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Art of the Flint Hills

Don Lambert

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ROAD TO THE SKY
Robert Sudlow
Courtesy of Barbara Sudlow

Art of the Flint Hills

We'll never know who created the first art of the Flint Hills. It was made, no doubt, hundreds of years ago when a roaming Native American grabbed a piece of flint to etch onto a rock the vastness of the tallgrass prairie as far as he could see and ride.



Research by our editorial team uncovered the 1840 Expedition sketches of William Fairholme, who may possibly be the first European to capture the Flint Hills in art.

More recently, hundreds of amateur and professional painters and photographers have flocked to the Flint Hills for inspiration, to convey the same expanses the Native Americans had discovered.

As we think about who might have been the first to photograph or paint the Flint Hills in more modern times, we must remember that life on the prairie was hard. The necessary supplies may have been forsaken and the skills

forgotten on the journey as homesteaders struggled against brutal summers and winters while raising families. The daily hardships may have been transcended only on those springtime sunrises when awakened by roosters and fresh possibilities, and on those autumn sundowns knowing that harvest had been completed.

The first photograph of the Flint Hills may have been made in 1867 of Fort Riley by Alexander Gardner, who was hired by railroads to document their sites. One of the earliest paintings of the Flint Hills was done in 1927 by John Noble, an eccentric Wichita painter who traveled in Europe.

It is owned by the Wichita Art Museum.

In Wabaunsee County, Maude Mitchell painted prairie life around her in the early 20th century. Like so many women artists, her many skilled and beautiful paintings are only now being unearthed, restored, and celebrated.

It was Lawrence artist Robert Sudlow who helped popularize Flint Hills paintings with his thousands of inspired, impressionistic works. Sudlow, who died last year, led the way for three generations of Flint Hills painters.

Cottonwood Falls painter of sunrises and sunsets, Judith Mackey, continues the tradition while instructing and helping other artists living in the Flint Hills.

Mark Feiden is one of the photo-

graphers making his own mark. His roots go back six generations in Wabaunsee County. As the owner of Konza Press, he has produced five books of photographs, three of which are his own works. Now a graphic designer in Roeland Park, he makes photographs combining his longtime heritage with technical skills, direct observations and an abundance of enthusiasm for the Kansas prairie.

Don Lambert has written and produced five books about Kansas artists. His most recent, Homage to the Flint Hills was in conjunction with an exhibit of paintings and photographs which toured Kansas for two years and went to the nation's Capitol with a reception hosted by then U.S. Senator Sam Brownback.



NEHRING BRANCH
Mark Feiden



SHOOTING BUFFALO



112 MILE CREEK

William Fairholme Sketches
Huntington Library