

Maps as the Art of Necessity: The Lilly Library War of 1812 Map Collection

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IN HIS EXAMINATION of the War of 1812, J. C. A. Staggs notes that “Many of the problems that we encounter today in understanding the War of 1812 arise from the fact that the political geography of North America has changed greatly since 1815” (2012, 19). Places central to the conflict have either been renamed or have disappeared completely from later maps, making contemporary maps produced during or shortly after the conflict invaluable. This essay highlights a collection of such maps that are held at Indiana University’s rare books and special collections library, The Lilly Library.

The War of 1812 had a significant impact on a nation eagerly expanding its borders. Many areas of the United States were affected by the conflict, including the Indiana Territory. Indiana would go on to attain statehood in 1816, but not before key events unfolded and battles took place on its soil. Territorial governor William Henry Harrison negotiated the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809, forcing Native American delegates to accept substantial land cessions to the United States government. Angered by the sale of yet more land, Shawnee leader Tecumseh and 400 armed

followers traveled in the summer of 1810 to meet with Harrison in the territorial capital of Vincennes. Tecumseh contended that the Fort Wayne Treaty was illegitimate and demanded that Harrison nullify it. After a heated and unsuccessful exchange, Tecumseh threatened to ally with the British if his demands were not met (Langguth 2007, 166).

In November 1811, after tensions and violence had increased, Harrison successfully led 1000 American troops in a battle at Prophetstown, located near the confluence of the Tippecanoe and Wabash Rivers. The defeat at the Battle of Tippecanoe was a setback for the Native American forces that opposed the continuing cessions of their territory. Undeterred, Tecumseh’s Confederacy went on to ally with British forces in Canada. Consequently, the borderlands between Canada and the United States became the primary theater of conflict in the opening stages of the War of 1812. Fighting centered on Lakes Ontario and Erie, both Upper and Lower Canada, and the Old Northwest, consisting of Ohio and the Michigan and Indiana Territories. Later in the war, significant fighting took place in the Chesapeake Bay area and near New Orleans.

THE WAR OF 1812 BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

IN PREPARATION FOR the War of 1812 bicentennial, Indiana University Library embarked on a collaborative, year-long project involving the Lilly Library, the Indiana University Digital Library Program, and the Wells Library Technical Services Department. A website, *The War of 1812*, was created (Figure 1), which gathers a wealth of information on the war through a combination of essays and digitized primary source materials. Hundreds of manuscripts, books, maps, and prints relating to the War of 1812 are available online in digitized form. All of the

physical materials are located in the Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington.

The materials in the War of 1812 collection were acquired by Indiana University principally from 1942 to 1969, from a variety of sources and through the cooperative efforts of historians, librarians, and booksellers. The maps in particular came to the Lilly Library through collector, historian, and Indiana native, Richard Elwell Banta (1904–1977). Banta was involved in the book trade for much of his life, selling antiquarian and trade books to academic libraries



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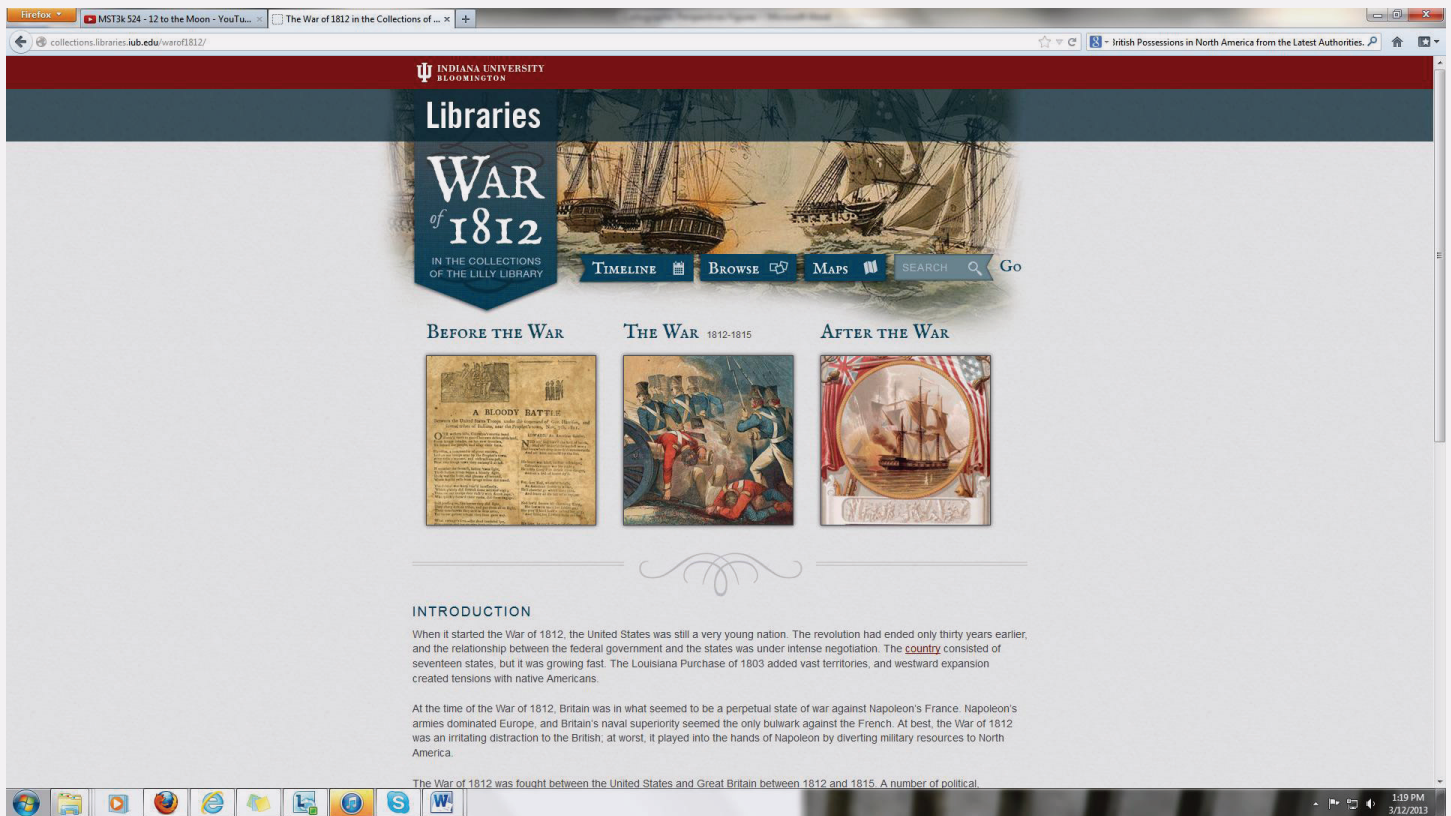


Figure 1: The War of 1812 website.

throughout the country. Although not formally trained in the subject, Banta became interested in the history of the Old Northwest, reading widely in the field and contributing to journals, periodicals, and encyclopedias (Thompson 1974, 28).

This portion of the collection consists of manuscripts and prints of coastal and theater-of-war maps. Some depict military activities during the war. The Lilly Library cataloged most of the printed items and manuscript collections; however, the Wells Library Technical Services Department contributed greatly by creating the War of 1812 finding

aid for the almost 5,000 individual items included in the collection. The 23 maps that were selected from the collection required specialized description and cataloging. In addition to the maps, correspondence, log books, legal documents, diaries, speeches, copybooks, orderly books, and receipts also received enhanced descriptions and were likewise digitized. Indiana University Libraries Digital Projects & Services (www.dlib.indiana.edu) digitized most of the collection items in the Digital Media and Imaging Center located in Wells Library; however, the most fragile and rare materials were digitized by staff located in the Lilly Library.

A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY EMERGES

AS RICHARD W. STEPHENSON EXPLAINS, “War, like necessity, has been called the mother of invention. The same might be said of cartography, for with every war there is a great rush to produce maps to aid in understanding the nature of the land over which armies will move and fight, to plan engagements and the deployment of troops, and to record victories for posterity to study and admire” (1989, 1). The maps in the Lilly Library’s War of 1812 collection

represent the conflicts that took place on both land and water.

In an early survey of the history of American mapmaking, Erwin Raisz wrote that “the map of America has been gradually built up through the centuries. The early charts of the Spanish, Italian, Dutch, French, and English navigators, and the maps of the explorers and army officers, however important, are American in their subject only. Their



Figure 3: Carey's British Possessions in North America from the Latest Authorities, 1814.

key players in this process: Jedidiah Morse, the author of the first comprehensive geography of North America, and Philadelphia map publishers Mathew Carey and John Melish, singling out Melish as “a full-time geographer, mapmaker and map publisher” whose “adult life was devoted to what he termed the topographic representation of the new republic” (127).

Matthew Carey (1760–1839), a Dublin-born immigrant, established a print shop and publishing house in Philadelphia. In 1795, he published *Carey's American Atlas*, the earliest atlas of the United States. Carey organized an elaborate cottage system of craftsmen for engraving,

printing, and coloring his maps, utilizing the best independent talent available. Some scholars of cartographic history have argued that the publication of *Carey's American Atlas* ushered in a “golden age” of American cartography:

Nearly all of the atlases of this era were printed with copperplates, a method that produced maps far more durable than those of later years. Also known as the intaglio process, copperplate engraving allowed fine, delicate lines that were easily maintained and updated; subtle and variable area

tones; and small, neat lettering. (Schulten 2001, 21)

In his seminal study, *American Maps and Map Makers*, Walter W. Ristow underlines Carey's role as "a pioneer in atlas publishing," but points out that Carey was not primarily concerned with publishing cartographic works. In contrast, "John Melish, a native of Scotland, was the first American publisher to concentrate his efforts wholly on producing maps, atlases, and geographical publications" (Ristow 1985, 21).

John Melish (1771–1822) first visited the United States while working for a Glasgow cotton merchant. Melish eventually relocated to Philadelphia and based his first major publication, a fact-filled two-volume work, *Travels in the United States of America in the Years 1806 & 1807, and 1809, 1810 & 1811* (1812), on the copious notes he had taken during his travels as a cotton merchant and on a trip to the Old Northwest. Eight maps illustrated the

volumes and Melish subsequently turned to map publishing. By 1814, he identified himself as a "Geographer and Map Seller" and had published several independent maps, geographies and gazetteers.

While engraving a map of the United States, the frontispiece for volume one of *Travels*, Henry Schenck Tanner "suggested the propriety of drawing a general map of the seat of war, and proffered the use of a very ample set of maps in his possession." The *Map of the Seat of War in North America* (Figure 4) was consequently also engraved by Tanner (1786–1858). Melish reports the map "sold so rapidly that the first plate was soon worn out, and a new one has since been brought forward, enlarged and much improved" (Melish 1813, 3).

That same year, Melish published several new maps which showed other areas that would likely be affected by the spread of war. *The Military and Topographical Atlas of the United States*, released in late 1813, consisted of eight such



Figure 4: Tanner's The Map of the Seat of War in North America, 1813.



Figure 5: Melish's East End of Lake Ontario, 1813.

maps engraved by Tanner. It included innovative smaller maps which offered a more detailed view of areas which had already seen extensive fighting, including the East End of Lake Ontario (Ristow 1985, 181) (Figure 5).

An expanded edition of *The Military and Topographical Atlas of the United States*, published after the Peace of Ghent in 1815, featured twelve maps, including a map of the New Orleans area. Specifically associated with the War of 1812, these publishing projects distinguished Melish as one of Philadelphia's premier cartographic publishers. Seeing the profit to be made, other commercial publishers also entered the fray. Some of these Philadelphia competitors were at the same time collaborating with Melish on other publishing projects.



Figure 6: Amos Lay, A New Correct Map of the Seat of War in Lower Canada, 1813.

Land surveyor Amos Lay (1765–1851) collaborated with engraver Henry Schenck Tanner to publish *A New Correct Map of the Seat of War in Lower Canada* (1814). The map (Figure 6) locates several of the military actions fought during the 1813 Saint Lawrence campaign, including the site of the Battle of Chrysler's Farm (November 11, 1813).

A Correct Map of the Seat of War (1812), drawn by Samuel Lewis (1753?–1822) and engraved by Samuel Harrison (Figure 7), shows important detail in the Old Northwest, such as the "Road cut by Gen. Hull" at the beginning of the Detroit campaign of 1812 and also the "Indian Boundary Line," agreed upon at the Treaty of Greenville (1795).

British cartographers also seized upon similar opportunities and managed to reach even larger audiences: John Luffman (1756–1846) published *A Map of the American Lakes and Adjoining Country: The Present Seat of War between Great Britain & the United States* (1813), claiming the map was "done in part, from a sketch of the late Major General Sr. Isaac Brock." Having forged an alliance with Tecumseh and forced the surrender of an American army at Detroit, Brock died in October 1812 defending the Niagara frontier at the battle of Queenston Heights. Luffman also took care to locate the principal tribes of Tecumseh's Confederacy (Figure 8).

In contrast, *The Sketch of the March of the British Army under Gen'l Ross from the 19th to the 29th August 1814* published from a sketch by D. Evans, Lt 3d Dr's., by James Wild, the Elder (1790–1836) is a detailed campaign and battle map (Figure 9). It shows the positions of British and American troops, relevant roads and waterways, and an



Figure 7: A Correct Map of the Seat of War, drawn by Samuel Lewis, 1812.

inset, “Sketch of the engagement on the 24th of August 1814 between the British and American forces,” the Battle of Bladensburg, Maryland, also known as the Bladensburg Races. The American militia fled through the streets of Washington before the British entered the city unopposed

and set fire to many of the government buildings in what became known as the Burning of Washington.

John Melish’s Philadelphia publishing house went on to produce many other outstanding maps. Melish’s most widely known work, the *Map of the United States with the Contiguous British and Spanish Possessions* (1816), an iconic large format representation of the United States as a transcontinental power, was published right after the War of 1812. Its ambitious conceptualization shows the United States boldly stretching from coast to coast, foreshadowing a period of sustained national growth and expansion, fueled by visions of Manifest Destiny (Ristow 1962).

For more information about the War of 1812 materials and the Lilly Library’s other collections, please visit the Library website, www.indiana.edu/~liblilly.

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Figure 8: Luffman’s A Map of the American Lakes and Adjoining Country, 1813.

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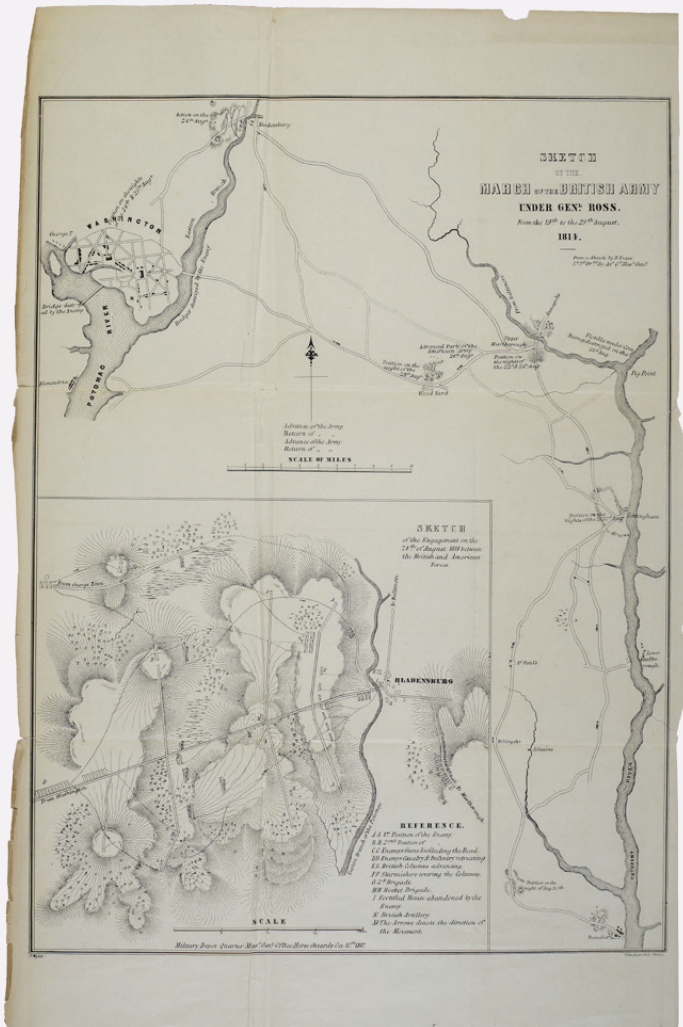


Figure 9: Sketch of the March of the British Army under Gen'l Ross, 1814.

*A New Correct Map of the Seat of War in Lower Canada:
Protracted from Hollands Large Map Compiled from
Actual Survey Made by Order of the Provincial Govt.
L. Amos and J. Webster, H.S. Tanner, engraver.
Philadelphia, 1813.*

*Sketch of the March of the British Army Under Gen'l Ross
from the 19th to the 29th August 1814. D. Evans, T.
Sinclair, lith. Philadelphia: T. Sinclair, 1814.*

