

The Canvasback

Summer 1995
Vol. 4, No. 3

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

\$3



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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

A woodduck drake carved by Butch and Mary Carol Larrimore sits on the porch of the Vandiver Inn. Photo by Mary Jo Moses.

FROM THE EDITOR

The yearly board elections are coming up shortly, and I want to take this chance to urge all of the membership to make an effort to vote for the board members. Board members play such an important role in the present and future of the Decoy Museum, and the membership control who is elected. Please take an active part in this process.

I would like to extend an invitation to all museum members for the Grand Opening of "Gunning the Flats." Yes, this exhibit is finally finished! Please join us for a reception on September 8, 1995 at 7:00 p.m. Come celebrate this large accomplishment with the museum's board and staff members!

Mary Jo Moses

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Havre de Grace Decoy Museum
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*From
the
President*



Dear Museum Member,

One of the special activities during this year's Duck Fair will be the formal opening of the "Gunning the Flats" exhibit gallery. "Gunning the Flats" has been the focus of our exhibit work for many years. Its completion marks the beginning of a new era for the Decoy Museum of interpretative exhibits. Soon, "What is a Decoy" and a restored Madison Mitchell Shop will be added to the museum's comprehensive exhibits, thereby enhancing our educational impact.

There are hundreds of patrons, volunteers, donors, and staff members who deserve the museum's thanks and gratitude for all of their efforts in creating "Gunning the Flats." They breathed life into a concept that now tells the story of why there were so many decoys made by many different carvers along the shores of the Susquehanna Flats.

"Gunning the Flats" is an exhibit of which we can all be proud. It is a tribute to the Susquehanna Flats' decoy makers. Carvers like Daddy Holly, Wally Algard, and Sam Barnes, hand-chopped thousands of canvasbacks for the sport and market hunters who came to reap the Bay's waterfowl bounty. They set the stage for the decoy makers of today. I do hope that everyone associated with the exhibit and the museum will join with us on Friday evening, September 8, to formally open "Gunning the Flats" to the public.

Allen J. Fair
President, Board of Directors

Tax deductible contributions can be made to the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. The museum was incorporated in 1981 as a non-profit organization which exists to document and interpret waterfowl as this art form applies to the social and economic life of the upper Chesapeake Bay region.

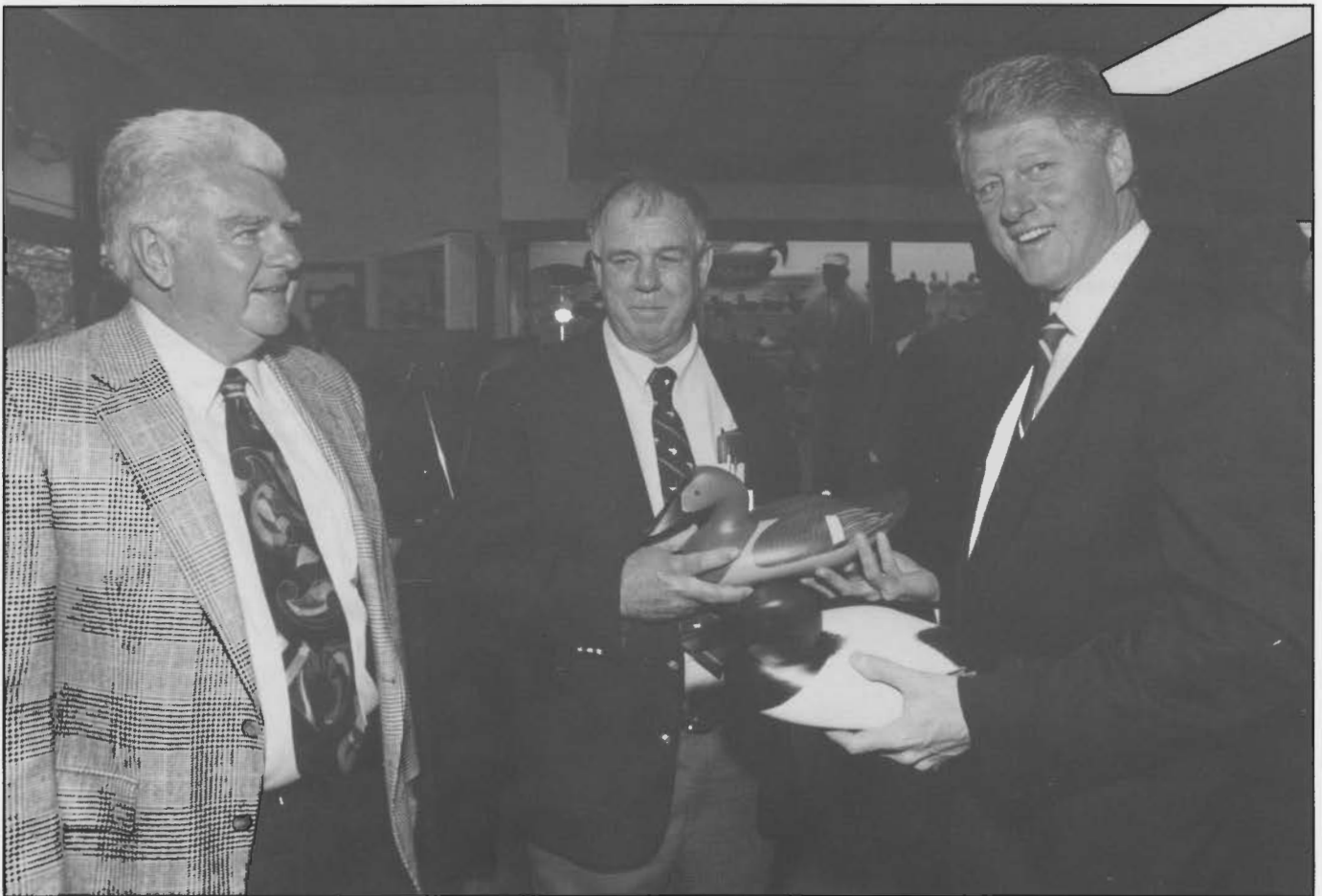
PRESIDENT CLINTON AND VICE PRESIDENT GORE AT THE DECOY MUSEUM!

Preparations for Earth Day 1995 festivities in Havre de Grace began many months previously. A few weeks prior to the date of Earth Day, rumors of a visit by President Bill Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore to Havre de Grace began circulating. Only days before Earth Day, secret service agents showed up at the Decoy Museum, requesting to use the Museum as the headquarters for Secret Service operations and as a holding area for the President and Vice-President. The Decoy Museum worked with the Secret Service agents to make preparations for the big visit. The President and Vice-President arrived on April 21, 1995 at 11:00 a.m. to deliver speeches to the public for Earth Day.

The Director of the Decoy Museum, Mary Jo Moses, the Board of Director's President, Allen J. Fair, and Vice-President, Jim Pierce, were on hand to greet

President Clinton and Vice-President Gore when they first arrived. After signing the museum's guest register, the President and Vice-President reviewed the decoys on display. The Decoy Museum then presented President Clinton with a pair of canvasback decoys carved by Jim Pierce, and Vice-President Gore received a pair of canvasbacks carved by Joey Jobes. They both were given a framed print by Durant Ball, "Canvasbacks Coming In."

The Decoy Museum was also pleased to welcome Maryland Governor Parris Glendening and presented him with a pair of canvasback decoys by Pat Vincenti. The pictures that follow document this memorable day, when President Clinton and Vice-President Gore visited the Decoy Museum and Havre de Grace.



Allen Fair, Jim Pierce, and President Clinton. Photo courtesy of the White House.



LEFT: *Jim Pierce, Allen Fair, Vice-President Gore, and Mary Jo Moses. Photo courtesy of the White House.*



ABOVE: *President Clinton and Jim Pierce. Photo courtesy of the White House.*



ABOVE: *President Clinton and Allen Fair. Photo courtesy of the White House.*



ABOVE: *Jim Pierce, Mary Jo Moses, Governor Glendening and Allen Fair. Photo courtesy of the Governor's office.*



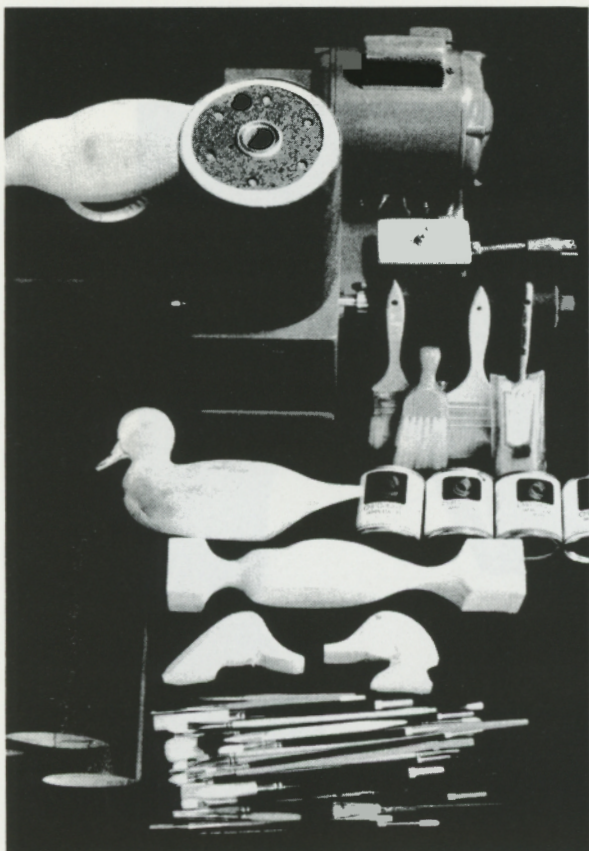
LEFT: *Jim Pierce, Allen Fair, and President Clinton. Photo courtesy of the White House.*



President Bill Clinton and Mary Jo Moses. Photo courtesy of the White House.



Jim Pierce, Vice-President Gore, and Allen Fair. Photo courtesy of the White House.



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Book Review

Early American Waterfowling 1700's - 1930

Written by

Stephen M. Miller

Reviewed by

Bill Smart

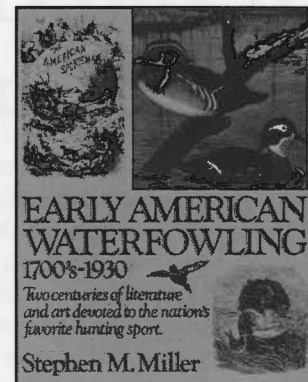
There are a number of books in print which are devoted to various aspects of waterfowl hunting, history, conservation, or unique regional features. However, I don't think there are any available which meld together all of these aspects with such in-depth research or in a more enjoyable presentation than this one. As a sportsman and conservationist, Stephen Miller shares with the reader his more than 30 years of research and information in an easy to read format which is dotted with wonderful pictures and reproductions of early prints.

In seven informative chapters the author ties together excerpts of waterfowling literature through the past two centuries. The opening chapter is devoted to the different species of waterfowl and the techniques used to hunt each unique bird. Ducks, geese, brant, cranes, swans, and shorebirds are discussed by the sportsmen who have hunted them through the years.

Two chapters are devoted to regional hunting: Atlantic Tidewaters and the West. The East Coast section reflects the hunting from Eastern Maine to Currituck Sound. Easterners will enjoy the articles about gunning on Barnegat Bay, battery shooting and night gunning on the Chesapeake Bay and the famous Carroll's Island Club. The Western section recounts stories from Quebec, the upper Midwest, the Southern clubs, the Far West, and an article about hunting in the Bad Lands by Theodore Roosevelt.

Hunting equipment is in a separate chapter with information about decoys, blinds, and an extensive reference on boat building in various regions. A chapter entitled "End of an Era" focuses on the impact of industrialization and the lack of conservation on waterfowl gunning. There is also an entertaining section of hunting hints and hazards. In this chapter, one can read about dealing with Indians, a cat tolling ducks, or find a recipe for teal from the 1700's! The last chapter is a short exhibit of old advertisements. My favorite is from a company in Brooklyn, New York, which sold grass suits to hunters. I can't help but wonder if Cap't Harry Jobs ever tried one of these.

This is a delightful book which is well researched and provides the reader with a great deal of



history and perspective. For the history buffs, the bibliography provides a superb reference for further reading. This book offers good reading as the dog days of Summer pass and the crisp Fall approaches.

Early American Waterfowling 1700's - 1930 is 279 pages and was published in 1987 by Winchester Press, New Century Publishers Inc., of Piscataway, New York. It is available at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum for \$27.95



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Grand Opening of the Exhibit "Gunning the Flats!"

After eight months of a hectic schedule of researching, writing, designing, fabricating, arranging, and installing, the seventeen different display areas around the perimeter of "Gunning the Flats" are finished! The Grand Opening of this exhibit takes place at the Decoy Museum on September 8th, from 7 p.m. - 9 p.m. Light hors d'oeuvres will be served. Ribbon cutting is at 7 p.m. Open to the public.

The "Gunning the Flats" exhibit has been in the making for over four years. January of 1994 marked a large forward step toward completion when Robert Hess and company finished up constructing the boardwalk. Valerie Lloyd's mural covered half of the exhibit area and Mary Jo Moses continued the mural around to encompass the complete room. More planning, research, and acquisition of artifacts took up the rest of 1994. By January of 1995, the installation of the first few cases took place and throughout the spring and summer the remaining displays were fabricated and installed.

The exhibit covers different types of hunting that were done out on the Susquehanna Flats. As you move through the exhibit, the categories that you will find are: The Susquehanna Flats Environment, Boats, Evolution of the Shotgun, Transportation, Market Gunning, Decoys of the Upper Bay, Conservation Laws, Outlaw Gunning, Baiting, Modern Gunning, and Body Booting.

A special thanks to all those involved with making this concept become a reality. The Decoy Museum has had a large number of people that have donated time, money, labor, supplies, expertise, and artifacts to this exhibit, and the Decoy Museum thanks everyone for their generous support. Come and see for yourself the completed exhibit of "Gunning the Flats!"



Come stand where the President has been! Senator Sarbanes, President Bill Clinton, Senator David Craig, and Mayor Gunther Hirsch, all standing in "Gunning the Flats." Photo courtesy of the White House.

THE GOOSE IN THE GAS PLANT

David Kent

The first time I saw him, I thought he was ugly. There he sat atop an old sewing stand, peeling, dusty, one-eyed, and looking forlorn. Even I, a novice, recognized him as a goose, but as I picked him up, he was surprisingly light. A quick inspection revealed that he was made of canvas stretched over a wire frame nailed to a bottom board. His neck and head were wood. On the bottom was the price; in three digits. "Whoa, who would pay that for this poor thing?" I thought, and put him down.

It was December, 1992 and my wife, Cora, and I were in the incubation stage of "Decoy Fever." In the Fall, we had visited relatives in Chase, Michigan and stopped to browse in an antique shop nearby. They had several wooden duck decoys that captured our fancy with their rugged simplicity. Suddenly, I remembered my grandfather's hunting and fishing resort in Wisconsin and the piles of decoys I played with when I was a kid. We didn't buy any then, but on the drive home, we talked about them and how we might learn more about decoys. When back home in St. Petersburg, Florida, I was rummaging through some auction catalogs from the Gas Plant Antique Arcade in town, so named because it was on the site of an old coal gas plant. Surprisingly, there was one that was devoted exclusively to decoys! I took it home and studied every page, picture, and description. The names of certain carvers appeared often and the estimated selling price ranged from less than \$100 to astronomical figures. I realized that this hobby was a complex but fascinating subject.

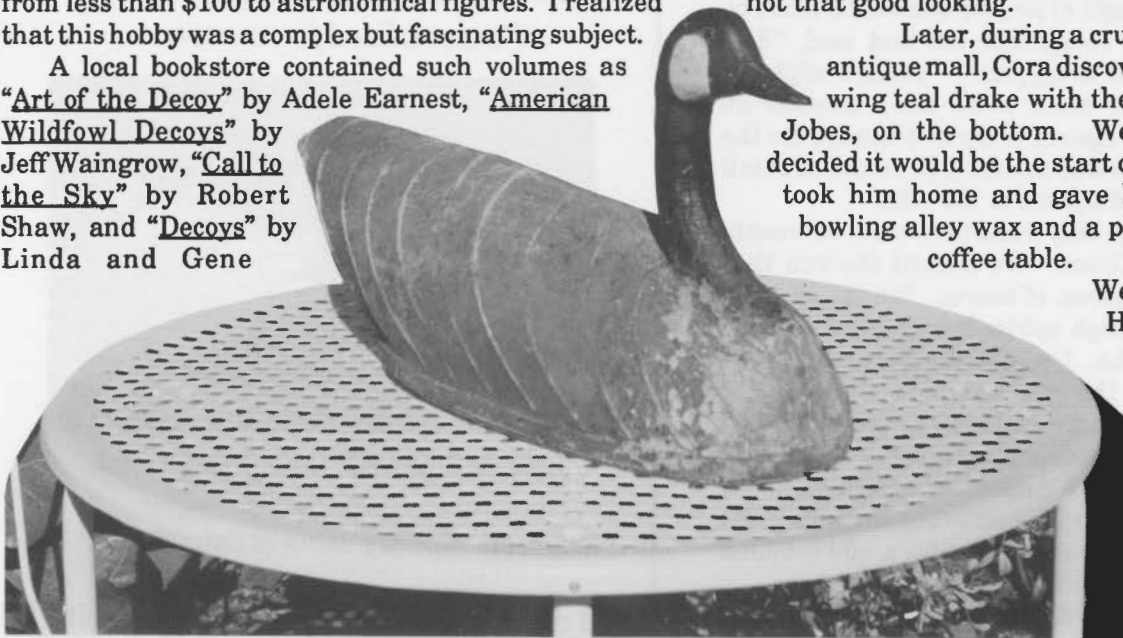
A local bookstore contained such volumes as "Art of the Decoy" by Adele Earnest, "American Wildfowl Decoys" by Jeff Waingrow, "Call to the Sky" by Robert Shaw, and "Decoys" by Linda and Gene

Kangas. What a bonanza! I bought them all and rushed home to share them with Cora. The more we read, the more we wanted to learn and the more we were convinced that decoys were something we could not live without. The next time I was downtown, I stopped again at the Gas Plant, just knowing that some sleek masterful decoy by Elmer Crowell or Harry Shourds was waiting for me to buy it for a song. Alas, the only decoy in that huge arcade was the old, battered canvas goose.

The Gas Plant is not the only antique store in Pinellas County Florida, and we began to search others in the area for just the right decoy to start our collection. By this time, we realized that duck hunting was never a big deal in Florida as evidenced by the lack of decoys, interest, and knowledge of the antique dealers in the area. Occasionally, I would re-visit the Gas Plant and each time noticed my friend the goose was still there. Was he getting better looking or was I starting to appreciate what he was? By now I had learned that such critters had been made in North Carolina along the coast to answer the needs peculiar to that area. I had seen photos of some of these canvas covered decoys and most of them were actually uglier than the one I visited from time to time. Or was he getting better looking? One day I decided to see if I could entice the owner to part with it for a \$100 less. The response to my offer was an emphatic "No way!" Oh well, he was really not that good looking.

Later, during a cruise through another antique mall, Cora discovered a coy little blue wing teal drake with the name, Cap't Harry Jobes, on the bottom. We both liked it and decided it would be the start of our collection. We took him home and gave him a good coat of bowling alley wax and a place of honor on the coffee table.

We first heard of the Havre de Grace Decoy Festival from an article in the local St. Petersburg newspaper. Having missed the 1993 Festival due to prior commitments we got the dates of the 1994 Festival and



My favorite decoy. Photo courtesy of David Kent.

marked every calendar in the house. This would be our pilgrimage, our contact with real decoy carvers, collectors, and sellers. A chance to absorb knowledge, history, study actual historic decoys, and maybe even enlarge our collection.

Later that month, I decided to show Cora the goose at the Gas Plant. Several days earlier, I had verified that the canvas goose decoy was still there and I had gotten a commitment from the owner to sell it to me for what I had now decided as a "steal." Funny how a little knowledge and a lot of desire can change your point of view. Of course, Cora did not have the benefit of months of preparation and anticipation of this moment. She thought he was ugly and overpriced! We walked around, browsing in other stalls while I explained the history of canvas birds, their relative rarity, the age and authenticity, and its potential value. She was unimpressed. "We need to know more about these things and besides, it'll never sell and the dealer will come down further if we wait," she said. I agreed and we left the goose in the Gas Plant.

I continued to lobby for the goose, by dropping subtle hints to Cora about how much I wanted the decoy and how it would be a valuable addition to our collection. Finally, one of my arrows hit its mark; "If we had that goose with us when we went to the Decoy Festival, I'll bet we could find someone there who will know all about canvas birds and can identify him." Sure enough, some days later as we passed the Gas Plant, Cora said, "Let's stop and see if the goose is still there." I tried to look like a bored browser wandering aimlessly among the booths in the store. There sat the goose atop the sewing stand, dustier than ever. But I saw his one glass eye brighten at the sight of me; we were old friends by now. The manager recognized me and said, "Still interested in that fine decoy, eh?" "Yeah, I might be tempted if the owner could come down another 50 bucks," I replied. He agreed to try and headed for the phone. After a few anxious minutes, he returned to tell us that the owner had agreed to the offer.

It was Wednesday, May 4 and tomorrow we were to leave for Havre de Grace. We packed the van that night, including the goose, of course. We set off early the next morning in high spirits amply supplied with cold drinks and snacks. Up with the first rooster the next day and on to the Festival. We flashed past Washington and Baltimore and soon we were cruising up US 40 looking for the turnoff to Havre de Grace. We found it easily and drove around the town until we found the Decoy Museum. We absorbed the wonderful exhibits, joined the museum as members, and shopped the gift shop and bookstore.

It wasn't until Saturday afternoon of the festival that I remembered our beloved goose! He was languishing in a box in the back of the van. "Let's go back to the

Middle School and find someone who knows about canvas birds," I suggested to Cora. We did and were directed to two people; first to Beatrice Berle from North Carolina. Ms. Berle has been a collector and dealer for some time and was particularly versed in canvas decoys. She studied our goose and offered the opinion that it may have been made by Ned Burgess, but the head had been replaced; not an uncommon event, since the long necks were fragile. He was probably made about 1920 to 1930 in the Currituck Sound area of North Carolina.

We thanked Bea for her expertise and next sought out Nick Sapone who is a present day maker of canvas decoys, also from North Carolina. Nick's birds are built just like our goose; same wire frame, and stretched canvas, wooden neck and head. Not surprising when we learned that he uses Burgess and other old-time makers as models. Nick concurred with Bea's assessment, but added that the head was replaced by an expert, possibly Mannie Haywood. He also assured me that it was alright to replace the missing eye, as long as it matched the other.

We went to the live decoy auction that evening. Auctioneer David Hartzel took his place behind the

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podium and banged the auction to life. There was an excellent offering of both old and contemporary decoys which went to spirited bidding. I confess to very limited exposure to auctions, but Cora had not only picked out some very good buys, she expertly added five decoys to our growing collection. The evening capped a wonderful day and we returned to our room with the bitter-sweet realization that tomorrow we would have to return to reality and Florida.

Driving home after the festival weekend, we relived every moment of the weekend, thrilled at the quality and depth of the entire event. We love our new passion for decoys, the people involved, and their respect for the old-time carvers. We also know that no matter how many decoys we may add to our collection, the one to hold the place of honor is our goose from the Gas Plant.

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My Swedish Decoys

**From a Letter by Anna
Helene Tobiassen
Tønsberg, Norway**

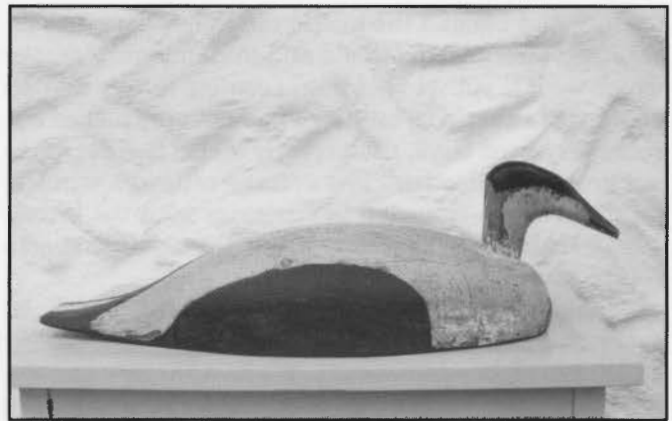
Many years ago, I lived with my family in Washington, DC. During this period we did quite a bit of traveling in the eastern areas of the United States. I like old things, and I made a habit of looking for my souvenirs in the old-barn type of antique stores with roadside, hand-painted signs. There I discovered, and immediately became fascinated by, the decoys that could be found in such places.

Once back in Norway, I began searching for decoys. I have not yet come across a Norwegian decoy, except for a rig of six or seven, very plain black decoys, looking as if they were made by using only a saw. I have though, seen quite a few decoys in Sweden, and have included some photos of my four favorite Swedish decoys.

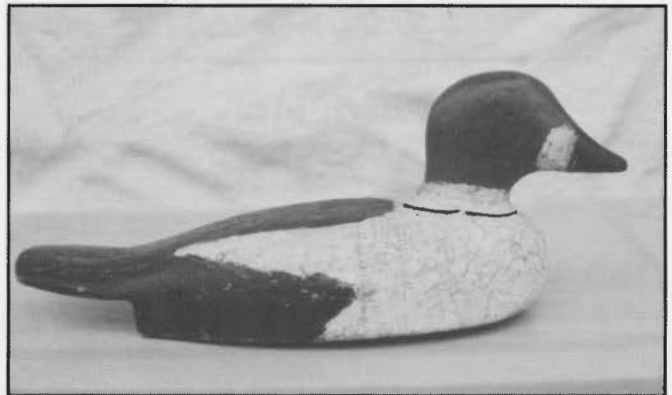
The yellow eider decoy was bought on the western coast of Sweden, in the region of Bohuslen. The others came from the eastern shores. One eider decoy has traces of black leather nailed onto its rather short tail. The other eider has a head made from a naturally shaped branch. The two eiders and the merganser are hollow, but the little whistler is not.



Yellow eider decoy with traces of black leather. Photo courtesy of Anna Tobiassen.



Eider with head made from a naturally shaped branch. Photo courtesy of Anna Tobiassen.



Goldeneye or "whistler" decoy. Photo courtesy of Anna Tobiassen.



Hollow merganser. Photo courtesy of Anna Tobiassen.

1995 DUCK FAIR

September 9th & 10th

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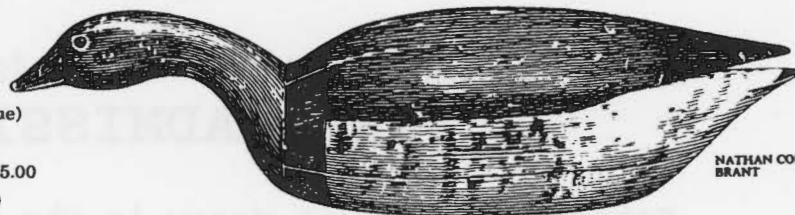
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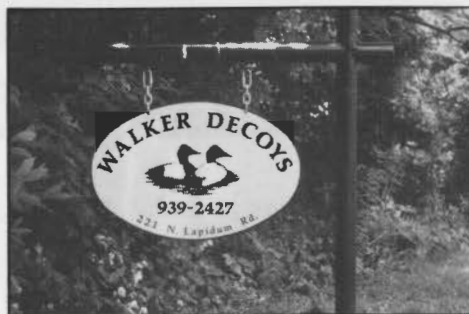
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Oversize	Price
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Decoy Lamps (most)	Price
1/2 Swan Lamps	\$120ea
3/4 Size Swan	\$125ea
1/2 Swan	\$65 ea

Northern New York Carving

Hilda Clark

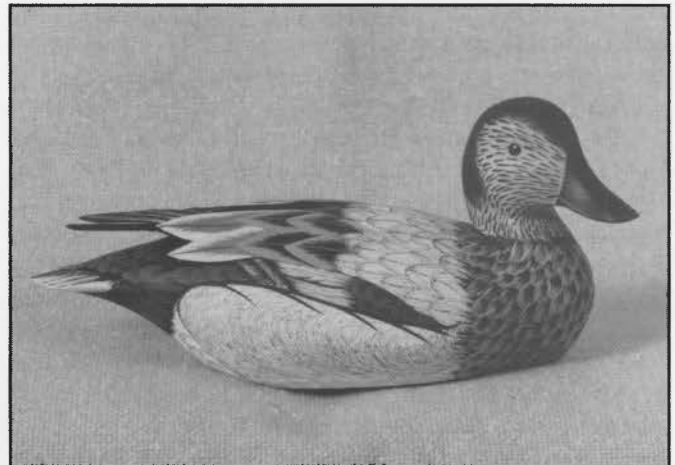
In Northern New York State, on Rt. 3, also known as "The Seaway Trail," a mallard drake on an attractive sign alerts the traveler that Ferguson Decoys are on view in the cottage-like shop nearby. The glimpse of a full-size swan decoy in the window calls you inside to see more.

Tom and Linda Ferguson carry on the proud tradition of one of the oldest folk arts in America, decoy carving. Long before the market gunning of the 1800's, Indian hunters along the St. Lawrence River used the skins of dead birds stuffed with grasses to attract live birds. The purely functional decoy was in great demand around the turn of the century, when railroad transportation made it possible to ship freshly killed birds to major cities, such as New York City and Philadelphia. It was not unusual to harvest fifty to one-hundred birds a day on the St. Lawrence River. A single storm on the river could cause a hunter to lose all his decoys and purchasing replacements was costly. Therefore, local hunters began carving their own decoys thereby starting a rich tradition which is evident today in the work of the Ferguson's.

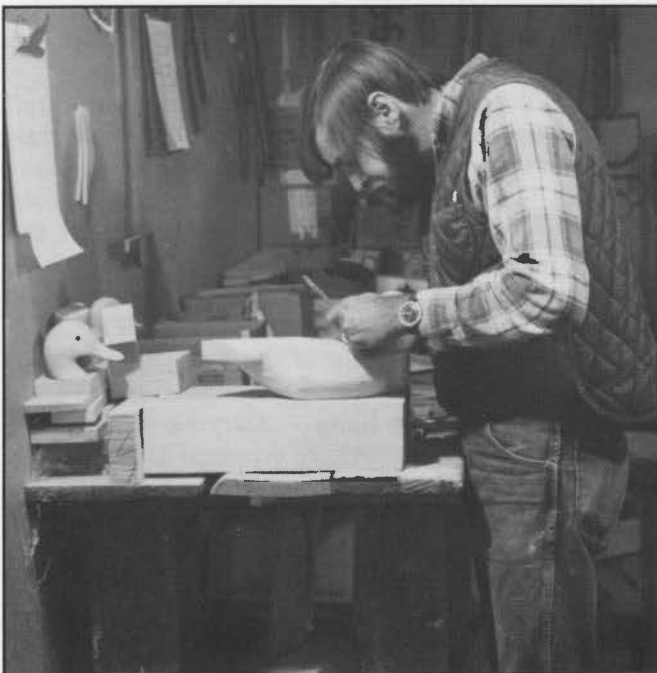
Tom Ferguson produces only decorative decoys, but when he began his apprenticeship with Kenneth I. Harris in 1971, Mr. Harris was still making hunting decoys. Originally from Watertown, NY, Ken Harris had made his own working decoys since 1927. After

moving to Woodville, NY, the present site of Ferguson's Decoys. Harris turned to decoy carving as a full time occupation.

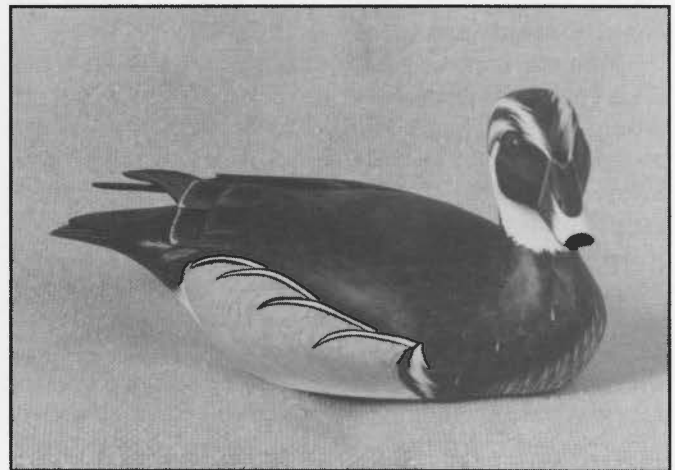
The early work of Mr. Harris reflected the influence of "The Granddaddy of the St. Lawrence carvers" - Chauncey Wheeler (1862-1937). Having worked as a boatman and hunting guide around the Alexandria Bay area, Wheeler knew well the requirements for good working decoys on the rough, icy waters of the St. Lawrence River. Early carvers around the St. Lawrence area had discovered that, "You've got to have birds with long necks if you're hunting on this river . . . something to hold onto so you can wind them out quickly. Otherwise, a man could freeze out there." Wheeler's sleek-bodied birds, with long necks and high heads, would become the prototype for all early St. Lawrence decoys.



Gadwall drake by Ferguson. Photo from the Ferguson collection.



Tom Ferguson at work. Photo from the Ferguson collection.



Wood duck by Ferguson. Photo from the Ferguson collection.

Chauncey Wheeler's signature was the deeply carved eye ridges on each bird.

Mr. Wheeler influenced many young carvers in the region, but the most prolific of them was Ken Harris. His early decoys were quite racy and Wheeleresque. As time went on, his style changed, becoming full-bodied and unlike any other St. Lawrence decoys. Having established his own style in carving, Ken Harris' decoys became increasingly in demand. By the 1950's, he had a flourishing business and his work was highly decorative. The demand for his work was such, that many orders had to be turned away. Harris also became known internationally, and some of his decoys are in the collections of noted personalities such as Queen Elizabeth and Clark Gable. Around 4,600 birds were produced by Harris before his death in 1981, at the age of seventy-six. During his many years in the business, Ken Harris was employer and mentor to many of the prominent carvers working in the St. Lawrence region at the present time, including Tom Ferguson.

Ferguson Decoys started in 1980, when Tom and Linda purchased the business in Woodville from Ken Harris. The tradition of producing fine carvings has been passed on in the work done by the Fergusons. Mr. Ferguson was quoted in a newspaper article as saying, "It (carving) came quite easily to me, but it took almost four years to have real confidence in (my) own carving." Now after many years in the business, Ferguson has developed his own unique style, while keeping a small amount of the Harris influence in his work.

The delivery of a truckload of kiln-dried basswood from a lumber yard in Binghamton, NY begins the process of decoy making at the Fergusons'. Approximately twenty-eight hours from start to finish are invested in the making of a single decoy.

Tom starts by roughing out the body shape on one of his bandsaws in the barn workshop, which is located behind the sales shop. He uses a silhouette to guide the transformation of a fourteen inch block of wood into a decoy. From then on, the work is accomplished by the use of Stanley chisels, knives, and sanders. The heads of the decoys are done separately, hand-whittled and later attached to the body with epoxy glue.

Ferguson decoys are available in two grades. Decorative grade birds are life-size carvings painted in the finest detail. Collector grade decoys are also life size, but raised wings (which are not inserts) are painstakingly carved from the original block of wood. Full-bodied styles are also available. They have raised wings with the legs and feet mounted on drift wood and



Ferguson shop. Photo by Thomas J. Moses.

painted with excellent attention to detail. Both grades of decoys are offered in eighteen different species, both hens and drakes. After Tom applies the sealer, the decoys are handed over to Linda for painting.

Although she has no formal training in art, Linda paints each decoy with intricate detail. Using live models, photographs, and mounts, the former dental hygienist handles the Grumbacher brushes and acrylic paints with precision and accuracy. Linda applies three coats of gesso as a base, before applying the carefully blended colors and finely etched feathers that turn the life-size carvings into authentic looking birds. Sometimes feathers are done with a wood burning technique and small detailing handled with a Rapidograph pen. The combined results are handsome.

In addition to the ducks, Tom and Linda craft Canada geese, loons and shorebirds. They are busy with orders year round, but do little advertising. Word of mouth leads customers to visit the shop or place orders throughout the year. Return customers frequently request the mate to their original purchase.

Even if not planning a purchase, the Ferguson Shop is a great place to stop. Related work of other artists is on display as well as a few of the Ken Harris decoys forming a nice blend of the work of past and present artists. The Ferguson Shop - carrying on the decoy tradition of the St. Lawrence River in Upstate New York.

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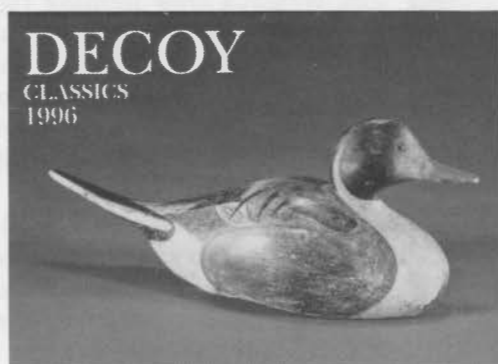
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Cap't Jimmy Wright Celebrates Thirty-five Years of Carving

C. John Sullivan

I believe that most collectors of the wooden fowl find a link to the past through our mutual fascination with this American folk art. I've found that among the very few of the real "old timers" that are still alive and well, the link comes not just from the folk art, but from the great stories they are willing to share with the decoy world.

On Maryland's beautiful Eastern Shore in a community which might hold a record as one of the smallest in the state, there resides a carver, who though not an old timer in the chronological sense, is certainly one by virtue of experience. In Kent County, Maryland's village of Massey, one will find a folk art carver plying his craft in his backyard or at his kitchen table. James A. Wright, born in Double Creek, Queen Annes County, Maryland in 1933, is a full-time carver of almost anything. Jimmy's grandfather was a market hunter selling migrating fowl to keep his family fed. His great-grandfather was a lighthouse keeper at Queenstown.

In the early 1970's on a decoy and dove hunting trip to Dorchester County, my oldest and best decoy friend Henry A. Fleckenstein, Jr. and I were shooting over Henry's rig of the most realistic dove decoys. Among the group were flying doves with attached metal wings, a feeding dove, a sleeping dove, and a preening dove. Every possible natural position was represented in that rig of doves we shot over that day. After some persistent prying on my part, Capt. Henry finally revealed to me the carver of those wooden counterfeit fowl. It was Jimmy Wright of Massey, Maryland. I imagine that by now Jimmy has carved literally hundreds of dove decoys for Henry and me. Dove hunters still seek out Jim Wright doves.

It was shortly after that dove hunting trip that I was to make the trip to Massey. That trip was one back in time. Jim was rated as a sharpshooter during his stint in the U.S. Army, and on that day I had the opportunity to witness some truly outstanding shooting skills demonstrated by Jim with his trusty Colt six-shooter. It struck me on that first visit that Jim could wear a six-shooter more comfortably than most men wear their D.U. pins.

On a follow up visit, as I watched Jimmy carve a

special order robin decoy for me, I asked him where he kept his power saws and sanders. Jim quickly informed me that he didn't use any power tools. When I asked him why not, he replied, "I tell people my carvings are handmade, and if I used power tools they wouldn't be handmade now, would they?"

Over the years Jim Wright has signed his carvings using his full name, James Wright, address Massey, MD and the year made. His western-style signature he calls the Bar-W signature is a slash (/) over the letter "W."

Jim has carved every species of migratory waterfowl native to Maryland's Eastern Shore, including two full-size swan decoys. His miniatures may range in size, from a one inch brant to a fourteen inch swan. Jim's personal gunning rig usually included a "confidence" decoy. He continues carving a variety of confidence decoys ranging from full-size great blue herons and snowy egrets to blue jays, yellow hammer flickers, and red winged black birds. Jim Wright's crow hunting rigs have appeared in sales of the major decoy auction houses. These crow hunting rigs include several crow decoys and a large owl decoy. The owl decoys made by Jim Wright include great horned, barred, barn, and snowy owls.

In addition to doves, waterfowl, shore birds, bob white quails, parrots, confidence decoys, crows, and owls, Jim Wright carves fish and frog decoys. His folk art carvings include whirly gigs and World War I era airplanes.

A certain whimsical attitude pervades each of Jim's carvings. Just as it is difficult to explain to a Long Island decoy carver how to pin point the various identifying characteristics of decoys from the Susquehanna Flats, they typically say they all look the same, it is equally difficult to tell someone how to identify a carving from Jim Wright. There is just something that invades each of his carvings. Maybe from watching Jim carve so many things over the years, I see something of him in each of his carvings that isn't apparent to those who don't know the man. When I look at that high jauntiness of the head; something says to me, "I'm from Massey, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland — I'm handmade by Jimmy Wright."



Cap't Jimmy Wright holding one of his swans. Photo courtesy of C. John Sullivan.

From the Collection: Ed Pearson

Karla Mattsson, M.A.

Edwin Pearson is one of Havre de Grace's many under-appreciated decoy carvers. It is not known when Ed began carving decoys, but by the turn of the century he was in full swing, and he continued to carve up to his death in 1932. In his later years, Ed worked closely with Bob McGaw Jr., and his decoys are credited for being Bob's main influence for his famous "1929" models. It has been speculated that Bob McGaw turned bodies for Ed Pearson, but enough differences occur between the two men's work to cast doubt on that. Ed Pearson was a contractor and boat builder from a family of wood workers; it is likely he had his own duplicating lathe among his other wood working tools.

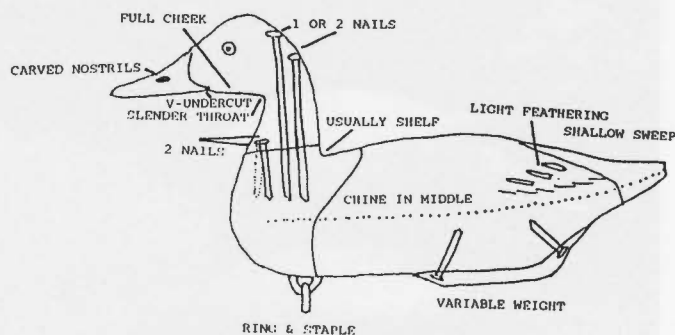
Ed's decoys show amazing consistency, aside from minor technical variations. These changes have not been placed in a time frame, but using Bob McGaw as a model, I believe Ed's earliest work are those without neck shelves. There is no stylistic change between the lathe turned decoys and the hand-chopped ones, creating great difficulty in telling them apart. They were finished to the degree where all tell-tale tool marks were obliterated. Over all, Ed Pearson's decoys are very well made and quite refined. Unfortunately, he apparently made only canvasbacks.

The heads on his decoys are distinctive. He paired an unusually full cheek with an exceptionally slender throat, which is apparent in profile. The face is a little long, tapering into a fine bill. The bill separation has a generous curve into the mandibular region. All of his decoys have a V-shaped undercut beneath the bill. Mandibles are not carved in, but most decoys do have carved nostrils. Eyes were painted on, if they are present at all. Ed attached the heads to their bodies



Ed Pearson canvasback decoy. Photo by M. Moses.

with two nails in front of the neck and two behind the head, but some have only one nail behind the head. The putty covering the nails is rarely popped on an Ed Pearson decoy, even a well weathered one.



The only noticeable variation in body shape is the presence or absence of a neck shelf, the overall style remains the same. The block is shallow and wide, with a straight back and shallow sweep into the tail. The tail itself is thin and narrow, compatible with the delicate bill. The chine line is in the middle and is softly rounded, more so in the lathe-turned bodies. The bottom is also softly rounded, and thickens in the rear. The breast has a slight slope, which carries into the throat.

His decoys uniformly have ring and staple anchor attachments, but the weighting is highly variable. Any weight found on Upper Bay decoys can be found on an Ed Pearson decoy. The most frequent weight is the "dog bone," shape, no doubt due to his close connection to Bob McGaw.



Ed Pearson decoy in front, Bob McGaw decoy behind. Photo by M. Moses.



Shelfless canvasback drake, courtesy of Nelson Mengel. Photo by M. Moses.

Ed Pearson decoys in original paint are simple, but have wing details. The primary feathers are applied with a wet on wet technique which ties into the speculums. The black bib extends beyond the shelf and partially up the neck.

Every Ed Pearson canvasback is a classic and classy decoy. His consistently high quality carving and unmistakable style is only enhanced by his influence on Bob McGaw. Ed certainly ranks among Havre de Grace's best carvers, including the Holly family and Dick Howlett.



Pair of canvasbacks, courtesy of Bill Smart. Photo by M. Moses.

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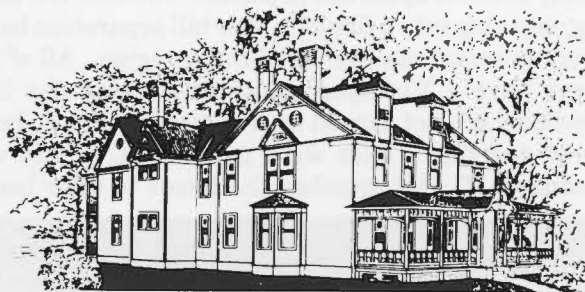
Pearson brand. Photo by M. Moses.

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My Favorite Decoy

Karla Mattsson

My favorite decoy is, without a doubt, my first decoy. After finishing graduate school, I had moved back home with my parents in Midland, Michigan where I began looking for a job. Curatorial positions are few and far between and I was getting discouraged receiving so many rejection letters. When Karen Marshall of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum called for an interview I was elated, but knew nothing about decoys. Karen recommended that I study up on the subject before the interview.

Our local library had little on the subject, but I read what I could find. Bill Mackey's book, American Bird Decoys, was about it for reference material. Armed with this new information, I scoured the antique malls looking for good, old, working decoys and found several that were appealing. I decided to buy one to celebrate if I got the job. After the interview, I looked again at the decoys and ruled many out. My mom was very patient as I spent an afternoon weighing the merits of three in particular. I chose what I thought was a mallard hen and felt extravagant paying seventy-five dollars for a decoy.

Since then, I have learned a tremendous amount

about ducks and decoys. I have not yet been able to identify the carver of my first decoy, but I can say confidently that it is an over-size, blue-wing, teal drake, not a mallard hen at all. Looking at him reminds me of just how far I have come, and where I have yet to go. Even though I bought him while I was still naive on the subject of decoys, I continue to find him irresistible. The brutal simplicity of his shape and paint pattern will always be to me, the epitome of a working decoy.



My favorite decoy. Photo by M. Moses.

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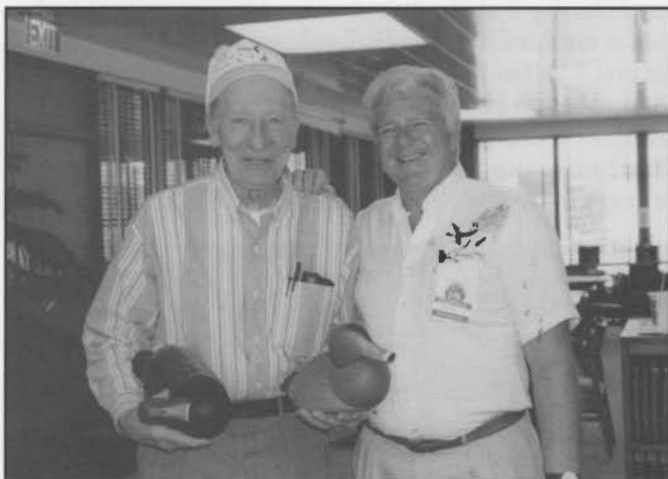
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Charlie Bryan and Allen J. Fair at the Honorary Chairmen Autograph session. Photo by H. Miles.



Chris White, artist of 1995. Photo by H. Miles.



Board member Madelyn Shank at the Autograph session. Photo by H. Miles.



Exhibitor Louis Frisino with visitor. Photo by H. Miles.



Whittling away! Photo by H. Miles.

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1995 Decoy Festival - Winners

Senior Duck Calling Contest

- 1st Darvin Gebhart, Hanover, PA
- 2nd David Barnes, Liverpool, PA
- 3rd Sean Mann, Towson, MD

Senior Goose Calling Contest

- 1st Fred Zink, Clayton, OH
- 2nd Greg Webster, Linkwood, MD
- 3rd Ken Saubier, Rising Sun, MD

Novice Duck Calling Contest

- 1st Karl Helmkamp, Ahsokie, NC
- 2nd Jerry Cook, Wilmington, DE
- 3rd Allen Stanley, Dover, DE

Novice Goose Calling Contest

- 1st Kevin Popo, Claymont, DE
- 2nd Gary Michael, Lutherville, MD
- 3rd Chris Martin, Stevensville, MD

Junior Duck Calling Contest

- 1st Rickey Robinson, Bel Air, MD
- 2nd Joshua Smith, Windsor, PA
- 3rd Michael Luongo, Centerville, MD

Junior Goose Calling Contest

- 1st Michael Luongo, Centerville, MD
- 2nd Barry Mickey, Pylesville, MD
- 3rd Bud Mickey, Pylesville, MD

Team Duck Calling Contest

- 1st Sean Mann, Towson, MD and Robert Dolby, Pocomoke City, MD



Winners of the gunning rig competition; Bob Barrow, Bill Kell, and Mike Smyser. photo by B. Wilson.

Team Goose Calling Contest

- 1st Dave Barnes, Liverpool, PA
- Josh Neuwiller, Cordova, MD, and Greg Webster, Linkwood, MD

Painting Contest

- 1st Kevin Hammel, Pt. Pleasant, NJ
- 2nd Ed Itter, Pasadena, MD
- 3rd Ron Laber, Fishing Creek, MD

Head Whittling Contest

- 1st Charlie Jobes, Havre de Grace, MD
- 2nd Art Boxleitner, Willow Street, PA
- 3rd John Clark, Havre de Grace, MD

Gunning Rig Competition

- 1st William Kell, Spring Grove, PA
- 2nd Mike Smyser, Manchester, PA
- 3rd Bob Barrow, Patterson, NY

Decorative Floating

- 1st Mark Strohman, Parkville, MD
- 2nd Sina P. Kurman, Alloway, NJ
- 3rd Jeff Beach, Pikesville, MD

Best of Show - Decorative Lifesize

- 1st Robert Hostetter, Elkton, MD
- 2nd Vincent A Ciesielski, Bethany Beach, DE
- 3rd Dan Williams, Owings Mills, MD

Best of Show - Decorative Miniature

- 1st Ashley Gray, Frederick, MD
- 2nd Dan Williams, Owings Mills, MD
- 3rd Ashley Gray, Frederick, MD

Gunning Stool Competition

- 1st Robert A. Barrow, Patterson, NY
- 2nd Mike Smyser, Manchester, PA
- 3rd Howard Gaines, Dover, DE

Decorative Slick Competition

- 1st Barry Strohmeier, New Castle, DE
- 2nd Fred Zink, Clayton, OH
- 3rd George Stram, Forest Hill, MD

Youth Carving Competition

- 1st Les Fuller, Elkton, MD
- 2nd Carrie Dill, Havre de Grace, MD



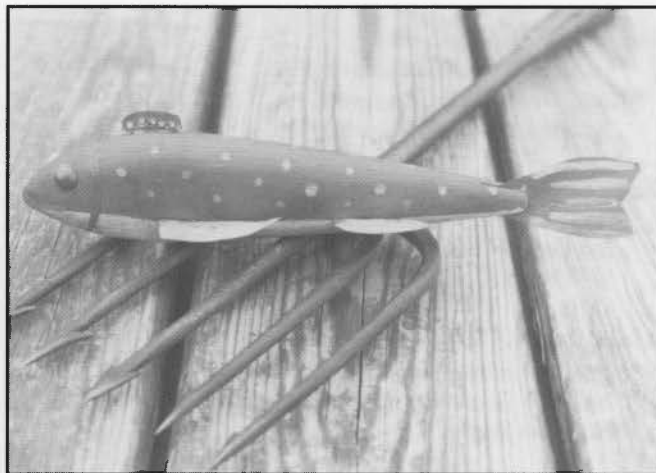
Arlene Grace competes in the calling contest. Photo by H. Miles.

EXHIBIT UPDATE

FISH DECOYS

As a first for the Decoy Museum, we will be displaying fish decoys! These are predominantly working decoys for spear fishing in Michigan and Minnesota, where fishermen cut holes in the ice and lure fish into spearing range. Fish decoys are beautiful and fascinating examples of folk art that many people may overlook.

Thanks to collector Bill Lawton, the Decoy Museum will exhibit dozens of fish decoys from September through November. Included in this display are examples by such famous carvers as Earl Kiemeyer, Vernon Braggs Sr., and Harvey Chase. Be sure to stop by and admire these decoys during the Duck Fair, September 9th and 10th.



One of the fish decoys by Vernon Braggs, Sr. that will be on display. Photo courtesy Bill Lawton.

1995 Calendar of Events

- September 8** **Grand Opening of "Gunning the Flats"**
Come and see the completed exhibit. Open invitation to membership.
7 p.m. - 9 p.m. Light hors d'oeuvres. Ribbon cutting at 7:00 p.m.
- September 9, 10** **8th Annual Duck Fair**
Held at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum and on the Bayou Condominium lawn. Live auction Saturday 1 p.m.
Sponsored by The Record, and MBNA American Bank. (410) 939-3739
- October 5, 6, 7** **Auction of Important American Bird Decoys, Guns, and Sporting Collectibles**
The Ward Museum & Oliver's. (410) 742-4988
- October 20, 21, 22** **Fall Classics Festival**
Antique and classic boat show, decoys, classic cars, and trucks
The Charlestown Yacht Club, Charlestown, Cecil County, MD
(717) 531-2218
- October 21** **Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition & Sale**
Chestertown, MD (410) 778-0416
- November 10, 11, 12** **25th Waterfowl Festival**
World's Premier Wildlife Art Show and Sale. Easton, MD
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Weekend Carving Demonstrations

at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

August 5,	Charles Bryan	September 23,	Butch and Mary Carol
August 6,	Joe Cook		Larrimore
August 12,	Lenny Burcham	September 24,	Joe Cook
August 13,	Bill Weaver	September 30,	Jack Simperts
August 19,	Noble Mentzer		
August 20,	Bryon Bodt	October 1,	Capt. Roger Urie
August 26,	Joey Jobs	October 7,	Lenny Burcham
August 27,	Nick Birster	October 8,	Barb Wachter
		October 14,	Noble Mentzer
September 2,	John Ingoglia	October 15,	Art Boxleitner
September 3,	Allan Schaubert	October 21,	Butch and Mary Carol
September 9,	Duck Fair		Larrimore
September 10,	Duck Fair	October 22,	Nick Birster
September 16,	Wayne Thayer	October 28,	Jack Simperts
September 17,	Joe Cook	October 29,	Joe Cook

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.

If you are interested in any open dates or would like to become a weekend carver for future dates, please contact Arlene at (410) 939-3739 during museum hours.

Thanks to all of the carvers- Arlene Grace.

Auction News

Decoy Festival Auction

This year's Decoy Festival Auction was better than ever, raising much needed funds for the museum. There were 141 lots offered, which cleared \$37,335 before the buyers' premium was added on. The 10% buyers' premium directly benefits the Decoy Museum. Of the 141 lots, only three were buy-backs. Volunteer auctioneer Dave Hartzell once again did a fantastic job keeping the auction moving well and coaxing bidders into action. Evans McKinney's Honorary Chairman collection brought \$3,400, and was worth every penny. Charlie Bryan and Robert D. Hess donated decoys to the Museum for the auction, and Charlie Joiner donated decoys to the R. Madison Mitchell Endowment. We wish to thank these carvers for their generosity.

If you are interested in consigning decoys to next year's Decoy Festival Auction, please call George Juergens at (302) 892-0978 or the Museum at (410) 939-3739. We will be taking consignments until April 1, 1996, but will accept donations at any time.

Top fifteen lots of May 6, 1995 Decoy Festival Auction

<u>Description (Catalogue No./ Bidder No.)</u>	<u>Price</u>
Honorary Chairman Collection by Evans McKinney (0/456)	\$3,400
Pr. Goldeneyes by Charlie Joiner (140/464)	\$1,700
Pr. Wood Ducks by Charlie Joiner (71/375)	\$1,400
Pr. Wood Ducks by R.M. Mitchell & Bill Collins (78/301)	\$1,000
Sleeping Canada Goose by R. Madison Mitchell (82/411)	\$900
Snow Goose by Charlie Bryan (139/300)	\$875
Pr. Sleeping Canvasbacks by Charlie Joiner (138/441)	\$800
Pr. Sleeping Canvasbacks by Charlie Joiner (72/337)	\$750
Black Duck by Jim Holly (21/374)	\$700
Black Duck by Bob Litzenberg (67/441)	\$575
Pr. Canvasbacks by R. Madison Mitchell (117/408)	\$550
Sleeping Blue Goose by Bob Litzenberg (35/432)	\$550
Pintail Drake by Bill Gibian (39/447)	\$550
Pr. Canvasbacks by Bob McGaw (22/411)	\$525
Pr. Ring-necked Ducks by Bob Litzenberg (33/367)	\$500

1995 DUCK FAIR CHAIRPERSONS MARY CAROL AND BUTCH LARRIMORE

Karen Chen

Mary Carol and Butch Larrimore have been working as a team since the very start of their careers as decoy makers. Over ten years ago, the couple was interested in collecting Madison Mitchell decoys. Butch remembers thinking, "Hey! We ought to carve some birds and sell them. Then we could collect more decoys." He chuckles and adds, "Of course, Madison Mitchell birds went up in cost more than we could keep up with." Butch, however, would only take up carving if Mary Carol would join him. She says, "From the start he would only do it if I did it." Butch agrees, "We would do it as a team or not at all." The couple realized that if they were not both involved in carving, that a great deal of time could be taken away from their relationship. Now when they go to shows, they are able to go out



BELOW: A pair of canvasback decoys by the Larrimores. Photo by M. Moses.

ABOVE: Butch and Mary Carol Larrimore. Photo courtesy of the Larrimores.





Pintails. Photo by M. Moses.

to dinner together. They see each other at the museum and at the shop. Their annual Thanksgiving trip to Chincoteague to study waterfowl becomes a mini vacation. Butch says without hesitation that the best part of working as a team is, "the time we get to spend together."

The couple learned to carve and paint from Ray Overturf of Reisterstown. The teacher encouraged them to work separately to produce pieces for competitions. Although the Larrimores have won many ribbons and believe that competition does motivate carvers to do their best work, the couple still prefers teamwork. Mary Carol says, "I'm not a competitive person. It's not in my nature. Yes, you do improve through competition. You want to find out why you didn't win and make it better... but I do that anyway."

The Larrimores also say that they receive the same amount of satisfaction regardless of whether they worked on individual projects or shared the job. "It's the end product you're concerned with," says Mary Carol, "whether you completed it yourself or together. It doesn't make a difference." Butch says, "It's not look

what I did, but look what WE did."

The team has discovered each other's strengths and learned to rely on them. Although Butch insists that Mary Carol is the better carver, he makes the patterns, roughs out bodies, sands and puts the pieces together. Mary Carol details the heads and does all the painting. She admires her husband's ability to visualize a completed decoy saying, "He has it in his head before he ever starts. I can't do that." Mary Carol also compliments Butch's work of putting together neck joints and making patterns. She says, "People come into the shop and say it's a beautiful pattern before I even start painting."

Family is obviously a priority with the Larrimores. While Butch considers carving a recreation saying, "It is relaxing for me. It's my therapy," Mary Carol sees it as more of a job. She used to work outside the home, but when her job status changed, Butch suggested that working on decoys would give her the opportunity to stay at home and take care of their grandson, Bryan. Mary Carol has had to carve and paint at odd hours in order to accommodate the child's schedule. Bryan is now

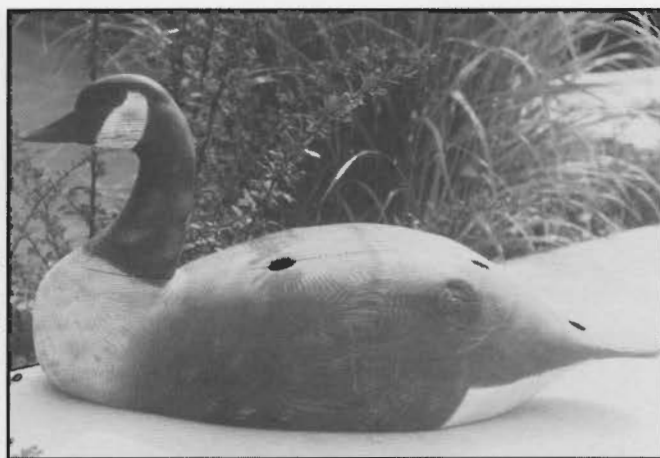
five years old and is learning which ducks are which. Mary Carol sometimes lets him help put the eyes into the decoys. She says that he tries to avoid doing his chores by saying, "Nana, I'd rather do ducks."

The Larrimores really enjoy working together. Mary Carol states that in the beginning they had a little trouble because she has difficulty taking criticism. However, she now feels that Butch is her best critic. When asked what is the hardest part about working as a team, Butch seems genuinely stumped. Then he answers, "I don't know. We get along pretty well."

Two of the couple's main goals in decoy making are to try to make the birds look as lifelike as possible and to make them affordable, Mary Carol says, "We remember what it was like on the other side of the table." Butch talks about how he would admire decoys thinking, "Boy, I wish I could afford that," laughs and says proudly, "but now I make them."

The Larrimores like to joke that they make decoys for people, not for ducks, meaning that they do not produce hunting decoys. In fact they offer a promise that if anything happens to a piece they sold, they will try to repair it. One time, a customer put them to the test. He had brought home a black duck crafted by the Larrimores. He did not have a shelf ready to display the work, so he set the decoy aside. Unfortunately, one of his big dogs discovered the bird and "thought it was the greatest thing to chew on," explains Mary Carol. The head and the bill were mauled. The customer returned the decoy to the Larrimores to see if they could do anything with it. They were a little dubious, but managed to fix it up. The customer is now very careful to immediately put all his ducks on the shelf as soon as he brings them home.

Although Butch and Mary Carol reside in Boring, and are technically "outsiders," they feel Havre de Grace has always given them a big welcome. Butch says, "Everyone has always been kind and helpful. They made us feel a part of it." The couple feel that one



Antiqued Canada goose. Photo by M. Moses.

of the biggest pleasures of making decoys is all the interesting people they meet at shows and when volunteering at the museum, Mary Carol says, "Certainly it is rewarding when you do a piece and people enjoy it and are willing to purchase what we enjoy making."

The time spent talking to people and volunteering at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is just one of many reasons we feel honored to have Mary Carol and Butch Larrimore working as the Chairpersons for the 1995 Duck Fair.

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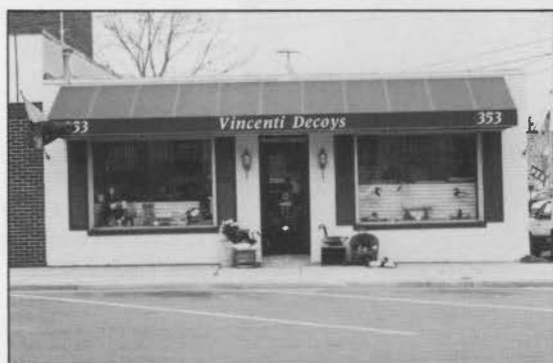
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