

Cartes Très Curieuses: French Mapmakers and the New World

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Early French maps held by The Historic New Orleans Collection will be shown and related to European efforts to explore and colonize parts of North America and the Caribbean. The business and technology of mapmaking in Europe will also be considered, with emphasis on the careers and influence of French cartographers Guillaume De L'Isle, Nicholas de Fer, Jacques Nicolas Bellin, Jean Baptiste d'Anville, Henri Chatelaine, and others. These men faced enormous practical difficulties in obtaining reliable geographical information about the Americas in an age in which information moved slowly. Many of the maps they created incorporated images of native tribes and flora and fauna that highlighted the exotic differences between the New World and Europe, even if they perpetuated dubious ethnographic and scientific notions about the Americas. Nevertheless, French cartographers contributed much to the complex and evolving geographical conception of North America, in the process creating beautiful documents with lasting value to collectors and cartophiles.