Everett Ray Call interviews

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Three interviews with former Emporia Gazette editor Everett Ray Call conducted by Emporia State University professor Loren E. Pennington. The first interview addresses Call's boyhood days in Sedan, Kansas, his early days as a newspaper photographer, and his commentary on William Allen White. The second interview continues Call's comments on William Allen White and follows with his commentary and analysis of the Emporia Gazette under William Lindsay White as editor and publisher. The third interview covers events of his own career with the Gazette, including famous murder cases, local, state, and national politics, and the newspaper's relations with Emporia State University and its presidents and with the Emporia Chamber of Commerce.

Creator: Call, Everett Ray, 1932 -

Date: 2007

Callnumber: Kansas Veterans of World War II Oral History Project, Emporia Flint Hills

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 220589

Item Identifier: 220589

www.kansasmemory.org/item/220589

RC: Oh, yes, he was still in charge of the *Gazette*. So they decided to take it to him. Well, they didn't come to the office. They made an appointment in the evening, and of course it was the custom at the W. L. White house to have cocktails in the evening and kick back, and I thought, well, that's the end of my university salary story because they'll get over there, and they'll have a few drinks, and it will be good old boys together, and that'll be the end of my story. But W. L. White backed us up, told us to go ahead. We published it on the following Monday, we sold—it wasn't our goal—but one effect of it was it sold a great number of newspapers. That wasn't our goal. We were trying to point out inequity at the university.

LP: Would you say this kind of fit William Lindsay White's philosophy?

RC: Yes.

LP: I mean, this is the type of thing that he would do, even though it wasn't in his best interest.

RC: A lot more than what I mentioned earlier about the Kent State and about the city dump and so on. This was more W. L. White's kind of stuff. And I'm proud of him for backing us up on it. But I think, and you would know better than I do, but I think within the next two or three years, there were some pretty good salary adjustments made up at the university.

LP: Well, of course eventually it came about that these salaries were public information.

RC: Well, yes.

LP: And that you could get them. And in fact, if you really want to force it, you still can, but it's a little—try going up and just getting the thing out cold, and you'll find it takes. . . .

RC: Well, you probably can get them online now, I don't know.

LP: Maybe. I don't know.

RC: But legally they were public information then.

LP: Public information.

RC: But that doesn't mean one can always just get them that easily. It's like when we tried to get Virgil Basgall's salary. We got the city budget and we found he was being paid from a dozen or so, or maybe twenty, different funds, and we never did figure it all out.

LP: Couldn't add them all up?

RC: No, and I've kidded Virgil about it, and all he said was, "Well, all you had to do was ask me."

LP: I must say right here, Ray Call, that I once asked Virgil Basgall who was the most influential person in Emporia, and he told me it was Ray Call.

RC: Oh, really?

LP: And I asked the same question of Ray Call, who told me it was Virgil Basgall. But anyway, that's an aside.

RC: Well, I'm trying to think of Hammer, the commissioners, Mrs. Hammer.

LP: Oh, Jane Hammer.

RC: Jane Hammer. Virgil once told me Jane Hammer gave him more trouble than anybody else in the county. But anyway, we digress. So where are we now?

LP: Well, we're talking about William Allen White and his use of advocacy journalism.

RC: Right.

LP: And this is something, I take it, you thought probably William Allen White would not have done.

RC: No, I think William Allen White would have done it.

LP: Certainly some of the things he was involved in, like the Ku Klux Klan, and some of the other things he was involved in, certainly were a type of investigative journalism.

RC: And the point is nobody objects to it on the editorial page. Or nobody should, because that's the page of opinion. The question is, when it got into the news columns, was it justified, and that's a subjective call. I have my opinion, and others have their opinions. I can say that I feel very strongly that we're moving into advocacy journalism, particularly on television, and to a certain extent in newspapers.

LP: And I take it, you do not approve of this?

RC: Oh, it isn't for me to approve or disapprove. It's not the thing we did. And what's best for humanity, I don't know. I always felt that a news story should be like a criminal trial. The prosecution presents its side, and the defense presents its side, and the jury, or the readers, make the judgment. But if somebody is arrested for child molestation, for example, did we go out and try to find out a defense for this person who was arrested? No, we didn't. So it's hard to know where to draw the line. But, that was our goal; you didn't say John Doe was arrested for speeding, you said John Doe was arrested and charged with speeding. Police said John Doe said this. We did work very hard at that.

LP: Let me back up to a couple of things which you suggested here. One of them you were suggesting [was] the hard-line Republicanism of William Lindsay White. But I am of the impression that that was not William Lindsay White's background from his days in New York.

RC: Oh, certainly not.

LP: And before, and in England during the war and this sort of thing.

RC: His *Report on the Russians*, which got him into trouble with Harrison Salisbury, the famous writer, *New York Times* writer. I was trying to think of his name earlier. W. L. told the story. By the way, don't let me end without telling about when W. L. got arrested. But anyway. . . .

LP: I had the impression, and you can stop me if I'm wrong about this, that William Allen White himself started out as a pretty conservative Republican and gradually under the influence of Theodore Roosevelt. . . .

RC: Exactly.

LP: Especially moved progressively toward the center of American politics.

RC: I agree with that.

LP And that William Lindsay White in his younger days consorted with radicals, had radical friends, this sort of thing, whereas his father had from right to left, he moved from left to right.

RC: That's the point I wanted to make, and that is exactly right.

LP: Well, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upstage you here.

RC: Now the Harrison Salisbury story.

LP: So you are talking of William Lindsay White in his latter days.

RC: Latter days. He was born in 1900. I came along in 1955, so he was 55 years of age when I first knew him. And we'll talk about his younger days. I want to tell about Harrison Salisbury. W. L. White wrote a book called *Report on the Russians*. And as a prelude to that, I will say W. L. White, Harrison Salisbury, and other journalists went into

Russia. Now bear in mind that Russia was an ally of the United States during World War II, but very soon after World War II, things began to change. And these reporters were over there, and W. L. White tells a story about Harrison Salisbury having an affair with a young Russian woman over there, and that his wife heard about it, and he was in trouble. And so he asked W. L. White to say he was at a certain event that W. L. White was writing about in this book so he would have an alibi with his wife. It wasn't true, but he asked W. L. to put it in his book so that he could prove to his wife that he wasn't having an affair with this woman on that occasion. And so the book came out, and it was a very strong criticism of Russia. And W. L. immediately became an enemy of his old friends who were leftists, as was he. And so when Harrison Salisbury criticized the book, he pointed out that it was full of errors because W. L. White claimed he [Salisbury] was at this event, and he really wasn't there at all. He had since divorced his wife.

LP: But he had put that in at Salisbury's request.

RC: At Salisbury's request.

LP: Now Salisbury says he told a lie.

RC: Yes, told a lie to criticize the book. W. L. White told me that. A couple of times I've heard him talk about it. So I think it's probably true. I haven't read *Report on the Russians*, so I may get it and look in the index. But anyway, he was, up until World War II, in with a kind of a leftist crowd, I think, in Washington D. C. His wife, of course, was a celebrated figure.

LP: You're speaking of Kathrine White?

RC: Kathrine White. She was a fact checker for *Life* magazine, worked for *Time* magazine, was at the home of Bernard Baruch at social occasions. John O'Hare once

wrote she was the most beautiful woman in New York, this kind of thing. So they were in a very sophisticated liberal crowd, the China Lobby sort of people. Is that a good example?

LP: Yes.

RC: I think so.

LP: Do we have anything more we want to say about this?

RC: No. Go ahead.

LP: Okay. One of the other things that you suggested here previously today is a sort of a ruckus over the tornado alerts [between the *Gazette* and] KVOE. What was the relationship under William Lindsay White of the *Gazette* to the radio station KVOE?

RC: Old Ed McKernan, I think he's Ed.

LP: Well, there's Ed McKernan, Jr., and Ed McKernan III. There are three of them.

RC: And Ed III is still with us.

LP: And the one that's Jr. is the one I always thought of as the old man.

RC: The old man. And I'm the same anyway. Ed Jr. and W. L. White hated each other.

LP: Ed McKernan, Jr.?

RC: Yes.

LP: Okay.

RC: And if the *Gazette* took one side, the radio station invariably took the other side. I remember one time I wrote an editorial about the misbehavior of C of E students at an R-rated movie, and the radio station immediately took the other side. I mean it was almost a knee-jerk reaction that we were going to fight over virtually every issue. Ed McKernan [and W.L. White]. . . .

LP: But they were both Republicans.

RC: I think Ed was.

LP: I mean William Lindsay White and Ed McKernan, Jr.

RC: Well, you had to be in Kansas.

LP: I certainly never thought of Ed McKernan, Jr. as a big liberal.

RC: No, Frank Lill, maybe, who ran the *Emporia Times*, he was our Democrat. I liked the McKernans, but we were battling over the issues. But W. L., he didn't handle that very well. He's kind of like Bob Dole. You're either with him or against him, and it became a personal thing.

LP: What do you mean like Robert Dole?

RC: Well, Bob Dole is like that, in my experience.

LP: Oh, okay, I thought you meant something with William Lindsay White.

RC: No, Bob Dole was that way. We supported Bob Dole from day one.

LP: You're talking about "we," the *Gazette*?

RC: That's right. When he first was a congressman, when he first decided to run for the Senate, W. L. White gave a big banquet in his honor at the old Broadview Hotel ballroom and invited all the political operatives from all over eastern Kansas, all the editors. And he had a lot of chits to call in. And we had a big banquet for him at the Broadview Hotel, and in my view, sort of launched him in this end of the state. He's from the Big First, out west. And we supported Bob Dole through the years. And up until the time of the Iran-Contra Affair, when he embraced Colonel—the one who's a commentator now.

LP: You're talking about the one who was the Marine colonel, whose name I can't recall.

RC: It'll come to me in a little bit. [The person is Oliver North—ed.] But we criticized Dole for supporting him, and he cut us off in an instant.

LP: This was after William Lindsay White?

RC: Yes. I wrote the piece, and from then on, he really wouldn't have anything to do with us.

LP: That's interesting. In other words, your editorial caused a rift between the *Gazette* and Robert Dole.

RC: And, you know, even when we would go back for conventions and see him, he was very cool. What were we talking about?

LP: We were talking about this the whole question of advocacy journalism.

RC: But, summing it up over all on that issue, that was a small part. If he [W.L. White] felt very strongly about some of these local issues, he would use them in his columns, I felt, to his advantage. But he was really pretty careful about having a balanced news report, he really was, except for a few times, I think.

LP: I had one experience with him personally which involved you, as a matter of fact. And that is when I was interviewing him at Newman Hospital.

RC: When he was dying?

LP: When he was dying. And the phone rang, and it was Ray Call. And you called to ask—and he was somewhat lethargic in the interview, and he was really laboring to talk to me. And you called him and said, "Well, we have a situation here where we have a news item that the family has asked us to withhold, and should we do it?" And I noticed that he immediately perked up and became his old self and told you in no uncertain terms that you would publish the story.

RC: Yes.

LP: That you would not withhold just because it was going to embarrass somebody.

RC: And it was probably one of his friends, I would imagine.

LP: Yes; that's why you had called him about it.

RC: He had a number of friends.

LP: I was surprised how quickly there was a whole change in his personality and attitude, that he was back running a newspaper at that moment.

RC: And that's more his role than the other examples I've given. They were exceptions. But that's more his role. He was a pretty straight editor. He really was.

I want to go back because I want to get on the record something about W. L.'s youth. He grew up the son of a famous and wealthy man. And as I understand it, he went away to college. There was a lot of drinking; he drank all of his life. And he became a little bit of a wild child, as I understand it. That is, I remember one story about him buying a raccoon coat, which was what they all wore in the Twenties. But before he could, he had to get permission from his father, and there was a family fight about that. But the point is, he was in the Roaring Twenties. He was caught up in all this. Tess DeLong has told me some stories. She was our former society editor. But the story I didn't know and was really shocked to find out about was told to me by Ted McDaniel, the managing editor. And he said, "You know, W. L. White almost went to jail one time." I said, "No, I hadn't heard about it, Ted." And he said, "Well, he was back home from college on vacation, and he had made a date with one of the sorority girls here." And they went out to a party and had a lot to drink and then went out in a car, and he became very, very aggressive, romantically aggressive, let's say. And the girl resisted

him, although I gather it took all of her strength, and finally he took her home. Whereupon she went to the house mother and told her what had happened, and she called the police. And so the police came out, and the police took him down to headquarters. They didn't arrest him. They took him down to headquarters. So here they have William Allen White's son in the Emporia police station accused [of] assault, I suppose, or attempted assault or whatever. And somebody called William Allen White, and they got the city attorney in. And by the time the smoke had cleared, a formal apology was written to the girl and to the sorority, and no charges were ever filed. And I asked Jay Jernigan, who wrote the very fine biography of William Lindsay White, if he had come across any of this in his research, and he said, "Yes, I did." But he didn't elaborate.

LP: And he didn't publish it?

RC: No it's not in the book.

LP: It's not in the book.

RC: It's not in his book, but he, you know, kind of hushed it. Of course, Barbara Walker, William Lindsay White's daughter, was involved in putting his book together, and I feel sure he didn't want to offend her by putting that in. But he says, "Yes, I did," saying it was true.

LP: Where do we go from here?

RC: Well, that's all I have.

LP: You have nothing further on William Lindsay White?

RC: No, I don't think so. I mean, I could talk.

LP: How was he as a person?

RC: Well, let me, yes, there were a couple of things. I'll talk, at the end, I'll talk about when he died. I will tell about his wonderful parties.

LP: I had the occasion to witness a couple of those at the Emporia Country Club. I was not at the party, but I was in the Country Club when the parties took place, and they were something to see.

RC: I will tell you about one party, because it was probably the most memorable, and it was at the Country Club. As we arrived, a storm arrived, first sleet and then snow and all of that, and freezing rain, all of this. But when we arrived, it was just starting. So as we came in the front door, and this was when the Country Club was arranged a little differently, and the bar was over there, and the first thing you were given was a glass of Imperial Peg. An Imperial Peg is a mixture of champagne and brandy, and it goes down like strawberry soda, I suppose. It's just the most wonderful drink you've ever had.

LP: Was this a William Lindsay White specialty?

RC: No, I don't think so.

LP: He always liked to bring up specialty things.

RC: Different things, for example, he once served me the fin of stingray in New York City. I might tell about that. But anyway, we started out with Imperial Peg, and then we went into dinner, and each department head was in charge of keeping the wine glasses filled. We had wine with every course. Of course, we had about an hour social hour where people were drinking these Imperial Pegs. And then we had wine. And the job of the department heads was to be sure no wine glass ever got low. We were to keep the wine glasses full. This particular Christmas party, we were served roast suckling pig. And you wonder where we got that. We got that from Gene Steffes down at the Olpe

Food Bank. And then the rest of the dinner was out of Charles Dickens. And the dessert was plum pudding with flaming brandy over it. And the department heads got lessons on how to heat brandy in a spoon so it would flame and then pour it over the plum pudding so that the plum pudding had this wonderful blue light.

LP: What do you mean they got lessons?

RC: Huh?

LP: You said they got lessons?

RC: Yes, he took us in to show us how to put. . . .

LP: Was this before the party?

RC: Yes, before the party, when the people were gathering. We were told to fill the wine glasses. And he says, "Now, here's how you do the plum pudding. You take a tablespoon. Put the brandy in there. You hold it over a candle until it's very warm, and then you move it down and the brandy will catch fire. And then you pour that over the plum pudding." And it made a beautiful blue light, you know, just covered that like a ball. And so after we'd had Imperial Peg and after we'd had wine, we had brandy over plum pudding. And for entertainment, we had Christmas carols by the College of Emporia Chorale. And then they introduced the retired people. And then we went into the bar, which was a large room, and the bar was open for anything anybody wanted. Well, our photographer passed out in the men's room. He went in there to throw up into the commode, and he couldn't get up and passed out in the men's room. So we just left him in the stall. Wanda Gibbs's husband, Dick Gibbs, when the party finally ended and people started to go, Dick started out the front door. And by that time we had a glaze all over everywhere. And he took about three steps and fell down. Took about three steps

and fell down again. And so he then crawled on his hands and knees to get out to his car. And this was typical of the state we were all in. And W. L. was just delighted with all this. So they loved to have a party.

This is tape 2 of the second Call interview, side [A].

LP: Ray, we were talking about, what shall I say, the fact that William Lindsay White was given to rather flamboyant entertainments, and this type of thing. You were describing a Christmas party. Any other incidents along that line that you care to describe?

RC: Well, I think, before World War II, they lived a very active life, social life in New York City. And I would like to credit him, actually both Whites, with giving me an education. And one part of that was to have me come back to New York City and stay in their house and go to a play or go to a museum, whatever.

LP: What was your position at the *Gazette* at this time?

RC: At this time, I had probably reached managing editor. I ended up as executive editor, and I think I had got to be managing editor at this point. And I didn't become executive editor until W. L. died.

LP: I see. You were kind of running the everyday operations of the paper?

RC: Right. Running the news department, not the advertising department, only the news department. So, anyway I think as part of my education, they had me back—I think the first time I went back, they had me as their guest at a meeting of the national convention of the American Civil Liberties Union. I'm pretty sure it was at the Waldorf. I'm certain that LBJ was the speaker, Lyndon Johnson.

LP: Now, was William Lindsay White a member of the ACLU?

RC: Yes.

LP: A big proponent of that?

RC: Yes, which is quite a contrast with his Republican ties.

LP: Yes. The ACLU is noted for its liberal tendencies.

RC: And this goes back to his liberal days. He was an early member. He may have been a charter [member], I don't know. But he was an early, active member in ACLU, and so he was invited.

LP: A little more background, if you feel comfortable with it. You say—do you think they brought you back with the purpose of educating you?

RC: I think so.

LP: In other words, what shall I say, as a Kansas boy who needs a little education in the world?

RC: Exactly right, needs to see the world. And what other reason would there be?

LP: Well, I don't know. I mean, it could be that it was just altruistic on their part. But you think they had more than just altruism in mind?

RC: Yes, I think they wanted their editor to have a broader view of the world, I really do. Now as a sideline of this ACLU dinner (they didn't like the word banquet), we heard LBJ speak. And at the end of the dinner, people were leaving, and the head table was up on the stage. And there was an elderly lady up there, and she seemed to be all by herself and sort of lost. And Kathrine White said to me, "Oh, Ray," she said, "Alice is having trouble. Go up there and help her, will you?" And I looked around and I didn't see any stairs, so I just bolted up on the stage, being a country boy, and helped this little old lady

get down off the stage and on her way. And it was Alice Longworth Roosevelt. I had no clue that that's who it was.

LP: Is that the daughter of Theodore Roosevelt?

RC: Of Teddy Roosevelt, the rascally daughter of Teddy Roosevelt. The one who said, "If you can't say anything nice about anybody, sit by me," if you remember. But I didn't know it at the time. And then when we went home, she told me who it was. And since, I have read a great deal about her family in Teddy Roosevelt books. So anyway, that was the main event. But they also put me up at their house. Now it was a brownstone at 160 E. 66th Street. It was just a block away from the Russian embassy. It was in a very nice upper-class neighborhood.

LP: They owned this place?

RC: They owned this place. They bought it for a song before the war, and then when their health failed, they sold it for quite a nice profit. I don't know how much. But when they became sick in later years, they sold it. But they bought it for a song before the war. You entered from the street into a little hallway, and dead ahead was a formal dining room. To the left as you went in was the kitchen, to the right was a place for coats and galoshes and such. Then out the back of the dining room was a garden, and it was a common garden for all the houses on the block. And one of the neighbors was the cartoonist Bill Mauldin, for example. It was a nice neighborhood. They had a butler named Clarence. I can't think of his last name. And after you. . . .

LP: You mean the Whites had a butler?

RC: Yes, not Bill Mauldin. The common garden served all the houses in the block. Okay; after you entered, you went up a staircase on the right into a very large living room

with windows all across the back that opened out onto the garden. Then on the front of the house was an office, Mrs. White's office, mainly. It was I think five stories, with bedrooms on the next two, and W. L. White had his own study upstairs. And Clarence [the butler] lived in the little penthouse on top. So it was a pretty large, nice. They had separate bedrooms with walk-in closets between them. They put me up in Barbara's old room. And they had yet another spare bedroom across from mine, up on the, let's see, third floor. As I say, W. L. had an office up there where he did his writing. So it was quite a nice place. And after we settled in, I remember one of the first things we did, W. L. had gone upstairs, and Mrs. White said, "Ray, would you mix the martinis?" And I said, "Mrs. White, I have never mixed a martini in my life." She said, "I'll tell you how." She said, "Go over to the cabinet and get out the bottle of gin." And I did that. And she said, "Now pour the bottle of gin into the pitcher." And I did.

LP: Was this the whole bottle?

RC: Yes. It probably wasn't full. It was probably half a bottle of gin or so. And I poured it in. She said, "Now, there are ice cubes there. Put about five or six ice cubes into that." And I did. And she said, "Now, stir that." And I stirred it. And she said, "Now, pour it into the glasses." That was the way they made martinis.

LP: Their martini was truly a hooker of gin.

RC: Yes. There was no vermouth even in the proximity that I could see. And as an aside, at the Emporia Country Club, they had their own martini pitcher with a Harvard crest on it because he was very proud of being from Harvard.

LP: I have seen that.

RC: But anyway, then they sent me to my first New York play, which was *Half a Sixpence* with Tommy Tune, as I recall. They asked me where I wanted to go. Of course, I wanted to go the Metropolitan Museum. I didn't go to the Empire State Building. I think I wanted to see the Museum of Modern Art. And then we went home. There was a party after the ACLU meeting, now that I think of it. We walked over there from the Waldorf. And these were old sophisticated, very sophisticated friends of the Whites. And I remember one of the young women looked at me and said, "Oh, you look just like an owl," she said of my appearance. And they all thought that was very funny. "You have a very owlish appearance," she said. Anyway, at this nice home we went to for a party afterward, which was mainly a cocktail party, I began to look around the walls. And I saw Picasso and Dufy, however you pronounce Dufy the artist, and you know, a number of very fine . . . Matisse, you know. They had a marvelous collection of art. So I was in the home of some very wealthy person. I have no idea who it was. But he [the owner] took me around and showed me the paintings and pointed them out to me and was very gracious. And their next door neighbor, I remember Mrs. White, maybe at a later visit, but I remember a next door neighbor, she said, "I want you to see a painting that my neighbor bought." And I believe the artist's name was Botero. Are you familiar? He draws very fat people, very fat figures. We could look it up. But they lived in pretty nice digs up there in a pretty nice neighborhood.

LP: It wasn't Emporia.

RC: No. You know, I just reviewed this story about Belle Livingston coming to Emporia, and Jay Jernigan said in [his book] that Mrs. White just hated to come to

Emporia because, first of all, they couldn't have a bar in the William Allen White house. And they were so provincial back here that she just was never comfortable.

LP: Now this is Kathrine?

RC: Kathrine White. Mrs. Kathrine White. And, you know it's true, she just withered people here in Emporia with sarcasm.

LP: However, I must say I always got along very well with her.

RC: Well, what does this tell us, Loren?

LP: I don't know what it tells us, Ray.

RC: It tells us that you're pretty sophisticated, well-educated.

LP: No, I hardly think so.

RC: A very worldly fellow compared with the rest of us Emporians. Let's put it that way, if you want to be so modest. But she was a snob. Mrs. White was a snob. But as I say, she had lived an exciting—I keep using the word sophisticated, but it fits—life in New York. While he was a war correspondent, she was a, she had a, almost a salon. Is that the term I want to use?

LP: That's the term.

RC: At the William Allen White, or William Lindsay White house there. She would entertain people who were coming to New York City. Whitley Austin, who later became the editor out in Salina, stayed with them. He was a young reporter who also was the one who wrote the story, one of the stories, about Belle Livingston. And I could tell an off-color story, but I think probably we'd better not, about Whitley.

LP: Well, it's your interview.

RC: Oh, I'll put it in and spice it up a little. Mrs. White tells, I swear, told me this story, that Whitley Austen, the young reporter from Emporia was back visiting. They had taken him back there.

LP: He was from Emporia?

RC: Yes. Yes. He has a story all of his own. His family, do you remember Col. Whitley, who had a mistress?

LP: Oh, the Whitley Opera House and all of that?

RC: And had a mistress, and he is from that union. And that's why his name is Whitley. But he was an excellent editor. Anyway, he was back there visiting, and Mrs. White tells of the story of him, them going down one of the major streets in New York City and him reaching, sitting beside her and wrapping his arm around her and putting his hand down the front of her dress. And I thought that was a really brazen thing to do with W. L. driving the car. But this is the kind of patter that Mrs. White would rattle off. I remember one time I was leaving the house, and she said something to me, and I didn't get it. I don't know if I should be telling this. So I went back two or three steps and I said, "Sorry, I didn't hear you." So she repeated it, and I still didn't hear it, so I went up to the steps. And she says, "I said, I was looking at you, and I said, 'What a nice behind'" [laughter]. I mean, I'm not implying any sexual aggressiveness. What's the term? She would say, you know, anything outrageous. She was very sophisticated.

LP: She was referring to your behind?

RC: Yes.

LP: I see.

RC: But she wasn't making a pass at me. She was just saying something outrageous. She did that. And of course, in the Twenties, in New York City, from what I've read, whether it be. . . .

LP: She was a part of the Flapper Age.

RC: *The Great Gatsby* or whatever; this was considered very chic to do things like this. And she continued to do that all of her life. To hell with what the people of Emporia thought. But I'm trying to think of anything else in New York City. As I said, she held a salon in the house while he was over in Europe covering World War II. She also edited his stories in his books, and that has all been told before. But they lived, to sum it up, a very different life before World War II in New York City than they came back to when they came to Emporia. And Mrs. White didn't like it.

LP: That's a very good point you make. In my own interviews with William Lindsay White, for instance, I got the same impression; how he goes over to Europe as a young boy with William Allen White, and to show the kind of a circle the Whites circulated in internationally, they go down to the MacMillan's estate. . . .

RC: Yes; the book [publisher].

LP: And he [W.L. White] plays with this young boy down there who is Harold MacMillan, who is the later prime minister of England. But when he comes back to Emporia, it's a different life. It really contrasts this.

RC: Yes, and the people here, the people in Emporia have no notion of his broad background. They knew he wrote some books, but they had no notion of his stature, his international stature. His books have been made into movies, for God sakes. His books have been best sellers, but they saw the provincial view, I think.

LP: I am now connected with the World War II Roundtable, and for this fall we wanted to get a World War II movie, and we were talking about the Pacific theater. And we finally thought this was an appropriate time to run *They Were Expendable*, which is from [W.L.'s] book.

RC: Right. And when I was a boy, this was one of the great movies I saw because it was an action movie. It had, as I recall, John Wayne and two or three top-notch actors.

LP: In *They Were Expendable*?

RC: Yes.

LP: I don't remember John Wayne.

RC: I'm pretty sure.

LP: You may be right, Ray.

RC: We'll double check before we finish this, but I'm virtually certain, John Wayne, and there were two or three top actors in that film. I'm pretty sure. I'll double check, but I'm pretty sure. [Wayne did star in the film—ed.]

LP: Also, it's a very long film.

RC: Oh, is it? I didn't realize.

LP: It's over two hours.

RC: Is it really? For back then, that was a pretty long film. When W. L. went away to war, he started as a print correspondent, but became involved in radio. And he worked with—for example, when Eric Severeid's child was born in Europe, in England, Severeid had to take off to be with his wife, and they got W. L. to take Severeid's broadcasts. And he also did several broadcasts that won the National, International Foreign

Correspondents' Award for the, I think it was "The Last Christmas Tree" broadcast from Norway. He did a marvelous broadcast about the Blitz in London and so on.

LP: Was "The Last Christmas Tree" from Finland?

RC: Yes.

LP: You said Norway.

RC: From what?

LP: You said from Norway.

RC: Oh, okay. Yes. I'm sorry.

LP: Was it Finland?

RC: I don't know. We'll have to check. I don't know. Scandinavia, let's say.

LP: Well, of course, he was in Finland with the Finnish army during the Russo-Finnish War.

RC: Yes, right. And that's where it was. And anyway, he was successful in this and considered going into radio and television after the war, according to Kathrine White. And Kathrine White said that William Allen White called friends in high places, and this is hard to accept, but she told me this. She said she feels he called friends and pulled strings and prevented William L. White from going into broadcasting after the war. Hard to believe, but that's what she said.

LP: Because he wanted him to be in the press business, newspaper business?

RC: Well, William Allen White really had no respect for radio journalism. And of course, television didn't come along for a while. But he didn't want his son to get involved with broadcast journalism, which would have led to television, because it was considered cheap journalism, he thought, according to Mrs. White. This is, again,

hearsay, but she did tell me that. And also I'm sure he put pressure on W. L. "You don't want to get into that. You want to stay in. . . ."

LP: He wanted to bring him back to Emporia?

RC: I suppose. [W.L.] didn't want to come because he had worked with the *Herald-Tribune*, and he worked for some larger newspapers. And the *Reader's Digest*; he was a roving editor for *Reader's Digest* for a long time and wrote for *Reader's Digest*. So he did have a choice of careers, and he liked radio, but the influence of his father, perhaps a personal influence and maybe among the good old boys—I don't know.

LP: Did that have anything to do with his attempt to bring cable television to Emporia, do you think? I know that's another subject.

RC: You know, it could be.

LP: Catfish.

RC: We might just go there. What they said was, they wanted to leave something to Emporia. They didn't want to leave a park. They didn't want to leave a statue. They wanted to leave something that Emporians could have after they were gone.

LP: You're talking about William Lindsay and Kathrine White?

RC: That's right. And so at that point, cable television was fairly new. They were pretty early into it in Kansas. And so they got the franchise, and I might mention something here that tells us a lot about W. L. White. When they were putting in the system, they had a choice of poles they could use; Southwestern Bell Telephone Company poles, or they could put in their own individual poles. And of course it would be cheaper to use Southwestern Bell poles. And that was the way they were going to go, but W. L. then learned that if they went with Southwestern Bell, Southwestern Bell had control of the

content that went over it, along its poles. And he wouldn't have that. And so they went all over Emporia and drilled holes and put in, I don't know how many thousands of dollars worth of poles, and put in their own separate system. But I was told that their original goal was to leave something to Emporia. And this is kind of their monument, to have a cable television system.

LP: It wasn't just to bring in—as I recall, you also had a locally originated program.

RC: Terrible as it was, that's true.

LP: And you were in it.

RC: Yes, and I almost got fired over it because we jumped the gun. Once they had the poles up and they had a camera here, we decided, and the Whites were back in New York, and the manager and I decided it would be great fun to put the city election returns on cable. They had reserved a channel. And so we were out in a little building at the foot of the tower out here in northeast Emporia. There's just a little building for their equipment. And we went in there and put a floodlight up. And I read the returns, and he ran the camera, and we sent it out over the cable. Well, it was just absolutely terrible, and several of Mrs. White's friends called her and told her how terrible it was. And they [the Whites] called me, I think it was the next day because that's when they got the calls, and kept me on the phone for over an hour literally blistering me. And I thought at the end of this, they're going to say, "You're fired." But they didn't. I think they'd probably had a drink or two, but she, she had a little quip when she was running the *Gazette* for a brief time; if somebody made a mistake, she liked to say, "Rub their nose in it." She liked to say that. And I think that's what they were doing to me. They were rubbing my nose in this rather than firing me. But yes, and then. . . .

LP: But did they themselves have any idea of running a local television operation?

RC: Yes, in fact, after it was all finished, then they equipped a room in the *Gazette* with a television studio, with a little television control room. We had a daily newscast. We had kids come in on Halloween in their costumes. W. L. interviewed candidates for the city commission. And one time, when the famous author John dos Pasos, what did he write, *America*?

LP: Yes.

RC: He's an old friend of W. L. White, and when he was in town.

LP: An old left-wing friend?

RC: Yes, an old left-wing friend.

LP: And then a shifter to the right.

RC: Exactly. So when he was here, they set up and announced in the newspaper there would be an interview that evening. The problem was, they had a cocktail hour before they got down here. And by the time they were there, they were pretty frivolous, and it didn't really amount to very much. But it was fun.

LP: I wondered when you said they wanted to leave something. Is this what they wanted to leave, local origination? Was that part of their plan?

RC: Yes, it was. This is what they envisioned. And when they sold, this operation was intact. And it continued for a while. I don't know what the status of it is now. But I want to make another point. They were having a lot of fun with this cable operation, and I think would have gone on with it and really made something of it, but they had a charter with the city. Enter [City Manager] Virgil Basgall. And we were involved with a bitter political fight with the city commission. I think it was probably urban renewal, or it may

have been—no, I bet it was industrial revenue bonds. The city wanted to issue industrial revenue bonds to attract industry, and W. L. was absolutely opposed to them because of the tax break. And at one point, Virgil Basgall and the city attorney, George Allred, appeared at the Catfish office, which was adjacent to the *Gazette* and said, "We're here to audit your books." And they [the Whites] hadn't realized that the contract that they signed with the city gave the city the right to look and be sure they were getting their franchise fee, so many dollars per customer. And so they came in and W. L. White realized or assumed that they were there in a political vendetta in order to control him. And he would have nothing to do with it, and he sold the Cablevision, Catfish immediately. That's the reason they sold it.

LP: Sold it to what, Warner? It eventually became connected with Time-Warner.

RC: Yes; I cannot remember.

LP: Went through various sales.

RC: I've got a book here, we can look it up. But that is the reason he sold it. That's the only reason. He wanted to be independent. He wanted to be able, again, he wanted to be a watchdog. And he thought he was in watching against, watching out for the perils of industrial revenue bonds, or the perils of urban renewal. And so this was a threat to that watchdog role, and that's why he sold Cablevision. Catfish, we called it.

LP: What else can we talk about?

RC: Well, why don't we stop for a while? Does anything else come to your mind?

LP: There is one other thing I would like to bring up. Of course, William Lindsay White dies when? 1973.

RC: 1973.

LP: And who then becomes, in effect, what shall I call it, the boss?

RC: Yes. All right, let's talk about when he died because both of us remember when he had cancer and was at the hospital. Early on, he was diagnosed back in New York City. Of course they went to the very best clinics and surgeons back there and finally admitted that he had terminal cancer. And so he decided to come back to Emporia. And I remember he called me and Kenneth Williams, who was then the business manager, into his office.

This is tape 2 of the second Call interview, side B.

LP: And Ray, we were talking about 1973 and William Lindsay White's diagnosis with cancer.

RC: Yes, he came back to Emporia then and called me and Kenneth Williams.

LP: Had he been gone for a considerable period?

RC: Yes, but this was not unusual. I mean, he was gone.

LP: He came back. He operated back and forth.

RC: We might talk about his going to the Far East. You never knew where he was going to go. But anyway, he'd been back in New York, and he came back and called us in and said, "Boys." I think he used the term "boys." "I have terminal cancer." Then he sort of broke down and wept for a little bit; then he composed himself. And that was the only time I ever saw him show any emotion. And he underwent some unusual treatments. He was involved with some New York and other out-of-town doctors, and they tried various chemotherapy drugs on him. And as we both know, they weakened him a great deal, and he struggled with them. He was very strong. And I think the only thing that sustained him was that the hospital allowed him to keep gin and bourbon over in his little chest in

his hospital room, so that if I went up there after work, we would have drinks and talk about what had happened during the day.

LP: Did he continue to take a pretty active role in the *Gazette* even while he was in the hospital?

RC: Yes, he did indeed. I mean, not day-to-day things.

LP: Policy matters?

RC: Yes, or a political issue, a state political issue or a local political issue. And by the way, Dr. Garcia, Gould Garcia, was his doctor and was aware of all this that was going on and enjoyed it immensely, I think—that is having cocktails and so on. But when he died, Barbara and David, his daughter, Barbara, and her husband were back east with their children.

LP: Did he die rather unexpectedly?

RC: No, he was wasting away.

LP: Yes, I knew that. But you said they were not there when he died.

RC: I think they sent her home, because they usually do. They'll send the family home when someone's actually going through the throes of dying. And then they called her [Barbara] and called me, Gould did. And Helen and I went over to the hospital. And she [Kathrine] assigned us the job of taking care of the funeral to the point of even picking. . . .

LP: You and Helen?

RC: Helen and I.

LP: Your wife.

RC: Yes. And even to the point of picking out a casket. And her instructions to us were, "I want a plain pine box. Go down and get a plain pine box." Roberts-Blue-Barnett, I can't remember who, Turnbull might have been there by then.

LP: Mike Turnbull.

RC: Mike Turnbull, I think, might have been there by then. Well, they didn't have a plain pine box, nor could they get one. And so we reported that back to Mrs. White, and she wanted a simple wooden coffin. What we finally got was a nice mahogany coffin. And another sort of amusing sidelight, if a death can be amusing, is that Mrs. White absolutely hated flower arrangements from florists. She just hated them. I think it was Dick Gibbs who told me that one time—no it wasn't Dick Gibbs, it was the fellow at 12th and West Street, the florist there, Eubank. Otto Eubank told of taking flowers out to her house on another occasion, and she had told him that she didn't want flowers delivered to the house. And they had the order so they took it out there, and she literally chased the deliveryman out the front door and threw the flowers at him on the front sidewalk. That's how strongly she felt about this. So at the funeral then, or before the funeral, flowers began to arrive at the house. So she allowed them in the house, but she asked my wife Helen to rearrange every one of the flower arrangements that came in and put them into a more casual, natural arrangement. Every floral piece that came in had to be rearranged. I thought that was an interesting sidelight.

And I think it was, as I remember, it was at his funeral where she wanted all the people at the funeral to be able to throw down a handful of dirt as they do, did in the olden days. And of course, the problem was that they now have to have vaults, and so you couldn't. So we were all out there, gathered around the site of the White family

graves. They're all out there together. And we had to wait until a front-loader, a tractor, came out and lifted the lid off of the vault, put the casket in, and then we threw in our handfuls of dirt, clods. And then they put the lid back on and buried him. For a tombstone, Mrs. White had them take a printer's stone out of the *Gazette*. A printer's stone is a [tabletop-size piece] of granite or sandstone. It's about three inches [thick] and about four by six feet, I suppose. And she had them put the date of birth and date of death and epitaph on the printer's stone and then put that down there beside William Allen White's grave, flat down on the ground, which I thought was unusual, too.

LP: And appropriate.

RC: Yes, very appropriate. And at that time, we were getting rid of the stones because we were shifting to a new style of printing, from hot type to offset printing. So we had the stones, and that's what she used as a marker. And it's still out there.

LP: Now, of course, then we can say Kathrine herself was the boss?

RC: Yes, she was very much the boss.

LP: And she went on until when?

RC: When W. L. became, really was deadly sick, he knew it was terminal, he talked David and Barbara [Walker] into coming back to run the *Gazette*. And he started David down in the press room. He worked in the press room and so on. And David was to become publisher, and did.

LP: David's background was in what?

RC: David's background is. . . .

LP: I think he was a college administrator?

RC: Yes, but let me just say he had a bachelor's from Stanford, he had a master's from