

**A Walking Tour
From
RED ROCKS through the STRINGTOWN of WAW and WLW**

as told in

BLACK EMPORIA
*The African-American Experience Through the Lives
of Emporians*

“Well this editor was born (at RED ROCKS) in Stringtown, has lived there all his life, and intends to go on living there if not until he dies at least until he is bulldozed out and so holds himself not to be just kind of honorary colored but the genuine article ... He went to Century school Of course, he now tries to be tolerant in the spirit of our times and says some of his best friends are white people, which is partly true His real friends are in fact over here in Stringtown among his own people.”

William Lindsay White, 1981
Black Emporia (p. 48)

In his autobiography William Allen White tells that the “colored people who live not far off” feared the house might be haunted. “But Sallie and I admired it with wonder and awe. Here the children were born. Here we have seen the major pageant of our lives pass. Here we have lived, indeed, happily ever after.”

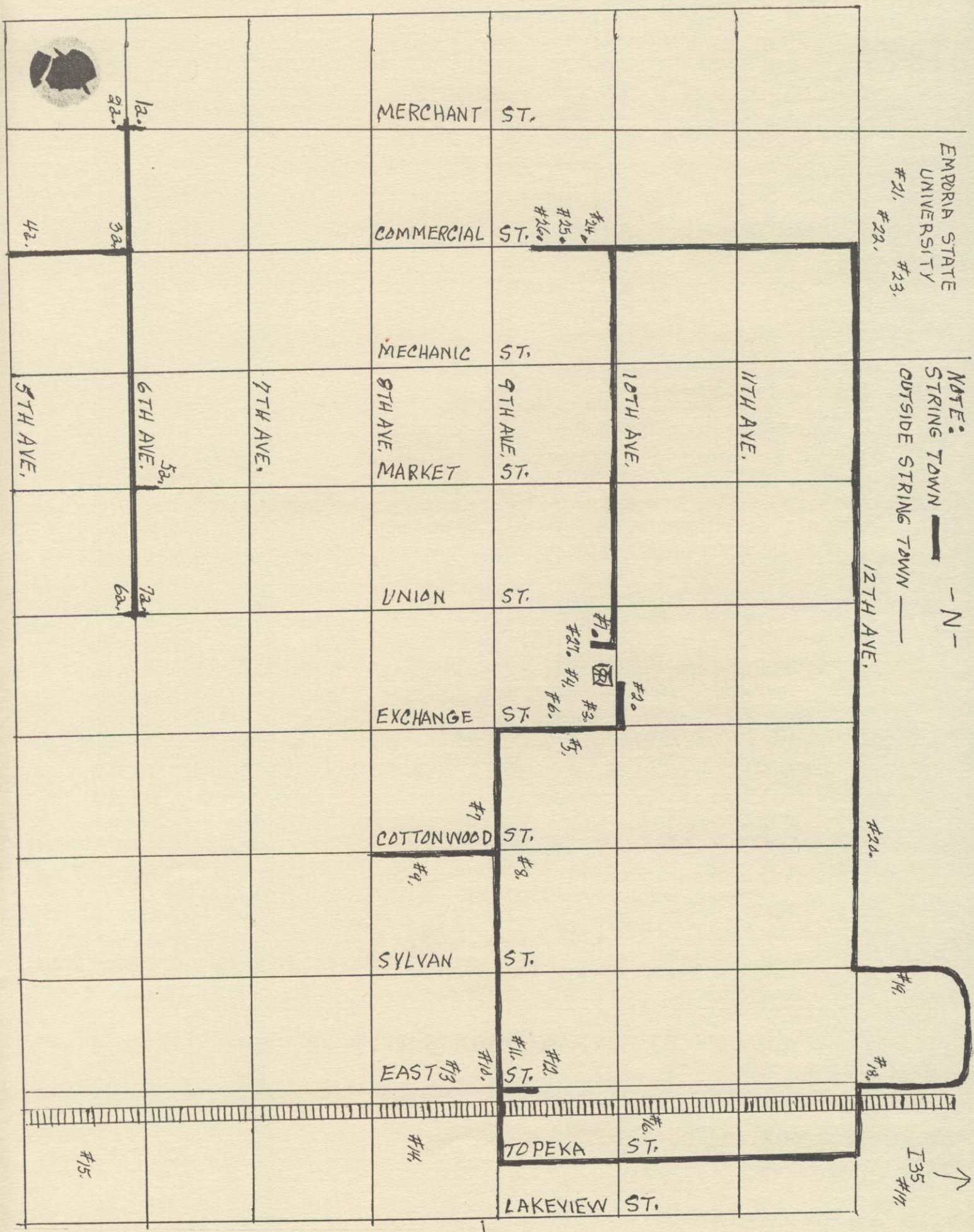
William Allen White, 1946
The Autobiography of William Allen White

Writing Contributors: Nellie Essex
Elizabeth Williams

Consulting Editor: Carol F. Marshall, Ed.D.

Emporia, Kansas
2003

W-



EMORIA STATE
UNIVERSITY
#21, #22, #23.

NOTE:
STRING TOWN ——— -N-
OUTSIDE STRING TOWN ———

12TH AVE.

#20.

#19.

#18.

I35
#17

MERCHANT ST.

COMMERCIAL ST.

MECHANIC ST.

8TH AVE. MARKET

UNION ST.

EXCHANGE ST.

COTTONWOOD ST.

SYLVAN ST.

EAST ST.

TOPEKA ST.

LAKEVIEW ST.

11TH AVE.

10TH AVE.

9TH AVE. ST.

7TH AVE.

6TH AVE.

5TH AVE.

12.

32.

72.

62.

92.

42.

52.

#24
#25
#26

#20
#21
#22
#23
#24
#25
#26

#7

#9.

#10.

#14.

#15.

E-

Throughout the tour descriptions the parentheses refer to pages in the book **BLACK EMPORIA**.

The *Black Emporia* Stringtown tour begins

Red Rocks
(1) William Allen White's home is a National Landmark located at 927 Exchange Street in Emporia, Kansas. Named Red Rocks for the Colorado limestone used by a wealthy attorney and cattleman who built it in 1885, it was purchased by White in 1901. It is said that six presidents stayed here. Today Red Rocks commemorates the *Emporia Gazette* editors and their families who for four generations lived there. Today's editor of the *Gazette*, continuing in the family ownership, actively participates in its preservation.

The guide cover quotes W. L. White's comments in the May 26, 1981 *Emporia Gazette* article entitled "Stringtown." Josephine Dell asked the *Emporia Gazette* to reprint it during a discussion of controversy over the status of decline in Eastside Emporia (p. 48). As she (Nellie Essex) sat in the Red Rocks home on a living room chair, on a dining room chair, and in a chair by the stairwell architect Frank Lloyd Wright designed she said, "I never thought I'd be here. I can now say I sat here. It is really something to look out of these windows. Now I know why he (WLW) wrote that this is Stringtown. I can see down the streets here on Tenth Avenue and look east to Cottonwood and Sylvan and East Streets." Today in her 80s she is sitting in all of these chairs in a home that is no more than two blocks from where she has been living as an adult and no more than seven to eight blocks from where she grew up as a little girl and where she went to school. (p. 23) She is the retired director of Emporia's Head Start programs.

Lindsay Home
(2) A *Gazette Forty Years Ago* column tells that a "Dogs Christmas Party" was held at 1003 Exchange by Sandy White, an eleven month-old Scottish Terrier belonging to W. L. White. A small tree was decorated with bologna tied to its branches. At 11:45 refreshments were served. They were completely eaten in 27 seconds. Invited guests were Snowball and Chigger Lindsay, WuWu Thudim, Pal Triplett, Tex Dando, Jack Williams, Pepper Just, Bingo Hirschler, Mack Hughes, Mick Swap, Snappy Lowther, Ricky Lambert, and Gerald Newman Sprague. Jack Williams, whose master was Rex Williams, was the best decorated dog there. He had a wide pink ribbon tied around his stomach with a bow knotted over his back. This was Christmas time, 1933. Rex Aaron Williams was fifteen years old. (p. 44)

Elizabeth and Rex Williams
(3) In 1949 Elizabeth Holt married Rex Williams. Elizabeth recalls that she and Rex and their children maintained the *Gazette* office building and catered parties throughout Emporia. Providing the dining and chauffeuring services for W.L. White's wedding of his daughter Barbara to David Walker (documented by *Life* magazine) was a special time. (p. 35) The Walkers preceded their son Christopher, current *Gazette* editor/publisher, as editor and publisher of the *Gazette* after the deaths of editors WLW and his wife Katherine.

Ku Klux Klan
(4) The Ku Klux Klan in Emporia is another dog story. When Mary White (daughter of WAW) heard the Klan was coming to Emporia to parade on downtown's Commercial Street, she went to the home of one of the local Klan leaders and released his pet dog. During the parade, the little dog ran to the feet of his owner, identifying the hooded gentleman for all to see. (p. 44)

WAW School
(5) At 902 Exchange is the William Allen White Elementary School built in 1950 to replace Union School. It has remained more than 50 percent black/minority in its enrollment. Today enrollees are accepted from any families wishing to expose their children to diversity. The lobby contains photo tributes to the WAW family and includes the editorial written by WAW ("Mary White") that has immortalized his daughter Mary throughout the world. It was written following her accidental death while riding her horse one afternoon after coming home from school. Mary described herself as "I want to change things and fix things. I want people to know I have been here during my life." Mary met Jane Addams when Jane came as a guest to Red Rocks, and again in Estes Park at a tea party hosted by the Whites. No wonder she was a hero to Mary. Jane's Hull House in Chicago's inner city was a refuge to immigrants arriving from many countries. Jane Addams was also the co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) along with W.E.B. DuBois, a Black writer who revolutionized perceptions of the African American experience as early as 1901. (p. 45)

Mother's Home
(6) Across the street to the west is the house that later became the home of the mother of William Allen White, thus enclosing the gardens and the Visitors Center with Red Rocks. Arriving at 9th Street, turn left to Cottonwood, one block east.

Paul Terry
(7) The corner of 9th and Cottonwood locates the homes of Paul Terry (southwest) and Nellie Essex (northeast). Paul played basketball for Dean Smith's father who was coaching Emporia High School. ". . . I got along well with the players but back in those days the 'N' word was quite common. Of course they didn't use it around me unless they slipped." Smith notes that his father was told by some schools to leave the Negro at home or do not come. The coach had no intention of doing that but sometimes did leave Paul in the car with a sandwich while the others ate at a restaurant. Smith's (famously known coach of North Carolina) book *A Coach's Life* says Paul singlehandedly integrated high school sports in Kansas. (pp. 7, 8) Paul's father Charles wrote numerous letters to the *Gazette* denouncing segregation in Emporia. One of many responses to Charles Terry was from William Allen White marked June 17, 1929, from the Hotel de la Gere in France. It compliments Charles for his observations. (pp. 11, 12)

Rex and Elizabeth Williams' former home was south of the Terry home. Another frequent correspondent with the *Gazette* editors, Elizabeth's comments have been about timely issues in the town for many years. (pp. 35-42)

- Mark and Nellie Essex** (8) Nellie's husband Mark Essex was born in 1919. Some of his upbringing occurred in Dunlap, Kansas, ten miles northwest of Emporia. Dunlap was one of two Black settlements founded in Kansas by 20,000 Blacks at the closing of the Civil War. Mark's family came from Kentucky to Dunlap and later to Emporia. London Harness, Dunlap's last Black resident, was a frequent visitor at the Essex home, enjoying sitting on the porch that is still a summer gathering place. (pp. 25, 27)
- Mary McClain** (9) South of the Essex home is where Mary McClain, a social worker, resides. Her grandfather worked as a porter for the Santa Fe Railroad and her father was a "check clerk" at the Santa Fe Freight House. Her father saw there was a need for a Black Boy Scout Troop in Emporia as Black boys could not join the white troop. He also found funds to buy uniforms so the boys could be proud of the way they looked as well as proud of the skills they learned. (p. 61) Continue east on 9th Street.
- Velma Hutcherson** (10) This is the corner of 9th and East Street. Sharon and her husband live on the southwest side. She is the daughter of Velma Hutcherson. Velma tells that both of her father's parents were slaves in Mississippi. Her grandma had been a cook for her master. Eventually grandma had twelve children, one being Velma's dad. Velma's grandfather was appointed a slavebeater while he was a slave. (p. 33)
- Catherine Carter** (11) On the northwest corner stands the home of Catherine Williams Carter. Catherine and her two brothers, Elijah and Clayton, came by themselves from Burlingame to go to school in Emporia in 1919. Mary White, the daughter of William Allen White, would take Elijah to school in her car. Elijah would tell Catherine that it was okay because Mary's dad thought it was, and he was the editor of the *Emporia Gazette*. (p. 3) Clayton became interested in raising greyhound dogs for racing tracks. He had pens for the dogs behind this house. (p. 4) Today Catherine is 103.
- Tulsa Race Riot, 1921** (12) Catherine's uncle, Seymour Williams, a teacher in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was hailed as a leader during the June 1921 Tulsa Race Riot that destroyed Greenwood, an African-American enclave so prosperous it was known as "Black Wall Street." Authors of *Black Emporia* accidentally uncovered the story in Mrs. Carter's piano bench while doing oral interviews in 1999. The Tulsa site was later visited by Marshall and subsequently documented. (pp. 4, 5, 87)
- Bud Brooks** (13) The Bud Brooks family property is on parts of each side of East Street south from 9th to 8th. An annual Eastside Community Memorial Day BBQ is held there and is attended by hundreds. It has become Emporia's Juneteenth celebration (p. 27), one that observes the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Music, dancing, and games accompany the meal and a memorial service is held during the evening. Bud's grandfather, a former teacher in Africa, was forced into slavery. Bud was born in Durant, Mississippi. He was in the cement construction business for 35 years. He and his wife Dorothy had thirteen children, all of whom attended William Allen White school. At a family reunion in 1986 at Durant, Mississippi,

the Brooks in attendance mirrored the migratory patterns of Blacks as reflected in a February 2001 television special entitled "Goin' to Chicago." The migration after the Civil War gravitated to this northern city. (pp. 29, 30, 31, 32)

**Remembering
the Katy
Railroad
(14)**

From the Carter house Nellie Essex would call her Daddy when she was a little girl. He would light his lantern east on 9th and Watson where they lived and Nellie would run down and up the hill. On her way she crossed the Katy railroad track that went to Dunlap and Council Grove and all points west. The end of the line can now be seen servicing the grain elevators three blocks south. It was here that the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus put up their tent shows. Josephine Dell tells "Grandma Mack would always take us to visit Uncle Perry when the Ringling Circus was in town ... he would always leave us passes." Perry Lowery taught himself to play the cornet at age five. "He was the greatest cornet player of his day ... but he never played under the Big Top. The manager of Ringling Brothers decided the crowd would never accept a Black man. So his playing was in the side shows." (p. 47) In the meantime an eleven-year-old Louis Armstrong was emerging on the jazz scene in New Orleans.

**Josephine and
Morris Dell
(15)**

**Emporia's
East Lake
(16)**

From 9th go north on Topeka Street past the East Lake of Emporia. (p. 24) In the 1920s this was a largely rural part of town. The lake was a gathering place for a diverse number of Emporia visitors including hobos from the Katy trains, Native-American Indians who were watering horses and camping, and traveling gypsy families with wagons painted in bright colors. The company could be both fascinating and awesome to young children passing by. (p. 24)

**Interstate 35
(17)**

At 12th between East and Sylvan Streets the grandparents of Elizabeth Williams had a home on north 18th. This horseshoe circle, formerly encompassed by the Katy, contained a barn and a pasture and a place for raising pigs and chickens. "When I was 10 years old my grandfather told me the state wanted to buy the property for a highway. That highway is there today - I-35." (pp. 6, 38) On the west side of the loop was the city incinerator, very scary as remembered by the children of Stringtown.

**Neal and
Lillian
Morrow
(18)**

The location of a house at East and 14th was a local gathering place for young Blacks where there were dances and cake sales. Neal Morrow, a former WW II veteran and member of the 5th and 6th armies following Patton into Belgium, met his wife Lillian here. She came from Texas where as a young child she picked cotton. "When you're a baby they put you on the sack they are pulling on their back, with cotton in it, and you're born into it." She was a long-time teacher at Emporia Community Day Care Center.

**Burt Rich
(19)**

At the corner of 12th and Sylvan, Burt Rich had a home. Born in Kentucky in 1878 he arrived in Emporia with a mule team and wagon. The 1976 bicentennial publication of Emporia said he was the biggest colored contractor west of the Mississippi with more than 100 men on his payroll. "I tried to show with my life that a Black man could do more than field work." (p. 71) His constructions include Emporia State University's entrance fountain.

- Camp Alexander** (20) Driving west on 12th Avenue was a common practice for Mr. E.J. Alexander, a Black man who came from North Carolina and bought land five miles east of Emporia to raise vegetables and fruits to make his living. He would sing about his wares as he came into town, always giving the children an apple or a pear or whatever he had available. Upon his death he willed his property to the children of Emporia for a camp and park. The Camp Alexander year-round recreation programs are important to the Emporia community. It sits on a hillside overlooking the east entrance to the city as I-35 crosses over the Neosho River. (p. 71)
- Emporia State University** (21) **Tom and Mary Bonner** (22) Moving further west to 12th Street is the main street of Emporia running north and south, Commercial Street. The entrance to Emporia State University is on the north end. Many Black families have left a legacy at the university. Thomas and Mary Bonner, both professors who joined the faculty in the late 1960s, are celebrated annually by the Bonner/Bonner lecture series. Their guest in 2003 was Julian Bond, executive officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. (p. 57)
- Louise Flowers** (23) There were times in the 30's when the university, known for its preparation of future teachers, did not provide Black students equal opportunities for student teaching. They were simply observers in the campus laboratory school or taught in that setting from plans prepared by their supervisors. (p. 8) But in 1957 Mary Louise Flowers was hired to direct the school lunch program at Butcher Children's School, the campus elementary laboratory. The government gave the program orange juice as a surplus commodity – lots of juice was served. So Louise told the children they were going to have liquid sunshine for a daily snack. A kindergartner reported, "Mama, today Mrs. Flowers served us liquid moonshine." (p. 54)
- 1916 Redwork Quilt of 4 Emporia Black Churches** (24) Turning south and going down Commercial, the tour passes Black establishments located on the west side of the street starting at 10th, the first location for St. James Baptist Church. The church was one of four black churches that made a redwork quilt top in 1916. It has been celebrated in national quilt shows from New York to California. It contains several hundred names. The quilt, and pictures of some of the persons it identifies, are on display at the Lyon County Historical Archives at 225 East 6th. (pp. 97-103)
- Norma Hotel** (25) **Dr. Pepper Plant** (26) Next to the church was a barber shop, the Norma Hotel, and a restaurant. "There were 8 to 10 rooms upstairs. Downstairs was the family restaurant and pool room. We served barbeque and chicken and hamburgers. Sometimes I would need to take orders upstairs" (Velma Hutcherson, p. 34) A Dr. Pepper business stood beside the hotel.
- Visitor's Center** (27) Across the street at 10th was Century school. W.L. White attended as did his sister, Mary, and the Black children in Stringtown. (p. 48) The tour turns east on 10th Street and returns to Red Rocks and the William Allen White Visitors Center located in the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired gardens. *Black Emporia* is available at printer's cost in the Center.

Tour of Points of Interest Outside STRINGTOWN

- 1a Broadview Hotel – workplace of Black bell boys, elevator operators, and beauty salon assistants (p.35)
- 2a *Emporia Gazette* offices and presses (pp. 35, 48)
- 3a Citizen's National Bank – workplace of Black elevator operators and custodians (p. 35)
- 4a Newman's Department Store and Tearoom (p. 3)
- 5a Lyon County Historical Museum – 1916 names quilt top (pp. 97-105)
- 6a Lyon County Historical Archives – 1916 names quilt top photos and collage of photos from names on the quilt (pp. 97-105)
- 7a Preston Plumb House – city founder, Kansas Senator – sewing classes for Black girls were held in the 1930s and 1940s at this house (v., 37)