

BOOKS WITH COLORED PLATES - TRANSCRIPT

You can't see me, and the main reason is because I'm hiding behind this facsimile of a version of the first printing of Audubon's Birds of America. I'm showing you this because I want you to get an idea of how big that book is. It's a difficult book to read in bed, and it is obviously the kind of book that when it was published, 1820s, early '30s, was way beyond the reach of the vast majority of book buyers.

So people couldn't buy and most people wouldn't want to buy the original Birds of America in the double-elephant folio format. And so Audubon in light of what was considerable commercial success with this large set, which did go to institutions, decided that he would produce a large octavo edition with reduced but same plates. And, that is what I'm offering here in this very nice set of seven original volumes, original boards, new Morocco spine replicating the original. This set came into my inventory with what's called red rot in the back strip, and there was nothing to do except replace it. But the original spine looked exactly like this.

Audubon was the illegitimate son of a sailor and a Creole mistress. He spent his whole life involved with disastrous business ventures. Finally, his wife who had been a neighbor of his and who really is responsible for probably the most famous American book ever published, told him that he needed to follow his passion, which was the painting of ornithological subjects. The large edition of the Birds of America came out as a result, and then as I said this followed because there was a market for it. And it was a huge success.

In terms of color plate books in 19th century America, there was nothing that topped it. There were more than 1,000 subscribers. It was produced over a long period of time, five years, 100 fascicles, each with five plates. When a book is produced over that period of time, the quality of the paper will almost always vary, and that is the case with the Birds of America octavo edition. Usually, there's foxing in one volume or another, and in this book it's in the second volume oftentimes. This particular set has some foxing on a few plates, but basically it's a very clean copy.

This is a book that is extremely valuable, but it's not extraordinarily rare. So, when you consider advertising it or purchasing it, you look for differences between this particular set and another. This is a very tall set. It's taller, you know, the pages are taller. There's more margin than any book on the market, any other copy on the market or any other copy that's been advertised at auction even as being "very tall."

Also with this set, there is an autographed letter from Audubon stuck in the front. He is arriving in Albany in July of 1844. He's talking about marketing the double-elephant folio version of the Birds. He's asking how things are back home. It's very personal, long letter, and a very nice addition to a set of the Birds of America in extremely desirable condition.

Like the octavo Birds of America, this is an American book that was first produced in a very large format, and which quickly became very expensive and for which there was then a market for a smaller version. Again, large octavo, but again something that you can handle, something that you don't need two people to turn the pages. This is a book, Indian Tribes of North America, that has a curious history. Beginning in 1824, when representatives from Indian tribes would come to Washington on business, a tradition began where they would have their portraits painted. A man named King did the portraits. Colonel McKenney, as in McKenney and Hall, decided at a certain point that it would be commercially

clever, and actually something worthwhile for posterity to take these paintings and turn them into a book. And that's in fact what we have here.

And, when the Smithsonian burnt in 1865, these paintings were destroyed, and so it's a very good thing that we have not only the large McKenney and Hall, but the McKenney and Hall that is less costly, and even affordable for some folks. This is a third octavo edition, which is generally thought to have the richest coloring. And this is in the deluxe publisher's binding of red Morocco, full of gilt scrolling decoration, and it is extremely well preserved. Although the main value resides in the portraits of the Indians inside, some of whom look very stereotypical to us, some of which look much more modern, the outside is also a nice feature in this particular set.

These are representative samples of the 40-volume set of Jardine's Naturalist's Library. It contains 1,300 colored plates, mostly of animals and insects and reptiles, creatures from the animal kingdom, as well as zoologists of some eminence. It's the second printing. It's a book that you see frequently, but you almost never find it in nice condition. You usually find it in cloth, and very frequently it is the subject of, what shall I say, affectionate destruction. In other words, plates are taken out to be framed, sold and framed.

This particular set is absolutely precious in two ways, because the owner, and I've never seen this before with a multi-volume set, has taken the four parts of the animal kingdom, the four parts of the set of the book, the birds, the animals, meaning mammals, the fishes, and the insects. And he has had these different parts of the animal kingdom, these different texts relating to these different parts of the animal kingdom, bound in different colored Morocco. So the birds are in red, and the mammals are in green, and the fishes are in burgundy, and the insects are in purple or black, I can't tell.

And this reminds me of a segment that I did on early binding where the Apollo and Pegasus owner, Grimaldi, put his books in a different colored Morocco depending on whether they were in Classical languages or in vernacular languages, and reminds me of the library of Pietro Duado, who had different colors of Morocco depending on the subjects. The medical were in citron Morocco, and the others were in green or brown, I can't remember exactly.

But this is something I had never seen in a modern book and particularly in a multi-volume set, and it's very clever and it turns out that once again, as with these books here, it's in remarkable condition. This book has been re-backed, the Birds of America. These are in absolutely original condition and extremely well preserved. The plates in here are small. They're attractive without being arresting, but this set on the shelf, I can't help but smile.