

MISSOURI RIVER HERITAGE MURAL



1 *"This place is where I live, where I work, where I dream. This place is where I make life happen."*

The person kneeling in the grass, reaching into the water, is George Gillette who is featured in the documentary, "Boys with Braids," a film created in collaboration with Bismarck Public Schools about the empowerment of cultural traditions. The script on Gillette's shirt is Lakota for "Water is Life." Gillette is a reflection of the larger theme of modern indigenes on the northern plains who embrace cultural heritage and work to imagine and shape the present and future.

2 *"Where I'm from, the fields are sown with seeds from near and far."*

A farmer harvests vegetables from her garden. When immigrant settlers arrived to the northern plains from the 1860s up to 1900, they brought their agricultural practices with them. This farmer represents women's contributions to agriculture on the northern plains. As historian Barbara Handy-Marchello writes in *Women of the Northern Plains: Gender and Settlement on the Homestead Frontier: 1870-1930*, "All of these women built the foundation of today's rural communities and are the foremothers (often literally) of the present generation of farm women." This work, she continues, "remains at the center of farm and rural life."



3 *"[The Missouri River] is the homeland of the original farmers, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara."*

Maxi'diwiac, or Buffalo Bird Woman, tills her field with a bison scapula hoe. This Hidatsa master heirloom seed saver represents the deep roots of agricultural heritage along the fertile Missouri River bottoms. Generations of ancestral knowledge informed her advice, and her recipes were documented in the first decades of the twentieth century in the book, *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden*.



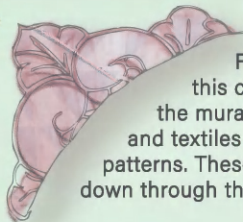
4 *"My family is connected to this land through farming."*

Germans-from-Russia immigrant farmers break ground on a homestead. In 1883, known as the Great Dakota Boom, thousands of European immigrants filed claims under the Homestead Act. Laboring as farmers, the Germans from Russia were one of the largest cultural groups to settle in this region. By 1900, North Dakota had the highest percentage of foreign-born citizens out of all the states in the union.



5 *"We are rooted deeply, and we bring our traditions forward with us."*

First Peoples and immigrant settler folk artists find inspiration in the natural world, in this case as represented by the Scandinavian/Norwegian floral wood carvings throughout the mural. Geometric motifs like the "flying geese" triangles in the sky appear in decorative arts and textiles such as Dakota beadwork, Ukrainian egg decorating (pysanky), and American quilt patterns. These forms of expression are rooted in different cultural traditions that have been passed down through the generations and are practiced in a variety of forms.



6 WORDS FOR "RIVER" IN MANY OF THE LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN OUR NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

LAKOTA: MNISHOSHE, MNISÓSE, MIH-NEE-SHO-SHAY

ICELANDIC: FLJÓT

MANDAN: MAATAHE

FINNISH: JOKI

CZECH: ŘEKA

SWEDISH: STRÖM

HIDATSA: AWÁADHI

UKRAINE: РІЧКА

DUTCH: RIVIER

ARIKARA: TSWAARUXTÍ HUUKJAAHAÁNU

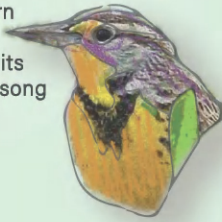
NORWEGIAN: ELV

DANISH: FLOD

GERMAN: FLUSS

7 *"Where I'm from, there is wide open prairie where meadowlarks and crickets sing..."*

The Prairie Rose is the state flower of North Dakota, and a welcome sign of spring on the Northern Plains. The western Meadowlark, seen perched on a branch, is the state bird of North Dakota. In Lakota, its name is Txashiyagmunjka and its song heralds the changing of seasons. When it sings its spring song, it tells us, "the world is made anew, enjoy!" And then, as the summer progresses, its song gradually shifts. By winter it is entirely different because, as Lakota historian Dakota Goodhouse explains, the meadowlark's tongue has split nine different times over the course of the year.



9 *"The river represents change..."*

An American Bison (or Buffalo) grazes on short-grass prairie with a herd of beef cattle. The juxtaposition between these two animals represents the dramatic change in the ecology and economy of the Northern Plains that came with Euro-American settlement and the arrival of the railroad. In subsequent years, the bison was hunted near the brink of extinction—a cruel and intentional result of U.S. policies aimed at removing Native American tribes and making way for cattle ranching. Most famous among these rustlers was Theodore Roosevelt, who described life on the open range as "a most healthy life." Ironically, his experience ranching in the Badlands west of the Missouri River inspired in him a conservation ethic that would become the cornerstone of his political career. In recent decades, efforts to restore bison herds to the Northern Plains have met with great success. In 2016, the 114 th U.S. Congress passed H.R. 2908, Public Law 114-152, the National Bison Legacy Act, a modern conservation heritage success story.



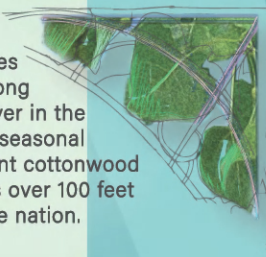
10 *"We grow from the land because of the gifts it gives us."*

Plants provide food, shelter, dyes, fibers, oils and even contribute oxygen to the air we breathe. Much of what we know today about the region's plants and their uses comes from the traditional knowledge of the Lakota and other indigenous groups. That knowledge is represented in this mural by echinacea, also known as coneflower, and red willow. Echinacea and willow leaves and bark can be used to treat wounds, relieve toothache, and boost the immune system. The branches of the willow tree are malleable and can be used to create baskets and shelter.



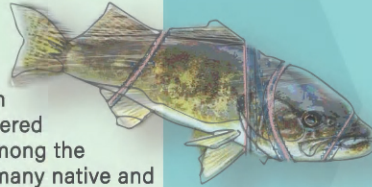
8 *"The cottonwoods clap when you walk outside."*

Rustling cottonwood leaves frame the top of the mural. These native trees are sometimes thought of as the "Sequoias of the Plains". They thrive along rivers and streams, where the soil is moist. Since the damming of the river in the 1950s, cottonwoods have been in decline, as cottonwood seeds require seasonal flooding to vest the seed. Sometimes mistaken as a short-lived tree, giant cottonwood stands remain. The "Big Tree" at Cross Ranch State Park, for example, is over 100 feet tall and over 200 years old, and others antedate the 1776 founding of the nation.



11 *"[The river] is a source of life..."*

The Missouri River is home to a variety of native and non-native species of fish. The Northern Pike is the state fish of North Dakota, and it and the walleye fish are prized by anglers. The endangered Pallid Sturgeon, sometimes called the "dinosaur of the Missouri," is among the largest freshwater fish, weighing up to 85 pounds. In addition to the many native and non-native fish, the Missouri and its tributaries provide important habitat for waterfowl and aquatic life. A favorite site among canoers and kayakers on the marshy tributaries is the Western Painted Turtle, known for its brightly colored, red-orange markings.



MISSOURI RIVER HERITAGE MURAL

THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

ABOUT THE MURAL

Conceived as an idea in 2016, and made reality with the creation in 2022 and installation in 2023, the Missouri River Heritage Mural is the culmination of a years-long collaboration. It involved local artists, cultural knowledge keepers, municipal and state agencies, numerous heritage non-profits, and over 200 participants. A central goal was realized by bringing partners within the Northern Plains National Heritage Area together to share personal stories about how and why the Missouri River in central North Dakota was and continues to be meaningful.



SCAN FOR
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INDIRECT PROCESS

GoodSpace Murals uses an indirect technique that is called the “parachute cloth” technique. The entire mural is painted on 5-foot sheets of canvas before installing onto the wall.

COMMUNITY DESIGN SESSIONS

At the start of the project, GoodSpace Murals hosted a series of public input sessions to design a mural that would capture the significance of the Missouri River to the people here. “I heard that the Missouri River is what binds us all together,” says McLain. “It represents our heritage, our history, and what gives us hope and a vision for the future. This mural design seeks to invite the viewer into that future with references to Buffalo Bird Woman, German-from-Russian Farmers, traditional farming of the three sisters, planting and investing in the land and knowing that the river here is what makes everything work.”



OPEN ACCESS

This technique opened up the possibility of collaboration. By bringing each of the canvas sheets to public gatherings, literally hundreds of people were able to participate in the painting of the mural. Working with local partners, the mural design was colored in paint-by-numbers-style at a series of community paint parties held in the summer of 2022.



INSTALLATION

Once dry, the sheets were installed like permanent wallpaper on a pier of the Grant Marsh Bridge. Here, the mural is backed by views of the Missouri River itself, adjacent to the orientation headquarters of the Northern Plains National Heritage Area and visible from the riverfront trail that links Pioneer, Keelboat, Steamboat, and Sertoma Parks.



THE ARTIST

Greta McLain, Artistic Director of GoodSpace Murals, has over a decade of mural making experience around the world—creating projects in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Memphis, Philadelphia, Argentina, Mexico, and France that bring communities together for hands-on expression and education. Her unique and innovative method centers on community participation in every aspect of design and creation. “We aim to include as many people as we can in the public art process; seeding ownership and agency in our public landscape.” She enlisted the help of local artists who assisted in planning and implementing each step of the mural making process.

THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS:



THE NORTHERN PLAINS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The Northern Plains National Heritage Area (NHA) celebrates the important natural, cultural, and historic sites tied to the Missouri River in central North Dakota. For centuries, the river has shaped the lives of the people here. The interconnected stories of Native Americans, explorers and settlers, and farmers and ranchers on the Northern Plains contribute to our nation's history and are central to who we are today.

Encompassing Burleigh, Morton, Mercer, McLean, and Oliver Counties, the Northern Plains NHA works to preserve, promote, and develop the significant cultural, natural, and scenic resources of the region and encourages residents and visitors to discover historic sites, engage in cultural events, explore the scenic landscape, and experience the heritage of the Missouri River.



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