

Despite Modernization, Flint Hills Remain Stable Through Generations

The Flint Hills have changed little in the past century and a half, with much thanks due to dedicated care of its owners.

Families with six generations of Flint Hills land ownership related history of making a living on the land, while diverse methods of modern day operation were reviewed during afternoon programs as part of the recent third annual Symphony in the Flint Hills.

In a beautiful, blue-skied setting with lush emerald Flint Hills overlooking two clear ponds, more than 6,700 people participated in activities which climaxed with the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra performing a 90-minute concert in the North Lakeview Pasture, owned by the White family of Council Grove.

After gates opened at noon, there was a steady stream of cars into the parking area, and people moving to the concert and program grounds almost a mile out in the grasslands. Nearly 1,700 volunteers helped with the event, from setting up facilities with over a dozen tents to assisting visitors with their diverse needs.

Many of the crowd walked the trail while others utilized the horse-drawn covered wagons, tractor-pulled trailers and golf-cart-type vehicles.

John White is a fifth-generation Flint Hills landowner, with his children and grandchildren the sixth and seventh generations respectively. "My great great grandfather, Thomas White, came to Morris County from Kentucky in 1857 and paid \$600 for 160 acres north of Council Grove," related White, while reviewing heritage of the area.

"He came with an oxen team in a schooner wagon, but his wife became sick en route and passed away," White continued. "Thomas White later bought an adjoining 160 acres from his brother, making the original farm of 320 acres."

When Thomas White passed away at an early age, his son, William Henry (W.H.) White, 17, and daughters had to fend for themselves. The girls married and moved away, but W.H. remained in Morris County, building the legacy that is left today.

"W.H. was active in the livestock business and also operated a general store in Council Grove," John White stated. "He served two terms as the Morris County treasurer and was then elected as the Morris County representative to the state legislature."

Three more generations of the White family followed with W.H.'s great grandsons, John, Hank and Bill, currently operating C.H. White and Sons, a farming and ranching operation, named for their grandfather.

W.H. White started the Farmers and Drovers Bank in 1882, and served as its first president. The White family remains active in the bank, with John, Hank and Bill and John's children, Julie Hower and Steve White, all in leadership positions. Julie Hower's children and Steve White's daughter are the seventh generation of the White family in Morris County.

In 1880, W.H. White wrote, "When our generation is gone, there will be none left who know anything about the pioneer farmer and his early struggle to make this country the beautiful spot it now is."

John White emphasized, "We believe W.H. would be thrilled to know that his beloved Morris County has remained a beautiful place, cared for by generations who have shared his reverence and love of the land."

Some of the original tract north of Council Grove remains in the White family, while nearby land was taken by the federal reservoir in the 1960s. Pastures in which the symphony was conducted were purchased by John's father, Hale, in the 1940s.

Neighboring the White pastures to the north is rangeland owned by Cosgrove Farm Company, which also originated in the 1850s, according to John Doran Cosgrove, who spoke after John White.

"My brother, Dave, and I are the fifth generation of pioneer stock operating Flint Hills land in Morris County," Cosgrove informed. Frank Doran and Mary Clark came to the United States from Ireland in 1857, first arriving in New York. Frank and Mary were married the next year, and traveled to St. Louis by train in 1859.

"They then came by boat to St. Joseph, Mo., where they bought an oxen team, wagon, breaking plow, cook stove and other provisions to travel further west," Cosgrove shared. "They came to Topeka, then through Eskridge, to settle in August 1859, on Munkres Creek north of Council Grove, where my family lives today."

First cabin constructed by the Dorans was close to the creek, despite a warning from Kaw Indians that it was on a flood plain. In 1871, the couple moved to higher ground and built a stone home, with sand hauled in from Junction City.

"The original stone house had two rooms downstairs and three upstairs. It is the same house that I grew up in with my parents and seven siblings. However, it was added onto when I was a baby," Cosgrove noted. "My family lives in this house now."

Seven children were born to the Dorans, but only four survived. "The oldest was John Doran, for whom I was named," Cosgrove recognized. "He chose to stay home and farm, while Thomas Doran left home to go to school at St. Mary's Academy and then to KU at Lawrence."

There Thomas Doran met and married Mary Woodward, daughter of Brenton, one of the first pharmacists in Kansas, and his wife Lucy, one of the first school teachers. Thomas became an attorney in Topeka, and his only child, Josephine, met and married Michael Cosgrove, also of the law firm.

"This is where the Cosgrove name came into the picture. My dad, Thomas Francis Cosgrove, was one of their two children," John Cosgrove verified. Oddly enough, Mike Cosgrove, Michael's father, had settled in Morris County in 1873 south of Council Grove near Dunlap in the Neosho River Valley.

Some of the Cosgrove land near their home, north of Council Grove, was taken when the reservoir was constructed, and the family replaced that land with acreage south of town.

"Next summer will be the 150th anniversary of our ranch, and one of my sons is now the sixth generation working the land. Hopefully, it will continue into future generations," Cosgrove said.

Contemporary Flint Hills ranching was discussed by a panel including Don and Peg Jenkins, Larry and Linda Johnson and Kevin and Mary Kniebel, with Mike Beam of the Kansas Livestock Association as moderator.

Originally from Jackson County, the Jenkins have managed large ranches in Butler and Chase counties, and now have a cow-calf operation north of Council Grove, look after yearling pastures and do day work for other cattlemen.

Johnson, who had worked for other ranches previously, manages the 14,000-acre Mashed O Ranch, a cow-calf and steer grazing operation on the Morris-Chase County line, with assistance from his wife and two employees.

The Kniebels have a diversified family operation near White City, with a commercial cow-calf herd in which calves are retained through finish weight in an on-farm feedlot. They have a registered Red Angus herd to sell seed stock in addition to growing all of their livestock feed.

Don Jenkins emphasized he and his wife wouldn't now call their operation a contemporary ranch because they'd moved to the area for semi-retirement after managing large operations, including the Z-Bar Ranch in Chase County.

"That's a tremendous ranch, and we weren't too pleased when it was turned into a national park. But, that gives an opportunity for more people to enjoy the beautiful Flint Hills," Don Jenkins admitted.

While in charge of a Butler County ranch, the Jenkins couple looked after 22,000 acres with 900 stock cows and 4,500 yearlings. "We bought our place in Morris County 11 years ago and now have fall and spring calving cows with the calves retained for summer grazing. We've been pursuing merchandizing grass-fed beef," Jenkins briefed.

Larry Johnson explained that his ranch includes 750 spring calving and 80 fall calving cows, along with 1,250 yearlings on an early intensive grazing program. "We save our heifers as replacements and rotate using Hereford and Angus bulls," he confirmed. "Calves are sold at weanling age, often to repeat customers, who have been pleased with their performance in the feedlot and on the rail."

Noting the controversy of burning Flint Hills pastures in some years gone by, Johnson indicated, "We burn the entire ranch every year. I would prefer not to always burn the cow pastures, but the way we're situated, the whole countryside is burned when it comes that time in the spring."

Calving at the Kniebel operation begins in February with the couple taking turns checking at midnight and at four o'clock in the morning, and also looking over the herd twice during the day. "We breed our cows artificially to select bulls, so we don't typically have many calving problems. If we lose a calf, it's quite personal to us," Mrs. Kniebel declared.

With his father and brother involved in the Kniebel partnership, Kevin Kniebel elaborated, "We raise feed to finish all of the cattle produced. All of our crop residues are utilized, so we don't let anything go to waste."

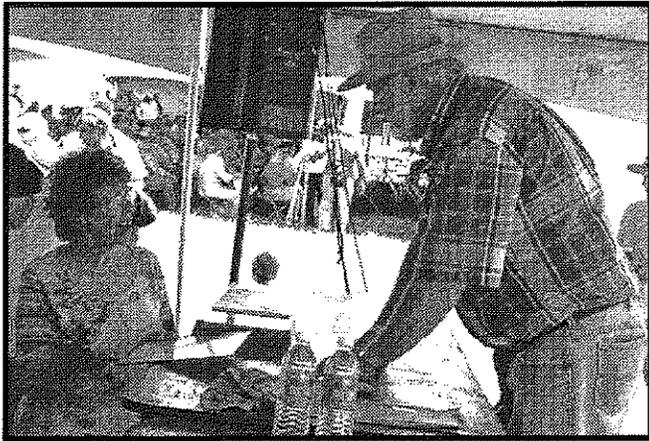
Finished cattle in the Kniebel operation are sold through the U.S. Premium Beef program, which has added profitability, the couple contended. Government-assist programs are utilized as well to economically maintain and improve the grass and farm ground.

"It's hard to put into words what it's like to ranch in these beautiful Flint Hills. There is a fondness, uniqueness and sacredness here, so peaceful, like one can see God," described Peg Jenkins.

"Ranchers in the Flint Hills are producing the most wholesome, nutritious meat in the world. We must keep the land in private ownership in order for this to continue," agreed the group in conclusion.



Mike Beam of the Kansas Livestock Association in Topeka was moderator for a contemporary ranching panel during afternoon programs which were part of the recent Symphony in the Flint Hills. Questions from the audience were fielded by the speakers.



John Doran Cosgrove is the fifth generation of pioneer stock operating Flint Hills land in Morris County. John's great grandfather came from Ireland and settled in the area in 1859. Cosgrove spoke about the family's history during programs as part of the Symphony in the Flint Hills, conducted in pastures south of those operated by Cosgrove and his brother, Dave. Indian artifacts collected by Cosgrove on the land originally inhabited by Kaw Indians were shown after his presentation.



Fifth, sixth and seventh generations of the White family in Morris County posed in their North Lakeview Pasture south of Council Grove when they hosted the recent third annual Symphony in the Flint Hills. Thomas White came to the area from Kentucky in 1857 and bought land, still in family ownership. Shown are Steve White, Julie (White Alexander) Cage, John White, Julie (White) Hower and the seventh generation, Allison and Hailey Hower.



Contemporary ranching in the Flint Hills was reviewed by this panel for one of the programs as part of the recent Symphony in the Flint Hills hosted by the White family of Council Grove. Panelists included Don and Peg Jenkins, Larry and Linda Johnson and Kevin and Mary Kniebel, with Mike Beam of the Kansas Livestock Association as moderator.

