



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
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[Shows The Wilberforce Colony] Upper Canada

Stock#: 86689
Map Maker: Tanner
Date: 1841
Place: Philadelphia
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 15 x 12 inches
Price: \$ 375.00



Description:

Free Black American Colony Formed In Cincinnati

Fine example of Tanner's map of Upper Canada, published in 1841.

The map includes a large inset of Lake Superior, and nice detail in the region between Lake Erie, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, which had been acquired by the Canada Company.

Of greatest note, the map includes the "Wilberforce Tract." This is a reference to the land acquired by a group of Free Black Americans from Cincinnati, which at the time was the location of the Wilberforce Colony.

This would seem to be one of the very few maps to include the Wilberforce Tract / Colony.

Wilberforce Colony

The Wilberforce Colony was established as a place for Black American citizens of Cincinnati to escape the racial tensions and discrimination which reached a boiling point in Cincinnati in the late 1820s.

Cincinnati's black population in the 1820s grew quickly. While Ohio was a free state, the southern portion was influenced by settlers from the South and racial tensions grew. This change alarmed some white residents. In response to a citizens' petition in 1828, the Cincinnati City Council appointed a committee to enact laws to prevent the increase of black population.



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A group of Black Cincinnati residents formed a society and began a dialogue with the Canada Company in 1828. Near the end of June 1828, the group elected Israel Lewis and Thomas Crissup to survey a site in Canada to which the Cincinnati blacks could emigrate. Lewis and Crissup met with John Colbourne, the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, to discuss prospects of settling in the area. They contracted with the Canada Company for the purchase of 4,000 land in Biddulph in the Huron Tract in Ontario, lots 2, 3, and 5 north of the Proof Line Road and lot 11 south of the road (Kent County) for the amount of \$1.50 per acre. The land was on the Ausable River, twenty miles from Lake Huron, and thirty-five miles north of Lake Erie.

In July and August of 1829, the Cincinnati riots broke out, as whites attacked blacks. There was an exodus of around 1,000 blacks from Cincinnati. Some of Cincinnati's Black residents fled to nearby towns or villages. Others organized an exodus, with many emigrating starting the trek to the land acquired from the Canada Company, some 400 miles from Cincinnati.

Settling in the still-unnamed Wilberforce Colony required purchase of land, forcing those without financial resources to stop their exodus to the North while still in the United States, settling in towns on the southern shore of Lake Erie where they could find work. Those who made it to Canada still had to travel from 35 miles north from Port Stanley, Ontario through untracked forest. In the first year, only 5 or 6 families completed the trek. At the site, they had to clear land for crops and to build dwellings.

The contract with the Canada Company called for a \$6,000 payment by November 1830. But the shortage of colonists made that impossible and financial stability for the colony was precarious for that first year. The Colonists sought to funding in Cincinnati and from the Ohio state legislature, without success. However, a group of Quakers (mostly based in Oberlin, Ohio) agreed to fund the purchase. On September 20, 1830, James Brown, former US Minister to France and US Senator from Louisiana, and Stephen Duncan, an extremely wealthy planter and slaveholder from Pennsylvania and Mississippi, purchased 400 acres for the settlement.

With proper title to the colony, commenced their plans in earnest. In 1831 they named the settlement as "Wilberforce," in honor of William Wilberforce, the prominent British abolitionist. Leading the fight against the British slave trade, he helped gain passage of the 1807 Act that abolished the slave trade throughout the British Empire, although the institution of slavery itself would not be abolished in the British empire until the August 1833, effective in 1834.

The Cincinnati emigrants tended to be more educated, and education for their children was of great importance. They were building on a tradition formed in Cincinnati, where the community placed great importance on education. The first institution established in Wilberforce was a school. American social reformer William Lloyd Garrison visited the colony in 1831, and noted that 20-30 children attended



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schools. By 1832 they had established three schools, whose quality was sufficient that it attracted students from the surrounding white population.

By 1832 the settlement had crops in the ground and log homes. Settlers built three sawmills, one powered by water; a gristmill, and several general stores. The proximity of the settlement to the Ausable River provided transportation access to goods, and provided a way to export products, both agricultural and forest-related.

Word of the Wilberforce Colony spread and interest grew in emigration from other northern cities. The Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia assembled black leaders from across the north to search for solutions to empower all African Americans. In an 1830 national convention, the Assembly organized itself as the American Society of Free Persons of Color (ASFPC), the beginning of the black convention movement. Impetus began at the first annual convention of the ASFPC, with the proposal to establish a manual labor college for young men in New Haven, Connecticut. When this seemed impossible, the convention turned to Wilberforce. A national subscription campaign in the United States and Great Britain, under the direction of Nathaniel Paul, was attempted. The subscription drive failed, but the importance of higher education to the Wilberforce colonists was clearly demonstrated.

Within the first 18 months, as Wilberforce grew from the initial few families, other black American emigrants joined them from Boston, Rochester, Albany, New York, Baltimore, and other cities. Subsequent recruiting efforts drew blacks from other northern cities, and by 1832 there were 32 families in the area. By 1835 the community had 166 inhabitants. Eventually about 150-200 families settled in the Colony.

With the growth of the Colony, a board of managers was created, primarily to oversee financial matters. Austin Steward was president. He and other newcomers replaced the old Cincinnati leaders, in 1831 relegating Israel Lewis, original colony organizer and land agent, to U.S. fundraising agent. He was one of two fundraising agents appointed, the other being Nathaniel Paul in England.

Disagreements between the original Cincinnati families and new settlers eventually led to the decline of the colony. The Cincinnati leaders came from city life and did not adapt well to the harsh farming environment. Within that first decade, many of the leaders of the emigration movement who had located in Wilberforce, left the community. In addition, both fundraising agents failed to live up to expectations.

By the late 1840s the Irish began moving into the area as part of a wave of immigration resulting from widespread famine in Ireland. The black population declined greatly, with many of the original colonists moving on to larger, growing urban centers such as Detroit, Cleveland, or Toronto to obtain wage-based employment. Eventually the Irish community supplanted Wilberforce altogether, and the town of Lucan was incorporated. Wilberforce as a free black colony faded into history.



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Detailed Condition: