

FROM A HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

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This is a forum for anyone to talk about historic preservation. If you have something to say about historic preservation, write an article, or tell The Guttenberg Press what you would like to know more about and maybe we can find someone to write an article.

Let's start with some important (and maybe boring) background. Historic preservation covers a lot of subjects. Wikipedia defines it as "an endeavor that seeks to preserve, conserve and protect buildings, objects, and landscapes."

Many government agencies promote historic preservation including the National Register of Historic Places under the U.S Dept of Interior, the National Park Service, State Historical Society of Iowa, Clayton County Conservation Board, and Guttenberg Historic Preservation Commission. Locally the Clayton County Conservation Board is working on the Motor Mills Historic Site.

There are even more non-government preservation organizations including the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Iowa, and Guttenberg Heritage Society. Many of these groups are non-profit and encourage membership. Locally the Guttenberg Heritage Society operates the Lockmaster's Heritage House Museum.

All of those boards and commissions are confusing but some feel that locally the most important issue is to preserve Guttenberg as a Historic River Town. Let's use this column in the Guttenberg Press to talk Historic Preservation. These can be small personal issues like restoring windows in old homes or big issues like maintaining our overall historic look while promoting business and progress. Maybe we will even have some disagreement and debate on how to manage these small and big issues.

Let's start by defining some words: restore, renovate, remodel and remuddle. It is easy to think that every home and business should be restored. But according to Webster restore means "to put back into a former or original state." That sounds like a good concept but the idea of living in my 160-year-old house without indoor plumbing does not sound like fun.

Another term is renovate. Again to quote Webster this means "to restore to a former better state (as in cleaning, repairing and rebuilding)." We did that with some of our home's old floors and windows.

The last commonly used word is remodel. Webster says to remodel is to "make over, modify, change or rework." We certainly remodeled the baths and kitchen in our 160 year old house. Almost nothing is original. We only kept and renovated the claw foot tub.

One final not-so-common term is remuddle. Remuddle is sometimes in dictionaries but not Webster. The online wiktionary defines this as "to remodel a building or room in a way that obscures or destroys key aspects of the original design." Many preservationists draw the line here. If you remuddle a building you lose the historic design of that building – usually forever. This is however sometimes a matter of opinion. Personally my least favorite remuddled building is one you have seen on TV. Soldier Field in Chicago looks like someone landed a spaceship in ancient Greece. In my opinion it is awful!

Maybe readers have opinions on which buildings in Guttenberg or surrounding communities may have been restored well, or questions on how they might fix up their old house without remuddling it. Let's start the discussion.