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[All Things Considered](#)

'A Place For The Old And A Place For The New:' White Mountains Maps Exhibit Offers A Window Into N.H. History

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1 of 4 — Archivist and registrar Rebecca Enman stands next to historic maps of New Hampshire at the Plymouth State University Museum of the White Mountains' "Wayfinding" exhibit.

Peter Biello/NHPR



2 of 4 — A 3D relief map of the White Mountains is displayed at the Plymouth State University Museum of the White Mountains' "Wayfinding" exhibit.

Peter Biello/NHPR



3 of 4 — Archivist and registrar Rebecca Enman describes the function of a theodolite, an old surveying tool, at the Plymouth State University Museum of the White Mountains' "Wayfinding" exhibit.

Peter Biello/NHPR



4 of 4 — An old map of New Hampshire shows a coastline that's much longer than in reality at the Plymouth State University Museum of the White Mountains' "Wayfinding" exhibit.

Peter Biello/NHPR

An [exhibit](#) at the Plymouth State University Museum of the White Mountains gives visitors a window into what settlers in New Hampshire saw when they came to the Granite State centuries ago.

Early maps that show a warped coastline and employ different names for the White Mountains cover the walls and are ensconced in display cases. The floor is speckled with old map-making tools that precede the technology of today.

All Things Considered host Peter Biello visited archivist and registrar Rebecca Enman for a tour of the exhibit, which is on display through Sept. 17. Below is a transcript of their conversation.

Peter Biello: So what should we look at first?

Rebecca Enman: The earliest map in the exhibit is this map, which was made by John Foster, made in 1677. This is a facsimile that we have here that was reproduced in 1826, and this is the map that actually calls the White Mountains the "Wine Hills," so it was a publisher error. One of the really cool things about maps is that they tell the story of the time in which they were made. So, you know, what was the style of the day? You know, what were the transportation modes of the day? What do we know about New Hampshire when these maps were made?

Peter Biello: In this map? Looking at it now, it seems like it's a little out of proportion. It seems like if this were today's map, New Hampshire's coastline would be like 60, 70 miles long compared to the rest of the state, which would be much shorter. Why is it skewed that way? Does it have to do with the measurement tools they had on hand back in, I guess, 1791?

Rebecca Enman: Definitely the technology was not as accurate as it is today. These are the very first maps, so the surveying tools were not wonderful. And also they were really relying on the local

resources of the day. So... bringing together maps from kind of all over the region, oh, you know, I mapped this, I mapped that.

Peter Biello: Back in those times, in the 1800s, maybe early 1900s, how big an industry was the map publishing industry?

Rebecca Enman: It was huge. Definitely for all of the different tourism, marketing, and then also once you got here, recreation has always been a huge draw for the region. So if you got here, you know you wanted to hike, you would get your AMC map and your AMC trail guide and you would go up in the mountains. And so it was really important that you had all of those maps available to you. So I would say it was very important.

Peter Biello: So in addition to maps in this room, there seem to be tools of the map-making trade. Right next to you there is a device that looks like some kind of surveying equipment. Can you tell us a little bit about what this device is?

Rebecca Enman: So this is a theodolite, it is a surveying tool, and this equipment for its time is incredibly accurate. And so this is the original box that it would have been folded up in and would have gone inside. And so somebody had to carry that package up the mountain. So, yeah, we've got map-making materials from all different areas. So this is a later theodolite in that case. Over there, we have a very early theodolite, that brass object in the case. So it's really to show kind of how map-making has changed over time and how map-making tools have changed over time.

Peter Biello: This map is fascinating. It's a map of Franconia Notch and if you've driven through the notch, you see this giant mountain looming. If you're headed north, it's on the left. And this is the first time I've looked at it in this way. And you can see how small the little highway is snaking through these, what look like pretty profound ridges here. That's a fascinating way to look at something that you may have seen dozens of times, but now seeing it anew,

Rebecca Enman: It's really wonderful. You can see the evidence of geological kind of movement over time, waterways, how things have shifted and changed, evidence of glacier activity. So it's really exciting and it's a new way to see what we are so familiar with.

Peter Biello: And you've got a quote on the wall here: "Geography is just physics with a couple of trees stuck in it." That's Terry Pratchett.

Rebecca Enman: Yeah. That was one of the fun things that we wanted to do at this exhibit was kind of just gather some funny or interesting or thought-provoking mapmaking quotes. And so you'll see them sprinkled throughout the exhibit.

Peter Biello: So as things become more digitized and as these handheld tools have fallen out of fashion, what, if anything, do you think is lost about mapmaking?

Rebecca Enman: I don't think that these maps will ever disappear. I think that there's a lot of history there. People are fascinated to come look at old maps to see what they looked like 100 years ago, what things looked like 200 years ago. I think that there was definitely these maps are personal. Each map really tells a story about the map maker. Each map maker had different things that they were interested in, certain trails, certain history. So these maps, they tell a story that maybe a satellite or a camera can't quite tell. But I think that it all comes together, and I think that there's a place for the old and a place for the new.

Peter Biello: Well, Rebecca, thank you very much for speaking with me. I really appreciate it.

Rebecca Enman: You're very welcome. I look forward to welcoming visitors to the museum.