

Rookery Building  
209 South La Salle Street  
(Southeast corner of  
La Salle and Adams Streets)  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1030

HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
31-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
801 - 19th Street, North West  
Washington, D. C. 20006

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## ROOKERY BUILDING

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ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
31-

Location: 209 South La Salle Street (southeast corner of La Salle and Adams Streets), Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: Edward C. Waller et al.

Present Occupant: Office tenants.

Present Use: Offices; part of the financial district of Chicago.

Statement of Significance: The Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks has cited it: "In recognition of its pioneering plan in providing shops and offices around a graceful semi-private square and the further development of the skeleton structural frame using cast iron columns, wrought iron spandrel beams and steel beams to support party walls and interior floors."

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners (chain of title): Legal description of the property: Lots 33 to 50 of Block 116, Subdivision of Block 116, School Section Addition to Chicago of Section 16-39-14.

Abstract of chain of title found in Book 467, p. 281, Cook County Recorder's Office: The property was first leased from the city of Chicago by Edward C. Waller for the Central Safety Deposit Company on December 4, 1885 (Documents 674255 and 674256). The property was leased for 99 years. The most recent entry in the Deed Book on January 14, 1960 again names Waller as grantee and the City of Chicago as grantor (Document 177564779).

The following description of the ownership of the property was taken from: "11 Story Office Building, the Rookery, Sold," Chicago Tribune, June 18, 1951.

"The La Salle Street property was purchased by the city of Chicago for \$8,750. A city hall was built around the reservoir and used until another city building was constructed on the site of the present city hall.

"In 1885 the land was leased from the city for 99 years by Edward C. Waller at a fixed rental of \$35,000 annually.

Waller assigned the lease to the Central Safety Deposit company, which completed the Rookery in 1888. The lease provides that the building shall be turned over to the city in 'good condition' May 1, 1985. . .

"The original stockholders included the architect, Norman B. Ream, W. E. Hale & Co., Owen F. Aldis, Edward C. Waller (who was secretary of the corporation from 1885 to 1931), and P. E. Shepard Brooks of Boston.

"Although it owns the land, the city had to pay taxes beginning in 1903 which amounted to \$20,836. Thus the city's income from its \$35,000 ground rental was cut to \$14,164."

The following was taken from Ernest Fuller, "Famous Chicago Buildings," Chicago Tribune, December 20, 1958. "Ownership has changed hands relatively few times. Title is still in the name of Central Safety Deposit Company, the corporation that erected the building. The Sudler firm has an ownership interest in the property. The land is leased from the city."

2. Date of erection: 1886-1888.
3. Architect: Burnham and Root.
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: The general contractor was the George A. Fuller Company. The Illinois Terra Cotta Lumber Company and the Dearborn Foundry Company supplied part of the building materials (Microfilm: Roll 27, Frame 8, Burnham Library). Ornamental iron was by the Hecla Iron Works of New York and was the largest contract of its kind up to that time (Ornamental Iron, November 1893, p. 97). The Chicago Terra Cotta Company fireproofed the building (Industrial Chicago, Vol. I, 1891, p. 403).
5. Notes on alterations and additions: The court lobby was remodeled by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1905. Wright removed most of John Root's original iron ornament and replaced it with simple geometric plans. The staircase was encased in white marble. Rectangular urns, also of marble, and rectangular light fixtures were also designed by Wright. Elaborate gilded arabesques cover many of the remodeled surfaces (Manson, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1958, p. 168). Additional remodeling was carried out in 1944. Plans were by Magnus Gunderson, mosaics by the Davis Mosaic Co., and all marble C. F. Italian (Microfilm: Roll 25, Burnham Library).

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The Rookery building is on the site of a former city water tank built in 1842. When the tank survived the 1871 fire, John Van Osdel designed a temporary city hall, two stories high, which was built around it. The tank was later converted to a reading room and became the first home of the Chicago Public Library (Chicago and Its Makers, 1929, p. 163; Fuller, Tribune, December 20, 1958).

The building received its name from the fact that many pigeons had made the water tank area their home. The story is as follows: "One day an irate citizen stormed into Mayor Joseph Nedill's office and protested against the pigeon population in the district. 'Why this building is nothing but a \_\_\_\_\_ rookery', he complained. The name stuck. Twenty years later, when the skyscraper was erected, it was formally given the name of the Rookery." (Daily News, April 30, 1955). The building was to have been named the Central Building, but popular opinion caused it to be named "The Rookery." (Ornamental Iron, 1893, p. 96).

Many noted persons and corporations have had their headquarters in The Rookery. The Corn Exchange Bank, the Illinois Trust and Savings Bank, and the Chicago Stock Exchange at one time were located there (News, July 9, 1948). Burnham and Root had their offices in the building and Frank Lloyd Wright was also associated with The Rookery. "His front office was briefly there in 1898-99. The building was long under the management of his patron, Edward Waller, and it housed the headquarters of William Winslow and the American Luxfer Prism Company." (Manson, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1958, p. 168).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary Sources:

Burnham, Daniel Hudson, 1846-1912, Diaries 1895-1910, 16 vols. In manuscript, Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Burnham, Daniel Hudson, 1846-1912, Letters, business and personal, 1890-1912, 21 vols., Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Renwick, Ralph, Rookery building letters concerning the Rookery building and the origin of skeleton construction, August 1948, March 1950, Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Rookery building. Ten sheets of architectural drawings by Burnham & Root. Gift of D. H. Burnham, Jr. to the Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago. (Also on Microfilm: Roll 27).

Rookery building, original drawings, Chicago, 1891, Microfilm: Roll 25, frames 1-19 and Roll 27, frames 1-36, Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

2. Bibliography:

Condit, Carl W., The Rise of the Skyscraper (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 77, 78, 83-84, 101. Photograph p. 35.

"Eleven Story Office Building, the Rookery, Sold," Chicago Tribune, June 18, 1951. Clippings in the Chicago Historical Society Library.

Engineering Record, November 3, 1888. Floor plan, framing plan, foundation plan, fireproofing details.

"Famed City Landmark Named for the Birds," Chicago Daily News, April 30, 1955. Clippings in the Chicago Historical Society Library.

Fuller, Ernest, "Famous Chicago Buildings," Chicago Tribune, December 20, 1958. Photograph. Clippings in the Chicago Historical Society Library.

Gilbert, Paul, and Bryson, Charles Lee, Chicago and Its Makers (Chicago: Felix Mendelsohn, Publisher, 1929), p. 163. Photographs pp. 174, 399.

Industrial Chicago, 2 volumes (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1891), Vol. 1, pp. 15, 188, 401. Photograph Vol. 2, p. 122.

"Loop Buildings Cited on Designs," Chicago Tribune, October 28, 1957. Clippings in the Chicago Historical Society Library. (Also mentions the Monadnock, Sears Roebuck & Co., the Auditorium, Carson Pirie Scott & Co., and the Reliance).

Manson, Grant Carpenter, Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910 (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1958), p. 168. Photograph of Wright's remodeling of the lobby.

Monroe, Harriet, John Wellborn Root (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1896), pp. 116, 139-140. Illustrations of the Rookery: pp. 38 (Main entrance), 41, 60 (Details), 63 (Building), 64 (Vestibule), 67 (Covered court), 95 (Capital).

Moore, Charles, Daniel H. Burnham, 2 volumes (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), Vol. 1, pp. 24, 26.

Orear, G. W., Commercial and Architectural Chicago (Chicago: Published by the author, 1887), p. 183. Perspective drawing.

"Pigeons can point with pride to Building they named," Chicago News, July 9, 1948. Clippings in the Chicago Historical Society Library.

"Pick 4 Loop Buildings as Landmarks . . ." Scrapbook of art and artists of Chicago and vicinity, 1958, pp. 99, 100, 102, Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Randall, Frank A., History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949), pp. 5, 18, 65, 93, 112, 152, 200, 224, bibliography p. 112.

Rebori, A. N., "The Work of Burnham & Root, D. H. Burnham - D. H. Burnham & Co. and Graham Burnham & Co.," Architectural Record, Vol. 38 (July 1915), p. 47. Photograph p. 42.

"Remodeled entrance for the Rookery building, Chicago; Frank Lloyd Wright, architect for remodeling," Inland Architect, Vol. 50 (September 1907), p. 36. Plates.

Tallmadge, Thomas E., Architecture in Old Chicago (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 145, 149, 156, 190, 198, 203, 204, 205, 208.

Van Osdel, John Mills, A Quarter Century of Chicago Architecture (Chicago: R. E. Swift & Company, 1895), p. 99. Photograph.

"Rookery building, Burnham & Root Office Library," Inland Architect, Vol. 12, No. 2 (September 1888). Plates and plan.

"Rookery Building," clippings in the Pamphlet File of the Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

"Rookery Building," Inland Architect, Vol. II, No. 8 (July 1888). Plates:  
Adams Street entrance, detail La Salle Street facade, La Salle Street entrance vestibule, La Salle Street entrance, and covered court.

"Rookery Building," The Graphic, January 11, 1888, pp. 277, 282. Perspective drawing.

"Rookery Building," The Graphic, March 22, 1890, p. 188. Photographs; interior views showing Central Safety Deposit vaults.

"The 'Rookery' building, Chicago," Architectural Record, Vol. 1, (January-March, 1892), pp. 271, 274. Exterior view and interior view of staircase.

"The Rookery building," Ornamental Iron, Vol. 1 (November, 1893), pp. 94-98; photographs of exterior and original interior finishings, pp. 94-98, plan-p. 96. An excellent early description of the building especially of the interior details.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Original plans, construction, etc.: The building has one basement and eleven stories, a height of 164 feet (Randall, 1949, p. 5). It is built on spread foundations employing beam and rail grillages (Randall, 1949, p. 112). The foundations were laid during the winter of 1885-86 under a special heated shed, an innovation for that time (Ornamental Iron, 1893, p. 95). The upper floors were constructed of cast-iron columns joined by wrought-iron spandrel beams, which was almost true skeletal construction. Granite columns were added to the structure on the lower floors (Condit, 1952, p. 83). The building originally had 550 office rooms and was the quarters for three banking institutions. It contained 4,765,500 cubic feet and cost \$1,500,000 in 1886.

"One of Burnham's ideas was installation of safe deposit boxes for rental by the public. At that time banks had vaults for their own use, but none for outsiders. This was the first setup of its kind in the country." (Daily News, April 30, 1955).

- B. The following description was taken from: "The Rookery building," Ornamental Iron, Vol. 1, November 1893, p. 96:

"The building is square in plan, covering the entire lot and eleven stories high, constructed of iron and steel covered with tiling and is fireproof. The exterior walls are of a dark brown brick and terra cotta detailed in East Indian style. The upper stories are lighted from a central court, sixty-two by seventy-one feet in the opening, built of glazed white terra cotta. An iron and glass roof covers the open court on the level of the second floor.

"Access to the upper floors is had by service of ten elevators for passengers and one for freight. An elaborate oriel staircase on the court back of the La Salle street entrance and a staircase from the Adams street entrance also give access to the upper stories . . .

"The corridors are floored and wainscoted in Italian marble. The wood finish throughout is antique oak . . ."

- C. The following description was taken from: Monroe, Harriet, John Wellborn Root (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1896), pp. 139-140.

"The Rookery stands upon a plot of ground nearly square, giving the designer the advantage of depth which the narrow lots of the Insurance Exchange and Phoenix denied him. Here there are eleven stories, and the material is brown brick, with a massive colonnade of granite at the basement. At the angles of piers the bricks are rounded, and there is much moulded brick and terra-cotta decoration suggestive of Arabic motive. Mr. Van Brunt objects to the equal value of horizontal and vertical divisions in this building, and finds in its adventurous detail 'an absence of subordination and repose'; and Root himself always doubted whether its wealth of ornament would endure the test of time . . . The effectiveness of one feature--the interior court with its audaciously planned stairway--has never been called in question."

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect  
National Park Service  
August 1963

Addendum to;  
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**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

PAGE 8

Addendum to:  
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Data pages 1 through 7 were previously transmitted to the Library of Congress. This is data page 8.

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One survey control contact print per plate; survey control information for each pair.

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|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-401L * | NW CORNER FROM WEST--LEVEL    |
| LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-401R   | NW CORNER FROM WEST--LEVEL    |
|                            | Left and right overlap: 95%   |
| LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-402L * | NW CORNER FROM WEST--INCLINED |
| LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-402R   | NW CORNER FROM WEST--INCLINED |
|                            | Left and right overlap: 95%   |

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Data (Page 9)

LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-403L *	CENTRAL BAY, WEST ELEVATION--LEVEL
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-403R	CENTRAL BAY, WEST ELEVATION--LEVEL
	Left and right overlap: 80%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-404L *	CENTRAL BAY, WEST ELEVATION--INCLINED
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-404R	CENTRAL BAY, WEST ELEVATION--INCLINED
	Left and right overlap: 75%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-405L *	WEST ELEVATION, SOUTH BAYS--LEVEL
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-405R	WEST ELEVATION, SOUTH BAYS--LEVEL
	Left and right overlap: 80%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-406L *	WEST ELEVATION, SW CORNER--INCLINED
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-406R	WEST ELEVATION, SW CORNER--INCLINED
	Left and right overlap: 80%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-407L *	WEST ELEVATION, FROM SOUTH--LEVEL
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-407R	WEST ELEVATION, FROM SOUTH--LEVEL
	Left and right overlap: 95%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-408L *	WEST ELEVATION, FROM SOUTH--INCLINED
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-408R	WEST ELEVATION, FROM SOUTH--INCLINED
	Left and right overlap: 95%

LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-409L *	SW CORNER--INCLINED 12 DEGREES
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-409R	SW CORNER--INCLINED 12 DEGREES
	Left and right overlap: 90%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-410L *	SW CORNER--INCLINED 26 DEGREES
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-410R	SW CORNER--INCLINED 26 DEGREES
	Left and right overlap: 95%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-411L *	NW CORNER, NORTH ELEVATION--LEVEL
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-411R	NW CORNER, NORTH ELEVATION--LEVEL
	Left and right overlap: 90%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-412L *	NW CORNER, NORTH ELEVATION--INCLINED
LC-HABS-GS05-T-4210-412R	NW CORNER, NORTH ELEVATION--INCLINED
	Left and right overlap: 90%

PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

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**ROOKERY BUILDING**  
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**Data (Page 11)**

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