

Refinishing Texas Historical Markers

When details on historical markers fade or are damaged, it's cleanup time! With a few supplies and a bit of effort, you can renew your local markers. You can also use similar techniques to remove graffiti.

In our example, the finish on the Littlefield Home historical marker located on the University of Texas at Austin campus has been damaged by the hot Texas sun and a harsh climate, making it difficult to read.

Start by gathering the materials.

Here are the tools and materials you need to clean or repair the surface of a marker on a post:

NOTE: If refinishing a marker attached to a building or surface, cover the surrounding surface with poster board, paper or a tarp to prevent over-spray of the paint.

- stiff wire brush (stainless steel works best)
- soft bristle scrub brush
- spray bottle or bucket of water
- soap
- towel
- can of black lacquer spray paint
- painter's mask
- can of clear lacquer spray paint
- cotton rags
- lacquer thinner
- 80 grit and 120 grit sandpaper
- power sander or hand sanding block
- roll of two-inch painter's masking tape



Step 1:

Use a stiff wire brush to remove flaking or other debris; always use a side-to-side or left-to-right motion while cleaning the surface. Debris may also stick inside the raised lettering. If this happens, carefully use a sharp tool or knife to remove debris.



Step 2:

Use a soft bristle brush to remove dust and other debris around letters. If available, use a portable air blower to remove fine particles.



Step 3:

Thoroughly clean the marker surface with soap and water. Towel dry and allow time for the marker surface to dry completely.



Step 4:

Apply two inch painter's masking tape to the border and base of the marker.



Step 5:

Apply two even coats of an automotive black lacquer (spray) to the entire surface of the marker. Allow the black lacquer to dry completely. Use a painter's mask to avoid inhalation of spray paint.



Step 6:

Remove dried black lacquer from the medallion and title letters with a soft cotton cloth and lacquer thinner. Use care not to remove the black lacquer on the flat surface portions of the medallion and area surrounding title letters. Allow marker to dry completely.



Step 7:

After removing masking tape from the marker border and base, use a battery-powered or electric sander and 80 grit sandpaper or a hand sanding block to remove black lacquer from raised text. Use care not to remove black lacquer from flat surface areas. Lightly use the sander to clean marker border and base. Use 120 grit sandpaper to manually polish border and raised medallion.



Step 8:

Remove fine debris with paint or bristle scrub brush. If available, use an electric or battery-powered air blower to remove fine debris.



Step 9:

Apply two even coats of clear lacquer spray paint to the entire surface of the historical marker.



Step 10:

Step back and admire your work; you now have a historical marker that has been renewed to its original splendor.