

January 1988

Dear _____:

We are very pleased to announce that the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History has passed an important milestone. ^{Twenty - five} ~~One-half~~ of the forty original Gentling bird paintings created for their famous book, OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, have been pledged to the institution.

In spite of severe problems with the Texas economy following the debut of the Gentling birds in its exhibits hall in January 1986, the Museum of Science and History has achieved signal success in its efforts to purchase the entire collection. The twenty bird paintings that now belong to its permanent collection are the result of the enthusiastic support of individuals, corporations and trusts, and even the children of the First Texas Council of Camp Fire clubs who have been raising funds for two years to contribute the popular painting of the mockingbird which is the state bird of Texas. All the Camp Fire children who have worked for this project proudly wear a cloth merit badge embroidered with the Gentling mockingbird from the museum's painting.

Although the Gentlings wish to give the museum sufficient time to acquire the entire collection so that it can remain intact and in Fort Worth where it belongs, they have had from the beginning an understanding with the museum that every effort would be made to purchase the collection within three years of the January 1986 debut exhibition. Budget cuts and increasing work loads on museum staff members and the cancellation of the Harbinger newsletter have made it more difficult for the Museum of Science and History to reach bird painting donors or to keep the public informed of the progress made with its program to purchase all the Gentling paintings. And this is further complicated by the fact that Fort Worthians generally believe that the collection has already been secured for the museum.

In the last two years the Gentling collection and the book for which the Gentling birds were painted were shown to thousands of viewers and have garnered important state-wide and national publicity. The collection has been displayed with great public enthusiasm at the Dallas Museum of Natural History and the Institute for Texan Cultures in San Antonio, and more institutions are requesting exhibition time. Publicity about the Gentling birds has appeared on national television, in People Magazine and other magazines and newspapers in

Texas, across the United States and even in Europe. Their book, OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, has received unanimous critical acclaim as the most important book of its kind ever published in Texas and one of the great American bird books of the twentieth century. We would like to quote a few of the critics' comments, remembering that, regardless of the text, and the fine printing and binding, it is the paintings which make this book such an important publication.

" A triumph of beautiful design, fine printing and original scholarship. There was nothing in Paul Mellon's incomparable collection of 18th and 19th century illustrated books from Britain of greater appeal and sheer beauty."

Edmund Pillsbury, Director
Kimbell Art Museum, Ft. Worth

" One of the most important books published in Texas. "

Ron Tyler, Director
Texas State Historical Association

" A mountainous folio of a book, a museum-quality work, unlikely ever to be emulated. "

Harold Billings, Director
General Libraries
University of Texas at Austin

" The most stunning and prodigious book in Texas history. "

A.C. Greene, Coordinating Director
The Center for Texas Studies

" Marvelous, a simply overwhelming book. "

Andrew Wyeth
Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania

" A colossal artistic achievement which will be of interest to all Americans . . . "

James E. Moody, Librarian
The New York Historical Society

Both the Amon Carter Museum and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth can claim the ownership of a copy of the Gentling book, and practically every major library in the state has acquired a copy. However, only one Texas institution will ever have an opportunity to own the entire collection of the original paintings, and that is the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. If the museum does succeed in its efforts, the Gentlings are going to donate all their pencil and watercolor studies for the bird paintings and all the notes, manuscript material and correspondence relating to the creation of their pictures and their landmark book. Thus the museum will be able to offer to future students all the relevant research materials concerning the Gentling project.

Because there are certain barriers preventing the Gentlings from actually donating the remaining paintings to the museum, the museum's ultimate success

in acquiring the complete collection should not be viewed as a foregone conclusion. We are going to make every effort to expedite the museum's efforts by helping to inform the public of the continuing status of the collection and to help with the donation process. The remaining bird paintings can be purchased for donation at the price of \$7,500 per picture. The names of donors as well as the names of those persons in whose memory the pictures are given will be prominently displayed whenever the pictures are exhibited.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to believe that a treasure of national importance could have been created in our home town of Fort Worth literally by two of our own neighbors. The crowds at the Gentling exhibits and the enthusiastic critical reception of their publishing accomplishment across the country seem to bear out this view. This has proven to be an encouraging exception to the old saying that " prophets are without honor in their own land. "

It is true that half the collection of forty paintings now belongs to the Museum and that this is an outstanding accomplishment in view of our troubled economy. But this also means that twenty paintings remain to be added to the museum collection to keep them all together. In such a unique ensemble could become a very special part of Fort Worth's own cultural heritage for the enjoyment of future generations.

Roger Tory Peterson, the most famous living ornithologist and painter of birds in the world, wrote recently that the Gentlings' OF BIRDS AND TEXAS is an ".....extraordinary! The book is a breathtaking accomplishment and celebrates both the birds and the wildness that still exist in Texas." We think the people of Fort Worth agree and will take great pride knowing that the Museum of Science and History will be the permanent home of the entire collection and the focus of increasing national and international attention as the Gentling book becomes better known throughout the country and abroad.

If you are interested in viewing the collection or have any questions about a possible donation, please feel free to call me at _____ or _____.

Sincerely yours,

E. Ralph Carr,
Project Manager