

From the

# LOUISIANA

State Historic Preservation Office

Office of Cultural Development,  
Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

## Ask an Expert

By Tracy Nelson

**Q** My house is raised about six feet and the floors are wood planks. In rooms where we have added carpeting we don't have temperature control problems but most of the house is the bare wood flooring (with occasional filling missing between the old planks). Should we use spray foam insulation underneath or another type? The house was built in 1870.

**A** With the cold weather upon us this is a concern for many people. As you have learned, wood has a low insulation value and can cause your floorboards to feel cold from the air moving under your house. There are three options for you to improve your situation. You can remove your wood floorboards, lay a subfloor and re-lay the original hardwood planks. This can be expensive and requires an expert of old houses. Second, you can close in between your piers, which will stop the movement of cold air under the house. If you go this route, make sure your winter solution can be removed or opened up during the warm, wet months when you want the air movement under your house

to help with moisture issues. The third option is to insulate from underneath. This can be tricky to get right. For your house, use rigid insulation between the floor joists. In this option, the two most important strategies are to leave an air space between your floorboards and the insulation that will increase your overall R-value, which is the construction industry term for measuring thermal resistance, (install half way up the floor joist), and make sure there are no air gaps around the insulation. With your house being raised six feet you will be able to monitor that a good job is done by your contractor. Make sure you inspect the work before the final payment is made. As for spray foam, you should not use it.

### Insulation:

- Overview of energy savings: <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief03.htm>
- Energy-saving tips: [http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/grants/hbrgp/info\\_for\\_owners/Oct2009PIPLowCostNoCost.pdf](http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/grants/hbrgp/info_for_owners/Oct2009PIPLowCostNoCost.pdf)
- Insulating Historic Houses: [http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/grants/hbrgp/info\\_for\\_owners.aspx](http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/grants/hbrgp/info_for_owners.aspx)

For more information about weatherizing your old home, attend the PRC's Homebuyers Workshop on Tuesday, Nov. 9 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the PRC, 923 Tchoupitoulas St. Learn how to make your historic home ready for the winter months. Tracy Nelson, director of the Historic Building Recovery Grant Program, will present on storm window options. Bill Robinson with Train2Build will present on reducing those cold drafts, proper insulation for older homes and weatherizing wood windows. Both presenters will answer questions from the audience. "Weatherizing Your Old Home" is underwritten by Capital One. For more information call 504.636.3399 or visit [www.prcno.org](http://www.prcno.org).

**Q** How do you properly remove vegetation from the mortar on the outside of a house?

**A** Ferns that grow in the old, cured joints of masonry are attracted to the limestone in your mortar. However, they do not like newly repointed lime-based mortar as the mix is too hot for their taste. Algae, moss and fungi grow because there is a water source that keeps the brick damp. To stop any of these biological growths you need to make the conditions inhospitable. You can use bleach (a very mild solution), peroxides (be very careful to match the product with your masonry type) or a biodegradable cleaner (best option). Power washing is not recommended due to the potential for damage to the masonry as well as the introduction of even more water to the problem area. For ferns, gently remove by hand and either repoint the joints if needed or put a mild solution on the mortar bed surface. For algae, moss or

fungi, use a mild solution and a soft brush to remove the growth. Try to solve the water issue that is causing the bricks to stay damp.

### Masonry Cleaning:

- Overview of masonry cleaning: <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief01.htm>
- For bio-degradable cleaner: <http://www.cathedralstone.com/>

*Tracy Nelson is the director of the Historic Building Recovery Grant Program under the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office. She has a Masters in Sustainable Design from Cambridge University, England, and is a graduate in Historic Preservation from Roger Williams University in Rhode Island. After years of hands-on experience in the field, she recently purchased her own 100-year-old home in New Orleans' Holy Cross National Register District. She will be answering your questions each month, so please contact [mfitzpatrick@prcno.org](mailto:mfitzpatrick@prcno.org) and your queries will be forwarded.*

## Happening in the Hills

St. Francisville, LA

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### OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

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**Barrow House - 225.635.4791**  
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