

# READINGS IN AMERICAN MATERIAL CULTURE

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Spring 2003  
Herter 400  
Tuesdays, 2-5

*“A method based on the document is prejudiced; fated to neglect the majority of people, for they were non-literate, and, within the bounds of literacy, to neglect the majority of people, for they did not write.*

Henry Glassie  
*Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*

## ***Our Shared Purpose***

The aim of this course is to introduce graduate students to study of “history from things,” or material culture. Throughout the semester, we will attend both to the methods by which material culture can be harnessed for historical analysis and to significant genres or avenues of inquiry undertaken by scholars working with material culture sources. Each week, we will look closely at one work, selected either because it is, or may become, a classic work in American material culture studies. Here we will consider the careers of the authors themselves, and how the work at hand fits into the larger trajectory of their careers as well as the larger trajectory of the field. Secondly, we will try to situate the work among others that have tackled similar sources or asked similar questions. Along the way, students will gain familiarity with the most significant literature in material culture studies, major trends in material culture historiography and methodology, and the leading figures who have given the field its shape and direction.

## ***Assignments: Readings, Writings, Discussions***

The readings, as I indicate above, are selected in order to introduce you to the most significant scholars and scholarship in this field. We will read a set of core books (the first work assigned each week) over the course in the semester in fairly chronological order, so that you will develop a sense of how the field has developed over time. At the same time, these works can also be situated thematically; secondary readings allow the class to survey a range of approaches to a similar problem, e.g., the development of an America middle class, or the relationship between things and gender.

Each week, in order to organize your thinking for our discussion, you will prepare a short response paper (2-3 pages) summarizing and synthesizing the readings and suggesting what you see to be the most interesting issues or questions raised. These writings should attend to questions of both method (that is, how each author tackled his or her subject) and content (that is, what understanding has emerged about a given subject area from the work of several historians over time).

A team of two students will lead each weekly discussion. They will be responsible for a short report reviewing the biography of the week’s primary author(s) [marked with an \* in the syllabus], for framing questions to guide our class conversation, and for directing discussion.

A final paper –12-15 pp – will be due on the last day of class. In it you will, by responding to an important essay assessing the “state of the field,” convey your own sense of the state of material culture study.

## ***Fieldwork Project***

Students in this course will contribute to the Barn Preservation Project currently underway in Massachusetts. In order to gain skills in observation, analysis and documentation, students will catalog agricultural buildings in

Hampshire County. In order to successfully complete this project, **ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED** at three workshops designed to help you obtain the skills you will need to assess these structures (since this fieldwork project replaces the more typical thirty-page final paper but should consume less time, these structured hours should be considered equivalent to the time students would otherwise have necessarily spent developing an independent project). **YOU MUST CLEAR YOUR CALENDARS FOR THE FOLLOWING DATES AND TIMES:**

Workshop on cataloguing historic barns, Thursday March 4, 3:00-5:00, Herter 601  
Workshop on photographing historic buildings with Stan Sherer: Friday, Feb 13, 1-4, Lederle 100A  
Workshop on wood identification with Bruce Hoadley: Friday February 27th, 1:00-5:00 p.m. 105 Holdsworth Hall

Alternative Option: In order to serve the different needs student bring to this course, in a limited number of cases a second option will be available (with consent of instructor) for an alternate final project designed for historians pursuing an ongoing and at present methodologically-traditional project. Students choosing this project must demonstrate that their project is underway and ongoing; i.e., a thesis or dissertation in progress. In order to help you incorporate a larger variety of sources into this larger research, you may elect to write a 30-page historiographical essay on the state and promise of material culture study in your field of inquiry, and propose ways that this literature will inform and improve your project as originally conceived. **Students choosing this option must still attend two of the three special workshops listed above.**

### *Readings*

Most of the articles and book chapters assigned below are available via RESERVE and E-RESERVE. These required books are also available for purchase at the Jeffrey Amherst Bookstore (and are on RESERVE):

Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*  
Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*  
Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage Consumer Culture and Votes for Women*  
Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*  
Heneghan, *Whitewashing America Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination*  
Cummings, *Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay*  
Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*

In order to help you with your group field project, the following titles are recommended and also available both at the bookstore and RESERVE):

James O’Gorman, *Connecticut Valley Vernacular: The Vanishing Landscape and Architecture of the New England Tobacco Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)  
Thomas Durant Visser, *Field Guide to New England Barns and Farm Buildings* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997)  
John Michael Vlach, *Barns* (NY: Norton, 2003)  
“How to Improve the Quality of Photographs for National Register Nominations,”  
NPS publication available at: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/photobul/>

## **SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND DISCUSSIONS:**

### **Feb 3 Introduction: Methods, Manifestoes**

Readings: Henry Glassie, “Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact’s Place in American Studies,” in Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America* [RESERVE]  
Cary Carson, “Doing History with Material Culture,” in Ian Quimby, ed., *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (New York: Norton, 1978) [E-RESERVE]

ARTICLES ON METHOD:

E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," *Winterthur Portfolio* (1974) [E-RESERVE]

Prown, "Style as Evidence," *Winterthur Portfolio* (1980) [E-RESERVE]

Zimmerman, "Workmanship as Evidence" *Winterthur Portfolio* (1981) [E-RESERVE]

**Tuesday, Feb 10: First Things First: Henry Glassie and the beginning of modern material culture studies**

Reading: \*Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: a Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville, U-TN, 1975) [ch 1-5, VIII]

REVIEW COURSEPACK ARTICLES ON METHOD (above)

AND SKIM THROUGH, DEVELOPING A SENSE OF THE METHODOLOGY:

St. George, *The Wrought Covenant: Source Material for the Study of Craftsmen and Community in Southeastern Massachusetts* (Brockton: Brockton Art Center, 1979) [RESERVE]

Robert Trent, *Hearts and Crowns: Folk Chairs of the Connecticut Coast, 1720-1840* [RESERVE]

**Tuesday, Feb 17: Finding Sources Underground**

Reading: \* James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: the Archaeology of Early American life* (Garden City, N.Y. : Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977)

Payner and McGuire, "The Archaeology of Inequality: Material Culture, Domination and Resistance," in *The Archaeology of Inequality*, 1-27. [E-RESERVE]

Patricia Samford, "The Archaeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53(1): 87-114. [E-RESERVE]

Donna Seifert, "Within Site of the White House: The Archaeology of Working Women," *Historical Archaeology* (1990) [E-RESERVE]

**Wednesday, Feb 24: Dwellings**

Reading: \*Abbot Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625-1725* (Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press, 1979): Intro & chs 1-3, 8-10.

Lanier and Herman, *Everyday Architecture of the Mid Atlantic*, "Introduction," [RESERVE; for a good overview of architectural styles in general, some of you may wish to consult the chapter "Popular Architectural Styles."]

Williams, Michael Ann, *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (Athens: U-Georgia, 1991), Introduction, Ch. 4 [E-RESERVE]

Annmarie Adams, "The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia," in Cromley and Hudgins, ed., *Gender, Class and Shelter* (Knoxville: U-Tennessee, 1995): 164-178. [E-RESERVE]

**Tuesday, March 2 Discovering the Vernacular Landscape**

Reading: \*J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, c1984), 1-70, 147-57

J. Ritchie Garrison, *Landscape and Material Life in Franklin County, Massachusetts, 1770-1860*, Intro, "Farmsteads," Conclusion [RESERVE]

Lanier and Herman, *Everyday Architecture of the Mid Atlantic*, Ch. 7: "Landscape Ensembles" [RESERVE]

Dell Upton, "Black and White Landscapes in Early Virginia" in St. George, *Material Life in America* [RESERVE]  
John Michael Vlach, "Searching for Barns in the Archive of Folk Culture" *Folklife Center News*  
Fall 2003, 3-6.

**Tuesday, March 9: Ghosts in the Machine: The Material Culture of Belief**

**AS PREPARATION FOR CLASS: Self-Guided Field Trip: spend some time browsing through a local cemetery, looking closely at the stones. Use Deetz to help you observe the changes in gravestone iconography over time. You are encouraged to bring in images to illustrate your discoveries.**

Reading: \*Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* \ (New York, N.Y. : Architectural History Foundation ; Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, c1986 [RESERVE]  
Colleen McDannel, *Material Christianity* (New Haven: Yale, 1996), "Material Christianity" and "Piety, Art, Fashion: The Religious Object" [RESERVE]  
Jenna Weissman Joselit, "Kitchen Judaism," in Braunstien and Joselit, *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950* (The Jewish Museum, 1990) [RESERVE]  
M. Drake Patten, "African-American Spiritual Belief: An Archaeological Testimony from the Slave Quarter," in Peter Benes, ed., *Wonders of the Invisible World*, (Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings, 1992: Boston University 1995): 44-52. [E-RESERVE]  
Barbara Ward, "In a Feasting Posture: Communion Vessels and Community Values in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century New England," *Winterthur Portfolio* 23 (Spring 1988): 2-24. [E-RESERVE]

**March 16 – SPRING BREAK**

**Tuesday, March 23: The Material Culture of Refinement**

Reading: \*Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Things, 1992* (Intro, Conclusion, and 2 chapters of your choice)  
Philip Zea, *Innumerable Temptations* [RESERVE]  
Katherine Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930* (Rochester, N.Y. : Strong Museum ; Amherst, Mass. : Distributed by the University of Massachusetts Press, c1988) (RESERVE, browse)  
SKIM: Rodris Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage" in St. George, *Material Life in America* [RESERVE]

**Tuesday, March 30: FIELD TRIP: OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE.**

Carpools will depart Herter promptly at 2:00, and return at approximately 5:00, though we can arrange carpools such that one vehicle remains at OSV later, if students wish to spend more time in the Village.

**Tuesday, April 6: NO CLASS: DEVOTE PREP AND CLASS TIME TO WORK ON BARN SURVEY**

**Tuesday, April 13: The Travels in the Interior: Material Culture of Domestic Life**

Reading: \*Ken Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) [RESERVE]  
Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Knopf, 1986) [RESERVE]  
*Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950* (The Jewish Museum, 1990) SKIM “A Set Table: Jewish Domestic Culture in the New World, 1880-1950” [RESERVE]  
Lizabeth Cohen, “Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915” [E-RESERVE]  
Billy G. Smith, “The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750-1800” in St. George, *Material Life in America*. [RESERVE]

## **Tuesday, April 20: Material Culture and the study of Race**

Reading: \* Bridget T. Heneghan, *Whitewashing America Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination* (University Press of Mississippi) [RESERVE]  
John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993) [RESERVE; SELECTIONS]  
Paul R. Mullins, “Race and the Genteel Consumer: Class and African-American Consumption, 1850-1930,” *Historical Archaeology* 1999 33(1): 22-38. [E-RESERVE]

## **Thursday, April 27: Material Culture and the study of Women’s History**

Reading:\*Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (Columbia University Press, 1999)  
Sarah H. Hill: *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and their Basketry* (UNC Press, 1997) [RESERVE; Intro, Prologue, “Rivercane,” Epilogue]  
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Furniture as Social History” *American Furniture*. [E-RESERVE]  
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Hannah Barnard’s Chest: Female Property and Identity in Eighteenth Century New England” in *Through a Glass Darkly* (UNC, 1997), 238-273. [E-RESERVE]

## **Tuesday, May 4<sup>st</sup>: New Mindsets, New Methods**

Reading: \*Robert Blair St. George, *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1998), introduction and two chapters of your choice  
Ann Smart Martin, “Makers, Buyers and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework” *Winterthur Portfolio* 29, nos 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1993): 141-57. E-RESERVE  
Cary Carson, “Why Demand?” in Carson, et al, eds., *Of Consuming Interest: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* Charlottesville: U-Va, 1994) [SKIM: RESERVE]  
Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1999.) “Onward,” “History” and “Method,” [SKIM: RESERVE]

## **Tuesday, May 11: What’s Next?**

Reading: \*Cary Carson, “Material Culture History: The Scholarship Nobody Knows” In *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. [E-RESERVE]

FINAL Writing Assignment: In a 1500-2000 word essay, respond to Carson’s “Scholarship Nobody Knows.”