



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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[Printed on Textile] Plan of the City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia. ceded by the States of Virginia and Maryland to the United States of America, and by them established as the Seat of their Government after the Year. MDCCC.

Stock#: 53437
Map Maker: Ellicott
Date: 1795 circa
Place: Philadelphia
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 21 x 23 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Textile Printing of the First Official Map of Washington D.C. -- With Portrait of George Washington, President of the United States.

Rare textile printed example of Andrew Ellicott's seminal Plan of Washington, the first official map of the City of Washington, printed on fabric, with a large portrait of George Washington at the top left.

Threads of History describes the map as "Probably American," listing a date of 1800-1810. With Washington named as "President of the United States," it would seem just as likely that the map was printed before the end of his Presidency.

Washington DC and the Ellicott Map

The site of the permanent American capital remained unsettled for years after the United States gained its independence from Great Britain. Prior to 1790 Congress met variously at Philadelphia, Lancaster and York, Pennsylvania; Annapolis and Baltimore, Maryland; Princeton and Trenton, New Jersey; and New York City.

The location of the permanent capital was not confirmed until the Residence Act of 1790, which provided



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for a district not more than 10 miles square along the Potomac River, "at some place between the mouths of the Eastern Branch and the Connogocheague." Passage of the Act was made possible by the Compromise of 1790, in which southern states agreed to back Alexander Hamilton's plan for federal assumption of state debts in return for the latter's support for locating the capital along the Potomac.

In January 1791, President Washington announced that the capital district would be a diamond-shaped tract, 10 miles per side, roughly centered on the confluence of the Potomac and Eastern Branch (Anacostia) Rivers. Andrew Ellicott was engaged to conduct a topographical survey of the area, while Pierre L'Enfant was hired to develop a plan for the capital city itself. L'Enfant was a French artist and engineer who had served as a volunteer during the Revolution, and was sufficiently well connected that he had been asked to design the seal for the Society of the Cincinnati. He was brilliant but difficult, so much so that George Washington eventually fired him in 1792 and engaged Andrew Ellicott to complete the project. Ellicott, in turn, used L'Enfant's design as the basis for his plan of the city.

Upon completion of his drawings, Ellicott forwarded his manuscript plan to the firms of Thackara & Vallance in Philadelphia and Samuel Hill in Boston. Each firm was engaged to engrave and publish the plan as quickly as possible, in order that it might be distributed to facilitate the sale of land in the new city. Before publishing the large-scale "official" plans, each firm released smaller versions, which appeared as plates in *The Universal Asylum And Columbian Magazine* (Thackara & Vallance, published March 1792) and the *Massachusetts Magazine* (Hill, May 1792). The full size engraved versions of the large-scale, "official" plan were not ready until the summer of that year.

This boldly engraved plan preserves L'Enfant's vision of a grand capital on the European model, with broad avenues, large public squares and dramatic sightlines, all designed to make the most of the site's topography and its splendid riverside setting. The intent was to convey the grandeur and permanence of the national government, which at the time was all of three years old, boasted a bureaucracy of perhaps 200 employees, and rested on a Constitution that was feared as much as it was venerated. This vision was ultimately realized, but few would have predicted it at the time. In 1792, the capital site was humid, swampy and fetid and would remain so for years, and its grand buildings rose in the midst of a sea of mud.

Rarity

We are aware of only one other example on the market in recent decades.

Detailed Condition:

Drawer Ref:

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Soiling and minor dampstaining as illustrated. Affixed to an archival backing board for framing.