

AMELIA ELIZABETH WHITE BIOGRPHY

Amelia Elizabeth White was born (1878) into a world of culture and privilege on the upper east side of Manhattan. Her father – Horace White – had covered the Lincoln-Douglas Debates and eventually became the editor-in-chief and owner of *The Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Evening Post* as well as being instrumental in the founding of *The Nation*. Over his lifetime, Horace White amassed a fortune through investments in railroads and other business.

Amelia – who was barely five feet tall - was described by a friend as “...a tiny little thing. She weighed perhaps not quite 90 pounds, but she had a brain on her like steel wool.”

In August 1913, after graduating from Bryn Mawr College in 1901, Elizabeth traveled to New Mexico for the first time to visit a former classmate living on a ranch near Wagon Mound. There she encountered archeologists and visited many geological and anthropological sites. After visiting Santa Fe for the first time to celebrate her 35th birthday, Amelia declared New Mexico to be “Heavenly country”.

In June 1916, Amelia went to St. Valery, France for a two-year stint as a Red Cross Volunteer in French and Belgian hospitals as World War I raged. Her sister Martha joined her in 1917 and the two of them served at La Panne until 1918. Amelia was decorated by the Queen of Belgium for her service and continued to volunteer in a Paris hospital until the end of 1918.

During this time, Amelia’s father passed away (September 1916) and upon her return to America, Amelia and Martha each received about \$55,000 in yearly income from their father’s estate that allowed them to set up their independent lifestyle and be financially secure for life.

In 1923, though Amelia and Martha planned to live in New York City, the sisters took a car journey – in a Lincoln Touring car – that would change their lives. En route to California to view a solar eclipse at Mount Palomar, they stopped in Santa Fe to, of all things, get their hair done and ended up buying land... Or so the story goes.

Santa Fe had so captivated the White sisters; they decide to reside here full time.

Amelia and Martha found their new home in Santa Fe along a dusty, dirt track, frequented by sheep and goat herds, on the southeastern edge of town, on Garcia Street.

Over the next few years, the sisters transformed their property into an elaborate, Santa Fe-style compound complete with guest houses, dog kennels (for their beloved Irish Wolfhounds), stables, along with a swimming pool and tennis court – the first of their kind in Santa Fe.

They called their compound *El Delirio* – The Madness – after a bar in Seville, Spain near the hotel where the often sisters stayed.

This delightfully eclectic estate would serve as a gathering place for artists, writers, musicians, intellectuals, anthropologists, and archeologists during the 1920s and 1930s. Amelia would reside at *El Delirio* until her death in 1972.

Amelia soon became one of the most influential women (sadly unrecognized and underappreciated) in the state of New Mexico as Santa Fe developed from a sleepy trading post into the center of art and culture it is today.

Land and its development were a major focus of Amelia's life's work.

In 1924, owning nearly 250 acres on Santa Fe's eastside, she formed the Da Vargas Development Corporation for the purpose of acquiring and developing land "That would capture the character and flavor of the best of Santa Fe".

Amelia and Martha became instrumental in the evolution of a "Santa Fe style" of architecture - based on the principle that new housing and development could be built using traditional methods, materials and design and still serve the modern citizen.

Endorsing the Spanish-Pueblo style of architecture, the De Vargas Development Corporation attached covenants to sale of their properties restricting building style and future conveyances.

"No building, except a private dwelling, shall be erected, and said dwelling house and necessary outbuildings shall be in the Old Sant Fe or Pueblo-Spanish style of architecture."

The White sisters were also founding members of the Old Santa Fe Association and became members of the city's first formally chartered planning commission.

Amelia soon became a community activist in Santa Fe concerned with Native American arts, preserving Native lands and culture and Native American health.

It was her desire to demonstrate the contribution of the First Americans to our culture. She worked to promote a broader acceptance of Native American art as "Indian art as art, not ethnography", believing that "Indian art had a vitality not found in European art."

Amelia fought passionately on behalf of Native American peoples to resist official US government policies of forced assimilation. And, as a proponent of Native American health care sponsored many surveys of the health and welfare of the Pueblos.

Amelia's legacy did not stop there.

She was the regional director of Dogs for Defense during World War II. This being a direct result of she and Martha breeding their beloved Irish Wolfhounds at *El Delirio*.

Amelia was instrumental in founding the Laboratory of Anthropology, the Old Santa Fe Association, the Santa Fe Animal Shelter (in loving memory of her sister Martha who died of cancer in 1937), the Santa Fe Indian Market and Garcia Street Club (founded in 1945 as a community center for Santa Fe's children and still exists today).

Upon her death, Amelia willed her lands and holdings to SAR as a legacy gift, which included Sena Plaza. She also donated land for the construction of the Laboratory of Anthropology, the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, the Folk Art Museum, and the Santa Fe Botanical Garden.

This formidable woman left a legacy that is still felt to this day. Her name does not grace any buildings and there are no plaques giving her credit for her altruistic, public-minded works. A single public park is the only location that bears her name and was also her gift to the city for the enjoyment of all people.

AMELIA WHITE PARK HISTORY

Located along the historic Old Santa Fe Trail, this small park is just under three acres and features native trees, grasses, and wildflowers.

No one seems certain about when the area became a park but drawings from 1954 by the Meem, Zehner, Holien & Associates architectural firm show the central rose garden laid out much as it exists today.

Sisters Amelia Elizabeth and Martha Root White deeded the property to the Santa Fe Women's Club and Library Association in May 1959. The gift from the sisters was to be the site of the future Woman's Club clubhouse.

The association deeded it back to Amelia White in 1961. Five years later, on June 16, 1966, Amelia deeded the park to the city of Santa Fe. The city council was informed on June 29, 1966 "title to the Korean Conflict Memorial Park on Old Pecos Road had been received..."

The deed that transferred the park to the city included the "express condition" that it be used "only for the purpose of a public park ... and that flowers and vegetation will be cultivated and irrigated."

The Korean Conflict Memorial is a tall, pale column at the east end of the park. At one time, a plaque on the base declared the park was a memorial to participants in the Korean Conflict. In keeping with the European design of the park, a fountain at the west end balances the memorial. Lore has it that the fountain was only turned on a few times because wind gusts blew the water away from the fountain.

The National Park Service granted Santa Fe National Historic Trail certification status to three Santa Fe sites, the Plaza, Fort Marcy (Prince Park) and Amelia White Park, in April 1995. In the certification agreement, the city of Santa Fe "committed to the sensitive management of them for public use and enjoyment."

AMELIA WHITE PARK SFGC & FLO 200 INITIATIVE

The Santa Fe Garden Club (SFGC) was founded in 1939. Forty-four years later, the club became a member of the Garden Club of America (GCA), a national organization with 200 member clubs. In keeping with the GCA goals the SFGC, from its beginning has been involved with numerous community projects.

The Garden Club of America tasked all their member clubs with creating a project in honor of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederick Law Olmstead, considered the first great American Landscape Architect. This program is known as the FLO200 Initiative.

The SFGC approved the renovation of the central courtyard of Amelia White Park, on Old Santa Fe Trail, as the site for their FLO200 project.

Over the past 50 years, the SFGC has funded several landscape projects at Amelia White Park – including care and maintenance of the former rose garden in the central courtyard. SFGC officially adopted the park in 2023. Given today’s climate challenges, it’s time for a new approach that reflects new priorities – water conservation, beneficial plants, and wildlife habitat.

The park has a gentle slope with a paved, central courtyard accessed by 360 linear feet of covered pergola. The courtyard is surrounded by a border planter and 8 raised interior planters.

The central courtyard also houses a memorial that honors Santa Fe veterans who served in the Korean War.

The planters have been redesigned to include xeric, pollinator friendly plants. The border planters have been replanted to include low water, bird habitat planting.

The garden will be used as a resource for the citizens of Santa Fe to teach young and old about best practices for water use and garden design using native and bee friendly plants.

The SFGC, in partnership with the Santa Fe Department of Parks and Open Spaces, seeks to make Amelia White Park a place where citizens can learn best practices with the help of other local non-profit organizations like the Santa Fe Master Gardeners, the Xerces Society and the Audubon Society, through meaningful civic partnerships echoing Olmstead’s commitment to public spaces in America.

THE AMELIA WHITE PARK **CONTINUING RESTORATION**

PHASE 1 (COMPLETED)

In 2022, The Garden Club of America (GCA) created the FLO200 Initiative in honor of the 200th anniversary of Frederick Law Olmsted's birth, the father of Landscape Architecture. All member GCA clubs were tasked with identifying a project to commemorate this landmark occasion.

The Santa Fe Garden Club (SFGC), not having any parks or areas designed or developed by Frederick Law Olmsted near-by, sought a public space that could be addressed in the manner of Olmsted.

Through an extensive search of the parks in Santa Fe, the SFGC landed upon the Amelia White Park, a jewel of a park located on Old Santa Fe Trail, to focus its efforts.

Working with the Parks and Open Spaces Division, and many other like-minded community partners, the SFGC undertook a complete transformation and restoration of the Central Courtyard. The Amelia White Park was rededicated by Mayor Alan Webber during a celebration of the park's renewal on June 16, 2023.

Subsequently, the Amelia White Park's application to the Archive of American Gardens at the Smithsonian Institution was successfully completed and accepted on September 16, 2024.

PHASE 2 (CURRENT)

In late 2024, members of the SFGC made an official statement to the Santa Fe City Council concerning the continued need for collaboration with the City to further improve the Amelia White Park. Subsequently, following a presentation to Mayor Webber, \$25,000 in capital outlay funding from the City of Santa Fe was granted to the Amelia White Park for continuing improvements. This money, combined with SFGC's Amelia White Park designated funds raised during Phase 1, will allow Phase 2 to commence in early March 2025.

Phase 2 will see the refurbishment, repair and painting of the main structure of the Pergola, that runs 360 linear feet bisecting the park east to west; the removal of the severely deteriorated, damaged and dangerous *latillas*; and the installation of a new superstructure made of a composite, recycled material that will hold up to the elements of heat, cold and wind in Santa Fe for years to come.

PHASE 3 (FUTURE)

Phase 3, which is wholly dependent on the completion of Phase 2, will see the further enhancement of the park with the installation of a solar panel on top of the west end of new *latilla* structure.

This solar panel will provide power (there is none in the park currently) to one of John Gaw Meem's original design features – the Fountain which cannot currently function as it was intended. The Fountain will be cleaned up, repaired, be surrounded by new plantings, and once again become a flowing water feature, providing much needed water for wildlife and even a canine companion or two out for a stroll in the park.

AMELIA WHITE PARK COMMUNITY PARTNERS

All of the SFGC's community partners contribute in one way or another to introducing to the general public a world of history and nature, helping them to better appreciate their role and responsibility within it.

CITY OF SANTA FE PARKS AND OPEN SPACE DIVISION - Santa Fe has 100 parks and open spaces containing more than 2,500 acres and offers more than 70 scenic parks, from neighborhood rose parks to historical and athletic parks. This allows the division to offer a wide range of experiential opportunities for adults and children alike by providing innovative and sustainable services at all city parks, trails, and open spaces.

SANTA FE EXTENSION MASTER GARDENERS - *a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to learning, teaching and promoting locally sustainable gardening through practical, research-based knowledge and programs.*

RANDELL DAVEY AUDUBON CENTER & SANCTUARY – a 135-acre nature sanctuary that serves as the state office and educational center for the National Audubon Society, which offers education programs and free natural history and birding walks throughout the year.

THE SANTA FE BOTANICAL GARDEN - In partnership with nature, the Garden demonstrates its commitment through education, science, conservation, community service, presentation of the arts, and the sustainable management of our public garden. Its mission is to celebrate, cultivate and conserve the rich botanical heritage and biodiversity of our region.

THE XERCES SOCIETY FOR INVERTEBRATE CONSERVATION - is a non-profit environmental organization that focuses on the conservation of invertebrates considered to be essential to biological diversity and ecosystem health. The Society collaborates with federal and state agencies including the US Department of Agriculture, as well as scientists, land managers, educators, and citizens to promote invertebrate conservation, applied research, advocacy, public outreach and education.

THE INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS – its mission is “to empower creativity and leadership in Indigenous arts and cultures through higher education, lifelong learning, and community engagement.” This is the driving force behind all that IAIA does and the guiding principle for their dedicated faculty and staff.

THE SCHOOL FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH (SAR) - Established in 1907, SAR advances creative thought and innovative work in the social sciences, humanities, and Native American arts. SAR is home to the Indian Arts Research Center, a leader in community-advised and collaborative Indigenous arts engagement and collections management. It is also home to the Amelia White Archives.

THE NEW MEXICO HISTORY MUSEUM - a statewide educational resource, local landmark, and destination for anyone who wants to understand the diverse experiences of the people of New Mexico, the dynamics that have shaped the state, and the relationships that connect this region with the rest of the world.

THE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (DAR) – founded in 1890, DAR is a lineage-based membership service organization for women who are directly descended from a patriot of the American Revolutionary War. King Charles III of Spain, through its alliance

with France and as part of its on-going conflict with Britain, declared war on Britian in 1776 and ordered Spanish troops from what is now parts of the American West, including New Mexico, to be dispatched to the battlefields of the colonies. Female descendants of the soldiers are eligible for membership in the DAR.