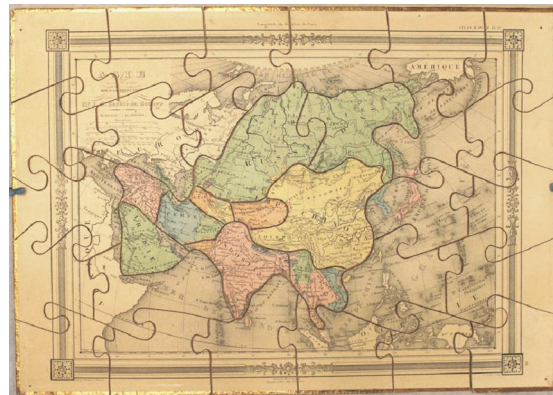
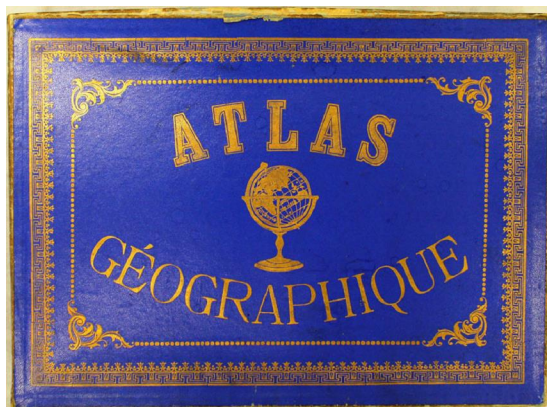


A Brief History of Dissected Maps, the Earliest Jigsaw Puzzles

by Joe McAlhany
Old World Auctions

An eternal classroom staple, the dissected map (or puzzle map) remains the most fun and engaging way for a child to learn geography. But the appeal of the puzzle map extends beyond the classroom and beyond childhood. Dissected maps have a long, rich history and continue to delight collectors of antique puzzles as well as collectors of antique maps. The novelty of piecing together a disassembled world never fades.

The history of puzzles can be traced as far back as the third century B.C., to Archimedes' Ostomachion, a square divided into fourteen pieces that can be reconstructed in a variety of ways. But the earliest examples of what we now call jigsaw puzzles were dissected maps, originally intended as educational games. In the late eighteenth century, on the eve of Industrial Revolution and mass urbanization, upper class families began to take a more active interest in the education of their children. Influential treatises on education by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau radically changed the ways in which people conceived of learning and the child's mind. One of Locke's enduring ideas, outlined in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), was the concept of using toys as teaching tools. Puzzle maps are a wonderful illustration of this concept, a perfect combination of geography lesson, game, and -- as collectors would surely argue -- work of art.

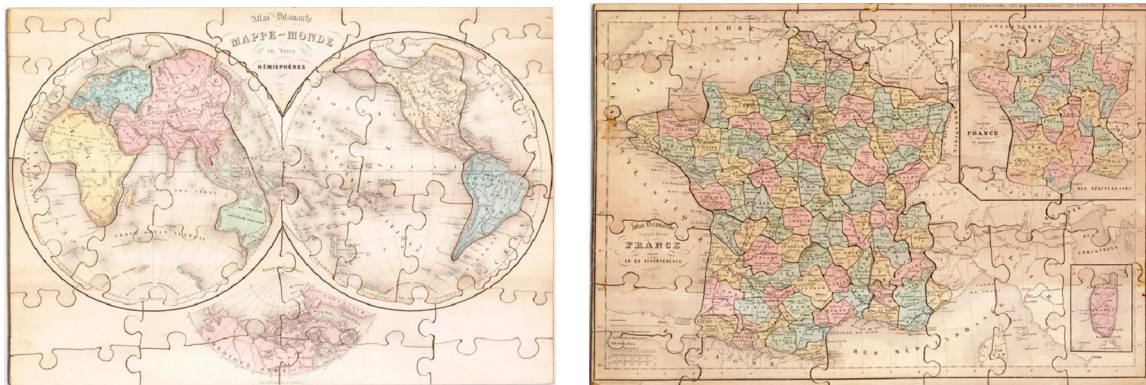


Above are the box cover and the puzzle map of Asia from a set of 8 puzzle maps of the world and continents, published by Barbie du Bocage, circa 1845. This set will be offered in our September 2015 auction.

Although it is impossible to say for certain who invented the jigsaw puzzle, John Spilsbury (1739-69) is commonly associated with the earliest examples. An apprentice of Thomas Jefferys, Spilsbury created what is credited by many as the first jigsaw puzzle sometime in the 1760s (dates vary from account to account). Entitled *Europe Divided Into Its Kingdoms*, the map shows just what its title suggests: the continent quite literally divided, dissected into pieces along its geographical boundaries. If Spilsbury was not the very first to create the jigsaw puzzle, he was almost certainly the first commercial producer of puzzles. He appears in the 1763 London directory as an "Engraver and Map

Dissector in Wood," and over twenty dissected maps were advertised on his trade card. Spilsbury was a dedicated craftsman who engraved, printed, and tinted the puzzle maps himself. His process for making his dissected maps consisted of attaching the maps to thin mahogany boards and sectioning them with a handheld fretsaw. The business was lucrative. Dissected maps were initially very expensive; even the cheaper reduced versions cost as much as a weeks' pay for the average worker. Spilsbury's clientele included elite boarding schools and King George III, whose children owned at least two of Spilsbury's puzzle maps, which can now be found in the royal puzzle cabinet on display at the Kew Palace in London.

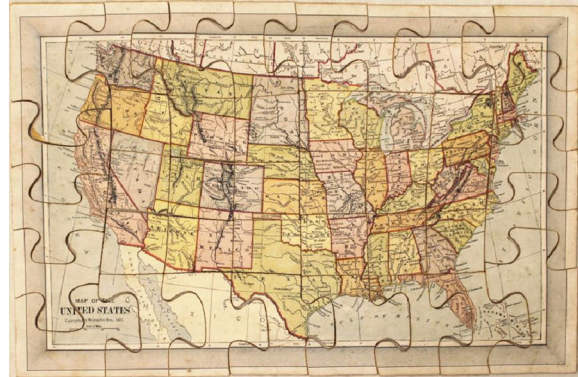
Spilsbury is not the only figure with a plausible claim on the title of Inventor of the Jigsaw Puzzle. The Lilly Library at Indiana University has in its collection a puzzle from German publisher Martin Engelbrecht that the university asserts is the oldest known jigsaw puzzle. Indeed it is dated 1730-41, but these dates may reflect when the original image was published rather than the actual puzzle. Covens and Mortier, a publishing firm based in Amsterdam, turned several of their maps from the 1720s and 30s into puzzles, but it is possible that they just dissected their outdated stock. The earliest corroborating evidence that the firm was producing puzzle maps is an advertisement from 1779. A compelling case can be made for French publisher and educator Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont as the true inventor of dissected maps. Documentary evidence indicates that she utilized "wooden maps" (likely dissected) in the 1750s to teach geography to girls in London, and she may have been selling these maps as early as 1756 -- before Spilsbury's puzzle maps hit the market. Unfortunately, there are no remaining examples of her maps, making it impossible to confirm that these wooden maps were indeed dissected and that they were manufactured by Beaumont herself. Still, Beaumont seems to be as likely a candidate for creator of the dissected map as Spilsbury.



Above are two puzzle maps from *Atlas Geographique*, a set of 6 maps by Delamarche, circa 1866. The intricate saw-work on the map of France outlines each individual department.

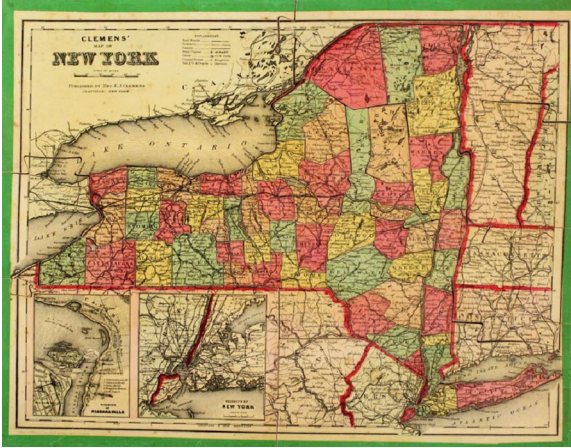
Regardless of who actually invented them, dissected maps grew in popularity in the decades following their debut. In London alone, nearly twenty publishers and mapmakers had begun producing puzzle maps by the turn of the century. Throughout the nineteenth century, companies in other European countries -- most notably France, Germany, and the Netherlands -- developed their own jigsaw puzzles in their own style. Towards the end of the 1700s, European manufacturers, most of them English, started to export dissected maps to America, and by the middle of the 1800s, certain English

companies made maps of the United States specifically for their American customers. A.T. Goodrich and Co. was the first American company to produce puzzle maps, starting in 1818 with their "new and elegant" *Dissected Map of the United States*. Despite their high price, puzzle maps proved to be a popular item in the United States. It is even said that young Abraham Lincoln was fond of the educational pastime.



McLoughlin Brothers' *A New Dissected Map of the United States* was housed in an elegant box with a label printed using multi-stone chromolithography. The above puzzle map was published circa 1887.

The costly early puzzle maps and the boxes that contained them were crafted using fine hardwoods like mahogany and oak. Their creation was a meticulous manual process: they were colored by hand, and the pieces were cut one at a time. Because of this, only the pieces along the edges interlocked, and puzzles typically had fifty pieces or fewer (this also kept the puzzles from being too difficult for the children they were designed to teach). The puzzle market expanded in the nineteenth century as new production methods lowered prices. Hardwoods were largely abandoned in favor of less costly softwoods, and engraving was phased out in favor of the more expedient lithography process. While hand-coloring continued into the late nineteenth century, the process was made more efficient and less expensive thanks to child labor. The subject matter of puzzles changed with the production methods; soon the early geographical, Biblical, and historical puzzles were joined by more colorful subject matter, such as nursery rhymes and fairy tales. By the time the puzzle industry began to utilize color lithography in the latter half of the 1800s, graphic and splashy picture puzzles became a popular seller. At the end of the nineteenth century, further improvements in production and distribution, along with a general increase in prosperity, made puzzles available to a much larger portion of the population, at least in the United States. A typical children's puzzle at this time was made of heavy cardboard rather than wood. If it was made in America, it was likely cut from a stack of two or more puzzles with a power scroll or band saw. Many featured advertisements on their versos.



Above is *Clemens' Map of New York*, which was produced by the short-lived Colton, Ohman & Co, circa 1900. The image at right shows an advertisement that appears on the back of the New York puzzle map. This puzzle map will be offered in our September 2015 auction.



As puzzles continued to evolve into the twentieth century, they grew more popular with adults. Puzzles were no longer exclusively an educational item -- they could be purely recreational too, a challenge for the sake of challenge. But dissected maps endure to this day and serve the same purpose they did in the late 1700s: to turn the challenging subject of geography into a game. Only now the game is not just the domain of children. During World War II, puzzle maps of far-flung battlefields were big sellers with adults and teens looking for a more hands-on engagement with current events. Today, there are puzzle maps of the world available with thousands of pieces. It is hard to imagine someone devoting countless hours to a project like that without walking away with a better understanding of the layout of the world.

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