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# Finding aid for the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps Collection 481

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This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on September 07, 2018.  
Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections  
Department

111 Library Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

[localhis@grpl.org](mailto:localhis@grpl.org)

URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
<b>Creator:</b>	Sanborn, D.A. (Daniel Alfred), -1883
<b>Creator:</b>	Sanborn Map & Publishing Co.
<b>Title:</b>	Sanborn Fire Insurance maps
<b>ID:</b>	Collection 481
<b>Date:</b>	1874-01
<b>Date:</b>	1878-01
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 Linear Feet One oversize box
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Abstract:</b>	This collection includes two volumes of Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for Grand Rapids, Michigan, published in January 1874 and January 1878. Fire insurance maps are large-scale maps with detailed drawings of the built environment of urban areas. They were produced for insurance agents to use in quoting fire insurance policies. The maps are helpful for researching the history of a property and for general knowledge of the history of Grand Rapids. Due to their rarity, access to the physical maps is limited. The maps are available digitally in our online collections: <a href="https://grpl.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16055coll17">https://grpl.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16055coll17</a>

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## Biographical / Historical

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The publication of fire insurance maps dates to the end of the 18th century, with the earliest maps produced in London, England. Fire insurance maps were created to provide detailed, accurate information about buildings for insurance agents to use to quote fire insurance policies.

D.A. Sanborn, a surveyor from Massachusetts, started producing fire insurance maps in 1866. In 1876 his company became known as the Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. D.A. Sanborn died in 1883 and the Sanborn Company continued on after his death, becoming the largest producer of fire insurance maps in the United States.

In 1883, the Sanborn Co. began depositing a copy of each map they produced with the Library of Congress, resulting in a collection documenting over 12,000 cities in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The 1874 and 1878 Grand Rapids Sanborn maps were discovered in the early 1990s in the attic of a house at 336 Paris Avenue SE. Sanborn fire insurance maps from the 1860s and 1870s are rare today. Generally less than 20 copies were produced of each volume. The maps were lithographically printed and then hand colored with the aid of waxed paper stencils. There are no other known copies of the 1874 and 1878 Grand Rapids maps.

The Library of Congress notes only three volumes of Sanborn maps in their collections prior to 1883: an 1867 Insurance Map of Boston, an 1868 map of Toledo, Ohio and an 1879 map of Rutland, Vermont.

The Library has additional Sanborn maps for Grand Rapids dating from 1888 to the 1950s.

You can also view additional fire insurance maps and information about them through the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/>

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## Content Description

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This collection includes two oversized volumes of Sanborn fire insurance maps for Grand Rapids, Mich., dated 1874 and 1878. Fire insurance maps are large-scale maps with detailed drawings of the built environment of urban areas. The maps show construction materials of buildings, the location of doors and windows, building use and other details.

The maps are helpful for researching the history of a property, for development projects, for environmental history and for general knowledge of the history of Grand Rapids.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

111 Library Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503  
[localhis@grpl.org](mailto:localhis@grpl.org)

URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

## Conditions Governing Access

Due to the rarity of the physical maps, they may only be used with the assistance of a staff person. This access is dependent on staff availability and other patron requests. You may contact us to make an appointment to view them - 616-988-5497 or email [localhis@grpl.org](mailto:localhis@grpl.org).

Digital versions of the maps are available online: <https://grpl.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16055coll17>

## Immediate Source of Acquisition

Don Smalligan, 2015.013

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- maps
- Michigan -- Grand Rapids -- Maps
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Fire risk assessment -- Maps

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## Collection Inventory

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Title/Description	Instances
Insurance Diagram of Grand Rapids, Mich., D.A. Sanborn, C.E., 1874-01 <u>Date:</u> 1874-01	Box 1
Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Grand Rapids, Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., 1878-01 <u>Date:</u> 1878-01	Box 1