

STUART W. GENTLING

3 May 1993

Kit Ward
P.O.Box 515
North Scituate, MA. 02060

my copy -

*Created copy sent to Kit Ward
3 May 1993*

Dear Kit:

Here at last is your signed contract. We can agree on everything except, of course, the John Graves provision, since we no longer have access to his text.

^{TRADE}
^{EDITION} I am currently working on a new narrative for the smaller version of "Of Birds and Texas." A rough first draft should be finished in a couple of weeks, ~~or so~~. I'll send it to you warts and all. It is basically an account of our growing up to become artists and the role Audubon played in our lives during those early years and later. The narrative goes on to tell about our first tentative moves in the direction of doing a big bird book, then our final commitment to the project. It also details our experience in collaborating with writer, John Graves, David Holman the printer, and Craig Jenson who created the book box and portfolios. It discusses the financing of the project and the problems we encountered which almost destroyed us.

I then focus on our fortuitous discovery of John James Audubon's long-lost first published painting of the Boat-tailed Grackles and our fascinating researches to prove its authenticity. It first appeared in altered form in Alexander Wilson's "American Ornithology," the first great bird book published in the United States. The grackle painting story continues as I tell of the critical role it played in saving our publication project from disaster. Our book had been dedicated to Audubon years before we discovered that picture. It was almost as if the great bird artist reached out from the grave to help finance the last critical phase of the book.

Finally, I write about our experience with Sothebys when our bank had the painting auctioned in New York before a national audience. The story appeared all the next day on CNN and two weeks later in a two-page spread in People Magazine. The picture sold for \$253,000, the highest price ever achieved by an Audubon bird painting at auction. Late that afternoon Scott and I took a cab up to 155th street to visit Audubon's grave for the first time, a fitting end, I think, for my narrative ^{INTRO} throughout which I have carefully woven Audubon's own life story. In a sort of epilogue I round out my account with a brief summary of Audubon's life after completing his "Birds of America," ^{THEY} and I go on to tell of the final days and aftermath of our own project.

Kit, I realize that editors have the final say about such things, but I really do hope that they permit Scott and me to design the structure and layout of the book as well as the cover. I know we would do a first class job. In addition to the 50 color plates, we have about 35 or more exquisite watercolor

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studies of birds, many of which served as remarques for the special Artists' Copies of the folio. These have already been photographed and made into 4" X 5" transparencies. We already have 8" X 10" transparencies for most of the color plates and guaranteed access to any that we may need to re-photograph. The additional studies will add many more birds familiar to bird lovers in the rest of the country, thus further enhancing our new book's national appeal. It is also important to remember that in the original folio more than one-third of the species depicted are game birds which have proved in the past a major selling point of our book to hunters and outdoor sportsmen. Also Scott and I would like to include a few additional illustrations of our very early bird paintings, and perhaps some of the preliminary pencil studies for the folio plates. If the publisher would also like to see more landscapes to further enrich the new book, we have plenty of gorgeous ones from which to choose.

It would also be most helpful - not to mention very interesting - to include reproductions of the research material surrounding our discovery of the Audubon grackle painting. Any potential publisher who knows and cares about the history of American bird books should be excited to know that "Of Birds and Texas" and its sequel will be the only two books in American publishing history that can claim a direct connection to the two greatest American bird books created in the nineteenth century, Alexander Wilson's "American Ornithology" and "Birds of America" by John James Audubon.

All this will, we think, make a book that will even be more interesting than the original "Of Birds and Texas," and it should further enhance its appeal to a national audience. I ^{need} should mention here that every critic outside of Texas who reviewed our book was quick to point out that "Of Birds and Texas" ^{could} should not be considered simply as another piece of Texana, but had great appeal to all lovers of art and ornithology.

Since you want to make overtures to New York publishers as soon as possible, I am preparing six portfolios, each containing several prints and publicity material which you can carry with you and leave with potential prospects. With any luck I'll have them ready in a couple of weeks. I am also enclosing with this letter four plastic sheets containing slides of many of the color plates from our folio as well as our watercolor bird studies. They are all original slides so they can be duplicated if you wish to give a few to your prospects. You have our permission ^{to} have them copied for this purpose. We hope that they will help you. I'll be in town for a while, so if you need me, Kit, just give me a call.

Sincerely yours,

P.S. I know it sounds whimsical, but I rather like the title "Of Birds and Texas, Audubon and Us."