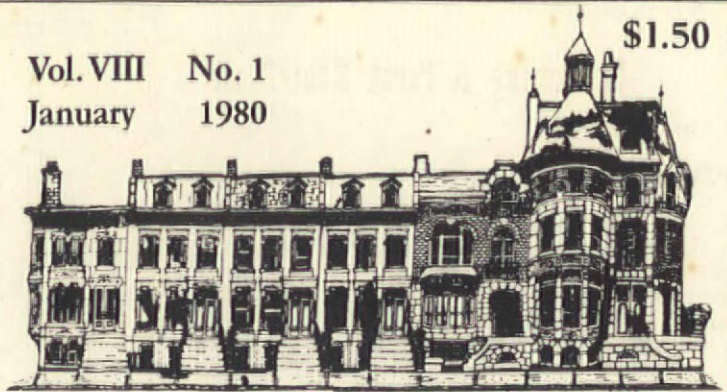


THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

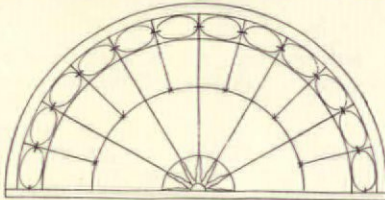
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Restoration And Maintenance Techniques For The Antique House

The Federal House



By Carolyn Flaherty

THE FEDERAL PERIOD is generally considered to be from 1780 to 1820. The term "Federal" actually refers as much to a political and social era as to an architectural style. In fact, many architectural historians do not even use the word to describe houses but call them "Adam" or "neo-classical."

AFTER THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION of 1776, and the resulting post-revolutionary depression, America experienced a time of great prosperity and expansion. With it came a desire to find a more "American" style than the English Georgian which had been the model for the well-off colonist.

THERE WERE THREE PRIMARY ARCHITECTS who created this new Federal style. The first was Samuel McIntire, who worked in Salem. He designed beautiful buildings and was also a master wood-carver. His mantels (generally with a sheaf of wheat motif) were works of art and inspired many imitators.

THE SECOND was Charles Bullfinch, a classically trained architect who returned from England in 1787. While there he was strongly influenced by the Adam brothers. He began, in Boston, to create some of our finest architecture.

THE THIRD FIGURE was Asher Benjamin. He wrote seven handbooks of architecture



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Coming Next Month

REPAIR OF CAST IRON

that found wide acceptance over a 50-year period. He was a force in the style that immediately followed Federal--the Greek Revival. But his early writings sought to bring the Federal style to the country builder. He firmly believed in the "Americanizing" of house building by getting away from the English and other European fashions. His most popular handbook was fittingly titled "The American Builder's Companion."

TO CREATE THIS AMERICAN STYLE, these architects looked to the forms of Ancient Greece and Rome--representations of a time associated with the ideals of democracy. The Colonial Georgian style was also based on Roman architecture. But it was Roman forms as set by a 16th century architect, Andrea Palladio. His publications were used in 18th century England as the basis for Georgian architecture.

BY THE END OF THE REVOLUTION, Palladian-Georgian architecture had become too grand, elaborate and English for the aspirations of a new, expanding country. So the Federal era architects actually went back in time before Palladio's interpretations--straight to the source as it were.

THE FEDERAL STYLE was more restrained than the exuberant Georgian. Windows and doors were subtly scaled with fan and

(Cont'd on page 4)

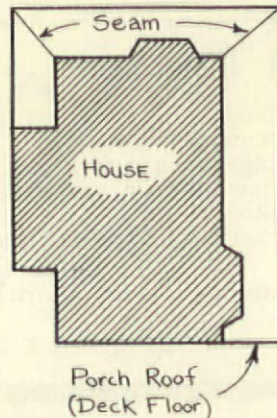
Canvassing A Porch Roof/Floor

To The Editor:

YOUR ARTICLE in the March 1978 OHJ on canvassing a porch floor was quite helpful on a project of ours. We, too, have a porch--the roof of which also serves as the floor for the deck above. There was evidence that the deck floor had been canvassed in the past to make a watertight covering over the porch. Since we had to do major repairs on the porch roof last summer, it seemed that canvassing the deck floor again would be a practical way to keep the porch roof dry--and a nice period touch as well.

THE SAMPLES OF OLD CANVAS that we had found at the edge of the deck were a #8 or #10 canvas. But we ended up using a #3 (heavier) canvas, as it was the only material available at the time in the 10-ft. widths we wanted. We had approximately 100 sq. yd. of roof.

WE RAN FULL lengths of canvas on all three sides of our porch so that there were only two seams--at each of the corners. We used the methods described in the article--except that we used two kinds of adhesive. We used "Interlux" canvas adhesive to lay the canvas and "Nautolex" vinyl canvas adhesive to seal it. (The only reason we used Nautolex as a sealer was that we couldn't obtain sufficient quantities of the Interlux adhesive.) The Nautolex would not have been durable enough to lay the canvas, but was an excellent sealer.



THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL[®]

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AFTER SEALING, we painted the canvas with standard porch & deck enamel, as it is more flexible than marine paint.

WE NOW HAVE A WATERPROOF roof that we can also walk around on and use as a deck. A major bonus is that it is very attractive as well. Total cost for the job was \$343 for the canvas and \$260 for the adhesive. Thanks for publishing the article--it was just what we needed!

Clare Palamara
Atlantic Highlands, N.J.

Old-House Restoration Now On Public Television

SHOWING THE RAPID RATE at which interest in old houses is sweeping the country, there's now a 26-part series on house restoration on TV. Called "The Old House-Works," the program is produced by The Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting. It's being aired on 150 Public Broadcasting Stations in 40 states.

THE EDITORS of The Old-House Journal have cooperated with the program's producers in assembling basic how-to information that is appropriate for historic architecture. The series has been endorsed by The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers.

SPREAD THE WORD about the program in your community. It's an especially valuable educational tool for local preservation groups who've been trying to spread the preservation gospel. Consult local TV listings for times.



Program Host Bob Callahan (left) attempts sash repair with aid of veteran carpenter, Gilbert Brooks.

Modern Vs. Traditional Materials

To The Editor:

IN READING The Old-House Journal, I detect the recurring theme that you shouldn't do anything in restoring old houses or in antique repair that can't be undone. I restore old houses and antiques and am a purist in the sense that the original design, style, character and quality should be retained. I think it is foolish, however, not to take advantage of the new construction adhesives, new furniture glues, new chemicals, new tools and techniques.

I DON'T USE SHORT CUTS to repair things and do not consider it necessary to consider what some craftsman may face in re-doing my repairs. Hopefully, those I make will outlast my generation and that of my sons and daughters. As long as the integrity of the original is maintained, why not do the best job you can with the most modern and best materials available?

John C. Newman
McLean, Va.

AS WITH MANY DISPUTES, the basic problem here seems to be in the definition of terms. The OHJ has nothing against modern materials where they do indeed maintain the "integrity of the original." The problems arise with the assumption that all new materials are automatically better than the traditional ones they replace.

COMMON SENSE must play a big part in selecting the right material for a job. A house that has been standing for 75, 100 or 200 years should not be used as a test laboratory for untried materials. If there's any doubt, stick to the traditional material that has known characteristics.

ASK THESE four key questions:

1. Will the new material be seen? If not, historical aesthetics are less of a problem.
2. Will the new material be physically compatible with the old materials with which it will be in contact?
3. What kind of a job is this? If it is a rehab job, then the aesthetic considerations are less important than if it were a restoration or preservation job.
4. What are the maintenance/repair/replacement implications of the new work?

AN EXAMPLE of lack of consideration of the maintenance implications is the use of roofing cement to stop leaks in slate roofs. A number of OHJ readers have acquired old houses with slate roofs that have horrible looking black "measles" all over the slate. Even after proper repairs have been made in the slate to

stop the leaks, it is extremely difficult to remove the smears of roofing cement.

AND OF COURSE, some of the modern materials that are fine in some applications are not suitable for others.

● **ADHESIVES**--Modern adhesives are a great improvement over fish and hide glues. They have wide application in old-house repairs. But there are some areas of mis-application: (a) Some homeowners feel that these modern glues are so good that EVERYTHING should be glued. On exterior applications especially, where movement may be expected, mechanical fasteners (e.g., nails) may be preferable because they allow more movement. (b) For repair of fine antiques, many museum conservators still prefer hide glues because they are reversible; i.e., they can be cleaned out of joints with hot water.

● **CAULKS & SEALANTS**--The butyl, silicone, polysulfide, polyurethane and latex caulks are a great improvement over the old linseed oil caulks. Even the greatest purist would be happy to use a modern caulk on a museum-grade house. Ethafoam backing rods, too, are a big improvement over oakum.

● **WOOD CONSOLIDANTS**--Epoxy wood consolidants are being used in growing amounts to repair rot-damaged wood. There are safety and application problems, however, so anyone using these materials should have read the available literature thoroughly (see OHJ, Nov. 1979, pg. 130).

● **SHEETROCK**--Gypsum wallboard is a satisfactory substitute for plaster, especially on do-it-yourself rehab jobs where the homeowner lacks plastering skill. But sheetrock becomes a visible surface and can have aesthetic drawbacks on early buildings where the original wall was surfaced with rough plaster. Sheetrock looks too smooth and perfect in these old buildings.

● **MASONRY SEALERS**--Silicone sealers, once heralded as a great cure-all for moisture problems, are now recognized as a potential hazard because they can prevent water vapor from escaping from a building.

● **FOAM INSULATION**--Enough problems have shown up with this "new improved" material that we do not recommend its use.

NEW IS NOT NECESSARILY BETTER. For example, aluminum siding is widely promoted as an improvement over painting. But experience is showing that after 10 to 15 years, the aluminum siding begins to look pretty ratty and requires--yes--painting! In the meantime, the siding contractor may have destroyed significant architectural detail during installation. And the aluminum siding may be masking dangerous rot and/or termite conditions. This is a case where "new" does not mean "improved."

HERE ARE SOME OTHER "NEW" materials: Imitation wood panelling; acoustical tile; spray-on paint/insulation gunnite coatings; imitation stone; foam beams; plastic barn siding. No further comment needed.--CL

(Federal House--Cont'd from page 1)

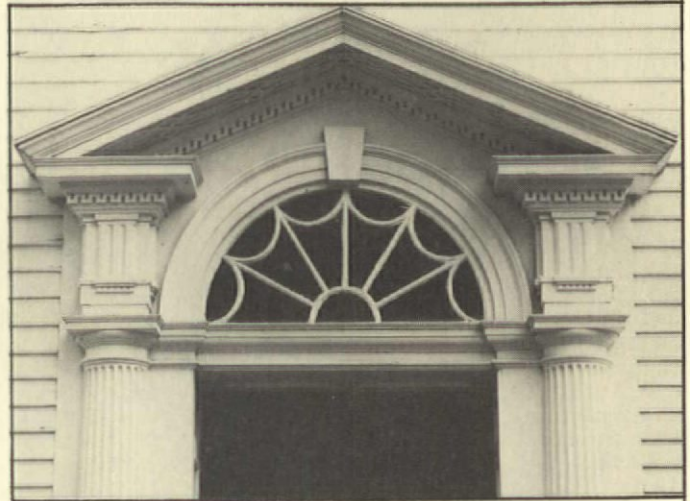
oval motifs used for decoration. Columns and mouldings were simple and elegantly carved. Decoration, both interior and exterior, became lighter and more delicate in scale. The graceful mantel with carved motifs replaced the heavy wood panelling of the Georgian period.

THE FEDERAL MANSION was built along the Eastern seaboard for the prosperous merchants who were growing rich in the booming maritime trade. They were mostly built of wood in New England but later brick was used, especially as the style spread inland and westward. The most elegant of these houses were generally three stories high, topped with a low hipped roof and a balustrade.

MEANWHILE, simple Federal details (perhaps just sidelights around a door or a small portico) were added to the basic Colonial house of rectangular shape and the vernacular Federal house replaced the old-fashioned plain Colonial.

A 1796 Federal

THE SALEM TOWNE HOUSE, built in 1796, provides an excellent model for restoring a Federal house. It was originally built in Charlton, Massachusetts and was moved to Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts, in 1952. It is not as grand as many of the Federal mansions, but it is a high-style Federal and typical of the kind that a community leader lived in.



The entablature of the house has high-style Federal period decorative details: The full half-circle fanlight, the upward thrust of the keystone block, and the soffit of the raking cornice embellished with a carved guilloche or interlace.

MANY EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR architectural features of the Towne house were taken from William Pain's "Builder's Pocket Treasure," possibly the Boston edition of 1794. The south side of the house overlooks a formal garden and grape arbor, as well as a gazebo.



The General Salem Towne House is a handsome example of the Federal style with fine proportions and details. It has been restored using research data compiled about the Towne family and others in New England at the time.

THE TOWNE HOUSE is furnished with a typical mixture of American and European items. The prosperous homeowner of the era usually bought American furniture and often used indigenous floorcoverings. But for wallpaper, fabric, pottery, china, brass and silver, they looked to England and France. Direct trade with China was begun in 1785, and many American homes had large sets of export porcelain and Oriental carpets.

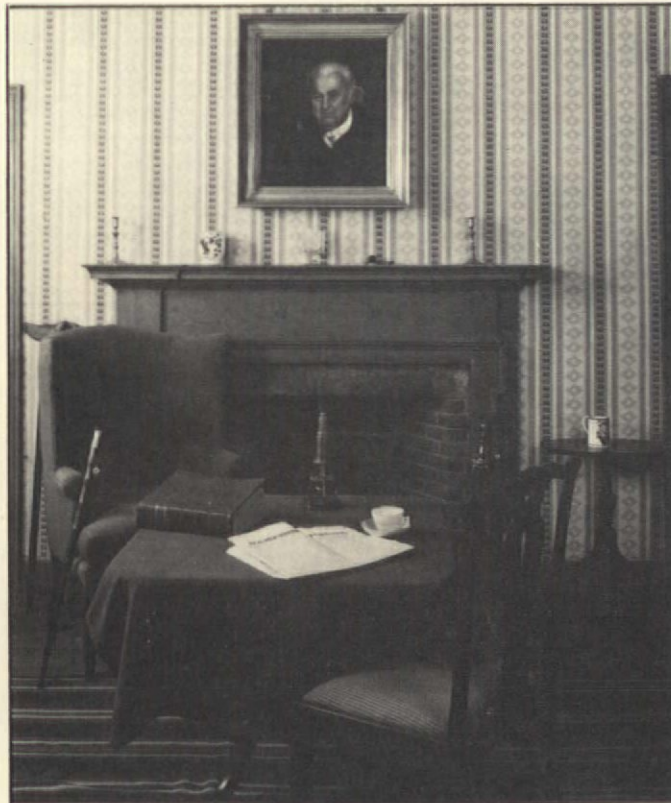
THE TWO FIRMS mentioned on the following page (Scalamandre and Waverly) as manufacturers of reproduction fabric are listed in the 1980 Old-House Journal Catalog. Also in the Catalog are sources for handwoven rugs, canvas floorcloths, many companies with furniture and decorative accessories of the period.



The Dining Room has scarlet cloth curtains in simple style with swags and cascades. Many early 19th c. authors stressed the appropriateness of using scarlet for curtains in dining rooms. Wallpaper is gray on white and woodwork is a soft, light green. Floor covering is a painted canvas floor cloth. Dishes are English ironstone.



The Sitting Room Chamber has a high-post bed hung with reproduction bed hangings made of Waverly's "Peel Document" which is a reproduction of a block printed English cotton, dated 1798. Window curtains are simple festoons, operated by cords which run on pulleys. Floor is covered with striped cotton rag carpet.



General Towne's Study features a portrait of the General himself. The carpet is a reproduction of a warp faced (or Venetian) carpet woven in Sturbridge, c. 1815. The cover on the study table, intended to protect the wood from spilled ink and sand, is made from Scalamandre's "Independence Hall Baize."



The Parlor features a tea table set with Chinese Export dishes, c. 1800-1815. Sofa was made in Charlton, Mass., in the early 19th century and is upholstered in reproduction wool moreen. Window curtains are made of reproduction cotton dimity with applied fringes. In full summer, the sofa is also dressed in a dimity slipcover.

OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE is a living museum of early New England. It contains a working farm, a schoolhouse, church, bank, and many early houses, all of simpler style than the Towne House. These photos are from Old Sturbridge Village and are by Donald F. Eaton.

The Federal Revival House

THE DESIRE FOR A MORE "American" style of architecture was strong again by the late 1800's, and brought about the Colonial Revival. The Federal style again came into fashion. Most of the Federal Revival houses merely had classic detail applied to the sprawling, irregular shaped structure popular by the turn of the century.

BUT EVEN IF these houses did not have the symmetry and regularity of the originals (unless of course, they were replicas) they did contain classic mouldings and cornices, delicately detailed ceiling medallions and Adam-style mantels. They demanded to be furnished and

decorated in very different manner than had been popular for the late Victorian house.

PAINTED WOODWORK (usually white or shades of muted gray or green) returned after years of using dark woodwork like walnut. Walls were again painted in light blues, apricots and the elegant, airy shades of the classic periods. Reproduction wallpapers, based on Early American patterns were widely available. And reproduction furniture came into its own. Copies of Sheraton, Chippendale and Hepplewhite pieces were used to furnish the neo-Federal house and Americans became interested in their own antique furniture. 🏠



THIS HOUSE is a 1903 Colonial Revival owned by Mr. and Mrs. Jim Sciarillo. It is located in the Prospect Park South section of Brooklyn where there are many large houses of this type. Typical of the style, Federal details are applied to a large house of Victorian proportions. Although the house is of large proportions, the interior does contain graceful arched doorways and classic mouldings. The doorway has simple Federal trim with sidelights. Unfortunately, the former owner removed the porch, destroying some of the house's classic charm. The Landmarks Comm. has ascertained that it was originally painted white with green-black shutters.



THIS HOUSE is a good example of the replica-type neo-Federal often built in the early 20th century. Built in 1913, it is a seeming anachronism standing as it does in a Brooklyn brownstone neighborhood of three and four storey 1880 houses.

Built of dark red brick, with a slate shingled roof, it has neo-Federal details. The central entrance has proportioned, paired columns, with a simple fanlight over the door. The fanlight motif is repeated in the three dormer windows. The trim above the lower windows is in the classic Adam style and all the windows have shutters.

Rotten Window Sills

By James McConkey, Washington, D.C.

ROT OCCURS LESS frequently than you might think--sturdy old windows last years even with neglect. Before you begin wrecking, test the wood with a knife to be sure it's really rotten...not just badly weathered.

IF THE WINDOW SILL is rotten, don't despair. Rotted wooden parts can be removed. With repair, the window lasts years more, and you save the cost of a modern and possibly inappropriate replacement. The job is labor-intensive and messy; such repair work is unpopular among professionals. But if you're willing to do the work yourself, you'll save nearly the entire cost of the job.

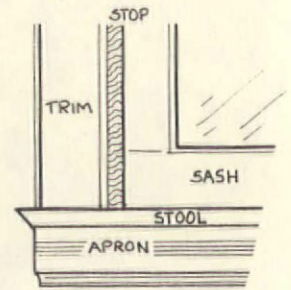
WINDOWS have to shed water. If they don't, they'll rot. Under optimum conditions, well-designed windows do stay dry. However, without proper maintenance, other problems arise that eventually lead to wood rot...problems such as a crack in the masonry above the window. The sill is the most vulnerable part because water can sit on it.

AT FIRST it's hard to tell where the house stops and the window begins. The exterior of the house is a protective armor against the weather, and any outside opening has to be tight. Nevertheless, it isn't difficult to take the window apart. A window is just put together with nails. Sash, casing, moulding, and stool are all embellishments of a basic box set in the wall. The sill is the only specialized part, being of heavier stock and sloped to shed water outward. (The sill is NOT the horizontal piece inside with the rounded edge--that's the stool. The sill is the bottom-most part of the window frame, on which the windowpane--sash--comes to rest.) The window sill, in turn, rests on the more massive sub-sill, which is part of the house. The sub-sill overhangs the house siding, so water runoff will fall clear.

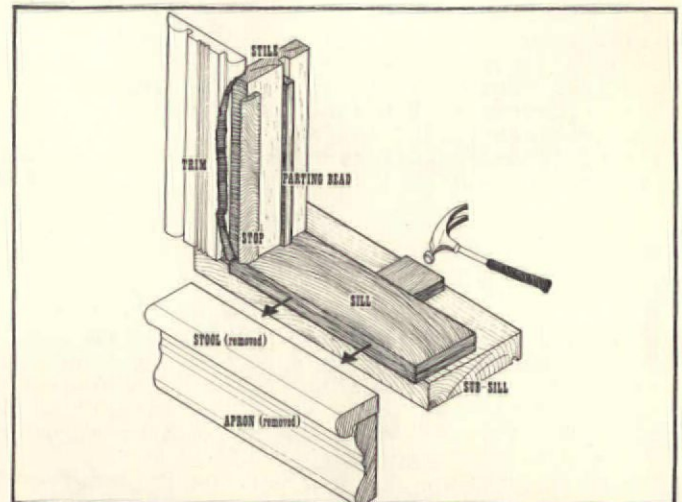
RARELY are the sill and sub-sill combined as one piece of wood. In a masonry house, the sub-sill might be brick, stone, concrete, or wood. In a frame house, it is wood. The sub-sill rots more frequently than the sill; replacing it follows easily once you've removed the sill.

A New Sill

TO REMOVE the sill you must first take off the apron and the stool. The apron pries off, but the stool is fastened to the sill with nails; the stile prevents its being pried upward. You can tap it out from under the stiles, just as you can tap the sill out in one piece if only the sub-sill needs replacement. (Protect reusable stool and sill with a block of wood. See below.) If the window is attached with cut nails, the stile and trim will have to come off before the stool. Stock is commercially available if the stool should crack, though shimming might be necessary in replacing it.



SINCE YOU'LL NEED a new sill just like the old one, note its key dimensions before demolishing it. Measure the exact width of the sill, including the extensions that run under the jamb into the wall. Saw out a middle piece to provide a cross-section. Try to keep enough of one of the end pieces for dimensions too. If any nails are left in the stiles, pull them out rather than cutting or bending them.

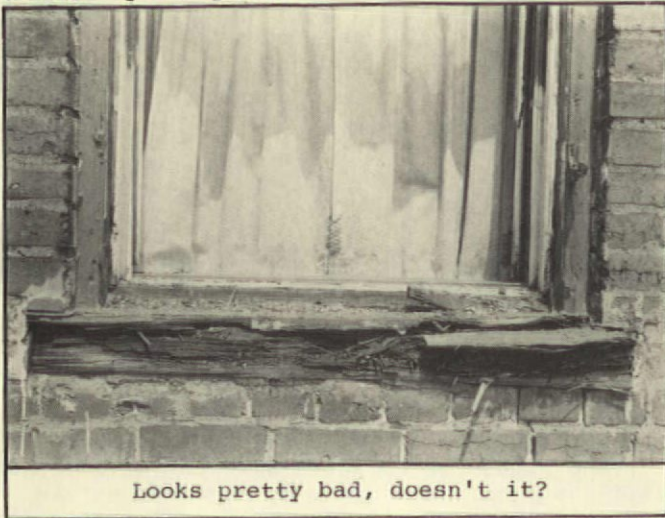


WHETHER YOU COPY the sill yourself or have it milled, keep in mind that the wood must be straight-grained and knot-free. Clear white pine is the usual choice in mills.

IF YOU ARE dealing with a masonry-installed window, you may not be able to get the new sill past the wooden floor of the weight pocket: You can cut this extension off without detriment to the shape of the window. You can cut the sill short at the ends instead of running it all the way under the weight pockets, if necessary.

BEFORE INSTALLING the new sill, give it two generous coats of paint-compatible wood preservative.

(Photos by Henry Eastwood)

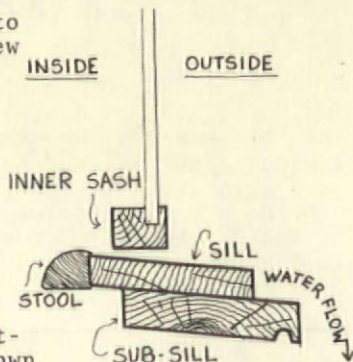


Looks pretty bad, doesn't it?



The new sub-sill is in place.

USING A WOODEN BLOCK to protect it, tap the new sill into place. Be patient; if the piece is balky, remove wood accordingly rather than forcing it in. Drive some thin wooden wedges between the sill and the sub-sill to tighten the sill against the stiles. Check to be sure the sill slopes to the outside, then toe-nail down through the stiles into the sill with 8- or 10-penny finishing nails. The exception: If the removable plate which gives access to the weight pockets is down near the sill, don't nail through it. Now, nail the sill to the sub-sill.



drive wedges under the sub-sill. Temporary wooden wedges may be used in masonry during installation and nailing. But before remortaring between the wall and the sub-sill, push in some tight-fitting stones or pieces of brick and remove the wedges. Again, check that the sub-sill slopes to the outside and coat it with wood preservative before replacing.

Don't Fool With Fenestration

THE NUMBER OF BRAND-NEW windows on remodelled old houses demonstrates how many people think it's easier to buy new rather than repair the old. The fact is, short of spending a lot of money on custom-made duplicates, you aren't likely to find anything as good as the double-hung ones you already have.

THE CHEAPEST wooden replacement window will cost roughly what it costs to recondition an old one. Then add the cost of removing the old and installing the new. Then, unless the old mouldings are salvageable and compatible, add the price of new interior trim. What this "cheap" replacement gives you is a window that will need replacement before the old one would have needed simple maintenance.

FINALLY, new windows rarely fit old openings. You must either buy a unit smaller than the old one, thereby reducing light and ventilation, or proceed with costly enlargement of the original opening. In landmark districts this is especially unacceptable.

...And The Sub-Sill

IF THE SUB-SILL IS ROTTEN, the same rules for removal and replacement apply. You're free to demolish it, but make sure you get measurements. It's actually easier to replace the sub-sill than the sill. The sub-sill does not typically run more than an inch or so under the sill, so getting it out is easy. If the wall is masonry, chip out the mortar from around the sub-sill. Sometimes there is metal flashing around the ends of the sub-sill. If so, carefully pull the nails and bend the flashing back so it can be re-applied to the new piece.

ONE FEATURE of the sub-sill mustn't be overlooked in creating the duplicate. Underneath, about a quarter of an inch from the outside edge, runs a shallow groove. This serves to make water bead up and drip off rather than run underneath and work its way into the wall. Don't forget this drip-edge when making the new sub-sill.

IT'S VERY IMPORTANT that the sub-sill fit snugly under the window, to prevent the window from going out of shape. For the same reason, it's important that the sub-sill rest firmly on the house wall. In frame installations,

SEE JAMES McCONKEY'S previous article in the December 1979 issue for an explanation of the anatomy and general rehabilitation of double-hung windows.

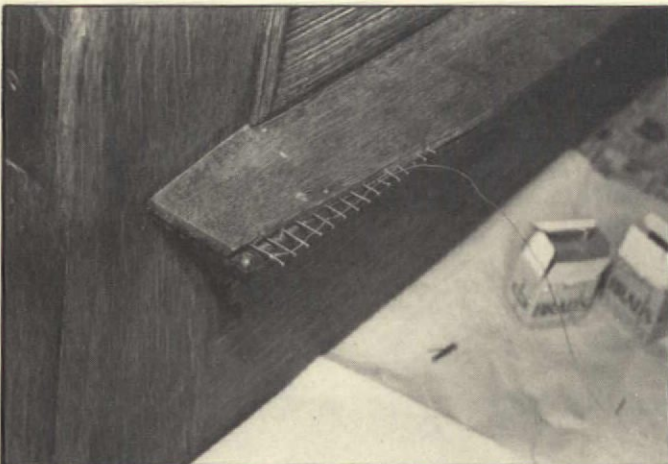
SOMETIMES, sills are badly weathered and pitted, but not sufficiently rotted through to need replacement. For restorative techniques--including the use of epoxies--see the August 1974 issue of the Journal.

Repairing A Golden Oak Door

By Barbara Schiller

NOTHING WENT ACCORDING to plan the day we moved into our Victorian house. The movers were late, the cloudy day had turned into a rainy day. The street which had seemed charming with its maple trees and brick Queen Anne houses now looked old and tired--sodden papers in the gutter, hard rock blaring from a rooming house.

IT SEEMED AT LEAST PAR for the course that a section of beading and a triangular six inch corner were knocked off a cornice on the handsome inner front door. The beading was found under the hall radiator, the missing corner had vanished in the confusion. The door was the least of our problems in a house that had a kitchen with a six by six foot hole gaping in the rear wall.

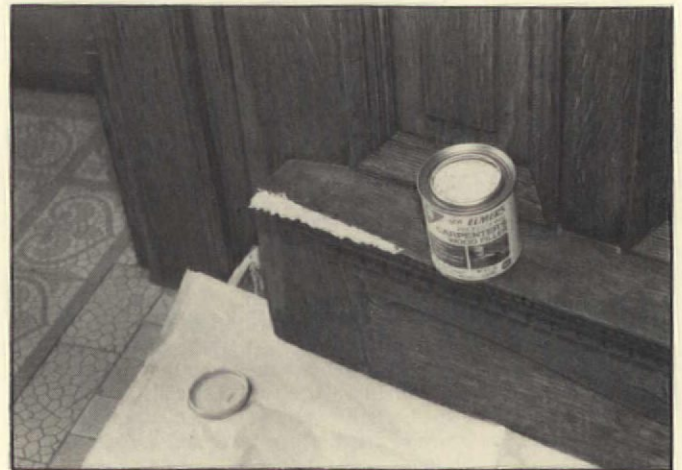


Where the wedge-shaped piece is missing, the brads have been put in. The regular size hammer was somewhat awkward for hammering in the brads--a smaller size tack hammer would have been more convenient. Though the brad sizes differed, it was important to be sure that the heads would be more or less evenly aligned. They had to stick out yet remain below the level of the original running edge so that the wood filler could cover them completely and be sanded down without uncovering any metal. The galvanized wire was not woven too tightly so that the wood filler could work between the strands and become a solid piece rather than layers.

FOUR YEARS LATER our restoration project had reached the comfortable stage where we could worry about the door's lack of perfection. We had stripped the golden oak of its marred, dark brown varnish, bringing out its architectural quality and the wear and weathering that had come with 90 years' exposure to sunshine and leakage and more recently, neglect.

WE DID NOT OBJECT to the aging. After all, who would want their grandmother to look like a teenager? A furniture restorer noticed the cornice damage and told me that it could be built up by hammering in brads as an armature for wood putty. With the confidence of a professional he assured me it would be a snap. My amateur experience with crumbly wood putty had convinced me that it was a real nuisance material. Artfully, I convinced my husband to do the job by telling him how easy it would be. I would get all the necessary materials--all he had to do was, well, do it.

SINCE WE LIVE in a very active restoration area our neighborhood hardware store caters to the particular needs of its customers. I confided my misgivings about wood fillers and was handed an 8 ounce can of New Elmer's Professional Carpenter's Wood Filler with the assurance that it represented a very real improvement over its competitors. We had estimated the



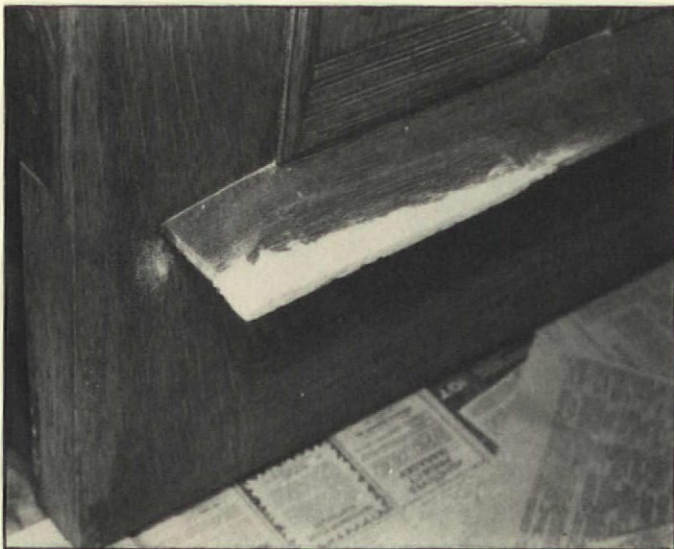
The wood filler is applied liberally with a screw driver, in this case, and extended beyond the natural edge.

range of brad sizes needed--half inch, inch and inch-and-a-half. An interior stain to match the oak door rounded out my purchases.

IN REPAIRING the door my husband first determined the area that needed to be built out and then hammered in brads of the appropriate sizes. Hammering such small nails into a hardwood like oak is awkward and can make the handiest person butter-fingered. One method that helps is to wedge the brads between the teeth of a comb. Another method is to use a needle-nosed pliers to hold the brad.

I FELT THAT EVEN WITH the resulting neat armature, any additional aid in getting the wood filler to do its job would be helpful, and conceived of a wattle and daub method of weaving in the galvanized wire in and out between brads. Wattle and daub is a medieval method of wall or fence construction in which mud or plaster was applied over poles intertwined with reeds or branches. The accompanying pictures show just how well this method works and, incidentally, that a college major in medieval studies offers practical knowledge.

THE NEW ELMER'S WOOD FILLER is certainly more workable than its competitors, but one layer was not going to do the job. We let the first layer dry overnight and then built up a second layer. When this was sanded the resulting surface gave us the feeling that this repair job was going to be more than just passing fair. This feeling evaporated after the first

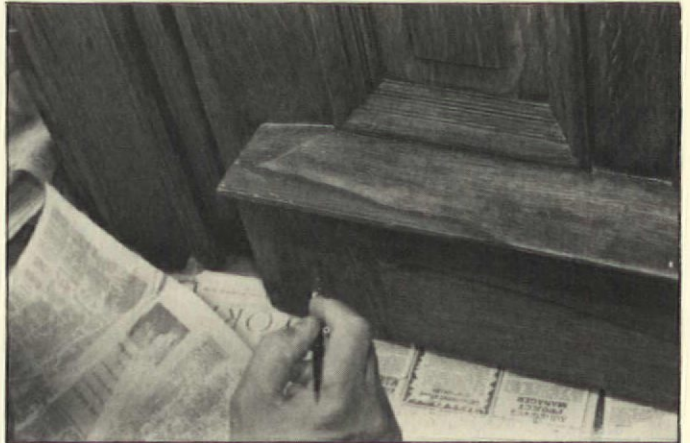


Here you can see why the wood filler had to stick out yet remain below the level of the original running edge--so the sanding could be done without uncovering any metal. After the second coat had dried some of the larger irregularities were cut down with a knife before sanding with fine sandpaper. A sanding block prevented the thin edges from becoming rounded and kept the corner sharp. After the stain was applied, the burnt umber pigment had to be spread on the still-wet second coat of stain in order to mimic the uneven coloring of the original surface.

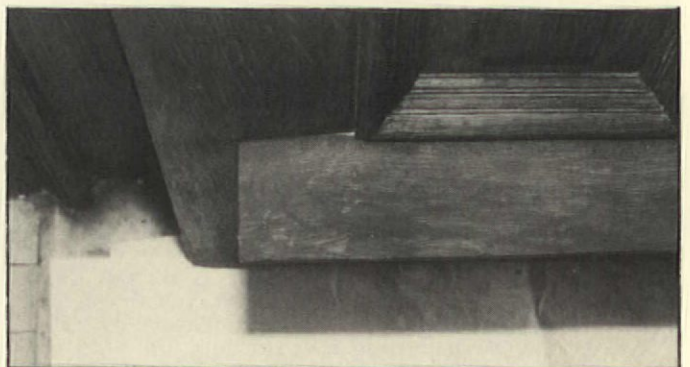
coat of stain was applied. It was called Victorian Oak. But it was for Victorian oak that was in the pristine condition of our quarter sawn oak hall wainscoting, not the weathered door. The patch looked like 20th century vinyl. A second coat did not improve matters.

MY HUSBAND THEN APPLIED burnt umber oil pigment directly from the tube with an artist's camel hair brush, blending it on to match the uneven coloring of the rest of the cornice's surface. It looked good even when wet. In the daylight of the next morning we could not tell that the door had been mended.

THIS METHOD, though fairly painstaking, is not difficult and has applications to a variety of the small scale repair problems that face the owners of old houses. 🏠



In this photo you can see the marked difference in appearance between the real wood and the new piece with the stain applied. The burnt umber pigment is now being applied with a small camel hair brush.



The finished cornice on the door with its mended corner gives no indication that it is not all original.

Restorer's Notebook

Testing Dip-Stripped Wood

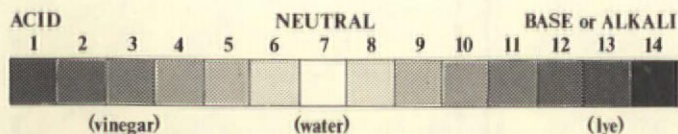
MANY DIP-TANK stripper formulations contain lye, tri-sodium phosphate (TSP), sodium carbonate, or combinations of these. Wooden pieces stripped in these solutions cause repainting problems if the chemicals are not properly neutralized AND rinsed out.

FREE ALKALI reacts with oil-base paints to saponify (make soap of) the oil; film failure results. TSP reacts with moisture to form free alkali. Sodium carbonate absorbs water, causing bubbling and peeling. Therefore, some way of ascertaining whether any of these chemicals remain in the wood is needed before beginning any refinishing.

THE CHOICE is one of a large class of chemicals, called indicators because they change color depending on the pH of their surroundings. The best indicator for our application is phenolphthalein ("fee-nall-they'-leen"); it is available at druggists or chemical supply houses, and is usually included in student chemistry sets. It's also the principal active ingredient in many laxatives.

DISSOLVE a few pinches of phenolphthalein in denatured alcohol (shellac solvent) and paint or spray it on stripped surfaces. (Or, if the phenolphthalein is already in dissolved liquid form, spray it on as is.) Areas where there is indeed free alkali will turn a violent magenta; areas with TSP or carbonate, a light pink. These areas must be treated with an acid--vinegar is safest--until this color doesn't appear. Then it must be flushed copiously with water and left to air dry. Repainting or refinishing can follow, with no failure due to chemical action likely to occur.

James B. Tyler
San Francisco, Cal.



The pH Scale

(Editor's Note: The important thing is to determine--before refinishing--if your dip-stripped piece was neutralized before being returned to you. As long as you catch the problem before repainting, vinegar (acetic acid) will usually work to neutralize the alkali and prevent peeling problems. For a more complete discussion of this dilemma, see the August 1979 issue of the Journal.)

Doctoring Old Pipes

MANY OLD HOUSES have a problem with rusty water, especially in the bathrooms. Before resorting to expensive replumbing with all new pipe, try to correct it with less costly and simpler methods.

FREQUENTLY the problem is solved by replacing the short nipples between the pipe coming out of the wall, and the shut-off valves under the sink and toilet (often behind the regular bathtub valve). Also clean out each shut-off valve. These fill up with sediment which can cause low water pressure, another common old-house condition. Even if the plumbing is in generally poor condition, these measures can alleviate the situation for a few years.

Bernis Copeland
Long Beach, Cal.

Removing A Sprayed Ceiling

DURING AN EARLY-1960s remodelling of our old house, the previous owners had the smooth plaster ceilings sprayed with fireproof acoustical material. Feeling that this asbestos-based, textured ceiling treatment was inappropriate, we came upon a method for removing the substance.

SCRAPING THE CEILING dry was futile. But we noticed that a water-damaged area was flaking badly, so we tried soaking the entire ceiling. Presto! It worked.

HERE'S WHAT WE DID:

1. We used respirator masks-- essential.
2. Removed all furniture; covered floors with heavy plastic and layers of newspaper.
3. Opened all doors and windows for ventilation.
4. Evenly sprayed the whole ceiling with water through the garden-hose nozzle. The ceiling was thoroughly damp, but not dripping.
5. Scraped the acoustical material off while it was wet, using scraping knives. It came off like butter.

THEN WE FILLED AND SANDED the cracks in the plaster, and painted.

THESE SPRAYED ACOUSTICAL ceilings abound on the West Coast, and are found in new and old houses around the country. We've learned that a sprayed ceiling is often the homeowner's answer to the cracks that appear after an earthquake.

AGAIN-- until recently this material was asbestos-based. Take the proper precautions.

Georgiana Yashioka
Altadena, California

Got Any Tips?

Do you have any hints or short cuts that might help other old-house owners? We'll pay \$15 for any short how-to items that are used in this "Restorer's Notebook" column. Send your hints to: Notebook Editor, The Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

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THE ICE NINE COLLECTION is a line of 8-in.x10-in. single-strength glass panes, which can be ordered framed in lead. Minimum order is 9 panes. For an idea of price: The small windows are about \$4.00 each (\$6.25 framed); the larger panels described above are about \$50.00 (subject to change.) Discounts are allowed on multiple orders. Large window catalog--\$2.00 refundable; small windows--\$1.00.

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Helpful Publications

A Useful Bibliography

JAMES MASSEY at The Historic House Assn. has compiled an excellent 18-page annotated bibliography of the preservation literature. It's a valuable tool for any individual or group that's building a reference library.

THE BOOKS and publications are grouped into eight sections: (1) Architectural History; (2) Historic Preservation; (3) Restoration and Rehabilitation; (4) Care of the Historic House; (5) Journals & Periodicals; (6) Real Estate & Legal Issues; (7) Related References; (8) Surveys of Historic Buildings.

MANY OF THE BOOKS are available from the National Trust Bookstore. They are indicated by an asterisk--and ordering information is included.

ALONG WITH THE 18-page "Guide To Preservation Literature," The Historic House Assn. will send information about its programs and membership details. Send \$1.50 to: Historic House Assn., Decatur House--Room J, 1600 H Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

More From HCRS

PRESERVATION BRIEF #6 is "Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings." Finally, a thorough and convincing case has been made against the use of sandblasting and other extreme cleaning methods. The report explains the abrasive cleaning techniques--including delicate low-pressure and micro-abrasive methods that may be of use--and describes the damage that will occur to various building materials.

THERE HAVE BEEN seven Briefs from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service: (1) Cleaning & Waterproof Coating of Masonry (2) Repointing Mortar Joints in Brick Buildings (3) Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings (4) Roofing for Historic Bldgs. (5) Preservation of Adobe Bldgs. (6) Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning (7) Preservation of Glazed Terra-Cotta

THESE ARE all available from the Government Printing Office (75¢ ea.); however, the Preservation Resource Group has offered to send Journal readers #1-7 for \$4.50 and to supply each subsequent issue @75¢.

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