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To Messrs. Scott and Stuart Gentling
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Sirs:

May I introduce myself as the author of a forthcoming book entitled "An Index to Audubon's Birds of America", written under the aegis of the Department of Ornithology of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The book will be published in 1987.

I read with the greatest interest the article in your work, "Of Birds and Texas", in the Jan. Feb. issue of Southern Accents and was especially impressed by your lively rendering of the Wild Turkey. What I am writing about in particular is your discovery of a lost Audubon painting, The Great Crow Blackbird. There are a lot of unanswered questions about this painting and I am hoping you will be able to throw some light on the subject for which I would be most grateful.

I think the best thing would be to review what I have learned from my research to see if

it agrees or conflicts with what you have learned.

Audubon arrived in Philadelphia in 1824 to search for an engraver for his great project, Birds of America. Charles Lucien Bonaparte, the ornithologist (and nephew of Napoleon) took him to see Alexander Lawson, an engraver who engraved for Wilson, Lewis and Clark, and Bonaparte. Lawson was rude and scornful of Audubon's work and refused to have anything to do with it.

Nothing daunted the two men returned to Lawson again to endeavor to get Lawson to engrave a painting Audubon had done of a female Brak tailed Grackle that Audubon called the Great Snow Blackbird. I suspect that Bonaparte had asked Audubon to make this drawing to serve as an illustration in Bonaparte's forthcoming ornithological work. Again Lawson was rude and scornful.

Now there is a gap until 1825 when Audubon received an ornithological volume by Bonaparte. Alice

Ford in her biography of Audubon says what Audubon got was Volume I of the "American Ornithology" by Bonaparte. The New York Historical Society says what he got was "Continuation of Wilson's American Ornithology" by Bonaparte. At any rate in it (Plate 4) Audubon at last beheld one of his drawings in print. Actually the two birds were by two different artists, the male by A. Riden and the female by John J. Audubon, so noted in the credit line of the legend.

Now comes a curious point. This print is reproduced in Alice Ford's "John James Audubon". In the title Miss Ford wrote under the print describing it, she says "Engraved by Alexander Lawson", but if one puts a magnifying glass on the legend one can clearly see that it says "Engraved by W.H. Lizars". Lizars was the Edinburgh, Scotland, engraver who engraved the first ten plates of Birds of America before Audubon changed to Harell.

Lawson certainly was Bonaparte's engraver

but Lizans certainly engraved this particular print. It is my intention to check out all the Bonaparte ornithological volumes and see who were the artists of the original paintings and who were the engravers who engraved the plates from which the illustrations were struck. It will be a little time before I can do this as the volumes available to me are in New York and I am in Maryland.

The New York Historical Society says Audubon drew the Brak-Tailed Grackle three times, once for the one we are discussing for Bonaparte, once an unpublished drawing, and once for Birds of America, Plate CLXXXVII. The Birds of America one is nothing like the Bonaparte one. Plate CLXXXVII depicts a male and female in the branches of a Live Oak. Furthermore it is not titled "Great Crow Blackbird" but bears the legend "Brak-Tailed Grackle". It was

engraved by Howell long after Lizars had gone out of Audubon's life.

I wonder if you have seen the Bonaparte print anywhere else but in the bound Bonaparte volume? In other words, were some of the Bonaparte volumes broken up and the prints sold separately ~~as~~ as happened so often with Birds of America.

The article says you have reproduced the painting you found in 'of Birds and Texas'. Is this reproduction of the male and female as in the Bonaparte print or is it just the female by Audubon. I wonder whatever happened to the original copper plate?

I fear I have burdened you with a great many questions. My hope is that you will find a dialogue between us to be interesting.

I would like to ask you one more. If it

is not confidential information. I would be so
very interested to know when, where, and under
what circumstances you found the painting.

Was the painting signed and did it have comments
written on it as was Audubon's custom?

I would be so grateful for any information
you could send me on this matter.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely,

Jusanne W. Low

(Mrs. Francis H. Low)

P.S. Have you any information on A. Rider? I
have never heard of him. S.M.L.