

Map Corner

Ten Years of the Map Room

by Jay Osborn,
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THIS SUMMER WE celebrate the 10th anniversary of the award-winning Gesher Galicia Map Room (maps.geshergalicia.org/). Since the official online launch of the Map Room in July 2012, the resources available on the site have grown significantly in number and diversity, making it a useful complement to other tools for genealogical research. In this article, I will review the history of the Map Room, describe some recent developments, and discuss plans for further advancing the site in the future.

From Paper to Pixels

We have been interested in maps and how they can enhance family history research since the first days of Gesher Galicia. By May 2007, a new Gesher Galicia Cadastral Map and Landowner Records Research Project was created under the leadership of our organization's late president, Pamela Weisberger.

Using member donations, Gesher Galicia collaborated with eastern European researcher Brian Lenius to photocopy several selected 19th-century cadastral map sheets and corresponding property owner records for a handful of towns in eastern Galicia at Lviv's Central State Historical Archive (TsDIAL). Brian also surveyed the archive's holdings for additional maps and registers that could possibly be used in future map projects.

At Gesher Galicia's annual regional meeting in New York City that year, printed copies of the map sheets were assembled by volunteers with scissors and tape. It was an amusing and enlightening precursor to the digital work that would later become our focus (Weisberger, Pamela, "Research Corner," *Galitzianer*, November 2007, 2).

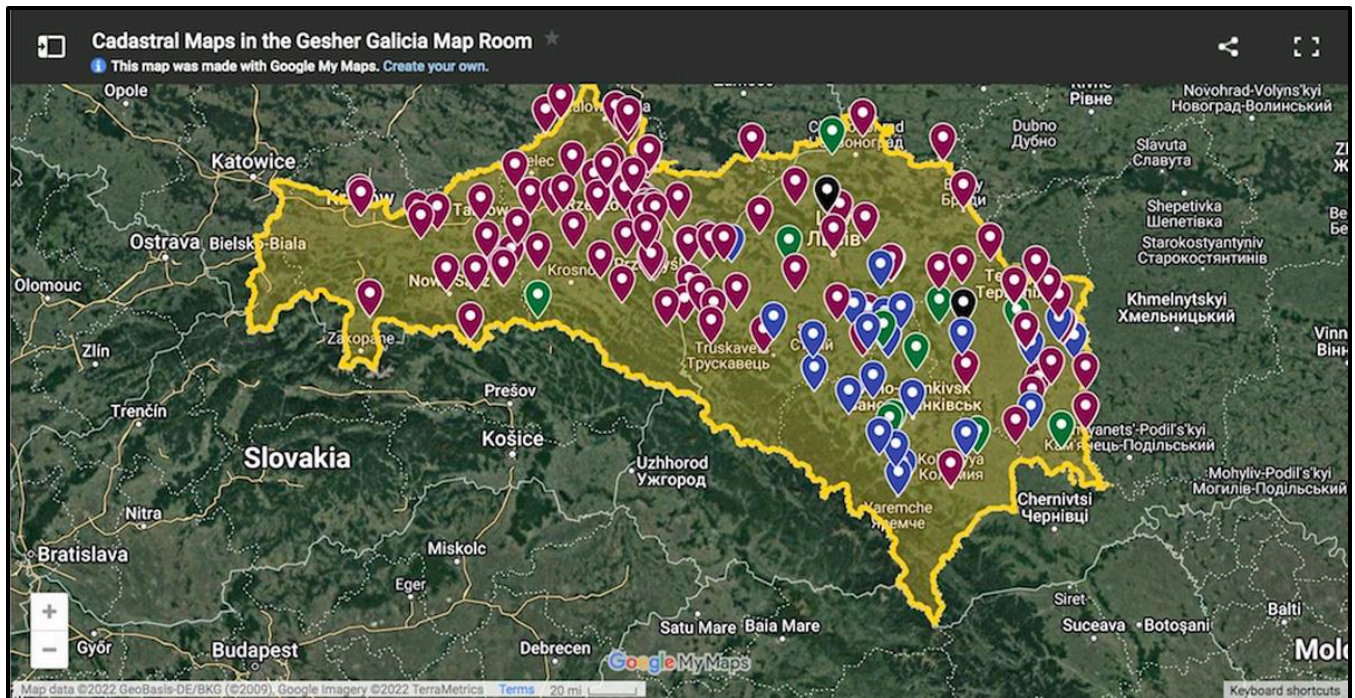
Individual members and town research leaders contributed funds for copying more maps and registers, and the scope of our research expanded to include Polish archives. We began scanning photocopied map sheets to digital versions and attempted to capture the color of many cadastral maps with digital cameras. Eventually, color scans of small sections of the map sheets were permitted by the archives.

In time, Gesher Galicia had acquired photocopies and scans of a few dozen town maps, but still had no practical way to share the graphics with members and others. Initial attempts to "stitch" digital map images together were successful but created image files that were too large for web browsers and online research.

Prototype to Launch

In 2011, my wife Marla and I moved for several months to Lviv (the former capital of Galicia) for her own Jewish family history research, centered in the nearby town of Rohatyn. Our move coincided with Gesher Galicia's acquisition of camera images of the Rohatyn cadastral field sketch of 1846 and its associated property registers.

That spring, Alex Feller, Gesher Galicia member and founder of the Rohatyn District Research Group, visited us in Lviv. Together, Alex and I brainstormed ways to assemble the separate map sketch images for the Rohatyn map and to create a tool and data set suitable for further research by others. After experimenting with different technologies, we settled on a tiled-image approach, meaning a map created through the combination



An interactive map of Galicia with pins that link to all the cadastral maps currently available in the Map Room

of smaller images, or tiles, similar to Google Maps. That summer I uploaded the first complete Galician cadastral map to my personal server (Osborn, Jay, "Map Corner," *Galitzianer*, March 2018, 21–26).

Pamela Weisberger then asked me whether a similar approach could be applied to her backlog of cadastral map images—and the idea for the Geshher Galicia Map Room was born. In February 2012, I created the first prototype of the future Map Room on my server, borrowing heavily in layout and style from the web design for the All Galicia Database. Although this trial only included five maps, it allowed us to refine features and prioritize future additions.

Five months later, we moved the project to the developing Geshher Galicia website. Pamela then officially launched the Map Room that summer with a demonstration at the 2012 Paris IAJGS conference. At the end of that busy year, we introduced the Map Room to our members with an article in the *Galitzianer* (Weisberger, Pamela, "Research Corner," *Galitzianer*, December 2012, 2).

At the time of its launch in 2012, the Map Room contained a total of 36 maps. Like today, there were different categories of maps in the collection. Then, there were 22 cadastral maps, three regional maps, nine city street maps (Lemberg/Lwów, plus the major cities of Kraków, Łańcut, and Przemyśl), and two special maps (a pre-WWI railroad system map of Austria-Hungary and a WWII Lwów Jewish ghetto resettlement map).

Cadastral maps have been described in most of our previous Map Corner articles, and they make up the core of our collection. They are historical maps of Galician cities, towns, and villages, created from detailed land surveys conducted by officials of the Habsburg Monarchy from the 1820s to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after WWI. Because of their accuracy and level of detail, many of these maps are instrumental to genealogists and historians in their research.

Regional maps show Galicia's place in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and illustrate the changing administrative divisions within Galicia

and at its borders over time. The maps in this section of the Map Room now span from the Partitions of Poland through the interwar period.

Our city street maps include historical street maps of major cities that were in Galicia and Bukovina. These maps can provide an important bridge in family history studies between cadastral maps and the modern era. Lastly, our special maps are more unusual ones, such as scientific and ethnographic maps, WWI battle maps, and Holocaust-era maps.

Significant Growth

In the 10 years since the launch of the Map Room, we have steadily accumulated new maps and continued to develop tools and skills in map assembly and historical research. Along the way, we have reached some significant milestones.

In 2013, both the Map Room and the Cadastral Map and Landowner Records Project were awarded the IAJGS Award for Outstanding Program or Project That Advances the Objectives of Jewish Genealogy. This award recognized the unique value of our maps and property records in adding a spatial dimension to family history research and in opening new leads into unknown family tree branches (Pamela Weisberger, "Research Corner," *Galitzianer*, September 2013, 2–3). At the time of the award, the Map Room had a total of 55 maps online.

In 2016, we announced that Gesher Galicia's 100th cadastral map had been published: the 1853 map of Rudnik (Osborn, Jay, "Gesher Galicia Publishes Its 100th Cadastral Map!" *Galitzianer*, March 2016, 9–10). Today, in total, we have assembled and published more than 250 maps online, including 166 cadastral maps, 57 regional maps, 17 street maps, 20 special maps, and four data maps, which are explained in the following section.

The Map Room is a volunteer project, meaning that resource availability often varies. In addition,



Gesher Galicia board members with the 2013 IAJGS award, from left to right: Shelley Pollero, Brooke Schreier Ganz, Pamela Weisberger, Renee Stern Steinig, Marla Raucher Osborn, and Jay Osborn

during the last couple years, work has been especially impacted, first by the COVID pandemic and then by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Yet, we have still posted more than 15 new maps since last summer. And thanks to Gesher Galicia's former research coordinator, Tony Kahane, and his team of associates in Poland and Ukraine, we have plenty of scanned archival map materials in storage for future assembly and publication.

New Resources for Researchers

Three projects over the course of the Map Room's history deserve special mention. First, in 2013, Gesher Galicia began participating in a European program of cross-border archive cooperation to digitize and database the detailed graphical resources of Austro-Hungarian cadastral maps. Since we digitize in both Poland and Ukraine, use a seamless map-sheet stitching process, and provide an interactive free-access website, Gesher Galicia is able to function as a bridge between state archives and end users.



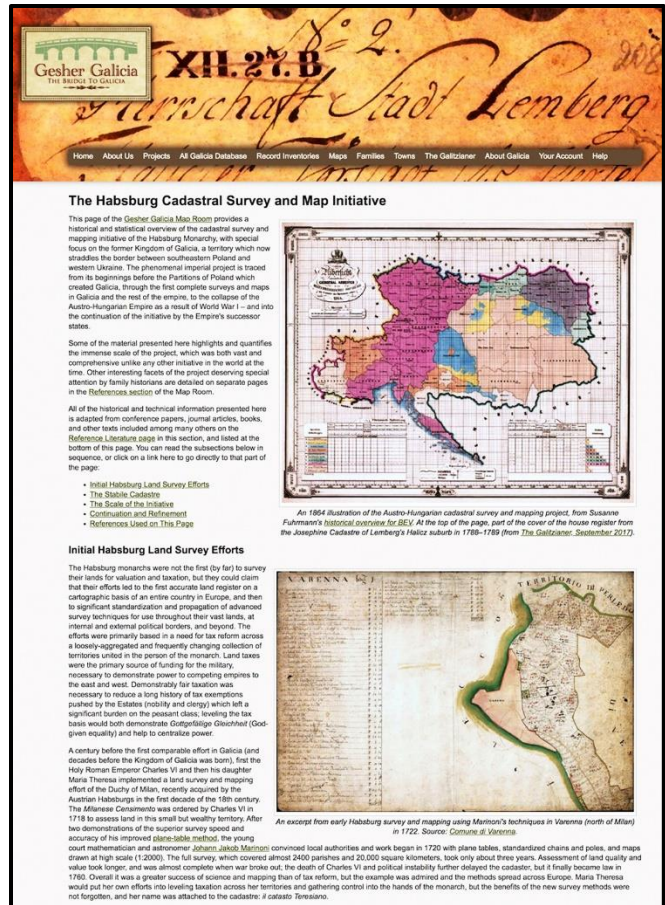
An overview in the Map Room introducing cadastral maps as a resource for genealogists

Second, in 2015, we began collaborating on a project with the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, located in Warsaw. Through this partnership, we provided formatted digital images of cadastral maps to the museum's Resource Center for printing onto durable paper. The end goal was for museum visitors to be able to handle and study these stitched cadastral maps for their family history research. More than a hundred detailed true-scale maps were created, serving as tangible tools for genealogical researchers (Osborn, Jay, "Partnership with POLIN Museum on Printed Cadastral Maps," *Galitzianer*, June 2016, 7–9).

Third, in December 2021, we introduced a new section of the Map Room that features four pilot interactive "data maps," one for each of the following towns: Chyrów, Nadwórna, Rohatyn, and Skała. These maps link vital records and other family information to historical cadastral maps, providing a graphical view of the history of entire communities (Osborn, Jay, "Map Corner," *Galitzianer*, March 2022, 9–12).

Looking Forward

The growth of the Map Room during the past decade has created some practical issues that we had not anticipated, both in the sheer number of maps



A review in the Map Room of the history of the Galician cadastral survey and mapping initiative

on the site and in the needs of researchers using the maps for family history study. After simply extending the Map Room homepage again and again for years, we have now organized and restructured the website to speed up access.

We have also created a platform for adding introductory articles and tutorials—such as the ones illustrated on this page—as well as links to map sources and printed and digital references. Looking forward, we hope to further expand this section of the Map Room to support greater use of historical maps as a resource for genealogists. And of course, we will also continue to add more maps.