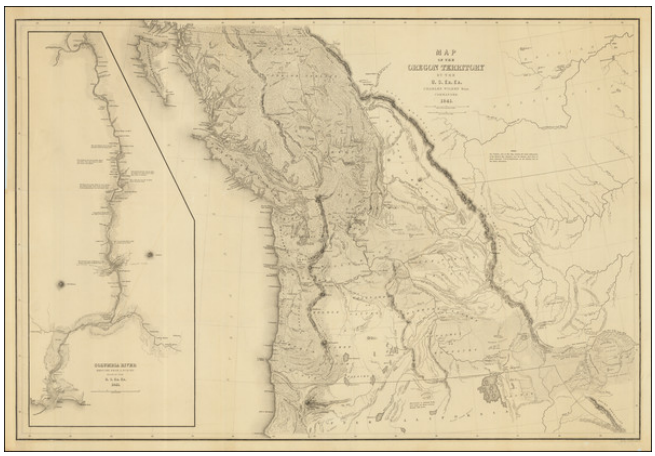
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Map of the Oregon Territory By the U.S. Ex.Ex. Charles Wilkes Esqr. Commander. 1841.



Stock#: 76806
Map Maker: Wilkes

Date: 1841 (1844)
Place: New York
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 35 x 23 inches

Price: SOLD

Description:

First American Map of Oregon Territory and The Pacific Northwest

Nice example of this important map of the Oregon Territory, made as part of the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition, also known as U.S. Ex. Ex., the largest and longest United States' exploratory expedition.

The map shows the results of the first American surveys of the Columbia River and Puget Sound. This larger edition, published in a limited print run, is quite rare. The result is the most important and accurate map of the period and a map of considerable importance in the history of the cartography of the region.

The map shows an intricately detailed coastline and terrain stretching from just north of the 54th parallel, which U.S. Ex. Ex. commander and surveyor Charles Wilkes thought should be the northern boundary of the Oregon Territory, to Cape Mendocino in California. The Cascade Range is well delineated, as are the riverine systems. The officers of U.S. Ex. Ex. not only surveyed 800 miles of the coast, but they also explored overland in three groups, which explains the detail inland. The toponyms are split between European names given by Hudson's Bay Company traders, previous naval expeditions like Vancouver's, and the U.S. Ex. Ex. itself, as well indigenous place names.

To the left is a large inset of the Columbia River. The officers surveyed up the Columbia River and an overland group continued all the way to the mission at Walla Walla. This inset, oriented to the east, shows the river from the mission to the notorious bar at the mouth of the river. A notable feature is the many "Indian village" sites dotting the river's edge, showing how populated the region was before Europeans and Americans came up the river.

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Wilkes, the primary architect of this and the other maps made on the voyage, drew upon the information provided in recent maps by Hood, Arrowsmith and Parker, as well as information from Jedidiah Smith and Peter Skene Ogden. In a note in northeast he mentions that, for the western portion of the map, he relied heavily on the information of the Hudson's Bay Company traders, whom he met on an overland foray, and, for the east, on the recently returned overland exploration expedition of John C. Fremont and the United States Topographical Corps.

United States South Seas Exploring Expedition (U.S. Ex. Ex.)

By the 1830s, the United States was eager to learn more about the Pacific Northwest, an area that had been contested by Britain for decades. The first boundary negotiation took place in 1818 and, by the late 1830s, streams of American immigrants had begun to make their way west in wagon trains, drawing the boundary question into sharp relief.

Additionally, the young nation craved international recognition like that garnered for Britain by Cook and for France by La Perouse. Leaders in Washington thought that if they mounted their own large-scale naval voyage of exploration, they would be considered as equals on the international intellectual stage. Despite enthusiasm in some corners, after initially approved in 1836 the voyage floundered due to lack of support from the conservative United States Navy. Eventually, Martin van Buren, who had inherited the project when he became President, appointed Secretary of War Joel Poinsett to take charge of the operation. Poinsett, in turn, chose Lieutenant Charles Wilkes (1798-1877) to head the squadron.

Wilkes was forty years old when selected to lead U.S. Ex. Ex. Although he had little command experience, a shortcoming that would become a liability while at sea, he was one of the country's premier nautical surveyors; at the time he was chosen he was heading the Depot of Charts and Instruments in Washington D. C.

Wilkes was given six ships to command-one of, if not the, largest exploratory expedition ever mounted. Additionally, he selected a corps of nine scientists to accompany the mission and he put himself in charge of the physical sciences, surveying, astronomy, meteorology, and nautical science. Other scientists included Titian Peale, son of Charles Wilson Peale, and James Dwight Dana. The two artists included on the roster, Alfred Agate and James Drayton, got to use a new invention, a camera lucida, which projected an image on paper for tracing. Surveying, however, was Wilkes' top priority, a preference that continually frustrated his fellow scientists.

The squadron left August 18, 1838. First, they sailed for Madeira, then round Cape Horn and up the western coast of South America before setting off across the Pacific to Sydney. Then, the ships turned south to explore Antarctica, the last great unknown continent of the world. Afterward, they stopped at

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Hawaii en route to the Pacific Northwest, where they conducted the surveys for this map in 1841. Then, the squadron crossed the Pacific again, sailed through the Philippines and Borneo, around the Cape of Good Hope and back to New York on June 10, 1842.

Publications and Outcomes of U.S. Ex. Ex.

Upon their return, Wilkes himself oversaw the preparation of the thousands of pages of data and notes for publication. He also had to contend with a court martial about his behavior and dispensing of punishments while at sea, although he was acquitted of all but one charge. Congress was also interested in the results of the voyage and sought to control the distribution of the narrative and subsequent reports. They limited publication to 100 lavish copies which were allocated to each of the states, allies of the United States, the Library of Congress, the Naval Lyceum, and the principal officers of the voyage. However, as print runs could not be smaller than 250, additional copies lacking the seal of the United States were also distributed by private booksellers.

The first official publications to appear were Wilkes rambling five-volume narrative of the voyage, accompanied by a folio atlas, in 1844. This map appeared in that atlas. A further 19 volumes were prepared over the course of 30 years, each on a different scientific topic, although only 14 were ever distributed. Perhaps the most impressive legacy of the expedition were the almost 250 charts Wilkes prepared in two atlases (completed 1858, published 1861, but not distributed until after the Civil War). These formed the basis of the United States Hydrographic Office.

The Hydrographic Office was not the only institution affected by the U.S. Ex. Ex. The immense natural and ethnographic collections brought back were initially displayed at the U. S. Patent Office. Later, they formed the basis of the collection for the Smithsonian Institution. Additionally, specimens from the voyage helped to start the U.S. Botanical Garden, the National Herbarium, and the National Observatory.

The British-US Boundary Dispute

Another outcome of the voyage had to do especially with the subject of this map. The Oregon Territory was becoming a topic of increasing importance to the United States by the time the voyage returned. Even before Wilkes arrived in the Pacific Northwest in 1841, the Hudson's Bay Company was reporting that the expedition would likely increase the U.S. government's desire to possess the area. In June 1842, just as the ships returned to New York, the expedition became a topic in the continuing boundary negotiations with Britain. Wilkes himself was a strong advocate for the 54'40" boundary, as shown on this map.

Additionally, the 1840s was the boom decade of the Oregon Trail. Between 1840 and 1860, 400,000 journeyed overland on the 2,000 mile Oregon Trail; they formed one of the largest mass migrations in

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American history. It is no surprise, therefore, that James K. Polk made the Oregon Territory one of his campaign issues in 1844, with the slogan "54°40 or Fight!"

Polk was elected but quickly became embroiled in another border dispute to the south, the Mexican-American War (1846-8). Rather than fighting on two fronts, Polk tried to negotiate the northern border with the British. By this time, Americans outnumbered the British in Oregon six to one. The British, eager to protect the forts they had built via the Hudson's Bay Company, wanted a parallel at the 42nd parallel. Polk compromised on the 49th. The border treaty was signed in June 1846.

Initially, the land was left unincorporated. However, on November 29, 1847, an incident occurred at the Walla Walla Mission, which Wilkes' men had visited on an overland surveying trip. Marcus Whitman, his wife Narcissa, and their children were killed by Cayuse people during an attack on the mission. The Cayuse accused Whitman of poisoning Cayuse who had been in his care. Whitman had guided one of the first large wagon trains west and was well known to lawmakers in Washington D.C. Outraged by the violence, but not, presumably, by the alleged poisonings of the Cayuse, Congress began to organize to have Oregon brought under direct US control.

Oregon was officially incorporated as a US Territory on August 14, 1848. In 1853, the northern portion was carved out and became Washington Territory. In 1859, the southwestern portion of the Territory became the state of Oregon. The rest of the Territory eventually became parts of the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

U.S. Ex. Ex. was one of the largest exploration expeditions ever mounted. It was also the last great sailing voyage of discovery. The publications overseen by Wilkes augmented the U.S.'s international scientific reputation and the collections gathered by the scientists on board seeded some of the best known institutions in America. However, the voyage is little known and pales in comparison to public knowledge of Lewis & Clark and even Fremont. This is because the 1840s is also the time when the U.S. turned away from the seas and toward the interior, from sailors to cowboys.

However, the expedition was hugely important in the history of cartography of the United States, and this map in particular captures an important moment in U.S. expansion. While the smaller edition of the map appears on the market with some regularity, this large format edition has become somewhat of a rarity. It would make a fine addition to any collection of the American West.

Detailed Condition: