



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

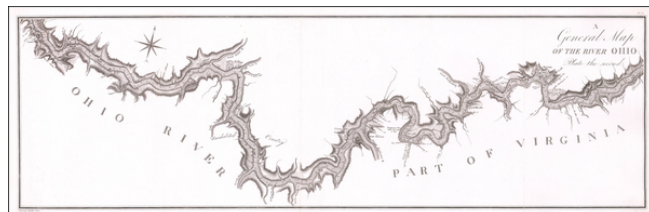
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A General Map of the River Ohio. Plate the Second

Stock#: 60823
Map Maker: Collot
Date: 1804 (1826)
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size: 38 x 13.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Antique Map of a Section of the Ohio River Prepared By A French Spy

Important early map of the Ohio River from Maysville, Kentucky to just south of Wheeling, West Virginia, prepared by the French military officer and spy George Henri Victor Collot, working on orders of the French Ambassador to the United States, as part of his reconnaissance of the Western Frontier of America in 1796.

The map is the second part of Collot's detailed map of the Ohio River. The first extends from Pittsburg to just below Wheeling, West Virginia. The second (this map) extends from near Wheeling to within about 20 miles of Cincinnati.

Collot's detail is befitting of the work of a trained military officer engaged in a reconnaissance of America's then western frontier, with an eye toward future invasion or support of regional rebellion. Collot's map provides regular soundings within the river, the location of the fortifications at Marietta, Ohio, the names of towns and smaller settlements on the river (including building placements), the location of a Salt Works, a floating mill near Gallipolis, "Dangerous Place when the water is low" near Tart Falls, and large crosses in the river (likely mooring places mostly near major towns).

Collot's role as a spy undertaking reconnaissance on behalf of France reflects the remarkable upheaval in French politics in the decade following the conclusion of the American Revolution. Collot's first American experience was as a French officer fighting alongside General George Washington, where he served as aide-de-camp and maréchal des logis under General Rochambeau, France's senior military commander during the Revolution.

The map is unquestionably the most detailed charting of the region undertaken in the 18th Century.



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The map was drawn for the atlas to accompany Collot's, *Voyage dans l'Amerique Septentrionale*". This is one of 23 maps which appeared in the Atlas volume, of which only 100 were printed in English. The work is of extreme rarity and very important in the history of American Cartography.

Historical Context of the Map & Collot's Reconnaissance

In 1763, the territory west of the Mississippi River was ceded to Spain by France, while the lands east of the river were ceded to Britain. In 1783, the lands east of the Mississippi formally became territory of the United States, although American possession of the region was tenuous at best. The mainly Francophone inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley had little affinity for Anglo-American rule, and their frontier lifestyle made them virtually impossible to control.

In the 1790s, the government of post-Revolutionary France was actively engaged in planning to retake France's lost American territories. The new French Government had an increasingly acrimonious relationship with both America and Spain, and the possibility of supporting an insurrection by the region's Francophone inhabitants was considered a viable means for France to regain Louisiana and the Illinois Country.

In 1796, acting on order from Paris, the French ambassador Pierre August Adet charged General George Henri Victor Collot (1750-1805) with undertaking a reconnaissance mission to the Mississippi frontier, in order to assess whether the region could be retaken by France. A former governor of Guadeloupe, he was an accomplished veteran of colonial service and an extraordinarily gifted mapmaker. Unfortunately, Collot was not as secretive about the purpose of his mission as Adet, and even before he commenced his expedition in March 1796, the American Government knew his intentions and appropriated \$500 to retain agents to shadow Collot.

While Collot's intellectual achievements were impressive, his mission was a political disaster. Collot was arrested at Fort Massac on the Ohio River by the American officer Zebulon Pike (himself soon to become an important Western explorer). Pike told Collot that "you have been indefatigable in surveying the Ohio, by taking the courses, distances, heights, etc., as well as reconnoitering the adjacent area for which you exhibit no authority". While he was well aware that Collot was a French agent-provocateur, Pike set him free, as he could not find any legal means of detaining him. Collot was, however, later shadowed by Spanish agents and arrested and deported as soon as he arrived in New Orleans. Fortunately, the Spanish governor allowed Collot to retain his maps and papers.

Overview of Collot's Spy Mission, Report & Maps

Acting under instructions from Citizen Pierre-Auguste Adet, French Minister to the United States, General



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George Henri Victor Collot undertook a secret reconnaissance in 1796, of the western American frontier. Collot traveled from Pittsburgh down the Ohio to the Mississippi, up the Mississippi to the Missouri and Illinois Rivers, and then back down the Mississippi to New Orleans. During his journey, he constructed a large number of exceptionally detailed manuscript maps and views of the region that he traversed. Many of these were groundbreaking, containing never before recorded information about a wilderness that was just beginning to undergo settlement.

Completed at nearly the exact time that Lewis & Clark were departing St. Louis, up the Missouri River, Collot's maps were engraved in Paris in 1804, but publication was suppressed due to Napoleon's sale of Louisiana to the United States the previous year. The Louisiana Purchase effectively ended any possibility that the region could be acquired by France. As a result of the changing politics and Collot's death, his report and maps did not come to market until 1826, when they were issued in a limited number under the title *Voyage dans l'Amerique Septentrionale* . . .

A nineteenth-century bookseller called Collot's work "one of the most famous, most important, and rarest of all books of Mid-Western Explorations." Eberstadt pronounced it "extraordinarily rare." Its rarity is due to the supposed deliberate destruction of all but three hundred French and one hundred English copies by the publisher, who had purchased the edition from Collot's estate, hoping to increase its value.

The Suppression of Collot's Report & Maps

Following his return to France, Collot set out to prepared his report and maps from notes and sketches taken during his journey. In 1800, Napoleon acquired Louisiana from Spain, Collot, and Adet were named two of the commissioners of the new French territory. However, before they could cross the Atlantic to take up their assignments, Napoleon had a change of heart and decided to sell Louisiana to the United States.

Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to sell Louisiana to America brought a practical end to Collot's work on behalf of the French Government. As a result, the impetus to publish Collot's work disappeared and, to the contrary, it became expedient to suppress his reconnaissance, rather than publish its results and overtly admit to the Americans the full scope and extent of Collot's espionage work during his visit.

Ironically, the suppression of Collot's maps has a simultaneous parallel during Thomas Jefferson's administration, when 4 expeditions were sent out by Jefferson to explore the Louisiana Purchase and the Transmississippi West (Lewis & Clark, Zebulon Pike, Dunbar-Hunter and Freeman-Custis expeditions). In April 1806, Thomas Freeman, surveyor, and Dr. Peter Custis, naturalist, undertook an expedition at the request of Thomas Jefferson's administration through parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma. They were accompanied by a military escort under the command of Capt. Richard Sparks. At the same



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time that Zebulon Pike was exploring westward into the Louisiana Territory, Freeman and Custis traveled along the Red River to a site in present-day Texas in the vicinity of the old Caddo villages, where they were stopped by a force of Spanish cavalry protecting the Spanish claims to an ill-defined boundary of the Louisiana Purchase. After a brief skirmish, Freeman and Custis withdrew.

While a report of the 1806 Freeman-Custis expedition was published and a map prepared by Nicholas King, the political sensitivity surrounding the expedition was such that the report of this southern expedition into Texas was kept secret, with only a few copies printed. Nicholas King's map of the expedition, which provided physical proof of the US Government's encroachments into Spanish Texas, was suppressed completely, with no known examples of the map surviving until an example was discovered in about 1877 in the Custis papers and a second example was discovered in the past decade, which had been owned by another early American explorer, Washington Hood (1808-1840).

Rarity

The map is rare on the market. This is only our second example in more than 20 years.

Detailed Condition: