

TRACK:

See who was chosen for the All-County Boys' Team

SPORTS
LOOKINSIDE 11

HISTORICAL:

1866 county plat map restored

STATE & LOCAL
LOOKINSIDE 7

Keeping kids drug free

Dr. Kristo answers the question 'How nosy should you be in your child's life?'

HEALTH
LOOKINSIDE 9

Noblesville Daily Times 50¢

Noblesville, IN 46060 / (317) 773-9960 / USPS 391-140

Vol. 100 - No. 44

Friday, June 4, 2004

1866 PLAT MAP



Tracy T. Mendez / tmendez@noblesvilledailytimes.com

Hamilton County Surveyor Kent Ward, left, and GIS specialist Suzie Mills, stand in front of the oldest known plat map showing land ownership. The map recently was restored and a digital copy of it hangs in the county surveyor's office.

Old map restores history of ownership

By Laura Hawkins
Daily Times

Visitors to the Hamilton County surveyor's office will have to look closely at the 1866 map hanging on the wall to realize it is only a digital copy. Even the white areas scattered across the plat map appear to be small tears that have grown with time.

Yet it's as close to the original that the viewing public will get. The oldest Hamilton County plat map with names indicating property ownership soon will be placed, restored and protected, in a vault.

The map was a gift to Hamilton County Surveyor Kent Ward from the late Robert Guilkey, who instructed his family that on his passing the map should be put in Ward's care.

"He was very proud of it," recalled Guilkey's daughter Shari Jobes, now a deputy county auditor. She said the map had been kept in her father's closet for years. His father, Charles Guilkey of Cicero, found it in his father's attic.

When Ward received it, it was brittle, fragile and accustomed to being rolled.

"We were kind of afraid," Jobes said of its condition.

Suzie Mills, the surveyor's office GIS specialist, had the job of finding a way to restore the map as much as possible to its original state. First she went to the Art Museum in Indianapolis, which "didn't want to touch it," she said.

Eventually she was led to Massachusetts-based Northeast Document Conservation Center. The center has restored the likes of Lewis & Clark documents, a collection of Thomas Jefferson papers and an original Rembrandt painting — and that's just the work of one assistant paper conservator.

Carolyn Frisa has worked on many other assignments as well, including the 1866 Hamilton County map.

"We do work on this type of wall map all the time," she said in a telephone interview. "Quite a large number of them were produced from 1840 to the end of the century."

The county's map was in "medium condition" and was not too difficult to clean and restore, Frisa noted.

After taking slides of the map, she cleaned its surface to remove the dirt and dust. Wearing a respirator, gloves and a hood, she then immersed the map in ethanol to take off the varnish.

After a 24-hour drying period, the ink was tested to make sure it wouldn't bleed and then the map was washed for a couple of hours in water.

"You're really hoping to wash the acidity out of the paper," she said, adding the wash reduces discoloration as well.

"The next thing that I did was I lined the map on Japanese paper...because it doesn't become acidic over time," Frisa explained. The paper was

What is a plat map?

A plat map shows each plot of land and who owns it. Today such maps usually come in book form and can cost anywhere from \$15 to \$20. The Hamilton County surveyor's office does not make plat books because the information they maintain is updated monthly online.

doubled and attached with wheat starch, which also does not become acidic.

It then dries on a board for about a week.

"Everything we do has to be reversible," she said. "They could easily remove the map from the backing."

Once dried, the map was encapsulated in Mylar, an archival polyester film.

"It ends up being two days in total," she said of the process.

However, the company currently is working on a six-month backlog, and when digital photo reprints are done, as they were with Hamilton County's map, it takes even longer.

Twelve months later, the map returned home with its digital reprints.

At the end of April, a copy was hung in the Hamilton County Government and Judicial Center office.

The cost to restore it was \$1,455, but for Ward, the map is priceless.

"One of my interests is in county history," he said. He even has gone so far as to pull items out of trash cans to preserve pieces of the area's past.

Needless to say, "I'm very protective of it," he noted of the map.

The surveyor's office currently is in the process of putting the map on its Web site, but it likely won't be ready until fall. The large map must be prepared in sections.

"It's going to be very easy to read on the computer," Ward said, noting already "we've had a lot of comments on it."

It will be a handy tool for genealogical research, he added, noting copies of the digital reprint also were given to the two Hamilton East Public Libraries and the Hamilton County Historical Society.

The map offers a glimpse back to the population centers of Hamilton County in the late 1860s. Carmel at the time was named Bethlehem, Shieldsville was a town that no longer exists, and "a lot of roads that don't exist anymore" can be found on the map, Ward said. Also, Sheridan is not on the map, since it wasn't created until 1869, Boxley is referred to as Boxleytown, and Atlanta at the time was named Buena Vista.

The next oldest map that shows all of the property ownership is in the book, "Helm's History" from the 1880s, Ward said.

E-mail Laura at lhawkins@noblesvilledailytimes.com