University of South Florida

From the Selected Works of Anna H. Perrault

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Librarian, Louisiana State University Libraries, 1969-1993

Anna H. Perrault, University of South Florida

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/anna_perrault/26/
The Eye of a Connoisseur, the Intellect of a Scientist

Life on a salt-domed island, surrounded by the marshes and bayous of south Louisiana, instilled in Edward Avery McIlhenny a permanent curiosity about the natural world. Much of the lifetime of this noted naturalist was devoted to exploration, conservation, and research. A logical extension of these activities was the development of a library.

With the eye of a connoisseur and the intellect of a scientist, McIlhenny amassed a collection of books that traced the history of natural history, in particular of botany and ornithology. In 1971, two decades after his death, this collection was given by an anonymous donor to the Louisiana State University Libraries, where it has grown to more than 4,000 volumes.

In addition to bound works, the collection houses prints and original works on paper and canvas, some commissioned specifically for the collection. It also includes the university’s selection of 200 original watercolors of Louisiana flora by the botanical artist Margaret Stones, as well as bronze and porcelain sculptures of flora and fauna.

Though the collection contains a wealth of purely scientific works, its illustrated books published from the 16th century to the present are especially fine. Natural-history illustration, at its best, is a seamless merging of science and art. Such illustrations may be actual scientific records, the result of original observation and research, but they can also be bona fide works of art, produced with as much creative fire as if executed by nature itself. Add the historic element, the fact that such works actually chronicle the development of man’s knowledge of the natural world, and they become important to artists, scientists, and historians alike.

—Kathryn Morgan, head of rare-book collections at Louisiana State University

The illustration of the purple-breasted carib (above) is reproduced with permission from Nature Classics: A Catalogue of the E. A. McIlhenny Natural History Collection at Louisiana State University, compiled and edited by Anna H. Perrault, adjunct professor at the university’s School of Library and Information Science, and published by Friends of the LSU Library.