

American Studies 335  
New England  
Roger Williams University  
CAS 228  
M, W, & F 11:00-12:00  
Fall Semester, 2008

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## Course Introduction

### **Texts**

Wood, William

*New England's Prospect*, edited with an introduction by Alden T. Vaughan  
Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993

Wood, Joseph S.,

*The New England Village*  
Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1997

Hansen, Karen V.

*A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England*  
Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996

Drake, Samuel Adams

*New England Legends & Folklore* (reproduction of 1883 edition)  
Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1993

We'll use these four texts in the order given. After the first units of this course we'll be working in more than one text simultaneously, so you will need to purchase them all early in the semester.

I will also ask you to download and read some materials from the internet, as well. It will be most efficient if you buy a three ring notebook in which to keep those materials.

American Studies 335 is one of a group of American Studies course with a focus on the relationship between geography and culture. The nature of New England is shaped by the nature of the land itself, and we'll be exploring that relationship all semester. The four books for the course reflect this:

- **William Wood's** book recounts an Englishman's first impression of the New World, including its topography and natural resources. We'll be comparing his impressions with the impressions of two other early colonists, which you'll download from the Internet. More about this later
- **Joseph Wood's** book recounts the development and elaboration of what has become the dominating symbol of New England, the Village. Some of you may have visited either Sturbridge Village or Mystic Seaport, each of which is a partial recreation of a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century New England environment. As we work our way the book we'll come to understand why villages developed *where* they did (for example, why is downtown

Bristol on Narragansett Bay and not on Mount Hope Bay, as Roger Williams University is? And we'll also learn how some of the things we come to associate as "typical" of the village from the very beginning actually represent a deliberate creation of an image, beginning not in colonial times, but as recently as the 1870s,

- The shape and nature of the village physically creates the shape of the village society and culture. We'll look at this through **Karen Hansen's** book. How did men and women in New England Villages relate to each other? What were the typical institutions through which they interacted? Here, we'll look at everything from the role of the Church to the role of the Picnic.
- **Samuel Drake's** book is very different from the rest in that it is a collection of works of the imagination—folk tales, legends, poems, and the like, recorded when New England was much closer in character to its origins than perhaps it is now. Folk literature unlike High literature, is also a product of geography. You'll notice that Drake organizes his book geographically<sup>1</sup>. This makes it fit within the framework of the course. I've not used it in this class before. I hope you'll enjoy it...not only the tales, but the wonderful 19<sup>th</sup> century engravings which illustrate it.

### **Internet Requirement**

More and more, academic literacy and scholarship cannot be said to be complete without a knowledge of the internet as a resource and tool. There will be a number of exercises in this course which will require significant time spent online. Those of you with computers will not find this too difficult. In fact, internet resources are available 24 hours a day, barring the occasional system crash. For those of you who do not own a computer or do not have access from your home or dorm room, there are many public machines available in the Library and on the second floor of the Gabelli School of Business. If you are uncomfortable with using the "net", I'll be happy to assist you during office hours or by appointment. Resources and tutorials are available through a website I've created for this course at for this course at <http://amst335.homestead.com>. This is a work in progress, and you will be expected to visit it weekly as assignments for the following week will be posted there.

We will make extensive use of Blackboard in this course as well. Written work will be submitted through it. I will also offer opportunities to submit rough drafts prior to submission for final grades. I will introduce Blackboard early in the semester. If you are not familiar with it an need help operating it make an appointment and I'll provide a quick and easy tutorial.

### **Work and Evaluation**

The vast majority of the work you prepare for a grade in this course will be written outside of class. Most assignments will be fairly short (3-5 pages), and I'll accept an

informal style of documentation. However, I won't be happy with work which is mentally or grammatically sloppy. Some of this work will be more like take-home examinations: in other words, there will be a question or questions to which each of you will respond. The rest of it will be more free form: perhaps involving some private investigation of your own with a report of the results. I expect that there will be *three* of these, all told.

The first of these papers will be presented to you about the third week of class, and will be based upon William Wood's book and the internet assignment materials I send you to find and think about. You'll have about 10 to 11 days (a week and the weekends around it) to work on the paper. There will also be a required class presentation, based on work which you will turn in in writing.

Very shortly I will stop using paper to distribute instructions. There will always be a hard copy version available through the internet for those who like to keep such things handy, but in the interest of tree-saving, I'll leave the decision about whether to print off a hard copy to the individual student. Note: you will be able to print off anything which is web-based.

**Grading will be based on approximately these proportions:**

**3 short papers as described above... 20 per cent of your grade each.** One of these will be based on the folk literature associated with a specific New England Place, and this will form the basis of your class presentation. The paper and presentation will happen near the end of the semester, but I'll be asking you to select your place fairly early in the term.

**Individual or Group Project to be presented to the class 30%:** (20% for the paper, 10% for the presentation). I would expect this paper to be more fully developed conceptually than the others. I'm using the term "paper" here in a very loose sense. The paper might be a traditional essay, a power point presentation, or even a website for those who enjoy or would like to try that sort of thing. This project will involve an exploration of a specific New England town. I will present a more specific explanation of this once I've had a chance to discuss it with you in a class planning session.

**Attendance and Participation, Quizzes if there are any, 10%**

**Attendance will be recorded. Three** unexcused absences will lower your grade a notch. **FOUR** unexcused absences will result in a grade of F. I'm liberal in the reasons which I accept for excusable absences: these would include, for example, illness, a family emergency, or a scheduled activity of another class or Roger Williams University athletic team. An absence caused by leaving early on weekends

is NOT excusable. I will circulate a sign-in sheet for you record your attendance. Use the mailbox communicate with me regarding absences.

I'm looking forward to sharing this semester with you. One of the joys about teaching New England is that the region is so very compact. If you're willing, and interested, we may schedule trips to one or more of the easily accessible New England locales: Plimoth Plantation, Sturbridge Village, Mystic Seaport, New Bedford, or even Martha's Vineyard. I'll get you talking about this early on in the semester.

Mike Swanson

1. The locales for the *New England Legends*
  - a. Boston Legends
  - b. Cambridge Legends
  - c. Lynn and Nahant Legends
  - d. Salem Legends
  - e. Marblehead Legends
  - f. Cape-Ann Legends
  - g. Ipswich and Newbury Legends
  - h. Hampton and Portsmouth Legends
  - i. York, Isles-of-Shoals, and Boon-Island Legends
  - j. Old-Colony (Plymouth) Legends
  - k. Rhode Island Legends
  - l. Connecticut Legends
  - m. Nantucket Legends