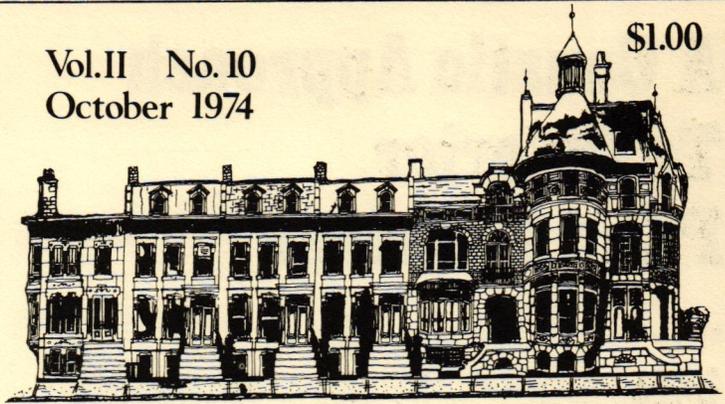


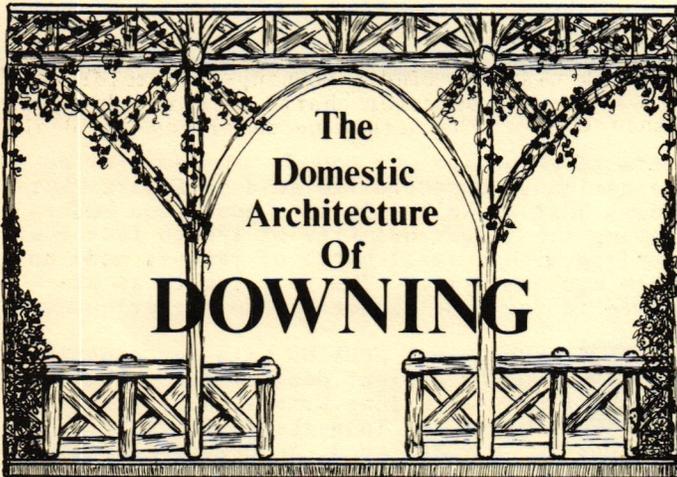
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Renovation And Maintenance Ideas For The Antique House



In This Issue

Detecting and Defeating Rot.....	6
Removing Exterior House Paint.....	2
A Federal Enclave in Charlestown.....	3
Shakes and Shingles.....	12
An Architectural Dictionary.....	12

Coming Next Month

PREVENTING ROT IN THE OLD HOUSE

by Carolyn Flaherty

A CAREFUL LOOK AT ANY HOUSE built between 1850 and 1870, or a city park of the same period, will most likely show to some degree the influence of Andrew Jackson Downing.

IN THE EARLY PART OF THE 19TH CENTURY, architects were rarely employed for building a private residence. The usual practice was for a man to look around, decide what he liked best, and then hire a carpenter-builder to make one like it. In fact, builders, carpenters and bricklayers commonly called themselves architects and the distinction between them and a professional architect was of little importance to the general public.

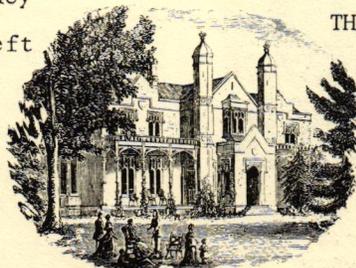
THE GREEK REVIVAL STYLE was in its heyday in the decades of the twenties and thirties. A severe style, it left the cheaper versions looking rather like plain wooden boxes. Downing detested the practice of building private homes to look like smaller versions of public buildings. He referred to the Greek Revival houses as "tasteless temples."

THE GOTHIC REVIVAL had just begun to make its way across the ocean

but had not yet made a dent in the great popularity of the classic architecture.

DOWNING WAS BORN IN NEWBURGH, New York in 1815, where his father owned a nursery. After his father's death, Andrew Jackson ran the nursery with his brother, Charles, ending his formal education at 16. Although he was self-taught in botany, he soon became an expert landscape gardener.

When he married in 1838, he designed a house for himself and his bride to be built in Newburgh, high above the Hudson. The Gothic style (then known as Elizabethan when it applied to houses) fit in with his theory of "expression of purpose" or "truthfulness" in architecture. It offended him that the Greek style was used for church and bank alike. The Gothic also suited his idea of himself as a serious and poetic man. And it suited his informal, asymmetrical, woody landscaping.



Downing's Own House

THE GREAT SUCCESS OF HIS DESIGN and the admiration it received led him to be interested in the design of houses as well as landscaping. In 1841, at 26, he published "A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America." It was a popular and influential book and he followed in 1842 with "Cottage Residences," which incorporated designs for

(Continued on page 9)

A Caustic Approach To Exterior Paint Removal

by Laurence J. Reilly

A KEY ELEMENT IN RESTORING any masonry structure is the removal of paint from originally unpainted surfaces. Paint was usually applied later to hide dirt (especially in urban areas) and deteriorated mortared joints. Proper architectural painting can make a building attractive but presents two major drawbacks. First, it is not original (in most cases), and secondly, it leads to endless repainting as the surface again deteriorates and become dirty.

THERE ARE THREE OPTIONS OPEN to the owner who wishes to remove exterior paint: (1) sand-blasting; (2) hand-scraping; (3) chemical solvents. Of the three, only the third presents a treatment that will leave the original surface intact, and is relatively easy. This article will deal with this third method, limited to masonry buildings covered with an oil base paint.

SINCE OIL BASE PAINT is acidic in nature, it will be chemically broken down by an oxidizer, or caustic base. The base used in this instance is caustic soda (lye), purchased at a chemical supply house in 100 pound kegs, flake



This pre-Civil War brick townhouse in Trenton's Mill Hill Historic District is an example of the excellent exterior restorations of brick and frame houses being done in this area.

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form at about 20¢ per pound. For smaller applications, household lye sold in supermarkets works just as well. It is a good idea before buying the larger quantity of lye to test the surface with a small batch of remover made up with household lye. The test sample is prepared in the same manner as the larger quantity.

REMEMBER THAT WORKING with any caustic requires a great deal of care. Rubber gloves with long wrists, hat, plastic face shield, long-sleeve shirt, etc., are musts. A rubberized, hooded slicker is ideal. If the solution gets on the skin, it should be washed immediately with plenty of water. It can also be neutralized with vinegar.

THE IDEA BEHIND THIS ENTIRE PROCEDURE is to stick the caustic to the painted surfaces, because a plain solution of caustic and water will not adhere to a vertical wall. A thickener is needed. This can be a number of products including Cab-O-Sil (fumed silica), fluffed calcium stearate or plain cornstarch. I used cornstarch and found it quite satisfactory—as well as inexpensive.

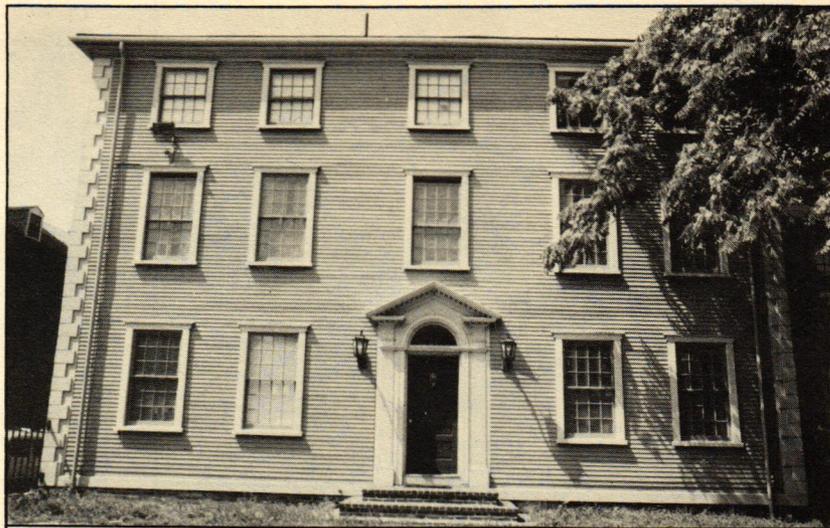
TO BEGIN, two non-metallic containers are needed. I prefer 5-gallon, plastic, joint-compound buckets. In one, put a quantity of the caustic and slowly add water, stirring gently until the caustic is dissolved. In the other bucket, put cold water and add the thickener. When using cornstarch, add until the water turns a milky white in color and stir until all lumps are dissolved. Then add the thickened solution to the caustic which should immediately become thick and syrupy. The strength of the remover varies directly with the amount of caustic used. I usually make about a gallon of each solution using perhaps a pound of caustic soda. The coverage will depend upon the painted surface to be stripped. Since there are so many variables, much individual experimentation is required.

A NYLON-BRISTLED PAINT BRUSH will not be affected by the caustic. Whenever possible,

(Continued on page 5)

A Restored Federal Enclave In Charlestown

By Humphrey O'Sullivan



To restore the original Federal-style exterior, owner James Adams had to strip off a one-storey commercial appendage and replace most of the woodwork.

CHARLESTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS, is not unique. It is simply another residential neighborhood at the core of an American urban sprawl (Boston in this case) which decided, albeit tumultuously, to mend its ways. In the 1960s it raucously reviewed the substance of its history, the frailty of its present condition, and the alternatives for its future. Charlestown chose preservation—of the neighborhood and its unique residential qualities—and it all started along Main Street.

THOMPSON TRIANGLE sits in the middle of Charlestown, a 10-minute ride from downtown Boston. Its buildings include storefront commercial space, rental units, a tavern and restaurant—all restored to their appearance of the early 1800's. And at the heart of the Thompson Triangle enclave is the home of James Rivers Adams—the man primarily responsible for its restoration.

ADAMS LIVES in what is now called the Benjamin Thompson house. The house dates from 1780-1790—a fact established from a scrap of wallpaper. A little research revealed that the paper had been manufactured by an English concern that was only in business at that time.

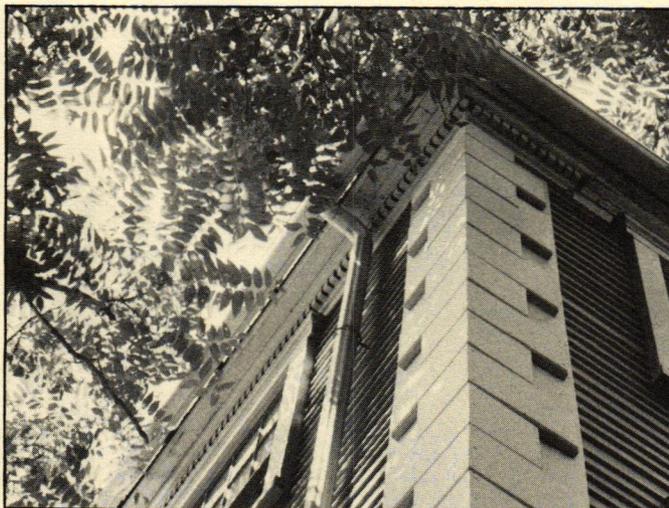
JIM ADAMS' scale of operation is considerably bigger than the average old-house restorer. A contractor by profession, in the mid-1960's he recognized the importance of reviving inner city neighborhoods. He purchased property in

Charlestown, and then obtained from the Boston Redevelopment Authority the largest single amount then granted for a single restoration project (\$305,000). Adams' approach to restoration is very businesslike. "Hire an architect and make a design of the entire building or you'll end up re-doing over and over again." While he grants that there may be small projects that the devoted restorer can accomplish himself, he will often spend fruitless hours on a task that a pro can do cheaper and better.

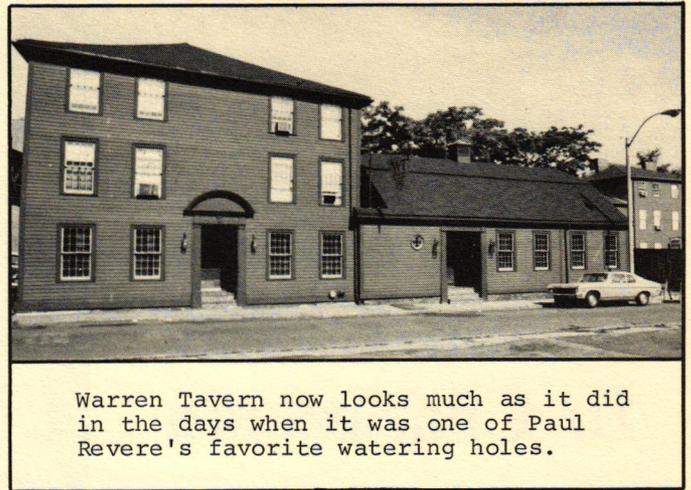
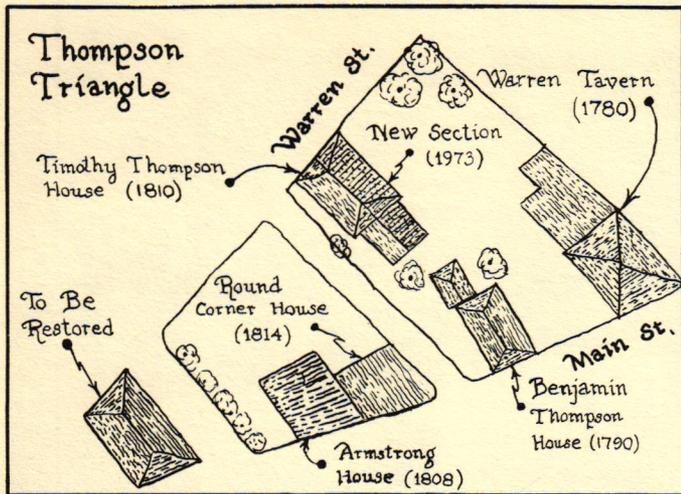
DURING RESTORATION OF The Benjamin Thompson House, Adams discovered that its internal layout had been switched around a couple of times. What was originally the back of the house was made into the front...when a one-storey commercial addition was added. At one point it was the living quarters, workshop and salesroom for a milliner, Sarah Colby, whose son Gardner would later leave his name on Colby College in Waterville, Maine.

ADAMS' BASIC PLAN was to restore the outside of the building as faithfully as possible to the original and maintain a practical integrity on the inside. As it turned out, only the dentils on the cornice were salvagable from the original woodwork.

ALTHOUGH THE NEW clapboards were considerably longer than the original, Adams was careful to reproduce the original spacing between boards. An expensive home such as the Benjamin Thompson



Wooden corner quoins had to be entirely re-created. The dentils in the cornice are the only bits of the original exterior woodwork that remain.



Warren Tavern now looks much as it did in the days when it was one of Paul Revere's favorite watering holes.

house would have less of the clapboards exposed ("distance to the weather") than would a less expensive structure. The Benjamin Thompson House has 3½ in. exposure, for example, while clapboards on the nearby Warren Tavern have 4 in. to the weather.

ADAMS REMOVED THE ONE-STORY ADDITION and gutted the inside. With the able detective work of David Arms, a Boston architect and student of the era, they reproduced plans of the house as it had originally stood. They found the original window casings and reproduced the frames from discards. Cuts from the original first floor staircase were still in the walls, and the style of the balustrade was duplicated from a section still standing on the third floor. While the house was structurally sound (a reinforced post-type construction), additional stability was provided by burying lally columns in the walls.

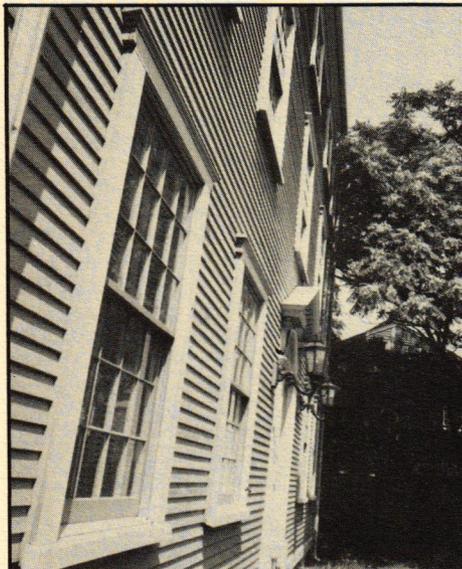
IN ONE ROOM WHERE A WALL WAS TORN DOWN, a kitchen replete with pots, pans and a fireplace was found. A newspaper with an editorial

by Samuel Adams was on the floor. Some of the doors dated to 1740, but from the remainder of the structure it was obvious they had been hand-me-downs from some other house. Even in 1780 everything didn't have to be brand new.

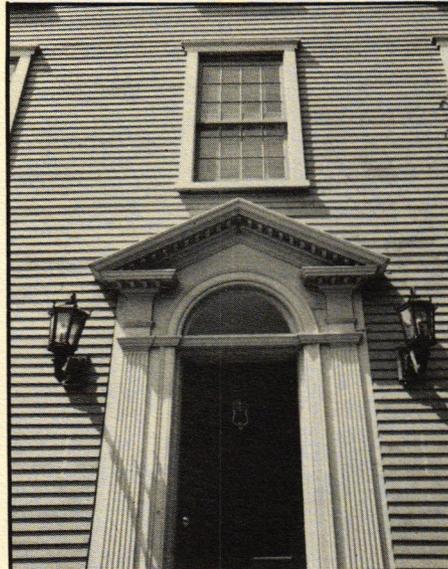
THE SHOWPIECE OF ADAMS' PROJECTS is the Warren Tavern, a hangout of Paul Revere's, which has been restored as a local tavern and restaurant. The Deacon Larkin House down Main Street a piece—close enough so that Revere could borrow his steed from Larkin for the big ride—has also been restored by Adams.

THE EXCITING ASPECT of the Thompson Triangle restoration is that it shows that an enlightened urban renewal agency can be persuaded to preserve—not bulldoze—and that restoration can also be good business!

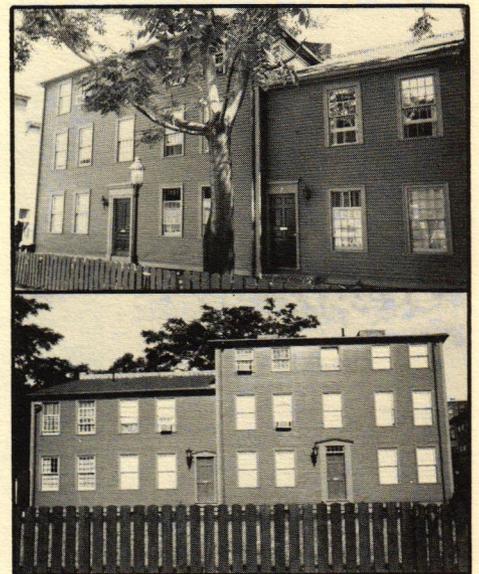
Humphrey O'Sullivan of New York and Boston is a free-lance writer specializing in travel, gracious living and health care.



Adams set window frames on his house 2 in. out from siding to achieve added visual impact.



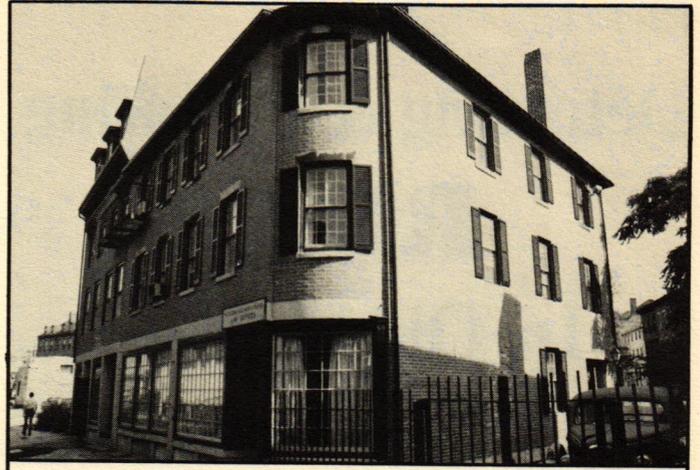
Federal style doorway was re-created from clues that survived the numerous remodelings.



Top: Original sections of the Timothy Thompson House. Below: Section built in 1973 in Federal style.



Low estate that had befallen the Thompson Triangle buildings is shown by this photo of the Round Corner House in 1968.



Now restored, the Round Corner House and adjacent Armstrong House provide pleasant apartments and offices (including Adams').

(Paint Removal—Cont'd from page 2)

I use stiff, discarded brushes, because the remover will clean them like new, thus yielding a highly desirable bonus!

USUALLY, immediately upon application, the paint will start to break down. When there are many layers, only the top-most layers will come off at first. But remember, as in all types of paint removing, patience is the watchword. The longer the remover is on, the more paint it will remove.

ONCE THE SURFACE IS COATED, it should be kept moist. Moisten by gently sprinkling with just enough water to keep the remover intact without causing it to run. After about an hour, test the surface with a hard jet stream from a garden hose.

IF THE PAINT WASHES OFF down to the original surface, it is ready. If not, wait longer before testing again. In situations where there are many coats of paint, it is possible that the remover will not cut all the way through. In this case, the remover must be washed off and the entire process repeated. I once let a coat of remover remain for a week, and the paint was not completely removed.

HERE, HOWEVER, IS WHERE THE EXPERIMENTATION comes in, varying the strength of the solution. A handy tool is a pump which will increase the water pressure used in connection with a wand at the end of the hose, a knife-like jet of water can be produced that will lift the softened paint much more readily than a garden hose. These pumps and hose attachments are used in building-cleaning and probably can be rented.

QUONCE THE PAINT IS REMOVED, the surface should be washed down with acid to neutralize any remaining caustic. Hydrochloric will remove dirt. Extreme care must be exercised whenever working with any of these acids as they will harm human tissue, plants, trees, parked cars, etc., as will the paint remover. These acids must also be thoroughly rinsed off with water.

WHEN WORKING ON THE EXTERIOR of a building, extreme care must be taken to properly protect adjoining properties. Check first with abutting owners and mask off any surfaces that might be contacted by any of the chemicals or the water used in their removal. Sheet-plastic works well as a protective covering, and is readily available.

THERE IS ALSO A POSSIBILITY that a permit may be required from the local building inspector, especially if the work is to be done on the front of a house.

THE REMOVED PAINT USUALLY GATHERS at the base of the building and after the water runs off, it can be shoveled into a waste container. Since the paint does not dissolve in water, I do not think there is any environmental damage from the water that runs off into storm drains.

ONCE A BRICK BUILDING HAS BEEN CLEANED, there is usually a tendency for the bricks to effloresce. This can be removed with muriatic acid and will sometimes disappear when a sealer is applied. The sealing should be done a week or two after the cleaning when the bricks are thoroughly dry. In older buildings, the water jets may rake loose mortar from the joints and make pointing necessary. Pointing is probably advisable in any case and a clean surface improves the adhesion of the pointing mortar.

MY OWN HOME was cleaned and treated in the way I have described with highly satisfactory results. I know of no commercially available process or material that removes paint from exterior masonry economically. With the current trend in architectural preservation and restoration, perhaps a better method will be available soon. Until then, the caustic and water approach will have to do.

Laurence J. Reilly, an ardent restorationist, owns a home, with his wife, Rogette, in the Mill Hill Historic District in Trenton, New Jersey. It was the subject of the Old-House Living feature in the March, 1974 issue of The Old-House Journal.

Part I

Detecting & Defeating ROT In Old Houses

IN THE 19TH CENTURY, the Victorians developed a fondness for romantic ruins. "Pleasing decay" they called it. The decay is not so pleasing, however, when it is your house that is becoming the ruin.

FUNGI THAT CAUSE DECAY in wood are nature's scavengers. Their job in the life cycle is to break down dead wood and return it to the earth. Just because some of this dead wood may be part of your house is of no concern to these rot-causing creatures.

THUS IN PREVENTING ROT in wooden house timbers you are battling one of the basic forces of nature. The spores of the decay fungi are being continually produced by the billion and carried aloft on the wind. The air inside and outside your house, therefore, constantly carries the seeds of decay. The homeowner's only hope is to prevent the timbers from becoming an inviting home for these eager eaters.

WOOD CAN BE A LONG-LASTING building material. We have wooden structures in the U.S. that date from the 1700's—and there are timber structures in Europe that are many centuries older. There is, however, no such thing as total victory in the battle against rot—only temporary successes. Recognize, for example, that all wood that is continually exposed to the weather is going to have to be replaced sooner or later.

BUT AS LONG AS THE OLD-HOUSE OWNER is vigilant and conducts periodic inspections for decay-breeding conditions, the forces of decay can be kept at bay. All interior timberwork can be made to last indefinitely if the proper preventive maintenance procedures are followed.

Know The Enemy

ALMOST ALL HOUSE ROT is caused by fungi—plant-like organisms that grow without chlorophyll, true roots, stems or leaves. There are six categories of decay you might encounter around your house, ranging from mildly annoying to downright alarming.

● **BLUESTAIN**—A dark color caused by a fungus invading sapwood. The color can penetrate

deep into the wood. The stain by itself does not seriously weaken the timber. But the presence of bluestain is an indicator of moisture conditions that could generate more dangerous forms of rot. Bluestain is often found around sources of moisture such as window sash, water pipes and bathroom fixtures. Stained wood is more vulnerable to water penetration—and thus prone to further decay. Color of this type of sapwood stain can range from brown through blue, steel gray and black.

● **MOLD**—Also called mildew. Mold fungi form a powdery, loose mass on the surface of wood. Color of mold on softwood can range from orange and pink through green and black. Mold on hardwood usually shows up as dark spots. Although mold won't seriously undermine the strength of wood, like sapwood stain it can make the wood more susceptible to attack by more aggressive fungi.

● **BROWN ROT**—Caused by fungi that consume cellulose, brown rot imparts to infected wood a brownish color, plus a tendency to crack across the grain, then to shrink and collapse. The wood becomes very water absorbent and loses strength rapidly.

● **WHITE ROT**—Caused by fungi that consume both lignin and cellulose, white rot causes wood to lose color and appear whitish, leaving the affected member in a fibrous and stringy condition. The wood doesn't crack across the grain as with brown rot, and doesn't shrink or collapse until the rot is very advanced.

● **SOFT ROT**—Not as serious as other rots, soft rot is normally confined to the surface of wood. Exterior surfaces afflicted by soft rot tend to be severely cracked and fissured, both with and across the grain. But when the surface is scraped with a knife, you soon strike sound wood. Soft rot tends to occur on exterior surfaces that are frequently wet, such as shingles, window sash and shutters.

● **WATER-CONDUCTING ROT**—This most insidious type of rot fortunately is not too common in the U.S. Unlike other forms of rot that require water to be supplied externally, this fungus can carry its own water over considerable distances through its web-like structure. These tentacles deposit water in the sound wood, raising the moisture content and making it suitable ground for the fungus to grow and spread further. Because this fungus can carry its own water, it is sometimes called "dry rot," which is somewhat misleading since it does have to get water from somewhere in order to carry out its cycle of decay-and-spread.

One variety of water-conducting fungus—*merulius lacrymans*—is common in England and Europe and is known familiarly as "house rot." Another variety—*poria incrassata*—is found in the southern U.S. This type of decay can spread undetected inside partitions, revealing itself only after serious structural damage has been inflicted.

Conditions That Breed Rot

ROT-CAUSING FUNGI need four basic elements in order to thrive: Oxygen, moisture, food and moderate temperature. By eliminating any

one of these conditions you can control or eliminate rot.

Keeping Water Out Of Houses

IN A HOUSE, the two most practical variables to control are the food supply and moisture. Excluding oxygen isn't possible—although some old-timers used this principle to store logs free from rot. They would simply submerge the logs in a fresh-water pond.

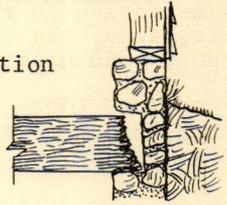
ROT FUNGI CAN ONLY START FEEDING in earnest on wood that contains moisture above the fiber saturation point (approximately 30% water, compared on an oven-dry basis). By comparison, the wood in a normal dry building contains about 12-14% moisture. Trouble only starts when this level of water is raised by moisture from an external source—such as from precipitation or from the soil. By locking out this excess moisture, you deny the fungi one of the four requirements for life.

YOU CAN ALSO MAKE THE FOOD SUPPLY—the wooden timbers—less appetizing by using preservatives that act as poisons. More about this later.

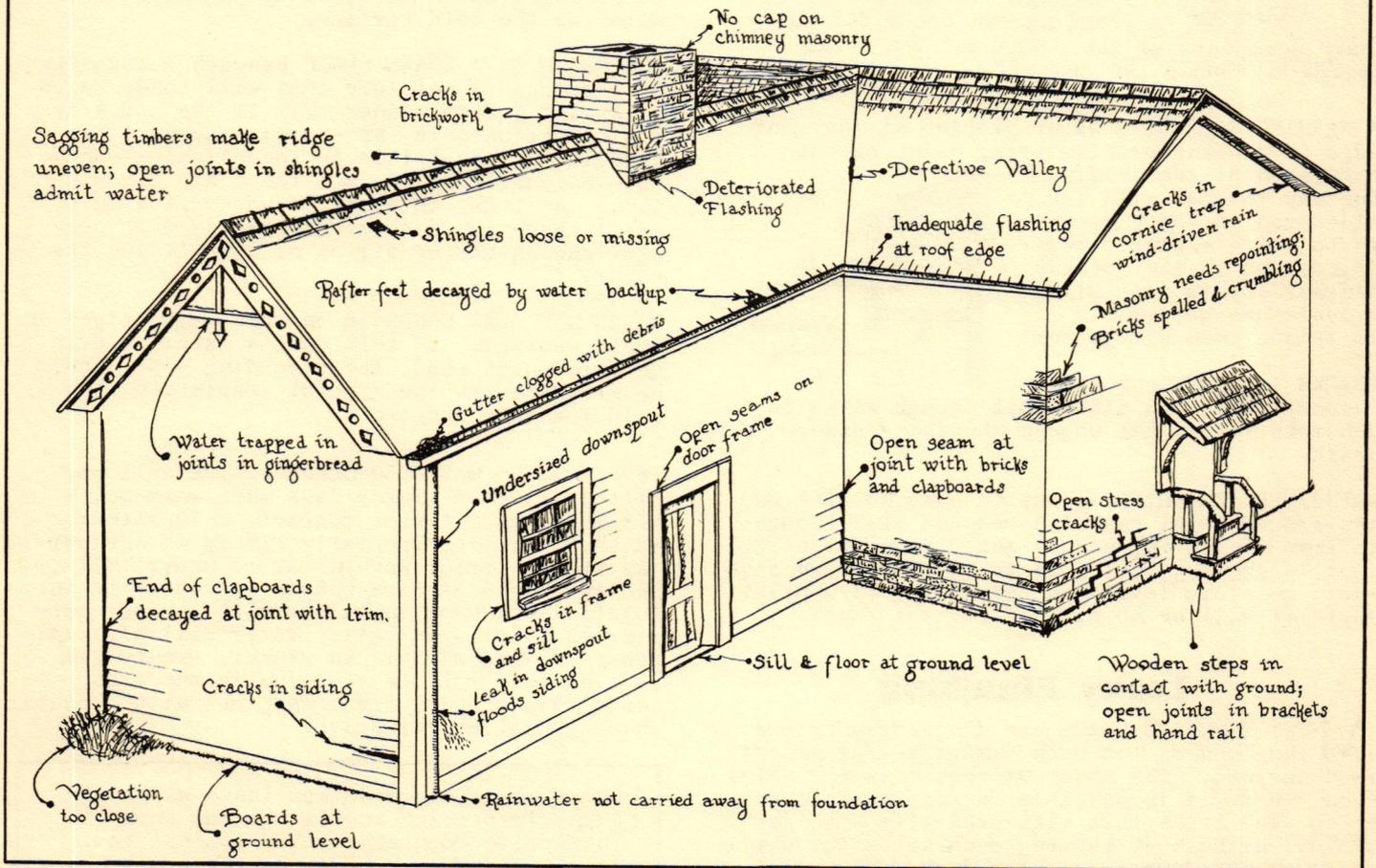
MOISTURE THAT CAUSES ROT usually comes from one or more of 4 sources: (1) Ground Moisture; (2) Rain & Snow; (3) Plumbing Leaks; (4) Condensation.

GROUND WATER will migrate from soil to the house through several avenues:

- Direct contact of wood with the soil. Sometimes the level of the earth around a house gradually rises over the years until the exterior woodwork is touching the soil. Porches and steps in particular are likely to have wood in contact with the earth. There should be at least 8 in. clearance between sills and the ground level.
- Condensation of water vapor in crawl spaces under the house.
- Strands of water-conducting rot will transmit ground water far into a wooden structure as described earlier.
- Capillary action in the foundation walls can carry water up several inches to wet the sills. Also, some old structures may have floor joists set into the



Where Water Will Attack An Old House



foundation below the current ground level. The water that leaks into the masonry will cause rot in the ends of the beams.

Rain And Snow

WATER FROM RAIN AND SNOW can find amazingly devious routes into a house. Water can be drawn into very thin cracks in wood joints—and will remain in such confined spaces for long periods.

ANY EXTERIOR SURFACE that has an open joint or seam that is unprotected by caulk or a paint film is subject to water penetration. The end grain of siding—especially where it meets vertical trim—is vulnerable. So are porch railings, door and window frames, shutters and decorative trim such as Victorian gingerbread. Lateral cracks in clapboards present an open invitation to rainwater. Until such boards are replaced, the cracks should be plugged with putty and painted.

EDGES OF ROOFS are especially vulnerable. Gutters can become clogged with leaves, or, in the winter, by ice. Gutter blockage can cause water to back up under the roofing. This can result in water flooding down into the cornice and interior partitions. The proper eave flashing under the shingles will prevent such flooding—but an old house might not have adequate (or any) such flashing. The same type of flooding can occur during

heavy downpours if the downspout isn't big enough to handle the run-off.

A WARNING SIGN of a water problem at the roof edge is peeling or blistering paint on the underside of the soffit. One way to deal with ice blockages in the winter is to place electric heating cables in the gutters. Another way to cope with troublesome gutters is to remove them altogether!

CRACKS IN STUCCO or other masonry walls can also admit enough water to generate rot in the wooden sheathing underneath.

RAINWATER SPLASHING against a hard surface on the ground level can also rebound high enough to keep the siding unduly wet. Vegetation that is growing too close to the house can also raise moisture levels in the siding to a point where it will be hospitable for rot fungi.

Leaky Plumbing

MOST PLUMBING LEAKS are discovered before they can do too much damage as far as rot is concerned. The major exception is the bathroom, where it is possible for fixtures to develop slow leaks that will gradually soak partitions without attracting much attention until considerable damage has been done.

CRACKS IN TILE GROUT in floors and tub enclosures can admit enough moisture to rot timbers—and the process will probably be slow enough so that it won't be discovered until structural damage has been done. Gaps in tiling around bathroom fixtures should be kept closed with silicone caulk. Loose grout should be removed and re-grouted, then water-proofed with silicone. The homeowner should also be on the lookout for loose and lifting tiles. Not only will they admit water—they may also signify that water has been penetrating for some time and that wood is rotting.

IF YOU HAVE A PANEL (usually located in a closet) that gives access to the back of tub and shower fixtures, you should open it occasionally to check for signs of leaks. If you don't have such a panel and are doing some restoration work around the bathroom that is creating a mess anyway, you should consider the practicality of installing a plumbing access panel where it won't be noticed.

Condensation

CONDENSATION is the most insidious source of moisture, since the water comes from vapor in the air and not from an obvious source like rain or a leaky pipe.

CONDENSATION OCCURS WHEN warm, moisture-laden air contacts a cold surface. Warm air can hold more water vapor than cold air. So if the cold surface lowers the temperature of the air below its dew point, the excess water has to go someplace. It shows up as droplets of water on the cold surface.

THE EARTH IN A CRAWL SPACE beneath a house can be a source of moisture that will condense on sills and joists—especially if the house is air-conditioned in the summer. Corners are especially susceptible to condensation—and rot—because they get the least air circulation. Best way to combat condensation in a crawl space is to cover the ground with polyethylene sheets or strips of asphalt roofing paper.

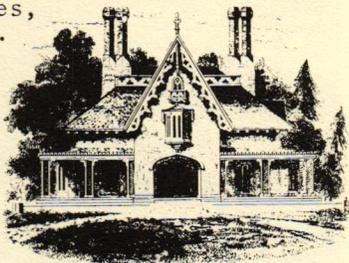
WATER MAY ALSO CONDENSE on cold water pipes in humid weather. If this causes water to drip on structural wood, the offending pipe should be wrapped with the special insulation that is sold for this purpose.

CONDENSATION MAY ALSO OCCUR inside wall partitions on cold winter days when warm moist air from the interior contacts cold exterior walls. This is especially likely if a vapor-resistant barrier was installed under the siding. This problem should not occur if insulation has been installed with a vapor barrier on the inside wall. Water will also condense on window panes in winter, eventually causing soft rot and staining in the sash. Where this occurs, treat the sash with a pentachlorophenol preservative.

Part II in the November issue will outline inspection techniques and some effective countermeasures against rot.

houses, along with floor plans, complete instructions for building them, cost of each design and a complete landscaping design for each style.

HE FAVORED STYLE for cottages was the "Pointed" or "English Rural Gothic." This style, more than any other, suited his ideas of the picturesque. He favored irregular roof shapes, and asymmetrical design. Although he recognized that the cheapest way to build a house was in a square or rectangle, he recommended the addition of bay windows, verandahs, and decorative trim to give a more irregular and richer appearance.



THE MOST OBVIOUS DECORATIVE FEATURE was the vergeboard. He achieved a sculptured effect by using thick wood, cutting out Gothic motifs and enriching with wooden moldings.

DOWNING'S GOTHIC COTTAGES are sometimes called "Carpenter's Gothic." This is misleading. When a carpenter-builder took a plain, thin piece of wood and cut out a Gothic design or any other fanciful motif on a vergeboard it was a Carpenter Gothic. There were even a few of these types around when Downing was writing, and he scorned their "card-board" appearance. Although these naive versions were often meant to imitate Downing, and are quite charming, they are not really what Downing had in mind. Downing's designs had a richness and sophistication that few carpenter-builders could match.

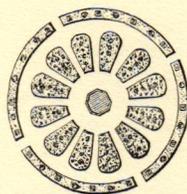


THANKS TO DOWNING, bay windows became a mid-Victorian fad. They were often added to the simplest farm-house, and even today, you can spot a house built many decades before the mid-19th century and tell by its bay window that the owner had probably read "Cottage Residences."

THAT AMERICAN-AS-APPLE-PIE FIXTURE, the porch, also grew out of Downing's ideas. The Colonial, Georgian, Federal, Greek and other popular earlier styles had at most a small portico. But Downing loved the verandah. Along with the practical function of keeping the entrance dry, he felt they were "a necessary and delightful appendage" in a country with hot summers. "Hence a broad shady verandah suggests ideas of comfort, and is highly expressive of purpose."

DOWNING DEVOTED A LARGE PART of "Cottage Residences" to his first interest—landscaping. He had been influenced by many rural landscape architects in England, particularly J. C. Loudon, who had also written books describing how a cottage could be treated with different facades. Like Loudon, he preferred informal landscaping in a more "romantic" manner than the formal Georgian gardens or the geometric Dutch gardens. He did, however, favor the Georgian method of using a running ditch, instead of fence, hidden

by shrubbery to separate portions of the landscape, particularly from cattle. This was called a "ha-ha." He used vines and creepers to integrate house and garden, and also to hide the ugliness of badly designed houses.



Parterre

FOR VERY SMALL COTTAGES, with a limited space for planting, he designed various forms of the parterre, with perhaps a vase on a pedestal or a sun-dial for the center. He was continually searching to find indigenous trees and plants that would bloom successively and provide the best color and odor.

WITH A TRUE VICTORIAN SENSE OF "APPROPRIATENESS," Downing preferred tall, pointed trees surrounding the vertical lines of the Gothic style, and round-shaped trees for the flatter Italian style.

ONE OF DOWNING'S MOST popular designs was a type called the "Cottage Ornee."

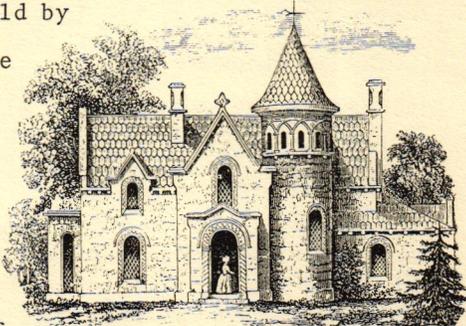
To a rural English cottage he added a verandah and perhaps a small balcony made of slender logs, with vines and creepers abounding. This would give a picturesque appearance to even the simplest house. The French flavor of "ornee" added to the humble English word "cottage" caused this style to become instantly dear to the mid-Victorian heart.



ALTHOUGH THE GOTHIC WAS DOWNING'S FIRST LOVE, and "Cottage Residences" featured many versions of the pointed style, some other romantic styles were included. It was from his major work, however, that the full impact of his taste and influence was felt.

THIS BOOK, "THE ARCHITECTURE OF COUNTRY HOUSES," fully developed his ideas about architecture, and was so complete in its attention to detail that builders used it for decades to imitate the cottages, country houses and villas he described. These designs were for farm houses, stables, gate houses as well as Elizabethan cottages, Italian and Tuscan villas, and the bracketed style he made famous. It was published in 1850, just two years before his tragic death in 1852. Over sixteen thousand copies were sold by

the end of the Civil War. The second part of this article will explore the ideas and designs put forth in the volume—which had an influence that can be seen in the Victorian homes left to us today.



Villa in the Norman Style

Springside: The Only Downing Cottage We Have Left

AN ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE FACT is that Springside, containing a cottage and gate house, is the only authentic work of architecture and landscaping by Downing still standing in America.

ALTHOUGH HIS BOOKS WERE THE MOST POPULAR writings of their kind published in this country—and they changed the appearance of the American countryside—only at the former estate of Matthew Vassar in Poughkeepsie can one see the single example of his work left to us. Even more unbelievable is that this unique piece of our heritage is about to become an apartment house development, at the very point in our history when our pride in our past and appreciation of our remaining old houses is on the rise.

MATTHEW VASSAR, brewer, philanthropist, and founder of Vassar College, originally bought the 27 acres now known as Springside because of its topographical beauty, which needed only "the hand of taste." Failing to persuade the City of Poughkeepsie (apparently even then lacking in imagination) to buy it for a public cemetery, he decided to make it his home.

HE CALLED IN THE FAMOUS Andrew Jackson Downing, who up until then had promoted the designs of others or collaborated with A. J. Davis. It was 1850, just before Downing's new association with Calvert Vaux.

DOWNING DESIGNED A MAIN HOUSE, a gardener's cottage, barns, stables and a gate house. For unknown reasons, the main house was never built, and Vassar, an unpretentious man, settled happily into the gardener's cottage where he lived out his life. The buildings nestled in a picturesque landscape containing an aviary, apiary, and a miniature Stonehenge, and Vassar allowed the people of Poughkeepsie to use the grounds for a public park.

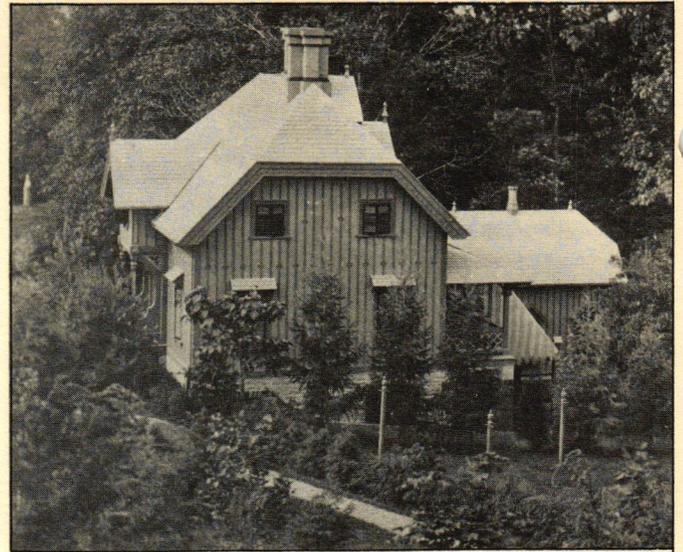
THE BARNs HAVE SINCE BURNED DOWN, and the grounds—although Downing's design is still visible—have lost all the romantic objects; iron dogs, swan fountains, etc. The cottage is currently being vandalized.

THE PROPERTY IS IN THE HANDS OF a private owner. Back in 1968, when he submitted his apartment house plan to the city, a flood of protesting letters from preservationists and interested people poured into City Hall at Poughkeepsie, but the City still approved the housing development.

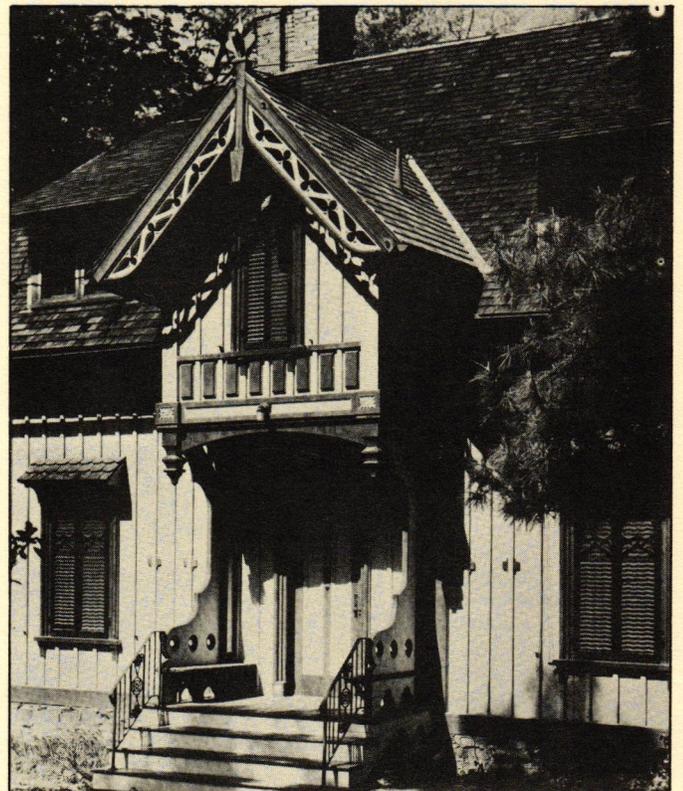
FORTUNATELY FOR THE ROMANTIC LITTLE COTTAGE, the state of the economy prevented the development from getting under way and the city approval ran out.

THE DUTCHESS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION IS again fighting hard for a city-owned public park with the buildings restored.

IF YOU WISH TO HELP, direct an angry letter to: City Hall, Poughkeepsie, N. Y. 12602.



Side view of Springside cottage. Downing liked truncated gables (they were picturesque and yet gave "an air of rustic modesty") and batten decorations. Photo courtesy of Vassar College Library.



Doorway detail on front of cottage. Gothic cut-outs on vergeboard, dark, decorative shutters, and the use of a darker shade of paint for trim are typical Downing.

Part II in the November issue will explore the many styles Downing popularized, including the famous "Hudson River Bracketed," and his views on interior paint, decoration and furniture.



Downing On Color



DOWNING HAD VERY DEFINITE THEORIES regarding the use of color on both the exterior and interior of houses. The one color he really disliked was white. Most of the Greek Revival and other wood frame houses were painted white in the early part of the 19th century.

ACCORDING TO DOWNING, "The glaring nature of this color, when seen in contrast with the soft green of foliage, renders it extremely unpleasant." It was so unpleasant to him that he presented three pages of arguments against this "great breach of good taste" in "Country Houses."

THE OBJECTION TO WHITE was based mostly on the glare and harsh effect caused by the sun on the white house and its conspicuousness in the landscape. To compound this solecism, shutters painted in bright green rendered the effect even more appalling. He recommended a cool, dark green as a less offensive shade than the bright green. He preferred, however, to have oak shutters. If real oak was not within the means of the home owner, he advised staining a cheaper wood in imitation of oak.

COLOR WAS GIVEN A LOT OF ATTENTION by Downing because it is the first impression of a house to be perceived by the eye. After doing in, in no uncertain terms, the universal white house, he rightly felt bound to make recommendations for the colors appropriate for his designs.

THE DOWNING THEORY IN COLORING HOUSES was to "avoid any colors that nature avoids. In buildings, we should copy those colors that she offers chiefly to the eye—earth, stone, bricks and wood are the materials of which houses are built." Since houses are not built of foliage, there was no reason to paint a house green.

THE ORIGINAL "COTTAGE RESIDENCES" contained six color samples, three shades of gray and three of drab or fawn. Barns or stables, because they were meant to be unobtrusive, should be dark browns or grays. But a cottage, small country house or villa should be of a mellow, cheerful shade that harmonized with the countryside. A mansion could have a graver color than a cottage to express its greater dignity and size.

HOUSES SURROUNDED BY TREES should be lighter in shade than those more exposed. A general recommendation was, "The safest color, for general use, is something between a cream and a dust color." This tint was the color of English freestone, and usually called fawn. He recommended that cheap stucco and cement cottages be washed in this shade.

DOWNING LIKENED THE FEATURES OF A HOUSE such as window facings, cornices, eaves, etc. to the features on a human face. To have them all the same shade would give the same insipid effect that colorless features do to the face.

THE RULE WAS SIMPLE. If a light shade was used for the house, a darker shade of the same color would be used for the features of the house, and a still darker shade or the darkest green or brown for the shutters, if they were to be painted. The variety would produce a cheerful effect and avoid the dull, heavy look of a house painted in monotone.

IF THE TINT CHOSEN FOR THE HOUSE is a dark one, then a much lighter shade of the same tint would be used for the features. Or, perhaps one or tints in a light shade that would harmonize with the dark tint.

IN "COUNTRY HOUSES" Downing gives a list of approved colors and tells how to make them for those who "have to depend on their own wits." It may be of interest to those trying to find a Downing-type color in the laybrinth of color charts in our modern paint stores. The method he describes would also produce a durable paint by today's standards.

"The colors are supposed to be first finely ground in oil, and then mixed in small quantities with white-lead and boiled linseed oil. A few trials will enable the novice to mix agreeable neutral shades—especially if he will be content to add a very little of the darker shades at a time, and try the effect with the brush. After the proper shade is obtained, enough should be mixed at once to go over the whole surface."

- Fawn color: White, yellow ochre, and Spanish brown.
- Drab: White, Venetian red, burnt umber, with a little black.
- Gray stone: White, lampblack, and a little Venetian red.
- Brown stone: Spanish brown, chrome yellow, a little white and lampblack.
- French gray: White, ivory black, with a little Indian red and Chinese blue.
- Slate color: White, lampblack, and a little Indian red.
- Sage color: White, raw umber, Prussian blue and Venetian red.
- Straw color: White, yellow ochre, and orange chrome.
- Chocolate: Spanish brown and black—or, for a light shade, Venetian red and black.

Downing sincerely hoped that "at no very distant time, one may have the pleasure of travelling over our whole country, without meeting with a single habitation of glaring and offensive color, but see everywhere something of harmony and beauty."

A Dictionary For House Buffs

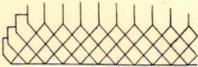
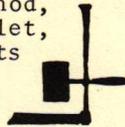
Products For The Old House

Fancy Shingles

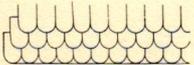
And Shakes

Handsplit and fancy butted shingles are very hard to find these days. Owners of Victorian houses, particularly the Queen Anne style, have a difficult time trying to replace the decorative shingles originally used on their houses. They were often in combinations of shapes; perhaps round shingles with a banding of diamond-shapes.

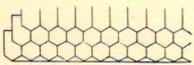
There is a firm in Washington that makes these shakes and shingles out of red cedar. (A shake is a shingle that is handsplit. This method, using a froe and mallet, splits the wood in its natural divisions, making it more resistant to the weather.) They have handsplit shakes in the hard-to-find large sizes. Complete installation instructions come with each shipment.



Diamond



Fishscale



Hexagonal

The fancy butted shingles are hand cut with a band saw. They come in many decorative shapes, including Arrow, Fish-Scale, Half Cove, Acorn and Diamond. But if the brochure does not have what you want, they will hand cut to your design.

The Dana-Deck company is a family operation, and they employ many old-time splitters and weavers. Their shakes and shingles are graded and labeled under the Red Cedar Shingle & Handsplit Shake Bureau.

Send for their brochure:
File 6.1/Da—Architectural Lumber Specialties.
Dana-Deck & Laminates, Inc.
Lopez, Washington 98261.

A WORD DICTIONARY IS indispensable for understanding new words, correct spelling or just playing scrabble. An architectural dictionary is equally indispensable for using fix-it books, reading about architecture or just getting along at a party peppered with do-it-yourselfers.

Fortunately, there is a very good one available. Published by the American Technical Society, it is titled "Architectural and Building Trades Dictionary." It begins with "Aaron's rod (an ornamental molding with only one serpent—the kind with two starts with "c") through to "zonolite concrete" (a form of concrete which acts as an insulator). And in between is everything you always wanted to know about what goes into a house but didn't know what to call it.

Over 500 pages, this volume has at least as many illustrations, either line drawings or photographs.

Because it really is a text book for the building trades, it is clearly written and complete.

It defines both elementary and more sophisticated tools and equipment, building materials of every kind, build-

ing and finishing techniques—both interior and exterior—and plumbing and electrical tools and terms. It provides additional knowledge for the beginning handyperson or the highly capable craftsman.

Interspersed with all that technical information is a full identification of classic architectural terms. For instance, under "acanthus" (illustrated below) the reader is told that it is an ornament patterned after the leaves of the acanthus, a plant native to the Mediterranean region. A well-known example of the use of the ornament is the Corinthian capital. In addition, house styles, roof shapes, and a myriad of ornamental details are described.

There are additional sections on pertinent legal terms, and an alphabetical listing of building material sizes used by draftsmen.

A plainly bound but sturdy book, it offers a truly amazing wealth of information.

To order, send \$9.25, (includes postage and handling) to:
American Technical Society
848 East 58th Street
Chicago, Ill. 60637
--C. F.



Acanthus

The Old-House Journal

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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.