

HPSS 732-01 Witness Tree Project
Emergence of Conservation in the US to 1900
[in conjunction with FURN 2451]
Wintersession 2022

Instructor: Daniel Cavicchi
Office: 404 Washington Place
E-mail: dcavicch@risd.edu
Class: AA Schedule, 9-12 am, College Building 301

“The equation of animal and vegetable life is too complicated a problem for human intelligence to solve, and we can never know how wide a circle of disturbance we produce in the harmonies of nature when we throw the smallest pebble into the ocean of organic life.”

--George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature* (1864)

Course Philosophy

Since 2009, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and the National Park Service (NPS) have worked to develop a collaborative model for teaching and learning centered on witness trees, long-standing trees that were present for key moments in American history. The Project arranges for a fallen witness tree to be shipped from a national historic site to RISD, where, in a joint history seminar and design studio, students interpret the history the tree witnessed and make relevant objects from the tree’s wood. In addition to classroom study, the Project variously involves field trips, guest lectures, exhibitions of students’ objects, and other events that highlight the significance of material culture, landscape, and design in learning about American history.

In this iteration of the Witness Tree Project, we will work with diverse trees from the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont. As the boyhood home of environmentalist George Perkins Marsh and the farm of businessman Frederick Billings, the site served as a catalyst for the nineteenth-century American conservation movement and offers many ways to explore the emergence of conservation and its ideological complexities, including debates about resources, stewardship, restoration, protection, and justice, from the colonial occupation of Abenaki lands to the development of national parks at the turn of the century.

In conjunction with the Witness Tree studio, the overarching focus of the Witness tree seminar is to focus on developing your capacity for historical thinking and research. Thinking historically essentially involves placing ideas and events in particular contexts and the always incomplete task of imposing order on the messy and multifarious information from the past. You need to learn how to assess different types of evidence; understand changing attitudes and debates about diverse topics over time; and apply this knowledge to the crafting of persuasive interpretations.

Learning Objectives

- To understand multiple concepts of nature and human behavior in the emergence of the American conservation movement.

- To learn general trends in environmental history in the United States between 1700 and 1900.
- To develop familiarity with the practices of observational and historical research in place-based history.
- To learn how to assess historical evidence and articulate positions on historical issues.
- To explore how historical research might animate and shape art and design.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Course Materials

Required:

Scholarly essays from JSTOR and online sources, as indicated below.

Recommended:

Charles Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature*. Seattle: U. of Washington Press, 2003 [1864]; ISBN: 9780295983165. [*Man and Nature* is in the public domain and available online; if you want a paper version, this is the preferred edition].

Key Online Sites:

Marsh Billings Rockefeller website:

<https://www.nps.gov/mabi/index.htm>

Conservation Timeline:

<https://www.nps.gov/mabi/learn/historyculture/conservation-timeline-1801-1900.htm>

Evaluation

1. Class Participation 20%

Wintersession requires intensely-sustained attention and work. You should make every effort to organize your time so that you keep up with the reading and come prepared to participate in each class meeting.

2. Mapping Assignment 30%

3. Biography of Landscape 50%

Descriptions below.

Grading Policies

- For Wintersession 2022, due to the unpredictability and possible disruption from the continuing pandemic, grades will be based on a P-NC scale, where “P” equals “meeting and/or exceeding the basic requirements of the course.” Since this is a collaborative class, Dale Broholm and I will do the grading together.
- All assignments not completed by the last day of class will result in an NC for the course, unless you have made other arrangements with me.
- Plagiarism is a serious offence and may warrant further judicial action. Be sure that you understand what constitutes plagiarism before you begin an assignment.

SCHEDULE

Groundwork

Background: Cultural Landscape Report, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park, Volume I: Site History -
http://npshistory.com/publications/mabi/mansion_grounds_clr1.pdf

1. Thursday, Jan. 6 – Introduction (ONLINE)

2. Monday, Jan. 10 - Biography of Landscape (ONLINE)

Jan Kolen and Johannes Renes, "Landscape Biographies: Key Issues" from *Landscape Biographies*, Jan Kolen, Johannes Renes, and Rita Hermans, eds. Amsterdam University Press, 2014. (JSTOR)

Lisa Brooks, "Every Swamp is a Castle." *Northeastern Naturalist*, Vol 24, No. 7 (2017): pp. H45-80. (JSTOR)

See also: *Our Beloved Kin* website: <https://ourbelovedkin.com/awikhigan/index>

Abenaki Era, Pre-Nineteenth Century

Background: UVM | Place, The Abenaki People -
<https://www.uvm.edu/place/towns/greensborobend/abenaki.php>
Nebi: Abenaki Ways of Knowing Water -
<https://www.uvm.edu/seagrant/resources/videos/nebi-abenaki-ways-knowing-water>

3. Wednesday, Jan. 12 – Ndakinna (ONLINE)

[Multiple Authors], "Abenaki," from Siobhan Senier, ed., *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Writing from Indigenous New England*. University of Nebraska Press, 2014. (Project MUSE)
Cheryl Savageau, "Stories, Language, and the Land." *English Language Notes*, Vol. 58.1 (April 2020): 21-39. (Project MUSE)

See also: *Beloved Kin and Memory Lands: Poetry Reading by Cheryl Savageau*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M49z5Nz3Bgk>

4. Thursday, Jan. 13 - Ecology and Power (ONLINE)

Bill McKibben, Stephen c. Trombulak, and Christopher McGrory Klyza, "European Settlement and the Founding of Vermont" from *The Story of Vermont*. University Press of New England, 2015. (Project MUSE)

Thomas Wickman, "'Winters Embittered with Hardships': Severe Cold, Wabanaki Power, and English Adjustments, 1690-1710." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 72.1 (Jan. 2015): 57-98. (JSTOR).

Elise A. Guyette, "Founding Mothers and Fathers of the Hill, 1790s-1800s" from *Discovering Black Vermont*. University of Vermont Press, 2010. (Project MUSE)

Marsh Era, 1789-1869

Background: George Perkins Marsh -
<https://www.nps.gov/mabi/learn/historyculture/gpmarsh.htm>

5. Thursday, Jan. 20 – Man and Nature

George Frederick Marsh, *Man and Nature* (1864). Available on line at:
<https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/man-and-nature-1864> OR
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/37957/37957-h/37957-h.htm>

***Mapping Assignment Due**

Maps are selective, purposeful representations of a place. They quickly communicate multiple levels of detail and scale and can address diverse factors such culture, behavior, and physical environment. In this assignment, create a map that combines two distinct sets of information regarding the Piedmont region of current-day Vermont, based either on what we've read or what you've researched, so far in the course. Your maps may be visual, textual, 3-D or 2-D; all maps must include at least two clear "layers" of information. Radical juxtapositions are welcome; the scale is up to you. For examples, see the creative mapping of Rebecca Solnit at <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/artistic-atlas/>. NOTE: In addition to the map itself, be prepared to present: 1) why you chose the layers you did; 2) how you represented them; 3) what their intersection reveals.

6. Monday, Jan. 24 –Field Trip (whole day, 7 am to 7 pm)

7. Wednesday, Jan. 26 – Nature and Agency

Marcus Hall, "The Provincial Nature of George Perkins Marsh." *Environment and History*, Vol. 10.2 (2004): 191-204. (JSTOR)

Paul Outka, "Introduction: The Sublime and the Traumatic" from *Race and Nature: From Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. (Online at Google Books).

Patrick Morgan, "Reimagining the Human: George Perkins Marsh, Theology, and the Proto-Anthropocene" from *Manifesting Vertical Destiny*. Ph.D dissertation, Duke University, 2019.

*Visit by Patrick Morgan

Billings Era, 1869-1914

Background: Frederick Billings -

<https://www.nps.gov/mabi/learn/historyculture/frederickbillings.htm>; The Billings Women - <https://www.nps.gov/mabi/learn/historyculture/the-billings-women.htm>

8. Thursday, Jan. 27 – Agrarianism and Freedom

Steven Soll, "Farm Against Forest" from *American Wilderness: A New History.*, ed. by Michael Lewis. Oxford University Press, 2007. (EBSCO)

Jason E. Pierce, "Our Climate and Soil is Completely Adapted to Their Customs: Whiteness, Railroad Promotion, and the Settlement of the Great Plains" from *Making the White Man's West*. University Press of Colorado, 2016. (JSTOR or EBSCO)

9. Monday, Jan. 31 – Forestry and Control

Gifford Pinchot, "How Conservation Began in the United States." *Agricultural History*, Vol. 11.4 (Oct 1937): 255-265. (JSTOR)

Theodore Catton, "Public Forests and Forests in Trust" from *American Indians and National Forests*. University of Arizona Press, 2016. (Project MUSE or EBSCO)

10. Thursday, Feb. 3 - Environmentalism and Identity

Adam Rome, "Political Hermaphrodites: Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America." *Environmental History*, Vol. 11.3 (July 2006): 440-463. (JSTOR)

Karl Jacoby, "Class and Environmental History: Lessons from 'The War in the Adirondacks.'" *Environmental History*, Vol. 2.3 (July 1997): 324-342. (JSTOR)

Conclusion

Background: Michael Sacca, *From the Hills of Vermont* (video) -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8UObYC_Jjg

Rolf Diamant, "Thinking and Acting Anew." *Parks Stewardship Forum* 37.3 (2021): 437-441; "A More Complete Story." *Parks Stewardship Forum* 36.3 (2020): 346-350.

11. Monday, Feb. 7 - Marsh's Legacy

David Lowenthal, "Nature and Morality from George Perkins Marsh to the Millenium." *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26.1 (2000): 3-27.

Nicholas A. Fisichelli, Gregor W. Schuurman and Edmund Sharron, "Climate Change: Responding to the Crisis Portended by George Perkins Marsh." *The George Wright Forum*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2015): 276-289.

*Visit by Rolf Diamant

12. Wednesday, Feb. 9 - Presentations

***Landscape Biography Due**

Write a 7-10 page narrative biography of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller landscape. Your biography should address one or more key theoretical questions, especially: 1) Who (or what) are the authors of this landscape? 2) How has the temporal dimension of this landscape taken 'shape' in rhythms, transformations, layers, and memories? 3) What are the primary forces (aesthetic, biological, economic, philosophical, political, social, etc.) that have contributed to this landscape's life history?