

Why maps?

Most of the time, when we study the past, we need to imagine what it looked like. Maps can help change that. They give us a way to “see” the boundaries of the world in which our ancestor lived and to figure out where their records were held, to imagine where familiar landmarks and locations may have existed in the past, and sometimes even to catch a glimpse of the buildings themselves. Maps are not perfect sources, but they can be key in helping understand our roots.

Anytime we use a map, we must be careful to consider why it was made. Cartographers will design their map based on its intended purpose. It may mention certain locations and not others; use a certain scale; or employ certain symbols. A map intended to demonstrate the power of the British Empire in London will look quite different from map intended to document fire risk in insurance company maps.

We also need to consider the map maker’s knowledge of the location. Are they basing their map on reliable information or on someone’s best guess? A 1673 map of Virginia includes unicorns – because the map maker thought they existed.

Ready to try working with maps?

Activity One:

Imagine... You are Woodbury's First Selectman, and you need to send an emergency message to the mayors and first selectmen of the neighboring towns. But what towns? (Remember: town borders have changed over time.) It's 1758. Or 1766. Or 1776.

To find the answers, visit the following links at the Library of Congress website:

- 1) <https://www.loc.gov/item/99466765/>
- 2) <https://www.loc.gov/item/73691553/>
- 3) <https://www.loc.gov/item/99466764/>

What towns are listed as bordering Woodbury on the following dates?

1758:

1766:

1776:

Did you notice one town is in a very different place on two maps? Which one?

Why do you think this happened?

Activity Two

Imagine. It's 1893, and you have a reservation at the Central Hotel. (You can glimpse the hotel at <https://ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/140065%3A1104>.) You've arrived on the Middlebury Road just fine – but promptly got lost. You've stopped someone for directions. What way do they tell you to go?

See https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~26673~1110182:Thomaston-P-O-?sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort&qvq=q:woodbury%20connecticut;sort:Pub_List_No_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=1&trs=2 for details.

To learn more:

How Maps are Made

Monmonier, Mark. *How to Lie with Maps: Second Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Smith, Cynthia. "The Exotic Animals of the Americas," *The Library of Congress*, 7 Oct 2020

(<https://blogs.loc.gov/maps/category/history-of-cartography/>: accessed 28 November 2020.)

Thompson, Clive. "From Ptolemy to GPS, the Brief History of Maps," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 2017

(<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/brief-history-maps-180963685/>: accessed 28 November 2020).

Using Maps to Trace Your Family History

"Maps," *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Maps>: accessed 28 November 2020).

"Using Maps in Genealogy," *USGS* (<https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/mapsgenealogy.pdf>: accessed 28 November 2020).

Maps and Connecticut History

"Map & Geographic Information," *Connecticut State Library*

(<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/hg/oldhouse/maps>: accessed 28 November 2020.)

Virga, Vincent and McCain, Diana Ross. *Connecticut: Mapping the Nutmeg State Through History, Rare and Unusual Maps from the Library of Congress*. Guilford, CT: Morris Book Publishing, 2011.