

## “This is Mississippi, calling Granite Falls . . . Over!”

Visitors to museums and genealogical societies in Snohomish County are often amazed by the unique mapping capability we’ve developed over the past few years. Granite Falls Historical Society (GFHS) led an effort to digitize maps that stretch all the way from original homestead lines, mining claims, and railroad maps, through decades of township maps (showing individual property owners) and fire insurance maps (showing every outhouse and chicken coop), up to modern parcel lines, aerial photographs, and “special spots” like County Corners, Centennial Trail, and individually significant historical sites and structures.

All of these maps are “geo-referenced” . . . that is, scaled exactly the same and placed precisely on top of one another, so easy comparisons can be made. It takes only an instant to answer the question, “Who homesteaded the property I live on?”, or “Exactly where was the railroad depot, and where did the track pass through town?”

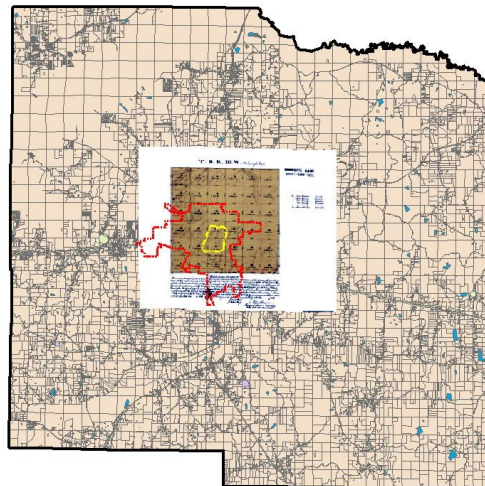
Imagine our surprise when we got a phone call from Oxford, Mississippi asking us if we could assist them in selling the idea of doing the same thing for their area. They’d read an article in History News magazine (published by the American Association of State and Local History, AASLH) about a small town in the Pacific Northwest who’d learned to incorporate maps into their research tools, and called AASLH to get a good phone number.

You see, Oxford MS is a classic old southern town . . . courthouse in the middle, surrounded by commercial buildings, amazingly well-preserved, and the entire area is the subject of intense tourist research. William Faulkner lived there, and in his novels about the fictitious Yoknapatawpha County, he described in detail various places and buildings in Lafayette County MS, the centroid of which is the city of Oxford. Thousands of people visit to find and explore Faulkner’s world.

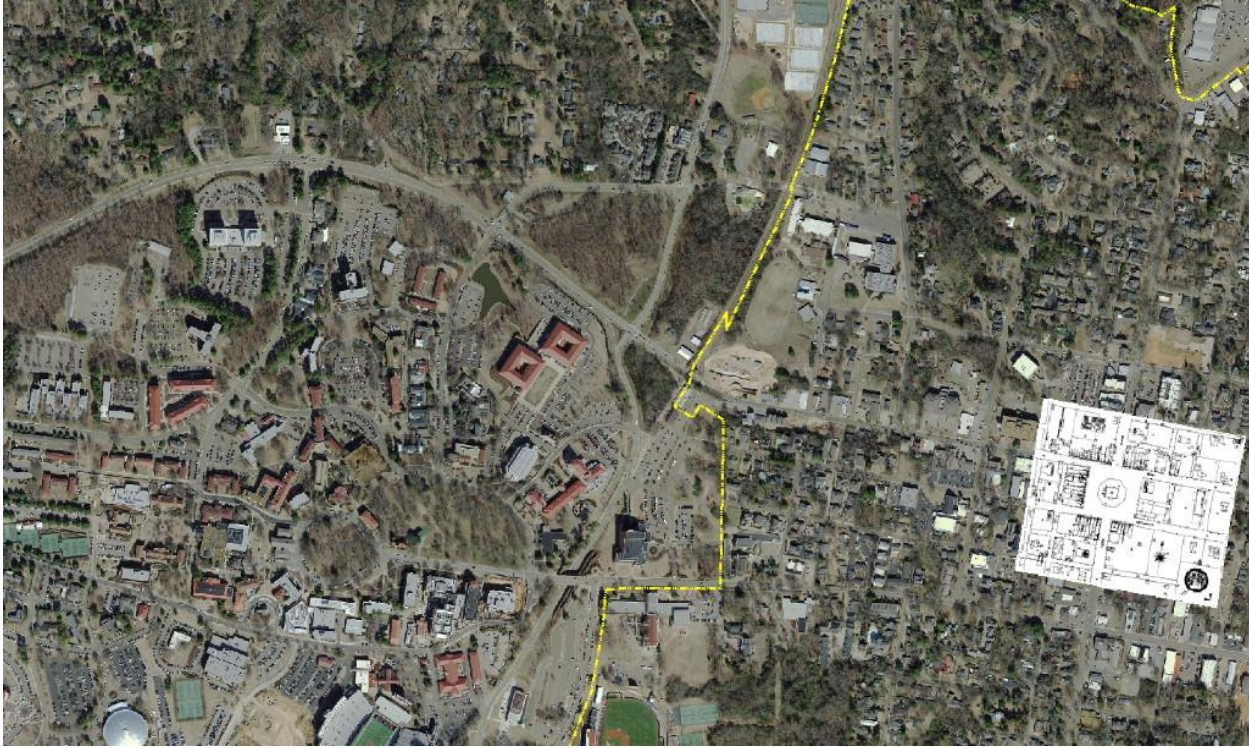
The local historic association wanted to convince the City, and local tourism bureau, and “Ole Miss” (which is a large part of Oxford) to combine forces and make history more available by combining their old maps with modern technology. They watched automated Powerpoint slides and videos from GFHS, and knew the approach would be great for them as well, but hoped to get something “personalized” in time for their big annual meeting in March, 2015. So GFHS agreed to help.

One Oxford employee sent us modern property lines of Lafayette County, along with city boundaries and aerial photographs of the downtown area. The local historical society sent us fire insurance maps from 1885 through 1925 of the downtown area. Another local historian sent us a map of the local township from 1833! GFHS took care of the geo-referencing and provided them a multi-layer map they could use for demonstration:

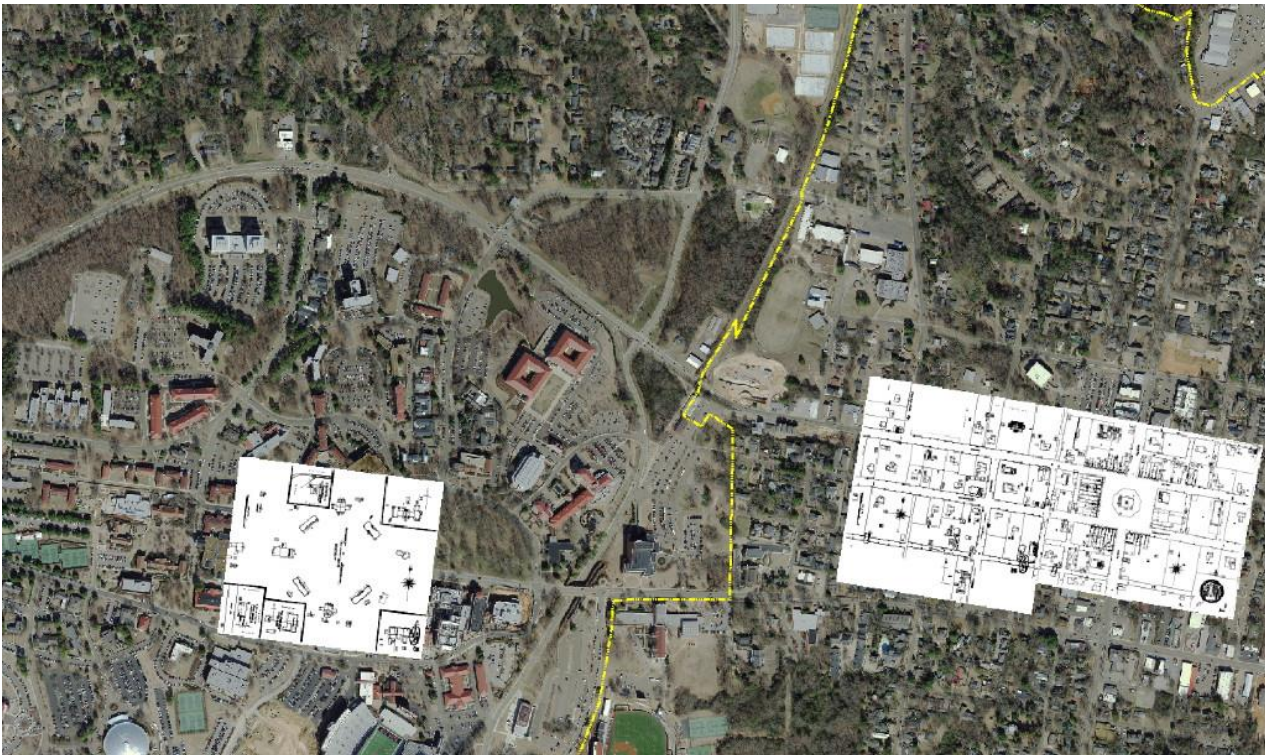
- 1) This is Lafayette County, MS, with an 1833 map placed exactly where it should be, showing details of property ownership at the time. The red and yellow lines mark today’s Oxford city limits and the “smaller” downtown business district.



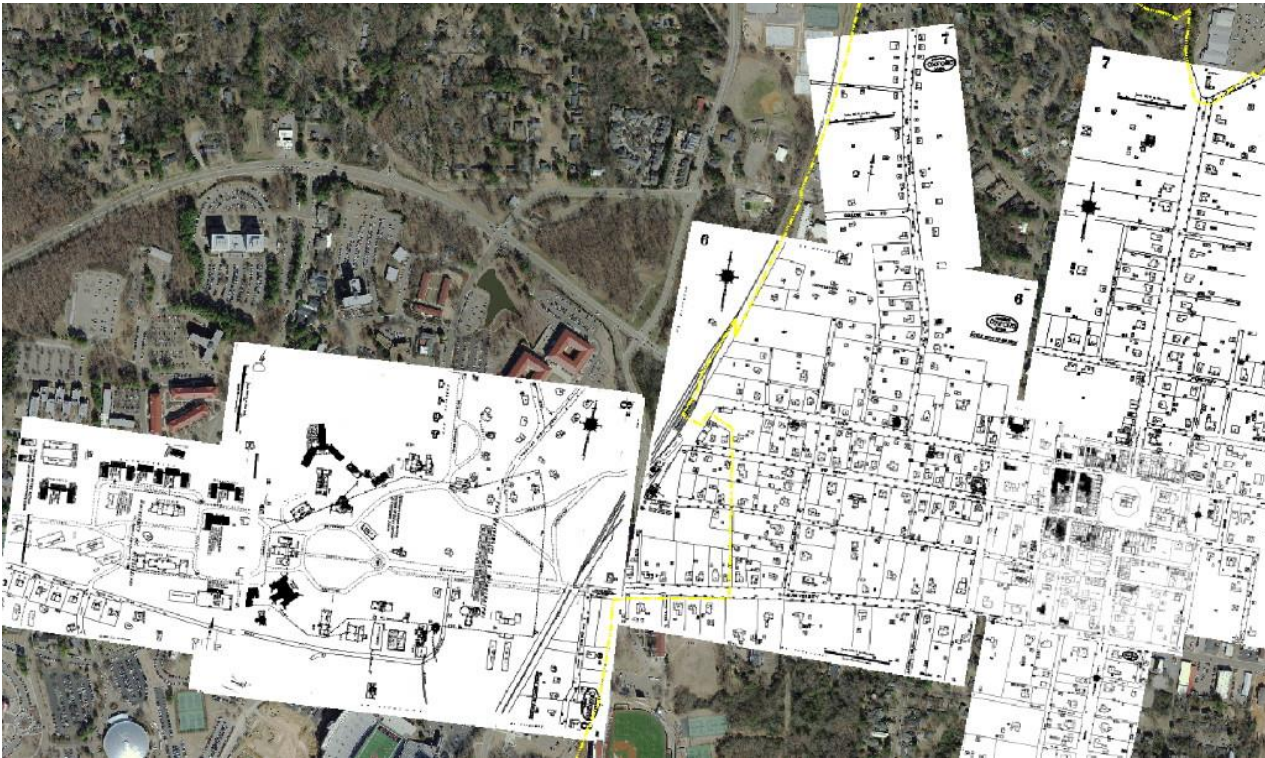
2) Zooming in much closer, you can see part of today's downtown business district with the 1885 Sanborn Fire Insurance map superimposed (clearly the town was much smaller in 1885). Courthouse Square is at the center of the fire map.



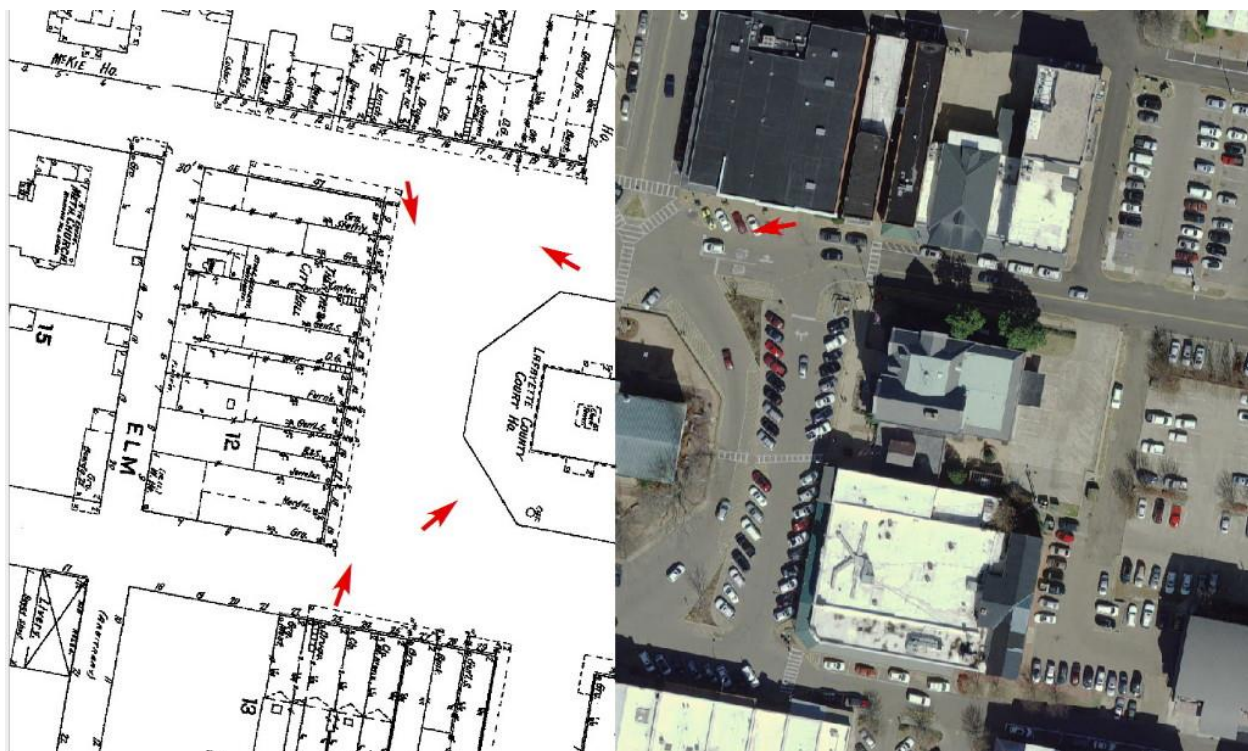
3) By 1895, the town had grown significantly. The separate area to the west is actually the fledgling University of Mississippi, appearing as a group of about eight buildings.



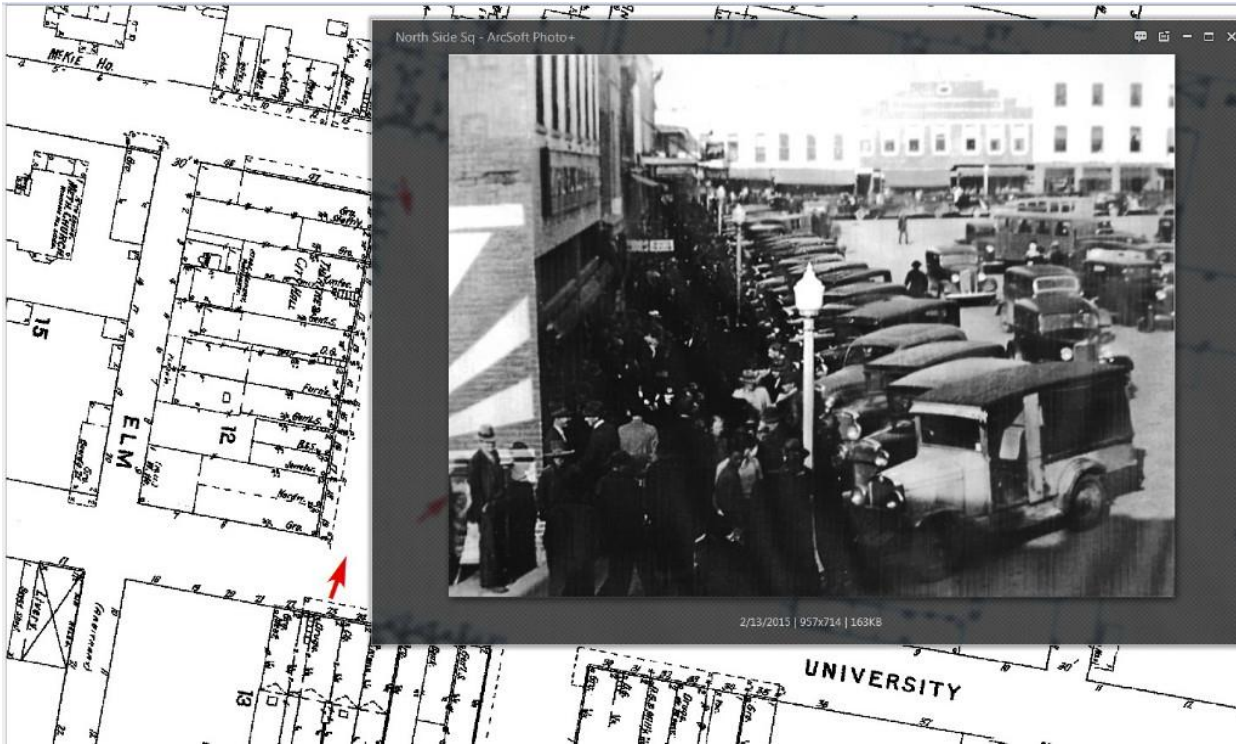
4) By 1925, both Oxford and Ole Miss had grown significantly!



5) Zooming in to see just Courthouse Square, we can actually “swipe” the 1925 fire map on and off the screen to do a comparison between “then and now”. Notice the arrows on the map. We can click on each of those arrows to display what you would have seen had you been standing on the arrow, facing in the same direction, “back in the day”. Let’s click on the arrow at the lower left . . .



6) You can see the west side of the square on the left, with the north side in the distance! By clicking on the various arrows, we can look at all sides of the square.



The folks in Oxford were wildly successful at their March meeting, gaining the commitment of all parties to pursue this mapping project to completion. They sent a letter to our Snohomish County organization, saying “we are years ahead of where we would have been without your help and experience!”

Remember, if you have questions about the history of Snohomish County, this mapping system is available for your research. We look forward to helping you! Take advantage of your local museum!