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U.S. Department of the Interior

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## Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve News Release

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For Immediate Release

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### Celebrate Women's History Month at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve



#### Women's Voices of the Flint Hills



Celebrate Women's History Month at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve on March 26, 2016 by listening to three women's perspectives of life in the Flint Hills. Performances will be at 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 1:30 p.m. respectively. All programs are free of charge.

The program begins at 11 a.m. with Joyce Thierer presenting *Settling in Kansas Territory*, a first-person historical performance. Joyce Thierer meets the audience as Mary Fix, who is proud that her family's fulfillment of the Homestead Act has made her husband the owner of their farm. She tells how she decided that this place reminded her of their home in Pennsylvania, and about their neighbors, but she longs to be a part of the lives of the Kanza and Potawatomi people. *Settling in Kansas Territory* reflects

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Joyce Thierer's personal ties as well as her professional passions. Mary Fix was Joyce's great- great grandmother, and Joyce grew up hearing many of Mary's stories about settling in Kansas Territory from her grandfather as they checked cattle in a horse-drawn buggy. Mary's personality and some of her stories are, however, drawn from other settlers. A fifth generation (since 1856) Flint Hills, Kansas landowner, Dr. Thierer's research and teaching are in agricultural history, women's history, and the history of Kansas and the West. As a youngster she rode her horse from her parent's farm to the Wabaunsee County bookmobile, where she filled her saddlebags with books on archeology and history. Her bachelor's and doctoral degrees in history are from Kansas State University. She also has master's degrees in library science and history from Emporia State University, and was a librarian in Kansas and Nebraska. She is a professor of history at Emporia State University.

At 12:30 p.m. Kitty Frank will present a first-person historical performance, *Fortune and Loss on the Santa Fe Trail* as Kittie Hays, adopted daughter of lifelong bachelor, trader, and frontiersman Seth Millington Hays. Kittie Hays was at the center of it all. Aunt Sally, a free woman, cared for the little girl as if she were her own, while working alongside Seth in the trading post business on the Santa Fe Road. Constantly underfoot, Kittie collected stories of the men, oxen, and mules who moved the heavy freight to and from Santa Fe, the Kaw tribe's last years before being removed to Oklahoma Territory, and the Westport entrepreneurs who partnered with Seth including James Hamilton and Colonel A.G. Boone.

Historical performer Kitty Frank lives near Allen, Kansas with her husband in an area that was formerly Kaw tribal land. She relates to the love of the harshness and beauty of the Flint Hills shared by Kittie Hays and the Kaw tribe. Her other activities include fictional writing and selling vintage clothing online. She has worked in grant writing, grant administration, non-profit management, youth development, health care quality outcomes improvement, and had several bouts as a political candidate. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics from Emporia State University.

At 1:30 p.m. Ann Birney will present *I Just Always Loved the Outside: Flint Hills Farm Girls, 1915 – 1980*. Bertha and Inez Russell, and Edith, Alice, and Emily Bechelmayer of Chase County told Ann Birney stories of corn shocking, mangled fingers, love of tractors, and the loathing of tractors and the love of horses. Ann Birney also spoke with Flint Hills women born after World War II, all of whom worked hard outdoors as children and young women. She will share what she learned from them about change over time in what girls and their fathers thought about the



roles of girls and of women. She will also attempt to answer the question, “Why if girls grew up helping their fathers on the family farm did they not become farm managers?”

Ann Birney is an independent scholar. Her doctorate in American Studies is from the University of Kansas and the focus of her research continues to be women and work. She has been juried onto arts and humanities rosters. Dr. Birney has also been a public, university, and art librarian, as well as a library educator.

In celebration of the National Park Service 2016 Centennial and Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve’s 20 year anniversary, the preserve invites you to discover the meaning of national parks, how your park inspires you – both in personal connections and memorable experiences. Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is located two miles north of Strong City on Kansas State Highway 177 (the Flint Hills National Scenic Byway) and is a unique public/private partnership between the National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy. For additional information on Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, please visit [www.nps.gov/tapr](http://www.nps.gov/tapr), email [tapr\\_interpretation@nps.gov](mailto:tapr_interpretation@nps.gov), call the preserve at (620) 273-8494, or visit the preserve’s facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/NPS.TallgrassPrairie>. To learn more about The Nature Conservancy in Kansas, visit the Conservancy’s website at [www.nature.org/Kansas](http://www.nature.org/Kansas) or Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/TNCKansas>.

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