

Anna Austin Ingleman
A Convergence of Passion and Career: Dramatics in
Independence, Kansas
(1900s-1930s)

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Figure 1. Photograph of Anna A. Ingleman about 34 years old in the 1913 Montgomery County High School yearbook

SOURCE: *Orange & Black* Montgomery County High School 1913 yearbook

This study involves the impact by teacher Anna Ingleman in Independence, Kansas during the early 20th century on the dramatics and theatre of the school, town, and the legacy they inspired. This study includes yearbook photographs and articles, dissertations, and newspaper articles from various Kansas papers.

“Miss Anna A. Ingleman is one of the best friends that the school and students have,” remarked Earl Hussong, a student of Anna’s in 1923. Anna was an English teacher at Montgomery County High School in Independence, Kansas from 1908-1946 and stayed with the school when it became Independence High School in 1921. Anna was a pivotal figure in the history of the school because she founded the school’s dramatic club in 1913. Throughout her years in the Independence school district, Anna taught at both the secondary and collegiate level, teaching a variety of courses ranging from English and Elocution to History.¹ She directed plays through the High School dramatics club (eventually called the Dee-Dee Club), Independence Junior College, and was instrumental in the founding of the Independence Community Theatre.²

In the 1920s, Independence was out of the ordinary in comparison to other towns in Kansas at the time. Located in southwestern Kansas, Independence was home to about 15,000 people. Due to its status as an “oil boom town” thanks to its success in the oil business under people such as Harry Ford Sinclair, Independence at one time boasted of being the wealthiest town in the nation. Due to its location between cities like Tulsa, Oklahoma and Kansas City, Missouri, Independence saw a lot of cultural activity. Lecture tours, tent shows, and performers often pit stopped there. The wealth from the oil accommodated and perhaps even encouraged this wide variety of cultural interests. This “elegant place suddenly made rich” continued in this lavish lifestyle up until the Great Depression. Playwright William Inge said of his childhood home, “Big people come out of small towns”. Perhaps the biggest person ever come from the town of Independence, was none other than Miss Anna Ingleman.³

¹ Rachel S. Torbett, “Anna Ingleman: Speech Teacher” (PhD diss., Kansas State College of Pittsburg, 1968), 1; Torbett, “Speech Teacher”, 3; Torbett, “Speech Teacher”, 25.

² “Community Theatre Organization Here,” *Independence Daily Reporter*, December 4, 1922, 1.

³ Jane W. Courant, “The Drama of William Inge” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 1990), 56, 62.



Figure 2. Postcard of Independence High School circa 1918.
SOURCE: Kansas Historical Society



Figure 3. Photograph of downtown Independence, Kansas in 1913.
SOURCE: Kansas Historical Society

Anna's Dee-Dee club was one of the liveliest organizations on campus, and had a threefold purpose to promote the arts of public speaking, public reading, and dramatics.⁴ Anna's legacy can be seen through the history of Independence by looking at how her life inspired the drama department. However, it is most tangibly seen in the impact her dedication had on those she taught. The history of Independence would not be what it is today had Anna not been a consistent encourager in the lives of a few of her students who eventually went on to work in professional theatre. One Anna's former students, Suzanne Wilbur, spoke to the dedication possessed by her teacher, "When she got too old to teach in the high school, she moved over to the junior college. And when they retired her, she headed the community theatre. She just kept going and going."⁵

Miss Anna A. Ingleman had a passion for teaching. From the 1922 yearbook from Independence High, "we learn upon excellent authority that Miss Ingleman has deliberately cast aside some fine propositions in order to remain in the teaching professions."⁶ Her dedication to sharing her love of the dramatics with her students and peers, inspired generations. Anna exemplified the ideal high-school relationship by being a teacher holding control but simultaneously allowing her pupils to work alongside her to be "fellow adventurers in each new field."⁷ Her dedication to students in their pursuit of dramatics is tangibly seen through the work of some of her former students, Vivian (Jones) Vance and William Inge, both big names in their perspective drama-related fields. Without a teacher like Anna Ingleman encouraging the exploration of expression in her Midwest Independence High School, how vastly different would theatre be perceived there today?

⁴ *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1924), 90.

⁵ James Suber, "Salinan Knew Playwright's Family," *Salina Journal*, June 22, 1973, 14.

⁶ *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1947), 14-15.

⁷ Matthew Page Gaffney, "High-School Dramatics," *Junior-Senior High Clearing House* 4, no. 6 (Feb. 1930): 371.

Anna Austin Ingleman was born on September 1, 1879 to a German immigrant father and Pennsylvanian mother. Her family home was located on a farm in Coffey County, Kansas. Anna attended a rural school near her home, and even became a teacher there at the age of sixteen. She went on to receive a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Kansas, a Masters in English from the University of Colorado-Boulder, and then returned to the University of Kansas to study Dramatics and Speech therapy. In addition, she attended the Kansas Teachers' College in Emporia.⁸ Her love for words and oration was clear by her choice of studies, her participation in readings and recitations, and in the fact that during her time at the University of Kansas she was the Vice President of their reading club. In 1903, she even won the Hood prize, a statewide essay and declamation prize.⁹ It was said of her that "it is a matter of considerable satisfaction to the friends of Miss Anna to know that she has acquitted herself so creditably and successfully. She is a lady of far more than ordinary talent in rhetoric, and in this contest came in competition with some of the best young talent in the state."¹⁰ In 1908 Anna began teaching at the then called Montgomery County High School in Independence, Kansas.¹¹ She was there until her retirement in 1946.¹² She instructed English courses from 1908 until 1920 when she began to teach speech and dramatics as well.¹³ In her classroom, Anna incorporated dramatic interpretation and drama components into her teaching. Such aspects as elocution, memorization, movement, and action are vital components to successfully putting on a play, and Anna was exposing her students to

⁸ Torbett, "Speech Teacher," 2.

⁹ "Recital of Elocution Students of the University of Kansas", Lawrence Daily Journal, May 14, 1904, 4; "University Notes," Lawrence Daily World, February 6, 1905, 1; "Concert at Baptist Church," Lawrence Daily World, January 14, 1904, 1; "A Splendid Program," The Daily Gazette, February 22, 1904, 1; "Local Exchanges," Burlington Republican, June 18, 1903, 3; "Hood Prize Contest in Essay and Declamation," The Emporia Weekly Gazette, June 12, 1902, 7.

¹⁰ "Local Exchanges," 3.

¹¹ "The Alumni," The Graduate Magazine of the University of Kansas 7 (1908): 78; Torbett, "Speech Teacher," 5.

¹² Orange and Black (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1946), 81; Torbett, "Speech Teacher," 8.

¹³ "New H.S. Faculty," Independence Daily Reporter, July 2, 1921, 5.

these factors even before the dramatics club was founded.¹⁴ She was working towards a dramatic shift from the focus on voice and elocution work previously taught in schools, to more hands-on and physical dramatics.

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, drama education in America was largely ignored and often criticized. This opposition stemmed from ideas conflicting with dramatic representation presented by Plato in his Republic. The focus was instead on elocution. However, when the Progressive Education movement began to take off, “education as an experience” was often favored as opposed to strict book learning.¹⁵ Elocution becomes expression, but slowly. The interest in dramatics was included in the Progressive Movement because it engaged students as active participants in their own education.¹⁶ In Independence, Anna was far ahead of her time when it came to incorporating individual artistic expression and dramatics into education. At the time, when people spoke of “art instruction” in public schools, it was commonly in reference to painting and the study of drawing, not dramatics and literature. However, an 1899 *Journal of Education* article stated that, “There are at least three different lines of art education possible today in all good public schools. These are: drawing, music, and literature.” It also said that “another false conception of art education now prevalent in public schools is that the main object is to have children produce something beautiful. This is important, but it is immensely more important that children be trained to appreciate what is beautiful in art.”¹⁷ But by the mid-1920s, and even into the 1930s, art and drama education was still extremely scarce in secondary schools in the United States. In the 1920s, “in the average school, the money earned by the

¹⁴ Torbett, “Speech Teacher,” 6.

¹⁵ Liora Bresler, *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (Springer Science and Business Media, 2007): 47.

¹⁶ “Our History,” Progressive Education Network, Accessed April 27, 2017, <https://progressiveeducationnetwork.org/history/>.

¹⁷ Thomas M. Balliet, “The Art Idea in Education,” *The Journal of Education* 49, no. 1 (Jan. 5, 1899): 5.

dramatics class [was] requisitioned to pay the athletic team's debt, or to provide a new drinking fountain for the lower hall." Dramatics was severely overlooked and under favored by schools, and still yet by the 1930s it was said that "dramatics furnish a rich field, and most schools have as yet no more than looked over the fence."¹⁸

Anna Ingleman of Independence, Kansas was so far ahead of her time regarding the world of dramatics, for by 1913, she had organized the school's first drama club because, "in order to develop the dramatic talent in [the] school, it was proposed that it be united into a club."¹⁹ The impact of the dramatics to humankind can be summed up in a quote pulled from a dissertation on the history of speech and drama education: "The dramatic instinct cannot be eradicated. Drama education may fluctuate in popularity, and its need may be fulfilled by other activities. However, drama will always be a part of mankind."²⁰ This quote was exemplified in Anna. Her dedication to a field that garnered only shallow support from the world at the time illustrated her passion for its necessity. In a general survey given to schools in 1913, it was found that oral expression was being introduced to high schools around the same year.²¹ Anna, however, had moved past the simplicity of oral expressions towards full-fledged dramatic productions. These emerging elective courses in oral expression needed teachers who "held one quality: willingness to teach the course. It is hardest because it demands on the teacher's side inventiveness, enthusiasm, superlative tact, and broad sympathy." Those were qualities which Anna had already demonstrated and incorporated into her teachings.²²

¹⁸ Mary Virginia Rodigan, "Dramatics in the High School," *The English Journal* 10, no. 6 (June 1921): 320; Gaffney, "High School Dramatics," 373.

¹⁹ *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1913), 49.

²⁰ Rose-Mary Rumbley, "The History of Speech and Drama Education in the Dallas Public School (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 1971), 22.

²¹ Rumbley, "The History of Speech," 34

²² *Ibid.*

While Anna's was not the primal dramatics club in the state, her groundbreaking work in Independence remains intact even still today. In order to convince the school district to approve her proposition for the club, she kept clippings of programs of speech and dramatics being conducted at other Kansas high schools, as well as ones across the nation, and showed them to people who could help her get speech and dramatics added into the curriculum.²³ Between 1913 and 1920, the dramatics club made a few appearances sporadically; however, since 1920, Independence High has maintained a course in speech or dramatics in every year following.²⁴

A *Peabody Journal of Education* article identifying the key problems in educational dramatics stated that the director of a production as well as their casting choices was highly important to its success, so the success of Anna's plays reflected well on her own character.²⁵ According to journalist James Suber, Independence "was a cultural town. The arts flourished. The people were interested in music and drama," and so it made sense that coupled with Anna's abilities, she could garner large crowds to her productions.²⁶ It has been said of Anna that she possessed exceptional ability in casting. "She has spent many successful years behind a teacher's desk in M.C.H.S. and I.H.S., and is known and liked by everyone. Her work in expression and dramatics is highly efficient, and a play cast never had a better coach."²⁷ In response to the success of a senior play directed by Anna in 1922, a reporter wrote, "Much of the success of the play is due to the splendid coaching of Miss Ingleman, assisted by Miss Spradling. Miss Ingleman again proves her ability as a coach in the choice of her characters and the way in which the characters respond."²⁸

²³ Torbett, "Speech Teacher," 12.

²⁴ Torbett, "Speech Teacher," 14.

²⁵ Arthur L. Bradford, "Educational Dramatics in High School," *Peabody Journal of Education* 18, no. 2 (Sept. 1940): 112.

²⁶ Suber, "Salinan Knew Playwright's Family," 14.

²⁷ Torbett, "Speech Teacher," 25.

²⁸ *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1922), 42.

In one instance, Anna organized a pageant for the Fourth of July entitled the *Drawing of the Sword*. The production involved over 150 characters decked in “elaborate costumes.”²⁹ An *Independence Daily Reporter* article stated, “Miss Ingleman, who directed this performance must be given warm praise for her excellent work.”³⁰ The production attracted more than five thousand people, and due to requests by people from the audience, the pageant was encored a few days later.³¹

As a director, Anna had the opportunity to coach two young talents who would go on to lives of stardom: Vivian Vance and William Inge. Of Vivian, Anna said “Vivian Jones would make good, I always knew. She had a real talent and I believe she was the most versatile student I ever had.” Vivian’s parents did not approve of their daughter’s love of acting but, Anna was like a light in a dark place. She counteracted the negative attitudes of Vivian’s parents by positively encouraging Vivian in her multifaceted talents. An anonymous *Kansas City Star* reporter said that “Vivian was quite the talker then, too having won a state declamation contest.”³² Anna often coached students for Declamation contests, so it was no surprise when Vivian’s success in declamation directly mirrored her teacher’s success from years prior.³³ During her time at Independence High, Vivian starred in several comedies including, *A Night in Bohemia*, *When a Man’s Single*, and a character comedienne written and directed by Anna herself.³⁴ Anna often chose comedies for her students to perform, and Vivian’s eventual success in the hit comedy *I Love Lucy* very well could have stemmed from the opportunities she was

²⁹ “Patriotic Pageant,” *The Evening Star*, June 28, 1918, 1.

³⁰ “Praise for Miss Ingleman,” *Independence Daily Reporter*, July 5, 1918, 4.

³¹ “Drawing of Sword,” *Independence Daily Reporter*, July 8, 1918, 1.

³² Rob Edelman and Audrey Kupferberg, *Meet the Mertzes* (St. Martin’s Press, 2013), 91.

³³ *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1922), 87.

³⁴ “A Night in Bohemia,” *Independence Daily Reporter*, January 6, 1922, 2; “When a Man’s Single,” *Independence Daily Reporter*, December 17, 1921, 3; “Four Good Home Talent Vaudeville Acts,” *Independence Daily Reporter*, May 28, 1921, 5.

given as a teenager. In the years following Vivian's graduation from high school, she continued in her passion for theatre. She left Independence in 1927 to seek dancing and singing gigs, and even borrowed the stage name "Vivian Vance" from a member of the local theatre crowd in Kansas, Vance Randolph. She eventually settled in Albuquerque in its budding theatre community where she was cast in romantic comedies like *This Thing Called Love*, *Broadway*, and *Redemption*. A former New York actress who had settled in Albuquerque due to health reasons became somewhat of a mentor to Vivian during her time there and said that Vivian had "played many types of roles while a young girl here [in Albuquerque], some glamorous, some comical, some sentimental, but one I remember in particular because it convinced me of her ability to make an audience respond as she wanted them to." After her regional success, Vivian eventually landed a spot in the Alvin Theatre (now called the Neil Simon Theatre) on Broadway, and shortly after that, landed a spot on *I Love Lucy* which earned her the title of the very first woman to earn a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series.³⁵ Without the encouragement and coaching by Miss Anna Ingleman during her youth, someone entirely different than Vivian might have held that title.

Anna Ingleman was also influential in the life of William Inge, playwright extraordinaire. He followed in the footsteps of his teacher, for he too graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelor of Arts in Speech and Drama. After school, he went on to teach English and Drama in Kansas and then worked as a drama critic for the *St. Louis Times*. He was offered a scholarship for graduate school, but eventually dropped to refocus on theatre. "I sort of based my life on the theatre," said Inge. "Having given up the theatre I had given up the basis that I'd set

³⁵ Edelman & Kupferberg, *Meet the Mertzses*, 99; "Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series," Wikipedia, Accessed April 27, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primetime_Emy_Award_for_Outstanding_Supporting_Actress_in_a_Comedy_Series#1950s.

for my life upon. I was terribly confused.” His friendship with playwright Tennessee Williams called him back to his own love for playwriting.³⁶ Perhaps his most well-known play, *PICNIC*, opened in NYC in 1953. Themes, characters, and settings from his plays closely mirror his young adulthood in Independence. Several of his plays and novels, including *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* and *My Son is a Splendid Driver* were autobiographical. Playwright Robert Anderson remarked that, “Bill bled into his plays.” During his time in Kansas, “Independence’s Montgomery High School had a strong dramatics program under the leadership of English teacher Anna Ingleman, still something of a legend in the town. Inge was an active member of the drama club.” Anna recalled of William, “That boy was a genius in some ways and I knew it, but I didn’t know exactly in what field he was going to succeed.”³⁷ She did, however marvel at his talent as an impersonator and a playwright saying, “I can take absolutely no credit for Billy’s ability to write plays and create such fascinating characters. All I did was get him started in dramatic work.”

Anna Ingleman’s efforts in establishing dramatics into mainstream education is still seen in Independence even today. Her impact on her students was evident, and the 1924 yearbook was even dedicated to her.³⁸ In addition, due to her time teaching at the Independence Junior College after she had retired from the High School, “The Anna Ingleman Memorial Award” was established in her honor. This award recognizes success in students in acting and dramatics at the school.³⁹

³⁶ “William Inge Biography,” William Inge Center for the Arts, Accessed April 27, 2017, <http://ingecenter.org/william-inge-biography/>.

³⁷ Jane W. Courant, “The Drama of William Inge” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 1990), 58.

³⁸ *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1924), 6.

³⁹ Alan Glines, *A Kansan Conquers the Cosmos: or, ‘Spaced Out All My Life’* (iUniverse, 2010), 41; Glines, *Spaced Out*, 48.

Anna's love for theatre also influenced the community of Independence because Anna was part of the 1922 founding of the Independence Community Theatre, where she acted as Vice President.⁴⁰ She served as the director for the Little Theatre Guild until her death and was influential in the events leading up to the creation of the William Inge Center for the Arts and its corresponding annual William Inge Festival.⁴¹ Without Anna Ingleman's push for William to continue in the arts, he might not have. When Anna retired in 1946, her successor at Independence High was a woman named Margaret Goheen.⁴² Margaret was influential in continuing the thriving drama department.⁴³ Margaret would eventually go on to found the aforementioned William Inge Festival in 1982, and an award for outstanding contributions to theatre in Independence and the surrounding area was named after her. Because of the festival, people such as Arthur Miller, Neil Simon, and Stephen Sondheim have ventured to Kansas.⁴⁴ These big names in arts culture ended up in Independence, Kansas due to the domino effect started by Anna Ingleman all the way back in 1913.

To say that Miss Anna A. Ingleman contributed to the life of the arts in Independence, Kansas is an understatement. Her dedication to the arts is something of a spectacle. Due to her determination and love for her students and their passions, Independence now holds many theatrical accomplishments to its name including Vivian Vance, William Inge, and "the nationally renowned event" that is the William Inge Festival.⁴⁵ The life and actions of Anna Ingleman go to show that if your passion is outside of the norm, it doesn't make it any less real or beneficial – in the long-run, it might inspire a movement.

⁴⁰ "Community Theatre Organization Here," 1.

⁴¹ Torbett, "Speech Teacher," 5

⁴² *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1947), 4.

⁴³ *Orange and Black* (Independence, Kansas: Tribune Printing Company, 1947), 1.

⁴⁴ "History," William Inge Center for the Arts, Accessed April 27, 2017, 1, <http://ingecenter.org/about/>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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