



## Community

### Traveling 'Fences' Exhibit Now Displayed In Vermillion

[Print Page](#)

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Published: Tuesday, September 30, 2008 12:03 AM CDT

VERMILLION — Is the old adage “good fences make good neighbors” accurate?

That’s one of the questions in “Between Fences,” a traveling Smithsonian exhibition that will be displayed at Vermillion’s W. H. Over Museum through Nov. 2.

“We all know about fences, we’ve seen them and we know they protect us, keep us and some of our cherished possessions safe,” said Nancy Hodgson, museum volunteer who’s helped organize the display. “What we may not have thought of are the fences created by geographical barriers such as mountains, rivers, political borders and cultural divisions. Raising awareness of those fences that aren’t so obvious is one of the objectives of the display.”



Nancy Hodgson, a W.H. Over Museum volunteer and Local Coordinator for the Smithsonian’s traveling “Between Fences” exhibit, believes the public will enjoy viewing the display throughout October at the museum in Vermillion. The exhibit is part of the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum on Main Street project. (COURTESY PHOTO)

The idea of owning land and using fences to achieve that is highlighted in the display. The concept was unknown to Native Americans, but had been used in Europe long before settlers began building the first fences in America.

“Fences were used to mark property lines and reduce arguments amongst neighbors,” Hodgson said. “Each spring, neighbors walked their fence lines together and worked together to fix them if necessary. Fences have shaped and affected many cultural attitudes. Once you start examining fences, that becomes more apparent.”

W. H. Over Museum applied to host the exhibit and was selected to do so by the South Dakota Humanities Council. The exhibit will tour six South Dakota communities through July 2009.

The display is made up of a selection of artifacts, photographs and illustrations that are intended to stimulate exploration of the multiple meanings behind the familiar icon of the fence.

“Whether they’re made of split rails, decorative white pickets or tall chain links, a fence conveys information about the people who built it,” Hodgson said. “How they view their property and the nature of their relations with their neighbors, those barriers speak eloquently of all those things. This display allows us to explore this fascinating aspect of our own region’s history. We hope it will inspire many to become even more involved in the cultural life of our community.”

“Between Fences” is part of Museum on Main Street, a unique collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), state humanities council across the nations and local host institutions. The program is funded by Congress. The exhibition only goes to communities with less than 20,000 residents. Hodgson said the W. H. Over Museum was very pleased to take part in the exhibit.

"It's always nice to have anything come from the Smithsonian," she said. "When we applied to host it, we considered all the ways we could use it while it was here, and we've developed a lot of activities surrounding the exhibit."

A complete list of events related to "Between Fences" is available at <http://www.betweenfencesvermillion.org/>. They include presentations at W. H. Over Museum and the Vermillion Public Library throughout October, as well as school art and photos contests, an essay and poetry contest, "Paint a Picket" contest, open photography contest and mystery fence contest.

"Our local Girl Scouts identified photos in our archives that are used in the display," Hodgson said. "We sent information about the activities to schools in the three-state area because we believe schools will be able to make use of the exhibit while it's here. We have posters and information about the exhibit if teachers would like to use them. We wanted to explore different themes of the exhibit and we have scheduled a variety of events."

More details about "Between Fences" are available at <http://www.museumonmainstreet.org/>.

The museum will offer special hours during the time the exhibit is there, opening 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1-5 p.m. on Sundays.

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