

OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, THE JOURNEY

Audubon and us

From the time Scott and I first began to think about actually publishing our elephant folio, "Of Birds and Texas," we were acutely aware that this expensive limited edition would be available to relatively few people, those who could afford it and had the space where it could be properly displayed. It was always our hope to publish a smaller, more economical version to reach a wider audience. In spite of all the lavish praise bestowed on the folio by important people in the art, book, and museum worlds, there was always that one lingering criticism, namely that a book weighing 46 pounds was simply not user-friendly, especially for those who wished to read the critically acclaimed text.

Almost seven years have passed since our imperial folio made its public debut. It is seven o'clock of a cold January morning. Snow has covered everything with a Christmas card purity, and I am sitting before a bay window overlooking Aspen's Ajax mountain emerging above the steam of our jacuzzi. I feel utterly removed from those feverish days of almost constant crises when we struggled to bring "Of Birds and Texas" to reality. I have on the ottoman before me a xerox copy of the printer's proof for the book's text. It is the first time that I have read it through entirely since our publication first appeared in August of 1986. I have to admit that I really enjoyed it. So many half-forgotten events come back to mind that I can't help feeling a renewed sense of awe and even pride that my twin brother Scott and I were able to complete with a minimum of artistic compromise an undertaking of such magnitude and logistical complexity - not to mention the expense!

Knowledgeable critics reviewing our book were always quick to point out that "Of Birds and Texas" stood well within the tradition of large format American natural history books begun in the nineteenth century with Alexander Wilson's "American Ornithology" and followed somewhat later by John James Audubon's "Birds of America," still the grandest bird book of them all. Scott and I felt honored to be considered in such company. From the very beginning our elephant folio had been dedicated to Audubon. Re-reading that xerox proof this morning and reliving some of our experiences has made me realize again just how strangely the story of the creation of our book echos Audubon's own history. Although our unusual connection with John James Audubon is mentioned in our original text, it was never written about in detail. I have always wanted to tell the remarkable story about how our lives came together in a series of incredible coincidences and how in an almost surrealistic way the great bird artist reached out from the grave to save our publication from disaster. And, believe it or not, Alexander Wilson had something to do with it too. So many things happened to us after

Christmas Season is over,

As had one more question to ask him. What did he think about the signature? He answered that they had

the 10th of January 1985. I don't think anybody on that day including the museum people had any idea that almost nine more months would have to pass before the Museum finally had their contract drafted, voted on and ready to sign. We finally signed it on October 31, 1985.

Then there were the problems with David Holman and his presses, already mentioned above. They literally began the day we got our loan and had become all the more worrisome and critical after I had decided to let him do all the color work as well as the text. David, for reasons known only to himself, had decided to do the color printing before doing the text by letterpress. He apparently had one problem after another getting the press "balanced" and in proper working order. We had no color printing until July 1985 when David was able to produce two color plates. I have already mentioned that work then stopped for about three weeks while more press adjustments were made. There was for us no other choice but to sit on the sidelines and wring our hands while he wrestled with arcane technical problems. With this last session of press repair most of David's problems seemed to be worked out, and the color printing began in earnest. By October he had printed about fifteen more plates. All this time, however, our money meter kept on ticking and ticking and ticking. The tremendous amounts we had pay up front for materials put a strain on us from the beginning. With costs for printing paper, metal type, cloth and book board for portfolios and boxes, for color separations, a secretary, a large warehouse, an accountant, Ralph's expenses and our own living needs, it was no wonder that by the autumn of 1985 we could see that we were going to run out of money before the project was finished.

David Holman had the unnerving habit of never warning me of his impending money problems until they reached crises levels. His pride simply would not let him. It was he who was in charge of the purchase of equipment and materials and for the color separations. When those bills ultimately came due or were past due, then I would finally get a call. Because of mechanical delays a situation had developed where I was constantly paying out money without seeing anything accomplished. Now, ironically, when David was at last ready to roll, I wasn't. Suddenly, we had become the cause for delays until we were able to negotiated another \$50,000 loan to send to Austin.

You can well imagine our frustration now that the publication was fully underway to suddenly run out of money, yet knowing that as soon as our books were ready for delivery there would be ample funds waiting in escrow, in Museum pledges and future book sales pending delivery to pay for these emergencies. I tried to keep focused on the long view, the ultimate goal of getting the books in hand no matter what sacrifices might be required in the short term. I had to remember

Truth was that our 5000 loan of the previous
for which our house had been mortgaged
Fall to get our printing started up again
was ^{over} exhausted.

