



New York Life Building

Address: 39 South LaSalle Street

Date: 1894

Architect: Jenney and Mundie

Style: Chicago School Skyscraper

CHRS

Rating: Orange

Threat: Owned by Chicago's wealthy and influential Pritzker family, the New York Life building continues to possess a high occupancy rate. However, the Pritzkers stated in 2000 that they are considering redeveloping the site, along with the parcel to the immediate north, to build a modern office tower. For a number of months, speculation existed that the new building would house the headquarters of the Pritzkers' business empire, which includes the familiar Hyatt Hotel chain.

In 2001, however, the Pritzkers and the Hyatt leadership stated that the site of the New York Life Building was no longer being considered for the new Hyatt offices. Nevertheless, no commitment was made toward preserving the New York Life Building. To our knowledge, the property is still considered to be available for demolition and redevelopment. No attempt has been made by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks to give the building landmark status.

Today, the fate of the building remains undecided. However, the people of Chicago and high-rise lovers around the world cannot afford to lose this important building, either to demolition or to unsympathetic repairs. It is imperative that the building be landmarked at the present time, while sensitive restoration remains a possibility.

Fulfillment of Landmark Criteria:

The New York Life Building meets a required number of the criteria established by the Chicago Landmarks Commission for preliminary landmark status.

Integrity: The exterior and interior of the New York Life Building are amazingly intact, considering the building's age. Certain absent details, notably the cornice, could be recreated as is being done presently on the Marquette Building a few blocks to the east.

1. **Significant Architect:** William LeBaron Jenney revolutionized urban downtown architecture with the development of the first skyscraper, the Home Insurance Building (Chicago, 1884, *demolished*).
2. **Significant Architecture:** With the demolition of the Home Insurance Building, it is the New York Life Building that gives Chicago—and the world—its closest link with the ground-breaking technology of Jenney's Home Insurance Building.
3. **Critical Part of City's Heritage:** The role of Chicago as the "insurance broker to the West" cannot be understated. This building, in its final stages of construction was a marvel to millions of visitors to the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, and it became instantly famous.
4. **Unique Visual Feature:** The early Prairie-themed detailing on the building anticipates the famous Prairie School of design, which developed in Chicago in the years following.