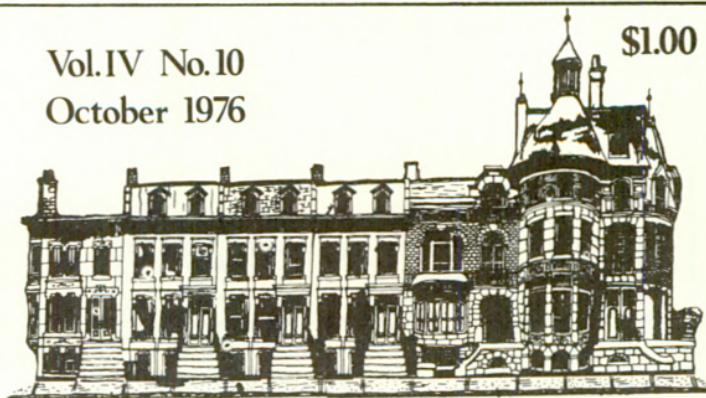


THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

Vol. IV No. 10
October 1976

\$1.00



Renovation And Maintenance Ideas For The Antique House

How To Research And Date Your Old House

By Clem Labine

In This Issue

Taxes On Old Houses.....	2
A Medieval House.....	3
19th Century Cooking & Heating.....	5
Woodstoves.....	7
Victorian Pull-Chain Toilets.....	12

Coming Next Month

CREATING A VICTORIAN HALLWAY

RESearching AN OLD HOUSE is something that most owners put off "until the more important things are done." Unfortunately, this common attitude is exactly the WRONG way to approach a vintage house. It's like setting out to build a house without constructing a foundation.

SURE, you have to make sure that the roof doesn't leak and that the termites aren't about to run off with the place. But once the structure is stabilized, the research work should be high on the list of priorities.

WHEN RESTORING AN OLD HOUSE, the goal is to do work that is in keeping with the style and tradition of the structure. Among other things, the in-character restoration is the best way to preserve the long-term market value of the property. But to do high-quality restoration work, you have to know what the house was like originally. And that means research...at the outset.

INVARIABLY, when someone does rehabilitation and decorating work before finding out everything possible about the house, he or she regrets doing certain things. But then it is too late; the work is done and the money is spent.

IN RESEARCHING a house, you are looking for answers to questions

such as the following:

- Who built the house and when?
- What style is it?
- What did the house originally look like—inside and out?
- Who owned and lived in it?
- What were the cultural forces at work when the house was built?

QUONCE YOU'VE IMMersed YOURSELF in the history of the house, you begin to feel differently about the building. It acquires a new personality—and makes you change your ideas about what you want to do to the structure. Usually, the desire to make changes decreases and the desire to restore in a period fashion increases. You become less eager to tamper with a house that has meant so much to so many.



THERE ARE FOUR basic sources for historical information about your house: (1) Oral history; (2) Documentary sources; (3) Inferred data; (4) Physical evidence.

ORAL HISTORY is just a fancy name for talking to everyone who might know anything about the house in its earlier days. Obviously, this tech-

(Continued on p. 8)



Taxes On Old Houses

To The Editor:

OWNERS OF HOMES more than 100 years old might investigate the age category under which their houses are being assessed for real estate taxes.

IN MY CASE, I received notice of a huge 55% increase in my real estate tax. Upon investigation at the county assessor's office, I learned that our county carries houses under several age categories for tax purposes. And our 1872 Victorian was incorrectly listed in the "under 80" category. A written protest was in order.

I FILED A TWO-PAGE LETTER that reviewed our previous taxes and noted the \$550 increase. I ended the letter with a polite—but firm—request for a review of my increase based on the house's age. With the letter I enclosed a copy of the certificate we had just received from the Historical Commission as the owner of a 100-year-old home. I also enclosed a letter supporting its age, signed by the Commission president, and a copy of a mid-1890's photo of the house with a history of the owners from the family that had built it in 1871-72.

WITHIN A MONTH, I received a letter from the assessor's office with a "Certificate of Error," which reduced my tax increase by about 50% for the next 4 years (the period between assessments).

OUR CASE MAY NOT be typical. The "over 80" tax category may be unique to Cook County. But I felt this experience might be of value to some of the other readers.

George D. Bushnell
Wilmette, Ill.

ED. NOTE: Too, sometimes people invest enormous amounts of energy rescuing an old house from decay—and then are slapped with huge tax increases as a reward for their efforts. Have any other readers had successful experiences dealing with tax authorities so they help—not hinder—old-house preservation? Let's hear from you!—CL

Restoring Porch Spindles

To The Editor:

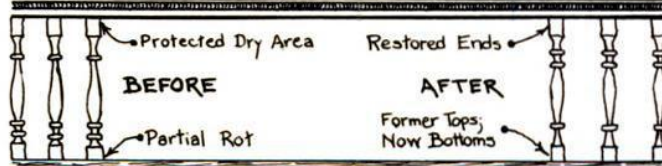
IN THE PROCESS of restoring the large verandah of our 1900 house, I discovered that almost all of the 220 balusters in the porch railing had partially rotted at the bottom. But the tops—which had been protected from the weather by the hand rail—were in good condition.

THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL®
Published Monthly For People Who Love Old Houses

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Published by The Old-House Journal Corporation, 199 Berkeley Pl., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217. Tel. (212) 636-4514. Subscriptions \$12/yr. in U.S. and Canada; \$20/yr. elsewhere. Printed at Royal Offset Co., 34 W. 15th St., NYC 10011. Contents of the Old-House Journal® are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without specific permission in writing from The Editor.

I REMOVED ALL of the balusters and restored the rotted areas by treating with penta and patching as required. I then installed all of the balusters upside down. The weakest wood areas



are now protected by the top rail. The baluster pattern is symmetrical enough so that no one has noticed the switch.

I FIGURE THAT these restored balusters are good for another 70 years.

Doug Danz
Verona, Wis.

A Call For Help

To The Editor:

Help! Does anyone know of a process to take old linoleum paste off a floor? Our 1830 townhouse has beautiful (we think) old wide board floors. But they are covered with many layers of linoleum. We can rip the linoleum up. But it leaves behind a messy residue.

WE WANT TO AVOID SANDING the stuff off if at all possible in order to preserve the character of the old floors. We're desperate!

Elizabeth Tully
Boston, Mass.

ED. NOTE: Sanding is the common solution. Does anyone know a better way to help out our desperate reader?—CL

A

Medieval

House

By H. Weber Wilson

PAUL LEWIS IS AN OLD-HOUSE LOVER with a peculiar problem. He owns just the house he has always wanted, and he is totally committed to restoring all its original eccentricities of form and design. Unfortunately, an earlier owner didn't share his appreciation of the original construction. Thus he is faced with a lot of "de-converting" before getting on with setting the building back to what it was originally intended to be.

PAUL'S PROBLEM is peculiar, though, because the modernization on his house was done about 1780. And, although Paul's house is in England, his story is similar to thousands of old-house experiences in North America.

DOES IT BOTHER HIM TO TEAR apart walls, floors, and windows that were put in place 200 years ago? "Not at all," says Paul. "For me, anything after the medieval period is just too new. And besides," he adds, pointing to a fine 18th century corner cabinet, "lots of what I pull out of here makes great trade bait to help me get the 17th century building parts I need for my restoration."

THE HOUSE PAUL OWNS is in Hastings, the landing spot of the last invaders of the island--William the Conqueror in 1066. "The town grew up from the smuggling trade," explains Paul, "and the people who lived here were considered as 'foreigners.' William picked this spot to land because he knew his landing would be unopposed. The actual battle was fought about eight miles out of town." Hastings today is a well-frequented seaside resort.

"I HAVE ALWAYS HAD STRONG FEELINGS about the medieval era," says Paul, "and have only felt comfortable when living in a medieval environment. It's as if I've always known I'd live in a house like this." Actually, it's the second medieval house Paul has had, the first one being just a little further down on All Saints Street. "I bought the first place in 1967," he explains, "and while someone had done a creditable job of restoration in the 1930's, I found myself inexorably drawn into changing things back to the way I knew they had originally been."

PAUL SOON FOUND HIMSELF drawn more and more into medieval house reconstruction and further away from musical composition which is his main livelihood. "Finally I had to choose," says Paul, "so I opted for the music and some financial success." I put my medieval furniture in storage, sold the house, and moved to modern quarters. The composing went well, but I soon discovered that all my spare time was spent out looking for another medieval building to buy."

PAUL MADE BIDS on barns, churches, and even a Great Hall in different parts of England, but with no luck. Then, in November of 1975, this house became available. "I knew the house, the owner, and the neighbourhood," says Paul, "so I didn't waste a minute. I got the papers drawn and signed in a week and moved back to Hastings. I knew I had come home."

MOVING INTO A ROOM a few doors down the street (in another house ca. 1450) he began work the day after closing. "The first day we cleared a path through the weeds to the 'plumbing' out back, then got right into the project," he relates. "I knew the house well, had even helped the previous owner draw up basic reconstruction plans, so we were off to a flying start."



The house, built about 1620, was remodeled about 1790. Paul will replace the oriel window that was removed.

STRIPPING THE HOUSE of the 18th century modernization meant taking the house down to its basic elements. Unlike tearing out a pink tiled bathroom or plastic kitchen cabinets, however, Paul actually had to utilize preservation techniques during the stripping out process. He wanted to save as much of the material as possible, and also he didn't want to disturb any of the original work that might lay underneath.

"PEOPLE IN THE PERIOD OF 1780-1800 must have had a terrific keep up with the Joneses complex," says Paul. "By that time the houses on this street were certainly classed as old relics so the owners rehabilitated them by eliminating or hiding as much of the original design and form as possible." In the case of Paul's house, the half-timbered front was covered over, the inside walls were covered with "match boarding," the oriel window sheared off, and the whole place given





The attic room showing how the timbers are joined. On the right side is a bit of "wagenschot" and across the middle is the carved cornice.



The leaded glass window, exposed after 200 years, is in the corner. Stacked in front are solid oak mullions and ceiling bosses.

"WITH THE ARRIVAL of the Spanish Armada in 1588, building methods changed," explains Paul. "The Navy claimed priority on the remaining oak so builders learned how to use less by laying weight along the grain instead of across it. It also meant that softwoods had to be used in construction, especially on outside surfaces, and this led directly to the development of lead paints."

"THIS HOUSE IS a good example of building methods of the 16th and 17th centuries," states Paul. "Up to this time only the wealthy could afford chimneys and window glass. Also, builders hadn't figured out how wood grain affected beam strength, so most of the supporting timbers were cut square, often making them of massive size."

a nice, "new" plain look to go with the Georgian style that was in vogue.

SO, WHEN PAUL BEGAN to strip away these Georgian innovations, he didn't know how much of the original building had been carted off or what was there to be uncovered. Happily, along with the oak timbers, he has found carved wooden brackets that will support the oriel window he will replace. On the second floor he dug out an original leaded glass window which had been buried in plaster 200 years ago. Also surviving is the wooden spiral staircase between the top floors, and in the attic, two very special features.

FIRST, THERE ARE SOME of the original wall boards--an example of the original wainscotting. The word comes from the Dutch "wagenschot" meaning "wagonwood" because it looks like the sideboards of old wagons. Paul believes his is one of the few surviving examples of the original style.

SECOND IS ONE OF THE FINEST architectural details of the house--a carved wooden cornice which for some reason was inverted and used as a beam.

PAUL IS NOT ANXIOUS about the scope of his project. "The point is to do it properly, not quickly," he says, and he is determined to do just that. For example, one of the stereotyped impressions of medieval buildings is to see black timbers framing whitewashed plaster. "Totally wrong," declares Paul. "Only in a few parts of the country was this practice of 'maggie' decoration common. In most places the wood and plaster were left to weather naturally. One of my major tasks will be to strip off all the black paint."

THE WOOD WAS ALSO USUALLY used while still green, so as it dried out the frame took on that wonderful twisted, cockeyed look that gives such character to the houses that survive today.

HE HAS UNCOVERED almost all the original timber framing, but, as he explains, "A real problem with the Georgian conversion is that it didn't let the timber breathe, so I've had a good bit of rot."

THE INSIDE AS WELL will be put back just as it was originally designed, even down to the wall coating. All the original "daubing" was carefully recovered, and this straw-mud mixture will be reconstituted and applied as a final finish on the walls. "I plan to have 5' 8" doorways," says Paul, "And will use the four fireplaces for both heating and cooking as much as is practical."

A MAJOR JOB AHEAD is to build a new front wall, complete with oriel window. But by the time he and Del get around to that project, they will be real experts in medieval house construction. "After the front is restored," says Paul, "I'm going to transform the back part of the house into a 'little Great Hall' for my 17th century tapestry, 16th century furniture, and 1713 spinet. Then I think I'll never need another place to go."

THE HOUSE PRESENTLY stands stripped, but rather than looking forlorn, it has the positive air of something that is coming back to life after centuries of misunderstanding. Paul Lewis understands his building, and will provide it with the consideration such an architectural matriarch deserves. ■■

Part II

19th Century

Cooking And Heating

In the September 1976 issue, Don Yule recounted how he repaired his two century-old stoves. Because the art of starting and maintaining a coal fire has been all but lost, this section describes how he actually operates the stoves.

By Don Yule

MY STOVES BURN two different sizes of coal; the kitchen stove burns pea coal, while the parlor stove requires the larger walnut coal. This of course means that there must be two separate bins in the cellar. Local delivery will cost between \$80 and \$100 a ton today, usually in three ton minimum lots. My bins hold three tons each, and six tons will last more than a full winter. So while coal delivery is more bother than oil delivery, it needs to be done only once a year, and at less than half the cost of oil. Coal enters my cellar through a chute that opens on the sidewalk and is then shovelled into the proper bins by the deliverymen.

WHILE I ONLY NEED to light the parlor stove on the very coldest days, it burns three times as much coal as the kitchen stove, costing about \$4 a day to operate compared to \$1.25 for the kitchen stove. Both these operating together will maintain 77° in the house when it is well below zero outside.

THE BEST COAL is Reading anthracite. The cost per ton is higher, but there is also more heat and less ashes per ton. It reduces to about one part ashes from five parts coal, and issues no visible smoke from the chimney when the stove is fully kindled and operating properly. The use of the softer, cheaper bituminous coal is to be avoided, especially in the city. Black smoke and soot accompany its burning.

ALSO AVAILABLE in large sacks is a petroleum based, charcoal-like stove fuel, at about the same price as city coal. It burns easier and hotter than anthracite, but more rapidly. It is good for starting coal fires in sluggish draft conditions (damp, still days) and in the kitchen stove for an extra hot fire for baking in the ovens. This fuel can be had from Preston Fuels of Lowell, Mass. which also carries stoves, parts and accessories.



The warm air from the parlor stove below rises through a large oval "riser" to the main floor above. Some air exits through the grate in the mantel, the rest passing to the bedroom floor above and exiting from a similar grate.

Firing Up

IN THE COURSE OF the stove repairs, I was able to discover the function of the several knobs and levers, and determine in a general way how the stoves operated.

I HAVE LEARNED NOT TO WORRY about accidentally setting fire to the coal bin in the cellar. Hard coal just won't burn except in deliberate circumstances, and no careless match is going to start it up outside of a stove. If you put anthracite coal on hot charcoal in an outdoor cooker, it will not be consumed.

TO KINDLE A COAL FIRE, we begin with the assumption that the stove is in proper working order and the grate, ash pan and flues are clear of all residue. Adjust all controls for maximum draft. This means that the draft door, or vent, below the grate and in front of the ash pan must be open to admit all air possible under the grate to promote combustion. Likewise, all dampers must be opened or closed. Let me explain: On all large coal stoves there are one or more sliding or butterfly valves whose purpose it is to impede or divert the passage of smoke from the most direct and easy way up the chimney. All such controls must be

in the open position when kindling the fire. However, there will also be found one or more sliding vents that allow the introduction of outside air into the smoke pipe, thereby decreasing the force of the draft. All such vents must be closed during kindling.

ONE NOW TAKES a tabloid-sized newspaper, folds single sheets twice, and twists them. These are laid evenly side by side across the entire area of the grate. Remember that any area of the grate left uncovered will allow the draft to pass around the fuel instead of through it, thus cooling the fuel off instead of kindling it.

ONE NEXT NEEDS A BUCKET of kindling wood, in length no longer than the grate will allow to lay down flat, and split (with an axe) no more than an inch in thickness. If lumberyard scraps are available, quarter-round moulding is perfect. Lay the sticks thus prepared in a single layer over the paper twists, but crosswise to their position. Repeat this with a second layer of kindling over the first, but laying this parallel to the paper twists. The objective is to get as much kindling into the small coal grate as possible while still leaving space for the draft to pass through. There must be enough kindling to burn for a half hour, or it will be all consumed before the coal gets hot enough to ignite.

NOW OVER THE KINDLING BASE one spreads an even layer of coal, no deeper than the depth of the kindling. Too much coal will choke off the draft, and too little will allow the draft to bypass the coal after the kindling is consumed.

THE FIRE-BOX should be fairly well full now, and ready to light. Long fireplace safety matches are handy for this. Close all stove doors and light the paper twists in several places from under the grate. My stove has a special little door just for this purpose.

AFTER A HALF HOUR of burning, most of the kindling should be consumed, and blue flames should be coming from the coal. The blue is the first evidence that the coal itself has ignited. As the kindling is consumed, the coal will settle down to the bottom of the grate. When the "starter" coal is mostly glowing red, it is time to add more coal. Depending on the depth of the fire-box, one may have to add coal once or twice more, waiting in between for the new coal to partially ignite before adding more.

ONE SHOULD AVOID ADDING TOO MUCH NEW COAL at one time, as this will absorb too much heat from the ignited coal and also choke the draft off. So add coal in stages until the fire-box is full of ignited coal. Then you reverse the position of all controls; that is the easiest way to remember all that needs to be done: In other words, you close the draft door all or most of the way, likewise close all damper controls, and open all draft vents.

ALL THIS IS NECESSARY because coal burns so very hot when fully ignited that unless you slow it down as much as possible, you will produce too much heat, burn too much coal, and possibly even damage your stove. So

never let a coal fire rage away with the drafts open for very long after the house temperature gets up to normal.

Maintaining The Fire

OUR PARLOR STOVE is equipped with a gravity feeder. This is a perforated iron tube that hangs from the rim of the opening at the top, and descends to a few inches above the grate. This feeder tube may be filled entirely to the top with coal after the fire is fully ignited, and will feed coal down as it is consumed in the grate. Thus prepared, the stove will burn for ten to twelve hours without attention. Our stove has two sets of isinglass-windowed doors. The lower doors are opposite the coal grate. If little or no red glow can be seen through these lower doors, it is time to shake the ashes down.

FIRST, THE SHAKER HANDLE is attached and drawn in-out several times. This slides open the center of the grate bottom and lets larger clinkers fall through. The coal burns into an inverted dome that supports itself on the sides of the grate, leaving a hollow space inside. Thus the fire itself does not fall down when this grate is opened, only the consumed ashes.

NEXT, PUSH THE HANDLE in to close the sliding grate, and move the handle from side to side. As you do this, ashes will fall through the grate, the live coals will descend, and you will see them appear through the teeth of the grate. When the coals reach the bottom of the grate, they will begin to catch in the teeth of the grate as they slide in opposition. Do not force the shaker handle—you could break or bend the grate. When considerable resistance is met in the handle, it is time to stop, the job is done.

EVEN THE BEST OF STOVES will need a little help now and then getting rid of the clinkers during continuous operation. Whenever it becomes evident that the bottom of the grate has such an accumulation of debris that the ordinary grate-shaking operation will not suffice, you must use the poker to do a more thorough job. For this you will need heavy leather work gloves and a poker with a curved tip. The poker should be of small enough diameter that it may be passed between the teeth of the grate.

WHEN YOU HAVE EXTRACTED as much debris as possible, dump and close the sliding grate, then close the doors and shake the grate from side to side, causing the fire to descend. Add more coal as necessary.

IT IS WELL TO DO this clinker-removing operation before retiring in the evening, as it will allow you to fill the stove as full as possible with new coal, with no space in the grate being taken up by ashes. Also the freer the grate is of the draft-choking clinkers, the more fully will the coal be consumed. It is a good idea to empty the ash pan at the end this operation, too. You already have on your gloves, so open the draft door and pull out the ash pan and dump it into the ash can. Use this can only for ashes, never garbage, as hot ashes can set fire to lots of things. During continuous operation our parlor stove needs to have the

ashes dumped about twice a day. Never let the ash pan get over-full as you will then knock off the top ashes inside the stove as you draw out the pan. Also, these accumulated ashes retard the draft, and reflect up so much heat that the grate could warp or crack.

Heat Distribution

SEVERAL VALVES control the heat that travels upstairs from my stoves. I usually leave the control levers set so that the house has uniform heat on all floors. Sometimes we open the grate in the bedroom all the way while dressing and my wife uses it for a hair dryer.

ALL OF THE HEAT PIPES have been cleaned and vacuumed out. I got sheets of the washable aluminum-mesh air filter material, the kind that is made for air conditioners, and installed these behind the heat grates to catch airborne dust. Despite what you may have heard, a properly operating coal stove is totally odorless and no soot or ashes travel up into the rooms. Of course, the air is quite dry and you may want to use a humidifier. I keep a kettle boiling on the cookstove at all times.

I ALWAYS LEAVE A WINDOW OPEN a crack in the dining room, as a coal stove burns huge quantities of oxygen and could asphyxiate you (like any kind of flame) in a tightly closed room. Some of the fresh air is also drawn into the heat risers, and passes to the upper rooms. I usually leave all inside doors open and this allows the cooled air to return back down the stairwell and be reheated by the stoves and sent up the risers again.

Cooking Tips

OUR COOKSTOVE will easily burn through the night and still be ready to cook breakfast in the morning if properly stoked in the evening. In addition to the regular raking and stoking procedure, one should adjust the controls immediately for slow burning, without waiting for the new coal to ignite. This delays the ignition of the new coal for several hours. The stove will be burning nicely about breakfast time, and you will only need to rake out the ashes and adjust the controls for cooking. After breakfast, stoke up with new coal, dump the ash pan and close the dampers and drafts.

COAL IS A GOOD hot fuel for cooking, but a little advance preparation is necessary. About an hour before



Don and Jaye Yule's 1879 brownstone in the Prospect Heights section of Brooklyn. The stoves are on the ground floor-- behind the cast iron grilles.

a meal is to be cooked, one should "turn on" the heat by raking and stoking as necessary (don't add so much new coal that it will take long to ignite.) Leave the controls in the hot burning position, and when you are ready to cook the meal the stove will be ready for you.

THERE ARE NO "hot spots" on your pans from coal heat, so you will have little or no trouble with scorching, a big problem with gas stoves. On the other hand, water will take longer to boil exactly because there are no hot spots. So always keep a full kettle of water on one of the cooler side burners where it will be maintained at near the boiling point. Fill your cooking pots from this kettle and no time will be lost heating water. I also keep several pans and griddles in the warming oven at the top of the stove.

FOR HOT COOKING, you will need pots that will fit in or over the open stove holes so get pots and griddles of the same or larger diameter than that of the stove hole. ■■



Information About Wood Stoves

AT THE SAME TIME that more people are starting to use wood as a fuel, older wood heating equipment has become difficult to get. So new

wood stoves are being manufactured at a rapid pace and these stoves vary greatly in quality. There is help available for the selection of a new wood heating stove in an excellent article (reprinted from RAIN Magazine) that includes a chart comparing the characteristics of some popular models.

PART OF AN INFORMATION PACKET, the wood heating stove article is followed by a guide to selecting and repairing wood cook stoves. The guide tells how much you can expect to pay for a cook stove; approximate costs for replacing parts; names and addresses of sources for repair.

INFORMATION on chimney troubles and safety complete the packet.

TO OBTAIN RAIN Paper #1—Wood Stoves, send \$1.00 (postpaid) to: RAIN Magazine, 2270 N.W. Irving, Portland, Oregon 97210.





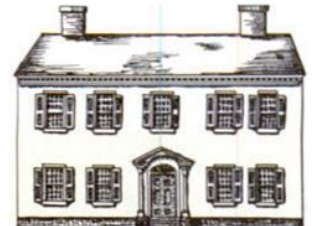
Colonial 1690-1760



Saltbox 1700-1770



Cape Cod 1710-1830



Early Georgian 1720-1760

(Dating Old Houses—cont'd. from p. 1)

nique will be more fruitful for houses built after 1890 than it will be for older dwellings.

The Human Links

BY STARTING with the most recent occupants, you may be able to trace the chain of owners. If you're lucky, the house will have been lived in by fewer than five families. Luckier still, you may find relatives of these families still in the area. In addition, you can probably gather names of other people associated with the house (former neighbors, friends of the family, housekeepers, etc.). These people can often add helpful details—especially when members of the owners' families can't be found.

CONSULTING LOCAL TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES should tell whether any of these people—or their relatives—are still in the area. Phone calls or letter/questionnaires can quickly determine whether these folks have any helpful data.

SOME OF THE INFORMATION you'd hope to get: Colors inside and out; Type and placement of furniture; Uses of various rooms; What was done to cool house in summer and heat it in winter; How holidays were celebrated; Decoration of the house, etc.

AND ALWAYS...you are looking for old photos of the house that people will let you borrow to have duplicates made.

IN PERSONAL INTERVIEWS, it's a good idea to have a written checklist to guide you. When dealing with people's recollections, it is very easy to get sidetracked by interesting—but irrelevant—stories. One word of caution: Memory is a fragile thing. People may tell you some charming details. But before you accept anyone's recollection as gospel, try to get verification from another source.

Documentary Evidence

USUALLY THERE ARE one or more public offices where you can find records relating to your property. The later the house was built, the greater the likelihood of finding specific information. Records and deeds from before 1850 tend to be rather vague and relate more to the land than to

dwellings. Also possible: None of the old records exist anymore due to loss by fire.

PROCEDURES FOR FILING public documents vary from town to town. So you'll have to discover any local idiosyncrasies for yourself.

THE BUILDING DEPT. is the best source of information about your house—if they were issuing building permits at the time your home was built. Among the information you may be able to glean from these records:

- Date building permit was issued
- Name of owner
- Name of architect and builder
- Cost
- Type of heating plant, roof and basic materials used
- Floor plans that show placement of major fixtures
- Dates and types of major alterations

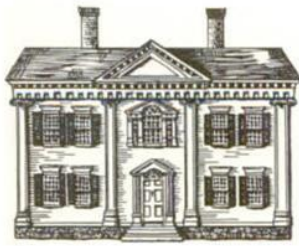
TO LOCATE BUILDING DEPT. DATA, normally you need to know your block number and lot number. This can be obtained from your deed, from maps in the Building Dept., or from plat books (more on these later).

OFTEN, ONLY SUMMARY INFORMATION (such as a permit number) will be recorded on an index card that is used as the primary working reference for your property. Getting the detailed information requires digging out the original permit from the archives. This can be a time-consuming chore—and may require special permission. So don't expect Building Dept. personnel to welcome your inquiries with a big smile. But polite persistence will usually get you the assistance you need.

Delving In The Deeds

SECOND SOURCE of information is the office that registers real estate transactions. This source will give you names and dates of owners of the property—and sometimes sketchy information about the dwelling on the property.

ONE CAUTION about deed information: When the deed goes back to the 1700's or early 1800's, you can't automatically assume that the structure you own is the same one referred to in the earliest deed. Fire may have destroyed



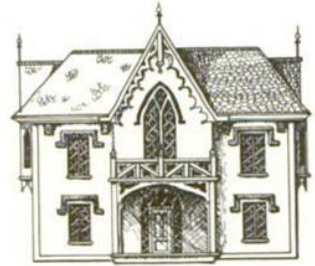
Late Georgian 1760-1780



Federal 1780-1820



Greek Revival 1815-1840



Gothic Revival 1835-1880

the original house and you may be living in a replacement built at a later date.

ALSO, HOUSES WERE MOVED with surprising frequency in the old days. It is possible that your house was built at another site and then moved onto your land at a later date.

The Plat Books

PLAT BOOKS (large scale maps showing lots and buildings on each block) are available for most large communities going back into the 19th century. These maps, originally drawn up for insurance purposes, can be an invaluable research tool. For example, if you can't locate a building permit for your house, you can go back through the plat books (which were issued annually) to see the first year when a house was indicated for your lot.

BY COMPARING PLAT BOOKS from year to year, you can also see how a neighborhood developed, when water and sewer lines appeared, etc. Plat books should be available through your historical society or public library.

Digging In Directories

DURING THE LATE 1800's and early 1900's, many cities had directories that listed people at their home addresses. These were precursors of the telephone book. Often, these directories also included occupational information. These directories can be especially helpful if other official records have been lost or destroyed.

SOME OF THESE DIRECTORIES were organized by address. In this case, you can look back and see the oldest entry you can find for someone living at your address. Other directories were arranged alphabetically by last name. In these cases, you have to have names from the deed records in order to know who to look up. When occupations and titles are given, often you can watch the rise (or fall) of an individual's fortunes by looking him up in successive directories.

THESE DIRECTORIES—if compiled for your community—should be available through your public library or historical society.

IF ANY OF THE HOUSE'S OWNERS were prominent citizens, you may be able to locate a detailed

obituary for them through your library.

FEDERAL CENSUS INFORMATION—although confidential for this century—is available before 1880. In your area Federal Archive and Record Center you may be able to locate census questionnaires filled out by the families living in your house.

YOUR LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY can also be a goldmine of pictorial information. It may have photographs of your particular house. At the very least, you can usually find old photos of your neighborhood and of houses similar to yours.

The Educated Guess

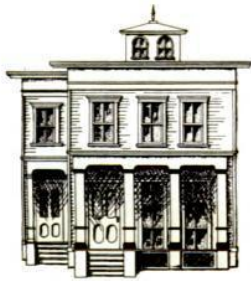
WHEN NO WRITTEN RECORDS can be found, you have to fall back on information you can infer from the house itself. In other words, an educated guess. Houses built before 1830 provide many clues from the material in the house itself. Up to that time, most construction materials were handmade—and there are enough variations in materials and

Some Helpful References

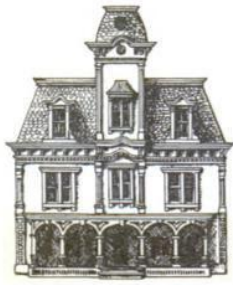
AN INFORMATIVE WALL CHART (3 ft. x 2 ft.) delineates 42 major architectural styles in the U.S. from 1600 to 1940 and shows when each was most popular in the four major sections of the country. Available for \$3.00 from: Architectural Styles, Box 272, Dover MA 02030.

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS of major U.S. architectural styles are set forth in a 313-pg. hardcover book—"American Architecture Since 1780." Contains over 200 photographs with excellent captions. Recounts the origins, flourishing and decline of the styles. Available for \$15 from MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge MA 02142.

A HANDY INTRODUCTION to the 17 most common old-house styles is contained in a 4-page folder—"Field Guide To Old-House Styles." Contains line drawings and capsule descriptions of each style. Field Guide is available for 50¢ from: The Old-House Journal, 199 Berkeley Place, Brooklyn, NY 11217.



Italianate 1845-1885



Mansard 1855-1885



Queen Anne 1875-1900



Carpenter Gothic 1870-1910

methods to provide dating clues. More on this later.

AFTER 1830, machine technology began to spread rapidly. Materials and methods became more uniform during successive decades of the 19th century. So it is very difficult to date late 19th century houses from the material alone. Rather, you have to look at the architectural details of the house...inside and out. A good first approximation of age can be gleaned from a knowledgeable reading of the style and decorative features.

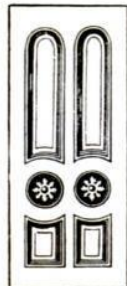
INFERENCES FROM THE ARCHITECTURAL style are based on knowing that tastes in domestic architecture have gone through well-defined phases. But two precautions must be observed in drawing conclusions: (1) Styles were in fashion at different times in different parts of the country; (2) You must learn about the false clues that a house can give off (more below).

IN INTERPRETING the style of your house, it's imperative that you become familiar with the architectural peculiarities of your area—in addition to knowing what the standard style books say. For example, new styles tended to appear first in the cities of the East. It could take 20-30 years for a style to show up in remote rural areas or the far West. One of the references listed on the previous page gives some helpful guidance on when various styles appeared in major sections of the U.S.

Beware Misleading Clues

A COMMON ERROR made in looking for age clues in the style of a house is to try to make a determination based on the entire physical mass. This approach overlooks the fact that very few old houses stand exactly the way they were built. Over the years, various "improvements" are made. Material is added—or taken off.

FOR EXAMPLE, a simple colonial-style farmhouse built in 1800 might have undergone extensive renovation in 1860. A typical remodeling would have called for raising the roof, adding a fancy bracketed cornice, plus new chimneys and porches. To the casual observer, it would look like a typical mid-Victorian Italianate home. Only closer examination would reveal the building's earlier origins.



Door
ca. 1879

ALSO CONFUSING to the beginner is the tendency of many carpenter-builders (and architects, too) to combine in a single dwelling the elements from several different styles that pleased them. Any attempt to hang a single style label on such a building is doomed to failure.

THE KEY LIES IN STUDYING each detail in the house: Windows, doors, cornice, porches, chimneys, roofline, siding, ornament, interior woodwork, mantels, etc. The styling and combinations of many of these elements can give age clues to within 10 years. If all pieces seem to match up in age, then you have a pretty good idea of what you are dealing with. If there seems to be a big disparity in the age of the parts so that you're utterly confused, then it may be time to call in the experts.

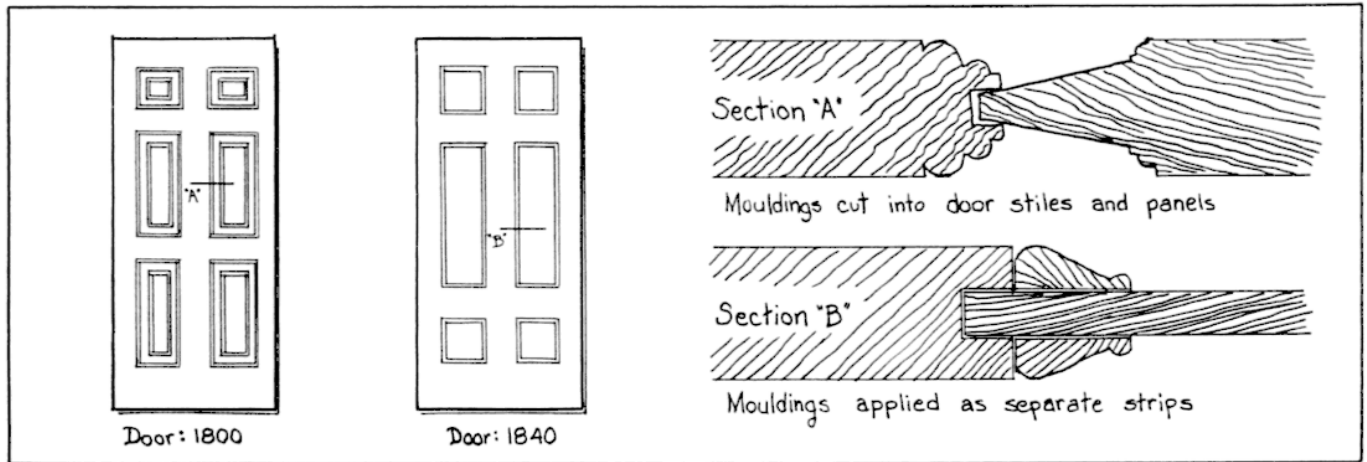
OBVIOUSLY, this process of stylistic analysis will go a lot faster with the guidance of a professional architectural historian. But the homeowner who puts his or her mind to it can usually usually learn enough about local architecture to pinpoint the age of the house to within 10-15 years.

Physical Evidence

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE is mainly of value for houses built before 1840. After that date, there aren't enough variations in materials and methods to be very helpful. Dating from physical evidence is tricky for the experts—so obviously most homeowners can't expect to come up with accurate results without a lot of study. What follows is a

Old Nails Yield Dating Clues

Hand Wrought Nails; Made from 1600's up through early 1800's	Machine-Cut Nails with handmade heads 1790's-1820's	Machine-Cut and headed nails 1815's-1830's	"Modern" Machine- Cut Nails 1830's-Present



brief review of the kinds of things a trained antiquarian would look for.

FIRST, you don't draw any conclusions from a single piece of evidence. Rather, you try to date as many pieces of material as you can—and then see what patterns develop. For example, it's easy to be led astray by the propensity of old-time builders to re-use building materials. (Recycling was not invented by the current generation!) You could very well find hand-wrought nails and hardware made in 1790 being used in a house built in 1830.

AMONG THE ELEMENTS that can yield up dating clues: Nails; Latches & Hinges; Timber Framing; Sash & Window Glass; Plaster Lath; Woodscrews; Doors; Fireplaces & Chimneys; Paneling. Here is a brief sampling of the dating characteristics of some of these elements:

NAILS: All nails were hand-wrought up until the 1790's. Then a series of technical developments made possible machine-made nails. Nail manufacture changed several times up until the wire nail took over after 1850. So a good sampling of nails can help you date a house as before 1790; or a date somewhere between the 1790's and 1840-50; or after 1850. An excellent book-let on nail chronology is available.*



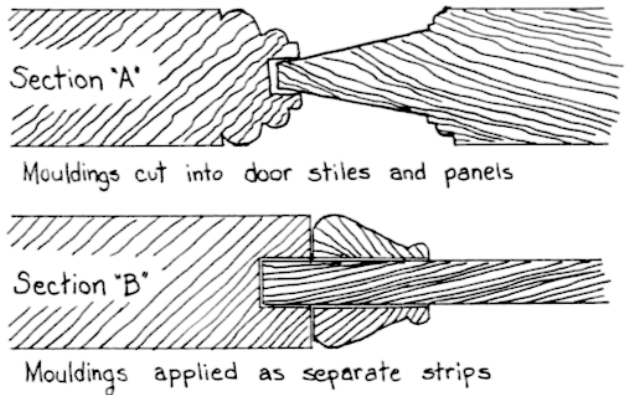
Wire Nails After 1850's



Pointless Screw: Before 1846

SCREWS WITHOUT POINTS were in wide use up until 1846. New machinery at that date made it possible to make screws with points—which won rapid acceptance. So the existence of screws without points in old hinges, etc., indicates a house was probably built before 1846.

MOULDINGS ON ORIGINAL DOORS give clues (see diagram above). Until about 1835, all mouldings were cut as an integral part of the door with hand moulding planes. When cheap machine-cut strip



mouldings started to become available, many builders quickly adopted them. Any door with these separate moulding strips was made sometime after 1835. However, doors with integral mouldings were still being made after 1835 in some areas where strip moulding wasn't available—or by old-time carpenters who wouldn't abandon the old ways.



Suffolk Latch 1740-1840



Norfolk Latch 1800-1850

LATCHES AND HINGES can also yield dating clues. Unfortunately, in many cases the original latches may have been replaced. The best place to look for original hardware is in the minor rooms on upper floors, attic doors, etc. In some cases these less important spaces were "modernized." Two common hand-wrought latch types and approximate dates are shown at the left. Detailed information on dating old hardware is given in the booklet described at the bottom of this column.

A HOUSE FRAME made up of large 6"x6" (or larger) timbers held together with wooden pegs indicates the house was built before 1840. Balloon framing—based on 2x4's—came into use in the 1840's. You can usually see the framing members in the attic. The attic is also a good place to look for other original materials, nails, etc., and for signs of alterations. ■■

Booklet On Dating Pre-1840 Houses

TO PROVIDE MORE DETAILS on dating pre-1840 houses, The Journal has arranged to reprint Henry C. Mercer's classic paper "The Dating of Old Houses." It's based on research in 150 old houses in Pennsylvania. Conclusions, however, also apply to New York, New England and Southern states. The 64-pg. softcover booklet also contains a useful "Glossary of Colonial Architectural Terms." To order, send \$3 to: Old-House Journal, 199 Berkeley Pl., Brooklyn, NY 11217.

*"Nail Chronology As An Aid To Dating Old Buildings." Available for 50¢ from: Assn. for State & Local History, 1315 Eighth Ave. South, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

Products For The Old House

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THE ROYAL WINDYNE COLLECTION is an unusual new line of lamps that are appropriate for the old house--either late Victorian or early 20th century. Simply styled in brass with glass shades or globes, the lamps are hand-crafted in solid brass, electrified, and hand-finished.



THE SEVEN LAMPS in the line (shown is the Duke of Wellington) are not reproductions. They are original designs with a turn-of-the-century flavor and would be attractive additions to rooms with an Art Movement, Edwardian, or Art Nouveau motif.

FREE DESCRIPTIVE literature and ordering information is available from the Royal Windyne Collection, Windyne Company, Box 9091, Richmond, Virginia 23225.



Victorian Oak Pull Chain Toilets

A CALIFORNIA COMPANY, Heads Up, Inc., is now manufacturing a full line of oak bathroom furniture and accessories, including a reproduction pull chain toilet.

Jim and Debbie Hogan were restoring their home in Newport Beach and wanted to install a period bathroom. When Hogan had difficulty locating a "Valveless Water Waste Preventer," as the pull chain toilet was originally called, he decided to reproduce them himself. "I figured there were lots of people who would like a really unique bathroom," recalls Jim. "So I called wood working craftsman, Ron Bray, and we put the company together."

TODAY'S APPARATUS is based on principles first employed by



Thomas Crapper, a plumbing genius and Royal Plumber to Kings Edward VII and George V. The Heads Up version of the Crapper toilet is efficient (uses only half the water of a standard toilet) and handsome with oak encased tank, solid oak seat and brass hardware. It retails for about \$500. Also available are oak shaving stands, oak sink with china bowl, oak mirrors, towel hangers, and other accessories.

For more information, contact: Jeff Scott, Heads Up, Inc. 1835 Whittier Avenue, D-5, Dept. OH, Costa Mesa, CA 92627. Tel. (714) 646-7722.

Historic Wallcoverings

The Reed Early American Homes Documentary Wall-covering Collection is now available through interior designers and fine retailers. Described in a handsome, colorful brochure, "Early American Homes" from Reed, \$4.50. Each wallcovering is shown in a restored home. Designers and fine retailers can purchase the brochure in a specially created, spectacular portfolio with full sample pages for \$50. For additional information, contact: Reed Early American Homes, P.O. Box 52899J, Atlanta, GA 30305. Telephone: (404) 261-6383.

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