

Paint Finishes

Paint and other paint-like finishes are character defining features of a structure or landscape feature. These finishes hold important information regarding class, style and historic practices of previous tenants. Finishes can range from white washes to oil paint and from basic wall protection to such specialized decorative finishes as graining, marbleizing and *trompe l'oeil*. Finishes also provide a crucial layer to protect wood surfaces from moisture and ultra violet rays. Paint removal should be considered only where there is significant paint deterioration and where the existing will be replaced with a new layer of matching finish.

Guidelines for the treatment of paint and paint-like finishes

- Documentation of paint layers must occur with any project that threatens earlier layers. This documentation is through professional collection of paint samples for paint analysis.
- Interior paint finishes should be assumed to be historic fabric and treated protectively unless otherwise indicated.
- All efforts should be made to retain earlier paint finishes and only remove failing paint to the next sound layer.
- Retaining a representative sample is necessary in any situation that requires complete removal of paint layers.
 - In windows this is achieved by retaining a one inch by one inch square of original finish in the upper right hand corner of the window sash.
 - At the cladding this could be achieved by leaving the upper three courses of siding intact with the original finishes.
 - Although retention of architectural fragments with the original finishes can be a method of preserving the paint history of a feature this method is problematic. Fragments separated from their host lose their context and count on accurate record keeping and storage to preserve the sample. In situ preservation of paint finishes is always preferred.
 - Other examples can be developed and implemented to retain paint finishes.
- Failures with specialized decorative painting should be assessed in conjunction with a conservator and the Collections Team.
- Finish colors should be matched to the documented colors used on the previous painting campaign unless otherwise determined by Historic New England's *Proactive Preservation and Interpretation Planning* committee. Replace in-kind unless approval is provided for departure.

Further Reading:

Chase, Sara B., "Painting Historic Interiors," *Preservation Brief 28* (Washington, D.C., 1992).

Weeks, Kay D. and David W. Look, AIA, "Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork," *Preservation Brief 10* (Washington, D.C. 1982).