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## Vernacular Architecture Forum Syllabus Exchange



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**instructor:** Nora Pat Small  
**course title:** History of American Architecture  
**institution:** Eastern Illinois University  
**date offered:** Spring, 2007

  

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**History of American Architecture**  
**HIS 5050**  
**Spring 2007**

Dr. Small

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Office Hours: Wed. 9:00-11:30, Mon. and Fri. 12:30-1:30, 3:00-4:00, and by appointment

This syllabus is subject to change at the professor's discretion.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 581-6583.

**Texts:**

Leland Roth, *American Architecture: A History*

Dell Upton and John Vlach, *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*

Other readings as assigned.

**The Course:**

This course is designed to acquaint you with the American built landscape and with the ways that architectural historians and others have studied and analyzed it. As the semester progresses, you will want to consider how architectural history contributes to our understanding of society and culture, and how an understanding of the built environment can contribute to public interpretations of that culture and to historic preservation. The overriding question for the semester is: why does the American landscape look the way it does?

**Your Grade:**

This class will consist of both lecture and discussion. Be prepared to discuss all of the assigned readings on their due dates. Take careful notes in class. Feel free to raise questions or to ask for clarification during lecture or discussion.

Your grade is based on:

Class participation: 25%

Weekly readings journal: 25%

Research paper: 50% broken down as follows—

- Bibliography: 10% Due Jan. 29
- Thesis statement: 10% Due Feb. 19
- Draft of paper: 15% Due Mar. 19
- Final paper: 15% Due April 30

## Calendar

Jan. 8

Course Introduction

Readings:

Introduction to *Common Places*

Jan. 15: No Class, MLK, Jr. Day

Jan. 22

Interpreting style and materials

Readings:

W. Barksdale Maynard, excerpt from *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*

Dell Upton, "Art," chapter six in *Architecture in the United States*

Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," in *Common Places*

Kniffen and Glassie, "Building in Wood," in *Common Places*

Journal question: How can style be used to understand architecture? Why should we not use style alone to analyze architecture? What is the (a) definition of style?

Jan. 29

Seventeenth Century

Readings:

Roth, ch. 2

"Virginia's Cure," 1661, from *America Builds*

Carson et al, "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," from *Material Life in America*

Frasier Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation," in *Common Places*

**Bibliography due**

Feb. 5

Seventeenth Century, cont.

Isham and Brown, "Early Rhode Island Houses," in *Common Places*

Abbott Lowell Cummings, "Inside the Massachusetts House," in *Common Places*

Robert St. George, "'Set Thine House in Order': The Domestication of the Yeomanry in Seventeenth-Century New England," in *Common Places*

Joseph Wood, "Village and Community in Early Colonial New England," from *Material Life in America*

Journal question: Compare, contrast, and explain the seventeenth-century Chesapeake Tidewater region's built environment and the seventeenth-century New England built environment.

Feb. 12

Eighteenth Century—Theory and Interpretation

Readings: Glassie, “Eighteenth-Century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building,” in *Common Places*

Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” from *Material Life in America*

Alan Gowans, “Mansions of Alloways Creek,” in *Common Places*

Feb. 19

Eighteenth Century—Southern vernacular and high style

Readings:

Roth, ch. 3

J. Gibbs, “A Book of Architecture,” from *America Builds*

Dell Upton, “Vernacular Domestic Architecture in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Virginia,” in *Common Places*

Journal question: Describe the eighteenth-century rural Virginia landscape. How did it differ from the seventeenth-century landscape? Why did it change? (That is, what social, cultural, economic, and/or political forces were at work that explain, or help explain, the changes?)

**Thesis statement due**

Feb. 26

Post-Revolution—Neoclassicism and Technology

Readings:

Roth, ch. 4

Travis McDonald, “Constructing Optimism: Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest,” from *PVA VIII*

“Thomas Jefferson and the Virginia State Capitol,” 1785, from *America Builds*

Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to Trustees of East Tennessee College,” 1810, from *America Builds*

P. C. L’Enfant, “Plan for the Capitol City,” 1791, from *America Builds*

P.C. L’Enfant, “Plan for Paterson, New Jersey,” 1792, from *America Builds*

A. Benjamin, “The American Builder’s Companion,” 1806, from *America Builds*

B. H. Latrobe, “Responsibilities of an Architect,” 1806, from *America Builds*

Journal question: In the post-Revolutionary era in the new republic (c. 1790-1820) of the United States, neo-classicism and romanticism entered architectural practice. How did these two movements manifest themselves in American architecture? What principles underlay them? How were those principles incorporated not only in the work of architects like Benjamin Latrobe and Thomas Jefferson, but also in the vernacular built environment?

March 5: No class, interviews

March 12: No class, spring break

March 19  
Nineteenth Century

Readings:  
Roth, ch. 5, 6

**First draft of paper due**

March 26  
Nineteenth Century, cont.

Readings:  
A.J. Downing, "Cottage Residences," 1842, from *America Builds*  
Horatio Greenough, "On Function in American Architecture," 1843, 1852, from *America Builds*  
J. Ruskin, "The Seven Lamps of Architecture," 1849, from *America Builds*  
Gervase Wheeler, "Cheap Wooden Dwellings," 1855, from *America Builds*  
J. Bogardus, "Cast Iron Buildings," 1856, from *America Builds*

Journal question: In what ways did new construction methods and materials affect the American built environment in the nineteenth century?

April 2  
Nineteenth Century, cont.

C. Beecher and H.B. Stowe, "The American Woman's Home," 1869 from *America Builds*  
Olmsted and Vaux, "Plan for Riverside, Illinois," 1868, from *America Builds*  
C.F. McKim, "On Colonial Architecture," 1874 from *America Builds*  
R.T. Ely, "Pullman: A Social Study," 1885, from *America Builds*  
John Vlach, "Shotgun Houses," in *Common Places*  
Vincent Scully, "The Shingle Style," from *America Builds*  
Carl Lounsbury, "The Wild Melody of Steam: The Mechanization of the Manufacture of Building Materials," from Bishir et al, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina*  
Fred Peterson, "Anglo-American Wooden Frame Farmhouses in the Midwest, 1830-1900," in *PVA VIII*

Journal questions:

1. How and when did the general perception of colonial architecture shift from "odd, misshapen piles" (Thomas Jefferson's characterization) to picturesque national treasures? How did this changing perception affect new design and construction?
2. How does Beecher and Stowe's vision of domestic life ("The American Woman's Home") compare with Pullman's vision of domestic life ("Pullman: A Social Study")? How do each of these visions incorporate or treat labor?
3. Compare and contrast Vincent Scully's study of the shingle house with John Michael Vlach's study of the shotgun house. What is the primary goal of each author? How have they each chosen to make their case?

April 9: No class, exhibit construction week

April 16

Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Readings:

Roth, ch. 7

Richard Guy Wilson, "Architecture, Landscape, and City Planning," from *The American Renaissance*

A.D.F. Hamlin, "The Battle of the Styles," 1892, from *America Builds*

M. Schuyler, "Last Words About the World's Fair," 1894, from *America Builds*

M. Schuyler, "Architecture in Chicago," 1895, from *America Builds*

L. Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," 1896, from *America Builds*

F. L. Wright, "Art and Craft of the Machine," 1901, from *Roots of Contemporary American Architecture*

Burnham and Bennett, "Plan of Chicago," 1909, from *America Builds*

April 23

Twentieth Century—Overview, and Between the Wars

Readings:

Roth, ch. 8, 9

Greg Hise, "From Roadside Camps to Garden House," from *PVA V*

R. A. Cram, "The Philosophy of the Gothic Restoration," 1913, from *America Builds*

Hitchcock and Johnson, "The International Style," 1932, from *America Builds*

F. L. Wright, "Broadacre City: A New Community Plan," 1935, from *America Builds*

Mies Van Der Rohe, "Inaugural Address," 1938, from *American Builds*

Journal questions:

1. Between 1885 and 1915 how did academic eclecticism, progressivism, and modernism manifest themselves in U.S. architecture? Examples?
2. In what ways does optimism about machines and technology manifest itself in the architecture of the 1920s and 1930s?
3. In the 1930s various individuals and organizations sought answers to various (or sometimes all) social ills through housing design. What examples of social reform through housing reform in the 1930s can you provide?

April 30

Twentieth Century—Post WW II

Readings:

Annmarie Adams, "The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia," from *PVA V*

M. Nowicki, "Composition in Modern Architecture," 1949, from *America Builds*

M. Nowicki, "Function and Form," 1951, from *America Builds*

Lewis Mumford, "Crystal Lantern," 1954, from *America Builds*

P. Johnson, "The Seven Crutches of Modern Architecture," 1954, from *America Builds*

Federal Highway Act, 1958, from *America Builds*

Mumford, "The Highway and the City," 1958, from *America Builds*  
L. I. Kahn, "Form, Design, and Other Writings," 1957-1962, from *America Builds*  
R. Venturi, "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," 1968, from *America Builds*  
A. L. Huxtable, "The Art of Expediency," 1968, from *America Builds*

Journal question: What characteristics define post-WW II architectural modernism? What challenges to main stream modernism manifest themselves in the 1950s and 1960s?

**Final paper due**

## Assignment Descriptions

Spring 2007

### *Class Participation*

I will expect active participation from everyone. Always come to class prepared with questions or discussion points that arise from the readings.

### *Weekly Readings Journal*

Purchase a composition notebook. You will turn this in each week at the end of class. In it, I want you to write down the author and title of each assigned reading, followed by a **brief** analysis. Some of your readings will have obvious theses, some will not. Please note, this is NOT an exercise in telling me what the author wrote. I know what the author wrote. You need to provide a brief analysis, in which you might consider the following:

- was there an argument?
- in what historical or historiographical context was this written?
- what are the author's main points?
- who was the author's audience?
- how do the secondary and primary sources support or contradict the textbook?
- how do, or do, earlier readings relate to the current week's readings?

In addition, there are suggested journal topics in the syllabus. Those questions are meant to help you organize your thinking about the reading. You may answer them in part, in whole, or not at all, but be sure to consider them for class discussion.

Not all of the above questions will be relevant for all of the readings. Some are pertinent only to secondary sources, some only to primary sources, and the textbook (tertiary source) is a different animal altogether. DO NOT use these questions as some sort of strict guide to what you may or may not write in your journals. They are only meant to get you started thinking. Feel free to pose your own questions in the journal. You do not necessarily have to answer them.

Each week's journal will receive only a check, check plus, or check minus so that you will know whether or not I think your analysis is up to snuff. These will translate into A, B, C at the end of the semester.

### *Research Paper*

The research that you conduct for this paper will form the basis for next year's exhibit at the Tarble, the final exhibit focusing on cultural corridors. The exhibit will be developed around the architecture and landscapes that developed along the corridors that brought people to east-central Illinois (and the region.). For the purposes of this research and the exhibit, those corridors are the National Road/ Rt. 40, the river, the railroad, and the interstate. The exhibit will encompass the 1830s to the 1950s, but only building types or landscapes representative of those corridors will be featured.

You will each choose a building type from the list below to research. You will also want to try to locate an extant example, or visual documentation, of your building type in or around Coles County.



Building types:

Motor courts

Motels

Hotels

Taverns

Inns

Rest areas (along interstate), or similar traveler facilities

Railroad depots

Gas stations

Restaurants

Roadside attractions

You will complete this paper in 4 stages:

- Bibliography: 10% Due Jan. 29. This must be a thorough bibliography. It will include primary and secondary sources, and will be as extensive as possible. I will expect you to demonstrate that you have searched multiple databases, published bibliographies, even library stacks. Your bibliography should include works that deal with the building type in general, as well as its appearance in the Midwest, along the corridor in question, or in the vicinity of east central Illinois. The success not only of your paper, but of next year's exhibit rests on the compilation of excellent bibliographies.
- Thesis statement: 10% Due Feb. 19. You must have reviewed a good portion of the works in your bibliography to devise a workable thesis statement. You may write a historiographical paper if that seems useful for next year's students. What are the architectural historical issues associated with your building type? Has anyone written a critical monograph, or do most or all of the works treat the building type only superficially? Remember that next year's exhibit, being at the Tarble, will need to deal in some way with the aesthetics of these corridors and the buildings that appear along them, but that will not be the only issue that we hope to address in the exhibit. Other issues might include change over time, the impact of technology on transportation and hence on the corridors and the buildings that appear (or disappear) along them, the migration of building forms, and similar topics.
- Draft of paper: 15% Due Mar. 19. Treat this draft as you would your final paper. I want to see the very best paper that you can deliver. I am allowing time for a rewrite because inevitably some rewriting is needed. Your paper will have a cover sheet with the title, your name, the course number and title, and date. It will be as long as it needs to be. Remember that these are substantive research papers and you will have to make the determination about length. You must include your bibliography and footnotes or endnotes. Please see me well before the due date if you have any questions about proper bibliographic or footnote form. Endnotes, if used, will begin on their own page. There is no such thing as a Works Cited page in history research papers.
- Final paper: 15% Due April 30. This must be revised in accordance with suggestions made on the draft. You will turn in the draft with the final paper.

If any stage of this project is not completed satisfactorily, I reserve the right to give zero credit unless it is revised in accordance with my suggestions. All aspects of the paper will be completed in accordance with the Chicago Style Manual or Turabian Style Manual.

Some works that might be of use or of interest, in no particular order:

Stilgoe, John. *Metropolitan Corridor*.

Stilgoe, John. *Common Landscapes of America, 1580-1845*.

Whitacker, Craig. *Architecture and the American Dream*.

Wallis, Allan D. *Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes*.

Madden, Betty. *Arts, Crafts, and Architecture in Early Illinois*.

Raitz, Karl. *The National Road* (2 volumes)

Hofstra, Warren. "Private Dwellings, Public Ways," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, V.

Almost anything by J. B. Jackson.

Alalen, Arnold, ed. *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*.

Ayers, Edward, et al. *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*.

Lorentz, Pare. *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1930s film)

Onuf, Peter and Andrew Cayton. *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region*.

Ryden, Kent. "Writing the Midwest: History, Literature, and Regional Identity," *Geographical Review* 89:4 (October 1999), 511-32.