



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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[Wisconsin Territory] New Boston [with papers related to Detroit-based investors in the paper city.]

Stock#: 58241
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1836
Place: Detroit
Color: Pen & Ink
Condition: Fair
Size: 37.5 x 25 inches
Price: \$7,500.00



Description:

A Paper City in the Wisconsin Territory -- and the Detroit Investors Who Fell For It.

This small archive is comprised of a large pen and ink manuscript map and assorted documents related to the paper city of "New Boston", which was formed by Detroit-based speculators just before the organization of the Wisconsin Territory. The map and supporting documents, which run from April 1836 to January 1837 (Wisconsin Territory was formed July 3, 1836), paint a picture of frenzied interest in the development of the Wisconsin Territory, then at the bleeding edge of the American frontier. The papers show a series of transactions in which the wealthier citizens of Detroit sold parcels in the paper city among themselves at ever increasing prices.

The archive includes various modern documents analyzing the New Boston owners and land transfers. This analysis was prepared by a previous owner.

New Boston, Wisconsin Territory

New Boston was intended to sit on the southern shore of Green Bay, not far from the town of Green Bay, which was well established in the 1830s. Surprisingly, the historical record is practically devoid of mention of New Boston. The plans for the city did not result in settlement of any kind, nor was the townsite, which was just up the bay from Green Bay, used for another settlement. The present archive illuminates the genesis of the paper city and captures it midway through its "boom" but we are left to guess what became of its speculators and their investments.

Land Speculation in the Newly-Formed Wisconsin Territory



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This map, and the land speculation that led to its production, have their roots in the 1836 creation of the Wisconsin Territory. The Territory was authorized in 1835 when the populations of Crawford County, Brown County, and Michilimackinac County had grown large enough to justify splitting the region from Michigan, which it had been a part of since 1818.

The impending creation of the Territory led to a host of land speculations, some of which fared better than others. For instance, James Duane Doty, a Michigan legislator and agent from John Jacob Astor who led the effort to create Wisconsin Territory, invested in and eventually helped create Madison, WI. The Wisconsin Historical Society entry on the creation of the Territory relates the illuminating story of how the capitol was founded:

Doty, meanwhile, had traveled to the land office in Green Bay in April 1836 and purchased with a partner the 1,000 acres where downtown Madison now stands. He soon found a third partner, who put in another 360 acres, and the trio formed a corporation with 24 shares worth \$100 each. On his way to Belmont that fall, Doty engaged surveyor John Suydam to quickly assess the site and map out a hypothetical city. If the territorial delegates chose it for the capital, Doty and his partners would earn a windfall by selling town lots to settlers and speculators.

On November 23, 1836, the delegates began to debate nineteen possible sites, each of which had advocates like Doty who hoped to get rich quick. Doty lobbied aggressively for votes, however, even sending a wagon to Dubuque for buffalo robes, which he handed out to the freezing legislators, and apparently promising choice Madison lots to undecided voters at discount prices. Madison's uncontroversial location and Doty and Suydam's attractive map of a modern city (named for a much-admired Founding Father who had just died) also helped attract votes. When the dust settled on November 28, the territorial legislature had chosen Madison for its capital.

Government surveyors had already laid out the township and section lines, but now the city proper had to be platted. Doty hired a young New Yorker, Franklin Hatheway, for that work, and in the summer of 1837 the city began to take shape on an isthmus between two lakes. The capitol grounds were established atop its highest hill, major streets were laid out, buildings were erected, and speculators as far away as New York and Washington bought lots. Doty and his two partners ultimately brought in \$35,510 on their investment of \$2,400.

The speculators were right to be optimistic; in 1836 Wisconsin's population was 11,683, in 1846 it was 155,277, and by 1850 (just after statehood) the population was 304,456.

Related Manuscript



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There is one other known map of New Boston, also from 1836, recorded in a negative photocopy held by the Wisconsin Historical Society and the University of Wisconsin. The two maps are probably related, as they share roughly the same layout and details.

Detailed Condition:

The manuscript map executed on four joined sheets of thin wove paper watermarked "G & Co" (an 1830s American watermark). The map drawn in iron gall ink, or some similar oxidizing ink, resulting in some paper cracking (see image). Despite the extent of the cracking, very little of the actual image is wanting; some pieces, including of the border, are present in a separate mylar sleeve.