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instructor: Elizabeth Cromley
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Architecture of American Houses
Professor: Dr. Elizabeth Cromley
E-mail: e.cromley@neu.edu

ARC 329 Key #54768 Seq. A, 11:45-1:25, M and TH
Office 375 Ryder Mailbox: 151 RY
Walk-in Office Hours: Thurs 2-5

This course will examine the architecture of American dwellings (houses, apartments, etc.) from the first settlements of Spanish and English colonists in the 16th and 17th centuries to issues of dwelling in the present. Some specific issues that we will repeatedly take up (emphasis varies according to time period) are: the changing forms of household and family; the social/economic class of dwellers; modes and costs of producing dwellings; the relation of the dwelling to nature; the relation of the dwelling to the state; the relation of the dwelling to modes of transportation; and competing issues of rank and function in the dwelling plan. The aim of the course is to prepare you with sufficient historical understanding so you will be a good designer in the Housing Studio.

The architecture of houses is often presented as a sequence of styles, and those who can identify “what style is it?” are assumed to understand the subject. In this course we will instead concern ourselves first with the builders and users of houses, and ask such questions as: what spatial concepts were available to an English colonist in Massachusetts in 1630 who wished to build a house? Who were the household inhabitants that a Spanish colonial California house would contain? What sorts of tasks was a house supposed to support for its 1850s Boston dwellers? Through what means did a house convey meaning to the other dwellers in a 1950s community? What were the historical routes by which such ideas came to be accepted and then replaced? The buildings of Boston and the surrounding area will be used to study these architectural principles as well as style characteristics.

The skills mastered in this course are diverse. Architecture majors will take this course and gain a vocabulary of architectural terms, forms, principles, and exemplars which they will use in their subsequent education and practice as designers. Non-majors will take the course to familiarize themselves with the built environment in which they live and the nature of residential architecture. Students will do research both in the field and in the library, and present their work in written form, enhancing their communication and information literacy abilities.

Textbook to purchase from NU bookstore: Carter and Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture* (IVA), and ARC 329 Classpack. The classpack titles are marked with a * as required readings.

Optional: If you need more familiarity with the architectural styles used in American houses, get either McAlester, *Field Guide to American Houses*; or Jeffery Howe, *The Houses We Live In*. These books will allow you to become familiar with the changes in American house design over time; read to keep up with the chronological progress of the class lectures.

This course has a website: www.architecture.neu.edu/arcu329
login: amhouses password: petaluma

Additional readings of general interest are eds Upton and Vlach, *Common Places* (UV); Lester Walker, *American Shelter*; Mayhew and Meyers, *Documentary History of Interiors*; Clifford Clark, *American Family Home*; Mary Foley, *The American House*; Fitch, *American Building* vol.1, 2; Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream*; Lawrence Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*; Calloway and Cromley, *Elements of Style*.

Grading: there will be 5 short reports on the field trips following assignments handed out at each trip site (4 pts each=20); two exams (25 points each), reports on the readings whose discussion you managed (10 pts) and 1 research project presented in two parts—part 1 (5 pts) and part 2 (15 points). Assignments are *due on the dates specified*. I take points off for failure to participate in class discussions. No make-up exams are offered without a doctor's letter. No late or extra-credit projects are accepted.

Class Schedule

- 6 Sept. Intro. to course material and to ideas of doing housing history.
Schedule of Field Trips
- 10 Sept Anglo Colonial houses and settlement patterns in New England and the Chesapeake region
Issues: what principles governed the spatial organization of colonial houses? how do economic circumstances affect building construction?
Required reading: *Cummings, selection of inventories from "Inside the MA House."
Recommended reading: A. Cummings, *The Framed Houses of MA Bay 1625-1725*; J. Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*; Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation," in Upton and Vlach, eds. (UV) *Common Places*; Jordy and Pierson, *American Buildings & their Architects*, v.1; *Historic American Buildings Survey* (HABS) for Massachusetts. See also HABS online for each state.
- 13 Sept **Trip 1:** Meet at Paul Revere House on North Square, in the North End (Green or Orange T to Haymarket). Tour starts at noon
- 17 Sept Spanish and French colonial types; Eighteenth-century houses of New England
Issue: how did different ethnic groups make houses to suit their traditions?
Required reading: *Wilson, "When a Room is the Hall";
Recommended reading: Reys, *Making of Urban America*; Chappell, "Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses," UV.
- 20 Sept How to choose your research paper topics—hand out the assignment
Required reading: IVA, Chapter 1, and discuss it.
- 24 Sept The Plantation and eighteenth-century houses of the South; the Federal period - new interior planning in larger houses. Issue: what is new in the functional specificity of rooms and strategies of circulation space?
Required reading: *Wenger, "The Dining Room"
Recommended reading: American Heritage, *Notable American Houses*; Williams, *A Guide to Old American Houses*; HABS (Historic American Buildings Survey.gov) houses of Massachusetts
- 27 Sept **Trip 2:** Meet at Harrison Gray Otis House 141 Cambridge St. (Green T to Govt Center or Haymarket); tour starts at noon
- 1 Oct Builder's Handbooks: Asher Benjamin, Samuel Sloan, et alia; Issue: what is the role of publications in the development of the Greek Revival and other historic style revivals
Required reading: *Jennings, "Drawing on the Vernacular Interior" and Calvert Vaux, selection from *Villas and Cottages*, 1864,
- Oct 4 Urban row-house forms and the expansion of cities; conveniences.
Issue: how do new inventions/technologies affect house planning?
Required reading: *Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America" and Beecher, selection from *American Woman's Home*, 1869
Recommended reading on row-houses: B. Bunting, *Boston Back Bay*; Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstone*; Orwell, *Gift to the Street*
- Oct 8 Holiday
- 11 Oct **Trip 3:** Meet at the Gibson House Museum, 137 Beacon St. (Green T to Arlington); tour starts at noon

- 15 Oct Class will not meet; use this as a research day: finish your Part 1 of the research paper.
- 18 Oct First Exam
- 22 Oct Farms and Utopian communities.
Issue: how do social reform movements shape house design?
Recommended reading: Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn* ; S. McMurry, *Farm Houses and Farm Families*, D. Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*
Required reading: *IVA* chapter 4
Part 1 of research paper due today
- 25 Oct Mills and factory towns: workers' housing
Issue: who provides housing for poor laborers?
Required reading: *Borchert, "Alley Landscapes of Washington"
Recommended reading: Buder, *Pullman*; Coolidge, *Mill and Mansion*; Byington, *Homestead*; Vlach, "The Shotgun House," UV
- 29 Oct Apartments and tenements; the invention of multiple dwellings for the U.S., Triple deckers and other New England multiple dwellings
Issue: how does middle-class individualism deal with multiple dwellings?
Recommended reading: K. Heath, *The Patina of Place*; E. Cromley, *Alone Together*
Required reading: *Cromley, "Apartments and Collective Life"
- 1 Nov. Prairie School and bungalow ; The automobile and early 20th century automobile suburbs;
Issue: how does the desire for a "simple life" reshape house design? How does the automobile reshape design?
Recommended reading: H. Brooks, *The Prairie School* ; and the mail-away plans catalogs such as *Radford's Bungalows* or the Sears Roebuck pre-cut houses
- 5 Nov Private and Federal housing of the 1930s, 40s; Federal greenbelt towns;
Issue: what is the Federal government's role in housing its citizens?
Required Reading: *Barron, "Adequately Re-housing Low Income Families"
- 8 Nov Field **trip** to Villa Victoria, community-organized public housing. Meet at front door of Ryder (Ruggles end), at noon
- 12 Nov NU Holiday
- 15 Nov. Modernism and the house: Buckminster Fuller, Charles and Ray Eames, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Philip Johnson, Marcel Breuer
Required reading: selection from *A. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, on Farnsworth House
Recommended reading: McCoy, *Second Generation*; Frampton, *American Masterworks*
- 19 Nov 1950s developer housing. Issue: what style is the right one for mass-produced single-family housing?
Required reading: *R. Chow, selection from *Suburban Space--Fabric of Dwelling*;
Recommended reading; Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, Jandl, *Yesterday's Houses of Tomorrow*
- Public Housing since 1950; High-rise homes for the poor: Pruitt-Igoe
Required reading: Vale, selection from *Reclaiming Public Housing* and **IVA*, chapter 5

- 22 Nov No class: Thanksgiving break starts at 11:35
- 26 Nov **Trip 5**, Tour of Mission Main low-income and market-rate housing. Meet at noon, Ryder side door
- 29 Nov Housing alternatives of the 1980s-2010; co-housing; work at home; child-centered; green; multigenerational
Required reading: “New American House” selection from: Franck and Ahrentsen, *New Households, New Housing*
- 3 Dec. current housing types, zoning and legislative frameworks; New Urbanism
Required reading: “The Legal Technology of Exclusion” from *New Suburban History*

Part 2, Final Research Paper due by 5pm, Dec. 5, in my mailbox in 151 RY

Final exam scheduled by NU during the week of Dec. 7-14

Research Project and Paper Assignment: Choose a dwelling to investigate and report on it in comparison to examples of its type, examined through one of the issues that run through this course.

Step 1: Choose a dwelling (house, apartment, etc.), probably from the Boston area, that you can see in person to draw, photograph, get inside of, measure, and get to know; discover the original and current names of its rooms, find out the date of construction and the dates of alterations and additions. (Town Buildings Departments keep these records; interview the owners/residents). Do not choose a dwelling that is famous and already has a lot written about it.

Step 2: identify the category of houses to which yours belongs and research the history of that category of houses --for example: 19th-century urban rowhouse, or 18th-century rural farmhouse, or early 20th century suburban bungalow, or mid-twentieth-century public housing unit, or contemporary bachelor condo, etc.

Step 3: compare and contrast your example with the general category to which it belongs, **focusing on one** of the following aspects of the dwelling either as built or in the present:

changing forms of household and family (Resources: social history, history of the family, census data)

social/economic class of dwellers and their dwelling preferences (Resources: social history, economic history, census data, interviews)

modes and costs of producing dwellings (Resources: construction history, period advertisements, state subsidies, census, builders' professional organizations)

relation of the dwelling to nature (Resources: histories of period attitudes toward nature, siting and landscape; uses of outdoor space; nature indoors)

relation of the dwelling to the government (Resources: housing histories, federal housing policies--tax refunds and other subsidies)

relation of the dwelling to modes of transportation (Resources: City atlases, histories of transit, relation of dwelling to public and private transpo. routes, vehicles and parking)

competing issues of rank and function in the dwelling plan (Resources: names of rooms, uses of rooms, who uses which rooms, meanings)

For Part 1 of the paper, tell me the name of your building, some basic facts about it (step 1 above), the category of dwellings that you'll compare it to (step 2 above), and the focus or theme that you will use to analyze it (step 3 above). Hand in 2-3 pages with this preliminary project description.

Part 2: Write the final paper. Develop a bibliography of building documents, books and articles, etc. Use IVA suggestions to document and interpret your evidence. As you write your final paper, apply to your analysis those lecture topics and field-trip examples that illuminate your subject and cite specific course readings. The completed paper will be 10 pp. typed (250 words/pg); endnotes (or other correct citations of sources), bibliography and illustrations will add additional pages. If supporting material is odd-sized, contain all in a binder of 9"x12" max.

Everyone will use these questions to guide the reading of classpack articles for discussion:

1. What has the author defined as the *problem or issue* to be explored in the article?
2. What *kinds of evidence* are summoned to unravel the problem or expose the issue?
3. How does the *argument* proceed? What *resolution* does the author arrive at? What path is illuminated?
4. Does the evidence offered to answer the questions posed by the author satisfy you? What holes do you see in the arguments? Do the *conclusions seem convincing or wrong*?
5. List some ways that the insights in this article could be *applied to a housing issue in the present*.

REPORT: when it is your turn to manage the discussion, you will write up your analysis of the assigned reading (answering the questions above and anything else you wish to say) and hand it in on the day of the discussion.

List of readings in classpack

Abbott Cummings, sample inventories from "Inside the MA House"
Chris Wilson, "When a Room is the Hall"
Mark Wenger, "The Dining Room"
Jan Jennings, "Drawing on the Vernacular Interior" and Calvert Vaux, selection from *Villas and Cottages*
Ken Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America" and Catharine Beecher, selection from *American Woman's Home*
James Borchert, "Alley Landscapes of Washington"
Cromley, "Apartments and Collective Life"
Cheryl Robertson, "Male and Female Agendas"
Alice Friedman, selection from *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, on Farnsworth House
Barron, "Adequately Re-housing Low Income Families"
Renee Chow, selection from *Suburban Space: the Fabric of Dwelling*
Larry Vale, selection from *Reclaiming Public Housing*
"New American House" from Franck, *New Households*
Gerald Frug, "Legal Technology of Exclusion" from *New Suburban History*

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