The *dramatis personae* include Charles Wilkes, eventual leader of the expedition, who was promptly court-martialled upon the conclusion of the Ex. Ex.

Jane Renwick, Wilkes’ wife, long-suffering

Charlie Erskine, crewman, youngster who was unlettered at the beginning of the voyage, cruelly punished by Wilkes, and who wrote of experiences in the 1890s

William Reynolds, first a supporter, then a staunch accuser of Wilkes after the end of the Ex. Ex. Voyage.

William Hudson, second in command of the Ex. Ex., who had no talent for surveying.
…James Dwight Dana, the geologist, more or less equivalent to Charles Darwin’s role on the Beagle, except that he had other scientific specialists to accompany him. Later became a professor of Geology at Yale, and regarded as the foremost American Geologist of his time.

Other noteworthy specialists: Titian Peale, Charles Pickering, Joseph Couthouy, and William Brackenridge, horticulturist, later founder of the U.S. Botanic Garden
The ambitious scale of the Ex. Ex. Is indicated by its makeup of 3 tall ships, a supply ship, and two schooners. One schooner was lost in the Southern Ocean, the other sold to an Englishman at the mouth of the Columbia River. The store ship was too slow to keep up, so was sent home from the mid-Pacific. Peacock was lost to a storm at the mouth of the Columbia river. Porpoise and Vincennes were the only 2 of the original 6 vessels to return to the U.S., along with a replacement brig, Oregon, purchased in San Francisco. Altogether, a very expensively supported 4-year expedition.
In the matter of ocean exploration, the Ex. Ex. Probably deserved credit for earliest sightings, and recognizing the continental nature of Antarctica, as afforded it by the German cartographers of the day, who named Wilkes Land in honor of the commander of the Ex. Ex. The ships of the Ex. Ex. Did make “land”fall on freshwater pieces of ice shelf, as shown in this Wilkes sketch.
After a tumultuous voyage, Wilkes faced court-martial proceedings upon his return to the U.S. Eventually cleared and exonerated, Charles Wilkes became exemplary in his overseeing of placing materials into the newly founded repositories of the U.S., such as the Smithsonian, the U.S. Botanical Garden, and other collections that researchers have been using ever since. Wilkes’ arch-detractor/-enemy, Reynolds, eventually toddled off to Hawaii, a semi-retired, invalided? Navy casualty, but returned as a senior volunteer at the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War.
Franklin’s 3rd Expedition de-confused

1. Expedition to Coppermine River, 1819-1822.
2. McKenzie Expeditions 1823, when Franklin ventured west to Return Reef (Oliktok Pt)
3. “Lost” or Northwest Passage Expedition, 1845-47+

Both the highwater mark and the concluding tragedy to the Admiralty’s 19th century hopes to find a NW Passage. Probably the second strongest dis-inducement (next to the Crimean War) for Britain to purchase the Territory of Alaska from Russia.
To review, the overlapping lives of key figures (among many others) in the late 18th and mid-19th centuries.
While the searches for Franklin built toward their greatest intensity, our friend, Robert FitzRoy had a series of misadventures after the second voyage of the *Beagle*, and returned from one such misadventure in New Zealand as a passenger, with his family on a ship like this one in 1845. He ended up saving the Malcolm from near-certain sinking and loss of life during a storm on the way back to England, by a most amazing coincidence of his experience and a pampero storm of the type he knew so well from his *Beagle* days in Magellan Strait. Stay tuned.
In truth, Bennett Jr. was more fascinated by polar and Arctic affairs than by explorations of darkest Africa. The state of U.S. Science and Geographic understanding in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War was...confusing...certainly immature. Note the nation’s restless energy applied to efforts to join world powers as a partner at the table.

One indication of where things stood was the state of knowledge about high latitudes. It can be thought of as a “wishful geography” of poorly known regions of the planet, and polar science in particular.

Silas Bent of the U.S. Navy had voyaged with Commodore Matthew Perry to Japan in the decade before the U.S. Civil War. He returned impressed by the Japanese *Kuro Siwo*, the warm current, more or less the Pacific equivalent of the Atlantic’s Gulf Stream. Without much firsthand knowledge of high latitude oceanography, Bent let it be known that he believed the easiest, most promising route to the North Pole must lie through the North Pacific and along the coast of the nation’s newest Territory, Alaska. There, he argued, an explorer could ride “downhill” on the Japanese warm current, the *Kuro Siwo*, as it flowed through something like a ring of ice that circled a warm, OPEN Polar Sea. Bent, no doubt, dined out on the proceeds of his public lectures hyping the promise of an open Polar Sea.

Lest we laugh at it, his “OPEN POLAR SEA HYPOTHESIS” had a surprising cast of proponents.
Matthew Fontaine Maury stirred up quite a following of international scholars when he called a meeting in Brussels, Belgium in 1853 for the purpose of standardising means and practices for recording physical oceanographic and meteorological observations. Of that conference, more later.