

Call For Artists

The Spoon River Mussel Trail



The Spoon River Mussel Statue Trail

We are excited to invite you to be part of a unique county-wide project – the Spoon River Mussel Statue Trail, a public art initiative designed to celebrate the culture, history, and creativity of Spoon River Country. This project will feature a series of large mussel sculptures, each transformed into a work of art by local and regional artists, and placed at key locations throughout the region. Together, these sculptures will form a vibrant trail that draws both locals and visitors to explore our area. The trail also honors Fulton County’s cultural roots and its deep connection to the Spoon River, where mussel shells once played a vital role in Native American life and trade – even giving Spoon River its name.

We invite you to submit a design proposal to be considered as one of the featured artists for this trail. Selected artists will have the opportunity to showcase their creativity on a large-scale public canvas while contributing to a project that promotes tourism, supports the arts, and celebrates our region’s identity in a meaningful way.

Artists chosen for the project will receive a stipend for their work, as well as recognition on the statue QR code, trail maps, social media promotions, press releases, and other marketing efforts connected to the project.

Enclosed are the full project guidelines, design specifications, and the application form. If you have any questions or would like to discuss your ideas further, we would be happy to connect with you.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to share your talent and help leave a lasting impression on our community.

Warm regards,

Jennie Grove
Marketing and Tourism Director
Spoon River Partnership for Economic Development
marketing@cantonillinois.org
309-647-2677 Ext 3.

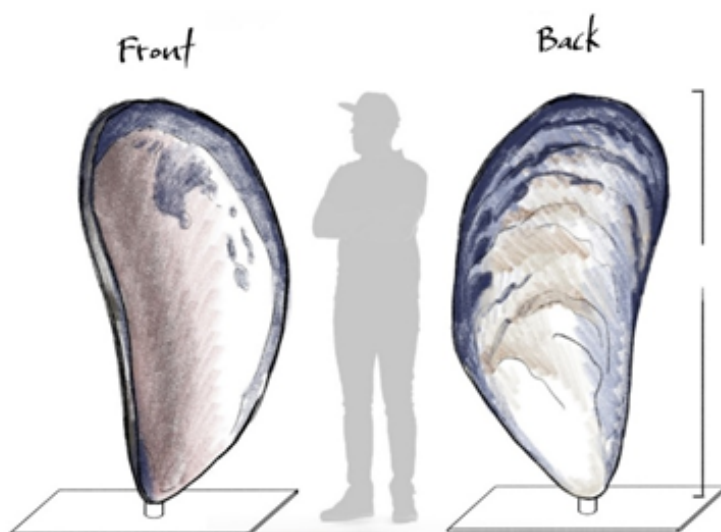
About the Project

The Spoon River Mussel Statue Trail is a county-wide public art initiative designed to celebrate Fulton County's rich cultural heritage and deep ties to the Spoon River, whose name and history are closely intertwined with mussel shells used by Native Americans for trade and daily life.

The project will feature a series of artist-painted mussel statues installed throughout the county, each uniquely designed to reflect local identity, history, and creativity. By creating a trail of these vibrant public artworks, the initiative aims to increase regional tourism, engage local communities, and provide a platform for artists to share their talents in a lasting and meaningful way.

Details

- Statues: Standing 5 feet tall, representing the Spoon River mussel shells.
- Locations: Strategically placed in historically and culturally significant public areas across Fulton County, such as parks, historical landmarks, and town centers.
- Artwork: Each statue's mural will be created by local artists, depicting the unique history and significance of the location it represents.
- Educational Component: Plaques on each statue base will provide information about the location's historical and cultural context.
- Trail Experience: Visitors will receive maps at local stores, tourism centers and online, guiding them to the statues. Completing the trail by submitting photos with all ten statues will earn participants a t-shirt or sticker.



Example: Murals vary by location & artist design

Artist Opportunity

- Paint a mural design on a fiberglass mussel sculpture provided by the partnership.
- Receive a \$1,500 stipend for the completed mural.
- Gain public recognition: featured on the project website with a bio and additional information, named in promotional materials, and invited to the public release event for the sculpture to speak on your design.
- Showcase your work outdoors in high-traffic community locations, contributing to a county-wide public art trail.

Artist Guidelines

- Incorporate at least one key historical point from the assigned location in your design.
- Paint on the inside curvature of the mussel, approximately 3 feet wide by 5 feet long.
- Use exterior-grade paint suitable for outdoor display; Sherwin-Williams Satin Emerald Exterior Paint is preferred.
- Complete the mural within 3–4 weeks. The anticipated timeline of mural creation is in early Spring 2026.
- Designs must be family-friendly and appropriate for public spaces.

Application Guidelines

1. Completed application form
2. Artist statement: your artistic philosophy, approach to public art, or why you're interested in this project and your connection to Fulton County.
3. Artist biography: background, experience, style, any relevant public art projects.
4. Examples of previous artwork/ Portfolio (5 images minimum).
5. Concept sketch or idea for the chosen mussel sculpture.
6. Commitment to complete the project within the 3–4 week timeframe.

Deadline to Apply: **December 31, 2025**

Artists will be notified January 15, 2026

Submit Applications To: Marketing@cantonillinois.org or mailed to 48 N. Main Street, Canton, IL 61520

Bring history to life, showcase your creativity, and leave a lasting mark on the Spoon River Mussel Trail!

Important Notes

- **There are 10 available sculptures, each linked to a different community. Artists may apply for more than one, but assignment is based on selection.**
- **Each location comes with suggested historical content; your design must include at least one historical element. If you wish to include another historical aspect relevant to the location that is not listed, you may submit it for approval.**

Statue Locations & History

- **Canton** - Canton Park District | Big Creek Park
 - Canton Highlights: Known for its agricultural innovation (P&O Plowworks & International Harvester), over 1,400 acres of parks, the Dairy and Cigar industry and as the hometown of inventor Charles Duryea, astronaut Colonel Steve Nagel, and Elizabeth Magie's father.
- **Cuba** - City of Cuba | Cuba Square
 - Cuba Highlights: Known for its agriculture, farming, and mining heritage, the Toledo, Peoria & Western Railway, and the annual Soldiers and Sailors Reunion, one of only two festivals in the nation honoring military veterans and active service members.
- **Downtown Lewistown** - City of Lewistown | Downtown Porter Park
 - Lewistown Highlights: Known for the Historic Oak Hill Cemetery, setting of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology; the Rasmussen Blacksmith Shop Museum, a working blacksmith shop since 1880; and Abraham Lincoln's speech at the Fulton County Courthouse.
- **Rural Lewistown** - Emiquon | Emiquon Observatory Onsite
 - Highlights: Home to Dickson Mounds & Emiquon, a major Native American settlement and burial mound complex, showcasing the development of gathering, hunting, gardening, and farming lifestyles. Emiquon's backwater wetlands and lakes served as a vital resource for Native American communities for over 600 generations. The Spoon River—named for the abundant mussel shells used as spoons—provided mussels for food and tools.
- **Farmington** - City of Farmington City Park or City Square
 - Farmington Highlights: Known for its Underground Railroad history, its past as a bustling mining community for Italian immigrants, and its strong community spirit today.

Statue Locations & History Cont'd

- **Bernadotte** - Bernadotte Historical Society | Bernadotte Veterans Park
 - Bernadotte Highlights: Located on the Spoon River, Bernadotte features the only dam on the river, originally built in the 1830s for a grain mill and later used to supply Camp Ellis during World War II. The village is also home to the historic Bernadotte Bridge (a Pratt truss bridge on the National Register of Historic Places) and was a site for Underground Railroad activity, with operators like Francis and Harriet Overton helping freedom seekers travel north.
- **Ipava** - Easley Pioneer Museum | Onsite
 - Ipava Highlights: Known for Camp Ellis, a WWII training facility and major regional employer, and its museum complex featuring the Freeman School #179 and John Easley's original log cabin. Founded as Pleasantville in 1846 by John Easley, the village was renamed Ipava in 1853
- **London Mills** - Village of London Mills | Riverside Park
 - London Mills Highlights: Established in 1846 when James Eggers built a grist mill and named it after his hometown in England. The arrival of the railroad and Spoon River bridge in the 1850s spurred growth. Key landmarks include the Ross Hotel (1883), now a museum preserved by the London Mills Community Association, and the Spoon River, offering scenic views, fishing, and kayaking.
- **Astoria** - City of Astoria | City Park or City Square
 - Astoria Highlights: Founded in 1836 as Washington, later renamed Vienna, and officially chartered as Astoria in 1839 to honor famous fur trader John Jacob Astor. Located along a historic stagecoach route from Peoria to Quincy, it served as a key stop for travelers. The town lies within Illinois' Military Tract, land originally deeded to War of 1812 soldiers, which led to complex settlement and land ownership histories.
- **Ellisville** - Ellisville Opera House/ Historic Ellisville Restoration Organization | Onsite
 - Ellisville Highlights: Founded around 1828 by Levi Ellis, who established the post office in 1838. The Historic Ellisville Restoration Organization (H.E.R.O.) preserves the town's heritage, including the 1891 Ellisville Opera House, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the historic post office, recognized for its early role in rural mail delivery.

Choose the location that resonates most with your artistic vision.

Consider incorporating elements of the site's history, cultural significance, or natural features into your design.

Artist Application

Artist Name: _____

Business (if applicable): _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Statue Location Preference:

First Choice: _____ Second Choice: _____ Third Choice: _____

Please attach the following:

Required Documents

- Artist Biography (1-2 paragraphs)
- Artist Statement (1-2 paragraphs)
- Portfolio / Work Samples (up to 5 images)

Mussel Sculpture Proposal

- Concept Sketch / Visual Idea (Attach or link)

Your design should incorporate at least one key historical point from the assigned location.

Description of Design and Historical Element(s): _____

Confirm ability to complete the mural within 3-4 weeks: Yes No

Interested in multiple sculptures (if allowed): Yes No

By signing, I agree to complete the mural per guidelines, create a family-friendly design, allow my work and bio to be used in promotions, and understand the statue will remain publicly displayed for the duration of the project period.

Artist Signature: _____

Date: _____

For questions or to return this form, contact:

Jennie Grove
Spoon River Partnership for Economic Development
Marketing@cantonillinois.org
309.647.2677 Ext 3



Concept Sketch

