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THE ARCHITECTURE OF JOSEPH LYMAN SILSBEE  
Personal Background and Historical Context

by HARUHIKO FUJITA, A.I.J.

フランク・ロイド・ライトは1888年にアドラーとサリバンの事務所へ入る前にジョセフ・ライマン・シルスビー (1848-1913) のもとで働いた。これは一年足らずの短期間ではあったが、シルスビーはサリバンとは対照的に住宅設計を中心とする建築家であり、シカゴへ出たライトにとって初めての実務の経験でもあったので、しばらくして住宅作家として出発するライトに少なからぬ影響を及ぼしたものである。またシルスビーはシカゴへ移る前にニューヨーク州シラキュース市で10年近く設計活動をしており、そこにはアメリカにおけるハイ・ピクトリアン・ゴシックの佳作といえる事務所建築を残している。しかし概してその作風には復古的な傾向が強く、革新的なサリバンの背後に隠れたシルスビーについての研究は、そのシカゴ時代の作品を部分的にあつかったものが米国で公表されているだけで、その人生と作品との本格的な調査研究が待たれている。

本論は筆者が1979年および1980年に米国でおこなった十九世紀建築研究の第一報であり、シルスビーに関してはニューヨーク州における作品の分析と考究とを中心に数回に渡って建築学会に報告される予定である。

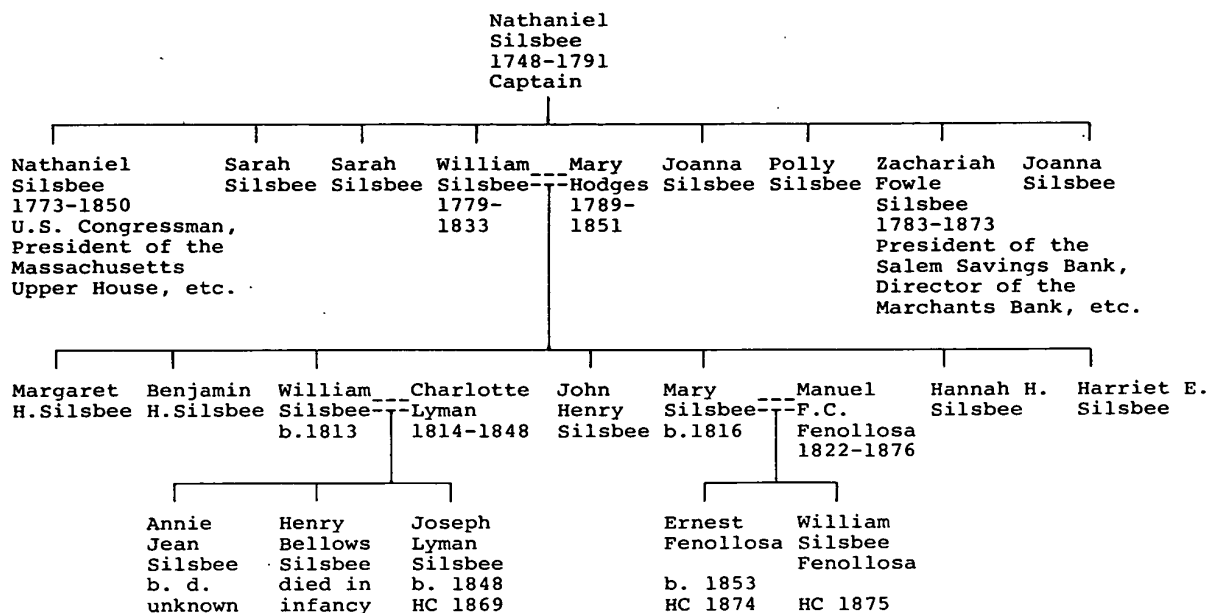
#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Joseph Lyman Silsbee was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on November 25th, 1848.<sup>1</sup> His mother, Charlotte Lyman, died during his infancy. His father, William Silsbee, was a pastor and preached in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New York States. After teaching in a private school in Cincinnati from 1851 to 1853, William Silsbee went to Europe and returned to America in 1854, though it is unclear whether or not Joseph was with him the entire time. From 1855 to 1863, William Silsbee held the pastorate of the Second Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he married Maria P. Woodward in 1858. Before settling in Troy, New York, in 1868 as Minister of the Reformed Christian Church, William Silsbee resided in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 1863 to 1867. At that time, Joseph Lyman Silsbee attended Phillips Exeter Academy and entered Harvard College as a number of his kinsmen, including his father, had done.<sup>2</sup> Graduated with an A.B. degree at Harvard in 1869, Joseph Lyman Silsbee entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which had established the first professional course in architecture in the United States, though he was in the course for just one year, from 1869 to 1870.<sup>3</sup>

As Henry-Russell Hitchcock pointed out, Joseph Lyman Silsbee came from a well-known Salem family.<sup>4</sup> Nathaniel Silsbee, one of his grandfather's brothers, was particularly famous. After some experience as a sea captain, including adventurous voyages in the East Indies trade, he successively held important posts in the business as well as the political world. Included among them were President of the Senate of Massachusetts and Senator in Congress.<sup>5</sup> J. L. Silsbee's grandfather, William Silsbee, also followed the sea, as did his younger brother, Zachariah, and the three Silsbee brothers shared the management of prospering family ventures.<sup>6</sup> At that time, Salem was one of the biggest centers of Eastern trade in the country. Nathaniel Silsbee was one of the half-dozen shipmasters who established the East India Marine Society of Salem and was its first treasurer.<sup>7</sup> This kind of atmosphere might have fostered in J. L. Silsbee an interest in Oriental culture, as it did in Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), one of his cousins. Fenollosa was also born in Salem, and became an eminent scholar who made contributions to art education in Japan and played an important role in the introduction of Oriental art to the Western world. ( See "Family Tree". )

( The Graduate School, Osaka City University )

- FAMILY TREE -



( HC: Graduates of Harvard college )

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the first half of the nineteenth century, only a small number of American practitioners had satisfactory training in architecture, and the prevalent method of qualifying for practice in the United States was by apprenticeship in the office of an architect. There was little technical change in architecture from the last century, and the scale of each building project was generally small. Practitioners were far less conscious of architectural style than the designers of the next generation. However, the profession was going to experience great changes around the time of the Civil War.

As for architectural education, in addition to the existing apprenticeship system, a British tradition, a kind of French atelier system was introduced by a few architects before and after the Civil War. The French system was primarily associated with the education at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, though the new system in the United States was not as purely pedagogic as that in France. Before long, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts began to have a tremendous influence upon the American architectural scene through several institutes which were established from the late 1860's onward. The first American student at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts was Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895) who studied in the Paris atelier of Hector Martin Lefuel. After his return to America, Hunt worked for Thomas Ustick Walter in Washington D. C. and moved to New York City to establish his own office and atelier in 1857. Though this was a small, private atelier, it possessed the French-trained teacher as well as an exceptionally nice collection of reference materials in the new country, and soon proved to be one of the most significant places of architectural education in pre-Civil War America. Among the pupils Hunt taught there were Henry Van Brunt (1832-1903), Charles D. Gambrill (1832-1880), George B. Post (1837-1913), William R. Ware (1832-1915), and Frank Furness (1839-1912). After the Civil War, Furness showed his creative power in Philadelphia, while Post became one of the most successful architects in New York City. Gambrill entered into partnership with Post and afterwards with

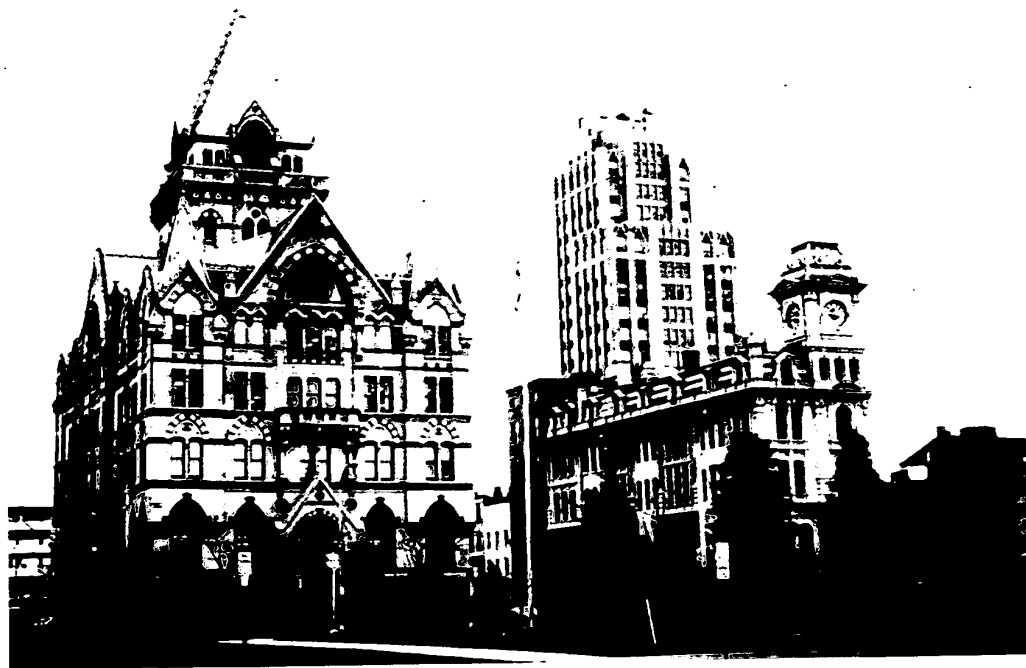


Figure. J. L. Silsbee,  
Syracuse Savings Bank,  
1876 (Left).

H. N. White,  
Onondaga County Savings Bank,  
1867 (Right).

Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886). Ware and Van Brunt formed an office for architectural practice in Boston in 1863.<sup>8</sup> They maintained an atelier in the office after the manner of their former patron.<sup>9</sup> Van Brunt was a scholarly architect and an architectural critic who translated Viollet-le-Duc's influential *ENTRETIENS SUR L'ARCHITECTURE*.<sup>10</sup> Ware, with a great interest in architectural education, organized a two-year course for their pupils and devoted to their instruction that time which was not required by the duties of the office.<sup>11</sup> In a few years, Ware was appointed director of the architectural school of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The school opened in 1868 after more than two years' preparation including Ware's European tour to study the various systems of architectural education. This is the school where Joseph Lyman Silsbee started his professional study in 1869. At that time, all of the instruction in architecture at the school was given by Ware.<sup>12</sup> With the changing times, a growing number of Americans including Silsbee sought opportunities for higher education in architecture. Study in Europe, especially at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, was becoming popular. Among his contemporaries in the east, for example, Robert Swain Peabody (1845-1917) entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts from Harvard College, Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909) entered the Paris school after a brief study at the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard, and William Rutherford Mead (1846-1928) went to Europe to study after graduating from Amherst College and architectural training in New York, though he did not enter the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Henry Hobson Richardson was ten years Silsbee's senior, while Louis Henry Sullivan was eight years his junior. Both of them were, more or less, educated at the Paris school.

Not much can be found concerning Silsbee's days at M.I.T. and his career in the early 1870's. Henry F. Withey and Elsie R. Withey noted in their *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects* that Silsbee began practice in Syracuse, New York, where he had an office for ten years (1872-1882).<sup>13</sup> There is, however, another description in the *Historical Collections of the*

Essex Institute of Salem:<sup>14</sup>

"Studied as an Architect in Boston; spent more than a year in Europe, from 1872 to 1873; went to Syracuse, N.Y., in the latter year, where he has ever since found employment as an architect, besides his work in Albany and other parts of the State, and to some extent outside the State."

Judging from the high quality of his early work in Syracuse, Silsbee must have had years of intensive study in Boston and possibly in Europe. It is beyond doubt, at least, that Silsbee married Anna B. Sedgwick in Syracuse on June 5th, 1875. At about the same time, Silsbee reached the first summit of his work. He was commissioned to design two commercial buildings in Syracuse; the White Memorial Building and Syracuse Savings Bank (Figure), both of which show Silsbee's design ability in the High-Victorian manner.

#### NOTES

1. Henry F. Withey and Elsie R. Withey noted in their Biographical Dictionary of American Architects that J. L. Silsbee was born in 1845. James A. Emmerton in the Historical Collections of the Essex Institute, which is the more primary information source, noted that he was born in 1848. The Witheys noted Silsbee's first name as "James" instead of "Joseph"; some authors thereafter described Silsbee as "James Lyman Silsbee". However, that name is not listed in the Essex Institute's Historical Collections.
2. Essex Institute, Historical Collections of the Essex Institute, Volume 17, p. 310, Massachusetts, 1880 (Reprinted by Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York and London, 1971).
3. Historical Archives, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
4. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, In the Nature of Materials, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1942, p. 4.
5. Op. Cit., Essex Institute, pp. 286-287.
6. Lawrence W. Chisolm, Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1963, p. 12.
7. Op. Cit., Essex Institute, p. 287.
8. William A. Coles (ed.), Architecture and Society, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. 16.
9. Arthur Clason Weatherhead, The History of Collegiate Education in Architecture in the United States, Los Angeles, 1941, p. 24.
10. Viollet-le-Duc (translated by Henry Van Brunt), Discourses on Architecture, James R. Osgood and Company, Boston.
11. Op. Cit., Weatherhead, p. 24.
12. Ibid., p. 24.
13. Henry F. Withey and Elsie R. Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased), Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., Los Angeles, 1970, p. 554.
14. Op. Cit., Essex Institute, A detailed description of the Silsbee's relatives can be found as "Henry Silsbee and some of his descendants" from p. 257 to p. 311 in the Volume XVII of the Historical Collections.