

UNM Historic Preservation Committee guidance for the treatment of windows and review submittal requirements

The University of New Mexico Historic Preservation Committee provides guidance to assist the University in maintaining and preserving their valuable historic assets. The Committee provides the following information to help guide all University personnel who are involved in the maintenance and upkeep of windows throughout the university's properties.

Windows are an important characteristic of all buildings and therefore require special care and consideration for maintenance and repair. University properties that are ranked 1 and 2 in the UNM Historic Preservation Plan must have any plans for alteration to the building including windows and doors evaluated by the UNM Historic Preservation Committee, (HPC). State or National Historic Registered properties require a further review by the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office following the UNM HPC review.

The UNM HPC follows US Department of the Interior National Park Service, Department of the Interior guidance for the treatment of historic properties. *Preservation Brief 9 – The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows* and *Preservation Brief 13 – The Repair and Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows* guide the treatment of windows across UNM. Please visit the National Park Service technical Preservation Services web site for the most current information and preservation guidelines at:

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>

UNM Guidelines:

Historic windows are individually significant features, or contribute to the character of significant facades; their distinguishing visual qualities must not be destroyed.

Further, UNM HPC recommends against changing the historic appearance of windows through the use of inappropriate designs, materials, finishes, or colors which radically change the sash, depth of reveal, and muntin configuration; the reflectivity and color of the glazing; or the appearance of the frame.

The HPC recommends maintenance, repair and retrofit as the first and primary treatments to all UNM Windows. Repair and/or retrofitting windows is often more economical than wholesale replacement, and more effective in preserving the building's historic character. Both techniques can allow for energy efficient repairs while not altering the windows defining characteristics.

Review Process, The Treatment Proposal

Proposals for window repair or alterations must be reviewed by HPC for all rank 1 and 2 buildings and state and nationally registered properties. The proposals must provide the following information utilizing a 3 stage maintenance and repair preservation process approach:

1. Survey and document the buildings windows with both written and photographic descriptions.
 - Drawings and Photographs, liberally annotated, to document location, operability type, condition of sash frame and subframe.
2. Physical Evaluation of Windows
 - Presence and degree of corrosion
 - Condition of paint
 - Deterioration of metal sections, including bowing
 - Sash misalignment, bent sections
 - Condition of glass and glazing compound
 - Presence and condition of all hardware (operators, screws, bolts, hinges)
 - Condition of masonry or concrete surrounds, including need for caulking or resetting of improperly sloped sills.
3. Develop a Rehabilitation Work Plan that includes a 3 step plan:
 - Routine Maintenance
 - Repair
 - Weatherization

HPC Review

The full window treatment proposal and rehabilitation plan must be submitted to the UNM-HPC chair 10 days prior to the review meeting. The submittal must include:

- Complete window and building survey
- Complete physical evaluation of all windows in the building
- Complete window Rehabilitation Plan

The HPC will hold regular meetings on the first Monday of each month from 11:00am to 12:00pm.

- a. Applicants for review or discussion items may arrange to be placed on the agenda by contacting the HPC Chair a minimum of 10 days prior to a regularly scheduled meeting.
- b. Meeting schedules and committee contact information is located at: <http://iss.unm.edu/PCD/university-architect/historical-buildings.html> or by phoning Planning and Campus Development 505-277-9202

Attachments:

1. UNM Historic Preservation Implementation Plan
2. Preservation Brief 9 – The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows
3. Preservation Brief 13 – The Repair and Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows

Attachment 1: UNM Historic Preservation Implementation Plan

HISTORIC PRESERVATION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

6-Sep-07

Below are UNM buildings/zones that appear in the **UNM Heritage Preservation Plan**. For the sake of implementing the Plan, they are listed in the following ranked order:

1 - Highest (historically very important to retain, or already state or federally registered)

2 - Medium (has historic features that can be archived, replicated or recalled)

Does not preclude removal if there is a compelling need for use the property on which it sits or the adjacent lands;

3 – Lowest (Marginally historically relevant)

1

Ash Mall
Duck Pond
Zimmerman Cactus Garden
Scholes Hall
Anthropology Building
Alumni Chapel
Zimmerman Library
Terrace Mall
Carlisle Gym
Northrop Hall (E&PS)
Tight Grove
Alumni Memorial Courtyard
Hodgin Hall
Sara Reynolds Hall
Art Annex
Mesa Vista Hall
Travelstead Hall (COE)
University House
Economics Building
Hokona Hall
Naval ROTC
Jonson
Estufa
Alvarado Hall Dorm (157)

2

Bandelier Hall
Mitchell Hall
Engineering Annex
Anthropology Annex
Clark Hall
Yale Mall

3

Biology Annex
COE Simpson Hall
COE Educ Classrooms
COE Masley Hall
COE Manzanita Center
Applied Research (54)

Marron Hall
Castetter Hall
Communication & Journalism
Parsons Grove
Cornell Mall
Smith Plaza
COE Courtyard
COE Tech Center
COE Kiva Lecture Hall
1717 Roma (26)
1801 Roma (20)
Tapy Hall
Santa Clara Dorm (61)
Coronado Dormitory (155)
Santa Ana Dorm (71)
Laguna DeVargas Dorm (74, 75)
Ocate Hall Dorm (156)

Attachment 2: US Department of the Interior national Parks Service PRESERVATION BRIEF 9



Historic six-over-six windows--preserved. Photo: NPS files.

The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows

John H. Myers

- [Architectural or Historical Significance](#)
- [Physical Evaluation](#)
- [Repair Class I: Routine Maintenance](#)
- [Repair Class II: Stabilization](#)
- [Repair Class III: Splices and Parts Replacement](#)
- [Weatherization](#)
- [Window Replacement](#)
- [Summary and References](#)
- [Reading List](#)
- [Download the PDF](#)

The windows on many historic buildings are an important aspect of the architectural character of those buildings. Their design, craftsmanship, or other qualities may make them worthy of preservation. This is self-evident for ornamental windows, but it can be equally true for warehouses or factories where the windows may be the most dominant visual element of an otherwise plain building. Evaluating the significance of these windows and planning for their repair or replacement can be a complex process involving both objective and subjective considerations. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* and the accompanying guidelines, call for respecting the significance of original materials and features, repairing and retaining them wherever possible, and when necessary, replacing them in kind. This Brief is based on the issues of significance and repair which are implicit in the standards, but the primary emphasis is on the technical issues of planning for the repair of windows

including evaluation of their physical condition, techniques of repair, and design considerations when replacement is necessary.

Much of the technical section presents repair techniques as an instructional guide for the do-it-yourselfer. The information will be useful, however, for the architect, contractor, or developer on large-scale projects. It presents a methodology for approaching the evaluation and repair of existing windows, and considerations for replacement, from which the professional can develop alternatives and specify appropriate materials and procedures.

Architectural or Historical Significance

[return to top ▲](#)

Evaluating the architectural or historical significance of windows is the first step in planning for window treatments, and a general understanding of the function and history of windows is vital to making a proper evaluation. As a part of this evaluation, one must consider four basic window functions: admitting light to the interior spaces, providing fresh air and ventilation to the interior, providing a visual link to the outside world, and enhancing the appearance of a building. No single factor can be disregarded when planning window treatments; for example, attempting to conserve energy by closing up or reducing the size of window openings may result in the use of *more* energy by increasing electric lighting loads and decreasing passive solar heat gains.



Windows are frequently important visual focal points, especially on simple facades such as this mill building. Replacement of the multi-pane windows with larger panes could dramatically alter the appearance of the building. Photo: NPS files.

Historically, the first windows in early American houses were casement windows; that is, they were hinged at the side and opened outward. In the beginning of the eighteenth century single- and double-hung windows were introduced. Subsequently many styles of these vertical sliding sash windows have come to be associated with specific building periods or architectural styles, and this is an important consideration in determining the significance of windows, especially on a local or regional basis. Site-specific, regionally oriented architectural comparisons should be

made to determine the significance of windows in question. Although such comparisons may focus on specific window types and their details, the ultimate determination of significance should be made within the context of the whole building, wherein the windows are one architectural element.

After all of the factors have been evaluated, **windows should be considered significant to a building if they:**

1. are original,
2. reflect the original design intent for the building,
3. reflect period or regional styles or building practices,
4. reflect changes to the building resulting from major periods or events, or
5. are examples of exceptional craftsmanship or design.

Once this evaluation of significance has been completed, it is possible to proceed with planning appropriate treatments, beginning with an investigation of the physical condition of the windows.

Physical Evaluation [return to top ▲](#)

The key to successful planning for window treatments is a careful evaluation of existing physical conditions on a unit-by-unit basis. A graphic or photographic system may be devised to record existing conditions and illustrate the scope of any necessary repairs. Another effective tool is a window schedule which lists all of the parts of each window unit. Spaces by each part allow notes on existing conditions and repair instructions. When such a schedule is completed, it indicates the precise tasks to be performed in the repair of each unit and becomes a part of the specifications. **In any evaluation, one should note at a minimum:**

1. window location
2. condition of the paint
3. condition of the frame and sill
4. condition of the sash (rails, stiles and muntins)
5. glazing problems
6. hardware, and
7. the overall condition of the window (excellent, fair, poor, and so forth)

Many factors such as poor design, moisture, vandalism, insect attack, and lack of maintenance can contribute to window deterioration, but moisture is the primary contributing factor in wooden window decay. All window units should be inspected to see if water is entering around the edges of the frame and, if so, the joints or seams should be caulked to eliminate this danger. The glazing putty should be checked for cracked, loose, or missing sections which allow water to saturate the wood, especially at the joints. The back putty on the interior side of the pane should also be inspected, because it creates a seal which prevents condensation from running down into the joinery. The sill should be examined to insure that it slopes downward away from the building and allows water to drain off. In addition, it may be advisable to cut a dripline along the underside of the sill. This almost invisible treatment will insure proper water runoff, particularly

if the bottom of the sill is flat. Any conditions, including poor original design, which permit water to come in contact with the wood or to puddle on the sill must be corrected as they contribute to deterioration of the window.



Deterioration of poorly maintained windows usually begins on horizontal surfaces and at joints, where water can collect and saturate the wood. Photo: NPS files.

One clue to the location of areas of excessive moisture is the condition of the paint; therefore, each window should be examined for areas of paint failure. Since excessive moisture is detrimental to the paint bond, areas of paint blistering, cracking, flaking, and peeling usually identify points of water penetration, moisture saturation, and potential deterioration. Failure of the paint should not, however, be mistakenly interpreted as a sign that the wood is in poor condition and hence, irreparable. Wood is frequently in sound physical condition beneath unsightly paint. After noting areas of paint failure, the next step is to inspect the condition of the wood, particularly at the points identified during the paint examination.

Each window should be examined for operational soundness beginning with the lower portions of the frame and sash. Exterior rainwater and interior condensation can flow downward along the window, entering and collecting at points where the flow is blocked. The sill, joints between the sill and jamb, corners of the bottom rails and muntin joints are typical points where water collects and deterioration begins. The operation of the window (continuous opening and closing over the years and seasonal temperature changes) weakens the joints, causing movement and slight separation. This process makes the joints more vulnerable to water which is readily absorbed into the endgrain of the wood. If severe deterioration exists in these areas, it will usually be apparent on visual inspection, but other less severely deteriorated areas of the wood may be tested by two traditional methods using a small ice pick.

An ice pick or an awl may be used to test wood for soundness. The technique is simply to jab the pick into a wetted wood surface at an angle and pry up a small section of the wood. Sound wood will separate in long fibrous splinters, but decayed wood will lift up in short irregular pieces due to the breakdown of fiber strength.

Another method of testing for soundness consists of pushing a sharp object into the wood, perpendicular to the surface. If deterioration has begun from the hidden side of a member and the core is badly decayed, the visible surface may appear to be sound wood. Pressure on the probe

can force it through an apparently sound skin to penetrate deeply into decayed wood. This technique is especially useful for checking sills where visual access to the underside is restricted.

Following the inspection and analysis of the results, the scope of the necessary repairs will be evident and a plan for the rehabilitation can be formulated. **Generally the actions necessary to return a window to "like new" condition will fall into three broad categories:**

1. **routine maintenance procedures,**
2. **structural stabilization, and**
3. **parts replacement.**

These categories will be discussed in the following sections and will be referred to respectively as **Repair Class I**, **Repair Class II**, and **Repair Class III**. Each successive repair class represents an increasing level of difficulty, expense, and work time. Note that most of the points mentioned in Repair Class I are routine maintenance items and should be provided in a regular maintenance program for any building. The neglect of these routine items can contribute to many common window problems.

Before undertaking any of the repairs mentioned in the following sections all sources of moisture penetration should be identified and eliminated, and all existing decay fungi destroyed in order to arrest the deterioration process. Many commercially available fungicides and wood preservatives are toxic, so it is extremely important to follow the manufacturer's recommendations for application, and store all chemical materials away from children and animals. After fungicidal and preservative treatment the windows may be stabilized, retained, and restored with every expectation for a long service life.

Repair Class I: Routine Maintenance [return to top ▲](#)



This historic double-hung window has many layers of paint, some cracked and missing putty, slight separation at the joints, broken sash cords, and one cracked pane. Photo: NPS files.



After removing paint from the seam between the interior stop and the jamb, the stop can be pried out and gradually worked loose using a pair of putty knives as shown. Photo: NPS files.

Repairs to wooden windows are usually labor intensive and relatively uncomplicated. On small scale projects this allows the do-it-yourselfer to save money by repairing all or part of the windows. On larger projects it presents the opportunity for time and money which might otherwise be spent on the removal and replacement of existing windows, to be spent on repairs, subsequently saving all or part of the material cost of new window units. Regardless of the actual costs, or who performs the work, the evaluation process described earlier will provide the knowledge from which to specify an appropriate work program, establish the work element priorities, and identify the level of skill needed by the labor force.

The routine maintenance required to upgrade a window to "like new" condition normally includes the following steps:

1. some degree of interior and exterior paint removal,
2. removal and repair of sash (including reglazing where necessary),
3. repairs to the frame,
4. weatherstripping and reinstallation of the sash, and
5. repainting.

These operations are illustrated for a typical double-hung wooden window, but they may be adapted to other window types and styles as applicable.

Historic windows have usually acquired many layers of paint over time. Removal of excess layers or peeling and flaking paint will facilitate operation of the window and restore the clarity of the original detailing. Some degree of paint removal is also necessary as a first step in the proper surface preparation for subsequent refinishing (if paint color analysis is desired, it should be conducted prior to the onset of the paint removal). There are several safe and effective techniques for removing paint from wood, depending on the amount of paint to be removed.

Paint removal should begin on the interior frames, being careful to remove the paint from the interior stop and the parting bead, particularly along the seam where these stops meet the jamb.

This can be accomplished by running a utility knife along the length of the seam, breaking the paint bond. It will then be much easier to remove the stop, the parting bead and the sash. The interior stop may be initially loosened from the sash side to avoid visible scarring of the wood and then gradually pried loose using a pair of putty knives, working up and down the stop in small increments. With the stop removed, the lower or interior sash may be withdrawn. The sash cords should be detached from the sides of the sash and their ends may be pinned with a nail or tied in a knot to prevent them from falling into the weight pocket.



Sash can be removed and repaired in a convenient work area. Paint is being removed from this sash with a hot air gun. Photo: NPS files.

Removal of the upper sash on double-hung units is similar but the parting bead which holds it in place is set into a groove in the center of the stile and is thinner and more delicate than the interior stop. After removing any paint along the seam, the parting bead should be carefully pried out and worked free in the same manner as the interior stop. The upper sash can be removed in the same manner as the lower one and both sash taken to a convenient work area (in order to remove the sash the interior stop and parting bead need only be removed from one side of the window). Window openings can be covered with polyethylene sheets or plywood sheathing while the sash are out for repair.

The sash can be stripped of paint using appropriate techniques, but if any heat treatment is used, the glass should be removed or protected from the sudden temperature change which can cause breakage. An overlay of aluminum foil on gypsum board or asbestos can protect the glass from such rapid temperature change. It is important to protect the glass because it may be historic and often adds character to the window. Deteriorated putty should be removed manually, taking care not to damage the wood along the rabbet. If the glass is to be removed, the glazing points which hold the glass in place can be extracted and the panes numbered and removed for cleaning and reuse in the same openings. With the glass panes out, the remaining putty can be removed and the sash can be sanded, patched, and primed with a preservative primer. Hardened putty in the rabbets may be softened by heating with a soldering iron at the point of removal. Putty remaining on the glass may be softened by soaking the panes in linseed oil, and then removed with less risk of breaking the glass. Before reinstalling the glass, a bead of glazing compound or linseed oil putty should be laid around the rabbet to cushion and seal the glass. Glazing compound should only be used on wood which has been brushed with linseed oil and primed with an oil based primer or paint. The pane is then pressed into place and the glazing points are pushed into the wood around the perimeter of the pane.

The final glazing compound or putty is applied and beveled to complete the seal. The sash can be refinished as desired on the inside and painted on the outside as soon as a "skin" has formed on the putty, usually in 2 or 3 days. Exterior paint should cover the beveled glazing compound or putty and lap over onto the glass slightly to complete a weather-tight seal. After the proper curing times have elapsed for paint and putty, the sash will be ready for reinstallation.



Following the relatively simple repairs, the window is weathertight, like new in appearance, and serviceable for many years to come. Photo: NPS files.

While the sash are out of the frame, the condition of the wood in the jamb and sill can be evaluated. Repair and refinishing of the frame may proceed concurrently with repairs to the sash, taking advantage of the curing times for the paints and putty used on the sash. One of the most common work items is the replacement of the sash cords with new rope cords or with chains. The weight pocket is frequently accessible through a door on the face of the frame near the sill, but if no door exists, the trim on the interior face may be removed for access. Sash weights may be increased for easier window operation by elderly or handicapped persons. Additional repairs to the frame and sash may include consolidation or replacement of deteriorated wood. Techniques for these repairs are discussed in the following sections.

The operations just discussed summarize the efforts necessary to restore a window with minor deterioration to "like new" condition. The techniques can be applied by an unskilled person with minimal training and experience. To demonstrate the practicality of this approach, and photograph it, a Technical Preservation Services staff member repaired a wooden double-hung, two over two window which had been in service over ninety years. The wood was structurally sound but the window had one broken pane, many layers of paint, broken sash cords and inadequate, worn-out weatherstripping. The staff member found that the frame could be stripped of paint and the sash removed quite easily. Paint, putty and glass removal required about one hour for each sash, and the reglazing of both sash was accomplished in about one hour. Weatherstripping of the sash and frame, replacement of the sash cords and reinstallation of the sash, parting bead, and stop required an hour and a half. These times refer only to individual operations; the entire process took several days due to the drying and curing times for putty, primer, and paint, however, work on other window units could have been in progress during these lag times.

Repair Class II: Stabilization [return to top ▲](#)

The preceding description of a window repair job focused on a unit which was operationally sound. Many windows will show some additional degree of physical deterioration, especially in the vulnerable areas mentioned earlier, but even badly damaged windows can be repaired using simple processes. Partially decayed wood can be waterproofed, patched, built-up, or consolidated and then painted to achieve a sound condition, good appearance, and greatly extended life. Three techniques for repairing partially decayed or weathered wood are discussed in this section, and all three can be accomplished using products available at most hardware stores.

One established technique for repairing wood which is split, checked or shows signs of rot, is to:

1. dry the wood,
2. treat decayed areas with a fungicide,
3. waterproof with two or three applications of boiled linseed oil (applications every 24 hours),
4. fill cracks and holes with putty, and
5. after a "skin" forms on the putty, paint the surface.

Care should be taken with the use of fungicide which is toxic. Follow the manufacturers' directions and use only on areas which will be painted. When using any technique of building up or patching a flat surface, the finished surface should be sloped slightly to carry water away from the window and not allow it to puddle. Caulking of the joints between the sill and the jamb will help reduce further water penetration.



This illustrates a two-part epoxy patching compound used to fill the surface of a weathered sill and rebuild the missing edge. When the epoxy cures, it can be sanded smooth and painted to achieve a durable and waterproof repair. Photo: NPS files.

When sills or other members exhibit surface weathering they may also be built-up using wood putties or homemade mixtures such as sawdust and resorcinol glue, or whiting and varnish. These mixtures can be built up in successive layers, then sanded, primed, and painted. The same caution about proper slope for flat surfaces applies to this technique.

Wood may also be strengthened and stabilized by consolidation, using semirigid epoxies which saturate the porous decayed wood and then harden. The surface of the consolidated wood can then be filled with a semirigid epoxy patching compound, sanded and painted. Epoxy patching compounds can be used to build up missing sections or decayed ends of members. Profiles can be duplicated using hand molds, which are created by pressing a ball of patching compound over a sound section of the profile which has been rubbed with butcher's wax. This can be a very efficient technique where there are many typical repairs to be done. The process has been widely used and proven in marine applications; and proprietary products are available at hardware and marine supply stores. Although epoxy materials may be comparatively expensive, they hold the promise of being among the most durable and long lasting materials available for wood repair. More information on epoxies can be found in the publication "Epoxies for Wood Repairs in Historic Buildings," cited in the bibliography.

Any of the three techniques discussed can stabilize and restore the appearance of the window unit. There are times, however, when the degree of deterioration is so advanced that stabilization is impractical, and the only way to retain some of the original fabric is to replace damaged parts.

Repair Class III: Splices and Parts Replacement [return to top ▲](#)

When parts of the frame or sash are so badly deteriorated that they cannot be stabilized there are methods which permit the retention of some of the existing or original fabric. These methods involve replacing the deteriorated parts with new matching pieces, or splicing new wood into existing members. The techniques require more skill and are more expensive than any of the previously discussed alternatives. It is necessary to remove the sash and/or the affected parts of the frame and have a carpenter or woodworking mill reproduce the damaged or missing parts. Most millwork firms can duplicate parts, such as muntins, bottom rails, or sills, which can then be incorporated into the existing window, but it may be necessary to shop around because there are several factors controlling the practicality of this approach. Some woodworking mills do not like to repair old sash because nails or other foreign objects in the sash can damage expensive knives (which cost far more than their profits on small repair jobs); others do not have cutting knives to duplicate muntin profiles. Some firms prefer to concentrate on larger jobs with more profit potential, and some may not have a craftsman who can duplicate the parts. A little searching should locate a firm which will do the job, and at a reasonable price. If such a firm does not exist locally, there are firms which undertake this kind of repair and ship nationwide. It is possible, however, for the advanced do-it-yourselfer or craftsman with a table saw to duplicate moulding profiles using techniques discussed by Gordie Whittington in "Simplified Methods for Reproducing Wood Mouldings," *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology*, Vol. III, No. 4, 1971, or illustrated more recently in *The Old House*, Time-Life Books, Alexandria, Virginia, 1979.

The repairs discussed in this section involve window frames which may be in very deteriorated condition, possibly requiring removal; therefore, caution is in order. The actual construction of wooden window frames and sash is not complicated. Pegged mortise and tenon units can be

disassembled easily, if the units are out of the building. The installation or connection of some frames to the surrounding structure, especially masonry walls, can complicate the work immeasurably, and may even require dismantling of the wall. **It may be useful, therefore, to take the following approach to frame repair:**

1. conduct regular maintenance of sound frames to achieve the longest life possible,
2. make necessary repairs in place, wherever possible, using stabilization and splicing techniques, and
3. if removal is necessary, thoroughly investigate the structural detailing and seek appropriate professional consultation.

Another alternative may be considered if parts replacement is required, and that is sash replacement. If extensive replacement of parts is necessary and the job becomes prohibitively expensive it may be more practical to purchase new sash which can be installed into the existing frames. Such sash are available as exact custom reproductions, reasonable facsimiles (custom windows with similar profiles), and contemporary wooden sash which are similar in appearance. There are companies which still manufacture high quality wooden sash which would duplicate most historic sash. A few calls to local building suppliers may provide a source of appropriate replacement sash, but if not, check with local historical associations, the state historic preservation office, or preservation related magazines and supply catalogs for information.

If a rehabilitation project has a large number of windows such as a commercial building or an industrial complex, there may be less of a problem arriving at a solution. Once the evaluation of the windows is completed and the scope of the work is known, there may be a potential economy of scale. Woodworking mills may be interested in the work from a large project; new sash in volume may be considerably less expensive per unit; crews can be assembled and trained on site to perform all of the window repairs; and a few extensive repairs can be absorbed (without undue burden) into the total budget for a large number of sound windows. While it may be expensive for the average historic home owner to pay seventy dollars or more for a mill to grind a custom knife to duplicate four or five bad muntins, that cost becomes negligible on large commercial projects which may have several hundred windows.

Most windows should not require the extensive repairs discussed in this section. The ones which do are usually in buildings which have been abandoned for long periods or have totally lacked maintenance for years. It is necessary to thoroughly investigate the alternatives for windows which do require extensive repairs to arrive at a solution which retains historic significance and is also economically feasible. Even for projects requiring repairs identified in this section, if the percentage of parts replacement per window is low, or the number of windows requiring repair is small, repair can still be a cost effective solution.

Weatherization [return to top](#) ▲

A window which is repaired should be made as energy efficient as possible by the use of appropriate weatherstripping to reduce air infiltration. A wide variety of products are available to assist in this task. Felt may be fastened to the top, bottom, and meeting rails, but may have the

disadvantage of absorbing and holding moisture, particularly at the bottom rail. Rolled vinyl strips may also be tacked into place in appropriate locations to reduce infiltration. Metal strips or new plastic spring strips may be used on the rails and, if space permits, in the channels between the sash and jamb. Weatherstripping is a historic treatment, but old weatherstripping (felt) is not likely to perform very satisfactorily. Appropriate contemporary weatherstripping should be considered an integral part of the repair process for windows. The use of sash locks installed on the meeting rail will insure that the sash are kept tightly closed so that the weatherstripping will function more effectively to reduce infiltration. Although such locks will not always be historically accurate, they will usually be viewed as an acceptable contemporary modification in the interest of improved thermal performance.

Many styles of storm windows are available to improve the thermal performance of existing windows. The use of exterior storm windows should be investigated whenever feasible because they are thermally efficient, cost-effective, reversible, and allow the retention of original windows (see "Preservation Briefs: 3"). Storm window frames may be made of wood, aluminum, vinyl, or plastic; however, the use of unfinished aluminum storms should be avoided. The visual impact of storms may be minimized by selecting colors which match existing trim color. Arched top storms are available for windows with special shapes. Although interior storm windows appear to offer an attractive option for achieving double glazing with minimal visual impact, the potential for damaging condensation problems must be addressed. Moisture which becomes trapped between the layers of glazing can condense on the colder, outer prime window, potentially leading to deterioration. The correct approach to using interior storms is to create a seal on the interior storm while allowing some ventilation around the prime window. In actual practice, the creation of such a durable, airtight seal is difficult.

Window Replacement [return to top ▲](#)

Although the retention of original or existing windows is always desirable and this Brief is intended to encourage that goal, there is a point when the condition of a window may clearly indicate replacement. The decision process for selecting replacement windows should not begin with a survey of contemporary window products which are available as replacements, but should begin with a look at the windows which are being replaced. **Attempt to understand the contribution of the window(s) to the appearance of the facade including:**

1. the pattern of the openings and their size;
2. proportions of the frame and sash;
3. configuration of window panes;
4. muntin profiles;
5. type of wood;
6. paint color;
7. characteristics of the glass; and
8. associated details such as arched tops, hoods, or other decorative elements.

Develop an understanding of how the window reflects the period, style, or regional characteristics of the building, or represents technological development.

Armed with an awareness of the significance of the existing window, begin to search for a replacement which retains as much of the character of the historic window as possible. There are many sources of suitable new windows. Continue looking until an acceptable replacement can be found. Check building supply firms, local woodworking mills, carpenters, preservation oriented magazines, or catalogs or suppliers of old building materials, for product information. Local historical associations and state historic preservation offices may be good sources of information on products which have been used successfully in preservation projects.

Consider energy efficiency as one of the factors for replacements, but do not let it dominate the issue. Energy conservation is no excuse for the wholesale destruction of historic windows which can be made thermally efficient by historically and aesthetically acceptable means. In fact, a historic wooden window with a high quality storm window added should thermally outperform a new double-glazed metal window which does not have thermal breaks (insulation between the inner and outer frames intended to break the path of heat flow). This occurs because the wood has far better insulating value than the metal, and in addition many historic windows have high ratios of wood to glass, thus reducing the area of highest heat transfer. One measure of heat transfer is the U-value, the number of Btu's per hour transferred through a square foot of material. When comparing thermal performance, the lower the U-value the better the performance. According to ASHRAE 1977 Fundamentals, the U-values for single glazed wooden windows range from 0.88 to 0.99. The addition of a storm window should reduce these figures to a range of 0.44 to 0.49. A non-thermal break, double-glazed metal window has a U-value of about 0.6.

Summary and References [return to top ▲](#)

Technical Preservation Services recommends the retention and repair of original windows whenever possible. We believe that the repair and weatherization of existing wooden windows is more practical than most people realize, and that many windows are unfortunately replaced because of a lack of awareness of techniques for evaluation, repair, and weatherization. Wooden windows which are repaired and properly maintained will have greatly extended service lives while contributing to the historic character of the building. Thus, an important element of a building's significance will have been preserved for the future.

This publication has been prepared pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, which directs the Secretary of the Interior to develop and make available information concerning historic properties. Technical Preservation Services (TPS), National Park Service prepares standards, guidelines, and other educational materials on responsible historic preservation treatments for a broad public.

1981

Reading List [return to top ▲](#)

ASHRAE Handbook 1977 Fundamentals. New York: American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-conditioning Engineers, 1978 (chapter 26).

Ferro, Maximillian. *Preservation: Present Pathway to Fall River's Future*. Fall River, Massachusetts: City of Fall River, 1979 (chapter 7).

"Fixing Double-hung Windows." *Old House Journal* (no. 12, 1979): 135.

Morrison, Hugh. *Early American Architecture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Phillips, Morgan, and Selwyn, Judith. *Epoxies for Wood Repairs in Historic Buildings*. Washington, DC: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Department of the Interior (Government Printing Office, Stock No. 024016000951), 1978.

Rehab Right. Oakland, California: City of Oakland Planning Department, 1978 (pp. 7883).

"Sealing Leaky Windows." *Old House Journal* (no. 1, 1973): 5.

Weeks, Kay D. and David W. Look, *Preservation Brief 10: Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork*. Washington, DC: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1982.

**Attachment 3: US Department of the Interior national Parks Service
PRESERVATION BRIEF 13**

PRESERVATION BRIEFS

13



Metal casement window from "Hope's Metal Windows and Casements, 1818-1926." Photo: Courtesy, Hope's Windows, Inc.

The Repair and Thermal Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows

Sharon C. Park, AIA

- Historical Development
- Evaluation
- 1890–Present: Typical Rolled Steel Windows
- Routine Maintenance
- Repair
- Weatherization
- Window Replacement
- Summary and References

- [Reading List](#)
- [Download the PDF](#)

The Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation" require that where historic windows are individually significant features, or where they contribute to the character of significant facades, their distinguishing visual qualities must not be destroyed. Further, the rehabilitation guidelines recommend against changing the historic appearance of windows through the use of inappropriate designs, materials, finishes, or colors which radically change the sash, depth of reveal, and muntin configuration; the reflectivity and color of the glazing; or the appearance of the frame.

Windows are among the most vulnerable features of historic buildings undergoing rehabilitation. This is especially the case with rolled steel windows, which are often mistakenly not deemed worthy of preservation in the conversion of old buildings to new uses. The ease with which they can be replaced and the mistaken assumption that they cannot be made energy efficient except at great expense are factors that typically lead to the decision to remove them.



Maintaining historic steel windows for continued use is always recommended. Photo: NPS files.

In many cases, however, repair and retrofit of the historic windows are more economical than wholesale replacement, and all too often, replacement units are unlike the originals in design and appearance. If the windows are important in establishing the historic character of the building, insensitively designed replacement windows may diminish—or destroy—the building's historic character.

This Brief identifies various types of historic steel windows that dominated the metal window market from 1890-1950. It then gives criteria for evaluating deterioration and for determining appropriate treatment, ranging from routine maintenance and weatherization to extensive repairs, so that replacement may be avoided where possible. This information applies to do-it-yourself jobs and to large rehabilitations where the volume of work warrants the removal of all window units for complete overhaul by professional contractors.

This Brief is not intended to promote the repair of ferrous metal windows in every case, but rather to insure that preservation is always the first consideration in a rehabilitation project. Some windows are not important elements in defining a building's historic character; others are highly significant, but so deteriorated that repair is infeasible. In such cases, the Brief offers guidance in evaluating appropriate replacement windows.

Historical Development [return to top ▲](#)

Although metal windows were available as early as 1860 from catalogues published by architectural supply firms, they did not become popular until after 1890. Two factors combined to account for the shift from wooden to metal windows about that time. Technology borrowed from the rolling industry permitted the mass production of rolled steel windows. This technology made metal windows cost competitive with conventional wooden windows. In addition, a series of devastating urban fires in Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and San Francisco led to the enactment of strict fire codes for industrial and multi-story commercial and office buildings.

As in the process of making rails for railroads, rolled steel windows were made by passing hot bars of steel through progressively smaller, shaped rollers until the appropriate angled configuration was achieved. The rolled steel sections, generally 1/8" thick and 1" - 1-1/2" wide, were used for all the components of the windows: sash, frame, and subframe. With the addition of wire glass, a fire-resistant window resulted. These rolled steel windows are almost exclusively found in masonry or concrete buildings.

A by-product of the fire-resistant window was the strong metal frame that permitted the installation of larger windows and windows in series. The ability to have expansive amounts of glass and increased ventilation dramatically changed the designs of late 19th and early 20th century industrial and commercial buildings.

The newly available, reasonably priced steel windows soon became popular for more than just their fire-resistant qualities. They were standardized, extremely durable, and easily transported. These qualities led to the use of steel windows in every type of construction, from simple industrial and institutional buildings to luxury commercial and apartment buildings. Casement, double-hung, pivot, projecting, austral, and continuous windows differed in operating and

ventilating capacities. In addition, the thin profiles of metal windows contributed to the streamlined appearance of the Art Deco, Art Moderne, and International Styles, among others.



Historic metal windows provide abundant natural light in this rehabilitated industrial space.
Photo: NPS files.

The extensive use of rolled steel metal windows continued until after World War II when cheaper, noncorroding aluminum windows became increasingly popular. While aluminum windows dominate the market today, steel windows are still fabricated. Should replacement of original windows become necessary, replacement windows may be available from the manufacturers of some of the earliest steel windows. Before an informed decision can be made whether to repair or replace metal windows, however, the significance of the windows must be determined and their physical condition assessed.

Evaluation [return to top ▲](#)

Historic and Architectural Considerations

An assessment of the significance of the windows should begin with a consideration of their function in relation to the building's historic use and its historic character. Windows that help define the building's historic character should be preserved even if the building is being converted to a new use. For example, projecting steel windows used to introduce light and an effect of spaciousness to a warehouse or industrial plant can be retained in the conversion of such a building to offices or residences.

Other elements in assessing the relative importance of the historic windows include the design of the windows and their relationship to the scale, proportion, detailing and architectural style of the building. While it may be easy to determine the aesthetic value of highly ornamented windows, or to recognize the importance of streamlined windows as an element of a style, less elaborate windows can also provide strong visual interest by their small panes or projecting planes when open, particularly in simple, unadorned industrial buildings.

One test of the importance of windows to a building is to ask if the overall appearance of the building would be changed noticeably if the windows were to be removed or radically altered. If so, the windows are important in defining the building's historic character, and should be repaired if their physical condition permits.

Physical Evaluation

Steel window repair should begin with a careful evaluation of the physical condition of each unit. Either drawings or photographs, liberally annotated, may be used to record the location of each window, the type of operability, the condition of all three parts—sash, frame and subframe—and the repairs essential to its continued use.



A severely deteriorated frame, such as this, can be replaced in kind. Photo: Henry Chambers, AIA

Specifically, the evaluation should include: presence and degree of corrosion; condition of paint; deterioration of the metal sections, including bowing, misalignment of the sash, or bent sections; condition of the glass and glazing compound; presence and condition of all hardware, screws, bolts, and hinges; and condition of the masonry or concrete surrounds, including need for caulking or resetting of improperly sloped sills.

Corrosion, principally rusting in the case of steel windows, is the controlling factor in window repair; therefore, the evaluator should first test for its presence. Corrosion can be light, medium, or heavy, depending on how much the rust has penetrated the metal sections. If the rusting is merely a surface accumulation or flaking, then the corrosion is light. If the rusting has penetrated the metal (indicated by a bubbling texture), but has not caused any structural damage, then the corrosion is medium. If the rust has penetrated deep into the metal, the corrosion is heavy. Heavy corrosion generally results in some form of structural damage, through delamination, to the metal section, which must then be patched or spliced.

A sharp probe or tool, such as an ice pick, can be used to determine the extent of corrosion in the metal. If the probe can penetrate the surface of the metal and brittle strands can be dug out, then a high degree of corrosive deterioration is present.

In addition to corrosion, the condition of the paint, the presence of bowing or misalignment of metal sections, the amount of glass needing replacement, and the condition of the masonry or concrete surrounds must be assessed in the evaluation process. These are key factors in determining whether or not the windows can be repaired in place. The more complete the inventory of existing conditions, the easier it will be to determine whether repair is feasible or whether replacement is warranted.

Rehabilitation Work Plan

Following inspection and analysis, a plan for the rehabilitation can be formulated. The actions necessary to return windows to an efficient and effective working condition will fall into one or more of the following categories: routine maintenance, repair, and weatherization. The routine maintenance and weatherization measures described here are generally within the range of do-it-yourselfers. Other repairs, both moderate and major, require a professional contractor. Major repairs normally require the removal of the window units to a workshop, but even in the case of moderate repairs, the number of windows involved might warrant the removal of all the deteriorated units to a workshop in order to realize a more economical repair price. Replacement of windows should be considered only as a last resort.

Since moisture is the primary cause of corrosion in steel windows, it is essential that excess moisture be eliminated and that the building be made as weathertight as possible before any other work is undertaken. Moisture can accumulate from cracks in the masonry, from spalling mortar, from leaking gutters, from air conditioning condensation runoff, and from poorly ventilated interior spaces.

Finally, before beginning any work, it is important to be aware of health and safety risks involved. Steel windows have historically been coated with lead paint. The removal of such paint by abrasive methods will produce toxic dust. Therefore, safety goggles, a toxic dust respirator, and protective clothing should be worn. Similar protective measures should be taken when acid compounds are used. Local codes may govern the methods of removing lead paints and proper disposal of toxic residue.

Typical Rolled Steel Windows Available from 1890 to the Present [return to top ▲](#)

DOUBLE-HUNG industrial windows duplicated the look of traditional wooden windows. Metal double-hung windows were early examples of a building product adapted to meet stringent new fire code requirements for manufacturing and high-rise buildings in urban areas. Soon supplanted in industrial buildings by less expensive pivot windows, double-hung metal windows regained popularity in the 1940s for use in speculative suburban housing.

PIVOT windows were an early type of industrial window that combined inexpensive first cost and low maintenance. Pivot windows became standard for warehouses and power plants where the lack of screens was not a problem. The window shown here is a horizontal pivot. Windows that turned about a vertical axis were also manufactured (often of iron). Such vertical pivots are rare today.

PROJECTING windows, sometimes called awning or hopper windows, were perfected in the 1920s for industrial and institutional buildings. They were often used in "combination" windows, in which upper panels opened out and lower panels opened in. Since each movable panel projected to one side of the frame only, unlike pivot windows, for example, screens could be introduced.

AUSTRAL windows were also a product of the 1920s. They combined the appearance of the double-hung window with the increased ventilation and ease of operation of the projected window. (When fully opened, they provided 70% ventilation as compared to 50% ventilation for double-hung windows.) Austral windows were often used in schools, libraries and other public buildings.

CASEMENT windows adapted the English tradition of using wrought iron casements with leaded comes for residential use. Rolled steel casements (either single, as shown, or paired) were popular in the 1920s for cottage style residences and Gothic style campus architecture. More streamlined casements were popular in the 1930s for institutional and small industrial buildings.

CONTINUOUS windows were almost exclusively used for industrial buildings requiring high overhead lighting. Long runs of clerestory windows operated by mechanical tension rod gears were typical. Long banks of continuous windows were possible because the frames for such windows were often structural elements of the building.

Routine Maintenance [return to top ▲](#)

A preliminary step in the routine maintenance of steel windows is to remove surface dirt and grease in order to ascertain the degree of deterioration, if any. Such minor cleaning can be accomplished using a brush or vacuum followed by wiping with a cloth dampened with mineral spirits or denatured alcohol.

If it is determined that the windows are in basically sound condition, the following steps can be taken:

1. removal of light rust, flaking and excessive paint;
2. priming of exposed metal with a rust-inhibiting primer;
3. replacement of cracked or broken glass and glazing compound;
4. replacement of missing screws or fasteners;
5. cleaning and lubrication of hinges;
6. repainting of all steel sections with two coats of finish paint compatible with the primer; and
7. caulking the masonry surrounds with a high quality elastomeric caulk.

Recommended methods for removing light rust include manual and mechanical abrasion or the application of chemicals. Burning off rust with an oxyacetylene or propane torch, or an inert gas welding gun, should never be attempted because the heat can distort the metal. In addition, such intense heat (often as high as 3800 deg. F) vaporizes the lead in old paint, resulting in highly toxic fumes. Furthermore, such heat will likely result in broken glass. Rust can best be removed using a wire brush, an aluminum oxide sandpaper, or a variety of power tools adapted for abrasive cleaning such as an electric drill with a wire brush or a rotary whip attachment. Adjacent sills and window jambs may need protective shielding.

Rust can also be removed from ferrous metals by using a number of commercially prepared anticorrosive acid compounds. Effective on light and medium corrosion, these compounds can be purchased either as liquids or gels. Several bases are available, including phosphoric acid, ammonium citrate, oxalic acid and hydrochloric acid. Hydrochloric acid is generally not recommended; it can leave chloride deposits, which cause future corrosion. Phosphoric acid-based compounds do not leave such deposits, and are therefore safer for steel windows. However, any chemical residue should be wiped off with damp cloths, then dried immediately. Industrial blow-dryers work well for thorough drying. The use of running water to remove chemical residue is never recommended because the water may spread the chemicals to adjacent surfaces, and drying of these surfaces may be more difficult. Acid cleaning compounds will stain masonry; therefore plastic sheets should be taped to the edge of the metal sections to protect the masonry surrounds. The same measure should be followed to protect the glazing from etching because of acid contact.



The historic steel sash is shown in place, prior to its removal and replacement with inappropriate aluminum sash (see below). Photo: NPS files.

Measures that remove rust will ordinarily remove flaking paint as well. Remaining loose or flaking paint can be removed with a chemical paint remover or with a pneumatic needle scaler or gun, which comes with a series of chisel blades and has proven effective in removing flaking paint from metal windows. Well-bonded paint may serve to protect the metal further from corrosion, and need not be removed unless paint buildup prevents the window from closing tightly. The edges should be feathered by sanding to give a good surface for repainting.

Next, any ***bare metal*** should be wiped with a cleaning solvent such as denatured alcohol, and dried immediately in preparation for the application of an anticorrosive primer. Since corrosion can recur very soon after metal has been exposed to the air, the metal should be primed immediately after cleaning. Spot priming may be required periodically as other repairs are undertaken. Anticorrosive primers generally consist of oil-alkyd based paints rich in zinc or zinc chromate. Red lead is no longer available because of its toxicity. All metal primers, however, are toxic to some degree and should be handled carefully. Two coats of primer are recommended. Manufacturer's recommendations should be followed concerning application of primers.

Repair [return to top ▲](#)

Repair in Place

The maintenance procedures described above will be insufficient when corrosion is extensive, or when metal window sections are misaligned. Medium to heavy corrosion that has not done any structural damage to the metal sections can be removed either by using the chemical cleaning process described under "Routine Maintenance" or by sandblasting. Since sandblasting can

damage the masonry surrounds and crack or cloud the glass, metal or plywood shields should be used to protect these materials. The sandblasting pressure should be low, 80-100 pounds per square inch, and the grit size should be in the range of #10-#45. Glass peening beads (glass pellets) have also been successfully used in cleaning steel sections. While sandblasting equipment comes with various nozzle sizes, pencil-point blasters are most useful because they give the operator more effective control over the direction of the spray. The small aperture of the pencil-point blaster is also useful in removing dried putty from the metal sections that hold the glass. As with any cleaning technique, once the bare metal is exposed to air, it should be primed as soon as possible. This includes the inside rabbeted section of sash where glazing putty has been removed. To reduce the dust, some local codes allow only wet blasting. In this case, the metal must be dried immediately, generally with a blowdrier (a step that the owner should consider when calculating the time and expense involved). Either form of sandblasting metal covered with lead paints produces toxic dust. Proper precautionary measures should be taken against toxic dust and silica particles.



The historic steel sash (see photo above) was removed and replaced with modern aluminum sash, resulting in a negative visual impact on the building's historic character. Photo: NPS files.

Bent or bowed metal sections may be the result of damage to the window through an impact or corrosive expansion. If the distortion is not too great, it is possible to re-align the metal sections without removing the window to a metal fabricator's shop. The glazing is generally removed and pressure is applied to the bent or bowed section. In the case of a muntin, a protective 2 x 4 wooden bracing can be placed behind the bent portion and a wire cable with a winch can apply progressively more pressure over several days until the section is realigned. The 2 x 4 bracing is necessary to distribute the pressure evenly over the damaged section. Sometimes a section, such as the bottom of the frame, will bow out as a result of pressure exerted by corrosion and it is often necessary to cut the metal section to relieve this pressure prior to pressing the section back into shape and making a welded repair.

Once the metal sections have been cleaned of all corrosion and straightened, small holes and uneven areas resulting from rusting should be filled with a patching material and sanded smooth

to eliminate pockets where water can accumulate. A patching material of steel fibers and an epoxy binder may be the easiest to apply. This steel-based epoxy is available for industrial steel repair; it can also be found in auto body patching compounds or in plumber's epoxy. As with any product, it is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper use and best results. The traditional patching technique—melting steel welding rods to fill holes in the metal sections—may be difficult to apply in some situations; moreover, the window glass must be removed during the repair process, or it will crack from the expansion of the heated metal sections. After these repairs, glass replacement, hinge lubrication, painting, and other cosmetic repairs can be undertaken as necessary.

To complete the checklist for routine maintenance, cracked glass, deteriorated glazing compound, missing screws, and broken fasteners will have to be replaced; hinges cleaned and lubricated; the metal windows painted, and the masonry surrounds caulked. If the glazing must be replaced, all clips, glazing beads, and other fasteners that hold the glass to the sash should be retained, if possible, although replacements for these parts are still being fabricated. When bedding glass, use only glazing compound formulated for metal windows. To clean the hinges (generally brass or bronze), a cleaning solvent and fine bronze wool should be used. The hinges should then be lubricated with a non-greasy lubricant specially formulated for metals and with an anticorrosive agent. These lubricants are available in a spray form and should be used periodically on frequently opened windows.

Final painting of the windows with a paint compatible with the anticorrosive primer should proceed on a dry day. (Paint and primer from the same manufacturer should be used.) Two coats of finish paint are recommended if the sections have been cleaned to bare metal. The paint should overlap the glass slightly to insure weathertightness at that connection. Once the paint dries thoroughly, a flexible exterior caulk can be applied to eliminate air and moisture infiltration where the window and the surrounding masonry meet.

Caulking is generally undertaken after the windows have received at least one coat of finish paint. The perimeter of the masonry surround should be caulked with a flexible elastomeric compound that will adhere well to both metal and masonry. The caulking used should be a type intended for exterior application, have a high tolerance for material movement, be resistant to ultraviolet light, and have a minimum durability of 10 years. Three effective compounds (taking price and other factors into consideration) are polyurethane, vinyl acrylic, and butyl rubber. In selecting a caulking material for a window retrofit, it is important to remember that the caulking compound may be covering other materials in a substrate. In this case, some compounds, such as silicone, may not adhere well. Almost all modern caulking compounds can be painted after curing completely. Many come in a range of colors, which eliminates the need to paint. If colored caulking is used, the windows should have been given two coats of finish paint prior to caulking.

Repair in Workshop

Damage to windows may be so severe that the window sash and sometimes the frame must be removed for cleaning and extensive rust removal, straightening of bent sections, welding or splicing in of new sections, and reglazing. These major and expensive repairs are reserved for highly significant windows that cannot be replaced; the procedures involved should be carried out only by skilled workmen.

As part of the orderly removal of windows, each window should be numbered and the parts labeled. The operable metal sash should be dismantled by removing the hinges; the fixed sash and, if necessary, the frame can then be unbolted or unscrewed. (The subframe is usually left in place. Built into the masonry surrounds, it can only be cut out with a torch.) Hardware and hinges should be labeled and stored together.

The two major choices for removing flaking paint and corrosion from severely deteriorated windows are dipping in a chemical bath or sandblasting. Both treatments require removal of the glass. If the windows are to be dipped, a phosphoric acid solution is preferred, as mentioned earlier. While the dip tank method is good for fairly evenly distributed rust, deep set rust may remain after dipping. For that reason, sandblasting is more effective for heavy and uneven corrosion. Both methods leave the metal sections clean of residual paint. As already noted, after cleaning has exposed the metal to the air, it should be primed immediately after drying with an anticorrosive primer to prevent rust from recurring.

Sections that are seriously bent or bowed must be straightened with heat and applied pressure in a workshop. Structurally weakened sections must be cut out, generally with an oxyacetylene torch, and replaced with sections welded in place and the welds ground smooth. Finding replacement metal sections, however, may be difficult. While most rolling mills are producing modern sections suitable for total replacement, it may be difficult to find an exact profile match for a splicing repair. The best source of rolled metal sections is from salvaged windows, preferably from the same building. If no salvaged windows are available, two options remain. Either an ornamental metal fabricator can weld flat plates into a built-up section, or a steel plant can mill bar steel into the desired profile.

While the sash and frame are removed for repair, the subframe and masonry surrounds should be inspected. This is also the time to reset sills or to remove corrosion from the subframe, taking care to protect the masonry surrounds from damage.

Missing or broken hardware and hinges should be replaced on all windows that will be operable. Salvaged windows, again, are the best source of replacement parts. If matching parts cannot be found, it may be possible to adapt ready-made items. Such a substitution may require filling existing holes with steel epoxy or with plug welds and tapping in new screw holes. However, if the hardware is a highly significant element of the historic window, it may be worth having reproductions made.

Weatherization [return to top ▲](#)

Historic metal windows are generally not energy efficient; this has often led to their wholesale replacement. Metal windows can, however, be made more energy efficient in several ways, varying in complexity and cost. Caulking around the masonry openings and adding weatherstripping, for example, can be do-it-yourself projects and are important first steps in reducing air infiltration around the windows. They usually have a rapid payback period. Other treatments include applying fixed layers of glazing over the historic windows, adding operable storm windows, or installing thermal glass in place of the existing glass. In combination with caulking and weatherstripping, these treatments can produce energy ratings rivaling those achieved by new units.³

Weatherstripping

The first step in any weatherization program, caulking, has been discussed above under "Routine Maintenance." The second step is the installation of weatherstripping where the operable portion of the sash, often called the ventilator, and the fixed frame come together to reduce perimeter air infiltration. Four types of weatherstripping appropriate for metal windows are spring-metal, vinyl strips, compressible foam tapes, and sealant beads. The spring-metal, with an integral friction fit mounting clip, is recommended for steel windows in good condition. The clip eliminates the need for an applied glue; the thinness of the material insures a tight closure. The weatherstripping is clipped to the inside channel of the rolled metal section of the fixed frame. To insure against galvanic corrosion between the weatherstripping (often bronze or brass), and the steel window, the window must be painted prior to the installation of the weatherstripping. This weatherstripping is usually applied to the entire perimeter of the window opening, but in some cases, such as casement windows, it may be best to avoid weatherstripping the hinge side. The natural wedging action of the weatherstripping on the three sides of the window often creates an adequate seal.

Vinyl weatherstripping can also be applied to metal windows. Folded into a "V" configuration, the material forms a barrier against the wind. Vinyl weatherstripping is usually glued to the frame, although some brands have an adhesive backing. As the vinyl material and the applied glue are relatively thick, this form of weatherstripping may not be appropriate for all situations.

Compressible foam tape weatherstripping is often best for large windows where there is a slight bending or distortion of the sash. In some very tall windows having closure hardware at the sash midpoint, the thin sections of the metal window will bow away from the frame near the top. If the gap is not more than 1/4", foam weatherstripping can normally fill the space. If the gap exceeds this, the window may need to be realigned to close more tightly. The foam weatherstripping comes either with an adhesive or plain back; the latter variety requires

application with glue. Compressible foam requires more frequent replacement than either spring-metal or vinyl weatherstripping.

A fourth type of successful weatherstripping involves the use of a caulking or sealant bead and a polyethylene bond breaker tape. After the window frame has been thoroughly cleaned with solvent, permitted to dry, and primed, a neat bead of low modulus (firm setting) caulk, such as silicone, is applied. A bond breaker tape is then applied to the operable sash covering the metal section where contact will occur. The window is then closed until the sealant has set (27 days, depending on temperature and humidity). When the window is opened, the bead will have taken the shape of the air infiltration gap and the bond breaker tape can be removed. This weatherstripping method appears to be successful for all types of metal windows with varying degrees of air infiltration.

Since the several types of weatherstripping are appropriate for different circumstances, it may be necessary to use more than one type on any given building. Successful weatherstripping depends upon using the thinnest material adequate to fill the space through which air enters. Weatherstripping that is too thick can spring the hinges, thereby resulting in more gaps.

Appropriate Types of Weatherstripping for Metal Windows

SPRING-METAL comes in bronze, brass or stainless steel with an integral friction fit clip. The weatherstripping is applied after the repaired windows are painted to avoid galvanic corrosion. This type of thin weatherstripping is intended for windows in good condition.

VINYL STRIPS are scored and fold into a "V" configuration. Applied adhesive is necessary which will increase the thickness of the weatherstripping, making it inappropriate for some situations. The weatherstripping is generally applied to the window after painting.

Closed cell **FOAM TAPE** comes either with or without an adhesive backing. It is effective for windows with a gap of approximately 1/4" and is easy to install. However, this type of weatherstripping will need frequent replacement on windows in regular use. The metal section should be cleaned of all dirt and grease prior to its application.

SEALANT BEAD. This very effective type of weatherstripping involves the application of a clean bead of firm setting caulk on the primed frame with a polyethelene bond breaker tape on the operable sash. The window is then closed until the bead has set and takes the form of the gap. The sash is then opened and the tape is removed leaving the set caulk as the weatherstripping.

Thermal Glazing



Historic steel sash can be fitted with dual glazing to improve thermal efficiency. Photo: NPS files.

Another weatherization treatment is to install an additional layer of glazing to improve the thermal efficiency of the existing window. The decision to pursue this treatment should proceed from careful analysis. Each of the most common techniques for adding a layer of glazing will effect approximately the same energy savings (approximately double the original insulating value of the windows); therefore, cost and aesthetic considerations usually determine the choice of method. Methods of adding a layer of glazing to improve thermal efficiency include adding a new layer of transparent material to the window; adding a separate storm window; and replacing the single layer of glass in the window with thermal glass.

The least expensive of these options is to install a clear material (usually rigid sheets of acrylic or glass) over the original window. The choice between acrylic and glass is generally based on cost, ability of the window to support the material, and long-term maintenance outlook. If the material is placed over the entire window and secured to the frame, the sash will be inoperable. If the continued use of the window is important (for ventilation or for fire exits), separate panels should be affixed to the sash without obstructing operability. Glass or acrylic panels set in frames can be attached using magnetized gaskets, interlocking material strips, screws or adhesives. Acrylic panels can be screwed directly to the metal windows, but the holes in the acrylic panels should allow for the expansion and contraction of this material. A compressible gasket between the prime sash and the storm panel can be very effective in establishing a thermal cavity between glazing layers. To avoid condensation, 1/8" cuts in a top corner and diagonally opposite bottom corner of the gasket will provide a vapor bleed, through which moisture can evaporate. (Such cuts, however, reduce thermal performance slightly.) If condensation does occur, however, the panels should be easily removable in order to wipe away moisture before it causes corrosion.

The second method of adding a layer of glazing is to have independent storm windows fabricated. (Pivot and austral windows, however, which project on either side of the window frame when open, cannot easily be fitted with storm windows and remain operational.) The storm window should be compatible with the original sash configuration. For example, in paired

casement windows, either specially fabricated storm casement windows or sliding units in which the vertical meeting rail of the slider reflects the configuration of the original window should be installed. The decision to place storm windows on the inside or outside of the window depends on whether the historic window opens in or out, and on the visual impact the addition of storm windows will have on the building. Exterior storm windows, however, can serve another purpose besides saving energy: they add a layer of protection against air pollutants and vandals, although they will partially obscure the prime window. For highly ornamental windows this protection can determine the choice of exterior rather than interior storm windows.

The third method of installing an added layer of glazing is to replace the original single glazing with thermal glass. Except in rare instances in which the original glass is of special interest (as with stained or figured glass), the glass can be replaced if the hinges can tolerate the weight of the additional glass. The rolled metal sections for steel windows are generally from 1" 1-1/2" thick. Sash of this thickness can normally tolerate thermal glass, which ranges from 3/8" 5/8". (Metal glazing beads, readily available, are used to reinforce the muntins, which hold the glass.) This treatment leaves the window fully operational while preserving the historic appearance. It is, however, the most expensive of the treatments discussed here.

Window Replacement [return to top ▲](#)

Repair of historic windows is always preferred within a rehabilitation project. Replacement should be considered only as a last resort. However, when the extent of deterioration or the unavailability of replacement sections renders repair impossible, replacement of the entire window may be justified.



This is a successful replacement in kind of the deteriorated frame shown above. Photo: Henry Chambers, AIA.

In the case of significant windows, replacement in kind is essential in order to maintain the historic character of the building. However, for less significant windows, replacement with compatible new windows may be acceptable. In selecting compatible replacement windows, the material, configuration, color, operability, number and size of panes, profile and proportion of metal sections, and reflective quality of the original glass should be duplicated as closely as possible.

A number of metal window manufacturing companies produce rolled steel windows. While stock modern window designs do not share the multi-pane configuration of historic windows, most of these manufacturers can reproduce the historic configuration if requested, and the cost is not excessive for large orders. Some manufacturers still carry the standard pre-World War II multi-light windows using the traditional 12" x 18" or 14" x 20" glass sizes in industrial, commercial, security, and residential configurations. In addition, many of the modern steel windows have integral weatherstripping, thermal break construction, durable vinyl coatings, insulating glass, and other desirable features.

Windows manufactured from other materials generally cannot match the thin profiles of the rolled steel sections. Aluminum, for example, is three times weaker than steel and must be extruded into a boxlike configuration that does not reflect the thin historic profiles of most steel windows. Wooden and vinyl replacement windows generally are not fabricated in the industrial style, nor can they reproduce the thin profiles of the rolled steel sections, and consequently are generally not acceptable replacements.

For product information on replacement windows, the owner, architect, or contractor should consult manufacturers' catalogues, building trade journals, or the Steel Window Institute, 1230 Keith Building, Cleveland, Ohio 44115.

Summary and References [return to top ▲](#)

The National Park Service recommends the retention of significant historic metal windows whenever possible. Such windows, which can be a character-defining feature of a historic building, are too often replaced with inappropriate units that impair rather than complement the overall historic appearance. The repair and thermal upgrading of historic steel windows is more practicable than most people realize. Repaired and properly maintained metal windows have greatly extended service lives. They can be made energy efficient while maintaining their contribution to the historic character of the building.

Notes

1. The technical information given in this brief is intended for most ferrous (or magnetic) metals, particularly rolled steel. While stainless steel is a ferrous metal, the cleaning and repair techniques outlined here must not be used on it as the finish will be damaged. For information on cleaning stainless steel and nonferrous metals, such as bronze, Monel, or aluminum, refer to *Metals in America's Historic Buildings* (see bibliography).
2. Refer to Table IV. Types of Paint Used for Painting Metal in *Metals in America's Historic Buildings*, p. 139. (See bibliography).
3. One measure of energy efficiency is the U-value (the number of BTUs per hour transferred through a square foot of material). The lower the U-value, the better the performance. According to *ASHRAE HANDBOOK 1977 Fundamentals*, the U-value of historic rolled steel sash with single glazing is 1.3. Adding storm windows to the existing units or reglazing with 5/8" insulating glass produces a U-value of .69. These methods of weatherizing historic steel windows compare favorably with rolled steel replacement alternatives: with factory installed 1" insulating glass (.67 U-value); with added thermal break construction and factory finish coatings (.62 U-value).

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable assistance of co-worker Michael Auer in preparing this brief for publication. This publication is an extension of research initiated by Frederec E. Kleyle. Special thanks are given to Hope's Architectural Products, Inc., Jamestown, NY, for their generous contribution of historic metal window catalogues which were an invaluable source of information. The following individuals are also to be thanked for reviewing the manuscript and making suggestions: Hugh Miller, Chief, Park Historic Architecture Division, National Park Service; Barclay L. Rogers, Museum Services, National Park Service; Susan M. Young, Steel Window Institute, and Danny Schlichenmaier, State Building Division, Lincoln, Nebraska. Finally, thanks go to Technical Preservation Services Branch staff and to cultural resources staff of the National Park Service Regional Offices, whose valuable comments were incorporated into the final text and who contributed to the publication of this brief.

This publication has been prepared pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, which directs the Secretary of the Interior to develop and make available information concerning historic properties. Technical Preservation Services (TPS), National Park Service prepares standards, guidelines, and other educational materials on responsible historic preservation treatments for a broad public.

September 1984

Reading List [return to top ▲](#)

ASHRAE Handbook 1977 Fundamentals. New York: American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-conditioning Engineers, 1978.

Crittal, W. F. *A Metal Window Dictionary*. London: Curwen Press, 1926. Reprinted by B.T. Batsford. Ltd., 1953.

Gayle, Margot; David W. Look, AIA; John G. Waite. *Metals in America's Historic Buildings: Uses and Preservation Treatments*. Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Department of the Interior. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980.

Gillet, William. "Steel Windows." *Windows and Glass in the Exterior of Buildings*. National Academy of Sciences Publication 478. Washington, D.C.: 1957,7578.

Sarton, R. H. "Selecting and Specifying an Appropriate Type of Steel Window." *Metalcraft*. Vol. 6, No. 1 (January, 1931): 4348, 6465.

Sweet's Architectural Catalogue. 13th Edition, New York, Sweets Catalogue Service, Inc., 1918.



nps.gov



nps.gov