

1838-42 Wilkes Antarctic Expedition:

Its many (often unfavorable) facets

Purpose

This exhibit uses archival postal and related communications material to chronicle the story of the momentous, yet troubled, 1838-42 “Wilkes Antarctic Expedition.” Its complex history will be seen through numerous facets beginning with a tortured authorization and organization to well beyond its extensive and uneasy voyage, including the expedition’s links to other historic Antarctic expeditions of the time.

Background

The 1838-42 “Wilkes Antarctic Expedition” (officially the *U.S. Exploring Expedition*, abbreviated “Ex.Ex.”) was a monumental undertaking. It was the first official USA Antarctic expedition and one of the most important expeditions in Antarctic exploration history. *It named and confirmed the existence of Antarctica.* A number of its facets amazingly link it to the three other major Antarctic expeditions of its period (Weddell’s, 1822-24; d’Urville’s, 1837-40 and James Ross’, 1839-43).

Scope

Contemporaneous material will present the history of “Wilkes Antarctic Expedition” from its ominous beginning in 1836, through its 4-year voyage, return and completion of many of its scientific publications into the 1850s. Included will be postal documentation of its competing Ross and d’Urville Antarctic expeditions, as well as that from Weddell, with whom they are all linked.



Charles Wilkes’ Congressional presentation book plate from one of 100 VIP copies of his five volume expedition narrative officially published by the U.S. Government in 1844, from which it was charged he improperly profited due to copyright manipulation.

Highlighted Material

Although much of this material shares the same extraordinary challenge factor, especially scarce and unique items are indicated in dark red text.

Text

Background and historical information is in serif text. Philatelic or postal information is in sans-serif text.

Exhibit Plan

- 1 Problem Plagued Preparation
- 2 To Antarctica - First Cruise
- 3 To Antarctica - Second Cruise
- 4 From Antarctica
- 5 Aftermath