

THE AMERICAN SKYSCRAPER

More than any other phenomenon, the skyscraper has determined the character of the American city, altering its physicality and land use patterns; prompting design, technological, and infrastructure developments; creating internal work environments; and redefining boundaries and expectations of individuals and groups defined by gender, class, and ethnicity. This volume examines the various dimensions of the skyscraper in its American urban context. Focusing on the major skyscraper cities of New York and Chicago between 1870 and 1960, the studies in this volume address many of the major aspects of the skyscraper through a diversity of disciplines, including planning and public policy, art and architectural history, labor and business history, and American studies. The result is a kaleidoscopic view of the skyscraper, a building type whose existence as object and icon is inextricably linked to the city itself.

Roberta Moudry is a historian of American architecture and urbanism. A recipient of support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Getty Grant Program, and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, she has taught in the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning at Cornell University and is the author of the forthcoming *Met Life's Metropolis*.

Cambridge University Press
0521624215 - The American Skyscraper: Cultural Histories
Edited by Roberta Moudry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)



Frontispiece “New York Sky Line.” Reprinted with permission of the Keystone–Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside.

**THE
AMERICAN
SKYSCRAPER**
Cultural Histories

Edited by
Roberta Moudry



**CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Cambridge University Press
0521624215 - The American Skyscraper: Cultural Histories
Edited by Roberta Moudry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521624213

© Cambridge University Press 2005

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

The American skyscraper : cultural histories / edited by Roberta Moudry.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-62421-5 (hard cover)

1. Skyscrapers – United States. 2. Skyscrapers – New York (State) – New York. 3. Skyscrapers – Illinois – Chicago. I. Moudry, Roberta. II. Title. NA6232.A44 2005

720'.483'0973 – dc22

2004024031

ISBN-13 978-0-521-62421-3 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-62421-5 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this book and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
Introduction	1
<i>Roberta Moudry</i>	
PART ONE. MAKERS AND USERS	
1 The Beaux-Arts Architect and the Skyscraper: Cass Gilbert, the Professional Engineer, and the Rationalization of Construction in Chicago and New York	19
<i>Gail Fenske</i>	
2 Law Makes Order: The Search for Ensemble in the Skyscraper City, 1890–1930	38
<i>Keith D. Revell</i>	
3 The Female “Souls of the Skyscraper”	63
<i>Lisa M. Fine</i>	
PART TWO. IN THE IMAGE OF THE CLIENT	
4 Type and Building Type: Newspaper/Office Buildings in Nineteenth-Century New York	85
<i>Lee E. Gray</i>	
5 Chicago’s Fraternity Temples: The Origins of Skyscraper Rhetoric and the First of the World’s Tallest Office Buildings	98
<i>Edward W. Wolner</i>	
6 The Corporate and the Civic: Metropolitan Life’s Home Office Building	120
<i>Roberta Moudry</i>	
7 The Chicago Tribune Tower Competition: Publicity Imagines Community	147
<i>Katherine Solomonson</i>	

vi	Contents
PART THREE. URBAN CONTEXTS	
8 The Heights and Depths of Urbanism: Fifth Avenue and the Creative Destruction of Manhattan <i>Max Page</i>	165
9 Built Languages of Class: Skyscrapers and Labor Protest in Victorian Public Space <i>Sarah Watts</i>	185
10 The Skyscraper Ensemble in Its Urban Context: Rockefeller Center <i>Carol Herselle Krinsky</i>	201
PART FOUR. POPULAR CULTURE	
11 The Shadow of the Skyscraper: Urban Photography and Metropolitan Irrationalism in the Stieglitz Circle <i>Antonello Frongia</i>	217
12 The Skyscraper, Gender, and Mental Life: Sophie Treadwell's Play <i>Machinal</i> of 1928 <i>Merrill Schleier</i>	234
13 The Sublime and the Skyline: The New York Skyscraper <i>David E. Nye</i>	255
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	271
<i>Index</i>	275

List of Illustrations

Frontispiece. “New York Sky Line.”

1	“New York City from Brooklyn Bridge.”	2
2	New York skyscrapers souvenir folder.	3
3	“Building one of New York’s greatest skyscrapers.”	11
4	Flatiron Building under construction.	13
5	East Twenty-fourth Street #1, Entrance Lobby, Cass Gilbert’s Office, ca. 1912.	20
6	East Twenty-fourth Street #1, Drafting Room, Cass Gilbert’s Office, ca. 1912.	21
7	The Brazer Building, Boston, 1894–97.	23
9	Broadway Chambers Building, New York, under construction, 1899–1900.	28
10	West Street Building, New York, 1905–07.	29
	Woolworth Building, New York, with diagram of the tower wind bracing, 1911.	31
11	Woolworth Building, New York, under construction, 1911–13.	33
12	View of the Court of Honor, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.	40
13	Singer Building, City Investing Building, and Hudson Terminal Building with Trinity Church steeple, New York, between 1904 and 1910.	41
14	Downtown Baltimore after the fire of 1904.	45
15	“Towers” figure from New York City’s 1916 zoning report.	49
16	View from the Empire State Building to Chrysler Building and Queensboro Bridge, 1932.	51
17	Hugh Ferriss. “An Imaginary Metropolis.”	53
18	Circuit Supply Co., Chicago, 1910.	67
19	Number and Percentage of Male and Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870–1930.	69
20	“How would you like my job?” ca. 1909.	71
21	Auditor’s office, Bowman Dairy Co., 1912.	75
22	Male office space, Pullman Co., Chicago, 1916.	76
23	Female office space, Pullman Co., Chicago, 1916.	77
24	New York Times Building, 1857–58.	89
25	New York Herald Building, 1865–67.	90
26	New Yorker Staats-Zeitung Building, 1872–73.	91
27	New York Tribune Building, Phase One, 1873–75.	93
28	New York Tribune Building, 1875.	95
29	Newspaper Row, New York, ca. 1900.	96

30	Masonic Temple, Chicago, 1890–92.	99
31	Roof Garden–Observatory, Masonic Temple, 1890–92.	100
32	Lodge Rooms and Parlors, Masonic Temple, ca. 1892.	103
33	Proposed Odd Fellows’ Fraternity Temple, 1891.	105
34	Lobby, Masonic Temple, 1890–92.	107
35	Floor plans, second through ninth, Masonic Temple, 1890–92.	109
36	“A City Under One Roof – The Masonic Temple, Chicago.”	110
37	Stairway and Galleries, Masonic Temple, 1890–92.	111
38	Metropolitan Life Home Office, ca. 1898.	123
39	Metropolitan Life Home Office, ca. 1905.	125
40	The Metropolitan Life Tower and Madison Square, ca. 1910.	126
41	“A New York Campanile 700 Feet High.” Metropolitan Life Tower.	127
42	“A War Upon Consumption.” Cover, health booklet, 1909.	129
43	Large workroom, Metropolitan Life Home Office, ca. 1910.	133
44	Women and men on the roof of the Home Office, ca. 1910.	136
45	The proposed 100-story North Building, 1929.	137
46	The North Building as completed, 1950.	139
47	Tribune Tower in 1925.	149
48	Advertisement for the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition.	151
49	Proposal for North Michigan Avenue, 1918.	153
50	Proposed models for Tribune Company’s building.	155
51	Readers’ suggestions for the design of Tribune Company’s building.	157
52	North Michigan Avenue Bridge Plaza, with the Wrigley Building and Tribune Tower, ca. 1933.	159
53	Berenice Abbott. <i>South and DePeyster Streets</i> , November 26, 1935.	167
54	Fifth Avenue’s transformation.	169
55	Fifth Avenue north from Fifty-first Street, New York.	171
56	Vanderbilt House, Plaza Hotel, and entrance to Central Park, New York.	173
57	Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, New York, between 1900 and 1910.	177
58	Advertisement for the Fifth Avenue Coach Co.	179
59	Madison Square Garden, 1908.	187
60	Official Program, Paterson Strike Pageant, 1913.	188
61	Madison Square Garden Tower with sign.	189
62	Truckloads of strikers’ children, sent to New York City.	193
63	The White Star Liner <i>Olympic</i> compared with the Metropolitan Life Tower and the Woolworth Building.	197
64	Rockefeller Center, air view looking west, ca. 1974.	203
65	Rockefeller Center, plan of buildings and underground concourse since 1974.	207
66	Rockefeller Center, three buildings completed in 1973.	210
67	Rockefeller Center, mini-park west of McGraw-Hill Building.	211
68	Alvin Langdon Coburn. <i>The Octopus</i> , 1912.	219
69	Lewis W. Hine. <i>View of Empire State Building from Subway</i> , 1930–31.	220

List of Illustrations

ix

70	Flatiron Building, 1903.	221
71	Fuller Building (Flatiron), ca. 1903.	222
72	Alvin Langdon Coburn. <i>The Flat Iron Building, Evening</i> , 1912.	223
73	Alfred Stieglitz. <i>The Flat Iron – New York</i> , 1902.	225
74	Richard Hoe Lawrence. <i>Gotham Court</i> , ca. 1890.	227
75	Alfred Stieglitz. <i>Old and New New York</i> , 1910.	229
76	“At Seven” (New York production title: “At Home”) scene set for 1934 Russian production of <i>Machinal</i> .	236
77	“Maternity” (New York production title: “Maternal”) scene set for 1934 Russian production of <i>Machinal</i> .	237
78	Husband’s costume, sketch for 1934 Russian production of <i>Machinal</i> .	242
79	“Domestic Hearth” (New York production title: “At Home”) scene set for 1934 Russian production of <i>Machinal</i> .	243
80	“Prohibited.” Photograph of Clark Gable and Zita Johann from the 1928 New York production of <i>Machinal</i> .	245
81	“At Court” (New York production title: “The Law”) scene set for 1934 Russian production of <i>Machinal</i> .	246
82	“Prison” (New York production title: “A Machine”) scene set for 1934 Russian production of <i>Machinal</i> .	247
83	“Inspiring Heights of World’s Greatest Skyscraper – Empire State Building from Air, New York.” ca. 1931.	257
84	New York City skyline from New Jersey, 1908.	259
85	Night Scene, Southeast from 515 Madison Avenue, 1937.	261
86	From the Flatiron Building looking northeast past Madison Square Garden to Queensboro Bridge, New York.	262
87	“Up Broadway and Fifth Avenue from Flat Iron Building, New York.”	263
88	View of Broadway south from the Woolworth Building, ca. 1913.	265
89	Looking east from the Singer Tower.	267

List of Contributors

Gail Fenske is an architect, historian, and Professor of Architecture in the School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation at Roger Williams University. She has held visiting appointments at Cornell University and MIT. She has written numerous essays on the skyscraper, including “Corporate Identity and the New York Office Building, 1895–1915,” co-authored with Deryck Holdsworth in *The Landscape of Modernity*, edited by David Ward and Olivier Zunz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); “Cass Gilbert’s Skyscrapers in New York: The Twentieth-Century City and the Urban Picturesque,” in *Inventing the Skyline*, edited by Margaret Heilbrun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and “The Image of the City: Cass Gilbert’s Woolworth Building and the Creation of the New York Skyline,” in *Cass Gilbert, Life and Work*, edited by Barbara S. Christen and Steve Flanders (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

Lisa M. Fine is Associate Professor of History and Graduate Chair at Michigan State University. She is the author of *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago 1870–1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); co-editor with Mary Anderson, Kathleen Geissler, and Joyce R. Ladenson of *Doing Feminism: Teaching and Research in the Academy* (Michigan State University Press, 1997) and *The Story of Reo Joe: Work, Kin, and Community in Autotown, U.S.A.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

Antonello Frongia teaches history of photography and urbanism at the University of Trieste and the University of Venice in Italy. He is the author of *L’occhio del fotografo e l’agenda del planner. Studio su Jacob A. Riis* (*The Photographer’s Eye and the Planner’s Agenda. A Study*

of *Jacob A. Riis*) (Venice: Iuav/Toletta, 2000), and is completing a book entitled *The Shadow of the Skyscraper: Photography and Urban Culture in America, 1890–1938*.

Lee E. Gray is Associate Dean of the College of Architecture at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. He received his Ph.D. in architectural history from Cornell University and his Master's degree in architectural history from the University of Virginia. He is the author of *From Ascending Rooms to Express Elevators: A History of the Passenger Elevator in the 19th Century* (Elevator World, Inc., 2002) and he is currently working on a history of vertical transportation in the twentieth century.

Carol Herselle Krinsky is Professor of Fine Arts at New York University. She is the author of five books, including *Rockefeller Center* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). She has written many articles and book chapters on architecture of various periods as well as on studies of medieval and Renaissance art. A past president of the Society of Architectural Historians and of COPAR (Cooperative Preservation of Architectural Records), she has lectured widely around the United States, in Europe, and in China.

Roberta Moudry is an architectural and urban historian. She has taught architectural and urban history at Cornell University, and has received research grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Getty Grant Program, the Architectural History Foundation, and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.

David E. Nye is Professor of History at Warwick University, Coventry, England. He has lectured throughout Europe on American history and culture and has been a visiting scholar at Harvard, MIT, the Netherlands Institute for

Advance Study, Leeds, Cambridge, and most recently the University of Notre Dame. The sixteen books he has edited or written include *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1990), which won the Dexter Prize and the Abel Wolman Award; *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1994); and his most recent book, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 2003).

Max Page is Associate Professor of Architecture and History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He wrote *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), which won the Spiro Kostof Award of the Society of Architectural Historians. He is also the co-editor (with Steven Conn) of *Building the Nation: Americans Write Their Architecture, Their Cities, and Their Environment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) and the co-editor (with Randall Mason) of *Giving Preservation a History* (London: Routledge, 2003). In 2003, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Keith D. Revell is Associate Professor of Public Administration at Florida International University in Miami. He received his Ph.D. in American History from the University of Virginia. He is the author of *Building Gotham: Civic Culture and Public Policy in New York City, 1898–1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), which received the Urban History Association's 2003 Award for the best book on North American urban history, and the Public Works Historical Society's 2003 Abel Wolman Award for the best new book on public works history. His work has also appeared in *Studies in American Political Development*, the *Journal of Policy History*, and the *Journal of Urban Affairs*. His current research

List of Contributors

xiii

focuses on the redevelopment of South Beach and on efforts to regulate the market economy in the twentieth century.

Merrill Schleier is Professor of Art History at the University of the Pacific. She is the author of *The Skyscraper in American Art, 1890–1931* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990); “Lewis Mumford’s Classed and Gendered Modernism,” *Architectural Theory Review* 3 (Nov. 1998):1–16; “Ayn Rand and King Vidor’s *The Fountainhead*: Architectural Modernism, the Gendered Body and Political Ideology,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61 (Sept. 2002):310–322. Her book *Skyscrapers/Gender/Film*, which was awarded a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, is forthcoming from University of Minnesota Press in 2005.

Katherine Solomonson is Associate Professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of Minnesota, where she also holds positions in the departments of American Studies, Art History, Cultural Studies, and Comparative Literature. She has worked with the Design Center for American Urban

Landscape on public housing and on postwar suburbia, including the national conference, “Reframing the 1945–65 Suburb.” Her publications include *The Chicago Tribune Tower Competition: Skyscraper Design and Cultural Change in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), which received the 2003 Alice Davis Hitchcock Award from the Society of Architectural Historians.

Sarah Watts is Professor of History at Wake Forest University. She is the author of *Order Against Chaos: Business Culture and Labor Ideology, 1880–1920* (New York: Greenwood, 1990) and *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Edward W. Wolner is Associate Professor of Architectural History and the Humanities, Ball State University. He has received research grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, the Wolfsonian/FIU, and the John Nicholas Brown Center for the Study of American Civilization at Brown University.

Acknowledgments

I extend a public and profound thanks to the authors of this anthology for their patience and the intellectual work that they have shared in conversations, text, and images. Beyond the texts you read here, the authors have contributed to discussions within various disciplinary and cross-disciplinary constituencies that began prior to the writing and compiling of this anthology. Groups of authors presented versions of the work contained here in a panel discussion, “The Skyscraper, the City and Urban Culture: Architecture and the Negotiation of Public/Private Urban Space,” at the 1997 American Studies Association/Canadian Association for American Studies Annual Meeting; at a roundtable entitled “The Skyscraper and Its Cultural Context” at the 1997 Society of Architectural Historians Annual Meeting; and at the Gotham History Festival in October 2001. These interactions and the public commentaries that emerged were valuable to the development of these essays and their relationship to each other. Over an extended period, authors have shared ideas, sources, and images with each other: together they have shaped a virtual conversation marked by respectful debate, collegiality, and exciting discoveries. In this manner, the work herein has lived two lives, one as the process and one as the final product, which as a whole, is greater than the sum of its parts.

In addition, I would like to thank other individuals who lent support and criticism in the development and completion of this project: Edward K. Muller, Lauren O’Connell, Christian Otto, Dell Upton, and Carol Willis. I thank Stuart Blumin and John W. Reps for broadening my perspectives on the built environment. I would also like to acknowledge the influence of the late Theodore M. Brown. Our conversations

Cambridge University Press
0521624215 - The American Skyscraper: Cultural Histories
Edited by Roberta Moudry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xvi

Acknowledgments

about the skyscraper and modernism remain with me.

I thank the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts for its generous

support of the visual materials. Beatrice Rehl, Fine Arts Editor at Cambridge University Press, has been a steady supporter, and most essentially, a perceptive and critical guide.