of the film shows Jane Addams conversing with Mary Katherine at the Whites home in Emporia in 1920; in actuality, Jane Addams visited the Whites at their cabin in Colorado.<sup>301</sup> The film, despite its inaccuracies, does give the viewer an excellent image of Mary Katherine White as an avid lover of horses, a prankster,

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<sup>299</sup>*The Emporia Gazette*, 19 October 1977, Mary White Collection.

<sup>300</sup>“Mary White,” *TV Guide*, 18 November 1977, A-94. The actress Kathleen Beller played the role of Mary.

<sup>301</sup>Charles Webb, “*Emporia, the Athens of America, is Just Ahead . . .*” *The Emporia Data Book* (Emporia: Emporia State University, no date). According to Webb’s book, Jane Addams visited Emporia twice: first, on June 11, 1908, to give a lecture at the College of Emporia; second, on January 12, 1922, to give a lecture in Albert Taylor Hall on Normal School campus. Mary Bogan, Administrator of Special Collections, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, Interview by author, 24 February 1999, Dearing, Kansas, Telephone. According to Bogan, she went to the October 20, 1977 showing of *Mary White*. As Miss Bogan entered the theater, Mr. Radnitz noticed she was carrying a notepad and said, “don’t expect this to be a documentary.” Miss Bogan wrote down pages of inaccuracies she found in the film.

and a brilliant reformer who advocated the need for changes in the society in which she lived.

Mary Katherine White's legacy has continued to affect people seventy-five years after her death. Mary Katherine's life had a profound effect on the life of this historian. As one who was born and raised in Kansas, he frequently recalls hearing the names William Allen White and Mary Katherine White. Throughout elementary and high school, this student learned of the Whites and their importance to the history, politics, and reforms in the state. The editorial, "Mary White," was read and reread throughout the school life of this Kansas student, but it was not until this historian took a biography class that he truly desired to learn about the short life of Mary Katherine White. While the first steps of research were being taken, Mary became an obsession, and a quest to tell her story began. This writer learned that Mary Katherine was not an ordinary young lady; she was not spoiled as many people believe; Mary Katherine White was an individual with certain goals; she was a reformer who wanted the wrongs that existed in early twentieth century society made right. She was determined, strong-willed enough to see that her goals were at least heard, if not accomplished; Mary Katherine White was ahead of her time. Yes, Mary Katherine enjoyed life and that is what makes her interesting. She wanted change, she wanted to be her own person, and if she could play pranks and practical jokes as well as change society, she was all happier yet! Mary Katherine White has caused this historian to reevaluate some of his accomplishments and goals. Does he want to make an impact on the lives of others? Does he want to change the lives of people in modern American

society? Can this writer learn from Mary Katherine White's example and make the world in which he lives a better place? Most definitely!

Although Mary Katherine White's life was cut short, she lived her life to its fullest and had many adventures during her almost seventeen years. Her father mentioned, when discussing Mary Katherine's life, that

... when one thinks of the marvels of the world, the strange new things that man has discovered about himself and his universe, it could well be true, maybe in some distant world among the millions that whirl around our universe, Mary will meet her mother and me and ... will grin, [and say] I've had an adventure.<sup>302</sup>

One must remember that life is an adventure; it has its ups and downs. Mary Katherine survived ill health and lived to be nurtured in the shadow of a famous father. She was on her way to becoming a successful woman in her own right. Mary Katherine was a youthful progressive, a young woman ahead of her time, and one can only wonder what influences she might have had on the issues of equality, reform, and women's rights had she not been struck in the head by a tree limb. Her father referred to her as his "Peter Pan." And in some ways the name is fitting. She was not given the opportunity to grow up - yet she continues to live, weaving her way through the thoughts of those who have come to know her.

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<sup>302</sup>William Allen White, *The Autobiography of . . .*, 605-06.

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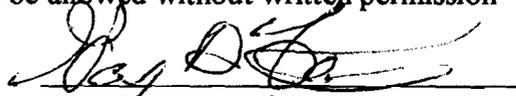
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