



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

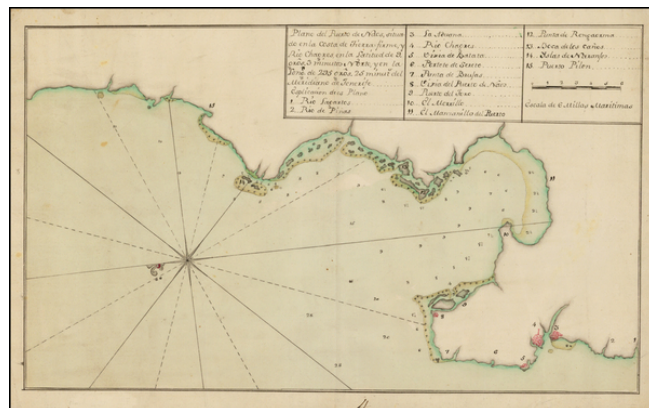
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[Panama / Mouth of Panama Canal] Plano del Puerto de Naos, situado en la cost de Tierra=firme, y Rio Chaores en la Latitud de 9 orox, 3 minutos Norte y en la Lono de 295 oros 25 minuts del Meridiano de Tenerife . . . (manuscript harbor plan)

Stock#: 36774
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1750 circa
Place: n.p.
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: VG+
Size: 18.5 x 11 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

A finely executed mid-18th century manuscript chart of the area of Panama's Caribbean coast which includes the mouth of the Chagres River, Limon Bay, and the future site of the port of Colon, the Atlantic terminus of the Panama Canal.

The chart captures the coastline, focused on the Bahia de Limon, with the northward direction roughly facing towards the left of the scene. The "Esplicacion", or legend labels 15 key sites; most notably 4. Rio Chagres (the site of Fort San Lorenzo) and 5. Real Aduana (the customs house), located across the river's mouth. The modern port of Colon, the Atlantic terminus of the Panama Canal, is located approximately where points 12 and 13 are labeled on this chart. While the work is anonymous, given its content and style, featuring coastal conventions and depth soundings, but limited topographical information, it was almost certainly made by a pilot in the service of the Armada Real. As will be explained, Chagres was a critically important port during the time that this chart was drafted, around 1750.

The Chagres region had long occupied a prominent place in the history of Panama. The Chagres River and the Bay of Limon were discovered by Columbus during his final voyage in 1502. Shortly after the conquest of Peru in 1534, the Spanish began exporting vast amounts of silver and gold from the region. During the rainy season, the gold was transported from Peru to the Caribbean via the Las Cruces Trail, a significant portion of which followed the Chagres River. As such, the area became a point of great interest for pirates, who began attacking the coast of Panama about 1560.

To protect the treasure shipments, the Spanish constructed Fort San Lorenzo, between 1587 and 1599, at the mouth of the Chagres River. The construction of the Real Aduana followed in 1630. Fort San Lorenzo



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would see considerable action and at one point was sacked by Henry Morgan (Morgan the Pirate) in 1670 and reconstructed in the 1680s.

During the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-42), the British Royal Navy made Panama's Caribbean coast one of their main targets. Admiral Edward Vernon sacked Portobello, then the other key treasure port in the region, in November 1739. On March 22, 1740, Vernon attacked Fort San Lorenzo, quickly securing its surrender. The British tried to level the fort's massive stone walls, but met with only limited success.

Following the war, the Spanish government decided to abandon Portobello and to strengthen Fort San Lorenzo, whereupon the fortifications were greatly expanded. The present chart appears to date from this key period. These fortifications survive to this day and have been declared a UNESCO heritage site, being described as "Magnificent examples of 17th- and 18th-century military architecture, these Panamanian forts on the Caribbean coast form part of the defence system built by the Spanish Crown to protect transatlantic trade."

As the 18th-century progressed, declining Peruvian silver yields combined with a preference for sailing around Cape Horn over taking the Panamanian overland route, led to the decline of Chagres. Fort San Lorenzo was converted into a prison.

It was only during the California Gold Rush (1848-1855) that the region returned to prominence. Steamboats took aspiring miners up the Chagres River, towards the short overland trip to Panama City and then on to awaiting ships headed for California. The flood of American prospectors turned the town into "Yanqui Chagres".

In 1855, Chagres's importance once again declined, this time in favor of the nearby port of Colon, which became the Atlantic terminus of the new Panama Railway. The line managed to transport passengers from the Atlantic to the Pacific in only 3 hours.

In 1904, American engineers took up the construction of the Panama Canal. Completed in 1914, its Atlantic terminus was Colon, transforming it into one of the world's busiest ports. In the process, the Chagres River was dammed in order to create Lake Gatun, the vast reservoir that makes up much of the canal's route.

The present map is truly significant, as early manuscript maps of Panama only very rarely appear on the market.



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Detailed Condition: