

The Audubon Genius



John James Audubon

John James Audubon was born in Louisiana near New Orleans. For several years he resided in France where he enjoyed every luxury. after wards, he spent many years traveling through the forest, hunting, and studying the birds.

He said his first recollections were of his home in the South, where he would lie among the flowers and listen to the songs of the mocking birds. While yet a boy he gathered bird nests, eggs, curious stones, and moss. His

first start was to kill and stuff the birds, but this hobby failed to satisfy him because their plumage was not bright like that of the live birds. Instead, he commenced drawing pictures of the birds. He was married to a young lady in Pennsylvania and brought her down the Ohio River in a flat-bottomed float called an "ark"

This was their wedding trip. In Louisville, he entered into the trade business, but when the competition become too strong, he and his partner shipped their goods to Henderson or Hendersonville. A few years later he returned to Henderson when he, with several partners, attempted to operate a steam mill; but the place was not suitable, every one concerned lost his money. Audubon let the region with his sick wife, gun, drawings and dog.

Audubon spent most of his time in Kentucky, rambling in the wilds, and persons in both Louisville and Henderson have often spoken of seeing him come in with his great quota of game. He said Kentucky was a "sort of promised land for all sorts of wandering adventurers." Audubon traveled many thousands of miles to make his drawings, sometimes living only on fruits and roots. At time he had to quit this work for a while and turn dancing master or artist to procure funds.

After Audubon had traveled, studied, written, and made many hundred drawings, rats got into his box and cut up all his papers; for a while he was almost heartbroken and could scarcely eat or sleep. Finally, with true courage, he said, "I will make more drawings and make them better than any the rats cut up."

So he persevered and, with the aid of his wife, who encouraged and inspired him in his great work, and gladly gave of her salary as a teacher to defray expenses, he at last went to Europe to arrange for its publication. Ultimately, Audobon was made a member of the Royal Society at Edinburgh, concerning which he wrote his faithful wife, "So, poor Audubon, if not rich, thou wilt be honored at least and held in high esteem among

men."

In another letter he said, "I have run the gantlet of Europe and may be proud of two things; I am considered the first ornithological painter and the first practical naturalist of America."

His Birds of America contains pictures of one thousand sixty-five birds, natural size.