

THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

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Restoration And Maintenance Techniques For The Antique House

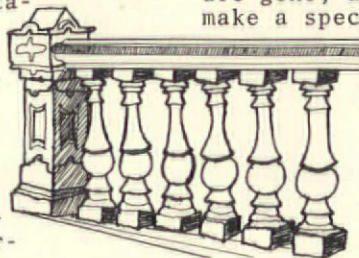
CAST IRON

By Robert Ohlerking and
The Old-House Journal Technical Staff

RUST — that's what cast iron and wrought iron have in common. If rust can be prevented, ornamental ironwork lasts a very long time. So the maintenance methods outlined in this article apply to all exterior ironwork, cast or wrought.

CAST IRON is of course cast in a mould; wrought iron is wrought, or hammered and twisted into shape. The two have different properties because they are actually slightly different metals. Cast iron includes silicon and 2-4% carbon, which makes it pourable when in a molten state. It is also brittle and hard, easily fusible but not able to take hammer-blows. Wrought iron is almost pure iron, with not more than .1-.3% carbon content. It has a tough and stringy quality, and can even be worked cold.

EVEN IN WELL-PRESERVED and rehabilitated city neighborhoods, there is an astonishing amount of corroded cast iron lining the residential streets. Of the few repairs attempted, most have failed and even added to the problems. Iron fences and balustrades are an important part of the proportion and period detail of old houses and streetscapes, so it's unfortunate if a lack of printed infor-



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Coming Next Month

AN OLD-FASHIONED KITCHEN

mation and professional advice has contributed to the sad conditions. Metalworking expertise isn't required for the stabilization of elements, or for the scraping, priming, and painting operation. Time is what's required, along with the same patient attention that's given to other old-house tasks.

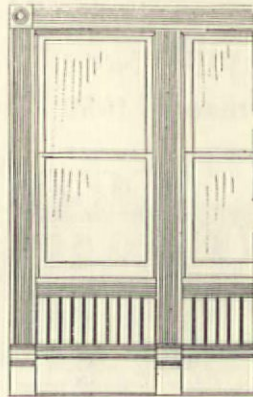
CAST IRON presents some extra repair problems for two reasons. First, cast pieces are often bolted together to form balusters, newels, etc., and these pieces eventually begin to come apart. If not tightened and caulked, the tension and compression that hold the piece upright are lost; also, water gets in and parts may oxidize from the inside out.

THE SECOND PROBLEM is lack of available replacement parts. A foundry in full production could turn out quantities of cast-iron pieces of every style. But the large iron foundries are gone; and to have a modern metalworker make a special sand mould, cast a replacement

piece, and ready it for painting is necessarily expensive. It is, therefore, very important to fix problems before they destroy any iron, and to salvage whatever pieces are still around. This is where ad-hoc mending techniques come in.

(cont'd on p. 19)

More About Double-Hung Windows

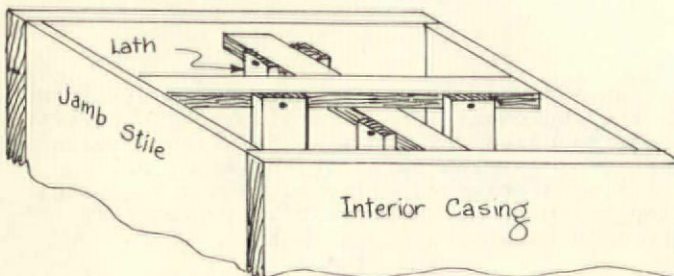


To The Editor:

I WOULD LIKE TO add a couple of suggestions to your article on fixing double-hung windows (OHJ, Dec. 1979, pg. 133). First, in old homes with many previous owners, the jamb stile around the weight door may be so butchered that it may not be wise to attempt to remove a door that has been nailed.

SECOND, double-hung windows are sometimes grouped in pairs, sharing a common weight box between them (see sketch). The four weights in this box are separated by plaster lath boards to prevent weight entanglement. However, in time, these boards sometimes break or drop down--jamming the weights. And because of their length, the lath cannot be removed through the weight door.

THE SOLUTION TO BOTH these problems is removal of the interior decorative casing. This will expose the entire weight box. (While open, caulk can be applied to the seams within the box to reduce air infiltration.)



Common Weight Box For Adjacent Windows

CASING SHOULD BE replaced with screws--choosing screw heads that are compatible with window hardware. This will allow quick and repeated removal should problems occur in the future. It is also wise to replace the interior stop with screws for the same reason. Screws of brass, aluminum or stainless steel will remove any concern about rusting.

Jack W. Heffelfinger
Reading, Pa.

To The Editor:

HERE ARE THREE additional suggestions for fixing double-hung windows. (1) Often, it is necessary to strip all the paint off the sash run for the upper sash in order to lower

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it to the sill. I routinely strip this paint off with a propane torch.

(2) I prefer to reset the stop moulding with screws instead of nails. I have been using brass screws with a finishing washer. I have found houses of a similar age to mine that used screws originally. This makes it easier to disassemble the window in the future.

(3) I use a belt sander to remove all paint from the parting bead. This makes it easier for the windows to move up and down once the unit is reassembled.

Gary L. Schlesinger
Libertyville, Ill.

To The Editor:

YEARS OF NEGLECT often render window pulleys inoperative due to lack of lubrication and build-up of paint. I have found that it is very useful to remove the pulleys for maintenance. Locate the screw that holds the pulley (usually one) and remove it. Take the pulley out after cutting around the paint with a utility knife.

SOME PEOPLE prefer to remove all the paint from the pulley and leave it unpainted. The rest of the pulley mechanism can be lubricated and checked out mechanically. One final thought: Be sure that any replacement sash cord is the same approximate diameter as the old cord. This will ensure that it does not jam in the pulleys and can be properly knotted to hold in the sides of the window sash.

James W. Greene
Buffalo, N.Y.



Rejuvenating A Queen Anne In Eau Claire

By Dana Giffen, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN A ROMANTIC FANTASY of ours--to restore a unique old house to its former charm and grandeur. In 1976, my husband and I were house hunting, and the fantasy became reality.

WE FELL IN LOVE with a Queen Anne house, built in 1894 by a wealthy lumber baron named Foster, for his daughter, Carrie Winslow. The Winslows acquired a subsequent fortune selling patent medicine to the lumber camps and the house was known locally as the "old Winslow House."

IN THE 1920's the house was sold to the Arnold family, who lived in it for 50 years, and fortunately, didn't remodel much of it.

DESPITE BADLY PEELING PAINT and rotting porches the house retained much of its original elegance, especially its profusion of "carpenter's lace" and the magnificent bevelled glass window set into the exterior brick chimney.

WE WERE DISCOURAGED WITH the inflated prices and poor quality of workmanship in the modern homes we had seen, so buying the unique and improbable Winslow House seemed the right thing to do.

WE ENTERED A MUSTY HALLWAY. Looking past the dreary wallpaper and ancient carpeting, our eyes fell on the beautiful carved spindles of

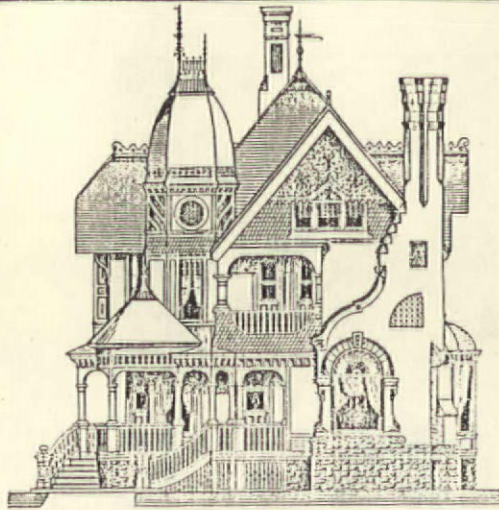
the open staircase. We moved on into the parlor where rainbows fell across our faces from the bevelled windows. I was enchanted with the original combination gas and electric light fixture, an imaginative concoction of brass filigree and opalescent globes. By this time I was seeing only selectively--relishing the potential of the house, and ignoring what I didn't want to see.

FOR A SHORT WHILE after acquiring the house, that euphoria remained. It was dispelled by the reality of the work we had cut out for us.

OUR FIRST DECISION WAS to refinish all of the hardwood floors, hidden under many layers of old, darkened varnish. We enlisted the help of a 78-year-old gentleman, one of the few refinishing craftsmen still in Eau Claire. He appreciated the beauty of the wood and sanded it to a silky smoothness.

THEN WE SEALED all the upstairs floors with several coats of polyurethane. My husband, Glenn, painted the third coat of polyurethane on with a brush, rather than the large lambs-wool applicator, to get a really smooth surface. We wanted to be able to wash the upstairs floors, especially the children's bedrooms.

DOWNSTAIRS, in the living and dining rooms, we preferred using penetrating sealer and wax. We found we got a smoother look and feel. Also,



TWO STORY HOUSE.
DESIGN No. 73.

Although the Giffen's house appears unique, this was not the case when it was built. The drawing above is from a pattern book published by architect George Barber, who ran an extensive mail order business out of Knoxville, Tenn., from about 1888 to 1920. His pattern books were published from time to time and in them a prospective client could find a residential or other design that suited him, make any changes he liked on the squared graph paper that was supplied, and--for a fee--receive complete working drawings and specifications. This design was one of his more popular ones and was published about 1888 and reprinted many times.

HOWEVER, AS A RESULT of the insulation, we did have a moisture problem causing peeling paint on the exterior. This has been just about solved using tiny air vents (Sears Co.) drilled into the underside of the clapboards. We still don't know if this was the "best" solution to our insulation problems--but we are quite satisfied. Scraping and painting took most of the summer but when we were finished we were able to proudly display a sign from our city designating our house an historic landmark.

WE HAD OUR FOUR FIREPLACES CLEANED, and after the replacement of one damper and a few loose bricks, they were all in good working order. We found we could heat the whole house during the spring and fall, using only the fireplaces. And even during the severe Wisconsin winters, the fireplaces provided heat along with the furnace.

DURING THE LONG WINTERS we steamed wallpaper, sometimes using a rented steamer. We found that just soaking the paper with paint rollers dipped in hot water worked fine in some rooms.

we wanted to be able to re-wax when the high-traffic areas showed wear.

THE ONLY FLOOR WE CARPETED was the entry hall and staircase, which had originally been carpeted. We chose an Axminster carpet with a subtle pattern of browns, apricots, green and gold, which enhanced the mellow wood all around it.

OUR NEXT PROJECT WAS TO REFURBISH the exterior of the house. The porch had suffered from wet rot as it is in the most humid area of the yard, surrounded by shrubs and trees, and under some leaks in the porch roof. The leaky roof was repaired and new boards were placed in the porch.

WE WANTED TO KEEP the exterior its original colors--creamy yellow with green trim. With energy costs soaring, one of our priorities had been to insulate. We decided to have rock wool blown into the walls and our attic ceiling--seven and three quarter tons of it! Although the expense was a large chunk of our restoration budget, it was a wise expenditure, as we were able to cut our fuel consumption in half.



Entry halls with elaborate wood staircases and turned spindles are a common feature in Queen Anne style houses.

THE MASTER BEDROOM ceiling was a spider web of cracks, which Glenn painstakingly patched with fiber glass strips and Krack-Kote, manufactured by the Tuff-Kote Company. I spackled the less severe cracks in the walls, and we gave the room several coats of white paint.


KEEPING UP THE VICTORIAN TRADITION of using one material to resemble something more elegant, we repapered the long hallway with a vinyl which looks like raw silk. The heavy paper was a practical way to help hold up our cracking walls and it provided a scrubbable surface for an area frequented by children, friends, and pets.

WE REPLACED SEVERAL modern, unattractive light fixtures with period ones. Several were purchased in antique shops. The upstairs hallway lights we found at a salvage yard--the remnants of an old schoolhouse.

WE HAVE DIVIDED OUR house projects into summer jobs and winter jobs. In the winter we steam wallpaper and strip woodwork with a heat gun. When we can open windows, we used chemical strippers.

SO FAR, WE HAVE RESTORED the living room Swoodwork; beautiful birch hidden under many layers of dark varnish, and the kitchen mouldings and wainscotting, which we're now in the process of uncovering from under many layers of paint.

THIS PAST YEAR the house was placed on the National Register. After we were designated an Historic Landmark we were able to apply for a matching fund grant to repair the crumbling brickwork on the magnificent exterior chimney of the house. This Federal grant came from off shore oil drilling taxes.

LITTLE BY LITTLE, the house becomes more beautiful, warmer, more ours. We love the sense of being linked to the past, and we appreciate the artistry and craftsmanship that went into making our home. It's exciting to be able to add our own talents to restoring it, seeing an aging structure breathe new life, again sheltering a family. In a sense we have a reciprocal agreement--we take care of the house and it shelters and challenges us. 



Chandelier in the parlor is the original gas and electric combination. All wood in both living room and parlor is birch.



Upstairs hall is papered with a vinyl that looks like raw silk. Baseboard, moulding and door frames have been stripped.

Refinishing Clinic

Brushes For Latex Paint

Q. SOMEONE recently told me that I should not use a brush made of pure natural bristle in water-based latex paint. Was my friend right or wrong? And why?

A. YOUR PAL was right. Constant immersion in the water of latex paint causes natural bristles to swell as they absorb water. Eventually, the brush will come apart. Use a synthetic bristle (usually nylon) in latex paints. The best synthetic bristles are sanded and flagged on the ends. This creates a lot of little fibers on the ends of each bristle so that they hold almost as much paint as a natural bristle.

Hairline Cracks In Plaster

Q. WE ARE VERY PLEASED with our old house except for one thing. While the plaster walls seem solid, they are filled with little cracks. Is there anything we can cover these walls with that can be put on by a couple of "not so smart" homeowners?

A. A FABRIC-BACKED WALLCOVERING such as Walltex or Sanitas (to name two of the best-known brands) should solve this problem. They are applied like any other wallcovering. In addition, there's now on the market heavier fabric linings designed especially for use over concrete block and panelling as well as cracked walls. All of these products have the advantage of saving the plaster walls that are already there (assuming they are structurally sound). Putting on these liners is cheaper and much less messy than replacing with plaster board or panelling.

Tacky Varnish

Q. I RECENTLY VARNISHED the handrail and newel on the main staircase of our 1850 Italian Villa. But after three weeks the varnish on the top of the rail and newel are still tacky. What caused this and what can I do about it?

A. FROM YOUR DESCRIPTION, it sounds as if it is only the top surfaces that remain tacky. If so, the trouble is probably accumulated grease and oil--much of it coming from the constant rubbing of hands across the wood surface. This oil can prevent varnish from curing properly.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE DONE before varnishing was to wipe down these top surfaces with mineral spirits and soft rags. The mineral spirits (or paint thinner) will dissolve this grease

and oil so that it can be picked up in the soft rags.

NOW THAT THE DAMAGE IS DONE, the only solution is to remove the tacky varnish with paint & varnish remover and start over again. And this time, be sure to wash the handrail and newel thoroughly!

Additive For Paint?

Q. RECENTLY, I bought some flat latex wall paint for our home. I told the clerk I was going to put it on myself. He then tried to sell me some sort of liquid to mix in the paint to make it dry slower and stick better. Is this just agimmick to "trade up" the customer?

A. IT MAY HAVE BEEN, but the salesperson was probably suggesting this additive for your benefit. Most latex wall paints now dry quickly. Depending on the wall color underneath, the room temperature, and the color of the paint you are applying, it is often difficult for an amateur to apply latex without lap marks and other defects. Chances are the salesperson wanted to be sure you were happy with your paint, and was suggesting a product such as "Floetrol" made by the Flood Co. of Hudson, Ohio.

Stand-In For Lead Paint

Q. WE BOUGHT AN OLD HOUSE and want to re-paint with something as close as possible to the old oil-based lead paints. Can you recommend a paint that will fit this specification?

A. FOR YEARS for this type of application I have used a Dutch Boy paint called #111A Gloss House Paint. It does not dry too quickly, covers old surfaces well, and can be tinted. I suggest that you stay away from an alkyd-type exterior paint. This is a little more like an enamel--which I believe you do not want.

DEVOE PAINT COMPANY supposedly has recently come out with a line of late 19th-century paint colors that are also supposed to replicate, as closely as possible, the tone and sheen of the old lead-based paints. However, I haven't seen any of these paints for myself so I can't vouch for them.

Most of the material in this column was assembled by John F. Zirkle. John is a retired housepainter residing in Harrisonburg, Va.

(cont'd from p. 13)

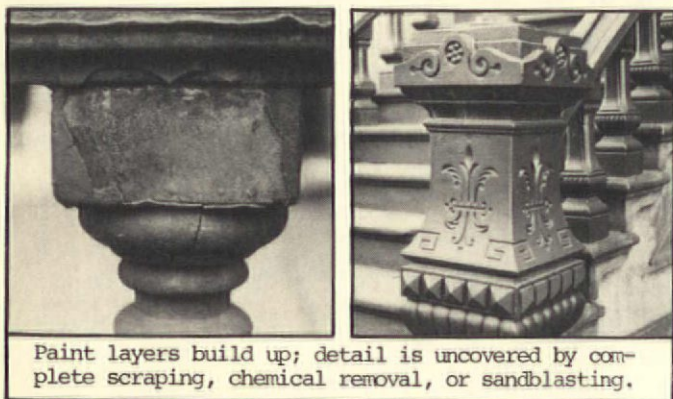
MAINTENANCE PRINCIPLES for cast iron are:

- (A) PREVENT RUST AND CORROSION
 - (1) Paint
 - (2) Plug holes
- (B) MAINTAIN STRUCTURAL SOUNDNESS
 - (1) Keep it together with binding and bolts, welding, etc.
 - (2) Brace loose elements by resetting.
- (C) RECREATE MISSING PIECES
 - (1) Sheet metal
 - (2) Casting replacement parts: Iron, aluminum, fiberglass, or epoxy.
 - (3) Wooden replacements

Scrape · Prime · Paint

EVEN THE SMALLEST CHIP in the paint allows rust to spread underneath. After the cast iron is restored, proper maintenance will include periodic checking for rust and peeling paint. Peeling areas should be wire-brushed, then spot-primed and painted.

IF THE IRON has been neglected, the whole fence or balustrade should get the scrape--prime--paint treatment. You may want to strip all of the old paint layers off to bring out the details of the casting; however, all that's necessary is complete rust removal.



Paint layers build up; detail is uncovered by complete scraping, chemical removal, or sandblasting.

THE SEVERITY of peeling and rusting conditions will clue you in on what tools to use. For mechanical rust and paint removal, some simple tools are tried and true:

- **WIRE-BRUSH:** Start with this. It removes rust and flaking metal, as well as loosened paint.
- **SCRAPERS:** To help you get under the paint and into crevices. But don't chip or bang the paint off cast pieces...you might fracture the iron. (Wrought iron is more resilient.)
- **ROTO-STRIPPER** (or the like): Rotating wires that you chuck into an electric drill, and which flap abrasively against the iron, removing paint very successfully.
- **SANDPAPER:** Useful for smaller jobs or final feathering of high paint edges, corners, etc.
- **FLEXIBLE ABRASIVE FLAP-WHEELS:** These do sandpaper jobs, but a little faster. They come in

different sizes and are also chucked into an electric drill.

NAVAL JELLY is an alternative for badly rusted areas, especially where the corroded spots are less accessible to mechanical removal. However, naval jelly has its drawbacks. It is phosphoric acid in a gel, so it has certain safety limitations; be aware that the run-off during rinsing may kill garden plants. And it must be flushed away with copious amounts of water--the enemy of naked iron. After wetting down iron, it's a good idea to dry it with a hot-air gun.

REALLY EXTENSIVE jobs may warrant sandblasting. A successful job is directly related to the skill of the operator; he must be able to judge pressure and grit of abrasive, and he must be diligent about masking all other surfaces. While sandblasting can't be generally recommended as a do-it-yourself operation, the machines are available for rental--and it's possible that with care and dexterity a homeowner could do a respectable job. Sandblasting has compelling advantages: It means fast and complete paint removal. But one should keep in mind that pressurized abrading pits the iron to some extent, increasing its surface area. More exposed surface is more to worry about...theoretically, at least.

PPRIMING SHOULD FOLLOW immediately. You can't wait until the next day, so start early or only scrape as much iron as you'll have time to prime before nightfall. Prime everything you intend to paint. This is important to assure bonding of the new paint to the old surface.

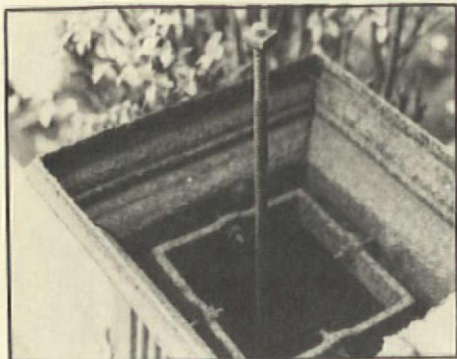
METAL PRIMERS are readily available. Their pigment is usually zinc oxide or iron oxide, which have rust-inhibiting properties. (Zinc chromate, until recently found in popular paint brands, has been named as a known carcinogen.) Red lead has a reputation for being the best iron primer, and it does have unsurpassed qualities; however, it has very definite disadvantages and recent studies show that iron oxide was probably used even more often than lead in the 19th century. Lead paints are illegal nowadays.

DON'T PRIME or paint when the temperature is below 50 F. or when it will drop to below freezing at night, or in wet weather, or in direct sunlight.

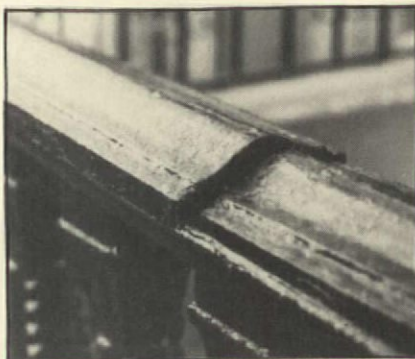
(continued)

There is limited preservation literature about cast iron. Most books and manuals say only "keep it painted" and "for major repairs, find a competent ironworker." Good advice as far as it goes, but what about minor repairs and the dearth of ironworkers?

The information in this article was assembled from many sources, both neighborhood and professional. If you've had additional experience with repair and care of cast (or wrought) iron, please let us hear from you.
--The Editors



(L) A simple bolting system holds cast elements together. (C) Segment of hollow rail has been displaced. Solution is realignment, a bolt through top and bottom of rail, and caulk between segments. (R) Obvious situation where an epoxy such as auto-body putty is suitable.



Latex Vs. 'Oil-Based'

THE RECURRING AMBIVALENCE here is that dependable oil-based paint has a long track record, while latex is being pushed by the paint companies--and latex is somewhat easier to use. Generally speaking, the problem that crops up in using latex paint is not failure of the paint film, but rather improper bonding of the new paint to the old surface. Oil paint, with its longer drying time, more thoroughly wets the surface and creates a better bond. Meticulous preparation and the use of a compatible primer should mitigate the bonding problem.

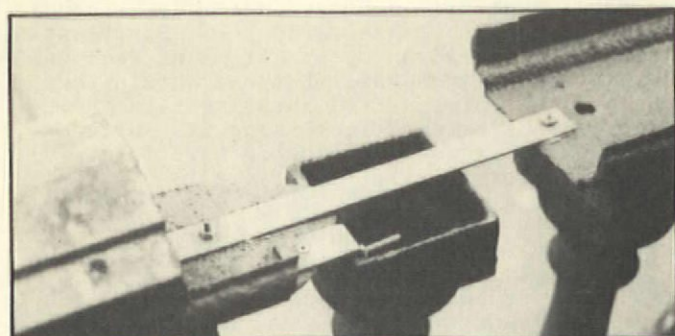
THE PRIMER should be left to cure according to the specifications on the label. Usually this means from three days to over a week before final painting. The finish paint should go on a clean, dust-free surface in two thin (not thinned) coats, with proper drying time in between. Exterior enamel--glossy--offers the most resistance to dirt and abrasion. Some people prefer flat-finish paint for aesthetic reasons; it will probably need touching up and repainting sooner than a glossy surface.

THE MOST POPULAR COLOR for ornamental ironwork has always been black. When cast iron was first installed it was often painted dark brown or dark bottle green. For some styles in some regions, more fanciful colors were used. And in front of brownstones, the massive cast-iron balustrades were often painted with brown sand paint in imitation of carved stone. (See the article about Sand Paint in the Sept. 1979 issue.)

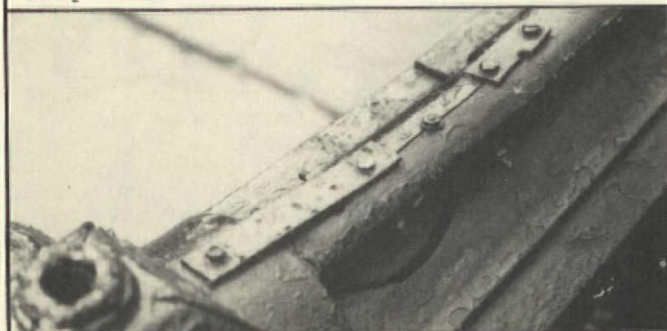
Minor Repairs

CHANCES ARE that old ornamental ironwork is going to need more than paint. Mostly you'll find cracks, holes, and separations between pieces. Even though some of the conditions look quite distressing, we'll call them minor because repairs can be done by an interested homeowner.

AN UNDERSTANDING of the on-site assembly of cast iron elements helps when it comes time to put it all back together. The balustrade consists of hollow cast balusters, each pinned to the masonry slab by a small protrusion inside, and a two-part cast rail. The bottom piece of the rail is bolted to threaded tabs inside the balusters, and then the top rail is bolted to the bottom rail. (See photos.)



Good use of mending plates and bolts--sturdy and inconspicuous.



Poor example of metal binding. It is inelegant and didn't solve the problem.



Example of exfoliated iron--expanded by rust--due to filling with concrete.

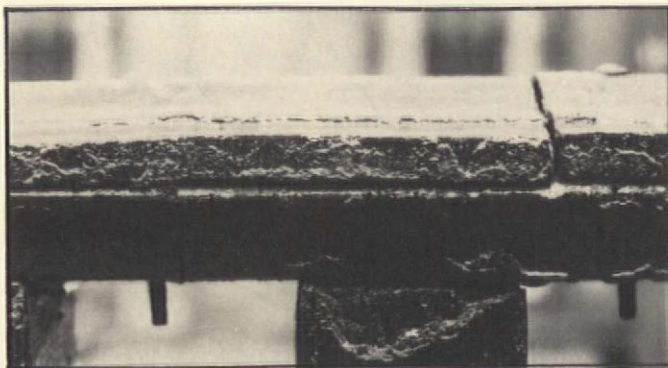


Photo shows two-part cast-iron rail, simply bolted together. Gap between segments should be caulked to keep water out.


THE NEWEL is usually four cast sides with a cap or cap and finial. It is put together hollow with minimal bolting and little interior structure. It is held to the ground by a simple bracing system that consists mainly of a central threaded rod the height of the piece, which is set into the masonry and packed in lead. See the illustration plate on page 22.

YEAR'S OF EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION cause the pieces to separate from one another. These cracks especially must be filled with an elastomeric compound that will move with the iron and still keep water out. High quality exterior caulk is the choice. Recommended is architectural-grade silicone rubber sealant such as Dow 790 or 795. (Not usually marketed in retail hardware stores; try builders' suppliers.) Paint won't stick to silicone for very long, but this caulk comes in black and sandstone colors. A butyl caulk--which IS paintable--is the second choice, though for large joints in extreme climates, flexibility might not be adequate.

IN USING all of these products, read the labels and follow the directions. If the caulk label says to apply to a clean, non-glossy surface in certain weather conditions, take their word for it. And always be sure to allow sufficient time for curing of sealants and primers.

SMALL HOLES can be filled with plumbing epoxy such as Smooth-On, Kwik-Metal "Cold Solder", or Plumber-Seal. Auto-body putty, which is easily found, not hard to use, mouldable and sandable, and which has an expansion/contraction factor, is useful for do-it-yourself filling. (Wear gloves when working with epoxies.)

THE PHOTOGRAPHS illustrate the conditions and their solutions more clearly than words.

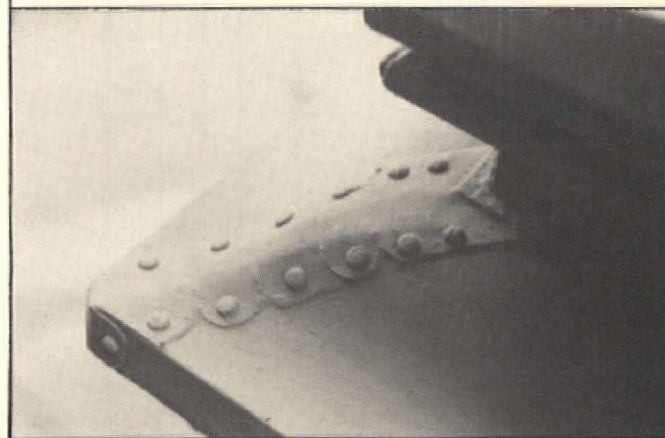
NO ONE KNOWS who started the practice of pouring concrete into wobbly newels and rails--but in some places it's so common people mistakenly believe it's original to the construction. It is unacceptable. Concrete absorbs water, encouraging the iron to rust from the inside out. The pieces will eventually buckle outward, which looks ugly besides admitting water and debris. And moisture that does get into the parts has no chance to evaporate. 



Well-maintained cast iron; all repairs done by owners as soon as problems appeared. Details below.



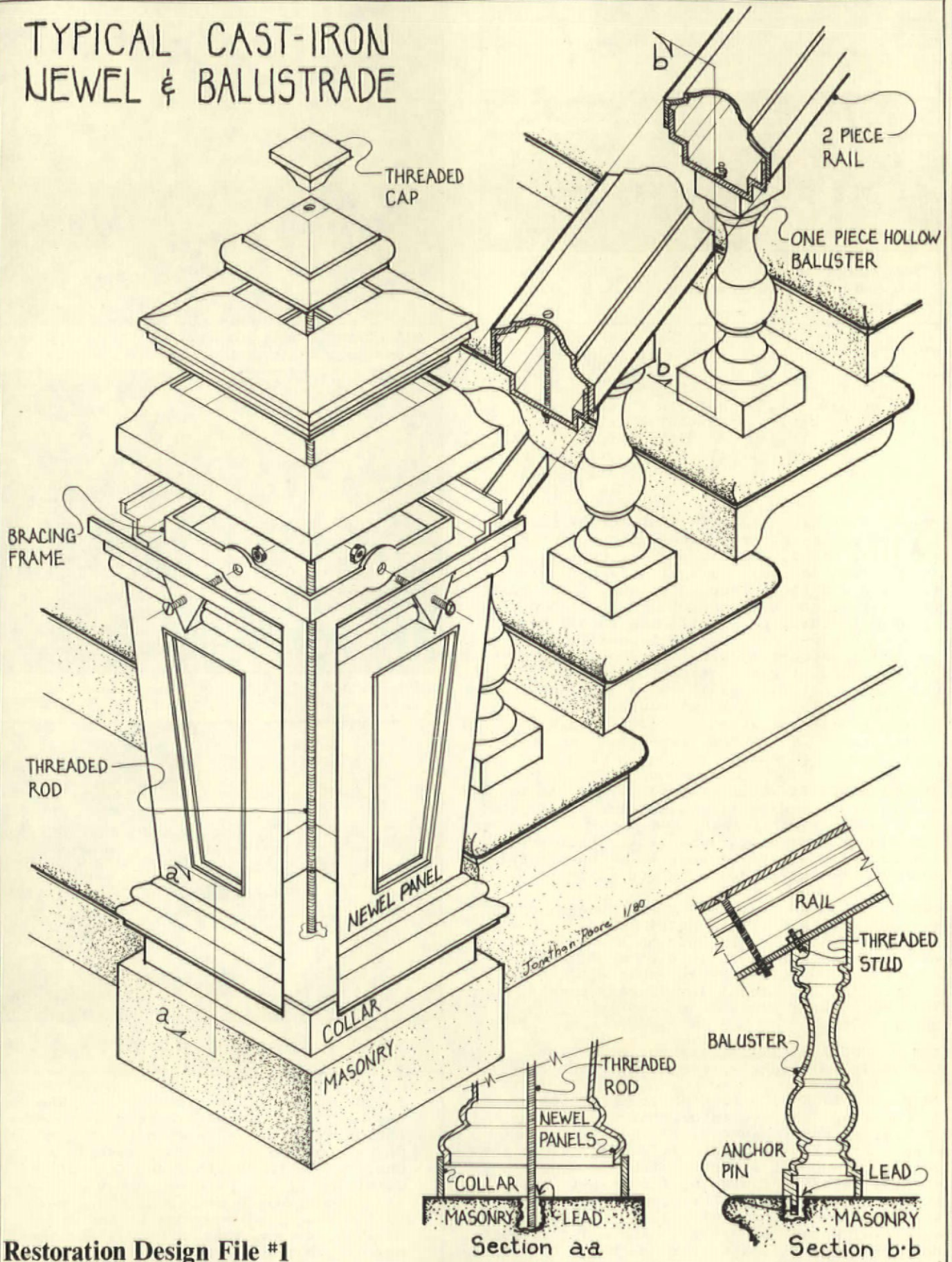
Closeups belie small size of these sheet-metal patches, held by screws and caulk, done 30 years ago.



Coming Next Month: MAJOR REPAIRS & CASTING

BOB OHLERKING is an urban planner who has been involved with historic preservation since his days with the NYC Landmarks Commission. He is presently the Chairman of the History and Landmarks Committee of the Park Slope Civic Council (Brooklyn), a member of the Preservation League of New York State, and is co-writing a maintenance manual for owners of urban rowhouses.

TYPICAL CAST-IRON NEWEL & BALUSTRADE



Restoration Design File #1

Restorer's Notebook

Cleaning Caulk...

CAULK IS OFTEN chosen to seal gaps in high-moisture areas such as the bathroom and kitchen. Unfortunately, caulk is notorious for attracting stains and mould, regardless of the fastidious habits of the housekeeper (me). I had not found a way of really getting it clean until I mistakenly spilled some WISK on the sink. (Wisk is a liquid detergent/spot remover.) It cleaned the caulk immediately and left no trace of stains. Wisk must be sponged off with clear water within a few minutes, as it works by dissolving a thin outer layer of the caulk. Actually--it might prove to be a solvent for old caulk you want to remove.

Ann Bonney
Warehouse Point, Conn.

...And Grout

NEITHER CLOROX NOR VINEGAR removed the stains on the grout lines between our bathroom tiles. However, we found a commercial pool cleaner that both cleaned the grout and ALSO removed all the mineral residue from the tiles and porcelain.

THE PRODUCT we used is called BIO-GUARD POOL SURFACE CLEANER. (From Bio-Lab, Inc., Decatur, GA 30031.) It contains phosphoric acid, muriatic acid, and synthetic detergent. Although we couldn't find it in any hardware stores or home centers, it is readily available at swimming pool stores.

FOR MAXIMUM effectiveness, apply the cleaner without diluting. Scrub vigorously with a toothbrush and a scrub brush. Rinse several times. Be sure to wear gloves as the product is very hard on skin.

IT WON'T HARM chrome; but don't use it on brass or copper. And besides tile, it can be used on vinyl, fiberglass, steel, ceramic, and even painted surfaces.

Margot D. Saavedra
Washington, D.C.

Color-Matched Wood Filler

THERE ARE DOZENS of formulations on the market for filling nail holes and minor blemishes in wood surfaces. But one of the most suitable fillers is easy to prepare from materials on hand. I filled the nail holes in new redwood mouldings with my own filler, as described below.

MIX A STIFF PASTE of ordinary dry-mix taping compound. To this paste add either colors in oil (used for coloring oil-base paint), or some of the bottom sludge from a can of oil-base wiping stain. I used the latter, from a

can labelled mahogany. A bit of experimentation gives you the right color; several shades can be prepared for use on different areas of wood if there is significant color variation. Put the mixture in the nail holes--I find that my index finger is the best tool ever devised for the job. The mixture dries quickly and looks perfectly awful, but here's the good part: The excess wipes off the once-shellacked surface with a slightly damp rag, leaving only the plug in the hole. No sanding is required and the whole process goes very rapidly. If you have matched the colors well, the second coat of shellac (over the filled holes) makes them disappear. I've never had holes filled this way shrink or fall out.

James B. Tyler
San Francisco, Cal.

Lead Weight

ONCE WHEN REPAIRING raised veneer on a table, I looked for a convenient way to hold the reglued areas in tight contact. I simply placed a twenty-five-pound bag of lead shot on each repaired spot. This worked in regluing floor tiles too.

THE SHOT BAGS are most useful when you're gluing irregular surfaces. The weight conforms to the contours of the work. Of course, if you don't have lead shot around the house, sand bags or the like will work as well.

John Krill
No. Lima, Ohio

Weatherstrip's Added Bonus

BY NOW, everybody knows that it's important to weatherstrip and caulk all the cracks and gaps throughout your house. A tight house will lose less heat in winter and keep cooler in the summer. But another advantage of closing these gaps is that you save on cleaning and redecorating: Cracks around doors and windows admit dust, dirt, insects, and moisture, all of which contribute to the discoloration of paint and wallpaper. I've noticed a significant reduction of dirt and discoloration on my interior finishes since my house has been made weather-tight.

Bernis Copeland
Long Beach, Cal.

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.

Products For The Old House

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IF YOUR RESTORATION requires any kind of wood column or pilaster here is a company you should know about.

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TO OBTAIN a free brochure describing their products, write to: A. F. Schwerd Mfg. Co., Dept. OHJ, 3215 McClure Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15212. Telephone: (412) 766-6322.

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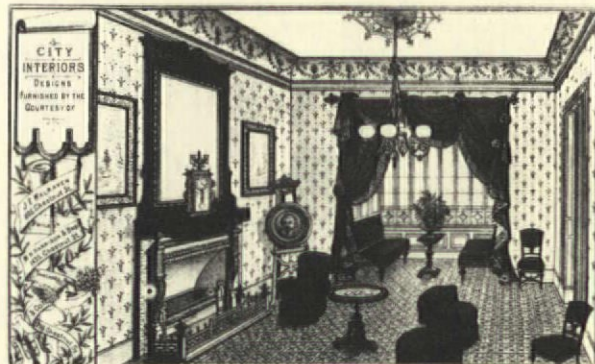
The World Of Victorian America

AN EXCELLENT BOOK has just been published that provides a guide to the decorative arts and culture of the Victorian era. The rather cumbersome title--"The World of Antiques, Art, and Architecture in Victorian America"--does give an idea of how much is covered in one volume.

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WITH 600 BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS and 45 color plates, the book is profusely as well as imaginatively illustrated. The authors, Robert Bishop and Patricia Coblentz, write with affection as well as knowledge of this most fascinating era.

TO ORDER: "The World of Antiques, Art, and Architecture in Victorian America" send \$19.95 for hardcover or \$12.95 for paperback, to: E.P. Dutton, Customer Svc. Dept. OHJ, 2 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.



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