Minnesota on the map

More than 22,000 maps have been collected by the Minnesota Historical Society. From maps that label the interior of North America as *terra incognita* (unknown land), through the discovery of major geographic features, to those that show the location of your nearest bus stop, information has been represented in many ways. Certainly, maps are useful in getting us from point A to point B, but they have served innumerable other purposes as well.

"Information" can be accurate, exaggerated, or distorted. The first maps depicting the land now known as Minnesota, designed to attract the attention of Europeans, often carried all three of these attributes. Centuries later, as "manifest destiny" fanned the fervor of westward expansion, maps were used to legitimize the conquest and displacement of Native Americans who had inhabited Minnesota for centuries.

In *The Power of Maps*, Denis Wood describes a map as "a compilation of what others have seen or found out or discovered . . . piled up in layer on top of layer so that to study even the simplest-looking image is to peer back through ages of cultural acquisition." These layers convey the activities, values, and concerns of each generation of Minnesotans: measuring the land, dividing it into political units, and selling it as a commodity; promoting leisure and recreation in addition to the state’s industries; and revealing the technological sophistication of today’s mapping techniques.

This selection of maps—works of science, art, economics, and political power—provide a look back in time and a digital window into today.

This exhibit is part of the Minnesota Historical Society’s Traveling Exhibit Program.

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