

Heritage Park of North Iowa History

Heritage Park of North Iowa is a subdivision of the Winnebago Historical Society. The Winnebago Historical Society is a 501 (3) (C) organization. Heritage Park of North Iowa's mission is to preserve our local heritage so that future generations will better understand how our region evolved, to educate and to entertain, and to help our region through tourism. It combines preservation activities with living history and tourism in a way that will benefit our community.

Heritage Park of North Iowa was being discussed in the summer of 1997. The goal was to create a regional park that would serve the North Central area of Iowa. It progressed through small group meetings to where a core group of individuals began to explore objectives, location, funding, and organization. In 1998 we had commitments from the Winnebago Historical Society, the Holtan Farm Museum in Winnebago county, the Timberland Museum in Hancock county, the Hanlontown Community Club which sponsored the annual Steam Threshing Days in Worth County, The Hill City Tractor Club in Hancock County, and the Tri-County Antique Power Club in Kossuth County. The commitments were that the Holtan Farm Museum and the Timberland Museum would move to the Heritage Park grounds, The Winnebago Historical Society would become the parent organization, and the three regional farm shows would join together at the Heritage Park grounds. We also began discussions with the Hanson Foundation concerning the financing of a farm owned by Winnebago Industries, Inc., which was located on the South edge of Forest City. In 1999, the Hanson Foundation agreed to lease the farm from Winnebago Industries, Inc. for three years for our use and if we met specified conditions, they would purchase the farm for Heritage Park of North Iowa. Heritage Park of North Iowa accomplished these goals and the 90.69-acre farm was paid for and deeded to the park in the spring of 2001.

Heritage Park of North Iowa now has a 90.69-acre farm, which includes 23.5-acre show grounds, of which approximately 14 acres are fenced in. There are over 40 buildings set up, which are for artifact display, demonstrations, or facility operation. These buildings include log houses, an 1890 church, school houses, houses, barns, fire station, jail, barber shop, gas station, to modern storage buildings all filled with interesting artifacts and machines.

There are artifacts at the park that show American Indian artifacts, fossils, minerals, farm implements and tools, household utensils, turn of the century furniture, looms, farm tractors, steam engines, chain saws, wood carvings (including a 600 foot wood chain), fire engines, antique vehicles, and much more. The demonstrations often include threshing, sawmill operation, shingle production, burr mills, corn shelling, plowing, corn shredding, sorghum processing, spinning wool, trolley rides, quilting, painting, and other miscellaneous crafts found on the farm.

Annual events scheduled include Kite Day, Steam School & Spring Steam Up, Heritage Festival, Heritage Park Tractor Ride, Old Iron Swap Meet and Consignment sale, Steam Threshing Days, and Christmas service and supper. People have traveled from many states to attend these major shows along with our regional public. Several tours during the year are given to tourists, schools, organizations, and the curious.

We have had financial support from the Hanson Foundation, Vision Iowa CAT grant, Winnebago Industries, Inc., Hancock County Supervisors, Hancock Foundation, Worth County Supervisors, Worth County Development Authority, Winnebago County Supervisors, Winnebago County Community Foundation, Holland Contracting, Ron Holland House Moving, Teamquest Corporation, Forest City Rotary Club, Forest City Lions Club, Forest City Chamber of Commerce, the city of Forest City, 3M, Manufacturer's Bank & Trust, Black Hills Energy, Farrer Endowment Foundation, Kinney Lindstrom Foundation, and many small businesses and individuals.

We have been fortunate to have many volunteers for both labor and equipment. Their ages run from pre-teenagers to 95 years old. We have received almost 100,000 volunteer hours of assistance so far. Our members come from a wide range of skills and abilities. Some own heavy construction equipment, others have skills that vary from banking, teaching, welding, cabinetmaking, house moving, farming, building construction, administrators, and people who just want to help. Volunteers comment that they find it a very rewarding project and we find that their assistance and knowledge to be very productive. The enthusiasm of our members can be contagious! Our website is www.heritageparkofnorthiowa.com.

Please contact Jim Oulman, 641-585-4332 if you have any questions.