

Map Collection Development Guidelines

Special Collections and Archives

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Purpose of the Map Collection

As an integral part of the Western History Collection within Special Collections and Archives (SCA), the primary purpose of the map collection is two-fold: to support the ongoing [mission of the library](#), in particular how it relates to and supports the needs of our Denver community, and to support research into the development of the western United States, enabling a deeper understanding of humanity's part in that development. As part of our larger historical collection, our intent is to ensure that these maps are not only available to people today, but also for many generations to come.

A relatively recent and growing collection interest is in support of the African American Research Library (AARL), which is part of SCA. The AARL is located on the 2nd floor of the Blair Caldwell Branch Library.

Audience

As a public library, we encourage everyone to use our collections. Frequent users of the collection include young scholars working on a school project, people who want to find plat maps for their property research, authors needing a geographical illustration for a book or article, or even curious people who just want to browse maps to virtually explore the world around them.

Scope

The collecting area of the collection is defined geographically as the United States west of the Mississippi River, including Alaska and Hawaii. Functionally this also includes adjacent areas of southern Canada and northern Mexico. Collection focus, often reflected with larger scale maps, deeper coverage, and greater detail, is on Colorado and the Front Range.

It should be noted that in addition to sheet maps, many maps within the department can be found within published books and atlases interfiled with the rest of the collection. A more complete cartographic search includes diving into those volumes.

There is no limit to the time period collected. Maps in the collection date from the late 15th century to the present, though the majority of the maps are from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century. Many maps in the department may be stored within one of our many archival collections, or published within monographs or atlases, and so not cataloged individually. Contact one of our helpful reference librarians for assistance with these resources.

Like many map collections, SCA holds an extensive collection of U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Army Mapping Service / Defense Mapping Agency (AMS/DMA) topographic maps. Detailed topographic print mapping from the USGS is available primarily for Colorado, while other parts of the western United States are available at scales of 1:125,000 and smaller. Almost all USGS topographic maps ever published are available online. The AMS/DMA international map collection, also in SCA, covers the entire world at a wide variety of scales. Most maps in this set date from the 1930s to the 1950s.

While the map collection falls within the Western History Collection, special collections within the department are also supported, including the:

- Conservation collection, which has a worldwide scope
- Genealogy collection, which focuses on the entire United States and Europe. The Genealogy collection includes a separate map collection that is also part of SCA. Maps that geographically fall outside of the western United States are placed in the Genealogy collection.
- 10th Mountain Division Resource Center, which includes the U.S. Army division's military and other actions in central Europe during and after World War II
- African-American Research Library at the Blair Caldwell Branch, which focuses on the African American experience in Colorado and the West

Collecting Guidelines

The following are guiding principles and goals, though reality often means that gaps in coverage occur.

Geographical

Overall geographical scope for the main map collection is defined as the United States west of the Mississippi River, sometimes known as the Trans-Mississippi West. This is taken to include the adjacent areas of Mexico and Canada, since there exists significant cultural cross-over.

As an integral part of the Denver community, the most robust map collecting occurs for Denver and the larger metropolitan area, and progresses outward. Geographical priorities, in order of importance:

- Denver
- Front Range
- Rest of Colorado
- Adjacent states
- Rest of the West

Coverage for Denver is updated annually for most subject areas. Highway maps for adjacent states and street maps for major cities within them get updated approximately every 5 years, with western states outside of that area updated every 10 years.

Ongoing collection development seeks to fill known gaps. Of particular interest is achieving more complete coverage of populated places, and formerly populated places (aka, 'ghost towns'), in Colorado.

Subject

While some scientific content is available, the vast majority of material covers popular subjects of wider interest. The collection is particularly strong in Colorado's railroad development, mining history, and transportation. Transportation maps often provide detailed information on streets, roads, and highways, but also urban transit development from the 19th century onward. Many of these sheets are manuscript maps, and as such are the only copy known to exist.

Genealogy maps are filed in separate cabinets and these primarily cover land holdings in eastern United States from the 17th century through the early 20th century, and some similar maps of the British Isles. Filed within this set are a large collection of family trees. Many of these sheets have been pulled from published books.

Formats

The vast majority of maps in the collection are print, with several hundred digitized at high resolution and available for download as non-georeferenced TIFs. Atlases are part of the Western History collection and are interfiled with other books. WHG operates a full-service imaging lab, which digitizes cartographic and other materials based on departmental priorities.

Born-digital and geospatial datasets are relatively new to the collection. We are in the process of georeferencing some digitized maps to support initiatives like the Time Traveler's Map of Denver, and exploring ways to provide long-term access to born-digital maps in various formats.