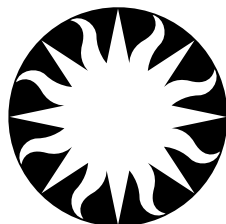
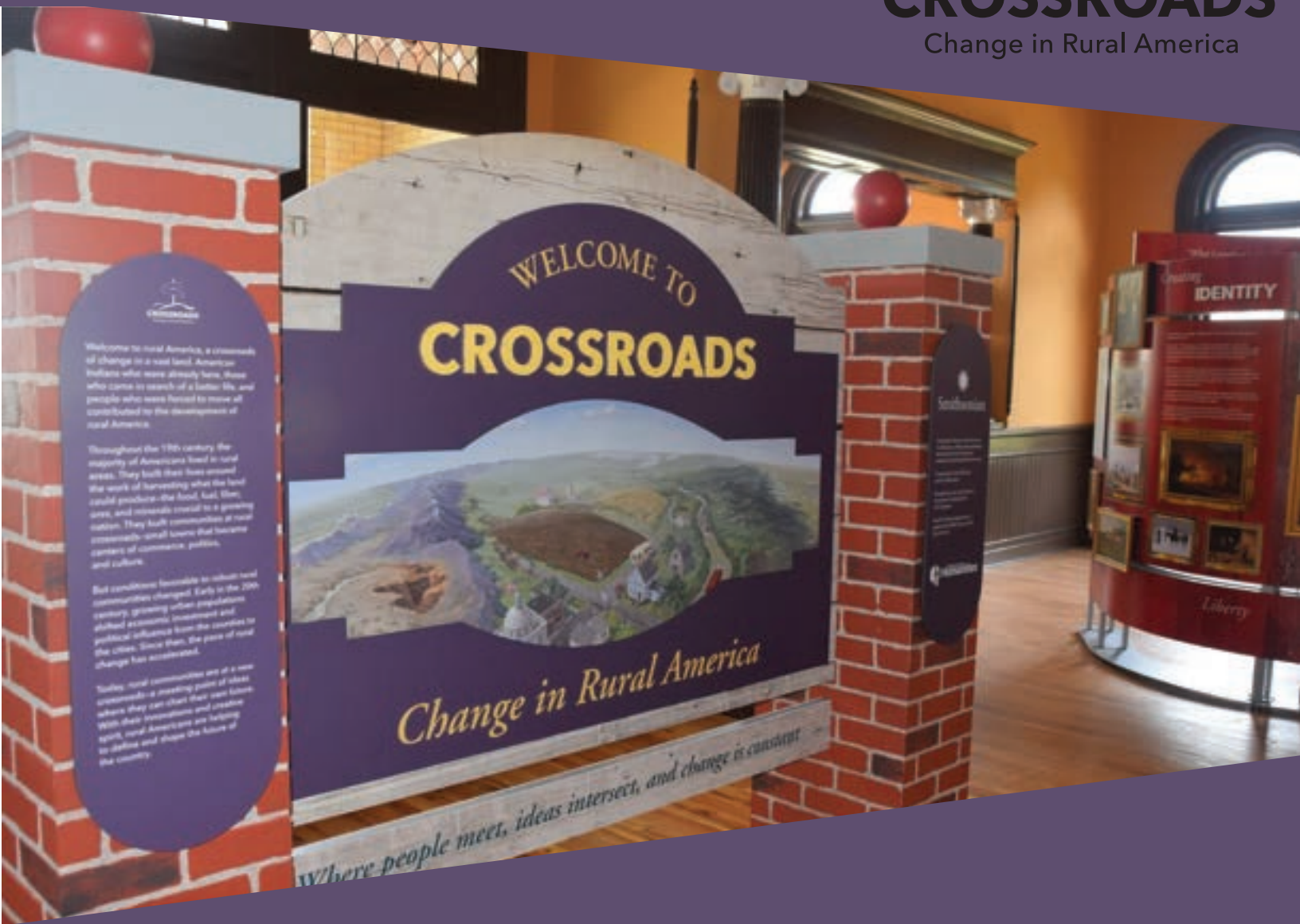


Smithsonian Museum on Main Street Impact Report



CROSSROADS
Change in Rural America

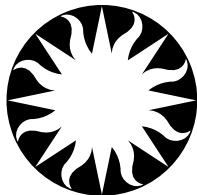


Smithsonian



The Smithsonian Museum on Main Street, *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* tour would not have been possible without the contribution of the following sponsors

Statewide Tour Sponsors



Smithsonian



Local Site Tour Sponsors





Linda Dunlavy
Executive Director
MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC)



In Massachusetts, a “rural town” is defined as having fewer than 500 people per square mile. Using this definition, more than half of all Massachusetts cities and towns are rural. Of these, half are in the four western counties (Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire) and the other half are distributed throughout the eastern Massachusetts counties of Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Essex, Middlesex, Nantucket, Norfolk, Plymouth and Worcester (all counties in Massachusetts except Suffolk).

Only 13% of the Commonwealth’s population lives in a rural town, but rural towns in Massachusetts make up make up 59% of the State’s total land area.

Rural communities have many assets:

- Natural beauty and physical landscapes that are conducive to outdoor recreation and tourism.
- Full participation in the movement towards small-scale farming, and locally made food and beverage products.
- A smaller scale that is focused on problem-solving, innovation and collaboration.
- A quality of life that attracts new residents and visitors.

However, the challenges facing rural municipalities are daunting. By and large, rural population growth is stagnant or declining and the rural population is growing older. An aging population exacerbates the problems of population decline by increasing the number of citizens on fixed incomes thus increasing the need for specialized healthcare services, housing and infrastructure and reducing the available workforce. A stagnant and aging population also reduces the number of children in the public school system but declining enrollment rarely eliminates the need for a classroom or the costs of maintaining school facilities.

Wages are significantly lower in rural areas than urban and suburban areas of the Commonwealth. The average earnings per job in Franklin County, the most rural county in Massachusetts, are only 40% of the average Boston-based Suffolk County job. The earnings in rural Barnstable and Berkshire Counties are not significantly better. Even with the consistency of the minimum wage rate, rural areas have jobs that pay significantly less and have fewer full-time jobs than the metro Boston area. Wages are not keeping pace with rising costs of living and are not preparing rural workers for inflation and increased housing costs since COVID.

The vast majority of state and federal funding programs use formulas largely reliant on population. This reduces the allocation of funding to rural areas, despite similar infrastructure and service needs.

The Rural Policy Advisory Commission was created by the legislature in 2015 to enhance the economic vitality of rural communities. The Commission serves as a research body for issues critical to the welfare and vitality of rural communities and advocates for the needs of rural municipalities across Massachusetts. Partnering with Mass Humanities to highlight the beauty, vibrancy, culture and challenges of rural U.S.A. through the traveling Crossroads exhibit was a significant advocacy collaboration and a successful one. Through the work of the RPAC, Massachusetts created its first ever Director of Rural Affairs in 2023.

Coincidence?

About Museum on Main Street



Museum on Main Street (MoMS) is a Smithsonian outreach program that engages small town audiences and brings revitalized attention to underserved rural communities. The Smithsonian partners with state humanities councils, like Mass Humanities, to bring traveling exhibitions, educational resources and programming to small towns across America through their own local museums, historical societies and other cultural venues.



Smithsonian

MoMS exhibitions are designed to engage communities and become a catalyst for conversation about life in small-town America. The goal is to start dialogue, build excitement, facilitate connections and open doors to your community's history, culture, people and sense of local pride.

About *Crossroads*

Many Americans assume that rural communities are endangered and hanging by a thread. But that perception is far from true in many areas. Many rural Americans work hard to sustain their communities. Why should revitalizing the rural places left behind matter to those who remain, those who left and those who will come in the future? All Americans benefit from rural America's successes. We can learn great things from listening to those stories. There is much more to the story of rural America!



Crossroads: Change in Rural America offers small towns a chance to look at their own paths and highlight the changes that affected their fortunes over the past century. The exhibition will prompt discussions about what happened when America's rural population became a minority of the country's population and the ripple effects that occurred.

Despite the massive economic and demographic impacts brought on by these changes, America's small towns continue to creatively focus on new opportunities for growth and development. Economic innovation and a focus on the cultural facets that make small towns unique, comfortable and desirable have helped many communities create their own renaissance. The future is bright for much of rural America as small towns embrace the notion that their citizens and their cultural uniqueness are important assets.



Museum on Main Street

Six Rural Communities

Mass Humanities' Selection Committee selected six sites from 19 applicants.

Eligible communities had to be "rural" with populations of no more than 12,000 as of the 2010 census.

Eligible sites also had to have a geographic distribution, have adequate space for the exhibit, and be able to host the exhibit in a tour date that works for the overall tour schedule.

The tour started in Essex in September 2022 and closed in Athol in June 2023.

Each site hosted the Smithsonian *Crossroads* exhibit for six weeks, during which the host organizations led programming and events aimed at sparking conversations about the past, present and future of their towns.



Essex (pop. 1,471) is a coastal town in Essex County. The Essex Shipbuilding Museum is a maritime museum that explores the history of the wooden shipbuilding industry in Essex. Essex produced more wooden fishing schooners between 1668 and the twentieth century than anywhere else in America.

Hull (pop. 10,072) is a town in Plymouth County, located on a peninsula at the southern edge of Boston Harbor. Hull is the smallest town by land area in Plymouth County. Lifesaving has been an important part of Hull's history. Joshua James, Hull's most famous lifesaver, and his crews, are estimated to have saved over 1,000 people from shipwrecks. The Hull Lifesaving Museum is located in the historic Point Allerton Life Saving Station.

Rutland (pop. 7,973) is a town in Worcester County. Rutland is the geographic center of Massachusetts; a tree, the Central Tree, located on Central Tree Road, marks the general spot.

Turners Falls (pop. 4,049) is an unincorporated village in the town of Montague in Franklin County. The village of Turners Falls was founded in 1868 as a planned industrial community that harnessed the Connecticut River through the construction of a dam and canal. Turners Falls was named after Captain William Turner, who, during King Philip's War in 1676, made a surprise attack on an indigenous encampment located near the falls.

Sheffield (pop. 3,257) is a town in Berkshire County. It is the oldest town in Berkshire County. Much of Sheffield remains open and in agricultural production. The Sheffield Resolves were an early Colonial American petition against British rule and a manifesto for individual rights. Elizabeth Freeman, who was enslaved in Sheffield, later used those ideas to win her freedom.

Athol (pop. 11,584) is a town in Worcester County and was once a major railway and industrial hub for the state. During the early part of the 20th century, local water power and rail service attracted manufacturers such as Union Twist Drill and the L. S. Starrett Company to the area, leading to Athol's nickname "Tool Town." Starrette remains the town's largest employer to this day, and thus does Athol live up to the nickname.



A Rural Love Story

We often think of a crossroads as a choice between two things: good and bad, progress or failure; technology or tradition. But we can also think of a crossroads as a place where things come together. Therefore, being at a crossroads is more about new possibilities and old traditions meeting together and deciding, "What will that relationship look like?" The geographer Yi Fu Tuan talked about a sense of place being created not only by its location on a map and the surrounding landforms but also by its emotional tone, social meaning and generative potential. Tuan asked us to consider the things yet to come and to recognize that we are defined not only by what we have been but by what we have the potential to become.

Crossroads are also about diversity. How do we see ourselves moving forward in a way that embraces new and different horizons, new and different forms of economy and new and different people and cultures? It is not either-or; it is about incorporating change. Thinking about a crossroads as something that adds rather than subtracts is helpful because, along with the things we gain with change, there is sometimes a sense of loss too. Our worlds are shaped by both what we gain and what we lose, and some of those losses are very real and challenging. But we can choose what we privilege, what we give value to, and what we prioritize.

What I love about rural Massachusetts are the people who choose rural life, whether that is to continue a tradition of generations or whether they are more recent transplants who come here from further away. These are people who prioritize what we euphemistically call quality of life, but what we really mean is that for these people--for us--the environment we live in is more important than convenience. In rural America, we have chosen to define ourselves by the strengths of our community. We have decided to value our farmers, the tradespeople, the artists and artisans, the songwriters, storytellers, the cooks, the mechanics, the educators, the churches and houses of worship, the immigrant communities, the indigenous peoples and the long-time residents. Our community members are our greatest asset and our greatest strength.

The world is at a crossroads. We are all facing questions about: What is important to us? How do we protect the ones we love? Where will we live? Who do we embrace? What do we value? I'll bring us back to the idea that life is rarely defined by simple dichotomies of good and bad, right or wrong.

We are on a path of constant learning, constant change and constant evolution, shaped by our choices, or priorities, our values and our history.

In rural Massachusetts, it is the diversity of our experiences, our influences, our past, that will help shape the richness of our futures.

As Yi Fu Tuan says, our generative futures.



Leo Hwang, Ph.D.
University of Massachusetts,
Amherst



Dr. Leo Hwang, Turners Falls

130

Free Public Programs

“The most successful thing about MoMS was the increase in visitation, and the multiple partnerships fostered through the programs. Being such a small organization, we had to rely on lots of collaboration and volunteers to pull this off. These relationships will definitely persist into the future and the organization as a whole is better for them.”

- KD, Director, Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum



Essex

Programs	Number Held
local exhibits	21
community conversations	6
lectures	16
panel discussions	10
films	2
school programs	11
oral histories recorded	25
other programs	39
TOTAL	130



Athol



Sheffield

Mass Humanities tasked the host organizations to host six free public programs while they were hosting the exhibit, including at least one community conversation on an important topic to their community. All of the hosts went above and beyond with the programming, some doing more than twice the number of programs requested of them.

Role of the State Tour Scholar

The overarching intention of using a tour scholar is to help host sites with the development of locally-based ancillary exhibitions, community activities and public educational programs that expand on the Smithsonian exhibition's central themes. The state scholar is essential to this process, working hand-in-hand with local organizers to craft exhibitions and activities that are expressions of their unique history and experience.

Dr. Leo Hwang, as the state tour scholar for *Crossroads* in Massachusetts, has been critical to the success of the program, from consulting with host organizations on their programming plans to being a guest lecturer in Turners Falls. He has shape the tour by connecting us to local perspectives and consideration of the “*Crossroads*” theme and how it relates to our rural Commonwealth communities.



Athol



Conversations

During the *Crossroads* tour across the Commonwealth, several common themes emerged from the programming and conversations that rural communities were having:

Access to Health Care

One major theme that came up again and again was access to health care for rural communities. This interest in rural health care is no doubt a result of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, this is not a new concern for rural communities in Massachusetts. Several of the host communities have deep historical connections to the health care crisis and the need to address access to health care in rural areas.

Sheffield programs spoke about Revolutionary War Doctors in the Berkshires and the establishment of modern medicine with the opening of the region's first hospital in the early 1900s.

Rutland formally housed the first state-operated sanatorium for treating tuberculosis patients in the United States. This history continues today when, in 2021, Rutland became the region's largest hub for COVID-19 vaccinations.

"An aging population exacerbates the problems of population decline by increasing the number of citizens on fixed incomes, the need for specialized healthcare services, housing and infrastructure, and reducing the available workforce."

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director, RPAC

Farming Pivots

In every community the exhibit visited, we heard conversations about how farming had changed and what local farmers were doing to try to preserve the culture of localized farming by making some very diverse and creative pivots and adapting to change. Several communities hosted farmer forums with the community, where it was the first time that community members got a chance to meet the farmers who worked the land and hear firsthand the challenges that they were facing.

"I learned how the farming issues we see in our own community are universal, and are not specific to our own location."

- Visitor Survey, Rutland



Diemand Farm, Franklin County

Conservation & Development

In every rural community, you ask what the locals value most, and time and again, the natural resources are the first thing they mention. The tour brought forth community conversations about the vital role rivers, woods and oceans play in a community's history - from its development to industrialization to modern-day recreation and tourism. The conversations also voiced concerns about how to balance addressing resource needs such as housing and transportation at the cost of protecting the natural beauty of Massachusetts' natural assets. In Athol some are still bitter about the Quabbin Reservoir. In Essex, one of the few remaining salt marshes in the country is under threat from climate change. Rural industries such as fishing, clamming and farming are needing to adapt, or at least find a compromise, or risk losing what they value most of their culture and way of life.



"Rural Massachusetts offer mountains and forests that allow for skiing, hiking, and world-class mountain biking facilities; rivers, lakes and ocean for kayaking, fishing and other water sports; and quintessential New England villages that are welcoming and idyllic."

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director, RPAC

Demographic Changes

All of the host communities had conversations about how their communities had changed over time. Several communities, including Essex and Sheffield, saw a population increases during the COVID pandemic as remote work made rural living more accessible to more people.



"I learned about how the community has adapted and continues to adapt as times change."

- Visitor Survey, Rutland

Several of the communities reported having growing pains and difficulties finding common ground between the "new" population and the one that had been living there for generations.

To quote our tour scholar Dr. Hwang,

"All the world is at a crossroads. Rarely is life defined by simple dichotomies of good and bad, right or wrong. We are on a path of constant learning, constant change, constant evolution shaped by our choices, or priorities, our values, and our history. In rural Massachusetts, it is the diversity of our experiences, our influences, and our past that will help shape the richness of our futures."

It is Mass Humanities hope that these conversations will continue long past the exhibit's closing helping us find better understanding, connections to our past, hope and a path forward for our future.

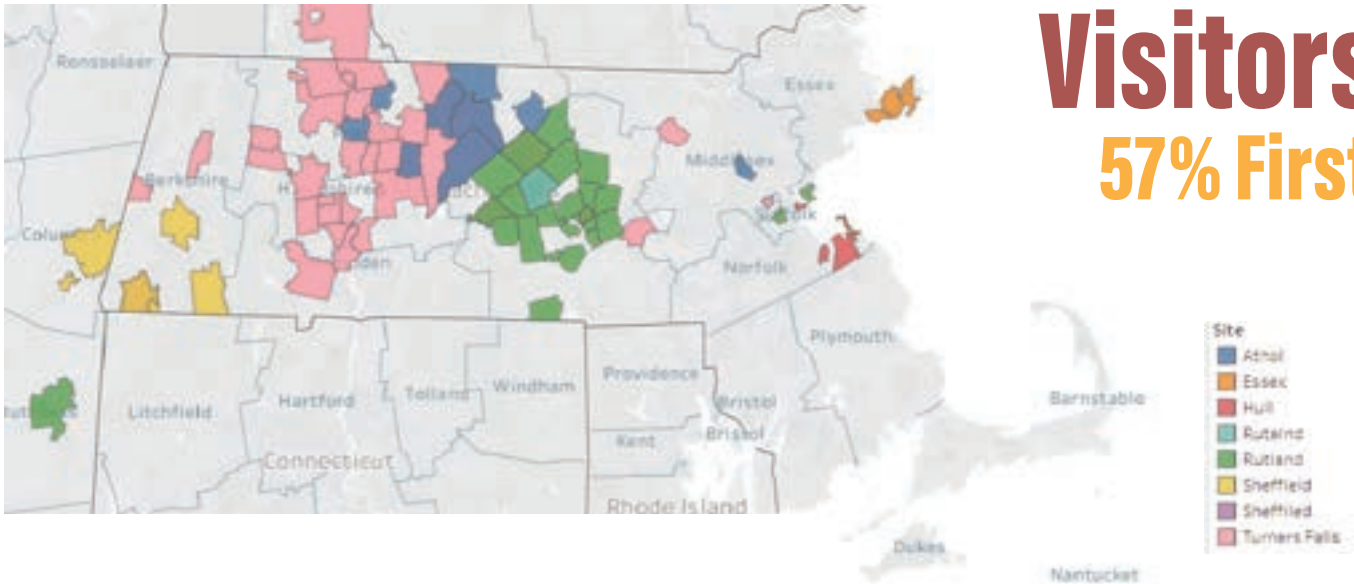


Visitors

9 Counties

Over 23,000

Visitors!
57% First time



Mass Humanities collected 388 visitor surveys from the communities hosting the MoMS *Crossroads* exhibit. Out of those surveyed 57%, were first time visitors to the host organization. The host organizations that were libraries also saw a 50% uptake in issuing new library cards to people within their community.

"I grew up in local town and a lot of the exhibit hit close to home; it made me appreciate and love where I come from and want to learn more. The diversity of rural life is often forgotten and it was a good reminder of what it means to be a community."

- Visitor Survey, Rutland



Walking Tour, Turners Falls

"loved the Smithsonian exhibit and how it challenges notions of rural life while also celebrating it."

- Visitor Survey, Turners Falls



Students



Rutland school group

"I think this has been the best experience I've had in a very long time with the kids."

- Visitor Survey, Rutland

2,000

Rural Students Reached

Museum on Main Street works with cultural organizations, students and teachers to help them understand and record local history. Mass Humanities was delighted with how many students came to see the exhibit. From home school groups to public school field trips, MoMS reached a large number of young people and connected them to their local history and community.

"I came as a chaperone for high school students and the exhibit was so professional. The local pictures and pieces were relevant to the students."

- Visitor Survey, Athol

35

School Groups



Sheffield

"The field trips from the schools were the most telling. Each day of the visits, we would see children return with family members because they had to show mom, dad, grandma, grandpop."

- Kerry Remington, Rutland Library Director

Funding

**\$10,000 Mass Humanities Grant
& \$10,000 for 2nd year of Programs
Thanks to our funding sponsors**

Mass Humanities provided each host organization with a \$10,000 grant as well as capacity-building workshops and will also be providing a second-year grant of \$10,000 to each host organization to continue programming after the exhibit leaves the community.

In addition to this support, each organization successfully leveraged additional funding from local donors, small businesses, local foundation and individual donations. Organizations also leveraged significant in-kind support from donated services including space rentals, food and more.

\$44,759
Additionally Raised

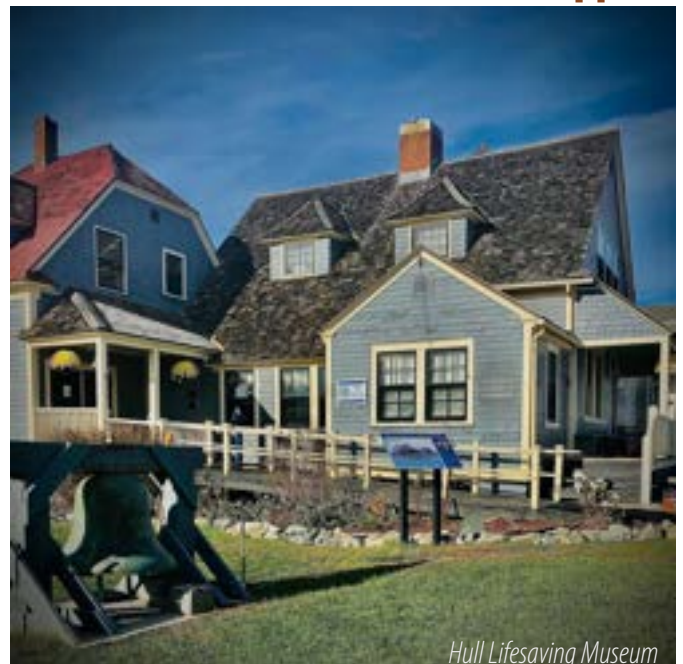


Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum



Discovery Center, Turners Falls

\$77,416
In-kind Support



Hull Lifesaving Museum

\$18,442
Capital improvements

The success of Museum on Main Street is evidenced not only in the broad scope of public programs in host communities but also in how the projects serve as catalysts for fostering lasting institutional advancements and ambitious capital improvements.

Partner Organizations

Museum on Main Street exhibitions and programs inspire a heightened awareness of local history. Exciting collaborations begin between museums, educational organizations, and local businesses. Entire communities get involved, unleashing a tidal wave of public programs and educational activities. The success of Museum on Main Street is evidenced not only in the broad scope of public programs in host communities but also in how the projects serve as catalysts for fostering lasting institutional advancements and ambitious capital improvements.



Turners Falls

"Overall, hosting this exhibit brought out a lot of civic and community pride. We not only saw increased traffic to the library, but we were able to watch connections form in the exhibit room, at events and in casual conversations at the library."

- Deena Caswell, Bushnell-Sage Library Director

69%

First-time volunteers

	Essex	Hull	Rutland	Turners Falls	Sheffield	Athol
Total # of volunteers	32	20	205	48	65	35
# that were first time volunteers	12	0	196	33	21	17
Total # of volunteer hours	531	160	540	593	1041	111

An important part of MoMS are the community partnerships the host organizations form. Mass Humanities asked that the host organizations work with partners in their communities for their programs. In total there were 67 partner organizations that MoMS reached.

Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Partnership

Mass Humanities is honored to have been able to partner with the Massachusetts Rural Policy Advisory Commission as part of the *Crossroads* tour. The mission of the Commission is to enhance the economic vitality of rural communities, which makes them ideal partners for helping to bring the first Museum on Main Street exhibit to Massachusetts.

The Commission and its members were invaluable partners for this tour. Providing advice, connections and perspective from planning to completion. Several members spoke at events along the tour. Overall, this partnership helped to bring awareness to legislators and policymakers in our rural communities.





Great Falls Discovery Center Opening Ceremony



Essex, Shipbuilding Program

"Our town planner came to see the exhibit at least three times. He commented that it was the blueprint needed to make a community."

- Kerry Remington , Rutland Public Library Director



Athol, Exhibit Assembly Team

"I am finding it so difficult to express in words how honored and grateful we are for this opportunity. Thank you for the support and training you have given to us throughout this exhibit." - Maureen Gillis, Development Director at Hull Lifesaving Museum"

