

Leiter I Building  
200-208 West Monroe Street  
Northwest corner of Monroe  
and Wells Streets  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HABS NO. ILL-1021

HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
23-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
801 19th Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

## LEITER I BUILDING

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ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
23-

Location: 200-208 West Monroe Street; Northwest corner of Monroe and Wells Streets, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: La Salle National Bank.

Present Occupant: Gompers Supply Company on first floor. Various tenants on upper floors.

Statement of Significance: The first Leiter Building, built 1879, has been cited as a Chicago Architectural Landmark, "In recognition of its contribution towards the development of skeleton construction. Cast iron pilaster continue as columns from foundation to roof with widely spaced piers framing glass bays, which anticipate the steel cage of the Chicago School."

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners (chain of title): The following abstract of the chain of title is from Book 466-A, pp. 173-75, 178, in Cook County Recorder's Office.

Levi Z. Leiter, the original owner, assembled the parcel of land on which the building stands in two separate transactions on October 21, 1875 and July 23, 1879 (Documents 54714, 54715, 230625). The property remained in Leiter's estate for several years following his death (Inventory dated April 23, 1909, Document 79D/19). The property was deeded to Iva M. Morris and husband August 2, 1944 (Document 15331205), and was then known as the Morris Building. In recent years mortgages have been held by the National Life Insurance Company, the La Salle National Bank, and the First National Bank (Documents 1420765, 148655500, 18806108), and the ownership has passed from the Morris Building Corporation to Joseph Gross (November 1, 1962, Document 18375258). The title is presently held by the La Salle National Bank (May 24, 1963, Document 18806108).

2. Date of erection: Building permit issued August 16, 1879.
3. Architect: William Le Baron Jenney (1832-1907).
4. Alterations and additions: The original building was five stories high. Two stories were added in 1888, Jenney and Otis, Architects. The two added stories match the original

ones in treatment, and the original cornice was removed and re-used [original drawings]. Most of the ground floor elevation has modern shop fronts, and the interiors have been entirely remodeled for office use.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Primary Sources: Original drawings of the Leiter Building, including 1879 building and 1888 additions, on microfilm, roll 9, frames 1-12, in the Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago.
2. Bibliography:
  - a. Condit, Carl W. The Rise of the Skyscraper. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952. pp. 39-40, 46, 112-13, 139, 245.
  - b. Randall, Frank A. History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949. pp. 13, 60, 88-89, 172, 174.
  - c. Tallmadge, Thomas E. Architecture in Old Chicago. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941. pp. 187-88.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Leiter I Building, very nearly a glass box, is an important early example of the development of a completely skeletal structural frame.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Rectangular, 102'-6-5/8" (east four bays) x 82'-8" (south three bays); bays are subdivided into three units.
2. Number of stories: 7 stories, graduated in height. First story 16'-6", second 14'-0", third 13'-0", fourth and fifth each 12'-6", sixth and seventh stories added later.
3. Foundations: Spread foundations.
4. Wall construction and structural system: The building nearly developed a full skeleton frame construction. The interior

floor and roof loads are supported on a system of cast iron columns with timber girders running east-west and wooden floor joists running north-south. Dimensions of the structural bays are 24'-6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 13'-2". Cast iron columns were set flat against the brick wall on the west and the piers on the east to receive the ends of the girders. Thus the brick piers that show on the east side are not part of the structural system. The piers on the south side, however, help support iron beams that receive the floor joists. The exterior surfaces are painted a light gray. Large flat decorative blocks with incised patterns mark the intersection of the brick piers and spandrels.

"The design live load was 250 pounds per square foot. Eight-inch by 12-inch cast-iron columns were set flat against the east and west walls and the piers to support the timber girders, which run east and west. One column at the stairway was set flush in the wall. The joists are 3-inch by 12-inch at 9-inch centers, running north and south. At the north party wall the joists are embedded in the wall. At the south wall the joists are supported on two 7-inch iron beams that bear on the brick piers and on the cast-iron mullions between the triple windows between the piers. The mullions are continuous columns from the foundations to the roof. Cast-iron lintels, bolted to the columns, support the brick spandrels. Had the wall columns been inserted in the piers and had three more columns been added, the construction would have been essentially skeleton construction."

Frank A. Randall, History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949), pp. 88-89.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Later additions; doors on ground floor are mostly modern entrances to shops.
- b. Windows and shutters: "In appearance the Letter Building is a series of slender, widely spaced piers and spandrels forming a continuous pattern from base to roof. Each of the large rectangular panels enframed by the brick work is filled by three windows extending from floor to ceiling and separated by cast-iron mullions, which are continuous from foundation to roof and have a bearing function. The wide openings of glass anticipate the huge 'Chicago windows' of the next decade." Carl W. Condit, The Rise of the Skyscraper (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 113. One-over-one-light double-hung wooden sash windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Flat.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Simple cornice of corbelled brick.

C. Description of Interior:

Floor plans: The interior was designed as a simple open space on each floor. A principal stairway was located at the southwest corner of the building, reached through the main entrance on the south side of the building; a second, rear stairway was located at the northeast corner. The interior has been remodeled, and only parts of the rear stairway survive.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The building is at the northwest corner of Monroe and Wells Streets, fur business streets in the downtown Chicago area. The main entrance faces south and the secondary entrance east, with an entrance to the ground floor store at the southeast corner. An alley is to the west of the building.

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National Park Service  
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