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## New BPL center boasts 2nd-largest map collection among US public libraries

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 21, 2011 04:09 PM

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Above is *Nova totius terrarum orbis geographica ac hydrographica tabula*, dated 1630.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The Boston Public Library will unveil a new map center on Saturday that boasts the second-largest map collection housed in any public library in the country.

In a recently-renovated, 5,700 square-foot space on the first floor of the Central Library's historic McKim Building, the [Norman B. Leventhal Map Center](#) features a new exhibitions gallery, a public learning center, and a reading room for rare map research, library officials said in a press release this week.

The center also features a custom stained glass reproduction of a 1775 map of Boston, exploration areas for children, climate-controlled map storage and a three-foot diameter world globe, the announcement said.

Boston library officials say the center ranks among the top 10 in the country in terms of collection size, the significance of its pre-1900 material, and its digitization program.

"Some of the Boston Public Library's finest preservation and innovation work can be seen in the Leventhal Map Center," library president Amy E. Ryan said in a statement. "From careful care of rare maps to dynamic displays of artifacts

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and atlases, the Leventhal Map Center appeals to the researcher in all of us – whether it is cartography or curiosity that draws us in.”

A [ribbon-cutting ceremony](#) will be held Saturday at 11 a.m. at the space where a six-month city capital renovation project recently finished.

Created in 2004, The Leventhal Map Center is a nonprofit organization established as a public-private partnership between the city’s library and philanthropist Norman Leventhal, according to the library. Its mission is to combine the Boston library’s permanent collection of 200,000 maps and 5,000 atlases with a select group of rare maps collected by Leventhal in order to make both collections publicly available.

The maps are displayed through exhibitions, educational programs, and a website that includes more than 3,600 digitized maps at [maps.bpl.org](http://maps.bpl.org), officials said. The collection is global in scope, dating from the 15th century to today, with a particular strength in maps and atlases of Boston, Massachusetts, and New England.

“It is unique among the major collections because it also combines these features with exceptional educational programs to advance geographic literacy among students in grades K-12 and enhance the teaching of subjects from history to mathematics to language arts,” the library announcement said.

“The opening of this map center is a testament to the success that public-private partnerships can bring to Boston,” Mayor Thomas M. Menino said in the release. “Together with city dollars, a private investment by Norman Leventhal makes it possible to showcase and share more of what the Boston Public Library has to offer to the people of Boston.”

Following tomorrow’s ribbon cutting, there will be exhibition tours within the center and, at 11:45 a.m., a geography-centered puppet show for children held in the nearby courtyard.

The map center’s initial exhibitions will be open to the public at all times that the Central Library in Copley Square is open. The exhibitions include: “Treasures” and “Unconventional Maps: Exploring the Stories of Cartographic Curiosities.”

Norman Leventhal said in a statement: “I commend Mayor Menino and the Boston Public Library for constantly working to find ways to make the riches of Boston available to all her residents, not just the most fortunate among us.”

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