

## Archive

### Historic Preservation in New Castle

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October 22, 2008

Well It's been quite a while since the last update to the preservation blog. It was a quiet summer with no major construction activity at the houses. However, that doesn't mean we weren't working on the projects. We were finishing up condition reports on the Amstel and Dutch Houses before developing specs for the projects. We also spoke with several different roofers about the projects.

Our architect, John Bowie, developed comprehensive specs and drawings for the roof and masonry work at both the Amstel and Dutch Houses. The kitchen wing of the Amstel House will be re-roofed with cedar shingles, as will the Dutch House - but the Dutch House shingles will be taper-cut on the butt end. This will match the shingles that are currently on the Dutch House. Since we're working on the roofs, we will insulate the attics and also correct some gutter problems caused by poorly pitched and sized gutters and downspouts. Garden houses at both properties will also be re-roofed in kind.

The Amstel House will also have extensive chimney work done - primarily on the kitchen chimney which, from the roof line up, will be reconstructed since it is unsound. The entire chimney will be restored to a safe, functional condition. However, for the foreseeable future, no open fires will be permitted in the Amstel House due to the sensitive collections maintained there. The other chimney's will be re-pointed along with various spots around the foundation. Finally, the kitchen fireplace will be restored to its original 18th century appearance.

For this exterior work, like everyone that owns property in the historic district, we needed to get approval for our work from the New Castle Historic Area Commission (HAC). Last Thursday we appeared before HAC and received approval for our plans at both houses. We presented well thought-out plans and the approval process went very quickly and smoothly. I think it was very helpful to talk to the HAC well in advance of seeking their approval. They were very helpful in ensuring that we considered all potential impacts that our projects could have on our buildings' character and the New Castle streetscape.

For more information about HAC and the architectural guidelines for the historic area, visit [http://newcastlecity.org/city\\_gov/hist\\_area.html](http://newcastlecity.org/city_gov/hist_area.html).

We'll also be getting started with some structural repairs in both houses - mostly reinforcing weakened beams and a lintel. Before we do that in the Dutch House we need to relocate some electrical boxes. We'll also be instituting a structural monitoring system in the Dutch House to keep an eye on structural movement within the building's timber frame system. Since this work is inside the house, the HAC does not need to approve the work. Nonetheless, since both houses are very significant historic properties we are proceeding very thoughtfully, and will document the entire process so our decisions may be understood in the future.

All this work should be underway shortly after Thanksgiving. In the meantime, we are examining ways to make our historic buildings more accessible. Improving accessibility will entail more exterior changes, and so we will attempt to get on the HAC agenda again in November.

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June 11, 2008

So tomorrow night is the famous NCHS Garden Party at the Dutch House...there's still time to buy tickets...call or buy them at the door. We are expecting about 135 people so far...

Tomorrow night's party, of course, is also the venue for announcing the Society's annual award for excellence in historic preservation. This year we renamed the award the "Bamberger Historic Preservation Award" after Reinhardt and Elizabeth Bamberger - previous stewards of the Rosemont House at 110 Delaware Street. Mr. Bamberger was a previous recipient of the Society's preservation award for his diligent conservation of his home's original historic fabric. He was also a major benefactor of the New Castle Historical Society.

We will be announcing two awards this year - one public and one private project...be sure to attend to find out who this year's recipients are!

In other preservation news...

Did you know that there are federal tax incentives available for the preservation of income producing properties like retail space, rental properties, and office space? Specifically, the following tax credits are available:

- 20% tax credit for the *certified rehabilitation* of *certified historic structures*.
- a 10% tax credit for the rehabilitation of *non-historic, non-residential* buildings built before 1936.

For more information about the Federal tax credit program for commercial structures, visit <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/brochure1.htm>.

More:

The National Trust For Historic Preservation recently established a website devoted to the relationship between historic preservation and sustainability. Visit the new website at <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/>.

New Castle Specific:

Many New Castle property owners need guidance when planning exterior changes to buildings in the historic district. Many questions can be answered by reviewing the [\*New Castle Historic Area Guidelines and Standards Handbook\*](#).

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## June 1, 2008

I met with our architect and representatives from a local roofing contractor last week to discuss the upcoming roof projects and get an estimate for the jobs. We will be re-roofing the Dutch House (and its garden shed), and the Amstel House kitchen wing, the pent roof on the 4th Street facade and the garden shed. Our meeting led to an interesting philosophical discussion involving an approach to preservation that I'd like to recount for you.

We are interested in obtaining a class A fire rating using a genuine wood roof so wanted to hear from the roofer and shingle manufacturer about how we can accomplish that while maintaining the historic character and minimizing removal of historic fabric from the houses. We also would like to improve the energy performance of the historic buildings by insulating the roofs while insuring that our new wood roof would receive adequate ventilation to prevent premature decay of the shingles.

We think that the current roofs at both houses are currently applied to shingles both with no plywood or other

sheathing. This is how wood roofs have been built for centuries and is certainly appropriate for our two buildings. They currently get good ventilation beneath the shingles. To improve fire retardancy to the highest level (Class A), a new roof of Class B shingles (which are treated with a factory applied chemical retardant) would need to be applied over sheathing of fire retardant plywood. If the shingles are nailed directly to the plywood, they will rot prematurely because air flow beneath the shingles will be inadequate to dry them out. So, somehow we need to insure adequate ventilation between shingles and sheathing. One option is to use an open mesh product that gets sandwiched between the shingle and the plywood, leaving about 3/8" of space. We will also need to insure ventilation at the eave and ridge of the roof.

To minimize the removal of historic fabric we would likely install the plywood over top of the existing (presumably historic) shingle lath. This will raise the roof level above its current height creating a gap at the rake board. Typically, on modern houses, this is solved by the addition of a piece of trim to hide the gap. But this solution created a different profile on the rake board, and changes the shadow lines visible from the street. Since the roof lines of a house contribute greatly to the building's unique character, these are things we would ideally like to avoid. On the plus side, adding a trim piece is reversible in the future and does not permanently compromise the building's fabric. This challenge would go away if we remove the shingle lath, but since it is likely historic lath, it is a record of the building's history that we want to maintain. Lath will include nailing patterns, and possibly ghost lines, nails, and other material that give clues to the architectural history of the buildings.

Finally, we would like to add insulation to the roof (not the attic floors in these cases) to improve energy efficiency. The buildings do not have full-size traditional attics. The uppermost floors are used for storage, and the ceiling is plastered directly to the underside of the roof rafters. To improve efficiency while keeping these upper spaces conditioned for use, we'd like to insulate between the plaster and the roof. Again, we need to insure that there is adequate ventilation between the insulation and the sheathing or else we risk rot.

So here are some questions we're wrestling with at the Society:

- 1) Is increased fire protection for the houses and their contents an acceptable trade-off for changing the architectural detail of the exterior by adding reversible trim to the rake boards? And, of course, will the Historic Area Commission, who needs to approve all permanent exterior changes to buildings in the historic district, approve the addition of trim?
- 2) If we apply shingles over sheathing, with a mesh breather in between, will that application allow enough ventilation to prevent premature decay of the shingles? For a discussion of a preservation project that used this mesh product visit <http://www.rooftopsystemsengrs.com/interface01.htm>.
- 3) If we insulate the roof, will we be able to provide enough ventilation between the insulation and sheathing to prevent decay of the sheathing?

One additional concern about adding sheathing to a historic roofing system...will it be too heavy for the historic structure? With our proposed plan we will only have one layer of plywood added. Some roofers may specify a layer of gypsum sandwiched between two layers of plywood...we think that much added weight might be too much for our roof timbers to support. So we think one layer is best for us.

Regardless of our final solutions, while the roofs are off, we will have great opportunity to photograph and document the roofing systems at both houses (as long as we stay out of the roofers' way).

For more information about replacing historic wood roofs, visit <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief19.htm>.

## State Tax Incentives for Historic Preservation

Historic property owners will want to know about an upcoming presentation about the State's tax credit program for improvements to historic properties (both residential and commercial)...

Middletown Main Street will host a workshop about Delaware's Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program on Tuesday, June 10, 2008 from 7 – 8 p.m. The *free* information session will be presented by Joan Larrivee of the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs in the Town of Middletown council chambers at Middletown Town Hall, located at 19 W. Green Street.

Enacted in 2001, Delaware's Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program assists in preserving and rehabilitating historic buildings throughout the State by providing tax credit which is equal to a percentage of the cost of the rehabilitation, subject to other requirements of the program. Both income-producing and owner-occupied residential buildings may apply for these tax credits.

Jointly administered by the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office and the Delaware Division of Revenue, the Delaware's program is unique in that it allows for Credit Awards to be transferred or assigned to anyone with Delaware income or franchise tax liability.

Ms. Larrivee will discuss the criteria a building must meet in order to be eligible for the historic preservation tax credit program, what criteria the rehabilitation work must meet to qualify for the credit as well as the application process for Delaware's Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program.

The public is invited to attend the free, one hour information session. For more information, please contact the Middletown Main Street office at 302-378-2977.

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## May 11, 2008

Time for a project update...We met with our architect and general contractor in April to discuss planning our upcoming projects. They are currently working on getting contracts and estimates together to move forward. It looks like the bulk of the work will happen mid-summer.

In the meantime, here are a few opportunities for increasing your knowledge about historic preservation issues:

### Webinars on Historic Windows

Over the next few months there are three FREE webinars planned on the topic of historic wooden windows. To register for these webinars, [click here](#). In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that these webinars are underwritten by Marvin Windows:

#### **Windows and Historic Preservation Projects - May 22 at 2:00 p.m. ET**

Find out about the advantages and disadvantages of using wood and clad windows on your historic restoration and rehabilitation projects. Two experts discuss the details.

**John Sandor**, Architectural Historian, U.S. National Park Service

**Steve Lien**, Commercial Architectural Representative, Marvin Windows and Doors

**The Do and Don'ts of Traditional Windows - July 22 at 2:00 p.m. ET**

When you're specifying windows for historic projects or traditionally inspired new construction, success lies in getting the architectural details right. Learn how to make traditional window design work for you from one of the field's leading architects and a Marvin architectural design expert.

**Stephen Mouzon**, AIA, LEED AP, CNU, New Urban Guild

**Jeff Hoffman**, Architectural Representative, Marvin Windows and Doors

### **The Science of Wooden Windows - October 9 at 2:00 p.m. ET**

Why is wood still the number-one spec for in-kind window replacement on historic projects and a top choice in the market for new construction, as well? The answer is more scientific than you might think. Learn the basics of wood science as they apply to installation and performance from two prominent experts in the field.

**Sandra R.F. Vitzthum**, AIA, Sandra Vitzthum, Architect, LLC

**Ben Wallace**, Wood Scientist, Marvin Windows and Doors

### **Archaeology Month**

May is "Archaeology Month" in Delaware! There are several events planned around the State this month to help increase awareness about archaeology. There will also be some archaeology related activities scheduled during *A Day In Old New Castle* on May 17. For more information about Archaeology Month [click here](#).

### **State of Delaware Preservation Plan, 2008-2012**

The State of Delaware just completed its update of its plan for historic preservation. You can read the plan online by clicking [here](#) (Adobe Acrobat Reader is required to view the plan).

### **Preservation & Sustainability**

National Trust for Historic Preservation president, Richard Moe, recently delivered a speech in Berkeley, CA about the role that historic preservation can play in combating climate change. For his views on why historic preservation is the "ultimate form of recycling" [click here](#).

### **This Place Matters!**

Late last year, the New Castle Community History and Archaeology Program rolled out the idea of creating an exhibit focusing on places in New Castle that were important to residents of the community. While the exhibit has not yet come to fruition, there is an alternative opportunity to spread the word about why New Castle is important. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has launched an online campaign to celebrate special places around the country. Visit [This Place Matters!](#) on the Trust's website for a virtual tour of historic place in the U.S. or to submit your own special place!

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### **March 31, 2008**

I attended some free public workshops at the National Main Street Conference in Philadelphia on Sunday. The workshops provided an introduction to the four-part Main Street approach to economic development using historic preservation as a tool. The conference is sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and continues until Wednesday (Registration and fees are required for the rest of the conference).

Several nearby communities in Delaware are designated Main Street communities including Newark, Delaware

City, Middletown, Brandywine Village and Wilmington.

For more information about the National Trust's Main Street program visit [www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org).

For information about the Delaware Main Street program, visit the newly updated website at <http://mainstreet.visitdelaware.com/>.

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### **March 28, 2008**

I've been remiss in not keeping up with the preservation blog, so it's time for an update...

First, a couple of smaller projects...Dave Harrington repaired the two garden gates at the Amstel House that had been hanging crooked due to their own weight and wouldn't close. Thanks to Dave the gates work and latch smoothly now!

R.J. Peoples Painting donated the labor and paint necessary to repaint the interior of the beehive cabinets in the Amstel House to their original, first-finish appearance. Based on a paint analysis completed by [Catherine Adams-Masek](#) several years ago, we know that the earliest color inside these cabinets was a vibrant Chinese Red - a far cry from their recent Colonial Revival gray/white! In addition, the Chinese Red had a VERY high gloss finish to help reflect candlelight. We used a semi-gloss paint with a high-gloss polyurethane to achieve the right effect. Stop by for a glimpse into the house's colorful past (Remember NCHS members get in free!). Thanks to Steve Pedrick, and his painters Mike and Gene, of R.J. Peoples for their generosity in completing this project for us!

The [Arasapha Garden Club](#) is hard at work in the Amstel Garden getting ready for spring. We've taken down the leyland cypress along the north wall of the garden are in the process of replacing them under the design guidance of landscaper Ann Berry. Also, this is the first spring since the Garden Club's bulb planting campaign last year - stop by to see what "springs up!"

We're working on getting projects scheduled at the houses at the moment. Since the asbestos abatement project in February, I have met the fire and security professionals at Radar Security to discuss upgrades to the systems at both the Amstel and Dutch Houses. At their request, I asked our preservation architect, John Bowie, to provide floor plans for all levels of each house that can be used to plan the upgrades, which includes additional detectors and alarms. I just sent the plans off to Radar.

I also met with Bill Henkowski of Berry Refrigeration to discuss some repairs to the HVAC system at the Amstel House that should help it perform more efficiently. The repairs will include reconnecting ducts, converting a duct to a return, and insulating the exposed ducts in the basement which we'll do ourselves since it's a good homeowner project! We're just waiting on an estimate, then we'll get started.

Like the asbestos project, these projects are being overseen by me rather than the general contractor that will be managing some of the other upcoming projects.

We'll be meeting with our architect and general contractor on April 8 to discuss major project schedules and other logistics. And we hope to get the ball rolling soon!

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## March 27, 2008

On Tuesday, I attended the Livable Delaware conference at the University of Delaware. Governor Minner proposed a "Livable Delaware" agenda a few years ago to help curtail sprawl and direct growth to areas that make the most sense. The conference brought together leaders from the government, private, academic, and non-profit sectors to discuss current issues and create partnerships. Historic preservation touches on almost everything that was discussed at the conference, but I was particularly interested in the sessions that focused on preserving Delaware's heritage. All in all a good conference, that generated ideas, both for me and others. For more information about Livable Delaware visit the State of Delaware's website [here](#).

On Wednesday, the Friends of Newark sponsored a lecture by a well-known preservation consultant, Donovan Rypkema, from Washington, D.C. Donovan works primarily with the economics of preservation and was discussing how towns can create partnerships between themselves and local colleges to improve their economic vitality. I learned a new term, "Generica," for those parts of America that look like they could be anywhere. They have no characteristics that ties them to a specific locale. They are areas that are covered in asphalt, fast food joints, and strip malls. You know you are in "Generica" when you are driving down a road you've been on many times before, and suddenly you realize that you're not sure where you are exactly. You can read some of Donovan's previous presentations about "PlaceEconomics" [here](#).

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## February 8, 2008

### Asbestos Abatement

Before we can get started on any projects that will require workers to be in the basement of the Amstel House, we need to remove a small amount of duct insulation that is suspected of containing asbestos. While asbestos is not dangerous if left undisturbed, particles can become airborne during construction projects if the material is damaged. This poses a threat to the workers as well as others in the building. So how did we proceed?

First, we contacted a local company that has the ability to take small samples of the duct insulation and test it to be sure it contains asbestos. After all there's no point in removing the material if it's not hazardous! So, on January 11, Harvard Environmental of Bear took some samples and examined them using "Polarized Light Microscopy" to identify any asbestos fibers based on their structure. As suspected, the results showed that our duct material was 55% Chrysotile Asbestos, and that means it had to go!

Our next step was to call County Environmental of New Castle to remove the asbestos – a process called "abatement." After reviewing their proposal, we contracted with them to perform the work, and scheduled it for today, February 8. Additionally, we also contracted with Harvard Environmental again to conduct an air quality test after County completed their abatement to insure that the air quality was safe.

The pros from County Environmental arrived about 7:30 this morning ( a half hour early) and started immediately. The basement was sealed off using heavy plastic sheeting. We also turned off the HVAC system to prevent air distribution through the building. The process did not take long at all – they were done before 11:00 a.m. I can't describe it because I was not allowed in the basement to watch! Once they finished up, Harvard arrived (also earlier than scheduled I might add!) to set up an air monitor. It ran for over an hour, and the final results showed that the air quality was excellent. A job well done by both County and Harvard! Thanks to both companies for their assistance!

So, now our basement is ready for the next steps of correcting some HVAC duct issues and providing some

structural reinforcement of floor joists...Stay tuned!

For more information about asbestos containing materials, visit the EPA at <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/pubs/ashome.html> or the Delaware Division of Air & Waste Management at <http://www.awm.delaware.gov/AQM/Asbestos/>.

### **January 25, 2008**

We'll be getting underway soon with some major preservation projects at the Amstel and Dutch Houses.

Projects planned for this year include: Removal of some asbestos containing duct insulation from the basement of the Amstel House; providing some structural support to both the Amstel and Dutch Houses; making some repairs to the HVAC system in the Amstel House; repointing several exterior areas of the Amstel House where mortar is deteriorating; rebuilding the Amstel House kitchen chimney; restoring the Amstel House kitchen hearth and flue; installing new roofs on both the Dutch House and the kitchen wing of the Amstel House; installing lightning protection at the Amstel House; re-roofing the garden sheds at both properties; improving the function of the gutters and downspouts at the Amstel House; improving ground level drainage there; installing ultraviolet filtering panels on the windows of the Amstel House; upgrading our fire and security systems at both houses and improving accessibility to the Amstel House.

Whew! I'm tired just writing about it! More details to come as we get underway...

### **January 4, 2008**

Welcome to the New Castle Historical Society Director's Preservation Blog! Check this page often to see what's happening with the preservation and restoration projects at the Society's two historic properties - The Amstel House and The Dutch House. I plan to use this forum to keep our members, donors and other preservationists up-to-date with our projects - including details on historic building conditions, challenges, treatment options, and solutions.

I hope that this will serve as a resource for the stewards of other historic properties, especially those undertaking the same types of projects we are facing today. I'll include links to online resources that will help explain our decision-making process and treatment options that we select for our historic properties in the hopes that these resources will also be useful for you.

I'll also keep you posted about regional events related to historic preservation, and both regional and national preservation issues as they arise. With that in mind, be sure to save the evening of Thursday, January 31 to attend Bernie Herman's 7 pm lecture on *Delaware's Exceptional Early Buildings*, at the NC Presbyterian Church.

Check in next week for some details about current conditions of our properties and our upcoming project schedule.