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Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

2014 – Flint Hills Land, Sky, and People (Cathy Hoy, Jim Hoy, Marty White, Editors)

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## Flint Hills Land, Sky, and People

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### Recommended Citation

Hoy, Cathy; Hoy, Jim; and White, Marty (2014). "Flint Hills Land, Sky, and People," *Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*. <https://newprairiepress.org/sfh/2014/flinthills/1>

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The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

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## *Flint Hills Land, Sky, and People*

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If you have spent time in the Flint Hills of Kansas, you will understand the restorative emotions that inspire the theme chosen for the 2014 Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal—Flint Hills Land, Sky, and People.

Land represents the natural history of the tallgrass prairie and everything that is sustained here—from the geological formations that created it eons ago to the plants and animals that inhabit it today. Sky is always present on the prairie, and its influence becomes an almost physical and spiritual need for those who come to know it. For artists, poets, and musicians it is a never-ending inspiration and muse for creativity. People of many kinds have lived in the Flint Hills over time, both threatening and sustaining this remarkable natural habitat. In their coming, people from earliest times to the present have created fascinating stories. Some of these stories we know and some we can only surmise. Together these three aspects of nature and culture characterize the Flint Hills. In 2014, Symphony in the Flint Hills celebrates this magical combination in Butler County.

Butler County is distinctive from other parts of the Flint Hills and yet shares important characteristics of the tallgrass prairie. The stories of land and sky that

ABOVE: FLINT HILLS CLEARING SPRING STORM  
*John D. Morrison*

follow are similar in many ways to other areas in the Flint Hills, but the stories of people show that they have had an even greater impact here than in other parts of the Flint Hills. There is evidence of human presence here thousands of years ago. More recently, in the 1700s and 1800s, Indian tribes such as the Osage and the Kanza hunted or lived here. These earlier people used the land gently and left little evidence of their time on it, but the people who came later to “settle” the land from the mid-1800s on had a much greater physical impact. Ranching, farming, and the discovery of oil resulted in Butler County becoming the most heavily populated county in the Flint Hills. Ranching helped keep much of the tallgrass prairie intact because the ranchers’ goals were directed toward maintaining good grass; the protein-rich bluestem prairie grasses were essential for healthy cattle and prosperous ranches. The ranch where this year’s Symphony in the Flint Hills is located, known as the Rosalia Ranch, is owned by the Gottsch Cattle Company.

The heart of the Field Journal comprises the series of essays, stories, and poems reflecting the theme of Flint Hills Land, Sky, and People. These essays and stories are primarily about the natural and cultural history of Butler and Greenwood Counties, for while the concert itself is in Butler County, the Rosalia Ranch lies along the border of both counties. Moreover, the two counties share an extensive history of oil-field culture not found in other areas of the Flint Hills. The art associated with the prose and poetry includes historic and contemporary photographs, sketches, and paintings by artists who work in the Flint Hills. Various interpretations of the prairie sky are found throughout the Field Journal. Many of the authors and artists are from the region and have a passion for maintaining the integrity of the tallgrass prairie and the Flint Hills.

On the final page of the Field Journal are the lyrics of the most beautiful folksong of the Great Plains, the Kansas state song, “Home on the Range,” the traditional concluding musical selection of each year’s concert.