

# Exterior Entrances and Porches



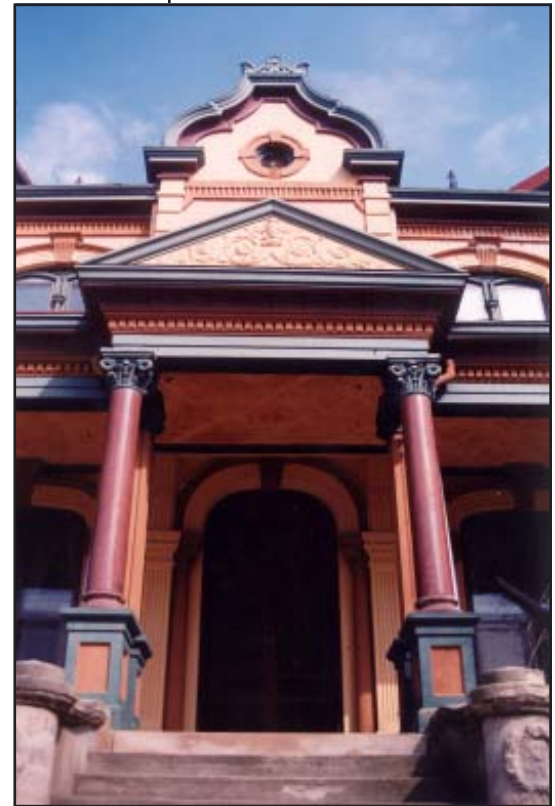
St. Joseph Landmark Commission

Exterior entrances and porches are primary features that help to define the historic character of a building and district. Due to their prominent locations, these features were typically embellished with rich architectural ornamentation and were often “updated” over time to reflect current architectural tastes. Doors, windows, trim work, columns, turned posts, railings and balusters, cornices, and steps were often conceived as a single design component that contributed significantly to the style of a structure. Variations in entrance and porch forms and details could also create diversity among an otherwise identical grouping of building forms.

Porches are found on nearly all residential structures in St. Joseph’s historic districts. These porches are primarily found on the main building façade and frequently will wrap around on one or more additional sides. Back porches, side porches, sleeping porches, and balconies are also found in the historic district. Many of the City’s Greek Revival and Italianate houses and duplexes (also referred to as “double houses”) originally boasted small entrance porches. These were often supported by square or chamfered posts and ornamented with bracketing and sawnwork spandrels. Often smaller entrance porches were replaced around the turn-of-the-twentieth century with larger porches that exhibited Colonial Revival tastes with classical columns and other “early American” architectural detailing found in domestic Georgian and Federal designs of the previous century. Efforts should be made to preserve porch additions and changes that are at least fifty (50) years old. These changes, if significant, help chronicle the evolution of the building over time.

While several masonry homes in the historic districts feature porches with concrete or encaustic or marble tile floors, most homes have porches with wooden floorboards that were assembled in tongue-and-groove fashion. The floor rests on a frame substructure that, in turn, is supported by brick piers or a continuous brick foundation. Floorboards were laid perpendicular to the house and projected approximately 1”-2” beyond the skirt board sheathing the outer face of the porch floor framing. Floorboards were frequently rounded or “bull-nosed” at the edge to help repel water and minimize water penetration to the open wood grain at the ends of the boards. The floor structure was also sloped away from the house to allow for proper drainage.

The roof structure of the porch was supported by a variety of post or column types. Square and chamfered posts, often incorporating heavy caps and applied or inset panels and trim work, were used with the Greek Revival, Italianate, and Second Empire styles of architecture. Classical columns and colonettes, most commonly of Doric or Tuscan design, were incorporated into entrance porches and doorway pilasters in Greek Revival and Colonial Revival homes. Turned posts in a variety of designs became widespread during the Queen Anne period of domestic architectural design of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tapered posts set on brick or stone piers or heavy masonry columns defined porch treatments of the post-Victorian era through the 1930s.



Polished granite columns with carved sandstone capitals and an elaborate pressed tin gable ornament embellish the entrance porch of the George Hax house, 401 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Museum Hill Historic District.



# Exterior Entrances and Porches



The City's Residential Historic Preservation Loan Program assisted the owners of the 1887 John Albrecht house, 418 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street (top) and the 1889 C. H. Foote duplex, 904-06 N. 9<sup>th</sup> Street (bottom), with the rebuilding of their front porches.

Ceilings of porches exhibit a variety of finishes. The most common treatment is the use of wooden beaded board or “box car” siding. These tongue-and-groove boards were installed both perpendicular and parallel to the front wall plane of the house. Flat and raised panel wooden covered ceilings are found on some of the City’s more elaborate residences. Stucco and plaster finishes, as well as ornamental metal, were also used to create design interest.

In commercial buildings, entrances were often incorporated into storefronts and recessed to provide shelter from the weather. Original entrance doors in historic commercial buildings were typically wood with a single large pane of glass. This glass was often beveled. Rarely was stained glass used in commercial entry doors. Single and double door arrangements were typical. Secondary entrance doors located either within the storefront or on a side elevation would often provide separate access to upper floors. These doors would either be stylistically identical to the ground level storefront doors or be of a more residential design.

Every effort should be made to preserve historic entrance and porch configurations and features. Enclosing porches, particularly those found on principal elevations, is considered inappropriate due to the tendency to obscure or destroy original details and disrupt the proportions, massing, and scale of the

building. Embellishing entrances and porches with decorative elements may be appropriate if the added elements are compatible with the style of the building and, particularly, if evidence to support the presence of these elements historically can be presented.

Where entrances and porches have been insensitively altered or are missing, restoration or reconstruction should be guided, when possible, by documentary evidence of the original configuration and details. When no such documentation exists, a new design that is compatible with the historic building in terms of proportion, shape, scale, massing, materials, and details should be executed.

## Maintenance and Repair

Maintenance of entrances and porches is critical due to their continuous exposure to weather. Porch floors and stairs should be properly sloped to shed water. Maintaining a sound paint film and sealed joints on wooden surfaces is essential for preventing moisture damage as is the proper repair and maintenance of roofs, gutters, and downspouts. For maintenance of masonry and metal porch components refer to BRICK AND OTHER MASONRY MATERIALS and ARCHITECTURAL METALS respectively.

# Exterior Entrances and Porches



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## Exterior Entrances and Porches: Guidelines

1. Retain and preserve historic entrances, porches, and balconies.
2. Retain and preserve character-defining architectural elements and details of historic entrances, porches, and balconies such as piers, foundation walls, lattice, flooring, porch supports, ceilings, railings, balusters, steps, brackets, and other decorative trim work.
3. Follow a routine program of inspection and maintenance of entrances and porches to avoid deterioration:
  - Maintain a proper slope to the floor and steps to assist in the shedding of water.
  - Maintain a sound paint film and sealed joints on all wooden surfaces to prevent moisture damage. Prime all sides of new wooden surfaces, including porch flooring.
  - Check the condition of wooden, masonry, and metal elements regularly for signs of deterioration.
4. Repair historic entrance and porch elements whenever possible. Repair by patching, consolidating, reinforcing, or splicing deteriorated sections. Keep as much of the original fabric as possible. When replacement is necessary, match the original in size, shape, pattern, composition, color (in the case of masonry and metal features), and texture.
5. Do not replace deteriorated wood porch floor and steps with concrete or brick.
6. Use only slow kiln-dried lumber when replacing or replicating porch features, if possible. Treated materials have a tendency to warp and split as they dry, particularly if they are not kiln-dried. Slow kiln-dried wood products must be specified at the lumber store.
7. Avoid the use of stock entrance doors, porch railings, and other ornament that may not proportionately relate to the building. Modern day porch balusters, for example, are generally taller and thinner than historic balusters and will convey a different visual appearance. Building code provisions generally allow for the retention of historic porch balusters and railings. New railing installations, however, will require compliance with present-day building code provisions. Consult with the City's building inspector and preservation planner when considering porch rail installation.



The entrance porch of the Louis C. Burnes house, 1923 Francis Street, Harris Addition Historic District.



Paint all visible porch features. Treated materials, when used, should be painted following a proper period of drying/curing.

# Exterior Entrances and Porches

## Exterior Entrances and Porches: Guidelines continued

8. Avoid enclosing entrances and porches on the front or sides of a historic building. Side and rear porches may be considered for enclosure if the effect is minimal from public view on the street. If enclosed, transparent materials, such as glass and screen, are preferable as they do not obscure the original open character. If additional supports are necessary to support screen or glass panels, they should be as visually unobtrusive as possible.
9. When embellishing entrances and porches with architectural ornamentation, use architectural elements that are compatible with the character of the building or style, particularly if there is evidence to support the presence of such features historically. If evidence suggests the presence of features for which no definitive physical or pictorial records exist, a new design that is consistent with other historic entrances and porches on buildings of the same period and that is compatible with the subject building should be undertaken.
10. Reconstruct missing entrances, porches, and balconies with the original design based on accurate documentation or with a design that is compatible with the historic character of the building in terms of proportion, shape, scale, massing, materials and details.
11. Avoid adding new porches, entrances, or balconies to primary elevations where none existed historically.
12. Make ramps and other entrance and porch modifications necessary for improved accessibility for the disabled reversible so as not to obscure or damage architectural features and diminish the building's overall historic character.
13. Paint all visible entrance and porch features. It is inappropriate to leave surfaces unpainted such as flooring or porch railings. Treated materials, when used, should be painted following a proper period of drying/curing.