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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

B-2372

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name JOHNSTON BUILDING
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 26-30 South Howard Street N/A not for publication
city, town Baltimore N/A vicinity
state Maryland code MD county Independent City code 510 zip code 21201

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	0 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		_____ structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		_____ objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	1	0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Cast Iron Architecture of Baltimore, Maryland, 1850-1904
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER Date 8/23/94
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)
Edson H. Beall 9/26/94
Entered in the National Register
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/warehouse

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/manufac-
turing facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

QUEEN ANNE

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls IRON

BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

The Johnston Building is a five-story loft building constructed in 1880, located at the southwest corner of South Howard Street and Cider Alley, in downtown Baltimore, Maryland. The building reflects the influence of the Queen Anne style in its facade organization and detailing; it incorporates brick, stone, and cast iron elements. The first floor facade features cast iron columns. The building retains good architectural integrity; the storefront retains most of its important cast iron elements, and the upper floors are essentially unchanged.

8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1880

Significant Dates
1880

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Gott, Jackson C., Architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

THEME:

Cast Iron Architecture in Baltimore, Maryland, 1850-1904

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Johnston Building is significant as representing a Cast Iron Storefront: Multistory Loft type building.

See continuation sheet

No. 4

For HISTORIC CONTEXT and MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN data.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet No. 10

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Less than one acre
 USGS Quad: Baltimore East, MD

UTM References

A

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3	6	0	3	0	0
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4	3	4	9	7	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Boundaries are defined as a single city lot, specifically identified as Block 655, Lot 15, recorded among the Land Records of Baltimore City, Maryland.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property comprises the city lot upon which the resource stands.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James D. Dilts
 organization for Baltimore Heritage, Inc. date September 1987
 street & number 4611 Keswick Road telephone (410) 235-9733
 city or town Baltimore state Maryland zip code 21218

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

The Johnston Building is located on the southwest corner of South Howard Street and Cider Alley, facing east. It is five stories high, with a full basement and shed roof, and measures 59'6" across the front, and 81' on the alley side. The building is a double warehouse, divided lengthwise by a brick wall, thus providing space for separate tenants in each half. Contemporary news accounts refer to this detached structure in the city's former warehouse district as two warehouses; the repetitive nameplates at the top, and the cornice return on the north side, all designating it the "Johnston Buildings," plural, reinforce this idea.

The Johnston Building has eight bays; the dividing wall is expressed on the exterior as a central pilaster. The materials of the polychromatic, richly-detailed facade are red brick, with stone trim on the upper four levels, and structural cast iron for the ground floor storefronts.

The street level bays are defined by four engaged columns flanking the major pilasters at the corners and center of the building, and six free-standing ones. They are round, unfluted, and set on tall bases with partially chamfered corners. The capitals have an acanthus-leaf design topped by heavy, petal-like excrescences. The columns continue a short way above these capitals, surrounded by rectangular casings with colonnettes, which are miniatures of the primary columns. They extend through the bases as well, one of which bears a casting mark: "Variety Iron Works, No. 4 Light St[reet], Baltimore, Md."

On the northern half of the building, the middle column has been replaced with an I-beam, and the capitals of the remaining columns are lacking some of their elements. On the southern half, the capital of the column adjacent to the central pier is missing entirely; the other capitals are intact, but part of the exterior casing above them has disappeared, exposing the structural column underneath. Otherwise, the columns are in reasonably good condition, fully visible, and could be restored.

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The iron beams these columns support also have an external casing that features a serrated lower edge, plain frieze, and cornice with a running floral and leaf pattern. The casing is damaged in spots, particularly where the column was removed; the serrated edge is missing some of its teeth. The entrances at the corners of the building, and the storefront windows between, have been covered with plywood with padlocked access doors.

Because the iron is damaged to some extent, and the plywood is recessed behind the plane of the original plate glass front, it is possible to analyze the supporting structure. Each column is attached to a three-sided metal casing, the whole forming a structural unit 15" wide and 24" deep--exactly the depth of the overhead beam, which is also hollow (containing an I-beam). The voids in the column unit and around the I-beam have been in-filled with brick. Thus, the decorative iron, half an inch thick, forms a structural envelope for the interior masonry, and together they hold up the facade above.

The design of the facade is busy and ornate, yet it offers subtle variations in plane and a full range of window treatments: stone lintels at the second level, segmental brick arches for the third, semi-circular brick arches at the fourth, and stone lintels again on the fifth (running in a continuous band across the entire face of the building). The windows are double-hung, one-over-one, with the top sashes straight or curved, to match the masonry.

Column bases, capitals, and impost blocks are of stone, in several configurations. Narrow, horizontal stone bands in the brick piers and pilasters provide further contrasts in color and material, except at the fifth story where the piers are plain. The three major pilasters are further decorated with narrow vertical slots and wider panels where the bricks have been turned so that their corners project. At the second and third levels is a set of segmental arches, each spanning two windows; their treatment varies. Finally, the facade is enlivened by small, square, corner-brick panels, along with rosettes and stylized maple leaf designs set in the stone impost blocks. A plain brick frieze and metal cornice complete the structure. Above the roofline are two large pediments with scrolled sides, each of which proclaims the date of construction and, below it, the name of the building. Some of the

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numerals and letters are missing from the identification panels. The masonry is in generally good condition, although dirty; some of the windows on all of the upper stories have been filled with plywood.

The building's south side is windowless; the north, facing the alley, has three windows on each floor except the fifth, which has four. Some of these are broken and boarded. At the rear, two large brick arches, each four windows wide, rise nearly to the top of the building, with the windows at the fifth level being curved to fit under the arches. The windows are double-hung, nine-over-nine (except on the fifth floor), and have been mostly broken out, although the frames are intact; the openings have been boarded from the inside. Corrugated metal covers the spandrels between floors, and there is a metal fire escape between the arches. A shallow, one-story brick shed with eight arched window openings (again, mostly boarded), and a corrugated metal roof, extends from the back of the building.

Inside the northern half (entrance could not be gained to the southern), the basement has iron columns and wooden beams. The first floor has been made into office space, with panelling, dropped ceiling, etc. The upper floors are all the same: open, column-free loft space with a wooden stairway in front next to the dividing wall, and an elevator opposite on the alley wall.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT:

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Piedmont

Chronological/Developmental Period(s):

Industrial/Urban Dominance, A.D. 1870-1930

Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme(s):

Architecture/Landscape Architecture/Community Planning
Economic (Commercial and Industrial)

Resource Type:

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Urban

Historic Function(s) and Use(s):

COMMERCE/TRADE/warehouse
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/manufacturing facility

Known Design Source: Gott, Jackson C., Architect

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HISTORY & SUPPORT:

The Johnston Building, and its fraternal twin to the north, the Rombro Building, are among the few double warehouses remaining in Baltimore. Their colorful and elaborate Victorian facades distinguish them among the city's 19th-century commercial structures. They represent an architectural use of cast iron--as storefront framing--of which relatively few examples remain. The Johnston and Rombro buildings appeared within a year of one another in 1880-1881, built by the same developer, the Johnston Brothers; designed by the same architect, Jackson C. Gott; and with their cast iron elements fabricated by the same foundry, the Variety Iron Works. Over the years, they have housed wholesale companies dealing in tobacco, hats, shoes, clothing, and home and office furnishings. Some early occupants, such as Samuel Hecht, Jr., & Sons, later became significant retailers in Baltimore. Both structures have survived for more than a century with no irreversible alterations. The developers, architect, and foundry were all closely identified with Baltimore. Harriet Lane, the wife of one of the Johnston Brothers, was an important local philanthropist; these buildings were part of her legacy.

"The locality now preferred by the wholesale business men lies south of Baltimore St[reet], and between Charles St[reet] on the east and Eutaw St[reet] on the west," announced the Baltimore correspondent of one of the nation's leading architectural magazines in January, 1881. "In this district a large number of splendid warehouses have been erected within the past two years, and as an inducement to merchants and others, property-holders in this vicinity offer to erect such buildings as may be desired if the tenants will agree to rent for a short term of years."¹

The Johnston Brothers, local bankers, were such property owners. In the late 1870s, they assembled roughly half a dozen lots on either side of Cider Alley and in early 1880, they were ready to build. In February of that year, the Baltimore American noted that architect Jackson C. Gott was preparing designs for "two fine iron front warehouses on Howard St[reet]" to be named for the owners. "They will have a front of sixty feet, be five stories high, and the building will

¹American Architect and Building News, January 29, 1881, p. 59.

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go up at once."²

Baltimore one hundred years ago was the clothing center for the entire South, and the heart of the garment trade was in the city's wholesale district. Many of the companies were housed in buildings such as this, where the goods could be displayed and sales transacted in the ground floor business area while the production took place in the lofts upstairs.

The earliest occupants of the Johnston Building were in the apparel business. The tenant, 1882-c.1898 (in the northern half), was the G.S. Howser Co., wholesale dealers in hats, caps, and straw goods. "The display is very interesting and attractive, a wonderful variety being shown in every line," according to one of the business publications of the day.³ Charles Weilder and Sons, wholesalers of "cloths, cashmeres, and vestings," occupied the other half of the building.

By 1898, however, Gassaway S. Howser, the principal owner, had moved the firm elsewhere. His place was taken by S.F. and R.F. Miller & Co., "summer and bicycle clothing manufacturers."⁴ That year, the southern half of the structure was occupied by S. Lowman & Co., also a clothing concern.

Shortly after the turn of the century, the Miller and Lowman companies moved out and the Benninghaus Tobacco Co., 26 South Howard Street, and Claussen & Wagner, cigar-makers, 28-30 South Howard, came in. The latter firm was gone by 1904; Samuel Hecht, Jr., & Sons, carpet importers and jobbers, were the new tenants. Four years later, they had expanded into China and Japan mattings (inexpensive and popular floor coverings). This and other Hecht family operations were the ancestors of the Hecht's department stores. In the 1940s and 1950s, wholesale furniture companies occupied the Johnston Building. It is now vacant.

²Baltimore American, February 16, 1880.

³Illustrated Baltimore, the Monumental City, 1890, New York, p. 178.

⁴Baltimore City Directory, 1898.

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Cast iron columns were often employed to frame the first floors of otherwise masonry commercial buildings, because their compressive strength permitted them to be made more slender than brick or stone piers. With the enlarged openings filled with plate glass, they allowed plenty of light into the interior, along with a clear view of the merchandise on display. They were also decorative and could be quickly erected.

The iron framing for the Johnston Building storefronts was provided by the Variety Iron Works, York, Pennsylvania. The firm had an office in Baltimore, which accounted for a fourth of its sales, and did a substantial business in New York supplying one of the large dealers in architectural ironwork. The Variety Iron Works obtained most of its raw materials from the Ashland Iron Furnace, north of Cockeysville. The company specialized in architectural and ornamental items, such as columns and beams, stairways and shutters, and also turned out machinery, millwork, and entire iron buildings.⁵

The architect, Jackson C. Gott, was well-equipped to deal with these materials. He had apprenticed himself to a carpenter as a young man, and then studied architecture and building construction in the offices of several local architects before becoming one himself at age 25; Gott was often called in during his later career as a consultant on questions of structure.

Gott was born in Baltimore County on a farm on the site of what is now Ruxton. His parents died when he was young; Gott received an elementary education before becoming an apprentice carpenter. As an architect, he designed several houses, commercial office buildings, and industrial plants in Baltimore, as well as the Maryland Penitentiary. His office also produced plans for the Western Maryland Railroad stations at Glyndon and Union Bridge, college buildings in Westminster, and Masonic temples in Belair, Salisbury, and Richmond (Gott was a prominent Mason). He was an active Democrat as well, which may have accounted for his numerous commissions for government buildings.

⁵The Monumental City, Its Past History and Present Resources, George Howard, 1878, Baltimore, p. 743.

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His final design was for the Gaither Building on Baltimore Street, which has since disappeared. Gott retired following the 1904 fire, and died five years later, at age 80. A bachelor, he lived in downtown hotels almost all his life and "was a well known figure about town," said the Baltimore Sun.⁶

The Johnston Brothers, bankers and developers, were equally well-known among Baltimore's businessmen. Henry Elliott Johnston, and Josiah Lee Johnston, his younger brother, had inherited their father's investment banking business, and changed the name to Johnston Brothers and Company; their offices were on Baltimore Street. The two brothers, and Henry's wife, Harriet Lane, were equal partners in the properties near Cider Alley.

Harriet Lane was the niece of James Buchanan. She was an orphan, he was a bachelor. Buchanan raised and educated her, and when he became President in 1857, brought her into the White House where she served as official hostess. During the previous four years, he had been Minister to England, and for some of that period Harriet Lane, who was pretty and vivacious, was the Hostess of the London embassy, where she became a favorite of Queen Victoria. She remained with Buchanan at his home near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, after he left the White House in 1861, until 1866, when she married Henry Elliott Johnston.

The Johnstons lived on Park Avenue in Baltimore and had two sons, both of whom died when they were 13 and 14 of rheumatic fever. In 1883, a year after their second son died, the bereaved parents established the Harriet Lane Home. By this time, both the Johnston Building and the companion warehouse on the other side of Cider Alley had been completed. Henry Elliott Johnston died in 1884, Harriet Lane in 1903, and the surviving brother, Josiah Lee Johnston, in 1904. Because of complications in the three wills, the Board of Managers of the Harriet Lane Home did not immediately establish the institution, but with the death of Josiah Lee Johnston, they could proceed, and they decided to affiliate with the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

When the Harriet Lane Home finally opened in 1912, said a historian of the Hopkins hospital and medical school, it constituted "an important

⁶Baltimore Sun, July 9, 1909, p. 14.

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step in the development of pediatrics in America."⁷ Up to that time, there had not been a satisfactory arrangement between a medical school and a children's hospital. John Howland, the first director, and Edward A. Park, his successor, set the high standards for the Harriet Lane Home--which in the 1930s became the Pediatrics Department of the Johns Hopkins Hospital--and Helen B. Taussig, head of the Harriet Lane cardiac clinic, continued them in more recent times.⁸

The lack of a sufficient endowment had been a problem from the beginning. The bulk of the Johnston Brothers' estate, including the two warehouses, had been left to the Harriet Lane Home, to be administered by trustees.⁹ In 1919, the Harriet Lane Home probably received in excess of \$125,000 when D.K. Este Fisher, trustee, sold the Johnston Building (and the other warehouse structure, the Rombro Building), to separate buyers.¹⁰

⁷The Johns Hopkins Hospital and The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Alan M. Chesney, Vol. 3, p. 222.

⁸Heritage of Excellence, The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Thomas B. Turner, pp. 122-125; 330-331; 468.

⁹Last Will and testament of Josiah L. Johnston, November 16, 1900, SRM 94-334.

¹⁰Baltimore City Land Records, Liber 3455, Folio 72; Liber 3456, Folio 215; Liber 3492, Folio 33.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

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Land Records of Baltimore City

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, Baltimore City, Maryland
Historical Trust, Crownsville, Maryland.

Tax Records of Baltimore City: 1896, 1924-28, 1938-42, 1953-57, 1962-66