

Deseret Morning News, Friday, October 13, 2006

'Between Fences' — Smithsonian exhibit at Layton museum explores Americans and their barriers

By [Natalie Clemens](#)

Deseret Morning News

LAYTON — According to a national exhibit, fences reveal a lot about people and their relationships with others.

The exhibit, "Between Fences," is a National Smithsonian traveling exhibit that explores how people have fenced in their lives and property throughout history.

The thought-provoking exhibit opened at the Heritage Museum of Layton, 437 Wasatch Drive, on Sept. 16. The free museum will host the display until Nov. 2.

The museum's director and curator, Bill Sanders, said the display is designed to show people how they live and remind them about how they look at and treat others.

"The exhibit is kind of a look at how we use fences," he said. "We live between fences and sometimes we hardly notice they are even there, but they become pretty important factors in our lives and have been pretty important factors in history."

Sanders said he thinks the exhibit is designed to stimulate discussion. He said that Layton is fortunate to be the first of five cities in Utah to host the Smithsonian exhibit.

"I think this is an opportunity for people who have never had a chance to go to the Smithsonian to see something that the Smithsonian produces," he said. "I think that's one of the greatest benefits (of the exhibit), to bring Washington, D.C., to Layton."

The national exhibit includes five different sections that are displayed on different panels. From documenting the beginnings of fences in America to examining the possibility of fencing in the United States' borders, the exhibit encourages people to think about different barriers both physical and metaphorical.

The first section, "This Land Is My Land," explores the concept of property ownership.

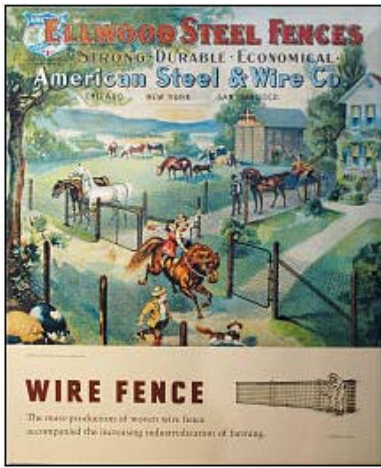
"(It looks at) how we actually came about getting our property and how we regard our property," Sanders said.



Fifth-grader Nivek Christopherson from Whitesides Elementary in Layton checks out the barbed wire fences in the traveling Smithsonian exhibit.

Mike Terry, Deseret Morning News

"This Land Is My Land" documents the introduction of fences into North America by early colonists. It includes early pictures of Jamestown, Va., and Plymouth, Mass.



An antique advertisement for Ellwood Steel Fences is on display as part of the traveling Smithsonian exhibit titled "Between Fences."

Mike Terry, Deseret Morning News

"They brought the concept of fencing in your garden, or your crop, so the animals that roamed free didn't get into your garden," Sanders said.

The second section, "Farm and Fence" shows the production and invention of different fence types.

"In the eastern part of the United States, you had plenty of timber and stuff like that, so early fences were made of large rails," Sanders said.

These large-rail fences were called worm fences.

As people traveled across the country, timber wasn't as readily available, so in the early 1850s and 1860s, that sparked the creation of barbed wire.

Sanders said that as fencing moved across the country that also created a conflict between ranchers and farmers. The farmers wanted to fence areas in, but ranchers wanted to leave spaces open.

The exhibit's third display, "Don't Fence Me In," addresses the land wars between farmers, ranchers and their lawyers. It shows how fences were used in the Midwestern and Western states. It also includes a display of different types of barbed wire.

The exhibit's fourth section, "Good Fences Make Good Neighbors" looks at how people fence themselves in with their own personal property.

"Americans define themselves, their neighborhoods, and their country ... beginning with their yards," the exhibit states.

Sanders said the exhibit asks, "Are we really fencing ourselves in, or are we fencing others out and making barriers between homes?"

The exhibit's final section, "Building Borders," explores the fences or barriers that separate the United States from Canada and Mexico.

"Perceptions of America and its neighbors are reflected in the way we build our boundaries," the exhibit states.

Sanders said it discusses the hot topic of fencing off the Mexican border and also talks about the U.S. border with Canada.

In preparing for the national exhibit, Bill Sanders and Joy Petro took pictures of local fences to display on the walls behind the exhibit. The museum's board also invited local artists to paint pictures that included fences to complement the exhibit.

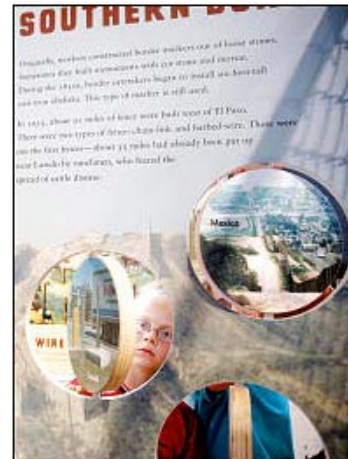
The traveling Smithsonian exhibit fills up one of the museum's galleries and is set up in panels that display pictures and cards.

"It's a really interesting display," Sanders said.

Sanders said the display was brought to Layton with the help of the Utah Humanities Council and The Museum on Main Street, an organization that works with the Smithsonian Institute to put together traveling exhibits that can go to smaller museums in rural areas of the United States.

"Between Fences" will be at the Heritage Museum of Layton until Nov. 2, 2006. The museum is the first of five Utah locations to host the display, which will be in Utah until July 2007. The Heritage Museum of Layton is open Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and closed Sunday and Monday.

The national exhibit will also travel to the American West Heritage Center in Wellsville, then the John Hutchings Museum of Natural History in Lehi, the Anasazi State Park Museum in Boulder and the Delta City Library in Delta.



Fifth-grader Josh Faulkner, a student from Whitesides Elementary in Layton, examines a display with the Smithsonian exhibit titled "Between Fences."

Mike Terry, *Deseret Morning News*

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