

Name _____

Date _____

The Empire State Building

An icon of American architecture, the Empire State Building, located in New York City, is named for the state of New York. The nickname for New York State is the Empire State because of its wealth and prosperity. The tall and stately building was the idea of Alfred E. Smith and John J. Raskob. Smith had spent four years as Governor of New York State and had just completed an unsuccessful campaign for U.S. president. Raskob, also unemployed but very wealthy, had made a fortune in stocks. They happened to be friends and the year was 1929. Together they decided to build the world's tallest skyscraper.

The site they selected was occupied by the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in downtown New York City. The Waldorf-Astoria had been built as a luxury hotel in 1893 but by the 1920s it appeared out-of-date as the times had changed dramatically. Today it might be renovated as a historic treasure of days gone by, but it was demolished in 1929. It took workers five months to tear down the magnificent and sturdy building that was less than 40 years old to make a place for the new skyscraper.

Meanwhile architects and engineers were creating the blueprints for the elegant and modern skyscraper that would utilize the latest in building technology. Instead of load-bearing brick and concrete walls on the outside, the new building would use a steel framework on the inside, like a skeleton, to provide support for the structure. Invention of the steel-making process in the 1860s by Henry Bessemer allowed architects to create this kind of support structure that continues to be used in tall buildings today. Also in the late 1800s Elisha Otis made elevators safe for passengers by inventing the automatic elevator brake. This kept the elevator from crashing to the bottom floor of the building if a cable that supported the elevator broke. Advances in technology like these paved the way for Smith and Raskob to dream about creating a building that was 1,000 feet tall!

Name _____

Date _____

The Empire State Building (Cont'd)

At the same time as the plans for the Empire State Building were being drawn up, car mogul Walter Chrysler was constructing a building of his own in New York City, the Chrysler Building. Since there is competition to be the world's tallest building, Chrysler kept the height of his building a secret at the time but the original plans called for it to be 925 feet tall. When Chrysler heard the height of the proposed Empire State Building he had architects design a metal spire for his building which made it 1,048 feet tall.

Not to be outdone, Smith and Raskob consulted with *their* architects and added five more stories to the Empire State Building but that made it just 1,050 feet in height. Since the Chrysler Building had reached its final height, the Empire State Building would officially be the tallest building in the world. But the developers wanted to win by more than just the small amount of two feet so they decided to add a landing dock for dirigibles at the top of the building. Today the building reaches 1,250 feet in height and is large enough to have its own zip code.

A dirigible or airship was a new type of transportation in the early 1900s and people expected to be traveling in airships until the airship Hindenburg dramatically exploded in 1937, killing 36 of the 97 people on board. After the disaster very few people were interested in traveling in a dirigible. The Goodyear blimp is a modern example of a small dirigible.

At one point during construction of the massive new building there were 3,500 construction workers performing 60 different tasks every day to get the building completed on schedule. It took only one year and 45 days to build the Empire State Building and it was completed ahead of schedule.

Name _____

Date _____

The Empire State Building (Cont'd)

Unfortunately, the U.S. stock market crashed in October, 1929, less than one month after the opening construction ceremony for the Empire State Building, and the Great Depression started. Construction workers who had jobs working on the giant project were very fortunate to have a good job while tens of thousands of others around the country could not find work.

The world was still gripped by the Great Depression when the world's tallest building was completed on April 30, 1931. There were only a few businesses that could afford to rent space in the new building when it opened. Once the American economy rebounded, the Empire State Building was and continues to be a prestige address. In 1981 it became a New York City Landmark, preserved as is forever.

And what about the dirigible landing pad at the top? One dirigible landed there in September, 1931 as a publicity stunt for the building. The winds at that height were too strong to land a dirigible. Smith decided the winds at the top of the building were too dangerous and abandoned his idea of a dirigible dock.

Name _____

Date _____

The Empire State Building Questions

Circle True or False after analyzing each of the following statements.

1. True False The Empire State Building was built on the site of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.
2. True False The construction of the Empire State Building used brick load-bearing walls.
3. True False Henry Bessemer invented the steel-making process in the 1860s.
4. True False Tall buildings today use a steel skeleton.
5. True False Walter Chrysler was responsible for advances in elevator technology.
6. True False The builders of the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building both wanted to construct the tallest building in the world.
7. True False An F-16 fighter jet is an example of a dirigible.
8. True False When the Empire State Building opened in 1931 it remained empty because the U.S. was involved in a world war.
9. True False The Empire State Building is protected from changes or being torn down.
10. True False The Empire State building has its own zip code.

Name _____

Date _____

The Empire State Building Answers

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False
6. True
7. False
8. False
9. True
10. True