

For immediate release

New Carson Donnell Gallery Opens at Bond County Museum



***RIBBON-CUTTING DEDICATION:** Celebrating the opening of the Carson Donnell Gallery at the Bond County Museum are (left to right) Robert Whiteside, Kendra Finley, Susan Watson, Frank Watson, Dr. Cary Holman, and Michael Hubbard.*

GREENVILLE, IL — October 5, 2026 — The Bond County Historical Society officially opened and dedicated its new Carson Donnell Gallery during a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday, Sept. 30, at the Bond County Museum in Greenville. The permanent gallery brings together an expanded collection of works by one of Bond County's most celebrated artists.

“Most would agree that Carson Donnell was the most prominent artist in Bond County in the 1950s and ’60s, and probably the most prominent of all time,” said Dr. Cary Holman, president of the Bond County Historical Society, during the dedication.

The regional icon specialized in autumn *plein air* landscapes and vibrant fall colors. The gallery grew from an idea proposed by Historical Society member Robert Whiteside in 2024, when Whiteside met with Kendra Finley, widow of the late Walt Finley, at her home to appraise some of her art pieces. Walt, a Hillsboro pharmacist, was a friend of Donnell and an enthusiastic collector and promoter of his work, displaying Donnell’s paintings for sale in his drugstore and purchasing several himself.

“Mrs. Finley was interested in selling most of the works by Carson that they had collected over the years,” Holman said. “We weren’t able to buy all of them.” The Society negotiated for nine.

“Mike Hubbard got the ball rolling with the first pledge towards purchasing those paintings, and then Frank and Susan Watson offered to contribute the balance to buy the paintings,” Holman said. Frank Watson is part of another longtime local pharmacy tradition: Watson’s Drug Store in Greenville, operated by the Watson family for four generations.

The nine works purchased from Finley eventually found a home in the museum. By the time Whiteside and Holman picked up the paintings in August 2025, the garage, once suggested as gallery space, had been filled with larger donations.

“As Bob and I began unloading the paintings here at the museum, Bob thought it sad to just put these paintings in storage,” Holman recalled. “So Bob immediately began making space on these walls here in the parlor to hang the paintings. By the time we left the museum that afternoon, we had a Carson Donnell Gallery right here.”

The gallery features the newly acquired works along with Donnell pieces already owned by the museum, including paintings, wood-cut block prints, oil wash sketches and Donnell’s original easel. One of the most dramatic paintings from the Finleys, featuring a striking sycamore tree, is displayed directly on the easel. A large Donnell landscape, *Kaskaskia River*, is also on temporary loan from Bradford National Bank, while additional works were loaned by Historical Society members.

For Kendra Finley, the gallery represents a lasting connection to an artist she remembered from her early years in Hillsboro after moving there with her husband from St. Louis in 1962. “Right away we would go down to his barn on Sunday afternoon, watch Carson paint,” Finley said. “I don’t think anybody loved him like Walt did. He was such a genuinely nice person.”

Finley’s preservation of the family collection, along with the contributions of Hubbard and the Watsons and the efforts of Whiteside and other Historical Society members, helped make the gallery possible.

Following the ribbon-cutting, Society members, donors, and guests toured the museum and new gallery. The Carson Donnell Gallery will remain open to the public during regular Bond County Museum hours, with the special exhibition continuing through the end of the calendar year.

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