

PERNICIOUS CARTOPHILIA

BY MICHAEL RYVAL

Ed. Note:— The following article appeared in the March 1978 issue of The Financial Post, printed and published by McLean-Hunter Ltd.

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Antique maps are still terra incognita to most people. To their collectors, however, they are a joy, a trial and a good investment.

It was in 1962 that Toronto Elementary-school principal Edward Rutherford first succumbed to cartophilia, a sort of mutation of bibliophilia and just as incurable once the bug has bitten. Rutherford, then a teacher with an inherent interest in history, was rummaging through "a pile of junk" his mother's neighbor intended to throw out. His eye was caught by an old but well-preserved copper-plate engraving, embellished by a colorful hand-painted border of heraldic crests, ghostly galleons, and windy cherubs. It turned out to be a map of the northern hemisphere. More precisely, it was a map of the northern hemisphere as Amsterdam cartographer Jan Jansson believed it to be in 1640.

"I was immediately fascinated," Rutherford remembers. "I had never seen a map that old before. More than 300 years, can you imagine? Not only was it beautiful to look at but also the information was so elementary, so primitive, that I couldn't resist it".

Rutherford paid his mother's neighbor \$50 for the find, a price he later learned was fair for the day. The 1640 Jansson—cartophiles identify their treasures by the cartographer's surname and tend to sound like car buffs or oenophiles discussing improbable vintages—now is worth about \$250. That five-fold increase in value reflects the extent to which the bull market in rare maps has developed during the 1970s. Prices have generally doubled in the past five years alone according to Toronto map dealer Neil Sneyd. And they are expected to double again in the next five.

Map dealers offer various explanations for the soaring prices. Most agree that rare maps were considerably undervalued until now, considering their relative scarcity. Current demand is pushing them up to their true value. What is prompting the demand? For one thing, museums, rare-book libraries, and other institutions are beginning to recognize the importance of maps as historical documents and works of art. But more

important, maps have become the latest darlings of the affluent collector-investor. Like rare coins, books, stamps, and prints before them, they are being snapped up as hedges against inflation.

New York map dealer Richard Arkway is hesitant about making mercantile projections: "I'm no investment counselor or economist. It's all very complex. But there's no denying the tremendous rise in the past couple years. The question now is whether prices will go up 50% or only 20% in the near future".

All of which is bitter-sweet news for modest-income collectors such as Edward Rutherford, who have made maps their hobby. True, Rutherford's collection of 200 maps is worth a lot more than he paid for it. But he feels he is being priced out of the market:

"I'm really stuck. The investor may be waiting for prices to rise. But as a collector, I would like nothing better than for them to go down, down, down. I don't want just any old map today. The ones I want are rare and expensive—\$300, \$600, \$1,000. I'm limited to one or two purchases a year now."

Rutherford's hobby has a long and honorable history, stretching back to the Renaissance and beyond. It's known, for example, that a comprehensive collection of classical and medieval maps was scattered to the four winds at the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and generations of dedicated cartophiles have been trying to repair the damage ever since. Maps attract certain collectors because they are unique combinations of artistic and intellectual disciplines; each is a graphic rendering of the state of man's historical, geographical and scientific awareness of the world at the time of publication.

On the other hand, maps have never had the mass appeal of, say, books or stamps. Even today, at conservative estimates, there are fewer than 500 serious map collectors like Rutherford in the world and perhaps only a dozen or so in Canada.

Rutherford amassed most of his 200 maps before 1967, when Centennial fever gripped the nation and triggered a treasure hunt for cartographic and other Canadiana that is still in progress. His particular interests are world maps showing North America and specific maps of what now is Canada. The first cartographic reference to Canada, says Rutherford, appeared on a French manuscript map by Pierre Desceliers, of Dieppe in the 1540s; it was based on Cartier's exploration. The first printed reference to Canada appeared in the 1560s on an Italian map.

Rutherford's 1640 Jansson is a polar projection, possibly the first such projection to be published. It is also one of the first maps to show Hudson's Bay as an inland sea, closed on the west, and not a possible ocean avenue to the Far East, as had been thought up until then. Newfoundland and the mouth of the St. Lawrence are shown, with the river heading south off the edge of the map. (The great lakes don't start washing up on maps until the 1650s, and then only one by one.) All the rest of what now is our home and native land is labeled "Terra Incognita."

Like most surviving maps of that era, the Jansson was originally part of an atlas. Jansson and his Amsterdam contemporary Willem Blaeu, one of the great cartographers of the age, used to steal each other's plates pretty freely for their rival atlases—and both happily "borrowed" from Mercator, their illustrious predecessor of a generation before. Frequent plagiarism among cartographers of the 17th and 18th centuries perpetuated curious errors. California, for example, kept appearing on maps as an island for decades after everybody knew it was really part of the mainland—although the San Andreas fault may yet make those early maps eerily prophetic.

For old-fashioned cartophiles such as Rutherford, these errors, omissions, and anomalies are part of the reason why the hobby is so fascinating. He delights in showing off his collection to visitors and pointing out some of his favorites—a 1778 Zatta of Newfoundland, a 1670 de Wit of the Great Lakes region. He spends many of his holidays in London, chatting to dealers about maps he can't afford and browsing through the magnificent collection in the British Museum's map room: "Ah, to be alone in the map room, away from the noise and bustle!"

Toronto Stockbroker and publisher Christopher Ondaatje is a cartophile of a different contour. Ondaatje, to be sure, has some aesthetic appreciation of maps. He favors the 18th-century depictions of North America by French, Dutch, and Italian cartographers. He says British maps of the era, particularly those after the conquest of 1763, "are not nearly as good art forms." Ondaatje believes "early world maps, especially those showing North America, are some of the finest art forms available."

Through his publishing house, Pagurian Press, Ondaatje has invested more than \$60,000 in rare maps. "I'd bet the total catalogue value is close to \$500,000," he says.

As might be expected, the Pagurian collection is usually kept in a vault. But for a visitor, Ondaatje will unroll some of his prizes, including a 1677 du Val that

recorded the discoveries of Champlain. (Looking closely, one can see "a route to the Orient" passing roughly through present-day Thunder Bay.) The du Val cost Ondaatje a tidy \$2,000.

Ondaatje, like every serious collector, keeps a catalogue of his maps. But he holds it close to his chest when visitors are around. Asked if he likes to meet other cartophiles to talk shop, he looks a little alarmed: "Oh no, we're loners! If they saw my maps, they would try to find out where I got them and I wouldn't want that."

However, that is not a typical reaction among collectors. As Ondaatje later admits, they naturally come to know about each other if only because they are dealing in the same limited market. He himself buys mainly through British and other European dealers: "The maps are cheaper there; Europeans don't want them, but we do."

Investor Ondaatje tends to stress the commercial rather than the artistic value of the Pagurian collection: "In three years, some of these will be so difficult to get, they'll be virtually priceless. I'll tell you one thing: I don't know if I'll ever sell them, but I'm certainly not selling them now."

Somewhere in between Rutherford and Ondaatje are collectors such as Leonard Vis and Walter Keyser.

Vis, a Toronto advertising executive, is a native of Amsterdam who married a Canadian and moved here in 1972. Aware of his home city's cartographic heritage, he began collecting maps 10 years ago. He now concentrates on the New World: "The fascinating thing is to see how long it took people to get a grasp of this immense continent."

As a recent immigrant, Vis finds our general immunity to cartophilia almost scandalous. "Most Canadians are not interested in maps of their country, their history," he says. "They're just not interested."

Unlike Vis, witness some of the treasures on which he has laid his hands. These include a 1700 Pieter Mortier of North America (the first large-size map of the continent) and a 1662 map of Labrador by Willem Blaeu's son Johannes. He is especially fond of his map of America by Belgian cartographer Petrus Bertius, who died in 1629. After sifting through some two dozen reference books Vis is fairly sure nobody else has this particular Bertius: "And if that's the case, I'm hanging on to it for a long, long time."

Walter Keyser, the head of a large real estate financing firm, began collecting maps three years ago. The pressure



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to do so came from his wife Connie, an art dealer. "For a while I couldn't see myself spending money on these things," he says. "Then one day I gave in."

Keyser adopted a methodical approach to map-collecting. First he chose an area—the Arctic and the Pacific Northwest, including Alaska and the Aleutians. Then he boned up on the history of the area. Finally he put together a list of 12 "must-have" maps for his special field. So far he has collected three of his definitive 12, plus several other maps of the area, and spends most of his spare time during his frequent business trips prowling through book and map stores looking for the other nine.

In the process, and a little to his own surprise, Keyser has become something of an expert on the history of the Northwest. He can unravel, with appropriate map references, the tangled 18th-century controversy about the discovery of Alaska and explain the 17th-century confusion about the Northwest Passage. Much of that confusion, it seems, was caused by an imaginative cartographer who etched in a cunning passage through the Rockies alleged to have been penetrated by a wholly fictitious Admiral de Fonte of Spain. Small wonder that about the same time Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift, echoing Plutarch, was mocking the state of the cartographic art with these lines:

"So geographers, in Afric maps
With savage pictures fill their gaps,
And o'er unhabitable downs
Place elephants for want of towns."

Now a convinced cartophile, Keyser thinks maps are a bargain: "The vast majority are relatively inexpensive, and that's the joy of it to me. They're like 300-year-old sketches by Rembrandt—at a much, much lower cost. They're a good investment, too. But people who buy maps really don't anticipate profits. And anyway, they are not that easy to sell."

Dealers disagree with Keyser. Maps are easy to sell, particularly the coveted masterpieces by cartographers such as Mercator, Ortelius Blaeu and De L'Isle.

"Some maps have totally disappeared," says Arkway, the New York dealer. "That's the case with the really beautiful 16th-century Italians. It's likely to happen soon to the 17th-century Dutch. And then one day, the 18th century. . . ."

"Admittedly, you can't exactly sell these maps overnight. But you can do it fairly rapidly. Dealers are much more interested in buying than selling. And we can't buy enough these days."

Tips for would-be cartophiles

Whether you take up maps as a

hobby or an investment, you need a good general knowledge of cartography.

Read the basic reference works by such authors as R. A. Skelton, R. V. Tooley, Lloyd Brown, and Louis Karpinski. Then pursue the public collections in such places as the University of Toronto's Sigmund Samuel Library, and McGill's Redpath Library.

Choose a special field. It may be a particular era, or a certain region, or an individual cartographer. Then buy one or two maps in that field and study them. "You can't buy or collect in a vacuum," Arkway says.

Cultivate reputable dealers and try to get on their mailing lists. Once you are a serious collector, dealers will keep your interests in mind. And they won't overcharge you.

Remember that prices are negotiable, particularly if you are buying several maps. On the other hand, Walter Keyser warns, it's better to buy quality than quantity.

There are few investment bargains left, but if you spot a whole atlas of the 17th or 18th century it might be worth your while to take a close look at it.

Dealers say forgeries are not a problem. Collector Edward Rutherford is not so sure. He was once offered a rare Ortelius for \$800 by a London dealer: "It was one of those 'antiqued' maps, a fake. The dealer denied knowing it, but who's to tell?" the great question mark in cartography is the celebrated "Vinland" map at Harvard, allegedly an 11th-century Viking depiction of the New World. It was authenticated by the British Museum's Skelton before he died but now is generally considered spurious. Having paid a reported \$1 million for it, Harvard is reluctant to expose the map to modern scientific tests.

Beware of facsimiles, reproduction of the same era but not true originals. Rutherford recalls seeing what purported to be a 1752 De L'Isle of North America that was actually printed in 1789: "It's just an historical oddity but it takes a practised eye to spot it."

DR. SISTERS

Dear Dr. Sisters:

I am about to come home on leave after a two-year stint of surveying in Saudi-Arabia, where the only ladies I see are of the camel persuasion. This suits me, because I am terribly shy with girls, and really only feel comfortable with Mummsy. What can I do to overcome my phobia? I enclose a snapshot of the chief surveyor and myself, with our camel.

Rex Oedipus



SURVEYORS ON THE MOVE

Thomas Seawright was recently appointed as Manager, Land Boundaries Program, Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

Ron Logan, formerly with the POLARIS project at M.C.C.R., is now Land Registrar in Simcoe.

The West has lured another Ontario surveyor, with **Steve Gossling**, who was formerly with the firm of T. E. Rody Ltd. moving to Alberta.

Bob Stocker is leaving his surveying activities for the time being and entering Osgoode Hall in September.

W. S. Gibson & Son Ltd., have opened an office in Madoc. W. W. Lorenz is the manager of this new enterprise for one of the more senior firms in Ontario.

Grant McBurney has been appointed Editor for the Canadian Surveyor, the journal of the Canadian Institute of Surveying.

President of the Canadian Institute of Surveying for 1978 is **Hugh O'Donnell** from Ottawa, who assumed office at the Annual Meeting of the Institute in Calgary in May. **John Barber**, Past-President of the A.O.L.S. was elected a Provincial Councillor at the same meeting.

Henry Gerrits has opened an office in Scarborough at 94 Pitt Avenue.

An office has been opened at 146 Prescott Street in Kemptville by **John H. Kennedy**.

The following surveyors have opened offices **John Goltz** in Perth, **Ron Smith** in Gananoque.

Bill Fenton is managing the J. D. Barnes Ottawa office.

Bruce Wright has been appointed Chief Surveyor in charge of the new Survey Section of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications.

Dear Rex:

My, you are a big one, aren't you? Is everything in proportion? I see you in the picture, but I'm not sure about the other two. Which one is the camel?

Your problem interests me. What you are suffering from is known clinically as strangulated libido, one of the forms of nymphomania. Typically, you are an only child, and your mother is so beautiful, fragile and ethereal that other females seem crass.

The only possible therapy for this explosive condition is sustained contact with a vibrant and passionate, yet cultured woman. I have ordered a special couch. What is your flight number?

Dr. Sisters