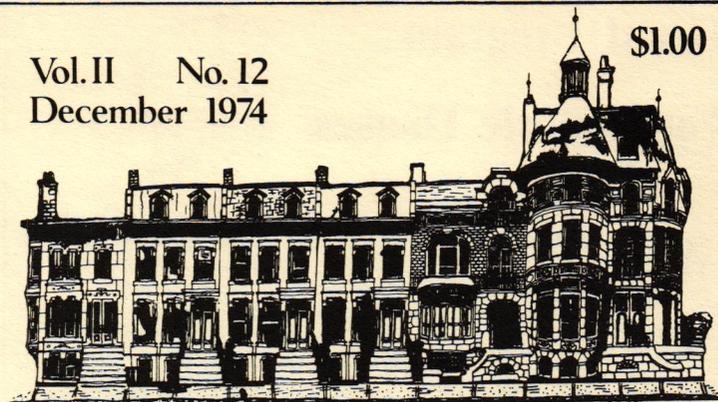


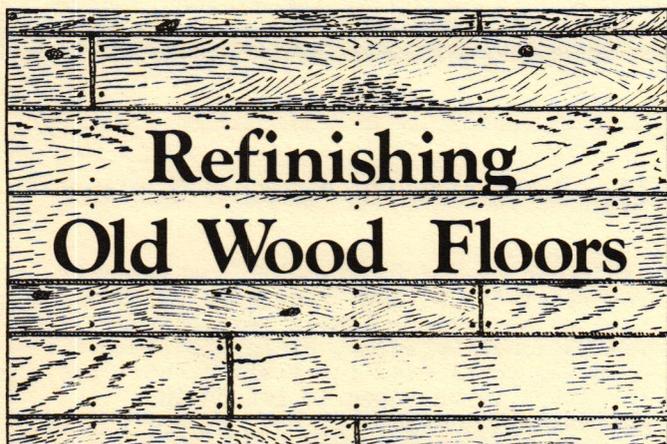
# THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

Vol. II No. 12  
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Renovation And Maintenance Ideas For The Antique House

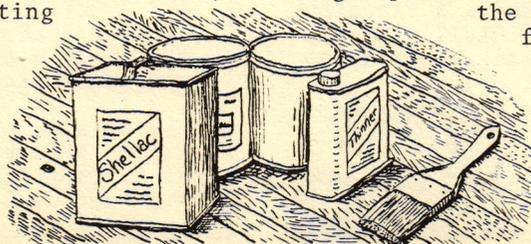


**A** NICELY FINISHED FLOOR is one of the crowning touches that pull a room together. But the old-house owner confronts an amazing number of techniques and finishes that can be used.

IN THIS ARTICLE, we'll deal strictly with clear natural finishing that let the grain of the wood show through. Although naturally finished floors are immensely popular today, this was not always so. In the 1700's and early 1800's painted floors were in favor. If you have a house of this vintage—and the wood in the floors is in bad shape—painting may be the answer. (For more on painted floors, see p. 8.) A painted floor is quite authentic for Early American houses—and it is much easier to prepare a floor for painting than for natural finishing.

REGARDLESS OF THE FINISH to be used, obviously you shouldn't start work on the floors until all plastering has been completed. This usually means that wall and ceiling painting should be completed, too, since repainting often requires patching of the plaster. And nothing damages a new floor quite like feet grinding plaster dust into the finish.

IF YOU ALREADY HAVE a naturally finished floor, the first



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## Coming Next Month

SELECTING THE RIGHT FLOOR FINISH

decision is whether you need to completely re-finish, or whether renewal of the old finish might suffice. Washing the old finish with mineral spirits or turpentine—rubbing gently with fine steel wool, and mopping up with lots of paper towels—will lift old dirt and wax. Sometimes this treatment will bring about an amazing rejuvenation of an old dull finish. If there are worn spots that require touch-up, a product such as Fabulon's Epoxy Gym Finish will provide good adhesion to both the bare spot and the edges of the old finish.

**I**F THE OLD FINISH IS SO SCARRED and chipped that complete refinishing is required, then the old finish has to be removed. There are two ways to do this: Paint removers or sanding. Neither is a particularly pleasant task.

OF THE TWO TECHNIQUES, sanding is the fastest and probably the most satisfactory for the majority of hardwood floors. There is one case, however, where one should hesitate before setting a power sander to the floor. And that is the house with old softwood plank floors that have acquired a pleasing texture of uneven wear from generations of foot traffic. A power sander will remove the variations and produce a flat, even surface that

(Continued on page 5)

# Grant Program For Historic Houses



A PROGRAM OF \$100,000 in matching grants for the preservation of national historic sites has been announced by Bird & Son, Inc. The program offers cash awards up to \$5,000 for exterior restoration and preservation. This includes projects such as landscaping, roofing jobs, siding, exterior painting, and restoring windows, or an improved right of way.

ALL AREAS OF THE COUNTRY will be considered, and small amounts will be encouraged as well as the larger ones approaching the \$5,000 limit. Bird & Son is anxious to support projects all over the country—not just New England.

ANY RESTORATION may receive a grant if it conforms to the following eligibility guidelines:

- ▶ The site must be open to the public on a regular basis.
- ▶ The site must be registered, or under consideration, by the National Register of Historic Places. (See box.)
- ▶ The amount of the grant can only be as large as the amount the restoration can raise for the project. Evidence of matching funds must be submitted.
- ▶ The project should refer only to an exterior improvement that has not yet been started, but one that can be logically completed by January 1976.
- ▶ Only one proposal per organization can be accepted.

GRANTS WILL BE AWARDED on the basis of realistic assessment of the costs involved, responsible plan for execution and overall merit and community interest.

TO BEGIN APPLICATION, write Bird & Son a short letter of intent describing the project and plans for obtaining matching funds. If eligible, they will send an official application form. Direct correspondence to: Bird & Son, Inc., Historic Grant Program, E. Walpole, Mass. 02032. Applications must be received by March 31, 1975. Final judging (by a panel of historians, architects, environmentalists and business people) will take place on June 1, 1975.

BIRD & SON, founded in 1795, manufactures modern vinyl building and roofing materials and have initiated this program as a Bicentennial commemoration. It is an intelligent effort on the part of the business community to protect our cultural heritage. Hopefully, other manufacturers such as paint and wallpaper concerns will be prompted by Bird & Son's example to take part in restoration and preservation projects.



## THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

Published Monthly For People Who Love Old Houses

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## How To Get On The National Register

SINCE ONE OF THE ELIGIBILITY requirements for receiving a grant from Bird & Son is that an historic building be either on The National Register, or in the process of being considered for listing, here are the steps to be taken to get on The National Register.

A SITE MUST FIRST be listed on the State Register if there is one your state. Every state has a State Historic Preservation Officer appointed by the Governor. Usually located in the State Capitol, this officer may or may not have a staff. The most direct route is to call the State Office of Information and ask where to reach the Historic Preservation Officer.

A REPORT containing photographs, historical significance, etc. will be required for the state to survey the historic property. Once it has passed their review, they will send their nomination to Washington for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

OFTEN an individual building has not applied for listing on the National Register but is located in an officially designated Historic Area. In that case, all buildings in the Historic Area have been listed even if they did not apply individually.

IF, FOR SOME REASON, you cannot locate the State Historic Preservation Officer, you can write directly to:

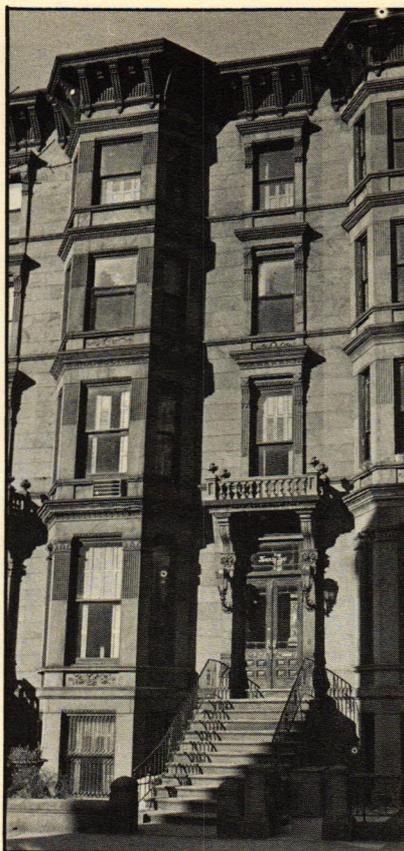
The National Register of Historic Places  
National Parks Service  
U. S. Dept. of Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

# Insuring Townhouse Living

By Claire Wood

**E**VERY NOW AND THEN an old house so affects the consciousness and lifestyle of its owner that its influence extends past the immediate community and out into the mainstream of old-house living. Such a house is the five-storey brownstone owned by John Cassara in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn.

THE HOUSE WAS BUILT IN 1883 for the family of Richard Hyde, a Brooklyn theater owner and manager. The house is a fine example of the Victorian neo-Grec style. The three-sided bay rises a full four storeys above a high basement. The prominent cornice is carried on massive grooved brackets. Classical touches—fluting and echoes of a Grecian entablature—surround windows and door. The house had changed hands only once before its sale to Mr. Cassara in 1963.



Photos by Jim Kalett

THE EARLY 1960's marked the beginning of the revival of Park Slope, generally recognized as one of the finest enclaves of Victorian architecture in the country. Although the house on 8th Avenue had been gently treated and required less work than many brownstones, all around him Mr. Cassara found neighbors up to their necks in massive restoration and renovation projects. In time, it became apparent that almost without exception one of the problems shared by these urban pioneers was a desperate lack of adequate homeowners insurance. Many were having policies arbitrarily cancelled merely because of a house's location.

**S**INCE INSURANCE is Mr. Cassara's business, and because he had an immediate and personal interest in the welfare of brownstones and brownstoners, he set out to try and solve the problem. A brownstone, originally designed as a single family dwelling, but frequently containing as many as eight to ten rental units, obviously has a unique set of insurance requirements. It became clear to Mr. Cassara that through ignorance and oversight the brownstone restorers were being treated very shabbily by insurance companies—even though these new homeowners by and large held more



Parlor drapes are 80 years old, of fully lined tapestry that glows richly in front bay. Virtually indestructible, they are often dry cleaned.



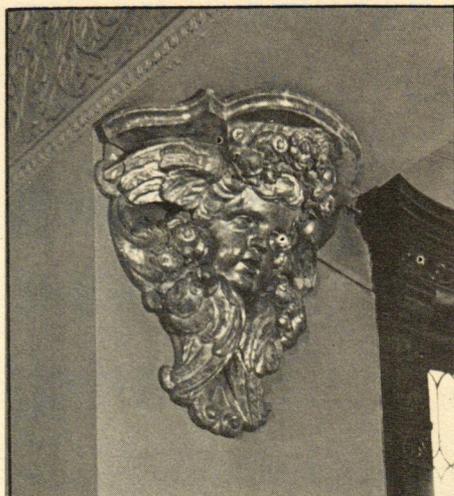
Parlor on main floor has a graceful elegance accented by pieces from Cassara's lifetime collection of fine furniture.



Marble mantel in parlor is 18th-century English. Above is a Massachusetts Hepplewhite mirror with gilded sconce.



Dining room on the parlor floor features several Federal period pieces. Kitchen on the right was converted from the original pantry. Chandelier was made in France for the U.S. Ambassador in 1800; it was only recently electrified. Leaded glass in the back bay comes alive in the afternoon sun, radiating warmth to the entire room.



When originally acquired, cherubs were covered with thick white paint. While stripping, Cassara discovered the original gilt underneath. Miraculously, he was able to strip all the paint without damaging the gilt. Cherubs are now used as architectural ornaments in dining room arch framing the bay.

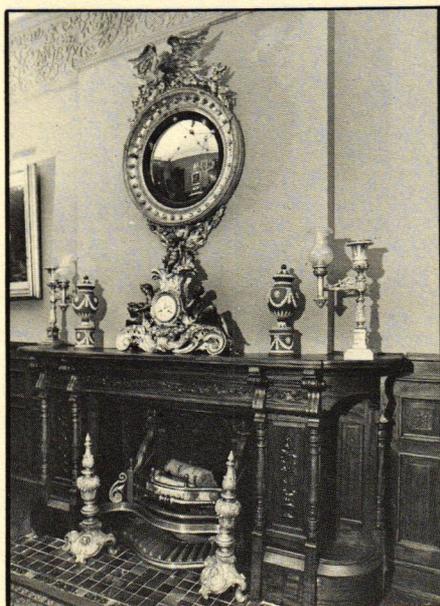
more commitment to their homes than even the most house-proud suburbanite. Comprehensive homeowner policies were being denied to these city pioneers just on the basis of where they lived; and the rates on various types of partial coverage were exorbitant.

**C**ASSARA's insurance firm of Murphy and Jordan, dealing primarily with banks, breweries and publishing, proved highly receptive to the idea of trying to interest its carrier—The Insurance Company of the State of Pennsylvania—in the plight of brownstoners. "We took people from the Company into brownstone neighborhoods in New York City," says Mr. Cassara. "We showed them restorations completed and in progress. We introduced them to the homeowners...people who were doing more than their share to restore and maintain fine houses which in most cases are part of an exciting architectural heritage."

THE INSURANCE COMPANY of the State of Pennsylvania agreed—after this persuasive presentation—that brownstoners should have protection designed to fit their special needs. So they developed a special filing for the New York State Insurance Department aimed specifically at brownstoners. Several months ago, Mr. Cassara formed the Brownstone Agency as a

division of Murphy and Jordan, and at last New York's band of brownstoners has a source of adequate insurance protection from a company that is happy to have their business.

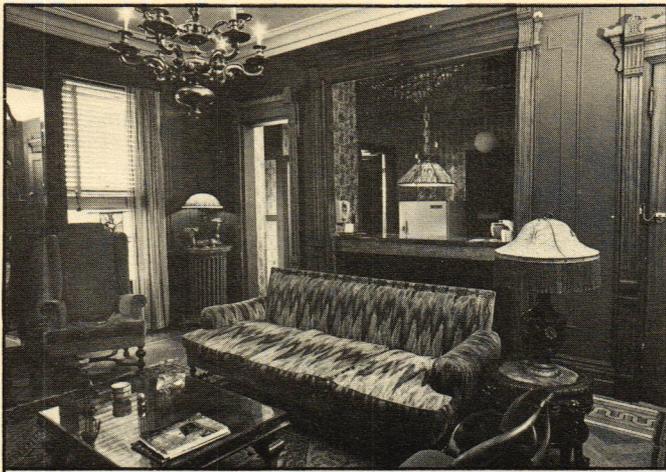
EACH STATE has its own particular insurance filing requirements, and having overcome the problems of New York State, the Brownstone Agency has begun to address itself to the situation in other urban areas—beginning with Philadelphia, Boston and Washington. Urban pioneers there may soon have a more sympathetic source of insurance protection for their city houses.



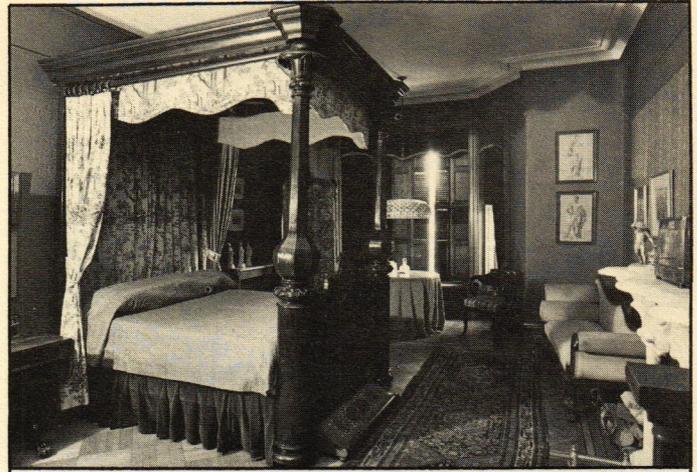
Dining room mantel, original to the house, is topped by a Federal mirror with a particularly majestic eagle.

**T**HE HOUSE THAT INSPIRED this contribution to old-house living is a five-storey dwelling that is currently divided into five living units. Mr. Cassara's apartment includes the breath-taking sweep of the parlor floor, where a pantry was converted into a kitchen, and a deck added to the back of the house to overlook the meticulously landscaped back garden.

ON THE THIRD FLOOR, his sitting room, breakfast kitchen and bedroom can be reached by the original mahogany-panelled Otis elevator, with embossed ceiling and brass cage door. The apartment provides a dramatic setting for Mr. Cassara's extraordinary



Linen closet off sitting room was converted into breakfast kitchen. Woodwork around kitchen arch was rescued from another house; luckily it's a perfect match.



Massive canopied bed with toile lambrequin and bed curtains was made in 1850. Velvet drapes in front bay are also antique. Marble mantel was original to house.

ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE DEVICES for promoting revival of neighborhoods and old houses has traditionally been the house tour. Alas, sometimes people whose houses are "finished"—and thus most valuable in inspiring others to follow their example—are reluctant to open their homes to hundreds of tramping feet. If John Cassara had made this choice, given the house's high incidence per square foot of Oriental rugs and exquisite furnishings, it would be understandable. Instead, he has often

opened his doors to a variety of community projects to share with old and new friends his vision of life in a Victorian townhouse.

More information about this unique insurance program for city renovators can be obtained by writing John Cassara at: The Brownstone Agency, 111 John St., New York, NY 10038. Tel. (212) 962-5620.

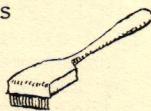
(Refinishing Floors—Cont'd. from page 1)

will have none of the pleasing character that the unevenly worn floor possessed.

**T**HE ALTERNATIVE TO POWER SANDING, alas, is hand scraping. A shellac finish can be taken up with alcohol, steel wool and lots of paper towels. Shellac is the easiest finish to remove. Paint or varnish require a chemical remover—and a lot of elbow grease. Beware of liquid removers that contain wax; traces of the wax may remain in the wood and create problems when the finish is applied. You're best off sticking with the paste-type water-rinseable removers. If you do use a wax-containing remover, you should thoroughly rinse the floor afterwards with mineral spirits and paper towels, or use a water-soluble wax-removing powder such as Wax-Off.

POWER SANDING IS QUITE APPROPRIATE for most hardwood floors such as those found in Victorian houses and other city rowhouses.

A COMMON PROBLEM is to find linoleum glued to a nice old wood floor. After the linoleum is pulled up, there frequently is a mastic and felt residue left on the floor. This can be softened with turpentine or mineral spirits so that it can be taken up with a hand scraper. Or it can be taken off with a power sander; just be prepared to use lots of open-coat coarse paper. The mastic fills the paper very rapidly, dulling its cutting power, and requires frequent changes of paper.



ASSUMING YOU'VE DECIDED TO SAND OFF THE OLD finish, the next decision is whether to do it yourself or hire a professional to do it for you. Sanding a floor is hard, dusty work. The only reason to do it yourself—besides saving money—is that you are more likely to take more time with the medium and fine papers that is required to get a really smooth surface. The fine sanding is a time-consuming step and is the area where a hired workman is likely to skimp. If you decide to do it yourself, some guidelines are set out below to help you achieve top-quality results.

### Tips On Sanding

**F**LOOR SANDING CHURNS UP a lot of very fine wood dust. So the first step in getting ready to sand is to remove all furniture, pictures, shades, drapes, etc. that can act as dust-catchers. This dust can return to haunt you as you are applying the finish to the floor. All loose boards should be fastened and damaged boards replaced (see the May 1974 Journal).

ALL PROTRUDING NAILHEADS should be countersunk. Taking special pains at this step will save you a lot of grief later on. Protruding nails will tear the sandpaper—requiring frequent changes of paper—and can even damage the rubber on the drum of the sander itself. You may also want to remove the shoe molding at the bottom of the baseboards. This

Optional:  
Remove  
Shoe  
Molding

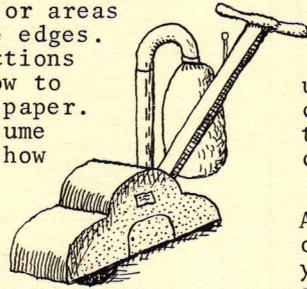


step will allow you to sand more neatly at the edges. But the moldings should only be taken up if they will come off easily under the gentle prying of a putty knife; if they show a tendency to splinter then better leave them in place—or else be prepared to totally replace them with new moldings.

DOORS TO ADJACENT ROOMS and halls should be closed to contain the dust. Opening the windows top and bottom will provide ventilation and also an escape route for some of the dust.

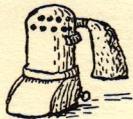
## Setting Up The Sander

**S**ANDERS CAN BE RENTED at many large hardware, paint and tool stores. (Consult your Yellow Pages under "Floor Machines—Renting.") You'll need two sanders: A large drum sander for the major areas and a small disk sander for the edges. Be sure to get thorough instructions from the rental person about how to operate the machine and change paper. Many people in rental shops assume that everyone was born knowing how to operate power sanding equipment. Also be sure to get a good look at the condition of the rubber on the sanding drum. If someone else chewed it up, you don't want to get blamed for it.



Drum Sander

ONE CAUTION: Drum sanders draw a lot of current and may blow the fuses on 15-amp. circuits. If you have 220-v. circuits in your house, you should see if the rental shop has 220-v. machines, since these draw only half as many amps as a comparably-powered 110-v. sander. Also, be sure to rent extension cords sufficient to reach from the selected power source to all work areas; the large amperage drawn by these machines dictates special heavy-duty cords.



Edger

PROFESSIONAL FLOOR SANDERS who only have 15-amp. 110-v. circuits to work with frequently will by-pass the circuit breaker with a jumper in the fuse box. (But this procedure should never be attempted by anyone who is not totally familiar with the hazards involved.) To remove an old finish and prepare the floor for refinishing requires three sanding steps:

- FIRST CUT—Sanding with coarse open-coat paper breaks up and lifts the old finish;
- SECOND CUT—Medium paper removes all of the scratch marks left by the coarse paper;
- THIRD CUT—Fine paper removes scratches left by the medium paper and leaves floor perfectly smooth.

NORMALLY, all cuts are made parallel to the length of the boards—to avoid roughing the grain with cross-cutting. One major exception to this rule is when you have a very thick, gunky finish to take up. In this instance, many old-timers will make one cross-grain pass with the coarse paper to help break up the

finish, then make a pass parallel to the grain with the coarse paper to lift the remainder of the old finish.

**C**OARSE PAPER's function is not only to lift off the old coating, but also to smooth out any discrepancies in the surface that are bothersome. The amount of material taken up is regulated by the speed at which the machine advances across the floor. It will try to pull you along at a brisk clip; by holding back and slowing it down, more material is removed.

SOME POINTERS ON USING THE DRUM SANDER: Never allow the sanding drum to contact the floor while the sander is stationary—the drum will grind a hole for itself faster than you can say "there's a hole in my floor!" Use the clutch lever on the handle to lift the drum every time the sander stops. Begin your cut at one wall and walk the sander to the opposite wall. Then pull the sander back along the same path. The return pass picks up some of the dust thrown out by the first cut. Lift the drum, then re-align the sander to make the next pass, overlapping the first cut by 2-3 in.

AS THE COARSE PAPER becomes loaded with the old finish, it loses cutting efficiency and you should install new paper. The gummier the old finish is, the more frequently you'll have to change paper. You'll also find yourself changing paper often (a dreary task!) if you didn't do a thorough job of countersinking protruding nailheads.

ONCE ALL THE OLD FINISH HAS BEEN LIFTED with the coarse paper, load the medium paper into the sander. Repeat the sanding sequence until all the marks from the coarse paper have been removed. Follow the same sanding sequence with the fine paper, polishing off all the scratches left from the medium paper. Even though the floor seems quite smooth after the medium paper, it still needs a thorough going over with the fine paper to give first-class results. The finish you apply to the floor, rather than hiding sanding imperfections, will magnify them. A thorough fine sanding is the difference between the "quick and dirty" job and a superior one.

**O**NE EXCEPTION to the sanding sequence outlined above is encountered with a parquet floor. Because of the criss-cross way parquet pieces are laid, there is no single direction to the grain. Therefore, "sanding with the grain" has no meaning. Also, parquet strips generally are much thinner than other types of flooring, so you have to be

## More About Sanding

AN EXCELLENT REVIEW OF SANDING techniques and other floor refinishing procedures is contained in a 22-page booklet published by Pierce & Stevens (maker of Fabulon and other finishes). Booklet is available for 10¢ by writing to: Pierce & Stevens Chemical Corp., P.O. Box 1092, Buffalo, New York 14240.

## Different Sanding Papers For Different Jobs

SELECTING THE CORRECT ABRASIVE for a job involves: (1) Type of grit; (2) Size of grit; (3) Backing. Among the grits used are:

- **Flint**—A quartz material resembling white sand, flint is the least expensive—and softest—of the grits. Flint paper is especially useful for hand-sanding heavily painted or pitchy surfaces, throwing it away as it clogs. When clean, wood can then be sanded with garnet paper.
- **Garnet**—Garnet is sharper than flint and does not crumble as easily; best for hand-sanding clean wood. Though more expensive initially than flint paper, garnet is more economical in the long run.
- **Silicon Carbide**—Hardest of all abrasives, silicon carbide grit is used for most floor sanding papers.
- **Aluminum Oxide**—For power sanders of the hand-held variety, aluminum oxide is most satisfactory. More expensive than garnet, aluminum oxide will prove less expensive on the job.

**GRIT SIZE**—To make things nice and confusing, there are two systems for classifying grit size. The old system uses a numerical code; the newer system uses numbers that represent the number of openings per inch in a screen through which the abrasive particles can pass. Here is a rough table of equivalents:

Grade	Grit Size (Old System)	Grit Size (New System)
Very Fine	6/0-10/0	220-400
Fine	2/0- 5/0	100-180
Medium	1 - 0	50-80
Coarse	2½-1½	30-40
Very Coarse	4½-3	12-24

**BACKING**—Abrasives are glued either to a cloth backing (stronger and more flexible) or to paper. Abrasive particles may be glued close together so that no backing shows ("Closed Coat") or spaced widely so that 30-50% of the backing is visible ("Open Coat"). Open coat paper is used for gummy material that tends to clog or "blind" the paper.

careful not to remove too much material. The answer is to remove the old finish by starting with a finer paper—a #2½ closed coat—in order to avoid deep scratches across the grain. This procedure takes longer because you'll have to change papers more frequently—but it will conserve the floor.

**E**DGER IS A DISK-TYPE SANDER and thus tends to make circular scratch marks on the floor. You have to develop a gentle touch when using the edger—especially when using the coarse paper—so that you don't make deep swirl marks that are difficult to remove with the medium paper. Avoid pressing down; let the weight of the machine do the work. One hallmark of a slap-dash sanding job are the circular marks near the baseboard caused by careless use of the edger.

### Fire Danger

The super-fine dust created by floor sanding is highly combustible. When finished sanding, all collector bags on the machines should be emptied into boxes and the boxes placed outside where they can do no damage—even if they should burst into flame. Fires have been started many hours after work stopped by sparks that had been sucked up into the dust bag and which smoldered for hours before breaking out in flame.

BECAUSE THE EDGER MAKES A CIRCULAR CUT, you can't work it into the corners. Here you have to resort to hand scraping. This is a tedious, time-consuming chore. When hiring someone to sand floors for you, checking the work they do in the corners is a clue to how much pains they are taking with the whole job.

SINCE TWO SANDERS ARE USED IN FLOOR refinishing, it is an ideal job for two people. One becomes the specialist with the drum sander and the other with the edger. Two people should be able to sand an average-size room in 4-5 hours of steady work. Two rooms can be sanded in one long day by two people—but be prepared to collapse from total exhaustion after if you are not accustomed to heavy physical labor.

WHEN DOING THE FINE SANDING, either work in your stocking feet or else in crepe-soled shoes so you won't leave marks on the bare wood. After the final pass with the fine paper, vacuum thoroughly—not only the floor but also baseboards, moldings and any other place where wood dust may have accumulated. Otherwise, this dust may come floating down onto your newly applied finish.

**I**F THE FLOOR HAS BEEN STAINED BLACK in patches by leaking water, probably the best time to deal with these is after all the machine sanding is done. You can probably remove the spots by bleaching with oxalic acid. You should be able to get oxalic acid crystals at a large paint store or a drugstore. Make a solution of ½ cup crystals in warm water. Brush the solution on the stain and let it soak into the wood. When the solution has dried, vacuum up the dried crystals and re-sand the surface by hand or with an orbital sander.

Part II of this article next month will review the many different finishes you can apply to a newly sanded floor.

# Painted Floors



NATURALLY FINISHED FLOOR BOARDS were not as highly regarded in the 18th and early 19th centuries as they are today. When hardwood floors were used, as in a parlor or a ballroom, they were waxed. But early American floors were often softwood and left bare. Before the Revolution, the few carpets used in a household were generally on the tables. The early floors were often painted to add color and enrichment to a colonial room.

THERE ARE FLOORS IN OLD HOUSES TODAY that are made of wood that is too old and stained to be finished nicely—that would have to be bleached too much or would splinter excessively or have a flat, uninteresting softwood grain. An easy, interesting, and authentic alternative to a natural finish is a painted floor.

MOST OFTEN THE FLOOR WAS PAINTED in a solid color. Sometimes only a border was painted on a bare floor. As floor cloths, rag and hooked rugs, straw matting and carpets came into use, they were usually placed on painted floors. The most popular colors in use in the latter part of the 18th century were gray, dark green, gray-greens, pumpkin yellow, chocolate brown, and terra cotta red.

THE FIRST KIND OF ORNAMENTATION to the painted floor was freehand work. An itinerant painter, who usually grained the woodwork and perhaps decorated the walls, would often paint patterns that simulated mosaic tiles, or the English "turkey carpet" with geometric designs. A popular freehand pattern found in many old homes is a painted representation of marble, sometimes having a scroll border. A black and white checkered pattern is seen in many colonial rooms. This black and white checkered or diamond pattern, imitating expensive black and white marble floors, is found into the Victorian era.

STAIRS HAVE BEEN FOUND in old houses with a painted, figured strip running down the middle of the stairs with contrasting border edges, designed to give the appearance of a stair runner.

## Stencilled Floors

AFTER THE REVOLUTION, stencilled floors became quite popular and remained fashionable until about 1840. Stencilling was more complicated than freehand designs. Strong paper or cardboard, with a design cut out of it, was placed on the floor and the paint applied to the open space. When these stencil patterns were meant to imitate carpets, the stencil was a square pattern designed to match on all sides. A small star or flower was sometimes used at regular intervals of about 3 or 4 feet. The stencilled floors found in historic homes testify to the variety and colorfulness of the designs:

- An eight-petaled black flower on a deep pumpkin ground



- Black and gray octagons (done with two stencils—the gray inside the black) on a dark green ground
- A border pattern showing a vine in two shades of green with a red-brown fruit.

## Spatter Painting

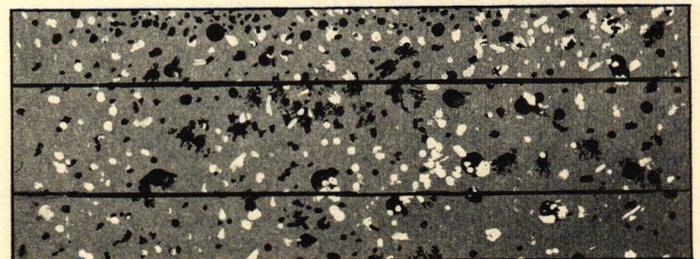
SPATTER PAINTING or "spatterdash" was a widely used 19th-century method of decorating floors. It is still a very practical method of covering a floor as well as an authentic restoration technique. Originally, dark spots were spattered on a gray ground, but later examples show the reverse, with dark floors spattered in two or more light colors, giving a cheerful quality to a room. Some of the more typical early color schemes were:

- Copper brown ground with black, white, yellow and green spatters.
- Black with any variety of colored spatters.
- Blue ground with white, red and yellow.
- "Pepper and salt"—a popular New England combination for halls and stairs. Gray ground with small spatters of black and white.

To spatter paint, the ground color is applied and allowed to dry thoroughly. For the spots, flicks from a whisk broom give the best effect. It is wise to practice on a few pieces of newspaper first, to get the feel of it. Be sure to protect the baseboards and wall to at least two feet up the walls. Each set of spatters will have to dry thoroughly before the next set is applied.

FOR A SOFTER, TEXTURED EFFECT, the colors can be applied to the ground color with a pad of steel wool or a natural sponge instead of spattering them on. A thin coat of paint is applied to any flat surface (a pie plate will do) as if it were a stamp pad. Then dab the steel wool on the paint pad and apply like a rubber stamp to the floor.

IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO USE ENAMELS if a coat of light varnish or polyurethane is applied for protection. However, one of the virtues of the old-fashioned, unprotected painted floor is that worn spots can be simply touched up or painted over without eventually having to remove a coat of dirty varnish.



# Cast Iron Fences

by Elaine Freed

ORNAMENTAL CAST IRON was one of the most important manufactured products of the Victorian era. It enabled the average citizen of the period to obtain, at low cost, a great show of luxury and architectural adornment.

WROUGHT IRON, hand wrought by a blacksmith, had limited decorative ironwork to the homes of those who could afford handcrafted work and to certain uses. But cast iron could be reproduced in any form for which a mold could be prepared. The rapid evolution of fancy, cast iron work made it available to middle-class home builders. Iron work was no longer associated only with prestigious institutions and estates of the wealthy.

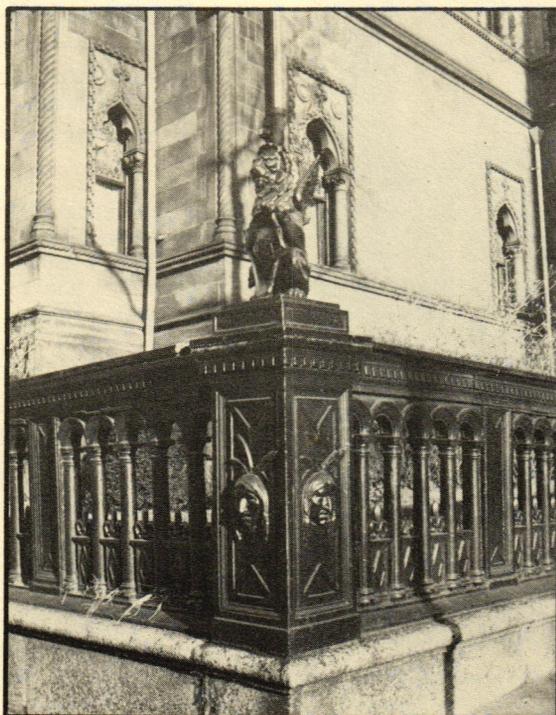
A FEW VOICES PROTESTED the degradation of craftsmanship but, by and large, people welcomed the proliferation of consumer goods and embellished their houses with the new cast iron products. Buildings and lawns across the land were decorated with railings, crestings, verandahs, urns, statues, garden furniture, and weather vanes all made of the newly available ironwork.

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR USES FOR CAST IRON was for fencing. With manufacturers turning out fences with gothic motifs and romantic floral and "rustic" patterns, the owner of a new Victorian mansion no longer had to surround

his lawn with anything so commonplace as a wooden picket fence.

WHILE VICTORIAN FENCING imitated traditional iron work designs, they made important concessions in size. Large estate fences maintained their monumental dimensions but the new foundry-made residential iron fences followed the more modest proportions of old-fashioned wooden

picket fencing. They seldom exceeded four feet in height. Thirty-six inches was a popular standard; some fencing was even lower. Foundries offered both square and round vertical pickets, usually measuring 1/2 or 3/8 in.



NINETEENTH CENTURY iron fencing followed a common structural pattern throughout the country. Three horizontal bars—channel bars, open from the underside—supported vertical pickets, which were fastened in sections to line posts. These supporting posts were anchored in the ground with braces on stone or iron footings. Large corner posts and gate posts gave added strength.

THE TOPS OF THE VERTICAL pickets were usually embellished with a cast iron ornament. Crosses and spearheads enjoyed great popularity. They were simple to

make but echoed the majesty of medieval architecture. Gothic tracery could be translated easily from wood or stone carving into the



molded forms of cast iron, though the limitations of the molding process blunted the effect somewhat.

AS ORIGINALLY DESIGNED, the sharp, pointed picket heads had a practical use—they were dangerous to climb over and therefore discouraged entry. Nineteenth century fencing, being more akin to stair railing in scale, was benign in comparison. For a safety feature, in fact, iron rods often enclosed the picket head under a protective arch. Iron fencing

Iron cresting patterns from catalogs, circa 1880's.

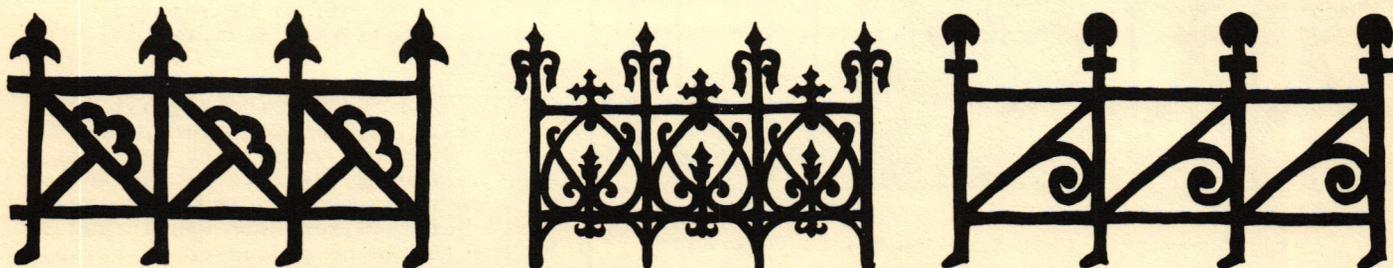
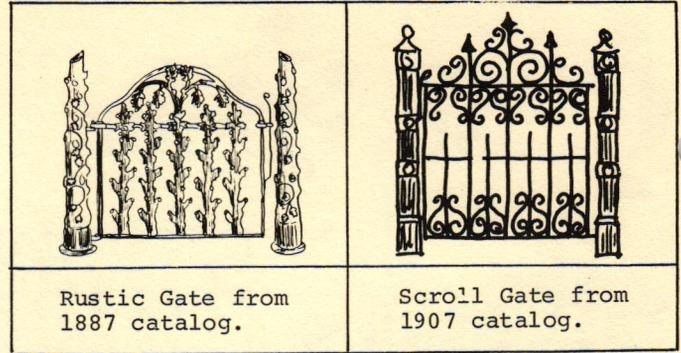




Photo by Catherine Taylor

House in Central City, Colorado, with a simple iron fence made by the W. T. Barbee Co. of Chicago. An interesting feature is the sawn wood trim on verge-board and over window.



**F**OUNDRIES DIFFERENTIATED VERY LITTLE among the various motifs. Customers wanted fancy iron work and did not bother themselves with the nomenclature or the history of design. Fence patterns were not identified in catalogs as being Gothic or Florentine or any particular style.

Iron work catalog merchandise was identified by number and described with terms that bespoke its practical qualities as much as its design: "Showy... handsome... plain, substantial... durable... elegant and strong... very ornamental." One popular and ornate pattern was described simply as "rich and massive in appearance and a very durable fence."

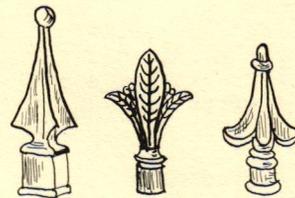


Line Post Tops

was primarily decorative and offered neither privacy nor protection from intrusion.

**A**NOTHER VERY POPULAR motif was the "rustic." Iron morning glories and grape-studded vines twisted around iron representations of branches and trellises to form settees, verandahs and fences. Fence designs often imitated hand-made sapling fences. However curious this may seem to us, it satisfied the Victorian desire for "romantic" settings.

**THE SCROLL**, a popular motif since the Middle Ages for wrought iron work, was another common pattern for cresting and fences. Similar to many English iron gates of the 1700's, the flowing line and circular pattern of the scroll appeared on many cast iron Victorian fences.



Picket Tops

In 1890 a typical 36 in. iron fence sold for around \$1.50 a linear foot, including the supportive line posts. Corner posts commanded from \$2.00 to \$7.00 each. Entry gates were the most expensive single item, selling for as much as \$15.00.

**IRON WORK FOUNDRIES** frequently labeled their fences with the foundry name and address, making identification an easy task. Gates often carried name markers—

cast, separate pieces attached in the center to be read by passersby as a form of advertising. Less obvious were the company name letters cast in one of the structural pieces, typically a post. Gates, unfortunately, were the most likely part of a fence to fall off or be removed, and the identifying foundry name went with it.

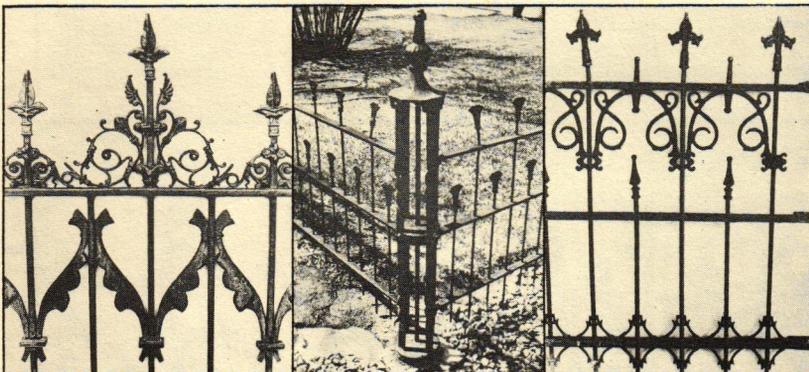


Photo by Catherine Taylor

Photo by Elaine Freed

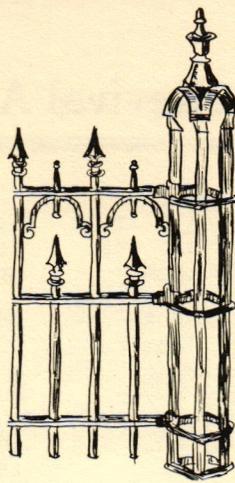
Photo by Catherine Taylor

Three Ornamental Cast Iron Fences in Colorado

**FENCES HAVE ENJOYED** the highest survival rate of all 19th century cast iron. Over the years, the rest has been bulldozed, carted off, junked, left to rust, or recycled. During World War II, iron work was turned in by the ton to be processed as scrap

for the war effort.

**T**HE REASON so many fences remained intact, however, was not so much out of loyalty of ownership as the simple fact that they were hard to get out of the ground. You couldn't just haul the fence off to the junk dealer—you had to dig it up first. Thanks to inertia, we still have a rich heritage of Victorian fencing.



IRON, OF COURSE, IS VERY durable and, protected from rust by paint, will last for centuries.

THAT PORTION THAT DISAPPEARED WAS MORE likely the victim of changes in taste and technology than either the elements or prolonged usage.

Elaine E. Freed of Colorado Springs is a free-lance writer and a teacher. She will be directing a student survey of local iron fencing for the Colorado Centennial-Bicentennial.

## Care & Repair of Ornamental Iron

**O**RNAMENTAL IRONWORK can be one of the most attractive features of an old house—but it can be rusted by the elements. From time and neglect it can become encrusted with scale and rust—or else smothered with layer upon layer of paint that obscures the original detail.

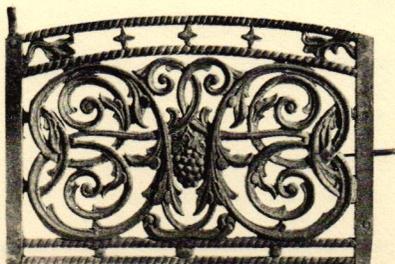
IRON THAT IS BADLY RUSTED should be thoroughly de-scaled before painting. This can be done with putty knife, wire brush and emery paper. Somewhat faster is a wire cup-brush attached to a power drill. In really bad cases you might want to use a commercial rust remover like naval jelly.

FIRST PAINT COAT APPLIED should be a good quality metal primer like Rust-Oleum. If the final coat will be black, use gray primer rather than the red lead, as gray will be easier to cover. Finish coat can be any good quality exterior trim paint; a high-gloss enamel holds up better than flat.

IF THE IRONWORK IS IN A HIGHLY VISIBLE AREA and covered with many layers of paint, you should consider stripping before repainting. It's amazing how much better ironwork looks when the original sharp lines are restored. Any commercial paint remover will work—or you can use a torch to burn the paint off. A torch can be very satisfactory for this operation because, unlike wood, you don't have to worry about setting the iron on fire.

WHEN APPLYING FRESH PAINT over old paint, be sure to chip out and prime any rust spots. Rust can spread under a fresh coat of paint and cause premature failure of the new paint film.

IF YOU HAVE a particularly nice piece of iron and wish to preserve its natural beauty, you can coat the surface with wax every three months or so. But before waxing, remove all traces of rust with emery paper...with a few drops of turpentine if the rust is heavy. Wax thoroughly



with a liquid floor wax, or beeswax dissolved in a little turpentine. After the wax has set for about 15 min., buff lightly with a soft cloth. If exposed to continual wear (such as a handrail) or harsh weather, re-waxing may be needed more frequently than every three months. Though requiring continual maintenance, this process will impart a natural beauty that no paint or plastic coating can match.

**I**RO REPAIR IRONWORK is not too difficult. Any ironworker who is competent with a welder can handle most jobs. Most repairs consist of straightening bent pieces and strengthening those joints attacked by rust. Ends of railings and bars built into masonry can be tipped with bronze or sleeved with copper to avoid further rust damage.

IRONWORK THAT IS HOLLOW due to being cast in several pieces (such as a heavy balustrade) frequently will have pieces broken off. If the broken piece is at hand, it can be welded back in place. If lost, the hole should be plugged with portland cement mortar and painted in order to keep water out. Fencing that has been removed from its original site is often in bad shape...especially the footings. Since proper mounting is essential, if the original braced footings cannot be used, a similar support should be welded to the posts and then sunk in concrete to a depth of 2-3 feet.

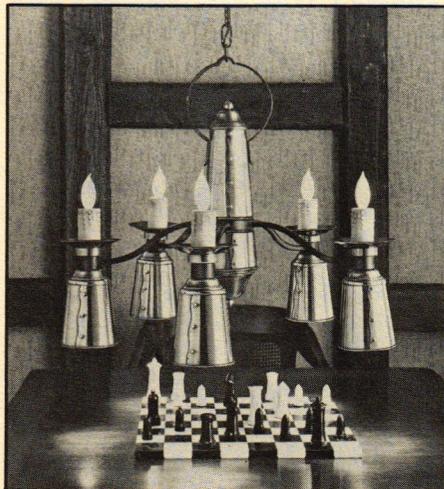
FORTUNATELY, replacing missing iron parts is not an impossible task, as ironworking is still an active craft. Expense will vary widely. Wrought iron is relatively easy and inexpensive to fabricate. Reproducing a cast iron part is more expensive because a foundry has to make a pattern, a mold and then the casting. A number of companies offer off-the-shelf ornamental iron, but most is of the wrought scrollwork variety. Two companies that stock a broad range of ironwork are: Lawler Machine & Foundry, 760 North 44th St., Birmingham, Ala. 35212; and Tennessee Fabricating Co., 2366 Prospect, Memphis, Tennessee 38106.

# Products For The Old House



## Reproduction Lighting

Lighting the old house presents some unique problems; a totally authentic restoration of old lighting systems would result in interiors with definitely limited visibility. A couple of compromises between old and new have just been introduced by Progress Lighting and are available at dealers. Imported oil lamp (above) has blown etched glass shades, with cut designs. Scrolled cast arms are richly finished in antique brass. Swedish black iron candelabra (below) combines antique look with very practical downlighting suitable for game rooms etc. Oil lamp retails for about \$476; the black iron lamp for around \$242.



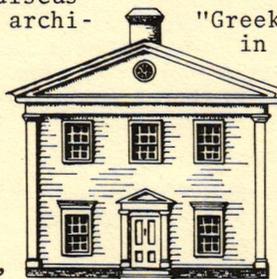
# Greek Revival Architecture

THE GREEK REVIVAL or Classic style of architecture was the major style in America from 1820 to 1860. The author, Talbot Hamlin, of "Greek Revival Architecture in America" presents a strong argument that it was not really a revival but a true expression of the American spirit of the time.

BY 1820 the colonial attitude was dead. Americans turned away from England and her culture and back to the classic Roman and Greek cultures for inspiration in education, the arts, and architecture.

THIS UNIVERSAL flowering of the Greek Revival style became a truly American style and created a remarkable unity, harmony, and quiet loveliness in towns across the country, and a dignified impressiveness to many public buildings.

HAMLIN BEGINS with a discussion of late Colonial architecture, Jeffersonian classicism, and the roots of the Greek Revival forms. The evolution of the style is traced regionally and chronologically, first in the Eastern cities and through the South,



Texas, and its eventual spread to the West, covering a period up to the Civil War.

THE PASSING of the Greek Revival after the Civil War is also fully explored and related to the political and cultural changes the War brought about and the turn to eclecticism which followed.

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT BOOK—scholarly but entertaining—with many photographs, sketches, floor plans and section drawings displaying the work of almost every important architect of the time.

ALTHOUGH it is primarily a study of architecture in America in the major portion of the 19th century, it gives the reader a deeper and richer understanding of the culture, politics, and ideals of the American people in an important and often neglected period of our history.

"Greek Revival Architecture in America" is available in a sturdy paperback edition, with sewn binding, from Dover. Send \$4.50, plus 35¢ postage and handling, to Dover Publications, Inc., 180 Varick Street, N. Y., N. Y. 10014.

## The Old-House Journal Subscription Story:

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The faded "For Sale" sign had a bold red "Sold" nailed diagonally across its front.

The sign was a jolt for those who had taken the Old House for granted. The Old House (it was said as if "Old" were the house's surname) had been on the market for four years. It was common knowledge in town that no one would buy it. No eye saw the stately beauty beneath the peeling paint. Rather, all that was perceived was the history of its previous owners... unhappy years ending in an acrimonious breakup.

The car rolled slowly past the Old House, the driver viewing his new acquisition with a glow of anticipation. His bearing was straight, his face strong, open and honest. The town would take to him.

Later it would not be recalled whether it was the informative publication on his dashboard, or some other reflection on his impeccable taste. But in years to come he would always be referred to as The Old-House Colonel.

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