



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
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Dempsey's Automobile Book California 1909

Stock#: 69601
Map Maker: Consolidated Motor Car
Company / H. H. Dempsey
Company
Date: 1909
Place: San Francisco
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 5.5 x 8 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The First Detailed California Road Atlas.

An exceptional rarity, being probably the earliest statewide California road atlas intended for the drivers of automobiles.

The atlas includes 23 road maps, including one general map, a map of the Los Angeles region, and many maps of the Bay Area and Central California.

The road maps are noteworthy for their extreme sparseness; for instance, the map of "Los Angeles and Vicinity" is blank but for small clusters of roads in downtown Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Pasadena, and Whittier, with only single arterial roads to connect them to the city center.

The atlas includes the following maps:

1. Map of California Showing Main Roads [Inset map of Southern California]
2. San Francisco Showing Main Streets Used by Automobiles
3. San Francisco to Redwood City
4. Redwood City to San Jose
5. Los Gatos to Pescadero
6. San Jose to Gilroy
7. Jan Jose to Santa Cruz
8. Santa Cruz to San Juan and Salinas
9. Salinas to Monterey [17-Mile Drive named]



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10. Niles to San Jose
11. Oakland to Niles
12. From Stockton to Livermore
13. Stockton to Yosemite Valley
14. San Francisco to Garcia
15. Sonoma to Santa Rosa
16. Santa Rosa to Cloverdale
17. Cloverdale to Ukiah
18. Oakland to Martinez
19. Vallejo to Napa
20. Cordelia to Vacaville
21. Sacramento to Placerville
22. Placerville to Lake Tahoe
23. Los Angeles and Vicinity
24. Los Angeles to San Diego

History of Early Automobile Roads in California

Automobile fever reached California at the very end of the 1890s. The first gasoline-powered vehicle built west of the Mississippi River appeared on the streets of Los Angeles in the early morning hours of Sunday, May 30, 1897, and the first time a "motor carriage" appeared anywhere in Southern California. The four-cylinder, gasoline-powered carriage built by J. Philip Erie and S.D. Sturgis was tested on the city streets of Los Angeles in preparation for a trial run to San Bernardino.

Three years later, on December 13, 1900, a group of Los Angeles auto enthusiasts incorporated the Automobile Club of Southern California.

Five years later, in 1905, there were a total of 6,500 cars, trucks, and motorcycles in all of California.

Travel between cities was still a very precarious thing with many routes unmarked and in poor condition unsuited for the early automobiles. The Automobile Club sought to remedy this by putting up road signs throughout California and the American Southwest.

1908, with Henry Ford's introduction of the Model T, car ownership was within reach of the American family. Interestingly, the present atlas points to how Ford and other major manufacturers had not yet consolidated the market when it was produced; the non-map pages are filled with advertisements for smaller car companies, manufacturing in places like Racine, Wisconsin.



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The Automobile Club of Southern California first started issuing road maps around 1906. These developed into the famous strip maps in 1912.

This atlas was produced before the most important piece of early automobile road legislation had been passed in California; the California Highway Act of 1910 provided for \$18,000,000 in bonds to be issued for highway construction and improvements. Every county and city fought for their fair share of the funds, but even this massive bond was a drop in the bucket for statewide road requirements.

Rarity

Though the title page alleges that the book was printed in an edition of 12,500, this is the only known extant example of the atlas; it does not appear in OCLC, nor have we located any other sales records or references to it.

As road atlases from this period were necessarily issued in small numbers (despite what this one claims), and were of a very ephemeral nature, quickly becoming outdated and discardable, it would not surprise us to learn that there was another California road atlas of a comparable or somewhat earlier date. Thus far, however, we have not been able to locate one.

We find only one other contender for the title, *Hancock automobile and motorcycle road book* (1907), which is described in OCLC as having "folded maps" (see OCLC 84282861).

Note: Subsequent to posting this item, we purchased an example of the 1907 Hancock book, which can be seen here: <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/77432>

Detailed Condition:

Small 8vo. Publisher's blue pictorial wrappers (somewhat worn). 23 maps and 1 bird's-eye view, 96 pages (complete).