

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

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Week of April 16, 2012

For Monday, April 16

Read, in Stilgoe,
in Section IV, Borderland Life and Popular Literature,
16. Frosting 186 - 206
17. Improvement, 207 - 220

There's nothing particularly difficult about this selection from Stilgoe. The title of chapter 16 is, once again, a little on the obscure side. But if one thinks of what frosting is, tasty, to be sure, but also decorative, then one will understand Stilgoe's point. In this case, the emphasis is on greenery: trees, shrubs, and the like, and their uses.. The pictures are, as usual, important. Pay some attention to the dress of the men. s. Why all the coats? Why all the ties? Why all the hats? What's going on?

Chapter 17's title is not as mysterious. But it is important to note and distinguish between two types of "improvement" featured. On the one hand, self-improvement, but on the other, "improvement" of the community. Interestingly, the same gender has an important role in each.

We've talked, on and off, about streets, and I'll be showing a video about them. IF I don't show it Monday, I'll show it Thursday.

As "nature" became more and more important, people were less and less willing to wait for Mother Nature to produce trees of significant size to produce the desired romantic effect. Stilgoe pictures one of the monumental efforts Borderlanders used to move mature trees. On the web page for this week is today's technological response to the same demand. This is not the largest such machine, nor the largest such tree.

For Thursday, April 19

Read, in Home, Short History of an Idea,
Chapter Six, Light and Air, pp. 121 - 143
Chapter Seven, Efficiency, pp. 144 - 177

These two Chapters in Rybczynski will bring us into the Twentieth Century, as the American Suburban House continues to evolve. In Chapter Six, Light and Air we consider some of the machinery which makes a house function... and, once again, we'll see that even such "essentials" as bathtubs and flush toilets were available for adoption long before they became popular. Once again, culture predominates, and what we need to reconsider what we consider as absolutely necessary for comfort. Note how advertising works to create a sense of need where none existed previously.

Men were perhaps more concerned with improvements in the "systems" of the house, plumbing and heating, for example. Solid fuel burning furnaces were a great innovation, either those which allowed for the circulation of heated air or radiators circulating steam. Click on the illustrations for more information.

There were great advances in plumbing as well, which led to the invention of a new room. Victorian squeamishness led Americans to call this room the "bathroom" though bathing was not the chief activity which occurred in it. The English had their own set of euphemisms, probably the chief of which was the W.C., (the abbreviation for "Water Closet". Click on the illustration to the left to visit a "venerable" firm, still making the product for which it was famous in the late 19th century. The name of the owner was probably coincidental, but it became another euphemism for the room in which a certain bodily function took place.

Chapter 7 looks at innovations in the "woman's sphere" and most particularly at the revolutionizing of the American Home through the introduction of electricity. To prepare you for discussing this, I'd like to have you (A) guess how many electrical appliances you have in your home, and then (B) mentally survey your own homes and list all the electric appliances in them, by room. How close to right were you? Bring the list with you to class.