

# A SKYSCRAPER IN THE GREEN MOUNTAINS?

What is the tallest building in your town? How about in the state of Vermont? Today, it might be hard to tell. There are so many new buildings going up.

In 1930, however, one building stood out as the tallest in the state — the Service building on Merchants Row in downtown Rutland. This was Vermont's only skyscraper, towering seven stories high, with an overall height of 101 feet.

We tend to think of our state as the home of cows and barns, but not of tall buildings. In fact, we may take trips to big cities to see tall buildings. So, many people are surprised to learn that Vermont, too, has a skyscraper. The Service building was modeled after big-city skyscrapers like New York's Empire State Building, even though it has only seven stories **compared** with the Empire State's 102 stories. In the 1920s and 1930s, Americans were excited about skyscrapers and **marveled** as each new building climbed higher than the last.

Actually, the Service building broke two modest records of its own. It topped the Mead Block, which had been the highest building in Rutland, by two stories, and it bested Montpelier's National Life building, then the highest in the state, by a story.

The tale of the Service building is also the tale of Carl B. Hinsman. In 1891, Hinsman was eighteen years old and had just graduated from Rutland City High School. He went to work as a mechanic for the Howe Scale Company. He was steadily promoted, first to paymaster, then to treasurer, vice-president and, finally, president. Along the way, he found time to become president of a bank, serve in Rutland city government and the state senate, and volunteer his time with the Boy Scouts.

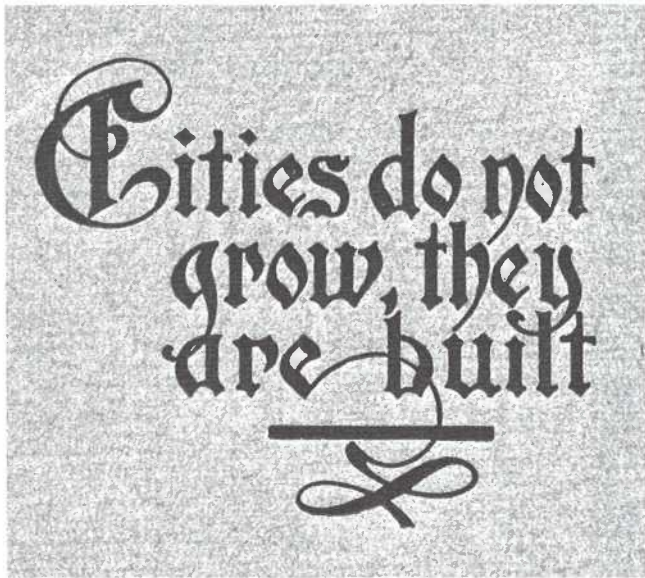
By 1928 he was a successful businessman. He wanted to erect a building that would attract attention and that the City of Rutland could be proud of. With his new office building, Hinsman felt that he

was performing a service for the community. So, he named it the Service building. This was his way of thanking the city for his success.



Service building, built in 1930 by architects Hutchins and French. Seven stories, 101 feet. Its fashionable Art Deco style has narrow shafts between the windows and an arrow design in the brick of the upper story. These decorations fool the eye and make the building seem taller than it is.

He worked with his **architects** to make the building up-to-date, stylish, and full of modern **conveniences** that most buildings at this time did not have, such as elevators, mail chutes, and the latest in fire protection. It was designed and decorated in the fashionable Art Deco style, which was popular in cities like New York and Chicago. The front of the building has long, **vertical** brick panels, like stripes, that make it appear taller and narrower than it is. There is a **pyramid** on top to make it look still higher.



Carl B. Hinsman, the owner of the Service building, would have agreed heartily with the message in this 1920s broadsheet. What does it mean that cities are "built?"

On top of the pyramid, there was once an **amber** glass globe that shone brightly at night. Why put a light on top of the building? Airplanes did not have radar in the 1930s and pilots had to find their way by sight. After dark, it was easy for airplanes to get lost. Pilots approaching Rutland could tell where they were by using this light as a **navigation** beacon.

When the Service building was completed in March of 1930, the *Rutland Herald* newspaper called it

"impressive in design . . . and ultra modern." Carl B. Hinsman was proud of what he had done. He wanted Rutland to grow into a great city. He felt that by building his skyscraper he had brought a taste of the big city to Vermont.



Empire State Building, built in 1931 by architects Shreve, Lamb, and Harmon. 102 stories, 1,250 feet. This sleek tower with its step-like form is typical of skyscrapers built in the 1920s and 1930s.

## VOCABULARY

**compare** - to examine

**marvel** - to fill with curiosity

**architect** - person who designs buildings

**conveniences** - things that save work, add to comfort

**vertical** - upright

**pyramid** - a four-sided triangular form

**amber** - yellowish-brown color

**navigation** - charting a course

## BUILDING THE BIG-CITY GIANTS

In the mid-nineteenth century, almost all buildings were one, two, or three stories, and the highest buildings in Vermont towns were the churches. In most Vermont towns, this is still true. In the big cities outside of Vermont, as the cost of space rose and the number of people increased, it made sense to construct higher buildings that could house and provide work space for lots of people and still only take up the street room of a single-story building.

Early builders of tall buildings faced many **obstacles**. One was a building's ability to support its own weight as upper floors were added. In the nineteenth century, the taller a building was, the thicker its walls had to be. As buildings rose higher, the walls became thicker and thicker to support the weight of the floors above. But thick walls took up too much space.

In the twentieth century, this problem was solved by constructing a skeleton or framework of steel to hold up a skyscraper. Now the steel skeleton instead of the wall held up the weight of the building. The Service building is made in this way.

It took strong and skilled men to build skyscrapers. Not only did they have to **assemble** the heavy steel frames, they had to do it high above the ground. They worked without safety nets or lifelines. Some were killed in accidents. The Service building is small compared to other skyscrapers, yet two men fell to their deaths while working on it.



## THANKS TO ELISHA GRAVES OTIS, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WALK UP THE STAIRS!

Early architects of tall buildings faced another big obstacle. What good was a ten-story building if no one would live or work in it! Architects felt that many people would not use these buildings because there were too many stairs to climb. Would you use stairs to get to the top of the seven-story Service building? How about the 102-story Empire State Building? How long do you think that would take you?

There had to be a better way to move people from story to story. It is **ironic** that a man from Halifax, Vermont, which had no buildings higher than three stories, solved this difficult problem. Elisha Graves Otis invented the Otis safety elevator and demonstrated it in 1853 at the New York Crystal Palace Exhibit, a world's fair. In the years ahead, his invention caught on. The Service building, which is pictured in this issue, has an Otis elevator. So does the 110-story World Trade Center in New York City, the tallest building in the world.

### VOCABULARY

**obstacles** - things that stand in the way

**assemble** - put together

**ironic** - the opposite of what it seems