

Capote left his mark on town in western Kansas

The Associated Press

HOLCOMB, Kan. — People in this prairie community remember Truman Capote as charming but also a bit overbearing as he dashed about town in his sporty Jaguar and strange clothes, gathering details for his book *In Cold Blood*, about the murder of a farm family.

"He was hard to forget," said Bill Brown, a professor at Kansas State University in Manhattan who was editor of the newspaper in nearby Garden City. "His personality and appearance were foreign to western Kansas."

"After I knew him about a week I decided I liked him," said 81-year-old Myrtle Clare, who was the town's postmistress when Mr. Capote spent the early 1960s there. He gathered information for his best-selling book about the murder of Herb Clutter, his wife and two of their children, Nancy and Kenyon.

Mr. Brown recalled that Mr. Capote, who died Saturday in Los Angeles, would strut jauntily into the



Truman Capote
... "hard to forget"

news room of *The Garden City Telegram* and expect immediate attention. Mr. Brown said he never thought much of Mr. Capote's ways.

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"He'd come in right before deadline and think I could drop everything," said Mr. Brown, who was editor of the newspaper 25 years ago when two men murdered the Clutters in their farm home at Holcomb, a few miles west of Garden City.

"He had this celebrity air," Mr. Brown said. "He thought he deserved immediate and undivided attention."

Mr. Capote arrived a few weeks after the Nov. 15, 1959 slayings, and the frail writer with a droning voice did not go unnoticed long. By the first of the year, he was a guest in several homes. The town had a celebrity in its midst. Parties were given for him, and he gave parties in return.

"He was an interesting fellow," said Duane West, former county attorney for Finney County.

"It's my impression that, in Garden City, Capote made an effort to accentuate his eccentricities," Mr. West said. He "went out of his way to appear more of a character than he was, wearing that huge sheepskin-

lined coat and an Army pillbox cap."

In 1964, Mr. West and his wife visited New York and called Mr. Capote, who had told them to phone if they were ever in town. He said Mr. Capote and fellow author Harper Lee took them to "Hello, Dolly," which had just opened on Broadway.

"In the New York setting, he was much less eccentric," Mr. West said.

Bob Rupp, 41, who was Nancy Clutter's boyfriend, said his memory of Mr. Capote is stained by the fact that the author made millions of dollars by writing about something that shook a community so terribly.

"I'm sure he was accurate, but he came in way too soon and stirred up a lot of things people were trying to forget," Mr. Rupp said. He said he was interviewed by Mr. Capote over several afternoons, and he now regrets giving him permission to use his name in the book.

Mr. Rupp said he never read *In Cold Blood* or saw the film that was based on it. "I never had the desire to," he said.

Mr. West said, "I can't see that anything worthwhile came out of the book except to generate sympathy for a couple of cold-blooded killers who deserved none."

In Cold Blood was published in 1966 after the two men convicted of the murders — Richard Hickock and Perry Smith — were hanged. In the years before the execution, Mr. Capote was in constant contact with Smith and Hickock. He visited them on death row, sent them money for necessities and wrote to them. He attended their executions on April 14, 1965.

Cliff Hope, who was Mr. Clutter's attorney, said Mr. Capote was "gracious, businesslike and intelligent."

But he regrets having helped him with the book.

"I'm sorry it was ever written," he said. "It brought fame and fortune to Capote, but you might say it didn't do anyone any particular good, least of all Capote. He wrote very little of consequence after that."