

## Carl Reed – Tallgrass Express

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

From bluegrass to tallgrass. No, I'm not talking about converting your lawn. I'm referring to the progression of a singer, songwriter and musician who is part of an effort that is celebrating the Kansas Flint Hills. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Annie Wilson of Tallgrass Express String Band. Today we'll meet her fellow lead vocalist in the band, the talented Carl Reed of Manhattan.

Carl grew up in a musical family in Michigan and studied agriculture at Michigan State. After college, Carl volunteered for the Peace Corps and was assigned to a grain laboratory in Costa Rica. While working there, two things happened: One, he met a visiting delegation of grain science specialists from Kansas State University, and two, he bought a guitar. The guitar was for his own pleasure and enjoyment. But when his two-year assignment was up and he was looking for a job, he thought of Kansas State.

Carl wrote K-State to express interest in a job, and he was ultimately hired onto the K-State Grain Science faculty where he worked in international grain programs for nearly 30 years.

Meanwhile, Carl continued to play the guitar. He got into bluegrass music, bought a stand-up bass, and started writing songs. "I had tunes buzzing around in my head," Carl said.

Carl enjoyed the music, but when he saw Annie Wilson perform, he saw something more. It wasn't so much a love of being on stage as much as it was a love of the Kansas Flint Hills which she was promoting through her music.

"When I saw what Annie was doing, I knew I really wanted to support this," Carl said. "She's trying to promote the authentic Flint Hills experience."

In 2009, Carl joined Annie's band, the Tallgrass Express String Band, doing lead vocals and harmony.

"He is an amazing songwriter," Annie Wilson said. "In addition to being a great musician, he is our Kansas historian."

In 2010, with Carl Reed as one of its members, the Tallgrass Express String Band produced a CD of sixteen original Flint Hills songs.

In 2014, the band produced a two-CD set featuring 30 songs, including five by Carl. These include Kansas Song about the state's culture and climate; Song of Samuel Wood, a Kansas leader of the Underground Railroad; Little Ol' Life, a song about life's simple joys; and Freedom Must Prevail, a spirited ballad about the abolitionist movement in Kansas.

The fifth song, titled Letters of Long Ago, is a haunting tune about long-lost love letters which were found when an elderly lady passed away in the rural community of Paxico, population 210 people. Now, that's rural. Here is an excerpt:

(music)

For more information, go to [www.tallgrassexpress.com](http://www.tallgrassexpress.com).

From bluegrass to tallgrass. No, this doesn't refer to your lawn. It describes the progression of this musician from playing bluegrass to being part of a band which promotes the tallgrass prairie of the Kansas Flint Hills. We salute Carl Reed, Annie Wilson, and the other members of the Tallgrass Express String Band for making a difference with their talents. Whether bluegrass or tallgrass, they are making beautiful music together.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.