The Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation

Landmark Designation Staff Report
April 10, 2012

The Abell Building

329-335 W. Baltimore St
Baltimore, MD

Summary

The Abell Building is a late-19th century double warehouse, owned by A.S. Abell, owner of the *Baltimore Sun*, who constructed it as one of his investment properties. Designed by prominent Baltimore architect George A. Frederick, this structure has been called the "finest non-ecclesiastical Victorian Gothic structure still standing in Baltimore," and is considered to be Frederick's best industrial design. The ironwork was cast by Bartlett, Hayward & Co. The building survived the Great Fire of 1904, and housed a variety of businesses and manufacturing firms, representative of how the garment district grew and changed throughout its history.

Architectural Description

The Abell Building was designed by seminal Baltimore architect George A. Frederick, and its ironwork was cast by Bartlett, Robbins & Co. This polychromatic building is considered to be Frederick's best industrial design, with "his creative use of cast iron, Victorian design elements and stone detailing."[1] The six-story building is located at 329-335 West Baltimore Street, at the southeastern corner of the intersection with Eutaw St. The building extends the length of the block to the northern side of Redwood Street, and has façades on West Baltimore, Eutaw, and Redwood Streets. The Eutaw St façade runs the length of the block. The building features cast-iron on the first floor of the entire building, and the Redwood St. façade has one and a half stories of ironwork due to the slope of the site. The upper floors are polychromatic and highly decorative, and leading architectural historian James Dilts calls the architecture "exuberant" and the finest surviving Victorian warehouse remaining in the City.[2] The Abell Building is the most ornate structure in this section of the city, a survivor of "an architectural era where ornament and fine craftsmanship were recognized even for factory structures," according to the National Register form for the Loft Historic District North.[3]

The building is six bays wide on the Baltimore and Redwood Street façades, and the Eutaw Street façade is 19 bays wide, divided into three sections by two large brick Doric pilasters that frame a central section of the building. The central section of the Eutaw Street façade holds five bays, and the other two flanking sections hold seven bays each. The cast-iron one and a half story storefront has Corinthian columns between each bay, and larger structural fluted pilasters featuring sunburst designs located on the corners of the building and judiciously spaced on each façade.[4] A small name plate for Bartlett, Robbins & Co. is located on the western-most pilaster on the Baltimore Street façade. Most of the bays hold bipartite windows supported by an iron base and framed by Corinthian columns, with large segmental arch bipartite windows above. There are doors in three bays, one on the Baltimore Street façade, and two on the Eutaw Street façade. A bracketed intermediary cornice marks the transition from the cast-iron first floor to the upper floors.

The second through fifth floors are polychromatic, with pressed brick, with white marble, terra-cotta and bluestone serving as accents and trim. The structural pillars feature decorative marble bands with stylized classical and geometric patterns. The second and third stories are identical to each other, with a white marble trim that runs below the windows, serving as a sill for the segmental arch 1/1 sash windows that are present in each bay. The windows are flanked by Corinthian pilasters, and topped by a molded brick arch with blue stone banding. The pilasters

feature decorative terra cotta tiles on the pilasters between the windows. The fourth floor is more decorative. It has the same segmental arch 1/1 sash windows as the lower floors, with a running band of decorative terra cotta trim and white marble trim running below the sills. The windows are again flanked by Corinthian pilasters, topped with a molded brick arch with blue stone banding and a white marble keystone and incised white marble spandrels between each arch. The fifth floor is the most ornate, with a polychromatic arcade. Each bay holds two narrow arched 1/1 sash windows, which are divided by white marble Corinthian columns, and framed by brick molded arches with marble keystones and marble banding. Brick Corinthian pilasters are present between each bay. The fifth floor of the five bay central section of the Eutaw Street façade is different. It possesses the same segmental arch 1/1 windows found on the lower floors in the first, third and fifth bays. The second and fourth bays do not hold windows, but instead hold brick and white marble. The white marble curves at obtuse angles to visually represent an arch.

The cornice is comprised of highly decorative corbelled brick and bluestone trim. Above the roofline is a band of decorative metal coping. In the central section of the Eutaw Street façade, a large brick parapet with supporting columns topped with domes rises above the roofline. This is an original feature of the building, which originally advertised the name of the building. A very short sixth floor that was level with the height of the parapet, was added to the top of the building in the 1890s, following a fire of the top floor.[5] Its bays and columns match those of the lower floors, and it is slightly set back.

The building was rehabilitated a few years ago, and now is home to luxury apartments on the upper floors, and retail space on the first floor.

Architectural and Historical Context

In the United States, the use of cast-iron in architecture began in the early 19th century. First used for interior structural piers in buildings, it wasn't until the mid-19th century that cast-iron was used for the exterior of buildings, and the decorative possibilities of cast-iron were explored. The technology of cast-iron architecture helped commercial buildings evolve into modern skyscrapers.[6]

The Sun Iron Building, constructed in downtown Baltimore in 1851 for A.S. Abell, was the first large-scale commercial building constructed completely of iron.[7] This building led to a great interest in cast-iron, and Baltimore's iron industry and economy surged due to the demand for cast-iron across the nation. Many buildings in Baltimore itself were constructed with cast-iron, or had cast-iron details. By the end of the 19th century, there were approximate 100 iron front warehouses and commercial buildings in the City.[8]

This building, constructed in 1880, was part of the cast-iron boom. In the 1870s, it was typical for multistory loft buildings to be composed of a full cast-iron façade, but this fell out of fashion by 1880. The Abell Building is an early example of the next fashionable style for multi-story loft buildings, which were characterized by cast-iron columns and lintels that framed street-level openings, supporting upper façades constructed of brick that exhibited aspects of the High Victorian Eclectic style with molded brick and polychrome details.[9] It is likely this building

sparked the trend. The Neo-Grec features of the Abell Building were inspired more by structure than by style, according to James Dilts. This adoption of Neo-Grec features in cast-iron architecture was seen in much of the cast-iron architecture in the city. According to Labrouste, Viollet-le-Duc, and other French architects in the mid-nineteenth century, Neo-Grec features represented a return to the pure architectural logic of the Greeks.[10]

Warehouses with partial or full cast-iron fronts became ubiquitous in the business district, particularly on Baltimore Street by 1878.[11] These iron-front warehouses were used primarily as "vertical manufactories" that benefitted from cast-iron both on their façades but also on the interior supports. They had open floor plans and large windows that were beneficial for garment or other mid-scale manufacturing.[12] When the Abell Building was constructed, it housed two warehouses, each 26 feet wide and 172 feet long. Only the warehouse abutting Eutaw Street had windows on all three sides of the building.

Located in the garment district, this building was used as a factory and warehouse during the majority of its history. The clothing industry was the primary manufacturing activity in Baltimore during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; Baltimore was second largest clothing manufacturer in the country.[13] This building was located in the heart of the garment manufacturing district, which was located close to Camden Station and the harbor. This location took advantage of the proximity to both the railroad and ships that would bring raw materials and distribute the manufacturing company's products to the region or nation.[14] The building hosted wholesale clothing and shoe manufacturing firms, as well as a printer, wholesale dry goods stores, a billiard hall, and other businesses.

The building was constructed before fire-proof construction materials were common. The building suffered several fires and a gas explosion in its first few decades, each of which caused damage to the building. The fires were generally due to the manufacturing activity, and two of them were deadly.[15]

This building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building to the Loft Historic District North, and also a contributing building to the Multiple Property Listing "Cast Iron Architecture of Baltimore, Maryland, 1850-1904".

Building History

The building was constructed in 1879-1880 for A.S. Abell as an investment property. Arunah S. Abell was the founder and owner of *The Baltimore Sun,* and as such was a highly influential and important citizen of Baltimore. Abell had constructed the Sun Iron Building in Baltimore almost thirty years earlier, ushering in the age of cast-iron architecture.

Abell received a permit to construct two five story warehouses on the southeast corner of Eutaw and Baltimore Streets in July 1879, and the construction of the building took over a year.[16] The building was designed by George A. Frederick, and constructed by Hopkins & Marshall. An 1881 *Sun* article lists all of the artisans and manufacturers who contributed to the building, from the two million bricks to the hardware to the plastering.[17] George A. Frederick was a highly

influential architect who designed several important buildings in the City, including City Hall. It is a Baltimore City Landmark. Frederick was named a fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1877.[18]

The iron-front is the work of the foundry of Bartlett, Hayward, & Co., one of the premier foundries in the country.[19] This foundry did much of the ironwork in the city and nationally. It produced the ironwork for the Peabody Library at the same time as the Abell Building.[20]

A.S. Abell seemed fond of setting new trends in architecture, which he did with the Sun Iron Building, and did so again to a lesser degree with the Abell Building. He received praise for the "magnificent warehouses" which were deemed "very handsome, and different from any other buildings in the city, combining gracefulness with massiveness."[21] The building, which was also referred to as the "Abell Block"[22] was also notably different from other buildings in the city due to its design and embellishment when it was constructed.[23]

The building has hosted a variety of tenants throughout its history, which represented the broad swath of businesses that prospered in this section of the City. The address of the property was 353-357 West Baltimore Street until 1889, when all of the addresses in Baltimore City were updated. Since 1889, the property has been 329-335 West Baltimore Street. In constructing this double warehouse building and other "handsome residences and business edifices," Abell was credited with "assisting struggling humanity" because the buildings gave employment to artisans, mechanics, and laborers, encouraged industry, and increased the tax base of the City.[24]

There were dozens of tenants located in the two warehouses over their history. Some of the more prominent tenants include the Friedenwald Printing Co., lithographers and printers, who leased the warehouse at 333-335 W. Baltimore Street, where they remained until 1906.[25] The firm was established in 1875 by Isaac Friedenwald, and became one of the leading book printers in Baltimore. H.L. Mencken wrote that the company boasted it could print a book in any language ever known. It had one of the largest sets of types in the United States. In 1906, the firm moved into their own building and changed its name to the Lord Baltimore Press.[26] One of the leading shoe wholesalers in the city, Frank & Adler, rented the warehouse at 329-331 W. Baltimore St. between 1900 and 1912, when they moved just down the street to the Appold/Faust Building, located at 307-309 W. Baltimore Street.[27] The firm was founded in 1873 by Solomon Frank, Simon C. Frank, and Joseph Adler. The firm was one of the organizers of the Baltimore Shoe and Leather Board of Trade.[28]

There were numerous wholesale clothing manufacturers that rented space in the building. They include H.E. Hartman & Co., who rented the warehouse at 329-331 W. Baltimore St from 1880 to 1890;[29] Cone Bros., Lohman & Burger, who rented the same warehouse from 1891-1892.[30] Strouse Bros. rented the warehouse at 333-335 W. Baltimore between 1884 and 1890.[31] Jacob Schoeneman, who was supposedly known as the "Pants King" across the US, rented space in the building in the first decade of the 1900s.[32] Burger, Hood & Co., N. Bloom & Co., and the Adolph Ginsberg Co., all clothing manufacturers, rented space in 333-335 W. Baltimore St. in 1914.[33] H.W. Rothstein rented space from 1918-1922,[34] the DeLuxe Clothing Company leased space in the 1920s,[35] the L. Mayers & Son had space in the building from 1935-1982,[36] the Haas

Tailoring Company had a lease from 1948 into the 1960s,[37] and the Calvert Coat Co. leased space from 1951-1960.[38]

Other firms include Bruff, Faulkner & Co, wholesale dry-goods and notions house, who rented 329-331 W. Baltimore St. from 1881-1883,[39] Sigmund's Hats, which rented space from 1892-1893,[40] S. Halle & Son, a wholesale shoe manufacturing firm, and Haverford Cycles Co., a bicycle and motorcycle shop, rented space in 329-331 W. Baltimore in the 1920s.[41] The building also housed a billiard hall in the 1920s,[42] Theodore Klupt & Co., a stationary store, in the 1940s and 50s,[43] and various other businesses such a blood donation center in the mid-to-late 20th century.[44] The building was also the Baltimore headquarters of the Republican Party in 1919.[45]

The building was vacant and deteriorating after the last tenant moved out in the 1990s. The property was owned by the family of Michael Abrams from 1957 until 2005, when it was sold to PMC Property Group. That developer has rehabilitated the property and converted the building into luxury apartments and a first floor retails space.[46]

Staff Recommendations:

The Abell Building meets CHAP Landmark Designation Standards:

B. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history;
2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in Baltimore's past;
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The Abell Building is a late-19th century double warehouse, owned by A.S. Abell, owner of the Baltimore Sun, who constructed this as one of his investment properties. Designed by prominent Baltimore architect George A. Frederick, this structure has been called the "finest non-ecclesiastical Victorian Gothic structure still standing in Baltimore," and is considered to be Frederick's best industrial design. The ironwork was cast by Bartlett, Hayward & Co. The building survived the Great Fire of 1904, and housed a variety of businesses and manufacturing firms, representative of how the garment district grew and changed throughout its history.

Historic Maps
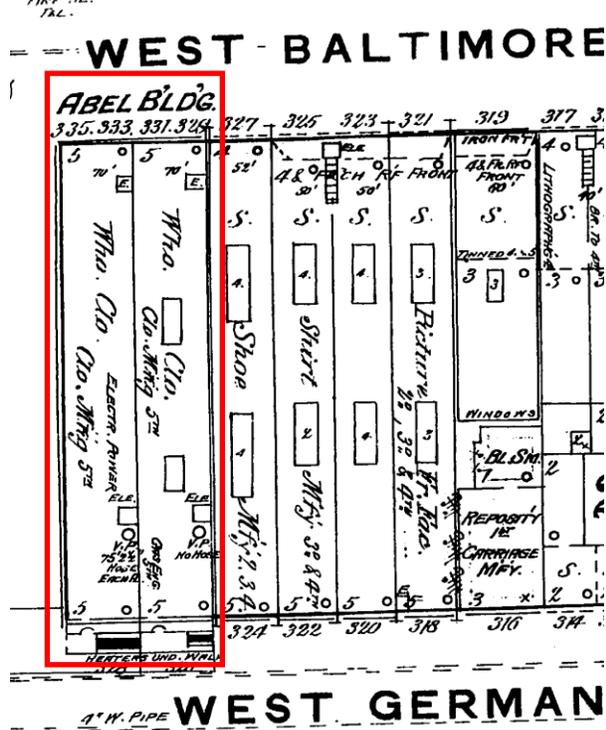
1879 Sanborn Map detail of the building.
(Sanborn maps 1876-1915, Volume 1, p.628)
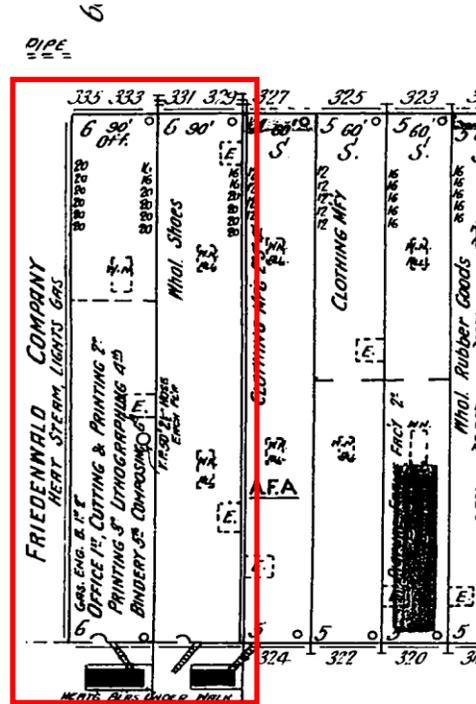
1901 Sanborn Map detail of the building.
(Sanborn maps 1901-1902, Volume 1, p.7)
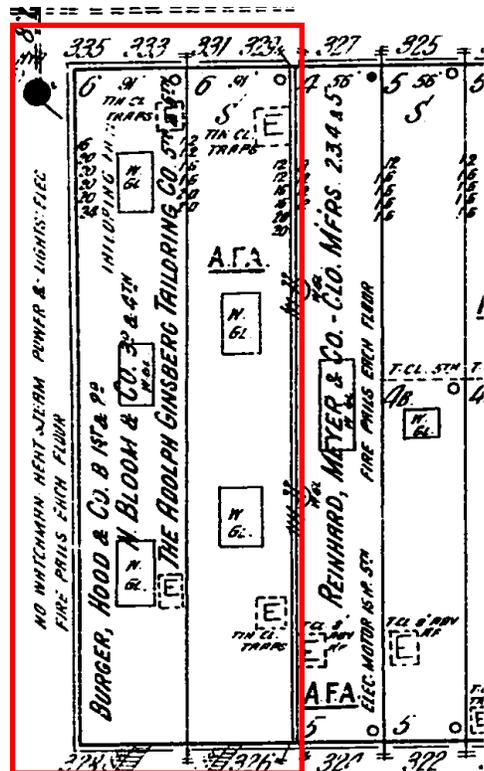
1914 Sanborn Map detail of the building.
(Sanborn maps 1914-1915, Volume 1, p.3)

Historic Images
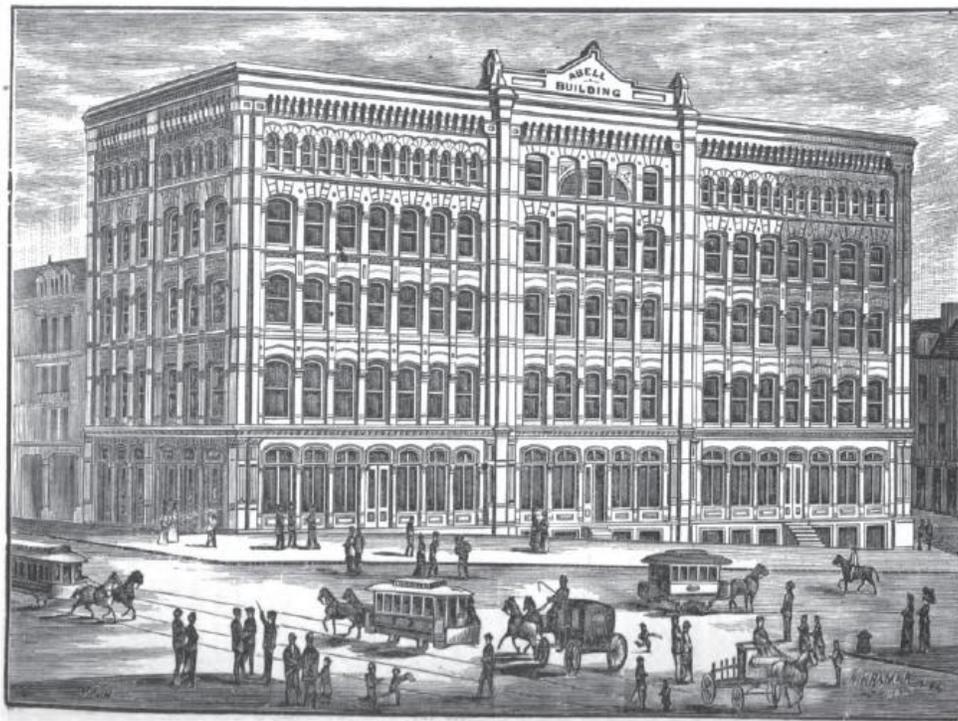
ABELL BUILDING, S. E. Corner of Baltimore and Eutaw Streets.

An illustration of the building, circa 1880, in George W. Howard *The Monumental City* (Baltimore: J.D Ehlers & Co, 1873), 832.

H. & E. HARTMAN,
Wholesale Clothiers.

ABELL BUILDING,

BRUFF, FAULKNER & CO.,
Wholesale Dry Goods and Notions.

S. E. COR. BALTIMORE AND EUTAW STREETS, BALTIMORE, MD.

An illustration of the building circa 1881, in John Thomas Scarf, *History of Baltimore City and County,* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), after 624.

HABS Photograph, MD-66-1, taken September 1985 by Louise Taft.

HABS Photograph, MD-66-2, taken September 1985 by Louise Taft.

Current Building Photos

Baltimore Street façade.

Baltimore and Eutaw Street façades.

Eutaw and Redwood Street façades.

Upper Floors and Cornice, Baltimore St. façade.

Detail of brick and stone polychromatic details.

[1] National Register of Historic Places, Loft Historic District North, Baltimore, Baltimore City, Maryland, B-4045, Section 8, 6.

[2] James D. Dilts and Catharine F. Black, editors. *Baltimore's Cast-Iron Buildings & Architectural Ironworks* (Centerville, MD: Tidewater Press, 1991), 73.

[3] National Register of Historic Places, Loft Historic District North, Baltimore, Baltimore City, Maryland, B-4045, Section 8, 4-6.

[4] National Register of Historic Places, Loft Historic District North, Baltimore, Baltimore City, Maryland, B-4045, Section 8, 6.

[5] "Fire Fought for Hours: Top Floors of Friedenwald Printing Establishment Ablaze" *The Sun,* December 7, 1903, 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)

[6] National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form, Cast Iron Architecture of Baltimore, Maryland, 1850-1904, Section E3-5.

[7] *Ibid*, Section E4.

[8] *Ibid*, Section E2.

[9] *Ibid*, Section F13.

[10] Dilts and Black, 73.

[11] *Ibid,* Section E2, citing the *Baltimore American,* January 24, 1878.

[12] *Ibid,* Section E5.

[13] National Register of Historic Places, Loft Historic District North, Section 8, 5.

[14] *Ibid,* Section 8, 5.

[15] "Fire and Death", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Feb 25, 1892; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 5; "Killed by Falling Bricks", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Dec 18, 1899; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 7 ; "Fire Fought for Hours", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Dec 7, 1903; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 12

[16] "Accidents" *The Sun,* July 21, 1879, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986); "Local Matters: Almanac for Baltimore – This Day" *The Sun,* January 24, 1881, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)

[17] John Thomas Scharf, *History of Baltimore City and County,* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881),864, 849-850.

[18] Dilts and Black, 73.

[19] George W. Howard *The Monumental City* (Baltimore: J.D Ehlers & Co, 1873), 865.

[20] Dilts and Black, 73.

[21] Howard, 833.

[22] Scharf, 623.

[23] "Local Matters: Almanac for Baltimore – This Day" *The Sun,* January 24, 1881, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)

[24] Howard, 833.

[25] "Classified Ad 33 –No Title" *The Sun,* December 12, 1891, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986); "For Friedenwald Co." *The Sun,* June 12, 1906, 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)

[26] "Abell Building" Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, B-1017, on file with CHAP, Department of Planning, Baltimore City.

[27] "Classified Ad 16 –No Title" *The Sun,* July 26, 1900, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)

[28] National Register of Historic Places, Faust Brothers Building, Baltimore, Baltimore City, Maryland, B-1081, Section 8, 5, citing Phillip Kahn, Jr. *A Stitch in Time: The Four Seasons of Baltimore's Needle Trades* (Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society, 1989), 111.

[29] "Baltimore Enterprise" *The Sun,* November 30, 1880, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986); *Woods' Baltimore City Directory*, (Baltimore: John W. Woods 1881), 375; *R.L. Polk & Co.'s Baltimore City Directory,* (Baltimore: Nichols, Killam & Maffitt 1890), 541.

[30] "Fire and Death" *The Sun,* February 25, 1892, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986); "Sanitary Work for City Authorities" *The Sun,* September 10, 1892, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)

[31] *Woods' Baltimore City Directory*, (Baltimore: John W. Woods 1884), 1045; *R.L. Polk & Co.'s Baltimore City Business Directory,* (Baltimore: R.L. Polk. 1890-91), 98.

[32] "Mr. J. Schoeneman Dead: Was Known From Coast To Coast As "The Pants King." *The Sun (1837-1986);* Dec 24, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 10.

[33] Sanborn maps 1914-1915, Volume 1, p.3

[34] "Classified Ad 15 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jul 7, 1918; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), C2; "Says America Must Hold Its Place Among Nations", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Feb 20, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 5

[35] "Real Estate Deals and Building News", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jan 30, 1926; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 14

[36] "Display Ad 48 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jun 4, 1935; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 19; "Classified Ad 4 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jul 15, 1982; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), D12

[37] "Real Estate, News", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Sep 19, 1948; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), A19; "Classified Ad 16 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jan 23, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 28.

[38] "Classified Ad 1 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jan 12, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 20; "Display Ad 51 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jan 1, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 27

[39] Scharf, 413-414; *Woods' Baltimore City Directory*, (Baltimore: John W. Woods 1881), 144; *Woods' Baltimore City Directory*, (Baltimore: John W. Woods 1883), 165.

[40] "Classified Ad 15 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Apr 5, 1892; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 2; "Classified Ad 19 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jun 3, 1893; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 3.

[41] "Display Ad 14 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Dec 18, 1920; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 8; "Classified Ad 28 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Sep 23, 1923; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), A13

[42] "Billie Burke To Head Tonights Radio Program", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Mar 14, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 9

[43] "Other 24 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jun 19, 1942; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 25; Classified Ad 1 -- No Title, *The Sun (1837-1986);* Jan 2, 1957; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 21

[44] "Display Ad 30 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Apr 9, 1969; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), A12

[45] "Broening's Campaign On", *The Sun (1837-1986);* Mar 8, 1919; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986), 14

[46] Jill Rosen, "Building's sale may inspire new lease on west-side life", *The Baltimore Sun* [Baltimore, Md] 10 Apr 2005: 1B.