

Lecture #13: Planning for Gardens, Children...and Disasters

Suggested Readings:

Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*, 1969.

Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 2001.

Erwin Hargrove & Paul Conkin, *TVA: Fifty Years of Grass-roots Bureaucracy*, 1983.

Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, 1979.

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*, 1995.

Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*, 2007.

Outline

I. The Dream of a Rural Cityscape: Parks and Suburbs

1831, Jacob Bigelow organized Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts: rural retreat in city, contemplation of death & nature, pointing toward park, arboretum, suburb (cf Forest Hill Cemetery in Madison)

Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852, *Theory & Practice of Landscape Architecture*, 1841, transferred

J. C. Loudon's landscape ideas from England: constructing the picturesque and the beautiful directly upon the gardened landscape: estates & rural retreats

Frederick Law Olmsted, Central Park, 1857: bringing rural picturesque to city, curvilinear organic patterns in opposition to civil grid, with Mt. Auburn & Downing as models

led to ideal suburb: Riverside, IL's (1869) curving streets, middle-class houses on large lots, with gardens tended by women: male commute between home and workplace meant suburb shaped by feminine notions of beauty

II. A Woman's Garden, A Woman's Home

Mabel Osgood Wright, founder of CT Audubon, editor of *Bird-Lore*, author *Garden of a Commuter's Wife*, 1901: bird-watcher and conservationist as gardener

(dramatic shift in late 19th c from High Victorian gardening fashion--massed beds of single-color annual plants in parterres--toward rustic, perennial plantings promoted by William Robinson & Gertrude Jekyll, ideas spread to US and still dominate)

Celia Thaxter's *Island Garden*, 1894, on Isles of Shoals, New Hampshire: garden as expression of woman's role as nurturer of young life, flower as symbol of fertility and feminine beauty, garden as direct sign of God's love for birth, growth, and death

III. Moral Visions for Children: Nature Study

Gifford Pinchot saw women as key to movement's success in role as educators of next generation conservation publicly supported by women's clubs, Audubon societies, etc.

but one of most important vehicles for women's work in conservation: nature study movement

nature study romantic, sentimental, embraced natural world and its creatures as anthropomorphic vehicle for exploration of human values: fables, moral lessons

many forms: Florence Holbrook's nature myths, fictional Indian stories, nature spirits

Anna Botsford Comstock's more scientific approach still retained search for values: Botsford born 1854; 1874 enrolled at Cornell, met entomologist husband J. H. Comstock and became scientific illustrator for him; 1895 became involved in nature study, joined Cornell faculty, became leading figure of movement for next three decades: *Handbook of Nature Study* first published 1911, remains in print as a classic

nature study as another domesticated strand of romantic sublime: secularization of religious values, nature as best context for educating children to cultural values

IV. Boys, Girls, and Woodcraft Indians

among most popular of natural history authors in early 20th century: Ernest Thompson Seton

born 1860 in England, to Canada at age 6, began work as artist/illustrator, doing animal illustrations for scientific publications by mid-1880s; wolf killer in NM in 1893

most popular short story: "King of Currumpaw," 1894; *Wild Animals I Have Known* published 1896; stories of noble wolves & other animals struggling against odds, dying

1902 created Woodcraft Indians; became model for Lord Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts in England, 1908 (military)

Seton in turn founded U.S. branch of Boy Scouts in 1910; followed in 1912-15 by Juliette Low's Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts emphasized domestic, "feminine" values: home-making, group vs. individual achievement; nature as field for nurture and communal support more than competition

Seton's child Indians used fantasy to occupy a lost American landscape, but also encounter a natural world whose meanings are a higher source of moral value in modern society

conservation: preserving the world being lost, whether for wildness or to save a child's moral universe: birdhouse as a practical symbol of gentle nature humanely protected

progressive conservation: nature as resource, sublime cathedral, Sunday School, home

II. TVA: Conservation and the Vision of Regional Planning

Tennessee River: most eastern rainfall, great volume, Muscle Shoals 2nd only to Niagara

National Defense Act 1916: nitrate plant at Muscle Shoals, Wilson Dam completed 1925

linkage of hydroelectricity with energy-intensive industry (nitrates, aluminum, nuclear), and hence with military expenditures during wartime; boosted in South as fertilizer and power source for urban-industrial development, with Feds providing capital

Muscle Shoals controversy of 1920s: public vs private power; local development in northern Alabama vs wider power source; regional planning vs particularistic development

Nebraska Sen. George Norris key promoter of hydro development, numerous bills, compromises

factions: N Dems & W/MW Reps support public power; NE Reps oppose govt comp with private

Harding, Coolidge, Hoover all oppose public intervention, but Hoover great conservationist

FDR's election broke deadlock on Tennessee Valley, broadened mandate toward large-scale regional planning which FDR had derived from numerous sources: uncle Frederick Delano, urban & regional planning, Howard Odum's regional studies at Chapel Hill (Odum's sons would go on to be among leading ecologists of next generation), etc.

1933: Tennessee Valley Authority Act creates TVA with goal of region-wide planning

original constitutional basis for Federal water acts--navigation, flood control--now broadened to include hydropower development nationwide, but also social planning

TVA designed to modernize depressed farming region of eroded hill country: agents educate farm families about anti-erosion measures, construct new houses, electrical methods, business techniques, wage labor in construction, highways, urban links, tourism

III. CCC: Conservation and the Army of Unemployed

Key ally of TVA and other Fed agencies: Civilian Conservation Corps, created 1933:

recruit young men, 17-23 to fight unemployment and supply labor for conservation measures

\$30/month, room, board, camps around country for anti-erosion, planting, roads, parks

by 1939, 8.5 mill man-days to conservation, 2.18 mill men employed, 1.575 billion trees planted, 140,000 miles roads & trails built

CCC as scientific management and planning applied to social/economic problems, but also almost incidentally a crucial labor force conservation throughout nation

IV. Erosion and Communal Disaster: Soil Conservation

erosion as ruling metaphor for not just ecological, but economic and social failure, waste

varieties of erosive experience: sheet erosion, gully erosion, wind erosion

(NB also big floods of 1920s, attributed to deforestation at river headwaters [cf. Marsh])

Hugh Hammond Bennett's *Soil Conservation*, 1939, became great overview textbook on this subject for generation painter Alexandre Hogue, b. 1898, as important regionalist/realist painter in late 1930s, Great Plains and desert SW as chief subjects; religious symbolism of crucified land

V. Dust Bowl

Plains drought worst in nation's history, 9 years below ave rain, 1934 worst ever at 9", origins not merely climatic, however: overgrazing, land plowed too deep by dry-farming techniques, WWI expansion had prompted massive investment in new land, tractors, equipment, and subsequent depression brought bankruptcy

net result was that land was no longer protected by crop cover, open to winds

May 1934 ushered in Dust Bowl when 9 May storm carried 350 million tons to East Coast in single storm; massive duststorms eroded hundreds of millions tons of soil

govt intervention: shelterbelts (cf. Marsh's climatic theories), contour plowing to compensate for grid field boundaries, Resettlement Administration to relocate farms off of marginal lands (end of frontier vision), Taylor Grazing Act to end homesteading on rangelands; reliance on experts to redirect social destiny of rural land & people

John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, 1939, became most compelling popular account of "Okie" migration

Alexandre Hogue's "Mother Earth Laid Bare" (1938), "The Crucified Land" (1939): icons

technology to solve technological prob: but what of underlying social/economic system?