

Patty Reece – Volland Store

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 to the store. In this case, we're not going for milk or bread. We are visiting a historic store building which is becoming a cultural and educational center for a rural region of Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Patty Reece and her husband Jerry are owners of the Volland Store, a historic structure in the community of Volland. Patty is from Oklahoma originally. She met and married Jerry, who ultimately developed a successful real estate business in Kansas City. When he and Patty drove to visit her family in Oklahoma, their route would take them through the Flint Hills of eastern Kansas.

"We fell in love with the Flint Hills," Patty said. Their daughter attended K-State. Eventually they bought a home in the Flint Hills of Wabaunsee County.

Their new home was north of the tiny community of Volland, where they spotted a deserted brick building. The windows were gone, the roof was gone, but the walls were still standing. The word was that it was a former store building now owned by an out-of-town descendant.

Meanwhile, Patty got involved in Wabaunsee County. She served as art editor of the Field Journal for the Symphony in the Flint Hills when Wabaunsee County hosted the event. In the process, she worked with local historian Greg Hoots. She learned about Otto Kratzer, the remarkable man who had built the store at Volland. She even met and befriended the current owner, Otto's granddaughter Karen Durso.

Then one day Patty got a call. Karen had received an offer to buy the bricks from the walls which still stood at the site of the Volland store. She was considering the offer but hated to see the building torn down. In the end, Patty and Jerry Reece bought the building and saved it from being destroyed.

The Reeces learned the store's fascinating history. Otto and his brother Bill started a small store in Volland more than a century ago. In 1913, they opened a big, new store in the brick building which still stands. It was a vibrant place. Volland became a major cattle shipping point on the railroad. Railroad crews scheduled their stops at lunch to get good food at the Volland store.

Otto Kratzer passed away in 1971. The descendants moved away and the building fell into disrepair. Through the years, Volland was bypassed by highways. Population left and the community faded away almost entirely.

By the time the Reeces bought the store building, the roof and floors had fallen into the basement. As the Reeces learned the rich history of the building and potential benefit to the community, they decided to save and repurpose it.

"We started out using five gallon buckets and a couple of really strong guys to carry junk out of the basement until we could get equipment in there," Patty said. They cleaned out the junk, stabilized the walls, and are restoring the building.

On June 7, 2015, the Volland store will reopen as a community center for cultural, art, and entertainment events. Various upcoming art displays, meetings, and events are scheduled for the building. A large open space will be at the heart of the building, with a partial second floor providing guest quarters and an artist's studio. "We call it the Loft at The Volland Store," Patty said.

Volland is located on old Highway K-10 southwest of Alma. It is no longer printed on the Kansas map but has recently been added to Google maps – a sign of the times! Four houses remain in Volland. Only one of those is occupied by a single rancher. This means that Volland currently has a population of one. Now, that's rural.

How exciting that such a rural community could become home to a new cultural center for the region. For more information, go to facebook.com/vollandstore.

Let's go to the store – not for milk or bread, but for the history and culture of the community. We commend Patty and Jerry Reece, Greg Hoots and others for making a difference by saving, repurposing and using this building. In the future, this building has lots of good things in store.

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