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**Atlas -- Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition. During The Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842. By Charles Wilkes, U.S.N., Commander of the Expedition, Member of the American Philosophical Society, etc.**

**Stock#:** 68885  
**Map Maker:** Wilkes  
  
**Date:** 1845  
**Place:** Philadelphia  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** 34 x 24 inches (maps)  
  
**Price:** \$ 2,800.00



**Description:**

***"The United States Equivalent to the Voyages of James Cook, Jean Francois Galaup de Laperoouse, Alejandro Malaspina, and Ivan Fedorovich Kruzenshtern for England, France, Spain, and Russia, and the Maritime Equivalent of Lewis and Clark." - W. Michael Mathes***

Nice example of the Atlas to accompany the report of the United States Exploring Expedition, often called the "Wilkes Expedition".

**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,



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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 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 was the almost 250 charts Wilkes prepared in two atlases (completed 1858, published 1861, but not distributed until after the Civil War).



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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.

**List of maps:**

1. Chart of the World shewing the tracks of the U.S. Exploring Expedition in 1838, 39, 40, 41 & 42. Charles Wilkes ESQ. (34 x 24 inches)
2. Chart of the Antarctic Continent shewing the Icy Barrier attached to it. (34 x 24 inches)
3. Chart of the Viti Group or Feejee Islands (34 x 24 inches)
4. Map of the Oregon Territory (34 x 24 inches)
5. Map of Part of the Island of Hawaii Sandwich Islands shewing the craters and eruption of May and June 1840. (23 x 15 inches)

**Detailed Condition:**

Large Octavo. Publisher's cloth tooled in gilt and blind. Title, contents leaf, and 5 hand-colored lithographed folding maps.