

Tripoli Barber Supply

606 S. 9th Street



606 S. 9th Street is one of the neighborhood's most beautiful buildings. With its unique masonry and delicate window design, the space has housed a range of different businesses throughout the years – some more legitimate than others!

Tripoli Barber Supply Company was established by brothers Charles, Frank, and Angelo Di Puppo, who emigrated from Italy to Philadelphia at the turn of the 20th century. Barbers by training, they first founded the Tripoli Barber Supply Company at the corner of 9th and South in 1911, before eventually moving the business to the space on 606 S. 9th Street. As they looked to expand their business, they turned to local Italian-American architect Enrico Coscia to turn the old row home into a facility that would serve their business ambitions. The eye-catching façade you see today is Enrico's design!

While the business ostensibly sold barber supplies, the Di Puppo brothers were also successful bootleggers, specifically for denatured alcohol, which was mostly used for soaps and creams. During Prohibition, there was an established market for bootleggers to sell denatured alcohol to illegal distilleries, which would then make the alcohol safe for consumption. Philadelphia was a primary source for this type of alcohol distribution and, although many of these operations were quickly shut down, the Di Puppo brothers successfully ran theirs from 1921 to 1925, making them the longest-running operation of this type.

Eventually, their luck ran out. While the circumstances surrounding the cessation of their operations is unclear, it is unlikely they faced severe consequences. The brothers continued to grow their company, purchasing a second location on Walnut street, and eventually also acquired the building adjacent to the 9th street location to expand into.

Over time, the demand for barber supplies waned and the company shifted its focus to beauty products, changing their name to Tripoli Beauty Supply Company. By the 1970s, the company was gone.

Since then, the building's ownership has changed several times. Most recently, the space was occupied by Via Bicycle – arguably one of the best bicycle shops in the city – which had been in the neighborhood for over 20 years. When the building was sold in 2016 and Via Bicycle moved out, they removed their signage, revealing underneath the original engraving for Tripoli Barber Supply Co. Although the business is gone and the neighborhood has changed, the sign serves as a reminder of the colorful history of Bella Vista and the lasting heritage of the building. We also look forward to the next chapter; at press time, the space is being actively renovated to house the Pet Snobs Boutique, whose owners are in the final stages of securing zoning approval.



Interested in learning more about Bella Vista's historical buildings? We are currently on a hiatus due to the pandemic; however, the BVNA Preservation Committee normally meets on the last Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Palumbo Recreation Center. Follow BVNA on FaceBook to find out when we will be scheduling our next meet and join us!