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Vernacular Architecture Forum Syllabus Exchange



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Vernacular Architecture

Old College 202

Art History 454/654

History 454/654

Urban Affairs 654

Autumn 2001

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Texts on Reserve:

All required texts have been placed on reserve as well as the complete run of Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture. Also on reserve are two anthologies containing numerous essays that we'll read through the semester.

John Michael Vlach and Dell Upton, Common Places

Robert Blair St. George, Material Life in America.

All reserve readings are listed under ARTH 654.

Required texts:

There are two required texts.

Henry Glassie, Vernacular Architecture (Bloomington: Indiana

University Press, 2000)

Glassie's work is a synthesis of fieldwork and ideas that have evolved in his work as it has unfolded since the mid 1960s. Few individuals (the key exception would be Dell Upton) have exerted a greater influence on vernacular architecture studies in the United States. Glassie's text does not fit easily into our course, but I have placed it in the beginning for the purpose of enabling us to refer back to its core arguments.

Gabrielle M. Lanier and Bernard L. Herman, Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997)

The work by Lanier and Herman was conceived as a guide for fieldworkers in vernacular architecture. The organizing ideas focus on the notion of an archaeology of architecture and landscape. The text parallels the introductory classes and serves as a reference point for information on vernacular building technologies, types, and contexts.

Course Requirements:

Past course evaluations have suggested a shorter reading list and more time devoted to class discussion. While the readings have been scaled back, I find that discussion remains a problem. We have more material to cover than a mere fourteen week semester allows. Still, we will work toward discussion for the last 30 minutes of class each week. Also, the readings and the lectures are an inexact match. Much of the material we will discuss has not been published or is difficult to acquire. Again, discussion will be a significant component in the class and will represent 10 percent of the final grade. If you have not participated in discussion, I will call on you.

Each student is required to write an original research paper on any aspect of vernacular architecture. The paper should be both descriptive (presentation of research materials) and interpretive (analysis of research materials). Papers that explore the physical history and context of an individual building or complex are an excellent starting point for those with little or no experience. I maintain a list of recommended buildings for class participants who wish to pursue this option. Before you begin your paper, you must submit a typed (word processed) one paragraph proposal identifying what you plan to study, how you plan to conduct your research, and the sorts of interpretive questions you intend to ask. Submission of proposals as Word attachments is preferred. The abstract requirement helps you focus your project and to keep it well within the scale of a seminar research paper. Successful papers from past classes include individual house studies, data base studies of landscapes and buildings documented in tax lists and other record groups, thematic studies (such as barn framing in a small locale), and the study of building records and legal disputes. You can begin with either a question or analytical framework (diffusion, acculturation, Georgianization, etc.) or with a particular building or record group. The analytical perspective in the paper can come from the readings or lecture materials, or it can draw on the larger body of theoretical literature that we will be unable to cover in our class. If you would like to discuss potential paper topics, please come see me during office hours or make an appointment. The abstract and paper represent 50 percent of the final.

Paper proposals are required of all students. Your proposal should contain two potential topics--unless you have discussed one with me in advance of the assignment and have had it verbally approved. For each topic state the basic research question and research data including buildings. Proposals are to be brief; both should cover no

more than two double-spaced typed pages. Again, all students are strongly encouraged to come in and chat with me about possible topics, buildings for study, documentary and data sources, and/or appropriate research and fieldwork methods. Final papers should be typed with **black and white** photographs and complete notes and bibliography (either Chicago Manual or anthropological are acceptable). The illustrations may be scanned images or photocopies; original photographs are not required. Papers must contain original primary source research (documents and/or buildings) and integrate interpretation with description. A suggested length (excluding illustrations) is 15 to 20 pages. Papers are graded on the basis of original research, interpretation, and presentation. Late papers drop one letter grade for each day they fail to appear.

Past classes have lamented that they did not enjoy the opportunity to share their research. This year the course requires a formal presentation undertaken in the form of a conference paper. The paper will be 20 or 30 minutes long (to be determined) and illustrated with slides, handouts, overheads, or other appropriate materials. Presentations that run over their scheduled time will be interrupted. A reading length of 20 minutes usually represents 9-10 pages, but practice and time your presentation in advance. The presentation is valued at 25 percent of the final grade. Attendance for class presentations is required.

The class also works as a group on the statistical study of historic buildings and landscapes. The work for this segment involves in class workshops and out of class group consultation leading to an in-class discussion. We work in the University's computer lab, discuss the potential of microcomputer databases, and explore ways to use statistical information. This assignment not only introduces you to a set of skills, but also encourages you to think about the

built environment in different terms. The case studies to be covered for this class will be selected from the 1798 Federal Direct Tax Census. The exercise is a collective effort from start to finish and provides 15 percent of the final grade.

Classes: Each class, except for the workshops, will consist of two approximately 80 minute presentations, a fifteen minute break, and a closing discussion. Weekly discussion topics are identified in the course outline.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Our class is broken into major components. The first set of lectures and discussions is devoted to basics including overviews of building forms and technologies, research techniques, and fieldwork.

August 28: Introduction. Vernacular architecture as a field of study. The archaeology of architecture: principles of fieldwork, research and analysis. Course requirements. Regional sources for fieldwork and documentary research.

1) The archaeology of architecture.

Suggested readings:

- Upton and Vlach: "Introduction," xiii-xxiv.
- PVA II, Camille Wells: "Old Claims and New Demands: Vernacular Architecture Studies Today," 1-10.
- Roderick J. Lawrence, "The Interpretation of Vernacular Architecture," Vernacular Architecture, 14 (1983), pp.19-28.
- PVA IV, Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman, "Introduction: Toward a New Architectural History," 1-6.

- Mathew Johnson, "Vernacular Architecture: The Loss of Innocence," Vernacular Architecture (1997), 13-19.

LEARNING TO LOOK

September 4: Building Materials and Technologies, Part I:
frame, log, brick, stone, and earth.

Read:

- Dell Upton, "Traditional Timber Framing," Brooke Hindle, ed., Material Culture of the Wooden Age, (Tarrytown: Sleepy Hollow Press, 1981), pp.35-93.
- Upton and Vlach: Kniffen and Glassie, "Building in Wood in the Eastern United States," 159-81; Roberts, "The Tools Used in Building Log Houses in Indiana," 182-203.
- Lanier and Herman, Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic, 61-95.
- Glassie, Vernacular Architecture, 1-60.

September 11: Building Materials and Technologies, Part II:

Read:

- Brunskill and Clifton-Taylor, Brickwork, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977), pp.67-93;
- Harley McKee, "Brick and Stone: Handicraft to Machine," Charles Peterson, ed., Building Early America, (Radnor: Chilton Book Company, 1976), pp.74-95.

- Lanier and Herman, Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic, 95-118.

September 18: House Types, Ornament, Function, and Transformations; the use of style in vernacular buildings. Inventory exercise.

Read:

- Lanier and Herman, Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic, 10-60 and 119-176.
- Edward Chappell, "Looking At Buildings," Fresh Advices (1984).
- Glassie, Vernacular Architecture, 61-96.

September 25: Fieldwork

Read:

- Lanier and Herman, Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic, 278-350.
- Glassie, Vernacular Architecture, 96-138..

October 2: The Reconstruction of Ordinary Landscapes:

Computer Workshop with Dick Stevens.

Read:

- St. George: Carson, et. al. "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," 113-158.
- Gregory Stiverson, Poverty in a Land of Plenty, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), chapter 3.
- Orlando Ridout V, selection from forthcoming volume on the 1798 Federal Direct Tax.

INTERPRETATIONS

These presentations focus on different interpretive approaches illustrated through a series of case studies. Each week the underlying methodological or theoretical framework will be introduced and followed with its application to a particular problem. A discussion topic is also identified for each week. The topic provides both a starting point and a conversational touchstone for the conclusion of the class.

October 9: Diffusion and Building Cycles.

- 1) The German settlements and migrations in the eastern United States.
- 2) Rebuilding cycles in the age of agricultural reform.

Read:

- Upton and Vlach: Glassie, "Eighteenth-Century Cultural

Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building," 394-425.

- Glassie, Vernacular Architecture, 131-159.
- Upton and Vlach: Chappell, "Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley, 27-57.
- PVA IV: Bergengren, "The Cycle of Transformations," 87-97.
- W.G.Hoskins, "The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640," Provincial England, (London: MacMillan & Co., 1965), pp.131-148;
- R.Machin, "The Great Rebuilding: A Reassessment," Past and Present, 77, pp.33-56.

Discussion topic: looking at buildings as culture.

October 16: House Form and the social organization of the urban domestic landscape.

1) The North Shore towns of Massachusetts Bay

2) Origins for Philadelphia

Read:

- St. George: Smith, "The Laboring Lives of Philadelphians," 233-260; Blackmar, "Rewalking the 'Walking City'," 371-384.
- Mary Ellen Hayward, "Urban Vernacular Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore," Winterthur Portfolio, (Spring 1981) 16:1, 33-63;
- Martha Zierden and Bernard L. Herman, "Charleston

Townhouses: Archaeology, Architecture, and the Urban Landscape, 1750-1850," from Yamin and Metheney, Landscape Archaeology, 193-227.

- Peter Guillery and Bernard L. Herman, "Deptford Houses," Vernacular Architecture (1999).

Discussion topic: studying complex environments.

October 23: Tradition and Innovation: the logic of appropriate solutions in vernacular design.

1) Rural mills in Virginia

2) The transformation of architectural ideas from the American South to Liberia, West Africa.

Read:

- Upton and Vlach, Hubka, "Just Folks Designing," 426-32.
- Dell Upton, Holy Things and Profane, 101-162.
- St. George: Upton, "White and Black Landscapes," 357-69; Morgan, "Work and Culture," 203-32.
- PVA IV: Chapman, "Slave Villages," 98-107; Kimball, "African-Virginians and the Vernacular Tradition in Richmond City," 108-120.
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Recommended:

- M. Belcher, S. Holsoe and B. Herman, A Land and Life

Remembered: Americo-Liberian Folk Architecture.

Discussion topic: identity and architecture.

October 30: Material Culture as Evidence.

1) Church, chapel, meeting house, and campground

2) A Victorian hunting resort

Read:

- Robert St. George, Conversing By Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture, 205-295.
- Upton and Vlach: Cummings, "Inside the Massachusetts House," 219-39; Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America," 240-60.
- Gerald Pocius, A Place to Belong, 153-271.

Discussion topic: systemic relations

November 6: Closing Thoughts:

1) Historicism and Subdivisions.

2) Yard Art and the Presentation of Self.

Read:

- John Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation, 7-99.
- Barbara Kelly, Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown, 59-168.

Discussion topic: vernacular architecture in the present.

November 13: Class Presentations

November 20: Class Presentations

November 27: Class Presentations

December 4: Class Presentations

December 7: 4:00 p.m.: Final papers due. No extensions, no incompletes, no mercy, no.