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Big News - Large Format Digital Imaging Laboratory

by Eric Honneffer

A 50" X 58" 1870 wall map of Putnam County was discovered during a house renovation in 2003. Its advanced state of deterioration prompted a telephone call to the Center for Archival Collections' Conservation Lab at Bowling Green State University.

The owner was willing to donate the map to the center in anticipation that it could be repaired enough to be reproduced. Although the tattered, dusty, damaged map was surface cleaned and segmented for further treatment, it became quite apparent that the extensive damage to the map was going to make traditional hands-on conservation methods difficult if not impossible to complete. It was critical to reproduce the informational content of the unusual map rather than risk losing the smallest detail during treatment. Furthermore, the map could only be reproduced face up.

After some extensive investigation into outside reprographic companies we discovered in our own backyard, BGSU's Large Format Digital Imaging Laboratory (LFDIL) located in the Student Services Building near the university library. The lab is one of four "divisions" within the College of Technology's Center for Applied Technology, devoted to testing and evaluation of large format scanners and printers. Its mission includes:

- Providing numerous educational opportunities and services to faculty and students.
- Providing return value to the industry in terms of publication of impartial evaluations and innovative applications.
- Providing scanning and printing services for clients within the university as well as outside individuals and businesses.

It is the LFDIL's affiliation with the Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research (FLAAR) that provides the lab's students and users with almost limitless access to innovative scanning and ink jet printing equipment and similar technology as it is being developed and tested.

The "preservation solution" for the 1870 wall map proved to be the LFDIL's Cruse Reprographic Scanner capable of producing high resolution scans – face up – of original documents and artifacts (up to approximately three inches in height) with maximum dimensions of 3' x 4'. The scans are then saved to CD's in TIFF format. This high-end digital scanner is apparently one of over twenty such installations of various models currently in use in the United States, according to information on the Cruse web site.

Once each of the segments of the 1870 map were scanned and saved to CD, the image was "cleaned-up" in Photoshop. The separate images were reunited and then printed on photo paper from a Colorspan Mach 12 printer, capable of producing copies up to 72" wide by 100' long using eleven inks.

At the conclusion of this lengthy project the donor of the Putnam County map was able to obtain a full sized reproduction of the map for display purposes and Putnam County agencies ordered copies for their offices. The CAC is currently working with the LFDIL to produce a booklet of townships from this map which will serve as a compact reference tool for researchers since the size and condition of the original prohibited handling. The original map sections were sleeved and placed into oversized storage at the Center for Archival Collections.

Other notable oversized historical documents scanned at LFDIL include: an 1861 Williams, Fulton and Defiance Counties' Fair broadside, an 1870 Bird's Eye View of Toledo, an 1853 plat map of Ada (Johnstown), Ohio and an 1887 map of Danbury and Catawba Island Townships.

For further information about the LFDIL: http://bgsu.edu/colleges/technology/cat/lfl/about/index.html (link does not work...)

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