

Burnham Kelly

January 23, 1912 — February 3, 1999

On February 3, 1999, the AAP College lost one of its most important members, Burnham Kelly, who gave the college its current shape and form. As Dean from 1960-71, Kelly guided the college into a new era of growth and change. He caused it to have greater recognition and prestige among the recognized leading schools teaching architecture, art and city and regional planning. His impact was felt across the college in the undergraduate and graduate teaching areas where he expanded the college's professional offerings to embrace urban design, historic preservation, and regional science. He re-established the dormant Landscape Architecture Program, and initiated a Masters and Doctoral program in Architectural and Urban History. He also helped build the excellent Ph.D. degree program in Regional Planning. During his term as Dean, the college gave the signal to the world about its new approach by restructuring itself into three departments and several new graduate fields. This was reflected in a change of name from the College of Architecture to the College of Architecture, Art and Planning.

The scope of change did not stop there. Kelly was a visionary builder in other areas as well. He started a New York City program for architects and planners, which gave AAP students an opportunity to study in an environment much different from Ithaca. In New York, they could experience the urban environment first-hand, and see the work of top architects, planners and artists. While there, students could meet with many of the leaders in their fields, an opportunity not readily available in Ithaca. In addition, Burnham embraced community service as an important responsibility of the college, and an integral part of the education of design and planning professionals. Indeed, with his urging and support, the college became the leader in service among the endowed schools at Cornell. The breadth and depth of these changes, in retrospect, is remarkable. The deans who followed him from the 1970s on built on the foundation he established.

Burnham Kelly was born in 1912 in Evanston, Illinois. He attended Williams College, graduating in 1933. He went on to study law at Harvard, graduating in 1936, and practiced law briefly in Rhode Island before returning to study city planning at MIT. He received the Master of City Planning degree from MIT in 1941, and eventually returned there to join the faculty of its Planning Department after a stint in the service during World War II. During the war years, 1941-45, Kelly worked with the National Defense Research Council and the Office of Scientific Research and Development in Washington, D.C. He also served overseas during this period, primarily in France, on war-related research. In 1946, he was awarded the Army-Navy Certificate of Appreciation for his work for the government.

Kelly taught and did research at MIT from 1945-60. His teaching dealt primarily with land use law and housing. In those years, Burnham's strong interests were focussed on research on industrialized housing. While there, he served as the head of MIT's Bemis Foundation that was concerned with the U.S. housing industry. His record of accomplishments at MIT brought him to the attention of the Cornell faculty and administrators as they searched for a new dean for what was then called the Architecture College. He was selected for the deanship in 1960. At Cornell, Kelly pursued his interests in land use law and housing. After leaving the deanship in 1971, he returned to the classroom to offer those subjects in the Department of City and Regional Planning. He continued to teach well after he retired from the faculty, until 1987. CRP students considered Burnham an excellent teacher who taught a rigorous course that was critically important to their preparation as planning professionals.

In his long career, Burnham was widely recognized for his abilities and accomplishments; for these, he garnered many awards. Among the most important to him was the recognition by his alma mater, Williams College, which awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters in 1963. In addition, Kelly was appointed by President Kennedy to the National Fine Arts Commission, serving from 1963-67. This committee influenced all federal architecture and art in the nation's capital. Following this, New York's Governor Rockefeller appointed him to the New York State Council on Architecture where he served with distinction from 1968-72. He also served as a trustee for the institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York City from 1968-1974, and was a director of the Housing Association of Metropolitan Boston during his MIT days. Dean Kelly also published many articles and authored or edited two books emanating from his housing research with the Bemis Foundation: *Prefabrication of Houses and Design* in 1951, and *Production of Houses* in 1959.

Those who knew Burnham and who served with him at the AAP College when he was Dean remember him as always willing to listen and entertain new ideas. In a sense, he was a futurist, although he would be too modest to allow that term to be applied to him. He was easy to approach, thoughtful and supportive of the faculty's initiatives, but always looking to further ideas brought to him that would put the college at the cutting edge of the professions. His colleagues then and now think of him as a builder of programs at the college, especially those in the City and Regional Planning Department. He gave CRP the guidance, backing and encouragement it needed, at a critical time in its development, to make it the world-class department it is today.

His closest colleagues and friends knew him to be a warm and devoted father. He adored his wife, Jean, who shared many years of life with him until her death a few years previously. Burnham was a man who fully enjoyed life, especially being outdoors in nature. He loved skiing, both downhill and cross-country, enjoyed camping and

canoeing, and most other outdoor sports. In his retirement years, he continued to be physically active, expanding his interests to include square dancing, worldwide travel and the study of art. In retrospect, those who knew him well remember a man who led a full and productive life, leaving behind important contributions to his family, his university and to the community.

In later years, when he shared his life experiences, he seemed somewhat surprised that people thought he had done so much in his lifetime. He was truly modest, believing that he was not really deserving of any credit; he claimed that he was just doing his job. He believed that he was exceptionally lucky throughout his life, lucky with his wife and family, with the people who worked with him, and with the places he worked. His colleagues and friends felt fortunate, also, that he lived and worked with them in Ithaca at Cornell.

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