Faculty Research Grant Report – Summer 2011
Allotment and Workers’ Gardens in Europe, 1864-1919
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The Faculty Research Grant awarded in November 2010 supported travel to England, France, and Germany between June 30 and October 1, 2011 (one month in each country). The grant enabled conducting research in three of the best libraries in the world: the British Library in London, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. In addition, research was conducted in other more specialized collections. In London, at the London School of Economics (general collection, government documents, pamphlet collection and archives), at the London Metropolitan Archives, at the Friends’ Library, at the Camden Local History Collection, at the Royal Horticultural Society Library, and at Guildhall Library of the City of London. In Paris, at the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, at the Bibliothèque de l’Hôtel de Ville (formerly Bibliothèque administrative de la Ville de Paris), and at the Société nationale d’Horticulture de France. In Berlin, at the Gartenbaubücherei and Architecture collections of the Technische Universität, at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Berlin, and at the Zentrum für Berlin Studien of the Berlin public library.

In preparation for this research, the month of May had been spent as a post-doctoral fellow at the Dumbarton Oaks library, the most comprehensive collection for landscape studies in the U.S. This fellowship enabled consultation of most publications available in this country prior to travel abroad. Other collections were contacted and provided digital documents, eliminating the need for a visit. They include the National Association of Allotment Holders in the UK, the Amis de l’Abbé Lemire and the Ligue du Coin de Terre et du Foyer in France.

Time was carefully scheduled to maximize use of the collections when they were accessible and printed sources that surfaced during research were checked daily in Worldcat to avoid spending time on resources that would be accessible in the US either locally, or through interlibrary loan. Articles were requested on interlibrary loan when holdings existed in the US. In short, great care was taken to spend time abroad only with those documents and publications that were only available locally. Work was conducted seven days a week, working at home on those Sundays when no libraries were accessible (primarily in Germany).

In all three locations, images suitable as book illustrations were identified, photographed (when allowed), purchased or ordered. Information on procedures for obtaining publication rights was also obtained for each requested image.

Conceptually and in broad strokes, research in England placed the allotment gardens at the nexus of the questions on who had right to own or access land in the light of increasing precariousness in the social condition of the working class and the shortage of available hands for agricultural labor. Research also brought to light archival sources on the role of the Society of Friends in the 1930s during the coal miner strikes in Wales. Out of chronological scope for this study, this as of yet unprocessed archival material warrants further examination and publication. In France, the absence of a Socialist alternative to the workers’ gardens, created by Christian Democrats, underscored the paternalist origins of the movement and its direct connection with the 1891
Papal Encyclical "Rerum Novarum". In Germany, where the literature on the "Kleingarten" is by far the most extensive, the gardens have two different origins: one connected to education and youth organizations in Leipzig, the other originating from housing shortage and living conditions in Berlin. In the latter case, both the Land Reform (Bodenreform) and Life Reform (Lebensreform) movements are directly connected to the garden movement.

Germany also provided the most extensive and explicit literature on the question of aesthetics for the workers' gardens. At the time when the discipline of landscape design and concern for the configuration of urban green spaces (in the wake of Olmsted in the US) were being articulated in Germany, some landscape designers considered the Kleingärten, and their huts, worthy of their attention. Concerns for aesthetics were not absent in the United Kingdom or in France but they surfaced in different ways, unrelated to the design profession.

Since returning to the US on October 1, writing is a full-time commitment, with a projected typescript delivery date of May 1 (University of Virginia Press). Should there be need for additional documentation on this research activity, my contact information during 2011-2012 sabbatical leave is 654 Shippeetown Road, East Greenwich, RI 02818 (401-886-0787)