Daniel Burnham was an architect, living in Chicago. His father was the older brother of Nathan Clark Burnham, the father of Al-Anon co-founder, Lois Burnham Wilson. Lois and Daniel were first cousins, grandchildren of Rev. Nathan Clark Burnham.

Daniel’s family had moved to Chicago when he was seven. He had hopes of going to Harvard or Yale, but failed both entrance exams. While doing assorted jobs, he discovered a passion for architecture.

Daniel had fallen in love with a lovely young woman whose father, Holland Weeks, was a Congregational minister. However, Rev. Weeks found himself increasingly drawn to the Swedenborgians, and ended up starting a society of the Church of the New Jerusalem in Henderson, N.Y., in 1825.

Like his cousin Lois Wilson, Daniel was raised as a Swedenborgian. He had become a successful architect, and was commissioned to be the Director of Works for the Columbian Exposition; The Chicago World's Fair. It opened on May 1st, 1893, and people gasped in amazement at the 640 acre fair. An entire city had been created in Jackson Park! It was a city filled with the scents of flowers instead of the stench of the stock yard. The streets were clear; not filled with garbage. The buildings were aesthetically pleasing, in matching white, and they all served useful purposes. The water was clean; the food was plentiful.

It was called "The White City" after the color of the buildings. The White City offered a new vision of what kind of community could exist in a city. It became the start of city planning and landscaping, it was a statement about the integration of the environment and social justice. It made Daniel Burnham into a world-famous architect.
About 15 years later, Burnham was commissioned to develop a plan for Chicago. He put together a breath-taking vision of a city that was for the use of its citizens. He presented his plan in 1909, and much of the plan was put into effect after his death in 1912.

Burnham said that his plan for Chicago was inspired by Swedenborg’s concept of “uses.” He believed that a city or a building should exist for improving the quality of life of people. In Chicago, he saw that the property along the shore of Lake Michigan was being purchased for private enjoyment or by business for industrial gain. He believed that the water and the land belonged to everyone. He fought tirelessly to get the shores into the hands of a commission that made it all into beautiful parks for the enjoyment of all. One can now drive for miles along Lake Shore drive with an unobstructed view of the water, and enjoy beautiful public parks. Burnham knew that many people experienced the divine in nature, and he believed that a city -- and a building -- should have a lot of open space and light. He put many parks in the cities that he developed plans for. Most of the work he did for cities was done without a fee.

One researcher on Daniel Burnham's, Dr. Kristen Schaffer, in her book, Daniel H Burnham, has discovered that Burnham’s original draft of the Chicago Plan contained a radical social agenda in addition to a physical lay-out of the city. Burnham had wanted a city filled with social services to alleviate hunger and homelessness – and even to provide day care for the children of working parents. What happened to that part of the plan? It somehow disappeared from the final version of the Chicago Plan. It has yet to be implemented. This is part of what he wrote, that was eliminated:

_It is only within comparatively recent times that people have begun to realize the imperative need of organizing the forces of honesty and decency, for better physical conditions, for broader charities, for the prevention as well as the cure of evils. Slowly it is beginning to dawn on the American mind that the rights of the individual must be subordinated to the general good, that the price of civilization is provision for the health and happiness of all the people, and that the really prosperous city is one that education and morality, by inculcating high ideals, unite all the people in the common endeavor to make their city preeminent._

_In this newly-awakened civic consciousness lies the hope of the regeneration of the American city. The merely animal growth will no longer suffice. Pride in mere numbers or area is seen to be unworthy. The newer ideals comprehend good order and convenience and even beauty. In short, the city is developing within itself a soul._

_Burnham knew that God’s plan for us was not just heaven after we die, but heaven right here and now._

The White City & the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, was a mysterious event that has changed the world. The vision of the purity in its design and the cutting-edge innovations and concepts it introduced to the public sparked change. People’s lives were woven together in ways that only God can understand.
Daniel Burnham’s role in the fair changed Chicago and architecture forever. It led to his being commissioned to develop the Plan of Chicago years later. Seeds from this plan spread across the country and are visible in the style of many of the city buildings, courts and banks inspired by his designs.

The fair was also a time that serial killer, H. H. Holmes, found victims for his horrible crimes. Next week, we’ll look at the non-fiction book, *Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* by Erik Larson. It contrasts Daniel Burnham’s brilliant experience in the Columbian Exposition with the evil deeds of H.H. Holmes.

Another aspect of the 1893 World’s Fair was The Parliament of World Religions. It was the first attempt to bring together all of the world’s religions, and it was instrumental in starting the interfaith movement in the U.S. Its designer was Chicago Swedenborgian Charles Bonney.

Daniel Burnham took the concepts of Swedenborg and used them to develop architectural design. For Lois Burnham, Swedenborg was her childhood grounding, out of which she came to terms with Bill’s alcoholism and helped to found Al-Anon.

Surprisingly, Burnham never did well in school, and flunked his college entrance exams. Yet, he radically changed the lives of countless generations of people in Chicago, D.C., the Philippines, and many other places. He has given many of us an opportunity to experience the Divine in even a grain of sand along the shore of Lake Michigan. He found his deepest passion in life, and he followed it.

Burnham knew that God’s plan for us was not just heaven after we die, but heaven right here and now in our cities. The health and happiness of all people – and all of nature – is in that plan.