
By DR. IRVING WARD-STEINMAN

It was at Beech Woods Plantation, in West Feliciana Parish, when John James Audubon started his march to lasting fame. The year was 1825. Bayou Sarah, Oakley, New Orleans and other plantations of Louisiana were host to this genius.

The result was "The Elephant Folio." A fantastic artistic accomplishments. Audubon painted birds and animals. This led to prints but it started with exquisite plates of his massive work. Some 435 are indexed as to prices paid. Havell and Bien are two sources of this information.

Joseph Mason and a select group of artists worked the backgrounds while Audubon did the birds and animals. Here we have in this remarkable compilation, the sizes of individual prints, numbers, watermarks, dates printed, the methods and all that fascinating data so dear to lovers of Audubon.

With the world-wide fame of this artist, the "Handbook of Audubon Prints" is a first and most welcome.

The authors are experts in Audubon. Taylor Clark and Lois Elmer Bannon spent years in dedicated and devoted research to garner the information packed into this "Handbook". We must remember that the "Elephant Folio Engravings" reflect the period 1824 to 1838.

The "Birds in Miniature" as reflected in the Octavo Editions of "The Birds of America" reflect the era of 1840 to 1871, climaxed with the reissue of the "Elephant Folio" of "The Birds of America" (1860). The labor required to reproduce Audubon was a challenge capable of being processed by few artisans. The equipment of today was not available a century ago.

Audubon's "Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America" covered the craftsmanship era of 1845 to 1948, with the Octavo Editions released in 1849-1854. This was a time of superb artmanship.

The authors share in Audubon's genius with an evaluation of the various editions of the birds and animals.

The scintillating breath-taking black and white reproductions are a rare delight. Audubon missed little in nature. The "Handbook" illustrates the yellow throated verio, long billed curlew, forked tail flycatcher, blue grosbeak, red breasted snipe, black vulture, and the animals offer American elk, Rocky Mountain Neotemo, American Raindeer.

The authors estimate the number of complete sets that were made while faced with the numbering and re-numbering process of prints. The scarcer the number of complete sets, the higher the price.

Audubon's background starts with his birth at Aux Cayes, Santo Domingo (now Haiti) in 1785. His father was a French naval officer, sea merchant and planter. He was six years of age when he left the island for France where love and affection awaited him.

His father had a plantation at Mill Grove in Pennsylvania where he went at the age of 18, with the purpose of devoting himself to agriculture. But his consuming passion in birds caused him to sell his father's plantation and he started south.

His early days was as a taxidermist, where he undoubtedly received an insight into proportion, plus painting pastel portraits and teaching drawing. The lure of the forests was too great for city life, and so we find him at Beech Woods Plantation, in West Feliciana Parish in 1825.

So now the reader knows the rest of the story.