



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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[The First California Road Atlas] Automobile and Motorcycle Road Book

Stock#: 86618
Map Maker: Hancock Bros.
Date: 1907
Place: San Francisco
Color: Color
Condition: VG
Size: 12.75 x 15.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Of the Utmost Rarity. Earliest Recorded California Motorist's Atlas. A Foundational Mapping of Modern California.

Fascinating road atlas providing a unique insight into the state of the earliest automobile roads in California. Front and center in the importance of this book are the maps--one inset map focusing on the Bay Area, one on central California--which show the very limited roads that snaked through the state at the time. This is the earliest recorded road atlas intended for motorists focused on California and shows the state at a critical point in its modern history.

The focus of the maps is on the Bay Area and the Central Valley. The further south one journeys in the state, the fewer roads are present. Northern California, and in particular the Bay Area, has dozens of crisscrossing roads and is much better serviced than the roads towards Los Angeles. The folding map of Los Angeles (not included in the present example) shows just how poorly serviced that city is, which is described in the guide's text. The reverberations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, which happened



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the year before this map was published, had not yet upended the demographics of the state.

The rest of the 24-page booklet contains just as much interesting information. A distance index along twenty-six different routes is provided, with most of the trips originating from San Francisco or other nearby cities. Full-page advertisements and a smaller map of the Bay Area roads complete the booklet. This map was drawn by J. F. Hancock and printed by the Hancock Brothers.

The Turning Point of Modern California

Any modern denizen of the state knows how critical road infrastructure is to the state. The region's expanse and the relatively sparse spacing of cities make it so that road transport is critical to its infrastructure, and it means that cars would have a much greater importance than in any East Coast Region.

Not only is the era of cars critical for making modern California, but it is also critical for creating the north-south divide we still see today. While roads and car ownership started in the north, this was just because Los Angeles and San Diego were relative backwaters until the concentration of cars made it possible for these cities to be just as easily connected to the rest of the state. The cities built before the advent of cars would look drastically different than those built after: Southern California, as well as San Jose and parts of the Bay Area further from San Francisco, are built as sprawling, decentralized cities while San Francisco follows a more East Coast planned layout. The one, measly road which exited Los Angeles at the time would reshape the state as we know it.

The Earliest Automobiles of California

The state of Californian roads in 1907 was a far cry from today. Driving would not really take off until the 1910s, which makes this remarkable little atlas very early. The first recorded public instance of driving dates from 1897 following a trial show run from Los Angeles to San Bernardino. This led to widespread popularity, and by 1905, there were approximately 6500 registered motorized vehicles. Still, this tiny number represented only a sliver of the state's wealthiest members, and the state still lagged behind its eastern counterparts in terms of car consumption.

One year after the creation of this atlas, Henry Ford's Model T would hit the road, and the earliest days of motoring would be over. The *California Highway Act of 1910* issued 18 million dollars in bonds which allowed for better highway construction and propelled the state's automobile industry and economy into the modern age. Better roads meant more motorists, and allowed for the distances between points to be shortened, and allowed for California's diverse industries to be properly connected for the first time. This would lead to a positive feedback where more motorists led to more infrastructure needed, a feedback



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loop that has continued for over one hundred years.

Rarity

OCLC lists one example of the 1907 first edition, in the California State Library. We know of a second example in a private California collection. Three examples of the second 1909 edition are known, in the Huntington Library, in the California Historical Society, and in the David Rumsey Collection at Stanford University.

OCLC does not list any automobile maps of California published before 1907 other than those limited to the Bay Area. The Automobile Club of Southern California (founded in 1900) have their first recorded maps of Californian areas dated in 1906, but their *Automobile Club of Southern California Tour Book*, published in various editions, is not recorded before 1908. No additional map books or atlases which showed the roads of California before 1907 were located.

Detailed Condition:

Bound in original cloth binding. Front past-down, [24], 1 folding map. Wear, discoloration, and warping of cloth binding. Lacks folding map of Los Angeles.