

HIST 213/ENST 213
North American Environmental History: Rivers of North America
Fall 2019
Mondays, 2:00-4:52 ACWS 215

Contact

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In order to obtain an accurate idea of these New World forests, we always realized that we had to follow some of the rivers which flow beneath their overhanging shadows. Rivers resemble great tracks carefully provided by Providence, from the beginning of the world, to penetrate the wilderness, allowing man access.

Alexis de Tocqueville, 1832

Rivers cannot change their source, only their course. Neither can we change their histories or their influence on us.

Del Barber, 2011

Welcome to the study of environmental history in North America. Environmental history asks us to consider our relationships with nature in the past: how nature has shaped human thought and human actions, and how, in turn, humans have shaped the landscapes around them. Nature and society is each actor and acted upon.

Like all history, it looks for both change and continuity. But environmental historians may focus on physical or material evidence (places and products of resource extraction, patterns of settlement, the grooves of transportation routes). Or they may deal with the imaginative and ideological (how cartography, art, and science understand and represent the natural world; how we process nature into political empires, bodies of knowledge, networks of exchange, and “sense of place”). Finding our way to a sustainable relationship with the natural world is, quite simply, the crucial issue facing us in the twenty-first century.

In this course, we will explore our history with nature through one of the most important features of the North American continent: its rivers. We’ll cover centuries of history and a continent’s worth of geography, looking at common themes as they play out along different rivers. (You’ll also learn a lot about Canada!) We’ll delve into one of the more significant rivers in the United States, just a few feet away: the Susquehanna. But these themes and questions can be applied to all sorts of environments in North American history. Hopefully, you will take from the class new ways of thinking about both history and landscapes familiar to you.

The Course at a Glance

		Watch for...	
August 26	Why Environmental History? Why Rivers?	River Town	
September 2	Rivers for Exploration and Exchange		
September 9	Indigenous Riverscapes		Riverwalk Journal
September 16	Rivers for Harvest	Library Lab	
September 23	Rivers for Settlement	Samek Gallery	
September 30	Rivers and Transportation	Lewisburg Canal	
October 7	Rivers and Industry	Mill Dams	Home River
October 14	Fall Break		
October 21	Rivers, Disasters, and Response		
October 28	Rivers and/as Megaprojects		
November 4	Rivers and Cities	River Town	
November 11	Rivers as Green/Blue Spaces	Story Map (Lab)	
November 18	Rivers and Identity		Block Study
November 25	Thanksgiving		
December 2	Rivers and Borders		
December 9	Rivers and Restoration		Exam Period

All readings available on Moodle.

August 26 Why Rivers? Why Environmental History?

Chris J. Magoc, “In search of a useable – and hopeful – environmental narrative in the mid-Atlantic,” *Pennsylvania History* 82:3 (2015), 314-328.

Philip V. Scarpino, “Anthropocene World / Anthropocene Waters: A Historical Examination of Ideas and Agency,” in *Rivers of the Anthropocene*, eds. J. Kelly et al (University of California Press, 2017), 101-115.

September 2 Rivers for Exploration and Exchange

Timothy J. Shannon, “Avenue of Empire: The Hudson Valley in an Atlantic Context,” in Jacobs and Roper, eds, *Worlds of the Seventeenth-Century Hudson Valley* (SUNY Press, 2013), 67-84.

William L. Lang, “Lewis and Clark on the Columbia River: The Power of Landscape in the Exploration Experience,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 87:3 (1996), 141-148.

September 9 Indigenous Riverscapes

Micah A. Pawling, “Wəlastəkwey (Maliseet) Homeland: Waterscapes and Continuity within the Lower St. John River Valley, 1784-1900,” *Acadiensis* 46:2 (2017), 5-34.

Christine DeLucia, “An ‘Indian Fishing Weir’ at Musketaquid: Marking Northeastern Indigenous Homelands and Colonial Memoryscapes,” *Environmental History*, 23:1 (2018), 184–198.

September 16 Rivers for Harvest

Carolyn Podruchny, Ch. 4, “It is the Paddle That Brings Us,” *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 86-133.

Strother Roberts, Ch. 1, “Hunting Beaver: The Postdiluvian World of the Fur Trade,” *Colonial Ecology, Atlantic Economy: Transforming Nature in New England* (UPenn Press, 2019), 25-30 and 43-51 **only** (“Beaver Ecology” and “The Postdiluvian Landscape”).

September 23 Rivers for Settlement

Christopher Parsons, Ch. 4, “The Limits of Cultivation,” in *A Not So New World: Empire and Environment in French Colonial North America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 97-124.

Peter Mancall, Ch 5, “The Colonists’ Economy,” in *Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700–1800* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 95-129.

September 30 Rivers and Transportation

Carol Sherriff, Ch. 3, “Reducing Distance and Time,” in *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (Hill and Wang, 1996), 52-78.

David Schley, “A Natural History of the Early American Railroad,” *Early American Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13:2 (2015), 443-466.

October 7 Rivers of Industry

Brian Black, “Oil Creek as Industrial Apparatus: Re-Creating the Industrial Process through the Landscape of Pennsylvania’s Oil Boom,” *Environmental History* 3: 2 (1998), 210-29.

Christopher Jones, “A Landscape of Energy Abundance: Anthracite Coal Canals and the Roots of American Fossil Fuel Dependence, 1820–1860,” *Environmental History* 15:3 (2010), 449-84.

October 14 Fall Break

October 21 Rivers, Disaster, and Response

Ari Kelman, “Boundary Issues: Clarifying New Orleans’ Murky Edges,” in *Cities and Nature in the American West*, ed. Miller (University of Nevada Press, 2010), 195-204.

Christopher Morris, Ch. 8: “Engineering the River of Empire,” *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and its Peoples* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 140-168.

Frank Connelly and George Jenks, *Official History of the Johnstown Flood* (Pittsburgh: 1889), Ch. 2 “The burning debris at the bridge,” 24-31. Archive.org

<https://www.americanrivers.org/2019/03/making-room-for-floods-in-the-midwest/>

October 28 Rivers and/as Megaprojects

Sarah T. Phillips, “Rural Electrification, Soil Conservation, Water Control, and Farm Security,” in *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 132-148.

Martin Melosi, Ch. 4: “The environmental impact of the big dam era,” *Precious Commodity: Providing Water for America’s Cities* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 78-96 only.

Christopher Jones, Ch. 5: “Taming the Susquehanna,” in *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 161-194.

November 4 Rivers and Cities

Charles S. Olton, “Philadelphia’s First Environmental Crisis,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 98:1 (1974), 90–100.

Michèle Dagenais, Ch. 3: “The St. Lawrence: ‘A Superb Instrument to be Developed and Moulded,’” in *Montreal, City of Water: An Environmental History* (UBC Press, 2017), 48-69.

Edward K. Muller, “River City,” in *Devastation and renewal: An environmental history of Pittsburgh and its region*, ed. Joel Tarr (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 41-64.

November 11 Rivers as Green (Blue?) Spaces

Jennifer Bonnell, Ch. 5: “Charles Sauriol and the Don Valley Conservation Movement,” and Ch. 6: “Metro Toronto and the Don Valley Parkway,” *Reclaiming the Don: An Environmental History of Toronto’s Don River Valley* (University of Toronto Press, 2014), 113-172.

November 18 Rivers and Identity

Tricia Cusak, Ch. 2: “The Chosen People: The Hudson River School and the construction of American Identity,” in *Riverscapes and National Identities* (Syracuse University Press, 2010) 19-56.

David Neufeld, “Learning to drive the Yukon River: Western Cartography and Athabaskan Story Maps,” in *Big Country, Big Issues: Canada’s Environment, Culture, and History*, eds. Knopfler and Mauch, *Perspectives*, 4 (Rachel Carson Center, 2011), 16-43.

November 25 Thanksgiving

December 2 Rivers and Borders

J.M.S. Careless, “Two River Empires: An historical analysis,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 5:2 (1975), 28-47.

Daniel Macfarlane, “Dam the Consequences: Hydropolitics, Nationalism, and the Niagara–St. Lawrence Projects,” in Macfarlane and Heasley, eds., *Border Flows: A Century of the Canadian-American Water Relationship* (University of Calgary Press, 2016), 123-150.

December 9 Rivers and Restoration (and Review)

Martin Doyle, Ch. 12: “The Restoration Economy,” *The Source: How rivers made America and America remade its rivers* (Norton & Co., 2018), 283-305.

Jill English, “‘Burying rivers is not a great idea’: Cities work to uncover their hidden waterways,” [CBC News](#) (23 September 2018) – with video

Susan Phillips, “How the Clean Water Act fixed the Delaware River’s pollution problem,” [WHYY](#) (15 January 2019)

“The Cuyahoga’s Comeback,” <http://www.americanrivers.org/cuyahoga50/index.html>

Evaluation

There are five components to your final grade: discussion, four assignments, and a final exam.

1. Discussion and Participation 25 %

Discussion, driven by curiosity and a sense of discovery, and informed by the literature on the subject, is key to evolution of scholarship. To quote Bill Cronon, one of the United States’ leading historians, “Learning how to talk intelligently and enthusiastically about significant subjects is actually one of the most important skills you can learn in college.”

This is a collaborative environment in which we are learning together. Come prepared, and come to engage in considered, thoughtful, informed, and on-topic ways. I’ll occasionally offer discussion questions, but it’s important for you to engage directly with the material. Ask yourself:

- What is this scholar telling us (what is their thesis/argument)?
- What sources do they use?
- How does it speak to the theme of that week?
- What is one particular detail, anecdote, personality, or place that catches your attention?

This assignment is about situating yourself in the landscape, and “reading” the landscape as an historical artifact. It requires some research, a camera, a phone (with Google Maps), a notepad, a couple of hours on a dry day (ideally), and a decent pair of shoes. (If you need any of these, please let me know.)

First, consult the following:

- [online aerial photographs of Bucknell University campus](#) available via the University Archives and Artstor *OR* [Penn Pilot](#)'s aerial photographs of Lewisburg

and

- [the 1925 Sanborn fire insurance maps of Lewisburg](#).

Look for points of interest along the river and the creeks as they flow through the town.

You're now going to see what this looks like on the ground. Begin where Limestone Run meets the Susquehanna River. The closest you can get is the end of Mill Street or Ball Alley. Follow, as best you can, the route of Limestone Run. It divides into two just before the rail tracks, on St. George Street at South 4th St. Then follow either:

- Limestone/Bull Run (to the north) through town and across Highway 15 at Saint Mary's Street, to the newly reclaimed wetland.
- Miller Run (to the south) through campus, under Highway 15 to the Bucknell golf course. If you take this route, you may wish to consult [this walking tour](#) from the Bucknell Center for Sustainability & Environment.

Please be safe and sensible – we don't want to be fishing anyone out of a stream!

As you walk, think about our relationship with these waterways.

- Take notes about what you see: the route of the streams, the way the town is built over and around the water, obstacles and points of access, things scenic or hidden. What do you see on, in, and around the streams? Where do they lead? How do they change as they move through the town? What does it mean that the water has been “restored”?
- Take photographs. Look especially for evidence of human intervention in the waterway. Look for the original sites of interest you identified on the aerial photographs and insurance maps. How do they look now?
- Ask people you meet how (if!) they interact with the water.
- At the end of your walk, identify the *three* most interesting moments or locations.

Then:

1. Select or curate 3-5 of what you consider your most important photographs, plus one *detail* from an archival photograph *or* one *detail* from a Sanborn map. For each, write a short caption (2-3 sentences) explaining their significance to the whole. Assemble these in Powerpoint.
2. Submit the field notes in paper copy, and the photographs (in PowerPoint) via Moodle.

3. Home River

15%

Due October 7

In 2019, Professor Tina Adcock (following from Dr. Jessica DeWitt) asked on Twitter “[what is your home river?](#)” So ... what *is* your home river, and why might it matter in environmental history?

(Please note: your home “river” may be a creek or a wetland. It might be as big as the Mississippi or ... not as big. If your home waterway is not a marquee one, you will need to think creatively about research on the region, watershed, and surrounding area.)

This assignment is about using *secondary* sources – that is, published, peer-reviewed scholarship. You will need to *locate, select, and assess* at least *three* scholarly sources relevant to your home river.

1. Decide what waterway you most identify with. (Read through the Twitter feed to see how people responded!)
2. Review this syllabus for ideas or issues in environmental history that may be relevant.
3. Using [WorldCat](#) (the library catalogue), find a *scholarly monograph* [book] on your river.
4. Using the database “[America: History & Life](#),” find a *journal article* on your river. (Do not choose a book review.)
5. Using WorldCat or “America: History & Life,” find one *additional* source: either monograph, essay in edited collection, or journal article.
6. When you have selected your three sources,
 - cite fully in Chicago Style
 - in a paragraph, summarize why this source is of value to understanding the environmental history of your home river. Make concrete references to the source.

We will have a library session on September 16 with Nancy Frazier to discuss research skills.

Not everything that a search engine turns up will be useful. You will need to *read the introduction* and/or table of contents, consider the chapters, and read the full articles.

Feel free to use the library tutorials in your search:

- [Getting started with research](#)
- [Information Literacy](#)

4. River Town: Lewisburg Block Study

20 %

Due November 22

This assignment focuses on analyzing *primary* sources (in this case, maps), studying the place you inhabit, and communicating your analysis in a clear and constructive way to a public readership. We will be working with Samantha Pearson of [the Lewisburg Neighborhoods Corporation](#) to provide detailed historical accounts of Lewisburg, a “river town.”

We will be using [the Sanborn fire insurance maps digitized by Penn State](#), which offer a detailed record of built Lewisburg between 1885 and 1925. We'll be focusing on the downtown area: along Market Street and along the river.

In groups of four, you will be responsible for *two blocks*, or about a third of a Sanborn sheet. *One pair* will be responsible for the blocks on the Sanborn maps from 1890 and 1896. *One pair* will be responsible for the blocks on the Sanborn maps from 1906 and 1913.

1. Walk the blocks, and observe what is there now, by taking pictures and notes.
2. *On a separate trip*, print out a Google map of your blocks, and annotate / fill it in as you walk. This may take several trips.
3. Examine your blocks as represented on *each* layer or year of the Sanborn maps. Look, in particular, for:
 - i. significant changes
 - ii. continuities (buildings/spaces that haven't changed)
4. Find, where possible, other representations of your blocks, notably:
 - i. [Map of Union County](#), 1856
 - ii. Pomeroy & Beers, *Atlas of Union & Snyder Counties*, 1868
 - iii. [Bird's Eye View of Lewisburgh](#), 1884, Library of Congress
 - iv. Google maps
 - v. Aerial photography
5. Working with Carrie Pirmann, each pair will design a story map of at least seven slides: an introduction, and two slides for each year of Sanborn map. We will *all* use the Sanborn map from **1901** as a base map. Each slide should include:
 - i. a detail of interest identified on the 1901 base map
 - ii. an annotation that describes in narrative form its significance: the use or occupant, building design/material type, etc. and how this has changed.
 - iii. a hyperlink to another Sanborn map from a different year
 - iv. a second image, whether a photograph of the current building/streetscape or a detail from one of the other historical maps.

5. Final exam 25%

There will be a final test in the exam period that asks you to draw from the lectures, readings, and class discussion.

Research and Writing

[Nancy Frazier](#), the research librarian for history, and [Carrie Pirmann](#), the research librarian for environmental studies, will be *invaluable*. Make sure you make an appointment to see them well in advance of any assignment. Their contact information is available on the library website.

Style matters. Part of this is academic credibility (appropriate referencing, the depth of research); but part too is the clarity of argument, the lyricism of the phrasing. Yes, this is where grammar

and spelling help. There's a science to research, but writing is an art. I strongly recommend visiting the [Writing Center](#), where you can work on your drafts with a peer writing consultant.

In History, we follow the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).

Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day. I do not assign extra work in lieu of the assignments outlined in this syllabus.

Expectations and Professionalism in the Classroom

The university and the classroom can be spaces for wonderful freedoms – freedom of thought, of discussion, of exploration – but are also places that (like workplaces and the public sphere writ large) require mutually respectful and professional behaviour. This means arriving on time and prepared, and treating each other civilly and generously in listening and conversation. (It also means refraining from using electronic devices in ways that might be considered disruptive or disrespectful to others. I would ask you to take notes by hand unless otherwise required; we will occasionally use laptops for in-class work.) We are very privileged to be here, and should treat these opportunities for learning with the utmost respect. I will respond to email during business hours (8:30-4:30, Monday-Friday).

Academic Responsibility

Academic integrity is at the core of the community of scholarship to which we belong. We will spend a significant part of this course discussing academic practices. I follow University policies on these matters, which can be found at <https://www.bucknell.edu/AcademicResponsibility>.

Please note the University Honor Code.

Bucknell University expectations for academic engagement

Courses at Bucknell that receive one unit of academic credit have a minimum expectation of 12 hours per week of student academic engagement. Student academic engagement includes both the hours of direct faculty instruction (or its equivalent) and the hours spent on out of class student work. Half and quarter unit courses at Bucknell should have proportionate expectations for student engagement.

Student Needs and Accommodation

Students who may need classroom accommodations should contact the Office of Accessibility Resources (<https://www.bucknell.edu/about-bucknell/accessibility-resources/services-and-resources-for-students/academic-accommodations>) as soon as possible. Please also come see me if there is anything I can do to ensure your academic success.

Learning Goals

We will aim to achieve the following goals (and History Department learning objectives):

- Develop an understanding of the practice and purpose of the field of environmental history, and specifically, the relationships between people and nature in North America in the past (1, 2, 7)
- Situate historical study with other fields in understanding the relationship between environmental and historical change, and imagining responses (2, 7)
- Speak and write reflectively and articulately in response to class material and sources of research (3, 4, 5)
- Complete assignments that demonstrate intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, a thorough and considered plan of research, and delivers the findings in a convincing and accessible format (4, 5, 6)
- Learn more about the value of history in understanding the state of landscape and society in the present (7)