

Optima dies... prima fugit

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Contributing Critic

Whenever people start reminiscing about times past and lost youth my mind turns to Dylan Thomas. He seems to have forever captured, and fixed at some still point of the turning world, the aura of childhoods long ago. In prose he caught the wide-eyed wonder of the childhood world in *Memories of Christmas* and a poem like *Fern Hill* perfectly distills the ache and nostalgia for the child seen through the telescope of time.

*Now as I was young and easy under
the apple boughs,*

*About the liltng house and happy
as the grass was green...*

And it was of the green and carefree days of youth that Mary Frances White spoke during her talk, *Growing up in Manhattan*. The talk was given as part of the lecture series *Riley County: Looking Backward Toward the Future* sponsored by the Kansas Committee for the Humanities and the Riley County Historical Society.

The large audience in the Historical Museum on Thursday night heard Dr. White talk of the three great influences on her life while growing up in Manhattan: the university, church and family.

Her parents came to Manhattan from Indiana in 1909 in order that her father, Alfred E. White, could take up his position in the math department at KSC at a salary of \$1,000 per nine month academic year. Her father came home to lunch every single day, no noon time classes or faculty meetings, and at that time Prof. Price, head of the history department, taught classes to high school students.

*All the sun long it was running, it
was lovely,*

the hay fields high as the house...

And Dr. White told of living in the Congregational parsonage, of white fruit cake for Christmas, of the Park View Hospital on the corner of Juliette and Laramie, of the house her father built on the corner of Fairchild and Denison when there was only farm land all around, of fetching milk in a pail, of having ice and coal delivered and of the first family car.

That car was bought by her father in 1918, and one week after he had

bought it he obviously felt that he knew everything that there was to know about driving and packed his family into it and set off for a vacation to Indiana, 715 miles in four and a half days over unmade roads. Dirt, gravel and camping by the roadside. Yes, there was a time before even motels.

She read part of an accounts list, kept by her father, for the year 1913. Amongst the meat that the family eat that year were:

Oysters, which cost 30 cents.

Ham, 15 cents.

Porkchops, 20 cents.

Pot roast 25 cents, chicken 75 cents, liver, brains...never mind the prices, when did you last see that kind of selection in your local supermarket?

And there way worse to come, where price inflation is concerned. The phone bill was \$1.75, rent was \$25 and the water bill was \$1.50 a quarter.

In the sun that is young once only,

Time let me play and be

Golden in the mercy of his means.

There were tales of hot fudge in winter, of hikes on the prairie, of swooshing down Leavenworth hill on a bobsled, and of hot chocolate and cookies afterwards.

Dr. White, who taught in the English department at KSU for 30 years, started out her talk by saying, "I'm not going to tell you anything very exciting, because my life was not very exciting." But in a talk that was interesting, amusing and ultimately moving, she told of that precious, eternal excitement of childhood and youth as she brought back that hour of splendour in the grass and of the glory in the flower.

It was a happier arrangement to use the exhibit space for the talk, even though I missed the model airplanes swaying from the ceiling. However the situation did call attention to the fact that if the society is to continue to sponsor events of this kind, and clearly there is an interest in these talks, then a permanent facility is needed. It was good news to hear the announcement prior to the talk that the Society had received a donation of \$100,000 towards expansion of the museum. A matching donation is now being sought and it can only be hoped that the search for matching funds will be successful.