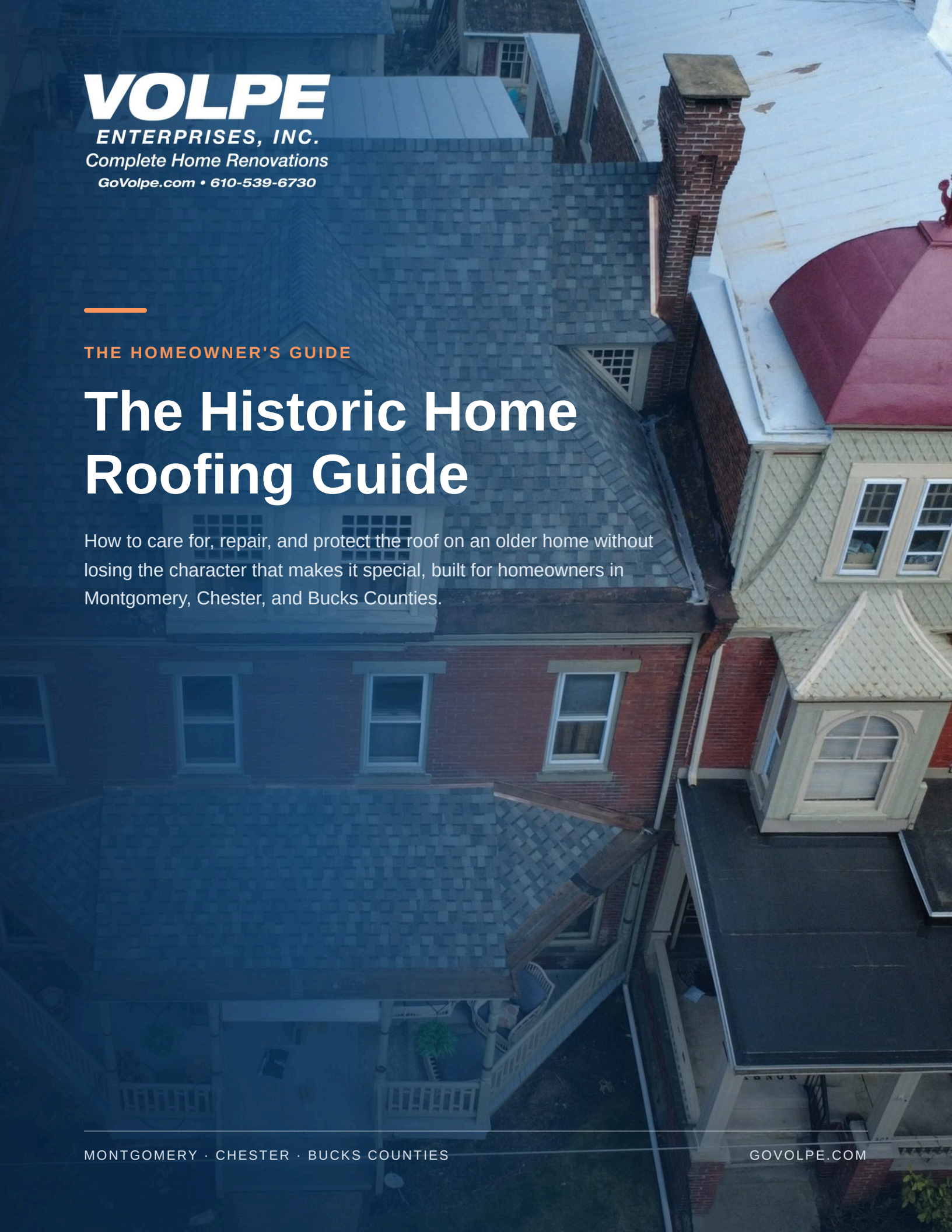




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THE HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE

The Historic Home Roofing Guide

How to care for, repair, and protect the roof on an older home without losing the character that makes it special, built for homeowners in Montgomery, Chester, and Bucks Counties.



SECTION 1

Know Your Historic Roof

The first step in caring for an older roof is knowing what it is made of. Each traditional material ages differently and needs a different kind of care.

Material	Look	Typical lifespan	Often found on
Natural slate	Gray, green, purple, or mottled stone	Can reach 75 to 100+ years	Victorians, stone colonials, twins
Cedar shake	Warm wood that weathers to silver	20 to 40 years with care	Farmhouses, colonials, cottages
Copper and terne metal	Standing seams with a natural patina	50+ years	Porches, bays, dormers, door hoods
Clay tile	Rounded or flat fired tiles	Many decades	Spanish revival and Tudor homes

Lifespans are general ranges and depend on installation, exposure, and maintenance.

SECTION 2

Preserve First: Repair Before You Replace

Many historic roofs are better than they look. The fasteners and flashing that hold them together usually wear out long before the roofing material itself.

Often Repairable

- A few broken, slipped, or missing slates
- Leaks around chimneys, walls, or valleys
- Loose ridge caps or decorative cresting
- Worn box gutter linings
- Isolated rot in cornice or fascia trim

Time to Consider Replacement

- Slate that flakes, crumbles, or sounds hollow
- Widespread slipping across many slopes
- Soft or sagging roof decking
- Shakes that are split, cupped, or mossy throughout
- Repeated leaks after past repairs

Ask for an honest assessment. A contractor experienced with older homes should tell you when a targeted repair can buy your original roof many more years.

SECTION 3

Common Roof Problems in Older Homes

Older homes have their own set of weak spots. Knowing them helps you catch small issues before they turn into water damage inside.

Failing Flashing

The metal around chimneys, dormers, and walls is the most common source of leaks on a historic roof.

Hidden Box Gutters

Built-in gutters tucked into the cornice can leak into walls and ceilings long before you see a drip.

Little or No Ventilation

Many older attics were never vented, which traps moisture and heat against the roof deck.

Layers and Patchwork

Past owners may have roofed over old layers or patched with mismatched materials that trap water.

SECTION 4

Matching the Original Look

When a roof does need replacing, the goal is a new roof that looks like it belongs on the house. Four details make the biggest difference.

Detail	What to match
Material	The original material, or a quality alternative that recreates its look where weight or budget is a concern
Color and texture	Blended tones that read like natural slate or weathered wood, not a flat single color
Size and exposure	The scale and spacing of the original courses, so the roofline keeps its proportions
Metal accents	Copper flashing, valleys, gutters, and porch roofs that tie the whole exterior together

Slate look without the weight. Synthetic slate and designer shingles can recreate a historic roofline on homes where natural slate is not practical, and they pair beautifully with copper details.



SECTION 5

Historic Districts and Approvals

Many Pennsylvania boroughs and townships have local historic districts with a review board or historic commission. If your home is in one, roofing changes visible from the street may need approval first.

- 1 **Check your district.** Ask your municipality whether your property sits in a local historic district.
- 2 **Learn the guidelines.** Many boards publish rules on roofing material, color, and visible details.
- 3 **Gather product details.** Samples, product sheets, and photos of the existing roof support your application.
- 4 **Plan the timeline.** Build review time into your schedule so approval is in place before work begins.

The same care applies to historic churches and buildings. Stone churches, bell towers, and older institutional buildings across our area face the same questions of matching materials, protecting masonry, and working with review boards.

SECTION 6

Modern Protection, Original Character

Today's roofing layers can make an older roof far more resilient, and most of them stay hidden from the street.

Hidden Upgrades

- Ice and water barrier at eaves and valleys
- Modern underlayment beneath the roofing
- Balanced attic ventilation
- Repaired or reinforced roof decking

Visible Character Kept

- Rooflines, dormers, and turrets
- Copper flashing and porch roofs
- Chimneys and their original masonry
- Cornices, trim, and decorative details

Copper ages with the house. New copper flashing, gutters, and porch roofs start bright and slowly weather to a soft brown, then a green patina that suits older homes.

SECTION 7

Caring for Your Historic Roof

A little attention each season goes a long way toward protecting an older roof and the home beneath it.

Season	What to do
Spring	Look for slipped slates, lifted shakes, or damaged flashing after winter. Clear gutters and downspouts.
Summer	Check the attic on a hot day for trapped heat and moisture. Trim branches that touch the roof.
Fall	Clear leaves from gutters and box gutters before freezing weather. Check chimney caps and flashing.
Winter	Watch for ice buildup along the eaves and stains on upper ceilings. Never walk on an icy roof.

Stay off the roof. Slate and tile crack easily underfoot. Look from the ground with binoculars and leave rooftop work to a trained crew.

SECTION 8

Questions to Ask a Historic Roofing Contractor

Your roof is part of your home's history. Use these questions to find a team that will treat it that way.

- ☐ Are you registered as a home improvement contractor in Pennsylvania and fully insured?
- ☐ Can you provide product details for a historic district review?
- ☐ Can I see completed projects on homes similar in age to mine?
- ☐ How will you protect masonry, trim, and landscaping during work?
- ☐ Will you recommend repair if it can save my original roof?
- ☐ How do you handle damaged decking found during tear off?
- ☐ How will you match the original materials and details?
- ☐ What warranties cover the materials and the workmanship?

Notes on Your Roof

PROTECT YOUR HOME'S HISTORY

Ready to talk about your historic roof?

Whether your roof needs a careful repair or a full replacement, a Volpe roofing specialist will assess its condition, explain your options, and help you choose the right path for your home.

Schedule Your Free Roof Estimate

Call (610) 539-6730 or visit govolpe.com to request your Free Roof Estimate.

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This guide is for general information. Historic district rules vary by municipality and change over time. Confirm specific requirements with your local review board and your roofing contractor.