

Museum of Agricultural Technology

Lincoln, Nebraska

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Although they operate as autonomous realms on their own, Agriculture and the State of Nebraska have forged an undeniable symbiotic relationship. The combined success of our State's harvested crops and desirable livestock serves as a primary engine for our economy. Furthermore, our State's demonstrated agricultural prowess has projected and maintained a fitting identity in the consciousness of non-Nebraskans.

Located on the University of Nebraska's East Campus, the *Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum* is unique. There is no other public museum in the United States dedicated to showcasing tractors that are either historically-significant themselves (such as the 1909 Minneapolis Ford B) or tractors that feature technological breakthroughs within a larger historical pedigree (such as the Al-lis Chalmers WC). While some private or corporate collections may exceed the *Larsen's* collection in their overall number of tractors, most of them are dedicated to particular manufacturers. Furthermore, these private collections are typically located in challenging rural areas that discourage the cultivation of a regular visitorship.

As a newcomer to the State of Nebraska, I am discovering the poetic qualities of the Nebraskan agricultural landscape. But perhaps more importantly, I find that I am developing a healthy fetish for those technological assemblages that tend, toil and till the soil itself. It is clear to me the purpose of the *Larsen Museum* resonates with the region in which it sits.

My interest in the current museum began in August 2005 when I moved to Lincoln's East Campus neighborhood. Along Holdridge Street, I glimpsed a small red sign with "TRACTOR MUSEUM" in white block letters. Intrigued, I followed a series of them to a tucked-away niche on UNL's East Campus. As a visitor, I found a non-descript building with no public visibility and with insufficient square footage for their current curatorial mission. As an architect, I recognized a measurable disconnect between the cultural significance of the *Larsen* and its current facility. Therefore, as a vehicle for my 4th Year Design Studio at the UNL College of Architecture (ARCH 410: Tectonics), I asked students to design a speculative successor to the current *Lester F. Larsen Tractor and Power Test Museum*.

Relative to the current museum, this new Museum of Agricultural Technology would:

- serve as our nation's premiere resource for the dedicated preservation and presentation of Agricultural Technology.
- be located on a visually-prominent site in Lincoln NE.
- sharply increase square footage for permanent and temporary exhibits.
- contain an Agricultural Education Center that would serve visiting schoolchildren as well as vocational continuing education for the general public.

Fifteen students and I began the design project with an overnight trip to Moline IL to tour the architecturally-significant John Deere Headquarters designed by Eero Saarinen (1964) and the Figge Art Museum designed by David Chipperfield (2005). Both of these buildings are celebrated works of architecture and the trip enabled students to experience each building's respective qualities firsthand. Upon return to Lincoln, students were given a choice to design for one of two equally-viable sites: An urban site on the southwest corner of Q Street and Centennial Mall, or a suburban site at the far west end of the existing East Campus test track along 33rd Street (north of the forthcoming *International Quilt Study Center*). Over the 12-week development of their individual proposals, students were responsible for identifying a specific design intent that would help them make design decisions at various scales. This design intent may prompt a particular lay of the building on the land, as well as may suggest a certain technical detail with expressive qualities. Our semester was punctuated on 07 December 2005 with a Final Jury that was open to the public. Through the economic generosity of several donors, I was able to invite out-of-town architects to participate in this event. While it was good to have visiting architects, I was pleasantly surprised by the number of non-architects as well. That same week, the story of our semester experience was featured in several articles including the *Omaha World Herald*, *Lincoln Journal Star* and UNL's *Daily Nebraskan*.

This temporary exhibit is possible only through the contributions of many people. The linear sculpture in this exhibit is a design "probe" by student Mike Bettis. Mike generated this probe after having recorded the various cyclical rhythms of a Johnny Popper tractor from its initial ignition, putting it in gear, throttling up, and driving for about ten minutes before shut off. Of the four projects exhibited, the architectural proposals by students Beate Kehr and Kerstin Kuhlgemeyer are for the urban site in downtown Lincoln. The proposals by Troy Fosler and Cole Wycoff are for the UNL East Campus site along 33rd Street. My sincerest thanks go to both Bill Splinter and Jeremy Steele for their overall support for this studio's effort and their collective willingness to act as a resource for the students. I also thank all fifteen ARCH 410 students for making their best studio effort to date. I owe additional thanks to Cole for his assistance in organizing this exhibition.

Although this student work was executed as an academic exercise, I hope this exhibit will spark an interesting dialogue between tractor enthusiasts, the current *Larsen Museum*, the University of Nebraska, the City of Lincoln and State of Nebraska about the feasibility of such a premiere facility in forthcoming years.

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