

Alice Ford • Pickering Apts. 206 • Newtown, PA 18940

August 24, 1989

Dear Stuart and Scott, dear Scott and Stuart,

Late yesterday, only a day after my zillionth birthday, I opened my door on the spectacle of the great Texan box. A few hours later I did delicate surgery to preserve the perfect carton, then stored it away in flat pieces. I pulled out the fat envelope containing your letter, Stuart, again one so revealing of your angelic qualities, and the galleys sent for greater ease of reading. It was a very hot, humid night, and not the time to begin what I know will be a memorable journey through your seven or so years of so much demanding work, determination and--yes--love. It's morning, now, and I am about to hoist the book onto a plant roller, place a sheet on the livingroom floor, open the box, draw up a low chair, and BEGIN! But before I do I want you to know that this has to be that SURPRISE that we long for in childhood, something wonderful under a leaf or in the deep hole of some old tree. Throughout life we go on longing without ever quite knowing what it is. Only twice I've had the surprise take my breath away--this was the second time and in every way the unlikeliest. There is no way to thank you, just now, except to assure you that I do understand all that drove you, and perfectly. You are still going to help decide who deserves this gift when I have been swept out of the way.

When I write again it will be about the BOOK. That's why I want to say a couple of things that you should know concerning what I wrote, at the 11th hour, about the controversial grade conspiracy. A year or so after I read Morris Tyler's translation of the crucial Bonaparte letter to Audubon I read that he had donated his collection to Yale. This was close to the time of my deadline with Abbeville, when I supposed the book would actually be out by the time of the catalog's promise. On learning that the original was indeed in the Beinecke, I drove up to do my own translation, one that is absolutely verbatim, literal and complete. It does not differ substantively with Morris T.'s version, but you can decide as to that. (I used to wonder why I longed in childhood to learn French, years before I had the chance and had never heard of Audubon although I had an instinctive passion for birds.) The last sentence on page 168 is based on the last letter of a notebook of letter copies (Ord to Waterton) in the library of the American Philosophical Society. I mean, Rider's having given the drawing to Ord. I am utterly appalled to discover that the junior editor who did such a poor job on the index elected to drop this documentation! The Dear knows what else she did, of the kind. She has since been banished--a Yale graduate who came from its Art Gallery.

I want to comment, too, on your thoughts about the drawing of the Tree Swallow. Its date, May 17 on the original, certainly bears out your hypothesis, one that I myself should have called attention to in connection with the paper written for the Lyceum. (I had been studying the originals daily, weekdays, for 2½ months--as I told you? --when a staff member told me to finish up, that plans had been made to publish the collection. Fortunately, I had finished all but those in frames on a gallery wall. Even more fortunately, fate got in the way of my own hopes and left the job to Marshall Davidson (died last week in NYC) and Edward Dwight. It would have killed me. Dwight, too, is gone, as you may know; his legends are riddled with so many bad guesses and the like that they are among Errata that I have compiled

for the benefit of future scholars (as per my final note on page 500) who turn to Herrick, Arthur, Fries and myself). I decided against including them but instead turned the compilation over to the Frick Art Reference Library.

You spoke of Lehman and his possible contribution of botanical grounds. You know that he provided those for the birds painted at Egg Harbor, N.J., and Mauchunk, Pa., in 1829. I grieve over the missing drawing of the Charleston waterfront which I saw, and gasped over, at the NYHS in 1960. Also, he drew the "rough-leaved Cordia," a West Indies plant introduced to Florida (Key West) per Cuba. It appears only in the octavo Birds, Vol. 4, page 321, applicable to Folio plate 177--or so an old note of mine says. Audubon wrote Lucy on July 15, 1829, that he had taken a "help" to assist him in finishing the plants at that time. Lehman drew for 30 days before being dismissed. In Holbrook's Herpetology (1842) you will find the turtles and tortoises that Lehman drew on stone. And in American Historical Prints (Stokes Coll.), NYPL, you will find views by Lehman. His view of Bethlehem, Pa., is the most prized by that city. This may tell you more than you wanted to know about him.

--b'flies--

The yellow ~~s'tails~~ are passing through, this week, bound for Central America. I can picture how exciting the trip to Mexico was for the Princetonians. I am less than a novice on Mexican art, ancient; although, in my Brooklyn Museum days, its basement held a huge collection amassed by Herbert Spinden--some of it was anthropological, in general. I tremble to think of what may have become of it. The whims of passing curators are responsible for shocking initiatives, ^{at} in even the most respected museums, some of it scandalous and still sub rosa. A librarian traded a Birds Folio for seven thousand dollars worth of various wanted books on twentieth century art. (Fries did not happen onto this one, which was long ago broken up and sold by Kennedy Galleries.)

It's 10.15. I have an 11.30 appointment that I would probably forget about if I opened the treasure now. Picture me gourmandizing over it this afternoon!

Your everythingly grateful friend,

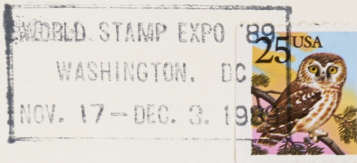


P.S. The "old lady" who owned the grackle drawing could have been linked with the Merriams (of Dictionary note) who once owned the first drawing in my 1986 edition of the 1826 Journal of Audubon? A Virginia dealer--actually a private school teacher--wrote me about it and his belief that it was from the journal. I let Wm Reese know and he bought it at once, after Henry Bradley Martin had refused to pay \$15,000. So I think the grackle probably belongs to the Reese family now. The truth will out. W.R.'s failure to reply suggests this to me, strongly. He tried hard to talk me out of thinking my drawing a highly desirable item, in his desire--I think--to acquire it for a song and from my innocence. I was going to send you my gift copy of his My Method, but I see that you have it. I can't forgive Mrs. Low and her smarmie announcement to you, which you seem to accept philosophically, without having learned what it was proper to tell you. Are the owners afraid that we are thieves? At least they granted permission to publish--but because it had already been shown in the Sotheby catalog.

Scott, I have decided that you would like the 1989 book. I shall write a little, more or less thumbnail, sketch about why I so much longed for a chance at this edition. The end papers will hold it.

Is there a spare photo of Twin Artists with Skull--to cherish???????

Food
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A charming portrait of baby Basil Rathbone (see 18269e) ^{in color} appears in a Sotheby
Cat., for sale in London, June 2, 1989, & appraised at £ 300 - \$ 400. By 998. Pencil,
pastels & watercolor, 8 1/2" x 7". Its fate? Sotheby's (NYC) took to sending cats.
containing 100s & \$s. offerings some years ago. Unrequested, that's true.
I learned of the grackle, just before sale. Ashenille handled my
requests. I made no direct ones. Did you first
see the Bonaparte plate in my 1964 edition?