

The Cambridge Historical Society has a long and storied history of helping to restore and preserve the landmark homes in the Cambridge area. They play a critical role in ensuring the history of Cambridge and its homes are not lost and, in fact, are brought more to the forefront of the area. Charlie Allen of Charlie Allen Restorations is an integral contributor to their efforts through his help in contracting resources and in the planning of the restoration process. The following two articles are excerpted from two issues of the Cambridge Historical Society's newsletter with permission from the Society.

Facilities Committee Report Winter 2006

The goal of the facilities committee for this year was to implement a Cambridge Historical Commission Institutional Preservation Grant. The Grant was to provide new roofs for the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. As with so many old house improvement projects this one took some unexpected turns!

First, upon detailed inspection of the roofs we determined that the rear chimney needed to be rebuilt. Permission to do so was received from Charles Sullivan, Director of the Cambridge Historical Commission. The brick, mortar composition, and joint tooling were agreed upon and the chimney was torn down and re-built in the exact original configuration last fall.

Another part of the project involved the balustrade on the main roof of the house. It proved more difficult to repair than anticipated. We erected scaffolding across the front of the building to allow us safe access. This allowed for the careful dismantling of the 52' assemblage and a means to lower sections to the ground.

When they were safely dismantled we discovered that some of the balustrade moldings and spindles were beyond repair. This required additional approval from the Cambridge Historical Commission. Sarah Burks examined the existing balustrade and granted us permission to replace the failed elements. Knives were cut and new moldings milled. Quarter spindles were turned. The fabricated moldings were approved and our Certificate of Nonapplicability amended to reflect this approval. At this writing our balustrade is continuing its road back to health at my shop in Somerville.

So what about the roofs? After removing all old layers of roofing, we now have a new garage roof! The sun porch roof has been repaired and should see many more years of service. Our main roof has been stripped and a new EPDM (rubber) roof installed. Special attention was given to the west wall eave where a gravel stop was installed to keep water from spilling over on the rough cast plaster wall. New posts to receive the repaired balustrade have been installed and flashed in. The ell will be outfitted with a new cedar shingle roof. The

shingles will be red cedar and have treated with a fire retardant. And the tiny rear entry door roof will sport a new copper cover.

We also intend to repair the front gate, which is now in the garage, and the posts that support the gate, as part of this project.

What turned out to be a very large and complicated project is nearly complete. I think the Society can be proud of the quality, methods, and craftsmanship that have gone into this major undertaking and can rest assured that our roofs will stand in good repair for many decades into the future.

HLN House Balustrade Summer 2006

by Charlie Allen and Karen L. Davis

Repairing the deteriorated balustrade that graces the roof of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House along the Brattle Street Facade proved to be the most challenging aspect of the major roofing project recently completed by the Society.

The legendary history of the balustrade, which was added to the house in 1853, is documented in the "Reminiscences" of Susan Nichols, who began to live in the house in 1850. She wrote, "As the house looked very low for its breadth, we purchased the discarded railing roof the cancel of St. Paul's Church in Boston to serve as a facade giving more height," St. Paul's, which still stands at 138 Tremont Street in Boston, was designed in 1819 by Alexander Parris and was the first temple-front, Greek Revival-style building in Boston. The chancel has been remodeled numerous times, most recently in the early 20th century by Ralph Adams Cram.

It appears that the carpenter who fashioned the balustrade for the Nichols's cut the vase-like pot-bellied balusters in half lengthwise (they are flat at the back where they are visible), lined them vertically with the five-bay window pattern of the house and created solid panels to link the sections. Each of the five baluster sections is composed of frame containing five half balusters flanked by a quarter one at the junction with the solid panels. Molded top and bottom rails tie the entire structure together.

In 1980, the balustrade was found to have rotted top and bottom rails. These were replaced with new stock. The top rail was clad with aluminum and blocks were placed beneath the bottom rail to lift the balustrade off the roof surface. More repairs were made in 1995. In April of 1997, following a major snowstorm, the balustrade was found hanging off the roof. The Society stabilized it with metal braces, which were shored up again in the winter of 003. Over time the previous repairs and New England winters severely degraded the balustrade.

The original balustrade had been built in place up on the roof. Due to its deteriorated condition, scaffolding was erected and the balustrade taken to the

shop of Charlie Allen Restorations in the winter of 005-006. Cutting the balustrade into manageable sections while saving as much historical fabric as possible created a memorable challenge. The repair work was further complicated since the structure had bowed and racked over its 15 years on the roof. Most original elements had been replaced over time. Only the quarter balusters and most of the frame appeared old enough to have dated to the original chancel rail.

New molding knives were cut and the deteriorated moldings were replicated and replaced, saving as much of the existing material as possible. All new and original elements were backprimed and received two coats of finish paint. The sections were reassembled and transported to house where they were hoisted up and set back into position were, with proper maintenance, they should last for another 15 years.