

ARCHIVAL MAPS AS ILLUSTRATED BY THOSE IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES¹

ON A CERTAIN DAY in June, 331 years ago, and again in August of the same summer a small vessel of three tons burden sailed past the mouth of the Severn only about three miles from where we are now assembled. In it on both occasions were some dozen white men engaged in exploration that in two short trips of three and six weeks respectively, despite storms and Indian encounters, outlined the entire indented shoreline of Chesapeake Bay and the lower courses of many of its tributary rivers with an accuracy which comparison with the modern map shows to be deserving of all praise.

These expeditions are described by their leader in his classic account of the first permanent English settlement in the New World. In the author of that account, known to the world in general as soldier and colonial official and, if you will, adventurer in two hemispheres, the geographer recognizes a kindred spirit. For what could be more in keeping with the modern geographer's definition of his subject as the study of man in his environment than the following quotation from Captain John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles*, published in 1624, where, in introducing the section on the Summer Isles, i.e., Bermuda, he says:

Before we present the matters of fact, it is fit to offer to your view the Stage whereon they were acted, for as Geography without History seemeth a carkasse without motion, so History without Geography wandreth as a vagrant without a certaine habitation.

With your permission I should like to submit Captain Smith's quotation as a sentiment peculiarly appropriate to the topic of the present brief paper. For in the administration of an archival map collection there should be a blending, it seems to me, of the points of view of the geographer on the one hand and the professional historian and archivist on the other, or, rather, the geographical principles should be fitted into the framework of the principles developed by modern archival economy.

When the National Archives was being established, provision was made for a separate Division of Maps and Charts because, as stated in the *First Annual Report of the Archivist of the United States*,²

¹ Read at the Third Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Annapolis, Maryland, October 13-14, 1939.

² Washington, D.C., 1936, p. 16.

the special scientific problems involved called for professional geographical supervision. The geographer's point of view was thus generously recognized; it was necessary also to study and apply the archival point of view.

The cardinal principle of archival economy is, we take it, the principle of *respect pour les fonds* which calls for maintaining groups of documents intact according to the agencies of whose activities they are an outgrowth and whose functions they reflect. This principle of provenance underlies the organization of the regular custodial divisions in the National Archives, according to which a separate division is provided for each legislative branch and each executive department of the federal government. The three specialized divisions, Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings, Photographic Archives and Research, and Maps and Charts, are exceptions to this scheme in that, because of the special nature of their materials, they receive records from all executive departments and branches. They may be thought of structurally as tiers cutting horizontally across all departments, while the regular custodial divisions represent vertical compartments, each devoted to a single department.

If, then, inviolability of the administrative derivation is the dominant archival principle, what would the geographical principle be? The answer to this question touches upon the organization of the science of geography as a whole. It is the regional principle.

The subject-matter of geography is divided into two parts, general geography and regional geography. General geography deals with the general principles and laws of the phenomena relating to the earth, such as the laws of climatology or plant geography or human geography. Regional geography deals with the association in a given area or region of the various factors that go to make up the natural environment of that area or region and man's activities therein.

Obviously, it is not possible to have maps of the general laws of climatology or the principles of human geography. Maps belong in the field of regional geography; each map represents a definite portion of the earth's surface (or of the whole world, in some cases).

From the geographer's point of view a map collection should be arranged and classified regionally, i.e., by countries, states, or other areas. This is the primary interest. Whether a map of Illinois shows distribution of prairie and forest, coal and other mineral resources, history of settlement, or modern transportation lines, the basic fact is that it deals with Illinois. Therefore, it should be classified and

filed by the state. Other interests can be taken care of through cross-referencing, such as entries under coal, settlement, railroads, motor roads, etc., under which would then be grouped cards referring to maps of all the states or other areas in the collection on which these aspects were represented. Classification of maps by the regional principle, and indeed of all geographical publications, textually and otherwise, is now greatly facilitated by two publications by Mr. Boggs, one³ as chairman of a committee of the Association of American Geographers and the other⁴ as joint author with Mrs. Lewis, map librarian of the Department of State. Thiele's American Library Association manual⁵ also has useful data.

A consideration of these matters and, more important still, the character of the material actually coming into the custody of the Division of Maps and Charts at the National Archives led inevitably to the conclusion that the regional principle, at least as a primary principle of classification and arrangement, is not appropriate for an archival map collection. To have applied the regional principle would have merged together maps derived from different agencies and would have broken down the agency of derivation structure. As a corollary, it would have cut across the threads connecting the maps with their related textual records in the other custodial divisions of the National Archives, and to maintain those threads unbroken and to see that, in the manner of a complex technological exhibit, every colored ribbon correctly leads from its label to the object which that label describes is, as we see it, one of the important duties of the division.

How these questions of classification and arrangement and relation to corresponding textual records actually work out can best be illustrated by describing briefly the different groups of maps in the Division of Maps and Charts.

The maps now in the custody of the division number some 38,000 and were derived from the United States Senate and from five executive departments, an interdepartmental committee, and an independent agency. The most important collections are those from the Department of State, from the Office of the Chief of Engineers in

³ S. W. Boggs, "Library Classification and Cataloging of Geographic Material," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, XXVII (1937), 49-93.

⁴ S. W. Boggs and Dorothy C. Lewis, *Classification and Cataloging of Maps and Atlases* (Washington, 1932).

⁵ Walter Thiele, *Official Map Publications* (Chicago, 1938).

the War Department, from the Office of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior, and from the Senate.

The State Department maps represent the outstanding collection formerly in the archives section of the office of the Historical Adviser. It contains the maps relating to treaties to which the United States has been a party, to the international boundaries of the United States, to arbitrations, including the fur seal arbitration, and to the agreements with Great Britain concerning the North Atlantic fisheries. The treaty maps include six complete copies, among them the Steuben-Webster copy, of the Mitchell Map of 1755 which Colonel Martin of the Division of Maps of the Library of Congress has characterized as "without serious doubt . . . the most important map in American history."⁶

The treaty maps, especially the Disturnell map of Mexico and the Melish map of 1819, have had the benefit of close study by Colonel Martin and also by Mr. Boggs, the results of which are published in Hunter Miller's volumes of definitive treaty texts.⁷ These maps therefore already have, as it were, a public record, expressed in terms of the agency in whose custody they formerly were. Here, obviously, is a case that pre-eminently calls for *respect pour les fonds*.

As to classification, the maps had, prior to their transfer to the National Archives, been arranged and card indexed by treaties and conventions and under these according to the individual articles to which the maps related. As a result, it has been readily possible to identify and locate any given map.

The maps from the Office of the Chief of Engineers are the military maps of historical value from the Map Files Section of the Administrative Division of that office. They exclude the maps dealing with river and harbor surveys and other nonmilitary engineering works. The maps resulting from the explorations and surveys of the former Bureau of Topographical Engineers form the bulk of the collection. Significant among the maps in the collection are the Civil War maps.

The Chief of Engineers maps are arranged according to an alphabetical classification scheme beginning with the North Atlantic states

⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography*, "John Mitchell," XIII, 51.

⁷ *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., 1931-1937); Mitchell's map, III, 328-351, and IV, 403-413; Disturnell's map, V, 340-370; and Melish's map, III, 54-55.

and progressing southward and westward to the Pacific coast. Each map is numbered within this scheme and for each there is an index slip. Here again there is an established system of notation and filing that needs to be preserved.

The same holds even more true of the Indian Office maps, which constitute the largest collection of all, numbering about 17,000 items. In this collection most maps bear a file number compounded of the number of the tube in which it was formerly kept and a map files serial number. The map number will frequently be found on the correspondence or other textual document in the Division of Interior Department Archives to which the map is related, and in these cases finding the map related to a given document and vice versa is relatively simple.

When the correspondence does not carry the map number, other steps have to be taken to identify and locate the desired map. In this, the most valuable aid is the card index that was prepared under the supervision of the Division of Maps and Charts as part of a WPA project originally sponsored by the Indian Office whereby the whole collection was also mounted on cloth or otherwise rehabilitated. This index consists of three sets of cards that are arranged respectively by map number, by states, and by subjects. Since the rather arbitrary sequence used in the tube filing need no longer be followed now that the maps are flat filed, it is proposed, in agreement with the Indian Office, to arrange them physically by states, under state by Indian reservation, and under Indian reservation chronologically. By means of these numerous devices, the ready location of any given map in this large collection seems assured.

The Senate maps came to the Division of Maps and Charts in the various miscellaneous bundles in which they had been stored in the attic of the Senate wing of the capitol. They contain maps that were used by various Senate committees, such as Civil War maps used by the Committee on Military Affairs; also maps used as so-called engraver's "copy" for the production of the printed maps appearing in Senate documents. The Division of Classification of the National Archives has classified these by number and session of Congress and, so far as possible, by Congressional document number. This provides a valuable key.

These examples have indicated that most of the collections were organized according to some system before they were transferred to the National Archives. The need to retain their original adminis-

trative grouping is all the greater. However, although this confirms the archival principle as the appropriate primary principle to apply, it may be pointed out that it might be desirable, especially in view of the type of inquiries that are being received in the division, to apply the regional principle in creating a card catalogue that would bring together the entries concerning different maps in various collections that deal with the same area or subject. It may be that the magnitude of the task, especially with increasing acquisitions, would make it difficult of achievement, but a modified form dealing only with major categories might prove feasible, such as the Division of Cataloging is carrying out as regards the textual records.

In what has preceded it has been the intention to discuss aspects of map administration that are distinctively archival. An archival collection, of course, also has problems in common with those of a regular map collection, such as use of paper folders for filing, or mounting and dissecting the maps to fit the size of the drawer in the map cases used, etc. Some of these questions have been referred to in Mr. Brown's paper,⁸ and further information on them is available in the two publications by Mr. Boggs of which mention has previously been made, so that it seems unnecessary, even if the time would allow, to discuss them further here.

If in conclusion we turn from these details to the world outlook to which the geographer is accustomed, we will remember that the stage whereon our national life has been and is being acted is one of the two areas of continental proportions in which the white man has found the climatic conditions necessary to his continuous and compact occupation of the land. Maps are the graphic form in which that settlement and its precipitates are most effectively recorded. The geographers entrusted with the care of these national records of the drama enacted on the American scene are aware of their significance and by the very quality of the material in their custody daily experience the perennial validity of the challenge *noblesse oblige*.

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⁸ Lloyd A. Brown, "The Special Problem of Map Administration." Paper read at the Third Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Annapolis, Maryland, October 13-14, 1939.