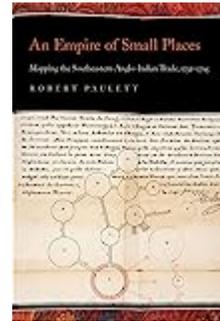




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## From Linked Spaces to Bounded Neighborhoods: The Human Geography of the Southeastern Anglo-Indian Deerskin Trade

The Anglo-Indian deerskin trade of the colonial Southeast has attracted ample scholarly attention over the past twenty years; therefore much is known about the scope and conduct of the trade, the prominent persons who engaged in it, as well as the means by which the trade transformed Native conceptions of property and power. In *An Empire of Small Places: Mapping the Southeastern Anglo-Indian Trade, 1732-1795*, Robert Paulett adds a new twist by examining the ways in which trade influenced the region's human geography. By exploring how Natives and Europeans utilized and conceived of space, Paulett argues that together both peoples created an improvised system of linked places, a network of paths, rivers, and nodes of exchange that served as the conduit of trade for roughly half a century (p. 2). Not until achieving independence from Britain did Georgians seek to impose a new spatial order in which land would be mapped and occupied by whites. Once fluid and permeable, the colonial human geography gave way to a bounded system of neighborhoods defined by their

perceived geographic isolation and by the absence of Indians. That the old ways died hard, however, is testament to the enduring impact of deerskin trade upon the region's human geography.

To lay the groundwork for his analysis, Paulett begins with the cartographic conflict of the early eighteenth century, in which European and Native conceptions of space jostled for supremacy. On one level this contest pitted European empires that had territorial claims to the region against one another, and often reflected the wishful thinking of imperial designers. To take but one example, Guillaume Delisle's 1718 Map of Louisiana and the Course of the Mississippi illustrates the bold assertion of French claims on the Southeast (p. 15). As Paulett points out, Delisle's map not only claimed for France all of the territory west of the Appalachian mountains south of Virginia, but also the Carolinas, which fell under the French orbit by virtue of discoveries made during the reign of Charles IX. Not to be outdone, early British cartographers countered by making aggressive

territorial claims of their own, as exemplified by the work of Herman Moll. Working from Delisle's map and at least two other privately circulated manuscript maps produced by South Carolinians, Moll's "New Map of the North Parts of North America claimed by France" (1720) projected English expansion by delineating the boundaries of "Azilia," a stillborn colonial project that lay within the boundaries of modern Georgia. Successive British cartographers would follow suit, by depicting rivers and trading paths as linear conduits feeding deep into the interior and, as John Mitchell did in 1755, by extending British colonial borders across the entire continent.

Native peoples of the Southeast held altogether different conceptions of space, as can be seen in the 1737 Chickasaw map produced by Mingo Ouma and Alexandre de Batz. Paulett provides a deft reading of this frequently referenced map, noting how Indians conceived of political units as circles, and how paths between them signified trade and friendship, whereas broken paths indicated the enmities that existed between polities. Devoid of directional or distance indicators, as well as land features, Native mapping was primarily about relationships between human communities connected by paths, which had practical as well as symbolic significance.

The dynamic interaction between these distinct mapping traditions led to the creation of a "pidgin sort of cartography" that relied heavily upon the input of Indians and traders involved in the deerskin trade (p. 23). What they shared in common was the idea of the Southeast as a series of linked places. Paulett identifies this form of mapping, derived from letters, reports, and sketch maps made by traders and their Indian informants, as "narrative." What typified narrative mapping was its complexity and ambiguity. Trading paths often served as the centerpieces of maps, such as those derived from Indian agent Thomas Nairne's original 1708 sketch map. Indian villages dotted the landscape, and rivers and trading paths figured prominently in them as well, for the practical reason that these fell within the purview of traders who knew the landscape. Paulett likewise observes that cartography did not become systematized—characterized by the use of chain and transept and straight lines of demarcation—until the French and Indian War, as indicated by the maps produced by imperial agents Wilhelm De Brahm and David Taitt. Although these later cartographers tried to impose a new sense of order upon the ambiguous Southeast, the deerskin trade nevertheless followed its own course and "created a series of unique places, each requiring its own set of rules and behavior"

(p. 48).

Paulett devotes the remainder of his book to providing an in-depth look at these unique places. The Savannah River is the focus of chapter 2, in which he depicts the river as having a "fragmented" identity, because it was difficult to control and its diverse users invested it with different meanings (p. 51). For Native peoples, village life centered on rivers and consequently flowing bodies of water figured prominently in Indian cosmography as portals to the Under World, an inverse universe associated with longevity, monsters, chaos, and death. Over the years, the Savannah River attracted a number of Native migrants, including Shawnees, Yuchis, and eastern Chickasaws who settled in the region to trade. Indians conceived of the river as both a boundary—in 1717 the Creeks and South Carolinians ratified a treaty prohibiting each other from crossing it—and as a connector between themselves and English colonies. The English who used the river saw it primarily as an artery for commerce that also served as a means for projecting their culture throughout the region. Even so, disputes over the river's jurisdictional rights between South Carolina and Georgia made it a contested space. In addition to addressing these conceptual issues, Paulett zeroes in on the ordinary, such as watercraft and the persons who used them. Importantly, many of the boatmen were enslaved persons, and Paulett identifies the "Africanization" of the river as one of its key features. The Savannah River, he surmises, constituted one link in a transatlantic black world, a communication network that, for some, served as a conduit for freedom.

Paulett observes how riverine traffic associated with the deerskin trade shaped the town of Augusta, Georgia, the subject of chapter 3. Although initially envisioned as an orderly British town set upon a grid, Augusta evolved a "straggling" settlement pattern whereby town residents established homes in scattershot fashion along the main trading path leading into the Creek nation. Unable to control its development, Georgia officials came to view Augusta as a degenerate and disorderly place, where the colony's prohibitions of rum and slavery were evaded with ease, and where a motley crew of Britons, Indians, and Africans blended with regularity. Augusta's residents did, however, provide a service to the colony by wresting the deerskin trade from established South Carolina traders. Several prominent trading partnerships, such as Rae, Brown and Co, dominated the trade and came to define the town. Paulett explains that life at Augusta was centered on a series of large, fortified trading compounds, whose proprietors became *de facto*

town magistrates due to the absence of duly constituted civil authority. Storekeepers monopolized business and dominated cultural life. A picture emerges of an Augusta hostile to outsiders, who, conversely, were suspicious of the monopolizing tendencies of the great trading companies. Only later in the century, when the Augusta traders faced new competition from those who conducted business within colonial settlements or in the woods, did Augusta begin to lose its place as the epicenter of the deer-skin trade.

As any student of the region's history is aware, the Southeast's colonial landscape featured a system of pathways—the subject of chapter 4—that connected European settlements to Native communities, and Native polities to each other. Consistent with works by scholars such as Joshua Piker and Angel P. Hudson, Paulett finds that the path held both practical and figurative meaning for those who traveled upon it. Paulett distinguishes his work from those by his predecessors, however, by offering further reflections upon the manner by which Indians and English people adjusted to using trading paths in a colonial context. For one thing, power was decentralized, so English notions of property and status tended not to apply, and therefore one had to adjust to the perils of traveling in contested spaces. Seemingly no detail escapes the notice of Paulett, who recounts the manner by which Europeans learned where to go, and how to endure the rigors of outdoor living associated with travel. Importantly, English travelers often were targeted by Indians, who were known to appropriate the personal property of interlopers and sometimes commit bodily harm. Experienced English travelers thus learned to cope by donning the appropriate frontier costume and arming themselves. The pace of travel, naturally, depended upon the health and temperament of one's horses, which Paulett observes held the real authority on the paths (p. 128). The inability of the English to impose their will upon the paths thus had a certain leveling effect which benefited enslaved Africans, most notably David George, whose maneuverings between Virginia and Creek country enabled him repeatedly to change owners before fleeing slavery for good at the onset of the American Revolution.

Inevitably, paths fed into Native villages, where much of the actual trading for deerskins took place. In his fifth and final chapter, Paulett ponders the significance of the homes of traders who resided in Indian towns, observing that these edifices were the most scrutinized and contested spaces relevant to trade—by Indians, traders, and imperial officials alike. For Britons, homes symbolized the male-dominated symmetry of patriarchal

eighteenth-century culture (p. 143). Homes signified an individual's mastery of property, authority over the dependent persons who lived there, and in general one's social status in the Southeast. Britons also imagined that traders' houses should play a civilizing role in introducing European notions of property, industry, and patriarchal authority among Indians. In addition to being loci of trade, traders' homes were also recognized by British officials as important sites where firsthand information about Indian affairs could be obtained, and where policies could be implemented. Consequently, officials such as James Glen and Edmund Atkin strategized ways to allow imperial officials a measure of control over resident traders.

However, Paulett recognizes that English people who resided in Indian country (and imperial officials who purported to regulate their behavior) were never truly independent of local Native communities. Erecting a house in the first place required that traders obtain permission from local leaders, who often granted occupancy rights as part of a ritualized friendship in which traders were subjected to local rules of kinship. Also, due to the fact that Indian men constructed the traders' edifices, their designs conformed to the local vernacular architecture rather than British styles. Most importantly, Natives and Englishmen held fundamentally opposed ideas about the definition of a house. By virtue of the matrilineal clan system of the Creek Indians, household property was vested in women, who exercised much of the day-to-day authority within it. As symbols of an intrusive system of property and exchange, traders' houses made easy targets for Indians. Contests over the function and meaning of houses took several forms. Indians engaged in house breaking as a way of protesting against traders who violated local notions of fair prices. Stealing from traders therefore was a means of negotiating fairer prices, and breaking into or destroying houses reminded the traders that they were the Indians' guests. The fact that traders had to lock their doors further symbolized their fundamentally different conceptions of property.

Paulett situates his story in a relatively stable period of the eighteenth century, and perhaps because of this his topical chapters have a tendency to emphasize continuity and patterns of interaction over temporal change. That being said, Paulett is sensitive to the changes wrought first by Georgia's wresting of the trade from the South Carolina, and later by those which followed in the wake of the Seven Years War and the American Revolution. For example, during the Seven Years War British imperial officials extended their reach by establishing a South-

ern Department of Indian Affairs, an agency charged with enforcing the new ground rules for trade implemented after the Peace of Paris in 1763. Paulett recounts how Britain's ill-conceived plan to open up the trade to anyone who could pay for a license had deleterious consequences, namely the influx of new traders who flooded the Indian nations with more goods than were needed to meet demand, including larger quantities of rum. Concurrently, the growth of the colonial population increased the demand for western land. This not only led to conflicts between Indians and British settlers, but also between Indians, as exemplified by the 1773 "New Purchase" in which an indebted Cherokee nation ceded land also claimed by the Creeks as a means for paying their creditors. Eventually, the British imperial crisis that led to the American Revolution intruded into Indian country, as the war all but extinguished the trade emanating from Augusta, which was then rerouted southward through Pensacola, Florida.

Keeping in mind these and other temporal changes, Paulett concludes not simply by recapitulating his main points, but by looking ahead to the reconfiguration of Southeastern geography after the Revolution. An anecdote about Augusta resident and trader Andrew McLean's fence represents in microcosm what happened after the Revolution. As Paulett reveals, during the Revolution most of the old Augusta traders fled and moved their operations to West Florida. Unlike most of his loyalist fellow traders, McLean returned to Augusta after the revolution to reclaim his property. The Georgia legislature, meanwhile, had decided to refurbish the decaying town by tearing down old buildings, conducting surveys, and re-establishing Augusta on an orderly grid pattern. As it happened, one of the newly designed roads cut through a fence on McLean's property and was targeted for destruction. McLean protested, but in vain. Surveying of the new Augusta began in 1783, and McLean's fence came down.

McLean's fence thus signifies the demise of old Augusta and of the linked spaces of the deerskin trade. After the Revolution, Georgians saw themselves not as part of an integrated imperial whole, but rather as members of bounded communities that were distinct from those of Indians. Trading, when it occurred, took place almost exclusively within Indian communities and outside of the purview of most Georgians. As a means of articulating this new way of conceptualizing space, Paulett turns to contemporary newspapers, which indicated the ways in which Euro-Americans re-imagined their world as a series of discrete spaces. For example, newspapers

recounted grotesque stories of Indian violence, which taught readers an ongoing lesson in the history of borders (p. 182). Paulett surmises that accounts of Indian violence enabled white Georgian readers to draw contrasts between peaceful homes and the violence taking place on distant frontiers. What Paulett notices in particular is the emergence of a new trope, that of "neighborhood," which revealed a changing set of beliefs about relationships in the Southeast (p. 184). It seems that Georgians felt that no real connection existed between their communities and those of Indians; rather Georgians conceived of their relationship with Indians as that between semi-sovereign groups of people who simply happened to live near one another. Indians therefore came to be viewed as dangerous outsiders, due in part to the connections some tribes had to Spanish Florida. By the 1790s, Georgians had forged an identity based upon "local circumstances" which foreshadowed the state's later conflicts with the national government, including those which prompted secession and civil war (p. 189). Paulett observes that the language of neighborhoods and boundaries persisted for decades, and that Georgians reverted to employing the language of connectedness (featuring stories about roads, turnpikes, and canals) after Indians had been removed from state borders. By that time, the only vestige of the old geography of the deerskin trade could be found on the Savannah River, where enslaved boatmen continued to ply their trade, often outside of the purview of suspicious whites, who found common cause in circumscribing their activities.

On the whole, Paulett's analysis is consistent with pre-existing works on the Southeast, and therefore his argument that a fluid system of human geography gave way to rigid one is hardly surprising. What Paulett offers is not a new thesis per se, but a new, intimate perspective on human interactions within different spatial contexts. His approach is somewhat reminiscent of David Preston's *The Texture of Contact* (2009), which offers "on the ground" perspectives on human interaction in Greater Iroquoia. Like Preston's work, Paulett's book is brimming with subtle details; of how a packhorseman once bit the ear of his horse to bend it to his will; of how Oakesuskee assassins killed merchant William Rae but spared his body of ritual mutilation as a sign of the respect they formerly had for him; of South Carolina Indian agent Thomas Nairne's delightful reaction to being fed buffalo tongue for the first time; and of how lost newcomer William Mylne startled his horse by rustling a paper map, causing the horse to gallop madly through the woods, which required Milne to spend one hour retrieving the

possessions that the horse had scattered.

*An Empire of Small Places* is a thoroughly researched and well-written book that should appeal to Southeastern specialists and those with an interest more broadly in colonial-era human geography. Although the author makes deft use of his evidence and convincing arguments, certain criticisms seem warranted. For example, in his discussion of the Savannah River, Paulett pays scant attention to the Yamacraw and Yuchi Indian towns, and the trading store and home of John and Mary Musgrove. One is therefore left to wonder what kind of influence these spaces had upon the river's human geography. At other times, more nuanced interpretations seem to be in order, such as when Paulett suggests that the Savannah River was incidental to the lives of leading Augusta merchants. Although the Augusta merchants were not in the habit of traveling upon the river themselves (as

were their employees and slaves), it is hard to believe that the river was, in Paulett's words, "probably not a central part of their lives," given its importance as an artery of commerce, among other considerations (p. 61). Similarly, Paulett makes the rather straightforward assertion that "the trade actually served to enhance women's power in Creek life" whereas it might be better to state that the trade cut both ways (p. 162). Women may have enjoyed better access to trade goods, but it should not be forgotten that the trade likely imposed new burdens on women (who dressed the deerskins) and that men retained considerable control over their marketing. These modest criticisms aside, *Empire of Small Places* is a remarkable achievement in turning a microscope's focus upon interactions between diverse peoples, and in firmly cementing the study of place in the history of the colonial Southeast.

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