

Aged Men's Home
1400 West Lexington Street
Baltimore
Baltimore City County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-182

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

AGED MEN'S HOME

Location: 1400 West Lexington Street, Baltimore, Baltimore
City County, Maryland

Demolished in July 1959

Brief Statement of Significance: This building, erected 1863-1865, is significant because of the excellent manner in which the architect, Thomas Dixon, fitted its design to meet the special purposes for which the building was intended.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The history of the organization responsible for the Aged Women's and Aged Men's Homes is pertinent. "Several ladies" formed the Impartial Female Humane Society in 1802 for the purpose of assisting "the deserving widow and deserted wife" and to establish a "Male Free School, upon liberal principles."¹ The Society was incorporated in 1811, and in 1849 the Society was reincorporated as "The Baltimore Humane Impartial Society and Aged Womens Home," for the express purpose of enlarging its sphere of activity to include the aged.² In 1864 the charter was again changed to include a home for Aged Men.³ About this time the school was discontinued. Thus, the Aged Women's Home and Aged Men's Home (the modern name) has had continuous existence as a non-sectarian charity institution for 157 years. This is the oldest charitable organization in Baltimore.

In December 1848 the Society announced its determination to build an aged women's home on the present site. Thomas Dixon, architect, supplied the general drawings; the building was soon put under construction and was finished in 1850.

In 1863 the Society began to plan for an aged men's home. There are few documents concerning this project. The Annual Report of the Baltimore Humane Impartial Society and Aged Women's Home and Aged Men's Home for the year 1865 (Baltimore: James Young, 1866) summarizes the information. Building and supplying a heating system, and enclosing the lot cost \$28,218.05, or 60% more than the considerably larger Women's Home. Funds were supplied for the purpose as follows: Donations, \$15,400; appropriations from the city government, \$2,000; a loan from the Aged Women's Home, \$5,001; sale of city stock, \$2,273; and cash from the Baltimore United Fire Department, \$2,165.

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1. Handbill, dated Baltimore, January 23, 1802, in possession of the Society.
 2. Statutes of Maryland, 1849, ch. 33.
 3. Statutes of Maryland, 1864, ch. 394.

The managers of the Society gratefully acknowledged the "unexpected and munificent donation ... from the Baltimore United Fire Department ... which (removed) much of their anxiety by enabling them to pay off a large part of their indebtedness for the new building."

Thomas Dixon, now associated with his brother James, was the architect. The home opened January 1865.

No important alterations seem to have been made in the Aged Men's Home.

Prepared by Wilbur Harvey Hunter, Jr.
and F. Garner Ranney, The Peale Museum,
Baltimore, Maryland - November 1959

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

The Aged Women's Home (cornerstone laid 1849) was completed in 1850 and the adjoining Aged Men's Home (cornerstone laid 1863) was completed 1865. Both were demolished in July 1959. Their significance lies in their special purposes and the admirable way in which their functions were met. Thomas Dixon was architect for both and is also notable for the design of the Baltimore City Jail (1855-1859, with James Dixon), and the Mount Vernon Place Church (1870 ff., with Charles L. Carson), as well as other important buildings.

B. Detailed Description:

The Aged Men's Home was built in 1863, imitating, on a smaller scale, the main elements of the design of the adjoining Aged Women's Home. It is, accordingly, a much less experimental building and of lesser architectural quality and significance. The solution of functional problems provided in the earlier design had evidently been found to be practical during the course of administration, and so the architect merely duplicated these principal arrangements and harmonized his additions with the original.

This he accomplished with reasonable success, although in a Tudor Gothic which is less refined and more "Victorian" in character. The exterior combines well with the other structure and, being set farther back on the lot, takes a becomingly subordinate position. The gabled front echoes the more monumental, step-like rise of the neighboring Aged Women's Home and is allied with it through the repetition of certain decorative motifs, such as the drip molds over the windows, which are very similar. Certain features, notably the wide and hospitable front porch, may mark a functional improvement over its prototype.

On the whole, however, the style and detailing are inferior and the general effect less cheerful and spacious. This is particularly

true in the central court, where the comparative shortness of the court emphasizes the octagonal plan of the surrounding galleries, and the device of plain columns, carried up the full three stories, with little differentiation, change of scale, or ornament, gives a closed-in, well-like feeling to that area which, in the other building, is its most impressive feature.

The facade of the Aged Men's Home is approximately sixty feet wide, a central section, twenty-eight feet wide, being set slightly forward. The walls are brick, three bricks deep, laid in common bond. There is a stone course foundation, with a stone water table. Above the first and second stories are belt courses of brick, three bricks wide. The front cornice is painted brick, the side cornices are wood. The central block rises in a broad peaked gable a full story higher than the rest of the building, in line with the sky light over the central court. This gable has a brick cornice trimmed with stone and bears a plain cartouche inscribed "Aged Men's Home 1863."

The large brick porch seems to be the favorite gathering place of the inmates during good weather. It is 28 feet wide by 18 feet, 6 inches, deep and has two stone arches on each end and three in front. Each arch is six feet wide and is surmounted by a label mold. Eight stone steps, bounded by railings, lead up to the center arch. The flooring is red tile. The parapet has a stone crenelation on a small scale, similar to that on the porch of the Aged Women's Home, but pinnacles with crockets occur only as terminals to the two buttresses which support the outward corners of the porch, and these pinnacles are shorter than on the other building and stumpy by comparison.

The front door is framed by a brick arch and has two leaves with long glass panels. A window on either side opens onto the porch. Above the porch, in the center of the projecting block, are double windows flanked by single windows on the second and third stories and in the gable are two lancet windows. All floors have one set of double windows on each side of the central block. Cast-iron drip molds, simulating stone, surmount all these windows on the first and second stories and those on the third story in the central block. Each set of double windows is divided by a brick column. The windows on the first floor are two feet, six inches, wide by six feet, six inches, high and the rest appear to be of approximately the same proportions. Each window has eight lights and a granite sill.

The entrance hall is plainly designed. Opposite the front door, to the right of a wide opening leading to the central court, is the main staircase with a walnut rail and newel post. Below the stairs is a doorway to the southeast corner room. On the left of the hall is a large parlor with a fireplace and marble mantel. The hall has a plaster cornice and a plaster rosette decorates the center of the ceiling.

The court beyond is much smaller than that in the Aged Women's Home. Plain circular wooden columns, four on each side and two at each end, support the galleries on the second and third stories and

rise to the light well in the roof, which, like the galleries, takes the shape of a somewhat elongated octagon. In the middle of the wall facing the entrance is a wide and shallow rounded bay, with double doors on each floor which now open into closets, but which may once have been designed for an elevator or dumb waiter.

On the first floor five doors open off the court on the east side and four on the west. The second and third floors have six rooms opening on each side. The doors are very plain, with wood trim and oblong transoms containing three equal panes of glass set in a row. Partitions are lath and plaster; the floors are wood with wood sub-flooring.

A later wing connects the rear of the building with the Aged Women's Home and provides access to the more recent dining room shared by both establishments.

The roofs are tin, probably over wood.

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