

# MUSEUM on Main Street

## CROSSROADS: Change in Rural America

In 1910, 72% of Americans lived in rural communities. In 2010, only about 18% of the U.S. population remained in rural areas. In just a century, massive economic and social changes moved millions of Americans into urban areas. Yet, less than 15% of the U.S. landmass is considered urban.

*“Something went wrong, says the empty house in the weed choked yard. Stones in the fields say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste. And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard like branches after a storm – a rubber cow, a rusty tractor with a broken plow, a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.”*

“Abandoned Farmhouse” by Ted Kooser



Many Americans have negative perceptions of rural communities. They consider small towns endangered and hanging on by a thread. Poverty, isolation, and neglected infrastructure are among the real threats small towns face.

**But, the story of rural America is much more complex. Many communities are thriving and vibrant in the face of major change.**

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.

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* offers small towns a chance to examine their own paths to highlight the changes that affected their fortunes over the past century. The exhibition’s sections will include:

- ◆ Identity: What is the strong identity that we have had with rural America?
- ◆ Land: How has our attraction to and interaction with the land formed the basis of rural America?
- ◆ Community: Rural America is not just the farm or the history of agriculture; it is also the community—small town Main Streets, local clubs and organizations, schools, and local businesses.
- ◆ Persistence: Changes have transformed rural America, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. What are some of these changes, and what have they meant for rural life? How have rural communities reshaped themselves in response?
- ◆ Managing Change: What is rural life like today and where is it heading? Rural Americans describe their experiences and their thoughts.



Smithsonian

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* will spark spirited conversations about the future across the country. The Smithsonian will focus on the words and actions of rural Americans telling their own stories of the changes that have shaped their communities by collecting stories from host states via its Stories from Main Street project. People interested in rural communities will be able to share stories through a web-based story collection campaign. A touchscreen computer kiosk included with the exhibition will offer visitors a chance to hear the experiences of people throughout the country.



The project will also embrace the notion of creative placemaking by providing a set of tools developed through partnerships with national and state organizations to help communities explore their past to decide what is most important about their towns and how to use it to preserve the future. State humanities councils participating in the project will play an integral role in facilitating these conversations and helping communities connect exhibitions and programmatic initiatives to a statewide initiative on civic engagement about the future of rural communities.

*“I like this community. I think it’s given me a lot, so I wanted to come back and give back to the community.”*

– small-town resident that moved back to the community,  
interviewed by the US Department of Agriculture

### **Sample Humanities Programs and Local Activities**

Host communities for *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* can explore a wide array of exhibition and program opportunities. Communities will be able to engage citizens in substantial discussions about a variety of themes:

- ◆ What defines your rural community?
- ◆ What is the role of the land in defining your community?
- ◆ How has your community evolved over the twentieth century?
- ◆ How has the reality of the rural experience for your community compared to our American myth?
- ◆ What are some of the inequities in rural America and your community, past and present?
- ◆ Why are some people welcome, and others not?

The exhibition will also encourage the audience to use evidence to chart change in their communities and to plan for the future, including discussions on topics such as resource management and rural sustainability.

### **Curators and Advisory Team**

The exhibition will be developed by co-curators Dr. Debra Reid of The Henry Ford and Dr. Ann McCleary of the University of West Georgia. An advisory team of scholars and rural leaders includes: Dr. David Danbom, professor emeritus from North Dakota State University; Donna Neuwirth of Wormfarm Institute; and Dr. Gregory Smoak of the University of Utah.



### **Funders**

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and state humanities councils across the nation. Support for Museum on Main Street is provided by the United States Congress.

### **Availability to State Humanities Councils**

Exhibitions available for tours beginning September 2018 (council participation begins fall 2017)

### **Contents and Crates**

Free-standing exhibition with audio, video, and interactive components, banners, and artifacts mounted in cases. Requires 700 -750 square feet of exhibition space. Number of crates and weights to be determined.

## **Crossroads Resources Provided**

### **Administrative Resources**

- ◆ State coordinator manuals featuring program development strategies, sample budgets/contracts and other support materials. Provided in hard copy format and also available online at [www.museumonmainstreet.org](http://www.museumonmainstreet.org) for easy access and for quick distribution of information;
- ◆ Museum on Main Street listserv for state council coordinators and national organizers providing answers to project questions and opportunities for networking and project development;
- ◆ The MoMS team provides advice and assistance in all areas of program development and tour coordination.
- ◆ Access to Stories from Main Street, a digital archive of stories about small and rural communities, and a toolkit of storytelling and story collecting training resources for use in local projects. Host councils and organizations can contribute local stories, audio clips and videos via the project website at [www.museumonmainstreet.org](http://www.museumonmainstreet.org). Councils are also invited to develop questions and themes that can be used in story-gathering campaigns on the website.

### **Workshops and Meetings**

A state council MoMS coordinator will attend and/or host the following workshops and meetings:

- ◆ National MoMS Orientation Webinar — for state council staff members to meet with Smithsonian project directors to learn more about MoMS in advance of the tour (state council coordinators that have completed a MoMS tour are not required to participate);
- ◆ National Meeting — state council staff member to meet with the MoMS team, exhibition curators, and other participating state councils one year in advance of the tour;
- ◆ State Program Workshop — Smithsonian personnel co-host a program planning workshop for all in-state participating venues and partners;
- ◆ State Installation Workshop — Smithsonian personnel co-host a workshop at the site of the exhibition's tour opening for all in-state participating venues.



### **Public Relations/Marketing**

- ◆ Participation in national publicity efforts by the Smithsonian;
- ◆ Smithsonian web page, at [www.museumonmainstreet.org](http://www.museumonmainstreet.org), featuring each state's rural itinerary and homepage links to each state humanities council;
- ◆ Project press kit: digital press images, and news releases for local use;
- ◆ One multi-colored outdoor banner featuring state council name;
- ◆ Full color poster with state council logo, along with full color postcards for promotional use

### **Fundraising Resources**

- ◆ MoMS informational brochure;
- ◆ Foundation proposal template;
- ◆ Upon request, letters of support from SITES, exhibition curator;
- ◆ Opportunities to provide underwriting credit on exhibition's credit panel.

### **Education Materials**

- ◆ Educational resources, filmography, and reading lists;
- ◆ Docent handbook and training materials;
- ◆ Local Exhibition Support Manuals featuring program development strategies, local exhibition development guidelines, exhibition script, and installation instructions. Provided in hard copy format and also available on-line (1 per local site and 1 for state coordinator);
- ◆ Spanish translation of the exhibition script.

