



The Sears Tower: The History of Chicago's Most Iconic Landmark

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures

*Includes accounts of the building's construction and history written by those who worked on it

*Includes a bibliography for further reading

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“Chicago is a city of skyscrapers. New York is not. New York is a city that's a huge rock that has been carved out to make streets. [Gordon] Bunshaft was always jealous when he came to Chicago because he could stand and see the buildings. In New York, you can't do that. You have to be miles away to see the buildings.” – Bruce Graham, architect

Walking around Chicago today, it's easy to forget about its past as a rural frontier, and that's due in no small part to the way Chicago responded to the Great Fire of 1871. Immediately after the fire, Chicago encouraged inhabitants and architects to build over the ruins, spurring creative architecture with elaborate designs, and architects descended upon the city for the opportunity to rebuild the area. Over the next few decades, Chicago had been rebuilt with the country's most modern architecture and monuments, and the Windy City's skyscrapers reached over 20 stories by the early 20th century, but it wouldn't take long for the city to turn its early skyscrapers into things of the past. Burnham's 22 story high Masonic Temple Building, once the tallest building in the world, was demolished in favor of buildings that were twice as tall.

The early skyscrapers that still stand look like antiques compared to Chicago's current skyline, because during the mid-20th century, architects built dozens of much taller buildings throughout Chicago, often constructing these enormous structures in less than a decade. In 1968, builders finished the John Hancock Center, the first building in Chicago to reach 100 stories, but Chicago's skyline gained its most iconic feature in 1973, the year the completed Sears Tower became the tallest building in the world.

Though it's technically named the Willis Tower today, Chicago's landmark is still best known as the Sears Tower, and Sears got a lot of bang for its buck. The Sears Tower only took two years to build at a cost of about \$150 million, and it is still the second tallest building in America, a fact Chicagoans sharply debate after the Sears Tower was judged to be shorter than New York City's new Freedom Tower. In 1969, Sears wanted to create a large office space for its employees in the city, and they commissioned the firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to design and build the structure. The firm conceived of the now famous design, in which the first 50 stories of the structure were connected by what are essentially nine separate tube shaped buildings. After the 50th story, seven of the nine tubes rise up to the 90th floor. From there, only two tubes rise to the building's 108th floor. This design gives the Sears Tower the appearance of a large building at ground level that gradually tapers off into a thinner rectangle at the top.

Naturally, the size and shape of the Sears Tower have made it an inviting target for daredevils who like to climb skyscrapers and other tall structures. In 1981, Dan Goodwin used suction cups to help him climb the building and avoid authorities who tried to stop him. For added effect, Goodwin was wearing a Spider-Man suit. Even more impressively, in 1999 Frenchman Alain Robert climbed the building with his bare hands and climbing shoes. Of course, people looking for a safer way to the top can ride elevators to an observation deck on the 103rd floor, and over a million people choose this option each year.

The Sears Tower: The History of Chicago's Most Iconic Landmark chronicles the construction and history of the Windy City's most famous building. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Sears Tower like never before, in no time at all.

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