



*"Whenever you stop on the prairie to lunch or camp, and gaze around, there is a picture such as poet and painter never succeeded in transferring to book or canvas . . . [We] ought to have saved a . . . Park in Kansas, ten thousand acres broad—the prairie as it came from the hand of God, not a foot or an inch desecrated by 'improvements' and 'cultivation'. It is only a memory now."*

D.W. Wilder, editor of the *Hiawatha World*, 1884

## The Last Stand

Tallgrass prairie once covered 140 million acres of North America. Now less than 4 percent remains, mostly in the Flint Hills of Kansas. On November 12, 1996, Congress created the 10,894-acre preserve, protecting a nationally significant example of the once-vast tallgrass prairie ecosystem, while preserving a unique collection of cultural resources from prehistoric times through the ranching era.

Central North America, once called the Great American Desert, supports three types of grasslands. Tallgrass, mixed grass, and short grass prairies respond to decreasing rainfall amounts, while providing food and habitat for hundreds of prairie animals. Four grasses dominate tallgrass prairie—big and little bluestem, switch grass, and Indian grass. Travelers and traders crossed the vast prairie to find greater opportunities, but development was inevitable as settlers discovered the rich prairie soil.

After John Deere invented the steel moldboard plow—it could cut tough prairie sod—settling and cultivating the prairie grew by leaps and bounds. In less than a generation the prairie soil was broken, the land settled and forever changed.

American Indians knew well the value of the prairie and of human harmony with nature. Tribes of Kansa, Osage, Wichita, and Pawnee made this region their home and hunting grounds. Millions of bison roamed the plains, providing food, shelter, and ceremonial life for the tribes. As the United States expanded, Indian removal policies forced the Indians onto reservations and changed their cultures. In part to subdue the Indians, the bison were slaughtered almost to extinction. As settlement and agriculture followed, the tallgrass prairie made its last stand.



Greater prairie-chicken  
©B. MOOSE PETERSON/WRP



Eastern meadowlark  
©TOM MURRAY



Coyote  
©RON NIEBRUGGE



American bison  
©D. ROBERT & LORRI FRANZ



Wild blue indigo  
©GALAN DETRICK/PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.



Compass plant  
©KENNETH HIGHFILL/PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.



Lead plant  
©MIKE MCDOWELL



Butterfly milkweed  
©CALVIN J. HAMILTON

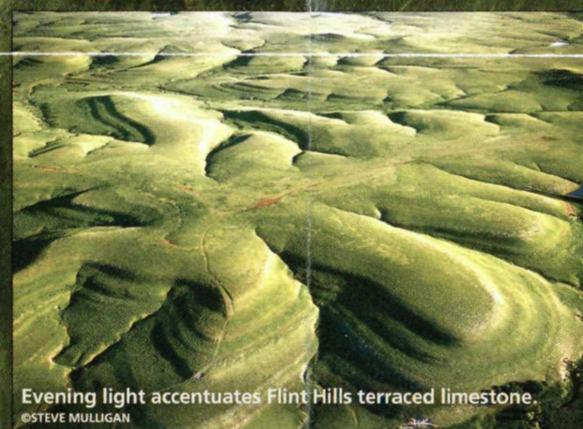


Blue sage  
©DON KURZ



Gayfeather  
ANDREW LAWSON/©DORLING KINDERSLY

### A LIMESTONE LAYER CAKE



Evening light accentuates Flint Hills terraced limestone.  
©STEVE MULLIGAN

**THE FLINT HILLS OF KANSAS** Over 250 million years ago this area was a vast inland sea that deposited great layers of limestone, shale, and flint. The Flint Hills were created as softer shales eroded away, leaving behind hardened flint shelves, in a process called differential erosion. The Flint Hills were too rocky to plow, except in the bottomland of creeks and rivers.

**PRAIRIE FIRES** Before humans lived here, lightning-ignited fires raced unchecked over the prairie until a large river or stream stopped them. Bison followed the burning prairie, grazing on tender new plant shoots. Seeing this, American Indians used fire for attracting large grazing animals to hunt. Managing the prairie by using fire and grazing allows for greater prairie diversity. Today the preserve staff works to mimic these natural processes for the prairie's health.



Switch grass  
©MIKE HADDOCK



Little bluestem  
©MIKE HADDOCK



Big bluestem  
©MIKE HADDOCK



Indian grass  
©MIKE HADDOCK



Buffalo grass  
©MIKE HADDOCK



Canada wild rye  
©PAUL JENKINS, WILDFLOWER FARM

### THE PRAIRIE LIVES UNDERGROUND

A significant world exists underground as the tallgrass prairie root systems reach down 15 to 25 feet into the soil, surviving fire, drought, and the changing environment. In dry periods prairie plants go dormant, conserving energy for regrowth when rain penetrates the soil. Thousands

of nematodes and other animals help keep the prairie healthy through their normal life functions. They turn and aerate soil by digestion or burrowing. A handful of sod can hold 50–100 nematode species, microscopic worms that eat their way through soil. Burrowing mammals

and reptiles evade predators by tunneling. Over 200 springs and seeps on the preserve begin underground and meander through layers of limestone before they reach the surface. Aquatic life, like the endangered Topeka shiner, thrives

in these pools and streams. This seldom-seen underground world—nematodes and vast plant root systems mining rich, deep soils—gives life to the creatures above.



Fire stimulates new growth from plant roots below ground.  
©LARRY SCHWARM

### PRAIRIE LIFE ABOVE GROUND

Over 400 species of plants, 150 kinds of birds, 39 types of reptiles and amphibians, and 31 species of mammals await your discovery here. Examples of most commonly seen animals are rabbits, turkeys, ornate box turtles, snakes, upland sandpipers, collared lizards, and grasshoppers. Far more elusive are foxes,

pocket gophers, coyotes, and deer. Bears, antelopes, panthers, and bison roamed the North American prairie before it was settled. Greater prairie-chickens prefer areas away from human activity, and their presence indicates that the prairie is biologically diverse. These members

of the grouse family need taller, denser grasses for nesting, but they also need open spaces with shorter vegetation—called leks or booming grounds—for breeding. Where the conditions are diverse, prairie chickens will return to the same leks yearly to mate. The birds are threatened by

habitat loss, due to conversion of native prairie to cropland and development.

Prairie life above and below ground work together, along with the preserve's cultural heritage, to tell the continually unfolding story of this fascinating and special place.

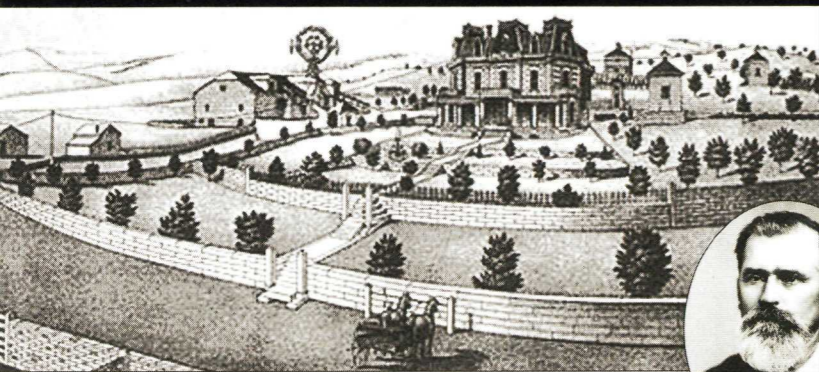
# Historic Ranch Headquarters

**ABOUT YOUR VISIT** The preserve is administered by the National Park Service. The historic ranch headquarters is two miles north of the U.S. 50 and Kansas 177 intersection, ½ mile west of Strong City, Kansas.

The preserve is open daily 9 am to 4:30 pm except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. On your visit you may see ranch activities, and you are welcome to observe and ask questions.

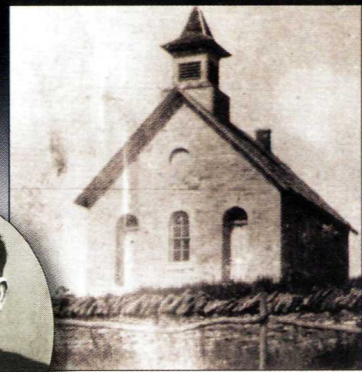
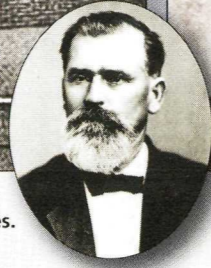
**HELP US PRESERVE THE SITE** Smoke only in the designated area. Pets are not allowed in the buildings or the backcountry areas. Please do not climb, sit on, or disturb rock walls, buildings, or other features.

**FOR YOUR SAFETY** Watch your step while walking the grounds. Do not enter corrals or approach the livestock or wildlife. Report accidents or safety hazards to a ranger.

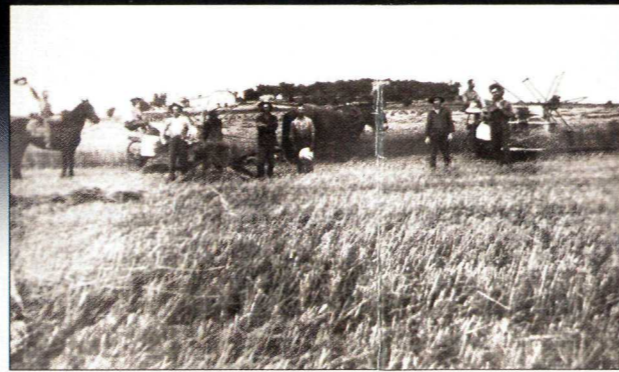


Lithograph of Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch, 1887.

Stephen F. Jones.



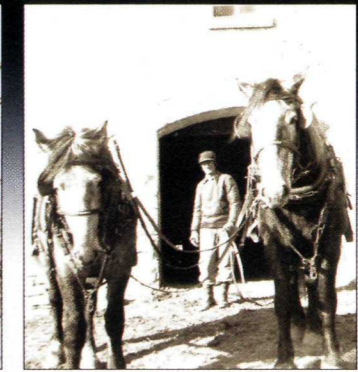
Lower Fox Creek School, 1882.



Benninghoven Ranch, 1920s.



Hired hands eating watermelon, circa 1920s.



Hazel Slabaugh and team, 1940s.



Moving Davis Ranch cattle, 1955.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS NPS

## ONE RANCH, MANY OWNERS

Stephen F. and Louisa Jones came to Chase County, Kansas, at the end of the open range period in 1878 to create a feeding station for the Jones brothers' Colorado cattle operation. Stephen Jones began buying land from individuals and railroads, amassing 7,000 acres. He built his Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch complex near the railhead for convenient shipping of his Durham, Galloway, Hereford, and polled Angus cattle to the Kansas City market. After the Colorado ranch was sold, Jones focused on raising purebred stock and race horses. He owned this land only 10 years, from 1878 to 1888, but he left an enduring legacy in the area.

Barney Lantry, Jones's neighbor and business associate, bought the ranch for \$95,000 in 1888, incorporating it with his own Deer Park Place for a total of 13,000 acres. Lantry's ranch tenants lived in the Spring Hill Ranch house. When Barney Lantry and a son Henry died, Spring Hill and Deer Park Farm was divided and sold to Charles Patten and F.W. Freeman. In 1909 the Pattens sold 1,080 acres of the land to Otto and Flora Benninghoven, marking the return of a resident-owner family to the Spring Hill Ranch house. The Benninghovens, active in the local agricultural community, raised cattle, sheep, and turkeys, helping to pay off the debt in 1917. In 1921 the Pattens sold the remaining 8,602

acres of pasture to Lester and Beulah Urschel, separating the Spring Hill Ranch land from the farmstead.

The Benninghovens worked through the Great Depression, but eventually lost the land in 1935. George H. Davis, a prominent Kansas City grain dealer, bought separate ranch properties from Prudential Insurance Company of America and the Urschels, reuniting the Jones/Lantry lands. Davis employed the Benninghovens, who continued to live on the property until 1942. After their departure, Hazel Slabaugh and his wife Erma, among other families, were hired to live on the property and manage the ranch for the next 40 years.

When Davis died in 1955, the ranch became the Davis-Noland-Merrill Grain Company, later renamed the Z Bar Ranch. In 1986 the Z Bar Ranch was sold and placed in a trust managed by Boatmen's First National Bank in Kansas City. The National Park Trust bought the 10,894-acre parcel in 1994, donating the ranch headquarters and the school to the National Park Service in 2002. Today The Nature Conservancy is the primary land owner. The Kansas Park Trust operates a bookstore on the site. Both work in partnership with the National Park Service.

### More Information

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve  
P.O. Box 585  
Cottonwood Falls, KS 66845  
620-273-8494  
www.nps.gov/taptr

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) for more information about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

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## THE RANCH BUILDINGS

The Spring Hill/Z Bar Ranch represents a continuous ranching legacy from the 1878 Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch to the Z Bar Ranch that sold in 1986. Over the years the ranch has undergone many transformations. The buildings show remnants from its earliest beginnings as well as changes made by the ranch's many owners.

North of the historic ranch headquarters is the Lower Fox Creek School built in 1882 by Stephen Jones on land he donated. His daughter Loutie attended classes there. You are invited to walk around the historic ranch headquarters and school area in daylight hours using this map as your guide.

- 1 **LIMESTONE BARN**  
This massive three-level limestone barn measures 110' x 60', with ground access to all three levels. It housed livestock and equipment, and stored hay and grain to feed the animals in winter. In 1882, 5,000 pounds of tin covered the roof. In the 1940s four large grain bins and two cupolas were added, along with iron support beams in the barn's interior.
- 2 **CORRALS AND FENCES**  
These played a pivotal role at the ranch, controlling animal flow and grazing patterns. Stephen Jones fully enclosed his 7,000 acres using a readily available resource—limestone. He also built inner pasture fences for selective breeding and grazing distribution, to prevent overgrazing any one particular area.
- 3 **OUTBUILDINGS**  
Built after 1900 these buildings were used as workshops and to store vehicles and equipment.
- 4 **SCRATCH SHED**  
Originally built in 1882 this structure enabled chickens to exercise in winter, increasing egg production. Four south-facing windows let in sunlight to warm the interior in winter, creating a very cozy environment for Mr. Jones's chickens. The building has been remodeled over the years to accommodate the needs of the ranch.
- 5 **CHICKEN HOUSE**  
The hillside and sod roof act as natural insulation for this 1882 building. Two vents in the barrel-vaulted ceiling regulate temperature and air flow, promoting greater egg production. The west door led into the scratch shed.
- 6 **CARRIAGE HOUSE**  
Built between 1910 and 1920, this building housed ranch vehicles and equipment when the Benninghovens lived here.
- 7 **RANCH HOUSE**  
The architectural features of this 1881 four-level Second Empire-style limestone mansion include a mansard roof, large windows, solid walnut staircase, faux painted woodwork, ornate cornices, and ceiling medallions. The house was built into the hillside for natural insulation. Gravity fed the natural spring water into the home via an intricate underground piping system.
- 8 **CURING HOUSE**  
Jones used this 1881 structure to cure hams and other meats, which were hung from hooks in the rafters. Port holes and cupola vents allowed air circulation, a requirement for proper curing.
- 9 **OUTHOUSE**  
This little structure behind the ranch house was built in 1881. The interior walls are rough-cut ashlar stone; the exterior walls are block limestone. An unusual feature is the use of three holes, two adult and one child size. The windows are curtained for added privacy.
- 10 **ICE HOUSE**  
Built in 1882, this structure was used to store ice cut from the Cottonwood River and other nearby sources. The ice was placed in sawdust and prairie hay for insulation. This gave the Jones family access to ice year-round, a luxury for the time. The door was originally on the north side, but was moved to the south to support the changing needs of the ranch.



→  
To Southwind Nature Trail and LOWER FOX CREEK SCHOOL  
Built in 1882, this one-room school provided a setting for educating local area students until 1930, when it was abandoned and reverted to the ranch owner. The school is a ½-mile walk from the ranch headquarters.

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