

## Al Harris – Fowl Territory

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

Let's go into fowl territory. No, I'm not chasing a baseball out-of-bounds. Fowl Territory is the creative name for a store which sells duck decoys and other collectibles, including many other keepsakes relating to waterfowl and various wildlife. It all started with ducks. This store has so many ducks that it is definitely waterfowl territory. The store is connected to an antique store in a rural Kansas community which specializes in vintage collectibles. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Al Harris is the owner and founder of the shop named Fowl Territory. He is an outdoorsman. "I used to hunt a lot when I was younger," Al said. "Now I'm just a big fan of nature." As a young man, he started collecting deer antlers. Then someone gave him a duck decoy. He noticed each decoy was different, so he started collecting various wildlife keepsakes. Someone referred to them as "nature's knick-knacks."

Al went to the University of Kansas. He became a chef and worked in various locations in northeast Kansas. Al became a corporate chef for EVCO, the food distribution company. He even served as chef for Governor John Carlin.

"I worked on the Meals on Wheels program while at Stormont Vail in Topeka," Al said. "We took it from serving 50 people a day to serving 1,150 people per day." Wow.

An old college roommate of Al's owned a building in Paxico. Eventually he and Al became business partners and opened up a shop there in 2015.

For years, Al had been collecting wildlife collectibles on his travels around Kansas. "This meant I finally had a place other than my house to display my entire collection," Al said.

Because he had such a variety of ducks and other waterfowl, they called the store Fowl Territory. Today, the store displays and sells many types of duck decoys and other wildlife keepsakes. There are glass ducks, wood ducks, plastic ducks, taxidermy ducks, prints of ducks, paintings of ducks, and more. There are antlers, mounted deer heads, mounted elk antlers, and lots of related things plus non-wildlife items.

One of his favorites is a massive set of elk antlers. Another item consists of two deer heads with their antlers intertwined. Their heads were locked together. "The guy found them this way," Al said. "They were dead when he found them."

The shop is located in downtown Paxico which has long been a center for antique stores. Next door to Fowl Territory is Main Street Antiques, also owned by Al and his business partner. It includes other antique vendors who rent space for their displays. "We buy, sell, trade, and consign," Al said. "Since we sell things on consignment, that can give people a good option." The place has the look of a man-cave, but inside there is something for everyone.

"We focus on quality," Al said. "I have very good vendors that have a great eye for quality products." Several of those dealers help by taking turns working in the shop.

"You can see stuff here that you've never seen before," Al said. These antique collectibles include such items as a stacking lawyer's bookcase and other furniture, to one-of-a-kind sculptures, old farm equipment, and vintage treasures. "There's an optometrist tool here that was used for checking peripheral vision in the 1900s," Al said.

“We’re trying to build a clientele and attract travelers and collectors off I-70,” Al said. Paxico is well-situated, located just about a mile from the interstate.

The community holds a big blues festival each fall which attracts three-to-five thousand people. During the rest of the year, it’s a quiet, rural community. Paxico has a population of 221 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information on the store, search for Fowl Territory on Facebook.

It’s time to leave fowl territory – not with a baseball, but with an appreciation for nature’s knick-knacks of waterfowl and other wildlife. We commend Al Harris for making a difference by sharing his appreciation of these keepsakes of the outdoors. So if you’re at a baseball game and a foul ball comes right at your head, what should you do? Duck.

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