

## HISTORY OF THE LEPIDOPTERA ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE THOMAS COOPER LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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From 1829 to 1837, renowned French entomologist Jean Baptiste Alphonse Boisduval (or Déchauffour de Boisduval) (1799-1879) and wealthy American naturalist John Eatton Le Conte, Jr. (1784-1860) published installments of *Histoire Générale et Iconographie des Lépidoptères et des Chenilles de l'Amérique Septentrionale*. This publication included 78 hand-colored engraved plates, many of which were reproduced from original drawings by John Abbot (1751- ca.1840), an English artist and naturalist who resided in Georgia from 1776 until his death. The history of the original set of drawings copied for the published plates in *Histoire Générale* has remained obscure. It is now known that most of these drawings are deposited in the Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina. These drawings changed hands at least eleven times, were taken from Georgia to New York, then to France and England aboard ship. 135 years after their journey to Europe, they were returned to New York and ultimately found a home in South Carolina within 135 miles of their origin.

In 1920, renowned butterfly and moth expert Charles M. Oberthür summarized the early history of an original set of drawings reproduced for the published plates in *Histoire Générale*. In 1969, Charles F. Cowan also traced these drawings, but lost track of them after 1963. Art historian Vivian Rogers-Price relocated these drawings at the University of South Carolina and offered a brief historical overview up to 1983. Her treatise was published as an exhibition catalog and was therefore overlooked by scientists studying the butterfly illustrations in *Histoire Générale*. Based on an exhaustive review of historical and contemporary evidence, we are now able to appreciate the amazing history of these important drawings.

In the front of a copy of *Histoire Générale*, shelved in the Entomology Library, The Natural History Museum, London, is a brief inscription that reads, "The originals of these plates passed into the possession of M. Chas. Oberthür from the library of Dr. Boisduval. Seen by F. A. Heron, 11 x 1904." Francis A. Heron served as Assistant-in-Charge of Butterflies for the British Museum (Natural History) from 1901-1910. At least twenty-five years earlier (probably in 1871), American entomologist Samuel . H. Scudder had visited Boisduval in Paris who showed him drawings by John Abbot that were "contained in a little oblong folio volume, on sheets broader than high (27 x 16.5 cm), instead of on ordinary large folio sheets." Scudder obtained permission from Boisduval to draw at least 25 of the figured caterpillars and chrysalids. Scudder later published these copies and confirmed that the original figures were "formerly used in Boisduval and Leconte's Iconography." Scudder's loosely written notes about these drawings were discovered in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. Under the heading "Abbot's Drawings in Boisduval's Possession," Scudder identified the butterfly species depicted in the drawings and indicated the figures he desired to copy. At a later date, Scudder haphazardly inserted J. E. Le Conte's name into the title of the notes because he suspected that some of the drawings were actually by Le Conte.

The John Abbot drawings in this set were commissioned in 1813 by J. E. Le Conte, who asked Abbot to illustrate Georgia butterflies and moths, including adults and early stages, but not food plants. In 1810, Le Conte's brother, Louis, had inherited the family's immense rice plantation (over 1250 hectares) near Riceboro, Liberty County, Georgia. Called "Woodmanston," this plantation was located 40 km (25 mi) southwest of Savannah, where John Abbot resided during most of the years from 1806 to 1816. A small portion of this plantation remains as a botanical garden on the National Register of Historic Places. J. E. Le Conte resided in New York, but regularly visited his brother at the plantation during the winter months. The proximity of Woodmanston to Savannah surely enhanced Le Conte's relationship with Abbot, who may even have visited the plantation.

In 1828, Le Conte took this set of drawings to Paris where he met with Boisduval to discuss the book they would eventually coauthor. After some were duplicated for engravings in *Histoire Générale*, Boisduval apparently kept them for many years with the other illustrations he had assembled. Probably around 1850, Boisduval temporarily loaned the set to French lepidopterist Achille Guenée for his multi-volume publication on moths. A number of moth species were described and figured by Guenée in his publication *Spécies général des Lépidotères* based on Abbot drawings, but the disposition of these illustrations was unknown.

In 1876, three years prior to his death, Boisduval presented his library, ostensibly including these drawings, to good friend and fellow Parisian lepidopterist Louis M. A. Depuiset. Depuiset organized all of Boisduval's assorted illustrations sometime before his death in 1886. Depuiset had also helped maintain Boisduval's enormous insect collection that was bequeathed in 1876 to C. M. Oberthür of Rennes, France. Either before or after the death of Depuiset, Oberthür also acquired this set of original drawings. In 1928, four years after Oberthür died, a book dealer named La Chavalier purchased his library. During the next four decades, the drawings remained in private hands. They resurfaced on 4 November 1963 when Sotheby and Company auction house of London offered them for sale on behalf of "a lady" (Lot 1). They were then mounted in two half-morocco albums. The Sotheby catalog included a full-page black and white reproduction of Abbot's drawing of the royal walnut moth, *Citheronia regalis* (Fab.). Rare book firm H. P. Kraus of New York City purchased the set from the Sotheby auction for a meager \$1,456. In 1964, H. P. Kraus again offered these drawings for sale, incorrectly describing them in the sales catalog as the original paintings for the sumptuously illustrated book entitled *The Natural History of the Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia*, published in 1797 by James E. Smith and John Abbot. This catalog featured a full-page color reproduction of Abbot's drawing of the mourning cloak butterfly, *Nymphalis antiopa* (L.). H. P. Kraus had matted and repackaged the drawings in six blue half-morocco portfolio cases with gilt-lettered backs. They were offered for sale with a matching boxed copy of *The Natural History of the Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia* at a total price of \$12,500. Thankfully, the University of South Carolina obtained the drawings from this sale and they are now safely deposited in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, Columbia.

Publications by C. F. Cowan, V. Rogers-Price, and Pamela Gilbert (former Librarian at The Natural History Museum, London) claimed this set of drawings included 148 illustrations, all rendered by Abbot. However, the set actually includes 149 illustrations, only 99 of which appear to be from the same set by Abbot. These Abbot illustrations

were drawn in a horizontal format, with the caterpillar and chrysalis placed above the adult figures for each species. Many have names and other pencil notations written by Abbot, Boisduval, and Le Conte. Boisduval combined these illustrations with those from other sources for use in *Histoire Générale* and perhaps other publications. The drawings are all rendered in watercolor and graphite, mostly on cream-colored wove paper, and mounted on stiff paper backing. The sheets measure approximately 26 cm x 16.5 cm. The margins appear to have been trimmed, perhaps for their arrangement into volumes. They are all numbered in pencil, probably in Boisduval's hand.

Only 34 of the 55 butterfly illustrations in this set are by Abbot. Charles M. Oberthür attributed 17 butterfly watercolors to French naturalist Émile Blanchard; no.s 13-15, 17, 20, 23, 25, 32, 34, 40, 48-54. Undoubtedly ignorant of Oberthür's assessment, an unpublished inventory of these illustrations compiled by H. P. Kraus also credited 17 illustrations to Blanchard, matching those listed by Oberthür with two exceptions; no. 13 (as by Abbot) and no. 45 (as by Blanchard). Blanchard's illustrations are quite distinctive, most being signed in ink "E. Blanchard, pit." They are rendered in a vertical format, do not include caterpillars and chrysalids, and depict only one side of dorsal adult butterflies. Until recently, one of these drawings (34) hung in the President's office at the University of South Carolina. A more recent evaluation shows the Blanchard illustrations to be 14, 15, 17, 20, 23, 25, 32, 34, 40, 45, 48-54. Number 37 is signed by French engraver Paul C. R. C. Duménil. Illustrations 4 and 13 may also be by Duménil, but are unsigned. Boisduval also utilized drawings by Blanchard for his treatise on the Lepidoptera of Madagascar.

The moth illustrations in this set are rendered in several formats and probably represent the work of at least two artists in addition to Abbot. 64 are consistent with the format Abbot used for the butterflies in this set. A number of drawings were prepared on smaller pieces of paper that were then pasted onto the larger sheets. Most of these smaller drawings depict only caterpillars and frequently include names and life history notations in Latin and French, written in Boisduval's hand. J. E. Le Conte may have rendered many of the smaller drawings. Moth expert Lawrence F. Gall (Yale University) recently examined Abbot's original moth drawings in this set and confirmed that they are likely among those that A. Guenée consulted for his *Spécies général des Lépidotères*.

It is obvious that the figures for 43 of the butterfly plates in *Histoire Générale* were copied from this set of original drawings. Many illustrations include pencil notations that refer to the corresponding published plates (e.g. "Pl. 2"), as well as the numbers used for individual figures. All of Abbot's figures were rearranged for the published plates, but ten of Blanchard's multi-species illustrations were reproduced in their original layouts. Several published plates in *Histoire Générale* lack similarly formatted original drawings in this set, explaining a fear of C. M. Oberthür that some watercolors had been lost. Published plates in *Histoire Générale* that depict food plants were evidently taken from other sets of Abbot illustrations. The whereabouts of these paintings is unknown, but S. H. Scudder obtained three sets of Abbot's "Notes to the Drawings of Insects" from Boisduval during his trip to Paris. They pertain to 191 paintings of insects with food plants, including 172 butterflies and moths, rendered after 1806 when Abbot moved to Savannah.

The full importance of these drawings will continue to be realized for many years to come.

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