



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
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**The Harbour of Charles Town in South-Carolina from the Surveys of Sr. Jas. Wallace
Captain in his Majesty's Nave & Others with A View of the Town from the South Shore
of Ashley River.**

Stock#: 63670
Map Maker: Des Barres
Date: 1777
Place: London
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 24.5 x 33 inches
Price: \$37,500.00



Description:

Magnificent Revolutionary War Reconnaissance Chart of Charleston, South Carolina from The Atlantic Neptune

Spectacular Revolutionary-era chart of the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina, based on British surveys taken in the weeks prior to the unsuccessful British attack on Charleston / Battle of Sullivan's Island in June 1776. Des Barres chart of Charleston is the first of his three charts of the area and the first major British wartime reconnaissance of Charleston Harbor.

At the outset of the war, Charleston was without question the most important port in the Southern British Colonies. Held by the Americans, the taking of Charleston was essential to the British War efforts. The



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approach to Charleston's harbor from the sea is hazardous in the extreme, and the British would have been desperate for up-to-date, accurate hydrographic data.

Blessed by a fine harbor and proximity to the Lowcountry indigo and rice plantations, Charleston, South Carolina was the wealthiest city in Britain's North American Colonies. During the American Revolution it was much coveted by the British and was the target of two major campaigns. In the first, which culminated in the June 1776 Battle of Sullivan's Island, the Americans, led by General Charles Lee, withstood a British attack on the fortifications guarding the outer harbor. In 1779, the city would eventually fall to the British after a month-long siege.

Offered here is a rare and important chart of Charleston and its immediate surroundings, based on surveys conducted by the British navy during the failed campaign of 1776. The chart depicts Charleston and its large and complex harbor, at the confluence of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, along with several miles of coastline. Hundreds of soundings are given, with a heavy concentration around Charleston Bar and at the inner harbor and Ashley River. The treacherous channel through Charleston Bar is shown, which required an approach from the east, followed by a sharp northward turn to avoid Cummins Point. The city itself is shown, its central square, fortifications and outlying neighborhoods clearly visible.

Des Barres' chart is finished with a fine birdseye view of Charleston, drawn from the south shore of the Ashley River. The city's harbor-side fortifications are clearly visible, as is the steeple of St. Michael's Church, built in the 1750s.

Per the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich), this is the second state of the chart, with the view of the city completely re-engraved. In the third state Sullivan's Island is re-engraved and the view rendered in aquatint.

Following its completion in 1777, it would become the primary reconnaissance work for Charleston and unquestionably utilized by the British in the planning and execution of the subsequent siege in 1779.

The Battle of Sullivan's Island

As shown on the chart, the narrow harbor entrance forced approaching vessels to pass close to the southern end of Sullivan's Island. In March 1776 Colonel William Moultrie, commander of the South Carolina militia, had the island occupied and ordered construction of a long, low fortification of palmetto logs. An assault on the city from the sea required neutralizing the fort as a precondition for landing troops in the city.



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A British force under General Henry Clinton and Admiral Peter Parker arrived off the coast of Charleston Harbor in June of 1776. Recognizing the significance of Sullivan's Island, Clinton planned a two-pronged attack. He placed a force on Long Island just north of Sullivan Island, with the intention of fording the channel separating the two and attacking the fort by land, while the fleet bombarded it from the seaward side.

The attack took place on June 28 but was successfully repelled by the South Carolinians. As indicated on this chart, the channel between Long and Sullivan's Islands was no shallower than seven feet at low tide, and Clinton's forces were essentially marooned during the battle. Meanwhile, the fleet's bombardment of the fort failed to damage its resilient palmetto-log walls, while three British frigates ran aground on a sandbar. After heavy losses, Clinton and Parker abandoned the attack and sailed north, where they would capture New York City in the fall of 1776.

Is James Wallace Truly the Chart's Author?

The chart cites as its source the "Surveys of Sr. Jas. Wallace Captn. In his Majestys Navy & Others." Wallace (1731-1803) had entered the Navy in 1746, made Lieutenant in 1753, Commander in 1762, and Post Captain in 1771. Most of the first four decades of his career were spent on the American Station, and he and his ships saw much action during the Revolution. However, we locate no evidence to suggest that he was in fact present at Charleston in June 1776. All evidence suggests that he was in the New York and Halifax area, commanding the *HMS Rose*.

In July 1776 Wallace took command of the *HMS Experiment*, 50 guns. This vessel had seen action at Charleston, suffering serious damage and dozens of fatalities, while its Captain Alexander Scott was severely wounded. After taking command, Wallace participated in the taking of New York City. We surmise that upon taking command of the *Experiment* from Scott, Wallace took possession of a stash of hydrographic surveys of Charleston Harbor that had been in Scott's possession. When Wallace was sent to England with dispatches in early 1777, he would have had an opportunity to deliver these to London, providing J.F.W. Des Barres, who at the time was in London producing *The Atlantic Neptune* with access to the surveys (more on which below). Why Des Barres chose to credit Wallace with the survey work is not known.

It is worth noting that Wallace is credited as the artist of an aquatint entitled *The Phoenix and the Rose, Engaged by the Enemy's Fire Ships and Galleys* (1778), which also appeared in *The Atlantic Neptune*. In that case Wallace, commanding the *Experiment*, was present at the event depicted, which took place on



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August 16, 1776 on the lower Hudson River.

Ironically, Wallace's career during the American Revolution would end in September 1779, off the coast of South Carolina, when his ship, the *HMS Experiment*, would become disabled and be seized by 3 French ships on September 24, 1779.

The Atlantic Neptune

The chart was issued in *The Atlantic Neptune*, an atlas of North American waters published in London by J.F.W. Des Barres and used by British navigators throughout the American Revolution. The charts were of an extraordinarily high quality, remained the standard for decades, and were often copied and reissued by American and European engravers and publishers.

Copies of the Neptune were apparently made up to order, and new charts, maps and views were being produced throughout the Revolutionary years, and there was thus no standard collation. The most complete versions extended to five volumes, covering in turn 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. The volumes integrated nautical charts, recognition views and sailing directions to provide seamen with multiple, (hopefully) complementary data sets for navigating the often difficult waters off the East Coast and Gulf of Mexico.

The Harbour of Charles Town in South-Carolina is just one of three charts in the *Atlantic Neptune* related to Charleston. The others, *A Sketch of the Environs of Charlestown in South Carolina* and *A Sketch of the Operations before Charlestown the Capital of South Carolina*, were both prepared after the British capture of the town in 1780 and are based on surveys taken at that time.

In all, a rare, the present chart is an informative and visually appealing depiction of one of the most important harbors in British North America, shedding light on an important American victory in the early years of the American Revolution.

Detailed Condition:

Original watercolor view. Minor offset and soiling, top and left margins trimmed close with some loss to left outer neat line.