A Museum on Main Street exhibition from the Smithsonian traveling to 30 states through 2024

Tour Review
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Museum on Main Street

The Smithsonian invites hundreds of small museums, in towns with populations of 500 to 20,000, to participate in a national exhibition program.

With support and guidance from state humanities councils, host communities have the opportunity to create their own educational programs, cultural activities, and exhibitions that center on local culture and history.

To date, Museum on Main Street exhibitions have visited over 1600 communities in all 50 states.
Exhibition Overview
Crossroads’ Guiding Questions

What does “rural America” mean?
How has our attraction to and interaction with the land formed the basis of rural America?
How have rural communities and small towns evolved and changed?
What makes these places unique?
How do we identify with them?
Changes transformed rural America (including global influences), especially during the 1900s.

What are some of these changes, and what have they meant for rural life?

People are holding on in their rural communities. Why and how?

What is rural life like today? How are rural Americans shaping their future?
Introduction

Americans come together at crossroads. Small towns are centers for:

- Commerce and trade
- Local politics
- Culture and ideas

Rural America changed significantly in the 1900s:

- Demographics
- Education
- Access to services
- Economic viability

Rural communities may face challenges as well as opportunities
American culture is filled with romantic views of rural life and culture.

Living and working in a rural place can also be difficult.

How is rural America represented in books, songs, poetry, and art?

How do rural ideals square with American ideals?

- Economic opportunity
- Personal liberty
- Equality
Land

Land is core to our concept of rural life.

Our sense of place is powerful. Many Americans express strong connections to the rural landscape. Memories of recreation in rural places. Natural beauty draws people to rural areas. For some, rural landscapes represent hard work and isolation.

Not everyone is a landowner. Most Americans connect with rural places through public lands.

How do attitudes towards land ownership and access differ among Americans?

Are there stories of conflict over land in your state?
Community

Communities grew at rural crossroads
  • People connect, exchange ideas, work towards common goals, rely on neighbors, and build the future of their community.

Sustaining communities
  • Country Life Movement
  • New Deal and rural electrification programs

Accelerated change
  • Change in the second half of the 20th century
  • Erosion of political power in some states
  • Demographic changes
  • Civil rights struggles
  • Aging populations
  • Challenges of inequality and poverty
Rural Americans believe in their communities and many choose to work to resolve issues rather than leaving.

Economic survival requires revitalization of small towns, and inspires new ways of thinking about farming and extractive industries.

Many Americans are discovering the benefits of rural life. The slower pace and quiet surroundings, proximity to natural resources etc.

Popular culture connects urban and suburban Americans to rural life. Rural life and people are often romanticized or satirized.
Managing Change

Some rural communities face significant challenges.

Americans are confronting these issues and finding new and unique solutions.

There are many different voices to welcome into these conversations.

What will your town look like in ten years?

What has your community lost that matters most?

What change for good would you make in your town?

As a Major, what would you do?

Name three things you would miss if you had to leave.
Specifications
Specifications

- Six free-standing sections
- Installation requires 750 square feet of space
- Five audio and video media components
- Mechanical, tactile, and low-tech interactives
- Various sized object cases
- Packed in 16 wheeled crates that fit on a 26-foot U-Haul truck
Statistics
Where is *Crossroads*?

Please note: Outlaying years are subject to change.
Types of host organizations

Data based on combined numbers for MoMS exhibitions.
Volunteer Profile

Hosting an exhibition happens through the help of many volunteers.

On average, a single community is supported by:

• 32 volunteers
• ½ of the volunteers is new to the organization
• 2000 volunteer hours

Resulting in a volunteer value of about $50,860,-- per community.*

* Based on the Independent Sector’s estimate of the average value of a volunteer hour for 2019
**Attendance Profile**

**VISITOR ORIGIN**

- 45% Out of town
- 55% Local

**ATTENDANCE CHANGE**

- Decrease: 8%
- No change: 7%
- 1-20%: 8%
- 21-40%: 23%
- 41-60%: 31%
- 200% or more: 23%

**STUDENTS BY AGE BRACKET**

- Elementary School: 16%
- Middle School: 47%
- High School: 37%

**ATTENDANCE**

- **3175** Average number of exhibition visitors per community
- **5,821** Average number of program participants.

Data based on numbers reported by former communities.
Heard on the road!
(Case Studies)

“The value of the exhibit to our community can not be measured. Not only was it a great display but the community felt pride in being selected to display it. Many people in the community will never be able to visit the Smithsonian exhibit so this traveling exhibit gave our residents something new, interesting and lasting memory.” -- Live Oak, FL
The local exhibition focused on changes in Polk County that have impacted jobs, health, technology, and transportation. It sparked conversations about the agricultural roots of the town and how rural landscapes have been replaced by emerging urban areas.

Residents and elected officials participated in a panel discussion, Managing Change: Polk County’s Future. The Audience appreciated being part of the planning for the future of their county.

Student answered the postcard questions brainstormed about problems and solutions for changes in the county and completed an activity pack with their parents.

The local exhibit included information on Pughsville, an African-American community. The exhibit attracted many former members of this community, who had never visited the history center.
Live Oak, Florida
Suwannee River Regional Library

Population: 44,190
Attendance: 12,183
In-kind support: $14,168
Oral History projects: 147
Preservation workshops: 1,872

Their local exhibition, “Photos of the Past,” attracted many residents, who could identify people in the photos and reminisce about a bygone era. Topics in a series of lectures ranged from agriculture to art, and from bootlegged alcohol to music and gardening.

The museum took the opportunity of hosting a Smithsonian exhibition to explore a wide variety of marketing reach across three neighboring counties. Their marketing efforts included flyers, postcards, road signs, and social media, and resulted in increased attendance and over 1000 likes on Facebook.
The host organization in Cedar Key used the Crossroads Exhibition to talk about the local working waterfront. It created an opportunity to explore how changing transportation methods have impacted the community over time.

Additionally, the community created a video about Cedar Key to accompany the Crossroads Exhibition. The video reached over 70,000 viewers on Facebook, and is now a permanent fixture of the Cedar Key Visitors Center.

In preparation to hosting Crossroads, the community hosted a beach clean effort.
The main topics of discussion were changes over time with regard to transportation, innovation, industry, and recreation.

Host organizations worked with a variety of community businesses to create a companion exhibition that featured model tractors, old bank ledgers, and patents. By creating this type of community buy-in, it received over $60,000 of in-kind support and involved lots of new volunteers.
The local exhibition focused on rural health and changes in farming. Two centennial farms were used in the local exhibition as case studies highlighting changes in family farming over last 100 years.

Presented the screening of a documentary film about Dr. Tom Catena, one of the world’s 100 most influential people by Time Magazine in 2015 for his work in the war-torn Nuba Mountains of South Sudan. He was trained in a rural medicine curriculum that was developed at a clinic in Marshall.
The local exhibition, “Classrooms & Community: Changes in Rural America’s Sense of Community” explores how changes in the educational structure, moving from one-room buildings to consolidated schools in the town, shaped ideas and perceptions of what community means. They were able to highlight oral interviews done in 2018 that focus on their sense of place, memories, and values.

By the end of the project, they created a community mural at their new Visitor and Welcome Center which highlights changes in their community over time. A professional artist worked with local residents, especially students at Olympia High School, to design and paint it.

“*This was an amazing experience for our board and staff. It increased our capacity to integrate ideas, think about our community’s history, and work together in meaningful ways. It also generated considerable pride among members of the community.*”

- Atlanta Public Librarian
Dillsboro, Indiana

Aurora Public Library District, Dillsboro Branch Library

Population: 1,404  
Attendance: 1,650 (72% increase)

Their local exhibition, “Dillsboro: Where We Were, Where We Are, and Where We’re Going” showed the resilience of the Dillsboro community over the course of the past 50 years.

Local students were inspired by the exhibit postcard question, "If you were mayor, what would you do?,” and 275 students submitted essay responses. The town appointed a “Mayor for the Day: who enacted some of their wishes—giving popsicles to everyone in town. Younger residents could see that they have a voice in their community. They could be inspired and empowered to make change in their town.

“Crossroads” truly brought regionalism to Dillsboro. Some of our businesses have been working towards regional marketing and the new Dillsboro Arts/Friendship Gallery also attracts visitors from outside of our area. But, the Crossroads exhibit had a message that resonated with rural America far and wide.”

- Susan Greco, Town of Dillsboro Economic Development Director
Bristol, Indiana
Elkhart County Historical Museum

Total Population of Town: 1600
Number of paid staff: 5
Number of volunteer staff: 8
Number of Hours volunteered: 86
Total volunteer Value: 1,904.04
Total Attendance: 845
For Exhibit: 599
For Programs/Activities: 246
Local – 10%
Out of Town – 90%

This museum received new and renewed attention across the county and region. The exhibit with the Smithsonian’s brand reputation, drew visitors who had never been here.

“The exhibit generally was a reiteration of ideas and themes we already consider in our content development. The identity section was useful in dispelling stereotypes. That section especially opened our eyes to new ways we can look at other subjects we are teaching at the museum.”
North Manchester, Indiana
Center for History/North Manchester Historical Society

Total population of town: 6,100
Number of paid staff: 3
Number of volunteer staff: 25
Total volunteer hours: 1664
Total volunteer value: 43,520.00
Total Attendance: 1275
For exhibit: 454
For Programs/Activities: 821
Local: 70%
Out of Town: 30%

“We had 9 different groups visit us in private “Night at the Museum” viewing. Mainly service clubs. They were relaxed, happy to not be in crowds and had all the time they needed to see not only the Crossroads exhibit but also our companion exhibits. They compared notes and shared stories and realized we had an awesome museum. We will continue this program in the future. Each group is invited back once a year to have their regular meeting and then have a private visitation.”

The exhibition gave insight into American history and culture by reminding the visitors that they are so much the same people with very similar stories.
Hopkins, South Carolina

Historic Harriet Barber House

Population: 3,023
Attendance: 836
Funding support: $24,969
Value of volunteer hours: $15,343

*Crossroads* was shown in the historic Harriet Barber House located on a 42-acre tract of land purchased in 1872 by Samuel Barber, who was a well-digger as a slave, and his wife Harriet. Barber was a farmer and a minister after the Civil War. Over 100 people gathered at the exhibition opening for food, music, and to pay historical tribute to the Harriet Barber House. “Front Porch Music” was a popular event using traditional roots music to celebrate local culture and bring people to see *Crossroads*.

They hosted a series of teacher workshops in preparation for the exhibition to engage local teachers.
Moscow, Idaho

Latah County Historical Society and Moscow Chamber of Commerce

Population: 24,000
Attendance: 2,335
In-kind Support: $3,950

Moscow is a thriving rural community that sits at the crossroads of traditional American Indian trails, wagon roads, railroads, and now highways. It has seen major changes to local industries, but also still relies heavily on agriculture to sustain itself.

The local exhibit, “Then and Now: Latah County Communities at the Crossroads,” juxtaposed historic photos and contemporary photos of various towns in the county. The exhibit focused on the ways transportation and agricultural technology remade areas communities. Some towns faded away while other re0imagine their futures.
Rexburg, Idaho
Museum of Rexburg

Total population of town: 28,000
Number of paid staff: 4
Number of New Volunteers: 20
Total number of hours volunteered hours: 64
Total Volunteer Value: 1416.96
Total Attendance: 4,100
For Exhibit: 3600
For Programs/Activities: 500
Local: 80%
Out of Town: 20%

“With the MoMS exhibit we encouraged to build our own exhibit to accompany it. Doing that exhibit helped to spur ideas and thoughts about our community and the relationships with the local university. We had a lot of great feedback about the exhibit and the things that they learned about their town.”
Cuthbert, Georgia

Andrew College

Total Population: 3500
Number of volunteers: 75
Total Hours Volunteered: 272+
Total Attendance: 2783
For Exhibit: 2558
For Programs/Activities: 225
Local – 70%
Out of Town – 30%

5 Schools visited with a total of 822 children
   34% Elementary School
   34% Middle School
   32% High School

“Sharing ideas and opinions on the postcards highlighted both the serious/thoughtful comments and the comical/ridiculous ones. Amazingly, the local exhibits contributed a warm-homey atmosphere to the overall site, which inspired visitors to stay longer and talk more with one another and the docents. The postcard questions and the local exhibits helped to initiate impromptu stories that otherwise would have never been told.”
Blue Ridge, Georgia
Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association

Total Population of Town: 2300+
Total Amount of paid staff: 6
Total Amount of Volunteer staff: 75
Total Volunteer Hours: 336
Total Volunteer Value: 9139.20
Total Attendance: 2884
For Exhibit: 925
For Programs/Activities: 1959

“Zero school groups visited, some child attendance was possible, but no school trips were made due to the pandemic. However, some students from the area were involved in the Stories YES video project and collaborated together to gather media about their town and create short stories. The overall crowd pleaser was the interactive audio box and the kiosk computer.”
Iola, Kansas
Fine Arts Center

Total population of town: 5,000
Number of paid staff: 5
Total Attendance: 484
Local – 46%
Out of Town – 54%

“We experienced a wonderful example of how the Smithsonian brand can bring attention to the community hosting an exhibition. A gentleman appeared at our doors on the final weekend. He was from Virginia, and he was traveling for his job. He said he was a lover of the Smithsonian in D.C. but had not been able to visit since it had not been open for many months due to COVID. In his news feed, he read the Crossroads exhibit was in Iola and made the decision to drive 3 hours out of his way to visit the venue. A win win win for the Smithsonian, our venue, and our local economy.”

“Given COVID, we feel it was very timely for the Crossroads project to come to Iola. Many citizens in large populous areas are weighing how they are experiencing the pandemic in city vs. rural. It was a wonderful conversation starter for our county to see if there is an opportunity to guide those city crossroads in the direction of our community.”
Senatobia, Mississippi
Northwest Mississippi Community College

Total population of town: 7,610
Number of paid staff: 14
Number of volunteer staff: 14
Total volunteer hours: 495
Total Volunteer Value: 12,275.05
Total Attendance: 848
For Exhibit – 331
For Programs/Activities – 517
Local – 85%
Out of Town: 15%

“One of the best experiences for me as a host of Crossroads was seeing our graphic arts instructor bring her students in and literally go through the exhibit panel by panel illustrating design concepts, she was teaching them in class. Many of our students are from very small, rural communities and to give them the opportunity to see a Smithsonian exhibit that is so well-designed and to incorporate it as part of their educational experiences was one of the most amazing moments of my career.”

“Seeing people’s faces light up when they saw things that triggered their memories or past events or of their grandparents and listening to different people’s stories of their past and present. Meeting community members who came to see the exhibit was seeing and meeting rural America face-to-face.”
How have views of rural America changed over time?
Smithsonian exhibit provides opportunity for school students

Smithsonian Exhibit to open Saturday at Old School Museum
Selected Press Coverage
‘Change in Rural America’ exhibit attracts crowds – Farm Week Now (Illinois)

‘Crossroads: Change in Rural America’ – The Sault News (Michigan)

Smithsonian to Rural Regions: Your Wealth Is In Your Culture – PEW Charitable Trusts

Smithsonian exhibit visits Voorhees – The Times and Democrat (South Carolina)

EMCC Scooba library chosen for Smithsonian exhibition – The Meridian Star (Mississippi)

Smithsonian Exhibit About Rural America Makes Tracks to Salem – WBIW.com (Indiana)

At the Crossroads: Rural communities spotlighted in traveling Smithsonian exhibit
- REMC Magazine (Indiana)

“Museum on Main Street” comes to Dillsboro
- Vevay Reveille Enterprise & Switzerland County Democrat (Indiana)

Smithsonian exhibit kicks off Indiana tour at Dillsboro library - The Journal Press (Indiana)

Coming to a Crossroads: Traveling Smithsonian exhibit explores six rural communities across Indiana.
- AAA Crossroads Magazine
Smithsonian exhibit settles in at Old School - My Journal Courier (Illinois)

Crossroads: Change in Rural America reopens at DeKalb County History Center - Daily Chronicle (Illinois)

Smithsonian ‘Crossroads’ exhibit on tour in Illinois - AgriNews (Illinois)

SC Artist represents state’s rural landscape in Smithsonian exhibit - The State (South Carolina)
https://www.thestate.com/entertainment/article221835760.html

Grand opening for Smithsonian exhibit Saturday - The Monroe News (Michigan)

Rural America at a Crossroads: Smithsonian traveling exhibit opens at Atlanta Museum - The Herald News (Illinois)

Smithsonian exhibit opens at the Atlanta Museum - The Courier (Illinois)

Indiana Humanities Crossroads review video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUyKdlJ23r8