

The Lebow Clothing Factory

Description by Seawall Development

The Lebow structure is significant both as a representation of state-of-the-art industrial construction during the early decades of the twentieth century, as well as its contribution to Baltimore's economy through machine manufacturing and later the manufacturing of men's clothing. The Crown Cork and Seal Company machine shop was designed in 1914 by Baltimore Architect Otto G. Simonson and built by the West Construction Company. The facility, designed to replace an existing, undersized shop used by the Crown Cork and Seal Company began operation in early 1915 as an extension of the company's already sizable manufacturing facility at the northeast corner of Guilford Avenue and East Oliver Street. The building incorporated many innovations that placed it at the forefront of the modern design of industrial facilities. With a structure of reinforced concrete, the building was the first in Baltimore to use a "beamless floor system", also known as flat-slab construction that did not require structural beams to span between columns.

Natural light was provided to the 'U' shaped facility through expansive industrial steel-sash windows, totaling over 60% of the surface area of the building's exterior skin. This was a significant change from earlier adjacent buildings erected by Crown Cork & Seal that made use of traditional punched openings in exterior masonry load bearing walls. The ventilation system was also extremely advanced, as it did not rely upon the large windows to provide a consistent flow of fresh air, as air from the surrounding area was very dusty and this dust was harmful to the delicate machinery inside the building. The facility utilized an extremely innovative mechanical system that provided clean, tempered air throughout the building. The clean air passed over a series of pipes that were heated with hot water in the colder months and chilled with cold water in the warmer months to provide tempered clean air that was claimed to be able to keep the building interior at a consistent 70° year round. The conditioned air was then forced by another set of fans through the hollow structural columns and distributed through openings in the columns near the ceilings.

In 1950 the Lebow Bros. Clothing Company leased the upper two floors of the facility and moved their operations from their previous long-term location on West Baltimore Street above the Isaac Hamburger & Sons shop. Lebow Bros. Clothing was one of Baltimore's premier men's clothing manufacturers, known as a "#6 Make" in the needle trades, the coats produced by Lebow were distinguished by their

high quality and extensive handwork. In 1982 Lebow Bros. was one of four divisions purchased by New York industrialist Abraham Zion. Mr. Zion about this time also purchased the building itself, unifying for the first time the company and the property. Due to changing economic conditions, the company only survived another three years and was shuttered in 1985. The facility has remained idle and unoccupied for a quarter century, falling into greater and greater disrepair as required maintenance was not performed and squatters occupied the facility.

The redevelopment of The Lebow Building will take full advantage of the historic building's open and expansive warehouse feel, as well as utilize the abundance of natural light that floods the interior space through the massive windows described above. Rehabilitation of existing historical conditions will all capture the industrial character of the building.