

# Docent Informational Handbook

John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove  
Audubon, PA  
2014

## Handbook Contents:

**Introduction** ..... 2

### Part One: Background Information

**1.1 Who is John James Audubon?** ..... 3

**1.2 Mill Grove – Site History and the Audubon Years** ..... 4

**1.3 Mill Grove Timeline** ..... 9

**1.4 The Making of a Masterpiece – *The Birds of America*** ..... 11

**1.5 Further Notes and Facts** ..... 15

**1.6 John James Audubon Timeline** ..... 18

### Part Two: Docent Materials

**2.1 What is a Docent?** ..... 20

**2.2 Museum Exhibit Guide** ..... 23

**2.3 Audubon Publication Key** ..... 30

**2.4 Reference Materials** ..... 32

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove, the first home in America of legendary artist-naturalist John James Audubon. More than two centuries old, the estate, a national historic landmark, is an important part of local history, and the Audubon prints it contains are national treasures. In addition to the museum, the Center also maintains several walking trails through the 212 acre wildlife sanctuary and conducts educational programming and outreach. Since 2004, Mill Grove has operated as a partnership with Montgomery County and the National Audubon Society. Its' mission is to educate and inspire people to cherish and protect the natural world by preserving Audubon's artistic, scientific, and historic legacy as well as celebrating the conservation movement that it has inspired.

This handbook is intended to prepare volunteers to become museum interpreters and docents, but it will also be helpful to anyone interested in Audubon, Mill Grove, or the museum collections.

Part One offers general information regarding the history of Mill Grove and the life of John James Audubon. Part Two presents materials to assist volunteers in running museum tours and interacting with visitors. Also included here is a room-by-room guide of the museum exhibits.

The handbook should serve as a strong starting point for anybody wishing to learn about these topics. Volunteers are encouraged to consult further resources to gain more comprehensive knowledge. For those interested, a list of some helpful resources can be found in the back of the handbook.

## Part One: Background Information

### 1.1: Who is John James Audubon?

John James Audubon is best known today for his colossal *The Birds of America*, a collection of 435 life-size prints made from Audubon's paintings of bird species across North America. The most complete ornithological work of its time, *The Birds of America* remained unrivaled in scientific breadth for many years. As an artistic achievement, though, it has never been surpassed. Audubon was able to depict birds with remarkable accuracy and, famously, in vibrant, animated positions.

In undertaking such a project, Audubon became one of the most traveled men of his age. He journeyed to all corners of North America, including New Orleans, Florida, present-day North Dakota, Labrador, and most everywhere in between. Everywhere he lived, Audubon sought out new species of birds and other animals to capture with his gun and with his brush. He was, one could say, the quintessential outdoorsman, a man who felt most at home in the rugged woods of the American frontier.

It is the story behind *The Birds of America* that makes John James Audubon a timeless and compelling character. Producing the work took several decades of tireless work, and the outcome was always uncertain. Born as an illegitimate child on his father's plantation in Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti), he did not seem destined for prominence. Audubon did enjoy a bourgeois upbringing in France, learning to dance and play the violin and flute; but he did not excel in school, and failed in his attempt to become a naval officer. Young Audubon, however, enjoyed being outdoors and drawing what he saw – a passion which soon blossomed in the young man residing along the Perkiomen Creek at Mill Grove.

## 1.2: Mill Grove – Site History and the Audubon Years

This historic house was built in 1762 for Mr. James Morgan. The name of the estate, Mill Grove, stems from the fact that a grist and saw mill were built earlier and located along the Perkiomen Creek below the house. The kitchen addition (now the offices and library) was added in 1764 and may have operated as a tavern for a few years.

Interestingly, both British and Continental troops passed through the area during the Revolutionary War, taking resources and often damaging property of local estates, including Mill Grove.

The house and property passed through several hands before being purchased in 1789 by Captain Jean Audubon, a retired French naval officer and the father of John James Audubon. Fear of uprising in Saint Domingue, where Capt. Audubon operated a sugarcane plantation, had led him and other plantation owners to sell their property. France was amid swelling unrest as well (Bastille would fall that same year). Capt. Audubon came to the U.S. to settle other business and perhaps buy a farm. He was attracted to Mill Grove for its soil and, even more, the rumored lead vein beneath its ground. Upon the advice of Quaker friend Miers Fisher, Capt. Audubon purchased 284 acres, including the stone house, as an investment. After securing a tenant farmer, Mr. & Mrs. William Thomas, to reside at and manage the site, Audubon sailed for France. Because of ill health and turmoil caused by the French Revolution, he was never able to return to America.

In 1803, Capt. Audubon decided to send his struggling son, John James Audubon, to live with the tenants at Mill Grove. In an effort to avoid conscription into Napoleon's army, John James sailed to America alone at age 18. He became seriously ill upon his

arrival in Philadelphia, but he was nursed back to health by two Quaker women.

Audubon would thereafter speak using the Quaker “Thee” and “Thou,” adding to his French charm. He arrived at Mill Grove in late 1803 or early 1804.

Young Audubon was already passionate for birds and being outdoors. He loved to hunt, fish, horseback ride, ice skate, swim, and (perhaps most of all) observe and draw wildlife. According to John James Audubon’s journals, he spent the generous allowance provided by his father on fine guns, fishing tackle, clothes, bird dogs, and horses. Of this time at Mill Grove, Audubon would later write:

“My father [...] gave me what Americans call a beautiful “plantation,” refreshed during the summer heats by the waters of the Schuylkill River, and traversed by a creek named Perkioming. Its fine woodlands, its extensive acres, its fields crowned with evergreens, offered many subjects to my pencil. It was there that I commenced my simple and agreeable studies, with as little concern about the future as if the world had been made for me.” (In Streshinsky, 23)

He particularly enjoyed a small rock cave on the property, where he would sit and sketch a pair of nesting phoebes. Audubon then performed the first recorded bird banding in America by tying silver thread around their legs to see if the pair would return to nest the following spring. A year later, he was delighted to witness their arrival.

Audubon’s appetite for roaming outdoors, while perhaps unbeneficial to the farm, would lead to two watershed moments in his life:

**Wire Armature:** When drawing birds, Audubon continuously experimented with modeling techniques that would allow him to depict the subject as if it were alive. During his time at Mill Grove, he developed a method of wiring and mounting his birds that he would use to draw his later masterpieces. Audubon described his breakthrough as a sort of epiphany which came to him early one morning. He rushed to Norristown

for supplies and then prepared a Belted Kingfisher that he had shot over Perkiomen Creek in this new manner, attaching it to a board with pins and wires. Audubon was delighted with the result, proclaiming that he could finally see “the real Kingfisher.”

**Lucy Bakewell:** During Audubon’s stay at Mill Grove, a wealthy English family moved to the nearby farm at Fatland Ford. The Frenchman Audubon, perhaps nervous or uninterested, did not immediately approach his new English neighbors. One day, while hunting in the surrounding woods, he came upon the father, William Bakewell, who was also out hunting. The afternoon ended with Bakewell extending an invitation to Audubon. When he arrived at Fatland Ford, he was immediately attracted to the eldest Bakewell daughter, Lucy, a young woman of Audubon’s age who possessed intellect, grace, and charm. Thus began their four-year courtship. Lucy would prove to be Audubon’s most loyal companion. Her unyielding support through hard times and separation was vital to Audubon’s eventual success.

In 1805, John James sailed to France to speak with his father. Young Audubon wanted to warn his father of the untrustworthy Francis Dacosta, who had been hired as an agent to manage the lead mine at Mill Grove. Audubon was also seeking his father’s permission to marry Lucy Bakewell.

Captain Audubon was not prepared to support John James’ wish to marry. His son was still young and had no means of financial support. Instead, Captain Audubon placed Mill Grove in the hands of John James and family friend Ferdinand Rozier. The two became formal business partners and were to return to America to decide how best to

manage the Mill Grove property. Shortly after arriving in America, they divided and sold Mill Grove in 1806.

Audubon would never again live at Mill Grove. He and Rozier traveled to the frontier in Louisville, Kentucky to open a dry goods store. In 1808, Audubon returned to Fatland Ford to marry Lucy. The couple settled in Louisville, and in 1809 their first son, Victor Gifford Audubon, was born. This marked the beginning of several decades of Audubon's unstable finances and, soon, his quest to publish an authoritative edition of American ornithological drawings.

Audubon always looked back fondly upon his time at Mill Grove. Below is one example from later in his life, in a letter to a young acquaintance (Spencer Baird, who would eventually become secretary of the Smithsonian Institution):

It is a good long time since I was young and resided near Norristown...but still my heart and mind oftentime dwell in the pleasure I felt there.

...Within a few miles of that village my [father] did live, and it was there also that my good fortune led me to know and marry the excellent wife I have. (qtd. in Ford, 389)

Though Audubon spent less than three years at Mill Grove, those years facilitated his interest in ornithological art, and his experiments in wire armature laid the foundation for his later perfection of the form. The brief but happy and carefree days which Audubon spent at Mill Grove were never experienced again in his lifetime.

Mill Grove changed hands several times until 1813, when it was purchased by the Wetherill family. The War of 1812 with Britain had cut lead supplies, so the family looked to the site's lead mine to supply their paint company in Philadelphia. The Wetherills owned the property for nearly 140 years.

In 1830, copper ore was discovered at Mill Grove, and by 1850 nearly 200 miners worked the site. The mine was abandoned by 1858, but it had contributed to the development of the local town, Shannonville (renamed Audubon, PA in 1899).

Mill Grove was sold to the Montgomery County Commissioners in 1951, the centennial of Audubon's death, by Herbert J. Wetherill and reopened as the Mill Grove Museum and Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary.

The fireplace wall paneling in the Audubon Bedroom and several doors on the second floor are original construction of the house but, the inside wood trim and fireplaces were changed by the Wetherills in the 1820s. The colonial revival front porch and dormer windows were added at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the 1950s, artist George Harding, assisted by John Hanlen, created the wall murals within the house. The murals illustrate highlights from Audubon's life, work, and travels throughout North America.

In 2004, the National Audubon Society agreed to lease the site from the county. The John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove now operates as a public/private partnership between Montgomery County and the National Audubon Society.

### 1.3 Mill Grove Timeline of Events

#### History of Mill Grove Property

#### Life of John James Audubon

Lenni Lenape tribe inhabits the area.			
King Charles II	to	William Penn	1681
Penn receives extensive land grant, which includes Mill Grove. Names the tract "Pennsylvania," or Penn's Woods.			
William Penn	to	Tobias Collet & others	1699
Tobias Collet et al	to	Edward Farmer	1722
Edward Farmer	to	Thomas Morgan	1738
Thomas Morgan	to	James Morgan	1746
The Mill Grove house is built.			1762
The stone kitchen wing is built.			1764
James Morgan	to	Rowland Evans	1771
Rowland Evans	to	John Penn, Jr.	1776
John Penn	to	Samuel C. Morris	1784
			1785 JJA is born in Saint Domingue (Haiti) as Jean Rabine.
Samuel C. Morris	to	Augustine Prevost	1786
Augustine Prevost	to	Capt. Jean Audubon	1789
He installs the Thomas family (Quakers) as tenant farmers and managers of the property.			
			1803 JJA, age 18, is sent from France to live at Mill Grove.
Capt. Jean Audubon	to	Francis DaCosta	1804
			1806 JJA and Ferdinand Rozier sell remaining share of Mill Grove to Francis Dacosta. JJA leaves Mill Grove.
Francis DaCosta	to	William Poyntell	1808 JJA marries Lucy Bakewell at neighboring Fatland Ford.
William Poyntell	to	Frederick Beale (Beates)	1811
Frederick Beale (Beates)	to	Samuel Wetherill	1813
			1827 Robert Havell, Jr. begins printing of <i>The Birds of America</i> in London.
Samuel Wetherill	to	Samuel P. Wetherill (by partition. Gained legal ownership in 1833.)	1829
Samuel P. Wetherill	to	Martha Wikoff Wetherill (by will)	1839 Publication of <i>The Birds of America</i> Folio completed.
Martha Wikoff Wetherill	to	Rev. William Sudders, et al (in trust)	1840
			1848 Publication of <i>Quadrupeds</i> Folio completed in Philadelphia.
			1851 JJA dies on January 27 at age 65 in New York home.

			1874 Lucy Audubon dies at age 87.
Samuel Wetherill, Trustee	to	Emily W. Foster	1876
Emily W. Foster	to	Israel Wood	1876
Israel Wood	to	Eliza Jane Reed	1877
			1887 First <i>Audubon Magazine</i> published by George Bird Grinnell, editor of <i>Field &amp; Stream</i> and former pupil of Lucy Audubon, to promote the protection of birds.
Clinton Rorer	to	William Henry Wetherill	1892
Residents of surrounding Shannonville, PA petition to change the village name to Audubon to honor the late JJA.			1899
William Henry Wetherill	to	Herbert Johnson Wetherill	1927
The grist/saw mills and miller's cottage are demolished after local water company purchases portion of land.			1928
Herbert Johnson Wetherill	to	County of Montgomery	1951
1951 is the 100th anniversary of the death of John James Audubon. The County purchases 12 acres of the Mill Grove site in order to establish the "Audubon Shrine and Wildlife Sanctuary." This plot includes the Mill Grove mansion house and outbuildings.			
1951 - 1956+C22, County hires Philadelphia artists Harding and Hanlen to turn the house into a museum. The artists paint and install the murals. They also raise the floors and add wall paneling and chair rails.			
The Double Elephant Folio and other Audubon works are donated to the site by the estate of Mrs. Charles T. Church. Soon after, Audubon collector Edwin T. Vare donates individual Audubon prints and establishes a fund for collecting Audubon art.			1961
House at Mill Grove designated a National Historic Landmark by the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service.			1989
County enters into a partnership with National Audubon Society to share management and operation of site. NAS becomes responsible for site's programming.			2004

#### **1.4: The Making of a Masterpiece – *The Birds of America***

Audubon dedicated much of his life to completing his monument to ornithology. The idea that he could apply his passion for observing and drawing birds to create a publishable work first occurred to Audubon in 1810. Audubon was living in Louisville with Lucy, operating a dry goods store to make ends meet while hunting and sketching birds during his spare time. A Scottish ornithologist named Alexander Wilson approached Audubon with a collection of drawings of North American birds. Wilson was in the process of creating his great work, *American Ornithology*, and was searching for subscribers (subscriptions, or commitments to purchase, were necessary to acquire before such large, expensive works as Audubon's or Wilson's could be published). Audubon was thrilled to see a work which so closely mirrored his interests. Years later, after the two had become rivals, Audubon wrote that he had been leaning over, pen in hand, to subscribe to Wilson's work, when his partner, Rozier whispered to Audubon that his own work was vastly superior. While the true reason Audubon did not subscribe was likely because he did not have the money, this incident marks the germination of Audubon's audacious idea, that he could one day earn fame and fortune as an artist-naturalist.

Finances were a constant problem for Audubon during the next decade. A trade embargo in 1807 had crippled the business in Louisville. In 1810 Audubon decided to move his family to the frontier town of Henderson, Kentucky, a decision which caused Rozier and Audubon to part ways. Though Lucy was disdainful of rugged Henderson, Audubon was attracted to its wildness. Their second son, John Woodhouse Audubon was born in 1812.

Business prospects in Henderson were uncertain. The next project was an attempt to build a mill with Lucy's brother, Thomas Bakewell. The project failed and ended with

Audubon being jailed in Louisville for bankruptcy. The family had lost nearly everything. Audubon traveled to Cincinnati, where he worked briefly as a taxidermist at a museum. It was when the museum failed to pay him for his work that Audubon became determined to attempt a complete volume of American birds. He left Cincinnati with one of his pupils, Joseph Mason, for Louisiana to paint and describe new birds for his growing portfolio. Then, in 1824, he journeyed back up North to seek publication.

The scientific community in Philadelphia was skeptical of Audubon. It had already found its great ornithologist in the late Alexander Wilson, who had many proponents. George Ord, a prominent member of the American Philosophical Society and overseer of the deceased naturalist's work, became an outspoken critic of Audubon's work and campaigned to sour his reputation in the field. It became evident that American naturalists not yet ready for a challenger to Alexander Wilson, especially not a woodsman without formal training, and that publishers were unwilling to undertake such an ambitious project.

Audubon had spent 15 years operating shaky businesses, working odd jobs, and traveling around the country. Lucy was struggling to raise their two sons while teaching to earn money. Audubon's artistic skills had begun to bring modest income through portraits and lessons. In 1824, his art was published for the first time, a drawing for a New Jersey bank note. But the naturalist's aspirations were much higher. He was confident in the superiority of his watercolors, despite the bitterness of those in Philadelphia, and was determined not to give up.

Unable to find support for publication in the United States, Audubon instead traveled to England in 1826. He was immediately embraced. Europeans were fascinated by the American frontier and found Audubon's bizarre blend of ruggedness,

sophistication, and extraordinary artistic ability captivating. After exhibiting his artwork around England and Scotland, Audubon hired William Home Lizars of Scotland to publish *The Birds of America*. But with only 10 plates produced, Lizars' colorers went on strike and production was halted. Audubon searched for a new printer and engaged the firm of Robert Havell Sr. and Jr. of London as engravers and colorists. Robert Havell, Jr. was a master craftsman in his own right. His engraving skill and printing process ensured that the brilliance of Audubon's watercolors would be captured in print form.

**Creating the Prints:** The printing process used by Havell consisted of four steps: tracing, transferring, printing, and coloring.

- **Tracing:** First, Havell would trace in pencil the outline of Audubon's watercolors onto transfer paper.
- **Transferring:** The paper was then laid onto a waxed copper plate and run through a press. The pressure from the press would transfer the pencil markings onto the waxed plate. Next, Havell would painstakingly remove the marked portions of wax with a fine, sharp instrument. The plate was then soaked in an acid bath which would react only with the exposed copper, "etching" the design into the metal.
- **Printing:** With the design etched into the plate, Havell's staff would place ink into the grooves and print it onto a piece of "Double Elephant" paper. (The pressure from printing would distort the soft copper metal over time, so the plates had to be restruck after every 100 prints or so.)

- **Coloring:** Havell employed dozens of artists to hand-color each black and white print using watercolors, over 87,000 total prints!

From 1827 until June of 1838 Havell and his staff labored without a day's production lost to create approximately 190 complete folios. The last prints were colored in 1839 and the operation closed down. Audubon sold the folio by subscription for \$1,000 – a fortune in the 1820s and 30s – and only the very wealthy, such as royalty, governments, and universities, could afford the purchase price. Subscribers received the individual plates over time, about 10 at a time (see Nancy for an explanation of the numbering system), as Audubon and Havell were able to produce them. Each subscriber was responsible for binding their own set of 435 plates. Audubon and editor William MacGillivray also produced an accompanying text, *Ornithological Biography*, which provided data, observations, and vivid – if sometimes irrelevant – frontier anecdotes.

In 1840, Audubon and his family began production of a smaller-sized version known as the “Octavo” editions, which combined the images from *Birds of America* with text from *Ornithological Biography*. The Octavo editions were more affordable (\$100 per set) and helped Audubon reach a wider audience. In Audubon's lifetime his work received immense praise.

Though some would attempt to challenge Audubon's scientific accuracy (particularly regarding the *Ornithological Biography*, as well as his claims to new species), *The Birds of America* was undoubtedly the most impressive artistic work of ornithology ever created.

## 1.5: Further Notes and Facts

- **Audubon's Charisma:** Audubon was a charming and handsome man. He was sometimes eccentric and shy but could other times be arrogant and brash. He fell in love with America, gaining full citizenship in 1812, and was particularly fond of the frontier. In many ways, the Frenchman personified the America woodsman, along with other legendary characters Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. He often grew his beard and hair long and was known to don fur on his clothing and caps. The clever Audubon would use this persona overseas, where European elites were fascinated by the American frontier, to attract support for his work. He enjoyed being both a woodsman and a gentleman.
- **Conservationist?** Audubon was not what we would call a conservationist. In fact, the term did not yet exist. He spared nothing in his quest to catalog American birds, shooting thousands and thousands of birds for sport and for specimens. He did greatly admire birds, and found much pleasure in nature generally, as his time at Mill Grove demonstrates. Later in his life, Audubon did note the disappearance of birds and lamented the impact of uninhibited hunting.
- **Scientific Criticism:** Many within the American scientific community criticized Audubon (sometimes vehemently) for lacking scientific precision. Audubon could at times be loose with the facts. In one erroneous paper, Audubon described a rattlesnake chasing a squirrel across tree branches and constricting it to death (the story could be true, but the attacking snake was certainly not a rattlesnake). Some of

the figures in *Birds of America* were wrongly identified as new species. Audubon did, however, put great effort into depicting his subjects accurately and proportionately. His drawings challenged the conventions of the period by depicting birds in life-like poses and situations. The drawings are animated, whereas scientific diagrams had tended to show subjects in still, silhouetted positions. In *The Birds of America*, birds can be seen chirping, eating, nurturing, etc. For instance, in one unusual plate (no. 157) an Eskimo Curlew can be seen looking mournfully upon its deceased partner.

- **Lucy Audubon: A Steadfast Supporter:** *The Birds of America* probably would not exist if not for the endurance and support of Audubon's wife, Lucy Bakewell Audubon. John James' lifestyle (spending hours on end hunting and painting, traveling regularly across the country) left Lucy alone much of the time. Moreover, Audubon's infrequent income required that Lucy also work to keep the family afloat. She gave teaching lessons and raised their sons, Victor and John, while Audubon was absent for months and years at a time. At times she grew frustrated and cold, reminding Audubon of his financial duties. Even when forced to rely on Bakewell family members for support and residence (many of whom begrudged her husband), Lucy did not abandon Audubon. It is evident in John James' letters that his relationship with Lucy was vital to his wellbeing during hard and lonely times.

Lucy outlived John James and their sons. As money dwindled, she was forced to sell her property at Minnie's Land, NY. In 1863, she sold her husband's original watercolors to the New York Historical Society. After no one would buy the engraved copper plates from the *Birds of America*, Lucy sold them for scrap (some plates were

saved by a man who recognized their identity...(see Nancy for the details and current locations). Lucy died in 1874 at age 87.

- **National Audubon Society Connection:** The John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove is operated as a public/private partnership between Montgomery County and the National Audubon Society, who arranged to lease the property in 2004. Audubon Societies across the country began to form at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in opposition to the fashion and game industries. In 1886, editor of *Field and Stream* George Bird Grinnell and former student of Lucy Bakewell Audubon formed a group through his magazine to advocate for bird protection. He called his organization the Audubon Society, after John James Audubon. Though the organization soon disbanded, the name would be taken up by later groups who advocated for bird conservation.

## 1.6: John James Audubon Timeline

Year	Location	Event
1785	Saint Domingue, now Haiti	Born on April 26 as Jean Rabine to Capt. Jean Audubon and his French mistress Jeanne Rabine
1789	Mill Grove, PA	Capt. Audubon purchases a 284 acre farm northeast of Philadelphia as an investment
1791	Nantes, France	Young Audubon is secretly sent to France as slave uprisings begin in Saint Domingue(present day Haiti)
1794	Nantes, France	Audubon and sister Rose are formally adopted by Capt. Audubon and wife Mrs. Anne Moynet Audubon
1803	Mill Grove, PA	Sent by his father at age 18 to live at Mill Grove in order to avoid conscription into Napoleon's army
1804	Audubon, PA	Meets Lucy Bakewell at neighboring Fatland Ford. Immediately falls in love
1804	Mill Grove, PA	Performs the first recorded bird banding experiment in North America in a small cave on Mill Grove property
1805	Coueron, France	Returns to his father's home to discuss the property and request permission to marry Lucy
1806	Mill Grove, PA	JJA and business partner/family friend Ferdinand Rozier divide and sell Mill Grove property
1807	Louisville, KY	Opens dry goods store with Rozier
1808	Audubon, PA	Marries Lucy Bakewell; business is struggling
1809	Louisville, KY	Victor Gifford Audubon is born
1810	Louisville, KY	Meets ornithologist Alexander Wilson; moves to Henderson, KY after store fails
1811	Henderson, KY	Rozier leaves partnership, moves to Missouri
1812	Henderson, KY	John Woodhouse Audubon is born; Tom Bakewell joins Audubon as business partner
1813	Henderson, KY	Partners begin mill construction project along Ohio river
1819	Louisville, KY	Mill project fails. Audubon jailed for debt; family loses most possessions
1819	Cincinnati, OH	Employed as taxidermist by Western Museum Society
1820	Cincinnati, OH	Museum cannot pay Audubon. Decides to attempt a great work on the birds of North America. Takes on 13 year old apprentice Joseph Mason, who paints backgrounds for most of Audubon's

## work

1821	New Orleans, LA	Travels south to finish his collection. Paints portraits, gives lessons, and draws birds
1824	Philadelphia, PA	Presents his drawings to scientists, naturalists for possible publication
1826	Liverpool, England	Unable to get published in U.S., sails for England
1826	Edinburgh, Scotland	Enthusiastic reception overseas. First plate is engraved by William Home Lizars
1827	London, England	After Lizars' colorers strike, Audubon hires new engraver, Robert Havell Jr. Havell would work for the next 12 years to produce <i>The Birds of America</i>
1829		Returns to U.S. to retrieve Lucy, collect more birds, and sell subscriptions
1830		Returns to England with Lucy
1831	London, England	First volume is published. Returns to North America for 3 year collecting trip
1839	London, England	Final volume is published. Returns to U.S. and begins work on <i>Quadrupeds</i> with friend Rev. John Bachman
1840		Begins producing smaller "Octavo" edition of <i>Birds of America</i>
1841	New York	Purchases house at "Minnie's Land" (now known as Washington Heights) along Hudson river. A high rise apartment bldg now stands where "Minnie's Land" once stood.
1843	Western Frontier	Realizes dream of visiting American West on an expedition up the Missouri river to collect for the <i>Quadrupeds</i> ; trip is relatively unsuccessful
1845	Philadelphia, PA	First volume of <i>Quadrupeds</i> is published
1846		Turns over production to son John Woodhouse as health deteriorates
1848		<i>Quadrupeds</i> is completed
1851	Minnie's Land, NY	Dies on January 27, age 65
1874	Shelbyville, KY	Lucy Bakewell Audubon dies on June 18, age 87

## **Part 2: Becoming a Docent**

### **2.1: What is a Docent?**

Docents are important to any museum experience. They engage visitors in ways the physical exhibit cannot by interpreting objects and articulating themes according to the specific interests of each guest. The docent gives voice to the exhibit and, as such, shapes its educational influence upon visitors. Whether as a resource on the exhibit floor or formal tour guide, docents can make a trip to the museum more enjoyable and memorable.

Personal interpretation can be particularly helpful at museums like the John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove, where visitors' knowledge of the exhibition material varies widely. Most adults and some children will have heard the name "Audubon" before, but they may often know little else. For instance, some visitors may arrive with an interest in conservation or local history. Others may be art students or collectors. And still others may enjoy biology or the outdoors. The museum has something to offer all of these people, and even those who have never heard of Audubon before. A strong docent can speak to guests' interests and background while also introducing them to new information and ideas.

For this reason, it can be helpful to assess your visitors before a tour begins. Don't try to guess or judge for yourself: one approach would be to ask some general introductory questions. Examples could include: "Is anyone from the local area?" "Have you heard about John James Audubon before? And how about the National Audubon

Society?” Such initial conversation can make guests feel comfortable and help you adjust your tour to keep it engaging.

School groups, for instance, warrant particular attention. Children learn differently than adults and often have shorter attention spans. Keeping children engaged requires clarity, conciseness, enthusiasm and participation. Children will respond to a lively, upbeat docent who asks frequent questions.

The museum’s exhibits feature many fine examples of Audubon’s art. Just as Audubon was able to bring birds to life on paper, the docent’s task is to bring these artworks alive to the visitor. Interpreting art is difficult, especially when that art straddles boundaries between art and science. It is one thing to say that Audubon’s birds are beautiful, and it is another entirely to explore why they are beautiful and special. The detail of the feathers, feet and legs of the birds, their vivid poses, the exact proportions – highlighting specific features can help visitors appreciate the artwork... (also check with Nancy for an explanation of the markings on each print... the engraver’s notation, the numbers in the upper corners, etc. Or, you could ask the visitors what they find striking about a particular print. No matter the approach, interrogating the nuances of exhibit objects can, for the right audience, greatly enrich their museum experience.

One other thing to keep in mind is that the John James Audubon Center is not just a museum: it is an historic site and nature preserve. The house at Mill Grove is about 250 years old, built before the United States even existed! Audubon himself lived here during some very formative years of his life. Mill Grove is the only structure in the US remaining that JJA actually lived in! This gives the house real significance to the museum: Mill Grove does not just contain the exhibits, but is itself a part of them. Similarly, the grounds surrounding the museum are where Audubon developed his

exceptional drawing technique. Many visitors will be excited to experience the same natural setting that inspired this great artist-naturalist more than two centuries ago.

Below are offered some general characteristics demonstrated by strong museum docents. However, every docent will have his or her own style of interaction and education. Being creative and genuine is crucial: no one enjoys listening to a fully-scripted lecture. In fact, a docent is more like a conversation partner than a lecturer. Remember that no two tours will be alike!

### **Some Tips for Becoming an Effective Docent:**

- **Be confident:** You know the material well, and your audience is interested in what you have to say. Small museums offer friendly and inviting atmospheres, so there's no need to be nervous.
- **Consider your demeanor:** Docents are speakers, and they are also performers. Visitors respond to facial expressions, hand gestures, eye contact, and posture. Utilize your body language to engage them. It also demonstrates your enthusiasm and professionalism.
- **Speak clearly:** Articulate your thoughts clearly and at an appropriate volume. Make sure everyone can hear you, and avoid overuse of speech fillers.
- **Don't be afraid to say, "I Don't Know":** There's no way to predict what questions visitors may ask. Try to answer questions as best you can and admit when you are unsure. The visitor will appreciate your honesty. And the visitor will likely be excited to have asked an intelligent question. Always make an attempt to locate an answer by asking another on duty staff member. Visitors will appreciate it.

## 2.2: Museum Exhibit Guide

### First Floor:

#### *Room One: Gift Shop*

#### *Room Two: Folio Room - Birds of America*

I. The centerpiece of the room, and the museum's crown jewel, is an original edition of Audubon's famous *Birds of America*, which features 435 copper plate engraved images of birds drawn true to life – accurate in size, detail, and action. Audubon was able to depict his subjects in life-size by using the largest paper size available, known as “Double Elephant.” A complete **folio** consists of 435 prints (called **plates**) with a total of 1,065 life-size figures of birds portraying 489 supposedly distinct species of birds (not all of Audubon's discoveries turned out to be new species). Every plate (print) measures approximately 29½ x 39½ inches. Mill Grove is fortunate to own a complete, bound first-edition folio consisting of four volumes. Each volume weighs 50 pounds or more, except the *third* volume which weighs 76 pounds. The *Birds of America* volume on exhibit here is bound in full Moroccan leather. The set was presented to Mill Grove in 1961 by the estate of Mrs. Charles T. Church of New York, in memory of her husband.

#### *Room Three: Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*

II. Exhibited to the right of the fireplace is Audubon's final work, *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, produced from 1845-1848. It features 150 hand-colored stone lithographs executed by J.T. Bowen of Philadelphia. Its “Imperial” dimensions, 28 by 22 inches, allowed many of the smaller mammals to be represented life-size. The

complete set consists of three volumes and originally sold for \$300. Mill Grove owns a complete set bound in two volumes, one of which is on display.

Audubon collaborated with family friend John Bachman, a minister and naturalist, to produce the work. Bachman wrote three volumes of accompanying text *Animal Biographies*. *Quadrupeds* was the only work in which Audubon shared title page honors. Audubon's youngest son, John Woodhouse Audubon, is thought to have painted nearly half of the figures for the *Quadrupeds* as his father's eyesight and health were deteriorating rapidly during production. His name is listed on many of the prints as "Drawn from nature by J.W. Audubon."

**III.** Across the room, one scene from the *Quadrupeds* entitled "Mole Shaped Pouched Rat" can be seen in the glass case in three forms: J.W. Audubon's original oil painting; J.T. Bowen's "Imperial" print; and J.T. Bowen's later "Octavo" print, approximately 6.5 by 10 inches, or 6.5 by 10.75 inches, depending on how it was bound.

**IV.** Above the fireplace hangs a rare, uncolored print from *Birds of America* showing Havell's engraving skill. This is what the prints looked like after being pressed from the copper plates. A colored print of the same scene hangs adjacent. Every print of the *Birds of America* was hand-colored by hired staff using Audubon's original watercolor paintings as their patterns. Over 87,000 total prints were produced this way. This print shown happens to be the PA State Bird, the Ruffed Grouse.

**V.** Also on display in this room is an original "pattern proof" from *Birds of America*. These were completed prints that were reviewed for quality. Note the paint splotches and

hand-written notes visible on the print denoting changes needing to be made. It is interesting to compare the proof with the final print of the same plate hanging adjacent.

**VI.** The model to the left of the fireplace represents Audubon's unique wire armature technique. Audubon learned to mount specimens on gridded paper, using wire to recreate natural body positions. Audubon's ability to pose his specimens perfectly allowed him to paint them proportionately and in life-like ways. According to his journals, Audubon first practiced this technique at Mill Grove with a Belted Kingfisher, the same species shown here in our model. A print of the Kingfisher hangs above.

## **Second Floor:**

### ***Room One: John James Audubon Bedroom***

**I.** The spirit and inspiration of Audubon is captured by this recreation of his bedroom at Mill Grove. We know that Audubon was already fascinated by the natural world when he arrived in the United States in 1803. Mill Grove provided him an environment where he could indulge in his passion for the outdoors, perform whimsical experiments, and develop his artistic abilities. The room has been reconstructed from an account by William Bakewell, Lucy's younger brother (quotation on display), whose vivid description captures the young naturalist's eccentric talents.

The canopy bed dates to very early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was owned by one of the first commissioners of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Because young John James did not own much while living at Mill Grove, none of Audubon's original belongings can be seen at the museum. The fireplace wall paneling in the room is original to the house when Audubon resided here.

**II.** Exhibited in this room, immediately left of the doorway, is an original pencil and crayon drawing of the “False Foxglove” wildflower completed by Audubon shortly before he sold Mill Grove, on behalf of his father, in August 1806. Signed and dated, this is one of his earliest known drawings, and one of the few known to exist that Audubon actually completed at Mill Grove.

***Room Two: Rotating Art Gallery***

**I.** The room features contemporary artists whose work is relevant to the themes explored in the museum. The exhibits change every three to four months.

***Room Three: Children’s Activity Room***

**I.** Materials are available for visitors to create their own ornithological drawings.

**II.** The wall murals, like those on the first floor, were painted by George Harding and John Hanlen in the 1950s. They depict three major habitat areas frequented by Audubon: the Louisiana swamps, the prairie country of the Upper Missouri River, and the “bird rocks” of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

***Room Four: Bird Banding from a Silver Thread***

**I.** The room exhibits the science and art of bird banding. Several interactive displays invite visitors to band themselves to learn the technique, and participate in the migration process. The video loop in the window sill, shows a Saw-whet Owl being banded by a licensed bird bander. Visitors will learn the history of bird banding from Audubon’s

silver thread experiment to today's modern techniques.

**II.** *Display Case:*

The display case features historical bird banding equipment, such as actual retired bird bands, actual records, collection nets, and measuring tools used by licensed bird banders.

**III.** The room also features prints, one from the original double elephant folio, and the other is from the Reissue of the elephant folio of *The Birds of America* (1860, commonly called *The Bien Edition*). *The Bien Edition* was issued after John James Audubon's death and used the newly developed medium Chromolithography.

**IV.** In this room is the second book of the *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*.

**Third Floor:**

***Room One: Songbirds and Bird Hats***

**I.** The cases of stuffed songbirds offer a graphic example of the kind of activity which propelled the Audubon Society into action for the cause of conservation and preservation. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, game hunters could earn a living by shooting and stuffing songbirds. Wearing bird feathers – or even entire stuffed birds – on one's hat became extremely fashionable in Victorian America, and eating “songbird pie” was commonplace. Examples of bird hats from the period are displayed in the room, as well as a large collection of bird eggs. The three Audubon prints on the left, show examples of large birds killed for their plumage.

***Room Two: Taxidermy Specimens***

**I.** This room represents specimens similar to the type Audubon collected and sketched while living at Mill Grove. Audubon performed some rather crude taxidermy and also assembled an assortment of nests. He collected eggs, snake skins, and other materials from the countryside. This room also contains many other fine examples of larger preserved birds and animals.

**II.** The Bald Eagles in the center display case represent three significant periods in this species development. The large, dark immature bird is perhaps about six months old. The intermediate stage of brown and white is a three to four year old, and the mature adult, with white head and tail, is six to seven years old. The large size of the dark immature specimen is likely due to the fact that it is a female.

***Room Three: Site History***

**I.** The lighted display case is filled with mineral specimens found at Mill Grove or on adjacent lands. The mineral specimens and artifacts in this case were found over a long period of time and are from the old Wetherill lead and copper mines abandoned on the property.

**II.** Hanging on the screen is the original, hand-written petition drawn up to change the name of the nearby town from *Shannonville* to *Audubon* in 1899. This event was initiated by W. H. Wetherill, whose family owned the site for decades. The signatures were from local residents supporting the petition for the name change. There are at least six states in the U.S. with towns named for Audubon, but only Pennsylvania can claim

his first home in America.

**III.** In the 1820s, Thomas Birch, son of the noted English painter William Birch in the Philadelphia area, created in oil on canvas the first known image of Mill Grove for Samuel Wetherill. One of the two original paintings is owned by the New York Historical Society. The large wall photo is a photocopy of the other painting still held in the Wetherill family. Adjacent to this, hang two photographs of the old grist mill at Mill Grove, built in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and torn down in 1928. On the other side is a photo of Fatland Forge, Lucy Batewell's original American home. She became Mrs. John James Audubon in 1808. Under the glass is a collection of Octavo *Quadrupeds of North America, Octavo* (1854).

**IV.** As you leave the third floor, note the small window openings alongside the doors of each room opening into the hallway. Before the dormer windows were added late in the nineteenth century, these openings were designed to let light into the rooms and hall, as well as air, thus aiding in the ventilation of the attic floor during the summer months. This inventive use of window openings inside homes is seldom seen today.

### 2.3: Audubon Publication Key

**Title:** *The Birds of America* Double Elephant Folio Edition

**Publication Dates:** 1827-1838

**Size:** Double-Elephant, 29 ½” x 39 ½”

**Publisher:** Robert Havell, Jr., engraver; London, England

**Notes:** 435 hand-colored prints from engraved copper plates. Issued in 87 numbers of five prints each...see Nancy for an explanation of the numbering. Approx. 190 sets produced. Four volumes, unbound. Priced at \$1000.

**Title:** *Ornithological Biography*

**Publication Dates:** 1831-1839

**Editor:** William MacGillivray

**Publisher:** Adam Black; Edinburgh, Scotland and London, England

**Notes:** Accompanying text for *The Birds of America*. Includes: descriptions, observations, episodes, and anatomical drawings. 750 sets of five volumes produced. Price: Folio subscribers, 21 shillings per volume; non-subscribers, 25 shillings per volume.

**Title:** *Synopsis of the Birds of North America*

**Publication Date:** 1839

**Publisher:** Adam and Charles Black; Edinburgh, Scotland and London, England

**Notes:** Index to *The Birds of America* and *Ornithological Biography*. Includes: systematic catalog of known bird species in North America, 491 in all, with brief physical descriptions.

**Title:** *The Birds of America* Octavo Edition

**Publication Dates:** 1840-1844

**Size:** "Royal" Octavo, 6 ½" x 10"

**Printer:** J.T. Bowen, Lithographer; Philadelphia

**Publisher:** J.J. Audubon, New York; J.B. Chevalier, Philadelphia.

**Notes:** 500 hand-colored stone lithographs using camera-lucida images from Folio prints. Issued in 100 parts of five lithographs each. Approx. 1200 sets produced. Seven volumes, unbound. Priced at \$100. Several later editions produced through 1870.

**Title:** *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* Imperial Folio Edition

**Publication Dates:** 1843-1848

**Size:** Imperial, 22" x 28"

**Printer:** J.T. Bowen, Lithographer; Philadelphia

**Notes:** 150 hand-colored stone lithographs. Issued in 30 parts of five prints each. Approx. 300 subscribers, but amount of sets produced is unknown. Two or three volumes, unbound. Priced at \$300. Nearly half of the images are thought to have been painted by John Woodhouse Audubon. Rev. John Bachman wrote three volumes of accompanying text, *Animal Biographies*, which were included in the Folio subscription.

**Title:** *The Quadrupeds of North America* Octavo Edition

**Publication Dates:** 1851-1854

**Size:** Octavo, 7" x 10"

**Printer:** J.T. Bowen, Lithographer; Philadelphia

**Notes:** 155 hand-colored stone lithographs. Issued in 31 parts of five lithographs each. Three volumes: bound or unbound. Includes: Bachman's text. Three editions produced, as well as a later fourth edition in 1870.

## 2.4: Reference Materials

### Introductory:

Blaugrund, Annette. *The Essential Audubon*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999.

PBS Documentary. *Drawn from Nature*. "American Masters" Series. DVD.

### Audubon Biography:

Rhodes, Richard. *John James Audubon: The Making of an American*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

Streshinsky, Shirley. *Audubon: Life and Art in the American Wilderness*. New York: Villard Books, 1993.

Ford, Alice. *John James Audubon: A Biography*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1988.  
(See Appendices after text, including detailed chronology, genealogical chart, family documents, and summaries of Audubon's publications.)

### Audubon's Art:

Steiner, Bill. *Audubon Art Prints: A Collector's Guide to Every Edition*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.

### Mill Grove:

Hunt, Rebecca Anne. "Blessed Spot along the Perkiomen: An Historical Analysis of Mill Grove." M.S. Thesis, Historical Preservation. University of Pennsylvania, 1994.  
Accessible at <http://www.archive.org/details/blessedspotalong00hunt>

### Links for Docents:

[http://www.museumonmainstreet.org/admin/shared\\_admin\\_files/Docent\\_Training\\_Workshop\\_050711.pdf](http://www.museumonmainstreet.org/admin/shared_admin_files/Docent_Training_Workshop_050711.pdf)