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Move Over Google Maps! Marin County Library is doing some serious mapping!

Jeff Hurn
ACT 3 Partners, jeffhurn@gmail.com

Jack Schaeffer
ACT 3 Partners, jack@act3partners.com

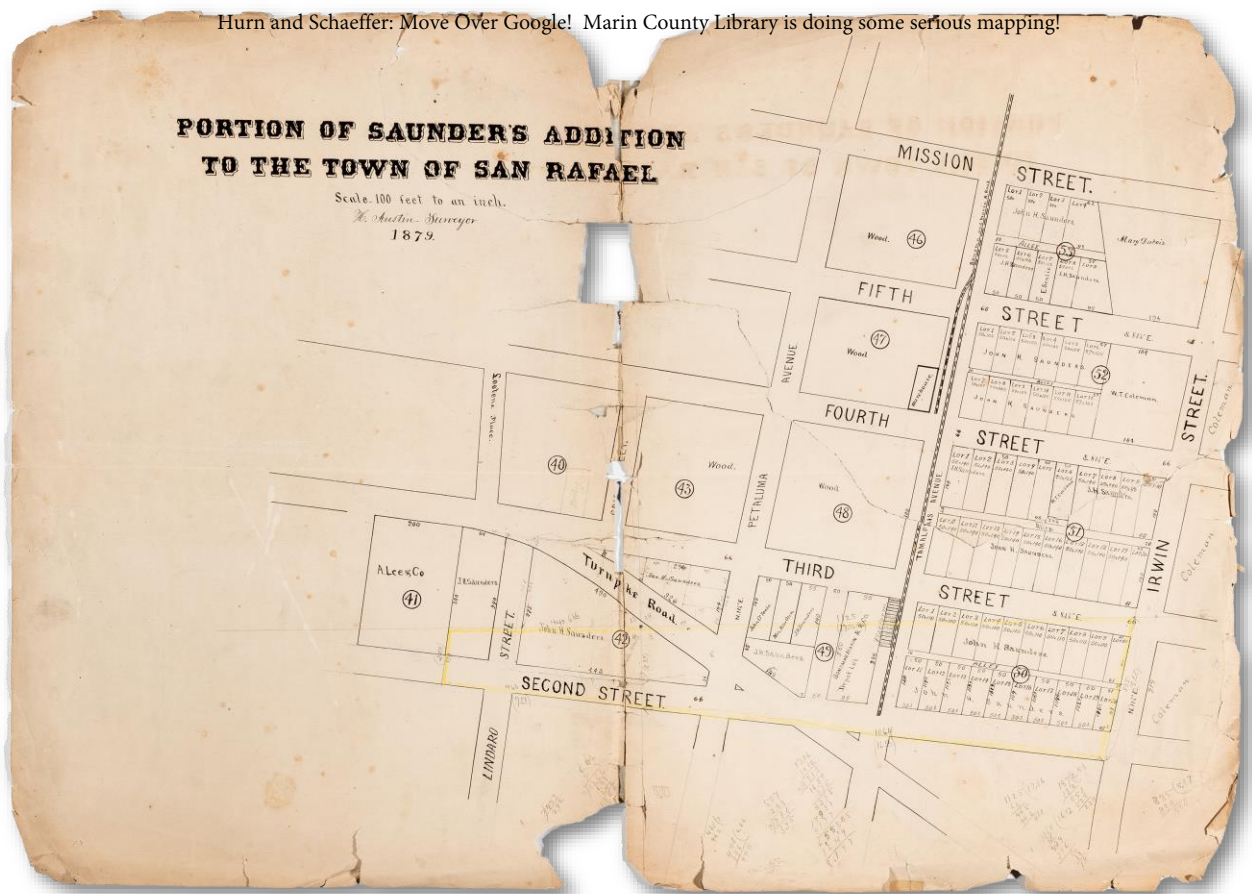Follow this and additional works at: https://online.vraweb.org/vrab

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Abstract

The digital imaging team at ACT 3 Partners describes the tips and techniques used to capture a special collection of more than 2000 historic maps and surveys for the Marin County Library. Many of the maps which date back to the1800's are fragile and worn but are still used today by surveyors and developers. They were digitally captured on site at the Library's archive, and are now available on the Library's public portal. As researchers, historians and other non-surveyors access the collection, a wealth of cultural history contained in the maps have been discovered.

PORTION OF SAUNDER'S ADDITION TO THE TOWN OF SAN RAFAEL

Move over Google Maps!
Marin County Library is doing some serious mapping!

Act 3 Partners just completed the initial phases of a digital capture project for the Marin County Free Library involving a gigantic treasure trove of historical maps. The incredible detail covered by this collection makes Google Maps look like sketching on a napkin by comparison!

The Anne T. Kent California Room at the Marin County Library is an archive dedicated to collecting and preserving information on local, regional, and state history with a strong emphasis on the history and culture of Marin County. Resources include photographs, oral histories, biography files, maps, books, directories, voter registers, local newspaper clippings, documents and ephemera.
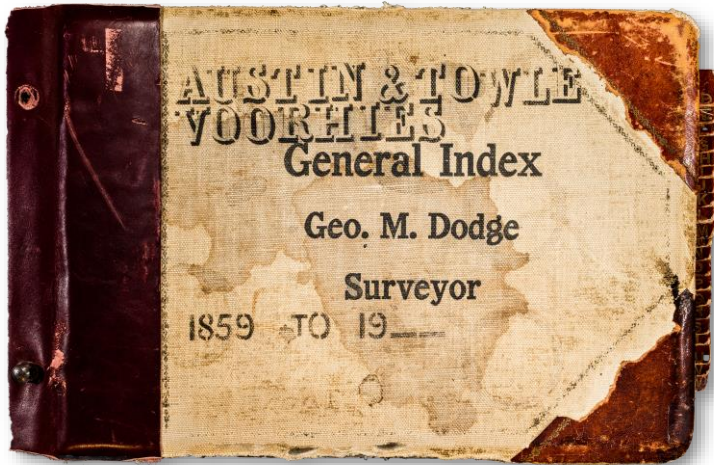
"We're as dedicated to making our historic assets accessible to the public as we are to preserving them. Our public portal is expanding with 32,000 digital files and growing!"

-Laurie Thompson, Librarian, Ann T. Kent California Room

Bringing the Past into the Future

Recently the Library came into possession of almost 30,000 unrecorded local land surveys dating back to the Gold Rush.

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It seems that the collection had been passed down (and added to) by a succession of private surveyors over the last 150 years. William Schroeder, the last owner of the collection, felt strongly that the collection should be available to the public and preserved for future generations.
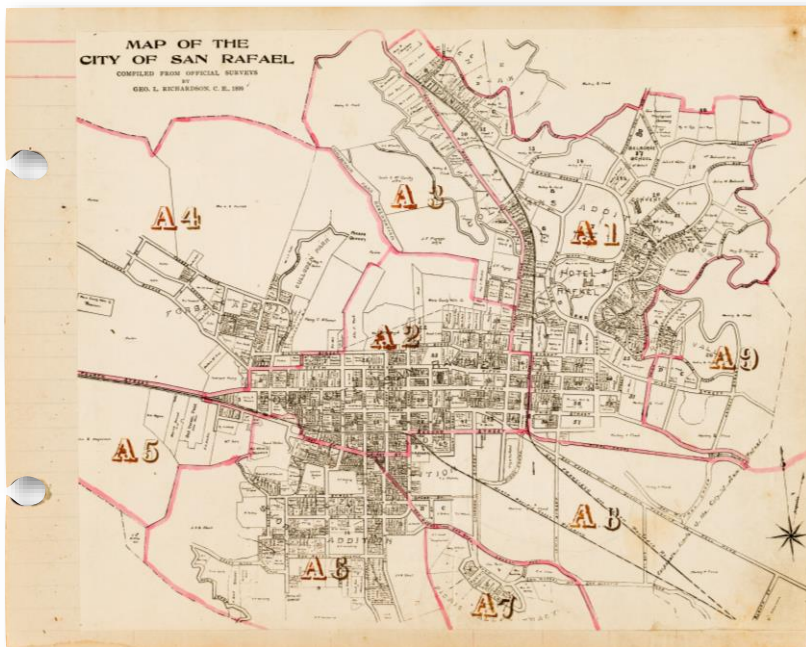
The library's challenge was finding an efficient way to digitize the maps with sufficient resolution to capture their fine detail while handling the fragile items with appropriate care. In response to an inquiry from Laurie Thompson, the Librarian of the California Room, we offered to demonstrate our "Raw Rapid Capture" photographic approach with a few sample maps. This capture method had been very successful with our map projects for University of California Davis and Santa Clara University. Having sample maps in gorgeous detail to show potential sponsors seems to help our clients find funding, so we're always happy to provide test captures.

"Our goal is to give the end-user, surveyors and non-surveyors alike, access to a searchable site where they can view, zoom in, download, and print these beautiful, oversized, mostly hand-drawn maps, all for free, from any computer or mobile device."

-Carol Acquaviva,
Librarian/Digital Archivist

Phase One – Save the indexes!

Pleased with the results of our tests, the Library asked us to begin the digitization in two initial phases. We started with a set of 2100 Index maps dating back to the mid 1800's. These maps are in constant use at the library by surveyors and contractors, and the wear and tear of this physical handling was worrying the library staff. We captured each 12" x 16" map in a 24-megapixel RAW format image and then applied a contrast and sharpening tweak that enhanced the readability of the fine line work. These maps are now available for surveyors and the public to pour over *online* – instead of pawing over them physically in the library!

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Phase Two - Big Maps mean Big Shots

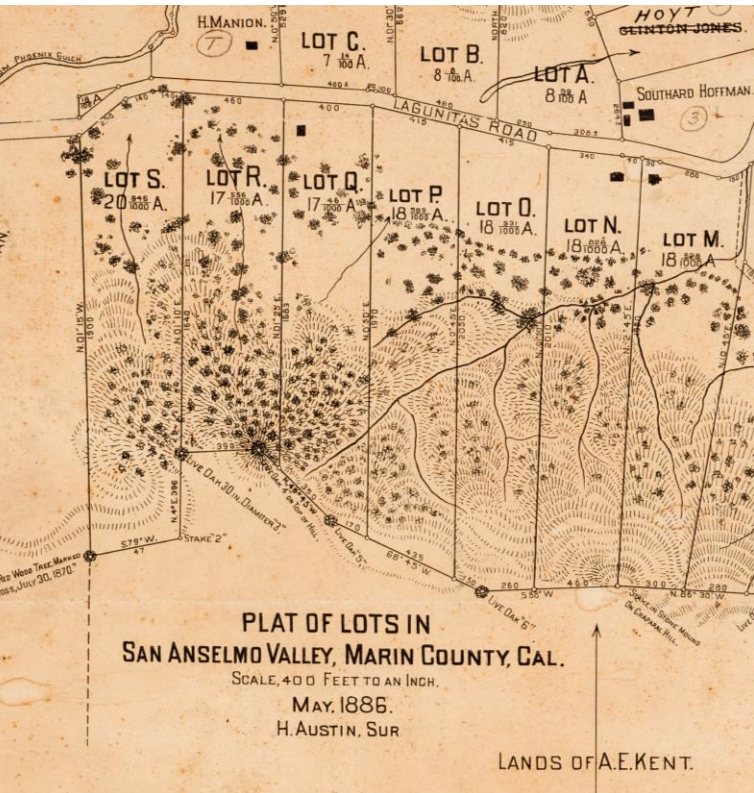For the second phase of the project we brought our capture rig to the California Room and set up for a four-day session. Many of the maps to be captured in this phase were very large and some were in a very fragile and tattered state. Our strategy for assets like this involves a sliding 4 x 6 foot white metal surface, which allows us to use small magnets to gently hold the bent maps flat and pin torn sections into position. We make sure to position the magnets in blank image areas and retouch them out later. For medium-sized maps we use a 50-megapixel camera in a single shot.

Many of the most interesting maps were very large, over four or five feet long.   One even stretched out to more than ten feet! For these, even a 50 megapixel shot is not enough to reproduce fine detail to the level we require. So we shoot multiple shots of each map, carefully aligned, and then "stitch" the separate shots into a seamless composite using Adobe Lightroom or Photoshop.   The resulting images have exquisite resolution with file sizes up to 500 Mb! Good thing disk space is cheap these days!

Who says librarians are shy and quiet?

At the end of our four-day session we had captured over 2000 maps - a figure made possible by the efficient teamwork of the library staff and volunteers. At our suggestion they had organized the maps into groups by size, which greatly reduces the need to move the camera between shots. On top of that they had organized themselves into an energetic assembly line,

PLAT OF LOTS IN
SAN ANSELMO VALLEY, MARIN COUNTY, CAL.
SCALE, 400 FEET TO AN INCH.
MAY, 1886.
H. AUSTIN, SUR.

LANDS OF A. E. KENT.

passing us maps and putting them away so we could focus on the photography. It was a pleasure to work with such a professional group.

Back in our own studio we run a post-production pass over each image—cropping and straightening, sharpening and enhancing, retouching out magnets and imperfections.   Because we shoot RAW-formatted images and process them with an Adobe workflow all edits are non-destructive and reversible. Finally, we render out everything renamed and formatted to the

"This should serve as an example to other counties ... making old maps accessible to the public will unlock a wealth of cultural and historical information."
-William Schroeder,

library's specs, ready to go into the library's online portal.

At the time of this writing, more than 2700 pages of the index maps and 100 of the oversized maps are available on the Library portal, with more added every day
http://contentdm.marinlibrary.org/digital

For more information about Rapid Raw Capture
visit http://www.act3partners.com

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