

# COUNTRY CROSSROADS

CONNECTING RURAL FAMILIES

## Let's cover rural Manitoba with 'barn quilts,' say Ag Museum staff

Inspired by other barn quilt trails of southern Ontario and Iowa, staff with the Manitoba Agricultural Museum at Austin hung out their own barn quilt on Mother's Day and are working with other communities to piece together a map of where more will eventually be found



Manitoba Agricultural Museum's executive director Georgette Hutlet (l) and curator Tanya Wiegand display the museum's new barn quilt sign, to hang on the fence of the Austin-area museum. The pattern is a version of the Log Cabin block and is emblazoned with one of the museum's most popular artifacts, Big Roy, a Versatile Model 1080. PHOTO: MANITOBA AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM

**BY LORRAINE STEVENSON**  
Co-operator staff

Eunice and Doug Pratt were heading south through Iowa for a U.S. holiday when they spotted the first 'barn quilt' — a brilliant-coloured quilt block affixed to the front of a barn.

But it wasn't made with fabric.

It was a large, colourful wooden eight-foot-square painted replica of a quilt block, and one of many the Winnipeg couple saw as they began to travel along the state's barn quilt trail, guided by an online map to find them.

"We were lucky to get out of Iowa after that," jokes Doug. "I don't know how many thousands of km we put on."

The Winnipeg couple says the vivid no-two-alike quilt signs were a sight to see, and worth the detour.

"They were absolutely spectacular to see as you're passing by," said Eunice. Some were quite large and most on the corn-

growing state's still-plentiful older barns. They learned they'd been done as a tribute to farm women, their artistry as quilters, and their contributions to their communities.

"It just gave such note of history and a note of art to the countryside," added Eunice. "It's such a touching tribute to farm women and the contributions they made."

The barn quilt will start to appear in Manitoba too, say staff with the Manitoba Agricultural Museum. Before she came to this province to become its curator, Tanya Wiegand worked with teams of artists and local history buffs in southern Ontario's tobacco country to create a barn quilt trail there.

The project, designed as a boost for tourism and the rural economy, completed 20 barn quilts in each of four counties, says Wiegand. They were each to be affixed to barns and other local historic sites. A local hotelier loved the sight of them and had one done for her business.

Wiegand and other museum staff plus Parkland Tourism officials are now working with several rural communities to start blazing a barn quilt trail here too.

It's a way for communities to highlight historical and heritage sites, said Wiegand.

"It's a really good tourist attraction," she said. "It will get people off the main road, going to places they would not normally go."

As a start, the museum unveiled its own barn quilt on Mother's Day. The tribute to the museum's own quilt collection features an image of 'Big Roy,' Versatile Model 1080, in its centre. It also launched a new website to inspire others to get started creating one of their own.

"Once more barn quilts get done they'll be on the website and people can access the website and know exactly where they are, and to travel through the countryside and see them," she said.

Museum executive director Georgette Hutlet is excited about the idea.

It's a perfect way to highlight the last remaining old barns of Manitoba, of which there are fewer and fewer, said Hutlet. There are also many other interesting heritage sights that could bear the block, she said, adding Parklands Tourism executive director Kathy Swann plans to blaze a barn quilt trail that directs too.

"We will meet with communities one by one and make suggestions of other things that might benefit from having a barn quilt too," said Hutlet.

"It could also be a cenotaph, or a historic building or something that's been there for a long time," said Hutlet. "Often people who live somewhere for a long time don't realize the attractions they have."

The tourism value is that these attractions can bring people to places they've never been before, or wouldn't ordinarily visit.

According to various Iowa websites, the quilt block signs were often tackled by 4-H clubs

and school students working with adult volunteers and local quilters to select designs and locations, and paint and install the signs. About a third of Iowa's counties embraced the idea and have barn quilt trail maps available in stores, museums, public offices and tourist booths.

It just seems right that Manitoba be covered by these quilts too, said Wiegand. Quilting is such a key part of our rural heritage.

"Barns and quilts just go together."

Museum staff urge anyone interested in this initiative to check out their new website [www.barnquiltsmanitoba.com](http://www.barnquiltsmanitoba.com) and contact them for more information.

Manitoba Agricultural Museum  
P.O. Box 10  
Austin, Man. R0H 0C0  
Tel.: 204-637-2354  
Fax: 204-637-2395

[lorraine@fbcpublishing.com](mailto:lorraine@fbcpublishing.com)