

Mrs. Francis H. Low
(Susanne M. Low)
Miles River Road
Rte. 1 Box 210
Easton, Maryland 21601
U.S.A.
Tel: (301) 822 3666

In reference to research into the location
and provenance of all known copies of
Audubon's "Birds of America", the Double
Elephant Folio, under the aegis of the
American Museum of Natural History,
New York.

letter

1

July 11, 1989

Mr. Scot Gentling
4801 Harley St.
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

Dear Mr. Gentling,

I hope you will remember me and our
correspondence and phone calls of 1986-7. I got in touch
with you because I was so interested in your discovery
of the Audubon painting of the Brak-tailed Grackles at
that time known as Great Crow Blackbirds.

In one of my many moves between our Florida
house and our house here part of my files turned up missing
including my correspondence with you so I am writing
you now to ask you if you will refresh my memory as
to how, when, and where you discovered the painting as

letter 2

I and my colleagues have become interested in the whole curious story.

We all from time to time have funny things happen that cause us to say "isn't it a small world" but I think you will agree that what I am about to tell you beats all. About a month ago my husband and I were staying with one of our married daughters. We went to have tea with some friends of hers and there on the wall was your Audubon painting of the Snackles!! She told me they had bought it at Hershel & Adler in New York. They would love to know more about it so I told them what I knew and said I would try to find out more by writing to you.

Then I worked for a few hours in the library of the American Museum of Natural History in New York and put to-gether the history of your painting as best I could. I enclose a copy.

One point in particular interests me. In your painting (The one I saw while visiting my

letter 3

daughter) is written "Drawn from Nature by John J. Audubon" or perhaps it was John James Audubon - I can't quite remember. This line is beautifully and carefully written and looks as though it were an engraved line rather than hand-written. Yet it could hardly be engraved, could it, as this is a water-color done by Audubon for Bonaparte. The line certainly isn't in Audubon's handwriting. Do you think the line was written in by Lawson?

So, to recapitulate, would you consider all that is in this letter and all that is in the history attached and tell me what you can. I would love to be able to tell my daughter's friend your part in how you found the painting and from whom you got it, etc. Then, besides that, I would so appreciate anything you can add to my research from a scholarly point of view.

My book on Birds of America is in print and I enclose information about it. Now that the book is finished I have embarked on a new project for the American Museum of Natural History which is to locate all the

surviving copies in the world of Birds of America (at present count 121) and also to learn what happened to the others. As you know it is generally believed that between 175 and 200 copies were printed. All this to go into a data bank in the new Audubon Room in the Museum. Information on the original Double Elephant Folio, the Octavos, the Synopses, the Bibles, and modern copies will all be included.

You will be pleased to know that your painting is beautifully framed and beautifully hung in a lovely house.

Looking forward so much to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Susanne W. Low
(Mrs. Francis H. Low)

A History of the engraving of the Great
Crow Blackbird as it appears in The
first edition Charles Bonaparte's American
Ornithology.
Susanne M. Low

This history is made up of Mrs. Low's research
in The Library of the American Museum of Natural
History in New York and in The New-York Historical
Society also of New York. Also included are notes
from Mrs. Low's correspondence with Scott Gentling
of Texas, the discoverer of the lost Audubon drawing
now in private hands, and notes from the revised
edition (1989) of Alice Jod's biography of Audubon,
pp. 167-168.

Alexander Wilson, the father of American ornithology,
was the author of "American Ornithology", a work of
nine volumes that appeared between 1808 and 1814.
Wilson died in 1813 and the completion and publication
of the 9th volume was done by another eminent ornithologist
of Philadelphia, George Ord.

Another eminent Philadelphia ornithologist of the
time was Charles Lucian Jules Laurents Bonaparte, Prince
of Canino and Musignano (1803-57). Between 1825 and
1833 he produced his great work, "American Ornithology;
the Natural History of Birds inhabiting the United States,
not given by Wilson". 4 volumes published by

Anthony Finney, Philadelphia. These volumes were illustrated with 27 engravings engraved by Alexander Lawson. 26 were from paintings by Titian Peale. The painting for the 27th was attributed jointly to John James Audubon and Alexander Rider. Rider's help in producing this work was enlisted by Bonaparte to assist Peale in preparing his drawings and to hand color the finished engravings. The story of this particular work, Plate IV in Volume I, follows:

#25 While in Philadelphia in March of 1824, Audubon met Bonaparte during which time Bonaparte paid Audubon for a painting of a pair of Boat-tailed Grackles (known at that time as Great Crow Blackbirds.) It was Bonaparte's intent to have Lawson make an engraving from it to use as an illustration for "American Ornithology". In Audubon's painting both male and female face to the right.

The engraver, Lawson, convinced Bonaparte that the drawing was too large for the copperplate. In fact it probably wasn't but Lawson disliked Audubon and possibly did not want to engrave it. In any event Rider made a new drawing of a pair of Boat-tailed Grackles that Lawson used. However as it is plain

to see that Rider's drawing took much from Audubon's drawing, Bropante saw to it that both Audubon and Rider got credit. So we may see in Vol. I, Plate IV, the following lines:

Left: Drawn from Nature by John J. Audubon & A. Rider

Center: 1. Great Crow Blackbird. 2. Female
Quiscalus Major

Right: Engraved by A. Lawson.

As mentioned above, in Audubon's drawing both male and female face right. In Rider's drawing the female still faces right but the body of the male faces left with the head turned back right.

The drawing by Rider which was used in the Plate IV engraving is in the Philadelphia Academy of Science. I have not seen it but reputedly it is signed with a forged signature of Audubon. This last seems curious and should be checked out.

The drawing by Audubon was found by chance by a Texan, Scott Gentling, who sold it. It is now safe in private hands, where Mrs. Low has seen it.

The popularity of the works of both Wilson and Bonaparte led to many new editions. Among them were editions combining Wilson's 9 volumes and Bonaparte's 4 volumes all boiled down to 3 octavo volumes of text and ~~2~~ a large quarto volume of plates.

Sir William Jardine, eminent Edinburgh, Scotland, ornithologist saw to some of these later editions published in Scotland. Mrs. Low is at the moment in correspondence with the Edinburgh University Library for help with the following mystery:

Between pp. 82 and 83 of the first edition (1964) of Alice Ford's biography of Audubon there is a copy of Plate IV, Vol. I, Bonaparte's American Ornithology, the Great Crow Blackbirds. Although the printed description under the print includes the line "Engraved by Alexander Lawson", if one inspects very carefully with a magnifying glass one can clearly see that it says to the right under the birds "Engraved by W.H. Lizars." Lizars was a well-known engraver of Edinburgh, Scotland, who did the first 10 plates of Audubon's "Birds of America" and the work of Selby among others. Possibly the

print in the Ford book comes from one of the Edinburgh re-publications.

Further research into the details of a transaction whereby an American ornithological work was republished in Scotland or elsewhere is needed. Negotiations must have been entered into between the new publisher (Tadine?) in Edinburgh and either the American author (Bangs?) or the American publisher (Finney). What were the details regarding the illustrations? In general were new plates engraved or were the original plates sent over to Edinburgh from America? The more one thinks about it the more questions arise.

See - John James Audubon by Alice Ford
original edition 1964
between pp 82 + 83 - next to last illustration

See - John James Audubon by Alice Ford
revised edition 1988
illustrations: following p. 165
text: p. 149 (par. 3)
p. 162 (last par.) 165, 166.

Mrs. Francis H. Low
Miles River Road
Route 1, Box 210
Easton, Maryland 21601

Mr. Scot Gentling
4801 Hanley St.
Fort Worth
Texas 76107



Wey

ring
Books
Audubon Painting
Camera

5
Fg