

Mitchella

Rubiaceae

Mitchella commemorates a Virginian (American) botanist, physician and cartographer, Dr. John Mitchell (1711-1768). After his education in Europe he returned home in 1731 and discovered several Virginian plants while practising as a physician and running an apothecary's business. By the end of his 20s he was corresponding with and sending specimens to botanists in Europe. In his 30s he was also considering the generic relationship of plants and reviewing the classification of some. Apart from botany he mused on the causes of varying human skin colour between races concluding this had been caused by environmental factors and he also considered the reproduction mechanisms of marsupials. In 1745 he contended that epidemics occurring in the Virginian region stemmed from unsanitary British troop ships. His own bouts of malaria had by then severely weakened him and he left for London in 1745. During the journey he lost his possessions when pirates attacked his ship, including all his years of botanical notes and his herbarium. In 1747 he reached London destitute and his wife, who was ill, died the following year. Mitchell came under the patronage of General Sir John Campbell (1693-1770), the 4th Duke of Argyll, which enabled him to expand his contacts and carry out research in the Duke's laboratory. Authorities believe that his now growing interest in cartography was fed by increasing French political ambition regarding North American lands. Commissioned (by The Lords Commissioners of Trade and Foreign Plantations) to develop his draft 1750 map of North America, he sought the help of the Swedish/Finnish economist and natural historian, botanist and plant collector, Pehr Kalm (1715-1779) who he had met and assisted on his stop off in England before his 1747-1751 North American trip. He also obtained much information from the governors of all of the North American colonies. This culminated in Mitchell's 1755 published map which attracted widespread European and American enthusiasm but authorities today note its strong political presentational bias towards the British. (His subsequent editions of the map, over 20 of them, are said to have corrected much of this emphasis.) The map, often referred to as *The Mitchell Map*, is said to have been used from 1783-1932 (just) in boundary negotiations, perhaps the most prominent of which was the 1783 Treaty of Paris which ended the American War of Independence. From 1744 he was a member of the American Philosophical Society, and from 1748 he became a Fellow of The Royal Society. His published works include *Dissertatio brevis de principiis botanicorum et zoologorum*, and *Contest in North America between Great Britain and France with its Consequences and Importance*.