

Mount Vernon Historic Preservation Newsletter

New Year, New Programs

Please Join Us!

There's no doubt that Mount Vernon's historical architecture is a large part of its history. However, it's also closely intertwined with the stories, or the spirit, of the people who live, and have lived, in Mount Vernon.

With this in mind, the Mount Vernon Historic Preservation Commission (MVHPC) is planning a series of programs to provide a venue for people to reminisce and share the stories that have shaped this town.

This program, called Mount Vernon Stories, will be held on the second Saturday of each month, from 9:30 am-10:30 am, in the City's Council Chambers (lower level of City Hall). Each month will highlight a specific topic or building of Mount Vernon's history with encouragement for audience participation by sharing related memories and stories. The programs are free and open to anyone who has an interest in Mount Vernon history.

Starting in March, the following programs are scheduled:

Saturday, March 14th: **The Waln House** (we know it as the home of the John and Betty Wolfe family). Built c. 1856, this brick house is a landmark in the community. Elijah Waln moved to the newly platted town of Mount Vernon in 1848 where he farmed and opened the first general store. He was elected to the Iowa General Assembly, served as postmaster, justice of the peace and was a trustee for Cornell College. Please join us for a photo tour of this beautiful historic home. Members of the Wolfe family will be present to share their stories.

Saturday, April 11th: **Houses from Kits and Houses that Move**. When folks could order just about anything from the Sears catalog, the company sold 75,000 mail-order houses. Chris Davis joins us to talk about her neighbor's Sears home. Chris will also talk about the house she lives in and how it was moved to its current location. Are there other Sears' homes in Mount Vernon? What other houses in Mount Vernon have been moved?

Saturday, May 9th: **The Robinson House** (we know it as The Gathering House). George Robinson came to Iowa in 1856 and to Mount Vernon after serving 3 years in the Civil War. The original 1-story frame house was built c.1865 on land that also included the owner's brickyard operation. The 2-story brick house was built in 1887, incorporating the original house. Please join us for a photo history of this home and brickyard. The current owners, Paul and Sondra Meyers, will be present to share their stories of restoration.

Mount Vernon Stories is part of an outreach committee for MVHPC. If you'd like to be part of this committee, have suggestions for topics, or would like to bring related photos or mementos to a program, please contact Machele Pelkey at 319-551-2515.

City Directories Online

Who Lived in Your House?

City directories have been around in the U.S. for a long time. They were initially created by craftsmen and salesmen to contact local residents and potential customers. Directories evolved and were often created to include different types of information from the census.

There are 3 Mount Vernon city directories (1902, 1907 & 1925) now available online. In addition, there are also 4 early telephone directories (1932, 1940, 1952 and 1955).

To access the directories, go to mvhpc.org and click on the 'City Directories' link found on the sidebar. Each directory can be searched by entering information in the search window found at the top of each page.

City directories document moves, changes in occupation and living arrangements. Add it all to a timeline and you can keep track of a family's or business's comings and goings.

Street names and house numbers can change over time. For example, consider the following listings for the same address.

1901: 601 s 1st ave
1907: 601 1st ave s.
1932: 601 1 av S
1952: **600** 1 av S
2020: 600 1st Ave SE

City directories are wonderful resources for the year-by-year portrait they paint as well as containing a wealth of information for genealogists.

A big thank you to Janet Budack, Mary Evans and Mary's granddaughter for making these valuable resources accessible online.

If you know of someone who has copies of Mount Vernon city directories they would like to share, please contact Mary Evans at marye1840@gmail.com.

From Mount Vernon Hawk-eye, January 14, 1870

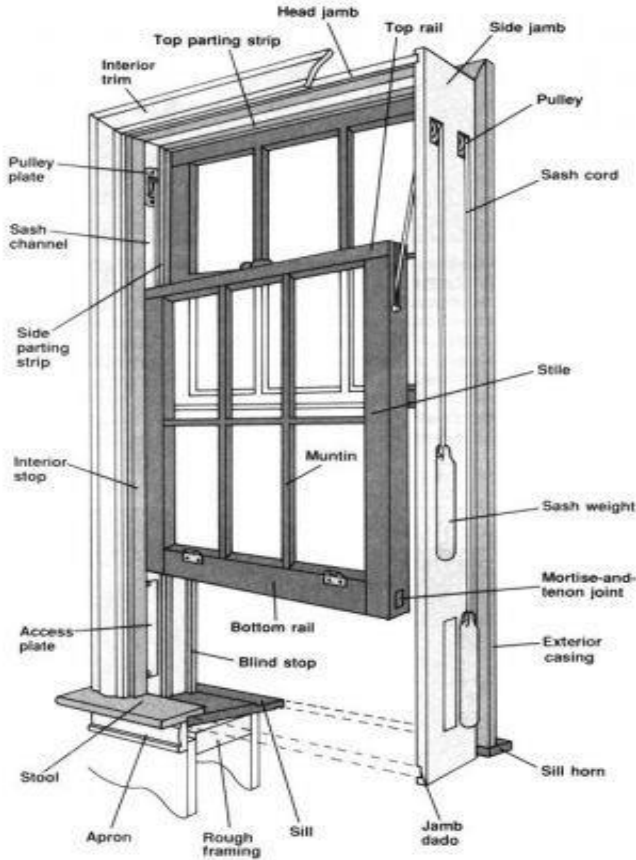
A few overcoats yet on hand which can be had at greatly reduced prices, by calling at the store of S.H. Bauman.

Historic Windows

Vital to the Spirit of a Historic Building

One of the most important architectural features on a historic building is its original windows. Besides adding beauty and character, original windows connect the outside of the building to the inside and offer invaluable clues to a building's history.

Anatomy of a Window



Historic Windows are Original – Replacement windows always alter the historic appearance of a building. Trim, dimensions of parts and proportions of replacement windows almost always deviate from the original.

Historic Windows are Simple - Unlike replacement windows, old windows are easily repaired. Using wood putty, glazing, caulk and paint are simple repairs that can be done by a homeowner.

Because historic wood windows were assembled similar to a cabinet, a skilled carpenter can easily take apart a historic window, repair it, and put it together again.

Historic Windows are Sustainable - Saving existing windows is 'greener' than producing new windows. Maintaining existing windows saves the energy and

resources needed for new windows and offers hand-crafted woodworking, authenticity and historic value.

Original windows have probably been in service for as many years as the age of the building. Repairs on original windows could last another 50 years before restoration is needed again. That kind of longevity makes historic windows extremely "green" on any sustainability scale.

Historic Windows are Energy Efficient - If restored correctly, original windows will be as (or even more) energy efficient than replacement windows. They will also cost less and provide a payback much faster than the cost of a replacement window can be recovered through savings in energy bills. Retrofits such as storm windows and insulating shades can achieve energy savings at a much lower cost.

For more information, go to mvhpc.org and click on YouTube Content in the sidebar. You will find a 3 part video on Preservation of Historic Windows.

This House is for the Birds

Literally

While sitting outside and enjoying a late autumn afternoon, I became aware of an inordinate number of birds on the side of our brick house. After closer inspection, I realized that they were pecking at, not only the mortar, but the soft bricks. Several of the bricks had been pecked to the point of having a scooped out appearance. What!? Why would birds be pecking at a brick house?

After some research, I learned that some birds need grit to help them digest their food. They find this grit in soft bricks and mortar. They may also be looking for nutrients, such as calcium carbonate, that's a common ingredient of mortar.

Brick damaged from pecking



We followed a suggestion to hang feeders containing generous amounts of coarse sand. We also hung some fine screen (attached only in the mortar) to cover the most damaged section. So far, this seems to have solved the problem. We'll see once spring arrives.

--Machele Pelkey

Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye, January 8, 1920

Good ice packs were secured at both the Upper and Lower Palisades, in fact, the largest crops ever put up there being reported. Last year there was no ice supply at all at the lower Palisades and but a limited supply at the Upper Palisades headquarters.