

A BRIEF HISTORY OF “CITIZENS TO PRESERVE BLACK HAWK 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.”

Prior to the 1970’s Governors 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.

The formation of Citizens To Preserve Black Hawk Park Foundation, a non-profit, 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 11th St. 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. State law did not allow expressways to be put through Parks unless no feasible alternatives existed. That alternative has resulted in Veterans Memorial Bridge at Carr’s Landing which opened in 2007. Crossing the Rock River, this bridge has connected the John Deere Expressway and the Milan beltway and has diverted some traffic away from the Park, now a Historic Site. 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 Department of Conservation. Now Historic Sites are part of the Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Natural Resources.

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

By 2000 the storm/sanitary sewer belonging to the City of Rock Island had deteriorated, resulting in some sewage release into the Rock River. The proposal to replace the old sewer along the Rock River Trail 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 in the lower Site picnic area. The lift station pumps sanitary sewage through sewers under Blackhawk Road. The integrity of the Rock River trails remained 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 governs the rental of the Watch Tower Lodge for wedding receptions, anniversary celebrations, reunions and other occasions. Profits go to improve Black Hawk State Historic Site. In addition to providing educational support for the Site, the Foundation seeks volunteers to help with tours by school groups, with educational booths at other venues, and with free programs offered by the Site, such as the Valentine Walk and Stroll Through Springtime. The Foundation’s volunteers help remove exotic species such as garlic mustard that crowd out the Site’s native species.

Improvements to the Site have included updating the Hauberg Indian Museum signage and installing an audio tour, the Saukenuk and fur trade displays, improvements to Singing Bird Center, outdoor signage about the history of the Park/Site, exotic removal in the Black Hawk forest, and the production of trail guides, booklets including “Cooking With Nature’s Bounty” and “The Natural Remedies Book”, postcards and the 52 page, Twelve Moons: A Year with the Sauk and Meskwaki, 1817-1818.

The Foundation’s website, www.blackhawkpark.org contains information about Site events, school visits, bus grants, facility rental, and free lesson plans for use with “Twelve Moons”.

Future generations deserve to experience this gem called Black Hawk State Historic Site. All who share in support of Black Hawk are invited to join Citizens to Preserve Black Hawk Park Foundation. Log on to www.blackhawkpark.org for more information or call (309) 788-9536.