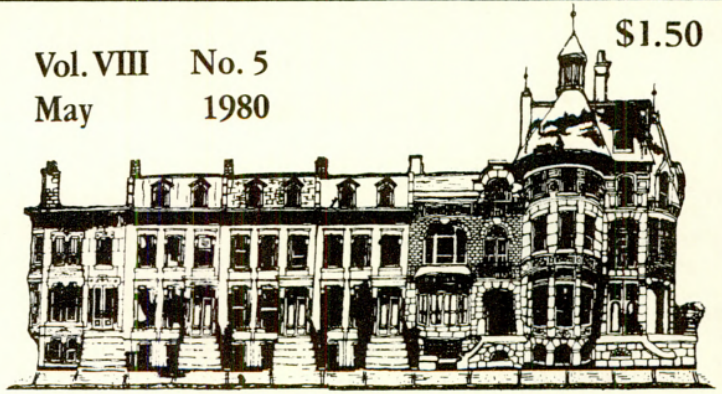


THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL

Vol. VIII No. 5
May 1980

\$1.50



Restoration And Maintenance Techniques For The Antique House

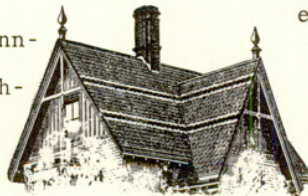
Slate Roofs

By The Old-House Journal Technical Staff

UP AGAINST THE CLAIMS of asphalt roofing manufacturers and unenlightened contractors, comes this article--a little bit of friendly persuasion for keeping that old slate roof. There are BENEFITS, both practical and aesthetic, to maintaining an existing slate roof. And even as replacement roofing or on new construction, slate is a cost-efficient material over the long term. It will outlast many asphalt roofs, all the while giving beautiful, low-maintenance service. The passing of time only enhances it. Because it is natural stone, an infinite variety of color and texture is found among slate roofs.

SLATE WAS POPULAR for roofing until the late 1920's. The same traditional methods are used for the quarrying and milling of slate today, although most current production goes toward structural uses (such as slabs for damp-proof courses) and for flagging. However, some companies continue to produce roofing slate, and some will fill special orders for restoration projects. (See the box on page 55.)

IN THE UNITED STATES, slate has been quarried to the greatest extent in Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Virginia. The Vermont slate region extends into Washington County, N.Y., and the Pennsylvania region into Maryland. There is also a high-quality slate taken in Piscataquis County, Maine, but this



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Coming Next Month

FRONT GARDENS IN THE CITY

is no longer generally available for roofing. In the Peach Bottom District (PA-MD border) slate has been quarried since the 1730's, and slate was quarried for local use in Virginia as early as 1787. But before 1850 and the railroads, most slate used in this country was from Wales.

How Long Does It Last ?

THE SLATE INDUSTRY is prudently conservative in its claims. The prevailing opinion about slate's longevity is that Pennsylvania slate lasts at least 50 years, Vermont (and N.Y.) slate lasts at least 100 years, and Buckingham (VA) slate lasts at least 175 years. This takes into account those slates which fail from individual natural flaws, and those veins which produce slate that is the most porous or of the least desirable mineral constituents.

IT IS SAFE TO SAY that slate, being naturally durable stone, is one of the most permanent roofing materials available. The star example of its longevity is the roof of the Saxon Chapel at Stratford-on-Avon in England. After nearly 1200 years of exposure to the weather, the Welsh (high quality) slate is still in good condition.

[\(Continued on p. 51\)](#)

New Threat To Old Houses: Technological Trashing

PRESERVATIONISTS made some impressive gains in the 1970's. In many towns it is becoming almost fashionable to restore old buildings, rather than to pull them down to construct vacant lots.

BUT NOW, with much education remaining to be done on the why's of preserving old buildings, a new potential enemy is appearing on our unguarded flank. Conservationists--people concerned with the preservation of natural resources--may become as big a problem in the next 10 years as the bulldozers have been in the past.

MOST PRESERVATIONISTS have felt, I think, that conservationists were our natural allies. Both groups share an abhorrence of waste, a concern for the physical environment, and a respect for individual workmanship.

BUT I FEAR the tide of public policy is flowing so strongly in the direction of energy conservation that it may make antagonists out of people who should be friends. While federal funds for preservation are being slashed, for example, politicians are competing with each other to devise new tax incentives and grants for energy conservation.

ALL OF WHICH IS FINE--up to a point. But past experience with urban renewal has shown what happens when you attempt to solve a problem by quickly throwing buckets of money at it. There is the danger that the rush to retrofit old buildings for energy conservation is going to wreak as much havoc as the bulldozer forces did in the past.

COUNTLESS THOUSANDS of old houses have been covered in aluminum and vinyl siding in a misguided search for energy savings. Only now is it being discovered that these substitute sidings can cause terrible damage (See OHJ, Apr. 1980).

THE GOVERNMENT'S emphasis on "insulate everything" has led countless thousands of others to blow sidewall insulation into their old houses. It will be a decade or more before the folly of this step shows up fully in rotted sills and clapboards.

MUCH MORE VISIBLE, however, will be the consequences of hanging solar collectors all over old buildings. When this is

THE OLD-HOUSE JOURNAL®

Published Monthly For People Who Love Old Houses

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Published by The Old-House Journal Corporation, 69A Seventh Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217. Tel. (212) 636-4514. Subscriptions \$16/yr. in U.S.; \$18 in Canada (U.S. funds). Not available elsewhere. Printed at Royal Offset Co., 34 West 15th St., NYC 10011. Contents of The Old-House Journal® are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without specific permission in writing from The Editor.

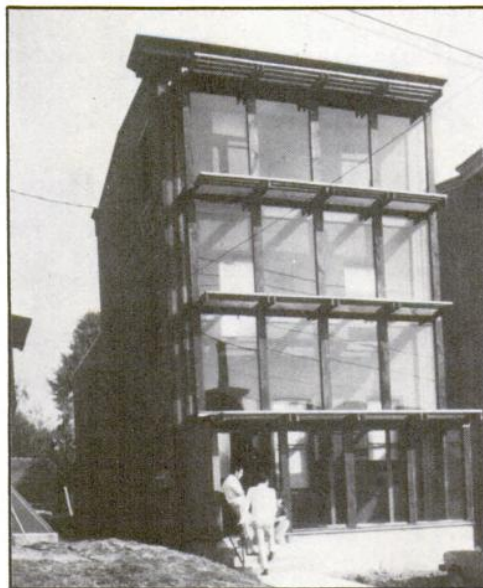
done by people who have no interest in old architecture, the result can be disastrous. A special danger is that the owner or architect will feel compelled to make a bold "personal statement" at the expense of the building's appearance. When energy gadgets are displayed in a conspicuous fashion, the result can only be called "technological trashing."

ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS of the 18th and 19th centuries considered the creation of beauty one of their prime functions. That they succeeded admirably is shown today in the public's delight in restored houses and neighborhoods across the U.S. People love the texture, proportion, ornamentation and human scale of old buildings.

OLD BUILDINGS were frankly designed to evoke an emotional response from people. The emotional reaction is removed when a building is technologically trashed.

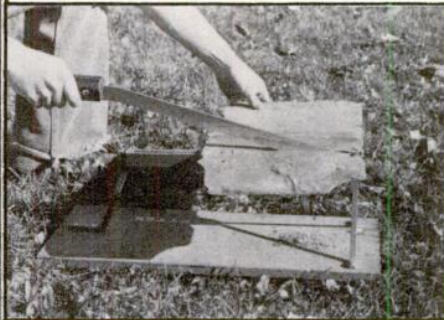
IN THE 1980's, there will be more and more people ruining the beauty of old buildings by smothering them with insulating siding, solar collectors and other gadgets. It's crucial that we who love the appearance of old architecture become totally familiar with the techniques of energy efficiency. We have to provide the "soft technology" to make old buildings energy conserving--without destroying their beauty!

--Clem Labine

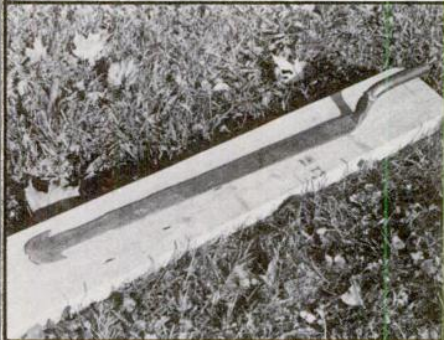


TECHNOLOGICAL TRASHING: The facade of this handsome house has been hidden behind an ugly glass wall that is supposed to act as a solar heat collector.

Slater's Tools



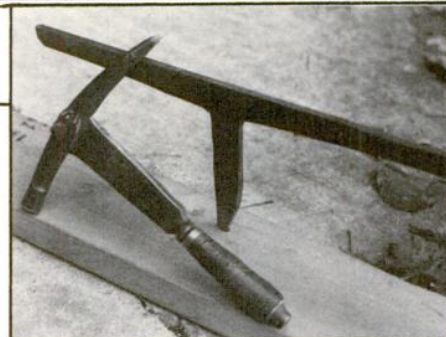
SLATE CUTTER: A simple tool similar to an office paper-cutter, convenient for cutting quantities of slate on site.



SLATER'S HAMMER: Cast-steel one-piece tool. One end is pointed for punching slate; other end is a hammer head for driving nails. On each side of the shank is a shear edge for cutting slate.



RIPPER: Cast-steel tool 24 in. long used for removing damaged slate. Thin blade is slipped under broken slate and hooked around nail shaft. The other end of tool is struck sharply with a hammer; end hook cuts and withdraws the nail. (left)



STAKE: T-bar (18 in. long) with the short arm pointed for driving into plank or scaffold. Long arm acts as rest for slate during punching and cutting operations, or as a straight edge.



Buying & Matching

LIKE OTHER SHINGLES, slate in quantity is bought by the square (the number of shingles that cover 100 square feet of plain roof surface with the standard lap). For restoration jobs, of course, smaller quantities can be purchased from either a distributor or a quarry, depending on circumstances. Top dollar will be paid for just a few slates, especially if you have the shop punch, cut, or bevel the slate, or if shipping is involved. A roofer who deals in salvaged slates may be the best source for very small orders.

APPROXIMATE 1980 Roofing Slate Prices: (per square, may vary)

PA Black.....	\$165/sq.
VT Weathering Green.....	190/sq.
VT Unfading Green.....	230/sq.
VT Variegated Purple.....	265/sq.
Buckingham Grey.....	350/sq.
NY Unfading Red.....	1200/sq.

PERMANENCE DOESN'T COME CHEAP, as you can see. But maintaining an existing slate roof and replacing slates as they break--one or a few at a time--is relatively simple and inexpensive. A slate roof is one of the most valuable assets an old building can have. Its proper maintenance over time will ensure its preservation. (A slate roof adds appreciably to the value of a house.)

WHEN ADDITIONS or alterations are made to a house, or when the existing roof is repaired,

it would be nice to have the new sections of the roof match the old in color and texture. Slate of the same quality and color characteristics should be used. Because of the deep and varied color in a slate, matching is not as difficult as it is with other stone, such as granite and marble. It is important to get in the same color family, however, and this means getting the replacements from the same region or occasionally from the very same quarry. In addition, the difference between Unfading and Weathering colors must be considered. A new Weathering Green slate from Vermont, for example, will not match old Weathering Green slate (by now a subtle brown or grey) for some years.

TO BLEND NEWLY BOUGHT with old slate, the best method is to remove some slates in an old intact section of the roof, and mix these with new slates. Slates on dormers and in shadows will be less obvious than those on the roof's major expanse, so it may be preferable to use the new slates on these small areas.

Where To Buy Tools

SLATE TOOLS are available through any of the quarries that supply roofing slate, as well as through many roofing suppliers.

HAMMER, RIPPER, AND STAKE are available direct from the manufacturer by mail. Please call for prices:

JOHN STORTZ & SONS
210 Vine Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106
(215) 627-3855



TO MATCH SLATE, look at the underside of an old slate. (The exposed part is not a good example of the color because it has accumulated organic debris and pollution.) To check the color as it was before Weathering--if Weathering Slate--look at the inside of a broken slate.

PENNSYLVANIA SLATE colors are Blue-Grey, Blue-Black, and Black. Buckingham and other Virginia slates are generally Blue-Grey to Dark Grey with micaceous spots on the surface that produce an unusual luster. Vermont slates can be Light Grey, Grey-Black, Unfading and Weathering Green, Unfading Purple (rare) and Variegated Mottled Purple and Green. Unfading Red slates are found only in Washington County, N.Y.; these are the most costly. Also, a lustrous Unfading Black slate of exceptional strength was long quarried in the town of Monson, Maine. It is no longer sold as roofing slate.

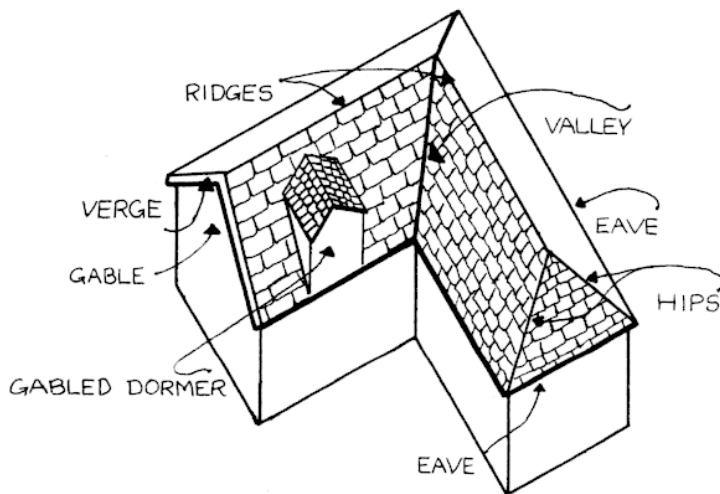
Failures, Leaks

ONE OF SLATE'S major advantages is that it needs no ongoing maintenance: No painting, no preservative coatings, no waterproofing or fireproofing, and no cleaning. Slate resists seasonal weather changes better than other roofing materials. (Some slates have a greater porosity than others and will eventually begin to spall due to freezing cycles.)

ANY ROOF, however, should be checked and maintained periodically. Gutters and flashings are particularly prone to problems and may need occasional repairs. (See Maintenance of Gutters, Oct. and Nov. 1979.)

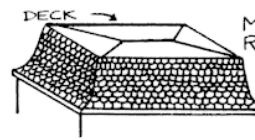
COMPLETE FAILURE of a slate roof is almost always due to poor installation methods--bad flashing details or inferior nails. The nails sometimes give way; the worst condition is when ALL the nails need replacing because false econ-

Dictionary



RIDGE has the combing slates (those projecting at the top) alternately projecting on either side of the ridge.

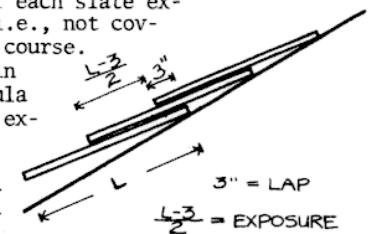
CURB: The line formed by the junction of two different slopes on one side of a roof--especially on Mansard and Gambrel roofs.



DECK: The flat or nearly flat top of a Mansard roof.

ELASTIC CEMENT: A sticky, waterproof compound used to secure hip and ridge slates, and to cover exposed nail holes. It has a high melting point and low freezing point. Also, any modern product meeting these criteria.

EXPOSURE: The length of each slate exposed to the weather, i.e., not covered by the next above course. Exposure is expressed in inches. A simple formula is used to compute the exposure: Deduct 3 in. (standard lap) from length of slate and divide by two. For a 24-in. slate, usual exposure is $24-3=21$, $21/2=10\text{-}1/2$ inches.



FELT: For a standard roof, refers to 30 lb. (optimum) asphalt-saturated rag felt. It is laid under the slates in horizontal layers with the joints lapped 3 inches towards the eaves and at the ends. It does not have long-term waterproofing value; but rather protects the roof while the slates are being laid, has insulating value, and forms a cushion for the heavy brittle slates.

FLASHING: Metal sheets or patches that are used to prevent water infiltration at intersections of projecting surfaces through the roof, or against which the roof abuts. (For example, valleys, around chimneys and dormers.) BASE FLASHINGS are used over or under the roof covering and turned up on the vertical surface. CAP FLASHINGS are those built onto the vertical surface and bent down over the base flashings. (Latter also called Counter Flashings.)

BABY: In single slate replacement, a piece of copper or other metal used to cover nail holes and provide a channel for water runoff. See photos.

BUTT: The exposed end of a roofing slate.

CLEAR: In regions where slate contains bands of rock compositionally different from the main body of slate, "clear" denotes slates which have been trimmed of all such ribbons.

COMMERCIAL STANDARD SLATE: Most common and available roofing slate. Exact definition varies by region, but generally this slate is 3/16 inch thick with varying widths (8-14 in.) and a length between 18-24 in. Each slate has a bevelled edge and pre-punched nail holes. Quality is fairly consistent.

COMB RIDGE: Ridge finishing treatment in which the combing slates (see Saddle Ridge) on the North or East side are laid extending 1/16-1 inch over the other side. The grain of the combing slates may be either vertical or horizontal. The COXCOMB

omy or ignorance led to the use of the wrong nails to hold each slate. If some slates are letting go because their nails have rusted through, this could mean that eventually all the slates will have to be relaid with the proper copper nails. Today's galvanized nails can not be recommended. Old slates can be reused.

LEAKS IN SLATE ROOFS are usually caused by deteriorated flashing, or missing slates. Flashings gradually erode from ice and atmosphere. Flashing repair can often be tackled by the homeowner, especially the flashings around chimneys and stacks and in open valleys. Replacing flashing in closed valleys--where the metal is covered by slates--is more complicated.

WITHOUT A DOUBT, it is more economical to keep up the repairs on a sound slate roof by replacing missing slates and deteriorated flashings, than to replace it or cover it with a modern, less permanent material. If the majority of

the slates are delaminating or crumbling, it won't be possible to save the roof. It should be recognized that such a roof is probably many years old already, and that the condition resulted from the original installation of inferior, least expensive slates.

Replacing A Broken Slate

INDIVIDUAL SLATES may have to be replaced because of breakage or natural deterioration of a flawed slate. A slate is tough and durable but brittle. A falling tree limb, a heartily thrown rock, or a careless footstep can break it. Many problems are caused by improper installation: The nails may have been driven too tight, causing tension in the tightly held slate which results in its cracking. Or the nails may not have been driven quite far enough, causing the slate in the course above to rest unevenly on the protruding nail head.

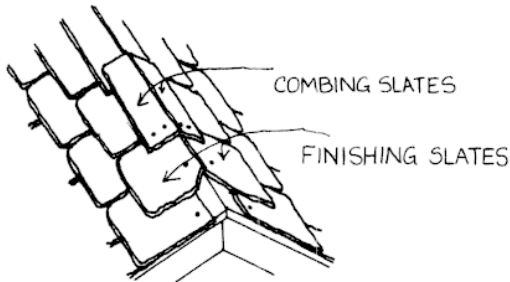
(Text continues on p.55)

FREAKS: Slates having an unusual combination or variation of color, bought for special effects on special order. They are thicker than usual--never split under 1/4 inch and up to 2 inches or more.

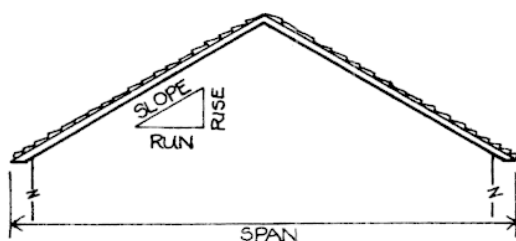
GRADUATED ROOF: Variation on the Standard slate roof. Slates are arranged so that the thickest and longest are at the eaves, diminishing in size and thickness to the ridges. Usually this is combined with other generally more labor-intensive treatments such as closed valleys.

LAP (HEADLAP): That part of a slate overlaying the slate two courses below. The standard lap is 3 inches. Roofs with less slope (flatter) often take a 4 inch lap; those very steep need only a 2 inch lap. See sketch at EXPOSURE.

RIBBON STOCK: Slate which contains bands of rock differing in composition and color from the main body of stone. It is always labelled as such. Usually from Pennsylvania quarries.



SADDLE RIDGE: Finish in which the regular roofing slates are extended to the ridge line so that slates on both sides of roof are butted flush. Then another course of slates is laid with its grain horizontal (combing slates) and lapped horizontally to cover the previous combing slate's nail holes. They are butted flush on either side of the ridge.



SLOPE (PITCH): The angle of inclination that the roof makes with a horizontal plane. It is usually described in terms of the vertical rise (in inches) to each foot of horizontal run, as in "8 in 1." Or it can be described in terms of the total rise (height) of the roof to its total span, as "1/4 pitch" or "1/4 slope."

STANDARD ROOF: One composed of Commercial Standard Slate (approx. 3/16 in. thick) of more-or-less uniform standard width and length, with butts laid to a line, in standard slate colors. (No color patterns, no freaks.) Encompasses those slates with butts (exposed ends) trimmed to have an hexagonal, diamond, or Gothic pattern.

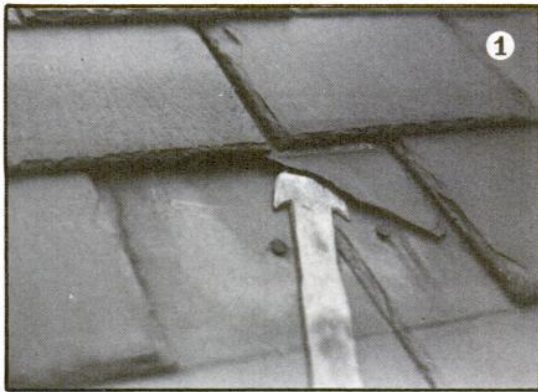
SQUARE: Number of slates needed to cover 100 square feet of plain roof surface, when laid with the customary lap of 3 inches. So, you'd need more small slates to make a square, fewer large slates. (For example, there are 686 10-in.x6-in. slates in a square, but only 98 24-in.x14-in. slates to a square.) Also, roofs with less slope (flatter) take a 4-in. lap, so more slates are needed to cover 100 sq. ft.; very steep roofs take a 2-in. lap, so fewer slates would be needed. Commercial Standard Slate weighs 650-750 lbs. per normal square.

TEXTURAL ROOF: In between a Standard Roof and a Graduated Roof. Generally, such a roof has more visual interest than the Standard, with the use of rough slates instead of smooth, or with unevenly laid butts, or variations in the thickness, size, and color of slates. (Not usually over 3/8-in. thick.)

UNFADING: A color designation given to those slates that do not "weather" or appreciably change color over the years. (As Unfading Red.)

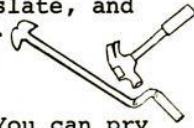
VALLEY: The depressed (inside) angle formed by the intersection of two inclined sides of a roof. In an OPEN VALLEY, the metal flashing is exposed as the slates do not come together. A CLOSED VALLEY, where the slates completely cover the metal, is used on expensive jobs. ROUND VALLEYS and CANOE VALLEYS are descriptive names for two types of Closed Valleys.

WEATHERING: Modifying word describing the color characteristic of a slate. Weathering slates react chemically with the atmosphere to gradually change hue over the years; does not affect longevity or hardness of the slate. See Unfading.



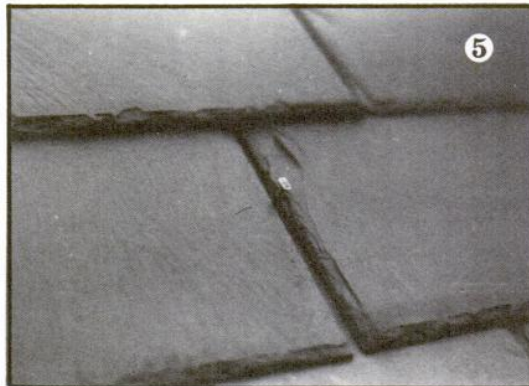
Making Babies

FIRST REMOVE any broken slate, with the Ripper **1**. Slip the pointed end under the broken slate, and hook it over the nail. By hammering downward on the other end of the tool, you'll cut the nail shaft **2**. (You can pry up the surrounding slates by gently driving nails in sideways. Or use the ripper like a shoe-horn.) Replace the broken slate **3**. Line up the new

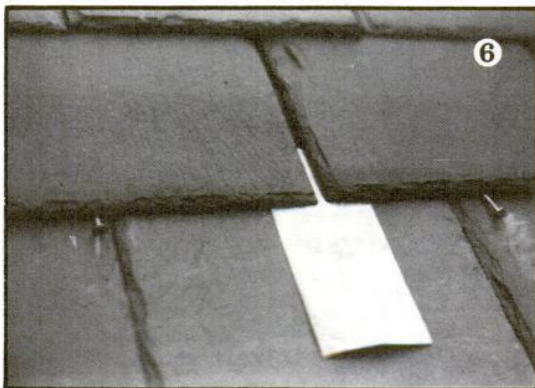
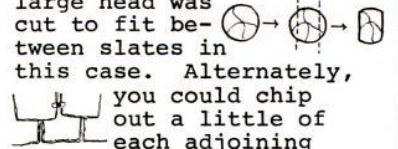


slate in its course and be sure pre-punched nail holes (if any) are covered. Mark and punch a hole in the replacement slate **4**, preferably 1-2 inches from the next above slate, but always above double coverage. (You want a hole ONLY in the new slate, not in the one below it.) Use a nailset or punch, or drill the hole.

A SLATER'S NAIL is a heavy gauge copper wire nail with a large flat head. Its length should be twice the thickness of the slates plus one inch.



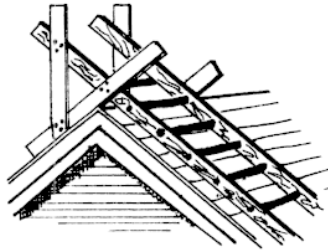
3d nails are appropriate for standard-thickness slates up to 18 in. long. Use 4d nails for extra-long slates, and 6d nails on hips and ridges. DO NOT use common wire nails or shingling nails. Drive the nail **5**; note that the large head was cut to fit between slates in this case. Alternately, you could chip out a little of each adjoining slate.



BEND A PIECE OF COPPER slightly convex or concave to make a BABY that will cover the exposed nail hole **6**. Slide it firmly up so that its bottom edge is 2 inches below the nail. If necessary, tap a screwdriver against the baby to push it up, or use the nail trick again as in the photo. The baby will stay in place **7**, adequately covering the nail hole. If it is bent concave, it will channel rainwater better.

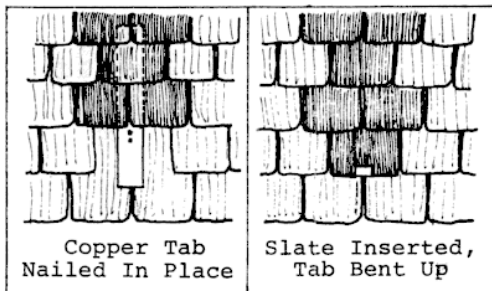
SEE the text for another method of holding a replacement slate.

WORKING up on the roof is tricky because slates are brittle and will break if full weight is placed on them. The roof can be padded with an old blanket and a ladder can be laid on the roof to work from.



A ridge hook is a simple device which attaches to the top of the ladder and hooks over the ridge --one can be bought or rented. (Roofers will have scaffold brackets or other equipment. In no case should they leave supporting metal straps in the roof when they're finished; the metal will rust, staining the slates.)

THERE ARE TWO METHODS for holding the new slate in place. The first is the simple copper holding tab shown in the drawing. However, ice may bend this tab in cold climates. A sure way to fasten the new slate in place is shown in the photographs on p. 54.



IF A WHOLE AREA of slates needs replacing, or needs new nails, first remove all the slates. This will minimize the number of babies, since some slates will be nailed in the normal way, that is, with the nail holes covered by subsequent courses of slate.

THE NAIL shouldn't be driven so tight that the slate is under pressure--the slate should HANG on the nail (unlike wood shingles). Normally, the nail hole would be sealed with elastic cement. (You can use Dow's "Gutter-Seal," Alcoa's "Roof Sealant," or exterior caulk.)

Notes On Reroofing

TOTAL REROOFING with slate is a procedure larger than this article, and probably a task beyond the fond desires of most OHJ readers. But reroofing with slate is sometimes a worthwhile consideration. Brand-new man-made materials are never quite harmonious with the other elements of an old house and its setting. Slate, on the other hand, instantly blends in as a natural material. It may be preferred over wood shingles in densely populated areas where a fireproof roof becomes a necessity.

IT IS GENERALLY RECOMMENDED that the old roofing be removed first. It's a prerequisite if the existing roof is uneven, much-interrupted by hips and dormers, or if the sheathing or rafters have rotted. But if the existing roof is smooth or can be easily shimmed, a slate roof can be laid on top of it. Follow the recommendations of a competent roofer.

COMMERCIAL STANDARD SLATE (3/16 in.) should present no load problem to a structurally

Quarries

FINDING a slate company (quarry or distributor) doesn't necessarily mean you've found a ROOFING slate supplier. The following quarries produce roofing slate, and can fill special orders for restorations.

VERMONT STRUCTURAL SLATE CO., Fair Haven, VT 05743. Tel.(802) 265-4933.

RISING AND NELSON SLATE CO., West Pawlet, VT 05775. Tel.(802) 645-0150.

EVERGREEN SLATE CO., 34 North St., Granville, NY 12832. Tel.(518) 642-2530.

HILLTOP SLATE CO., Middle Granville, NY 12849. Tel.(518) 642-2270.

STRUCTURAL SLATE CO., Pen Argyl, PA 18072. Tel.(215) 863-4145.

BUCKINGHAM SLATE CO., 4110 Fitzhugh Ave., Richmond, VA 23230. Tel.(804) 355-4351.

The Book

THE BEST BOOK about slate roofs is SLATE ROOFS, a reprint of a 1926 publication by the now-defunct National Slate Assn. It's full of well-organized information--historical, scientific, and practical, and it's required reading for any roofer unfamiliar with slate or a homeowner who plans an extensive roofing job. The price (ppd.) is \$7.95; order from Vermont Structural Slate Co., Fair Haven, VT 05743. Tel.(802)265-4933.

SPECIAL THANKS to Bill Mahar of Vermont Structural Slate for all his help.

sound roof. (Max. 800 lbs./square, including slate, nails, felt.) An engineer should be consulted before installing a Graduated Roof or if there is any question about the soundness of the roof members beneath the existing roof.

Enlightened Roofers

AN UNRECOGNIZED FACT these days is the high salvage value of slate; it can be reused, being in no way damaged or used up on its first roof. There are tales--not many--of less-than-scrupulous roofers advising replacement of a slate roof that merely needed work on the flashings, just to make off with the resalable slate.

MORE OFTEN, when a roofer says "It can't be fixed," he's really saying "I can't fix it."

INDEED, IT MAY BE DIFFICULT to find a contractor familiar with slate roofs. Your safest bet is with a roofer who advertises in the Yellow Pages as a Slate Roofer. If finding a slate roofer in your part of the country is unlikely, it is possible to hire and educate another responsible roofer to do the job. First, find one who doesn't say "Asphalt is better than slate" or "You can't buy roofing slate anymore." Then have him read the Slate Roofs book. A few things must be mastered... like working on a brittle roof, and driving the nails just right. But many of the procedures are standard for any kind of shingle, slate, wood, or asphalt.



Living With Gas Lighting

By Don Yule, Brooklyn, N.Y.

NEW YORK was the first city to have electric lighting--starting in 1880 with Edison's first generating station on Pearl Street in Manhattan. But for a half-century prior to that, city homes had been illuminated by gas, piped into each room.

MY BROWNSTONE ROW HOUSE was built in 1879, and many of the original gas fixtures are still in place and operating. Most of the rooms have one outlet in the ceiling, allowing a "gasolier" to hang from the center of a rosette, and another outlet on the wall. I found several varieties of fixtures in these locations, depending on the room.

MY HOUSE WAS NOT ELECTRIFIED until the 1920's. By that time, electric service had become more reliable, the overhead lines having been replaced by underground cables. Several of the original gas fixtures were converted to electricity by the simple expedient of threading wires through the gas pipes and replacing the gas jets with pull-chain sockets.

ALL OF THE OVERHEAD FIXTURES were electrified, but most of the wall gaslights in my house were left as they were. (The owner at that time was either trying to save money on the conversion--or else he was still not convinced that electricity was here to stay!)

THE GAS FIXTURES are still quite workable. Although I don't use my gaslights regularly, we do light them on social occasions, when candles might otherwise be used. I find they create the desired atmosphere.

ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING fixtures is the gas mantle unit in the bathroom. It is strategically located over a marble sink which has two bevelled-glass mirrors above it. It was obviously the place where the man of the house shaved; hence the need for the bright light provided by the mantle. The gas light also provides ample heat for this small room.

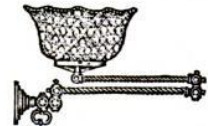
EDITOR'S NOTE: Many old houses have the gas lines still intact in the walls. Before attempting to re-activate such a system, however, be sure to have it checked out by your plumber or gas company to be sure it is still safe.



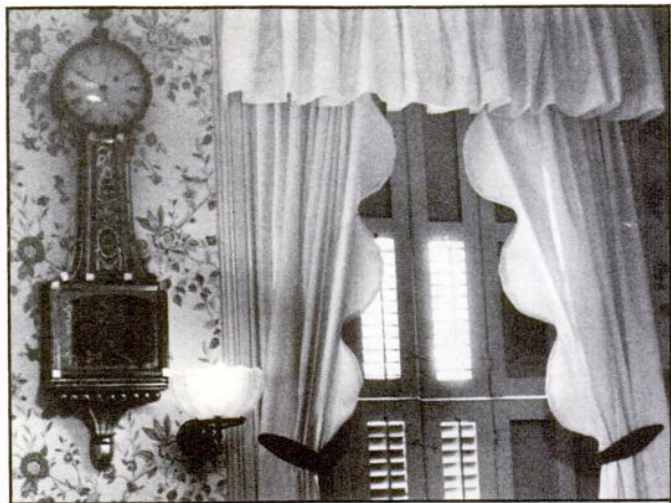
An unusual three-arm sconce with open flame casts a soft light on a self-portrait by the author's wife, Jaye.

IN THE MASTER BEDROOM, there is an ornamented brass wall fixture over my desk. The valve has an auxiliary outlet on the side. I use this valve for an extension hose running to my Welsbach gas student lamp. This is one of my favorites: A heavy brass desk model with a gas mantle and green glass shade.

IN THE LIBRARY, above my wife's desk, is an unusual triple-burner gas wall sconce, with a valve in the shape of a gas flame. The kitchen has a swing-out model that can fold out over the kitchen counter. Presumably, this was handy for reading cookbooks. There's a similar fixture at the bottom of the cellar stairs--providing a meager light for the coal bin.



WE DON'T HAVE big blackouts in New York City very often, but when we do, I'll be ready! 🏠



Original gas wall sconce still lights the Yule's front parlor.

How To Make Victorian Drapery

By Carolyn Flaherty

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE a publication comes along that adds so much valuable knowledge and practical help in the restoration of old houses that we want to bring it to your attention in a big way.

SUCH A BOOK IS "The Curtain-Maker's Handbook." While it has already proved indispensable in many house museum restorations (The Taylor-Barry House in Kennebunk, Maine and The Molly Brown House in Denver, Colorado) its value lies in its application to any old house of the Victorian period. The author not only gives suggestions for window hangings, but complete instructions for planning, cutting, making and hanging drapery.

ANY OLD-HOUSE PERSON who sews should be able to follow the diagrams and sewing instructions and for those who don't sew--a drawing, instructions and yardage requirements can be taken to a local place that will make drapery but which does not ordinarily deal with period styles.

A Little History

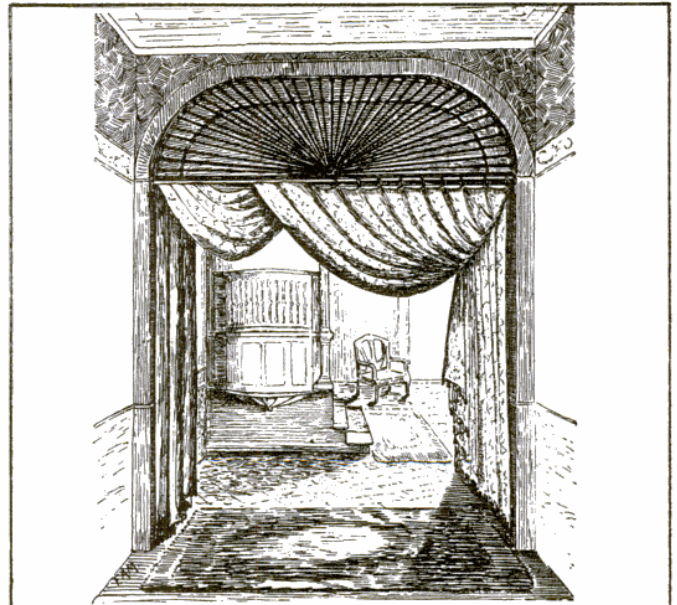
TWO YEARS AGO, Martha Gandy Fales (a consultant to historical societies and museums in northern New England) was looking for an appropriate design for window hangings for a room being refurbished in the Victorian period. A volunteer thought she had an old book that might be helpful. It was "Practical Decorative Upholstery" by F. A. Moreland, published in Boston in 1889. It was so helpful that E. P. Dutton has reprinted it as "The Curtain-Maker's Handbook." Ms. Fales has written the excellent introduction for this reprint edition. Mr. Moreland explains the purpose of the book in his preface:

"It is the art seen from the standpoint of a practical draper, and if to an expert such close attention to detail seems tedious and unnecessary, it must be remembered it is written for the uninitiated."

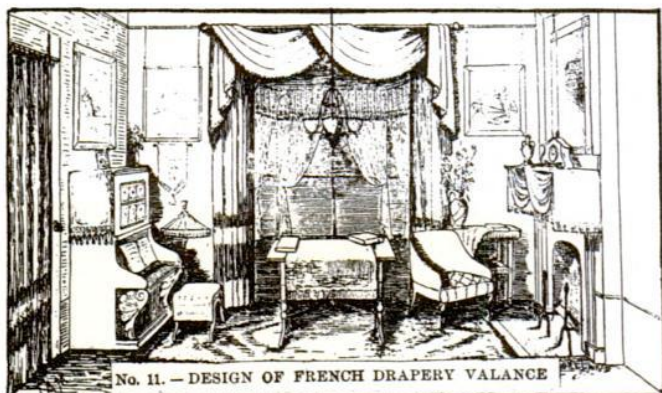
DRAPERY in Moreland's day was by no means confined to windows. He gives instructions for making portieres; covering walls; alcove and archway drapery; laces, glass and sash curtains; curtain and traverse rods; draping brass bedsteads; how to launder curtains; cleaning painted floorcloths and linoleum; and even a method of preserving the feathers in a feather bed.

A Selection Of Drapery

A SMALL SAMPLE of Moreland's instructions and designs from the book follows. I have selected the designs that seem to be of the most general interest.



Hall drapery is looped over a pole and drawn up on one side by means of a cord running through rings placed between the curtains and the lining. The rope is a decorative effect.



French Drapery Festoon

IN MAKING UP A DRAPERY when the design is intended to convey the idea that the whole is in one piece and simply thrown over the pole, the festoons are cut by a different rule, as in hanging they are to droop below the pole at the head; and the pleats, instead of being gathered together in a small compass, are spread along the pole to correspond to the width of the wing or long curtain to which it is attached.

THIS METHOD is especially adapted to the fashion of using poles, which allows a freer handling of goods than in using the cornice, and if well done will quite deceive the eye and appear as though the goods had been put over the pole without cutting.

INDEED THE REQUEST is sometimes made that the drapery be so arranged and not cut at all. This would be impossible to do except for some very simple form of drapery in silks or other reversible goods requiring no lining.

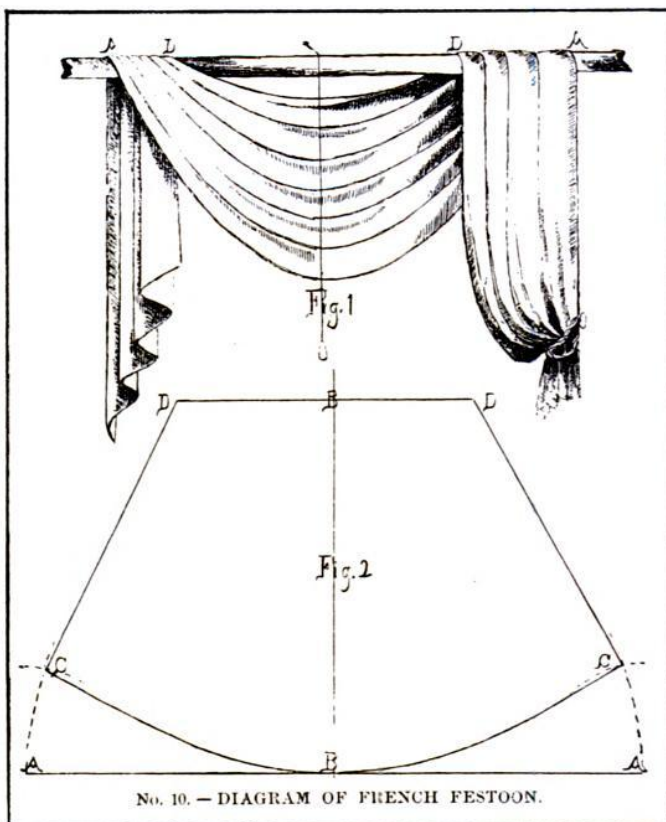
IT WOULD BE VERY IMPRACTICABLE any way, and the desired effect can be produced better by having the drapery properly cut and made up in separate pieces.

THE DESIGN must first be drawn to a scale adapted to the form of the window or whatever the space may be, having each part in good proportion.

ON THE POLE before alluded to, mark off in full size the width of the drapery, dividing it up according to the spaces required for the various parts. Put a tack at each end of space to be occupied by the festoon. (See AA, Fig. 1.) Hook the measuring tape at A, letting it fall down and around to A at the other end, and as low as required by the scale drawing.

THIS GIVES the full measurement around the bottom of the festoon which is to be laid out for base line AA, on the previously prepared paper for patterns the same as for cutting the common festoon. (See Fig. 2.)

WITH THE T-SQUARE ERECT the perpendicular line BB, Fig. 2. This will be through the middle of the base line, as the festoon at the bottom is the same on both sides.



NOW TAKE HALF the base line for radius with centre at B, draw the sweep C, and on it locate the point C, one-sixth the whole base line above the point A. Now mark off on line BB the depth of the pattern, which is to be twice the depth of the festoon when pleated up.

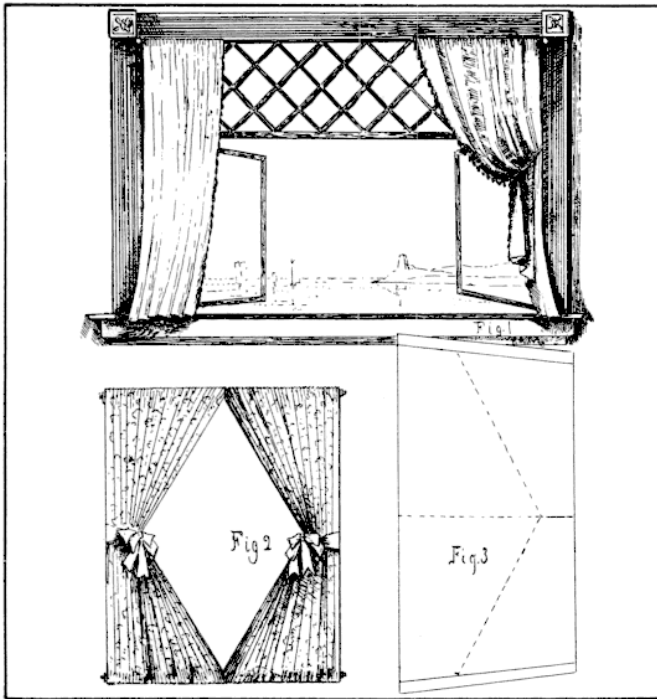
THROUGH THE MARK at the top draw the head line, which is to be as long as the measurement of the head each side of the perpendicular line, which in this case is a little less on the right side. (See head line DD.)

THE HEAD is to be measured the same as the base by dropping the measuring tape as low as the head of the festoon is to sag below the pole, and noting the measurement each side of the plumb line, which is represented by the perpendicular line on the pattern.

RULE FROM points CC to DD, and you have three sides of the festoon. Draw one-half the bottom as shown by diagram. Cut around sides, top, and this half of the base, fold over on perpendicular line, and cut out the other side of bottom by the same curve.

DESIGN No. 11 would do for an over-drapery for portieres going outside the door casing, or the form modified for the occasion would be an easily made valance in silk for a light drapery over laces, or to festoon the front of a mantel, and is an easy lesson for a beginner. From five to seven yards of silk would make a lambrequin for an ordinary-sized window, requiring five to six yards of fringe. In cutting the festoon for the design, the perpendicular line would come in the centre, as the festoon spreads the same both sides.

INSTRUCTIONS are excerpted from: "The Curtain-Maker's Handbook."



Advice About Curtains

ABOVE are Moreland's designs for cottage and diamond drapery. They are simple enough to require no further diagrams. He does, however have a great deal to say on the subject of lace, glass, and sash curtains. Here are some of Moreland's comments:

Lace Curtains

LACE CURTAINS that are to hang under long curtains or lambrequins should be arranged so they can be easily removed without taking down the other work. The practice of attaching them to the same rings that support the other drapery when poles are used is a bad one, as it brings them all too close together to allow either to drape well. The best method is to turn a hem at the top to receive a rod which is supported by hooks or brackets on the casing.

Laundering


INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLEANING LACE CURTAINS: Soak them over-night in warm water with soap and a couple of spoonfuls of borax or ammonia. After soaking twelve hours, move them around in the tub and that will be sufficient to remove everything but stains. Rinse them thoroughly in clean, warm water. Stretch them a little and fasten them to frames to keep them from shrinking. Frames can be made of light strips of board screwed together at the corners so they can be easily taken apart and packed away for future use; or the curtains can be tacked out on the floor, previously covering the carpet with large sheets of paper. Be sure, when tacking out, that the front edge and bottom are at right angles. Keep the back edge as near parallel to the front as the work will

permit. All the unevenness will then be at the top, and the curtains will dry out nice and square. The top will have to be trimmed off square and rehemmed for the rod. Use very little starch, as, the more flexible they are, the more graceful they will hang.

Glass Curtains

GLASS CURTAINS are short curtains to go inside the casing, and are usually hung on a small rod with sockets or eyes on the stop beads, unless the window shades should be on the outside of casing. They will then have the rods supported by brackets projecting far enough to keep the curtain clear of the shade. Lace curtains of this kind are often used at the same window with long laces, and it is also a very tasteful way to drape chamber and cottage windows, and show the casing all round. Make them of some light material, silk, muslin, or madras, and trim them with soft fringes.

Vestibule Curtains

VESTIBULE CURTAINS are usually hung with rod top and bottom, and allow double fullness if possible. Finish them about five inches longer than the glass opening, so the hemming will not be seen on the outside. In hanging, place the upper rod first, slip the lower rod through the hem, and draw down tightly enough to cause the curtain to hang in well-defined pleats, screwing on the brackets to hold. For a door with single large opening, a pretty treatment is to have the curtains in pairs, fringed and weighted with shot. Shirr up the top, put on rings for the rod. A traverse cord and pulleys with dainty tassels to match are a nice addition, but as such curtains would be within easy reach one could dispense with the traverse. 

To Order The Drapery Book

"THE CURTAIN-MAKER'S HANDBOOK" is a reprint of an 1889 volume written by Frank Moreland. Moreland, having had 20 years experience in the upholstery and drapery business, gave instructions for planning, cutting, making, and hanging drapery. He included seventy illustrations. There is an excellent contemporary introduction by Martha Gandy Fales. This softbound edition has 320 pages.

THE PRICE is \$7.95, plus \$1.00 postage. Send check to: Mr. Cyril I. Nelson
E.P. Dutton, Dept. OHJ
2 Park Avenue
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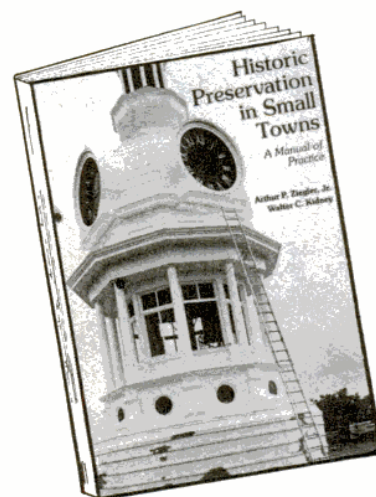
Helpful Publications

Help For Small Towns

THE DEFINITIVE BOOK on developing a preservation plan in towns of fewer than 50,000 people has just been published by the American Association for State and Local History. "Historic Preservation in Small Towns, A Manual of Practice" was written by preservationist Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr. and architectural historian Walter C. Kidney.

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