

A Different Look

Everyone has heard the familiar maxim, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Less familiar, however, is the cartographer's assurance that a map can contain more information, in and of itself, than any other document or printed information "package." Although a final proof of such a statement may remain elusive, it's well worth the time to reflect on why this may be true.

A map can illustrate an endless variety of information in a concise and precise format. Even a simple road map alerts the user to the size of the cities and the distance between them. Splashes of green indicate the vegetation such as forests or parks, and a careful examination of the type of line used will give an indication as to the nature of the road on which the automobile will travel: gravel, two lanes, four lanes, expressway—even if freely accessible or at a cost. Regional attractions and campgrounds are marked along with airports and other notable resources of a given community. If it is a geological map, the maker uses a complex system of symbols to describe the earth itself in such a way as to be clearer than pages of text. Innumerable maps of many different purposes graphically demonstrate every possible activity or topic from troop movements to political entities to planets and stars of the universe. Think of a subject; invariably there will be a map that will illustrate more than is readily learned from pages of description—no matter how well written.

The story of mapmaking is the story of

our attempt to represent the round orb that is earth on a flat surface. The first cartographers attempted to resolve the problem by miniaturizing the area being mapped. In choosing this approach, they were making use of the power of pictures. However, as the area to be illustrated grew, and as more and more aspects of the earth were shown, cartographers had to look for other methods of representing the geographic reality. They were looking for something more powerful than pictures.

What cartographers found were symbols as, over time, the first primitive efforts of mapmakers evolved. Many of the illustrative mechanisms used by the early cartographers are the foundations for later mapping techniques. Or to put it another way, early illustrations have been distilled to become the symbols we find on contemporary maps. Carefully drawn woodlots on 18th century maps have become the green areas representing forests on 20th century maps. When examining one of the classic French maps of an earlier century, the size and importance of a town is represented with a fair degree of accuracy by the size of the miniature church or cathedral drawn on the map. The "picture" of the church eventually became a square surmounted by a cross or a synagogue by a star, and the community was reflected in different-sized dots or blocks. Or, for instance, we can all recall seeing antique maps where disembodied cherubic heads blow the prevailing winds across newly discovered or even undiscovered seas. Those figures later became the wind roses that still

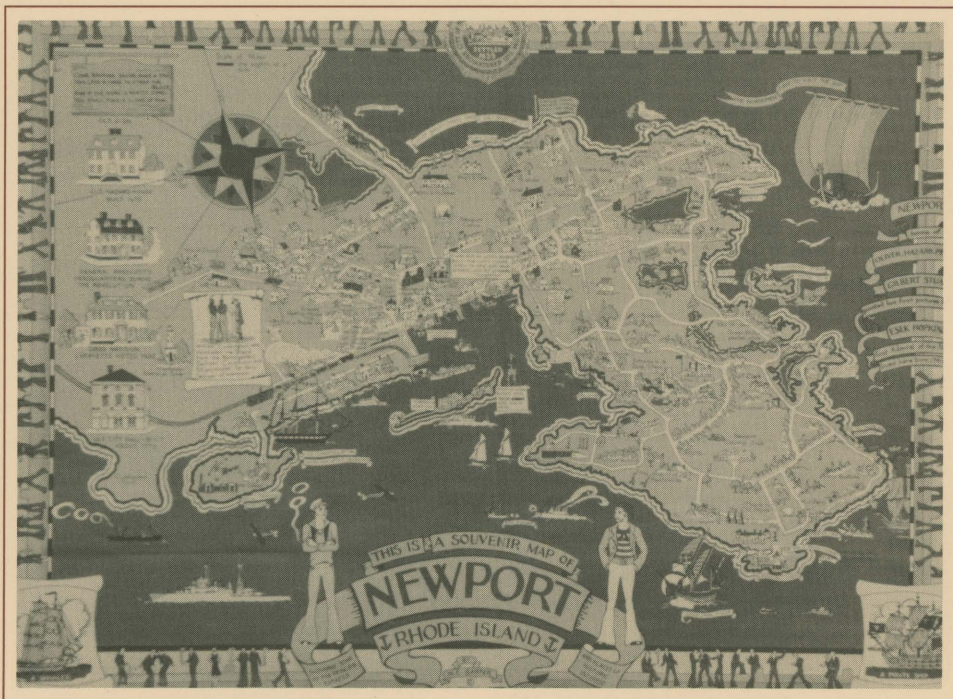
appear on nautical charts. Also worth note is the fact that historians use old pictorial maps to learn the geographical vision of the age in which they were prepared rather than merely as predecessor to today's cartography.

Despite the triumph of symbols over pictures in cartography, pictorial maps are still used for a number of reasons. Here the best of two worlds may be combined: pictures that demonstrate and a map that provides succinct information. Pictorial maps provide a simplicity and effectiveness that can't be matched by other approaches. Daily weather maps, seen in newspapers, on television, and elsewhere are a wonderful example of communication in its most basic form. Almost everyone uses these maps to understand complex meteorological systems. And, who does not recall the pictorial maps of childhood that illustrated the nation's industries through the use of cars in Detroit, oil derricks in Oklahoma, and movie cameras in California?

Yet, there are some who may well raise questions of accuracy when the complex is reduced to the simple. When does this approach create an inaccurate overview? Admittedly, this does occur, but underlying all of the work is a cartographer's belief that his is an exact science. And, in general, it is although the nature of the beloved pictorial map does lend itself to generalization. Maps, too, have to be critiqued for that which they intend to do. No one would intentionally direct a desert traveler to an oasis that is several miles from where it is noted on the map, or send a ship sailing where there are reefs and shoals. Valid use depends on the degree of specificity that is needed. In the end, it must be recognized that a pictorial map simply doesn't try to tell what a geological or nautical map must tell.

Waldo Library is the home of a wide-ranging and research-oriented collection of maps and atlases. Located on the third floor of the library, the area contains over 170,000 sheets in special housing, and hundreds of atlases. Although it is basically a research collection, there are a few pictorial maps. One example, found in the main library, is in *An Atlas of Fantasy*, compiled by J.B. Post (Ballentine Books, 1979). Here fact gives way to whimsical fantasy in that the cartographers present maps of imaginary places from mythology and fiction. Castles perched atop mountains abound as do forests made up of individual trees and fully formed mountains that rise suddenly from flat plains.

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Pictorial Newport

Autographs

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one of the most important inventors of the 19th century whose imagination and creativity transformed modern living. From the moving picture to the incandescent lamp to the recorder and player of sounds, his contributions were truly as extraordinary in the realm of science and industry as the respective talents of those other great and powerful people who responded to Sophie Levin almost a century ago. From a microcosm of individuals comes a macrocosmic picture of a moment in time—discovered in some 90 autographs that were not thrown away.

B.B.

—♦♦♦—
"A house without books is like a
room without windows."

Henry Ward Beecher

A Different Look

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The variety of maps found in Waldo includes topographic sheets covering all areas of the world, geologic maps of the United States, aeronautical charts of the earth, and nautical charts of the United States as well as numerous topical maps covering all hemispheres. If, just to salve your curiosity, you do pursue a pictorial map, be sure to look for the *Souvenir Map of Newport, Rhode Island*, that is replete with a wind rose and bell-bottomed sailors. Another splendid example of this genre is the 1952 map of *Historic Michigan*, published by the Historical Society of Michigan and drawn by Frank Barcus. Displayed are historical facts and events that occurred in Michigan—framed in a geographical context.

The presence of pictorial maps in a research collection brings into focus a particular aspect of both scholarship and cartography. That is, even in serious research and mapmaking, there is a place for simplicity, and a place for a diverse, possibly whimsical viewpoint. Looking at a problem, or a place, in a different way can be just what is needed.

M.M.

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