



## Evaluating Non-Historic Exteriors

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### Assessing Integrity

Historic places evolve, and these changes may be determined to be historic following National Register guidelines. The important principle illustrated in this document is not that a given remodeling material is or is not acceptable in assessing historic integrity for National Register listing or eligibility, but that the historic context developed in the nomination is essential in evaluating historic changes. A guiding principle, as stated in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (Criteria Bulletin)*, is found on its very first page:

Decisions concerning the significance, historic integrity, documentation, and treatment of properties can be made reliably only when the resource is evaluated within its historic context.

To qualify for inclusion in the National Register, a property must represent a significant part of the history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture of an area, be it local, state, or national. But it must also present the characteristics that make it a good representative of properties associated with that aspect of the past; that is, it must have historic integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, location, and/or feeling.

The examples in this inaugural issue of the *Best Practices Review* look at assessing the integrity of buildings with non-historic exteriors. The illustrated examples are all listed properties in the National Register.

This publication compliments the guidance provided in National Register Bulletins by providing examples on specific topics. Your feedback is welcome; contact Sherry Frear, Chief & Deputy Keeper, [sherry\\_frear@nps.gov](mailto:sherry_frear@nps.gov).

For copies of the nominations referenced in this document, please visit our [Database and Research](#) page. For National Register Bulletins and other guidance, please visit our [Publications](#) page. All images are from National Register nominations unless otherwise noted.

As provided in the *Criteria Bulletin*, at page 44,

- Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance.
- Historic properties either retain integrity (that is, convey their significance) or they do not.
- Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant.

The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance.

### Key Concept



If the historic exterior building material is covered by non-historic material (such as modern siding), the property can still be eligible *if* the significant form, features, and detailing are not obscured. If a property's exterior is [obscured] by a non-historic false front or curtain wall, the property will not qualify under Criteria A, B, or C, because it does not retain the visual quality necessary to convey historic or architectural significance.

Such a property also cannot be considered a contributing element in a historic district, because it does not add to the district's sense of time and place. If the false front or curtain wall is removed and the original building materials are intact, then the property's integrity can be re-evaluated.

Excerpted from *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, p. 47.

Presented in this *Best Practices Review* are two groups of case studies in which exterior materials are not original to historic buildings. The first group looks at artificial veneer stone, the second at manufactured weatherboards. Both were typically applied over existing brick or siding. These materials were developed primarily to remodel exterior appearance and minimize maintenance, particularly when applied over wood siding. Their use may radically change appearances, especially when architectural ornamentation is also removed, usually for ease of installation. However, careful installation can preserve essential physical features and support National Register eligibility under the seven aspects of integrity, namely, location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and/or association.

## Simulated Masonry

### Perma-Stone, Formstone, and other proprietary products

A variety of manufactured products were developed to imitate masonry such as brick and stone. Beginning c. 1929, with the Perma-Stone Company in Columbus, Ohio, these products proliferated to the extent that it is difficult to document the manufacturer and date of application. Typically, this material was applied over existing exterior surfaces, often using a steel lath substrate for wood surfaces. Depending upon the method of application, removal can be problematic for original surfaces. Damage to underlying historic materials should be avoided in any removal effort.

### St. Aloysius Orphanage

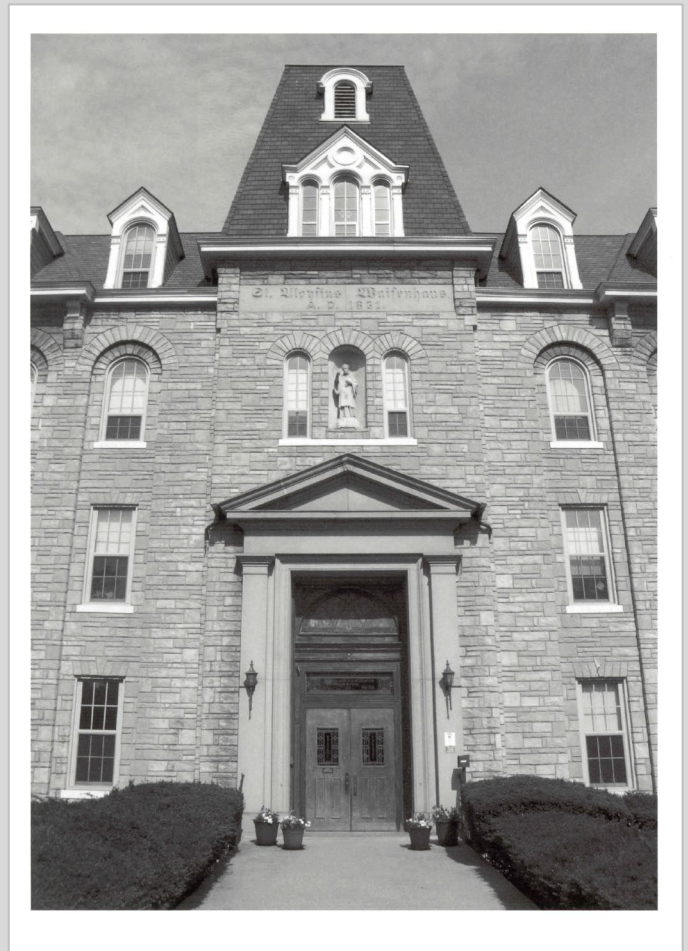
Cincinnati, Ohio, NR Ref. 12000835

Listed 2012 as a building with a period of significance of 1856–1960 under Criterion A for social history

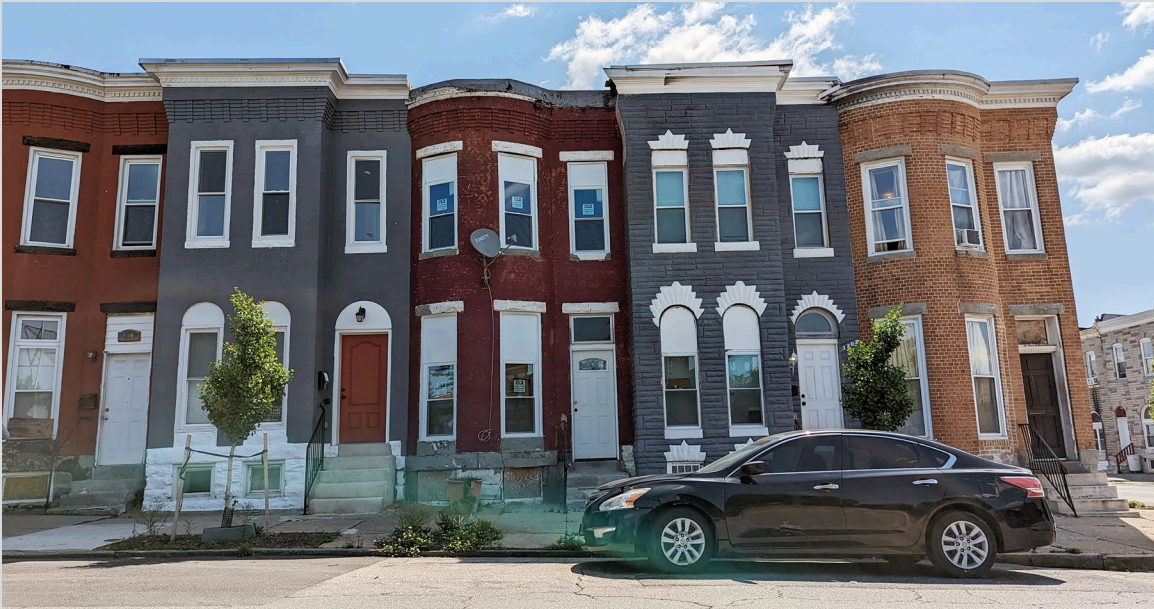
The nomination documents that in 1953, the building exterior's soft brick was deteriorating, and Perma-Stone was added. The color chosen closely matched the orphanage's 1923 limestone chapel. Although the application covered brick walls and stone lintels and sills, important character-defining features of the exterior design were maintained by the historic institution. In addition to the mansard roof with its cornice brackets and dormers, the pedimented entrance survives along with historic window openings. The historic context describes a major remodeling of the orphanage within the period of significance. As the area of significance is social history, not architecture, the original nineteenth century design was not the reason for listing, providing greater latitude in assessing integrity.



Postcard showing main building (1856-61) and wings (1869). Courtesy of Cincinnati Public Library, Hamilton County.



Main entrance, c. 2012, as remodeled in 1953 with Perma-Stone added over deteriorated brick.



1300 block of N. Patterson Park, Baltimore, Maryland, 2022. The variety created by veneer stone and painted brick is typical. (S. Frear/NPS).

## East/South Clifton Park Historic District

Baltimore, Maryland, NR Ref. 02001611

Listed 2002 as a district with a period of significance of 1850–c. 1955 under Criteria A for community planning and development, and C for architecture

This very large residential district has over 4,800 contributing resources and less than 100 non-contributing buildings. The district is characterized by long blocks of architecturally modest row houses two or three stories high. Baltimore is well-known for the popularity in the mid-twentieth century of the extensive use of veneer stone (called Formstone in this nomination), usually applied along with a careful retention of many original architectural details. For these simple working-class rowhouses, this is often just cornices and original fenestration patterns. Although the application date of veneer stone may not be readily identifiable, its use generally does not make a building non-contributing to the district. For the East/South Clifton Park Historic District, the nomination includes the following description in the inventory of properties:

Typical alterations to the numerous rowhouses in Baltimore include facing front facades with Formstone, replacement of windows and doors, and replacement of deteriorated elements with modern materials. Elements that evidenced replacement materials include cornices and front stoops. These alterations, however, do not detract from the overall cohesiveness of the district as an entity.

This very broad assessment of integrity is testimony to the context for the distinctive character of Baltimore’s neighborhoods of rowhouses constructed for residents

of modest means. However, the nomination as listed also allows for the removal of veneer stone without affecting contributing status by not identifying veneer stone specifically as a historic material. This may be controversial for those who consider this material historic, but the difficulty of dating its application may be one reason. Regardless of material significance, the removal of veneer stone may not be an appropriate treatment if it causes physical damage to the building. Potential deterioration or destruction of underlying historic materials must be carefully considered before undertaking such work.

Several more recent nominations for large districts in Baltimore (*e.g.*, Upper Fells Point in 2007, Locust Point in 2012, and Brewers Hill in 2014) continue this broad interpretation for contributing properties by accepting houses with veneer stone as contributing. Only “modern” or “new” buildings are listed as a basis for non-contributing status. Subsequent revisions to the documentation could more explicitly recognize veneer stone as “historic.”

## Over-the-Rhine Historic District

Cincinnati, Ohio, NR Ref. 83001985

Listed 1983 and revised 2014 as part of a boundary expansion, as a district with a period of significance of 1840–1941 under Criteria A for commerce, industry, and ethnic heritage; and C for architecture

The Over-the-Rhine Historic District includes nearly 1,280 buildings and structures. The buildings are primarily row houses, semidetached row houses, single family detached buildings, and free-standing commercial, industrial, or institutional buildings.



12th Street between Pendleton and Reading Road, 1983.

National Register if the significant form, features, and detailing are not obscured.

## Sagamore Village Historic District

Portland, Maine, NR Ref. 100005397

Listed 2020 as a district with a period of significance of 1942–1953 under Criteria A for politics and government, and community planning and development; and C for a planned architectural community constructed for war-related industrial housing

Constructed in 1942, all 90 apartment houses and the community building survive on the 29.5-acre site. In 1987, the Portland Housing Authority undertook a lead abatement program that entailed covering wood clapboard siding with vinyl siding. The Housing Authority also replaced all of the wood windows with wood/vinyl combination sash. As stated in the nomination, “[t]he character defining features of the Sagamore Village Historic District are identified in its spatial layout and repetition of forms. The similarity of scale, roof form, fenestration, plan and materials of all the buildings defines the district. The street layout, uniform housing unit setback, uniform side lots, open spaces and undefined lot lines identify the designed character of the district.” Although every building has non-historic weatherboards, the survival of all the buildings in their original form and fenestration creates an intact representation of historic Sagamore Village.

As stated in the 1983 nomination:

A major feature of the Over-the-Rhine that distinguishes it from other areas of the city is its older cohesive character. The visual continuity presented by the majority of buildings is the unifying component that imparts sense of place. The physical relationship of one building adjacent to another in a dense, compact built environment is accentuated by the overall uniform façade lines imposed on the streets. The relative scale, brick building material, height, and architectural detailing blend to create distinctive streetscapes reflecting a particular sense of time and place.

As the image above shows, the character of the district is defined by the large concentration of brick commercial/residential buildings built in the late nineteenth century. As is also evident in this view, the brick walls, simple cornices, and flat stone lintels are character-defining features that create the context for assessing integrity in this district.

## Manufactured Weatherboard

Aluminum, vinyl, engineered wood

The maintenance of wood-sided buildings is a time-consuming effort and often a substantial expense for the homeowner. A product which promises relief from periodic painting and gives the building a new exterior cladding has considerable appeal. For these reasons, aluminum and vinyl siding have been used extensively in rehabilitating the nation's stock of wood frame residential buildings. Nevertheless, if the historic exterior building material is covered by non-historic material, the property can still be eligible for listing in the



Typical housing types.



View of Wedgewood House, 1985.

## Dr. Milton Wedgewood House

Lewiston, Maine, NR Ref. 86000071

Listed 1986 as a building with a period of significance of 1800–1899 under Criterion C for architecture

The Wedgewood House, a three story building with a mansard roof and a four story tower, was built in 1873 for prominent local physician Milton C. Wedgewood. In 1955, aluminum siding was added to the exterior. The wide exposure and lack of corner boards as seen in this image were typical of aluminum siding installation at that time.

The property is significant as an important surviving work of a leading regional architect, Charles F. Douglas. Douglas was well-known in the Lewiston area for his sophisticated interpretation of the mansard and Italianate styles, as well as for his ability to offer house plans which departed from the traditional room arrangements, to serve a client's unique requirements. The Wedgewood House is noteworthy in this regard as the first floor plan was designed to serve as a combined residence and office.

Although the siding does not contribute to the architectural significance of the property, it was installed in a manner to preserve all the known major character-defining features of the building's exterior design. These include the mansard roof and tower with slate shingles, and wood dormers and cornices, as well as wood window and door trim. As stated in the *Criteria Bulletin* at page 47, "if the historic exterior building material is covered by non-historic material (such as modern siding), the property can still be eligible if the significant form, features, and detailing are not obscured."

Note that the 1986 nomination does not meet current documentation standards, as it lacks interior photographs and a building sketch plan.

## Neosho Colored School

Neosho, Missouri, NR Ref. 100000887

Listed 2017 with a period of significance of 1872–1891 under Criteria A for African American history and B for its association with George Washington Carver

The Neosho Colored School was built as a one-room school in 1871. In addition to its significance as a school for African Americans, this rare resource is important as the school where George Washington Carver developed his passion for learning, launching his career.

The building was converted into a residence in 1893. A porch and lean-to on the rear were added outside the period of significance, as well as two generations of siding: fiberboard siding was added after 1956, followed by metal siding in the late twentieth century.

As shown in the 2012 image, the building at that time bore little resemblance to the historic school. A historic structures report in that year documented surviving historic fabric. (Susan Richards Johnson & Associates, 2012.)

In 2016, restoration work revealed historic wood weatherboard, an essential physical feature as it reflects the period of use by African American students, including George Washington Carver. The porch and lean-to, part of the building's non-historic residential use, were removed at that time.

Subsequent work exposed scant evidence of the school's original interior and significant reconstruction is needed bring back its schoolhouse days. Because of the loss of interior features that would physically convey its significance as a school, the building's original form and fenestration, and damaged but surviving wood siding, took on greater importance as character-defining features.

Because of the rarity of the resource and its ability to still convey its historic use as a school—due to its restored form and fenestration, and surviving wood siding—and as a rare surviving African American school that is also associated with George Washington Carver, the property was individually listed in the National Register in 2017.



Sketch by George Washington Carver, c. 1939.  
The house on the left is no longer extant.



Before porch, lean-to, and contemporary siding removal, 2012.



After initial rehabilitation work, c. 2016.

[The National Register of Historic Places](#)

is the official list of buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture.

