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Constructing the 1889 Baist Atlas of Richmond, VA: Building Blocks for Digital Projects

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Constructing the 1889 Baist Atlas of Richmond, VA: Building Blocks for Digital Projects

Lauren Work, Digital Collections Librarian

<http://labs.library.vcu.edu/baist-atlas/>



The Baist Atlas project was the first design of its kind created for VCU Libraries. The digital project was created by a collaborative effort to preserve, digitize, describe, and code an interactive website to showcase and supplement a unique resource for researchers. This ongoing project also experimented with ideas about use, access, evaluation and outreach for the collection.

Preparation

Preservation

Repair, including the pictured scraping technique to patch small holes in the map, and stabilization for handling and photography.



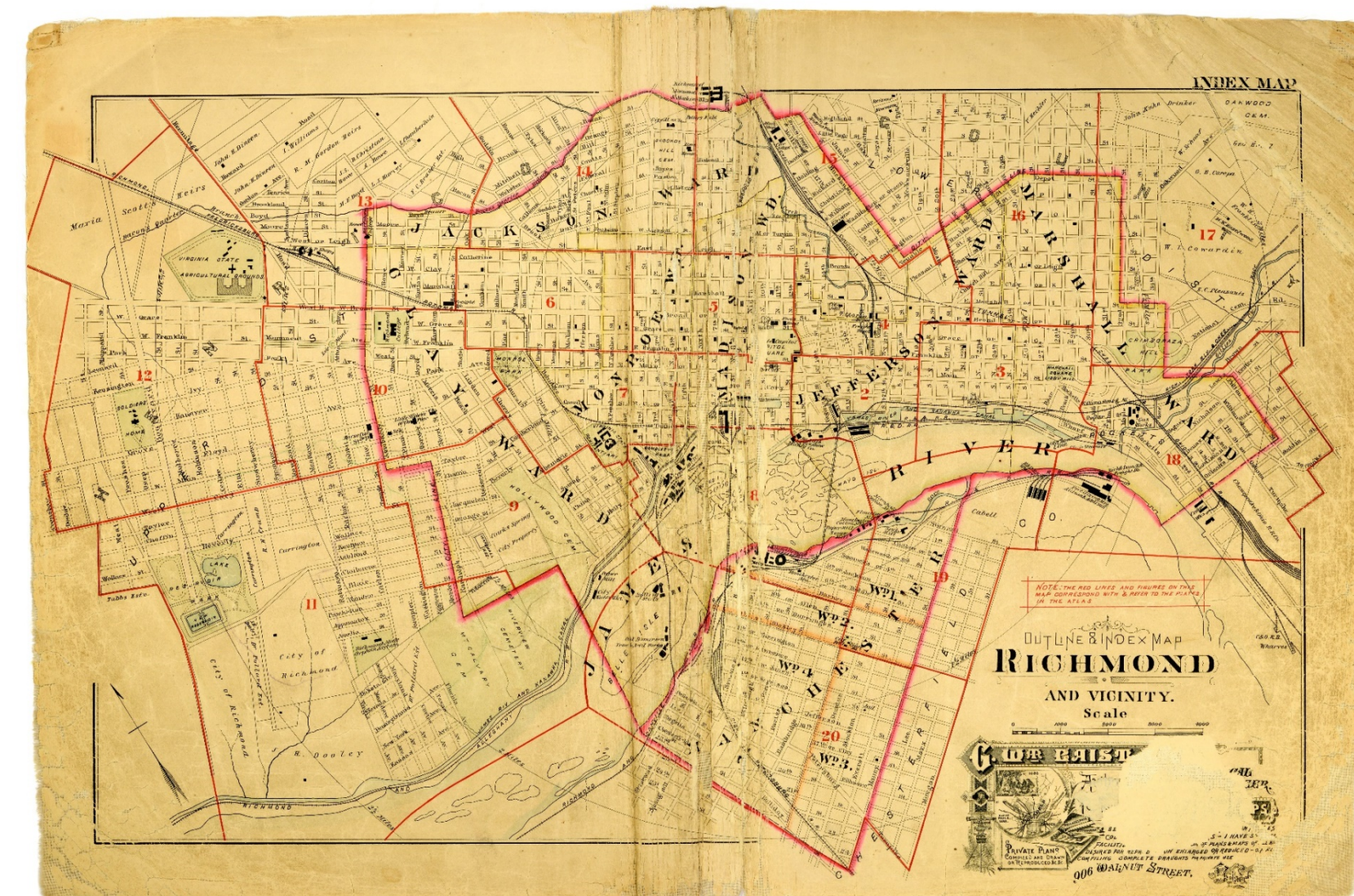
Digitization

Photography, editing, and digital “stitching” of component parts of the large image together for accurate digital presentation.



Cataloging

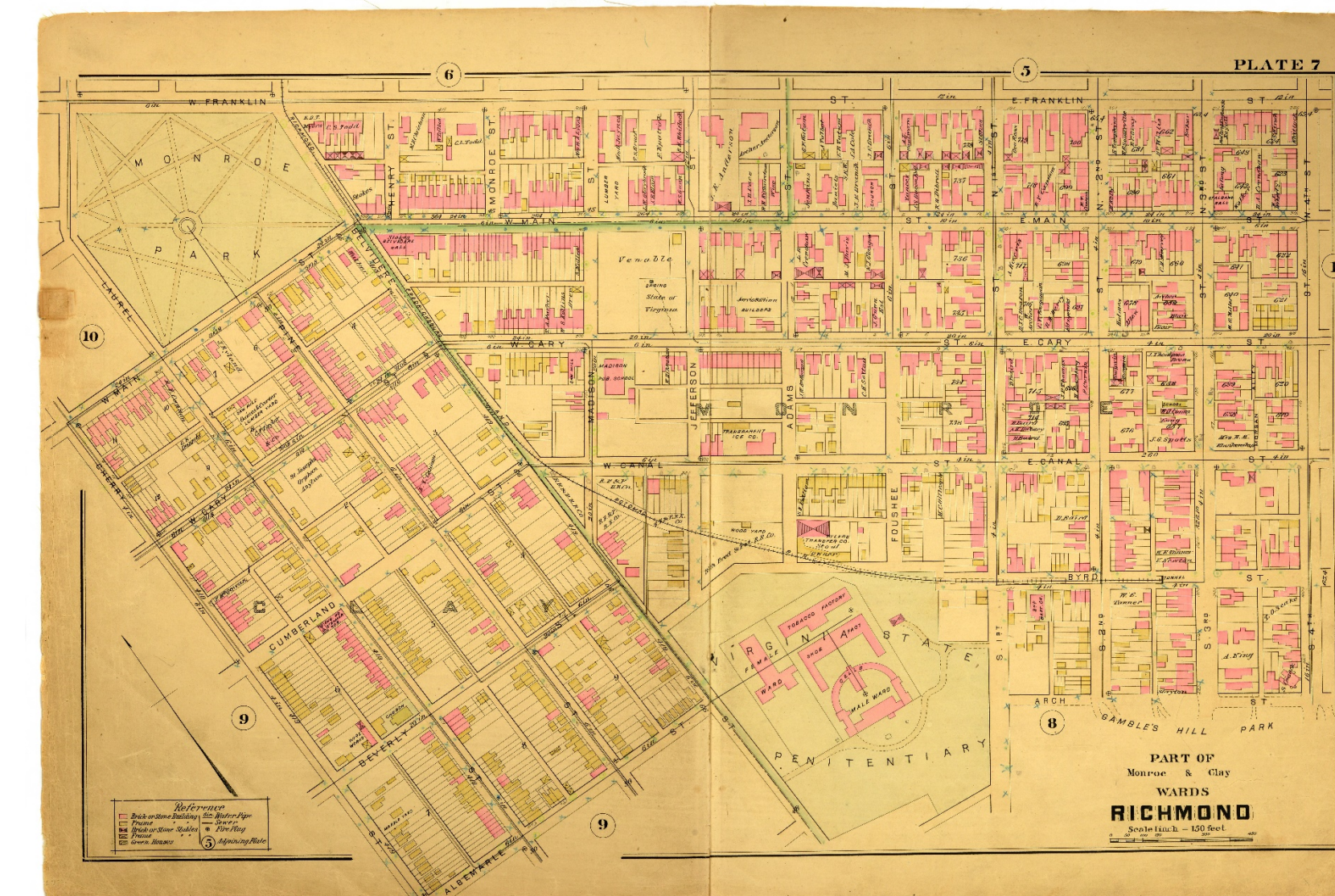
Supplemental cataloging for anticipated research use included:
-Street borders
-Street index



Design

Collaborative development

The project was an iterative design collaboration between the VCU Web Team and Digital Collections.



History in context

To provide a reference for how the 19th century Atlas fits into the landscape of modern Richmond:



- All 20 panels were georectified over Google Maps
- Architectural “Points of Interest” were identified for each panel
- Street View was used to contrast historic images with present day architecture



New avenues for discovery

In addition to presenting the Atlas online, the interactive site also serves as a pathway to related VCU digital collections that feature the neighborhoods and structures in the Atlas.

Delivery

Supplemental resources

Downloads of digital collections are typically made available in our CONTENTdm management system. For the Baist Atlas, VCU Libraries provided additional resources for download and use including geospatial data and the Atlas street index.

Feedback & Assessment

- Quantitative:* Google Analytics
Event-specific metrics were created for actions like downloads and clicks on the interactive website link.
- Qualitative:* Internal reviews from VCU Libraries & various faculty was solicited during a soft rollout of the site.

Outreach

- Presentations & collaborations with interested groups:
- History and urban planning departments
 - Friends of the Library
 - Archaeology PhD student

Social media strategies included:

- Tumblr posts for “Map Mondays”
- Flickr Commons site metadata includes a link for the interactive website

Challenges

Time

Preservation work was extensive and necessary for the project. This collaboration took several months, which was longer than originally anticipated.

Digitization trouble shooting

Lighting, photography and digital editing for a large format item called for new approaches and workflows. These steps also required additional project time.

Challenges

Scope creep.

Enthusiasm for the project ran high, and additional ideas were integrated continuously. This will be mitigated in future projects by establishing a project charter.

Cascading technical challenges

Scope creep led to shifting technical requirements, which delayed development.

Communication & Issue Tracking

Google Docs are not ideal for development. GitHub will be used for future projects for better issue tracking and workflow.

Challenges

Feedback

This needs to be early and often. Our feedback provided great criticism, but it was too late in the project for major change.

Audience identification

The project was geared for scholarly research, but we struggled to identify our target audience. Students? Historians?

Sustainability

Preservation and migration plans for the site are extremely important. We are planning to use a project charter to assign ownership and future responsibilities.