

AMST 333  
House and Home in America  
Roger Williams University  
M-TH 3:30 - 4:50  
GHH 108

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## Week of February 6

This week we'll introduce the second of the books for the course, and begin to look at the early roots of Suburbs as we know them today. As this section indicates, the beginnings were both theoretical and practical.

### For Monday, February 6

Read, in Stilgoe,  
Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820 - 1939  
Introduction, 1- 17  
Section I. "Intellectual and Practical Beginnings"  
"View" 21  
1. "Witch Hazel" 22 - 26  
2. "Botanizing" 27 - 37  
3. "Shadows" 38 - 48

Frequently when we come upon a book which is heavily illustrated we sigh with relief because it means we have less to read. We then proceed to pretty much ignore the illustrations. The illustrations in Stilgoe are very important, and we lose a lot of value if we don't spend serious time looking at and interpreting them. Stilgoe helps us see why suburbs are important places... perhaps the most politically potent places in America today (soccer moms, SUVs, and all that). As you read him, notice that the captions to his illustrations are very important. We tend to ignore captions: Don't! It may take you a bit to get used to this book..

One of the major difficulties with this study--perhaps the only major difficulty-- is that the chapter titles are more poetic than informative. A "View", for example in 19th century terms, is picture drawn to represent a scenic vista. One still sees it used this way on picture postcards, occasionally. In this instance, the "view" described is on the preceding page.

For Thursday, February 9

Read, in Stilgoe

Section I. "Intellectual and Practical Beginnings"

4. "Parks" 49 - 55

5. "Heights" 56 - 64

Download, and read, also,

Town and Country Roads, by Robert Copeland

The volume in which this article is located is part of the Making of America Project at the University of Michigan. In its original form it is a little awkward to use, as the only way to find it is by volume of the journal from which it was taken, followed by looking page by page. I've converted it into a .pdf file which may be a little easier to use.

Note, too, that as late as 1872 Copeland (p. 58) can complain about suburbs using language which would have been appropriate in Roman times: "Instead of these pleasing combinations, this blending of town and country, we enter every town between stiff houses, without a vine to decorate or a tree to shade, through the suburbs given up to squalid inhabitants, redolent with bad smells, the pathway disputed by rampant pigs or predacious cows."

We may do a little gazetteer exercise in class, noting, as does Stilgoe, that many suburbs wind up being named in ways which include the word "Heights" or "Park". Synonyms for these words were popular, too (words like "Hills," "Highlands," "Gardens," and the like. Considering that early cities tended to be fronted upon water (like Bristol, for example) it stands to reason that the areas surrounding the city centers would be higher in elevation than the city centers were. But this does not explain why people chose to name them in this fashion. We're lucky. The Department of the Census has updated the American Factfinder with new data from the 2010 Census. They've changed the format slightly, too. But a little fiddling around and it starts to make sense. Why not play with it a bit before class?