

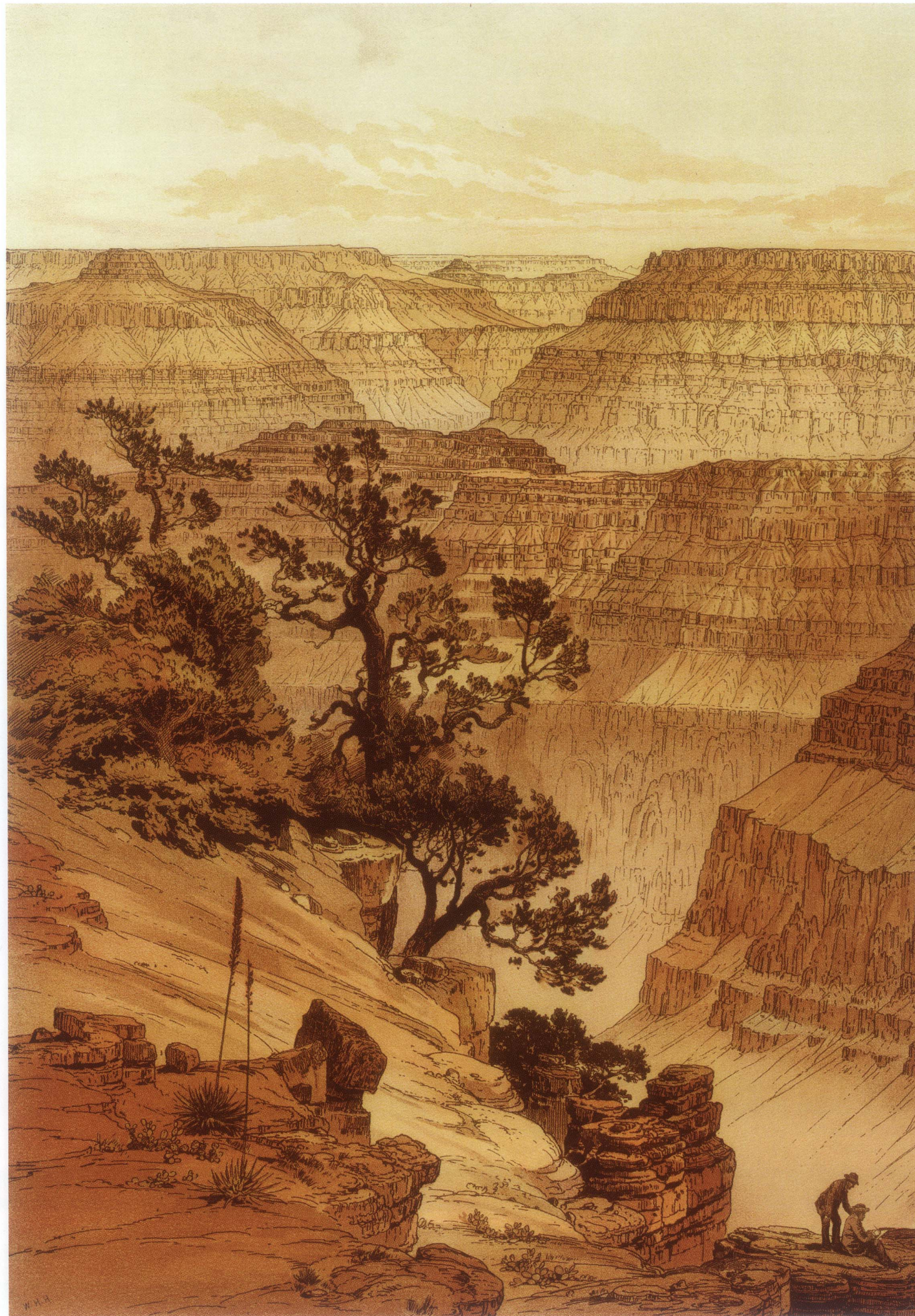
## INTRODUCTION

### THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST IN MAPS

BY DAVID RUMSEY

The mapping of the West has only recently been completed. I learned this at first hand in the late 1970s when I became stranded in the Owyhee Desert, which spans northern Nevada and southeastern Oregon. I was camping in the middle of this little-known corner of the American West when my car broke down at the end of the road. The nearest habitation was fifty miles ahead of me but only reachable by walking through a roadless wilderness; following the road back out would have meant walking almost twice as far, so I chose the more direct, though uncharted path. The only maps of the area available at that time were the United States Geological Survey (USGS) 1:250,000-scale series, which showed the bare outlines of the region but left all immediate details to one's imagination. Now, facing me was a vast and suddenly imposing area, my only means to navigation: a map drawn to a scale that was functionally useless for one stranded and on foot. The 1:24,000-scale series maps for the Owyhee Desert, one of the last places in the contiguous U.S. to be mapped in detail by the USGS, were not to be published until the mid-1980s.

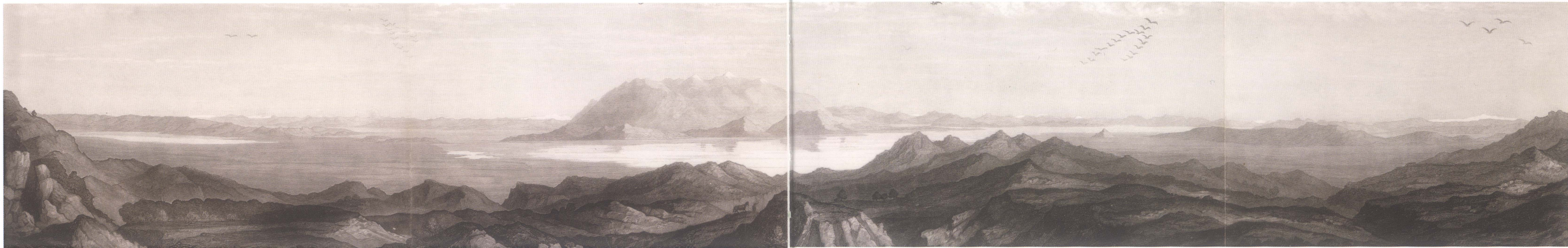
It is daunting to look out over a fifty-mile vista and realize that one's life depends on dead reckoning and that the route one takes is based mostly on hope. Walking those miles was the most frightening event in my life and my closest brush with death. As I stumbled late at night through the silently beautiful landscape, I gained an admiration verging on awe for the explorers



William Henry Holmes: "Panorama from Point Sublime" (Part I, Looking East). In: *Atlas to Accompany the Monograph On the Tertiary History of the Grand Canyon District*, by Clarence E. Dutton (New York: Julius Bien & Co., 1882).

Overleaf: F. S. von Egloffstein, "Valley Of The Mud Lakes, Showing Eighty Two Miles Of The Projected Rail Road Line." In: *Reports of Explorations and Surveys to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad From the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean*. Volume XI, (Washington: George W. Bowman, 1861).





who had had no maps at all to guide them. After four days of what seemed like endless walking, climbing down thousand-foot-deep canyons, crossing rivers, and sleeping on the desert floor, I managed to make my way to safety almost by accident: I found two workers checking equipment at a remote underground gas pipeline.

They were just about to leave in their truck when they saw me approaching. As we drove thirty miles to the nearest town, they explained that they came to this outpost only once every two months; they felt therefore that our meeting had been a divine occurrence, due in no small part to their being devout Mormons (they also gave me a copy of the *Book of Mormon*). I was grateful and ready to accept any help, divine or otherwise.

When the USGS 1:24,000-series maps were published years later, I made a collage of the ones that detailed the walk that might very well have been my last, but for the Mormon gas-pipeline workers. I filled an entire wall with 1:24000 maps so I could visually re-walk my escape whenever I liked and see the location of my rescue. Maps became the mnemonic devices I used to recall the uncharted wilderness that had changed my life.

Shortly after this intense experience, and in large measure the result of it, I became a serious map collector. Over the ensuing twenty-five years, I built one of the largest private collections in the United States, currently numbering over 150,000 maps. Always fascinating to me, the American

West has been a central focus in creating the collection. Many of the maps pictured in this book come from my collection; all of the maps and essays here reveal new ways for us to understand America.

The maps in this book cover 366 years and are by indigenous American, Italian, French, Spanish, English, Dutch, and American cartographers. Maps of the West were produced by kingdoms to stake claims to territory, by governments to encourage settlement, and by private map publishers, among others. Some were used by mariners for coastal and river navigation and the earliest maps of America show only land that was reachable by water. Later, explorers, trappers, and traders investigated the interior and the maps became more complex. Gradually military expeditions took center stage, culminating with the great scientific surveys at the end of the nineteenth century.

As exploration advanced, so did printing techniques. The first maps were engraved on wood blocks; they were followed by copperplate, steel and lithographic engraving; photolithography and electrotpe came into practice at the end of the nineteenth century. Specimens from these various presses are now dispersed in libraries, museums, and private collections.

Maps are among our most basic documents, and when we examine them, we are at the roots of history. In *Mapping the West* we can locate the campsites of the Lewis and Clark expedition; see the maps that enticed emigrants to abandon their lives in

Europe to establish themselves in California; and look at military maps used during the Mexican War. Large and small occurrences make their way onto maps, bringing to life the events that have created the American mythology.

The West was a vast and unknown land when the United States was established at the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783. Within twenty years, the newly formed nation doubled in size with the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803. Forty-five years after the Purchase, with the annexation of Texas and Oregon and a war with Mexico, the size of the country had tripled, and its boundaries stretched to the Pacific Ocean. The process of exploring, mapping, and peopling this land was unlike anything that had ever taken place before, and it is one of the most intriguing subjects in all of history. In *Mapping the West*, salient examples are brought together to tell the impressive story of the mapping of this vast, hazardous, awesome, and hitherto obscure land.

The variety of the topography in this vast space brought forth great cartographic art, as illustrated in this book in such widely differing maps as the hand-made vellum chart of Juan Martinez, the Aztec map on deerskin, and the elaborately ruled map in relief by F. S. von Egloffstein (who also drew the stunning panorama of the proposed railroad route across the Valley of the Mud Lakes shown above, as well as the view of Franklin Valley shown on the endsheets).

Certainly the varied topography of the West presented challenges to cartographers. Its huge mountains, river basins, canyons, and deserts slowed both exploration and understanding. As a result of these challenges and the varied ways these challenges were faced, many fallacies and myths about uncharted areas persisted over time; particularly dramatic in this regard is California, which at one time had been delineated as an island. One by one, however, mapmakers and explorers solved each of the mysteries that faced them.

The remarkable view of the Grand Canyon in 1882 by William Henry Holmes shown on the preceding pages is a paradigm of the history of the mapping of the American West: it is an attempt to understand a vast space, seemingly impenetrable, yet inviting itself to be discovered, delineated, and ultimately settled. Holmes was the topographical draughtsman for the Dutton Grand Canyon survey, and at the canyon, according to Holmes's biographer, "The West's greatest draughtsman had found the West's greatest view." His topographical drawing shows a spectacular vista that exists today in almost unchanged form. The same cannot be said for most of the western parts of America. Human presence, assisted by maps and other tools of rationalizing the land, has forever altered it, revealing another aspect of mapping. Maps often do more than describe their subjects; sometimes they cause the subjects they describe to change.

The maps in this book often have this two-edged aspect: they are attempts to accurately portray the landscape as it existed at the time of their making, but then in subsequent maps we see how the information contained in earlier maps has led to further change and settlement. This course of action is at work throughout the book, from Hernán Cortés' Map of the Gulf of Mexico (1524) to the U.S. General Land Office Map of the United States and Territories (1890). The essays accompanying the maps show how the maps are interconnected, where one builds on the next, until we reach a comprehensive understanding of the landscape and of the changes wrought by human hand.

As each map owes a debt to those maps that precede it, so in turn does any study of maps owe a debt to those studies that precede it. Surprisingly, there have been few comprehensive studies on the maps of the West. Notable among these is the *Memoir* accompanying G.K. Warren's 1857 Map of the Territory of the United States, which is perhaps the first such work. Beyond Warren's *Memoir*, standing hugely as precedent, is Carl I. Wheat's *Mapping the Transmississippi West 1540-1861* (San Francisco: The Institute of Historical Cartography, five volumes, the fifth in two separate parts, published between 1957-63), one of the most impressive works on cartography ever published. Limited to 1,000 copies (350 additional copies were later reprinted in a smaller format), Wheat described 1,302 maps and illustrated most

of them. In *Mapping the West* there are more references to this book than to any other, reflecting the author and contributors' great debt to Wheat's scholarship.

Since *Mapping the Transmississippi West*, no general study of the mapping of the West has been published, despite the fact that interest in maps during the past four decades has steadily grown. In evidence: American maps of the West have become one of the most rapidly developing areas of collecting, both privately and institutionally. The benefits of this interest are great. As these collections are formed and expanded, new information is constantly coming to light and many previously unknown maps have been discovered. Nevertheless, the up-to-date and more accessible cartographic study on the West has remained—until now—unwritten, perhaps because Wheat's magisterial work has the reputation for being definitive.

*Mapping the West* builds on these earlier works and makes the maps of this huge geographical area available to a wider public by both letting the maps speak for themselves through excellent reproductions and by providing historical and contextual information that enhances our understanding of them. The power of the maps to tell the history of the American West shines through these pages, showing, as Wheat said, how maps "better than any other documents, illustrate the story of developing thought and understanding and vividly reflect the advance and unfoldment of knowledge of this enormous and majestic region."