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New Exhibit: “Harvesting the River: Pearl Buttons” at the Illinois State Museum

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois State Museum in Springfield has opened a new exhibit *Harvesting the River: Pearl Buttons* focusing on an important and historic Illinois industry – the harvesting of freshwater mussels from Illinois waters.

Freshwater mussels have lived in North America since the Age of the Dinosaurs – more than 200 million years. They’re ecologically important, cleaning water in streams and lakes and providing food for many species. American Indians gathered mussels for food and used shells for tools and ornaments. In the 1890s, a German immigrant invented a new use for mussels that launched an industry – pearl buttons.

Harvesting the River: Pearl Buttons focuses on the industry and its ecological impact on Illinois rivers, utilizing the Illinois State Museum’s research and collections. The exhibit features textiles, tools, drilled shells, button blanks, and of course pearl buttons. The exhibit also includes a stunning three-dimensional model of a mussel on loan from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The new exhibit is located in the ISM Hot Science gallery of the *Changes* permanent natural history exhibition. *Harvesting the River: Pearl Buttons* will be open through May of 2019.

For more information on this exhibition or about the Illinois State Museum, call 217-782-7386 or visit the Museum’s website at www.illinoisstatemuseum.org.

The Illinois State Museum is located in the State Capitol Complex at 502 South Spring Street in Springfield.

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