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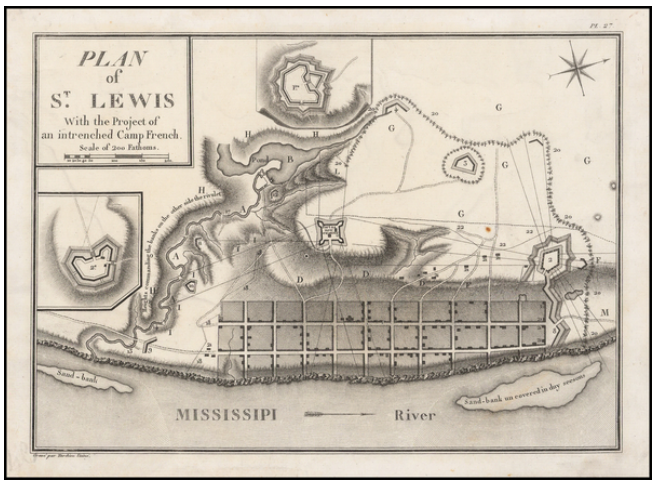
Plan of St. Lewis With the Project of an intrenched Camp French

Stock#: 49962mb
Map Maker: Collot

Date: 1804
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 11 x 5.6 inches

Price: SOLD



Description:

One of the First Printed Maps of An American City West of the Mississippi River

Collot's map of St. Louis provides a pre-Lewis & Clark look at one of the first cities West of the Mississippi River in the Transmississippi West.

It is unquestionably one of the earliest town plans of any town west of the Mississippi and one of the earliest obtainable maps of St. Louis and one of the first printed maps of the city (although released 20 years after it was first printed for reasons known only to Collot's widow).

The map shows an early town plan (consisting of 33 city blocks), early buildings, fortifications, streets and roads, and the Heights commanding the banks on the other side of the rivulet. A Sand-bank uncovered in duy (dry) seesons is also noted). The center point is the Fort (as now existing). Significant detail is given treating the lines of sight (and shot) from the various fortifications. Rumsey notes that the map pre-dates the Louisiana purchase in 1803.

When Collot visited St. Louis in 1796 it was a small settlement under Spanish control since the end of the French and Indian War. It held some 600 inhabitants, all French speaking and describes by Collot as "less degenerate than the race which dwell on the American side." Collot recognized its strategic significance:

> *The position of St. Lewis, five leagues from the mouth of the Missouri, and eight from that of the Illinois, considered in a military point of view, is one of the best on the river Mississippi.... If we consider St. Lewis in a commercial point of view, we shall find its position still more fortunate. (p. 249)*

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Collot was surprised by the poor state of its fortifications and tiny garrison of 17 men, from which "it might easily be presumed… that Spain had the intention of abandoning Upper Louisiana." (p. 248) To remedy the situation, Collot in the *Journey* proposes two alternative plans for fortifying town. These are described in the text in some detail and illustrated on the map offered here.

Although French General Victor Collot traveled through the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys in 1796, his two-volume account was not published until 1826. During his inspection tour, Collot observed the topography, resources, and people of these American and Spanish-held lands, which he illustrated with regional maps, town plans, and views in an accompanying atlas. His plan of St. Louis displayed the town's military fortifications, which he found sadly lacking. But the image also reveals the town emerging as the gateway for the fledgling Missouri River fur trade. The work was completed in 1804 but delayed 20 years by the death of Collot. The work represented a significant step forward in the mapping of the regions explored.

This is one of 23 maps which appeared in the Atlas volume, of which only 100 were printed in English. The work is of extreme rarity and very important in the history of American Cartography.

Overview of Collot's Spy Mission, Report & Maps

Acting under instructions from Citizen Adet, French Minister to the United States, General George Henri Victor Collot undertook a secret reconnaissance in 1796, of the western American frontier. 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 constructed a large number of exceptionally detailed manuscript maps and views of the region that he traversed. Many of these were groundbreaking, containing never before recorded information about a wilderness that was just beginning to undergo settlement.

Completed at nearly the exact time that Lewis & Clark were departing St. Louis, up the Missouri River, Collot's maps were engraved in Paris in 1804, but publication was suppressed due to Napoleon's sale of Louisiana to the United States the previous year. The Louisiana Purchase effectively ended any possibility that the region could be acquired by France. As a result of the changing politics and Collot's death, his report and maps did not come to market until 1826, when they were issued in a limited number under the title Voyage dans l'Amerique Septentrionale . . .

A nineteenth-century bookseller called Collot's work "one of the most famous, most important, and rarest of all books of Mid-Western Explorations." Eberstadt pronounced it "extraordinarily rare." Its rarity is due to the supposed deliberate destruction of all but three hundred French and one hundred English copies by the publisher, who had purchased the edition from Collot's estate, hoping to increase its value.

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The Supression of Collot's Report & Maps

Following his return to France, Collot set out to prepared his report and maps from notes and sketches taken during his journey. In 1800, Napoleon acquired Louisiana from Spain, Collot, and Adet were 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 decoded to sell Louisiana to the United States.

Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to sell Lousiana 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 supress his reconaissance, rather than publish its results and overtly admit to the Americans the full scope and extent of Collot's espionage work during his visit.

Ironically, the supression of Collot's maps has a simultaneous parallel during Thomas Jefferson's administration, when 4 expeditions were sent out by Jefferson to explore the Louisiana Purchase and the Transmississippi West (Lewis & Clark, Zebullon Pike, Dunbar-Hunter and Freeman-Custis expeditions). In April 1806, Thomas Freeman, surveyor, and Dr. Peter Custis, naturalist, undertook an expedition at the request of Thomas Jefferson's administration through parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma. They were accompanied by a military escort under the command of Capt. Richard Sparks. At the same time that Zebullon Pike was exploring westward into the Louisiana Territory, Freeman and Custis traveled along the Red River to a site in present-day Texas in the vicinity of the old Caddo villages, where they were stopped by a force of Spanish cavalry protecting the Spanish claims to an ill-defined boundary of the Louisiana Purchase. After a brief skirmish, Freeman and Custis withdrew.

While a report of the 1806 Freeman-Custis expedition was published and a map prepared by Nicholas King, the political sensitivity surrounding the expedition was such that the report of this southern expedition into Texas was kept secret, with only a few copies printed. Nicholas King's map of the expedition, which provided physical proof of the US Government's encroachments into Spanish Texas, was supressed completely, with no known examples of the map surviving until an example was discovered in about 1877 in the Custis papers and a second example was discovered in the past decade, which had been owned by another early American explorer, Washington Hood (1808-1840).

Detailed Condition: