David Rumsey, map collector and public benefactor, appears to be a man obsessed with maps. By his own reckoning, his collection contains more than 150,000 pieces, and is generally limited to the New World of the 18th and 19th centuries. The assimilation, management, and sharing of his collection has become a second career of sorts, and from the perspective of time, appears to have eclipsed his first career in California real estate. In addition to being a celebrity map collector, Rumsey has become a kind of cartographic Andrew Carnegie. After amassing his wonderful collection, rather than lock it away, he generously decided to make it available to the public. But instead of building libraries around the country, he has made the maps available on the Internet at www.davidrumsey.com.

*Cartographica Extraordinaire* focuses on 120 maps in particular, and illustrates how historical maps can be used to understand modern issues by incorporating them into geographic information systems. The book’s subtitle, *The Historical Map Transformed*, touches on the idea that old maps, when transformed by modern scanners and software, can be combined with ancient or modern images to create new, refocused images of various landscapes. Thus, as stated in the book, old, static maps come alive and become the foundation of modern geographic information systems. For example, on a map that appears on pages 24-25 of the book, USGS photo-mosaics provide the base, with overlays of both USPLSS sectional maps and Lewis and Clark’s maps from their reports. Another example, a map of Lake Tahoe (see image on next page), combines the mapping done on the ground in 1877. It has been geo-rectified using prominent features in the landscape and on the various maps, then corrected to the National Elevation dataset, then finally morphed into a green tinted Landsat7 image from NASA. It is a wonderful piece of modern mapping, one that was possible but not
practical to make until the advent of modern software and equipment. The authors contend that digital re-processing unleashes the content of the old maps, and I must say I’d have to agree.

The notion of combining maps of different scales and wildly different methods of construction is old news to most surveyors. After all, it is a rare surveyor that does not have access to a computer, copier and plotter, and who has not used this equipment to compile maps. What is unique about Rumsey’s book is not what he describes or how he gets his results, for even today’s cutting-edge technology will be out-of-date one day. What is special is the wonder and scope of his maps and his tacit encouragement that you can do this, too—and he will provide the base maps, thousands of them! Many people besides surveyors and cartographers have already jumped on the digital mapping bandwagon. Of late, map librarians across the country have been deluged with requests from amateur mapmakers who wish to have their homemade images added to their state’s collection.

Readers quickly discover that Cartographica Extraordinaire is as much about mapmaking as it is about historical maps. But it is the old maps, more so than the new, that will probably tempt the reader to pick up this huge beautiful book in the first place. It is the old maps, which need no justification
and little explanation, that may keep you glued
to the book for hours. With the mixture of old
maps and new within the chapters, the book
could easily stand alone as a study in cartographic
history, independent of the author’s grand digital
enterprises. To do so, however, would dim
the spotlight on the authors’ demonstration of
cartographic evolution and modern mapping pos-
sibilities. The old maps displayed in this book are
somewhat like fine old buildings in a landscape –
properties that are lived in, used, modified, and
improved over time to suit the current occupant’s
needs and desires. Lands do not stay fixed in
time unless one makes and keeps a print. But in
my opinion, it may take professional experience
making and using maps to truly appreciate the
extraordinary collection in this book.

Historic surveys are often featured in the
book, although they are absent from the modern
mapmaking. Chapters are arranged in chronologi-
cal order; old to new, with exploration maps in
the front and the urban street plans in the back.
Readers will discover La Perouse in the western
Pacific in the 1790s, followed by maps of Cook,
Vancouver, and other surveyors of shorelines.
Then come the explorers of the interiors, bound-
ary surveyors, topographic mapmakers, transpor-
tation maps, and finally, the aforementioned street
plans. Wonderful maps! The book is as much
about modern map compiling and editing as it is
about collecting.