

Guidelines

ENTRANCE— WHEN A DOOR IS MORE THAN A DOOR

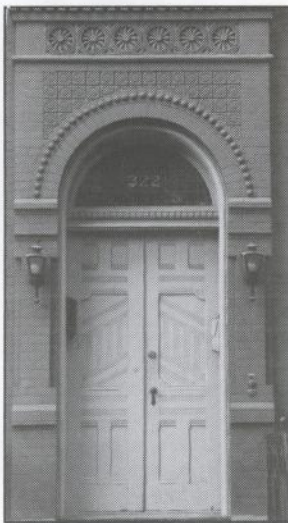
E ntrance transcends “door.” Arriving at a building and knowing you have arrived, when arrival is an event: that is what “entrance” is about. The right door, mail slot, and door bell for a building are important to the experience of arriving, just as the right shoes are essential to an outfit. A Colonial-era “cross-and-bible” door is a note of discord on one of our dignified Victorian ladies just as jogging shoes clash with a three piece suit.

A little extra trim at the door celebrates arrival on even the most modest building. On grand buildings, the entrance may be the major architectural statement. On Capitol Hill, arrival at a house’s front door is the final part of a carefully orchestrated sequence beginning at the sidewalk. Moving from the sidewalk through the front gate is moving from public space to the beginning of “turf.” Private possession is reinforced when one climbs a few steps onto the stoop where the standard three-foot by seven-foot door is exalted by relief, a transom with gold leaf house numbers, and a door hood.

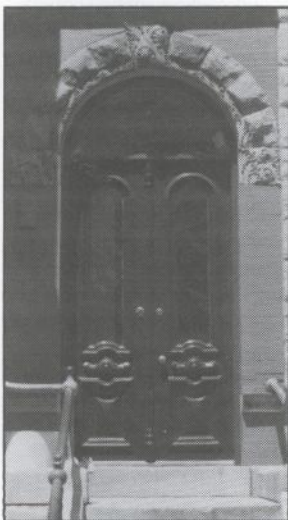
Our front entrances have been much modified over time: in some cases, such as lighting and electric door bells, because of changing technology. Other “improvements,” like adding brick to iron stairs or inappropriate doors, are harder to understand. Because so few of our front entrances are intact, they represent discrete preservation/restoration projects. Careful maintenance of iron stairs, installation of appropriate mail slots or boxes, restoration of gold house numbers, or replacement of inappropriate doors are all relatively inexpensive projects that present a new face to the neighborhood—providing us, the current users and homeowners, with pleasure as we come and go.

Because of the number of separate components involved in entrance, this guideline is divided into three parts: relationship to grade, stoops and porches, and the front door with its associated parts.

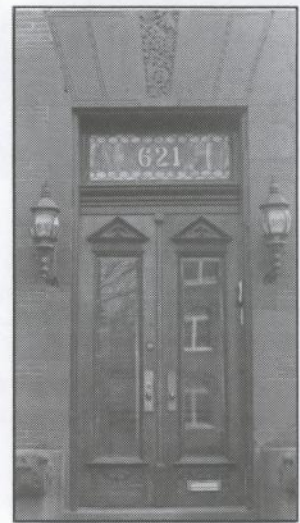
Left & right: Examples of some typical Capitol Hill doors (and entrances), including glass and solid doors, single and paired doors. Note also how house numbers are handled and universal presence of transoms over the doors. Note the bolection moldings on the doors at 621 East Capitol and A Street, S.E.; 904 East Capitol; and the arched panel door at 802 A Street, S.E.



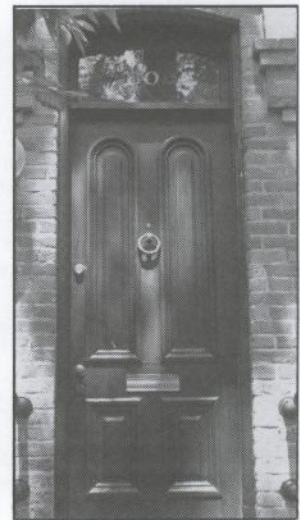
322 EAST CAPITOL STREET



904 EAST CAPITOL STREET



621 EAST CAPITOL STREET

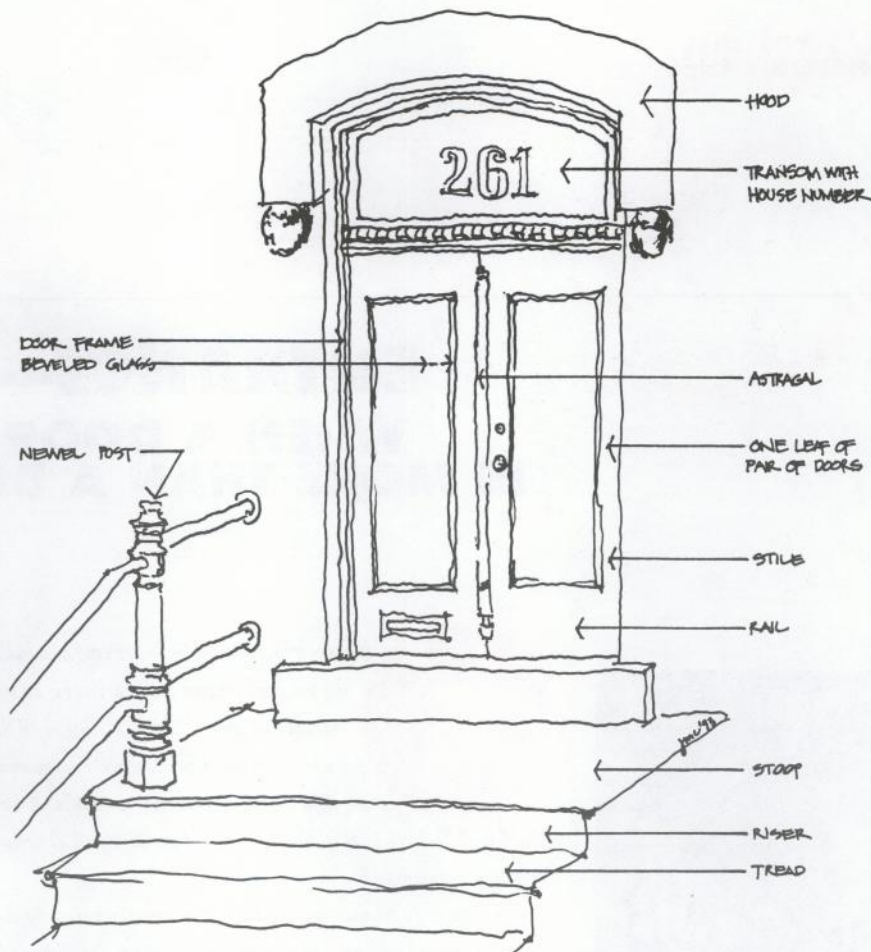


802 A STREET, S.E.

JUDITH M. CAPEN AIA



A fine Italian-style entrance at 304 East Capitol Street, including collection molding at the door.



ENTRANCE: THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE HOUSE TO GRADE

Patterns. The typical Capitol Hill row house first floor is elevated above the ground, sometimes half a level or more, but at least a step or two, even when the house is very modest and has no basement or cellar. Capitol Hill's oldest Federal-era wood houses fit this pattern, as do some small Victorian-era houses. Even little houses with virtually no front yards on narrow streets have entrances raised at least a step and often two or three. Sometimes, local grade conditions create sloping front yards raising the first floor of a house above sidewalk level in addition to the steps. The exception proving the rule, are four buildings on Second Street, N.E. between E and F where the first floor of the buildings is slightly below grade.

In one of the common late 19th-century row house floor plans, the dining room and the kitchen are in the basement, with full height ceilings of eight feet or more. This ceiling height forced the first floor substantially out of grade. In contrast, the basement of the dogleg type plan with the kitchen in the first-floor dogleg shrank to a utilitarian cellar for heating equipment and the first floor dropped down closer to grade.

Exceptions. The major exception to the pattern of elevated first floors is at commercial uses, often at

corners. These buildings typically have first floors flush with the sidewalk, sometimes with no basement at all. Buildings built within the last twenty and thirty years, often with garages flush with the sidewalk level are the other instance of buildings without elevated first floors. Some building styles, such as Romanesque buildings tend to be closer to grade. The early 20th-century Beaux Arts-style and Chateausque houses are usually only three or so steps above grade.

Alleys. Capitol Hill's alley buildings are either carriage houses or very modest dwellings. The carriage houses, naturally, are at grade to allow wheeled vehicles access. Even though surviving alley dwellings usually do not have cellars and have little room for stoops and stairs since they are located right on the alley, they are nearly always raised two steps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preserving Existing Relationships to Grade: First, the entrance at the elevated first floor should not be removed. This leaves the original entrance to the building high and dry, and brings you into the basement, probably without upstairs amenities like a vestibule air lock. There are other practical disadvantages, too, such as the climb all the way from the basement to the top of the house. The stairs to the basement in most Capitol Hill row houses are narrower than the main stair, also. Likewise, while the statement of entrance is made at the first floor with

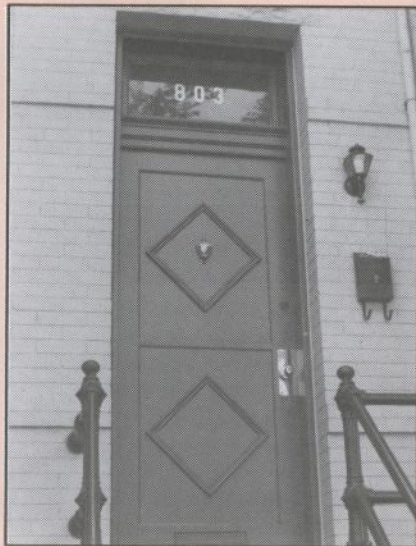
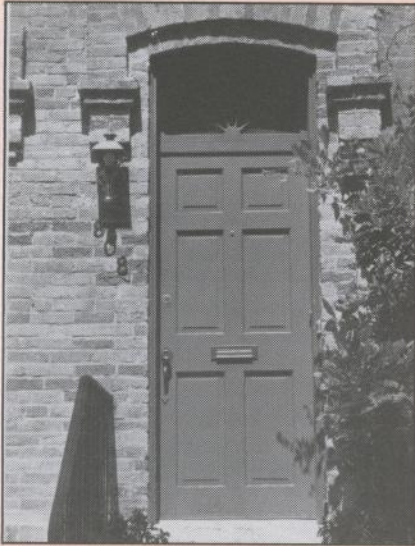
big doors and lots of ornament, the basement doors are narrower, without transoms, ornament, or vestibules. Finally, even if the basement story has full eight foot ceilings, that ceiling height is surely lower than the first floor, again lessening the glory of the entrance experience. Ultimately, flexibility in using a house is increased by having both the basement and first floor entrances.

The second major recommendation is to leave the front yard intact. It is sometimes a temptation, when adding a basement rental unit to a house sitting on a slight rise, people are tempted to cut down the front yard to sidewalk level. Please don't, lest you strand the original front stairs and stoop in the lowered front yard and expose a portion of the house foundation, like a 19th-century lady hoisting up her skirt to cross a puddle.

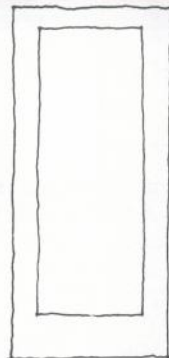
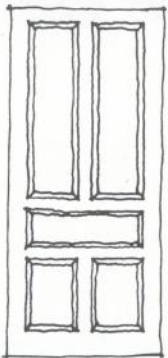
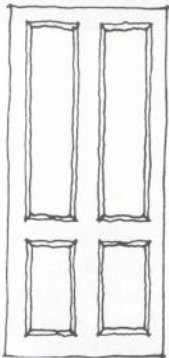
In cases of elevated front yards where basements need exterior access, do not be tempted to cut a trench from the sidewalk to the basement door. The preferred method, leaving the streetscape intact to the greatest extent, is to bring a basement entrance off the walk at the foot of the house stairs. It may seem odd to climb a few steps to the front yard level—then go down a few steps into the basement—but that is the original plan of many of these houses and is least destructive to building fabric. The basement unit also gains privacy.

New Construction should respect the pattern of elevated first floors both for neighborhood consistency and the important privacy afforded.

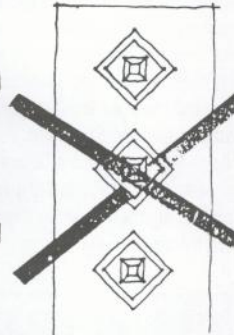
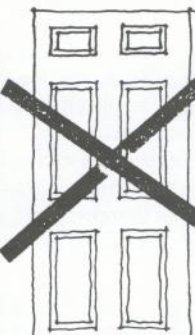
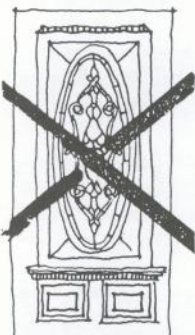
WHAT NOT TO DO



Inappropriate door styles including the ubiquitous "cross-and-bible" and the thankfully less common diamond designs. Note inappropriate door knockers, mail slots, house numbers on the wall, inappropriate type style on numbers in the transom, light fixtures, and a single transom light replaced by a fan light. A kind of overkill can be seen on some Capitol Hill houses, both mail slot and mail box or house numbers painted in a transom and glued to wall beside the door.



The first four doors are perfectly acceptable. The four and five panel doors are ok as they are; and even better with moldings applied to create the look of raised or bolection moldings. The third door, the four panel with the arched tops, is a common original door. This, with the four and five panel doors, is one of the good alternatives available from House of Doors, albeit expensive. The final, simple and economical solution is a glass door.



Four illustrations of inappropriate doors. The first two refugees from the 1950 suburbs need no comment. But, amazingly, doors like these are still being installed on our late Victorian houses. Please don't. The third, ubiquitous six panel or "cross and Bible" door is a common, but inappropriate, replacement door. Consider replacing your six panel door with one of the appropriate designs. The final door illustrated is a "Victorian" design that is, nonetheless, not appropriate for Capitol Hill. We have yet to see a single original door on the Hill like this one. Remember, a cardinal rule for modifications to our buildings is: if there's no precedent for it in the original building stock, don't use it. Without the rectangular insert with the oval glass this door could be acceptable on certain Capitol Hill houses. It is, however, expensive, in the over \$1,000 range.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

Apart from preserving the glory of our entrances for their own sakes, as critical contributors to the architectural character of our houses in the Historic District, their treatment comes under the purview of the Standards for Rehabilitation of the Secretary of the Interior. Standards number 2, 3, 5, and 6 are particularly applicable:

"2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features...that characterize a property shall be avoided."

This Standard is the basis for recommendations to repair and maintain historic building fabric rather than removing or replacing it.

"3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken."

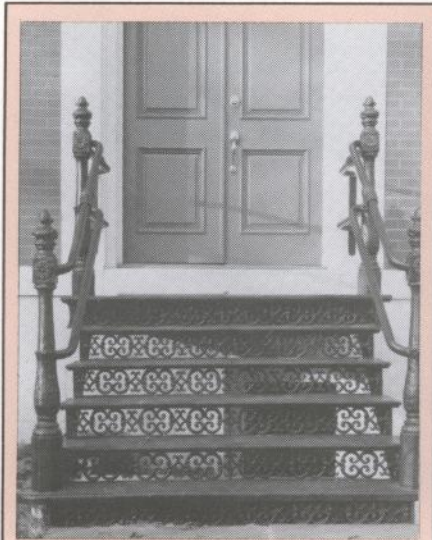
This Standard articulates the philosophy behind recommendations to make all work consistent with a building's period and style.

"5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved."

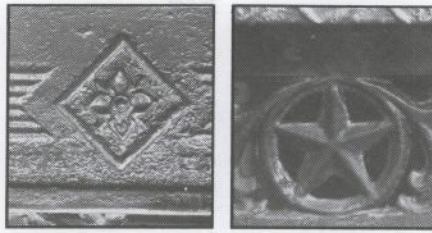
Many of Capitol Hill's entrances, including doors, hoods, stoops, and stairs are examples of distinctive features, construction techniques, and of craftsmanship.

"6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence."

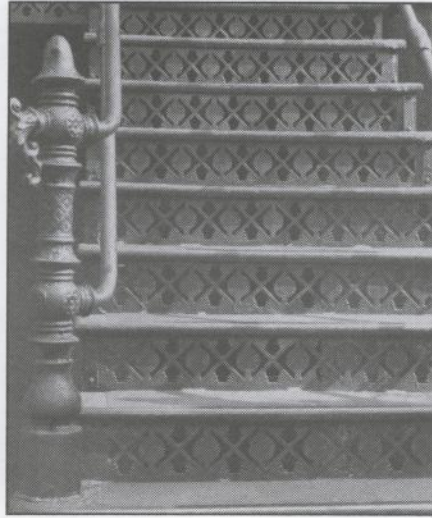
From Standard 6 we can see why the recommendation is always to replace-in-kind and to investigate what missing elements were likely to have been before undertaking to replace them. ☼



Brand new stairs, stoop, and rails at
814-818 East Capitol Street.

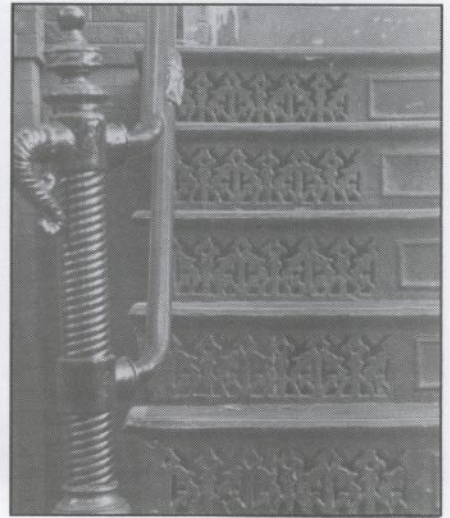


Right Centered five pointed star. This set of steps unfortunately has had steel plate added to the treads.



632 East Capitol Street

Left A gallery of cast iron stair riser patterns found on the Hill. Most of Capitol Hill's stair risers share the same few designs. The "star" and "grape" patterns are also common in other Washington row house neighborhoods. After the star and grape designs, the next most common designs are the "tulip" and "fan" designs. The first riser on many of Capitol Hill's cast iron stairs is the same with this floral diamond motif regardless of the pattern on the rest of the risers.



122 11th Street, SE

ENTRANCE: THE FRONT STAIRS AND STOOP

Capitol Hill's elevated first floors make front stairs and stoops ubiquitous. Stoops and stairs serve the function of a porch for many Capitol Hill houses.

Much of the detail that enlivens the late 19th-century buildings of our Historic District is a product of the increased pace of industrialization in the second half of that century. Elaborate moldings and ornament, previously possible only with expensive hand carved wood or stone, were now available in pressed metal and brick, cast iron and plaster. The richness and diversity of our cast iron stairs, stoops, and handrails illustrates this.

Patterns and Exceptions. The majority of front stairs and stoops on Capitol Hill are cast iron. Masonry front steps and stoop, either stone or stone mixed with brick are less common. These heavy constructions tend to be found on more Romanesque-style buildings. Even less common are stone stairs with iron railings; least common of all, are wood stairs, railings, and stoops.

A distinctive aspect of our iron stairs is their decorative riser patterns. The stair, stoop, and railing patterns are limited to a relatively limited number, as would be expected of a manufactured item selected from catalogs.

Capitol Hill's several different designs of iron handrails are mixed with a variety of newel posts. One sometimes sees different newel posts and/or

railings used on identical houses in a row, presumably to differentiate the houses in the same way builders today vary siding colors on otherwise identical houses. While approximately two-inch diameter iron pipe was the most common railing, worked or wrought iron rails are found, too, in various patterns.

Although less common than iron stairs and stoops, the Hill nonetheless has many masonry front stairs and stoops. Historic risers and treads of this type are always stone, never brick. Brick was not a material used on horizontal surfaces at row houses. While brick was used for streets and public sidewalks, house walks were typically exposed aggregate concrete and front steps were stone or iron. Over the years, many Capitol Hill row houses have acquired brick on front walks, walls, and steps, all without historic precedent. The walls on either side of the stairs, called "check walls," were sometimes brick with stone caps; rock-faced stone with dressed, or smooth, stone caps; or dressed stone with foliate carving.



1206-1212 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE

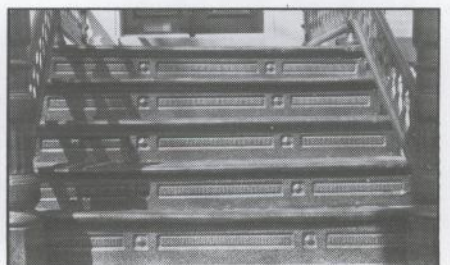
RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintenance. Cast or wrought iron stairs and stoops must be stripped and painted regularly.

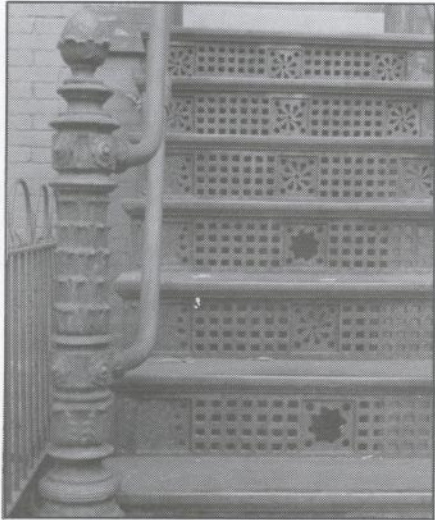
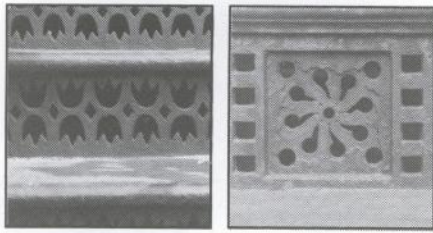
Removing great thicknesses of paint from cast iron stoops and stairs is perhaps the only acceptable application for abrasive cleaning or sandblasting. The technique of sandblasting was developed for cleaning and stripping of iron industrial structures and heavy machinery, including railroad rolling stock and steel bridges.

If you do sandblast cast iron, it is important to protect all adjoining surfaces and materials. The brick or stone the typical cast iron railing attaches to is much softer than the iron itself so sandblasting overspray can deeply pit and damage the masonry if it is not protected.

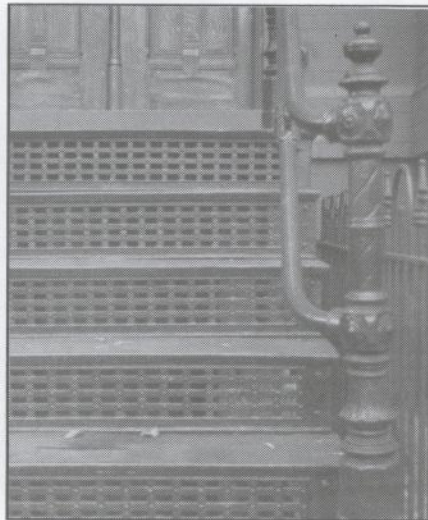
The alternative to sandblasting paint-encrusted iron work is to strip it by hand using a combination of chemical strippers, heat, and wire brushes. Hand stripping is tedious, but has the advantage of allow-



600 East Capitol Street



Some riser designs may only show up on a single Capitol Hill stair. Gridded geometric design with spiral element at 328 11th Street, SE.



Rectangular basket weave at 213 11th Street, SE.

ing the homeowner to proceed at his/her own pace. An alternate stripping system is "Peel-Away" involving wrapping the work being stripped. All chemical stripping systems, however, are messy and odiferous.

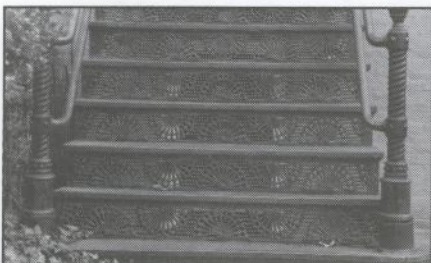
Any stripped cast or wrought iron must be primed immediately to prevent rust, the most obvious threat to ferrous metal. Rust, technically "corrosion," is when the iron or steel oxidizes to form ferric or ferrous oxides, in the presence of moisture and air. Once iron work shows signs of rust, you can use a rust converter to turn the iron oxide (rust) into iron phosphates or complex organo-metallic compounds, which are stable and form a good undercoating for repainting. Rust converters have the great advantage of brushing on and, as liquids, can penetrate into cracks and joints where rust may be. (There are two categories of these rust converters: one is orthophosphoric acid-based and the other is tannic acid-based. Try to avoid the ones that contain resins as those are more expensive, have shorter shelf lives, and don't allow re-coating.)

Inquire at your local hardware or paint store for these products.

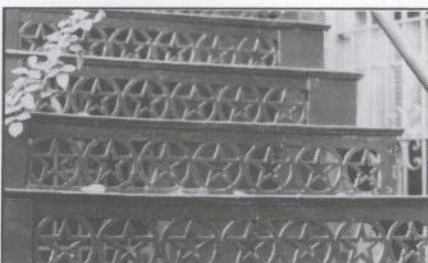
Once the initial stripping and repainting has been done, the horizontal surfaces of the stairs and stoops especially need regular wire brushing and repainting every year or two.

Repair. In spite of regular painting and maintenance, hundred-year-old ferrous metal connections are subject to rust and deterioration.

The connections of newel posts to steps, rails to newels, treads to stringers, and so forth were historically bolted or made with other mechanical connections. An especially vulnerable part of the assembly is the newel post at the bottom step. Newels generally have a threaded rod running down inside them, through the stair tread, bolted from underneath. These threaded rods often rust through, loosening the top of the newel. Frequently the newel itself remains rusted to the bottom step for a while. The threaded rod and nut



707 East Capitol Street



606-614 C Street, NE

TERMINOLOGY



architrave: ornamental moldings around the jambs and lintel of a doorway or other opening

astragal: a member fixed to one of a pair of doors to cover the joint between the meeting stiles and to close the clearance gap; provides a weather seal, minimizes the passage of light and noise.

baluster: one of a number of vertical members used to support a stair handrail

bolection: a molding projecting beyond the surface of the work it decorates, as that covering the joint between a panel and the surrounding stiles and rails.

bracket: an overhanging member projecting from a wall to support a weight like a cornice or hood, acting outside the wall

cheek wall: narrow upright face forming one side of an opening

newel-post: a tall and more or less ornamental post at the head or foot of a stair, supporting the handrail

rail: a horizontal piece in a frame or paneling, could be bottom or top rail of a door

riser: the vertical face of a stair step

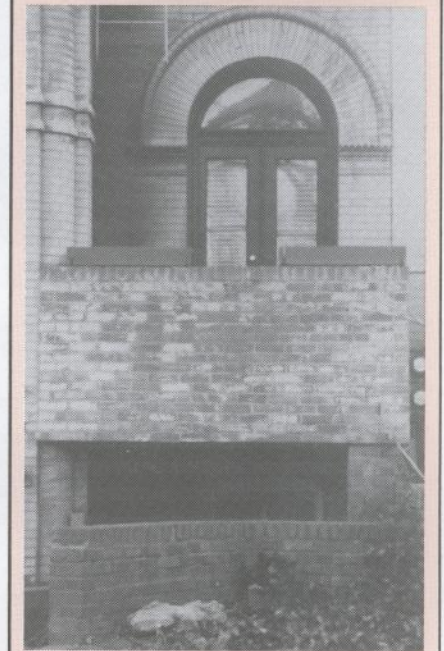
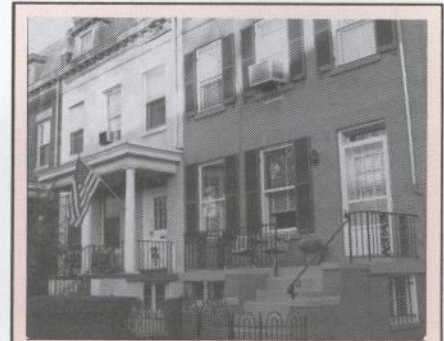
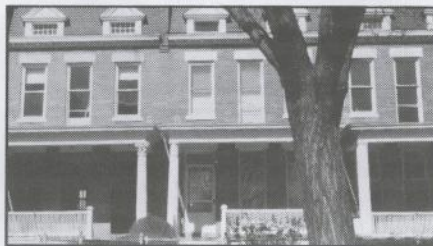
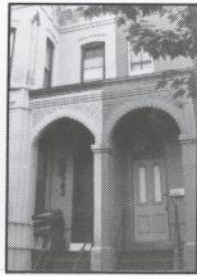
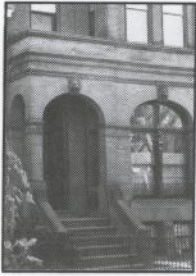
stile: one of the upright structural members of a frame, as at the outer edge of a door

surround: an encircling border or decorative frame

tread: the horizontal part of a step

that secures it can be easily replaced and should be before the newel is knocked off the step, possibly falling and shattering.

Do not pour concrete inside the post. Concrete is a hygroscopic material: it absorbs moisture from the air or from any other source. Thus, it will get moist, stay moist, and moisture will migrate through it. That in turn, means a constant source of moisture in direct contact with the interior of the cast iron post where you can't see it or protect against it. Thus, the post will rust from the inside out.



WHAT NOT TO DO WITH PORCHES AND STOOPS: DON'T AMPUTATE!

Top right & left Although not at all common on the Hill, an occasional porch takes the form of a covered brick vestibule, almost open extensions of the square bays such as these at 911 East Capitol Street and 701-703 Constitution Avenue, N.E.

Center The Hill has uncommon instances of wood stairs and stoops. These must be respected, and maintained, as appropriate to their houses such as these stairs at 9 Eighth Street, N.E. It is not possible to determine through casual inspection if these stairs are original, but their design is appropriate to the Georgian Revival house style.

Bottom Note the unusual detailing on historic porch at 633 A Street, N.E. This house also has an intact transom and original door.

Top The great Victorian-era impulse toward the porch seen in the Richardsonian Romanesque, the Italian, and the Queen Anne styles found expression even on the limited canvas of row house facades on Capitol Hill, which has a number of third story porch/balconies like these at 904-06 East Capitol Street.

Second down "Porch-front" houses are in the 1300 block of East Capitol Street. Distinguished by front porches extending nearly the width of the house, usually with classical elements like the round columns and Corinthian capitals seen here and mansard roofs with dormers. Wood porches and steps are integral to these houses and should be preserved.

Third down 505 and 507 East Capitol Street are clearly a pair. 505 has been modified with aluminum siding, obscuring the cornice board between the brackets, and has a porch of a more classical style than the Italian-style house itself. 503 East Capitol has a more characteristically Italian-style wood porch.

Bottom Observe how the front porches of 215-217 Sixth Street, S.E. help to create the separation between the sidewalk and house missing because the first floor is so close to grade.

Generally, all mechanical connections in these systems should be repaired with mechanical fasteners; do not weld. The heat from the welding weakens the cast iron.

Replacement. The only reason replacement of stairs and stoops should be necessary is if the entire original stair or stoop is missing. (If only components are missing, save what's there and replace what's missing in kind.) While dreadful things have been done to our cast iron stairs and stoops over the years, including their complete removal, it is relatively rare that masonry stairs and stoops have been removed altogether. If yours is such a case, the stairs and stoop should be recreated in masonry, in a design consistent with the house. Among the 8,000 structures of the Capitol Hill Historic District, it is always possible to find at least a close relative to your house to look to as a model for missing parts.

Salvage and New. Because of the number of houses that have been demolished all over Washington, it is possible to find old iron stoops and railings as salvage. New cast iron stair systems similar to the historic ones are available. Local artisans and welders can often replace missing or damaged pieces.

ENTRANCE: THE PORCH

Porches exist on the earliest architecture: the Greek temple had a porch. Porches meet important functional and aesthetic needs. The front porch, a delightful amenity, fosters social intercourse in fair weather, and cover in inclement, and helps create a transition between the public and private realms.

"Porch" is defined as a structure attached to a building to shelter an entrance or to serve as a semi-enclosed space; usually roofed and open sided.

Patterns and Precedents

Capitol Hill, though dominated by masonry row houses with porches not the rule, nonetheless has a rich collection of porches on its buildings, projecting out from the building bodies and carved into them. The existence of porches at all is testimony both to their practicality and to the popularity of the richly porched Queen Anne style. Porches also figured in varying degrees in the other popular styles of the later 19th-century.

Front. While most Capitol Hill row houses have only iron stoops and stairs there are, nonetheless, a number of front porches: original, later additions, or replacements of deteriorated porches.

When original, these porches should be valued and maintained as an important contributor to the building's character. Sometimes, we see a late 19th-century house, often Italian, with a porch of more neo-classical character with classical columns, capitals, and classical moldings. Without researching building permits, we cannot know for sure if the

porch was original, but the possibility of a later addition is suggested when styles of two different periods are found on a building.

Capitol Hill also has a small stock of wood houses with original wood porches.

Sometimes, the great 19th-century porch impulse found its expression on the upper floors of the taller row houses. Frequently, a bay stops short of the last floor, allowing a balcony. In some cases, that balcony is roofed, and developed as an aerial porch.

The general absence of front porches on late 19th-century Capitol Hill row houses was remedied in the porch-front houses of the first decades of the 20th-century. The porches of these houses, in wood or masonry, extended nearly the full width of the house, and often were decorated with classical or Georgian Revival touches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintenance. Regular maintenance with occasional repair, is the best defense against having to replace historic elements. Masonry elements may need pointing (a topic here reduced to basic advice: use a soft mortar compatible with old brick). The major challenge to most porches, however, is rot of wooden elements caused by water.

The porch roof is often where water problems begin. The nearly flat roofs of so many Capitol Hill porches are difficult roofing conditions. And, while we tend to notice water stains on our ceilings, a porch roof may leak for a while before we notice anything, allowing rot in the roof structure and the porch columns, if wood. Thus, it is important to pay careful attention to porch roofs, painting them regularly if they're metal and inspecting and repairing them if they are asphaltic composition.

All wood porch elements need regular painting, as it is the paint coating that keeps moisture away from the wood. Porch floors, especially, need nearly annual painting. Because they are horizontal and often have tongue-and-groove boards where water can linger, it is essential that the paint coating protecting the wood from water-caused rot remain intact.

Repair and Replacement. Sometimes, neglected wood porch elements like columns, brackets, and balusters are missing altogether or so deteriorated they cannot be saved. When other brackets or balusters are present, you can carefully remove intact elements and have them replicated by a lumber or millwork company. If your porch has lost its columns, brackets, or rails, or if original wood elements have been replaced with wrought iron or other materials, you can usually find a house and porch similar to yours to allow you to replicate elements. Several of the catalogs listed at the end of this guideline carry stock lines of wood brackets and columns that may work for your porch. Many Capitol Hill porches had elaborate column capitals in metal or composition that have been removed or allowed to deteriorate. You can have a good sheet

metal shop match intact capitals or order new capitals from the W. F. Norman Company's extensive line of economical metal capitals and other sheet metal. (They are economical today, just as they were economical a hundred years ago, which is why they are found on our buildings substituting for more expensive materials.)

Other elements such as wood porch steps are simple shapes and merely need a competent carpenter to replace rotted treads. Even so, match original profiles and configurations.

Porch floor boards and wood ceilings are also readily repaired or replaced by a carpenter. Ceilings are often a tongue-and-groove board, called "beaded board," with a groove down the middle to make it look as if it were only an inch or so wide. These same beaded boards are often seen as wainscoting in full height basements, and sometimes at stairs, closing off the basement stair side from the first floor. Beaded board, while expensive, is readily available today. Porch ceilings are one exception to the generally somber color schemes favored by Victorians: frequently they painted their porch ceilings sky blue, perhaps, according to one version, so flies would think it was the sky and self-immolate against the boards.

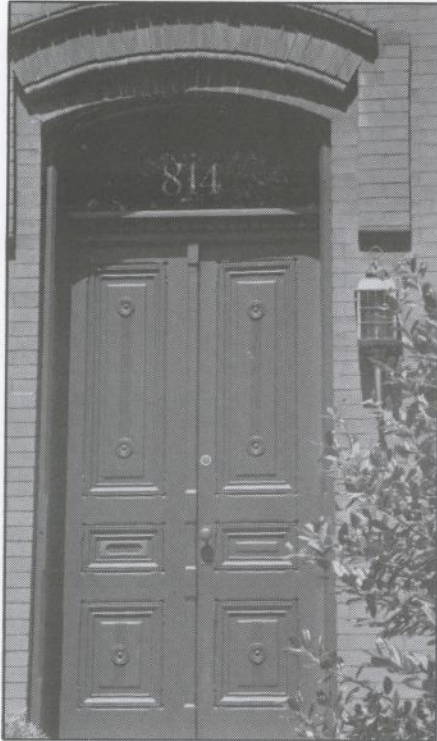
Ironically, while so many owners of Victorian-era houses have added Colonial elements to their houses, some owners of Colonial Revival porch-front houses have removed the front porches to create a more Victorian, flat-front appearance. This, of course, does not respect the house as a product of its time and inappropriately alters its appearance. Subsequent homeowners are then faced with the task of replacing the amputated front porch.

New. Naturally, no new porches should be built on the front of historic row houses that did not originally have them.

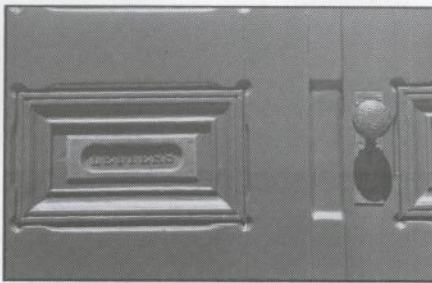
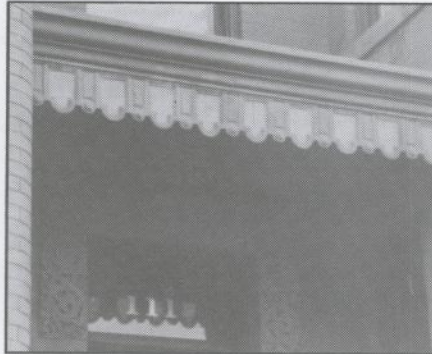
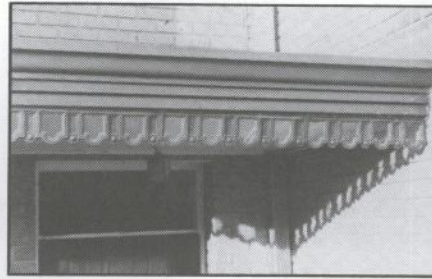
Exception: Iron Marquees. While infrequent, Capitol Hill does have a few canopy-like marquees with glass inserts in the border. These marquees seem to be somewhat later than the dominant 19th-century building stock, frequently being found on 20th-century porch-front houses, generally on the secondary entrances now sometimes serving a doctor's or dentist's office. They appear on some older buildings (but may have been later additions) and are also found on some apartment buildings.

Maintenance for marquees should be a combination of that appropriate for all ferrous metals (regular painting) and that for stained glass (regular inspection and cleaning of the glass.)

If your house appears once to have had a marquee, either from evidence on the house or from similar houses that still have them, you are fortunate. You can build a simple canopy roof form and then order stock "Marquee enrichments." One category of marquee enrichments is the glass pendant frame, some of which closely match patterns found on Capitol Hill houses.



Above & bottom right Accouterments: note the mail slot, house number in transom, and astragal (dividing piece) between the paired doors at 814 A Street, S.E.



Two examples of marquees with glass inserts.
Top left 632 East Capitol Street
Center left 111 Eighth Street, S.E.

The omnipresent transom seen here in the Queen Anne style.
Top right 904 North Carolina Avenue, S.E.
Bottom right 644 East Capitol Street.

ENTRANCE THE FRONT DOOR

One of the frequent preservation challenges for us here on Capitol Hill is the replacement of inappropriate non-original doors. It is hard to imagine a situation where it would be appropriate to replace an original exterior door.

The front door is a part of a rather complex system designed to exclude unwanted guests, water, and cold air, while admitting the authorized, the invited, and light. The front door is the largest piece of the system, but the overall impression and function is affected by the hardware including hinges, knobs and locks; and all the accessories such as house numbers, mail slots, and door bells.

Patterns and Precedents

Front. Most of the grandeur of our Capitol Hill entrances is created by door surrounds: hoods, transoms, and ornament enlarge upon the door. The doors themselves are usually about the same height as modern doors (6'-10" or 7'-0"). Widths are more variable, with front doors on modest houses being an odd 2'-10" width; double door openings being in the 3'-8" to 3'-10" range; and some houses having generous single doors 3'-4" to 3'-8" wide.

Except for the small row houses where you enter directly into the living room and the porch-

front houses, most Capitol Hill row houses have air lock vestibules. With their inefficient heating systems, it is not hard to understand why the Victorians so frequently used air locks at front entrances to minimize blasts of cold air. Air lock doors were frequently different in design and configuration from the exterior entry door.

There is astonishing variety among our doors, some illustrated here. Capitol Hill row houses have paired solid doors, paired glass doors, single solid doors, single full glass doors, and single two-thirds or half glass doors. Within these types we have amazing diversity in ornament. One of the common patterns in door ornament is what is called "bolection" molding. When a door has a recessed panel, this molding, applied at the joint of the panel with the door rails and stiles, projects beyond the surface of the door, creating a robust decorative effect characteristic of the prevalent Italian style. The common six-panel, cross-and-bible doors are nearly all replacements with no historic precedent, an artifact of lumberyard availability.

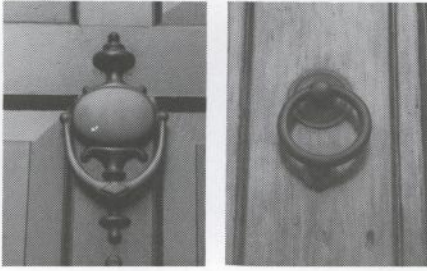
Capitol Hill's historic glass doors typically have beveled glass. We know of no instance of historic stained glass in a Capitol Hill door.

Capitol Hill's houses of the last quarter of the 19th-century had transoms over the front door. These transoms ranged from simple rectangular shapes to a variety of arched openings. Some transoms have gridded muntins in the Queen Anne-

style; others are stained glass; many are plain glass with gold-leaf house numbers. When you see a house without a transom you invariably see one with a modified, often Colonial-style, door surround that covers up the transom.

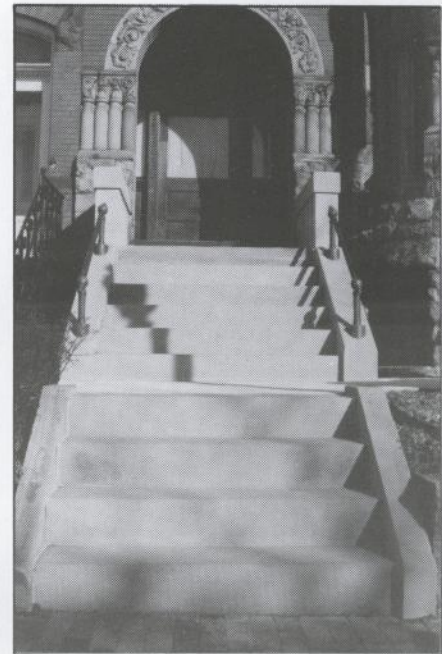
Except on the some of the Hill's oldest houses of the Federal period, such as Carbery House at 423 Sixth Street, S.E. (built in 1813) and Colonial Revival row houses of the early 20th century, Capitol Hill's transoms did not have fan lights. The addition of fan lights in transoms is another common modification to many Victorian-era houses that should be reversed.

The major exception to the prevalent transom is on the small, wood frame Federal-style houses (with the gabled roof sloping to the street, sometimes with two dormers, usually nearly at grade), which date from earlier in the 19th-century and sometimes lack transoms. The Hill has two historic instances of semi-circular arched openings without transoms, one of which appears in a photo illustrating security iron at the front door, and a few cases of later 19th and early 20th century transom-less houses. The scarcity of exceptions to the universal transom among Capitol Hill's 8,000 contributing structures only reinforces the importance of the pattern.



Top left The two-common Colonial-type door knocker (on a six-panel cross-and-bible door, naturally) contrasted with a door and knocker, right, at 121 Fifth Street, S.E. more appropriate to Victorian-era buildings. This photo at 121 Fifth Street also illustrates a bolection molding clearly.

Bottom left & right Some examples of typical Capitol Hill doors.



The mark of good preservation is its invisibility. Left center The door at 611 A Street, S.E. is a new door and is virtually indistinguishable from original doors. Note the bolection molding.

Above A lovely example of good preservation/restoration at 408 A Street, S.E. The lower four risers are new within the last several years, replacing crumbling original stone steps with exactly the same configuration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintenance and Repair. Good maintenance and repair of original front entrance doors is all the more critical when one realizes how difficult it is to find appropriate replacement doors.

Paint or other finishes exposed to the weather can only be expected to last for five to ten years.

Regular touch up, re-painting, and occasional complete stripping should allow original, or good replacement, doors to outlast us all. Whenever you plane doors to improve their fit or strip and repaint them, don't forget to coat all the exposed wood on all edges, including the tops and bottoms. The paint or other coating you use seals the wood from moisture that will cause the door to swell and deteriorate.

Replacement. There are numerous cases of inappropriate and deteriorating replacement doors on the Hill. These doors are excellent candidates for replacement with more appropriate doors. The first step in this process is to find a good door. The second step is to get a building permit. This is a case where getting the building permit and going through the Landmark Review Process may be easier than finding the right door. (The staff historian in the Historic Preservation Office is happy to offer suggestions and work with you on door selection when you go for your permit. Consider that office a resource in your search.)

What constitutes the right door? You will need to determine this for your particular house within the constraints of your own preferences. Since so many Capitol Hill row houses were built in groups or are variations on a few themes, your first step should be to look at the other houses grouped with yours or similar to yours, looking for original doors. You may be wondering how to tell original doors from replacement ones. Virtually all of the Hill's original doors have more relief than the replacement ones, often with bolection or other molding projecting from the face of the door. Thus, these doors have a thicker, more robust look than replacement doors with recessed panels or, worse, moldings glued on the surface of flat doors. Six panel, or "cross-and-bible" doors are easily recognized as non-original except on the rare Colonial Revival style house.

If the historic opening size for your front door was reduced when an inappropriate door was installed, please return the opening to its original size. It takes a little bit more shopping, but it is possible to fit openings that are non-standard today. It is important to the proportions of our houses to maintain original door proportions, taller and wider than today's lumberyard standards, and to preserve transoms as part of the overall opening proportion. Standard exterior door sizes today come in 2" increments of width from about 2'-8" to over three feet, with an important exception: 2'-10" is not a stan-

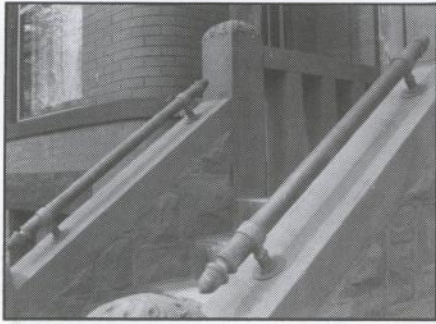
dard door width. Even so, a local lumberyard was recently able to get a custom 2'-10" door economically. The standard height for doors is 6'-10" to 7'-0".

Probably one of the easiest and most economical door solutions, appropriate to many house styles, is the full glass door. These, either single or double leaf, were frequently used on Capitol Hill buildings and are readily available today. They are economical, even as custom doors for our sometimes oddly sized openings. However, not everyone wants a glass front door. If you want a solid door, you will be faced with additional challenges or expense.

Another easy door solution, but not economical, is to buy one of several appropriate door designs available from local door companies. Unfortunately, these doors can be extremely expensive, over \$1,000 each. However, since they are mahogany and custom they should last your lifetime and will be made to fit whatever door opening you have.

Somewhere between the most and least expensive alternates is getting a custom door in the typical four panel style with arched top panels, in pine instead of mahogany. The owner of one custom door like this we found estimated the cost of her custom door in the range of \$800.

A simple four panel door, available from many lumberyards even in non-standard sizes, is an

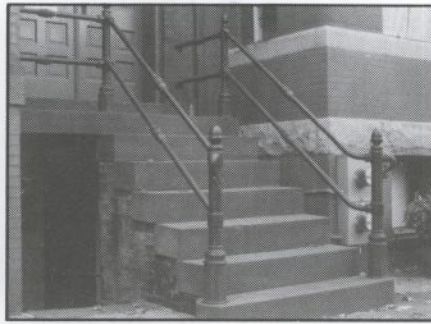


908 Massachusetts Avenue, NE

A wiggly, zig-zag motif in iron work is not uncommon on Capitol Hill, found in stair railings, security iron, and balcony rails. Here it appears in three forms, from left at 700 A Street, S.E., 616 A Street, S.E., and with a wagon wheel form at 614 East Capitol Street. Note, the same visually light, vaguely foliate riser pattern with all three.

While cast and wrought iron stairs, stoops, and railings dominate on the Hill, there are also many brick and/or stone stoops, with and without iron rails. These masonry stoops are often associated with Richardsonian Romanesque style buildings. The stairs and stoops at 711 East Capitol Street far right, and 908 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., above right both combine stone treads with stone cheek walls and some iron work.

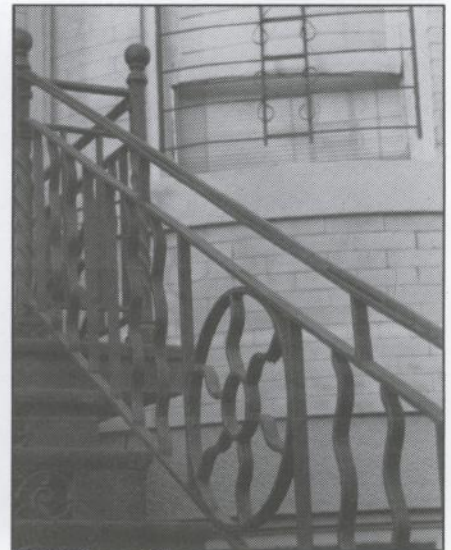
Top right This stair at 121 11th Street, SE, could easily have been iron, but is, instead, stone treads on a brick base, with the typical two iron tube railings, including the decorative sleeve midway on the rail.



121 11th Street, SE



700 A Street, SE



616 A Street, SE



acceptable and economical alternative in pine or fir. A five-panel door would also be fine, but is not widely available. While a simple four- or five-panel door would be acceptable as is, it is simple to add wood molding around the panels to create the look of bolection molding.

Beware of "Victorian" style doors that are not characteristic to our neighborhood. Several door and millwork companies now manufacture charming doors with lots of detail and oval etched or decorated glass panels. While these doors are found in other Victorian neighborhoods, they are not found on Capitol Hill and so represent an "alteration with no historical base," warned against in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

You'll notice that we have not discussed used doors salvaged from other buildings. If you can find an appropriately style door that fits your opening, it is a fine alternative. It is, however, very difficult to fit a salvaged door to an existing opening. New Construction. One of the major problems of new construction on Capitol Hill is an appearance of meanness. Where the adjacent Victorian house was generously articulated with ornament; the new building next door may have little more than a stripped down cornice. The Victorian house, with eleven foot ceilings on the first floor and possibly two additional stories with ceilings over nine feet looks, and indeed is, tall compared to new construction with eight foot ceiling heights. Lower ceilings in the new building limit the size of the windows.

Finally, a new house might have a single three-foot by seven-foot, Colonial style, cross-and-bible door, while its Victorian neighbor has an elaborate door as part of an entrance statement, further developed with a generous transom and an elaborate surround. Surprisingly, when Capitol Hill's doors are larger than today's standard, it is only a slight difference. The generosity of Capitol Hill's entrances derives from the combination of slightly larger door, strongly enhanced by transom, and surround.

To achieve this generosity in new construction, a simple expedient is to use double doors. Double doors are very common on the Hill and certainly create a larger door opening. Few, if any, Victorian-era Capitol Hill houses had sidelights, so sidelights should be avoided. If a double door is used, the strip where the two doors meet, the astragal, is another opportunity for articulation. Historic astragals were often ornamental enhancements to the door.

The addition of a transom at the front door helps to increase the size of the door opening without creating an unwieldy door, admits light to the front entrance area, contributes to the verticality of the entrance, and helps the building to conform with the prevalent pattern of door transoms in the neighborhood.

While a simple double door with transom on new construction might be enough to evoke a Victorian quality, some additional articulation at the entrance is highly desirable.

Historically, this articulation typically took the form of a cap or hood at the door, developed with varying degrees of complexity.

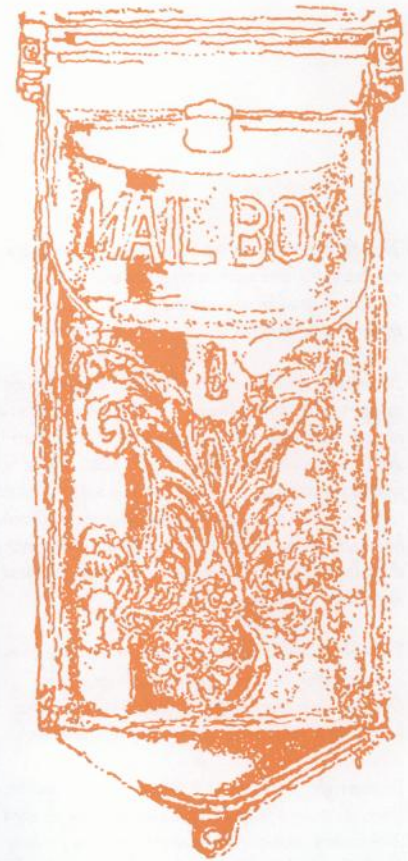
The standard practice of swinging exterior doors into buildings helps to prolong their life. When doors swing out, the top of the door may get rained on, causing them to swell, warp, and deteriorate.

HARDWARE

Door hardware includes both visible and less visible components, including hinges, knobs, locks, cane bolts, and weather stripping.

Door hinges are normally sold in pairs with an exterior or solid core door requiring one and a half pairs, or three hinges, per door. The material and finish range from primed steel to steel plated with brass or chrome, to solid brass and solid stainless steel. Solid brass and solid stainless steel hinges can be astonishingly expensive. As long as the exterior door swings into the house, hinges will not be exposed to the weather and steel hinges of should be satisfactory. Some lovely reproduction historic hinges are available from catalogs referenced at the end of this guideline.

If you study the photographs here of intact front doors, you will notice the historic doors have simple knobs, sometimes embossed with a pattern, or set on a square escutcheon plate, with a lock above or below. If you have an original door with historic hardware and wish to increase security, it would be



711 East Capitol Street



700 A Street, SE

Appropriate accessories like these are readily available from sources listed on page 12.

appropriate to add a mortised (fully recessed in the door) deadbolt, either with a thumb turn on the inside, or key operated on both sides. Key operated on both sides makes sense at glass doors where you don't want someone to be able to open the lock after breaking the glass.

ENTRANCE: ACCESSORIES AT THE FRONT DOOR

While you are thinking about your front door, you might also think about its accouterments. Just as front doors themselves have been the targets of unnecessary "improvement," front door accessories have also often been "improved." We see Capitol Hill houses with original gold house numbers in the glass door transom and brass or light reflecting numbers on the door or wall beside the door. We see a door bell and a door knocker at the same front entrance. Colonial-type light fixtures are pervasive as are suburban looking mail boxes, which are unfortunately, virtually the only ones available at local hardware stores.

Some of the proliferation of inappropriate door accessories is attributable to decades of denigration of everything "Victorian" and a full century of popularity of Georgian Revival, Colonial styles. When people went to the hardware store or looked in catalogs for light fixtures, mail boxes, door bells, mail slots, door knockers, and house numbers virtu-

ally all that was available were the Colonial styles. Fortunately for Capitol Hill's Victorian-era building stock, that has changed. Appropriate Victorian reproduction products are now available both in stores and in the catalogs listed at the end of this guideline.

Mail Boxes/Slots. There are few precedents on the Hill for mail boxes because the doors typically had mail slots. If you are thinking about a return to a mail slot, look around at the original ones: you'll notice they are frequently rectangular with half circle ends. Easy to find modern mail slots often have exterior flaps that obscure the capsule shape. Mail slots with this shape and an interior flap are available at some local hardware stores.

If for some reason, a mail slot will not work at your entrance, appropriate mail boxes are available from catalogs.

House Numbers. House numbers are another small, but important detail. Looking around, you will notice that virtually every one of our houses has or had a gilded house number in the glass transom over the door. Any competent sign painter will paint your house numbers in gold on your transom (for about \$150 for three numbers). Gold vinyl numbers are also available for less cost. While we can see many examples of almost intact gold numbers from nearly a hundred years ago, vinyl letters are less time-tested.

The type face is important, too. You want a serif type face with a black shadow. As always, your best guide to appropriate type face and location in the transom is to look around the neighborhood. Door bell/knocker. Another entrance accouterment is the door bell. The plastic, suburban, illuminated type is not historic. The simplest approach is best: a button on a plate. More appropriate than an electric door bell is a door knocker or the twist type of bell since there is little evidence that our Victorian-era houses originally had door bells. Avoid the Colonial style of door knockers. Simple ring knockers are found as original equipment on many Capitol Hill doors. Both ring knockers and twist bells are available locally at Union Hardware and, economically, through catalogs.

Lighting. Finding appropriate exterior lighting for Capitol Hill houses is made difficult by the fact that most of our houses did not originally have exterior electric lighting, so there are few precedents. Since electricity was just beginning to be widely installed in houses in the same decades most of Capitol Hill was built, there wasn't a wide variety of fixture designs available.

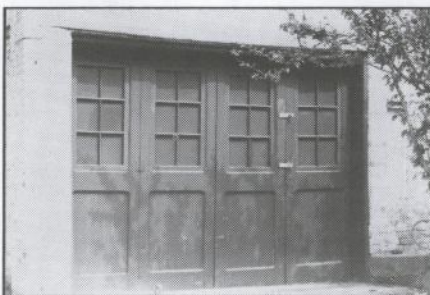
Avoid the brass and glass lantern or carriage lamp types. ✪

Top left It's possible to have secure glass doors. Here is a nice example of iron work incorporated with a door. 907 East Capitol Street is also one of Capitol Hill's two examples of arched head openings without transoms.

Bottom left Another category of entrance is used for cars into garages or carriage houses. The historic entrance to a carriage house looked like an aggregation of individual doors: four wood doors, often with glass panes, hinged to fold back to allow access. Many people do not use their carriage houses for cars, so can easily maintain or install such historically accurate doors, forgoing both the convenience of the automated upward acting automatic garage door and its non-historic appearance.

Top right Overly-elaborate iron work and modifications to a door opening. The iron work, reminiscent of New Orleans, is inappropriate for the Hill. The opening has been changed in some odd way creating two transoms.

Bottom right The entrance to the Charlotte Lee apartment house, illustrates a fully developed entrance from the early 20th century, including light fixtures, and some building numbering overkill with numbers on the door and wall.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Relevant Capitol Hill Historic District Design Guidelines, published by the Capitol Hill Restoration Society, available from the Society (202) 543-0425, include:

Capen, Judith. *Building Styles in the Capitol Hill Historic District*. to identify the style of your building and appropriate entrance elements for it.

Unpainted Ladies. for recommendations on paint colors.

Schauer, Lyle. *The Stained Glass Windows of Capitol Hill*.

Relevant Preservation Briefs (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Preservation Assistance Division, Technical Preservation Services) available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, and from the D.C. Historic Preservation Office (202) 727-7360, include:

Smith, Baird M. "Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings." Brief #3.

Weeks, Kay D. and Look, David W. "Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork." Brief #10.

Park, Sharon C. "The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors." Brief #16.

Nelson, Lee H. "Architectural Character: Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character." Brief #17.

PRODUCT SOURCES

Always useful, full of good information and pertinent advertisers is *The Old House Journal*. P.O. Box 50214, Boulder, Colorado. 80321-0214.

A newspaper-magazine format, bi-monthly publication with articles and extensive source listings Traditional Building. (718) 636-0788.

The Antique Hardware Store. Kintnersville, Pennsylvania. 1-800-422-9982.

The Renovator's Supply, Miller Falls, Massachusetts. (413) 659-2211

Stephoe and Wife (for new cast iron stairs), Toronto, Canada M6H 2C7, (415) 530-4200.

Union Hardware on Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. and at D Street, N.W.

lighting fixtures: Rejuvenation Lamp and Fixture Co. Portland, Oregon. (503) 249-0774.

glass canopies: ("Marquee Enrichments")

W.F. Norman Corporation, Nevada, Missouri 1-(800) 641-4038.

millwork: Smoot Lumber Company, 6295 Edsall Road, Alexandria, Virginia 22312, (703) 823-2100.

Somerset Door and Column Company, Somerset, Pennsylvania (814) 443-1658.

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