

Course Syllabus

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HISTORICAL RESEARCH METHODS: INTERPRETING
ARCHITECTURE A6799 FALL 2017

Andrew Scott Dolkart Wednesday 3:00-5:00

Syllabus

This class will introduce students to methods of undertaking research on historic buildings and how to use the material uncovered to interpret a building and make an argument for its significance. Preservationists are often called upon to assess a building or group of buildings and make a case for its preservation. Undertaking historic research is crucial to making a determination of significance (or, indeed, to determining that a building may not be that significant). We will utilize a variety of resources to undertake research and interpret what we have found, including our sense of sight; archival records; architectural drawings; census records; government new building, alteration, conveyance, and tax records; maps and atlases; photographs, trade catalogues, etc. We will use the local study area that is the focus of Studio I for most of our exercises, but also make a detour to Woodlawn Cemetery for one series of exercises. Although focused on New York City, the resources that you will use and the ideas that they generate will be applicable wherever you are working.

Officially this class meets on Wednesdays from 3:00-5:00, but our schedule will be flexible. Some classes will end early and others may go until 6:00. Since the class will dovetail with Studio I, some presentations will take place during studio time. There will also be days devoted to individual work and discussion of your project with me (“tutorials”). I am also available to discuss issues with your assignments during my office hours on Tuesday morning or by appointment. The class will culminate with final presentations on December 6.

The class is divided into five projects, three specifically relating to the Studio study area in Brooklyn, one at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, and one in the Classics Collection at Avery Library. The first exercise examines what you can learn from just looking at a building. Then, for Project 2, we will move on to examining a building as an independent design and as part of a larger context. This exercise will also include use of archival material and an introduction to biographical research, an important tool for giving life to a building (ironically, we will do this with individual mausoleums at a cemetery). In Project 3 each student will be assigned buildings in the study area. We will use various research tools to explore the history of these buildings. Project 4 will take us to Avery Library where students will be introduced to the trade catalogue collection and will analyze what we can learn about materials and manufactured products from these publications and you will think about what the catalogues are selling and how they are doing it. For the final project you will investigate your Studio building, using the tools you have already learned to formulate arguments for its significance and argue for its preservation if you think that this is warranted.

Each project will end with a student presentation and written paper. Both verbal and writing skills are very important for preservationists so I will be accenting these in this class.

Books

Everyone should purchase a copy of:

Cyril Harris, *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture* (Dover).

I have ordered this book at Book Culture at 536 West 112th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue.

Calendar (subject to change)

September 6. Project 1: Introduction and Learning to Look.

September 7. Studio. The History of Bedford-Stuyvesant Lecture.

September 11. Studio. Project 1 Learning to Look Presentations.

September 13. Project 2: Analyzing a Building and Site. Meet at Woodlawn Cemetery.

Project 1 Building Descriptions due.

September 20. Introduction to Archival Research. Avery Library Drawings Collection.

Introduction to Biographical Research.

September 27. Research day and individual tutorials.

October 4. Project 2 Woodlawn Presentations. Woodlawn papers due.

Lecture: Using Maps and Atlases.

October 11. Project 3: Researching Buildings.

Researching Buildings Lecture.

October 18. Individual Tutorials.

October 25. Individual Tutorials.

Project 4: Introduction to Trade Catalogues. Avery Library.

October 30. Project 3 Presentations in Studio and Project 3 papers due.

November 1. Individual Tutorials for Project 4.

November 8. Project 4 Presentations and Papers.

Project 5: Interpreting Significance.

November 15. Individual Tutorials.

November 29. Individual Tutorials.

December 6. Project 5 Presentations.

December 8. Project 5 Papers Due.

Grades will be determined by the quality of your papers and presentations, the effort that you have put into them, and the depth of your analysis.