

MADISON: A MODEL CITY

BY

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(12) To organize the park work of Madison under a new park law.

(13) To take the existing parks of Madison as a nucleus and by supplementing them with small open spaces, larger parks and parkways, as already outlined, secure a well-balanced park system for the future.

(14) To provide playgrounds and large school grounds in every residence section of the city.

(15) To adopt reasonable regulations for the control of all buildings so as to differentiate neighborhoods and protect real estate values.

(16) To consider methods of improving the housing of people of small means.

(17) To investigate and report upon city finances for Madison as regards bond issues, current taxes, and relation to the State government.

This list briefly summarizes the report and presents for consideration and action the main points in the program for the improvement of Madison. It is a long program, yet it contains only recommendations which must sooner or later be take up. While it is a program calling for some large expenditures, it is also a program that would result in equally large economies. Successful action is dependent upon the co-operation of the State, the railroads, private individuals and the city. The responsibility for the first seven points, however, rests mainly with the State, and of the last ten points mainly with the city. Probably no far-reaching changes can be effected without a permanent city plan commission, such as a recent act of the legislature provided for, with power and funds to investigate, study and execute comprehensive plans of improvement.⁶

In estimating the size and difficulty of these undertakings, the achievements and programs of other cities and

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states should be considered. More than fifty cities in the United States have begun comprehensive improvements on a large scale and Madison cannot hold even its present place by present methods.⁷ Cities are as definitely in competition as individuals and a new standard of city making has been set. Any city which hopes to advance must accept this new standard and find ways and means to apply it to local conditions. No better illustration could be given of the frank and whole-hearted acceptance of this new city standard than that of the recently published plan for Chicago. It is big, broad, far-seeing. Fortunately, too, a careful investigation of its legal aspects discloses its practicability. It appears (1) that without any additional legislation many of the recommendations of that plan can be adopted and practical steps taken to carry them into effect; (2) that the Illinois legislature has ample power to grant either to the city or to other governmental agencies such additional authority as may be necessary to carry out all of the recommendations of the plan as fully and as rapidly as may be found wise; and (3) that additional authority, and especially a substantial increase in the local bonding power, is essential to the effective accomplishment of the most important of these recommendations. "It remains for the people of Chicago, through their legally constituted representatives, to decide upon the wisdom of the suggestions and to adopt them in the order of their relative importance and availability. The necessary funds can no doubt be secured as rapidly as it can be clearly shown that their expenditure will result in real advantage to the individual citizens who constitute "the public," and upon whom rests, directly or indirectly, the burden of expense. In the last analysis it must be clear that a community which makes wise expenditure for public works not only im-



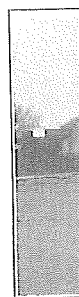
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poses no real burden upon private property, but increases the value of all private property within its limits. Such a community should be given adequate authority to levy taxes and incur debt, subject always to such intelligent supervision of expenditures as will effectively guard against extravagance and waste. Certainly, any limitations upon a progressive municipality should be broad enough to make it possible to undertake such public enterprises as are recommended in this plan.* The legislature of Wisconsin, ever forehanded in matters related to the public welfare, has already acted favorably upon joint resolutions which when finally adopted by the people, as they undoubtedly will be, and incorporated as amendments to the State Constitution, will provide all the power necessary for effective action by both State and city.⁸

As a matter of fact, the most ambitious proposals for American cities in no wise equal the actual achievements of the cities of the Old World. All that we are beginning to think of doing here has been for decades realized fact in European cities. Thus there is in Europe, especially in Germany and Switzerland, better provision for city life, for business, for health, for pleasure and all at less cost to the tax payer. Consider, for example, the lake cities of Switzerland, especially those that are capitals of cantons or seats of universities! Do they not present a perfectly practicable ideal of what Madison might readily be? Lucerne, Lugano, Constance, Zurich, Neuchatel, Lausanne, Geneva,—these and other Swiss cities may be named as an inspiration and guide for Madison. Examine their city plans, their city ordinances, or better still, walk their streets and public places. Without exception,

* From "The Plan of Chicago."

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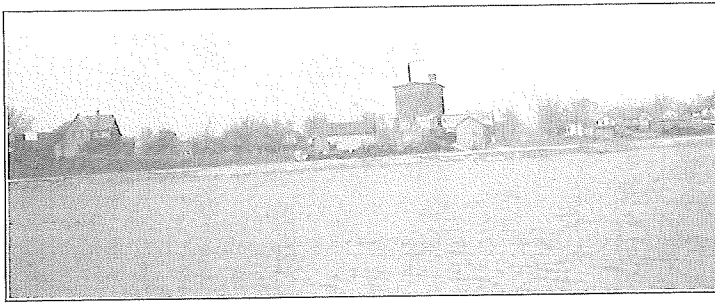


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we should find a happy development of lake frontages for public use; a rational street system; a freedom from nuisances; a wise and reasonable regulation of railroads and private buildings; the careful planting and protection of street trees; an abundance of recreation areas and public gardens of all sorts; practical and beautiful sites for public buildings, art galleries, museums, and music halls; comfortable and sanitary housing, and withal a prudent anticipation of future needs. Take any city at random and see the list and character of its attractions in a Bae-

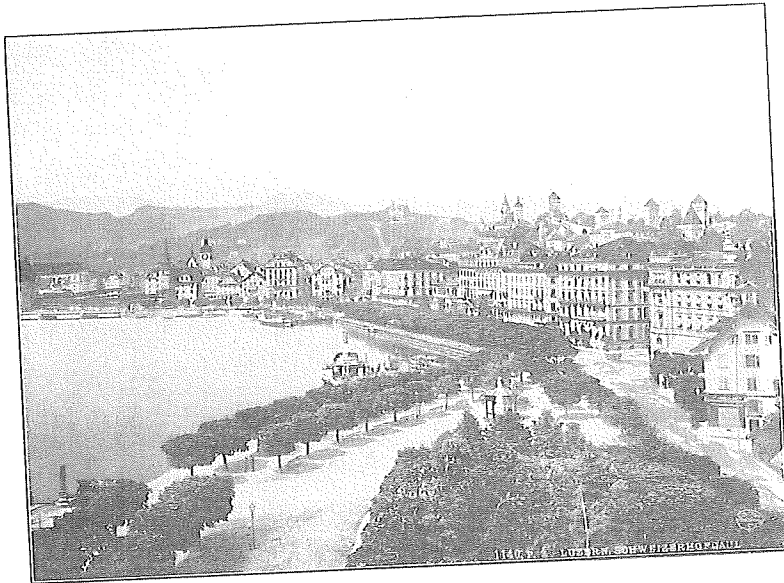


West Madison, showing mill near Brittingham Park, in a section otherwise devoted to residences and recreation.

deker guide-book. They are of the highest order and almost endless, and yet they include little that Madison may not possess. In a recently published volume, Frederick Harrison, the English critic and essayist, has given apt expression to the charm and achievements of some of these Swiss cities. He says, "I hold Zurich, Basle, and Geneva to be the model cities of our age—the fine type of what cities will one day be in a regenerated age—the true type of civic organization, having sites of rare beauty and convenience, spacious streets and avenues, noble public walks and gardens. . . . Of them all, I hold Geneva to be the finest type of a rational city that Europe pos-

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sesses. Its modest population of about 120,000 is as much as is needed for high civic life. Its wonderful site, astride the most beautiful rushing river in our continent; its calm and spacious aspect at the mouth of a grand lake large enough to look like an inland sea, and yet not so broad as to cease to be a lake; its superb view of the snow chain



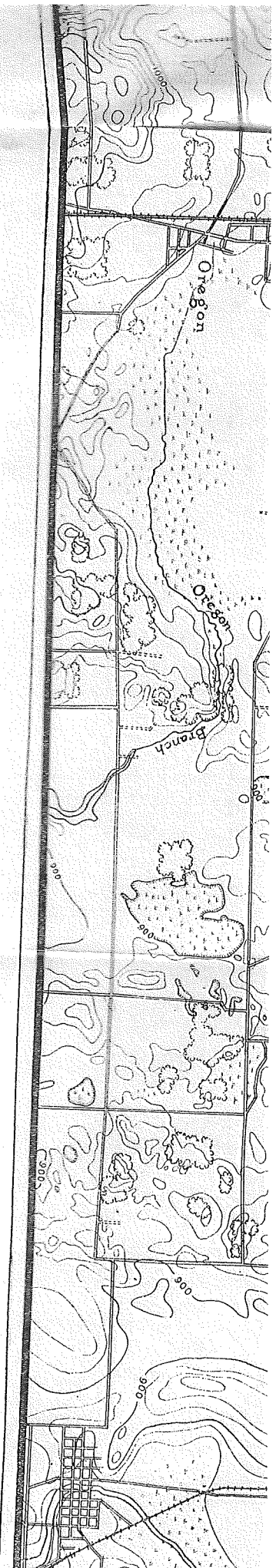
LAKE FRONT TREATMENT, LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND.
Note method of trimming trees, so as to afford shade but not to shut out the view.

of Mont Blanc; its beautiful gardens, bridges, and promenades; its history of two thousand years, its intellectual and spiritual memories of four centuries; its record as the asylum of the oppressed; its ingenious and studious people—all this makes Geneva the very model of a true city. A true city, where, as in Athens, Florence, Venice, Antwerp or Ghent, of old, men can live a wholesome civic life, not in huge amorphous caravansaries such as Lon-

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don, Paris or Berlin—not in suffumigated barracks such as Manchester, or Lyons, or Glasgow—but in a beautiful, well-ordered, free, organic city.”

Of all the cities in the United States, it appears to me that Madison has the best opportunity to become in the future a city of this type, a model modern American city. It has the site, the environment, the climate, the population, the high civic spirit, the traditions, the permanent attractions of government and higher education. It lacks only the increase of wealth and population, which time will certainly and quickly bring, the co-operation of various public bodies, and a well-considered plan of city making which it is the purpose of this report to at least inaugurate. It is within the power of the people of Wisconsin to make Madison in the future what Geneva is today—a beautiful, well-ordered, free, organic city.



GENERAL PLAN FOR TRIT OF THE FOUR LAKES MADISON WISCONSIN



JOHN NOLEN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
CAMBRIDGE MASS.
1910

