

Research Essay: Amanda Rinder (*Chicago* Style)

Title and writer's name centered about halfway down title page

Title announces topic clearly and succinctly

Sweet Home Chicago: Preserving the Past,
Protecting the Future of the Windy City
Amanda Rinder

Course title, instructor's name, and date centered at bottom of title page

Twentieth-Century U.S. History
Professor Goldberg
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Marginal annotations indicate *Chicago-style formatting* and *effective writing*.
Source: Andrea A. Lunsford (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008).

Only one city has the “Big Shoulders” described by Carl Sandburg: Chicago (fig. 1). So renowned are its skyscrapers and celebrated building style that an entire school of architecture is named for Chicago. Presently, however, the place that Frank Sinatra called “my kind of town” is beginning to lose sight of exactly what kind of town it is. Many of the buildings that give Chicago its distinctive character are being torn down in order to make room for new growth. Both preserving the classics and encouraging new creation are important; the combination of these elements gives Chicago architecture its unique flavor. Witold Rybczynski, a professor of urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania, told the *New York Times*, “Of all the cities we can think of . . . we associate Chicago with new things, with building new. Combining that with preservation is a difficult task, a tricky thing. It’s hard to find the

Paper refers to each figure by number

Double-spaced text



Fig. 1. Chicago skyline, circa 1940s. (Postcard courtesy of Minnie Dangberg.)

Figure caption includes number, short title, and source

middle ground in Chicago.”¹ Yet finding a middle ground is essential if the city is to retain the original character that sets it apart from the rest. In order to maintain Chicago’s distinctive identity and its delicate balance between the old and the new, the city government must provide a comprehensive urban plan that not only directs growth, but calls for the preservation of landmarks and historic districts as well.

Chicago is a city for the working man. Nowhere is this more evident than in its architecture. David Garrard Lowe, author of *Lost Chicago*, notes that early Chicagoans “sought reality, not fantasy, and the reality of America as seen from the heartland did not include the pavilions of princes or the castles of kings.”² The inclination toward unadorned, sturdy buildings began in the late nineteenth century with the aptly named Chicago School, a movement led by Louis Sullivan, John Wellborn Root, and Daniel Burnham and based on Sullivan’s adage, “Form follows function.”³ Burnham and Root’s Reliance Building (fig. 2) epitomizes this vision: simple, yet possessing a unique angular beauty.⁴ The early skyscraper, the very symbol of the Chicago style, represents the triumph of function and utility over sentiment, America over Europe, and perhaps even the frontier over the civilization of the East Coast.⁵ These ideals of the original Chicago School were expanded upon by architects of the Second Chicago School. Frank Lloyd Wright’s legendary organic style and the famed glass and steel constructions of Mies van der Rohe are often the first images that spring to mind when one thinks of Chicago.

Yet the architecture that is the city’s defining attribute is being threatened by the increasing tendency toward development.

Source cited
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Opening para-
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Clear transition
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Fig. 2. The Reliance Building. (Photo courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.)

The root of Chicago's preservation problem lies in the enormous drive toward economic expansion and the potential in Chicago for such growth. The highly competitive market for land in the city means that properties sell for the highest price if the buildings on them can be obliterated to make room for newer, larger developments. Because of this preference on the part of potential buyers, the label "landmark" has become a stigma for property owners. "In other cities, landmark status is sought after — in Chicago, it's avoided at all costs," notes Alan J. Shannon of the *Chicago Tribune*.⁶ Even if owners wish to keep their property's original structure, designation as a landmark is still undesirable as it limits the renovations that can be made to a building and thus

Signal verb
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duces quotation

decreases its value. Essentially, no building that has even been recommended for landmark status may be touched without the approval of the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, a restriction that considerably diminishes the appeal of the real estate. “We live in a world where the owners say, ‘If you judge my property a landmark you are taking money away from me.’ And in Chicago the process is stacked in favor of the economics,” says former city Planning Commissioner David Mosen. ⁷

The Berghoff buildings, which house the Berghoff Restaurant and its facilities, are a prime example of this problem. The restaurant has been a feature of the Loop for more than ninety years. But when the building was proposed for official designation in 1991, the City Council voted against it after considerable urging from the Berghoff family. Neil King, a real estate valuation expert who testified before the Landmark Preservation Committee, stated that “no developer is going to buy this property once it’s designated.” ⁸ The LaSalle National Bank told the Berghoffs that it would foreclose on a mortgage for more than \$2.7 million if the Council named the Berghoff buildings landmarks. ⁹ The Berghoff conflict illustrates that the problem of overbearing development cannot be solved simply by assigning landmark status to historic buildings; it is an ongoing struggle between yesterday’s creations and today’s economic prosperity.

Nowhere is this clash more apparent than on North Michigan Avenue—Chicago’s Magnificent Mile. The historic buildings along this block are unquestionably some of the city’s finest works. In addition, the Mile is one of Chicago’s most prosperous districts, with a massive volume of shoppers traveling there daily. The

Example of complicated economics of preservation

“Magnificent Mile” illustrates conflict between development and preservation

small-scale, charming buildings envisioned by Arthur Rubloff, the prominent real estate developer who first conceived of the Magnificent Mile in the late 1940s, could not accommodate the crowds. Numerous high-rises, constructed to accommodate the masses that flock to Michigan Avenue, interrupt the cohesion and unity envisioned by the original planners of the Magnificent Mile. In *Chicago's North Michigan Avenue*, John W. Stamper says that with the standard height for new buildings on the avenue currently at about sixty-five stories, the "pleasant shopping promenade" has become a "canyon-like corridor."¹⁰

Evidence supports claim made in paragraph's topic sentence

Many agree that the individual style of Michigan Avenue is being lost. In 1995, the same year that the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois declared the section of Michigan Avenue from Oak Street to Roosevelt Road one of the state's ten most endangered historic sites, the annual sales of the Magnificent Mile ran around \$1 billion and were increasing at an annual rate of about five to seven percent.¹¹ Clearly, the property's potential as part of a commercial hub is taking priority over its architectural and historic value. The future of this district rests on a precarious balance between Chicago's responsibility for its own heritage and Chicagoans' desire for economic gain. Stamper notes, "What made North Michigan Avenue such an attractive focus of activity in the 1920s is being incrementally destroyed in the interest of maximizing return on the investment."¹²

Perhaps the best single example of the conflict between preservation and development in Chicago is the case of the McCarthy Building (fig. 3). Built in 1872, the McCarthy was designed by John M. Van Osdel, Chicago's first professional

Additional example introduced



Fig. 3. The McCarthy Building. (From the University of Illinois at Chicago, *Chicago Imagebase*, <http://www.uic.edu/depts/ahaa/imagebase>.)

architect. Paul Gapp, a *Chicago Tribune* architecture critic, described it as “a stunningly appealing relic from Chicago’s 19th century Renaissance era.”¹³ The McCarthy was made a landmark in 1984, but it wasn’t long before developers recognized the potential of the property, situated on Block 37 of State Street, directly across from Marshall Field’s. With plans for a \$300 million retail and office complex already outlined, developers made a \$12.3 million bid for the property, promising to preserve the McCarthy and integrate it into the complex. The city readily agreed. However, a series of modifications over the next two years completely transformed the original plan. With the old structure now useless to the project, developers made subsequent proposals to preserve just the facade, or even to move the entire McCarthy Building to another location. When these propositions didn’t work out, the developers began offering to preserve other buildings in exchange for permission to

Source of image
quoted in
figure caption

demolish the McCarthy. Gapp admitted that the city was caught in a difficult situation: if it protected the McCarthy, it would be impeding development in an important urban renewal area, and if it allowed demolition, Chicago's landmark protection ordinance would be completely devalued. He nonetheless urged city officials to choose the "long view" and preserve the McCarthy.¹⁴ However, the developers' offer to buy and restore the Reliance Building, at a cost of between \$7 million and \$11 million, and to contribute \$4 million to other preservation efforts, prevailed. In September 1987, the Chicago City Council voted to revoke the McCarthy's landmark status.

Ironically, Chicago's rich architectural heritage may work against its own preservation. With so many significant buildings, losing one does not seem as critical as perhaps it should. The fact that Chicago boasts some forty-five Mies buildings, seventy-five Frank Lloyd Wright buildings, and numerous other buildings from the first and second Chicago Schools may inspire a nonchalant attitude toward preservation.¹⁵ The public seems to justify the demolition of quality architecture by citing Chicago's vast number of such works. Excusing the razing of Chicago's Arts Club, noted for having the only known interior designed by Mies himself, and other buildings on Michigan Avenue, the city's Planning and Development Commissioner, Valerie Jarrett, told the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "We are a city that is rich in our architectural heritage . . . we do a yeoman's job of preserving those buildings."¹⁶ This rationale is careless; each building is an original creation and should be evaluated as one, not as a faceless member of the group.

The razing of the McCarthy Building in 1987 exposes the problems inherent in Chicago's landmark policy. But the real

Introduction of counterevidence that large number of significant buildings diminishes value of each

tragedy is that none of the plans for development of the property were ever carried out. Block 37 remains vacant to this day. Clearly, the city needs creative and vigilant urban planning. Yet some have questioned the importance of such planning, arguing that it stifles innovation and creative advances. Jack Guthman, a Chicago lawyer representing a group of property owners, told the *Chicago Tribune* that he opposed landmark designation: “What [those proposing designation are] saying is a clear indictment of today’s architecture—that we can’t improve on the past.”¹⁷ Proponents of this viewpoint, however, neglect one important fact. The city has an extensive history of urban planning, dating back to Burnham’s original Chicago Plan of 1909, which posed no hindrance to the likes of Mies and Wright. In addition, just one look at the rapid and disorderly growth of North Michigan Avenue makes it clear that unlimited development is not the answer.

To uphold Chicago’s reputation as an architectural jewel, the city must participate in urban planning. The most important municipal duty in managing development is to ease the economic burdens that preservation entails. Some methods that have been suggested for this are property tax breaks for landmark owners and transferable development rights, which would give landmark owners bonuses for developing elsewhere. Overall, however, the city’s planning and landmarks commissions simply need to become more involved, working closely with developers throughout the entire design process. If both parties outline their needs, restrictions, and priorities and then negotiate until mutually satisfied, a middle ground can be reached. Of course, there are some demands on which the city should not compromise, such as the significance of landmark

Call for planning
to address
economic costs
of preservation



Fig. 4. Union Station, circa 1925. (Postcard courtesy of Minnie Dangberg.)

status. But added cooperation on other fronts could help to mitigate a few strict policies and achieve a practical, productive balance.

The effectiveness of an earnest but open-minded approach to urban planning has already been proven in Chicago. Union Station (fig. 4) is one project that worked to the satisfaction of both developers and preservationists. Developers U.S. Equities Realty Inc. and Amtrak proposed replacing the four floors of outdated office space above the station with more practical high-rise towers. This offer allowed for the preservation of the Great Hall and other public spaces within the station itself. "We are preserving the best of the historical landmark . . . and at the same time creating an adaptive reuse that will bring back some of the old glory of the station," Cheryl Stein of U.S. Equities told the *Tribune*.¹⁸ The city responded to this magnanimous offer in kind, upgrading zoning on

Example of successful planning introduced

the site to permit additional office space and working with developers to identify exactly which portions of the original structure needed to be preserved. Today, the sight of Union Station, revitalized and bustling, is proof of the sincere endeavors of developers and city planners alike.

In the midst of abandonment and demolition, buildings such as Union Station and the Reliance Building offer Chicago some hope for a future that is as architecturally rich as its past. The key to achieving this balance of preserving historic treasures and encouraging new development is to view the city not so much as a product, but as a process. Robert Bruegmann, author of *The Architects and the City*, defines a city as “the ultimate human artifact, our most complex and prodigious social creation, and the most tangible result of the actions over time of all its citizens.”¹⁹ Nowhere is this sentiment more relevant than in Chicago. Comprehensive urban planning will ensure that the city’s character, so closely tied to its architecture, is preserved.

Conclusion
offers hope
of a solution

Notes

1. Tracie Rozhon, "Chicago Girds for Big Battle over Its Skyline," *New York Times*, November 12, 2000, <http://www.lexisnexis.com> (accessed November 7, 2006).
2. David Garrard Lowe, *Lost Chicago* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2000), 112.
3. *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2000*, s.v. "Sullivan, Louis Henri," CD-ROM (Microsoft, 2000).
4. Lowe, *Lost Chicago*, 123.
5. Daniel Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 105.
6. Alan J. Shannon, "When Will It End?" *Chicago Tribune*, September 11, 1987, quoted in Karen J. Dilibert, *From Landmark to Landfill* (Chicago: Chicago Architectural Foundation, 2000), 11.
7. Steve Kerch, "Landmark Decisions," *Chicago Tribune*, March 18, 1990, sec. 16.
8. Patrick T. Reardon, "'No' Vote Makes It a Landmark Day for the Berghoff," *Chicago Tribune*, April 5, 1991, sec 1.
9. Ibid.
10. John W. Stamper, *Chicago's North Michigan Avenue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 215.
11. Nancy Stuenkel, "Success Spoiling the Magnificent Mile?" *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 9, 1995, <http://www.lexisnexis.com> (accessed November 8, 2006).
12. Stamper, *North Michigan Avenue*, 215.
13. Paul Gapp, "McCarthy Building Puts Landmark Law on a Collision Course with Developers," *Chicago Tribune*, April 20, 1986,

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14. Ibid.

15. Rozhon, "Chicago Girds for Big Battle."

16. Rich Hein, "Preservationists Rally behind 'Mies and Moe's,'" *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 4, 1994, <http://www.lexisnexis.com> (accessed November 10, 2006).

17. David Mendell and Gary Washburn, "Daley Acts to Protect Michigan Ave. Skyline," *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 2001.

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19. Robert Bruegmann, *The Architects and the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 443.

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