

Victorian Era Architecture

1850 to 1900

Architectural Style and Sensitive Rehabilitation

1850 to 1900

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Nashville emerged from the Civil War a growing southern agricultural and industrial center. A dramatic increase in population during the 1870s and 1880s led to the development of suburbs, such as Edgefield and Lockeland Springs, which today feature some of Nashville's historic domestic architectural styles. The development of several institutions of higher learning, such as Vanderbilt University, Fisk University, and Meharry Medical College, and the cre-

ation of an electric streetcar transit system in the late 1880s encouraged and facilitated suburban growth.

This rapid industrialization and the growth of the railroads led to changes in architectural methods and styles. Light balloon-frame construction replaced heavy-timber framing and fostered architectural experimentation with eclectic Victorian styles. "Victorian" architecture refers to an era during which Queen Victoria reigned in England and encompasses a wide variety of styles, including Italianate, Second Empire, Romanesque Revival, Queen Anne,

and Eastlake. Although Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1901, the Victorian styles dominated the second half of the nineteenth century.

The great variety of Victorian architectural styles can be overwhelming. It is difficult to find in Nashville or anywhere else a "pure" example of a Victorian style due to the eclectic mixing and matching of many designs. Moreover, there is no defined chronology of styles, but rather overlapping periods of popularity. In addition, other styles of the period, such as Colonial Revival architecture, often featured Victorian influences.

IDENTIFYING THE STYLES

Several styles differing widely in appearance make up the Victorian era in architecture. Examples of Victorian styles include Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Eastlake, Romanesque, and transitional designs. In general, these styles contain multi-textured and multi-colored walls with steeply pitched roofs and can be divided into early, middle, and late periods of the Victorian era.

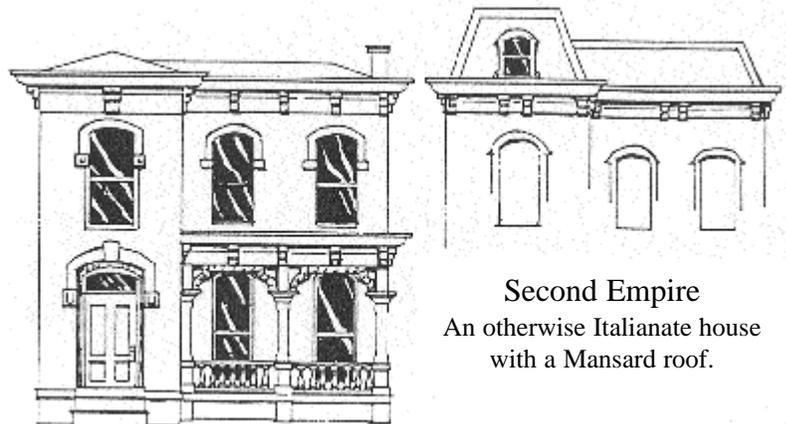
Early to Middle Victorian

During the middle of the nineteenth century, tastes turned away from Greek and Roman Revivals toward other revival styles. Gothic Revival, characterized by pointed arches and gingerbread trim, blossomed during the 1840s, yet few domestic structures remain in Nashville. A well-known example is Glen Oak, located on 25th Avenue South.

The Italianate style, however, grew in popularity and remained fashionable through 1880. Low-pitched roofs and widely overhanging eaves with decorative brackets distinguish Italianate residences. In addition, they feature tall, narrow windows that typically have elaborate decorative crowns. A defining feature is often a square cupola or tower. A number of Italianate-

style houses remain in Nashville neighborhoods. These are mostly modest middle-class houses, but several grand country estates were also built in this design, such as Two Rivers on McGavock Pike and Clover Bottom on Lebanon Road.

A similar style is the Second Empire design, which is basically an Italianate structure with a French mansard roof and dormer windows. The French-inspired Second Empire style takes its name from the reign of Napoleon III and was common in the United States from 1855-1885. West Meade's Mansard roof reflects the influence of the Second Empire style. A fine non-residential example of the Second



Second Empire

An otherwise Italianate house with a Mansard roof.

Victorian Era Architecture

STYLES, CONTINUED

Middle to Late Victorian

By the 1880s, two-dimensional gingerbread trim had been superseded by elaborate three-dimensional decorative elements. Houses became less compact in plan and outline, and surface treatments became rich and varied. Two such styles include Queen Anne and Eastlake and are common throughout Nashville's historic neighborhoods.

Queen Anne is the style most often associated with the term "Victorian." This style is characterized by a steeply pitched, irregularly shaped roof

and an asymmetrical façade often with patterned shingles. Queen Anne houses are typically two stories, have a dominant front-facing gable, and feature a one-story porch. These houses

usually have several seemingly inharmonious decorative elements, such as windows of many shapes and various types of building materials.

The Eastlake design is similar to the Queen Anne style in overall effect though usually somewhat smaller in size. The styles share the rambling irregularity of outline and highly decorative treatment;

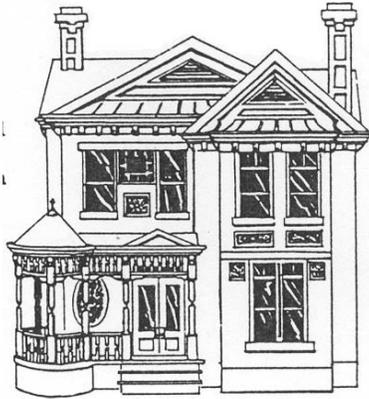
but, in contrast to the Queen Anne, masonry in Eastlake is generally confined to chimneys and foundations. Decorative elements included

extremely creative and elaborate woodwork. Examples of the Eastlake style exist within the Edgefield Historic

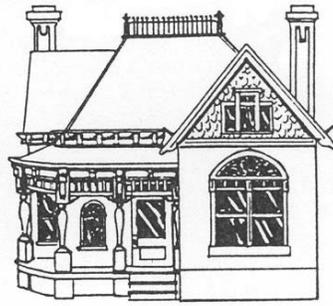
District along Boscobel and Fatherland Streets.

Another style popular in the 1880s and 1890s seen with some frequency in Nashville is Victorian Romanesque Revival. A loose revival of the medieval Romanesque style, it is characterized by heavy stonework and low, rounded arches.

Its occasional towers, turrets, and varied window sizes and shapes are similar to Queen Anne. Romanesque Revival is rather large in scale and always of masonry construction, usually stone. The remaining Nashville examples combine brick and stone.



Queen Anne



Eastlake



Transitional Victorian

In the 1890s, toward the end of the Victorian era, taste began to shift away from the exuberant decorative approach of preceding decades back toward more restrained architectural decoration based on the classical orders of ancient

Greece and Rome. This resulted in houses that combine Victorian planning with classical ornament. There are a number of such houses in Nashville that are clearly Victorian in overall arrangement and in

Transitional



certain details but which lack most or all of the traditional Eastlake woodwork. Most often the Eastlake porch has been replaced by a porch with Greek- or Roman-inspired columns.

The styles outlined above provide an overview of Nashville's Victorian era domestic architecture. It is important to remember that all the features of a particular house may not fit neatly into one style category. A house may well contain elements of several different styles as well as something totally unprecedented.

Romanesque Revival



Victorian Era Architecture

SENSITIVE REHABILITATION

The general idea when renovating a Victorian house, or any old house, is to create a comfortable, livable environment, compatible with the lifestyle of the present, while retaining its architectural character—that which makes it and its neighbors an important document of our past. The National Park Service defines rehabilitation as a “process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.” While the terms “restoration” and “reconstruction” imply a somewhat rigid depiction of a specific period, as with a historic house museum, rehabilitation simply suggests sensitivity

to the historic integrity of the property.

For most people a period restoration is neither financially feasible nor practical. What makes sense in most cases is a sensitive, careful rehabilitation. Homeowners within historic and conservation zoning districts must apply for permits through the Metro Historical Commission and follow specified design guidelines.

In planning a rehabilitation, one must determine the architectural character of the house. This is largely a matter of architectural style but goes beyond style alone. Character also involves the relationship of the house to the street, its yard, and to surrounding structures. These relationships combine with architectural style to create the character of the house. Together houses create the character of the street, and streets form the character of the entire neighborhood.

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

In determining architectural character, it is helpful to look at a house as two layers. The first is the structure itself: the walls, openings for windows and doors, the configuration of the roof and chimneys. These constitute the basic form of the house. They are the core to which finish materials are applied. The final appearance of the house depends heavily on its basic form. In planning a rehabilitation, priority should be given to maintaining the basic form or returning to the original form if alterations have been made.

The second layer consists of finish materials, both functional and decorative. This includes visible masonry, siding, roof materials, doors and window sashes, and all sorts of decorative trim. The porch, both functional and decorative, is also of paramount importance to the character of the house.

Finish materials are of secondary importance only in that they are applied to the basic form and are in that sense dependent upon it. If lost or altered, finish treatments can usually be returned to original configuration with a great deal less trouble and expense than can the basic form, yet their importance to the character of the house should not be underestimated.

Siding, Finish Materials

Wood

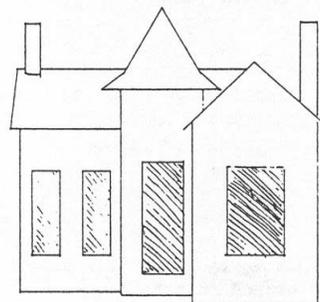
Simple or beaded, lapped siding, tongue and groove, and board and batten siding were used on Victorian houses. Siding and carved fancy work were always painted. Wood shakes and shingles were also used, sometimes cut in fancy shapes and laid in decorative patterns; they were usually stained.

Masonry

Earlier houses usually employed locally made brick that had a dark red-orange color. Mortar tended to be yellowish and was very soft. Later brick tended to have a smoother surface finish. Colors varied but were usually redder and less orange than before. Mortar joints were usually very narrow and often tinted to match the brick. The effect on

Three Views of the Same House

Basic Form

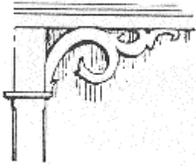


Basic Surface Treatment

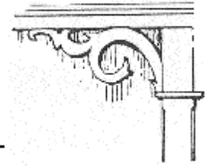


Decorative Trim





Victorian Era Architecture



ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER, CONTINUED

most houses was of a single color without the mottled color variation effect often seen in today's brickwork.

Stone is plentiful in this region and is frequently seen in house construction. All but the smaller houses had a stone foundation. Other than in foundations, stone is mostly seen in remaining Nashville Victorian houses as decorative trim—window lintels, column capitals—usually with decorative carving.

Non-original surface finishes

Composition shingles and roll siding, aluminum and vinyl siding are not original on Victorian houses and should be removed. Paint on masonry is generally not original, but removal is not always the best action.

Roof Materials

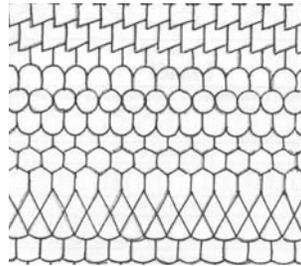
Three types of roofing were in common use in Nashville's Victorian neighborhoods. Earlier homes most often used wood shingles, as did the more modest homes later. Some roofs were of metal—especially standing seam tin. Others featured slate roofs often with metal ridges and flashing used as part of a decorative scheme.

Metal and slate roofs also often had iron finials (a sculptured ornament often in the shape of a leaf or a flower) at gable peaks and iron filigree, called cresting, along the ridges of the roof. Re-roofing over the years has caused the

loss of most of this type of decorative work. Only scattered examples remain locally.

Paint Colors

Victorian paints were usually lead-based. The finish resembled present-day semi-gloss. The Victorian era began with a shift away from the white paint dominant in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Early to mid-Victorian era homes featured soft, pale colors designed to blend and harmonize with nature—beige, soft, muted greens, pale grays, and blue-grays. Colors grew darker and more intense as architecture became more ornate during the mid- to late Victorian era. Frame houses developed interesting color schemes using a wide range of earth tones and dark greens and reds. Bright colors or blues were generally not used. Transitional Victorian homes developed white and pale colors as classical decorative forms regained favor.



Decorative shingles are commonly found on Victorian facades.

Setting

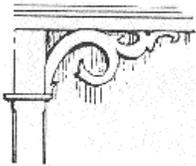
With only a few exceptions, the Victorian houses left in Nashville were designed for narrow, deep lots in early streetcar suburbs. The houses were designed to be seen primarily from the street, and thus the street façade is the most important. The side of a house was designed to be seen in detail only if the house was on a corner. Front yards were small, rear yards were somewhat larger, and side yards virtually nonexistent. Houses built in this way tend to create a visual rhythm along the street. Vacant lots and buildings that stray too far from the norm in size or placement on the lot disturb this rhythm.

REMOVAL OF MATERIALS

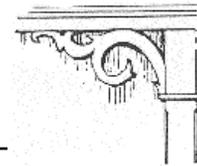
Removing features of a house that are not original is usually an appropriate treatment and often, but not always, a desirable course of action. Careful thought should be exercised before removing anything. Anything actively detrimental to the structure of the house, like aluminum or vinyl siding, should be removed. Other additions to the house such as wrought iron porch columns or inappropriate window sash are generally replaced with something more appropriate during the course of the rehabilitation.

Other considerations, however, may enter into the decision. Consider, for example, rooms that have been added to

the rear of a house in recent years. The addition is not especially compatible with the style of the original house, but it is not visible from the street and does little to compromise the character of the house. If the space is needed inside and the addition is structurally sound, it would be foolish to remove it. Also consider a 100-year-old house that has a 75-year-old porch. The porch does not match the original style of the house and is obviously a later addition, but it has been in place long enough to have become a significant part of the house and its history. Retaining this porch could well be preferable to replacing it, especially if the appearance of the original porch is a matter of conjecture. Always think about it before removing anything.



Victorian Era Architecture



REPLACING WHAT'S MISSING

Over the years, most old houses have lost something—bits and pieces of decorative trim, a mantel or light fixture, an entire front porch. It is always appropriate to restore missing parts of a house if two things are known: first, that the feature being restored was indeed there originally, and second, what the feature looked like. Ideally, everyone could have an

old photograph or original architectural plans as a guide in replacing missing parts of the house. This is rarely the case, however, and some degree of educated guesswork is often necessary in replacing what is missing. This is fine if carefully done, but regrets can arise if additional evidence proves the reconstruction of a missing feature to be inept or, worse, if the “restored” feature turns out never to have existed at all. Avoid expensive mistakes, and know what

you are doing when replacing missing parts.

Any rehabilitation, no matter how careful, will involve not only changing the present appearance of the house but also making some changes from what is known or believed to be its original appearance. This is fine if changes are made in a way that is sensitive to the architectural character of the house. Change is not inherently bad, but avoid insensitive change.

Rehab Advice ♦ Rehab Advice ♦ Rehab Advice ♦ Rehab Advice

WINDOWS

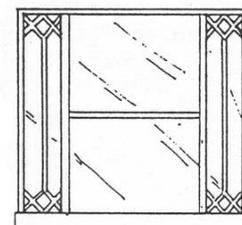
The typical window in a Victorian house is a rectangle considerably taller than it is wide. Though there were variations, the window sash is usually double-hung (the type that slides up and down to open and shut) with one light over one (meaning a single pane of glass in the top half and a single pane in the bottom).

Sometimes, usually because interior ceilings have been lowered, windows are shortened. This has a serious effect on the basic form of the house and should be corrected. Occasionally windows have been shortened and widened with picture window-type sash installed in the new, wider opening. This has an even worse effect on the appearance of the house and is more difficult to correct because part of the original wall has been removed in the widening process.

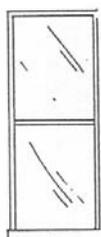
Stained Glass

The use of stained glass in Victorian houses was more limited than many people imagine. Leaded stained glass was not typical of Italianate-style houses, but single panes of ruby glass were sometimes used in front door transoms. Leaded stained glass was seen with some frequency in Eastlake and

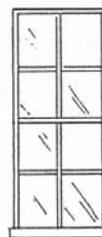
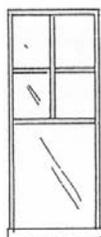
Queen Anne houses, in stairwell windows especially, and also in transoms and in odd-shaped decorative windows, never in an entire double-hung sash. The larger and more ornate the house, the more stained glass it was likely to have. Some houses had none at all. The late Victorian transitional-style houses had less stained glass, though leaded windows with clear bevel edge panes began to appear.



A wider window with flanking sidelights is common among transitional houses.

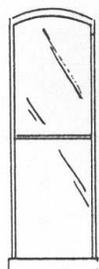


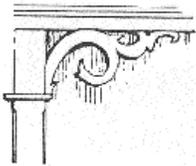
Left: Typical one-over-one Victorian sash
Right: Four-over-one and four-over-four are also common.



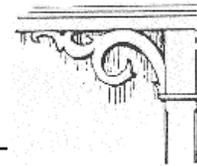
Storm Windows

As energy conservation becomes more important, many people feel the need to install storm windows. This addition can be handled so that it does little damage to the integrity of an older house. Two general rules to follow: First, the storm window should be made to fit in the original window opening exactly. It should not overlap onto the wall surface or be patched in to a larger opening. Second, the storm window should be an appropriate color matching that of the sash behind it and should never be left raw aluminum. Aluminum storm windows can be ordered in colors from the factory; among the available colors is a dark brown that is appropriate on many Victorian houses. Aluminum storms can also be painted if the factory film is removed or allowed to weather off.





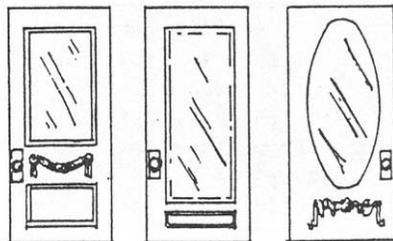
Victorian Era Architecture



DOORS

Styles of doors have changed over the years. If an original door is missing, an effort should be made to find an appropriate replacement. Sometimes a new door must be used, but flush doors and inappropriate paneled doors should be avoided.

An unfortunately frequent addition to the front door of many old houses is a storm door. While storm doors do have their functional merits, they obscure the details of the door behind—details that were meant to be seen. If a storm door must be used, it should be a single pane of glass from top to bottom in a frame of unobtrusive color, though the reflection on the glass still obscures a clear view of the door behind it.



Transitional style doors typically had a glass panel. These are common variations.

on a masonry foundation or piers. Wooden latticework usually filled the spaces between the brick or stone piers. On larger masonry houses, the porch was sometimes built of stone and/or brick and had a floor paved with ceramic tile; but, on the whole, wooden porches were much more commonplace in Nashville.

The disadvantage of wooden porches was their tendency to rot. At the outside edge especially, blowing rain wet the floor and column bases. If aggravated by poor maintenance—allowing gutters to clog, failing to keep the wood surfaces painted—rot was the inevitable result. Some deteriorated porches have been removed altogether. Some have been enclosed. Many more have been “improved” with poured concrete floors and altered columns.

Porch Repair

Relatively few Victorian porches have survived intact.

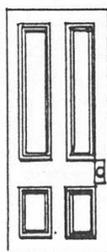
Almost all require some repair, but the situation varies so much from house to house that it is difficult to make generalizations about what should be done. Difficult questions can arise if the work required goes beyond the

repair or replacement of a few places here and there. Generally speaking, repairs which conserve as much as possible of the original fabric of the porch are most desirable. Sections that are missing or are deteriorated beyond repair

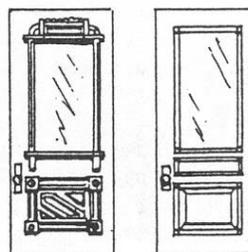
PORCHES

No Victorian house was built without a porch. The porch was an important functional element of the house and, in most cases, an essential decorative feature as well. Today, though not as important functionally, the porch is still visually essential. Often, on smaller houses especially, the porch is the major decorative feature of the entire exterior; and the architectural style of the house is determined by its design.

Though they were roofed in different ways, most Victorian porches were constructed entirely of wood and set

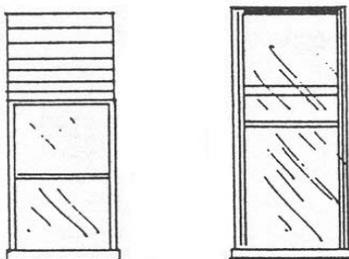
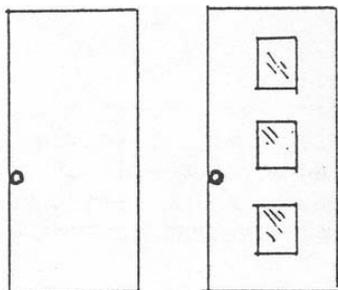


Left: A door typical of Italianate and other mid-century styles. Right: Later Victorian doors were usually half-glass.



Problems to Avoid

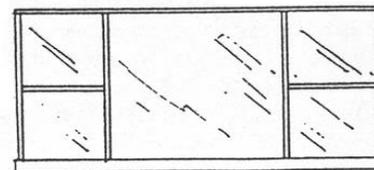
Below: Flush doors like these are not appropriate as front doors for Victorian houses.



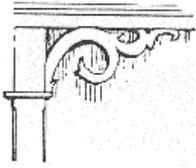
Left: Ceiling lowered, a new sash installed, and the gap filled.

Right: Lower ceiling dropped behind original sash

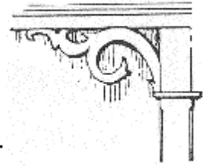
Below: The original opening has been lowered and widened to make room for this picture window. This creates a potential structural problem as well as visual inconsistency.



Problems to Avoid



Victorian Era Architecture

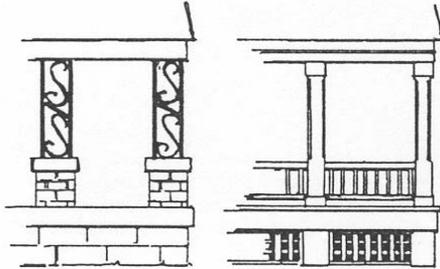


PORCHES, CONTINUED

should be replaced, matching the original if possible. If the porch is completely missing or altered beyond recognition, some form of reconstruction is in order.

Decisions on a course of action for treating a porch must hinge on two points: first, how much is known about the original appearance of the porch, and second, how much is the owner willing to pay.

Determining the original appearance of a porch or of individual pieces is not difficult if only a few pieces are missing. Determining the original appearance of a porch that has been removed or is missing a great deal of its wood-



Left: An altered porch.

Right: A simple reconstruction that avoids possibly erroneous excess.

work is more difficult and sometimes impossible to do with a great degree of certainty. Clues can be found. Remnants of the foundation or piers are often left in the ground suggesting the plan of the original porch. The out-

line of columns and other woodwork and the line of the porch can often be seen on the wall where the porch joined the house proper. The architectural character of the house itself, if it has strong stylistic flavor, can lead to sound conclusions on the general appearance of the original porch even if other clues are not present.

If the question of appearance can be settled, the question of expense arises. Repair and replacement of bits and pieces is generally within reason. However, replacing large amounts of Victorian woodwork, though not always prohibitively expensive, can cost a great deal. Additionally, demolition of inappropriate additions like a concrete porch floor can be a major undertaking.

The preceding paragraphs are intended not to discourage the prospective renovator but to paint a realistic view of the situation. In planning a porch rehabilitation, compromises must sometimes be made. The lack of sure information on the porch's appearance and/or the lack of money will sometimes dictate a job that stops short of total restoration. For example, wrought iron porch columns are replaced with woodwork that appears, after careful study, to be appropri-

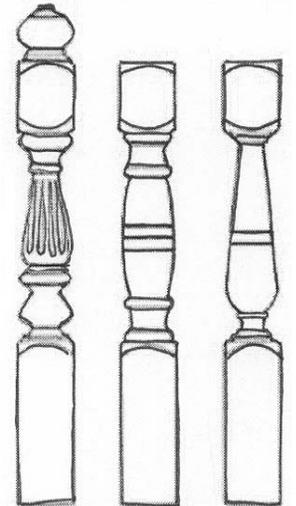
ate to the house, but for reasons of expense the concrete porch floor is retained. Such compromises are acceptable if the renovator carefully studies the situation, carefully weighs the options, and precedes with as complete and authentic a rehabilitation as possible within the limits of the situation.

Enclosing Porches

With the advent of air conditioning, the idea of sitting outside on the porch on a muggy 95-degree day ceased to be attractive to most people, and one of the porch's most important original functions became less significant. Many people are tempted to enclose porches, but this is a temptation to resist. Enclosing a porch, even with single, wall-sized panes of glass does major visual damage to the porch and thus to the house itself. Besides, open porches are still quite pleasant in the spring and fall. The foregoing does not apply as strongly to side porches that are not highly visible from the street. These can sometimes be enclosed without doing serious harm to the principal façade of the house.

Porch Lights

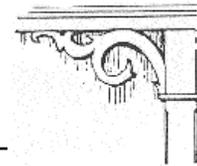
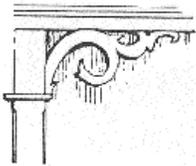
Most Victorian houses in Nashville were built without porch lights. There has been a trend toward the installation of wall-mounted porch lights, frequently resembling coach lights, which are architecturally inappropriate. Most people want a porch light today, and a proper porch light need not detract from the architectural character of the house. Usually one can be installed flush with the porch ceiling, which lights the entrance without being visible from the street.



These decorative posts are commonly found on Victorian era porches.

Porch Steps

Victorian porches with wooden floors usually have wooden steps. Stone or brick porches and an occasional wooden porch had stone steps. Victorian porches have never had brick steps. Do not add brick steps to a Victorian house.



Victorian Era Architecture

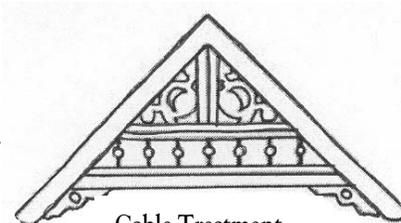
ROOFS

Because of the expense of replacing original roofing, a compromise roof is often the only choice. Sheet tin barn roofing crimped at regularly spaced intervals makes a fair visual imitation of standing seam tin and is much more affordable. There is not a good imitation of wood or tin shingles or slate, and, unless the real thing is being used, a visually low-key material that does not attract attention is the best choice. Single color composition shingles in dark colors are good for this. Composition shingles that imitate slate or wood should be avoided. They look as fake as they are. Functionally the roof is one of the most important elements of the house and often the first to need rehab attention. Nothing much can be done to the rest of the house if the roof is not sound. Visually the roof is also of great significance. Its design is one of the basic visual elements that make up the style and architectural character of a house. Roof design involves roof pitch and contours, roofing materials,

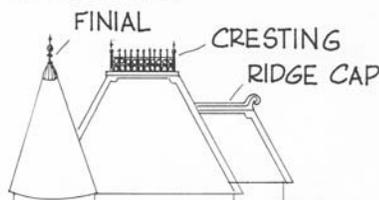
and decorative trim. All these things need careful consideration in rehab planning.

Roof Configuration

The plan, outline, pitch, and height of the roof make the framework to which roofing material is applied and are basic to the visual character of the entire house. In most cases, the roof configuration is original and should be retained. Any additions to the house or changes made in the roof itself should not seriously interfere with the roof configuration as seen from the street.



Gable Treatment



Roof Materials

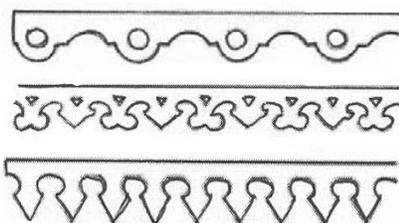
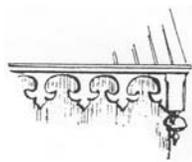
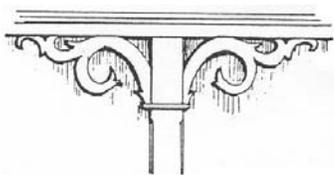
Three materials were commonplace on Nashville's Victorian roofs: wood shingles, slate, and tin. In almost every case, wood shingles have been covered over or replaced with another material. This is all too often the case with slate and tin as well. Ideally every house could have its original roof material. Replacing wood or tin

shingles is affordable for some; but, unfortunately, slate and standing seam tin are so expensive that they are generally out of reach. Slate and tin are both durable materials and should last several lifetimes if properly maintained. They can be repaired, and every effort should be made to save such roofs before the decision is made to replace one.

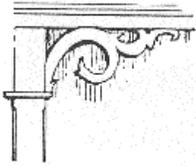
Because of the expense of replacing original roofing, a compromise roof is often the only choice. Sheet tin barn roofing crimped at regularly spaced intervals makes a fair visual imitation of wood or tin shingles or slate, and, unless the real thing is being used, a visually low-key material that does not attract attention is the best choice. Single color composition shingles in dark colors are good for this. Composition shingles that imitate slate or wood should be avoided. They look as fake as they are.

DECORATIVE TRIM

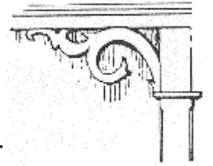
Unfortunately decorative trim is more rare than original roofing. Many later Victorian houses—Queen Anne, Eastlake, and transitional styles—had metal caps with decorative ends at roof ridges and open ironwork called cresting and finials at roof peaks. Most of this trim has vanished, but every attempt should be made to save it wherever it still exists. Unless there is documentation that such trim was original, it generally should not be added to a roof where it does not now exist.



This type of trim is commonly found on Victorian houses.



Victorian Era Architecture



Add-On Siding

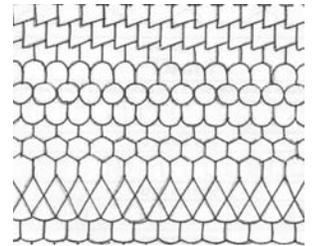
Many people who are distressed by the idea of having to keep wood painted—an ongoing maintenance necessity—have had their wooden houses, or wooden portions of masonry houses, covered with “low maintenance” siding. These sidings range from the asbestos shingles and roll siding of some years ago to the aluminum or vinyl siding most often installed today. All such sidings damage the house. At the very least, even the most careful installation will damage the visual integrity of the house, and few installations are careful. Further, such sidings are prone to trap moisture behind them, which rots the wood underneath. Because the siding remains new looking for a time, moisture-related problems often go undetected and cause serious structural damage.

If siding is already on a house, it should be removed now! Often the excuse is heard, “I don’t want to take the siding off because I’m afraid of what I might find underneath.” This excuse is the very reason to take the siding off. Any deterioration present under the siding is not getting better and is probably getting worse. Remove the siding and make necessary repairs as soon as possible.

WOOD

Exterior wood, whether used as sheathing for the entire house or as a porch and trim work on a masonry house, has both functional and decorative importance.

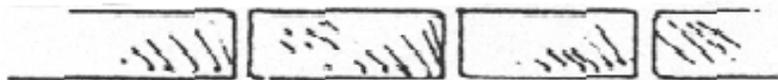
Functionally, wood serves either wholly or in part as the exterior shell of the house and must withstand the often-harsh assaults of wind, rain, sun, and changing temperature. To this end, wood is painted. Eventually weather will deteriorate paint, and seeing that this protective coating is renewed periodically is vital. Unpainted wood deteriorates very rapidly. Occasionally stain was used rather than paint. Stain alone was often used on wooden shingles used as siding. Stain with a coating of varnish was often used on front doors.



Decorative wooden shingles

As decorative treatment, wood was used in an incredible variety of ways on Victorian houses, sometimes with results that border on spectacular. While rehabilitation should always preserve as much of the original fabric of the house as possible, replacement of deteriorated wood may prove necessary. Replacement wood should duplicate the form of the original. Duplicating Victorian decorative effects can be difficult and expensive, but preserving the character of the house is worth the effort.

Paint and stain colors also played a vital decorative role. The white seen more often than not on Nashville’s Victorian houses is not an appropriate color in most cases. White was out of style during the Victorian era and only returned to favor toward the turn of the century. Color fashions changed somewhat during the period with each successive fashion suited to contemporaneous buildings. The Metropolitan Historical Commission has at its office several excellent publications on proper paint colors, which are available for consultation.



BRICK

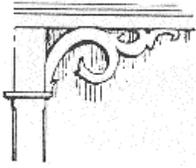
Brick is designed to withstand weather without paint or any other protective coating and to look good while doing it. As such, brick is a relatively maintenance-free material. Unless it has been the victim of serious neglect or outright abuse, brick usually requires little attention in the rehab process.

Brick Repair

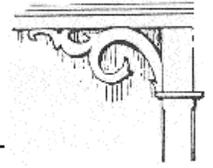
In this brief publication, it is not possible to get into a detailed discussion of the causes of brick and mortar deterioration. Very often it stems from excess water, either leaking from faulty gutters and downspouts or seeping upward from the ground. There are other possible causes as well, and the cause of the deteriora-

tion should be found and corrected before any time or money is spent on repairs. When repairs are made, three important properties of the masonry should be carefully considered: softness/hardness, dimension, and color.

Old brick and old mortar are considerably softer than brick and mortar in general use today. Modern firing produces brick that is very hard, and

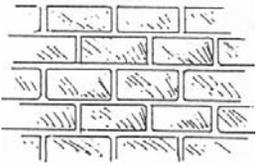


Victorian Era Architecture



BRICKS, CONTINUED

modern mortar contains portland cement, also very hard. Old, softer brick can be seriously damaged in the normal cycle of expansion and contraction caused by extremes of tem-



Normal Mortar

perature if hard, inflexible, new masonry materials are placed against it. When a hole is patched or missing mortar replaced, the materials added to the wall should match the softness of those original to the wall.

Care should be taken to match the size and shape of original bricks and mortar joints when repairs are made. This problem is mostly frequently seen in the replacement of missing mortar, called repointing or tuckpointing. Too often, repointed mortar joints are much wider than the original joints, drastically altering the appearance of the wall. Careful repointing is hard to do but is worth the effort.

Difficulties in color matching arise in part from the vast variation in brick and mortar composition and manufacture over the years and in part from natural aging and the accumulation of grime that occurs over time. Bricks can often be found to approximate the color of original bricks. Mortar tinting can be more difficult and requires a good and willing mason. An exact color match on brick and mortar is hard to achieve, but an effort in this direction should be made.

Paint and Brick

As previously mentioned, brick

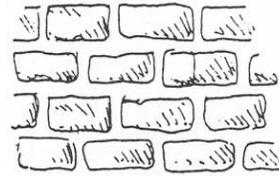
does not require a coating of paint to be functional or attractive. Very few historic houses were painted originally. Most Victorian builders liked the way brick looked, often laying it in fancy patterns or combining it with stone for decorative effect. Over the years, some old houses were painted to disguise additions or to hide dirt or sloppy repair work. In very few cases, virtually none here in Nashville, was a brick Victorian building of any type painted to begin with. To paint such a building now, for the first time, is to detrimentally alter the architectural character of the house.

Aside from aesthetics, painting brick raises practical questions. Paint is an ongoing maintenance responsibility—expensive and a bother. Painting brick introduces a mainte-

nance problem to a material that should be largely maintenance free. It rarely helps with moisture problems as many people have hoped it would.

So why paint?

A painted house usually can be effectively and safely cleaned, but careful thought is in order before this is undertaken. It would be



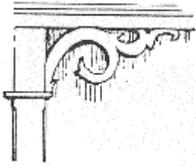
Improper Repointing

helpful to know why the house was painted in the first place. Was it to hide alterations and repairs? Was it to keep deteriorating mortar in place? If this is the case, cleaning could be disappointing or could necessitate further maintenance. Cleaning is usually a good idea and a positive step. But the process should not be undertaken lightly.

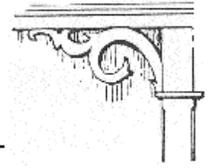
Brick Cleaning



Brick can be cleaned of dirt and paint effectively with safe chemical methods in most cases. Under no circumstances should sandblasting or any other kind of abrasive cleaning be used. This kind of process does not really clean the brick. It removes the outer layer, exposing the rough, softer, more porous inner core of the brick. It also wreaks havoc on mortar. The appearance of the brick suffers as a result; but even more important, exposing the inner brick makes it much more vulnerable to the extremes of the weather and, because it is very rough, likely to accumulate grime much more quickly than before. Clear sealers often recommended for sandblasted brick are rarely very effective and require frequent renewal. Sandblasting salesmen can be very persuasive, in spite of growing public skepticism of abrasive cleaning. Thus sandblasting sometimes masquerades under gentle-sounding names like dusting or feather blasting. It is all the same, and it should be steadfastly avoided. Sandblasting can cause serious damage, and the process is absolutely irreversible.



Victorian Era Architecture



STONE

While stone and brick are quite different physically, similar rehab recommendations apply. Like brick and mortar, stone and mortar should be compatible. New mortar joints and replacement stone should match the old. Cleaning with gentle chemical methods is recommended. Abrasive cleaning should be avoided.

Painted stone looks even worse than painted brick. Stone should not be painted and should be cleaned of paint unless special problems exist that would make cleaning inadvisable. Vines damage stone masonry as they do brick. Keep vines off stone walls and foundations.

Most vines that grow on brick and stone, especially ivy, are harmful and

should be removed. They may look romantic and lovely, but they cause two problems. First, they hold moisture that can damage the wall and seep through to the interior of the house. Second, the shoots they send out actually penetrate brick and mortar joints, wedging the wall apart. If allowed to continue long enough, this process can cause the wall to collapse.



ADDING ON

It is at times necessary to add on to an old house to create more space or to make existing space more usable. All through history, houses have grown in successive stages as changing needs demanded. Many old houses in Nashville already have one or more additions, some dating from early in the history of the house. There is nothing wrong with adding on if it is done with care and sensitivity to the architectural character of the original design.

There are two general rules to follow. First, the addition should not compromise the integrity of the principal façade of the house. The principal façade is architecturally the most important and is a vital component of the character of the entire street. It

should be preserved if possible. In most cases, this means an addition should be at the rear of the house, not visible from the front. In the case of a corner house, an addition to the rear would of course be visible, but the principal façade need not be affected.

Second, the addition should be a contemporary design distinguishable from the original structure. Old buildings are expensive and very difficult to imitate successfully, and imitations of old architecture create problems with perception. Additions that imitate the design of the original house blur the line between old and new. Perceiving its successive stages can then be difficult. Being able to readily see the different stages of the house is important today and will become more so as those who come after us will study our ways of life by looking at our build-

ings. The historic value of an old house is best protected when the addition is readily distinguishable from the original. With the careful use of materials, scale, and color, such an addition can be a harmonious partner of the older parts of the house.

Remember • Remember

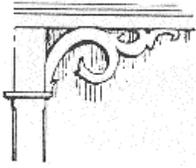
- ◆ The architectural character of a single house is a vital component of the character of the entire neighborhood.
- ◆ Additions should be a contemporary design distinguishable from the original structure.

INTERIOR

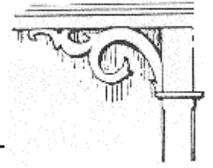
The focus of this pamphlet has been on the exterior of Victorian houses. The exterior, especially the street façade, is the part that is seen by the public and that the owner, in a sense, shares with the public. It is generally held, therefore, that maintaining historical accuracy is much more important on the exterior of a house than on the interior, the private

preserve of its occupants.

The interior of a house is where adaptations to modern living usually become a serious issue. Everyone wants to be warm in the winter and cool in the summer. No one wants to read at night by gaslight or heat a bathtub-full of water on a wood stove. Adapting an old house for modern convenience is perfectly acceptable and, if done with care, will do



Victorian Era Architecture

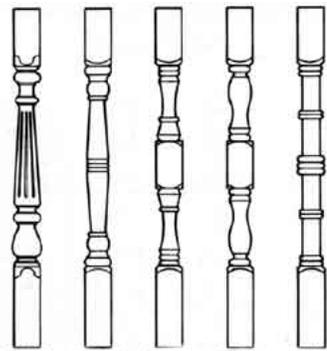


INTERIOR, CONTINUED

little harm to the architectural character of the house.

As a general rule, do not do anything to a room that would seriously hamper a period restoration in that room should an owner desire one. This means retaining, or repairing if necessary, original wall surfaces, doors, woodwork, mantels, floor surfaces and hardware. All this may not be possible in a given room, but it should be the goal. This approach allows for any style of decorating, from sleek contemporary to Grandma's attic, but retains the basic features of the room necessary for an accurate period restoration, should that be desired in the future.

This approach discourages inappropriate treatments that are difficult to reverse, such as lowered ceilings, obtrusive installation of climate control systems, inappropriate wall and ceiling treatments like sheet paneling and spray-on textures, and indiscriminate alteration of the floor plan.



Balusters

Exceptions will sometimes need to be made. Each house must be considered as a separate case, and the needs of individual owners vary widely. Kitchens and

bathrooms usually require a complete overhaul. Closet space often must be created where none exists. Traffic patterns sometimes need adjusting, requiring the moving of a wall or door. All of this is perfectly acceptable if the goal of preserving the essential architecture character of the house is kept firmly in mind, and the new is made to fit unobtrusively with the old.

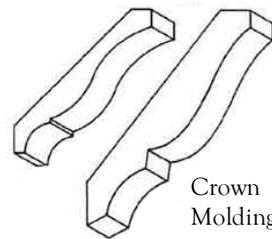
Saving Plaster

Often when the rehabilitation of an old house begins, the owners find cracked and crumbling plaster; but cracks and holes do not necessarily mandate removal of the plaster. Plaster can be patched and repaired successfully, usually saving time, effort, and money in the process. Seriously deteriorated plaster should be removed; but all too often, renovators rush into plaster removal when it is not really

necessary. Because of its low cost and ease of installation, dry wall is usually the choice for plaster replacement. However, dimensional problems can arise when fitting dry wall to original baseboards and other moldings because it is usually not as thick as the original plaster layer. Original plaster should be saved if possible.

Crown Moldings and Ceiling Medallions

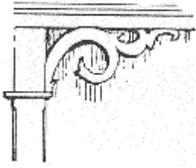
Only a few Nashville houses had any kind of crown molding or ceiling medallions. There has been an unfortunate trend among those renovating old houses to add elaborate crown moldings and medallions where none existed. This can be an expensive addition and difficult to reverse once finished. The result usually looks exactly like what it is—a phony addition, especially the medallions, which hang below the original ceiling plaster. This is a fad to avoid.



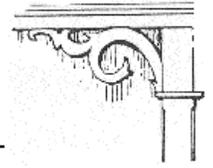
Crown Molding

Mantels

The mantel is often a dominant visual feature of a room. Styles of mantels varied widely over the years; if a mantel is missing, care should be taken to replace it with one of an appropriate style. Mid-century Victorian homes, such as the Italianate style, usually have a cast iron mantel with a stone hearth. The lines are simple with a curved mantel shelf and an arched firebox opening. Later Victorian homes, such as Queen Anne and Eastlake styles, have a wide variety of configuration and materials. The mantels feature a rectangular firebox opening with glazed tile used for the hearth. Decorative style sometimes takes cues from exterior decoration of the house, which is often very elaborate. Mantels within transitional Victorian homes are similar in overall form and materials to those of late Victorian houses. Decorative work is based on classical motifs, such as columns and garlands. Most Victorian mantels were designed for small coal-burning grates. These grates sometimes are enlarged to burn wood, but care should be taken not to do visual violence to the mantel.



Victorian Era Architecture



LANDSCAPING

Though the average old house owner cannot logically be expected to maintain a period restoration of the grounds of his house, a few pointers on Victorian gardening practice can be helpful.

Planting

Generally the fashion was away from carefully trimmed formal gardens with symmetrical arrangements of paths and hedges. A natural, rustic look, often carefully contrived, was preferred. Foundation plantings were not in style, but vines were often grown on trellises at the side of the house or on the porch. The yards reflected the period's archi-

ture in that it was ornamental. Yards were meant to be admired, a notion championed by landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing.

Fences

Where fencing was used, Victorians preferred as transparent a fence as possible, allowing the person on the street to see into the yard. Low wooden picket or iron fencing was common in Nashville's Victorian front yards. High solid walls obscuring the view of the



house and/or yard are not appropriate at the front of the house. Privacy is often desired in the backyard today; high, solid fencing is perfectly acceptable at the back if it is not obvious or obtrusive from the street.

Side and Rear Yards

Most Victorian houses in Nashville were designed for and built on narrow urban lots. Side yards are generally not in keeping with the rhythm of the street, which calls for a house every fifty feet or so. The rear yard was reserved for more utilitarian needs, such as laundry and vegetable gardening, which was typically concealed by high solid fences.

ADDITIONAL INFO

This pamphlet is designed to acquaint the owner of an old Nashville house with the basic considerations involved in a careful rehabilitation, rather than to provide detailed technical information on the rehabilitation process itself. The Metropolitan Historical Commission has in its library more detailed information on a long list of rehabilitation-related topics. The staff is willing to make site visits and offer additional advice. For further assistance, call (615) 862-7970.

Sources

Ames, David L. and Linda Flint

McClelland. "An Overview of Suburbanization in the United States, 1830 to 1960." National ParkService. <<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/index.htm>>

Doyle, Don H. *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985.

Harris, Cyril M. *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. New York: Norton Publishers, 1998.

"Heritage Preservation Services." <<http://www2.cr.nps.gov>>

McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Knopf, 1984.

"Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation." <<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tax/rhb/stand.htm>>

"Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings." <<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm>> (Covers topics ranging from reroofing to exterior painting. Hard copy available at the MHC office.)

Text, Illustrations, Design: Sarah Jackson and David Paine, 2003

Metropolitan Historical Commission does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, sex, color, national origin, religion, or disability in admission to, access to, or operations of its programs, services, or activities. The Metropolitan Historical Commission does not discriminate in its hiring or employment practices. The following person has been designated to handle questions, concerns, complaints, requests for accommodation, or requests for additional information regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act: Terri Johnson, 3000 Granny White Pike, Nashville, TN 37204 Phone: (615) 862-7970, Fax: (615) 862-7974. The following person has been designated as the Metro Title VI Coordinator to handle questions, concerns, complaints, or requests for additional information regarding Title VI of The Civil Rights Act: Michelle Lane, Department of Finance, 222 3rd Avenue North, Suite 650, Nashville, TN 37201, Phone: (615) 862-6170, Fax: (615) 862-6175. Inquiries concerning non-discrimination policies other than ADA and Title VI compliance should be forwarded to: Veronica Frazier, Department of Human Resources, 222 Third Avenue, Suite 200, Nashville TN, 37201, Phone: (615) 862-6640.