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Public Library digitizes rare Audubon books

Giant folios now on view in new display cases

The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County is fortunate to own one of the few intact copies of John James Audubon’s *Birds of America*. Housed in the Joseph S. Stern, Jr. Cincinnati Room at the Main Library, one page of only one of the double elephant folio editions was turned each week. At that rate, it took over eight years to see every page.

But now, thanks to the new cases the Library unveiled during a brief ceremony today, the four-volume folio set is part of a permanent exhibit that also features a new computer touch screen allowing visitors to digitally flip through the books and zoom in on the artwork.

*Birds of America* was acquired in 1870 by then-Library Director William Frederick Poole from the prominent Longworth family of Cincinnati for $1,000 and is now valued at $12 million. Over the summer, Digital Services worked with the University of Cincinnati’s Conservation Lab to scan the rare images so they would be available online in the Digital Library as well as on screen. The Library received $25,000 in pledges or gifts toward the project.

“We’re very proud to be able to do this beautiful work of art justice with a bigger case that will keep it safe from the elements and allow us to show more of these magnificent prints to everyone,” said Kimber L. Fender, the Eva Jane Romaine Coombe Director of the Library. “We’re also grateful for the chance to share our set online with art and nature lovers from around the world.”

**Related program: ‘America’s Other Audubon’ with Joy Kiser**

Joy M. Kiser, a former librarian for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, will present a mini documentary on Genevieve Estelle Jones at 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5, at the Main Library — Genealogy & Local History Department.

A native of Circleville, Ohio, Jones’ father forbade her from marrying the man she loved. In 1876, hoping to take her mind off her broken heart, she visited the Centennial World’s Fair in Philadelphia where she saw engravings from John James Audubon’s breathtaking *Birds of America*. Inspired by Audubon’s example, Jones became determined to create her own book illustrating the nests and eggs that Audubon had omitted. Kiser’s program will include aspects of the family’s story, archival photographs, and many details that could not be included her book, *America’s Other Audubon.*