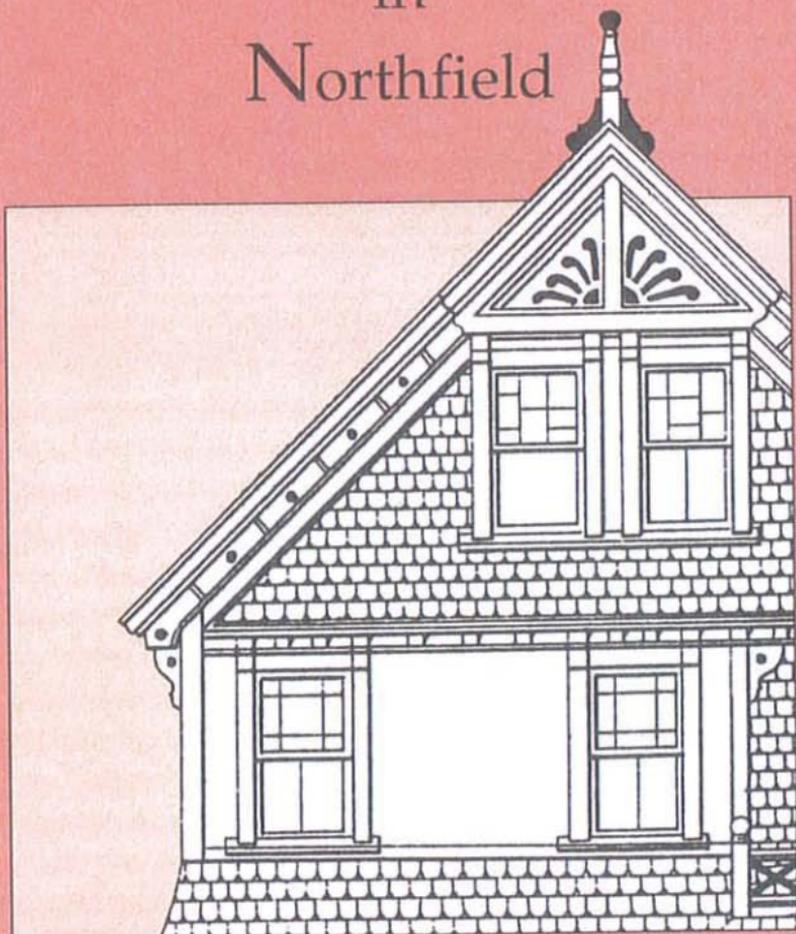


Guidelines for Exterior Rehabilitation

At
Home
in
Northfield





Distinctive wooden trim and siding are among the distinctive features of the dormer on this Classical Revival style house.

NORTHFIELD'S HISTORIC HOUSES

Northfield's downtown is known across Minnesota for its handsome collection of historic commercial buildings of red brick and terra cotta and buff-colored limestone. Surrounding this architectural centerpiece are neighborhoods filled with a variety of houses representative of the city's growth over nearly 150 years. These houses tell the story of an early wheat-milling center on the banks of the Cannon River which grew to be a successful trade and education center.

A walk around Northfield's older neighborhoods reveals excellent examples of Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne and Arts and Crafts architectural styles, as well as a great variety of simple vernacular houses, all remarkably well preserved. Ornate wooden trim at windows, porches, and eaves is intact. Wood siding has been cared for with paint and stain by several generations of owners, and colorful paint schemes can be seen everywhere. Unfortunately, some houses have been stripped of their historic character because of insensitive alterations. In many cases, owners probably did not know what other rehabilitation options were available to them.

Northfield's fine collection of older houses are irreplaceable historic resources. Homeowners are the key to their conservation. If you would like to learn more about the history of your house, or are planning a rehabilitation project, contact the HPC at 645-8833.

Prepared by Carole Zellie/Landscape Research, St. Paul, MN for the Northfield Heritage Preservation Commission. 1992.



Avoid exterior alterations which can transform the building at left into that at right.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES

If you are planning exterior maintenance or rehabilitation on your older Northfield house, please consider these recommendations from the Northfield HPC.

First, plan carefully. Seek advice from a variety of sources, not just those selling a particular building product. Learn about the building. When was it built? What types of materials were originally used on the exterior and what is their current condition? What are the important features that give the house its character?

If you work with a contractor, choose someone who understands the materials and appearance of older buildings. Try to conserve as many original architectural features as possible. Additions and new construction, as well as all other exterior alterations should be compatible with the building as well as its historic neighborhood setting.

Here are four general principles to keep in mind:

1. It is better to *maintain* than to repair.
2. Damaged elements should be *repaired* rather than replaced.
3. If replacements are necessary, they should *match* the originals as closely as possible.
4. Consider the *reversibility* of any changes.



The chimney is a distinctive feature of many historic houses. Repairs to mortar and brick should match the original as closely as possible.

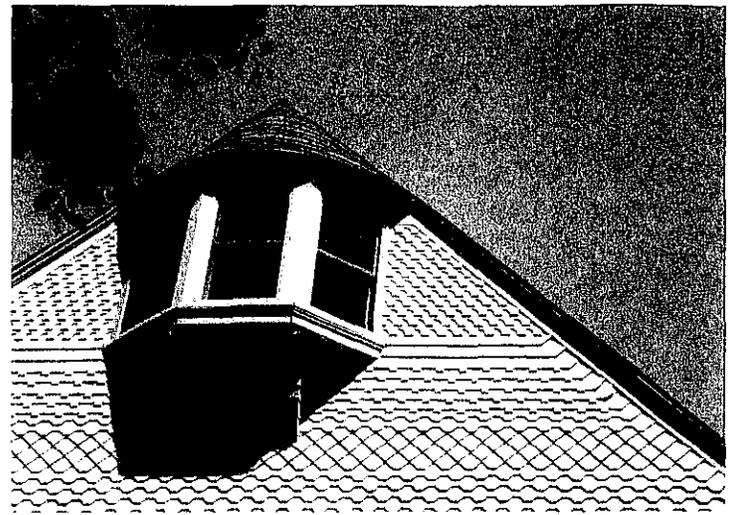
MASONRY

Most of Northfield's older houses are covered with wood siding or shingles. Masonry houses include those of red or yellow brick, dating from the late nineteenth century, and those of dark red brick, usually built from 1910 to 1930. There are also several concrete block houses, made to look much like stone, and even one bungalow covered with pebblestones. Stucco was also popular in residential construction after about 1915, and stone and brick facing was a feature of many houses after this date.

Many of the city's houses have buff-colored limestone foundations; concrete block became popular after about 1910. Many chimney styles are evident, including a few early examples in buff-colored brick. Chimneys with decorated panels or elaborate brick work should be conserved.

Brick, stone, and concrete may sometimes require attention to joints and mortar. The mortar holding masonry in place keeps water from entering the wall. Major masonry work should be executed by a skilled mason. A bad repointing job, using the wrong mortar or poorly done joints, can damage the bricks and eventually the walls. New mortar should match the strength, color, and texture of the original.

Masonry cleaning should be accomplished by the gentlest means possible, usually with low water pressure and soft brushes. Sandblasting or abrasive cleaning should not be used under any circumstances.



Decorative wooden shingles enrich the exterior surfaces of many Northfield houses, particularly in the gable ends.

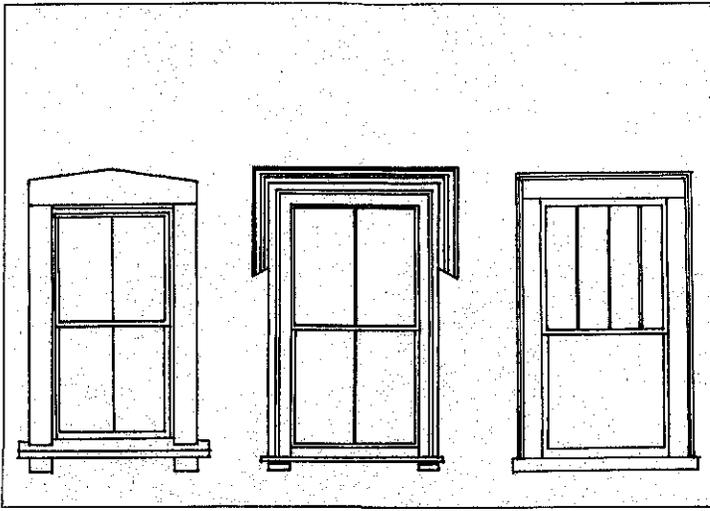
EXTERIOR SIDING

Narrow wooden siding (or clapboards) and shingles give Northfield's historic neighborhoods much of their visual distinctiveness. If properly maintained, wood building products are long lasting and durable. No manufactured product—including vinyl siding—has been able to substantially improve on the long-term performance or appearance of wood.

Vinyl (and aluminum) siding are heavily advertised to the owners of older houses. However, potential buyers should consider a number of issues related to long-term maintenance, value, and aesthetics before making the decision to cover over existing siding.

Because it sometimes removes or covers over trim and decorative details, vinyl siding can destroy the visual character of older houses. It also alters the qualities of shadow and texture provided by wood siding and trim. Once installed, the color of vinyl siding cannot be changed.

When siding alters the historic appearance of a house, it can actually lower resale value. Many buyers prefer wood-sided buildings with intact trim and siding, and less potential for hidden moisture damage. Given the high cost of the initial installation of vinyl siding, homeowners should compare it to the cost of several paint jobs which will maintain the character of the house.



The single or double-hung window is the most common on Northfield's older houses; proper replacements should be chosen with care.



This porch has had many repairs over the years, but its historic character remains intact.

WINDOWS

Windows are important design elements. They establish the visual rhythm, balance and general character of the house, particularly at the front. Any alteration to windows—including removal of trim and changes in size or type—can have a major impact on appearance.

Size, type, and location of windows, particularly on the front of the building, should not be altered. If complete window replacement is necessary, energy-efficient, historically-compatible units are available.

Square and rectangular windows with single or double-hung sash are traditional throughout Northfield. Replace double-hung sash with similar units; most crank-out or sliding sash units are inappropriate for historic houses.

PORCHES

Nearly all of Northfield's late nineteenth and early twentieth-century houses had a front porch. Some only sheltered the top step, while others ran the full front of the house and wrapped around the corner. Builders paid a lot of attention to the porch, and concentrated a variety of decorative details there, including brackets, turned posts, and balusters. Porches, therefore, contribute greatly to the character of the house, the appearance of the street, and the hospitality of the neighborhood.

Porches are very exposed to the elements and require periodic maintenance. Original details such as brackets and turned posts should be conserved where possible, or replicated if replacement is necessary. Avoid replacement of wooden posts with metal columns. It is preferable not to enclose open porches, since this usually has an adverse effect on the appearance of the house.

19th Century Vernacular



Italianate Style



Gothic Revival Style



Queen Anne Style





Additions can be designed to enhance, rather than destroy, the architectural character of the house.

NEW ADDITIONS & PAINTING

The addition of dormers, rooms, and garages to older houses can have a great impact on the exterior appearance of the house. New additions should be carefully designed to conform to the massing, volume, height, facade proportions and scale of the building. Materials and details should be identical to or compatible with those of the building.

A growing number of Northfield homeowners have found that repainting with traditional colors gives a dramatic new look to their houses. Many late nineteenth-century houses were originally painted with two or even three colors. Ask your local paint dealer for samples of historically appropriate exterior paint colors.

Questions? Contact the Northfield Heritage Preservation Commission at 645-8833.

Classical Revival Style



Arts and Crafts/Bungalow

