

## A PORTRAIT OF JOHN ABBOT

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This illustration is a copy of the only known likeness of John Abbot (1751-ca.1840), pioneer Georgia naturalist and artist. The original is included in a leather-bound volume of Abbot paintings rendered for London jeweler John Francillon that is now in The Natural History Museum, London. American entomologist Samuel H. Scudder personally examined this portrait during a visit to London in 1871. He asked artist George Willis to create an exact duplicate, which Scudder reproduced as the frontispiece to the first volume of his three-volume masterwork *The Butterflies of the Eastern United States and Canada, with Special Reference to New England* (1889). This published facsimile is shown here.

The original painting is believed to be a self-portrait. In an 1888 letter preserved in Harvard University, William F. Kirby, then assistant curator of entomology in the British Museum, told S. H. Scudder, "There is no memorandum on the portrait itself that it was painted by Abbot, but I should suppose that there is no reason to doubt the tradition is correct." The portrait is mounted behind an oval cutout within a removable cover page. The caption on the cover page, written in Abbot's hand, reads, "John Abbot of Savannah. Georgia. America." As Savannah is mentioned, it must have been painted sometime after 1806 when Abbot moved from Burke County, Georgia to Savannah, Chatham County. This volume of paintings (no. 16) is dated 1804, suggesting the portrait was completed subsequent to the other illustrations and later bound into the volume by Francillon. There are obvious dark spots on the original painting, which W. F. Kirby suggested was the result of the portrait being "touched up with white lead, which has lost its color."

In his biography of John Abbot, (*Canadian Entomologist*, 20: 150-154, 1888), S. H. Scudder referred to this portrait, remarking, "there seems to be not a little humor in the quaint features and figure, and the spare form hardly gives the figure of robust health which the face would indicate...it represents him in the thinnest of southern costume." When this painting was completed, Abbot was probably in his mid-fifties. It portrays a gentle artist in the prime of his creative life. John Abbot was a modest man who would never have imagined the future importance of his work. He would most certainly be honored, though slightly embarrassed, for his likeness to be so openly revealed to the world.