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The Plan of Chicago, republished

By Patrick T. Reardon on Tue., 06/30/2009 –4:03 am.

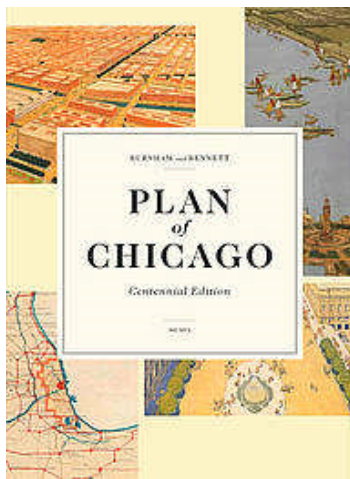
A confession:

Probably 15 years ago, I bought a hardcover copy of the 1993 reprint of the Plan of Chicago for \$70. It was a beautifully done reproduction by Princeton Architectural Press with a nine-page introduction by Kristen Schaffer.

Then, a year ago, I ordered a used copy --- which turned out to be nearly pristine --- for \$26. My excuse: I'm such a fan of the book that I wanted to have it at home and at work.

So I'm not exactly objective when it comes to the Plan.

But, if you're interested in learning why there's all the hubbub this year about the document, you can see for yourself because a new reprint has just been published by the Great Books Foundation in time for the 100th anniversary of the Plan's publication on July 4, 1909.



It can also be purchased at the Chicago History Museum, the Chicago Architecture Foundation, the Book Cellar, Powell's Bookstore and Printers Row Fine and Rare

The edition --- prepared in collaboration with Chicago Metropolis 2020, the Burnham Plan Centennial Committee, the Chicago History Museum and the Commercial Club of Chicago, which commissioned the Plan a century ago --- is available at the Great Books Foundation website. The paperback is \$39.95 while a hardcover is offered for \$125.

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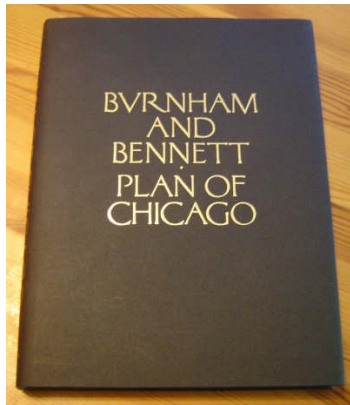
This blog is about history, planning and the future. It's rooted in the recognition that we live in a world that is created by plans – and by the failure to make plans. [\[MORE\]](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Patrick T. Reardon](#) is a Chicagoan, born and bred. He has been writing about the city, its region and planning issues, mainly in the Chicago Tribune, for nearly 40 years. [\[MORE\]](#)

Books. (In addition, a digital version of the text is available online.)

To my eye, the illustrations in the new edition are brighter and pop off the page more than those in the 1993 version, still available for \$85. Certainly, the cover is more lively than the imposingly formal, cut-in-stone cover of that earlier version.



The 1993 edition of the Plan of Chicago

On the other hand, I miss the Schaffer introduction which disclosed that Daniel Burnham, the Plan's principal author, included in his 310-page draft many social programs and proposals that were left out of the final document.

The impact of the Plan on American thinking

In place of Schaffer's piece is a fine essay by Carl Smith, author of "The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City," stressing the broader social impact of the Plan on American thinking.

"Perhaps the Plan's most important heritage," he writes, "is its contention that we must not unreflectively take the world in which we live as either inevitable or inalterable, but rather be constantly attuned to how we can make it better."

Smith, a Northwestern University literature and history professor, notes that the Plan itself and its main author have become symbols of that idea of making a better world.

"The Plan of Chicago and Daniel Burnham, who died in 1912, have assumed iconic status," he writes. "They have come to stand for the idea of planning itself, and for doing so on the largest and boldest scale. The Plan helped establish the planning profession and prompted numerous other city plans for places large and small, several of them prepared by [Burnham's co-author] Edward H. Bennett."

I've always been bugged by the Plan's lack of photographs showing the urban problems that the document was seeking to ameliorate.

A tonic for “pleasureless lives”

But Burnham and Bennett were able to paint a word picture, such as in this sentence that Smith quotes: “Thoughtful people are appalled at the results of progress; at the waste in time, strength and money which congestion in city streets begets; at the toll of lives taken by disease when sanitary precautions are neglected; and at the frequent outbreaks against law and order which result from narrow and pleasureless lives.”

Smith writes that the co-authors “improbably declared that the opportunity was at hand not only to reorganize and refine this sprawling and unruly metropolis, as daunting an undertaking as that was, but also to redesign it so brilliantly that Chicago would equal or even surpass the glory of Pericles’ Athens, the grandeur of imperial Rome, and the splendor of modern Paris as recently rebuilt by Baron Haussmann under Napoleon III, the model they had most in mind.”

The redesign of a city --- bold, indeed.

In terms of the social services that Burnham proposed, Smith mentions Schaffer’s discussion of how they fell out of the final document. And he adds, “Meeting minutes reveal the planners instructed [Plan editor Charles] Moore that ‘the text of the book should emphasize the fact that the Plan is a business proposition.’”

Apparently, as with any planning document in the real world, there was a limit to how bold Burnham’s sponsors were willing to be.