

Three pencil drawings of birds from the Ann Eliza Hepburne Rooth Friendship Album, pgs. 20, 32, and 97. Ann Eliza Hepburne Rooth Fonds, 1837-1897 RG 505

Researched by Aaron Rose



These three bird illustrations are taken from Ann Eliza Hepburne Rooth's friendship album. This album is in the collection of the Brock Library's Archives & Special Collections (RG 505). While these drawings are not labeled in the album, they resemble a couple of Golden-Crowned Kinglets scouting for food (on the right), a couple of Northern Flickers on the tip of a broken tree (in the middle), and a Common Swift perched on a branch (on the left). Each one of these drawings are made using graphite on now yellowed and slightly damaged paper.

In the 19th century, there was a divide of fondness regarding specific species of birds that still carries on today. While it's assumed that these drawings are reflecting the beauty of these creatures, some expressed different opinions about them at the time. In fact, the Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario expressed the common fruit grower's hatred for the English Sparrow multiple times throughout years of annual reports. Eventually, by 1893's report, the nature of these sparrows was accepted by this organization and they ended up being decidedly labeled as "universal pests."¹

A similar example comes from the *St. Catharines Journal* on June 3rd, 1841, but this time the author has an opposite take. Here the writer expresses a love for birds and their wish that "intelligent farmers could be awakened to the importance of preserving robins and other small birds as a means of aiding in their work."² The author then says that "the slight inroads [that the birds] make upon the farmer's crops are repaid a hundred-fold by the protection they afford against a thousand destroyers". The Idea in this small excerpt is that the birds eat the worms and bugs that eat the fruit.

¹ Ontario, *Annual Report of the Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario*, 1893.

² Hiram, Leavenworth, "St. Catharines Journal."

It is not certain what stance Ann Eliza Hepburn Rooth took on this debate, but the inclusion of these sketches in her friendship album may be indicative of an admiration for the bird species living in the Niagara region. Including such gracefully and skillfully drawn sketches of birds native to her living area suggests a sort of respect for the feathery fellows.

Further Reading

Leavenworth, Hiram. "St. Catharines Journal," June 3, 1841.
<https://dr.library.brocku.ca/handle/10464/17665>

Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario. *Report of the Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario for the Year 1883*, 1883. <https://dr.library.brocku.ca/handle/10464/4767>

Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario. *Annual Report of the Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario*, 1893, 1893. <https://dr.library.brocku.ca/handle/10464/4773?show=full>

Rooth, Ann Eliza Hepburne, and Brock University Library. Archives. Ann Eliza Hepburne Rooth Fonds, 1837-1897. <https://dr.library.brocku.ca/handle/10464/5502>