

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Reliance Building

AND/OR COMMON

Reliance Building

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 32 North State Street

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

7th

STATE

Illinois

CODE

COUNTY

Cook

CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME (See Continuation Sheet)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, Cook County Recorder of Deeds  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

County Building

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

STATE

Illinois

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

September 1963

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

National Park Service, Department of the Interior

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.



# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The original building on this site survived the 1871 fire although one-third of the building was destroyed. The building was purchased by William E. Hale in 1882 from the First National Bank of Chicago. Root began plans for a 16 story building in 1890. The bank relocated from the first floor in 1890 but leases on the four floors above ran until 1894. Osmund Overby in his HABS report (1963) gives a vivid description of the unusual way the Reliance went up--"As a result, work was begun on the ground floor and foundations in 1890 while the upper stories and their tenants were held up by jack screws. In 1894, these were demolished and thirteen stories of steel construction were added to the completed ground floor without disturbing its tenant. It took less than two days to erect each story. The building was completely closed in on November 8, 1894, and was due to be occupied January 1, 1895. From 1890 to 1894 Root's original plans had been changed by Atwood so that the resulting upper stories are of cream-white terra cotta while the original first story was of polished Scotch granite."

The building is rectangular: 55 feet 10 inches on the State Street side and 84 feet 10 inches on the Washington Street side. It rises 15 stories to 200 feet in height. The base is a spread foundation with beam and rail grillage. The construction is iron-skeleton with irregular bay spacing with non-bearing masonry walls on south and west sides. The ground floor contained large areas of glass framed in granite--above there is open grill work of windows framed in glazed white terra cotta. This terra cotta cladding was made in the Gothic mode with quatrefoils, cusps, etc. This tile work sheathing and the windows enclosed the structural frame producing a "curtain wall" building. The roof is flat but the original ornamental cornice is gone. It was called a "porcelain tower" by contemporary critic; the tiles were made by the North Western Terra Cotta Company. The ornamental iron and elevators were made by the Winslow Brothers. (Some of the iron work and polished granite have been removed--probably when the building was sold in 1923 or later.) The cornice was removed after 1948.

In spite of the alterations on the interior and the intrusive shop windows on street level the Reliance Building remains one of the classic structure. in the evolution of 20th century architecture.

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# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES 1890-1895

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Burnham and Root, D. H.  
Burnham and Company

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Reliance Building is one of the key monuments in the development of modern architecture. The "Chicago School" or style, grew as the result of the building boom following the fire of 1871 and reached its zenith in the 1890's--the Reliance is a simple, honest expression of these functional commercial structures. Carl Condit has written of this early skyscraper--"If any work of structural art in the Nineteenth Century anticipated the future, it is this one. The building is the triumph of the structuralist and functionalist approach of the "Chicago School."<sup>1</sup>

This building is a refined version of an earlier "Chicago" type, Holabird and Roche's Tacoma Building, constructed in 1887 (demolished 1929). In the Tacoma all windows in the bays were double hung and remained isolated design elements--Reliance has bays almost entirely filled in with glass; "Chicago windows" of a large fixed central pane framed by narrow double-hung windows that open, form bands of glass one above the other that become the body of the building itself.

"The Reliance is not, like the Crystal Palace, a passing sensation produced for a exposition. It is a utilitarian structure commissioned as an office building, and it has actively used as such since its completion..... In its grace and airiness, in the purity and exactitude of its proportions and details, in the brilliant perfection of its transparent elevations, it stands today as an exciting exhibition of the potential kinesthetic expressiveness of the structural art. Although it is outrageously disfigured by signs and by a "modernized" base, the essential beauty of this slim glass tower still reveals that it has its place....as a witness to the best of the spirit of the nineteenth century."<sup>2</sup>

Begun in 1890 as a remodelling of an earlier structure by John Root of the Firm of Burnham and Root, only two stories had been completed when Root died in 1891. Revised plans for the upper floors were done in 1894 by Charles A. Atwood, chief designer for D. H. Burnham and Company.

<sup>1</sup>Condit, Carl, The Chicago School of Architecture, University of Chicago Press, 1964.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid p. 111.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 1 of Assessor's Resubdivision of Sub-lots 1 to 5 of Assessor's Division of Lots 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Block 58.

Original Town Section 9, township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolina Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

July 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street N.W.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Reliance Building, Ill.

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 4

PAGE 1

Fee: Trustees of Central States, S.E. & S.W. Areas  
Health, Welfare and Pension Fund  
Mr. Francis J. Murtha  
8550 Bryn Mawr Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Lease: Reliance Associates Inc.  
Mr. Joseph G. Abramson  
122 East 42nd Street  
New York, New York

Sub-Lease: State Street Properties Inc.  
Mr. Sam Karoll  
32 N. State Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Trust No. 20550  
LaSalle National Bank  
Mr. William B. Higginbotham  
Vice President  
135 S. LaSalle Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60603

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The use of terra cotta cladding was a great innovation, a building could be kept clean and it was light. Louis Sullivan was to use it a few years later on the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building and the Guaranty Building in Buffalo, New York. The system of steel framing also provided for an unusual system of wind bracing, the construction schedule for the top ten stories was a remarkable 15 days (July 16 to August 1, 1895) and this building also stands as a milestone of the functionalist group of the Chicago School that strove for sheer, dematerialized uncluttered, high-rise structures. The Reliance is a direct forerunner of the work of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier.

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(Continued)

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PAGE 2

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