



ITS NUMBER 7

Interpreting The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Subject: Painting Previously Unpainted Woodwork

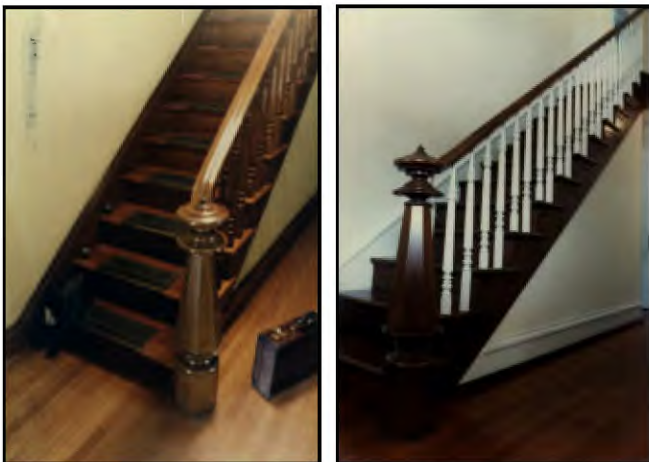
- Applicable Standards:
2. Retention of Historic Character
 5. Preservation of Distinctive Features, Finishes and Craftsmanship

Issue: Interior features and finishes are important in determining the overall character of historic buildings. Even simple features and finishes may be individually or collectively significant in defining that particular historic character for which a building has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Not only are the architectural and decorative features themselves important, but the manner in which they are finished is equally significant in defining the building's historic character.

Applying paint to traditionally *unpainted* interior surfaces can be as damaging to a building's historic character as removing paint from traditionally *painted* surfaces. For this reason, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation recommend against changing the appearance of historic features by applying new finishes to surfaces that have traditionally carried another type of finish.



This late-nineteenth century Victorian Gothic-style house had survived for almost a century with only minimal changes to its interior and exterior.



The naturally finished stairway to the second floor provides a major focal point in the hallway. Although only the balusters, floor molding and wall stringer around the staircase were painted white, this nonetheless has had a profound effect on the overall interior historic character.

Application (*Incompatible Treatment*): A late-nineteenth century (1891), Victorian Gothic-style house located in a small town historic district was rehabilitated for continued use as a single-family residence. The house had survived with a remarkable degree of integrity over the years; thus, the rehabilitation did not require any structural or plan changes, but consisted primarily of updating the kitchen and bathrooms, mechanical systems and utilities, and cosmetic refurbishing of the interior. The interior of the house had retained not only its original room configuration, but also its unpainted, naturally-finished decorative wood trim, which remained—with the exception of the already painted dining room woodwork—in almost pristine condition. Doors and their surrounds, window sash and trim, stair balusters, baseboards and floor moldings, mantels, built-in cabinetry which included bookcases in the living room and clothes cupboards in the bedrooms, a decorative transom screen and even original wood curtain rods remained intact. Together, these features contributed significantly to the historic character of the house, and were typical of Victorian Gothic house interiors of the period.

The woodwork was particularly fine in two of the first-floor formal rooms and its natural color complemented the intricate designs of the parquet flooring.

As part of the rehabilitation all the previously unpainted wood trim throughout the house was painted white. Because the interior trim with its unpainted natural-colored finish was such an important historic feature of the house, painting it white resulted in a drastic change and loss of historic character. The extensive interior woodwork with the tone and grain of the natural finish had given a distinctive quality to the house, furthering the sense of time and place associated with the historic district. Painting of the woodwork lessened significantly the historic character of what had been a virtually intact late-nineteenth century house, and the rehabilitation does not meet the Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation.



This view, taken before rehabilitation, shows the fine built-in cabinetry in one of the formal rooms on the first floor. Its natural color harmonizes with the designs of the parquet flooring.



During rehabilitation most of the naturally-finished woodwork was painted white, resulting in a drastic change of character to this late-nineteenth century interior.



These "before and after" photographs of an original sink in an upstairs bedroom also show how dramatically the painted woodwork has changed the character of the room.