



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

Map of the United States with the Contiguous British & Spanish Possessions Compiled from the latest & best authorities by John Melish . . .

Stock#: 16997
Map Maker: Melish
Date: 1816
Place: Philadelphia
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 57 x 36 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

John Melish's map of the United States is the single most important and influential map of America published in the 19th Century and is rivaled only by John Mitchell's map of North America in 1755 as the single most influential map in American History.

This example of the map is the final 1816 edition, which can be identified by the inclusion of Alabama Territory, which did not formally become a Territory of the United States until the following year. As such, this map is almost certainly the first printed map to show Alabama Territory.

Described by Thomas Jefferson as a luminous view of the comparative possessions of different powers in our America, Melish's map, first issued in 1816, was the first indigenous attempt to map the United States from coast to coast and synthesized the works of Lewis & Clark, Humboldt, Pike, Arrowsmith and others for the first time in a single large format coast-to-coast mapping of the United States.

Much as Mitchell's map influenced boundary disputes and treaties in North America for nearly a century after its publication, the Melish map similarly became the essential source map for the 19th Century. It has been described by several commentators as the visual embodiment of Manifest Destiny to an American public searching for a graphic depiction of America's territorial acquisitions from coast-to-coast in the early 19th Century. Following the Louisiana Purchase, Americans turned their attention westward to the great expanse from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. While the explorations of Lewis & Clark and Zebulon Pike provided early regional snapshots of previously unknown regions in the West, it was left to Melish to tie together these works, along with Arrowsmith's map of Mexico and other available sources, into the first systematic and comprehensive map of the US.



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Prior to his map of the US, Melish had produced a number of other highly acclaimed regional maps and his rare Military & Topographical Atlas of the United States. However, this map of the US would become his masterwork, ultimately reissued in 25 known states of the map between 1816 and 1823. The most notable advance in the later states of the map is the addition of an extra plate at the bottom of the map, which provided coverage of Cuba, Jamaica, the Virgin Islands and the remainder of the Gulf Coast and the Yucatan to the map. The map, in its various editions, faithfully recorded the changing geography of the US, as various boundary disputes, treaties and explorations extended both the geographical territory of the US and a young nation's knowledge of its own territory. The US-Mexico boundary established by the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819 was laid out on a copy the 1819 edition of the map.

Melish reportedly released only 100 copies of each edition. Because of the map's size and its use as an official source, relatively few copies have survived.

The present example is segmented and mounted on linen, which has recently been renewed. The map is housed in a slipcase with ties and laid into a clamshell box. A few small stains and a bit of soiling. Two small areas of restoration, one in North Carolina and one at the right edge of the map, just touching the neckline.

Detailed Condition:

See Description