


THE OSHER MAP LIBRARY AND SMITH CENTER FOR CARTOGRAPHIC EDUCATION PRESENTS
a travelling exhibition originating at the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library



CHARTING AN EMPIRE: *The Atlantic Neptune*

March 25 to August 14, 2014

<http://www.oshermaps.org/exhibitions/charting-an-empire>

Using nautical charts dating from the eighteenth century to the present, this exhibition examines the importance of accurate charting with a focus on Atlantic Canada and New England. It defines how Britain put her mark on the land and explores the complex processes of marine surveying and nautical chart production.

The period following the French and Indian War (1755–1759), the North American component of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), was a time of change and discovery in North America. In this exhibition we look at the decade following the war, when Britain set out to accurately chart the coast and survey the inland areas of their newly expanded, resource-rich empire. Joseph Frederick Wallet Des Barres published the resulting charts, beginning in 1774; the outbreak of the American Revolution led him to hasten their publication and to combine them into the four-volume *The Atlantic Neptune* (1777–1782). With more than a hundred maps at different scales, as well as many views and coastal profiles of the Atlantic Coast, from Quebec to the Gulf of Mexico, this maritime atlas set the standard for nautical charting for the next fifty years.

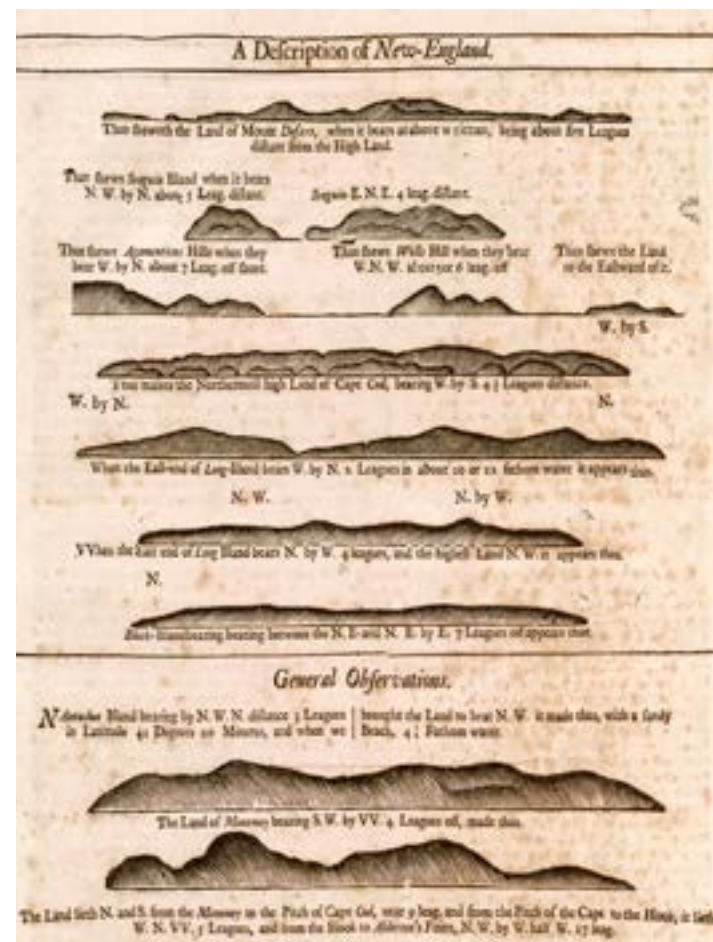
In northern Maine, the surveyors encountered the most complex coastline on the eastern seaboard. With its rocky and broken coastline and numerous harbors, bays, and inlets, the mainland coast

alone extended 3,500 miles. With the addition of countless offshore islands, the total Maine coastline measured more than 5,000 miles. Upon completion, these marine surveys provided a complete and systematic view of the New England coast and the maritime advantages it offered for colonial settlements in the region. Moreover, the printed charts proved to be critical for British naval operations during the Revolution.



Item #4

The crudely executed headland views displayed in this 1716 edition of the fourth part of *The English Pilot* exemplify the type of visual resources available to navigators prior to the publication of *The Atlantic Neptune*. These early coastal profiles demonstrated the need for navigators to have accurate visual representations of unknown coastlines. The dark woodcuts displayed here would not have been very useful to those attempting to identify landfalls, as opposed to the finely executed and detailed coastal profiles included in *The Atlantic Neptune*.



1. Richard and William Mount, and Thomas Page

Quote and detail from *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book*
 London, 1716; reproduction, 2014
 Osher Map Library (Osher Collection)

2. John Thornton (1641–1708)

A Chart of the Sea Coast of New Foundland, New Scotland, New England, New York, New Jersey, with Virginia and Maryland
 London, between 1748 and 1770
 Osher Map Library (OML Collections)

3. Stephen Hornsby (1956-)

“Staple Regions in North America and the Caribbean, 1764-1775”
British Atlantic, American Frontier
 Lebanon, NH, 2005; color reproduction by Evan Thornberry, 2013.

“The Northern Coast and Harbors of His American dominions were unexplored and very partially and imperfectly known, and that only to a few fishermen.”

J.F.W. Des Barres

Quote from “Utility”
The Atlantic Neptune
 London, 1777; reproduction, 2013

4. J.F.W. Des Barres (1722–1824)

Title page for volume one, *The Atlantic Neptune*
 London, 1777

5. J.E. Gambardella

“Joseph Frederick Wallet Des Barres” ca. 1920
 Reproduction of original oil on canvas, courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1996-476-1.

6. J.F.W. Des Barres

“References”
The Atlantic Neptune
 London, 1777
 Courtesy of the Jay I Kislak Foundation

7. J.F.W. Des Barres

The Coast of Nova Scotia, New England, New-York, Jersey, the Gulph and River of St. Lawrence ...
 London, 1780

“The Invincible ... bound for Newfoundland ... [was] on the point of running on the shoals of the Isle of Sable; but, discovering the danger from the soundings and descriptions of the bottom given in The Atlantic Neptune, upon which infinite labor had been bestowed, they altered their course in the critical moment.”



8. J.F.W. Des Barres

Quote and detail from “Utility”
The Atlantic Neptune
 London, 1777; Reproduction, 2013

9. J.F.W. Des Barres

[Eight Views of the East of Nova Scotia]
 London, 1781

10. J.F.W. Des Barres

Mechios River Near the Mills; A Sketch of Mechios Mills
 London, July 31, 1777

11. J.F.W. Des Barres

Egmont Harbor
 London, 1777
 Courtesy of the Jay I. Kislak Foundation

12. J.F.W. Des Barres

[Views in the Vicinity of Halifax]
 London, 1777
 Courtesy of the Jay I. Kislak Foundation

Samuel Holland, Surveyor General for the Northern District, relocated from Quebec to Portsmouth in 1770 to begin the survey of New England, a task that would take the next five years to complete.



13. J.F.W. Des Barres

A View of Portsmouth in Piscataqua River
 London, 1781

14. J.F.W. Des Barres

A Plan of the Town of Newport in the Province of Rhode Island
 London, 1781

15. J.F.W. Des Barres

[Coastal View of Chebucto Head]
Halifax Harbor
 London, 1781; reproduction, 2013

16. J.F.W. Des Barres

Falmouth Harbour
 London, 1781 [3rd state]
 Engraved copper printing plate
 Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

17. J.F.W. Des Barres

Falmouth Harbour
 London, 1777 [1st state]



Samuel Holland undertook the challenging task of surveying the coast of Maine from the summer of 1772 to October 1773. For the purposes of the survey, he divided the region into three distinct parts: from the Saint John to the St. Croix, a territory which belonged to Nova Scotia; from the St. Croix to the Kennebec, which belonged to the “Country of Sagadahook” (Sagadahoc); and from the Kennebec to the Piscataqua, which comprised the Province of Maine, then part of Massachusetts. With its numerous islands and inlets, this chart of Casco Bay permits us to imagine the complexities and difficulties Holland faced in surveying Maine’s coast.

21. J.F.W. Des Barres

[Mount Desert Island and the neighboring coast of Maine]

London, 1777

Osher Map Library (Osher Collection)

22. Below the Boat

Mt. Desert Island/ Bar Harbor

Wooden bathymetric chart

Osher Map Library (Osher Collection)

23. J.F.W. Des Barres

The Coast of New England

London, 1781

Osher Map Library (Osher Collection)

24. United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

Bay of Fundy to Block Island

London, 1887; Updated 2013

25. J.F.W. Des Barres

Chart of Plymouth Bay

London, 1781

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Matthew H. Edney Ph.D., Osher Professor; Yolanda Theunissen, Curator

18. J.F.W. Des Barres

Falmouth Harbour

London, 1777 [2nd state]



19. Rosemary Mosher, Orbis, LLC

Composite Map of Portland from 1777 and 2001

Created in 2005

Osher Map Library (OML Collections)

20. J.F.W. Des Barres

[Coast of Maine: from Roger’s Bay to Portland Sound]

London, 1777

Osher Map Library (OML Collections)