

Local History Restored

by Anne Vazquez

When a local man brought in an antique map to Peter Crafts and offered to sell it to him, Crafts thought the asking price was too high for the object. Still, he was intrigued by the potential of the piece. The map, which dates back to 1865, is of a birdseye view of the seven-mile-long island of Avalon, New Jersey. It depicts the island as

it looked at the time, with a smattering of homes, a hotel, and a railroad line that no longer exists. The scene is a far cry from the many homes that occupy the island today.

In addition to its historical value, a notable aspect of the map was its size: 10' long by 12" high. Crafts, who has been in the restoration and framing business for over 40 years, saw the map as something that residents of the seaside resort might like to display for themselves. "Many of the homes in this area have high ceilings and



Photo 1: Peter Crafts, owner of The Gilt Edge, stands with the framed map of Avalon, New Jersey. It measures 11'8"x14".



Photo 2: Jessica Koch, head conservator at The Gilt Complex, is assisting Crafts in restoring the original map.



Photo 3: The tattered end of the map is being repaired by using a piece from a reproduction (on top).

large walls, so a piece of this size is a natural for many in this area,” he explains.

The Plan

Instead of purchasing the map, Crafts arranged to buy the rights to reproduce the map from the owner. There was just one problem. As might be expected of a map over 130 years old, it was in

the map. Luckily, the local historical society had a blueprint it, which Crafts was able to borrow.

A Little Help

So with the three versions of the map at his disposal, Crafts turned to the task of having the map restored and reproduced. He contacted Mainly Photos, located in Chatham, New Jersey, to digitize,



Photo 4: A close-up of the framed piece. On the right is a corner detail of the frame chosen to house the map.

less than perfect condition.

At one end, the map was badly damaged, with much of the section having no illustration at all (see Photo 3). In fact, only the muslin that the paper had been adhered to remained in this part. Crafts did some research in the Avalon area to find out if there were any other existing versions of the map.

He eventually found a conservator who owned another copy of the map. (He bought it at a reasonable price.) While this one was aged as well, it was in better shape than the first map. With that in his possession, he continued to look for any other people that knew of

correct, and reproduce the map.

They were able to scan in a complete map by using the data from the three versions. Any missing pieces were created by manipulating the digital pieces of the map's image to recreate what it should have looked like. Once the map was “good as new,” it was ready to be reproduced. They printed a series of twelve maps.

The Design

Crafts chose a mahogany Hicks-style frame with a corner block ornament and a 22-karat gilded cove liner for the finished piece. The frames were made by Quebra-



Photo 5: Crafts displays several of the maps in his shop.

cho, Inc., located in Glendale, New York. Crafts says his decision to use a Hicks-style frame was influenced by the period of the artwork.

The size of the piece prompted him to use acrylic for the glazing, instead of glass, to minimize the weight. A conservation-quality backing was used. The total dimensions of the framed piece are 11'8" long and 14" high.

When asked about customers' reactions to the piece, Crafts says they have been very positive. Using a series of photographs, laid side by side at his design counter to display what the map would look like when finished, he sold eight, sight unseen, for \$1500 each. Once he had the maps framed in his shop, he raised the price to \$2000. "I offered the lower price to those clients who decided to purchase the maps before physically seeing them," explains Crafts.

He says he will have another edition of the maps printed when the demand calls for it.

Where It All Started

In addition, Crafts is using his extensive restoration experience to restore the original map for the owner who first approached him. He is repairing the tattered end by splicing the same section from a reproduction and attaching it to the original map. In order to visually blend the new section once it is part of the original, he is using pastels and other materials to tone it to make it appear aged.

Local history is important to many people and it's something you could utilize in your business. Does your town, or county, have a claim to fame, or characteristics that make it stand apart from other locales? If you're not already using this angle for sales in your shop, you probably should. It may not arrive at your design counter on its own, but if you look around, it should be easy enough to find a defining feature of your area that many of your clients will appreciate (and even better, want to display in their homes or offices.) ■