

The Canvasback

Summer
1993

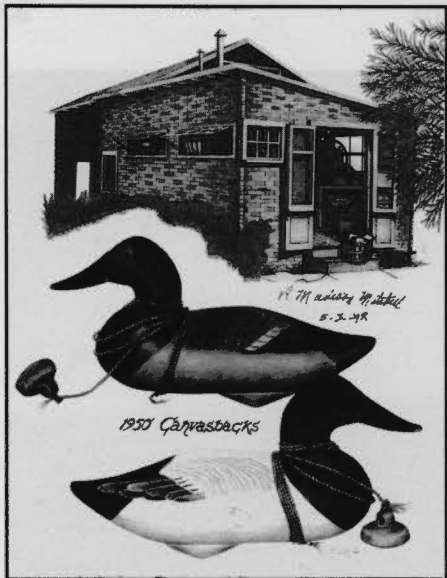
Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

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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

R. Madison Mitchell. Photo by Audrey Bodine.

FROM THE EDITOR

Producing this issue of *The Canvasback* has given me a sense of endings and beginnings.

I am probably one of only a few people with the distinct disadvantage of having known Madison Mitchell for an extremely short period of time - three months. I visited him once at his home, where I explained who I was and what I was doing at the Decoy Museum. He greeted me with open arms and insisted on a kiss. The kindness and sincere warmth he showered upon me, a total stranger, made an impression on me that I will never forget. As I held his hand, I spoke to him briefly about what was going on at the museum. He nodded, smiled, and said to me "keep up the good work."

So this issue of *The Canvasback* is dedicated to Madison, and to "keeping up the good work" that we know Madison would expect from all of us. It is fitting then, that with this issue, we are not only looking back on the lives of Madison Mitchell and Bob McGaw but also looking ahead to the 6th Annual Duck Fair and continuing progress in the creation of the *Gunning the Flats* Exhibition.

So, in Madison's spirit, let us all keep up the good work, and I hope to see you at the Duck Fair!

Karen Marshall

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1993**

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The Canvasback

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*From
the
President*



Dear Museum Member,

The Decoy Festival was a big success thanks to people like the Schaubers, the exhibitors who bring beautiful examples of folk art to share, the 4,000 plus attendees, and, of course, all of our dedicated volunteers. Everyone who participated joined in making the festival one of Havre de Grace's best events.

But there's more coming. A decoy summer is made perfect by the Duck Fair, which this year features local carver Linda Robinson as the Honorary Chairwoman. Linda's work creating shore bird decoys adds a special dimension to the term folk art. She will be joined by numerous other exhibitors in this expanded event along the shores of the Susquehanna Flats as the museum celebrates decoy making and the Chesapeake Bay on July 17 and 18.

This *Canvasback* edition honors R. Madison Mitchell and contains some personal reminiscences of Madison by a few who knew and loved him. Madison Mitchell will be missed by all whom he touched and this edition is just one way that we can thank him for his contributions both to the museum and to the art of the decoy.

The museum's rapid growth over the past few years was due to Madison's dream that a museum should be created to preserve the Susquehanna Flats decoy making heritage that he was so much a part of. He was Honorary Chairman of the 1st Havre de Grace Decoy Festival and from that seed he watched as the museum grew. Since then we have been able to expand the festival and to develop other special events which have enabled us to build and operate this educational institution. However, with a yearly budget of over \$180,000 and the need to continue with museum improvements, the Board of Directors created the R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Fund to help underwrite operational costs as well as some major changes to the membership format and fees. These actions have been taken to insure that more people can participate in different ways to make the Decoy Museum the best it can be, therefore fulfilling Madison's dream.

Allen J. Fair
President, Board of Directors

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**Volunteer
Spotlight**

Thank You Decoy Festival Volunteers



Volunteers contributed over 200 hours of time during the Decoy Festival! Thanks to all of the volunteers who helped to make the Decoy Festival a huge success—we could not have made it without your help!

Volunteer Dave Denton and young participant at the Middle School. Photo by Ralph Broth.

Keeping the Duck in Shape



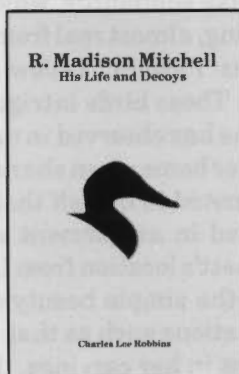
Members of the Evergreen Garden Club: Shirley Graves, Sally Woomert, Louise Angert, and Lois Gilbert (not pictured). Photo by Lois Gilbert.

Volunteers are needed to keep the landscape in shape! If you are interested in donating time to help keep the Decoy Museum's shubbery and flowers looking their best, give Karen Marshall a call at 939-3739.

Canvasback Book Review

R. MADISON MITCHELL HIS LIFE AND DECOYS

by
Charles Lee Robbins



Robert Mitchell was no doubt one of the most prolific decoy makers of the 1900s. Who?? Pardon me, Madison Mitchell, as he demanded to be addressed when he was a young and forthright grade school student. And so it was, that is how he was known his entire life. And that is how he lived his life, doing things his way. I suspect that it is next to impossible for one author to capture the depth of the spirit, energy, and kindness of Madison Mitchell, however, Mr. Robbins' book provides the reader with a feeling of what kind of person he was.

The book itself has essentially two distinct sections. The first section is an introduction and a brief biography of Mr. Mitchell and his influence upon the art of decoy making. This portion of the book gives the reader some insight as to the influence of his father and favorite uncle upon his work ethic and chosen profession as a funeral director. He became a decoy carver quite by chance as he was asked to help his mother's cousin make decoys in 1924. This cousin was a renowned Susquehanna Flats carver in his own right, Sam Barnes. He was literally forced to go it alone in the decoy business when Barnes died unexpectedly in 1926 and Madison vowed to honor the unfilled decoy orders for the Fall gunning season. His decoy making was further influenced by local watermen including Captain Billy Moore, Bob McGaw, and the Holly family. During the course of his some sixty odd years of decoy making, Mr. Mitchell influenced a number of carvers including: Eddie Mauldin, Paul Gibson, Harry Jobes, Charlie Joiner, Jimmy Pierce, Bill Collins, Bobby and Charles Jobes, Pat Vincenti, Steve Lay, Gilmore Wagner, and David Walker.

The second section of Robbins' book is really a primer on decoy making and a thorough representation of the various types of decoys produced by Mr. Mitchell and his 'boys.' At one time, Madison estimated a production of 100,000 birds during the lifetime of shop operations.

Madison Mitchell was truly a master carver of functional and beautiful waterfowl folk art. He was a wonderful and generous man who often wondered what all the fuss was about; moreover, he was an inspiration and strong supporter of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

R. Madison Mitchell, His Life and Decoys is 157 pages and was published in 1987 by Stockson Printing Company, Bel Air, Maryland. The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum does have copies available for \$29.95 and a few copies of the first edition which were signed by the author and Mr. Mitchell for \$100.

By Bill Smart



*Linda Robinson.
Photos by Ralph Broth*

Linda Robinson

Decoys With a Woman's Touch

The soft, cool lines of shorebirds in nature are reflected by decoy maker Linda Robinson, the Honorary Chairwoman of the 1993 Duck Fair. In the five short years that she has been 'knocking on wood,' Linda has been able to carve a special niche for herself within the male oriented decoy community. But this is nothing unusual for this special woman whose husband and son are both carvers and who enjoys being 'just a little different.'

This sense of the unusual has lead Linda to make shorebirds, which she accomplishes in a pristine fashion. She creates working, almost real from afar, lifesize decoys of a variety of 'little birds' such as Plovers, Yellow Legs, Sanderlings, Arctic Terns, and Spotted Sandpipers. These birds intrigue her and her decoy subjects are often prompted by what she has observed in nature. One day Linda was walking on the farm next door to her home when she noticed a Killdeer at the edge of a field along the road. She noted to herself that they 'do nest in the strangest of places' but then watched in amazement as the mother pretended to have a broken wing to hide her nest's location from Linda. "What a touching scene, made more interesting by the simple beauty of the Killdeer's sweet facial mask" Linda thought. Observations such as that of the Killdeer help Linda to capture much of nature's spirit in her carvings. Linda began making decoys in 1988 because she was around them all the time as her husband, Dick, is a decoy maker himself.

By
John V. Quarstein

As she had always enjoyed working with wood, Linda began helping him with his decoys, running the lathe, sanding, and priming bodies. But Linda quickly realized that she wanted to do more and that making ducks was not the answer. She just did not want to infringe upon her husband's work. Linda actually thought that she would be more comfortable working on birds that she enjoyed watching, which lead her to focus on shorebirds. Jimmy Pierce prompted her to begin her first bird, giving Linda a great deal of advice and encouragement. It was a Yellow Legs and it took her almost a year ("I burned a lot of them in the woodstove" Linda remembers) until she finished one she liked. Since then Linda has made over 400 birds and she is amazed that she has gone from giving them away as gifts to actually selling them

Linda believes she has come a long



way with her painting and carving techniques since 1988. She is continually adding new species, always keeping the first decoy of a series to compare with each additional one she makes. This gives her the encouragement to try even another species as she can see the improvement in her style with each new bird she creates. Linda feels that her carving and painting styles are a mixture of traditional Havre de Grace and Delaware River designs, but she has used this base to develop her own paint patterns while trying to obtain a soft, appealing style. Although her observations of birds in nature help guide her painting, she primarily works from photographs. However, each bird has slight color variations, which "doesn't happen intentionally when I do it," admits Linda, "but it's real!"

When carving Linda is striving to create something in between the older working style and that of the modern detailed decoratives. She uses Jelutong wood because its easy to carve. 'Anything with a motor' is Linda's byline when it comes to the actual carving as she believes that "women have to have a little edge." Linda uses a bandsaw to cut out her birds, then a drawknife and other carving knives (but often its a foredom tool) before using a drum sander to finish the bird prior to priming and painting. The end result is a beautiful image.

Although some might consider it unusual for a woman to make decoys, Linda disagrees as she believes that it's simply because many women do not think to try. She notes that there are several women such as Jan Calvert and Patty Waterfield who are very successful carvers. The only real difference between the sexes as far as decoy making goes Linda believes is that men have greater hand strength. Linda solves this problem by reducing the size of some of the birds, such as a Snowy Egret or a Great Blue Heron, into a quarter or half versions. She also feels that being around the right people—Jimmy Pierce, Allan Schaubert, and her husband—gave her the impetus, advice, and support to begin carving decoys.

Linda Robinson is extremely pleased to have been selected as the Honorary Chairwoman of the 1993 Duck Fair. She is humbled by this honor and hopes that her selection will "encourage more women to try this rewarding hobby."

Dick Robinson

Linda Robinson might not have developed so quickly into an outstanding carver had it not been for her husband Dick, who was already a decoy maker, collector, and duck hunter. Dick is very proud of his wife's accomplishments and is pleased that they are able to work together in his shop on individual projects.

Dick has been carving for over 12 years, creating a full line of miniature and half-size waterfowl including Canvasbacks, Redheads, Teals, Mallards, and Wood Ducks. His favorite species to carve is the Whistling Swan as he is always trying to devise different head styles and positions. Swans are perfect for this purpose because of their "long graceful necks." He has probably made over 2,000 decoys using a variety of woods including pine, cedar, basswood, and jelutong. He primarily uses Japan colors for his paint.

Dick Robinson became a carver due to his interest in decoys and because he is an avid hunter. He has been gunning for over 20 years and recently purchased 7 acres near Cambridge, Maryland, so that he can enjoy this sport with his son Rick. Gunning gives him a chance to "get away from it all." He admits that "I don't care whether I shoot the gun or not, I just like watching the birds."

His first decoys were silhouette geese made for his own gunning rig and Dick has since made between 50-60 full-size Mallards, Blackducks, and Canvasbacks. He credits Jimmy Pierce as the person who taught him and motivated him to become a decoy maker, however, Dick also believes that Bob Litzenberg, Madison Mitchell, and Charlie Bryan have influenced his style.

Linda Robinson calls her husband her best friend, critic, and mentor and he in turn, truly appreciates her beautiful work with shorebirds. Dick and Linda have even begun working together on a special series of half-size Canvasbacks, with wooden keels and strung with weights. The Robinsons have become a true decoy family, as their 13 year old son, Rick, has begun carving. In just a few years he has already made between 30-40 miniature swans, the first of which was a birthday gift for his father. Without doubt, the Robinsons have become a real part of the Susquehanna Flats decoy making heritage.

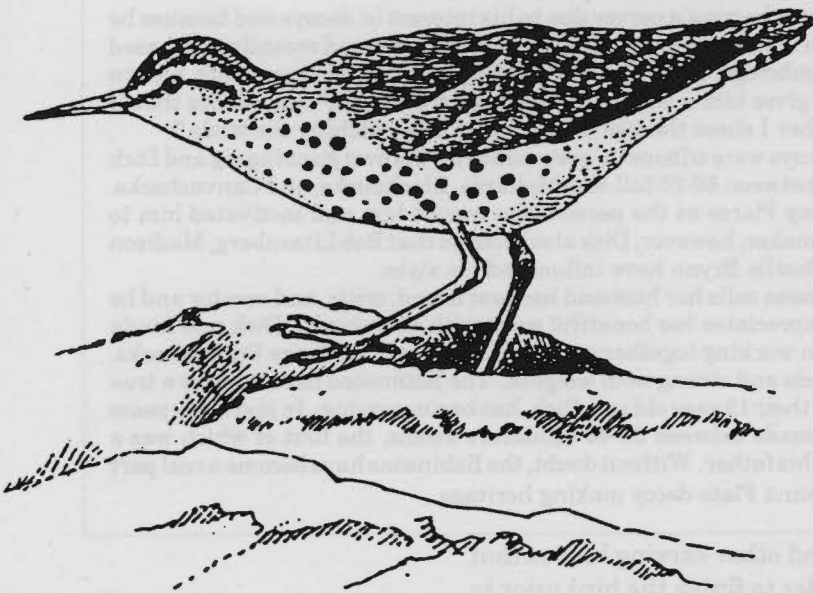


*Rick and Dick Robinson.
Photo by Ralph Broth.*

Spotted Sandpiper

Linda Robinson's favorite bird to re-create as a decoy is the robin-sized (7-8 inches in length) Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*). This sandpiper is one of the best known of American shorebirds and is widely seen along shorelines of the Chesapeake Bay as well as around the margins of inland ponds and streams. Linda calls it a 'sweet little bird' and the shorebird's habit of endlessly bobbing the rear part of its body up and down, whether standing or walking, has earned it the nickname of 'teeter-tail.'

A gregarious bird, Spotted Sandpipers can be found in large flocks and are easily indentified by its distinctive flight: short bursts of rapid wing beats alternating with brief periods of sailing. These sandpipers have long wings, with long grayish legs and toes. Their plumage features mud-colored upper parts which contrast with underparts that are white in winter and spotted in summer. Spotted Sandpipers have a distinctive white wing stripe and their voice is a clear peet-weet with an occasional soft trill. They usually forage in the mud and shallow water for insects, worms, and crustaceans.



Although most shorebirds breed in the north, the Spotted Sandpiper is one of the few that nests in the United States. The breeding season is from May through July and the female is the dominate partner in the courtship displays. Usually located among grasses, the nest is a depression in the ground litter, but it may be lined with grass.

Clutches consist of four buff eggs that are irregularly spotted with various shades of brown. Incubation requires about 20 days and is primarily performed by the male, who also assumes responsibility for the young. A female often lays for more than one male, and she may help incubate a late clutch.

Linda Robinson enjoys carving Spotted Sandpipers and since they are so easy to find in beach areas they are rather popular with collectors. Linda likes to make a special effort with her sandpipers, mounting them on driftwood which rises upward. She then clusters the birds in various positions such as standing, guarding, feeding, and sleeping. Such work is a progressional geometric expression which gives the viewer a feeling of the Spotted Sandpiper's constant teetering motion.

From nature to art, Linda Robinson catches the essence of the Spotted Sandpiper, with her beautiful design which is just "a simple reflection of my love for Shorebirds."

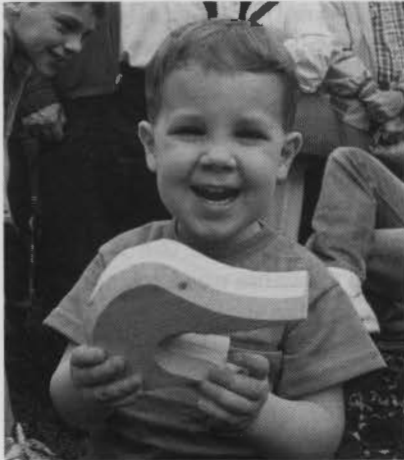
By
John V. Quarstein

IT'S DUCK FAIR TIME!

July 17-18, 1993

at the Decoy Museum

1993 Duck Fair Honorary
Chairwoman Linda Robinson
of Bel Air, Maryland



Keith Jobes agrees...the Duck Fair is fun for everyone!

Join in on the fun for two days... instead of just one! July 17th and 18th you'll agree the Duck fair's the place to be. Even better yet, admission is FREE! We've got decoy makers, ducks, and other waterfowling buffs. Fun activities for children and auctions for grown ups.

Tentative Schedule

Saturday July 17th

9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

- 11 a.m. Decoy Festival Honorary Chairman Head Whittling Competition
- Noon Silent Auction closes
- 1 p.m. Live Auction begins
- 3:30 p.m. Old Squaw Raffle Drawing

Sunday July 18th

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- 11 a.m. Open Head Whittling Contest - Bring Your Knives!
- 1 p.m. Duck and Goose Calling Contests
- 3 p.m. Silent Auction closes
- 3:30 p.m. Old Squaw Raffle Drawing

Exhibitors will be present throughout both days with decoys and waterfowl art and related goods. Environmental and nature groups will have special exhibits and activities for visitors of all ages, plus many food vendors will keep you from getting hungry.



Joey Jobes whittling away at the 1991 Duck Fair.

By Norm Smith
Chairman

Reflections of Madison

I operate a third generation 40 year-old family retail business in Wilmington, Delaware, Mitchell's Family Stores, and about 20 years ago a young man who was then trimming windows for me talked constantly about his interest in collecting decoys. He shared his interest enthusiastically with me. He often talked about his trips to Havre de Grace to buy decoys from Paul Gibson and Madison Mitchell.



*R. Madison Mitchell.
From the collection of Joe Mitchell*

One day, I believe in 1976, my daughter Wendy and I were walking through a farm that borders a summer home that I own on the Elk River below Elkton, when we came upon a small farm pond. Wendy happened to spot a decoy that was missing its head and looked quite old at the edge of the pond and decided to bring it home. I thought that the decoy was a piece of junk and tried to talk her out of bringing it home. She brought it home anyway and I now know that this decoy was responsible for inciting in me a feverish interest in decoy collecting.

I told my window trimmer about my daughter's find and he insisted that I bring it in for him to see. I did and he said that he thought that it was a Mitchell decoy. This peaked my interest and I became more interested in learning more about this Madison Mitchell since we shared the same surname and now the possibility existed that I owned a Mitchell decoy. My window trimmer told me that Madison was in his seventies and was a funeral director by trade. I decided that I wanted to meet Mr. Mitchell and noticed an article in Elkton's Cecil Whig newspaper in December of 1978 that his decoy shop was to be

opened to the public on the Havre de Grace Candlelight Tour on the following Sunday. That Sunday I traveled to Havre de Grace with my wife and two daughters and waited in my car until 4 o'clock when the tour began.

We were the first to enter Madison's shop at 4 o'clock and were directed up to the paint loft to discover Bill Collins and Madison painting Canvasbacks. I tried to break the ice by mentioning that my name too was Mitchell. Without looking up from his painting, Madison asked me where my folks were originally from. I answered "from upstate Pennsylvania" and he remarked that we couldn't be related since he had traced his roots back for some time right here

By
Joe Mitchell

in Harford County. I then mentioned that I thought that we had found one of his old decoys. He asked to see it and took one glance at it and said that it was not made by him but that Bob McGaw had made it. I asked if Bob McGaw lived close by and Madison answered that he used to and that he had buried him 20 years ago. Madison said that if the decoy had a head that it would be worth a lot of money.

Two women then came up into the paint loft and began talking with Madison. One woman knew Madison and introduced her friend to him. She then commented that Madison was world famous and sold his decoys to many people who lived in distant areas. Her friend asked Madison if he shipped his decoys to those distant areas. Madison answered "nope, if they want them they have to come here."

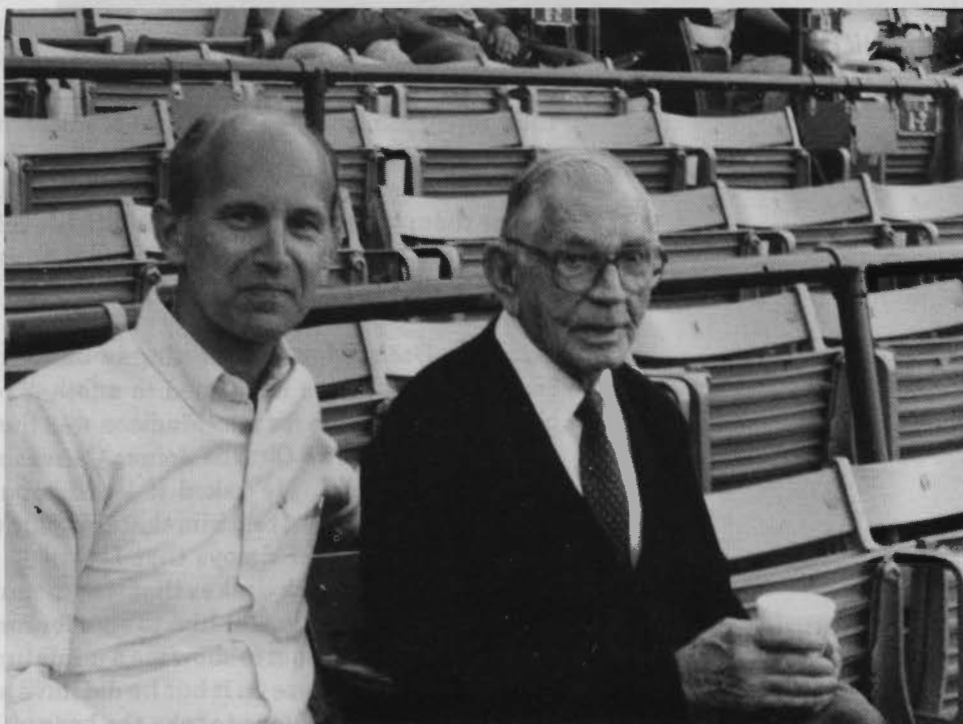
This introduction brought me back many times. I placed my order for any and all species that might be made, a full set if possible! I returned many times expecting to pick up some decoys. What a naive person I was! I was never able to purchase so much as a single decoy directly from Madison's shop. Nevertheless, I became fascinated with Madison and continued to visit him mostly in his home.

My wife passed away in March of 1985 and I didn't visit with Madison for a period of about six months. I learned that Madison was going through some hard times as well. He had to give up working in his shop because of his failing eyesight. Upon Madison's learning of my wife's passing we developed a very strong common bond. His wife had passed away some years before and he knew what I was going through and counseled me—understanding my hurt. My father had also passed away in 1983 and I soon adopted Madison as my own father.

Our friendship grew considerably over the years and we developed what I considered to be the closest thing to a father and son relationship. I came to love and respect him and know him as a gifted man with knowledge of more subjects than any one man should have. We seldom talked about decoys but instead about baseball, especially his beloved Orioles, politics, any and all world events, the space program, and I could go on and on. We often speculated whether or not we shared any distant blood relationship.

Sometime in 1987, I believe, Madison's grandson, Mitch Shank asked me if I would like to go to an Orioles game with

Joe Mitchell and Madison at an Oriole baseball game. Photo from the collection of Joe Mitchell.



himself, his wife Jessica, and Madison. I accepted and when we arrived at the ballpark we sat in a private box reserved seat section with the name tag Maslin on it. I asked Madison what the name Maslin meant. He answered that his wife's maiden name was Maslin. I told him that my wife's grandmother's maiden name was Maslin. He asked where she was from and I answered Chestertown. He showed some surprise and indicated that there could be some relationship. I went back to my wife's side of the family and discovered through a family tree that we were indeed related by marriage. Madison's wife and my wife's grandmother proved to be cousins. I remember his reaction was "my God, we really are related!" What a small world!



Joe Mitchell and Madison at the Decoy Museum.

Upon seeing Madison to his door that night after the baseball game, he told me to come inside to see something that he had for me. He then presented me with a cork Canvasback drake decoy that looked brand new. He signed and dated it for me. He dated it 1972! I resisted taking the decoy and offered to pay him for it. He insisted that I take it. Knowing he was trying to find a pair of his Mallard decoys, since he had given away the only pair that he had, I offered to trade him an extra Mallard hen that I had for his cork canvasback. He reluctantly accepted and the next time I came to Havre de Grace I delivered my hen to him. I then set out to locate a drake and called a number of dealers including my friend, Mau-

rice Pease, in North Carolina. Maurice said that he did have a pair for sale and would give them to Madison the next time he came to Havre de Grace to hopefully repay some of the favors that Madison had done for him. The next time I visited Madison he told me had something to show me. I guessed that it was the pair of Mallards and he was surprised to discover that I knew Maurice was giving them to him. He then went into his collections room and gave me back my Mallard hen saying he didn't need it anymore. That was the kind of man Madison was.

During a Decoy Museum meeting in January of 1988, there was a surprise recess called and we adjourned to another room only to discover a surprise birthday celebration for me. Madison was there and he presented me with his own personal pair of Charlie Joiner Canvasbacks signed "Happy Fiftieth, R. Madison Mitchell." He asked if I had a pair of Charlie's Canvasbacks. I admitted that I did but told him that this pair would have far more significance to me than any other decoys that I owned. Another time I took one of his miniature Canvasback drakes that was mounted on a base that I had recently purchased at an auction for him to sign for me. He signed it and then took me into his collections room to show me a miniature Canvasback hen that matched it. The hen had no base on it but he did have a drake with a base. He provided a screwdriver and told me to take the base off the drake and put it on the hen.

After making the switch he told me to take the hen home with me to become a mate to my drake. Perhaps the most unique decoy he ever gave me was a terribly tiny flying canvasback. I asked him to sign it but it was so small that he could only sign his initials, "R.M.M."

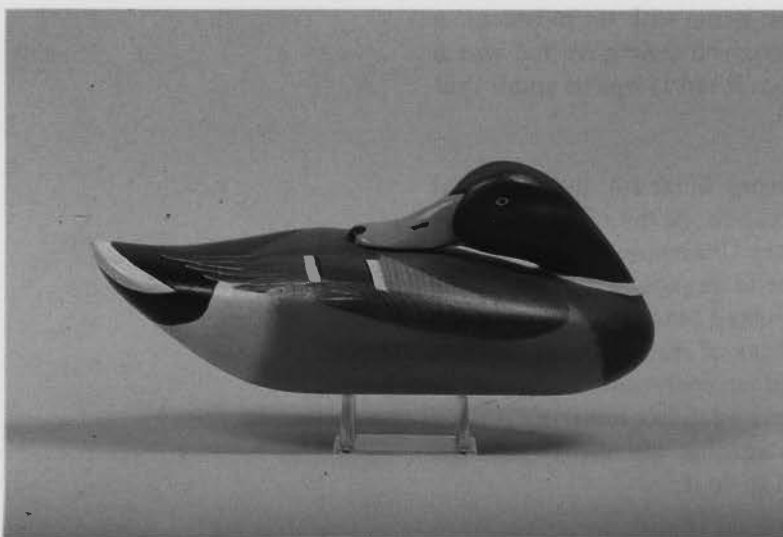
As a member of the Board of Directors of the Decoy Museum, my principal responsibility is merchandising the Museum's gift shop. In my efforts to make money for the museum, I have asked our Honorary Chairmen many times to sign a quantity of items such as books, posters, or to engage in autographing sessions at the Decoy Festivals. Each time that I asked Madison he cheerfully agreed even knowing that signing great quantities of items would be very difficult for him since he was legally blind. He told me each time he signed his name he had to spell it to himself to make sure that he didn't miss any letters since he really couldn't see anything that he was signing. He always assured me that since it was for the museum he was glad to do it.

I'll never forget calling Madison on the phone or knocking on his door and asking how he was. His answer was either, "no use complaining" or simply "sober." In spite of his age, I don't think that any of us ever expected Madison to pass on. He was so resilient, he seemed to be able to bounce back from any adversity. Mr. Mitchell was truly one of the most unique people that I've ever met. His true love was in giving. He would give material items if he had them. He gave advice, his wisdom, and mostly his love. He made an incredible number of his friends because of his willingness to share his life.

We can thank God that we can celebrate the fact that Madison lived to see the recognition and love that he so richly deserved, not only because of his ability as a decoy carver, but most importantly because of the great humanitarian that he was. His passing truly marks the end of an era in many ways. He will live forever in our hearts.

Joe Mitchell and Madison with the Decoy Museum's travelling exhibit. Photo from Joe Mitchell's collection.





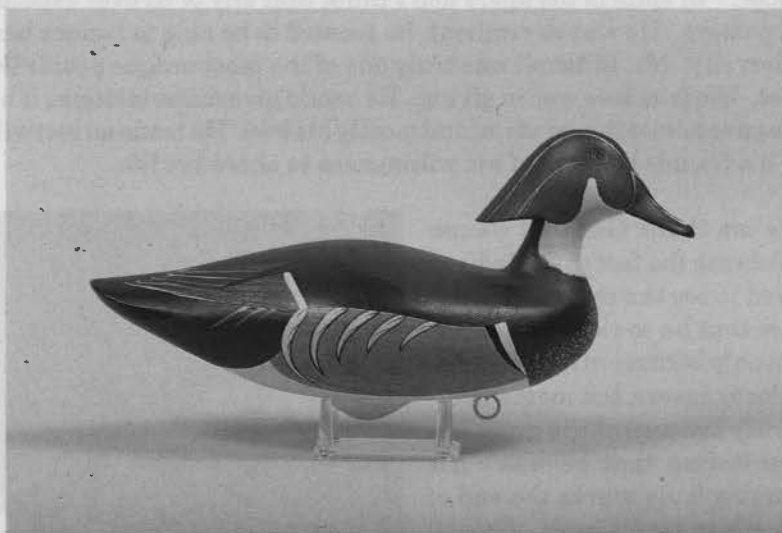
*Mallard drake sleeper, decorative,
length: 14 1/4 in., height: 5 3/8
in., width 6 9/16 in.*

R. Madison Decoy S

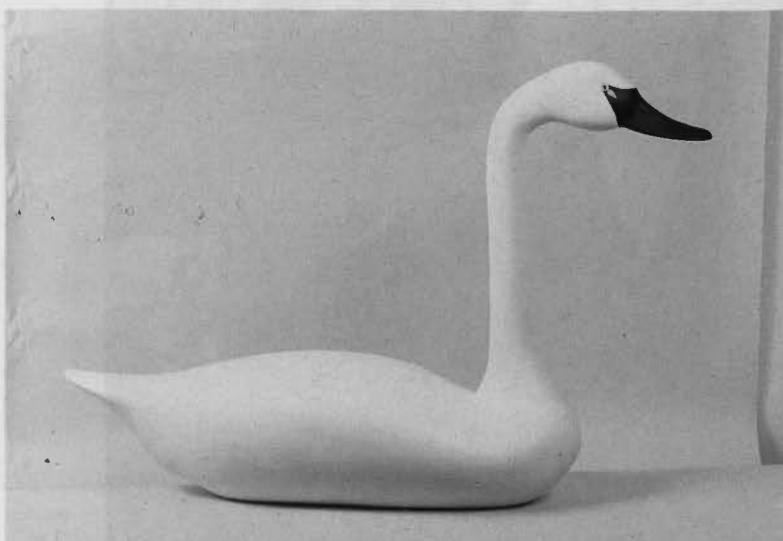
Photos by F

Decoys are perhaps the greatest legacy left by decoys during his career, formalizing the Havr intricate paint patterns make R. Madison Mitch measured.

All Mitchell bodies are machine turned and head 5 nails, three long through the top and two small it joins the body. Lead ballast weights were at primarily used cedar or white pine for his decoy



*Wood Duck, drake, decorative,
length: 12 in., height: 6 1/4 in.,
width: 6 in.*



*Whistling (Tundra) Swan,
straight neck, length: 28 in.,
height: 23 in., width: 10 1/4 in.*

n Mitchell Sampler

Ralph Broth

Madison Mitchell. He produced over 100,000
vire de Grace style. The sharp, clean lines and
chell's decoys a standard by which all others are

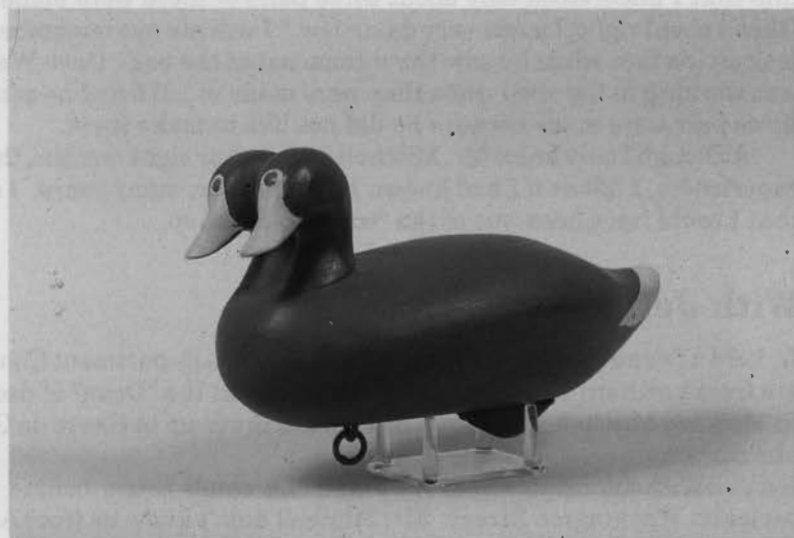
ads are hand carved. Heads were attached with
iller nails in the lower forepart of the neck where
attached with either two or four nails. Mitchell
oys.



*Red Head drake, tupelo wood,
length: 14 1/4 in., height: 7 3/4
in., width: 6 in.*



*Canvasback drake, tupelo wood,
length: 15 in., height: 8 in., width:
6 3/4 in.*



*American Coot, two headed (only
60 made), length: 11 1/2 in.,
height: 5 3/4 in., width: 6 1/4 in.*

Reminiscences of Madison

With Carter Gray

I will always remember the first time I met Madison Mitchell. It was at the 1992 Havre de Grace Decoy Festival, the first one I ever attended. I was walking along and saw a sign that read "Mr. Mitchell will gladly sign your decoys." I could not believe that Madison Mitchell was actually at the show. That moment, I knew I had to have a picture of him. Unfortunately, I did not have a camera, and I didn't have the slightest idea of where I could find one. So I got in my car and started driving around. I finally came across an Ames department store and I purchased a polaroid camera. After returning to the school, I then had to buy a decoy that he could sign. I found a Blackhead drake signed and dated 1958. I took the decoy to him so he could sign it, and of course, he told me it was already signed. But I told him I didn't care, I just wanted him to sign it again so I could get some pictures.

That is one of my favorite experiences, and I treasure those images the most because of all I went through just to get a picture of him. Since that time I have learned quite a bit about Havre de Grace and even purchased a few more Mitchell decoys, and was getting to know Mr. Mitchell fairly well before he passed away.

In November of 1992, I purchased a pair of Pintail sleepers and immediately took them to Mr. Mitchell to let him see them. When I pulled them out of the bag he held out his hands and said "Sprigs" in such a tone of voice I could tell he was very excited to see them again. I said to him that I understood only about three pairs of these were made and he said "that's about right, I made very damn few." I will always remember the excited look on his face when he saw them come out of the bag. Dave Walker said he was working in the shop when they were made in 1976 and he said only about three pair were made because he did not like to make them.

Although I only knew Mr. Mitchell for seven or eight months, through these experiences, I felt as if I had known him for many, many years. I always wish that I could have been one of the "boys" in the shop.

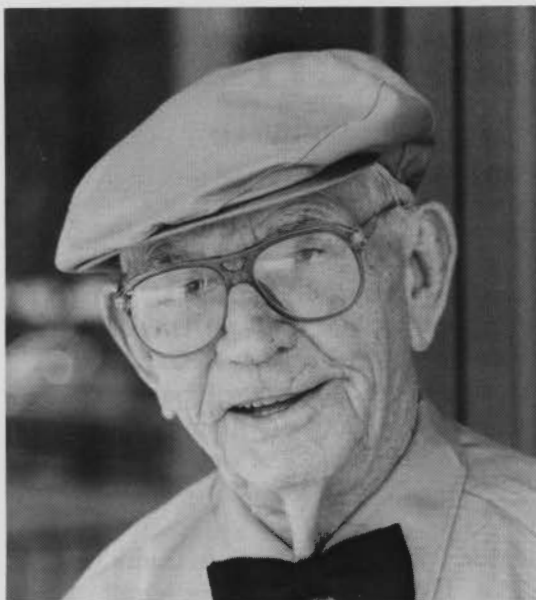


*Madison Mitchell and Carter Gray.
Photo courtesy of Carter Gray.*

With Jeff Moore

In 1984 a friend and I were in Baltimore for a Fire Department Conference. We are from northern Indiana and had heard about the "Dean" of decoy carvers - R. Madison Mitchell. We took a day off and drove up to Havre de Grace to look him up.

Without much effort we found the small house behind the funeral parlor on Washington Street. Mr. Mitchell didn't know us from Adam, but he



made us feel welcome, showed us around his home and entertained us with stories. He also sold us a bottle of "sweepings" (Duck Dust) for the benefit of the Decoy Museum. He then gave us the keys to his decoy shop.

Can anyone imagine how many decoys came out of that shop? The woodworking machinery was on the ground floor with the paint loft upstairs. There were approximately 50 decoys on the racks in various states of repair. Madison doubted he would ever get to them.

We had a hard time walking away, he loved to visit with everyone and no one was a stranger.

I think it was the influence of this fine gentleman that developed my love of the Chesapeake Bay, Havre de Grace, the Decoy Museum, and the Flats decoys which I value so much.

*R. Madison Mitchell. Photo by
Howard Miles*

Bill Collins and Madison Mitchell.



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R. Madison Mitchell

Excerpts from a Sermon by The Rev. Kenneth R. Dunnington
January 18, 1993

"Well done, good and faithful servant. Come, enter the kingdom that has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world." As we gather today to give thanks to God for the life of Madison, I have no doubt that Madison was ready for heaven. My only question is: Is heaven ready for Madison? Knowing the type of person he was, we can only imagine that it's going to be a bit more lively up there since this last Thursday, for Madison will again be gathered around that pot-bellied stove, there to join his old friends Bob McGaw, Paul Gibson, Lou Klair, and, as they pass those decoys around, oh how the stories will fly and life will be even more joyful for the saints. Sam Barnes, who originally taught Madison the art of decoy making, will join them, along with all the others who sat at the feet of the master and learned how to turn a block of wood into a piece of art.

You have come to remember your loved one today, your friend, your mentor. We have so much to thank God for. Will Rogers was fond of saying that he never met a man he didn't like. If Madison didn't like you, it wasn't because he didn't try to like you. That seems to have been very much his character of welcoming, of accepting people. He never seemed to tire from meeting people, from having people over to his home, his shop, from going to various events that put him in touch with even more people. The door was never locked. It was always open. He liked people; he liked to talk.

Madison was not only known as a carver but also as a businessman in this community, and he touched many lives with his care and compassion at moments of their deepest distress. He lovingly cared for their loved ones and helped to prepare them so that, when they saw their loved ones for that last time, there was still that sense of recognition, that sense of comfort, and there was a sense of hope that he was able to offer to them. Madelyn told me a story about a man who came up to Madison awhile ago and he said, "Mr. Mitchell, don't you remember me?" Madison had since lost his eyesight or much of it, and he said "No, I don't remember you," and he said "Well, sir, you buried my wife back in 1945," to which Madison said, "Hell, I buried a lot of people in 1945." But the fact is that he would have remembered and known them and cared for them at that time and at that moment as he did all the other years for all the others who had to place literally their loved ones' care into his care, to work with them. Many who came to pay their last respects these last few days may not have had any interest in decoys but a deep heartfelt sense of appreciation for a man who touched their lives with his compassion.

Madison was known in this community by his membership in this church, in the Masonic Lodge, and I understood that they had an outpouring for the Masonic Service and that of all the past presidents, the oldest living past president of our lodge was Madison Mitchell. He was a member of the Rotary Club and the Susquehanna Hose Company, all of which enabled him to give more of himself to this community and to the people whom he loved.

But Madison is especially going to be missed by his family. He was a family man. He talked often about his wife, and he didn't wait for you to come to him - he came to you. Nightly I would see him walking down Washington Street, the familiar red sweater, as he made his way to Ells and Madelyn's for dinner. I've seen pictures of the excursions he took and some even very recently, "Brother," to decoy events and to see the train displays that you set up. I've seen pictures of times cherished with family in Michigan and Florida. I've been with grandchildren when they've taken their grandfather to dinner and to an Oriole game. He loved you all. Go back and look at the photos of you and him together and you can see the gleam in his eye. You bet he loved you. Perhaps the greatest pain a parent or a grandparent can experience is to see a child die. Andy's death pained Madison. He didn't try to figure it all out because he knew he couldn't. He just said to me, "If I could change places with Andy, I would," and all of us knew that if Madison could, he would.

1994 Decoy
Festival Honorary
Chairman

Robert F. McGaw, Jr.

Robert F. McGaw, Jr.'s selection as Honorary Chairman of the 13th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy Festival is not the only accolade that has been bestowed upon this nationally recognized carver. The first was by the renowned folk art collector, Joel Barber, whose 1934 volume, *Wild Fowl Decoys*, utilized McGaw's Canvasbacks as a prime example of Susquehanna Flats' floating sculptures. Then came the July 1938 *National Geographic* issue about the Chesapeake Bay which depicted McGaw working on a decoy. He was once again honored on March 22, 1985, when the U.S. Postal Service issued a plate block of 4 decoy stamps in its series highlighting American folk art which featured a 1929 McGaw Canvasback. Such recognition might have bothered this humble carver, a man who elected to sell miniatures to the soldiers of Aberdeen and Edgewood so they could have a souvenir of the Chesapeake Bay rather than selling all he could produce, at a higher profit, to Abercrombie and Fitch. Yet McGaw's decoys and his role in the development of decoy making truly warranted these honors and more.

The handsome yet functional decoys of Robert F. McGaw, Jr., are highly sought after by collectors today, but few may realize the historical significance of his carvings. Bob McGaw changed the course of decoy making forever. He was the first carver on the Susquehanna Flats to utilize a lathe to produce decoy bodies. Prior to McGaw purchasing his lathe in 1929, all decoy bodies

By
John V. Quarstein
and
C. John Sullivan, Jr.
Photos courtesy of the
R. Madison Mitchell collection.





were hand chopped. The lathe allowed him to manufacture a consistent body size, shape, and style with speed and efficiency. His lathe was sold to Madison Mitchell and then to Paul Gibson who produced the Havre de Grace-style bird throughout their lifetimes. Dozens of Havre de Grace carvers use lathes today to produce thousands of decoys each year.

Robert F. McGaw, Jr., refined the scratch painting technique first used in Havre de Grace by James T. Holly. McGaw utilized a much finer instrument which produced a very thin feathering style, especially seen in his strong diagonal wing speculums. Many old time gunners complained that when a cripple would swim into their rig they had difficulty in distinguishing it from the McGaw decoys. His decoys were among the most realistic ever to float on the Susquehanna Flats.

Probably some of the most beautiful specimens of McGaw's work are his miniatures. His mating cross necked geese rise above the norm as prime examples of folk art. Although many decoy carvers from the Susquehanna Flats had produced miniature decoys prior to McGaw's time, he crossed the line from mere models of working decoys to decorative miniatures when he mounted them on hard wood bases. He produced both miniatures and full-sized birds on bases and sold thousands of them to early collectors for purely decorative purposes. Bob McGaw was truly ahead of his time. Not only did he produce beautiful decoys, but more importantly, his ability to look to the future of decoy carving was a force that brought national attention to Havre de Grace some 50 years before it was to be called "The Decoy Capital of the World."

*"It's an unlucky duck
that knows its own image."*

Robert McGaw's 1929 High-Head Canvasback Selected for 1994 Festival

The Board of Directors of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum proudly announces the selection of Robert Franklin McGaw, Jr. (1879-1958) as the Honorary Chairman of the 13th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy Festival. Bob McGaw is one of the foremost carvers of the Susquehanna Flats, whose beautiful decoys helped to establish the Havre de Grace style. Keeping with the tradition set by the 1992 selection of Jim Currier as Honorary Chairman, it is fitting that McGaw now receives this tribute.

Accordingly, the decoy symbol of the 13th Annual Decoy Festival will be McGaw's 1929 high-head Canvasback. The museum would like to request that carvers wishing to help honor Bob McGaw could do so by donating their own replica of a McGaw style Canvasback. Please contact Jimmy Pierce for more information about how you can participate in the McGaw '29 series.

1993 Decoy Festival: Better Than Ever

By
Clovis Bolen
Chairman

Over 4,500 visitors came from 26 states, Washington, DC, and several foreign countries to attend this year's Decoy Festival. The newest addition to the Festival, the 2nd floor exhibit area at the Decoy Museum drew 1,397 visitors on Saturday May 8th. From all accounts, visitors and vendors seemed to have had a very enjoyable experience. For the first time, exhibitor evaluations were distributed and the Decoy Festival Committee has reviewed the wide range of comments that were returned. Taking under consideration your ideas and suggestions, we plan on improving next year's show to make the 1994 13th Annual Decoy Festival the best yet.

Thanks to all those who made the 12th Annual Decoy Festival a success!

Mark your calendars now to be in Havre de Grace May 6-8, 1994!



Honorary Chairman Bill Schaubert, the Honorable Louis Goldstein, Honorary Chairman Allan Schaubert, and Clovis Bolen have a moment to visit during the busy weekend. Photo by Ralph Broth.

Contest Winners

Duck Calling Contest

1st Place	Keith McGowan	Middleton, DE
2nd Place	Al Dager	Newark, DE
3rd Place	Scott Titus	Catonsville, MD

Goose Calling Contest

1st Place	Dave Hagen	White Hall, MD
2nd Place	Al Dager	Newark, DE
3rd Place	John Taylor	Salisbury, MD

Old Squaw Painting Contest

1st Place	Bud Jennings
2nd Place	Ed Itter
3rd Place	Ron Laber

Decorative Miniatures

1st of Show	Jeffrey Moore	Wilmington, DE
2nd of Show	Rich Smoker	Crisfield, MD
3rd of Show	Richard Schepis	Wall Township, NJ



Bud Jennings with his winning Old Squaw. Photo by Ralph Broth.

Bill Weaver, Roger Urie, and Allan Schauber judging the head whittling contest. Photo by Ralph Broth.

Gunning Rig Contest

1st Place	Bill Kell
2nd Place	Mike Smyser
3rd Place	Mike Diester



Head Whittling Contest

1st Place	Joey Jobes	Havre de Grace, MD
2nd Place	Bob Jobes	Havre de Grace, MD
3rd Place	Charles Bryan	Middle River, MD

Decorative Slick

1st of Show	Mark Strohmman	Parkville, MD
2nd of Show	Sally Schneider	Mantoloking, NJ
3rd of Show	Robert Moreland	Harrisonburg, VA

Decorative Miniatures

1st of Show	Jeffrey Moore	Wilmington, DE
2nd of Show	Rich Smoker	Crisfield, MD
3rd of Show	Richard Schepis	Wall Township, NJ

Craftwoods Decorative Lifesize

1st of Show	Ernie Muehlmann	Springfield, PA
2nd of Show	Ernie Muehlmann	Springfield, PA



Mary Carol Larrimore and Jean Hiss examining an Old Squaw. Photo by Ralph Broth.

Canvasback Cove Decorative Canvasback

1st of Show	Ken Scheeler	Vineland, NJ
2nd of Show	George Stroum	
3rd of Show	Carroll Nasuta	Bel Air, MD



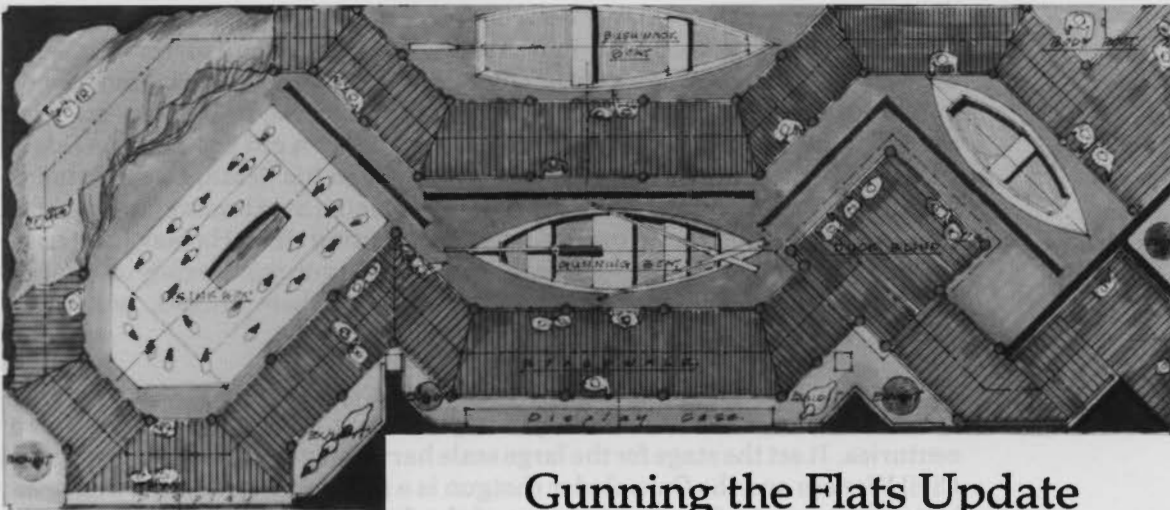
Ken Clodfelter, Whitey Franck, and Mark Strohmman judging the Decorative Floating category. Photo by Ralph Broth.

Decorative Floating

1st of Show	Jeffrey Beach	Pikesville, MD
2nd of Show	Rich Smoker	Crisfield, MD
3rd of Show	Pat Kurman	Alloway, NJ

Gunning Decoy Youth Division Winners

Joey Oliphant
 Paul Johnson (Youth and Novice)
 Jolene Lowe
 Stacy Ols
 Josh Haglin
 Jennifer Hager
 Christine Pelletier



Gunning the Flats Update

The Decoy Museum recently received a wonderful donation of an 1833 fowling piece from Miss Mary Helen Calwalader of Joppa, Maryland. This shotgun was used by at least two of her ancestors on their Gunpowder Neck Farm, which gives the gun a valuable local history provenance. More importantly, however, is that this fowler is one of the earliest examples of American percussion shotguns and will help the museum place into context the impact of firearm technology on waterfowling in the *Gunning the Flats* exhibit gallery. Since this piece has such a complex background, I will approach it in three parts so to provide a thorough understanding of this weapon's importance.

One of the first features one notices when looking at the Calwalader fowler, beyond its size, is the beautiful presentation plate, marked 'Issac Greer, 22 February 1833', mortised into the fine walnut stock. This is a primary key to dating the weapon, however, other components of the shotgun's construction reinforce the presentation date. The gun's length (overall: 63 1/2 inches; barrel: 48 inches) and its gauge (7) are indicative of 18th and early 19th Century efforts to compensate for lack of accuracy and efficient hitting power. Long barrels gave shot a more effective guide toward its target and lower gauges enhanced the killing pattern.

This fowler is typical of early American shotguns featuring a bar action (also called front action) lock with exterior hammers and scroll engraving. The gun was made by A.C. Baxter of Baltimore, however, the barrels have underside Birmingham proof marks indicating that they were imported from England. This was a common practice among American gun makers to utilize superior English laminated steel in the manufacture of shotguns as they were better able to withstand heavier powder loads necessary in low gauge weapons. All of the gun's components (barrel length and steel, gauge and ignition system) indicate that it was made for the sole purpose of sport waterfowling and is an example of the finest firearm technology available in the 1830's.

This 7 gauge fowler is attributed to General George C. Calwalader (1806-1879) of Philadelphia, a descendant of one of George Washington's Revolutionary War aide-de-camps. Calwalader purchased most of the Gunpowder Neck (now part of Aberdeen Proving Grounds) between 1840-1860. This manor house on

Calwalader Percussion Fowler



Coin silver presentation plate.

By
John V. Quarstein

Maxwell's Point had originally been used by some Baltimoreans as headquarters for a 'ducking club' and it is believed that he acquired this property primarily to entertain his Mexican War compatriots and Philadelphian friends gunning on the Bay. The shotgun was probably acquired by the General prior to the Civil War according to family legend, either as a gift or left at his estate by one of his friends who never retrieved it. Upon his death, George's lands eventually passed to his nephew John Calwalader (an avid hunter himself) who also leased gunning rights to a Philadelphia hunting club. He may have used this fowler, however, by the time he inherited it, the gun was already outmoded by the newer technologies of damascus doubles, bore chokes, and other innovations.

The final portion of this weapon's historic trilogy is its percussion ignition system, which was the first major improvement to firearms in over two centuries. It set the stage for the large scale harvesting of waterfowl in the post-Civil War era and the Calwalader shotgun is a fine, early example of this revolutionary system. The development of the first percussion lock is generally credited to Alexander John Forsyth, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, who also had a passion for scientific experimentation and a natural love of waterfowling. As minister of Belhelvic Parish, he was equally near Aberdeen University and the sea coast allowing him to fulfill both of his hobbies. Forsyth began experimenting with gun ignition systems, according to family legend, because he had become frustrated shooting waterfowl with his flintlock fowling piece.

He noted that the flintlock's pan flash not only warned the birds of impending disaster but the slight hesitation in the ignition of the charge in the barrel was all that the ducks needed to evade the shot. Furthermore, if the powder was wet or the touch hole fouled, the flintlock would fail to fire. Having learned about recent experiments with gunpowder and primings, he set himself to the task of creating a faster and more dependable firing system.

Forsyth focused on chemical compounds called fulminates, which are salts produced by dissolving metals in acids. Early

in the 17th Century their explosive qualities were discovered, however, it was Forsyth who developed a tube that directed the fulminates flame into the bore. The concept was completed in 1805 when he created a lock system featuring a small pivoted magazine (called a scent bottle lock) that delivered a precise amount of fulminate and a hammer which directed the flame towards the powder. Although he failed to convince military authorities of the system's feasibility, Forsyth was able, with the assistance of inventor James Watt, to secure a patent and begin production. Other inventors quickly endeavored to enhance the system, using paper and pill fulminate primers, yet none of these proved to be totally satisfactory due to the expense and reliability. Joshua Shaw of Philadelphia completed the final step in this new ignition technique in 1822 when he patented the copper percussion cap. The cap, containing either



Percussion lock plate.

fulminate of mercury or potassium chlorate, was waterproof and insured the sportsman of a quick and dependable fire.

The work of Forsyth and Shaw ended the slow and unreliable flintlock's dangerous fire sparks and cumbersome priming powder. The percussion technology enabled the manufacture of safe double barreled shotguns, which increased the hunter's ability to harvest birds at a greater rate than ever before. This new principle changed firearm production forever and is the beginning of other rapid improvements during the 19th Century resulting in the automatic shotgun.

The Calwalader 7 gauge fowler itself is a transitional piece in the evolution of weaponry and it epitomizes the rapid integra-

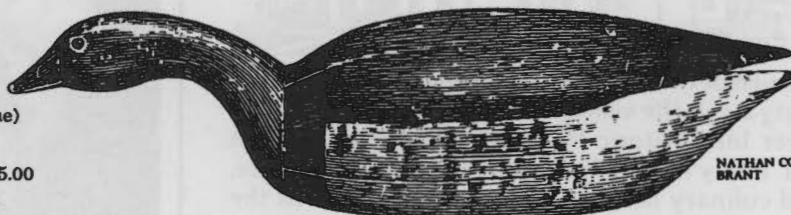


tion of new technology into waterfowling. The three stories that are connected to this 1833 shotgun: the gun itself, its user/local history relationship, and it serving as an example of a major improvement in firing systems, provided valuable insights into the days when ducks were hunted only for sustenance and sport. However, the fowler's double barrels and percussion ignition system make it a symbol of the first step towards market hunting.

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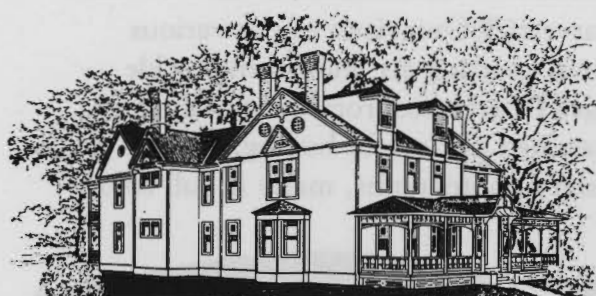
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Membership Fee Changes

Board Notes

The Board of Directors of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum announces the following changes to its membership format and fee structure beginning September 1, 1993.

New Membership Fees:

Individual	\$20.00 per year
Family	\$35.00 per year

These categories receive free admission to the museum, 10% gift shop discount, and four issues of *The Canvasback*.

Business	\$100.00 per year
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In addition, this category receives 10 free passes to museum.

The increase in the regular membership fees is due to the rising cost of museum operations and the expense related to producing *The Canvasback*.

In addition to these fees, the Board of Directors has created a new Annual Giving Program called the Susquehanna Flats Club. This \$250.00 membership category is designed for the active supporter of the Decoy Museum and the Club's membership includes the following benefits:

- Free admission for member and guest to the museum
- 10% gift shop discount
- Ticket to each of the annual dinners
- 1 weekend pass to the Decoy Festival
- 1 Patron ad in the Decoy Festival Booklet
- 1 ticket to the Decoy Festival Exhibitor Event or other special event
- 4 issues of *The Canvasback*
- 1 signed and numbered copy of Louis Frisino's "Gunning the Flats" print (initial donation only)
- 1 special lapel pin (initial donation only)

The Susquehanna Flats Club provides museum patrons with the opportunity to participate in all of the museum's events and obtain recognition as being a special friend of the Decoy Museum. Add it up, with Frisino's "Gunning the Flats," membership in the Susquehanna Flats Club is a great bargain for those who care about the museum's future.

In conjunction with these changes, the Board of Directors voted to discontinue its Lifetime Membership category. All current lifetime members will continue to receive the same benefits and status as before. Although the lifetime membership will now be used to honor those individuals who have exhibited extraordinary support for the Decoy Museum, such as volunteer hours or special donations, museum supporters can still purchase Lifetime Memberships until September 1, 1993.

These membership changes are of immense importance to the Decoy Museum as it needs your support now more than ever to help preserve the decoy's unique folk art heritage.



Staff Notes

The Decoy Museum lost a faithful and devoted employee on May 29, 1993. Mary Bengston had been hospitalized briefly after the Decoy Festival, and had been recuperating at home before passing away. She will be sadly missed by her many friends. Being an avid reader, Mary requested that contributions be made to the Decoy Museum's Library Fund.

Grants Awarded

The Decoy Museum has recently received several grants to assist in the construction of the museum's permanent exhibit, *Gunning the Flats*. The Waterfowl Festival, Inc. has generously appropriated \$10,000 towards the construction costs. The Maryland State Arts Council has given the museum \$1,919 and the Harford County Cultural Advisory Board has awarded \$500 toward the completion of *Gunning the Flats*. Thanks to these fine organizations for their continuing commitment and support of the waterfowling heritage of the Chesapeake Bay.

Carving Classes and Seminars Coming Your Way

Planning has begun for a fall series of carving classes and special topical carving and painting seminars. More information will be mailed out in August to museum members.



Tea on the Flats was held at the Decoy Museum on Wednesday May 5th. Joe Cook, Noble Mentzer, and Capt. Harry Jobs entertained questions from guests. Photo courtesy of John Jessup.

Weekend Carving Demonstrations

at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

August 1,	Harold Goodman	September 25,	Len Burcham
August 7,	George Hendricks	September 26,	Roger Urie
August 8,	Charlie Bryan		
August 14,	Ken Clodfelter	October 2,	Pat and Jeanne
August 15,	Bill Weaver		Vincenti
August 21,	Butch and Mary Carol	October 3,	Pat and Jeanne
	Larrimore		Vincenti
August 22,	Butch and Mary Carol	October 9,	Noble Mentzer
	Larrimore	October 10,	Mike Dedikind
August 28,	Pat Vincenti	October 16,	Butch and Mary Carol
August 29,	Mike Dedikind		Larrimore
		October 17,	Butch and Mary Carol
			Larrimore
September 4,	Noble Mentzer		Steve Lay
September 5,	Rick Rappeselli	October 23,	Joe Cook
September 11,	Joe Cook	October 24,	Joe Cook
September 12,	Byron Bodt	October 30,	Steiner Pierce
September 18,	Ken Clodfelter	October 31,	Ernie Mauldin
September 19,	Bob Wachter		



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



The **Bayou**

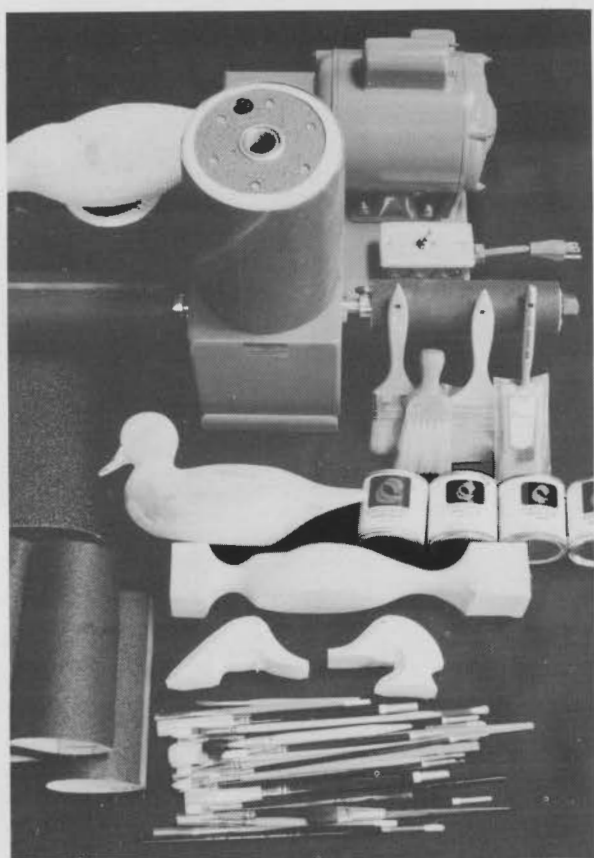
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