It started out with a phone call from Luke Vavra of Cartographic Arts, who had finally decided to retire and wanted to consign the majority of his remaining stock with Old World Auctions. As a dealer for 40 years, Luke had amassed one of the best collections of early Virginia maps, plans of DC, and charts of the Atlantic ocean of any US dealers. Of course being in Virginia ourselves, we knew that his material was both a great fit for our auction house, and would also prove to be a pleasure to catalog. Often with large collections we split the material among multiple auctions to ensure that we don't over-index in any one particular geography, however this collection felt different. We decided that Luke's material was a perfect candidate for a special auction.

But there was one thing that was nagging us: diversity. Our customer base is very diverse, as are their collecting interests. As Luke's collection was heavily focused on North American material, we knew we needed additional items to round out the sale. So we pondered: Who could supply additional maps for this special sale to generate broader appeal? It made sense for it to be another dealer (or two), who had enough stock to spare 150 maps or so, and who wasn't as focused on the New World. And it was important to us that we select a dealer of the same caliber as Luke Vavra - in the business since the "old days" and well-respected in the map community. At map fairs, in taxi cabs, and over drinks and dinners, Jon and I have developed relationships with some amazing dealers over the years. And two names popped into my mind: Jonathan Potter and Steve Luck. So I called them up and they both agreed to "give it a go."

Who are these dealers, you ask? Oh you should know; really you should. But in case you don't, I'll share a little about their backgrounds.

Henricus Hondius, *America Septentrionalis*, c. 1639. Rare first state of one of the most important maps perpetuating the myth of the Island of California.

Luke Vavra began his career in the army and served in both the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. He studied the theory of guided missiles and spent six years teaching and operating the Army’s guided missiles. During his career, Luke used maps almost daily, and had even learned to survey and make maps while earning his degree at the University of Utah. So it was no surprise when he and his wife, Patricia, founded Cartographic Arts in 1976, selling maps, globes, and scientific instruments related to using and making maps. He began his business while still active in the service and wasn’t able to invest much time into the map business until he retired in 1979. After retirement, he also began working as an engineer for a defense contractor in 1982, doing double-duty along with his map business. Having moved to Virginia on an army assignment in 1973, Luke developed an interest in early maps of Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay and began collecting the derivatives of John Smith’s map of Virginia. He was also drawn to plans of Washington, DC, due to his proximity to the city and his interest in its development.

Luke expanded his inventory in part through buying trips in London, visiting Jonathan Potter and Steve Luck on occasion to meticulously sift through their material. After purchasing a 1786 edition of "Transactions of the American Philosophical Society," which included a letter and chart of the Gulf Stream by Benjamin Franklin, Luke became interested in learning more about the gulf stream and expanded his map stock to include charts of the Atlantic Ocean. Having been involved with maps for many years, Luke noticed a significant change after Graham Arader entered the map trade in the mid-1970s. Arader commanded "outstanding prices" for his maps, thereby establishing value and solidifying antique maps as a viable category within collectibles. This move also encouraged collectors both to invest in maps and to sell their maps on the market. Luke also notes the impact that the internet has had on the map trade, in terms of increasing both the availability of maps and information related to maps. As a result, many maps have "come out of the woodwork" as individuals are able to access information about their map's worth and to find an appropriate outlet for selling.

In addition to operating Cartographic Arts, Luke also spent 10 years as a volunteer cataloger for the Virginia Historical Society, the fourth oldest historical society in the nation. He cataloged several hundred maps during his tenure, including many from the Paul Mellon collection, bequeathed to the society in 1999. He continued his business in earnest until the passing of his wife in 2010. Now that Luke is fully embracing his retirement, he is going back to his earliest hobby, stamp collecting, with a focus on German stamps.
Jonathan Potter began collecting maps as a teenager, while frequenting the stalls of London's Portobello Road with his parents on Saturday mornings. In 1970 he turned his hobby into a job by accepting a position at The Map House (then known as Sifton Praed). At the time, The Map House was a leading supplier of modern maps and guidebooks, but "had just one and a half plan chests with old maps and the directors were keen to expand that aspect of business." Expand they did, and in 1976 Jonathan Potter (Antique Maps) Ltd was incorporated. In the early 1970s there were no map societies, map fairs, and very few reference books on antiquarian maps; they were seen "as an adjunct to the antiquarian book trade." However by the mid 1970s, map dealers began setting up shops in London, which spurred a number of general reference works and cartobibliographies to be published in the subsequent 10-15 years. In 1980-81 both the International Map Collectors' Society and the London Map Fair were founded - the first of their kind. (Today dozens of map societies and a handful of annual map fairs can be found all over the world.)

Jonathan's business continued to grow, both in size and reputation, over the years. He believes that his success is due to several factors. He maintains a wide variety of high quality material at many price points, so that there is "something for everyone." Due to his experience in the trade, he can guarantee that the maps are "properly identified and with condition and colour correctly described." Jonathan also treats every enquiry with the same approach and consideration, whether they derive from his shop, fairs, or his website. Undoubtedly his success is also due in part to his book, "Collecting Antique Maps: An Introduction to the History of Cartography," which was first published in 1988 and remains today one of the most approachable and informative general reference works in the map world. As a result, Jonathan has had the opportunity to serve customers from all walks of life, including Chilean General Augustin Pinochet and Margaret Thatcher, who purchased a map as a gift for Ronald Reagan.
And what does Jonathan foresee in the future? In his own words: “The increasing number of younger map enthusiasts now visiting shops and fairs indicates that, after a relatively flat period for the trade around 2010, the market is picking up. Another interesting factor is the number of younger dealers and second-career participants now exhibiting at fairs in a serious and committed way.” In his view, although perhaps the “collecting mentality” has changed over the years, a new generation of buyers has moved into the market. Only time will tell how the new and old sellers will be able to cater to the ever-evolving map world.

Steve Luck, Tooley Adams & Co.

Steve Luck was a ski instructor in the French Alps, with a love of travel and thrills, when the opportunity to join the map business presented itself. And believe it or not, the map world offered both travel and thrills back then. Within his first few months on the job, Steve recalls being sent to an auction in Germany to bid on some items, including a four-volume Blaeu atlas (which was worth nearly as much as a house at the time). He explains, "It was extremely exciting - the travel, the history of geography. The environment was so different at that time. It was a wilder place to be than it is today." Steve was introduced to the map business by his step-father, Douglas Adams, one of the founders of Tooley Adams & Co. Douglas Adams and Steve partnered with Ronald Vere Tooley to start the business in 1982. Tooley, who was Adams’ step-father, helped propel the map trade in the 1950s and became known as the “Grand Old Man of Maps.” Tooley was at the forefront of the map trade beginning in the 1920s, and is largely credited with introducing the practice of breaking atlases and selling the map sheets individually. This practice expanded the potential base of customers by offering more affordable material, thereby popularizing map collecting. Tooley is also well-known for authoring numerous indispensable reference books that can be found on nearly every
map dealer's bookshelves still today. After Tooley and Adams passed away in 1986 and 2004, respectively, Steve became the sole proprietor of Tooley Adams & Co.

Over the years, Steve has noticed changes in the map business, some due to the evolution of the trade, and some due to global and technological changes. Back then the map trade was more sociable, with many more deals going on behind the scenes or "over a pint." The world felt bigger, travel was easier, and there seemed to be more opportunities. Over time, due in part to the advent of the internet, the ability to find something unique has diminished. Today's map trade is much quieter, more formal, and perhaps a bit more calculated. Despite these changes, Steve still enjoys the history and geography - looking at maps and reading about them and researching them. And he realizes that having been in the trade for so many years, he has advantages over many of his newer competitors. The more experienced dealers work on their memory and their gut instinct; they can make quick, calculated decisions on whether to buy or sell something, and for how much. Their deep knowledge gives them an edge, and makes buyers more comfortable buying from them. And of course being associated with the name "Tooley" doesn't hurt.

What their backgrounds don't tell you is that these three men are some of the nicest people you will ever meet. They are kind, honest, genuine people who really, really love maps. And they love to talk about and teach others about maps. If you ever run into one of them at a map fair, or happen upon Jonathan or Steve's shops in the UK, please introduce yourself. They are all worth knowing.

Our special June auction, which we're calling our "Across the Pond" sale, is really a celebration of over 100 collective years in the map business. There will be unique items, old favorites, and a little something for everyone. This special auction will feature around 450 items from geographies all over the world and will only run for one week, so mark your calendars: June 15-22, 2016.

If you would like to share a comment on this article, please head to our Facebook page.