

Perpetual Building
Planning Board Worksession
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Research Report

EHT TRACERIES INC



1121 FIFTH STREET, NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20001-3605 TEL (202) 393-1199 FAX (202) 393-1056 E-MAIL EHT@TRACERIES.COM

Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association: 8700 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland



8700 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD, principal façades. (EHT Traceries, 2007)

...the prevailing note in a well-designed bank building is the consummate expression of the importance of the institution and a certain mystery which adds immeasurably to the dignity of the management."

*"Recent Bank Buildings in the United States,"
Architectural Record, January 1909, p. 4.*

INTRODUCTION

The Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association stands as an historic and architectural icon in Silver Spring. Its strong, long-term visual association with the Perpetual Building Association, once the region's largest and most prestigious savings and loan association, its physical presence on Georgia Avenue at the heart of Silver Spring's commercial center, and its significance as a suburban example of mid-twentieth century geometric modernism, establish it as a tangible expression of the importance of Perpetual Building Association and of Silver Spring itself, a significant center within Montgomery County and a major mid-twentieth-century suburb of Washington, D.C.

The building, a branch office constructed by Perpetual in 1958 to serve Silver Spring, a significant center of Montgomery County and a major suburb of the Nation's Capital, is significant as it:

- 1- Represents the growth and initiative of Perpetual Building Association, which was recognized as the leading savings and loan association in the Washington, D.C. region and which, at its height, was the largest savings and loan association in the United States (Criteria 1a. and 1d.); (p. 6)
- 2- Stands as an excellent example of the geometric modernist aesthetic with high artistic value and as the first example of the style used for a major financial institution in Silver Spring, with a direct association with the first fully articulated modernist financial institution in the Nation's Capital, (Criteria 2a. and 2c.); (p. 12)
- 3- Is an outstanding example of the twentieth-century idea of corporate branding, which has established it as a familiar and identifiable visual feature as a result of its distinct architectural appearance (Criteria 1a. and 2e.); (p. 14)
- 4- Symbolizes the importance of Silver Spring as a major suburban community in lower Montgomery County and its value to the growth of the Nation's Capital and the greater metropolitan region (Criteria 1a. and 2e.); (p. 16) and
- 5- Represents the twentieth-century phenomenon of blending the architectural, technological, and structural disciplines to create a specialized building type (Criterion 2a.). (p. 17)

TIMELINE OF PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION BUILDINGS

1881 – Founding of institution as Perpetual Building Association

1926 – Construction of new Classical Revival headquarters at 11th and E Streets, N.W., to the design of C.L. Harding

1952 – Branch opens at Georgia Avenue and Wayne Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland

1953 – Headquarters opened at the corner of 11th and E Streets, N.W., Washington, D.C. to design of BB&EC and Robert Scholz

1954 – Acquires a bank in Bethesda from merger with Bethesda Chevy Chase Building Association at 6940 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland

1955 – Branch opens at 7401 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland

1956 – Consolidation with Anacostia Federal Savings & Loan Association provides two branch buildings at 1340 Good Hope Road, S.E., Washington, D.C., and at 7118 Marlboro Pike in Prince Georges County, Maryland

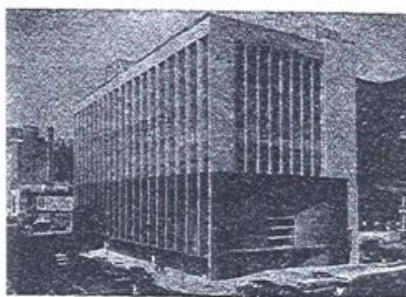
1958 – Acquires two buildings in choice locations from merger with Progressive Savings & Loan Association located at 808 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., and at 3410 Hamilton Street, West Hyattsville, Maryland

1958 – Branch opens at 8700 Georgia Avenue in the central business district of Silver Spring, Maryland

1965 – Branch opens at 6401 Belcrest Road and East West Highway, Hyattsville, Maryland (Prince Georges Plaza)



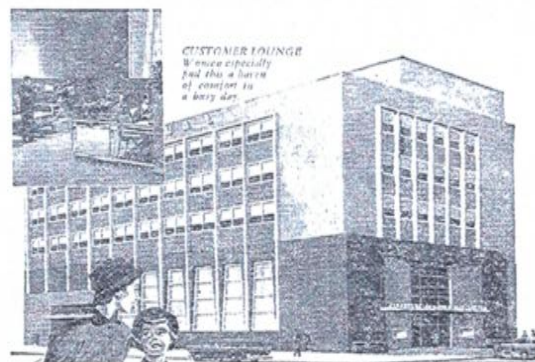
Washington, D.C., 1926. *Washington Post*, 4 April 1926.



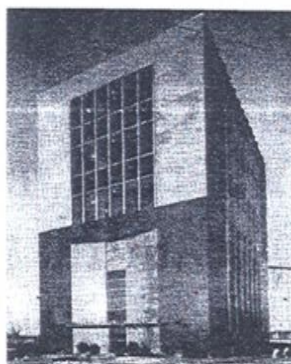
Washington, D.C., 1953. *Washington Post*, 4 October 1953.



Bethesda, MD, 1955. *Washington Post*, 7 August 1955.



Silver Spring, MD, 1958. *Washington Post*, 12 January 1958



Hyattsville, MD, 1965. *Washington Post*, 6 February 1965.

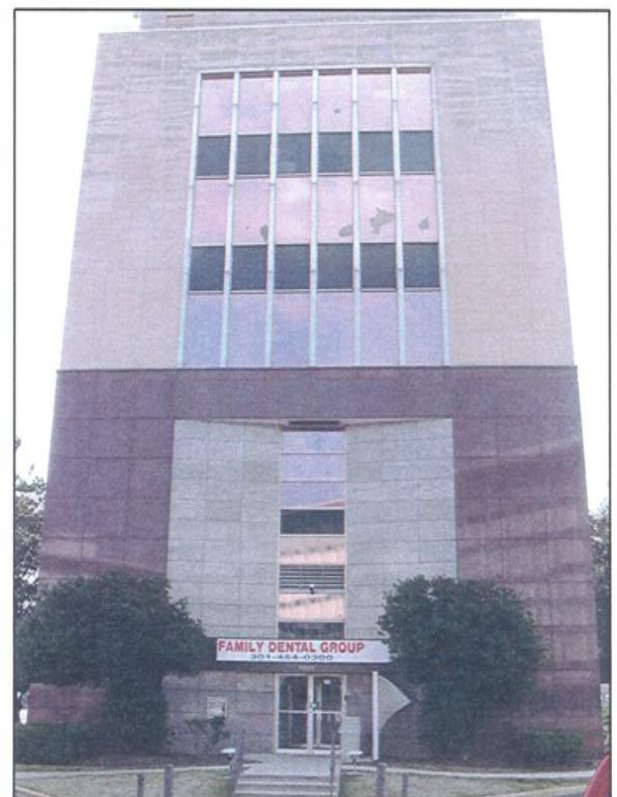


**PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION:
BUILDING AS BRAND**

Flagship design for Perpetual Building Association at headquarters, 11th and E Street, N.W., Washington D.C. (EHT Traceries 1988).



Bethesda branch (1955) above and Silver Spring branch (1958) below. (EHT Traceries 2007).



Hyattsville branch (1965). (George French 2007).

FIRST, THE SILVER SPRING BRANCH OFFICE OF THE PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION

Represents the growth and initiative of Perpetual Building Association, which was recognized as the leading savings and loan association in the Washington, D.C. region and which, at its height, was the largest savings and loan association in the United States (Criteria 1a.and 1d.).

HISTORY OF PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1881 in Washington, D.C., the Perpetual Building Association (later known as the Perpetual American Federal Savings and Loan Association, following its 1980 merger with American Federal Savings and Loan Association) grew to become the largest savings and loan association not only in Washington, D.C., but in the United States as well.¹ During its more than 110 years of operation, Perpetual was probably responsible for more home financing in the Washington, D.C. region than any other savings and loan association.² During the mid-twentieth century, Perpetual expanded its services with branch offices, both building new offices, as well as incorporating existing facilities acquired through mergers and acquisitions. Perpetual was responsible for the design and construction of three branch offices in the style of its flagship building in downtown Washington, D.C.: Bethesda in 1955; Silver Spring in 1958, and Hyattsville in 1965.

Edward C. Baltz, president of Perpetual from 1946 through 1966, and chairman of the board from 1966 through 1973,³ traced the association's beginnings to a group of poker-playing Englishmen, calling themselves the St. George's Society. "This group had formed a habit of cutting some of the larger pots and in this way building a fair size kitty, and then at a later date turning the fund over to some worthy charitable cause. On one occasion, a member of the group requested permission to borrow the money for the purpose of making the down payment on the purchase of a home. Repayment with interest was prompt, and thus was planted the seed for a most worthwhile cause and shortly thereafter Perpetual came into being."⁴ A few years after this original loan, the group prepared a constitution and by-laws for a formal organization to be known as the Perpetual Building Association. On October 1, 1881, Perpetual "opened its doors as a full-fledged building association."⁵

¹ "Crestar Bank purchased Perpetual in January 1992." <http://www2.fdic.gov>.

² Among the more notable studies of the history of savings and loans: Edward F. Stauber, *A Financial Survey of Building and Loan Associations in the District of Columbia*, The Catholic University of America Press, 1951; David L. Mason's *From Buildings and Loans to Bail Outs: A History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831-1995*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK: 2004; Carol Hooper, Robinson & Associates, *National Register Multiple Property Documentation: Banks and Financial Institutions in Washington, D.C.*, May 1993.

³ Jones, William H. "Edward C. Baltz, Retired Head of Perpetual Building, Dies." *Washington Post* 18 July 1974: C-4.

⁴ Baltz, Edward C. *Perpetual Building Association: "One Friend Tells Another..."* New York: Newcomen Society of North America, 1966, p.9.

⁵ Baltz, Edward C. *Perpetual Building Association: "One Friend Tells Another..."* New York: Newcomen Society of North America, 1966, p.10. Perpetual did not incorporate or establish a charter, operating as a mutual association for many years until federal regulations dictated such compliance.

Perpetual's original building was located on the 1100 block of F Street, N.W. in downtown Washington, D.C. Although staying in the general vicinity, Perpetual moved its offices numerous times before it purchased 506 11th Street, N.W. in 1911. In 1914, the association moved its offices to a more prominent location at 500 11th Street, the corner of 11th and E Streets, N.W. In 1926-1927, a new headquarters, designed by noted Washington architect C.L. Harding, was constructed by the William P. Lipscomb Co., Inc. for Perpetual at the same site. Doubled in size from its former quarters, the new building was designed to be "in keeping with the improvements taking place in this immediate neighborhood."⁶ This two-story banking hall followed the time-honored traditions for nineteenth and early twentieth century financial institutions with the Classical Revival style evident in its scale, form, ornament, and masonry construction. Such solid and conservative design was *de rigueur* for the financial institutions of the time, when their buildings manifested the conservative thinking and fiscal responsibility so important to their customers.

SAVINGS AND LOAN INDUSTRY

An understanding of the history and development of savings and loan associations illuminates the prominence and significance of the Perpetual Building Association and the Silver Spring Branch office. The savings and loan industry is a financial operation distinct from a traditional bank. Although the associations use various names, such as building associations or cooperative banks, among others, savings and loans are member-owned financial institutions organized to provide home mortgages for owner-occupied houses. They are the financial institutions that provided the wherewithal to fulfill the twentieth-century "American Dream of Home Ownership."⁷ In 1928, John E. Owens, who was associated with the Republic National Bank of Dallas, addressed the United States League of Local Building and Loan Associations. Calling for an alliance between traditional bankers and those associated with savings and loans, he described the associations as "a distinct department of finance aside from banking, different from mere loaning agencies. [The savings and loan associations] have correlated, by the most intelligent process known to man, the borrower and the lender, the investor and the realty owner. The savings instinct and the homing urge meet in the offices of [your] institutions and in the alchemy of a new credit turn out of one door a holder of a real estate bond and at the other a pleased possessor of a home."⁸ A more technical definition describes these associations as "a local cooperative financial institution organized to receive long-term savings from the public which are invested, primarily, in amortized loans on residential real estate."⁹ Often referred to as "financial intermediaries," savings and loans do not make commercial loans or create credit as banks do, instead they focus on loans for owner-occupied houses and some government bonds. Unlike a bank where customers place money into an individual account, money put into a savings and loan association is considered an investment and participants become a part owner in

⁶ "Building Society to Have New Home; Work is Started," *Washington Post*, 4 April 1926.

⁷ David L. Mason, *From Building and Loans to Bail-Outs: a History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831-1995*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸ "Banker Expresses Attitude Toward Loan Association," *Washington Post*, 24 June 1928.

⁹ Edward Stauber, "A Financial Survey of Building and Loan Associations in the District of Columbia," Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1951, p.1.

the association, i.e. members. Rather than interest, savings and loan association members receive dividends.

In 1831, inspired by British associations, Philadelphia became the home of this country's first building and loan association, the Oxford Provident Building Association. Twenty years later, the Georgetown Building Association was formed in the District of Columbia. By 1925, twenty associations were based in the District, despite strong government regulations, unique to the Nation's Capital, that were administered by the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency.¹⁰ The associations, like most financial institutions, profited from the economic boom of the 1920s, providing the means for the American public to buy their own homes.¹¹

In 1932, with the onset of the Depression, Congress passed the Federal Home Loan Bank Act. This act called for the establishment of a federal system of eleven federal regional home loan banks from which individual savings and loans could borrow to avoid problems associated with short-term imbalance of deposits and withdrawals. Organized to operate in a manner similar to the Federal Reserve System that serves traditional banks, the Federal Home Loan Bank System was critical to the continuance of the savings and loan industry during the financial stress of the Depression. Under the administration of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, this system made mortgages more affordable by providing funding to qualified savings and loan institutions, as well as insuring investor's savings up to \$10,000. The program, which was strongly supported by the United States League of Savings and Loan Associations, changed the country's savings and loan industry, providing federal regulations to protect the public and the funding needed for the associations to overcome temporary shortfalls. This resulted in the decrease in the number of small, under-capitalized, and short-lived associations, as the majority of building and loan associations converted their organizations into regulated federal savings and loan associations with federal financial backing. With the input of federal funds into a government-sponsored home financing program, savings and loan associations expanded their services to respond to the growing (and more fiscally responsible) home ownership program and to include such newly permitted services as personal loans. This shift laid the groundwork for the multi-fold expansion of savings and loans across the country, including the Perpetual Building Association.¹²

ONE OF THE STRONGEST SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE NATION

From its earliest years, Perpetual Building Association was regularly distinguished as one of the largest savings and loan businesses in Washington, D.C. A solid funding source for new homeowners, year after year, Perpetual advertised its savings and loan services, noting fluctuating interest rates to the increasing population of the Nation's Capital. Although not a bank, Perpetual earned status as one of the larger financial institution in the District of Columbia. In 1929, beyond making its annual report of assets, Perpetual advertised its success by including

¹⁰ F.W. Patterson, "Building Loan Firms Here Declared Safe," *Washington Post*, 15 July 1925.

¹¹ David L. Mason, *From Building and Loans to Bail-Outs: a History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831-1995*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹² The specific organizational history of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board is presented in the Staff Report of the Committee on Banking and Currency, United States Senate Sub-Committee on Housing, "Federal Home Loan Bank Board and Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation: A Study of Relationships." Washington, DC: GPO, November 15, 1956.

the total assets of more than \$18,000,000 in its advertising copy. With these assets, Perpetual ranked as **the** largest savings and loan association in the District.¹³ By September that year, their regular display ads in the *Washington Post* boasted "Assets Over \$20,000,000."¹⁴ The November advertisement, barely a month after the stock market crash, still asserted the claim of \$20,000,000, but added an additional note, "Surplus [*sic*] \$1,000,000," that was clearly intended to assuage fears following the crash.¹⁵ On November 17, the Board reported to its stockholders assets totaling \$24,000,000 and a standing as the twelfth largest association in the United States Building and Loan League.¹⁶

Perpetual's strength as a financial institution was tested in February 1931, when a run on the bank, caused by an unsupported rumor spread through anonymous phone calls, was halted through the efforts of Perpetual and the leadership of Federal-American Bank, Security Savings & Commercial Bank, Riggs Bank, and John W. Pole, who was the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency.¹⁷ By May of that year, demonstrating the association's fiscal strength, Perpetual reported the purchase of the four-story building adjacent to their new banking hall, announcing their intention to demolish the structure and construct in its place a "a stone addition as high as and conforming architecturally to their existing stately office building."¹⁸ The need for expansion proved real, and despite financial problems throughout the country, Perpetual increased its assets by the end of 1932 to \$30,500,000. Although by this time it had long been the largest savings and loan association in the District, in 1932, it was ranked ninth among the membership associations of the nationally based United States Building and Loan League, and fourteenth in the nation.¹⁹

In March 1933, newly inaugurated President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed a Bank Holiday to allow the government to assess the financial soundness of the country's banks. Savings and loans associations were also examined during this "holiday." However, unlike 9,000 of traditional banks, not a single savings and loan failed as a result of the mass audit, and the Federal Home Loan Bank System was re-activated immediately to service the savings and loan industry. This served as testimony to the success of the Federal Home Loan Banking Act, and strengthened the public's perception of savings and loans during the Depression.²⁰ In 1936, with more than \$44,000,000 assets, and "investing and borrowing members of more than 50,000,"

¹³ Display Ad 23, *Washington Post*, 26 February 1929.

¹⁴ Display Ad 29, *Washington Post*, 10 September 1929.

¹⁵ Display Ad 25, *Washington Post*, 6 November 1929.

¹⁶ Thomas A. Cahill, "Perpetual Building Assets are Shown," *Washington Post*, 18 November 1930.

¹⁷ "Bankers Voice Supreme Faith in Institution," *Washington Post*, 5 February 1931; "Machine Gun Squad and Extra Police Guard Against Robbers. \$200,000 Deposited in Firm Yesterday. Banks, Leading Patrons Reassure Crowd and Put New Funds in Concern," *Washington Post*, 6 February 1931; "Woman Clerk Suspected in Starting Run," 7 February 1931; "Run on Perpetual Building Association Demonstrates Solidity of Washington Financial Institutions," *Washington Post*, 7 February 1931; "Hundreds of Calls Link Woman to Run," *Washington Post*, 8 February 1931.

¹⁸ Thomas M. Cahill, "Perpetual Building to Expand Offices," *Washington Post*, 23 May 1931.

¹⁹ Thomas M. Cahill, "Perpetual Closes Best Year," *Washington Post*, 16 November 1932.

²⁰ David L. Mason, *From Building and Loans to Bail-Outs: a History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831-1995*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Perpetual became the largest savings and loan association member of the United States Building and Loan League.²¹

Perpetual's strength as a savings and loan was enhanced by a number of innovative architectural programs. A specific highlight was initiated in 1936 when the association offered its members the opportunity to use an "architectural and advisory service."²² This service provided "professional guidance in small home building to promote better home value" by offering, for a small fee, architectural advice and assistance with construction supervision for new home builders as part of its lending services.²³ A range of house designs, from small, inexpensive models to "homes costing as much as \$7,500 exclusive of the lot," was available for the members' use. If a potential homeowner sought a larger, more personalized home, arrangements could be made to provide the necessary services. To assist Perpetual, a group of registered architects formed the Architects Small Home Service. Composed of Washington architects Leon Chatelain, Jr., D. S. Johnson, J. H. Lapish, M.S. May, C. M. Meigs, and E. P. Schreier (who initiated the idea), the organization gained the endorsement of the Washington Chapter of the American Association of Architects.²⁴ Within three weeks of the announcement, more than 200 prospective homebuilders visited Perpetual's offices to view the model house plans. With the goal of protecting the association's investments by helping its members build better houses, Perpetual's program became a national model for savings and loans around the country. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLB), which had been studying how to set up such a service, commended Perpetual for its successful program. The FHLB Board reported that Perpetual's alliance with the American Institute of Architects, referred to as the "Washington example," was being followed around the country. By May, the FHLB Board joined with Perpetual and offered designs prepared by Washington's Architects Small Home Service to member savings and loans around the country.²⁵

The success of the Home Building Service Plan was one of the keys to Perpetual's continuing success. Community activism, as well as leadership in the U.S. League of Savings and Loans and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board were other examples. By 1941, the association's achievements led the Board of Directors to recommend the replacement of its existing building with a new, larger structure that could handle the increased work associated with its success. This would result in an exciting new building in 1953.

In 1955, Perpetual topped \$204,000,000 by midyear, but competition had taken away its title as the nation's leading savings and loan—describing itself as "the largest savings-loan institution in the East."²⁶ As the Washington metropolitan area's home building programs expanded, so did

²¹ "Building-Loans of Nation Led By Perpetual," *Washington Post*, 28 February 1937; Thomas M. Cahill, "Perpetual Bldg. Assets Rise to \$44,000,000," *Washington Post*, 20 November 1936; "Perpetual Building Will Open New 7-Story Home Monday," *Washington Post*, 4 October 1953.

²² "Perpetual Puts Out New Home Finance Service," *Washington Post*, 1 March 1936.

²³ "Perpetual Puts Out New Home Finance Service," *Washington Post*, 1 March 1936.

²⁴ "'Service' Goal Set by Capital House Builders; Architects Organize to Give Practical Aid to Home Owners," *Washington Post*, 8 March 1936.

²⁵ "6 Home Plans Offered by New Service," *Washington Post*, 24 May 1936.

²⁶ "Perpetual's New Building Opens Monday in Bethesda," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 7 August 1955.

that of other suburban markets, and by 1958, despite continually growing assets, now over \$288,000,000, its national ranking fell to fourth.²⁷

BRANCH BANKING

Although World War II did not dampen home building in the Washington metropolitan area, as it had throughout the country, once the war was over, the Washington suburbs began to develop to levels not thought possible.²⁸ Bethesda and Silver Spring, which had developed cautiously between the two World Wars, experienced tremendous development following the war. These areas developed into full-fledged communities with populations of young families requiring the range of services that were offered in downtown Washington to be located more conveniently in its suburban centers. Perpetual responded by initiating a branch office program through new construction of its own branches, as well as through merger or purchase of existing savings and loans. The first branch office to be opened was located in an existing building at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Wayne Avenue in Silver Spring in 1952.²⁹ The first branch constructed specifically for Perpetual was completed in 1955 in Bethesda. However, that year, Maryland passed a law restricting branches operated by out-of-state financial institutions. Perpetual responded by getting support for a law that would grandfather the right of out-of-state institutions with existing branches in the state to keep their branches in business. As the issue of interstate banking gained momentum, the Federal Bank Holding Act of 1956 prohibited interstate banking unless a state specifically allowed it, clearly establishing Maryland's jurisdiction. As a result, Perpetual was one of only three out-of-state savings and loans with the right to operate branches in Maryland, although that right was limited to existing branches. Unable to expand within Maryland or Virginia, in 1957, Perpetual took an alternate route by acquiring the failed Anacostia Federal Savings & Loan Association. The acquisition included the branch buildings at 1340 Good Hope Road, S.E., in the District of Columbia and 7118 Marlboro Pike in District Heights, Prince Georges County.³⁰ However, its next major move was in January 1958, when capitalizing on an existing branch office, it opened a new five-story building on Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring.

In 1980, Perpetual, still the largest savings and loan in the District of Columbia, merged with American Federal Savings and Loan, the District's fifth largest association.³¹ The new Perpetual-American Federal Savings and Loan Association had assets over \$1,500,000,000 and 21 offices in the District and Maryland. This merger and sound financial practices maintained Perpetual-American through the savings and loan crisis of 1982. Still restricted by state law from new branches in Maryland or Virginia, Perpetual-American began building new branches

²⁷ Frank C. Porter, "Perpetual Assets Top \$288 Million," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1958.

²⁸ Donald D. Hester, "U.S. Banking in the Last Fifty years: Growth and Adaption," University of Wisconsin, August 2002, <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/econ/archive/wp2002-19.pdf>.

²⁹ S. Oliver Goodman, "Perpetual's Assets Hit Top of 190 Million," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 16 November 1954, p. 31.

³⁰ S. Oliver Goodman, "Anacostia Investors Get Merger Details," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 22 April 1956, p. C9.

³¹ Jerry Knight, "Perpetual, American Plan Merger," *Washington Post*, 6 May 1980; Nancy L. Ross, "Mergers Alter District's S&L Kaleidoscope," *Washington Post*, 23 November 1980.

in many locations around the District.³² Its branch-design program of the 1980s drew attention once again to its innovative approach to architecture. However, by the very early 1990s, Perpetual-American's strength was diminished and, in 1992, Crestar Bank purchased the association's assets, ending more than 110 years of support for the construction of new houses throughout the Washington metropolitan area. Through its vast membership and assets, Perpetual became the largest and longest operating savings and loan association in Washington, D.C. and Montgomery County, and most likely responsible for funding the construction for more homes in Montgomery County than any other single financial institution. Its long-term ranking as the largest savings and loan in the nation establishes Perpetual's extraordinary success and its significance to the history and development of Silver Spring and Montgomery County.

SECOND, THE SILVER SPRING BRANCH OFFICE OF THE PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION

Stands as an excellent example of the geometric modernist aesthetic with high artistic value and as the first example of the style used for a major financial institution in Silver Spring, with a direct association with the first fully articulated modernist financial institution in the Nation's Capital (Criteria 2a. and 2c.).

The Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association Building is a five-story, limestone- and granite-clad reinforced concrete and steel structure representative of mid-twentieth-century geometric modernism. Its trapezoidal footprint establishes the basis for its modernist geometry. Although the composition employs materials often associated with Classical Revival architecture, the building's limestone and granite facades presented a distinctly new appearance for a financial institution in Silver Spring when the building was completed in 1958. In its form and ornament, the design rejects the traditional composition so long associated with financial institutional architecture in the United States. This early expression of non-traditional motifs features strong geometric forms, little applied ornament, and clean, well-articulated vertical lines superimposed on horizontal bands. One of a group of related buildings, the Silver Spring Branch Office building is executed using a common architectural vocabulary whose modernistic forms announce its association with the Perpetual Building Association. Like the Bethesda branch built in 1955 and the later Hyattsville branch from 1965, this five-story building was designed as a variation of the flagship building in the District of Columbia. In Silver Spring, its siting as a dominant element of an important gives it a strong presence. The use of two primary entrances—one at each of the intersecting main streets, reinforces this dominance of the corner. Presenting a trapezoidal, rather than rectangular, footprint, its ordered geometrical composition reiterated the themes of the original design, fitting the new branch into the specifics of the new site. Similar composition, materials, and fenestration marked the branch as part of the Perpetual family. Its unconventional composition eschewed the traditional base, shaft, and capitol of classical and renaissance architecture, replacing it with an asymmetrical frame that expressed the concrete structure behind its limestone veneer. The public character of the banking hall was expressed with a monumental inverted rectilinear-framed entry flanked with

³² The Federal Riegle-Neale Interstate Banking and Branching Efficiency Act of 1994 lifted the prohibition against interstate banking as well as resolving emergency legislation adopted in the 1980s to save failing savings and loan associations.

large, multi-story trapezoidal windows; the floors above were delineated by horizontal bands of office windows expressing the routine administrative operations that took place above the banking hall. Throughout the nation, forward-looking financial institutions viewed “the modern, progressive bank building as a powerful image-making and passive advertising tool.”³³

Perpetual realized their image-making and advertising tool through the geometric modernist design produced by the Bank Building & Equipment Corporation (BB&EC), one of the largest bank design and construction companies in the United States. The 1953 flagship Perpetual building was important to BB&EC’s portfolio, as its location in the center of the Nation’s Capital, its size, its strong and innovative design, and the prestige of Perpetual made this one of their most important commissions at the time. Since its founding in 1913, BB&EC focused primarily on banking facilities.³⁴ Providing full services to financial institutions, it offered both a building design and technological components necessary to the banking industry. Following World War II, the firm directed its aesthetic to a geometric modernism—based on a rational and strictly organized expression of forms and materials without historic precedent. The company’s architects promulgated this new style for both the architecture and building’s internal operations, endeavoring to incorporate both the newest technology and the newest architecture. The new headquarters Perpetual building was not only of modern design, but boasted such innovative features as an open concrete structural system, air conditioning throughout, and the use of pneumatic tubes to connect tellers and bookkeepers.

In 1941, Perpetual’s Board of Director’s recommended that the association begin looking at options for new space to house its increasingly successful operations. Its stately Classical Revival-style banking hall in downtown Washington had few offices, which resulted in insufficient space to house the records for increasing number of accounts. With the onset of World War II, action to implement any plan for expansion was deferred. The alliance with BB&EC likely began during the war as the firm encouraged design planning: “Get tomorrow off your mind and at least down on paper. Don’t just plan...*prepare!* We’ll help you by drawing up completed plans....NOW of the improvements you contemplate. Then, the moment peace comes...without...cost...we’ll bring them up to date.”³⁵

In 1953, Perpetual Building Association opened its new headquarters at the very same location as its earlier buildings, carefully phasing construction to avoid the interruption of services. The building was presented in a new style—one that completely rejected Classical Revival composition and motifs and looked to basic geometric forms for its inspiration.³⁶ This style, a

³³ Carol J. Dyson and Anthony Rubano, “Banking on the Future: Modernism and the Local Bank,” *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, ed. Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2000), 2-43 and 2-56.

³⁴ BB&EC’s portfolio included hotels as well as banks, with the hotel chains of Hilton, Sheraton, and Howard Johnson among their clients. BB&EC is also responsible for the Maryville University campus in St. Louis, Missouri. “Joseph Gander” in *Maryville You*, Maryville University of St. Louis, Alumni Affairs Office, St. Louis, MO, Winter 2002, Vol.7, #2.

³⁵ “Here’s a New Service for Bankers Who Want to Prepare for Tomorrow!” Advertisement for BB&EC, *Burroughs Clearing House* 27 (September 1943).

³⁶ That same year Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) completed the Manufacturer’s Trust branch (Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street, Manhattan). Gordon Bunshaft’s design for a glass palazzo is often attributed with the first use of

geometric modernism, was different from the modernism that had gained momentum in Europe. It was an American interpretation that would come to be distinctly associated with the immediate post-World War II era prior to the ascent of the European-based Bauhaus and the International Style in this country.

Although the concept of a true modernist design for a bank had been unveiled in Philadelphia in 1929 with Philadelphia Savings Fund Society building designed by William Lescaze and George Howe, other financial institutions in the United States embraced a less ambitious break with the past, choosing designs that presented a modernist expression of classicism.³⁷ By diluting the classical elements to their barest abstraction, the architects provided a bridge between the Classical Revival and the Modernism. The work of masters such as Paul Cret's brilliant Folger Shakespeare Library in 1932 introduced an aesthetic that provided the security of classical proportions without the elaboration of ornament. However, following World War II, a second stylistic strain was introduced that eliminated the classical basis for the designs, replacing it with one of pure geometry. This new interpretation incorporated technological advances that were direct products of World War II, as well as the indirect product—a philosophy that sought to disassociate itself from the past and the anguish of war. One of the earliest expressions of this style was completed in 1950 by Gilbert Underwood, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, in his design for the General Accounting Office (GAO) in Washington, D.C.³⁸ This large-scale government office building incorporated both a new aesthetic and new technological advances, such as complete HVAC system, continuous fluorescent lighting, and movable office partitions.³⁹ The style is an ordered, rationally based presentation of materials without ornamentation. Unlike Modern Classicism, Stripped Classicism, or even "Starved" Classicism, all reference to classical imagery or forms is avoided. Through the manipulation of materials into specific geometric forms, the composition reads as a design plotted on a grid or graph, rather than that of a traditional classical tripartite format or other ancient foundations such as Egyptian or Neo-Greek composition. The design of the GAO, like the Silver Spring Branch Office and other buildings of the style, relies on a variety of lines and geometry rather than organic forms. The choice of materials is a key factor in the design as different materials and surface treatments are shaped and juxtaposed. The material shifts can be subtle or strong, the geometry elaborate or simple; however, the buildings present as solid masses unlike the later Modernist styles that rely on various degrees of immateriality of form and material within a geometric framework.

The Perpetual headquarters building in Washington, D.C., which was being planned as early as 1941, established the building prototype for Perpetual's future architectural undertakings. The headquarters employed distinct features, including a strong corner presence, trapezoidal windows on the lobby level, a consistent use of materials including red Carnelian granite and limestone,

modernism for a financial institution. A masterpiece, Bunshaft's modernist design is based on the historic precedents of Italian Renaissance design.

³⁷ Charles Belfoure, *Monuments to Money: The Architecture of American Banks*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc. 2005), pp. 212-312.

³⁸ The U.S. General Accounting Office is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its architectural and historical significance.

³⁹ This combination of a new style with new building and structural technology encouraged a new approach to architectural design. Gilbert Underwood played a critical role in this industry change. See "Architects to Convene," *New York Times*, 3 June 1951, Real Estate.

the use of clean, well-articulated lines. This resulted in its recognition by the press and public as “the first major financial structure of pure modern design in the Nation’s capital.” Its grand opening prompted the broadcast of the opening ceremonies on local radio and television stations.⁴⁰ Highlighted in its advertising campaign in late 1952, Perpetual’s new headquarters building became more than a major physical move for Perpetual. The new building’s footprint doubled the size of the former building and its contemporary massing reached seven stories in height. However, most importantly, its modern appearance drew attention to the association’s forward thinking and innovative approaches to the financial industry.⁴¹

The branch banks built in subsequent years referenced the design features of the flagship Washington, D.C. building. The branch banks were not identical or of a stock design, rather they presented a variation on the basic theme, adapted to each specific site, an approach heralded by BB&EC in later advertisements for their services. As a result, the intentional choice of a modern architectural design became representative of Perpetual Building Association and was a form of corporate branding where the values represented by the architecture represented the company’s values. Through this architectural approach, each building became an icon of their business. (See attached comparison of Perpetual Building Association Buildings, p. 4). The Silver Spring Branch Office still stands as an intact example of the geometric modernist style, a significant contribution to the aesthetic development of Silver Spring and Montgomery County.

THIRD, THE SILVER SPRING BRANCH OFFICE OF THE PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION

Is an outstanding example of the twentieth-century idea of corporate branding, which has established a familiar and identifiable visual feature as a result of its distinct architectural appearance (Criteria 1a. and 2e.).

The great significance of the modernist design used at the Silver Spring branch office can be understood by placing the building into the historic context of Perpetual’s program to construct branch offices in close-in Maryland suburbs using a variation of the architectural design of their distinctive headquarters building. As a result, the modernist design of Perpetual’s buildings became the association’s stamp on the communities it served. The association building is an icon for the Perpetual Building Association and, to this day, is both a familiar feature within the community and visually associated with Perpetual.

BRANCH BANKING

Although now taken for granted, the concept of branch offices for financial institutions was not a common practice prior to the mid-twentieth century. As suburban growth began to increase exponentially, branch banking became more desirable and soon became standard operations for larger financial institutions. Long supported by some financial experts, such as John W. Pole, U.S. Comptroller of the Currency, as a means to eliminate small, weak banks, branch banking was also often interpreted as unfair to individual financial institutions, many of which could not

⁴⁰ “Perpetual Building Will Open New 7-Story Home Monday,” *Washington Post*, 4 October 1953.

⁴¹ Display Ad 34, *New York Times*, 7 July 1952, p. 32.

compete with large urban financial institutions that were supported by enormous capital.⁴² When urban banks sought to cross state lines into adjacent suburbs, the controversy was only increased. With the passing of the Federal Home Loan Bank Act of 1932, state regulations were superseded by federal law. The law established limitations for the associations to a portfolio of conventional mortgages within a 50-mile radius of the association office, Federal Housing Authority (FHA) loans to a 100-mile radius, but did not put geographic limits on G.I. home loans, but branch banking was relatively non-existent. Beyond this, states regulated the associations within their boundaries. However, branch banking remained relatively non-existent. By 1949, only 75 associations had branches, which was approximately one out of 80 associations.⁴³ Following World War II, this changed as savings and loan associations followed the changing demographics into the suburbs with the concomitant increase in the push for home ownership. Soon the number of saving and loan associations with branches was one in eight.⁴⁴ However, as the issue of interstate banking gained momentum, the Federal Bank Holding Act of 1956 prohibited interstate banking unless a state specifically allowed it. Perpetual was affected by this when the Maryland House of Delegates passed a law in 1955 limiting out-of-state savings and loan associations from crossing into Maryland. The result was that Perpetual and other Washington savings and loan associations were prohibited from opening any more branches in the adjacent suburbs.⁴⁵ This created hardship for many Washington savings and loan associations as the population, and thus customers, was in the process of shifting from the confined boundaries of the District of Columbia to the burgeoning suburbs. Perpetual worked around this by advocating for an amendment to the law that allowed “existing branches of ‘foreign’ associations to move to new locations within one mile and in the county.”⁴⁶ In addition, by acquiring and consolidating existing savings and loan associations, Perpetual was able to expand into the existing facilities. (See attached Perpetual Building Association Timeline, p. 3).

CREATING A CORPORATE IMAGE

The design of Perpetual’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. was the first step in establishing a modern architectural program that would identify Perpetual through its physical presence in a community. The use of modernist design was inherent to this innovative idea. An advertisement for BB&EC asserts “clean, modern architecture is the mark of a leader in any thriving suburban community.”⁴⁷ Carol Dyson and Anthony Rubano’s research into the history of financial institutions revealed that following World War II the banking industry rejected the impenetrable fortress appearance of the earlier buildings, replacing them with new modern buildings whose design was fresh and attractive to the post-World War II population. These new buildings brought attention to the institutions: “The sleek, modern, progressive bank building became a

⁴² “Office of the Comptroller of the Currency,” <http://www.occ.treas.gov/pole.htm>.

⁴³ David L. Mason, *From Building and Loans to Bail-Outs: a History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831-1995*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ David L. Mason, *From Building and Loans to Bail-Outs: a History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831-1995*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ “Saving-Loan Branch Ban Voted in Md.,” *Washington Post*, 24 March 1955.

⁴⁶ “Saving-Loan Branch Ban Voted in Md.,” *Washington Post*, 24 March 1955.

⁴⁷ “Design for Suburban Banking,” Ad for BB&EC, *Burroughs Clearing House* 38, February 1954.

marketing tool.”⁴⁸ Perpetual went a step beyond a single “tool” by constructing branch buildings using a common, modern aesthetic that would become a symbol of the strength and efficiency of the institution, which evolved into a powerful icon representing Perpetual throughout Washington, D.C. and the close-in Maryland suburbs. The Bethesda branch, a five-story building located at 7401 Wisconsin Avenue, was noted as the tallest building in the community at the time of its opening in August 1955.⁴⁹ Its clean lines, geometrical-based vocabulary, and sleek limestone and granite facing stood in contrast to the small-scale Colonial Revival-style fieldstone commercial buildings that had dominated Wisconsin Avenue before the new bank was constructed.⁵⁰ By employing the vocabulary used at the headquarters building, Perpetual established an association between the two buildings. Association customers received a subliminal message that Perpetual was their savings and loan association, regardless of whether it was in Bethesda or Washington, D.C. As members of the association, they owned the association’s buildings and, through the architecture, this message of association, and hence, allegiance, was reinforced. Perpetual built its second new branch office in Silver Spring in 1958.⁵¹ This third use of the architectural vocabulary further reinforced the corporate image. Through the architecture, Perpetual advertised its presence on the street to everyone passing by. There was no question as to what the building’s purpose was or who occupied its offices; the corporate brand established Perpetual’s identity. In 1965, Perpetual opened a new branch, once again employing the same architectural vocabulary, although an updated variation on the original design, at 6401 Belcrest Road and East-West Highway in Hyattsville.

Through this use of common architectural forms, materials, and aesthetic, the association of these buildings to each other, and to those who remember Perpetual, remains as vivid today as it was on their respective opening days. This idea of corporate branding has become a symbol of twentieth century commerce. The use of a building rather than simply a logo came to the forefront in the 1950s with such retail corporations as McDonald’s (organized 1955), and its use at Perpetual marks a significant early expression of the phenomenon. The Silver Spring Branch Office manifests the Perpetual Building Association program, advertising, celebrating, and enhancing Perpetual’s accomplishments as the region’s largest and most successful savings and loan association, and continues to represent this history through its physical presence today.

FOURTH, THE SILVER SPRING BRANCH OFFICE OF THE PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION

Symbolizes the importance of Silver Spring as a major suburban community in lower Montgomery County and its value to the growth of the Nation’s Capital and the greater metropolitan region (Criterion 1a).

⁴⁸ Letter to Jef Fuller, Chair, Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, from Carol Dyson and Anthony Rubano, 23 July 2007.

⁴⁹ “Perpetual’s New Building Opens Monday in Bethesda,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 7 August 1955, p. C13.

⁵⁰ “Perpetual Building Association Still Growing in Its 76th Year of Service,” *Washington Building Congress Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 5, February 1957.

⁵¹ In 1957, branch expansion continued as Perpetual acquired two additional buildings through consolidation with Anacostia Federal Savings & Loan Association: 1340 Good Hope Road, S.E., in Anacostia and 7118 Marlboro Pike in District Heights, Prince Georges County. Although the Anacostia branch has a modernist façade, this dates to its original construction prior to the merger with Perpetual.

The Perpetual Building Association had opened a branch office in Silver Spring in 1952 during a time of significant suburban growth in Montgomery County. After World War II, Silver Spring was second in population to Baltimore, and in 1947, became home to the Washington area's first suburban branch of a department store, Hecht's. Residential developments initiated in the 1930s also gained momentum after the war as new developments were constructed, and the commercial area flourished with new stores and institutions, many designed in the new Modernist aesthetic. The central business district of Silver Spring became a thriving commercial area and marked an important shift in the relationship between Washington, D.C., and close-in suburbs.⁵² Establishing a branch bank in a growing area allowed Perpetual to capture new and expanding business in the suburbs. The first Silver Spring branch office, located at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Wayne Avenue, was the first branch office opened by Perpetual in the Washington metropolitan area. In 1958, Perpetual opened a new facility for the Silver Spring branch, a modernist building whose design was based on that of their headquarters building in downtown Washington, D.C.

A major advertisement for the opening asserts that Perpetual "dreamed of building a new office to serve the people of Silver Spring and Montgomery County. We wanted it to include all the facilities to give the very finest savings and loan service, and to give real benefit to the community."⁵³ There is a symbiotic relationship between a savings and loan association and its community, for unlike traditional banks, the savings and loan industry depends on new construction to support its activities. The symbiosis was demonstrated in the customer amenities it provided to its members. This included a public auditorium for community use and a member lounge. The large windows opening into the banking hall gave the customers the sense of access, while desks for bank officers on the floor of the banking hall encouraged communication.

The growing suburb was the ideal location for branch offices, but it also served to assist in the identification of the areas that held promise for development. Perpetual's commitment to Silver Spring, its directors' optimism for its future, and the willingness to construct a new office is symbolized by that building itself.

FIFTH, THE SILVER SPRING BRANCH OFFICE OF THE PERPETUAL BUILDING ASSOCIATION

Is an important representation of the twentieth-century phenomenon of blending the architectural, technological, and structural disciplines to create a specialized building type (Criterion 2a).

The Silver Spring Branch Office was designed as one part of a building program intended to distinguish its owners, the Perpetual Building Association. The Perpetual Building Association headquarters in Washington, D.C. and the three branch banks in the Maryland suburbs were all designed following a similar and distinct modernist form, and the Silver Spring Branch office

⁵² Potomac-Hudson Engineering, Inc., *Historic Sites Survey Report: Silver Spring Central Business District*, December 2002, p. 13.

⁵³ Display Ad, *The Washington Post and Evening Herald*. 12 January 1958, p. E3

represents this collaborative architectural effort. The design scheme for the Perpetual Building Association headquarters located at the corner of 11th and E Streets, N.W., in Washington, D.C., was created under the direction of Earl Davenport at BB&EC with W.G. Knoeble of BB&EC serving as registered architect, and Robert O. Scholz as the supervising and consulting architect.⁵⁴ For the building in Silver Spring, Charles Jost of BB&EC was the registered architect and Robert O. Scholz served as the contractor and the consulting architect.

The Silver Spring Branch office represents the collaboration of design and construction that was behind the Perpetual building program. It was a new type of architectural design. Rather than a single master designing all aspects of a building—the design for the architecture, landscape, infrastructure, furniture, even fabrics and tableware—such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Charles Platt, Wallace Harrison, and Washington, D.C.’s own Edmund Corning⁵⁵ had done, this project was the product of a team composed of a nationally based design consortium that provided the architectural, engineering and technological expertise, as well as the actual task-specific equipment, working with a local architect who brought knowledge of local building and zoning requirements. This project team, foreshadowing today’s collaborations, is an early example of an approach that facilitated the creation of modern, site-specific, efficient, and technologically advanced design. The collaboration was a fundamental component of the success of BB&EC, which vaulted itself into the position as one of, if not, the nation’s premiere design/build firms for financial institutions, as its team interacted with local architects to facilitate the design and construction of new buildings. This interaction was a response to the increasing number of new and jurisdictionally unique building codes, health and safety regulations, and zoning requirements that were promulgated in the twentieth century. Although based in St. Louis, Missouri, BB&EC worked around the United States and in Latin America. BB&EC put forward an innovative business model—one that is common to the latter half of the twentieth century—that of specializing in a specific building type, rather than a single geographic area, and taking one’s skills and experience to the locations where it is desired. However, the breadth of the firm’s business demanded specific knowledge of the unique building requirements of the client’s geographic jurisdiction. By engaging a local architect and/or builder, BB&EC could become aware of the requirements in new venues and work with rather than in competition to local firms. Thus, the Perpetual Building Association buildings were a collaborative effort between the client—Perpetual Building Association, BB&EC, and prominent Washington architect and builder, Robert O. Scholz.

ROBERT O. SCHOLZ

An important member of this collaboration team was Robert O. Scholz, a noted architect in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and founder of the firm, Robert O. Scholz Company, Inc,

⁵⁴ Perpetual Savings and Loan Building, 1111 E Street, N.W., “D.C. Historic Resources Inventory Buildings and Structures Data Sheet, D.C. Historic Preservation Office.” The original building permit was not located and likely has been missing since 1991 when it was signed out from D.C. Archives to the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. D.C. Archives has one loose plan that was part of the original permit. The data sheet noted here was created prior to the disappearance of the building permit.

⁵⁵ Edmund Corning was responsible for the complete design of the American Association of Business and Professional Women Headquarters Building in Washington, D.C., now demolished.

which performed both design and contracting work. His brother, Oscar R. Scholz, operated the firm. Although the firm was small, Scholz designed numerous well-known buildings in Washington, D.C., including Alban Towers and several other large Art Deco apartment buildings located on prominent corners.⁵⁶ The principal men involved in the financing, ownership, and construction of Scholz's apartment and commercial buildings were a close-knit group of friends who had known each other since the 1920s. Scholz was a yachtsman and some of his business associates were boating companions as well, including Edward C. Baltz, long-time president of Perpetual Building Association. Scholz served as a member of the Board of Directors and as consulting architect for Perpetual Building Association, and remained on the board until 1975.⁵⁷ In 1948, Scholz served as the project architect responsible for the design of more than 800 single-family dwellings in Arlington Forest, one of Arlington County's best-executed examples of a planned, mixed-use subdivision that evolved in distinct phases before, during, and after World War II.⁵⁸ After his brother's death in 1954, Scholz became involved in oil drilling investments and did not actively continue his architectural practice although he maintained an office in the World Center Building, a Modernist-style office building that he designed in 1949.⁵⁹

As a member of the Perpetual Board of Directors and experienced architect, it was a logical collaboration for Scholz to consult with BB&EC on the design of the Perpetual headquarters and branch banks. Written statements provided by W.A. Sarmiento, Director of Contemporary Architecture for BB&EC from 1952 to 1961, further explain the role of Scholz in the design of the building. Sarmiento explained that Scholz, with his local experience, helped to resolve issues with building department regulations and inspections. More importantly and due to his position on the Board of Directors, he was "a must" as a consulting architect. Sarmiento added to his discussion of the architect that "Mr. Scholz went beyond his duty; he was generous to provide his artistic talent to the building design. And it improved."⁶⁰ Thus, Scholz's role in the design and construction of the Perpetual buildings allowed him to contribute elements to the design program.

BANK BUILDING AND EQUIPMENT CORPORATION

To meet the particular architectural, technological, and structural needs of the growing banking industry, commercial design firms focusing on a single industry emerged in the twentieth century to create this specific building type. Bank Building and Equipment Corporation (BB&EC), founded by Joseph B. Gander in 1913 in St. Louis, Missouri, was a firm that specialized in all parts of the bank building process including planning, design, engineering, construction, interior furnishings, and equipment. BB&EC was "the industry leader in bank design" and "rural and

⁵⁶ Alban Towers Apartment Building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places for National Register Criterion C as the work of a master. A number of other buildings by Scholz are contributing buildings to National Register listed historic districts.

⁵⁷ "Robert O. Scholz, Architect, Building In Area 50 Years," newspaper clipping from Architect vertical files at Historical Society of Washington.

⁵⁸ Arlington Forest, Virginia, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2005 in recognition of its architecture and community planning.

⁵⁹ Robert R. Scholz, interview with Andrea F. Schoenfeld, EHT Traceries, 18 July 2006, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁰ W.A. Sarmiento, email message to Marcie Stickle, 3 August 2007.

urban institutions alike benefited from its progressive approach.”⁶¹ The firm claimed to have completed more than 1,000 building or renovation projects for banks before 1941.⁶² After World War II, as bank building focused on modernization and expansion as well as customer service and increased efficiency, BB&EC was at the head of the industry. The firm was credited with “this breakthrough in financial design” by “making the pioneering effort” and used their own headquarters, completed in 1957, as an opportunity to showcase “the most modern equipment and fixtures combined with clean, efficient layout and functional design.”⁶³

BB&EC brought together a team of creative specialists to handle all aspects of a given project. To ensure the best quality of work, “each member of the project team has the freedom of opinion necessary to contribute the best ideas...to assure effective, practical and economical results.” Important departments of BB&EC included Design and Contemporary Architecture. Each director influenced designs made under his tenure. During the time of the design of the Perpetual Building Association headquarters in Washington, D.C., Earl Davenport was the Director of Design, a position he held until 1955. From 1955 to 1965, Wenceslaus Alfonso (W.A.) Sarmiento served as Director of Contemporary Architecture.⁶⁴ The range of services and staff allowed BB&EC to service all project needs from the beginning to the end or individual parts which allowed clients “complete flexibility of choice.”⁶⁵ By the early 1950s, BB&EC operated five offices around the country. In addition to high design and construction standards, BB&EC guaranteed project costs at the preliminary recommendations.

The partnership between Perpetual and BB&EC provided Washington, D.C., and nearby Maryland with one of the area’s most significant and long-lasting architectural icons.

⁶¹ Carol J. Dyson and Anthony Rubano, “Banking on the Future: Modernism and the Local Bank,” *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, ed. Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2000), 2-43-2-56.

⁶² J.B. Gander, “Studies in Bank Modernization,” in *Burroughs Clearing House*, November 1941, p. 20.

⁶³ “Pioneers in Modern Bank Design,” *The Independent Banker*, January 1963.

⁶⁴ W.A. Sarmiento letter of September 1, 2007 to Royce Hanson, Chair of Montgomery County Planning Board.

⁶⁵ “50 Years of Specialization...4000 Financial Projects,” *Bank Building and Equipment Corporation*, 1963.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PERPETUAL'S MAGNIFICENT NEW SILVER SPRING OFFICE OPENS TOMORROW, JANUARY 13

For years we at Perpetual have dreamed of building a new office to serve the people of Silver Spring and Montgomery County. We wanted it to include all the facilities to give the very finest savings and loan service, and to give real benefit to the community.

Now the dream is realized.

*---The Washington Post and Evening Herald.
12 January 1958, Page E3*

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Silver Spring Branch Office is a significant representative of the growth of the American banking industry after World War II, and as one of the first examples of a new building type – the branch bank. Through its alliance with the largest savings and loan association in the nation, the Silver Spring Branch Office became essential to the burgeoning development of suburban Washington, D.C. by offering building and home financing in the decades following World War II through to the end of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the Silver Spring Branch Office is a significant early expression of corporate branding, established through a modern architectural program that would identify the Perpetual Building Association and its geometric modern branches merely through its physical presence in a community. Despite the sale of the association's assets in 1992, after more than 110 years of sponsoring construction of new houses throughout Montgomery County and the greater Washington metropolitan area, the Silver Spring Branch Office remains a prominent visual and historical landmark, representing the significant history of the Perpetual Building Association and the mid-twentieth-century development of Silver Spring and greater Montgomery County.

COMPARATIVE EVALUATION

This study has evaluated the building within the historic context of the Perpetual Building Association. While the Silver Spring Branch Office is one of three similar structures, two of which are extant in Montgomery County, its presence in Silver Spring is critical to an understanding of the significance of Perpetual Building Association and it “clearly possess the defined characteristics required to strongly represent the context.”⁶⁶ By establishing a branch bank in the two strongest suburban centers in lower Montgomery County, Perpetual Building Association marked the importance of Silver Spring to Montgomery County's growth and its increasingly strong role as a center for population. The Silver Spring building as a free-standing

⁶⁶ National Register of Historic Places, “National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” National Park Service, 1997, p.9.

structure at the center of Silver Spring's commercial district speaks to its role as a significant representation of the Perpetual Building Association.

INTEGRITY

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. The National Register has identified seven aspects of integrity: Location; Design; Setting; Materials; Workmanship; Feeling; and Association. This building meets all seven aspects of integrity, continuing to represent the stability and permanence that were key to its original presentation and its role in the community.

FINDINGS

The study of the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association finds that the property meets the criteria of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Ordinance Criteria 24A-3(b)(1)a. and (1)d., as well as 24A-3(b)(2)a., (2)c., and 2(e). As of 2008, the building has reached the fifty-year mark and the National Register Criteria Consideration G for resources less than fifty years is no longer applicable; therefore, the property was evaluated using the standard National Register and Montgomery County criteria.

SUPPORT FOR FINDINGS

These findings are not unique. Support for this listing is extensive. Beyond the applicants, numerous scholars, citizens, and community groups, it also includes the following:

- On June 20, 2007, Peter Kurtze, the National Register Coordinator, Maryland Historic Trust, responded to a request by the Silver Spring Historical Association, that it was his opinion, based on information presented by the association, that the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association "meets National Register Criterion C as a representative example of commercial Modern architecture of the 1950s period in the Washington suburban region."⁶⁷
- On August 15, 2007, the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission voted to recommend to the Planning Board eligibility of the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association for listing on the Master Plan for historic preservation as an historic landmark.⁶⁸
- The Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission's 2007 newsletter, *The Preservationist*, identifies the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association as a building threatened by development pressure. In

⁶⁷ Peter Kurtze e-mail of June 20, 2007, 2:18:41 PM to Mary Reardon, cc: R Little@mdp.state.md.us.

⁶⁸ Transcript of August 15, 2007 hearing of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission.

addition, the front-page article describes the building as “downtown Silver Spring’s most important example of postwar International-style architecture.”⁶⁹

- In December 2002, Potomac-Hudson Engineering, Inc. prepared the Historic Sites Survey Report for the Silver Spring Central Business District for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The report identifies “Perpetual American Savings Bank” [*sic*] as one of four buildings that are “Candidates for Further Evaluation” since at the time of the survey the building did not meet the National Register criteria of fifty years of age. The report acknowledges that “a number of properties appear to merit immediate National Register evaluation upon reaching 50 years of age,” and that, “alternately, these structures may also be evaluated for local Master Plan designation prior to reaching 50 years of age, as there is no County 50-year evaluation requirement.” The report describes the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association as “an excellent example of bank architecture of the period, constructed of limestone and polished granite, and should be evaluated as a building highly representative of its type, as well as for its role in the history of Silver Spring.” The concluding recommendations in this report advise that the “properties listed as being prime candidates for review and research upon reaching 50 years of age be documented and given full consideration well before their 50th birthday, so as to make sure that the proper research and documentation has been done well in advance and does not become the subject of a rushed or panicked attempt at protection as a reaction to some later threat.”⁷⁰ The report’s associated recommendations confirm the historic significance of the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association as part of long-term historic preservation planning efforts.

RECOMMENDATION

The study of the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association finds that the property meets the criteria of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Ordinance Criteria 24A-3(b)(1)a. and (1)d., as well as 24A-3(b)(2)a., (2)c, and 2(e). Therefore, it is the recommendation of this report that the Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association meets the criteria for designation to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* for its historical and cultural significance as well as architectural significance and should be listed on the *Master Plan*.

⁶⁹ “20th Century Silver Spring Buildings Being Considered for Designation,” *The Preservationist* (Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission) Summer 2007.

⁷⁰ Potomac-Hudson Engineering, Inc., *Historic Sites Survey Report: Silver Spring Central Business District*, December 2002, p. 23.

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