

1990

Rare map collection at university library

On the 100th anniversary of the publication of the first Sanborn map of the city of Santa Cruz, the UC-Santa Cruz library is calling attention to its extensive collection of the maps.

Sanborn maps are a creation of the Sanborn Map Co. of New York, which devised them for the use of fire-insurance agents.

According to Stanley Stevens, map librarian at UCSC, the maps provide a wealth of detail on the size, shape and construction of homes and commercial or public buildings.

With the Sanborn map at his desk, an insurance agent could learn the fire hazards related to any property in the city and be able to write a policy on the basis of that information. The maps indicate the widths and names of streets, property boundaries, building use and

house and block numbers, at a scale of one inch to 50 feet. They show locations of water mains, fire hydrants, alarm signals, and even potential fire hazards, such as boilers or other industrial machinery.

For these and other reasons, said Stevens, Sanborn maps are one of the best records for architectural history, land use, urban density and fire history, and thus of current interest to many people beside insurance agents.

Because companies leased the maps, rather than selling them outright, copies are exceedingly rare. As new maps were issued, the Sanborn Map Co. (which is still in business) would recall the old ones, and since most had no commercial value, they were usually destroyed.

The map done of Santa Cruz and published in four sheets in October 1883 was the first Sanborn map in the state of California, and when UCSC was created, that map was the first library material of any kind to be purchased. It is the only known copy of the map anywhere.

The UCSC library has an extensive collection of Sanborn maps for cities in Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Monterey, San Benito and San Mateo counties, dating from 1883 to 1965.

Some are the original maps, but most are photographic reproductions, mounted as 35mm slides. All will be available for reference use by faculty, students, and the general public in the map room on the first floor of the McHenry Library.

The UCSC library has Sanborn maps of Watsonville for the years 1886, 1888, 1892, 1902, 1908, 1911, 1920, 1939, and 1940.

Also in the collection is a complete set of maps of Monterey from 1926-36, which show in great detail the Cannery Row made famous by John Steinbeck.