

American Architecture
History 5404 and Art 5285
Spring 2009, Tuesdays 6:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Dr. Ann McCleary

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Course Objectives

The primary objectives of this course are

1. to provide an introduction to the field of American architecture;
2. to examine the various methods one can use to study architecture;
3. to investigate the historiography of the field;
4. to develop skills in documenting and interpreting history buildings; and
5. to explore how architecture can be used to understand American history and culture.

Graduate students will learn how to use buildings to elucidate broader issues and topics in American history. Those interested in public history will likely find that this knowledge about architecture will prove useful in careers such as museum studies or historic preservation as well as community history projects, where public historians interpret buildings as a means of educating the public about local and regional history.

This course will trace the evolution of American architecture with a particular emphasis on the "home" from the first European housing in North America throughout the late twentieth century. Through the lens of domestic architecture, we will examine the various approaches to studying architecture--including style, floor plan, interior decoration and design, furnishings, use of space, and building technologies and construction. Students will develop a working knowledge of architectural styles and terminology during the course; a background in American architectural styles is *not* required.

We will focus particularly on "vernacular," or ordinary, architecture, particularly in the first half of the class, although we will also talk about major architects and designers and significant architectural styles and influences. Our study will reflect the interdisciplinary character of this field, drawing upon scholars in the fields of art history, anthropology, archaeology, cultural geography, folklife studies, the history of technology, women's history, and American social and cultural history. The readings will reflect this variety of perspectives, particularly the collection of essays in *Common Places*.

This course will require field trips and fieldwork experiences that allow students to apply their knowledge from the readings and class discussions to interpreting and dating buildings. Each student will be required to attend two field trips and interpret the buildings through two written analyses. In addition, each student will complete a final project that either documents a building or building complex or interprets and analyzes historical sources to address an historical issue or question about American history or culture.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to document and interpret historical buildings, identify their style or construction period, write a narrative describing a building's history and its architectural analysis and description, and identify the architectural important characteristics.
2. Students will be able to conduct historical research in written records to date a building, trace a chain of title, and document the building's history.
3. Students will be able to describe and analyze, in writing, the evolution of American architecture from the colonial period through the late twentieth century from an interdisciplinary perspective.
4. Students will be able to use buildings to examine broader historical questions in U.S. history and culture.
5. Students will be able to identify the methods that different scholars use to study architecture and the

contributions that these scholars make to the field of architectural studies, including historians, architectural historians, cultural geographers, anthropologists, women's historians, and historic archaeologists.

Course Readings

Required:

Dell Upton and John Vlach, *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*. University of Georgia Press.

Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of American Housing*. MIT Press.

Clifford Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800-1960*. University of North Carolina Press.

Dell Upton, *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America*. National Trust for Historic Preservation

Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes*. University of Tennessee Press, 2005.

Recommended:

Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. Alfred A. Knopf.

This book provides a good glossary of terms, definitions, and architectural styles.

Course Requirements

Examinations (30% of final grade)

The course includes a midterm and final examination, which draw both on readings and class discussions. Each exam will include identification questions requiring students to view slides and interpret the buildings. In addition, there will be short and long essay questions that focus on some of the methodological and historiographical issues of American architectural history. The final exam will not be cumulative, but will be based on materials from the second half of the class. Each exam will be worth 15% of the final course grade.

Fieldwork experiences (10%)

One of the best ways to learn about how to study architecture is to visit and interpret buildings. Each student will be expected to attend two field trip excursions and write up a two-page, word-processed summary of what s/he learned. Each report must include a floor plan and the field notes that you recorded during the visit. These fieldwork assignments must be turned in within two weeks of the field trip if you want to receive credit for this work. The grade will be dropped 10 points for every day these assignments are late past the two-week period.

Methodology essay: (15%)

Throughout the class, we will be talking about how scholars of different disciplines study architecture. Graduate students will be required to examine one building and analyze it from at least three different disciplinary perspectives, showing how practitioners of that discipline would approach and study the building. These approaches MUST include an art historical perspective and two others (which may include cultural geography, anthropology, folklife, archaeology, or history). This assignment should be three to five pages in length and must be word-processed. Be sure to attach at least one photograph of the building you are interpreting. This paper will be due on the week of **March 24**, either on the class date or at a meeting of the graduate students that week

Class project or paper (30%)

The class paper or project offers students an opportunity to apply the knowledge gained in class to analyzing and interpreting some aspect of American architecture through **an original research project**. Students will have two choices for this project:

1. A thorough study of a building or building complex, including an architectural description and analysis, floor plans, photographs, historical research, and a contextual examination of the building placing it in historical and architectural context. The contours of this study will vary with the building that the student chooses. While the assignment will require many of the same components as a National Register nomination, students will be expected to write this assignment as an essay rather than a report format. Please note that you cannot select a building already nominated to the National Register of Historic Places or that has already been researched and documented.
2. An original research paper that uses primary source documents on architecture to explore a historical question or issue. This essay might be an analysis of local buildings from tax records, probate records, or other courthouse records; a study of mill workers housing or the development of a mill town; or the analysis of sharecroppers housing based on historical photographs. There is also a wealth of advice literature that provides considerable insight into architecture and cultural history, from advice literature for women in popular magazines and etiquette books to architectural patterns books and catalogs. In addition to primary sources, this paper must include *at least* five secondary sources on your topic.

All papers should be approximately fifteen pages of text, *plus* additional visual documentation (such as site plans, floor plans, photographs, illustrations, examples of historical research, etc) as is pertinent to the topic. Papers must be word-processed and include footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography of sources utilized. More detailed paper requirements will be forthcoming.

Project topics need to be submitted to me for approval by **February 3**. If you are completing the first option, please include a one-page description of the building, an image of the building(s), and any historical information that you know at this point. If you are pursuing the second paper option, please include (1) the primary source(s) that you plan to use, (2) the question that you would like to address, and (3) five secondary sources on the topic. If you need help in selecting a topic, please see me as soon as possible.

Class participation, oral presentations, discussion, and attendance (15%)

The class will be taught in a seminar fashion, meaning that while I will provide some lecture, it will also involve discussion of the readings and of slides shown in class. Please do the reading before each class to be prepared.

Class meetings are important; I will show slides and present additional material that will not always be included in your readings. To emphasize the importance of class attendance, more than two unexcused absences can lower your final course grade one letter grade (10 points); more than four unexcused absences will lower your final grade by 20 points.

Graduate students will also meet separately, every two weeks, for discussions that probe the readings in greater depth. We will develop a schedule for these meetings, and I will assign topics for discussion and some additional readings. For example, we will begin our discussions with the book *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture* during our graduate meetings.

Graduate students will also be required to help teach the class on February 17, using the content in *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture*. More details will follow.

Class Policies

1. Plagiarism is a serious offense and any example of plagiarism (even just one sentence!) or other act of academic dishonesty will be punished with an automatic "F" in the class. Claiming ignorance of what plagiarism is will not constitute a valid excuse. The History Department uses the definition of plagiarism produced by the American Historical Association, which is available on the department's website at <http://www.westga.edu/~history/statementonplagiarism.pdf> Please read this statement and acquaint yourself with this definition.
2. Cell phone use will not be tolerated during class. Turn off your cell phone when you come to class.

If I see cell phones in use or on your desk during class, especially text-messaging, I will remove them for the remainder of the class. Laptops may only be used for taking class notes.

Tentative Schedule

Please note that the schedule is subject to change and additional readings may be assigned. Graduate student meetings and discussions will be added to this schedule.

- January 13: Course introduction; Looking at architecture**
- January 20: Architecture, Housing, and Society in Early New England**
Readings: Upton/Vlach: (Isham/Brown) 149-158; (Cummings) 219-239; (St. George) 336-365; Wright: chapter 1
- January 27: Architecture, Housing, and Society in Early Virginia**
Readings Upton/Vlach: (Upton) 315-35; (Neiman) 292-314. Wright, chapter 3; Roots, "The English," 55-61.
- February 3: Georgian ideals and cultural diffusion**
Readings: Upton/Vlach: (Kniffen) 3-26; (Glassie and Kniffen) 159-181; (Gowans) 367-393; (Price); 124-148; (Glassie), 394-432
- Due: research proposal**
- February 10: The Mid-Atlantic, the Upper South, and the Lower South Regions**
Readings Roots: "Introduction," 7-15, and "Germans" and "Scots-Irish," 68-79. Upton/Vlach: (Chappell) 27-57; (Vlach) 58-78.
- February 17: Documenting historic buildings**
Readings complete Carter and Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture*
- Due: class presentations**
- February 24: Ethnic Architecture across America**
Readings Finish Upton, *America's Architectural Roots*.
- March 3: Midterm Exam**
- March 10: Early Nineteenth Urban Architecture and Landscapes and the Development of Architectural Pattern Books**
Readings Upton/Vlach: (Bishir) 447-481. Wright, chapters 2,4. Clark, chapter 1.
- March 17: No class, spring break**
- March 24: The Cult of Domesticity, Mid-Nineteenth Century Pattern Book Architecture, and Architectural Revivals**
Readings: Upton/Vlach: (Ames) 240-260; (Peterson) 433-446; Wright, chapters 5 and 6; Clark, chapters 2 and 3.
- Due: Methodology essay**

- March 31:** **Turn-of-the-Century Architecture in the City: Industrialization, the Suburbs, and the Working Class Family**
Readings Upton/Vlach: (Cohen) 261-279; (Borechert) 281-291; Wright, chapters 7-8; Clark, chapter 4.
- April 7:** **Architectural Reform: Bungalows, Home Economics, and the Progressive Housewife**
Readings Upton/Vlach: (Lancaster), 79-106; Wright, chapter 9; Clark, chapters 5-6.
- April 14:** **Planned Housing: Company Towns, Planned Communities, and Public Housing**
Readings Wright, chapters 10 through 12
- April 21:** **Post-World War II Suburban Housing, the Ranch House, and the Middle-Class Family Ideal**
Readings Wright, chapter 13. Clark, chapter 7 and 8.
- April 28:** **Contemporary American Architecture and Housing**
Readings Wright, chapter 14. Clark, chapter 9.
- Due: Final research project**
- May 5:** **Final exam, 6-8 p.m.**

