

**HISTORY 644**  
**Material Culture and the Built Environment**  
**Fall 2001**

**Professor Linda J. Borish**

**Time: Tuesdays 6:30-9:00pm**

**Office Hours: 4317 Friedmann Hall**

**Tuesday 12:30-2:00pm; 4:00-5:30pm;**

**Thursday 12:30-1:30pm, or by appointment**

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This graduate course introduces the theory and study of material artifacts and the built environment in American culture and historical research. We will examine the variety of ways artifacts serve as social and cultural documents and learn to interpret the values, beliefs and attitudes embodied in the material aspects of American life. We will probe the human imprint on the landscape and factors shaping spaces, places and the built environment. Using artifacts, visual evidence, physical structures, and technology, the course examines the social and cultural forces affecting the production and use of material objects and how material objects and the built environment have shaped culture in historical contexts.

Readings explore historical approaches to material culture studies and ways that social class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and other social forces influence the production and consumption of artifacts and places. This seminar will develop critical skills in the interpretation of objects and the analysis of the relationship between objects, spaces, and cultural meanings. Research projects and class assignments will increase our use and knowledge of material culture in American history.

**Required Readings**

Thomas Schlereth, ed., Material Culture: A Research Guide

Robert B. St. George, ed., Material Life in America, 1600-1860

Sally McMurry, Families and Farmhouses in 19th Century America

Kenneth Ames, Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture

Kathryn Grover, ed., Fitness in American Culture: Images of Health, Sport, and the Body, 1830-1940

Barbara A. Schreier, Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience, 1880-1920

David Nasaw, Children of the City: At Work and At Play.

Warren Belasco, Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945

## Articles

Linda J. Borish, "'Another Domestic Beast of Burden': New England Farm Women's Work and Well-Being in the Nineteenth Century," Journal of American Culture, 18 (Fall 1995): 83-101.

Selected Articles in Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice, Vol. 5: 1 (Spring 2001), Guest Editors, Linda J. Borish and Barbara L. Tischler, special issue on "Labour, Leisure, and Sport"

Linda J. Borish and Barbara L. Tischler, "Labour, Leisure, and Sport in Cultural Perspective"

Alice Kessler-Harris, "History is Public or Nothing"

Donna M. DeBlasio, "The Immigrant and the Trolley Park in Youngstown, Ohio, 1899-1945 "

Robin F. Bachin, "'Courage, Endurance and Quickness of Decision': Gender and Athletics at the University of Chicago, 1890-1920"

Chris Rasmussen, "'Jobs Galore for Robots': Robot Salesmen, Robot Entertainers, and the National Machine' of Prosperity in the 1920s and 1930s "

Wilma J. Pesavento, "Sport and Recreation in the Pullman Experiment, 1880-1900," Journal of Sport History, 9 (Summer 1982): 38-62.

Linda J. Borish, "'Athletic Activities of Various Kinds': Physical Health and Sport Programs for Jewish American Women," Journal of Sport History 26 (Summer, 1999): 240-270.

## Course Requirements

1. Regular class attendance and participation in discussion based on required readings. Each student will select one of the assigned readings and topics and will critically analyze and lead discussion on the reading -20% of the final grade.

2. Object analysis - short written presentation of 5-6 double spaced typed pages on historical analysis of a specific artifact, using appropriate methodology from our course and our readings. Papers must include documentation of the object or visual material of the object. Object study papers are due in class on October 2, 2001 - 20% of final grade. All paper topics need to be approved in advance by the professor so please come to see me. Include a bibliography and endnotes/footnotes with your text indicating the sources pursued to investigate the artifact.

3. Statement of research plans and preliminary list of primary and secondary sources for the research paper. In your paper proposal of 5 double-spaced typed pages you will describe your research focus and approach to material culture or the built environment. Discuss your main research question, and the kinds of sources for your research to investigate material culture or the built environment in historical and cultural context. Papers are due in class on October 30, 2001 - 20% of final grade.

4. Final Research Paper based on material culture or group of objects in American history analyzed in social and cultural context, 17-20 double-spaced typed pages. The paper will examine the relationship between material artifacts or the built environment and cultural beliefs, attitudes, values, and behavior to understand the significance of artifacts and the human imprint on the landscape in history and American culture. The importance of objects and changes in the way individuals or groups of people related to objects in such areas as production, marketing, consumption, community identity, urbanization, leisure, rural life, or cultural institutions will be analyzed in relation to historical issues. Artifacts, space, and technology as revealed in historical literature or rural/urban periodicals may also be explored in your research. Papers must use proper citations for endnotes/footnotes and include a bibliography. Research Papers are due by Wednesday, December 5, 2001 by 4:00pm. 40% of final grade. Late papers will be downgraded a letter grade for each day late.

### **Schedule of Classes and Reading Assignments**

August 28

#### **Introduction to Material Culture Studies**

Reading: Schlereth, "Preface," in Material Culture; St. George, "Introduction," in Material Life in America

September 4

#### **History and Theory of Material Culture Studies**

Reading: Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research"; Lewis, "Learning from Looking: Geographic and Other Writing About the American Landscape"; Pursell, Jr., "The History of Technology and the Study of Material Culture;" Schlereth, "Material Culture Studies and Social History Research" in Material Culture; Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in Material Life in America, pp. 17-37

September 11

#### **Method and Analysis of Artifacts**

Reading: Upton, "The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture;" Ames, "The Stuff of Everyday Life: American Decorative Arts and Household Furnishings;" Bronner, "Visible Proofs: Material Culture Study in American Folkloristics," in Material Culture; Isaac, "Ethnographic Method in History: An Action Approach;" Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifacts Place in American Studies," pp. 39-92; Sweeney, "Furniture and the Domestic Environment in Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1639-1800," pp. 261-290 in Material Life in America; Schlereth, "A Guide to General Research Resources," in Material Culture

September 18

#### **Research and Reading for Artifact Analysis - No Class meeting**

September 25

### **Space, Place, and Ritual in American Environments in the Eighteenth Century and Early Nineteenth Century**

Reading: Wade, "'Shining in Borrowed Plumage': Affirmation of Community in the Black Coronation Festivals of New England, ca. 1750-1850," pp. 171-182; St. George, "Artifacts of Regional Consciousness in the Connecticut River Valley, 1700-1780;" Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia;" Dinkin, "Seating the Meetinghouse in Early Massachusetts;" Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage;" Brooke, "'For Honour and Civil Worship to Any Worth Person': Burial, Baptism, and Community on the Massachusetts Near Frontier, 1730-1790," pp. 335-369; 407-418; 439-485; Davis, "The Career of Colonel Pluck: Folk Drama and Popular Protest in Early Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," pp. 487-501 in Material Life in America

October 2

### **Domestic Life, Community, and Change in Antebellum Material Culture**

Reading: Blackmar, "Rewalking the 'Walking City': Housing and Property Relations in New York, City, 1780-1840"; Bender, "The 'Rural' Cemetery Movement: Urban Travail and the Appeal of Nature," pp. 371-384, pp. 505-533; Clark, "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History": The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870," in Material Life in America, pp. 535-549  
Begin, McMurry, Families and Farmhouses in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America  
Video: "Hearts and Hands"

### **Paper Due of Object Analysis**

October 9

### **Rural Life, Daily Life, and the Farm Environs**

Reading: McMurry, Families and Farmhouses in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America; Borish, "'Another Domestic Beast of Burden': New England Farm Women's Work and Well-Being in the Nineteenth Century"

October 16

### **Victorian American Culture and Cultural Meanings**

Reading: Ames, Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture

October 23

### **Material Culture and Physical Culture**

Reading: Grover, Fitness in American Culture  
Borish, "Athletic Activities of Various Kinds": Physical Health and Sport Programs for Jewish American Women

October 30                    **Sport, Leisure, and the Built Environment**

Reading: "Labour, Leisure, and Sport" essays in Rethinking History;  
Pesavento, "Sport and Recreation in the Pullman Experiment, 1880-1900,"  
Video: "Coney Island"

October 30                    **Research Proposal Paper Due**

November 6                    **Costume, Gender and Ethnicity**

Reading: Schreier, Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience, 1880-1920

November 13                    **Urban Life, Children, and Consumer Culture**

Reading: Nasaw, Children of the City

November 20                    **Research on Projects – No Class Meeting**

November 27                    **On the Road: the Automobile and Cultural Patterns of Travel and Touring**

Reading: Belasco, Americans on the Road

December 4                    **Foodways: Past and Present**

Reading: Hilliard, "Hog Meat and Cornpone: Foodways in the Antebellum South," in Material Life in America, pp. 311-332

Tuesday evening class - Final Examination Period

**Research Paper Due – Wednesday, December 5, 2001**