

## A TRIBUTE TO MAPS -- AND MAPMAKERS

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**BYLINE: JONAH RASKIN**

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In the beginning, no one got California right -- least of all the cartographers. Examine the earliest European maps of the place we now call the Golden State and you see that it was initially thought to be an island. The mistake went on for ages and misled kings, explorers, pirates and missionaries. According to Sonoma County's own Henry Wendt, the author of this elegantly written and beautifully produced book -- and the owner of **Quivira** Winery -- the description of California as an island was ``perhaps the longest running and most notable mistake in cartographic history."

``Mapping the Pacific: Coronado to Lewis and Clark" presents for the first time the author's very own private collection of rare maps, unusual books and eye-catching illustrations. The 100-page, oversized book has just been published in tandem with the exhibit of the same name that's now drawing enthusiastic crowds at the Sonoma County Museum. It's a testament to human curiosity and the will to make known the unknown and forbidding.

You turn the pages of Wendt's lavish book and you travel back in time to an era when Europeans thought there was an exotic city in Northern California called **Quivira**. It was an era, too, when Japan was thought to be just a stone's throw off the coast of California. It's a wonder that, with maps like these, explorers didn't get lost on land and at sea far more often than they did.

The story that's told here -- or at least one of them -- is a story of persistence, dedication and of growing accuracy in the realm of cartography. The maps get better and so, too, the understanding of the world improves immensely. In the first map that's included here -- it's dated 1544 -- North America is barely recognizable, though Florida, (``Terra florida") stands out distinctly. In the last map of the continent, which is dated 1778 -- just after the Declaration of Independence -- you recognize the contours of the land. At last, North America

looks a lot like the continent you can find in a Rand McNally book of maps. There's a sense of proportion, and places are more or less accurately depicted in relationship to one another.

By the time that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark returned from their epic journey to the Pacific Ocean 200 years ago, the continent was no longer unmapped and mysterious, though in its vastness and its beauty, it was still majestic.

Early European maps of North America were classified government documents and top secret. Handing them over to a rival empire or rival power was tantamount to treason, and kings valued them as highly as the crown jewels. Not surprisingly, the mapmakers themselves were highly valued artists and craftsmen.

Maps are at the heart of this book, but the mapmakers and the map capitals of the world aren't far behind. In the brief essays that accompany each individual map, Wendt takes readers from Venice, which was the center of the mapmaking world in the 16th-century, to Amsterdam and then to Antwerp, Paris and London. As empires rose and fell, so too the most celebrated of mapmakers were drawn to imperial centers. In those days a talented mapmaker could write his own future.

Some of the cartographers, like the Flemish master Gerard Mercator, are world famous. Others, like the eccentric Englishman John Briggs or the Jesuit missionary Eusebio Kino, are less well known, though they're certainly deserving of historical recognition. Wendt gives them their moment in the sun, praising Kinos' humanitarian efforts on behalf of the indigenous population.

Perhaps the hero of this book is Captain James Cook, the first man to make accurate maps of the coast of North America. Cook's inspiring story has been told before many times, but Wendt tells it especially well -- how he sailed around the world, charted the coast of New Zealand, eliminated scurvy -- among other notable feats -- before he was killed in Hawaii in 1779.

At least half a dozen illustrations depict the natives that European mapmakers and explorers encountered as they traveled around the world. There are stunning portraits of men and women from the Aleutian Islands and Vancouver Island, too.

In addition to the maps, and Wendt's accompanying text, there is an informative essay by Ronald E. Grim titled "Cartography, Geography, and Politics." "Before 1800, the major European powers were not necessarily exploring the North American continent to advance geographic knowledge," Grim writes. "They were primarily building empires." There's a brief foreword by Natasha Boas, the chief curator of the Sonoma County Museum, in which she writes, "We experience this book as we might a magical journey." And in the preface that's written by Henry Wendt and his wife, Holly, the authors explain that they have retraced the voyages of the early explorers in their own 55-foot sloop. So the spirit that motivated the early explorers and cartographers lives on.

“The Pacific coast of North America was literally the ‘edge of the world,’ and one of the last regions to be explored and mapped,” the Wendts write. In its own quiet way, their book takes you to the edge of the world and beyond. So, by all means, go to the exhibit, but take this book home with you, and relive the sense of adventure from the comfort of an armchair.

Jonah Raskin is a regular book reviewer for The Press Democrat.

**Infobox: MAPPING THE PACIFIC COAST:**

Coronado to Lewis and Clark

By Henry Wendt

**Quivira**; \$25

AT THE COUNTY MUSEUM

“Mapping the Pacific Coast: Coronado to Lewis and Clark, the **Quivira** Collection” is on display through May 30 at the Sonoma County Museum, 425 7th St., Santa Rosa. Museum hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. For more information, call 579-1500.

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