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The Frye-White Collection

William David Barry
Maine Historical Society

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FROM THE COLLECTIONS
THE FRYE-WHITE COLLECTION

In the *Portland Sunday Telegram* of January 3, 1943, the celebrated journalist Elizabeth May Craig (1888-1975) reported from Washington D.C.:

If it weren't for [wartime] priorities, Senator Wallace H. White, Jr., of Maine, ought to get himself a steel safe to hide away the old Atlas he found in his Grandfather Frye's law office in Lewiston last October. Otherwise the respectable Maine Historical Society, or some enterprising autograph collector, or even the Library of Congress, may be climbing in the back window of his house here and snitching the Atlas.

Craig went on to note that Senator White (1877-1952), grandson of Senator William Pierce Frye (1831-1911), had come across a copy of *A New and Elegant General Atlas* (Boston, 1805), while cleaning out his law office in Lewiston's Coe Block. The atlas had seen better days, but upon opening it, Senator White knew he had a treasure. The volume, turned into a scrapbook, opened with the autographs of twenty-two members of the Cumberland County Bar and sixteen from the Kennebec County Bar in 1820 – the year Maine became a state.

From there things got even better, with signatures of Samuel Adams, William H. Crawford, Daniel Webster, William H. Seward, and other state and national figures. Most significant were two letters from James Monroe and one from Thomas Jefferson. One Monroe letter concerned the appointment of a judge for Maine and the other, dated 1818, introduced Gen. William King to Governor Hugh Mercer of Virginia. King was then leading the separation movement from Massachusetts and spearheading the Democratic-Republican party down east. These political reforms were brought out forcefully in a short note written from Monticello on November 19, 1819:

TH: JEFFERSON returns thanks to General King for his kind communication of the constitution of Maine,

which he finds marked with wisdom in every point, except that of representation. Equal representation is so fundamental a principle in a true republic that no prejudices can justify its violation, because the prejudices themselves cannot be justified. The claims of the corporate towns in this case, like those of the barons in England, have forced the body of the nation to accept a government by capitulation, where the equal rights of the people at large are forced to yield to the privileges of a few. However, you will amend it by & by: in the meantime I welcome the new state into our Union & salute General King with the most friendly recollections and associations of esteem and respect.

Monticello, November 19, 1819.

A similar, although not exact copy of this note can be found in the Library of Congress (Jefferson Mss no. 181), and, according to the *Portland Press Herald* (April 10, 1943), another draft is at the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

Accompanying the newspaper coverage of Senator White's find is his own twelve-page account of the atlas-scrapbook: Clearly he recognized it as an item "which may have a public interest." However, the treasure did not go to a collecting institution; rather, it remained in the family.

John W. White of Minot, nephew of Senator White, inherited the atlas, and came to view it with much the same sensitivity and appreciation as Senator White. He was keenly aware of what the holding meant to the people of the state and that the Maine Historical Society was actively interested in adding it to its extensive manuscript collection. Thus, in 1992 he presented the atlas, Senator White's typed account, and other documents from Theodore Roosevelt and Harry Truman, as the Frye-White Collection (Coll. S-5531).

The Frye-White Collection, with its unique documents relating to statehood, joins numerous related documents at the MHS, including the William King Papers. Its inclusion is perhaps made even more appropriate when one considers that

THE FRYE-WHITE COLLECTION

the Society itself was founded in 1822, by leading citizens like King and a number of the attorneys whose autographs fill the atlas.

William David Barry

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Monticello Nov. 17. 179.



Wallace H. White served in the U.S. Senate from 1930 to 1949. *Photo gift of John W. White.*