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## Condition and Antique Maps

Antique maps may sustain many forms of damage over the years, some of which can be easily overlooked in the excitement surrounding a purchase. So it is important for collectors to understand issues related to map condition and exercise care with each acquisition.

### CONDITION FLAWS

Condition flaws may be categorized somewhat arbitrarily as either *aesthetic* or *structural*.

Most aesthetic flaws are static, in that they will not develop further if left alone. These include paper toning, soiling, water staining, manuscript notations, or library ownership stamps. Of greater concern are problems such as foxing (a brownish yellow, patchy discoloration caused by the action of mold on iron salts), and mildew (usually appearing as blackish, grayish, or purplish splotches). Left untreated, these can progress and occasionally damage a map irretrievably.

The most common structural flaws are creases, tears, puncture holes or wormholes. Less obvious but potentially more serious is deterioration of the paper overall. "Healthy" paper is both supple

and crisp at the same time; it should produce a distinctive crackling sound when held at the edges and waved gently up and down. When the fibers in a sheet of paper deteriorate, they can become either brittle and crumbly or limp and spongy.

Other structural flaws are byproducts of the binding process. Most common are center- or other folds and trimmed margins, both of which reflect the binder's effort to fit the map within the confines of a book.

The impact of condition flaws is a function of degree, perception and rarity. The most common problems (e.g., small tears, folds, or a spot of foxing) are acceptable and do not seriously detract from a map's value. The threshold will vary from person to person and map to map, however: Flaws in a sought-after rarity are more acceptable than similar flaws in a common piece. And one person's "throwaway" may be perfectly acceptable to another prospective buyer.

### MAP CONSERVATION

If well executed, conservation improves the aesthetic value of a map, extends its lifetime, and enhances its market value. That said, a well-conserved map is still less valuable than the same map in excellent original condition. As with condition flaws, the decrement in value will be a function of the extent of conservation and the intrinsic desirability of the map.

It is thus important to inspect a prospective purchase for signs of conservation, some of which may be easily overlooked. Some of the most common are closed tears,

trimmed margins extended with thin strips of paper, and whole maps stabilized by backing with thin tissue. On maps that have been more seriously damaged, one should also look out for areas of lost image that have been replaced with manuscript facsimile.

Unfortunately, maps can also be damaged by misguided efforts at conservation. Most common are tears closed with cellophane tape, which contains chemicals that will discolor the map and damage the paper. It is also common to find a map glued to a cardboard, foam core or other backing, usually in an effort to stabilize it for framing. Though removal is often possible, chemicals in the glue and/or backing often do substantial damage. Somewhat more subtle is excessive bleaching, which can leave the paper unnaturally bright and seriously weaken its fibers.

### BUYER AND BIDDER BEWARE

The most obvious tool available to the purchaser is the condition assessment provided by the seller.

At a minimum, most map dealers and specialty auction houses will rate a map's condition on a scale such as "excellent," "very good," "good," or "fair." Some use further gradations such as "just about very good" or "good or better."

Such information should be used with care, as there is no standardized condition rating scale. One dealer's "excellent" may be a more exacting dealer's "very good." A related concern is

#### In this issue:

Condition and Antique Maps  
page 1

Establishing a Coherent View  
of the Northeast: *The Gerritsz-De  
Laet "Nova Anglia, Novum Belgium  
et Virginia"*  
page 2

Continued on page 4

# Establishing a Coherent View of the Northeast: The Gerritsz-De Laet “Nova Anglia, Novum Belgium et Virginia”

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century separate voyages by Giovanni Verrazano and Jacques Cartier yielded the first information about the coasts of New England and New York. Based on their reports, Giacomo Gastaldi produced the first two maps to focus on the region—the *Tierra Nueva* (1548) and *La Nuova Francia* (1556). Though “state of the art” at the time, these maps are unrecognizable to the modern eye.

For the rest of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, European interest in the New World was largely focused elsewhere: either on exploiting the wealth of Latin America, or on finding a route *around* or *through* the Americas to open up a western trade route to Asia. It was only in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century that explorers representing England, France and the Netherlands inaugurated the “modern” cartography of the region.

## EXPLORATION AND MAPPING IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The most important explorers of northern New England were Samuel Champlain and John Smith. The former sailed down the Maine coast in 1605 and in fact reached the “elbow” of Cape Cod, and in 1609 he reached what is now Lake Champlain via the St. Lawrence River. In 1614 John Smith explored the Maine coast and Massachusetts Bay.

To the South, in 1609 Henry Hudson became the first European to voyage up the Hudson River, reaching almost to the site of present-day Albany. In 1613-14 Adrien

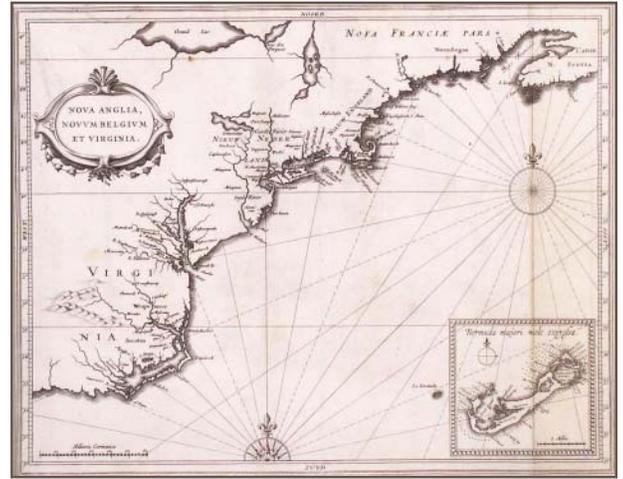
Block became the first to explore Long Island Sound and the adjoining coasts.

Each man produced one or more maps documenting his discoveries, Hudson and Block in manuscript only, and Champlain and Smith in print. Of these, a manuscript map by Block provided by far the most accurate and comprehensive view of the region, as he was able to draw on Champlain’s published discoveries in northern New England as well as his own first-hand explorations. But even he made crucial errors such as omitting any sign of the Great Lakes, Martha’s Vineyard or Nantucket and showing a mis-shapen Lake Champlain too far to the south and east.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1620s Dutch and English publishers issued a number of printed maps and globes attempting to integrate these sources. The first and arguably best effort was Willem Blaeu’s *Paskaart van Guinea, Brasilien en Westindien*, followed by others by Blaeu, Henry Briggs, John Speed and others. However, these are all general maps of the Americas or the entire world, and the representation of the Northeast is always too tiny to provide much detail. Further, they all make important errors such as failing to depict Lake Champlain, the island of Manhattan and/or the Connecticut River.

## NOVA ANGLIA, NOVA BELGIUM ET VIRGINIA

The first *regional* map to incorporate these new discoveries appeared in 1630. This was *Nova Anglia, Novum Belgium et Virginia*, drawn by Hessel Gerritsz and published in Johannes De Laet’s *De Nieuwe Wereldt ofte Beschrijvinghe van West-Indien*.



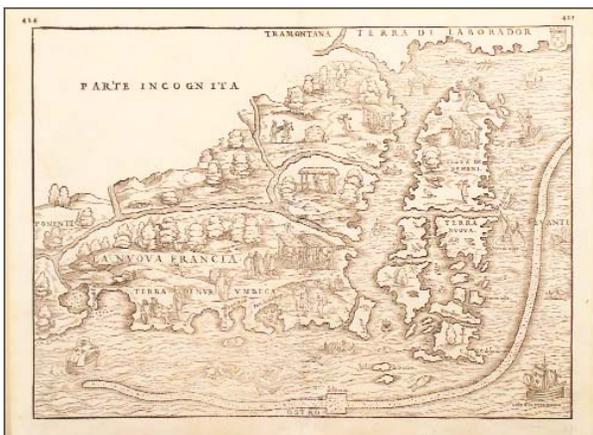
Hessel Gerritsz/Johannes De Laet, *Nova Anglia Novum Belgium et Virginia* (1630)

Depicting the East Coast from the Carolinas to the southern end of Nova Scotia, this map is a masterful synthesis of the work of Champlain, Block, Smith and others. It is the first printed regional map to depict the New England, New York and New Jersey coasts with reasonable accuracy, including among other things Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard, the Connecticut River and Manhattan as an island. It is also the earliest obtainable map to indicate the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain and hint at their geographic relationship.<sup>2</sup>

From a geopolitical perspective, this map is the first to document the emerging contest between the English and Dutch for dominance in the Northeast. In this context, it is the first printed map to document Dutch settlement at Fort Orange and New Amsterdam, now Albany and New York City respectively. As a corollary, it is the first printed map to use the place names “Manhattes” and “N. Amsterdam.” Likewise, it is a very early record of English settlement at Plymouth and possibly Cape Ann, and is in fact the first map to use the name “Massachusetts.”

## THE MAP-MAKER AND PUBLISHER

Gerritsz and De Laet were well positioned to produce this superb piece of cartographic synthesis.



Giacomo Gastaldi/Giovanni Ramusio, *La Nuova Francia* (1556)

De Laet (1583-164?) was a director of the Dutch West India Company, established for the purpose of commercial development in the New Netherlands (now New York) and other areas of the New World. After early difficulties the Company privatized the colonization of the New Netherlands by instituting “patroonships,” massive grants of land to Company directors and others who in turn assumed responsibility for attracting more settlers. De Laet himself received the patroonship of Rensselaerwyck, an enormous area in the vicinity of Albany. By publishing *De Nieuwe Wereldt* and thereby boosting European interest in the region, De Laet served his own interests as well as those of the Company.<sup>3</sup>

Hessel Gerritsz (1581/82-1632) was from 1617 the cartographer to the Dutch East India Company and thereafter assumed the same role for the Dutch West India Company. Somewhat like a modern chief information officer, it was his responsibility to compile the most current geographic and hydrographic information and make it accessible to Company directors and captains. He also sought to prevent these trade secrets from falling into the hands of other nations.<sup>4</sup> This may explain the many years of delay in publishing *Nova Anglia, Novum Belgium et Virginia*, the “raw materials” of which had been available for many years.

### RELATED MAPS

It is most interesting to compare the De Laet-Gerritsz map with Willem Blaeu’s *Nova Belgica et Anglia Nova* (1635). Though Blaeu succeeded Gerritsz as cartographer to the West India Company—and therefore had access to much the same data—he based his map almost entirely on the Block map of 1614. As a result the maps differ quite significantly, beginning with the considerably larger region covered by the De Laet. In the New England area a number of differences favor De Laet, who more accurately locates Lake Champlain, depicts Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket (both absent on Blaeu’s map), and provides a better representation of Narragansett Bay.

The De Laet-Gerritsz map should not be confused with Johannes Jansson’s 1636 map by the same name. This close copy is

on a somewhat larger scale, covers slightly more territory to the Northeast, and includes new decorative elements. Jansson also omitted the inset map of Bermuda—presumably so as not to compete with the large-scale map of the island produced by his partners in the Hondius family.

### FOR THE COLLECTOR

The Gerritsz-De Laet and Blaeu maps are important acquisitions for anyone interested in the early exploration and settlement of the Northeast, though the former is increasingly hard to find.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately the Jansson map, while derivative, is a more readily available and less costly substitute.

Whether one opts for the Gerritsz-De Laet or the Blaeu (or both) should hinge on one’s focus as a collector: the former has the advantage of precedence and the inclusion of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket, while the latter is to most eyes far more attractive and visually engaging.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Robert T. Augustyn and Paul E. Cohen, *Manhattan in Maps*, pp. 22-23 for an accessible discussion of the Block map.

<sup>2</sup> Preceded only by two maps by Samuel Champlain (1612, 1616) and Blaeu’s *Paskaart*.

<sup>3</sup> Augustyn and Cohen, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> See Gunter Schilder, “Organization and Evolution of the Dutch East India Company’s Hydrographic Office in the Seventeenth Century,” *Imago Mundi*, vol. 28 (1976), pp. 62-63.

<sup>5</sup> *Antique Map Price Record* (2004) documents 57 copies of the Blaeu map on the market since 1984, but only 7 of the Gerritsz-De Laet.



Willem Blaeu, *Nova Belgica et Anglia Nova* (1635)

### FURTHER READING

Augustyn, Robert T. and Cohen, Paul E., *Manhattan in Maps: 1527-1995*. New York: Rizzoli, 1995. Pages 26-27 discuss the Gerritsz-De Laet map in its historical context.

Burden, Philip, *The Mapping of North America*. Rickmansworth, England: Raleigh Publications, 1996. Attempts to illustrate and discuss every state of every map of North America through 1670, including the maps discussed in this article.

Cumming, W.P., Skelton, R.A. and Quinn, D.B., *The Discovery of North America*. New York: American Heritage Press, 1972. Chapter 6 provides a popular overview of the early explorations.

Stokes, Philip, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island*. Union, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 1998, vol. 2. Chapters 2-4 offers a scholarly discussion of early explorations and their relationship to the early cartography of the Northeast.

*In brief...*

**Boston Rare Maps** is a regular exhibitor at antiquarian events in New England and New York as well as at the Denver and Miami Map Fairs. Visit [www.bostonraremaps.com](http://www.bostonraremaps.com) for more information. Also, we are always interested in purchasing fine and rare antique maps related to New England and the Northeast. Feel free to contact us at **413.527.4020** or **info@bostonraremaps.com**.

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(continued)

“condition inflation,” a classic form of which is the “otherwise” clause. Here is an exaggerated example:

Paper toned, large tear at lower left with slight loss of image, and a large grease stain (pizza?) at right center, otherwise excellent.

Many sellers augment their ratings with a description of specific condition problems. However don't expect this to be comprehensive, as typically only the most important issues are highlighted. This is entirely appropriate: an exhaustive description of flaws can make a perfectly appealing map sound like a throwaway.

Finally, dealers can and do make honest mistakes; it is all too easy to miss a problem when cataloguing under time pressure. For example, this writer was recently mortified to learn—from a customer, no less—that he had failed to describe a very long closed tear in a copy of Homann's *Nova Anglia*.

### ASSESSING CONDITION

Use the following steps when examining a map in person:

1. Visually examine the map front and back, looking for signs of aesthetic or structural flaws as well as repairs.
2. Place the map between yourself and a light source, and look again for flaws or repairs. Repeat for the other side of the sheet.
3. Feel the paper (in the margin only, without touching the printed image!) to assess its quality and condition.
4. Smell—yes, smell—the paper to detect residual signs of bleaching.
5. After you've used your own senses, review the catalogue description and ask the seller what he or she considers to be the significant condition issues.

Framed maps present special challenges—of particular concern are the condition of the matted-over areas and the possibility that the map has been “laid down” (i.e., glued to a cardboard, foam core or other backing). In such cases, always inquire as to whether the map has been inspected out of its frame; if not, we strongly recommend making the purchase contingent on just such an examination.

When considering a purchase by phone or internet, always contact the seller for more detail about condition. For example, just how large is that “large grease stain?” It is also helpful to request a high-resolution jpeg or other image, enabling you to inspect the map more minutely than allowed by the low-resolution web images or thumbnail illustrations in catalogues.

Finally, inquire as to the seller's policy on returns and refunds. Most will allow you to return a map for a full refund within a certain period of time, no questions asked, though you may be expected to cover the cost of return shipping. So long as such a policy is in place, your risk is reduced to essentially zero. Purchasing at auction is a different matter; it is almost impossible to obtain a refund unless the house has grossly misrepresented the item.

### TO CONSERVE OR NOT TO CONSERVE?

Given the cost, the slight risk and the impact on “authenticity,” it is best to leave alone maps already in very good condition. For maps with more serious problems, however, there is no standard answer as to when conservation is merited. All that can be said is that, if the current state of a map prevents it from fulfilling your purpose, have it conserved.

A very small number of conservation steps can be accomplished by the layperson. Most commonly one may close small tears with acid-free tape or tissue

and remove surface soiling with a special document cleaning pad. Appropriate supplies are available from conservation-supply firms such as Talas in New York City ([www.talasonline.com](http://www.talasonline.com)).

For more involved work, find a professional! Most conservation requires specialized equipment and supplies, a knowledge of materials and chemistry, and lots of practical experience. The website of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (<http://aic.stanford.edu>) offers a searchable directory and other resources.

### A WORD FOR THE WISE

The intent of this article is not to create panic about condition flaws, but to help others become more informed buyers of antique maps. Essentially all maps will have some imperfections, however slight, and these should be acceptable. Those who pursue only “perfect” copies will miss out on good buying opportunities and prevent themselves from the proper appreciation of many quite wonderful pieces.

### FURTHER READING

Manasek, F.J. *Collecting Old Maps*. Norwich, VT: Terra Nova Press, 1998. Chapter 6: “Condition and conservation.”

[www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org), the website of the Northeast Document Conservation Center, offers extensive information about caring for and conserving works on paper.

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