

## *Our Missouri Podcast*

Title: Episode 14: A Conversation with Missouri's First Lady

Guest: Teresa Parson

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KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. Today's episode is a special one as it was recorded on location at the Governor's Mansion in Jefferson City and features Mrs. Teresa Parson, First Lady of the State of Missouri, and Dr. Gary R. Kremer, Executive Director of the State Historical Society of Missouri. We graciously accepted an invitation from the First Lady to sit down and discuss her life and family as well as her goals for addressing important issues related to the state's culture and history. And now, we take you to the library of the Governor's Mansion for a conversation with Missouri's First Lady.

SEAN ROST: Welcome to the *Our Missouri Podcast*, First Lady Teresa Parson.

TERESA PARSON: Thank you very much. Very happy that you're here today.

GARY KREMER: Thank you Mrs. Parson for hosting us here. We all know who the Governor is, and we know a little bit about his roots. But, many of our listeners don't know who Mrs. Parson is. So, why don't we begin by you just telling us who is Teresa Parson?

TERESA PARSON: Well, basically, I think I'm just a normal Missourian. I come from humble beginnings. I grew up on a farm. I'm actually a very proud mother of two, and I have five grandchildren. And, honestly, my faith and my family give me the strength that I need each day. They carry me through on rough times, and I just rely on them for a lot of support. I actually have been in banking, and retired after forty years of service in banking. I always found time, however, because I think it's important—our next generation—how important it is—so, I always tried to make time to volunteer and do things that involve children.

GARY KREMER: Okay. You said you grew up on a farm.

TERESA PARSON: I did.

GARY KREMER: Was that near Bolivar?

TERESA PARSON: It was. Most of my life has been in and around the Bolivar community. My parents actually had a dairy farm, and I would milk in the evenings while my brothers played sports during high school. They would milk of a morning.

GARY KREMER: How many cows?

TERESA PARSON: About forty.

GARY KREMER: That's a lot.

TERESA PARSON: Yeah. Yeah. Well, it was okay. My dad, actually, when my brothers—I have three brothers—started in sports, they actually would be gone, of course, to practice in the evening. So, I would milk. But, my dad put in a pipeline at that time, so made life easy for me.

GARY KREMER: Did your family raise its own feed for the animals?

TERESA PARSON: Yes.

GARY KREMER: You had hay and corn?

TERESA PARSON: Hay, silage, corn. Yes. Yes. And my dad also—he worked off of the farm as well. A forty hour work week. So, we all helped support the family by putting a little bit of our own selves in to the farm.

GARY KREMER: So did you—growing up, were you in the hay field? Did you drive a tractor? Did you drive a truck?

TERESA PARSON: I did—a little. Most of the time, I would rake. That's about the only thing that dad would allow me to do. And then, of course, I would drive the truck or the tractor when they were loading the hay onto the wagons. But, yeah, I helped.

GARY KREMER: That's pretty cool.

TERESA PARSON: We had a big garden. Each one of us children, I remember, had—that was—during the summer months, that's what we would do. Our duty was, actually, to weed one row each day. So, we all had our own little duties to take care of, and that was one of—we had four of us, so each day four rows from the garden was weeded.

GARY KREMER: So, do you still garden?

TERESA PARSON: We haven't, of course, for the last two or three years. But, after Mike and I married, we lived in town so we didn't do a garden at that time. But, when we moved back and bought some acreage outside of town, yes, we had a little garden for a few years. And it was

always fun because the kids—one day, when the corn was ready and we would go out and we'd pick the corn all together, we would all come back to the house and we would cut the corn and put it away and then split it up and send it home with the kids.

GARY KREMER: So, did you do canning and that sort of thing growing up?

TERESA PARSON: Oh, yes. I've done that in my lifetime as well. Yes. Pressure cooker canning. Green beans. Beets. All kinds. Anything. A lot of things.

GARY KREMER: That's pretty cool. Were your ancestral roots in Polk County?

TERESA PARSON: They were. My grandparents on both sides, actually. One of them came from Kentucky, and the other one came from Tennessee. But, my mom and dad, both, were raised and have lived in Polk County their entire life. They actually just celebrated sixty-eight years of marriage.

GARY KREMER: Really?

TERESA PARSON: They're both living. Both living on their own.

GARY KREMER: That's a real blessing.

TERESA PARSON: It is. It is. Mike and I are real blessed. His mom and dad, before his mother passed away, had celebrated sixty-three years of marriage, before his mother passed away. So, yes, my mom and dad both—and they still live right there in Polk County.

GARY KREMER: Wow. Were they farmers as well?

TERESA PARSON: Are you talking about my grandparents?

GARY KREMER: Yeah. Your grandparents.

TERESA PARSON: My grandparents.

GARY KREMER: I'm sorry, yeah, your grandparents.

TERESA PARSON: My Grandpa Seiner was, but Grandpa Franklin, actually, did not farm very much. He worked for an MFA most of his life. So, he had an agriculture background.

GARY KREMER: In Polk County?

TERESA PARSON: Uh-huh.

GARY KREMER: Yeah. Interesting. What's it like to be First Lady?

TERESA PARSON: Well, it's a different lifestyle. It's very rewarding, very humbling. I enjoy each day waking up. It's still just something that it's unbelievable when you wake up in this particular house. So, it's very rewarding. I enjoy it. I enjoy it.

GARY KREMER: What's a typical First Lady day? Or, is there such?

TERESA PARSON: Well, they vary. They're different. Somedays I travel with the Governor. Somedays I have meetings here—this morning I had meetings here in house. We may have guests. We'll have luncheons. Possibly banquets in the evenings, sometimes. So, it's always busy. There's always something each day. Each day is different.

GARY KREMER: What do you think is the First Lady's biggest challenge in responsibility?

TERESA PARSON: Well, my challenge is finding time for my children and grandchildren. The other things just seem to take place. But, it's hard [and] it's difficult because we are so family oriented that sometimes when the grandchildren have special games or homecomings and different things, we try as much as we can to make time to do that. But, that's the most difficult part is just trying to find time for your family always and keep them always—

GARY KREMER: How many grandchildren?

TERESA PARSON: We have five. We have five.

GARY KREMER: Aged—

TERESA PARSON: Well, actually, from twenty down to eleven. So, that's our daughter and her husband have the five children. Our son and his wife do not have any children, but they live down in southwest Missouri.

GARY KREMER: Have they spent the night here?

TERESA PARSON: Oh, yes. They have. They do not get to spend as much time up here as what Mike and I would like, obviously, but, yes, they've been here.

GARY KREMER: I bet they thought that was pretty cool.

TERESA PARSON: They think it's pretty special, and it is pretty special. So, I'm glad that they feel that way because it is special to come.

SEAN ROST: Before we return to our conversation, let's take a step back in time with Bob Priddy to an event from this week in history in a "Missouri Minute."

BOB PRIDDY: I'm Bob Priddy with this "Missouri Minute." Joseph Pulitzer seemed to have a thing for the number ten. He arrived in Missouri on October 10<sup>th</sup>, cast his first important vote in the Missouri legislature on January 10<sup>th</sup>, and he was born on April 10<sup>th</sup> in 1847. He came to Missouri broke and speaking poor English because a man had told this was a good place to

become Americanized. He became one of our greatest American newspapermen. He got a job on a German paper in Saint Louis, left it to own another German paper for one day, and then he bought the *Saint Louis Post*. Three days after that, the backers of the more successful *Dispatch* decided to merge with him and his paper creating the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*. At the age of twenty-two, only six years after coming to this country, he became a member of the Missouri General Assembly, where he fought against corruption in Saint Louis County government. Eventually, he went to New York. There to publish the *New York World* in its epic circulation battle against William Randolph Hearst's newspaper triggering the era known as "yellow journalism." His health was always precarious. His eyesight always bad. He went blind when he was sixty-four, shortly before his death in 1911. I'm Bob Priddy for the Center for Missouri Studies.

GARY KREMER: Looking forward over the next couple years, do you have any particular initiatives you hope to accomplish while you're First Lady?

TERESA PARSON: Well, as I said earlier, when I did volunteer, I always tried to do things that we related to children. Actually, the Governor and I were involved in the JAG, which stands for Jobs for America's Graduates, during the time that he was in the Lieutenant Governor's office. We actually co-chair the JAG-Missouri board here in Missouri, and Mike is actually a member of the national board as well. Jobs for America's Graduates is a program geared for high school children to keep them in school to help them to get their high school diploma. And then, to put them in to either a workforce or a secondary school or a four-year college if that's where they need to be headed. A lot of these children in this particular program—it is for at-risk students. And a lot of times not because of situations that they're not intelligent—because they're very bright young people—but its family situations a lot of times that they struggle because of something at home. This program engages them and keeps them in school and helps them get into the workforce in whatever capacity that they have.

GARY KREMER: Great.

TERESA PARSON: Yeah. And then, also, another initiative of mine is all children with any type of special needs—and all special needs. But, the reason I chose that is—pretty much has to do with I have a great-niece who has autism and I've seen the struggles and the sacrifices that her family has made. So, that was all children with all of the different special needs, but that's the reason I chose that program. We'll advocate for that and for people—just awareness as to what these children—and a lot of these children, as well, with some type education and help can actually live very productive lives.

GARY KREMER: You've been First Lady and you've lived in this house more than six months—going on a year, really—what have been some of the most memorable events or activities in your time as First Lady and in this house?

TERESA PARSON: Well, immediately after coming in I saw the importance of the docent program here and the volunteers that help in this particular house. I wanted something special for them. So, we had an appreciation luncheon for them one day. Had a coffee and a tea. They were here, so that was pretty special. We've done, of course, the Parson Fall Foliage out on the lawn.

The children always enjoy that. We've followed with trick-or-treating. And, of course, the candlelight ceremony here for the Christmastime. Another special thing that we've had the honor to do is the U.S.S. Missouri nuclear submarine crew was touring the state of Missouri, and we had them and welcomed them in to the Mansion, and was able to use the U.S.S. silver that we have in house here. So, that was a special day because they were traveling our state and we wanted to show our support for them. So, those are some of the highlights, I think, of the things that we've been able to do.

GARY KREMER: I've seen that you refer to this house—the Mansion—as the "People's House." What does that mean to you?

TERESA PARSON: Well, the Governor's Mansion is owned by all Missourians. So, therefore, I think it is the People's House. I just have the opportunity—and Mike, the Governor, has the opportunity to live here for a short period of time. But, this house belongs to all Missourians and that's one of things that when I was not living in this house that I did have interest in knowing more about it. I just, frankly, want to share this house as much as I can for the time period that I'm here. It doesn't always work with everyone's schedule because we do have a lot of things going on that have to take place here in the Mansion, but when we can, we're more than happy to try to schedule groups and share the entire Mansion with them and share our history. That's one of the reasons that we've developed Mr. Buzzaround. Mr. Buzzaround buzzes around the Mansion here and we do 360 [degrees] videos of showing each room because I think the children need to learn about our history because it is so important. There's so many things here—I myself at my age have learned so many things about this building during the time that I've lived here that I did not know before getting here. So, if we can encourage and entice children to learn more about our state's history, that's what I want to do. So, that's why we've developed the mascot, Mr. Buzzaround. We're going to be developing a little coloring book for them to be able to take with the history and be able to color that we can pass out to the children as they enter.

SEAN ROST: For those who are interested in visiting the Governor's Mansion, where can they learn more about the facility and how to book a tour?

TERESA PARSON: They can just go to the Missouri Governor's Mansion website, and there's a tab to book a tour. They can sign up for a tour there.

GARY KREMER: What are some of your favorite spaces and places in the Mansion? What are the things you like about it?

TERESA PARSON: Well, of course, in the residence part, the dining room is pretty special because it is a hand painted wallpapered room. It depicts the dogwood trees and our bluebird and state bird and flower. So, that's a pretty special room. It's bright and it's a happy room. The sunporch is, probably, another second favorite. That's a place where I go out. I do a bible study of a morning and read [with] my coffee and just enjoy the view. It looks toward the Capitol, so I can see the Capitol in the background. And at night, when the dome is lit, it's just gorgeous. So, those two rooms are probably my two favorite rooms in the residence part.

GARY KREMER: I can see why.

TERESA PARSON: Yeah.

GARY KREMER: Soon, in the spring, fourth graders—third and fourth graders—come by the droves, by the hundreds, by the thousands, to Jefferson City, and one of their stops is obviously this magnificent building. When they come here, what can they expect to see and what can they expect to learn?

TERESA PARSON: Well, I think there's so many sites and so many stories to experience about the Mansion. There's so much history here. There's the artwork, the heritage of our state. There's beautiful artwork here. The portraits of the First Ladies. The antiques that's here is quite amazing, and they're absolutely beautiful. So, I just want to share all that with the children.

SEAN ROST: As we prepare for the bicentennial in 2021, what are some things that you are looking forward to?

TERESA PARSON: Well, I think just sharing the state and the Governor's Mansion here as well as the bicentennial for the state. The Governor's Mansion will be having its 150<sup>th</sup> the same year. So, those two things are something that I think we need to enlighten people across the state about and have them make their way to Jefferson City and enjoy their history.

GARY KREMER: What do you think is the most unknown thing about this building that would surprise most people or many people?

TERESA PARSON: Well, if they've done any research on the building—of course, most people would probably know that it was built in 1871. But, calculating that out, we're getting ready to celebrate in 2021 150 years of this building. And so, that's something that's quite enlightening to people. But, probably the most impressive thing we tell people on tours is that the building, the house, was built in [an] eight months time period. That's quite remarkable for a building this size without any power tools at the time. A lot of prison help was used to build the house. The cost of the house was just below \$75,000 at the time. That partially furnished the house as well.

GARY KREMER: It's hard to believe.

TERESA PARSON: So, that's quite remarkable. We've got pretty good use out of our money, I believe.

GARY KREMER: Yeah. I would say so.

TERESA PARSON: So, yeah, it's very beautiful. Something that I went back to research to see how many families had actually lived in the house. Now, there have been a couple governors that were here and then out and then back in again. But, if you actually count the number of families that have lived in the house, there's only been thirty-five families before the Governor and I now that have lived in this house in the 150 years.

GARY KREMER: Wow. That's not that many.

TERESA PARSON: Not that many. Not that many at all.

GARY KREMER: Well, we deeply appreciate your taking time to talk about the People's House with us. Thank you so very much. Is there anything else you want to add about being First Lady or about the Governor's Mansion itself?

TERESA PARSON: Not that I can really think of other than we would encourage everyone—anytime they're in Jefferson City—try to make us a stop on their agenda because this is a fabulous house. There's so many things and so much history here.

GARY KREMER: Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much.

TERESA PARSON: Thank you. Yes.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh. If you are interested in more of the people, places, culture, and history around our Missouri, check out the following upcoming events:

If you're in the mood for a little bluegrass music to kick off your summer, Rolla is the place to be on May 19<sup>th</sup> for Ozark Pickin' Time. This afternoon of music and memories will be held at the Cedar Street Playhouse in Rolla and features Jimmie Allison and Midnight Flight, Jerry Rosa and the Rosa String Works Band, and Marideth Sisco and Accomplices. This event is free and open to the public, though registration is appreciated. While you're there, be sure to check in with staff from the State Historical Society of Missouri to learn how the Historical Society is preserving the state's rich musical history.

With the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center slated to be closed from spring to midsummer 2019 for the move to the newly constructed Center for Missouri Studies, you only have a few weeks left to view three featured art exhibits. In the corridor gallery, the exhibit "Work Artwork" consists of art by staff members and volunteers from the Historical Society's six research centers across the state. In the Main Gallery, visitors will find two exhibits, "Benton's Perilous Visions" and "The Aesthetic of the Monumental Figure." To learn more about these, and other, exhibitions, please visit [shsmo.org/art/exhibits/](http://shsmo.org/art/exhibits/).

National History Day in Missouri is looking for educators, historians, writers, filmmakers, museum staff, and community members to join them at this year's state contest to judge student projects. The state contest will be held on April 27, 2019 at the University of Missouri-Columbia. To thank you for your essential participation in National History Day in Missouri 2019, the State Historical Society of Missouri will provide a light breakfast and lunch, plus a travel stipend of up to \$50 for judges whose round trip mileage exceeds 75 miles. National History Day in Missouri is a unique opportunity for middle and high school age students to explore the past in a creative, hands-on way by producing a documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website on a topic of their choosing. To learn more about National History Day

in Missouri, including judge orientation and how to start a program at your own school, please visit [shsmo.org/nhdmo/](http://shsmo.org/nhdmo/).

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, join Debra Foster Greene, professor emerita of history from Lincoln University, for her presentation entitled, "To Educate and Elevate: The African American Press in Missouri." Part of the African American Experience in Missouri Lecture Series, this presentation will be held at the Memorial Student Union's Stotler Lounge on the University of Missouri's campus and is sponsored by the Missouri Humanities Council, the University of Missouri's Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, and the State Historical Society of Missouri.

Finally, coming up this summer, the *Our Missouri Podcast* will launch a four-part series celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission and moon landing. In an effort to document the history of the moon landing and grow the Historical Society's oral history archive, we will be collecting stories from listeners who are interested in speaking about their memories of this historic event. These "Memories of the Moon Landing" conversations will be preserved in the Missouri Innovation & Exploration Oral History Project (C4352), with some of the stories being featured on the podcast. In you are interested in contributing your story, please contact us by email at "[ourmissouri@shsmo.org](mailto:ourmissouri@shsmo.org)."

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at [shsmo.org/our-missouri](http://shsmo.org/our-missouri).