

The Chicago Frame

Architecture

How the steel frame and the elevator produced the tall building.

In Chicago after the 1871 fire, a metal skeleton frame took the load that walls had carried, so the outside of a building became a screen rather than a support.

HOME INSURANCE
1885

RELIANCE BUILDING
1895

- Home Insurance Building, Jenney, 1885, ten storeys.
- Its claim to be the first skyscraper is disputed.
- Otis demonstrated the safety elevator in 1854.
- Reliance Building, 1895, is almost entirely glass.
- The Chicago window: fixed centre, opening sides.
- Sullivan, 1896: form ever follows function.

LOOK FOR IT

Once the frame carries the load, the facade is free. Le Corbusier codified that as a principle in 1927.

Against the load-bearing masonry wall and its height limit. Sullivan's phrase was about expression, not about stripping ornament.