



Kansas Preservation

Newsletter of the Cultural Resources Division • Kansas State Historical Society



Early Twentieth Century Courthouses

Thirteen county courthouses were recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These second- and third-generation courthouses reflect three common styles: Richardson Romanesque, Classical Revival, and Modern.

Article on page 3



Vinyl is Not Final

Have you ever heard the lifetime guarantees and unconditional satisfaction claims made by vinyl siding companies and wondered if they were true? Have you ever groaned over the peeling paint on the exterior of your home and seriously considered giving those companies a call? Most homeowners have probably considered replacing the exterior siding of their homes to reduce maintenance or give their property an updated look. It is not an unreasonable consideration. However, most homeowners do not know all the facts about replacement siding materials and the damage they can cause. The concerns are the same for buildings 20 years old or 200 years old. The original siding materials are usually the best materials for any building. Below are facts on just a few of the serious problems that can be caused by replacement siding.

Original exterior materials contribute to the overall historic character of a building. Be it wooden clapboards, shingles, metal panels, brick, or stucco, the original skin of any building is one of the biggest elements of its character. The size of the clapboards, their texture, and spacing are visible to even the most casual viewer. This is why buildings with non-historic siding are usually deemed non-contributing in historic districts. Replacement siding spoils that character and can destroy the physical integrity of a building. Replacement siding materials rarely have the same profile as historic wood clapboards. The simulated wood graining found on some vinyl siding products does not even closely resemble wood siding. Wood does not have a rough raised surface graining unless it is severely weathered or sandblasted.

The installation of replacement siding often involves the removal of a building's exterior character-defining features. These include door and window trim, porch detailing, and even the original siding itself. When features are not removed, they are often cut so the new siding lies evenly or they are hammered full of nail holes during the installation process. This type of damage is irrevers-

ible. Even when installation is carefully undertaken to avoid the removal or destruction of character-defining features, they are usually wrapped in new siding and hidden from view. In these cases, the new siding and wrapped trim project beyond the plane of doors and windows, giving them a recessed appearance. The character of the building is not the same as it was before.

And one must remember that the issue is not entirely about the appearance of a building. Even if replacement siding materials can be made to look exactly like the original materials, they will never be the historic materials. "If these walls could talk, imagine what they'd tell us," is an old saying that reflects this idea. Replacing the original materials reduces

Replacement siding spoils a building's character and can destroy its physical integrity.

the overall physical integrity of any building. When original materials are lost, so is the evidence of past craftsmanship, quality of materials, and the connection those materials had to the people around them.

Replacement siding does not correct existing problems, it only hides them.

Often property owners decide to add vinyl or aluminum siding because they dislike having to paint every couple of years. What many people do not realize is that a good paint job on a properly maintained and prepared surface should last 5-10 years. There are a host of reasons why a paint job may only last a year or two on a building. Some reasons include excess moisture from poor guttering or drainage,



This photograph shows the warped vinyl siding on the rear of the Warren Wesley Finney House in Emporia.



The original clapboard siding is revealed as the vinyl siding is being removed.

This article was prepared by Katrina L. Klingaman, a historic preservation specialist with the Cultural Resources Division. Katrina's principal responsibilities are the federal and state tax incentives.



Shown here are "before" and "after" photos of the house at 315 Woodlawn in Topeka, which became a contributing structure in the Potwin Historic District with the removal of the non-historic siding.



leaking roof, leaking foundation, or even humidity from everyday activities like showers and laundry. This excess moisture causes paint to peel and fail as the moisture seeks an escape from the wood. If moisture problems are corrected prior to repainting, the paint adheres to the surface longer. Other reasons for paint failure include poor preparation of the surface and incompatible paints. Failure to remove all of the loose paint from a surface means that the new paint does not get a good anchor. Likewise, using primers and paints that are not compatible or trying to paint too quickly can lead to a poor result.

Installing replacement siding over problem areas, especially those involving moisture, only exaggerates the deterioration. Vinyl and aluminum are not vapor permeable. Any moisture that becomes trapped behind the siding cannot evaporate. Without proper venting, condensation develops, which in turn can lead to mold and mildew growth and accelerate wood rot. In the end repairs may cost the homeowner much more than if the problems had been addressed at the outset.

Replacement siding also prevents property owners from seeing new problems. If a roof leak develops and moisture

Replacement siding also prevents property owners from seeing new problems, hiding the problem until it becomes severe.

gets into the walls, peeling paint would quickly give a visible cue that something is wrong. Replacement siding hides the problem until it becomes severe.

Similar problems can occur with products known as "liquid vinyl." These elastomeric paints also tend to hide problem areas and exaggerate moisture issues. Since they are relatively new on the market, no long-term studies have been conducted to determine the effects after 15-20 years. Their lifespan is unknown, whereas we know that the lifespan of properly maintained wood clapboards typically exceeds 100 years.

Is replacement siding really cost efficient? We have all seen the ads claiming that replacement siding means

you'll never have to paint again, reduces energy bills, has a lifetime guarantee, increases your property value, and saves you money in the long run. However, there are several things that these ads do not share. Vinyl siding has a realistic lifespan of about 15 years before it needs repair or replacement. As stated before, wood clapboard lasts from 50 to 100 years and beyond with proper maintenance.

Vinyl siding can warp with high heat, including hot summer days, and becomes brittle through exposure to UV rays and cold winter weather. Aluminum siding can dent and scratch. Damaged pieces cost more to repair than wood siding. When pieces are beyond repair, they can be replaced, but new pieces rarely match the old. This is because the color of the siding fades over time. There is also a risk that siding manufactured will no longer be in business.

Aluminum and vinyl siding can be painted if they fade or you get tired of the manufactured color, but the paint will have to be maintained just as if it had been applied to the original siding. Even when aluminum or vinyl siding does not need to be painted, it must be thoroughly washed down twice a year to keep it looking fresh.



The Runyon House at 400 Osage in Manhattan is shown first with its asbestos siding and secondly after the removal of the asbestos and repair of the original clapboards.



There is no evidence that replacement siding adds any significant insulation value to your building. Most heat is lost through the roof of a building. Since siding materials are so thin, they really do not help lower energy bills. Even if insulating panels are installed beneath the siding, they rarely make a significant change. In fact, installing insulation or moisture barriers on the exterior sides of walls can actually cause more problems. Interior moisture from everyday activities, such as showers and laundry, can be trapped within the house, causing mildew and mold growth if not properly vented.

A close look at the long-term warranties on replacement siding may show that these are very limited. Most manufacturers' warranties rarely cover problems associated with installation since local distributors install most replacement siding. Improper installation is a major cause of problems with replacement siding. Also, most warranties are only for 20 years or they are prorated after 20 years to cover only a reduced amount of repair or replacement costs. While many replacement siding products have been on the market for decades, newer products have not been through long-term tests to really gauge their life expectancy.

Replacement siding can be very expensive. The cost is generally all up front or possibly financed out over several years. Closely comparing the initial costs, finance charges, and pos-

While improper installation is a major cause of problems with replacement siding, manufacturers' warranties rarely cover problems associated with installation.

sible future replacement against traditional maintenance of the original siding should always be done prior to committing to replacement siding. Take into consideration how long you expect to own the building, how many paint jobs you can expect in that time period, and how the costs for maintenance of the original siding will be spread out over those years.

Replacement siding does not necessarily make a building more attractive to potential buyers. Buyers seeking historic properties, especially those in historic districts, will not appreciate a new siding job. The charm and character of original exterior material—whether it is brick, shingle, clapboard, or stucco—is usually preferred to aluminum or vinyl.

The Kansas State Historical Society

has helped fund the removal of non-historic siding from some properties with the aid of the Heritage Trust Fund grant and State Rehabilitation Tax Credit programs. Vinyl siding was removed from the rear of the Warren Wesley Finney House in Emporia after it warped and came loose from the house. The few damaged clapboards beneath were replaced to restore the historic appearance of the house. Asbestos shingle siding was removed from the Runyon House in Manhattan to reveal the original cedar clapboards beneath. Another project at 315 Woodlawn in the Potwin Place Historic District of Topeka involved removal of the non-historic siding to reveal the original clapboards beneath. The house was previously listed as non-contributing to the district, but has since been reevaluated due to the removal of the siding.

What are some other concerns?

Some other concerns include impacts to health and the environment. Studies have shown that the PVC materials used to make vinyl siding release toxic chemicals when burned in a fire and may release potentially harmful gases throughout their lifespan. That “new car” smell we all like is actually the off gassing of plastics and PVCs similar to vinyl siding materials. The replacement siding materials themselves are not the only sources of health concerns.

Cases have been cited of insects and other small animals living between the

original siding and the new. The waste products of those animals can cause a variety of health concerns.

Also, the manufacturing of PVCs has been linked to environmental concerns across the globe. This is in addition to the adverse effect that all of the old siding materials and failed replacement siding materials are having on landfills. Some original siding materials and replacement siding materials, such as aluminum or steel, can be recycled, but the vast majority are not. You can learn more about the consequences of PVCs at www.bluevinyl.org

No matter the age of the building or the type of original exterior material on a building, repairing and maintaining that exterior is nearly always preferable to replacing it with an incompatible siding material. The siding is the skin of the building. Proper care and treatment will pay for itself in time.

Please contact the Cultural Resources Division of the Kansas State Historical Society for information on correcting moisture problems in historic buildings, proper surface preparation for painting, as well as the care treatment techniques for other types of siding materials such as brick and stucco.

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Valentine's Little Chef Diner. (Photo Courtesy American Diner Museum.)

Do You Remember?

Valentine Diners Featured on KSHS Web Site

A new page on the KSHS web site (www.kshs.org/diners) explores the history of Valentine Diners, a brand of pre-fabricated enameled steel buildings manufactured in Wichita beginning in the 1930s. Valentines were small eight- to twelve-seat diners with a limited menu, making them ideal for a one-person operation. These buildings were designed to provide customers with affordable meals, and owners with an independent living.

At the web site, you can read about the history of the Valentine company, view photographs of diners, find locations of the buildings throughout the state, and learn about the character-defining features of the buildings.

If you would like to share information about a Valentine Diner in your community, please contact Blair Tarr at (785) 272-8681 Ext. 427 or btarr@kshs.org.

