John Mitchell’s Map of North America (1755):
A Study of the Use and Publication of Official Maps
in Eighteenth-Century Britain

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ABSTRACT: John Mitchell’s famous map of North America stands as an archetype of the official publication of maps in eighteenth-century Britain. It was, however, the product of a special effort by the Earl of Halifax, president of the Board of Trade, who sought to advance his own aggressive agenda with respect to the British empire in North America in the run-up to the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763, known in North America as the French and Indian War, 1755–1760), to persuade his ministerial colleagues both directly through negotiation and indirectly by manipulating public opinion. This re-evaluation of Mitchell’s work concludes that its archetypal status is unwarranted. The practices that were developed by administrators in London and the colonies for commissioning, using and circulating regional maps are examined. A distinction is made between the use by officials of printed maps as sources for general geographical knowledge and of manuscript maps for knowledge specific to certain administrative issues. Then the origins of Mitchell’s map are re-examined. The conclusion reached is that the map is truly innovative: it was the result of a uniquely successful solicitation of information from the colonies and its publication broke with the established patterns of map circulation and consumption.

KEYWORDS: North American colonies, Board of Trade and Plantations, official mapping, colonial mapping, map use, public discourse, French and Indian War, Seven Years’ War, John Mitchell, Henry Popple, George Montagu Dunk (Earl of Halifax), Philip Yorke (Earl of Hardwicke), Thomas Pelham-Holles (Duke of Newcastle).

A significant number of published geographical maps of Britain’s North American colonies are known to have been based on material that originally circulated in manuscript within the relatively restricted confines of administrative circles. Yet we have no satisfactory model to explain how and why official maps ended up being published. Why should some end up in print when many others did not? Were government officials responsible for ‘pushing’ those maps onto the
market? If so, what were their motives? Alternatively, were commercial mapsellers responsible for ‘pulling’ official maps out of archives and publishing them? If so, how did they have access to the archives or indeed know what was available? Were there ‘special relationships’ between officials and mapsellers? These important questions have to be answered if we are to understand the place of published maps in the public debates carried on in eighteenth-century London concerning Britain’s relationship with its colonies and to the other imperial powers in North America.

Map historians have traditionally assumed that the publication of official maps relating to North America was the inevitable and natural culmination of the cartographic project itself, otherwise how would new geographical information be made widely available? The supposition was undoubtedly shaped by the publication of two large maps of eastern North America endorsed as having been prepared, with the ‘approbation’ of the Board of Trade and Plantations from maps in the Board’s archives: Henry Popple and Clement Lempriere’s map of 1733 and John Mitchell’s map of 1755 (Fig. 1 and Plate 9).

The aim in this article is to explore the relationships between official and published maps of Britain’s North American colonies by considering whether Mitchell’s famous map was in fact representative of some general cartographic system. I start by analysing the structure of official mapping in the century or so before Mitchell prepared his map. This period runs from the 1670s, when a recognizably imperial regime began to be established by Charles II, with the first serious attempts to bring the North American colonies under Crown control, and ends just before 1763, after politicians and administrators in London intensified their attempts to control the colonies. My aim is to discover the different ways in which officials on both sides of the Atlantic used manuscript and published maps.

I then examine the origins of Mitchell’s map to elucidate why it was made and why it was published. (These are not necessarily the same issue.) The second part of the paper corrects the long-established narrative of the map’s origins, construed in terms of American nationalism and exceptionalism. The project was initiated not by Mitchell himself, as has generally been understood, but by the Earl of Halifax, president of the Board of Trade, who sought to promote his own imperial agenda both within the government and outside it among the British public. In doing so, Halifax altered the protocols for acquiring and managing geographical information from the colonies. Mitchell’s map turns out to be unrepresentative of the general system operating at the time. Rather, it resulted from a specific moment in relations between officials in London and the colonies; at best, it might be suggested that Mitchell’s map prefigured the map-publication projects of the post-1763 era of intensified imperial control of the colonies.

British Officials and Their Maps

The history of the use of maps for administrative purposes comprises a dialectic of desire and ability: the desire of some officials for maps and the ability of others to provide them. In the case of the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world, we find constant demands by administrators in London for small-scale, regional maps of the North American colonies and an equally constant inability by colonial officials to meet those demands. Colonial officials could make maps only for their own immediate administrative needs relating, for example, to boundary disputes or military planning. Official discourse concerning the geography of the colonies accordingly featured a distinctive pattern in which administrators treated specially commissioned maps (mostly manuscript) differently from commercially available maps (mostly printed). Officials used the specially commissioned maps in relation to the specific administrative issues for which they had been made. In contrast, officials used published maps to acquire general geographical information. The final issue to be considered in establishing the context within which John Mitchell produced his map is therefore how and why some maps left governmental confines for publication by commercial mapsellers.

Administrative Anxieties

Britain’s transatlantic empire was as ‘polyarchic’ as every other aspect of British government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with power and responsibility distributed across a bewildering array of institutions. Responsibility for the colonies ultimately lay with the monarch, who, as the corporate entity of king-in-council, worked through and with the advice of the Privy Council. After the 1688 revolution, however, Parliament steadily appropriated the powers of the Privy Council, a process that intensified with the accession of the House of Hanover in 1714 and the formation of the parallel institution of the
Fig. 1. John Mitchell, *A Map of the British and French Dominions in North America with the Roads, Distances, Limits and Extent of the Settlements*, engraved by Thomas Kitchin (London, Andrew Millar, 1755). Variant 1. Copper engraving in eight sheets; sectioned into quarter sheets and mounted on cloth. 136 x 195 cm; c.1:2,000,000. Library of Congress, G3300 1755. M5 Vault Shelf. (Reproduced with permission from the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress.)
Cabinet. The authority of this body of political advisors who clustered around the newly evolved position of prime minister came from Parliament rather than the monarch. By the 1720s, Parliament itself began to take the initiative in colonial affairs. Specific responsibility for the colonies within both the Privy Council and the Cabinet lay with the secretary of state for the southern department. Neither the monarch and his Privy Council, nor Parliament and the secretary of state, however, had much time for colonial issues, being far more engrossed with domestic and European affairs.5

Actual oversight of the colonies thus fell to a number of lower-level institutions within the British government, among them the Admiralty, which enforced the navigation acts; the Board of Customs, which collected the tariffs set by those acts; and the Diocese of London, which officially sanctioned and regulated the practice of established religion in the colonies. The principal institution of imperial government was the succession of committees organized after 1670 to collect information and to advise the Privy Council on issues of both trade and the colonies: the Council for Foreign Plantations (1670–1674); the Committee of the Lords of Trade and Plantations (also known as Lords of Trade, 1675–1696); and the Lord Commissioners of Trade and Plantations (or Board of Trade, 1696–1782). The Board of Trade initially possessed some limited powers, but these were soon abrogated by successive secretaries of state. Otherwise, these groups had no formal executive power.

The power wielded by the committees stemmed only from the personal political standing of their presidents and secretaries. Their common purpose was to report to the Privy Council via the secretary of state for the southern department, to recommend appointments, and to review colonial legislation, boundary disputes, foreign trade, defence arrangements and relations with indigenous peoples. The final decision was always made by the king-in-council. The awkward position of each committee as the point of contact between the colonies and the Privy Council was reinforced by colonial governors who routinely ignored the committees altogether and corresponded directly with the secretary of state.6

Maps of the colonies were used at this lower level of the imperial administration. Customs commissioners seem to have relied on regional maps to understand the spatial implications of the navigation acts, although they did not pursue any systematic programme to collect maps.7 The Privy Council’s committees, understandably, showed the most geographical interest. Indeed, from as early as 1670, committee records reveal a constant anxiety over the lack of knowledge about conditions in the colonies. Item 16 of an agenda from that year, when the Privy Council laid several charges on the newly organized Council for Foreign Plantations, dealt with the need to acquire geographical knowledge:

You are also by all Ways and means you may to procure exact Mapps, Platts or Charts of all and Every [one of] our said Plantations abroad, together with the Mapps and Descriptions of their respective Ports, Harbours, Forts, Bayes, Rivers with the Depth of their respective Channels coming in or going up, and the Soundings all along upon the said respective Coasts from place to place, and the same so had, you are carefully to Register and Kepe.8

A similar charge was repeated in 1672 as an essential prerequisite for the Council for Foreign Plantations’ execution of its other duties. These included the general requirement for the council-lors ‘to enquire, and informe yourselves by the best ways and Means you can of the State and Condition’ of the plantations as well as more specific questions such as ‘What Castles or Forts they have, [and] how situated’, or ‘What the boundaryes, and Contents of their Lands are’.9

When the Council for Foreign Plantations was disbanded in 1674, its papers were dispersed among its members, and no record exists of the maps it had collected. One of the first tasks faced by the Lords of Trade in 1675 was therefore to reassemble the Council’s map collection. Apparently unsuccessful in this, and facing a pronounced lack of maps at a time of unrest and rebellion in both Virginia and New England, the Lords of Trade in January 1676 inserted an order into a circular letter to all the colonial governors, requesting that maps of each territory be sent to London. Although often repeated, this directive produced few results. In the same vein, Edward Randolph was instructed in the same year, on the occasion of his first mission to Massachusetts Bay, to procure ‘an exact Map of the whole Country and town of Boston’. In 1678, Randolph gave a copy of such a map to Charles II as part of his report on the establishment of an efficient mechanism to enforce the navigation acts in New England.10

The administrative desire for geographical knowledge was subsequently regularized within the long sets of instructions, drafted first by the Lords of Trade and then by the Board of Trade, which the Privy Council issued to all newly
appointed royal governors in conjunction with their commissions. The first of these cartographic instructions was presented to Sir Edmund Andros in 1686, when James II appointed him governor of the new Dominion of New England: ‘you shall transmit unto us by the first opportunity a map with the exact description of the whole province under your government with the several fortifications you shall find or erect there’. Andros attempted to fulfill the directive and instructed a surveyor to map the rivers and coast of Massachusetts Bay and Maine. Although that work was interrupted when the surveyor was imprisoned during the 1688 revolution, Andros was able to transmit some maps to Britain. 11

When the Lords of Trade were disbanded in 1696, their powerful secretary William Blathwayt sequestered their records, including the maps, in an effort to control the new Board of Trade. 12 The Board’s secretariat seem to have been especially anxious about the lack of maps and so repeated the directive given to Andros to every newly appointed governor in each of the colonies throughout the eighteenth century, right up until the American Revolution. Yet, regardless of the repetition and at times urgency of the demand, it seems that only once did a colonial governor comply with the Council’s instructions and send a map to London. 13

The reasons for the almost complete lack of compliance lie in the nature of the colonial government. Each colony’s administrative structure was unique. The apportionment of executive, legislative and judicial powers in each colony was as much a historical creation as it was a legal construction and changed substantially over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nor was regularity among the colonies imposed when, after 1670, the Crown increasingly enforced its authority on the corporate and proprietary colonies as part of a larger campaign to curtail the hundreds of autonomous corporations that controlled many aspects of British life. The problem was that the reach of the authorities in London was limited. They could do little more than determine who should be appointed as governors, military commanders-in-chief and members of governors’ councils. After 1690, the politics of each colony centred on the struggles between the governors and the locally elected legislatures for the upper hand in controlling taxation and exercising executive power. As a result, governors had neither the opportunity nor the funds to comply with all the general directives they received at the time of their appointment.

They were faced with the more pressing demands of colonial administration and ongoing battles with colonial legislatures over their salaries and administrative finances. Recognizing this, the Privy Council did not insist that the governors fulfill every instruction given to them. Rather, the instructions comprised general desiderata to guide the governors’ actions. The Council’s directives to governors to provide them with maps were thus pro forma statements of the potential utility of consistently updated geographical knowledge. 14

At the same time, the colonial authorities were relatively unconcerned about knowledge of their own territories. There were, of course, some spatial anxieties, especially over colonial boundaries and routes of military significance, but no administrative concern for making maps was evident unless and until maps were specifically needed. Colonial authorities were certainly reluctant to underwrite the production of general-purpose regional maps. Cadwallader Colden, surveyor general of New York, had sought to compile a general map of the colonies in the 1720s, but he was denied support and funding by his province’s governor and legislature. He was thus much aggrieved when, at the start of the Seven Years’ War, the new British commander-in-chief in North America asked him to supply just such a map. 15

Other instances of this apparent lack of general geographical interest include the Virginia assembly’s 1744 rejection of Joshua Fry’s 1738 proposal to survey and map that colony, and the combined rejection in 1753 by the governor and general court of Massachusetts Bay of Cornelius Douglass’s proposal for help in finishing the ‘Plan of the British Dominions of New England’ privately prepared by his late uncle William. 16 In each instance, personal disquiet over the state of territorial knowledge was inadequate to overcome institutional poverty and, perhaps, complacency.

Official Map Consumption

Lacking any systematic or continually refreshed supply of maps, colonial and imperial officials alike obtained their general information from commercially available maps. William Blathwayt, for example, assembled his composite atlas of the North American colonies in about 1680 from maps originating in a variety of places. Most he purchased from British mapsellers: maps of the world, of larger regions of North America, and of certain colonies that had some significance for the British public. More detailed maps of the British American
colonies—most of which were still limited to the coastal margin—were available in manuscript from commercial chartmakers in London's docklands who made maps on demand. Blathwayt obtained detailed printed maps of French colonies in Paris, and maps of South America were available from Dutch sources through London mapsellers. Finally, to secure map coverage for a few areas, and Massachusetts Bay in particular, Blathwayt had to resort to taking copies of manuscript maps that had been prepared in the colonies for more specific reasons than simply giving a general sense of geography to the Lords of Trade.17

The Board of Trade also relied on commercial maps, that is, those printed for the open market. In 1752, for example, the Earl of Halifax, president of the Board, and the Duke of Newcastle, then secretary of state, were developing plans to oppose the French in North America. In the process, Halifax consulted and took measurements from a map, perhaps Solomon Bolton’s 1752 derivative of a map of North America by J. B. B. d’Anville.18 More generally, the 1780 catalogue of the Board’s map collection listed 120 maps that were certainly geographical in nature, out of a total of some 400 maps of all sorts, including topographical plans of fortifications (built and planned), property surveys of land patents, and marine charts of coasts and harbours. Half of the geographical maps were printed, and most of these were identified with the names of leading publishers such as Thomas Jefferys and the Robert de Vaugondy family. The others were manuscript maps that were both regionally focused and clearly related to specific administrative issues. A significant portion of these manuscript maps were produced after 1763 and the intensification of imperial control.19

Reliance upon commercial materials was not limited to maps but encompassed other geographical materials as well, although their use was rarely acknowledged in the minutes of the various committees. A rare exception to this silence occurred in 1719, when members of the Board of Trade briefly concentrated on British fishing rights in Nova Scotia, during which they consulted both Samuel Purchas’s Purchas his Pilgrimes (London, 1625) and John Ogilby’s America (London, 1671).20

A similar reliance on commercial maps can be seen among colonial administrators as well. For example, in 1746 Benjamin Franklin purchased two sets of Popple and Lempiere’s Map of the British Empire in America (1733), one to be displayed beside the main door to the chamber of Pennsylvania’s House of Assembly, the other to be bound in atlas form for more private consultation by the assemblymen.21 A 1770 inventory of the governor’s residence in Williamsburg, Virginia, mentioned that on the walls of the front parlour were displayed Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson’s map of Virginia together with maps of North America by both Mitchell and Emmanuel Bowen; another impression of the Fry and Jefferson map was kept in the room’s cupboard.22 In February 1756, Massachusetts Bay’s House of Representatives resolved to purchase, frame and hang seven recently published maps of North America, presumably to have them at hand to follow the events of the new war with the French.23

We can therefore conclude that on both sides of the Atlantic administrators relied on maps available on the open market to understand the overall spatial structure of the colonies. In this respect, administrators and politicians used and related to published maps of the colonies in the same way as they did other published maps they encountered in the rest of their lives, which is to say as sources of general geographical information.

In contrast, the same administrators and politicians met their specific needs for geographical information by commissioning special maps. Thus, when the governor of New York proposed in 1700 to build a fort within the territory of the Onondagas, one of the Iroquois nations, he noted that his ‘present idea of the country and its situation in the [available published] map’ gave him a good idea of where the fort should be located, but his geographical knowledge remained insufficiently specific. He therefore sent Colonel Wolfgang Wilhelm Römer to map the country of the Iroquois more closely in order to ensure that the fort would be placed for maximum military effect.24

Many of the specially commissioned maps prepared in the colonies were subsequently sent to London to inform officials there. These maps did not circulate widely but remained in manuscript within an institutional and archival setting. They were read and interrogated only in conjunction with the particular administrative task at hand and in concert with a variety of letters, reports and other documentation. Once the task was complete, all were deposited in the archives. Small maps were generally stored with the associated documents. Larger maps, however, could not be easily housed in document files and so were routinely removed for storage, thereby creating highly varied, unsystematic and artificial administrative map collections. Although manuscript and printed maps
could be housed together in these collections, they were not necessarily treated in the same way. In particular, with the exception of the few maps printed in conjunction with lawsuits before the Privy Council, specially commissioned maps were disseminated when necessary to other administrators and politicians in manuscript. They were neither printed nor published.25

Official Maps in Private and Public

Over time, some of the maps that officials had specially commissioned were incorporated into commercially published maps; most were published in London, but some appeared in print in the colonies. The map of the boundaries of Massachusetts Bay commissioned from William Reed in 1665, for example, eventually served as a principal source for maps published in Boston in 1677 and in London in 1676 and 1677. The title of the Boston map, the woodcut in William Hubbard’s Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians, explicitly referred to having been ‘done by the best Pattern that could be had’.26 This phrase implies that Hubbard had access to other maps which he might have used as patterns for his own, suggesting further that some manuscript maps circulated beyond the confines of official discourse and government archives to enter private geographical discourse. And, indeed, the private, non-government archives to enter private geographical interests. As a result, some maps commissioned by government officials ended up being circulated privately among governmental or non-public circulation, did not preclude the transfer of maps from one discourse to the other privately among geographical cognoscenti. The transfer of maps from one discourse to the other followed neither pattern nor system but depended upon happenstance. Furthermore, the transfer of maps from private hands to publication was similarly fortuitous. Publication depended upon either gentlemen wishing to see their own maps in print or mapsellers being allowed to copy maps in the private collections of gentlemen that they thought would meet the demands of the general public.28

John Green, for example, explained that he had compiled his New Map of Nova Scotia, and Cape Britain (London, Thomas Jefferys, 1755) from previously printed maps and ‘a considerable Number of manuscript Charts, Surveys, Draughts, and Plans . . . most of which were either communicated to myself, or procured by my Friends’. Those friends in turn contacted a ‘number’ of collectors, and especially General Samuel Waldo who was ‘so extraordinar[ily] beneficient, as even to send to America for Surveys of certain particular Parts which I was at a loss for’. At the same time, Green censured ‘one gentleman’ who ‘refused to communicate the Materials which [he] was in possession of’.29

A variation on the shift from private to public is presented by Henry Popple’s Map of the British Empire in North America. Popple was the grandson, son and younger brother of successive secretaries to the Board of Trade. Before becoming an agent for several of the West Indian colonies, he had worked as a clerk for the Board of Trade for a few months in 1727, and his personal connections with the Board allowed him to draw on its materials to prepare a map as a strictly commercial venture. In making and publishing his Map of the British Empire in North America, Popple apparently sought to take advantage of public interest in the colonies stemming from Parliamentary efforts to reform them, culminating in the chartering of Georgia in 1732 and the Molasses Act of 1733.30 Captain Clement Lempiere prepared the map for Popple.31 Popple presented the map as an official work, claiming in the endorsement on the final sheet that he ‘undertook this Map with the Approbation of the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations’, although the endorsement actually relied for its effect on the testimony of the astronomer, Edmund Halley. As the English commissioners appointed to resolve the boundaries of Acadia–Nova Scotia noted twenty years later, the map was made neither for the Board nor at the Board’s initiative. The Board only subscribed to the map, probably at the instigation of Popple’s elder brother, its secretary, with the idea of sending one copy of the map to each governor in North America.32

The overall pattern by which maps moved, from official to private and from private into public circulation, did not preclude the transfer of maps directly from government archives into publication. There was no official policy of cartographic
secrecy, even if such a policy could have been maintained in the face of the general permeability of British archives. It was simply that administrators and politicians in London had no interest in having maps published for public consumption. It was not until the 1750s that anyone in government circles sought to make maps public; then the Earl of Halifax commissioned John Mitchell’s map of the North American colonies and perhaps also organized the publication of the Fry and Jefferson map of Virginia.

Halifax, Mitchell and the Map

John Mitchell’s eight-sheet Map of the British and French Dominions of North America (1755) has been called, in view of the prominent role it came to play in political affairs, ‘the most important map in American history’. In November 1782, British, American and Spanish diplomats used several variants of the map to visualize and define the borders of the new United States of America, as finalized in the Treaty of Paris (1783). The map’s authoritative status in delimiting the United States–Canadian border was confirmed by the Treaty of Ghent in 1814. The map was still being adduced as evidence in interstate and international legal disputes in the 1930s. Understandably perhaps, studies of Mitchell’s map and its history have tended to be the preserve of American scholars, who have inappropriately construed the history of the map’s origins so as to make it accord with the pervasive and nationalistic belief in the exceptional nature of the United States.

As the story has been told, Mitchell left Virginia in 1746 for Britain. In 1750, he compiled a now-lost map of North America, with the intention of educating the British about France’s aggressive territorial policies there. The map brought Mitchell to the attention of the Earl of Halifax, president of the Board of Trade, who actively supported Mitchell in the preparation of a more complete and correct map. Halifax granted Mitchell access to official archives, solicited new maps from the colonies for his use and finally sanctioned the publication of his completed map in 1755 as propaganda to justify the British position in the imminent French and Indian War (1755–1760) (see Fig. 1 and Plate 9).

This narrative portrays Mitchell as a colonial who seized the initiative to define a proto-American territory in order to protect it from French incursions and to educate British officials about it. In doing so, the narrative neatly affirms the persistent belief that the modern United States was forged solely by British North American colonists who successfully took their destiny in their own hands. This traditional account with its underlying nationalism is too simple, however. The origins of Mitchell’s map need to be situated within the wider military and imperial concerns of the British administration.

It would also appear that the nationalistic narrative has prevented historians from recognizing the importance of several key points of evidence. They have overlooked some significant documents that tell a different story about the origins and political uses of the map. They have treated the French and Indian War as a strictly North American conflict, whereas it can only be understood in the broader context of the Anglo-French competition for dominance in Europe and for global empire overseas. They have also failed to wonder why a physician who had previously shown no interest in geography as a field of study should have set out to make a map on his own initiative. Finally, they have hitherto missed the crucial point that Mitchell’s activities actually broke significantly with the practices whereby administrative maps circulated between the colonies and Britain, and between official and public discourse in Britain.

Mitchell and Halifax

We need to look to someone other than Mitchell as the initiator of the map. This person had to have a position within the British government sufficient to reconfigure the established relationship between official and public mapping. Only one person fits the bill: George Montagu Dunk (1716–1771), second Earl of Halifax, who served as president of the Board of Trade, 1748–1761. Halifax, I argue, recognized the need for a synoptic view of the geopolitical situation in North America, recruited Mitchell as his geographical expert, had him create the necessary view, circulated the resultant manuscript map among his colleagues and had it published as well. Halifax did all this because, unlike his predecessors, he exercised real political power. On the one hand, the Privy Council surrendered some of its authority when several councillors realized that the Board would, for once, have to take the initiative in colonial affairs to resolve the increasingly untenable position of the royal governors of New York and New Jersey. On the other, factional politics within the Whig ministry allowed Halifax to acquire the power,
although not the title, of a secretary of state, complete with a seat in the Cabinet. 40

Halifax took over the Board at the end of the War of Austrian Succession (1741–1748). That war had resulted in a stalemate between French land power and British sea power, and strategists on both sides quickly realized that the balance of power would eventually have to be resolved by land victories in areas of imperial competition beyond Europe, most likely in North America. In restoring the pre-war global status quo between Britain and France, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) gave a new lease of life to their competing claims to the vast region between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, and in particular to the Ohio valley. Furthermore, the treaty included provisions for the formation of a joint commission to resolve the extensive territorial overlap between French Acadia and British Nova Scotia. The North American colonies thus suddenly became strategically significant to both the British and the French. In seeking to learn more about the North American colonies—to which he had, of course, never been—Halifax soon found an informant in the person of John Mitchell (1711–1768).

Mitchell had been born in Virginia and educated at Edinburgh, and he had pursued a successful medical career in the colonies. 41 While in Virginia, his intellectual passions were for medicine, botany and, to a lesser degree, zoology; he published and corresponded widely about these subjects on both sides of the Atlantic. But he had no intellectual commitment to geography and mapping. 42

Poor health forced Mitchell and his wife to seek Britain’s milder climes in 1746. Unfortunately their ship was captured by a French privateer, and although they were released, their belongings were confiscated and Mitchell’s large collection of seeds and plant samples was ruined. Arriving impoverished in Britain, Mitchell perforce relied upon his reputation as a botanist to make a living as a consultant for large landowners who were passionate about horticulture and who sought expert opinions on exotic flora for their gardens. A key figure in this respect was undoubtedly the Duke of Argyll, who was probably responsible for introducing Mitchell to Halifax, another aristocratic gardener. 43

That Halifax approached Mitchell to serve as an expert on colonial affairs is indicated by several pieces of evidence. Mitchell wrote to Cadwallader Colden in March 1749, boasting that he had ‘the good fortune of frequent access & conferences with several [i.e., several people] in power, who are frequently asking me about what happens in our Colonies’, but at the same time complaining that the ‘many things’ he now had ‘in hand about America . . . tire me with scribbling as well as thinking’. And, after some long inquiries on medical and botanical matters, Mitchell revealed a new appreciation for cartographic matters and for the Anglo-French territorial dispute in the Ohio valley. He reviewed some recent maps by d’Anville and those in Charlevoix’s history of New France, posed a series of geographical questions for Colden, reported the recent land grant to establish the Ohio Company to promote interior settlement as a barrier against French encroachments and suggested that a similar endeavour was under discussion for Nova Scotia. 44

Eighteen months later, Mitchell wrote to John Bartram, the Pennsylvania botanist, that he had ‘been obliged to give over my botanical pursuits for some time’. 45 It is appropriate to conclude from this conjunction of geographical interests, wistful remembrance of abandoned intellectual passions, and association with politicians that Mitchell’s new and unaccustomed role as a geographer stemmed from this new connection rather than the opposite, that his geographical interests had generated the political acquaintance.

Halifax evidently prevailed upon Mitchell to compile a map of North America from the materials in the Board’s archives, with the goal of creating an overview of the respective British and French territorial claims. Despite having no previous experience in making maps, or any long-standing intellectual interest in geographical matters, Mitchell was able to draw on a basic knowledge of the process of map compilation that lay at the core of geographical education for eighteenth-century gentry. The result was the map, his first, which he completed in 1750.

Mitchell’s Sources: Official and Private

Mitchell’s first manuscript map of 1750 exposed the inadequacy of the Board of Trade’s cartographic archives, for, in July of that year, Halifax sent an urgent directive to every colonial governor on the North American mainland requiring each of them to transmit a precise account of colonial boundaries, a map of their colony and information about French encroachments.

[The] Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations judging it necessary for His Majesty’s Service and for the Benefit of the Plantations, that the Limits or Boundaries of the British Colonies on the Continent of America should be distinctly known, more particularly
so far as they border on the Settlements made by the French or any Foreign Nation in America, . . . desire you will send their Lordships, with all possible Dispatch, as exact an Account as you can of the Limits and Boundaries of the Territory [of your province or colony], together with a Chart or Map thereof, and all the best Accounts and Vouchers you can obtain. 

This special directive—tied as it was to a specific and pressing need and issued by an official with real political power—produced results, whereas the general instructions previously conveyed to every new governor had not.

Entries in the Board’s journals suggest that six colonies responded with maps and textual accounts: the London officers of the Hudson’s Bay Company sent a map of the territories they claimed to the north of New France; the governor of Massachusetts Bay, a large map of New England specially surveyed and compiled by Richard Hazzen, the governor of New Jersey, an impression of Lewis Evans’s map of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York which had been published in Philadelphia in 1749; the lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania, a manuscript version of the same map; the acting governor of Virginia, the map of the province by Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson, based on their specially commissioned survey; and, the governor of North Carolina, a plan of the Virginia–North Carolina boundary as run in 1749. Another three colonies returned written descriptions of their boundaries: Connecticut, New Hampshire and South Carolina. Finally, New York’s governor promised that he would forward further information if he could acquire any in addition to the other items that he had recently dispatched to London specifically on the geography of New York and the Iroquois confederacy.

The documents from Virginia—Fry and Jefferson’s map, Fry’s geographical account of the ‘back settlements’ and other information—received special treatment in London because they encompassed the strategically important Ohio valley. When they reached the Board in December 1751, Halifax passed them on to Mitchell for analysis. In his report, Mitchell emphasized Virginia’s particular potential to withstand the French encroachments in the Ohio valley. This point presumably induced Halifax to have Fry and Jefferson’s map printed by Thomas Jefferys early in 1753. Cooie Verner suggested that not many impressions of the map were originally made because few copies of this state are known to survive. Even so, to judge from the ornate cartouche and Jefferys’s statement of copyright, it is clear that the map was intended for the open market rather than distributed solely within official circles.

While waiting for the replies to Halifax’s request for information, Mitchell refined his geographical skills by making a second manuscript map, also now lost, of the colonial road system as part of his ultimately unsuccessful manoeuvrings between 1751 and 1753 to become postmaster general of the North American colonies. He also sought updated geographical material from his own contacts in the colonies. He asked Colden in New York directly about the territories of the Iroquois and French encroachments thereon, topics which were crucial to British territorial claims. Benjamin Franklin, in Philadelphia, sent Mitchell an unidentified map. Thomas Penn, the proprietor of Pennsylvania, noted that he would have given Mitchell copies of his own maps of the colonies, except that Mitchell’s access to the collections of the Board and ‘of several private People’ meant that he had already acquired copies of all the maps in Penn’s own library.

Mitchell eventually compiled one large and highly detailed map of eastern North America—his third—from all the maps and other information that he and Halifax had received from the colonies, together with printed maps bought by the Board in London. He took his overall geographical structure from the maps of the distinguished French geographer, Guillaume Delisle. Delisle’s maps of North America might have then been forty to fifty years old, but they were still widely regarded as the most authoritative geographical images of the continent. Mitchell corrected some parts of Delisle’s outline by reference to observations of latitude and longitude made by officers of the Royal Navy, as recorded in ships’ logs that he was able to borrow from the Admiralty. He then incorporated into this general framework the detailed regional maps of the colonies.

The Map and Its Political Use

No copy of Mitchell’s third manuscript map of North America is known to survive, but we do know that Halifax circulated a copy among his governmental colleagues, even as yet another copy was in the hands of the engraver Thomas Kitchin. Within government circles, Mitchell’s work was apparently treated as any other specially commissioned, manuscript map and was understood to present a particular point of view. We should therefore consider what the map would have been like in manuscript—by taking the
printed version (see Fig. 1) and eliminating the ornate title cartouche and full-colour wash found on many impressions (as on Plate 9)59—and the message it had for senior members of the British government, before we turn to its surviving incarnation in print.

An Imperially Expansive Map

Mitchell mapped out a geographically expansive interpretation of Britain’s territorial claims. His delineation of the colonial boundaries, and his numerous textual notes about them, should be considered in three regional sections.60 He applied a different legal strategy to each to justify British claims. For the region between the Atlantic Ocean and the Appalachian Mountains, Mitchell relied on the de facto argument that direct British settlement legitimated British claims. For the distant territories lying to the west of the Mississippi River, and the westward extension of the British colonies across the continent, he based his interpretation on the assertions of control and legitimacy made by British monarchs in the charters they had granted to the North American colonies. And for the region in between, from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River, which is to say the area specifically in dispute with the French, he took account of the acquisition of territory from indigenous peoples. All was underpinned by wishful thinking that ignored the realities of imperial control. The result was a thoroughly partial, highly selective and inconsistent argument.

Mitchell drew the boundaries between the settled parts of the British colonies with care and precision. Referring to those boundaries that had yet to be definitively established—between Pennsylvania and Maryland, North and South Carolina, and South Carolina and Georgia—he noted that the lines on his map served ‘only to give the Public a view’ of the boundaries and were not intended ‘otherwise to affect the Claims of any’. He also included several relic boundaries, the legacy of old and still unresolved grants, such as Lord Granville’s district in the Carolinas.61 To the far north, he delineated the territories claimed by the Hudson’s Bay Company according to his interpretation of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713).

In contrast, Mitchell took considerable liberties with law, logic and history in delineating the extensions of the British colonies across the continental interior. He reduced the truly complex history of the charters by which British monarchs had divided North America to an overly simple and misleadingly rational process. The key to the argument was the prominently placed label for the fortieth parallel: ‘Bounds of Virginia and New-England by Charters, May 23. 1609 and Novr.3. 1620, extending from Sea to Sea, out of which our other Colonies were granted’. This statement neatly established the precedence of British claims in the interior and implied that the wide extent given by Mitchell to British colonies north and south of the fortieth parallel derived logically from those early charters. Yet not only were both charters quickly superseded, they were by themselves inadequate for Mitchell’s needs.

The 1609 charter for Virginia permitted Mitchell to run Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia all the way to the map’s western edge. However, that charter defined only a relatively narrow swath of land across the entire continent, less than six degrees of latitude in width.62 Mitchell therefore had to use an entirely different charter—the 1665 modification to earlier grants to the Carolina proprietors, with its southern limit of 29°N—to ensure that British territory reached the Gulf Coast. The result was territorial ambiguity: Mitchell did not push British claims south past the negotiated boundary with Spanish Florida, but he did overlay French Louisiana with the southern colonies. Yet, if the printed map is a valid guide, he probably avoided extending the names of the southern colonies to the west of the Mississippi so as not to impinge completely on French Louisiana, which he recognized with its own expansive toponym.

Despite its rhetorical importance, Mitchell could not in fact pursue the territorial implications of the 1620 charter for the Council for New England. In part, he had to accept that the charter’s transcontinental swath—from 40°N to 48°N—had been interrupted by the separate creations of New York and Pennsylvania. But of much greater importance was the need to accommodate Britain’s more powerful legal claims to interior lands that were already occupied by the French. Those claims derived from a long series of treaties between the British and the Six Nations of the Iroquois, by which the British argued the Iroquois to be their dependents and so asserted that Iroquois territory was British territory. The political dependency of the Iroquois upon the British had been confirmed by the other European powers in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713). As much as he might have wanted to do so,63 Mitchell could not give the same westward extension to the New England colonies as he did to the southern colonies without subverting this crucial legal argument.
The British understandably adopted a generous interpretation of the extent of Iroquois territory. They took it to comprise not only the areas then occupied by the Iroquois in the middle of the eighteenth century; ‘IROQUOIS’, the broad region supposed by Mitchell to be then inhabited by the Iroquois. Letters and lines indicate further extensions to Iroquois territory: A, area around Lake Champlain supposedly formerly inhabited by the Iroquois; B and C, areas that Mitchell understood as having been conquered by the Iroquois over the previous century. Asterisks indicate Mitchell’s annotations concerning the history of the Iroquois and English settlement; those quoted in the text are indicated by the letters ‘m’ etc. Dots are French forts that ‘encroached’ on Iroquois-British territory; the key ones are: 1, Fort St Frédéric (Crown Point); 2, Fort Niagara; 3, Fort Du Quesne.

The British understandably adopted a generous interpretation of the extent of Iroquois territory. They took it to comprise not only the areas then occupied by the Six Nations, in what is today upstate New York, but also any region where the Iroquois had (perhaps) once lived or whose inhabitants they had defeated in battle. For example, the Virginia government considered it legitimate for the Six Nations to cede the entire region north of the Ohio River in a 1744 treaty—as the necessary preliminary to the establishment of the Ohio Company in 1748 to develop trade, promote settlement and counter the aggressive French policy of building forts in the region—although the Iroquois at best exerted only nominal authority there (which was of course why the French were able to build their forts in the first place). The drawing in Figure 2 indicates the territories that Mitchell argued were legitimately claimed by the Iroquois, which he then divided between Virginia and New York.

Mitchell gave the Six Nations an expansive toponym, ‘IROQUOIS’, which stretched from southwestern Pennsylvania to the St Lawrence River. He labelled Lake Champlain as ‘L. of the Iroquois or Champlain’ and identified its surrounding region (‘A’ on Fig. 2) as the original territory of the Iroquois with the label ‘Irocoisia | The original country of the Iroquois and formerly so called’ (‘m’); he also labelled the St. Lawrence River ‘River of the Iroquois or Catarakui’ (‘n’). To the north of the Great Lakes, he identified large territories that the Iroquois supposedly possessed by right of conquest (‘B’). He noted, for example, the lands of the ‘Antient Outaouacs | Expelled by the Iroquois’ (‘p’) and that ‘By the several Conquests here mentioned, the Territories of the Six Nations extend to the Limits here laid down; which they
have been in Possession of about 100 Years’ (‘q’). All of these territories Mitchell presented as properly belonging to New York, so that the colony stretched north across the St Lawrence River and around Lake Ontario to Lake Huron.

To the west, one of the two long commentaries set by Mitchell between the Illinois and Ohio rivers, and close to the Mississippi, proclaimed in similar vein that ‘The Six Nations have extended their Territories to the River Illinois, ever since the Year 1672, when they subdued, and were incorporated with, . . . the Native Proprietors of these Countries’, a point further ‘confirmed by their own Claims and Possessions in 1742, which include all the Bounds here laid down, and none have ever thought fit to dispute them’ (‘r’ on Fig. 2). A number of other comments about the presence of the Iroquois litter the region between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes, establishing it as Iroquois territory (‘C’). Mitchell assigned this extensive region to Virginia.

Mitchell could not reduce the region south of the Ohio to the rule of the Iroquois. For this region, all the way to the Gulf coast, Mitchell used his commentaries to explain how the British presence in the region either predated that of the French or rested on specific treaties with, or conquest of, the native peoples. He included a number of notes that demonstrated French perfidy, the sheer extravagance of the French claims and the illegitimacy of the French encroachments.

The overall message of Mitchell’s map was that the British could rightfully claim vast territories in North America. Yet the inconsistencies and logical flaws of his cartographic argument mean that it would probably have persuaded only those readers who were already convinced of the validity of British claims. It was very much a one-sided argument, which paid little attention to the legal arguments adduced by the French in support of their imperial claims. In particular, Mitchell ignored the fundamental fact that the French already had a strong presence in the Ohio region, either directly or through native intermediaries, and had been able to build a number of forts there. The net result was to accord France only those territories which remained after all the British claims were first taken into account. Setting aside Mitchell’s uncertainty over the legitimacy of British claims to Louisiana, the result was a pervasive and, for other British, persuasive claim that Britain should by right possess the entire region between the Appalachians and the Mississippi.

Administrative Use of the Manuscript Map

Mitchell’s depiction of expansive imperial territorial claims for Britain was very much in line with the Earl of Halifax’s political agenda. By the time Mitchell had completed the map, sometime in later 1754, political attention in Europe—among both government officials and the general public—was focused on the situation in North America. An aggressive French policy to establish forts on the interior lands also claimed by the British (see Fig. 2) was rapidly raising tensions. The British ministry recognized that these tensions could well lead to war and actively sought to reach a peaceful compromise before hostilities could break out. Halifax, alone within the upper echelons of the British government, held out for the complete integrity of Britain’s territorial claims in North America. Unlike the rest of the ministry, he would rather have gone to war than surrender any land in a compromise with the French that would otherwise have maintained the peace.

Halifax deployed Mitchell’s third map to further his own agenda within the ministry. He followed the established procedures for the official use of specially commissioned maps by circulating a manuscript copy of the map to his colleagues. The particular occasion for Halifax’s unveiling of the map was in response to a proposal advanced early in February 1755 by Sir Thomas Robinson, the diplomat charged with negotiating a peaceful compromise with the French, for the creation of a neutral zone in the Ohio valley. Halifax derided Robinson’s scheme as geographically inept: its adoption would lead to severe territorial concessions. In drafting a memorandum to counter Robinson, Halifax clearly relied heavily on a map to describe geographical features. Although Halifax did not identify the map he used, it was undoubtedly Mitchell’s; certainly, Robinson subsequently used a manuscript copy of Mitchell’s map, provided by Halifax, to revise the proposed neutral zone.

The lord chancellor, the Earl of Hardwicke, found Mitchell’s map and reputation to be persuasive. Halifax had evidently already promoted Mitchell’s expertise and qualifications to his ministerial colleagues. Hardwicke was now convinced by Mitchell’s manuscript map of the cogency and appropriateness of Halifax’s geographical arguments, although he continued to be wary of Halifax’s opposition to any compromise with the French. Indeed, Hardwicke thought that the map was too forthright in its depiction of
Britain’s territorial claims. He became concerned when he learned that the map was in the process of being published, and he urged the Duke of Newcastle, now prime minister, to stop its publication.

I find the Board of Trade are just publishing, or encouraging the publication of, this Map; & if not stopt, it will be out forthwith. I fear very inconvenient Consequences from it, for it carries the Limits of the British Colonies as far, or farther than any other, which I have seen. If it should come out just at this juncture, with the supposed Reputation of this Author, & the Sanction of the Board of Trade, it may fill people’s heads with so strong an opinion of our strict Rights, as may tend to obstruct an Accommodation, if attainable, on the foot of Convenience, & make what may be necessary to be done to avoid the fatal Evil of a War, the Subject of great Clamour. I beg Your Grace would not mention me as first giving this hint; but my opinion is that it is desirable that it should be stopt for the present, & some proper method taken for stopping it in a prudent way.\(^{71}\)

Hardwicke evidently thought that Mitchell’s map posed a substantial political risk to the ministry. The public would gain an exaggerated sense of what was at stake in North America, and there would be a backlash against the ministry should a compromise be reached with the French. For Hardwicke, maps, especially when officially sanctioned, could be a powerful influence on the politically significant sections of the public. In the event, Hardwicke’s concerns were completely borne out when the public got their hands on the published version of Mitchell’s map.

Publishing Mitchell’s Map

Hardwicke wrote to Newcastle on 16 February 1755. On the same day, Richard Jackson, a London lawyer with a particular interest in both maps and the North American colonies, recorded that he had just acquired an impression of Mitchell’s map, and he later said that this purchase took place ‘near 3 weeks before [the map] was made publick’.\(^{72}\) The map seller, Andrew Millar, did not advertise the map until the end of March, and the date in the published map’s imprint (13 February 1755) must thus indicate the time the map was sent to press. The following weeks would have been taken up in printing, correcting minor errors in the plates and assembling and colouring a sufficient number of impressions of the large and expensive eight-sheet map. We may imagine that word of the map’s availability was passed around the geographical cognoscenti who would have accounted for the first sales.\(^{73}\)

In its published form, Mitchell’s map promoted Halifax’s political agenda. Colour was added to the printed map to considerable effect to highlight the extensive territorial claims. The consistent application of water colour to delineate the colonies strongly suggests that the colourists followed a scheme probably set by Mitchell, although particular colourists did produce minor variations. Outline colour was applied to emphasize the printed boundary lines. On some impressions, each colony was colour-washed (see Plate 9). The use of pink wash within a red outline on these maps for the territories of Virginia, New York, New Hampshire and the Hudson’s Bay Company made a bold visual and political statement, since British territory surrounded and constrained the green-tinted territories permitted to New France.\(^{74}\)

Prominent in the lower right-hand corner is an allegorical title cartouche featuring standardized images of the fertility and mercantile potential of the North American environment (Fig. 3). A palm tree flanks the left side, stalks of ripe maize the right. Below, on the left, wingless putti play on a fishing net, a beaver beside them; to the side is a view of a tropical shore with a settlement and barrels (of molasses?) ready for export on a waiting ship. In the centre and to the right two indigenous figures in feather headdresses and skirts are seated. The woman, who carries a bow and quiver of arrows, is probably an allegory of America. The man’s hands are held in supplication. Both figures gaze upwards, through the lines of the title (with its references to the Earl of Halifax and the Board of Trade) to the top of the cartouche, where the royal crest and union flag are supported on clouds by winged putti. The relationship of the two figures to the symbols of British authority clearly constitutes a claim that the native peoples are dependent upon Britain and actively look to Britain for protection and leadership. We may go a step further and suggest that at least the male figure specifically signified the Iroquois.\(^{75}\)

The map’s title takes up fourteen lines in a mixture of roman, italic and blackletter typefaces in at least half-a-dozen sizes. The large blackletter type for the words ‘North America’, ‘The Earl of Halifax’, ‘[The] Lords Commissioners [for] Trade [for] Plantations’, and ‘[In]’. Mitchell is particularly significant. The typefounder William Caslon had resurrected the use of blackletter in Britain in the 1730s. By the 1750s this consciously antiquated typeface served to convey overtly nationalistic sentiments, as in, for example, the words ‘Society of Anti-Gallicans’ in the title of a profoundly anti-
French map of North America published by the Society in December 1755. On Mitchell’s map, as on the later one, the blackletter gave these crucial elements a sense of a Teutonic and distinctly non-French heritage: their deployment effectively declares that not only are Halifax, the rest of the Board of Trade and Mitchell English, but so too is North America itself.76

Just above and to the left of the title cartouche, a text has been added to the published version of the map (see Fig. 3). The text constitutes a certificate, ostensibly written by the Board’s secretary, John Pownall:

This Map was Undertaken with the Approbation and at the request of the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations; and is Chiefly composed from

Fig. 3. John Mitchell, Map of the British and French Dominions in North America (1755), Variant 1. Detail of title cartouche on sheet 8. (Reproduced with permission from the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress.)
It could, of course, be argued that Halifax's initial intent in commissioning Mitchell to make a map of eastern North America was simply to create a document with which he and his colleagues in the British ministry could understand the spatial issues involved in the competition for empire. The sealing of the map's status with a certificate, however, suggests that Halifax's intention in having Mitchell's map published was to create a definitive statement that would shape the conceptions of politicians and public alike.

The need for an authoritative published map of North America had been highlighted in 1749–1753, during the ultimately unsuccessful deliberations of the Anglo-French commission to demarcate the boundary between French Acadia and British Nova Scotia. The commissioners debated the merits and flaws of at least twenty-three different published maps and found that none could be relied upon. Indeed, the French commissioners complained that geographers 'are more interested in giving their maps an air of system and of truth, that is an appearance of scholarliness, than in fixing the rights of princes and the authentic limits of regions'.

Mitchell did not share quite the same disdain for published maps. His concern was that without the necessary credentials, the best maps could not be recognized and all published maps would thus be distrusted. In 1751, at the height of the negotiations of the Acadia–Nova Scotia commission, when he was seeking information from Colden about the territories of the Iroquois and the French encroachments at Crown Point and Niagara, Mitchell complained that the 'relations of the Historians Geographers & Travellers' all 'want the sanction of public authority' and so 'cannot be supposed to have that due weight especially with our adversaries [i.e., the French] that their justness seem to give them', and went on specifically to urge Colden to provide, if he could, 'proofs & authorities' for his information, which would constitute 'a signal service to the public'.

The Board's endorsement of Mitchell's map provided just that 'sanction of public authority' which Mitchell thought was lacking in other published works. We can see now how the many references to charters and treaties on his map pointed directly to the necessary 'proofs & authorities' and how they, and the other textual annotations, all suggested the depth of analysis that Mitchell had undertaken of the information available from government archives. Mitchell's map thus provided a potent image, certified by high-ranking officials, that set out for the public in Britain and France alike what Halifax wanted the official British position to be. Even to the cynical reader who might otherwise have disparaged the map's scholarly appearance as a misleading sham, it presented an image that spoke with a degree of authority not achieved by other, more ordinary published maps.

The public response in London to Mitchell's map was almost entirely favourable. There was no dispute over the map's status as an official and authoritative work. John Huske declared in no uncertain terms:

But the French Geographers, D'Lisle, Du Fer [De Fer], 
&c. have in their late Maps limited their [the Iroquois']
Rights Northward, to a South West Line they have
drawn from Montreal to Lake Toronto, where they also
bound them to the Westward, and allow them only
the Country between this Line and our Settlements.
However, to point out the Mistakes, or rather designed
Encroachments, of the Maps of America published in
France, of late Years, by Authority, would be almost to
copy the whole of them. Therefore it must give every
Briton great Pleasure to see our Countryman Dr.
Mitchel, F.R.S. detecting their Mistakes and designed
Encroachments, and almost wholly restoring us to our
just Rights and Possessions, as far as Paper will admit of
it, in his most elaborate and excellent Map of North-
America just published; which deserves the warmest
Thanks and Countenance from every good Subject in
his Majesty's Dominions.

During the course of the Seven Years' War other commentators referred to Mitchell's map when they wrote about 'looking at the map of America'. One author specifically noted that Mitchell's map 'must be right' because it had the 'approbation of the board of trade'. Conversely, the East Jersey proprietors felt compelled to publish their criticism of Mitchell's depiction of the New Jersey–New York boundary precisely because the map had been done by 'official approbation' and so would bear weight in a court of law.

If mimicry is the sincerest form of flattery, then the numerous smaller and cheaper derivatives of Mitchell's map are another testament to its impact on contemporaries. Mitchell's map could still be subjected to criticism as a work of geographical science, but its credentials prevented criticism of it as a work of politics. It would seem, therefore, that Hardwicke's concern that Mitchell's map
would radicalize public opinion was not inappropriate: that was Halifax's intent.

John Mitchell's 1755 map of the British and French colonies in North America was the product of a particular and brief moment in the history of the relationships between the colonial authorities in North America, on the one hand, and imperial officials in London, on the other. Mitchell worked on behalf of one such official, the Earl of Halifax, who was actually interested in colonial affairs, who had real political power and who fought for his imperial, anti-French agenda. The map was the direct product of a singularly successful solicitation of geographical information from the colonies. And it was a crucial element in Halifax's political strategy to advance his uncompromising political agenda to resist the French in North America. He used the map to persuade his ministerial colleagues of the appropriateness of his agenda both directly and indirectly through Britain's still nascent 'public opinion'. And as such it was a great success. The British ministry abandoned a compromise with the French and soon had plans in hand to oust the French from their colonial encroachments by force.

Mitchell's cartographic endeavours mark a significant deviation from the established system of official mapping of the North American colonies. That system featured two key elements: first, the differential treatment of published and manuscript maps, the one being read for general information in line with the practices of public discourse, the other being specially commissioned and used to resolve precise issues; second, the selective transfer of manuscript maps from official archives, through private hands, to the potentially wide circulation offered by publication. The manner in which Halifax specially commissioned Mitchell to make his final manuscript map and then used that map to educate and persuade his ministerial colleagues about a specific point—the proper disposition of Anglo-French boundaries in North America—suggests that, in its origins, the map was little different from any other manuscript map of the colonies used and read by government officials.

The deviation came when, at some point, Halifax decided to have Mitchell's work published. He realigned the official/public divide when he converted a specially commissioned manuscript into a published work for general consumption. Then he granted the map a certificate of official status. In 1733, Henry Popple had been able to claim only that he had been permitted by the Board of Trade to make his map, and he had to look to Edmund Halley's vague testimony to grant his map some authority. In 1755, Halifax was able to give Mitchell's map the credentials it needed to be privileged by the public. The map still cannot be called an 'official' map in the sense of those maps carefully crafted by modern governments to adhere in all respects to official policy; after all, Mitchell represented only Halifax's agenda, not that of the entire ministry. Yet, to the extent that neither the prime minister nor the lord chancellor called a halt to the publication of Mitchell's work, his map came to embody the British government's policy.

Halifax did nothing so radical as to create new institutional structures for the publication of government maps, so we cannot say that he was responsible for the development of official programmes to publish maps. But the publication of Mitchell's map does stand as a key moment in the progressive acceptance by the eighteenth-century British government of the need not only to publicize official information such as trade statistics, but also to control and regulate that information. This is a topic for further analysis. For now, however, we can conclude that Mitchell's map provides another seed of modern mapping practices that would flourish only after the end of Europe's *anciens régimes*. Setting aside the nationalistic manner in which the map has traditionally been studied, we are left with new and significant reasons to consider this *sui generis* map to have been truly extraordinary.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

Halifax’ (see note 5), 583 n55, who also identified the relevant map as Solomon Bolton, North America Performed under the Patronage of Louis Duke of Orleans . . . by the Sieur d’Anville, engraved by R. W. Seale (London, Paul Knapton, 1752).

19. Modern ‘List of maps, plans, &c.’ (see note 12) is cursory and many maps are hard to identify, but he did distinguish between printed and manuscript maps. My necessarily approximate count identified 61 printed geographical maps, 55 manuscript geographical maps, and four others whose form was not specified. See also P. A. Penfold, America and West Indies, vol. 2, Maps and Plans in the Public Record Office (London, HMSO, 1974).


27. This phenomenon is too large and complex to be discussed here in any detail. Besides, it comprises a significant arena of intellectual activity that requires its own dedicated study rather than being construed solely as the principal avenue for the transfer of maps from official to public discourses. What follows in the text is a summary statement.


29. [John Green, né Bradock Mead], Explanation for the New Map of Nova Scotia and Cape Britain, With the Adjacent Parts of New England and Canada (London, Thomas Jefferys, 1755), l. G. R. Crane, ‘John Green: notes on a neglected eighteenth-century geographer and cartographer’, Imago Mundi 6 (1949): 85–91, attributed both the map and its accompanying memoir to Green. Waldo’s role in the map’s preparation was also highlighted in Gentleman’s Magazine 25 (August 1755): 383.


31. Green, Explanation (see note 29), 14, blamed the map’s failings on Pопple’s ‘operator’, one ‘Capt. Lampriere’, Babinski, Henry Popple’s 1733 Map (see note 30), 9, accepted that Lempriere had indeed made the map. This point is corroborated by the unique manner in which Lempriere was identified beside the map’s cartouche as both ‘del.’ (delineator of the cartouche, which Bernard Barons etched, with some engraving) and ‘inv.’ (inventor of the map), as opposed to W. H. Toms and R. W. Seale who engraved the map’s geographical features and lettering.

32. Calendar of State Papers: Colonial Series 40: no. 444 (18 December 1733) and 41: no. 324 (26 September 1734). British memorial of 23 January 1755, in The Memorials of the English and French Commissaries Concerning the Limits of Nova Scotia or Arcadia (London, Thomas Jefferys, 1755), 277–78. This argument has not stopped modern com-
mentators, such as Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, Random House, 2000), 19, from attributing official status to Pople’s map.


35. Mitchell’s 1750 map is known only from a passing reference to ‘the first drawing of this Map in 1750’ to in the blocks of text added in about 1757 to what Mitchell described as the ‘second edition’ of his published map. Edney, ‘Mitchell map’ (see note 34), transcribed the text blocks in full. See also Matthew H. Edney, ‘A publishing history of John Mitchell’s map of North America, 1755–1775’, *Cartographic Perspectives*, no. 58 (2007): in press.


42. *The Library of an Early Virginia Scientist: Dr. John Mitchell, F.R.S. (1711–1768)* (Fredericksburg, E. Lee Trinkle Library, Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia, 1971), [24]–38, is a reconstruction of Mitchell’s library from the works he cited in his pre-1746 published works (all medicinal and botanical). Of the 27 works identified, all dealt with medicine and natural history, except for some works on Africa and three general histories of Virginia. Mitchell’s correspondence reveals a general lack of interest in geography and maps before his return to Britain.


46. Berkeley and Berkeley, *Dr. John Mitchell* (see note 36), 177–78, quoting from United Kingdom, National Archives, CO 324/15, fol. 1. 19 July 1750. The circular letter is also found in CO 324/13, 251–52. See also Clayton, ‘Duke of Newcastle, Earl of Halifax’ (note 5), 581; *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (see note 24), 6: 586–87; *Journal of the
Commissioners for Trade (see note 20), 9: 89 (18 and 19 July 1750).


48. Green, Explanation (see note 29), 4 and 8–9, examined two separate copies of this map (now lost) in private hands. It was less than 8 feet (2.44 m) by 4 feet 4 inches (1.32 m) and drawn at a scale of four miles to an inch (1:2,533.440). On Hazzen’s coastal surveys and drafting for this map, see Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts 27:97 (10 October 1750), 98 and 100 (11 October 1750), 189 (2 April 1751), 193 (4 April 1751), and 197 (5 April 1751); Josiah Willard to William Bollan, 2 November 1750 and 26 February 1750/1, Massachusetts State Archives, Massachusetts Archives 20:656–58, esp. 658, and 54: no. 13.


50. The map has been often reproduced; see especially Verner, ‘Fry and Jefferson map’ (note 13), for details.

51. Journal of the Commissioners for Trade (see note 20), 9:107 (22 October 1750), 290 (11 March 1751/2), 169 (13 March 1750/1), 207 (13 June 1751), 289 and 298 (11 March 1751/2 and 15 April 1752), and 221 (2 August 1751), respectively. See also Berkeley and Berkeley, Dr. John Mitchell (see note 36), 178–88.

52. Journal of the Commissioners for Trade (see note 20), 9:183 and 225 (23 April and 9 October 1751), 308 (29 April 1752), 221 (2 August 1751), and 156 (29 January 1750/1), respectively.

53. Norona, ‘Joshua Fry’s report’ (see note 16). Berkeley and Berkeley, Dr. John Mitchell (see note 36), 175 and 180–87, and Clayton, ‘Duke of Newcastle, Earl of Halifax’ (see note 9), 581–82, on Mitchell’s report. The obsequiousness of the map’s dedication to Halifax strongly suggests yet does not guarantee that the manuscript map was passed directly to Jefferys for publication. Note also that the map lacked any formal certificate of official approval by the Board of Trade.

54. Peter Collinson to Benjamin Franklin, 3 June 1752 and 7 July 1752, in Labaree, Papers of Benjamin Franklin (see note 21), 4:318–20 and 333–35. See also Collinson to Colden, 1 September 1753, in Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden (note 15), 4:404–6, and Collinson to Franklin, 26 January 1754, in Papers of Benjamin Franklin, 5:190–93, esp. 192. This mapping episode was briefly mentioned by Berkeley and Berkeley, Dr. John Mitchell (see note 36), 167.

55. Mitchell to Colden, 25 March 1749 (see note 38), 416; Mitchell to Colden, 5 April 1751, and Colden to Mitchell, 18 July 1751, in Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden (note 15), 9:87–91 and 98–102, respectively. See also Collinson to Franklin, 3 June 1752 (see note 54), 311, Collinson to Franklin, 27 January 1753, in Labaree, Papers of Benjamin Franklin (see note 21), 4:412–15, esp. 414, re a map from Philadelphia. Thomas Penn to Richard Peters, 21 February 1755, quoted by Gipson, Lewis Evans (see note 49), 61.

56. Berkeley and Berkeley, Dr. John Mitchell (see note 36), 178, noted that the Board of Trade spent no less than 104 pounds on maps between 25 March 1750 and 5 January 1755.

57. Mitchell explained these sources in the textual annotations added to the ‘second edition’ of the published map (c.1757); see Edney, ‘Mitchell map’ (note 34).

58. The Earl of Hardwicke to the Duke of Newcastle, 16 February 1755, in Pease, Anglo-French Boundary Disputes (see note 38), 113, is fairly clear that Hardwicke had examined a manuscript copy of Mitchell’s map rather than an early printed proof.

59. Eighteenth-century British manuscript maps were generally plain in style. Joan Winaers, Thomas Jefferys’s map of Canada and the mapping of the western part of North America, 1750–1768, in Images & Icons of the New World: Essays on American Cartography, ed. Karen Severud Cook (London, British Library, 1996), 27–54, discussed a manuscript map with an ornate cartouche, but this was a neat copy intended as the model for the published map. Note that cartouches were generally designed at the behest of the publisher by professional graphic designers, who also painted stage scenery for the London theatre.

60. Some of the notes were transcribed by Emerson D. Fite and Archibald Freeman, A Book of Old Maps Delineating American History from the Earliest Days Down to the Close of the Revolutionary War (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1926), 182–84, and Berkeley and Berkeley, Dr. John Mitchell (see note 36), 194–98. See also Edney, ‘Mitchell map’ (see note 34), and John Rennie Short, Representing the Republic: Mapping the United States, 1600–1900 (London, Reaktion Books, 2001), 234–35. All are readily visible on the freely accessible images of Mitchell’s map on the Library of Congress’s American Memory Network, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html.

61. These boundaries were an alternative western boundary for Nova Scotia along the Penobscot River in what is now Maine; a roughly north–south line dividing the proprietorships of East and West Jersey; a roughly east–west line in the same colony identified as the limit of New York’s territorial claims; the bounds of the Northern Neck proprietorship that Lord Fairfax had established within Virginia between 1745 and 1747; and the area, comprising the northermost part of the Carolinas, retained by Earl Granville when the seven other proprietors sold their lands back to the Crown in 1730.

62. The 1609 charter actually specified that Virginia extended north–south by two hundred miles to either side of Cape Comfort, at the mouth of James River. Given the cape’s position on Mitchell’s map, and his adoption of a degree of sixty-nine miles, Virginia’s latitudinal limits would have been at 34°1’N and 39°9’N. See Franklin K. Van Zandt, Boundaries of the United States and the Several States, USGS Professional Paper 909 (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1976), 93.

63. Mitchell did show the supposed northern boundary of New England under the 1620 charter, running along the short length of the forty-eighth parallel between Lake Superior and the inset of Hudson’s Bay. In New England itself, he extended New Hampshire and the unallocated crown lands northward to the St Lawrence River, which left only a small enclave of French territory south of that river, opposite Montreal.


65. For Mitchell’s investigations of the Iroquois, see Mitchell to Colden, 5 April 1751 (see note 35), and
La carte de l'Amérique du Nord de John Mitchell (1755): une étude de l'utilisation et de la publication des cartes officielles dans l'Angleterre du 18e siècle

La fameuse carte de l'Amérique du Nord par John Mitchell se pose en archétype des publications cartographiques officielles dans l'Angleterre du 18e siècle. Elle fut cependant le fruit d'un effort particulier du comte de Halifax, président du Board of Trade, qui cherchait à faire progresser son projet agressif en ce qui concernait l'empire britannique en Amérique du Nord, dans la période préparatoire à la guerre de Sept Ans (1756–1763), connue en Amérique du Nord comme la guerre des Français et des Indiens, 1755–1760), en convainquant ses collègues ministres à la fois directement, par la négociation, et indirectement, en manipulant l'opinion publique. Notre nouvelle évaluation du travail de Mitchell conclut que son statut d'archétype est injustifié. En premier lieu, nous examinons les pratiques développées par les administrateurs géographiques généraux et de cartes manuscrites pour obtenir des connaissances précises relatives à certaines questions administratives. Une distinction est établie entre l'utilisation par les officiels de cartes imprimées comme sources de connaissances géographiques générales et de cartes manuscrites pour obtenir des connaissances précises relatives à certaines questions administratives. Puis l'origine de la carte de Mitchell est réévaluée, et nous arrivons à la conclusion...
que cette carte est véritablement innovante: elle était la réponse à une demande d’information faite aux colonies, exceptionnellement couronnée de succès, et sa publication était en rupture avec les caractères habituels de la circulation et de l’utilisation des cartes.


El mapa de Norteamérica de John Mitchell (1755): un estudio del uso y publicación de mapas oficiales en el siglo XVIII en Gran Bretaña

El famoso mapa de Norteamérica de John Mitchell permanece como arquetipo de los mapas oficiales publicados en el siglo XVIII en Gran Bretaña. Fue, sin embargo, el producto de un esfuerzo especial del conde de Halifax, presidente del Departamento de Comercio y Exportación, para impulsar su particular intención agresiva contra el Imperio Británico en Norteamérica, en el periodo previo a la Guerra de los Siete Años (1756–1763), conocida en Norteamérica como la Guerra Franco-India, (1755–1760). Con el mapa intentaba persuadir a sus colegas del ministerio, directamente a través de una negociación e indirectamente manipulando a la opinión pública. La conclusión de esta nueva revisión del trabajo de Mitchell es que considerarlo como un arquetipo es injustificado. En primer lugar, se examinan las prácticas desarrolladas por los administradores en Londres y en las colonias para comisionar, usar y hacer circular mapas regionales. Se distingue también entre el uso por parte de los funcionarios de mapas impresos como fuente para el conocimiento geográfico general, y de los mapas manuscritos para el conocimiento específico de ciertas cuestiones administrativas. Posteriormente, los orígenes del mapa de Mitchell se vuelven a examinar concluyendo que el mapa es verdaderamente innovador, como resultado de una extraordinaria y exitosa solicitud de información de las colonias, y que su publicación rompió con los parámetros establecidos para la circulación y consumo de mapas.
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