

The Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library: The First Ten Years of Public Outreach and Educational Programming Using Historic Maps

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THE NORMAN B. LEVENTHAL MAP CENTER at the Boston Public Library (LMC/BPL) was launched in July 2004 as a partnership between Norman B. Leventhal and the Boston Public Library. In 2007, it became a separately incorporated 501(c)3 non-profit organization governed by an independent Board of Directors. Created to promote the use of maps as an important educational tool to understand history, geography, civilization, and the world today, the LMC seeks to preserve, catalog, study, and exhibit the Boston Public Library's rare and historically significant collection of over 200,000 maps and 5,000 atlases dating from 1482 to the present. Approximately 10 percent of the

maps (20,000) and 20 percent of the atlases (1,000) date from before 1900.

Founded in 1848, the Boston Public Library was the first free publicly supported municipal library in the United States. It was the first to lend a book, open a branch library, and create a dedicated children's room. It is the second largest library in the United States by number of volumes and is one of only two public libraries that is a member of the Association of Research Libraries. Today, the BPL and its 24 branches serve almost 3.5 million people annually.

ACCESSIBILITY TO SCHOLARS, GENERAL RESEARCHERS, AND CASUAL VISITORS

IN 2011, THE LMC moved from its temporary library location to a newly renovated space in the 1896 McKim Building of the Boston Public Library's Central Branch, located at Copley Square in downtown Boston. Upon entering, LMC visitors are greeted with a map gallery, which features rotating exhibitions of about thirty objects every four months. The new LMC space also includes a learning center where patrons can browse over 1000 reference titles, a securely equipped research room that invites patrons to conduct research in a comfortable environment, and a state-of-the-art storage vault to house the historically significant collection. The LMC is staffed with eight full-time positions.

In-depth reference services are provided at the Map Center, Monday through Friday. On average, the LMC assists between 20 and 25 researchers per month in the research room, while staff answer nearly 120 additional map-related inquiries in person per month. While

appointments are suggested, the LMC often accommodates casual researchers who have serendipitously become



Figure 1. Visitors enjoy the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center Gallery.



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interested in the collection as a result of viewing exhibitions in the map gallery. The free accessibility of the

collection allows these casual visitors an opportunity to experience a research library's collections first-hand.

WORLDWIDE ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH THE WEBSITE

THE LMC WEBSITE, maps.bpl.org, was launched in 2006 and continues to be the central location for the Map Center's web presence as well as the main access point to the freely available digital collection. As the map collection is cataloged, conserved, and digitized, the maps are added to the site. Currently more than 7,000 digital map images are now accessible through the website where users can download, zoom, pan, and buy a reproduction of each of LMC's digital items. The LMC's website receives over 11,000 views on average per month, a number that has grown steadily since its launch.

In addition to the LMC's collection, agreements have been made with other institutions such as the American Antiquarian Society, Boston Athenaeum, British Library, Harvard Map Collection, Library of Congress, New York Public Library, and Newberry Library, as well as private collectors, to include American Revolution Era primary source material from their map collections within the LMC's website. This has been done in an effort to promote digital philanthropy, diversify the digital collections, and provide an access hub for historical maps. So far, the number of these types of items included in the LMC's digital collections is over 1,050 maps.

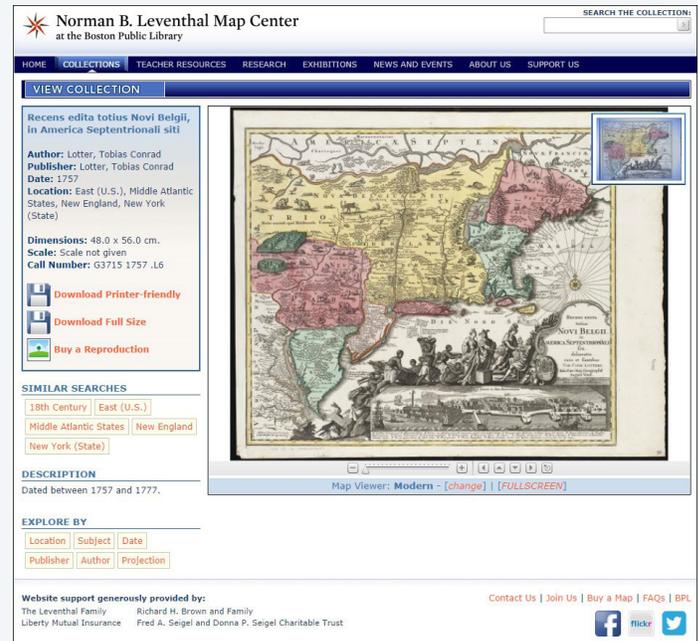


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center's website.

ACCESSIBILITY TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH EXHIBITIONS

THE LMC HAS MOUNTED multiple gallery exhibitions since occupying its new space. Each was curated to include roughly 30 maps or cartographic items, and exhibitions have included physical tours, gallery guides, lecture programs, and outreach programs. More recent gallery exhibitions have also been formatted for the web as a virtual tour. They can be viewed at the Boston Public Library's exhibitions webpage: www.bpl.org/exhibitions. One recent exhibition, *City of Neighborhoods: The Changing Face of Boston*, featured current and historical maps and photographs portraying changes in Boston's neighborhood demographics over the past 100 years. Over 48,000 people visited the exhibition, which was also translated into Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Chinese to accommodate the city's most common non-English speakers.

Since the LMC moved into its new space, the staff has also completed two major exhibitions featuring about 90 objects each. The first, *Torn in Two: 150th Anniversary of the Civil War*, hosted in the BPL's Main Exhibition Hall from May to December 2011, celebrated the American Civil War's sesquicentennial by featuring 50 historic maps and 40 photographs, prints, and related materials. In 2012 and 2013, the exhibition toured to the Grolier Club in New York City, Ford's Theater in Washington, DC, and the Osher Map Library in Portland, Maine, where additional audiences could view the collection.

The second major exhibition, titled *We Are One: Mapping America's Road from Revolution to Independence*, opened in May 2015 in the BPL's Main Exhibition Hall. The

exhibition commemorates the 250th anniversary of Britain's 1765 Stamp Act by displaying 60 maps and 40 related graphic documents, paintings, and three-dimensional objects. The exhibition closed at the end of November 2015, but will travel to Colonial Williamsburg in 2016 and to the New York Historical Society in 2017.

ACCESSIBILITY TO TEACHERS AND SCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING FOR K–12 students is at the core of the Map Center's mission to spark young people's curiosity about the world. Educational activities range from intensive programs where students are introduced to how to think about and engage with historic maps, to teacher training workshops that expand educators' views of the ways in which they can teach with maps. Over 2,500 students and teachers participate annually in education programs both in the Map Center and at schools. The students range from second graders learning about the elements of maps, to high school students researching the history of their Boston neighborhoods. Approximately 50% of the students are from Boston Public Schools.

Additionally, over 200 teachers annually participate in professional development workshops ranging from half-day workshops to one-week institutes. The LMC continues to expand partnerships for offering workshops, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Boston National Historical Park, and the Library of Congress's Teaching with Primary Sources program.

The Center's website serves as the main access point for map resources, lesson plans and activities for younger students. The website includes the *Maps in the Classroom* section, where downloadable map reproductions can be searched by location and curriculum topic. Additionally, the *Teacher Resources* section of the website includes lesson plans, curriculum units, and map activities searchable by grade level, location, time period, and topic.

In connection with the *We Are One* exhibition, the Map Center has made the American Revolution the main focus of its educational programming for students and teachers in 2015–2016. Funding for these initiatives has come largely from the Library of Congress's Teaching

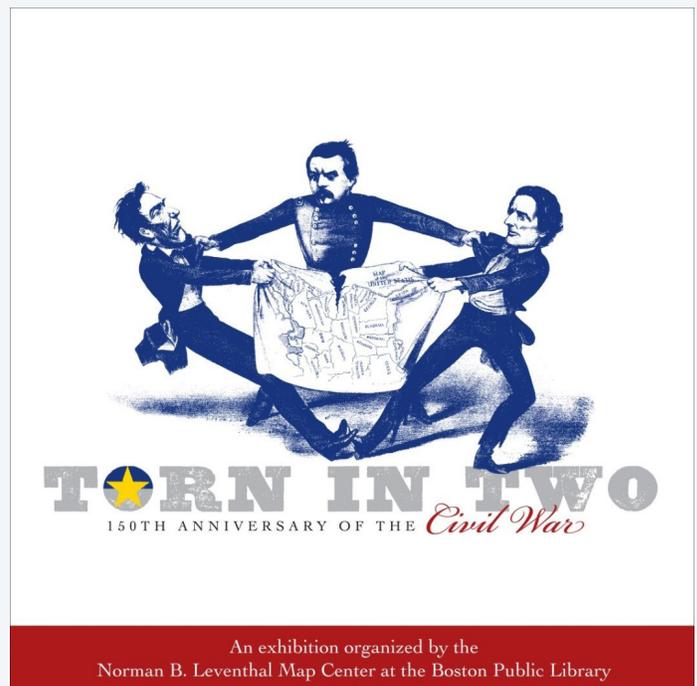


Figure 3. Exhibition catalog cover for *Torn in Two*.

with Primary Sources Program (Eastern Region), and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities. This initiative has created resources and opportunities for students and teachers to take advantage of the rich American Revolution era resources available at the Leventhal Map Center and Boston Public Library. Components of this project include:

- **Teacher Fellowship Program**

Through a competitive application process, the LMC selected two teachers who spent 10 days during the summer of 2015 doing extensive research in the Map Center, BPL, and Library of Congress collections. Fellows produced lessons and resources focused around teaching the American Revolution with maps.

- **Summer Teacher Institute — *Mapping Boston's Role in the American Revolution***

In partnership with: Boston National Historical Park, Massachusetts Historical Society, Bostonian Society/Old State House, Old South Meeting House, Paul Revere House, Old North Church, and the National Archives and Records Administration. Twenty-seven teachers spent a week investigating the Revolution with a geographical focus. Teachers received three graduate credits from Framingham State University.

- **American Revolution Map Sets & Teaching Materials**

Working with a teacher advisory group, the Map Center has produced the first in a series of map sets

connected to the collections of the LMC and Library of Congress. These sets will be presented at teacher workshops and available for any teacher from the LMC website.

FUTURE PLANS

THE LMC HAS RECENTLY been awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Institute of Museum and Library Services to improve access and use of its digital collections, starting with items that pertain to the American Revolutionary War Era and including collections from numerous partner institutions. Among the many enhancements being developed, users will be enabled to georeference maps and create digital overlays, and educators will be able to access, utilize, and create digital lesson plans related to the maps for

classroom teaching. All of the resulting developments will be available in an open source repository for use by other cultural institutions. A 5-year plan for Map Center gallery exhibitions includes such titles as *Women in Cartography*, *Shakespeare's World*, and *Under Your Feet*; each one exploring different cartographic and historic topics. Each exhibition will eventually become available online and accessed through the LMC's website, as will upcoming news regarding events or developments within the collection.