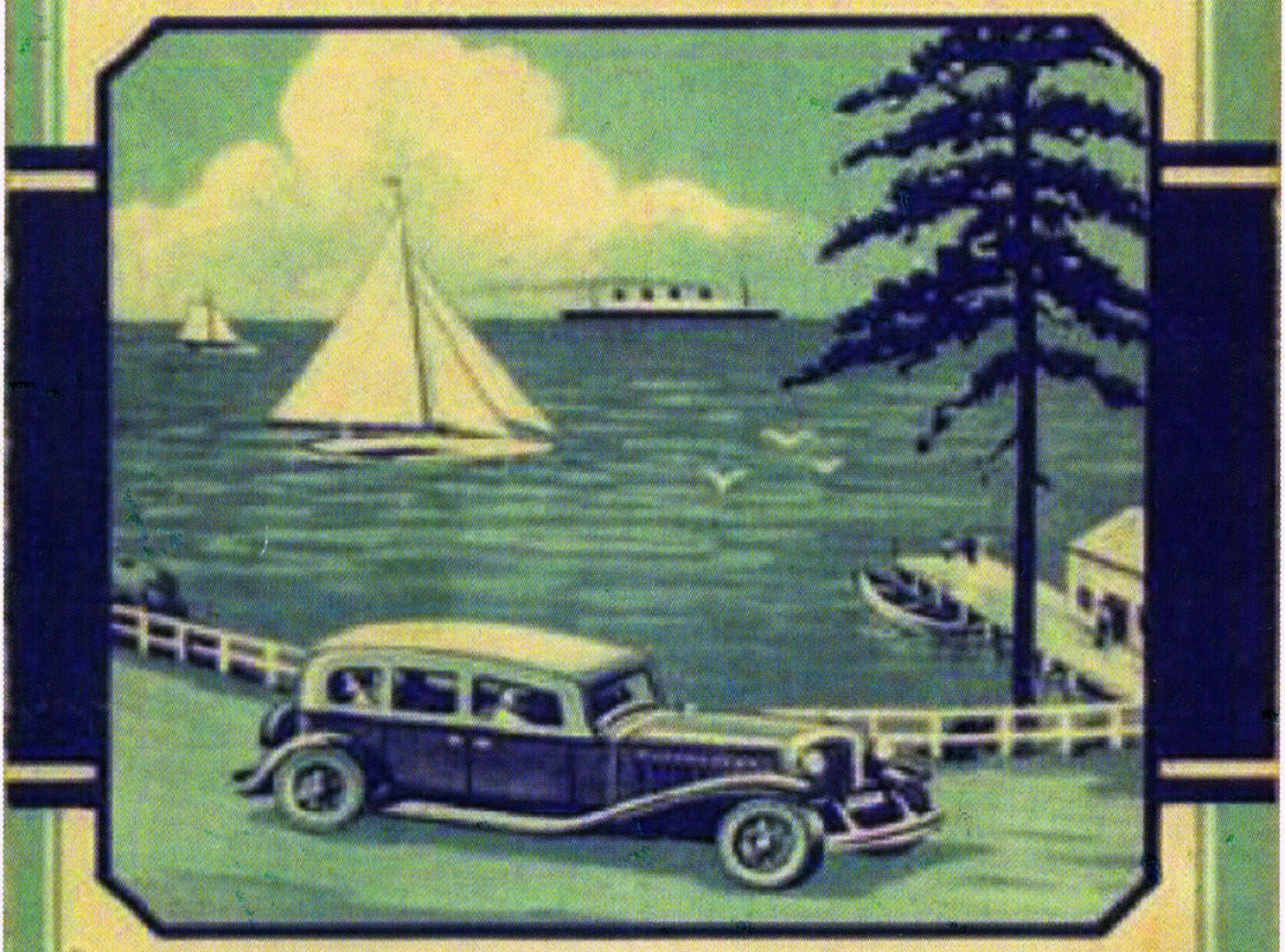
2023

ROAD MAP COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION

OFFICIAL ROAD MAP DATING GUIDE



SHOWING

How to date road maps and interpret date codes for

- General Drafing Co.
- Rand McNally & Co.
- H. M. Gousha Co.
- Mid-West Map Co.
- Clason Map Co.
- Auto Club of Southern California
- California State Automobile Assoc.

Compiled by

Mark Greaves, RMCA #39

COPYRIGHT
All rights reserved

Distributed Free to RMCA Members

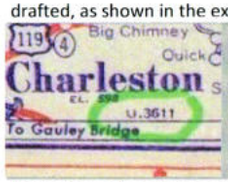
ROAD MAP DATING GUIDE FOR RAND McNALLY, GOUSHA & GENERAL DRAFTING

Compiled by Mark Greaves (RMCA #39), Supplement to *The Legend* #96, Summer 2023

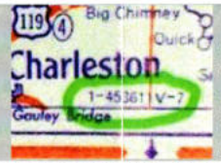
YEAR	R. McN.	GOUSHA	GEN. D.	YEAR	YEAR	R. McN.	GOUSHA	GEN. D.	YEAR	YEAR	R. McN.	GOUSHA	GEN. D.	YEAR
1919	(A)	-	-	1919	1946	46 / 6-	T	-	1946	1973	73	UU	A21	1973
1920	(B)	-	-	1920	1947	47 / 7-	U	-	1947	1974	74	VV	A22	1974
1921	(C)	-	-	1921	1948	48 / 8-	V	-	1948	1975	75	WW	A23	1975
1922	(D)	-	-	1922	1949	49 / 9-	W	-	1949	1976	76	XX	A24	1976
1923	(E)	-	-	1923	1950	50 / 0-	X	-	1950	1977	77	YY	A25	1977
1924	F	-	-	1924	1951	51 / 1-	Y	-	1951	1978	78	ZZ	A26	1978
1925	G	-	-	1925	1952	52 / 2-	Z	-	1952	1979	79	AB	A27	1979
1926	H	-	-	1926	1953	53 / 3-	AA	A1	1953	1980	80	AC	A28	1980
1927	I	A	-	1927	1954	54 / 4-	BB	A2	1954	1981	81	AN	A29	1981
1928	J	B	-	1928	1955	55 / 5-	CC	A3	1955	1982	82	MZ	A30	1982
1929	K	C	-	1929	1956	56 / 6-	DD	A4	1956	1983	83	OB	A31	1983
1930	L	D	-	1930	1957	57 / 7-	EE	A5	1957	1984	84	YL	A32	1984
1931	M	E	-	1931	1958	58 / 8-	FF	A6	1958	1985	85	CP	A33	1985
1932	N	F	-	1932	1959	59 / 9-	GG	A7	1959	1986	86	KX	A34	1986
1933	O	G	-	1933	1960	60 / 0-	HH	A8	1960	1987	87	QD	A35	1987
1934	P	H	-	1934	1961	61 / 1-	II	A9	1961	1988	88	WJ	A36	1988
1935	Q	I	-	1935	1962	62 / 2-	JJ	A10	1962	1989	89	ER	A37	1989
1936	R	J	-	1936	1963	63 / 3-	KK	A11	1963	1990	90	IV	A38	1990
1937	S	K	-	1937	1964	64 / 4-	LL	A12	1964	1991	91	SF	A39	1991
1938	T	L	-	1938	1965	65 / 5-	MM	A13	1965	1992	92	UH	A40	1992
1939	U	M	-	1939	1966	66 / 6-	NN	A14	1966	1993	93	GT	-	1993
1940	V	N	-	1940	1967	67 / 7-	OO	A15	1967	1994	94	NA	-	1994
1941	W	O	-	1941	1968	68 / 8-	PP	A16	1968	1995	95	ZM	-	1995
1942	X	P	-	1942	1969	69 / 9-	QQ	A17	1969	1996	96	BO	-	1996
1943	Y	Q	-	1943	1970	70	RR	A18	1970	1997	97	-	-	1997
1944	Z	R	-	1944	1971	71	SS	A19	1971	1998	98	-	-	1998
1945	45	S	-	1945	1972	72	TT	A20	1972	1999	(99)	-	-	1999

R. McN. = Rand McNally & Co.; **GOUSHA** = H. M. Gousha Co.; **GEN. D.** = General Drafting Co.

Rand McNally map codes are found along the bottom edge of the map area, and use a simple alphabetical coding sytem, beginning with the letter '**A**' for 1919, '**B**' for 1920, and so on (see chart above). However, no such codes have actually been found on their road maps prior to '**F**' for 1924, and many road maps prior to the early-1930s do not include date codes. These letter codes were generally combined with a numeric code for the map area, and beginning in the mid-1930s two digits indicating the year the map was first drafted, as shown in the example at left below.



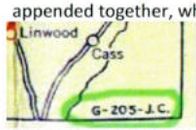
1939 map of Ohio: 'U.3611'
The '**36**' shows the year the map was first drafted (1936); '**11**' means Ohio was the 12th map done that year (they started with '**00**' for Illinois); and '**U**' is the code for 1939.



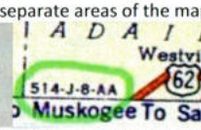
1951 map of Ohio: '1-453611V-7'
Same base code '**3611**' as before, with '**45**' added (major revision in 1945?); '**1-**' prefix for 1951 edition; and '**-7**' suffix for the 7th revision (the '**V**' stands for Velox, a type of photographic paper).

When the alphabet ran out in 1945, the base code ('**3611**' in the example above) continued to be used, sometimes with a second 2-digit year added at front, likely indicating a major revision of the map was done, but not a completely new drafting. Then a single digit for the year of publication was added as a prefix, and the revision number as a suffix - see example at right above. With only one digit (prefix) to indicate the year, some ambiguity may develop - does '**6-**' mean 1946, or 1956? So, other clues may need to be used to determine the correct decade. By 1970, only 2-digit prefixes for the year were used. While Rand McNally has published a few road maps into the 21st Century, they appear to have stopped using map codes, as the latest observed is '**98**' for 1998.

Gousha also used a simple alphabetical coding sytem with the codes also found along the bottom map edge, starting with the letter '**A**' when the company produced their first road maps in 1927 (see chart above). In 1928 a 3-digit code for the map area was added, along with generally two letters, either '**J.C.**' or '**S.C.**' though sometimes only a single '**J**' or '**S**' is used. The meaning of these letters is unknown. See example at left below. In the mid-1930s the codes were divided into two parts, with the letter for the date and the 3-digit code for the area in one part, and a number 1-12 for the month of the year the map was drafted, along with the '**J/C/S**' letters in a second part, though often times these two parts are still appended together, while other times they are found in separate areas of the map, though always along the bottom edge.



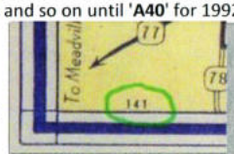
1933 map of Ohio: 'G-205-J.C.'
The '**G**' is the code for 1933; '**205**' is a code for the map area (Ohio); the meaning of '**J.C.**' is not known.



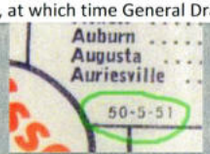
1953 map of Missouri: '514-J-8-AA'
'**514**' is a code for the map area (Missouri); '**J-8**' indicates the map was drafted in the month of August; '**AA**' is the code for 1953.

When the end of the alphabet was reached with '**Z**' for 1952, the codes for the year were extended by using double letters starting with '**AA**' for 1953, until the alphabet rand out again with '**ZZ**' in 1978, at which point a more convoluted double letter system was used (see chart above), until 1996 when Gousha was bought by Rand McNally. Also at some point the 3-digits codes for the map area were extended to 4 digits. Given the additional '**J/C/S**' letters found in Gousha codes, it is mportant not to confuse these with the year codes, for example, '**G-231-J.C.**' is 1933 (**G**), not 1929 (**C**) or 1936 (**J**), '**11-V-634-S**' is 1948 (**V**), not 1945 (**S**), and '**605-S**' / '**U-6**' (two separate codes) is 1947 (**U**), not 1945 (**S**).

General Drafting maps mostly have dates on the cover or map title inside, as well as copyright dates starting in the late-1930s, so are relatively easy to date. Starting about 1940, many of their maps have a numeric code inside indicating the month and year of printing, such as '**141**' for Jan. 1941, or '**1049**' for Oct. 1949. On maps from 1951 to 1953 these codes take on the format '**YY-M-YY**' where the first '**YY**' is the year the map was drafted, then '**M-YY**' the month and year the map was printed. In 1953 a letter was appended to the code, indicating which printing company was used, with '**P**' and '**W**' being the most commonly seen. In 1954 the initial '**YY**' part of the code was dropped, so that only the month and year of printing were indicated for a few years. At this time they also developed the coding system shown in the chart above, where '**A1**' indicates 1953, '**A2**' 1954, and so on until '**A40**' for 1992, at which time General Drafting was purchased by the Langenscheidt Publishing Group and absorbed into the American Map Company. (Occasionally the characters are reversed, such as '**4A**' rather than '**A4**'). These codes do not actually start appearing on maps until 1958 however, and indicate when the map was originally drafted, not when the map was printed - the code for the month/year along with the letter for the printer was still used for that. These two codes at first appeared together with a hypen separator, but by the early-1960s the printing date/company code was moved to the back cover, while the code for the original map drafting year appeared along the bottom edge of each map insice. A progression of examples of codes on Esso maps of New York are shown at right. The convention for dating General Drafting maps is that those printed in the Fall are for the following year - for example, the map with the Nov. 1961 code shown in the last example is found on the 1962 edition of the Esso New York map.



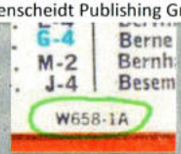
'**141**' = map printed in Jan. 1941



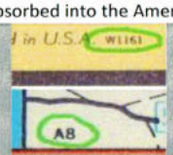
'**50-5-51**' = map first drafted in 1950, printed May 1951



'**556W**' = map printed May 1956 by company coded '**W**'



'**W658-1A**' = map printed June 1958, first drafted in 1953 ('**1A**')



Bottom of back cover

Corner of map inside

'**W1161**' = printed Nov. 1961
'**A8**' = map first drafted in 1960

Mid-West Map Company

Most MWM maps from 1926 to 1936 contain a code consisting of a mixture of numbers and letters. Dates may be determined from the first digit following the first letter of the code, which is the last digit of the year. There are usually two codes: on the cover, and one on the map inside. Use the later date if they don't agree. For example;

'**R0529**' (cover), '**Q08CE**' (inside) = 1930

'**2P8818**' (cover), '**O716C**' (inside) = 1928

Also, these guidelines may help to date a MWM map:

Maps with text only covers 1926-29; illustrated covers 1930-36

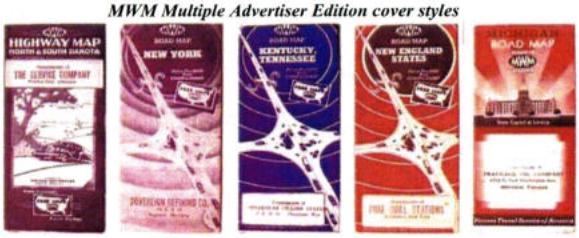
Maps measuring 5" x 7" usually 1926-28; 5¼" x 8½" are 1927-34

"Highway Map and Guide" title used 1926-33

"Highway Map" title used 1934-36

Date codes were dropped after 1936, but cover and map border styles can be used to pinpoint a date:

MWM Multiple Advertiser Edition cover styles



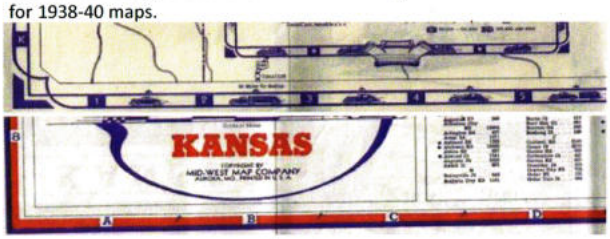
1936 1937 1938 1939, 40 1941

MWM Single-Sponsor Edition cover styles



1937 1938 1939 1940 1941

1937 maps feature little illustrations of various vehicles between the letter & number grid references. This was changed to check marks for 1938-40 maps.



1939-40 date codes start with '**A142...**' with next 2 digits the year, reversed:

'**A142934210**' = 1939

'**A14204425**' = 1940

1941 dual MWM & Gousha, with Gousha cartography and date codes.

California State Automobile Association

Some idea of the publication year for early maps that aren't dated can be obtained from the address of their offices in San Francisco:

'**681 Market**" from 1911-14

'**1628 Van Ness**' from 1915 to 1925

'**150 Van Ness**' starting in 1926

Up to 1949, codes are read forward as month-year:

'**5-39**' = May 1939

'**7-48**' = July 1948

From approx. 1949 to 1965, codes are read backwards as month, year:

'**251**' = Jan. 1952

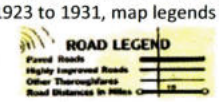
'**366**' = June 1963

Starting in 1966, codes are read forward as month-year:

'**9-67**' = Sept. 1967

Clason Map Company

Clason maps from 1928 to 1931 have codes, but not related to dating the maps. From 1923 to 1931, map legends can be used to determine years:

1923 

"Highly Improved Roads"

1924 

"Paved and [Hard] Surfaced Roads" or, if you see only two road classifications

1925 

"Through Routes" or "Best Roads"

1926 

Graveled Roads (or any mention of gravel), plus no roads printed in red

1927 
Red roads (Red U.S. Highways appear for the first time and in all subsequent years) along with a mention of gravel and/or macadam roads

1928 

All-Weather Roads, plus (Blue) printing

1929 - 1931 

All-Weather Roads, plus (Black) printing

For the "Green Guide" series, cover styles changed over the years as shown below:



1908-10 1911-14 1915-16 1917-19 1920 1921



1922 1923 1924-29 bk cvr 1924-26 bk cvr 1927-29 1930-31

Automobile Club of Southern California

Some idea of the publication year for early maps that aren't dated can be obtained from the address of their offices in Los Angeles:

'**758 S. Olive**" (or "**8th & Olive**') prior to 1914

'**1344 S. Figueroa**' from 1914 to 1923

'**Figueroa & Adams**' from 1923 to 1927

'**2601 S. Figueroa**' starting in 1927.

1929 to 1934, codes usually read right to left as month-day-year:

'**92717**' = July 17, 1929 (each digit right to left)

'**29163**' = March 16, 1929 (code right to left, sub-components left to right)

'**03311**' = Jan. 13, 1930 -or- Nov. 3, 1930 (ambiguous, could be either)

1935 to mid-1940s, codes read left to right as month-year:

'**6-35**' = June 1935

'**436**' = April 1936

Mid-1940s to 1962, codes read left to right as day-year reversed-month:

'**1744**' = April 1, 1947

'**218412**' = Dec. 21, 1948

'**1947**' = July 1, 1949 (NOT 1947!)

'**C-5361**' = Jan. 5, 1963 (some codes preceded by '**C-**')

Starting 1963 codes read left to right as month-year:

'**9-67**' = Sept. 1967