

Chapter 14 (11-01-11)

**Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death, I
will fear no evil: for thou art with me.**

Psalm 23:4 KJV

Floyd's Disappearance

Davis Floyd disappeared from the pages of written history from sometime in 1808-09 until the fall of 1811. It was as if he had disappeared and entered the Dark Ages of his life. His productive life as a soldier and politician had come to an abrupt halt. It is known that he, age twenty, and his first wife, Susannah Johnston Lewis, a pregnant widow age fourteen, were married on February 14, 1794 in Jefferson County, Kentucky, and that she died sometime in 1808. The cause of her death is not known. She bore four children, one of which came from her first marriage; the other three were Floyd's children although he treated her son as his own. Their names and respective birth dates were Gabriel Jones Floyd born in 1795, Charles Floyd born in 1798, Elizabeth Floyd born in 1803, and Benjamin Floyd born in 1807. Gabriel was probably the son of Susannah's first husband, George Washington Lewis. If there was a Benjamin, he probably died before his father's death since he is not named in a post-mortem lawsuit against Floyd's heirs. Susannah may have died from the complications of child birth. That happened frequently. Floyd married his second wife, Elizabeth Robards Lewis, a widow, on March 20, 1809 in Jessamine County, Kentucky. She was born on April 24, 1776, some say on April 25, 1775, which would have made her about thirty-three years of age at the time of her marriage to Floyd; he would have been thirty-five. As far as known she had two children by her first husband, Judge Thomas T. Davis, but she had none with Floyd. Their names were Thomas C. Davis and Milo R. Davis. Even without income Floyd and his

family could subsist in the village of Jeffersonville. They probably lived in a log home in the vicinity of modern day Fort Street which marks the location of Ft. Finney, later called Ft. Steuben. It is known that William Clark was stationed at that fort because on September 2nd, 1792, he wrote a letter to his brother, Jonathan Clark, from that location on that day.

Floyd's Valley of the Shadow of Death

In 1808 Floyd lost not only his wife but also his clerkship in the Indiana Territorial House of Representatives at Vincennes, and he lost his commission as a major in the Indiana Territorial Militia and his commission as a Falls of the Ohio pilot. Gov. Harrison and the folks in Vincennes had turned against him probably because of his involvement in the Aaron Burr affair and his anti-slavery sentiments. Floyd had previously owned and operated a ferry boat between Clarksville and Shippingport just west of Louisville. Whether that enterprise was operating during the period of 1808 to 1811 is unknown. It is probable that Floyd was practicing law in Jeffersonville during this time.

Audubon at the Falls of the Ohio

John James Audubon, the famous painter of birds and wildlife, was born in Haiti in 1775 and raised in France. He came to America in 1803 and then moved to Louisville, Kentucky, just three days after he and his wife, Lucy Bakewell, were married in Fatland Ford, Pennsylvania. They resided in the famous Indian Queen, a hotel in Louisville that was located where the National City Tower is located today, within the confines of Main, 5th, Market, and 4th Streets. Audubon was a journalist and while many of his entries are lost today, some were preserved. In his five volume *Ornithological Biography* published in Edinburgh, Scotland between 1831 and 1839, he wrote in connection with an article on Canadian geese and a hunter:

At another time my friend proceeds alone to the Falls of the Ohio, and, as usual, reaches the margins of the stream long before day. His well-trained steed plunges into the whirls of the rapid current, and, with some difficulty, carries his bold rider to an island, where he lands drenched and cold. The horse knows what he has to do as well as his master, and while the former ranges about and nips the frozen herbage, the latter carefully approaches a well-known pile of drifted wood, and conceals himself in it. His famous dog Nep is close at his heels. Now the dull grey dawn gives him a dim view of the geese; he fires, several fall on the spot, and one severely wounded rises and alights in the Indian Chute. Neptune dashes after it, but as the current is powerful, the gunner whistles to the horse, who, with pricked ears, gallops up. He instantly vaults into the saddle, and now see them plunge into the treacherous stream. The wounded game is overtaken, the dog is dragged along, and at length on the Indiana shore the horse and his rider have effected a landing. Any other man than he of whose exploits I am a faithful recorder, would have perished long ago. But it is not half so much for the sake of the plunder that he undergoes all this labour and danger, as the gratification it affords his kind heart to distribute the game among his numerous friends in Louisville.

Sanders, Scott Russell, *Audubon Reader--The Best Writings of John James Audubon*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1986, p. 165; from Audubon, John James, *Ornithological Biography*, Vol. III, Edinburgh, 1831-1839, pp. 1-18.

This friend of Audubon's could have been Floyd. In the preceding paragraph, he recounts his acquaintance with this man. The paragraph begins "Reader, I am well acquainted with one of the best sportsmen now living in the whole of the western country, one possessed of strength, activity, courage, and patience,---qualities of great importance in a gunner." He did not identify the man but he did identify his dog. Floyd lived less than a mile upriver from the Falls of the Ohio on the Indiana side in Jeffersonville. He had been a Falls of the Ohio commissioned pilot since 1803 or 1804. He had taken hundreds of boats through the Falls during all water levels. He and his father had operated a ferry boat between Clarksville and Shippingport at the lower end of the Falls. As a militia officer in a dragoon unit, Floyd would have been an excellent horseman. He had commanded an Indiana militia dragoon unit as early as

1801 in Clark County, Indiana Territory. He fought in the Battle of Tippecanoe in the fall of 1811. There are other accounts about his horse riding abilities. Audubon does not say he witnessed the scene at the Falls of the Ohio, but his journal entries being in the present tense, he may have seen it. While a circuit judge in the Second Judicial Circuit between 1817 and 1823, there is a family story about an older and heavier Davis Floyd crossing an engorged stream on horseback, and being saved from a watery death by his trusted servant. The good judge rewarded his savior with the sharing of his red liquor henceforth.

The preceding paragraph mentioned above describes the exploits of Audubon's friend, sportsman, and gunner. He praised his friend for his knowledge of the woods he hunted in, the ability of his "steed," his preparedness for any shooting occasion including the donning of a white shirt over his regular clothing when there was snow on the ground, the faithfulness of his dog, Neptune, and his resilience to such cold weather as to make it difficult to fasten even a button. Beryl Markham, who grew up in Kenya in the early 20th century and was the first woman to fly the Atlantic Ocean east to west solo, wrote the following passage in a book entitled *West With the Night* published in 1942 about the relationship of man or woman, and his or her horse and dog:

To an eagle or to an owl or to a rabbit, man must seem a masterful yet a forlorn animal; he has but two friends. In his almost universal unpopularity he points out, with pride, that these two are the dog and the horse. He believes, with an innocence peculiar to himself, that they are equally proud of this alleged confraternity. He says, 'Look at my two noble friends---they are dumb, but they are loyal.' I have for years suspected that they are only tolerant.

Suspecting it, I have nevertheless depended on this tolerance all my life, and if I were, even now, without either a dog or horse in my keeping, I should feel I had lost contact with the earth. I should be as concerned as a Buddhist monk having lost contact with Nirvana.

Markham, Beryl Markham, *West with the Night*, North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, New York, 1942, p. 108.

It is likely that Floyd had a similar relationship with his "steed" and his dog whether he was, or was not, the friend, sportsman, or gunner described by Audubon in his wonderful portrayal of whoever it was. It is documented that Floyd was an adventurist of the most remarkable kind. Floyd was an intimate friend of Gen. George Rogers Clark, who lived at the Point of Rock in Clarksville overlooking the Falls of the Ohio; Capt. William Clark, who along with his bride, Judith, had moved to St. Louis; and Major William Croghan and his wife, Lucy Clark, who lived at Locust Grove, upriver from Louisville.

In his journal account entitled "Louisville in Kentucky," Audubon said:

No sooner had we landed [in Louisville], and made known our intention of remaining, that we were introduced to the principal inhabitants of the place and its vicinity, although we had not brought a single letter of introduction, and could not see, for their unremitting kindness, that the Virginian spirit of hospitality displayed itself in all the words and actions of our newly-formed friends. I wish to name those persons who so unexpectedly came forward to render our stay among them agreeable, but feel at a loss with whom to begin, so equally deserving are they of our gratitude. The Croghans, the Clarks (our great traveller included [referring undoubtedly to Capt. William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition]), the Berthouds, the Galts, the Maupins [Maj. George Rogers Clark Floyd married a Maupin in 1809], the Taracons, the Beals, and the Booths, form but a small portion of the long list which I could give.

Scott, *Audubon Reader--The Best Writings of John James Audubon*, p. 27; from Audubon, *Ornithological Biography*, Vol. I, pp, 437-440.

In another journal account entitled "Chimney Swallow, or American Swift" Audubon stated:

Immediately after my arrival at Louisville, in the State of Kentucky, I became acquainted with the hospitable and amicable Major William Croghan [his wife, Lucy, was George Rogers Clark's sister] and his family. While talking one day about birds, he asked me if I had seen the trees in which the Swallows were supposed to spend the winter, but which they only entered, he said, for the purpose of roosting.

Answering in the affirmative, I was informed that on my way back to town, there was a remarkable tree on account of the immense numbers that resorted to it, and the place in which it stood was described to me. I found it to be a sycamore, nearly destitute of branches, sixty or seventy feet high, between seven and eight feet in diameter at the base, and about five [feet] for the distance of forty feet up, where the stump of a broken hollowed branch, about two feet in diameter made out from the main stem. This was the place where the swallows entered. On closely examining the tree, I found it hard, but hollow to near the roots. It was now about four o'clock after noon, in the month of July [1808]. Swallows were flying over Jeffersonville, Louisville, and the woods around, but there were none in the tree. I proceeded home, and shortly after returned on foot. The sun was going down behind the Silver Hills [just west of modern day New Albany]; thousands of Swallows were flying closely above me, and three or four at a time were pitching into the hole, like bees hurrying into their hive. I remained, my head leaning on the tree, listening to the roaring noise made within by the birds as they settled and arranged themselves, until it was quite dark, when I left the place, although I was convinced that many more had to enter. I did not pretend to count them, for the number was too great, and the birds rushed to the entrance so thick as to baffle the attempt. I had scarcely returned to Louisville, when a violent thunderstorm passed suddenly over the town, and its appearance made me think that the hurry of the Swallows to enter the tree was caused by their anxiety to avoid it. I thought of almost the whole night, so anxious had I become to ascertain their number, before the time of their departure should arrive.

Sanders, *Audubon Reader--The Best Writings of John James Audubon*, pp. 145-146.

Audubon returned to the site of the tree the next morning and put his ear up against the trunk. All was silent for twenty minutes. Then he heard a great roar from within the tree and when he looked up he saw the swallows pouring from the hole. It took thirty minutes for the birds to exit the hole. Then the tree was silent again. He later estimated there were 9,000 birds in the interior of the tree. At this point in his story he said "I watched the motions of the Swallows, and when the young birds that had been reared in the chimneys of Louisville, Jeffersonville, and the houses of the neighborhood, or the trees suited for that purpose, had left their native recesses, I visited the tree on the 2d day of August [1808]." The birds in the hollow Sycamore eventually left their nest and by

September they were all gone. Later in this story he mentioned "General William Clark assured me that he saw this species [the Swallow] on the whole of his route to the Pacific, and there can be no doubt that in those wilds it still breeds in trees or rocky caverns."

Audubon arrived in Louisville the first time as a bachelor in early 1808 and in partnership with Ferdinand Rozier, they opened a mercantile store in what is now downtown Louisville close to the Ohio River. He left Louisville and returned in a short time with his wife, Lucy. They lived in the Indian Queen Hotel where later their first child would be born. Audubon was more interested in Louisville's social life and collecting and painting birds than he was in his store. In 1810 they left Louisville and went to live in Henderson, Kentucky, less than 100 miles downriver from Louisville. He said that "Louisville did not give us up, but we gave up Louisville.

While in Louisville and at the Falls of the Ohio Audubon collected and made drawings of the following birds: (1) the orchard oriole (June 5, 1808), (2) the summer red bird or tanager (June 20, 1805), (3) the female woodpecker (June 24, 1808), (4) the female indigo bunting (June 29, 1808), (5) the least fly catcher procured near Louisville (date unknown, 1808), (6) the female blue-gray gnatcatcher (July 1808), (7) immature summer warbler (date unknown, 1808), (8) the female belted kingfisher (July 15, 1808), (9) the Canada goose (date unknown 1808), and (10) the Chimney swallow or American swift (July 27, 1808).

Audubon made another contribution to pictorial history in some his paintings by including in the backgrounds scenes of pastures, a plantation house, or forests. These backgrounds aid us in understanding the changes which were taking place in America at that time. Audubon was a big hit in Europe when he went to England in 1826. His landmark book, *Birds of America*, published in 1827 was a

big hit then and now. A recent sale of this book brought more than \$10,000,000.00. There is a wonderful Audubon museum in Henderson, Kentucky, near Evansville, Indiana that is worth a visit by any of his fans.

Speculation on Floyd

This chapter speculates on Floyd's whereabouts during this period of his life. In another chapter the author speculated about whether Floyd was the major appointed by Gov. Harrison during this period to silence him on his anti-slavery stand. That major may or may not have been Floyd. Likewise, the goose hunter may or may not have been Floyd. But in all fairness Floyd could have been Audubon's remarkable hunter.

Books and references relied upon other than those cited in this chapter:

(1) Peterson, Roger Tory, and Virginia Marie, *Audubon's Birds of America*, A Tiny Folio, Abbeville Press Publishers, New York, New York, 1990.

Images:

- (1) Prints of Audubon Birds Sketched at the Falls of the Ohio.
- (2) Painting of Audubon by John Syme, 1826.
- (3) Photographs of scenes at John James Audubon State Park at Henderson, Kentucky.