

Chicago Legacy: Burnham's Plan

CCSSR2—support important ideas with examples; CCSSR7—integrate ideas and information from different sources.

What was Daniel Burnham's big idea?

When DuSable came to Chicago, about 350 people lived here. At first it grew slowly. Then Chicago grew very fast. By 1855, about 30,000 people lived here. That year the Burnham family moved here. Daniel Burnham was a boy when he came to Chicago. He would be part of Chicago's progress.

By 1870, 300,000 people lived here. There was no plan for where everything should be. Chicago was crowded. It was hard to get places. The streets were too busy. People built homes in a hurry. They used wood. Most of the city was made of wood. The Great Chicago Fire happened in 1871. It lasted for 36 hours. Almost 18,000 buildings burned down. About 100,000 people lost their homes. Some people chose to leave. But most stayed. They would rebuild Chicago.

After the fire, people could make Chicago a better city. They could change the city. They took trash from the fire to make a park. Today that park is called Grant Park. They rebuilt other parts of the city. But there wasn't a big plan. So streets started getting crowded again.

Daniel Burnham was an architect. Architects plan buildings. They think about who will use the buildings and what they should look like. Architects draw pictures and makes models to show their plan. But Daniel Burnham did more than plan buildings.

He was one of the first people to have a job called "city planner." A city planner thinks about what a city needs. It needs many things. It needs parks and public buildings. It needs streets. A city planner thinks about the whole city. Daniel Burnham knew how to make big plans. He was in charge of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. That was a big fair. There were more than 200 new buildings at the fair. Many people came from around the world to see it. They saw many new things. They saw movies and electric light bulbs. Those were new inventions in 1893.

After the fair, Chicago kept growing. In 1906, more than two million people lived here. Daniel Burnham convinced leaders that the city needed a plan. They decided he should make that plan. He saw problems. He thought of ways to solve them. He planned ways to make the city better. He asked another architect to help him. That person was Edward Bennett.

In 1909 they finished their big plan. The plan added parks and forest preserves. It had big public buildings. It made wide streets called boulevards. Then it would be easy for people to travel in Chicago. Burnham planned bridges over the Chicago River. He planned railroad stations. City leaders decided to do many parts of that plan. It took many years and a lot of money.

You can see Daniel Burnham's legacy in Chicago today. Navy Pier is one part of his plan. Some roads and bridges came from his plan, too. His legacy is in many places in Chicago. And it is part of how Chicago works. He said that it is important to have very big dreams. He said people should make great plans. That idea is still important today.

Write History

A newspaper tells what is happening. In 1909 there was no television, radio or internet. People got their news from the newspaper. Write what you think the newspaper said about Burnham's plan in 1909. Tell what you think people said about it.