

The Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation is a member supported non-profit that preserves and stewards land and water for the lasting well-being of all people and wildlife.

Because Jo Daviess County does not have a forest preserve or county conservation district to protect and make available parks and recreation areas, JDCF provides this service to our community. We currently have over 1,500 acres open where the public can enjoy outdoor activities for free without the use of local tax dollars.

JDCF is only able to do this work through the support of individuals such as you. Annual membership begins at just \$50.00 for you and your entire family! Click the QR Code below and join today.



Jo Daviess
Conservation Foundation
Preserving Land - Now & Forever

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Maa Pij

("Good Earth")

Center for Science & Culture

1221 N Ferry Landing Rd, Galena, IL

Visitor's Guide

A 316-Acre Nature Reserve Owned by the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation & Co-managed with the Ho-Chunk & Sac and Fox Nations.



www.jdcf.org

Welcome!

The Maa Pij ("Good Earth" in the Ho-Chunk language) Preserve is a place that welcomes all people to gather, learn, and participate; where scientific applied conservation methods and Indigenous cultural knowledge come together through land, food, and community.

The Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF) received the donation of this 316-acre preserve from Nancy Winter through the Hamill Family Foundation, who purchased the property to protect the significant Indigenous history of the site in 2011. In addition to burials, the land here drew people for other cultural ceremonies as well as provided food and medicine found in abundance within the native prairies and forests that once flourished here. This land holds deep layers of human heritage and it remains a sacred site to the descendants of these first people

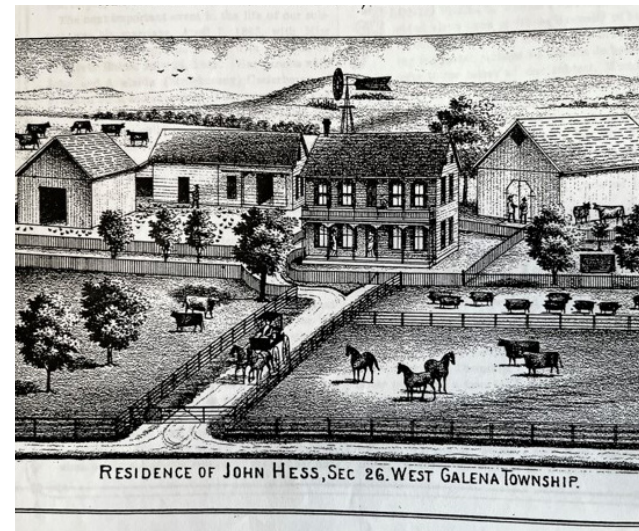


A traditional Ho-Chunk lodge now sits alongside the 1885 farmhouse, both of which host programs.

of Illinois including Ho-Chunk, Sac and Fox, Meskwaki, and Potawatomi.

In 2024, JDCF celebrated the dedication of the preserve as a Center for Science and Culture - a hub for education and outreach curriculum in partnership with our tribal partners, local schools, and community members. The historic 1885 Hess House has been re-purposed to create a space that can host programs year-round regardless of weather. People of all ages can tend to the three sisters garden where traditional indigenous foods, such as Teejop Wicawas (Ho-Chunk four lakes corn) are grown. The prairie and woodlands provide endless space for learning and reconnecting to the natural world.

The preserve is only open to the public for specific programs and events, all of which can be found on JDCF's website, www.jdcf.org.



The Hess farm depicted in the publication "1889 Portrait & Biographical Album of Jo Daviess County" (Chicago: Chapman Brothers)

These are ancestral Native American homelands

By the mid 1800s, nearly all Indigenous people had been forced from Illinois, sometimes through violence and land grabs, by the State and Federal Government’s use of the ‘Indian Removal Act of 1830.’ The result was the displacement of Native Americans from their traditional homeland to reservations, oftentimes very far away from their ancestral lands. The dire repercussions of this Act are still being felt throughout Native American communities to this day.

Native American People Today

Today, over a dozen Federally recognized Tribes call what is now NW Illinois part of their ancestral homelands. Many of the descendents of the people who once lived here have reservation and non-reservation communities in Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska.



Chloris Lowe Jr, twice past president of the Ho-Chunk Nation, shares his knowledge with JDCF’s Camp Casper campers.

A Brief Overview of Maa Pij

This remarkable piece of land holds a tremendous amount of natural and human history. Geographically, its western edge once featured “the portage, a narrow neck of land between the Fever (now Galena) and Mississippi Rivers, so named because the Indians and traders were accustomed to carry their canoes and goods across to save the journey down to the mouth of the Fever River and back up again.”* The portage is clearly marked on early maps of Jo Daviess County.

At roughly the same time that the portage was removed, so too were the first peoples who used it a millennia ago, the ancestors of modern-day Indigenous Nations who once called northwest Illinois home. Drawn to the fertile ground of the southern Driftless region, Indigenous peoples farmed the ‘good earth’ found here for centuries prior to European contact. The Federal Government’s ‘Indian Removal Act of 1830’ forced nearly all native peoples east of the Mississippi River to move west onto reservation lands. In 1865, John Hess acquired this property and in 1885 built the historic farm house that still stands today. The Hess Family retained ownership of the property for three generations until its purchase from the Georgine Hess Trust by the Hamill Family Foundation in 2011.

Although absent for almost 200 years, ancestors of the Ho-Chunk Nation, Sac and Fox Nation, and other indigenous peoples remain, buried in

ancient cemeteries that sit high on the bluffs at the western edge of Maa Pij. These State and Federally protected burial grounds are near an overlook where the two rivers converge and where water, land, and sky meet in an expansive view down the Mississippi River valley. This view of the three elements of nature is held sacred by Indigenous people to this day. Before engaging with our Tribal Partners, we at JDCF viewed this area as sacred because of the presence of the hallowed ground. But we have learned that the opposite is true - that the burials were placed due to the sacredness of the place itself.

Today, much like the portage of old, the land at Maa Pij is acting as a bridge, one that is reconnecting past to present by welcoming back the modern-day descendants of the various Indigenous people who lived here dating back thousands of years. We now see Maa Pij as a hub for science and culture, a place for exploring diverse ways of stewarding the land, a place that mixes Indigenous knowledge of care for the land with western scientific understanding of this place. Few sites like this currently exist in the US. It is JDCF’s hope that this new model of stewardship is adopted by other conservation organizations throughout the Midwest.

**“History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois” (Chicago: H.F. Kett & co. 1878)*



Where water, land, and sky meet.



The ‘good earth’ at Maa Pij. (c) Henry Matthiessen III



Indigenous-led woodland burn in 2023.