



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

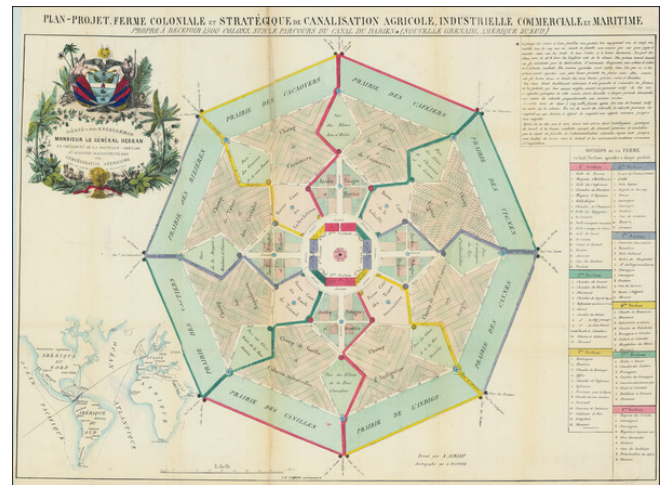
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[Utopian Town Plan - Panama Canal Project] Plan-Projet. Ferme Coloniale et Stratégique de Canalisation Agricole, Industrielle, Commerciale et Maritime Propre à Recevoir 1,500 colons, sur le parcours du canal du Darien. (Nouvelle Grenade, Amérique du Sud.)

Stock#: 102711
Map Maker: Airiau
Date: 1860 circa
Place: Paris
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 36 x 25 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Utopian Town Plan for a Panama Canal Colony in 1860

This fantastical town plan was the brainchild of Athanase Airiau, a utopian colonization scheme in Central America connected to his proposal for an interoceanic canal through the Isthmus of Darien, now known as the Isthmus of Panama.

The Airiau canal plan was a full 50 years before the actual completion of the Panama Canal in 1914. This beautifully hand-colored octagonal plan shows a carefully organized, seemingly self-sufficient community, centered around a church - Eglise de Notre Dame de France. The grand Agricultural City has roads that zig and zag without any particular purpose beyond top-down aesthetics, with some roads changing course in the middle of open fields where a straight line would have sufficed. Airiau's vision brings to mind similar geometrically complex colonial plans from previous centuries, especially [Sir Robert Montgomery's 1717 plan for the Margravate of Azilia](#) - envisioned as a "future Eden" to be established on lands south of the Savannah River.

Airiau aimed his proposal at the authorities of the Granadine Confederation, present-day Colombia. His vision was centered around the canalization and colonization of the Isthmus of Panama. Airiau's ambitious plan included founding 150 farms and a city to be populated by European settlers, who would engage in agricultural activities as well as contribute to the construction and maintenance of the proposed canal. As



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shown in the present elaborate town plan, Airiau was not merely proposing an infrastructural endeavor but a fully utopian scheme for colonization, featuring pre-defined sections for diverse crops such as vanilla, nopal, indigo, tobacco, cereals, cocoa, cotton, vineyards, sugar, sorghum, fruits, and vegetables, along with various types of livestock.

A selection of notable details from the plan:

- Champ de Tabac et des Cereales
- Parc de Genisses de la race Bovine
- Champ des Nopaleries
- Champ de Cannes a sucre et de sorgho
- Prairie des Cafeiers
- Prairie des Vignes
- Champ de Cacoyers

An extensive text describes the basic idea behind the colony: free passage for settlers and their families, a commitment of twenty years, a family council to maintain order and harmony. Settlers' share to be 25% of the net profits of the colony.

The map is dedicated to a notable political figure of the time, Pedro Alcántara Herrán, styled within an allegorical cartouche as "Ex Presidente de la Nouvelle Grenade et Ministre Plenipotentiaire de la Confederacion Grenadine."

Airiau published this map in a publication outlining his dual-purpose, canal/colonization plan: *Canal Interocéanique par L'Isthme du Darien, Nouvelle-Grenade (Amérique du Sud) Canalisation par la Colonisation* (Paris, 1860). His report appeared during a period of significant interest in and debate over the potential construction of a canal that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and thereby revolutionize global trade routes and maritime navigation. Airiau's advocacy for the Darien route over others is grounded in a comprehensive analysis of the region's geography, climate, and natural resources, positing it as the most favorable location for the canal's construction and for the establishment of a European colony.

Despite the innovative nature of Airiau's proposal, it did not come to fruition, attributed to its utopian character. Nonetheless, this historical episode illustrates the early and ambitious endeavors to improve



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global maritime routes and the development of the Panama region long before the successful completion of the Panama Canal in the 20th century.

Rarity

This unusual town plan is very rare in the market.

Detailed Condition:

Lithograph map, with original hand color. Sheet age toned. Old fold marks. Else clean and very nice.