

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**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

Leiter II Building

AND/OR COMMON

Sears, Roebuck and Company

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Northeast corner of South State Street and East Congress St

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

___ VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

7th

STATE

Illinois

CODE

COUNTY

Cook

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

___DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

___STRUCTURE

___SITE

___OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

___PUBLIC

PRIVATE

___BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

___IN PROCESS

___BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

___UNOCCUPIED

___WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

___YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

___NO

PRESENT USE

___AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

___EDUCATIONAL

___ENTERTAINMENT

___GOVERNMENT

___INDUSTRIAL

___MILITARY

___MUSEUM

___PARK

___PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___RELIGIOUS

___SCIENTIFIC

___TRANSPORTATION

___OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. Dean A. Swift, President (312-875-2500)

STREET & NUMBER

Sears, Roebuck and Company, Sears Tower

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Illinois 60680

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Cook County Recorder's Office

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

STATE

Illinois

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey, OAHP, National Park Service, Dept. of Interior

DATE

FEDERAL ___STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The dimensions of the building were stupendous for the period. It is 144 feet deep on Van Buren and Congress and 402 feet long on State Street. It is 132 feet high, eight stories in height, each floor had 16 foot ceilings when constructed it was one of the largest buildings in the world in floor area and cubic volume.

There are no bearing walls, all the weight of the floors and walls are carried by fireproofed metal columns to spread foundations of beam and rail grillages and concrete. The floors were left open to be subdivided by tenants. The nine-bay west front (143 feet, 9 inches) and the three bay south and north flanks (133 feet, 13-1/4 inches) are light gray Maine granite divided by Romanesque colonettes filled with large panes of plate glass. The windows are one-over-one light double-hung sash, the floors vaulted tile. The roof is flat with a very simple, shallow cornice below. The interiors have been extensively remodeled and in 1940, caissons to hardpan were built under the west wall prior to construction of the State Street Subway.

"The building is of straight warehouse construction. The interior at any point reveals a great sweep of open space divided into broad avenues marked off by ranks of high, slender columns. No other department store can quite match the Sears Roebuck in this respect."¹

Leiter II honestly and clearly states its "cellular" construction--a strong testimony in the union of engineering and art.

¹Condit, Carl; The Rise of the Skyscraper, University of Chicago Press, 1952; page 135.

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1889-1891 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Major William Le Baron Jenny (1832-1907)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The second Leiter building was a proto-skyscraper that represents the highest achievement of William Le Baron Jenny. His first triumph was the Home Insurance Company Building of 1884-1885. (demolished 1931). This earlier structure evolved with the help of Jenny's engineering assistant, George B. Whitney, and was a triumph in large scale urban construction utilizing the new building materials and techniques. What Carl Condit called "the major step in the conversion of a building from a crustacean with its armor of stone to a vertebrate, clothed only in a light skin."² Jenny's engineering skills earned him a great reputation but the ornament and detailing was derivative until he designed the Leiter II which demonstrated his ability to combine the structural with the aesthetic.

Leiter II was originally built for Seigel, Cooper and Company but was not occupied by them for more than seven years. Levi Z. Leiter was originally in partnership with Marshall Field and the Leiter name can still be seen on the State Street facade. The present occupants are the home office of the firm founded in 1886 by Alvah Roebuck and Richard Sears. A contemporary publication of 1891 (Industrial Chicago) the building is discussed: "It has been constructed with the same science and all the careful inspection and superintendence that would be used in the construction of a steel railway bridge of the first order [the Eads bridge had impressed Chicago architects]... designed for space, light, ventilation and security, the Leiter Building meets the object sought in every particular.... A giant structure.... healthy to look at, lightsome and airy while substantial, was added to the great houses of a great city.... A commercial pile in a style undreamed of when Buonarotti erected the greatest temple of Christianity."

For the first time, in this building, the steel and wrought-iron skeleton were the structural as well as the architectonic elements that produced a new fully developed and logical structure. "The interior frame furnishes

² Condit, Carl; The Chicago School of Architecture; The University of Chicago Press 1964; page 83.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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the dominant accent of the street elevations--the pattern of large, open rectangles into which the outer walls are divided....The long west elevation is developed directly out of the structural system behind it, much as the isolated buttresses of the Gothic cathedral serve as primary visual elements in its indissoluble unity of structure and form"²

Jenny, in his later buildings, reverted to an overlay of ornament, not trusting his instincts so beautifully realized in Leiter II.

²Ibid., p. 90

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