

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Audubon's Illustrated West

A recently published book which any collector would be proud to have in his library is "Drawings of John Woodhouse Audubon, Illustrating his Adventures through Mexico and California, 1849-1850". An introduction and notes on the drawings are by Carl Schaefer Dentzel.

The very handsome and unusual book has been published by the California Historical Society and released by the Book Club of California for its membership in a limited edition of 400 copies at \$25 a copy. Like "Jedediah Smith and his Maps of the American West" by Dale Morgan and the late Carl I. Wheat, with an introduction by Wheat, the latest book published for the book club. "Drawings of John Woodhouse Audubon," will soon, if not now, be a collector's item and sell for three or four times its publication price. The Audubon book is printed by the Grabhorn Press of San Francisco.

By good fortune Audubon's journals recording the trials and triumphs of the exploring company have been preserved, (they were published, with an introduction by his daughter Maria Audubon in 1906,) but alas, most of his drawings were lost in a shipwreck in 1857. The only ones known to be saved are those reproduced in this newest book. There are in all 34 illustrations of which only five have been published before.

The collection is of surprising interest. Some of the drawings, such as the superb views of San Francisco in 1850, are finished, but many are sketches made on the spot with notes in the margins to remind the artist of certain details to be filled in at a later date. It is impossible in a short space to mention all the drawings, but special mention must be made of the San Francisco series and two watercolor sketches of a "Forty Niner" and "Twenty-five Miles West of Jesus Maria" - both faithfully reproduced in color.

John Audubon, son of the famous ornithologist, joined a company of California gold-seekers in 1849. It was not so much the lure of wealth that drew him West, as an opportunity to see and sketch the countryside and its inhabitants. The animals and plant life, which might be encountered on the way. No doubt the unusual choice of route to California, through the wild and little known

terrain of Mexico, appealed to his spirit of adventure to say nothing of the chance to observe and describe the natural wonders that awaited him.

The publication committee gives us this information: ". . . unfortunately the company that set off so bravely met with much hardship. There was trouble - cholera, lack of adequate provisions - all the vastitudes that might be expected of travel in such difficult country. Yet Audubon, upon whose shoulders fell the burden of leadership, still managed to record his impressions and to make many sketches as his party struggled through the mountain passes to California."

Universally known and admired are the bird prints of his father John James Audubon (1780-1851), an American naturalist who classified and portrayed the birds all over North America.

The Audubon bird prints were first published in Great Britain between 1837 and 1838: issued in parts which were bound in four volumes called "Birds of America."

These plates are highly prized today for their decorative quality and their examples of printmaking, not to mention their ornithological importance. The great favorite is the Turkey Cock - the American wild turkey, not the barnyard fowl - which was number one in the series. Incidentally, the complete Birds of America was originally sold for \$1,000: it has recently brought over \$15,000 at auction.

Throughout the Deep South, Audubon's prints seem to be in every home. While on a tour the Ante-Bellum houses in Natchez last year, during the annual house and garden pilgrimage, we noted many original framed prints on the walls of these charming houses. One home had the complete book on display, and we assure you, it was a conversational piece for everyone. Audubon once taught ballet and dancing in Natchez and this episode in his life is beautifully portrayed in one of the scenes in the Confederate Pageant, an important evening event throughout the month-long pilgrimage, which attracts tourists from all over the world.

We might also mention that we have seen a complete book of Audubon's Bird Prints, including the famous No. 1. Wild Turkey, in the Silliman Library at the Hartnell College in Salinas. This library was the personal collection of the late Mr. Silliman, father of James Silliman of Salinas, prominent Monterey County citizen.