

Drawing Maine: The Pictorial Maps of the Phillips Brothers

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THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

TWO DAYS BEFORE THANKSGIVING in 1973, a father and son lost control of a small, backyard brushfire in Northeast Harbor, Maine. The fire destroyed a small art studio containing much of the inventory of two of Maine's most prolific pictorial cartographers, the brothers Luther Phillips (1891–1960) and Augustus Phillips (1898–1975). The father was the younger brother, Augustus, better known as Gus. Despite the fire, many of the brothers' works survived with family members, on the walls of stores, sporting camps, and homes throughout Maine.

In 2017, the late Mary-Jane Phillips Smith, Gus's daughter, donated the remaining Phillips maps, along with

hundreds of postcards and the 35 mm slides used to print them, to the Penobscot Marine Museum, a historical museum located in the small, coastal town of Searsport, Maine. In addition to the largest photography archive in the state, the Penobscot Marine Museum includes historic Maine wooden boats, a sea captain's house, a fisheries building, art galleries, and a library. Under the direction of Kevin Johnson, the museum's photo archivist, and aided by Cathy Jewitt, Gus's granddaughter, the Penobscot Marine Museum has collected and curated the definitive Phillips Collection.

THE PHILLIPS BROTHERS

BORN TO A FARMER'S FAMILY of modest means on Mount Desert Island, neither Gus nor his brother Luther would have exclusively identified themselves as cartographers, but in retrospect, both are best known through their maps. Luther, the older brother, was a draftsman by profession and received his education from MIT in architecture. During the 1940s he developed a series of postcards and illustrated maps as a side business in Maine's summertime economy. After some success, he began to involve his younger brother Gus to color and paint a handful of these early maps.

Gus's life, in contrast, was more typical of coastal Maine's rural working class. Although the Phillips family had traditionally been mariners, Gus grew up amid the transformative years following industrialization. Mount Desert Island's influx of rusticators—the wealthy summer vacationers seeking simpler, rustic lifestyles—throughout the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth

centuries provided Gus with various service and labor jobs throughout his life. In addition to cartographer, Gus would have described himself variously as a hunting guide, vegetable farmer, draftsman, handyman, ice cutter, or carpenter. But to look at his life through the volume of creative work he made, it becomes evident that he lived his life for his passions—most of which derived from physical arts and crafts.

It is impossible not to compare the brothers' work. Looking at their maps, Luther's work is crisper, with the exemplary penwork of a professional draftsman, with compositions and linework that are neater overall. Gus's earlier maps are undoubtedly rougher, but his later maps show a nuanced view of local geography and terrain representation. Taken with the added context of Gus's exploration of painting and wood carving, his pictorial maps and mural paintings reveal the crowning work of a folk artist who realized his signature style.



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PENWORK AND PICTURING PLACES

LUTHER CREATED THE FIRST DRAFT of *A Map of Mount Desert Island* in the early 1930s. The island was by far the brothers' most reworked and longest published subject. This map depicts many colonial romanticisms of interest to white Americans of the time: the European exploration of the Maine coast and the stories surrounding the voyages of Samuel de Champlain. The map includes fine penwork, illustrations of historically significant ships, quotations in French, an inset reproduction of Samuel de Champlain's historical map, and a cartouche depicting indigenous Americans framing another locator map that shows the pre-Columbian/European conception of the Americas.

The ocean calls the most attention. In addition to the use of waterlines to delineate land from water, it includes a notable pictorial wave-hatching pattern to fill the marine areas. Whether conscious or unconscious, this style echoes several sixteenth-century Renaissance maps—like those found in *The Mariner's Mirror* (1586), for example. The version of *A Map of Mount Desert Island* shown in Figure 1 is relevant to the arc of the Phillips collection because it represents Luther's early penwork and includes Gus's first color washes, possibly their first collaboration. Gus republished this map in the 1960s with completely different colorations.



Figure 1. *A Map of Mount Desert Island*. Luther Phillips, 1932. Courtesy of the Penobscot Marine Museum.

Luther's maps usually included precise illustrations of historical figures of interest. In his *1941 Map of Pemaquid*, he highlights Fort William Henry and the surrounding villages. The map blends American colonial narratives with local context: houses were carefully located with the help of resident Walker Gilbert and annotated with family names.

One of Luther's best-known maps is probably *A Decorative Map of Penobscot Bay Region*, a detailed representation of the upper part of Penobscot Bay and the surrounding towns. Here are all of Luther's strengths on display: a commitment to geographically sound and heavily patterned hydrography, numerous, well-executed lettering styles, tightly organized insets, an intricate cartouche, and many naturalistic historical diagrams. Even though variations of this map were reprinted, occasionally colored by Gus, the content was never significantly altered from the original.

In almost every case, Luther's maps follow a common pattern. He frames an extent around a region or locale



Figure 2. 1941 Map of Pemaquid. Walker Gilbert and Luther Phillips, 1941. Courtesy of the Penobscot Marine Museum.

of interest, usually coastal, and then highlights subjects of interest. The overall drama of the composition derives from attractive penwork. The visual strategy is to incite the viewer to explore. His maps bear a similarity in subject and style to those of Ruth Rhoads Lepper Gardner (1905–2011), another prolific and renowned pictorial cartographer of the Maine coast. The themes of Lepper Gardner and Luther's maps are resonant throughout the coast: historical ships and buildings dominate the maritime landscape.

Moosehead Lake (1953) is likely Luther's last map, but it is his first map—apart from a few small-scale global and state maps—to frame an area of interest away from the coast. Almost two decades later, Gus painted a new version, *Moosehead Lake* (1971). The differences in the brothers' styles are immediately apparent when comparing the two maps. Even though Luther has abandoned the cartouche and much of the pen ornamentation of his early



Figure 3. *A Decorative Map of Penobscot Bay Region*. Luther Phillips, 1940. Courtesy of the Penobscot Marine Museum.



Figure 4. Moosehead Lake. Luther Phillips, 1953. Courtesy of the Penobscot Marine Museum.

maps, he retains many of his signature design choices: callouts on parchment banners, copperplate-like lettering, and naturalistic sketches. In contrast, Gus employs illustrative figures more as imaginative flourishes than exemplars of geographic interest. His figure painting is also less naturalistic than Luther's and more caricaturist. Gus never quite matches Luther's skill with a pen, but his use of paint gives the terrain representation a unique dynamism, allowing for the landscape itself to become the focus.

The most interesting comparison between the brothers' styles is that their work exemplifies differences in their respective eras and abilities. Luther's productive years were between 1932 and 1953, an era marked by the

FROM WALL ART TO WAYFINDING

AT AGE 62, Gus began republishing his late brother's maps and adding new extents of his own. Several of these first extents mimic Luther's style: an iconic region or locale is identified and then illuminated with annotations



Figure 5. Moosehead Lake. Augustus Phillips, 1971. Courtesy of the Penobscot Marine Museum.

Great Depression and the Second World War. Patrons of Luther's maps were likely wealthier cottagers who sought cultural memorabilia as wall art, and Luther was not solely dependent on the maps for his income. Gus's primary years of production were between 1960 and 1975. During this time, vacationers typified a burgeoning middle class; in addition to the cottagers, visitors now included a much higher number of tourists, outdoor enthusiasts, and day-trippers. For the final years of Gus's life, the map and postcard business was his primary source of income. It is no surprise, then, that his maps span a wider range of geographic extents and scales, were prolifically produced and distributed, and show broader experimentation in terms of media.

and sketches. But Gus also began to create a series of maps to explore a small niche market. Before David DeLorme first published the now iconic *Maine Atlas and Gazetteer* in 1976, there were very few well-organized reference

maps for planning recreation trips. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Gus developed 8–10 extents depicting popular outdoor areas. While these maps were not intended for use on the trail, they were in demand at many stores and sporting camps for the regional overview they provided outdoor enthusiasts.

This *Phillips' Map of Northern Maine's Moosehead-Allagash Region* (1963), is most likely Gus's first outdoor map of this kind. There are several major departures from earlier Phillips maps worth noting. First, unlike the previous maps, this includes the self-referential title *Phillips' Map*, and demonstrates a fresh style of locators and color palettes. Second, the base details and layers were traced directly from USGS topo maps on separate transparencies—these were shipped directly to the printer to be registered and shrunk to the correct publishing dimension. Lastly, the map represents local geography with the purpose of being an accurate reference for locations of boat ramps, roads, campsites, gates, and other key infrastructure for planning outdoor trips.

Gus's only wayfinding trail map was developed on commission for Acadia National Park in 1973. Split into east and west extents, it was the only known Phillips map to be printed double-sided. In *Path and Road Map of the Eastern/Western Part of Mount Desert Island*, we see a few notable deviations from his other recreation maps: more care has been taken with contour accuracy; conserved lands are precisely represented, including enclaves and exclaves; the symbology is simple and unornamented; and copperplate-style lettering is restricted to the ocean. Some Phillips flair remains with a showy

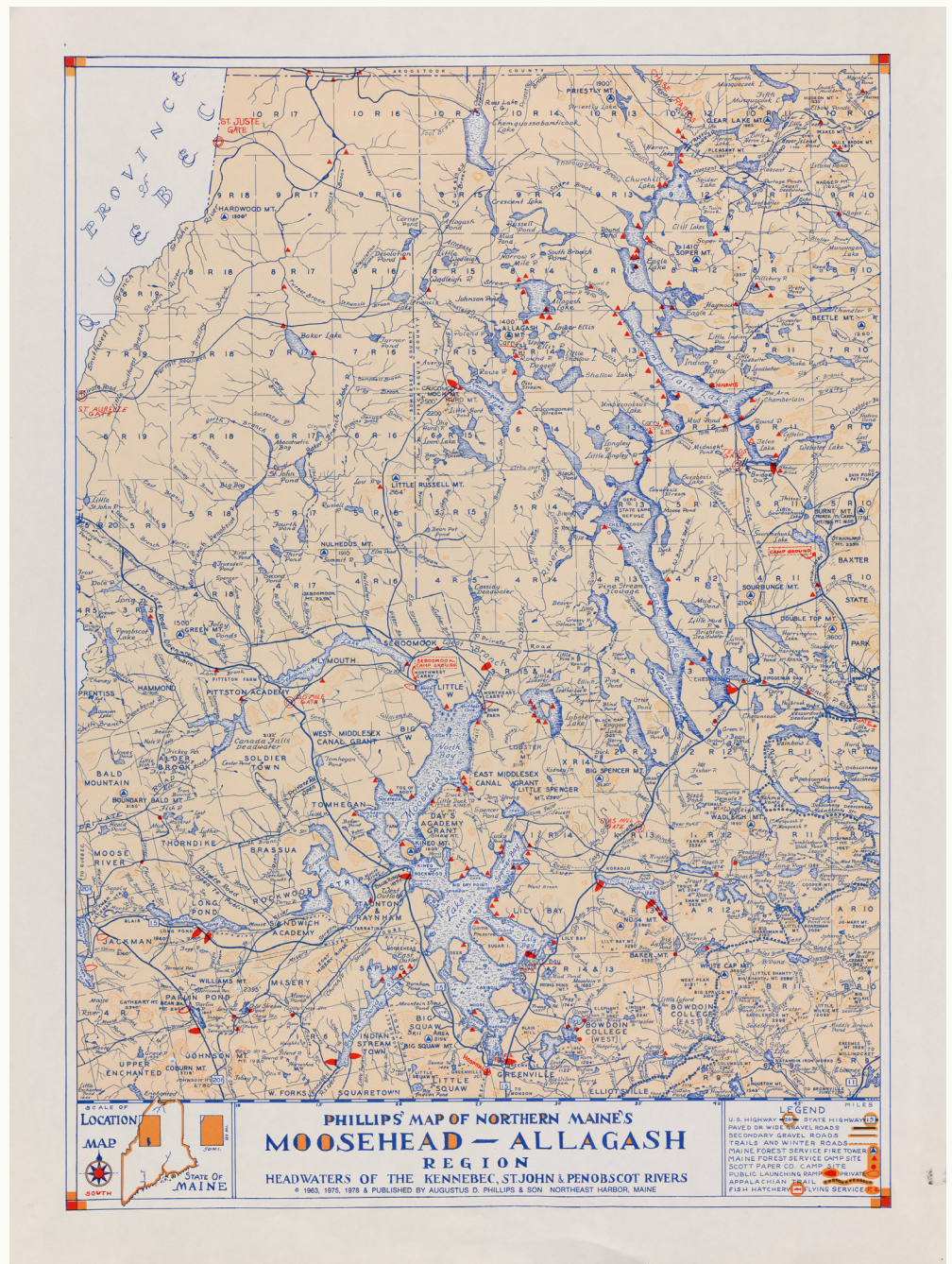


Figure 6. *Phillips' Map of Northern Maine's Moosehead-Allagash Region*. Augustus Phillips, 1963. Courtesy of the Penobscot Marine Museum.

compass rose and a few parchment callouts, but otherwise, this map is designed to highlight trails and points of interest with little extra. Although this may be the Phillips map that required Gus to work hardest to ensure geographic accuracy, it represents primarily trace work. As an artist who loved to use color and embellishment, we truly see Gus's unique eye emerge through his painted landscape representations.

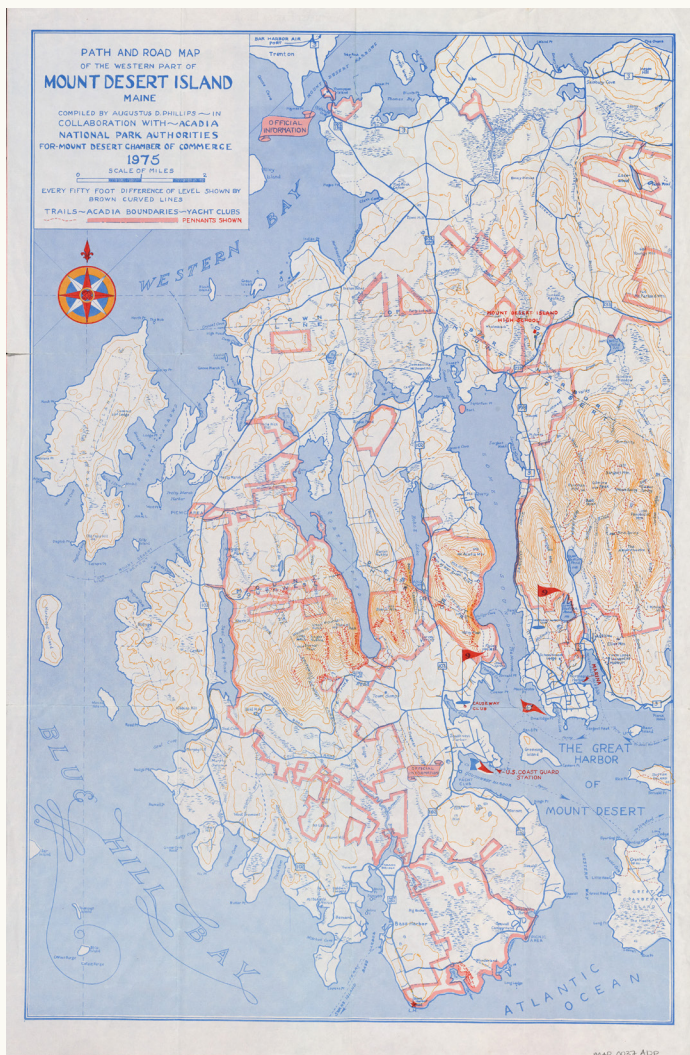


Figure 7. Path and Road Map of the Western/Eastern Part of Mount Desert Island. Augustus Phillips, 1973. Courtesy of the Penobscot Marine Museum.

PLEIN AIR CARTOGRAPHY

GUS SPENT THOUSANDS OF HOURS looking at the landscape, and one of his great passions was painting outdoors, en plein air, as the style is called. While delivering groceries in Mount Desert Island’s Asticou neighborhood, Gus met renowned plein air painter Carroll Tyson in 1912. Gus struck up a good friendship with Tyson, who took him under his wing as an informal apprentice. Tyson, heavily influenced by the impressionists that preceded him, clearly influenced Gus’s work. His subsequent paintings reflected the stylistic color, mood, and depth of Tyson and the enclave of Mount Desert Island’s plein air painters. Gus never made a living with his paintings, though a dozen or more survive in the hands of various family members.

In 1965, Gus painted a large mural to honor several major contributors to Acadia National Park: George B. Dorr,



Figure 8. View to Northeast Harbor. Augustus Phillips, c. 1930s. Courtesy of Mary-Jane Phillips Smith; photo by John Meader.

Charles W. Eliot, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. This map, *Sunrise on Acadia*, still hangs in the Northeast Harbor library, and at approximately 6 feet wide and 4 feet tall, it is truly an impressive painting to behold. Modern digital cartographers, who know the difficulty in achieving attractive terrain representation, labeling hierarchy, color balance, and visual harmony, will appreciate how Gus's map coheres. The relief, for instance, breaks tradition from the typical northwest illumination and instead suggests sunrise lighting by illuminating the landscape from the east-southeast.

In addition to painting outdoors, Gus spent hundreds of hours in an airplane, taking pictures that informed his knowledge of the landscape and later became postcards. Of the 600-plus postcards Gus developed, over 120 were aerial landscapes and about half a dozen were small map prints.

Alongside *Sunrise on Acadia*, Gus produced at least six other painted maps. He also made a novel oblique-perspective layout, *Aerial View — Casco Bay, Maine to the Longfellow — Blue Mountains*, which could have been created only through imaginative spatial interpretation from reference maps and familiarity with the coastline from his time in the air.

At the end of his life, Gus began to develop several large-format, mural maps in this same oblique perspective. Two extant works were of Mount Desert Island, looking northward to Maine's interior. One of these was very large, approximately 4½ feet tall by 10 feet wide. The other was smaller and can be found at the Northeast Harbor Library, hanging over the mantel in the reading room. The plaque reads: "*Mount Desert to Katahdin: a Bird's Eye View* (1982) by Augustus D. Phillips. Donated by Bob and Miriam Pyle. Illness prevented Mr. Phillips from completing this,



Figure 9. *Sunrise on Acadia*. Augustus Phillips, 1965. Courtesy of Northeast Harbor Library; photo by John Meader.

his final map. It was given by Donald Phillips, his son, to Bob Pyle in 1985.”

Although sadly unfinished at the time of his death, it does represent the best of what Gus had to offer in terms of cartographic vision: a fully formed geographic imagination unhindered by any lack of technical resources, fully able to express his love of place through paint.

FINAL YEARS AND TODAY —

GUS SPENT THE FINAL TEN YEARS of his life carving out a unique niche as a self-employed, pictorial cartographer in rural Maine. Instead of working for an illustration company, Gus and his brother Luther were part of a small cohort of independents who painstakingly illustrated maps by hand. Once an extent had been developed, the Phillips brothers traced, inked, painted, and lettered their maps from scratch. The maps were published and distributed by the authors themselves—often covering hundreds of miles across Maine and sold directly from the back of a station wagon.

Luther, who was responsible for approximately 10–15 maps, died in 1960. Gus independently created 20–25 maps after his brother’s death. Gus inherited the entire business at age 62 and adapted and republished many of

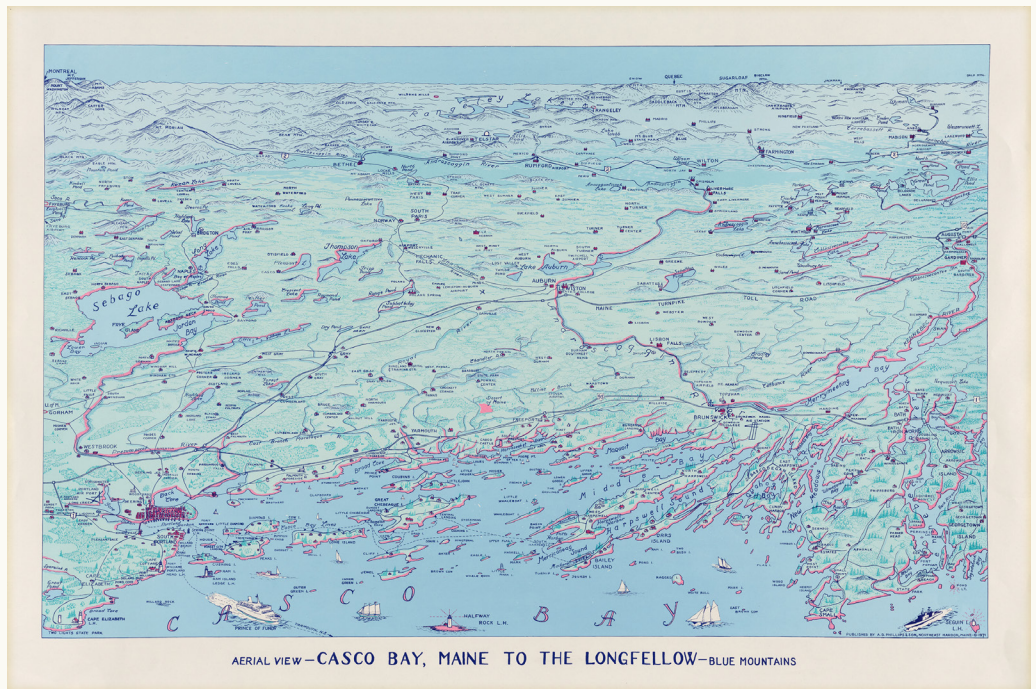


Figure 10. *Aerial View — Casco Bay, Maine to the Longfellow — Blue Mountains.* Augustus Phillips, 1971. Courtesy of Penobscot Marine Museum.



Figure 11. *Mount Desert to Katahdin: a Bird's Eye View.* Augustus Phillips, c. 1975. Courtesy of Northeast Harbor Library; photo by John Meader.

Luther's pieces throughout the 1960s and 1970s. When doing so, he updated the copyright but retained Luther's name posthumously, inscribing his own in a shared co-authorship. The total collection of currently inventoried maps—discounting a wide array of aerial postcards, a handful of map postcards, and a few reprints of historical maps not authored by the Phillips brothers—comprises approximately 35–40 unique designs.

Tucked into the small town of Searsport, the Penobscot Marine Museum hosts the largest digitally available collection of Phillips maps, along with other unique and historically significant collections: manuscripts, logbooks, journals, area maps, and over 3000 nautical charts. It

offers a large online database as well as licensing and reproductions of photographs, archives, and maps, including the Phillips Collection.

The Phillips maps may be enjoyed as folk art, but the collection is also worth attention for its breadth of style and methods, conveyed by two brothers in an era when pictorial maps were popular. We know from their writings that Gus and his son were devastated when their map studio “burned flat,” but their inventory was never truly lost. With the Penobscot Marine Museum's support, the Phillips maps will attract viewers and decorate walls for many years to come.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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