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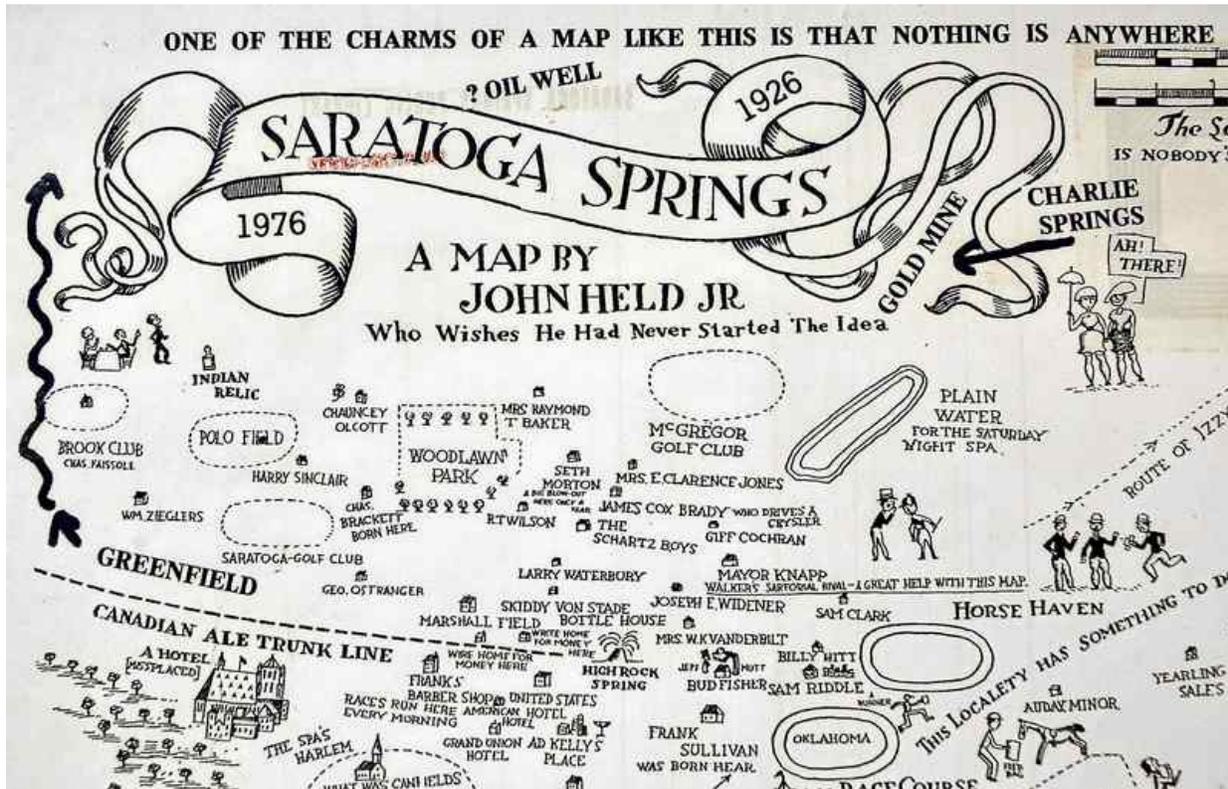
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History museum to open exhibit featuring maps dating back 250 years



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MIKE McMAHON - MMcMAHON@DIGITALFIRSTMEDIA.COM, John Held Jr., a well-known Connecticut illustrator drew this mental map of Saratoga Springs in 1926, In 1976 "Chartlie Springs" published it. In 2015 Saratoga Springs is celebrating its Centennial year as a city. This exhibit examines its growth from colonial times through the 20th century using maps. Over 100 original, ...

By [Lauren Mineau](#), Saratogian

Posted: 04/12/15, 6:38 PM EDT | Updated: on 04/12/2015

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John Held Jr., a well-known Connecticut illustrator drew this mental map of Saratoga Springs in 1926. MIKE McMAHON – MMcMAHON@DIGITALFIRSTMEDIA.COM

SARATOGA SPRINGS >> A few local people decided they wanted to create an inventory of maps of the Spa City, but over the course of collecting them, an idea was born.

A two-year combination of efforts by the city assessor's office, the Saratoga Springs Public Library, the city historian the county historian, the history museum and Skidmore College built the exhibit opening this week at the Saratoga Springs History Museum.

“Mapping A City” Saratoga Springs as seen through 250 years of maps, open. Tuesday, April 14. The exhibit will feature a collection of maps that illustrate how the Spa City has grown over the years.

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The group started research to create an inventory of historic maps, but as they worked, it was realized that the maps told a story. Many of the maps are familiar but some in the exhibit have never been showcased, including a piece from 1772 that shows most of the land now known as Saratoga County.

“When people ask if we had a certain map, or know where one is, now we can say yes,” said Teri Blasko, local history librarian at the Saratoga Springs Public Library.

The collection is a combination of maps from the city and county historian’s collections, the museum, and some private collectors loaned pieces.

“Once we started looking, they kept coming out of the woodwork,” said Jordana Dym, a history professor at Skidmore College.

During the search, maps were found in unconventional places, sometimes wrapped up in an everyday document, like an advertisement for a property auction.

Putting together the exhibit also allowed the maps to be framed and protected, many were found tucked away, folded, or just not preserved properly.

“We started thinking about them as something to preserve,” Dym said. “More than just something to show getting from point A to point B.”

The maps tell Saratoga’s story through the years, some show people’s ideas for growth and development, a concept still weighed to this day. One 1894 plan illustrates a concept for a “Greater Saratoga” including plans for a foot bridge along Broadway and a gondola throughout town, even a public library, which wasn’t built in the Spa City until the 1950s.

Maps and brochures from the 20th century show plans popping up every few years with whatever fresh idea someone had at the time.

“They show the way people develop changes over time, the second half of the 20th century it seems Saratoga kept trying to reinvent itself,” Blasko said. “People kept thinking about what’s next.”

Discoveries were also made about the people who made the maps, personalities came through in the design and configuration. A map on loan from Yaddo views as a piece of art itself, as well as being informative. It shows roadways before the Northway was built and the illustrator included an artfully designed compass in the corner and fancy calligraphy of “Saratoga Springs” at the top.

“There are people’s stories in the maps as well,” Dym said.

The most modern piece is on loan from the public library and it too, tells a story. A jigsaw puzzle, mounted and framed, dated 1996 normally hangs in the staff room at the public library.

“It was put together over time by the library staff, on coffee breaks, during free moments,” Blasko said.

The exhibit is also the museum’s contribution to the city’s Centennial celebration, though one of the challenges was finding artifacts from 1915 to highlight.

“We were looking but people didn’t think to draw a new map when the city became official, because nothing had officially changes,” Dym said. “We were asking questions of people 100 years ago that they didn’t think of.”

They ended up finding engineering maps folded up from 1915 and a piece from the Lester Brothers, a former real estate company on Broadway. The century old pieces will be showcased together, as part of the city’s 100th year celebration.

The exhibit opens Tuesday with an official opening from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. that will be free and open to the public.

Student in the Skidmore College class, Mapping The Americas will also maintain a website of the maps in their digital form including historical notes and other information. The digital version can be viewed at <http://ssmp.skidmore.edu/>

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About the Author

Lauren Mineau covers local city news, politics and more. Reach the author at lmineau@digitalfirstmedia.com or follow Lauren on Twitter: [@laurenmineau](https://twitter.com/laurenmineau).

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