

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

2020 MOSHER STREET (WAREHOUSE) (Midtown Edmondson Historic District)

HABS No. MD-1432

Location: 2020 Mosher Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

The warehouse at 2020 Mosher Street is located at latitude: 39.300106, longitude: -76.650341. The coordinates represent a point at the center of the property and were obtained in 2022 using Google Earth (WGS84). There is no restriction on their release to the public.

Significance: For approximately fifty years, from ca. 1910 to 1960, the 2020 Mosher Street warehouse was associated with the lumber industry in Baltimore, which was the center of wood production in the state of Maryland. Located along the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad, the property was originally used by the Lafayette Mill and Lumber Company. After the Bowen Corporation built the existing warehouse in 1945, Herbert L. Bowen leased it to the United States Plywood Corporation, the Western Mill & Lumber Company, Inc., and the Roddis Plywood Corporation until ca. 1960. The Maryland Workshop for the Blind leased the warehouse by the early 1960s. The Bowen estate sold the property to Bowl America, Inc. in 1981, which used it for storage until it was acquired by its last owner, Mosher LLC, in 2016. Because of its association with the lumber industry and the railroad, 2020 Mosher Street is significant as a contributing property of the National Register-eligible Midtown Edmondson Historic District.

Description: 2020 Mosher Street is a single-story brick-faced warehouse with a large original main section built in 1945 and a smaller addition built in 1951. The original main building is essentially rectangular with two sides that measure approximately 101' and 203'. The northwest corner is chamfered to follow the alignment of the neighboring railroad tracks, resulting in a plan shape that is a five-sided polygon. All exterior walls are red brick laid in a common bond pattern with a brick soldier course located toward the base and brick corbels in the cornice. The building has a flat roof clad in bituminous material with a brick chimney in the southeast corner. The primary façade, which faces Mosher Street, has a three-segment stepped symmetrical parapet roofline with a narrow rectangular brick-framed panel set within the parapet's tallest center segment. All original façade openings have been covered up, including the windows and the original off-center, recessed main arched entryway, with a brick basketweave tympanum and corbelled surround, that have been infilled with brick. In addition, two loading dock openings at the west end of the original façade have been boarded up.

The east elevation has three original loading dock openings sealed with wood or metal panels, and five clerestory window openings infilled with concrete blocks. Four additional clerestory window openings at the southern end of the east

elevation have been infilled with brick. The north elevation has a loading dock doorway at the east end that is sealed with metal panels. Vegetation completely obscures the angled northwest wall elevation and partially obscures all of the west wall except for a sealed loading dock opening flanked by two concrete block infilled clerestory windows.

The 1951 rectangular addition connected to the original building's southwest corner measures approximately 62' x 47'. All door and window openings of the addition are infilled with masonry or sealed with wood or metal panels, with the exception of a single-leaf metal door at the east end of the south façade that currently serves as the principal entrance. This section of the building has a butterfly roof clad in a bituminous material and a brick chimney located near its center. The Mosher Street façade originally had three small window openings to the west of the entry door and a row of thirteen small clerestory windows. The symmetrical angled planes and center valley of the butterfly roof can be clearly discerned when viewing the west elevation of the addition. Partially visible on the west elevation, but obscured by plywood panels, is what appears from an interior inspection to be a row of clerestory windows toward the center of the wall. The north elevation is partially obscured by vegetation but appears to have several clerestory window openings infilled with concrete blocks and a concrete stairwell leading down from grade to a basement door.

The interior of the original portion of the building consists of high-ceilinged open warehouse storage space with masonry walls, bare concrete floors, and exposed steel beams and columns. The brick walls have boarded-up openings indicating former loading bays, as well as areas infilled with non-matching brick or concrete block that may have once been openings for additional doors and windows. There are also several modern multi-pane windows set within masonry infill areas that are boarded up on the exterior.

The interior of the 1951 addition, used for administrative offices, is partitioned into an entry foyer/reception hall, a rear (north) office space, a front (south) office space, and several small ancillary rooms located toward the rear of the building. The interior walls and ceilings of the foyer and offices reflect the mid-century modern architectural features visible on the exterior, including banks of clerestory windows and the angled planes of the butterfly roof. Interior finishes include concealed spline acoustic ceiling tiles, vinyl floor tile, and painted or wood-grained wall panels. The ancillary rooms were not surveyed due to unsafe conditions.

History: Transportation improvements were a significant factor in the development of the area around 2020 Mosher Street in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Road improvements in the 1880s, combined with the initiation of

streetcar service on Edmondson Avenue in 1899, led to residential development in West Baltimore.¹ The 1873 opening of the Baltimore and Potomac (B&P) Railroad through West Baltimore led to the development of warehouses and industrial facilities clustered along the rail line.²

During the early twentieth century, the property on which 2020 Mosher Street now stands was used by the Lafayette Mill and Lumber Company. Incorporated on September 11, 1899, this company immediately began acquiring property and developing its mill and lumber yard, with the main facility located south of Mosher Street on the site of 2000 West Lafayette Avenue.³ By the time of the 1914 Sanborn map, the site of 2020 Mosher Street served as the company's rail yard with platforms and sidings.⁴

By 1919, during the time that the Lafayette Mill and Lumber Company used the property, Baltimore City and County were the leading centers of wood manufacturing in Maryland, with 164 plants employing approximately 8,000 employees. According to F.W. Besley and J. G. Dorrance's 1919 publication, *The Wood-Using Industries of Maryland*, these plants were "of prime importance to the industrial activity of the city and the State. With unparalleled shipping facilities by rail and water, there is no reason why Baltimore should not continue to be a leader in the manufacture of forest products along the Atlantic Coast."⁵

In 1929, when Charles H. Cromwell, the president of Lafayette Mill and Lumber Company, was seriously ill, a petition was filed in the Circuit Court to appoint a receiver for the company. According to the press coverage, the company's stockholders and directors wanted "the business closed out under jurisdiction of the court."⁶ In 1931, the receivers held an auction of the company's equipment,

¹ Elizabeth Fagan, "Warehouse at 2020 Mosher Street, B-5296," Maryland Historical Trust Determination of Eligibility Form (Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 11 September 2015), 2-3.

² Eli Pousson, "Midtown Edmondson Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (draft), (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2015), 8-22 – 8-27.

³ "Lafayette Mill and Lumber Co.," *The Sun* [Baltimore], 12 September 1899, 7; "A New Lumber Yard," *The Sun*, 20 September 1899, 10; "City Council," *The Sun*, 26 September 1899, 10, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 4 March 2023.

⁴ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Baltimore, Independent Cities, Maryland, Vol. 2, 1901, Image 60, Map 167, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573190102/?sp=60&st=image&r=-1.222,-0.164,3.444,1.604,0; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Baltimore, Independent Cities, Maryland, Vol. 2, 1914, Image 82, Map 181, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573191402/?sp=82&r=-1.204,-0.077,3.407,1.588,0, all accessed 7 January 2024.

⁵ F.W. Besley and J. G. Dorrance, *The Wood-Using Industries of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland State Board of Forestry, 1919), 85-86.

⁶ "Lumber Firm Placed in Hands of Receivers," *The Sun*, 7 August 1929, 26, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 4 March 2023.

with notice that “immediately thereafter” the property would be sold.⁷ The site was cleared of structures by 1938, after numerous fires occurred on the vacant property.⁸ The land was then transferred between public and private ownership, including ownership by the Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington Railroad (PB&W), before being sold to the Bowen Corporation on March 14, 1944.⁹

In 1945, the Bowen Corporation constructed the main building of the 2020 Mosher Street warehouse under the guidance of Herbert L. Bowen, a concrete products manufacturer and industrial real estate investor. Until the early 1960s, the building was utilized by companies related to Baltimore’s lumber industry. At the time of its construction, the building was described in trade journals as “completely modern in every respect... designed especially for plywood and will stock and sell the wide variety of plywood and allied products distributed by the company.”¹⁰ Its construction was announced in 1945 by *The Sun* as being located “at Mosher Street and the Pennsylvania Railroad,” noting that it was leased to the United States Plywood Corporation.¹¹ This plywood company, headquartered in New York City, had been formed by a merger of several smaller plywood companies along the East Coast. The building at 2020 Mosher Street was its seventeenth warehouse location.¹²

According to *The Sun* in early 1951, the United States Plywood Corporation filed plans for a \$60,000 warehouse at 2020 West Mosher Street that was designed by the architectural firm of Fenton & Lichtig.¹³ It is possible that the article may have referred to a hoped-for, but never constructed, new building at the site, as both portions of the existing warehouse are already shown on the 1950 Sanborn.¹⁴ Later Sanborn maps, including from 1952, 1971, 1974, and 1982, show the same configuration of the two building sections.¹⁵

⁷ “Receivers’ Sale,” classified advertisement, *The Sun*, 20 May 1931, 25, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 4 March 2023.

⁸ U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), “1937-38 Baltimore City & Baltimore County,” Aerial Image, 1:20,000 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, 14 February 1953), cited in Fagan, “Warehouse at 2020 Mosher Street, B-5296,” 4.

⁹ Fidelity National Title Insurance Company, *60 Year Title Search, Property Title File No. BP210007, 2020 Mosher Street, Baltimore, MD 21217*.

¹⁰ *Veneers and Plywood*, 39, (1945), cited in Fagan, “Warehouse at 2020 Mosher Street, B-5296,” 4.

¹¹ “Real Estate, Building News,” *The Sun*, 17 June 1945, 34, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 13 June 2019.

¹² Fagan, “Warehouse at 2020 Mosher Street, B-5296,” 4.

¹³ “Warehouse Proposed,” *The Sun*, 14 January 1951, 65, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 13 June 2019.

¹⁴ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Baltimore, Independent Cities, Maryland, Vol. 2, 1914 (updated Dec. 1950), Image 50, Map 181, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573195002/?sp=82&r=-1.212,-0.047,3.423,1.595,0, accessed 7 January 2024.

¹⁵ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Baltimore, Independent Cities, Maryland, Vol. 2, 1914 (republished

The United States Plywood Corporation continued to lease the property until at least 1964 when it is listed in *Polk's Baltimore City Directory*.¹⁶ It appears that during this period the company implemented several sub-leases, including two to lumber companies. In July 1958, the Western Mill & Lumber Company moved into the warehouse to use it as its temporary location following a major fire at its facility further north in West Baltimore.¹⁷ In May 1959, *The Sun* reported that a sublease for 22,000 square feet at the 2020 Mosher Street property was negotiated for the Roddis Plywood Corporation.¹⁸

In the early 1960s, the property served as a subcontract center for the Maryland Workshop for the Blind. According to local news stories, the workshop hired visually challenged adults for tasks such as assembling sanitation kits for use in Civil Defense shelters and assembling decorative decanter stoppers for local distilleries.¹⁹ It is possible that this work was conducted at this location under the auspices of the Packaging Service Company, which was listed as being at this location in early 1970s telephone directories.²⁰

Anne H. Bowen, the widow of Herbert L. Bowen and primary owner of the Bowen Corporation, died in 1979.²¹ The Bowen estate sold the property in 1981 to Bowl America, Incorporated, a recreational bowling alley operator that used the building for storage. On June 30, 2016, Bowl America, Inc. sold the building to Mosher, LLC.²²

1952), Image 50, Map 181, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573195202/?sp=50&st=image&r=-0.452,0.556,1.825,0.882,0, accessed 7 January 2024; Sanborn Map Company, Baltimore, Maryland, 1971, 1974, 1982, Collection of Environmental Data Resources, Inc.

¹⁶ R. L. Polk & Company, *Polk's Baltimore City Directory*, 1964, cited in *EDR-City Directory Abstract* (Shelton, Connecticut: Environmental Data Resources, Inc., 2019).

¹⁷ Western Mill & Lumber Company, Inc. advertisement, *The Sun*, 8 July 1958, 2, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 8 July 2023; Fagan, "Warehouse at 2020 Mosher Street, B-5296," 4; "Ten-Alarm Blaze Hits Mill Yard," *The Sun*, 22 June 1958, 36, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 10 March 2023.

¹⁸ "Business Transfers," *The Sun*, 5 April 1959, 118, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 10 March 2023.

¹⁹ "For Defense," *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 10 October 1962, 56, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 04 March 2023; "Blind Adults Assemble Stoppers," *The Evening Sun*, 7 October 1963, 12, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 13 June 2019.

²⁰ The Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company of Baltimore City, annual telephone directories (on file at the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland).

²¹ "Anne H. Bowen, 82, was school official," *The Sun*, 18 June 1979, A8, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 21 November 2022.

²² Fidelity National Title Insurance Company, *60 Year Title Search, Property Title File No. BP210007, 2020 Mosher Street, Baltimore, MD 21217*.

- Sources: “A New Lumber Yard.” *The Sun* (Baltimore), September 1899.
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“Receivers’ Sale.” Classified advertisement. *The Sun*, 20 May 1931.
<https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 04 March 2023.

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Baltimore, Independent Cities, Maryland.
_____. Sanborn Map Company, Vol. 2, 1901, Image 60, Map 167.

https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573190102/?sp=60&st=image&r=-1.222,-0.164,3.444,1.604,0.

_____. Sanborn Map Company, Vol. 2, 1914, Image 82, Map 181.

https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573191402/?sp=82&r=-1.204,-0.077,3.407,1.588,0.

_____. Sanborn Map Company, Vol. 2, 1914 (updated 1950), Image 82, Map 181,

https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573195002/?sp=82&st=image&r=-1.15,-0.154,3.299,1.595,0.

_____. Sanborn Map Company, Vol. 2, 1914 (republished 1952), Image 50, Map 181.

https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573195202/?sp=50&st=image&r=-0.452,0.556,1.825,0.882,0, all accessed 7 January 2024.

Sanborn Map Company, Baltimore, Maryland, 1971, 1974, and 1982.

“Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.” Collection of Environmental Data Resources, Inc.

“Ten-Alarm Blaze Hits Mill Yard.” *The Sun*, 22 June 1958.

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Western Mill & Lumber Company, Inc. "Complete New Stock."
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accessed 5 July 2023.

Historians: Nancy L. Zerbe, Steven Patrick, Tyreen Reuter, ARCH², Inc., 2023.

Project

Information: The documentation of 2020 Mosher Street was undertaken in 2021-2023 as mitigation in accordance with the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement for the Frederick Douglass Tunnel, formerly the Baltimore & Potomac (B&P) Tunnel Replacement Program. 2020 Mosher Street will be demolished to make way for realignment of the Northeast Corridor associated with a new 1.9-mile-long tunnel north of the existing tunnel alignment. The documentation project was sponsored by the United States Department of Transportation Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), in coordination with the Maryland Historical Trust. It was prepared by Nancy L. Zerbe, Principal Investigator, Steven Patrick, Historian, and Tyreen Reuter, Historian. Renee Bieretz prepared the large-format photography. Christopher H. Marston, HAER Architect, advised the project.