

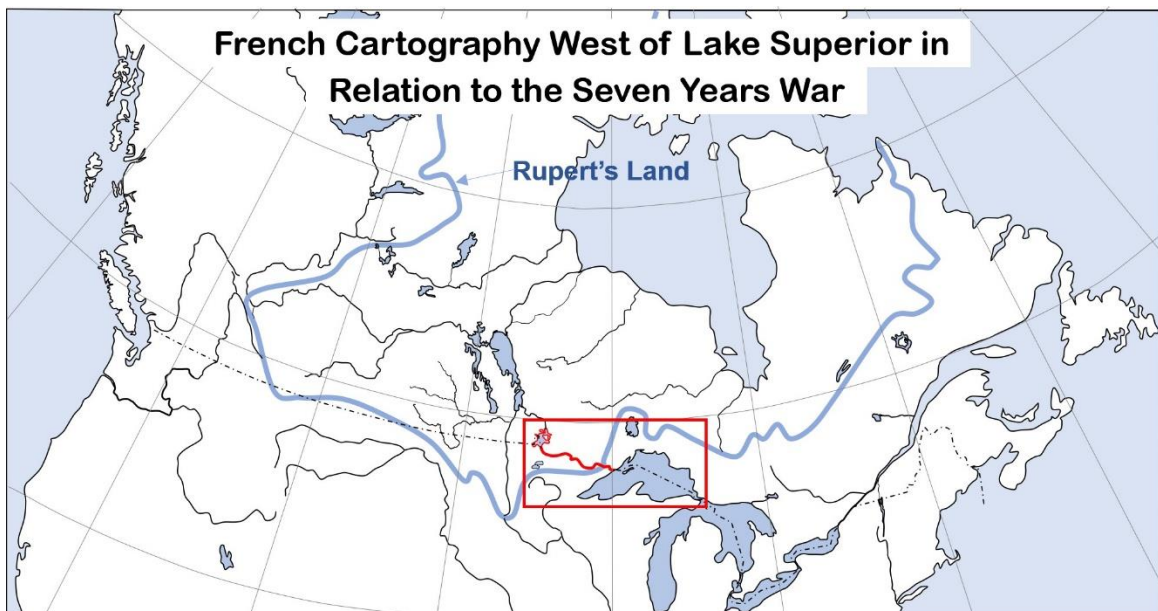
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**BULLETIN**

**French Cartography West of Lake Superior in Relation to the Seven Years War**

CARTO ACMLA VIRTUAL CONFERENCE PAPER

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**French cartography up to 1756**

No accurate information was available to European cartographers about the territory west of Lake Superior until sometime after 1730 when Pierre de la Verendrye provided his sketch maps of Lake of the Woods and a map by Auchagah, his Cree guide, showing the 570 km route.

French westward exploration was stalled along the western shore of Lake Superior, roughly from Lake Nipigon to the Falls of St. Anthony on the Mississippi River. Since Sieur Duluth picked up Jesuit Father Hennepin near Mille Lacs (Minnesota) in 1680, the only French to pass west of the 600 km line were illegal, illiterate *coureurs de bois*. La Verendrye arrived in 1731 with approval to search for a route to the western sea.

While this French exploration hiatus was in effect, competition with the English for living space brought frontier skirmishes. By the time La Verendrye was building his first large trading post on Lake of the Woods in 1732, a war with maps was underway. Claims for western land were made with maps, whether the geography was really known or not. French maps were in circulation long before the English had theirs to offer.

Although the territory west of Lake Superior is very large, the zone adjacent to the Lake is small when viewed on a map of Canada. The small zone makes up a geological and ecological margin between the western Canadian Shield and the eastern edge of the great plains prairie. Three maps from 1729, 1743 and 1746 will illustrate the French knowledge of the west up to the declaration of war in 1756.

*Territory west of Lake Superior which remained un-explored by the French and other Europeans from 1680 to 1730.*

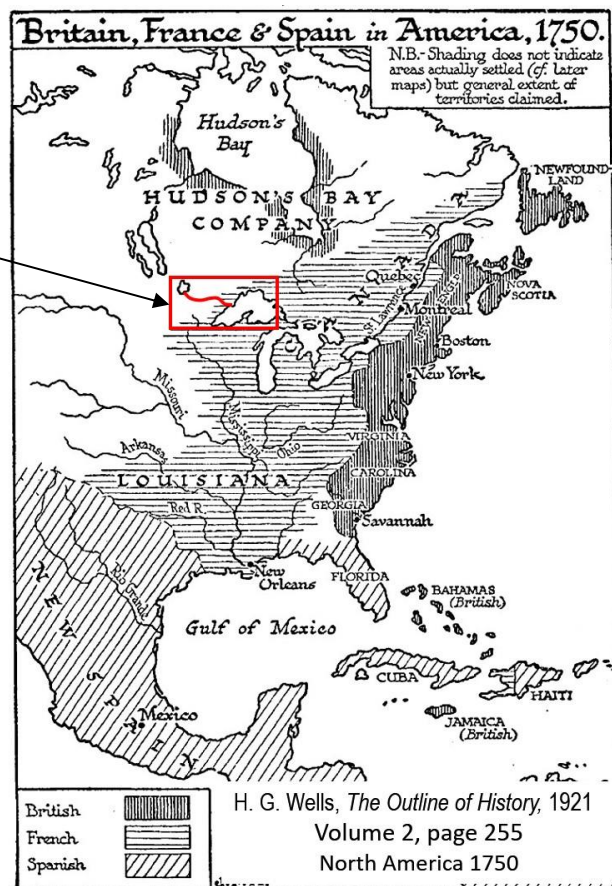
Some independent French fur traders made notable attempts to go west of Lake Superior to find new territory for fresh grounds for their business. These are three examples:

The first recorded person to go west was Jacques de Noyon in 1688, possibly accompanied by others. His effort was not licensed and his turn-around point is uncertain, possibly Rainy Lake.

Zacharie Robutel de La Noue was a licensed trader sent by the government in 1717. He stayed at Lake Superior without going further west until 1721 before returning to Montreal.

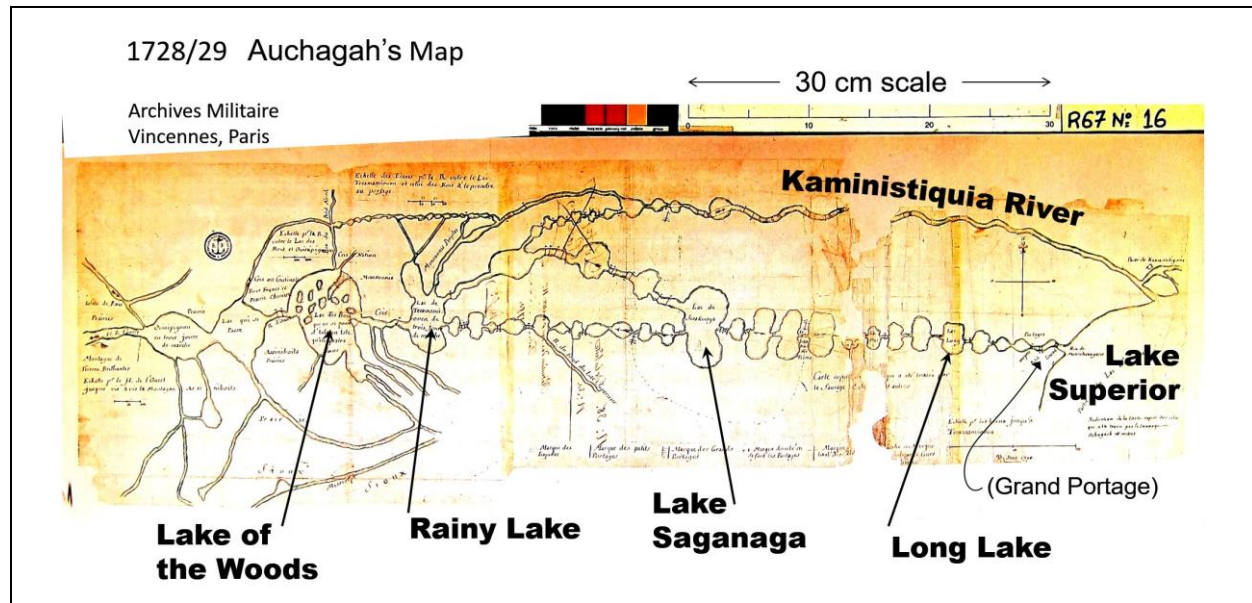
Jean Pachot is said to be the first French trader to use the Grand Portage in 1722. (see p.13)

Joseph La France was an unlicensed trader in 1739 who followed the routes taken by La Verendrye in 1731 and 1732. La France issued a map but it was an error-filled copy.



H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, 1921  
Volume 2, page 255  
North America 1750

## 1729 Auchagah's Map



Auchagah's depiction of the 570 km route to Lake of the Woods was simplified but still showing the essential features. According to La Verendrye the map was drawn for him over the winter of 1728/29 by Auchagah with input from other Cree chiefs who lived in the region.

Starting from Lake Superior, the map shows two principal routes to Rainy Lake and one route from there to Lake of the Woods. Auchagah recommended the route through Long Lake and Lake Saganagah which he interpreted as having 25 lakes but later travelers report 37 lakes and 32 portages. These details show the deep know-ledge of the people who lived in the region and the importance for first-time explorers to seek help from knowledgeable local guides.

Auchagah's map and mutual goodwill with the party of fifty fur traders led by La Verendrye opened the way for France to begin exploring west of Lake Superior.

The map shown here is kept in the Archives Militaire at Vincennes, near Paris. The original by Auchagah is said to have been drawn with charcoal on birchbark. As the scale indicates, the map is large, roughly 1 m in length. This archive copy could have been made in Quebec or in Paris. Other copies have been made in various sizes, often with less detail. A test for authenticity of the Auchagah map is that "Long Lake" is marked on the chain of lakes exactly as it is in this copy.

The name Grand Portage for the 8 ½ mile trail between Lake Superior and the Pigeon River is derived from Gichi Onigamiing or the great carrying place as it was known to the Indigenous people who frequented the site since the first millennium CE. The Kaministiquia River, 65 km to the north, was an alternative link to the western country. As mentioned above, Jean Pachot is said, by the Ontario Heritage Trust, to be the first French trader to use the Grand Portage in 1722.



## 1743 Jacques Nicolas Bellin

1743 Jacques Nicolas Bellin (1703 – 1772)

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By 1743 the routes from Auchagah's map were incorporated into a map by Jacques-Nicolas Bellin at the French Navy cartographic office - Le Dépôt des Cartes et Plans de la Marine, in Paris. The most important features picked up from Auchagah's map are: the first three large lakes west of Lake Superior, the choice of rivers to reach the three lakes, and the arrows showing the direction of water flow. Bellin also further simplified Auchagah's map by leaving out several small lakes. Thereafter, these routes or portions of them were being reproduced on maps by other cartographers in France and elsewhere in Europe. At the same time, La Verendrye was able to move around on the prairie both by water and overland which opened the way for him to extend the scope of his maps, and so to increase French knowledge of the west over the next ten years.

This timing is in line with French diplomatic activity to assert its claims to sovereignty over North American territory from New Orleans in the Gulf of Mexico, up the Mississippi, Ohio and Missouri Rivers as far as places where Duluth, Hennepin, Charlevoix and several other Jesuit, military and fur trade explorers had travelled, including the Great Lakes.

Under Bellin, as the chief cartographer at Le Dépôt, a particular style was established for North America which was mostly distinguished by the shapes of the five Great Lakes. However, too much simplification by Le Dépôt of details submitted by La Verendrye depreciated the value of his exploration. New maps of western Canada created at Le Dépôt were all from one source, La Verendrye. For the French side, the map war called for more surveys of new western territory to produce new maps, not simplified old maps.

## 1746 Jean-Baptiste D’Anville

1746 Jean-Baptiste d’Anville (1697 – 1782)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/D%27Anville\\_Am%C3%A9rique\\_Septentrionale\\_1746\\_UTA\\_1.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/D%27Anville_Am%C3%A9rique_Septentrionale_1746_UTA_1.jpg)



Diplomacy between France and England was faltering over land claims issues in Acadia and the lower St. Lawrence River while new quarrels came up in the “high country” with rivers flowing down into the Great Lakes. There was suspicion that maps in general use were faulty and were the cause of geographical disputes, in which there was some validity.

D’Anville, who was older than the other cartographers in Le Dépôt and established as a leading theorist on world geography, took a turn at creating a definitive map of North America. By waiting three years, more sketch maps by La Verendrye had been received at Le Dépôt from which D’Anville copied certain new features. His map released in 1746 made use of essentially the same information that Bellin and others were using but west of Lake Superior the end result differed in several details. True to his principles, D’Anville ended his western details at Lake of the Woods where his exploration information ran out.

Auchagah’s route from Lake Superior to Lake of the Woods was simplified by removing most of the minor alternative segments. Also, D’Anville applied a more correct smaller size for the three key lakes west of Lake Superior. He seems to have had information about the course of Riviere du Fond du Lac (now the St. Louis River) which subsequently influenced John Mitchell.

There were then two base-maps with noticeable differences, by Bellin and by D’Anville, two highly respected cartographers. In the map war, the English were starting to take notice of the latest French cartography.

## 1755 John Mitchell

1755 John Mitchell (1711–1768)

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Through the 1740s and into the 1750s the rival land claims between France and Britain grew more intense. Acadia and the Atlantic sea coast received most attention because it was the closest region to Europe and the place where towns and people were most numerous. Population of the British Colonies was already ten times that of New France. Nevertheless, the loss of frontier land to a smaller French colony was possible because the British Colonies were each constituted independently while the situation required their joint action. The British Board of Trade and Plantations had no program for creating maps of the thirteen colonies comparable to the work done by Le Dépôt des Cartes et Plans de la Marine in Paris for the colony in New France.

John Mitchell, however, saw the picture very clearly; as a citizen of Virginia, well educated in Edinburgh and later taking up residence in London. There he soon found members of the Board of Trade and Plantations receptive to his warning that France could likely overtake a large part of North America. Mitchell proposed that a map showing British land claims should be drawn up for serious negotiations with France and the Board supported his scheme by giving him full access to the available British cartography on North America.

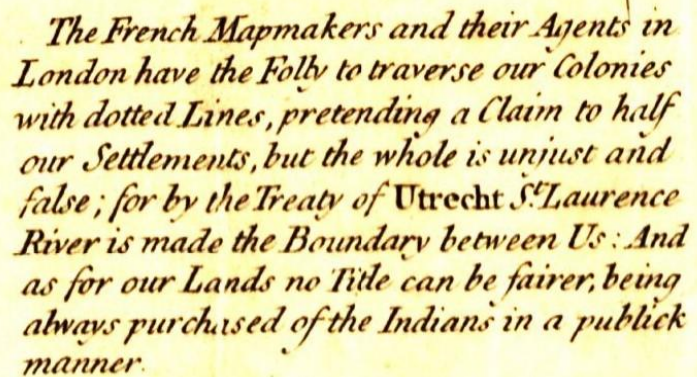


Mitchell could use the best of world maps of North America as sources as well as his personal knowledge of the north east colonies. In February 1755, in London, he unveiled a remarkable, large map in trapezoidal projection 54 x 78 inches covering the continent from the Atlantic coast to 500 miles west of the Mississippi River and from New Orleans to Hudson Bay. All over it were 250 notes exclaiming in imaginatively different ways that such and such “an Englishman had been there a long time ago”, or words to that effect.

Around the time when Mitchell’s map was issued, other British mapping entrepreneurs such as Henry Overton produced look-alikes with provocative comments about the French map-makers.

*Overton placed this note on a map that was labelled as a copy of one made earlier by D’Anville.*

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*The French Mapmakers and their Agents in London have the Folly to traverse our Colonies with dotted Lines, pretending a Claim to half our Settlements, but the whole is unjust and false; for by the Treaty of Utrecht St. Laurence River is made the Boundary between Us: And as for our Lands no Title can be fairer, being always purchased of the Indians in a publick manner.*

Mitchell’s map was too late to prevent war between France and Britain which started with action in the British colonies in 1754 and officially broke out world-wide in 1756. His depiction of Auchagah’s 570 km route to Lake of the Woods was simplified, more similar to D’Anville than to Bellin, but still showing the essential features. In the overall route of 37 lakes in which Auchagah and La Verendrye had singled out Lac Long, Mitchell presented the whole eastern string of 9 lakes flowing east into Lake Superior as a single Long Lake. By simple comparison it looks possible that Mitchell copied Bellin’s Great Lakes layout for his core inland feature and used D’Anville’s simplified version of the route to Lake of the Woods.

D’Anville had also marked the eastern string of 9 lakes as a single Long Lake on his map in 1746. An innocent coincidence of an obscure feature such as this is unlikely and it is fair to assume that Mitchell copied the Long Lake grouping directly from D’Anville’s map, or someone’s copy of it. This cartographical error in locating Long Lake was ignored in New France but after the American Revolution the true location of Long Lake became very important when Mitchell’s map was used in defining the new international boundary.





