PLAN OF CHICAGO

CHAPTER I

ORIGIN OF THE MOVEMENT FOR A PLAN OF CHICAGO. THE WORLD'S FAIR OF 1893 AND ITS RESULTS. THE SPIRIT OF CHICAGO

The World's Fair of 1893 was the beginning, in our day in this country, of the orderly arrangement of extensive public grounds and buildings. The result came about quite naturally. Chicago had become a commercial community wherein men from the beginning were accustomed to get together to plan for the general good. Moreover, those at the head of affairs were, many of them, the same individuals who had taken part in every movement since the city had emerged from the condition of a mere village. They were so accustomed to results even beyond their most sanguine predictions that it was easy for them to believe that their Fair might exceed all fairs that had preceded it.

Then, too, the men of Chicago, trained in intense commercial activity, had learned the lesson that great success cannot be attained unless the special work in hand shall be entrusted to those best fitted to undertake it. It had become the habit of the business men of Chicago to select some one to take the responsibility in every important enterprise they undertook; and to give to that person earnest, loyal, and steadfast support. [It cannot be claimed justly that any man or any group of men accomplished these tasks. In each instance the spirit of Chicago, finding expression through chosen instruments, achieved results. Thus the design and arrangement of the buildings of the World's Columbian Exposition, which have never been surpassed, were due primarily to the feeling of loyalty to the city and to its undertakings; and, secondly, to the habit of entrusting great works to men trained in the practice of such undertakings.

This spirit still exists. It is present to-day among us. Indeed, it seems to gather force with the years and the opportunities. It is even now impelling us to larger and better achievements for the public good. It conceals no private purpose, no hidden ends. This spirit—the spirit of
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Chicago — is our greatest asset. It is not merely civic pride; it is rather the constant, steady determination to bring about the very best conditions of city life for all the people, with full knowledge that what we as a people decide to do in the public interest we can and will surely bring to pass.

The plans presented in this report are the result of studies carried on for many years at the instigation of those who, realizing how surpassingly fine was the result temporarily attained in the World’s Fair of 1893, are confident that the time has now come to create here in this ever-growing city conditions under which a great commercial people may dwell together while pursuing their daily avocations. These plans frankly take into consideration the fact that the American city, and Chicago pre-eminently, is a center of industry and traffic. Therefore, attention is given to the betterment of commercial facilities; to methods of transportation for persons and for goods; to overcoming the obstacles which prevent or obstruct circulation; and to increase convenience. It is realized, also, that good workmanship requires a large degree of comfort on the part of the workers in their homes and their surroundings, and ample opportunity for that rest and recreation without which all work becomes drudgery and even servitude. Then, too, it is understood that the city has a dignity to be maintained; and that good order is essential to material advancement. Consequently, the plans provide for impressive groupings of public buildings, and reciprocal relations among such groups. And since beauty in its true sense is the highest human satisfaction, and makes the most universal appeal to the human mind, the plans aim to ascertain in what civic beauty consists, and to apply those principles to the conditions prevailing in Chicago.

Moreover, consideration is given to the fact that in all human probability Chicago, within the lifetime of persons now living, will become a greater city than any existing at the present time; and that, therefore, the most comprehensive plans of to-day will need to be supplemented in a not remote future. Opportunity for such expansion is provided for. Such, it is believed, is the true spirit of democracy. The American city, which is created by and for the whole people, who are its rulers; the city which knows no distinction of classes, but in which each individual shall have the fullest opportunity to attain the highest development which his talents make possible — such is the ideal. Believing firmly that such an ideal city can be approximated here on the shores of Lake Michigan during the next fifty years, the Commercial Club of Chicago submits these suggestions, with the confident hope and expectation that the same spirit which in the past has accomplished such results will in the immediate future achieve the highest ideal of mankind — a place in which to work and to live in fullest freedom.

The unqualified success of the Chicago World’s Fair, in so far as architectural achievement is concerned, is so universally recognized that the means adopted to bring about that result must be regarded as a precedent of the highest value when any similar undertaking is proposed. In fact, it is quite within bounds to say that to this Fair may be traced directly the beginnings in the United States of the movement for civic improvement that has now spread throughout the land; and that wherever, and in so far as, the methods adopted at Chicago have prevailed, success has followed. Therefore, at the outset of so important an undertaking as the preparation of plans for the city of Chicago, it is desirable briefly to have clearly in mind the essential conditions which are a prerequisite for success. A brief review of the methods followed in 1892–93 will suffice for this purpose.

As the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America approached, all the people of
Chicago were ambitious to have that celebration located in Chicago; and with this end in view
the leading men of Chicago during the summer of 1889, organized a tentative commission. Other
cities put forth their various and reasonable claims. New York urged its commercial supremacy
and its age among American cities; Washington, that it was the capital of the nation; and St.
Louis appealed for the recognition of the rich and important valley of the Mississippi. When,
in the spring of 1890, Congress finally gave its decision in favor of Chicago, the magnitude of the
task undertaken called for most serious consideration.¹

Two things were evident. First that the occasion demanded the active and persistent sup-
port of all the people; and second, that success was to be obtained only through artistic control.
The lesson of Philadelphia in 1876–77 was taken into consideration; for there business con-
siderations controlled the planning, artistic questions became subordinate, and architecture had
little to say. At Chicago the reverse was the case. The men of administration spontaneously
entrusted to the architects the control of the location and construction of the buildings, with all
their accessories. No such radical step had ever before been taken in this country. Moreover,
the determination once made, it was adhered to; and from beginning to end no lay committee

¹The organization which carried out the work was a corporation chartered by the legislature, having forty-five
directors, Mr. Lyman J. Gage being president.
ever attempted to exercise artistic judgment. They chose the best method of procedure; and the result amply justified their self-imposed restraint.

The Grounds and Building Committee of the World’s Columbian Exposition first called a Chicago architect as unofficial adviser; and when this committee was formally organized, the same architect was selected as chief of construction with supreme authority. 1 A consulting architect, consulting landscape architects, and a consulting engineer were chosen; and ultimately five local and five foreign firms of architects were selected by the Chief of Construction, to whom were entrusted the execution of the principal buildings determined upon. 2 Later, advisers in sculpture and painting were added to the list.

The elements which gave to the Chicago World’s Fair pre-eminence among exhibitions of its kind were, first, a well-defined plan, devised, under competent direction, by architects and other artists of the highest standing in their several callings, who worked with the single aim of producing an ideal creation; and, secondly, the unhesitating and unstinted support given by the people of Chicago, who were quick to recognize the breadth and beauty of the proposed treatment. Chicago realized fully that the event to be celebrated was one of first significance in the history of mankind; and this consciousness was the inspiration which guided and sustained the work through every discouragement to the final adequate consummation. 3

This same spirit, which carried out the Exposition in such a manner as to make it a lasting credit to the city, is still the soul of Chicago, vital and dominant; and even now, although many new men are at the front, it still controls and is doing a greater work than it was in 1893. It finds the men; it makes the occasion; it attracts the sincere and unselfish; it vitalizes the organization and impels it to reach heights not believed possible of attainment. Individuals come and go; the spirit remains, and is always responsive to the call of the community.

1 MS. report of the Director of Works in the Field Museum of Natural History.
2 The architects appointed were Henry Ives Cobb (Fisheries Building), S. S. Beeman (Mines), Burling and Whitehouse (Venetian Buildings), Adler and Sullivan (Transportation), and Jenny and Maudie (Horticulture), of Chicago; Richard M. Hunt (Administration), McKim, Mead and White (Agricultural), George S. Post (Liberal Arts), of New York; Peabody and Stearns (Machinery), of Boston; and Van Brunt and Howe (Electricity), of Kansas City. The Fine Arts Building was designed by Charles Atwood, as was also the Peristyle.
3 A significant illustration of the spirit in which the World’s Fair work was conceived is found in one incident. On the appointed day the architects assembled to submit to the general committee sketches for their several buildings. There had been a luncheon, prolonged by animated discussion. The scheme as a whole had begun to take hold of the men. The short winter afternoon was approaching an end when Richard M. Hunt, then the dean of the architectural profession, suffering from the severe pains of rheumatism, slowly arose to speak of the Administration Building, a sketch of which he fastened to the wall. The New York architect who followed Mr. Hunt had on his building a dome four hundred and fifty feet high. Instantly a murmur ran around the group. The designer turned from the sketch. “I think,” he said, with deliberation, “I shall not advocate that dome; and probably I shall modify the building.” There was a breath of satisfaction. The next architect had a portico extending out over the terrace. Without waiting for criticism he said he should draw the portico back to the face of the building. As one by one each man fastened his sketch to the wall, it was as still as death in the room; and those present could feel the great work drawing them as by a magnet; and each was willing to sacrifice his personal ideas to secure the unity of the whole composition. Finally the last drawing was shown; the last explanation had been made. The chairman, Mr. Gage, arose. “Oh, gentlemen,” he said, “this is a dream!” Then he added, “You have my good wishes. I hope the dream can be realized.” Mr. Saint Gaudens, who had sat in a corner all day, listening, but never speaking and scarcely moving, went over to Mr. Burnham, and taking both his hands exclaimed: “Do you realize that this is the greatest meeting of artists since the fifteenth century?”
The results of the World's Fair of 1893 were many and far-reaching. To the people of Chicago the dignity, beauty, and convenience of the transitory city in Jackson Park seemed to call for the improvement of the lake front of the city. With this idea in mind, Mr. James W. Ellsworth, then president of the South Parks Board, during the year following the Fair, proposed to Mr. Burnham the improvement of the lake front from Jackson Park to Grant Park. Following out this suggestion, a plan for a connection between the two parks was drawn to a large scale, and the project was presented at a meeting of the West and South Parks Boards. Later this design was exhibited at a dinner given by the Commercial Club; and among the many business men who spoke in favor of the project on that occasion Mr. George M. Pullman, Mr. Marshall Field, and Mr. Philip D. Armour were emphatic in expressing their conviction that the proposed scheme would be of enormous value to Chicago, and that it should be adopted and carried into execution. This was the inception of the project for a park out in the lake, having a lagoon between it and the shore.

During the next three or four years more careful studies of the lake front scheme were made and very large drawings were prepared for a meeting of the Women's Clubs, at the Art Institute Building, and for a Merchants' Club dinner at the Auditorium. At this juncture, Mr. Ferdinand W. Peck took up the matter by giving a dinner to three hundred men of Chicago, at which, amid much enthusiasm, the belief was expressed unanimously that Chicago could and would carry out the plans as presented. The newspapers and magazines, both at home and throughout the country united in commenting on and commending the undertaking; and during the decade that has elapsed since the plans were first presented, the proposed improvement has never been allowed to be forgotten, but has ever been looked upon as a something sure to be accomplished.

While these plans were in course of preparation an extensive expansion of the South Parks system was in progress, and a plan was formulated for an outer belt of parks and parkways. These movements started with energy in 1903, under the general direction of the South Parks
Commission and the Commissioners of Cook County, Mr. Henry G. Foreman being president of each of these organizations.

Meantime the influence of the Chicago World’s Fair was manifesting itself in the capital city of the nation, where the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the removal of the seat of government to the District of Columbia had created a demand for the improvement of the city of Washington. A commission composed of two architects, a sculptor and a landscape architect, was created; and because of the results obtained at Chicago, Mr. Burnham was recommended by the representative body of architects for chairman of the Washington commission, his associates being men who had been associated with him in the World’s Fair work.¹ The Washington task led to a careful and extensive study of the entire subject of city planning and the appropriate placing and grouping of public buildings; and the results of the commission’s labors are now in course of realization. No sooner was the Washington report presented than various cities throughout the land were stimulated to take up the work of civic improvement. Called into the service of assisting in the preparation of a group plan for Cleveland, Mr. Burnham was brought face to face with problems arising out of the peculiar needs of a commercial as distinguished from a capital city.² Next the people of San Francisco entrusted to Mr. Burnham the preparation of comprehensive plans for the improvement of their city—a task which involved the study of all the considerations incident to city planning. While this work was still in progress a call came to advise the Government in regard to improvements at Manila and to devise a scheme for the creation on the hills at Bagio, of a summer capital for the government of the Philippine Islands.

In the spring of 1900, Mr. Burnham agreed with Mr. Charles D. Norton, president of the Merchants’ Club, and with Mr. Frederick A. Delano, a former president, to undertake on behalf

¹The Commission consisted of Daniel H. Burnham, chairman; Charles F. McKim, Augustus Saint Gaudens and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
²The members of the Commission were Daniel H. Burnham, chairman; John McCainere and Arnold Branner.
of that organization to work out a complete scheme for the future development of Chicago. In order to facilitate the progress of the work two rooms were built over the roof of the Railway Exchange Building, where work has gone on without interruption up to the present time. Mr. Edward H. Bennett, who was associated with Mr. Burnham in the preparation of the plan for the city of San Francisco, has co-operated in the preparation of the plans herein presented. The Merchants' Club and the Commercial Club having been merged in 1907, under the name of the latter, the work has been continued under the auspices of the Commercial Club; and during the past three years the members of the Club, through committees and personally, have devoted themselves to the task, often at serious sacrifice of their private interests. More than two hundred fully attended meetings have been held; and the interest and enthusiasm has been such as men rarely give to public affairs. During many weeks meetings have taken place daily; and during the entire time no week has passed without one or more such gatherings. By invitation of the Club, the Governor of Illinois, the Mayor of Chicago, and many other public officials have visited the rooms where the work was in progress, and have become familiar with the entire scheme as it was being worked out. The Department of State, through the United States consul in various European cities, has furnished valuable information relative to civic development now in progress. Thus the plans have had the benefit of many criticisms and suggestions made by persons especially conversant with existing conditions. Moreover, visitors interested in the improvement of cities and in park work of all kinds have come from both American and European cities; and from them also much of value and encouragement has been gained. Indeed, from the very inception of the work one constant purpose has been manifested: the people of Chicago have become determined that the physical conditions now existing in their city shall be changed radically for the better.

The public spirit evinced in this enterprise distinctly shows that it is necessary only to call upon our people to get an instant and most hearty response in the direction of the public good. The purpose of this task therefore was:

First, to make the careful study of the physical conditions of Chicago as they exist;

Second, to discover how those conditions may be improved;

Third, to record those decisions in the shape of drawings and texts, which shall become a guide for the future development of Chicago, in commerce, in health of mind and body, and in the enjoyment of life.

No one part of the city has been considered exclusively; but equal consideration has been given to every section. It is believed that prosperity for each is the surest and most lasting prosperity of the city as a whole, and that no improvement of one part can fail to benefit all the others.

In creating the ideal arrangement, every one who lives here is better accommodated in his business and his social activities. In creating better freight and passenger facilities every merchant and manufacturer is helped. In creating a complete park and parkway system, the life of the wage-earner and of his family is made healthier and pleasanter; while the greater attractiveness thus produced keeps at home the people of means and acts as a magnet to draw those who seek to live amid the most delightful surroundings they can find. People of means are the money spenders and where they congregate there is work for the wage-earner. The very beauty that attracts him who has money makes pleasant the life of those he lives among, while anchoring him and his wealth to the city. The prosperity aimed at is for all Chicago.