

Home Town News: William Allen White and the "Emporia Gazette"

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Anderson asks, in conclusion, why the results of professionalization in pharmacy were "meager" (127) compared to the spectacular professional success of physicians. He answers that pharmacists lost control of pharmaceutical technology to corporate drug manufacturers, whereas doctors retained control of health care technology through the hospitals which became "bastions of the physicians' professional domain" (130). Further, pharmacists suffered from the popular belief, justified or not, that they had failed to live up to their professional obligations in selling liquor, patent medicine, and dangerous drugs, while physicians were active in the movement to reform these trades, appearing as leaders in the emerging system of professionalized health care. Anderson's answer is not altogether convincing; he acknowledges that the gap between science and practice was as wide in medicine as in pharmacy and that doctors were guilty of drug abuse. *Iowa Pharmacy* is, nonetheless, a valuable contribution to a neglected part of Iowa history and, in a larger sense, an insightful study of how the search for occupational efficiency, order, and stability shaped the growth of modern America.

Home Town News: William Allen White and the "Emporia Gazette," by Sally Foreman Griffith. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. viii, 241 pp. Notes, illustrations, index, bibliography. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY TOM MORAIN, LIVING HISTORY FARMS

William Allen White was lionized during his lifetime as America's favorite small-town newspaper editor. White wrote his first editorial for the struggling *Emporia Gazette* in 1895, entered actively into the affairs and politics of the Kansas community, and within a decade had turned the paper into a profitable enterprise. During the same years, White acquired a national reputation as a spokesman for small-town America through the publication of short stories, frequent articles for other newspapers and magazines, and especially a scathing editorial on Kansas Populism written in an angry fit after an encounter with some local farmers. White's efforts to promote his national reputation while at the same time remaining a spokesman for Emporia, particularly its business community, created difficulties for him. The 1896 editorial, "What's the Matter with Kansas?" which so pleased Republican party officials and first brought him national attention, created ill feeling at home that severely tempered White's pleasure in his new fame. Those tensions—and the skill with which White handled them—animate Sally Foreman Griffith's masterful study, *Home Town News*.

Griffith divides her study into three parts: White's early years and his establishment as *Gazette* editor, his political transformation from a conservative Republican into a leading Progressive, and his maturing views on the nature of industrial America. White had modest literary success with some short stories in the style of E. W. Howe and William Dean Howells, but Griffith concentrates on White the Emporia newspaper editor. The pages of the *Gazette* itself, its business correspondence, and White's personal papers provided abundant resources for the three major themes she chose to explore.

The first theme is the career of White himself, from his boyhood determination to "be somebody" to the tremendous public acclaim he received in his later years as the foremost spokesman for small-town America. In detailing White's struggle to maintain both a national and a local *persona*, however, Griffith pays almost no attention to White as husband and father. It is not until late in the book that Griffith even mentions White's daughter Mary, who died when she was sixteen and whose loving obituary may have been the most famous piece White ever wrote. Just as White mediated between the small town and the outside world, so too would wife and children mediate between a sometimes cantankerous editor and his community when relations became strained. Nonetheless, the author's depiction of White's standing on both local and national levels is well done.

Griffith's second theme is the impact of industrialism on small-town newspapers. In chapter three, "The Practical Printer," she traces how innovations in printing technology enabled the *Gazette* to expand its circulation, and she explains how mass circulation and the growth of national advertising helped give editors like White an independence unknown to their counterparts a generation earlier. Expansion was profitable because manufacturers seeking nationwide product distribution were ready to invest in local newspaper advertising to reach potential customers. In earlier times, editors were beholden to local political cliques for their economic survival, but national advertisers cared very little what position the newspaper took as long as it sold copies.

While outside advertising income no doubt increased newspaper profits, Griffith may overestimate the degree to which outside advertising freed White from the need to maintain the good will of the local business elites. A comparison of local and "foreign" advertising inches in typical editions could have revealed how diverse his advertising base was. Nonetheless, Griffith points to a deeper way in which technology affected the small-town newspaper. Wire services, companies that supplied local papers with cardboard mats from which photo-

graphs were recast in lead and printed, and advertising companies that designed and mass-produced exciting ad copy improved the *Gazette's* visual appeal and coverage of national events. But, as Griffith argues, they also sent the subtle message that the national was more important than the local. Local events that were once the heart and soul of the small-town newspaper were downgraded in favor of more "newsworthy" features.

Griffith's third theme expands on the impact of technology to show how it brought about a new relationship between the community of Emporia (and by implication small towns all across the Midwest) and the larger world. Organizations of national scope, such as the YMCA, service clubs, and the Red Cross, took over the direction of some community activities. Merchants more and more became outlets for name-brand products. Motion pictures became an important factor in setting fashion and local standards. Increasingly, White felt the tensions of trying to mediate between the interests of the community and the growth of national forces.

Through these themes Griffith describes White's emergence as a leading Progressive of his day, a friend of muckrakers such as Ida Tarbell and even Theodore Roosevelt. She argues that what unified Progressives was more a rhetoric based on moral convictions than an agenda of specific reforms. At times, Griffith may be guilty of ascribing to White a more explicit consciousness of guiding principles than he had. In her view, for example, White "seized upon [World War I] as a powerful tool with which to forge a higher community" (202). At the time, however, while many saw the war as a righteous crusade, participants would have answered that winning the war was a goal in itself, not merely a means to a higher end.

These criticisms are minor, however. *Home Town News*, which won for Griffith the Allan Nevins Award, is an insightful exploration of the changing nature of small-town journalism and the small town itself. White's national stature made him atypical of most country editors. Most local editors did not lunch with Roosevelt or discuss house remodeling plans with Frank Lloyd Wright. Nonetheless, the changing environment in which the small town existed was common across the Midwest, and Griffith's study offers a creative and penetrating analysis of how decisive those changes were.

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