Abstract

Many colonists brought books, atlases, and maps to America; some assembled personal libraries that would ultimately benefit public institutions. The establishment of academic and subscription libraries initiated institutional collecting. Printed catalogues and other records document the cartographic collections formed in early America. This essay surveys those collections.

Keywords: Map collections, academic libraries, subscription libraries, eighteenth century, map collectors
Outside of New England the presence of books and cartographic materials was recorded from an early date. When in 1590 John White returned to Roanoke Island, North Carolina, looking for remnants of the colony that he had governed and later abandoned, he discovered five chests containing ruined clothing, household furnishings, books, pictures, and maps.[4]

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, maps such as this could often be found in British North America: Edward Wells, "A New Map of the most Considerable Plantations of the English in America Dedicated to his Highness William Duke of Glocester," published in A New Sett of Maps both of Antient and Present Geography (London, 1704). Courtesy of Historic Deerfield.

Booksellers’ catalogues and newspaper advertisements indicate the diversity of cartographic products available to eighteenth-century American consumers. Individuals collected maps, charts, atlases, and globes for any number of reasons. For some, maps and atlases fulfilled a utilitarian need. Others seemingly followed the advice of John Dee and Daniel Defoe who argued that a gentleman should acquire maps to aid in his understanding of history and current events and to beautify his home.[5] Eighteenth-century authors occasionally addressed the usefulness of atlases or maps. English educator and philosopher, John Locke, observed that an English gentleman “cannot well be without Camden’s Britannia” and a good collection of maps.[6] John Clark, a

As in Europe, the personal libraries assembled by some American collectors and scholars would ultimately benefit social institutions that served a wider audience. The origins of many early American libraries can be traced to philanthropy, with one prime example being Anglican clergyman Thomas Bray (1665-1730). Bray established numerous “parochial” libraries from Maryland to South Carolina; the largest, in Annapolis, contained more than 1,000 volumes.[8] In 1700, the colonial assembly in Charleston accepted a gift of books from Bray for “the Provincial Library at Charles-Town” which could be borrowed by any of the town’s inhabitants, and donated £225 toward a book fund. Thanks to gifts like Bray’s, more institutional libraries existed in the South than in any region of the country at the beginning of the eighteenth century.[9]

The contents of these and other newly formed libraries often reflected the “useful improvements” so prized by eighteenth-century Americans, and therefore included geographies, atlases, and to a lesser extent, maps. While cartographic works always constituted a minor element, maps played a more visible role in those colonial collections gathered for the purpose of governance or military planning. In 1747, Benjamin Franklin wrote to William Strahan, his principal book supplier in London, requesting copies of Henry Popple’s twenty-sheet Map of the British Empire in America, both bound and on rollers, and “8 or 10 maps of equal size” to display in the Pennsylvania Statehouse in Philadelphia.[10] During the American Revolution, framed copies of John Mitchell’s Map of the British and French Dominions in North America, Lewis Evans’s A General Map of the Middle British Colonies, Nicholas Scull’s Map of the Improved Part of Pennsylvania, the John Green/Thomas Jefferys Map of the Most Inhabited Part of New England, and others could be consulted in the War Office in Philadelphia.[11] The audience for such maps, and the uses to which they were put, would presumably have differed from maps found in contemporary “public” or academic libraries.

The creation in 1638 of the first institutional library collection in British North America resulted from a bequest of more than 400 books given by the Rev. John Harvard (1607-1638) to the fledgling college in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which would take his name. Despite the emphasis on theology, students at Harvard had access to a collection that contained an impressive array of atlases, none of which had been owned by John Harvard. By 1723, subsequent gifts and purchases had added John Speed’s Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World (London, 1627), Arnold Montanus’ Atlas Japanensis (London, 1670), the 1612 edition of Sebastian Münster’s Cosmographia Universalis, three editions of Ptolemy’s Geographia, and others.[12] (See Appendix I for a list of these titles.) The importance of the collection, however, led to concerns over its use. Thomas Hollis III, one of the library’s early benefactors, complained in 1725 that books were frequently not on the shelves, and he noted that students took them to their “chambers” and “teare out Pictures and Maps to adorne the Walls....”[13] Imprudent practices and a devastating fire in 1764 took their toll. But by 1790, several atlases had been replaced, and new titles, such as the Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (Antwerp, 1592) by Abraham Ortelius and Atlas Maritimus & Commercialis: Or, a General View of the World (London, 1728) had been added to the collection.[14]
Alases by Herman Moll frequently appear in the holdings of colonial libraries. This is "A New & Correct Map of the Whole World" from his The World Described: Or a New and Correct Sett of Maps (London 1720?), [http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3200.mf000001](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3200.mf000001). Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

Early records of the College of Connecticut (now Yale University) in New Haven register gifts of maps and atlases such as a “sea chart of the Mediterranean” in 1712, “Moll’s Mapps” in 1714, the “Atlas Maritimus” in 1730, and a “general atlas” and “Well’s Mapps” in 1733.[15] Along with the earlier acquisitions, the 1743 Catalogue of the Library of Yale College in New-Haven cited an unidentified edition of Ptolemy’s Geographia, and an “atlas in folio” in the collection. Unlike Harvard, maps and atlases appear to have found little favor, as no additions appear in the college’s 1791 catalogue. Other colleges also owned modest cartographic collections. Princeton University was chartered in 1746 as the College of New Jersey. In 1760, the college owned Herman Moll’s Atlas Geographus (London, 1711-1717) and an unidentified edition of Nicolaes Visscher’s Atlas Minor among a library of 189 titles.[16] Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, began its library collection shortly after its founding in 1764. The initial printed catalogue of its holdings listed “D’Anville’s 12 Maps of Geography,” possibly Twelve Maps of Antient Geography (London, 1750) to accompany Charles Rollin’s Ancient History of the Egyptians…and Grecians, first published in Paris.[17] Few Southern academic institutions amassed libraries in the eighteenth century. The oldest, the College of William and Mary, founded in 1693 in Williamsburg, Virginia, lost its collection in 1705 to a fire, and never printed a catalogue of its holdings in the eighteenth century.

Outside of academia, groups of individuals with shared literary interests began to assemble collections of mutually owned books. Membership required payment of an annual fee, or subscription. The first such social library in British North America, the Library Company of Philadelphia, was founded in 1731 by Benjamin

The impulse to create social libraries spread throughout the colonies. In New England alone, the period 1733 to 1780 witnessed the establishment of at least fifty-one social libraries. Benjamin Franklin noted in his autobiography that Philadelphia’s Library Company “was the Mother of all the N American Subscription Libraries, now so numerous,” and added, “These Libraries have improv’d the general conversation of the Americans, [and] made the common Tradesmen and Farmers as intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries…” Unlike many academic or ecclesiastical libraries, social libraries often did not originate with a gift of books. Instead, the collections frequently began with the purchase of titles. Abraham Redwood (1709-1788), a merchant in the prosperous seaport of Newport, Rhode Island, left a £500 bequest with which to establish a subscription library. In 1747, a group of Newport civic leaders, clergymen, and merchants drew up a roster of books to purchase in London for the library. The 1764 printed catalogue of the Redwood Library specified the cartographic titles they felt the collection required: the *Atlas Maritimus & Commercialis: Or, a General View of the World* (London, 1728) by John Senex and others, John Flamsteed’s *Atlas Coelestis* (London, 1729), and *A New Sett of Maps, Both of Antient and Present Geography* (London, 1706) by Edward Wells.


Whether through purchase or bequest, private collections became the basis for institutional libraries or greatly supplemented them. One well-known example is the numerous books, geographies, atlases, and maps assembled by Thomas Jefferson that became the kernel of the Library of Congress. Two Philadelphia bibliophiles, James Logan (1674–1751) and Stephen Girard (1750-1831) amassed substantial libraries that they later donated. Girard, a native of France, immigrated to Philadelphia in 1776 where he made money in shipping and banking. Girard’s collection, reflecting in part his early career as a ship captain, included Georges Le Rouge’s *Pilote Americain Septentrionale Pour les Cotes de Labrador* (Paris, 1778), Citoyen Teulère’s *Entrée de la Riviere de Bourdeaux* (Paris, 1776), Jean-Baptiste d’Après de Mannevillette’s *Neptune Oriental* (Paris, 1781), Samuel Holland’s *A New Chart of the Leeward or Caribee Islands* (London, 1787), and *The English Pilot, Fourth Book* (London, 1770).
Girard founded a school for orphan boys, now known as Girard College, where much of his library resides. James Logan, a London merchant who accompanied William Penn as secretary to found the colony of Pennsylvania, formed one of the colony’s largest private libraries. Atlases, both contemporary and antiquarian, formed a notable part of his collection. Herman Moll’s Atlas Minor: Or, a New and Curious Set of Sixty-two Maps (London, 1736), the Atlas Coelestis (London, 1729) of John Flamsteed, three editions of Ptolemy’s Geographia, Martino Martini’s Novus Atlas Sinensis (Amsterdam, 1655), and the 1610 Hondius edition of Gerard Mercator’s Atlas Minor all found a place on his shelves. After Logan’s death, much of his collection, recorded in the Catalogus Bibliothecae Logonianae (Philadelphia, 1760), became part of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Books collected by his son, James Logan II, such as Carrington Bowles’ A General Atlas of Thirty-six New and Correct Maps (London, 1771) also joined the Library Company’s holdings.

As the eighteenth century drew to an end, the “useful knowledge” represented by maps, charts, atlases, and globes contributed to a growing consciousness of the new nation’s territorial extent and diversity. Maps acted as unifying representations of statehood, and thereby played an important role in the printed discourse that helped formulate a national character. The role that American publishers played in purveying awareness of the new republic can be seen in the relative abundance of atlases, geographies, and sheet maps printed after the American Revolution. These practical works joined earlier cartographic titles found in academic, social, and circulating libraries. Institutional libraries, as noted by eighteenth-century antiquarian Richard Gough, provide a “safe port” which has been critical to the preservation of cartographic collections, and has made the discipline of the history of cartography possible.

APPENDIX I

Some eighteenth-century institutional cartographic collections, with sources noted.

CONNECTICUT

Yale College, New Haven, Connecticut

- “Atlas Generalis, Fol.”
- “Maps and Sea-Charts, Fol.”
- Moll, Herman. “Moll’s Maps”
- Ptolemy, Claudius. Geographia
- Wells, Edward. “Well’s Maps”

GEORGIA

Georgia Orphan Academy, Bethesda
“Atlas minor”
Moll, Herman. “Maps of Herman Moll, 1 vol.”
Palairet, Jean. “Palairets atlas”

MASSACHUSETTS

American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Boston
Catalogue of Books in the Library of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Boston, 1802)

- Clark, Matthew. [Complete Chart of the Coast of America] (Boston, 1790)
- Moll, Herman. Unidentified atlas
- Pownall, Thomas. A General Map of the Northern British Colonies in America (London, 1776)
- Robijn, Jacobus. New Enlarged Lightning Sea Columnne (Amsterdam, 1689)
- San Miguel, Tofono de. Atlas Maritimo de Espana (Madrid, 1789)
- Wells, Edward. Unidentified atlas

Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
Catalogue of Books in the Massachusetts Historical Library: An Annotated Edition of the 1796 Library
Catalogue of the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, 1996)

- Blodget, William. A Topographical Map of the State of Vermont (New Haven, 1789)
- Blodget, William. A New and Correct Map of Connecticut One of the United States (New Haven, 1792)
- Evans, Lewis. A General Map of the Middle British Colonies in America (Philadelphia, 1755)
- Faden, William. The British Colonies in North America (London, 1777)
- Frazer, William. A Correct Ground Plan of the Dreadful Fire at Ratcliff (London, 1794)
- Gridley, Richard. A Plan of the City and Fortress of Louisburg (Boston, 1746)
- Jefferys, Thomas. The American Atlas: or a Geographical Description of the Whole Continent of America (London, 1776)
- Jefferys, Thomas. Jamaica from the Latest Surveys (London, 1794)
- Johnston, Thomas. Plan of Kenebeck & Sagadahock Rivers & Country Adjacent (Boston, 1754)
- Lawrence, F.A. Grundris der Kayser Freien Reichs und Handel Stadt Hamburg [Hamburg?], 1791
- Mercator, Gerhard. Mercatoris Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes Studio Hondio (Amsterdam, 1632)
- Pelham, Henry. The County of Clare in the Province of Munster and Kingdom of Ireland (London, 1787)
- Pelham, Henry. A Plan of Boston in New England with its Environs (London, 1777)
- Pinkham, Paul. A Chart of Nantucket Shoals (Boston, 1791)
- Popple, Henry. Map of the British Empire in America (London, 1733)
- Sayer, Robert. A New Map of England & Wales With the Roads & Distances (London, 1794?)

Harvard College, Cambridge
Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Collegij Harvardinii (Boston, 1723)

- Colom, Jacob. Fierie Sea Columnne (Amsterdam, 1637)
- Goos, Pieter. Lightning Colomne or Sea Mirrou (Amsterdam, 1669)
● Münster, Sebastian. *Cosmographia Universalis* (Basle, 1612)
● Speed, John. *Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World* (London, 1627)
● Ptolemy, Claudius. *Geographia* (Venice, 1511)
● Ptolemy, Claudius. *Geographia* (Basle, 1542)
● Ptolemy, Claudius. *Geographia* (Leyden, 1618-1619)

**Salem Social Library**
*Bylaws and Regulations of the Incorporated Proprietors of the Social Library in Salem* (Salem, 1797)

● “Senex’s Maps” **Williams College, Williamstown**
  
  *A Catalogue of Books, in the Library of Williams College, Williamstown* (Bennington, VT, 1794)


**NEW JERSEY**

**Library Company of Burlington**

● “A Collection of Maps to explain G. Anson’s Voyage”

**NEW YORK**

**New York Society Library**

● Guthrie, William. *Atlas to Guthrie’s System of Geography* (London, 1795)
● Moll’s “Maps of the Geography of the Ancients”

**PENNSYLVANIA**

**Juliana Library Company, Lancaster**

● Bowen, Emanuel. *A Complete Atlas; Or, Distinct View of the Known World* (London, 1752)
● “a pair of compleat Globes, of a new construction”
● “a pair of Globes, terrestrial and celestial”

**Library Company of Philadelphia**

- Blodget, Samuel. *Perspective Plan of the Battle Fought Near Lake George* (Boston, 1755)
- Bowen, Emanuel. *A Complete Atlas; Or, Distinct View of the Known World* (London, 1752)
- Senex, John. *Modern Geography: Or, All the Known Countries in the World* (London, 1708-1725)

Union Library Company of Hatborough

- Bowen, Emanuel. *A Complete Atlas; Or, Distinct View of the Known World* (London, 1752)

RHODE ISLAND

Redwood Athenaeum, Newport
A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Company of the Redwood Library (Newport, 1764)


SOUTH CAROLINA

Charleston Library Society
A Catalogue of the Books, Belonging to the Incorporated Charleston Library Society (Charleston, 1770)


APPENDIX II

Virginia Congressman James Madison’s 1783 list of books and maps “proper for the use of Congress.” From: Robert Rutland, "Well acquainted with books": The Founding Framers of 1787: With James Madison’s List of


Bonne, Rigobert. *Atlas Moderne* 3 volumes (Paris, 1762-1771)

Cassini de Thury, César François. *Carte de la France, Publiée sous la Direction de l’Académie des Sciences*


Mannevillette, Jean Baptiste. *East India Pilot or Oriental Navigator* (London, 1782?)

Sayer, Robert and James Bennett. *A New and Accurate Chart of the Bay of Chesapeake* (London, 1776)


NOTES


quotation from An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, to Which Are Now Added...in Three Volumes, Vol. 3 (Boston, 1803), 283.

7. John Clark, An Essay Upon Study (London, 1731); John Clarke, Letters to a Student in the University of Cambridge, Massachusetts (Boston, 1796). Clark recommended purchasing the Atlas Coelestis (London, 1729) by John Flamsteed, and the seven-volume Atlas Historique ou Nouvelle Introduction a l'Histoire (Amsterdam, 1721) with maps by Henri Châtelain. Clarke’s series of published letters addressed to students at Harvard advocated the use of the “artificial globe,” and advised them to “procure some approved maps.”


9. Haynes McMullen, American Libraries Before 1876 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), Table 2.2.


