

a newly discovered painting by J. S. Audubon

The Great Crow Blackbird

app.

background on the Bonaparte Audubon Painting

In 1824 John James Audubon arrived in Philadelphia with his portfolios crammed with his paintings. He had come to find a suitable engraver and perhaps a publisher who might undertake the task of presenting his work to the public. Philadelphia was the most important publishing center in America at that time. It had been the home base for Alexander Wilson (1766-1813) whose famous "American Ornithology" had been produced there between 1808 and 1813.

He was convinced that his paintings of birds were the best yet painted in America, and he was certain that he had gained new knowledge and fresh insights concerning the birds of America which would render much of Wilson's work obsolete. Whether or not he expected to be received in Philadelphia with open arms we ~~could~~ probably never know, but one thing is certain; he arrived in that city naively expecting that the men whose reputations and fortunes ~~were~~ ^{had been} bound up with Wilson's work would be open-minded and eager to become involved in a fresh ornithological enterprise.

Philadelphia has always been a very conservative city whose cultural life is influenced and to a great extent controlled by a quiet and firmly established oligarchy. This is true today,

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The Great Crow Blackbird

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but it was even more so in Audubon's ^{time.} day.
It must not have been long after his arrival
in that city that Audubon was made
painfully aware that the ~~established~~
Scientific and literary establishment of
Philadelphia was firmly committed to Wilson's
American Ornithology and that any new comer,
whether his work be of merit or not, would
be greeted with indifference or outright
hostility. ^{The ~~most~~ most important members of this} ~~this~~ ^{as for an} ^{Audubon} ^{was} ^{concerned}
~~this~~ established oligarchy consisted
of George Ord, the biographer of Wilson and one
of the executors of his estate since Wilson's death
in 1813; the engraver, Alexander Sawson, who
had worked intimately with Wilson to produce
the hand-colored plates for the nine volumes
of the American Ornithology and who owned
a percentage of all royalties obtained from the
publication, Titian Ramsay Peale, son of the
famous Charles Wilson Peale whose museum,
housed on the second floor of Independence Hall,
was the most famous in America. ^{Titian Peale} ~~He~~ ^{was} a
naturalist and artist and had ^{even} ~~returned~~ ^{with} been to
the far west gathering specimens ^{from} the famous
Jong expedition. ¹⁸²⁰ He was then engaged ⁱⁿ doing the
illustration for a supplement ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{volume} Wilson's work which
was to be published the following year, under the auspices
of the fourth ^{"honorary"} member of this establishment, the
young Charles Julien Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon.

the
back
mountain
of
4th volume
- 5x -

George Ord made his hostility to Audubon and his work very clear from the moment of their ^{first meeting} introduction. He considered Audubon to be no more than an undisciplined amateur whose work ^{depicting} ~~displays~~ American birds in their birds pursuing their activities amidst botanical arrangements drawn from their natural surroundings, to be

He considered Audubon to be no more than an undisciplined amateur ^{and} He was very critical of Audubon's approach to painting ^{the} birds ^{shown} pursuing their activities amidst botanical arrangements which ~~had been~~ drawn from the birds' natural habitats. Alexander Sawson ^{and Titian Peale were} of the same p. 270 opinion. In fact Sawson went a step further to tell the artist that his work was too soft and faintly to be printed correctly, and that he should look to the examples ^{of} ~~of~~ Wilson and Peale and follow their practice of depicting birds in profile on a single branch ~~on~~ ^{on} uncluttered by ^{floral} botanical decoration.

Charles Bonaparte was more sympathetic to his fellow emigré Frenchman, but the 21 year old naturalist greatly needed the good will of Ord, Sawson and Peale in order to accomplish his aim of publishing his supplement to Wilson's

though perhaps
not sufficiently
pure, nevertheless

work. He did not want to absolutely discourage Audubon, because Audubon's ~~work~~ ^{paintings} ~~talent~~ was obvious and whose painting displayed a skill and a sophistication never seen before, might be of use for future projects.

He did not want to absolutely discourage Audubon. He could see that Audubon's talent was obvious. His paintings might not possess the scientific purity demanded by ^{Burton's followers} ~~God, Jackson~~ and Peale, but ^{it was obvious that} they displayed a skill and a sophistication never seen before and Audubon might be of use for future projects. Though Jackson had flatly stated to Bonaparte that he would not engrave Audubon's work, ~~because~~ of ~~the~~ ^{an} ~~his~~ ^{own} ~~personal~~ ^{was} ~~objection~~, Bonaparte was convinced that ~~that~~ ^{an} Audubon's illustration could appear in the Supplement, if ^{the artist} ~~Audubon~~ would submit a picture conforming to the printer's demands.

~~Audubon~~ When Bonaparte ^{went to Audubon} ~~approached~~ Audubon with his proposition, the artist's ~~was~~ ^{former} ~~was~~ were

When Bonaparte ~~visited~~ ^{visited} ~~went to~~ Audubon's room at Fifth and Minor Streets to make his proposition, the artist's fortunes were at their low ebb. Though he had made ^{some} ~~made~~ friends in the city including Thomas Sully and the naturalist

and he had been ^{attracted} ^{to secure} ^{enough pupils to make} ^{anything more than} ^{a meager living!}

Charles Alexander Le Sueur, ^{the} ^{in on the} ^{money} his small exhibition
 which he had held ^{in order} ^{to raise money} ^{to pay his expenses} ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~rooms~~ ~~intended~~ ~~for that~~
 purpose had met with indifferent success. He
 had very little ~~money~~ ^{cash} in his pockets, was ^{now} in
 debt from the cost of ^{the} ^{exhibition}, and he was
 still smarting from his treatment by ~~Peck~~ ^{Peck},
~~Peck and Jackson~~, the ^{city} scientific establishment.
 The publication of any of his work would
 certainly be a step forward from his current
 melancholy state, and he was receptive to the young man's
 suggestions. Bonaparte went ^{straight} through the artist's
^{collection of bird pictures} portfolio and ~~chose~~ ^{chose} his ~~best~~ ^{best} and was attracted
 by his painting of the Boat-tailed Grackle,
 a picture which he had painted ^{down} three years
 before in January of 1821 at Bonnet Carré above
 New Orleans during ^{his journey on Nicholas Benthout's keelboat} ~~his journey on Nicholas Benthout's keelboat~~
 journey to ~~that city~~ ^{down} the Mississippi River
 to that city.

During his journey down the Mississippi
 River to that city on board the keelboat of his
 friend, Nicholas Benthout. Would Mr Audubon
 repaint this ^{interesting} ~~southern~~ species on a smaller piece of paper and
 be acceptable to Mr. Jackson? ^{Mr} Audubon would.

What he produced in the next few days
 was a small painting measuring 10 1/2" by 14"

The picture that Audubon produced
 for Bonaparte was quite a departure from

Audubon
 332 359P

the flamboyant painting, of which he was
so proud. It was a simple painting, showing
two birds ~~perched~~ on a ~~some~~ bare branch
with the female below ~~and~~ in ^{direct} ~~single~~
profile and the rich blue male perched
above shown in ^{dark} a three quarters ^{view} profile. To
compliment the two birds and to emphasize the
~~the~~ scientific purity in accordance with examples
shown in Wilson's work Audubon included an
illustration of a boat-tailed Grackle egg in the
lower right ~~and~~ corner of the illustration. He
knew that he had compromised his personal
standards, but the painting just might please
Tawson and perhaps even Aud and as far
as Titian plate was concerned the boat-tails,
though reduced to a most austere format, ^{that}
were still beautifully drawn and painted. Even
the most insensitive observer ^{would} could note the
difference between Audubon's work and ^{the} stiff and
primative rendering of Plate and ~~Wilson~~ ^{both}.
To be published ^{in an important ornithological publication} would at least give him a collect
which he had not enjoyed before.

rather

When at last he had his trunks and portfolios
packed to leave Philadelphia for New York he was
in good spirits. He had money in his pockets,
the result of a chance meeting with ^{a wealthy young} gentleman
farmer named Edward Harris who largely purchased
enough of his pictures to allow him to pay his

The way pleased that → He was ^{in the city} financially
debts and to pay for his journey to New York.
He had a picture that was about to be
^{printed} published in a prestigious new publication, and
in the back of his mind he was formulating
an incalculably ambitious new plan. He would
look to Europe and not to America for his publisher.
With his wife, Lucy's help, somehow he would
raise the money to make the journey. He would
secure introductions to the brightest minds and
the finest craftsmen of the age, and never again
would he subject himself to the humiliations,
humiliation of being judged by petty men
in a provincial publishing backwater. In Europe
there ~~was~~ was an enlightening public which
had ~~no~~ all few personal axes to grind,
who would see the merit of his work, and
whose fascination with the vast new continent
of North America would offer him unlimited new
possibilities to promote his work - and
himself. It would be two years before Audubon would
have to ^{work in morning} make the trip. As his ship Delos left
the shores of America behind in April of 1826 bound
for Liverpool and approaching what must have
been going through his mind? He was forty-one years
old, in the middle of his life. In spite of his
confidence in his own talents and abilities, he was
at that moment so ^{direct} feeble, a nobody. Though he
had ambition and the boundless energy to pursue

that
his ambition, time and again his optimism
had been dampened by experience. The fate of his
painting of the Boat-tailed Grackles is a case
in point.

~~Audubon was in New York~~

When Audubon was finally able
to see the Bonaparte Supplement to ~~Alexander~~
Wilson's work, what greeted his eyes bore little
resemblance to the simple but elegant painting
which he had presented to ~~the~~ ^{for publication} ~~going~~ naturalist. To
him this was Philadelphia's first slap in the
face. Sawson's ^{ultimate} final insult, and Bonaparte, at
least had been an unwitting accomplice. He had
admonished Bonaparte from the beginning not to
allow his work to be altered in any way. Clearly
he felt that he had been betrayed. Another
~~factor~~ ^{factor} had intervened. He could see that the
female was based on his original drawing, but it
had been altered somewhat and ~~in~~ ^{was} a heavier hand.
The male was not his at all. ^{Audubon's} ~~his~~ elegant ~~portrayal~~
version of the ^{bird} with beak open and a full of life
had been replaced by a stiffly posed, thick-
legged bird pointed in the opposite direction from
his ^{original} drawing. ^{now} The bird's head was turned, looking ~~back~~
~~over its shoulder~~ ^{back over its back}. In fact everything, had been
altered from his original work except for the
Grackle egg which, though it had been reversed
in the engraving, and was ^{now} in the lower left

corner of the page, was nevertheless copied exactly from his original painting. Also in the lower left corner ^{of the plate} was engraved "Drawn from nature by John J. Audubon and A. Reiter." Receiving credit for a painting which had been so profoundly altered offered little consolation. Audubon was furious. ~~and~~ ^{he} immediately penned a letter to Bonaparte stating his objections. This letter is lost, but ^{perhaps} Bonaparte's reply survives and gives us a good idea of ~~what transpired~~ the fate of Audubon's original drawing. In his letter Bonaparte apologized for the changes made ^{that were} and for the part that he played in it. Being responsible for those changes. He excused himself by saying that Audubon apparently had not properly recorded the correct measurements of the page upon which the reproduction of the drawing was to appear. Since Audubon's drawing ^{was} slight too large for printing, it was necessary to alter the pose of the ^{bird's} ~~whole bird~~ from a position in which the ^{bird's} ~~tail~~ ^{looking forward and} ~~brancher~~ ^{was} stretched out diagonally across the page ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{to} an attitude in which the bird ^{was} ~~reversed~~ ^{pointed} ~~its head looking backward~~ ^{over its back.}

Bonaparte wrote that Alexander Jansson wanted to do the picture over again but that he, Bonaparte, refused, ^{to all and all} knowing that Audubon would permit no changes in his work. It was necessary to bring in a sympathetic artist, Alexander Ryder, to ~~the~~

to make the necessary corrections without utterly destroying the artist's original concept. Bonaparte added that he hoped that Audubon appreciated the fact that he had not asked Titian Peale, now Audubon's enemy, to make the changes. Though the alteration had been substantial Rider had used enough of Audubon's picture to warrant including his name in the credits along with ~~Rider's name~~ the name of Rider.

I am not so ^{certain} ~~sure~~ that Bonaparte did everything ^{in his power} ~~possible~~ to preserve Audubon's original drawing for his book. Being an artist myself and having often been faced with ^{similar} ~~big~~ restrictions, I can see easily the ^{how} ~~poor~~ picture could have been altered to fit a smaller format. The head of the male bird could ^{or just} I traced the drawing and then without ^{changing} ~~altering~~ the basic poses ^{or} ~~and~~ directions of the Grackles, I reversed the head of the male bird and adjusted the position of the female, moving it about an inch ^{or a half} to the left. This alteration required only minimal changes in the ~~for~~ lower twig and the foot of the female. I am forced to the conclusion that had Bonaparte or Sawson or Rider wanted to preserve intact the essential elements of Audubon's drawings - both his poses and his unique ^{done} ~~style~~ and sophisticated style, it could have been ~~made~~ ^{done}.

with a minimum of changes requiring little technical skill or artistic ability. It should be noted that ~~most~~ many of the birds in Wilson's publication were not depicted life size so that Audubon's painting of the Grackles could have been reduced the required inch or so with the aid of a camera lucida without altering the picture in any other way whatsoever.

I have concluded what Audubon must have thought, that the Wilson Clique in Philadelphia did not want the public to get even a glimpse of work by an unknown artist whose ^{painting} work ~~was~~ ^{through} ~~was~~ ^{would} reduced to the ^{simple} ~~simple~~ Scientific format ~~then~~ followed by Wilson and Peale never the less ^{would} ~~displays~~ a talent, ^{and} a sophistication and ^{beauty} ~~beauty~~ never seen before in any publication of American birds. This ^{ambitious} newcomer was clearly a threat, and without their help ~~he had little chance~~ the impoverished itinerant bird artist had little hope of publishing or making a reputation for himself in America. Being essentially little men, they did not reckon on the depth of Audubon's commitment to his great plan and his determination to succeed. ^{what was the cost.} ~~It would be only 3 years~~ Only three years were to pass before he was to begin the publication of his own monumental "Birds of America"; and eleven years after that, when

the last of the 435 elephant folio plates
was completed in the London shop of
Robert Hancock, the name of Audubon
and the work of Audubon had completely
^{and forever} eclipsed that of Wilson and his Philadelphia
protégés. Wilson's accomplishments and Bonaparte's
supplements to Wilson will always stand
as a milestone to ornithological art and
science, but it is to John James Audubon and
his ^{magnificent} "Birds of America" that we must
look to see the ~~most~~ greatest publication
of its kind ever undertaken. It is like ~~skill~~ never
to be produced again. ^{Why?} As Baron Cuvier said in
the 15th century is still true today, ^{he said that} Audubon's
"Birds of America" is "the greatest monument ever
erected by art to nature." "wrote out all"

^{Among} ~~the~~ Those of us who so deeply love the
work of John James Audubon and who never
tire studying his life ^{or} pouring ^{over} page after
page of ^{this} birds and animals, we might,
perhaps, have a measure of gratitude to
those Philadelphia whom indifference or
hostility toward Audubon and whose mistreatment
of only one small drawing ^{of Bonaparte's brother} may have directed
the artist on the course that he was to follow to
greatness. ^{It was they who helped} ~~and~~ installed in him a determination
to overcome ^{obstacles} that would have defeated
all but the most dedicated of men. ^{And} They may have

^{Heritage}
1824 - plate 267 Red Headed Woodpecker,

* Drawn by John J. Audubon from Nature (American
Widgeon) Heritage Plate 282. New Orleans (1821) ^{date not given probably 1822}

* " " " " " The Bacculated Duck

+ Heritage Plate 286 New Orleans Feb. 1822
(Green-winged Teal) ^{New Orleans} Feb ~~18~~ 1822 Heritage Pl. 322
↳ note the Capital "A"

1824

Brant Heritage plate 312 (unsigned) Philadelphia
Perigee Falcon Niagara Falls Aug. 1824 Heritage 315

Eastern Phoebe Jan. 1825 Her. plate 319

Upland Plover Jan 1825 Her plate 329

Swamp Sparrow Audubon signed this picture
with his wife's name and uses two different
styles of A's in spelling, "Audubon." Heritage Plate 331

Great Crested Flycatcher 1824 Plate. Her. Pl. 335

* Blue Winged Teal Her. Plate 353 Drawn by John
J. Audubon from Nature Feb 1822 New Orleans.

^{Heritage Pl.}
Chimney Swift 327 1824 in the east

* Drawn by John J. Audubon from Nature May 17 1820 Philadelphia
Heritage pl 397 Tree Swallow winter egg.

Don't know ~~from~~ by John J. Audubon from Nature
New Orleans Heritage pl. 405 from Seamp. New
Orleans Feb. 1822

★ ^{Stony}
Mr. Brann did not get turkey pint.
1313 Samsel Avenue
338-9671
Call Brian Perkins -
Keith Johnson -

Yoked a letter with nouns
of subs acids: