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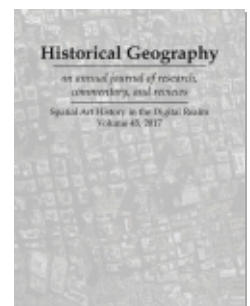
## Revisiting the Historical Atlas of Canada

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## Revisiting the *Historical Atlas of Canada*

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A historical atlas, although aimed at visualizing past eras and past places, is always a product of the time in which it was created. So any assessment of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* needs to be aware that it was of a product of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Although it might be interesting to imagine what a Volume IV might look like – the half century from the 1967 Centennial to the Sesquicentennial, perhaps – that consideration would undoubtedly want to look back further in time, and both refresh and reframe how we got to now. It would do this because of at least three things, I suggest: new scholarship in academia that frame different questions than were the case four decades ago, some prompted by current debates in Canadian society; new data that is now available due to the fruits of new research areas; and newer ways of visualizing that data in the era of digital humanities scholarship, including Historical GIS. These three intertwined factors – context, evidence, visualization – invariably also color the lenses of a retrospective assessment of the first three volumes.

For example, the *Atlas* would now likely want to grapple with visualizing the 150,000 indigenous children who were removed and separated from their families and communities to attend residential schools in over 139 Canadian locations. There were 80 such schools operating in 1931, and 72 in 1948. In Volume III, we mapped enrolment in one province, Alberta, in one year, 1911, and added a small pie-chart map of religious affiliation of Indian Residential Schools nationally in 1920. We wrote less than 90 words, but at least they were about "the scars of cultural conflict." Now, I suspect, an entire plate could and would be done.<sup>2</sup>

I have always been proud of the fact that we made indigenous views of space and place a part of Plate 2 on Canadian territorial evolution; Bob Galois's portrayal of the contrast between the view of land in the Gitskan and Wet'suwet'en territories and those on a government pre-emptor's map in 1920 was a harbinger of the later published work by a cohort of scholars in British Columbia.<sup>3</sup> But back then, it was an edgy elbowing to force it onto a plate seemingly about neutral representation of territorial evolution. Today you can judge it as too small a vignette, an

insufficient illumination of land rights compared to the vast amount of material now available, and not just on BC; but back then, like the one small map of Alberta Indian Schools, that presence offered a challenge to more conventional historical atlases.

A further example of new evidence would include the three million individual entries of data compiled in 2005 by a team of seven SSHRC-funded researchers on the Chinese Head Tax Register. A very small part of that work is evident in the Hermansen and Yu chapter in the Bonnell and Fortin edited volume, *Historical GIS Research in Canada*, to illustrate the migration of Chinese communities to 460 distinct locations across Canada.<sup>4</sup> On Plate 27 of Volume III, we only included a small graph and 60 words of text, but noted the racist sentiments in BC that helped initiate those head taxes. On a plate that centrally considered the migration streams of 1.4 million people from Europe, together with a quarter of a million from the United States, and the third of a million that moved west from central Canada between 1891 and 1914, then the space devoted to those 34,000 from China, Japan and India was in a certain proportional balance, perhaps? But not likely today.<sup>5</sup>

We were mapping a period of national growth, between when Canada was a British imperial outpost and a post-Second World War world where the dominant U.S. role on the world stage had arrived. We looked at how the National Policy and many government institutions developed to tie a country together east and west (with railroads, roads, radio and TV networks), as counters to the many north-south links between Canadian regions and the United States. Though we were trying to avoid portraying Canada as 'not the United States on the continent,' we were aware of the American fact in culture and economy. We mapped many aspects of the American presence, but only at the last did we see firms as multinational rather than simply American corporations. But we were not yet seeing things as part of a wider 'globalization.' That word, with all the good and bad associated with it today, was not part of the lexicon when this *Atlas* was being made, although you might well argue that the broad embrace of Harold Innes, and staples, and metropolitan dominance across all three volumes did indeed consider some vital aspects of historical globalization. I suspect that a Volume IV would likely see it as a central theme.

We were doing this work in the 1980s, a time when the divisive Canadian-American Free Trade Agreement was being negotiated (NAFTA was a good seven years on, in 1994). We were also working in a period when regional tensions with Quebec were part of daily debate (the 1980 referendum was history, but the sentiments of the far closer second referendum of 1995 were already in the air). Other regions were seeking a voice as well, especially in the West, with the Reform Party formed in 1987. We tried hard to see a Canada nationwide, even if we were in Toronto. In the Volume III coach house editorial office,<sup>6</sup> we worked most mornings listening to Peter Gzowski's *Morningside* on CBC Radio, with its regular diet of stimulating regional discussion, and as historical geographers we genuinely believed in pursuing place-centered analysis. Mapping the dead and wounded from St. John's, Newfoundland, was a way to portray the horrors of the First World War through the home front, as opposed to a conventional map of European battlefield positions. Class and ethnicity in Montreal was vividly visualized through housing styles. Corporate boardrooms that controlled many parts of Canada were explored through office building tenancies in Toronto. Colorful wooden grain elevators along branch lines in dozens of Prairie small towns framed graphs that sought to show the shifting balance of American and farmer-centered marketing cooperative. (The recent disappearance of those wooden landmarks would now likely mystify a younger reader of those plates who traveled across the Canadian prairies.)

The insistence on a presence for the ordinary and the everyday, rather than conventional histories and 50,000-foot mapping of aggregate data, was a reflection of emerging ideas in academia: family history, labor history, and feminist thought were being channeled into various plates. On a personal note, I interviewed Nelson Thibault in Winnipeg, who had ridden the rails during the 1930s before becoming a labor organizer in Sudbury after the war. We mapped his geography, the 35 different stages of a restless journey to survive the Depression: he only would talk to me, and let me record that data, after I was able to persuade him, through draft plates we had already sketched, that we were crafting what he saw as a “progressive” view of the country.

Cartographic editor Geoff Matthews, along with co-panelist Byron Moldofksy, supervised painstaking hand-scribed, peel-coat production work by over a dozen cartographers, and the editorial research team constantly got on-the-job cartography training about what could – and more importantly could not – be delivered in terms of data symbols and color shades, given the production technology of the days. We had to prune back interval categories for data from 7 to 5 to 3, use a smaller set of symbols for a simpler legend, often on larger maps. We used this information to interact with plate authors, to help translate vastly ambitious ideas from researchers all across the country working in several distinct disciplines into do-able plates of the Atlas. It took time – 30 full days to meticulously scribe a plate, and so we needed to be sure we had it right before that final process was started – but one benefit of that slow editorial pace was that the overall balance of plates, sections, and the entire volume could be subtly adjusted. Back then, in Hobbit time, before emails, there were no pdfs of maps to send, no Word documents to be circulated, no ArcGIS explorations of massive Excel datasets to quickly whip up an array of visualization options. But the bottom line was always solid evidence and accuracy of mapping.

Face-to-face discussions on long road trips by the editorial team kept researchers in touch with the emerging shape of the volume, and the overall product was also guided by editorial board meetings twice a year. It was a multi-year, multi-disciplinary effort by 140 research assistants and associates, and many plate authors, working on a tight budget and an urgent need to get a product out. Even set against the changing contexts and capacities of today, it was a worthwhile achievement.

## NOTES

1. For an earlier reflection by two of the Atlas editors, immediately after all three volumes were published, see R. Cole Harris, “Maps as a Morality Play: Volume I of the Historical Atlas of Canada” in *Editing Early and Historical Atlases*, ed. Joan Winearls (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995): 163-180; and on Volume III, Deryck W. Holdsworth, “The politics of editing a national historical atlas: a commentary” in *Editing Early and Historical Atlases*: 181-96.
2. Indeed, co-panelist John Warkentin proposed an entire *Atlas* devoted to Indigenous geographies past and present (see Warkentin in this special issue), and there would likely be many places where the insights from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would find mapped expression.
3. A marker of the framework for those works can be found in Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossession? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94 (2004): 161-182.
4. Sally Hermansen and Henry Yu, “The Irony of Discrimination: Mapping Historical Migration Using Chinese Head Tax Data” in *Historical GIS Research in Canada*, eds. Jennifer Bonnell and Marcel Fortin (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2014) 225-237.

5. This plate might stand as a poster child for “settler colonialism,” the dominant negative refrain across these roundtable sessions. For a different take on that term, see S. Max Edelson, *The New Map of Empire: How Britain Imagined American Before Independence* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).
6. Co-editor Don Kerr, still teaching his courses on Canadian regionalism, had his office in the Geography Department further up St. George Street in Sidney Smith Hall. He came down to the Coach House for regular meetings with myself, assistant editor Susan Laskin and research associate Murdo MacPherson.



## Mapping Indigenous Canada

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I propose that it would be useful to produce an Indigenous historical reference atlas of Canada, or at least select historical maps reference maps of Indigenous Canada. By an historical reference atlas I mean an atlas that has maps on demography, economic geography, and transportation that provide basic background information on the Indigenous population of Canada since Confederation. The time period is somewhat arbitrary, but basically it covers the period when substantial census information across Canada becomes available, although the information will vary in quality. I start with two examples from outside Canada of how such maps might be useful.

Susan Schulten in her excellent book on U.S. mapping in the nineteenth century, describes a painting of 1864 that hangs in the U.S. Senate. Titled, “Final Reading of Emancipation Proclamation,” it depicts Abraham Lincoln and seven members of his cabinet. In the lower right hand corner of the painting is a map propped against a chair. It can clearly be identified as a map produced by the US Coast Guard Survey (the foremost US mapping agency of the time) in 1861, “Distribution of Slave Population.” It is an elegant choropleth map of the U.S. South, showing by county the proportion of blacks to a county’s total population. The higher the proportion the darker the tint. The map becomes particularly compelling when you see that in some counties over 85% of the population was slave. Schulten discusses how it is known that Lincoln used the map to follow the progress of his armies, and she also emphasizes the moral and symbolic power of the map. The map provided a deeper understanding of human circumstances underlying the great emancipation struggle. Schulten also makes the important point that “The map not only conveyed the extent of slavery, but also translated the vast data of the census into a compelling and comprehensive picture.”<sup>1</sup>

Last January (2017), Rosa Orblinski, our map librarian at York University, showed me a small, full-color atlas of Syria produced in 2015. At first sight, I thought it was a United Nations atlas, but it turned out that a relatively small country, Austria, had decided to invest in this atlas to show the recent mass migrations of refugee Syrians into Europe. The library’s version is published in English. There are 14 full-page maps showing distribution of religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups in Syria, camps by country for Syrian refugees in Europe and Turkey, and location of Syrians in European countries. In their Forewords, the ministers of two Austrian government departments explain why the atlas was produced. I will extract only three