THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

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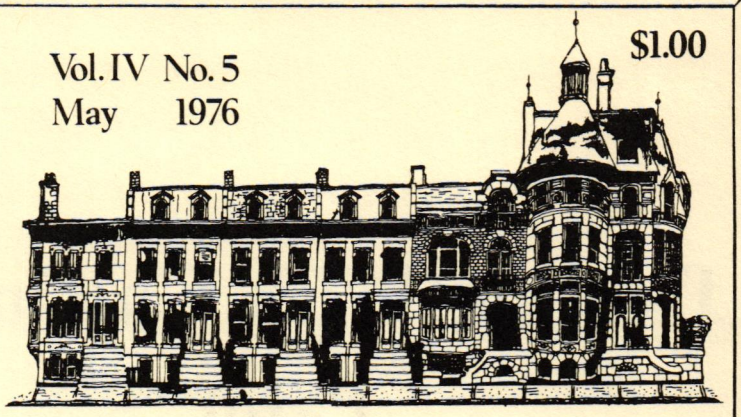
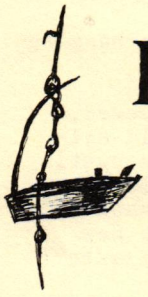


Renovation And Maintenance Ideas For The Antique House

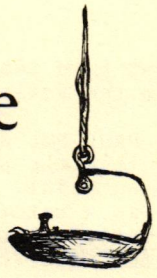
In This Issue

Coming Next Month

AVOID EXTERIOR PAINTING MISTAKES



Lighting The Colonial House



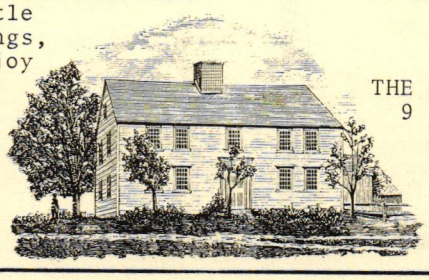
By Lawrence M. Duryee

THE HANDY DO-IT-YOURSELFER will be interested in this first-hand experience gained by the writer in his efforts to make his pre-Revolutionary house comfortable at night and at the same time preserve its authenticity. The house was "in building" in 1738. It was in that year that Isaac Bronson willed it to his son Josiah.

FORTUNATELY, only eight families have owned the old "Josiah Bronson Homestead" since it was built. None of these people were wealthy enough to ruin the fundamental design of this wood-frame farmhouse with its central chimney, and the house is practically intact.

LIGHTING AN old farmhouse built 238 years ago presents problems. Today's ingenious fixture manufacturers have outdone themselves in producing excellent reproductions of wrought iron lighting units duplicating those in use after 1840. But the old-timers like the Bronsons spent their days in hard labor around the farm merely to survive. They had little time at night for social gatherings, or even sufficient leisure to enjoy anything but the crudest form of illumination. As a result, we know quite definitely that crude "betty lamps," equipped with nothing but wick and tallow, were hung from the backs of maple ladder-back chairs. Burned marks on the backs of the top members of these picturesque chairs attest to this practice. The pewter and tin whale oil lamps also helped light the family's limited night activities, but the design of these units only dispelled the darkness. Ceiling and wall fixtures were practically unknown in the early days before 1750, but some wrought iron floor lamps equipped with tin shades have come down to us. These were lighted with wick and tallow.

WE WERE ELATED to come upon an old, authentic wooden lighting fixture at the Shelburne Museum in Vermont. It was made of pine and equipped with an old, bent candle for its light source, and had four glass panels. While there are some obvious hazards in selecting old pine or chestnut for lighting, we have found that the results of this design, carefully executed and in use for well over ten years in the Josiah Bronson Homestead attest to its safety if normal precautions are taken. The present version is electrified to reduce danger to an absolute minimum.



Wooden Lantern

THE DIMENSIONS OF THIS wooden lantern--9 in. high, 7 in. wide, 5 in. deep--give it a rugged, pleasing appearance especially when it is mounted on an old wall whose surface has not been ruined by paint. Our walls are white with the

(Continued on page 7)

Dealing With Calcimine Paint

Montgomery Ward & Co.'s Kalsomine Colors.

1st. It is the only strictly Sanitary Kalsomine in the world and contains the best Hygienic disinfectant known to science.

2nd. It is prepared dry, and made ready for use by simply adding hot water. Full directions on every package, and can be applied by an inexperienced person.

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From the 1895 Montgomery Ward & Co. catalog.

By Clem Labine

CALCIMINE is a dirty word to many old-house people. We became acquainted with calcimine the same way that many old-house owners do—the hard way. We had just purchased our brownstone and one of the first things Claire wanted to do was to paint the closets so she would have a place where her clothes would be at least partially safe from the plaster dust.

SHE SPENT ABOUT FIVE HOURS on a sweltering summer afternoon stuffed inside three different closets, coating each with a fresh coat of white paint. Finally finished—tired but with a sense of satisfaction at a job well done—Claire went back to admire the first closet she had completed. Whereupon she burst into tears! The fresh paint was hanging from the walls in foot-long ribbons.

THE PROBLEM, as we subsequently discovered, was that the walls were coated with old calcimine paint. The fresh paint we were putting on was a water-based latex. Since calcimine is water-soluble, it was partially dissolved by the water-based paint. Result: The new paint wouldn't stick to the walls. Disaster!

The Nature Of Calcimine

CALCIMINE PAINT was used in America from the 18th century up to the early part of the 20th century. Calcimine was a water-based wash, usually white—but sometimes tinted blue or other pastel shades. It was mixed right on the job from whiting (chalk), glue size and water...plus tinting pigment if desired.

CALCIMINE WAS POPULAR in Early America because it could be made inexpensively by the householder from materials at hand. Calcimine retained its popularity—especially for ceilings—even after premixed paints became available. The attraction was the soft, lustrous flat finish that calcimine gives...quite unlike the effect given by oil-based or latex paints. The noted restoration architect, Joseph J. Roberto, plans to use calcimine on the ceilings of The Old Merchant's House restoration that he is supervising in New York City. He made this choice not only because calcimine is an authentic finish for the Greek Revival period, but also because he likes the soft silky effect it creates.

ONE DRAWBACK OF CALCIMINE was that it had to be washed off before another coat was laid on. If layer was added on top of layer, the whole mass tended to crack and peel. Some old-time painters would take the short-cut, however, and not wash off the old calcimine before recoating. The buildup caused peeling problems that many old-house owners are living with today.

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What To Do About Calcimine

AN OLD-HOUSE OWNER may confront the calcimine problem in two guises: (1) The wall or ceiling may have a calcimine finish still exposed; or (2) the calcimine may be covered over with subsequent layers of oil-based paint.

IF YOU AREN'T SURE whether you are facing a calcimine-finished surface, you can test by scrubbing with hot water. If it is calcimine, it will wash right off.

WHEN CONFRONTED WITH a calcimine finish, you have two choices: (1) Paint over it; or (2) strip the calcimine off before repainting. If the calcimine coat is tight to the surface and shows no signs of peeling, you are probably safe in just over-painting. Be sure to use an OIL-BASED paint.

IF THE CALCIMINE FINISH shows much inclination to peel, you are best off stripping it before repainting. The following procedure is recommended: Fill a pail about half full with hot water. With a large bristle brush, soak a section about 3-ft. square with water. With a sponge, scrub off the old calcimine, and then move on to the next section. Change water frequently—to avoid leaving a fine calcimine dust on the surface. Adding a little trisodium phosphate (TSP) to the wash water will hasten the process.

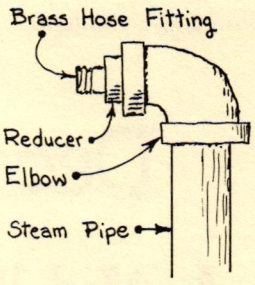
MORE DIFFICULT is the situation where the calcimine has been coated with an oil-based paint...and the calcimine is starting to peel. In this case, the calcimine can't be washed off because the water can't penetrate the oil paint film. The two options in this case are: (1) Chip out the loose places and patch with spackle or joint compound; or (2) undertake the tedious process of stripping all the paint off.

THE DRAWBACK of just patching a peeling calcimine surface is that nothing is done to correct the cause of the peeling. In fact, the addition of yet another layer of paint is likely to accelerate the peeling process. It is probable that your beautiful new paint will start flaking off in six to eighteen months as more of the calcimine base coat comes loose from the plaster.

Steam Stripping

THE ALTERNATIVE—stripping the layers of oil paint and calcimine—is equally unappealing. However, in the long run it is the soundest procedure. The easiest method (relatively speaking) is stripping by steam soaking. Steam will pass through the oil paint layer and loosen the calcimine. The only problem is getting an adequate source of steam.

HOMEOWNERS WHO HAVE steam heat have a ready-made source of steam. You can disconnect a radiator, unscrew the steam valve from the steam pipe, and attach a standard set of plumbing fittings that will allow you to hook up a heavy-duty garden hose to the steam pipe.



1. Remove steam valve from steam pipe.
2. Attach elbow and fittings.

SURPRISINGLY, a heavy duty garden hose has proved quite satisfactory for handling the low-pressure steam that comes from home heating plants. When the thermostat is turned up, the heating plant becomes a continuous steam generator that propels steam through the hose and out the nozzle. By holding the nozzle directly at the painted surface, the calcimine will start to loosen in a few seconds. A wall scraping knife will scoop the old paint off in long continuous ribbons once the steam has done its work for a few minutes. An entire ceiling can be scraped clean in about 4 hours. It is, however, hot messy work—definitely not the type of activity you'd want to schedule for a hot summer day. Lots of condensed steam will end up as water on the floor, so plenty of newspapers are in order.

OBVIOUSLY, handling live steam requires care. Steam can inflict painful burns if the nozzle is directed against the skin. Taping the nozzle to a long broom handle with friction tape allows you to control the nozzle while keeping your hands at a safe distance. The procedure works best with two people; one handling the steam hose and one scraping.

HOMEOWNERS WHO DON'T HAVE steam heat can use a wallpaper steamer. This device puts out a lot less steam, however, so the procedure will take quite a bit longer.

AFTER STEAM STRIPPING, there will still be some calcimine residue left on the surface. This can be washed off using the procedure outlined earlier. When the calcimine is removed, all cracks should be patched, the patches primed, and then the entire surface coated with a good quality primer (tinted a shade darker than the ultimate finish coat).

Notes From The Readers...

Transom Operators & Other Old Hardware

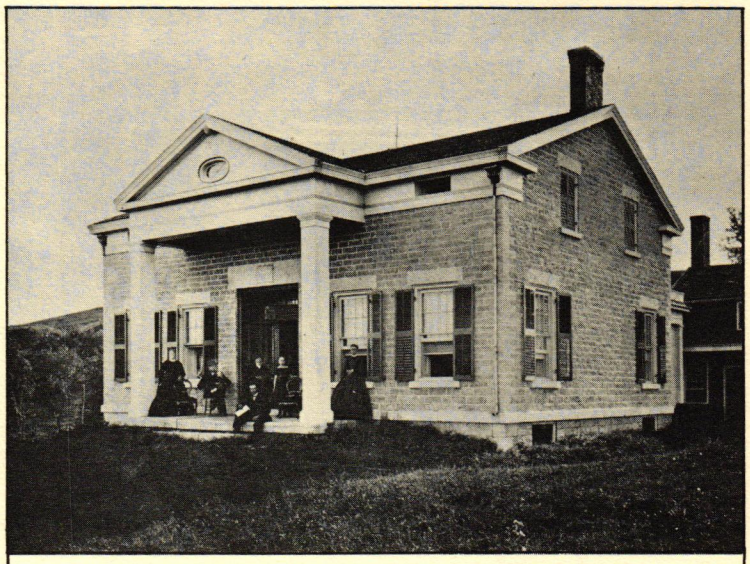
To The Editor:

Here's a source for old-style hardware that might benefit some other readers. They were able to provide—conveniently and economically—some transom operators manufactured by CIPCO Corp. The source is: Specialty Distribution Co., P.O. Box 9498, Greensboro, N.C. 27408.

Mr. Paul E. Schmidt of the company was very helpful in sending photocopies of various styles from his manufacturers' catalogs. Readers having difficulty locating any type of old-style hardware would do well to contact this company.

Joyce Buck
Bath, N.C.

Decorating A Mid-19th Century Farmhouse



Visitors to the Museum who see this old photograph of the D. Lipe House, taken soon after it was built, immediately notice that the beautiful front portico has been removed. The Museum, using this photo as a guide, has had an architect redesign its probable construction, and it is soon to be rebuilt.

HISTORIC FORT PLAIN, the center of a circle of ten forts during the Revolutionary War, is located in the beautiful Mohawk Valley in upstate New York. The D. Lipe House, a stone farmhouse built in 1848, is the home of the Fort Plain Museum. Two years ago the house was seriously damaged by fire. With rebuilding, installation of all new utilities, and the restoration, Director Donald L. Tuttle has had an uphill fight.

WITH ALMOST NO RESTORATION FUNDS, he and his staff have had to find or devise inexpensive shortcuts that should be of interest to readers saddled with high hopes and low budgets. They have proven again that necessity is the mother of invention.

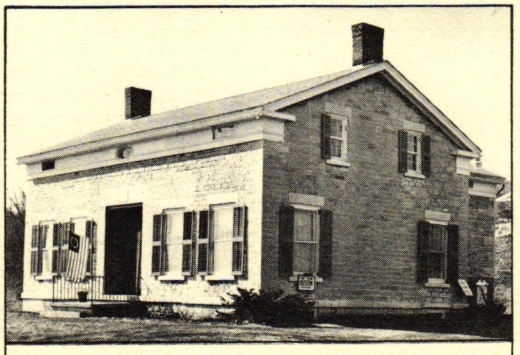
THE OLD PHOTOGRAPH at the top of the page has provided a good deal of the kind of knowledge necessary to an authentic restoration. By blowing up various sections of the picture many details were brought to light and reproduced. They were able to see the original interior window hangings, door details, corbelling of the chimneys and the tin leaderboxes at the corner of the soffit.

WHILE EXAMINING the blow-ups last summer, one of the staff leaped up and ran to the barn, returning triumphant with an original leaderbox from the house that had been tossed in the back of a wagon stored in the loft. Using the original as a guide, a tinsmith is now reproducing copies to be installed this spring.

WHAT WAS first thought to be a lantern hanging over the door turned out to be a canary taking the summer sun in its cage.

The Formal Parlor

FIRE AND WATER caused extensive damage to the parlor, destroying all of the restrained classic plasterwork of the ceiling and cornices. Although a plaster medallion once graced the center of the ceiling, it had long ago been removed. The diameter was determined from a slight depression left in the original plaster.

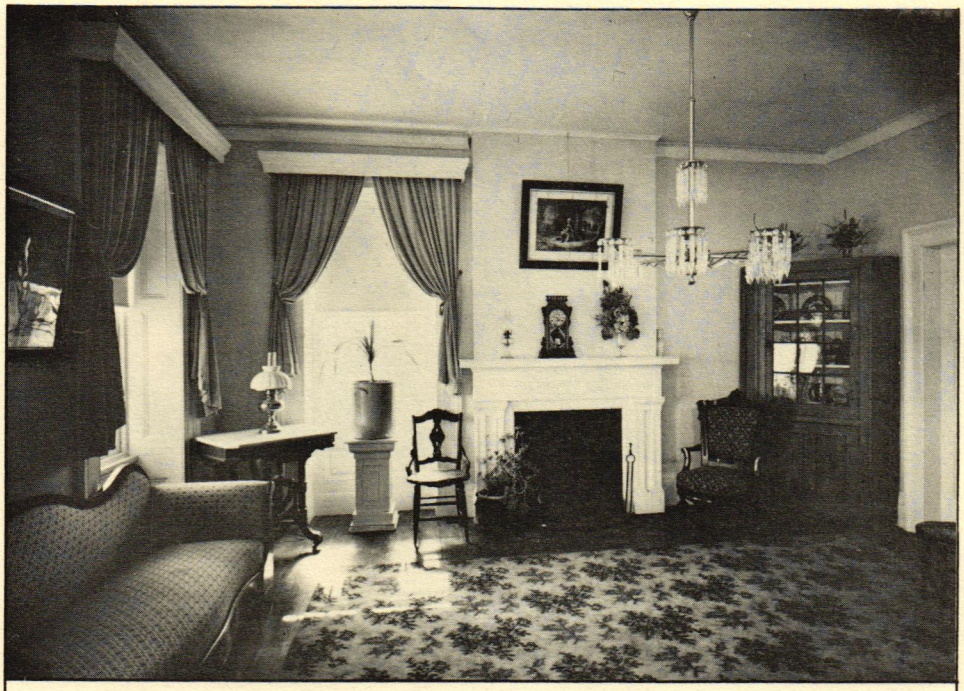


Fort Plain Museum today.

BECAUSE AN ENTIRE CEILING was required after the fire, and plasterers capable of duplicating the original are next to nonexistent in the Mohawk Valley, they opted to sheath the ceiling with plasterboard finished with a coat of spackle cut with off-white latex paint to brushing consistency. A cup of ordinary laundry blueing in five gallons of the mix counteracted the yellowish tone of the spackle.

CORNICE DETAILS WERE reproduced from stock wood "colonial" mouldings from the lumberyard; recessing the crown mould produced a "shadow" effect suggestive of a heavier mould than it actually is. Reproduction medallions being too expensive for the budget, they turned a wood one from the end of a large wire spool. Painted with the spackle-paint mix, it looks as if it was made a hundred and fifty years ago.

THE PINE MEDALLION was turned by the more crafty of the staff on a borrowed 6 ft. lathe with the face plate off the end to allow for such a large diameter. It was not an easy job, since such a large turning hunk of wood tended to act like a huge flywheel and constantly threatened to come loose and create the makings of a "disaster" movie in the little shop. Donald Tuttle promises to give a colorful description of the process to anyone wishing to duplicate the tension of it all.



The refurbished formal parlor in the D. Lipe House.

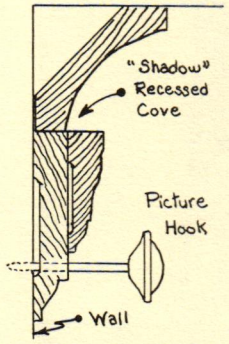
THE CORNICE for the drapes was made from leftover cornice moulding. The drapes, a three-quarter length authenticated from a mid-19th century interior decorating book, were made from a donated bolt of fabric from a nearby fabric-dyeing mill. The fabric is a soft yellow-gold and the walls are painted champagne yellow.

BECAUSE THE TIME SPAN featured is 1848-1900, some later Victorian pieces were added as if the family living there acquired them over a 50-year span--a lady's carved back upholstered side chair, a marble top stand, a mantle clock made in 1873, and a magnificent yellow bronze kerosene chandelier which took them nearly three months to strip, clean and repair. Although gas lighting was being introduced at the time or soon after the D. Lipe House was built, there is no evidence of gas fixtures there. Apparently kerosene was the only lighting fuel used until electricity was added in the 1920's. Today the house is completely wired with with a new 200 amp. service, but all outlets and switches are hidden from view.

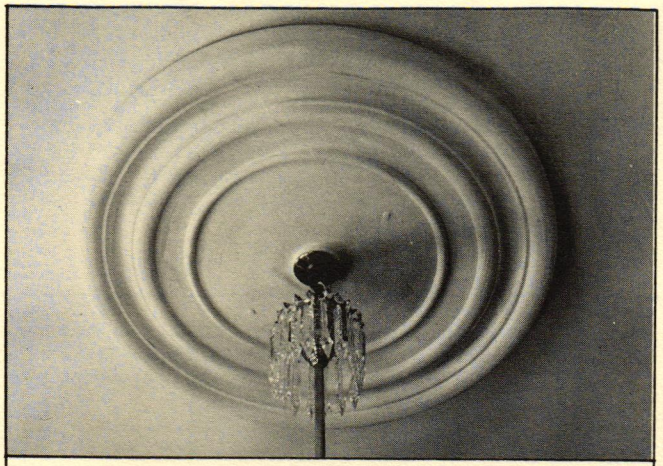
HISTORICAL archaeology is one the main interests of the Museum. From ceramic shards found in excavations, it was possible to document the type and patterns of crockery originally used in the house. The corner cupboard holds the results of many excavations.

A CAREFUL examination of every surface of a room often rewards you with small details essential in creating (or re-creating) an atmosphere long since gone. While they were measuring for new cornice moulding, several odd-shaped holes near the ceiling were noticed, holes left from the use of ornamental hangers.

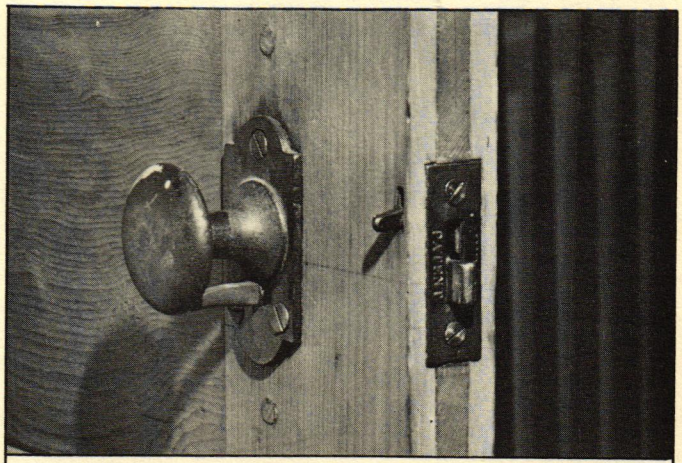
THESE LITTLE DEVICES were popular in the mid-19th century to prevent damage to plaster walls from picture hooks. The spike was driven into the cornice board and the ornamental knob of colored glass and brass screwed on. The picture was suspended down the wall by a long wire attached to the hanger. The nose-to-the-plaster examination showed that four hangers had been once used in the formal parlor.



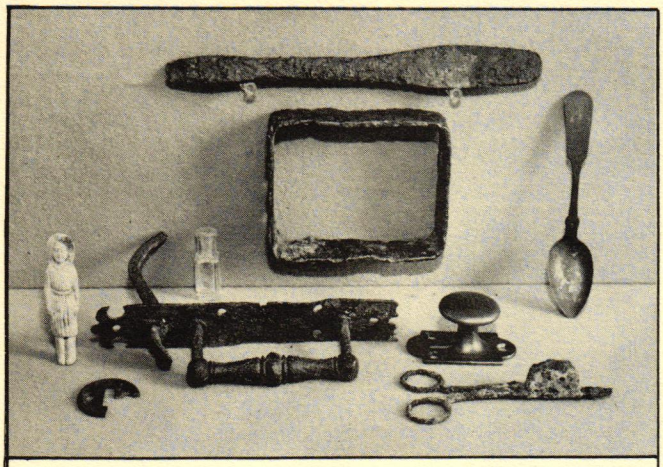
TODAY PICTURES hang from ornamental hooks (salvaged from another house) in the same place they did 100 years ago.



Ceiling medallion made from end of spool.



The unique "Judd Patent" door latch.



Along with "frozen Charlotte," some articles found in excavations are a Norfolk latch, coin silver fiddleback spoon, Judd Patent door pull or lift latch of cast iron, medicine bottle, an iron ferrier's tool, iron wagon tongue ferrule, cast iron escutcheon plate, and a pair of candle snuffers.

The attractive hallway features a cherry stair rail. The walls are painted yellow. The gilded cast iron lighting fixture has an etched Greek key design on the globe. It is original to the house and is still used as a kerosene lamp for Museum tours although it has been electrified.

The Victorian atmosphere of the gift shop is enchanced by the period wallpaper.

ALL INTERIOR DOORS of the D. Lipe House feature cast iron lift latches, sometimes with inset locking levers. The striker plates are marked "Judd Patent." Unique to mid-19th century farmhouses of the mid-Mohawk Valley and surrounding area, their origins were traced to the Oliver Judd Foundry of Cherry Valley, New York. As the shutters were being cleaned and repainted prior to re-installation, it was discovered that the weighted-ball shutter latches were also manufactured at the Judd foundry.

THE RUNNING TURKEY GIFTSHOP at the Fort Plain Museum (it takes its name from a blue running turkey design on a stoneware crock in the Museum's collections) is a delightful room of Victorian clutter. The wallpaper on the gift shop walls is a deep blue background with a paisley design in gold, yellow, red and light blue. It is a reproduction, closely matching the original, by Thomas Strahan Company, Chelsea, Mass. 02150, and they have it available in three color versions.

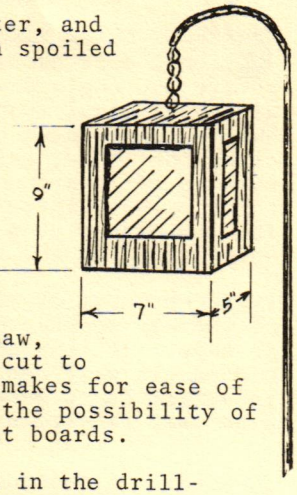
THE SHOP SPECIALIZES in inexpensive gifts and quality local handmade crafts such as rugs, pottery, cornhusk dolls and tinware. Wall sconces from antique strap hinges, lamps, and other items are made in the Museum's shop. All sales go directly to support the Museum's operating expenses and restoration program. Two of the most interesting items are the reproduction cast iron planters that attach to the inside of the window (in photo holding a fern) priced at $6.00, and a reproduction of the little bisque doll, originally made in Germany in the 1870-90's and called a "frozen Charlotte," found in a cellar excavation, and now available for 50¢.

Some of our readers may wish to visit the Fort Plain Museum or order the items mentioned in the story from their gift shop. For further information, write to: Donald L. Tuttle, Director, Fort Plain Museum, Box 344, Canal Street, Fort Plain, New York 13339.

Pictures by Blair Photo.

(LIGHTING--Continued from page 1)

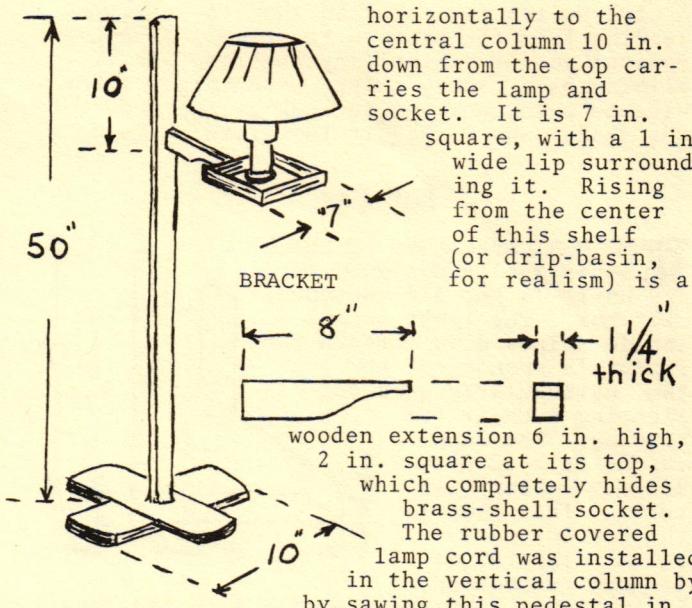
original horse hair plaster, and the surfaces haven't been spoiled with sand-papering. The panels of the wooden lighting fixture are made of matted, translucent fiberglass sheets that effectively eliminate glare from the light bulb. The rectangular openings in the four panels were cut out of chestnut pieces with a bench-mounted jigsaw, before these pieces were cut to finish dimensions. This makes for ease of handling, and eliminates the possibility of splitting the old chestnut boards.



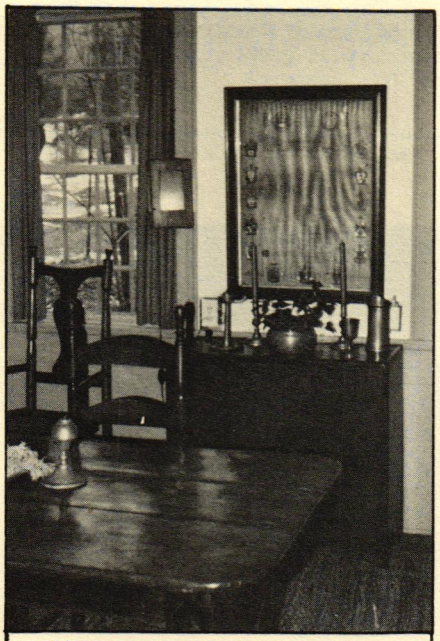
A ROUTER BIT was employed in the drill-press to form the picture frame openings. These indentations are necessary for holding the fiberglass panels securely. They also give the fixture a finished appearance. The wood was carefully selected for its natural weathered color, straight grain, and lack of knots. Any old barn that is about to fall down is a good source for these pieces of ancient pine or chestnut. You can usually collect the pieces you want for the asking. Be sure they are not over a half-inch thick, so you won't have to spoil them by planing them down.

Floor Lamp

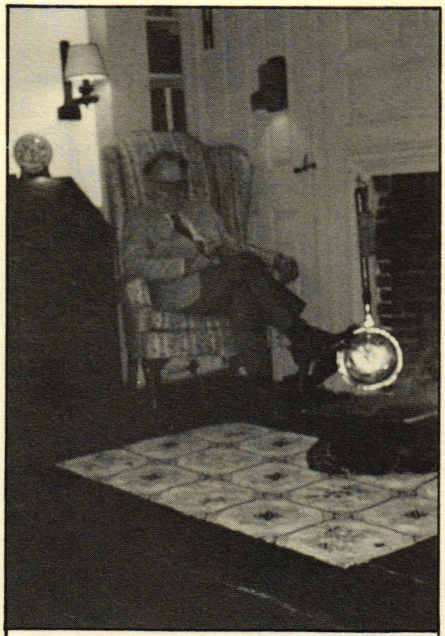
A WOODEN FLOOR LAMP for your desk area is illustrated which carries out the early American motif. It is constructed of weathered pine, well smoothed with 4-0 steel wool and then waxed. It is 50" tall from floor to top of pedestal. The "shelf" that is attached horizontally to the central column 10 in. down from the top carries the lamp and socket. It is 7 in. square, with a 1 in. wide lip surrounding it. Rising from the center of this shelf (or drip-basin, for realism) is a wooden extension 6 in. high, 2 in. square at its top, which completely hides brass-shell socket. The rubber covered lamp cord was installed in the vertical column by by sawing this pedestal in half, lengthwise, chiselling out the channel, inserting the two-conductor cord, then closing the two halves of the column and glueing with epoxy cement. Careful sanding and smoothing of these sawed surfaces before they are rejoined eliminates the line caused by sawing. The finished column is 1½ in. square (cross section).



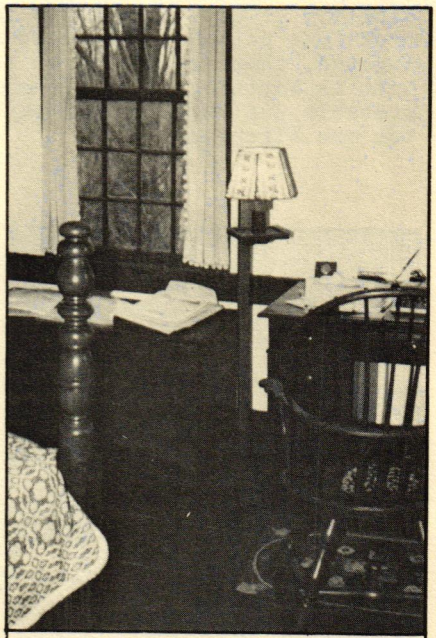
WHERE THE HORIZONTAL SHELF and bracket are attached, a 3/8 in. hole is drilled horizontally which enables you to install the wiring the rest of the way. For making the base, two crossed slabs were carefully fitted together at ninety degrees from each other, forming a sturdy cross-pieced bottom for the completed lamp. In one of these slabs a 3/8 in. hole is drilled horizontally through it and into the pedestal to accept the wiring.



Chestnut lantern hangs from the window frame. Note whale oil lamp on the dining room table.



A wall fixture (adapted from the floor lamp design) and a salt box fixture shed light on the author.

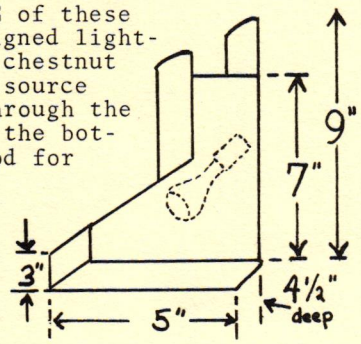


A pine floor lamp constructed by the author provides ample light for his desk area.

A cord switch installed in the 115 volt line leading from the base to the plug is a convenient way of controlling the lamp and it eliminates a clumsy switch which might otherwise be both annoying to look at (up under the shade) and difficult to maintain.

Salt Box

THE MOST APPEALING of these individually designed lighting units is the old chestnut salt box. The light source inside shines down through the fixture's opening at the bottom, particularly good for lighting a chair for reading. The lamp inside is a 50 watt Reflector-Lamp (115 volt). This lamp is the correct size--2½ in. diameter at its unmirrored end, 3½ in. long. It screws easily into the brass-shell socket mounted at an angle inside the old salt-box, and it can be readily replaced. It delivers its beam at the correct angle relative to the chair. A fifty volt-ampere auto transformer rests on the floor, supplying varying voltage to the lamp. This unit is made by Superior Electric Co., Plainville, CT.



IT ENABLES THE USER to select the desired light intensity by simply leaning down and turning the control knob. It is not a resistor, therefore does not waste heat, or operate at any elevated temperature. Wiring leading from the control to the fixture is concealed by Wire-Mold channel behind the door on which the unit is mounted, making the two-conductor lamp cord entirely invisible. Surrounding the light bulb inside the fixture is a carefully applied lining of asbestos sheet to prevent any possibility of scorching while the lamp is in use over long periods. When the fixture is not lighted, there is no way to tell that this unit is anything but a pleasing old salt box, probably put there by the owner to hold matches for the fireplace.

Outside Lantern

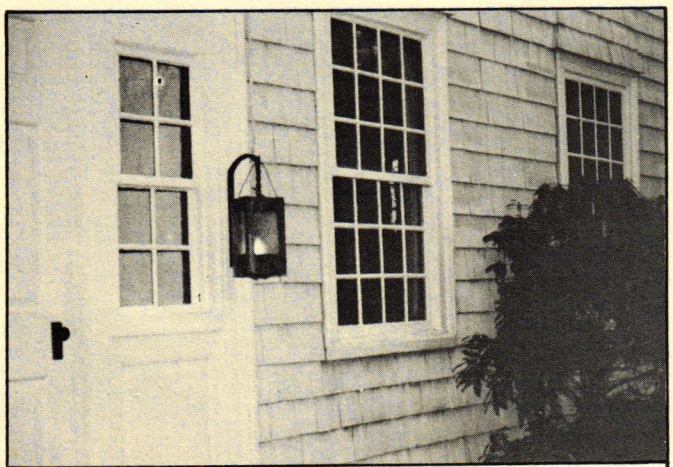
THE EXTERIOR FIXTURE SHOWN MOUNTED by the front door has survived ten years of severe New England weather. It is a replica of the original found in the Shelburne Museum, but is constructed quite differently to withstand ice, snow, hail, and heavy wind. This unit is built around a carefully made ½ in. thick plywood interior, to which are secured the old pine pieces so they will not split apart when ice and snow seep into the joints.

THIS CONSTRUCTION is necessary due to the age of the old weathered barn wood from which it is made. If this design is not followed the old panels will deteriorate. The years of use in all kinds of weather have subjected this pine lamp to very exhaustive tests.

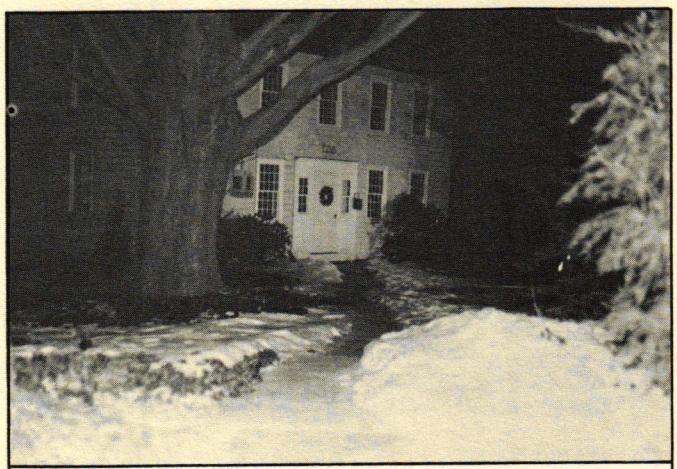
SOURCES: "Flamescent" is the trade name for these long lasting bulbs, made by Dura-test, and obtained from the Nichols Lighting Co. of Plainville, Conn. Various wattages are available, depending upon the location of the unit. These lamps produce a desirable imitation flame effect, and burn outdoors with no depreciation of life due to rugged New England winters.

WIRING: Underground "Trench-lay" for outdoor units can be easily laid in a trench dug only three or four in. deep in the lawn, for mounting units on a tree. "Romex" was used for the fixture attached to the house, and also for the unit mounted near the door on the barn. Switching is done, of course, from inside not on the fixtures themselves.

Lawrence M. Duryee is a Professional Engineer and a Charter Member of the Lamp Lighters of Connecticut. He has recently been appointed to the Board of Directors of The Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Route Committee. The photos and drawings illustrating this article are by Mr. Duryee.



Pine lantern hanging outside front door.



Another outside lantern hangs from the tree.

"Chemical Crazy"

Danger: Restoration May Be Hazardous To Your Health

By The Old-House Journal Technical Staff

THIS IS A SCARE ARTICLE. We don't want to scare you into abandoning restoration. Rather, we want to scare you into observing sensible precautions for your own well-being. After reviewing a lot of literature in the field, we sure have succeeded in scaring ourselves. None of us on The Journal staff were aware of all of these health hazards. The new information is not going to stop our restoration activities. But it sure is going to change how we do some things.

A EUROPEAN CONSERVATOR on a recent trip to the U.S. remarked that American restorers are "chemical crazy." He was astonished at the number of organic chemicals that are used in such a casual way by old-house owners.

WHAT FOLLOWS is by no means an exhaustive survey of all physical and chemical hazards encountered in restoration work. But it does summarize some of the most common dangers that all of us face.

The Worst: Paint Removing

REMOVAL OF SURFACE COATINGS is probably the single most dangerous restoration activity. There are toxicity hazards both from the removers themselves and from the paints being removed. For extra excitement, there is the added danger of fire.

THE FUMES from many, if not all, commercial paint removers are toxic to one degree or other. Severe damage to lung tissue has resulted from prolonged exposure to such fumes. Even more serious is the recent discovery that methylene chloride—the active ingredient in many removers—can have fatal short-term effects. When inhaled, methylene chloride is broken down in the body to form carbon monoxide—a toxic substance. Exposure for 2-3 hours can result in levels of carbon monoxide combined with hemoglobin in the blood that adds stress to the cardiovascular system. This can be quite serious for people with a weakened or diseased cardiovascular system. Cases of fatal heart attacks following exposure to paint removing substances have been reported in the medical literature.

METHYLENE CHLORIDE is not the only bad actor. The solvent benzene is especially dangerous. Benzene can be absorbed through the skin—and the presence of as little as 25 parts per million in the air is considered dangerous. Benzene has been linked to some forms of liver cancer and to failure of the bone marrow.

AS AN EXAMPLE of the type of hazardous chemicals that some stripping formulations contain, in the December 1975 issue of The Old-House Journal, we gave the formula for the finish reviver used by the Stuhr museum. The ingredients were:

Methylene Chloride*
Toluene
Acetone
Methanol or Denatured Alcohol
Benzene

VAPORS FROM ALL THESE CHEMICALS (except toluene and denatured alcohol) are considered hazardous to a greater or lesser degree. Also, as noted previously, benzene can be absorbed through the skin as well as inhaled.

THE PRECAUTIONS to be observed in handling chemical paint and finish removers are:

(1) Use adequate ventilation. Preferably, work outdoors. Never use paint removers in an enclosed basement workshop. If you are stripping wood inside the house, be sure to have windows open—and use a fan to disperse concentrations of chemical vapor. It is especially difficult to ventilate properly in cold weather. But it is better to turn off the heating plant, open the windows wide and work shivering in layers of sweatshirts than it is to risk the health hazards of breathing chemical fumes in a warm enclosed room.

(2) Use rubber gloves to avoid absorption of solvents through the skin. Be wary of pin-

*This component was erroneously listed as "methyl chloride" in the December issue.

hole leaks in rubber gloves; they immediately render the gloves useless. Whenever a fingertip or other part of the hand feels cool, it is a sign that there is probably a leak.

Fire Hazards

FLAMMABLE PAINT REMOVERS (the benzol containing types) and organic solvents (such as alcohol, mineral spirits, etc.) present special fire hazards. The danger is not just from throwing a lighted cigarette into the can. Vapors from the organic solvents are heavier than air and tend to accumulate at floor level. If you are working in a cellar, these vapors can be ignited by a furnace or water heater.

THERE IS ALSO a potentially lethal combination in flammable remover, steel wool and electrical outlets. If you are removing paint from panelling and your steel wool contacts an electrical outlet, the resulting sparks can ignite any flammable remover that may be spread on the adjacent woodwork. The Journal staff knows of several serious fires that have been started in this way.

TO AVOID FIRE HAZARDS: (1) When working inside, use only nonflammable removers whenever possible;

(2) If a particular procedure dictates the use of a flammable remover or solvent, be sure to work with windows open and a fan blowing to avoid buildup of combustible vapors at floor level. NEVER use flammable removers in the cellar;

(3) If you must work with steel wool and flammable materials near electrical outlets, cut off the power by pulling fuses or throwing the circuit breakers.

IN HANDLING paint removers, keep the material off the skin—and especially out of the eyes. Make sure there is a source of running water at hand to immediately flush away any accidental spills on the body. If there isn't any running water, be sure to have a large bucket of clean fresh water in the area. An eye cup (available at any drugstore) is valuable for rinsing out the eyes and should be a standard piece of safety equipment.

Lead Poisoning

LEAD POISONING is another hazard associated with paint removal. Lead poisoning is one of mankind's oldest environmental problems. Physicians of ancient Greece and Rome recognized the toxic nature of lead. Lead has long been acknowledged as an occupational hazard for painters. Yet many old-house owners who enthusiastically start out sanding and torching off old paint do not recognize that they are exposing themselves to possible lead poisoning.

SOME SYMPTOMS of lead poisoning are dizziness, nausea and a general malaise. Renovators who have gotten lead poisoning may mistakenly ascribe their symptoms to fatigue or a cold. Prolonged exposure to lead paint particles can do permanent damage to vital organs and the central nervous system. Children and pregnant women are especially vulnerable.

ANY HOUSE BUILT PRIOR TO 1940 probably contains some lead paint. So EVERY old-house owner should be aware of the potential hazards. Lead can be absorbed both from the dust created by sanding and scraping lead paint, or from the vapors created by burning paint off with a blowtorch or propane torch. Using torches inside is especially dangerous because the vapors become more concentrated.

SAFEST WAY TO REMOVE lead paint is with an electric hot air blower (see The Journal, April 1975 p. 3). The heat gun—which has a low fire risk—is quite efficient and easy to operate. The stream of hot air softens and lifts the paint. There are no toxic lead fumes created because the operating temperature of the gun is lower than the volatilization temperature of lead.

CHEMICAL REMOVERS can also be used to strip paint without danger of lead poisoning. Chemical removers, however, have their own hazards as described previously. Dip tanks, where appropriate, can also be used to remove lead paint safely.

THE RESIDUE of removed lead paint still presents a hazard and should be packaged and disposed of in a way that won't attract small children.

IT SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED that lead paint that remains tight to the wall presents no hazard to the occupants of the house. It is only when the paint comes off the wall—either through peeling or active removal procedures—that any danger is created.

IF IT IS EVER NECESSARY to sand lead-based paint, do it outdoors if possible and be sure to wear a good-quality tight-fitting dust mask.

Testing For Lead Paint

IF YOUR HOUSE WAS BUILT before 1940, there probably is some lead paint present...and you should observe the precautions outlined above. If there is any doubt and you want to test, there is a simple procedure you can follow to determine the presence of lead-based paint. It is called the "sodium sulfide test" or "spot test." It is based on the principle that a a drop of sodium sulfide solution will turn black in contact with lead paint.

ROGER A. RENSBERGER of the Lead Paint Poisoning Project at The National Bureau of Standards has provided The Journal with this description of the spot test:

▶ Wash any dirt, grease or oil off the area you wish to test. Dry it thoroughly.

Safety-Conscious Readers

The Old-House Journal staff wishes to thank the following readers who sent us their comments on chemical safety: Richard Byrne, Conservator, National Museums of Canada; Joseph H. Fries, M.D., Brooklyn, N.Y.; Jack C. Thompson, Portland, Ore.; Barton Milligan, Ardmore, Pa.; Angelita M. Hinek, Consumers' Research Magazine; Roger A. Rensberger, National Bureau of Standards.

- ▶Scratch a corner of the painted surface to expose any hidden layers of paint. Test may also be performed at the edges of cracked or chipped paint, providing that all layers of paint are exposed.
- ▶Apply a drop of the nearly colorless sodium sulfide solution on the fractured paint surface with a medicine dropper.
- ▶After 90 seconds, check the solution drop for color. It will turn grey to black if lead paint is present. If it remains colorless, there is probably no lead compound in the paint.

NOTE: The sodium sulfide solution will not change color if the old lead paint has been covered over with a non-lead paint. That's why it is necessary to scratch through all layers to expose a sample of every paint that is present.

ONE CAUTION IN INTERPRETING RESULTS: There are a few uncommon forms of lead in paint that will not give a color change in the spot test. Also, if the paint is dark in color, it may be difficult to observe the color change in the sodium sulfide drop.

LOCAL PHARMACISTS can prepare the spot test solution by dissolving sodium sulfide in distilled water to form a 5% to 8% concentration. An ounce of the solution will be enough for several dozen tests. Some pharmacists may require a doctor's prescription in order to fill a request for the chemical solution.

IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE to make the test solution from a photographic chemical: Kodak Sepia Toner #1691757. Although other manufacturers make sepia toner, only the Kodak product contains enough sodium sulfide to react with lead paint.

TO MIX THE SOLUTION, use only Part B of the two-part package. Fill a clean glass container with one pint of distilled water. Pour Part B toner into the water while stirring with a clean glass or plastic stirring device. (Do not use metal.) Mix solution thoroughly and transfer 2-4 oz. of it to a dark glass bottle fitted with an eyedropper cap for protection from sunlight. (Do not let the solution come in contact with metal bottle caps or container lids.)

CAUTION: Sodium sulfide is poisonous. Keep solution out of reach of children. Do not allow it to come into contact with eyes. In case of accidental ingestion, notify a physician immediately. Dispose of any excess solution by pouring it down a sink and flush with plenty of water.

Other Health Hazards

- Puncture wounds are an occupational hazard of restoration work—and so is the lockjaw that could result. Be sure your tetanus shots are up to date. Richard Byrne, a leading restoration consultant, notes that he will not allow a workman on one of his jobs unless the worker can show evidence of having received a tetanus shot within the last 2 years.
- Some joint taping compounds contain asbestos. Sanding these materials puts asbestos fibers into the air, which is then inhaled into your lungs. Asbestos has been linked to some forms of cancer. The safest course is to use only taping compounds that specifically say "No Asbestos." If it doesn't say, then assume the material contains asbestos and level it only by "wet sanding"—smoothing with a damp sponge.
- Inhaling plaster dust is not desirable. The lungs have no way to eliminate the plaster dust that may accumulate there. In extreme cases, silicosis could result. If you are going to be generating large amounts of plaster dust during demolition work, be sure to wear a good-quality, snug-fitting dust mask.

NOT EVERY POSSIBLE restoration hazard has been set forth in this article. But from what we have discussed, we think most people will realize that we all should be a little more wary of some of the materials we deal with all the time. The objective is to keep from doing bad things to ourselves while we do good things for our houses.

Painting Tip:

Latex Caulk For Wood Cracks

WHEN PREPARING FOR PAINTING, patching cracks in woodwork and the joints between woodwork and plaster is essential for a good-looking finished job. Materials often used for this job—spackle and wood putty—are rigid and sometimes fall out after a year or so as the wood expands and contracts.

HOWARD ZUCKER, professional grainer, offers this tip to Journal readers: Use latex caulk, the same material used for exterior caulking. The caulking gun makes it convenient to run the material into long cracks. A damp sponge will wipe away any excess. Most important, the latex is flexible and will expand and contract along with the wood. And after being allowed to dry a day, it takes paint well.

Products For The Old House

Conservators' Catalog

FINE SPECIALTY MATERIALS used in the restoration of art objects, antiques and other items of importance are difficult to locate. That's why the appearance of the Alfa Catalog is such an exciting event.

IN 102 PAGES, hundreds of fascinating products are grouped in 8 sections: Abrading Products; Bonding Products; Brushes; Casting Materials and Consolidants; Chemicals, Labware and Safety Products; Coating Products (including waxes); Coating Products; Sheet Materials; Tools.

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FOR BROCHURE ON TCS, contact: Sidney S. Epstein, General Sales Manager, Follansbee Steel Corp., Follansbee, West Virginia 26037.

Wood Turnings

LOOKING FOR a replacement baluster, leg, spindle or other turning? One of The Journal's readers has a small business that fills the sometimes critical need for custom turnings.

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HOUSE RESTORATION--Full restoration to small patch jobs. Carpentry & cabinetry. If you are doing your own work, ask about a consultation. Eastern seaboard area. Doug Ross (212) 857-4865.

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CONSULTANT SERVICES--For the old-house owner. Help with specific problems, long-range planning. (Chicago area) Write: Old House Consultant Services, c/o Michael Fisher, 5117 S. Dorchester Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60615. (312) 643-4128.

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