

Research Notes

Bewitched by Maps: A Caveat

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Although preoccupied with borders and limits, cartography paradoxically transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries. One tacit contention in the following essay insists that certain readers suffer from a tunnel vision that leads them to misinterpret maps. The lengthy opening allusion to Hotspur and his forgotten map reminds us of the dangers of not only rushing impetuously into the affairs of this world but also of regarding certain documents too narrowly and too subjectively.

Some readers question my using the extended allusion. In choosing to employ it, however, I try to dramatize important connections between the disciplines of, among others, literary criticism and history and to warn against attitudes such as impetuous judgment and wishful thinking, which I perceive as recurrent in most of the historians who have misinterpreted the 1756 maps.

Actually, both disciplines—literary and historical criticism—often suffer from a kind of humorless, over-preoccupation with their respective importance and exclusivity. The very genre of Shakespeare's history play, however, urges upon us a more cosmopolitan, diversified vision.

In one of those scenes of character revelation for which Shakespeare is justly famous, Hotspur (Henry Percy) in *1 Henry IV* curses his bad memory, the result in turn of an impetuous personality: "A plague upon it! I have forgot the map" (3.1.4-5). As it turns out, his ally, the Welsh Prince Glendower brought the map by which Hotspur, Glendower and the other conspirators then proceed to divide up Henry IV's kingdom among themselves, even before they have won it. They soon fall to bickering over where to draw the new boundaries. Although Hotspur insists on obtaining some choice territory, he really could not care less about what the map shows: "in the way of bargain, mark ye me, I'll cavil on the ninth part of a hair" (3.1.133-4). Put simply, he needs to argue with Owen Glendower, whom he loathes. Eventually, the conspirators mend their differences, but Hotspur's impulsive, impetuous character has been set before us graphically, and it is confirmed later when he fails to take the time to read important communications from his family. When he finally dies under the sword of the Henry IV's son, Prince Hal, we perceive, in part, his death as the consequence of a man who refused to examine things carefully—his family's motives, their plans, his own self-infatuation. Even small things like maps and letters, we see, cannot command his attention. One of the hard truths learned by many of Shakespeare's characters—Hotspur is not one—and by his audiences

is that people see what they want to see. The precise boundaries of Hotspur's new land were not as important as acting out his dislike of Owen Glendower.

Leaping from Hotspur's fifteenth-century map of England to four manuscript, mid-eighteenth-century drafts of Pennsylvania and its western territories and the ways in which those maps have been interpreted, we recognize another kind of impetuosity, together with a new perceptual difficulty: with surprising frequency modern commentators have not seen what the maps purport to symbolize and instead often make snap, Hotspur-like judgments about the record confronting them. Far from forgetting maps, however, many historians fall under their spell, a spell often so powerful that their critical judgment becomes hamstrung, deficient. In spite of the frequency with which we use maps, regarding them almost as commonplace aids to our research, we often do not know how to read them, do not take the time to linger critically over the image or images they record. Too often, we leap to conclusions unjustified or accept without reservation inherited interpretations that have become attached to the maps like barnacles.

I am looking at a copy of a manuscript map, the original in the British Museum.¹ [Fig. 1: *Hulbert's copy of the British Museum Map*] Presumably, a hand roughly contemporary with that of the draft itself identifies it as "A Map of Part of the Province of Pennsylvania West of the River Susquahannah." This particular reproduction is in *The Old Glade (Forbes's) Road*, published in 1903 by Archer Butler Hulbert, who captioned it "Forbes's Road to Raystown (1757)." People often—I know this from experience—people often misconstrue the map as showing the road that Brigadier General John Forbes cut during his famed expedition that eliminated Fort Duquesne, the French stronghold on Pennsylvania's western frontier, and drove the French from the Ohio valley. They overlook, or do not wish to see, that Hulbert's caption—"Forbes' Road to Raystown (1757)" (my emphasis)—describes only a portion of the road drawn: Hulbert draws attention only to the route Forbes took to Raystown (today's Bedford), nothing more. Impetuously, he used a ready-made map to meet needs only partly realized. He should have used another or drawn his own map.

There are several errors in Hulbert's note. The Forbes expedition took place in 1758, leaving Carlisle in July, not in 1757 as Hulbert's note declares. His phrase "Forbes's Road" implies wrongly that Forbes blazed the road to Raystown; in fact, that route delineated was opened in 1755 by James Burd in an attempt to link Pennsylvania directly with the north-south road Edward Braddock was cutting for his doomed attack on Fort Duquesne. When Burd reached the summit of the Allegheny Ridge on 17 July, he learned of Braddock's defeat, ceased work, buried his tools, and returned to Shippensburg by way of Fort Cumberland.² (The tools were recovered three years later by Forbes.) This event raises a further problem with Hulbert's presentation, for his sub-

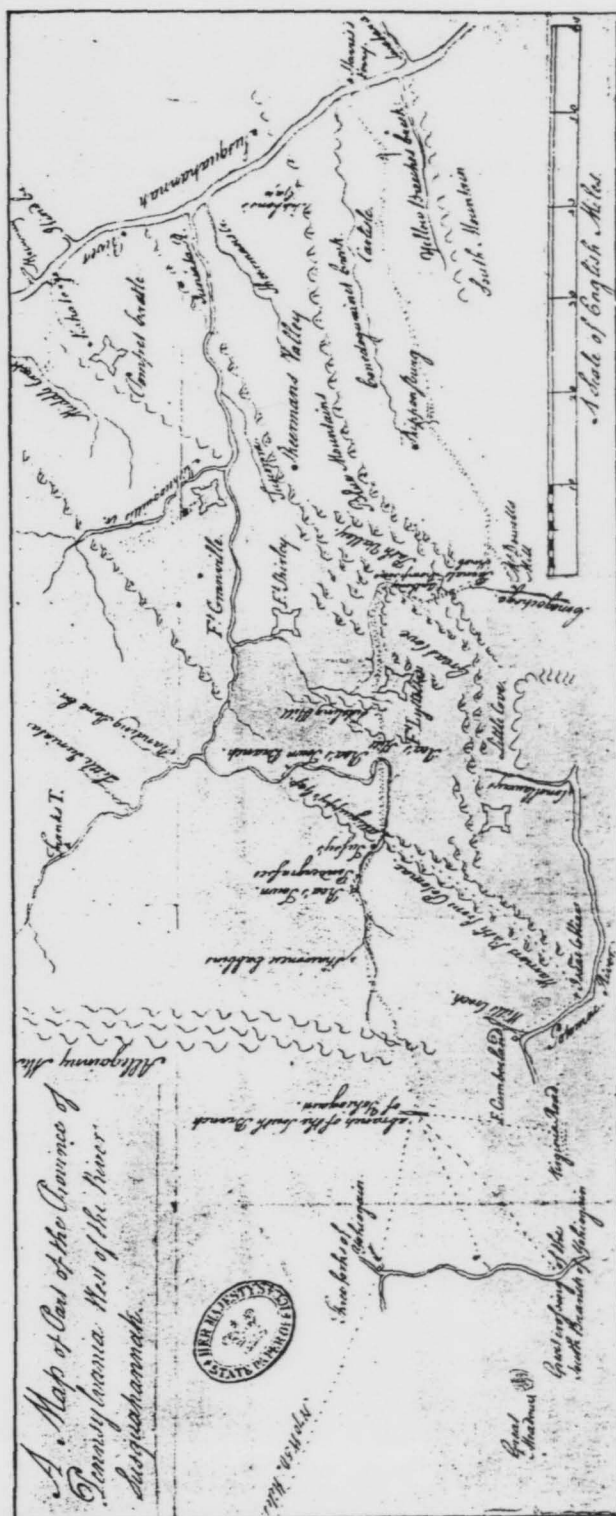


Figure 1. Draft in the British Public Record Office, "c. 1750," as reproduced by Archer B. Hulbert, *The Old Glade* (Forbes's Road (1903), who misdates it as 1757.

caption adds the following: "The dotted line to the Youghiogheny shows the line of Burd's Road." Between Raystown and the Three Forks (or Turkey Foot) of the Youghiogheny we see two kinds of "dotted line," one (Raystown to the Allegheny Ridge) of close-spaced dots suggesting at times two tracks, the other (from the Allegheny to the Three Forks) a single line of more widely spaced dots which continues on to Fort Duquesne. The latter, of course, represents a projected route, for James Burd never cut his road to the Youghiogheny in 1755, although one might infer otherwise from reading Hulbert.

Intended by Hulbert to illustrate part of the Forbes Road, this map really shows the 1755 Burd Road as it existed and as it was intended. The caption also wrongly dates the Forbes expedition as 1757, and close scrutiny of certain details on the draft suggests that mid-year 1756 is altogether a more accurate date. The draft clearly delineates Fort Granville at the junction of the Juniata River and Kishacoquillis Creek. Granville was destroyed by the French and Indians on 31 July 1756 and never rebuilt. The full draft—Hulbert cuts off the top portion of the original—also fails to show either Fort Augusta, finished by July 1756, and Fort Loudon on the Conocogheague, completed in December 1756. About a year after Braddock's defeat (9 July 1755) seems a reasonable date for the map.

The British Museum map challenges our perception in yet other ways, ways intrinsic to itself as a map of western Pennsylvania in mid-1756. Illustrated in large are two forts—Pomfret Castle (upper right) on Mahantango Creek and an unnamed fort (lower middle) on the Conollaways (today's Tonoloway) Creek. The problem with these two defenses is that, as nearly as thorough research can determine, neither was ever constructed.³ The perplexity here redoubles when we examine another manuscript map, of the entire province and of about late 1756, in the Pennsylvania archives: it also illustrates Pomfret Castle. [*Fig. 2: Pomfret Castle, State Archives Map*] What are we to do with maps as historical evidence when they record as fact features that never existed? After all, these are not maps concocted like many in the Renaissance and Middle Ages, half out of fact, half out of imagination. The question strikes to the heart of our need to find what we want to find, of our allowing wish-fulfillment to get between fantasy and good sense. Pennsylvania Governor Robert Hunter Morris intended to build the two forts as part of the line of fortifications he was erecting between the province's settled areas and the Ohio valley. He apparently much favored Fort Pomfret Castle, even referring to it on two occasions as built.⁴ Possibly the maps express that attachment by showing them as he hoped they would be; perhaps they reflect his need to leave behind a cartographic picture of his achievement as he awaited for William Denny to replace him during the summer of 1756.⁵ Whatever Morris's motives, the placing of Pomfret Castle on the maps has bedeviled historians.

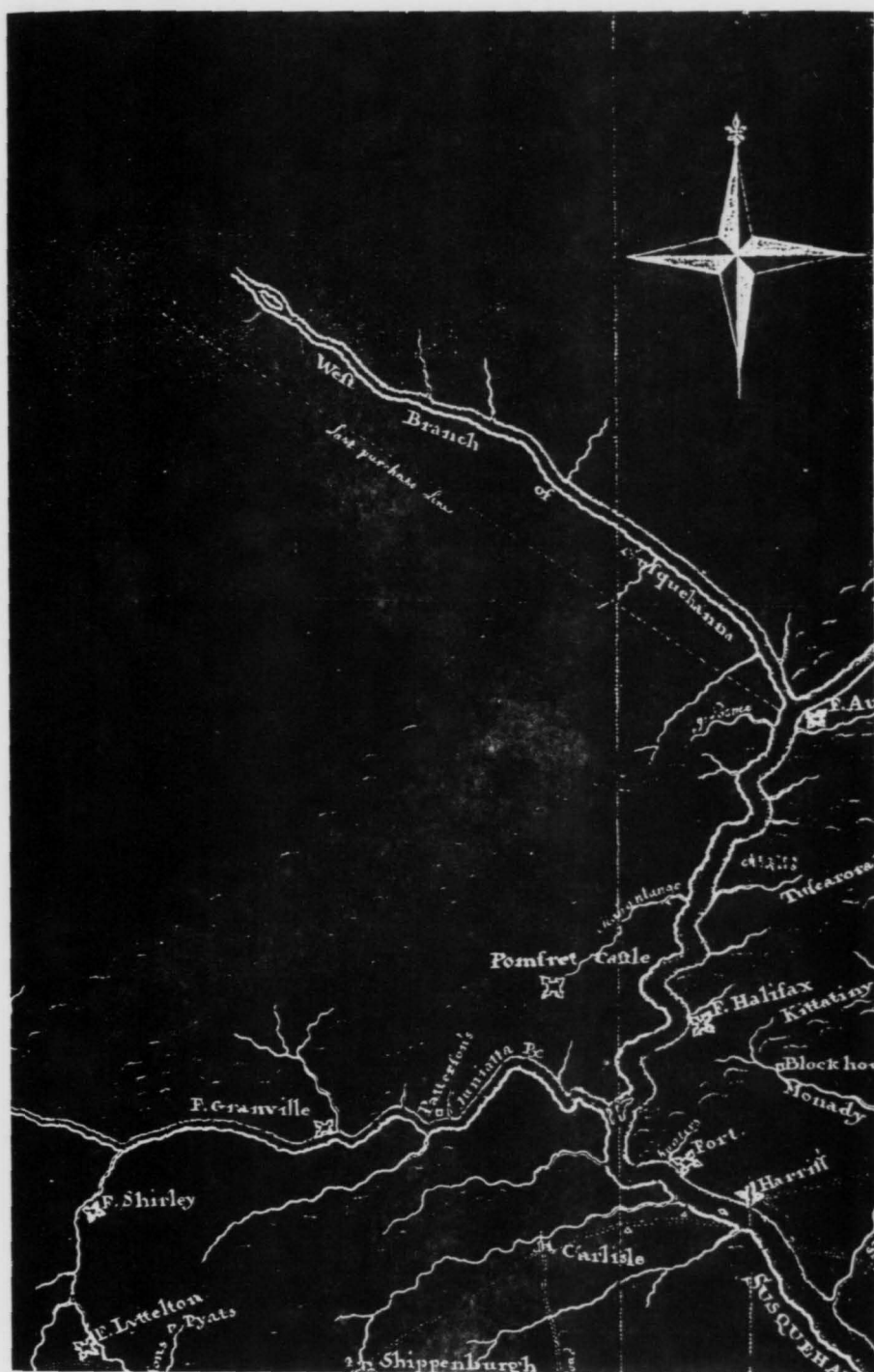


Figure 2. Portion of the draft in the Pennsylvania State Archives showing Fort Pomfret Castle, which was never erected.

We cannot dismiss altogether the maps showing Governor Morris's possible wish-fulfillment or perhaps expressing his need to burnish his badly damaged reputation; but neither should we accept them as unadorned, simple fact. We need to assess them both as records and as propaganda. Nor should we dismiss Hulbert's mistakes as evidence of the faulty methodology we sometimes expect of older, "dated," historians. Another map of western Pennsylvania from the same period provides additional insight that the problem may be inherent in the way we tend to interpret maps, in the way we are inclined to venerate them uncritically.

In 1994 Seymour I. Schwartz published his *French and Indian War, 1754-1763: The Imperial Struggle for North America*.⁶ The book's summary account of the principal events of the French and Indian War serves as matrix for an attractive presentation of the rich cartographic heritage of that conflict. Schwartz reproduces a Library of Congress map similar to the British Museum draft we have been discussing. [Fig. 3: Lib. of Congress "Armstrong" Map] Not so esthetically executed as the British Museum map, "Mr. George Armstrong's rough draft of the country to the west of the Susquehanna" is nonetheless important, for it not only confirms the general plan shown on the other (omitting Fort Pomfret Castle and the unnamed fort on the Tonoloway), but also presents two boxes recording distances. Transparent stylistic resemblances to a map in the Draper Collection,⁷ on which a pencil notation reads "Armstrong's map west of Susquehanna," has led some to think that George Armstrong authored the map. Cataloguing information in the Library of Congress discloses that this attribution relies upon evidence in the papers of Henry Bouquet showing that Major George Armstrong was sent out in July of 1758 to discover and survey a route from Raystown to Fort Duquesne. The Library of Congress notations, however, also suggest that George's brother John drew the map. Indeed, this alternative is more attractive because Colonel John Armstrong of the Pennsylvania Regiment was the famed military leader who had led the successful attack across the Alleghenies on the Delaware town of Kittanning in 1756; he was also deputy surveyor for Cumberland county. He knew something of the trans-Allegheny country; he knew how to take surveys and draw maps. As the Bouquet papers reveal, furthermore, George's abrupt return from his reconnaissance provoked Bouquet to outrage and confirmed Forbes himself in his dim view of George's road-building ability.⁸ If nothing else, George Armstrong would not have been a likely choice to compile what appears to be something of an official or semi-official map of the Forbes expedition. On the other hand, the distinctive handwriting of John Armstrong, on surveys and in letters, unfortunately does not match the lettering on the map.

The issue as defined by the way these suggestions of authorship have been presented, however, is irrelevant, for, again, commentators have perceived what

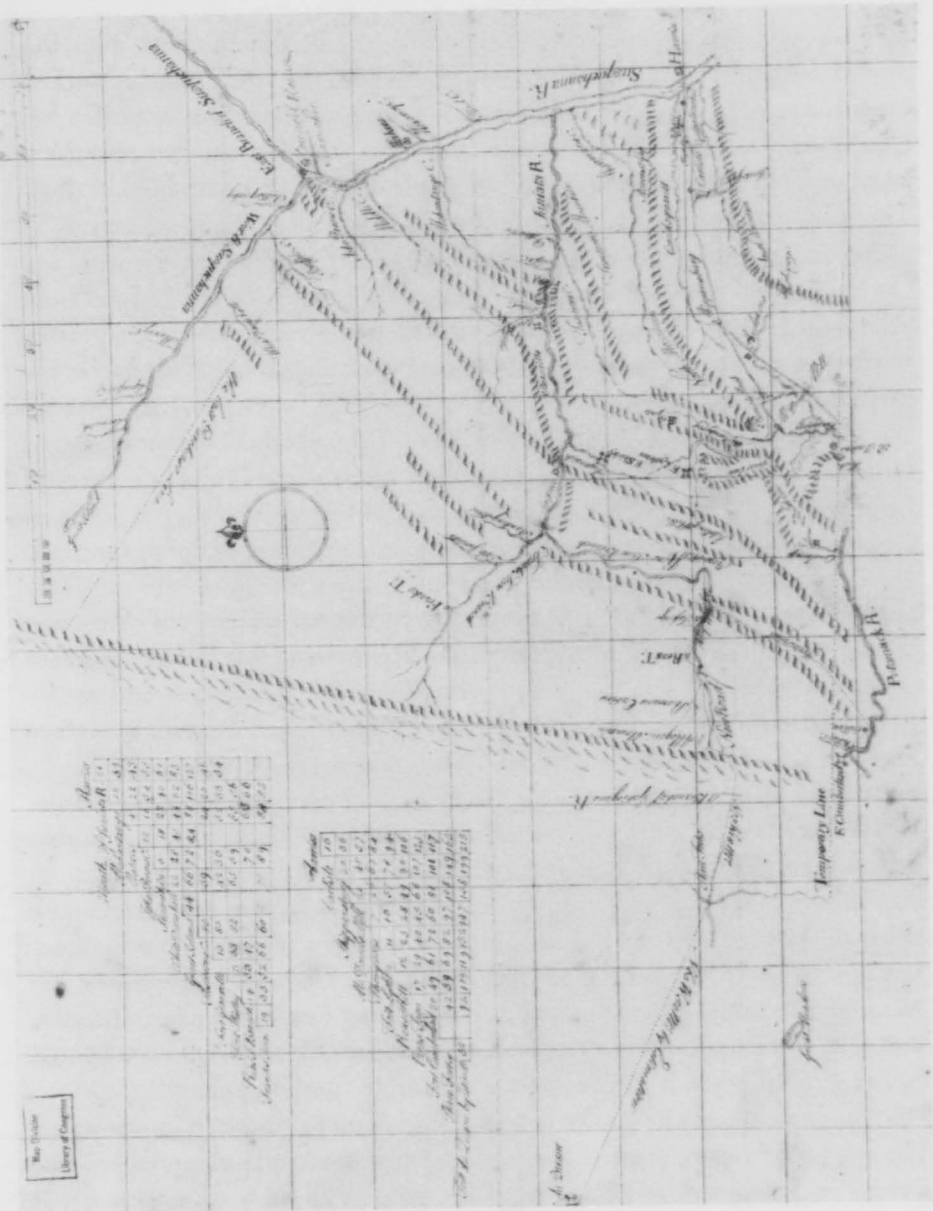


Figure 3. Draft in the Library of Congress, attributed to either George or John Armstrong and dated variously as 1755 or 1758.

they want or are predisposed to see. As with the British Museum map, this draft dates from about July 1756, not from 1758, the year of Forbes's march cross-country to Duquesne, and it does so for the same reasons: it shows a fort burned on 31 July 1756 (Granville) and does not illustrate two important provincial forts erected in July and December of 1756 (Augusta and Loudon). The road depicted in the lower portion is, once more, James Burd's 1755 route, actual and projected, to Fort Duquesne. Charmed by the map and connecting the penciled-in phrase "Armstrong's map" on the Draper look-alike with John or George Armstrong who figured prominently in documents relating to the Forbes campaign, commentators rather too quickly derive the map from 1758 or after.

One final example. In January of 1759, Pennsylvania Surveyor General Nicholas Scull brought out his watershed map of the "Improv'd Parts of Pennsylvania." He should have waited and corrected it so that it reflected recent events such as the taking of Fort Duquesne in November of the previous year. One suspects that as Forbes prepared to move westward into the Ohio and northward toward Lake Erie people eagerly desired some way of visualizing the new territories opened by the campaign. Maintaining that he had consulted with those involved in the recent developments in the western counties—Major Joseph Shippen, Deputy Surveyors Colonel John Armstrong, George Stevenson, and Benjamin Lightfoot—Scull issued his map, disappointingly out-of-date. Notwithstanding that Granville had ceased to exist two-and-a-half years earlier, his great map still depicts it, and notwithstanding that Forbes had renamed Duquesne Fort Pitt immediately upon investing the ruins in November 1758, the Scull map, which shows little west of the Alleghenies, refers to the fortress by its French name but does not actually show the fort's location. [*Fig. 4: N. Scull's 1759 Map showing Ft. Granville, destroyed 1756.*] More significantly, historians and others viewing Scull's visually impressive and eloquent chart tend to interpret it as reflecting a Pennsylvania as it existed in late 1758. In fact, it was obsolete on its publication in January 1759.

There are lessons here to be acquired, and perhaps we can in un-Hotspur-like ways take them to heart. Historical maps are powerful instruments. Their beauty is often part of their power. They purport to fill with graphic detail geographic abysses, blank spaces in our comprehension of the intricacies of this earth. This they seek to achieve in ways that are not discursive or dialectical, but esthetic and visual: they endeavor to overawe and persuade by appealing more to the eye than to the mind, and they do so by relying on an accumulation of hearsay and travellers' reports; on surveyors' and astronomers' observations and mathematical calculations; on a full array of graphics techniques; and, as apparently in the case of Robert Hunter Morris, on wishful thinking and political urgency. Although they claim to show space as it is, they frequently define it as it should be, as their authors would like it to be.



Figure 4.
Detail from
Nicholas Scull's
1759 map of
Pennsylvania
showing Fort
Granville,
which was
destroyed in
1756.

The power wielded by maps may be appreciated in the veritable flood of maps that occurred in 1755 as France and Great Britain geared up for the war that would decide the fate of North America. As Seymour I. Schwartz has urged, the great maps of John Mitchell, Lewis Evans, John Huske, Jean Nicholas Bellin, Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville, Robert de Vaugondy, and others, in their many editions and piratings, represent an impressive contribution to the propaganda war waged from 1755 on.⁹ Their purpose was not only to reveal and define to politicians, military leaders, and others the exact territories occupied by the rival powers, but also to stake out claims to land not actually possessed. Maps thus appeal often to sensibilities other than those we usually employ in dispassionate, objective historical interpretation.

The fault lies also in ourselves. We tend to approach maps too inclined to believe what we see, sometimes too ready to leap to conclusions not even implied. We see a manuscript map dating from the 1750s, and in all respects it cannot compare with the Mitchell or Evans maps of 1755. Yet, strangely, we sit mesmerized by it—I have expended many, many hours during the past years examining the “Armstrong” map and its related drafts. My experience is not unique. On it is an east-west road labeled “New Road” running from Carlisle to the Youghiogheny. Someone writes in the margin of a slightly earlier version of the same draft (that in the Draper Collection) “Armstrong’s map.” Another infers, “Yes, George (or John) Armstrong . . . the Forbes expedition . . . “New Road” . . . the Forbes Road . . . 1758.” We shut our critical eyes to forts long turned into charred timber or never built, thereby perceiving a landscape that in 1758 never existed. Thus, we come to see the “Forbes Road” striking to a point some 70 miles south of where it actually terminated and then running north, the Monoghehela to the left, contrary to the intention and instructions of John Forbes. We have been bewitched by a map.

Notes

1. Public Record Office 803, Colonial Office, Maps Pennsylvania, no. 2. Library of Congress, G 3820 1755 A7 Vault.
2. James Burd to Governor Robert Hunter Morris, 25 July 1755, *Colonial Records*, 6:499.
3. See Robert A. Hunter, *Forts on the Pennsylvania Frontier, 1753-1758* (Harrisburg, 1960), pp. 373-7, and Guy Graybill, "The Search for Pomfret Castle," in *Real Sketches* (Middleburg, Pa., 1975), pp. 13-41.
4. See Hunter, *ibid.*
5. Dissatisfied with his performance, the Pennsylvania proprietary relieved Morris of his position and appointed Lieutenant Colonel William Denny of the regular army to replace him. Approved in May 1756 by the Crown, Denny did not, however, take his oath of office until 20 August. Thus, between May and the end of August, until Denny's arrival, Morris functioned as something of a lame duck.
6. (New York).
7. Draper Series ZZ Collection, Whi (X3) 51389 (P653), vol. 7, Wisconsin Historical Society.
8. For the command's dislike of George Armstrong, see John Forbes to Henry Bouquet, [9 August 1758], *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, ed. S. K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent, and Autumn L. Leonard (Harrisburg, 1951), 2: 345; Henry Bouquet to John Forbes, [31 August 1758], *ibid.*, 451; and Henry Bouquet to James Burd, 1 September 1758, *ibid.*, 458.
9. See "The Emergence of the Nation, 1750-1800," in Seymour I. Schwartz and Ralph E. Ehrenberg, *The Mapping of America* (New York, 1980), 159-63.