

ALEX. BROWN & SONS COMPANY BUILDING
(Chevy Chase Bank)
135 East Baltimore Street
Baltimore
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1121

HABS
MD-1121

PHOTOGRAPHS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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ALEX. BROWN & SONS COMPANY BUILDING
(Chevy Chase Bank)

HABS No. MD-1121

Location: 135 East Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21202; UTM coordinates:
18.360919.4349918

Present Owner/Occupant: Chevy Chase Financial Services (1996-present)

Present Use: Bank

Significance: The building was built for Alex. (Alexander) Brown & Sons (founded 1800), the first and oldest continually operating investment banking firm in the United States. As such, the building represents the firm's and, by association, Baltimore's, significance in American finance in the nineteenth century. Architecturally, the building is the first Baltimore commission of the firm of Parker and Thomas. It is one of the few structures in the district to survive the Great Fire of 1904, and the only known surviving structure to retain much of its elaborate, deliberately impressive marble and bronze interior and stained glass dome.

Historian: Laurie Ossman, Ph.D., Summer 2001

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1901; expanded by two bays (to the south) in 1905-7
2. Architects: Parker & Thomas, 1901. Douglas H. Thomas, Jr. (1872-1915) was the Baltimore native of the firm and headed the Baltimore office, while J. Harleston Parker (1873-1930) was based in Boston. Thomas was graduated from the Johns Hopkins University in 1893, attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) from 1893-95, and briefly apprenticed to an unknown Boston firm, before traveling to Europe to study informally in Italy and Paris. Unlike Parker, who is known to have matriculated at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Thomas does not appear to have formally enrolled. It is unknown how and when Parker & Thomas met, whether as students in Boston, or later in Paris or, indeed, after Parker's return from his European travels in 1900.¹ In any case, the

¹"D.H. Thomas, Jr., Killed," Baltimore (Morning) Sun 12 June 1915: 14 c.3. The obituary makes reference to Thomas's time in Europe but does not specify formal attendance at any school of architecture there.

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two formed the partnership soon after Parker's return, with the Boston-born, Harvard-educated Parker leading the Boston office and Thomas the Baltimore one.

The firm's first Baltimore commission was the prestigious Alex. Brown & Sons Company headquarters (completed 1901). Presumably, Thomas was the partner in charge of the firm's Baltimore commissions. His family was socially prominent in Baltimore and, as Dorsey and Dilts note, the architect was a member of several social clubs which would have granted him personal acquaintance and access to potential clients.² Other significant Baltimore commissions of the firm include: the Belvedere Hotel (1903); Gilman Hall of the Johns Hopkins University's new Homewood campus (1904); and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company Building (1906).

In 1907, Arthur W. Rice joined the Boston office as partner. It is unclear how, if at all, his partnership influenced the firm's Baltimore commissions. Significant surviving local commissions of Parker, Thomas & Rice include: the Savings Bank of Baltimore (1907); the Gilman School (1909); and Hansa Haus (1912). While the Baltimore Gas & Electric Building was not completed until 1916 (following Thomas's death in 1915), the design and commission were likely underway during his lifetime. Following Thomas's death, the firm had no notable new commissions in Baltimore.

In the fifteen years of Thomas's leadership of the Baltimore office, he brought the firm commissions from the city's premier commercial and financial institutions, which, in turn, were responsible for many of Baltimore's most enduring Beaux-Arts and, especially, Georgian-Federal Revival-style landmarks. Through such commissions, Thomas played a crucial role in re-establishing the commercial and financial district's Beaux-Arts architectural identity, particularly following the Great Fire of 1904, and held a crucial place in Baltimore's Colonial Revival movement (see architectural character, below).

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses

1901-present: Descendants of the original owners, Alex. Brown & Sons. Alex. Brown & Sons merged in 1986 with Banker's Trust, which, in 1996, merged with Deutsche Bank. When Brown announced its intention to vacate the property in 1995, local concern arose that the building would be lost.³ Chevy Chase Financial Services took out a 40-year lease in late 1995 and devoted over a year and a half to mechanical upgrades and renovations. Although Chevy Chase holds a long-term lease on the building, the land and structure are still owned by Brown family descendants (the Griswold family).

²Ibid. According to Thomas's obituary, the architect was president of the Maryland Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and a member of the Maryland Club, the Baltimore Club, the Merchants Club, and the Elkridge Kennels. The obituary notes: "He took a great deal of interest in society and was very popular."

³Edward Gunts, "Firm's Move Puts Building's Future in Doubt," Baltimore Sun 6 July 1995.

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4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown.

5. Original plans and construction: East Baltimore Street elevation and longitudinal section reproduced in Architectural Review 9 (1902): pl. 6-7. Elevation of east (Calvert Street) facade with two-bay addition of 1905-7 is illustrated in an unidentified local newspaper clipping in a Maryland Institute scrapbook (copy on file at the City of Baltimore's Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation [CHAP]).

6. Alterations and additions

1905-7: Beecher, Friz & Gregg. Addition of two bays to the south for investment services offices. It is noteworthy that the Alex. Brown building is not included in the August 1913 Architectural Record monograph on the works of Parker, Thomas & Rice. Although it is not known why the firm was not hired to design an addition to its own building, the omission of the work from the monograph suggests that the partners were not pleased with the choice of Beecher, Friz & Gregg (or with the result).

1986-7: SMG Architects, Walter Schamu, principal in charge. Interior & mechanical renovation and exterior conservation. While the street-level banking room and adjacent safe deposit vault and "Brothers' Room" were restored to an historical appearance (see interior features, below), substantial alterations were made to the southern part of the structure, mainly encompassing the 1905-7 addition. These include (but are not restricted to): a new HVAC, electrical and plumbing throughout;⁴ new elevator cab, works and adjacent passageway; creation of a mezzanine level above the southern chamber of the ground floor for additional offices; creation of a colonial-style conference room on the second level with adjacent hallways and waiting area; modernization of basement space adjacent to safe deposit vault and mechanical room. This basement area was the historic location of the Western Union telegraph office.⁵

B. Historical Context

Alex. Brown & Sons, as an institution, signifies the commercial importance of Baltimore in the nineteenth century. As the Baltimore Sun floridly stated in 1911, through the firm and its international offices, "Baltimore touches the key which sends the electric fluid of financial responsibility to every quarter of the planet."⁶

⁴Plumbing was modernized to code with exception (noted below) of w.c. adjacent to Brothers' Room.

⁵James D. Dilts, section on Baltimore Street, Baltimore Commercial Architecture Project, unpublished study, (City of Baltimore Commission on Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) and the Maryland Historical Trust, 1992): 2-3.

⁶Oldest Banking Firm in the United States, reprint of article in Baltimore Sun 14 May 1911 (Baltimore: Alex. Brown & Sons, 1924): prefatory note, np [3].

The founder of the firm was a north Irish émigré who had established American connections for his linen trading business in Baltimore and Philadelphia prior to his arrival in 1800. This first Alexander Brown allegedly selected Baltimore for his business because it was “the gateway to the South.”⁷ Soon, Brown began underwriting bills of exchange for American merchants trading with English and continental markets, often using his own capital as guarantee. Not long after this, Brown reversed the process and began selling his own company’s bills of exchange to European traders. Thus, the Baltimore company was, by the 1820s, financing a large portion of the textile trade between Europe (mainly Liverpool) and the American South and Mid-Atlantic.

To further facilitate the banking business, the firm built a shipping fleet and helped underwrite (by backing an initial stock offering of five million dollars) the establishment of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company in 1827.⁸ By doing so, the company provided not only the capital but also the transportation for other companies’ trade concerns. By 1834, when the founder died, the Baltimore company had opened branch offices in key American textile centers including Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and New Orleans. Other branch offices had been established in Philadelphia (to offset competition with Baltimore from that city’s ports), New York (to take advantage of the western access granted by the newly completed Erie Canal), Boston (to capture a share of the East India trade), and Liverpool, England (established by William Brown, the eldest of the founder’s four sons).⁹ Eventually, the American branch offices became known as Brown Brothers & Company, while the Liverpool branch took the name of Brown, Shipley & Company. The financial panics of 1834 and 1837 led second son George Brown (the son in charge of the Baltimore operations) to diversify the company’s banking interests, accepting the presidency of the Mechanics’ Bank as well as becoming a founder and the first president of the Merchants’ Bank.¹⁰

In the era before anti-trust laws, the company skillfully guaranteed its survival and profitability by essentially maintaining an interest in every aspect and market of American trade on the East Coast prior to the Civil War. The founder’s ambitions, carried through by his sons, ensured that Baltimore was known throughout the United States and internationally as the center of American investment banking and, through their crucial role in establishing the B&O Railroad, as a commercial transportation hub as well.

Flexibility and a remarkable instinct for anticipating growth markets enabled the firm to shift its Southern trade network seamlessly from textiles to the coffee and sugar trades (with raw goods imported from Cuba, the Caribbean, and Far East), establishing profitable refineries for the latter commodity in Baltimore during the Reconstruction Era. With the Brown company’s

⁷Ibid, [5].

⁸Ibid. According to the author of the Oldest Banking Firm, models of the ships of the Alex. Brown fleet “form a sort of memorial frieze in the basement of the present bank building” [9]. This element does not appear to exist in the building any longer. The railroad connection is noted on page [13].

⁹Ibid, [9].

¹⁰Ibid, [13].

backing of most import businesses and processing plants, Baltimore, for a time following the Civil War, was the nation's largest grain exporter.¹¹

Following the death of George S. Brown in 1890, his son Alexander Brown expanded the company's interests once again, most notably by pioneering the use of public utility bonds as investment securities. This was an astute and timely maneuver, as the proliferation of electricity, in particular, as a public service, grew exponentially throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The present building, perhaps as a tacit advertisement for the public service utilities, claimed to be the first in the United States to be heated and lit entirely by electric power.

It was under this Alexander Brown's leadership that the present building was designed and built. Although the reason given for replacing the brownstone, Ruskinian Gothic building first erected on this site in 1860 was utilitarian, it is perhaps more than coincidental that the current Georgian Revival style building was designed and commissioned around the time of the firm's centennial in 1900. Of the 1860s brownstone edifice, the Baltimore Sun noted that "[in] its day it was regarded as the finest type of building."¹² The qualification "in its day" indicates that the 1860 building was no longer considered "the finest" and thus, perhaps, a rhetorical wish to maintain the company's image of qualitative pre-eminence may have played a role in the decision to commission the present structure. By 1901, the company maintained headquarters in ports around the world, including the Pacific Rim, Europe and South America. International currency exchange had become a major corporate activity. The choice to build the company's headquarters in stylistic reference to its Baltimore origins reaffirmed the centrality of this financial powerhouse—and its home city—to worldwide commerce and finance.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Georgian Revival. The choice of style is significant in the case of the Alex. Brown & Sons Company Building because it refers to the date of the company's founding in 1800. This historical reference is a visual reminder of the institution's endurance for over a century and its status as an integral part of the city's heritage. As with many "revival" styles (especially those which fall within the parameters of "Colonial Revival" in America) the 1901 interpretation of the architecture of the company in 1800 is not at all archaeologically "correct," since the 1800 Alexander Brown banking house was a wood-framed, three-story utilitarian structure of domestic scale (the family initially resided "above the shop") devoid of any elaborate ornament or

¹¹Ibid, [17].

¹²Ibid, [19]. The text dates from 1911. The stated need for additional space is somewhat misleading as the Brown firm, like many other companies in the financial district in the period, rented office space in various other nearby commercial buildings and the two-story 1901 building likely contained less office space than the four-story 1860 structure (based on fenestration patterns).

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applied representational motifs. The 1901 design tacitly suggests long-standing gentility through the use of high-style ornament (pilasters, the family monogram incorporated into the ironwork, the classical cornice) and materials (bronze, brick, marble) of the so-called Georgian period. The current building may be seen as an idealized view of the institution's past, reflecting turn-of-the-twentieth-century notions of gentility rather than archaeological authenticity.

In view of the fact that much of the subsequent work of Parker & Thomas (Parker, Thomas & Rice, after 1907) follows the Colonial Revival trend of the period, it may be said that the Alex. Brown & Sons Company building effectively marks the beginning of the firm's popularization of that style in the city of Baltimore. The firm later received the commission to design much of the Homewood campus of the Johns Hopkins University (1904 ff.), which followed the stylistic lead of the Carroll family villa Homewood (1803, built by Declaration of Independence signer Charles Carroll for his son, also named Charles).¹³ As in many cities, the popularization of the style coincided with a social trend toward rhetorical self-definition by the white, northern European, predominantly Protestant upper-middle and upper classes, who sought to identify themselves with the values and prerogatives of the Colonial and Federal era landed gentry. This phenomenon in Baltimore has, at the time of this writing, received scant scholarly attention.

The north (entry) facade is divided into three bays—in an a-b-a rhythm—by four giant fluted Ionic pilasters with angled volutes. These rest upon an ashlar base of limestone. Each side bay features a nine-over-nine pane window with a flat lintel with projecting keystone and corners. Bronze bars cover all glazing at this level. On the second level, the same window arrangement is embellished by the addition, at the bottom of the opening, of elaborate bronze window grilles in a shallow balcony. Foliate motifs in the grilles evoke Chippendale motifs, while the composition centers on a cartouche featuring the monogram device "AB." In the center bay, the window above the main doorway adds sidelights to the same nine-over-nine window units as the side bays, and similarly extends the balcony ironwork with flanking foliate panels.¹⁴

A flat-banded Ionic cornice rests atop the pilasters, while a bold dentil motif is carried out on the eaves. Above this, a parapet follows the bay rhythm of the lower levels and the parapet balustrade apparently serves no functional purpose other than to conceal the dome from street-level view.

¹³Homewood is located at the center of the Johns Hopkins University Arts and Sciences campus, and the villa served as an important source for Colonial Revival motifs and design throughout the period in Baltimore, both for its architectural merits and for its associations with the historically and socially pre-eminent Carroll family of Maryland.

¹⁴Curiously, the elevation drawing published in the *Architectural Review* in 1902 shows six-over-six windows, while the section shows the nine-over-nines "as built." The completed structure had (and has) nine-over-nines on both fronts.

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The long, east facade originally spanned five bays (the a-b-a rhythm carried out by a division of one-three-one) and follows the same materials, rhythms and decorative vocabulary as the north facade from ashlar base to parapet. The end (northern and southernmost) bays of the east facade follow the same articulation as the end bays of the north facade, with a barred nine-over-nine window on the first level and a balconied nine-over-nine on the second. The one-three-one division of the wall plane by four Ionic pilasters expresses the interior spatial division of "lobby" (one bay), main banking space (three bays) and Brothers' Room-Vault in the south bay. A hint of the arcuate dome inside is given in the use of two-story windows with arched opening in the three middle bays. The arches are defined in masonry with projecting keystones. The mullions of the arcuate "fanlight" elements follow an interlocking pointed arch pattern. The southward slope of the site permitted low transom windows in the basement level, as well as a stairway down to a sub-street level doorway in the south bay. This door provided direct access to the Western Union office.

The stylistically and materially "identical" Beecher, Friz & Gregg addition of 1905-7 disrupts the strict symmetry of the 1901 Parker & Thomas design.¹⁵ The addition seeks to create a secondary a-b-a rhythm by duplicating the end bay of the Parker & Thomas design, and inserting a wider bay (a pared-down version of the center bay of the north facade with a pedimented tabernacle frame surrounding the first floor opening and a nine-over-nine flanked by sidelights on the second level) between the south wall of the old building and the new addition. With the addition, the side facade rhythm becomes a-b-a-c-a. The west and south "facades" directly adjoin adjacent structures.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent. The building is carefully maintained, while visible fire damage to the marble pilasters and cornice from 1904 on the northwest corner of the exterior has been conserved in its post-Fire condition because of the historic significance of that event as well as the building's (and the institution's) survival.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Foundations: Steel-reinforced concrete
2. Walls: Brick, laid in Flemish bond, with marble pilasters, cornice, parapet, window and door headers (marble of unknown geographic origin)
3. Structural system, framing: Steel girders

¹⁵Perhaps the conceptual importance of the symmetry of the original building is one reason why Parker & Thomas did not execute the addition and did not include the building in the 1913 Architectural Record monograph of their works.

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4. Balconies, porticoes: An interior balcony overlooks the main banking room. To the east, facing Calvert Street, an open area originally served as a conference room, but is no longer in use.¹⁶ A walkway along the west wall connects the access stair at the south of the original building to this mezzanine area over the main entry. The bronze-railed walkway provides a good view of the stained glass dome and decorative plaster work of the cove cornice.

5. Chimneys: Not visible from street. Based on the interior, a chimney must exist on the south wall of original structure near the eastern corner to correspond to the fireplace in the "Brother's Room." The south wall, center, of the 1905-7 addition also retains a massive chimneybreast, although this unit is clearly no longer functional. Substantial modernization to the office spaces in the south addition in 1986-7 make it impossible to tell from visual examination alone if any other chimneys were originally present. As the press notices for the 1901 building take special note of the electric heating system (not extant), any chimneys in the design were almost certainly there for nostalgic and decorative purposes (such as in the walnut-paneled "Brothers' Room"). It is not known if the 1901 heating system extended into the two bays added to the south in 1905-7, but the presence of the large central chimney on the south wall suggests that this element was used for heating (either primary or auxiliary).

6. Openings

a. doorways and doors: The main entrance features an impressive tabernacle doorframe in white marble, with a triangular pediment supported by pilasters capped with scrolled brackets ornamented with swags. In this opening, a pair of bronze doors maintains the swag motif through its incorporation into each of the three panels of each door. The doors are bordered in a banded pattern, accented with foliate blocks.

b. windows and shutters: Windows are bronze-framed, restored in 1986-7, with no evidence of shutters on exterior or interior.

7. Roof shape, covering: Flat roof, covering unknown. Stained Glass dome over main lobby (restored 1982) is encased in protective glass shell with metal (probably steel) frame, concealed from pedestrian view by the roof balustrade.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans: The main banking room remains, generally, intact as an open space, with an entry bay defined by paired marble columns supporting a mezzanine above. The

¹⁶This information was provided by W. Wayne Jones, Special Police Services, Chevy Chase Financial Services, during a site tour on 4 February 2002. Mr. Jones was employed by the company throughout the 1996-7 renovations.

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remaining bays are open to full height. The bronze-grilled “teller’s cage” originally extended northward to the first bay, as defined by white marble columns. When the company relocated its main retail banking functions (ca. 1933), the teller cage was reduced to its present size.¹⁷

2. Stairways: No historic stairways remain intact

3. Flooring: Most of the floors have been covered by standard industrial-grade berber carpet. It is believed original wood flooring survives underneath. The main banking room retains its original inlaid black-and-white patterned marble floor; the “Brothers’ Room” retains a walnut-stained hardwood floor, possibly original.

4. Wall & ceiling finish: In the main banking room, color photographs taken prior to 1986 show the field color of the walls and coved cornice were painted a vivid scarlet, with plaster cartouches and molding in contrasting white. The cartouches feature the caduceus of Mercury, the Roman god of commerce, a common motif in Baltimore’s financial district. The red appears to correspond with accent ruby glass in the border of the stained glass dome and berry-like accents in the tromp l’oeil frame of the Brown Brothers oil-on-canvas portrait on the north wall, easternmost bay. Whether the red reflects the 1901 paint scheme is unknown. Early black-and-white interior photographs do suggest that the field color of the walls was not pure white (to blend with the decorative plaster work), as it now appears. Logically, for the period, one color from the stained glass dome would have been selected and carried through onto the wall fields. Whether this color was the red or a more sedate amber or green is unknown. Paint analysis would determine the original 1901 paint scheme with more certainty.

The dado of the main banking room is clad in a green serpentine (possibly Italian) marble which extends to form the base for the freestanding white marble columns with cast-bronze bases and capitals flanking the main entry. [The base of the teller’s cage is “faux” marbled in green to match.] The wall field is divided into panels by moldings. These panels now display Brown family artifacts, such as model boats (presumably in reference to the business’s origins in shipping). Of special note, in the northwest corner bay, a canvas panel depicts the generations of the Brown family from 1800 to 1901. The founder is represented by a portrait hanging in the background, while other deceased patriarchs were painted by the artist from old photographs. The dynastic image and connection of the style of the 1901 building to the founder and the year 1800 could scarcely be more explicit. The portrait is framed by a tromp l’oeil border of oak leaves and acorns. Traditional emblems of the god Zeus, the more likely meaning of the motif in the investment house setting derives from the old aphorism, “mighty oaks from little acorns grow.” The oak leaf motif is also used for the frame of the central clock on the

¹⁷Ibid.

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south center wall of the main banking room. The family monogram device, also seen in the exterior bronze grilles, is incorporated into the border of the painted panel.

The walls are joined to the domed ceiling by a coved cornice studded with cartouches featuring the caduceus emblem of Mercury, the Roman god of Commerce. The cartouches are linked with swags. The classical swag motif is made regionally and historically specific by the incorporation of the "bellflower" motif, associated with early Maryland plaster work and, especially, fine furniture. The most striking feature of the interior, the domed ceiling, rises from a bracketed cornice studded with electric light bulbs. The glass dome itself has been persuasively attributed to Baltimore stained glass artist Gustave Baumstock, based on similarities of material and composition to documented contemporary commissions by his studio in the city.¹⁸ The circular saucer dome is most ornate at the rim, where a running swag and cartouche border in green, pale amber, blue and red likely provided a decorative cue for the color scheme of the walls. Two concentric rings of slightly opalescent white glass in a scale pattern converge at a central ring (presumably iron) that serves as the base of a lantern, rising from the center. The interior surface of the iron ring appears to feature a twisted garland punctuated by foliate blocks. The lantern is mainly composed of the same subtle glass as the main dome field, culminating in a star burst at the top.

The dome was painted black during World War II, when civil defense measures sought to make such features less apparent from above, in case of airborne attack. The paint remained until 1982.¹⁹

In the south addition, a frieze of triglyphs and a neoclassical grille (possibly a window which originally opened onto an alley) remain of the 1905-7 decorative scheme. On the upper level, some corbels are still visible from the 1905-7 cornice treatment.

5. Decorative features and trim: Of features not noted elsewhere, most historic elements remain in the "Brothers' Room." The room is paneled in walnut, with a projecting bracketed cornice rising to a pedimented aedicule over the fireplace. The mantelpiece is supported by a pair of Ionic columns with angled volutes, like those of the exterior pilasters. The furnishings in the room do not appear to be original but appropriately reflect the intended Georgian-style drawing-room appearance.

6. Mechanical equipment

¹⁸Jacques Kelly, "Brown's Regains Its 'Dome of Cathedral Glass,'" Baltimore News American 25 June 1982. Kelly makes the attribution and also includes quotes from the artisans of Rambusch & Company who restored the dome during a 1982 renovation.

¹⁹Ibid., also W. Wayne Jones (as cited above).

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a. HVAC: Original system no longer in evidence. All present systems date to the 1996-7 remodeling by SMG architects of Baltimore, Walter Schamu, principal in charge.

b. lighting: In the main banking room of the ground floor, most of the original light fixtures appear to remain intact. Of special note is the ring of exposed light bulbs circling the perimeter of the stained glass dome. Although this feature has been retained and rewired to serve as intended, more effective fluorescent lights above the dome (to light it from "behind,") were installed as part of the 1986-7 renovation.²⁰

An unconfirmed account states that the Beecher, Friz & Gregg addition (two south bays) was also illuminated by a smaller stained glass dome which was covered over in the 1986-7 renovations, when the mezzanine level was inserted into the space. No photograph or drawing has been located to confirm this.²¹

c. plumbing: On the ground story, at the northeast corner of the conference room known as "the Brothers' Room," there is a remarkably intact half-bath from 1901: original white glazed ceramic tile, corner sink with chrome fixtures and pull-chain w.c. remain. From the conference room, an opalescent stained glass transom panel concealed the water tank for the w.c. The original metal tank was replaced by a lighter-weight fiberglass cistern in the 1996-7 rehabilitation of the building.²²

d. Additional features of note: Two safe deposit box rooms retain many original features. One, located adjacent to the main banking room (street level, northwest corner of original building) appears to be completely intact, with boxes, locks, vault doors and mechanisms polished and displayed as decorative artifacts. In the basement, a second safe deposit chamber no longer retains its interior fitting, except for the glazed brick lining, almost certainly a "fireproofing" material treatment. The basement vault retains its door and mechanisms. Both vaults (the openings lined with low-relief foliate ornamental bands in brass) were manufactured by the York Safe & Lock Company of York, Pennsylvania.; both locks were manufactured by Yale and operated with a timing mechanism whereby the lock shut down at a pre-set hour and could not be opened until a pre-set time in the morning.

Nearby, on the east wall, an opening leads to a short flight of downward steps and a passage sealed with a steel door. According to company sources, this

²⁰W. Wayne Jones interview.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

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doorway leads to a tunnel which connected the Alex. Brown building with the Mercantile Safe Deposit & Trust Company directly across Calvert Street to the southeast. It is unknown what corporate affiliation made this arrangement desirable or how long it was in use.

8. Original furnishings: Scattered throughout the building are a variety of furnishings, most notably two carved walnut benches in a Renaissance-revival style with green leather seat cushions, likely from the 1901 lobby furnishing scheme; two roll-top desks, probably oak, which are said to be original to 1901 but might be as “late” as the 1920s. Both feature a brass maker’s label reading, “Lucas Brothers, Baltimore, MD.” Both also have accompanying period chairs, also in oak. Outside the second floor conference room (created in the 1986-7 renovation) a waiting area contains a variety of artifacts related to the company and the Borwn and Griswold families. Most noteworthy here is a pre-1840 wall-hung pendulum clock, which may have been passed down through the company’s history. Throughout the second floor hallway, there are many engravings and period photographs from the company’s collection, as well as corporate ledgers. Included among the engravings are views of the city marked: “E. Whitefield,” View of Baltimore (dated 1847); View of Baltimore (dated 1752); and two ca. 1850 engravings.

D. Site: Urban commercial setting; no setback or plantings. Corporate histories state that from its founding in 1800 until ca. 1860, the company was located across Baltimore Street, to the immediate north of Barnum’s Baltimore Museum, as illustrated in the 1850 Sachse view of the city. In 1850, the company headquarters was a three-story federal structure, a “rowhouse,” with business on the street level and residential quarters above. It is not clear if this was the original building of 1800. In 1860, a building designated, “Brown’s Building” was erected on the present, southwest corner, site. The 1860 building was a four-story Gothic-Revival style brownstone structure, possibly designed by Charles L. Carson.²³

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: No original drawings or plans were located. A north (entrance facade) elevation drawing and longitudinal section were printed in Architectural Record 4, plates 6 & 7; drawings and plans created for the 1986-7 renovation are on file at SMG Architects, Baltimore.

B. Early Views: The company has perhaps a dozen historic images of the structure framed and on display in the building. Company administrators are uncertain whether the images are

²³Dilts, section on Baltimore Street, Baltimore Commercial Architecture Project, 2-3. Images of the Ruskinian Gothic edifice appear in George W. Howard, The Monumental City (1876) and in George W. Englehardt, Baltimore City, Maryland (1895).

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originals or copies of originals in the institution's collection or if some are copies of images on file at the former municipal history museum (the Rembrandt Peale Museum).²⁴

The company's edition, The Oldest Banking House in the United States, contains nine photographic views, including now-lost office interiors.²⁵ In addition, ten small-scale sketches of building details, as well as a reproduction of an engraving of the original Alex. Brown Company building "of the last century" are interspersed with the text. Several views (online cat. #Z24.344; Z24.352 & 354; Z24.381) of Baltimore's Great Fire of 1904 and its aftermath in the collection of the Maryland Historical Society show the building in context.

C. Interviews: W. Wayne Jones, Special Police Services, Chevy Chase, FSB, Baltimore; Steven Vito, Vice-President, Chevy Chase, FSB; unidentified staffer, SMG architects, Baltimore

D. List of Works Consulted

Brown Brothers & Co. Experience of a Century: 1818-1918, Brown Brothers and Company, Philadelphia, New York, Boston... Privately printed, 1918.

Brown, John Crosby. A Hundred Years of Merchant Banking. Privately printed, 1909.

Croly, Herbert, and Matlock Price, "The Work of Parker, Thomas and Rice," Architectural Record 34 (August 1913): 97-184.

Englehardt, George W. Baltimore City, Maryland: The Book of its Board of Trade. Baltimore: Board of Trade, 1895.

Gunts, Edward. "Firm's Move Puts Future in Doubt." Baltimore Sun 6 July 1995.

Howard, George W. The Monumental City: Its Past History & Present Resources. Baltimore: J.D. Ehlers & Co., 1876.

Kelly, Jacques. "Brown's regains its 'dome of cathedral glass.'" Baltimore News-American 25 June, 1982.

²⁴At the time of this report, not all images of the Rembrandt Peale Museum collection had been made accessible by the successor institution, the Maryland Historical Society, so it was not yet possible to verify correspondence of images.

²⁵The Oldest Banking House in the United States. Because of the multiple reprints, it is unknown whether the images date from 1911, 1914 or 1924. It seems unlikely that the newspaper would, in 1911, have devoted that much space to photographs, but the sketches may date to the original article of 1911. The edition note on the flyleaf of the 1924 booklet indicates that the only change to the 1914 edition was updating some partnership information, thus the photographs, at least, probably date from 1914.

Kent, Frank R. The Story of Alex. Brown & Sons. 1st ed. 1925. Baltimore: Norman T.A. Munder, 1925.

John Murphy Company. Baltimore, The Trade Queen of The South: The John Murphy Company's Guide to Baltimore and Text Book of Her Resources. Baltimore: John Murphy Co., 1902.

The Oldest Banking House in the United States. Reprint of article originally published in the Baltimore Sun 14 May 1911. 1st reprint 1914. Baltimore: Alex. Brown & Sons, 1924.

Olson, Sherry H. Baltimore: The Building of An American City. Rev. Ed. 1980. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Although not available for this study, the Griswold family (Brown descendants and current owners of the property) may retain design drawings, images or records pertaining to the commission. The corporate archives of Brown Brothers or Chevy Chase may have building records that have not been identified. Finally, no office records of Parker & Thomas in Baltimore have been located at the time of writing, at either M.I.T. (Parker's alma mater) or Johns Hopkins (Thomas's alma mater). As the Baltimore office closed soon after Thomas' death in 1915, it seems probable that the Baltimore office records were transferred to the Boston office.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

During the summer of 2001, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Maryland Historical Trust, in coordination with the City of Baltimore's Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) and Preservation Maryland, recorded ten historic buildings and sites within Baltimore's Central Business District through large-format photography and original historical research. The heart of the downtown area and focus of intensive redevelopment efforts, Baltimore's Central Business District is a designated city historic district and home to a diverse array of historic commercial and civic buildings, churches, theaters and other landmarks. Many of them predate the district's Great Fire of 1904 and chronicle Baltimore's rise as a financial, commercial and civic center. This project, coordinated by Martin Perschler, Collections Manager, HABS/HAER, and Catherine Lavoie, Senior Historian, HABS, and resulting in more than 150 photographs by Baltimore photographer James W. Rosenthal for HABS and ten detailed architectural histories by Laurie Ossman, PhD., also a Baltimore resident, grew out of concern about the recent loss of the Merchants & Miners Transportation Company Building at 17 Light Street and other buildings of architectural distinction in Baltimore.

Ranging chronologically from the Peale Museum (1814) to the Baltimore Trust Company Building (1929), and in function from Old St. Paul's Episcopal Church (1846) to the Gayety Theatre (1906), the ten landmarks selected for this study illustrate the architectural diversity of

ALEX. BROWN & SONS COMPANY BUILDING
(HABS No. MD-1121; page 15)

the district and the myriad forces that have informed the district's growth and evolution over time. The documentation resulting from this project formed the basis of a photographic exhibit that was launched at the Maryland Historical Society in May 2002 during National Historic Preservation Month.

The ten historic buildings and sites that were studied during the project are:

Alex. Brown & Sons Company Building (HABS MD-1121)
B&O Railroad Company Headquarters Building (HABS MD-1122)
Baltimore Trust Company Building (HABS MD-1119)
Gayety Theatre (HABS MD-1123)
Mercantile Trust & Deposit Company (HABS MD-191)
Monument Square & the Battle Monument (HABS MD-1126 and MD-185)
Old St. Paul's Episcopal Church (HABS MD-1124)
Peale Museum (HABS MD-398)
Pennsylvania Railroad Company District Office Building (HABS MD-1125)
Vickers Building (HABS MD-1120)