

American Revolutionary War Era Maps

Scope: With the first battles of the American Revolution occurring in the Boston area, one of the most important historical time periods represented in the Map Center's pre-20th-century holdings is the American Revolutionary War era, defined broadly as 1750 to 1800. This collection encompasses approximately 900 maps covering Boston and New England, as well as the remainder of eastern North America and the West Indies, during this time period.

While these maps highlight Boston's role in the Revolution, they also document the crucial events that led from the French and Indian War to the War of Independence and on to the formation of a new nation during the last decade of the 18th century. In doing so, they provide basic graphic resources for researching North America's historical geography by mapping and reconstructing settlement and cultural landscapes that gave each colony its identity and character. The maps portraying the period before the war provide the geographical basis for understanding the role of the 13 colonies within the wider context of the British Empire and its relationships with its European neighbors and competitors. They also provide an appreciation for how European spheres of political and economic power helped create political empires and influenced the delineation of boundaries.

Criteria

1. Uniqueness, rarity, and value: While many of the maps in this collection can be found in other institutions, our holdings are especially strong for the Boston and New England area. Among the unique and most rare items are Thomas Jeffery's *A General Topography of North America and West Indies* (1768), which documents the military activities associated with the French and Indian War, two sets of Frederick J.W. Des Barres' *Atlantic Neptune*, a 1775 powder horn inscribed by a British Soldier with a map of Boston, and a 1776 portfolio of maps owned by Benjamin Franklin, including the French edition of his Gulf Stream map.

2. Pre-eminent among libraries and cultural institutions: While there are four or five other major map collections focusing on military activities of the Revolutionary War, few have emphasized the broader geographical and temporal context. Because our collection is fully cataloged and digitized, ours is freely available online and is easily researched and accessed by the general public.

3. Historical significance that reflects the long-term BPL commitment to the collection, buttressed by the past and current generosity of individuals: This cartographic collection was derived from the generosity of many Boston residents who donated maps and atlases to the Library from the late 19th to the early 21st century, most recently Norman Leventhal.

4. Central to the history of the City of Boston and the communities that inhabit it: Because of the importance of the Revolutionary War era to Boston's history, the size of this collection and its focus on the northern theater of the war make it an invaluable resource for scholars researching the second half of the 18th century.

5. Resonates with communities of scholars and makes the BPL the destination for scholarship in a particular subject: Because these cartographic materials support research in other Revolutionary War and 18th-century collections throughout the library, it is a necessary destination for researchers using these resources.

6. Universality of subject matter and furthers the purpose of the BPL by contributing to a democratic education: Selected materials from this collection are featured in the Map Center's gallery exhibitions and educational curriculum for K-12 classrooms.

Provenance: These materials have been added intermittently and incrementally throughout the library's history as part of its general acquisition process.

Access: All single-sheet maps have been fully cataloged as MARC records and are available through the Library's online database. These same materials have also been digitized and can be viewed on the Map Center's website. Maps in atlases are in the process of being cataloged and digitized. The library's original card catalog also provides a brief individual description for each item.

Languages: The great majority of these maps are in English, although a few were published in French and German.

Related Collections:

Boston and New England Maps
Urban Maps
Maritime Charts and Atlases
Colonial and Revolutionary Boston

Funding Support: The Map Center's yearly acquisition fund is used to supplement and grow this collection.

Special Note: The Map Center's Acquisition Policy recognizes that Boston and New England, particularly during the second half of the 18th century, is a high priority for new acquisitions.