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THE Marquette Building

140 SOUTH DEARBORN STREET
CHICAGO

A QUEST FOR HEIGHT

At the turn of the century, Chicago was a center for innovative architecture. Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Holabird & Roche were just a few of the architects who gave rise to the “Chicago School of Architecture.” It was their visionary work that developed and refined the modern skyscraper.

Unfortunately, many of the buildings from that era are lost, victims of changing tastes, technology, and priorities. Scattered throughout the city, however, are a few remaining symbols of Chicago’s golden age of architecture. One of the best examples is the landmark Marquette Building.

This 16-story masterpiece was funded by Shepherd and Peter Brooks, designed by Holabird & Roche, and built by the George A. Fuller Company in 1894. Owen Aldis managed all aspects of planning and construction.

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE



Prior to 1894, Owen Aldis had completed an amateur translation of Father Jacques Marquette’s journals, and it is assumed that these efforts inspired the building’s name. Marquette was a Jesuit missionary who explored the region with Louis Jolliet between 1674 and 1675. Given the attention and resources dedicated to the art of the Marquette Building, it is clear that Aldis wanted to cultivate an appreciation of this important history.

Marquette’s travels through the New World and his exploration of unknown territories are symbolic of the courage and bold spirit of our earliest pioneers. In much the same way, the Marquette Building’s innovative style—a departure from conventional thinking—celebrates that pioneering spirit.

ABOUT THE JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

The MacArthur Foundation, which owns the Marquette Building, supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology is affecting children and society. More information is available at www.macfound.org.

Learn more about the historic Marquette Building by visiting the free exhibit located in the arcade just beyond the building’s lobby.

MacArthur Foundation

140 South Dearborn Street, Suite 1200
Chicago, Illinois 60603-5285
Phone: (312) 726-8000
Fax: (312) 920-6258
E-mail: 4answers@macfound.org
TDD: (312) 920-6285

www.macfound.org



Completed in 1895, this landmark building is a work of art that honors Chicago’s history and recalls the city’s architectural heritage.

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE PERFECTED

The Marquette Building is a steel-frame skyscraper, a marvel of its time. Previously, masonry walls bore a building's weight—the higher the building, the thicker the wall. Now, the glass, brick, and terra cotta “hung” onto the steel skeleton like a curtain, as the columns distributed the weight across the foundation. Such new skyscrapers weighed less than their masonry counterparts, so the sky was literally the limit.

The Marquette Building is also an example of the type of commercial architecture that developed in the 1880s and 1890s and was later dubbed “the Chicago School.” The first trait of the Chicago School was the expression of the steel frame that manifested on a structure's exterior. The frame—or skeleton—was clad in terra cotta to make it fireproof. The exterior of the building was enclosed in brick and terra cotta, creating a “skin” of glass and masonry. Windows filled the large spaces between the frame, and masonry piers and spandrels accented the hidden steel structure.

For the first time, architects had to consider what a tall building should look like. So the second feature of the Chicago School was the division of the façade into three distinct parts, emphasizing the vertical. The lower section is the weighty base. The middle section is the shaft with long vertical lines drawing the eye to the capital, the top section. The capital—or cornice—usually featured a classical decorative scheme. The Marquette Building's capital includes two small cornices on the 15th and 16th floors and the large cornice atop the 17th floor.

The final common characteristic is the Chicago window. With this element, form followed function by allowing lots of light and air into a building. A typical Chicago window has three parts. Smaller double-hung sash windows flank a large central fixed pane. On the Marquette Building, the central window is divided. One explanation could be that the Brooks brothers balked at the cost for large plate glass, but it also allowed for interior office space to be divided more easily.



HIGH ART FOR A TALL BUILDING

No expense was spared in the creation of a decorative scheme that honored Chicago's early history, and some of the nation's most celebrated artists were recruited for the project.

Above the exterior doors, Herman MacNeil designed four bronze panels that capture Father Marquette and Louis Jolliet's journey: launching their canoes, meeting the Michigamea Indians, arriving at the Chicago River, and interring Marquette's body.

Edward Kemeys sculpted all but two of the bronze busts above the elevators on the first and second floors of the lobby, as well as the calumets and panther heads on the entry doors. The busts honor members of Marquette and Jolliet's expedition and important Indian chiefs of the region. Amy Aldis Bradley sculpted the busts of Jolliet and Marquette.

The rotunda mosaic was designed by J. A. Holzer of the Tiffany Company. These exquisitely detailed artworks convey the story of the explorers' journey and Marquette's untimely death. Medallions, trophies, and characters represent period costume, coats of arms, weapons, and historic icons.

SAVING A LANDMARK

The Marquette Building is owned by and serves as global headquarters of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, one of the nation's largest private philanthropies. The Foundation has a long relationship with the building it calls home.

In 1938, John D. MacArthur purchased a failing insurance company, Banker's Life and Casualty Company, which had its offices in the building. In the following decades, changing tastes and severe deterioration caused many people to question the old skyscraper's value. In 1975, however, two important decisions ensured its survival. The building was granted landmark status by the City of Chicago, saving it from demolition, and Banker's Life foreclosed on the building's owners and began a \$17 million renovation.

In 2001, the MacArthur Foundation launched an extensive, multi-year restoration program. The original terra cotta cornice, a crucial component in the initial design, was removed in the 1950s. It was eight feet tall and extended more than six feet over the sidewalk. The new cornice matches the original in size, ornament, and color. It is made of glass fiber-reinforced concrete, similar in appearance to terra cotta.

On the Marquette Building's façade, masonry repairs to the terra cotta and brick were made using a lime putty mortar similar to the type used in 1894. More than 2,500 pieces of terra cotta were fabricated and installed to replace damaged, missing, or mismatched replacement pieces. A comprehensive cleaning of the façade was required so that the restoration architects could correctly match the original color.

The building's double-hung windows were removed and restored to preserve and recycle the original wood and glass. Using a microscopic analysis process, the team was able to determine the original paint shade used on window frames.

Today, the Marquette Building's prominence is not just a shadow of the past. The building remains an icon of Chicago's history, culture, and future.