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Map of the United States with the Contiguous British & Spanish Possessions Compiled from the latest & best authorities by John Melish . . . Improved to the 1st of January, 1818.

Stock#: 21493
Map Maker: Melish

Date: 1819
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 3rd state of the 1818 edition, which is the first edition to show Illinois as a State (Illinois was admitted into the Union in December 1818), with the boundary of Illinois moved northward, to create a panhandle so that Chicago and the southwestern coastline of Lake Michigan are part of Illinois. The map can also be distinguished from other editions by the presence of Watts T. in Northern Alabama (removed in later editions) and the absence of Ft. Clairborn (which first appears in the 4th state of the 1818 editions of the map).

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 &



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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.

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 a official source, relatively few copies have survived.

Detailed Condition:

Dissected and laid on linen (recently refreshed), with green silk edges. Laid into decorative red leather folder, with cloth ties. Some spotting and soiling, especially near title, but generally a very nice example.