



NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney
Chairman

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LANDMARK STATUS GIVEN TO FORMER LOWER EAST SIDE DEPARTMENT STORE

Edward Ridley & Sons Buildings, Rare Examples of Cast-Iron Construction on the Lower East Side, Housed One of NYC's Largest Department Stores in the Last Half of the 19th Century

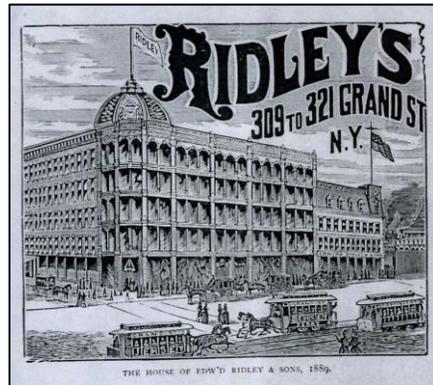


The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously approved the designation of two adjoining cast-iron buildings that once comprised the Edward Ridley & Sons Department Store, the largest retailer on the Lower East Side of Manhattan that also was one of the largest in New York City during the last half of the 19th century.

Located at 315-317 Grand Street and 319-321 Grand Street between Orchard and Allen streets, the two five-story buildings were designed in the Classical Revival style by Paul F. Schoen, a Prussian-born architect whose firm was responsible for several commercial buildings and banks in Manhattan. The firm also submitted proposals for the New York State Capitol, the Iowa State Capitol and the New York Life Insurance Company headquarters.

The two new landmarks, completed in 1886, are the only surviving buildings that were part of a sprawling retail emporium that was founded in 1848 by Edward Ridley as a dry goods in a brick row house at 311 ½ Grand Street that eventually occupied as many 20 lots that faced onto Grand, Orchard and and Allen streets.

Ridley was known in its early days for offering customers low prices and an inventory that included items such as gloves, hats, hosiery, dress trimmings and fancy bonnets. Its later growth was similar to that of other retailers such as James McCreery & Co., Lord & Taylor and Stern Brothers, which evolved from small shops in modest structures to large emporiums in grand buildings. By 1889, Ridley employed about 2,500 employees, many of whom were women, recent immigrants and neighborhood residents. (Advertisement at right, c. 1889)



The facades of the Grand Street buildings are made of cast iron, a material typically used in major mercantile buildings and retail stores elsewhere in Manhattan, and include such distinctive architectural elements as rows of round-arched windows, fluted pilasters and decorative relief panels. The building at 319-321 Grand Street is distinguished by a rounded corner at the intersection of Orchard Street, a prominent feature that was intended to increase the store's visibility from trolley cars traveling west from the former Grand Street-Williamsburg ferry.

Edward Ridley & Sons Department Store shut its doors in 1901, following a decline in sales and the area's status as a retail center. The buildings currently house a number of small businesses.

"These two buildings are rare examples of cast-iron construction on the Lower East Side that recall the heyday of the Ridley department store and of large retailers that neighborhood," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney.

In other business, the Commission held a public hearing on a proposal to give interior landmark status to the Rainbow Room, the famed 1930s nightclub located near the top of 30 Rockefeller Plaza.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 30,000 buildings and sites, including 1,318 individual landmarks, 114 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 108 historic districts and 18 historic district extensions in all five boroughs. Under the City's landmarks law, considered among the most powerful in the nation, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough.

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