

Multitasking on a Shoestring: Storage and Display Mounts for Oversized Maps at the Library of Virginia

The Library of Virginia had modest beginnings. When it was established by the state legislature in 1823, it was housed in the attic of the state capitol, a building designed by Thomas Jefferson, modelled after the Maison Carre in Nimes, France. Nowadays, the library has its own modern facility, and in addition, has a massive offsite storage facility. Between the two buildings, there are over 55 miles of shelving, holding over 97 million pieces of Virginia history dating from the early 1600s to today. And, as a state government archives, the library is mandated by law to make all of this material accessible to the public. Of course, in this era of mass digitization initiatives, there is a big push at our institution to get everything online. However, all original materials must still be made available to view in person. Particularly for maps, it is wonderful to see the physical object. Although maps are considered archival material, they are highly aesthetic as such. However, many of the most interesting maps in the collection are very large, and it is difficult to access them on short notice. To facilitate their viewing, our institution has committed to displaying maps on a regular basis.

Here are a few examples of the types of maps that might be typically displayed. John Mitchell's *Map of the British and French Dominions in North America*, 1755 (fig. 1) was the primary source used during the Treaty of Paris to define the borders of the new United States after the American Revolution. It is the most comprehensive map of the eastern part of North America made during the colonial period. The Sayer & Bennett, *New and Accurate Chart of the Bay of Chesapeake*, 1777 (fig. 2) is a highly accurate, yet beautiful documentation of the bay area. It drew heavily on the depiction of the bay established by the earlier Fry-Jefferson map of Virginia. The John Henry, *New and Accurate Map of Virginia*, 1770 (fig. 3), provides a fine depiction of the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula regions of the state. The Herman Boye *Map of Virginia*, often called the nine sheet map as it was printed from nine copper plates, was commissioned by the general



Fig. 1. John Mitchell's *Map of the British and French Dominions in North America*, 1755, copper plate engraving on paper, on two sheets, 138 x 100 cm each, hand colored, mounted on linen.

assembly in 1816 in order to have an accurate depiction of each county all in one map. This was for the purpose of planning internal improvements such as roads and canals, and so it is in fact a government document. Yet it is highly decorative and visually interesting (fig. 4). In addition to the large cartouche, there are enormous vignettes at each corner.

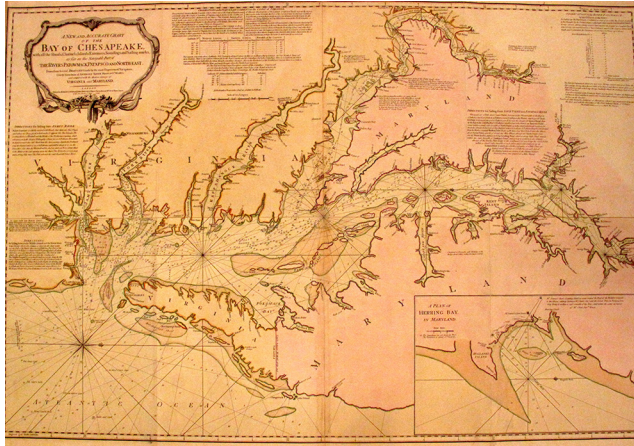


Fig. 2. Sayer & Bennett's *A New and Accurate Chart of the Bay of Chesapeake*, 1777, copper plate engraving on paper, 99 x 142 cm, hand colored.

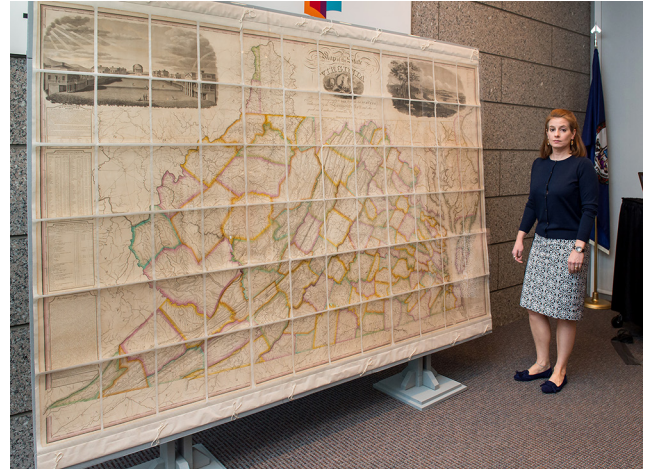


Fig. 4. Herman Boye's *A Map of the State of Virginia*, 1826, copper plate engraving on paper, dissected and mounted on Japanese tissue and linen, 160 x 248cm, hand colored.



Fig. 3. John Henry's *A New and Accurate Map of Virginia*, 1770, copper plate engraving on paper, mounted on linen, 98 x 133cm, hand colored.

One portrays a pastoral view of Richmond from the banks of the James River, showing the capitol building where this very map would have resided, and on the other side there is Jefferson's idyllic campus of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Because of its great size (160 x 248cm) and level of detail, the map took ten years to complete.

There are difficulties in displaying maps of this size, but we are committed to doing so in order to allow map researchers and aficionados to have access to them. The Library of Virginia currently sponsors a map lecture series where outside speakers are invited to present scholarly papers on Virginia related map topics, and it was decided that maps from our collection could be used to enhance these events by illustrating the topics being discussed. As there are no funds dedicated to displaying the maps, in the beginning, they were just laid out in their storage folders on tables in the conference rooms, which were guarded by volunteer staff. There are two obvious problems with this scenario. First, the viewers have to constantly bend over to see the detail in the maps, which is not ideal (fig. 5). Second, it does not really allow for the display of very large maps. Therefore, it was necessary to devise a way to vertically mount the maps in a way that would be both economic and time saving, since our staff is small and staff time is at a premium.

The idea would be to use the current form of map storage, the map folder, and adapt that into a display mount. This avoids creating another costly containment system for the maps, saves time, and also, by keeping the maps in their folders, it avoids unnecessary handling of the maps which is always desirable. The folders we use are made of folder stock with a 0.005 mil polyester cover, attached on one side with double sided tape. These folders would need to be securely attached to a rigid mount in such a way that they could be



Fig. 5. Visitor attending one of the Library of Virginia's temporary map exhibits.

easily detached, allowing the maps to be quickly returned to storage, and using a method that would not cause the folders to be significantly altered or damaged. It was decided that Hexamount panels would be used as the mounting surface because of its thickness and stability, while remaining lightweight. A non-adhesive attachment mechanism for the folders was devised, and then custom purposed floor stands were designed and built. The panels are attached to the stands with industrial Velcro, so they are easy to set up and break down quickly.

The first issue was to decide how to mount the map folders to the Hexamount securely, without altering or damaging the folders in any significant way. The solution was to use polyester strips that would traverse the folder and mounting substrate. A discreet slit was made through both, and the polyester strip was passed through both and attached to itself on the back of the mount with double sided tape (fig. 6). For most maps that fit into the 40 x 60 inch format, it is sufficient to use one attachment loop at each top corner of the folder (fig. 7). The map is allowed to rest freely inside of the folder. From a distance, the attachment is almost non visible. When it is ready to be removed, it can just be cut open



Fig. 6. A polyester strip is passed through the map folder and the Hexamount panel, a loop is made and fastened to itself on the back of the mount.

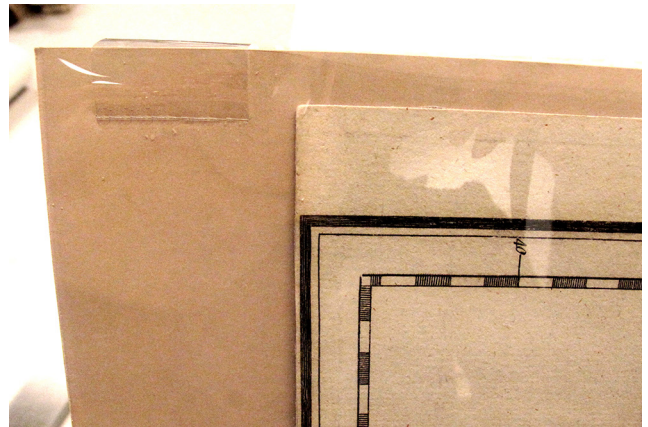


Fig. 7. Close up view of the polyester attachment.

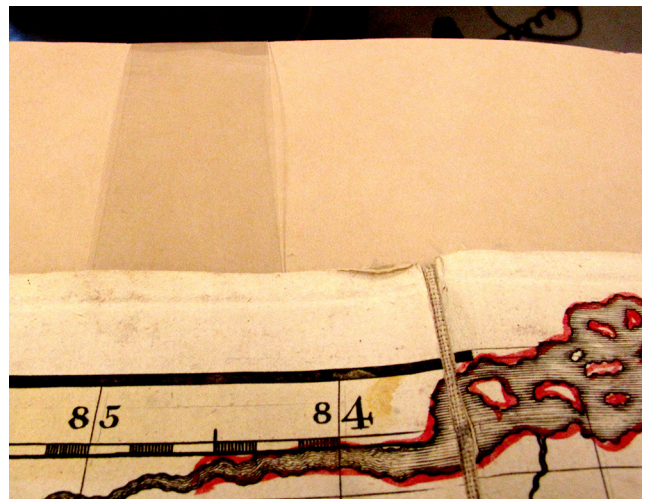


Fig. 8. A polyester hinge is used to securely attach the map to the mount.



Fig. 9. One of the floor stands, constructed of common lumber and industrial Velcro.



Fig. 11. Detail of the Boye Map of Virginia showing the scale of the text that is viewable in a 1 inch area.

and discarded. The slit made in the folder does not affect its stability and the visual consequences are minor.

In the case that a map might need to be displayed vertically when it is actually stored horizontally, it is possible to turn the map folder on its side and mount it this way. In this case, there is no closure in the folder to hold the map in place at the bottom, but this can be solved by temporarily hinging the map to the mount using polyester hinges (fig. 8).

For the floor stands, the emphasis was sturdiness and functionality rather than aesthetics, since most of the stands remains out of view. They were constructed from common lumber using $\frac{3}{4}$ inch furniture grade plywood for the bases and pine 2 x 4 boards for the vertical elements. The topmost piece was attached with a 5 inch hex bolt with a wing nut to allow for adjustment of the display angle (fig. 9). Panels were attached to the stands using 36 inch lengths of 2 inch wide Industrial grade Velcro. The total cost for constructing a set of six stands was \$184. This does not include the Hexamount panels, which are the most costly part of the display system. Other materials can be used which are more economical, such as double corrugated board or foam core board.

One of the main advantages of this system, other than economy, is that it allows viewers to get very close to the



Fig. 10. This system allows for close up viewing of the displayed material.

material (fig. 10). It is important to note that although the maps are very large, they contain an incredible amount of fine detail, as seen in figure 11. We have found that when the effort is made to make these maps available to viewers, they do become incredibly engaged in what they are seeing. This makes our efforts extremely satisfying and we are encouraged to continue to come up with practical solutions to make our collections more accessible.

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