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What's that triangular building?

Historic Grand Street site will someday be condos

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LIBRARY HALL – Library Hall, located at 704-712 Grand St., has housed a library, a town hall, a sawmill, and a furniture store since it opened in 1866.

Drivers heading up Grand Street might not see anything unique about the building on 704-712 Grand St. It's when they turn onto Summit Avenue that they notice the building's pronounced triangular shape.

Once known as Library Hall, the building most recently was the location of the National Rug and Carpet Store.

Built in 1866 as a meeting place and public hall, the five-story Library Hall was also the home of a library, one of the first ones in Jersey City. However, by 1871, the library portion of the facility was discontinued due to waning public interest.

However, it enjoyed other uses over the years.

Shortly after its opening, part of the building served as the Town Hall for the old Township of Bergen, until the township merged with the rest of Jersey City in 1870. The township of Bergen extended from the Pennsylvania Railroad at present Journal Square on the north, to Myrtle Avenue on the south, to Mill Creek and New York Bay on the east, and to the Hackensack River on the west.

The building is located near the Bergen Hill section of the city, where the city's upper class resided in the early 1900s.

In 1867, the building held the first banquet for the newly formed Abraham Lincoln Association of Jersey City (which still exists today) on Christmas Eve, called "The Lincoln Ball." The society, which remembers Abe Lincoln (who was assassinated in 1865), still commemorates the 16th president at Lincoln Park each February.

In the 1890s, the building was used by the Jersey City Police Department as the Fourth Precinct.

After that, it was known as Phoenix Hall, a rally spot for those sympathetic to the Irish Revolution that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Miriam Investment Company came into possession of the building in 1917, and it was used as a sawmill operating in connection with a nearby lumberyard and woodworking plant.

In December of 1945, the building was sold to Milton Michael, who ran Michael's Furniture until an unknown date. Then it was occupied as a carpet store.

The building not only has its own history but is surrounded by history as well. A few blocks away on Manning Street is the Whitlock Cordage, previously the headquarters of rope makers Whitlock Cordage, that will soon be the site of 330 mixed-income townhouses.

Condos to come

But now, the old library building itself will see a new use.

The owners of the building, Library Hall LLC, went before the Jersey City Planning Board on Aug. 9 to get approval for Preliminary & Final Major Site Plan. Their goal is to turn the existing industrial building into 12-unit housing complex with 11 parking spaces.

They received approval, but not before Planning Board Commissioner Leon Yost requested of the owners, as well as the architect on the project and their attorney, to look into the history of the building and make sure to document any artifacts and other historic features discovered during rehabilitation.

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