National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Technical Preservation Services
National Center for Cultural Resources

ITS Number 4

Interpreting The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Subject: Inappropriate Replacement Doors

Applicable Standards:

2. Retention of Historic Character
6. Repair/Replacement of Deteriorated or Missing Features Based on Evidence
9. Compatible New Additions/Alterations

Issue: Selecting appropriate replacement doors as part of a rehabilitation project is important in retaining the character of a historic building regardless of whether it is a residential or a commercial structure. The front door to a house, a store, or an office is an integral feature of the entrance to the building, and it should reflect accurately the building's style, period of architectural significance, and its use. If the historic door is still extant, it should be retained and repaired, or it must be replaced if too deteriorated to repair. Although the replacement may be a compatible new design, it is always preferable that the new door replicate as closely as possible the historic door, while meeting modern code or security requirements that may necessitate a stronger or more fire-resistant door. This includes reproducing the same glass size, pane configuration and profile of true muntins, and the same number, size, and shape of vertical or horizontal panels. A replacement door should also match the historic door in material as well as design, but in some instances, if the situation warrants, an appropriate substitute material may be used.

In accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, replacing a missing historic door with one that matches the historic door is preferrable if physical, pictorial, or photographic evidence exists to document its appearance. Absent that, the door may be replaced with a new unit that is compatible with the style and character of the historic building.

Application 1 (*Incompatible treatment, later corrected to meet the Standards*): This two-story, brick building was constructed between 1919-1920 to house the commercial operations of a local dairy. It was rehabilitated as legal offices. While the rehabilitation retained the character-defining glass block windows on the second floor of the primary street elevation the first floor storefront windows and entrance had to be replaced due to extensive deterioration.

Rehabilitated dairy building.

Incompatible "stock" door.

The storefront windows were replaced with simple, contemporary windows with dark-colored frames that were compatible with the historic building. But the "stock" white entrance door with its nine-pane glass and snap-in muntins above two vertical panels was not compatible with the historic building. In order to bring the project into compliance with the Standards, remedial work involved replacing the stock door with a simple glazed wood door that was compatible in both design and color with the historic building.

Appropriate replacement door.

Rehabilitated 1920s commerical building.

Application 2 *(Incompatible treatment, later corrected to meet the Standards)*: Another two-story vernacular masonry commercial building, also dating from the 1920s, that features three, one-bay storefronts on the first floor was rehabilitated for continued use as a restaurant and bar with rental apartments on the second floor. The original, historic storefronts had been replaced in the 1950s with aluminum frame windows and doors. Although, the Standards would also have allowed these later storefronts to be retained in the rehabilitation, the owner chose to install a new wood storefront with a simple, contemporary design, compatible with the building's historic character. However, the replacement wood doors had large stained glass windows and three vertical panels below, and were found to be inconsistent with both the plain character of the 1920s facade and with the replacement storefront. To meet the Standards, the owner replaced the doors with a simpler wood door with full length glass panel like the one shown in the accompanying sketch.

Suggested design for compatible, contemporary replacement door.

Rehabilitated storefront with incompatible stained glass door.

Application 3 *(Incompatible treatment)*: In a third project, a two and one-half story Foursquare house with Colonial Revival-style details built in the first decade of the 20th century was rehabilitated for continued residential use. Although most of the interior finishes and features, including all lath and plaster, had been removed by a previous owner, the original front door still remained. In the course of the rehabilitation, however, this historic door was replaced with a new door featuring multi-paned glass with two vertical panels below, the same "stock" door, in fact, that was used in the dairy conversion project. This multi-paned door is no more compatible with the character of this early-20th century house, than it was with the 1920s dairy building. To meet the Standards, the owner would have had to have a new door fabricated based on photographs of the original to match the historic door which had been discarded in the rehabilitation. A compatible, contemporary door could also have been installed to meet the Standards.

In general, generic or "stock" doors with multi-paned glass, are not appropriate to use as exterior replacement doors in historic rehabilitation projects.

Rehabilitated Foursquare house with inappropriate "stock" door (left) and no longer extant historic door (right) that was discarded in the rehabilitation.

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