Introduction

A popular cartographic form used to depict U.S. and Canadian cities and towns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the panoramic map. Known also as bird's-eye views, perspective maps, panoramas, and aero views, panoramic maps are nonphotographic representations of cities, portrayed as if viewed from above at an oblique angle. Although not generally drawn to scale, they show street patterns, individual buildings, and major landscape features in perspective.

Preparation of panoramic maps involved a vast amount of painstakingly detailed labor. For each project a frame or projection was developed, showing in perspective the pattern of streets. The artist then walked in the street, sketching buildings, trees, and other features to present a complete and accurate landscape as though seen from an elevation of 2,000 to 3,000 feet.[1] These data were entered on the frame in his workroom.

Perspective mapping was not unique to the United States and Canada or to the Victorian period. Mathias Merian, George Braun, Franz Hogenberg, and others produced perspective maps of European cities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These early European town plans, most often portraying major political or marketing centers, were small in size and were generally incorporated in atlases or geographical books. The perspective was usually at a low oblique angle, and streets were seldom identified by name. In some instances, the views were hypothetical, and one pattern might be used to represent various European cities.

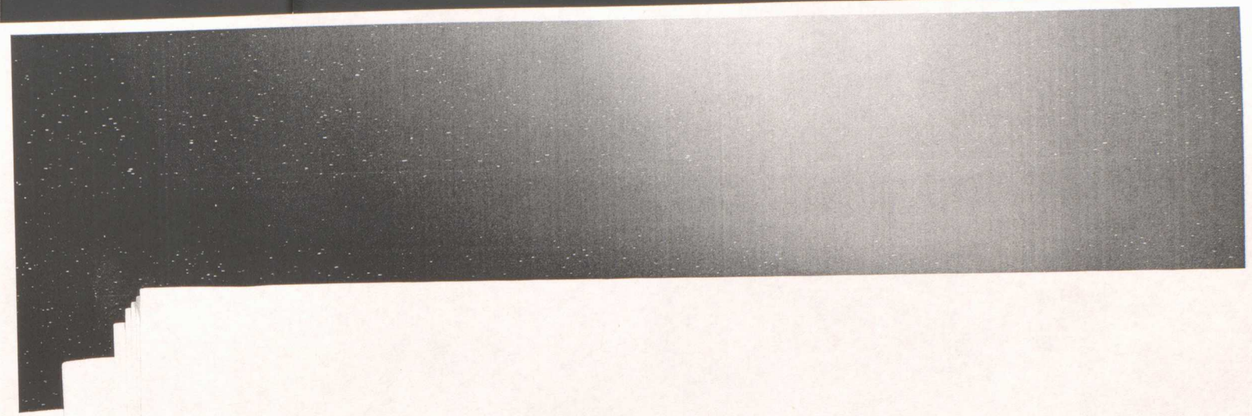
A modified version of the Renaissance city view was employed in the United States before the Civil War. Like their European predecessors, these perspectives, usually of large cities, were drawn at low oblique angles and at times even at ground level. Street patterns were often indistinct.

Also popular during this period were views of American cities drawn as though viewed from extremely great heights.

Victorian America's panoramic maps differ dramatically from the Renaissance city perspectives. The post-Civil War town views are more accurate and are drawn from a higher oblique angle. Small towns as well as major urban centers were portrayed. Panoramic mapping of urban centers was unique to North America in this era. Most panoramic maps were published independently, not as plates in an atlas or in a descriptive geographical book. Preparation and sale of nineteenth-century panoramas were motivated by civic pride and the desire of the city fathers to encourage commercial growth. Many views were prepared for and endorsed by chambers of commerce and other civic organizations and were used as advertisements of a city's commercial and residential potential.

Advances in lithography, photolithography, photoengraving, and chromolithography, which made possible inexpensive and multiple copies, along with prosperous communities willing to purchase prints, made panoramic maps popular wall hangings during America's Victorian Age. The citizen could view with pride his immediate environment and point out his own property to guests, since the map artist, for a suitable fee, obligingly included illustrations of private homes as insets to the main city plan.

Real estate agents and chambers of commerce used the maps to promote sales to prospective buyers of homes and business properties. Henry Wellge's 1892 panorama of Norfolk, Virginia, for example, was distributed with the compliments of Pollard Brothers Real Estate, and Thaddeus M. Fowler's 1893 view of Morrisville, Pennsylvania, was commissioned by realtor William G. Howell.[2]



Panoramic maps not only showed the existing city but sometimes also depicted areas planned for development. Fowler's 1890 map of Childress, Texas, and 1907 map of South Rocky Mount, North Carolina, are examples.

Panoramic maps graphically depict the vibrant life of a city. Harbors are shown choked with ships, often to the extent of constituting hazards to navigation. Trains speed along railroad tracks, at times on the same roadbed with locomotives and cars headed in the opposite direction. People and horsedrawn carriages fill the streets, and smoke belches from the stacks of industrial plants. Urban and industrial development in post-Civil War America is vividly portrayed in the maps.

As late as the 1920s, panoramic maps were still in vogue commercially. A view of Derby, Connecticut, by Hughes & Bailey, used on a letterhead of this period, includes a description of the various advantages the city could offer a new industry or a prospective home buyer. The promotional pitch concluded with the following observation:

> The many Natural Advantages of Location, the Cheapness of Power, Varied Industries, Skilled Labor, Facilities for Transportation, Proximity to other Large Manufacturing Communities combine to make Derby Exceptionally Attractive to the Manufacturer and Home Seeker as a Commercial and an Industrial Center.[3]

Norris, Wellge & Co.'s 1885 view of Madison, Wisconsin, illustrates another use of panoramic maps. In addition to those sold for wall hangings, copies of the view were used by S. L. Sheldon to advertise his farm implement store. The map is framed by eighteen pictures of farm machines, including the Gasaday sulky plow, the J. I. Case agitator, the Buffalo Pitts coal or wood burning traction engine, and Esterly's twine binding harvester. Sheldon sent copies of the panorama to his patrons, along with a request for their continued patronage. Similarly, Fowler's 1889 map of Hamburg, Pennsylvania, contains two advertisements below the neat line. One portrays W. William Appel's photographic studio, jewelry store, and residence, with a lithographic reproduction of the owner. The other, an advertisement for W. H. Grim, dealer in musical instruments and sewing machines, includes a view of his shop and a representation of a Miller organ, one of Grim's stock items.

There is little information about the number of prints usually published or the customary selling price. Obviously, more impressions were made of the maps of large cities than of those picturing small towns. An estimate from Meriden Gravure Company, Meriden, Connecticut, the printer of Hughes & Bailey and Hughes & Cinquin aero views in the 1910s and 1920s, noted that between one hundred and two hundred fifty copies of each view were generally printed.[4] However, Oakley H. Bailey, one of the bird's-eye view artists, stated in 1932 that he had made sketches of nearly six hundred different places and that total reproductions had exceeded a million copies. Simple arithmetic indicates that Bailey's estimate works out to approximately two thousand copies of each view.[5] Considering the scarcity of many views, it may be assumed that the average printing was probably in the neighborhood of five hundred impressions.

The cost of the individual bird's-eye view was very likely determined by the number of impressions and the buying capability of the