

PORCHES

The Least You Need to Know:

- Porches are a prominent feature of any historic building.
- Size matters – careful inspection of existing porch may reveal a smaller (or larger) porch was added or removed over the years.
- Details of porches are very important – railings, decorative features, steps. These details should be retained, repaired and maintained.

Introduction

Porches are very important and visible features of older houses. They are also some of the most frequently altered elements.

Regardless of the size or scale of the porch, the component elements, which can include columns, posts, pilasters, balustrades, entablatures, pediments, stairs, railings, floors, ceilings, trim, and other ornament, are essential to the distinctiveness of houses.

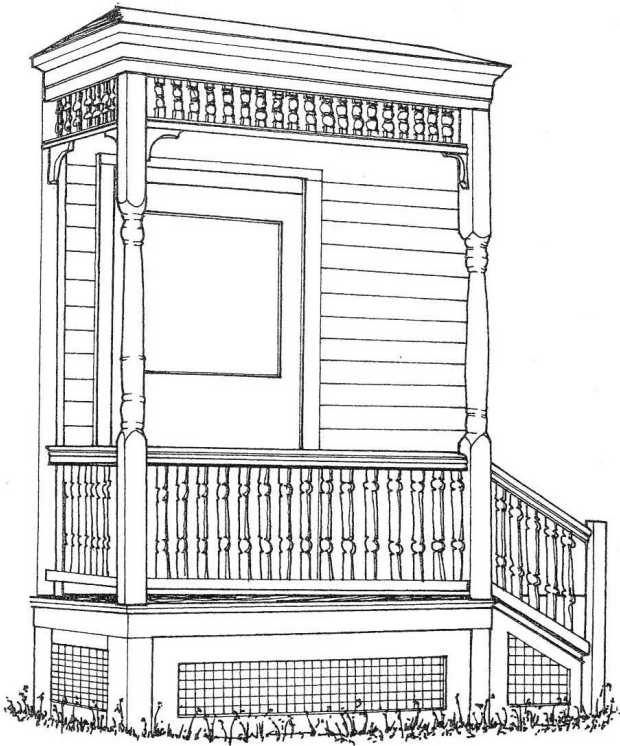
Many porch elements are protected from the weather by the porch roof. Other porch elements, like stairs and railings, have received hard use and exposure to weather for many years. Consequently, porches require careful maintenance to retain their unique character.



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Guidelines for Porch Repairs

Carefully inspect deteriorated porch elements. Replace only those parts that cannot be repaired. For example, the bases of porch columns are often a major site of extensive deterioration. But, a deteriorated column base does not necessarily require the replacement of the entire column.



Avoid introducing new materials that were not historically a part of the porch. For example, don't replace wooden posts with brick, metal, or vinyl posts, or with other synthetic material.

Using standard maintenance techniques, repair the damaged elements of the porch in place and reuse the original parts of the porch, including moldings and three-dimensional turned balusters, to restore the porch to its historic appearance.

If individual porch elements are beyond repair, replace only those elements with new elements of the same material and visual characteristics.

If a major portion of the porch has deteriorated beyond repair and the original design cannot be replicated, use stock lumber and moldings to create a simplified design that conveys the same visual characteristics as the original porch. Duplicate the dimensions and materials without the extensive detailing.

Enclosing Porches

Porches were meant to be open exterior spaces. Enclosing them is a radical change on any side of a building, and should never occur on the front of a building.

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Porch Steps

Steps need maintenance because they receive heavy use, are constantly exposed to the weather, and are in close contact with the ground. If your steps are deteriorated beyond repair and must be replaced, follow these guidelines:

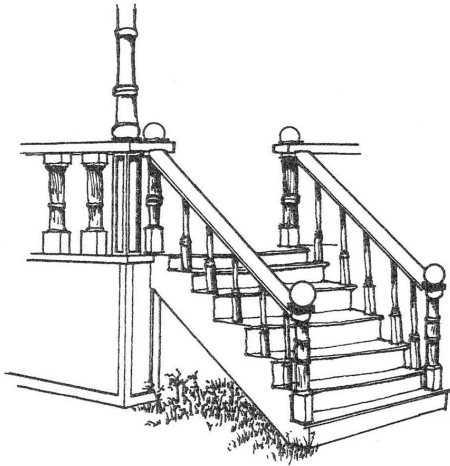
Rebuilt steps should continue the materials of the porch:

Wood stairs for frame houses are historically correct. They should not be replaced with concrete.

Brick steps are typically appropriate only for porches with brick posts and foundations.

Stone steps are typically appropriate only for porches with stone posts and foundations.

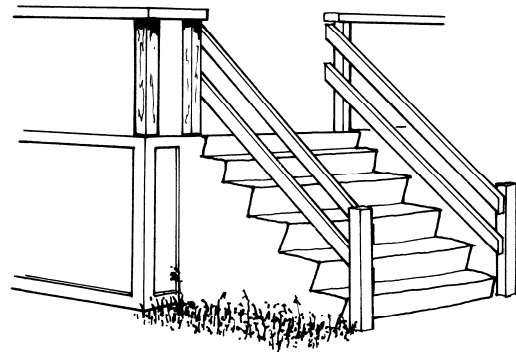
Concrete steps are rarely appropriate for historic houses.



Replacement step railings should match the balustrade of the historic porch in material and detailing:

Simple wood railings assembled from standard pressure treated or dimensional lumber is NOT appropriate.

Wrought iron or aluminum railings and columns are not good substitutes for wood elements. Their lightweight appearance is inappropriate.



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When is a New Porch Appropriate?

When it can be documented by historical, pictorial, and physical evidence that a porch of the type to be erected once existed on the house.

When it can be determined that houses of similar type, style, and date of construction were originally built with porches of the type to be erected.

Door Hoods

Many buildings have hoods over the entrance door rather than full porches. These hoods may be simple or highly ornated. They may be rounded or triangular in shape. Such hoods offer a degree of shelter and add detail and interest to the entrance and the overall building. Existing historic door hoods should be retained.



* Drawings used with permission from Borough of Gettysburg.