

Authors of atlas follow a map to funding

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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This column continues the story of the “Historical Atlas Map of Solano County,” commonly referred to as Thompson & West.

During 1876 and 1877, publishers Thomas Thompson and West sent their agents throughout Solano County to solicit subscriptions for inclusion in the atlas. With solicitations in place, their artists visited individual sites, landmarks, and local ranches to draw the images from which the etchings for the atlas would be created.

Eventually, the atlas was printed in Philadelphia, by Tho. & Hunter Printers. Its subtitle promised that it was “Compiled, Drawn and Published from Personal Examinations and Surveys.”

But first, Messieurs Thompson and West had to raise the money for the project. One source was Solano County itself, as is witnessed by the entry of the clerk of the board on Dec. 12, 1876. Titled “In the matter of the Petition of Mess. Thompson & West for an Appropriation for sketching Co. Buildings,”

The clerk’s beautifully handwritten record continues: “Upon reading and filing the petition of Mess. Thompson & West. County Atlas Publishers for an appropriation of \$240, for the purpose of Sketching the County Building in order that the same appear among the illustration in the County Atlas, now in progress by said Petitioners. It is ordered that the (sum) of the said petition be granted and said sum appropriated for that purpose, provided that the Court House, Jail and Hospital be made to appear on one page of such atlas. It is further ordered that Supervisor Hoyt be appointed to give the necessary directions for sketching the same.”

Board notes were routinely reported in the Weekly Solano Republican, but not always accurately. Thus, on Dec. 14, 1876, the newspaper quoted “An Appropriation of \$140 was made to Thompson & West County Atlas Publishers, for a full page engraving of Co. buildings in same.” The reporter obviously misheard the sum and quoted it at \$100 less than the clerk of the board recorded.

Fairfield’s Court House and Jail complex are indeed included in the atlas on one full page. The County Hospital, or infirmary, found its way onto another page. Instead of a full page, the image only received a third of a page. For this, the Board of Supervisors had to release further funds. In 1878, the board consisted of Chairman J. B. Hoyt, who

seems to have been one of the strongest supporters of the project, James McCrory, D. W. Harrier, S. K. Baker, and James McCudden.

On Feb. 7, 1878, the clerk of the board recorded: "In the matter of the payment of Thompson & West for View Engraving of Co. Hospital in Official Atlas ordered that the sum of \$80, payable out of the General Fund of the County be and the same is hereby appropriated for the purpose of paying for the Engraving of the View of the County Hospital of Solano County in the official Atlas thereof. And the County auditor of said County is hereby desired to draw his warrant and req the Co. Treasurer for said sum in favor of Mess. Thompson & West in payment thereof."

These two sums help to establish pricing for the individual images. \$240 purchased a full page image; \$80 purchased one third. There is only one large two-page image, six one-page images, 15 half-page images, two one-third page images; 15 one-sixth of the page, and two odd-sized small images. Based on the price of \$240 per full page, this would roughly translate to the sum of \$4,410.

So who were the residents and businesses that purchased these etchings at these prices? Among Vacaville residents are L. W. Buck and Levi Korn, each with half a page; W. J. Pleasants and Frank Williams bought one third each; W. B. Towson bought the smallest one, as did A. C. Hawkins of Elmira. St. Catherine's Academy, the famous girl's school in Benicia, purchased their image over two pages - what an advertisement for this successful school. None of the Vacaville supporters mentioned in the Weekly Solano Herald's advertisements of March 1876 on the other hand took the opportunity to have their property showcased.

One can speculate that Luzena Stanley Wilson, G. B. Stevenson, J. B. Merchant and others only purchased an atlas for their own use. No mention is made of the maps that are a hallmark of the atlas. Besides the California state map, maps show the county as a whole and portions of it with surveyed parcel lots and owner names.

A paragraph in the introduction to the atlas written by Thompson and West clarifies that much of this information came directly from the county. "We have spared neither money nor labor to make it as nearly perfect as possible; but if some minor errors have crept into the map work of a county having irregular survey and uneven topography, we shall not be surprised.

"Our acknowledgements are especially due to the Board of Supervisors, and to the county officials and their deputies, who have at all times aided us in gathering from the records such facts as were needed."

Besides the maps and images, the atlas also quotes census data, agricultural statistics,

population figures and other valuable information. The publishers also interviewed residents on the history of the early settlement of the county. Text includes short descriptions of all the settlements at the time.

Their preface to the atlas addresses the residents directly, explaining the difficulty and complexity of the work and expressing the hope that the atlas met with the expectation of the population.

"To The People of Solano County

"We return thanks for the confidence they reposed in our ability to make a Historical Atlas that should do credit to their county, and for the generous patronage they afforded us.

"In presenting this work, we hope it may appear to our patrons that their confidence was not misplaced, and that an adequate return has been made for the pecuniary support they rendered us.

"We have conscientiously endeavored to prepare an Atlas equal in all particulars to the representations we made in behalf of it, and equal also to the expectations entertained of it by our patrons.

"We are not rash enough to presume that the work is absolutely faultless, neither do we believe that a generous and intelligent community would demand that degree of perfection in a work of this kind.

"Few People, without actual experience, can comprehend the details of such a work, - its cost, and the care and pains necessary to bring it to completion. ...

"While our labors were progressing in the county we were constantly the recipients of courtesies and favors from all classes of citizens, to whom we return our thanks. ...

"To the public - spirited and gentlemanly members of the Press we return thanks for the interest taken in and encouragement afforded our enterprise.

"To many old Settlers, whose years of honorable toil have transformed the wild prairie into harvest-laden fields, we acknowledge our obligations for historical and biographical incidents connected with an early history of the county.

"That the convenience and utility of the work we have presented will be seen and appreciated by the public generally, is the hope and belief of the publishers."

These last words hold true today - their work is still one of the most valuable resources available for research.

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