

Calvin College Receives Rare Audubon Prints

CALVIN COLLEGE was recently gifted a collection of prints by naturalist and painter John James Audubon with an estimated value in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Birds of America, produced in 1966 by American Heritage Publishing, was donated to the college by Udean Burke, the late owner of Burke Christian Tours.

The collection contains 431 color illustrations of a wide variety of birds of the United States and is one of only 120 complete sets known to exist. Audubon's *Birds of America* was originally produced between 1827 and 1838, consisting of hand-colored prints made by engraved plates.

"The donor was looking for a Christian school that would put them to use," said David Malone, dean of the Calvin College and Seminary library.

The prints are to be used at the discretion of the college, without restrictions, for the needs of the school, he said.

"Generally, when we have something like this, it's my desire that we not hide it somewhere just in storage, and that the materials get engaged," said Malone. "That's really at the core of what a library does."

Often referred to as one of the world's most expensive books, one set of Audubon's collection of colorful, delicately detailed and authentically rendered prints was sold a few years ago for more than \$10 million. A majority of the 120 complete original sets, featuring hand-painted images of

such birds as the American Crow and the Red-backed Sandpiper, are owned by institutions.

Because they are so valuable, the prints need to be well cared for, but that does not necessarily mean they need to be sequestered and unavailable, explained Malone.

The library's goal is for these prints to be made available for natural science and history students to understand the role of documentation in the history of science. "The collection is very attractive, and I can imagine that [the prints] could be framed and hung around the campus," he said.

The prints are in near-perfect condition. While individual prints of Audubon's *Birds of North America* are available, it is much rarer to come across a complete set of all 431 prints, much less one in perfect condition, explained Randy Vogelzang, Calvin's director of gift planning and major gifts. "There are very few private colleges that have sets like this," he said.

What separates Audubon's work is the detail and the intricacy he was able to create in his documentation, explained Malone. The prints show the change in how the natural world was being documented and viewed at the time. But there is more.

"The science that we have today is shaped so much by a desire to know the God that created it," said Malone.



John James Audubon, Public Domain

John James Audubon reflects this desire to understand creation in his passionate and detailed study of North American birds.

"These fit well within a Reformed perspective," said Malone. "This is God's creation; let us fully understand the depth of it and try and understand as much as we can."

—Hannah Ebeling, Calvin College



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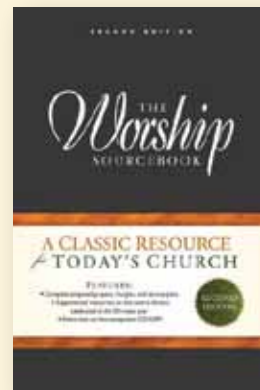
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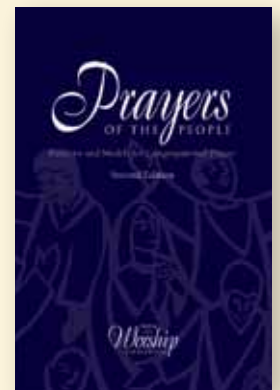
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