

April 2009 Edition

'Between Fences'

Smithsonian exhibit comes to Oldham Co. History Center

The exhibit explores history's relationship with fences

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LA GRANGE, Ky. (April 2009) – One of the world's best known museums, The Smithsonian Institution, is coming to Oldham County in the form of a traveling exhibit. "Between Fences" explores the relationships between communities and fences, and will provide many opportunities in which the community can participate.

"The Smithsonian always brings prestige and a great reputation, attracting a wide range of audiences," said Nancy Theiss, executive director of the Oldham County History Center in La Grange. "Between Fences" is a Museum on Main Street exhibit created by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

The Museum on Main Street program is a partnership between the Smithsonian Institution, the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and state humanities councils nationwide that serve small-town museums and communities. This program gives smaller communities a chance to benefit from the expertise and exhibit experience of the Smithsonian Institution, said Theiss.

"There are lots of Kentuckians that have never been to Washington, D.C., to see any of the Smithsonian Museums. Bringing the Smithsonian exhibit to Kentucky allows our Kentuckians an opportunity to see a first-class exhibit in their own home town," said Kathleen Pool, Associate Director for the Kentucky Humanities Council Inc. Pool added that the Kentucky Humanities Council and the Oldham County History



• For more information, visit:
www.museumonmainstreet.org or contact the Oldham
County History Center at (502) 222-0826 or online at:
www.oldhamcountyhistoricalsociety.org.

Center are “allowing the residents of Oldham County access to the cultural resources of our nation’s premiere museum. It also allows the local museum to use the Smithsonian name to get people excited about coming back to visit their own local museum.” “Between Fences” will be on display from April 25 through June 6 in the Rob Morris Chapel, located on the Oldham County History Center grounds. The exhibit opening will kick off with an Ice Cream Social at noon on April 25. The exhibit consists of tools, photographs, journals, postcards and illustrations relating to the history of fences. Visitors may be surprised at the exploration of the multiple meanings behind this everyday icon, said Pool. “This exhibit is more than just about fences. It is also about land division and what fences represent. Are we fencing things in or are we fencing them out?”

A fence conveys information about the people who built it, how they view and use their property, and the nature of their relations with their neighbors, she said. “Such barriers speak eloquently about how we view our communities and country as well. ‘Between Fences’ explores the implications of fences in Colonial America, around gated communities, and at our country’s borders with Canada and Mexico.”

The History Center had a large turnout when it hosted a previous Smithsonian Institution exhibition, “Key Ingredients: America by Food,” said Theiss. To accompany this exhibit, Theiss and the community produced a cookbook with recipes and stories that focused on the local food traditions and families of Oldham County.

“Between Fences” will focus on the way fences create barriers and divide landscapes, she said.

The exhibit is broken down into sections, such as This Land is My Land, Home, Farm & Fence, Production, Don’t Fence Me In, Good Fences Make Good Neighbors and Building Borders.

“It speaks well (of Oldham County) that the Smithsonian would pick a couple of county museums to use as the backdrop for presenting this exhibit,” said Bob Martin, chair of the Board of Directors for the Oldham County Historical Society.

Community projects are being planned to stimulate interest in the exhibit for the short time it will be on display at the History Center. More than 250 individual pickets have been given out for the Paint A Picket project, said Martin. These pickets are to be painted individually by all ages to celebrate “What History Means to Me” as the theme. It’s a “really unique” project, said Martin.

These pickets will be on display at the History Center grounds during the Golden Anniversary Gala on Sept. 25. The Oldham County Historical Society celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and the Paint A Picket project “is really a great community effort to have people voice to us what history means to them and why it is important. We can’t



Photo provided

Historically, fences have played a prominent role in the development of communities across the globe.

wait to see the results,” said Theiss.

Even though “Between Fences” might not appeal to everybody in the community, said Martin, it is an honor for it to be displayed in Oldham County. A lot of dedicated volunteers are needed to help install the exhibit, act as docents, and dismantle and package the exhibit so that it can arrive safely at its next destination.

The Oldham County History Center is the fifth city this exhibit will travel to in Kentucky, with each town typically hosting the exhibit for six weeks, said Pool. After leaving La Grange in June, it will go to the Boyle County Public Library in Danville for its sixth and final stop in Kentucky.

Host venues, such as libraries, state parks or local museums, find that a Smithsonian Institution exhibition increases community involvement because it “brings the excitement that comes along with hosting a “Smithsonian” exhibit,” said Pool. Each host community is required to assemble a local exhibit to tie into the traveling exhibit, and the Kentucky Humanities Council offers a mini-grant to host local humanities programs that supplement the exhibit. “This requires some planning and partnerships locally that would not have taken place otherwise,” she said.

“The topics that are offered with these traveling museums gives smaller museums the chance to showcase a particular aspect of each particular exhibit,” said Theiss. Many opportunities present themselves for explaining why fences are an integral part of the history of the different Oldham County communities.

Fences were often associated with European culture, German and English cultures being the primary landowners when Oldham County was initially established in the early 1800s, said Theiss. Oldham County has its share of board fences found around horse farms along U.S. 42, unique stone fences such as the ones surrounding Floyd’sburg Cemetery and the Kentucky State Reformatory, and even chain link fences that denote security and protection around some of the larger businesses in the county today.

Oldham County has a fencing heritage of which it can be proud.

“Between Fences” is the fourth Museum on Main Street Exhibit the Kentucky Humanities Council has brought to Kentucky. Previous exhibits include “Key Ingredients: America by Food” (two tours), and “New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music.”

The Kentucky Humanities Council has booked a new exhibit, “Journey Stories,” to tour Kentucky in 2011. Applications to host this exhibit will be taken later in the year.



Photo provided

This photo, part of the traveling exhibit, shows how fences have contributed to boundary disputes.