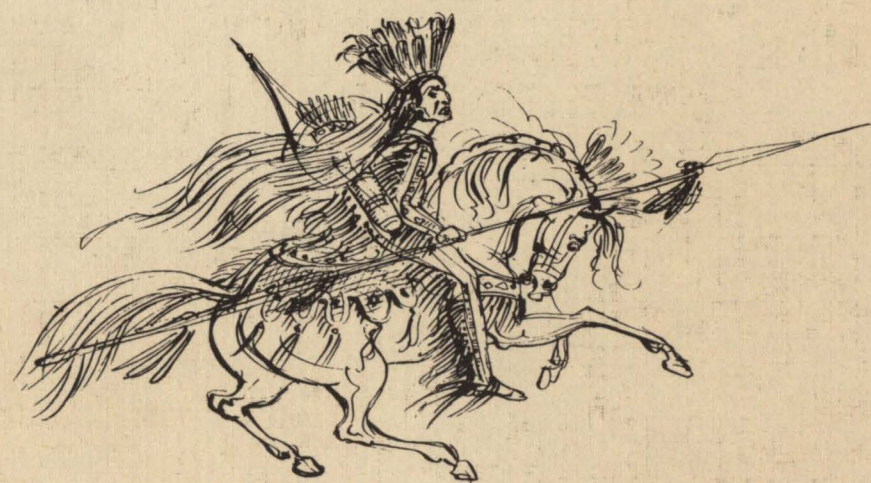
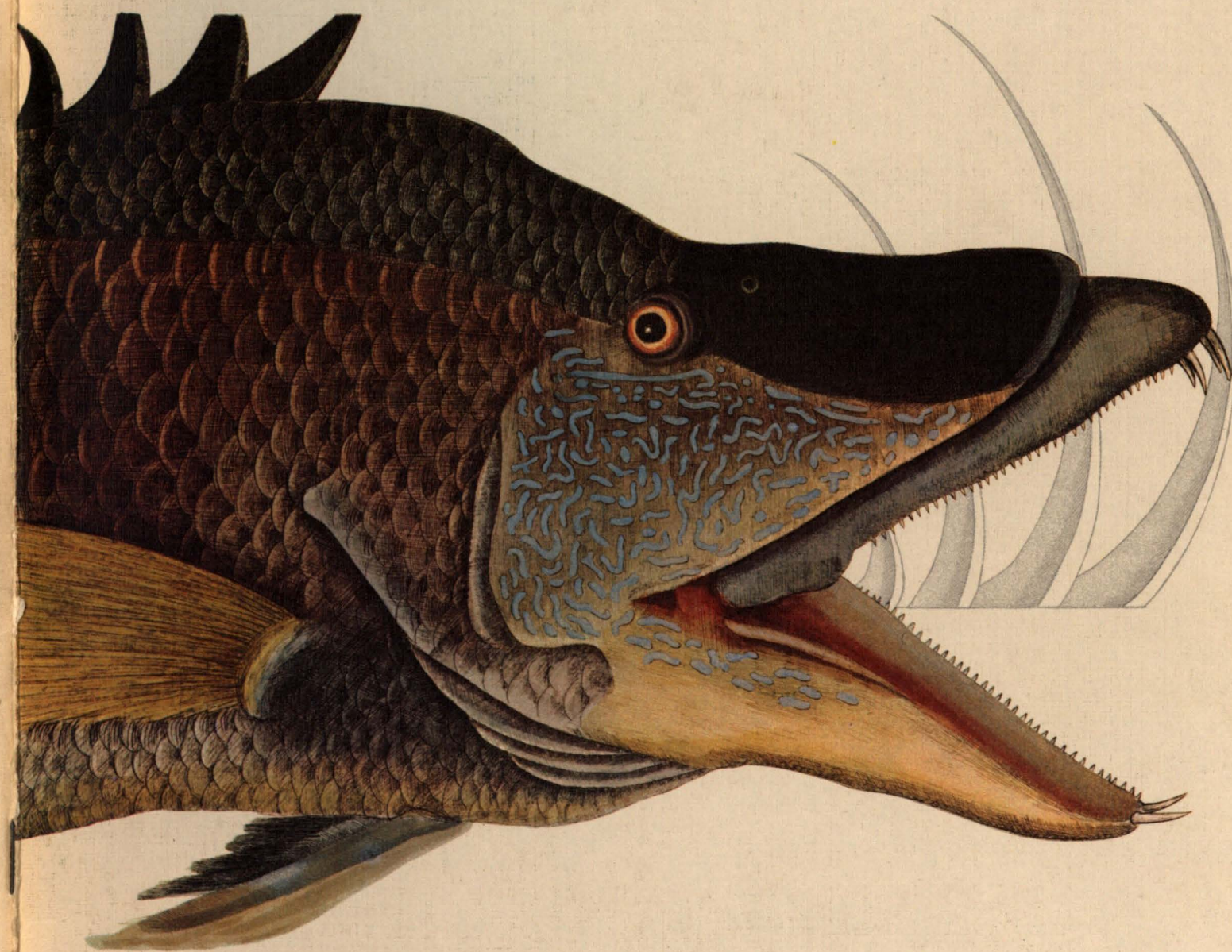


NATURALISTS IN AMERICA



A PUBLICATION OF THE THOMAS GILCREASE INSTITUTE OF
AMERICAN HISTORY AND ART





NATURALISTS IN AMERICA

CONTAINING A REPORT ON DEVELOPMENTS
IN NATURAL STUDIES IN AMERICA,
FEATURING ESPECIALLY THE NATURALISTS
AND NATURE-ARTISTS
OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

Written by David Curtis Hunt,
this article was prepared for
Publication in *The American Scene*
by William Patterson.





Cover illustration taken from Mark Catesby's *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas*, printed in London, 1731-1743.

Botanical illustrations reproduced on these pages are found in Volume II of the series *United States and Mexican Boundary Survey*, by William H. Emory, published in 1859.

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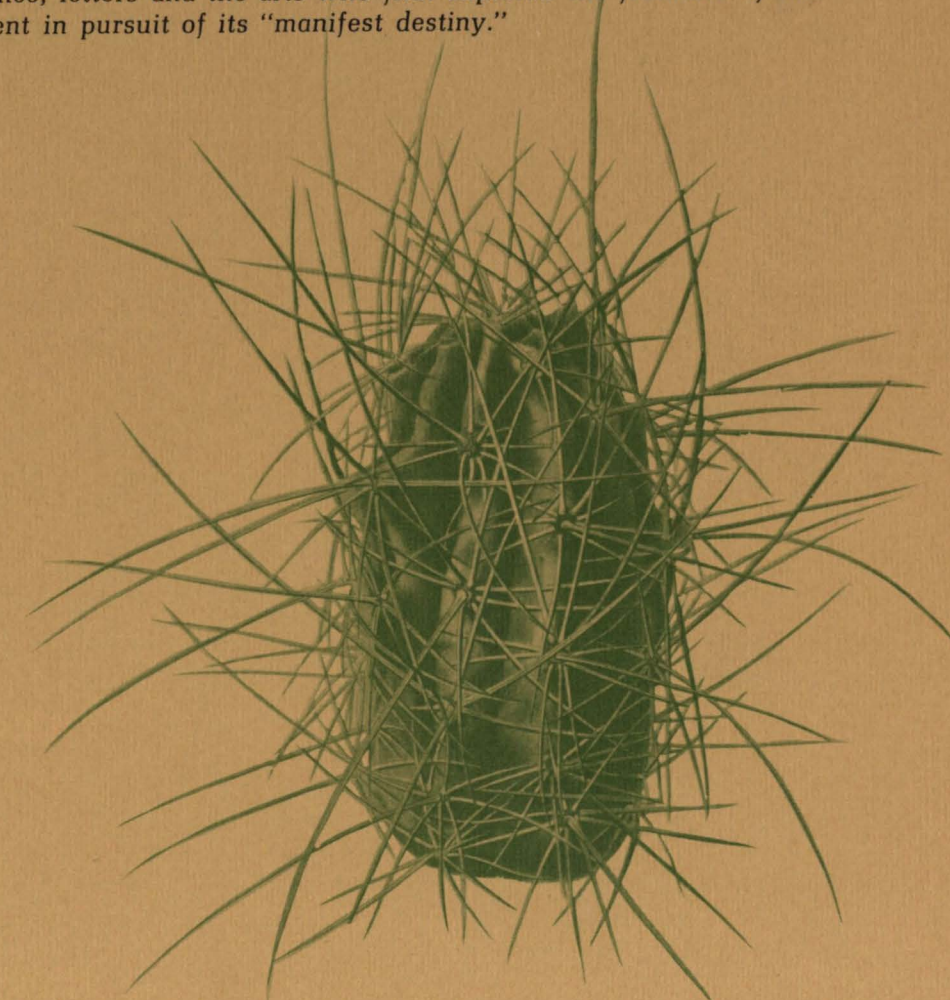
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To most of us, living in a modern age of man-made miracles, the natural world may seem remote, of little real importance. Far removed from former, primitive associations with the forces of nature, we tend to forget that these same forces still determine the conditions of our existence, or that in fact it is nothing else than our knowledge and application of the laws which govern the physical world that has made possible the technological wonderland we marvel at today.

Some of us are aware of the larger world, of course, interested in nature in general terms, perhaps, romantically contemplating its beauty or philosophising upon its fundamental orderliness. Others, however, continue to pursue investigations of nature more specifically, in the narrow and more specialized fields of scientific research: seeking to understand the essential shape and substance of the universe — to penetrate the disguises of a visible environment in order to uncover and reduce to common terms its basic, underlying principles.

The following commentary does not pretend to cover the entire range of past or present scientific inquiry, however, but only intends to indicate the general aims of such investigation, reviewing in particular past developments in the study-field of natural history. Drawing upon the several resources of the Gilcrease Institute for its descriptive references, this report also points to the present value and continuing importance of the study of nature: and with respect to the possible interests of the readership, focuses attention especially upon certain of the pioneer naturalists in America, describing briefly the activities of those energetic men of science, letters and the arts who first explored the frontiers of this nation as it advanced across the continent in pursuit of its "manifest destiny."



The scientific point of view so familiar to most people today first came into prominence in the 17th century, following on the heels of the explorations and discoveries of the preceding century when so many of the accepted notions concerning the nature of the universe were altered or upset. The store of factual knowledge was growing rapidly during this period and avenues of further inquiry were being developed by such men as Sir Isaac Newton, the outstanding scientific figure of his age, who formulated and expounded upon the first of modern concepts regarding the laws which govern the physical world.

The leading philosophers of the era, ridiculing the tendency to refer to ancient manuscripts for information pertaining to the workings of nature, promoted the idea of the "scientific method" in arriving at such knowledge; while an appreciation for the importance of obtaining evidence in support of theories or suppositions influenced not only the investigations of scientists and philosophers but also the thinking of lawyers, historians, statesmen and educators, eventually encouraging general reforms in the attitudes of society and the activities of scholarship everywhere.

Developments in the field of botany corresponded with the worldwide collecting of specimens as a result of increased overseas exploration. Botanical gardens and herb collections proliferated, adding important items to the existing stock of medicines and drugs. Advances in medical knowledge, generally, were furthered by new studies in human anatomy and the discoveries of such men as William Harvey and Leeuwenhoek, and mathematics underwent a rapid development as decimals came into use to express fractions, algebraic symbols were standardized, geometry simplified and calculus invented.

Exact mathematical knowledge of the solar system revolutionized navigation. The tides at last could be understood and predicted, and the invention of the chronometer made

the determining of precise longitude at sea possible. Cartographers revised their maps and charts and Europeans of that period were the first people in the history of the world to possess a reasonably accurate notion of the sizes and shapes of the oceans and continents.

Confidence in the observable, rational order of the physical world inspired the belief that man himself was capable of understanding — and therefore directing or controlling — the forces of nature to his own advantage. Scientific knowledge was increasingly applied to agriculture and manufacturing, and a regard for science and invention as the twin forces contributing to the inevitable advancement of civilization grew by leaps and bounds.

This faith in referential knowledge eventually became institutionalized as the need to know more of the activities of nature and the laws which control them brought men variously engaged in scientific studies into closer and more frequent communication. Several scientific and philosophic societies were formed — perhaps the two most famous being England's richly-patronized Royal Society and France's Academy of Sciences — and scientific periodicals began to be published.

Articles appeared pertaining to natural history, astronomy, mathematics, paleography and political science, and the classification of the plant and animal kingdoms was systematized. Latin continued to be the universal language of scholarship, although as time went on more papers were published in the vernacular; and the individual interests of learned men everywhere reflected a common interest in the advancement of knowledge on all frontiers of scientific research.

The hand-colored engraving of the Magnolia, reproduced on the opposite page, is by Mark Catesby, found in his *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas*, 1731-1743 edition. Gilcrease archives.



It is usually agreed that Benjamin Franklin was the most distinguished scientist in colonial America, although American society in the 18th century was generally too concerned with wresting a livelihood from the raw wilderness to worry overmuch about science, to say nothing of philosophy or the arts. The average colonial American exhibited little interest in any sort of scientific inquiry — other than that having something to do with agricultural experimentation — yet there were some men in America who achieved not only local distinction but even international recognition as a result of their investigations in the field of natural science.

John Winthrop, Jr., at one time governor of Connecticut, made the first systematic astronomical observations in the English colonies and obtained the first telescope for Harvard College. Paul Dudley published many papers through the auspices of the Royal Society which dealt with such widely ranging topics as snakes and earthquakes, and published a *Natural History of Whales* which was for many years the standard reference on the subject. Thomas Jefferson — philosopher, political theorist, scientist and architect — conducted the first recorded archaeological excavation in modern history upon an Indian mound in Virginia; and Cotton

Mather, most famous of the Puritan clergymen, contributed many papers to the Royal Society on the subjects of natural history and biology, publishing in his *Christian Philosopher* in 1721 one of the first widely-read explanations of Newton's laws.

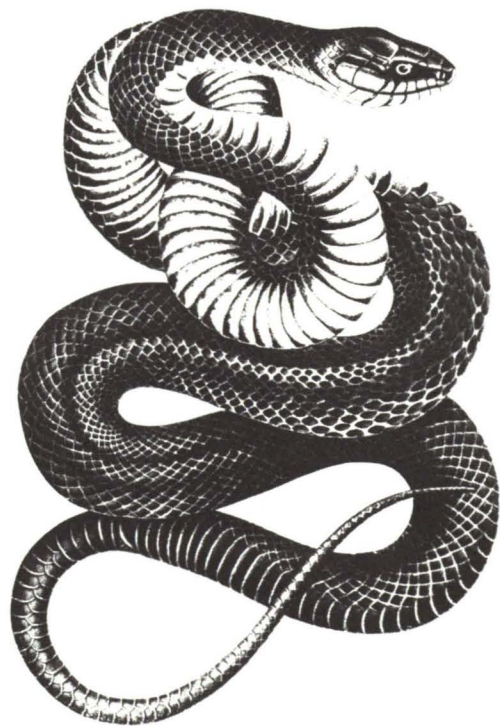
John Clayton achieved recognition for his work in botany and as early as 1680 John Bannister sent fifty-two species of American insects to London, as well as a paper on American mollusks which was published by the Royal Society. His report concerning the plant life of Virginia is considered the first systematic paper on the subject ever written in the colonies; and William Byrd II wrote several papers which he later incorporated into his own *Natural History of Virginia*.

The first man to study both the plant and animal life of the southern Atlantic regions of North America was the English author, artist and scientist, Mark Catesby. A fellow of the Royal Society, Catesby came to America in 1712 and spent the next eleven years collecting botanical and zoological specimens to send back to England. The Gilcrease Institute's edition of his *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas*, published in two volumes between 1731 and 1743, contains 220 colored etchings of birds, reptiles, fish, insects, mammals and plants, all done by Catesby himself, and is perhaps the finest publication pertaining to the natural history of the colonies to have come down to the present time.

John Bartram's account of his travels with his son, William, also survive in published form. Journeying up and down the colonies from Ontario to Florida collecting specimens for the Royal Gardens in London, John Bartram established the first botanical garden in the colonies in Philadelphia in 1718; and William Bartram's list of 215 American birds remained the most important work in American ornithology for many years — until the monumental publications of John James Audubon appeared in the early 1800's.

Engraving from William H. Emory's *United States and Mexican Boundary Survey*, Volume II, Part 2, 1859 edition.

The illustration on the opposite page is found in Catesby's *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas*, 1731 edition.





Audubon, doubtless the most celebrated American naturalist of the 19th century, was the man who, more than any other before him, influenced the direction that future studies in natural history in America were to take. Considered to be one of the greatest nature artists in history, he also contributed an important amount of information to the science of ornithology; and although considerable progress in this field has been made

in the years since—notably in the area of the scientific classification of birds—his accounts of his experiences in the little or unknown regions of America, where he went in search of his wild subjects, and his personal, almost poetic commentaries on the expanding American scene of that period provide us with a lasting impression of an otherwise irretrievable era in our nation's history.



Oil painting of the Wild Turkey, opposite, is an original, life-size portrait by John James Audubon. Gilcrease collection.

The Ring-tailed Cat, pictured here, is an original plate from Audubon's 1843 publication of *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, based on a sketch by John Woodhouse Audubon, son of the famous naturalist.

Born in Haiti in 1785 and brought up in Revolutionary France, Audubon accompanied his father and step-mother to America in 1806 at a time when the United States was a young nation thriving on the brink of a vast and almost totally unexplored continent. The Revolution had been won and was already history, and discerning Americans were beginning to realize perhaps for the first time the remarkable opportunities for growth and development inherent in the unmapped regions west of the Mississippi, as Meriwether Lewis and George Rogers Clark returned from a two-year trek across the newly-acquired Louisiana Territory and brought back reports from the perimeter of the Pacific Northwest. The native population was growing rapidly, becoming less and less an extension of the

culture of Europe and more and more "American" in its character. Interest in the frontier continued to exert its ever-present influence, and a compelling curiosity with regards to the possible character and content of the unprobed wilderness strongholds beyond the boundaries of established settlement stirred the nation.

An abundance of natural resources provided almost all the materials for expansion and development. A continent of trees offered timber for houses, wood for fuel and other related needs, while a wilderness of woods and rivers provided fish and game, furs and skins and valuable articles for trade. The pine, "most useful tree in the woods," varieties of oak, cedar, cypress, sweet gum and sycamore are most often favorably men-

tioned in reports from that period. Maple wood was widely utilized in the making of furniture and other household items, black dyes and ink were rendered from walnuts and gall berries, and various roots and herbs served medicinal needs or substituted in some cases for tea.

The American pioneer, relying almost entirely upon such resources to supply him with materials for shelter and sustenance, pushed the limits of the frontier ever westward, and early came to be familiar with nature and all her manifestations—a familiarity that was at once entirely practical, seldom really friendly, and not in the least disinterested or scientific.

The engraving of *Stanley's Hawks*, below, is an original Havell plate from the first edition of Audubon's famous *Birds of America*. An oil painting based on this earlier work is also included in the Gilcrease Institute's collection of J. J. Audubon's work.

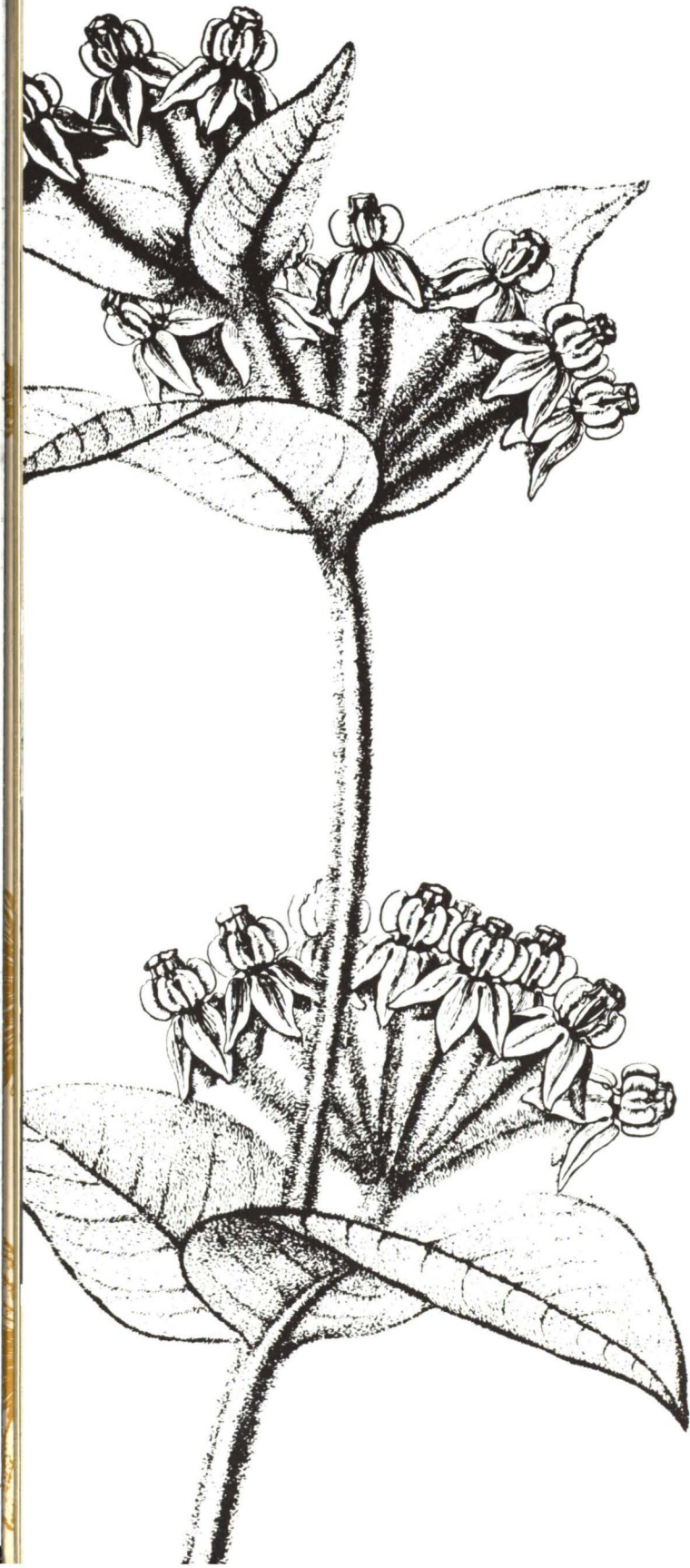


Texas Cat, oil painting by John Woodhouse Audubon. A lithograph of this same work, from the 1843 edition of *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, is also included in the Gilcrease Institute's collection.



In preparing his preliminary drafts, Audubon often wired his specimens in life-like attitudes against a carefully ruled background of squares, describing the exact dimensions of his models upon a section of similarly prepared paper. His work can be seen to have recreated a picture of the living bird which can be credited to the artist's observations of his subjects as they appeared in life, as well as to the sensitivity and training of a fine artist which Audubon brought to bear upon his work of scientific illustration.

The oil painting of the **Wood Ducks**, reproduced here, is one of three original paintings by Robert Havell, Jr., in the Gilcrease collection. Havell, the engraver who first prepared J. J. Audubon's work for publication, later accompanied the naturalist to America and settled in Tarrytown, New York, where he remained for the rest of his life painting scenes of the Hudson Valley area.



When John James Audubon moved to Kentucky as a youth he arrived in an area that was yet in its essentially frontier stages of development. And, from the beginning, his long-standing fascination with birds and animals sent him wandering in the woods to observe and study the habits of America's wildlife. He eventually married and attempted to settle down to more profitable enterprises, making his living for a time running a general

store; but his real abiding interest was in natural history, and in 1820 he went upriver from New Orleans to Cincinnati, Ohio, and back down again, painting and sketching birds and wildlife scenes in general. And from that time until his death, in 1851, he devoted himself entirely to traveling and collecting wildlife specimens in the United States and Canada, painting and writing about the birds and animals in America.

Audubon suspected — and rightly so — that no one who might follow after him would again have the opportunity to make such a complete and first-hand survey of America's wild creatures, for even in his day the natural habitats where many species flourished in such amazing abundance were beginning to disappear before the advance of civilization. A great many animals and birds were considered to be pests, despite the fact that they furnished much of the food and most of the necessities of the settlers; and laws were enacted in almost every state encouraging the "extermination of vermin."

Wild turkeys in particular were looked upon as great destroyers of wheat and corn, and parakeets were credited with the ruin of entire orchard crops. Foxes, raccoons, weasels and hawks killed or carried off poultry and smaller stock, and eagles and bears were considered very destructive of chickens, lambs and pigs. The offer of cash rewards for certain animal scalps or pelts, a practice still very much in evidence in many rural areas today, reduced the numbers of many animals and birds in most of the settled districts and exterminated some species altogether — and Audubon, working steadily, traveling far and wide, continued to capture and record the habits and appearances of a vanishing wild population, enduring personal privations and straining family relationships almost to the breaking point in his inspired and compulsive attempt to portray an accurate picture of America's natural scene.

Wishing at last, however, to reach a wider public than might ever see his paintings, Audubon finally decided to publish and sell engraved copies of his work. Unable to find a publisher in the States he went to England where, in 1826, he created something of a sensation exhibiting his considerable collection of watercolors. And for the next twelve years he remained in England, working on the publication of his now-famous *Birds of America*, a magnificent folio which presented 435 life-size, full-color engravings of nearly every known variety of bird on the North American continent.

This first edition of full-scale prints, with the exception of the first ten plates, was prepared for publication by an English aquatint engraver named Robert Havell, Jr.; and the Scottish naturalist, William MacGillivray, as-

sisted Audubon in his writing of the text to accompany the engravings. The fame of Audubon's paintings, seen by most of the public through Havell's reproductions, has tended to overshadow the importance of the text compiled to accompany the folio of illustrations. Nevertheless, the descriptive narratives contained in *Ornithological Biographies* significantly influenced many American naturalists and writers on nature subjects in the decades following their publication.

In 1839 Audubon returned to the United States where he published succeeding editions of his first folio, and in his later years he worked with Carolina naturalist, John Bachman, on a second series depicting the four-footed animals of the American continent — aptly entitled *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* — a work he did not live to complete. From about 1832 until his death he was assisted in his efforts by his two sons, John Woodhouse Audubon and Victor Gifford Audubon — and the greater part of *Quadrupeds* was completed by John Woodhouse, the younger of the two, who had accompanied his father to England and later married the eldest daughter of John Bachman, his father's associate.

John Woodhouse Audubon also traveled to Texas to gather material for his father's animal folio and in 1849 joined a gold rush expedition to California in search of more specimens. However, he returned home to New York the following year and for the remainder of his life continued to work on the animal folio and subsequent, smaller editions of both wildlife series.

The value of *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* has been overlooked by most of Audubon's present admirers and his reputation continues on the strength of his first publication despite the fact that endless reproduction has almost obliterated the style and freshness of the artist's original work. Many of the existing early editions of either volume, dating from the 1840's and 60's, can be identified as the works of American lithographers such as J. T. Bowen and Julius Bien; while original Havell prints surviving from the first editions of *Birds of America* — often themselves mistakenly referred to as Audubon "originals" — are today rare and expensive items, much sought after by collectors.

During the span of Audubon's lifetime America's growing pride in itself as a nation rapidly engendered a similar pride in its land; while at the same time the influence of Europe's popular interest in landscape painting became more pronounced in the developing cultural circles of the 19th century as Americans were prompted to look more closely at the natural wonders of their own wild scenery. The leading painters, writers and composers of the period, reflecting in their works the emotional expressiveness and growing artistic individuality that was to characterize all the arts for the next half century or more, turned more and more to romantic themes to give outlet for their creative impulses. And this "romanticism" in the arts, dissimilar in many respects to the general scientific trends of the time, nevertheless shared with scholarship an all-absorbing interest in nature.

American poets and writers returning from abroad in this period, inspired by what they had seen developing in the various national schools of the European art world, eagerly

set out to establish an authentic, native "American" tradition in their works. Washington Irving's stories based on Hudson Valley folktales and James Fennimore Cooper's picturesque and idealized epics of "hardy pioneers and noble savages" found an appreciative audience in America. American philosophers such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson added their encouragements to the nation's awakening regard for its natural heritage, and a whole "school" of painting developed around an interest in the American landscape: a discipline now called for the sake of convenience, the Hudson River School, after the area in which this movement first became apparent.

This landscape tradition, although greatly expanded in scope as time went on, was maintained throughout most of the 19th century; and while such early and lesser-known American artists as Alvin Fisher and Frederick Church painted simple country scenes that featured wide rivers and wooded hills, many later artists looking farther west for inspiration — men such as Albert Bierstadt, Alfred Jacob Miller, and in the latter part of the century, Thomas Moran — attempted to capture the grandeur of the Rockies and the mountain landscapes of the Far West at a time when more and more American settlers were crossing the Mississippi and the Great Divide.

Illustration of a fox found in the government report entitled *Explorations and Surveys for a Railroad Route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean*, published under the direction of the U.S. Secretary of War, Washington, 1854-55. Gilcrease archives.



The impact upon the public mind of the paintings of Miller or Bierstadt, or the wild scenes of native life on the western prairies depicted by George Catlin in his *Indians of North America* series, can only be speculated at this point. But it is probable that the works of those artists who accompanied the first sporting excursions, exploring expeditions and government surveying parties across the western plains, particularly in the first half of the last century, opened Eastern eyes to the wonders of the American West and doubtless influenced to a great extent the general interest in future expansion and settlement.

Many scientists, naturalists and novelists also accompanied expeditions to the western regions during this period, traveling in the company of scouts, trappers and representatives of commercial trading firms, glad of the otherwise unaffordable opportunity to investigate the interior of the continent or to document life on the western frontier.

In Washington Irving's *Astoria* or his equally-famous *Tour on the Prairies* a picture of activities on the American frontier is eloquently described; and in such reports as John K. Townsend's *Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains*, or from the observations of Philadelphia botanist, Thomas Nuttall, contained in his *Travels in Arkansas Territory* or his lesser-known *General View and Description of the Aboriginal Antiquities of the Western States*, the modern student of history, geography, biology or ethnology can find a ready source of reference pertaining to natural conditions in America in the early 1800's.

But perhaps the most descriptive of all such reports coming out of this era in American history is contained in the combined literary and pictorial records published by an adventuring German prince, Maximilian of Wied, who, in the course of his travels across the United States in the 1830's, organized an expedition to search and explore the little-known regions of the upper Missouri River.

Following the historic route of Lewis and Clark, who had pursued that great river to its source nearly thirty years earlier, Prince Maximilian set out with a company of traders in the employ of the American Fur Company, and together with a young Swiss artist named Carl Bodmer, crossed the prairies between St. Louis and the northern Rockies on the only highway then available to westward travelers: the wide Missouri, itself.

Maximilian's detailed account of this voyage is included in his now-unobtainable *Travels in the Interior of North America*, a lengthy report published in 1843 and supplemented the following year with an Imperial Folio of polychrome engravings based upon the sketches of Carl Bodmer. The Gilcrease Institute numbers both an English edition of Maximilian's travelog and the engraved folio of illustrations in its archival collection, as well as an additional, unbound set of the beautifully-colored Bodmer prints which in themselves constitute one of the most comprehensive picture-surveys of the western frontier ever published.

Travelers Meeting with Indians, Carl Bodmer.



Plate from the 1844 folio of engravings accompanying Prince Maximilian's *Travels in the Interior of North America*, based on an original watercolor study by Carl Bodmer.

Maximilian, a self-professed naturalist and well-known traveler in his day, held a somewhat less romantic viewpoint with regards to frontier America than many of his contemporaries. As a result, his journal consists not only of an interesting personal narrative of travel west of the Mississippi but contains, as well, a substantial report of his observations concerning the geography, geology, climate and animal and plant life of North America, recognized today to be one of the

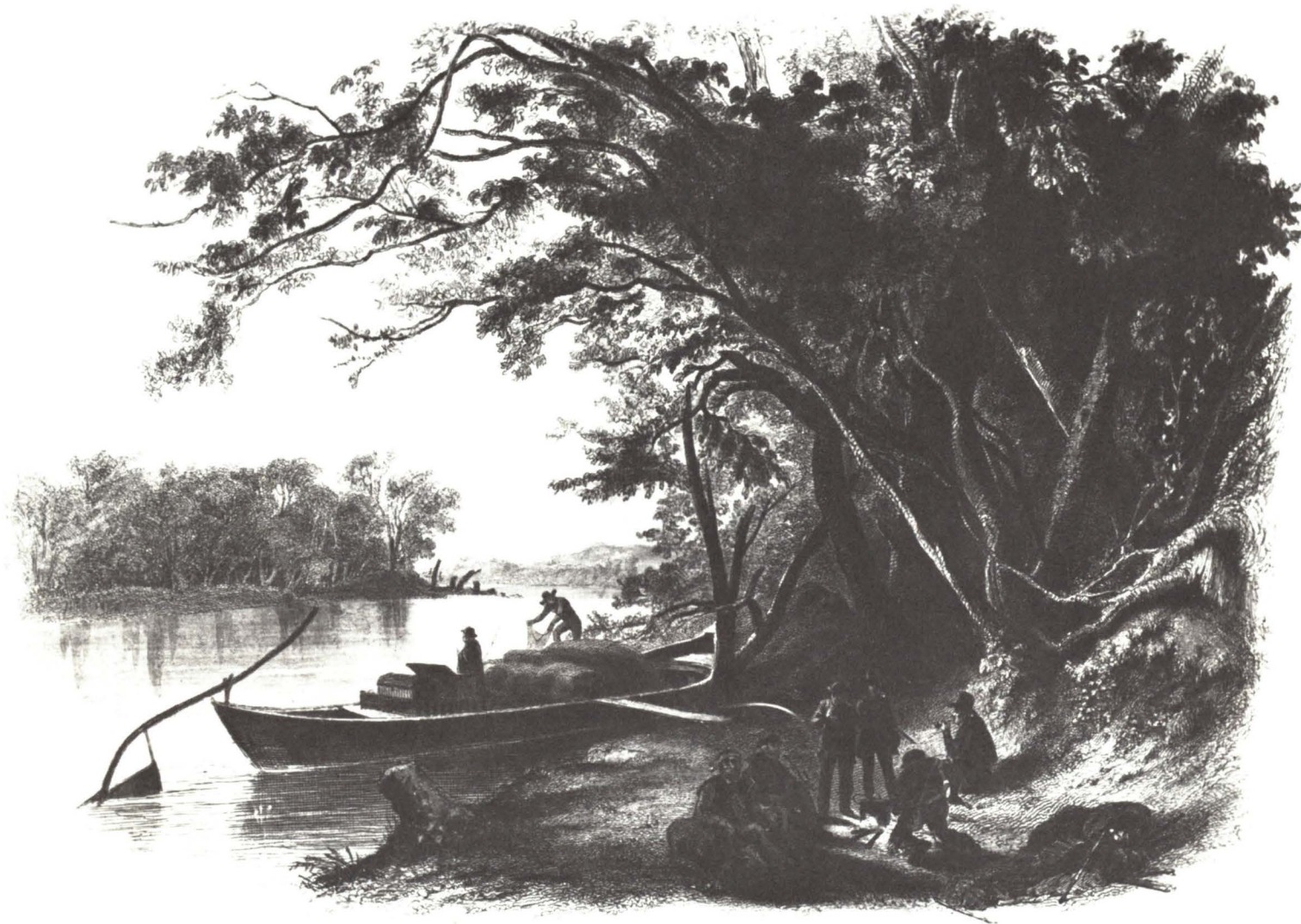
most graphic descriptions of the natural history of the continent to have come out of that period.

"There are two distinct points of view in which North America may be considered," states the prince in the preface to his 1843 publication. "Some travelers are interested by the rude, primitive character of the natural face of that remarkable country, and its aboriginal population, the traces of which are now scarcely discernable in most parts of the United States; while the majority are more inclined to contemplate the immigrant population and the gigantic strides of civilization introduced by it. The account of my tour through a part of these countries . . . is chiefly intended for readers of the first class.

"I have avoided the repetition of numerous statements which may be found in various statistical publications, but, on the contrary, have aimed at a simple description of nature. As the United States was merely the basis of my more extensive undertaking . . . it does not form a prominent feature; and it is impossible to expect, from a few months' residence, an opinion of the social condition and character of that motley population.

"The vast tracts of the interior of North-western America are, in general, but little

known," he continues, "and the government of the United States may be justly reproached for not having done more to explore them. Some few scientific expeditions, among which the two under Major Long produced the most satisfactory results for natural history, though on a limited scale, were set on foot by the government; and it is only under its protection that a thorough investigation of those extensive wildernesses, especially in the Rocky Mountains, can be undertaken.



Travelers Encampment on the Missouri, by Carl Bodmer, reproduced in a folio edition of plates published in 1844.

"Even Major Long's expeditions are but poorly furnished with respect to natural history, for a faithful and vivid picture of those countries and their original inhabitants can never be placed before the eye without the aid of a fine portfolio of plates by the hand of a skillful artist. In my description of the voyage up the Missouri, I have endeavored to avail myself of the assistance of an able draughtsman, the want of which I so sensibly felt in my former travels in South America. On the present occasion I was accompanied by Mr. Bodmer, who has represented the Indian nations with great truth, and correct delineation of their characteristic features. His drawings will prove an important addition to our knowledge of this race of men, to whom so little attention has hitherto been paid."

Concerning the outcome of this expedition, Maximilian later remarks:

"Though the main object of my journey — namely, to pass some time in the chain of the Rocky Mountains — was defeated by unfavorable circumstances, I should have been able, but for the loss of my collections, to communicate many new observations, especially in the department of zoology, which are now more or less deficient."

But while regretting the disappearance of his animal specimens, most of which were lost overboard as a result of carelessness on the part of the rowdy crew, he nevertheless believes that the drawings which Carl Bodmer made will prove to be of lasting importance, perhaps the most significant result of the exhausting excursion up the mighty Missouri; for he later writes:

"Authentic and impartial accounts of the Indians of the Upper Missouri are now especially valuable, if the information that we have since received is well founded: namely, that to the many evils introduced by the whites among those tribes, a most destructive epidemic — smallpox — has been added, and a great part of them exterminated. According to the newspapers, the Mandans, Manitaris, Assiniboin and Blackfeet have been swept away, except a small remnant . . . and as good portraits of this race have hitherto been extremely rare, the faithful delineation contained in the portfolio of plates accompanying this work will be interesting to the friends of anthropology and ethnography."

One of the most historically significant aspects of the Gilcrease Institute's total collection is its catalog of paintings, drawings and prints from this period in America's development. One of the most varied and extensive of its kind in the world today, it includes not only an important number of works by American artists of the Hudson River School, but also maintains one of the nation's largest representations of the paintings of Alfred Jacob Miller and an unexcelled collection of the oils, watercolors and original field sketches of George Catlin, whose notebooks and considerable file of correspondence are also preserved in the museum's library archives.

In addition to a larger, widely representative assortment of the works of many other western-traveling artists of the mid-19th century, the museum also houses a well-documented file of engravings, lithographs and published, illustrated folios and reports dating from this period, and retains the most complete compilation of Thomas Moran's magnificent western landscapes, watercolor studies, etchings, pencil sketches, engravings and chromolithographs to be found in any public or private collection anywhere.

A remarkable listing, to be sure, and only a part of a much larger catalog covering the range of our nation's history from the Colonial Period to the mid-20th century, its value exceeds even its total aesthetic or historic worth as representative American art in its documentation of America's past. And the pictures of the past, whatever else they represent, continue to provide a specific source of reference of importance to those who would investigate the social or cultural history of the United States, affording them a clear and reliable insight into the attitudes and aspirations of former generations of Americans — those early pioneers and politicians, immigrants and statesmen who settled this land, created the government and the institutions of this country and shaped its future course as a nation.





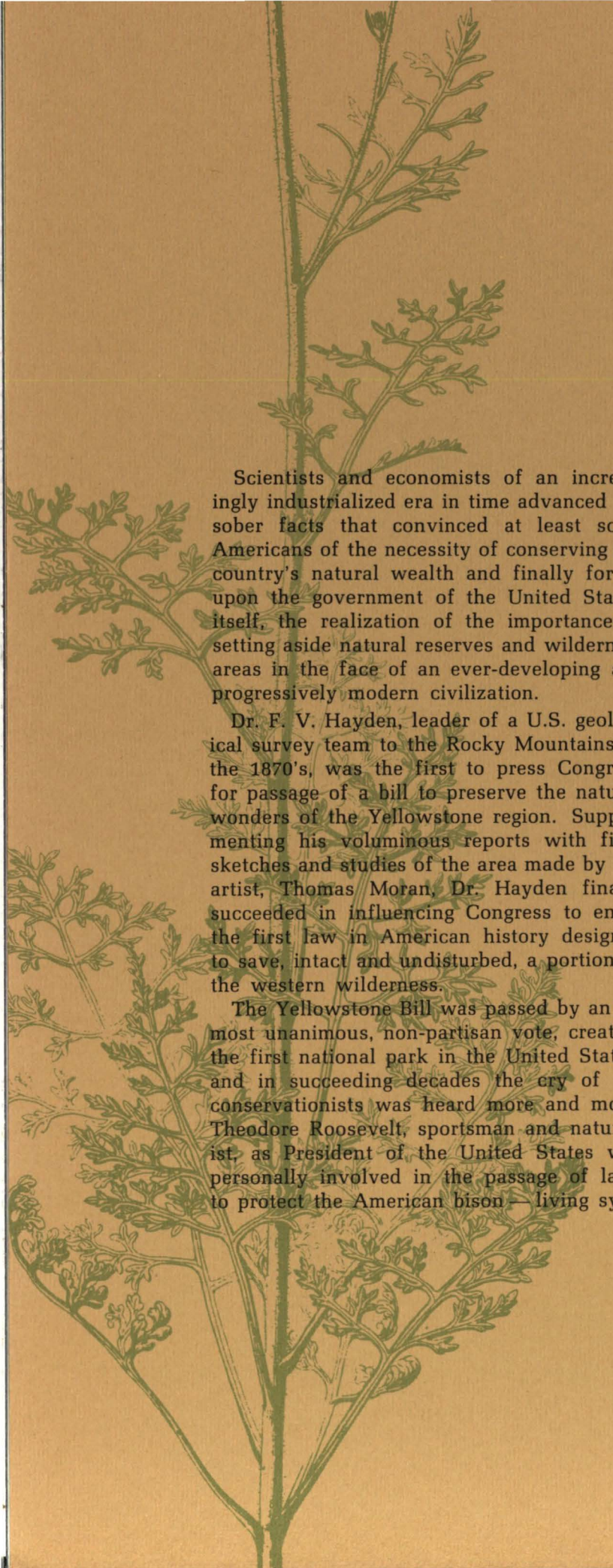
Multnomah Falls, oil painting by Albert Bierstadt.
Gilcrease collection.

Original field sketch by Thomas Moran. Gilcrease collection.



From the beginning, the existence of an unknown and almost unbroken wilderness was the most significant natural feature of the new world to which Europe's hopeful colonists came, a feature that both encouraged and inhibited settlement in this hemisphere and continued, even well into the 19th century, to influence the development of American civilization, the peculiar "American" character and, ultimately, the course of American history, itself. And the recurring theme in the annals of our nation's progress—the exploration, conquest and settlement of a wild and ever-widening land—became a distinctive part of a distinctively American tradition, a symbol of the early days of new-found freedom and opportunity.

It must be admitted, however, that the American settlers were surprisingly careless with regards to the natural abundance of the land, devastating nearly half a continent of wilderness wealth before the realization began to dawn upon them that perhaps there might be a limit to the seemingly limitless supply of land and timber, animals, minerals and primordial plenty. And it was the naturalist and the nature-artist of the 19th century, as well as perhaps the lyric landscape painters of the period, who first demonstrated an interest in this passing scene and strove to inspire in Americans a genuine appreciation for their land and its diminishing supply of natural resources.



Scientists and economists of an increasingly industrialized era in time advanced the sober facts that convinced at least some Americans of the necessity of conserving the country's natural wealth and finally forced upon the government of the United States, itself, the realization of the importance of setting aside natural reserves and wilderness areas in the face of an ever-developing and progressively modern civilization.

Dr. F. V. Hayden, leader of a U.S. geological survey team to the Rocky Mountains in the 1870's, was the first to press Congress for passage of a bill to preserve the natural wonders of the Yellowstone region. Supplementing his voluminous reports with field sketches and studies of the area made by the artist, Thomas Moran, Dr. Hayden finally succeeded in influencing Congress to enact the first law in American history designed to save, intact and undisturbed, a portion of the western wilderness.

The Yellowstone Bill was passed by an almost unanimous, non-partisan vote, creating the first national park in the United States; and in succeeding decades the cry of the conservationists was heard more and more. Theodore Roosevelt, sportsman and naturalist, as President of the United States was personally involved in the passage of laws to protect the American bison — living sym-

bol of a vanishing frontier — as well as other species of wildlife threatened with extinction at the beginning of the present century. Bills were passed restricting the overcutting of forests and the exploitation and misuse of other valuable resources, and the Audubon Society and other dedicated nature-study groups lobbied in the nation's capitol for the establishment of game preserves and national wildlife refuges.

At the beginning of the 20th century the careless and speculative agricultural practices of America's farmers finally resulted in the ruin of the farmlands of the western plains region during the infamous "dustbowl" years of the 1930's; and the threat to our national economy was thus forcefully brought to the attention of the country's leaders upon the winds that swept the prairies and scattered the topsoil of the centuries across the continent. Soil reclamation projects were hastily forwarded in the following desperate years, and even at the present time remain important activities of federal, state and certain local governments: and the problems still confront us, as even in our own day the pollution of our streams and major waterways, the depletion of our mineral reserves and the increasing industrial infection of the very air we breathe continue to be critical and mounting concerns of nation-wide importance.

*M*en had said, in the 17th century, that "knowledge is power" — and then had proceeded to demonstrate the premise through the remarkable scientific and technological achievements that revolutionized society in the following decades. But it was in the 19th century when they also began to realize that with such knowledge and power comes, unavoidably, responsibility, a realization harking back perhaps to the fundamental Adam, himself, whose superior intellect set him over the unimaginative beasts, giving him ultimate dominion and control of his world — and therefore the added burden of its care.

As a result of his progress in scientific knowledge over the centuries since, and because of his corresponding, awakening concern for the present world in which he lives, man has thus brought himself to the point at which he stands today: perhaps, as some think, a Point of No Return. And it remains to be seen whether the material achievements and intellectual advancements of the modern age will be able to answer sufficiently, and in time, all the questions that pertain to the supra-scientific problems of human survival.

Yet — if it is impossible for him to retrieve the simplicity of his youth, or to live again in an undisturbed world in "that happy state of nature" so fondly imagined by the poets and philosophers of the mid-19th century — man can, nevertheless, through his responsible use and control of his knowledge, continue to reap the benefits of a generous earth: and must, in the face of the uncertain future, continue to enlarge his understanding of himself and of his relationship to the natural world around him.

For it is his study of the natural world, in determining his over-all view of the universe, that necessarily forms his opinion regarding Life, itself — an opinion which in turn influences the basic judgments he employs in reckoning human values. And while man stands well within the sphere of nature's influence, the earth is his nevertheless to dominate, to explore, develop, continue to enjoy, or to destroy — and himself with it.

Therefore it is to be hoped that he will come to appreciate what is rightfully his, to learn to husband his resources before the time for learning is past and his present opportunities escape him: that he will struggle to retain in particular the human value-judgments that render his existence meaningful — and, in a world which he has come to influence and control, that he will ever strive to maintain and preserve for the sake of his future generations the vestiges of primitive splendor that yet remain to remind him of his original inheritance. ■

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