

Welcome to Crawford County



Celebration Belle Riverboat, Prairie du Chem

Crawford County should be savored and enjoyed, not hurried through. In this unglaciated county, roads follow the rhythm of the land, and farms and orchards are contoured around the twisting hills and valleys. There's a wealth of opportunity for the hunting, fishing, birding, hiking, biking, and canoe enthusiast!

THE FAMOUS RIVERS OF CRAWFORD COUNTY

The Mississippi River's beauty in this area rivals the Rhine and surpasses the Hudson, giving the visitor a romantic thrill of having stepped into one of Mark Twain's visions.

From the bordering highways, one beholds an ever-changing panorama of wind-and-water carved rock formations and colorful bluffs. The rivers are filled with hundreds of wooded green islands and water concourses, challenging to the exploring boater or photographer.

The Wisconsin River is a famous waterway that was the center of the bloody dispute over the Fox-Wisconsin river route that connected the Mississippi with the Great Lakes. The Wisconsin River delta is like an outstretched palm reaching for the Father of Waters. Father Marquette and Jolliet viewed the mighty Mississippi from towering bluffs at this confluence.

The Kickapoo River is one of the most crooked rivers in the world. Snaking its way 100 miles through the Kickapoo Valley, it covers a

distance of only 33 linear miles. This river provides nature's photographic wonderland, which can be viewed from the many highways that follow its winding path. One of the best views of the Kickapoo can be seen from the apple orchard road above Gays Mills. This river is an exciting adventure to the canoe travelers.

This heartland of the Upper Mississippi River abounds with excellent fishing for pan and sports species. There are numerous launching ramps and several marinas with small boat and houseboat rentals. The backwaters of this area provide a meandering series of waterways into nature's extravaganza. The area is renowned for hunting waterfowl, deer, grouse, squirrel, and rabbit. Fly fishing for trout on the many streams of Crawford County is yet another adventure to be had.

The Driftless Area, with many trails, is a haven for the hiker. The back roads of the area are ideal as bicycle ways. Bicycling the back roads and main roads of Crawford County is a growing interest, and we see more and more people touring on bikes. Some camp at Sugar Creek Campgrounds, Stump Dodger Campgrounds in Gays Mills, and at other sites. In a rural area of many nationalities, you are provided an unusual array of antiques with the antique stores of various styles being located along almost every byway. Rock and fossil collectors will find this a geological area of rich exploration.

There are many exceptional supper clubs

Don't Miss...

- The Kickapoo River (One of the most crooked rivers in the world)
- Prairie Villa Rendezvous
- Soldiers Grove America's First Solar Village
- Gays Mills Orchards
- The Mississippi River
- The Wisconsin River
- The Great River Road
- Fort Crawford Museum
- Spring Fest and Folk Fest - Gays Mills
- Rummage Along the River - Stoddard, Genoa, Victory, De Soto, Ferryville, Lynxville, Seneca
- Soldiers Grove Dairy Days
- Prairie Dog Blues Festival - Prairie du Chien
- Kickapoo Stump Dodger Bash - Gays Mills
- Crawford County Fair - Gays Mills
- Apple Festival - Gays Mills
- Villa Louis Carriage Classic
- Driftless Area Art Festival - Soldiers Grove



Prairie du Chien tourism center



and restaurants in the region. The unusual and historic eateries include a grill and bar, deli, and fine family dining. Nationally and locally renowned quick food stands also balance the hunger needs of visitors to the area.

The West begins in Crawford County, at the heart of the Upper Mississippi River bluff country, where you find a combination of scenery and history unsurpassed anywhere in the Midwest.

The rich historical lore found here in the exploits and daring of men and women who made the Northwest is equally fascinating to the casual visitor or learned traveler. The first American flag flown on Wisconsin Territory was raised here on September 4, 1805, on the visit of Lieutenant Zebulon Pike to explore the Upper Mississippi.

■ FORT CRAWFORD MUSEUM

Located at the confluence of the Wisconsin River with the Mississippi River, Prairie du Chien was of economic and military importance in the early 19th century. The British controlled the prairie and the Upper Mississippi Valley, along with the fur trade, until the close of the War of 1812. To establish the presence of the U.S. in the region, a chain of military forts was constructed: Fort Armstrong at Rock Island, Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, and Fort Snelling at the mouth of the Minnesota River.

The first Fort Crawford was a log structure, constructed in 1816 by the U.S. Army. It was built in the Main Village, located in what is now St. Feriole Island. A series of floods in the 1820s forced the War Department to move Fort Crawford to the mainland of Prairie du Chien. In 1829 the second Fort Crawford was erected. Built of local limestone, the fort sat

atop the highest ground, looking down on the Mississippi River. Stone barracks formed a quadrangle; outside the compound, a one story L-shaped hospital was built, facing south.

Fort Crawford was staffed throughout the 1830s. Troops stationed at the fort were involved in the Black Hawk War and the construction of the military road from Prairie du Chien to Green Bay. Here, Dr. William Beaumont performed many of his experiments on Alexis St. Martin to determine how humans digest food.

In the 1840s, Fort Crawford was abandoned. It was used as a recruiting station during the Mexican War and again during the Civil War. In 1872, the fort property was purchased by John Lawler, and he had a school for young women built where the barracks had once stood. The hospital fell into ruin and was often the subject for paintings executed by the students attending St. Mary's Institute.

The second Fort Crawford Hospital was first occupied in 1831, with Dr. William Beaumont as the first surgeon. Zachary Taylor, Jefferson Davis, and Chief Black Hawk are also associated with the second Fort Crawford. Some tireless DAR women bought the site in the 1920s, and in the 1930s it was reconstructed as a WPA project, with restoration completed in 1960. Since 1995, the museum has been owned and operated by the nonprofit Prairie du Chien Historical Society. The restored Fort Crawford Hospital contains exhibits on Dr. William Beaumont and his experiments, Fort Crawford, Black Hawk's surrender, and the use of Fort Crawford as a recruiting station during the Civil War, and the Swift United States Army General Hospital, one of three Civil War hospitals in Wisconsin.

An additional museum contains exhibits on the first railroad to cross Wisconsin, Mississippi River clamming and boating, and a special exhibit on the 200th anniversary of Fort Crawford. It is open daily 9 am to 4 pm as a museum from May through October. It is a National Historic Landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

■ VILLA LOUIS

Villa Louis is a Victorian country estate with one of the nation's finest collections of late 19th century decorative arts. Home of three generations of the Hercules L. Dousman family, the site today includes 25 acres of land on St. Feriole Island. The Dousman family rose to prominence during the last days of the Upper Mississippi Fur Trade.

Through timely investments in farm lands, lumber, steamboats, and railroad stock they became prominent and wealthy leaders in the economic and social development of southwestern Wisconsin. Villa Louis also includes sites, structures, and exhibits pertaining to the French-Canadian Fur Trade, 1816 Fort Crawford, and the War of 1812 in Wisconsin. The Villa Louis Historic Site opens for the season in May and closes the end of October. Call 608.326.2721 for hours and days open.

■ PRAIRIE DU CHIEN

Prairie du Chien, French meaning "Prairie of the Dog," was named for a clan or family of Fox/Meskewaki who lived on the prairie. The name is unique and the only known community in the world so named.

Long before the coming of the white men, the prairie was neutral ground where Indians met, most often to trade. It was claimed for France in 1673 by Marquette and Jolliet, who were the first white men to view the Upper Mississippi from the Wisconsin River.

Nicolas Perrot established a fur depot (fort) in the 1680s and named it for his patron saint. The first known white settlers came in the 1770s. After the Revolutionary War, it was part of the Northwest Territory, the Indiana Territory, the Illinois Territory, the Michigan Territory, the Wisconsin Territory, and finally in 1848, the State of Wisconsin.





Prairie du Chien was founded after Green Bay, which is the oldest European settlement in Wisconsin. American troops built Fort Shelby in 1814, and the British captured the fort in the same year. The first Fort Crawford was built in 1816 and the second in 1829. Chief Black Hawk surrendered to fort personnel and was imprisoned at the fort in 1832.

Today, Prairie du Chien is a community of over 6,000 residents. Located along the Mississippi River and towering bluffs, the community offers unlimited recreational opportunities, scenic beauty, and historic sites. It has become a popular tourist destination in southwest Wisconsin. Unique shopping, a variety of dining, attractions for all ages, family-oriented annual events, plus over 40 lodging properties keep people coming back year after year. For tourism information, contact the Prairie du Chien Area Chamber of Commerce/Tourism Council, 211 S. Main, Prairie du Chien, 800.732.1673, or visit their website at prairieduchien.org

■ CRAWFORD COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Crawford County was formed in 1820. The courthouse as it stands today was built in several stages. The oldest central section dates back to 1867. An earlier courthouse on this site was built in 1836, when Wisconsin became a territory. The Territorial Prison, referred to as the “Dungeons,” is located in the basement. The Territorial Prison—or more practical word, jail—since its function

was to hold felons for only a short time, is believed to have been constructed in 1843, five years before Wisconsin became a state. The jail was operational from that point on until the present jail was erected in 1896. A monument to Robert Lester, the Sheriff of Crawford County killed in the line of duty in 1844, when Wisconsin was still a territory, is located at the entrance to the Sheriff’s Department headquarters at the Courthouse. The building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

■ ST. GABRIEL’S CHURCH, SCHOOL, AND CEMETERY

The parish dates back to the 1820s and the stone church to 1836. The early settlers met in a log cabin on the banks of St. Feriole Slough. In 1908, the church was modernized when the twin spires and the new front were added. Father Galtier, early priest and the founder of St. Paul, is buried in front of the church. The cemetery behind the church holds the graves of most of Prairie du Chien’s early Catholics. St. Gabriel’s is the oldest operating parish in Wisconsin.

■ GAYS MILLS

The Gays Mills area is the center of the largest and most concentrated apple orchard area in the Tri-States. Mother’s Day Weekend is the date for the Annual Spring Festival. For up-to-date information on the dates of full bloom, call one of the orchards, or 608.735.4810. The apple harvest starts with

early apples in August, and continues through mid-October. Some apple salesrooms are open until Christmas. The Annual Gays Mills Apple Festival is the last full weekend in September. The Pioneer Log Cabin Village and Museum of the Kickapoo are also located in Gays Mills, Wisconsin.

■ ENJOY THE ORCHARD EXPERIENCE

From the junction of Highways 61 and 171 east of Gays Mills to three miles west of Gays Mills are the famed orchards of southwestern Wisconsin. From August through December of each year there is a different experience and a different atmosphere to enjoy at each orchard. In addition to apples, strawberries, and cherries, some orchards grow grapes, plums, squash, and pumpkins, plus other Wisconsin and local products are displayed during the season.

■ PRAIRIE VILLA RENDEZVOUS

It’s a new century at the natural crossroads formed by the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. The annual Prairie Villa Rendezvous in Prairie du Chien invites men, women, and their families from all walks of life to dress in their authentic buckskins and calico dresses as they recreate life as it was in the 1840s, when Prairie du Chien was the hub of the Mississippi Valley fur trade.

As one of the largest trading reenactments in the Midwest, with over 400 lodges,

visitors can visit and observe skilled craft persons as they demonstrate spinning yarn, woodcarving, basket weaving, pottery making, and beading. Period black powder rifles, clothing, hats, and beads are just a few of the many items you can purchase.

As you stroll through the Rendezvous, you'll smell the aromas coming from the buckskinners' lodges, where meals of venison stew, dumplings, fry bread, and kettles of coffee are prepared over an open fire. The Jaycees, co-sponsors with the Big River Long Rifles, are cooking their popular buffalo burgers for everyone to enjoy. Fry bread, Indian tacos, root beer, sarsaparilla, caramel corn, and other foods characteristic to the 1840s are also available for you and your family to enjoy.

Registered participants will compete in flint and steel fire starting, black powder shooting, hawk and knife throw, bull whip, and women's and children's games. This special event is always held Father's Day weekend on St. Feriole Island.

■ OTHER EVENTS

Ice Fisheree—first weekend in February; St. Patrick's Day Parade—weekend of St. Patrick's Day; Chamber of Commerce Fireworks; War of 1812—weekend following the 4th of July; Prairie Dog Blues Festival—last weekend in July. See a complete listing in Calendar of Events.

■ TOURISM INFORMATION:

For tourism information, contact the Prairie du Chien Area Chamber of Commerce/Tourism Council, 211 S. Main, Prairie du Chien, 800.732.1673, or visit their website at prairieduchien.org.

Fort Crawford Museum: 608.326.6960
Villa Louis Historic Site: 608.326.2721
Prairie du Chien Public Library: 608.326.6211
Wisconsin Room at University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Karrmann Library, Platteville
Lower Wisconsin River Genealogical and Historical Research Center, PO Box 202, Wauzeka, WI 53826-0202,

■ LYNXVILLE

Visitors will often see barges, the Delta Queen, Mississippi Queen, or the American Queen at Lock and Dam No. 9 locking through as they travel the Mississippi River. Roadside overlooks are available. Lynxville provides boat slip rentals, tourist information, etc. Also in Lynxville, you will

find a resort with a bar, lodging, a marina, and campground. The Lock and Dam provide an excellent opportunity to see barges, pleasure boats and the paddle boats lock through to get to the next section of the river. This is a great chance to be up close and see the whole process.

■ SOLDIERS GROVE

Soldiers Grove area provides a unique opportunity to explore America's first solar village, with buildings designed to exploit solar energy—perhaps the only solar village in the U.S. Both country-style and elegant Victorian-style dining and lodging are available locally as well as campgrounds and trailer parks, and a full complement of business services.

■ FERRYVILLE

The Village of Ferryville was first called Humblebush. When the ferry started running from Humblebush (Ferryville) to Lansing, they changed the name to Ferryville. Ferryville has lodging, three restaurants, pottery, collectibles, antiques, and some of the most beautiful views of the river from the observation deck. Sugar Creek Park is a terrific place to picnic and/or camp. The public boat launch is actively used to access the Mississippi River for pleasure boating, birding, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and hunting. This is the widest point on the Mississippi River and the sunsets are glorious year-around. Hiking at Sugar Creek Bluff is a new adventure that gives a panoramic view of the Mississippi River Valley in all directions and can be accessed during all four seasons.

■ DE SOTO

De Soto is a small village on the banks of the Mississippi River. Located on the Great River Road, it was once part of the Northwest Territory that once was the home of the Winnebago Indians. In 1837, the Winnebago's lost most of their land east of the Mississippi River in a treaty with the U.S. From 1820 to 1854, it was known as the Winneshiek Landing, Bad Axe County. The first settlers did not like the Indian name and finally settled on De Soto after Hernando De Soto, who discovered the Mississippi River. It became a center for grain and lumber to be shipped on the river. The town grew with hotels, a creamery, breweries, sawmills, grain elevators, warehouse, shoemakers, copper shop, blacksmith

shop, general store, doctors and lawyers. Today, De Soto is a small community where people enjoy being away from the hustle of the city. Restaurants, taverns, motels, and a boat landing are available to the people who come to fish, hunt, and enjoy the great Mississippi River.

■ MOUNT STERLING

On the way to the orchards, stop off at the Mount Sterling Cheese Co-op. The co-op has won several awards for their goat cheese, including the Wisconsin State Fair (home of the World's Champion Cheddar Cheese).

■ WAUZEKA

Wauzeka is a quiet little town located at the mouth of the Kickapoo River which flows into the Wisconsin River. The Kickapoo Indian Caverns along Highway 60 once served as a shelter for the prehistoric Indians of the valley.

Also located here is the Lower Wisconsin River Genealogical and Historical Research Center, a very active group in genealogical research.

"Currents through History" maps of the Lower Wisconsin River are available. Write: Lower Wisconsin River Genealogical and Historical Research Center, PO Box 202, Wauzeka, WI 53826.

A boat landing on Front Street accommodates canoeists and boaters alike. The floating dock enables fishing right from shore and is handicap accessible. Bathrooms are on site. Century Hall is a restored theater and a community center.

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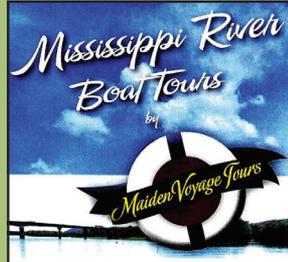
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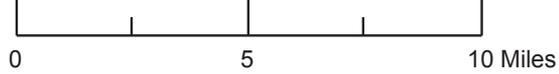
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