



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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## A Plan of the Town of Newport in Rhode Island. Surveyed by Charles Blaskowitz, Engraved and Publish'd by Willm. Faden . . . Sept 1, 1777

**Stock#:** 0514mb  
**Map Maker:** Faden  
**Date:** 1777  
**Place:** London  
**Color:**  
**Condition:**  
**Size:** 14.25 x 13.25 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



### Description:

Excellent example of Charles Blaskowitz's *A Plan of the Town of Newport in Rhode Island* - the Most Historically Important printed map of Newport - published during the American Revolutionary War.

This rare map depicts the town and harbor of Newport, Rhode Island during the height of its importance in American history, revealing how it appeared in the early days of the American Revolution. Newport was, until the war, one of the busiest harbors in the Thirteen Colonies, critically occupying a vertex of the 'Triangle Trade' that connected America, the West Indies and Africa. It had a population in excess of 9,000, making it was one of the more significant urban centers in America. Importantly, the plan also served as the definitive map of record of the town during the American Revolution.

One of the most accurate and detailed American town plans to date, it delineates and names every street and includes the outlines of all built-up areas. The numerous quays that project into the harbor from Thames Street are also featured. A key, labeled 'References', identifies 19 sites of interest by letters (A to T). These include; (A) Trinity Church, Rhode Island's primary Anglican house of worship; (B-I) the 'Meeting Houses' of various other Christian congregations, (L) the Court House, (M) the Goal (O) the Redwoods Library, founded in 1747, it is today the oldest lending library still in circulation, (P) the great estate of Nathaniel Kay, a leading Loyalist resident, which overlooked the town and was one of the first of Newport's great houses, (Q) the Town School House, (R) the Market Houses, which sold exotic goods from



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all corners of the British Empire.

Site (K) 'Jews Synagogue', refers to the Touro Synagogue, founded in 1759, it today has the distinction of being the oldest existing Jewish house of worship in America. It is testament to the exceptional spirit of religious tolerance that prevailed in Newport. A sizable community of Sephardic Jews, fleeing persecution abroad, settled in Newport and quickly improved to the cultural and economic life of the town. Another sign of the community's contribution is the presence of 'Lopez's W[harf]' jutting into the harbor near the end of Church Street. This refers to the enterprise of Aaron Lopez (1731-82), a Portuguese Jew, who became a leading philanthropist and introduced the whale oil industry to the Newport, which proved to be major employer and source of revenue.

Another, feature (T) "battery raised by the Americans," notes the fortifications to the north of the town which were hastily leveled by the American forces in December 1776 in anticipation of town's capture by Britain's Royal Navy. Also depicted, is Goat Island, where Fort George guards the seaward approaches to the town.

The story of the creation of the present map is fascinating, for the surveys on which the plan is based were conducted as part of the largest and most impressive mapping program ever undertaken in the Western Hemisphere. In the wake of the French & Indian War, in 1763, the British Government decide that it would be necessary to execute the first scientific and systematic mapping of the colonies, the General Survey of British North America. Captain Samuel Holland was appointed to lead an expert team to map the coasts of the northern colonies, employing exacting trigonometric surveys, while identifying aspects of economic, social and political interest. The Northern General Survey commenced their endeavor in Atlantic Canada in 1765, methodically working southwards down along the coasts of New England. By the summer of 1774 they reached the shores of Rhode Island.

The timing of the General Survey's arrival in Rhode Island was critical, as the colony was in a state of political unrest, although not yet in outright rebellion. While Newport was one of the most important British colonial ports, it was also home to America's most determined and successful maritime smugglers. Great tensions had developed between the royal government and the citizenry, who generally supported the smugglers' efforts to evade Britain's high taxes and customs duties. Violent altercations occurred, such as the 'Gapee Incident' of 1772, when a local gang burned a British customs vessel, which had run aground. Royal officials realized that accurately mapping Newport, and Narragansett Bay in general, was of especial importance if Britain was to maintain control of the region.

Charles Blaskowitz (1743-1823) was selected for the premier assignment of mapping Newport and Narragansett Bay. He was born in Prussia, but immigrated as a teenager to Britain to take advantage of



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the seemingly infinite opportunities afforded by the Royal Army. Educated in cartography at the 'Drawing Room' of the Tower of London, he subsequently played a leading role in constructing the 'Murray Map' (1761), the monumental military survey of Quebec. In 1764, he was sent by the Royal Navy to reconnoiter Newport and Narragansett Bay. Although no example of his mapping from this occasion survives, knowledge from this venture surely must have aided his subsequent endeavors. Since then, he had served as one of Captain Holland's principals on the Northern General Survey, conducting the definitive mapping of various parts of New England and Atlantic Canada.

As noted in the diary of Ezra Stiles, a prominent local resident, dated October 25, 1774, "This day the Kings Surveyors [Blaskowitz, etc.] began to take the plan of the Town of Newport". Exacting trigonometric surveys of Newport and its environs placed the man-made features of the town within their accurate topographical context for the very first time. The original manuscript on which the present map was based appeared as a large inset entitled "A Plan of the Town of Newport and it's Environs" on Blaskowitz and Thomas Wheeler's "A Plan of Rhode Island" (drafted late in 1774), which is today preserved in the U.K. National Archives (London). The map was quickly dispatched to the Board of Trade in London where it would have been consulted by high-level administrators.

Not long after the original manuscript arrived in London, the American Revolution broke out in earnest. Newport soon fell under the complete control of the Continental forces, as Britain's power ebbed from all of the Thirteen Colonies. Wanting a printed plan of the town to disseminate for official use, the Board of Trade granted access to Blaskowitz's original manuscript to J.F.W. Des Barres, who at some point in 1776, printed *A Plan of Newport in the Province of Rhode Island*, as part of his sea atlas, *The Atlantic Neptune*. While attractively presented, it was issued primarily for naval use, and so omitted many important landward details.

Meanwhile, during the later summer of 1776, Britain mounted a dramatic reprise, seizing control of New York City after a massive amphibious invasion. Wanting access to another premier ice-free port to support their new position, a fleet of the Royal Navy under Captain Sir Peter Parker easily seized control of Newport on December 7, 1776.

Now that Newport had returned to British hands, it was decided that a highly detailed map, faithful to Blaskowitz's manuscript, was urgently required, both as an aid the British military and to inform the general public about this critical location. The manuscript was placed under the charge of William Faden, London's leading mapmaker and the official Geographer to King George III. The result was the present plan, exactly engraved, it was by far the period's most detailed and complete map of the Newport. Faden clearly also had access to recent intelligence from British forces in the field, as he updated his work



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from Blaskowitz's original with recent military details, such as the aforementioned destruction of the town's northern fortifications and the identification of a 'Powder Magazine', located a ways into the interior. Faden issued the plan separately, but also as part of his exceedingly rare *North American Atlas* (1777).

*A Plan of the Town of Newport* assumed great importance as the definitive map of the town used by both sides in the ongoing conflict. The harbor served as a key British naval base used to support the army and to attack enemy shipping. In August 1778, the British fended off a combined Franco-American naval and land attack on Newport, led by General John Sullivan and Admiral Comte d'Estaing. In October 1779, in need of shoring up their positions elsewhere, the British abandoned Newport. The following July, the town became the headquarters of the French commander, the Comte de Rochambeau, and served as the departure point for his famous march to Yorktown, Virginia, where in October 1781, the combined Franco-American forces scored the decisive victory which determined the outcome of the war.

The Blaskowitz-Faden plan of Newport is one of the great town plans of Colonial America, and the most historically important printed map of Newport, having been issued during the American Revolution. It rarely appears on the market, and the present example is in especially fine condition.

**Detailed Condition:**