

THE WORLD AT YOUR ELBOW

James Wilson of Vermont: America's First Globe Maker

It must have been a great relief to sailors and other travelers when it was learned that the earth is round and not flat. No more worrying about coming to the edge and falling off!

After all, maps are flat, so looking at a map is not the easiest way to get an idea how the earth really looks. A much better way is to make a ball and cover it with drawings of all the land and seas: in other words, make a globe.

If you had been living in Vermont in 1795, it is likely you would never have seen a globe. In those days, globes were very expensive and none were being made in America. But in that year, James Wilson first saw some globes at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. The globes he saw had been made in England: one looked like the earth and the other like the **heavens**.

At home on his farm in Bradford, Vermont, James Wilson began the job of making America's first globe. It took him fifteen years to finish it!

First he sold some of his farm animals to buy an encyclopedia. By reading it he learned what he needed to know about map-making. He already knew how to make his own tools, ink, paper and glue. The thing he needed to learn then was how to make a **copper engraving** so he could finish his globe.

First James Wilson walked to Boston, but couldn't get the help he needed so he walked home. Then he walked to Connecticut and stayed there for two months learning what he could. When he returned home, he made a copper plate for his globe but it wasn't right, so he walked back to Boston. This time he learned the secret of how to make his globe.

First he made a wooden ball. Next he covered it with thick layers of paper to make a shell. He cut the

paper shell in half and took out the wooden ball. Then he glued the two pieces of the shell back together. After engraving the shapes of the earth's land and seas into his copper plate, he inked the plate and printed the **image** on paper. He then cut up the world picture in sections and glued them carefully onto his globe and put it in a frame so it could spin.

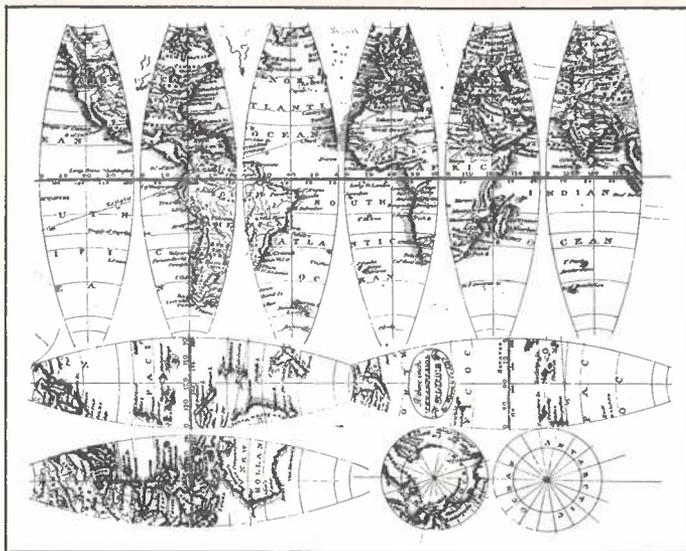


In 1810 he sold one of his first globes to his friend Judge Nathaniel Niles. It cost about \$25. Wilson's globes were an immediate success and soon he had an agent in Boston selling more. Within a few years, Wilson and his sons Samuel, John, and David

opened a globe factory in Albany, New York, where it was easier to do the shipping. The company was known as J. Wilson & Sons, and for more than 25 years it produced many kinds and sizes of globes like the one made by James Wilson on his farm in Vermont. That globe helped to change the way Americans saw the world.

James Wilson lived to be 92 years old. He improved his globes over the years and also experimented with models of the earth and sun and how they move. In spite of many hardships, James Wilson did what he had wanted so much to do: he made globes for the schools and homes of America, so that every citizen could better understand the earth. A globe is like having the world at your elbow.

—Karen Lane



VOCABULARY

- heavens** the sky as we see it from earth with all the stars and planets
- copper engraving** a way to make copies of a drawing by scratching it into a piece of copper metal
- image** picture