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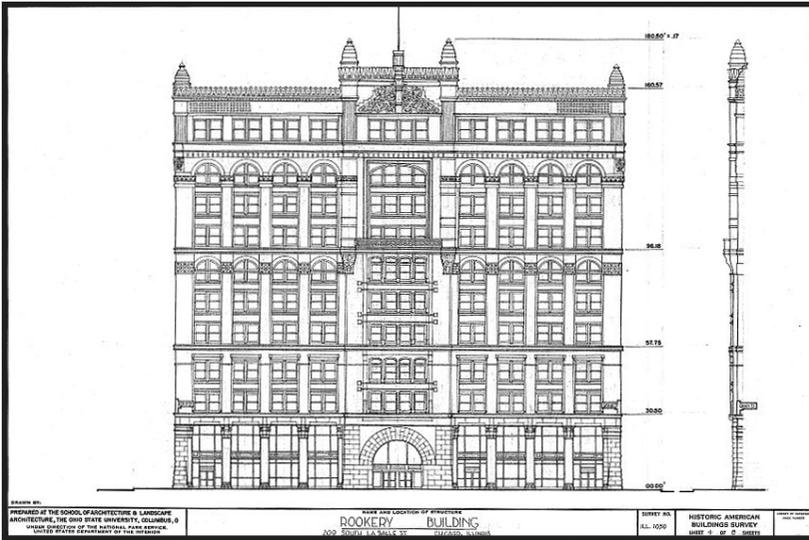


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Rookery Building, Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress.

THE ROOKERY BUILDING AND CHICAGO-KENT

A. Dan Tarlock

Chicago-Kent traces its origin to the incorporation of the Chicago College of Law in 1888. Chicago-Kent's founding coincided with the opening of the Rookery Building designed by the preeminent architectural firm of Burnham and Root. There is a direct connection between the now iconic Rookery Building, located at Adams and LaSalle, and the law school building further west on Adams. There is also a more indirect but interesting connection between the first and second schools of Chicago architecture and Daniel Burnham's vision of the modern city. Architects, but especially Daniel Burnham, helped make and

sustain Chicago as a world city, thus making it an attractive and exciting place to practice law to the benefit of all law schools in Chicago including Chicago-Kent.

The Rookery is now a classic example of the first school of Chicago architecture which helped shape modern Chicago and continues to make Chicago a special place, despite decades of desecration of this rich architectural heritage. The Great Fire of 1871 destroyed the Loop and the newly developed residential areas to the north. It did, however, narrowly miss the lumber yard which occupied the site of the current law school. Architects were immediately

attracted to Chicago because of the opportunities to rebuild the city. The skyscraper was perfected here, and this technological innovation, along with the telephone and Otis Elevator, created the modern office city by separating industrial production from its administration. By 1888, Chicago, along with Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo, was emerging as a major example of a modern city unconstrained by any significant urban past. The city had grown from about 100,000 persons when Lincoln was nominated for President, a few blocks from the current law school, to one million inhabitants and counting.

Chicago had surpassed Philadelphia and became America's second city. Chicago's location as a rail and water hub enabled it to become the processing center for the agricultural bounty of the Midwest and Great Plains as well as the distribution center for this region. For a brief period of time, wealthy Chicagoans used their new wealth and power to patronize a progressive group of architects to build modern, forward-looking cathedrals of commerce.

A group of Chicago architects, led by Dankmar Adler, Louis Sullivan, John Root, Daniel Burnham and later Frank Lloyd Wright, developed a distinctive style of architecture geared to the technological innovations that were changing the nature of business. The Rookery is a perfect example. The walls were

partially load-bearing, but the interior used the state-of-the-art steel frame, developed by William Jenny, to permit it to become the tallest building in Chicago. The building is a mix of early modernist and retrospective styles. The walls of large windows allowed maximum use of light because of the dimness of the 20 watt bulbs powered by Commonwealth Edison's first loop generating station across the street. The exterior building is also an example of Chicago Romanesque. This style, whose distinctive feature was the arch, was based on pre-Gothic Romanesque architecture in southern France. Initially adopted by Frank Richardson in Boston, the great Louis Sullivan brought it to Chicago. The Auditorium Theater, which opened in 1889, is the best surviving example.

After the elite lost interest in "modern architecture," innovation languished in Chicago until the post-World War II modernist school emerged. Until the 1980s, Post-War Chicago architecture was a monument to Mies van der Rohe. Fleeing Nazi Germany, he ultimately settled in Chicago, headed IIT's then Department of Architecture, designed its landmark campus, and more generally helped make the German Bauhaus the dominant form of post-World War II Chicago architecture.

The law school's current building, which opened in 1992, is a synthesis of the two great schools of Chicago architecture. Its scale and facade



"Rookery Building, exterior," photo from 1891, Images of America Collection, Frances Loeb Library.

recall the post-fire Prairie School, especially the Rookery Building. However, the incorporation of an arch into early designs was rejected as disproportionate to the building. Not only is it about the same height, it was designed by Holabird and Root, the successor firm to Burnham and Root. The relatively austere stone facade, rather than a pure steel and glass frame characteristic of Mies's main campus buildings, echoes the Rookery in both style and underlying philosophy. And, like the law, it both respects the past and looks to the future. Burnham rejected the argument of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright that America needed a distinctive style of architecture. Rather, "Burnham and his allies," as

the *Encyclopedia of Chicago* explains, "believed that the sometimes frantic quest for 'American-ness'—the obsession with New World originality and horror of all things European—was itself a kind of insecurity, and that maturity would consist in an acknowledgment that America was not culturally isolated from the rest of the world. Burnham and his associates saw the United States as a rightful heir to the traditions of Western culture."

Daniel Burnham's larger legacy for Chicago and its vibrant legal community is twofold. First, Prairie School architecture both symbolized Chicago's emergence as a world city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by allowing it to drain

the surrounding region of both resources and talent, legal and otherwise. This legacy along with Burnham's partially realized 1909 plan also helped Chicago to evolve into a major financial center, after its original industrial base of Chicago eroded after World War II. The concentration of law firms to serve Chicago's economy provided employment for thousands of lawyers.

The second legacy of Burnham's plan is much darker but also benefited Chicago lawyers. The much hailed plan envisioned Chicago as a great city in the mold of Paris or Imperial Vienna. But the plan primarily concentrated on a magnificent core and lakefront for the wealthy. The unruly, poor, polluted, and dangerous rest of the city, home to the waves of immigrants from around the world and migrants from other parts of the country, was depicted only by endless low rise, uniform blocks. In other words, the city that actually existed was largely ignored. It was left to others to deal with what was in fact happening on the streets of Chicago. In the twentieth century, Chicago's continuing attempts to deal with urban problems such as racial segregation, urban poverty, substan-

dard housing, rampant corruption, and juvenile and gang violence have provided endless opportunities for lawyers and future lawyers trying to obtain justice for individuals caught in the net of poverty, corruption, brutality, and discrimination equally characteristic of Chicago, including a young Columbia University graduate (and Chicago-Kent commencement speaker), Barack Obama. ♦

Sources and Further Reading

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A. Dan Tarlock received his undergraduate and law degrees from Stanford University. He joined the Chicago-Kent faculty in 1982 after teaching at the University of Kentucky and Indiana University, Bloomington. Professor Tarlock is one of the founders of the law school's Program in Energy and Environmental Law. He has taught energy law, environmental law, land use control, property and water law and has published widely in these fields.