

Gousha Road Map Date Codes

by **Mark Greaves** (RMCA #39)



The H.M. GOUSHA COMPANY
Road Map Specialists

The H. M. Gousha Company got its start when Harry Gousha, a sales executive working for Rand McNally, left the company in 1926 to start his own business. It didn't take him long to become Rand McNally's chief competitor, landing contracts to publish road maps for various oil companies, including Conoco, Gulf and Standard of Indiana, as early as 1927. This year is the starting point for Gousha map date codes, with the letter "A" used to indicate that year, with subsequent years running through the alphabet – "B" for 1928, "C" for 1929 and so on through "Z" for 1952. When Gousha ran out of letters, they simply doubled the letters for another 26 years, using "AA" for 1953 through "ZZ" for 1978. Then things got a little more complicated. They started using one system for a couple of years, with "AB" for 1979 and "AC" for 1980, but then switched to a new strategy, using "AN" for 1981, "MZ" for 1982 and continuing with this pattern until the company was bought by Rand McNally and no longer produced maps after 1996. See the chart below for a complete listing of Gousha date codes from 1927 through 1996.

A	1927		O	1941		CC	1955		QQ	1969		OB	1983
B	1928		P	1942		DD	1956		RR	1970		YL	1984
C	1929		Q	1943		EE	1957		SS	1971		CP	1985
D	1930		R	1944		FF	1958		TT	1972		KX	1986
E	1931		S	1945		GG	1959		UU	1973		QD	1987
F	1932		T	1946		HH	1960		VV	1974		WJ	1988
G	1933		U	1947		II	1961		WW	1975		ER	1989
H	1934		V	1948		JJ	1962		XX	1976		IV	1990
I	1935		W	1949		KK	1963		YY	1977		SF	1991
J	1936		X	1950		LL	1964		ZZ	1978		UH	1992

K	1937		Y	1951		MM	1965		AB	1979		GT	1993
L	1938		Z	1952		NN	1966		AC	1980		NA	1994
M	1939		AA	1953		OO	1967		AN	1981		ZM	1995
N	1940		BB	1954		PP	1968		MZ	1982		BO	1996

That is the simple explanation, but of course things are never quite as easy as they seem. The biggest point of confusion with Gousha date codes is that they used various letters in other parts of their map codes. A typical code from the 1930s might look something like "G-231-J.C." The "G" in this case indicates the year 1933, and the "231" is a code for the area mapped (Illinois). Most Gousha codes are then followed by "J.C." or "S.C." but sometimes it is just "J" or just "S" or nothing at all. It is not known what these "J C" and "S C" letters stand for (anyone have any ideas?), but it is important not to confuse those with the date codes. The best way to be sure is to use other date clues, such as cover designs, copyright dates and so forth. Another rule of thumb is that the letter(s) AFTER the 3-digit area code are NOT the date code, and always be wary of the letters C, J and S. Of course, the letters C, J and S do get used as date codes for 1929, 1936 and 1945 respectively, but the correct date can usually be figured out by examining other clues. Many oil company maps also have a date code of some sort on the cover, such as Conoco and Chevron.

Another problem can arise when the date code is left off for some unknown reason. For example, I have a Conoco map of Nebraska that only has the code "239-J-C." This is NOT the date code! But it does have codes of "10-K" on the city insets, indicating a 1937 map. Many of the Chevron booklet style maps from the late '40s do not have date codes, only the area codes. For example, 1948 Arizona maps have only "635-S" codes, where 635 indicates the Arizona map, and "S" does NOT mean 1945. But most of these have copyright dates, so they aren't too difficult to date. After 1953 it gets easier, as the date codes become two letters. Plus, starting in 1956, almost all Gousha maps have copyright dates on them.

As a general rule, it is best to use the date code chart on this page as a guide, but always look carefully and consider other clues before assigning a date to your road map. I have even seen cases where there is conflicting information, such as one date code on the main map and a different code on the insets, or a date code that doesn't agree with a copyright or cover date. In cases like that, I generally go with the latest date for dating the map.

Gousha date code scheme for 1981 through 1996 (and beyond)

ABCDEFGHIJKLM

NOPQRSTUVWXYZ

The best way to visualize the pattern is to split the alphabet into two sections, as above. The first code (1981) uses the first letters from each section (AN). Next, use the last letters from each section (MZ). Now, switch to using the second section first, and use the first remaining letters from each section (OB), followed by the last remaining letters from each section (YL). Every two years, switch between starting with the first or second sections of the alphabet, and alternate between first and last remaining letters to continue the pattern. When you run out of letters (GT in 1993), just repeat the cycle backwards. So, if Gousha had continued to make maps after 1996, their codes would have been LY in 1997, PC in 1998, XK in 1999, and so on until they reached TG in 2006.

Update on Gousha Road Map Codes

by Curtis Carroll (RMCA #46)

I remember decoding the new format of Gousha map codes back in the mid-80s and figured it was to confuse the competition. I remember Tom Deiley's, one of Gousha's production managers, disappointment and surprise when I revealed that I had broken the code when talking to him back then. When I worked for Gousha, from early 1994 to the end in June, 1996, I found out otherwise.

The bane of retail map publishing, and in fact all of printed publishing, is returns. When Gousha's future relied more on retail maps than free, giveaway maps, they started taking the edition years off because distributors would return two or three year old maps for credit even though, in many cases, they were still the current edition or at least current enough to sell. Internally, they still had to know what year a particular map was issued so they devised a scheme that would hide that. AB, AC, and so on, was too easy to decipher.

Another nugget of information I learned is that the number that preceded the letter year-code represents the month in which the main map, or inset, was updated in that 'edition year'. I recall the edition year being May to April, so that a 5-MM would mean the map was updated in May, 1964 and 4-MM, April, 1965. I

believe Gousha started doing this in the early '50s. The other numbers in the string, like Mark's examples: 239 and 635, had something to do with the file drawers where the film was stored in fireproof vaults. I don't know what the letters S,J, or C mean.

