Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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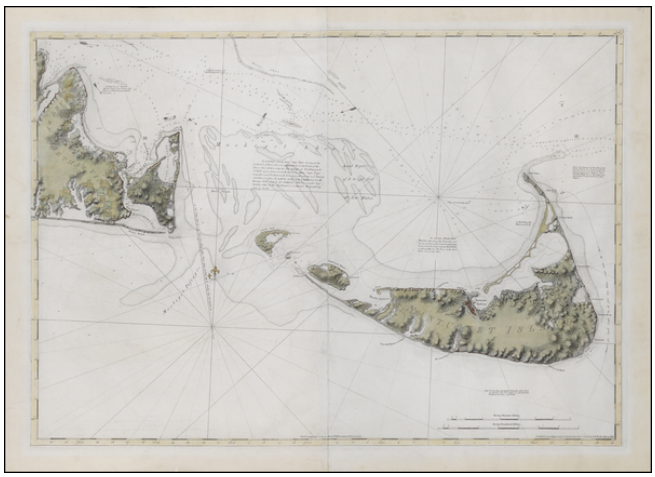
[Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard]

Stock#: 42756mb
Map Maker: Des Barres

Date: 1781
Place: London
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 42 x 29 inches

Price: SOLD



Description:

A superb example of the first and most highly sought after sea chart of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.

Des Barres's chart centers on Nantucket, eastern Martha's Vineyard and the surrounding waters, with particular attention given to the Sound separating the islands from Cape Cod. The detail is extraordinary, including both the surrounding waters as well as the island's natural and human topography. The hydrographic data includes soundings, shoals, rocks and other hazards, particularly north of the islands and in Muskeget Shoals. Several notes provide sailing directions for entering Nantucket Harbor, avoiding Muskeget Shoals, and navigating other difficult stretches of water. The terrestrial data includes hachuring and shading to indicate coastal and inland topography, roads, residences and even field boundaries on Martha's Vineyard. A tiny street plan of Nantucket Town is clearly visible, and numerous landmarks on both islands are identified by name.

The chart was first hurried into print in 1776, for use by British navigators during the opening months of the American Revolution. Des Barres repeatedly revised and improved the plate, pulling new impressions at least through 1781 and probably much later. These later states are the most desirable, as they include significant additional information and far more visually refined.

The present example is the seventh of the eight known states (per Henry Stevens), with the plate number "15" at top right and the imprint date changed to "Decr. 1st 1781" but without the islands' topography completely filled in as on the final state.

Des Barres' chart was the first published map of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. Its extraordinary

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accuracy and level of detail were not exceeded until the United States Coast Survey began to chart the area in the mid-19th century.

J.F.W. Des Barres and *The Atlantic Neptune*

Des Barres chart of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard was issued both separately and in *The Atlantic Neptune,* an atlas of charts and views of North American waters used by British navigators throughout the Revolution. The charts were of an extraordinarily high quality and remained the standard for decades, becoming the standard reference work for cartographic information used by American and European engravers and publishers for decades thereafter. On a broad scale basis, it was not until the United States Coast Survey commenced issuing maps in the middle of the 19th Century that a more detailed and systematic charting of the Northeast was made under the auspices of a single project.

The charts of the *Atlantic Neptune* which focus on New England were based on work overseen by Samuel Holland, a Dutch-born surveyor and engineer who entered British service during the French and Indian War. After the war, Holland had proposed "an accurate and just Survey… upon… a general scale and uniform plan" of North America east of the Mississippi. This was to be a "geodetic" survey following the most advanced methods then in use in Europe, but applied for the first time in North America: the locations of control points would be established by rigorous astronomical observation, intermediate areas pinpointed by triangulation, and details sketched in from direct observation.

Holland's proposal was approved by the British Colonial offices, and in 1764 Holland was named Surveyor General of both the Province of Quebec and the Northern District of North America, from the Potomac to the border with Canada. After several years work in the Canadian Maritimes, from 1770-1774, he focused on the New England coast, making his headquarters in Portsmouth. From Portsmouth, Holland sent out survey teams headed by his deputies Charles Blaskowitz, James Grant, George Sproule, Thomas Wheeler and Thomas Wright, utilizing the sloop *HMS Canceaux*.

Holland's finished surveys were sent to England, where Des Barres oversaw the work necessary for their engraving and publication. The demand for charts was high in those unsettled times, and Des Barres' operation soon occupied two townhouses and 20 assistants in compiling, drafting and correcting the charts. While *The Atlantic Neptune* was usually made up to order and had no standard collation, it ultimately extended to five sections: Nova Scotia, New England, the River and Gulf of St. Lawrence (based on the work of James Cook), the coast south of New York, and American coastal views.

Des Barres' Nantucket chart is very rare on the market and all-but unobtainable in such superb condition. The most recent example to change hands was an inferior, uncolored example at Rafael Osona Auctions for ca. $66,000 in 2014. The most recent impression recorded by *Antique Map Price Record* was sold by

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the firm of Martayan Lan in 1994.

Detailed Condition:
Old Color.