



**Subject:** Rear Additions to Historic Houses

**Applicable Standards:** 9. Compatible New Additions / Alterations  
10. Reversibility of New Additions / Alterations

**Issue:** Whenever possible, new additions should be constructed on rear elevations where they will have less of an impact on the building's historic integrity. Rear additions—like all new additions—should be subordinate to the original building in size, scale, and massing, as well as design. Additions that feature a higher roofline, that extend beyond the side of the building, or that have a significantly greater footprint than the original building are usually not compatible. The expansion of modest scale houses or those in prominent locations (such as a corner lot) can be particularly challenging. Standard 1 states that “A property should be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.” In cases where an overly large addition is required in order to accommodate the owner's programmatic needs, a more suitable building should be identified.

Rear additions that meet the Standards are compatible in design, yet differentiated from the old building, often through a process of simplification. For example, if the original house features narrow clapboard siding, multi-light double-hung sash windows and an elaborate decorative cornice, the new addition could be sided with different clapboards, one-over-one double-hung sash, and a less detailed cornice. New materials need not match exactly the historic materials but should be appropriate to the building type, compatible with existing materials, and unobtrusive in appearance.

Rear additions that do not require significant removal of existing materials may help retain the house's historic appearance and character. Connecting the new addition to the historic building with a modest hyphen can limit removal of historic materials, drastic structural changes, and irreversible changes to the original building. A hyphen can also more clearly differentiate new from old construction. Rear additions can also provide the opportunity to make a building accessible, rather than constructing ramps on a more prominent elevation.

**Application 1 (*Incompatible treatment*):** This modest residence began as a two-story log house. Later, the main portion of the house was converted into a distinctive Bungalow-style residence. Over time, multiple additions were also made along the natural grade at the rear of the house. Prior to rehabilitation, these later additions were quite deteriorated.



*Top and Above:* This historic house had been altered numerous times in the past—including multiple additions to the rear of the building.

When the project began, the existing rear additions were determined to be beyond repair and were demolished. A replacement addition of a similar size to those removed would likely have met the Standards. However, the new addition constructed on the rear doubled the size of the structure as it existed before the rehabilitation. As built, the cladding, openings, and rooflines of the new addition were appropriate to the building's historic character. Yet this was not sufficient to overcome the effect of an addition substantially more massive than the additions that were demolished. With two full floors, a footprint that was much deeper than the previous additions, a new deck extending from the rear and side elevations, and significant grade changes at the rear, this work competes for attention with the historic structure to which it is attached and has seriously impacted the property's historic character.



*The size of this new rear addition—incorporating two floors and an extended depth—combined with substantial changes to the site overwhelm the modest historic house.*

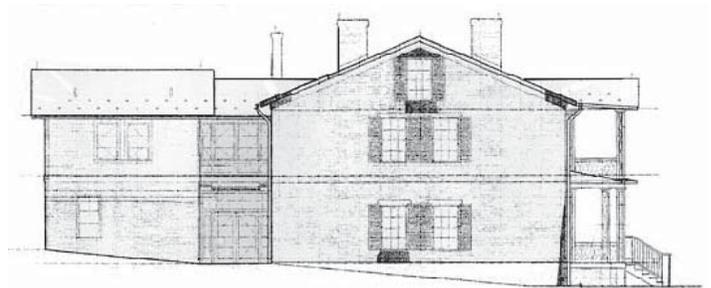
**Application 2 (Compatible treatment):** This large brick house was converted for use as offices. As part of the rehabilitation a new addition was constructed at the rear of the house. With a brick ground floor and a clapboard upper level set beneath a roofline that was lower in height than the original structure, the rear addition's design was both distinct from, and compatible with, the size, scale, massing and architectural features of the historic house. The use of varied materials on the addition (brick below, clapboard above) was handled with restraint in a manner that did not compete visually with the main house. The addition provided space to locate new systems for the entire structure as well as accessibility to the historic house at grade, making exterior ramps unnecessary.

A hyphen (with a lower roofline and narrower footprint) separated the new addition from the old, further distinguishing the various periods of construction and reducing the addition's massing. The hyphen required only a minimal amount of disturbance to the rear wall of the historic house and left the plan of the main house intact. If the addition were ever removed, the house's historic integrity would remain undiminished.

*Right: The house prior to rehabilitation.*

*Below right: Drawing of proposed rear addition and hyphen, showing how the new construction was subordinate in size to the historic house.*

*Below left: New addition and connecting hyphen. The new materials and fenestration complement, yet are distinct from, the historic house.*



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