



Old Orland Historic District

Building Color

The colors of a building—whether the natural colors of building materials or applied colors of paint or stain—are an important consideration with impact upon the building’s overall character. Though the choice of colors is largely a matter of personal preference, some colors are more appropriate than others, depending upon a building’s age, style, and setting.

Historically, color use varied with the time period. After the 1860’s (the time period in which Orland Park was first settled) typical colors included greens, reds, oranges, browns and olives that were fairly dark and rich. The body color was usually lighter, with trim painted in darker compatible colors; sometimes the opposite was true. Color patterns were simple, usually with only two different colors used on a building.

In the years between the 1880s and 1900s, when architectural designs became more complex and included more ornamental elements, the use of color followed suit. Three colors combined on a single building became more common, and there was a re-introduction of lighter colors that had seen less use in previous periods. When combined with darker colors, this created a more varied visual effect that complemented the generally more complex building designs.

In many cases in Old Orland the colors of unpainted brick or stone walls are the base colors, and trim colors should be selected to be compatible with them. In general, on buildings with dark red brick walls, darker trim colors such as maroon or dark green are appropriate, while for lighter tan or buff-colored brick, and for stone of similar color, consider yellow, cream, or white trim colors. On more recent buildings of concrete block or other material, follow these same rules of thumb, depending on the basic wall material color.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider choosing colors based on research into a building’s original paint colors. Using scrapers, sandpaper, and paint remover, chip or scrape down through paint layers to expose earlier colors (a qualified contractor is best for this job). Once historic paint layers are exposed, match current color chips to them to make a color selection. If original colors can’t be discovered or are unacceptable, then consider alternate colors chosen according to the time-period guidelines above.
2. Paint only surfaces that have been painted before. Stone surfaces were seldom painted originally; brick surfaces sometimes were but usually were not. Poor weather resistance or damage to a wall were the usual reasons for painting brick, though sometimes it was just to change the building’s look. In general, do not paint brick, stone, or concrete that has not been painted before. If it has been painted, consider re-painting rather than removing the old paint, because this can be difficult, expensive, and it can damage the masonry.
3. Avoid using too many colors on a building. Late 19th Century buildings should have a maximum of three different colors (the body color and two trim colors); those from earlier and later periods should have no more than two. Consider using light and dark shades of the same color when choosing body and trim colors.