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# When your subject is bigger than your office.

## Act3 Partners captures giant maps at the San Francisco Public Utility Commission

The archive at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is the most extensive collection of documents, photographs, blueprints, drawings and maps that chronicle the development of the water system for Northern California. The system is a public works infrastructure on the same scale as the railroads and highways, with a profound influence on the history of California.

What started as the Spring Valley Water Company in 1860 morphed into a vast system of dams, aqueducts, canals and pipes that stretches from the Sierras to the ocean – and fueled the growth of San Francisco, the East Bay and Silicon Valley.

Big projects seem to beget big maps. That was clearly the case when the PUC recently discovered a treasure trove of documents and maps from the 1860's to the early 1900's that were presumed lost in the 1906 earthquake.



A linen backed map showing the water distribution system for Contra Costa County. It's almost as big as Contra Costa County.



4 x 6 feet is big for a capture but 8 x 18 feet is ridiculous! It's especially challenging in the PUC archive because there isn't 18 feet of unobstructed space anywhere in the annex!

Necessity being the mother of invention, we rigged a novel pipe and drape system that simulated the flat moving map system we use for smaller maps. We draped the map over a horizontal bar near the ceiling and successively pulled section after section over the bar and into the camera's field of view. A pair of construction lasers helped assure that the map was perfectly flat to the camera, which is key to getting a good stitched result. It sounds complicated but once we were set up the maps were captured in mere minutes!

It's satisfying to know that these amazing relics of California history have come out of complete obscurity and can now be seen in sharp detail by a wider audience.

To learn more about our Raw Rapid Capture Process visit us at [Act3Partners.com](http://Act3Partners.com).

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