

## **The Evolution of a Nation: The David J. Morgan Collection**

by Eliane Dotson  
Old World Auctions

The evolution of the United States could be described as a series of discoveries, settlements, wars, treaties, and political moves. Each incident in our nation's history helped to shape the country, both geographically and ideologically. Maps tell the story of this evolution. Over time, maps show the changes in borders, nomenclature, and knowledge of our land. States are created, their boundaries shift, and they become filled with settlements and divided into counties. These changes over time are what fascinate many map collectors, driving them to build collections that showcase deep understanding of a specific place and how it developed. These collectors search for every little nuance in the cartographic progression of a region in order to tell a story.

Dave Morgan is one of these types of collectors. A large part of his collection, amassed over nearly 50 years, illustrates the political evolution of the United States. His focus on this theme is the "progression of the knowledge of the continent, the political divisions, and how the states came about." Simply collecting maps is not his goal; he has spent countless hours (sometimes days or weeks) poring over the maps and analyzing them. One of Dave's greatest pleasures is cartographic analysis - determining the source of each part of a map and how new information was incorporated. He has binders full of research that he has conducted on his collection, and undoubtedly there is still more research to be done.



*Lewis & Clark, A Map of Lewis and Clark's Track Across the  
Western Portion of North America, 1817.*

Dave Morgan's interest in map collecting had much more humble beginnings. Born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Dave had what he calls the "collector gene." He began collecting stamps around the age of 5, which morphed into collecting coins, then

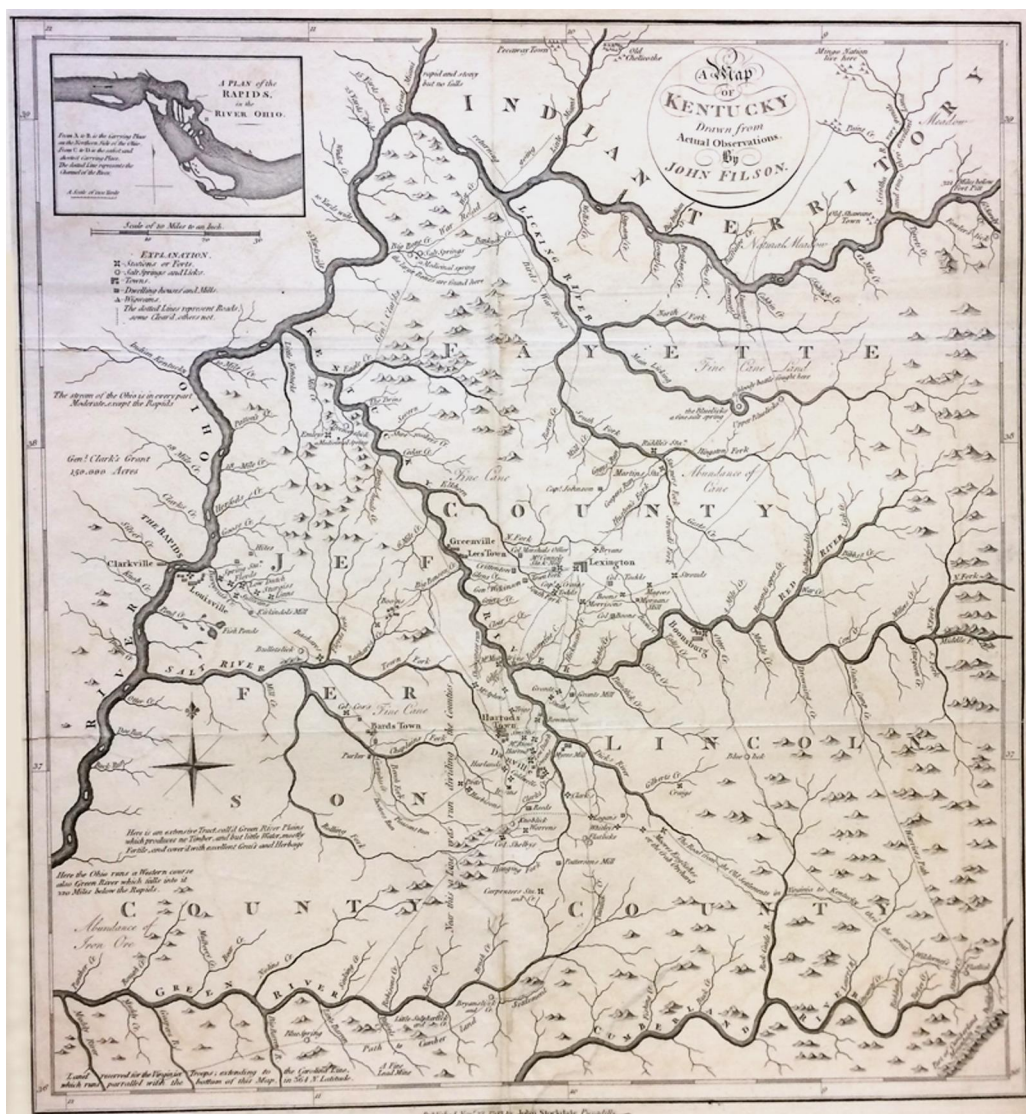
old paper ephemera, and then civil war artifacts. He was always collecting something, and pursued his collections for the pleasure of it rather than as an investment. He also had great interest in geology, which stemmed from his father, James P. Morgan, a professor of Geology at LSU, and earned a master's in Geology at LSU.

As luck would have it, the Morgans found themselves in a fortuitous location in the United States for geologists. After the first two offshore oil wells in the Gulf of Mexico (both in Louisiana) began production in 1938 and 1947, offshore activity increased dramatically, and the tidelands controversy between the United States and the state of Louisiana was initiated. The US Constitution did not specify whether the tidelands (the nearshore coastal waters, including estuaries and bays) belonged to the federal government or the individual states. This lack of clarity did not become an issue until it was discovered that the natural oil and gas within this region could be profitable. Although Congress passed the Submerged Lands Act in 1953, giving states ownership of three geographical miles from their actual shoreline, the act was poorly written and continued the controversy. In the early stages of the dispute, Louisiana's exercise of domain over the offshore areas as shown in documents and on maps was considered a critical element, as well as the State's claim to three leagues rather than three miles. In the 1950's Dave's father was hired as a consultant to the Attorney General's office in Louisiana to assist in the tidelands controversy. He was tasked with finding every historical map that depicted Louisiana, its boundaries, and its shoreline. He scoured institutions all over the United States, Spain and Britain, making photocopies of every relevant map he found. He subsequently created a cartobibliography of historic maps of Louisiana, grading each map for accuracy. With the Attorney General's office in need of more assistance with their case against the federal government, Dave also began working for the state, creating exhibits and writing some of the detailed analysis in their legal briefs. The arguments were all based on maps - historical maps and their accuracy (or lack thereof), and also on the changeable geography of Louisiana's deltaic influenced coastline.

Dave's work with the Louisiana Attorney General's office opened his eyes to the world of maps. He became aware of what cartographic material was available and realized that much significant material was affordable. His "collecting gene" took over and he began buying maps as soon as he graduated from LSU. He purchased his first two maps in McAllen, Texas while working for the Sun Oil Company - hand-colored Ortelius maps of Asia and Africa. Although he later discovered they were good early reproductions, he still has them framed and hanging up on the wall.

He soon decided to focus his collection on the Louisiana shoreline in homage of his home and his career. He realized that to get to the essence of Louisiana cartography, one had to understand the Gulf Coast, and so the collection expanded to include the entire Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida. He became determined to amass a comprehensive collection. At the time, the only way to buy maps was through dealers, and he began developing relationships with Walter Reuben, Clive Burden, Dick Arkway, Graham Arader, and Dick Fitch among others. As he had a modest income, he would search through their catalogs and purchase the affordable maps, lusting after the

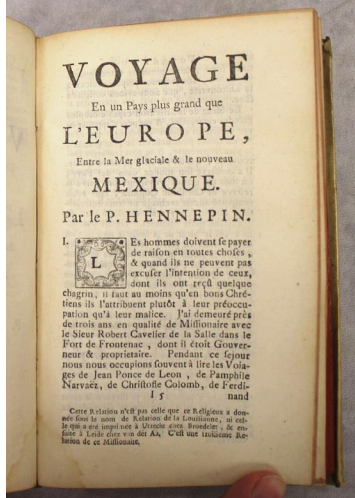
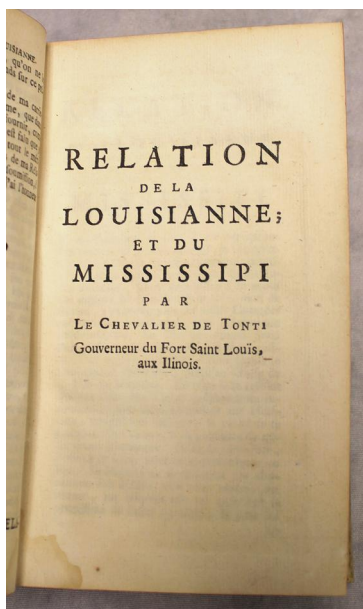
expensive ones. Dave realized he was "low on their radar", but found that over time the dealers would contact him when they came across a piece that would fit in his collection, and he appreciated the personal interaction. As he explains, "All those guys had a different flair and a different posture on collecting. You had a lot more contact with the dealers than you do now with the internet. It was nice - you had more of a personal involvement with your acquisition."



Filson/Stockdale, *A Map of Kentucky Drawn from Actual Observations*, 1793.

Over time the focus of his collection continued to grow, incorporating Louisiana Territory and eventually the entire United States. His interest in the evolution of the United States led him to begin collecting pocket maps of the individual states and early American atlases. His goal has always been to create a comprehensive collection, and he would often seek out different states and editions of a particular map, even if there were no significant changes. Investigating and documenting the changes between maps in his collection was always important, in addition to finding unique pieces for his

collection. Barry Ruderman, of Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps, who has worked with Dave Morgan for many years, commented, "Dave is one of the most astute collectors with whom I've worked. I've been most impressed with his ability to appreciate and integrate into his collection unusual material. His depth of knowledge and appreciation for integrating standard material with rarities, and for identifying maps that were often under-appreciated in the market, made his collection special."



Three images from Jean Frederic Bernard's *Relations de la Louisiane, et du Fleuve Mississipi... [bound with] Recueil d'Arrests et Autres Pieces pour l'Etablissement de la Compagnie d'Occident - Relation de la Baie de Hudson...*, 1720.

Fortunately such a special and unique collection has been shared with the public. Dave has put his knowledge and map collection to good use, creating a non-profit map museum, CARTE (Cartographic Acquisition Research Teaching and Exhibition) Museum. The opening reception was held on December 2, 2009, which would have been his deceased father's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. His exhibits have included "Finding the Mississippi," Mapping the Mississippi River and Its Tributaries," and "West Florida." His latest show, "Louisiana State Bicentennial," was his largest and most ambitious exhibit, and is still up today at CARTE Museum.



Juan Corradi, *Carta Esferica del Reyno de Mexico y Parte de la America Setentrional...*, 1802

A veteran collector, Dave has a few words of advice for novice collectors. Don't miss out on the big opportunities. He explains, "The ones that escape you think about forever... particularly ones that are rare. You never know if you're going to get a second bite of that apple." He also encourages collectors to do their own research and understand why each map is important and how it fits in with the rest of their collection. Additionally, since many antique maps and books are fragile, he believes that repairing and conserving them is important: "Don't just own maps, enjoy them. I have all of my stuff conserved, so that I can open them and compare them side by side. It's important to enjoy your collection, which means getting into it and comparing them - when did this happen? why did this happen? - it's the evolution of places and names." Many of Dave's pieces have been conserved by Leslie Courtois, Conservator at the Library of Virginia, who noted, "David Morgan has had a great deal of conservation work done on his collections over the years and has always had very exacting standards for the care and treatment for his maps and atlases. He has researched current standards and ethics in the field and insists on abiding by them." Having material repaired and preserved is important, and having it conserved the proper way is crucial.



The title cartouche to the second edition of John Mitchell's wall map of North America: *George Louis Le Rouge, Amerique Septentrionale avec les Routes, Distances en Miles, Limites et Etablissements Francois et Anglois par le Docteur Mitchel, 1756.*

Dave has decided to part with a portion of his collection so that he can focus his attention on atlases and pocket maps. He plans on continuing his research, filling up more binders on his quest to understand the evolution of the nation. Over 400 maps and books from his collection will be available in a special one-week auction from June 7-14. True to Dave's collection, the material will focus on the United States and the South. Included are notable pieces such as Juan Corradi's 1802 rare map of the Southwest and its companion Gulf Coast map, the 1793 Filson/Stockdale embryonic map of Kentucky, the 1817 issue of Lewis & Clark's landmark map of the West, the complete first edition of David Burr's *A New Universal Atlas*, and Jean Frederic Bernard's 1720 volume with important accounts by Tonti and Hennepin. A special feature of this auction will be the 1756 Le Rouge French second edition of John Mitchell's monumental wall map of North America, focused on what would become the United States in two decades. Often described as "the most important map in American history," the map was used for boundary determinations at the Treaty of Paris in 1783, as well as other significant boundary disputes. As Dave has an eye for the rare, the obscure, and the unknown, there will be dozens of maps and books that have never before been listed with Old World Auctions. There will certainly be something for every collector of American material.