

Arts & Crafts: A Forgotten Legacy of Richard Ely's Era

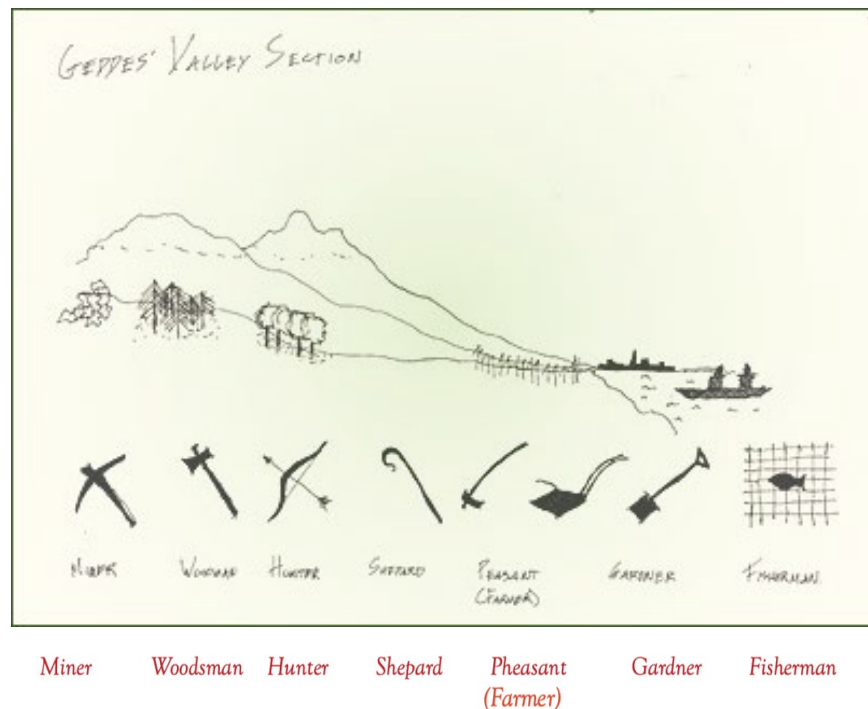
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November 2019

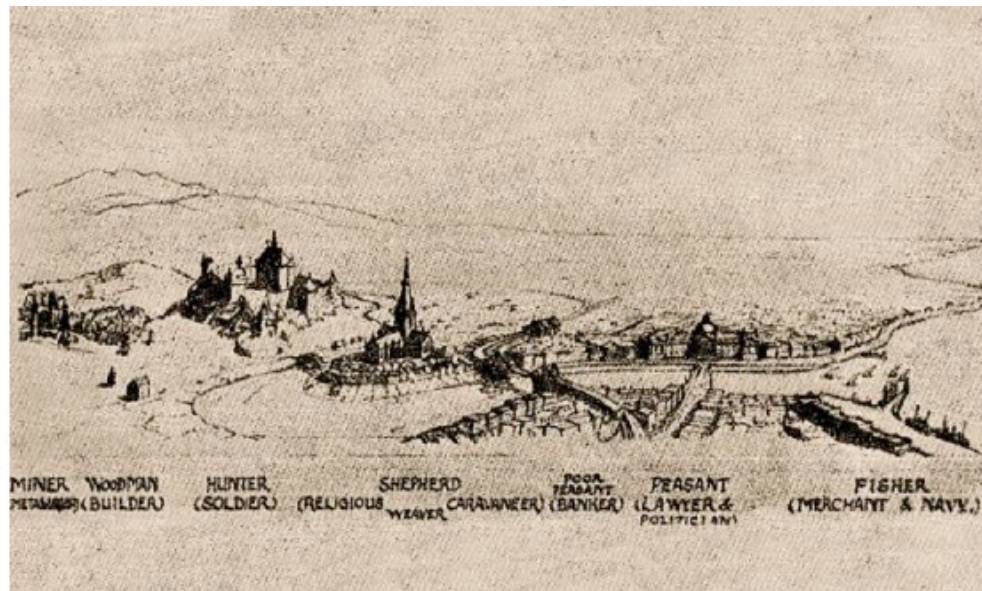
PART 2 – A Broad-Brush Look at Who's Who in the Arts & Craft Planning Field

In a recent issue of the LAI newsletter we looked at a broad-brush perspective of early 20th century planning theories and practices finding several at play. First there were the well-known classical City Beautiful plans seeking to bring the grandeur of Paris from Second Empire France to America's cities in the New World. A few decades later the International Style emanating from the German Bauhaus (celebrating its centennial year) sought to create completely new cities of superhighways, superblocks, and mass production.

Amid these two highly documented (and marketed) planning methods were also planners who founded, advocated or influenced the Arts & Crafts Movement, evolving in Britain and America from the 1850s into the 1920s. Arts & Crafts emphasized uniqueness of each place in its location, land, history and society. We begin our story with one of its most interesting and iconoclastic figures: Sir Patrick Geddes in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh, a young academic contemporary of Richard Ely, who also acquired his PhD "across the pond" (University of Heidelberg, 1879). Geddes would bring important additions to the meaning of *place* and the shaping of modern city planning applying the interrelation of the economic function of people and their places (a concept of an integrated social structure harking back to the Greek origin of economics: *okionomia*, meaning "household management" or "management of household affairs".)



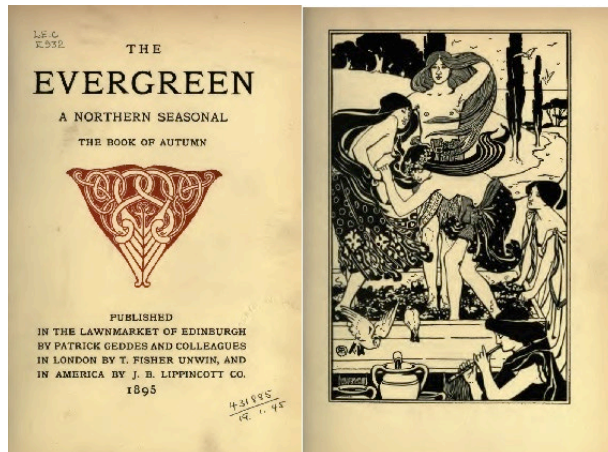
Patrick Geddes' FOLK•WORK PLACE Transect connecting people and their economic interests with Place as a key planning principle (1909).



Miner Woodsman Hunter Shepard Poor Peasant Peasant Fisherman
(Builder) (Soldier) (Religious, Caravaner) (Banker) (Lawyer) (Merchant & Navy)
(Weaver) (Politician)

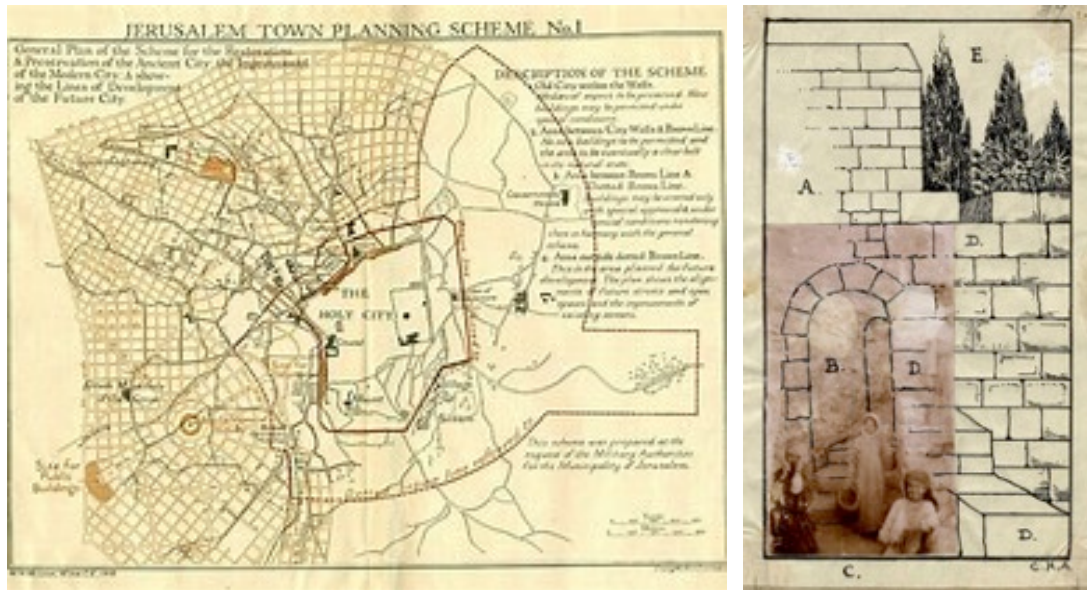
Lesser known of Patrick Geddes' *PLACE•WORK•FOLK* Transects illustrating built places. From “*Cities in Evolution*” (1915).

While Geddes is not often connected with these English Arts & Crafts movers, he would bring his evolutionary science background to sociology and, in turn, planning in an arts & Crafts framework. His planning mantra was to consider Folk-Work-Place as what we would call a “whole system” akin to today’s sustainability principles of community-economy-environment. Geddes would ground urban planning in survey research methodology including adapting bio-zone transects to human habitations of Folk-Work-Place transects. He framed these early urban planning methods with his publication of *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and to the Civic Arts* in 1915, coming a decade after completing his first major plan (City Development – A Study of Parks, Gardens, and Culture-Institutes: A Report to the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust) in 1904 funded by Scottish-America émigré/tycoon Andrew Carnegie. Not as well-known was his creating and editing a Scottish Arts & Crafts Journal *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal* in 1895. Geddes work was positively recognized by Ely such as in *Strengths and Weaknesses of Socialism*.



Patrick Geddes, *The Evergreen Review* title page and illustration (1895).

It's important to note the contemporaneousness with these British efforts were their American counterparts including the Olmsted Brothers (John and Frederick Law, Jr.), Warren Manning, George Kessler, Horace Cleveland, and most notably John Nolen. While space does not allow in-depth consideration of each of these visionary planning innovators, there are ample personal biographies available on each. More important for our story here is the interaction and collaboration between these individuals within their own nations but also in their bi-national collaborations. An important example of this cross fertilization and exchange in America is the First National City Planning Conference in 1909 (and subsequent ones into the late 1920s) organized by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and John Nolen. Frequent conference participants and visiting professors included Raymond Unwin, Thomas Adams and Patrick Geddes. Geddes, we note, was also the knowledge mentor of American urbanist Lewis Mumford to the extent that Mumford named his only son Geddes. Also, English Arts & Crafts leader C.R. Ashbee was a long-time friend with Frank Lloyd Wright with their correspondence being recently published. Ashbee is noted for his Arts & Crafts collective in the Cotswold but, again, less so for his brilliant urban plans such as his Plan for Jerusalem (1921).



(Above) C.R. Ashbee, *Plan for Jerusalem*. (Right) CR Ashbee's *Plan for Jerusalem: design for Post Office and Turkish Tower photo-montage*.



Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society emblem (1886), using the ampersand version of "and" as in this article.

So much could be said about this subject of bi-national Arts & Crafts planning, but with our space here, I'll conclude with the most solid relation of the Arts & Crafts Movement and urban planning. The name Arts & Crafts was created and established in 1887 at the First Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society event and publication organized by illustrator Walter Crane and book designer/publisher T.J. Cobden-Sanderson who wrote:

As a protest against this state of things, and partly to concentrate the awakened feeling for beauty in the accessories of life, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society commenced their work.

The movement, however, towards a revival of design and handicraft, the effort to unite—or rather to re-unite—the artist and the craftsman, so sundered by the industrial conditions of our century, has been growing and gathering force for some time past.

At their fifth Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society event in 1896 their theme and publication was Art and Life and the Building and Decoration of Cities with five participating planners/designers authoring chapters including:

- I. "Of Art and Life" by T. J. Cobden-Sanderson
- II. "Of Beautiful Cities" by W.R. Lethaby
- III. "Of the Decoration of Public Buildings" by Walter Crane
- IV. "Of Public Spaces, Parks and Gardens" by Reginald Blomfield
- V. "Of Colour in the Architecture of Cities" by Halsey Ricardo

In that the naming founders of Arts & Crafts Movement would choose to organize an early event around urban planning and city building establishes planning at the foundation of the Arts & Crafts Movement - not to mention that William Morris was the Society chair (Morris died just before the exhibition and was memorialized at the opening of the city exhibition).

Morris's interest in cities was demonstrated in numerous writings articulating his utopian search for the perfect city such as in "News from Nowhere" and other publications including "The Prospect of Architecture in Civilization." In his 1884 lecture entitled "Art and the Beauty of the Earth" Morris defined the community nature of Arts & Crafts design and planning:

We are here in the midst of a population busied about a craft which may be called the most ancient in the world, a craft which I look upon with the greatest interest, as I well may, since, except perhaps the noble craft of house-building, it is second to none other. And in the midst of this industrious population, engaged in making goods of such importance to our households, I am speaking to a School of Art, one of the bodies that were founded all over the country at a time when it was felt there was something wrong as between the two elements that go to make anything which can be correctly described as a work of industrial art, namely the utilitarian and the artistic elements.

Morris would advance his active regard for cities and their tradition by the founding of the first historic preservation organization "The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings." The organizing aspect of Morris' concept for the modern city was Socialism as he laid out in his publication of that title and his 1891 essay "The Socialist Ideal: Art."

Some people will perhaps not be prepared to hear that Socialism has any ideal of art, for in the first place it is so obviously founded on the necessity for dealing with the bare economy of life that many, and even some Socialists, can see nothing save that economic basis; and moreover, many who might be disposed to admit the necessity of economic change in the direction of Socialism believe quite sincerely that art is fostered by the inequalities of condition which it is the first business of Socialism to do away with, and indeed that it cannot exist without them. Nevertheless, in the teeth of these opinions I assert first that Socialism is an all-embracing theory of life, and that as it has an ethic and a religion of its own, so also it has an aesthetic: so that to every one who wishes to study Socialism duly it is necessary to look on it from the aesthetic point of view. And, secondly, I assert that inequality of condition, whatever may have been the case in former ages of the world, has now become incompatible with the existence of a healthy art.



Morris's Socialist League logo designed by Walter Crane.

In America from around 1900 to 1916 Arts & Crafts was the cultural zeitgeist expounded and practiced as the cultural entre into the 20th century. With proponents such as Elbert Hubbard and Gustav Stickley we find a zeal for this Movement including architecture, landscape architecture, planning and development expressed in their copious publications promoting this whole system of social/cultural reform. Stickley's influential magazine (1900-1916)

The Craftsman published no less than 146 articles on planning topics including 34 by Barry

Parker (Raymond Unwin's business partner). This influence reached the mass media too such as with journalist, urban advocate and environmental activist J. Horace McFarland authoring some 38 articles on community scale planning issues in the widely popular *The Ladies Home Journal* (the first periodical to reach 1 million circulation).

Richard Ely would publish in London Socialist Journals with the Social Democratic Federation (an early William Morris affiliation) and the Fabian Society – a competing organization to Morris's Socialist League – split more on personalities than positions. While supportive of Morris's ideas about art and beauty, Ely found Morris's Socialist position too extreme, especially on the issue of private land ownership (a utopian ideal Morris intellectually opposed while being a life-long landowner himself). While serving as director of the School of Economics, Political Science, and History at the University of Wisconsin from 1892 to 1925, he received an unsuccessful attempt to remove him as chair in 1894 for his "socialistic" views, which was unsuccessful. In 1925 he moved to Northwestern University as professor until his retirement in 1933. In the years between the two wars his position would become firmly "centrist" as he wrote against the extremes of both socialism and plutocracy, which he applied to advocacy for a balance between private and public land enterprise activities.



McFarland depiction of a dry Niagara Falls with uncontrolled power company diversions with his pre-Photoshop photomontage "The Ladies Home Journal" (September, 1905). He was an active campaigner with John Muir and Olmsted, Jr. to protect Niagara Falls and create national parks.

Arts & Crafts was built on a platform of democratic social/political/cultural change – the practitioners were envisioning a new world, which brings us back to our beginning. We began with Richard Ely and we will also end with him. At the core of the Arts & Crafts Movement was a zeal of activism, which proponents idealized, as utopians, would be achieved through the arts



Booker T. Washington c.1900 sitting in his favorite Arts & Crafts chair.

and social activism and not the Marxist revolutionary Communism. Their vision and energy led the way to child labor laws, unions, public education, building codes, zoning and... land economics. As with the bi-national planners mentioned above, there was also strong, progressive activism in the social sciences with not only Ely but also Scott Nearing (both received disciplinary actions from the universities for the “Socialist” leanings) along with Jane Addams, journalist Jacob Riis, and other leading educators including Thurston Veblen and John Dewey at the University of Chicago, journalist Muckrakers, and Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute (a close friend of Elbert Hubbard’s). Washington was clearly an Arts & Crafts influenced educator as articulated in his pedagogical treatise of 1904 *Working with the Hands: Being a Sequel to “Up from Slavery” covering the Author’s Experiences in Industrial Training at Tuskegee*. In his major address to the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895

(a first for a “Negro” at a major white event in the South) Washington called for a community of mutual inter-racial cooperation with an Arts & Crafts framing:

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful.

Washington even employs one of his friend’s (Elbert Hubbard) frequently used triad, “Head, hand and heart” in his writings.

If these principles of social equity, environmental sustainability, home and community design, and building beautiful cities has resonance today, we owe our legacy to these early practitioners of Arts & Crafts urban planning with their thoughts, writings and actions such as Richard Ely’s 1926 analysis of Sunnyside, a Garden City plan in New York:

Mr. Bing (director of the City Housing Corporation and Sunnyside developer, ed.) dreams of a garden city, using the results of the best experiments in our own and foreign countries; and his associates have every confidence at his dreams are going to become a reality. In thinking about a city within easy reach of New York, he has in mind a city which will have industries to provide employment, and one which will also have stores, and, therefore, will be more nearly self-contained. One idea that has been tentatively discussed is to surround this garden city by a ring of land reserved against building, which is to be used for gardens and general intensive agriculture. In this way it is hoped to keep the city from growing indefinitely. Mr. Bing looks upon the City Housing Corporation not as a local enterprise, but as national in scope, and the writer entirely agrees with him in this view.

As a last word on Ely and Arts & Crafts planning, he had this to say in *The Coming City* (1902) quoting Horace Cleveland, one of the preeminent planners of the Arts & Crafts era – a close colleague of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.:

The City: A Work of Art.

(T)here is an esthetic side to this, and it is receiving rapid development in these first years of the twentieth-century city. It is coming to be felt more and more that the city should be a work of art. "I would have the city a work of art" is the motto of the park commission of one of our great cities in the Northwest, namely, Minneapolis. It is the utterance of a noble man (H. W. S. Cleveland), long associated with the work of that commission, and to whom the thought of the city as a work of art was an animating ideal of his life.

Further Reading

Historic – Available in Reprint or Online

- Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*. 1910
- Richard Ely, *The Coming City*. Thomas Y. Crowell, 1902
 - *Problems of Today: A Discussion of Protective Tariffs, Taxation, and Monopolies*. (1888). Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1890.
 - *Socialism: An Examination of Its Nature, Its Strength and Its Weakness*. (1894) New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1895. —Reissued as *The Strength and Weakness of Socialism*
 - *Property and Contract in their Relation to the Distribution of Wealth*. In two volumes. New York: Macmillan, 1914.
 - With Edward W. Morehouse, *Elements of Land Economics*. The MacMillan Co., 1924
 - “The City Housing Corporation and ‘Sunnyside’”. *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Apr., 1926), pp. 172-185
 - “Professor Ely’s Social Creed”. *The Literary Digest*, New York November 3, 1894
- Patrick Geddes, *Cities in evolution: an introduction to the town planning movement and to the study of civics*.
- Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. Amazon Digital Services, 2012 (1898 First as *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. 1902 reissue with *Garden City* title)
- William Morris, “Art and the Beauty of the Earth” (1881 First)
- John Nolen, *New Towns for Old: Achievements in Civic Improvement in Some American Small Towns and Neighborhoods*. American Society of Landscape Architects Centennial Reprint 2005 (1926 First)
- Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. Martino Fine Books, 2015. (1890 First)
- Raymond Unwin, *Town Planning in Practice: An Introduction to the Art of Designing Cities and Suburbs*. Andesite Press, 2015 (1909 First)

Current Publications

- Walter L. Creese, *The Search for Environment: The Garden City Before and After*. Yale University Press, 1966.
- Leslie M. Freudenheim, *Building with Nature: Inspiration for the Arts & Crafts Home*. Gibbs Smith, Salt Lake City, 2005.
- Tony Horwitz, *Spying on the South: An Odyssey Across the American Divide*. Penguin Press, 2019
- Larry Kreisman and Glen Mason, *The Arts and Crafts in the Pacific Northwest*. Timber Press, 2007.
- Justin Martin, *Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted*. Da Capo Press, 2011
- Helen Miller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner*. Routledge, 2005
- Bruce Stevenson, *John Nolen, Landscape Architect and City Planner*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2015
- George E. Thomas, *Arts and Crafts to Modern Design: William L. Price*. Princeton Architectural Press, 2000.