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## Flint Hill Nights, Flint Hill Lights

Christy Davis

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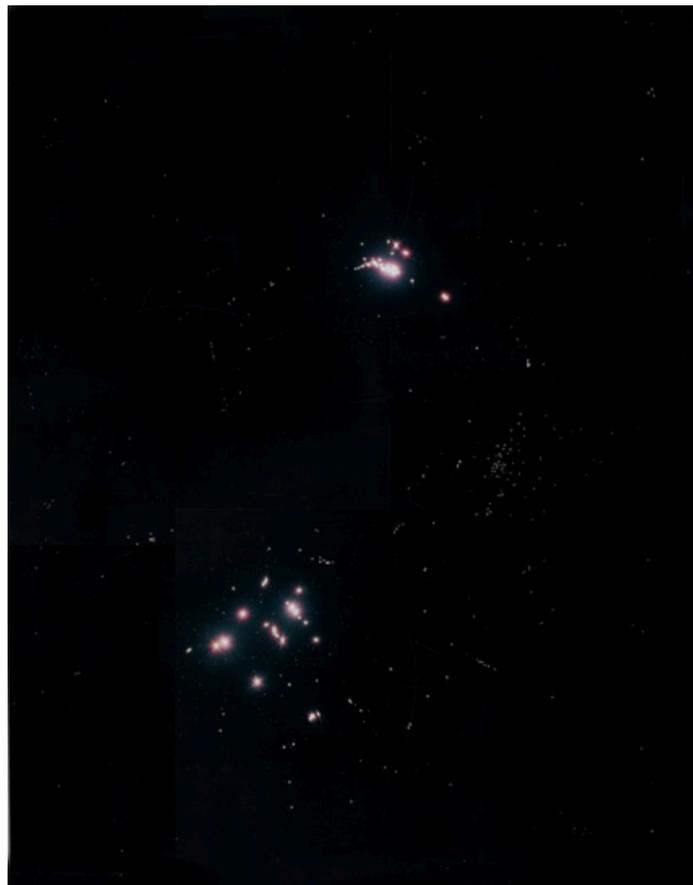
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*Constellation*  
Natalja Kent

## FLINT HILLS NIGHTS, FLINT HILLS LIGHTS

It was the Age of the City. In the fifty years following the Civil War, during the Second Industrial Revolution, eleven million Americans left their rural communities and moved to bustling metropolitan areas.

And although many city dwellers experienced crowded and unsanitary conditions, by the early twentieth century, cities were embracing new technology and aspirational architecture to project a cleaner and safer image. This new City Beautiful Movement was on full display at Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, where the combination of neoclassical buildings and rows of electric street lights created a gleaming "White City."

As Americans became more geographically mobile, towns everywhere sought to compete with their urban counterparts, which they could access via a growing passenger rail network. Salesmen of all stripes had little trouble convincing rural Kansans, many of whom had seen the White City, of the need for electrifying towns of all sizes. And local newspapers rallied the boosters. In 1905, the Cottonwood Falls News-Courant took up the charge: "It is the first duty of Cottonwood Falls to be steadily climbing up and going on and not sliding back. The lighting enterprise is a credit to our town and individuals as well and the city father should recognize and encourage it to the most liberal extent."

The standards set by a temporary fairground in Chicago were impossible for small towns to meet. But that didn't stop them from trying—even though the lighting was designed to address issues to which many rural communities were immune to: urban crime and industrial night shifts. Soon, the bright lights in small cities were eclipsing the constellations and blotting out much of what differentiated rural communities in the first place ... dark night skies and healthy living.

The good news about light pollution is that it, unlike other environmental trends, is easily reversible. By forcing light into the atmosphere, we have not lost the stars—only our ability to see them. There are some very simple steps you can take to reduce light pollution at your home or in your community. First, only use artificial lighting where necessary. If you need to direct light outside, use a shade or shield that keeps the light from clouding the

sky. Look for light fixtures that have been designated “Dark Sky Friendly” by the International Dark-Sky Association. Use timers and motion detectors. And reduce the use of decorative lighting.

Restoring our dark skies in rural communities has many benefits—from improved energy efficiency to gains in insect, animal, and human health—the things that attracted our ancestors to the prairie in the first place.

Christy Davis, Executive Director,  
Symphony in the Flint Hills.



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