

RARE BOOK

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1807

*Circular of the Secretary of the Treasury in relation to a plan for executing  
the Survey of the Coast*

1807.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,

25th March, 1807.

SIR:

The President of the United States\* being authorized by an act of the last session to cause the whole of the Coast of the said States, together with the adjacent shoals and soundings, to be surveyed, it is his intention that the work should be executed with as much correctness as can be obtained within a reasonable time; and he has directed me to reply to you, requesting that you will have the goodness to suggest the outline of such a plan as may in your opinion unite correctness and practicability.

As each nautical survey of the shoals and soundings presupposes a knowledge of the position of certain points of the Coast, it seems to me that the work should consist of three distinct parts, viz:

1. The ascertainment by a series of astronomical observations of the true position of a few remarkable points on the Coast; and some of the light-houses placed on the principal capes, or at the entrance of the principal harbors, appear to be the most eligible places for that purpose, as being objects particularly interesting to navigators, visible at a great distance, and generally erected on spots on which similar buildings will be continued so long as navigation exists.

2. A trigonometrical survey of the Coast between those points of which the position shall have been astronomically ascertained, in the execution of which survey the position of every distinguishable permanent object should be carefully designated, and temporary beacons be erected at proper distances on those parts of the Coast on which such objects are rarely found.

3. A nautical survey of the shoals and soundings of the Coast, of which the trigonometrical survey of the Coast itself, and the ascertained position of the light-houses and other distinguishable objects, would be the bases, and which would therefore depend but little on any astronomical observations made on board the vessels employed on that part of the work.

But this is submitted to your consideration, not for the purpose of pointing out any plan in preference to another, but only in order to show the view which we have taken of the subject, and the degree of accuracy which we are desirous of obtaining.

I will only add, that the greatest practical difficulties which have heretofore occurred relate to what I call the nautical survey, and on that part of the subject the following inquiries have arisen:

Can a correct survey be taken with one vessel alone? Can angles be taken with sufficient correctness from on board a vessel so as to ascertain its position in relation to three visible objects on shore? Or is it necessary that the vessel's position, at the time of taking any particular sounding, should be ascertained by observers on shore? And many others which an examination of the subject will naturally suggest to you.

Permit me also to ask whether you know any person whom you might recommend as capable of acting in the different parts of the work.

I have the honor to be, respectfully,  
Your obedient servant,

(Signed,)

ALBERT GALLATIN.

Mr. HASSLER,  
Philadelphia.

\*Thomas Jefferson.

# **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

## **Rare Books from 1600-1800**

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