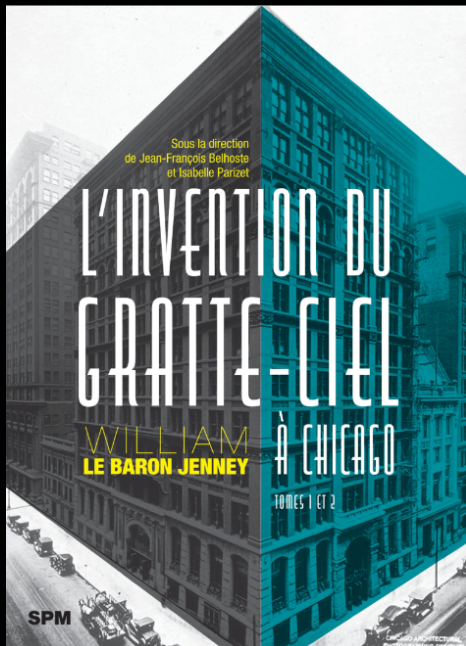


William Le Baron Jenney

Architecture Table, Cliff Dwellers, 9 September 2025



2024: Long-awaited



Jenney

Life, 1832-1907

From Notz (2007), a short but thorough biography

Birth: Fairhaven, MA (1832)

Travel: Chile, San Francisco, Philippines (1849-1851)

Paris: École Centrale, one commission (1853-1859)

Cincinnati: Jenney & Roelofson (1860-1861)

Civil War: Engineer/surveyor¹ (1861-1866)

Chicago: Architect (1867-1907)

Faculty: University of Michigan² (1876-1877)

¹with Sherman then Grant

²commuting from Chicago

Jenney

Chicago firms

1867-1869 Loring & Jenney

1869-1873 Jenney, Shermerhorn & Bogart

1873-1884 Jenney³

1884-1905 Jenney & Mundie

1904-1905 Jenney, Mundie & Jensen (currently Jensen & Halstead)

³Burnham, Sullivan, Holabird, Roche, Shaw, Pond worked under Jenney

Jenney

Chicago Commissions, Extant

- 1869 West Parks landscape, buildings
- 1879 Graceland Cemetary redesign
- 1891 Leiter II
- 1891 Ludington
- 1891 Manhattan
- 1892 Central YMCA (formerly Association)
- 1894 La Salle-Monroe (formerly New York Life)
- 1896 Morton⁴

⁴The list might be close to complete for commercial buildings. Jenney also designed many houses.

Jenney

Chicago Commissions, Demolished

- 1872 Portland Block (demolished 1933)
- 1873 Lakeside (demolished 1926)
- 1879 Leiter I (demolished 1972)
- 1885 Home Insurance (demolished 1931)
- 1890 Fair Store (demolished 1984)
- 1893 Spectatorium (collapsed before completion)
- 1893 Columbian Exposition Horticultural (demolished 1894)
- 1893 Isabella (demolished 2004)
- 1904 Chicago Garment Center (demolished 1975)⁵

⁵There were many smaller commissions. Andrew Elder did Herculean work compiling Jenney commissions prior to 1884. Compiling a complete list?





"The second Leiter building was Jenney's triumph.
 ...unbroken horizontal lines and continuous vertical bands
 ...provide revelation of the steel and wrought-iron framing.
 ...ornamental details reduced to the point of austerity."







"It was the major progenitor
of the true skyscraper."



"... a curious mixture of great structural vigor and redundant decorative details."



"It was the major progenitor of the true skyscraper."



HABS No. 101-1060





Home Insurance-1885

Popular: 'The First Skyscraper'

Controversy

Buffington 1888: Patent infringement

Chicago: Burnham, Jenney build the first-skyscraper case

Committees 1931: Investigated wreckage while demolished⁶

Condit 1952 was '... the first true skyscraper ...'

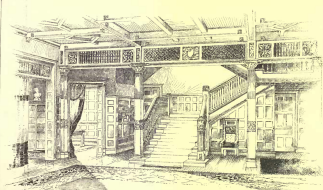
Condit 1964 was '... the major progenitor of the first true skyscraper ...'

Condit 1988: 'We can no longer argue that the HIB was the first skyscraper.'

Leslie 2013: 'only a small improvement over the Leiter'
'a crucial step away from the skeletal formula'

Barr 2024: 'well established among ... historians that WLB Jenney did not invent the skyscraper'

⁶Condit 1960, Turak 1985



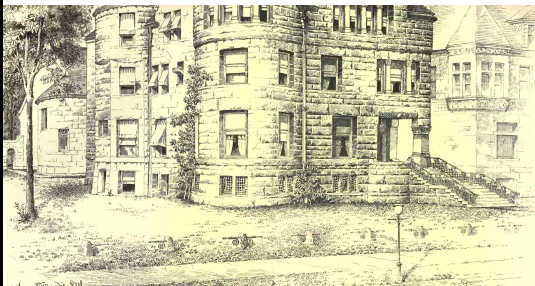
VIEW IN MAIN HALL, EDDY HOUSE, CHICAGO
JENNEY & OTIS ARCHTS.



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



At Home, November 1891

THE EDDY HOUSE
Lake Shore Drive, Chicago.
Jenney & Otis Architects.