



Subject: Alterations Without Historical Basis

- Applicable Standards:**
2. Retention of Historic Character
 3. Recognition of Historic Period
 6. Repair/Replacement of Deteriorated or Missing Features Based on Evidence
 9. Compatible New Additions/Alterations

Issue: When a historic building's distinguishing features such as windows, porch details, or doors are deteriorated beyond repair, they should be replaced with new ones that match the original features. Substituting new building elements of a different design than the historic elements, embellishing simple unadorned facades with high-style details, or adding features borrowed from a different period should be avoided. Conjectural changes create a false sense of historical development and are contrary to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Application 1 (*Incompatible treatment corrected to meet the Standards*): Plans for the rehabilitation of a small late-nineteenth century cottage included replacing a missing porch, removal of two original first floor windows and replacing them with floor-to-ceiling windows—a type of window generally found on buildings of an earlier period in that area. The introduction of the new sash and exterior shutters that extended to the porch floor created a design feature that, although commonly found in the historic district, never existed on this particular structure and gave the building an inappropriate historic appearance. In order to bring the project into conformance with the Standards the owner reinstalled the original sash.



Left: In the course of rehabilitation, the owner installed new windows in a historic design, which extended to the first floor. Full-length blinds were also added.

Below: To bring the project into conformance with the Standards, the original windows were reinstalled.

This 1880s cottage was in deteriorated condition prior to rehabilitation. Ghost marks of the missing porch are evident.



Application 2 (*Incompatible treatment*): A single-story, simply detailed, circa 1900 house located in a historic district of vernacular wood-frame dwellings was rehabilitated for continued residential use. The rehabilitation included the addition of Greek Revival-style details on the primary elevation. Triangular pediments were added to the window heads, and the original simple turned posts were replaced with square, Doric posts. The resultant changes undermined the vernacular simplicity of this house. Although some buildings within the historic district constructed about the same time featured Greek Revival details, they were, without exception, larger, more imposing structures. No other examples of modest, similarly-adorned buildings existed in the district. However, even the identification of other small scale Greek Revival would not confirm that the house in question ever featured these design elements.

This project failed to meet the Standards because of the removal of historic materials and the fact that the rehabilitation misrepresented the historic appearance of the building. If the added features were removed and the original posts re-installed, the historic appearance of the porch and windows would have been reestablished and the project would have met the Standards.



Right top: Simple turned posts and plain windows were the only expressive details of the vernacular frame building.

Right: The dramatic shift in appearance from a vernacular structure to a higher style building is achieved with Greek Revival posts and triangular window pediments. The building was not originally fitted with these details.

Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service

These bulletins are issued to explain preservation project decisions made by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The resulting determinations, based on the [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#), are not necessarily applicable beyond the unique facts and circumstances of each particular case.