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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began interviews (for what I thought then would be an article) in 2008 and continued right up to 2017. That's a long span of time to be working on a book, and I inevitably have forgotten people who helped me in the process. For that I apologize.

I knew very little about the University of Illinois (U of I) Police Department before I started this book and have only positive feelings for it now that I have finished. U of I police at the time took this book crime seriously—a pretty rare thing in 1980—and because of that it came to an end. Russell Knowles, who was integral in the capture and prosecution of Robert Kindred, talked to me several times and sent me letters on those occasions over the years when he would remember something. Dave Cook, who was not involved with this case but who was on the force at the time, met with me to discuss the life of a university police officer. Krys Fitzpatrick, who investigated the crime, talked with me at length. Charlie Moore sat for a long interview, as did Bruce Dixon, and their memories sparked particular avenues of research. Chief Jeff Christensen has been very helpful and put me in touch with others who also informed my research. Alexander Howard was patient, prompt, and friendly in helping me search for documents. In short, everyone from the U of I Police Department I approached has been very generous with their time and memories.

Bill Huff sat for a long conversation with me, and his memory of the events and his work with Norman Brown were tremendous. I am very sorry that neither he nor Brown lived long enough to see their work recognized in print. Tom Kilton, too, remembered the event quite well and talked with me early and often about it. Both Michael Zopf and Bob Auler spoke with me about their participation in the Kindred case—and both were still practicing law at the time we spoke. Dennis Trombatore and Mark Flynn both remembered the incident, and their participation in it, quite well, and they spoke to me about it. Stanley Hodge also spoke to me about the Texas A&M recovery, with which he was intimately connected. Nancy Boothe met with me at the Fondren Library at Rice University and showed me around the place—including the shelves that housed

the journals Kindred cut and the material sent back to Rice. Nancy Caldwell at Maryland has a strong memory of the crime and shared it with me while showing me around the McKeldin Library. I spoke with Paul Kanter, the US attorney who prosecuted the case—and although he did not remember it in particular, he gave me helpful information about his time as a prosecutor. I also talked with former FBI agents Joe Burns, Ken Hancock, and Steve Senteny—although none of them remembered this particular incident, they all had memories of their time in central Illinois that were helpful in reconstructing the law enforcement process. John Monckton and David Cobb both spoke to me about their part in the story, as did Joe Duchene. Most people recalled only very little about the incident, when they remembered anything at all, but even small details are important in reconstructing a story.

My colleagues at the U of I Library have been universally supportive. In ways small and large, they have aided my reconstruction and retelling of the story. A grant from the Research and Publications Committee allowed me to travel to Texas early in the process, which was very helpful. Thanks in particular to Valerie Hotchkiss, Dennis Sears, Tony Hynes, Rand Hartsell, Cherie Weible, Stuart Albert, Bill Maher, JP Goguen, and Tiffany Rossi.

I have walked the ground of this story hundreds of times, looking at the windows, roofs, grassy areas, and trees. For the most part, they are all still the same. It reminds me that the real heroes of this story were all just regular U of I employees—the man who found the books, the police who responded, and the librarians who tried to make sense of it all. Rare book crimes are always a surprise to the people who confront them; everyone here reacted as well as could be hoped.

It took a good long while for me to call Kindred. I assumed he would have nothing to do with me. Instead, he was very forthcoming and helpful, filling in the blanks I had about his biography and his start in the business.

The University Press of Kansas (UPK) has been nothing short of excellent. Kim Hogeland made the acquisition and prepublication process as simple and pleasant as it is possible to be; after many years of working on this project, it was great to have someone who believed in it and offered ways to make it better. Thanks also to Kelly Chrisman Jacques,

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Over the years, I have leaned on a number of people to read drafts of my work and provide high-quality editing and commentary. For this one, I settled on four people who have done a terrific job in the past and who I knew I could count on. Emery Lee and Chris Maynard, two very smart people I met in law school, brought their law-review-honed minds to bear on this book as they have on my others. I am proud to call them friends. Mark Mitek, who has been a tireless and generous supporter of my work, nevertheless was able to read this book with the detached eye of a lawyer and provided terrific advice. And my mom, Kay McDade, although not quite as detached as Mark, gave me good notes and corrections.

I am blessed with a wonderful family. My parents and siblings are now, and have always been, as loving and supportive as anyone could possibly want. I am doubly fortunate to be able to say that my in-laws measure up to that same standard. Thanks to you all.

I started this book shortly after I met Ashley Mitek, who became my girlfriend, fiancée, wife, and now mother of my two children. Throughout it all she has read chapters, listened to stories, joined me on trips, and been a tireless cheerleader for my work. Thanks to her—and now Flannery and Myrtle—for being altogether terrific.





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Torn from Their Bindings



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PROLOGUE

Near midnight, June 29, 1980
Champaign, Illinois

The brick wall standing between the largest state university library in the nation and the warm June air was wet with dew and full black. The moon was up but hanging on the opposite side of the immense building, so the light it cast offered only shadow. Humidity draped the area and dampened faraway noise, so the whole place was still and quiet. It almost seemed like the bottom of the ocean.

Into this quiet moonlight shade Willis Smalling drove his car; in the grand tradition of university employees, he was in no particular hurry. He was coming from the west on Gregory Drive, a mile-long road that began on one side of the sprawling university campus and ended on the other. He turned his car left into the library lot, then right toward his destination, and finally left again into one of the parking spots that lined the wall, his big headlamps sweeping the area back and forth like searchlights until his grille stopped just inches from the brick. An orange halo brightened the spot for a few seconds—enough to see he had not bothered to fit his car between the yellow lines—before he reached to the left of the steering wheel and pushed in the light switch. Everything returned to darkness. The quiet of the night returned, too, but just for an instant; then the rusty creak of his car door and the sound of it slamming shut announced his presence to anyone who had missed him pulling into the lot.

When he left the air-conditioned cocoon of his car, the humid night tightened his throat a bit. The haze sitting on the central Illinois town was typical of the growing season, and it was amazing how it trapped heat, even in the dead of night. Still, it kept him employed. Smalling was a university steam operator, there to make sure the library's giant air conditioner—its cooling towers sitting on the roof sixty feet above—was still working. To do that he needed to walk down into the Heating and Air Conditioning (HAC) building, a sunken square of brick that had a rooftop almost low enough to be seen from the lot.

This was routine. There was nothing wrong with the air conditioner, and to make sure that continued, it required checking. So once every five nights Smalling drove from the far edge of campus to the little building beneath the towering stacks to check the gauges. It took about twenty minutes and was never eventful. But it *was* hot. Despite its name, the building itself was not air conditioned.

Between him and the concrete steps leading down to the door of the HAC there were a large green generator about as big as an industrial freezer and two medium-sized trees. He walked toward them as usual, not noticing the dark and the quiet any more than he ever did. There was nothing about this night that suggested it was anything out of the ordinary, and so, as usual, his only worry was that he might trip in the dark. But he had done this walk a hundred times before, so he was not even particularly afraid of that.

On his way down the steps, he separated the correct key on the large metal ring, readying himself for the bang and clatter of the machines beyond the door. It was a designated ear-protection area, and even on the outside he could feel the thrum of heavy industry. As he got to the door, his foot caught on something and he stumbled, almost pitching forward into the stacks wall. He righted himself and looked down, wondering what could possibly be there. He assumed it was something left by a student. That was unusual because the steps leading to the entrance of the HAC were not on any regular thoroughfare and dark enough as to be almost invisible. But there was no accounting for the places students got themselves into—*particularly* if they were dark and out of the way—and he had seen stranger things on campus than what felt like a pile of bricks, so he did not think much of it. Then he tried to open the door. The object was larger than he thought and surprisingly heavy.¹ Smalling knelt to take a closer look.

At two feet in length and more than a foot wide, the three volumes of *The Holy Land: Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt, and Nubia* made a substantial doorstep. A group of lithographs made from drawings by David Roberts and published between 1842 and 1849, the set was owned by only a handful of libraries. But in addition to being rare, it was also valuable. Less than a year earlier, a similar three-volume set had sold for about \$5,000. The sepia-toned lithographs were outstanding pieces of work: so remarkably detailed and shaded they looked photograph-accurate and

so lovingly created they deserved to be hung on a wall and lighted. Cut from the books' bindings and framed, they would bring in a lot of cash. With these, as with most other books like them, the sum of the parts was worth far more than the whole.

But beauty and value were not the only traits these three volumes possessed in excess: they were also extraordinarily heavy. Each one weighed forty-five pounds. Bound and stacked, they made a sturdy base for a fourth book, William Linton's 1832 work, *Sketches in Italy*, with illustrations made from hundreds of drawings the artist created of that country's most beautiful scenes. A couple of years later a similar edition of Linton's work sold for nearly \$3,000.

Smalling stood up and looked around, his head now poking just above ground level. There was nothing and no one to be seen. He turned back toward the building; there was the door, and then to his left and a few feet above him was a window—the first of ten that went straight up the side of the stacks wall. It was closed. Anyway, if people had come out the window, why had they left the books behind?

His first thought was to take the books, still cool to the touch, inside. But they were just too big; the pile weighed as much as he did. He decided to leave them for the moment and go in. It wasn't like they were going to walk away. So, he pushed his key into the lock, opened the door as best he could, and squeezed himself inside.

The HAC was just as he had last seen it. He walked down a flight of metal steps and through a short hallway, then turned to his right and unlocked the door to the office. The phone was there, and it was the one spot in the whole place quiet enough to make a call, if only barely. Smalling traced his finger down a list of phone numbers pasted on the wall until he came to the police dispatcher—then he used the same finger to punch 3-1218 and, after that, to plug his other ear against the noise. The phone rang in a building across campus that looked more like a World War II-era Quonset hut than a headquarters. The dispatcher of the University of Illinois (U of I) Police Department, who answered the phone, listened to the steam operator's story—and the background clatter of his machines—unimpressed. Books-found-near-the-library was not exactly an emergency, so Officer Lawrence Shirley, whom she told of the matter, would not be approaching with sirens. She told Smalling to wait five minutes and then go outside to meet the officer.

That was just fine with Smalling. He still had his work to do. He hung up the phone and went about his business. The engines that kept the library cool were large and built like Sherman tanks. From his spot in the office he could see down onto the floor that sat another ten feet below and housed most of what he was there to check. At various points on the pipes and valves hung long thermometers and circular gauges. He needed to check each one to make sure they were all in the green. But he would not have time to do it all before the officer arrived. And because the machines were too loud and far from the door for him to hear a knock, he decided he would do a little of what needed doing and then get back to the rest later.

After five minutes he assumed enough time had elapsed for Officer Shirley to arrive, even if he had driven slowly. So Smalling went back up the metal stairs to meet him. He did not think the conversation would take long. It might be as simple as pointing to the books and helping the officer carry them. It was 12:10 A.M. when he walked up the steps leading to the door and pushed it open from the inside, careful not to hit the pile.

He need not have worried. The books were gone.



Chapter 1

THAT MEANEST OF ALL THIEVES

Robert Kindred liked to say he was in the artwork business, but what he really did was run the art world equivalent of a chop shop. The art he sold was lithographs and other prints he cut out of books, glued to cardboard, and put a frame around. After he harvested these *pieces* (what people in his business called illustrations cut from bindings) or *plates* (what everyone else called them), he did one of two things with the book: threw it away or put it back on the shelf of the library he was in.

It was the perfect job for him. He was uneducated, morally flexible, and hated the idea of a boss. Although these traits, taken together, tended to disqualify him from almost every possible career path, they were perfect for a library thief. The job basically had no barrier to entry except willingness to do it, and the task was so easy it instilled in even the most abject failure a sense of accomplishment. This, for many men, was a motive more powerful even than money.

In 1979, Kindred was in his mid-thirties, with a slight build—at five-and-a-half-feet tall, he weighed only 125 pounds—and an undistinguished face. And although being physically forgettable and on the small side of average are good traits for a library thief, they were not what Kindred otherwise felt were assets. He had grown up poor and plain in the cold winters of the Midwest and by the 1970s was trying very hard to forget it. So, he dressed smartly and drove flashy cars, the bigger the better. He was a member of the Playboy Club of Southern California and two auto groups and, after a string of unsuccessful relationships, by 1979 was married. But his cars were leased, not owned, his clothes were mostly cheap knockoffs, and his marriage was on the rocks. He was away from home all the time, spending lavishly on the best accommo-

dations and relying on escort services to fix him up with dates.¹ In short, his life was built on California sand.

This was a state of affairs not particular to Kindred. There were plenty of people with uneven personal and financial lives—and plenty of them who liked to dress up their problems with clothes and cars. There were even some who turned to crime to bail themselves out. But Kindred's problems were unique in this respect: they were about to have an enormous impact on the country's libraries, leading to a crime spree as damaging as any other of its kind in US history.

In the illicit trade of artwork cut from rare books, magazines, journals, and atlases, there are two major steps: the stealing and the selling. The stealing part is easy—and has been around as long as libraries have. Ralph Munn, onetime director of the Carnegie Library, thought it older still. Lecturing at the 1935 Annual Conference of the American Library Association, he admonished that library theft “might also be listed as one of the original and basic sins of mankind.”² (That was a view not entirely without support, according to a Dutch report from four decades earlier that opined that Satan himself was a book thief: “There was no doubt about this, for the marks of his cloven feet were found plainly imprinted upon the flagstones” surrounding a large, pilfered collection of books in Holland.³)

Whatever its worldly origins, the most insidious of these thefts—the criminal destruction of books for their illustrations—has a long and robust US lineage. Martha Bullard, the librarian in 1885 returning from Lake George to the Seymour Library in Auburn, New York, discovered not just “several,” but 130 pages of illustrations missing from *American Architect*.⁴ She was able to track down the man who had most recently used the journal and have him arrested. That man, W. Frank Bower, confessed to the crime within an hour, and upon being given the choice of paying a fifty-dollar fine or spending fifty days in jail, paid the fine and was set free.

Neither Bower's crime nor his punishment was at all shocking. By the late nineteenth century, print theft from libraries was well known to anyone who read newspapers or magazines. So was the opinion that the crime could be largely chalked up to the still-controversial notion of open book stacks. A 1902 *New York Times* article explained to readers that some libraries there, as in other cities, now allowed patrons to walk

the book stacks and pick out the tomes they wanted to read. “In several cities this is not allowed, however, because the privilege has been so abused by that meanest of all thieves—the engraving or picture collector, who, unable or unwilling to buy the picture he wants, steals it. Fortunately, these unprincipled thieves are few.”⁵

The article went on to note the most surprising way “these wretched thieves” did their work. Their tool was not a razor blade or knife or scissors but a piece of string a foot or so in length. After leaving this in his mouth for a while, the thief put the moist string as close to the binding as he could get on the plate he meant to steal. Then he closed the book, replaced it on the shelf, and browsed for other books to victimize before returning to the stringed page. With a slight tug, the illustration came out as easily as if he had used a knife.

Like many people of that era, the *Times* assumed the thieves were accumulating material for their own collections (this despite the fact that New York was the epicenter of a library theft ring run by bookstore owners). Two years later, the *New York Tribune* revisited the subject, including an explanation of the string method and entertaining the notion that some of the thefts were for profit. The *Tribune* article focused on thefts from the Lenox and Astor, the two toniest libraries in town, noting that at the “Lenox Library the thieves are of a higher order of intelligence, and greater skill must be used in watching for them.”⁶ This care paid off when a young man was caught stealing engravings. A warrant was secured, his home was searched, and dozens of stolen plates were found there. He confessed to being in the business of selling them.

The *Tribune*, like the *Times*, blamed the crime on public access to the stacks, noting that when there was restricted access, the loss was no more than twenty volumes a year. “Then the shelves were thrown open,” and losses immediately jumped a thousandfold. It would be a few years later, though, before the *Dial* (“Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information”) began to better understand the scope of the problem. The thefts were not merely the work of print collectors but sometimes were solely for profit. A man who would cut plates from John James Audubon’s *Birds of America*, the journal dryly noted, “need not be an enthusiastic ornithologist.”⁷

Like most cultural heritage crimes, by the time this one came to the attention of the media, it was in full gallop. The crime was an epidemic

so rampant that it extended beyond even university and public libraries—typically the most pliant of victims—to courthouses, town halls, and other municipal repositories. A 1909 *Tribune* article noticed this failing when its author observed that in “a noisy, littered room of the City Hall, used chiefly as a marriage license bureau and thronged with couples who painfully answer questions about their ancestors, are kept invaluable records and books pertaining to the city of New York in a way that almost suggests that they are regarded as so much junk.”⁸ In addition to the manuscript records of the city going back to the colonial era, there were hundreds of treasures, most sitting uncatalogued in piles, including copies of Audubon’s *Birds of America* and *Quadrupeds of North America*. Decades of dust was the only barrier between the tomes and the thieves, many of whom had already done their work. Not that anyone could say with accuracy what had been stolen; almost nothing was catalogued, so the only way of knowing what was supposed to be in the collection was institutional memory, traditionally a pretty sorry means of recordkeeping.

Between the turn of the century and the time *Kindred* was haunting Southern California, very little had changed. Although *Birds of America* was no longer in the open stacks, it was the exception. Journals and monographs with illustrations every bit as beautiful as Audubon’s works still sat on university shelves open to the public; library periodicals routinely told the tale of some man or other caught with plates and punished lightly by the authorities. To anyone paying attention, the act of cutting valuable prints from library books was well recognized for what it was: an extraordinarily easy crime with very little downside. There was little chance of getting caught in the act, and, even if that happened, littler chance of spending any time in jail. But there was one inconvenience: although stealing was easy, selling was not.

It was not prohibitively difficult, of course. But selling did present a speed bump. Fencing stolen items was always difficult but particularly tricky with these sorts of goods. Buyers who pay full price want to know the provenance of the items; buyers who do not care about the provenance will not pay full price. Of course, if the person selling the prints is a bona fide member of the bookselling profession, then no one thinks twice about buying from him.

The best way to prevent plate (or any book) theft is to lock up the valuable items in special collections. This does not prevent all theft, but it certainly ends the most damaging, wholesale sort. Unfortunately, locking up valuable books is hated by almost everyone. For librarians, it creates a great deal of what they consider needless make-work. For patrons, it requires patience and gives them the impression that their usage is being managed and scrutinized. Open stacks are practically sacred in this country, and any attempt to limit access is seen as downright un-American. Although a rash of rare book thefts in the early decades of the twentieth century finally convinced librarians to lock away many of these old tomes, they did not treat equally books and journals with breathtakingly valuable illustrations inside them. These treasures consistently remained on open shelves in libraries across the country, with only the honesty of patrons protecting them. By the 1970s, when Kindred was doing his work, decades of looting had not changed this—the only major impediments to wholesale book plate theft were library stamps and the capacity of car trunks. Only one of those was a problem.

Aside from an iron chain and a priestly incantation, the library stamp is the oldest theft-prevention technique.⁹ For hundreds of years libraries have been stamping their books and the plates within them with indelible marks. The expectation, particularly with illustrations, was that ink marks deter thieves; a library stamp somewhere on the illustration ruins the market value. Stamping was so universal, in fact, that the question was not *whether* to stamp, but *where* to stamp. Some librarians stamped the back of a print so that the ink did not interfere with the aesthetics of the image. Some stamped on the page of the print, somewhere in the margin. And some librarians even took to stamping an illustration right in the middle of the image. (This certainly took away from the artistry of the print—and proved very unpopular with patrons—but it pretty much guaranteed that the item would not be stolen.) In addition to discouraging theft, stamped plates had the added bonus of helping identify the owner library if a stolen print was later recovered.

Still, as important a tool as stamping was, only the last of these types of marks worked against Kindred. Every other one, aside from in the middle of an illustration, could be eradicated during the framing process. Stamps on the reverse side of illustrations—by far the most common type—might as well have not existed for Kindred, as easy as they

were to cover with backing. But even library stamps in the margins of the front side of prints were little better. Unless they somehow crossed into the space between the “four corners” of the image, they could be covered with a frame, bleached out, or trimmed off. Although library stamps might be an adequate deterrent to an amateur print thief, they meant very little to the likes of Kindred. Worse yet, by giving the illusion of security, the stamps encouraged librarians to make little more effort in the protection of these books full of illustrations.

What that meant for Kindred, and other men like him, was that libraries were an integral part of their supply chain. There was little chance of getting caught and less of a chance, after one was caught, of being brought to justice. In short, the only significant downside to being a print thief was the remote but persistent threat of a razor blade slicing open a hand. This was a danger for two reasons. The first was the wound itself. The second was the risk of getting blood on the merchandise. In the 1971 theft of some Audubon prints from Union College in Schenectady, New York, the thief managed to bleed on some prints when he cut his hand breaking glass to obtain them. This not only greatly lessened their value, it tipped off the buyer to the fact that they were stolen.¹⁰

There could be few people less destined for a career in the antique print business than Kindred. On the one hand, he already had a steady job. On the other, he was a high school dropout with absolutely no background in art of any kind; he was six months in the business before he found out what people meant when they asked for “botanicals.” His entry into the field was simply one stroke of luck piled upon another.

In the mid-1970s, his employer wanted him to spend a few months in Los Angeles and put him up in a local studio apartment.¹¹ One day, he was in a used bookstore and found an old volume of black-and-white steel engravings for three dollars. He bought the book with the idea of pulling out some of the prints and hanging them on the wall of his new place. He found Gemline frames he liked that came in packs of twelve; they had a paper mat on the back that punched out easily, and it took him almost no time to do the work. It was a small apartment, so four of the prints did the job; on a whim, he filled the remaining eight frames and gave them to a friend of his working at a flea market the next weekend.

Arthur Garcia, an interior designer for a large construction company in Southern California, was at that flea market. He was just then in the process of building tract homes near the Santa Monica Freeway and bought Kindred's eight prints to outfit one of the models. He gave his card to Kindred's friend and said he should call if he had more to sell. A couple of weeks later, Kindred happened to be near Garcia's office and stopped by unannounced. Garcia met him, chose sixteen more prints from that same three-dollar book, and told Kindred to frame them as he had the others. Then he directed him to an interior designer with a shop down on Robertson and Third, in West Hollywood. Kindred drove there, more impressed the closer he got. *This* was the California he wanted. That interior designer, Betty Lou, picked out several more prints from the book and told him to come back with as many more as he could find.

Over the next few months, still at his day job, he did steady work for the two designers, getting the message soon enough that he was atop a rising wave. Near Betty Lou's place, down Hollywood Boulevard, he found a few used bookstores selling for thirty or forty dollars large editions of botanicals—what he still then called “flower books.” (Betty Lou eventually clued him in to botanicals. On a few occasions she had asked for them, and he always demurred. But one time, he brought in a large box of loose prints for her to peruse, and she asked again. He told her he did not have any, but she was welcome to dig through the box. At the bottom she found a bunch of flower lithographs—reproductions of works by Pierre-Joseph Redoute. She said, “I thought you didn't have any botanicals.” Thinking on his feet, he said, “I forgot I had those.”) The sellers saw them as books and priced them accordingly, but Kindred knew them as nothing more than bound groupings of a hundred or so high-quality color prints.

Knowing he could get frames for a dollar each, he quickly did the math and decided to go into business full time. For a twenty-five-year-old country boy who basically flunked out of high school, this was as good a way to make a nice living as he was likely to find. It was not that he was lazy, but a brief spell in the US Air Force, followed by a few years in the corporate world, showed him that he did not want a boss or a nine-to-five job. He liked to travel, and he was a good salesman. On top of that, he was ambitious to be something more than little Bobby Kindred from

Villa Grove, Illinois. Avoiding failure—or even achieving moderate success—was not enough. He needed to be a big shot, and it drove him to seek monetary success no matter the risk. And the risk started almost as soon as he committed himself to this work.

What Kindred did not know was that he was in the best place at the best time to make money. A few years later, others would catch on to the idea of framing prints cut from books, and his ability to mine second-hand bookstores would diminish. And the California real estate market, although robust, would not always support the art market it did then. Of course, those were all future problems. In the near term, his big worry was finding frames for all the prints he had. Soon enough, his buyers wanted more than the generic, relatively cheap ones Kindred bought in bulk. So, he wandered into the custom-frame shop of Ben Wilkes, right near where La Cienega Boulevard crosses under the Santa Monica Freeway in midcity Los Angeles. After several transactions, they became friends, and Wilkes agreed to teach Kindred what he knew about framing. It was a relationship that would prove fruitful to Kindred for the rest of his life.

Success at a venture in which failure was nearly impossible taught Kindred the wrong lesson, and it was not long before he was overcommitted. First, that meant occupying some space in a local furniture store. This decision, like many that seemed relatively inconsequential at the time, had an outsized impact later. Selling framed prints in a furniture store was a tacit acknowledgment that his goods were not art of the sort that should be lingered over and admired but rather space-fillers that complemented the matched sofa. These opulent, sometimes staggeringly colorful works of nineteenth-century artists became backdrops for the generic kitchens and parlors of Southern California tract houses—and he could only price them accordingly.

More importantly, Kindred was committed to paying rent at the furniture store, so he had to move inventory to justify the outlay of expenses. This was far more challenging than just selling prints to supplement his income. It meant he needed a constant supply of art that was difficult to find and very soon would be expensive to buy even when it could be found.

He soon ran out of local inventory, so he travelled a lot, hitting up every used bookstore and antique shop he could find, counting on them

to have tattered books he could buy on the cheap. One of his early go-to publications was *Picturesque America*, a two-volume set of essays outfitted with nearly a thousand wood and steel engravings. An enormously popular nineteenth-century paean to the natural beauty of the United States, by the 1970s the book was a century old and most copies were worse for the wear. A lot of places sold the battered and broken volumes starting at five dollars, depending upon their condition. For antiquarian booksellers and collectors, the better the shape of the binding, the more desirable the book; for Kindred, the opposite was true. He was going to break it apart anyway, so a ripped spine meant less work and more profit. Copies of *Picturesque America* were so plentiful and weighty, he often found them used as doorstops in bookstores. Unbound, the prints would sell for eight to ten dollars apiece loose and three times as much in a frame. When he eventually taught himself how to hand-color them, he could double that price again.

In every town or city big enough to have a bookstore worth visiting, he discovered that there were also likely two or three shops he could sell to. As soon as he got in town he would check the *Yellow Pages*, making a list of all the frame shops, art galleries, interior design shops, and gift stores. One was bound to buy what he was selling. Over time, he developed a pretty reliable list of on-the-road customers he could sell to—supporting him as he lit out, by necessity, on even more lengthy buying trips. And that alone should have told him something.

The California corporate furnishing industry, upon whose ebbs and flows he was dependent, was evolving quickly—and attracting competition. Leading that category were Pamela and Jerry Rubinstein, who in 1975 opened the Gideon Gallery on Melrose in West Hollywood. They had a stock of 15,000 prints, mostly the colored flora and fauna preferred by their large customers. (“Something restful to take your mind off it all,” said Pamela.)¹² The black-and-white engravings of *Picturesque America* would no longer cut it.

The Gideon Gallery launch coincided with the opening of a much larger building—it looked like a futuristic, blue airplane hangar—just a block away, catering to the same basic business strategy. Situated on the corner of Melrose Avenue and San Vicente Boulevard, the Pacific Design Center (PDC) was 750,000 square feet of startling construction—or “huge, sleek, abstractly shaped, and assertively blue,” as one

local architecture critic put it.¹³ Inside, it was the West Coast home and headquarters of many interior design, decoration, and home furnishing trades, serving as a showcase for the “best in contemporary design and concepts in building products and interior furnishing.”¹⁴ But this was not just a big retail mall; these were contract furnishing stores that catered to people buying in bulk for schools, hospitals, restaurants, and major retailers, just the way the Rubinsteins and Kindred did. The foot traffic was not Southern Californians looking to spend a few hundred dollars on high-quality lithographs—the patron class Kindred *should* have been courting—but rather buyers for large institutions looking for art in bulk. Depending upon the location in the building, 700 square feet of space rented out for about \$7,500 per year.¹⁵ Despite the pressure of competition and the weight of rent, Kindred decided the PDC was the place for him.

It is difficult to pinpoint Kindred’s worst decision of the 1970s: there were several to choose from. But deciding to capitalize on the moderate success he had thus far enjoyed and move his trade to the PDC had to be high in the running. The supply of old lithographs was erratic, inconsistent, and finite—something he knew early on. Nineteenth-century botanicals, in particular, were extraordinarily difficult to come by with any sort of regularity. These lithographs and engravings have far more in common with oil paintings and watercolors than with ottomans and bed ruffles. But he had been charmed by the blue glint of California sun off the Melrose Avenue giant, and so he opened his “Antique Print Room” with the highest of hopes.

In his ardor to move up in the world, he had not read the warning signs. If he had, he would have found that, to the extent that a market existed for his wares, it was already filled by the likes of the Gideon Gallery. The Rubinsteins, who started with a stock larger than Kindred’s, improved it by a factor of ten in the coming years. Kindred, on the other hand, was a single man with no reliable supplier and little money; he simply could not compete. Almost from the beginning, he did not net nearly the revenue it took to justify his rent in the big building, and the longer he stayed the worse his trouble got. For most people it would have meant a change in business strategy—or even moderation of lifestyle. But most people would have had a backup plan. As with a great many things in his life, Kindred had not thought this move through, so he was

not prepared for failure. When it came knocking at his door, he found that the best place to avoid it was in the book stacks of major research institutions, razor blade in hand.

The nineteenth century was the pinnacle of production—both in quality and quantity—of the pieces Kindred loved to cut. This was particularly true of bird prints, which came into their own with the sudden partnership between scientific text and illustration. Although the science was important, the accuracy and artistic merit of the illustrations were the most striking aspects of early professional ornithology.¹⁶ The first hand-colored lithograph plate bird illustration was published in 1820, and after the craft took hold in England a decade and a half later, it became a Victorian era staple.¹⁷ Still, natural history illustration had been around and flourishing since the seventeenth century—lithography was simply heir to an illustration process already entrenched by the time of its invention: engraving.

To make an engraving, an artist sketched his work on a piece of paper backed with chalk. That paper was then laid, chalk-side down, on a polished sheet of metal—usually copper, zinc, or steel—and the lines of the drawing transferred. Then the engraver took a sharp metal pen (a graver) and incised the lines of the drawing into the metal. This was quite difficult to do, and harder still to do well. The engraver neither drew the image nor traced its lines in the traditional way; he merely pushed the pen in one direction, and when it was necessary to curve a line, he turned the sheet of metal.¹⁸ After the grooves were carved, the metal sheet was covered with ink, the excess ink wiped off, and the printing process begun. After the image was transferred to paper, it could either be hand-colored or left uncolored with the lines of the engraving.

Although this process of reproduction was revolutionary and essential for runs of books with high-quality illustrations, it was not perfect for artist-naturalists. Though engraving was a highly skilled trade, very few engravers had any appreciation for scientific illustration, let alone lifelike scenes involving birds and mammals. Artists often complained that there was a serious loss from their original work to its ultimate, printed form. Still, there was little to be done. The only major alternative for artists was etching—a method of reproduction similar enough to engraving that the terms are often used interchangeably. Etching allowed

greater flexibility in the creative process and took a lot less time to learn, so many naturalists, impatient with engravings, learned the art simply to have better control over the final product. Like engraving, etching also uses copper or zinc plates. But there is no cutting. Instead, the metal plate is covered with an acid-resistant wax, and then the artist sketches right onto the wax with a fine metal pen, exposing the parts of the metal he or she wants cut. Then the whole thing is dipped in a nitric acid bath, and the exposed parts—the parts “drawn” by the artist—are burned away.

The most famous bird book of all time, John James Audubon’s *Birds of America*, was illustrated in just this manner between 1827 and 1838. The work was done by two men, starting with Scotsman William Lizars. He did the first ten plates, including the famous turkey, from Audubon’s artwork by transferring the drawing outlines onto a large sheet of copper, which was then etched into furrows. The etched copper plate was then inked, wiped clear of the excess, and pressed with dampened paper that picked up the ink and duplicated the outlines of the original. The print was pulled and dried and then presented to a staff of colorists who followed pattern plates Lizars had colored to Audubon’s approval. The black-and-white outlined spaces were filled with transparent watercolors, each individual colorist applying one color as the print was passed from one artist to the next.¹⁹

Audubon soon became disenchanted, mostly with the pace of Lizars’s work, and hired Robert Havell (and, eventually, Havell’s son) to finish the job. Of Havell’s work, Audubon said he was “perfectly confident that no birds were ever so beautifully and softly represented in copper,” comparing Havell’s work with that of the superior lithographed plates starting to appear with regularity by that time.²⁰ In practice, that meant Audubon’s monumental work was one of the last illustrated in this manner.

Four decades before the completion of *Birds of America*, Alois Senefelder invented that superior form of illustration known as lithography. The process was essentially the reverse of etching and engraving. Instead of cutting a groove into a metal plate in which ink could sit, the German Senefelder drew on a piece of smooth stone with a waxy crayon. When this stone was then pressed on paper, the image was re-created there. It was a revolution for naturalists. They no longer had to rely on guildsmen to recreate their works of art—or, alternatively, learn how to etch—they could either do the work themselves or pay other artists to do

it. This process gained acceptance first in Germany and then in France; owing largely to engravers' unions in England (which obviously objected to artists doing their own work), it did not become popular in London until the 1830s. Then, as it had on the continent, it took off.

Because of this, it was only in 1832 that Audubon began experimenting with the form. Havell, his etcher, emigrated to the United States after he completed *Birds of America*. In the meantime, the most important printer in England, Charles Hullmandel, began to use lithography.²¹ Audubon gave this new technology a trial run, creating a large lithograph of a clapper rail. Satisfied with the results, his next (octavo) edition of *Birds*, as well as his *Quadrupeds*, used lithographic illustrations instead of engravings.²²

From that point on, most color plates in natural history journals used lithographs. Many popular magazines—especially the weeklies such as *Harper's* or *Illustrated London News*, from which Kindred loved to cut—still used distinctive copper and steel engravings for their uncolored illustrations. But the zoological journals—particularly ornithological journals—mostly used color lithographs. These accurate illustrations, supplemented by careful writing, helped create a reliable foundation of descriptive literature for ornithology. The process allowed for a more lifelike depiction of the plumage, and it generally increased the accuracy of illustration because it let naturalists do their artwork without intermediaries. Also, it was so much less expensive than engraving that journals could afford to include the work more regularly.²³ It was good for everyone.

