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## Review of *Flint Hills Cowboys: Tales of the Tallgrass Prairie* By Jame F. Hoy

Richard W. Slatta  
*North Carolina State University*

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*Flint Hills Cowboys: Tales of the Tallgrass Prairie.* By Jame F. Hoy. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006. xi + 319 pp. Map, photographs, index. \$29.95.

Jim Hoy, professor of English at Emporia State University, has ridden and written about the Flint Hills region of east-central Kansas since the 1970s. His earlier works include *The Cattle Guard: Its History and Lore* (1982), *Prairie Poetry: Cowboy Verse of Kansas*, with Vada Snider (1995), and a prequel to the present book, *Cowboys and Kansas: Stories from the Tallgrass Prairie* (1997). Hoy aptly describes his work as “part memoir, part history, part ethnography.” Moreover, “this paeon to the Flint Hills is my thanks to the land that has nurtured my life and nourished my soul.”

After introducing the reader to Flint Hills geology and sociology, Hoy rounds up his thirty chapters into five parts treating cowboys, cattle and horses, ranching, rodeo and other fun, and “a rough country,” the latter focused on criminals and crimes in the region. Each section blends bits of history (mostly without citations), folklore, tales (short, medium, and tall), poetry, and reminiscences from a wide range of Flint Hills inhabitants.

Readers interested in any of the topics listed above anywhere in the Great Plains will profit by comparing their special region with Hoy’s. For example, we learn that “In the Flint Hills the farmer and cowboy can be, and often are, the same person.” Sounds a bit different from the range wars that raged elsewhere between “sodbusters,” cattle ranchers, and sometimes sheep ranchers. We also get vignettes of celebrities of the past, including Casey Tibbs, Lucille Mulhall, Bill Pickett, and, of course, William Allen White.

My favorite sections of the book describe frontier pastimes, such as the venerable card games of pitch, pond fishing, early rodeo, and, yes, polo during the 1920s. Hoy also illuminates frontier dangers, such as prairie fires, conflicts, and the changes that gradually transformed the Flint Hills. Given his understandable boosterism, we can forgive him an occasional

exaggeration, such as terming the region “the best grazing land in the world.” That honor surely would be contested by the rich pampas of Argentina. A few photographs, many more valuable for flavor than hard information, complement the text. After finishing Hoy’s paeon, many readers will likely pull out an atlas and ask, “Now, where do I fly into to visit this strange and wondrous land?”

RICHARD W. SLATTA  
Department of History  
North Carolina State University