

**GEOG 586/HIST 512**  
**Historical Geography of North America**  
**Spring 2008**

TR 2:10-3:30, 104 James Hall  
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Office hours: TR 11-12; W 1-2

Purpose of the course

This course will introduce students to the field of historical geography. It is not, however, a survey of the historical geography of North America. Rather it will be a selective examination of aspects of the region's historical geography that is intended to help students cultivate an appreciation for the importance of history to geography and the value of employing a historical perspective in trying to understand places. It will also differ from a survey course in that it will take the approach of a graduate seminar in which students learn through reading, discussion, and research.

The course has two principal goals: To acquaint students with historical geography as it has been practiced in North America and to teach students how to do historical geography. Students will be acquainted with historical geography by being introduced to major themes in the field and reading studies that are representative of each approach. Students will be taught how to do historical geography through instruction and reading about research techniques, completion of a series of methodological exercises, and by undertaking a major research project.

What is historical geography?

Historical geography, sometimes defined as the geography of the past or the study of places through time, is one of the oldest traditions of geographical inquiry. It has been taught for as long as geography has been part of higher education. Many of the leading figures in American geography, from Carl Sauer and Peirce Lewis to Donald Meinig and Don Mitchell, have employed a historical perspective in their research.

Yet historical geography is different from other subfields within the discipline, such as political geography or climatology, because it does not focus on any single aspect of geography and does not possess a unified body of theories and concepts, or a commonly agreed upon set of concerns. For this reason, historical geography has sometimes had an identity problem within the discipline and some have questioned whether there is even such a thing as historical geography, arguing that all geography should be historically informed.

What unites historical geographers is a common belief that in order to comprehend contemporary geographical patterns it is first necessary to understand the historical processes that shaped them. While other areas of geography also incorporate a historical perspective, what sets historical geography apart is that it emphasizes a historical approach. Contrary to what some definitions of historical geography suggest, historical geographers are not mere antiquarians, but are also concerned with the present because it is the result of all that happened before.

Organization and classroom activity

Following an introductory section in which we will examine the development and contemporary characteristics of historical geography, the class schedule and course readings will be organized around seven themes that encompass much of the recent work in the field. In each section, the

instructor will provide a brief introduction to that approach and the class will read and discuss two article-length studies as examples. One of the studies in each section will be about a New England topic. We will also read and consider at least one article about research methods in most sections. A portion of several classes will be used to introduce students to particular source types and discuss research and writing issues.

Classroom activity will focus on discussion of readings, so it is imperative that students read the material to be discussed before coming to class and be prepared to discuss it. You are expected to contribute to classroom discussion and will be graded on the degree to which you participate and the quality of your contributions. Discussion is intended to be an open dialogue from which we all can learn. It's okay to disagree with the instructor or your fellow students, so long as you do so respectfully. In fact, it is encouraged. You will not be graded on your opinion or the degree to which your views coincide with those of the instructor. We will all learn more if we are open, honest, and candid. The best discussions are those that make us think about a subject in a different way than we would on our own. The quality of this class will depend greatly on how actively students become involved in discussions.

When you read the studies and prepare for the discussions, keep a few general questions in mind. What are the major themes of the study? What is the nature of the arguments presented? What methods and sources does the author use? Does the author have a particular point of view? How does the study reflect the author's training as a geographer (or how might the study have been different if done by a historian or some other type of scholar)? What are the study's strong and weak points? How could it have been improved? A series of discussion questions about each of the articles will be made available to students at least two days before we discuss that reading.

### Landscape history project

Students are required to produce a 3,000-word (excluding citations) research paper that examines the origins and evolution of a contemporary landscape. Geographers define a landscape as a geographic area and all its visible components. A landscape is everything you see and encompasses both natural and human features, including the land and its many forms, vegetation, water resources, buildings, infrastructure such as highways and power lines, signs, but also less conspicuous elements, such as weeds and trash. Any landscape is the sum of its parts and landscape studies emphasize a total view, not individual elements in isolation. Landscapes exist at a variety of scales, from a single small site, such as a vacant lot, to an entire city or a region.

Students should choose a landscape to study that is small enough in size that it can be researched in depth in a single semester. Suitable examples include a commercial area, residential neighborhood, urban district, industrial zone, transportation corridor, natural environment, or sites with distinct identities, such as a park, recreation area, or public place. If a landscape in which you are interested seems too large, you may wish to examine only a portion of it. The instructor may suggest that if your choice seems too ambitious. Because you will need to travel to your study area to do research and complete assignments, you should choose a location to which you can travel without difficulty. If you do not have access to a car, you should choose a location that is nearby or can be reached via public transportation. The instructor must approve your topic choice, so you may wish to come speak with him as you consider ideas. Topics must be approved by Tuesday, February 5, but do not wait until the last minute in case the instructor rejects your proposal at first or suggest changes. You must also obtain approval if you desire to change your topic in any way as the semester progresses.

Your research should seek to understand how your landscape came to possess its present characteristics over time. You should go as far back in time as necessary to comprehend how the landscape came to be. You should also seek to identify what the area was like before it began to look

as it now does, determine whether the land had any previous uses that are no longer visible, and try to uncover why earlier landscapes were altered. Any landscape is the result of myriad forces of the sort that give any place its personality — natural processes, economic activities, cultural characteristics, political factors, social relations, historical developments, and more. Your research should consider all of the factors that have shaped the landscape you study, though it should emphasize those factors that have been most important to shaping its character. The study of landscapes is an inherently visual endeavor and your paper should focus on the tangible elements of your study area.

Each landscape history project should be an original piece of scholarship and should not merely repeat the work of others. While all research builds on scholarship that came before it, you are expected to go beyond what you read to provide new information and interpretation. Finished projects must also show some use of primary source materials, such as those to which you will be introduced over the course of the semester. This assignment may be different than any other class project you have undertaken, but it is my hope that by doing more than regurgitating the work of others you will discover how rewarding research can be. You may find some information in books and articles. You may locate information online. But it is unlikely that such sources will provide all you need to know. You should conduct research in libraries and historical societies in your study location. You should identify anyone living who has a deep knowledge about your subject and interview them. You may wish to peruse old newspapers, study maps, or compile information from city directories. You will have to be resourceful. A guide to potential information sources will be provided.

There is no minimum number of sources; you should consult however many sources are necessary to carry out the study. The sources you use should demonstrate that you consulted a range of sources and source types. No more than twenty percent of your sources can be sources only available on the world wide web. Students will be asked to provide periodic updates on their research in class. The purpose of the updates is not to check up on students, but to encourage a more collaborative research process. It is hoped students will provide comments and suggestions to their classmates. Students are also required to meet individually with the instructor twice during the semester to discuss their research — once before March 1 and once before April 15. Students who fail to meet with the instructor will have their paper grades lowered. Students are also required to have a draft of their final paper reviewed by a writing assistant at the Connors Writing Center in a writing conference (see <http://www.unh.edu/writing/connors.html> for more information). Ask the writing assistant to send the instructor a note to verify your participation; it will also summarize what was discussed. Your paper should show that you paid attention to the writing assistant's suggestions. Students who fail to complete a writing conference will have their paper grades lowered.

The finished product of your research should be a narrative study with a clearly stated purpose, logical organization, and succinct conclusion. It should demonstrate your ability to examine sources carefully and critically, analyze and interpret evidence wisely, distinguish the important from the trivial, explain what happened coherently and concisely, and write effectively. Like the best history, your paper should also be a good story. Include maps, photos, and other illustrations if they help you tell that story. Papers must be typeset, double-spaced, and printed on only one side of each sheet, with each page numbered. Please write a word count for the main body of your paper on the lower right-hand corner of the last page. Sources must be cited using endnotes in the format explained in chapters 16 and 17 of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition, available in Dimond Library Reference (call number Z253 C57). A guide showing how to cite common source types will be provided. You will be graded on the thoroughness of your research, the depth of your analysis, and the quality of your writing. Papers are due Monday, May 12. Late papers and electronic submissions will not be accepted. Each student must also provide the instructor a 9-by-12 envelope addressed to the student and affixed with two 41-cent stamps so the graded paper can be returned to the student.

Students are also required to give a presentation based on their landscape history project. Presentations should be 12 to 15 minutes in length (no longer); an additional five minutes will be reserved at the end of each presentation for questions and comments. Presentations should not be mere readings of papers, but should focus on a few key themes and distill the most important information from the written study. They should recognize the different nature of public speaking and the tools that can be utilized to enhance a presentation. You may wish to employ audiovisual aids or distribute materials to the class if they help convey your ideas. Be creative and speak with as few notes as possible. You will be graded on your speaking ability, how well you present your research to the class, and your responses to questions and comments. Your final paper should reflect that you considered comments about your presentation by the instructor and fellow students.

### Methodological exercises

Students are required to complete six short exercises, each intended to replicate part of a typical research process and, because they are based on your landscape history project, should contribute to your final paper. After choosing a topic, you will be required to produce a short project proposal and a preliminary bibliography of secondary sources. Other exercises are intended to expose you to particular methodologies and source types commonly used by historical geographers — fieldwork, Census data, newspapers, city directories, fire insurance maps, and interviewing. Instructions for completing each exercise will be provided. Electronic submissions will not be accepted.

### Grading

Student grades will be based on written assignments, their presentation, and participation in class discussions. There will be no quizzes or exams. The research paper will be worth 35 percent of your course grade. Each of the methodological exercises will be worth 5 percent, 30 percent total. Discussion contributions will be worth 25 percent. The presentation will be worth 10 percent. No extra credit is available, nor are students permitted to redo work as a way to improve their grades.

Grades will be assigned based on the traditional scale in which an A represents work of exceptional quality, a B is considered good, a C is satisfactory, a D is poor, and an F is unsatisfactory. Grading in a course such as this is subjective. Students should keep in mind that grading is an assessment of quality not a measure of effort. The grades you earn are up to you. If you choose to do work that shows extraordinary ability and care, you will be awarded a grade that reflects that. If, however, you choose to do work that is superficial, sloppy, or fails to follow directions, you will be graded accordingly. The instructor strives to be as fair as possible to all students. If you have questions about how your work is evaluated, please ask. Although this is not an English class, the instructor pays significant attention to the quality of student writing because he believes the ability to write clearly and effectively is the most important skill students should possess by the time they graduate.

Students are also required to complete a personal information card and turn it in no later than January 29. Any student who fails to turn in a completed card by the due date will have their grade lowered one-tenth of a point (on a 4.0 scale).

### Attendance and tardiness

Because this class is discussion oriented, attendance is essential. Although attendance will not be taken, your discussion grade will suffer if you miss class because you will not be there to contribute. The instructor may also lower the semester grade of students who are absent frequently. Students should obtain notes from classmates for any classes missed and are responsible for any information provided during class periods from which they are absent.

Any exercise turned in after the due date will be docked one letter grade for each school day it is late. Lateness will be excused only when circumstances beyond a student's control prevent them from submitting an exercise on time. If you think you have a legitimate excuse, you must notify the instructor by e-mail or telephone *before the class period in which the exercise is due*, or, when that is logistically impossible, very soon afterwards on the same day. You must also be able to prove your excuse in writing (doctor's note, towing receipt with time listed, etc.). Conflicts with jobs, other classes, and your personal life are not satisfactory excuses.

### Academic honesty

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated in this course and will be severely punished when discovered. The instructor will review the university's academic honesty policy in class and will provide examples of behavior that would be considered violations of that policy. If you have questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, ask the instructor or see the university's *Students Rights, Rules and Responsibilities* handbook, available at <http://www.unh.edu/student/rights/srrr0708.pdf>

### Blackboard

The university's Blackboard computer system (<http://blackboard.unh.edu/>) will serve as an archive for course materials, will provide students access to their grades, and may be used as a method for distributing information between class meetings. The instructor will assume that the e-mail address linked to your account is your primary e-mail address and that you check it regularly.

### Readings

There is no textbook for this course, although the following book has been placed on reserve in Dimond Library for reference purposes:

Michael Conzen, Thomas A. Rumney, and Graeme Wynn, editors. *A Scholar's Guide to Geographical Writing on the American and Canadian Past*. University of Chicago Geography Research Paper No. 235. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Weekly readings are available on Blackboard in Adobe Acrobat format. `

## Tentative course schedule

January 22: Introduction to the course

January 24-31: Introduction to historical geography

*January 29: Personal information card due*

Craig E. Colten, Peter J. Hugill, Terence Young, and Karen M. Morin. "Historical Geography." In *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, edited by Gary L. Gaile and Cort J. Willmott, pp. 150-163. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Michael P. Conzen. "The Historical Impulse in Geographical Writing about the United States, 1850-1990." In *A Scholar's Guide to Geographical Writing on the American and Canadian Past*, edited by Michael P. Conzen, Thomas A. Rumney, and Graeme Wynn, pp. 3-90. University of Chicago Geography Research Paper No. 235. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Carol Kammen. "Researching Local History." In *On Doing Local History: Reflections on What Local Historians Do, Why, and What It Means*, pp. 43-76. Nashville: Association for State and Local History, 1986.

February 5-12: Regional geographies

*February 5: Deadline for approval of paper topic*

William H. Wallace. "A Hard Land for a Tough People: A Historical Geography of New Hampshire." *New Hampshire Profiles* 24:4 (1975), pp. 21-32.

D. W. Meinig. "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55:2 (June 1965), pp. 191-220.

Peirce Lewis. "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene." In *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, edited by D. W. Meinig, pp. 11-32. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

February 14-21: Migration and settlement

*February 14: Project proposal-preliminary bibliography due*

Joseph S. Wood. "'Build, Therefore, Your Own World': The New England Village as Settlement Ideal." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81:1 (1991), pp. 32-50.

Anne Kelley Knowles. "Immigrant Trajectories through the Rural-Industrial Transition in Wales and the United States, 1795-1850." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85:2 (June 1995), pp. 246-266.

Barnes F. Lathrop. "History from the Census Returns." In *Sociology and History: Methods*, edited by Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard Hofstadter, pp. 79-101. New York: Basic Books, 1968.

February 26-March 4: Industry and economy

*February 26: Fieldwork exercise due*

*March 1: Deadline for first meeting with instructor about landscape history project*

Michael M. Bell. "Did New England Go Downhill?" *Geographical Review* 79:4 (October 1989), pp. 450-466.

David R. Meyer. "The Emergence of the American Manufacturing Belt." *Journal of Historical Geography* 9:2 (1983), pp. 145-174.

Susan Wiley Hardwick. "Using City Directories to Teach Geography." *Journal of Geography* 89 (November-December 1990), pp. 266-271.

Jo Ann Rayfield. "Using City Directories to Teach History and Historical Research Methods." *Teaching History* 16:1 (1991), pp. 14-23.

March 6-13: Cities, suburbs, and towns

*March 6: Census exercise due*

Mona Domosh. "Controlling Urban Form: The Development of Boston's Back Bay." *Journal of Historical Geography* 18:3 (1992), pp. 288-306.

Blake Gumprecht. "Fraternity Row, the Student Ghetto, and the Faculty Enclave: Characteristic Residential Districts in the American College Town." *Journal of Urban History* 32:2 (January 2006), pp. 231-273.

Robert B. Lamb. "The Sanborn Map: A Tool for the Geographer." *California Geographer* 2 (1961), pp. 19-22.

March 17-21: Spring break; no classes

March 25-April 1: Environmental historical geography

*March 27: Newspaper exercise due*

Daniel Gade. "Weeds in Vermont as Tokens of Socioeconomic Change." *Geographical Review* 81:2 (April 1991), pp. 153-169.

Derek H. Alderman. "Channing Cope and the Making of a Miracle Vine." *Geographical Review* 94:2 (April 2004), pp. 157-177.

Gordon G. Whitney. "Reconstructing the Past." In *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain: A History of Environmental Change in Temperate North America From 1500 to the Present*, pp. 8-38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

April 3-10: Culture and landscape

*April 10: City directory/fire insurance map exercise due*

Blake Harrison. "The Technological Turn: Skiing and Landscape Change in Vermont, 1930-1970." *Vermont History* 71 (Summer/Fall 2003), pp. 197-228.

Daniel D. Arreola. "The Mexican American Cultural Capital." *Geographical Review* 77:1 (January 1987), pp. 17-34.

David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty. "Oral Documents." In *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*, 2d ed., pp. 103-121. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press/Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

April 15-22: Power and social relations

*April 15: Deadline for second meeting with instructor about landscape history project*

*April 17: Instructor at Association of American Geographers' annual meeting; no class*

Sallie A. Marston. "Public Rituals and Community Power: St. Patrick's Day Parades in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1841-1874." *Political Geography Quarterly* 8:3 (July 1989), pp. 255-269.

Cole Harris. "The Fraser Canyon Encountered." In *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change*, pp. 103-136, 289-293. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997.

April 24-May 8: Student research presentations (four per day)

*April 24: Interview exercise due*

*May 5: Deadline for students to complete writing conference, Connors Writing Center*

May 12: Last day of classes

*Paper due by noon, 121 James Hall*