

Bella Vista Buildings We Love

Building of the Month - Columbus Hall

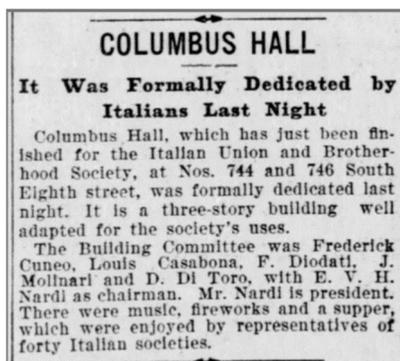
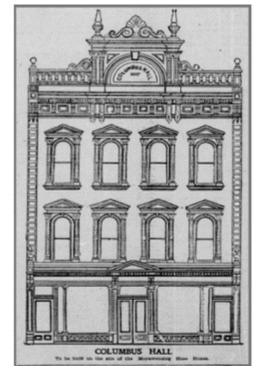
744 - 746 S. 8th Street

Built 1897



The first recorded land and building owner of this site was the Moyamensing Hose Company, a volunteer fire company organized in 1837. It was disbanded when the professional Philadelphia Fire Department was created in 1872. This was a period when the Washington Avenue Immigration Station was receiving many new arrivals from Italy. Some of these immigrants settled here in Bella Vista, which became the second largest “Little Italy” in America, eclipsed only by New York City.

The Italians found themselves in a completely new environment, one with a different language and new customs. They naturally came together to experience the familiarity of their traditions, foods, religion, language and heritage. The result was the formation of Italian societies to organize events, share resources, and bring people together.



In 1874, the Moyamensing Hose Company property at 746 S. 8th St. was purchased by Societa' di Unione e Fratellanza Italiana (The Union and Italian Brotherhood Society), who renamed the building Columbus Hall. In 1894, they purchased the adjoining lot at 744 S. 8th St. and began fundraising for a new building. The old firehouse was demolished, replaced by the beautiful building that still stands today. For many years, it was home to several different associations that helped Italian immigrants adjust to life

in the city. They provided financial aid, social gatherings, and fellowship for newcomers.

As the immigrants assimilated into American society, they no longer needed to limit their activities to these unique ethnic-specific associations. Their children, educated in the local schools, were fluent in English and helped increase the family's comfort with a wider range of experiences. As the associations

HOME OF THE
Societa' di Unione e Fratellanza Italiana
744-746 SOUTH EIGHTH STREET -- PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Columbus Hall. For many years, this building on Eighth Street, above Christian, served as the meeting place for the Societa' di Unione e Fratellanza Italiana and other organizations in the immigrant community. (From *History of the Societa' di Unione e Fratellanza Italiana*, 1929)

disbanded, Columbus Hall became less important as a community focal point, and ownership passed into private hands.



In 1982 Columbus Hall found new life as a restaurant, owned and operated by John and Dolores Righi. It was named *Mama Yolanda's*, after Yolanda Righi, John's mother, a much-admired cook in her younger days. The interior of the restaurant was decorated with many antiques, including two 1.5-ton religious statues that were salvaged when St. Theresa's Church, at Broad and Catharine Sts. was demolished.



In 1993, the restaurant was used in the filming of a movie, *Money for Nothing*. It was based on the story of Joey Coyle, a 28-year-old Philadelphia man who, in 1981, stole \$1.2 million that he found on the street, when the doors of an armored car in front of him sprang open. In 2013, the building was sold and converted into apartments.



Columbus Hall Today

Interested in learning more about Bella Vista's historical buildings? The BVNA Preservation Committee meets on the last Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Palumbo Recreation Center.

All are welcome.