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Mid-Semester Report

[Time Frame: 1869 to 1899]

Four Questions from Site Reports:

- What were the purposes of these maps?
- How many of these street names still exist?
- Have the property lines changed over time or are they the same for the most part?
- How many copies of these maps are there?

What were the purposes of these maps?

There are various reasons as to why a map is created to begin with, and now from us in the present day, our views or reasons for looking at a certain map is very much different than the people of that time period. All the maps that I have collected are post Civil War so the ruling of these maps being used for war at their time is out but there are still so many more potential reasons to explore. Unfortunately the exact purpose of each map isn't documented so that leaves a lot of room for assumptions. The buying and selling of land is a timeless act, it happens all the time, so some of these maps could have very well been used for buying and selling. Home and business owners could have also been a reason for the creation of maps, property lines are very important, sometimes things happen and details are swept under the rug, and if someone wanted to extend their property by how ever much, it would be very important to see if they even have the space and right to do that. Along with property lines another important things home and business owners may want to know is, what the original layout and foundation of their structure is and maybe even finding out how old their space really is. In addition to home and business owners, I know for sure some or most maps that were created and still kept in tact are fire atlases. Fire atlases were created and used by insurance companies as well as the fire department. It was important to know if a house was prone to catch on fire and how often that house, houses on that block or in that area also caught on fire, it definitely had an impact and was a very influential decision when it came to insurance companies taking on a new client. Fire companies needed to know how many buildings made of a certain material were on each block and how many fire alarm boxes and fire hydrants there were in an area, the fire department was not what it is now in the 1800s, they were not as efficient as they are now so it was very important to know where the closest fire hydrant was located in the event of a fire. To speak a little bit more on the fire alarm boxes, they were kind of used as a "zoning tool" as well as how buildings were numbered, it was of good use to the fire department. Another reason which might even be a more general reason that many of us probably use is, looking at the maps from a historical lens, looking at the structure of the land, and the changes it has withstood over time. Seeing how all the streets have changed, streets that were added, as well as streets that were removed. The buildings that no longer exist and all the structural changes the roads have undergone over time.

How many of these street names still exist?

In answering this question I used the last map of my time frame, which is dated at 1899 and I also used a Google map of Vinegar Hill. It was very hard to do so, and unfortunately I did not know how to operate the map warper under each map, so I was left to try and find street the street names by using my eyes and really trying my best to match them up, it was very difficult, but interesting, I learned a few things and to help me try to figure out what streets still existed I used the book available to me, Brooklyn by Name, and with that I did a series of two things, first I used the book and read the pages which corresponded to this neighborhood, and try to see what names were still in use and in existence, as well as what streets had no trace or showed any trace on the Google Map. Another thing I did out of interest was to also look up street names from the book and comparing that to what I found on the 1899 map. And of course there were street names in the book which I couldn't find on my 1899 map exactly but maybe if I had looked onto an earlier map, I would have found most if not all the streets listed in the book. So something that I did notice was that majority, maybe about 85 or 90 percent of the street names still exist and are still being used up to now. I found that to be really cool and nice, even with all the changes that took place over the years, for street names to still be used, I am very much impressed and glad to see that whoever was honored by having a street named by them is glad that their history still lives on to this day, and really, that is all that matters, keeping history alive and always spreading the knowledge behind what really happened. Not all of the streets that still exist today are still in the same exact location, some of the streets were a little hard to pinpoint just because they were moved and shuffled around, I'm still not too sure why that is exactly but maybe that could be something to look into down the line. Some of the streets that I found on the 1899 map that no longer exist, that I found to be quite interesting, I looked them up in the book, Brooklyn by Name, hoping to find something, anything, any trace that these streets did exist and why they had these interesting names, and boy was I in luck. The street names I came across were, Poplar Street, Middagh Street, Cranberry Street, Orange Street, and Pineapple Street. Poplar Street and Middagh Street I just thought were interesting, but I didn't bother to guess where the names could have originated from. However, when it came to Cranberry Street, Orange Street and Pineapple Street, I thought they were named after what people tried to grow on that block, or possibly what they even sold on their block, but that was not the case, the names hold a very different approach than my first impression did.

Have the property lines changed over time or are they the same for the most part?

In answering this question as well I used the last map of my time frame, which is dated at 1899 and I also used the same Google map of Vinegar Hill, which I used to answer the previous question. Although it was very hard to do so, and I still was unsure of how to operate the map warper under each map, I was left to try and find street the street names by using my eyes and really trying my best to match them up, it was very difficult, but a little bit more fun than my first time trying to match things up. Something new that I tried for this question was, printing out the map from 1899 and pulling up the Google Map of Vinegar Hill on my computer screen and trying to lay the 1899 map on top of my computer screen and trying to line up the land, I definitely underestimated how hard that would be and it did leave me a little stressed and frustrated but it

also forced me to be much more creative with trying to figure out if the property lines still stayed the same or drastically changed. What made it harder was, due to all the difference in names, I was not able to get a really good focus on the Google Map, and zooming out left some streets that I was potentially searching for out. But what I did after laying the 1899 map on top of my screen with the present day map available on my screen, I took a marker and traced out any changes I saw, and that led to a couple of discoveries. Unfortunately, by laying the two maps on top of each other, I mistook some of the bolded roads on the 1899 map, as major roads on the present day map which was tricky but also a big mistake, I was however able to extend a few of the major roads from 1899, using the present day map. The first thing that struck out was that most, if not all the piers facing the East River are larger than they were years ago, which only stirs us into one direction, manmade land was definitely something that was proposed, put in place and constructed. Before I get into my focus, the Brooklyn Bridge, I just wanted to address some things that could be seen just by looking at these maps, side by side and on top of one another. The Brooklyn Queens Expressway which in 1899 would have been starting from York Street, going up and cutting into Front, Water, Plymouth, and Bridge Street definitely changed a great amount of property lines. Essentially this Expressway cut into buildings, homes, and factories. And when you are building something as grand as that, you can't just simply build on top of everything, the surrounding structures also had to be removed, and by knowing this, it is only fair to assume that these businesses and people had to give up their land to the state. Another major thing that had to be constructed and changed the scope of property lines was Atlantic Avenue, this too cut into many structures, and Fulton Street was cut shorter on this end and took a little detour from the 1899 Fulton Avenue. Now to focus on where my interest is, the Brooklyn Bridge the starting point has changed, cut much shorter and whatever property it caused to be removed was long gone, which means some rebuilding in order to develop that area. The present day starting point does indeed cut into existing structures at the time, but since the bridge was seen as the greater good, those people too had no choice but to give up their land. Just by putting the maps side by side, it does indeed seem that a lot, if not all the property lines changed from 1899 till now, but again as I mentioned in one of my other responses, there was always the buying and selling of land, so naturally things would just change.

How many copies of these maps are there?

It is not easy as I believed it would be to determine how many copies of each map there are, because thousands of map plates were published by many companies, companies that were located in New York or Pennsylvania. And with two states and numerous companies making maps there were certainly a lot of creations, productions and copies being made. The New York Public Library alone has almost half a million maps and about 20,000 atlases. And this is just one of many archives located in New York not to mention however many archives are located in Pennsylvania that are home to many of these maps. It definitely is not surprising about how many maps were potentially created, published, and copied, but it really is a little mind blowing, for me to say the least. Let us take the fire atlases for example, the original being one and a couple if not a handful of backup copies, because after all, anything can happen so there always need to be a couple of backups, for safety reasons for instance. In addition to that, there needs

to be some copies for the state, they too need to obtain some copies for their records. A series of other copies have to be distributed to the fire departments. Every time a fire occurred, firefighters just couldn't go to the one available copy, locate the fire, figure out where and how many fire hydrants were nearby. That would not have only took way too long but also would have been dangerous for everyone but it would have been one of the most inefficient plans. The work that was done on the fire atlases were just magnificent, they are among, if not the only kind of maps that are heavily detailed in illustration and in explanation. There is a chance that in addition to the fire department using them, ordinary people also used them which means that there had to be more copies available for public use. Now to look at a much more common reason for there to be so many copies of one map is, the street map, this was a pretty basic map, just detailing the streets, alley ways, street corners, and maybe even certain landmarks that the people at that time would use to get around. Apart from the New York State and State of Pennsylvania national archives, there are probably so many other archives with the same maps, maybe even a wider range and larger time period of maps in their collections. The numbers are unknown, but one could just imagine. Again if the New York Public Library alone has almost half a million maps and 20,000 atlases, and some maps that are digitalized, there is no way to know the exact amount of copies of a map there are, with the amount of archives, and not to mention personal collections known and unknown to us, we the public are left at our imagination about how many copies there could possibly be.