



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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Mississippi of Intemperance

Stock#: 61834mb
Map Maker: Shober & Carqueville Litho. Co
Date: 1882
Place: Chicago
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 20 x 27.3 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The third known example of this extraordinary Temperance broadside featuring an allegorical map of the Mississippi River.

Fascinating allegorical image illustrating the evils of alcohol.

The broadside's central image is a map of the "Mississippi of Intemperance," fed by among others Cider Run, Tobacco Creek and the Beer and Whisky Rivers—the intoxicants becoming stronger as one moves downstream. After passing through Warners Rapids and tumbling over Delirium Tremens Falls, the river spills its victims into the Gulf of Despair, where they are watched over by a horde of nasty-looking demons. Surrounding the map are twelve numbered panels showing the fatal journey of a young man down the fatal river, propelled by drink from the drawing room to bars, billiard halls and gambling dens, and then on to illness, despair, murder, imprisonment and the gallows.

The broadside was issued in conjunction with a lecture of the same title by one "Dr." N. W. Tracy, who



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from the late 1870s to at least 1909 toured the Midwest on the Temperance circuit. In the early 1880s at least some of his lectures were illustrated by "a large allegorical painting," also titled "The Mississippi of Intemperance" and described by one source as no less than "9 x 15 feet." Presumably the painting and this lithographic poster are closely connected, though it is not been possible to establish which has primacy. In any event, the poster was available for sale no later than August 1882, with Tracy apparently relying on a network of distributors. For instance:

"Dr. Tracy's lithographic pictures "The Mississippi of Intemperance" have arrived and subscribers can obtain them at A. D. Henderson's shoe store. The price is one dollar, and parties desiring extra copies can procure them." (Waukesha (Wisconsin) Daily Freeman, Aug. 18, 1882, p. 8)

Tracy's poster was probably a commercial failure, as I find but a handful of mentions in the period press and located only two other extant examples (Library of Congress and the Billy Graham Center).

History of the Mississippi of Intemperance Slogan

The lecture title, the painting and this lithograph all raise questions of authorship and intellectual property ownership. To begin with, the title "Mississippi of Intemperance" predates Tracy, having been used as the title of an 1874 lecture given in Watertown, Wisconsin by the Rev. G. S. Hubbs. Further confusing matters, in mid-1883 Hubbs claimed copyright to a lithograph of similar description and had at least one canvasser working the Midwest on his behalf:

"Mr. L. L. Backus, who has been employed by Rev. G. S. Hubbs as special traveling agent, made our city a brief visit last Wednesday in the interest of the new picture on which Mr. Hubbs owns the copyright. It is entitled "The Mississippi of Intemperance," and is the outgrowth of a lecture which many of our citizens will remember hearing Mr. Hubbs delivery. It is a lithograph, 24x30 inches, executed in the very best style of the art. For a centerpiece is has a large river, fed by numberless streams, named "Cider run," "Bitters creek," etc., the whole emptying into the "Gulf of Despair." On the margin is a series of pictures representing the downward career of a young man, and showing up vividly the drunkard's fate." (The Appleton (Wisconsin) Crescent, June 23, 1883)

Whether Hubbs purchased the copyright from Tracy or sought to pirate his image I cannot say. Further, I



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have found no other reference to a lithograph by Hubbs meeting this description, and it is possible it never made it into print.

N. W. Tracy

The glow of virtue around N. W. Tracy's speechifying may have obscured a complex and perhaps even unsavory personality.

Tracy may have begun his career as a seller of patent medicines: Later in life, as will be seen, one paper described him as a "retired patent nostrum lecturer." Indeed, in the years 1871-5, someone of the same name is pushing "California Vegetable Tincture and Blood Searcher" in *The Weekly Marysville (Ohio) Tribune* and *The South Bend (Indiana) Tribune*.

The first possible mention of him we have found in a Temperance context is in April 1875, when an N. W. Tracy "of New York" assumed ownership of the Wallace House billiard hall and restaurant in Sterling, Illinois, with the stated intent that the place "be conducted on strict temperance principles." In any event, our Tracy was on the lecture circuit by 1879 at the latest, when an article grants him the honorific "Dr.," mentions him speaking in Minnesota and describes him as follows: "The doctor is a Murphy [i.e., Temperance] convert, and has had a varied experience. He has known the lowest depths of a drunkard's degradation, and is said to rival Gough in the fervor of his eloquence." He traveled and lectured for fully four decades, and during that period received literally thousands of newspaper mentions in connection with engagements throughout the Midwest and as far afield as Durham, North Carolina and Ithaca, New York. The last newspaper mention I find of Tracy is in association with a lecture on Ben Hur, given in late January 1919.

Somewhere along the line Tracy married, divorced, and remarried, though the second marriage seems not to have been entirely successful: In October 1889 his sons Roy (14) and Bob (12) were picked up in Lima, Ohio, having run away from home. According to a report--"Reform the Reformer"--in the *Democratic Northwest and Henry County News of Napoleon, Ohio*, the boys

could not bear the treatment they were subjected to at home, arising from domestic complications. Their own mother is married again to another man; and their father to another woman, who continually found fault with them, and procured them beatings they considered both cruel and unjust."

An 1890 article in the same paper is also of interest. Under the title "*Tracy, the Fakir. Store-Box Orator*"



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and Patent Medicine Vender [sic], he is described as a “temperance evangelist and retired patent nostrum lecturer,” who fell in a dispute with his landlady and, “swearing like a trooper,” attempted to skip town without paying. Worse still,

“The “Doctor” had trouble with the ladies of the W. C. T. U. which resulted in the closing of the doors of the Congregational Church upon him. When the collection was to be disposed of one night he emptied the hat into his capacious overcoat pocket and when the ladies asked for their per centage they got \$000,000,00. On account of this the church was closed to him...”

In fairness, both these articles appeared in the same local newspaper, and are the only two negative mentions of Tracy in the hundreds of articles I have examined. As a prominent Temperance evangelist he would likely have had numerous detractors and enemies among the “wets,” and it is possible one or both of these articles were planted by someone seeking to smear his name.

In all, an extraordinary and very rare relic of the Temperance movement and one of the most unusual allegorical maps I have encountered, well worthy of further study.

Rarity

Not in OCLC or Persuasive Maps: PJ Mode Collection

Map jointly owned with Boston Rare Maps.

Detailed Condition: