

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CITIZENS TO PRESERVE B.H. PARK FOUNDATION

The purpose of Citizens to Preserve Black Hawk Park Foundation is “to preserve, improve, and enhance the natural, ecological, historical, and archaeological features of Black Hawk State Historic Site.”

The formation of Citizens To Preserve Black Hawk Park Foundation began in 1972. The official Illinois Department of Transportation plan for the extension of John Deere Expressway showed the highway going through Black Hawk Park and ending at Eleventh Street in Rock Island. The plan called for four twelve-foot lanes, plus a center median. Realizing the detrimental effect such construction would have on the Park, local residents formed the citizens group to alter that plan and threatened litigation if an alternative plan was not developed. The Expressway would stop at 16th Street in Moline until another alternative was developed. State law did not allow expressways to be put through a Park unless no feasible alternative existed. That alternative has resulted in Veterans Memorial Bridge at Carr’s Landing opening in 2007. Crossing the Rock River, this bridge has connected the John Deere Expressway and the Milan beltway, effectively diverting traffic away from the Park, now a Historic Site.

Prior to the 1970’s the Governor of Illinois could sell or give public land to private developers. In 1978 after a developer wanted to obtain Black Hawk Park to develop private housing, State Representative Ben Polk sponsored legislation requiring legislative approval to sell, trade, or give away State land, thus protecting the Park from development.

In 1979 recognizing the importance of Native American presence in Rock Island and the possibility of increased funding in the Historic Sites division, the State of Illinois changed the designation from Park to Historic Site, still under the auspices of the Department of Conservation.

In 1984 the north section of Black Hawk was declared a Nature Preserve. Changes, including drainage, cannot be made that affect a Nature Preserve unless the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission has granted permission.

By 2000 the old storm/sanitary sewer belonging to the City of Rock Island had deteriorated resulting in some sewage release into the Rock River. The proposal to rebuild a new sewer along the Rock River Trail in the same area would have required heavy equipment that in the opinion of archaeology, geology and Site advisors, would destroy the integrity of the cliffs and vegetation below the Lodge. Working together, the City of Rock Island, the Foundation and State Representative Joel Brunsvold were successful in receiving funding to build a lift station, located on Site land, which could pump the sewage in conduits under Blackhawk Road. The integrity of the Rock River trails remains intact.

In 2007, Black Hawk was voted one of the Seven Wonders of Illinois, a well-deserved award from the Illinois Department of Tourism. Thousands of visitors enjoy the Site every year. The Foundation manages rental of the Watch Tower Lodge for wedding receptions, anniversary celebrations, reunions, and other occasions. All profits go to improvements at Black Hawk, providing beyond what the State budget can provide. As the educational support for the Site, the Foundation seeks volunteers to help with tours by school groups, with booths at other venues, and with free programs offered by the Site, such as the Unhuggables, Valentine Walk, and Stroll Through Springtime. The Foundation also recruits volunteers to help remove exotic species such as garlic mustard that crowd out the Site’s native species.

In 2017 the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency became part of the Department of Natural Resources. Black Hawk will remain a State Historic Site although many people call it Black Hawk State park.

All who share in support of the Site are invited to join Citizens to Preserve Black Hawk Park Foundation. Log on to [www.blackhawkpark.org](http://www.blackhawkpark.org) for more information or stop by the Hauberg Museum in the Watch Tower Lodge and pick up a newsletter with a membership form. Facebook postings can be found at Citizens to Preserve Black Hawk Park.