

Engraved map with fine original hand-colour, minor loss to old folds, loss to right and left margin, backed on Japan paper.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

North and South America in its principal divisions.

Author
SPILSBURY, J[ohn]

Publication date
1767

Publisher
Spilsbury, Engraver, Map and Print Seller in Russell Court, Covent Garden],

Publication place
[London,

Physical description
Engraved map with fine original hand-colour, minor loss to old folds, loss to right and left margin, backed on Japan paper.

Dimensions
430 by 470mm (17 by 18.5 inches).

Notes
The emerging children’s culture of the mid-eighteenth century produced toys and games that were often as ornamental as they were practical, and the demand for increasingly unique and interesting items had eventually resulted in jigsaw puzzles.

The invention of these is widely attributed to John Spilsbury (1739-1769), a British cartographer, engraver and map-seller who, in 1766, affixed a world map to a wooden boardand carved each country out. There are, however, earlier references to these sorts of geographical games made by a Madame de Beaumont in Paris. Her sets were typically expensive, and were of the style popular among the elite, for whom these items were made into symbols of status. In Jane Austen's 1814 novel 'Mansfield Park', for example, the poor protagonist is mocked by her wealthy cousins because she "cannot put the map of Europe together".

The cartographic jigsaws of John Spilsbury were also designed initially as games for the elite, his first one being presented to the children of King George III and Queen Charlotte, but were later sold to boarding schools as well, as teaching aids for geography classes. As pupils put the pieces together, they would learn how different countries connected to one another. During the 1760s, he created a variety of sets, including jigsaws of England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, together with puzzles of the four continents.

The present example, dated 1767, shows the continents of North and South America extending from Hudson Bay down to the Cape Horn. The eastern parts of North America are missing, and California is shown as a peninsula. The existing states are distinguished by colour border and colour wash, although not all of them would be turned into their own jigsaw piece when dissected: North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia, for example, are grouped together in a single piece. The Caribbean Islands are depicted in detail, while South America is dominated by the Chile, Paraguay, Brazil and Peru. On the right-hand side of the map, the eastern swathes of Africa, the Iberian peninsula, and parts of France and the British Isles appear. There is no scale bar or publisher's imprint, but in the lower left-hand corner, the cartouche contains both the title, Spilsbury's name and the year of publication.

Exceedingly rare; we are only able to trace one institutional example: the British Library, lacking three pieces.

Bibliography
Cartographic Items Maps 188.v.15.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 17688

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