



By Pat Toscano, LS

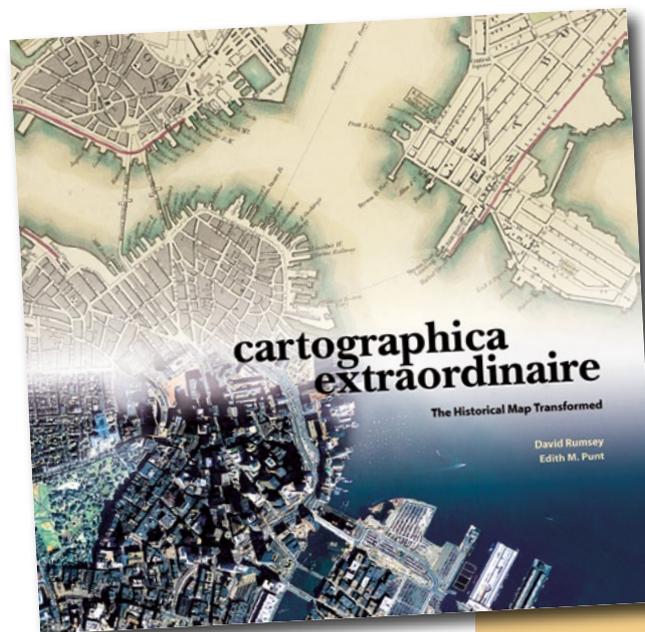
Pat is the City Surveyor for
New Britain, Connecticut.

Cartographica Extraordinaire: The Historical Map Transformed

by David Rumsey & Edith M. Punt

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

Title: *Cartographica Extraordinaire: The Historical Map Transformed*

Author: David Rumsey & Edith M. Punt

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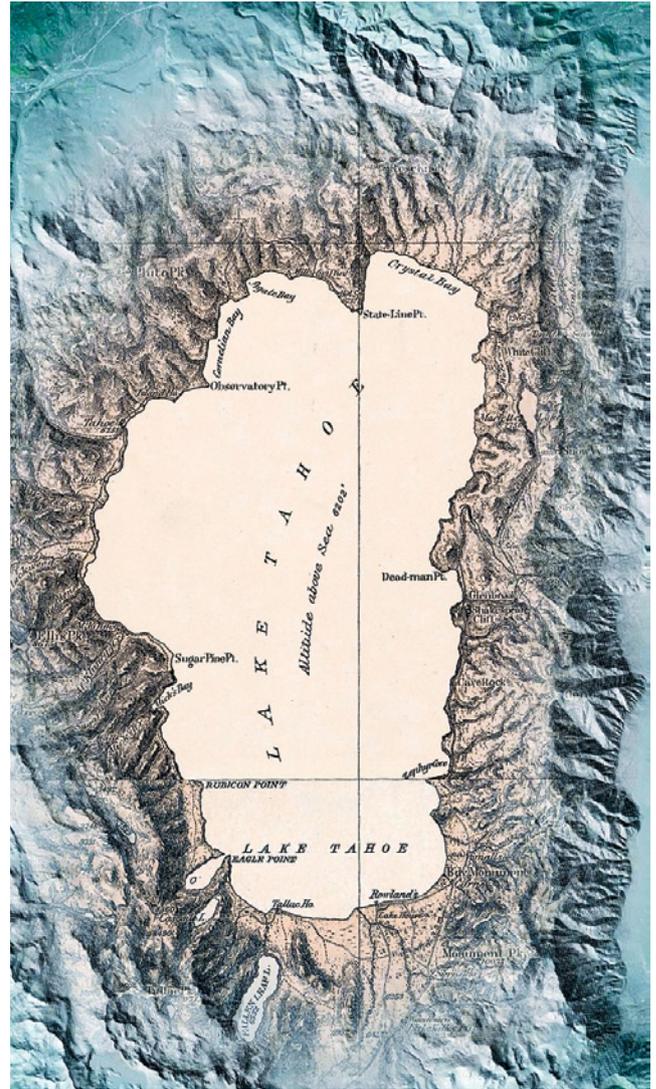
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practical to make until the advent of modern software and equipment. The authors contend that digital re-processing unleashes the content of the old maps, and I must say I'd have to agree.

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

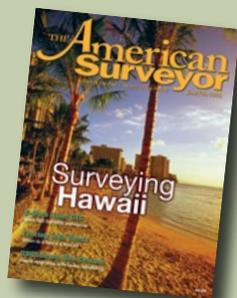
and little explanation, that may keep you glued to the book for hours. With the mixture of old maps and new within the chapters, the book could easily stand alone as a study in cartographic history, independent of the author's grand digital enterprises. To do so, however, would dim the spotlight on the authors' demonstration of cartographic evolution and modern mapping possibilities. 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 chronological 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, boundary surveyors, topographic mapmakers, transportation 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. *A*

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