Short Subjects: Map Management for Small Collections

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MAP MANAGEMENT FOR SMALL COLLECTIONS

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In the past, maps have been used only to illustrate texts or to buttress views gleaned from more traditional written sources. However, maps are primary sources and should be integrated with historical research from the outset.¹ They should be viewed as true documents, not as secondary sources.

Archivists and historians must remember that maps provide essential information related to places and man-made objects. "First, they reveal the existence of tangible things such as cities and rivers, as well as indiscrete items such as weather conditions. Second, maps demonstrate the relative position of these discrete objects in relation with other cultural or natural features."² By


developing a system for the management of these special formats, archivists will demonstrate to themselves and to researchers that maps are true documents and enable broader use.

Map management will not always be done by an archivist with specialized training. Many archives, especially those with small staffs, will designate an archivist to handle maps and to design guidelines for their care. Such a project was arranged as part of an internship at the University of Central Arkansas Torreyson Library Archives and Special Collections in the summer of 1987.

Soon after Archives and Special Collections opened, the department inherited from the main library approximately 260 maps of Arkansas dating from the late nineteenth century to the present. Their collection policy was not only to develop collections covering the entire history of Arkansas, but also to preserve and protect them, catalog them in a professional manner, and to make them available to researchers in a way that would follow normal archival practices. Collecting maps dealing with Arkansas was an integral part of that policy.

Background research for the project began with Ralph Ehrenberg’s Society of American Archivists manual on *Maps and Architectural Drawings*, Mary Larsgaard’s *Map Librarianship: An Introduction*, Harold Nichols’s *Map Librarianship*, as well as several other books and articles on map collections. Ehrenberg’s manual and Larsgaard’s book both proved to be excellent sources of information on how to arrange and describe collections.

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More background information was gathered from the University of Arkansas, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and the United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in Little Rock about how they managed their map collections. The University of Arkansas had previously cataloged their maps according to the Dewey decimal system but was currently changing over to the Library of Congress classification system. This system was not ideal for the University of Central Arkansas because the Library of Congress number would be too cumbersome at the level these maps needed to be arranged, which included the state, county, and municipal level. The Library of Congress number was several digits long at the state level of description. There was not enough room on a catalog card for this much information. Adding to the municipal or county level made the number even longer. The University of Arkansas at Little Rock was also considering a change in how they managed their collection, but had not determined what system was appropriate for them.

The USDA Soil Conservation Service held a collection of field survey maps from around the state, arranged in alphabetical order by community. To use these maps effectively, the user had to know all the surrounding communities in order to get the larger picture. This was especially true when various projects, such as flood plain planning, included more than one community. They were planning a two-year project to rearrange the maps in geographic order and assign a digit code that will be entered in a computer data base for easier access.

It was evident from background reading and neighboring institutions’ programs that there was no fully agreed upon standard for the administration of these special formats in archives. Only practical guidelines were suggested for their arrangement, description, conservation, storage, and reference service. Thus, it seemed that the development of an unique
organizational system for the map project at the University of Central Arkansas was the best solution.

The first decision concerning the arrangement and description of maps was that the system would be kept as simple as possible. An arrangement scheme based on geographic area is a good idea because it "is a simple system which can be applied to small as well as large collections; it is convenient for both archivist and researchers; and it does not require a complex system of classification numbers and indexes." Formal arrangement and classification schemes based on geographic area have been devised for cataloging maps by the Library of Congress and the American Geographical Society.

The decisions for physical organization and description were to provide easy research and retrieval access to the materials, as well as to facilitate storage. Maps were arranged by geographic area and ordered from the largest geographic area to the smallest. Once divided into series or categories, the maps were then described at a level which would provide the researcher with basic information. The retrieval of individual maps was improved further by the creation of tracings for each map by subject and titles.

As the management system evolved, the maps were divided into seven categories: national, regional, state, county, municipal, bound and miscellaneous. Each was assigned a roman numeral (I-VII) accordingly.

A separate card catalog was developed for the maps. Each map was assigned a locator code, which was noted on each card and penciled in the bottom right-hand corner of the verso of the map itself. The locator code was thorough. The code began with the word MAP on the first line. The following line gave the

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*Ehrenberg, Archives and Manuscripts: Maps and Architectural Drawings, 21.*
division number to which the map was assigned and the number that individual map had been given. The last three lines gave the division, publisher, and date, but it became apparent that these lines were not necessary in order to retrieve an item and were deleted.

Each map was then described individually on the catalog card. The description included: title, publisher, date, scale, dimensions, and color. Unscaled maps were described essentially the same way except that the scale was not included. If no date was given, an approximate one was provided. The measurement of the map was given in inches to the nearest eighth, giving the vertical dimensions first. The maps were measured within their borders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAP</th>
<th>CITIES AND TOWNS-SAVANNAH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV-8</td>
<td>State of Georgia State Highway System.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Highway Department 1962.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scale: 3/4&quot; = 10 miles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Size: 26 7/8&quot; X 20 3/4&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colored.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Illustration 1

Multiple access points were provided for each map. Cross-references included subjects, titles, and the name of the collection from which the map was pulled. (See illustration 1.) Subject tracings were established by using the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), as well as an established subject heading authority file from the archives. Using established subject headings from the LCSH is useful because most archives and libraries utilize these descriptive terms. Proper names were to be used whenever possible. The tracings dealt with the history of the state, such as Civil War (except major battles which were
entered under name), ethnic subdivisions, as well as political subdivisions, transportation, waterways, and other descriptive terms that would assist researchers in using maps as primary documents. These tracings were placed in alphabetical order on the shelflist card. (See illustration 2.)

While these maps were being arranged and described, conservation work was also completed. Fragile, rare, or old map sheets were deacidified and then encapsulated in sealed mylar sleeves. All maps were stored within acid-free folders and placed in map case drawers. Typically, five to ten maps could be enclosed in one folder.

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II-2</td>
<td>Scale: 1 inch = 125 miles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Size: 19&quot; X 24 7/8&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canal; Desert and Wasteland; Elevation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gas and Oil Fields; Mountains; Region-Northwest Africa; Transportation-Roads; Waterways-Lakes; Waterways-Ocean; Title.</td>
</tr>
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Illustration 2

New maps were placed in acid-free folders and held in a safe place until they could be processed. Encapsulation took place after cataloging. These maps were removed from the acidic cardboard backing with which they were shipped, and dirt brushed off all articles before placement in the folder.

Bound maps were defined as a collection of maps that contains no narrative. A catalog card was created for the collection as a whole, not for each individual map. They were processed with the same information as sheet maps; however, the number of maps included in the volume was noted on the
same line. Since there can be numerous maps in any volume, the sizes and/or scale will most likely vary. This also was indicated on the card.

It was important to know whether the system would work effectively for research use as well as staff use before the finalized set of procedures was written up in a manual. Therefore, after this system was designed, a manual regarding the administration of maps was compiled by consolidating specific procedures and policies that had been developed. Finally, a training workshop on the arrangement and description of maps was held for the rest of the staff. A member of the staff was then charged with the care, cataloging, and maintenance of the map collection.

The significance of this system is that other archives can use it also. Staff members at the Richard B. Russell Memorial Library at the University of Georgia have adopted this management plan to catalog a collection of twentieth-century maps. The majority of these maps are from political collections. Cards created for these maps also designate the names of collections to which the maps belong. Removal sheets were placed in collections from which maps had been removed. These maps show proposed dam projects, various official trips of public officials, and house and senate districts (state and national level).

Also, these maps supplement the manuscript and oral history collections by illustrating the history of Georgia. Although this is not a large collection, its importance cannot be denied.

While some institutions can use the same map system because research use is similar, collection size and historical maintenance as well as research use may cause others to choose alternate formats. For example, other departments at the University of Georgia arrange their maps in a different manner. The Hargrett Library for Rare Books and Manuscripts arranges its maps according to their dates. The locator codes are created by the date of the map, the first letter of the cartographer’s last name,
and a numerical designation of that first letter, such as 1875A1. On the catalog card the following items are indicated: location, year, scale, size in centimeters, and anything unusual about the map. Researchers usually request maps by date. Another department, the Science Map Library, catalogs their map collection according to AACR2 and Library of Congress rules. Their comprehensive collection consists of 338,000 individual maps. Many researchers are using these maps for specific geographic information.

In this instance, it is interesting that two institutions with two different missions are able to use the same map management system successfully. Part of the University of Central Arkansas Archives and Special Collections' mission is to collect maps dealing with Arkansas. However, the Richard B. Russell Memorial Library does not actively seek map collections unless they are a part of a political collection. The Russell Library chose the system developed at the University of Central Arkansas instead of those already instituted at the University of Georgia Libraries because of its use of tracings for each map by subject and title, feeling that this system would serve their researcher needs better. Maps have often been used purely to illustrate texts from more traditional written sources. But, these sources are in fact primary and should be integrated with historical research from the beginning. No matter how small the map collection may be, it is worthwhile to take the opportunity to catalog these primary sources. By having a system for the management of these special formats, maps will be seen as true documents by the archivist and the researcher.

Pam Hackbart-Dean is the processing archivist at the Richard B. Russell Memorial Library at the University of Georgia. She wishes to thank Tom Dillard, director of the University of Central Arkansas Archives and Special Collections, for his guidance on the map project described in this article.