



A map of the British and French dominions in North America, with the roads, distances, limits, and extent of the settlements, humbly inscribed to the Right Honourable the Earl of Halifax, and the other Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners for Trade & Plantations, John Mitchell, 1755

This landmark map of North America published in 1755 shows British sovereignty over large parts of the continent at the outset of the French and Indian War (1754-63). It is perhaps the most well-known 18th century map of North America. Created by John Mitchell, a native Virginian who moved to London in his mid-thirties, the map was compiled using information provided by governors of the British colonies. Although territories of other European powers are shown, the map is biased toward British interests. French claims in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, as defined by the *Treaty of Utrecht* (1714), are not recognized and, instead, English colonial claims extending west of the Alleghenies to the Mississippi River are emphasized. In addition to providing a vast amount of geographic information, the map can be seen as an expression of English dominance in North America. This map was later used to establish the boundaries of the United States in the 1783 Treaty of Paris. The map is hand-colored, with relief shown pictorially.

In the upper left is an inset map entitled "A new map of Hudson's Bay and Labrador from the late survey of those coasts." This map had a strong influence on Abel Buell in his Map of United States of North America (1784, #780.5), the first map published in the independent United States. The influence can be seen in a comparison with the cartouche on the Buell map and in the way the colonial claims extending from the Atlantic coast on this map are similar to the state claims extending to the Mississippi

on the 1784 Buell map. The map shows provinces, some counties, numerous towns and cities, frontier settlements, forts, roads, distances between major towns, rivers and lakes, portages, waterfalls, Indian villages and tribal territory, English "factories" among the Indians, mineral deposits, early routes of exploration, a few battlegrounds, and relief. Also shown are the fishing grounds in the North Atlantic and channels in the Saint Lawrence River and the Great Lakes.

Without serious doubt Mitchell's is the most important map in American history. There is impressive support for this evaluation. Most conclusive, perhaps, is the fact that it was the cartographic document consulted by official representatives of Great Britain and the United States at Paris in 1782 and 1783 in negotiating the treaty that terminated the Revolutionary War and recognized the independence of the United States. Although there is no mention of Mitchell's map in the treaty and no copies of the map were signed by the plenipotentiaries, there is strong evidence that it was consulted by the delegates. For example, Hunter Miller cited a letter from John Adams to James Sullivan, written on August 2, 1796, in which Adams affirmed that "Mitchell's map was the only one which the ministers plenipotentiary of the United States and the minister plenipotentiary of Great Britain made use of in their conferences and discussions relative to the boundaries of the United States, in their negotiation of the peace of 1783, and of the provisional articles of the 30th of November, 1782. Upon that map, and that only, were those boundaries delineated."

On April 8, 1790, nine days before his death, Benjamin Franklin wrote to Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, as follows: "I now can assure you that I am perfectly clear in the Remembrance that the Map we used in tracing the Boundary was brought to the Treaty by the Commissioners from England, and that it was the same that was published by Mitchell above 20 Years before."

Other historical uses of Mitchell's map can be noted. It is thought to have been in use in the British House of Commons during the debate on the *Quebec Act of 1774*; it is known to have hung in the halls of Congress in 1802 and several times subsequently. It was used in the discussions of British land grants in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, and in scores of controversies involving the boundary lines existing at the time of its publication. Great Britain and the United States agreed to its official status in the Convention of September 29, 1827; the King of the Netherlands made one of his conclusions, albeit an erroneous one, after using it in 1831; it exerted substantial influence in the negotiation and ratification of the *Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842*, and serious argument was based upon it by Great Britain before the Court of Arbitration at The Hague in 1910 in connection with the North Atlantic Coast Fisheries Arbitration. It was submitted in evidence before the Law Lords of the British Privy Council in 1926 in the appeal of Price Brothers & Company, Limited, from a judgment of the supreme court of Canada, and in 1926-27 in the Canada-Newfoundland (Labrador) boundary case. It was used as evidence before the Supreme Court of the United States in 1926 in the Wisconsin-Michigan boundary case, in 1926-27 in the Great Lakes level case, and in 1932 in the New Jersey-Delaware boundary case."

Dr. John Mitchell, of Virginia and England, was a distinguished and learned man of his time; he was a physician whose treatment of yellow fever became famous in 1793, a botanist of repute, the author of numerous works, and the maker of one map. Mitchell was concerned at the active French expansion throughout the northwestern part of North America and the seeming disinterest of the British authorities in enlarging and solidifying their colonial possessions. The map and an unsigned pamphlet attributed to

Mitchell, entitled *The Contest in America Between Great Britain and France by an Impartial Hand*, are expressions of that interest.

Mitchell commenced work on the map in 1750 and he was occupied in compiling it for the next five years. Through his intimacy with George Dunk, Earl of Halifax, he had access to the extensive collection of manuscript maps and geographical reports in the archives of the British Board of Trade. Mitchell's map was issued in 1755 with the approval and at the request of the British Government; it was dedicated to the Earl of Halifax, who was then President of the Board of Trade; it bears the endorsement of John Pownall, Secretary of the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, dated February 13, 1755; and in the printed text of the map is this statement:

This Map was undertaken with the Approbation and at the request of the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations [the Board of Trade]; and is Chiefly composed from Draughts, Charts and Actual Surveys of different parts of his Majesties Colonies & Plantations in America; Great Part of which have been lately taken by their Lordships Orders, and transmitted to this Office by the Governors of the said Colonies and others.

It appears, moreover, from the text printed on the second edition of his map, that Mitchell had access not only to the records of the Board of Trade, but also to those of the British Admiralty, which he speaks of as 'the Journals of our Ships of War kept in the Admiralty Office.'

In general, Mitchell's map is a political map, showing the division of eastern North America between the British and the French and the administrative subdivisions of the British North American colonies. The map also has roads, however, and gives the positions of the principal Indian tribes, as well as extensive notes regarding the dates of various settlements, the nature of the country, and so forth. Topographic features are roughly indicated, particularly in the Appalachian Mountains. It is especially worthy of note that, although a considerable portion of the territory of Louisiana is included, the boundaries of the maritime colonies are extended westward across the Mississippi River to the western border of the map. This is deliberate, for the parallel of 40° north latitude in the position of the present boundary between Nebraska and Kansas is denominated, "*Bounds of Virginia and New-England by Charters, May 23_ 1609 and Nov' 3_ 1620, extending from Sea to Sea, out of which our other Colonies were granted.*" Northwest of Lake Superior, in the present State of Minnesota, the same claim is repeated along the forty-eighth parallel in the words, "*Northern Bounds of New England by Charter Nov' 3 1620, extending to the South Sea's.*" Just off the present coast of Texas and just off the east coast of Florida the twenty-ninth parallel is marked "*Bounds of Carolina by Charter*" and "*Bounds of Carolina by their Charter.*" North Carolina is carried westward beyond the Mississippi River to the western edge of the map by specific boundary symbols.

The ornately decorated title, set in the lower right corner of the map, reads as follows on the first three editions: *A Map of the British and French Dominions in North America With The Roads, Distances, Limits, and Extent of the Settlements, Humbly Inscribed to the Right Honourable The Earl of Halifax, And the Other Right Honourable The Lords Commissioners for Trade &- Plantations, By their Lordships Most Obligated and very humble Servant Jn~ Mitchell_*

The map is impressive in size, measuring approximately 52 by 75 inches. It is at the scale of 1 :2,000,000, or about 32 miles to an inch. Printing was from engraved plates on eight separate sheets. The coast from Newfoundland and southern Labrador to Florida and Texas is shown, and the map extends on the west to what is now Oklahoma,

Kansas, and Nebraska, and on the north to Hudson Bay. An inset map in the upper left corner, entitled "*A New Map of Hudson's Bay and Labrador*," includes part of the west coast of Greenland, and the Mississippi River extends up to and disappears beneath the neat line of the inset map. Thus the position of its supposed headwaters is omitted. Mitchell's map was most favorably received, and a number of editions and plagiarisms of it were issued over a period of 30 or more years. Because the several versions were published at different dates and in a number of places, it is difficult to identify the specific copies of Mitchell's map that were consulted in treaty negotiations.

After years of detailed research Martin differentiated seven English impressions; two Dutch editions, with English titles, published in Amsterdam; ten French impressions, several with titles and notes in German as well as French; and two Italian piracies published in Venice. All of the above are at the scale of the initial edition. While the publication dates are not known for all variants, except for the latest French and Italian editions all were published before 1782.

The Library of Congress has a most comprehensive collection of the several editions and impressions of Mitchell's map. For 19 of the 21 impressions the Library possesses originals, and it has photocopies for the other two. It also has photocopies, from originals in other repositories, of variants for which the Library has printed editions.

Reference: Martin, Lawrence, "John Mitchell's Map of the British and French Dominions in North America," *A la Carte*, Library of Congress, pp. 102-113.







