



50TH

LANDMARKS
ILLINOIS

Landmarks Illinois 2021 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

JOLIET STEEL MILL MAIN OFFICE BUILDING

Joliet



“This distinctively ‘Joliet’ structure represents the best of the city’s past, present and future, offering boundless development potential as a testament in stone to the importance of the region’s industrial heritage.”

GREG PEERBOLTE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOLIET AREA HISTORICAL MUSEUM, OLD JOLIET PRISON HISTORIC SITE



JOLIET STEEL MILL MAIN OFFICE BUILDING



LOCATION

927 Collins Street
Joliet, Will County

YEAR BUILT

C. 1891

ARCHITECT

Unknown

CURRENT OWNER

United States Steel Corporation

WHY IT'S ENDANGERED

The Neoclassical/Romanesque Joliet Steel Mill Main Office Building sits in the 16-acre Joliet Steel Works National Register Historic District. Despite the designation, U.S. Steel has neglected the historic building, with proper maintenance largely ignored since the early 1980s when it

was vacated. The City of Joliet produced an Exterior Condition Report of the building in 2021 that noted extensive roof damage, evidence of water infiltration in the basement and collapsed rafters between the second and attic levels. Joliet officials have not seen the building interior for over six years and conditions inside are expected to have deteriorated as well.

Joliet officials have encouraged U.S. Steel to sell the building in a lot split from the overall 94-acre former steel mill site, recognizing its location on the Collins Street commercial corridor and the opportunity for a purchaser to utilize federal and state historic tax credits for rehabilitation could help facilitate its reuse. U.S. Steel, however, has also been unwilling to sell.

While the building continues to deteriorate, local residents have reached out to elected officials requesting that something be done. The Collins Street Neighborhood Council has been advocating for the reuse of the steel mill site and the former headquarters building for several years. Yet the fear of demolition due to neglect looms large. The [Main Office Building](#) is symbolic of Joliet's industrial heritage and is an architectural and cultural landmark on Collins Street. Many buildings that once represented the city's industrial heritage have already been demolished, heightening the importance of preserving this structure. If it continues to deteriorate, the Main Office Building will become a blight to the neighborhood. Without rehabilitation and reuse, this important historic resource is in jeopardy of being lost forever and a missed economic opportunity.



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HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE & BACKGROUND

The Joliet Steel Mill site serves as a reminder of local, economic development that shaped Joliet. The mill began production in 1869, following multiple technological advancements like the open-hearth furnace, and employed thousands of people, mainly immigrants, from the late 1800s to early 1900s. The success of the company and the jobs it provided helped Joliet become a thriving city, fostering culture, commerce and helping create recreational areas for residents to enjoy. It was an iconic representation of Joliet with its physically imposing structures where hard-working immigrants made an honest living. The mill also links to the history of United States steel production, bringing the site into a larger context.



By the 1920s, Joliet's steel mill had become a division of the mighty U.S. Steel and was the corporation's second-largest mill. With the onset of the Depression, the mill experienced a slow decline. The site's physical constraints and its older buildings were poorly suited to automated assembly, leading to it being passed over in favor of newer locations. U.S. Steel closed production at the facility in 1983, when it was the oldest operating industry operating in its original location on the [Illinois and Michigan Canal](#).



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The Main Office Building, constructed between 1886 and 1891, is an excellent example of Neoclassical/Romanesque architecture executed in rusticated Joliet limestone. The building's distinguishing features include layered Neoclassical pediments and a large Romanesque arch over the entrance. The front-gabled building is 40 feet in length by 60 feet wide, is two-and-half stories tall and sits on a raised basement. The entry is deeply recessed beneath a wide Romanesque arch, leading into a remodeled atrium. Vacant since the 1980s, it is representative of the evolution of the steel industry from a large number of independent operations into a highly consolidated business dominated by only a few large corporations. Despite its decades of vacancy, the building stands prominently on a busy thoroughfare as a reminder of Joliet's once thriving steel industry.

The City of Joliet and its community partners wish to re-engage U.S. Steel in meaningful dialogue to determine the best reuse of the property and to determine how to complete immediate repairs to stabilize and prevent further deterioration of the building. The city also requests open communication channels with U.S. Steel to allow community partners to facilitate interest in the property from developers as well as to work toward a larger plan to repurpose the nearly 200-acre former steel mill complex.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Urge U.S. Steel to take action on the Main Office Building. [Sign the petition](#) asking U.S. Steel to work with the City of Joliet and its community partners to develop a plan for the site's reuse.

Reach out to local advocates to see how you can support preservation of the site:

- Greg Peerbolte, Executive Director, Joliet Area Historical Museum & Old Joliet Prison Historic Site:
g.peerbolte@jolietmuseum.org, 815-723-5201 ext. 7210

FURTHER READING

[Steeling Joliet's Past](#)

The Forest Preserve District of Will County, article by Bruce Hodgdon

[Then & Now: Illinois Steel Company Offices – Joliet](#)

Shaw Media, March 26, 2017

[Steely face of old Joliet needs a face lift](#)

Chicago Tribune, September 22, 2006