

IT WENT JUST AS WE HAD PLANNED by Bryan Blundell

"The best laid plans....", "Don't count your chickens before they hatch", "Some times you eat the bear, some times the bear eats you", "Oops". These are all familiar sayings. Why are they familiar? Because we all know things don't always go just as planned. This is true with everything from high tech efforts to mundane tasks. This "Oops Factor" sometimes seems especially true for construction projects. On top of this, it seems there is a general impression that this is even truer for historic preservation related projects.

Construction projects involving historic preservation, in many ways, are no different than any other type of project. They all start with an anticipated end result. They all require a level of understanding as to the necessary steps to get from the beginning to the end. They all have limitations and requirements that need to be met. Each project hopefully follows an orderly sequence of steps. Each new step builds on the previous accomplishments. Each step happens within its expected time, duration and at the anticipated level of quality. Doesn't this sound like every construction project or family vacation, that you have ever been involved with. Ha..Ha..Ha.. The short answer is NOOOOOO.

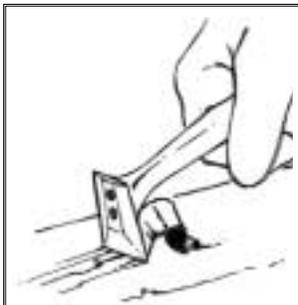
The world is real and real situations have a way of including unexpected variations and surprises. In the real world, plans are always being adjusted to deal with the unanticipated details. When these surprises occur in real life adjustments are made. Tempers may rise and steam may be blown off in the process, but the end result should be that appropriate changes are made as required. If experienced and competent people are involved, they are better able to make minor adjustments so that unanticipated details have minimal, if any, negative overall affect on the situation.

When unexpected details are encountered by individuals with minimal experience or during a process that has not been well planned, there is a tendency for an over reaction to occur and disproportionately large amounts of energy and effort to be expended. When this happens on a project that requires exact attention to details, the results can be close to disastrous. In a controlled environment, where the number of variables is limited, inexperience may be overcome by providing detailed written directions. Many times we see historic preservation projects that are handled in this manner.

(IT WENT continued on Page 3)

A PLAN "B" OF ACTION by Mark Clark

The Washington National Cathedral is the second largest Cathedral in the United States and the sixth largest in the world. The nave is 1/10th of a mile long and the Cathedral's commanding site just off of



Dell Corporation used various methods to remove 75 years worth of varnish and wax from Cathedral flooring including hand scraping.

Wisconsin Avenue makes its north tower the highest point in Washington DC. Stone masons, carpenters, tile setters, sculptors, stained-glass workers and artisans of every sort have labored since 1899 to create a monument and sanctuary, for Washingtonians, and the whole country as well. So as with any of Dell's projects there was appropriate reverence and awe given for the tradespeople that had come before.

At the Cathedral, it had been decided to install a localized air-conditioning system. This was due to the fact that summertime temperatures can reach over 100 degrees in the Great Choir Area.

area is located toward the front of the nave, between the pulpit and the High Altar. It consists of two sets of three tiered rows of carved oak pews which face each other, separated by an open area of marble floor. The tiered floors were made of white oak. In order to install the ductwork and registers for parts of the air conditioning system, the two lower rows of pews and their oak flooring had been temporarily removed. The Cathedral's Facilities staff, along with their Historic Preservation Director, decided to have the oak floors cleaned and refinished prior to reinstalling the pews. Dell Corporation was asked to develop and implement a plan for executing this part of the project. After consultation with the Cathedral staff, it was agreed that the project would follow some basic criterion.

1. Cleaning and refinishing the oak flooring was to be completed in time to reinstall the pews prior to Palm Sunday (only a few weeks away.)
- 2.. The Oak Flooring was considered historic material, so removal of the finish with a drum sander was not deemed an appropriate method. Due to the public nature of the Cathedral, the job also had a "no dust" mandate. The console and some of the pipes of the organ were located in the work area, so sanding here would be especially inappropriate.

(PLAN B Continued on Page 2)

The Facilities Manager for the Cathedral called Dell Corporation in to look at refinishing oak flooring in the Great Choir area. The Choir

SUMMER PAINTING TIPS

1. Start early in the morning and perform difficult or high tasks before the midday sun gets around.
2. Work on the "shady" side of the building whenever possible, especially on those blistering hot days. Too much direct sun is not healthy for you or the paint you are applying. Elevated surface temperatures can cause paint to dry too quickly and contribute to premature paint failure.
3. If it looks like rain, especially in the afternoon, you can usually bet getting wet is not far off. Acrylic and oil-based paints both need several hours of drying time before they form a film that will resist moisture. Most importantly though, rain on a summer afternoon is usually accompanied by thunder and lightning...

SO GET OFF THE ALUMINUM LADDER! . . . ANY LADDER!

(PLAN B continued from page 1)

3. Given the historic nature of the material, it was important that the patina and character of the flooring remain. Again, sanding was not appropriate
4. The color and luster of the new finish should blend with the aesthetics of the existing pews and panels walls, which were not being refinished.
5. The work day was limited due to morning, afternoon and special services.
6. The visiting public would be in close proximity to the work area at any given time during the day. Any chemicals that were used must be reasonably safe and not have a suspicious odor.

Dell Corporation tested various methods for removing the existing thick, brittle finish. The finish appeared to be multiple coats of varnish over which were multiple layers of various waxes and dirt. It turned out that Peel Away #5 was the most effective of the strippers that were tested. The plan was to apply the stripper, allow an appropriate dwell time, scoop up the stripper and varnish residue with broadknives and then "final clean" the floor with a ReCyClean machine (a power-wash/vacuum-capture system). The floor would then be buffed gently with a wax stripping screen, stained and varnished.

Well, applying the stripper went as planned...sort of. In some areas, the finish was topped with an extra thick waxy film. This proved resistant to the stripper. (While the stripper softened the old finish, it by no means made removal easy.) So "Plan B" was used: Section by section the stripper was left to dwell overnight and then the sticky results were removed with hand scrapers the next day. The flooring was then scrubbed with bronze wool pads and clear water to remove the residue. Finally, the floor was rinsed with the ReCyClean unit, buffed with the stripping screen and refinished as originally planned...sort of.

Years of constant wear had left a light colored

strip of wood down the center of each aisle. Blending this light stripe into the surrounding floor proved to be a challenge. A thin coat of oil-based stain was applied to the entire floor, immediately wiped down and then allowed to dry for 48 hours. A heavier coat of stain was applied to the light areas and allowed to dry until it began to get tacky. These areas were then wiped down and the stain was allowed to dry for 48 hours. Then, three coats of varnish were applied and each coat was buffed between applications. The results were considered outstanding by both the Cathedral staff and passersby. The best part was that whether by "Plan A" or "Plan B" the process was completed ahead of schedule and everything worked out just fine. In the evolution of this specific project, here are the steps that we followed...

1. Planning the project:
 - a. Determine with the project team what basic philosophy and needs will direct the process.
 - b. Establish a realistic time frame for completing the project.
 - c. Test to make sure the materials and methods are appropriate for the project.
 - d. Establish what is expected to be the step by step project schedule.
2. Project process:
 - a. Attack the project as planned.
 - b. As variables and problems arise, adjust materials and methods to achieve planned schedule and goals.
 - c. Pay attention to details.

When dealing with reality, be flexible and realize that "Plan A" will most likely need modification. Consider these steps when your next project comes along. Remember, if you ever have any questions, give us a call and we will be happy to try to help.

Monroe Workshops Training Classes

- Aug. 21-23 "Wood Deterioration and Repair"
 Sep. 11-13 "Use Of Lime Mortars"
 Oct. 9-11 "Use of Lime Mortars"
 Dec. 4-6 "Fresco Painting"

For Additional Information
 Call: 804.929.8113

Or Visit

<http://www.DellCorp.com/workshops.html>

Dell Corporation Preservation Quarterly

Volume 1, Issue 3
 a quarterly publication by
 Dell Corporation
 P.O. Box 1462, Rockville, MD 20849

Editors: J. Bryan Blundell
 Carol G. Blundell
 Mark D. Clark
 David B. Wells

(c) 2000, Dell Corporation

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



Reminder to Self...Never Bid A Gutter Cleaning Job Over The Phone Again.

Dell Corporation Preservation Specialties P.O. Box 1462 Rockville, MD 20849-1462
 Telephone (301) 279-2612 Fax (301) 279-7885 E-mail: info@DellCorp.com

A CLOSER LOOK...

by Bryan Blundell

President of Dell Corporation

Teamwork is an important factor in achieving goals. Information, knowledge and experience can be shared through teamwork, thus providing a comfortable and an on-going learning environment. With this in mind, Dell Corp is delighted to announce a team effort of four different companies,

Dell Corporation

Preservation Resource Group

Price Masonry Contractors

Virginia Lime Works

These companies have joined together to provide training classes related to preservation skills. Four classes are currently scheduled for the last half of 2000. (For exact dates see Page 2 of this issue.) These classes will be held in Monroe, Virginia utilizing accommodations and classroom space at Sweet Briar College with hands-on activities located at the 'Monroe Place' and 'The Farm'.

**For additional information call:
804-929-8113.**

(IT WENT continued from page 1)

The process of obtaining a price for work is based on the belief that providing detailed written specifications can overcome the variables of a project. On some projects, the perception exists that with historic preservation it is possible to provide a set of specifications, detailed enough, to furnish the necessary experience. As a result, it is expected that the specifications are so precise that the work is not allowed to deviate from that predetermined path and process. This puts the reality of the world at odds with the perceived world of the specifications. A good set of specs is important on a project but not when they lead to the belief that the work is a 'paint by number' proposition.

When working on a project, keep in mind the variables that will influence the outcome. These include everything: materials; techniques; time frames; initial costs; and people. All of these factors will influence the ultimate long-term cost of the project. Most likely the biggest variable will be the people. People will be the greatest factor influencing the ultimate success or failure of the end result. Questions: Have the people that are asking for the work to be done identified the need and given the right directions? Have

PRODUCT REVIEW: ProPrep Scrapers

by Mark Clark

I have been involved in construction, maintenance or historic preservation for 25 years. In that time, I have had occasion to scrape off literally hundreds of pounds of paint and finishes in preparation for repainting or refinishing. I hated every second of it. Now here is the point where the salesman says, "Until Now!". Well you won't read that here my friends. I still hate to scrape, but there is a tool available that at least helps to reduce the agony.

ProPrep scrapers were designed by a tradesperson for a tradesperson. The ProPrep system consists of two different handles and eight interchangeable blades. There is a large headed handle for large blades and a small headed handle for the small blades (makes sense, huh?). The blades are shaped to fit the contours of panels, moldings and other surfaces that you encounter in the real world when removing paint. The blades are made of stainless steel and can be easily sharpened or replaced as needed. The nylon handles are shaped to fit a human hand that has to use a tool for hours at a time. I find that both the blades and the handles stand up to chemical paint removers and high temperatures from heat guns. The blades don't clog up on the backside of the blade like most paint scrapers and the handles are guaranteed for life.

My field personnel started using these 6 years ago and now they won't use anything else. We recently used them with great success to remove 75 years worth of old varnish and wax from historic oak flooring in the nave at the Washington National Cathedral. Later this summer, we will use the ProPrep system to remove paint during our restoration efforts on wood windows at the Enoch Pratt House/Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, MD. No matter how nice or important the site, I don't think I will ever like scraping paint, but with a ProPrep scraper I know I have the best tool for an otherwise difficult job.

For more information on this or any other featured products, contact PRG, Inc.

Phone: 800.774.7891 or (800.PRG.7,8,9,10)

the people that will do the work understood the request and have the background to accomplish the task?

Experience and ability is important when dealing with any aspect of a project, especially people.

Along with the experience and ability of the various members involved in a project, another important factor is the need to work as a team. Depending on the project, the team may be somewhere in between small and amazingly large. Either way, communication between team members is very important. Many times it is beneficial to have the team working together before the first drawings are made and stay active until after the last scraps of debris are swept into the dustpan at the end of the physical project. By working as a team, each individual can provide others with bits and pieces of their experience in an effort to avoid some of those many little (and not so little) surprises that can pop up. In the process of the team sharing experience and knowledge, the prospect of a more successful conclusion, to the overall effort, is likely. Not only does this reduce the surprises during the construction process but can provide better results which could reduce problems and maintenance

in the future. The other dimension of a successful team effort is the education that each member experiences during the process of sharing knowledge with others.

Working as a team and learning from one another is a basic component of a community. There is no need for each person in a community to invent a wheel because the wheel is part of the legacy of the community. The team builds on the information, knowledge and experience that exists within its members (community). This provides an opportunity for knowledge and wisdom to be passed from one generation to the next. It is this sharing that makes for a stronger community. The whole concept of historic preservation is based on the importance of community. The belief is that by retaining appropriate segments of the past, there is the opportunity for information, knowledge and experience to be shared over generations. This can provide a sense of continuity, participation and ownership that is important in everyone's day-to-day life. It is this positive effort of teamwork and cooperation that can reduce and moderate the negative surprises that life offers.

HELPFUL HINTS : *Removing Paint With Heat Guns From Wooden Surfaces.*

There are times when removing paint or finishes with chemical strippers is not appropriate for one reason or another. At times such as these, the use of controlled heat may be considered to soften and remove the paint. In times past, open flame was often used as a heat source. An increased awareness of the health risks associated with paint fumes and the obvious dangers of using torches, has eliminated this as a viable option in most situations. However, in the practiced hands of a trained tradesperson, heat-guns can remove paint safely and quickly. The trick to removing paint efficiently is applying the right amount of heat to soften and lift the paint, while doing the least amount of harm to the substrate. Many people use the heat-gun to "cook" the paint off. By burning the paint to a crisp, the chance of creating hazardous fumes is increased, as is the possibility of damaging wood or plaster substrates. Here are some suggestions that may help you with your next project.

1. Hold the heat-gun 5-6 inches away from the surface and apply high heat evenly over a small area.
2. Usually you will see the paint film begin to swell slightly. This means the paint has come loose from the substrate and is soft enough to be removed.
3. Use a sharp scraper or putty knife to carefully remove the softened paint film. Continue applying heat just beyond the area where you are working. You will find that with practice, it is possible to keep the heat-gun and scraper moving: heating an area, then scraping while heating the next area, etc.
4. Oil based paints seem to "react" more to heat by swelling, bubbling and visibly lifting off of the substrate.
5. Acrylic/latex paints may appear tight even after heat has been applied. Don't worry, they are usually ready to be removed. Don't wait until the paint turns black and crispy.
6. Many times, the original primer is resistant to removal. If you are not stripping the surface for staining and varnish, don't worry, leave it. Clean and sand the surface, prime it and you will be ready for your finish coats. If you are cleaning the substrate for staining, use sandpaper to remove the primer residue, and remember that wet-sanding can help reduce dust.
7. Keep the heat even and back-off if the paint begins to "cook".
8. Wear appropriate protective gear, and work in a well ventilated space.
9. Most of all, don't rush the job.

Have fun and good luck with your next paint removal project.

Mark Clark, *Preservation Specialist*, Dell Corporation

The Preservation Quarterly

This issue featuring:

It Went Just As We Had Planned

A Plan "B" Of Action

Product Review on ProPrep Scrapers

Painting Tips, Helpful Hints and A Closer Look...

and more!

Dell Corporation

Preservation Specialties

P.O. Box 1462

Rockville, MD 20849-1462 USA

Telephone (301) 279-2612

Facsimile (301) 279-7885

E-mail: info@DellCorp.com

Presorted Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
Suburban, MD
Permit # 3024