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[Civil War Manuscript Naval Chart -- Portsmouth N.H. to Apalachicola Bay, Florida]

Stock#: 91356
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1861
Place: n.p.
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: VG
Size: 14.25 x 7.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Sailing The Southern and Western Florida Coastline During The Civil War

Interesting hand drawn sea chart sketch of a voyage in the North Atlantic, tracking the journey of a ship from Portsmouth, New Hampshire to Apalachicola Bay, with a lengthy period on the southeast coast of Florida and the Bahamas. The last month of the tracks are confined to the area between Great Abaco Island and the west coast of Florida.

The chart shows the track of a voyage beginning in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in July, which resulted in two week out and back loop into the north Atlantic, before turing toward the Mid-Atlantic coastline, where it spent several days in early August, before sailing for the Bahamas. The ship made a loop around Grand Bahama and Great Abaco Islands in mid-August, before patrolling the Bahama Channel, as far as the Florida Keys, between about August 26 and September 8. Thereafter, the ship passed the western Florida Keys by September 9 and proceeding to what appears to be Appalachiola Bay.

The overall configuration of the chart suggests that it was copied from a commercial navigation chart of the Atlantic Ocean, with the most likely candidate being a Blunt Chart of the North Atlantic Ocean, which would have depicted both the course of the Gulf Stream and the relative positions of the major place names in the Southeast and Gulf Coast.

The map appears to be a journal type map in the hand of a skillful artist. The style is quite elegant for a sketch map of this type. The contrast between coastal features is well executed, with the addition of the direction of the Gulf Stream and daily tracking of the journey of the ship indicative of the skills of the maker, who was likely maintaining a journal and likely also responsible for taking the daily location readings which are plotted in red.



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The details in red on the Florida Coast are quite curious. The maker has done an excellent job sketching the rough topography of the map and showing that the journey seems to have ended somewhere between St. Andrew Bay and Apalachicola Bay, although there is also a faint red circle not connected to the route at Apalachee Bay, downriver from Tallahassee.

A note on the verso suggests that the map was created during the American Civil War, with the internal evidence strongly suggesting that the final point reached on the journey depicted on the chart is Apalachicola Bay.

Prior to the arrival of the railroad in the south, Apalachicola was Florida's busiest port and the third busiest port on the Gulf of Mexico (after New Orleans and Mobile), so this is the likely destination. The two primary industries in the region were cotton and lumber. The Chattahoochee and Flint River tributaries were navigable as far north as Columbus and Albany in Georgia, which made Apalachicola vital Southern shipping port. However, by the Spring of 1862, Apalachicola Bay had been abandoned by Confederate troops due to a blockade by the Union Navy and Apalachicola collapsed as a port town.

With the foregoing in mind, if the journey shown between July 14 and September 12 was in fact during the Civil War, it most likely could only have been either a trade voyage during 1861 or part of the post-blockade reinforcement by the Union Navy between 1862 and 1865. However, even by September 1861, the Union blockade was in place. Given the course of the voyage, including non-linear nature of the tracks, the most likely maker was either part of the Union Navy or possibly a confederate privateer.

Given the curious route depicted, further research would likely reveal our mystery ship.

Provenance: Brunk, November 12, 2022, Lot #764, with the following description:

American, probably Civil War era, hand drawn map on wove paper with J. Whatman's watermark . . . Inscribed verso "Civil War Map/probably a voyage by a Union gunboat beginning at Portsmouth, N.H. July 14 and ending on Florida coast Sept. 12".

Detailed Condition: