

The Canvasback

Summer 1992

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

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can•vas•back (kan'ves bak'), *n.*, *pl.* **-backs**, (esp. collectively) **-back**. **1.** A north American wild duck, the male of which has a whitish back and a reddish-brown head and neck. **2.** A style of decoy made famous by carvers of the Susquehanna Flats region. **3.** A quarterly publication of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 7** **A Visit with Jim Pierce**
by Richard Bonn
- 12** **The 5th Annual Havre de Grace Duck Fair**
by Barbara Gilden
- 14** **The Big Gun Speaks Again: A Susquehanna Flats Punt Gun Rig**
by Vernon Bryant with Virginia O'Flaherty
- 16** **Severn W. Hall**
by John Quarstein
- 22** **Defending the Bay**
by James J. Pottle
- 25** **Damascus Doubles**
by John Quarstein
- 28** **Decoy Festival Carving Contest Winners**
by Virginia O'Flaherty

DEPARTMENTS

- 4** President's Message
- 5** Exhibits
- 6** Fundraising
- 10** Museum Programs
- 21** Collections
- 30** Education

ON THE COVER

Decoys painted by Severn Hall from a gunning rig out of the Elk River in Cecil County, Maryland. Wing duck style Canada Goose, one of six made in the late 1950's; drake Canvasback by Sam Barnes, c.early 1920's; hen Canvasback by Henry Lockard, c.1940.

From the collection of J. Evans McKinney.

FROM THE EDITORS DESK

Upon this third printing of the **Canvasback** we wish to note the most recent change at the museum. Richard Bonn resigned in early April to return to his former profession, radio broadcasting. Richard's contribution to the museum is seen in the creation of this publication.

We are committed to this forum because it integrates the purpose of the **Canvasback** with the museum's mission. With each successive issue the editorial staff will strive to provide its membership and subscribers with thought provoking and educational articles, and information on the museum and its programs. We hope that this magazine enriches your understanding of the topics that the Decoy Museum seeks to explore.

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Virginia O'Flaherty

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Havre de Grace Decoy Museum
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**FROM
THE
PRESIDENT**



Dear Museum Member:

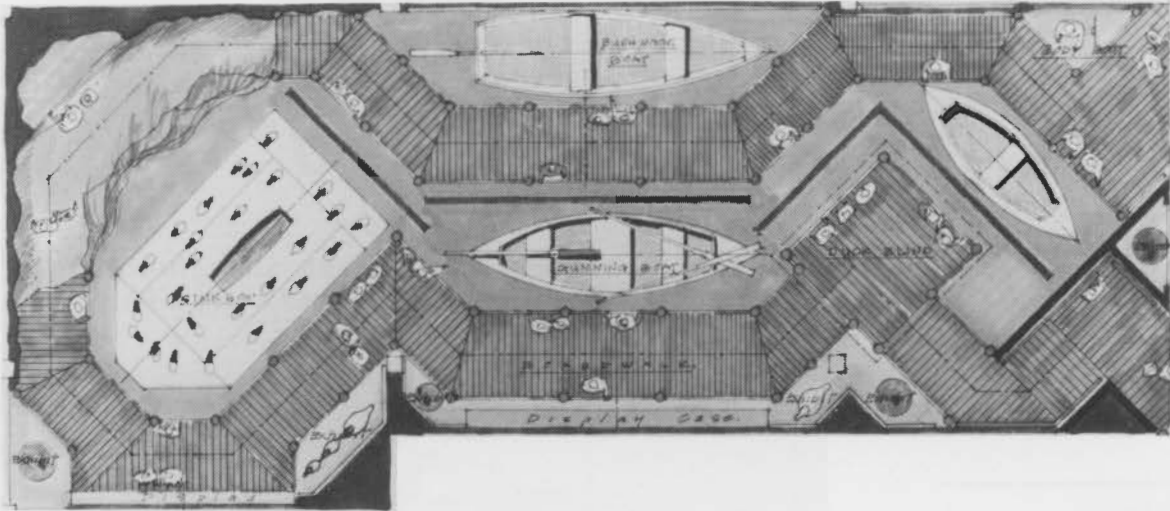
One of my favorite museum special events is its annual Duck Fair. Last year's fair was not only fun, but it was also an indicator of the tremendous community support for the Decoy Museum. Special children's games and activities are coupled with demonstrations, auctions and exhibits for adults, ensuring enjoyment for all who attend.

This year's Duck Fair will be even more special because the noted decoy painter Severn Hall has agreed to be its Honorary Chairman. Not only will Severn be at the museum to share his wonderful gunning stories but he has also begun to paint decoys again. The Duck Fair's live auction will feature examples of Severn Hall's distinctive work with decoys. July 18th will be a unique opportunity to meet one of the old "gunners of the Flats", to learn more about his lovely painting style or perhaps to acquire a Severn Hall painted decoy of your own, and remember to bring your Hagan book to be signed by Severn.

Begun as a dream over a decade ago, the Decoy Museum has now become a major addition to both its community and to the preservation of the Chesapeake Bay's decoy making heritage. The Duck Fair is only one of the museum's special educational activities, yet its success is due to the volunteers, exhibitors and participants who all share the love of decoys as a true American art form. I do hope that you will join us for the fun and learning in the sun during the 5th annual Duck Fair.

Allen J. Fair
President, Board of Directors

GUNNING THE FLATS UPDATE



EXHIBITS

In the Spring issue of the Canvasback I wrote about the thematic concepts of the Decoy Museum's upcoming exhibit gallery, "Gunning the Flats." This gallery will combine unique artifacts and imagery with wonderful stories expressed in a variety of media formats, and will place into context why so many decoys were made along the shores of the Susquehanna Flats.

In March we reviewed the interpretive format and artifact requirements for "Gunning the Flats". After comparing the list artifacts needed with the museum's collections made it obvious that additional, specific items were needed. The museum would like to call upon its friends to help it fill this exhibit with artifacts symbolic of the glory days of gunning. Some of the required objects range from old hunting licenses, photographs of gunning scenes and original newspaper articles attesting to the once bountiful hunting, to hunting outerwear, pre-1940 iron sink box decoys and wooden wing ducks to full bodied canvasback decoys used on the Flats, and firearms c.1830-1940. We are also seeking modern plastic, cork or styrofoam decoys, clothing and other items to complete its story about how gunning has changed on the upper Chesapeake Bay. Individuals who wish to discuss the particulars of donating or loaning artifacts for this exhibit should contact Jenny O'Flaherty, the museum's curator, prior to September 30th. All artifact contributors will be listed in the gallery's acknowledgements.

The Decoy Museum is also seeking financial contributions to underwrite this \$120,000 project. The museum has already received over \$2,800 in cash donations and has over \$60,000 in pending grant applications, however it needs much more support to complete the entire project. There is an ongoing capital campaign to which patrons may make a contribution, however, the museum has also established a special format by which individuals can support this exhibit. One of the exhibit design features is a boardwalk which guides visitors through the gallery. Each floor board can be purchased for \$50.00 with the donors name or message (not to exceed 24 letters) being inscribed on the board. Only 500 boards will be sold, so please contact the museum now to reserve your own "piece" of the exhibit. Construction of "Gunning the Flats" will begin this September. The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is counting on its membership's support to help make this exhibit a reality.

by John Quarstein

FUNDRAISING

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum Board of Directors is offering

RAFFLE

Tickets \$10.00 each
or 3 for \$25.00

Extra Special
13 for \$100.00

All proceeds of the
raffle will benefit the
Havre de Grace
Decoy Museum.

A complete set
of Half-Size or 'Miniature' decoys
by
Charles "Speed" Joiner
-1992-

In 1987, when Charlie was the Honorary
Chairman of the Decoy Festival a set like this
brought \$13,000 at auction.



Drawing to be held December 13th, at 8:00 P.M. at the Decoy Museum



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A VISIT WITH JIM PIERCE



Q: Jimmy, you were born in 1934 in Havre de Grace the year that the sinkbox was outlawed. Do you have any recollections of sinkboxes?

Jimmy: The only thing I ever saw as a kid was a sinkbox laying around the shoreline and there were plenty of decoys lying around because that era was over. Everybody started to go to blind shooting and also to bushwacking. When I got old enough to gun there were plenty of ducks and you shot 'em off the shoreline.

Q: Tell me about when you were a kid and were just getting started in duck hunting. Where did you get your first decoy rig from?

Jimmy: I was born on State St. and there were a lot of guys on the street who hunted. In fact just about every family in Havre de Grace hunted, because it was a good way to put food on the table. There was an abundance of decoys in garages, in basements, in the lofts, because of the sinkbox. And I knew people who owned sinkboxes. I lived four or five houses away from Nelson Barnard. I used to see him choppin' out decoys in his shop. There was never a problem getting decoys when you needed them.

Q: You say that decoys were everywhere, primarily because the sinkbox had been outlawed. Were people still making decoys?

Jimmy: Oh yeah, 'cause there was still a market for decoys made by people like Bob McGaw, Paul Gibson, Jim Currier and Madison Mitchell. They were the "four" decoy makers in this area. In the fifties they were still making decoys for the professionals, the businessman; you know, they were the ones that bought the decoys. Your local people made their own. The business for them was mostly for Canvasbacks, Bluebills and Redheads. Most of the decoys these guys were making were going away from here, the Potomac River, Chester River...people that had money.

Gunning decoy maker, teacher, mentor, museum builder, honorary chairman... these words express the many roles played by James I. Pierce in the renaissance decoy makers have experienced in the last decade. Jimmy is humble about his accomplishments and generous with his time and knowledge. Richard Bonn caught up with him at his shop in Lapidum, Maryland.

by Richard Bonn

Q: You talk about local people making their own decoys. That must explain why there are so many decoys out there that can't be identified.

Jimmy: We call 'em no names and some of 'em might have more history than the ones that have names. Names like Gilbert, Isaac Bishop and people like that. You've heard their names, but you don't know what their decoys are, and they were making 'em before the Holly's.

Q: What about the Holly era how many people do you think were making decoys back in the late 1800's to early 1900's?

Jimmy: Even in that era there you had Sam Barnes and the Holly family, but every waterman was probably a decoy maker. He made his own nets, during the off season he made his own decoys for hunting. Winter was long and many

a day they kept themselves busy by making decoys, building boats and making nets, it was a cycle. That's changed over the years 'cause the habitat for birds isn't here, the quality of the water's changed, our climate's gotten warmer, so the way of life isn't here anymore for the waterman.

Q: Tell me about your earliest memory of actually getting involved in making decoys.

Jimmy: Well, my grandfather lived next door to Bob McGaw and when I was young everybody in Havre de Grace had garden. People canned their own food and my grandfather helped Bob McGaw garden 'cause he had a big lot. I used to go to Bob's shop and watch him make decoys and then when I got to be 12 years old I used to go hunting with Harry Jobes. That's all you knew was hunting and fishing. Well, Harry started working in Madison Mitchell's shop and I did too and next thing you knew you started making some on your own as a hobby for your own gunnin'. And you make a few and you'd end up selling some, somebody would say I'll take fifty of 'em. Cedar (telephone) poles were free, they were everywhere, so we had plenty of material back then. I guess Harry and I were the next ones to fall in line as far decoy making went. And of course



Painting requires patience and a steady hand.

HdeGDM photograph

over the last ten or fifteen years a lot of the boys have taken up the hobby, or business I should say.

Q: How many years did you work for Madison Mitchell?

Jimmy: From when I was fourteen years old 'till I was thirty I didn't miss too many days at Mitchell's shop. After I went to work for the phone company I'd work in the evenings for him. When I got out of the service in 1956 I built a shop with my brother Steiner on Franklyn and Stokes St. Mr. Mitchell would let me turn the bodies on his machine, but I still worked at Mitchell's until when I got married. Then when I'd go on the road for the phone company I'd carve heads during lunch and put the birds together on weekends. At that time you'd only make a few different species, Canvasbacks, Redheads and Bluebills. We made very few puddle ducks. It was just the last twenty years

of Mitchell's time where you started making different kinds of birds, mostly for collectors

Q: How did Mitchell's shop operate, was there a schedule posted?

Jimmy: It was basically an honor system, you had a book in a drawer there and everybody had a job to do. Certain fellows would spoke shave the breast and tail, and on Saturday everybody would head ducks. On some Saturdays we'd head four or five hundred decoys, but what would happen in Mitchell's shop is that for ten or twelve weeks he'd do his painting. Right after January he'd buy all his supplies, his wood, paint and brushes then he'd start band sawing heads out and then he'd start turning bodies out and put them up in the loft in different bins. Then when school was out we'd run the lathe about five days a week. So it was really a process where you'd work all year and finish up all the birds at one time. Then when people started collecting the process changed a little bit. You'd start painting in the summer time so Mitchell could have finished birds all year round.

You know the old timers used to say, "If they're black and white and have red on 'em, who has to put an eye on 'em. If they could see the eye they better be dead lying on the water."

Q: Was anyone in the fifties shrewd enough to be putting Mitchell's birds away as collectible?

Jimmy: I don't think anyone back then was thinking about collecting decoys because there was an abundance of them around and we just took it for granted, who ever would think that decoys would become what they are today. There were some people collecting, but not many people were doing it. Bob McGaw miniatures were \$1.50 a piece. It wasn't until the seventies that decoys caught on. I think it was after the Mackey auction in 1973 (ed note: Bob Mackey was the famed collector who wrote the book "American Bird Decoys" and is considered one of the pioneers of decoy collecting) in Hyannisport, Mass. that decoy prices started going up. Mitchell decoys at that time were selling for \$7.50, then \$8.50, then \$14.00 but that was mostly due to inflation, then all of a sudden things just started going up in the 1980's. People started buying decoys because they liked 'em, not because they thought they'd be worth a lot of money. I gave away a lot of Mitchell decoys as gifts, who ever would have thought the prices would go up like they did.

Q: During the 1960's what percentage of decoys being made were being hunted over?

Jimmy: I think until the 70's almost all decoys were being hunted over. Once the ducks started leaving this area, when the celery grass was gone and the flyways changed that's when people started collecting. Of course that's my opinion and everyone seems to have an opinion about when this change took place.

Q: Why do you think the Havre de Grace style of decoy being made today so closely resembles the Mitchell style?

Jimmy: Well, Mr. Mitchell was probably the first one to mass produce decoys. They were fast and easy to make to keep the price down and he designed the



A finished decoy, signed, sealed and racked.
HdeGDM photograph

bodies off of the Holly style. You went from the hand chopped to the lathe turned style. Of course the demand was there so you had to save labor and everybody followed in the footsteps of Mitchell. He had a lot of influence in this area. One reason for this is that Mitchell employed so many people in his shop. People like Currier and Gibson didn't use as many people to help out. Lots of young guys were learning from Mitchell and started making their own decoys using the Mitchell body as a pattern.

Q: You talk about the change which took place between decoys being made for hunting to being made for collecting. Did this do anything to the process of decoy making?

Jimmy: Well, you put a little more time into making the birds, puttying 'em, sanding the heads and refining the painting. The one thing that Madison Mitchell taught you was to make as good a bird as possible, something that would work for hunting, but also something that would look good. Before the change if a bird had a little blemish on it you didn't worry about it, you know the old timers used to say, "If they're black and white and have red heads on 'em who has to put an eye on 'em. If they could see the eye they better be dead lying on the water."

Q: One last question, why do you think so many younger people today continue to make decoys for a living?

Jimmy: Well it's a lot of hours, and a lot of time, but it's what these fellows love to do. I was fortunate enough to retire when I was 55 years old to make decoys. I could have stayed working or become a consultant or do other things to make more money, but I wanted to be my own boss. It's just like Charlie Bryan and Speed Joiner, you've got to love to do it. And it makes you feel good that over the years people like to collect my work, they want a pair of my decoys in their house. It's a great living and you get to meet and visit with a lot of nice, interesting people.

About the author: **Richard Bonn** is program director at WIEM, formerly served as Director of the Decoy Museum. We wish him the best in his future endeavours.


Museum Programs

Weekend Carving Demonstrations

Visitors of all ages enjoy watching demonstrations of contemporary decoy carvers and waterfowl artists. Visit the Decoy Museum during July, August and September and enjoy a unique opportunity to meet and talk with these artists.

July 4-5	unscheduled	August 23	Charles Bryan
July 11-12	Richard & Francis Gick	August 29	Noble Mentzer
July 18	Ken Clodfelter	August 30	Bill Porterfield
July 19	Ed Watts		
July 25-26	Richard & Barbara Clark	September 5	Ed Watts
		September 6	Art Boxleitner
August 1	Art Boxleitner	September 12	Charles Joiner
August 2	Linda & Dick Robinson	September 13	Dave Walker
August 8	Len Burcham	September 19	Bill Weaver
August 9	Frank Muller	September 20	Charles & Bob Jobes
August 15	Butch & Mary Carol Larrimore	September 26	Butch & Mary Larrimore
August 16	Pat Vincenti	September 27	Bryon Bodt
August 22	Mike Dedekind		

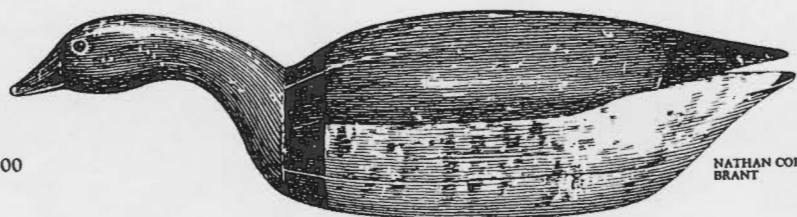
A BIG "Thank You" to all the carvers listed here, and to those who will follow.
Dotti Wise, Program Coordinator



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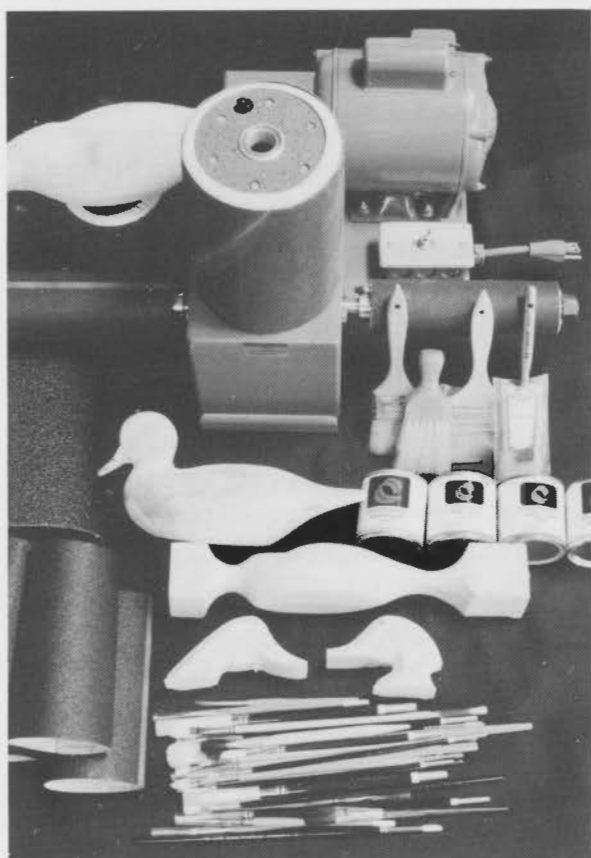
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THE 5TH ANNUAL HAVRE



When people from far and near ask with the most quizzical looks on their faces, "Duck Fair, what in the world is a Duck Fair?", self assured and quite comfortable in my answer, I smile and say "It's more than any family event you've ever attended was quacked up to be!" Without a doubt, the 5th annual Duck Fair held on the grounds of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum promises excitement, fun and entertainment for all who attend. A full schedule of events is planned for Saturday, July 18th (rain date Sunday, July 19th) from 9:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M.

SEVERN HALL 1992 DUCK FAIR HONORARY CHAIRMAN

A very special guest, Severn Hall is flying in from New Mexico to be the Duck Fair's Honorary Chairman. Visit Mr. Hall and hear some riveting tales from this old gunner and decoy painter of the Susquehanna Flats. Mr. Hall will be picking up his brush and painting a few decoys. Don't miss this unique opportunity to see and hear history come alive again. (see article on Hall on pp 20-25)



PUNT AND BATTERY GUN DEMONSTRATIONS

In the cove fronting the museum you will see a rig of over 100 decoys, a reminder of days gone by when this was a common enough sight on the Susquehanna Flats. Perhaps you should tie a string to your camera to prevent dropping it into the water as you witness to explosive firings of reproduction Punt and Battery guns handsomely made by Vernon Bryant of North East and Bernie Bodt of Churchville. Each year as all the cameras fly into the air at the heart stopping sound of the big guns, I wonder, has anyone ever gotten a good picture? The big guns will be fired alternately throughout the day.

DUCK & GOOSE CALLING CONTEST

Sean Mann, an avid duck and goose caller and national champion, will conduct a Duck and Goose Calling Contest at 4 P.M.. Entry fee \$10.00, cash and decoy prizes given for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners.

BAKE SALE

Bring your appetite because there will be an abundance of food and beverages available. For a delicious snack or to top off that scrumptious lunch stop by the bake sale table where the most delectable deserts can be purchased. Arrive early for special cakes and pies donated by some of the best bakers on the Bay. We promise, no one will go away hungry or thirsty.

DE GRACE DUCK FAIR

AUCTIONS

This year there will be two adult tables and one childrens table for each of the silent auctions. The first auction will end at 1:00 P.M. and the second at 4:00 P.M. A live auction will be held at 1:30 to 3:00 P.M.. by professional auctioneer, Michael Feldman from Westminster, Maryland.



CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES

Children will be delighted with the array of old fashioned fair games and prizes planned just for them. Don't forget the for-kids-only auction tables.

A. J. Fair, President of the Board of Directors, has just what it takes to keep everyone quacked up. He will keep the carvers busy and the excitement flowing during the Head Whittling contest. Last year during the this contest, Charlie Bryan of Middle River, and Honorary Chairman of the 1984 Decoy Festival was the winner raising \$1,300. Captain Harry Jobes of Aberdeen, 1988's Decoy Festival Chairman, and the winner two years ago, came in second raising \$1,100. Both men donated the entire proceeds of the contest to the museum to help support the museum's operations. Who will win this year's contest? Try to keep your eyes open through the tears of laughter from all of the ongoing shenanigans.

HEAD WHITTILING CONTEST

Take time to stroll along the new promenade constructed by Harford County with State and County funds to enhance the City of Havre de Grace's Historic and Cultural District. No admission is charged to enter the museum during the Duck Fair. So invite your friends and neighbors, and take a look at the new second floor and its outstanding view of the Susquehanna Flats. Enjoy a bird's eye view of the new promenade and visit the museum's gift shop.

Our purpose is to provide an entertaining and educational event for all of our members, friends of the museum and the community. With only five years under our belts the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is becoming one of the finest museum's around. Spread the word and have your friends and family share in the activities. Please mark your calendar now so you don't forget Saturday, July 18th, a special day for friends and family.

Adults

Enjoy great exhibits of decoys, decoy related crafts and paraphernalia, waterfowl art and collectables. Visit with your favorite carvers, and meet new artists.

by Barbara Gilden

THE BIG GUN SPEAKS AGAIN

A Susquehanna Flats Punt Gun Rig is Reborn

I used to be a revolutionary war re-enactor with my father when I was in high school, so I guess it makes sense that one day I'd want to build and demonstrate a punt gun skiff. It began when I started to read about market gunners...

Vernon Bryant demonstrating his reproduction punt gun and boat.

Howard Miles photographs

The punt gun was used by market gunners from after the Civil War until the federal law passed in 1918 limiting the gauge size ended the legal use of the big gun in the United States. These large bore guns continued to be used at night by outlaw gunners to kill scores of ducks. A hunter would scull stealthily upon a raft of sleeping canvasbacks. Then, striking the sides of the skiff with the hand paddles, a move that would cause the birds raise their heads, he quickly got off a shot that would successfully kill up to 100 ducks. The gunner had to return to land to re-load making three or four shots a night, while the pick-up man rowed out to gather the harvest.

At the Upper Bay Museum in North East, I came across a punt gun and boat belonging to Captain Ralph Murphy of Charlestown, Maryland. Ralph Murphy, one of the market gunners in the area was mentioned in Harry Walsh's book *The Outlaw Gunner*, but he was known and remembered by many people around the Upper Bay. He used "the big gun with Harry Barnes off Carpenters Point at night and the sinkbox (on display at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum) by day." (Walsh, 1971) There is a punt gun on display at the Decoy Museum that is now owned by the Lawson family of Havre de Grace, but in earlier times it was used for market gunning by the McMullan family of Charlestown, Maryland. Those guns were crude examples of gunsmithing because they were made by carpenters and blacksmiths. You have to look at English made guns to see a handsome punt gun.



I started by hand chopping the stock out of walnut cut from my father's farm in Rising Sun. I went to copy the stock and hammer from a big gun originally owned and used by George Cooper of Charlestown, Maryland, that was on display at the Upper Bay Museum. There I met Jack Footie who told me "I have a set of patterns (for a punt gun), you can have 'em." It was one of the best gun patterns I'd ever seen. The pattern had been drawn by Norris Pratt over twenty years ago for Duckie Foreacker who was interested in making a reproduction gun. Pratt, who was once was a buyer for Kippie du Pont's Gun Club had bought that gun at auction. The pattern was given to Jack Footie to take to Edgewood to

have some parts made, and for some reason the project ground to a halt. When I was finished with the pattern I returned it it Duckie Foreacker.

In black powder guns the most critical area is in the first 18" from the magazine. That's where the greatest explosive forces are exerted on the barrel, and where it is most likely to fail in a test firing. Dave Neel, a railroad welder,

by Vernon Bryant
with Virginia O'Flaherty

and I decided that two pipes welded together would give the margin of safety we felt was necessary. The welding job took about 8 hours. We slid a 1 1/2" pipe inside a 2" pipe, then had to build up the weld to hide the 5/16" space between the two pipes and then grind the weld down so that it wouldn't show.

When it came time to join the barrel and the stock I made a wooden template so we wouldn't burn up the pieces we were working on. Danny Neel was the torch operator and my father and I did the blacksmithing work. My father, who has an excellent eye for proportion beat the heck out of the iron while I held onto it with tongs. Every now and then he'd hold it up and decide if the curves and angles were going in the right direction.

Putting that lock together was the hardest part, I really think that anyone could have done the rest of the job. Because you had two carpenters working with steel it took my father and me five hours to complete. We used parts from a Brown Bess musket because it had the strongest spring. Parts we couldn't find, the drum and some of the lock mechanisms, were made by Dave Racine, a machinist from North East.

When the gun was finished we consulted with Heis McCall, a ballistics expert at APG, about the technical details - like how we could keep from getting killed if the gun failed. Heis McCall was a natural for this project because he was Joseph Heisler's grandson, an old market gunner on the Flats. He recommended applying a standard 1/2 lb. load of black powder, then tying the gun to a tree and attaching a string to the trigger and firing from behind a solid building. If the first firing was successful we were to fire it a couple of more times then double the load. When the barrel didn't explode we knew the gun was safe for public demonstrations with a standard load. The gun's finished length is 10 feet and it weighs 120 lbs.

After the big gun was completed I moved on to building the boat. To get an authentic pattern I turned again to the Upper Bay Museum. I copied the pattern down to the last detail from an original rail bird skiff made by Ralph Murphy for Heis McCall in the early 1940's. Now punt gun and rail bird skiffs are basically the same pattern, the only difference is the use that is made of them. The boat I made has knee ribs that are selected from trees that have branches growing naturally with the proper angle. One stem in my skiff is the original locust stem made by Ralph Murphy; I had to make the other. The boat is constructed of white oak framing with cypress sides and bottom.

Cypress is used because it doesn't rot from being exposed to water, even though it obtains three times it's weight in water. That makes a heavy boat to take in and out of the water. Watermen in the Lower Bay favor cypress for their work boats and usually just leave them in the water. When punt gun skiffs are removed the wood shrinks so much you can put your fingers inside the seams. When these boats are launched at the beginning of the hunting season they sink right to the bottom. After a few days you can bail the water out and the boat is tight for the season. (cont. p.29)



Loading Black Powder
Howard Miles photograph

Severn W. Hall

North East Maryland's Master Painter

by John Quarstein

Smog, smog, smog' were the reasons cited by decoy painter and decoy maker Severn Hall for leaving Maryland in 1978 for New Mexico. The Susquehanna Flats had nothing more to offer him as the bay's water 'wasn't good enough for ducks to puddle in.' Severn had stopped working with decoys around 1960 after his wife left him as he 'had to start really working for a living.' Now Severn Hall is once again painting decoys and will return to Maryland on July 18th as Honorary Chairman of the 5th Annual Duck Fair.

Severn Wallis Hall was born February 3, 1909 in North East, Maryland, and grew up gunning and painting decoys. He remembers that his first toy was a 'decoy to roll around the floor with' and by the time he really knew 'what a paint brush was' he began painting decoys for his uncle, Captain William S. 'Bartow' Hall's sinkbox rig and William Heverin. Primarily, he would 'put the feathers' on canvasbacks, receiving five cents each for drakes and ten cents each for hens. It was also during this period that Severn began his lifelong passion of duck hunting, gunning with individuals like Captain Ralph Murphy or his father, who operated the Melrath sinkbox.



Decoys painted by Severn Hall for a gunning rig out of Elk River, Maryland
HdeGDM photograph

Hall says that he was 'crazy over' gunning from sinkboxes and while in high school he would paint rigs and boxes just to be close to them. One of his favorite stories comes from a day when he was 17 and gunning with Captain Ralph Murphy. Hall recounts that the day was calm and Murphy (unknownst to Severn) had fallen asleep in the warm sun. Severn, being alert, saw a lone canvasback begin to toll into the rig of over 40 decoys. He waited and waited for Ralph to shoot, and finally, when the can was five feet away from the sinkbox, Severn shot. The drake's body landed on the box, his head hit the water 10 feet away. Murphy, who was known as a hothead, awoke yelling at Hall, saying 'can't sell a canvasback without a head.' Severn, ignoring the cussing, sheepishly told Murphy that he knew he could 'sew it back on.'

Once he graduated from high school, Severn studied electrical engineering at Drexel Institute in Philadelphia. He never worked a day in this field as 'it was hard to get a job like that in the Depression.' Instead, he turned to yachting, first serving as captain of the Dilks family of Philadelphia's yacht for three years. He then worked under Captain Bilsburgh for Felix du Pont, Sr., on the 75-foot sport fishing boat, the Buckruo, making several trips from New Castle, Delaware, to the West Indies.

By the 1940s Hall was back on the Chesapeake Bay fully occupied by gunning and decoys, repainting decoys of other makers for various large rigs. Some of his most important work came during his relationship with Johnny Schaeffer, of Chesapeake City, Maryland, who employed Hall to re-paint his decoys and to help him with his hunting parties. Schaeffer also kept Severn busy during the off season painting his boats and blinds just to keep him 'handy.' It was during this period that Severn Hall finalized his unique paint style, 'which can be spotted a mile away,' according to one collector and developed his decoy keel for stabilization in heavy seas as well his fascinating coot decoys.



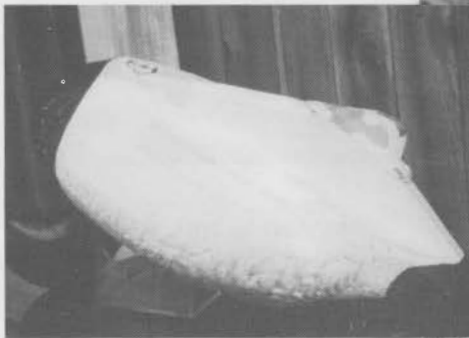
Blackduck, cork with embossed wings, c.1946
Private Collection
HdeGDM photograph

Severn had learned from his Uncle Will about the use of coot decoys in high school. Not only did he begin to experiment with painting coots, he also realized their value when stooled out at the foot of a large rig of canvasback decoys. A dozen or more coot decoys indicated 'good feelings' as Severn recounted and the can's would 'pitch right into 'em.' Hall made his first coots in the 1940's out of refrigeration cork. He developed his own style while whittling the first eleven, and the final partner to the dozen being made from an old blackduck cork body with a drum sander. Based on this design, Severn also began making wooden coots, featuring embossed wings and heads

- he had the coots strung on a single line with one anchor - this would make the coots appear to swim, looking more 'alive and natural' - as they would 'wave like a flag, beckoning ducks to toll into them.'

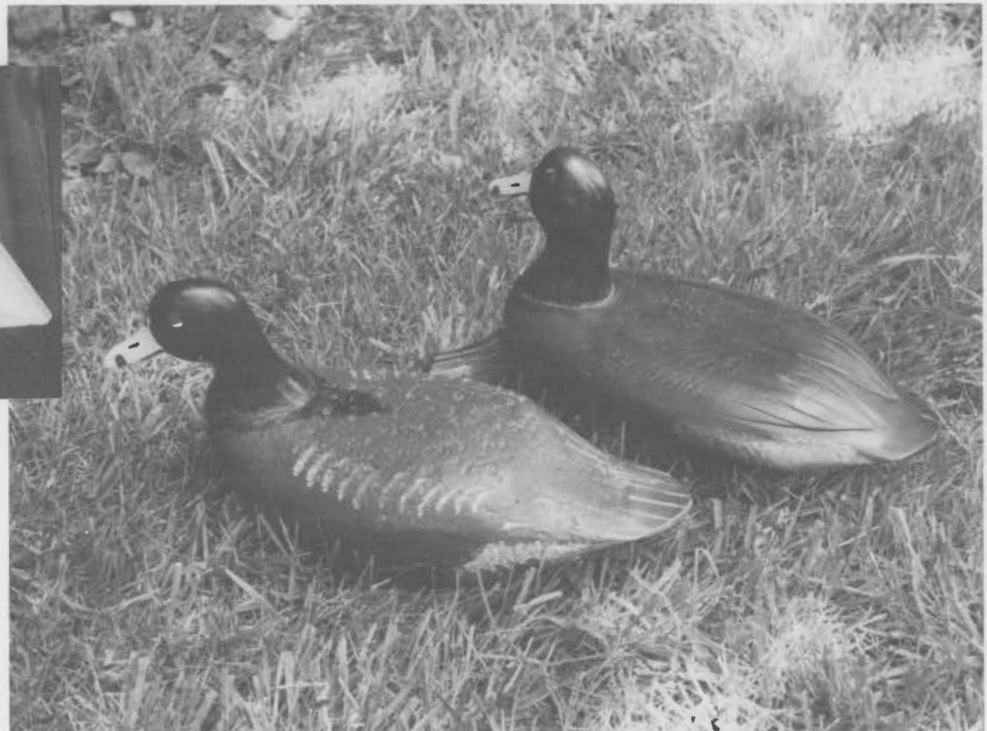
varying from picking to swimming poses. Bob Litzenburg believes that Hall's coots were more than just a confidence decoy, but were a 'confirmation of food' during this period of declining waterfowl populations and changes in the Bay's environment. Severin says that the coots would 'pick up celery nuts,' which made it easier for other ducks to feed. Baldpates, blackducks and canvasbacks would toll into these coots which were a 'a decoy class of their own.'

Severn's coots proved their worth more than once, especially one day in 1947 gunning with Johnny Schaeffer in Cara Cove. The blackducks were gun shy, so Hall decided to take his coots out to the cove 'just to see if they would do justice.' Within moments of laying out those coots in front of the offshore blind, the 'birds began to dart' and the gunners had a good shot, quickly gaining their limit. One of the men in Schaeffer's party, a Mr. Brown, called the coots 'Paul Parrots,' telling Severn to take special care of them when lifting the coots out of the water and to 'dry those coots off.' The next day, Severn did not want to stool them out until he could gauge the wind as he had the coots strung on a single line with one anchor. This would make the coots appear to swim, looking more 'alive and natural' according to Severn, as they would 'wave like a flag, beckoning ducks to toll into them.' Nevertheless, as the morning wore on and the ducks would not toll to the regular decoys, Schaeffer yelled for Severn to 'lay out those coots.' Hall still tired from the previous day's hunt ('running the pickup boat all day, transporting whiskey, etc.'), refused, saying 'they're my pets and I don't want to get their feet wet.' Schaeffer offered to buy them, to which Severn finally consented. It was not long after the coots were in the water that the gunners got their limit. An other hunter, Don Cole, Sr., who observed the shooting from a nearby blind, quietly contacted Hall to make him ten coots. Severn painted them in a 'fine fashion,' however, when Cole showed the coots to his wife, she told him to 'put those pretty ornaments in the windows — you are not putting those pretty decoys out in that muddy cove.'



Severn Hall Coot Decoys in wood and cork. Inset showing detail of Hall's alteration to Ward flat bottomed decoys.

HdeGDM photographs



Johnny Schaeffer had also purchased over 40 Ward Brothers balsa wood canvasbacks for bushwacking, but they could not handle the rough seas on the Bay during high winds. The problem puzzled Severn for only one night as he developed his keel concept during the next day as the solution. Adding a triangular keel containing a lead insert on a cedar base to these flat bottomed decoys gave them sufficient stability to 'fool the birds under all conditions.' Hall went on to make approximately 100 more canvasbacks himself using this keel.

Severn Hall was never a prolific decoy maker. By his own account he made close to 1,000 cork and wooden coots and canvasbacks, including numerous goose V-boards for his brother. However, it is his paint style which sets him apart from many other Susquehanna Flats decoy makers. Hall credits William Heverin for being the greatest influence on his style, especially his wing feathering details. Other decoy makers' paint styles also touched him, such as his glossy heads which he'd developed when re-working Ward Brothers' decoys with heads. Having repainted thousands of birds, Severn nonetheless established a unique style, the beauty of which delights all collectors today.

Concerning the art of decoy making, Severn's favorite carver was Bob McGraw, however, he hedges a little on such a definitive statement, by adding that William Heverin made 'the most natural decoy ever.' Basically Severn believes that it 'really doesn't matter what a decoy looks like because it is the maker's interpretation and a beauty by that right.'

Like so many other decoy makers, Severn Hall was drawn to this art form because of his love of gunning. After Severn would borrow decoy rigs to enhance his hunting in return for repairing and re-painting them, always returning the decoys 'in first class order.' When not painting or carving decoys, he built blinds and boats in preparation for the season.

He admits to baiting, surpassing limits and other 'outlaw' techniques, yet one senses a genuine love of the sport and waterfowl when listening to his stories. Severn actually gave up gunning for about three years because he became 'a little afraid of the law'. But it was hard for him to lay his gun down, especially since 'he was raised to do it.' Hall continued gunning until he left Maryland in 1978. Obviously his knowledge of gunning is immense and he must have been an excellent guide for sports who travelled to the Flats for its famous hunting.

Actually, Severn was a little cautious around 'sports', as they 'left too many cripples' that he had to 'row out and get' because they 'didn't know how to lead a bird' and were 'a little foolish with their fancy guns.' One 'green' hunter accidentally shot himself while gunning with Severn when Hall was on the water picking up birds. Although the man survived, thanks to Hall's quick reaction, his head wound left him with occasional headaches, of which he rarely complained. Severn called him 'surely a good sport'

Once sinkboxes were outlawed, Severn's a favorite gunning mode was "bushwacking" and his favorite partner was Jake Mowery of Lancaster, Pa. One day

Severn's favorite carver was Bob McGaw - he hedges a little on such a definitive statement - by adding that William Heverin made 'the most natural decoy ever.'

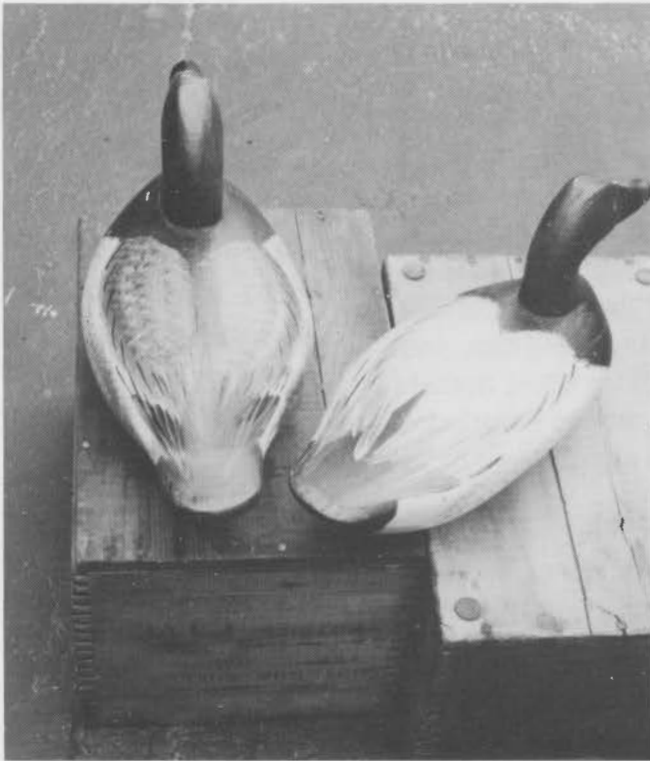
in 1946 Mowery (whom Severn credits as being another influence to his painting style) and a friend joined Hall bushwhacking on the Flats. Although it was a clear day they had 'bagged quite a few cans, redheads and other species,' but the oddest thing about the day Severn remembers was that there

were 'coots everywhere.' Of course, he had his own coot decoys out in the rig, which, Severn believes, prompted a large bunch of coots to swim right into his decoys. Severn, becoming excited told 'my sharp shooters- let's skull 'em.' The live birds held and then the three men 'roared out with muskets with all the plugs pulled out.' Jake and his friend were in the bow and kept re-loading because 'those darn coots seemed to be frozen in fright and their wings did not seem to work.' Hall yelled at his companions 'for God's sake stop shooting' as they 'had the water covered with dead coots and many cripples going off.'

Severn called it a perfect day's gunning as they had 'a bushel basket rounded up with birds without using any corn.'

Severn Hall is more than just a decoy painter. He like so many other carvers, is a symbol of the old days of gunning on the Susquehanna Flats. Hall is an amazing individual, to talk with him is like talking to a time gone by. He 'thought decoys all the time' and the 'rest of the time he thought about gunning.'

Severn Hall is a vibrant remembrance of the sky filled with birds and as a creator of a lovely painting style. He will be at the Haver de Grace Decoy Museum on July 18th to share his gunning stories and his painting technique during the museum's annual Duck Fair.



Canvasback Drake by Sam Barnes, Hen by Henry Lockard, painted by Severn Hall. HdeGDM photograph

A special exhibit of decoys painted by Severn Hall will be on display at the Decoy Museum from July 18 and will continue through September 1992.

As part of the celebration of Severn Hall's participation in the Duck Fair as Honorary Chairman, the Decoy Museum is presenting a special exhibit of decoys by numerous carvers of the Susquehanna Flats and originally painted or re-painted by Mr. Hall. This exhibit provides a fascinating look at the style of this individualistic Cecil County decoy maker and painter. Other decoys on exhibit include some rare pieces made by Mr. Hall and include both a wood and a cork coot.

The Decoy Museum extends much thanks to Mr. Evans McKinney, Mr. Bob Litzenberg, Mr. Lou Nolan and Mr. Tom Wiley for the loan of these decoys from their private collections.

About the author: **John V. Guarstein** is consultant to the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, Director of the War Memorial Museum of Virginia

The Decoy Museum received an award of \$1,800 for MAP-II (Museum Assessment Program for Collections) from the Institute of Museum Services. This federally funded program covers the cost of receiving guidance and advice on a variety of collections issues. This award will help to strengthen the Decoy Museum's collections management program by systematically analyzing specific activities that impact collections such as physical care in storage and on exhibit, preservation and conservation concerns, documentation and research. The museum is proud to receive this grant and to participate in this valuable program.

Recent Donations

The children of Francis and Jane Caponegro donated a unique collection of decoy heads by Robert G. Litzenberg to the Decoy Museum in a presentation ceremony immediately preceding the auction at the 11th annual Havre de Grace decoy Festival. The collection includes all the species of waterfowl made by Bob Litzenberg during his career as a decoy carver. This work is on display in the museum and will be placed with the collection of Mr. Litzenberg's decoys when space permits.



Robert G. Litzenberg presented a pair of miniature Canvasback decoys to the museum. These little beauties, one of 20 pair made by whittling during the fall and winter of 1991, will be on display with the Litzenberg collection.

Robert Litzenberg Heads donated during the Decoy Festival
HdeGDM photograph

Gunning Decoys by Joey Jobes

Joey Jobes is the youngest of Capt. Harry Jobes' three sons. He grew up around a decoy shop and continues the fine Upper Bay tradition. He currently works out of his own shop in Havre de Grace and is one of the finest young carvers in the area. His swans are unique for the feathering he applies and he produces a full line of gunning birds. Lamps and half size swan can be found in his shop as well.

Old Decoys Bought and Sold

126 South Stokes St.

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Joey Jobes applies feathers to a Black Head hen

DEFENDING THE BAY

Eagle populations continue to expand at APG, which has the largest eagle population in the northern Chesapeake Bay.
Jim Pottle photograph

Many people might wonder what a wildlife biologist does on an installation such as Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG), Md.

The work is enjoyable but very different from that done by most other wildlife biologists. Natural resources agencies have a primary function of resources management; whereas APG's primary function is defending the country and testing weapons we would need in the event of hostilities. The Army recognizes the value

of the natural resources at APG, but must complete its military mission. Wildlife managers on military reservations must therefore coordinate their programs into a military framework to accomplish their mission.

Only about 10% of the 72,000 plus acres of APG is developed and 90% is essentially open lands and waters. About 40,000 acres of APG are in the Chesapeake Bay. The land is a mixture of forest, fields, wetlands, marshes, beaver ponds, and brushlands. Within this maze of wild lands is an extensive network of test facilities. Army use of this acreage is the reason our lands are not covered with condominiums and marinas. This undeveloped land is a habitat base providing APG wildlife the home they need to flourish. The 114 bald eagles surveyed this past January and the average 1,100 deer annual harvest attest to the success of wildlife management at APG.

When a military biologist plans a new wildlife program, such as constructing a waterfowl pond, he or she must initially follow the same steps as any other biologist. Questions like what needs to be done, where to do it, how to fund the project, and why the project is needed must be answered. These are basic to any project development. At a military installation many other concerns must be considered such as if the site will affect the mission, will security be compromised, and if adjusting the scheduling of work will allow for perceived problems. All potentially affected organizations need to review and approve proposals to ensure initial evaluations are accurate. Many projects also get unplanned suggestions and funding to improve them. Unfortunately some projects also die in this review process. Most projects are supported, but the most limiting aspect of any project is funding projects. One thing is certain,



by James Pottle

the added coordination increases the time it takes to complete any project.

Military wildlife biologists must use original and innovative methods to accomplish work such as incorporating a military function to the project. One way is to have a project or management practice help in completing a specific test where both the military and wildlife benefit. Projects that would never otherwise be funded thus have a chance to become a reality. These projects benefit the military mission initially, and when a test is complete wildlife benefits over the long term.

Wildlife is not harmed, even in the initial period, although some projects require mitigation to comply with one or more environmental laws. These mitigations offer an excellent chance to improve habitats near a given project. As an example, one test required filling of a small wetland, and APG submitted a Section 404 Clean Water Act permit application. These permits require replacement of any lost wetlands. By selecting the site and type of mitigation, we not only replaced the wetlands, but improved on what was previously there. The wetlands now are better and their waterfowl values are higher so more waterfowl can use the same area. This helped us comply with the law but also helped APG fulfill its obligations under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The military has not normally been associated with wildlife management and other positive environmental programs in the past. APG faces many environmental issues. Past military practices have left a legacy of problems we are working to correct. The best technology of the 1940's, etc., does not compare to the technology of today. What were accepted practices then created problems for us today. We are cleaning up these past problem sites, the environment as a whole benefits, including wildlife.

APG supports more than 22,000 people every day. It is a small city and faces all the associated problems including waste generation, sewage treatment, and air emissions. We must comply with the environmental laws governing these areas of concern, and are doing so in close coordination with state and federal regulators.

In the past and today much of the wildlife management is supported from the permit fees paid for APG hunting permits. This is the same method used by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to fund their wildlife program. Because APG has a much smaller number of individuals to call on, harvests cannot exceed safe quotas, and the number of acres that can be safely used is limited, the funds generated this way are limited. Other funds support only a small percent of our wildlife program, limiting our potential.



Most of APG is open land, less than 10% is developed.
Jim Pottle photograph

This does not eliminate ideas or projects, it only changes the time when the work can begin. Our goal is to preserve wildlife resources and allow as much recreational benefit as we can.

Some of the public may feel the attitude of the average military leader is, "Let me do my mission, everything else is unimportant." Military leaders of today however realize the environment and wildlife legacy they are responsible for are important. Their mission is to defend both our natural and cultural heritage. If in the defense of that heritage they destroy it, the effort was wasted.

Wetlands and streams from APG help purify the water returning to the Chesapeake Bay.

Jim Pottle photograph



Any reversions to old patterns generally result from the frustrations associated with the added complexity mandated by this integrated effort. These temporary conditions are rare and getting rarer. In my experience any officer allowing environmental non-compliance is a thing of the past. In fact environmental compliance takes precedence over mission. The mission function is not eliminated, but its implementation is delayed and modified to get the job done while complying with all applicable environmental laws and regulations.

Fish and wildlife programs have benefited from the environmental movement through higher visibility, credibility, and

the increased funding. APG has an excellent program, but with this new visibility comes greater expectations for performance. APG is beginning to develop a volunteer program to expand its range of conservation projects. In this area of decreasing budgets and increasing expectations innovation will be essential to continuing APG's success. We also are setting up long term management plans to ensure continuity and direction of the overall program.

Being a wildlife biologist at APG has challenged all the skills I have learned in more than 20 years in the wildlife profession. This is a common condition to most wildlife professionals in the Department of Defense. The inherent need to integrate all wildlife work into an already complex military mission is a test of diplomacy, coordination, and teamwork, as well as to the application of basic biological principles. Time will determine the level of added success we achieve.

One thing is certain, the people of the APG community care deeply about the wildlife resources on the installation. They have put a lot of care and effort to support the wildlife program and continue to do so. By using the volunteer program we hope to increase the scope of our efforts and the level of participation. Long term planning and continued work will ensure wildlife will continue to prosper at APG. Fish and wildlife in the northern Chesapeake Bay will be the beneficiaries of our efforts, and the heritage we are defending.

About the author: **James J. Pottle**, APG's Fish and Wildlife Biologist is responsible for coordinating management of Aberdeen's wildlife species with the Proving Ground's mission. His 1987 Bald Eagle Management Plan resulted in continual expansion of the eagle population.

My father told me that he fired "that old gun once with your grandfather - but never again because it punched the heck out of me", recounted W. Robert Wilson, who really believes that his father was just scared of firing this 12 gauge Richards double barrel.

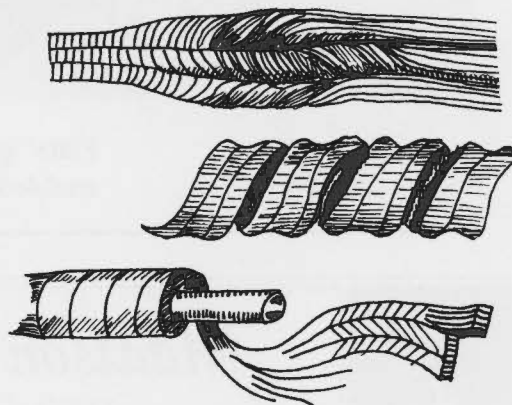
DAMASCUS DOUBLES

Since both his grandfather and his father had gunned the flats out of Havre de Grace sinkboxes, Wilson donated this Richards shotgun to the Decoy Museum where it will be used in the museum's upcoming "Gunning the Flats" exhibit gallery.

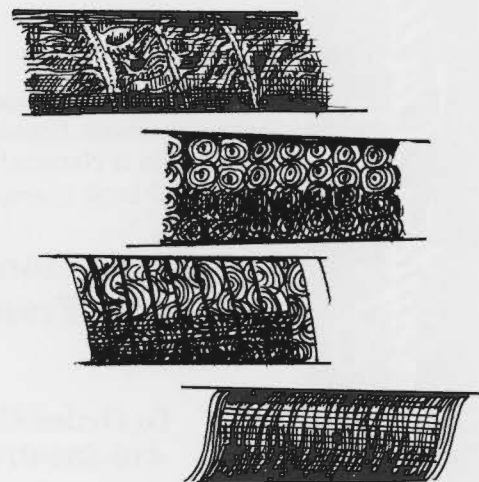
by John Quarstein

The Richards shotgun is an example of the final phase of blackpowder fowling pieces which were used from the 1870's until they were replaced by rapid fire guns using smokeless powder in the late 1890's. Commonly called "Damascus Doubles", this name has been applied to the entire group of double barrel, breech loading shotguns with non-fluid steel barrels. Most of these guns were made to accept black powder loaded shells only, and, on which the barrels seem to have a twist or spiral-like design in their finish.

The word "Damascus" has been applied to several types of barrels from this era, including twist and laminated, and was used to grade the quality of shotguns. More importantly however, "Damascus" refers to the specific technique of laminating or welding to give additional strength and decorative structure to barrels based on the sword blade making process which originated in the Syrian city of Damascus. This process featured alternating strips of iron and steel which were twisted and welded into larger rods and were then combined and coiled around a core and then welded. The more strands of steel and iron that are twisted before winding on the core (mandrel), the stronger and lighter the barrel could be made. The mandrel was then removed and the rough barrel filed, bored and finished. The final step was to acid etch the barrel on its exterior to bring out the design formed by the strips of twisted metal. There were four major techniques producing these barrels: single-iron Damascus, two-iron Damascus, three-iron stub Damascus and skelp; each of which left a particular design by which the barrel could be graded.

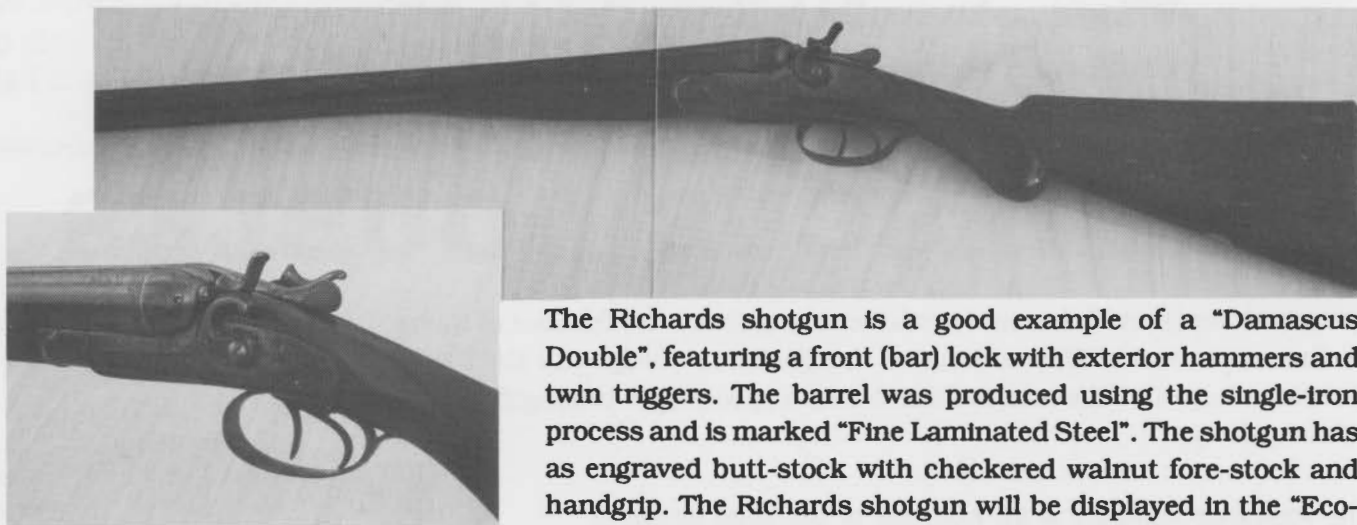


Steel and iron is laminated then coiled around a mandrel.
HdeGDM illustration



Single-Iron, Two-Iron, Three-Iron Damascus Barrel, and Skelp Barrel.
HdeGDM illustration

Beyond the eye appealing appearance of these barrels, the "Damascus" process achieved several important results including the manufacture of light weight barrels. This technique made possible the production of shotguns, especially double barrel types, with thin walled barrels thus making them less expensive, yet safe for use with black powder shells. The development of smokeless powder and self contained shells coupled with the resulting invention of pump action and autoloading guns quickly made the "Damascus" process outdated.



The Richards shotgun is a good example of a "Damascus Double", featuring a front (bar) lock with exterior hammers and twin triggers. The barrel was produced using the single-iron process and is marked "Fine Laminated Steel". The shotgun has as engraved butt-stock with checkered walnut fore-stock and handgrip. The Richards shotgun will be displayed in the "Economic and Technological Factors" section of the "Gunning the

Flats" gallery as it will help to detail the rapid technological advances which enabled hunters to harvest large numbers of waterfowl.

Madison Mitchell Wood Duck Decoy

Original Limited Edition Colored Etching- Edition Size 350

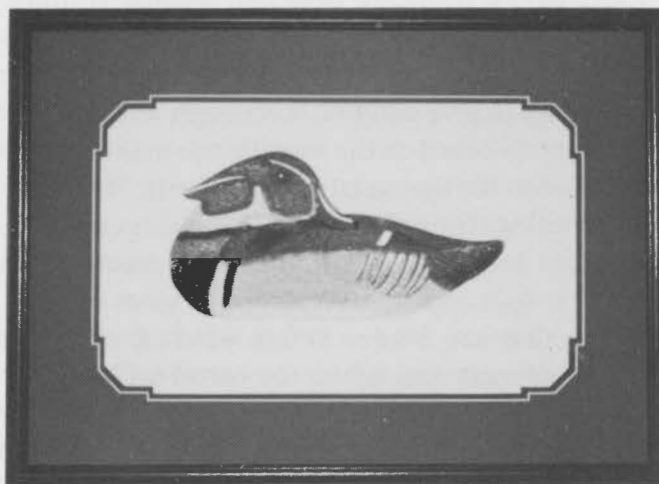
By Lawrence Snyder

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Rising Sun

Hunter's Sales Barn

**Special thanks to individuals and businesses
who donated services
and equipment to make
the Duck Fair a success.**

Severn Hall
Honorary Chairman
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Michael Feldman
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Bernie Bodt
Battery Gun
Vernon Bryant
Punt Gun
Chuck Maslin-Quackers
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Phillip Gilden, LPT
Office Services

**Thanks to all of the
volunteers who helped
organize and staff the
Duck Fair.**

Barbara Gilden, Chairwoman

11th Annual Decoy Festival Carving Competition Winners

Decorative Floating

Judges: Mark Strohman, Joe Kline, Ed Itter

Best in Show, \$500 Tim Bourque of Cutoff LA
2nd Place, \$150. Richard Smoker of Chrisfield MD
3rd Place, \$100. Arthur M. Franck of Baltimore MD

Decorative Lifesize

Judges: Mark Strohman, Carol Hopkins, Ken Clodfelter
Arthur "Whitey" Franck

Best of Show, \$500. Dan Williams of Reisterstown MD
2nd Place, \$150. Peggy & Ruth Lawrence of Easton MD
3rd Place, \$100. Pamela McCoy of Chantilly VA

Decorative Slick Decoy

Judges: John Berner, Bob Wilson

Best of Show, \$150. Jan Polite of New Castle DE
2nd, \$100., 3rd, \$75. Rusty Harvy of Odessa DE

Decorative Miniature

Judges:

Best of Show, 2nd & 3rd place, \$200.

Richard Schepis of Wall Township NJ

Gunning Decoy Contest

Judges: Mike Smyser, George Williams, Bob Wilson

Best of Show, \$300. William Kell II of York PA
2nd Place, \$150, Howard Gaines of Dover DE
3rd Place, (\$75.) Howerd Gaines of Dover DE

Canvasback Cove Contest

Judges: Ed Cassidy, Bob Wilson

1st Place Winner Carol Nasuta
2nd Place Barry Strohmeier
3rd Place Wayne M. Everd

Gunning Rig Contest

Judges: Dan Carson, Noble Mentzer, Wayne Thayer

1st Place Winner Bill Kell
2nd Place Michael Moore
3rd Place Mike Smyser
no cash awards

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(continued from p.15)

When I demonstrate the gun for museum events I use a 1/2 lb. of powder and several paper towels. This makes a crowd pleasing sound. The recoil of the boat is about 18 to 20 feet before going broadside. By that I mean that when the gun is fired the boat is pushed back in the water more than the length of the boat which is 16 feet, and the bow always pivots to one side. I think this is because the gun is mounted at a slight angle with the muzzle of the gun pointing to either the right or left.

It's pretty exciting to bring the past back to life. I feel that I have made a punt gun and skiff with as much authenticity as possible. Their patterns and history are true to Upper Bay traditions. I hope that you come to see the gun at the Duck Fair on July 18th where I will be firing during the day along with Bernie Bodt, who is demonstrating his reproduction battery gun.



A crowd of onlookers watch the gun's loading.
Howard Miles photograph

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Visit Mary's Studio and Gallery. Mary specializes in portraits, landscapes and still life including paintings of decoys by top Upper Chesapeake Bay carvers.



Mary H. Klunk graduated from Towson State University with a B.S. in Fine Arts. She has been an instructor in painting and drawing at both Harford and Cecil Community Colleges. She pursued graduate studies in painting at the Mitchell School of Fine Arts in Baltimore.

Education Programs

Tour Guide Training Workshops

Beginning in October the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum will host a series of docent (tour Guide) training programs. The program will be open to all museum docents and prospective docents of the Decoy Museum education program, as well as volunteer tour guides from organizations belonging to the North-East Maryland Museum Association (NEMMA).

"I love your museum and I'd like to volunteer to be a tour guide, but I don't know what to say to visitors." If this sounds like something you have said the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is offering a program just for you.

The workshops, **Interpretation: Basics and Techniques** will present a variety of educational approaches to presenting information to museum visitors. In order to activate our learning there will be time for questions and discussion, demonstrations and modeling of techniques, and participants will engage in role playing and practice skills on each other.

Docents are teachers in a special setting, the museum. If we think about our role as opening a door rather than filling a cup we will understand what it is to teach in a museum setting. Our goal is to stimulate interest and thinking in the visitor, and to awaken curiosity and the desire to learn more.

If you are interested in taking this course of study call or write the museum with your name, address and phone number. The first workshop will begin in October and the program will run monthly thereafter until June. Classes will be 2 hours and 45 minutes with a 20 minute break. Binders and instructional materials will be provided. A \$10. fee will be charged to cover the costs of printing and materials.

HAPPY 77th BIRTHDAY

BESSIE GILDEN

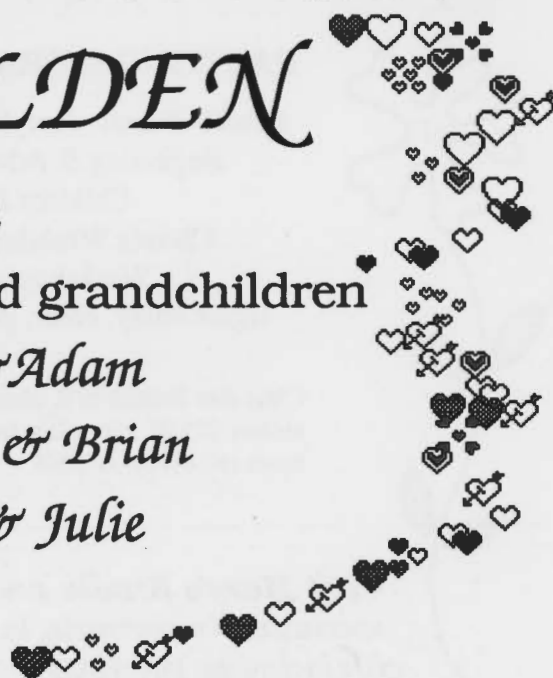
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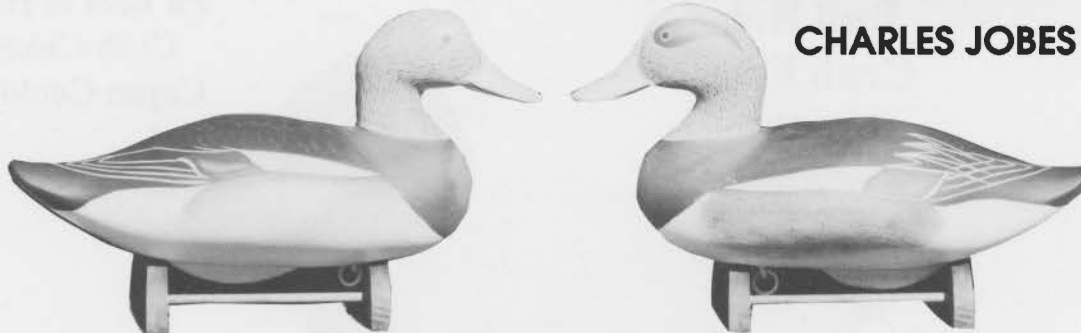
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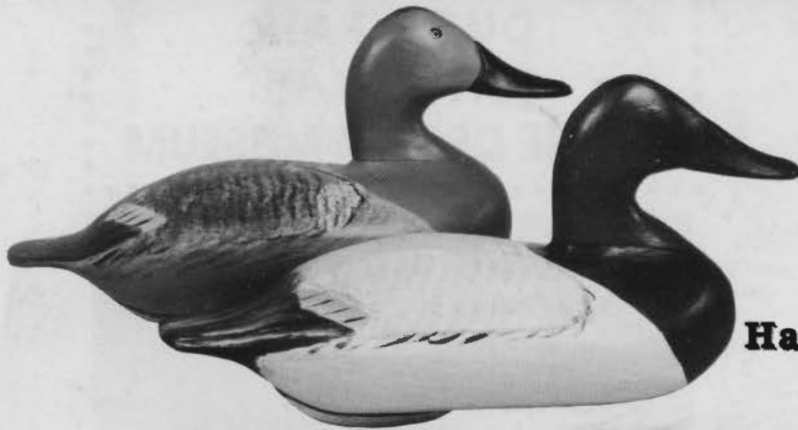
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