

Museum on Main Street

A Partnership of the Smithsonian Institution and State Humanities Councils with Rural America

Museum on Main Street brings together the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), the Federation of State Humanities councils, individual state humanities councils, and small rural museums in a collaborative effort to serve rural audiences. The partnership, established in 1991, was formed as a creative response to the challenges faced by rural museums to enhance their own cultural legacies.

By hosting a Smithsonian exhibition augmented by humanities programs, participating rural museums embrace new opportunities for professional training in volunteerism, philanthropy, marketing, and collections care and handling. SITES provides staff to help in exhibit management and object care. The state humanities councils train rural organizers in program planning and proposal writing. Working with in-state scholar teams, the state humanities councils also provide resources to help museums prepare exhibition-related events for and about their communities. Through the combined resources of SITES and State Humanities Councils, the program provides a lasting legacy of professional development and tools for future growth.

The Museum on Main Street exhibitions, which have traveled to nearly four hundred towns with populations of 500 to 20,000 in more than thirty-six states, capitalized on small-town local histories: *Produce for Victory: Posters on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*; *Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon*; *Yesterday's Tomorrows: Past Visions of the American Future*; and *Key Ingredients: America by Food*. Exceeding all expectations, the exhibitions sparked an astonishing array of public programs that in turn have generated unprecedented volunteerism, local philanthropy, cultural tourism, performing arts projects, and ambitious capital improvements. The latest exhibition, *Between Fences*, will open in September 2005.

For SITES, Museum on Main Street exemplifies the fulfillment of its mission: to extend Smithsonian collections, research, and exhibitions to communities across the nation. For State Humanities Councils, Museum on Main Street broadens public investigation of the humanities, inspires community pride and cooperation, and develops a heightened awareness of local heritage.

Museum on Main Street Exhibitions

Produce for Victory: Posters on the American Home Front, 1941-1945

Colorful posters—a visual call to arms—helped to mobilize American to "produce for victory" during World War II. This exhibition, comprised of twenty-five replica vintage posters from the Smithsonian's national Museum of American History, examines how posters circulated by the government and private organizations used patriotism to urge factory workers to increase industrial production. Public programs surrounding *Produce for Victory* include original plays and poetry, musical and choral concerts, historical fashion shows, veterans reunions, and radio show reenactments, bringing the war era to life for older and younger generations.

Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon

From its architectural forms to its use in advertising, the barn's role as a potent symbol of

American culture is the focus of Barn Again! The prevalence of barns in all segments of American life is illustrated by the architectural models, photographs, period advertisements, and memorabilia featured in the exhibition. This version was adapted from the original exhibition developed by the National Building Museum in collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Public programs, such as barn renovations, surveys of historically significant outbuildings, and restoration workshops, rejuvenate interest in local architectural history. Events, including barn-to-barn fun runs, barn dances, and barn raisings, extend the reach of hosting institutions into their communities.

Yesterday's Tomorrows: Past Visions of the American Future

During the past one hundred years, Americans have envisioned the future as a kind of technological Utopia. From ray guns to monorails, from nuclear-powered cars to waterproof living rooms that could be cleaned with a garden hose, American expectations about the future centered around rapid, breathtaking advances in science and technology. By examining films, toys, communities, transportation, advertising, and other material evidence from the late nineteenth through the late twentieth centuries, *Yesterday's Tomorrows* offers the opportunity to observe how ideas of the future from the past shed light on the values and attitudes of the time. To learn more about *Yesterday's Tomorrows*, visit the national Web site at www.yesterdaystomorrow.org.

Key Ingredients: America by Food

Key Ingredients: America by Food explores the connections between Americans and the foods they produce, prepare, preserve, and present at table – a provocative and thoughtful look at the historical, regional, and social traditions that merge in everyday meals and celebrations. It is the newest exhibition of Museum on Main Street, a partnership of the Smithsonian Institution and state humanities councils in service to museums and citizens of rural America. Through a selection of artifacts, photographs, and illustrations, *Key Ingredients* examines the evolution of the American kitchen and how food industries have responded to the technological innovations that have enabled Americans to choose an ever-wider variety of frozen, prepared, and fresh foods. *Key Ingredients* also looks beyond the home to restaurants, diners, and celebrations that help build a sense of community through food. The exhibition website, www.keyingredients.org, will list state itineraries, favorite local recipes and have additional resources on the topic.

Between Fences

Between Fences focuses on every region of the United States. Its subjects include the defining of home, farm, and factory; the settling of the United States; the closing of the range in the South and its meaning to former slaves; and the making of fences, including a look at why Abe Lincoln became known as a rail splitter. It examines human relationships on an expanding scale: neighbor versus neighbor; gated communities; and the Mexican and Canadian borders of the U.S. The exhibition tells American stories through diverse fence types. The *worm fence*, one of the most widely built types in American history, attracted the attention of many eighteenth and nineteenth-century visitors to the United States; its unique design contributed to international understanding of American society. The *picket fence* plays a legendary role in the United States: it is the very symbol of home. Battles between farmers and ranchers, fought with *barbed wire fence*, were flash points in the nationwide debate over enclosure and access to land and resources. The *chain link fence* has come to surround playgrounds, factories, and

houses. The industrialization of the fence - and with it, land and house - is essential for understanding contemporary life.

What is SITES?

The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) extends the Smithsonian collections, research, and exhibitions across the nation. SITES organizes and circulates exhibitions of all shapes and sizes on the arts, sciences, and humanities. Since the first exhibition went on the road in 1952, SITES has traveled nearly two thousand exhibitions for the education and enjoyment of museum-goers in every state and several foreign countries. Descriptions and itineraries for SITES exhibitions can be found at <http://www.sites.si.edu>.

What is the Federation of State Humanities Councils/What are State Humanities Councils?

Entering their third decade, the fifty-five state humanities councils have become a national force for public education in the humanities. Supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and private donations, the councils have extensive experience in developing adult education programs among in-state cultural organizations including universities, senior centers, libraries, and museums. The Federation of State Humanities Councils is the national membership organization of the state humanities councils. Its purpose is to sustain a national unity mission and serve as the national voice and advocate of the state councils.

Press Only

For further information about SITES and its programs, please call (202) 633-3168 or consult SITES' Web site at www.sites.si.edu/index.htm. For further information about Museum on Main Street, call (202) 633-0078 or visit the Web site at www.museumonmainstreet.org.

For further information about your State Humanities Council and their participation in Museum on Main Street, please contact Esther Mackintosh, Federation of State Humanities Councils, (703) 908-9700, or LuAnn Kern, Museum on Main Street, at (571) 663-4485 or by email at luannkern@comcast.net.