



MEMO

TO: Historic Preservation Committee

FROM: Mary Baker, Community Development Intern

CC: Kevin Turner, Community Development Director, and Brittany Anderson, City Planner

SUBJECT: Residential Fence Style Guidelines and Standards

DATE: July 7th, 2025

In response to your request for a fence style guide:

To allow fence building approvals to be carried out administratively by city staff, we recommend more detailed fence standards for residents to follow. We have researched fence style guides for other cities and their historic districts and have attached examples from the Cities of Madison, Savannah, and Rome.

Below, we have also included pictures of the existing fences in the district. We found that most fences along Main Street are white picket, and most fences off Main Street are split rail or chain-link. Most of the split rail fences had chicken wire on them. The current residential guidelines say to preserve existing walls and fences where they are, and wood picket fences may be added in the front or side yard facing the street, but they must be stained and painted. Also, if a chain-link fence is appropriate and necessary, it should be a dark color, only used in the rear yard, and not allowed to pass the rear façade of the home.

Regarding the general residential fencing requirements, Section 10.2.2 of the code states:

- A fence or wall not more than four feet in height may project into or enclose that portion of the property between the structure and public or private street(s).
- The fence or wall shall be at least ten feet from the roadway, or off the right-of-way, whichever is greater, but in no instance shall the fence or wall cause a sight distance problem to the motoring public.
- A fence or wall may project into or enclose other portions of the side or rear yard of the property provided the fence or wall does not exceed a height of eight feet.
- The decorative or finished side of the fence shall face outward.



Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Pictures taken from the Historic District:



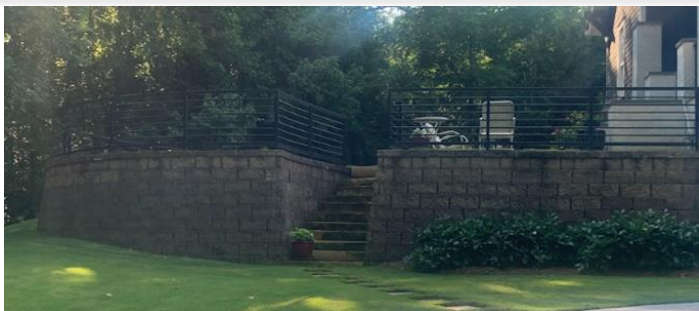
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City of Madison Fence Style Guide:

B. Fences

Both iron and wood fences were commonly used in Madison. In fact, the town once had many more fences than it does today, judging from historic photographs and the many low masonry walls that once supported wood fences. Most of the Madison fences were decorative wood, or picket fences, though there are a few remaining wrought iron fences as well. There is also historic precedent for solid plank fences, horizontal board fences and for various wire fences.

1. **Iron Fences:** Iron fences are actually expensive and only rarely installed today. Owners contemplating iron fences - now usually welded steel - should replicate simple historic designs when possible. Existing metal fences provide good examples. If there is documentation for an earlier metal fence, every effort would be made to duplicate the original.

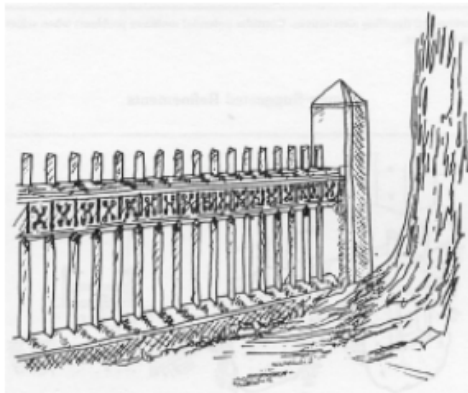


Some typical 19th-century examples of iron fences.



Simple, welded steel fences are often the most appropriate, when earlier fences are not known. Professional installation is recommended.

2. **Wood Fences:** Wood picket fences are the most common decorative fences in Madison. Owners wishing to install a wood fence should first consider recreating a known existing fence. Documentation should be sought in old photographs and on the site: often postholes or walls provide indications of earlier fences.



Picket fences generally varied from period to period. Ideally, fence designs corresponding to architectural style or type of the main house should be selected. Greek Revival houses, for example, usually had narrow, square-shaped pickets, usually set between parallel rails and supporting members. Other Greek Revival fences had baseboards meeting the sidewalks. Late 19th century fences tended to be more elaborate. Wider pickets, both with and without baseboards, and decorative sawn pickets, sometimes mimicking balustrades, were also common. Craftsman fences tended toward composite arrangements, sometimes with panels above and lattice below, or with alternating vertical boards. Finally, Colonial Revival fences return to styles of the early 19th century, often with prominent posts and gates.

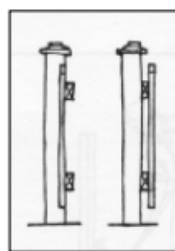
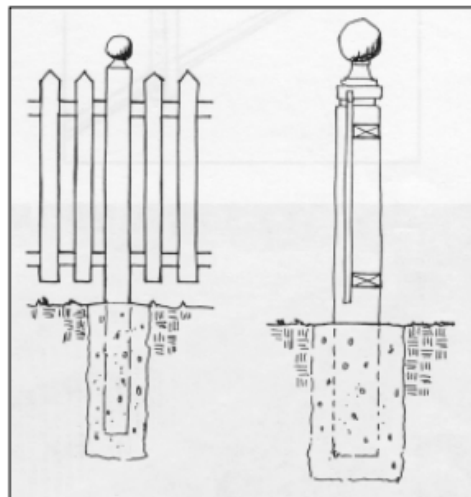
Fences should be installed following long recognized procedures. Treated material is highly recommended, as are galvanized nails. Boards can be pre-painted or pre-stained to promote longevity. Heights vary, but pickets generally range between three and four feet. Posts may be flush with the pickets or may be set back. They

may be prominent features of the design, or generally hidden from view. Fences should be detailed to avoid water penetration.

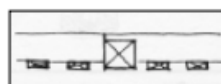
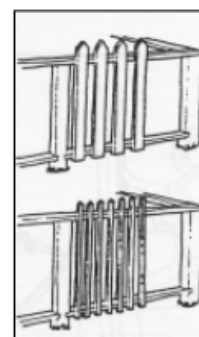
Some traditional picket fences, especially for more modest buildings, might be left unpainted. Various waterproof coatings will help to protect the life of such fences.

Picket fences are generally not appropriate for post-1940s houses with some exceptions. Picket fences would be inappropriate for most modern brick ranch houses. Prefabricated, especially thinner, wood picket fences are often inappropriate for historic buildings. Pickets should be at least 3/4 inches thick. Half-inch thick prefabricated pickets often look out of character with historic districts.

A Simple Fence

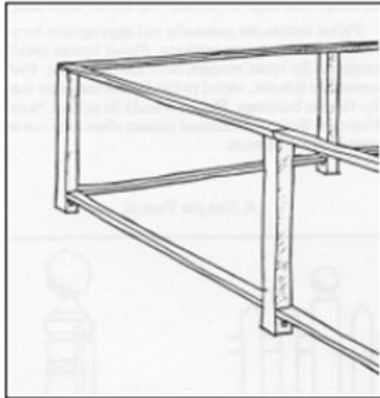


Posts, placed no more than 8 feet on center, are set in concrete, with a "crowned" top to promote drainage. Posts have simple ball (top) or slightly sloped plain wood (center, left) caps.

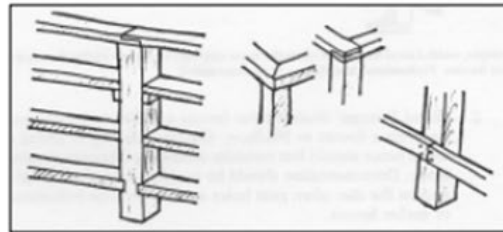


Pickets can be mounted to either side of rails. Picket sizes ranged from narrow (Greek Revival) to wider (late 19th-century). Posts need to be set into the ground approximately 1/3 their length.

Building the Rail and Setting Posts



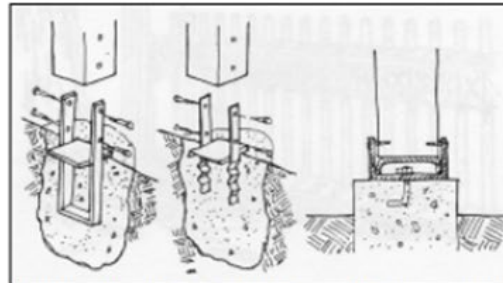
Space pickets with a spacer, checking that they remain vertical.



Various rail detailing alternatives. Consider potential moisture problems when selecting detailing.



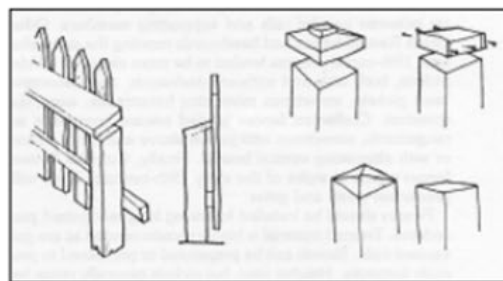
Some Suggested Refinements



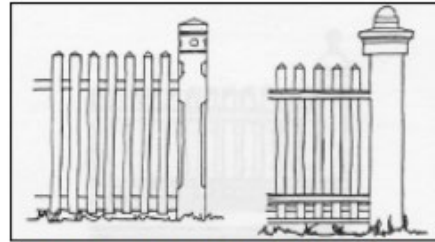
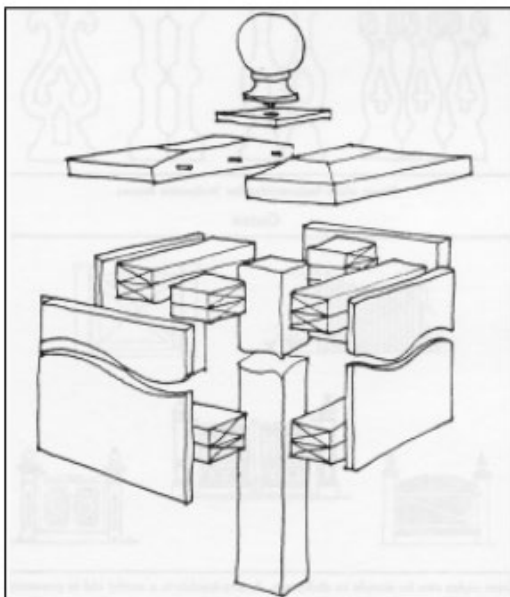
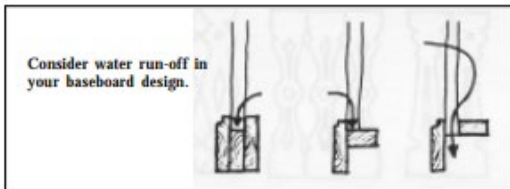
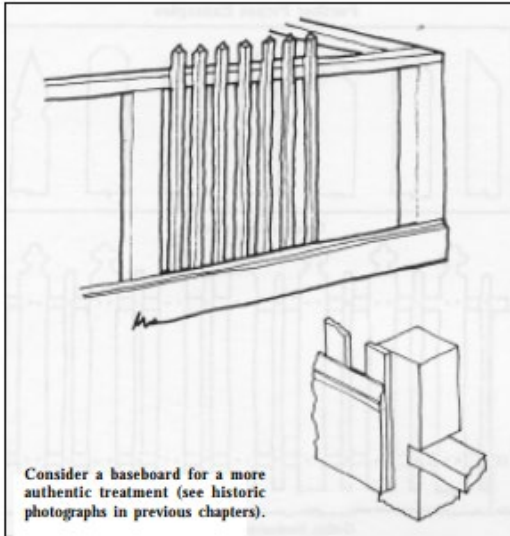
Consider metal anchors to avoid later decay. Otherwise, use treated material, especially for posts.



The posts and rail come first.

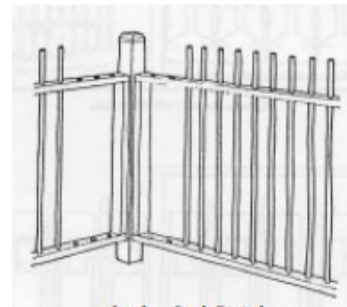


Slope upper rail and either bevel or use standard metal caps for posts. Avoid flat post-top as shown at bottom right.

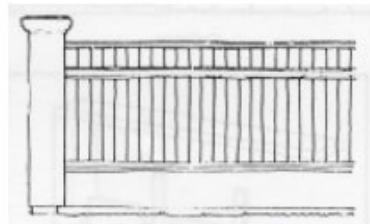


A built-up post is often preferable (see illustration bottom left).

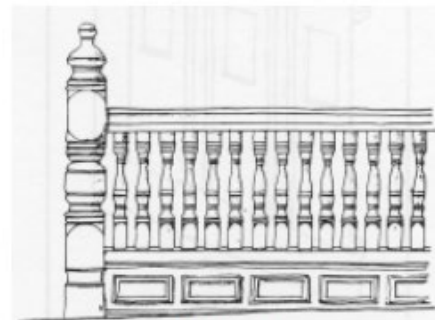
Some Alternative Styles



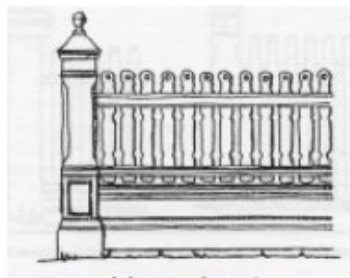
dowels - Greek Revival



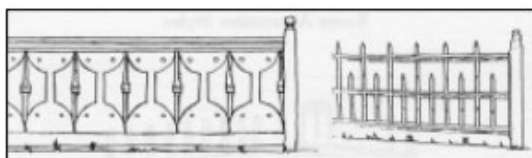
fence with rail - Greek Revival and later



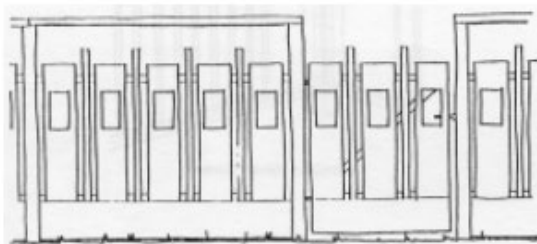
turned balusters - Italianate



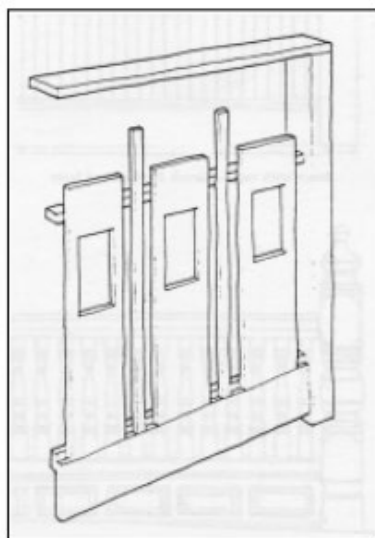
sawn balusters - Queen Anne



Queen Anne/Folk Victorian

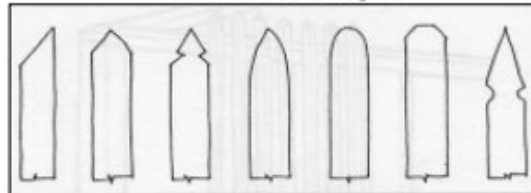


Craftsman

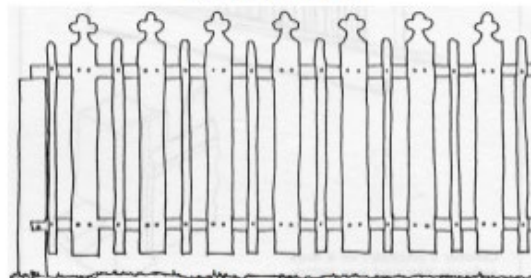


A detail from the Craftsman example

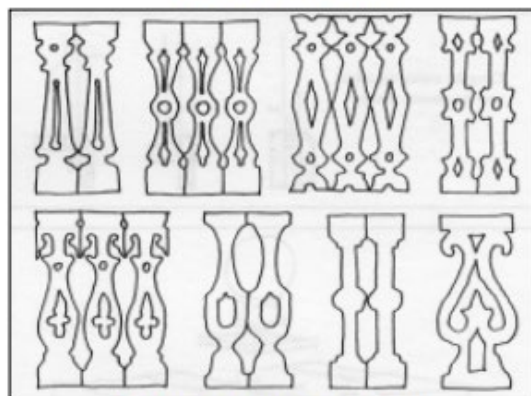
Further Picket Examples



Simple picket designs

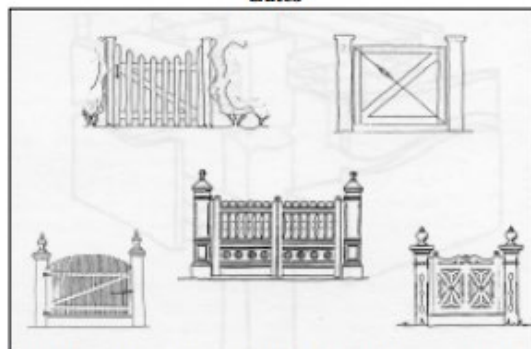


Gothic Revival-inspired pickets

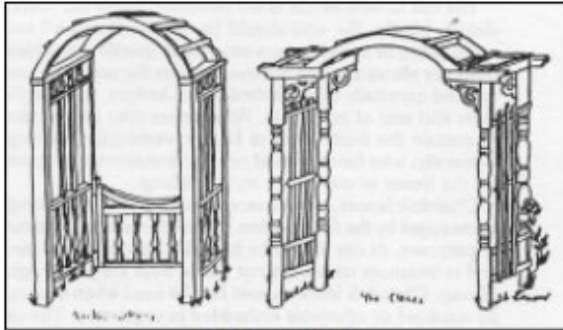


Sawn work balustrade for Italianate fences

Gates

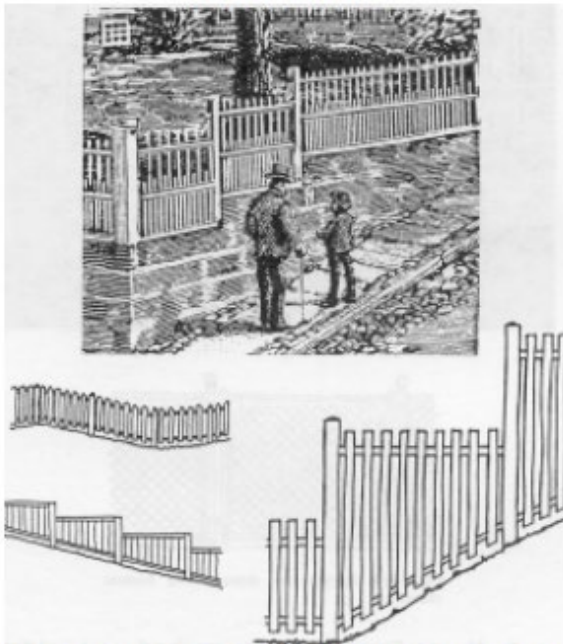


Gate styles can be simple to elaborate. A turn-buckle is a useful aid in preventing sagging.



Garden gates/arbors

Difficult Terrain



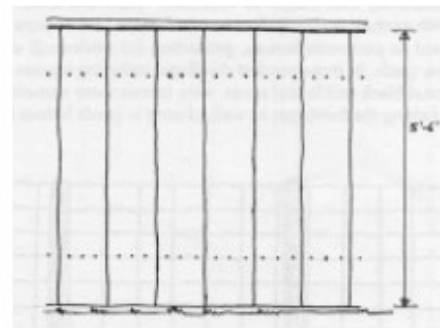
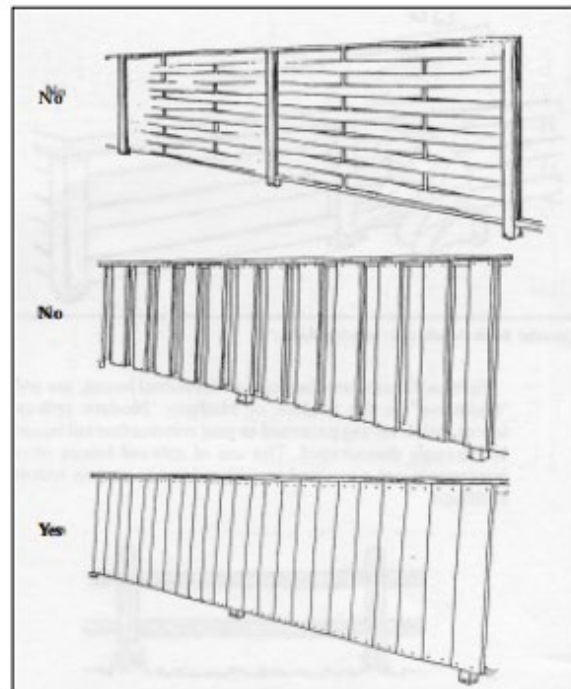
Picket fences can be used on rolling terrain. For steeper, continuous slopes, stepped fences are best.

3. **Plank Fences and Privacy Fences:** Vertical plank fences are traditional in Madison. Fences of this kind, ranging in height from four feet to seven or eight feet are indicated in historic photographs and are known to have been used in other southern towns as well. Fences of this kind usually lacked decorative embellishments; they were usually utilitarian in intent and character. Tops of boards, usually four to six inches wide were cut square or at an angle, creating a sawtooth pattern.

Traditional vertical plank fences provide ideal prototypes for new fence designs. Vertical plank fences can be used to create privacy and to screen parking lots or other non-traditional uses. Their use at the front of properties is discouraged as out of keeping with traditional practice. There are, however, instances in which the use of fences even at property fronts would be appropriate.

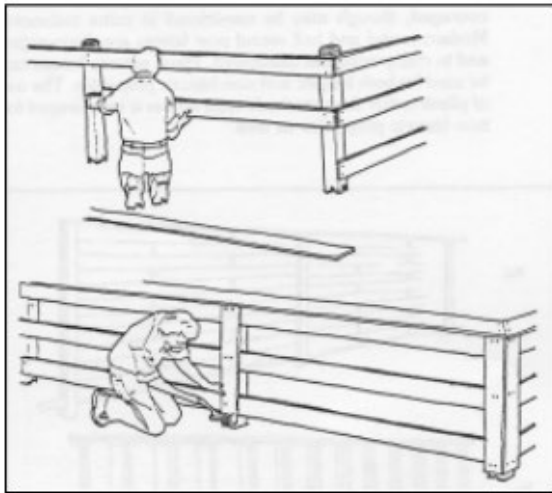
Plank fences, especially composite plank fences, were particularly common in traditional black residential areas. The use of composite plank fences for more modest buildings is strongly recommended.

Plank fences can be painted or may be stained to give a weathered look. A wide variety of plank fence designs will be accepted by the Commission. More modern designs, such as basket weave fences or lattice fences, are generally discouraged, though may be considered in some instances. Modern round and half round post fences are discouraged and in many instances disallowed. Plank privacy fences can be used for both historic and non-historic properties. The use of plank rather than stockade type fences is encouraged for non-historic properties as well.



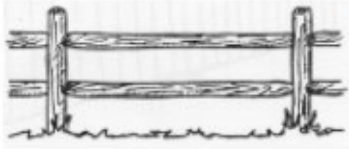
Design for a simple vertical plank privacy fence.

4. **Horizontal Board Fences:** Horizontal board fences are traditional for agricultural purposes. Many Madison properties had both domestic and agricultural functions, so board fences have been common in the town. Nearly always, board fences were used to contain animals. These are usually located at the rear of properties or around vacant lots. The use of board fences in front of houses on residential streets is not recommended or in most cases permitted.

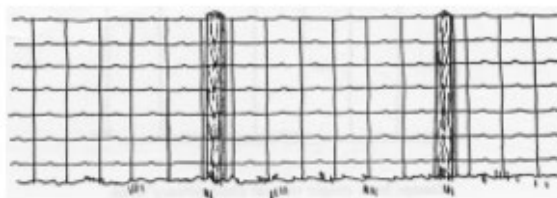


Consider finish details and "weatherability."

Split-rail fences, another form of horizontal fences, are only "traditional" in the folklore of Madison. Modern split-rail fences, either zigzag patterned or post construction rail fences, are strongly discouraged. The use of split-rail fences along frontages is not permitted for either historic or non-historic buildings.

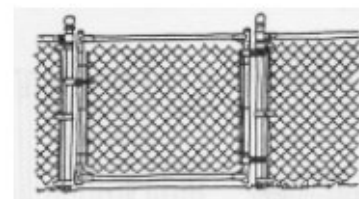


5. **Wire Fences:** Surprisingly, wire fences were more common historically than might be assumed. Their use from the late 19th century is clearly documented. Wire fences were usually used as perimeter fences, protecting (or enclosing) side and rear yards. In more modest dwellings, including houses in traditional black residential areas, wire fences were sometimes used along the frontages as well, closing in yards before houses.



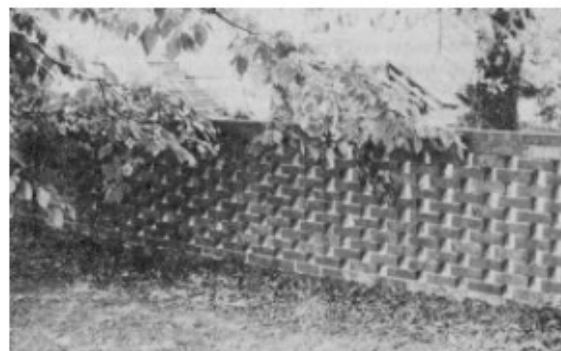
The use of wire fences is still permitted within the historic district. Ideally, the wire should be mounted on four by four inch wood posts, or in some cases attached to granite posts. Metal posts are allowed, when the fences are at the rear of properties and especially when embedded in hedges, again at the sides and rear of properties. Wire fences may also be used to contain the front yards of historic vernacular buildings. Generally, wire fences would not be considered appropriate for the fronts of more high style buildings.

Chain link fences, a more recent wire fencing, are strongly discouraged by the Commission. If chain link is used for security purposes, its use should be limited to side and rear yards and in instances where it is not visible from the public rights-of-way. Chain link fences would best be used when they can be screened or otherwise embedded in vegetation. The use of dark-green or black-painted or vinyl-clad chain link is strongly recommended.

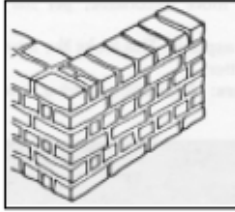


Chain-link fencing can detract from historic character.

6. **Masonry Fences:** Masonry fences, other than as foundations for other fences, are rare in Madison. Brick fences, using handmade or



Well-designed brick fences can be appropriate.



handmade looking bricks provide excellent privacy walls, when circumstances require it. Brick walls, however, are generally urban in character and are not usually appropriate for Madison.

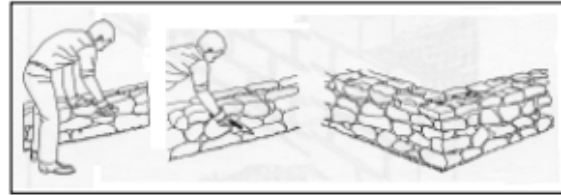
7. **Hedges:** The use of traditional boxwood, privet, and more recent holly hedges is strongly recommended as an alternative to different wood and metal fences. Hedges are traditional in Madison and help preserve the town's historic character. (See below for recommendations on landscaping, street trees, and gardens.)



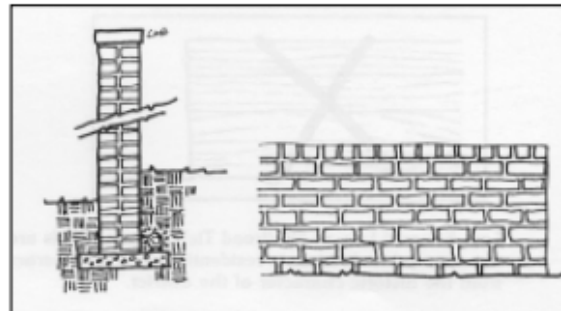
C. Retaining Walls

Retaining walls are a traditional feature in Madison, especially in hillier areas. Some walls are small, often really foundations for fences; others can extend as much as five to six feet above grade. When possible, existing retaining walls should be repaired or reset. If none exists, new walls following historic patterns should be constructed. Examples of historic retaining walls include:

1. **Stone:** The most naturalistic wall type, actually rare in Madison. Stone or stone veneer walls, set properly into the banks, create attractive and appropriate landscape features.

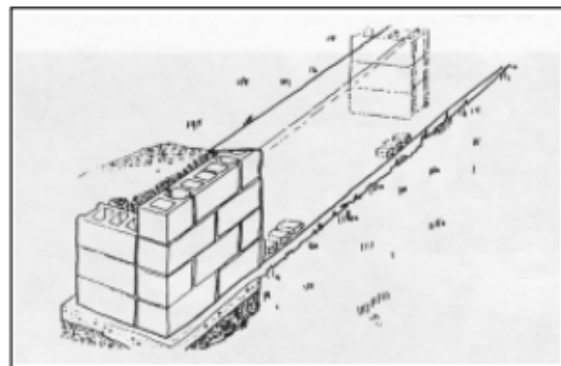


2. **Brick:** The most traditional retaining wall material. New brick walls should use artificially aged-looking brick or used brick when possible. High lime-content mortar and tinted cement would also help convey a historic appearance. Brick may be laid against a poured concrete or concrete block wall, which, in turn, is properly anchored into the embankment.



Place on footing and ensure proper drainage.

3. **Poured Concrete/Concrete Block:** Poured concrete and concrete block can be appropriate materials for retaining walls, provided their surfaces are subsequently stuccoed. Both materials have been used for retaining walls since at least the 1940s. Raw concrete and concrete block, however, are somewhat out-of-keeping with the character of historic residential areas. Their finish needs to be "softened," which smooth finished stucco accomplishes.



Block walls can be stuccoed or left "natural" and capped. Traditional molded block is probably best if the block remains exposed. In both cases provide for proper drainage – either through weep holes, as indicated above, or through perforated drain pipe, as shown in following photograph on next page.

City of Savannah Fence Style Guide

(12) Fences, Trellises, and Walls

Fences and walls, and the gates that lead to the gardens beyond, play an important role in the Historic District. Fences may allow the viewer to see in, while establishing boundaries. Walls contribute to street front continuity, provide privacy in side or rear yards, and screen cars and other utilitarian uses by creating walls of continuity along the streetscape (**Figure 8.61**).

Fences within the Historic District are usually built along the lot line and are generally brick or a combination of brick and iron. On wooden structures, wood or dowel picket fences are common (**Figure 8.62**). As the City expanded, the later Victorian areas of the District have low copings often capped with decorative iron fencing (**Figures 8.63 & 8.64**). Fences within the Historic District do not extend beyond the front elevation of a building, except in the rare exception of buildings on Trust lots facing a square and the southern Victorian end of the district.

The height of any fence, trellis, or wall shall not exceed 11 feet.

Walls and fences facing a public street shall be constructed of the material and color of the primary building; provided; however, iron fencing may be used with a masonry structure.

A masonry base shall be used with iron fencing.

Wood fences shall be painted or stained.



Figure 8.61: A brick wall with vegetation.



Figure 8.62: A quirky wooden fence.



Figure 8.63: A low masonry coping with iron fencing.



Figure 8.64: Low masonry coping with iron fencing and security gate.

City of Rome Fence Style Guidelines

14. FENCES AND WALLS

Historic fence materials include iron, wood, and masonry. Traditionally, fences in front or side yards were low and were used as decorative elements or to delineate property lines. Fences and walls add texture and variety to the historic district.

14.1 Retain and preserve original fences and walls.

REQUIRES:

- *Retaining and preserving features that are character-defining elements of original fences and walls including gates, pillars, hardware, decorative pickets, and rails.*
- *Using materials historic to the area for construction of new fences or walls. Select materials that are similar in scale, texture, color, and form as those historically used in the district, and that are compatible with the main structure.*
- *A fence or free-standing wall in any yard adjacent to a street to not exceed 4 feet in height. Any fence or free-standing wall occupying the front yard must be designed and located to ensure that it does not create a hazard for vehicles or pedestrians.*
- *A fence or free-standing wall in any or rear yard to not exceed 6 feet in height. Any fence taller than seven (7) feet will require engineered footings with stamped plans and a variance from the Board of Adjustment before a building permit can be obtained.*
- *Setting privacy fences back from the front facade of the building to reduce their visual prominence.*

PROHIBITS:

- *Using fences or walls to screen front yards.*
- *Using exposed concrete masonry units (CMU), Keystone, or similar interlocking retaining wall systems, concrete block, vinyl fencing, or chain link fencing.*

14.2 Protect and maintain original fences and walls.

- *Historic wood fences should be protected with a painted surface.*
- *Painting or covering a historic masonry fence or wall with stucco is not appropriate.*

14.3 Repair original fences and walls through recognized preservation methods.

- *Wood, iron, and masonry fences should be maintained and repaired according to appropriate historic building materials guidelines.*
- *If repointing of a masonry wall is necessary, use a mortar that is like that used historically, in color and texture.*