

Save Your Windows!

by Amy Catania, Executive Director, Historic Saranac Lake

This is the third of four columns that Historic Saranac Lake is contributing to the Adirondack Daily Enterprise this spring on the topic of architectural preservation.

It's hard not to notice the advertisements for replacement windows. The ads claim that new windows will keep our houses warm, save us money, and make our lives easy. More and more people are replacing their old windows with new vinyl ones. We notice this especially in Saranac Lake, where so many of our older homes have (or used to have) beautiful glassed-in cure porches.

Here at Historic Saranac Lake, we often field calls about replacement windows. We always urge people not to believe the claims of the replacement window companies. It is always best to fix the old wood windows that you have, and if you have to replace your windows, replace with wood. It's not what people want to hear. We want to believe that we can be free of our old creaky and leaky windows. But the best way to solve your window problem is to repair the ones you have. Here are five good reasons to restore your wood windows, adapted from a similar list created by the New England Window Restoration Alliance.

1. Wood windows are more durable. Many of our old wood windows are already older than we are, but they have many more years left in them with the right care. They may be starting to show their age, but with some work they can be repaired to last another hundred years. The craftsmanship and dense old growth timber of antique windows makes them incredibly strong and weather resistant. Many replacement windows come with limited warranties that don't cover labor. Many carry warranties of twenty years. In the lifetime of a building, that is not a long time.

2. Wood windows fit better. Your old windows were made to fit your house. Over the years, they have expanded and contracted with the seasons and with the settling of your house. Weather stripping can help your old windows fit and seal even better. Replacement windows, on the other hand, have a rigid structure. They don't expand and contract with your house, and their fit will never be as good as your original old windows.

3. Repaired wood windows will give you the energy savings you want. In the winter, the cold air comes right through your old windows, and replacing them with new vinyl windows seems like an obvious answer. But studies have shown that you can drastically improve energy efficiency in old windows with minor repairs. A local repairman can do the work for less cost than you might expect, as it usually requires simple things like replacing broken glass, reglazing and weather stripping. You can save 30-40% on heating costs with these simple measures. One study compared the energy savings between a restored wood window with a good storm versus a new vinyl window. In one entire year, the vinyl window was estimated to provide only **60 cents** in energy savings.

4. Wood is the environmental choice. Replacement windows are made of poly vinyl chloride (PVC), a material that is becoming a big concern in the building industry. Its production creates

toxic environmental waste, and over time it emits gases into the environment. When it burns it releases toxic dioxins. With proper precautions, lead paint that you might have on your old wood windows can be safely managed. But you won't escape lead with vinyl windows, as it is used as a stabilizer in PVC. When you add up the energy use that goes into production, shipping, installation and removal process of replacing windows, keeping your old windows is the green choice. Instead of paying for new materials made elsewhere, it is much better for our local economy to put money into repairs and restoration done by local craftspeople.

5. Old wood windows look better! Pick out an old glassed-in cure porch and compare it to a neighbor with new vinyl windows. Clearly, the old windows look better, even when they are in need of some repairs. Craftsmanship went into old wood windows, making for many unique shapes that give our homes special character. Old glass panes have varieties of color and texture. Old windows are not only more beautiful from the outside. They are more pleasing from the inside, too, because they let in more light than vinyl replacements.

If you are lucky enough to still have your old wood windows, we hope this article has helped you decide to keep them and care for them. If you have already replaced your windows, but still have the old ones in your basement, we suggest hanging onto them for the day you need to replace the vinyl ones. If you live in a National Register home, a tax credit can help subsidize repair of your old windows and other rehabilitation of your home. If you live in an old cure cottage and would like to find out about getting on the National Register and accessing the tax credit, please contact Historic Saranac Lake at 891-4606.