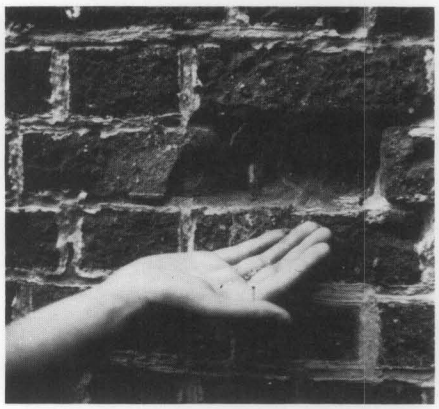
6 PRESERVATION BRIEFS



Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings

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"The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken."—The Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Historic Preservation Projects."

Abrasive cleaning methods are responsible for causing a great deal of damage to historic building materials. To prevent indiscriminate use of these potentially harmful techniques, this brief has been prepared to explain abrasive cleaning methods, how they can be physically and aesthetically destructive to historic building materials, and why they generally are not acceptable preservation treatments for historic structures. There are alternative, less harsh means of cleaning and removing paint and stains from historic buildings. However, careful testing should preceed general cleaning to assure that the method selected will not have an adverse effect on the building materials. A historic building is irreplaceable, and should be cleaned using only the "gentlest means possible" to best preserve it.

What is Abrasive Cleaning?

Abrasive cleaning methods include all techniques that physically abrade the building surface to remove soils, discolorations or coatings. Such techniques involve the use of certain *materials* which impact or abrade the surface under pressure, or abrasive *tools and equipment.* Sand, because it is readily available, is probably the most commonly used type of grit material. However, any of the following materials may be substituted for sand, and all can be classified as abrasive substances: ground slag or volcanic ash, crushed (pulverized) walnut or almond shells, rice husks, ground corncobs, ground coconut shells, crushed eggshells, silica flour, synthetic particles, glass beads and micro-balloons. Even *water* under pressure can be an abrasive substance. Tools and equipment that are abrasive to historic building materials include wire brushes, rotary wheels, power sanding disks and belt sanders.

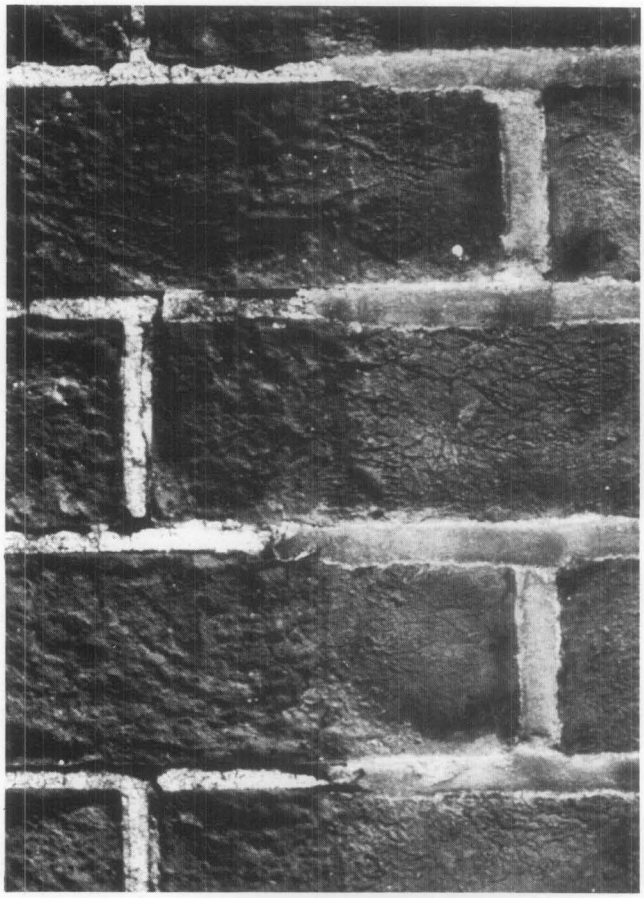
The use of water in combination with grit may also be classified as an abrasive cleaning method. Depending on the manner in which it is applied, water *may* soften the impact of the grit, but water that is too highly pressurized can be very abrasive. There are basically two different methods which can be referred to as "wet grit," and it is important to differentiate between the two. One technique involves the addition of a stream of water to a regular sandblasting nozzle. This is done primarily to cut down dust, and has very little, if any, effect on reducing the aggressiveness, or cutting action of the grit particles. With the second technique, a very small amount of grit is added to a pressurized water stream. This method may be controlled by regulating the amount of grit fed into the water stream, as well as the pressure of the water.

Why Are Abrasive Cleaning Methods Used?

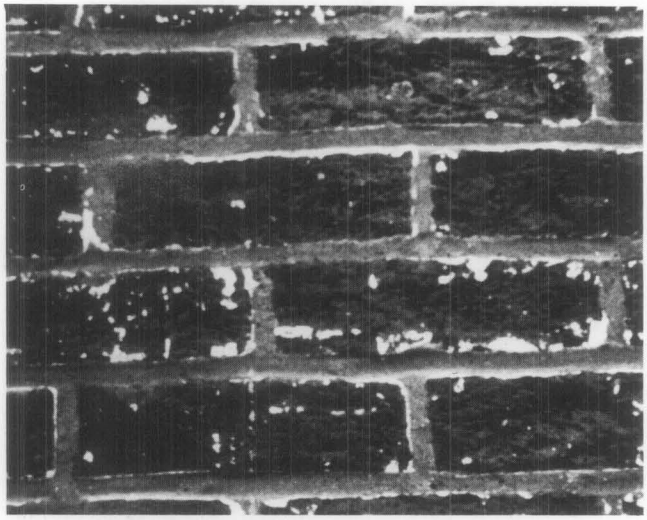
Usually, an abrasive cleaning method is selected as an expeditious means of quickly removing years of dirt accumulation, unsightly stains, or deteriorating building fabric or finishes, such as stucco or paint. The fact that sandblasting is one of the best known and most readily available building cleaning treatments is probably the major reason for its frequent use.

Many mid-19th century brick buildings were painted immediately or soon after completion to protect poor quality brick or to imitate another material, such as stone. Sometimes brick buildings were painted in an effort to produce what was considered a more harmonious relationship between a building and its natural surroundings. By the 1870s, brick buildings

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Abrasively Cleaned vs. Untouched Brick. *Two brick rowhouses with a common façade provide an excellent point of comparison when only one of the houses has been sandblasted. It is clear that abrasive blasting, by removing the outer surface, has left the brickwork on the left rough and pitted, while that on the right still exhibits an undamaged and relatively smooth surface. Note that the abrasive cleaning has also removed a considerable portion of the mortar from the joints of the brick on the left side, which will require repointing.*



Abrading the Surface without Removing the Paint. *Even though the entire outer surface layer of the brick has been sandblasted off, spots of paint still cling to the masonry. Sandblasting or other similarly abrasive methods are not always a successful means of removing paint.*

were often left unpainted as mechanization in the brick industry brought a cheaper pressed brick and fashion decreed a sudden preference for dark colors. However, it was still customary to paint brick of poorer quality for the additional protection the paint afforded.

It is a common 20th-century misconception that all historic masonry buildings were initially unpainted. If the intent of a modern restoration is to return a building to its original appearance, removal of the paint not only may be historically inaccurate, but also harmful. Many older buildings were painted or stuccoed at some point to correct recurring maintenance problems caused by faulty construction techniques, to hide alterations, or in an attempt to solve moisture problems. If this is the case, removal of paint or stucco may cause these problems to reoccur.

Another reason for paint removal, particularly in rehabilitation projects, is to give the building a "new image" in response to contemporary design trends and to attract investors or tenants. Thus, it is necessary to consider the purpose of the intended cleaning. While it is clearly important to remove unsightly stains, heavy encrustations of dirt, peeling paint or other surface coatings, it may not be equally desirable to remove paint from a building which originally was painted. Many historic buildings which show only a slight amount of soil or discoloration are much better left as they are. A thin layer of soil is more often protective of the building fabric than it is harmful, and seldom detracts from the building's architectural and/or historic character. Too thorough cleaning of a historic building may not only sacrifice some of the building's character, but also, misguided cleaning efforts can cause a great deal of damage to historic building fabric. Unless there are stains, graffiti or dirt and pollution deposits which are destroying the building fabric, it is generally preferable to do as little cleaning as possible, or to repaint where necessary. It is important to remember that a historic building does not have to look as if it were newly constructed to be an attractive or successful restoration or rehabilitation project. For a more thorough explanation of the philosophy of cleaning historic buildings see Preservation Briefs: No. 1 "The Cleaning and Waterproof Coating of Masonry Buildings," by Robert C. Mack, AIA.

Problems of Abrasive Cleaning

The crux of the problem is that abrasive cleaning is just that—abrasive. An abrasively cleaned historic structure may be physically as well as aesthetically damaged. Abrasive methods "clean" by eroding dirt or paint, but at the same time they also tend to erode the surface of the building material. In this way, abrasive cleaning is destructive and causes irreversible harm to the historic building fabric. If the fabric is brick, abrasive methods remove the hard, outer protective surface, and therefore make the brick more susceptible to rapid weathering and deterioration. Grit blasting may also increase the water permeability of a brick wall. The impact of the grit particles tends to erode the bond between the mortar and the brick, leaving cracks or enlarging existing cracks where water can enter. Some types of stone develop a protective patina or "quarry crust" parallel to the worked surface (created by the movement of moisture towards the outer edge), which also may be damaged by abrasive cleaning. The rate at which the material subsequently weathers depends on the quality of the inner surface that is exposed.

Abrasive cleaning can destroy, or substantially diminish, decorative detailing on buildings such as a molded brickwork or architectural terra-cotta, ornamental carving on wood or stone, and evidence of historic craft techniques, such as tool marks and other surface textures. In addition, perfectly sound and/or "tooled" mortar joints can be worn away by abrasive techniques. This not only results in the loss of historic craft detailing but also requires repointing, a step involving con-

siderable time, skill and expense, and which might not have been necessary had a gentler method been chosen. Erosion and pitting of the building material by abrasive cleaning creates a greater surface area on which dirt and pollutants collect. In this sense, the building fabric "attracts" more dirt, and will require more frequent cleaning in the future.

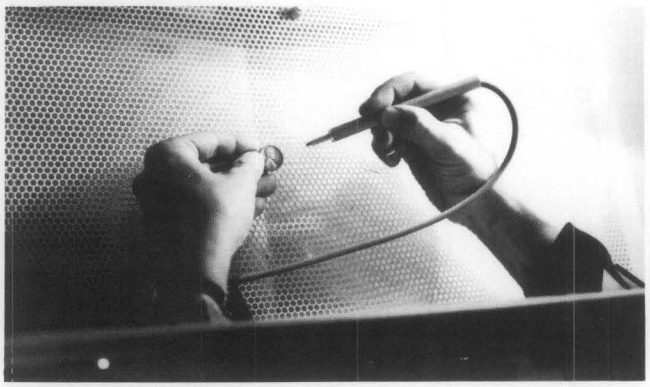
In addition to causing physical and aesthetic harm to the historic fabric, there are several adverse environmental effects of dry abrasive cleaning methods. Because of the friction caused by the abrasive medium hitting the building fabric, these techniques usually create a considerable amount of dust, which is unhealthy, particularly to the operators of the abrasive equipment. It further pollutes the environment around the job site, and deposits dust on neighboring buildings, parked vehicles and nearby trees and shrubbery. Some adjacent materials not intended for abrasive treatment such as wood or glass, may also be damaged because the equipment may be difficult to regulate.

Wet grit methods, while eliminating dust, deposit a messy slurry on the ground or other objects surrounding the base of the building. In colder climates where there is the threat of frost, any wet cleaning process applied to historic masonry structures must be done in warm weather, allowing ample time for the wall to dry out thoroughly before cold weather sets in. Water which remains and freezes in cracks and openings of the masonry surface eventually may lead to spalling. High-pressure wet cleaning may force an inordinate amount of water into the walls, affecting interior materials such as plaster or joist ends, as well as metal building components within the walls.

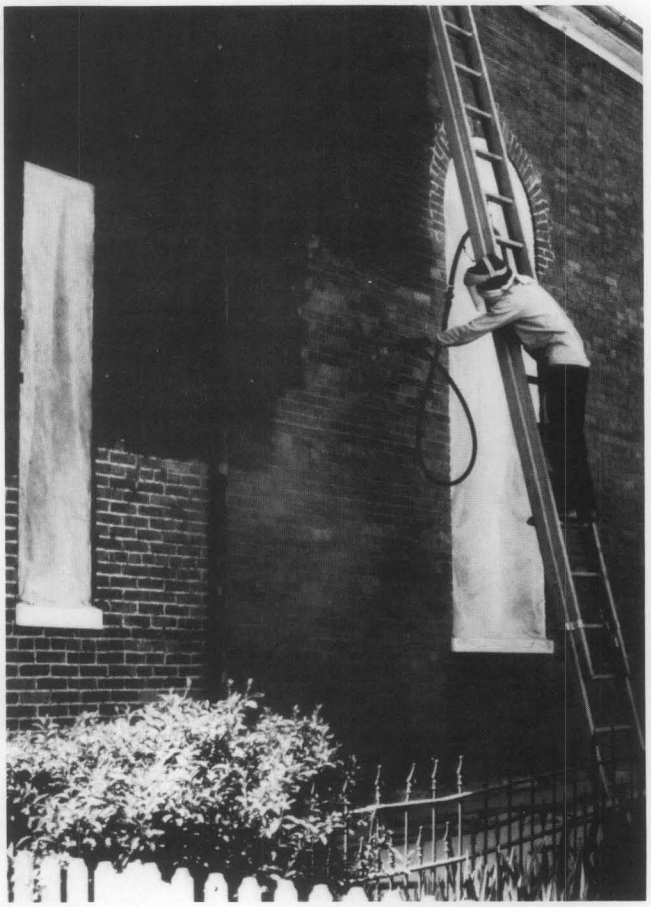
Variable Factors

The greatest problem in developing practical guidelines for cleaning any historic building is the large number of variable and unpredictable factors involved. Because these variables make each cleaning project unique, it is difficult to establish specific standards at this time. This is particularly true of abrasive cleaning methods because their inherent potential for causing damage is multiplied by the following factors:

— the type and condition of the material being cleaned;
— the size and sharpness of the grit particles or the mechanical equipment;
— the pressure with which the abrasive grit or equipment is applied to the building surface;
— the skill and care of the operator; and
— the constancy of the pressure on all surfaces during the cleaning process.



Micro-Abrasive Cleaning. *This small, pencil-sized micro-abrasive unit is used by some museum conservators to clean small objects. This particular micro-abrasive unit is operated within the confines of a box (approximately 2 cubic feet of space), but a similar and slightly larger unit may be used for cleaning larger pieces of sculpture, or areas of architectural detailing on a building. Even a pressure cleaning unit this small is capable of eroding a surface, and must be carefully controlled.*



"Line Drop." *Even though the operator of the sandblasting equipment is standing on a ladder to reach the higher sections of the wall, it is still almost impossible to have total control over the pressure. The pressure of the sand hitting the lower portion of the wall will still be greater than that above, because of the "line drop" in the distance from the pressure source to the nozzle. (Hugh Miller)*

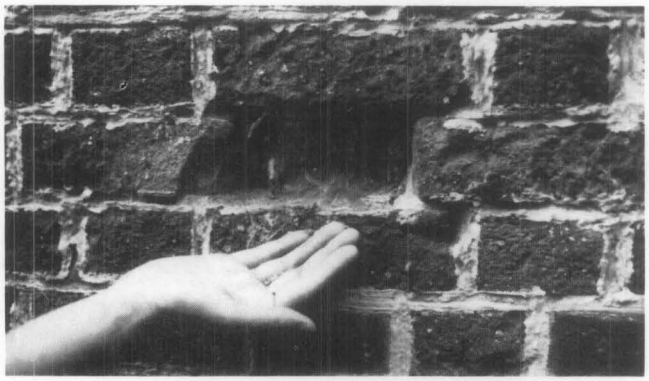
Pressure: The damaging effects of most of the variable factors involved in abrasive cleaning are self evident. However, the matter of pressure requires further explanation. In cleaning specifications, pressure is generally abbreviated as "psi" (pounds per square inch), which technically refers to the "tip" pressure, or the amount of pressure at the nozzle of the blasting apparatus. Sometimes "psig," or pressure at the gauge (which may be many feet away, at the other end of the hose), is used in place of "psi." These terms are often incorrectly used interchangeably.

Despite the apparent care taken by most architects and building cleaning contractors to prepare specifications for pressure cleaning which will not cause harm to the delicate fabric of a historic building, it is very difficult to ensure that the same amount of pressure is applied to all parts of the building. For example, if the operator of the pressure equipment stands on the ground while cleaning a two-story structure, the amount of force reaching the first story will be greater than that hitting the second story, even if the operator stands on scaffolding or in a cherry picker, because of the "line drop" in the distance from the pressure source to the nozzle. Although technically it may be possible to prepare cleaning specifications with tight controls that would eliminate all but a small margin of error, it may not be easy to find professional cleaning firms willing to work under such restrictive conditions. The fact is that many professional building cleaning firms do not really understand the extreme delicacy of historic building fabric, and how it differs from modern construction materials. Consequently, they may ac-

cept building cleaning projects for which they have no experience.

The amount of pressure used in any kind of cleaning treatment which involves pressure, whether it is dry or wet grit, chemicals or just plain water, is crucial to the outcome of the cleaning project. Unfortunately, no standards have been established for determining the correct pressure for cleaning each of the many historic building materials which would not cause harm. The considerable discrepancy between the way the building cleaning industry and architectural conservators define "high" and "low" pressure cleaning plays a significant role in the difficulty of creating standards.

Nonhistoric/Industrial: A representative of the building cleaning industry might consider "high" pressure *water* cleaning to be anything over 5,000 psi, or even as high as 10,000 to 15,000 psi! Water under this much pressure may be necessary to clean industrial structures or machinery, but would destroy most historic building materials. Industrial *chemical* cleaning commonly utilizes pressures between 1,000 and 2,500 psi.



Spalling Brick. *This soft, early 19th-century brick was sandblasted in the 1960s; consequently, severe spalling has resulted. Some bricks have almost totally disintegrated, and will eventually have to be replaced. (Robert S. Gamble)*

Historic: By contrast, conscientious dry or wet abrasive cleaning of a historic structure would be conducted within the range of 20 to 100 psi at a range of 3 to 12 inches. Cleaning at this low pressure requires the use of a very fine 00 or 0 mesh grit forced through a nozzle with a ¼ inch opening. A similar, even more delicate method being adopted by architectural conservators uses a micro-abrasive grit on small, hard-to-clean areas of carved, cut or molded ornament on a building façade. Originally developed by museum conservators for cleaning sculpture, this technique may employ glass beads, micro-balloons, or another type of micro-abrasive gently powered at approximately 40 psi by a very small, almost pencil-like pressure instrument. Although a slightly larger pressure instrument may be used on historic buildings, this technique still has limited practical applicability on a large scale building cleaning project because of the cost and the relatively few technicians competent to handle the task. In general, architectural conservators have determined that only through very controlled conditions can most historic building material be abrasively cleaned of soil or paint without measurable damage to the surface or profile of the substrate.

Yet some professional cleaning companies which sepcialize in cleaning historic masonry buildings use chemicals and water at a pressure of approximately 1,500 psi, while other cleaning firms recommend lower pressures ranging from 200 to 800 psi for a similar project. An architectural conservator might decide, *after testing*, that some historic structures could be cleaned properly using a moderate pressure (200–600 psi), or even a high pressure (600–1800 psi) water rinse. However, cleaning historic buildings under such high pressure should be considered an exception rather than the rule, and would require *very careful* testing and supervision to assure that the historic surface materials could withstand the pressure without gouging, pitting or loosening.

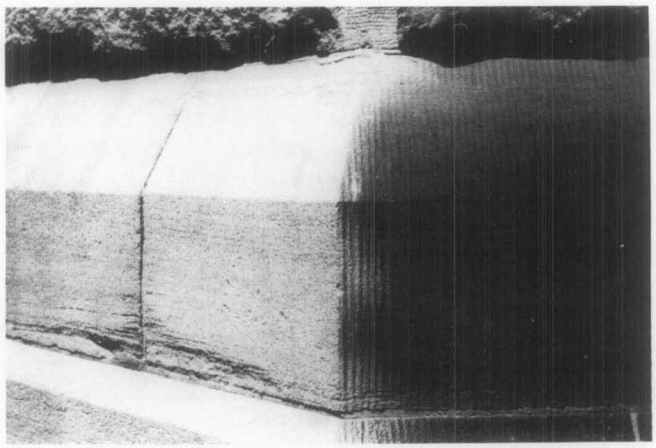
These differences in the amount of pressure used by commercial or industrial building cleaners and architectural conservators point to one of the main problems in using abrasive means to clean historic buildings: misunderstanding of the potentially fragile nature of historic building materials. There is no one cleaning formula or pressure suitable for all situations. Decisions regarding the proper cleaning process for historic structures can be made only after careful analysis of the building fabric, and testing.

How Building Materials React to Abrasive Cleaning Methods

Brick and Architectural Terra-Cotta: Abrasive blasting does not affect all building materials to the same degree. Such techniques quite logically cause greater damage to softer and more porous materials, such as brick or architectural terra-cotta. When these materials are cleaned abrasively, the hard, outer layer (closest to the heat of the kiln) is eroded, leaving the soft, inner core exposed and susceptible to accelerated weathering. Glazed architectural terra-cotta and ceramic veneer have a baked-on glaze which is also easily damaged by abrasive cleaning. Glazed architectual terra-cotta was designed for easy maintenance, and generally can be cleaned using detergent and water; but chemicals or steam may be needed to remove more persistent stains. Large areas of brick or architectural terra-cotta which have been painted are best left painted, or repainted if necessary.

Plaster and Stucco: Plaster and stucco are types of masonry finish materials that are softer than brick or terra-cotta; if treated abrasively these materials will simply disintegrate. Indeed, when plaster or stucco is treated abrasively it is usually with the intention of removing the plaster or stucco from whatever base material or substrate it is covering. Obviously, such abrasive techniques should not be applied to clean sound plaster or stuccoed walls, or decorative plaster wall surfaces.

Building Stones: Building stones are cut from the three main categories of natural rock: dense, igneous rock such as granite; sandy, sedimentary rock such as limestone or sandstone; and crystalline, metamorphic rock such as marble. As op-

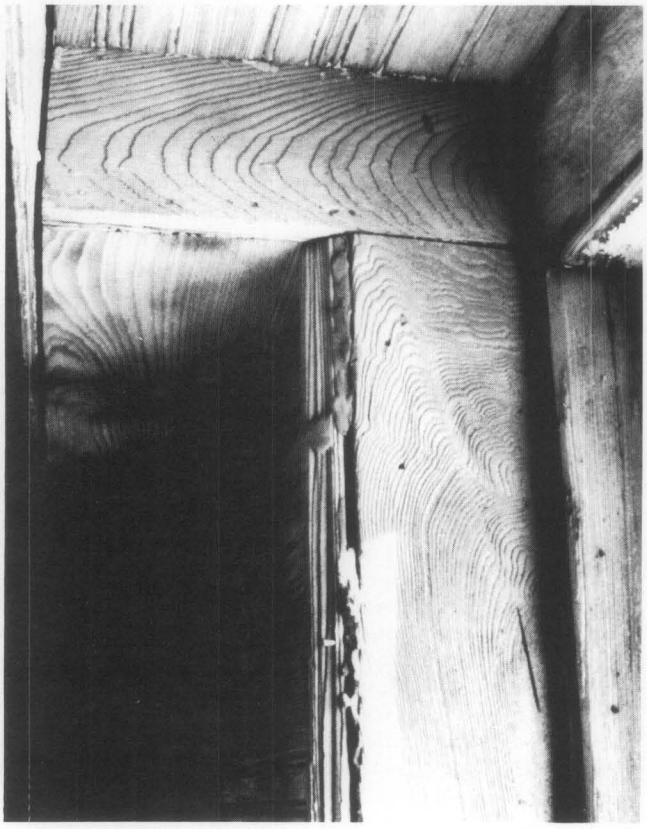


Abrasive Cleaning of Tooled Granite. *Even this carefully controlled "wet grit" blasting has erased vertical tooling marks in the cut granite blocks on the left. Not only has the tooling been destroyed, but the damaged stone surface is now more susceptible to accelerated weathering.*

posed to kiln-dried masonry materials such as brick and architectural terra-cotta, building stones are generally homogeneous in character at the time of a building's construction. However, as the stone is exposed to weathering and environmental pollutants, the surface may become friable, or may develop a protective skin or patina. These outer surfaces are very susceptible to damage by abrasive or improper chemical cleaning.

Building stones are frequently cut into ashlar blocks or "dressed" with tool marks that give the building surface a specific texture and contribute to its historic character as much as ornately carved decorative stonework. Such detailing is easily damaged by abrasive cleaning techniques; the pattern of tooling or cutting is erased, and the crisp lines of moldings or carving are worn or pitted.

Occasionally, it may be possible to clean small areas of rough-cut granite, limestone or sandstone having a heavy dirt encrustation by using the "wet grit" method, whereby a small amount of abrasive material is injected into a controlled, pressurized water stream. However, this technique requires very careful supervision in order to prevent damage to the stone. Polished or honed marble or granite should *never* be treated abrasively, as the abrasion would remove the finish in much the way glass would be etched or "frosted" by such a process. It is generally preferable to underclean, as too strong a cleaning procedure will erode the stone, exposing a new and increased surface area to collect atmospheric moisture and dirt. Removing paint, stains or graffiti from most types of stone may be accomplished by a chemical treatment carefully selected to best handle the removal of the particular type of paint or stain without damaging the stone. (See section on the "Gentlest Means Possible")



Abrasive Cleaning of Wood. *This wooden windowsill, molding and paneling have been sandblasted to remove layers of paint in the rehabilitation of this commercial building. Not only is some paint still embedded in cracks and crevices of the woodwork, but more importantly, grit blasting has actually eroded the summer wood, in effect raising the grain, and resulting in a rough surface.*

Wood: Most types of wood used for buildings are soft, fibrous and porous, and are particularly susceptible to damage by abrasive cleaning. Because the summer wood between the lines of the grain is softer than the grain itself, it will be worn away by abrasive blasting or power tools, leaving an uneven surface with the grain raised and often frayed or "fuzzy." Once this has occurred, it is almost impossible to achieve a smooth surface again except by extensive hand sanding, which is expensive and will quickly negate any costs saved earlier by sandblasting. Such harsh cleaning treatment also obliterates historic tool marks, fine carving and detailing, which precludes its use on any interior or exterior woodwork which has been hand planed, milled or carved.

Metals: Like stone, metals are another group of building materials which vary considerably in hardness and durability. Softer metals which are used architecturally, such as tin, zinc, lead, copper or aluminum, generally should not be cleaned abrasively as the process deforms and destroys the original surface texture and appearance, as well as the acquired patina. Much applied architectural metal work used on historic buildings—tin, zinc, lead and copper—is often quite thin and soft, and therefore susceptible to denting and pitting. Galvanized sheet metal is especially vulnerable, as abrasive treatment would wear away the protective galvanized layer.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these metals were often cut, pressed or otherwise shaped from sheets of metal into a wide variety of practical uses such as roofs, gutters and flashing, and façade ornamentation such as cornices, friezes, dormers, panels, cupolas, oriel windows, etc. The architecture of the 1920s and 1930s made use of metals such as chrome, nickel alloys, aluminum and stainless steel in decorative exterior panels, window frames, and doorways. Harsh abrasive blasting would destroy the original surface finish of most of these metals, and would increase the possiblity of corrosion.

However, conservation specialists are now employing a sensitive technique of glass bead peening to clean some of the harder metals, in particular large bronze outdoor sculpture. Very fine (75–125 micron) glass beads are used at a low pressure of 60 to 80 psi. Because these glass beads are completely spherical, ther are no sharp edges to cut the surface of the metal. After cleaning, these statues undergo a lengthy process of polishing. Coatings are applied which protect the surface from corrosion, but they must be renewed every 3 to 5 years. A similarly delicate cleaning technique employing glass beads has been used in Europe to clean historic masonry structures without causing damage. But at this time the process has not been tested sufficiently in the United States to recommend it as a building conservation measure.

Sometimes a very fine *smooth* sand is used at a low pressure to clean or remove paint and corrosion from copper flashing and other metal building components. Restoration architects recently found that a mixture of crushed walnut shells and copper slag at a pressure of approximately 200 psi was the only way to remove corrosion successfully from a mid-19th century terne-coated iron roof. Metal cleaned in this manner must be painted immediately to prevent rapid recurrence of corrosion. It is thought that these methods "work harden" the surface by compressing the outer layer, and actually may be good for the surface of the metal. But the extremely complex nature and the time required by such processes make it very expensive and impractical for large-scale use at this time.

Cast and wrought iron architectural elements may be gently sandblasted or abrasively cleaned using a wire brush to remove layers of paint, rust and corrosion. Sandblasting was, in fact, developed originally as an efficient maintenance procedure for engineering and industrial structures and heavy machinery—iron and steel bridges, machine tool frames, engine frames, and railroad rolling stock—in order to clean and prepare them for repainting. Because iron is hard, its surface,

which is naturally somewhat uneven, will not be noticeably damaged by controlled abrasion. Such treatment will, however, result in a small amount of pitting. But this slight abrasion creates a good surface for paint, since the iron must be repainted immediately to prevent corrosion. Any abrasive cleaning of metal building components will also remove the caulking from joints and around other openings. Such areas must be recaulked quickly to prevent moisture from entering and rusting the metal, or causing deterioration of other building fabric inside the structure.

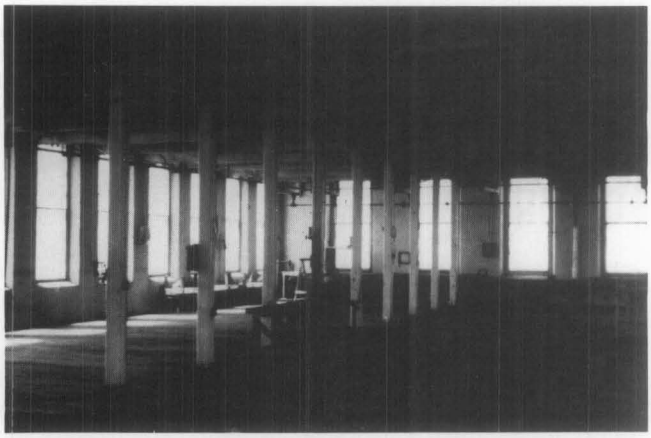
When is Abrasive Cleaning Permissible?

For the most part, abrasive cleaning is destructive to historic building materials. A limited number of special cases have been explained when it may be appropriate, if supervised by a skilled conservator, to use a delicate abrasive technique on some historic building materials. The type of "wet grit" cleaning which involves a small amount of grit injected into a stream of low pressure water may be used on small areas of stone masonry (i.e., rough cut limestone, sandstone or unpolished granite), where milder cleaning methods have not been totally successful in removing harmful deposits of dirt and pollutants. Such areas may include stone window sills, the tops of cornices or column capitals, or other detailed areas of the façade.

This is still an abrasive technique, and without proper caution in handling, it can be *just as harmful to the building surface as any other abrasive cleaning method.* Thus, the decision to use this type of "wet grit" process should be made only after consultation with an experienced building conservator. Remember that *it is very time consuming and expensive to use any abrasive technique on a historic building in such a manner that it does not cause harm to the often fragile and friable building materials.*

At this time, and only under certain circumstances, abrasive cleaning methods may be used in the rehabilitation of interior spaces of warehouse or industrial buildings for contemporary uses.

Interior spaces of factories or warehouse structures in which the masonry or plaster surfaces do not have significant design, detailing, tooling or finish, and in which wooden architectural features are not finished, molded, beaded or worked by hand, may be cleaned abrasively in order to remove layers of paint and industrial discolorations such as smoke, soot, etc. It is expected after such treatment that brick surfaces will be rough and pitted, and wood will be somewhat frayed or "fuzzy" with raised wood grain. These nonsignificant surfaces will be damaged and have a roughened texture, but because they are interior elements, they will not be subject to further deterioration caused by weathering.



Permissible Abrasive Cleaning. *In accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's* Guidelines for Rehabilitation Projects, *it may be acceptable to use abrasive techniques to clean an industrial interior space such as that illustrated here, because the masonry surfaces* do not *have significant design, detailing, tooling or finish, and the wooden architectural features are not finished, molded, beaded or worked by hand.*

Historic Interiors that Should Not Be Cleaned Abrasively

Those instances (generally industrial and some commercial properties), when it may be acceptable to use an abrasive treatment on the interior of historic structures have been described. But for the majority of historic buildings, the Secretary of the Interior's *Guidelines for Rehabilitation* do not recommend "changing the texture of exposed wooden architectural features (including structural members) and masonry surfaces through sandblasting or use of other abrasive techniques to remove paint, discolorations and plaster. . . ."

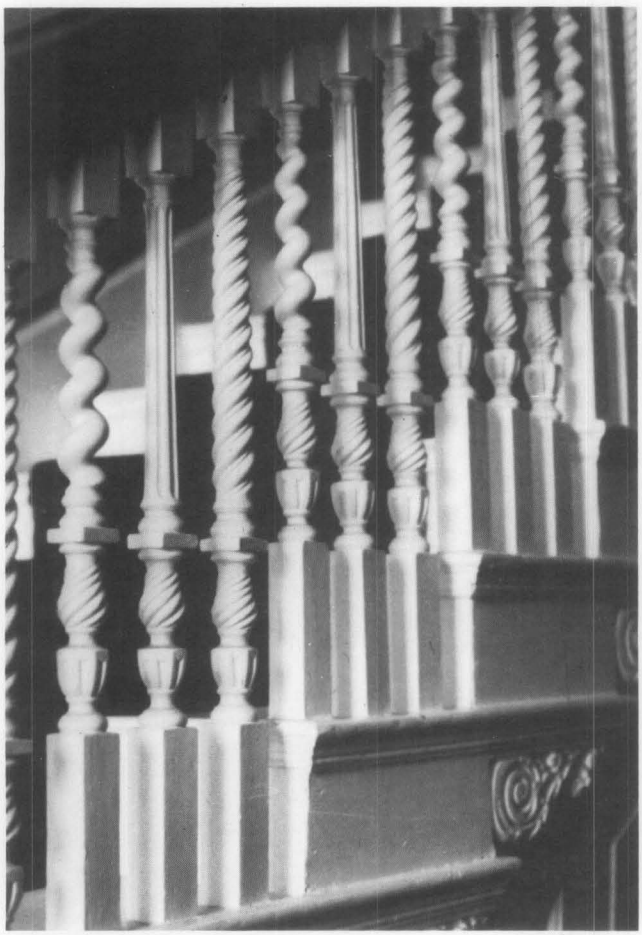
Thus, it is not acceptable to clean abrasively interiors of historic residential and commercial properties which have *finished* interior spaces featuring milled woodwork such as doors, window and door moldings, wainscoting, stair balustrades and mantelpieces. Even the most modest historic *house* interior, although it may not feature elaborate detailing, contains plaster and woodwork that is architecturally significant to the original design and function of the house. Abrasive cleaning of such an interior would be destructive to the historic integrity of the building.

Abrasive cleaning is also impractical. Rough surfaces of abrasively cleaned wooden elements are hard to keep clean. It is also difficult to seal, paint or maintain these surfaces which can be splintery and a problem to the building's occupants. The force of abrasive blasting may cause grit particles to lodge in cracks of wooden elements, which will be a nuisance as the grit is loosened by vibrations and gradually sifts out. Removal of plaster will reduce the thermal and insulating value of the walls. Interior brick is usually softer than exterior brick, and generally of a poorer quality. Removing surface plaster from such brick by abrasive means often exposes gaping mortar joints and mismatched or repaired brickwork which was never intended to show. The resulting bare brick wall may require repointing, often difficult to match. It also may be necessary to apply a transparent surface coating (or sealer) in order to prevent the mortar and brick from "dusting." However, a sealer may not only change the color of the brick, but may also compound any existing moisture problems by restricting the normal evaporation of water vapor from the masonry surface.

"Gentlest Means Possible"

There are alternative means of removing dirt, stains and paint from historic building surfaces that can be recommended as more efficient and less destructive than abrasive techniques. The "gentlest means possible" of removing dirt from a building surface can be achieved by using a low-pressure water wash, scrubbing areas of more persistent grime with a natural bristle (never metal) brush. Steam cleaning can also be used effectively to clean some historic building fabric. Low-pressure water or steam will soften the dirt and cause the deposits to rise to the surface, where they can be washed away.

A third cleaning technique which may be recommended to remove dirt, as well as stains, graffiti or paint, involves the use of commerically available chemical cleaners or paint removers, which, when applied to masonry, loosen or dissolve the dirt or stains. These cleaning agents may be used in combination with water or steam, followed by a clear water wash to remove the residue of dirt and the chemical cleaners from the masonry. A natural bristle brush may also facilitate this type of chemically assisted cleaning, particularly in areas of heavy dirt deposits or stains, and a wooden scraper can be



Do not Abrasively Clean these Interiors. *Most historic residential and some commercial interior spaces contain finished plaster and wooden elements such as this stair balustrade and paneling which contribute to the historic and architectural character of the structure. Such interiors should not be subjected to abrasive techniques for the purpose of removing paint, dirt, discoloration or plaster.*

useful in removing thick encrustations of soot. A limewash or absorbent talc, whiting or clay poultice with a solvent can be used effectively to draw out salts or stains from the surface of the selected areas of a building façade. It is almost impossible to remove paint from masonry surfaces without causing some damage to the masonry, and it is best to leave the surfaces as they are or repaint them if necessary.

Some physicists are experimenting with the use of pulsed laser beams and xenon flash lamps for cleaning historic masonry surfaces. At this time it is a slow, expensive cleaning method, but its initial success indicates that it may have an increasingly important role in the future.

There are many chemical paint removers which, when applied to painted wood, soften and dissolve the paint so that it can be scraped off by hand. Peeling paint can be removed from wood by hand scraping and sanding. Particularly thick layers of paint may be softened with a heat gun or heat plate, providing appropriate precautions are taken, and the paint film scraped off by hand. Too much heat applied to the same spot can burn the wood, and the fumes caused by burning paint are dangerous to inhale, and can be explosive. Furthermore, the hot air from heat guns can start fires in the building cavity. Thus, adequate ventilation is important when using a heat gun or heat plate, as well as when using a chemical stripper. A torch or open flame should never be used.

Preparations for Cleaning: It cannot be overemphasized that all of these cleaning methods must be approached with caution. When using any of these procedures which involve water or other liquid cleaning agents on masonry, it is imperative that *all* openings be tightly covered, and all cracks or joints be well pointed in order to avoid the danger of water penetrating the building's facade, a circumstance which might result in serious moisture related problems such as efflorescence and/or subflorescence. Any time water is used on masonry as a cleaning agent, either in its pure state or in combination with chemical cleaners, it is very important that the work be done in warm weather when there is no danger of frost for several months. Otherwise water which has penetrated the masonry may freeze, eventually causing the surface of the building to crack and spall, which may create another conservation problem more serious to the health of the building than dirt.

Each kind of masonry has a unique composition and reacts differently with various chemical cleaning substances. Water and/or chemicals may interact with minerals in stone and cause new types of stains to leach out to the surface immediately, or more gradually in a delayed reaction. What may be a safe and effective cleaner for certain stain on one type of stone, may leave unattractive discolorations on another stone, or totally dissolve a third type.

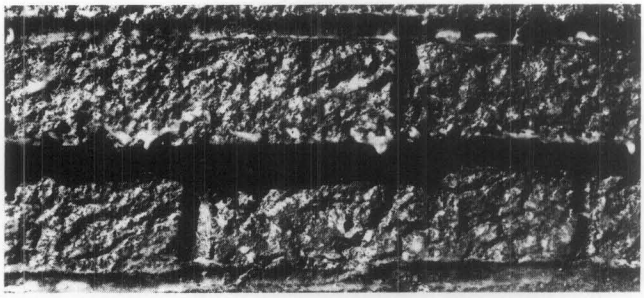
Testing: Cleaning historic building materials, particularly masonry, is a technically complex subject, and thus, should never be done without expert consultation and testing. No cleaning project should be undertaken without first applying the intended cleaning agent to a representative test patch area in an inconspicuous location on the building surface. The test patch or patches should be allowed to weather for a period of time, preferably through a complete seasonal cycle, in order to determine that the cleaned area will not be adversely affected by wet or freezing weather or any by-products of the cleaning process.

Mitigating the Effects of Abrasive Cleaning

There are certain restoration measures which can be adopted to help preserve a historic building exterior which has been damaged by abrasive methods. Wood that has been sandblasted will exhibit a frayed or "fuzzed" surface, or a harder wood will have an exaggerated raised grain. The only way to remove this rough surface or to smooth the grain is by laborious sanding. Sandblasted wood, unless it has been extensively sanded, serves as a dustcatcher, will weather faster, and will present a continuing and ever worsening maintenance problem. Such wood, after sanding, should be painted or given a clear surface coating to protect the wood, and allow for somewhat easier maintenance.

There are few successful preservative treatments that may be applied to grit-blasted exterior masonry. Harder, denser stone may have suffered only a loss of crisp edges or tool marks, or other indications of craft technique. If the stone has a compact and uniform composition, it should continue to weather with little additional deterioration. But some types of sandstone, marble and limestone will weather at an accelerated rate once their protective "quarry crust" or patina has been removed.

Softer types of masonry, particularly brick and architectural terra-cotta, are the most likely to require some remedial treatment if they have been abrasively cleaned. Old brick, being essentially a soft, baked clay product, is greatly susceptible to increased deterioration when its hard, outer skin is removed through abrasive techniques. This problem can be minimized by painting the brick. An alternative is to treat it with a clear sealer or surface coating but this will give the masonry a glossy or shiny look. It is usually preferable to paint the brick rather than to apply a transparent sealer since



Hazards of Sandblasting and Surface Coating. *In order to "protect" this heavily sandblasted brick, a clear surface coating or sealer was applied. Because the air temperature was too cold at the time of application, the sealer failed to dry properly, dripping in places, and giving the brick surface a cloudy appearance.*

sealers reduce the transpiration of moisture, allowing salts to crystallize as subflorescence that eventually spalls the brick. If a brick surface has been so extensively damaged by abrasive cleaning and weathering that spalling has already begun, it may be necessary to cover the walls with stucco, if it will adhere.

Of course, the application of paint, a clear surface coating (sealer), or stucco to deteriorating masonry means that the historical appearance will be sacrificed in an attempt to conserve the historic building materials. However, the original color and texture will have been changed already by the abrasive treatment. At this point it is more important to try to preserve the brick, and there is little choice but to protect it from "dusting" or spalling too rapidly. As a last resort, in the case of severely spalling brick, there may be no option but to replace the brick—a difficult, expensive (particularly if custom-made reproduction brick is used), and lengthy process. As described earlier, sandblasted interior brick work, while not subject to change of weather, may require the application of a transparent surface coating or painting as a maintenance procedure to contain loose mortar and brick dust. (See Preservation Briefs: No. 1 for a more thorough discussion of coatings.)

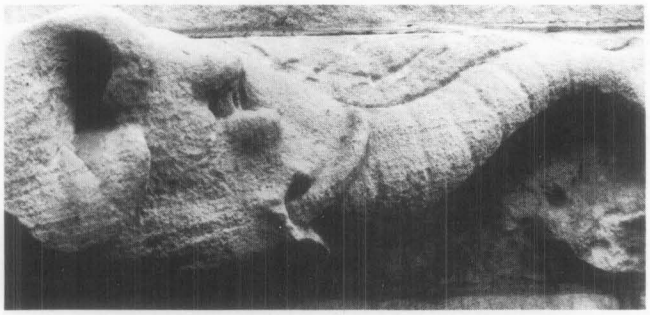
Metals, other than cast or wrought iron, that have been pitted and dented by harsh abrasive blasting usually cannot be smoothed out. Although fillers may be satisfactory for smoothing a painted surface, exposed metal that has been damaged usually will have to be replaced.

Summary

Sandblasting or other abrasive methods of cleaning or paint removal are by their nature destructive to historic building materials and should not be used on historic buildings except in a few well-monitored instances. There are exceptions when certain types of abrasive cleaning may be permissible, but only if conducted by a trained conservator, and if cleaning is necessary for the preservation of the historic structure.

There is no one formula that will be suitable for cleaning all historic building surfaces. Although there are many commerical cleaning products and methods available, it is impossible to state definitively which of these will be the most effective without causing harm to the building fabric. It is often difficult to identify ingredients or their proportions contained in cleaning products; consequently it is hard to predict how a product will react to the building materials to be cleaned. Similar uncertainties affect the outcome of other cleaning methods as they are applied to historic building materials. Further advances in understanding the complex nature of the many variables of the cleaning techniques may someday provide a better and simpler solution to the problems. But until that time, the process of cleaning historic buildings must be approached with caution through trial and error.

It is important to remember that historic building materials are neither indestructible, nor are they renewable. They must be treated in a responsible manner, which may mean little or no cleaning at all if they are to be preserved for future generations to enjoy. If it is in the best interest of the building to clean it, then it should be done "using the gentlest means possible."



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