



Podcast 1 Transcript

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1688

Vincenzo Coronelli

Partie Occidentale du Canada ou de la Nouvelle France: ou sont les Nations des Illinois, de Tracy, les Iroquois, et Plusieurs Autres Peuples; Avec la Louisiane. . .

The map before you is one of the most distinctive ones in the exhibition. Its background color is yellow; there are very few maps made with this color scheme. It of course stands out among all the other black and white maps made during the era. It has a wonderful cartouche in the upper right that gives the scale. Actually, several different scales are shown in the background of the cartouche, which is pink. In the lower right is the title cartouche in blue. The title of the map in French is “Partie Occidentale du Canada, ou de la Nouvelle Française,” which translates as “Part of Canada or of New France.” It shows the area North America claimed by the French, and its focus is on the Great Lakes.

This map was made by the great Venetian geographer/cartographer, Vincenzo Coronelli. Coronelli got his career off to a great start in his home of Venice, and then was called to Paris by the King of France to make maps and globes for the royal family. Coronelli made some very large globes- actually 13-feet in diameter. They were the largest globes of the time. His maps reflect detailed knowledge available to the French of the territories they claimed in the New World. The French had developed a great fur trade along the waterways of the Great Lakes and into the Athabaska region of the subarctic.

This map is very intriguing because of the place names on it, the information that he gives us about the Native American population, and the way the French were viewing their claims. If you look closely, you can see that the Great Lakes actually have several names. Lake Superior is called Lac de Tracy. It’s also called Lac de Condeé. If you look at what is now Lake Michigan, it also has three names. Apparently the favorite name of the time was Le Lac de Illinois, rather than Michigan, but it is also called le Lac d’affaire. There are several place names here. The French hadn’t really settled in on what they were going to use to refer to their territories, so there is a mixture of French and native names on the map.

The map is intriguing because it shows the Great Lakes quite accurately. It is probably the best map of the Great Lakes made during the 17th century. There is the usual cartographic symbol problem: How do you show areas that you know a lot about? You obviously have to exaggerate their size so you can put a lot of information in. If you look closely at the map, you can see the canoe trails from the St. Lawrence River, west to the Great Lakes, which are given a great deal of space and lots of names. All of the areas further away from the Great Lakes are shown in a smaller scale with much less information.

The mapmaker tries to give the French some idea of the names of the Native Americans. Of course these are not the names that the Native Americans used for themselves. Perhaps the most famous of these is the Sioux that the French used to refer to the Dakota. This is a short name of the name that the Algonquins had given the Sioux who they were fighting with. The Algonquins called the Dakota the “little snakes,” and the French just shortened this.

In the lower center portion, there is a pictograph of two Native Americans making a dug-out canoe, which of course is representation of the travel modes that were used further south. The symbols for the rivers are intriguing; they are generalized of course. The Mississippi River is straightened out. At the scale the map is made, the cartographer could not show every individual twist in the river, but he does attempt to show the major features, such as Lake Pepin and the Falls of St. Anthony.

In the northern part of the map, there is a lake shown. It has a very intriguing shape, kind of a crown-like lake, but we do not know if this refers to Lake of the Woods or Lake Winnipeg. It really just indicates that the mapmaker knew there were some large lakes to the northwest of Lake Superior, but he didn't have much information.

The cartouches are very intriguing. The native population is shown shooting cattle in water. The French had a hard time understanding what the buffalo actually looked like, and therefore show them as wild cattle. They give the native archers some fanciful garments making them look more like Greeks. At the top portion, we see the French with their firearms shooting bears and small mammals.

In conclusion, we see a representation of French knowledge of their territories. The mapmaker was skillful; the engraving is excellent, and it's a nice mixture of science and art, even though the art is sometimes a little fanciful.