



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard  
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(858) 551-8500  
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## Oregon Question Letter, Annotated Pamphlet, Sketch Map, &c.

**Stock#:** 46314  
**Map Maker:** Alexander  
**Date:** 1843  
**Place:** Various  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** Various  
**Price:** \$ 4,800.00



### Description:

***Interesting small archive relating to the Oregon Question, Involving Significant British and American Characters.***

The present offering consists of the following

- A letter from **Sir George Augustus Wetherall** (Deputy Adjutant General of Canada) to **Sir James Edward Alexander**, dated 6 June or July (?) 1843, penned as the conflict over the Oregon Country was heating up.
- An annotated copy of Military Posts -- *Council Bluffs To The Pacific Ocean*, House Document 830, May 27, 1842, transmitted by **John Russell Bartlett** (future US-Mexico Boundary Commissioner), including a Washington Hood's *Map of the United States Territory of Oregon West of the Rocky Mountains*.
- An unsigned manuscript map of the Northeastern United States and Northeastern Canada, traced from Guillaume De L'Isle's map of Canada, likely related to the boundary dispute settled by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842.

### Historical Overview

According to the Convention of 1818, both American and British citizens' rights were to be honored in the Oregon Territory. At that time the North West Company (NWC), based in Montreal, was the main



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organizational presence in the area. However, when the NWC merged with its rival, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), in 1821, the economy and de-facto government shifted to a base in Britain, not its colony. The HBC saw the territory as a buffer zone to keep Americans out, as well as a place to profit from the fur trade. They operated from forts designed to oversee this trade, including their stronghold of Fort Vancouver (just north of the mouth of the Columbia, which enjoyed direct trade and communication with London), Fort George (on the site of a previous fort opened by the American Fur Company in 1811 in what is now Astoria, Oregon), and Fort Umpqua (Elkton, Oregon).

By 1843, however, a flood of American settlers had started to farm the Willamette Valley. They resented the HBC's monopoly even if they enjoyed protection from the forts and traded with company stores. It is unsurprising, therefore, that George Augustus Wetherall surveyed the "little brochure" sent to him by John Russell Bartlett, carefully, as the proposed military posts between Council Bluffs (Iowa) and the Pacific Ocean, would directly challenge HBC control and British power in the area. The annotations-which seem to be in Wetherall's hand-intimate as much, as they discuss the HBC's existing forts, close relations with local tribes, and the failure of the American Fur Company.

The pamphlet had originally been sent to James Edward Alexander, then a captain with the 14th Regiment, by John Russell Bartlett. Bartlett was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1805, but spent his formative years in Kingston, Canada. He returned to Providence in 1824, where he worked as a bank teller and was active in the city's flowering historical and library societies. Bartlett moved to New York in 1836 and in 1840 founded a bookselling and publishing house with partner Charles Welford, which specialized in foreign book sales. It was during this time that Bartlett sent the pamphlet to Alexander, most likely at the request of or through contacts he had made as a boy in Canada. Ironically, within less than 10 years, Bartlett would be appointed United States Boundary Commissioner, charged with overseeing the setting of the border between the United States and Mexico.

The pamphlet Bartlett sent shows American concern for western expansion-by this time understood as Manifest Destiny-toward a territory previously left to a handful of mountain men and missionaries. Interestingly, the author of the report, Nathanael Greene Pendleton of Ohio, also played a role in the early history of Oregon. Pendleton was an Ohio lawyer who served as a Whig representative to the Twenty-Seventh Congress (March 4, 1841-March 3, 1843). His son, George H. Pendleton, was also active in politics and was the Democratic nominee for Vice-President in 1864. Oregon, officially made a state in 1859, voted Republican (National Union) in that election, but by a narrow margin. The eastern counties in particular went Democratic, including Umatilla County. In 1868, the county commissioners named a new town along the Umatilla River for the younger Pendleton, a town now famous for its woolen mills.

Wetherall's concern about possible American fortifications and settlements, most likely shared by Alexander and other British officers stationed in Canada, was well-founded. In 1840, there were 150



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Americans in the territory; by 1845, there were 5,000. However, Wetherall, who seems to have been involved in the negotiations over the Canadian-American boundary, is optimistic that the HBC forts would make for a British claim as far south as the Columbia. The HBC was less optimistic. In 1842, they had transferred their main fort in the region from Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia, north to Fort Victoria, on Vancouver Island. It does not seem that Wetherall was aware of this move, at least based on the contents of this letter.

Between 1843 and 1845, American farmers established the Oregon Provisional Government, which used American law and was opposed to the HBC monopoly. James K. Polk used the Oregon issue as one of his campaign pillars, enlisting the catchy phrase "54'40" or Fight!" to express American desire for the entirety of the Oregon country. In the end, it was the 49th parallel that was chosen in the Oregon Treaty of 1846.

By that time, Wetherall had returned to Montreal to serve as deputy adjutant-general of the British forces in Canada and Alexander was soon to be aide-de-camp to the commander of British troops in Canada. Bartlett was still running his publishing house in New York. The publishing business exposed him to many famous contacts in the literary world, including Edgar Allen Poe and Albert Gallatin. Bartlett published his philological opus, *Dictionary of Americanisms*, in 1848, before returning to Providence, in 1850. From 1850 to 1853, he served as the United States Boundary Commissioner in charge of the US-Mexico Border, as mandated in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848). During this time Bartlett mixed his philological interests with the ethnographical, recording words from local indigenous languages and gathering materials for a travel account published in 1854. From 1855 to 1872, Bartlett served as Secretary of State of Rhode Island. He also became librarian of the new John Carter Brown Library and created a detailed catalogue for Brown's Americana collection.

Finally, it is interesting that Wetherall refers to the Red River Colony as a possible "thorn in the side" of the US. The Colony was a project of the Fifth Earl of Selkirk, who was granted the land in what is now the upper Midwest of the United States and the Canadian province of Manitoba, by the HBC in the early nineteenth century. US annexationists tried to incorporate the Red River Colony around 1870, but they were largely unsuccessful. Combined with the Oregon boundary dispute and the Maine-Canada negotiations concluded in 1842, the creation of the northern border of the United States was a hot-button issue from Atlantic to Pacific.

As with all historical documents, this collection of map, letter, and pamphlet offers more questions than answers:

- Are the annotations from Wetherall, or another to whom Alexander lent the pamphlet, or from Alexander himself?
- Why would Bartlett send the pamphlet, as he was a US citizen, albeit with Canadian ties?



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- Why include this manuscript map of a different region?
- How does the manuscript map relate to the other materials and when did it join them?
- Was the sender harkening back to a previous boundary negotiation with the US?
- How does the 1842 Maine-Canada boundary negotiation fit into this story?
- What does The Archive Related To The Red River Colony annexation attempt?
- Where was Wetherall writing from?
- Where precisely was Alexander at this time?

Archival research may solve some of these questions, but others will have to be left unresolved.

Note: Bartlett's papers are held by the Rhode Island Historical Society and the John Carter Brown Library. Sources for information included in this report came from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, the Canadian Dictionary of National Biography, American National Biography Online, the Oregon Encyclopedia, the Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest (University of Washington), the Hudson's Bay Company, and various local history societies.

**Letter Transcription (dated June or July 6, 1843):**

*My dear Sir James -*

*This little brochure requires careful reading & I have detained it I fear too long. Brother Jonathan [i.e., the United States] makes out a very good ex parte case. Altho he assumes forts as the basis of his argument. I doubt whether England having other more matters to settle at home, will for a time trouble herself about a region so remote. The Hudson Bay Company are [?established] there at present & strong enough to resist any permanent location of the Americans. The Indians are their allies. They will be encouraged to molest any fort that may be established after years of squabbling. Our fort may be compelled to interfere. When I presume the claim of America (what seems to be just) of the Country South of the Columbia ie. separated from ours by a line drawn down the middle of that river will be granted & then notwithstanding their bluster, they offer to me to acknowledge by only installing one post on the East of the Rocky Mountains near the head waters of the Missouri & another at the mouth (left bank I presume) of the Columbia.*

*Where exactly is the Hudson Bay town of Red River. It is as large as Montreal I hear, & must be a thorn in the side of Jonathan [the United States]. As affording a fine affair(?) in place of arms for all hostile operations east of the R.[iver] M[issouri].*

*Ever sincerely yours,*



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*G. Wetherall*

#### Sir James Edward Alexander

Major-General Sir James Edward Alexander of Westerton (October 1803 - 1885) was a Scottish soldier, traveller and author.

In 1820, he joined the British East India Company's army, transferring into the British Army in 1825. As aide-de-camp to the British envoy to Persia, he was involved during the war between Persia and Russia in 1826 and in 1829 was present in the Balkans during the Russo-Turkish War, 1828-1829. From 1832 to 1834, he witnessed the War of the Two Brothers in Portugal, and in 1835, he took part in the 6th Cape Frontier War in South Africa, as aide-de-camp and private secretary to Sir Benjamin d'Urban.

In 1838, he was made a Knight Bachelor for his services. From 1841 to 1855, he served in Canada, among others in the staff of Sir William Rowan. Alexander was stationed in London, Canada West from 1841 to 1843. During his time in Canada, he was the co-author of *Canada, As It Was, Is And May Be* (London, 1852), with Sir Richard H. Bonnycastle. The book is "Respectfully Inscribed To Major General Sir. George Augustus Wetherall, K.C.B., K.H. The Adjutant General . . . "

During the Crimean War, he commanded the 14th Regiment of Foot as lieutenant-colonel in the Siege of Sevastopol in 1855 and held an important command during the Land Wars in New Zealand in 1862. He retired from active service in 1877 and in 1881 was given the honorary rank of general.

#### George Augustus Wetherall

General Sir George Augustus Wetherall (1788 - 1868) was a senior British Army officer. He commanded the Royals' 2nd battalion in Madras until 1831, then in the United Kingdom, 1831-36, and in Canada, 1836-43.

General Wetherall is most famous for his services during the rebellion in Canada of 1837-38, in the Battle of Saint-Charles, a battle part of the Lower Canada Rebellion fought in November 1837, between Great Britain and Lower Canada Patriote rebels.

Wetherall served as Deputy Adjutant-General in Canada from 1843 to 1850. In 1854, he was made Adjutant-General to the Forces, which post he held until 1860 when he took command of the Northern District of England.

At the expiration of his services in 1865 he was appointed Governor of the Royal Military College,



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Sandhurst. He became colonel of the 84th regiment in 1854, was knighted in 1856, made a lieutenant general in 1857, and appointed as Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath in 1865.

**John Russell Bartlett**

Bartlett was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on October 23, 1805. From 1807 to 1824 he lived in Kingston, Canada. From 1824 to 1836 he lived in Providence, where he worked first as a clerk in his uncle's dry goods store (1824-1828), then as a bookkeeper and acting teller at the Bank of North America (1828-1831), and finally as the first cashier of the Globe Bank (1831-1836).

In 1831, he was one of the founders of the Providence Athenaeum and was also elected to membership in the Rhode Island Historical Society. The following year he was ordering books for the newly founded Providence Franklin Society, an early lyceum. Over the course of his life he became involved with a number of other organizations including the New England Historic Genealogical Society, and being elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1856.

Bartlett moved to New York City in 1836. In 1840 he and his friend Charles Welford, started the bookselling and publishing firm of Bartlett and Welford. While in New York, he became friends with a number of leading intellectuals, including Albert Gallatin. In 1842, he helped Gallatin found the American Ethnological Society. Bartlett later served as the Foreign Corresponding Secretary of the organization.

From 1850 to 1853, Bartlett was the United States Boundary Commissioner responsible for surveying the boundary between the United States and Mexico.

After being superseded by another commissioner upon the accession of President Franklin Pierce, he published *A Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora and Chihuahua* in 1854, which contains much valuable scientific and historical material concerning the area.

From 1855 to 1872, Bartlett was Secretary of State of Rhode Island. In the later years of his life he became the librarian for the John Carter Brown Library and collated an exhaustive catalog of the collection that was published in four volumes.

**Detailed Condition:**