

The DFW Lintel Report: Why North Texas Brick Eats Steel Angles

by Travis Nech

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A Field Report From Fifty Years Under North Texas Brick — What Dallas Lintel Replacement Really Involves, and Why the Schedule Is So Predictable

by **Travis Nech**

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Chapter 1: Lintel Replacement Dallas TX — What a Dallas Lintel Lives Through

I've been working under Dallas brick for fifty years. Not around it, not near it — under it. On ladders in Lake Highlands, on scaffolds in Lakewood, on sixteen-foot garage spans in Plano where the steel was sagging like a tired clothesline. And I'll tell you what I tell every homeowner who asks me why their lintels are failing: in Dallas, a steel angle over a window or a garage doesn't live the life the catalog promised. It lives a North Texas life. And a North Texas life is hard on steel.

The lintel is the steel angle — sometimes a beam on the big spans — that holds the brick up over every window, every door, and every garage opening on your house. You barely see it. Most homeowners never know the word until an inspector writes it on a report. But that piece of steel is carrying thousands of pounds of brick, and it's doing it in the worst seat in the house: right at the weather line, where rain hits it, sun bakes it, sprinklers soak it, and the ground underneath it moves with the seasons.

That's the whole thesis of this book. Dallas lintels fail on a schedule you can practically set a watch by — and that schedule isn't random. It's written by four things: the black clay under the metroplex, the driving rain that comes at your walls sideways, the sprinkler systems that water your brick along with your St. Augustine, and the way tract homes got built from the seventies through the nineties. If your house is in Dallas County, your lintels are living under all four. This report is about how those four things eat steel, how to read the damage on your own house, and what to do about it before the repair bill grows teeth.

I want to be clear about one thing up front. This isn't a general lintel book. I've written those — the cost guides, the how-the-job-works guides, the what-to-ask-the-contractor guides. This is a Dallas book. The neighborhoods are real, the housing stock eras are real, and the failure patterns I describe are the ones I've seen with my own eyes, street by street, from Oak Cliff to Richardson to Mesquite. If you own brick in the metroplex, this is your field report.

Chapter 2: The Blackland Clay — The Ground Your House Is Arguing With

Everything in Dallas starts with the dirt. The metroplex sits on the Blackland Prairie — deep, dark, expansive clay laid down over Eagle Ford shale and Austin Chalk. It's some of the most expansive clay soil in the country. When it gets wet, it swells. When it dries, it shrinks. And in North Texas, it does both, hard, every single year: soaking spring storms, then a hundred-degree summer that bakes the moisture right back out.

Here's what that means for your lintels. Your house sits on a slab, and that slab rides the clay. When one side of the house is wetter than the other — a flower bed that gets watered daily on the east side, a downspout dumping on the west corner, a big oak in the front yard drinking a hundred gallons a day — the slab doesn't move evenly. It tilts, twists, and flexes. That's differential movement, and the brick veneer on your house has to absorb it.

Brick veneer is one wythe of brick — a single layer — hung on a wood frame. It moves with the frame, and the frame moves with the slab. Now look at your lintels. A steel angle over a window is rigid. It doesn't flex. It's bolted into a system that's constantly shifting a quarter inch here, an eighth inch there. Every time the ground heaves or settles, the brick around the lintel's bearing ends — the four to six inches of masonry at each end where the steel sits on the wall — takes a shear load

it wasn't detailed for.

The visible result is the crack pattern every Dallas inspector knows: stair-step cracks running through the mortar joints at the corners of windows and doors, or a horizontal crack right at the lintel line. Now, a crack at a window corner can mean two different things, and telling them apart is half the diagnostic work I do. It can be the clay moving the wall — differential settlement opening the joints. Or it can be the steel itself swelling from rust — rust jacking — and lifting the brick. Sometimes it's both, and in Dallas it's often both, because the same wet-dry cycling that moves the clay also feeds the rust. Water is the common thread. This ground and this weather conspire: the clay moves the wall, the movement opens the joints, the open joints let water in, and the water eats the steel.

Neighborhoods aren't equal on this. The Blackland clay is deepest and meanest in a band that runs right through the heart of Dallas — parts of Oak Cliff, South Dallas, East Dallas, and out through Mesquite and Garland sit on the heavy stuff. North Dallas, Richardson, and Plano have their own clay, though the geology shifts as you go north. Frisco and Allen, built on the newer edge of the metroplex, still have expansive clay — the whole region does — but the construction is newer and the drainage standards are better. When I'm bidding a job, one of the first things I want to know is where the house sits, because the ground tells me how much of what I'm looking at is rust and how much is movement. A good Dallas mason reads the soil map in his head before he reads your wall.

Chapter 3: Your Neighborhood's Build Era — The Failure Schedule

Dallas lintels don't fail randomly. They fail on a schedule set by when the house was built — because when the house was built decides what steel went in, how it was protected, and how many decades of North Texas weather it's been absorbing. After fifty years of working this city, I can drive down a street, read the rooflines and the brick, and tell you which lintels are due. Here's the schedule, era by era.

1920s-1940s: Lakewood, Oak Cliff, Highland Park, University Park. The old brick — and I mean that with respect. These houses are full masonry or heavy veneer, with brick that's often softer than modern stock and mortar that's high in lime. The lintels in these houses are frequently the original steel, which means they're pushing eighty to a hundred years old. Some of it was good steel, well set. A lot of it has been rusting since before the neighborhood had air conditioning. What I see on these houses: original angles that

have swollen and jacked the brick above the windows, often with the classic stepped cracking at the corners. The complication on old Dallas brick is the masonry itself — softer brick and lime mortar mean the repair has to be done with matching materials, not modern hard mortar, or you'll trade a lintel problem for a spalling-brick problem. These houses also predate modern flashing practice, so there's often no through-wall flashing at all above the lintel. Water has had a direct path to the steel for the better part of a century.

1950s-1960s: Lake Highlands, Casa Linda, Lochwood, parts of Richardson and Garland. The great brick-ranch era. Dallas exploded outward after the war, and the ranch house — low, wide, brick veneer on a slab — became the city's signature. These houses are sixty to seventy years old now, which puts their lintels squarely in the replacement window. The steel from this era was typically plain painted angle iron: primed at the shop, maybe painted once on site, and that's the entire corrosion protection it's ever had. Sixty years of Dallas rain on one coat of paint. You do the math. On these houses I see the full menu: rust staining bleeding down the brick over windows, horizontal cracking at the lintel line, garage spans starting to sag. The brick itself is usually a hard modern production brick — Acme and its competitors made millions of these — so matching is straightforward, which is the good news. The bad news is volume: a 1960s ranch has a lot of windows, a lot of lintels, and they're all the same age.

1970s-1990s: North Dallas, Plano, Irving, Mesquite, Garland, the Tollway corridor. The tract era — and this is where the schedule gets really predictable, because the construction was so uniform. Thousands of brick-veneer two-stories went up along the Dallas North Tollway, up through Plano, out into Mesquite and Garland, and the lintel package on these houses was value-engineered to a price point. Here's what that means in practice: the angles were often the minimum size the span tables allowed, the paint was thin, and the flashing details — when they existed — were minimal. The garage spans on these houses are the ones I get called about most. Sixteen feet of brick over a two-car garage, held by an angle that was just barely enough on paper in 1985, now forty years into rust and sag. When a North Dallas homeowner tells me the garage door is starting to bind, or there's a visible dip in the brick courses over the garage, I already know what I'm going to find before I get the ladder off the truck. This era also gave us the widened openings — homeowners in the eighties and nineties who had a patio door opening enlarged without the lintel being upgraded. The steel that's up there was sized for a smaller hole. It's been undersized for thirty years, and it's showing it.

2000s and newer: Frisco, Allen, McKinney, the far north. Newer construction, better codes, and — to give credit

where it's due — generally better lintel practice. Galvanized angles are more common, flashing details improved, and the houses haven't had enough decades for the schedule to catch them. But "newer" in Dallas still means twenty years of black clay and driving rain, and I do see early-stage issues on 2000s houses: failed paint on angles, sprinkler-fed corrosion over garage openings, and the occasional undersized steel on a big custom span. The schedule is longer here, not absent. If you own in Frisco or Allen, your lintels are in the maintenance window, not the replacement window — and maintenance now is what keeps them out of the replacement window later.

Read your street through this lens. If every house on the block was built in 1978 and three of your neighbors have had lintel work done, your lintels aren't a question of if. They're a question of when. That's not pessimism — it's the schedule, and the schedule is the most useful thing in this book.

Chapter 4: Driving Rain and the Northers — Weather That Hits Sideways

Dallas rain doesn't fall straight down. Anybody who's lived through a spring norther knows: the rain comes in sideways, driven by forty-mile-an-hour wind, and it hits the south and west walls of your house like a pressure washer. That's not a figure of speech. Wind-driven rain in a North Texas thunderstorm genuinely pressurizes water against the wall, and it finds every weakness — failed caulk at a window frame, a cracked mortar joint, the gap where the brick meets the lintel.

The steel angle over your window sits exactly where that water goes. There's a shelf — the horizontal leg of the angle — and water lands on it, sits on it, and works its way into the joint above it. On a house with proper flashing, the water gets directed out through the weep holes and the steel stays reasonably dry. On a house without flashing — which describes most Dallas houses built before the nineties — the water sits on the steel, seeps into the mortar, and starts the rust cycle. Every spring storm season adds another few dozen wetting cycles. Every summer adds the heat that bakes the moisture deeper into the masonry before it can dry.

Then there's the freeze. Dallas doesn't get many hard freezes, but it gets enough — a few nights in the teens every winter, sometimes an ice storm that shuts the city down for a week. Water trapped in saturated mortar joints freezes, expands, and pops the mortar apart. That's freeze-thaw damage, and it opens the joints wider for the next rain. The lintel line, being the wettest horizontal joint on the wall, takes the worst of it. I

see the pattern constantly: the mortar directly above and below the lintel is the first mortar on the wall to go, because it's the mortar that stays wettest longest.

The south and west exposures are always the worst. More sun, more wind-driven rain, more thermal cycling. When I walk a Dallas house, I start on the south and west sides, because that's where the schedule runs fastest. The north side, shaded and sheltered, can look ten years younger than the south side of the same house. Homeowners are always surprised by this — the house is one age, but the lintels are four different ages depending on which way they face. If your budget only covers some of the openings this year, do the south and west first. That's triage, and it's honest triage.

And one more Dallas weather note: hail. We sit in one of the most active hail corridors in the country, and while hail is a roof story first, it matters to lintels too — a big hail event beats up the mortar joints and chips the brick faces around openings, opening paths for water that weren't there before the storm. After a serious hail season, it's worth walking your lintel lines. The roofers will be busy; your brick deserves a look too.

Chapter 5: The Sprinkler System — The Accidental Lintel Killer

If I had to name the single most common, most preventable cause of premature lintel failure in Dallas, it wouldn't be the clay or the rain. It would be the sprinkler system.

Dallas is a lawn town. St. Augustine grass, watered on a timer, is the default landscape of the metroplex — and the default sprinkler layout sprays the house. Not on purpose. The heads along the foundation beds are set to throw water across the planting bed, and the planting bed is against the brick. Every morning, or every other morning, from March through October, those heads soak the bottom three feet of your brick wall. And the overspray — the fine mist at the edge of the pattern — hits the wall above, including the lintel lines over the ground-floor windows and the garage opening.

Think about what that means for the steel. A lintel's worst enemy is repeated wetting without full drying — and a sprinkler gives it exactly that, on a schedule, for eight months a year, for decades. The brick over the garage door in a Dallas tract home has been getting misted twice a week since 1987. The angle behind it never fully dries between waterings. The paint fails. The rust starts. The rust swells. And one day the homeowner notices a rust stain bleeding down the brick over the garage and calls somebody like me.

I've lost count of the Dallas jobs where the diagnosis took thirty seconds: walk up to the garage, see the sprinkler head six feet away aimed at the flower bed, see the rust stain directly above it on the brick. The water pattern and the damage pattern match like a fingerprint. It's that consistent.

The fix is free and takes ten minutes: adjust the heads so they water the grass, not the house. Pull the spray pattern back off the wall. If the bed against the house needs water, use drip lines — they put water in the soil where the plants want it instead of in the air where your brick doesn't. I'm not a landscaper and I'm not telling you how to keep your St. Augustine alive. I'm telling you that every gallon of water that hits your brick is a gallon your lintels have to survive, and the steel didn't sign up for irrigation duty.

While you're at it, look at where your downspouts discharge. A downspout that dumps roof water at the foundation next to a lintel-bearing wall is doing the same work as a sprinkler — concentrating water exactly where the steel sits. Extensions that carry the water away from the house are cheap. The clay under your slab will thank you too, because concentrated water at the foundation is what drives the differential movement from Chapter 2. Water management is the whole game in Dallas. Everything else is details.

Chapter 6: What the Tract Builders Actually Put In — The 70s-90s Lintel Package

Let me take you inside a 1985 tract house in Plano or Mesquite — not the model home, the one three streets over that sold for the base price. I know these houses the way a mechanic knows a particular engine, because I've opened up hundreds of them.

The window lintels are steel angles, typically a 3-1/2 by 3-1/2 or 4 by 4 inch angle, eighth-inch or three-sixteenths thick — sized to the span table minimum for the opening. They were shop-primed, and in a lot of cases that primer is the only coating the steel ever received. Some got a coat of paint on site. Many didn't, because once the brick went up, the steel was hidden and nobody was inspecting it. The bearing ends — the critical four to six inches at each side — were set on the masonry with whatever mortar was handy, and in a surprising number of these houses the bearings are short. Four inches where six was the detail. Three and a half where four was the minimum. Nobody measured. The brick went up fast.

Flashing? On most of these houses, no. Through-wall flashing above lintels wasn't standard practice in Dallas residential

work in this era — it was a commercial detail that hadn't migrated to the tracts. The weep holes you see in the brick above some of these lintels — those little open vertical joints — are often the only water management in the assembly, and on plenty of houses they're clogged with mortar droppings from construction, which means they don't weep anything.

The garage lintel is where the value engineering really shows. Sixteen feet is a long span for an angle iron, and the honest engineering answer for a sixteen-foot span with a full course load of brick above it is a proper beam — sometimes a tube steel or an I-beam with a brick shelf welded on. What went into a lot of these houses was a heavy angle — maybe a 6 by 4, three-eighths thick — which the span tables said was adequate. Adequate on paper, in 1985, with dry steel. Forty years later, with a third of the section rusted away and the middle of the span deflected a half inch, "adequate" is doing a lot of work in that sentence. The sagging garage lintel — the visible dip in the brick courses over the garage door, the door that binds in the summer — is the signature failure of the Dallas tract era. I've seen it on streets where every third house has it, all built by the same builder in the same two years.

None of this is an accusation. These houses were built to a price, they sold to families who needed homes, and most of them have served well for forty years. But the lintel package was designed for a thirty-year horizon with maintenance — and the maintenance, the repainting and recaulking, mostly didn't happen, because nobody told the homeowners the steel was there. You're reading this book, so now you know it's there. That's the advantage your neighbors didn't have.

Chapter 7: Reading Your Own Street — The Dallas Walkaround

Here's how to read your house the way I read it. Fifteen minutes, no tools beyond your eyes and maybe a pair of binoculars for the second story. Do it in the morning when the sun rakes across the brick — damage shows best in raking light.

Start at the garage. It's the biggest span and the most common failure point on a Dallas tract home. Stand back far enough to see the whole opening — across the street if you can. Look at the brick courses directly above the garage door. Are they level? Sight along them like you're sighting a rifle. A sagging lintel shows as a gentle dip in the middle of the span — the courses bow downward. Sometimes it's subtle, a quarter inch over sixteen feet. Sometimes it's obvious. While you're there, look at the mortar joints above the opening: horizontal cracking along the joint lines, especially in the first

few courses above the steel, is the rust-jacking signature. The steel swells, it lifts the brick, the joints crack horizontally. Vertical or stair-step cracks at the corners of the opening are more often movement — the clay talking. Both matter. Write down what you see.

Walk the window lintels, south and west first. Above every window, look for the rust stain — the orange-brown bleed running down the brick or the mortar. Staining is stage one. It means the steel is rusting and the rust is washing out with rain. It's the earliest visible warning, and it's the cheapest stage to address. Next, look for the horizontal crack at the lintel line — the joint directly above the steel opening up. That's stage two: the steel has swollen enough to move the brick. Then look at the courses themselves: are they level, or has the steel lifted them into a slight crown? Lifting is stage three, and stage three is replacement, not maintenance.

Check the paint on any exposed steel. On some Dallas houses you can see the underside of the angle — the horizontal leg — from below, especially over recessed windows or under a deep soffit. If the paint is intact and the steel is smooth, you're in good shape. If the paint is flaking and the steel is rough with scale, the corrosion is active. Surface rust on sound steel is a maintenance job: clean it, treat it, repaint it. Deep scaling that has thickened the steel is a replacement job. The difference is thickness — if the steel looks fatter than it should, it's jacking.

Look at what's watering the wall. While you walk, note every sprinkler head that sprays the brick, every downspout that discharges at the foundation, every spot where the grade slopes toward the house instead of away. You're mapping the water, because the water is mapping your future repairs. The lintel with a sprinkler hitting it is on a faster schedule than the identical lintel on the dry side of the house. Adjust what you can today — it's free.

Photograph everything. Date the photos. Do the walk every spring and every fall. What you're watching for is change — a stain that wasn't there last fall, a crack that's longer than it was in March. Change is the signal. A stable hairline crack that's looked the same for three years is a different conversation than a crack that grew a foot since spring. When you call a mason, those dated photos are worth more than any description. They tell the story of the failure in a way words can't.

Chapter 8: Rust Stains on Acme Brick — What the Local Brick

Tells You

Dallas brick has a look. If you've lived here long enough, you can spot it: the warm reds and oranges, the sandy textures, the blends that shift color in the afternoon sun. Most of it came from Texas manufacturers — Acme Brick first among them, a Texas company that's been firing brick since before most of these neighborhoods existed. When I open up a Dallas wall, the brick I find is usually a hard, well-fired production brick, and that matters for your lintel job in a very practical way: matching.

When a lintel gets replaced, brick comes out — the courses above and around the old steel have to be removed to get the steel out and the new steel in. Then the brick goes back. The brick that comes out intact gets reused. The brick that's damaged — cracked by jacking, spalled by water, broken in removal — gets replaced with matching brick. On a 1980s Dallas tract home built with a standard Acme production brick in a standard color, matching is usually straightforward. The brick is still made, or a current production run is close enough that a good mason can blend it invisibly. That's one of the quiet advantages of the tract era: the materials were commodities, and commodities are replaceable.

It's harder on the older houses. A 1930s Lakewood bungalow might have a brick that hasn't been made in fifty years — a particular blend, a particular texture, a particular size. Matching means hunting reclaimed brick from demolitions and salvage yards, and the hunt takes time and costs money. A good Dallas mason will tell you upfront when the match is going to be a project. A bad one will tell you "we'll match it" and show up with the closest thing the yard had. You'll see the patch every day for the rest of your life. Ask how he's matching, and ask to see the match brick before the work starts.

The mortar matters just as much as the brick, and in Dallas the mortar story is simpler than in older Eastern cities: most metroplex houses from the sixties onward were laid with standard Type N mortar in a fairly narrow range of colors — grays, tans, the occasional buff. Matching it is craft, but it's known craft. The exception is the pre-war houses with lime mortar — Lakewood, Oak Cliff, Highland Park — where the original mortar is softer than modern mixes, and putting hard modern mortar against it will damage the brick. If your house predates about 1940, make sure your mason knows lime. Ask him what mortar type he's using and why. The answer should be specific.

One more local note: painted brick. Dallas has a lot of it — the flip-house special, and plenty of older homes that got painted in the nineties. Painted brick over a lintel line hides the rust

stains, which means it hides stage one. If your brick is painted, you lose your earliest warning sign, so the walkaround matters more, not less. Look for the paint blistering or peeling in a horizontal band above the openings — that's often rust and moisture pushing from behind. And never let anyone talk you into painting over an active rust stain as the "fix." That's makeup on a wound. The steel keeps rusting underneath, and the paint just hides the evidence until the evidence is structural.

Chapter 9: The Garage Door Opening — Sixteen Feet of Dallas Trouble

I've mentioned the garage span in almost every chapter, and that's because in Dallas, the garage lintel is where the money is — both the repair money and the trouble. Let me give it the full treatment it deserves.

Sixteen feet. That's the standard two-car garage opening on a Dallas tract home, and it's the longest span of steel on a residential house. The brick above it — sometimes one story of brick, sometimes a full second story bearing on that span — weighs tons. Literally tons. A square foot of brick veneer weighs roughly ten to twelve pounds; sixteen feet of opening with ten feet of brick above it is carrying thousands of pounds on that one piece of steel. Everything about the garage lintel is the window lintel scaled up: heavier steel, more serious shoring during replacement, more brick to remove and rebuild, and a bigger bill.

Why Dallas garages fail first: the span is the longest, the load is the heaviest, the steel was often the minimum the tables allowed, and the exposure is the worst. The garage opening faces the street, which in most Dallas subdivisions means it faces south or west — the weather sides. It gets the driving rain, the sun, and the sprinkler overspray from the foundation beds flanking the driveway. It's the hardest-working piece of steel in the hardest spot on the house. When I tell Dallas homeowners that their garage lintel is the canary, I mean it literally: it fails first, and its condition predicts the window lintels' future.

The symptoms, in order: first, the rust stain bleeding down the brick above the door — easy to miss on a busy facade, which is why the walkaround matters. Then the horizontal cracking in the mortar joints above the opening — the jacking signature. Then the sag: stand across the street and sight the courses. A dip in the middle of the span means the steel is deflecting under load — it's undersized for what it's carrying, or corrosion has thinned it past adequacy, or both. Then the

door starts binding — the geometry of the opening is changing as the steel moves. A garage door that sticks in the summer and frees up in the winter is telling you the steel is moving with temperature and load. By the time the door binds, you're past maintenance and into replacement.

The replacement is the biggest residential lintel job there is: full-width shoring to hold the wall while the steel comes out — this is serious temporary structural support, not a couple of props. The old steel comes out, often in sections. The new steel goes in — and on a sixteen-foot Dallas span, the new steel should be properly engineered for the actual load, not just a heavier version of what failed. Sometimes that's a bigger angle. Sometimes it's a tube beam with a brick shelf. The engineering matters here more than anywhere else on the house, because the loads are the largest and the consequences of undersizing are the most visible. Then the brickwork goes back, matched, and — the step that decides whether this is a twenty-year fix or a fifty-year fix — the flashing and water management get done right. Water killed the last one. The new one gets protection.

Cost-wise, I'm not going to reprint the whole price guide here — that's what the cost book is for — but I'll give you the Dallas frame: a garage lintel replacement on a standard two-car opening typically runs in the low thousands, scaling with the span, the load above, the access, and the brick matching. Second-story brick above the garage pushes it up. Difficult access pushes it up. What pushes it up most is waiting — every stage of failure in Chapter 7's walkaround adds brickwork to the job, and brickwork is labor.

Chapter 10: When the Slab Moves — Telling Foundation Cracks From Lintel Cracks

This is the chapter that saves Dallas homeowners the most money, because it's the distinction that gets misdiagnosed most often — sometimes honestly, sometimes not.

Your brick shows a crack at a window corner. Is it the lintel, or is it the foundation? The answer decides whether you're calling a mason or a foundation company, and the price difference between those two calls is an order of magnitude. Foundation work in Dallas runs into the tens of thousands. Lintel work runs in the hundreds to low thousands. You want the right diagnosis before anyone sells you the wrong fix.

Here's how to tell them apart. **Lintel cracks** are local to the opening. The horizontal crack right at the steel line, the lifted courses directly above the window, the rust stain — these are

centered on the opening and they don't continue far past it. The damage is about the steel and the brick immediately around it. The rest of the wall can be perfectly fine.

Foundation cracks are about the wall as a whole. The classic Dallas foundation crack in brick is the stair-step: it starts at a window or door corner — because openings are stress concentrators, the weak points where movement shows first — and it steps diagonally through the mortar joints, up and away from the opening, sometimes running many feet across the wall. It may continue past the opening, through the wall, toward the corner of the house. You'll often see companion signs inside: doors that stick, sheetrock cracks at the same window corners, sloping floors. The crack is the wall telling you the slab moved.

The tricky part — and the reason this chapter exists — is that **both can be true at once**. The clay moves the wall, the movement cracks the joints around the lintel, water gets in through the cracked joints, and the water accelerates the steel's corrosion. I see this combination constantly in Dallas. The honest diagnosis names both: the foundation moved, and the lintel is now corroding faster because of it. The dishonest version picks whichever one the salesman sells. A foundation company that tells you every crack is the slab. A mason who tells you every crack is the lintel. Both are wrong sometimes.

Here's my rule, earned over fifty years: fix the movement first, then fix the steel. Repointing a lintel line or replacing a lintel on a wall that's actively moving is painting a sinking ship — the new work will crack with the next clay cycle. If the stair-stepping is active — growing, with interior symptoms — get the foundation evaluated by a structural engineer before you spend a dollar on masonry. An engineer's evaluation runs a few hundred dollars, and it's the cheapest money in this whole process, because it tells you which trade you actually need. If the movement is old and stable — the crack hasn't changed in years, no interior symptoms — then it's a masonry job: address the steel, repoint the joints, and monitor.

One more Dallas-specific note: the big trees. A mature live oak or pecan within twenty feet of your foundation is drinking hundreds of gallons a week out of that black clay in the summer, and the clay shrinks around the roots. That's differential settlement with a very specific cause, and it shows up as cracking on the tree side of the house. If your lintel-line cracking is worst on the side with the big tree, the tree is part of the story. Root barriers and targeted watering are the long-term answers — and that's a conversation with an arborist and a foundation engineer, not a mason. Know which expert owns which problem.

Chapter 11: What Lintel Repair Costs in Dallas — The Local Frame

I'm going to keep this chapter short on purpose, because the full price guide already exists — my book on lintel replacement costs in Texas lays out the ranges opening by opening, and I'm not going to reprint it here. What this chapter gives you is the Dallas frame: where Dallas sits inside those ranges, and what moves a Dallas bid around.

Dallas sits in the middle of the national range for masonry labor — not the cheapest market, not the most expensive. What moves a Dallas lintel bid isn't the hourly rate. It's the conditions, and by now you know what they are: the access (second-story work on a two-story in Plano costs more than ground-floor work on a ranch in Casa Linda, because scaffolding and safety aren't free), the extent of the corrosion (surface rust is a maintenance job; jacked steel with lifted courses is a replacement with extended brickwork), the brick matching (standard tract brick is easy; a discontinued 1930s blend from a Lakewood bungalow is a salvage hunt), and the load above (a garage with a second story of brick over it is engineered work, not a swap).

Get three bids. I say this in every book because it's true in every trade: three bids, throw out the outlier on each end if there is one, and interview the middle. On lintel work specifically, here's what the Dallas bid should contain: the opening specified with dimensions, the steel specified by size and type and coating (not "new lintel" — the actual specification), the shoring described, the brickwork scope with the matching method named, the flashing detail (its absence is the most common corner cut in this trade), a contingency clause for hidden corrosion, the schedule, and the warranty in writing. A bid that's missing the steel spec or the flashing line isn't a cheaper bid. It's a different, smaller job wearing a low price.

And a word about the handyman special. Dallas is full of capable handymen, and I respect the trade. But lintel replacement is structural masonry — shoring a wall, sizing steel, setting bearings, detailing flashing. It's mason's work. The handyman with a grinder can cut the old steel out. What he can't do is engineer what goes back in. On a sixteen-foot garage span, that distinction is the difference between a repair and a liability. Hire the mason.

For the full numbers — window, door, and garage ranges, repair versus replacement, what each line item means — read the cost book. It's free, like this one. Then come back here

and put your house inside the ranges using everything you've learned about your era, your exposure, and your soil.

Chapter 12: The Paint-Over — What I See on Dallas Flip Houses

Dallas has been a flip market for a decade, and I've been inside enough flipped houses to know the playbook. The flipper's lintel strategy, in most cases, is paint. Fresh paint on the steel, fresh caulk at the window, fresh mortar smeared over the cracked joints — and the house photographs beautifully. The inspection report says "lintel shows surface corrosion, monitor." The buyer moves in. Two years later, the paint blisters, the smear coat pops off, and the jacking that was there all along is suddenly visible.

I'm not saying every flipped house has hidden lintel problems. I'm saying the economics of flipping reward concealment over correction: a \$40 gallon of paint versus a proper lintel replacement. And the concealment works just long enough — through the inspection, through the closing, through the first year of the warranty nobody reads.

Here's how to protect yourself, whether you're buying a flip or you already own one. First, look at the steel, not the paint. Fresh, thick paint on a lintel in a thirty-year-old house is a question, not an answer. Ask what's under it. Second, look at the mortar joints above the opening with your eyes, not your assumptions: a proper repoint has tooled joints with clean profiles; a smear coat is flat, thin, and often a slightly different color. Run your finger along it — a smear coat feels like it's sitting on the joint, because it is. Third, sight the courses. Paint can't hide a sag. If the brick dips over the garage on a freshly flipped house, the steel was sagging before the paint went on.

If you're buying in Dallas's hot flip neighborhoods — the streets in East Dallas, Oak Cliff, and the older parts of Richardson and Garland where the flips concentrate — put the lintels on your inspection checklist explicitly. Tell your inspector you want the lintel lines looked at, not just the roof and the foundation. And if the report flags corrosion, get a mason's eyes on it before closing, not after. A \$600 window lintel replacement negotiated as a seller credit is a very different experience than a \$600 window lintel replacement you discover on your own in year two.

For sellers, the honest version of this chapter: fixing the lintel before you list is almost always cheaper than the credit the buyer will demand. A documented, proper replacement with a transferable warranty is a selling point. A painted-over problem is a liability that survives the closing and finds you

later — sometimes in the form of a very unpleasant letter.

Chapter 13: Hail, Gutters, and the Roof Above Your Lintel

Your lintel doesn't live alone. It lives under a roof, below gutters, at the bottom of a wall that starts at the eaves. Everything above it affects it, and in Dallas, the things above it take a beating.

Start with the gutters. A clogged or failed gutter overflows in a Dallas thunderstorm — and "overflows" means hundreds of gallons of roof water cascading down the brick wall, directly over the window and door lintels below. I've seen lintel lines that failed early for no other reason than a gutter that hadn't been cleaned in five years. The water pattern tells the story: a vertical stain band on the brick, widest at the top, running straight down over the opening. Clean your gutters. It's the cheapest lintel maintenance there is, and nobody thinks of it as lintel maintenance.

Then the roof itself. Dallas roofs live in the hail belt — Tarrant, Dallas, Collin, and Kaufman counties see some of the most active hail in the country, and the big events (the kind that drop two- and three-inch stones) don't just damage shingles. They chip brick faces, crack mortar joints, and knock the protective patina off everything they hit. After a major hail event, walk your lintel lines. Hail damage to the masonry around an opening opens water paths that weren't there before the storm — and water paths are lintel paths. If your roof got replaced after a hailstorm and nobody looked at the brick, the roof is new and the lintel is still carrying the storm's damage.

Flashing failures at the roof-wall intersection are the quiet version of the same problem. Where a second-story wall meets a lower roof — the classic Dallas two-story with the garage roof butting into the main wall — there's supposed to be step flashing directing roof water out over the brick, not into it. When that flashing fails, roof water runs down inside the wall cavity, and the first steel it finds is the lintel over the openings below. The symptom is a lintel that corrodes from the back side — the face of the steel looks fine, but the top leg, buried in the wall, is gone. A mason who opens the wall and finds the back of the angle rusted through while the face looked intact has found a flashing failure, not a steel failure. Fix the flashing or the new steel inherits the same bath.

The lesson of this chapter: when you assess a lintel, look up. The steel is the victim as often as it's the culprit. Gutters, roof, flashing — the water comes from above, and the lintel is just where it lands.

Chapter 14: Before You Call — The Dallas Homeowner's Checklist

You've walked the house. You've read the schedule. Here's the checklist that turns what you know into a productive first call with a mason — the things to have ready so the conversation starts at the right level.

1. Your era and your street. Know when your house was built and what the neighbors' houses are. "1978 tract in Plano, brick veneer, two-story" tells a mason more in one sentence than ten minutes of symptom description. If you know the builder, say so — some builders' lintel packages are known quantities.

2. Your dated photos. The walkaround photos from Chapter 7, with dates. Stains, cracks, sags — photographed in raking light, dated, and organized by opening. "The crack over the kitchen window was a hairline in March and it's a quarter inch now" is actionable information.

3. Your water map. Which sprinklers hit the wall. Where the downspouts discharge. Where the grade slopes toward the house. The mason is diagnosing a water problem that happens to involve steel — the water map is half the diagnosis.

4. Your foundation history. Any foundation work, any engineer's reports, any stair-stepping you've been watching. If there's active movement, say so upfront — it changes the sequencing of the work, and an honest mason will tell you to get the movement evaluated before he touches the steel.

5. Your access notes. Second-story openings, steep roof pitches below the work area, tight side yards, big trees in the drop zone — anything that affects scaffolding and staging. It affects the bid, and surprising the mason with it on day one doesn't lower the price.

6. Your matching information. If you know the brick manufacturer or color — sometimes it's on the original plans, sometimes a neighbor knows — bring it. If the house predates 1940, say so, because the mortar question matters.

With those six things ready, you're not a homeowner with a vague worry. You're a homeowner with a documented condition, and you'll get a better bid, a better diagnosis, and a better job. The mason will know you're paying attention, and — this is the part nobody says out loud — contractors price differently for customers who've done the homework. The homework signals that shortcuts will be noticed. That's worth

money.

Chapter 15: What to Ask a Dallas Lintel Contractor

This isn't the fifteen-question book — that's a separate volume, and it's worth reading before you hire. This is the Dallas cut: the five questions that matter most on this soil, in this weather, against this housing stock.

"What size and type of steel are you putting in, and how is it protected?" You want a specification, not a noun. The size, the thickness, whether it's plain painted, galvanized, or stainless — and the coating described as something that happens before installation, not after. In Dallas exposure, galvanized is worth discussing on every job. It's not the cheapest option. It's the option that respects the sprinkler.

"How are you shoring the wall?" Any lintel replacement without shoring is a non-starter — the wall above the opening weighs thousands of pounds, and cutting steel without supporting it is how walls get damaged and people get hurt. You don't need engineering drawings. You need to hear the plan described with confidence and specifics.

"What are you doing for flashing and water management?" This is the question that separates the craftsmen from the installers in Dallas. Water killed the old lintel. The bid should describe, in words, what keeps water off the new one — through-wall flashing, weep holes kept open, the assembly detailed so water goes around the steel. No flashing line in the bid means you're buying a repeat job.

"How are you matching my brick and mortar?" Especially on the older houses — Lakewood, Oak Cliff, the pre-war stock — the match is the visible half of the job. The answer should name the method: reusing the original brick, sourcing reclaimed matches, test panels for the mortar. "We'll match it" without a method is a promise without a plan.

"What's the warranty, in writing, and does it transfer?" The warranty should cover the steel, the installation, and the brickwork — workmanship and materials, named. It should say how long. And it should say whether it transfers to the next owner, because in Dallas's market, a transferable lintel warranty is a line in a listing that buyers' inspectors love to see.

Five questions. A contractor who answers all five specifically is a contractor who does the work specifically. A contractor who waves any of them off — "we've been doing this for years, don't worry about it" — is telling you exactly how much

attention your job will get. Listen to what the wave-off means.

Chapter 16: Questions Dallas Homeowners Ask Me

How long do I have once I see a rust stain? A stain is stage one — the steel is rusting, but it hasn't swollen enough to move brick. You've got time, measured in years, not weeks. But the clock is running, and it's running faster on the south and west walls and anywhere a sprinkler hits. Get it assessed, make a plan, and don't let stage one become stage three while you're thinking about it.

Can you just treat the rust instead of replacing the steel? When the steel is sound — surface rust, no swelling, brick undisturbed — yes. Cleaning, rust treatment, priming, painting, and repointing the joints is honest maintenance, and it's the right call. When the steel has swollen, lifted brick, or thinned structurally, treatment is theater. The test is the brick: if the courses above the opening are level and the joints are intact, the steel is probably sound. If they've moved, it's not.

Will my insurance cover lintel replacement? Corrosion is wear and tear, and wear and tear isn't covered — same as anywhere. The exceptions are the sudden events: a vehicle hits the wall, a tornado tears the opening, a covered peril damages the masonry. Then the lintel work can be part of the claim. But "my 1985 angle iron rusted" is maintenance, and in Dallas, it's the most predictable maintenance there is.

Do I need a permit in Dallas? Structural work on the building envelope generally does, and Dallas is no exception — the specific requirements vary by municipality, and there are a lot of municipalities in DFW. Your contractor should know the rules in your city and handle the paperwork. A permit triggers an inspection, and on structural work, an independent set of eyes is in your favor, not against you. If a contractor suggests skipping a required permit to save money, that's information about the contractor.

Should I replace all my lintels at once? If one is at stage three, the others are probably at stage one or two — same age, same steel, same weather. There's a real economy in doing them together: one mobilization, one round of scaffolding, one brick-matching effort. But you don't have to. Triage by exposure — south and west first, the garage span first — and phase the rest. What you shouldn't do is replace one and ignore the rest for a decade. The schedule doesn't pause.

I'm buying in Dallas. What do I look for? Put the lintels on

the inspection checklist explicitly — not just "masonry," the lintel lines specifically. Walk the garage span yourself and sight the courses. Ask the seller how old the roof is and whether there's been hail damage, because the roof's history is the lintel's history. And read the era: a 1985 Plano two-story with original lintels is a house with a known maintenance item, not a surprise. Price it like one.

How do I find a good lintel contractor in Dallas? Start with masons, not handymen — this is structural masonry work. Ask for addresses of recent lintel jobs you can drive by, not just photos. Ask the five questions in Chapter 15 and listen for specifics. And hire somebody who knows this ground — a mason who's spent years on Dallas clay and Dallas brick reads your wall differently than somebody passing through. Local knowledge is worth money on this job. For [lintel replacement in Dallas](<https://lintlerepair.com>), that's the work we do every day — and [Champion Brick Repair Dallas](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) handles the rest of your masonry. When you're done here, the rest of the free library is waiting at the [free books library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).

A Final Word Before You Walk Your Walls

Dallas eats steel angles on a schedule. Now you know the schedule: the clay that moves, the rain that hits sideways, the sprinklers that water your brick, and the tract-era steel that was built to a price. None of it is mysterious once you've seen it from under the brick for fifty years. It's just physics, weather, and time — and all three are manageable if you catch them early.

Walk your walls this weekend. Fifteen minutes, morning light, the checklist from Chapter 7. Photograph what you find. Adjust the sprinkler that's been soaking your garage brick since 1987 — that's free, and it might be the most valuable ten minutes you spend on your house this year.

The steel over your windows has been holding up your brick since the day the house was built, quietly, in the worst seat in the house. It deserves a look. Give it one.

About the Author

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