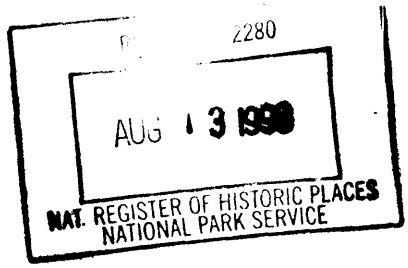
NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



1350

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House & Car Barn

other names/site number Charles Theater/Famous Ballroom (B-3991)

2. Location

street & number 1711-1717 North Charles Street ☐ not for publication

city or town Baltimore ☐ vicinity

state Maryland code MD county Baltimore City code 510 zip code 21201

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date 8-7-98

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

Edson H. Beall — 9.9.98

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- [X] private
- [ ] public-local
- [ ] public-State
- [ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- [X] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: rail-related
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: energy facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater
VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE
walls BRICK
roof SLATE
other N/A

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [X] **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [ ] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [ ] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] **B** removed from its original location.
- [ ] **C** a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] **D** a cemetery.
- [ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] **F** a commemorative property.
- [ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION
COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1892-1939

Significant Dates

1892, 1899, 1939

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Not known

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- [X] 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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- [X] State Historic Preservation Office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [ ] Local government
- [ ] University
- [ ] Other

Name of repository:

_____

Power House & Car Barn
Name of Property

Baltimore City, Maryland
County State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References Baltimore East, MD quad
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	360640	4352120
2			
3			
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Betty Bird

organization Betty Bird & Associates date April 1998

street & number 2607 24th Street, NW, Suite 3 telephone 202-588-9033/202-588-9059 (fax)

city or town Washington, District of Columbia state N/A zip code 20008

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Bowling, Inc.

street & number 5 Church Lane telephone 410-415-5004

city or town Baltimore state Maryland zip code 21208

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn, constructed in 1892, is a two-story brick Romanesque revival style building that has been altered for a variety of uses over the years. The organization of the rectangular building, which faces west onto N. Charles Street, reflects its two original functions. The southern half of the building (now the Charles Theater) was used for the power house; the northern half (formerly the Famous Ballroom and a bowling alley), was used for the car barn. The building is presently being rehabilitated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Prior to the rehabilitation, the 1st floor of the building had been altered by recent storefronts in a manner typical of commercial buildings. Original arched openings remain behind the exterior cladding that presently obscures the 2nd floor of the power house. The building thus retains the strong rhythm created by the arched openings of its original fenestration pattern. The interior of the building, which was originally unembellished open plan space typical of industrial uses, still retains its brick walls and corbelled cornice. Even in its present altered condition, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey the *Rundbogenstil* inspired architectural image employed by the Baltimore City Passenger Railway Company at the end of the 19th century.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn is a rectangular, brick mid-block building that faces west onto N. Charles Street, the major historic north/south street in Baltimore. A narrow alley, designated as Lovegrove Street, runs parallel to N. Charles Street behind the building. The building, originally constructed for a traction transit system, is located approximately two blocks north of the Pennsylvania Railroad passenger station and two blocks south of North Avenue, the major east/west axis for the city and a major arterial for intercity travel.

The west side of the building facing N. Charles Street is its primary elevation and is constructed of stone and pressed brick. The secondary facades are detailed in common brick. The original composition of the primary facade was based on a four-bay element on the north, reflecting the car barn function, and a three-bay element on the south, articulating the power house. A narrow, full-height hyphen connected these two functional elements, which were all united by means of a molded brick cornice with dentils. The two central bays of the car barn extended beyond the cornice to create a nave surmounted by a triangular brick pediment. The car barn and power house also shared a common stone watertable that articulated the base of the composition and a brick frieze with a molded brick bead extending above the capitals of pilasters.

A ca. 1930s photograph documents the appearance of the power house and hyphen prior to the mid-20th century addition of the theater facade. The arcuated primary facade of the power house featured a large central arched opening flanked by two smaller arches. The round arches were articulated with molded brick and glazed with multiple-pane sash. The photograph shows that the central element, which appears to have been largely glazed, housed the entrance to the building. Three rectangular openings above the watertable under each of the flanking arches housed one-over-one windows. The central arch was embellished with an oak leaf keystone. The triangular pediment featured a panel bearing the legend "BCPR" framed by fluted pilasters and consoles. The panel was

surmounted by a garland. The hyphen adjacent to the power house on the north had a door housed within a rectangular opening at the 1st floor and a narrow, full-height, molded brick arch at the 2nd floor.

Both the hyphen and the power house are now encompassed within the present ceramic tile facade of the Charles Theater, which obscures all but the triangular pediment, dentilled cornice, and massive central arch of the power house facade. Historic photographs document that the 2nd floor ceramic tile facade was present in the 1950s. The brick facade on the 1st floor was constructed in the 1970s. Physical evidence suggests that the original 2nd floor facade survives beneath the modern cladding. The original arched openings are still visible on the interior of the building. The pilasters, slight projection of the central element, and brickwork of the central arch are still visible on the exterior. The glass block and jalousie windows were inserted in the original secondary arches of the power house and the hyphen. In the triangular pediment, the letters "BCPR" for "Baltimore City Passenger Railway" survive behind the plywood placed within the pediment.

The primary facade of the car barn displays fewer changes than that of the power house. The ca. 1930s photograph depicts two large openings for streetcar access in the end bays. The rectangular openings are housed under round arches with thermal windows. The two central bays were infilled with one-over-one windows below large, six-light transoms. Round arched windows with fanlights extended above the transom and were topped by a triangular pediment with a triple window.

The principal change to this facade is the removal of the central element above the cornice line in the early 20th century, a change that was probably related to the failure of the complex roof above the car barn. While the original configuration of this roof remains unknown, present physical fabric suggests that the central, gabled roof extended over the front half of the central portion of the car barn. The rear section of this central, gabled roof still remains. The rear half of the car barn had a flat roof with six skylights. New steel roof trusses in the area below the missing roof suggest that the front portion may have been removed for structural reasons prior to the 1940s, when the present roof configuration is visible in a photograph of the Times Theater. Recent 1st floor storefronts have been inserted between the pilasters. While the upper portion of the frontispiece of the building has been removed, the basic design of the car barn and its decorative brickwork remain. The car barn still retains the strong facade articulation defined by the pilasters and round-arched openings flanking the two central rectangular openings. Its decorative brickwork has, for the most part, been retained. The car barn still displays its molded brick arches and stringcourse, stone pilaster capitals and rosettes, and elaborate brick paneling.

The secondary facades of the car barn and power house, detailed in common brick, present a dignified industrial face despite their minimal visibility from the street. The north wall of the building (north wall of the car barn) is surmounted by a parapet that steps down to the east facade, which faces the alley. Regularly spaced, round-arched openings on the 2nd floor, now infilled with concrete block, once provided light. The arches are detailed with a triple course of headers. The 1st floor of the north wall has been altered by the insertion of new openings and brick infill placed within older openings. The east wall of the building (rear wall of power house and car barn) displays similar round arched openings. Two semi-circular arches at the 2nd floor level of the car barn mirror the semi-circular arches on the front facade. All of the arched openings have been infilled with concrete block or brick; new openings have been inserted at the 1st floor level and existing 1st floor openings have been infilled. The

south wall of the building (south wall of the power house) is a blind wall with a stepped parapet similar to the parapet found on the north. A small one-story element with a triangular plan is nestled within the ell. This room appears on the 1904 Sanborn Map and is probably original to the building.

After the transit company sold the building in 1939, the interior of the car barn and power house was adapted to other uses. Because of its original industrial function, it is unlikely that the building's interior possessed character-defining decorative features. The 1904 Sanborn Map, the earliest Sanborn Map that depicts the structure, suggests that the building was largely full-height, open plan space. A small office was situated in the northwest corner of the power house; a tiny "Fire Proof Room" was situated in the southwest corner. A wall separated the power house and car barn. The 1904 Sanborn shows a division at the center of the car barn. A large metal fire door connected the front half of the car barn with the power house; two smaller metal fire doors connected the power house with the rear half of the car barn.

In the 1940s, the power house was converted to a movie theater. The power house was modernized by a ceramic tile facade constructed over the existing west wall. A 2nd floor was inserted in the front portion of the building and the front portion was adapted for an office, restroom, projection room and concession room. The full height space was maintained with the addition of a raked floor for a movie theater, a use that has remained in the building for the past 50 years. A 2nd floor was also added within the car barn. The 1st floor of the car barn was used as a bowling alley and the 2nd floor became the "Famous Ballroom." All of these new uses required different egress patterns that resulted in existing openings being sealed and new openings being inserted into the secondary, less visible facades. Because these uses required controlled artificial lighting, all of the window openings were sealed up. In recent years, new storefront uses like restaurants and office space were inserted in the 1st floor of the car barn. Prior to rehabilitation, the original brick interior walls were covered with dry wall and other recent finishes. The rehabilitation has now exposed the original interior walls and corbelled cornice as well as surviving elements of the roof truss under the gabled portion of the roof.

Despite changes the Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn retains sufficient architectural fabric to convey its identity as an industrial structure associated with the Baltimore City Passenger Railway. Essential physical features like its spatial footprint, Romanesque revival architectural style and decorative brickwork, large arched openings, and relationship to transportation arteries remain intact. The building retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While the original design has been compromised, the building retains sufficient stylistic integrity to convey its association with the architectural image established by the Baltimore City Passenger Railway in the late 19th century.

Integrity of location and setting are especially important for buildings associated with arterial transportation systems and particularly important for a building associated with Baltimore transit in the late 19th century. The location of this facility on N. Charles Street and its proximity to North Avenue and to the Pennsylvania Railroad rail yard are critical to understanding the evolution of street transportation in Baltimore. The structure retains significant elements of both its functional and architectural setting. North Avenue, Charles Street, and the Pennsylvania Railroad retain their importance as transportation arteries. The architectural styles and apparent date of the

majority of the structures in the vicinity of the Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn illustrate the impact of the transportation system associated with this building on the development of the area.

Despite alterations to the facade, the building retains a significant amount of its decorative brickwork. Stone trim, molded brick employed in arches and stringcourses, and decorative rosettes still remain. More importantly, sufficient fabric of the *tout ensemble* survives to illustrate the care that Baltimore City Passenger Railway lavished on the design and construction of utilitarian buildings. Because the decorative detail of the facade is executed in brick with stone accents, the skilled workmanship is readily apparent despite changes. Because of the scale and vigor of the original design elements of the building, the Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn retains integrity of feeling and association. The overscaled openings, decorative detail, and rhythm of the facade possess a presence sufficiently strong to read through later changes.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn, built in 1892, meets National Register Criterion A because of its locally significant association with the development of Baltimore's streetcar system. Constructed by Baltimore's oldest streetcar company to provide cable traction on one of its first and most important lines, the building marks the technological and political struggle to develop a mechanical alternative to horse powered cars in a competitive marketplace. Occupying a critical location at the confluence of several major arterial routes, the Baltimore City Passenger Railway power house and car barn is an important artifact of the competitive struggles that preceded consolidation of the street railway system into United Railways in 1899. The car barn was the node where the Baltimore & Northern Railway transferred its streetcars to City Passenger tracks. The N. Charles Street structure provided the foothold for Baltimore & Northern's surprising triumph in achieving a monopoly on Baltimore's trolley services as United Passenger Railways. In 1939 United Railways sold the structure. It was then converted into a movie theater, bowling alley, and ballroom. Although the facade has been altered, the building still retains sufficient architectural fabric to convey its original identity.

NARRATIVE HISTORY

The Baltimore City Passenger Railway power house and car barn is one of a number of structures that survive from Baltimore's important streetcar system. The Baltimore system, which operated from 1859 to 1963, was one of the most extensive in the nation, boasting over 425 miles of track.[1] Streetcars aided and profited from Baltimore's rapid growth in the 19th century. Horsecar tracks ran along important intracity thoroughfares and intercity arterial routes. During the 19th century the system was so extensive that the city's numerous horsecar companies laid multiple tracks along single streets and roads to carry their horse drawn streetcars. The intense competition among horsecar lines combined with the huge infusion of capital required to convert car lines from horse power to mechanical power led to the consolidation of the streetcar system in 1899. The streetcar system operated until 1963 when the system was finally defeated by the automobile.

Horse cars, or streetcars, running on fixed rails constituted the beginning of mass transit in Baltimore. Prior to the establishment of the horse car system, access to transportation was closely tied to wealth and class. Those with the means to maintain stables and carriages or to meet the exorbitant fees charged by hackney cabs could move easily about the city. Most people walked, leading existences circumscribed by a limited geographic area. Beginning in 1844, omnibuses, horse drawn conveyances that ran along city streets, provided a limited form of public transportation. These vehicles were slow and limited by the loads that could be pulled by the horses. Horse cars running on fixed rails increased the load the horses could pull and the speed at which they could pull it. After a contentious decade marked by opposition from omnibus operators and a political struggle among groups vying for the horsecar franchise, Baltimore awarded the franchise for its first horsecar system to the Baltimore City Passenger Railway. The franchise operated as a public utility with the company given the exclusive right to operate certain lines in exchange for the city retaining the ability to share in the profits and retain certain control over fares. Baltimore City Passenger made the most of their pioneering position:

[1]Michael R. Farrell, *The History of Baltimore's Streetcars*, p. 9.

> First and foremost, it had an undisputed monopoly for trackage on Baltimore Street, the most important east-west thoroughfare. Then it had a direct route to Druid Hill Park, which the opposition could not equal. Its lines out Pennsylvania Avenue, Gay Street, and later, Harford Road followed important arteries deep into what were then growing suburban areas. The ferry from Locust Point connected with its South Broadway route. Last but not least, after some minor extensions, its cars passed Camden, Calvert, President Street, and Baltimore & Potomac (Union) stations, meeting all of the railroads. It also held sole right to lay tracks on Lombard and Fayette Streets for most of their lengths. These latter franchises were never exercised, but for over a decade competition was limited by their very existence.[2]

Nevertheless, competition from other streetcar lines appeared before the end of the system's first decade of operation. By 1872 both the Citizens' Railway and the Baltimore, Peabody Heights, & Waverly Railway were operating cars that were essentially extensions of City Passenger's routes; by 1874 other competitors began to enter downtown.[3] Unlike some of its smaller, undercapitalized rivals, Baltimore City Passenger, under former governor Oden Bowie's fiscally conservative management, thrived through the horse car era, paying 10-12% dividends with the value of its stock increasing 700% over a 20 year period.[4]

As competition intensified, the stakes for finding a mechanical means of propelling the streetcars increased. Motive power would offer the advantage of higher speeds and larger cars that could carry greater loads. Mechanical power would also enable the companies to conquer grades present in Baltimore's terrain. Compressed air, batteries, traction cables, electricity, and even perpetual motion were considered as sources of power.[5] Of these alternatives, traction cables and electricity were the only technologically and economically feasible power sources. In 1885 the Baltimore and Hampden Railway established the first successful commercial electric railway in the country. This system, designed by Leo Daft, predated Frank Sprague's Richmond, Virginia trolley system of 1888, which is credited with transforming the entire industry.[6] Cable power, in which cars were pulled by an underground cable running continuously under the street, was pioneered in San Francisco. This power system proved particularly suitable for frigid climates and cities with steep hills.

Both traction cable and electric systems had their disadvantages. Electric railways required either overhead wires or an electrified third rail at grade. In an era when relocating the forest of poles and overhead wires into underground conduits marked major municipal reform, there was little political support for stringing additional overhead wire. Popular fears of fires and electrocutions caused by short circuits made electricity an unpopular power source.[7] Early electric streetcars "howled and sparked," lumbering through at what seemed excessive

---

[2]Farrell, p. 21.
[3]Farrell, pp. 23-24.
[4]Farrell, p. 24.
[5]Farrell, pps. 53-59. Baltimore City Passenger Company is credited with investigating perpetual motion (p. 57).
[6]Farrell, p. 53. While Bentley and Knight employed the technology in Cleveland in 1881, their effort was not financially successful (p. 53).
[7]Farrell, p. 63.

speeds.[8] Cable systems required enormous capital expenditure as well as disruption of existing service. Power stations with subterranean alleyways for pulleys and blocks had to be constructed at either end of the cable. The street under existing lines had to be excavated and conduits for cable installed and existing rails replaced with new, heavier rails for larger, 30 ft. long cars. Grading was also required to accommodate the cable.[9] A contemporary source estimated the cost of adapting a 10 miles of line for electric cars at $462,000 and for cable cars at $803,000.[10]

In the late 1880s, the growth of Baltimore provided urgent incentives to solve the dilemma of mechanical power. In 1888 Baltimore expanded the city by annexing 23 square miles on the north and west sides of the city, sparking a wave of real estate speculation and development.[11] In 1889 Citizens Railway and Peoples Railway merged to form the Baltimore Traction Company. Despite the financial and technical drawbacks of cable traction, both Baltimore Traction and City Passenger began a quixotic program of building traction systems that were obsolete before they were completed.[12] Even with extensive research, historians have never determined why traction was chosen over electricity at this late date. Transit historians believe that City Passenger was unable to obtain political support for electrification, placing traction within Sherry Olson's construct of "street-space privileges," around which most local political disputes of the period revolved.[13]

In 1890 Baltimore Traction began construction of a cable line running from Druid Hill Park south to the Pratt Street Power Station, then east to Patterson Park. The system was operational in little over a year, drawing crowds of riders upon its opening in May 1891. Traction cut travel times in half. Baltimore City Passenger, secure in its entrenched Baltimore City route system yielding high dividends and an ever-increasing stock price, had few incentives to pursue technological innovation.[14] However, the drastic decline in ridership on City Passenger's White Line, which followed a route similar to Baltimore Traction's new cable line, forced Oden Bowie into action.[15] By the spring and summer of 1893, City Passenger had converted its Blue, Red, and White Lines to traction, taking the dubious honor of building three of the last cable lines in the country.

As Baltimore Traction and City Passenger exhausted their capital on obsolete technology, smaller horsecar lines were poised to shift to Frank Sprague's electric trolley technology. By the early 1890s, city council ordinances permitting both Baltimore Traction and City Passenger to operate electric trolley systems had been introduced.[16] That same year Baltimore Transit, the Lake Roland Elevated, and the City and Suburban Railway operated eight electric lines. Finally, in 1894, the year of long-time president Oden Bowie's death, City Passenger began

[8]Farrell, p. 69.
[9]Farrell, p. 63.
[10]Farrell, p. 66.
[11]Sherry B. Olson, *Baltimore: The Building of an American City*, p. 209.
[12]Olson points out that Baltimore was among the last cities in the country to adopt cable traction for streetcars. (p. 210.)
[13]Farrell, pp. 67-68 and Olson, p. 221.
[14]Farrell, p. 59.
[15]Farrell, pps. 64-65 and Olson, p. 210.
[16]Farrell, pp. 65-66.

operating electric trolleys. By 1895, virtually all of Baltimore's streetcar lines had been converted to electric power and, more ominously for cable traction, Baltimore Traction abandoned its cable cars for electric trolleys.[17]

The cost of the new technology and bigger trolley cars favored larger, well capitalized organizations. The pace of consolidation of dozens of individual streetcar operations through merger and acquisition rapidly increased, resulting in three major companies by January 1898. Baltimore Traction merged with City & Suburban to form the Baltimore Consolidated Railway Company in June 1897. After Oden Bowie's death, City Passenger began the piecemeal acquisition of lines that would extend its reach beyond the city and prevent the new Consolidated Railway from controlling crucial routes.[18] By January 1898 of the dozens of streetcar operations that served Baltimore and its suburbs, there were only three survivors: City Passenger, Consolidated (formerly Baltimore Traction), and the upstart Baltimore & Northern (B&N) Railway, formerly the Pikesville, Reistertown & Emory Grove, a suburban railroad that fed passengers into the Baltimore City lines operated by Baltimore Traction and City Passenger.

The Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn was associated with one of City Passenger's original horsecar lines, the first horsecar line franchised by the city. The Blue Line, which began operations on December 2, 1862, ran "from North Avenue, down Charles Street to Read Street, and then via Read, Calvert, Lexington, and North Streets (now Guilford Avenue) to Baltimore Street" where it connected to east-west lines serving Canton and the financial district.[19] City Passenger constructed the power house and car barn required to convert the line from horsecars to traction in 1892. By 1893 the Blue Line ran traction streetcars. Nevertheless, City Passenger persisted in the effort to electrify the Blue Line. Baltimore refused to permit City Passenger to erect electric poles on Charles Street even though City Passenger's charter had been revised to allow it to use any power source currently employed by other transit companies in Baltimore. City Passenger was unable to convert the Blue Line to electric power until 1897 when a Court of Appeals decision ruled that the city did not have the authority to refuse permission for electric poles in violation of City Passenger's charter.[20]

Because of its strategic location, the Baltimore City Passenger Car Barn and Power House played a critical role in B&N's drive to become the dominant transit company. While B&N had been able to extend their reach into the outer parts of the city, street access within the city itself was controlled by its larger competitors' streetcar systems. B&N thus had no means of extending their system past the wide expanse of the Northern Central and Pennsylvania railroad yards. With the death of Oden Bowie, B&N struck a deal with City Passenger to extend its track one block to Charles Street and have City Passenger operate B&N's distinctive yellow cars on City Passenger's Blue Line. B&N crews were changed to City Passenger crews at the Charles Street car barn. By October 1897, B&N had come downtown.[21]

---

[17]Farrell, pps. 75-77.

[18]Farrell, p. 82.

[19]Farrell, p. 18 and p. 20. As an indication of the significance of the Blue Line, in the contentious local and state legislative battles over the horsecar franchise, the Maryland Legislature required completion of the Blue Line within a one year time frame as a condition for incorporating the Baltimore City Passenger Railway (p. 20).

[20]Farrell, pp. 93-94.

[21]Farrell, p. 88.

The stage was set for final consolidation in October 1898. At that time Consolidated owned 818 cars and controlled 181 miles of track and City Passenger had 407 cars and 103 miles of track. Baltimore & Northern had 53 cars and 40 miles of track, primarily in the suburbs. Because City Passenger's charter prevented it from acquiring parallel lines for consolidation, Nelson Perin of Consolidated was prepared to play a waiting game to drive a hard bargain for City Passenger's stock. Perin, however, had not reckoned with Alexander Brown and his banking house, which held Baltimore & Northern bonds that would become worthless if Consolidated held the monopoly on downtown transit and refused B&N access to its tracks. On December 8, 1898, the upstart Baltimore & Northern, backed by a syndicate formed by Brown, bought City Passenger, which had been trading at $62/share a few months before, at $90/share. In January 1899, Baltimore & Northern bought out Consolidated, which sold at 29-1/8 one month earlier, at $37.50/share.[22] Burlington & Northern had achieved the prize, but at the enormous cost of long term bonded debt.

The massive debt incurred by Baltimore Traction's and City Passenger's ruinous competitive foray into cable traction combined with debt service on the premium paid for their stock, haunted the future of Baltimore's public transportation system. Baltimore Traction's long term bonds falling due after the 1929 stock market crash affected United Railways ability to roll over debt and obtain new financing. Baltimore's transit company was forced to pay higher interest rates, placing it in the position of paying for debt service rather than equipment.[23] While streetcars were ultimately defeated by the convenience and affordability of the automobile, Baltimore's system labored under an additional burden of debt incurred during the brief competitive upheaval of the late 1890s.

Baltimore possesses several structures associated with the streetcar era, four of which are associated with the ill-conceived venture into cable traction. This physical heritage stems from the numerous transit franchises and their political struggle for competitive advantage. Because transit companies functioned as public utilities dependent on political support for their operations, their late 19th century buildings share characteristics with buildings associated with Baltimore's public works. Utilitarian, industrial buildings were treated with the same attention as buildings housing nobler uses. Both streetcars and structures went beyond functional requirements to make a distinctive statement about the power and stability of a company and its place within civic culture.[24] Buildings and rolling stock became marketing tools in the drive to impress riders and politicians. Baltimore Traction and City Passenger both achieved a distinctive architectural image in their Romanesque revival structures associated with cable traction. Baltimore Traction favored a robust, highly textured version of the style that combined contrasting granite and red brick employed in a manner reminiscent of Frank Furness. Their buildings feature three-dimensional elements like towers, turrets, dormers, and projecting bases that create a sculpted mass clearly meant to convey the aggressive vigor of the company that pioneered mechanical power. The more established City Passenger favored a quieter adaptation of the Romanesque that was closer to the German *Rundbogenstil* with its facade articulation marked by round arches and piers. Their planar buildings read as facades enclosing space. Linear elements like beltcourses, cornices, pediments, and stepped parapets articulate the two-dimensional composition.

---

[22]Farrell, pp. 97-98.
[23]Farrell, p. 131.
[24]David B. Ditman and Bernard J. Sachs, *The Architecture of the Baltimore Streetcar System*, p. 1.

The City Passenger Car Barn and Power House survives as an important physical reminder of the competitive struggle between Consolidated Railways (Baltimore Traction) and City Passenger in the last decade of the 19th century. Located on one of City Passenger's most important routes, the Car Barn and Power House is associated with both the folly of traction and with Baltimore & Northern's triumphant monopoly of Baltimore transit. While the building has been altered, it still retains sufficient architectural fabric for its appearance to recall that association. The City Passenger Car Barn and Power House preserves its identity as a City Passenger structure. Even in its altered state, the distinctive arches, central triangular pediment, and quiet embellishment of brick decorative motifs relate the building to City Passenger's architectural identity, visible also in its larger surviving power house on Baltimore Street near Central Avenue. The building retains enough architectural character to participate in a dialogue with Baltimore Traction's two surviving buildings, one of which is not far from the Charles Street structure. The location of the Car Barn and Power House geographically anchors the Blue Line, City Passenger's route on Charles Street, Baltimore's most important thoroughfare. Its setting within sight of the wide expanse of rail yard adjacent to nearby Penn Station provides tangible evidence of the strategic importance of the car barn's use as B&N's transfer point to City Passenger tracks.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ditman, David B. and Bernard J. Sachs. *The Architecture of the Baltimore Streetcar System.* Baltimore: Baltimore Streetcar Museum, Inc., 1994.

Electric Railroads Vertical File, Maryland Room, Enoch Pratt Free Library.

Farrell, Michael R. *The History of Baltimore's Streetcars.* Sykesville, Maryland: Greenberg Publishing Company, 1992.

Olson, Sherry H. *Baltimore: The Building of an American City.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, rev. 1997.

Pierson, William H., Jr. "Richard Upjohn and the American Rundbogenstil" in *Winterthur Portfolio* (Winter 1986), pp. 223-242.

Sachs, Bernard J., George F. Nixon, and Harold E. Cox. *Baltimore's Streetcars, 1905-1963: The Semi-Convertible Era.* Baltimore Streetcar Museum, 1982.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Baltimore

Wirtz, Paul, ed. *Baltimore and Streetcars, 1926.* Baltimore: Baltimore Streetcar Museum Publication, 1988.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is known as Lots 1 and 2 as shown on a Plat entitled "Subdivision Plan of 1711-1717 North Charles Street," as recorded in the Plat Records of Baltimore City in Plat Record Reference Liber S.E.B. No. 3427, said plat having been received for record on December 30, 1992.

Boundary Justification

The boundary corresponds with the present legal description of the record lots occupied by the Baltimore City Passenger Railway Power House and Car Barn.