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MAPPING THE COUNTY: BURR'S NEW YORK STATE ATLAS

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ABSTRACT: *David Burr's 1829 Atlas of New York State was a major landmark in American cartography and provided the basis for later county maps as well as creating a visual interpretation of the county as a geographic unit. The compilation of this work and its republication in 1839 was sponsored by New York State, and was one of the earliest State Atlases. The original Atlas was assembled by sending draft versions of the individual township maps to town supervisors and requesting corrections to be included on the final maps. These letters and draft revisions are preserved in the New York State Archives, and present a unique insight into mapping and portraying the New York landscape in the early nineteenth century.*

David Burr's Atlas of the State of New York represents a major stylistic landmark in American cartography. This paper examines its background, the cartographic sources it drew upon, the method of its compilation, and the impact it had on the subsequent cartography of counties within New York State. It also examines the symbolic depiction of the land, compared to traditional European cartography. The features that Burr's Atlas represents and emphasizes can be viewed as an official, New York state-sanctioned understanding of the landscape.

ATLAS SOURCES

Burr's New York Atlas was the second atlas of a state produced in the United States, the first being Robert Mills' 1825 *Atlas of South Carolina* (Ristow, 1985a). Initially published in 1830 with a copyright date of 1829, Burr's Atlas contains colored plates of New York's then 56 counties and brief geographical descriptions, with statistical profiles of each county derived from the 1825 census. The Atlas' Introduction describes the background to its creation and how the project was accomplished.

The Introduction cites the various cartographic sources that were used for base information, crediting C. J. Sauthier's 1779 New York map as the "first worthy of notice." This map provided data for only the eastern counties. Simeon De Witt's large scale 1802 map of New York State provided more recent and more detailed information for this area and the rest of the State. DeWitt's sources included the maps made from surveys performed with Robert Erskine when they headed the small map making corps of the Revolutionary Army. Consisting mainly of road surveys and traverses, these maps formed the framework for compiling detailed mapping information of the area from Connecticut to New Jersey.

Simeon De Witt served as the Surveyor General of New York state from 1784 until 1834. During that time he initially performed surveys, and then supervised the mapping of the State and disposal of state land. He co-ordinated and compiled material from land surveys and sales. For his 1802 map he drew on a wide variety of materials. These included maps he requested in 1797 from the supervisors of towns in the Hudson Valley from Albany to Long Island, his own 1792 map of the New Military Tract in the central part of the state and the Holland Land Company surveys for western New York. In addition, De Witt had access to all the other maps submitted to the Surveyor General's office. The maps required for land subdivision, sales and transfers provided the office with a major source for map compilation. De Witt's 1802 map, at a scale of about four miles to the inch, was engraved on six plates and includes not only New York State, but also parts of the neighboring states of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. By 1827, however, as the Burr Atlas Introduction states, "the great

improvements that have been made over the last fifteen years, and the alterations of the civil divisions. have rendered [earlier maps] almost useless." Burr credits De Witt's 1802 map as "undoubtedly the best within the reach of science and skill at the time of its projection: but since then the civil divisions of the State have undergone an almost entire change, and the progress of industry and art have produced still greater transformations" (Burr, 1829). This situation inspired David Burr to propose drafting a State Atlas of New York.

ATLAS COMPILATION

David Burr began his mapping career in 1825 as a deputy road surveyor in a party mapping the route of a proposed road from Little Valley in Cattaraugus County through Jamestown to Mayville in Chatauqua County. The road was part of the rapid development of New York's transportation links and this southern route was planned to balance politically the needs of the southern townships with the increased access brought to the northern communities with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 (Burr, 1826). Burr acquired copies of the maps and reports from two other survey parties as the first step in a plan to make an atlas of the State. He reported on this plan to the "Legislature of the Senate in 1827" which was convinced of the "great benefit to the public." On October 16, 1827 the legislature passed an act "directing that whenever a set of maps was compiled according to this plan, and delivered to the Surveyor-General and Comptroller, they would revise and correct the same, and when they were satisfied with their accuracy publish them at the expense of the State" (Burr, 1829).

Burr appears to have had the support of then Governor Clinton in this endeavor and worked with the Surveyor General's office in the process of producing the atlas. It is not certain whether Burr was attached to the Surveyor General's office, but he may have been since he lived in Albany from 1826 to 1832. From the evidence of unpublished documents in the Surveyor General's Land Papers at the New York State Archives in Albany, proposals for engraving the maps were made by three firms.

The engraving firms of Rawdon Clark and Company of Albany, and Balch Stiles and Company, andPeter Maverick, both of New York City, submitted bids for the project on November 2, 1827. Burr's plan for mapping the State proposed a large 50" by 60" State map, on six plates, a smaller 20" by 24" state map for inclusion in the atlas and maps of each of the 56 counties, together with a map of the city of New York. The title page was budgeted $125 for a fine engraving "of such a device as the author may suggest." Figure 1 shows this page, an elaborate engraving with an illustration of a bucolic landscape on the Hudson River near Fishkill. The maps were to be supplemented with geographical descriptions and statistical tables devoted to each of the counties. Maverick's high bid of $5550 was accompanied by a letter offering to reduce the bid if it was too high, but with no examples of his work except a map of New York City made in 1800. Maverick also expected the work to take at least two years. Balch and Stiles' offer of $4325 proposed the maps be executed in a style similar to attached sample maps that they had engraved of William B. William's *New York State* and John Farmer's *Territory of Michigan*. The winning and lowest bid of $4000 was submitted by Rawdon Clark. Their bid promised the work "to be done in as good a style as any map engraved in the United States." This firm also had the advantage of being in Albany where the Surveyor General's office was located. Surveyor General De Witt signed the contract for the Atlas with Ralph Rawdon and his partners Freeman Rawdon and Ashahel Clark on November 17th, 1827 (1827, Surveyor General's Land Papers, Series II, Box 2, No. 58. This archive is cited below by date, box and file number only).

By February 1829, the Surveyor General reported to the state senate about the progress of the project and the procedure "for having the maps of counties as correct as possible." De Witt's office had sent out "circular letters, one of which was addressed to the supervisor of each town, enclosing the delineation of each town as drawn by Mr. Burr, with a request to have all errors that might be preserved in it, corrected." These letters, sent from the Surveyor General's office requesting replies be directed to De Witt, support the idea that Burr was working directly under De Witt's supervision. The letters, mailed on various dates in 1828, asked for corrections to the proofs, delineations of roads and streams, and the locations of churches, public buildings, mills and other manufactories which were to be noted on the map by numbers and accompanied by a sheet of references. The request promised no funds but suggested an accurate map would benefit the citizens of the town (1828,5:172b).

The Surveyor General's Land Papers, Series II, in the New York State Archives has preserved over a

Figure 1. Burr's Atlas Title Page

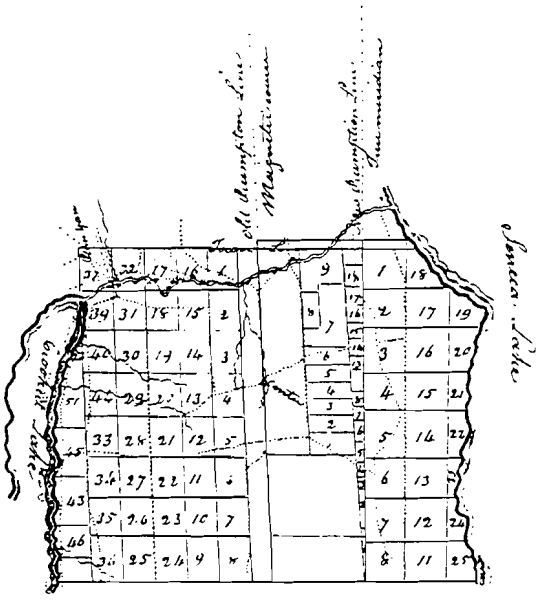
hundred of replies to these letters. Many of the respondents were frustrated by the small size of the maps (townships cut from the proofs of each Atlas page) and thus difficult to correct legibly. In some cases the supervisors or their surveyors redrew the maps, either at the same scale as the original, or at a larger scale to include all the information requested. Figure 2 shows an example of a typical town map, originally drawn at the same scale as the proof, (1828, 5:172b). Joseph Jones notes he redrew the map of Milo because the proof was "so erroneous" and included roads, mills, lot numbers and suggestions about the correct placement of the preemption line. Excuses for delay in returning the proofs are common. " I have been rather negligent in giving an answer to yours of the 17th of June--this season of the year is a very busy season and that must be my excuse," wrote Nathaniel Wright from Collins Town on July 24th, 1828 (Box 5, No.15b). Edward Nicholson wrote on December 2, 1828, "In consequence of myabsence last summer I never received the Map of our town until this supervisor's meeting, and not having time to correct it agreeably to your request therefore I send it as it is" and added a single mill to the map (1828, 13:67). Some town supervisors were delighted to comply; others demanded money. De Witt Drown of De Witts Valley was thrilled by the request from his namesake Simeon De Witt. While saying he was "not much of a Mappist as my namesake, your honor," and that he was a little ashamed at his efforts, he sent back a carefully prepared large scale version of the map "made in just one hour by the clock," with 24 carefully referenced points of interest (1828, 12:195). On the other hand, Gideon Hammond of Westport requested $4 for his services (adding some roads and five references to the proof map), the later return of the proof for his use, and answers to queries he had about land transfers (1828,13:65 a,b). Minories Day of Carlton requested $7 for reimbursement for employing surveyors to make the necessary corrections (1828, 5:114).

David Burr appears to have been paid $2358.88 for the Atlas, $500 of which was for "overseeing the work." Some of the remainder was for work he subcontracted out. The printed maps were hand colored (at a cost of seven cents a sheet), varnished, and then bound into volumes. The whole project had been budgeted $8000 from the Legislature. The Maps and Atlas were finally completed and delivered in January or February 1830, at $274.10 under budget. The Legislature further authorized that a copy of the large State map and Atlas be sent to the Governors of the other 25 States in the Union.

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

The Atlas used a spare palette of symbols: town lines, stage roads, county roads, villages, flouring mills, manufactories, forges, saw mills and churches in the 1829/1830 edition; with canals, railroads, post offices, academies and lighthouses added in the 1839/1840 edition. These items are identified in a key termed "Explanations." Figure 3 shows a portion of the map of the counties of New York, Queens, Kings and Richmond, reduced from the original size. This map includes marsh symbols as well, but they are not included in the key. It also contains other notable features, for example "Perpendicular Rocks Palisades" along the west bank of the Hudson, the locations of various ferries and even an elm tree located with a vignette in Richmond. Although De Witt's original letter to the town supervisors had asked for "all establishments of note, such as churches and public buildings, mills and other manufactories" as well as streams and all types of roads, the public buildings were omitted from the 1829 edition in many of the county maps. Perhaps this was a matter of inconsistent responses from the town supervisors, for the letters preserved in the archives do not represent a complete survey of the state. Burr's Atlas also employed minimum topographic symbols, in a select number of counties. The symbols used to show the topography resemble crude hachures, and appear more frequently in the older settled counties in the east of the state. Large areas of the Adirondaks are empty in the earlier edition, but more relief is shown in the second, reflecting further exploration and surveying. The use of hachures broke with De Witt's technique of using perspective renditions of known relief used in his large scale 1802 map.

The most obvious features in the mapped landscape are the lot lines dividing land parcels. These are often annotated with owner's names, and in the western part of the state, with township and range numbers. The message of this presentation is that the land is owned and thus tamed, although many of the more remote areas were still unsettled and largely unexplored. The precise location of parcels enabled land speculation, a major economic reality in early nineteenth century New York. Another interesting fact is revealed in comparing the large scale county maps with the smaller scale map of the whole state. Indian reservations are carefully outlined in the individual counties, but do not appear on the state map. This omission cannot be seen merely as a scale related consideration, for far smaller scale maps of the



The maps of the Town of Milo which came from the Surveyor General is so erroneous that I found it necessary to make a new one, which has accordingly been done on the same scale of the other. All the principal roads are marked by dotted lines – The Village of Penn yan is also represented by two dotted lines on Lot No. 37. The black marks along the Outlet of the Crooked Lake represent mills. If the main street of the village should be laid down on the map, it should be placed farther west, so that the east side would be where the west side now is, which would place the mill on the south side of the stream on the east line of 37 and the other on the west side of it.

The above map was made at the request of George Youngs Esq.r Supervisor of the Town of Milo – – by

Penn yan 1.st mo. 16. 1829. Joseph Jones

P.S. The old preemption line is crooked on the map sent here, but it is straight through this town – I believe however there is a crook or offset in that part which runs through Benton, not far from the middle of the town.

J. Jones

Figure 2. Burr's Atlas: Corrected Map of Milo.

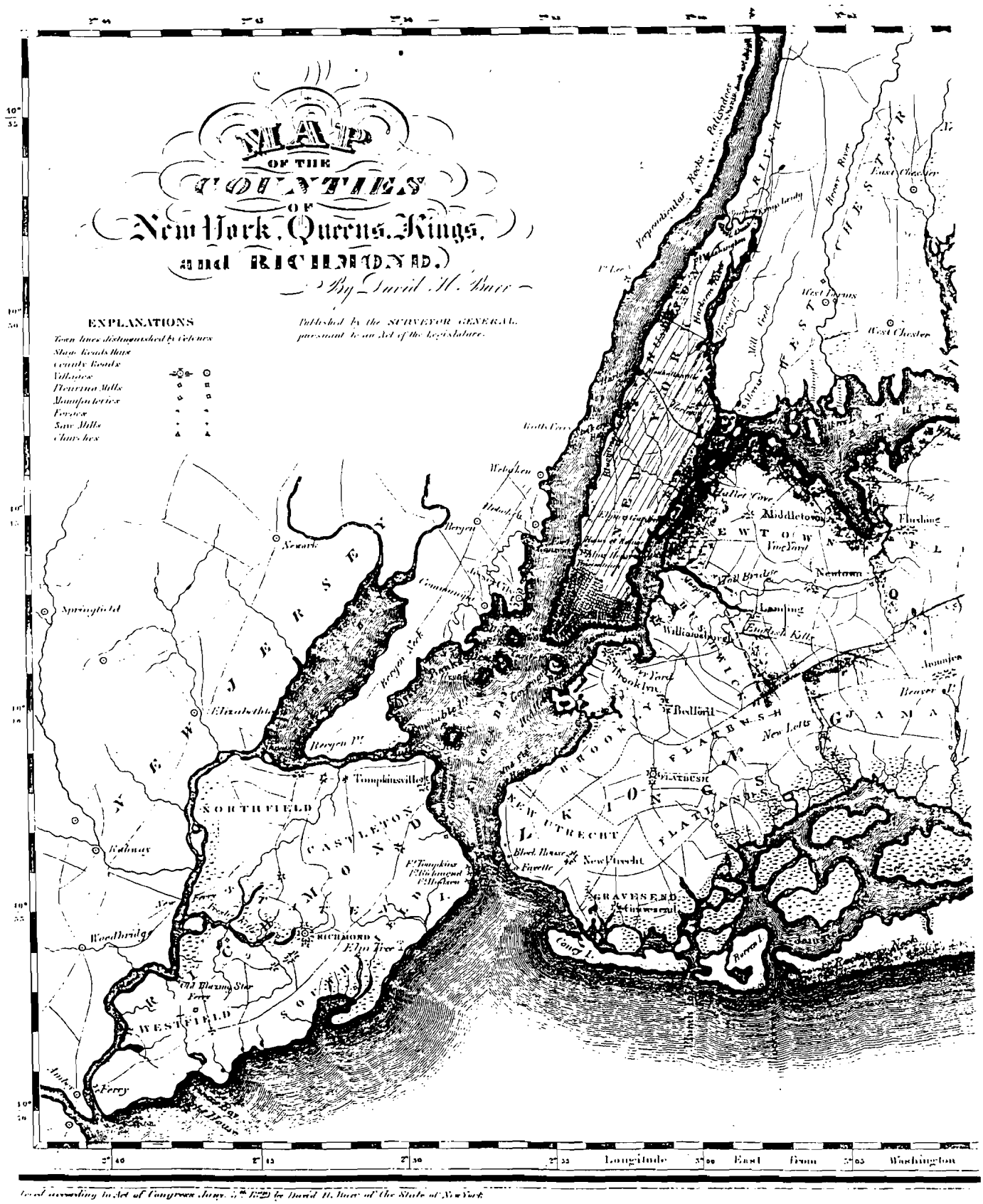


Figure 3. Burr's Atlas: Part of a County Map.

period included in gazetteers and state atlases included at least some of the Indian reservations. Instead, it can be interpreted as a part of state policy to eliminate the Indian presence in the mapped landscape, following the precedent set by De Witt's 1804 contraction of the state which indicated reservations only with a discrete 'R' rather than the named reservations included in his 1802 map (Mano, 1994).

The minimal mapping of features in the Atlas reflected two realities, the need for swift compilation of available material and the lack of detailed information about the landscape. The spare depiction is in marked contrast to the current European style of cartography which included a rich diversity of symbolic representations. The European landscape was, of course, more deeply comprehended and mapped more extensively than that of the United States. The maps of De Witt and Burr, which were distributed to the governors of the other states, became the standards of what has been termed the American style of cartography (Ristow, 1985b). The stripped down version of features included in nineteenth century American mapping reflected the influence of data scarcity on these early mapmakers.

ATLAS REPUBLICATION

Burr's Atlas was republished in 1839 (but with a republication date of 1840) by Stone and Clark of Ithaca, New York. The changes between additions are noted in a "Supplementary Introduction" (Stone and Clark, 1840). The need for an update was brought about by the development of new cities and villages, canals and railroads and other public works, and a new state census in 1835. For this edition, the publishers sent "competent individual[s] into each county (with a map of the same in his hand) with instructions to visit each town thereof, and to ascertain from citizens of thesame, everything of general interest". This change in procedure alleviated the problems encountered in the earlier edition, when adjustments were left to individual town supervisors, and the atlas corrections were inconsistent across the state.

The most obvious change between the two editions is the addition of all the post offices in the State in the republication. David Burr was appointed topographer to the US. Post Office Department in 1832 and it is reasonable to believe he may have supplied some of this information. The 1839/1840 Atlas also added to the introductory written material by including descriptions and statistics on the canals and railroads of the State, as well as sections on the topography and geology. The maps themselves were updated to include new "public improvements, institutions of learning, canals, railroads, turnpikes, harbors, lighthouses, etc."

An interesting 1840 addition in a few counties was the insertion of notes on points of historical interest; for example, details of the 1814 naval battle at Plattsburgh in Clinton County and the highlights of locations in Revolutionary War spy Major Andre's capture in 1780 on the map of Orange and Rockland Counties. The added "explanations" here include Washington's headquarters, the place where Andre boarded the Vulture (which is also depicted in a minute sketch), the house where Andre was held prisoner and the hill on which he was executed. By 1840, the tourist trade in New York state had begun to grow, canals and river transportation bringing an increasing number of visitors to view aesthetic or historically significant places as part of an exploration of a vision of cultural landscape. This trend intensified by the middle of the nineteenth century and spurred the publication of numerous travelers' guides for the Hudson River and the whole of New York state. Packaged in convenient pocket folders, these guides, which included a variety of transportation timetables, were published and reissued for many years by William B. Williams (1827-1845), Augustus Mitchell (1832-1846), J. Calvin Smith (1841-1858) and George W. Colton (1852-1871). All of these publishers used Burr's New York State map from the Atlas as a base.

David Burr followed up his Atlas in 1832 with revised editions of his New York State maps, published by Rawdon and Clark. J.H. Colton acquired the copyright for the map in 1833 and published revised editions for the next fifteen years. These maps were engraved by S. Stiles and Company and appeared in various formats, including the travelers' guides of the State and the Hudson valley noted above. Burr's New York map and Atlas had a profound effect on the map making of other States, particularly because of its wide distribution.

Burr's county maps provided the base information for the large wall maps of New York counties that began to appear in the mid 1850s. These

often included vignettes of notable buildings, and inserts of towns and villages, sometimes with lists of local tradesmen. These maps were published mostly in Philadelphia by Robert Pearsall Smith and his associates, using information from local county surveyors. Smith supplied the surveyors with lithographic reproduction materials and supervised the map publication. He worked extensively with J. H. French to obtain New York state funding to publish a map and gazetteer of New York state from these sources, but the legislature could not be convinced of the need to supply schools with accurate state maps, presumably because of the expense. Burr's Atlas information also provided basic data for the series of Beers atlases in the 1860s and 1870s. The Beers family produced a series of atlases of towns within various counties of Middle Atlantic states. The map publishing firm was founded by Daniel Beers, and later included Silas and Frederick Beers. These town maps provided information on land and building ownership and are invaluable as an historical cultural landscape resource.

CONCLUSION

Burr's New York State Atlas had considerable impact in shaping a new American cartographic style, particularly as it was distributed to the governors of the other states. The Atlas helped to create a visual concept of New York's counties as geographic units. The draft revisions of the Atlas maps, and accompaning letters sent to the Surveyor General's office, preserved in the New York State Archives, present a unique insight into the contemporary problems of mapping, and a valuable view of the New York landscape in the early nineteenth century. The items that are included or excluded from these county maps provide a perspective on the relative significance of certain landscape features, historical events and economic activities of this period in New York State. The influence of Burr's New York state map, included in the Atlas, was substantial in New York's cartographic history. Not only was it republished later in a variety of formats and scales, but it also provided the base for county and town maps from the 1850s to the 1870s which continue to serve as unique documents for researching historic data.

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