

INTRODUCING THE PRESERVATION QUARTERLY

by Mandy Campbell Berry

"What is the Preservation Quarterly?" That is a fair question, as we can guarantee that you have never seen one before. This is the inaugural issue of a quarterly newsletter to be mailed to our past, present, and future clients, contacts and partners. If you fall under the future client or contact category you may be wondering "What is Dell Corporation?". Briefly, Dell Corporation, founded in 1972, is a Preservation Contracting Firm which specializes in architectural restoration, conservation and preservation. Dell is based in Rockville, Maryland, however our experience is not limited to the Washington DC Metropolitan area. Dell has been involved in the preservation of historic structures throughout the eastern United States and beyond. Through this range of experience, our consultants and craftspeople have had the opportunity to work on some unique structures, including churches, historic houses and museums, private residences, commercial buildings, government offices, bridges, lighthouses, observatories and much more.

The Preservation Quarterly's goal is to bring some of this expertise to those who need it, through feature stories and various columns. The Quarterly will feature a listing of upcoming "Preservation Happenings" (your forum to publicize your organization's events) as well as



Dell Preservation Technician at work on the dentils at Gunston Hall, Virginia

maintenance tips and product reviews. We hope to fine tune and expand our newsletter over time, and invite you to share your suggestions and criticisms. Our goal is for The Quarterly to become a useful and dynamic resource to others involved in the preservation of historic structures.

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MAINTAINING HISTORIC STRUCTURES

by Mark Clark



Severely deteriorated roof, Maryland

One of the first questions that I ask when interviewing a perspective employee is, "What mental picture comes to mind when you hear the words, Historic Preservation"? The answer is almost always something like this; "I see someone doing very careful, tedious and exacting work, recreating the materials, techniques and workmanship of a bygone era on a very important, gorgeous, high-profile and probably irreplaceable historic structure...where the work will be seen and admired by millions for all eternity".

Okay, maybe I have exaggerated, but it's close to that. The point is that I feel

this is the picture that Historic Preservation conjures up for many people, but is it an accurate picture?

Dell President, Bryan Blundell, has been heard to say, "Good preservation is often times nothing more than good maintenance with an ego". When I first came to work with Dell Corporation five years ago, I sometimes wondered what in the world he meant by that statement. But as I have grown with the company and worked daily with Bryan, the meaning has become clear to me. As preservation specialists, our first job is to look for the cause of a problem condition,

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then develop and implement techniques that maintain the integrity of historic fabric. This may be as simple as re-hanging a gutter, reattaching a downspout or repairing a damaged roof. While this type of work may not always seem skillful or glorious in the traditional sense, it is almost always an effective way to extend

the useful life of historic materials. Our second job is to recreate historic materials and workmanship.

Let me give you a practical example of what I mean. Several years ago, Dell Corporation was contacted by a well-known Washington, D.C. architect and asked to give a "second opinion" on a vintage roof. The flat-seamed metal roof and built-in gutters covered approximately 5,000 square feet and had been installed sometime early in this century. The grand old house had long ceased to be a private residence and had been occupied for nearly half a century by the membership of a private club. The management and members of the club had been informed that the roof was in dire need of replacement. The appearance of the roof indeed seemed to confirm this assessment. There was peeling paint, rust and what appeared to be open seams in the metal. There was even plaster damage on the ceilings below that seemed to confirm that the old roof was leaking.

When we examined the roof, we found that once the peeling paint was scraped off, the metal substrate was in very serviceable condition. The rust was mostly a light surface coating. What appeared to be opened seams were just cracks in previously applied patching materials. (Most of which, incidentally, were inappropriate and later removed.) Nearly all of the interior plaster damage was found to be the result of leaking skylights or vents. Ultimately, only two

leaks were identified in the roof membrane itself.

Dell Corporation recommended a maintenance plan to the membership. They decided to set aside a small annual budget for its execution. Over a period of 3 years, we spent several days each summer cleaning, repairing, priming and painting the priority areas of the roof and built-in gutters. During the fourth year, the entire main roof was cleaned and two finish coats of paint were applied. This cycle of repair and maintenance of the roof has cost less than 25% of the estimated replacement cost. The roof is now in excellent condition, and if appropriate maintenance is continued, the roof can last well into the next century.

Dell Corporation has had an opportunity to work at places like Gunston Hall, Decatur House, Carlyle House, The Library of Congress and The White House, just to name a few. Sometimes the work is the ultimate in "Historic Preservation" and sometimes its "maintenance with an ego". Whichever it is, let me tell you I take great pride in knowing that we are doing our part to extend the life of the historic structure. But without carefully planned and well executed programs of maintenance, this will become an increasingly rare experience for the preservation specialist of the future.

Feel free to contact me personally to talk about the preservation needs of your site or the needs of your clients. ■

PTN's 3rd Annual
**INTERNATIONAL
PRESERVATION
TRADES WORKSHOP**

Gaithersburg, Maryland
November 2, 3 and 4 1999

"If you are a craftsperson involved in historic preservation and working on older structures, this is the place to network, learn from your peers and associates, and find yourself at home."

"You are not allowed to bring slides. You are allowed to bring hammers, notebooks and workgloves. Bring an instrument, bring a lawn chair, bring yourselves."

"The demonstrations/presentations are active exchanges between people with varying degrees of experience and a variety of skills. The openness of the meeting space, the method of presentation and the exchange of ideas turn those who are attending into instructors."

Excerpts from the Sept./Oct. PIN Newsletter, as found in each issue of Clem Labine's Traditional Building, or online at www.PIN.org.

This is the gathering of the trades.

Dell Corporation Preservation Quarterly
Volume 1, Issue 1
a quarterly publication by
Dell Corporation
P.O. Box 1462, Rockville, MD 20849

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If you would like to receive future issues of this newsletter, or if you would like to make any comments or suggestions, please contact us at 301.279.2612.

Mark's World by Mark Clark



"...I've always had a concern for Historic Preservation. For instance I use my Grandfather's original 1911 hammer everyday. Of course my uncle replaced the head in 1957, and I had to get a new handle last week..."

A CLOSER LOOK...

by Bryan Blundell,
President of Dell Corporation

Welcome to the first issue of Dell Corporation's Preservation Quarterly. Making this newsletter available to you has been a real work of dedication by all the staff with special efforts by Mandy Campbell Berry and Mark Clark. The purpose of this Quarterly is to share information that we believe you will find useful and to let you know about some of the activities of Dell Corporation.

In keeping with the main focus of our preservation efforts, we will be pointing out the importance of maintenance and many of the philosophies and techniques of saving historic materials. Too many times we observe the unnecessary damage and removal of historic elements and details. It is our hope that we can influence the saving of more of our material history through careful and appropriate consideration in dealing with our historic structures.

Please let us know of any topics that you feel should be addressed in future issues of the Preservation Quarterly.

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We welcome this opportunity to introduce you to the many aspects of Dell Corporation, in the hopes that you will call us first for your next preservation project.

In reading this publication throughout the year, you will notice a distinct emphasis on maintenance. Good, sound maintenance is the backbone of Historic Preservation, and is a realistic description of our approach. As you know, every aspect of the built environment has maintenance issues by virtue of being exposed to the natural environment and use. Being mindful and responsive to these issues not only extends the useful life of the original building materials, but also saves the money which might ultimately be required for replacement or more significant repair work.

Dell Corporation has many years of experience in offering diverse preservation services, and in working many museum staff members and directors, architects, engineers, and owners. Our commitment of sensitivity to the integrity of historic sites as well as our recognition of the importance of solid, efficient and communicative working relationships with other project members is the key to our approach.

Thank you for taking the time to read the first Dell Corporation Preservation Quarterly. Please take a moment to contact our offices at 301.279.2612 to offer your suggestions and thoughts on this new publication, and as always, we look forward to discussing your upcoming projects with you. ■

PRODUCT REVIEW: *HydroClear*

by Mark Clark

I recently tried out a product called HydroClear. I tested the material on various wood surfaces in our shop and liked the results. As a first field project, I applied it to the base of an unpainted wood totem pole (yes, really... a totem pole) that sets in the garden of one of our clients. Several days after the application, I went back to see how it looked. The HydroClear was basically invisible. After spraying the surface with water, there was no distinct difference in the appearance of the bare wood and the wood treated with HydroClear. The most discernible variance was that the water "beaded" up on the HydroClear surface instead of being absorbed immediately into the wood.



The manufacturers tell me that HydroClear is a suspension of synthetic acrylic resins and other materials in water. It dries in minutes and is absorbed into the surface of the wood to which it is applied. The co-polymer resins react with the surface wood fibers to create a tough skin that repels moisture while permitting vapor transmission.

HydroClear substantially reduces the effects of weathering due to wear, stains and moisture. Once cured, it is nontoxic, nonflammable and not slippery (when wet). It meets OSHA and EPA requirements for safety and ozone depletion.

HydroClear and other tinted Hydro- products were developed in the UK and marketed to the boating industry. Recently a new manufacturer has made the product available in the US. I think the Hydroproducts may have real potential in a variety of interior and exterior applications, from wood shingle roofs to stained siding, to bright finishes where urethanes and oil based spar varnishes are traditionally used. I am going to try it on my dad's 20 year old, unpainted deck next. *For more information on the product, contact PRG, Inc. in Rockville, MD. Phone: 301-309-2222, Fax 301-279-7885.*

FALL MAINTENANCE TIPS - *Drainage*

- 1.) Inspect chimney, dormer & valley flashings. Repair damaged areas to reduce risk of interior wall and ceiling damage.
- 2.) Clean debris from gutters and downspouts to help prevent ice damming.
- 3.) Adjust downspout leaders and splash blocks to direct water away from the building.
- 4.) Make sure windows and doors close tightly.
- 5.) Contact Dell Corp. for implimenting a maintenance plan for your property.

The Preservation Quarterly

This Issue Featuring:

Maintaining Historic Structures

Product Review: HydroClear

Fall Maintenance Tips

Preservation Happenings

Mark's World

Helpful Hints: Epoxies

and more...

HELPFUL HINTS : *Epoxies*

Epoxies are thermal setting and thus create heat as they cure. When sufficient amounts of part A and B are mixed, heat is generated. If the epoxy components are warm when mixed, or if the environment is sufficiently warm, the energy generated by the setting process can cause the epoxy to reach temperatures high enough to melt plastic bottles and blister skin. Basically, the warmer the environment, the shorter the working time or pot-life.



There are several ways to extend the pot-life. The most obvious ones being, don't work in direct sun and try to work in temperatures between 60° and 72°F. However when conditions are not ideal, here is a suggestion. Place the tightly sealed containers in a plastic bag and set in a containers of ice water. Do not allow them to freeze. By starting out with cooler components, the gross heat that is generated will be reduced, thus increasing the pot-life. With a little practice, you will be able to extend your working time and increase the quality of your work, even when conditions are less than ideal.

P.S. It's also a good idea to keep a bucket of sand handy when working with low-viscosity epoxies. If you have excess material, instead of ruining your bottle by letting the epoxy cure . . . squirt the excess into the sand. When it cures, remove the clump and it is ready for disposal. *Mark Clark, Preservation Specialist, Dell Corporation.*

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Preservation Specialties

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