Creating the Virtual Map Drawer

Toward a New Paradigm

Marcy Bidney
American Geographical Society Library
Overview

- Quick overview of map collections in the U.S.
- The major paradigm shifts in American map libraries
  - 1990s
  - 2000s
  - Now
- The difficult bits:
  - Managing legacy digital collections into the future
  - Recognizing the library digital divide
  - Remember those print collections?
Map Collections in America

- Primarily held in academic libraries
  - Some large urban public libraries
  - Rare map collections held only at some libraries
- Largely based on maps produced by the U.S. government
- Scanning primarily focused on local/regional maps
- Long trend toward closing/discarding map collections
The American Geographical Society Library

- Culturally and historically significant collection of materials focused on geography, cartography, travel and exploration and the history of these areas
- 600,000+ maps dating from 1452
- 15,000+ atlases dating from 1478
- 600,000+ photos/film negatives
- 16,000 maps in digital collections
  - 30,000+ scanned
- 90,000 photos in digital collections
The First Shift 1990s

- United States Census Bureau delivers decennial census via CD-Rom
- Libraries respond with increasing access to technology and software
- Association of Research Libraries launches the ARL GIS Literacy Project
Some U.S. libraries begin map scanning in the mid-1990s
  - Major strides made in the early 2000s

Costly

Early Debates about:
  - Microfilming vs. Scanning
  - Color vs. black and white
  - Scanning resolution
  - Storage capacity/cost
  - Long-term viability
The Third Shift
Now

- Digital Humanities
- GIS/Web mapping services
- New suites of services
  - Research
  - Scholar
  - Digital
- Collaborations on innovative projects with digital collections: LookHere!
The Difficult Bits
Managing Legacy Digital Collections: The AGSL Example

- One of the first map libraries in America to begin scanning maps in late 1990s
- No guidance, best practices, etc.
- Inconsistent application of workflows across collections
- Long before georeferencing of digital maps was a thing
What is the role of the library?

- Organizer?
- Collaborator?
- Teacher?
- Leader?
- Service Provider?

All of these?
Library Digital Divide?

HAVES
- Money
- Staff
- Equipment

HAVE NOTS
- Little to none of the above
Print Collections

- Advocate for access to undigitized print collections – they are still relevant!
- Careful to not feed into the ‘everything is online’ mentality
What percentage of collections are represented online?
Why is this important?

- Are there historically significant collections living in the shadows because of a lack of funding for creation of digital collections?
- Collaboration opportunities between those who have technology and those who do not?