



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
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A Map. Of Township (No. 14) in the 7th Range of Townships, in the County of Ontario, and State of New-York. Situate & bounded westerly on the Geneseo River, northwardly on Lake Ontario, easterly on the Gerundigut Bay, & South on the North Line of Township, No. 13. in 2d. Range. Containing 11,721 Acs. 3 Rs. 34 Ps.

Stock#: 55079
Map Maker: de Krafft
Date: 1792 circa
Place: Philadelphia?
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: VG
Size: 32 x 28 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

An Eighteenth-Century American Manuscript Town Plan on Vellum: A Robert Morris-Led Land Scheme at Present-Day Rochester, New York.

The earliest-known plan for a town on the future site of Rochester, New York, with an intriguing connection to Robert Morris' spectacular real estate investments in western New York State.

The map was executed by Charles de Krafft, an eighteenth-century American draughtsman and surveyor whose career included the creation of at least 4 manuscript Revolutionary War Battle Plans, served as one of the primary draftsmen for Pierre L'Enfant during the 1791 planning of Washington, D.C. and drafted a manuscript map of a part of the Ohio Valley for Thomas Jefferson, which Jefferson used to extra illustrate his personal copy of his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (See the biography section below for a full treatment of de Krafft's life and work.)

The Plan

The plan is skillfully executed in ink and wash color on a single large sheet of vellum. The quality of the work and the use of a large vellum sheet for the creation of the plan strongly suggests that it was made by



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de Krafft for one of the proprietors most likely Robert Morris.

The proposed town is shown in unparalleled detail, with plots delineated and assigned to the members of the investing syndicate: Robert Morris, Benjamin Barton, Samuel Ogden and Samuel Street. 193 plots are delineated all of which are faintly numbered in a different hand and with a lighter and redder ink than the rest of the map. The plots in Athens are numbered 1-104; in the town at the south end of "Gerundigut" Bay they are numbered 1-38; in the rest of the township they are numbered 1-51. In Athens proper, streets are named with widths noted, and a 15-acre public square is shown at the center of the projected town. The falls are labeled "Great Falls" (some 90 feet high!) and "Little Falls" (these falls offer an enormous potential source of power, largely explaining the appeal of the site as a setting for a major town). The trees used by the surveyor as landmarks are identified in the corners of the township.

The plan was based on a survey made, probably in 1792, by one Captain Job Gilbert, who had an ownership interest in Township 13, just east of Athens. (See *Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*, p. 488). Gilbert's work was copied, likely shortly thereafter, by Charles de Krafft.

It is worth noting we have found mention of an untraced 1792 map of Township 14, Range 17 [sic] recorded in a photostat copy at the Rochester Public Library. We have so far been unable to locate this photostat (Blake McKelvey, *Rochester History*).

Robert Morris and the Athens Scheme

Among the biggest losers of the American Revolution were the Iroquois of central and western New York, most of whom had sided with the British in the hope of forestalling settlement on their lands. The ironic result was that after the war these lands became fair game for wealthy speculators—both American and European—eager to make a killing from sales to land-hungry New England farmers. By means of a maze of treaties and private deals, the region was carved up into enormous tracts, one of which was the so-called Phelps and Gorham Purchase of 1788. The Purchase totaled some six million acres, but for our purposes, the relevant parcel was a huge parcel just east of the Genesee River and another much smaller one—the "Millyard Tract"—to the west of the Falls.

When Gorham and Phelps ran into financial difficulties, they sold the land to Philadelphian Robert Morris in 1791 (1734 - 1806). Morris was a financier, merchant, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and



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one of the founders of the American financial system. At the time this map was made, he was the United States' wealthiest citizen and most prolific land speculator, though within a few years the Panic of 1796-97 led to his bankruptcy and imprisonment. At any rate, in the early 1790s he was still flying high, and he soon flipped the parcel—at a huge profit—to a group of British investors known as the Pulteney Association.

However, Morris seems to have retained (or purchased separately) the township of Athens, bounded to the north by Lake Ontario, east by Irondequoit Bay, and west by the Genesee River (the township is shown on Augustus Porter's very rare [A Map of Messrs. Gorham and Phelps's Purchase](#) (1794)). With a small group of investors, he sought to develop a commercial town at the Falls of the Genesee, which with their great height provided a vast source of potential power, along with relatively easy access to Lake Ontario. His fellow investors included Samuel Ogden (1746-1810), who had served as a colonel in the New Jersey Militia during the Revolutionary War. Ogden later became involved in the iron business and served as one of Morris's agents. Other investors were Benjamin Barton Sr., a New Jersey-based entrepreneur, and Samuel Street, a New England-born trader. Street was one of the most important early American residents on Lake Ontario; he was trusted by the Five Nations and engaged by them to represent their interests to the Federal government.

[A 1939 Rochester History article by Blake McKelvey titled "Indian Allen's Mills"](#) provides the best overview of the Athens scheme:

There was a far-flung land-development scheme back of this transaction. Barton was associated with other speculators, including Robert Morris and his agent, Samuel Ogden, in the purchase during 1792 of the township lying between the Genesee River and Irondequoit Bay, now largely occupied by the eastern half of the city of Rochester. There Morris and his associates planned to establish a town at the head of Irondequoit Bay, and a commercial city, to be named Athens, on the east bank of the Genesee at the lower falls. It was obviously necessary to check any rival enterprise at the Allan mill site. The One-Hundred-Acre Tract was therefore acquired by Barton, and its title was shortly turned over to Ogden, the active agent for the associated speculators. But Robert Morris's land speculations had become so vast that, when in 1793 bank failures in London constricted his credit, it became necessary to unload as much of his property as possible. Thus Charles Williamson was able in 1794 to acquire the Genesee Mill Lot for the Pulteney Estate.

The scheme to develop Township 14 goes to one of the enduring questions about the involvement of



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Morris and other American investors in western New York: were they interested in actually developing the land they purchased, or were they simply flipping it in Europe for quick profit (namely to the Pulteney syndicate and the predecessors of the Holland Land Company)? This map suggests that the investors were genuinely interested in developing the choicer areas, even if their plans did not come to fruition.

The investment scheme at Township 14 was so short-lived that scant evidence of it remains today. Indeed, it is unclear who took ownership of the land after the original syndicate, although the Pulteney Association probably did so as, or just before, Morris's investments started to go downhill in 1794. What is known is that the Athens scheme was the first formal attempt to found a town on the current site of Rochester, New York and the present map is the most detailed extant record of that attempt. With the real estate frenzy of the 1790s more than a decade in the past, the site was finally built on in 1811 by Colonel Rochester and his partners. With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, the city blossomed into one of America's first boom towns.

In the national context, the Phelps and Gorham Purchase was one of a few public-private deals that characterized the first wave of westward expansion in the newly-minted United States. West of the Appalachian Mountains, the Ohio Company of Associates led settlement in what would become Ohio; in the south, the Yahoo land fraud involved a corrupted version of the *modus operandi* established in the north. Thus, this map of Robert Morris's Athens Scheme represents one of the earliest unique artifacts of American westward expansionism that one might hope to obtain.

Detailed Condition:

Ink and watercolor on vellum. Old folds and loose wrinkling. Scattered minor soiling.