

### 3.2.5. Porches and Exterior Stairs

#### Maintenance

- (a) Preserve, maintain, and clean historic porch and exterior stair materials and features according to accepted preservation techniques, unless deteriorated beyond repair (*Appendix G*, SOI Standards 2, 5, 6, 7).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Required for all exterior porches	Required if visible from the public right-of-way (ROW)	Recommended

#### Alterations

- (b) Do not add new porch features or ornamentation where not historically present (SOI Standard 3; see fig. 3-15).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Required for all exterior porches	Required if visible from the public ROW	Recommended

- (c) If replacing deteriorated historic porch materials or features, patch the smallest area possible, matching the materials, dimensions, profile, texture, and configuration of existing historic porch features (SOI Standard 6).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Required for all exterior porches	Required if visible from the public ROW	Recommended

- (d) If historic porch, balcony, or exterior stair railings do not meet current building codes, work with building code officials to determine if an exception may be possible, especially if the porch or balcony is seldom used. For porches and balconies that remain in use, maintain the historic railing and supplement it with a visually unobtrusive higher rail (SOI Standard 9).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Recommended	Recommended	Recommended

- (e) Synthetic replacement materials, such as composite lumber or synthetic materials, may be considered appropriate for replacing deteriorated porch floors or exterior stair treads in some cases,

such as when the porch floor has been previously replaced or when the porch floor is minimally visible (SOI Standard 6).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Appropriate	Appropriate	Appropriate

- (f) Generally, keep front porches open if they were open during the period of significance (SOI Standards 1, 2).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Required	Recommended	Recommended

- (g) Front porch enclosures may be considered appropriate in some cases, provided that they use materials that do not visually detract from the historic character of the building—like non-reflective screening or glass (never opaque)—and are installed in a reversible manner that does not damage historic features (SOI Standards 9, 10).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Inappropriate	Appropriate	Appropriate

- (h) Additions of ramps to comply with ADA standards should consider minimizing damage to historic fabric (SOI Standards 9, 10; see fig. 3-16).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Recommended	Recommended	Recommended

#### Restoration

- (i) If original porch posts are missing and their historic appearance is not documented, replace them with simple supports appropriate to the style and time period (SOI Standard 3).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Required for all exterior porches	Required if visible from the public ROW	Recommended

- (j) If research documents that historic features to the porch's roof are missing, such as decorative brackets or friezes, consider replicating and restoring them (SOI Standards 3, 6).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Recommended	Recommended	Recommended

(k) Remove visible non-historic porch features that diminish the structure's historic integrity (SOI Standards 3, 9).

High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Recommended	Recommended	Recommended



Figure 3-14. Example of original Folk Victorian porch detailing at 421 W. Main. Note how the turned porch posts are integrated into the masonry with attention to detail seldom replicated in non-historic examples. Source: HHM 2002 Survey.



Figure 3-15. Example of original character-defining Craftsman-style porch detailing on a ca. 1920 bungalow at 308 E. San Antonio. Source: National Register Nomination, Fredericksburg Historic District, 1983.



Figure 3-16. Example of an **appropriate** supplemental railing added above a historic balcony railing at 252 E. Main Street. Source: Google Street View.



Figure 3-17. Example of a reversible porch screening that does not damage or obscure historic character-defining features, **appropriate for Low or Medium priorities only**. Source: HHM archives.

Figure 3-18. Examples of **inappropriate** non-historic porch detailing. Source: HHM archives.

**Non-Historic Porch Detailing**

Non-historic elements are commonly found on porches. Original wood porch floors may have been replaced with concrete floors. Original porch posts may have been replaced with posts that do not reflect the building's original style. In addition, non-historic ornament may have been added. Throughout the nation, the popularity of Victorian architecture surged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Many homeowners added Victorian-inspired "gingerbread" detailing where it was not present historically. More recently, the Craftsman style saw a similar burst of popularity, and tapered porch columns were added to many porches without historical evidence. Similarly, faux-Midcentury Modern geometric porch posts and breeze blocks have been added to simple Minimal Traditional houses or houses with no style. All of these non-original features create a false sense of history.

If research documents that a porch feature is non-historic, consider removing it and returning to a more authentic historic appearance. To determine whether the porch detail is historic or not:

- Look at other stylistic elements of the house. Typically, "gingerbread" detailing is original only to Gothic Revival, Folk Victorian, Queen Anne, or Italianate styles. Similarly, tapered columns are original to only Craftsman houses, and decorative wrought iron is original only to Ranch houses or Minimal Traditional houses (with some Craftsman examples).
- Research the building's construction date, following the guidance in *Appendix H*. Original "gingerbread" detailing typically only dates from between ca. 1880 and ca. 1910. Original Craftsman tapered columns date from ca. 1915 to ca. 1935 (with half-columns on brick piers common between ca. 1915 and ca. 1925, then full-height tapered columns gaining popularity between ca. 1920 and ca. 1935). Some examples of decorative wrought iron date as early as ca. 1925, but most date from ca. 1940 through ca. 1965, with organic patterns prominent from ca. 1940 through ca. 1955, followed by geometric patterns between ca. 1955 and ca. 1965.
- Investigate how the ornamentation is attached. Original detailing often is integrated with other porch elements or attached with notching or dovetailing, while later additions may be simply nailed.
- Compare the hardness and paint layers of the gingerbread with the porch posts. If they are the same age, they should be similar.
- Look for "ghost" marks on the porch floor documenting the presence of earlier original columns.

If it is unclear whether a porch feature is historic or non-historic, consult with the Historic Preservation Officer. Note that the City of Fredericksburg never will require a homeowner to initiate a restoration project, but restoration may be recommended as part of a larger owner-initiated rehabilitation project.



Example of **inappropriate** non-historic "gingerbread" detailing added to a bungalow that likely originally had Craftsman porch styling.



Example of **inappropriate** faux-Craftsman columns added to a 1957 Minimal Traditional house that originally had no porch.



Example of **inappropriate** replacement of original organic wrought-iron porch posts with non-historic geometric porch posts on a simple ca. 1950 house.

Figure 3-19. Examples of **appropriate** ADA ramps added to historic porches. Sources: HHM, 2020; New York City, accessed January 22, 2021, <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/lpc/downloads/pdf/presentation-materials/20190507/Governors-Island-20-Evans-Road-Bldg-20.pdf>; Front Porch Ideas and More, accessed January 22, 2021, <https://www.front-porch-ideas-and-more.com>.

**ADA Compliance: Ramps**

In some cases, adding a ramp or wheelchair lift to a historic porch may be necessary to accommodate persons with disabilities. Adding the ramp at a side or rear entrance that does not impact the historic front porch sometimes may be an option, but sometimes the front porch provides the only feasible entrance. In these instances, the Historic Review Board may vote to approve a COA application that meets the spirit of *the Secretary's Standards* but does not precisely meet the letter of these standards and guidelines. (Refer to *Section 1.4.2.4.*) Refer also to guidance on enlarging a door opening for ADA compliance in *Section 3.2.6.*



The **above** rendering shows a proposed ramp added to a less-visible side elevation of a historic house at Governor’s Island in New York City.



The **top** photo shows a reversible ramp added at the side of a historic porch, keeping the historic porch steps intact and minimizing removal of historic porch railings. The **bottom** photo shows a subtle increase in the yard grade leading to the front porch, avoiding the need for a standard railing.