

Advice and Anecdotes from our Favorite Map Dealers

At the Chicago Map Fair and the Map Fair of the West, both held in October 2014, Eliane and Jon Dotson had the opportunity to reconnect with many of their friends in the map business. We asked our map dealer friends to share some words of wisdom on buying and collecting maps. Many dealers have been kind enough to take the time to offer their advice, and we would like to share their (unedited) points of view with you.

What tips do you have for collectors on buying maps and building collections?

- "Buy what you like. Is it the historical back story that fires your imagination? Is it the artifact quality of having something three hundred years old? Is it the brief historical glimpse of an evolving understanding of a region or continent? Is it just the visual appeal? Take some time to distill and focus your interest by studying and reading and knowing about the genre that interests you." Curtis Bird, The Old Map Gallery
- "Ask questions. Everyone was once a beginner. Start a dialogue with one or more dealers. Figuring out who you enjoy talking to and like working with is a big part of enjoying the collecting experience. It's fun to share and it's nice to get feedback from someone you trust. Invest in relationships, not just maps. Everyone makes mistakes. The only collector (and dealer) who makes no mistakes is the one who buys nothing. If you envision yourself building a collection, don't be afraid to take some risk. " Barry Ruderman, Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps
- "First decide what interests you, region, time in history, or subject matter. Then get a book or two on your interest and the maps associated. Decide what you want in a map (coloring, affordability, etc.). After that, get in contact with a dealer and discuss your interests, price range, and time table for building a collection. This will help the dealer match the right maps with your wants and needs." Sammy Berk, Harlan J. Berk, Ltd.
- "Three pieces of advice for the beginning collector: Collect with a clear theme in mind and rarely deviate from it. Buy one fine map rather than three or four minor ones. Trust an experienced map dealer or auction house for quality, authenticity and knowledgeable." Preston Figley, Antique Maps of America
- "Never ever buy a map with modern colour. It is vandalism. Also, watch for dealer descriptions that use the phrases "full colour" or "old colour" and don't specify whether or not it is original - this is a despicable and deceptive practice used by frauds and con-artists to pass off third rate material." Daniel Crouch, Daniel Crouch Rare Books
- "Don't necessarily focus on buying well-known or common maps. Make sure to pay attention to the rarities and buy things that are truly unique and special." Kevin Brown, Geographicus Rare Antique Maps
- "The most important thing for someone who wants to start or build a map collection is to fix on a theme for the collection. A group of maps comprises a collection only if there is a story of some sort which ties the maps together. The theme can be anything, for instance, a particular place, a cartographer, a type of map, or whatever, but it is the theme which makes the collection come together and increases exponentially the interest of the collection. The collector should

pick a theme that is of interest, but (s)he should also pick a theme where the universe of possible maps which fit that theme are both available and affordable!" Chris Lane, The Philadelphia Print Shop

- "Don't start with a checklist. Use the maps you find interesting as a means of guiding your quest for more information. It's difficult to research in the abstract and therefore working with what you own and what you are being offered creates an immediacy and an imperative for timely understanding and knowledge of your collection. It is far easier to immerse yourself in the intellectual quest when you have a tangible object in hand that is the centerpiece of your quest. Moreover, having something "in hand" when you are studying it allows you to sharpen your critical thinking and inquiry skills. Reading reference books and cartobibliographies can be a bit two dimensional. Using the acquisition process to shape the direction of your collecting keeps the process fresh and current. It also allows you to chase threads that you might not have understood or knew existed prior to a particular acquisition. So, no checklists. Chart an your own independent path." Barry Ruderman, Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps
- "Build the story line of what you are collecting. In a step-by-step, linear approach think through what you are assembling and the history it tells. If you are working on the early maps of North America, take time to identify the landmark maps for your era of interest and work towards an intelligent progression of maps. Collecting is a study of a developing field or theme. If a group of maps is scattered, indistinct and unconnected, it might be that you are not collecting, but hoarding." Curtis Bird, The Old Map Gallery

What question are you often asked by collectors and how do you answer it?

- "A question I often get is: 'How can you sell these maps when you love them so much?' I tell them that collectors are the true lovers, and dealers are the Cassanovas. While one is going out the front door, another is coming in the back door. We sell our maps so that we can continue buying them." George Ritzin, George Ritzlin Antique Maps & Prints
- "Question: How can I build a collection when I don't have much wall space? Answer: A good way to store your collection is in a flat file or table with large, deep drawers. Besides, the best way to enjoy and study a map is with it on a flat surface and a magnifier in hand, not on a wall with your nose pressed up to the glass." Sammy Berk, Harlan J. Berk, LTD

What is a favorite story you have about an experience buying or selling maps?

- "Years back my father and I rode the Trans-Siberian train from the Far East to Moscow. While in Moscow I found only one antique shop with any maps. I spoke no Russian and the shopkeepers no English. Fortunately a German was there who spoke some English and Russian. He would translate the price of a map and I would go into a side room, remove my sneaker, and pull out the nearest amount in hundred dollar bills. This bit of intrigue went on until I had purchased all the maps I wanted. As we were about to board the homeward bound plane, our tour director informed me that I must go to the back of the line, and if the Soviets held me for taking out antique maps, I was on my own. For a few seconds I regretted my purchases, but then I sailed through." Murray Hudson, Antiquarian Books, Maps, Prints & Globes

- "I sold a map of South Carolina to a collector of South Carolina Banknotes. I saw him a year later and he told me that the map is framed in the middle of his banknote display. He said it ties his whole collection together and he uses it to teach friends and family members about his collection of banknotes." Sammy Berk, Harlan J. Berk, LTD

What is your favorite reference book and why?

- "My favorite reference work is Wheat's *Mapping the Transmississippi West*. Rather than being a simple listing of items with a minimum of descriptive text, Wheat endeavors to describe the major, and many minor, maps of the American West and fit them into historical and cartographical frameworks. This work provides extensive detail about specific maps, creating a rich account of the evolving nature of American exploration, development, and mapmaking, primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries, through the descriptions of hundreds of individual maps." Fred Baron, High Ridge Books, Inc.

What are your thoughts on trends in map collecting?

- "One of the most intriguing periods of mapmaking is the second half of the 18th century. Two of the most significant wars ever fought occurred during these years, and the United States became a nation. Many of the most important and attractive maps of America chronicle these events, and they offer a rich field for collectors at every level. Some of the maps are readily available and reasonably priced while others are great rarities and command strong prices. The maps themselves were drafted and published in France, England, Germany, America and Canada, providing range and diversity. While this is hardly an overlooked area of collecting, there seem to be fewer collectors of Revolutionary War era maps at this moment, and it is a period that deserves renewed attention." Paul Cohen, Cohen & Taliaferro LLC
- "One of the most interesting areas of the market today is what a collector of my acquaintance refers to as "persuasive maps"... maps that use cartography to convey some non-cartographic message. Examples of the genre include allegorical maps depicting the stages of courtship, real estate promotional maps, and the famous "Serio-Comic" maps showing European nations in the form of animals. As prices of the best material in more traditional collecting areas have continued to increase, collectors and institutions have been turning to persuasive maps as a relatively cost-effective way to acquire material that is visually engaging, historically significant, and often just downright fun." Michael Buehler, Boston Rare Maps
- "There are more collectors than ever and they are more broadly dispersed around the globe than ever before. The saddest part of that observation is that the traditional map fair is no longer viewed as a necessary component to collecting, having largely been replaced by the internet. While the success and viability of RareMaps.com is entirely driven by the internet, I think the next great trend for map collecting will be how to intelligently unite map collectors in a forum that allows for friendships and collaborations to grow. Social media clearly presents the right platforms, but I have not yet seen something that broadly unites map collectors and brings them into the same virtual space." Barry Ruderman, Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps

- "All things pictorial and 20th century are realized to have a value in showing a world developing at an even faster rate than mankind has ever experienced, and things of this period capture not just a "glimpse" of time, but tell a story of culture accelerating. From needing to map "air routes" in the sky for flight, or for the first time mapping mankind leaving earth, orbiting and exploring space, it's a time of huge leaps. The 20th century can be dramatized in people that were born in log cabins, that rode on horseback, living long enough to drive their own car, and watch the moon landing on their TV. Cartography was an essential element in every facet of those developments, and collectively we have begun to realize this." Curtis Bird, The Old Map Gallery