

SIGNS

The Least You Need to Know:

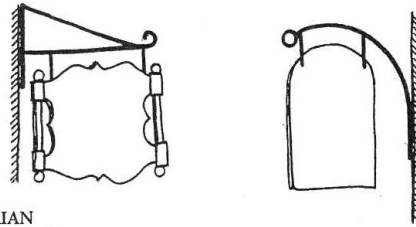
- While signs often change with usage of the building, they are still an important element of the overall appearance.
- Signs should be appropriate for the architectural style of the building and the character of the surrounding buildings.

Introduction

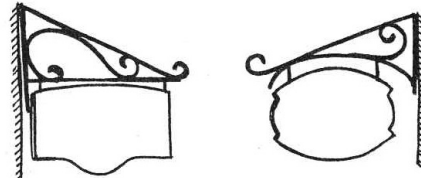
Signs are important parts of commercial buildings, both from a visual and a financial perspective. A clever, carefully designed sign can make a good first impression and can attract customers. A confusing, ordinary sign can detract from the appearance of a building and can turn customers away. Please consult with the Borough office regarding the limitations on sign size. Generally, signs on historic buildings should not exceed six square feet.

Signs were attached to and erected near buildings in Mercersburg from the earliest periods of the borough's settlement. Historic photographs can be used to determine the sign shape, lettering, and location of early commercial businesses. New signs advertising today's modern businesses can use these same elements to create contemporary signs that both enhance the character of the historic building and convey necessary information to the public.

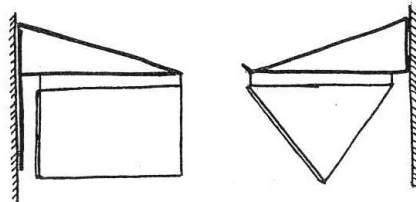
EARLY AMERICAN



VICTORIAN



MODERN

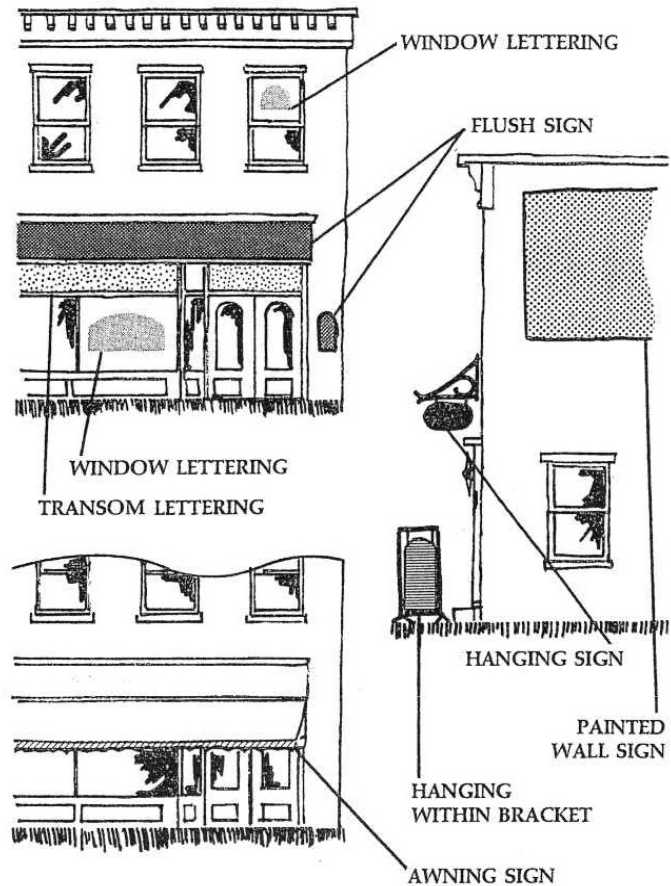


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The guidelines presented in this section are meant to help property owners design and select new signs that are compatible with their historic buildings and Mercersburg's historic district, while meeting the needs of modern business. In addition to following the guidelines in this manual, all signs installed must meet the provisions of Mercersburg's Zoning Ordinance.

Sign Position

- Hanging from a bracket perpendicular to the front wall
- Under the storefront cornice
- Attached flush to the building
- On the lower flap of a fabric awning
- Paint, vinyl, or etching on window(s)
- Temporary, movable, freestanding sidewalk signs



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Sign Types

Hanging Signs: Hanging signs are usually hung from an iron bracket perpendicular to the wall of a building, but parallel hanging signs may also be appropriate.



Painted Wall Signs: Include any signs that are painted directly onto the surface of the wall. This type of sign was used historically, but is appropriate today in limited cases.



Window Signs: Window signs include all signs that are attached in any way to a window. Painted signs, vinyl signs, and etched signs are the most typical types of window signs.

Awning And Canopy Signs: Awnings and canopies can include lettering and graphics on the lower flap, or valance. Letters and ornamental elements can be painted, screened, or sewn on the fabric.

Flush Mounted Wall Signs: Flush mounted wall signs include all signs that are more or less flat and attached parallel to, and directly against, the face of the building.



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Sandwich Boards: Sandwich boards are two-sided, movable signs that are triangular in form. They may advertise information that changes regularly (such as menu items), but the temporary nature of the information does not mean that this type of sign should be considered makeshift. These signs should be designed as carefully as all other business signs.

Guidelines for Attaching a Sign to a Building

The method of attaching signs to buildings must be carefully considered to minimize damage to historic materials.

- Choose methods that allow holes to be appropriately patched if the sign is removed. When possible, mount signs in mortar joints, not in masonry, so holes can be patched if the sign is removed.
- If holes or hardware remain in the building from previous signs, attempt to place the new sign in the same location.
- Place signs so that significant architectural details and features, including transom glass, remain visible.



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Material

Historically, signs were most often made of wood and were hung from wrought iron brackets. Brass plaques were also made and attached directly to the building. In the late nineteenth century tin, cast iron, and steel became available for signs. After 1920, steel, aluminum, and plastic became popular. Leaded glass signs also became popular at this time. Business names and other designs were incorporated into leaded and stained glass transoms that were installed above doors and display windows. Tile signs gained popularity in the 1930s. Names and designs were created in tile at the floor of an entrance to a commercial building or under the display windows.

Today, signs can be made from all of these materials.

Wood can be used, but redwood, which is the preferred species, is limited and therefore expensive. Wood look-alikes include urethane board and MDO board. Urethane board is compressed and hardened foam that can be finished by any real-wood method, including painting, carving, and routing. MDO board is similar to plywood and is made specifically for signs. It is composed of six layers, with the grain running in opposite directions in consecutive layers, which guards against warping. (Regular plywood is prone to warping.) MDO board has an approximate life span of 7 years. Like urethane board, it can be painted, carved, and routed, but it is heavier and thinner.

Vinyl is used for signs to produce letters and graphics that are applied to windows, boards, or other surfaces. Vinyl lasts longer than paint and is easier to change. A special frosted vinyl is available; on glass, it gives the appearance of etching. Vinyl, with the appearance of gold leaf, is also available.

Plastic signs are widely used for commercial advertisement, but they are generally not appropriate for historic areas. Corrugated plastic and Plexiglas are also not appropriate.

Aluminum with a baked enamel finish can also be used for signs. White is the most common color, but others are available. Vinyl or painted graphics are typically added to the surface.

Brass or other metal is sometimes used for small identification signs, markers, and plaques.

Cast iron is typically used for brackets and other hardware required to hang signs. Standard scroll brackets are available, but custom designs can be created. Steel is also sometimes used for hanging hardware. When it is used, it should be finished with a dark color to resemble cast iron.

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Gold leaf is a historically appropriate finish for signs. It gives letters and graphics a sophisticated, polished appearance. An Acid ink is available to create the texture and appearance of etching on glass. *Sandblasting*, which is generally inappropriate for historic buildings, can be used on new signs to create special textures.

Illumination

If a sign requires illumination, the lighting should be indirect, hidden from view, and small in scale. Lights may be placed in the ground, pointing up at a sign, or for hanging signs; they may be attached to the bracket, pointing down. Internally lit signs are not appropriate for historic areas. Neon signs, which were made of slender glass tubes illuminated by electrified gas beginning in the 1920s, may be appropriate for a limited number of buildings. Existing neon signs can still be repaired and refurbished today.



* Drawings used with permission from Borough of Gettysburg.