

**CLAIRE CARBONEZ-DEJAEGER
EMBASSY OF BELGIUM, OTTAWA**

**The Belgian Connection: Maps, atlases and engravings from Belgium in the
National Library of Canada and the National Archives of Canada**

In 2001, thanks to various contacts with curators at the National Library of Canada and archivists at the National Archives of Canada, I realized that these institutions have collected a number of very valuable and interesting documents from "Belgium" from the 16th and 17th centuries. The name is an anachronism, of course. Historically, we should say that the items originate from the Southern Low Countries, the Southern Netherlandic Provinces, as present-day Belgium came into existence only in 1830.

My research resulted in an exhibition which was held at the National Library in Ottawa in May and June 2002. The exhibition, opened on May 1 in the presence of Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage, was sponsored by the Embassy of Belgium and the National Library. In making my selection of documents for the exhibit I chose those documents that had a relation to Canada and North America. In total I retrieved 16 items from the National Archives and 24 items from the National Library's Rare Books Collection, mostly engravings, maps, atlases and travel accounts of 16th century explorers. The works of Johannes Ruysch, Gerard Mercator, Jodocus Hondius, Abraham

Ortelius, Cornelius de Jode, Gemma Frisius, Cornelius Wijnthout, Théodore de Bry and Johannes de Laet, on display in the exhibit, are among the oldest authentic documents in the holdings of the two institutions. The National Library's Rare Book Collection has also acquired works of Catholic missionaries, Jesuits and Récollets from the province of Hainaut, who came to New France at the end of the 17th century. Louis Hennepin, the most famous, is remembered with a plaque at Niagara Falls, as he published the first picture of the Falls in his book *Découverte de la Louisiane* in 1683.

The captions to the items on display stress their importance for the early history of Canada, for these items are as much part of the Canadian heritage as of the Belgian. Each of them tells the story of the discovery and exploration by Europeans of the new American lands, and the role which scholars from the Southern Low Countries played in disseminating information about the New World.

There were many maps and atlases on display, fine examples of the work of the Flemish school of cartography. Let us look at

the historical context of this school. In the 16th century the Belgian regions belonged to a political entity called the Netherlandic Provinces or the Seventeen Provinces. It had been formed by the expansion and unification policy of the Dukes of Burgundy, who had come into possession of the County of Flanders in 1384 when Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy and brother of the King of France, married Margaretha Van Maele, only child of the Count of Flanders. Successive Dukes strove to create a buffer state between France and the Holy Roman Empire through a skilful web of dynastic alliances. Finally one of them, Charles V, who was born in 1500 in Ghent, became not only Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders, Hainaut and Holland, but also King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor. When he succeeded to the throne, the Netherlands became the centre of an empire on which the sun never set. The Belgian regions were among the richest areas in Europe.

But then they had been at the centre of western civilization since the Middle Ages. Traditions of tolerance and humanism had slowly taken root there. Towns like Bruges, Ghent, Ypres, Liège, Tournai, Brussels, Antwerp and Mechelen had become centres of industry and trade, learning and culture. When Charles V abdicated in 1555, his son Philip II of Spain took over and ruled the Netherlands from Spain. The Seventeen Provinces, instead of being at the centre, found themselves suddenly at the edge, far away from Spain. Philip II didn't understand the Netherlandic provinces, whose leaders resented his autocratic and punitive rule and his intolerance in matters of religion. To eradicate all opposition and protestantism he established a reign of terror, persecution and bloody repression. Some 100 000 burghers,

Catholics and Protestants, fled the southern provinces and settled in Holland and the other northern provinces, which had won independence, and where they could breathe freely and profess their religion. Such was the case with the Flemish cartographers and authors whose work is on display in this exhibition: most of them fled the oppressive regime and settled in the northern provinces, where they helped launch the Golden Age of Dutch cartography.

Let us recall how the Flemish school of cartography emerged as the centre of geographical study and map publishing of the day. The Italian map-making centres in Rome and Venice lost importance with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, which cut off the overland trade route to the Orient, and with the discovery of the New World. The hub of world trade gradually shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. In the course of the 16th century the Flemish school of cartography became the centre of geographical study and map publishing, partly because the Southern Low Countries occupied a dominant position in world trade, partly also because the craft of printing and engraving had reached a high level of development there. They had to overcome Spanish secretiveness, for to keep competition at bay the Spanish Court kept its information on the New World to itself, and Iberian maps therefore circulated mostly in manuscript format. At the University of Louvain, Gemma Frisius (1505-1555) started a centre of cartography, at which Gerard Mercator was a student.

By 1540-50 Antwerp had emerged as the most important Western European commercial port and the greatest centre of world trade. The city was a meeting point for Eng-

lish, Hanseatic, Spanish and Italian traders and a distribution centre for oriental products brought to Europe by the Portuguese. With its 90 000 inhabitants, the city nurtured botanists and cartographers as well as artists, metal workers, printers and engravers. The latter had shifted from woodcut illustration to copperplate engraving, since the same copperplate could be revised and reused to produce many editions of the same map or print, thus reducing the cost of materials and labour.

As the new discoveries and explorations increased the demand for updated geographical material, engravers tried their hand at map-making. With the regular presence of Iberian and other navigators in Low Country ports, they had direct access to current geographic information from around the globe and soon began to publish the world's most accurate and popular maps. Cartographers and chroniclers like Ortelius, Mercator, De Bry and de Jode, all of whom were represented in the Ottawa exhibition, had all started lucrative businesses as goldsmiths, printmakers and antique sellers before turning to cartography.

Antwerp also boasted numerous printing-houses and bookshops, the greatest of them being the house of Christophe Plantin (1520-1589). His house became world famous and an important distribution point for the works, atlases and travel accounts of the New World, thus consolidating Antwerp's position as a centre of culture and knowledge. In 2001 the archives of the Officina Plantiniana in Antwerp were added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

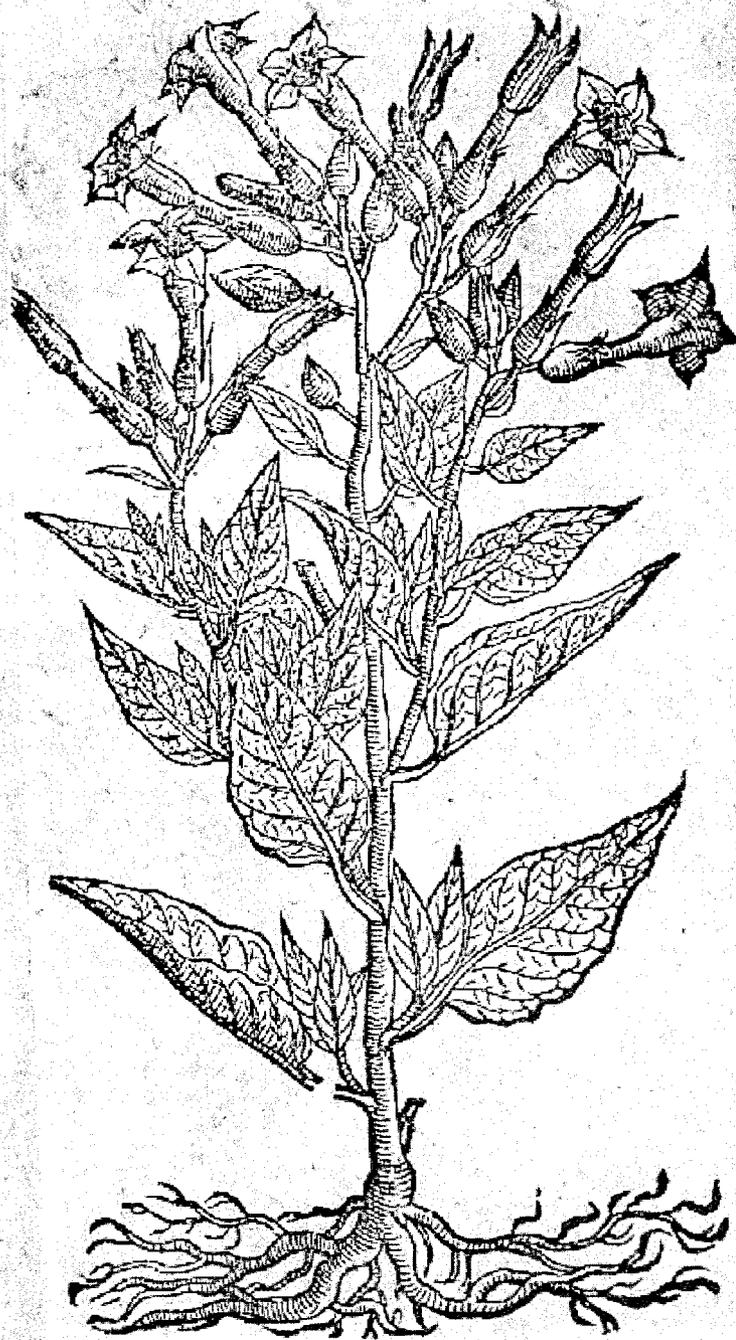
The title of the Ottawa exhibition refers to

the early 16th and 17th century contacts of the Southern Netherlands with Canada and the Americas. Indeed, Flemish cartographers and chroniclers from the 16th century played a crucial role in disseminating information about the New World, which Europeans began to explore only at the end of the 15th century. Although most cartographers and chroniclers of the New World had not actually been there (unlike the early missionaries), they provided in their maps, atlases and travel books the paths on which subsequent adventurers and seafarers would set forth for the New World. Flemish scholars published the travel accounts of the explorers, and their writings were translated from Latin into English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish and Italian. Through the many editions of their works and the many translations, they made the newly acquired knowledge available to the growing number of interested readers in Europe. These scholars informed the European public about the newly explored peoples, their cultures, the flora and fauna, the new world's medicinal plants and other riches. They aroused the curiosity and stirred the imagination of the European public, and depicted the New World as a place where colonists would want to make a new and fruitful beginning.

I believe the cooperation between the Embassy of Belgium and the National Library and National Archives of Canada was beneficial for both sides. Our Embassy was able to show a few aspects of our rich past, and the Canadian institutions took pride in showing some of their most important, oldest and most esthetically appealing documents originating from Belgium, revealing early connections between that country and Canada and North America.

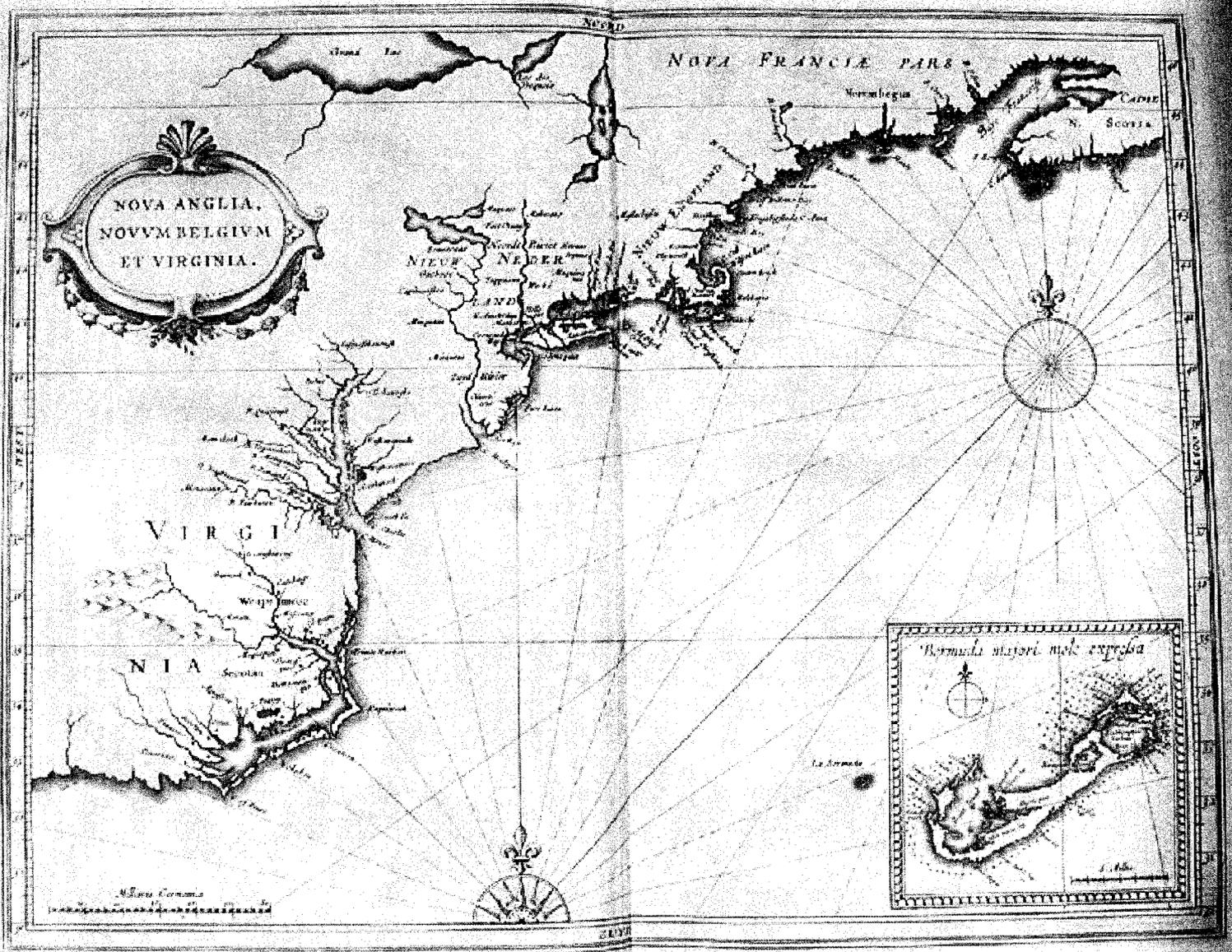
[Opposite: A tobacco plant, drawn by the Antwerp botanist Carolus Clusius, for the Latin translation of the Spanish doctor Nicolas Monardes' *Simplicium medicamentorum ex Novo orbe delatorum, quorum in medicina usus est, historia*, published in 1593 by the famous Antwerp printing house of Plantin. Tobacco leaves were considered a preventive and therapeutic medicine for scores of ailments.]

338 PETVM ANGVSTIFOLIVM.



Johannes de Laet's *Novus orbis* is a translation into Latin of *Nieuwe wereldt oft beschryvinghe van west-indien*, which was first published in Leyden in 1625, translated into Latin in 1633 and into French in 1640. Originally from Antwerp, de Laet (1582-1649) became a director of the Dutch West India Company, a company set up to promote trade with the New World. As such he wrote this book to promote New World commerce. It is not an original work, but an erudite compilation of the best existing treatises in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian and Dutch on the Americas with appended notes on navigators.

In 1624 the Dutch West India Company sent over some thirty Walloon Protestant families, who had fled to Leyden because of religious persecution, to colonize New Netherlands. The following year, a new contingent of colonists, also Walloons, arrived with large shipments of livestock, seeds and tools. Pierre Minuit, the first pastor of the Huguenot church and one of the directors of the small colony, purchased the Island of Manhattan from the First Nations. Under Peter Stuyvesant the colony was granted the rights and privileges of a municipality. In 1664 the English captured the colony of New Netherlands and New Amsterdam was renamed New York.



Wytfliet, Cornelius (d. 1597)

Estotilandia et labouratoris terra / by Corneille Wytfliet. Scale [ca. 1:14 000 000]. [Louvain : Tijpis Geradi Riuiji, 1597]. 1 map ; 23 x 29 cm, on sheet 31 x 35 cm. from: *Descriptionis ptolemaicae augmentum...* Louvain, 1597.

Ref. No.: NMC 006169

The mysterious "Estotiland" and the imaginary "Frislant", along with regions explored by Frobisher and Davis, accompany a Greenland sometimes mistakenly identified as Labrador. Wytfliet affirmed that in 1476 Johannes Scolvus Polonus (Jan Skolp) in the service of Denmark had penetrated the Northern Strait under the Arctic Circle, and arrived at the country of Labrador and Estotiland.

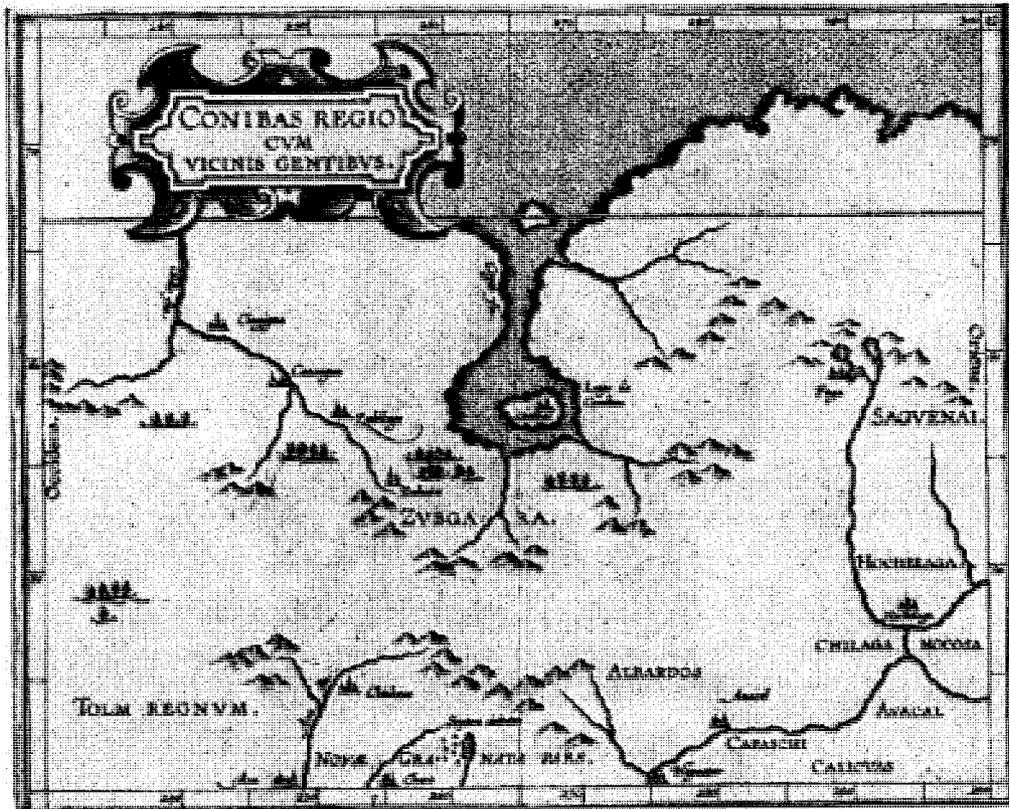


Wytfliet, Cornelius (d. 1597)

Conibas regio cum vicinis gentibus / by Corneille Wytfliet. Scale [ca. 1:40 000 000]. [Louvain : Tijpiss Geradi Riuiji, 1597]. 1 map ; 22 x 27 cm, on sheet 30 x 39 cm. from: *Descriptionis ptolemaicae augmentum...* Louvain, 1597.

Ref. No.: NMC 006403

This map is the first of the “upper country” of Canada, the region west of Hochelaga (Montreal). The St. Lawrence River was originally called the “Grande Rivière de Hochelaga”. Wytfliet shows a Lago de Conibas, a sweet watermass, flowing northwest into a bay of the Arctic Sea. The bay is an early representation of Hudson Bay, many years before it was actually discovered by Henry Hudson. The Lago de Conibas is an attempt at representing the Great Lakes, based on native accounts of the existence of huge watermasses farther in the west.



De Jode, Cornelius, 1568?-1600

Americae pars borealis, Florida, Baccalaos, Canada, Corterealis / by Cornelius de Jode. Scale [ca. 1:40 000 000]. [Antwerp] : D.D.A., 1593. 1 map : col.; 37 x 50 cm, on sheet 44 x 56 cm. from: *Speculum orbis terrae* ... [Antwerp], 1593.

Ref. No.: NMC 006579

In anticipation of finding the much sought after route to the Orient, Cornelius de Jode's 1593 map shows an unobstructed waterway and some notions of a bay (Hudson Bay) to the north of the American continent. The St. Lawrence River is based on Jacques Cartier's explorations. The Great Lakes were not mapped until the early 1600s. However, the Lago de Conibas may indicate an early awareness of those watermasses, converting the verbal account of the Indians into geographical reality. Some of de Bry's natives are featured in the cartouche.

One caption reads: "*Those who live between Florida and the land of Baccalaos are all called by the one name Canadians; but they comprise various races of people... and are all well intentioned and kindly toward others*".

