

## **HUB OF THE WORLD: U.S. PROMOTIONAL MAP BROCHURES IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY**

Linda Greenow and Jo Margaret Mano  
Department of Geography  
SUNY- New Paltz  
New Paltz, NY 12561

**ABSTRACT:** *Maps can be analyzed as cultural artifacts that both reflect and shape contemporary perspectives. Commercial maps for travelers and potential residents represent an important resource in this thread of investigation, yet little has been written about this sector of the map trade, except for a handful of articles focusing on road maps. In the late nineteenth century, U.S. travelers' maps could include railroad timetables and promotional material. Advertising strategies were further developed by oil companies' road maps in the early twentieth century. By the 1960s and early 1970s, the rapidly expanding highway system along with the popularity of automobile ownership meant that Americans were traveling more than ever. Potential economic growth stimulated urban boosterism as places vied for new industries and residents. This study examines promotional map brochures distributed by Chambers of Commerce and businesses in the mid-twentieth century, illustrating attempts by local leaders to promote their towns and counties to tourists, potential residents and industries. These publications carried messages about the opportunities and unique identity of places. The messages of these publications are analyzed by examining their mapmakers and cartographic elements, visual imagery and textual elements. This study of map brochures from across the country investigates the concept of place promotion in the 1960s and early 1970s.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Place promotion has a long history and its ingredients provide insight to contemporary perspectives. Communities determined to lure tourists or new residents market their "unique" qualities, location and attractions. Promotional map brochures of the 1960s and early 1970s reflect and portray an era of prosperity, economic expansion and unlimited possibilities, when growth was good and communities beckoned tourists, potential residents, and new businesses and industries to join them. Automobile travel in this pre-oil crisis age had grown exponentially with the Federal Highway Act of 1956, which created the interstate highway system. Free promotional map brochures were the bait to induce travelers to ingest many messages about the opportunities and unique identity of places. What were these messages, and what do they tell us about place promotion in the United States in the 1960s and

early 1970s? A study of promotional map brochures of this period from communities and counties across the country provides preliminary answers to these questions and suggests additional challenges for further study.

### **BACKGROUND**

The goals and processes of place promotion reflect broad social and economic changes such as urban re-development schemes, the growth of tourism, and post-industrial economic re-structuring. Studies of place promotion and place marketing in the twentieth century have included considerations of how places are presented and perceived. Two complementary but separate strands of work provide a useful backdrop for this study: the literature on place promotion and studies of maps as promotional tools.

Recent geographic work on place marketing provides a useful series of case studies of promotional techniques and achievements. A 1990 IBG Annual Conference session on "Selling places: the city as cultural capital, past and present" included a number of studies of cities of Europe, Britain and the United States which were later published as a collection (Kearns and Philo, 1993). For the United States, industrial and post-industrial cities have attracted the greatest attention, for example Los Angeles, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, and New York City (Goodwin, 1993; Holcomb, 1993; Holcomb, 1994; Ward, 1998; Short, 1993). This literature concentrates largely on historical accounts of boosterism up to World War II, or on the efforts of community leaders to promote their cities and towns since the economic difficulties of the 1970s. Place promotion by smaller cities and towns in the U.S. has gone unnoticed, perhaps because they have offered few, if any, dramatic or innovative promotional campaigns with large budgets, extensive publicity, and wide-reaching impacts. This field of study is in its early stages with tentative attempts at generalization. The 1960s and 1970s have also gone unnoticed, despite the importance of this period. In fact, "place selling remains only a secondary or incidental theme ..." (Ward, 1998) with slow progress toward creating a coherent framework for many individual episodes and case studies.

In the second strand of related work, road maps themselves have been investigated as artistic endeavors (Yorke et al., 1996) and as products of promotional campaigns by both map publishers (Akerman, 1993; Akerman, 2002) and the oil companies that gave them away for several decades (Ristow, 1946; Schultz, 1963). The decades between the end of World War II and the oil crisis of the 1970s stand out as the heyday of free road maps distributed by oil companies and much beloved by collectors since then. However, these maps, having been mass-produced with uniform formats across the country, have little or none of the richness that local, one-of-a-kind productions offer.

The promotional map brochures analyzed here are eclectic, idiosyncratic and biased towards the typical, whimsical and outrageous examples. They are part of a larger collection of road maps and memorabilia collected by a former geography student and generously given to the SUNY New Paltz Geography Department. Those chosen for study here

are predominantly of urban places, but there are also a number of county brochures, produced by a variety of institutions--county tourist boards, highway departments, road commissioners, or, in New Jersey, the intriguing Board of Chosen Freeholders. They were produced between 1956 and 1970, and the majority are Chamber of Commerce productions, some of which were sponsored by a local business such as a bank or moving company. The Chamber of Commerce brochures were the ones judged to depict most accurately and forcefully local perceptions of the community's self-image and attractions.

The map brochures have a wide range of sizes and include rousing slogans, claims to an impressive variety of "world renowned" characteristics, textual explanations, photographs, aerial views, fascinating information and peculiar snippets. They can be roughly classified into three types, based on the prospective audience. Some were directed mostly toward tourists, others were meant to attract new residents or businesses, and some combined both approaches. The first two types slanted the written and visual messages for particular groups, while the last attempted to cover all bases, using slogans which resonated with catchy themes: "Spend an hour or a lifetime," "A great place to live, work or play" or "Come for a day or to stay." As such, they illustrate the concept of place selling, which has been defined as "a rather broad entrepreneurial ethos or ideology which, at specific times, has permeated the common affairs of particular places" (Ward, 1998). The map brochures were analyzed by considering their cartographic, visual and textual ingredients.

## **MAPMAKERS AND CARTOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS**

Cartographic elements include the mapmaker and/or publisher and the quality of the map reproduction, the methodology of locating information, legends, symbolic variety and the different types of attractions noted within the body of the map.

The cartographic quality of the maps in these promotional brochures varies widely from simplistic, minutely lettered blackline maps to

elaborately keyed, highly decorated colored productions. Some of the maps were made for localities by nationally recognized firms--Map Corporation of America and General Drafting. Others were published by local or regional firms. However, a substantial number of the Chamber of Commerce brochures and maps within them are examples of the do-it-yourself approach. In this group, a local engineer was sometimes drafted to create a simple map, or the map was borrowed from a local company or, in many cases, no attribution was given for the cartography. The simplest format had no key. In a slightly more sophisticated approach the bare black street grid was overprinted with colored numbers, keyed to a list of important locations. More complex formats added a grid system and a street location index, although some indexes were so extensive they threatened to overwhelm the maps.

Brochures made primarily for new businesses and residents were more restrained than those directed at tourists and presented the bare essentials of streets and civic services. The cartographic quality was seldom high and the map was in sharp contrast to the accompanying visual elements and text, which were far more engaging. Maps in tourist brochures employed cartoon sketches and text overprinting to highlight local attractions, and the livelier added more colors. It is difficult to generalize about iconic messages, since each map brochure had its own unique flavor.

The Yuma, Arizona map, although small in size, used comic vignettes to locate the myriad attractions waiting for the curious visitor--date palm trees, mules, a pick-wielding ghost miner, cacti, snakes, skulls, signposts to historical buildings, mines, camps, orange groves, notable mountains, fishing spots and farming areas in the local region--surprisingly designated "The world's most productive agricultural center."

The patriotic red, white and blue, lake-studded example from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin was aimed at a diverse tourist group, not only interested in fishing for perch, bass and northern bass but also in "the largest Belgian settlement in U.S" and the "greatest concentration of sour cherry orchards." Further textual clues lead to the "Largest Sand Dunes in the State," "Site of First Sawmill 1853," and for the hard-core historian, a deserted mill village, ruins of lime kilns, a memorial to the Williamstown fire of

1871 and the site of Horn's pier--a short-lived one which lasted from 1877 to 1882.

The map of Houghton Lake, Michigan, promoted its natural wonders with a menagerie of wildlife sketches, thoughtfully identified. Home for bear, deer, raccoon, partridge, beaver, bobcat, herons, osprey and eagles, Houghton Lake's key attraction was fishing. The "weedbeds" in the lake located the best spots for bass, yellow perch, bluegills, and walleye and northern pike. Navigating the green glories of the scenic roads, tourists could enjoy parks, camping grounds, lakes, an outdoor and indoor theatre, golf courses and the "famed flood waters impounded by the Reedsburg Dam."

Brochures that attempted to reach both tourists and potential residents toned down the message with serious, dense blackline maps and fewer jolly pictures. Charleston, South Carolina, caught between the two approaches, leaned heavily toward textual information to substantiate its claim as "America's most Historic City." A map insert described ten "Interesting Charleston firsts--first US Chamber of Commerce 1773, first fire insurance, first attempt at fireproof construction, first prescription drug store, first artificial ice, [and] first book jackets," as well as several military firsts.

## VISUAL IMAGERY

Visual embellishments included aerial views, photographs, skyline logos, sketches and diagrams. Aerial photographs were persuasive promotional tools. A substantial proportion of the brochures sported this then cutting-edge technique. These oblique perspective pictures were reminiscent of nineteenth-century bird's eye views. Poor resolution and reproduction blurred the excitement of downtowns, and served to emphasize the monotony of flat-roofed buildings and expansive parking areas, although these were obviously indicators of a fertile economic climate. Communities with tree-lined streets and elegant church spires have the advantage of looking more inviting from the air.

Photographs were widely used to illustrate the "New Modern Buildings" in flourishing urban centers, as well as the diverse recreational activities in the more tourist-oriented examples. The typical

brochure devoted one side to the map, and about one-third to half the reverse side to photos or/and sketches. The liberal use of imagery reflected the importance of visual examples of the recreational and employment opportunities described in the text. Pierre, South Dakota, framed a scrapbook of black and white photos including the "World's Largest Compacted Rolled Earth Dam," as well as pictures of a cattle herd, wheat field, Sioux chief, cowboy, hunter, municipal airport, lake beach and park to cover all the clichés incorporated in "Recreation at its best, agriculture and industry." Variations on this theme meant more recreational illustrations for tourist areas. The epitome of such brochures is typified by one from Roscommon County, Michigan, a mecca for hunters and fishers. Miss Michigan smilingly graced the cover, fully equipped with fishing gear. Fourteen photos touted the local recreational opportunities, a majority of which included carcasses, some posed with suspiciously guilty-looking characters.

## TEXTUAL ELEMENTS

Textual elements embraced the place slogan or selling pitch, cultural and environmental attractions, "claims to fame" ranging from the mundane to the uproarious, and comments on the climatic benefits. Descriptive passages of what was then called a town's "way of life" provided a window on the values held by its residents and businesses according to the mapmakers. "Opportunity", "growth", "gracious" or "pleasant" living, and the charm of small town life with proximity to a city's attractions were appealing features. Work, play, and living were often equally emphasized, unless the brochure was aimed exclusively at tourists. Lists of churches, schools, parks, and hospitals were common. This information reassured potential employers of a stable and dependable work force, and a desirable location for their managers and executives to raise their own families (Ward, 1998).

Location was a significant asset among local boosters and was commonly summarized in a single word such as "hub", "gateway," "heart" or "center". Joplin, Missouri, considered itself "Geographically Great" as well as "The Crossroad of Mid-America."

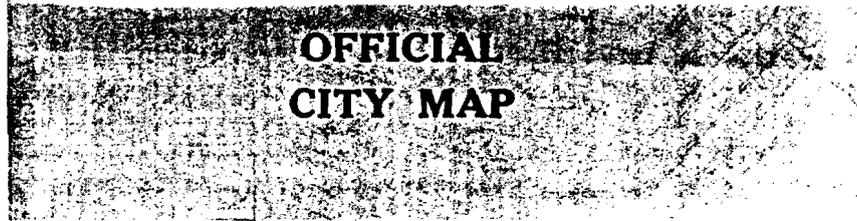
Columbia, Missouri, was proud to be "The City in the Center of Things" and, at the same time, "The Heart of Little Dixie".

Lubbock, Texas, provided a glimpse of what civic boosters meant when referring to their towns as "hubs". "Hub of the Plains" summarized Lubbock's 11 claims to centrality as The Hub of Agriculture, Industry, Transportation Facilities, Recreation, Medical Care, Livestock Processing, Religion, Accommodating Hotels, Education, and Entertainment. Capping this lengthy list was Lubbock as The Hub of Cleanliness (Lubbock won first place as "Cleanest City in Texas" for 11 consecutive years). A diagrammatic representation of what we may call "hub-ness" showed all roads and railroads leading directly to Lubbock.

Liberal, Kansas, known far and wide (as far as England, anyway) as the "Pancake Hub of the Universe," is a success story in how to integrate a rather whimsical local event into a half century of publicity topped off by an appearance in the *Roadside America* guidebook series (see Figure 1). Since 1950, Liberal and Olney, England (which started this tradition in 1445) have held an annual trans-Atlantic competition in which local residents of each town carry pancakes to a church in a timed race on Shrove Tuesday. This event was the focal point of Liberal's 1968 brochure, but the Pancake Race is only part of a much longer series of promotional ventures. Liberal is the home of a library built in the 1930s in the shape of an open book, "The Gateway to the Land of Oz", "the Queen City", "The Capital of the Southwest" and the home of the "Five-State Free Fair." As the guidebook says, "Liberal is a town that really wants you to visit" (Wilkins et al., 1992). It is also a town that takes civic pride and place promotion very seriously.

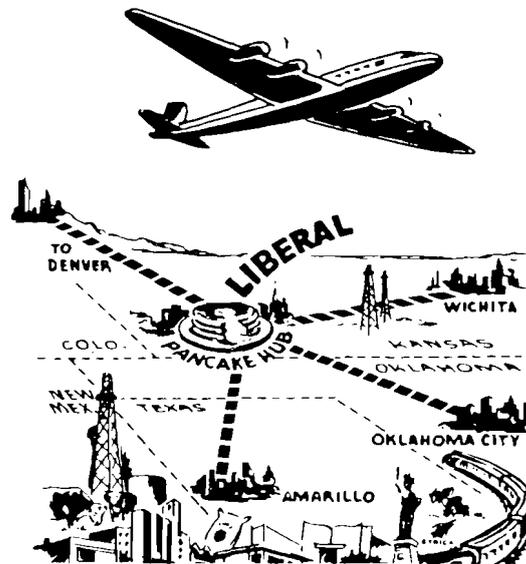
## CLAIMS TO FAME

Hyperbole abounded in the text accompanying many of the map brochures studied here. This was to be expected, considering that towns were vying with each other for free-spending tourists, new residents, and potential investors, businesses and industries. Thus, the following claims:



# Liberal

*The Pancake Hub of the Universe*



**DORSEY-PÄPEN VAN LINES, INC.**

formerly  
*Compliments of*

# DAVIS VAN LINES, INC.

PHONE MA 4-6291

*In cooperation with*

**LIBERAL  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

Figure 1. Liberal, Kansas. "The Pancake Hub of the Universe."

Pine Bluff, Arkansas: the site of the first shot fired during the Civil War; Fredericksburg, Virginia: America's most historic city; Sioux Falls, South Dakota: Crossroads of the Nation; Henry County, Ohio: The World's Tomato Capital. Claims of more questionable significance include: Green Bay, Wisconsin: Tissue Paper Capital and Cheese Processing Capital of America; Front Royal, Virginia: The Only Town of this Name in the World; Hereford, Texas: The Town without a Toothache. Such claims may have as their real audience "not the transient motorist or potential guest but the local population itself. It is a form of reassurance, a hopeful declaration that we are truly precious, somehow unique, and that the world will ignore us at its peril" (Zelinsky, 1994). If nothing else, such eccentricities could make a place unforgettable to an outsider.

### **Facts and Figures**

Many Chambers of Commerce and local boosters liked to point out the "top ten reasons" why one should re-locate to their town. Typical of such an approach is Idaho Falls, Idaho's, brochure, which grouped its assets as "cultural, economical (sic), social, industrial, educational, agricultural, and recreational."

McCook, Nebraska, produced a colorful map brochure listing "ten reasons why McCook, Nebraska, is a good place to work, live and play ..." First on the list, of course, was location, particularly McCook's access to an irrigation project and to highways leading to Denver and Omaha. In addition, McCook touted its industrial and manufacturing opportunities, a healthy climate, thriving agriculture, great transportation links, and a wholesome lifestyle including many churches, schools and amusements. There is nothing surprising on this list; almost every community presenting its supposedly unique advantages included some or all of these.

Facts and figures offered by communities ranged from the ordinary, such as those in McCook's publication (population, distances to other cities, average temperatures, number of schools and churches) to more hard-core statistics apparently aimed at potential investors. Many map brochures included an array of mind-numbing statistics about the city's or county's total assessed valuation, the total of all levies on real property, total retail sales in

the city, and indicators of growth such as population change, school enrollment, number of telephones, postal receipts, and motor vehicle registrations over a number of decades. Iowa City's Chamber of Commerce provided information about auto and truck registrations and building permits. This was typical; other towns and cities included the names of all local manufacturers, lists of businesses that employed over 50 people, or other such economic figures.

The similarities among communities' presentations of themselves were striking. Nobody claimed to offer an alternative lifestyle, a thriving community of writers or artists, or offbeat investment possibilities. There were scarce references to any racial, immigrant or ethnic groups (e.g. "colored" schools); the major exceptions were communities located near Indian reservations which offered Indian cultural events, tribal facilities or agency offices in their town. There was a startling, uniform consensus about which facts and descriptions would achieve the desired results. This is quite ironic considering the efforts of communities to establish themselves as "the greatest" or "the best" or "the most" of some type or another.

### **Local Attractions**

Culture (particularly local history) is often manipulated in the process of selling a place, raising questions among competing local groups about the authenticity of the traditions and events that are promoted (Kearns and Philo, 1993). A great majority of these promotional map brochures provided lists of places to visit or things to do, or at least the locations of schools, hospitals, parks and post offices keyed to their street maps. Some communities provided written descriptions, occasionally with photographs, of parks, historical sites, events, museums and scenic views. Frederick, Maryland and Charleston, South Carolina, provided instructions and directions for walking tours with their brochures. Pocatello, Idaho, "The Gate City to the Great Northwest and Yellowstone National Park", provided thumbnail maps of four scenic drives in the area. In a similar vein, Corning, New York, outlined four routes for local area tours of "Water on the Rocks", "Culture and Campsites", "Wine and Nostalgia," and "Sailplanes and Scenery."

### **Climate--Just the Facts?**

Many of the brochures made weather a major selling point; others cheerfully ignored the realities of climate. Resorts have historically touted the beneficial advantages of fresh, outdoor breezes, even substantial snowfalls, but vacationers have a seasonal choice in making destination plans. Places seeking permanent residents may not wish to deter them with climatic realities.

Southern cities vied for supremacy in the sunshine wars. Few would argue about Key Largo's weather attractions, couched in glowing terms in this description: "Nature has blessed Key Largo with an ideal climate. In winter, the sun warms this frost-free land to temperatures averaging in the 70s. In summer, balmy breezes keep temperatures at an average in the comfortable 80s, combining this with low humidity and comparatively pollen-free air, Key Largo will bless you too.... nowhere better for health, and happiness and just feeling great."

The Arizona cities of Yuma and Bisbee emphasized the positive aspects of their climatic situation. Yuma touted its self-proclaimed title of "Sunshine Capital of the Nation" and backed the claim with bare "Yuma Facts" --a percentage of sunshine days which varied from 96% to 99%, and monthly temperature, rainfall, and humidity averages for the four seasons. Yuma's scorching monthly average temperature for July of 94.1 degrees is tempered by the 32% humidity, while the average January 58.1 degrees is more appealing. Bisbee had a more comprehensive health-based pitch, avoiding the stark reality of actual temperatures. "Bisbee is located in that small portion of the United States which enjoys more sunshine than any other place. Over 80% of the daytime hours are blessed with sunshine. This highest sunshine percentage in the US, combined with clean, rarified air, low humidity and mild seasons... gives Bisbee the (sic) FINEST CLIMATE IN THE WORLD! Retirement possibilities are excellent. This outstanding year round climate makes people feel well and energetic... and brings relief to sufferers of asthma and other bronchial conditions."

Vacation destinations stressed the variety of leisure activities possible throughout the year, regardless of weather. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, stated "The climate is mild year round, making outdoor recreation enjoyable all four seasons of the year."

Warren County, New York, noted in the past few years it had "turned from a summer area to a Four-Season Vacationland." New York's Cattaraugus County ("Casual country") waxed poetic about the seasonal joys of "exploring its vast vistas of wilderness" but reserved the most eloquent prose for the 140-200 inches average winter snowfalls: "No more beautiful is Cattaraugus County than when it is covered with the ermine white of winter, its forest streams quietly bordered with ice crusts and its villages tucked secure and serene under their blankets of sparkling snow."

Brevity appeared the best policy in some weather-challenged places. Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin cited only "a temperate climate." Billings, Montana, gave a succinct description. "The climate in the Billings area is marked by a generous supply of sunshine, little heavy precipitation, low humidity and an average temperature of 48 degrees." Worthington, Minnesota, let the reader ponder the dryly stated "Climatological data. Average rainfall 27.13". Mean temperature 47.0." Averages were a safe refuge, since blistering summers and frigid winters evened out to a comfortable mean. Havre, Montana, just south of the Canadian border, gave these brief facts: "Annual mean temperature 43F, average annual rainfall 13", mild to cold winter, warm summers with cool evenings." For comparison Charleston, South Carolina, stated a significantly higher "Average year round temperature [of] 67 degrees." But that news was tempered with agricultural positives: "Percent of possible sunshine hours 65.2. Average date of last killing frost February 20. Average date of first killing frost December 1."

In contrast, Moorhead, Minnesota, reveled in mind-blowing climatic extremes: "Minimum and maximum temperatures spring 6 to 86, summer 22 to 98, fall 13 to 90, winter 27 to 41." Moorhead's added statement "Altitude 910 feet above sea level" does little to explain this roller-coaster experience, and proved the value of an "average" approach.

The best "sell" about the physical environment came from Idaho. No statistics here, just the good news. "There are no poisonous snakes...earthquakes, droughts, tornadoes and severe temperature extremes are unknown in the Lake Pend Oreille country."

## CONCLUSION

These map brochures are rich images of contemporary thought and practice in place promotion of the 1960s and early 1970s. They vividly portray the optimism of local leaders in towns and communities at a critical moment of increased mobility and locational choices. They are a rare resource; no doubt thousands of others were quickly thrown in the trash after serving their immediate purpose.

However, probing more deeply and comparing a large number of such publications reveals a fascinating contradiction in individual approaches to “selling” a place. Communities commonly asserted unbelievable claims to be unique, at the same time portraying an image of wholesome living and stable, solid business. Nearly all communities claimed identical enticements of lifestyle. The cliché was perhaps successful in the competition for people and resources. What worked in the past, at least as far back as the nineteenth century, apparently continued to succeed for communities, or at least the mapmakers and brochure producers believed it did. The old reliable claims continue to be purveyed today as the elements of successful marketing (Ward, 1998; Ward and Gold, 1994).

At first glance, the maps themselves seemed to be of negligible importance. Many are of barely adequate quality. Most were surrounded and overshadowed by eye-catching photos, amusing drawings, data, greetings, and advertisements. Nevertheless, the map was essential in this process of marketing, the “bait” which hooked the reader to accept promotional literature. One can imagine a visitor or potential resident asking for, or at least accepting, a free map, something useful and perhaps necessary. After all, a large and passionate following of motorists were accustomed to free road maps from gas stations.

Many questions remain for further study. What were the roles of local and state Chambers of Commerce and business associations, regional and state tourism agencies, and other participants in the creation and distribution of promotional map brochures? Did regional variations exist in the kinds of attractions advertised, or in the information

provided for tourists, future residents, and potential businesses? If regional differences in the messages existed, did they reflect different stages of industrial or post-industrial development? What values and messages are found in today’s community promotional materials, and how has web-based publicity changed place promotion, if at all? Ward (1993) asks if one can take a positive approach to such questions, “appreciating that the making and propagation of marketable place images can be worthwhile—an extension rather than a narrowing of the cultural meanings of place, even a source of enjoyment?” Our answer is a resounding yes.

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