

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY
DISTRICT OFFICE BUILDING
200 East Baltimore Street
Baltimore
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1125

HABS
MD-1125

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY DISTRICT OFFICE BUILDING

HABS No. MD-1125

Location: 200 East Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21201; UTM coordinates:
18.360954.4349943

Present Owner/Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Built to house administrative offices of the Baltimore headquarters of the Philadelphia-based Pennsylvania Railroad Company following the Great Fire of 1904, this structure was an early commission of the architectural firm of Parker & Thomas (later Parker, Thomas & Rice), the pre-eminent architects of Baltimore's Beaux-Arts commercial and financial structures in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1905
2. Architect: Parker & Thomas: J. Harleston Parker (1873-1930) and Douglas H. Thomas, Jr. (1872-1915)¹

Thomas was the Baltimore native of the firm and headed the Baltimore office, while Parker was based in Boston. Thomas 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 and Thomas met, whether as students in Boston, or later in Paris or, indeed, after Parker's return from his European travels in 1900.² In any case, the 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.

¹Dorsey and Dilts ascribe the building to the firm of Parker, Thomas and Rice, but the building predates Rice's partnership in 1907; Herbert D. Croly and H. Matlock Price, "Notes on the Work of Parker, Thomas and Rice, of Boston and Baltimore," *Architectural Record* 34 (August 1913): 97-184.

²"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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The firm's first Baltimore commission was the prestigious Alex. Brown & Sons banking firm headquarters (completed 1901).

Presumably, Thomas was the partner in charge of the firm's Baltimore commissions. Thomas's 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.³ Significant Baltimore commissions for the firm include: Alex. Brown & Sons (1901); the Belvedere Hotel (1903); Gilman Hall of the Johns Hopkins University's Homewood campus (1904); and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad 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 Company 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' leadership of the Baltimore office, he brought the firm commissions from the city's premier commercial and financial institutions which, in turn, sponsored the erection of some of Baltimore's most enduring Beaux-Arts 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 1904 Fire.

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses

1905-47: Realty Improvement Company of Baltimore City, leased to Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1905-1947⁴

1947-94: Read Drug & Chemical Company⁵

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown

³According to Thomas's obituary in the Baltimore Sun (12 June 1915: 14, c.3) 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 Elkrige Kennels. The obituary notes, "He took a great deal of interest in society and was very popular."

⁴Baltimore City Land Records, Liber MLP, Folio 346. The title was transferred to the Realty Improvement Company by Frank B. Smith on 29 December 1905, and a confirmatory deed transferred from Mary Lee Andrews 11 June 1906. The lease-arrangement with the Pennsylvania Railroad is confirmed by the fact that the Realty Improvement Company held the title in 1947, when the property was purchased by the Read Company.

⁵The Read Company was purchased by the Rite-Aid Corporation in 1983, at which time the name of the occupant changed, while no change in use or occupancy occurred.

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5. Original plans and construction: Unlocated

6. Alterations and additions: The street level has been significantly altered from its historic appearance. The earliest known image of the structure shows a rusticated base with three rectangular openings on each street-facing facade, the central opening of which aligned with the corresponding upper bay.⁶ On the Calvert Street facade, the flanking openings of the street level were doubled in width, thus spanning the width of two upper bays. The caption of the image notes specifically that the buildings is “of ferroconcrete.” This material connoted fire-resistance in the period of rebuilding following the 1904 Fire. Presumably, the exposed material of the rusticated base seen in the 1905 image is concrete and not an applied facing stone. Some time prior to 1985 the street level was altered and during the period of ownership of the Read Drug Company, some attempt was made to reflect the historic appearance through the application of a brick revetment (similar to the brick of the upper stories). The fenestration, however, did not take into account the historic rhythm of doubled openings flanking the central bay on the Calvert Street front, instead using five identical segmental-arched openings which, unfortunately, do not quite align with the upper story openings they presumably attempt to echo in form and arrangement. The Baltimore Street front features three identical, segmental-arched openings. It is unknown in what condition the historic reinforced concrete fabric remains beneath the applied brick.

B. Historical Context

The Pennsylvania Railroad Building reflects stylistic and material trends in Baltimore’s commercial and financial center following the February 7-8, 1904 Fire which leveled most buildings in the district. Stylistically, the Fire effectively eradicated the definitive Victorian character of the larger financial and commercial institutions located in the 64-acre area. This was partly due to a general shift in architectural fashion, often linked to the watershed White City at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, which presented the more restrained Renaissance-based classicism of the Ecole des Beaux Arts as an alternative to the formally complex, visually multivalent and picturesque modes (such as the Queen Anne and, especially, Second Empire) characteristic of the post-Civil War era. The Second Empire style, in particular, fell most precipitously from favor on an international level at the turn of the century.⁷ Parker & Thomas’s own design of the nearby Alex. Brown & Sons Company Building of 1901 shows that the firm, even prior to the 1904 Fire, was working very much within current international standards of architectural taste. In addition, in Baltimore, this stylistic shift toward Beaux-Arts classicism

⁶“The Pennsylvania Railroad Company’s new Central Building,” Baltimore Daily Record 15 July 1905, clipping in Pennsylvania Railroad Building file, City of Baltimore, Commission on Historical and Architectural Preservation [CHAP].

⁷It is, perhaps, indicative of the desire to replace Second Empire-style buildings in particular that while a completely gutted Fire “survivor” such as Carson and Sperry’s 1891 Beaux-Arts Romanesque style Equitable Building (southwest corner, Monument Square, corner of Calvert and Fayette Streets) was rehabilitated and remains in use, no major Second Empire structure was similarly salvaged.

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may have been emphasized by the widely-held belief that the air pockets beneath the Second Empire style's hallmark mansard roofs may have contributed to the invisible, unchecked spread of the Fire in the commercial district. The building's completion by July 1905 indicates the rapidity with which the city's business institutions rebuilt in the area, thus maintaining their association with the part of the city that had functioned as its financial heart since the eighteenth century.

The building is also a relic of the era when the railroad industry dominated commerce in Baltimore. The Pennsylvania Railroad vied, throughout the nineteenth century, with the locally-owned Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, for control of right-of-ways and development rights for lines in and out of the city. While the B&O was older (founded 1830), by the 1870s, the Pennsylvania Railroad (by purchasing smaller lines) was second only to Vanderbilt's New York Central in size, scope and profitability. Such was the competition in Baltimore that the two lines even maintained separate passenger terminals, with Mount Royal Station serving the B&O (and its dominance of lines running south) while the Pennsylvania maintained a site between Charles and St. Paul Streets, well to the north of the city's center.

In 1900, under the leadership of Alexander Cassatt (brother of expatriate Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt), the Pennsylvania Railroad effectively merged with the B&O and the two companies shared a Board of Trustees. Concurrently, the Republican party, led by Theodore Roosevelt (elected President 1901) began to move toward legislation prohibiting railroad monopolies such as this. Thus the Pennsylvania and B&O maintained separate corporate identities during this period, although the "union" of the two companies was also celebrated by Cassatt's pet project, Washington, DC's monumental Beaux-Arts Union Station (1902).

When the 1904 Fire destroyed the Second-Empire style B&O headquarters (1881-2, described as the B&O's then-President John Garrett's "pride and joy"⁸) on the corner of Baltimore and Calvert Streets, the corporate officers elected to rebuild a grand Beaux-Arts tower on a new site, two blocks west (corner of Baltimore and Charles). The Pennsylvania, by contrast, retained its site and elected the relatively small, restrained building seen today. The inter-relationship of the two companies and the coordination of their post-Fire building schemes is attested to by the fact that both the Pennsylvania Railroad building and the new B&O tower on Charles Street were designed by the same architectural firm, Parker & Thomas. The modesty of the Pennsylvania's building (in spite of the company's essential domination of the B&O) is part and parcel of the effort to maintain distinct identities for the two merged companies. In Baltimore (where the namesake company was the city's largest employer until the Second World War), an architectural assertion of preeminence by the B&O made civic sense. Finally, as railroad historian Herb Harwood notes, the Pennsylvania building was merely one of dozens of "branch offices" for the Philadelphia-based company, while the B&O headquarters building was the corporate centerpiece.

⁸John F. Stover, History of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1987): 201; an image of the Second Empire building after the Fire is on p. 200.

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The wide-opening and plate-glass windows of the building's original street level aptly conveyed its retail function as a passenger ticket office for the "suburban" Pennsylvania passenger station. The upper stories likely served as offices for commercial freight salesman.⁹

By 1906—the time of the Baltimore post-Fire rebuilding of both the Pennsylvania and B&O buildings—Cassatt was dead, the Republicans had passed antitrust legislation and the two companies administratively pried themselves apart once again.¹⁰ Thus what may have begun in 1905 as a somewhat disingenuous attempt to maintain the united railroad companies' discrete corporate identities through the erection of two separate and stylistically, hierarchically distinct structures, became an accurate representation of corporate separation by the time the buildings were complete.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Beaux-Arts matrix of Parker & Thomas's design is evident in the use of a classical vocabulary applied to a non-specific but clearly historical form, adapted to contemporary function. The Pennsylvania Railroad building refers to historical model of the Florentine Renaissance palazzo, with its tautly-maintained block-like form resting on a rusticated street-level base and rising through two levels to a heavy cornice. As the palazzo form was widely adapted between the Renaissance and 1905, the Pennsylvania Railroad building may owe its primary associative identity to Georgian adaptations. The arrangement of commercial offices over an open, loggia-like ground story recalls—perhaps deliberately—the colonial market-house form, exemplified by Peter Harrison's Brick Market in Newport, Rhode Island, of 1726, or (as known by description) Baltimore's own original (frame) courthouse of 1729. This application of a historical type to a suitable contemporary function is not only typical of Beaux-Arts design, but indicates an element of Colonial Revivalism in the work as well. As Baltimore has very few surviving pre-1776 buildings, drawing on a vanished model/building type (such as the courthouse) and "upgrading" it to brick with classical ornament effectively romanticizes Baltimore's urban past and suggests a tradition of refinement that suited the patrons and passers-by of 1905.

⁹Herb Harwood's explanation of the use of the building is borne out by the company's listing in the Baltimore City Directory of 1910. Harwood also made the contextual observation regarding the distance of the Pennsylvania's passenger station from the downtown center, where salesman, merchants and wholesalers would have done business, stayed in the district's hotels, gone to restaurants and the theater and thus would have been able to consult timetables and purchase tickets more conveniently at the Calvert Street branch office than at the station itself.

¹⁰Any history of either the B&O or Pennsylvania Railroad (noted in list of works consulted) recounts this complicated corporate relationship in greater detail. For clarification and simplification of that information, this summation is indebted to conversations with railroad historians James D. Dilts and Herb Harwood.

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The basic form, unbroken by turrets, bows or complex roof lines, is emphasized by rather than veiled in applied ornament. The only break in the cubic silhouette is the cartouche and flagpole over the main entrance, which serves to mark the primary entry bay. The generous width of the street-level openings marks a “modernization” of the rusticated base form, as the span of the openings was made possible by the use of modern steel reinforcement. This (perhaps inadvertently) grants the low-rise Baltimore building some passing resemblance to the commercial idiom of 1880s-90s Chicago, and the historically-based proto-skyscrapers of Burnham & Root or H.H. Richardson.

More directly, the classicism of the style, in conjunction with the use of brick, suggests a more local historical reference via the Georgian style. Parker & Thomas’s nearby Alex. Brown & Sons Company building (1901; kitty-corner from the Pennsylvania Railroad building) utilized the Georgian Revival manner, and the firm’s later work at the Homewood campus of the Johns Hopkins University, as well as the dozens of Georgian-revival style buildings produced by the Boston office,¹¹ indicate that the early American dialect of Renaissance-derived classicism was an important basis for the firm’s design aesthetic.

As title history indicates, the building was likely built with the intention of serving the Pennsylvania Railroad on a long-term lease,¹² but the simplicity of the design and lack of occupant-specific iconography may indicate the owner’s desire to produce a “generic” commercial structure that could be adapted to other occupants, as needed.

2. Condition of fabric: The exterior brick work appears structurally stable, with some mortar loss and carbonate surface staining on the upper stories. The steel-framed casement and transom windows of the upper stories (some boarded over) are original and in good condition.¹³ Ornamental bronze panels are heavily patinated, but it is impossible to determine the presence of bronze disease (or lack thereof) from visual examination. Ornamental relief panels at cornice level appear to be in excellent condition, with no noticeable spalling, cracking or losses. There appears to be little to no interior maintenance.

B. Description of Exterior

¹¹Croly and Price, *passim*.

¹²For an explanation of the socio-economic ramifications of Baltimore’s “ground rent” system (an English-derived arrangement by which landowners retained title to property while “renting” the land itself to a builder or developer, usually for term of decades, if not virtual perpetuity, while the builder might, in turn, rent the structure to an individual or business), see Sherry H. Olson, Baltimore: The Building of An American City, Rev. Ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997): 23, 168-9.

¹³For documentation of original appearance, see image in Croly and Price (p. 133). The crispness of the frame profiles suggests that the windows may have been rehabilitated or sandblasted as part of the ca. 1980 remodeling which transformed the street level facades.

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1. Overall dimensions: Lot size is 53x64; height is three stories
2. Foundations, walls, structural system: Foundation and street-level walls appear to be steel-reinforced concrete (the latter with post-historic brick veneer), as per contemporary press account.¹⁴ The scale of the building and the firm's other recorded work suggest that the upper levels are load-bearing brick, probably with steel girders.
3. Other: The northwest corner retains a narrow doorway surrounded by rusticated concrete that corresponds to the historic treatment of the street level facade. This doorway does not, however, appear in the ca. 1906 newspaper image of the structure.¹⁵ Additional research in historic photograph collections may help identify the date of this doorway which certainly postdates 1906, and predates the current street-level treatment of ca. 1980.

A heavy, banded cornice in concrete defines the street level as a "base" to the upper stories. Projections in the flat-banded cornice serve as a "base" for each of the brick piers that define the openings (five openings of equal width on the west facade; three openings in an a-b-a rhythm on the south facade). This subtle treatment suggests the presence of pilasters—and the classical orders—in the simplified brick pier forms. The second and third-level openings are vertically united under one, two-story segmental archway, marked by a keystone carved with a foliate relief block. The floor level between the second and third stories is marked, on the exterior, by classical swag and rosette panels in cast bronze surmounting the transom level of the second story openings. These swag panels, with deep relief and bold, solid masses, visually supports the more delicate, elaborate bronze grilles that read as balustrades for the third-level, full-height openings. [These grilles closely resemble those of the nearby Alex. Brown & Sons building of 1901, also designed by Parker & Thomas.] An elegantly carved frieze in a running foliate motif is defined, at the corners, by inset ornamental blocks in a slightly bolder depth of relief. This frieze is heavily shadowed by the overhanging eaves, emphasized by a profusion of scrolled corbel brackets, also carved in a foliate motif. A low, flat, solid parapet is "bumped up" slightly on the west (Calvert Street) facade over the center bay. On the south (Baltimore Street) facade, the main entry bay is marked by a more elaborately carved cartouche which supports a flagpole. On both street sides, the low parapet conceals a flat roof of unknown covering.

D. Site: Historic landscape design: Urban setting, no setback.

¹⁴"The Pennsylvania Railroad Company's New Central Building," Baltimore Daily Record 15 July 1905, clipping in Pennsylvania Railroad Building file, CHAP. The photo caption notes: "The structure, like the home of the News, is of ferroconcrete." This reference to the Daily News would contradict the file's stated source of the clipping as being from the Baltimore Daily Record. Checking the issue dated 15 July 1905 in both newspapers would clarify the actual source of the Maryland Institute clipping.

¹⁵Ibid. The photo caption notes that the structure "is rapidly nearing completion."

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PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: Unlocated

B. Early Views: Baltimore Daily Record 15 July 1905 (clipping in scrapbook, Maryland Institute vertical files); Croly and Price, "The Works of Parker, Thomas and Rice..." Architectural Record 34 (August 1913): 133.

C. List of Works Consulted

Secondary Sources

Alexander, Edwin P. On the Main Line: The Pennsylvania Railroad in the 19th Century. New York: C.N. Potter Company, 1971.

Burgess, George H., and Miles C. Kennedy. Centennial History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1846-1946. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania RR, 1949.

Croly, Herbert D. and C. Matlock Price. "The Works of Parker, Thomas and Rice of Boston and Baltimore." Architectural Record 34 (August 1913): 97-184, illus.

Dilts, James D. The Great Road: The Building of the Baltimore and Ohio, The Nation's First Railroad. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1993.

Hilton, George W. The Ma & Pa: A History of the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad. 1963. 2nd ed, Rev. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999.

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

"Parker, Thomas and Rice," Placzek, Adolf K., Ed. The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects. New York: Free Press, 1982.

Schotter, Howard Ward. The Growth and Development of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Philadelphia: Allen & Co., 1927.

Stover, John F. History of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1987.

Primary Sources

"D.H. Thomas, Jr., Killed." Baltimore (Morning) Sun 12 June 1915: 14 c.3.

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Baltimore City Land Records, Liber/Folio MLP 7089-3646; RO 2200/275; SCL 2393/37.

Interviews

James D. Dilts, railroad historian, Baltimore, phone interview, 7 February 2002

Herb Harwood, railroad historian, Baltimore, phone interview, 8 February 2002

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Archives of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company (Philadelphia) would seem the likeliest source for construction records, historic photographs or corporate annual reports that might provide historic views of the Baltimore building.

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 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)

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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)