

The Shot Tower
Fayette and Front Street,
Baltimore, Maryland.

HABS No. Md. 21

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Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Maryland

Historic American Buildings Survey
John H. Scarff, District Officer
1012 Keyser Building, Baltimore, Md.

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<u>OWNERS</u>	The City of Baltimore
<u>DATE OF ERECTION</u>	1828
<u>ARCHITECT</u>	Unknown
<u>BUILDER</u>	Unknown
<u>PRESENT CONDITION</u>	Good
<u>MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION</u>	Brick walls, wood floor construction to the 13th floor- 13th and 14th floors of iron - roof or 15th floor is new and of concrete.
<u>NUMBER OF STORIES</u>	14 floors and roof
<u>OTHER EXISTING RECORDS</u>	Nile's Register, December 27, 1828 - Vol/ 35 page 282 Illustrated News - April 16, 1853. Baltimore Sun - June 18, 1924 Baltimore Sun - August 24, 1924 Baltimore Sun - August 9, 1929.

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HISTORICAL DATA

The ground upon which the Phoenix Shot Tower now stands was once the site of the First Baptist Church to be built in Baltimore. In 1773, Thomas Bailey, executor of William and Ezekiel Towson, conveyed to Benjamin Griffith, Nathaniel Griffith, Davis Shields, George Presstman, Richard Lemmon, John McKim, James Cox and Alexander McKim a lot of ground in Jones' Addition to Baltimore Town. It was sold for 150 pounds and purchased "for a house of public worship and also a burying place." The church was to become the first home of the Baptists then recently in Baltimore. The Reverend Lewis Richard, the first chosen Minister, came to the church in 1785.

In the year 1828, Daniel Martin, being the Governor of Maryland, the General Assembly passed an act to incorporate the Phoenix Shot Tower Company of Baltimore. On June 2nd of that same year the corner stone of the present Shot Tower was laid in the land purchased for the purpose from the Baptists, by Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence. John McKim Jr was especially active in organizing the Phoenix Shot Tower Company and in planning the construction of the Tower.

"The circular brick tower erected by the Phoenix Company for making shot, at the corner of Front and Pitt streets, has reached the intended elevation, being two hundred and thirty-four feet, three inches high from the pavement. Its diameter is forty feet, and at the top twenty. The stone foundation wall is ten feet thick at the bottom, and six at the top. The brick work, which commences at the surface, is five feet and a half thick, of which thickness it continues for the height of nearly fifty feet; when it diminishes four inches in every story, being twenty inches thick at the top of the parapet, three feet in height, which crowns the summit.

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HISTORICAL DATA Cont'd:

"This huge structure, which is an excellent piece of brick-work, was commenced on the 2nd day of June, and finished on the 25th of November, and was built without scaffolding. The parapet at the top is white, and somewhat resembles in its appearance a mural crown; and as the tower is well proportioned, the whole edifice is an ornamental feature in the prospect of the city.

"The operation of manufacture commences with hoisting up the lead on an endless chain (or windlass) driven by steam, and melted in the kettles at the dropping stations, where it is alloyed with the chemical mixture to prepare for dropping; an iron handle or holder is then hung out over the hatchway which is open from bottom to top, and in this handle is placed a pan, with the bottom perforated -- the perforation being of a size corresponding with the shot required. The descending streams are parted by their continually accelerating velocity into the quantity of metal required to form each shot, which immediately assumes the spherical form, and maintains it, until, cooled by its rapid passage through the atmosphere, it becomes permanent before reaching the base of the tower, where it is received in a cistern of water, which suddenly destroys the velocity, without altering its form; it is then raised from these cisterns by a ladle or machinery and passes thence to the dryer, where it is thoroughly dried, and from thence passes to the polishing cask or cylinder, to which is added a small quantity of black lead. A quick revolving motion soon produces a bright polish, by the attrition of the shot against each other. It is then passed to the receiving box, through an aperture in the tower, thence to the finish-room; from thence to the inclined tubes, for separating the perfect from the imperfect - the perfect or spherical ones running freely down the inclination, while the faulty ones remain at the head, or straggle to the sides, and are swept back into a box and remelted. The good shot are received in a box at the end of the inclined table, and from thence pass to the sifting case, which contains a series of sieves of various sizes, the larger being at the top, and, as the shot

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HISTORICAL DATA: Cont'd.

descend through them, each sifter receives such as suit its size; from the sifter they are put in boxes or tubes, on a convenient bench, ready to be weighed, in bags of 25 lbs., and are then ready for distribution to the trade.

"Shot are known as buck and drop. Buck are made either by moulding or compression, and drop from dropping in towers from high cliffs, or down deep shafts of lead mines. The manufactories in this country are now located at six different points, as follows; New York, two; Philadelphia, one; Baltimore, one; Wythe county, Va., one; St. Louis, one, and consume annually from 150 to 200,000 pigs lead, and produce some 5,000 tons of shot, which are distributed to all parts of the country.

"Up to 1848, the receipts of lead from the west were sufficient for the wants of the manufacturers of this country. Then the news of the gold of California made a draft upon the labor of the states, and the miners of the West soon left, and the quantity of lead from there began decreasing, and importing from foreign countries commenced, and has gradually increased.

"We find, by reference to Ure's Dictionary of Arts, Manufactures and Mines, that the highest shot tower in Europe and by him supposed the highest in the world, is at Villach, in Carthina, being 240 Vienna, or 249 English feet high." The "Merchants Shot Tower" is, therefore, the highest building of the kind in the world, being one foot higher than that of Villach. The works are conducted by Mr. Thomas I. Clare, secretary of the company; and good management is everywhere apparent.

"The shot manufactured here have a high reputation. The metal is melted at various distances from the ground, and consist of lead, combined with arsenic and other metals, which give it the quality of forming readily into globules after it is poured into copper pans, in the bottom of which holes of requisite size have been drilled. The largest shot are dropped from the highest platforms.

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"In the hottest weather there is always a strong breeze at the top, and in high winds the visitor feels but little inclination to remain at the summit, both on account of the violence of the current of air, and the rocking motion which he seems to feel while there. The vane on the top of the flag-staff weighs about fifty pounds, and was some years ago blown off by the wind, and fortunately fell in the yard of a neighboring house. On one occasion the lightning rod on the outside became detached near the center, and a man was found hardy enough to suffer himself to be lowered by a rope from the top, in order to replace it. On another occasion, a sailor climbed up the large flag-staff and brought the vane down in his arms. When the visitor is on the top of the tower, let him consider what inducement would tempt him to perform either of these feats."

In 1878 its interior was destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt and continued to function until 1892, when the American Shot and Lead Company, which then operated it, was absorbed by the United Lead Company. Modern methods for the manufacture of shot were then in use and the tower was abandoned for shot-making purposes.

In February 1921, the property was sold to Charles F. Frickenscher and Edward R. Frichenscher, the owners of the Union Oil Company who at the time were the tenants of the property. The contract of sale named \$14,500 as the purchase price to be paid to the United Lead Company the owners at that date. The contract stipulated that the tower should not be used for the manufacture of shot.

Reports were current that the Union Oil Company planned to raze the tower and erect another building on the lot 90' X 170 feet, which was included in the purchase.

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HISTORICAL DATA; Cont'd.

Eighteen years prior to this some cracks were discovered in the tower, it was about to be condemned by the Building Inspector, but a cry went up all over Baltimore for its preservation. At that time residents in the vicinity were in fear for a short period because of the chance that the tower would fall on their homes. Closer inspection, however, disclosed the fact that the tower was in good shape and that there was no danger of its collapse.

In 1924 the property was purchased by popular subscription and presented to the city.

On August 9, 1929, repairs to the shot tower to cost \$25,000 were authorized by the Board of Estimates so that the structure could be made safe and opened to visitors.

The work on the shot tower provided a new floor, new stairs, replacement of windows, reconstruction of the roof and parapets, pointing up the brick work and whitewashing of the interior. The money was allotted from the contingent fund and the work done that summer. The tower was opened to visitors probably the latter part of that year.

The work of restoration including a gas fired apparatus to make steam which illuminated by red lights was discharged at night from the top of the tower. This simulated the effect of the old active times of shot making with such success that flames appeared to be coming from the tower. It is said that every night some two or three unsuspecting persons seeing what appeared to be flames issuing from the building turned in fire alarms. During recent years this has been discontinued.

Today the tower still dominates that portion of the city and is the only ^{ONE} remaining of five said to have at one time existed in the city. It is a well known landmark, closely adjacent to the civic center.

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HISTORICAL DATA; Cont'd.

At a bend in Fayette street which leads into the Philadelphia Road, it can be seen from both directions a long way and recent demolition on the north side of the street for purposes of street widening have opened up still other views.

John H. Staff

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ADDENDUM TO WRITTEN DATA

THE SHOT TOWER
Fayette and Front Streets
Baltimore, Maryland

Mr. John H. Scarff, District Officer,
U.S. Department of the Interior,
1012 Keyser Building,
Baltimore, Maryland.

Dear Mr. Scarff:

Upon my return to the office after an absence of a few days I find your letter of December 17 directed to United Lead Company enclosing a photograph of the interior of the old Shot Tower at Fayette and Front Streets in Baltimore.

It has been a long time since I have been inside of this Shot Tower, but I notice the zig-zag trough to which you call attention in the photograph. It would seem to me that this zig-zag trough probably was grooved to take care of some lifting device to take pig lead from the ground to the top of the Tower. I am inclined to believe that this zig-zag groove has something to do with some safety device on the elevator or lifting device. From my knowledge of the manufacture of shot, this groove or trough had nothing whatever to do with the actual manufacture of shot. No doubt you are thoroughly familiar with the method of manufacture which was in use in the old Shot Tower here, and I cannot conceive of anything that this trough would mean in the actual manufacture of shot.

I trust I have given you some information that might be of service.

Very truly yours,

Manager.