

News of the arts

Treasures of map collection

The Public Archives of Canada is currently displaying a number of maps as part of its celebrations of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the National Map Collection.

Treasures of the National Map Collection is an exhibition of 100 original maps dating from 1490 to 1982. The exhibition has been organized under a number of headings including: Canada in the World, New France, Atlantic Canada, Quebec/Ontario, Western Canada, The North, Urban Centres and Buildings.

Rapid expansion

The National Map Collection has grown from the few thousand maps of the original "map room" in 1907 to its present collection of close to one million maps, charts, plans, atlases, globes and architectural drawings. The collection is recognized internationally and is the largest and most significant in Canada. During the past decade the Public Archives has undertaken a vigorous acquisition program acquiring about 40 000 maps a year.

The National Map Collection attempts to collect one copy of each map showing Canada or its parts since the year 1500. For printed items, the goal is to acquire a good copy of each edition or state. Photocopies and facsimiles are collected as well as manuscripts and original prints.

Although originals are preferable in a national collection, sometimes copies are only available and they do have informational value for research. Consideration is given to acquisitions which fill in gaps or add to the present collection in terms of information, geographic area, cartographer, cartographical style and cartographical technology (surveying, mathematical projections, printing, etc.).

In general, maps showing Canada or specific areas of Canada are selected rather than general maps. These maps help in the study of various periods and themes in Canadian history — for example, the European discovery and exploratory periods, political and industrial development, settlement patterns, military history, transportation and communication, and urban development. In addition, pre-1500 examples of other parts of the world (usually in copy or facsimile form) are collected to show the history and development of cartography. Also, samples of various stages in the production of cartographical materials, such as working



Map of 1703 published by two French cartographers, Claude and Guillaume Delisle, showing eastern Canada, then part of the French Empire in North America.

copies and printing plates, are collected.

The premise that maps and other cartographical material should be collected as they are produced has been accepted at the National Map Collection since the 1940s for federal topographic series and some other current mapping. Since the 1960s there has been a systematic acquisition policy for series and separately published maps. This is certainly the most efficient and the most economical method of obtaining and preserving the cartographic heritage in mint condition.

Approximately 95 per cent of Canadian cartographic production results from governmental programs at the federal, provincial/territorial, and local levels. The National Map Collection acquires this material and the major part of the current cartographic production in the private sector, most of which is obtained through voluntary deposits. A great many of the current maps acquired are not published, although they are printed as ozalid copies.

Foreign acquisitions

The National Map Collection has also been committed since the 1960s to acquiring and maintaining an effective collection of foreign maps to support the foreign interests of government, industry and scholarship. In the acquisition of such current, non-Canadian cartographical material, selection is limited to

series at a scale of 1:250 000 or smaller for most parts of the world; larger scale mapping of areas of particular Canadian interest; national/regional atlases; certain types of thematic material; small scale world maps; and plans of major urban centres.

The Department of National Defence and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources assist in the acquisition program, partly by the establishment of exchange agreements with other nations. The Department of Energy, Mines and Resources initially transferred in 1965 approximately 150 000 maps to the collection. By weeding duplicate and surplus material from that collection and by selective acquisition policies in the past decade, the collection now holds a more streamlined and extremely useful collection of approximately 115 000 items. In this area, co-operation with major university map libraries is ensuring that Canadians have access to mapping of all parts of the world through union lists and inter-library loans.

In its public records role, the National Map Collection acquires cartographical and architectural records created or used by the Canadian government, its agencies and Crown corporations. The records have historical significance and show the government's organization and administrative working methods, or the general social, economic or other conditions.