

Design on the Land: Regional Expression - Donald S. Leighton

**I. Introduction**

- A. A bird's eye view of the landscape is a rewarding and pleasurable experience
- B. The rivers, bays, and bodies of water seen on maps, dramatically etch the outlines of the landscape when seen from above
- C. Topography, the physical features of a region, was the critical factor of settlement
- D. Development of settlement patterns and population are based on the regional topography

**II. Regional Differences in Topography**

- A. The eastern seaboard of America is a patchwork of topographical extremes
- B. Development in the mountains of Massachusetts follows the natural hills and valleys
- C. Development in the flat coastal plain of Southern Florida follows a geometrical grid

**III. Moisture and Land Development**

- A. Moisture affects the patterns of human settlement and population development
- B. Large ranches and scattered settlement in the arid western states contrast sharply to the density of population settlement along the New England coastal cities
- C. Southwestern towns are settlements around sources of water in the arid landscape

**IV. Climate**

- A. Climate plays an obvious role in human settlement and population development
- B. Smaller tracts of land support settlement and population growth in a mild climate

**V. The Role of Waterways**

- A. Waterways play a critical role in the development of the landscape
- B. Waterways were the routes of transportation before the advent of trains and automobiles
- C. Human settlement and population development occurred along the waterways

**VI. A Case Study**

- A. The New England landscape has its own unique story
- B. Topography sets New England apart from regions with flat terrain
- C. The network of streams and rivers flowing from mountains and following the valleys to the ocean played a major role in New England settlement and population growth

**VII. Colonial Settlement Pattern**

- A. The Indigenous people of prehistoric New England settled along the rivers and bays
- B. Rivers and bays provided transportation routes and sources of food
- C. The rich soils surrounding the rivers and bays supported agriculture
- D. The temperate climate likewise supported human settlement
- E. The heavily forested landscape supported the colonial ship building industry
- F. Farm land replaced the forests

**VIII. Effect of Industrial Revolution**

- A. Abundant streams provided waterpower that turned waterwheels to saw timber, ground corn, and support the industrialization of New England
- B. Human settlement and population developed around the mills

**IX. Changing Patterns of Transportation**

- A. First bays and rivers, and later canals, were the primary means of transportation
- B. Railroad transportation came in the late 1800s to move goods and people
- C. Canals and railroads both require flat topography and follow the river valleys
- D. Human settlement and population developed in linear patterns along canals and railroads
- E. New England is renowned for the village commons

**X. Fate of Communities**

- A. Electricity became available to industry, allowing manufacturing plants to move away from the water-powered mills
- B. Mill towns located along the streams began in the 1920s to struggle for their existence as manufacturing plants relocated
- C. The internal combustion engine brought forth new economics for moving goods
- D. The interstate highway system of the 1950s began to spread settlement and population across America and away from the congested cities of New England

**XI. Roots of the Past**

- A. The New England landscape today offers only hints of how previous ages lived
- B. Many small towns of New England preserve evidence of the past
- C. The larger structures of brick and stone in mill towns are easy to spot
- D. Clusters of brick or stone homes and neat rows of houses of the same design and material line tiny residential streets stand near now vacant mills
- E. Handsome churches and the town hall encircle the town common along with small businesses and more homes, all located within easy walking distance of the mill

- F. The uses of the village have probably not changed much since it built
- G. The houses are still homes; the mill may still contain commercial businesses; and the town probably still hosts annual fair on the village commons

**XII. Recycling a Community**

- A. Sometimes though, converted to new uses and the origin is harder to identify
- B. Once again, topography was crucial; miles of bikeways and trails follow the beds of the abandoned railways and canal towpaths
- C. Recreation and tourism have brought new life to New England

**XIII. Establishment of Heritage Corridors**

- A. Historic landscapes should remain within modern development
- B. Heritage corridors are one way that landscape architects are preserving the past to build a better future
- C. The heritage corridors identify both the cultural and natural resources of a region and provide guidelines for best utilizing these attributes for a more vibrant future
- D. Honoring the past and the heritage that remains is a successful regional planning formula

**XIV. Regional Expression of Southwest Florida Heritage**

- A. Southwest Florida coastal plain gently sloped west to the Gulf of Mexico and south into the Everglades. Inland rivers, coastal bays, and the gulf water are dramatic outlines of the landscape. Sugar-white beaches line the coast, interspersed with mangrove-fringed estuaries. Subtropical forests line the inland rivers, pine-forested prairies, and palm-studded marshes characterize the inland area.

- B. The first people, the Calusa, lived in fishing villages along the mangrove coast. Spanish explorers and American pioneers pushed into the region and drove out the aboriginals in competition for the resources and with disease. The Seminoles came later in retreat from Indian Wars and went deep into the Everglades, where many members continue to live.
- C. Fort Myers, established as a military garrison during the Indian Wars, slowly developed with agriculture and tourism, then rapidly as a shipping port with arrival of the railroad. The renowned beauty of Fort Myers earned the designation Horticultural Gem of Florida. Pioneer seasonal residents Thomas and Mina Edison contributed much to that beauty and the all the ambience and southern charm. Gasprilla Island was the shipping port for Florida phosphate, and Boca Grande a gritty company town, until landscape architects created a landscape that appealed to wealthy northerners to establish a winter colony. Useppa, Captiva, Sanibel, and the islands of Charlotte Harbor developed into a real estate bonanza, and saved Charlotte Harbor as an ecological preserve.
- Koreshan Unity Settlement, established alongside Estero River, was to be a New Jerusalem in the wilderness. The founder died, the population dwindled, leaving a large landed estate to members who stayed, and very little resources to perpetuate the town.
- Naples began as a Kentucky winter resort. Development languished until the railroad reached town, and soon languished again during the Great Depression. Development resumed following Hurricane Donna in 1960 and developed into a resort for the very rich, offering a lifestyle with amenities usually found only in large cities.
- Cape Coral started out as one of the largest land development schemes in Florida, a major dredge and fill operation that created severe environmental problems that persist. The 400 miles of canals, with boating, fishing, and water sports are a significant enhancement to the quality of life in this vibrant and friendly community that offers verdant golf courses and family attractions and beauty expected from Southwest Florida.

Development in general follows the geometrical grid of government surveys, as do the roadways, except for the river roads and the flowing path of the interstate highway across the landscape. The population has grown mostly along the coastal and more recently into former agricultural areas inland.

- D. The early economy was natural resource-based fishing, ranching, and agriculture, with scattered small settlements of low populations developed in harmony with nature along the inland rivers, bays, and coast, accessible only by water. Real estate development of winter homes followed, and tourism boomed along with air conditioning.

The regional has exceeded its natural environmental carrying capacity and is suffering from polluted water, congestion, and high costs to perpetuate the population expansion.

- F. A regional heritage trail would feature the early history of Southwest Florida when the small population lived in harmony with this unique region.

Three pioneer gardens of outstanding significance link key points on a heritage corridor. The Edison Winter Estate at Fort Myers represents the early pioneer period, the Koreshan Unity Settlement at Estero the middle pioneer period, and the Henry Nehrling Tropical Gardens and Arboretum at Naples the later pioneer period. Each of these three historic landscapes preserves evidence of the past when Southwest Florida was a unique region living in the harmony of subtropical nature.