

"Skyscrapers"

by Carl Sandburg

By day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and has a soul.
Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into it and they mingle among its twenty floors
and are poured out again back to the streets, prairies and valleys.
It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and out all day that give the building a
soul of dreams and thoughts and memories.
(Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care for the building or speak its name or
ask a policeman the way to it?)

Elevators slide on their cables and tubes catch letters and parcels and iron pipes carry gas and
water in and sewage out.
Wires climb with secrets, carry light and carry words, and tell terrors and profits and
loves--curses of men grappling plans of business and questions of women in plots of
love.

Hour by hour the caissons reach down to the rock of the earth and hold the building to a turning
planet.

Hour by hour the girders play as ribs and reach out and hold together the stone walls and floors.
Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of the mortar clinch the pieces and parts to
the shape an architect voted.

Hour by hour the sun and the rain, the air and the rust, and the press of time running into
centuries, play on the building inside and out and use it.

Men who sunk the pilings and mixed the mortar are laid in graves where the wind whistles a wild
song without words

And so are men who strung the wires and fixed the pipes and tubes and those who saw it rise
floor by floor.

Souls of them all are here, even the hod carrier begging at back doors hundreds of miles away
and the brick-layer who went to state's prison for shooting another man while drunk.
(One man fell from a girder and broke his neck at the end of a straight plunge--he is here--his
soul has gone into the stones of the building.)

On the office doors from tier to tier--hundreds of names and each name standing for a face
written across with a dead child, a passionate lover, a driving ambition for a million dollar
business or a lobster's ease of life.

Behind the signs on the doors they work and the walls tell nothing from room to room.
Ten-dollar-a-week stenographers take letters from corporation officers, lawyers, efficiency
engineers, and tons of letters go bundled from the building to all ends of the earth.
Smiles and tears of each office girl go into the soul of the building just the same as the
master-men who rule the building.

Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor empties its men and women who go away
and eat and come back to work.
Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and all jobs go slower as the people feel day
closing on them.
One by one the floors are emptied. . . The uniformed elevator men are gone. Pails clang. . .

Scrubbers work, talking in foreign tongues. Broom and water and mop clean from the floors human dust and spit, and machine grime of the day.

Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for money. The sign speaks till midnight.

Darkness on the hallways. Voices echo. Silence holds. . . Watchmen walk slow from floor to floor and try the doors. Revolvers bulge from their hip pockets. . . Steel safes stand in corners. Money is stacked in them.

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges butting their way across a harbor, nets of red and white lanterns in a railroad yard, and a span of glooms splashed with lines of white and blurs of crosses and clusters over the sleeping city.

By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars
and has a soul.