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2015

# The 'London' edition of Captain Charles Wilkes' Narrative of the US Exploring Expedition, 1845

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## Publication Details

Organ, M. K. 2015, 'The 'London' edition of Captain Charles Wilkes' Narrative of the US Exploring Expedition, 1845', *BibliNews and Australian Notes & Queries*, no. 385, pp. 12-18.

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# The 'London' edition of Captain Charles Wilkes' Narrative of the US Exploring Expedition, 1845

## **Abstract**

A copy of the rare 1845 imperial octavo 'London' edition of Captain Charles Wilkes' Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition exists in the National Library of Australia collection with original cloth bindings and ornamental blind and gold stamping featuring the seal of the United States on the front and back covers.<sup>1</sup> This set of five volumes plus atlas allow us to obtain a precise bibliographic description of this little known variant of the Narrative.

## **Keywords**

us, exploring, expedition, 1845, narrative, wilkes, london, charles, captain, edition

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

## **Publication Details**

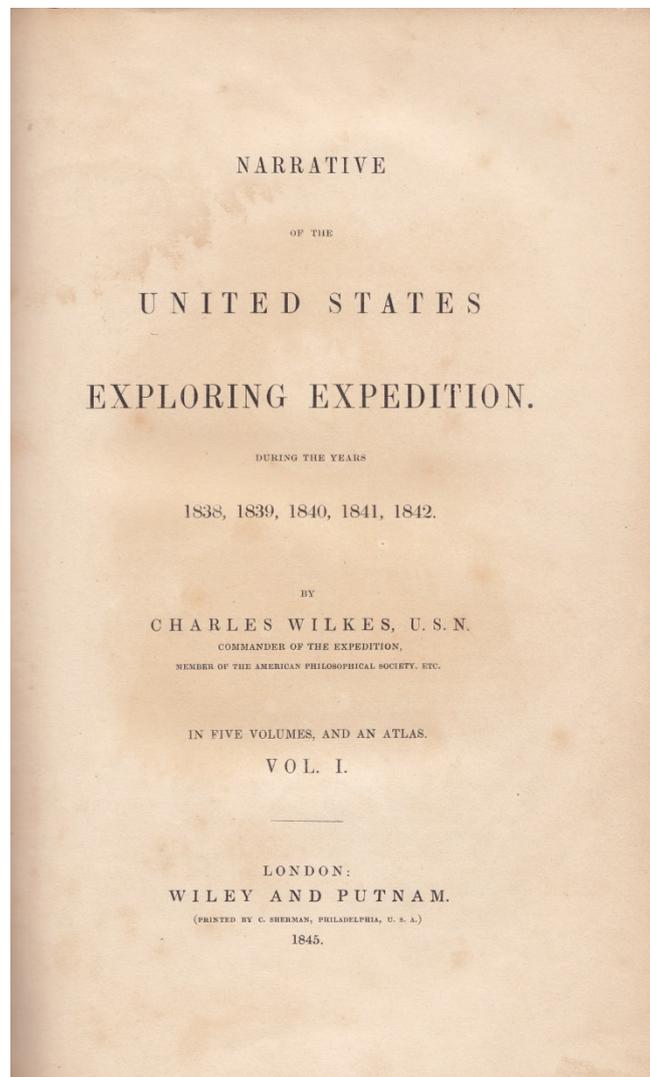
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**The 'London' Edition of Captain Charles Wilkes' *Narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition*, 1845**

Michael Organ

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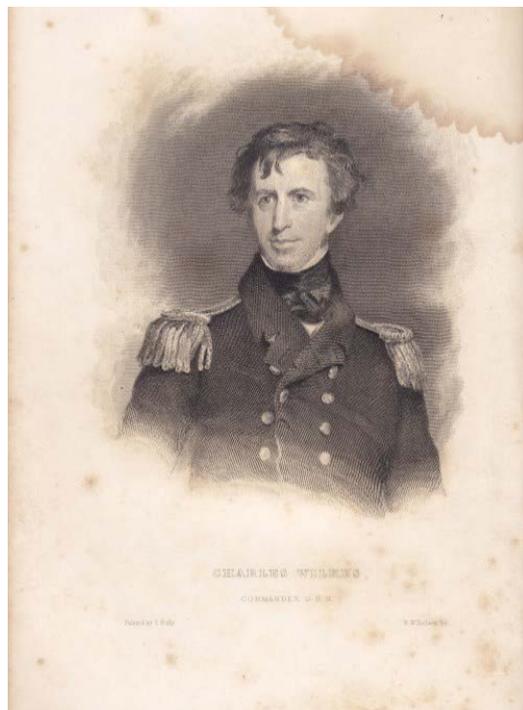
**Abstract:** A copy of the rare 1845 imperial octavo 'London' edition of Captain Charles Wilkes' *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*<sup>1</sup> exists in the National Library of Australia collection with original cloth bindings and ornamental blind and gold stamping featuring the seal of the United States on the front and back covers. This set of five volumes plus atlas allow us to obtain a precise bibliographic description of this little known variant of the *Narrative*.



## Introduction

David C. Haskell, in his book *The United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842 and its Publications 1844-1874*,<sup>2</sup> presented a detailed bibliography of the many publications - both official and unofficial - issued in connection with the Wilkes exploring expedition. While detailed information on printings, collations, publication dates, and bindings is provided for the numerous editions - e.g. the bibliographic discussion of the original 1844 official edition of the *Narrative* covers some 61/2 pages - Haskell's catalogue entries for items 4 and 18 are noticeably sparse. They comprise a brief description of the so-called 'English' or 'London' edition of the *Narrative*, issued in 1845 under the imprint of 'Wiley and Putnam, London', though printed, like its American counterpart of the same year, by C. Sherman of Philadelphia.

Little is known of this variant. Haskell cites only the copy held by the Harvard College Library, Cambridge, wherein it exists in a non-original binding. No other copies were identified in American or major overseas collections such as the British Museum during the lengthy period spent researching the book between 1940-68. Haskell was apparently unaware of copies held in Australian collections, or of J.A. Ferguson's 1951 *Bibliography of Australia* description of a set in the Dixon Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.<sup>3</sup> While Haskell's work remains the definitive bibliographic treatment of the Wilkes exploring expedition, no updated or corrected edition has since appeared. The 1968 entry therefore maintains currency outside of Australia with regard to the London edition of the *Narrative*. When the University of Wollongong Library obtained a copy of this set in 1996, the present author sought to expand upon Haskell and Ferguson's bibliographic descriptions and more clearly identify its placement within the overall publication program. To do this, it was necessary to understand the complexities of that program, especially as it revealed itself during 1844-5.



**Captain Charles Wilkes, author of the *Narrative***

## The Early Editions

The United States Exploring Expedition was undertaken under the auspices of the U.S. Navy, with the assistance of civilian scientists and artists between 1838-42. During that period it carried out extensive surveys and scientific studies of South America, the Pacific, Antarctica and Australasia. The official publication program, supervised by Commander Wilkes, commenced with the printing of his illustrated *Narrative* in 1844, and continued until 1874 when Congress officially suspended the program. By that time 20 of the planned 24 official volumes had been issued, along with numerous articles, preprints and unofficial editions.<sup>4</sup> During 1844-5 some five versions of the *Narrative* appeared (Table 1), all with substantially similar text, plates and maps.

**Table 1: Publication of Wilkes' Narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1844-5**

<i>Edition</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Binding</i>	<i>Copies</i>	<i>Compilation dates<sup>5</sup></i>	<i>Haskell no.</i>
Official edition, 5 vols. + Atlas	4to. (Quarto)	Dark green morocco + gold lettering	100	August 1844 - April 1845	1, 16
Unofficial edition, 5 vols. + Atlas	4to. (Quarto)	Black cloth	150	December 1844 - 1845	2A, 17A
do.	Imp. 8vo. (Imperial Octavo)	Black cloth	1000	January - August 1845	2B, 17B
do.	Imp. 8vo. (Imperial Octavo)	Blue cloth	?	January - February 1845	4, 18
do. 5 vols., no Atlas	Sm. 8vo. (Small Octavo)	Black cloth	3000	April - July 1845	3

The official edition (Haskell cat. nos. 1, 16), carried the imprint of the United States Congress and was printed by C. Sherman between August - November 1844, though it did not leave the binders for distribution until April-May 1845. The five volumes and atlas were handsomely printed on high quality paper, quarto in size,<sup>6</sup> and regally bound by Gaskill's of Philadelphia in full dark green Turkish morocco, with blind stamp decorative borders and the seal of the United States stamped in gold on the front and back covers. All subsequent official volumes received this elaborate treatment.

Somewhat scandalously a mere 100 copies were ordered printed by Congress, and these were for official presentation only to politicians and foreign governments. In many instances individual authors found difficulty in securing copies of their work. Three only sets of the official *Narrative* were issued to members of the original expedition in 1845, and twenty five were destroyed by fire prior to distribution.

Wilkes, though a government employee, and acting against the express wishes of Congress, early on claimed copyright of the *Narrative* and printing control over any additional copies beyond the 100 specified. He immediately made use of this right and, following completion of printing of the official edition, arranged for a further 150 quarto copies to be published by Lea and Blanchard of Philadelphia, using the original plates prepared by C. Sherman. This unofficial edition (Haskell cat. nos. 2A, 17A) was bound in black cloth, with blind stamped scroll work and gold stamped title and figurative pieces. The majority of these copies were also for presentation, and became available early in 1845, prior to the issue of the official version. The set retailed for sixty dollars. Wilkes then turned his attention to issuing a more accessible version of the *Narrative*. The quarto editions were largish and difficult to handle. A new, smaller, imperial octavo edition was prepared by Lea and Blanchard, with printing by C. Sherman (Haskell cat. nos. 2B, 17B). All the text was reset in smaller type, some minor editorial changes were made, and the images were stereotyped. Once again, the set comprised five volumes plus an atlas of five large maps. A thousand copies were printed between December 1844 - July 1845, with complete sets sent to reviewers on 1 August. This edition sold for twenty-five dollars. Wilkes commented at the time that "the Imperial 8vo has been got up in beautiful style, and stereotyped - the paper and execution fully equal, and, in some respects as a library book, to be preferred to the 4to edition."<sup>7</sup>

When the printing of this issue was completed a small octavo edition of 3000 copies was prepared (Haskell cat. no.3). Released around the same time as the imperial octavo version, it was printed on thinner paper and contained fewer illustrations and maps, though all of the original text. This budget-priced edition of five volumes minus the atlas served to place the *Narrative* before the general public. It also ended the initial phase of publication of Wilkes' volumes in their most complete form. Further reprints occurred after 1849, though a variety of condensed and abridged versions began to appear as early as 1845. Where, then, does the 'Wiley and Putnam, London' edition fit into this convoluted program of official and unofficial releases? Was it a separate printing from the Philadelphia edition or a mere variant with only slightly altered title page? How many copies were produced, and what form did its original binding take?

### **The London Edition**

Having secured copyright of the *Narrative*, Wilkes made arrangements during 1844-5 for the 'unofficial' publication of his work. Publishers Lea and Blanchard of Philadelphia and Wiley and Putnam of London were secured, with Sherman as printer and Gaskill's responsible for binding. Evidence would suggest that the London volumes were printed and bound at the same time as the American imperial octavo edition of 1845. According to statements made by descendants of the original publishers Lea and Blanchard in a 1940 letter to Haskell,<sup>8</sup> only 1000 copies of that edition were printed. It is unclear whether the London edition was part of this print run, or an extra 25, 50, 100 or more copies were printed separately with the 'Wiley and Putnam, London' title page. It is

possible that Lea and Blanchard, as Wilkes' publishers, assisted in the preparation of the London volumes.

The Ferguson entry provides further information on this variant. It refers to a 'List of New and Imported Works .... to be published by Wiley and Putnam', dated London, January 1845. It is therein noted that the first volume of the imperial octavo version of the *Narrative* "was now ready" and "other volumes will be delivered in February."<sup>9</sup> This most likely refers to the London edition with Wiley and Putnam imprint. Questions then arise as to the precise bibliographic description of this edition, and in what form it originally appeared. Haskell closely equates the London edition (cat. nos. 4, 18) with the imperial octavo edition in black cloth issued in the United States between December 1844 and August 1845. Of any variance he merely states: 'Collation: Same as no. 2B [and 17B] except that the verso of each title page is blank, having neither copyright notice nor printer's imprint.'<sup>10</sup>

Whilst text, images and collation are substantially the same for both the American and the London editions, binding differences may have existed. The original U.S. binding, as described by Haskell, is relevant to our discussion:

Binding: Bound in black cloth, straight-grained pattern, hand-sewn on three cords, no head bands, untrimmed. Front and back covers have blind-stamped three-rule border enclosing blind-stamped conventional scroll-work rectangular border containing blind-stamped decorations at top and bottom, and having eagle standing on shield with sailing ship in the background stamped in centre in gold leaf of low carat. Spine has five blind stamped bands enclosing four panels, the first and third having blind-stamped decorations the fourth having, stamped in gold of low carat, a female figure with staff surmounted by a liberty cap and holding in one hand an unrolled chart lettered at top ANTAR CON, sailing ship in the background. Lettered in second panel in gold leaf of same carat: UNITED | STATES | EXPLORING | EXPEDITION | vol. 1.<sup>11</sup>

Haskell was limited in that he only cited a single set of the London edition, and that with a contemporary library binding. His entry implies that the original binding was identical to the American edition described above. Ferguson provides more specific detail. He refers to a set from the Dixson Library with a similar collation, but in "Dark green cloth boards lettered on spine: 'United States | Exploring | Expedition | Vol.I'" and with the United States coat of arms in gold in a plain ornamental frame on the front cover. Were the two editions similar apart from the colour of their cloth covers? To clarify the situation we can study a number of copies of the London edition which are held in Australian libraries. They include:

- National Library of Australia - NK6349. Vols. 1-5 + Atlas. Original binding
- Dixson Library, State Library of New South Wales - Q84/47-52. Vols.1-5 + Atlas. Original binding (repaired)
- Wollongong University Library - Rare Book 995/43. Vols. 1-5 + Atlas. Contemporary library binding
- Queensland Museum - Rare Book 11/778d. Vols. 2-5 + Atlas. Modern binding

The Dixson Library set exists in what appears to be original blue-grey covers (not the dark green referred to by Ferguson in 1951), with blind- and gold stamped ornamentation almost identical to

the American edition. Minor variation exists in the absence of the female figure with staff on the spine, and volume numbers in Roman as opposed to Arabic numerals. These volumes have recently been partially rebound along the binding edge in blue cloth. The National Library of Australia set exists as originally issued in blue-grey cloth covers, with blind- and gold stamped decorative features identical to that described by Haskell for the American edition.

The University of Wollongong Library copies are bound in contemporary marbled boards with half calf spine and gold lettering. A label for the 'Settle Literary Society. Instituted 1770' with a catalogue number in ink graces the cover of each volume, suggesting a library binding dating from the time of issue of the work. The set in the Queensland Museum, acquired in 1911, has what may be a relatively recent leather and buckram binding.

### **A 'rare bird'**

It would appear that the London edition of Wilkes' *Narrative* was prepared alongside the U.S. imperial octavo edition during the first half of 1845, with only the title page and blue-grey cloth covers indicative of this foreign variant. Precise print numbers remain a mystery, though they were obviously small if we are to judge by the scarcity of surviving sets. With Haskell identifying only 32 extant copies of the official 1844 quarto edition of the *Narrative* in original morocco binding, the rareness and desirability of these volumes is well-known and has been appreciated since their day of issue. Perhaps just as rare, though obviously not produced in such a grand style, and therefore not as desirable to the collector, is the 1845 London edition. Only five copies are known to this author. The National Library of Australia set may be the only example of this version of Wilkes' unofficial *Narrative* to exist in original form. The Dixson Library set likewise presents an interesting variant.

### **Notes**

1. Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition. During the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, Wiley and Putnam, London, 1845, 5 volumes + Atlas.
2. D.C. Haskell, *The United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842 and its Publications 1844-1874. A Bibliography by David C. Haskell*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1968, 188p. The following discussion relies for the most part on the bibliographic information contained therein.
3. J.A. Ferguson, *Bibliography of Australia*, Volume III, 1839-45, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1951. Entry no. 4211, pp.544-5.
4. The complete official set as issued between 1844-74 comprised: v.1-5 Narrative; v.6 Ethnography; v.7 Zoophytes; v.8 Mammalogy and Ornithology; v.9 Races of Man; v.10 Geology; v.11 Meteorology; v.12 Mollusca & Shells; v.13-14 Crustacea; v.15-18 Botany; v.19 Geographical Distribution of Animals & Plants; v.20 Herpetology; v.21-22 Ichthyology; v.23 Hydrography; v. 24 Physics. Volumes 18, 21-22 and 24 were never printed. The Atlas accompanying the Narrative was not allocated an official volume number.
5. 'Compilation dates' refers to the approximate period from the commencement of printing to the issue of completed bound sets. In some instances this could take up to 8 months.

6. The standard sizes used by Haskell in relation to the *Narrative* include: Quarto (32½ x 24cm); Imperial Octavo (29 x 18cm); and Small Octavo (24½ - 25cm). Quarto was also signified by the abbreviations 4to or 4°, and Octavo by 8vo or 8°.

7. Charles Wilkes to Congressional Committee, 28 January 1845. *28 Congress, 2nd Session. House Report No. 160*, p.6.

8. Haskell, *op cit.*, p.39.

9. Ferguson, *op cit.*

10. Haskell, *op. cit.*, p.41.

11. *ibid.*, p.39.

### **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to thank the following for their assistance in the compilation of this article: Ian Goldsmith, National Library of Australia; Victoria Harrison, Queensland Museum Library; and the staff of the Mitchell and Dixson Libraries, State Library of New South Wales.

### **Notes on article contributors**

**Michael Organ** is Manager Repository Services at the University of Wollongong Library. Research interests include the Aboriginal and early European history of the Illawarra region, the German silent film *Metropolis*, the koala, and JRR Tolkien. His article 'Alice in Oz – "Please, Ma'am, is this New Zealand? Or Australia?": The Lewis Carroll Alice in Wonderland books in Australia' appeared in *Biblionews* (Issue 379, September 2013).