

Historic U.S. Steel office building in Joliet torn down after devastating fire

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Bob Okon

Building engulfed in flames when firefighters arrived

By [Bob Okon](#)



A wrecking machine on Saturday tears down the limestone exterior of the old U.S. Steel Main Office Building at 927 Collins St. in Joliet after a devastating fire that was reported at 3:11 a.m. Sept. 7, 2024
(Bob Okon)

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The historic U.S. Steel Main Office Building in [Joliet](#) stood for 133 years before being destroyed in a day in a devastating fire that started early Saturday.

The fire, reported at 3:11 a.m., was burning throughout the building at 927 Collins St. when firefighters arrived.

It was still smoldering at 2 p.m. as a wrecking machine tore down what was left of the limestone building once described by a statewide preservation group as “symbolic of Joliet’s industrial heritage.”

The cause of the fire is undetermined.

A Joliet Fire Department official, however, noted there was no electricity or natural gas supplied to the building, potential sources of an accidental cause for the blaze. Utilities had been cut off years ago as the building is no longer in use.

Firefighters arriving on the scene “found heavy fire coming from all floors and roof area of the large, vacant structure that once was the Main Office Building at the former Joliet steel mill site,” according to a news release from the fire department.



The Joliet Fire Department responded to 927 Collins St., the historic U.S. Steel office building, for a report of a structure fire on Saturday, Sept. 7, 2024. (Photo provided by Joliet Fire Department)

Flames on the second floor extended about 15 feet in the air from every window, according to the fire department.

Embers from the blaze blew as far as 2 blocks south on Collins Street and created a small brush fire, according to the fire department. Fire crews were deployed to ensure other buildings on Collins Street were protected.

The fire was under control by 5:30 a.m. but not completely out. Fire trucks stayed on the scene to hose down the building that continued to smolder.

Several blocks of Collins Street were closed to keep motorists away.

Firefighters did not enter the building because it was unstable and in danger of collapsing, Battalion Chief Victor Stachelski said.

“There are a lot of hot spots,” he said Saturday morning. “We can’t get into the building to take care of those hot spots.”



Joliet firefighters continued to hose down the U.S. Steel office building that continued to smolder until the decision was made to demolish what was left of the building after a fire that destroyed the insides and left the exterior unstable. (Gary Middendorf)

Stachelski said much of the exterior remained once the fire was under control, although the top of the building collapsed during the blaze and the entire interior of the building was destroyed.

“It’s that old Joliet limestone from the 1800s,” he said. “The bottom of it is holding up pretty good.”

The unstable condition of the building, however, led to a decision later Saturday to demolish it after a discussion between city officials and U.S. Steel. The wrecker arrived early in the afternoon, and by 2 p.m. most of the exterior had been knocked down.

Fire crews from stations 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 fought the blaze. No one was injured in the fire.

The structure was built in 1891 at what was the entrance to the U.S. Steel plant when it operated.

U.S. Steel remained the owner of the building, which was put on Landmarks Illinois’ list of “Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois” in 2021.

The building made the list in large part because of its deteriorating roof, which had holes in it leading to interior damage. U.S. Steel replaced the roof in 2021 after the building made the Landmarks Illinois list, although the company had agreed earlier to do the repairs.



Repairs to the roof of the vacant main office building at U.S. Steel were made in 2021. (Bob Okon)

Landmarks Illinois in its 2021 report noted a history of neglect while city and neighborhood groups sought to restore and preserve the building.

"The Main Office Building is symbolic of Joliet's industrial heritage and is an architectural and cultural landmark on Collins Street," Landmarks Illinois said in its report. "Many buildings that once represented the city's industrial heritage have already been demolished, heightening the importance of preserving this structure."

The office building had been the one building at the once massive steel plant that the city of Joliet had tried to preserve.

The U.S. Steel site for years has been vulnerable to trespassers and unlawful activity. In July, a dead body was found in an old pump house. The body was discovered by trespassers.

In February, police patrolling the area saw smoke and entered the property to discover several small fires along with stripped copper wire and assorted tools in another abandoned building.

In March 2023, police and firefighters searched the property for two hours after getting a call that a man had been injured in a fall. He was found and hospitalized.

Police told The Herald-News in July that they had been called to the U.S. Steel site for assorted problems 31 times since 2015.

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