



*The Rise of a Landmark:
Lewis Hine & the
Empire State Building.*

Photograph by Lewis Hine, ca. 1931.
Courtesy George Eastman House.



By Robert Hirsch

Fifty of Lewis Wickes Hine's (1874-1940) photographs, on loan from the George Eastman House, documenting the 1930-31 construction of New York City's Empire State Building will be on view from October 5 to December 31, 2002 at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. The exhibition is augmented with items from the Historical Society's collection that examine the American architectural form of the skyscraper and its role in American history. Buffalo played a part in this story with its distinctive high-rise buildings, such as Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building, Daniel Burnham & Co.'s Ellicott Square Building (once the "largest office building in the world"), and Dietel, Wade & Jones' Art Deco City Hall that can still be seen downtown.

When Hine began this last major undertaking, he was known for his socially conscious photographs dealing with themes of immigration, child labor, and World War I European survivors. For this project Hine wanted to dispel the growing notion that people had become insignificant within the urban landscape. His humanistic approach celebrates and mythologizes the spirit of human labor more than the building itself. Unlike the work of those interested in the beauty of technology, Hine's compositions juxtaposed human and machine characteristics. Often emphasizing the faces and statuesque characteristics of the workers bodies, Hine stepped away from the massive and flawless authority of technological systems to show how humans fit into industrial

progress. Hine also took personal risks, such as having himself swung out in midair with his view camera to record the final rivet being installed on the pinnacle of the building, as he followed the construction process of the 102 vertigo-producing stories. The project resulted in an innovative photographic book, *Men at Work* (1932), in which Hine summed up his position on the friction between humans and technology by writing:

"Cities do not build themselves, machines cannot make machines.... We call this the Machine Age. But the more machines we use the more do we need real men to make and direct them.... I will take you into the heart of modern industry...where the character of the men is being put into the motors, the airplanes, the dynamos upon which the life and happiness of millions of us depend."

In the aftermath of September 11th Hine's photographs show us that cities like New York are vital creative centers because their tolerant attitudes encourage creative expression. The skyscraper that is the Empire State Building is symbolic of our ability to rise above the status quo. Although the World Trade Center is gone, Hine's images make clear that the ingredients of such dreams are still part of the American landscape. These photographs reawaken people to the artistic and cultural heritage that makes cities like Buffalo rich and worth living in and serve as reminders that this legacy should not only be preserved but supported for future generations to come.

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Public Lecture Series

A series of four public lectures will be held to complement the exhibit:

Wednesday, October 9, 7:30 p.m.
Reconsidering Skyscrapers - Sam Bass Warner, Jr., Ph.D., Visiting Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and urban studies historian.

Wednesday, October 23, 7:30 p.m.
Technology of Skyscraper Building - Andre Reinborn, Ph.D., Co-Director, Seismic Laboratory, SUNY at Buffalo.

Wednesday, November 6, 7:30 p.m.
Native American High Steel Workers - Richard H. Hill, Sr., Professor, American Studies, SUNY at Buffalo.

Wednesday, November 20, 7:30 p.m.
Buffalo's High Rise Architecture - Jack Quinan, Curator, Darwin Martin House Restoration Corp., and Professor, Art History, SUNY at Buffalo.

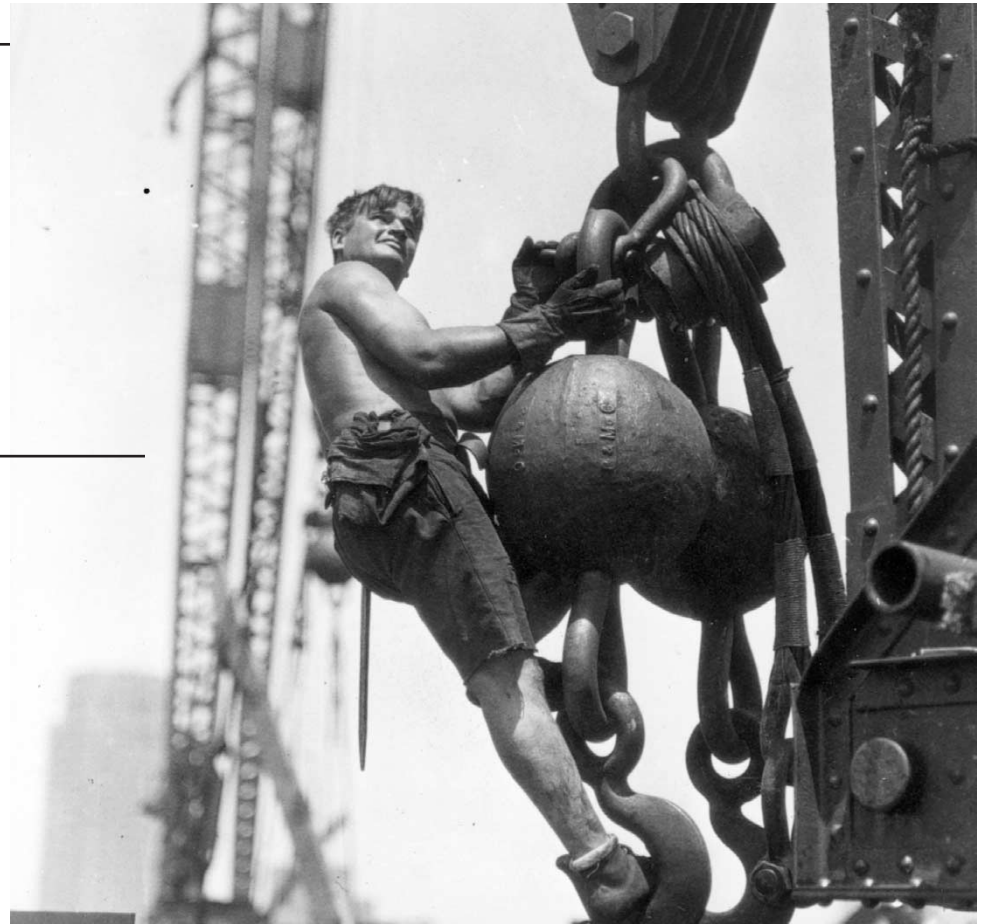
A walking tour of Buffalo's skyscrapers is being planned, dates to be announced. Special curriculum materials for educators and students also will be available to enhance student field trips to the exhibit.

For more information contact the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society 25 Nottingham Court (at Elmwood Avenue) Buffalo, NY 14216 (716) 873-9644, www.bechs.org.

Lewis Hine. *Icarus Atop the Empire State Building*, ca. 1931. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the George Eastman House.



Photograph by Lewis Hine, ca. 1931. Courtesy George Eastman House.



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