



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman  
Antique Maps Inc.**

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**Voyage dans l'Amerique septentrionale, ou description Des Pays arrosés par le  
Mississipi, l'Ohio, le Missouri et autres rivières affluentes; observations exactes sur les  
cours et les sondes de ces rivières; sur les villes, villages, hameaux et fermes de cette  
partie du Nouveau-Monde... Par feu le General Collot**

**Stock#:** 88151  
**Map Maker:** Collot  
  
**Date:** 1826  
**Place:** Paris  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 10.5 x 14.5 inches  
  
**Price:** \$ 135,000.00



**Description:**

***The Very Rare Atlas to Accompany the Reconnaissance and Espionage Mission and Exploration of Western Interior of the United States by French Spy General Victor Collot.***

***In Original Blue Paste Paper Wrappers.***

***Completely Unsophisticated.***

A remarkable example, in the original blue wrappers, of the rarest and most desirable atlases of Western American exploration - containing a suite of beautifully engraved maps, plates and views, summarizing the American frontier at the end of the 18th century, before its detailed exploration by Lewis & Clark and their colleagues. This atlas has an intriguing publishing history, described below, which has added to its allure.

Georges Henri Victor Collot's atlas draws on his exhaustive first-hand surveying, which he conducted at great personal risk during the spring and summer of 1796, as well as a state-of-the-art compilation of maps and travel accounts (most unpublished) covering the areas that he did not visit.

Collot's work was specifically aimed at assisting France in the event of its reoccupation of Louisiana and potential expansion throughout all of North America, west of the Alleghenies. He undertook his expedition as a secret agent of France - a key participant in the barely concealed great power struggle for the region,



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which pitted the United States, Revolutionary France, Spain, and the United Kingdom against one another.

Despite the exceptional quality of Collot's cartography, his work became politically uncomfortable following the Louisiana Purchase. It was suppressed for over twenty years until finally published by the Parisian firm of Arthus Bertrand in 1826. The suppression of the work added to its present mystique.

On Napoleon's orders, Collot was supposed to go with General Claude P. Victor to reoccupy Louisiana in 1802. However, that expedition never sailed, and Collot died in Paris three years later.

#### **Historical Context**

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.

It was in this context that, after the French Revolution, the government of post-Revolutionary France schemed to reacquire France's lost American territories. The Directoire had a tenuous relationship with the United States, which in 1796 was slowly building toward the Quasi-War. France's relations with Spain and Britain were similarly fraught. As such, the possibility of supporting an insurrection by the French-speaking inhabitants of frontier America was considered by many to be a viable means for France to regain Louisiana and the Illinois Country.

In 1796, the Directoire, acting through the French ambassador to the United States, Pierre-Auguste Adet, enlisted General Georges Henri Victor Collot (1750-1805) to undertake a reconnaissance mission to the Mississippi frontier. Collot was instructed to gather information about the region and evaluate the prospects of the region being retaken by France. General Collot, a former governor of the French Island of Guadeloupe, was an accomplished veteran of colonial service and a highly competent 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 commissioned agents to shadow Collot, at a cost of \$500.

While Collot's intellectual achievements were impressive, his mission was a political disaster. He was arrested at Fort Massac on the Ohio River by the American officer Zebulon Pike (himself soon to become a

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legendary 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 was forced to set Collot free, as he could not find any legal means of detaining him. George Kyte summarizes Collot's interaction with and arrest by Zebulon Pike:

*Finally, they were arrested by the troops of a Captain Pike, who was in command of the United States outpost at Fort Massac, near the mouth of the Ohio River. Captain Pike examined General Collot's papers and questioned him about his mission. Collot's arrest was undoubtedly due to the warning which McHenry had sent from Philadelphia in May to have the General and his companions followed and to seize their papers if some legal justification could be found. Collot's projected reconnaissance of Louisiana was almost fatally delayed at the time of his arrest, because Captain Pike considered holding him at Fort Massac until his papers could be sent to Philadelphia and examined there. General Collot estimated that it would have taken eight months for his papers to be sent to Philadelphia and returned to Fort Massac, and he pleaded with his captors to permit him to go on his way without forcing him to submit to such a delay. To Collot's relief, Pike decided to let him continue his journey, with his notebooks and maps still in his possession, but he sent one of his officers to accompany Collot until he entered Spanish territory.*

Collot was scared not only of being arrested (as he had been by the Americans and would eventually be by the Spanish) but also of assassination. The latter fear was justified when two painted Chickasaw Indians followed his party for three hundred or more miles from the Illinois country before seizing an opportunity to attack and fatally wounding Collot's partner, Joseph Warin, with a heavy club wound to the chest. Collot believed that the Indians had been hired by the British to assassinate him, mistakenly attacking and killing Warin instead.

On the Mississippi, Collot was shadowed by Spanish agents and arrested when he arrived in New Orleans. Governor Carondelet, the Spanish governor of Louisiana, allowed Collot to retain most of his maps and papers but kept a few of the Mississippi and had copies made of others.

#### **Collot's Mapping Project**

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 created many



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exceptionally fine manuscript maps, views, town and fortification plans, and drawings of his observations. Many of these were groundbreaking, containing never-before recorded information about a wilderness that was just beginning to undergo settlement.

Collot was motivated by the notion that the interior of North America could be controlled from several key locations, namely Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and New Orleans. He drew up masterful plans for fortifying the first two cities to inform a future French occupation. Collot believed that by controlling the Mississippi at St. Louis, France could gain the allegiance of all the frontiersmen in the river's watershed.

Collot's survey work was exceptionally thorough, according to Kyte:

*He carried with him the best available maps, which showed the course of the Ohio and its tributaries, and he added to or corrected the maps as need be, noting changes in the course of the channel, the depth of the river, or the location of islands and sand bars. By the time he had reached the mouth of the Ohio, on August 2, 1796, Collot had filled several notebooks with a mile-by-mile description of the course of the river and of the mouths of the principal streams flowing into it. Also, he and Warin had prepared drafts of a map of the course of the Ohio from Pittsburgh to the Mississippi. Their map represented a distinct improvement in completeness and accuracy upon all previous charts of the course of the river.*

Collot gathered information about the Transmississippi West while he was in St. Louis, this was turned into the most advanced map of that region from the period before Lewis and Clark's expedition.

#### **Collot's Account of His Project**

The following is Victor Collot's version of how his work came to be and how his background influenced its production. This is translated from the French version of his text.

*I saw, for the first time, North America during the War of Independence of the United States: I served then in the general staff of the French army, under the orders of the ex-Marshal Rochambeau.*

*Although still young at that time, I meditated on the great importance that geographical research in this part of the American continent must have for the commerce and power policy of Europe; I felt a strong desire to devote myself to this research, and I would have undertaken them from then on, if*



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*circumstances had not opposed my project. I returned to France with our troops, and I continued my military service.*

*I believe I should say here by what events I was taken back to those distant lands in 1794.*

*I had been named, in 1792, Governor-General of Santo Domingo (1); but, being informed that two commissioners were being sent there at the same time, whom I regarded as very dangerous men because of the exaggeration of their principles, I refused this appointment; that of Guadeloupe was offered to me a few months later, and I accepted it. All that I have done and suffered on this last island, during the years of 1793 and 1794, to preserve its inhabitants from pillage and massacre is beyond the subject of the present work and belongs to the history of the colonies.*

*Guadeloupe was taken by the English on April 21, 1794; I myself fell into their hands, after an honorable capitulation, and they transported me to the United States, instead of sending me to France, on my word, as they had pledged themselves there.*

*No sooner had I landed in Philadelphia than I was arrested there, at the request of a merchant of that city, for having, during the course of my administration at Guadeloupe, confirmed a judgment of the Court of Prizes, who had condemned his ship.*

*I was released after furnishing bail of 7000 pounds sterling, and after having promised, on my honor, to remain in the country, to represent myself in court as soon as I should be required to do so.*

*I appealed to Citizen ADET, then Minister Plenipotentiary of France to the United States, against the violation of international law; I begged him to intervene, in his capacity, to break the ties which were going to keep me far from my country, and to deprive me of the honor of sacrificing to him my days again. This minister was good enough to exert himself in the most urgent manner to obtain that I should be allowed the freedom to go to France; but the English faction had so much influence, at this period, of the Federal Government, that all his efforts were without success.*

*He reported on this affair to the Executive Directory, which made in my favor a very vigorous decree: the notification of this decree produced no more effect. It was not until 1799, under the government of the FIRST CONSUL, and by the effect of a new special decree, that I saw this species of captivity terminated.*

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*So we see how I made a forced stay, for several years, in the United States of America.*

*There was only one way to console me for my position: that was to try to employ the time of my exile in a way that might be of some use to France; and this motive made me resume my old plans of travels in the interior of North America.*

*I joined in this enterprise an officer of merit, Adjutant-General Warin, who had served under my orders, and who had accompanied me to the United States.*

*The work that I am publishing today is the result of our common labors, which cost the life of my unfortunate companion, and which I myself could not push as far as I had intended.*

*I beg grace in advance to the critics who would like to endeavor to point out the grammatical errors: I am not a man of letters; my stories, my descriptions will not seduce by the charms of style. At least one cannot dispute me the merit of the greatest respect for the truth. I also hope that my readers will be compensated by the care I have given to the maps, views, costumes, etc., which enrich this work.*

**The Suppression of Collot's Report and Its Present-day Rarity**

Following his return to France, Collot set out to prepare his report and maps from notes and sketches taken during his journey.

In 1800, Napoleon acquired Louisiana from Spain, with Collot and Adet 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'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 work, rather than publish its results and overtly admit to the Americans the full scope and extent of Collot's espionage work during his visit.

Collot's work was not offered to the public for sale until 1826, when the atlas was issued in a limited number by the enterprising bookseller-publisher Arthus Bertrand, under the title *Voyage dans l'Amerique Septentrionale*. Bertrand specialized in works on travel and exploration and published several of the most



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significant volumes from this period. To support the price of Collot's book, Bertrand destroyed all but 300 copies of the French edition and 100 of the English editions. This fact he happily advertised in the editor's note at the beginning of Collot's text.

Collot's atlas is very rare on the market. We note only 3 examples of the atlas at auction in the past 50 years (2 of which have appeared twice), including the present example, which was acquired at the William Reese Sale in 2022.

A nineteenth-century bookseller called this work "one of the most famous, most important, and rarest of all books of Mid-Western Explorations." Eberstadt pronounced it "extraordinarily rare."

#### **The Maps and Plates**

The title of the atlas, translated into English below, reflects the ambitious nature of Collot's information-gathering expedition:

*A Journey to North America, containing a Survey of the Countries watered by the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, and other affluing Rivers; with exact observations on the course and soundings of these rivers, and on the towns, villages, hamlets and farms of that part of the New-World; followed by philosophical, political, military and commercial remarks and by a projected line of frontiers and general limits.*

While the printed contents sheet lists the plates and maps in French, the plates themselves have English captions, as transcribed below:

*General Map of North America*

*General Map of the Course of the Ohio from its Source to its Junction with the Mississippi*

**"The beautifully executed map of the Ohio River depicts vividly the wilderness that this country was at the time of his journey." - Wagner-Camp**

*Plan of Fort Erie*

*Plan of Fort Niagara*

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*View of Pittsborough*

*Plan of the Town of Pittsburg*

*Sketch of a Flat bottom Boat; such as are used to descend the Ohio and the Mississippi*

*A General Map of the River Ohio, Plate the First*

*A General Map of the River Ohio, Plate the Second*

*A General Map of the River Ohio, Plate the Third*

*A General Map of the River Ohio, From its Source to its mouth: containing the names of the Towns,  
Villages and Farms, established at present on its banks: togethes [sic] with its soundings, and  
courses. Plate the Fourth.*

*Plan of an Old fort in the state of Kentucky*

*View of the Fort of the Natchez*

*View of Marietta on the banks of the Ohio*

*View of Long-Reach*

*An American Log-house*

*Plan of the Rapids or Falls of the Ohio. Latitude of Louisville*

*View of the Rapids of the Ohio and of Louisville taken from the village of Clarkesville*

*Indian of the Nation of the Shawanoes*

*Indian of the Nation of the Kaskaskia*

*French Habitation in the Country of the Illinois*





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*Road from Limestone to Frankfort in the State of Kentucky*

*Passage of a Branch of the river Juniata across a chain of Mountains uninhabited and covered with  
wood*

*Indian of the Mandanes*

*Map of the Course of the Mississippi from the Missouri and the Country of the Illinois to the mouth of  
this River*

*Plan of Cape Girardo*

*Plan of St. Lewis. With the Project of an intrenched Camp French*

*Map of the Country of the Illinois*

*Map of the Missouri; of the higher parts of the Mississippi; and of the elevated Plain, where the  
Waters divide, which run, Eastward into the River St. Lawrence; North East into Hudson's Bay;  
North North West into the Frozen Sea; and South into the Gulf of Mexico. To which is added  
Mackenzie's track in 1789.*

**"Although Collot was able to investigate the Missouri River only through the reports  
of others, his map is an important cartographic step in the growth of knowledge of  
the Missouri Basin, according to Wheat" - Wagner-Camp**

**"Collot's [map] . . . summarizes on one sheet the most recent geographical  
information of the western interior then available. The delineation of the western  
interior of the northern plains was taken directly from Arrowsmith's map of 1795 and  
that of the Platte and Kansas watershed's from [Antoine] Soulard's upper course of  
the Missouri, however, was realigned to fit with Arrowsmith's segment of the  
Missouri. Several new tributaries of the Missouri, notably the Cheyenne and White  
Rivers, were derived from [Jean-Baptiste] Truteau's description. A large northeast-  
flowing tributary depicted west of the Mandan villages is suggestive of the  
Yellowstone. Its identification was probably derived from Truteau, who had  
interviewed Cheyenne Indians, and a Frenchman named [Pierre] Menard, who had**



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**resided among the Mandans for some fourteen years . . ." - Ralph Ehrenberg**

*Map of the Fort of New Madrid or Anse a La Graisse*

*Plan of Fort Des Ecores at Margot*

*Plan of Nogales*

*Chart of the Sources of the Mobile and of the River Yazoo. Including part of the Course of the  
Mississippi from the River Margot to the Natches*

*Town and Fort of Natchez*

*Plan of Fort Baton Rouge*

*Sketch of New Orleans taken from fort St. Charles*

**Rarity**

Collot's atlas is very rare on the market, especially so in the original French blue wrappers. We note only 3 examples of the atlas at auction in the past 50 years (2 of which have appeared twice).

**Detailed Condition:**

Folio. Original French blue pastepaper wrappers with printed title label "Voyage dans l'Amerique septentrionale - Atlas." Very rare thus, with spine chipped, somewhat loose and worn, but very clean and nice. Title and contents leaf in French. 36 engravings by Tardieu comprising: 11 fine maps (10 folding, one double-page), 14 engraved plans, 11 engraved plates (8 views and 3 portraits of Native Americans). An absolutely beautiful, unsophisticated copy in its original state.