

# City of Jacksonville *Historic Preservation Commission* SUMMER 2007 NEWSLETTER

## Shutter Up! *The Ultimate Ornament for Old Houses*

Some people go to extremes researching original colors or recreating lost woodwork on old homes. But many blunder with shutters, using historically inaccurate styles, installing the wrong shape, and even mounting them backwards. To understand how to properly size and mount shutters, one must know the historical functions that required different styles.



Shutters were originally meant to shut! Before window glass was universally available, shutters offered shelter against inclement weather, privacy from neighbors, and security. Occasionally called blinds, these solid wood panels or framed wood slats were attached to the sides or tops of exterior window openings where they could be opened wide for air and sun,

closed tight for protection, or left somewhere in between. As glazed sashes became more common, shutters also helped protect the glass.

While solid shutters bolstered security to the first floor, louvered blinds let nighttime breezes in on upper floors. Moveable louvers could be closed with a tilt rod, providing ventilation and privacy at the same time. Dutch shutters were split so the lower half could be closed while the top half was left open.

Shutters were hinged to the outside edge of the opening so that it closed into the recess. They were usually paired on either side of the window, but some were the size of the entire opening and mounted only to one side. Hardware varied in style and placement. Hinges allowed movement and a hook or “shutter dog” kept them closed. Some shutters came and went with the seasons, especially after storm windows came along.

Evidence of old shutters, and their type, may be found in vintage photographs of the house. The biggest hint would be hinge brackets or plates remaining on the window frame, or screw holes or a mortise where the hinge may have been removed long ago. The top center of the windowsill

may have one or two metal brackets or a recessed niche, marking where shutters with hooks could be latched closed from inside the house. Holes, hooks or catches used to hold shutters open are more signs on exterior walls not far from windowsills. Irregular paint lines on siding are also clues to lost shutters.

Shutters should be equal to the actual width and length of the window opening: not shorter, not taller, not wider, not narrower! Whether or not shutters will ever be closed, they should look like they can.

The window recess should be the guide to selecting appropriate size shutters. Square-topped shutters don't fit rounded or even slightly curved window openings. Mount shutter hinges on the window-surround molding, never on the house wall.

Louvered shutters, whether movable or fixed, should be hinged to the window so the louvers angle down and away from the building when closed, directing away rain and snow. When open, the louvers angle toward the house. The bottoms of shutters were usually beveled to match the pitch of the windowsill, closing tightly and keeping out water.

It's important to match the original material of the shutters. Plastic shutters won't fool anyone. Although most shutters were wood, metal was sometimes used in regions of extreme weather.

The color of shutters was typically dark, replicating the void of the window so the building retained a similar appearance on all windows when some shutters were closed and others were open. Color choices have changed with the generations, however, and those of a 1920s brick façade home may have had white shutters, maybe with a cutout such as a pine tree in the upper panel. Queen Anne shutters may be of the rainbow hues of the Victorian era. Some acceptable options in the 19th century included using a darker or lighter version of the house's body color or, a bit more daring, painting the rails in the house's trim color and the panels or louvers in its body color. A safe bet is a shade of green, the typical color throughout the 1800s.



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# What Style Is Your House?

## Gothic Revival (1840-1865)

Started in England in 1749, Gothic Revival first appeared in the United States in the mid-1800s, marking the rise of the Romantic Era. Well-preserved examples of pre-Civil War Gothic Revival houses are relatively rare.

Gothic Revival homes reflect medieval cathedral architecture with adaptations of delicate wooden ornaments and other decorative details without copying authentic Gothic styles. A more complex Gothic Revival style, often called *High Victorian Gothic*, or *Neo-Gothic*, employs heavier stone and ornamental elements like pinnacles and parapets. Later, more modest Victorian Revival homes were at times brick with wooden trim.



Pattern books spread the Gothic Revival style across North America. Some builders lavished the fashionable Gothic details on otherwise humble wooden houses in the roof shape and window moldings.

In America, the Gothic Revival style was deemed best suited for rural areas. Architects of the day thought stately ecclesiastical homes and austere Gothic Revival farmhouses should be set in a natural landscape of rolling green lawns and bountiful foliage.

In towns, smaller and more ornate Gothic Revival homes were common, with trendy details often added to traditional homes that were not, strictly speaking, Gothic at all. The invention of the steam-powered scroll saw allowed builders to apply lacy wooden bargeboards, "gingerbread" trim, scrollwork, and other factory-made ornaments, creating a frivolous version of Gothic Revival known as *Carpenter Gothic*.

Gothic Revival homes usually have these features:

- Steeply pitched roof
- Lacy bargeboards or vergeboards
- Windows with pointed arches
- One story porch, (sometimes multiple porches, often with flattened, Gothic arches)
- Steep cross gables
- Asymmetrical (picturesque) floor plan
- Stained glass or diamond-paned windows (sometimes)
- Gothic windows above entry
- Tall chimneys, sometimes with ceramic chimney pots

Some Carpenter Gothic homes have:

- Bay and oriel windows
- Vertical board and batten trim

By the late 1800s, the fancifully detailed Gothic Revival style had lost popularity. Gothic Revival ideas didn't die out, but were frequently reserved for churches and large public buildings, even through the 1940s. Graceful Queen Anne architecture became the popular new style, but hints of Gothic Revival styling can often be found on Queen Anne houses. Exterior colors are typically earth tones, such as warm reds, browns and yellows, with complimentary-colored trim.

# Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings

The energy topic is as hot as the weather. Historic buildings owners are assessing their ability to conserve energy by improving thermal performance and making weatherization improvements. But in historic buildings, many measures are inappropriate alterations of important architectural features and can even cause serious damage to the historic building materials from chemical reactions or moisture. In this multi-part section, energy conservation techniques will be explored and explained, to provide a solid basis for decision-making and money savings.

Many historic buildings have inherent energy saving physical features and devices that increase thermal performance. Energy Research and Development Administration studies reveal that buildings constructed between 1940-1975 actually have the poorest energy efficiency. Older structures were found to use less energy for heating and cooling, likely requiring fewer weatherization improvements. Since they were designed with a well-developed sense of physical comfort and maximized natural sources of heating, lighting and ventilation, they use less energy.

Operable windows are the most obvious and common energy saving characteristic. Historic commercial buildings often have interior light/ventilation courts, rooftop ventilators, clerestories or skylights. These offer energy efficient fresh air and light, making energy consuming mechanical devices act as supplements to natural energy sources. Any time mechanical HVAC equipment can be turned off and the windows opened, energy will be saved.

Historic buildings often have a ratio of glass to wall of less than 20%, far better energy conservers than many new buildings. Exterior shutters, interior blinds, curtains and drapes, or exterior awnings minimize the heat gain or loss from windows.

Older structures minimize heat gain from the summer sun with exterior balconies, porches, wide roof overhangs, awnings, and shade trees. Living spaces on the second floor catch breezes and escape radiant heat from the earth's surface. Exterior walls were often painted light colors to reflect the hot summer sun, resulting in cooler interior living spaces.

Using heavy masonry walls, minimizing the number and size of windows, and painting exterior walls dark colors reduced winter heat loss. Walls of large mass and weight (thick brick or stone typical in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) have high thermal inertia, or the "M factor," which modifies the thermal resistance (R factor) of the wall by lengthening the time of heat transmission. This improves thermal performance beyond that previously recognized by absorbing heat at the outside surface, but taking a much longer time to transfer it to the interior than a wall with the same R factor, but low thermal inertia. High thermal inertia is why many older buildings lacking modern air conditioning still feel cool on the inside throughout the summer.

Although these characteristics may not typify all historic buildings, the point is that historic buildings often have thermal properties that need little improvement. One must understand the inherent energy saving qualities of a building, and assure, by reopening the windows for instance, that the building functions as it was intended.

Our next segment will discuss specific, preservation-friendly passive and retrofitting measures to reduce energy consumption.

**Save this sheet...**

**...more styles in the next edition!**