

Cartographic Collections

The American Geographical Society Library at UW-Milwaukee

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The American Geographical Society Library (AGS Library) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is the former research library of the American Geographical Society of New York (AGS of NY). Established in 1851, the AGS of NY is the oldest geographical society in the United States. The Society has conducted original research, aided the government, sponsored geographic scholarship, and once had an in-house cartography facility. The organization has played a prominent role in the advancement of geography by publishing and collecting periodicals, books, maps, atlases, and photographs. Led by notable explorers and politicians such as Isaiah Bowman, Charles P. Daly, and Robert E. Peary, the Society has been an integral part of the nation's maturing from its frontier beginnings. In 1978 an agreement between the AGS of NY and the University of Wisconsin System led to the transfer of over one million items to UW-Milwaukee. Today the pledge to maintain and preserve those materials and to carry on the tradition of promoting geographic understanding remains the focus of the AGS Library.

The collection today hosts an array of geographical treasures brought to Milwaukee from New York, including a 1452 manuscript *mappamundi*, a 1478 Rome edition Ptolemy atlas, and thousands of other rare maps, atlases, periodicals, and geographic texts. The Library also holds over 500,000 photographs and slides, some of which were the basis of two well-received recent exhibits at the Milwaukee Art Museum, "The American West, 1871-1874: Photographs from the American Geographical Society Library" (2005) and "Photographs from the Ends of the Earth" (2007).

The commitment to the historic materials is an important role, but, as the sole map library to a major urban research university, the AGS Library also provides modern resources to students, staff, faculty, and the community. The AGS Library staff collects, archives, and distributes digital data files from federal, state, and local governmental agencies. Visiting researchers from around the world benefit from two AGS Library fellowship programs. AGS Library staff members answer thousands of reference questions in person and

via email and mail. Access is also made available via the scanning of materials using a *Colortrak 4280* large-format, sheet feed scanner. The scanning of maps has been an ongoing project since the early 2000's and one of the most requested services. A new scanning project will bring nearly 1,000 Sanborn fire insurance atlas sheets of Milwaukee online this year as part of the UWM Libraries' efforts to increase digital collections. Currently hundreds of photographs and maps from the AGS Library can be viewed in the Digital Collections at <http://www.uwm.edu/Libraries/digilib/agsl/index.html>.

Striking a balance between current and historic interests is both tricky and rewarding for a collection like the AGS Library. While the majority of our annual budget is used toward modern materials, the AGS Library also makes retrospective purchases when unique opportunities arise. Recently, with the assistance of the Wisconsin Map Society, the AGS Library acquired an extremely rare and unusual map. The *Man of Commerce*, published in 1889, is a highly detailed 31 x 50 inch map that conflates human anatomy with the American transportation system (Figures 1-3). Published by the Land and River Improvement Company of Superior, Wisconsin, the map promotes Superior as a significant transportation hub, showing the routes of twenty-nine railroads across the United States. Human anatomy was the most prominent of the biological sciences of the nineteenth century, and the map's metaphor makes West Superior "the center of cardiac or heart circulation"; the railways become major arteries; and New York is "the umbilicus through which this man of commerce was developed." The explanatory notes conclude: "It is an interesting fact that in no other portion of the known world can any such analogy be found between the natural and artificial channels of commerce and circulatory and digestive apparatus of man."

The map's cartographer was A.F. McKay, and the engraver was Rand, McNally and Company. Only one other copy of this map is known to exist but is held in a private collection. This unique map is now part of the AGS Library and UWM and is available for public viewing and cartographic research.

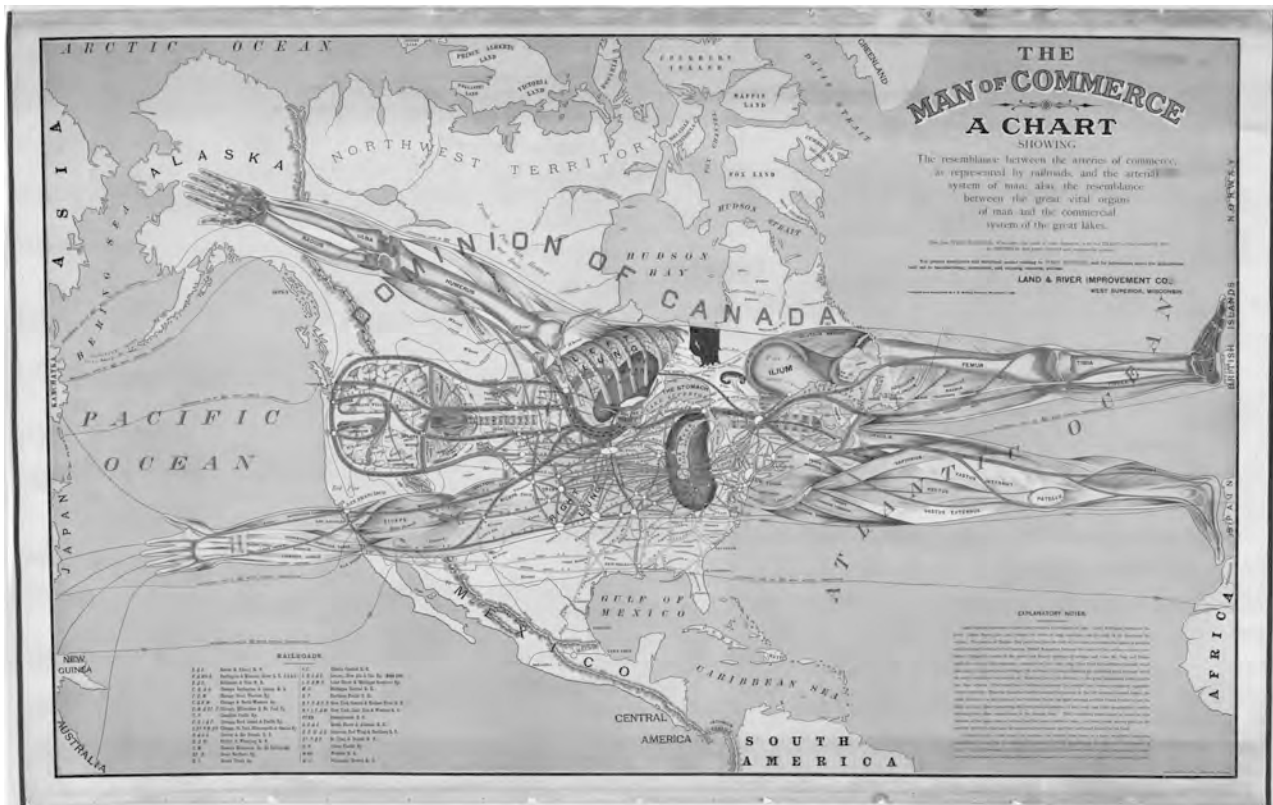


Figure 1. "The Man of Commerce: a chart," 1889 held at the AGS Library. (see page 63 for color version)

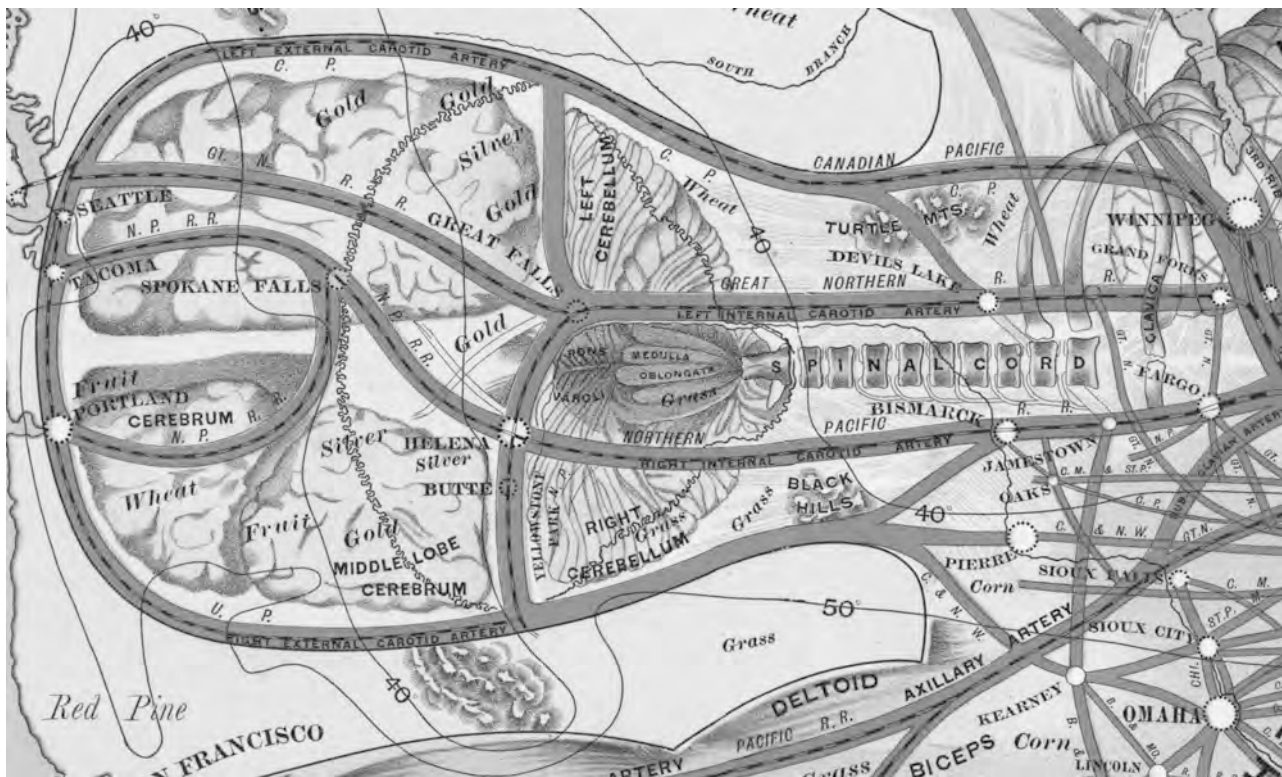


Figure 2. Close-up view of the Man of Commerce map: "As brain power moves man, so the precious metals are the basis of commercial movement, and they are found located at the head," from the explanatory notes. (see page 64 for color version)

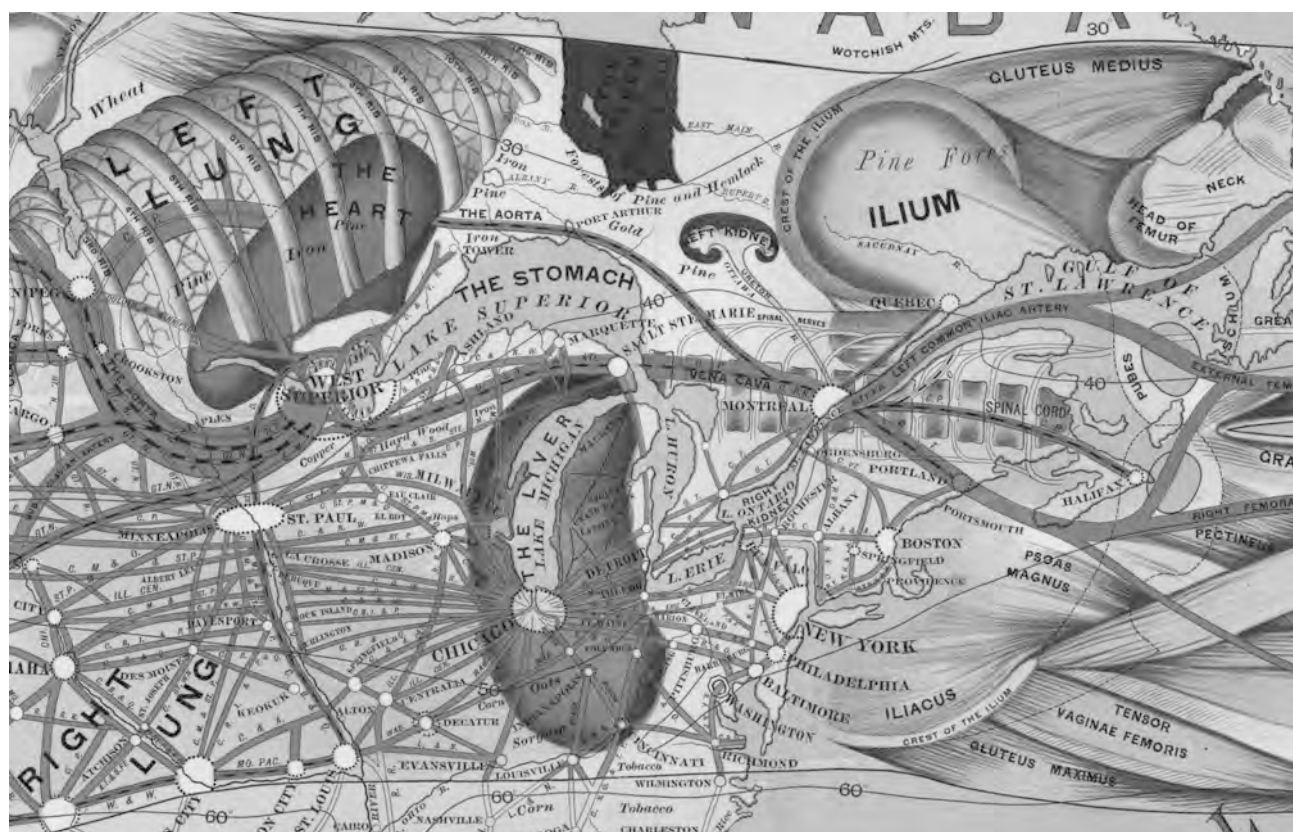


Figure 3. Close-up view of the Man of Commerce map showing the East Coast to the Great Lakes, identifying the lungs, stomach, liver, and heart. (see page 65 for color version)



Figure 4. An albumen silver print from glass negative held at the AGS Library. This photo is by John L. Dunmore and George Critcherson of the brig Panther during Issac Israel Hayes's Arctic expedition in 1869. (see page 65 for color version)

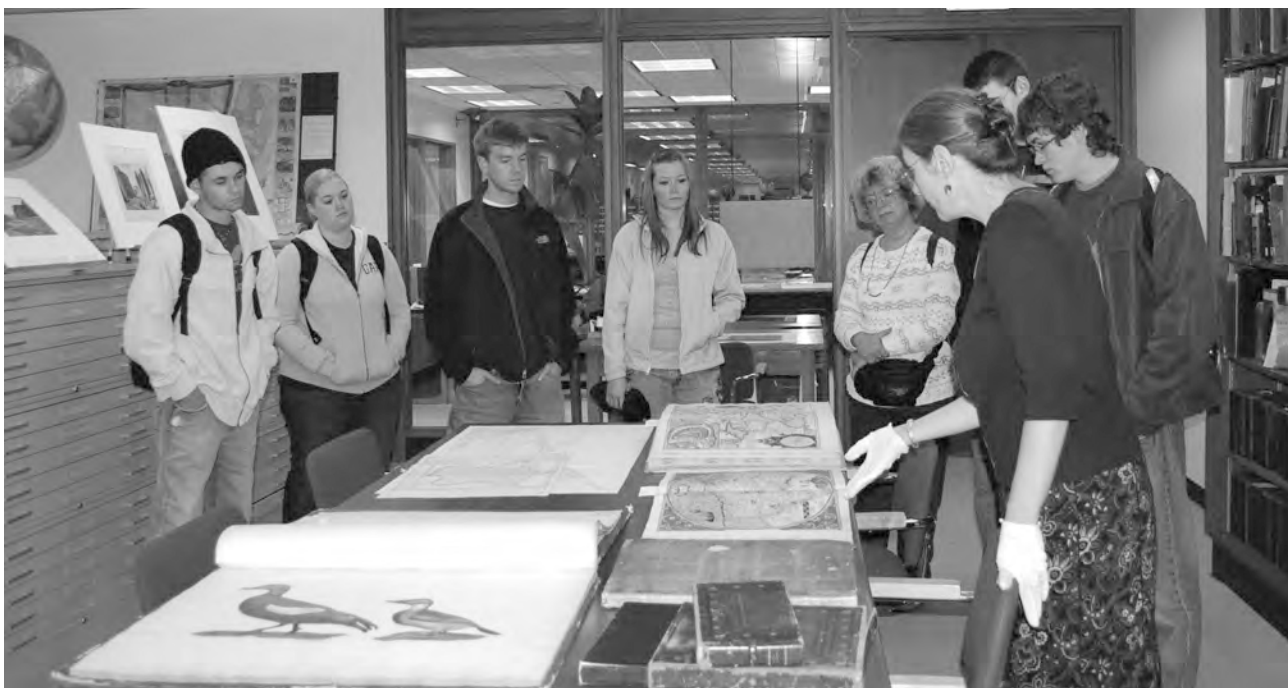


Figure 5. Reference Librarian Jovanka Ristic (wearing gloves) giving a tour of the AGS Library as part of GIS Day 2007 activities.