

# HERITAGE

Johnson County Heritage Trust • Environmental Journal Spring 2011





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*Heritage* is published four times a year. If you have articles, photographs, or ideas you'd like to contribute please do so.

**Front Cover:** Thanks to **Dana Noble** who has been taking photos on our JCHT properties. This one is from Big Grove  
**Back Cover and Pg. 7:** Dana Noble, yes, we're thinking of spring! Back cover, Hora Woods and pg. 7, Shimek.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The ground still has its blanket of snow yet all the signs of the spring renewal process are emerging:

- The sun is higher in the sky
- The days are getting longer
- The early spring birds are arriving
- And my spirits are soaring

I love all of the seasons of Iowa, each carries with it a special charm. But spring, the season of rebirth, generates the greatest anticipation and excitement in me.

My earliest rite of spring is maple syruping. By all appearances the forest remains lifeless in late February and early March yet in all the trees there is tremendous activity. Life giving sap travels from its winter storage vessels (roots), to the very tips of every branch to fuel the recreation of the most beautiful and varied solar panels on the planet. Tapping into this process in a small way does no harm and yields one of nature's sweetest nectars.

As this process is drawing to a close, all the fields and forests begin to burst into life. Katherine and I frequently take excursions, what we call our "trillium walks," looking for the first of the many spring ephemerals. One can hardly keep up with the bursting forth of new life.

And then I will begin the third of my spring rituals. I wander through the woods first looking up and then intentionally searching the forest floor. This ritual begins on the south and west slopes and continues for several weeks. I am hunting for the elusive morel mushroom. In this process I discover many more signs of rebirth and renewal.

This spring there will be another significant change for me. After serving 6 years on the board of JCHT, I (and three other great board members) will be "termining out." It has been an honor and a privilege to serve this excellent organization in this most important conservation moment. As has been the case every spring for the past thirty years, the JCHT Board will renew itself with new talented board members.

I will remain involved, but do want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your support of our mission: to preserve our natural heritage through protection and management of land and water with significant environmental value.

All the best, Dick Schwab



One of the views at the Lust property

## THE LUST LAND AND EASEMENT

by Casey Kohrt

On February 23, 2010, JCHT got an unsolicited email from Gary and Sharon Lust about their property. In part it said:

“We own a 160 acre property in Newport township, just off Newport road. This has 40 acres of crop land and the remainder is timberland. ... We have seen very good work done

by a conservation land trust in Teton Valley, Idaho, and wish to pursue the idea that our land may be of interest to your organization. ... This land occupies the largest roadless area between Highway One and Newport Road, which is one of the largest roadless areas in the county, and provides a corridor ... is rich in native timber species. We have been approached for years by real estate developers who would like to develop the property and would not like to see that happen...”

Of course we were interested, and quickly got to work researching the land that the Lusts owned. From public sources I scoured real estate boundaries, historic photos, land-use information, and any other pertinent data. The property looked very promising, and it has a contiguous woodland corridor to our Omara-Newport property. I couldn't wait to get out and see the property. I contacted the Lusts and set up a day to meet them at their property so the land acquisition and protection committee members could take a tour of the land.

On March 22, 2010, about five JCHT members met the Lusts and took a tour of part of the property. We met them at their house and talked briefly about the property. We then started off down the runway (Gary was a pilot with several planes) that was bordered by crop fields.

We entered the woods to the east of an old pine-spruce plantation that belongs to the neighbors. This woodland was relatively young and was typical of a successional woodland (it was open in the historic aerial photos). The grazing industry in the state largely collapsed in the 1960s and many former pastures converted to woodlands, with dominant trees being elm, ash, walnut, sometimes red oak. The understory did have a lot of gooseberry, indicative of former pasture. There were also some undesirable species such as autumn olive. This first trail led us down to a picturesque pond where the spring peepers were calling their spring song. I could see some mature oak woodland on the other side and asked that we go in that direction.

This led us to the southern end of the property. Once again the historic photos had shown that this section had been forested since at least the 1930's by mature trees. This area did not disappoint; it was dominated by large, grand red and white oak trees and large deep valleys cutting through it.



Sharon and Gary Lust

We then took off cross-country and walked across the dam that formed the pond, noticing several flowering native hawthornes. When we came up out of that valley were on the perimeter of a large spruce-pine plantation that was in a state of decline. There were openings in the canopy where hardwoods and hawthornes were taking hold. The area did have nice bird diversity.

Once we arrived at the eastern side of the plantation, I could tell we were in for a treat. Before us was a vast forest that seemed to be dominated by oak and hickory. There was a deep valley, a

tributary to Rapid Creek that cut through it. Right away we noticed young white oak here and there where harvesting had taken place twenty-plus years ago. A pocket of oak wilt was evident, but was giving opportunity for hickories to come in. A pileated woodpecker could be heard in the distance, a bird that needs large unbroken forests. We walked up and down the hills of this eastern section (the largest stand on the property). We were impressed with the woodlands and felt that this is precisely the kind of area we need to be working with landowners to protect.

Several other trips to the property by other members of JCHT reinforced the thought that this was a great place to protect. What began next was months of work to negotiate the terms of taking on an easement, and protect it in perpetuity. The property ranked high on our Land Evaluation Criteria Document. We then began work on crafting the easement document and language, the legal document that will protect the land. Tom Gelman put in countless hours to make sure that the Lusts' wishes were met and that JCHT's interests were protected. There was a deadline of December 31st to finish the document so the Lusts could realize the tax benefits of their gift in that year. It did all come together in the final weeks of December. JCHT has now protected an additional 146 acres of land in Johnson County. The land will not see development and its forests and open spaces will remain open.

The Lust property is not open to the public. JCHT has the obligation to monitor the property to see that the terms of the easement are being met.

### Upcoming JCHT events:

—2/22 Bluebird Diner "Share the Profits Night" from 5-9:00 JCHT gets 10% of profits!

—3/8 Prairie Preview at Parkview Church

—3/22 Bluebird Diner "Share the Profits Night" from 5-9:00 JCHT gets 10% of profits!

—4/26 Bluebird Diner "Share the Profits Night" from 5-9:00 JCHT gets 10% of profits!

—4/29 JCHT's Annual Meeting at North Ridge Pavillion—5/22 Family Day at Turkey Creek Preserve 1:00-3:00

—5/24 Bluebird Diner "Share the Profits Night" from 5-9:00 JCHT gets 10% of profits!

—6/12 Devotay "Benefit Sunday" a portion of the proceeds from will benefit JCHT! Mention JCHT when making your reservation.

—8/28 Iowa City Public Library event at Belgum Grove

—9/18 Family Day at Belgum Grove

—10/10 Dottie Ray broadcast, KXIC AM 800

## From the Desk of the Executive Director:

Once upon a time there was a slow time for Johnson County Heritage Trust...those days are behind us. I can't thank our dedicated volunteers enough for all of their efforts and commitment to this wonderful organization! As I compiled all of our 2010 accomplishments I am amazed at all that we have achieved! The most recent big news is that Johnson County Heritage Trust has joined forces with Gary and Sharon Lust to place a conservation easement on 146 acres of their property. A special thank you to Sharon and Gary! Prior to that conservation easement JCHT had held 10 conservation easements totaling just over 90 acres! Thank you to all who took time out of your busy schedule to attend the special membership meeting held on December 8 to discuss this important venture.

Johnson County Heritage Trust was very pleased to receive a \$1,900 grant from Community Foundation of Johnson County to assist with expenses associated with becoming an accredited land trust.

Publicity is circulating regarding Prairie Preview XXVIII and preparation for JCHT's Annual Membership Meeting is underway. Liz Hall has been working on a JCHT exhibit for the Iowa City Public Library. Stop by and see it! I am confident that her efforts will generate more support for our cause as Johnson County Heritage Trust becomes more publicized.

A wonderful partnership with the Bluebird Diner has been formed. The 4th Tuesday of each month from 5:00-9:00 p.m. JCHT will get 10% of Bluebird Diner sales. Again, I am confident that this will not only be financially profitable, but great for public relations! See page four for upcoming events and please contact me if you or your organization have interest in sponsoring of any of these events. The publicity you will receive for supporting a proactive and strong organization who is working diligently to preserve our natural heritage through protection and management of land and water with significant environmental value will be a win/win for all.

## Prairie Preview coming Tuesday, March 8th

Prepare to be inspired to take action at the Johnson County Heritage Trust's 28th annual Prairie Preview, to be held Tuesday, March 8, at Parkview Evangelical Free Church, 15 Foster Rd., Iowa City, beginning at 6:30 p.m.

The public is invited to attend Prairie Preview and discover the many possibilities for improving environmental health through landscapes. Learn how to create beautiful, low-maintenance and resilient landscapes that also help protect our local watersheds, reduce flooding, and decrease erosion, among other benefits.

There will be panel discussion on "Rain Gardens & Beyond . . . Time for ACTION!" The panel of experts will include: Liz Maas, restoration ecologist; Judith Krieg, Professional Wetland Scientist, president of EarthView Environmental, LLC, and president of Take a Kid Outdoors; Fred Meyer, Executive Director, Backyard Abundance; Chant Eicke, Senior Environmental Scientist, EarthView Environmental, LLC and community conservationist; and Jason Grimm, Food Systems Planner, Iowa Valley RC&D.

Prairie Preview also includes inviting displays and information from local environmental organizations and agencies. Doors open to the public at 6:30 p.m. for registration and viewing exhibits. The presentation begins at 7:30, with refreshments served afterward. Contact Tammy Richardson (319) 338-7030 or visit [www.jcht.org](http://www.jcht.org) for additional information.

Prairie Preview is sponsored by the Johnson County Heritage Trust, Friends of Hickory Hill Park, Project GREEN, Four Seasons Garden Club, Environmental Advocates, Johnson County Songbird Project, Johnson County Conservation Board and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Prairie Preview XXVIII is funded in part by a grant from Iowa's Living Roadway Trust Fund.

# A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

SUBMITTED BY LORI LINDNER

Johnson County Heritage Trust has come a long way from its first documented meeting in 1978; 2011 marks 33 years of JCHT's dedication to the preservation and conservation of our county's natural resources. While much has changed within the organization—including its creation of cooperative partnerships with like-minded agencies such as the Iowa Environmental Council, Johnson County Conservation Board and the national Land Trust Alliance, its growth from 50 to over 500 members, the hiring of a full-time director and the acquisition of a total of over 200 acres within eight properties—the trust's mission and values have remained steadfast.

Each year in the annual report, JCHT's board identifies yearly accomplishments that have enhanced our efforts, and also sets future goals to keep us striving toward excellence. In 2009, the board made a decision to pursue national Accreditation, recognizing it as an important next step in demonstrating our commitment to quality and the permanence of our obligation.

Accreditation is made available to us through the national Land Trust Alliance; it is a program overseen by an independent commission of the Land Trust Alliance, whose representatives will verify, through a rigorous and specific evaluation, that we are complying with the highest standards and practices possible, according to a set of nationally-recognized guidelines. The JCHT board has determined we will apply for Accreditation in 2012.

However, Accreditation is also a process, and there is much to be done before we even submit an application. To that end, the Accreditation committee, chaired by John VanRybroek, and overseen by Executive Director Tammy Richardson, have been using the Land Trust Alliance's set of Standards and Practices to identify JCHT's strengths and areas for improvement in all aspects of the organization, from our governance, structure and finances to the way we acquire, manage and maintain our properties.

President Dick Schwab said that, as history shifts from our national government being involved in land protection to increasingly more private citizens' groups taking responsibility for the preservation of our natural heritage, organizations like ours must be extremely well-run and well-organized.

"It is imperative that we are guided by a strong set of standards and practices," Schwab said. "Iowa is one of the topmost states in the nation in terms of our natural areas being disturbed by hu-

## Aldo Leopold Movie in Burlington

contributed by Bob Sayre

"Green Fire," a new hour-long documentary on the life and work of Aldo Leopold, will premiere in Burlington on Saturday, April 9, at the Aldo Leopold Middle School. The showing is part of a weekend celebration of Leopold and his Burlington roots organized by the Leopold Heritage Group. It will include a tour of the spectacular home site overlooking the Mississippi, hikes, round-table discussions, and talks by biographer Curt Meine, who narrates the film; Steve and Ann Dunsky, the directors; and Dave Steinke, the producer.

The full schedule is below:

8:30 Registration & Greetings. Aldo Leopold Middle School, 3075 Sunnyside Ave. Burlington, 52601 (319-752-8390)  
9:00 Round Table / Panel Discussions  
10:15 Home Site & Wild Place tour  
11:45 Lunch Break. Room reserved at Big Muddy's, overlooking Mississippi  
1:30 Welcome at Aldo Leopold Middle School by Superintendent & Principal. Film Introduction and Background by Curt Meine  
2:00 Green Fire Premiere  
3:00 Film Discussion with Steve and Ann Dunsky, Directors, and Dave Steinke, USFS Producer.

JCHT members who went on our tour of Burlington in October, 2009, were very impressed by the importance of Leopold's Burlington years (roughly from birth till age 16) to his later development as an ecologist. We also were warmly welcomed by Jerry Rigdon, former Burlington mayor; Steve Brower, landscape architect and Leopold historian; and Billie Beth Hays, the current owner, with her husband, of the Leopold-Starker house. For further information, contact me at 338-1428 or [rfsayre@mchsi.com](mailto:rfsayre@mchsi.com).



man action. In Johnson County, our biggest appeal is the blend of rich educational opportunities, an outstanding health care system, and beautiful outdoor and natural areas. People need to trust that we are protecting those areas and making them accessible to the public, when appropriate. We want to be as strong as anyone in the county in doing so.”

The process of Accreditation will guide JCHT to be as strong as it can be, Schwab added.

“We have already learned a lot about our practices. The Land Trust Alliance has spent a great deal of time and resources to provide trusts like ours with materials and support that help us in our learning,” Schwab said. “For example, we have learned how we can be more strategic about the lands we take, how we take them, and what are the best practices for holding conservation easements.”

From those first meetings in 1978, when a fledging group of eight people led a passionate membership of around 50 to write a set of bylaws, create a mission statement and define its purpose, JCHT has matured into an accomplished, recognized body of passionate people, whose stated values continue to guide our decisions and strengthen our commitment to be stewards of the land. We continue to respect the people, air, flora and fauna of our county, collaborate with others and conduct our mission with integrity.

Accreditation is one more important way to show our continued commitment to excellence.

Note: An excellent overview of the Accreditation process, and video testimonials from other trust organizations that have gone through the process, can be viewed at the National Trust Alliance website at [www.landtrustalliance.org/training/accreditation](http://www.landtrustalliance.org/training/accreditation).

**Sponsorship Benefits for Johnson County Heritage Trust Family Day to be held Sunday, May 22 at Turkey Creek Preserve and Family Day to be held Sunday, September 18 at Belgum Grove.**

#### **SPONSORSHIP LEVELS**

**SUNFLOWER - \$1,000**

**ASTER - \$500**

**PHLOX - \$250**

**CONEFLOWER - \$100**

ALL LEVELS OF GIVING assist in fulfilling our mission and include:

- Receipt of *Heritage* our quarterly environmental journal and recognition of your partnership in JCHT’s annual report and on our website [www.jcht.org](http://www.jcht.org).
- Company or individual named at your level of sponsorship in all press releases and publicity leading up to Family Day events including an article in the *Heritage*.
- Special sponsorship level recognition on the publicity flyer posted around Johnson County and sent home with hundreds of elementary school aged children.
- Signage with sponsorship level displayed at Family Day event(s).

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**Mark your calendars:  
April 29, JCHT's Annual  
Meeting at North Ridge  
Pavilion in Coralville.**



BECOME A FAN OF JCHT ON FACEBOOK ... Johnson County Heritage Trust fulfills its mission through the generosity of its members and donors. Every gift to the Trust is respected and appreciated. Please think of JCHT for not only lifetime gifts, but also as a part of your testamentary planning. A gift to JCHT is a gift to your children and community.

**Pick a membership level and renew (or become a new member).**

**Student Member \_\_\_\_ \$10   Regular Member \_\_\_\_ \$25   Family Member \_\_\_\_ \$40  
Sustaining Member \_\_\_\_ \$50   Sponsor \_\_\_\_ \$100   Benefactor \_\_\_\_ \$250  
Heritage Keeper \_\_\_\_ \$500 or more**