During 1990, Arthur Fox authored a report that's still invaluable: "Catalog of the Map Collection in the Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania." His guide is still consulted regularly at the History Center's Library & Archives Reading Room.

Fox wrote an accompanying article for this magazine summarizing the findings. His review examined the society's holdings of single-sheet maps, and provided detailed information about specific maps such as the A.G. Haumann map depicting Pittsburgh in 1795, and the William Masson map showing Pittsburgh in 1805.

In the ensuing years, the HSWP map collection has been enriched by new acquisitions. There were also other maps not included in the first survey.

Perhaps the most significant acquisition to the map collection is the set of 15 hand-drawn maps visually describing the results of an 1859 river survey done by the River Survey Commission. The prothonotary of Allegheny County originally held these maps and donated them to the Historical Society in 1999.

The primary goal of the survey commission, which was appointed by the county, was to measure and record the high and low water marks for the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers. Although river-stage measurements dominate each map, other aspects of Pittsburgh's geography appear, such as the original names of streets and boroughs, and the location of the Pennsylvania Canal. The inclusion of latitude and longitude coordinates makes possible overlaying yesterday's features on today's topography.

Other significant acquisitions to the collection are two Allegheny County maps from 1862 and 1890. These oversize maps are drawn on heavy paper and set on cloth backing. The 1862 map, drawn by lithographers Worley and Brocher of Philadelphia and based on surveys by S.N. and F.W. Beers, is a duplicate of one already held by the Historical Society and cited in Fox's article. It is worthy of mention here because it so beautifully complements the 1890 map, published by local lithographer Otto Krebs. The 1890 version, which measures nearly 6-feet square, also shows portions of the adjoining counties of Westmoreland, Washington, and Beaver. Comparing the two maps shows how the borders of townships and municipalities have changed. For example, Lower St. Clair is now part of the city of Pittsburgh, and in 1890, Mt. Lebanon was just a post office in Scott Township.

Fox briefly mentioned maps outside of Pennsylvania, but did not name any in particular. Two of the most fascinating maps of this type in the Historical Society's collection are the De Vaugondy maps of 1755 and 1768, as seen in the Summer 2001 issue of this magazine. These maps show boundaries of the colonies of the mid-Atlantic from two different perspectives, the British and French. The 1755
Map of Allegheny County, 1862.
Another set of atlases, by the Sanborn Map Company, provide even greater detail, though they do not cover as long a period as the Hopkins atlases. Whereas many of Hopkins’ atlases were created for real estate purposes, the Sanborn maps were created for insurance purposes, in particular fire insurance. This explains why the Sanborn maps include information about the width of water pipes leading to buildings and why they identify buildings made of fireproof construction. The only drawback to the Sanborn collection is that each volume was “updated” periodically over the years: new pieces of map were pasted over the obsolete information to show new buildings, boundary shifts, or street names. Despite this fault, the Sanborn atlas of greater Pittsburgh from 1927 (updated to 1931) is a highly recommended resource. The Historical Society collection of Sanborn atlases also includes maps of areas and towns beyond the Pittsburgh region, from Aliquippa in Beaver County to Youngsville in Warren County.
For a complete list of the maps held by the Historical Society, visit the History Center Web site at www.pghhistory.org and click on the Library & Archives link to view the catalog. Or stop by the Library and Archives Reading Room on the sixth floor of the History Center, Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Maps on the Web

Viewing many of the maps and atlases at the Historical Society, as well as hundreds of other cartographic resources, is as easy as a click of your mouse. Through a partnership with the University of Pittsburgh, 15 full atlases are available at http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh, the Historic Pittsburgh Project Web site. This ongoing project will expand both in the number of maps and in features. Currently, the site offers visitors the opportunity to search the 15 atlases (covering greater Pittsburgh from 1872 to 1939) by street name or building name. The site will eventually number 22 atlases.

Historical Maps of Pennsylvania at http://www.mapsofpa.com contains more than 200 maps of the commonwealth from 1681 to present, many of areas beyond Western Pennsylvania. The site is arranged chronologically by century and decade. Historical Maps of Pennsylvania presents a lot of information about each map as well as the history of cartography in Pennsylvania.

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