

Wagner Roof Lines

Wagner Roofing...between Washington and the weather since 1914

Winter 1997

27 Tons of Slate Top Dupont Circle Mansion

S Chester A. Arthur settled into the White House in 1882, roofers a few blocks away were driving hand-made nails to secure a new slate roof on a Dupont Circle mansion. Although the Arthur presidency hasn't weathered well (who even remembers President Arthur?), the roof on the Blaine Mansion lasted 115 years. The moral: Though a slate roof can last 21 presidencies, it can't last forever.

The new roof that Wagner Roofing recently installed at the Massachusetts Avenue and P Street building--built for former Secretary of State James G. Blaine--should last through an equally impressive number of presidencies. With 12,000 slate shingles weighing more than 27 tons, the roof is not only beautiful but extremely durable.

"Buckingham slate is the best slate available as far as durability and resistance to weather is concerned," said veteran Wagner employee Bob Wooldridge.

Quarried just south of the capitol in Buckingham County, Virginia, the slate is guaranteed for the life of the

building. Its high density gives it durability and also helps retain its deep blue color. In fact, a replacement shingle added 20 years from now would be indistinguishable in color from the slate installed this year.

This year's work on the Blaine Mansion required a repair of the entire mansard roof. Before removing the old roof, Wagner Roofing took extensive



Since 1882, the Blaine Mansion has been home to many D.C. notables.

measurements and photographs to make sure the intricate patterns and designs of the old slate could be exactly replicated. Then thousands of individual slate shingles needed to be hand-cut at 45-degree angles to mirror the scallop shape of the old slate. The roof's three towers, multiple pitches and elevations, hips and valleys,

skylights and dormer windows added to the formidable task.

"It was the challenge of all challenges in terms of a reroofing job," said Wagner Roofing President Chuck Wagner. "We took everything down to the bare wood and replaced it exactly as they had it."

Wagner Roofing received key assistance on the restoration project from Jack Fullerton of Moisture Infiltration Co. and Hagner Management's Nancy Thurston, whose company has managed the building since 1920.

The Blaine Mansion, one of the earliest of the great houses on Dupont Circle, passed through several ownerships over the years (see sidebar on page 2) but has been in the Spencer family since 1920. It was converted into professional office space in the 1940s, giving a home to the law offices of Samuel Spencer, an attorney who oversaw the pre-home rule government of the District of Columbia in the 1950s. Spencer, also known for his work as general counsel for the American Institute for Architects, drew up what is now the industry standard AIA contract.

The driving force behind this year's restoration work on the mansion, Spencer died in March at age 86, just five weeks before the renovation was completed.

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Blaine Mansion.....	2
In Our Words.....	2
Gallagher Mansion.....	3
Free Help.....	4
Know Your Roof.....	4

Blaine Mansion Housed Many Notables



James G. Blaine, who lost to Grover Cleveland in the 1884 presidential race, served as secretary of state under presidents James Garfield and Benjamin Harrison. He planned to build his home on 16th Street near Scott Circle but settled on the Dupont Circle site where construction began in 1881 (see main story on page 1).

The Blaines moved into their new home in December 1882 but lived there only a short time, possibly because the residence was too large and expensive to maintain. Later tenants in the mansion include Levi Leiter, the Chicago millionaire who was a partner with Marshall Field, owner of a chain of Chicago department stores.

Blaine died in 1893 and his wife eventually sold the house to George Westinghouse, inventor of the air brake and founder of Westinghouse Electric Co. The house was purchased by Henry B. Spencer in 1920 and was home to the Japanese Embassy from 1922-25. Spencer converted the building into office space in the late 1940s and in 1956 it passed to Spencer's children. The mansion now houses law and medical offices.

(Source: *Massachusetts Avenue Architecture, Volume II. Commission of Fine Arts. 1975.*)

Skilled Craftsmen are Getting Harder to Find

In Our Words

One of the greatest challenges facing the roofing industry today is the struggle to find quality craftsmen. Many industries battle with this issue, as the labor force changes from an age-old apprenticeship tradition to an "easy-route" work force. A Wall Street Journal article last year addressed this very problem (and in fact, the reporter interviewed our own master craftsman Bob Wooldridge at the National Building Museum trade show). The article asked, where have all the craftsmen gone? And what does their disappearance mean for the future of the building industry?

The craftsmen have gone by the way of easy street. Workers today just aren't as interested in long apprenticeships, in putting in the kind of hard work necessary to learn difficult skills like sheet metal work and fine slate work. In the past, these kinds of skills were learned over many years, under the tutelage of knowledgeable craftsmen. But this learning period usually meant a long term of low

pay and hard work, a sacrifice most workers today are unwilling and often unable to make.

The future of the building industry, one that creates structures designed and built to last through the generations, depends on our ability to encourage fine craftsmanship. At Wagner Roofing, our specialty work is our pride. Shop-made sheet metal work, such as cornices, and hand-cut slate carefully laid in elaborate patterns beautifully meld function and aesthetics. But to create these works we depend on a highly skilled work force, craftsmen who have the knowledge, the skill and the pride to make such products possible.

Our main source of training is still on the job. Entry-level helpers work with skilled craftsmen to learn the tools of the trade on the job. Advancement takes place as skills progress. This manner of learning tries to maximize production and learning, and relies on the knowledge and experience of veteran crafters. It's the way the vast majority of companies train employees.

But beginning this spring, the local Associated Builders and

Contractors will offer a sheet metal apprenticeship program that we plan to utilize. It's a pilot program, but one based on a principle of learning that we strongly support: intense education done under the guidance of highly skilled professionals. It's a more formal arena of learning than on-the-job training. Students get the chance to study and practice skills that are age-old, without the time pressures that go along with on-the-job training. It's basically a school for craftsmen, something that has been done through the centuries, but has fallen out of favor recently.

We hope to see and use more apprenticeship programs like this. We can't build quality without quality workers. We are glad to have a skilled crafters now but want to make sure we will have them well into the future. Thanks for the Associated Builders and Contractors for taking the lead in this arena.

Chuck Wagner



Majestic Home Saved From Deterioration

Just a few years ago Baltimore's Gallagher Mansion was dangerously close to collapse. Preservation architect James Wollon knows this first hand.

While touring the pre-Civil War stone mansion in 1994, he was temporarily stranded on the second floor after the staircase crashed. His associate, several steps ahead of him on the stairs, got a quick ride down to the main floor, where he landed unharmed. Wollon was able to scramble to safety even after the second floor buckled underneath him. A ladder in the attic put the much-relieved architect back on the ground.

"It was as bad as a building can be and still try to save it," Wollon said. "I didn't expect it to last until it was restored."

But last it did. Thanks to the efforts of a non-profit Baltimore developer, the beautiful 140-year-old landmark was recently resurrected to its former glory--and then some. An impressive \$3.4 million renovation and addition converted the residence into 40 much-needed, one-bedroom apartments for seniors. And now this work, done with an exacting eye for quality, detail and beauty has been nominated for several craftsmanship awards.

A happy ending for a building that until recently had a very uncertain future.

Built between 1854 and 1857, the Italianate villa is named after Patrick Gallagher, a grocer with a large family who hired architect Edmund Lind to expand the house to 17 rooms about 1879. Gallagher added a third story with a mansard roof that reflects the French Second Empire style of the time. The home stayed in the Gallagher family for 99 years, until 1972, but deteriorated rapidly after that due to vandalism and neglect.

The city of Baltimore bought the dilapidated building in 1986 in the hopes of saving this Baltimore City Landmark, also listed on the the National Register of Historic Places. The search for funds and resources to renovate was turned over to Govans Ecumenical Development Corporation, a non-profit developer and operator of service-linked housing and social service programs.

After a decade of lobbying and planning, GEDCO successfully secured a whopping \$3.4 million from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department, the city of Baltimore and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.

The extensive restoration began in fall of 1995 and ended this past fall. "They took off everything," said Julia Pierson, GEDCO executive director. "All there were were four stone walls."

Restoration of the ornate slate mansard roof became the challenge for Wagner Roofing, which has a successful history with challenging projects. Although the company does a wide range of work, including residential roofs, jobs like this one are a specialty.

"As far as degree of difficulty from one-to-ten," said veteran Wagner employee Bob Wooldridge, "it was right up there in the eight category."

A belt of multicolored scallop-shaped slate that encircles the steep mansard roof was carefully reproduced using a few of the existing shingles and many new. The work involved red slate, green Vermont slate and blue-gray slate. The rest of the slate roof is also new, as well as a stainless steel metal roof not visible from below.

Wagner's work on the roof has earned the company a nomination for the Metropolitan Washington Excellence in Construction Award. The nomination was made by Tom Capps, the project manager from Harkins Builders, which oversaw the construction.

Wagner's efforts also brought an award to the project foreman, Bob



Above, the Gallagher Mansion was near collapse in 1995.

Below, today the mansion is a residence for senior citizens.

Wooldridge, whose work on the Gallagher roof won a Craftsmanship Award from the Building Congress & Exchange of Metropolitan Baltimore. A 42-year roofing veteran, Wooldridge worked with other Wagner employees on the project: Roger McGraw, Jeffrey Wooldridge, Harvey Kneas and Robert Thomas.

"The nomination really means something. It's not just a perfunctory nomination," said Harry Hess, project architect, who has made only about 10 nominations in the past 10-to-15 years. Wagner's job "is one of the best we've ever seen," he said.

HELP!

Roofing Association Offers Consumer Help

Free help? Yes! the National Roofing Contractors Association will help you--free of charge--locate a qualified roofing contractor in your area. This service is open to anyone who needs it, from building owners, maintenance supervisors and architects to specifiers and homeowners.

Just call 1-800-USA-ROOF and you will receive a list of local and regional NRCA affiliate organizations. You will also get a booklet that describes common roofing systems and general roofing terminology. All inquiries are kept confidential.

1-800-USA-ROOF

Do you know your roof?



To many homeowners and property managers roofs can be a mystery, and leaks even more of a puzzle. But your roof really isn't that complicated. Read this and get a quick lesson on what makes a roof a roof.

Roofs are really just four basic elements. There are the rafters (or trusses), structural elements of a building, to which roof foundation is attached. This base, called the roof deck or sheathing, is usually plywood and is the first layer of protection over a structure or building. Over this goes the underlayment or felt (often called tar paper), a sheet of asphalt-saturated material that provides the second layer of protection. Finally, the shingles (or other roofing material such as metal or slate) protects the entire structure from the harsh elements of weather.

Written by Mike McQueen and Wendy Price Jones; designed by Carolyn Weary Brandt

Printed on recycled paper

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