

The WORLD in His HANDS

Murray Hudson's map shop in Halls draws interest from all corners of the world

Story by Cathleen Swiney • Photographs by Robin Conover

"I see globes everywhere — even where there aren't any."

The 58-year-old Murray Hudson says this with a laugh after looking at one item on a print and mistaking something for a globe. "Anything that depicts the globe, I like."

Hudson likes the globe all right — a lot. And maps and atlases and prints, too. In fact, 25,000 of them can be found in the shop he opened in 1988 in Halls that bears his name. The old post office on South Church Street bulges with antiquarian maps, globes and atlases.

"Maps are interesting because they are historical artifacts," says Hudson, who also has about 500 maps in his personal collection. "This is really a map from 1830, this is really a map from the 1600s. Also, it's the artistry of time."

Thirty-six years ago, the Forked Deer Electric Cooperative member never imagined that when he bought 50 maps it would lead to this — one of the largest 19th century map collections by an individual.

In 1964, Hudson was taking some graduate courses in English at Oxford University in England. Wanting to bring home gifts for relatives and friends, he stopped in a map shop. He walked out with 50 maps — enough to be offered a dealer discount.

Although he kept some for himself, Hudson didn't give more thought to the maps for years as he completed his graduate work and began his career as a college English professor at Auburn University.

Early in the '70s and by then a stockbroker, Hudson's thoughts turned to the worth of those tucked-away maps when the stock market went down. The maps' values had gone up.



Helping Murray Hudson, right, keep maps identified and organized at the shop in Halls are Edward Rich and Sally Smith. A rare 1892 celestial globe, below, is among the hundreds of globes in Hudson's shop.

"I should have put all my money in maps and not the stock market at the time," Hudson says ruefully.

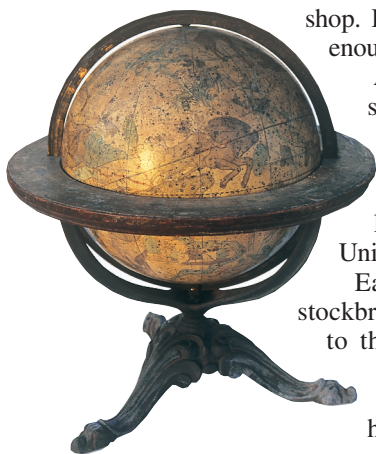
By 1978, he had returned home to Dyersburg, where he was born and raised, to help run the family farm. The four months of the year he wasn't farming, he was traveling across the country and abroad. And wherever he traveled, he found

himself at map dealers, buying and trading.

Then came an idea: Why not, he thought, turn his hobby into a business?

He worked out of his home until it was so overrun his wife, exasperated, suggested he find someplace else in which to operate. Upon learning the old post office was available, Hudson moved his growing cartography collection into the old post office. Today, by his estimation, it includes 23,000 maps, 800 globes, several thousand historical prints and several hundred wall maps.

The interior of the map shop brings to mind images of a library that's collided with a geography classroom; the air is spiced with the scent of musty old paper. The glass front door opens to the globe room; through a door to the left is the Holy Land and Middle East maps room. There, a table invites an opportunity to closely examine a part of the world in the making. Behind the original post office counter are five rows of shelves groaning with books and more globes and dozens of maps hiding the walls. In the middle of that, two barely visible desks, a couple of computers and a fax machine claim a small space.



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A typical day finds Hudson behind one desk fielding phone calls, and answering e-mailed and faxed inquiries and offers.

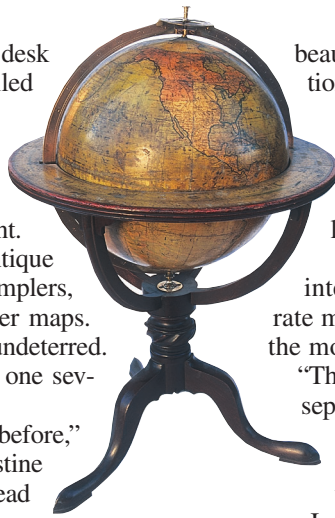
The maps, globes and atlases find their way into Hudson's hands through peoples' offers, auctions and dealer catalogues. But there's also the thrill of the hunt. For example, during a trip to a Nashville antique show, upon seeing several cross-stitched samplers, he inquired if the vendors had any sampler maps. They hadn't seen one in years. Hudson is undeterred. Continuing on through the show, he finds one several booths down.

"That's something I had never ever had before," he says, pulling out the prized map of Palestine dating to the late 1800s in which the thread used is colored with vegetable dyes.

Other acquisitions come through extreme efforts. He has smuggled maps out of Russia and recently went down to Florida to buy a 4-foot tall globe. He explains it is the same model as the one in the Oval Office at the White House and lights up when touched.

While Hudson maintains strong collections of the southeastern and southwestern United States, nearly any type of map can be found in the shop: topographic maps, country and world maps, Pony Express routes, Prohibition maps, Methodist church expansion, even maps showing places that no longer exist. Among the globes are one that depicts the route of Sputnik and some that were used as training for bomber pilots.

Early maps are decorative, even ornate. Pulling out a sea chart, he points to the elaborate ships and sea monsters drawn in



beautiful detail. By comparison, later maps fill a more functional rather than decorative need.

"People (today) seem to be more interested in just the facts. They go from A to B," he says. "In that day, the people who bought them were immensely wealthy — noblemen, merchants. Art was more an integral part of life, I think."

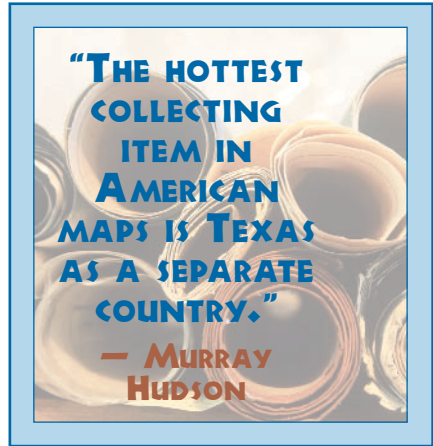
Having the world at his fingertips has proven to be an interesting lesson in history. He finds historically inaccurate maps, such as the ones depicting California as an island, the most interesting.

"The hottest collecting item in American maps is Texas as a separate country — as a republic," he says. "Those sell well."

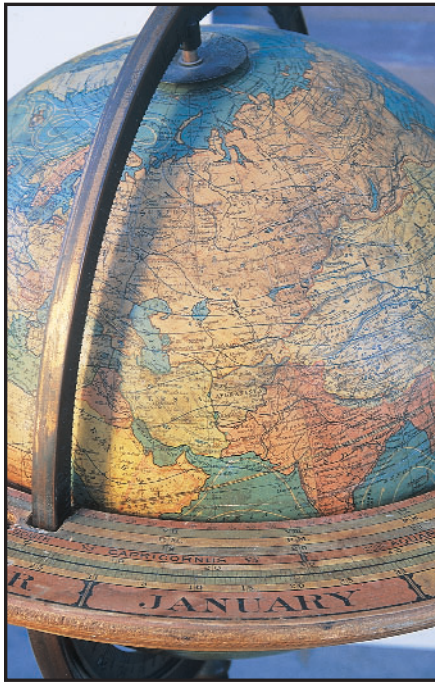
Also interesting, if not ironic at times, are names he runs across. He tells of a 1561 map of the British Isles in which a cave in Northern Ireland was called Purgatory.

"I thought, boy, is this a premonition of all the struggles still going on there 300 years later," he says.

His out-of-the-way shop in a dot-on-the-map town brings international travelers from all corners of the world including the Philippines, Germany and Italy. Serious collectors and dealers find the site remarkable because of the sheer number of items.



Inside the map shop, Hudson sits in the shadows of thousands of globes and maps. It looks deceptively unorganized when, in fact, everything has its own place. Above, an 1807 George III table or pedestal globe remains elegant even today.



Among the cartography items Hudson has in his store are an unusual circa 1926 Etruscan-style, full-mount floor globe, above left, and a hand-colored circa 1850 map of the Western Hemisphere that is surrounded by images of America at that time. Below, an 1864 atlas keeps company with hundreds of others.

“Most of the major dealers have come here at one time or another just to see what I have,” the professorial-looking Hudson says. “(They) can’t believe this is here — it is an unusual place to have this horde of maps and atlases.”

A horde and then some. Like a famished man at a smorgasbord, he acquires maps at random simply because he likes them.

“I can’t buy everything...but I try to buy as much as I can,” he says. “I’m more of a collector. Most people buy things and try to sell immediately. I buy five things for every one I sell so I end up with a lot more material.”

But even a famished man eventually gets full. The 2,000-square-foot building has surpassed full to gorged. Every flat surface is covered, every drawer nearly overflows.

The map shop fields calls and visits from scholar to student, tourist to treasure seeker. Hudson figures at least half of last year’s business came from research libraries and

museums. In fact, Hudson’s name can be found in the contacts list of the map expert at the Library of Congress, which houses the world’s largest map collection.

One item of interest to the Library of Congress, which also happens to be Hudson’s most prized possession, is a map collection that belonged to the second state geologist, James Safford. It includes a 12-foot long railroad map of East Tennessee.

“It’s just beyond belief. It’s his hand-drawn maps,” he says. “The state wouldn’t fund him, so if someone wanted to develop a railroad or mine, they would pay him and he would survey a large area of a county.

“It’s the best 19th century Tennessee map (collection),” Hudson says.

Three people help keep things running smoothly. Sally Smith catalogues the information on each item received as well as maintains the store’s Web sites; Edward Rich is the bibliogra-

pher; and Melissa Butler also performs computer work as well as mans the shop on Saturdays.

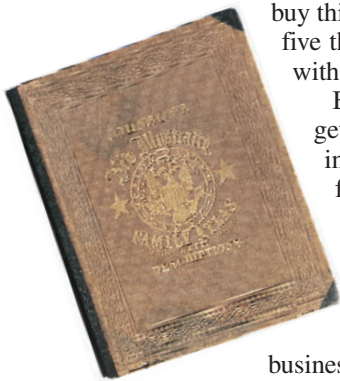
The oldest item in his store? Well, he’s looking for it, he says with an embarrassed laugh. It is a Ptolemaic map that was printed in Germany around the 1480s. Ideally, a particular item should be easy to find because it is logged in the computer to match a five-digit code tagged on each item to indicate its location in the shop. But, as with the case of the misplaced Ptolemaic map, that’s not always the case.

“I’m bad about picking things up and not putting them back, so I’m part of the problem,” Hudson admits.

What you won’t find in this map mecca — no matter how hard you look — is a map with an “X” marking the treasure spot. Hudson laughs when he talks about the countless inquiries he receives from people in search of a treasure.

“That’s one of the stupidiest questions I can imagine,” he says. “Sure, I’ll sell it to you, but when you get to the place marked X, you’ll see me driving away with my backhoe.”

As Hudson knows, when it comes to maps, it isn’t about a buried treasure chest. “A map is the treasure itself, not the value.”



Map Man

Murray Hudson Antiquarian Books and Maps: 109 South Church St., Halls, TN 38040; open Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. (other times by appointment); (901) 836-9057; e-mail: mapman@usit.net; Web sites: www.murrayhudson.com and www.antiquemapman.com.

