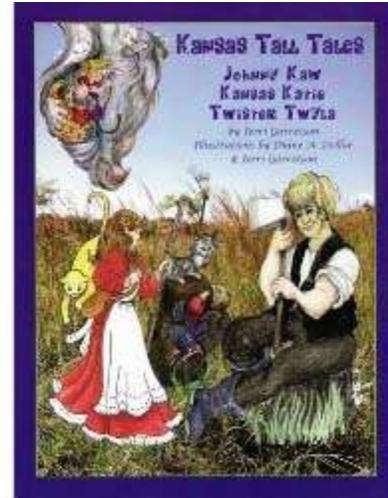


Review of *Kansas Tall Tales* by Jerri Garretson

Review by Jeff Hixon, Deputy Director, Statewide Resource Sharing

Just over ten years ago, the art and tradition of Kansas folklore got a significant boost with the publication of *Johnny Kaw*, Jerri Garretson's lively and inspired recasting for children of a story and character created for the 1955 centennial of Manhattan, Kansas, by Dr. George Filinger. Garretson launched Ravenstone Press to publish the book, and with this anthology marks the tenth anniversary of what might be thought of as a one-woman renaissance.

Johnny Kaw is a contemporary of the likes of Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill, and Finn McCool, and his role in shaping the physical and social landscape of Kansas as told here is sure to make proud Kansans of many a young reader.



Johnny is in good company here with two very different, but feisty, women of Garretson's own creation. *Twister Twyla* is the Kansas cowgirl who loves the wind, is fascinated by rodeo, and decides to combine the two when she realizes that "No horse could go fast enough for her."

Kansas Katie, in her own determined way, has bigger fish to fry than dust devils and tornados. She's not happy with the way men like Johnny Kaw and Paul Bunyan are going about settling the plains, and makes no apologies for her conviction that "that place needed the touch of a woman!" Her solution to this problem, with its sly references to another seed-carrying wanderer, is just right for her and for this atmospheric tale.

Though even the most casual reader will appreciate Garretson's self-described "Plains, cowboy and old-fashioned slang and colloquial English," it's easy to overlook the way she uses it to work with (and sometimes against) the pacing of events and forward motion in the stories. Especially when the story is read aloud – Jerri's storytelling experience really comes through – there is a syncopated feeling that adds a lot to the excitement of the stories. For those who read the three stories straight through, as I had never done before, Katie's first person narrative provides another change of pace at the mid point.

The inclusion of updated background and resource information will appeal to parents, teachers, and librarians, as well as the casual, if slightly older, reader.

I had the great pleasure of working together with Jerri for the North Central Kansas Libraries System, and I do consider her a friend who has been a great joy to my endless need-to-be-told stories. If you are

not yet familiar with this very special and admired writer and her memorable characters, here's a great place to start an acquaintance that I'm sure you will treasure.