



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

Phelps' Map of the United States, From the Best Authorities. 1834.

Stock#: 80839
Map Maker: Phelps
Date: 1834
Place: New York
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 54.25 x 45 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

A Prototype Humphrey Phelps Map of the United States, with Strange Western Cartography.

A fascinating and extremely rare map of the United States from coast to coast, published by the innovative American mapmaker Humphrey Phelps in 1834.

The map has been expanded from the first edition of 1833 to include a third western sheet extending coverage over the entire country. With this extension, the map provides a naive or retrograde view of the American West. The map barely advances the geography of the Robinson (1819), indeed in many ways outside of the immediate West Coast, the cartography is actually less refined than that map from roughly 15 years earlier. In Texas, there is some good pre-Austin information, with small Ranchos and settlements appearing on the map that are not normally shown on other maps of the period. That being said, foreign mapmakers such as Adrien-Hubert Brué were producing much more exact mappings of the West in the 1820s. That retrograde character illuminates the fascinating ways in which frontier America, in the 1830s, could remain more opaque to mapmakers in New York than to those in Paris.

As an example of domestic coast-to-coast mapping, Phelps's effort can be compared to John Melish's much more famous (and consequently, much more common) map first published in 1816. Though the present map is not as important as Melish's, it does deserve a place in our understanding of how the latter influenced (or did not) the cartography that followed.

This map is not only of interest for its cartography; it also represents an important development in American decorative arts. That quality largely derives from Phelps's inclusion of three extra prints at the



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bottom of the map.

The prints below the map are, from left to right:

- J. Baker. *Battle of Lexington, April 19, 1775. To the Enlightened and Patriotic Citizens of the United States...* New York: Humphrey Phelps
- Illman & Pillborw, after Steward. *Washington*
- J. Baker. *Battle of Bunker's Hill. (June 17, 1775.) To the Enlightened and Patriotic Citizens of the United States...* New York: Humphrey Phelps

The Birth of Humphrey Phelps-Type Maps

Today, Phelps is probably best remembered for his quintessentially American, sprawling decorative maps which combine cartography with auxiliary historical and decorative imagery. Most of these maps appeared in the 1840s. Earlier in his career, in the 1830s, Phelps mostly produced maps that followed the less ambitious, more restrained modes of the time. It is for this reason that the present map is so interesting; it shows the in-process development of Phelps from a fairly workaday mapmaker to one of the most important American creators of cartographic decorative arts in the 19th century.

In this map, Phelps has gotten more ambitious with his cartography, expanding his standard 1833 map of the United States east of the Great Plains into a full-fledged coast to coast production. Furthermore, he has added illustrations of George Washington and the Battles of Lexington and Bunker's Hill, drawing a line between the country's founding in the American Revolution and its 19th-century success in expanding across the whole of North America. His Ornamental Maps from more than a decade later would continue to celebrate Washington as the father of the nation and its figurehead, as well as the continued expansion of the country during Polk's presidency.

Rarity

We have been unable to find any other examples of this map in this configuration. For 1833-1835, OCLC records a single institutional example for the map, in the Library of Congress. Examples of the map from 1833 and '34 but without coast-to-coast coverage are scarce on the market but have appeared. Thus it is possible that this is a unique survival, representing an experimental approach by Phelps that did not result in any immediate success but helped him better understand his ultimate vision.

Provenance

Swann Auctions, New York, June 3, 2021, lot 119.



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Detailed Condition:

Original hand-color in full. Overall dimensions, including the rods, are 46x57 inches. Six sheets (three for the map and three for the decorative plates) mounted as one and backed on linen with wooden dowels. The whole professionally restored with some areas of paper infill in the margins. Relined with new linen.