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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:****MUSEUM OF APPALACHIA TO OPEN CLINE WAGON, CLINCH RIVER PEARLING EXHIBITS OCTOBER 16***Exhibits trace a wagon's journey home and Clinton's historic pearl trade*

NORRIS, Tenn. – The Museum of Appalachia will open two new permanent exhibits on Friday, October 16, telling stories that begin in East Tennessee but reach far beyond the region. The Cline Wagon exhibit follows a historic Claiborne County wagon from its Appalachian roots to Michigan and, decades later, back home. The Clinch River Pearling exhibit explores how pearls harvested from the Clinch River helped connect Clinton to an international market.

In celebration of the dual opening, the Museum will offer half-price admission on October 16.

The Cline Wagon exhibit is built around what is thought to be the only surviving wagon from the shop of brothers Alex and Wade Cline, who began making farm wagons and implements in the Claiborne County community of Dogwood in 1917. Their work even caught the eye of noted Tennessee photographer Joe Clark—later known for the black-and-white photography behind Jack Daniel's long-running advertising campaign—who documented the brothers at work. The wagon on display dates to the final years of Alex Cline's life and survives as a rare piece of the craftsmanship for which the shop was known.

But the wagon carries another history as well. When A.G. Turner, Cline's nephew by marriage, left East Tennessee for work in Michigan, he took the wagon north with him—a tangible piece of home traveling the same route as thousands of Appalachians seeking opportunity in northern industrial centers. That decades-long migration became known as the "Hillbilly Highway."

After more than half a century in Michigan, the wagon nearly slipped out of the family's hands before returning to East Tennessee in 2017. WBIR's late Ken Schwall documented its homecoming with Museum Board member Steve Dean and retired WBIR videographer Doug Mills, ending at the Museum of Appalachia, where the Turner family had long hoped it would find a permanent home. The wagon now carries two intertwined stories: the Appalachian craftsmanship that produced it and the migration that carried it north.

Housed alongside the Cline Wagon in a newly completed wing of the Museum's Hall of Fame building, the Clinch River Pearling exhibit shifts the focus to another chapter of East Tennessee history.

At the turn of the 20th century, Clinton found itself at the center of an unlikely international trade. Pearls pulled from the Clinch River drew buyers from New York,

while prized local finds traveled far beyond East Tennessee—including to the Paris Exposition in 1900. What began in the mussel beds of a nearby river became a valuable commodity with a market extending well beyond the region.

The Clinch River Pearling exhibit brings that era into view through an extremely rare Clinch River pearl and the people whose searches, discoveries and dealings built an industry around it. The story has renewed national relevance in 2026: Tennessee's freshwater pearl is one of eight items representing the state in the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History's new *From These Lands* exhibition, part of the Smithsonian's commemoration of America's 250th anniversary.

Both exhibits were conceived by Steve Dean, creator and executive producer of WBIR's *The Heartland Series*, and brought together several of his former *Heartland* colleagues. Producers Linda Billman and Amy Anderson joined Doug Mills and Steve Dean in developing multimedia experiences that extend beyond the physical displays, with QR codes connecting visitors to video content offering additional context and stories. That collaborative effort extended to the construction itself, with a dedicated group of retired Museum volunteers helping build the Cline Wagon exhibit.

Visitors may purchase half-price admission at the Museum's Visitor Center on October 16, or purchase tickets in advance at museumofappalachia.org/tours using promo code **PEARL**.

The Museum of Appalachia is a Smithsonian Affiliate museum in Norris, Tennessee, dedicated to preserving and interpreting the history and culture of the people of Southern Appalachia. The Museum is home to an 11-acre Pioneer Village, three exhibit buildings, more than 30 historic log structures, and thousands of artifacts documenting Appalachian life and culture.

For more information, visit museumofappalachia.org.