

# The Canvasback

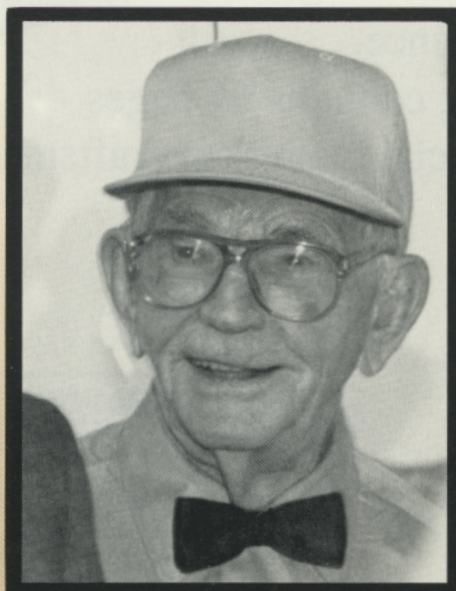
Winter 1993

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

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## Havre de Grace Decoy Museum



**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.

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### ON THE COVER

Louis Frisino's latest work, *Gunning the Flats*, has been created exclusively for the Decoy Museum. For more information on Frisino and his work see page 7.

### THE EDITOR'S DESK

As we celebrate the first anniversary of *The Canvasback*, it seems appropriate to take a moment to reflect upon the tremendous growth and development of our quarterly magazine over the past year.

From the beginning, *The Canvasback* has been very much an effort relying upon the skills and talents of many different individuals, all of whom deserve much credit for their hard work. As we enter the second year of publication, our goal continues to be to provide our members and subscribers with informative and entertaining articles and timely updates on activities at the Decoy Museum.

Those of us serving on the editorial committee encourage comments and suggestions from our readership, as we are committed to continuously improving the quality of *The Canvasback*. This issue is no exception, as I am sure you will notice the design, layout and content changes we have made. I am pleased to introduce Jeff McKaughan of Darlington Productions, who has joined *The Canvasback* team as desktop publisher and designer of this issue. Mel Stout, a recent contributing author; Joe Mitchell, Board Member; and Dotti Wise, museum volunteer; have generously volunteered to assist with editing of *The Canvasback*.

What makes *The Canvasback* very special is that it is an outstanding reminder of what can be accomplished in a small museum, with a great deal of teamwork and support.

*Karen Marshall*

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**The Canvasback**

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*From  
the  
President*



Dear Museum Member,

The Winter '93 edition marks the first anniversary issue of *The Canvasback* and I hope that you, our readers, are pleased with the magazine's growth. *The Canvasback* is an outstanding accomplishment for the Decoy Museum and is a symbol of our commitment to providing museum members with informative articles about decoys – their makers, their uses, and their environment. My thanks goes to all those writers, volunteers and advertisers who have helped to make this magazine such a success.

*The Canvasback* is just one facet of the museum's work to preserve our nation's decoy making heritage. Equally important are our efforts to develop programming which enables our patrons to learn from the makers themselves about their art form. This winter the museum will host several of these programs, ranging from Carvers Appreciation Day on February 27 to the enjoyable roast of Captain Harry Jobes on April 17th. On January 14th, the museum began a series of seminars called *Museum Magic* to help our patrons and volunteers learn more about artifact preservation and interpretation. Our decoy classes will also continue featuring Ken Blomquist as your guide to enhancing your painting or carving technique. See page 30 for a complete listing of dates for all upcoming museum events.

*The Canvasback*, our special programs, and the developing exhibit galleries are all part of the Decoy Museum's dedication to preserving the Chesapeake Bay's decoy making tradition. I hope that you will join with us to celebrate and learn more about this great American heritage.

The recent death of Madison Mitchell has saddened all us who knew and loved him. Madison was a rare man, a talented artist and a unique mentor who lived as a symbol of the old days of the Susquehanna Flats. He is a man whose genuine care for others will never be forgotten. Madison will always be living on in our minds each time we look at one of his beautiful decoys. Through his contributions, the Decoy Museum will keep his memory alive, sharing with others his love of waterfowl and decoys.

*Allen J. Fair*  
President, Board of Directors



# Walker Decoys

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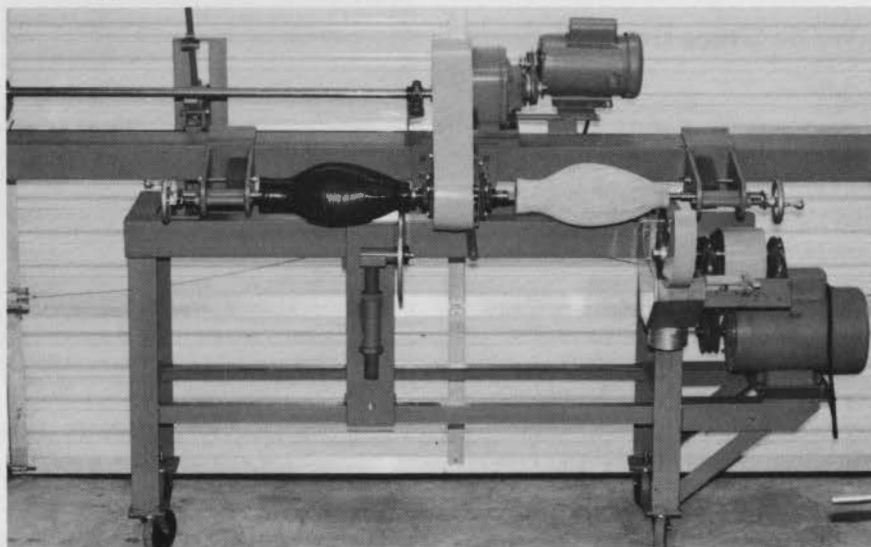
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Red Head	\$40 ea	Bald Pates	\$40 ea	Canada Goose	\$80 ea
Bufflehead	\$40 ea	Common Mergansers	\$130 pr	Loons	\$60 ea
Goldeneye	\$40 ea	Red-breasted Merganser	\$130 pr	Pigeons	\$35 ea
Pintail	\$40 ea	Hooded Merganser	\$130 pr	Doves	\$35 ea
Ringneck	\$40 ea	Wood Ducks	\$350 pr	Swan Flat-Bottom	\$350 ea
Blue Wing Teal	\$40 ea	Gadwall	\$50 ea	Swan With Keel	\$400 ea
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Canvasback	\$50 ea	1/2 size Swan Lamp	\$120 ea		
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## Volunteer Spotlight

### Decoy Museum Volunteer Association Begun

The Decoy Museum kicked off 1993 with a volunteer reception on January 7th. Bill Smart, Volunteer Chairman and Karen Marshall, Museum Manager, hosted the evening event to announce the creation of a volunteer association and introduce new volunteer opportunities at the Decoy Museum. The reception was also a way for us to say thanks to all of the volunteers who have given their time to the museum.

Many different positions are available for volunteers at the Decoy Museum: adult and school tour guides, outreach educational programs, guest carvers, special event assistants, curatorial assistants, gift shop clerks, information desk assistants, office aides, grounds maintenance, and special project assistants. Time commitments vary for each of these positions. Membership in the Volunteer Association gives you special benefits, and enables the museum to provide quality educational opportunities.

If you would like to volunteer and become a member of the Decoy Museum Volunteer Association, please call Karen Marshall at the Decoy Museum 410-939-3739, and she will gladly provide you with information and an application form.

### Weekend Carving Demonstrations

at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

February 6,	Joe Cook	April 4,	Robert Litzenberg
February 7,	Nick Birster	April 10,	Capt. Harry Jobes
February 13,	Butch & Mary Carol Larrimore	April 11,	CLOSED for Easter
February 14,	Butch & Mary Carol Larrimore	April 17,	Leonard Burcham
February 20,	Ed Itter	April 18,	Patrick Vincenti
February 21,	Art Boxleitner	April 24,	Butch & Mary Carol Larrimore
February 27,	Mike Dedekind	April 25,	Butch & Mary Carol Larrimore
February 28,	Joey Jobes		
March 6,	Dan Carson	May 1,	Charles Bryan
March 7,	Joey Jobes	May 2,	Ernie Mauldin
March 13,	Patrick Vincenti	May 8,	Annual Decoy Festival
March 14,	Bryon Bodt	May 9,	Annual Decoy Festival
March 20,	Noble Mentzer	May 15,	Capt. Roger Urie
March 21,	Harold Goodman	May 16,	Harold Goodman
March 27,	Ken Clodfelter	May 22,	Henry Gonzalez
March 28,	Vernon Bryant	May 23,	Jim Pierce
		May 29,	Steve Lay
April 3,	Capt. Harry Jobes	May 30,	Ed Watts

*Ellie Coale, one of  
the many outstanding  
volunteers at the Decoy Museum.*



Visit the Decoy Museum this February, March, and April to see demonstrations of contemporary decoy carvers and waterfowl artists. Enjoy this unique opportunity to meet and talk with these wonderful artists.



# LOUIS FRISINO

First Artist of the Year  
12th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy Festival

The Decoy Museum has named the acclaimed wildlife artist, Louis Frisino as the first Artist of the Year for the 12th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy Festival and has commissioned him to do a special limited edition print, "Gunning the Flats," a vivid image of oldtime canvasback shooting on the Susquehanna Flats, to become available for sale exclusively at the Decoy Museum in late April.

Frisino, a former commercial artist with the *News American*, graduated with honors from the Maryland Institute of Art, and the Maryland School for the Deaf. Since 1967, he has been producing waterfowl art with unbelievable realism, capturing the essence of various birds on canvas using watercolors, acrylics, and mixed media. Frisino has won numerous waterfowl art contests, more recently the 1986/87 Maryland, 1989 North Carolina, and 1990 West Virginia Duck Stamp Contests. In 1992 his work was selected as one of the top ten Federal Duck Stamp Contest entries.

The Decoy Museum is fortunate to be able to share with its members and patrons this exclusive offering of Mr. Frisino's work. 650 prints will be issued of this remembrance of the old days of duck hunting, with the proceeds benefitting the Decoy Museum's upcoming *Gunning the Flats* exhibit gallery.

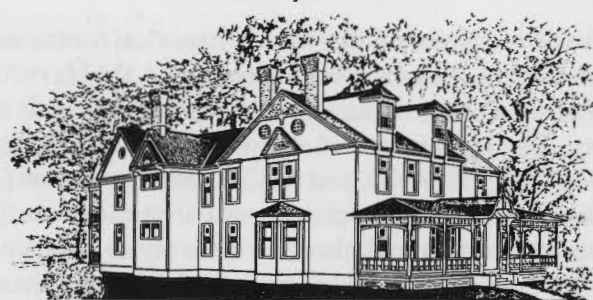
The prints will be available in the following quantities and formats, all signed and numbered:

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50 Medallion Numbered Prints	(\$150)
550 Numbered and Signed Prints	(\$100)

Contact the museum today to reserve your own "Gunning the Flats" print. Prints should be available by the end of April, 1993. Museum members will receive a 10% discount.

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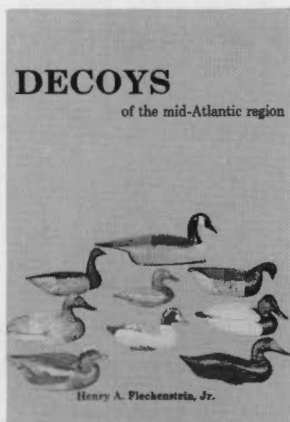


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## DECOYS OF THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION

by  
Henry A. Fleckenstein, Jr.

What better book to review in the debut of *The Canvasback* book review section than Mr. Fleckenstein's informative and educational work detailing decoys of the mid-atlantic region? A native of Harford County, Maryland, Mr. Fleckenstein has resided on the Eastern Shore since 1950. His interest and love affair with decoys began in 1960 and since that time he has become one of the foremost decoy authorities on the East Coast. This only seems like a natural progression for the son of a Chesapeake Bay waterman. Included among Mr. Fleckenstein's contributions to the decoy world is the fact that he has authored five books and written numerous decoy and gunning articles for national and local publications.



Here in Mr. Fleckenstein's first work (published in 1978), he provides over 750 pictures of decoys, various pen and ink illustrations and separate chapters on each of the following regions; New Jersey Coast, Delaware River, Susquehanna Flats, Chesapeake Bay, and Eastern Shore of Virginia, Back Bay-Currituck Sound. This volume also includes chapters on the history of decoys, carvers and collecting, restoring, and values (naturally the values section is somewhat outdated).

Each of Mr. Fleckenstein's regional chapters is introduced with an informative rendering of the area's significant gunning techniques, renowned carvers, and waterfowl species most common to the area. The reader is thoroughly educated as to the uniqueness of each region's historical contribution to decoy folk art and water fowl gunning. There are decoy pictures - and pictures - and pictures! It's easy to understand why seasoned collectors value this work as an essential part of their libraries. Moreover, the new collector readily adopts this book as "a decoy collector's bible."

Mr. Fleckenstein has filled his book with a myriad of little known historical comments. He ties in the relationships between carvers, the uniqueness of styles (i.e. the Havre de Grace school vs. Cecil County school of carving), regional and carver identification by style, weight, painting, and shape. The significance of decoy owner identification brands (i.e. SUSQUEHANNA, CARROLL'S ISLAND, and RECKLESS) also makes for interesting reading. I particularly like the decoy maker chapter where he addresses the types of species carved by the respective maker and also how their styles may have changed through the years. A perfect example is Bob McGraw's transition from hand chopped decoys to machine bodies in 1924. This is significant in approximating the decoy's age.

This publication is a superb reference for anyone who shares an interest in the history, collecting, or carving of working decoys from the mid-Atlantic region. Although a publishing date has not yet been established, Mr. Fleckenstein is presently researching his next book which will be an extensive study devoted to Maryland decoys.

*Decoys of the Mid-Atlantic Region* is 279 pages and was published in 1979 by Schiffer Publishing, Ltd. It was originally released in hard cover. The hard cover edition is now out of print and difficult to find, however, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum does have a limited number of this version available. Each of these editions are signed by the author and eight Chesapeake Bay area carvers, including R. Madison Mitchell.

Reviewed By  
Bill Smart



# Carvers Appreciation Day

Museum  
Special Event

One of the most important roles that the Decoy Museum plays as an educational institution is the promotion of decoy carving. Whether decorative or working, decoys are perhaps the truest American art form, reflecting an impelling simplicity of design and artistic beauty which stands as an important Chesapeake Bay cultural symbol. The museum exhibits examples of many famous carvers' work, both past and present, however it also strives to support the efforts of younger or lesser known decoy makers. It is contemporary artists who deserve attention, as they are the ones who will carry on the decoy making tradition.

The Decoy Museum is fortunate to have several artists, like Ernie Mills and John Simpers, who "set up shop" each weekend to help visitors interpret carving and painting techniques. In addition to this weekend program, carvers such as Bryon Bodt and Henry Gonzales, give their time and expertise to assist museum staff present learning activities for area schools. It is amazing to watch students interact with these decoy makers during class sessions as they learn by seeing and doing. These live demonstrations are among the most important components of the museum's operations because they bring to life the art of the decoy.

Carvers Appreciation Day is a way for the museum to give something back to those individuals who give their energies to help the Decoy Museum teach its patrons about how and why decoys are made. Its primary focus is to promote young carvers, exposing them to more people with the hope that they will continue "making wood chips." The museum feels obligated to play a significant role in promoting the continuation of the decoy carving art form and hopes to achieve this goal through its carving classes, weekend demonstrations, and classroom interpretive programs. By involving more decoy makers in these programs, the museum hopes that the public will gain a greater appreciation of these contemporary carvers' work.

The 1993 Carvers Appreciation Day will be held on February 27th on the museum's upper level. It will feature a wine and cheese reception beginning at 6:30 p.m. followed by a talk by the noted carver Robert Biddle on "Decoy Collecting." At 8:30 p.m., the Volunteer Carver of the Year Award will be given to the artist who has made a significant contribution to museum programming. A short, live auction will then be held featuring works by makers including Ken Clodfelter, Butch and Mary Carol Larrimore, and Wayne Thayer.

Carvers Appreciation Day is one small way for the museum to say thanks to all of the decoy makers who have helped it grow so rapidly. It is also an opportunity for the museum's patrons to join with the museum in honoring those artists who have given the decoy such an important place in American art.

## Come and Meet the Carvers!



The 1993 Carvers Appreciation Day is the result of several dedicated board members and volunteers who are working to enhance museum interpretative activities and special events. A much deserved thanks goes to Chairman Ed Watts, and his supporting cast of Norm Smith, Ralph Broth, Mert Street, Sherry Ramey, and Bob Wilson whose volunteer efforts match those of our dedicated carvers.

By John V. Quarstein  
and  
Ed Watts, Chair  
Carvers Appreciation Day

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# Bob Biddle

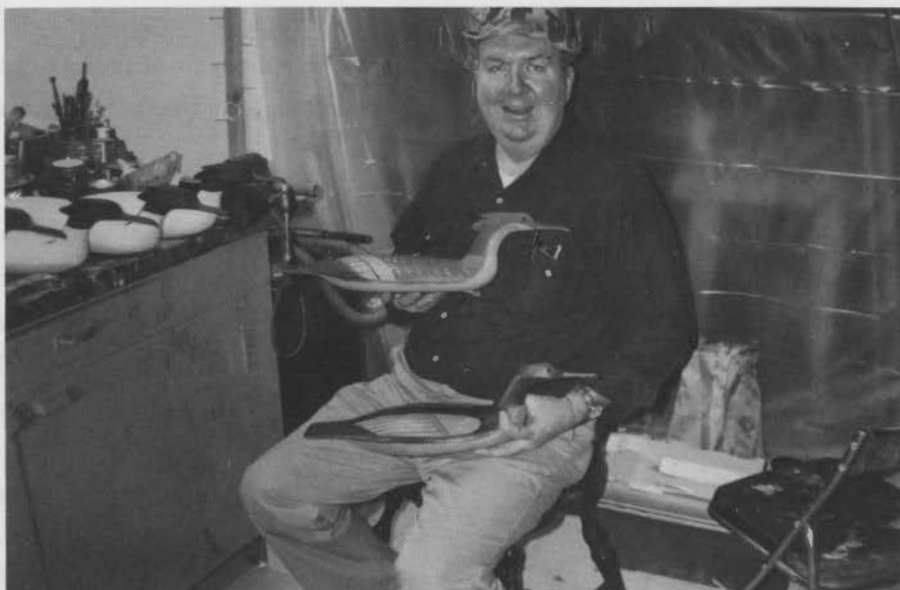
## Decoy Carver and Collector

The guest speaker for Carvers Appreciation Day is decoy maker Bob Biddle of Media, Pennsylvania. Biddle is no stranger to the Susquehanna Flats, as he was born in North East, Maryland, in 1937, and grew up at Port Herman on the Elk River. He began hunting at the age of 14, quickly becoming a decoy maker due to his father's reluctance to let Bob use his decoys fearing his son would not take proper care of them. Bob Biddle is now an avid collector of antique decoys and the maker of charming birds that delight many collectors.

Biddle first began creating his own designs as a teenager using wood found along the Elk River. If he had a big piece of wood, he made a big decoy. Since the 1960's he has produced between 3,000-4,000 decorative and hunting decoys which are noted for their smooth, classic lines. Bob makes all of his decoys by hand, using no power tools except a bandsaw, and his working birds often follow regional styles and needs. Form following function is the key to his designs such as those he has made for the Williams family of Currituck Sound in South Carolina. The shallow depth of this sound requires a special "floatability factor," necessitating Biddle to make hollow bodies with a pronounced keel. His observations of waterfowl such as canvasbacks led him to carve his "cans" always displaying that proud, high headed look.

Functionality follows again in his paint style, which favors older makers in that it features simplicity of paint. No two birds are finished alike as Biddle mixes his paint from a palette, coloring each decoy differently but following the same pattern. He believes that his work is not based on any other maker, but on his own observations of the birds themselves. recreating the personality of the bird is his main goal.

*Bob Biddle holding two of his American mergansers. Sitting on the workbench are partially completed red breasted merganser drakes.*



By  
John V. Quarstein

---

Biddle's favorite species to carve are American and Red-breasted Mergansers. He is fascinated by their wildness and man's inability to domesticate them. He notes that in nature mergansers have sleek lines with an impelling, racy look that makes them appear to be moving even when still. Biddle believes that they have a scared look, their attitude being one of mistrust. Bob strives to recreate this slick image of mergansers by leaning them forward, giving them a low profile in the water with their tails almost touching the water. He carves two sizes of mergansers; a standard life size version and an oversized example which changes with each decoy he creates. Biddle sometimes uses a horsehair crest on the heads of the oversize Red-breasted mergansers he makes.

Bob Biddle feels that decoys are as distinctive as handwriting, reflecting the maker's interpretation of individual waterfowl. He believes that a working decoy must convey the "attitude" of the bird it is intended to lure. The decoy's personality is more important than exact coloration, eye placement more effective than eye size and silhouette on the water more important than decoy size. He reminds other makers to think how a bird sits in the water and why other of his species would want to join him there. Obviously, Biddle believes that recreating the bird's presence and profile are the keys to a successful decoy.

Like so many other carvers, Biddle is an avid waterfowler, having hunted up and down the East Coast, which accounts for the various working decoy creations he has made. Bob still hunts, but now it is primarily just to be out there "watching the birds work" and reminiscing about the days of gunning gone by. His most memorable hunt was with Colonel Joseph Hall at Supawna Meadows Farm in New Jersey. They were gunning for pintails on a rainy day and Bob remembers there being so many anxious birds, coming from so many directions, that it was like an airport. With five flocks at five levels ready to pitch into the marsh, Biddle and Hall could not help but get their limit, only taking pintail drakes.

Beyond being a noted maker and lifelong hunter, Bob Biddle is a true scholar of this American art form. Bob collects antique decoys and is currently preparing a book on the noted Virginia Eastern Shore carver, Ira Hudson. Hudson is his favorite old master as Ira's decoys display all those important qualities of artistic sense and a certain personality that must have been part of the maker himself. His favorite Susquehanna Flats carvers are Scott Jackson and Leonard Pryor based on his observations of their canvasbacks which feature the "best looking heads." Older decoys fascinate him because the makers "knew their ducks" and produced efficient, functional designs that



exist today as folk art treasures.

The Decoy Museum is very fortunate to have this special artist as the featured speaker during Carvers Appreciation Day. Bob will touch on the art of carving which should be very interesting as he is an excellent teacher, having trained numerous carvers, including his brother-in-law, Bill Veasey. The primary focus of the talk will be on the regional aspects of decoy collecting; interpreting how decoys of old were designed only for local use due to environmental, transportation, and communication factors. The museum invites all of its patrons and friends to join with it on February 27th to enjoy Bob Biddle's expertise and knowledge about decoy collecting.

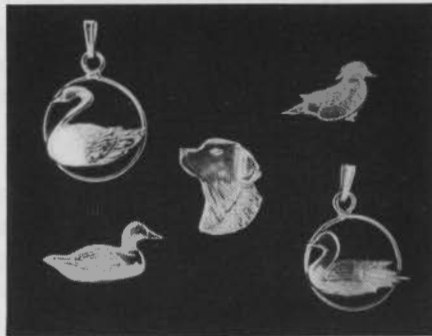
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## R. Madison Mitchell

March 11, 1901-January 14, 1993

R. Madison Mitchell, one of the most noted and prolific Chesapeake Bay decoy makers died on January 14, 1993, at the age of 91. Mitchell was the dean of Havre de Grace decoy makers, influencing several generations of carvers and was one of the major forces behind the establishment of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. His legacy as an artist will live on thanks to the beautiful decoys he created, and the lasting friendships he forged throughout the decoy community. "He was the last of the decoy masters," said Harry Jobes, who worked with Mitchell for 28 years, "and his passing marks the end of an era."

Robert Madison Mitchell was born on March 11, 1901 at Oakington, near Swan Creek, in Harford County, Maryland. He attended Havre de Grace Elementary and High Schools, enrolling in Baltimore Business College in January, 1918, living above his uncle's funeral parlor. After a brief period working at the General Motors Plant in Pontiac, Michigan, Mitchell returned to Harford County in 1920. In 1922, he received his license as an embalmer and funeral director. Opening his own funeral business, he looked to find a suitable outlet for his free time and in 1924 he began producing decoys with his mother's cousin, Sam Barnes. Barnes' death two years later left Madison with Sam's decoy orders for the upcoming gunning season. This situation was further complicated when Florence, Sam Barnes' daughter, married and moved to Philadelphia. As she had painted decoys for her father, Mitchell had to learn to paint his own decoys in time to fill Barnes' orders.

Obviously, he was successful (with a little help from Capt. Billy Moore) and in 1929 he turned away from Barnes' hand chopping technique when he built his own decoy making machine. By 1932 Madison rebuilt his shop, enhancing his paint style and expanding his variety of decoys. Despite changes in waterfowl populations and gunning techniques, Mitchell continued to increase production from the 1940's through the 1960's. He began to produce a wider range of birds, including Wood Ducks, Mourning

Doves, and Pigeons, as well as decoy lamps, Canada Goose scooters, and cast iron bookends. Madison Mitchell sold his shop to Bill Collins in 1979 and retired from carving and painting decoys due to failing eyesight in 1985.

By  
John V. Quarstein

Madison Mitchell produced over 100,000 decoys during his career and his



decoys are now highly sought after by collectors. His birds have a classic design based on the work of the early Havre de Grace carver, Daddy Holly, but with subtle body changes which made Mitchell's decoys easier to produce yet retaining sharp and clean lines. Madison's success, according to Robert "Bob" G. Litzenberg, was based on his making "very serviceable decoys which could stand rough use in gunning rigs and looked good overboard; having the dual ability of riding well in rough water while attracting ducks. He made a decoy a working man could afford."

Mitchell primarily used cedar or white pine for his decoys, all bodies being lathe turned with the heads hand carved. He did produce some Cork Black Ducks and Canada Geese. He developed an intricate paint style, using a fish-oil base, flatpaint which he mixed himself. Using the wet on wet technique, Madison was especially noted for his unique feathering.

Author and decoy maker Evans McKinney regards Madison Mitchell's work to be "of the highest quality" and Steve Ward called Mitchell's canvasbacks the "best on the Chesapeake Bay."

Although Madison Mitchell will always be remembered for his beautiful decoys, perhaps his greatest and most everlasting influence was his work with young carvers from the Havre de Grace area. "He was a true master, giving so freely of his time and knowledge" reflected former Mitchell student Jimmy Pierce. Mitchell employed numerous boys to help him during afternoons and summer months, turning and sanding bodies, making heads, priming, attaching ballast weights, and all the other tasks required to make a finished decoy. The names include some of today's leading makers such as Charlie "Speed" Joiner, Jimmy Pierce, Harry Jobs, Bill Collins, Pat Vincenti, Steve Lay, and a host of others. Jimmy Pierce sums up Mitchell's teaching relationships with the comment, "He was like a father to us. Anything he knew he shared and he taught me everything I ever knew about decoy making."

R. Madison Mitchell was a true gentleman. "To know him was to enrich your life," said decoy dealer and collector Duane Henry. Mitchell's life was filled with his kindness and generosity to others. His daughter, Madelyn Shank, called her father "Very gentle. He never said an unkind word about anyone and would give someone the shirt off his back." An artist, a teacher, and a gentleman, R. Madison Mitchell "refined and perfected the Havre de Grace decoy style," according to noted historian C. John Sullivan, "and his work spans the time of the sinkbox and market gunning to the decorative decoys of today." Madison Mitchell will always be cherished by those who are fortunate to own his decoys or to have known him and by the continued work of those decoy makers he trained and touched.

## R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Trust, Inc.

During the last ten years of his life, R. Madison Mitchell was dedicated to preserving the tremendous traditions of Susquehanna Flats decoy making by his work on behalf of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. In honor of his efforts, the Mitchell family has established the R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Trust, Inc., whose sole purpose is to support the Decoy Museum's acquisition, preservation, and interpretation of decoys. Your contribution in honor of Madison Mitchell will ensure the decoy making legacy epitomized by him will be continued. Please make your check payable to the R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Trust, Inc., and send it to the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, P.O. Box A, Havre de Grace, Maryland 21078.

# The Deadliest Device

The first glimpse of a sink box would not inspire a gunner with confidence. These boxes, or batteries, were constructed on the principle of Ericson's monitor, to show as little above the water as possible. Imagine a broad platform, ten feet long by six feet wide, with a coffin let into the center until it was flush around the deck, and you will have a very correct notion of a sink box. Around the edge of the platform there was a framework, over which canvas was stretched. This minimized the wash of the waves over the floating structure.

Decoys were placed around the box numbering from a few hundred to many hundred. Sufficient numbers of cast iron flat bottom sink box decoys were placed around the frame to assist in lowering the box to a level capable of concealing the reclined gunner from the approaching fowl. Wooden flat bottom wing ducks were placed on the canvas covered wings to further disguise the gunner. The sink box was quite simply an appliance, which by placing the gunner below the surface of the water, prevented the ducks from seeing him until the proper moment.

The sink box was designed to do one thing: allow the duck hunter to kill ducks; and that it did, oh, so well. It placed the hunter in the middle of the best duck shooting grounds in the country. It kept him out of view and concealed him from the waterfowl better than any other means. It did these things so well that according to an article in a Baltimore newspaper on November 12, 1880, "that it is estimated in Havre de Grace by parties who handle ducks for the New York Market, 10,000 ducks were shot on the first Monday of November."

It was reported that on that first day of the season in 1880, William H.

Text and  
Photos by  
C. John Sullivan

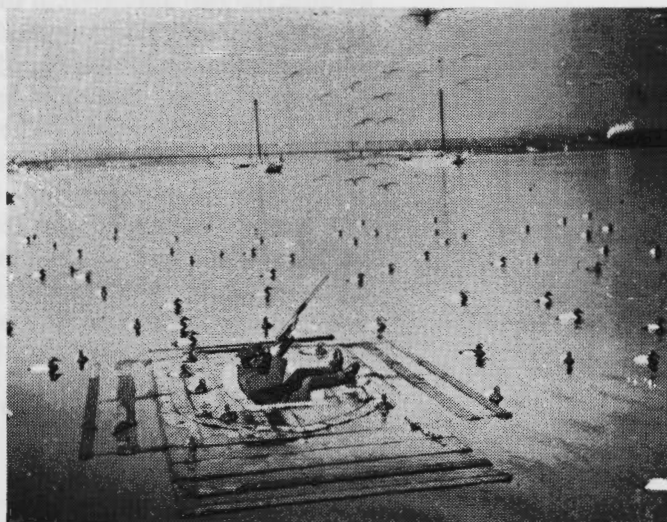


Dobson of Havre de Grace performed the feat of killing 501 ducks with his double barrel shotgun. Mr. Dobson had started his day with two shotguns but accidentally burst the barrel of one gun on his very first shot. This was not a good day for the ducks but an awfully good day for Mr. Dobson. While a day like this would no doubt be the exception, one must keep in mind that Dobson was shooting ducks as his livelihood, and not just for sport. Aside from shooting ducks for the market, wealthy sports also utilized the box.

The *Rough Ashlar*, a gunning scow from Havre de Grace, was owned by a group of sports from Philadelphia. It sailed the Susquehanna Flats from 1883 to 1893 under the same ownership. Its ten members and Captain had only five years gunning out of the ten years total, that they killed more ducks in the entire season than Dobson did on that day in 1880. They gunned the "box," bush-whacked and occasionally shot a "Canvas" off the scow. Their gunning log, a formal commercially printed affair, lists: "Members Shooting," "Guests," "Number of Ducks Killed (by species)," but most importantly, "Remarks." The remarks section always listed the weather conditions, gunning location, and time "put out and taken up," who was in the box and for how long. The total ducks killed by this group of sports was 5,019 over this ten-year period. My kind of gunning was in their first season, 1883, the journal entry reads: "Raining like hell— finished a bottle of Burgundy. Ducks not flying but squatting well on the wake at a distance. N by NE wind. Member W.B. Dixon and Guest John Thayer in the box most of the day."<sup>1</sup>

A day in a "box" was not so pleasant with conditions such as this. A gunner in his box was very much alone. When the rains came he got wet and was forced to sit or lie in inches of water. Snow and sleet showed no mercy and with winds driving the waves over the flaps a bailing scoop was literally a life saver. Under such conditions accidents did happen. Capt. Billy Moore of the scow *Reckless* lost his arm in a sink box shooting accident. It was always necessary for the lay boat or pick up boat to be lying near, for some days out of sheer excitement, hunters could die right in their boxes or accidentally shoot themselves or shoot holes in the box.

"Uncle" Bill Armour who was 75 in 1926 said this in an interview for the Baltimore Sun Paper Magazine Section: "Isn't sink box shooting a great hardship?" Uncle Billy was asked. "It sure is," was the answer. "When it's freezing cold its pretty bad down on these flats. A couple years ago two men, brothers, were frozen out by the Grasspatch, that little island you see right there."<sup>2</sup>



During their heyday there were about 50 sink box rigs operating out of Havre de Grace on the Flats. A sink box license cost fifty dollars, and a sneak-boat license twenty dollars in 1894. Shooting was prohibited except on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The sink box license was assigned to the boat rather than to the hunter. This allowed for one license to cover several sink boxes, if they all set out from the same boat.

The state and county laws, covering the best territory on the Chesapeake and its tributaries, were so stringent that duck shooting passed almost exclusively into the hands of two classes of men— professional gunners and rich sportsmen from Philadelphia, New York, and New England.<sup>3</sup>

In the personal gunning log kept by Henry Keen and Joel Pusey, they logged in a pretty good day of "boxing" on November 19, 1926. This day they killed 712



*"The sink box... is a wholesale murdering sort of thing and has little 'sport' about it."*

Canvasback in a double stool off "The Commodores" (now Oakington).<sup>4</sup>

Ferdinand C. Latrobe wrote this of the sink box in the Maryland Conservationist:

*"The sink box is in reality a floating blind. It is nothing more than an anchored box or coffin with hinged flaps to keep the water from invading it. It is a wholesale murdering sort of thing and has little 'sport' about it."*

The average good shot who was accustomed to shooting from a box would kill more birds than a comparable shot in a blind or shooting from the bar in the style known as "pass shooting." There were several reasons for this. Sink box shooting was practiced primarily on the Susquehanna Flats, the preferred location for tens of thousands of ducks to congregate for feeding on the lush beds of wild celery. The shooter had the best possible camouflage and the birds were shot at closer range.

The exceptional effectiveness of the sink box and the increasing awareness of early environmentalists led to stricter and stricter water fowling regulations. Finally, a proclamation issued by the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, on July 30, 1935 produced the strictest regulation ever. Based upon recommendations of the U.S. Biological Survey and Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, relative to the taking of migratory birds, the sink box was outlawed.<sup>5</sup>

The elimination of the sink box caused quite a turmoil among the gunners who used the device. It was such a serious blow since it was impossible to secure a stationary blind on the Susquehanna Flats and the sink box was the most successful of all means of water fowling. Gunners from Harford, Cecil, and Kent counties turned out on December 6, 1935 to protest the new regulations. State Senator Harold E. Coburn of Cecil County called the meeting. Articles against the ban appeared in the local newspapers. The Baltimore Sun ran an article entitled: "Gloom on the Susquehanna Flats." The outcry did not impact the legislation and the Havre de Grace Republican published a story with this doomsday byline: "Only a few gunners try their luck for ducks on the opening day of the 1935-36 season." The State Game Division had reported an estimated quarter million ducks in the vicinity of the Flats on that opening day.

I have the opportunity to view a sink box each and every day of my life. The box of Captain Joseph Heisler of Charlestown, Cecil County Maryland reclines on the wall of my den. The only beauty to such an artifact is in its construction, the way in which it fits together, the wood, copper nails and hand-wrought hardware, and its design, one of pure function.

Knowing where this box was used and by whom affords me the enjoyment of actually "feeling" the history and action of that bygone era: an era in which these "deadly devices" compelled great days of the Susquehanna Flats.

#### Endnotes:

1 Maryland Historical Society MS2552, Duck Hunting Record Book, Manuscripts Division, MD Hist. Soc. Library.

2 "Ducking Days Along the Susquehanna," The Baltimore Sun Magazine, December 5, 1926.

3 "Duck Shooting in Maryland," Cosmopolitan, November 1894.

4 Keen, H. and Pusey, J. Personal Gunning Log 1925-1926 Seasons.

5 Amending Regulations on Migratory Game Birds by the President of the United States of America (No. 2130); Regulation 3.

## Open Letter to Members and Friends of the Decoy Museum

I am presently working on this year's unique edition of the **1993 HAVRE de GRACE DECOY FESTIVAL BOOKLET**. Once again, by popular demand, souvenir copies will be distributed with ticket purchases to the show, May 7th, 8th, and/or 9th. You too can be a part of this endeavor. Consider the following; you can show your continued support by taking one of the following ads:

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Remember, these ads will appear in **6000 booklets**. Let everyone know who **YOU** and our supporters are and travel with each person as a 1993 Havre de Grace Decoy Festival Memory. (All ads must be mailed to the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, P.O. Box A, Havre de Grace, Maryland 21078, Attention: Barbara Gilden, Booklet Editor.) **THE DEADLINE FOR ALL LARGER ADS IS MARCH 15th. THE DEADLINE FOR SPONSOR ADS IS APRIL 30th.** Space for larger ads is limited so acceptance will be on a first come, first served basis.

Thank you  
*Barbara E.F. Gilden*

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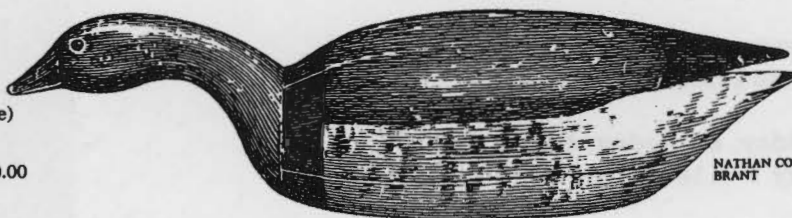
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# Bryon Bodt

## Young Carver Profile

Bryon Bodt is an unassuming, yet very talented young decoy maker. He does not consider himself an artist, but "just a duck maker" as he believes that anyone with practice and patience can make a good bird as long as they enjoy working with wood. The clean, smooth lines of his creations reveal that it also requires sharp observation skills and a genuine love of the waterfowl themselves as well as an inherent skill for recreating those birds as working decoys.

Bryon gives tremendous credit to his father, Bernie Bodt, for his success in making decoys. The younger Bodt's enthusiasm was initially sparked by his father's interest in antique decoys and gunning along the shores of the Upper Bay. This influence continues today as Bryon praises his father as being a guiding factor in his unceasing development as a decoy maker. Not only does his father act as a quality control specialist, but Bernie also helps his son with various stages of a decoy's production, especially the final paint.

Bryon Bodt started whittling heads when he was 14 while his father was making some decoys for gunning. This casual hobby quickly developed into a passion while he was studying biology at Washington College. He then apprenticed for three years with Jimmy Pierce to learn more about decoy production. He credits several other makers, such as Paul Gibson, as contributing factors in his work, however, Bryon believes that Charlie Bryan was the major influence on the development of his own style. Bryan taught Bodt how to make a "clean" bird; an eye appealing decoy which is smoothly sanded and having no paint smudges. Bryon believes these features are critical to the success of the modern decoy maker since less than 1% of most working birds created today are used for gunning; the primary clients are collectors who demand a neatly finished decoy.

Although his birds are patterned after the classic Havre de Grace working decoys of carvers like Bob McGraw, similar to other younger makers Bryon has quickly developed his own individual decoy style. He utilizes the "wet on wet" paint technique using home mixed paints based on Rustoleum and Japan color pigments. He paints with homemade brushes, applying at least five coat of paint to each decoy he makes. All of his bodies are machine turned, however, the heads are handmade. He currently produces over 15 species of waterfowl native to the Atlantic flyway, yet he is continually striving to improve his designs. By constantly looking at the waterfowl themselves in the wild or in pictures, he sees new features which he wants to accent that he previously thought unimportant to the decoy's production. He tries to add one new specie each year, but admits that it is a difficult process for him because the end result must be a design that can be reproduced in a timely fashion. Although Bodt has already decided upon the body and head, it takes him a great deal of trial and error creating the final version of the decoy's paint pattern prior to beginning production.

*Each Winter edition of The Canvasback will include an article about one of the Susquehanna Flats' "young carvers" in conjunction with the museum's annual Carvers Appreciation Day. The first decoy maker in this series is 29-year old Bryon Bodt of Churchville, Maryland.*

By  
John V. Quarstein

Bryon does not carve any decorative birds, as they require time to "do them justice." He also truly thinks that working decoys have more aesthetic, yet simple, style and lines which capture a feeling of an entire species rather than one particular bird. He enjoys recreating all waterfowl, but he is especially fascinated by hens. Bodt believes them to be more "than just brown birds," considering them more difficult to paint than the very colorful drakes. "Hens require a subtle mixture of different browns and grays" which Bryon takes pride in painting. Regardless of his subject, Bryon Bodt produces "pristine decoys" according to collector Clovis Bolen, "neat, plain, and simple - like the old carvers."

*Bryon Bodt, shown here in his workshop, is a Decoy Museum volunteer carver and true decoy craftsman.*



Beyond his own efforts creating decoys and helping out with his family's Christmas tree farm, Bryon Bodt is also one of the museum's numerous star carver volunteers. He works with various school groups who visit the museum as he enjoys the opportunity to enhance a student's appreciation and understanding of decoy making. He feels almost like a TV baker (like the Galloping Gourmet) when teaching these programs as within 20 minutes he can describe and enact the complete production process. For the students, watching a working carver becomes a true learning experience. One of his most embarrassing moments came during such a program when he "cut a hunk out of a finger." Bryon firmly believes that a decoy maker interacting with these children enables them to understand what it takes to make a finished decoy. He hopes that his involvement in these programs will give students a greater appreciation for the art form, the waterfowl themselves, and perhaps prompt one or two to begin carving.

Bryon Bodt became a decoy maker thanks to the guidance of his father and several other noted carvers, stepping into an artistic tradition to which he is now a significant contributor. He, like so many other carvers of his generation, create functional yet beautiful decoys which are a continuation of this unique Chesapeake Bay folk art.

Quilt Raffle

# *Come On In*

By Nancy Lambert

A one of a kind created exclusively for the Decoy Museum and originally owned by R. Madison Mitchell.

**Tickets are \$2.00 each  
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3 for \$5.00**

**Tickets available now at the  
Decoy Museum  
Drawing will be held on Sunday,  
May 9, 1993 at 4 p.m. at the  
Havre de Grace Middle School**



## **Miniatures Raffle Winner!!**

Decoy Museum Board Member Ken Bengtson looks on as "Speed" Charlie Joiner pulls the winning ticket for his beautiful set of miniatures. William Ward of Earlesville, Maryland was the lucky winner.





## Staff Notes



### Carvers Christmas Tree

This was the second year for the Carvers Christmas Tree and it was well received by those who saw it. There were ten new heads added to the tree this year (one even sported a Santa's hat!). Thanks to the carvers who carved a head this year. In a year or two the whole tree should be covered at the rate we are going.

Any carver who would like to make a head for the tree during the year can send or bring it to the museum. And the heads do not all have to be ducks – shorebirds, bluebird, and even a cardinal would look good.

Thanks again to a very generous group of people – carvers.

*Mary Bengtson*

## Museum Wish List

### Education

Old worn carving tools for children to handle during school tours  
Lectern  
Card table  
Folding chairs  
Steel storage cabinet  
Commercial free standing coat rack with hangers  
easels  
Volunteers!

### Administration

Office desk  
Macintosh LaserWriter or dot matrix printer  
Large cork board  
Volunteers!

### Artifacts for *Gunning the Flats*

Hunting clothing: body booting suit c. 1950's, old gunning coat  
Old photographs: gunning, decoys, production of decoys  
Old hunting licenses  
Decoys  
Volunteers!

### Operations

Bubblegum type machines to put corn in for outdoor boardwalk so more ducks and geese will visit us!  
Volunteers!

### Maintenance

Powerwasher  
Weedwhacker  
Volunteers!

### Gift Shop

Calculator or small adding machine  
Volunteers!

### And

More people to write articles for *The Canvasback*! We will gladly accept submissions about your favorite decoy maker, piece of hunting history, or an environmental issue that concerns you.

If you have any of the above and would like to donate an item or service to the museum, please call Karen Marshall at 939-3739.

## Education Programs

Carving classes have begun again and the Decoy Museum is pleased to welcome Ken Blomquist as carving class instructor. Ken has experience in all types of carving, including life size decorative, song birds and working decoys. His knowledge, versatility and teaching experience will make this carving class session very exciting and educational for beginning and experienced carvers.

Ken is a industrial arts teacher at the Havre de Grace Middle School, who specializes in teaching the art of carving to students. He is a world class winner in Ocean City, having received many awards for his work, and has been featured in James Warner's books.

The winter session of carving classes started on Tuesday, February 2, 1993 and will conclude on April 6, 1993. The winter session filled up very quickly. Thank you all for your interest. Be watching for more classes to be offered in the summer and fall.



**Museum Magic**, a series of workshops held at the Decoy Museum, has begun and is open to anyone interested in learning more about museum education, exhibits, collections, interpretation and conservation. There is still room to attend any of the remaining sessions.

<b>March 11</b>	<b>Terrific Tours: Enhancing Visitors Museum Experience</b>
<b>April 8</b>	<b>What is an Artifact and Why Collect?</b>
<b>May 13</b>	<b>Physical care of Collections</b>
<b>June 10</b>	<b>Understanding Exhibits</b>

All sessions begin on the second Thursday at 7 PM and will last 1 1/2 hours, with time for discussion and questions. Refreshments will be offered. The cost is \$3.00 for an individual class or \$10.00 for all 6 workshops. The fee covers educational materials provided to the participants. Pre-registration is required so please call for a registration form. For more information or to register call Karen Marshall at the museum, (410) 939-3739, weekdays from 9am to 5pm.

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# CELERY GRASS: An Environmental Barometer

Chesapeake Bay  
Environment

By Marianne Q. Riding, Roy F. Weston Inc.

At the end of summer, in the early sixties, my family would always try to take a months' vacation at my grandparents farm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. My grandmother and I would usually take walks down to the waterfront where I would run into the water as fast as I could to cool off from the August heat and humidity. I can remember running into the knee deep water and then diving into the thick waves of grass which grew in the water around the shoreline. At high tide, one of my most favorite games was playing underwater hide and seek in the grass. It was so thick that if you held your breath long enough, and stayed very still, the person who was "it" could swim right by and not tag you. This skill of course was acquired after many long hours of practice under the watchful eye of my grandmother sitting on the shore. Today, as I walk along the waterfront, I can't help but notice that the grasses of those carefree games of my youth have all but gone.

In autumn, my grandfather and I would walk through the fields of his farm and see the sky filled with migratory birds on their southern flight to open water. Those crimson months of changing winds and horizons were always punctuated by the sound of the birds honking with wings beating as they flew overhead and landed in the fields and water around his house. As I walk today with my grandfather, the waterfowl are still there but not in the same numbers as they were in the early sixties and the grasses along the shore seemed to have disappeared. We have often discussed the dilemma of, "where they have gone?" Perhaps overgunning may have attributed to the decline in the bird population, but would it affect the entire ecosystem? And with the strict bag limits for gunners, one would think there must be other reasons for the changing landscape.

Of course, most people who live on the Chesapeake Bay understand the fine line the estuary teeters on between industrial growth and natural resource protection. Now, in the decade of the 1990s, the community on both sides of the Bay is very much aware of the importance of protecting and maintaining the integrity of this living ecosystem. However, before the seventies and eighties with the focus on regulatory governance, the priorities of many who lived in the area was focused on industrial and population growth. They were dealing with the infrastructure complexities of growth with little knowledge or concern of the effect on the ecosystem which supported them.

I'm not the only one who noticed the transitions taking place over my lifetime. The grass in which I played is the very same grass that is a major supply of a highly nutritional food for waterfowl on the Bay, we call Celery Grass. The grass is a major attraction for waterfowl to our area. As their food supply has declined, so has the population of the birds. But where and why has the grass gone?

Much of the decline of Celery Grass along with other types of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), which live in shallow brackish areas with root, stems, and leaves completely submerged, can be attributed to a few significant environmental factors.

**1. Surface Pollution Runoff (Nonpoint Source Pollution):** The use of chemical insecticides in agricultural applications without the proper stormproof runoff controls, result in minimally diluted application of the very poisons which control weeds and insects into marshlands and creeks. In addition to the agricultural runoff, nonpoint pollution from suburban and urban sources also contribute to the decline of water quality. The runoff from paved areas: rain water mixed with oil, grease, trash, salts, and other products are typically unfiltered and are directly discharged into surface and groundwater which ultimately reaches the rivers and Bay.

**2. Sediment Runoff:** Another form of Nonpoint Source Pollution, is caused by the lack of erosion control. During a heavy rain, the runoff from unprotected construction sites and pasture lands, loaded with sediment and debris, fills up marshlands and creeks, robbing the natural grasses of needed sunlight to multiply and grow. In addition to blocking sunlight, the usually polluted sediment fills wetlands and

creeks stealing the natural habitat in which the SAV grows.

3. **Increasing salinity in the Northern Chesapeake Bay area and its estuaries:** Due to the decreasing amount of fresh water reaching the Bay from the Susquehanna River Basin (as well as other river basins eventually emptying into the Bay) and groundwater sources, the salinity of the water increases annually, making areas once habitable for the grasses uninhabitable.

4. **Point Sources:** Point Sources are clearly defined by pipes, directly discharging pollutants into a waterway. The flow is called effluent. It is typically a discharge from industrial and public owned treatment systems (POTWs). The effluent from these sources include industrial wastewater, treated sewage, and stormwater collected by municipalities. In some cases the effluent may not be in compliance with issued permits from their respective state and local government environmental resource agencies. If the effluent is not in compliance with the agreed upon toxic level, the result is dangerously high toxics (chemical as well as biological) directly discharged into the receiving water, adding another source of pollution into the stream.

These four points are significant factors in the decline of Celery Grass and indigenous flora, as well as the waterfowl and fauna which eat it. There has been progress to reverse the trends of our nation's industrial and agricultural polluting history. The combined efforts of independent organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the Save the Bay Foundation, as well as the regulatory agencies in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and Pennsylvania have assisted in heightening the awareness of the fragile ecosystem around the Bay and have passed regulations to begin correcting the problems. Some of the significant changes in regulatory guidance include the following:

1. **The Clean Water Act of 1972.** Since this regulation was passed, the United States has made significant and steady progress toward improving water quality. Regulating the disposal of industrial and municipal waste which comes from point and nonpoint sources directly decreases the amount of pollutants reaching the receiving streams and rivers.

2. **Stormwater Regulations of 1989.** These rules help to control the flow of nonpoint source pollution into the estuary by setting up guidelines for industrial, commercial, and municipal entities to improve their standards and practices to control rainwater runoff.

3. **Maryland's Erosion Control Regulations.** Eighty percent of Maryland's surface and ground waters directly impact the Chesapeake Bay. The State has taken on the responsibility of passing strict stormwater and erosion control rules directly affecting the water quality of the Bay.

Regulation is not the only answer to improving the water quality of our waterways and, in turn returning our precious flora and fauna to the region. Education is the key. Understanding why and how the environment changes, and what we as citizens and benefactors of the beautiful region around us, can do to improve the estuary daily will make a significant difference. All ages can benefit from instruction. Today, more than ever before, environmental awareness plays an integral part in changing our daily practices for the betterment of our landscapes and waterways for ourselves and generations to come.

I think that is the lesson my grandparents have instilled in me, a lesson we all can learn. If you live with nature rather than trying to conquer it, we all will enjoy and benefit from the beauty within.



## **Tribute to R. Madison Mitchell**

from 7-10 p.m., Saturday, March 13th  
at the Decoy Museum

Come and share your memories of  
Madison with family and friends

open to the public  
light refreshments will be served  
Call 939-3739

Donations in honor of Madison may be made to the  
*R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Trust, Inc.*  
to provide long term support  
for museum operations

## **A Roast and Toast to Capt. Harry Jobes**

Saturday April 17, 1993,  
at the Bayou Restaurant, Route 40.  
Tickets are \$20.00 per person

6-7 p.m. Cash Bar  
7-8 p.m. Dinner  
8- ? Toast

Auction of items from Capt. Harry Jobes and sons:  
Bobby, Charles, and Joey plus a few special  
surprises!

Enjoy a fun filled evening with Captain Harry and  
his friends. RSVP for tickets by calling the Decoy Museum.

Proceeds from the evening will pay for the creation of Capt. Harry's likeness for  
the Decoy Museum.





## Museum Events

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| February 11 | <i>Museum Magic Seminar continues with Interpreting the Susquehanna Flats, pre-registration required, 7:00 p.m., Decoy Museum</i>                   |
| February 27 | <i>Carvers Appreciation Day Evening Reception, 6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m., Decoy Museum</i>  |
| March 11    | <i>Museum Magic Seminar continues with Terrific Tours: Enhancing Visitors Museum Experience, pre-registration required, 7:00 p.m., Decoy Museum</i> |
| March 13    | <i>R. Madison Mitchell Memorial Tribute, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m., Decoy Museum</i>   |
| April 8     | <i>Museum Magic Seminar continues with What is an Artifact and Why Collect?, pre-registration required, 7:00 p.m., Decoy Museum</i>                 |
| April 17    | <i>Roast of Captain Harry Jobes, Bayou Restaurant</i>   |
| May 7-9     | <i>12th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy Festival</i>  |
| May 13      | <i>Museum Magic Seminar continues with Physical Care of Collections, pre-registration required, 7:00 p.m., Decoy Museum</i>                         |
| June 10     | <i>Museum Magic Seminar continues with Understanding Exhibits, pre-registration required, 7:00 p.m., Decoy Museum.</i>                              |

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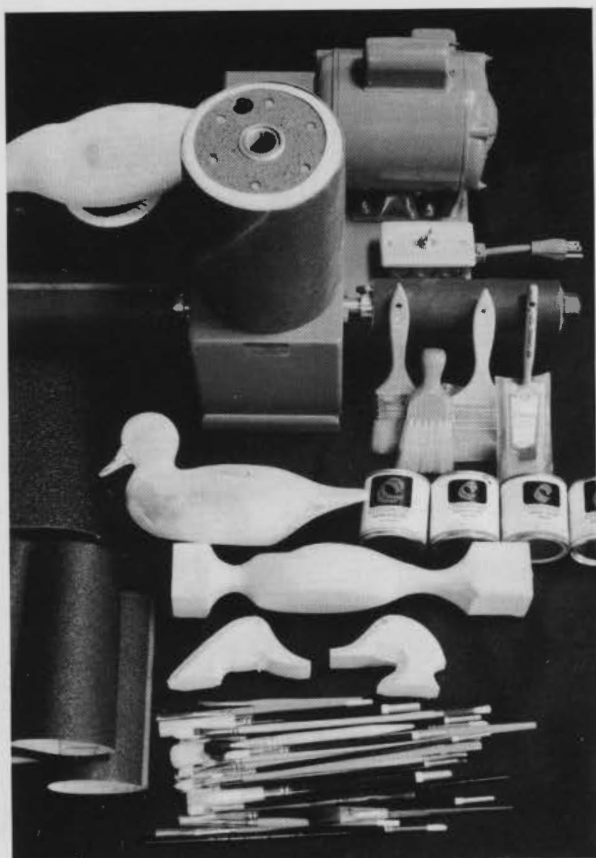
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