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## Documents and Interpretations

### In Quest of Audubon: Exploring Audubon's Monument in Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum to Rediscover Its History

Roberta J.M. Olson, Curator of Drawings, New-York Historical Society, and Matthew Spady, Independent Historian, Audubon Park Historic District

**T**he Audubon Monument dominates the northern entrance to Manhattan's Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum on West 155th Street. It is one of the cemetery's most frequented sites and often the entry point for visitors who come to explore this historic burial ground. Its towering Celto-Runic cross is unique among a wealth of memorials to some of New York's most distinguished citizens—including Eliza Jumel, Clement Clarke Moore, Madeleine Talmage Force, Ralph Waldo Ellison, and four former New York City mayors—as well as thousands of others from every walk of life.<sup>1</sup>

Four privet bushes punctuate corners of an uneven implied square on the raised grassy plot around the monument, but in stark contrast to other memorials found throughout the historic cemetery including that of William Backhouse Astor, Jr. (1829–1892) no entrance is visible. Although decorated with carved reliefs containing Audubon's portrait and images

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1. Born into poverty and dying the richest woman in New York State, Eliza Jumel (1775–1865) is most remembered for her brief second marriage to the elderly Aaron Burr and eccentricities of her later years. The Morris-Jumel mansion, her former house and Manhattan's oldest standing house, is located seven blocks north of Trinity Cemetery. Professor and lexicographer Clement Clarke Moore (1779–1863) is most famous for his Christmas poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas” (“’Twas the Night before Christmas”). American socialite Madeleine Talmage Force (1893–1940) survived the sinking of the RMS *Titanic*, which claimed the life of her husband John Jacob Astor, IV (1864–1912), also buried in Trinity Cemetery. Ralph Waldo Ellison (1914–1944), author of *The Invisible Man*, was an American writer and literary critic. The four former mayors buried in Trinity Cemetery are Cadwallader David Colden (1769–1834; Federalist); Fernando Wood (1812–1881; Democrat), A. Oakey Hall (1826–1898; Republican), and Edward I. Koch (1924–2013; Democrat).



Figure 1. John James Audubon Monument, 1893, Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, Eastern Division, New York, raised in honor of the legendary artist-naturalist John James Audubon (1785–1851). (Photograph by Glenn Castellano.)



Figure 2. Vault of William Backhouse Astor, Jr., Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, Western Division, New York. (Photograph by Eric K. Washington.)

of birds and beasts that he portrayed, the monument lacks interpretive signage, other than his birth and death dates on its base, leaving visitors wondering whether or not the monument marks the spot where Audubon is buried. In fact, some sources suggest that the vault may not lie beneath the imposing monolith. Puzzled by this conflicting evidence and inspired by the opening of the exhibition *Audubon's Aviary: Parts Unknown (Part II of The Complete Flock)* at the New-York Historical Society in March 2014, a band of Audubon enthusiasts, including the two authors and Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum historian Eric K. Washington,<sup>2</sup> converged on the site on April 3, 2014, to determine where the vault lies in relationship to the monument. This investigatory fieldwork, combined with archival

2. The authors thank Eric K. Washington for sharing his generous knowledge of Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum's history and for permission to use his photographs in this article. This article was written in celebration of the 230th Anniversary of John James Audubon's Birth and the 130th Anniversary of the Audubon Monument in Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum.



Figure 3. John Syme, *John James Audubon*, 1826. Oil on canvas, 35 by 27 inches. White House Collection, Washington, D.C., 963.385.1. (Courtesy of the White House Historical Association.)

research, revealed many fascinating details about the history of Audubon's two interments in the storied cemetery and who is buried with him, as well as how the impressive Audubon Monument came to be erected and why it stands in its present location.

## JOHN JAMES AUDUBON: AMERICAN ICON

Arguably the greatest American artist-naturalist, John James Audubon, whose name is memorialized as the namesake of the National Audubon Society and its many regional relations, was indeed a *rara avis* and significant historical figure. John Audubon, or J.J.A. as he signed many of his works, became an American citizen in 1812 and is known by many as America's first great watercolorist. He was first a self-made man, then a celebrity, and finally a legend in his own time. Audubon's life, then, represents the paradigmatic American success story.

In both his written and painted works, including those for his greatest triumph, *The Birds of America* (1827–38), Audubon combined a naturalist's curiosity with an artist's eye and a poet's expressiveness to ensure his unique place in the pantheon of natural history. A gifted storyteller and prodigious writer, Audubon wrote vivid letters, journals, articles, and books that capture America in its infancy, including the five-volume *Ornithological Biography* (1831–39).<sup>3</sup>

Born on April 26, 1785, in Les Cayes, in Saint Domingue (present day Haiti), Audubon was the son of Jean Audubon (1744–1818), a French naval officer, merchant marine captain, and sugar plantation owner, and his

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3. John James Audubon, *Ornithological Biography, or an Account of the Habits of the Birds of the United States of America; Accompanied by Descriptions of the Objects Represented in the Work Entitled The Birds of America, and Interspersed with Delineations of American Scenery and Manners* 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1831–39). This separately published "text" for the sumptuous double-elephant-folio plates of the original edition of *The Birds of America* was sent to all subscribers. If the letterpress had been printed with the plates, copyright law would have required deposit of nine copies of both at the Stationer's Office to secure its protection. Such an expense, as well as the two different formats, obviously precluded printing plates and text together. The five-volume work was a ground-breaking contribution to the science of ornithology. Its roughly 500 "bird biographies" for the 435 plates contained the first extensive accounts of the behavior of living American birds, together with information based on Audubon's field observations from his extensive journals, each species' taxonomical history, and dissections. A work of natural history written in a lively personal style, it was aimed for a general audience. In its pages Audubon remarked on the landscape, people, and the culture of America in its springtime as a nation in picaresque "delineations," as well as on avian behavior. There are also 145 anatomical illustrations based on dissections of 107 species in the last three volumes taken from drawings by his editor, the English ornithologist William MacGillivray. See Roberta J.M. Olson, *Audubon's Aviary: The Original Watercolors for "The Birds of America"* (New York: New-York Historical Society and Rizzoli, 2012), 25, 32–33, 47, 96.

mistress Jeanne Rabine (1758–1785), a French chambermaid who died soon after his birth. When Audubon was three-years-old, his father sent him to France. In Nantes, Anne Moynet (1736–1821), Jean Audubon’s wife, raised the boy as her own son. In 1803, when he was eighteen and at risk of being conscripted into Napoleon’s army, the youth sailed to America to oversee the family’s property at Mill Grove outside of Philadelphia. Uninterested in practical affairs and the daily running and administration of their land, Audubon spent his time drawing birds and courting Lucy Bakewell (1787–1874), an accomplished young woman who lived on the neighboring estate, Fatland Ford. The couple married in 1808, and as newlyweds moved south to Kentucky to begin their life together on the edges of America’s frontier.

An entrepreneur by nature, Audubon was involved with several commercial ventures. After suffering bankruptcy during the Panic of 1819, he decided to follow his true passion, gathering material for *The Birds of America* (1827–38). Engraved in London by master printmaker Robert Havell, Jr. (1793–1878), this series of 435 double-elephant-folio-sized plates is considered the most spectacular hand-colored folio print series ever produced.<sup>4</sup> The series of plates is also hailed by many as one of the world’s pre-eminent natural history documents, as well as the finest work of colored engraving with aquatint in existence. It marks the first time in history that all the birds portrayed in a series of prints were reproduced lifesize. An astute businessman, Audubon realized that the full-sized series was too expensive for the general public, so he re-published and marketed the plates in the early 1840s in an affordable octavo format with hand-colored lithographs.<sup>5</sup> His second great work, on the mammals of America, produced in collaboration with his two sons and the Reverend John Bachmann (1790–1874), was *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* (1845–48).

In September 1841, Audubon purchased a fourteen-acre plot of land on the northern side of 155th Street in northern Manhattan, deeding the property to his wife and naming it “Minnie’s Land” after the Scottish diminutive for “mother.” That same day, Audubon’s friend and a sub-

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4. Double-elephant size refers to the paper comprising the folio edition; because each sheet was hand-made they vary in size but measure roughly 40 x 27 inches.

5. One-eighth the size of the original edition, these lithographic images were produced by drawing directly on a lithographic stone rather than the laborious process of etching with aquatint and engraving on a copper plate that demanded greater time, effort, and care.

scriber to *The Birds*, Richard F. Carman (1801–1867), bought twenty-four acres on the southern side of the street. One year later, a few months after the Audubons had moved into their new home, Carman sold his acreage to “the Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestry of Trinity Church.”<sup>6</sup> The church’s vestry then hired architect James Renwick, Jr. (1818–1895) to design a rural cemetery there, nine miles beyond the city’s northern limits.<sup>7</sup>

Lying adjacent to the Audubon property, Trinity Cemetery was a logical location for the Audubon family’s burials. Shortly before Audubon’s death on January 27, 1851, his elder son, Victor Gifford (1809–1860), purchased a plot in the cemetery’s far southwestern corner, less than a five-minute walk from the Audubon house and visible from it when the trees were bare. Not surprisingly, given the Audubons’ continual financial problems, it was a last-minute purchase, and the plot was one of the least expensive in the cemetery.

## DIGGING INTO THE AUDUBON MONUMENT

The idea for the Audubon Monument seems to have originated sometime in 1885, thirty-four years after the naturalist’s death, when the New York Academy of Sciences began a popular initiative to erect a monument to honor the legendary artist-naturalist. Audubon had become a member of the Academy in 1824 (it was then called the Lyceum of Natural History), and it was on their premises at 563 Broadway that he exhibited his watercolor models for *The Birds of America* following a triumphal return to the United States from England in 1839.<sup>8</sup> Before June 1887,

6. New York City Register, Liber 428, page 576; Richard F. Carman to the Rector, Wardens, and Vestrymen of Trinity Church, September 1, 1842.

7. Carman had attempted to develop this property into a rural cemetery seven years earlier. In 1836, he and James Conner, a printer who had earned his fortune producing a stereotype edition of the Bible for the American Bible Society, offered an eighty-three acre plot to New York City’s Board of Aldermen, who were debating plans for a rural cemetery similar to Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery (founded in 1831 and acknowledged as the first rural cemetery in America). Stretching north from 152nd Street and the full width of the island, the plot encompassed the acreage that would become Minnie’s Land, Trinity Cemetery, and most of Carmansville. After nearly a year of price negotiations, the Aldermen selected an alternate site (and then dropped the plan altogether). When the New York Bowery Fire Insurance Company, which held the mortgage, foreclosed in July 1839, Carman and Conner lost their property. Two years later, Carman revived his rural cemetery plan when he repurchased a portion of the property and sold it to Trinity Church. See *Documents of the Board of Aldermen, of the City of New York* (New York: Printed by Order of the Common Council, 1837), 3:71–93, 725–727; New York City Register: Liber 342, page 64; Elizabeth Dunkin to James Conner; August 12, 1835, and the following seven records.

8. John James Audubon, *Catalogue of Audubon’s Original Drawings Exhibiting at Lyceum of Natural History, 563 Broadway*, exh. cat. (New York: W.G. Boggs, 1839). Audubon also published two articles in the *Annals of the Lyceum of Natural History*.



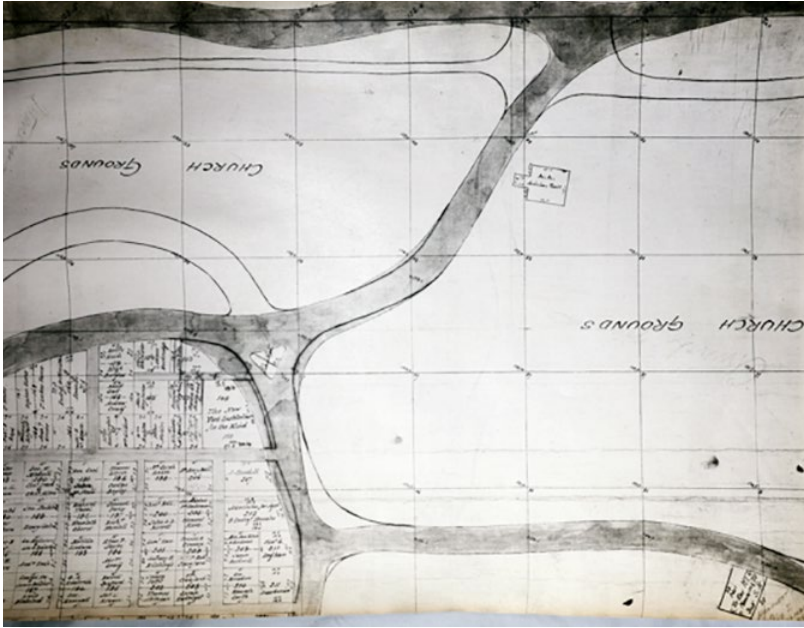


Figure 4a. Map of Plots in Trinity Cemetery [Audubon Vault at upper right; top is north with lettering upside down], Plate 5, 1870. Trinity Wall Street Archives, New York. (Courtesy of Trinity Wall Street Archives.)

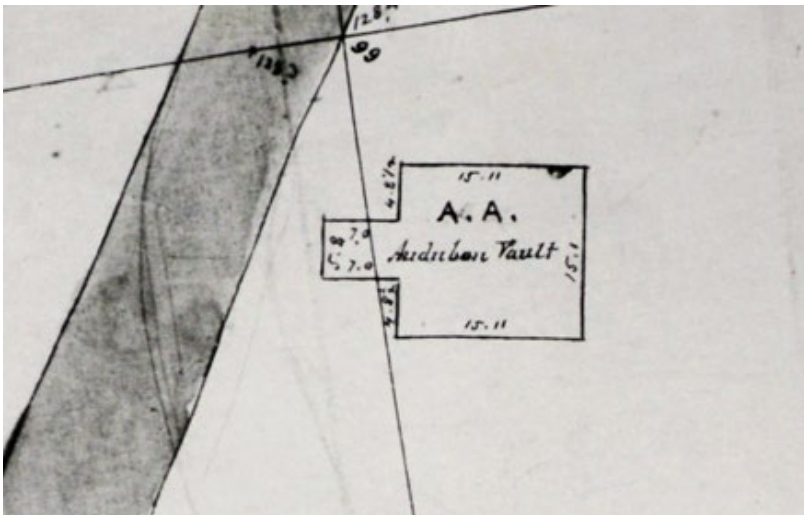


Figure 4b. Detail: Map of Plots in Trinity Cemetery, Plate 5, 1870. Trinity Wall Street Archives, New York. (Courtesy of Trinity Wall Street Archives.)

the academy formed an Audubon Monument Committee. To publicize its funding campaign, the committee began distributing a print with his portrait, engraved by Charles Turnure (1774–1857) after a lost miniature by Frederick Cruickshank (1800–1868).<sup>9</sup> Most published sources, including Francis Hobart Herrick, a seminal early biographer, generally agree that the commanding monument was raised above Audubon’s grave in the Eastern Division<sup>10</sup> of Trinity Cemetery in April 1893 but gloss over any specifics.<sup>11</sup> Until now, no one has brought together the various documents that detail the convoluted history of the naturalist-artist’s interment in the cemetery or has pinpointed precisely the orientation of the tomb in relation to the monument.

## DIGGING DEEPER

An unpublished manuscript plan/map of the cemetery plots in the Trinity Church Wall Street Archives includes the footprint and measurements for the Audubon vault (roughly fifteen by sixteen feet) and the vault’s entrance vestibule (approximately seven by six feet). But the vault’s exact location is difficult to determine from the map because the monument itself does not appear, and the paths were altered when the Church of the Intercession and its parish house were constructed between 1912 and 1915.<sup>12</sup> Further landscaping and landfill (possibly to deter looters or vandals) raised the ground level and concealed any traces of the Audubon vault.

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9. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 4, no. 1/2 (June 1887), featured the print as an insert bound in the volume next to the frontispiece. Thanks to Alex Mazzitelli for locating this illustrated insert and for general research assistance.

10. Various sources refer to the two distinct sections of Trinity Cemetery as Easterly/Westerly Division or Eastern/Western Division. The authors have chosen the latter terminology, which is more commonly used today.

11. Francis Hobart Herrick, *Audubon the Naturalist: A History of His Life and Time* 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1968; reprint of the second ed. of 1938 updating the first, 1917), 1:13; see also “In Memory of Audubon. His Granddaughter Unveils the Monument,” *Sun*, April 27, 1893; “Audubon Monument Unveiled,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1893.

12. In 1906, with the Church of the Intercession in debt and overcrowded, its thirteenth Rector, Dr. Milo Hudson Gates, aware of Trinity Church’s plans to build a chapel on the cemetery property, began negotiations with Trinity Wall Street Church. The solution was to have the Church of the Intercession become one of Trinity’s chapels, with a new church built on the cemetery land. The Church of the Intercession was subsequently “disestablished” as an independent parish, renamed Chapel of the Intercession, and absorbed into the Trinity Church Corporation. See: <http://www.intercessionnyc.org/history/>.



Figure 5. Original Audubon Family Vault Entrance, Trinity Cemetery, New York City from *Forest and Stream* [April 27, 1893]: p. 395, Library, New-York Historical Society. (Photograph by Glenn Castellano.)

While this map does not indicate which Audubon family members were interred in the vault or the location therein, sketched diagrams dating from c. 1917, once in the possession of the Audubon heirs, preserve the exact layout of the wall in the subterranean catacomb and its twenty spaces for entombment, then as today filled with the remains of fifteen individuals. The diagrams record not only the names or initials of family members and the year each died, but also that remains of John James and his wife Lucy lie on the top level side-by-side.<sup>13</sup>

Our preparatory research confirmed that Audubon was initially buried in another part of the cemetery, in the Western Division in plot 1069, located at the corner of 153rd Street near the Hudson River. A handwritten document recording the transfer of the original plot to the Audubon family states that it encompassed 336 square feet and cost \$97.10.<sup>14</sup> Various sources describe the site as a family vault, and the most complete account, by Benson J. Lossing (1813–1891), notes that “In the south-western extremity of the grounds, upon a plain granite doorway to a vault, may be seen, in raised letters, the name of AUDUBON”<sup>15</sup> Like other vaults in the Western Division, the Audubon vault conformed to the site’s topography and was burrowed into the hillside with its door and pedimented lintel fully visible and inscribed “AUDUBON.” Today, there is no trace of that vault, and the administrative offices of Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum occupy its location.<sup>16</sup>

The precise date for the inception of the Audubon Monument may be lost in the mists of time, but the project enjoyed a lengthy planning phase.

13. Diagrams formerly John James Audubon Museum, Henderson, Kentucky (once in an envelope addressed to Miss Audubon [Family Vault, Trinity Cemetery, NY]).

14. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, GEN MSS 85, Series V. Audubon Family Papers, Box 10, Folder 540. It gives the measurements as “18 ft 3 in in front and 14 ft 3 in in the Rear—25 feet five inches on the Southerly Side 18 feet 2 inches on the Northerly side containing 336 square feet at 2890 \$97.10.”

15. Benson J. Lossing, *The Hudson from the Wilderness to the Sea* (Troy, NY: H.B. Nims & Co., 1866), 384–385. See also Trinity Church, *Churchyards of Trinity Parish in the City of New York, 1697–1947* (New York: Trinity Church, 1948); Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America* (Stony Brook, NY: Museums at Stony Brook, 1980); David A. Poirier and Nicholas F. Bellantoni, *In Remembrance: Archaeology and Death* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1997); Robert V. Wells, *Facing the “King of Terrors”: Death and Society in an American Community, 1750–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 122–125, pls. 5.1–5.5, for other family vaults.

16. Daniel Levatino, Manager of Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, oral communication to the authors, April 3, 2014. When visiting this office, a Northern Mockingbird perched nearby, evoking the controversies surrounding Audubon’s watercolor of that species when he exhibited it in London in 1828, and his later vindication regarding the presence and appearance of a rattlesnake in its nest; see Olson, *Audubon’s Aviary*, 52, 146–147.

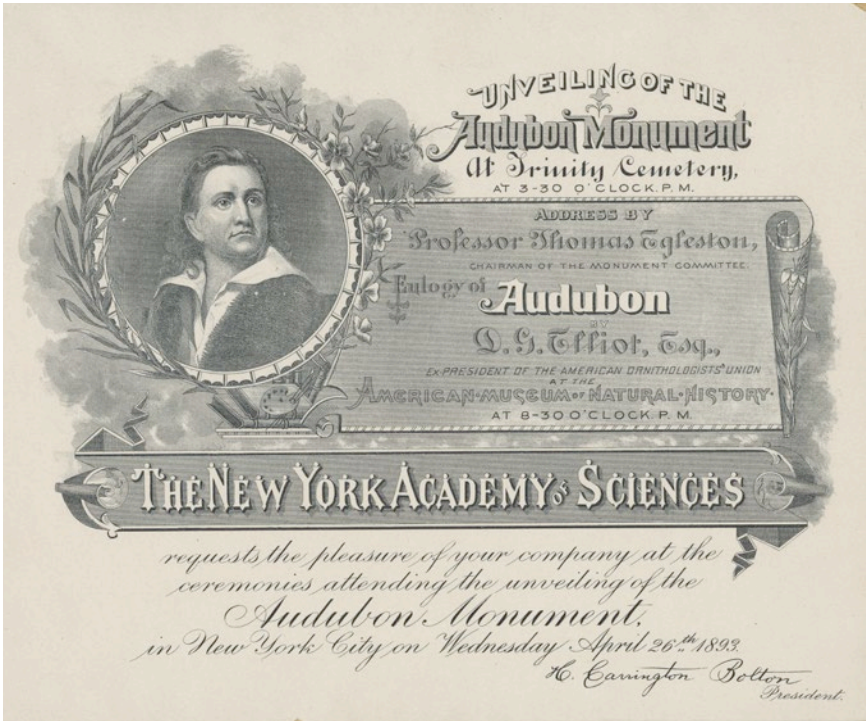


Figure 6. Invitation to the Unveiling of the Audubon Monument. New-York Historical Society, Library, Manuscript Division, BV Audubon. (Photograph by Glenn Castellano.)

One source declared that the idea for the monument dates to some thirty years after Audubon's death when Professor Thomas Egleston (1832–1900), an engineer at the Columbia School of Mines and later the Chairman of the Audubon Monument Committee, “stumbled upon Audubon’s grave” in the company of some scientific friends.<sup>17</sup> This event reportedly sparked the idea to raise a more fitting monument to commemorate the esteemed

17. “Proceedings of the Special Meeting of the Academy held at the American Museum of Natural History in the Evening of April 26, 1893,” *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* (1893): 41. In remarks to the meeting, Professor Thomas Egleston explained the genesis of the monument: “The idea of erecting a monument to Audubon originated in 1885, when I noticed in Trinity Cemetery a vault with the name of Audubon, very much out of repair, and endeavored to have it put in good order. To this there seemed to be some objection and it was not done. In the year 1886, when 153rd Street was to be cut through, thinking that some accident might possibly happen to the Audubon vault, which was very near to the line of the street, and it was to be opened, I proposed to the corporation of Trinity Church to remove the vault to a more prominent site, and suggested that I would endeavor to have a suitable monument raised to Audubon’s memory if this was done.”

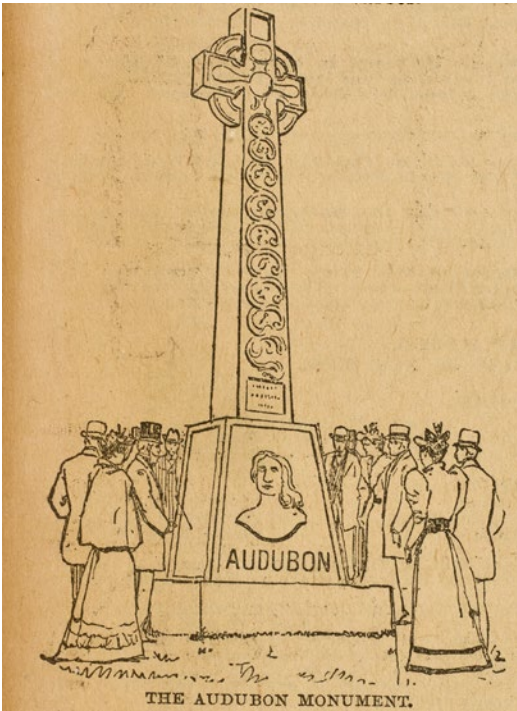


Figure 7. Line drawing of the Monument's unveiling, from "In Memory of Audubon. His Granddaughter Unveils the Monument," *Sun*, April 27, 1893. (Photograph by Glenn Castellano.)

naturalist-artist. One early suggestion was to re-bury Audubon in the soon-to-be-built Cathedral of St. John the Divine.<sup>18</sup>

Articles published in 1887 issues of the *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* and *Forest and Stream* suggest that the original catalyst for moving the Audubon family members from the Western Division to the Eastern Division, which dovetailed with the movement to erect a monument to Audubon, was indeed the westward expansion of 153rd Street to the Hudson River.<sup>19</sup> The anonymous author of the *Forest and Stream* article reported, "The Audubon plot in Trinity Cemetery will probably be disturbed by the continuation westward of One Hundred and Fifty-third Street. The trustees of the cemetery have with commendable liberality assigned the Audubon family a new plot close to One Hundred

18. "The Monument to Audubon. To Be Unveiled Next Week Near the Site of His Old Home," *Sun*, April 17, 1893.

19. "A Monument to J.J. Audubon," *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* (1887): 163–164; "The Proposed Monument to Audubon," *Forest and Stream* 29, no. 14 (October 27, 1887): 261.

and Fifty-fifth Street, in full sight of Audubon Park [a suburban enclave that grew out of Minnie's Land], and near the end of Audubon avenue, when this shall be continued from the north; and they are in hearty cooperation with the monument enterprise."<sup>20</sup> It is almost certain that the vision of such a monumental tribute to Audubon at the head of a grand Audubon Avenue would have enticed would-be donors to contribute to the planned memorial.<sup>21</sup>

According to the Register of Trinity Church Cemetery, on December 13, 1888, the remains of nine Audubon family members—including John James Audubon and his beloved wife Lucy Bakewell—were moved from plot 1069 Western Division to plot A.A. Eastern Division by an exchange of deeds. Among the remains transferred with them were those of a family friend, Anton Philip Heinrich (1781–1861), the first full-time American composer, first individual to conduct a Beethoven symphony in Kentucky in 1817, and a founder of the New York Philharmonic. Between 1898 and 1917, the remains of five additional Audubon family members and those of another friend (subsequently returned to England) were also interred in this new vault.<sup>22</sup> These numerous burials, including that of the artist's grandson, John James Audubon, on March 6, 1893, a few weeks before the Audubon Monument was dedicated, suggest that the new tomb's entrance was both visible and accessible during the first few decades after the transfer.

20. "The Proposed Monument," *Forest and Stream*, 261. The author was probably George Bird Grinnell (1849–1948), the naturalist and anthropologist who wrote many editorials and articles for the magazine. Grinnell, who had been tutored by Lucy Bakewell Audubon at "Minnie's Land," was a member of the American Ornithologists Union fund-raising committee for the monument, the editor of *Forest and Stream*, and an instrumental figure in the founding of the local Audubon Society.

21. The idea of a grand avenue beginning at 155th Street was never realized. At some point condemning land and paying property owners through several blocks was probably deemed cost prohibitive. Present-day Audubon Avenue originates at 165th Street, however, a map drawn before 1873 shows that its predecessor street "New Avenue," originated at 158th Street, only three blocks north of the Audubon Monument; see "Map of the City of New York North of 155th Street showing the progress made in laying out Streets, Roads, Public Squares and Places, by the Commissioners of Central Park, Under Chap. 565 Laws of 1865 and New Pier and Bulkhead Lines under Chap. 695 of Laws of 1867, Compiled and Drawn by Edward S. Ewen," private collection.

22. Trinity Wall Street Archives, New York, Register No. 2 Trinity Church Cemetery, p. 150, lists the remains, in addition to those of John James Audubon, removed from vault 1069 W.D. [abbreviation for Western Division]: Mrs. John James; Victor J. [Victor Gifford]; Georgiana [Georgianna] R.; Rosa; John James [infant grandson]; Mary Eliza [Bachman]; Jane; John Woodhouse; Anton P. Heinrich. Later, from 1889–1907, were added (*ibid.*, 226, 245, 254, 161, 172, 194): Anne G. [Gordon]; Victor Gifford, II; M. [Mary] Eliza; Joseph Whitley; John James [adult grandson]; Lucy B. [Bakewell].



Figure 8. Audubon Family Vault Footprint Reconstructed (looking northeast with the excavations at left center indicating part of the vault doors), Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, Eastern Division, New York. (Photograph by Eric K. Washington.)



Figure 9. Audubon Family Vault Footprint Reconstructed (looking east with vault entrance partially excavated), Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, Eastern Division, New York. (Photograph by Matthew Spady.)





Figure 10. Audubon Family Vault Entry Door Partially Excavated, Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, Eastern Division, New York, April 3, 2014. (Photograph by Matthew Spady.)



Figure 11. Door to Vault of the Families of In-laws George Hencken and Gottfried Link, Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, Western Division, New York. (Photograph by Eric K. Washington.)



Figure 12. Interior Catacomb of a Family Vault, Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, Western Division, New York. (Photograph by Eric K. Washington.)

Neither of the two most frequently cited published sources concerning Audubon’s final resting place in Trinity Cemetery—one an article entitled “The Audubon Memorial” in the *Trinity Parish Yearbook* (1888) and the other an article about the monument’s unveiling ceremony in the *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* (1893)—cite the second vault’s exact location.<sup>23</sup> The *Transactions* article, however, does record that the monument could not be placed *above* the new vault in the Eastern Division, as its weight would have caused the vault to collapse.

The Celto-Runic cross crowning the Audubon Monument was cut from a fourteen-ton block of North River bluestone that had been quarried in Malden Township in the Catskills near Saugerties. Eugene Pfister, foreman of R. C. Fisher & Co. at Corlears Hook, designed and supervised the carving of the over nineteen-foot cross from one piece of grayish-blue stone that

23. “The Audubon Memorial,” *Trinity Parish Yearbook* (1888): 111–113; “Presentation of the Monument to the Corporation of Trinity Church,” *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* (November 5, 1893): 30–38. The *Trinity Parish Yearbook* states that a monument to Audubon was first broached to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, but no action was taken, so later that year the Academy of Sciences took up the matter and appointed a committee; the cost was estimated at around \$10,000 and a national subscription was undertaken.

weighed seven tons. The entire tripartite monument, which cost more than \$10,000, measures twenty-five feet and ten inches in height and weighs twenty-one tons.<sup>24</sup>

The articles in both the *Trinity Parish Yearbook* and the *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* contain biographical mistakes about Audubon. Some of these he had perpetuated at various times in his career (e.g., to disguise his illegitimacy at one point he reported that he was born in Louisiana near New Orleans). Additionally, the *Parish Yearbook* locates the monument at 156th Street instead of 155th Street, as does the ticket to the monument's unveiling ceremony, although the actual invitation omits the street number. Even the monument itself is inscribed with the incorrect birthdate (May 21, 1780) that Audubon often gave. Ironically, and apparently unbeknownst to anyone attending the event, the dedication ceremony took place on Audubon's actual birthday, April 26th.

In remarks on the occasion of the dedication, later published in the *Transactions*, Professor Egleston noted that the monument not only commemorated Audubon the man, but also paid tribute to "science and perseverance under difficulties."<sup>25</sup> More importantly, Egleston explained why the vault is not beneath the monument. Praising the Reverend Morgan Dix (1827–1908), rector of Trinity Church, he said: "When you were informed that the weight of the monument might endanger the vault, you gave additional ground on which to erect it."<sup>26</sup>

So, if the monument is located on the "additional ground," where exactly is the Audubon vault? A manuscript map in the Trinity Wall Street Archives, which was commissioned in 1870 but subsequently annotated,

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24. "In Audubon's Memory. A Massive Stone Cross Nearly Ready to be Unveiled," *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1892. According to "The Audubon Monument," *New York Times*, January 4, 1889, anyone who gave \$1 or more received a portrait of the artist "reproduced from Turnure's steel engraving of Cruickshank's painting" (see n. 9 above). The paper kept a running tally of the contributions, reporting \$2,773.50 on February 20, 1891. It listed donors and amounts (April 2, 1891): Mrs. W.H. Vanderbilt and Cornelius Vanderbilt each gave \$100; Stanford White gave \$25; and the total pledged was \$5003.50. J.D. Rockefeller followed suit with \$100 with a total of \$6,724.50 on May 10, 1891. On November 2, 1891, \$7,370.50 had been raised. In "The Monument to Audubon," *New York Times*, January 14, 1892, Egleston is quoted as remarking, ". . . some of our largest subscriptions are conditional upon the whole amount being raised." Among the other donors were: Andrew W. Carnegie, Thomas A. Edison, George N. Lawrence, Collis P. Huntington, William Astor, and J. Pierpont Morgan. Herrick, *Audubon*, 1:13 n. 5, records that subscriptions from all over the country amounted to \$10,523.21.

25. Quoted in "In Memory of Audubon," *Sun*, April 27, 1893.

26. "Presentation of the Monument," *Transactions*, 31.

provides important clues (see Figures 4a, 4b).<sup>27</sup> Although the map does not depict the Audubon Monument or the nearby parish house of the Church of the Intercession (constructed later), it does show a detail of the vault on plot A.A. Eastern Division, along with its dimensions. The map also preserves the original paths delineated in pen and ink along with later, alternate paths shown in wash. Earlier markings also reveal that the Audubon vault is situated on what was once designated “Church Ground,” or common ground for white non-parishioners. Only parishioners (all of whom were white) were entitled to be buried in the “Parish Ground.”<sup>28</sup> The map also illustrates how the location of the new Audubon vault, albeit more conspicuous than the original burial site, was in a less fashionable (and less expensive) area of the cemetery, where many of the eleemosynary plots were located.<sup>29</sup>

## FINDING AND PLOTTING THE VAULT: HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Armed with this map and the deed that the Trinity Corporation gave the Audubon heirs, we began our search for the vault “at a point about sixty-five feet south of the centre of the gateway on 155th Street,” and paced “south westwardly fifteen feet one inch.”<sup>30</sup> Following the coordinates in the deed, which designates feet, inches, and directions, we used a tape measure to plot the vault’s footprint with heavy plastic line and stakes, thus outlining the roughly square Audubon vault (15 feet 11 inches x 15 feet 1 inch) and its entryway vestibule (5 feet 8 inches x 7 feet), a structure featur-

27. Map of Plots in Trinity Church Cemetery, Plate 5, Trinity Wall Street Archives, New York. Our thanks to Anne Petrimoulx, archivist for the Trinity Corporation, for assistance with the archival documents referenced in this article. The map was created in 1870 by A.D. & N. Ewen; Trinity Cemetery paid the firm \$1700 for “Maps & Surveys” (as noted in the Vestry Minutes for March 14, 1870). In 1935, it is recorded in the minutes of the Cemetery Committee (March 3, 1935) that “the map of the cemetery created in 1870 has become worn and is an inconvenient size for regular use, being about 11 feet by 3 feet. The map has been backed with linen for preservation and photostatic copies have been made and cut into 12 plates of approximately 22 1/2 inches by 17 inches.”

28. Between 1853 and 1871, African Americans, whether members of Trinity Parish or not, were buried in an allotted section of one of the Church Grounds of the E.D. identified as the Colored Grounds and the Colored Orphan Asylum Ground (after the 1863 Draft Riots). It is not clear whether the two were adjacent or one and the same, according to Eric K. Washington, e-mail to Roberta J.M. Olson, April 30, 2014.

29. Therefore, the gift of the new parcel in the Eastern Division for the Audubon family vault was less generous than if it had been in the Western Division, but once the Audubon Monument was erected, the value of the plot increased, as did the section, to the benefit of the Trinity Corporation.

30. The deed for plot no. A.A. in the Western Division is in the John James Audubon Museum, Henderson, Kentucky, 1938.572a.

ing descending stairs leading to a burial chamber.<sup>31</sup> The vault's footprint was larger than we had anticipated. While we calculated and recalculated these measurements, a newly-hatched butterfly provided a symbolic climax to our search, floating hesitantly on its just-opened wings over the Church of the Intercession.

After laying out the footprint of the chamber and its vestibule, we began searching for the vault's entry and its door. One of the cemetery grounds-men inserted a long, metal probe where our calculations placed the door. On the first attempt, his probe hit what we believed to be a man-made metal object on the very edge of the walkway next to the back right privet bush. The sound of metal tapping metal prompted a controlled dig. A hole about two-feet square and three feet deep revealed part of the lower base of a leaden door. The exposed portion framed a rust-corroded iron handle that, based on other subterranean vault entrances in Trinity Cemetery, would have been one of a pair, which today lie partially under the walkway. The exposed portal to the burial chamber, similar to others in the cemetery, confirmed our previous measurements. The Audubon vault lies southwest of the monument, with the monument's back sitting a few safe inches north of the vault's northeastern side.

Although we did not open the door to see the vault's interior, a similar structure whose entrance was temporarily open for replacing deteriorating brick and mortar offered a comparable model. That vault is built into the hillside of the Western Division, so it requires fewer descending stairs than the Audubon vault does. But the interior of the Audubon vault has a very similar layout, with all of the remains stacked along the back wall behind stone markers (like drawers in a cabinet).<sup>32</sup>

Fittingly, while the Audubon Monument faces north toward the never-completed Audubon Avenue, the family vault faces west and only slightly north—directly towards the artist's beloved home, "Minnie's Land." However, the Audubons' house, constructed in 1841–42, was demolished in 1931 to make way for 765 Riverside Drive, an apartment building.

The numerous visitors who come to admire the beautiful and historic memorials in Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum, to enjoy its natural beauty

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31. Alice Ford, *John James Audubon: A Biography* (New York: Abbeville, 1988), 489, notes that the staircase was seven feet deep (probably based on comparison with other, exposed vaults in the cemetery), although she makes many mistakes in her description of the vault and the transfer of bodies.

32. See n. 13 above.

and to wander along its wooded walkways adjacent to the Hudson River, eventually find themselves before the Audubon Monument; alternatively, for many it is their point of entry into the burial ground. Since archival sources related to the site are dispersed and not readily accessible, most visitors are unaware either of the monument's rich history, the historic reason for its placement, the relationship between monument and vault, or the names of those buried there with Audubon. The addition of signage and landscaping to connect the underground vault to the monument (or a thoughtful combination of the two), would help interpret this historically significant site for the many visitors drawn there to pay homage to artist and naturalist John James Audubon.