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### FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 260: 1895 (MAXIMUM BUILDING HEIGHTS-NEW YORK/CHICAGO/BOSTON)

By Richard Schulte

A book titled "Architectural Engineering.", authored by Joseph Kendall Freitag and published in 1895, includes a passage on building code height limitations for buildings in New York, Boston and Chicago. The following is an excerpt from this book addressing these limitations:

#### *"ALLOWABLE HEIGHT OF BUILDINGS.*

*The New York law sets no limitation on the height of buildings in the city.*

*Boston law: "No building or other structure hereafter erected, except a church spire, shall be of a height exceeding 2[-]½ times the width of the widest street on which the building or structure stands, whether such street is a public street or place or a private way existing at the passage of this act or thereafter approved as provided by law, nor exceeding 125 feet in any case; such width to be the width from the face of the building or structure to the line of the street on the other side, or if the street is of uneven width, such width to be the average width of the part of the street opposite the building or structure."*

*Chicago ordinance: "No building shall be erected in the city of Chicago of greater height than 160 feet from the sidewalk level to the highest point of external bearing walls. And the height of no building of skeleton construction shall be more than three times its least horizontal dimension. And no building of masonry construction shall be more than four times as high as its least horizontal dimension.*

*The building which have been termed "sky-scrapers" in Chicago were all built before the passage of this ordinance, or on building permits which were issued before the law went into effect."*

Given that the story-to-story height of modern steel framed office buildings is typically around 12 feet, the maximum height limitation measured in stories was approximately 10 stories in Boston and roughly 12 to 13 stories in Chicago in 1895.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Source:** "Architectural Engineering.", Joseph Kendall Freitag, 1895.

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