

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

Issue: November 15, 2011

★ **The Lost Panoramas: When Chicago Changed Its River and the Land Beyond.**

Williams, Michael (Author) and Cahan, Richard (Author)

Nov 2011. 160 p. CityFiles, hardcover, \$45.00. (9780978545000). 977.

“Most of the photographs in this book have never been seen before. Few were ever printed.” So begins the latest volume of discovery from Williams and Cahan, the eloquent archival sleuthing duo who, along with Nicholas Osborn, brought us *Who We Were: A Snapshot History of America* (2008), among other stellar books. Between 1894 and 1928, 21,834 meticulously composed and extraordinarily detailed photographs (shot with large-format view cameras using glass negatives), were taken for the Sanitary District of Chicago to document one of the world’s most famous engineering feats: the reversal of the Chicago River to prevent the city’s sewage from fouling Lake Michigan, the source of its drinking water. Many of the photographs fit together in seamless panoramas of a lost world, unspoiled rural Illinois at the close of the horse-and-buggy era, a land of subtle beauty and extraordinary fecundity. Here, too, are arresting photographs of rapidly growing and hideously polluted Chicago. Williams and Cahan profile the players, elucidate the technological innovations, track the politics, and document the beneficial and catastrophic consequences of this massive and hubristic tinkering with nature. A risky feat that is still rippling through the Great Lakes region and beyond as our infrastructure decays and water becomes an evermore precious and contentious resource.

— *Donna Seaman*