Notes on the
Map Collection in the
Historical Society of Western
Pennsylvania Archives
By Arthur B. Fox

DURING an internship in 1987, I had the opportunity to organize the map collection in the Historical Society’s Library and Archives. The result was a 143-page guide, “Catalogue of the Map Collection in the Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania,” which is available for public use at the Society’s Library.

Although a map collection is open-ended and never complete, my work describes the Society’s holdings as of January 1988; of the approximately 560 entries, 250 maps are believed to be original documents; photographs, photostats, reproductions and drawings of original documents make up the remainder. The maps are broken down into several sections:

- Pittsburgh and Allegheny City streets
- Military campaigns in Western Pennsylvania
- Pittsburgh population and census tracts
- Pittsburgh and Allegheny County transportation
- Pittsburgh and Allegheny County parks, cemeteries, plots and estates
- Pittsburgh geodetic and topographic maps
- Allegheny County
- Southwestern Pennsylvania coal, oil, and gas resources
- Western Pennsylvania counties
- State of Pennsylvania (eighteenth to twentieth century)
- Outside of Pennsylvania (seventeenth to twentieth century)
- War
- International

This article — an overview but not a duplicate of the catalogue — focuses on Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania documents.

Eighteenth to Twentieth Century Maps

The oldest Pittsburgh map in the collection, apparently an original document, “Plan of the tracts laid out and surveyed within the proprietaries manor south of the Coal Hill,” is dated 1787. The 13 x 13 inch map, drawn in color by John Hill, shows only a small section of property north and south of Saw Mill Run.1

“Pittsburgh in 1795” is a fairly common map found in many collections. Drawn by A.G. Haumann in 1869, it is believed to have been copied from other maps (all containing errors), descriptions, old deeds and plans of the town.2 The map was reproduced in many different versions, ranging from black-on-white to black-on-tan, and measuring from 23 x 30 inches to 5 x 7 inches.

Another controversial map of Pittsburgh is the Tardieu L. Aine Map of “Pittsburgh 1796,” by George Henry Victor Collet, who is believed to have been a military spy who visited Pittsburgh in the summer of 1795. Writing in 1946, one researcher concluded about Collet: “...his motives in making his journey have been questioned. It is evident from his descriptions, that he had in mind other things than ordinary sightseeing...[H]e was always more concerned with forts than with houses and because of that has left the only good description of Fort Fayette that any traveler or chronicler has recorded.”3

“The Plan of Pittsburgh: 1805,” by William Masson is represented by two superb hand drawn color maps of 22 x 29 inches. This document illustrates all landowners in the “Point” area, and is especially useful to historians. Masson based his drawing and map essentially on the 1764 surveys of Colonel John Campbell and the survey in 1784 by Colonel George Woods and Thomas Vicroy.4

“Plan of Pittsburgh and Adjacent Country,” an 1815-1816 map by Patterson and Darby — the one in the collection is a reproduction — is large enough, at 18 x 22 inches, to be studied in detail.

Although the Patterson and Darby map is
not controversial, the origin of "Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, 1825-26. Plan of Pittsburgh and Umgenbung," was questioned as early as 1929 in a newspaper article:

"...Pittsburgh historians are seeking a copy of the ancient Patterson map of Pittsburgh, published in 1816. They want to determine if it was identical with one published by the Duke of Saxe-Weimer (sic) Einenach in a book of travels printed in 1826...[T]he lettering on the Saxe-Weimer (sic) map is in English, [and] although the title is in German, some historians believed that it indicated the German traveler bought a copy of the Patterson map and traced it for his book."

"Map of Pittsburgh and it's Environ," by Jean Barbeau and Lewis Keyon, made in 1830, is well known to historians and reproductions are common. The Historical Society has three 26 x 33-inch issues; one of these, framed and varnished, may be original. The "Map of the Boroughs of Birmingham, South Pittsburgh and East Birmingham," made April 5, 1851, is historically important for documenting the city's growth at the end of what many historians call the "Commercial Era." The Historical Society's 50 x 30-inch color reproduction is especially useful in this regard, although it is damaged.

Maps of Pittsburgh and Allegheny City after 1870 are fairly common. Of note in the Historical Society Archives are:

"The Map of Pittsburgh and Allegheny Cities," 1886
"Map of the Cities of Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Environs," 1895
"J. M. Kelly's Map of Pittsburgh and Allegheny," 1895
"Map of the Cities of Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Environs," 1897
"Plan of City of Allegheny-1882"
"Map of the Cities of Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Environs," 1900
"Map of the Cities of Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Environs," 1902
"Pittsburgh and Vicinity U.S. Geological Survey," 1903
"Lippincott and McNeil's Map of Greater Pittsburgh," 1921

"Map of Pittsburgh," from 1913, details more than 100 street car routes and lists the names changes of over 400 streets, by ward. Dozens of other Pittsburgh maps cover the period from 1921 to the present.

 Maps of Allegheny County
Maps of Allegheny County in the Society's collection span the years 1860 to the present; this collection has approximately 20 original documents.

From the historian's perspective, "Map of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania," 1862, measuring 62 inches square, is a highly valued document of the early industrial era of Pittsburgh. In addition to its excellent features, this map details about 20 smaller areas and towns by using inset maps, including Elizabeth, Sewickley, Etna, Port Perry, Showstown, Sharpsburg, West Elizabeth, East Liberty, Braddock's Field, Tarentum, Natrona, Clinton, Middletown, Mt. Oliver, Amity, Buena Vista, Mansfield, Bakerstown, McKeesport, Allegheny City and Birmingham.


Assorted Western Pennsylvania County Maps
The importance of natural resources in the development of the region's industrial might in the nineteenth century is reflected by several coal, oil, and natural gas maps. Noteworthy are:

"Map of the Oil Belt of Clarion County, Pa.," 1877, which details extensive oil wells and individual property owners.
"Map of Connellsville Coal and Coke Region," 1868, shows coke, coal, and iron producing areas from Westmoreland to Fayette Counties.
"Map of Western Pennsylvania Coal Region," 1866, designates oil and bituminous coal fields, canals and railroads.
"Map of Fayette County, Pa.," 1865, a map by the well-known G.M. Hopkins company, documents iron, coal fields and railroads in that county.

The Archives also holds more than 130 other maps; most are from the nineteenth century, and are not originals, but rather black-and-white enlargements from microfilm.

Maps of Pennsylvania
This assemblage of 60 maps covers the entire state from 1749 to the present, and is arranged by respective century. The eighteenth century group includes several original color maps, some in excellent condition and of useful size. The 26 documents from the nineteenth century include many original maps in color.

Significant among this group are items such as "This Map of the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsylvania," 1759 and "A Map of Pennsylvania Exhibiting not only the Improved Parts of that Province, but also its Extensive Frontiers," 1775. "A New Map of Pennsylvania with its Canals, Railroads," 1846 details the Pennsylvania Canal across the state, and the steamboat route from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia.

An inset in "New County Map of the State of Pennsylvania and adjoining States," 1853 documents all counties during the 7th U.S. Census (1850) with respect to dwellings, families, population, deaths, and farms and manufacturing establishments.

Maps Outside of Pennsylvania

The final section in the catalogue includes 127 maps in several different classes, including seventeenth to twentieth century U.S. and international maps, Civil War maps, and Revolutionary Era maps. Although the 21 Civil War maps and 20 Revolutionary Era maps are reproductions, several of the eighteenth and nineteenth century documents are original.

The overall good physical condition of the maps in the collection means that most can be readily handled by researchers. The catalogue's author provides annotated descriptions with each map. Some maps display lengthy identifications; in these instances, the text was either copied or edited for conciseness. Titles were copied exactly as printed on the maps, and only rarely edited. 8

To determine the existence of different issues of a map, it is necessary to study the internal evidence on the map itself, noting changes in the state of the plate made by the engraver. There is no way of knowing how many copies were pulled from a plate at a given time unless the printer left some record, which is seldom the case. The word "issue" is a relative term used to differentiate between copies of the same map printed at different times, characterized by changes made in the plate between the two printings. An issue represents all the copies which were printed before a change was made in the plate. Two states of a map imply that there were two issues of that map printed. 9

An "edition," in the case of old maps, is determined by one thing only — the imprint, namely the place of publication, the printer and/or the publisher and date. An edition is one of the copies of a map which were printed by the same man, or men, at a given place and under a given publication date. Some maps do not bear a complete imprint, but usually there is a place of publication and the name of the printer or publisher.

Of the three pieces of information comprising the imprint, the date is most frequently omitted. This is easy to understand, when one finds maps which were published and republished over a period of several years. It was better to leave out the date altogether than it was to remove the first and engrave another every time the map was republished. 10

1 For a complete "plan of the city," refer to "Plan of the Lots laid out at Pittsburgh and the Coal Hill," 1787, drawn by John Hill; Darlington Library, University of Pittsburgh. See also Stephen Lorant, Pittsburgh: Story of an American City (New York: 1964), 53.

2 One example, an intact Fort Pitt, is depicted, when in fact it was in almost total ruin by 1790. Likewise, Fort Duquesne is "mapped" in its original location; actually the properties of Craig and Bayard were situated here. See also Lloyd A. Brown, Notes on the Care and Cataloguing of Old Maps (Port Washington: 1970), 50: "Finished maps are usually the product of many minds, even though the authorship may rightly be attributed to one or two persons. Whereas some map makers were able to get into the field and actually survey an area, many more had to draw their maps from the observations and field notes of others."

3 Elvert M. Davis, "Bates Boys on the Western Waters," Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 29 (March-June 1946), 6. This map is also featured in Henry Victor Collet, Voyage dans L’Amérique Septentrionale (1822).

4 For a listing of landowners and lot numbers on the map see, Verna L. Cowin, Archaeological Survey of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh: 1985), 58-60. Masson also emphasized the city’s importance as a shipping and ship-building center by drawing 10 vessels on the map — the schooners Amity and Conquest, the brigs Allegheny, Ann Jane, Bion, Fayette and Nanina, the ships Western Trader, General Butler and Pittsburgh.

5 The collection also has a 36 x 44 inch, black-and-white reproduction of this map.


7 Embossments on the other maps, "Fidelity Title and Trust Company," suggest that they were reproduced after 1898; this company is not listed in the Pittsburgh City Directory until after 1898.

8 Criteria suggested in, Cataloguing Old Maps, 50: "Titles on old maps vary widely in length and accuracy. Some are short and concise, and give an accurate picture of what one may expect to find on the map. Others are long and rambling, giving not only the title of the map, but a wordy biography of its author and the changes and revisions that have been made in the map, all of which leave the reader with a hazy idea of what the map actually portrays." See also, Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (Chicago: 1967), 274.

9 Cataloguing Old Maps, 87.

10 Cataloguing Old Maps, 88. Notes on different editions of maps can also be found in Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 152, 278.