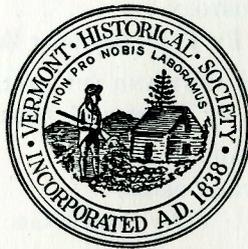


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# VERMONT *History*

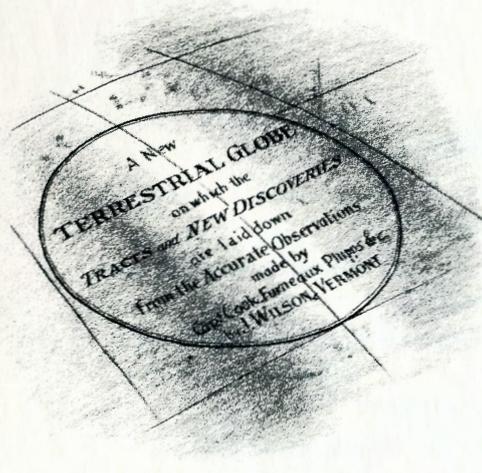
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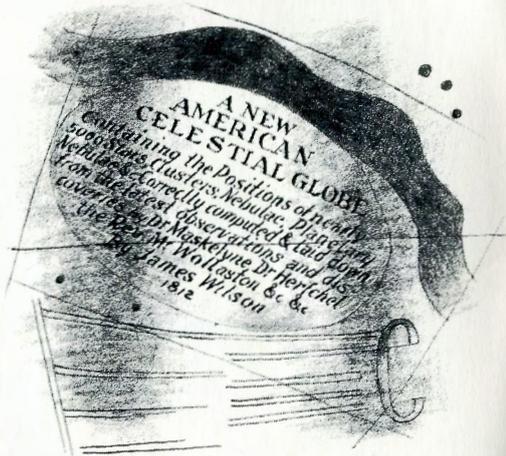
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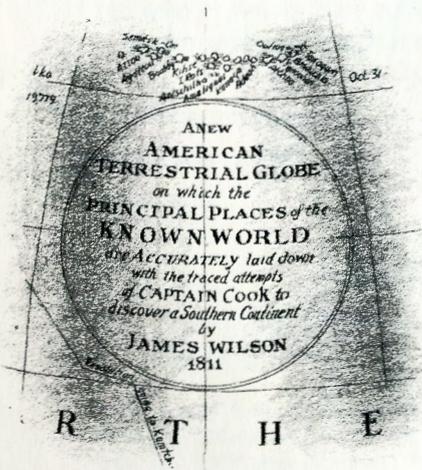
# Title Blocks of Early Wilson Globes



1810  
ORIGINAL EDITION  
Vermont Historical Society  
Montpelier



1812  
FIRST KNOWN CELESTIAL  
Norwich University Museum  
Northfield



1811  
OLDEST DATED GLOBE  
Dartmouth College Library  
Hanover, N. H.



1822  
FIRST USE OF VIGNETTE  
Latham Memorial Library  
Thetford



## JAMES WILSON'S GLOBES

### An Anniversary Report and Appeal

By RICHARD J. FOWLE

ONE hundred and fifty years ago, James Wilson of Bradford, Vermont, recorded the earliest dated sale (January 18, 1810) of his original trade edition of thirteen-inch terrestrial globes, the first to be made in the United States.<sup>1</sup> That a yeoman-blacksmith without formal education should determine to do this, and then spend many years doing it, and ultimately doing it very well, was naturally of interest to early historical writers.<sup>2</sup> More recently, attention has again been drawn to Wilson's successful efforts to master techniques, provide suitable materials, and assemble a finished product.<sup>3</sup> His family and business history have been reexplored, with proper emphasis on his achievements as a cultural pioneer.<sup>4</sup> However, much less attention has been devoted to surviving examples of the actual globes which James Wilson and his sons made, and only one writer has published full titles and descriptions of even a few of the editions of Wilson globes now known to exist.<sup>5</sup>

The American Geographical Society has for eight years been collecting data on any globes made before 1850 which are now in this country, to form the United States section of a proposed International Catalogue of Early Globes. Through the courtesy of Miss Ena L. Yonge, Map Curator of the AGS, a listing of the twenty-nine Wilson globes there reported was made as a point of departure. Several of these reports have been amplified or corrected by inspection, as to date, size, or condition. Eight more globes have since been located and examined, bringing the current census to thirty-seven confirmed examples,<sup>6</sup> with five additional possibilities still to be explored. The thirteen-inch globes now known include five celestial editions, and seven terrestrial editions with two significant variants. Although Wilson advertised nine-inch models at least from 1820 to 1828,<sup>7</sup> none is yet known to have survived the years. Having examined seventeen Wilson globes this year, including at least one specimen of every known edition through 1831, it is now possible for me to present with this report a tentative listing of all known

editions, and to indicate the institutions where examples are available for study.<sup>8</sup>

Since Wilson's globes are known to have been used for instruction in many academies of New England and New York between 1810 and 1840, where they must have helped shape the knowledge of many future teachers in the west, it would be good to know more about the sources which Wilson used, and about the time lag between the initial publication of new geographical or astronomical knowledge, and its inclusion on a newly revised globe. That among thirty-two confirmed existing thirteen-inch globes, not over four are known from any one edition, while six appear to be unique, suggests that other editions may well have been produced of which we know no surviving example. Like the unique specimen identified at Thetford this year, copies may lie forgotten in dead storage in or near early schools. Interested readers are sincerely invited to report to the Vermont Historical Society particulars of any unlisted Wilson globe, to help enlarge our census.

Because the original edition of terrestrial globes which Wilson sold in 1810 carried no date, and the present owners had no ready way to compare their globes with the few scattered examples of the dated second edition of 1811, no globe had been identified as belonging to the original edition until this sesquicentennial year. As Wilson's chief initial source of information is known to have been the Third Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published in parts from 1788 to 1797, it is hardly surprising to find slightly archaic Eighteenth Century designations on his earliest products. The undated globes in the Society's museum and at Harvard designate the southern waters as Western Ocean, Eastern Ocean, and Great South Sea, while the 1811 edition carries the more familiar "modern" names. Similarly, the undated specimens retain the long "s" in such names as *Bafses Strait*, *Caspian Sea*, and *Circasia*, which in 1811 yield to the uniform modern short "s." Outright errors on the undated globes, such as "Perouce Strait" are corrected on the new 1811 plates, which read "Perouse." Since the undated globes thus obviously antedate those of the 1811 edition, the conclusion that they belong to the original edition known to have been sold early in 1810 seems inescapable.

The next known revision supports Wilson's advertised claim to portray North America more accurately than was done on contemporary imported globes. The thirteen-inch terrestrial at the Norwich University Museum carries the exact title-block of 1811,

plus a slightly irregular inscribed ring of brownish coloring, covering the further legend "With Additions to 1819." The principal additions apparently stem from the Florida Purchase, as the Floridas now appear as United States territory. Wilson was conservative about the northeast and northwest boundary controversies, using the 49th parallel from Minnesota to the Pacific, and not encroaching on New Brunswick, despite his northern extension of Massachusetts' District of Maine to the St. Lawrence watershed. This globe, on which "Albany, N. York" appears below the circle outlining the title, is the first to confirm the establishment of production in that city, although the fact was well known from family records, and from listings and advertisements in Albany directories and newspapers. We can readily understand the decision to make a fragile, costly, and relatively bulky product at a point well served by water transportation, rather than to rely on the ox carts, flatboats, and portages of the upper Connecticut River valley.

On the 1821 celestial globe seen at Kingston, Wilson retained the title-block of 1812 except for the date, and perhaps somewhat shame-facedly crossed the "t" in "correctly." The long "s" here appears for the last time (in "Dr. Herchel"), and also for the last time there is no mention of Albany. He may have revised his astronomical plates at Bradford, while his sons attended to the growing "manufactory of artificial globes" at Albany. This globe, which is very little obscured by varnish, best portrays the delicate engraving and pastel coloring of the imagined shapes of the constellations which were still rather fanciful in the early Nineteenth Century. Its mate, the unique Kingston terrestrial of 1822, bears an enlarged circular title-block ornamented with engraved flourishes and a paraph, and is the first to designate the firm as "J. Wilson & Sons, Albany."

The title-block of the Thetford specimen of 1822 is illustrated because it is the first to carry the engraved vignette which appears on all later terrestrial globes examined. Drawn by D. W. Wilson and engraved by Balch, Rawdon & Co., this is an allegory of Columbia, seated at left, holding dividers over a large globe displaying the Western Hemisphere, behind which perches a slightly triumphant eagle holding in its beak a ribbon inscribed "E Pluribus Unum." This globe also carries, on a strip pasted under the original varnish, the legend "S. Wood & Sons Agents N.York". That no Wilson globe dated before 1826 is known to survive outside New England and the upper Hudson valley suggests the need for a wider market,

which may have resulted from this New York affiliation. The title-blocks of 1828 and 1831 are identical except as to date with this illustrated Thetford globe of 1822. The specimens of 1828 carry no agency designation, while on the 1831, it is engraved on the original plate.

The latest reported issues by the Wilsons themselves were in 1835, and are believed to represent a redating with only minor modifications of the general revision issued in 1831, when the sons were still active in Albany. By 1845, Cyrus Lancaster, Wilson's employee and successor in the firm, was issuing globes in his own name, as evidenced by the example exhibited at the Senate House Museum in Kingston, New York. The present need is to receive reports or clues of further editions and examples, not only to expand the Vermont Historical Society's present census of these initially Vermont products, but to perfect in sufficient time the entries relating to James Wilson and his sons in the proposed International Catalogue of Early Globes.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Entered by James Wilson in a notebook now owned by his descendant, Mrs. William S. Spencer, of Bradford, Vermont, whose courteous help, with that of her sister, Mrs. Lucy Moody, of Colchester, Vermont, is much appreciated. Mrs. Spencer states that Wilson's interest in learning to make globes was aroused before he left his native Londonderry, New Hampshire, in the 1780's.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Rev. Silas McKeen, *History of Bradford, Vermont* (1875), and L. P. Tucker, "A Vermont Genius" *The Vermonter*, April 1904, 270-275.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Pemberton, "Wilson's Worlds" *Vermont Life*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (Winter 1957-1958), pp. 58-59. Orton's color illustration on page 59 is typical of eleven of the globes seen. Dartmouth's 1811 and the privately-owned 1810, as well as the New Hampshire Historical Society's three-inch pair, have horizontal axial mountings without an adjustable meridian, so the equatorial plane is always vertical. The Columbia County Historical Society's pair at Kinderhook are the only ones seen on floor stands.

<sup>4</sup> John C. Huden, "Vermont Globe Maker" *The Vermonter* (December 1943), 241-246; and Harold Webb Haskins, "James Wilson—Globe Maker" *Vermont History*, Vol. XXVII No. 4 (October 1959), 319-330, and frontispiece.

<sup>5</sup> LeRoy E. Kimball, "James Wilson of Vermont, America's First Globe Maker" *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, N.S., Vol. 48 (April 1938), 29-48. The basic work on Wilson's advertising, and on the actual globes. See especially his "Chronological List of the Wilson Globes," 45-48, which is here adjusted and extended. There is no evidence that Wilson made a twelve-inch globe. Those before 1822 were called "13-½" which has been misprinted 13, 12., From 1822 on, Wilson designated them thirteen-inch, which is here used for all editions of his large globes.

<sup>6</sup> See table following.

<sup>7</sup> LeRoy E. Kimball, *loc. cit.*, 39, 40, 41.

<sup>8</sup> John C. Huden, *loc. cit.*, illustrates (without stating source) what appears to be an engraved sheet of globe gores for the known 3-inch terrestrial.

## KNOWN EDITIONS OF WILSON GLOBES

(A preliminary census, as of mid-1960, showing by size, type, and edition the location and relative condition of confirmed examples)

### A. THIRTEEN-INCH TERRESTRIAL GLOBES

Original	Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier	Good
Edition	Houghton Library, Harvard University	Very Good
1809-1810	A private owner in Vermont	Deplorable
First	Wilbur Library, Univ. of Vt., Burlington	Good
Dated	Dartmouth college Library, Hanover, N. H.	Fairly Good
Edition	Yale University, New Haven, Conn.	Not seen
1811	A James Wilson descendant in Vermont	Very Good
1811-1819	Norwich University, Northfield, Vt. (See text)	Very Good
1822	Senate House, Kingston, New York (plain title)	Fairly Good
variant	Latham Memorial Library, Thetford, Vt.	Good
1828	Mass. Inst. of Technology, Cambridge	Good
	Columbia Co. Hist. Soc., Kinderhook, N. Y.	Fair
	Mariners Museum, Newport News, Va.	Not seen
	A private owner in Massachusetts	Not seen
1831	Princeton University, Princeton, N. J.	Not seen
	Tall Tree Library, Jenkintown, Pa.	Not seen
	A James Wilson descendant in Vermont	Very good
1834	Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.	Not seen
1835	Suffolk Co. Hist. Soc., Riverhead, L.I., N.Y.	Not seen
	A private owner in North Carolina	Not seen

### B. THIRTEEN-INCH CELESTIAL GLOBES

1812	Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont	Very Good
	Yale University, New Haven, Conn.	Not seen
1821	Senate House, Kingston, New York	Very Good
1826	Columbia Co. Hist. Soc., Kinderhook, N. Y.	Fair
	Mariners Museum, Newport News, Va.	Not seen
	A private owner in Washington, D.C. (& Vt.)	Not seen
	A private owner in Massachusetts	Not seen
1831	Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.	Not seen
	Princeton University, Princeton, N. J.	Not seen
	Tall Tree Library, Jenkintown, Pa.	Not seen
	A James Wilson descendant in Vermont	Very Good
1835	A private owner in North Carolina	Not seen

### C. THREE-INCH GLOBES (n.d., Albany, 1822-1835)

MATCHED	New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord	Good
PAIRS	Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.	Not seen
SINGLE	A private owner in Illinois (terrestrial)	Not seen