



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard  
La Jolla, CA 92037

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(858) 551-8500  
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## Great Falls, Montana

**Stock#:** 58875  
**Map Maker:** Gibson  
**Date:** 1883  
**Place:** Minneapolis ?  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 14 x 24 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



### Description:

#### *The Lost Original Map of the Townsite of Great Falls, Montana*

Flawless example of this previously unknown map of Great Falls, Montana, almost certainly published by its original founders (Great Falls Townsite Company) in December 1883.

The map illustrates the newly platted townsite for Great Falls, in the Fall or Winter of 1883-84, during the first few months of its existence.



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In addition, the map provides two of the earliest views of Great Falls and Black Eagle Falls at the top of the map. The prominent display of the two sets of falls was intended to promote the prospect of creating water powered industry at the new townsite, a very rare example of illustrating water power as a means of promoting a town in the frontier American West. Moreover, as Black Eagle Falls would be dammed by 1890, the map is one of the few surviving images of the falls before the construction of the damsite in 1890.

The present map would seem to be the earliest surviving printed map of Great Falls. As described below, none of the signs of human development which were present in the first years of the town are shown on this map.

#### Dating The Map

Great Falls was created in 1883 by Paris Gibson, a businessman who had made his first fortune in Minneapolis and who had begun a new venture in Montana as a sheep herder. The earliest notice of the future city was in the *Helena Daily Independent*, Friday March 2, 1883, which noted:

*. . . a Company with Paris Gibson at its head contemplates building a woolen factory at the falls of the Missouri, a short distance below the mouth of the Sun river."*

One June 3, 1883, an announcement of acquisition of land by what would become the Great Falls Townsite Company appeared in *The River Press* (Fort Benton, M.T.)

*Six deeds, embodying about 1,000 acres of land for Jas. J. Hill, President and the leading spirit of the Manitoba railroad, and Paris Gibson of this city, were filed for record day before Wednesday with the county recorder. This land lies near the mouth of Sun River, not far from the Great Falls and is to be its site, so rumor says, of a coming metropolis. . . ."*

By June 27, 1883, the planned city was announced in a two column article in *The River Press* and the *Butte Miner* with the headline "**Great Falls -- The Coming Minneapolis of Montana**," extolling the virtues of the water power at the site, ". . . much greater than that of St. Anthony falls at Minneapolis." Over the course of the next month, accounts of the planned town were widely published throughout Montana's leading newspapers.

The area that would become Great Falls was surveyed for Paris Gibson by Herbert P. Rolfe (later publisher



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of the *Great Falls Leader*). In July 1883, Gibson sent Rolfe on an expedition to survey and plat what Gibson called "a Minneapolis on the Missouri."

Real estate sales and promotion started immediately. A newspaper account in the *River Press* notes that "Chas Weger, of Rock creek, has just arrived from the new city, where he has been to pick out a suitable point for Holter & Bros. proposed saw mill and planning mill."

By the Spring of 1884, the first construction had begun and the Great Falls Townsite Company was operating from two tents on Broadwater Bay. By the summer, the Great Falls Townsite Company was operating from offices on Central Avenue and by December, the company had announced the intention to run "a first-class ferry."

While the present map lacks publishing information and a date, we believe it was published in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.. This would correspond with its being associated with the original development of the Great Falls townsite, which was the vision of two Minneapolis residents, Paris Gibson and James J. Hill, along with Conrad Gotzian of St. Paul. The map was acquired at auction in the area in August 2018.

Of note, the map shows no sign of the arrival of the first railroad (the Manitoba Railroad in 1887), no bridge construction and no other sign of development, but the original parksite (Cascade Park), which was laid out from the town's commencement, is shown. Given the complete lack of development on the map, we surmise that this would have been the original promotional map for the town created shortly after its platting in 1883.

The map apparently pre-dates the construction of the Ira Myers Sawmill in the summer of 1884 and the Pioneer Hotel, which was also built in the summer of 1884. The map also does not illustrate the Cataract Mill, the first large industrial venture in Great Falls. Some of Cascade Park was given away in 1885, when the Cataract Mill became the city's first major industry. The Mill was located on the east bank of the Missouri River near 1st Avenue North.

We believe the map is the same map referenced in the *River Press* on December 5, 1883, page 5, where it is noted that Paris Gibson was planning to travel east to have "electrotyped [] the new map of the city of Great Falls."

The earliest printed map of Great Falls which we were able to locate is the map produced in 1890 by the Great Falls Water and Townsite Company illustrated here: <http://cdm103401.cdmhost.com/digital/collection/p15018coll5/id/95>

### Great Falls History



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Meriwether Lewis was the first white person to visit the area, which he did on June 13, 1805, as part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. York, an African American slave owned by William Clark and who had participated in the Expedition, was the first black American to visit the site of the future city.

After Lewis and Clark in 1806, there is no record of any white person visiting the site of the city of Great Falls until explorer and trapper Jim Bridger reached the area in 1822. Bridger and Major Andrew Henry led a fur-trading expedition to the future city location in April 1823. British explorer Alexander Ross trapped around Great Falls in 1824. In 1838, a mapping expedition sent by the U.S. federal government and guided by Bridger spent four years in the area.

The Great Falls of the Missouri River marked the limit of the navigable section of the Missouri River for non-portageable watercraft. The first steamboat arrived at future site of the city in 1859.

Politically, the future site of Great Falls passed through numerous hands in the 19th century. It was part of the unincorporated frontier until May 30, 1854, when Congress established the Nebraska Territory. Indian attacks on white explorers and settlers dropped significantly after Isaac Stevens negotiated the Treaty of Hellgate in 1855, and white settlement in the area began to occur. On March 2, 1861, the site became part of the Dakota Territory. The Great Falls area was incorporated into the Idaho Territory on March 4, 1863, and then into the Montana Territory on May 28, 1864. It became part of the state of Montana upon that territory's admission to statehood on November 8, 1889.

The modern city of Great Falls dates its first founding to 1883. Businessman Paris Gibson visited the Great Falls of the Missouri River in 1880, and was deeply impressed by the possibilities for building a major industrial city near the falls with power provided by hydroelectricity. He returned in 1883 with friend Robert Vaughn and some surveyors and platted a permanent settlement on the south side of the river. The city's first citizen, Silas Beachley, arrived later that year. With investments from railroad owner James J. Hill and Helena businessman Charles Arthur Broadwater, houses, a store, and a flour mill were established in 1884. The Great Falls post office was established on July 10, 1884, and Paris Gibson was named the first postmaster. A planning mill, lumber yard, bank, school, and newspaper were established in 1885. The *Great Falls Tribune*, the first newspaper in town, was published in May 1885.

Paris Gibson's partner James J. Hill organized the Great Falls Water Power & Townsite Company in 1887, with the goal of developing the town of Great Falls; providing it with power, sewage, and water; and attracting commerce and industry to the city. To attract industry to the new city, he offered low rates on the Montana Central Railway. By 1887 the town had 1,200 citizens, and in October of that year the Great Northern Railway arrived in the city. Great Falls was incorporated on November 28, 1888.

#### **Paris Gibson**



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Paris Gibson (1830-1912) was born in Brownfield, Maine and went to Boudoin College. In 1853, he was elected to the Maine legislature.

After moving to Minnesota, where he built the North Star Woolen Mill at St. Anthony's Falls, he served on the University of Minnesota Board of Regents from 1871 through 1879, and was a founding Trustee for Lakewood Cemetery. He abandoned his failed business interests in Minnesota to try his luck out West and, in 1880, paid a visit to the Great Falls of the Missouri River and quickly recognized their potential for producing hydroelectric power.

Gibson convinced his friend, railroad magnate James J. Hill, to invest in a townsite at the falls and urged that Hill extend his railroad through the new city. In 1883 the city of Great Falls, Montana, was founded. Paris Gibson, was quoted as saying "When the City of Great Falls was founded and its plat was recorded in 1883, it was decided at once to set aside for park purposes, certain well located tracts of land within the City limits and to commence the planting of American Elms and other desirable trees..." The First step in this planning was setting aside a large tract of land between Park Driveway and the Missouri River, extending a mile up from Central Avenue. Although the "park" named Cascade Park (now Gibson Park) was owned and cared for by the Township Company, Paris Gibson was in the forefront in leading the effort to develop a park system.

By 1887 Hill rail lines linked Great Falls to Butte, Montana, and Helena, Montana. However, the main line of Hill's Great Northern Railway bypassed Great Falls to the north. Despite this setback, Great Falls became a major center of trade for area farmers and ranchers, and its dams on the Missouri River contributed power for ore processing and grain milling industries.

#### **Rarity**

The map was apparently unknown prior to its purchase in August 2018.

#### **Detailed Condition:**