



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

[The Finest Colonial New England Sea Chart of the 18th Century] The Coast of New England

Stock#: 63672
Map Maker: Des Barres
Date: 1776
Place: London
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 29.5 x 41.5 inches
Price: \$ 24,500.00



Description:

By far the finest 18th-century depiction of the Coast of New England issued in *The Atlantic Neptune* to meet the needs of British navigators during the American Revolution.

This monumental chart depicts the complex coast of New England from Passamaquoddy Bay south and west to Narragansett Bay. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of depth soundings are given, banks and shoals are indicated by stippling, and occasional notations indicate tidal flow and the composition of the sea floor (information useful for navigators trying to determine their location). Though the degree of detail is uneven, there is a surprising amount of terrestrial information, including elevations indicated by hachuring, rivers, roads, and areas of habitation. In parts of Maine and New Hampshire the topographical information extends nearly 100 miles inland, encompassing for example the White Mountains and the



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Kennebec River system. The quality of the draftsmanship and engraving is superb yet utilitarian, entirely legible even where the information is most dense, and without superfluous detail or flourishes.

Per Sellers & Van Ee this is the fourth state of the chart, with plate number "3" in a small oval added at the lower-right corner. The catalog of the Henry Newton Stevens Collection at the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich) identifies it as the fifth state, based on the same feature.

Samuel Holland, J.F.W. Des Barres and *The Atlantic Neptune*

A terse note below the title informs the viewer that "The Soundings and Nautical Remarks in this Chart are laid down from the Observations of Lieutenant Knight of the Navy and Pilots." This conceals rather than illuminates the dozens of talented surveyors whose efforts, often under the most difficult conditions possible, made the chart possible.

The chart was issued in *The Atlantic Neptune*, an atlas of North American waters used by British navigators throughout the American Revolution. In its most comprehensive form, the *Neptune* provided coverage from the Gulf of St. Lawrence south and west to the Gulf of Mexico. 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.

The *Atlantic Neptune* is most frequently associated with publisher J.F.W. Des Barres, whose surveys of Nova Scotia composed one of its volumes. However the *Neptune's* many New England charts, plans and views were based on surveys overseen by Samuel Holland, a Dutch-born surveyor and engineer who entered British service during the French and Indian War. After the War Holland had proposed to the Board of Trade "an accurate and just Survey... upon... a general scale and uniform plan" of North America east of the Mississippi. (Harley, p. 27) This was to be a "geodetic" survey following the most advanced methods then in use in Europe, but applied for the first time in North America: The locations of control points would be established by rigorous astronomical observation, intermediate areas pinpointed by triangulation, and details sketched in from direct observation.

Holland's proposal was approved, and in 1764 he was named Surveyor General of Quebec and of the Northern District of North America. The latter role gave him responsibility for surveying the Canadian Maritimes (with the exception of Nova Scotia, which was Des Barres' purview) and the region between the St. John and Potomac Rivers. Similarly, one William Gerard de Brahm was appointed Surveyor General of the Southern District, with responsibility south and west to the Gulf of Mexico.

After several years' work in Canada, from 1770-1774 Holland focused on the coast of New England,



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making his headquarters in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. From there he sent out semi-autonomous survey teams, headed by deputies Charles Blaskowitz, James Grant, George Sproule, Thomas Wheeler and Thomas Wright. All told, he probably had more than 50 men working under his direct supervision, in addition to the occasional services of the sloop HMS *Canceaux* under Commander Mowatt, who conducted hydrographic surveys when not detached by the Navy for other duties.

Beginning simultaneously in Maine and New Hampshire, Holland had his teams work south and east along the coast, ultimately reaching Narragansett Bay by the end of 1774. At that point the survey was put on hold due to the growing tensions with the American colonists, and it would never resume. This general chart of the New England coast thus represents a culmination and synthesis of more than four years of work by Holland and his men.

Holland sent copies of many of his maps to J.F.W. Des Barres in London, who assumed responsibility for their publication, with sponsorship and funding from the Admiralty. In the case of *The Coast of New England*, Des Barres probably acted as compiler as well as publisher. Holland's chart likely had relatively little hydrographic data, so Des Barres incorporated surveys conducted by Lieutenant John Knight, commander of the HMS *Diligent*, in the waters off Cape Cod, Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.

At the same time, Des Barres undertook to publish his own surveys of Nova Scotia, where had been Surveyor General, and those of other surveyors active in North America. In all, he oversaw the production of more than 250 charts, maps and recognition views, many in multiple states and editions, along with numerous letterpress sheets of sailing directions. These were compiled to produce the atlas known as *The Atlantic Neptune*.

Copies of the *Neptune* were 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 comprehensive version extended to five volumes, covering in turn Nova Scotia, New England, the River and Gulf of St. Lawrence, 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.

In all, a lovely example of a rare capstone chart of the coast of New England from the greatest survey undertaken in 18th-century North America.

Detailed Condition:

Old hand-color. Minor offsetting and two short fold splits, but better than very good.