HISTORY OF BALTIMORE CADILLAC DEALERSHIPS: 1903-1928
BY VINCE TALIANO

On November 7, 2013, The Baltimore Business Journal published a story titled, The Cadillac Building, one of downtown Baltimore’s smallest, gets new owners and a chance for revival. The article referred to the 7,500 square feet, two-story building at 12 S. Calvert St. as the Cadillac Building (pictured left), known for its “French motif interiors that still bear plaster and tile logos that hearken to the building’s former use as a Cadillac car showroom.” The article named a listing agent who stated that the 16-foot plaster barrel ceiling with French motif design and Cadillac family emblem remain in the plaster columns. The agent also mentioned that there is also a Cadillac family emblem in the tile floor near the front entrance, and the building had some glass doors with the name Cadillac on them. This article led to a research effort by Chuck Piel and Vince Taliano to determine if the building was actually the location of a Cadillac dealership.

On January 27, 1905, The Baltimore Sun (pictured far left) included an architectural drawing of the proposed building and stated that it was to be erected for Richard P. Goodwin, who according to the article, “commissioned his architects to arrange the interior of the building in the most artistic effects possible.” On November 8, 1905, The Sun reported the building’s opening as a café with a modern French design (pictured near left). This information plus additional research led us to conclude that the building’s design, more than anything else, probably led to the claim that it was once a Cadillac showroom.
Although we were fairly certain that it was never a Cadillac dealership, we were still interested in seeing the **Cadillac Building**. The listing agent was contacted and a visit was scheduled for Chuck. Below are Chuck’s observations.

“There is a mosaic Cadillac logo in the floor at the front entrance. Unfortunately, shadows were present, so the picture is not the best (pictured top left). In addition to the Cadillac logo in the floor, logos are inside a small atrium and embedded in the embellishments of the barrel-shaped ceiling (pictured bottom left). No other Cadillac symbols were visible.

The first floor has its original mahogany marble-topped bar and checker-boarded tile floors, along with the original wall and ceiling flourishes (pictured below). It is absolutely beautiful! This space is now only used for special events like receptions, bar mitzvahs, etc. Over the last 114 years it has frequently been used as a restaurant/bar.

As our research showed, it is very unlikely this was ever a Cadillac dealership. The symbols and logos go along with the French architecture, as Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac was the most famous French explorer. These symbols represented his coat of arms.”

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So if the Cadillac Building that opened in 1905 didn’t serve as a Cadillac dealership, where was the first Cadillac dealership in Baltimore? It was expected the earliest mention of a Cadillac dealership in Baltimore would be in *The Baltimore Sun*. However, that was not the case. The first article found appeared in the September 24, 1903 issue of *The News* from Frederick, MD. It introduced the Mar-Del Mobile Company based at the Union Trust Building, Suite 1004, at 101 N. Charles St, as the Maryland and Delaware representative of Cadillac and a few other makes. Ironically, it featured an illustration of W.B. Hurlburt riding a Cadillac up the U.S. Capitol steps in Washington, D.C. (the text in the ad has been typed, below right, as the ad is difficult to read). According to the April 4, 1903 issue of *The Automobile*, Mr. Hurlburt of Detroit, MI was in D.C. for the Auto Show. He deflated the tires of his Cadillac Tonneau to climb the steps to win a wager with W.J. Foss, the local representative of Cadillac.

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**The Cadillac Climbs Steps.**

Ever since W.B. Hurlburt rode the Cadillac Automobile up the steps of National Capitol at Washington, a great deal of comment has been directed to this capable representative of the horseless machine. The wonderful hill climbing ability of the Cadillac is only matched by its ease of control. Its simplicity of construction is wonderful, and can not be fully understood without personal examination.

The representatives of the Cadillac, Searchmont, Yale and Waverly Automobiles throughout the States of Maryland and Delaware are the Mar-Del-Mobile Company, whose offices are at 1004 Union Trust Building, Baltimore. They are looking for energetic agents all over their territory.
The next ad discovered (pictured left) was from the November 7, 1903 issue of *The Democratic Advocate* in Westminster, MD. It mentioned “hustling agents will reap a harvest if they get to work now, for the field is ripe.” Like the earlier ad, this one served a dual purpose announcing the **Mar-Del Mobile Company** and that Cadillac salesmen were needed. Thus, began the era of the legendary Cadillac salesmen!

Those two ads plus the research on the **Cadillac Building** led to the conclusion that the first Cadillac dealership in Baltimore, the **Mar-Del Mobile Company**, was located at the historic **Union Trust Building**, Suite 1004, at 101 N. Charles St. (pictured below circa 1902 -- courtesy CardCow Vintage Postcards). It is a grand 12-story building with a long tenure in Baltimore’s history, as the research indicated.
Built in 1884 by Boston-based Winslow & Wetherill, the Union Trust Building (also called the Jefferson Building) is distinguished as one of only ten structures to survive The Great Baltimore Fire of 1904 that started a mere four blocks away. According to Fireproof Magazine, authorities believed that the structure was exposed to the severest test of any of the skyscrapers during the fire, yet its 800 tons of structural steel and cast iron were 100 percent salvageable (source: www.businesswire.com).

Perhaps the effects of The Great Baltimore Fire in the area (pictured left) led the Mar-Del Mobile Company to move later that year to 617 and 619 W. Pratt St. -- see ad pictured near left from the August 13, 1904 issue of The Sun listing that address as their current location.

In July 2014, an article in The Baltimore Business Journal stated that foreclosure proceedings began on the Union Trust Building property in 2010 after Columbia-based AMPAC Development started to convert the building into a 100-room Staybridge Suites hotel; however, the project was not completed. The building was sold at auction in November 2011, but the winning bidder never closed the sale. A second auction was scheduled for June 2012, but that auction was postponed. In June 2017, the Sunset Hotel Group purchased the property for $3.75 million. They converted the building into a Candlewood Suites hotel. The building picture far left is from the article, before the renovations began.

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Gentlemen—Last spring I purchased from the Mar-Del Mobile Company, your representatives in Baltimore, a "Model E" single cylinder Cadillac, and it has given me such faithful and excellent service that I feel a word of recommendation is owing to you.

The roads in this section of the country are very rough and hilly, but my "dear little Cadillac" has always without fail taken me where I wanted to go and brought me back home again.

I have used it for every purpose that I formerly used a horse and buggy, and the difference in cost of operation and maintenance of my machine, is less than half of what my team cost me. I have had my machine to stop for me only three times while in use covering nearly two thousand miles, and this was caused by my spark plugs fouling, which upon being cleaned, remedied all the trouble.

I can truthfully say and recommend after my experience with the "Model E" Cadillac that it is the best machine of its build and price that is made.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) HARRY B. HOFFACKER
617 and 619 W. Pratt St. became a temporary location for the Mar-Del Mobile Company. Approximately one year later they announced in The Baltimore Sun on September 29, 1905 that they bought a lot at the corner of Charles St. and Mt. Royal Ave. to build a four-story garage (pictured far left). After the Mar-Del Mobile Company left, the West Pratt Street building was used by the Ronemous Sign Company and the Baltimore Paper Box Company, among others. Today, the building is no longer there. It has been replaced with a tree-lined, grassy area near the University of Maryland at Baltimore campus and the Babe Ruth Birthplace and Museum.

In the ad pictured near left that appeared in the March 26, 1907 issue of The Baltimore Sun, the Mar-Del Mobile Company was fully operational at The Garage, its third location. The Charles St. and Mt. Royal Ave. building helped transform the area into an automotive business district with other dealerships operating nearby.

By 1908, the Mar-Del Mobile Company was selling Franklins and Packards, as well. Their location and offerings were confirmed in the 1908 International Motor Cyclopaedia (see below).

However, Mar-Del Mobile’s tenure as the Cadillac agency covering Baltimore was coming to an end.
In the February 25, 1909 issue of *The Baltimore Sun*, information was listed for the upcoming Auto Show (pictured below). These shows had taken place for a few years already, but this was the first year that listed a different company, the **New Bridge Garage Company**, located at the corner of North Ave. and Oak St., as the displayer of Cadillacs.

While the **New Bridge Garage Company** advertised in the August 1, 1909 issue of *The Baltimore Sun* (pictured right) that they had acquired the famous Cadillac “30” (introduced in 1909 and sold through 1911), it was reported later that month (August 30) by *The Sun* that the **Mar-Del Mobile Company** had signed with the H.H. Franklin Manufacturing Company as the dealer to handle Franklin automobiles in the city during the 1910 season. More evidence of Mar-Del’s decision to stop representing Cadillacs to focus on Franklins and Packards appeared in the October 1, 1910 issue of *The Packard* Number 10 (see below).

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The building known as **The Garage** (pictured above in *The Packard* article and below today) has been part of the University of Baltimore campus for quite some time. On a personal note, I spent over four years there in the 1980-90s as a student, and an employee of the University. I had no idea that the building was a Cadillac dealership at one time. Do you believe in karma (or should I say CARma)?
It appears the **New Bridge Garage Company**’s tenure as Baltimore’s Cadillac agency was short-lived. The January 8, 1910 issue of *The Sun* reported that the company was insolvent (pictured right). On February 20, 1910, the Great Auto Show exhibitor list in *The Sun* included the **Standard Motor Company** as the displayer of Cadillacs and Oldsmobiles (pictured below). From this point through Cadillac’s golden years of innovations (like the introduction of the self-starter), the **Standard Motor Company** was the Cadillac Agency in Baltimore. They were located at **14-16-18 Mt. Royal Ave.**, directly across the street from *The Garage*. 
The first **Standard Motor Company** display ad found in *The Sun* was from the February 2, 1910 issue, also promoting the Cadillac “Thirty” (bottom left). A similar ad ran on May 1, 1910 (bottom right). The Auto Show closed on February 27th and *The Sun* reported that “a feature of the show was the Cadillac chassis shown by the **Standard Motor Company**.” The article also mentioned that their exhibit was one place where all, whether professional, amateur, or the ‘just looking,’ stopped. That sounds like the 2019 Washington Auto Show where the CLC Potomac Region had two members’ cars on display, a 1949 Series 62 Convertible and a 1974 Sedan Deville, which drew many visitors, including the “just looking!”
In the October 5, 1913 issue of The Sun (pictured right), it was reported that the “New Home of the Cadillac Now Open.” The Standard Motor Company had moved from their W. Mt. Royal Ave. location to 1009-15 N. Eutaw St. This was the first mention of an actual Cadillac building in Baltimore found in our research.

This location would serve them well until 1921 when it was announced in the June 5th issue of The Baltimore Sun that Cadillacs would now be distributed exclusively by the Baltimore Cadillac Company (pictured below). It appears to have been a name change for the company and not a sale (an article in June 1923 in The Sun stated the Baltimore Cadillac Company formerly traded as the Standard Motor Company).

Personnel changes in the Baltimore Cadillac Company followed as George Williams became the new Sales Manager, succeeding R. Milton Norris, as reported on November 20, 1921 in The Sun. But, more significant and ironic changes were about to occur.
On December 3, 1922, *The Sun* announced that the Mar-Del Mobile Company merged with the Baltimore Cadillac Company to form the Cadillac Company of Baltimore. Thirteen years after they stopped serving as the Cadillac distributor, the Mar-Del Mobile Company was once again the distributor of Cadillacs in Baltimore, and The Garage was again the distributor location for Cadillacs.

The article listed the officers of the new company, with George Miller serving as President, and confirmed that Mar-Del Mobile Company was the first company to handle Cadillacs in Baltimore.

Below is a display ad for the Cadillac Company of Baltimore that appeared in October 5, 1924 issue of *The Sun*, featuring a 1924 Cadillac.

By that time, classified ads in *The Sun* listing multiple vehicles for sale, including used ones, were popular.
Below left and center are ads from September 20, 1925 and October 10, 1925, respectively, for the **Cadillac Company of Baltimore. The Sun** article far right from October 10, 1926 reports how they celebrated Cadillac’s 25th Anniversary.
A display ad for the relatively new LaSalle appeared in *The Sun* on January 15, 1928 (pictured below left). Ironically, the *Cadillac Company of Baltimore* would not be around to see how successful the LaSalle would become. Less than two months later, an announcement was made in *The Sun* on March 1, 1928 that the *Cunliffe Cadillac Company* would be succeeding the *Cadillac Company of Baltimore* (pictured below right).

The first 25 years of Cadillac dealerships in Baltimore illustrate the growth of the automotive industry where distributors represented many makes, trying to align themselves with the ones that they thought would succeed best. Although many manufacturers didn’t last, the ascent of Cadillac as *The Standard of The World* was evident in the advertisements that documented their success. Many different companies represented Cadillacs during this period with the *Mar-Del Mobile Company* being the first and part of the last one. They helped pave the way for the successful history of Cadillac dealerships in the Baltimore area that continues to the present.

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