

## Remembering Jim Hoy - Cowboy, Writer and Philosopher of the Flint Hills

Kansas Public Radio | By [Rex Buchanan](#)

Published February 28, 2025 at 5:03 AM CST

The Kansas Flint Hills has lost one of its strongest voices. Jim Hoy was a writer, cowboy and Flint Hills philosopher. Commentator Rex Buchanan was a friend and shares this remembrance.

*(Transcript)*

[Jim Hoy](#) was probably the best friend the Kansas Flint Hills ever had.

He passed away last weekend at age 86.

Jim grew up on a ranch outside of Cassoday down in Butler County. But he eventually went to the University of Missouri and got a Ph.D. in English. He then taught at Emporia State University for many years. He taught Chaucer and Old English, but he also taught courses on Kansas folklore and founded a center for Great Plains study.

And he wrote, a lot. Together with Tom Isern, he wrote newspaper columns on the Great Plains. He collected some of those columns into books. [He also wrote books](#) about everything from cattle guards to cowboy songs.

When I grew up on a farm out in central Kansas, there was a derogatory saying about pretend cowboys: All hat and no cattle. That sure wasn't true about Jim. He may have been a college prof, but he kept and rode horses nearly his entire life, helping work and move cattle with his son Josh, who sadly enough, passed away the same weekend as Jim. I last saw Jim last fall in an apartment in Emporia. In the middle of his living room, on a wooden stand, was his well-worn saddle, occupying a place of honor.

You could tell Jim loved nothing more than talking with ranchers, or explaining the Flint Hills to other folks. When I ran field trips in the Flint Hills, I'd often ask Jim to come by at the end of the day and tell some stories and sing some songs. He did that with grace and deep knowledge. Here's the ultimate compliment used by the people out where I grew up: Jim knew what he was talking about.

Jim loved the Flint Hills as much as anybody I know. He was a prime mover behind the [Symphony in the Flint Hills](#) that's held each summer. A few years ago a friend of mine went to the Symphony for the first time and wound up sitting with Jim. I told this friend of mine, I can't think of anybody better to introduce you to the Flint Hills, or Kansas for that matter, than Jim Hoy.

Over the years, it's clear that more and more people appreciate the Flint Hills. No matter what part of the state they're from, Kansans are proud of the Flint Hills, of the landscape and its culture. And that pride has translated into actions to protect and preserve this place. Jim Hoy was a big part of that.

Jim summed up the attraction of the tallgrass prairie about as well as anybody ever has: “If you want to have your breath taken away by rugged spectacle, go to the Rocky Mountains or the Grand Canyon; if you want a chance to catch your breath, come to the Flint Hills.”

So the next time you drive through the tallgrass prairie, take a deep breath. And thank Jim Hoy.

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Commentator Rex Buchanan is a writer, author and director emeritus at the [Kansas Geological Survey](#). He lives in Lawrence.