

## JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

### SELECTED STUDIES AND REMINISCENCES

#### AUDUBON'S FIRST MEETING WITH HIS WIFE

"Well do I recollect the morning, and may it please God may I never forget it, when, for the first time I entered the Bakewell household. It happened that Mr. Bakewell was from home. I was shown into a parlor where only one young lady was snugly seated at work, with her back turned towards the fire. She rose on my entrance, offered me a seat, and assured me of the gratification her father would feel on his return, which, she added with a smile, would be in a few minutes, as she would send a servant after him. Other ruddy cheeks made their appearance, but like spirits gay, vanished from my sight. Talking and working, the young lady who remained made the time pass pleasantly enough, and to me especially so. It was she, my dear Lucy Bakewell, who afterwards became my wife and the mother of my children."

Mr. Bakewell speedily returned, and Lucy attended to the lunch provided before leaving on a shooting expedition.

"Lucy rose from her seat a second time, and her form, to which I had before paid little attention, seemed radiant with beauty, and my heart and eyes followed her every step. The repast being over, guns and dogs were provided, and as we left I was pleased to believe that Lucy looked upon me as a not very strange animal. Bowing to her, I felt, I knew not why, that I was at least not in-

different to her."—MRS. AUDUBON, in "*Life of John James Audubon, the Naturalist.*" The quotations are from "*Audubon's Journals.*"

#### AUDUBON AS A YOUNG MAN

"On entering the room I was astonished and delighted to find that it was turned into a museum. The walls were festooned with all sorts of birds' eggs, carefully blown out and strung on a thread. The chimney-piece was covered with stuffed squirrels, raccoons and opossums; and the shelves around were likewise crowded with specimens, among which were fishes, frogs, snakes, lizards, and other reptiles. Besides these stuffed varieties, many paintings were arranged upon the walls, chiefly of birds. He had great skill in stuffing and preserving animals of all sorts. He had also a trick of training dogs with great perfection, of which art his famous dog Zephyr was a wonderful example. He was an admirable marksman, an expert swimmer, a clever rider, possessed great activity, prodigious strength, and was notable for the elegance of his figure and the beauty of his features, and he aided nature by a careful attendance to his dress. Besides other accomplishments, he was musical, a good fencer, danced well, had some acquaintance with legerdemain tricks, worked in hair, and could plait willow-baskets."

He [William Bakewell, the brother of Lucy] adds further, that Audubon once swam across the Schuylkill river with him on his back,—no contemptible feat for a young athlete.—MRS. AUDUBON. *The quotation is from a description of Audubon as a young man, supplied by Mrs. Audubon's brother.*

#### AUDUBON AND HIS INHERITANCE

At this juncture the father of Audubon died; but from some unfortunate cause Audubon did not receive legal notice for more than a year. On becoming acquainted with



## AUDUBON AT NIAGARA

"August 24 [1824].—Took passage for Buffalo, arrived safely, and passed a sleepless night, as most of my nights have been since I began my wanderings. Left next morning for the Falls of Niagara. The country is poor, the soil stiff, white clay, and the people are lank and sallow. Arrived at the hotel, found but few visitors, recorded my name and wrote under it, 'who like Wilson\* will ramble, but never, like that great man, die under the lash of a bookseller.'

"All trembling I reached the falls of Niagara, and oh, what a scene! My blood shudders still, although I am not a coward, at the grandeur of the Creator's power; and I gazed motionless on this new display of the irresistible force of one of His elements. The falls, the rainbow, the rapids, and the surroundings, all unite to strike the senses with awe; they defy description with pen or pencil; and one view satisfied me that Niagara never had been and never will be painted.

"I afterwards strolled through the village to find some bread and milk, and ate a good dinner for twelve cents. Went to bed at night thinking of Franklin eating his roll in the streets of Philadelphia; of Goldsmith traveling by the help of his musical powers; and of the other great men who had worked their way through hardships and difficulties, to fame; and fell asleep, hoping by persevering industry, to make a name for myself among my countrymen."—From the "Journals."

## AUDUBON'S FINAL EFFORTS TO OBTAIN MONEY TO GO TO EUROPE

"LOUISVILLE, November 20, [1824].—Took lodgings at the house of a person to whom I had given lessons, and hastened to Shipping

\*The Scotch ornithologist Wilson had recently been in America, and had visited Audubon.

Port to see my son Victor. Received a letter from General Jackson with an introduction to the Governor of Florida. I discover that my friends think only of my apparel, and those upon whom I have conferred acts of kindness prefer to remind me of my errors. I decide to go down the Mississippi to my old home of Bayou Sara, and there open a school with the profits of which to complete my ornithological studies. Engage a passage for eight dollars.

"I arrived at Bayou Sara with rent and wasted clothes and uncut hair, and altogether looking like a Wandering Jew.

"The steamer which brought me was on her way to New Orleans, and I was put ashore in a small boat about midnight, and left to grope my way on a dark, rainy, and sultry night, to the village, about one mile distant. That awful scourge, the yellow fever, prevailed, and was taking off the citizens with greater rapidity than had ever before been known. When I arrived, the desolation was so great that one large hotel was deserted, and I walked in, finding the doors all open, and the furniture in the house, but not a living person. The inmates had all gone to the pine woods. I walked to the post office, roused the postmaster and learned to my joy that my wife and son were well at Mrs. Percy's.

"It was early, but I found my beloved wife up and engaged in giving a lesson to her pupils, and, holding and kissing her, I was once more happy, and all my toils and trials were forgotten.

"December 1.—After a few days' rest I began to think of the future, and to look about to see what I could do to hasten the publication of my drawings. My wife was receiving a large income,—nearly three thousand dollars a year,—from her industry and talents, which she generously offered me to help forward their publication, and I resolved on a new effort to increase the amount by my own energy and labor. Numerous pupils desired lessons in music, French, and drawing. From Woodville I received a special invitation to teach dancing, and a class of sixty was soon organized. I went to begin my duties, dressed myself at the hotel, and with my fiddle under my arm entered the ballroom. I found



my music highly appreciated, and immediately commenced proceedings.

"I placed all the gentlemen in a line reaching across the hall, thinking to give the young ladies time to compose themselves and get ready when they were called. How I toiled before I could get one graceful step or motion! I broke my bow and nearly my violin in my excitement and impatience! The gentlemen were soon fatigued. The ladies were next placed in the same order and made to walk the steps; and then came the trial for both parties to proceed at the same time, while I pushed one here and another there, and was all the while singing myself, to assist their movements. Many of the parents were present and were delighted. After this first lesson was over I was requested to *dance to my own music*, which I did until the whole room came down in thunders of applause, in clapping of hands and shouting, which put an end to my first lesson, and to an amusing comedy. Lessons in fencing followed to the young gentlemen and I went to bed extremely fatigued.

"The dancing speculation fetched two thousand dollars, and with this capital and my wife's savings I was now able to foresee a successful issue to my great ornithological work."

The remainder of Audubon's residence at Bayou Sara was taken up with preparations for his intended voyages to England,—where he expected to find the fame given to all heroes so tardily in their own countries.—MRS. AUDUBON. *The quotations are from the "Journals."*

## AUDUBON IN EDINBURGH

"February 3 [1827].—Dr. Brewster, afterwards Sir David Brewster, proposed that I should exhibit the five plates of my first number of the "*Birds of America*" at the Royal Society this evening. He is a great optician, and advises me to get a camera-lucida, so as to take the outline of my birds more rapidly and correctly. Such an instrument would be useful in saving time,

and a great relief in hot weather, since outlining is the hardest part of the work and more than half of the labor. I visited the Royal Society at eight o'clock and laid my large sheets on the table. They were examined and praised.

"After this we were all called into the great room and Captain Hall came and took my hand and led me to a seat immediately opposite Sir Walter Scott, the President, where I had a perfect view of this great man, and studied nature from nature's noblest work. A long lecture followed on the introduction of the Greek language into England, after which the President rose, and all others followed his example. Sir Walter came and shook hands with me, asked how the cold weather of Edinburgh agreed with me, and so attracted the attention of many members to me, as if I had been a distinguished stranger."—*From the "Journals."*

## AUDUBON AND SIR WALTER SCOTT

"EDINBURGH, February 12.—Began the day by working hard on the pictures at the rooms of the Scottish Society. And to-day the Antiquarian Society held its first meeting since my election. It is customary for new members to be present at such times, and I went, and though I felt rather sheepish, I was warmly congratulated by the members. At one o'clock I visited the rooms of the Royal Society, which were crowded, and tables were set, covered with wine and fruits and other refreshments. The ladies were mostly of noble families, and I saw many there whom I knew. Sir Walter Scott was present and came towards me and shook hands cordially, and pointing towards a picture, said: 'Mr Audubon, many such scenes have I witnessed in my younger days.' We talked much of all about us, and I would gladly have asked him to join me in a glass of wine, but my foolish habit [Audubon was a total abstainer] prevented me. Having inquired after the health of his daughters, I shortly left him and the room, for I was very hungry; and although the table was loaded with delicacies, and the ladies were enjoying them freely, I say it to my shame, that I had not the confidence to lay my fingers on a single thing."—*From the "Journals."*



## AUDUBON AND HIS LONG HAIR

"[EDINBURGH], *March 19.*" Under this date we have an amusing entry. Audubon had been frequently importuned by his friends to cut his hair, which he had for years worn in ringlets falling to his shoulders. Hence the obituary:—

## EDINBURGH.

March 19, 1827.

This day my Hair was sacrificed, and the will of God usurped by the wishes of Man.

As the Barber clipped my locks rapidly, it reminded me of the horrible times of the French Revolution, when the same operation was performed upon all the victims murdered by the Guillotine.

My heart sank low.

JOHN J. AUDUBON.

The margin of the sheet is painted black, about three-fourths of an inch deep all around, as if in deep mourning for the loss which he had reluctantly submitted to in order to please his friends. He consented, sadly, because he expected soon to leave for London, and Captain Hall persuaded him that it would be *better* for him to wear it according to the prevailing English fashion!—  
MRS. AUDUBON.

## THE PROSPECTUS OF THE GREAT WORK

"To those who have not seen any portion of the author's collection of original drawings, it may be proper to state that their superiority consists in the accuracy as to proportion and outline,

and the variety and truth of the attitudes and positions of the figures, resulting from the peculiar means discovered and employed by the author, and his attentive examination of the objects portrayed during a long series of years. The author has not contented himself, as others have done, with single profile views, but in very many instances has grouped his figures so as to represent the originals at their natural avocations, and has placed them on branches of trees, decorated with foliage, blossoms, and fruits, or amidst plants of numerous species. Some are seen pursuing their prey through the air, searching for food amongst the leaves and herbage, sitting in their nests, or feeding their young; whilst others, of a different nature, swim, wade, or glide, over or in their allotted element.

"The insects, reptiles, and fishes that form the food of these birds, have now and then been introduced into the drawings. In every instance where a difference of plumage exists between the sexes, both the male and the female have been represented; and the extraordinary changes which some species undergo in their progress from youth to maturity have been depicted. The plants are all copied from nature, and as many of the originals are remarkable for their beauty, their usefulness or their rarity, the botanist cannot fail to look upon them with delight.

"The particulars of the plan of the work may be reduced to the following heads:

I. The size of the work is double elephant folio, the paper being of the finest quality.

II. The engravings are, in every instance, of the exact dimensions of the drawings, which, without any exception, represent the birds and other objects of their natural size.

III. The plates are colored in the most careful manner from the original drawings.

IV. The work appears in numbers, of which five are published annually, each number consisting of five plates.

V. The price of each number is two guineas, payable on delivery."

Probably no other undertaking of Audubon's life illustrates the indomitable character of the man more fully than this prospectus. He was in a strange country,



the fact he traveled to Philadelphia to obtain funds, but was unsuccessful. His father had left him his property in France of La Gibitière, and seventeen thousand dollars, which had been deposited with a merchant in Richmond, Virginia. Audubon, however, took no steps to obtain possession of his estate in France, and in after years, when his sons had grown up, sent one of them to France, for the purpose of legally transferring the property to his own sister Rosa. The merchant who held possession of the seventeen thousand dollars would not deliver them up until Audubon proved himself to be the son of Commodore Audubon. Before this could be done the merchant died insolvent, and the legatee never received a dollar of his money. Returning from Philadelphia to Hendersonville [Kentucky], the unfortunate Audubon cheerfully endeavored to provide for the future, about which he felt considerable anxiety. Gathering a few hundred dollars, he purchased some goods in Louisville, and returned to business in Hendersonville.—MRS. AUDUBON.

#### AUDUBON AS A CRAYON PORTRAIT PAINTER

From this date [that of the failure of his mill at Hendersonville] Audubon's difficulties appeared to increase daily. Bills fell due, and unmeasured vexations assailed him. He handed over all he possessed, and left Hendersonville with his sick wife, his gun, his dog, and his drawings,—but without feeling really depressed at his prospects. The family reached Louisville, where they were kindly received by a relative, and Audubon had time to think over some scheme for raising support for his family. Possessed of considerable skill as an artist in crayons, he conceived the

project of setting himself up as a portrait draughtsman. As he started at very low prices, his skill soon became known, and in a few weeks he had as much work as he could do. His family were settled with him, and his business spread so far into Kentucky, that affluence was again enjoyed by the wanderer. Audubon succeeded so well in portraying the features of the dead, that a clergyman's child was exhumed in order that the artist might have an opportunity of taking a portrait of it.

In illustration of his reputation as a crayon drawer, Audubon relates that a settler came for him in the middle of the night from a considerable distance to have the portrait of his mother taken while she was on the eve of death. Audubon went with the farmer in his wagon, and with the aid of a candle made a satisfactory sketch. This success brought other successes, and the portrait painter seemed to have got a new start in life. Shortly afterwards he received an invitation to become a curator of the museum at Cincinnati, and for the preparation of birds received a liberal remuneration. In conjunction with this situation he opened a drawing school in the same city, and obtained from this employment additional emolument sufficient to keep his family comfortably. His teaching succeeded well until several of his pupils started on their own account. The work at the museum having been finished, Audubon fell back upon his portrait painting and such resources as his genius could command.—MRS. AUDUBON.

#### AUDUBON AT BAYOU SARA

Audubon's fortunes in New Orleans varied exceedingly. From the sorest penury and deepest distress he was sud-



denly raised by the happy spirit he possessed and the untiring energy of his character. One day he was going about seeking for a patron to obtain a few dollars by drawing a portrait; the next he was dining with Governor Robertson of Louisiana, who gave him a letter of recommendation to President Monroe in connection with the expedition to Mexico. He had determined to go to Shipping Port, Kentucky, [where his wife and family were], but his departure was hindered by an engagement from a few pupils.

It happened, however, that Audubon was not to return to his family as soon as he expected. The voyage to Shipping Port was cut off by the acceptance of a situation in the family of Mrs. Perrie, who owned a plantation at Bayou Sara, in Louisiana. The duties accepted by Audubon were apparently simple enough. He was to teach Mrs. Perrie's daughter drawing during the summer months, at sixty dollars per month. His lessons would absorb one half of the day, and with a young friend, Mason, he was to have the rest of the time free for hunting. Board and lodging were provided for the two friends, and Mrs. Perrie's aim appears to have been to provide an opportunity for Audubon to carry on his pursuits under the guise of an employment which would be congenial, and not interfere with his work.—MRS. AUDUBON.

#### AUDUBON IN NEW ORLEANS

"October 20, [1821]. Left Bayou Sara in the Ramapo, with a medley of passengers, and arrived safely in New Orleans. My long, flowing hair, and loose yellow nankeen dress, and the unfortunate cut of my features, attracted much attention, and made me desire to be dressed like other people as soon as possible. My

friends the Pamars received me kindly and raised my spirits; they looked upon me as a son returned from a long and dangerous voyage, and children and servants as well as parents, were all glad to see me.

"October 25. Rented a house in Dauphine street at seventeen dollars per month, and determined to bring my family to New Orleans. Since I left Cincinnati, October 12, 1820, I have finished sixty-two drawings of birds and plants, three quadrupeds, two snakes, fifty portraits of all sorts, and have subsisted by my humble talents, not having had a dollar when I started. I sent a draft to my wife, and began life in New Orleans with forty-two dollars, health, and much anxiety to pursue my plan of collecting all the birds of America."—From the "Journals."

#### AUDUBON AT NATCHEZ

"March 16, 1822. Paid all my bills in New Orleans, and having put my baggage on board of the steamer Eclat, obtained a passage to Natchez in the steamer, in return for a crayon portrait of the captain and his wife."—From the "Journals."

#### HOW MRS. AUDUBON ASSISTED HER HUSBAND

"September 1.—My wife writes to me that the child she was in charge of is dead, and that consequently she has determined to come on to Natchez. I received her with great pleasure at the landing and immediately got a house hired, that we might resume housekeeping. In the meantime my wife engaged with a clergyman named Davis, in a situation similar to that which she had held in New Orleans."—From the "Journals."

#### MRS. AUDUBON'S DEVOTION TO HER HUSBAND'S GENIUS

Mrs. Audubon was desirous that her husband should go to Europe, and obtain complete instruction in the use of oil; and with this aim in view she entered into an en-



gagement with a Mrs. Percy to educate her children, along with her own and a limited number of pupils. Mrs. Percy lived at Bayou Sara, and thither Mrs. Audubon removed, while her husband remained at Natchez, painting with his friend Stein, the artist whose instructions in oil painting had been so valuable. After enjoying all the patronage to be expected at Natchez, Audubon and his friend Stein resolved to start on an exhibition as perambulating portrait-painters; and purchasing a wagon, prepared for a long expedition through the Southern States.

"I had finally determined to break through all bonds and pursue my ornithological pursuits. My best friends solemnly regarded me as a madman, and my wife and family alone gave me encouragement. My wife determined that my genius should prevail, and that my final success as an ornithologist should be triumphant."—MRS. AUDUBON. *The quotation is from the "Journals."*

#### AN INSTANCE OF AUDUBON'S DIFFICULTIES

"May 1, 1823.—Left Mr. Percy's at Bayou Sara on a visit to Jackson, Mississippi, which I found to be a mean place, a rendezvous for gamblers and vagabonds. Disgusted with the place and the people I left it and returned to my wife. I agreed to remain with the Percys throughout the summer, and teach the young ladies music and drawing. I continued to exercise myself in painting with oil, and greatly improved myself. I undertook to paint the portrait of my wife's pupils, but found their complexions difficult to transfer to canvas. On account of some misunderstanding, I left the Percys and returned to Natchez, but did not know what course to follow. I thought of going to Philadelphia, and again thought of going to Louisville and once more entering upon mercantile pursuits, but had no money to move anywhere."—From the "Journals."

#### AUDUBON AS A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST

"October 25, 1823.—I entered Louisville with thirteen dollars in my pocket. My son Victor I managed to get into the counting house of a friend, and I engaged to paint the interior of a steamer. I was advised to make a painting of the falls of the Ohio, and commenced the work.

"November 9.—Busy at work, when the weather permitted, and resolved to paint one hundred views of American scenery. I shall not be surprised to find myself seated at the foot of Niagara."—From the "Journals."

#### AUDUBON'S ENDEAVORS TO COMPLETE HIS GREAT WORK

Audubon reached Philadelphia on April 5, 1824. The journey to that city was undertaken as a desperate venture to obtain help to complete his ornithological work, and he was soon satisfied that the venture would be successful.

"April 25, [1824].—I am now determined to go to Europe with my 'treasures,' since I am assured nothing so fine in the way of ornithological representations exist there.

"July 12.—I have now in hand one hundred and thirty dollars to begin my journey of 3,000 miles. Before this I have often thought I could work my way through the world by my industry, but I see I shall have to leave here, as Wilson often did, without a cent in my pocket.

"NEW YORK, August 9th.—I have been making inquiries regarding the publication of my drawings in New York, but find there is little prospect of the undertaking being favorably received. Full of despair I look to Europe as my only hope."—MRS. AUDUBON. *The quotations are from the "Journals."*