



News and Notes for Historic Homeowners - 4

New Contact Information: call 617 944 6645 with Historic Homeowner questions

Wet Basements: We've all had them this Spring!

With torrential rainstorms on March 14 and 31, most New England basements saw anywhere from an inch or two to several feet of water seeping, creeping, gurgling or gushing in, overwhelming sump pumps, wet vacs, and bedraggled and distraught homeowners. Now that the waters have receded, and the fans, dehumidifiers, and sunny days have dried things out, it's a good time to prep for the deluges of the future, which a brand-new study from a University of New Hampshire environmental group, Carbon Solutions New England, predicts will become more frequent and extreme (<http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/cpc/documents/2010nprecip.pdf>).

For owners of old houses, keeping water out of and away from a basement has benefits well beyond avoiding floods in future rainstorms. Did you know that a dry basement can save energy? One noted building materials scientist has said "the best approach for energy savings is to manage rainwater at the exterior so that the soil in contact with the foundation remains dry. Dry soil is a good thermal resistor, and a thick cushion of dry soil surrounding the building provides optimum savings." (Wm. B. Rose, *APT Bulletin* 36, 2005)

So start your dry basement retrofit by adding longer leaders at the ends of down-spouts so rainwater is directed at least 3' out from the house. Keep gutters cleared and flowing and make sure the grade around the house slopes away and is not eroded at the foundation. Even with good, active drainage around the house, though, recent experience has proven the value of a sump pump to ward off water incursions. You may want to arrange to have one installed now, while they're back in stock, and get your wet basement emergency defense system up and running.

The emergency drainage solution can be as simple as a submersible sump pump set into a perforated plastic sump liner dug down into the lowest point in the cellar, connected to a GFCI electrical outlet well above likely water levels, and drained with a long flexible plastic sewer hose run out to a low spot on the property a good distance from the house. More sophisticated installations may include battery back-ups and back up pumps. One thing you may want to avoid in adding a sump pump to an old, as opposed to a new, house, is the permanent installation of a PVC discharge pipe through an outside wall or major framing timber. Just use a sewer hose, or encourage the installer to use a less destructive approach to siting a discharge pipe, such as removing one pane of a basement window.

For more information on sump pumps, see <http://home.howstuffworks.com/home-improvement/plumbing/sump-pump.htm>.

Green News: Antique Home vs. Antique Planet?

As this news goes out, we are awaiting the release of the latest draft of the Senate energy bill, which is sure to contain many hundreds of pages of regulation on how to improve energy usage in new and existing buildings. Each day brings a raft of information about green energy technology and how to

respond to various aspects of climate change. As befits this "uber-timely" topic, the on-line discussion is particularly lively.

Recently, George Musser, staff editor at *Scientific American* and author of their Solar-at-Home blog, posed the question "Are Old Houses Doomed: the conflict between historic preservation and energy efficiency." While energy retrofits will surely affect old houses in the years to come, there need not be a conflict between preserving antique homes and our antique planet. Mr. Musser was kind enough to post my response to that question in a follow-up blog. If you'd like to read more, see <http://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/post.cfm?id=five-tips-for-people-who-love-both-2010-04-02>.

On another "green" note, we are happy to report that Historic New England's Lyman Estate, where the Historic Preservation Team's offices are located, will undergo a comprehensive energy retrofit using a grant from the Murray-Patrick administration and the federal stimulus funding (<http://www.historicnewengland.org/about/WhatsNew.asp#A226>). The project will achieve dramatic energy savings in a very old (1793) and very historic house (designed by Salem architect, Samuel McIntire) using only reversible interventions that do no damage to the architectural fabric. Stay tuned for more news on green preservation!

Upcoming Programs:

Your Old House: Paint and Maintain to Conserve Historic Character

Thursday, May 6, 2010, 7:00 pm, Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, MA

All houses, from the simplest to the most elegant, have distinctive stylistic features that give them their historic character. Learn how the historic character of your old house can be retained, revealed, recaptured, or enhanced with appropriate renovations and period paint colors. Sally Zimmerman presents the Historic Preservation Month lecture at the Cape Ann Museum. For more information, see <http://www.capeannhistoricalmuseum.org/special/exhibits.htm>.

The Economical Historic Home: Energy Efficiency Basics for the Old House Owner

Friday, May 7, 2010, 12:30 - 4:30 pm, Providence, Rhode Island

Historic New England, in partnership with Preserve Rhode Island, the Providence Revolving Fund, and the Newport Restoration Foundation, is offering this workshop with demonstrations on insulation, weatherization, wood window repair, and energy retrofits. This workshop takes place on the west side of Providence at the Providence Revolving Fund, 372 West Fountain Street, and includes sessions inside a beautiful Victorian home on Parade Street. Advance registration is required. See http://www.newportrestoration.org/calendar/details/17614-the_economical for more information.

Anatomy of a Fireplace: the Hearth and Chimney

Saturday, May 22, 2010 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Swett-Ilsley House, Coffin House, Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm, Newbury, Mass.

This is the return of last year's sold-out program! Join masonry expert Richard Irons in a special behind-the-scenes exploration of the heart of the seventeenth-century house - the chimney. Irons identifies original material, discusses the evolution of chimney technology, and explores how changing foodways and cooking methods influenced hearth configuration. Bring pictures of your chimney mysteries for his review.

Open registration for Historic New England's general membership starts May 1 but Historic Homeowner members have exclusive access to pre-register for this uniquely informative program until May 1, so be sure to call 978-462-2634 to save your spot. Admission: \$25 Historic Homeowner members. Session includes morning refreshments; a boxed lunch may be ordered for \$10.

[Passport to Historic New England Homes](#)

[Thursday, June 24, 2010, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm, Lyman Estate, Waltham, Mass.](#)

Senior Stewardship Manager Joe Cornish and Manager of Historic Preservation Services Sally Zimmerman debut a new lecture for members that explores the architectural traditions and styles of the region by looking at Historic New England's thirty-six properties. Followed by light refreshments and a guided tour of the Lyman Estate. Admission: Free, Historic New England members only. Registration is required and space is limited. Phone 617-994-5934 to register for this Members' Month program.

[The Vermont History Expo is Back!](#)

[Saturday-Sunday, June 26-27, 2010, Tunbridge Fair Grounds, Tunbridge, Vermont](#)

For a genuine New England experience, it doesn't get much better than the Vermont History Expo. Plan now for a weekend in the country and stop by to visit Historic New England staff at our booth at the Expo. Nothing beats a sunny day with a bag of freshly-made kettle corn in the green hills and historic fair grounds in Tunbridge with fellow lovers of history, Vermont-style. See http://vermonthistory.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=190&Itemid=101 for more info.

[As always, don't hesitate to call or email with your questions and concerns about your historic home! \[szimmerman@historicnewengland.org\]\(mailto:szimmerman@historicnewengland.org\) or 617 994 6645](#)

Thank you for your support of Historic New England. It is YOUR commitment that helps to protect the unique character of historic properties throughout our region!