

SAINT JOHN HERITAGE CONSERVATION AREAS

Eaves & Cornices

INTRODUCTION

The roof edge that overlaps the wall is called the eave. Relatively simple in shape and construction it will be long-lasting with periodic maintenance.

The eaves were traditionally elaborated with trim and mouldings to celebrate the transition between wall and roof. This more elaborate eave is called a cornice. The eave and cornice are often the dominant decorative feature of the building.

The roof drainage system of eavestrough and downspouts may form an integral part of the roof edge and will require regular maintenance.

The shape, size, ornamentation vary considerably with the style of building, and are an important part of the character.

Periodically inspect your roof edges for signs of deterioration. Annually inspect the joints between the various materials and surfaces.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

The cornice plays an important role of visually capping the facade. If the cornice has been removed or simplified, the façade will look incomplete.

Removing a Cornice

Do not remove an original cornice. To do so will significantly alter the character of the building. The removal may expose materials and surfaces that were never intended to be seen, or to be exposed to the weather. These

materials may deteriorate rapidly once exposed, requiring further repair.

Replacing a Cornice

If your cornice is beyond repair, complete replacement is appropriate. Measure the existing carefully for duplication. Replicate the shape, dimensions materials and style and rebuild the cornice.

Covering a Cornice

Do not cover up elaborate cornices to simplify future maintenance, or to avoid repairs.

Mouldings, brackets and other decorative woodwork may continue to rot and deteriorate if covered, potentially creating a larger, and invisible, problem.

Metal Cornice

Pressed metal, on a wooden structural backup, was commonly used to create elaborate cornices at the roofline, and above entries and storefronts.

Usually tin-plated iron, sometimes copper, the relatively thin material was pressed or stamped to standard shapes and decorative forms.

Paint metal work, except copper, with a zinc-rich metal primer, and 2 coats of house paint.

Maintaining Metal Cornices

Metal cornices must be painted at all times, and will deteriorate rapidly if unprotected or damaged. Regularly scrape or chemically clean, caulk the joints, and repaint. Never use high pressure cleaning methods.



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Stone Cornice

A drop of solder will repair small holes, while larger cracks or holes will require a patch of the same material. Clean the surface with steel wool, apply flux and a thin coat of solder to the area and the patch. Attach the patch with solder, or use fibreglass repair kits intended for automobiles.

Replacing Metal Cornices

If the cornice has deteriorated beyond repair, or was removed earlier, consider replacement with a duplicate of the original. Many of the profiles of cornice can be replicated in aluminium, copper or galvanized iron sheet by local roofing and metal shops at reasonable cost. Marine grade plywood, treated wood mouldings, and cut woodwork may be assembled to replicate a metal cornice.

Wood Repairs

Eaves and cornices were regularly constructed of wood.

Gouge out all the rotted wood, and treat the area with a preservative. Then fill the cavity with epoxy filler. Large areas of rot are best removed. Treat the remaining good wood with preservative and fit with a new piece glued in place. New epoxy consolidants permit repair without removal of the rotted material.

Replacing Decorative Woodwork

Replace a rotten or missing piece of the eave or cornice with a replica. Trace the original outline onto cardboard, and transfer the shape

to wood of the required thickness. With a sabre saw or band saw cut the design. Treat the wood with preservative, glue the new piece in place, caulk the joint and paint it. If necessary drill and dowel the joints to reinforce them. Layered brackets can be built up from several pieces cut to shape and glued together.

Replacement mouldings in original patterns are available from local woodworking shops.

Installing New Rainware

Gutters and downspouts are intended to direct water from the roof away from the foundation and from doorways. If your house doesn't have gutters and your basement is dry, don't add gutters. Slope the grade away from the building and build a concrete apron around your house as alternate solutions to a little wetness in the basement.

Gutters will add new maintenance concerns, and may create new problems such as ice dams at the roof edge.

Slope the gutters 1/16" per foot to downspouts spaced 30-40 feet. Provide 1 square inch of downspout for each 100 sq. ft. of roof. Locate the gutter so that the imaginary extension of the roofline clears the gutter by 1/2 ', Direct the downspouts away from the foundation, or connect them to the storm sewer or a dry-well.



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Gutters and Downspouts

Galvanized steel is the cheapest, least durable, and most common material. Aluminum resists corrosion, and is available pre-finished in several colours. The colour selection is limited, and historic colours will require custom orders.

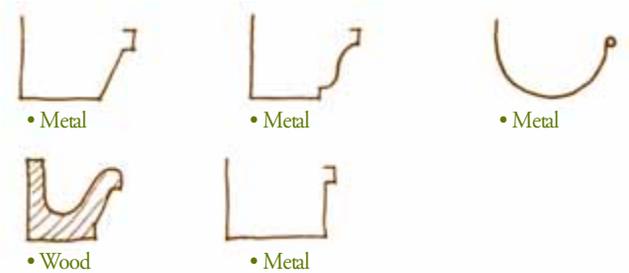
Copper rainware is the most expensive and can last up to 100 years with regular maintenance.

Gutters were usually shaped not only to collect rain, but to form a part of the decorative cornice. Downspouts were sometimes embellished with decorative items or fastenings.

Inspect your gutters twice yearly, and clean them of debris, gravel, and leaves annually. Install cages over the downspouts to prevent clogging them.

Renail loose hangers. Maintain as for metal cornices and flashings. Replace or reconnect loose downspouts. The concentrated flow of water at these locations can rapidly create serious problems in the walls if downspouts aren't maintained.

If the rainware has deteriorated beyond repair, replace it with a duplicate of the original. Many of the profiles of gutter can be replicated in aluminium, copper or galvanized iron sheet by local roofing and metal shops at reasonable cost. The readily available manufactured rainware, although inexpensive, is often too small to be suitable and may be inappropriate in design.



Typical Historic Gutter Profiles

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Practical Conservation Guidelines, application forms for Grants and Certificates of Appropriateness and other useful information for fixing up your older building is available from:

Heritage Staff | Planning & Development
10th Floor, City Hall
P.O. Box 1971
Saint John, New Brunswick | E2L 4L1
Phone: (506) 658 2835
Fax: (506) 658 2837

Email: Heritage@saintjohn.ca
Online: www.saintjohn.ca/heritage

Property Owners! Contact Heritage Staff before you begin to make any plan purchase supplies or hire contractors. Advice on ways to save you time, money and energy will be offered free of charge.

References

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