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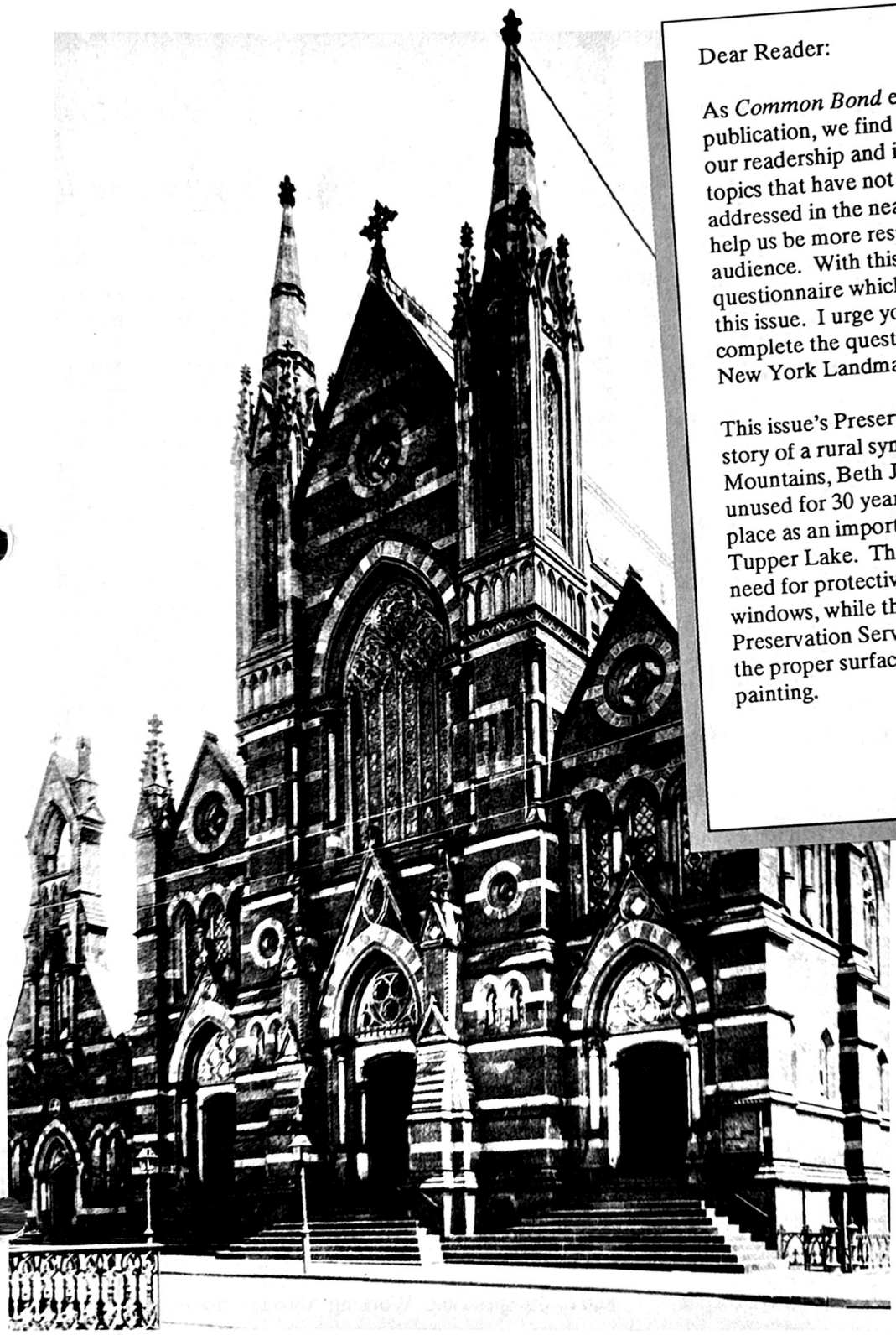
New York Landmarks Conservancy

Common Bond

The newsletter of the New York Landmarks Conservancy's Religious Properties Program on maintenance and preservation for owners of architecturally significant religious buildings.



Dear Reader:

As *Common Bond* enters its sixth year of publication, we find ourselves wondering about our readership and its needs. Are there additional topics that have not been covered but should be addressed in the near future? Your comments will help us be more responsive to the needs of our audience. With this in mind, we devised a short questionnaire which is being circulated along with this issue. I urge you to take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it to the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

This issue's Preservation Profile spotlights the story of a rural synagogue in the Adirondack Mountains, Beth Joseph Synagogue, that had been unused for 30 years but has re-opened to take its place as an important component in the fabric of Tupper Lake. The technical feature discusses the need for protective glazing over stained glass windows, while the Ask the Technical Preservation Services Center column focuses on the proper surface preparation for exterior painting.

The Rev. Thomas F. Pike
Chair, Advisory Committee

Contents

Preservation Profile	2
Is Stained Glass Protective Glazing Necessary?	4
Ask the Technical Preservation Services Center	8
Conferences and Exhibitions	9
Technical Services	10
Helpful Publications	10
In Brief	11

Old St. Ann's Church in Brooklyn Heights

Ask the Technical Preservation Services Center

Kim Lovejoy

Question:

We painted the exterior of our church last year and already the paint is beginning to crack and peal. We used a highly recommended, top-of-the-line brand of paint. Why is the paint failing so soon?

The Rev. Richard Burnett, Rector
St. James' Episcopal Church
St. James, New York

Answer:

Assuming the paint you used was truly "top-of-the-line," the reason for your paint failure is probably due to improper preparation of the surface rather than a poor application of new paint.

Before beginning a painting job it is always a good idea to analyze the old paint to see where failure is occurring and to see whether the new paint is compatible with the old paint or stain.

Chalking occurs when the aging of the old paint exposes the particles of pigment, producing a powdery residue. This fine powder does not form a good bonding surface with the new paint. If it is not cleaned off before applying the new paint, the new paint will fail. In order to form a good bond, the chalking must be first scrubbed off with a detergent solution, and thoroughly rinsed. After this, a high quality oil-based or latex primer will need to be applied.

Cracking of the old paint layers across the wood grain indicates that there are too many layers of paint on the wood. This condition necessitates the removal of the old paint by scraping or stripping.

Blistering or peeling of paint down to the bare wood is indicative of moisture problems within the wall. The source of these moisture problems can be leaking roofs or gutters, or open joints in the wood itself. It is, of course, useless to paint until these problems are taken care of. Another source of moisture is the water vapor generated inside the building itself from plumbing or from human activity. If this is a problem the only way to fix it is by installing a vapor barrier.

Mildew is a fungus that tends to grow in humid and shaded areas, usually the north side of a building, where there is little or no air circulation (Figure 1). On a superficial level mildew looks just like dirt. However, unlike dirt, mildew will lighten noticeably if a household bleach is applied to the affected area. Because mildew will grow through the new paint layer if not cleaned off, it should be removed before applying the new paint. Mildew can be removed by scrubbing the affected area with a bristle brush and a solution containing one quart of household bleach, 1/3 cup of detergent (with no ammonia!), and three quarts of warm water. If mildew is a problem over a large portion of your building, you may want to use a paint that contains a mildewcide. This will discourage the growth of mildew on the new paint job.

Peeling between layers of paint is usually the result of poor preparation of the surface in earlier paint jobs or incompatibility between different types of paint. Peeling between layers can sometimes be difficult to detect with the naked eye, so a test must be made for "tightness" on the wood. Apply adhesive tape to suspect areas and then remove it with a rapid jerk. If the tape comes off clean the paint layers are well-anchored to the wood and to each other. If the tape lifts up some or all of the layers of paint, the new paint job will probably fail unless the old paint is removed. Loose paint should be scraped off completely so that only tight paint remains. The edges of the sound paint should then be sanded to a feathered edge in order to form a continuous surface with the bare wood. This will greatly improve the appearance of the final paint job.

After all scraping and sanding is completed, any necessary carpentry repairs should be made. Any joints or gaps in the wood should be caulked and filled with a "paintable" caulking compound. Any set nail heads, holes,

Kim Lovejoy

Figure 1: Mildew forms in damp areas where there is little or no air circulation.

gouges, and other voids should also be filled using a caulking compound or wood epoxy. All accumulations of dirt, caulking and deteriorated paint should then be washed off the building using water with a mild detergent. The surface should then be allowed to dry thoroughly before being painted.

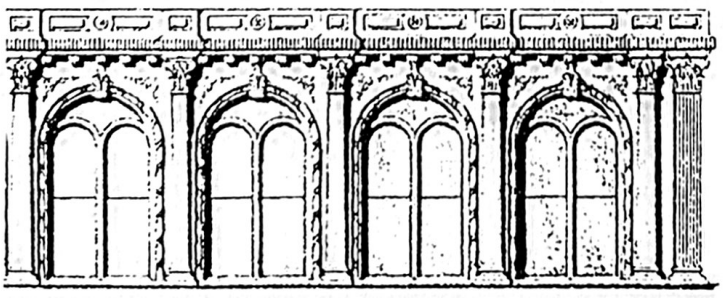
When all this preparation is complete, it is time to apply the primer. Primers are intermediate coatings between the wood and the new coat of paint that provide the topcoat with better adhesion. Primers should be applied to a dry surface to achieve better penetration. Any bare wood grain should receive a good build-up. Primers are usually used on weathered wood and chalking paint surfaces. However, be sure the primer and the topcoat are compatible. It is always a good idea to use the primer recommended by the topcoat manufacturer. If you use an oil-based primer, don't let it sit unpainted for more than two weeks because a soapy compound will form on the primer, compromising the adhesion of the new top coat.

After all this preparation is finished, the surface should be ready to paint. Remember, however, you get what you pay for. Inferior paint will produce an inferior paint job, no matter how well the surface is prepared. Use quality paint. If you are painting over oil-based paint, use oil-based paint, if possible, because the bond between even high-quality latex paint and oil-based paints does not tend to be good. If, because of air quality restrictions, you must use latex paint over an oil-base paint, surface preparation becomes an even more important aspect of the job. Again, be sure you use the highest quality latex paint with the appropriate primer. ■

The answer to this question is based on an article by Gordon Bock, "Painting Exterior Wood", which appeared in the May/June 1991 issue of the *Old-House Journal.*

Conferences and Exhibitions

The Technical Preservation Services Center of the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the National Park sService are planning a workshop on the **Maintenance and Repair of Cast Iron**, to be held in New York City on September 14 and 15, 1991. Nationally known experts will address the history, preservation, and state-of-the-art methods for inspection, repair, replacement, and preventive maintenance of cast-iron facades and ornamental iron work. For more information and to receive registration materials, contact: Kim Lovejoy, Assistant Manager, Technical Preservation Services Center, New York Landmarks Conservancy, 141 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010, (212) 995-5260.



On Wednesday, October 9, 1991, the **Institute for Sacred Sites**, a new initiative of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, will sponsor a workshop, **Voices of Experience: Fundraising for Religious Properties**, in conjunction with the General Theological Seminary in Manhattan. Drawing on the experience of clergy and lay people who have recently conducted or are currently in the midst of a fundraising campaign, the workshop will provide useful tips on fundraising for the restoration of religious properties. Registration materials will be available in late August. For more information contact Ed Mohylowski at the New York Landmarks Conservancy, 141 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010, (212) 995-5260.

The **Institute for Sacred Sites** will offer its **Inspecting and Maintaining Religious Properties** workshop in two New York State locations in 1991 and early 1992. One is planned for Long Island and the other for the Syracuse area. Watch future issues of *Common Bond* for more details, or call Ed Mohylowski at the New York Landmarks Conservancy, 141 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010, (212) 995-5260.

On Saturday, November 2, 1991, the **Greater Middletown Preservation Trust** of Middletown, Connecticut will present a day-long seminar on the stewardship of historic religious properties. The program is designed for clergy and lay people responsible for the maintenance and renovation of older religious facilities. The conference will be divided into four tracks addressing stewardship, preservation, fund-raising, and interiors. For more information, contact Ann Street at the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, Dekoven House, 27 Washington Street, Middletown, Connecticut 06457, (203) 346-1646.

On Friday, November 15, 1991, the **Pioneer Valley Planning Commission** of West Springfield, Massachusetts will hold a one-day workshop entitled **Faith and Trust: Enlightened Management of Religious Properties**. This workshop will provide practical advice and assistance to meet the needs of smaller congregations in cities, towns, and rural villages. The program will address common problems of maintaining and repairing older religious buildings, as well as opportunities for fundraising and shared use of buildings. For a full program description and registration materials contact: Gregory Farmer, Senior Planner, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, 26 Central Street, Springfield, MA 01089, (413) 781-6045. ■