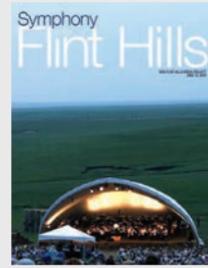


SFH told through the FLINT HILLS MEDIA PROJECT

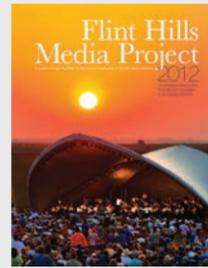
Since 2010, a Wichita State University class has documented SFH and captured stories from the host counties/communities. Their work can be found at flinthillsmediaproject.com and in the magazines produced each year.



2010



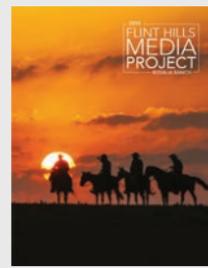
2011



2012



2013



2014



2015



(TOP) Members of the Kansas City Symphony gather a small crowd of listeners in 2006 at the symphony's first official location at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County. (BOTTOM) A helicopter captures an aerial view of the preserve. Courtesy of Symphony in the Flint Hills

It all began in 1994 with Jane Koger's innovative "symphony on the prairie" 40th birthday party — or so goes common Symphony in the Flint Hills lore.

But if Koger's birthday party was the rogue spark from a fire, Phil and Kathy Miller were the field set aflame.

The Millers, who had a long history in the nonprofit circles of Wichita, caught wind of the idea to re-enact Koger's legendary celebration and ran with it.

"They (the Millers) coalesced local volunteers, and we all said 'yes' for very different reasons than raising money for an organization we didn't know about," said former SFH executive director Emily Hunter Connell. "But we had our agenda, and they had their agenda, and they seemed compatible."

As most volunteers had other jobs, the planning fell to the Millers and Hunter Connell. Once the wheels were in motion, the group quickly realized two things: They would miss the 10-year anniversary of Koger's party, and doing this right involved more elements than anyone initially guessed.

"For 10 years people said, 'Is there ever going to be another Symphony on the Prairie?' Well, when we started work on it, we knew why there hadn't been — it's a helluva lot of work," Kathy said with a laugh.

Undeterred by obstacles, the trio plowed ahead. The Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve became the new location. The Kansas City Symphony signed on.

Support and networks grew through word of mouth; someone new someone who knew something about some element.

"That was key," Hunter Connell said. "And it happened over and over again that there were individuals who would just be somewhere in the constellations of considerations that just gave us the right kind of direction at the right moment."

After two years of preparation, all the man-hours finally paid off; the first of what would become an annual event sold out and left attendees wanting more. But the planning process took its toll on the Millers, and the two stepped down, leaving a heartbroken Hunter Connell to carry the tradition forward.

"They're the ones that started creating the lines of support from afar," Hunter Connell said about the Millers. "We didn't have the resources in Chase County, in the Flint Hills, that we could talk to. So, they were seminal, completely seminal."

The tradition continued without the Millers. Every year a new location; every year the same mission — increase awareness and appreciation for the Flint Hills.

"We didn't want to be against anything," Hunter Connell said. "This was all about being for the Flint Hills, to celebrate the Flint Hills, to bring people in no matter what their thinking was about politics, about economics, about religion, about anything, that this was simply a celebration of beauty."

— Jen Bookhout

INTRODUCING: SADDLE-SPAN TENT

Year two of the symphony was hosted in Wade Pasture outside Eskridge in Wabaunsee County. The evening was calm and beautiful, and the signature saddle-span tent was first introduced. Rather than the standard stage, it swooped into a dramatic oval roofline and matched the white-topped tents surrounding it.

A BLESSED SITE

The Field Journal — an attendee's guide to the symphony and the Flint Hills — was introduced at the fourth annual event near Florence in Chase County. A Native American shaman blessed the site with a "smudge" stick prior to the event, ridding Upper Turkey Springs Pasture of any evil spirits.

2007

2009

REMEMBER WHEN?

Each symphony had its own story. Whether it was its stormy weather, the raging winds or a unique setting on a U.S. Army post, we look back at each year's happenings to reflect on the event's 10-year anniversary.

2006

YEAR ONE: HOT, HOT, HOT

The inaugural concert, held at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County, was a hot one. One concert-goer wore brand new cowboy boots, but with the high temperatures, the boots had to be cut off due to blisters and swelling from the heat. Her husband drove to Emporia — a 45-minute drive — to buy her flip flops.



An organization worker distributes the 2007 almanac to attendees at the second annual event, held in Wade Pasture in Wabaunsee County. The "Almanac" was included in the concert program and was the precursor to the Field Guide. Courtesy of Symphony in the Flint Hills

2008

THE START OF THE CATTLE DRIVE

The third symphony took place near Council Grove on the North Lakeview Pasture in Morris County. It was the year of the first cattle drive, in which circling outriders herded surrounding cows to pass by concertgoers. It was the only year the cattle drive was described as a "stampede."