

# INTRODUCTION

*Entirely Unafraid* & *Stephen Osborne*

It's not easy to imagine a world without maps. Indeed, a world without maps would barely be a world at all—when we hear someone say “there's Canada,” we know that they are pointing not out the window but at a piece of paper. We consult maps every day. We stand on subway trains hypnotized by the schematics posted above the door; we search desperately through shopping malls for the map to lead us out; we consult “mind maps” when at a loss for ideas.

To get somewhere you haven't been before, you consult a map—to find the opera house in Moncton, for example, or the nearest liquor store in Swift Current; perhaps a passing citizen will draw a map for you on the back of that envelope you've been carrying around in your hip pocket. If you want to get from Lac Salami in Quebec to, say, Veal Lake in Manitoba, you consult a map before you set foot out the door, and when the fishing at Veal Lake turns out to be not so good, you might carry on overland to Eatlots Lake, for the pickerel. Or if you want to go from Brimstone to Black Hole to Yum Yum Point, or even from Coffee Rocks to Breakfast Cove (a short hop, but a tricky passage), you need to find the right map for the job.

One of the earliest uses of maps in modern Canada was to show European farmers how pleasant it would be to get out

to and travel around in the vast, possibly endless western plains. The Canadian Pacific Railway and the federal government, often mistaken for each other in that epoch, sent out hundreds of thousands of colourful maps inset with bucolic scenes and dotted with the names of cities linked by a dense network of railway lines; many thousands of immigrants poured into Canada and across the treeless plain, where they learned that the cities on the maps were tent cities and the railways purely hallucinatory. Even the average mean temperatures printed in the margins were hypothetical—today these maps are classified as early science fiction.

Maps conceal as much as they seem to reveal. The map that John Cabot took with him when he sailed for China contained no trace of Newfoundland; by the time Captain Cook got to the mouth of the Northwest Passage, as delineated in Maldonado's famous map of 1588, the Northwest Passage had disappeared from the face of the earth. Maps can be paradoxical in these and other ways, and one can be led to a suspicion of maps in general. Hence the well-known wariness of Canadians setting out for Treasure Island, say, or Giant's Castle: they remain skeptical until they see the place with their own eyes. This native skepticism is what led the *Geist* mapping team, whose motto from the beginning has been

“Entirely Unafraid of Canadian Place Names,” to engage in such close scrutiny of the Canadian cartographic record. We were convinced that something more than meets the eye was there to be found, and this volume is the result.

The maps collected here offer glimpses of imaginary nations that call themselves Canada—like parallel universes, they oscillate in and out of consciousness. Names lose their meanings quickly when repeated again and again, so that putting a name on a map is a way of memorializing and at the same time obliterating it. Who, for instance, when thinking of British Columbia, thinks of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea, or while pondering the scenic aspects of Lake Louise is put in mind of Queen Victoria’s offspring? The *Geist Atlas of Canada* demonstrates how promiscuously new meaning attaches to old names. The Old Testament roots of Jericho Beach, for example, go back no further than to a nineteenth-century logger named Jerry who floated his logs in a cove named for him by friends or possibly by himself; the village of Ganges has no connection with the holy river of India—it was named for a British ship of the line authorized to frighten Americans during the (now forgotten) War of Griffin’s Pig. Chesterfield Inlet, associated in the popular mind with images of sofas abandoned on icebergs, was named for an English

lord denigrated in 1755 by Samuel Johnson. And throughout the landscapes of the nation, echoes of autobiography reverberate through the ages. Desolation Sound, Fear Lake, Drunken Dick, Pain Court, Anger Island, Sigh Lake—such are the anguished traces of those who have gone before, many of them drawn to this country by the early maps produced by the CPR and the government. Immigrants always bring new mappings to new terrain, and as new mappings are laid down, older mappings created by those who were already here are erased, hence the work of First Nations to reclaim the memory and the fact of traditional territories.

Implicit in the concept of the *Geist Atlas* are the itineraries proposed in its pages. As the world’s destination points lose their lustre, as the catchphrase “world class” loses its magic, whole expeditions into new worlds begin to emerge from the maps in this collection. Soon we will be booking reservations for Erotic Tours of a Nation, Kitchen Implement Pilgrimages, National Beer Crawls, Journeys to Places That Sound Impolite, and for Sojourns along Philosopher’s Walk or Junkets into Angst. These are a few of the adventure tours of the future that promise to draw the whole world once again to our doorstep.