

# I INTRODUCTION

## I.1 Purpose of the Guidelines

More than two thousand towns and cities in the United States have adopted historic preservation ordinances and design guidelines for protecting and rehabilitating historic structures. They have done so out of a concern for the public appearance of their communities, and in order to preserve their heritage, protect property values, and encourage civic pride. In these jurisdictions, historic preservation commissions or similar governmental entities are charged with reviewing construction applications. They strive to protect the unique qualities of their historic district and to ensure that buildings do not fall into decay. In Chestertown, this review entity is the Chestertown Historic District Commission.

These guidelines provide the Historic District Commission (HDC) and property owners with guidance on appropriate methods for the upkeep and rehabilitation of the town's historic buildings. They also assist in the design of new construction in the historic district, whether these are additions to existing structures or entirely new buildings. The guidelines do not seek to prevent change. Change is inevitable in any living town, and these guidelines are aimed at ensuring that change is appropriate to Chestertown's unique character. The HDC uses the guidelines and applies the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* to evaluate the appropriateness of changes to a building and to the Historic District as a whole. Property owners can use these guidelines to identify what kinds of treatments are effective and appropriate, and to better understand what will be approved by the HDC.

## I.2 How to Use the Guidelines

This publication is intended to serve as a comprehensive guide to the wide range of construction projects that take place within Chestertown's Historic District. Navigating the text can be somewhat difficult due to the length of the Guidelines, but the easiest way to start is to look through the Table of Contents for a topic that matches your project.

Chapter I explains the **purpose of the Guidelines** and reviews the **architectural history** of Chestertown. Understanding how a building fits into the context of Chestertown's history is important in executing a sympathetic and appropriate project.

Chapter II describes the **Historic District and the Historic District Commission** that reviews permit applications in the District. It further describes **what kinds of projects do or do not require review**. Chapter II also summarizes the **procedures** followed by the Historic District Commission, as well as the **standards** used. Section II.6 contains the **Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**, which provide the basis for these and all other Guidelines used by Historic Districts across the nation. Chapter II concludes with a list of **frequently asked questions**.

If your project involves **repairs or rehabilitation of an existing structure**, Chapter III will be most useful. It starts by reviewing the characteristics and problems with different types of building materials (masonry, wood and metal), and then discusses issues with various building elements such as doors, windows, and siding. Chapter III also reviews the special considerations for commercial buildings, as well as topics such as outbuildings, signs, and mechanical equipment.

**New construction and new additions** to existing buildings are reviewed in Chapter IV, while **public spaces and landscaping** are treated in Chapter V. The final section, Chapter VI, deals with proposals for **demolition or moving existing buildings**.

The appendices contain a variety of additional information that applicants may find of use, including a checklist for applications, a copy of the Town ordinance that governs the Historic District, and helpful addresses and contact information.

### I. 3 Why Should I Preserve My Historic Building?

Aside from the necessary compliance with Town ordinances, there are many practical reasons for preserving historic buildings and adhering to these Design Guidelines. One good reason is that the guidelines generally recommend the best – and in some cases the most cost-effective – methods of maintaining or improving a historic structure. This is not to say that doing work according to the guidelines is always the easiest route. But following these recommended procedures will be better for the building and save money over time, while preserving a vital part of the community.

Older buildings were constructed differently than modern structures, and indiscriminate mixing of old and new materials or construction methods can have detrimental results. Old brick, for example, is generally softer than modern brick. The use of hard modern Portland cement or mortar on such brick can hasten its deterioration and result in serious structural damage. Sand-blasting paint from brick can lead to equally serious problems, while painting of previously unpainted surfaces may trap moisture and lead to decay. Application of vinyl or aluminum siding often seems attractive, as it can hide a multitude of sins and need not be painted for several years. But such siding also can hide deterioration inside the walls, resulting in much more expensive repairs down the road. And even vinyl siding eventually will have to be painted, and with the same regularity as wood siding, so the temporary cost-savings may be illusory. Using more appropriate materials can prevent a variety of long-term problems, while at the same time providing aesthetic benefits and preserving the historic character of the community.

Studies in numerous states across the country have shown that properties inside historic districts enjoy real financial advantages because of their adherence to design guidelines. A recent study of six historic districts in Maryland revealed a number of significant findings:

- **Businesses in the historic districts flourish when they capitalize on the district's unique character.**

- **Historic districts are a powerful economic investment tool for use in attracting new business to the entire community.**
- **The 6 districts annually generate over \$40.3 million in wages and over 1,600 jobs in the state, based on tourism and construction figures alone.**
- **Residential and commercial property values in the 6 districts appreciated on average 28.9% faster than properties located just outside the district in the same community.**

In addition to these long-term financial benefits, state and federal tax incentives can provide some substantial and more immediate financial rewards. The **Maryland Heritage Preservation Tax Credit** is administered by the Maryland Historical Trust. It provides Maryland income tax credits equal to 20% of the capital costs for rehabilitating a “certified heritage structure.” All contributing structures in Chestertown’s Historic District may apply for certification, and the credit is available for both owner-occupied residential property and income-producing property. The rehabilitation expenditures on the property must exceed \$5,000 over a two-year period for owner-occupied properties (different criteria apply to commercial properties), conform to the *Secretary of Interior’s Standards*, and be certified by the Maryland Historical Trust. The credit can be combined with federal and local incentives, and if the amount of the credit exceeds your tax liability for the year, the state will issue you a refund of the remaining amount. Pamphlets describing the credit are available at Town Hall, and information and forms can be downloaded from the Trust’s web site by looking under “Tax Credits – State” at [www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net](http://www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net).

The **Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit** is similar to the state program, but applies only to income-producing properties. This 20% credit is available for structures that are listed on the National Register or that contribute to the significance of a National Register Historic District. A map showing the boundaries of Chestertown’s National Register Historic District, as well as individually listed or contributing structures, is available at Town Hall. All buildings within the current local Historic District boundaries also lie within the larger National Register District.\* Additional information on this tax credit is available on the National Park Service web site, at <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tax/index.htm> or at [www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net](http://www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net) under “Tax Credits-Federal.”

\* The existence of two distinct historic districts within Chestertown is sometimes a source of confusion. The local “Chestertown Historic District” was established by the Town’s ordinance and its boundaries are shown on Figure . This local district is subject to these guidelines and oversight by the Chestertown Historic District Commission. The “National Register Historic District” is a larger area. Structures within this larger area, but which are outside of the boundaries of the local district, are not subject to review by the Chestertown Historic District Commission. If you own property on the boundary, it is advisable to consult with the Town Manager as to whether you are located within the Historic District.



Detail of “A View of the Town of Chestertown from White House Farm,” ca. 1795

## I.4 Chestertown’s Architectural Heritage

### I.4.1 Introduction

Chestertown was established as the county seat of Kent County in 1706. It became one of the most important towns in the Chesapeake during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was an official port of entry for the Province of Maryland. Although its importance as a port town declined after the American Revolution, the town regained prosperity as a county seat and the hub of a vibrant agricultural region from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because of its prosperity, Chestertown’s residents built and maintained a variety of substantial domestic, commercial and government buildings. The town’s housing stock now includes examples of most of the building styles popular in the country from the 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from folk buildings to superb examples of popular architecture. An understanding of these styles can help property owners better understand their own property. It can also develop a better feel for how to carry out effective rehabilitation or design new structures that fit with the rhythm and style of Chestertown’s existing architecture.

Residents of Chestertown are fortunate to have a number of good publications on the town’s architecture and history. *Chestertown, Maryland: An Inventory of Historic Sites* was first published by the Town of Chestertown in 1981. Based on the survey work of a large number of researchers, it provides a detailed listing of many of the Town’s important structures. The Town also published a highly useful walking tour, *Chestertown: An Architectural Guide*, by Robert J. H. Janson-La Palme. Placing the town’s early structures into the larger context of Kent County is a third book, *Historic Houses of Kent County: An Architectural History, 1642-1860*, by Michael Bourne (edited by Eugene Johnstone and published by the Kent County Historical Society). The following description of Chestertown’s architecture owes much to these earlier works.

### I. 4.2 Early Houses

Following the norm elsewhere in the Chesapeake, the earliest houses in Chestertown probably were built relatively quickly, with wood-frames resting on posts set in the ground, and they were vulnerable to rot and insect damage. As a result, no structures dating from Chestertown’s founding have survived. Although tradition holds that the Esau Watkins House at 109 North Water Street is the oldest house in town, it was built around 1739 and was preceded by the earlier Buck-Bacchus Store at 116 High Street, constructed ca. 1735. Both buildings illustrate a style that was to become popular in the growing port. Constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond, these two-story



Buck-Bacchus Store

houses have the symmetrical facades and hipped roofs that characterize what is known as the Georgian style. Perhaps the earliest structures in town are two plainer versions of the brick Georgian house that can be found farther away from the river. The Rebecca Lloyd Anderson House at 411 High Street and the James Anderson House at 401 Cannon Street are believed to have been constructed around 1733, and both have been sensitively restored.

### I.4.3 Georgian Style

Brick houses were better able to survive the passage of time, and consequently they comprise the vast bulk of the surviving mid-18<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Chestertown. A large group of these buildings cluster around Water and Queen Streets, and they range from relatively small houses (109 N. Water Street) to the much larger Custom House (101 S. Water Street, ca. 1745) and grander structures such as the Barroll House (110 High Street, ca. 1743) and Hynson-Ringgold House (106 S. Water Street, ca. 1743). These buildings share a number of common characteristics. All are built of brick. In the absence of native sources of stone, brick made of local clay became the most durable building material. All share a two-story configuration (usually two rooms deep). They also share the door and window placement, window forms, and roof styles common to Georgian exteriors. This Georgian style was rigidly symmetrical, with exterior openings that were balanced horizontally and vertically. Most have beautiful cornices beneath the eaves, belt courses between the first and second floors, and watertables beneath the first floor windows.



Custom House

Not all of Chestertown's early buildings conformed to the Georgian ideal however, and the smaller White Swan Tavern (231 High Street, ca. 1733) owes its symmetrically placed door and windows to a later renovation in 1793. Others mixed Georgian ideas with vernacular traditions. At 520 High Street there is small brick house with a symmetrical exterior. Next door at 518 High Street is a town house of a type sometimes called a "two-thirds Georgian" house. Reflecting a common approach to building on narrow city lots, the builders simply omitted one side of the house. What would normally be the center hallway is located along one side of the structure, while a set of rooms occupies the other side. In this fashion, builders could build to the latest fashion, while staying within the confines of a narrow lot (and perhaps the confines of a smaller budget). These structures are typical of the variations in scale, layout, and taste that can be seen in Chestertown's 18<sup>th</sup> century housing.



White Swan Tavern

Whether Georgian or not, all buildings from the period share a certain feel or character. Part of this has to

do with shared materials such as brick walls and wood trim, as well as similar roof pitches and roofing materials. But the shared character also comes from common elements such as windows and doors. Windows of the period were almost always sash windows made of wood, with a bottom sash that could be raised for ventilation. These sash windows replaced the casement windows of the 1600s. Upper sashes were sometimes fixed (single hung) and sometimes moveable (double hung). Unlike today's windows, those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were comprised of many small panes of glass set into wood muntins. Architectural historians describe such windows by noting the number of panes making up the upper sash and the number in the lower sash. A "nine-over-six" window, for example, has nine panes in the upper sash (arranged in rows of three panes each), while the lower sash has two rows of three panes each, for a total of six panes. Six-over-six and nine-over-six windows are common for the period, and a four-over-four or one-over-one window would look quite out of place in such a structure.



Nine over nine sash window

Doors of the period typically were paneled. Although windows ("lights") might have been set in the frame above the door, they would not have been found in the door itself. Modern hollow core steel doors, or doors with windows, bear little resemblance to the originals, and the original doors would not have been obscured by screen doors, which were non-existent at the time. Another defining characteristic of both doors and windows of different periods is the use of wood framing, trim, and muntins, including the width and depth of the frame and its profile.

Other shared elements of Georgian structures include brick color, similarity in mortar joints, similar techniques for laying bricks, and the presence of brick features such as a water table and belt course. Even the arrangement of such features and elements such as doors, windows and chimneys followed rules for the period. Builders used geometric principles to determine the relationships between features and their relative size. There was, for example, a mathematical relationship between height and width of the primary façade, the height of the roof above it, and the height of the chimneys above that. A rebuilt element – or an addition or new replica of a Georgian building – that departs from these formulae will inevitably look awkward and out of place.

The common attributes of these early buildings, which have generally been faithfully retained or restored in the Historic District, help give them their "colonial" feel and character. Each of architectural periods or styles discussed in these guidelines had its own rules or "grammar" for using and combining its distinctive architectural elements. Adherence to these rules is an essential quality of successful rehabilitation.

#### **I.4.4 The Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century – Georgian and Federal**

By the mid-1700s, grain was replacing the unpredictably-priced staple crop of tobacco in Kent County. Grain profits, coupled with Chestertown's role as a port of entry and its strategic position on the north-south route from Philadelphia to Virginia, brought a growing prosperity to the

county seat. A number of even grander Georgian houses were erected during the years just before and after the Revolutionary War, including Wide Hall (101 N. Water Street, ca. 1769). In addition, a new style emerged during the post-war period. The Federal style can be seen in structures such as River House (ca. 1784). The contrasts between Georgian and Federal can readily be seen in a comparison of Wide Hall and River House. Federal buildings could be brick or frame and were usually square or rectangular, often three stories high, with less steep (lower-pitched) roofs. Doors and windows were nicely scaled and elongated, often with fan-lights at the top. The elongated exterior openings and third story emphasized the vertical dimension of these buildings, while the narrow and delicate columns and moldings gave them a lighter feel than the solid bulk of the Georgian style. On nearby River House, the brick pilasters at the corners are typical of the Federal period. They are topped by a limestone capital, and limestone was used to highlight the watertable and belt course below and above the first floor windows. A beautiful hand-carved cornice runs beneath the eave.



Wide Hall

The buildings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were not, of course, restricted to dwellings. A variety of taverns and other commercial structures populated the bustling town, and these were joined by civic buildings, such as the court house and jail (neither of which survive), and churches. Emmanuel Episcopal Church was built in 1772, and its current form is an example of how later changes can mask the earlier style of an old building.

#### **I.4.5 The Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Doldrums**

The absence of certain architectural styles often says as much about a town as the prevalence of other styles. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a style known as Greek Revival swept through the country, with an emphasis upon classical Greek temple forms. Public buildings were designed in this style by architects such as Benjamin Henry Latrobe and William Strickland, and the style spread to residential architecture through widely-used architectural handbooks or “carpenter’s instructions.” Buildings of this style are conspicuously absent in Chestertown, with the exception of isolated examples such as Middle Hall at Washington College. This gap reflects the declining fortunes of Chestertown during the early 1800s, a decline brought on by the rise of Western Shore cities such as Baltimore and the spread of railroads to other areas, bypassing Chestertown. With declining incomes, less capital was available for the construction of public or private buildings during those years.

#### **I.4.6 Victorian Styles**

The decline in fortunes was reversed by growing steamboat traffic on the Chester River, a boom in the fruit-growing and canning industries, and the 1872 arrival of the railroad in Chestertown. The mid-century upswing in the economy is visible in the appearance of houses built in the popular new styles of the period, a group of styles collectively referred to as “Victorian.” They are interspersed among other houses throughout town and spread out along Maple and Washington

Avenues, reflecting the direction of Chestertown's new growth. Many people have an instant image of the "typical" Victorian house, usually characterized by elaborate trim and "gingerbread." In reality, however, the term "Victorian" encompasses a number of distinctive and very different styles, not all of which conform to the stereotype.

One such mid-century style is Italianate, modeled on the villas of Tuscany. The Kent County Court House (1860) and the Collins House (201 S. Water Street, 1857) are wonderful examples of the style. Italianate buildings typically have low-pitched roofs, overhanging eaves with brackets beneath them, and tall, narrow windows. The roof often is surmounted by a cupola or "lantern." The appearance of the tall windows benefited greatly from improved glass production techniques, which made much larger panes possible. One-over-one or two-over-two windows enhanced the vertical aspect of these buildings and dramatically changed their character.

Another mid-century style was the Gothic Revival. Inspired by the romantic novels of Sir Walter Scott and growing dissatisfaction with the restraints of classical architecture, Gothic Revival structures combined traditional aspects of medieval architecture, such as pointed arches, with more fanciful elements. The pointed arch was used in windows and was mirrored on gable trim, and such buildings typically had steep gable roofs with towers and intricate bargeboards or trim. The elaborate trim was made possible by the invention of the scroll saw, and elements could easily be ordered from cities such as Baltimore. Good examples of the Gothic Revival are the Boyd House at 200 North Mill Street (ca. 1888) and Christ Methodist Church at 410 High Street (1887-88). Such full expressions of the Gothic Revival are rare in the Historic District, although Gothic elements such as the front gables and lancet windows can be seen on many other houses.



Kent County Court House



Boyd House

Other popular styles from the 1870-90s included the elaborate Queen Anne and Second Empire styles. Queen Anne buildings often are characterized by gabled or hipped roofs (often with turrets or towers), second-story projections, large medieval-style chimneys, and the use of contrasting building materials such as brick, stucco, clapboard, and decorative wood shingles. A striking example is the Pearce House at 103 Maple Avenue (ca. 1890s), while others can be seen along Washington Avenue.

Perhaps the best example of the Second Empire style in Chestertown is Stam Hall at 206 High Street (1886). It combines many of the hallmarks of Second Empire, a style inspired by the rebuilding of Paris during the reign of Napoleon III. Foremost among these is the mansard roof, which is double-pitched, with a steep lower slope. Mansard roofs were almost always pierced by dormer windows, and the combination of the roof pitch and dormers provided enough head-space and light to transform the attic into usable living space. The style also utilized high, narrow windows, often with an oval top and flanked by pilasters or columns. Second Empire buildings typi-



Stam Hall

cally have sections of the façade that either project or recede from the main block. All of these elements, often combined with intricate brickwork and classical pediments, give these tall buildings an ornate and monumental feel.

As prosperity spread and the new Victorian styles took root, many Chestertonians decided to remodel their older houses. Sometimes this took the form of new additions or appendages such as porches built in the more modern style. With the passage of time, these additions have taken on an importance of their own, showing how tastes and fortunes evolved. Other times the changes were more drastic. The classic Georgian Wide Hall, for example, had its original hipped roof cut off and replaced with a mansard roof - all in an attempt to update its appearance. This was unfortunate, not simply because of the radical change it produced in such an important building. The architects of the remodeling failed to understand the original structural design of the framing; they severely compromised the building's structural integrity and it eventually began to come apart. The hipped roof was replaced in a later renovation, and the lingering structural problems were recently repaired at great cost. The episode provides a graphic illustration of the care needed in the renovation or rehabilitation of older structures.

#### **I.4.7 Civic Beautification and the Coming of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Chestertown also paid great attention to civic beautification during the late 1800s, a trend that continues today. The park in the center of town was laid out during this period, and its wonderful central fountain was installed in 1899. In addition, trees were systematically planted along many of the streets, a foresighted move that has contributed greatly to Chestertown's present charm. The town has continued the tradition and works hard to maintain its trees and landscaping.

The exuberance and eclecticism of 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian architecture gave way to two new trends at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of these was Neo-Classicism, a reversion to the earlier classical styles of architectures such as Georgian and Greek Revival. The Chestertown Bank at 211-213 High Street (1929; See page 6) and the old Public School (now county offices) at 400 High Street (1901) are obvious examples of this trend.

The other movement was an increasingly restrained approach to building. This trend was part of a larger shift that can be seen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts movement, the spread of simpler mail-order bungalows, and the growing popularity of restrained furniture such as that produced by Stickley. The detailed exteriors and cluttered interiors of Victorian era homes were being simplified. Four-square houses are a good example of this simplification, illustrated at 102 N. Water Street and 111



Town Fountain

Spring Street. These houses share a square floor plan with two stories, capped by a pyramidal roof. The roof often is pierced by dormers on four sides and may be flat on the top, surmounted by a “widow’s walk.” A two-story bay projection is typically found on one or two corners of the house, and a roofed ground floor porch commonly extends across the front of the house and may wrap around to the side. Windows typically are one-over-one and quite wide, particularly when compared with the narrow windows of the Italianate and Second Empire buildings. Although the eaves of these houses usually project out from the walls, brackets are rarely seen beneath them, and porch columns, rails, and other details are usually simple and restrained. Well-intended renovation efforts sometimes result in the installation of “ginger-bread” and other Victorian trim on these houses, elements that are completely out of character with the style.

Bungalows may be seen scattered throughout Chestertown, with many examples located outside the current Historic District. The prefabricated Sears and Roebuck catalog house at 223 S. Kent Street is a nice example of the type, and another may be seen across from Washington College at 311 Washington Avenue.

#### **I.4.8 Vernacular & Commercial Buildings**

Although examples of popular architectural styles may be seen all over Chestertown, not all houses fully expressed these ideals. Many were more vernacular, folk versions of the popular styles. Good examples of these may be seen up High and Cannon Streets, as well as elsewhere in town. Some structures depart radically from the norm. For example, the Palmer House, or “Rock of Ages” at 532 High Street, is the only early structure in town made of stone. In addition, many houses were small and modest when compared with the grander homes found along the Chester River and Washington Avenue. These houses are an important part of Chestertown’s architectural heritage, reflecting the way the larger part of the populace lived. They help to define the town’s character in equally important ways. One also should not



Sears and Roebuck Bungalow, Kent Street



High Street

overlook the many outbuildings that were once common on most residential lots. Surviving outbuildings range from a small storage building behind 359 High Street to stables, barns and garages that are scattered around town.

The commercial section of Chestertown suffered a disastrous fire in 1910, which helped depress the local economy and resulted in the loss of a variety of buildings. The new construction that filled in the burned lots can readily be identified across from the park. Other non-residential portions of the town have their own unique charm. Across from the court



Converted Barn on Queen Street

house, along Court Row, is a line of small, one-story offices known as Lawyers Row. These 19<sup>th</sup> century fronts show a delightful variety of ornamentation and have been well maintained. They are typical of a pattern seen in other small county seats, and nearby Centreville has a similar concentration of lawyers' offices near its courthouse.

Around the corner on High Street (just below the monumental Stam Building) are two more commercial buildings that represent the opposite end of the spectrum. The Prince Theater has a detailed façade of yellow brick. Constructed in 1928 as the "New Lyceum," the theater has now been restored and much of the facade and roof detail is original. Next to it is the Imperial Hotel, constructed in 1903 for multiple uses as a hotel, office and store. The two-story front verandah is a defining characteristic of the building. These three tall commercial structures – Stam Hall, Prince Theater, and the Imperial Hotel – work quite well together

and lend an air of prosperity to the street. When viewed together, they provide a good example of how buildings can work with another to create a rhythm and a distinctive streetscape.



Prince Theater