

Smithsonian Barn Exhibition Tours Nebraska, Indiana and Iowa

In November 2001, the Smithsonian's traveling exhibition *Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon* began a Midwestern tour hosted by museums in Iowa, Indiana and Nebraska. *Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon* explores barns in all segments of American life, from their architectural forms to their use in advertising. The exhibition features architectural models, photographs, popular culture objects and period advertisements.

Organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) and the National Building Museum, with assistance from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and in association with the Federation of State Humanities councils and the Nebraska, Indiana and Iowa State Humanities Councils, *Barn Again!* looks at the origin and fate of the barn in its various roles as warehouse, factory and legend.

Barn Again! is part of Museum on Main Street, a series of exhibitions and programs specially designed to serve museums, libraries and historical societies in rural communities. This unique collaboration brings together 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 challenge faced by rural museums to enhance their own cultural legacies.

The Exhibition

"Barns represent a vital aspect of the nation's cultural heritage," said Gregory K. Driecer, exhibition curator. "This project gives us an opportunity to focus on imperiled buildings that are key to who we are as Americans."

"*Barn Again!*" gives exhibition visitors new ways to consider a familiar icon. The exhibition surveys the agricultural changes that led to architectural adaptations on the farm, following major movements in American history such as 19th-century European immigration and westward migration. Industrial farming in the 20th-century has rendered many traditional barns obsolete because they cannot accommodate the enormous machinery and harvests of today's large-scale farms. The loss of these architectural structures is changing forever our rural landscape and depriving us of important historical monuments.

Highlighting distinct architectural types, the exhibition's variety of barn styles reveals the creativeness of farmer-builders who adapted these structures to fit their own needs—from the connected barns and houses of New England to the large dairy barns of the Midwest.

Even as barns disappear from the countryside, their iconic role in American culture remains constant. Advertising and industry professionals, politicians and artists frequently use barn imagery to convey American values such as

dependability, hard work, independence and traditionalism. Advertisers, for example, use pictures of barns to convey the idea of a product's "just-off-the-farm" freshness.

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