

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN MAP LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES  
**BULLETIN**

**The Cartoon-Style Poster Maps of Trans Continental  
Cartographers Ltd., Vancouver, B.C.**

**Feature Article**

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**Abstract**

This article provides information about the stylized poster maps created in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Trans Continental Cartographers Ltd., Vancouver, B.C. These maps, which depicted cities across Canada and the United States, contained pictorial views of popular landmarks, buildings and places of interest. The restaurants, shops, stores and other attractions portrayed often paid an advertising fee to be represented on Trans Continental's "city character maps," which were drawn in a quirky and humorous cartoon style at an enlarged scale.

**Introduction**

A wonderful quality of the Twitter social networking site is that it provides opportunities for the serendipitous discovery of information related to one's interests. Late last year, an intriguing poster map image of Calgary published by Trans Continental Cartographers appeared on the author's Twitter timeline, which was tweeted by Calgary historian Alan Zakrison (2022). This

poster rekindled the author's interest in cartoon-like maps<sup>1</sup> and sparked a desire to learn more about these posters and the publishers and artists responsible for their creation.

If one were to visit a college dorm room or teen bedroom during the 1970s or 1980s, walls would typically be covered in posters which showed rock bands, celebrity pin-ups, famous athletes, sports cars, and popular movies. Starting in the early 1960s, there was an explosion in the number of such posters designed purely for purchase and personal display (Rodgers, 2001) and which were sold in poster galleries and record stores. In 1969, during the height of the poster craze sweeping North America, Keith Hope, owner of Alpha Poster Galleries Ltd., founded a company called Trans Continental Cartographers, located at 942 Granville Street in Vancouver, to produce poster maps like the one depicting Calgary for distribution through his retail outlets in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg.

From 1969 until 1974, Trans Continental's team of artists created stylized poster maps for more than 30 different cities across Canada and the United States (see Appendix A). Known as "city character maps," each one contained a pictorial view of dominant landmarks and buildings and cartoons of significant events in the city's recent history. The majority of the structures and locations portrayed on these maps were restaurants, shops, stores and other attractions that had paid an advertising fee to be represented on the map (Bergmann, 1971). The maps themselves were drawn in a quirky and humorous cartoon style at an enlarged scale with little concern for locational accuracy or reality. Michael and Susan Southworth (1982) refer to these as floating landmark maps and note that this style was popular for tourist maps and posters. Naturally, due to distortions, omissions, incorrect orientation, and misleading juxtapositions, floating landmark maps were never intended to be used for navigational purposes (Southworth & Southworth, 1982).

### **Early Trans Continental Poster Maps of Vancouver and Victoria**

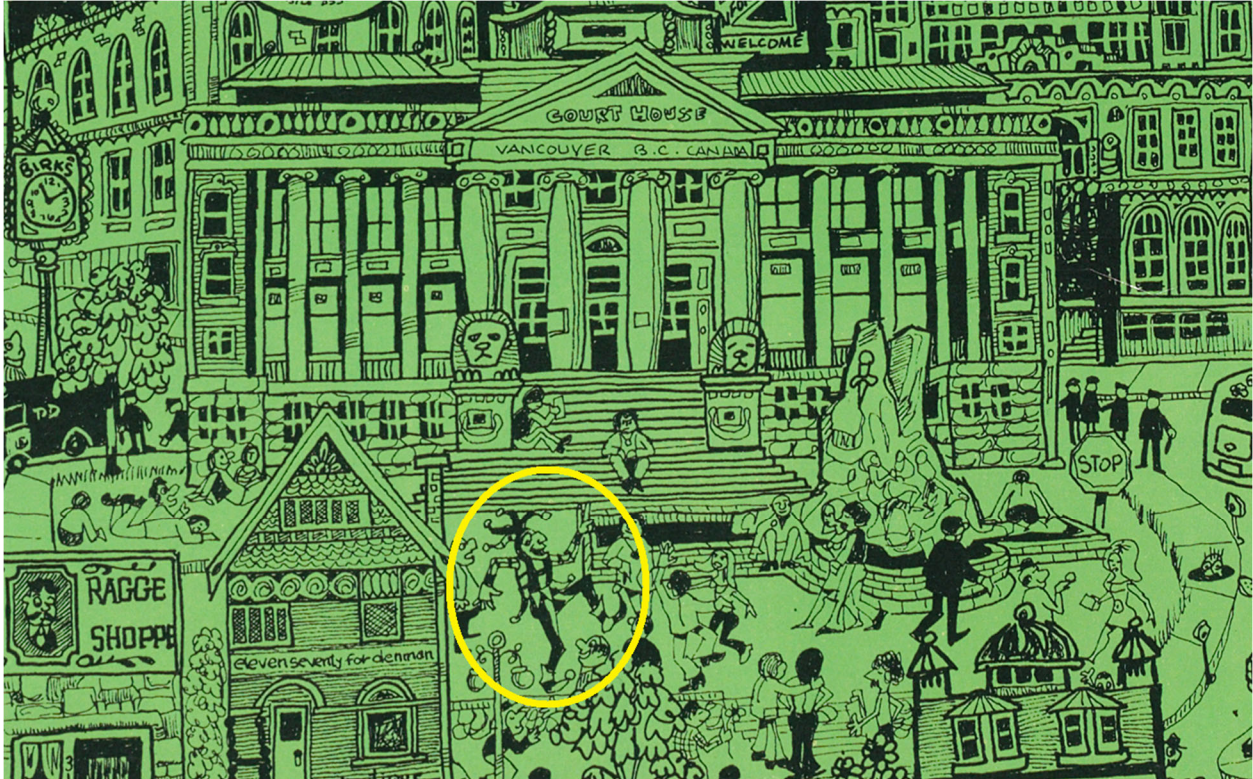
Trans Continental's first published work was a 30-inch by 40-inch poster of Vancouver in 1969 which showed a densely illustrated, three-dimensional view of the city's downtown area as well as Burrard Inlet and its bridges. Development of the [Vancouver](#) poster reportedly took five months and 2,000 copies were produced for its initial production run (Bergmann, 1971). The map was drawn and illustrated by artist W. Ellis using black ink on a green background. Water features and the sky were both shown in a bright, psychedelic yellow. Old English font was used for the map's title and its border was drawn showing a series of white Pacific dogwood flowers, the floral emblem of British Columbia.

Hundreds of scenes of cartoon citizens playing guitars, paddling boats, lying on the beach or shopping at businesses throughout the city served to enliven this unusual map. Interestingly, the

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps originating from my teenage appreciation of the irreverent artwork appearing in *Mad Magazine* such as *A Mad Pictorial Map of the United States* by Sergio Aragonés (1981).

man appearing in the map dressed in a jester costume and dancing in front of the Vancouver courthouse steps was based on the actual real-life antics of Mr. Joachim Foikis. In 1968, Foikis<sup>2</sup> had received a \$3,500 grant from the Canada Council for the Arts to reinvent the vanished tradition of the “town fool” (Donaldson, 2020).



*Detail from Vancouver (1969) poster picturing Mr. Joakim Foikis dressed in jester costume in front of the Vancouver courthouse.*

A second Trans Continental poster published in 1969 pictured Victoria and was subtitled with the city’s nickname “The Garden City.” It was drawn by artists W. Ellis and R. Noble using black ink with land and buildings appearing on a bright yellow background and water shown as vivid red. The names of those business who paid an advertising fee to be included on the map of Victoria were featured prominently.

### **Trans Continental’s Poster Maps of Cities across Canada and the United States in the Early 1970s**

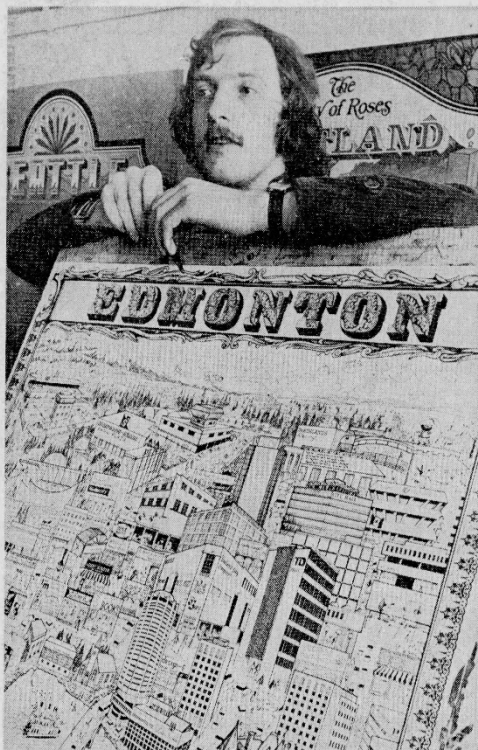
Trans Continental’s business model of charging businesses a fee to appear on their city poster maps proved effective in British Columbia, and over the next five years they replicated it throughout Canada and the United States. A Canadian Press newspaper article (“Firm maps

<sup>2</sup> Foikis was a former social worker with two university degrees—one in theology and the other in economics—who had only six weeks to go before he graduated with a third, in library sciences, from the University of British Columbia (Donaldson, 2020).

path", 1971) reported that, in addition to Vancouver and Victoria, Trans Continental had published and sold more than 70,000 poster maps of Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City by June, 1971. It seemed, however, that not all city character maps were commercially successful. In Saskatoon, the owner of Midtown Plaza reportedly regretted his purchase of a spot on the green and bright yellow poster and called it a "white elephant" because sales were poor and he felt that the type of map promised was not the one actually delivered (Gilchrist, 1971).

The company's roster of artists changed over time, and, as of 1971, included Ed (Edward B.) Langley, Marty Neumayer and Robbie Nyman, whose designs were sometimes listed under the name Penthouse Studios. They produced several additional maps of Canadian cities which included Calgary (c.1971), Ottawa-Hull (1973) and a "marine view" of Vancouver (1971). These posters continued to employ the firm's cartoonish, cluttered and distorted style but added extra

26\*\*\*\*The VANCOUVER SUN: Sat., June 12, 1971



Photograph of Ed Langley, Trans Continental Cartographers appearing in *The Vancouver Sun* (1971, June 12), p. 26.

color within the maps and border illustrations which made them far more visually appealing than earlier works.

In the United States, Trans Continental's artists had, by June, 1971, created poster maps of Seattle, Spokane, Portland and San Diego ("Firm maps path", 1971). Over the next four years, they added Indianapolis (1971), Kansas City (1971), San Diego (1971), Minneapolis (1971), Aspen (1971), Boston (1971), New Orleans (1972), Miami (1972), Atlanta (1972), St. Louis (1972), Cleveland (1972), Pittsburgh (1972), Philadelphia (1972), Los Angeles (1973), San Francisco (1973), Baltimore (1973), and Washington, D.C. (1974). Individual artists credited with producing one or more of the American city maps for Trans Continental were Ed Langley, Jodi Wiebe, Daniel Kamsky and Robbie Nyman<sup>3</sup>. American poster sales were handled through A. A. Sales Inc., Trans Continental's U.S. distributor based in Seattle, Washington.

In addition to Trans Continental, other companies were producing similar poster maps of North American cities

<sup>3</sup> Artist Robbie Nyman was affiliated with Penthouse Studios, Ltd. of Vancouver, a company in which Trans Continental's Keith Hope purchased a principal interest in 1972. Penthouse is credited with the design of Trans Continental's maps of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Ottawa-Hull and was publisher of the *Seattle* (c.1974) poster. Nyman also created similarly themed poster maps for other publishers which included *Vancouver* (1975) for Evergreen Press, *Montreal* (1976) for the Montreal Star newspaper, and *Sun Valley, Idaho* (n.d.).

in the early 1970s. Inter Continental Cartographers (Vancouver, B.C.) was an example of one such mapmaker. They employed artists James and Joan Wiebe to create advertising poster maps of Nashville, Austin and San Antonio in 1972. Details are scarce but it appears that Inter Continental eventually changed its name to Intercart Marketing Ltd. and later moved their offices to Toronto and then to Dayton, Ohio. But perhaps the most recognized and well-known producer of city poster maps in the 1970s and 1980s was Archar, Inc. of Toronto, Ontario. Founded in 1972 ("Charm city with a few surprises", 1977), Archar's "city character prints" from the early 1970s were initially and most frequently drawn by artist Swaena Lavelle though numerous other artists<sup>4</sup> were also involved in the creation of the company's 100+ poster maps published from 1972 until the mid-1980s. The names "Archar" and "City Character Prints" later became the property of Don Scott Associates, Inc. and then Buffalo Games who re-purposed the maps for their line of "City Character Puzzles" which were available until the early 1990s.

### Trans Continental's "Sell First Then Make It" Process

Trans Continental has been referred to as a publisher that subscribed to the 'subscription model' of cartography because their activities involved accepting payment from companies to feature their businesses on poster maps (Geographicus, 2023). This involved first sending their sales representatives to call on prominent businesses in cities to be mapped with the aim of enticing potential poster advertisers. Interestingly, their process mimicked those used by sales agents of panoramic bird's-eye views in the nineteenth century who solicited advance orders from businesses and individuals in a similar manner (Patton et al., 2005). In addition to selling a placement on their character maps, Trans Continental's representatives would also sell local firms a supply of the posters to be sold or used for promotional purposes. In Seattle, for instance, Seattle Trust paid Trans Continental \$1,200 to be represented on the poster and then bought a further \$5,000 worth of maps ("Firm maps path", 1971).



Figure 3: Classified advertisement for Trans Continental Cartographers appearing in *The Vancouver Sun* (1970, August 8), p. 36.

### Trans Continental Cartographers' Poster Maps as Cultural and Historical Resources

Trans Continental's "city character maps" are remarkable pieces of map ephemera from the

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<sup>4</sup> Archar's roster of artists and illustrators included Swaena Lavelle, Bob Hastings, Don Inman, Tom Dodds, Bing Chapelle, Lawrence Peckmezian, Barbara Spurll, Bozidar Damjanovic-Benedict, Cindy Delpart, Kim Forrest, Georgina M. Bernache, Gayle Lavery, Shunichi Yamamoto, Donald Liu, Francesca Profili, Gerry Castello, Susan Dewar, Robert Van Nood, David Cooper, Jean-Louis Rheault, L.H. Post, Gayle Grout, and Margaret Munro.

1970s that are becoming increasingly sought after by collectors. Map Curator James Akerman of the Newberry Library believes that ephemeral mapping materials such as these also offer a compelling resource for cultural and social historians, art historians, historical geographers, and historians of travel and travel literature (Akerman, 2021). Fortunately, a number of Trans Continental's poster maps have survived and found their way into the collections of a handful of libraries and archives across North America (see Appendix A). Though cartoonish and full of geographical inaccuracies, poster maps published by Trans Continental Cartographers are excellent examples of the types of custom pictorial maps created by advertising map publishers across North America during the late twentieth century.

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**Appendix A**

## Listing of Known Trans Continental Cartographers Ltd. Poster Maps

<b>Year</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Title/Artist</b>	<b>Library / Archive</b>
1969	Vancouver	<i>Vancouver</i> / artist W. Ellis	UBC
1969	Victoria	<i>Victoria, the garden city</i> (1st ed.) / artist W. Ellis & R. Noble	UBC; U. of Victoria
1970	Portland	<i>Portland: The city of roses</i> / artist Ed Langley	
1971	Vancouver	<i>Vancouver: The Pacific playground</i> / artist Ed Langley	UBC; LAC; Vancouver Public
1971	Saskatoon		
1971	Calgary	<i>Calgary: The stampede city</i>	
1971	Edmonton		
1971	Indianapolis	<i>Indianapolis: All-America city</i> / artist Jodi Wiebe	U. of Illinois
1971	Kansas City	<i>Kansas City: The city of fountains</i> / artist Jodi Wiebe	U. of Illinois; U. of Utah
1971	San Diego	<i>San Diego</i> / artist Edward B. Langley	UBC Archives
1971	Minneapolis	<i>Minneapolis</i>	
1971	Aspen	<i>Aspen</i> / artist Jodi Wiebe	U. of Illinois
1971	Seattle	<i>Seattle</i>	
1971	Denver	<i>Denver: The mile high city</i>	
c.1971	Regina		
c.1971	Winnipeg		
c.1971	Toronto		
c.1971	Montreal		
c.1971	Quebec City		
c.1971	Spokane		
1972	Boston	<i>Boston</i>	U. of Illinois; Cornell; LOC
1972	New Orleans	<i>New Orleans</i>	
1972	Miami	<i>Miami</i> / artist Daniel Kamsky	
1972	Atlanta	<i>Atlanta</i>	
1972	St. Louis	<i>St. Louis: Gateway to the west</i>	
1972	Cleveland	<i>Cleveland</i>	Cleveland Public Library
1972	Pittsburgh	<i>Pittsburgh</i>	
1972	Philadelphia	<i>Philadelphia</i>	
1973	Ottawa-Hull	<i>Ottawa-Hull. National capital region</i>	U. of Alberta; LAC
1973	Los Angeles	<i>Los Angeles</i> / artist Robbie Nyman	UBC Archives
1973	San Francisco	<i>San Francisco</i> / artist Robbie Nyman	U. of California, Berkeley
1973	Baltimore	<i>Baltimore</i>	
1974	Washington	<i>Washington D.C.: The nation's capital</i> / artist Robbie Nyman	LOC
c.1974	Seattle	<i>Seattle</i> / artist Robbie Nyman / publisher Penthouse Studios	Seattle Public; U. of Illinois
n.d.	Omaha		