

WELCOME TO CRAWFORD COUNTY

THE LAND OF THREE RIVERS



Photo Credit: Danika Wehling

**DESOTO • EASTMAN • FERRYVILLE • GAYS MILLS • LYNXVILLE • SENECA
PRAIRIE DU CHIEN • SENECA • SOLDIERS GROVE • STERLING • WAUZEKA**

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS AGO, IN THE LATE 1600S, THE FIRST EUROPEAN SETTLERS CAME TO CRAWFORD COUNTY.

Their mission was fur trading, and thanks to their success, Prairie du Chien became the second permanently settled community in Wisconsin.

Today, Crawford County draws visitors from around the region to enjoy boating and fishing along the Mississippi River, kayaking and canoeing down the Kickapoo River, apple picking in the area's prolific orchards, and visiting the historic sites that provide a glimpse into the early years.

Panoramic views bring nature to the forefront, showing off the riverside bluffs, native prairies, and the beauty of the Driftless landscape, unscathed by glaciers.

Gays Mills is a widely acclaimed apple capital, and visitors travel hundreds of miles every year to pick, eat, and bring home bags of the bountiful fruit. Gays Mills's apple history dates back to 1905, when farmers discovered that land along the Kickapoo River was well-suited for growing apples. Today, apple orchards thrive, covering more than 1,000 acres in Gays Mills, and every year in September, the Gays Mills Apple Festival celebrates the harvest with parades, carnivals, music, and food.

Near the Crawford County Fairgrounds in Gays Mills, the Log Cabin Heritage Park pays tribute to the folk architecture of the Kickapoo Valley. Six log buildings sit along a spring-fed creek, giving people an idea of early community life.

Soldiers Grove has become a destination for tourists with its annual Driftless Area Art Festival, held in September. Set against the backdrop of the Driftless hills and valleys, the fair exhibits all types of fine art, showing off the works of painters, potters, woodworkers, weavers, and metal smiths from the region and beyond, with local food purveyors, wineries, and musicians plying the crowds, as well.

Tourism is a major economic driver in Crawford County, and outdoor recreation is among the biggest attractions. Fishing tournaments draw anglers to the Mississippi River while the slower, picturesque Kickapoo River is a hot spot for kayakers and canoeists as they paddle along the winding waters.

For history buffs, St. Feriote Island is the site of the region's beginnings. In 1673, explorers Marquette and Joliet made their way to the confluence of the Mississippi River and the Wisconsin River, and French Canadians began settling there to engage in the fur trade. In the early 1800s, Fort Shelby was built on the island. It was the site of a battle between British and Americans during the War of 1812 where it was burned down. Fort Crawford was later built at the same site twice, as floods destroyed the first structure.

St. Feriote Island houses Villa Louis, the mansion built by fur trader Hercules Dousman in 1843. A Wisconsin State Historic Site and a National Historic Landmark, Villa Louis is open for tours, and nearly all of its artifacts are original furniture, silver items, and other antiques from the Dousman family. The Dousman House is another restored historical landmark. Built in 1864 to accommodate travelers on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad—which had a popular depot on the island—the hotel hosted presidents and other dignitaries. It was later converted into a meat-packing plant and then a warehouse, but is now a venue for weddings and other events. Also on the island, the Mississippi River Sculpture Park beckons with life-sized bronze sculptures depicting the area's history.

Crawford County shares a close relationship with its neighbors across the Mississippi River in Marquette and McGregor, Iowa, where visitors to Pikes Peak State Park and historic museums often cross to the Wisconsin side to get a bigger view of the Driftless and its origins.

FOR CALENDAR OF EVENTS & CURRENT INFORMATION: WWW.HIDDENVALLEYS.COM

TOP 10 CRAWFORD COUNTY DESTINATIONS

1
VILLA LOUIS HISTORIC SITE
Prairie du Chien

2
GAYS MILLS ORCHARDS
Gays Mills

3
THE SWEET TOOTH
Prairie du Chien

4
ST. FRANCIS HERMITAGE
Gays Mills

5
EAGLE'S LANDING WINERY
Marquette, IA

6
MISSISSIPPI RIVER SCULPTURE PARK
Prairie du Chien

7
SUGAR CREEK WINERY & SPIRITS
Ferryville

8
MUSEUM OF UNREMARKABLE OBJECTS
Gays Mills

9
PRAIRIE FUN LAND
Prairie du Chien

10
FERRYVILLE LOOKOUT
Ferryville



Mississippi River Sculpture Park
Photo Credit: Dena Nechkash



St. Francis Hermitage



The Sweet Tooth



Sugar Creek Winery



Eagle's Landing Winery



Villa Louis Historic Site



McGregor Historical Museum



Museum of Unremarkable Objects

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