

# HISTORIC ZONING

*News*

Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission  
Number 2 • Spring 1991

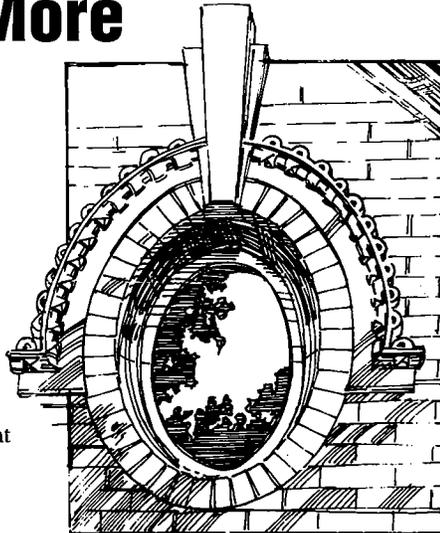
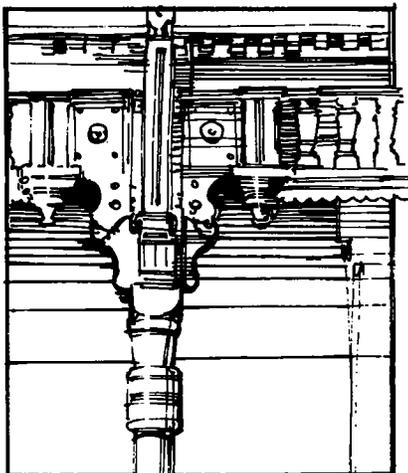
## Paint Colors, Lighting, Millwork, and More

**H**ow do you decide what color to paint a late nineteenth century Victorian cottage? Where do you go to find doorknobs or light fixtures to suit an early twentieth century bungalow? What would you need to consider when designing a compatible addition to a Tudor Revival house?

The rehab choices you make will affect the value of your house and neighborhood economically and aesthetically. The impact will be positive if you choose wisely and undertake the types of home improvements that are architecturally compatible and appropriate for your particular house and neighborhood.

If you are considering a home improvement project, our office may be able to help you increase the value to your house and save you time, trouble, and money on the front end.

In addition to free architectural/rehab advice from the staff, we maintain a library of technical information on interiors and as well as exteriors of old buildings.



Information ranging from appropriate paint colors to how to clean masonry can be found. We also have:

- copies from the 1970s to the present of the *Old House Journal*, a magazine full of useful, practical advice and sources on rehabilitation, landscaping, furnishings and other related topics;
- copies of *Traditional Building*, a directory of resources for sometimes hard-to-find historic hardware, lighting, millwork, etc.;
- catalogs on windows, doors, hardware, etc.;
- books on architectural styles, historic wallpapers, etc.

Historic loans are also available through MDHA for houses over forty years old located in designated Neighborhood Strategy Areas.

If any of the above would be helpful to you, please call our office at 862-7970 to make an appointment. This is a free service.

## District Expansion

**A** first for Nashville, an existing historic zoning district has been expanded. Approximately 100 properties on Shelby Avenue and Woodland, Fatherland, and South Ninth streets, historically part of the Edgefield neighborhood, were recently added to the Edgefield historic zoning district. Councilman John Summers and Historic Edgefield, Inc., are to be thanked for their two-year effort to obtain historic zoning protection for the fine Victorian, bungalow, four-square, and Tudor Revival period houses on these streets.

The Lockeland Springs-East End conservation zoning district may soon be expanded as well. Properties on the upper ends of Lillian and Boscobel streets and Shelby and Long avenues are targeted by the Lockeland Springs Neighborhood Association for inclusion. An information meeting for property owners will be held by the Historic Zoning Commission in April.

## Landmarks Protected

**T**wo more historic houses have been designated historic zoning landmarks: Idlewild, on Neeleys Bend Road in Madison, and the Smith Farmhouse, on Highway 100 in the Pasquo community.

Built c. 1874 by prosperous farmer Robert Chadwell, Idlewild is an outstanding example of Italianate period architecture and illustrates the Italian Villa style in a farmhouse. Betty Nixon is the owner.

The Smith Farmhouse, owned by Mary Smith, has been in the same family since its construction about 1815. Built by James H. Smith, a successful merchant who established general stores in the Pasquo and Brush Creek communities, the house illustrates the evolution of three distinct architectural eras: early

# Wood Fences

*"That the fence should enhance rather than impair the effect produced by the house, it must be made to conform to it. This will best be done, not by a finical imitation of details, but by imparting the same general character, whether of simplicity or richness, of lightness, or of strength...A fence should be adapted not only to the house, but the location and the neighborhood. Before you copy some pattern, which has struck your fancy, consider whether the circumstances of the two are alike."*

*Village and Town Cottages*

**W**ritten in 1856, this advice for building a suitable fence still holds true today. A fence gives a site its first opportunity to impress visitors. It is a visual amenity as well as a functional part of a house. As such, it needs to fit with the architectural style or character of the house to which it belongs.

Historically, the earliest fences in America were functional. Made of rough lumber, they kept intruders out and animals in and delineated the boundaries of newly settled land.

During the colonial era, fences were considered an important part of a home's entire design. Classical lines and design were advocated in an 1830 publication by the influential builder Asher Benjamin.

Near the mid 1800s romantic and picturesque era, fences fell somewhat out of favor as influenced by A. J. Downing. Downing advocated a natural, free-form look to the landscape. Fences were still needed, particularly in urban settings, but they were generally light and delicate, in keeping with the architectural feel of the Gothic Revival and Italianate periods.

During the latter half of the 1800s, Victorians favored ornate, fanciful fence designs complementing the fancy gingerbread and other exterior decoration on their houses. Patternbooks were published showing elaborately detailed fences, both iron and wood picket designs.

The early 1900s witnessed a return to nature, and ornamentation was again unpopular. Not much has been written on early twentieth century fences, but evidence indicates that where fences were built, the tendency to relate them to the design and character of the houses continued. Fence designs for bungalows, for example, were boxier and more squarish, like bungalows. Overall, fences of this period were simple, following more classic lines.

Today an enormous variety of fencing has become available. But not all are appropriate for Nashville's historic neighborhoods.

For example, chain link fences, when noticeable from public streets, are intrusive in historic neighborhoods because of their harsh, modern appearance. And rail fences with horizontal boards or split rails, are out of character in an urban setting because of their rural, colonial look.

To determine what types of fences are appropriate for Nashville's historic neighborhoods, we researched the subject and turned to old photographs of various local streets. We found that

iron fences were generally limited to the more formal, high style houses of the period from 1850-1900. Wood fences, however, appear to have been quite popular for all types of houses and architectural periods.

Because wood fences are appropriate in general and are still reasonably affordable to construct, this article focuses on wood fences.

We offer general advice due to space limitations, but if you will call (862-7970) to make an appointment, we will be glad to share our more detailed research, including information on construction methods and many sources for custom and ready-made fencing.

## General Rules Of Thumb:

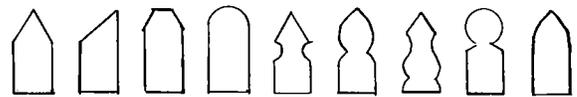
Be sensitive to the architectural character of house and surroundings. Make the scale of the fence proportionate to the scale of your house, and attempt to make it fit in with a unified look for the streetscape. Avoid visual clutter.

If a fence abuts a neighboring one, consider using the same type of fence if appropriate to the style of your house, or use a transitional element, such as a post between two different types of fences.

Make finished sides of fences face out to the street or neighboring yards. All structural members should be on the inside, facing your house.

To make a fence last longer, finish the fence with light colors—neutral white or pale cream paint, white wash, or opaque stains. (Historically, a front yard fence was almost always painted or whitewashed this way, giving it a more formal look).

Enhance an inexpensive wood fence with decorative cut tops of pickets or boards and posts.

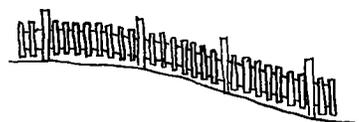


PICKET OR BOARD TOPS

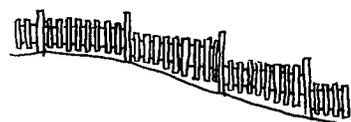


POST TOPS

Consider the terrain and plan for it, since not all fences adapt easily to hills.

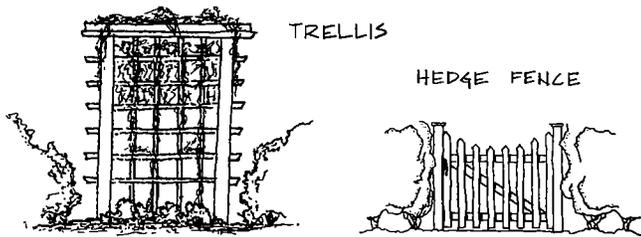


SLOPED



STEPPED

Avoid over-fencing. If privacy or screening is desired for certain areas, use plantings, a trellis, or section of a fence if appropriate, instead of boxing in the entire yard along the lot line.



Screen garbage containers from street view through use of a fence segment, gate, trellis, or planting.

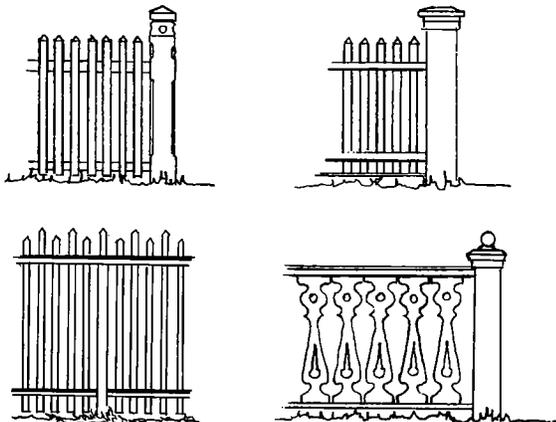
Consider removing inappropriate fences such as chain link. If removal is not feasible, soften the out-of-place look of a chain link by painting it dark green.

If purchasing ready-made fencing, check workmanship. Watch for open joints, missing structural pieces, thin pieces (commercially available pickets can be as thin as 1/2" and last perhaps 3 or 4 years), gaps where boards meet posts or rails, nails or screws not well sunk.

Install fence posts 3' into the ground. Fill post holes with soil and gate posts with concrete.

### Picket Fences

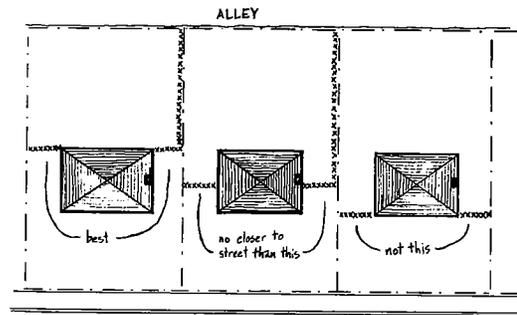
- are appropriate around front and/or rear yards, generally following property lines
- should range between 2' 6" to 4' in height
- should have pickets that range in thickness from 1/2" to 1 1/4" and in width from 1 1/4" to 3"
- should have pickets spaced to clear the ground by 3", spaced 2" to 3" apart, depending on picket width (Usually broad pickets are closer, 2" to 2 1/2" apart, and narrow pickets are about 3" apart.)
- should have posts set 6' to 8' apart with corner and gate posts from 4" x 4" to 6" x 6" square and slightly taller than intermediate posts, which are about 4" x 4" square.



EXAMPLES - PICKET FENCES

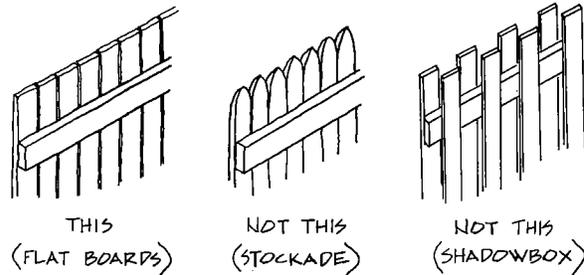
### Board (Privacy) Fences

- are appropriate only around rear yards (The front sections should be set no closer to the street than halfway between the front and rear walls of the house, ideally at rear corner.)

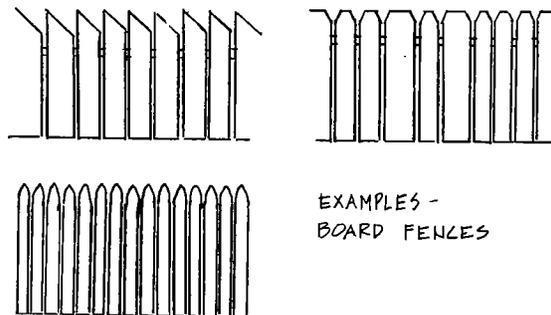


PLACEMENT OF BOARD FENCES

- should have boards 1" x 4 or 6" wide and 4' to 6' tall
- should have flat, not stockade or shadow box, boards



- should have vertical, not horizontal, boards
- should have 4" x 4" or 6" x 6" posts set 8' apart
- should have boards set 2" or 3" off the ground



EXAMPLES - BOARD FENCES

Sources:

*The Old House Journal*, March 1979 and April 1979

*Traditional Building*, March/April 1991

*Shaker Heights Fences*, 1984



## Design Guidelines Publication

**H**istoric Edgefield, Inc. has funded publication of a new design guidelines manual. The manual, designed for easier use by homeowners, includes the Edgefield design guidelines and information on how to get exterior changes approved by the Commission. To obtain a copy, call the Commission staff at 862-7970.

## Commission News

**N**ew Office. The Commission has moved from the Customs House to new offices at 176 Third Avenue, North, in the historic Bush-Herbert building.

**Staff.** Occasionally the staff is called on for professional expertise from individuals and groups outside Nashville's historic districts. Currently, executive director Shain Dennison is a featured speaker in a series of training workshops for historic zoning commissions

across the state sponsored by the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Tennessee Heritage Alliance. Curt Garrigan, staff architect, has been asked to serve on the 1992 Tennessee Main Street Program selection team.

## A Reminder

**I**f you live in or own property in a historic or conservation zoning district, please remember to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Commission for exterior changes *before* any work is done.

Work undertaken without a COA or in conflict with a COA is a zoning violation and subject to penalties and fines. Violations can easily be avoided by calling the Commission staff.

If you're not sure what changes require a COA, or if a problem arises while doing work approved in a COA, just call 862-7970. The staff will be glad to answer any questions or make adjustments to the COA.

They will provide free help to assist you in planning changes that will meet the design guidelines for your historic district. Getting their assistance on the front end will save you time and effort.

## Blakemore Update

**I**f you haven't visited the Blakemore conservation zoning district, Spring is a great time to go. Two of the four historic houses in this small district located at 1908 Wedgewood Avenue (near 21st Avenue, South) have been renovated for commercial use. Now home to The Village Gardener, a unique gift shop and garden center, they show how residential structures can be sensitively adapted for commercial use.

## Landmarks

*continued from page 1*

Tennessee log construction and later Victorian and bungalow styles.

Thanks to the owners and council members Buck Dozier and Jo Ann North, who sponsored the zoning bills for landmark designation. These special historic resources are now protected for all Nashvillians to enjoy.

### Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission

176 Third Avenue, North  
Nashville, TN 37201  
(615) 862-7970

Bulk Rate  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Nashville, TN  
Permit No. 123