
CHOOSING A PHILOSOPHY FOR YOUR HISTORIC STRUCTURE

by Mandy Campbell Berry

The most critical job of a steward or care-taker of a historic property is to make solid, well informed decisions for their building's life. This is an extremely simplistic statement, but in exploring what influences you to make your decisions, you are able to better understand the life of the building. This will enable you to recognize the philosophy which best suits your intentions. A building's philosophy articulates why people are interested and concerned about the building. The philosophy will help guide the decisions that need to be made to maintain, preserve and direct the life of the structure. The benefits of creating such a basic document are many.

Very often stewards do not think of their historic property in a "holistic" sense, but rather look upon the structure as a collection of parts, that was built in a certain year, by certain people, in a certain style, using certain materials for a certain purpose. Often the importance of the structure is that "so and

so" lived there, ate there, died there or slept there. You research and strive to learn why the structure is unique, and designate particular elements sacred. You recognize your use for the structure, and either struggle with how our modern conveniences might compromise the integrity of the features that you most value, or eagerly make changes and point to the remarkable improvements. As stewards you should create a sense of understanding and mission which can be shared with the structures community, both social and physical. You explore details and goals, and ponder the landscape, future repairs, maintenance, growth, HVAC systems, environmental concerns, materials, and parking. You quickly place priority on the "who" and "where", (intentionally deferring the "when" and "how" to budgetary restrictions), and lose sight of "why". A general description of "why" can protect your building from many inappropriate interventions, and is incredibly valuable

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PHILOSOPHY IN ACTION

by Mark Clark



Dell Preservation Technician investigating the stucco surface on the John Carlyle House in Alexandria, Virginia.

Recently we were asked by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority to look at the cracks in the exterior stucco walls of the Carlyle House in Alexandria, Virginia. The Georgian style home was built in 1753 of local Aquia Creek sandstone. The house survived multiple owners over hundreds of years. By the time of the American Bicentennial, the structure was nearly a ruin. It was during that period the Park Authority took action to save and restore the house.

One of the first problems the Park Authority faced was deciding how to deal with the exterior stone walls. Surviving letters from John Carlyle indicate that there were problems with some of the building materials and workmanship almost from the day construction began. While an exact date is not known, it is believed that the two side and back walls of the house

were covered in stucco by the end of the 18th century. During the restoration of the house in 1976, a decision was made to remove the existing stucco so the walls could be repaired. Ultimately, the front facade of the house was covered with a sandstone veneer to mimic the original. A decision was made to recover the sides and back of the house with stucco. Over the years, the stucco had developed cracks and "hollow" sounding areas. There was some whitish material on either side of most of the cracks. There was a general concern for the stability of the stucco.

The Carlyle House director indicated that part of their basic philosophy was to represent the house in a specific time period and to save existing historic fabric. With these two parts of the philosophy as a guide, it was decided that the first step in the process

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MID-WINTER MAINTENANCE TIPS

You may think you cannot do any maintenance work between now and the spring. Look over the following checklist and see how routine maintenance can reduce deterioration to your historic structure.

- Routinely check and clean gutters and down spouts.
- Does ice or snow build up on ledges, causing damage? Look to correct the cause.
- Do downspouts freeze solid? Install heat tape to avoid splitting.
- Remove snow from walkways to reduce use of salt which can damage concrete and masonry.
- Is condensation on windows causing paint problems? Look to correct the cause.
- Plan for Spring, call Dell Corporation at 301-279-2612**

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would be for Dell Corporation to document the condition of the modern stucco, and to some extent, its connection to the original stone substrate. A synopsis of our conditions survey is as follows:

1. We started out by "mapping" the stucco in two ways.

a.) Soundings were made with a wooden mallet over a predetermined pattern and the results were recorded on an elevation drawing.

b.) Each crack was numbered, measured and the results were plotted on an elevation drawing.

2. The next step was to try to determine what may be causing the whitish deposits on either side the cracks. A resistance moisture meter was used to determine the relative level of "soluble salts" on the surface of the stucco.

3. Stucco was removed from two sections, one that was tight and the other loose. The bond between the layers of stucco and the bond to the stone was observed for obvious failure conditions. The condition of the stone substrate was noted.

4. A sample of each layer of stucco was dissolved to look at its probable components.

5. A meeting was held with the Park Authority to discuss the findings and recommendations.

The information that Dell Corporation gathered during the survey helped to provide a baseline condition for developing maintenance methods that were

appropriate to the specific conditions and site philosophy. An argument could have been made for the removal of the modern stucco. However, in the areas that were observed, the stucco had been applied directly to the stone substrate. This made its removal without damage to the original stone, difficult at best. The hammer soundings seemed to indicate that the majority of the stucco was tight. The moisture meter showed elevated levels of soluble salts at the cracks, which was consistent with moisture migration through the cracks. The Park Authority indicated that the discoloration around the cracks was not an aesthetic issue, so overall cleaning of the surface was not required. It was recommended that the cracks be sealed with a flexible sealant to reduce water infiltration into and out of the substrate. The color of the sealant was selected in an effort to blend in with the stucco, and sand was applied to the surface to help with visual blending. It was also recommended that annual surveys be undertaken to provide reasonable information as to the condition of the stucco from year to year. Annual maintenance can go a long way to stabilize the current condition of the stucco, thus saving historic material and precious operating dollars. Let Dell Corporation help you to determine an appropriate course of action for your site. ■

Mark's World

by Mark Clark



"...okay, maybe we rethink the exterior painting idea..."

A CLOSER LOOK...

by Bryan Blundell

President of Dell Corporation

In this second issue of Dell Corporation's Preservation Quarterly, we briefly address the value of formalizing the basic philosophies of a historic building. Our hope is that by reviewing this topic it can help you to think about your building in a way that will assist you with future decisions. Preservation is about connecting the community to its past. So start with what the building means to the close knit and the larger community. The usefulness of this effort will become obvious as you use it to provide guidelines and boundaries in how to deal with the ongoing life of your building.

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to the people you employ to work on your building. To step back and make sweeping generalities may seem far too vague and obvious to be constructive. It is not. There are many ways to approach your stewardship, just as there are various combinations of communities, buildings and intentions. The base philosophy is the personality of your building.

Now, how do you define your philosophy? Start by creating a list of definitive truths about the building from your point of view as the steward(s). Being mindless of budget limitations is perhaps the most difficult part of this, however it is also very important, as being tied to a budget will dilute your vision. This philosophy will not negate any decisions that need to be made with finances as a limiting consideration. The philosophy instead may help to offer an acceptable range of options, and a guide by which to rank individual tasks under the umbrella of your larger priorities. This base philosophy should be telling of how the building fits into its social and physical community. This relationship is an important tie, as it indicates

PRODUCT REVIEW: VA Limeworks Lime Putty

by Mark Clark

The Virginia Lime Works (VLW), has revived a dying art by producing lime putty in the traditional manner. VLW uses a wood-fired kiln to burn limestone and make quicklime (Calcium Oxide). They then slake the quicklime in water, turning it into lime putty, which is sieved into three grades: coarse for masonry, fine for plaster and intonaco for frescos. The three types of putties are then aged until ready for your project. Several companies produce pre-packaged lime putty. However, most (if not all) of these lime manufacturers use gas-fired kilns that work at different temperatures than the wood kiln. You can make your own lime putty by slaking bagged hydrated mason's lime. While both of these methods for procuring lime putty are available, I have found there was always something missing in the lime putty itself. I really couldn't put my finger on it until I used the coarse lime putty from Virginia Lime Works.

The first thing I noticed was the texture. There are some impurities in the wood-fired lime putty that just don't appear in other limes that are commercially available. The wood-firing process results in a lime putty that creates a very "plastic" and workable mortar or plaster. Another notable quality of VLW's putty is the off-white color. Repair mortars made with hydrated mason's lime often tend to be "too white". Without adding colorants that may become unstable, it can be difficult to achieve the mellow off-white of many historic mortars. I was working on a mortar recipe for one of the Smithsonian Institution's museums, and used VLW's product in a trial batch. Voila! The mortar was as near to what I believed to be the original color as I could hope for. Of course the color, size and type of sand had an impact as well, but the mortar wasn't dead-white, and that was the quality I had not been able to achieve prior to using VLW's lime putty.

*Product will be available after April 17th, 2000 from PRG, Inc. Tel: 301-309-2222 www.PRGinc.com
Also available from PRG: Animal Hair for Plaster, call for details*

your priorities and intentions for how the building is used and perceived.

I have started with the ideas of people and history, both of which are very common in considering any historic building. This is just a starting point, however, to the idea of bringing a philosophy to your structure. It is important to ask yourself specific questions beyond this, which address the special qualities of your community, building and intentions. The answers (philosophy) will guide your discussions. Considering these facets of what is important to your specific situation distinguishes your efforts, your community and your building, and will guide your actions. Furthermore, the availability of such information gives your community an idea immediately of who you are and gives your contractors information as to what solutions and suggestions may or may not be acceptable.

Dell Corporation is experienced in helping to identify the philosophy for specific and unique historic sites. Dell is also able to offer guidance as to how to make the process of determining a philosophy a

manageable effort.

In the evolution of such a philosophy you will look at, not only how your site fits into the community, but also back to past documentation. This is a good time to create documentation and archive policies and files. As things have been changed in the past, they may also be adapted to suit your needs, and as people concerned with historic preservation, it is important not to make changes without documenting them. Keep your maintenance records and consultation reports. These can provide key information in determining solutions to continuing problems or maintenance issues in the future. Research revealing alterations and conditions in the past, in combination with your other records and files, will be very useful in helping to implement activities consistent with the philosophy and rich history of the building. Feel free to call us at 301-279-2612 to discuss the benefits of creating a philosophy for your structure. ■

The Preservation Quarterly

This issue featuring:



Choosing a Philosophy for your Historic Structure
Philosophy in Action
Product Review on Lime Putty from VA Limeworks
Maintenance Tips, Helpful Hints and A Closer Look...



and more!

HELPFUL HINTS : *Wood Dutchmen*

A "Dutchman" is not always a guy from Holland. In carpentry, the term "Dutchman" is used to describe a wood patch used in a repair. The term means much the same thing in stonework. I have found a way to get a tighter fitting Dutchman. First cut the patching material slightly larger than the area that is to be filled. Next, place the patching material over the void and trace an outline around the patch. Then cut back the area around the void to the outline. This is much easier than trying to cut the patch to fit the void, and produces a tighter, cleaner finished job. Of course, removal of material, especially historic material, is not always an appropriate option. In cases such as this, epoxy wood-filler or epoxy wood-filler in combination with an undersized wood Dutchman may work.

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