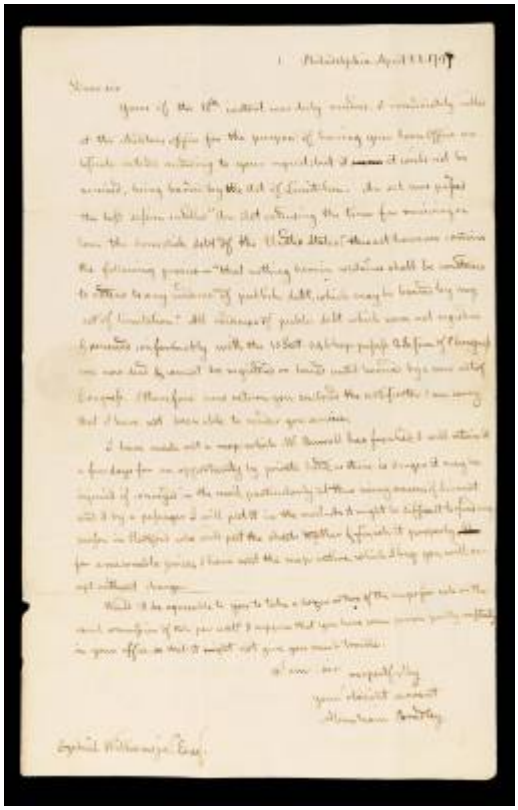


Single leaf, manuscript letter in pen and ink on recto, address to recto.

“I HAVE MADE OUT A MAP…” (BRADLEY) – DISTRIBUTING THE FIRST POSTAL MAP OF THE UNITED STATES TO LOCAL AGENTS

[Autograph letter to Ezekiel Williams Jr.]

Author
BRADLEY, Abraham

Publication date
1797.

Publisher
April 22,

Publication place
Philadelphia,

Physical description
Single leaf, manuscript letter in pen and ink on recto, address to recto.

Dimensions
320 by 200mm (12.5 by 7.75 inches).

Notes
Autograph letter signed “Abraham Bradley” to Connecticut Postmaster Ezekiel Williams Jr., in Hartford, sending him an example of the first printing of his important map ‘A Map of the United States. Exhibiting Post Roads & Distances…’, 1796, and wondering if he would could take a few more for resale, at a healthy commission of 12 1/5 percent:

“I have made out a map which M. Burrall has franked; I will retain it a few days for an opportunity by private hand; as there is danger it may be injured if conveyed in the mail, particularly at this rainy season; if I cannot send it by a passenger I will put it in the mail. As it might be difficult to find any person in Hartford who could put the sheets together & finish it properly ??? for a reasonable price, I have sent the map entire, which I beg you will accept without charge.

Would it be agreeable to you to take a dozen or two of the maps for sale on the usual commission of 12 1/2 per cent? I suppose that you have some persons pretty constantly in your office, so that it might not give you much trouble”.

Abraham Bradley’s map of the United States is a landmark in the both the history of cartography and American postal history, and one of only four wall maps of the United States to have been published in America before 1800. First issued in 1796, it went through two major revisions in 1804 and 1819, and was still being issued over thirty years after the first printing.

The map hung on the walls of most of the major American Post Offices, “providing a graphical depiction of the first standardized mail routes and schedules available to Americans and likely the only large format representation of the United States available to most of its citizens. It can truly be called the United State’s first wall map” (Taliaferro).

Benjamin Franklin had become the first Postmaster General of the United States by act of the Second Continental Congress on July 26, 1776, the same act which created the United States Post Offices. During the years immediately following the American Revolution, a central postal service was operative, but its routes and times were still not standardized. It was left to local carriers and contractors to establish schedules.

In 1790, Postmaster General Samuel Osgood complained that every stage coach operator and mail contractor maintained its own schedule for the days and hours of departures and arrivals, without regard to the needs of the US Government. A “regular system of days and hours of departure has never been established further southward than Alexandria.” Osgood’s concerns resulted in the passage of the Post Office Act of 1792. The Act became the catalyst for the creation of a regular schedule for the entirety of the postal road system.

Abraham Bradley, Jr., (1767-1838) was born in Connecticut. “He studied law and later relocated to Pennsylvania, where he first settled in Wilkes-Barre and later Philadelphia. He briefly practiced as a lawyer, before he was hired as a clerk in the General Post Office by Postmaster General Timothy Pickering in 1791. Bradley quickly made his name as the office’s authority on postal routes and schedules and with the passage of the 1792 Act, it became his duty to devise many of the standardized routes. As part of the process of establishing and standardizing routes, Bradley prepared a map of the United States to illustrate the newly established system. By 1796, the map was complete, as was Bradley’s elaborate chart of the newly standardized postal route time schedule, which was pasted down on the first complete edition of Bradley’s map.

In 1796 Bradley published his first ‘Map of the United States, Exhibiting the Post-Roads, the Situations, Connections, and Distances of the Post-Offices’. At that time, barely 15 years after the end of the War of Independence, most citizens of the fledgling United States still had no real conception of the magnitude of their young nation. This colorful map showed people a consolidated country, with national borders. They no longer lived among a scattered collection of states, but in a united land.

Ezekiel Williams Jr. (1765-1843), a Yale graduate, served as Postmaster of Connecticut until 1803, was a nautical insurance underwriter, and son of Ezekiel Williams Sr. (1729-1818) a merchant in

Wethersfield, Connecticut who had served as a captain in the Continental Army, and during the Revolutionary War, had served as a member of the Committee of the Pay Table and Deputy Commissary General of Prisoners in Connecticut. He was the sheriff of Hartford County from 1767 to 1789. The family papers are held at Trinity College.

Bibliography
P-Maps p874; Ristow p70-1; Schwartz & Ehrenberg p222; Smith Ohio p154; Shaw & Shoe 5900 Karpinski 1; Karrow 1-1392 (1804); Wheat & Brun 130, State V; McCorkle p38-9.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 17943

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