

The Canvasback

Fall 1996
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Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

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On the Water's Edge

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum



FROM THE EDITOR

As the trees start to lose their leaves in the fall, here at the Decoy Museum we are also letting one "leaf" float away. Our curator, Karla Mattsson, has been at the Decoy Museum for three years. During those three years, she has worked wonders taking care of the Museum's collection, conducting researching, planning exhibits, and as the assistant editor of *The Canvasback*. Karla has decided to return to Michigan to obtain a second master's degree, this time in Colonial History. We wish her the best of luck in her future pursuits. We will all miss her.

An upcoming date we just can't miss is the Decoy Museum's 10th Anniversary. Mark November 2, 1996, on your calendar for the celebrating at the Bayou Restaurant is the place for a dinner. Reservations can be made at the Decoy Museum (410) 939-3739. Tickets are only \$25 each. Please come and show support for the Decoy Museum in its 10th year.

Mary Jo Murphy

P.S. Yes my name has changed. After only five years of courtship, I married Charles D. Murphy on September 1, 1996 in a small, wonderful wedding. We are now happily married newlyweds.

ON THE COVER

A green-wing teal, made by Daddy Holly, sits by the fireplace in the home of Dr. John and Gail Carriere. Photo by Mary Jo Murphy.

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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*From
the
President*



Dear Museum Member,

Ten years ago, we held our first Anniversary Dinner commemorating the opening of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. It had been quite an effort by so many volunteers just to get it started. They all had a dream that one day the museum would become an important community educational and tourism resource. A decade later, I believe that I can proudly say that the museum's development has far exceeded our expectations.

Today the Decoy Museum is one of Harford County's finest attractions and the twenty-fifth tourist destination in Maryland. The original old brick building has been transformed into a facility that is still constantly improving. New exhibits now grace the space the pool had once occupied and the second floor's panoramic view of the Susquehanna Flats will soon be accessible for everyone to enjoy. Our collections have grown in an amazing fashion, an endowment honoring R. Madison Mitchell has been established, and specialized interpretive programs help students gain critical thinking skills as they study decoys. The list of achievements goes on and is a tribute to our staff, volunteers, and patrons who have joined together over the past ten years in making the Decoy Museum such a success. Yet, what really is important is; that we are a museum still building our future.

I do hope that all of our friends and supporters will join me on November 2, as we celebrate ten years of preserving America's decoy legacy.

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.



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Old Long Island Brant Stool

George W. Combs, Jr.

"Remember me not as I am now, but as I was in my glory days — dressed up with my new coat of paint — anchored about the battery rig, with a hundred of my mates."

Each year during the Waterfowl Festival in Easton, Maryland, the Artifacts Showcase invites a select group of dedicated decoy collectors to display a sampling of their collections for the public to view. But more important, is the "other" decoy and waterfowl artifact collector who scrutinizes the displays and leaves with a new, "got to have one of those," on his collection list. The array of brant decoys, with their vast difference of styles and construction, is one of the more popular displays. This year a collection of Long Island brants are featured.

The brant was as important to the south shore of Long Island as the canvasback was to the Chesapeake Bay. From colonial times until the eel grass blight of the late 1930's, the brant was the choice waterfowl of the market gunner and in later years the sportsmen who traveled from New York City for a few days of battery shooting on the flats of the "Great South Bay."

Brant were unusual waterfowl because their habits dictated that they be gunned heavily in the spring season. They decoyed better at that time of year and didn't leave for their nesting grounds until late May. Stories told by the market gunners, like Captain Al Ketchum of Copiague and Captain Carl Chichester of Amityville, described great flocks of brant feeding on eel grass at Yellow Bar off Babylon. Rigs of battery boxes (sinkboxes) and brant boxes (wooden boxes dug into a sandbar) were laid out on the leeward side of the beds of eel grass, and hundreds of brant stool (decoys) were set out to pull the flocks of brant into the range of the big bore guns.

The majority of the brant stool used by the market gunners and professional guides were of solid white pine and white cedar. The heads, called natural turn heads or root heads, were made from the roots and branches of red cedar or white pine trees. The grain of



Rob Birch (left) and Frank Brown Backer brant shooting in Amityville, Long Island — circa 1925.

the wood ran lengthwise up the neck and turned at a right angle to form the face and bill of the head. After they were carved, they were boiled in linseed oil to prevent checks and cracking. The natural crook of the root head gave the brant stool their distinguished look. Painting was done in a simple pattern with white lead paint, lamp black, and a bog brown. With a minimum of detail, the finished result was most effective in luring the brant. Hollowed bodied brant, such as those used in New Jersey, were virtually unknown on Long Island.

The most noted rig of brant stool was carved by David Cochran of Blue Point. They are considered the Cobbs of Long Island. The rig was last used in 1924 while battery shooting off Blue Point by the Suydam family and is branded on the bottom "W.L. Suydam." Smith Clinton Verity of Seaford made the most graceful root head brant prior to 1920. Delancy Townsend Smith of Amityville carved hundreds of root head brant for the battery trade which were branded "D.T.S." Captain Al Ketchum and Townsend Carmen made a rig with traditional carved heads. Willet Carman of Freeport and Ralph Cranford of Babylon also made rigs

RIGHT: *Frank Brown Backer with a "mess" of brant and broadbill in Amityville, Long Island — circa 1925.*

BELOW: *Rob Birch (left) and Townsend Carmen in battery box. Broadbill iron stool on deck and brant stool in water. Amityville, Long Island — circa 1925.*



using cork bodies and carved heads. Captain George Pennell of Massapequa had a rig of brant made of balsa bodies and root heads. Further out on Long Island, many fine root head brant were made for battery and point shooting by talented baymen such as Captain Bill Payne of Mastic in the late 1860's.

Bellport must be credited with an abundance of talented stool makers. Captain Charles Hawkins, Henry F. Osborn, Captain Wilbur R. Corwin, J.T. Corwin, and James S. Watkins were early carvers. The list of Bellport goes on: Thomas Gelston, Wilbur A. Corwin, one of the great painters of duck stool, Caleb Carman, Dan Petty, and John H.B. Boyle all carved brant stool to hunt over.

The Ackerly family of Patchogue and Blue Point had four generations of stool makers. Emory E. Ackerly and Nelson Ackerly made brant stool before the Civil War. Nelson, a Civil War veteran, made the first "Ackerly style" stool with a sharp ridge lengthwise on the back to keep them from tumbling out of the pile when stacked in the stool boat in great numbers for battery shooting. The last two generations, Lem Ackerly and William Ackerly, ended an era of Blue Point carvers.

The brant, during the market gunning era, brought more money than any other species of waterfowl in New York's Washington Market. Hotels and restaurants

were willing to pay high prices for the fat, delicious brant to satisfy the clientele who wanted the best dinner and soft clam pie. With the devastation of the eel grass, the brant was forced to eat sea cabbage and other grasses which affected their taste. The huge flocks dwindled over the years in large numbers due to the absence of their favorite food. They were no longer desirable for the sportsman, for they were "strong eating."

If you have a chance to visit the Waterfowl Festival and tour the Buy, Sell, Swap exhibit at the High School, be sure to visit the Artifacts Showcase. As you examine the Long Island Brant display, reflect back to Joel Barber's account of Captain Al Ketchum as a young boy in the 1860's. He sat in a brant box, bailing out the water and loading the eight bore muzzle loaders as his father and grandfather were shooting. The black powder smoke and its strong odor hung low that misty spring morning as the brant, enticed ever closer by the decoys, circled overhead preparing to land on the sandbar.

George W. Combs, Jr. is a 12th generation bayman from Long Island whose ancestors were stoolmakers, market gunners, guides, boat builders and baymen. He presently lives in Easton where he works the Chesapeake Bay and creates folk art carvings. Some of his brant collection will be on display at the Artifacts Showcase.



Rob Birch and Frank Brown Backer in double battery box. Notice that they are facing head fender for picture. When actually gunning, they would face the brant stool.

Book Review

Chesapeake Bay Decoys The Men Who Made and Used Them

Edited by Robert H. Richardson

Reviewed by

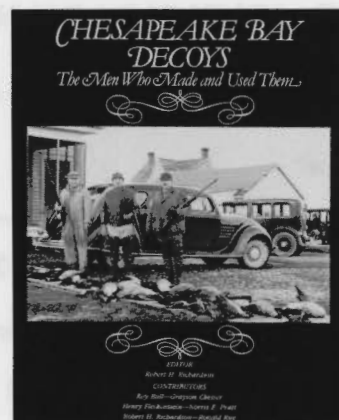
Bill Smart

I have reviewed a number of books in the past three years for *The Canvasback*, and in many recommended to the collector and reader to add a particular book to their library. In this case, up front, if you collect or have an interest in Chesapeake Bay decoys, this book should be on your shelf. Mr. Richardson, known as Bobby in collecting circles, originally published this book in 1973 and followed with a second edition. This, his third edition, is significantly revised with additional pictures (nearly 300), more background information about carvers and expanded detail about decoys.

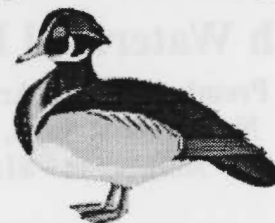
Most publications about decoys are the result of an author's research. Not the case for this interesting book. The contributors include well-respected authors, historians, collectors, and sportsmen. They include Roy Bull, Grayson Chesser, Henry Fleckenstein, Norris Pratt, Ron Rue, J. Newman Valliant, and F. Phillips Williamson.

Bobby Richardson weaves his writings with that of the contributors into nine chapters of informative and enjoyable reading. Included are chapters addressing swan decoys, sporting yachts, the Susquehanna Flats, Kent County, Talbot County, Dorchester County, Hawks, Hanners & Scissorbills, Somerset County, and the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Included too are four color portfolios of some of the finest Chesapeake Bay decoys from the best-known collections. Another nice addition to this latest edition is the expansion of the chapter on Virginia. These improvements coupled with the fine mix of decoy, carver, and sportsman photographs results in a truly interesting book to be enjoyed during the approaching winter.

Chesapeake Bay Decoys The Men Who Made and Used Them is 234 pages and was published by Decoy Magazine, Burtonsville, Maryland in 1991. It is available at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum for \$40.



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Gunning Floats of the New England Coast

Bob Brophy

The gunning float is a one or two-man boat used on the small bays and rivers of the New England Coast and the larger lakes and inland rivers.

The inland streams and smaller rivers in our area are still hunted by canoe because of the many turns and the often overhanging brush.

These boats are basically used to approach ducks, therefore they have a low profile.

The two-man boats are about 16' long and 4' wide and 18" deep with a 3' by 11' cockpit. The bow is decked over, as are the sides. The 6" side slopes slightly up to meet the 6" vertical side of the cockpit.

The one-man boat averages 13' x 4' x 18" deep. It also is decked on the bow and sides. The deck of both boats slopes away from the vertical sides of the cockpit and in most cases, these decks are canvas-covered. Water will wash over these decks. The boats will have a rather pronounced narrow bow — the two-man boat holding its width further forward than the one-man boat. The boats are of many designs and various construction.

When constructed, the old Merrymeeting Bay, Maine boats were strip-planked. The 1" x 6" cedar keel was held down in place on top of a 4" x 6" timber by 2" x 4"s braced against the shed or garage ceiling. The upsweep of the stern was achieved by placing a six-inch block between the 1" x 6" keel and the 4" x 6" support. The oak bow block and the oak stern were fastened to the keel. The mould frames were held in place edgewise to the keel. The 3/4" x 1" strips were then nailed edgewise to the keel (Fig. 1).

Each strip had to be planed by hand to make the pointed bow and slightly narrowing stern. As each strip was nailed to the previous one, the hull took shape. The hull was constructed up to the deck line at which time the 3/8" x 2" steamed oak ribs were put in. The mould frames were taken out and the decks and cockpit put on. This strip-plank construction produced a round or semi-round bottom depending on the designer.

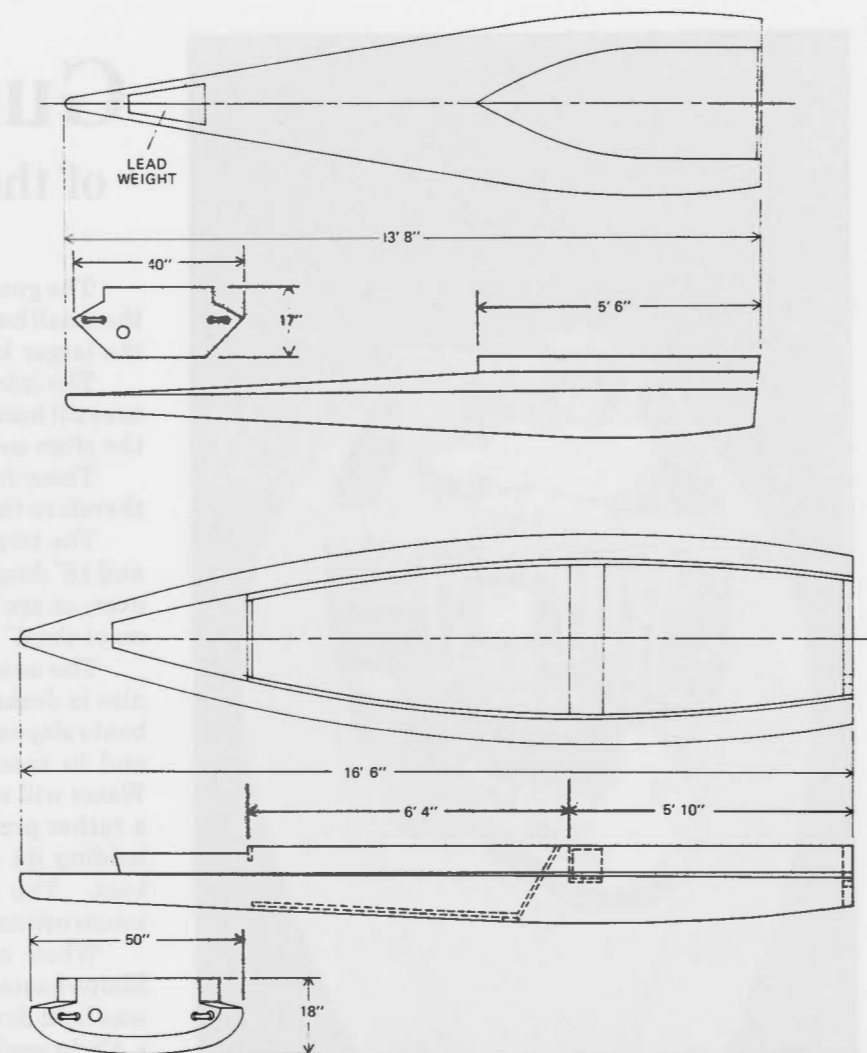
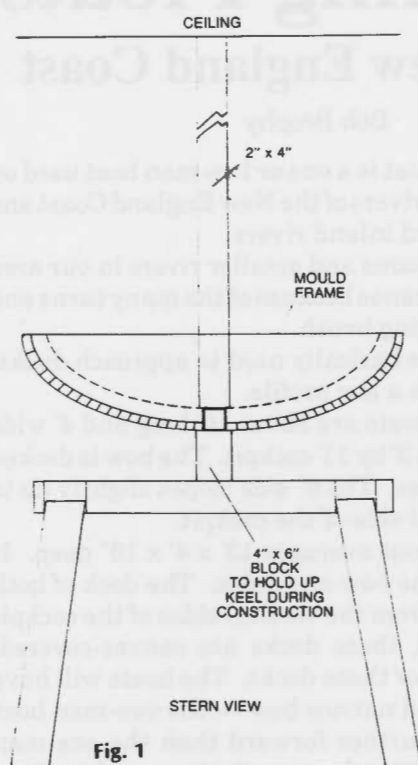
Some boats had a flat bottom about a foot wide and the sides at 45° angles. The sides rose about a foot to the deck that angled about 30° back to the vertical sides of the cockpit. The older boats were made out of full pine boards. The newer boats are plywood.

The boats made today are fiberglass. They are okay, but some people still like wooden decoys and canvas canoes.

A boat made of curved ribs and canvas-covered 3/8" thick planks, made about 1942 is believed to have been



The two-man Merrymeeting Bay set the design pace for boats today. The author (at the helm) and his brother Tom demonstrate technique as well as comforts afforded the eastern waterfowler.



Diagrams show the basic designs of the "Joppy" (above right) and the Merrymeeting Bay scullers.

a product of the Old Town Canoe Company, Old Town, Maine. An old Cape Ann, Massachusetts one-man boat had wide pine side boards and short cross planks on the bottom.

A spray curtain is a great comfort to the bowman when returning by outboard. Some boats are rigged with a small sail.

It is suggested that a plywood cover be padlocked in place when the boats are being towed on trailers or sitting in the yard.

The scull oar is usually of oak or ash. It has a straight round handle that may or may not be bent at its midpoint. The two or three-foot blade is straight and parallel along the edges of its 3" to 5" width. One side of the blade is crowned; the other is not. A good oar will have a lot of spring in it. When you are underway, the oar may bend as much as 30°.

When in motion, the gunning float is propelled forward by the scull oar which is extended through a round hole in the transom. The blade of the oar is held at an angle as it is moved across the fore and aft axis of the boat. With a turn of the wrist, the blade is turned to the opposite angle as the oar is brought back across

that axis. This action produces a figure-eight motion for the oar blade. The shorter the distance the oar is moved from side to side, the smoother the boat will go forward. Any back and forth motion of the bow or rocking motion will put the birds in the air for sure.

The boat is started forward by sitting up and using both hands. Once the boat is going, slide down onto your back and if you are right handed, scull over your left shoulder.

In the two-man gunning float, the two men lie on their backs with heads raised and supported just high enough to see over the front edge of the cockpit. The man in the stern does all the work and the bowman gets so cold, when he does get a chance to shoot, he is too stiff to sit up. The truth of the matter is, it is a very hard way to shoot if you are not used to it.

The bowman can move fore and aft to adjust the bow so that the bow is flush with the water. The one-man boat has lead weights in a well in the bow that can be changed to suit the weight of the man.

These boats are used in many ways. The market hunters would scull up to birds on the water and let go with a double 10, 8, or 6-gauge strapped to the bow, then pick up one or more with a double 12 and shoot the birds

on the wing. The boats are all front-end loaders. Today the boats are used to scull also. They may be used as a plain blind with a set of decoys, the boat being pulled into the grass and grassed over. The boats usually have lines attached back and forth across the decks under which the grass is held. There are also brush sockets on the outside of the cockpit. Brush, tied-up bunches of grass or burlap blind poles may be put in these brush sockets. A brushed-up boat may be used in open water in conjunction with a rig of decoys. Of course, the prime use of the gunning float is to scull up on birds.

The time of year determines the mode of camouflage. Early in the season it is olive-drab decks and gray sides, or grassed decks and brush. Later in the year the boats get splashes of white and/or snow and ice cakes on the front decks.

There are a few theories on the art of sculling. One is to head straight for the birds, thus giving them the smallest profile of the boat. Another is to scull in a banana course closing as you approach the waterfowl and they think you are something drifting by.

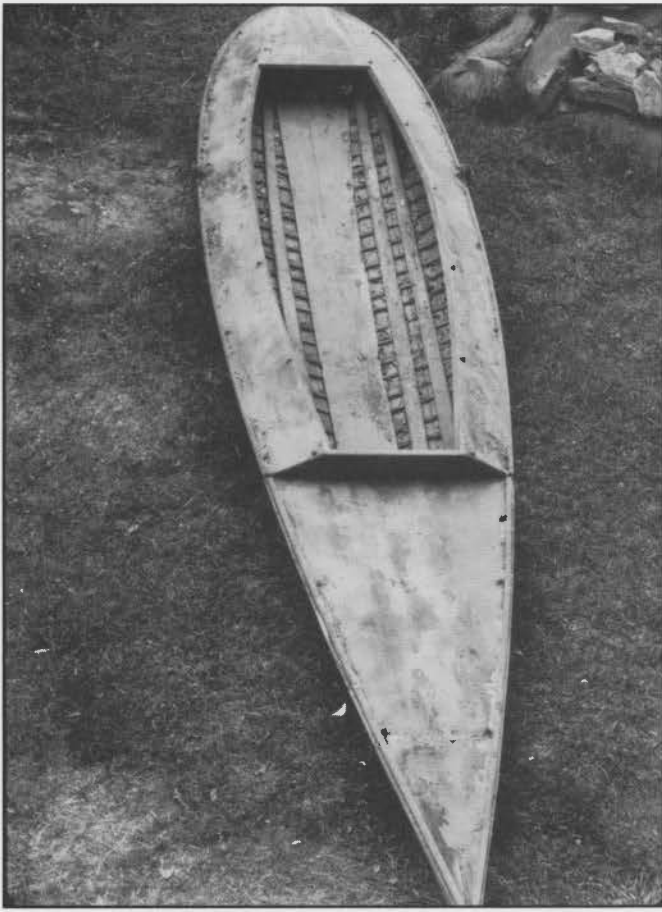
The tide and/or river currents are a study in themselves. If you have them with you, you might try a drifting sort of a scull. If you have to cross or go into the tide because of the wind and/or sun, you should try to keep that bow right on the birds. If you have all of the conditions with you, you have the tide with you, the early morning or late afternoon sun at your back and a slight following wind to break the small wake of your boat. Good luck to you on that one.



This early Cape Ann sculler was another design that later boats were patterned after.



A Merrymeeting Bay two-man boat, propelled by the author, demonstrates the technique used on the New England coast.



Let's Go Hunting.

Today the wind is north by northwest at 30-35 mph and the bay is white-capped. The tide is coming flood at 10 a.m. (Our normal tide is 7-8 feet — each month we get a flood tide of up to 11 feet on the full moon). We head up a small creek on the northwest side of the bay to a small bayberry bush-covered, salt marsh island. After setting out some hollow cedar-block decoys, we grass and brush up the boat. When the tide is at full flood and the waving grasses of the salt marsh become an angry body of white caps, the birds will be picking up here and there looking for a little more comfort.

Here come some blacks straight upwind. They don't see our grassed and brushed-up boat at all.

Five shots and only two birds down. What's going on here? After a spell, Walt says, "You know, those birds look like they are hanging on strings because their ground speed is slow, but their air speed is up. The same wind that is holding them back is pushing our shot also. We have got to lead more." Without notice, four teal are in on us — four shots and three drop. That's better. With the ebbing tide we stow the 3-horse and decoys. We pick up two mallards and another black as we scull the main creek back to the landing ramp.

Next day out—it's one hour before shooting time as



An early spoon-shaped gunning float showing the top (left) and bottom views. This relic found near Manchester, Massachusetts is an old (circa 1930) J.M. Whinney from Falmouth Foreside, Maine.

we slide the boat off the trailer and head out the big creek to the main river. The tide will be half tide and coming at dawn. We set our scaup decoys at the junction of the big creek and the main river. We anchor the brushed-up boat by the stern, down-tide and off to the right of the decoys. There being no wind today, the scaup will land into the tide. After a fast first hour and seven birds, we do have to work sometime, so back to the ramp.

The next time we go, the tide will be dead low just after dawn. Let's go across the main river to those mud flats. If we get over before the tide is full-out, we can pull out the wrapped bunches of marsh grass in the sockets and make it look like one of those small grass islands. We put out the black duck and Canada goose silhouettes and wait. The birds are feeding heavy about half a mile away . . . we guessed wrong today.

My bowman today is Tom and having better ears than I, he hears the Canadas first. Coming in off the ocean with heavy, slow wing beats, we know they are migrating birds. They land out in the main river and up river from the feeding birds. With as little commotion as possible, we stow the 3-horse and silhouette and wait for the tide to set us free. Time crawls, but no power boats come down the river to scare the birds yet. Hey, we're free! With the tide coming and the sun still low in the east, the scull is an easy one. Tom rises and with his over and under takes two geese.

On one occasion we had a funny thing happen. There was not much around so we started a long scull up on a flock of about 400 old squaws. As we sculled along, we were both looking for other birds. We sculled into the flock and wondered where half the birds were. After we shot four birds we just sat there in amazement as birds came popping up around us for 360°. It seemed as though 30 or 40 seconds went by before the other 200 birds came up.

Not all hunts with a scull boat produce birds.

Weather conditions predict the use of these small boats. While they will take quite a lot of rough water, our greatest danger are ice floes.

On a quiet winter afternoon, my son will drive the pickup about a mile from home and leave me with the one-man gunning float. I'll take a slow scull home. I pick up a bufflehead and a hen goldeneye. As I turn the island for home and watch a beautiful sunset, I can't help but wonder if the good old days are not today.

About the Author

"Waterfowling — that's my favorite!" says Bob Brophy of Gloucester, Massachusetts. In addition to this enthusiasm, he shares equal interests in collecting and carving birds. Bob has won many awards in local, national, and international competition.

Active as a North Shore chairman for Ducks Unlimited, and a native New Englander, he also collects these gunning floats he fondly writes of. He has twenty-two boats in his collection now and the "Joppy" and Merrymeeting Bay boats are his active ones out to use for waterfowling.

Bob hopes this feature will bring some response from readers as he always welcomes more background information on his older boats.

This article first appeared in D.U. magazine, November / December 1977.

"Swan Light"



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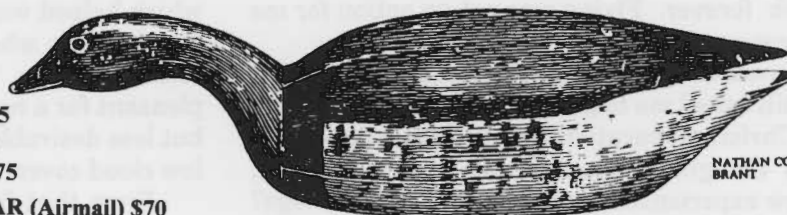
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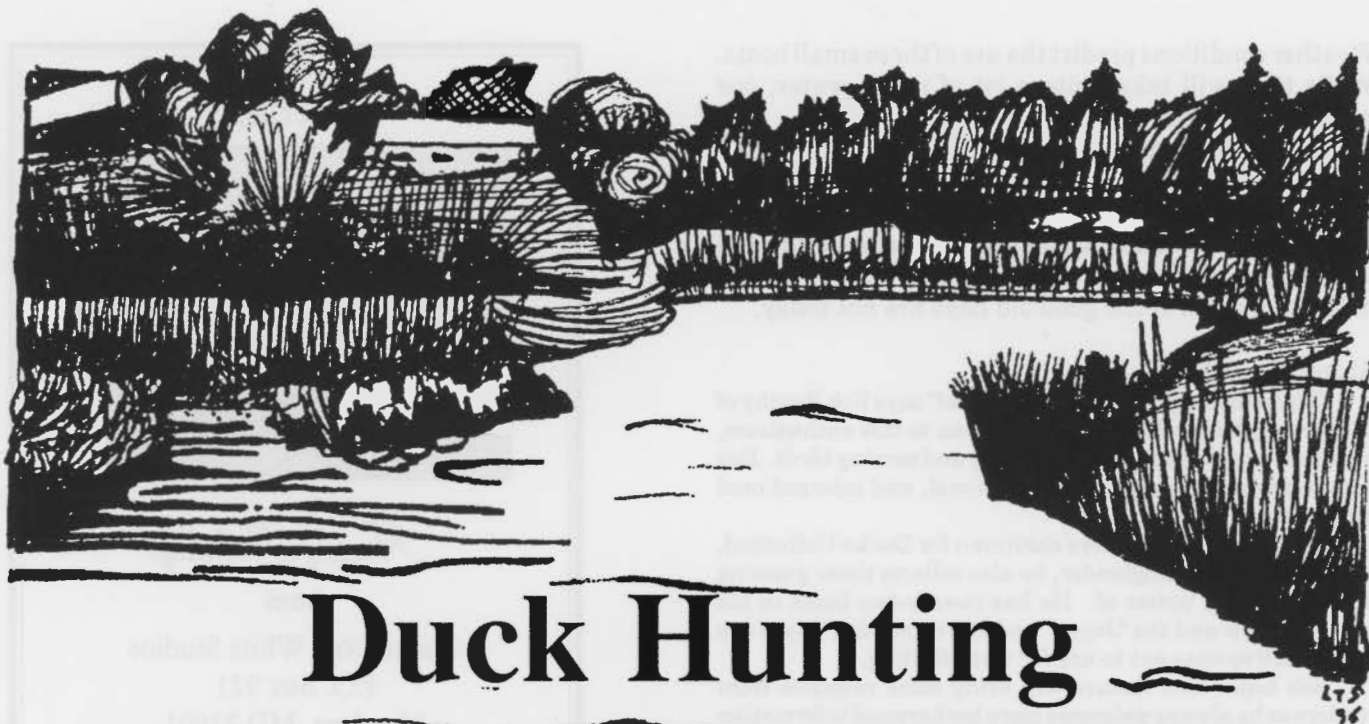
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Duck Hunting Quite a First Date!

Linda Smith

During my senior year at William and Mary College, I renewed an acquaintance with Bill, a duck enthusiast that I had met earlier. Although we were still each dating other people, we established a comradeship that was a perfect prelude to his asking if I wanted a ride home to Pittsburgh for Christmas break. In his query, he implied it was on his way. Although that seemed odd since his mother lived in Alexandria, Virginia he said something obscure about hunting in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. How was I to know duck blinds were scarce there? After evaluating my options, getting a ride home to Pittsburgh at my own convenience definitely outweighed stuffing myself into a midget car with five other Western Pennsylvanians, or taking the bus which always took forever. Flying was not an option for me in 1966 because of the cost.

As it turned out, both of our last exams were late in the day. Bill asked me to go duck hunting with him to celebrate Christmas vacation. Having never been duck hunting, I thought it sounded like fun. After all, weren't new experiences an important part of college? The only ducks I had known until then were the white ducks (later identified as Peking ducks) that resided at the Children's Zoo in Pittsburgh, PA. Bill said wildfowl were a whole different breed. He assured me that North American waterfowl were magnificent with their variegated plumage, and majestic in the air. They also did not sit around and eat all day long like the ducks in the zoo!

So, to celebrate the commencement of the holidays and to get a ride home, I agreed to a morning duck hunt prior to departing for Pittsburgh. Bill indicated that this hunting activity was a morning one, specifically, 4 a.m. This schedule allowed ample time to place those decoys in a "J" properly juxtaposed to the wind before the critical sunrise. After prime shooting time, lasting until about 9 a.m., we would head back to shore and be on the road in plenty of time to arrive in Pittsburgh by dinnertime.

The duck hunting excursion proved to be fascinating from the outset. Although the 4 a.m. wake-up call came exceedingly early, it was a beautiful crisp day. I was bundled up in layers of warm sweaters and coats, which helped ward off the chill. Later, I learned that the day was what a hunter would characterize as a "blue-bird" day. This term describes weather which is pleasant for a novice just going to take in the scenery, but less desirable for the avid duck hunter who favors low cloud cover.

From that first duck hunting experience, I could appreciate the zeal of the duck hunter in those early morning hours. There was the excitement of getting underway, the rush of cold brisk air, and the challenge to perfect the configuration of the decoys. As the sky lightened and only nature's sounds were heard, I had a sense of calm and communion with the world.

As the boat slid through the water, I was bundled so tightly that the brisk wind lashed only my face peering

out from my babushka. My exhilaration, even as a novice, was almost palpable. I felt that I understood this thing called duck hunting, but I had yet to see a real duck! We took the boat easily from Hampton Roads into Mill Creek to a stationary duckblind. Bill explained the concept of the blind since such structures were completely new to me. Once inside, I found a semi-cozy space to sit and enjoy the surrounding nature. The brushed protective wooden sides for the most part kept out the harsh elements. In later years, I was particularly fond of finding oysters along the shore and even roasting them in a bucket in the blind — Bill definitely knew his sport.

The morning sped by despite the limited sightings of ducks which were far out of reach anyway. Bill was quite accomplished with his duck calls. He did them with remarkable facility and some success. I realized exactly the high level of skill it required, when I tried to do a call, myself. At one point with ducks within reach, Bill handed me the gun and quietly instructed me. The result was not good. I did hit something, but it was a decoy. Mortified, I made a firm decision, let those who really enjoy something do it; I will just go along for the ride (roller coasters also fall into this category). From that first shot to today, I leave the literal "duck hunting" to those who relish it. The "duck hunting" I enjoy is being there to see the beauty of the water and sky, and the majesty of the ducks and geese flying above.

When it was time to leave, we went from the blind into the boat. We started up the engine, but the boat would not go forward. After some investigation, Bill announced there was a problem with a shearpin. My limited experience on boats consisted of rather tedious rides up and down the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, so this was my first experience with unreliability in boats. Likewise, this was the first but definitely not the last instance, when Bill had to use all his ingenuity to get us out of a problem his overwhelming optimism had gotten us into. My concern was increasing. Although we could see houses on shore, they were farther than I could dream of swimming even on the warmest summer day. Since we had already stayed much longer than our projected time, I was even more anxious.

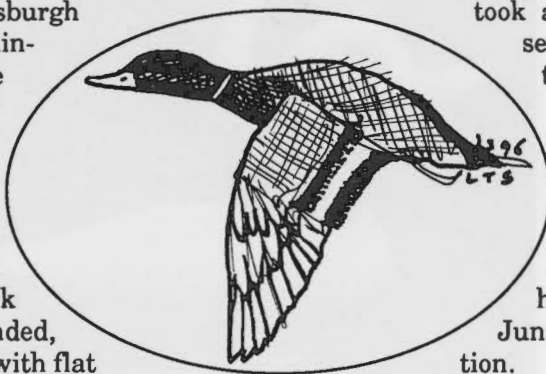
There was an arduous drive to Pittsburgh ahead and worried parents. Remaining calm, I asked exactly what we needed to do. Bill explained patiently that the problem of the shearpin was not unlike having a flat tire. Further, he always had a spare with him — except this day. It was odd. While the sun kept me warm while we were duck hunting, once I knew we were stranded, I got colder and colder. Whereas with flat



tires, there were gas stations, there was not anything comparable for boats out on Mill Creek. Also, on a frigid weekday in December, there was not one other boat in sight except those safely tied to their moorings on shore. Although I did keep my composure externally, inside I was scared.

After considerable debate, we determined that the only answer was to creep along in reverse. The trip back was an exceptionally long one. It was even colder as the sun was setting and the water seemed more threatening. In time, we made it to the dock, quite cold and chilled but greatly relieved. Docking the boat with the absence of maneuverability only prolonged the process. It had been quite a day, at once majestic, exciting, fun, and scary.

The undoing and packing up of the equipment took as much time if not more than setting up, so we were only able to travel as far as Alexandria, Virginia that night. Between exams, an early morning wake-up, and the harrowing part of our boat ride, exhaustion took over. We made it to Pittsburgh the next day. That first date must have been a hit, for we married on June 16, 1967, one week after graduation.



But even with my less than perfect first experience, I was hooked on duck hunting (as an observer), brushing boats, and later raising ducks, geese, and Labrador Retrievers. Our Labs were great fun and great companions on our duck hunting jaunts. To this day, I am able to differentiate different species of ducks with the best of the local hunters. Also, I am still fascinated by the behavioral differences of different species. As Ducks Unlimited enthusiasts, Bill and I contributed puppies, bought paintings, and even helped band the ducks we raised. One band was recovered in Alaska! At a wildlife preserve in Canada, we were enthralled with signets one summer. We had our own incubator and raised ducks and bred our Labs. At one time, we had in residence every species of North American waterfowl. Woodducks were a particular favorite as they jumped to find their exit hole and trailed after their mother and waddled miles to find ponds and duck weed. Dr. Mitchell Byrd of the College of William and Mary would annually bring his ornithology classes to our Christchurch farm in Middlesex County, Virginia.

I am no longer very active in wildlife projects, I do not live in the country anymore, and I am no longer married to Bill. However, a deep love of nature still abides in me that I can trace back to that first date in the duck blind. When I see the "V"s of geese fly south or see the last of the mallard ducks nibbling at bits of bread while I sit quietly on a pier, my communion with this part of nature continues.

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Canvasbacks	\$40 ea
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Mallards	\$40 ea
Pintails	\$40 ea
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Snow Geese	\$50 ea



Species	Price
Common Mergansers	\$130pr
Red-Breasted Mergansers	\$130pr
Hooded Mergansers	\$150pr
Swan -Flat Bottom	\$350ea
Swan -With Keel	\$400ea
Wood Ducks	\$350pr
Canada Goose	\$80 ea
Loons	\$60 ea
Pigeons	\$35 ea
Doves	\$35 ea

Oversize	Price
Canvasbacks	\$50 ea
Red Heads	\$50 ea
Black Heads	\$50 ea

Decoy Lamps (most)	Price
1/2 Swan Lamps	\$120ea
3/4 Size Swan	\$125ea
1/2 Swan	\$75 ea

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Saturday, February 1, 1997

9am - 6pm

Sunday, February 2, 1997

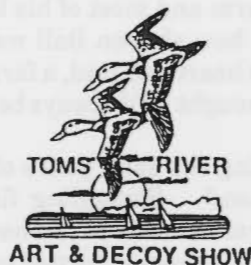
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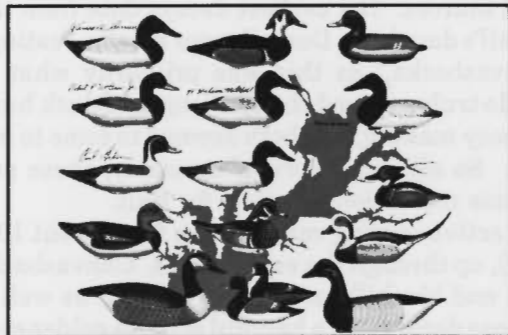
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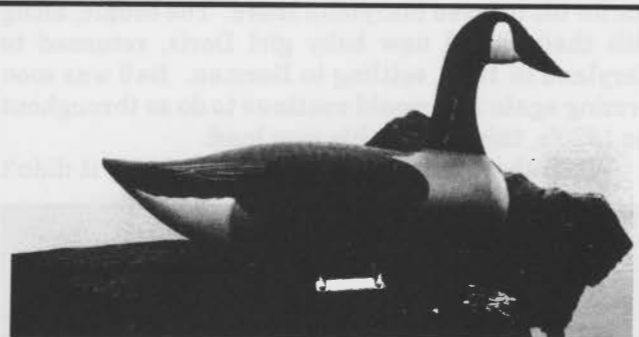


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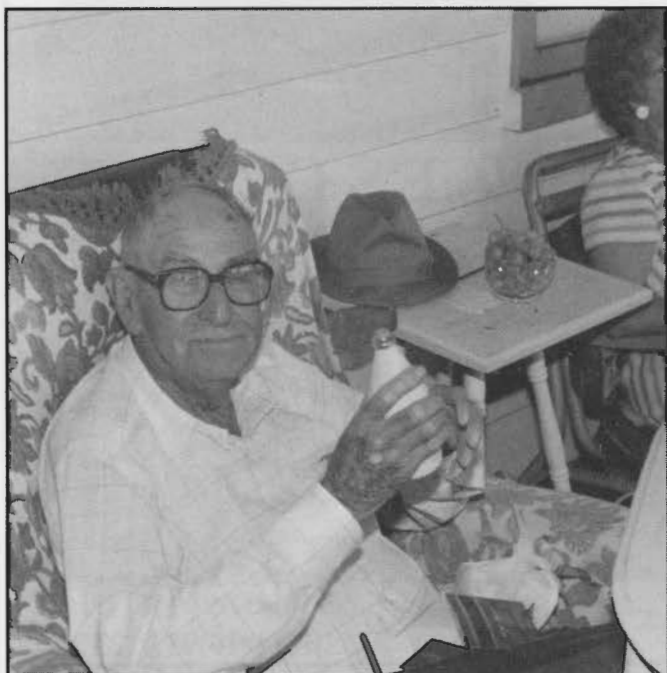
Talbot County Waterman and Decoy Maker

Chad Tragakis

Like Harford, Cecil, or Kent Counties, Talbot County is wonderfully rich in gunning and decoy-making tradition. Dozens of small, waterfront communities here can claim a chapter in the book of Chesapeake Bay waterfowling history, and countless men can lay title to its rich pages. One such community is Neavitt/Bozman: one such man was William Nelson Ball.

William was born in 1902 to Daniel and Mary Ball of Neavitt, Maryland. Raised to appreciate the simple life that farming afforded him, Nelson (as he was called), grew to become a part of the land and water that was his home. In 1924, Ball married his high school sweetheart, Glenna Harrison in Chestertown. Later that year, the two set out on their own moving to the West Grove/Kennett Square area of Pennsylvania. Ball worked as a farmhand for a time, but soon grew homesick for his beloved Maryland shore. The couple, along with their brand new baby girl Doris, returned to Maryland in 1925, settling in Bozman. Ball was soon farming again and would continue to do so throughout the 1920's, this time on his own land.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, it didn't



Nelson Ball in his later years. Photo courtesy of Doris Cooper.

take long for a vicious string of socio-economic repercussions to hit Maryland's Eastern Shore. Parts of Talbot County were hit particularly hard and after a brief hold-out, Ball lost his farm and most of his land. It is difficult to imagine just how shaken Ball was at that time. He was after all, in heart and soul, a farmer. It was all he knew, what he thought he'd always be and in essence — who he was.

Ball was devastated during the early years of the aptly-titled "Great Depression." Struggling financially, he reassessed what it was he could do and how he would provide for his family. He quickly turned to the bountiful waters of the Bay for his livelihood, becoming a first-class waterman. "Nelly," as he was known, worked his own boat for crabs and oysters in the Broad Creek and Choptank River area, and throughout the surrounding waters. He was well-known for making and repairing rake-shafts, and other equipment used in tonging oysters. Although he had hunted ducks casually in his youth, it was around 1929 that Ball began hunting ducks seriously to supplement the family's other food sources. His earliest decoys date from this period. Ball's daughter, Doris Cooper recalls, "eating a lot of canvasbacks," as this was primarily what he bagged. He truly enjoyed the challenges of duck hunting and decoy making, and both seemed to come to him naturally. So although born of necessity, these pursuits became recreational outlets for Ball.

Ball's active carving career dates from about 1930 (late 1929), up through the early 1950's. Canvasbacks, redheads, and bluebills are known by Ball as well as several goose decoys and a handful of balsa goldeneyes. A pintail and a blackduck, (circa 1950) with nearly identical form and matched, self-securing weights have recently been discovered, suggesting that Ball made at least one marsh duck rig. His daughter remembers that, "he used whatever he happened to be hunting at the time." She recalls, "he made his birds one at a time — not in the assembly line fashion," which may account for the frequent variance in many of his decoys, even those of the same period. All of Ball's birds were hand-chopped, worked with a draw-knife, and finished with a wood-rasp. He took pride in whittling sturdy heads which are often quite perky.

Some rather primitive canvasbacks and bluebills,



Redhead by Nelson Ball, circa 1930's. From the collection of Chad Tragakis. Photo by Chad Tragakis.

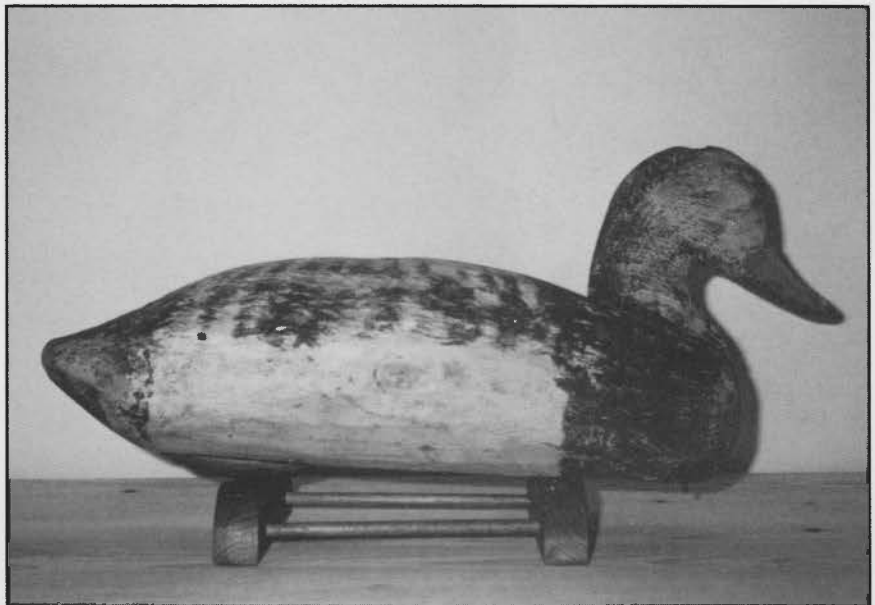
attributed to Ball and exhibiting some of his birds' characteristics, have recently surfaced. These decoys may be part of a later rig he hurriedly produced. Indicative of a true gunner, Ball's daughter recalls that he worked slowly and with great care when time afforded, but quickly when it did not. Reflecting this, collectors seem to agree that Ball's decoys, perhaps even more so than other makers, exhibit varying levels of craftsmanship. Some, with small humps and rougher finishes, appear extremely folksy — almost rustic. Others, exhibit outstanding, fluid lines and a wonderful sculptural form to the body and tail. Regardless, Ball's work consistently possesses that handsome, confident flair so often associated with Talbot County decoys.

Ball utilized simple but surprisingly realistic paint patterns on all his decoys. After fifty years, many remain in original paint. He often used thick staples without rings for line attachment — several variants of which are known. On his earlier decoys (1930-1940's), Ball most often used smooth, rounded, three-inch cast lead weights attached with two nails. On his later birds (1950's), two-inch, circular, inlaid weights, and an unusual, self-securing type are sometimes found.

Although Ball made decoys primarily for his own use, he is known to have contributed birds to the rigs of his best friends and gunning partners, Captain Pete Richardson (b. 1902) and Captain Otis Bridges (1903-19—). Richardson, a famed shot and carver in his own right, remembers fondly the days spent with

Ball at his Chestnut Oak Farm on Mulberry Point (Broad Creek/Harris Creek area). Ball and Richardson quickly earned a reputation as the premier gunners in the Neavitt/Bozman area. Richardson recalled that he and Ball gunned together throughout the 1930's and 1940's, and during this time, served as guides for the Long Point Gun Club, located at the end of Bozman's peninsula. One of the duties of such guides was providing decoys for the club's blinds. Richardson said that both he and Ball did in fact produce birds for Long Point, although the exact number is unknown. Thus far, no Ball decoys are known to carry a Long Point Gun Club brand, though such birds may certainly exist.

Though not making many new decoys, Ball continued to hunt seasonally and worked the water year in and year out until 1969. Glenna, his wife of nearly fifty years passed away in 1973. With Doris and her husband Thursby's encouragement, Ball carved decoys again for several years in the mid-1970's. "They were his same working bodies," Doris said of the later birds, "only with a bit more detail on the paint job." While many Talbot makers produced miniatures at some point in their carving years, none are known by Ball. He enjoyed a peaceful retirement in his beloved Bozman, after a lifetime of strenuous work in two demanding occupations. "He lived a simple life," Doris remembered lovingly, "but he enjoyed what he did — he took pride in it. He was not a complicated man, everything he did was not complicated." More than anything, she remembers her father as, "a hardworking, easy-going man, never argued. He didn't like to get angry." After a bout with Alzheimer's Disease, Ball passed away in 1989 at the age of 87.



Bluebill decoy by Nelson Ball, circa 1940's. From the collection of Chad Tragakis. Photo by Chad Tragakis.

For today's collector's, Ball's decoys are scarce as relatively few were made. At a recent Easton Waterfowl Festival, only three Ball decoys were offered for sale amidst the thousands of Chesapeake Bay birds. For years, auction-goers have seen decoys attributed to the Ball name. While many of these were in fact by Nelson Ball, it is important to note that another Neavitt maker, Irvin Ball (1923-1983), was working at about the same time. Known for his root-head geese, Captain Ball, like Nelson, was a full-time waterman who also guided, led fishing parties, and worked for a boat yard in St. Michaels. Irvin's daughter, Sandy Showell, recalls that the two distant cousins would often sit together in their favorite country store talking about the day's oystering, the coming duck season, or simply the pleasant Chesapeake Bay afternoon.

While Nelson Ball is no longer with us, his legacy lives on in the worn but sturdy decoys crafted by his able hands, and through the memories of those whose lives he touched. Among the dozen or so Talbot County makers who produced decoys primarily for their own use, he is perhaps the most renowned—and deservedly so. For, like his decoys, Nelson Ball's strength and resilience helped to shape Talbot County's waterfowling



Blackduck by Nelson Ball, circa 1950's. From the collection of Chad Tragakis. Photo by Chad Tragakis.

heritage and the rich history we so much enjoy remembering today.

The author would like to thank Doris Cooper, Dave Fannon, Larry Myers, Sandy Showell, Vance Strausburg, and Bert Wheedleton for the information and research assistance they provided.



A pair of Nelson Ball canvasbacks, circa 1940-1950. From the collection of Larry Myers. Photo by Chad Tragakis.

Duck Fair Review

September 14th and 15th was a beautiful weekend for the Duck Fair. The Susquehanna Flats sparkled in the sun and the temperature remained a pleasant degree. Over fifty exhibitors set up under the trees in front of the Decoy Museum. Volunteers manned the raffle tables, ugly duck table, and the bake sale tent. Chuck Mushinski and his retrievers gave outstanding demonstrations on the lawn, three times a day, while the crowds of people watched. Under the carving tent, Mitch Shank encouraged the Honorary Chairpeople while the whittled mallard heads. Then at 1 p.m., the live auction began with Jay Edwards as auctioneer.

On Sunday, a tent where you could paint a miniature mallard decoy for \$5 seemed to be the hit of the afternoon. Children and adults were able to bring home their newly painted decoy. Other kid's activities were set up on the second floor of the Museum.

Thanks go to all of our volunteers and everyone who participated in the Duck Fair — it was a success. If you were not able to come, you missed an enjoyable weekend. Mark on your calendars Duck Fair, September 13th and 14th for 1997!



Butch Larrimore and his grandson Bryan, carry decoys to the water for the battery gun demonstration. Photo courtesy of Butch Larrimore.



Charlie Pierce, Charlie Bryan, and Jim Pierce are enjoying the head whittling contest. Photo courtesy of Butch Larrimore.



Vernon Bryant, Mary Carol Larrimore, Ned Maynes, and Charlie Pierce all concentrate on whittling in the open contest. Photo courtesy of Butch Larrimore.

From the Collection

A Dart of Teal

Karla Mattsson

As the days shorten and nights grow cool, a hunter's thoughts turn to the tasty teal beginning their early migration. Not only are they the first fair game of the waterfowl season, their quick and erratic ways provide a challenge to even the most practiced shot, let alone to shooters rusty after a summer off. Among the most beautiful and engaging of ducks, the dainty teal are a treat for the eye, as well as for the palate.

Many thanks are extended to John and Gail Carriere for the use of their garden, perhaps the finest private garden in Havre de Grace.



Cinnamon teal drake by Charlie Bryan.



Blue-winged teal drake by Bill Schaubert.



Blue-winged teal drake by Bob McGaw.



Blue-winged teal drake by Ira Bordeleon.



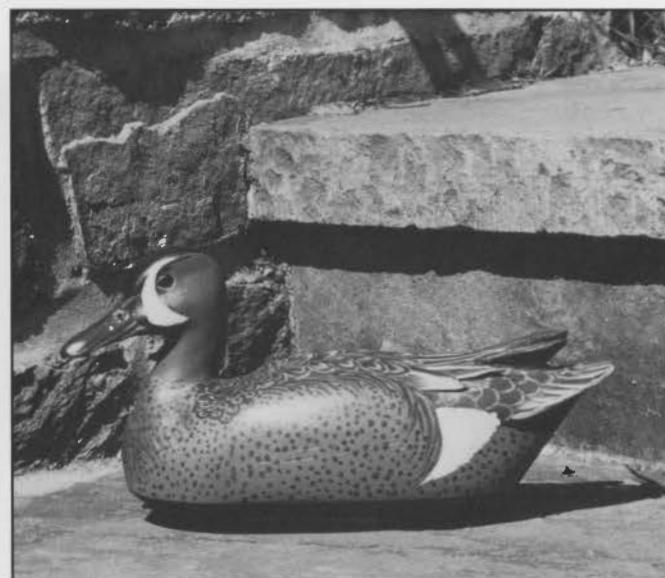
Blue-winged teal drake by William Pratt Manufacturing.



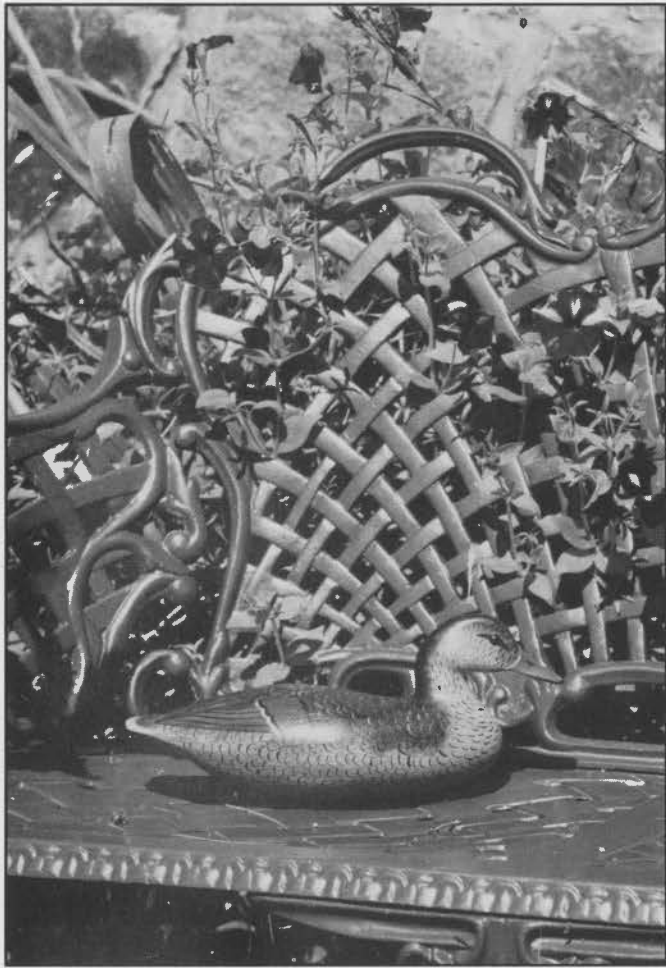
Cork green-winged teal drake by Madison Mitchell.



Green-winged teal drake by Charlie Joiner.



Blue-winged teal drake by Woodson Roddy.



Green-winged teal hen by Charles Seidel.



Green-winged teal drake by Madison Mitchell.



Green-winged teal drake by Bill Schaubert.



Cinnamon teal drake by Jim Pierce.

1996/97 Calendar of Events

November 2

*** Decoy Museum's 10th Anniversary Dinner & Auction**
Held at the Bayou Restaurant at 7 p.m. Please make reservations at the Decoy Museum. (410) 939-3739. \$25 per ticket.

November 8-10

Waterfowl Festival. Easton, Maryland
World's Premier Wildlife Art Show and Sale features 450 of the country's finest artists displaying paintings, sculpture, carvings, duck stamps, photography, crafts, and antique decoys. (410) 822-4567.

November 23-24

Annual Shrine Decoy, Art and Crafts Exhibit
Held at the Nur Temple Mosque in Wilmington, Delaware. Jame Lemon, (302) 998-8085 or Frank Minder, (302) 328-5863.

November 29-30

10th Annual Waterfowl Show and Auction
Chincoteague High School, Virginia. Contact Jean Boggs (804) 336-3478.

December 7-8

Susquehanna Flats Carving & Arts Festival
At Perryville Middle School. Carving competition under IWCA rules. Exhibitors, artists, dealers. Contact Ed Gray (410) 642-6861.

December 8

*** Candlelight Tour Sale and Carver Celebration**
Over 20 carvers will be selling decoys on the 2nd floor of the Decoy Museum from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Great selection. Also, 25% off all items in the gift shop for Decoy Museum Members only.

January 5-6

"Just for Sport" Antique and Collectible Hunting & Fishing Show and Sale
Mystic Lake Casino & Convention Hall, Prior Lake, MN (612) 439-7883.

February 1-2

13th Annual Tom's River Art & Decoy Show
Tom's River, NJ (908) 341-9622.

February 14-16

17th Annual Waterfowl Show and Sale
Harford Day School, Bel Air, MD (410) 838-4848.
** The Decoy Museum will have a table there. **

EXHIBIT UPDATE

The Elevator is Coming!

As I type, construction crews are pounding away, making room for the elevator machinery. The plans are approved and the foundation is poured. Soon the tower will be sprouting up like a flower in the summer sun. If all goes well, the elevator will be up and running by winter, just in time for new exhibits on the second floor. A lot of money has been raised by selling blocks to museum members, but there are many more blocks available. If you are interested in helping make the museum handicap accessible, think about purchasing one!

Permanent Case for McKinney

The 1995 Honorary Chairman collection of Evans McKinney decoys is now on permanent display on the second floor. This exhibit includes a full-sized swan, a Canada goose, and a mourning dove as well as an array of ducks. When you come by to see the new case, ride the elevator up!

Decorative Fish

Dan Davis of Easton, Maryland will be exhibiting his decorative fish carving in the foyer case. This fascinating collection will be on view from early December through late January. When you are looking for something to do in the cold winter months, be sure to stop by and see these wonderful fish.

Carver's Christmas Tree

A perennial favorite of museum visitors, the Carver's Christmas tree will be set out right after Thanksgiving, and remain on display until New Year's Day. There are new donations from Charlie Bryan and Carl Jensen, but there is still room for a decoy head carved by you. Call the Museum for details.

SAT., NOV. 23, 1996
10AM TO 5PM



SUN., NOV. 24, 1996
10AM TO 4 PM

ANNUAL DECOY EXHIBIT

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Weekend Carving Demonstrations at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

November 2, George Stram
November 3, Joe Cook
November 9, Barb Wachter
November 10, OPEN
November 16, Butch and Mary Carol
Larrimore
November 17, Joe Cook
November 23, OPEN
November 24, Bill Weaver
November 30, Ken Clodfelter

December 1, Barb Wachter
December 7, John Ingolia
December 8, Candlelight Carvers
December 14, Butch and Mary Carol
Larrimore
December 15, Joe Cook
December 21, Joe Cook
December 22, OPEN
December 28, Ken Clodfelter
December 29, OPEN

Call Arlene at (410) 939-3174
if you are interested in any of
the open carving dates.

No weekend carvers for Janu-
ary & February. See you in the
Spring!

Auction News

Duck Fair Auction, September 14, 1996

This year's Duck Fair Auction was a splendid little affair. After weeks of rain, the sun was shining and people were happy to be outside for an auction. Volunteer auctioneer, Jay Edwards, did a top rate job moving the auction right along and keeping track of bidders amid the festival crowd. The 96 lots in the auction raised \$3,953.50 for the museum, the best Duck Fair Auction in a long time! We are indebted to the many donors that contributed their work, making this auction a great success.

Duck Fair Auction Top 5 Lots

Description (Catalogue #/Bidder #)	Price
Charlie Joiner pr. canvasbacks (45A/100)	\$725
Harry Jobes pr. wood ducks (58/112)	\$475
Charlie Bryan pr. scaup (28A/108)	\$375
Jim Cockey pr. canvasbacks (44/124)	\$280
Mike Veasey decorative pintail drake (67/133)	\$200

The Decoy Museum is now taking consignments for the May 3, 1997 Decoy Festival Auction. There is a 10% seller's premium which benefits the Decoy Museum. There are no reserves, but should a consignor buy back their decoy, only the 10% seller's premium is charged. For advertising purposes, please have your consignment to the museum by February, or April 1 at the latest. If you are interested call the museum at (410)939-3739.

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LOCATION LAWS ANTIQUE MALL II

CLASSIFIED

For our members we offer free classified ads to buy, sell, and trade decoys or related objects. Please keep it under 15 words. For non-members, it will be \$5.00 for 15 words. Mail your classified ads to: Decoy Museum, P.O. Box A, Havre de Grace, MD 21078.

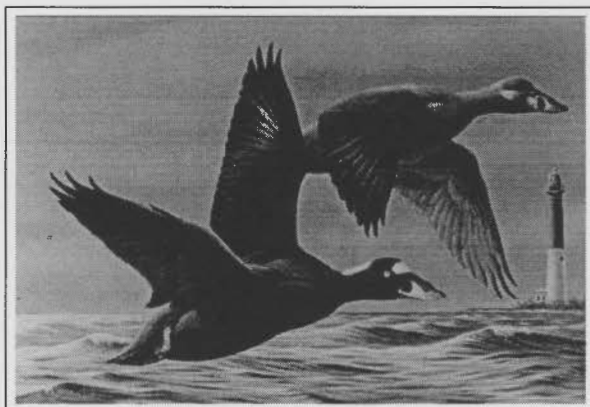
Decoys, including flickers from Crisfield, MD. Various species carved by the famous Cap't Bill Zack Ward. Call C.J. Sullivan (410) 879-1850

FOR SALE: Old wooden decoys. For list send S.A.S.E. to John Freimuth, 12123 S. 71st Avenue, Palo Heights, IL 60463. (708) 361-4343 (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

FOR SALE: Complete collection of Charlie bryan decoys. Includes some rare species, such as a seagull, blue goose, snow goose, coot, etc. Sale of collection goes to Decoy Museum's elevator fund. Call (410) 939-3739 for more information.

WANTED: Pacific Coast Decoys. Call Decoy Museum at (410) 939-3739

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The 1996-97 Federal Duck Stamp Print continues the grand tradition of offering only the finest quality artwork in the nation's most collectible limited edition print series.

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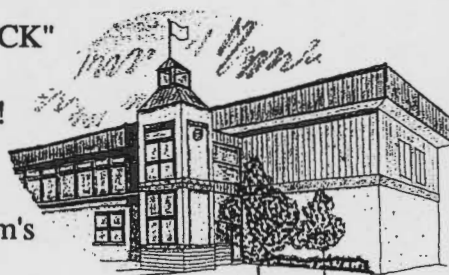
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**"BUY A BLOCK"
IS STILL
AVAILABLE!**



Thanks to the
Decoy Museum's
membership,
the fund raiser

"Buy a Block" is going very well. The 200
brown blocks have been sold out and only
white blocks remain! For more information on
how to contribute to the elevator fund call:
(410) 939-3739.

A Collection of C. Bryan Decoys Are For Sale.



A collection of decoys made by Charlie are for
sale at the Decoy Museum. The collection
includes some unusual pieces such as; a seagull,
blue goose, snow goose, coot, and a full-size
swan. The sale of the decoys, goes directly to the
Decoy Museum's elevator fund.

On January 1, 1997, the Havre de Grace
Decoy Museum will have new admission prices.
Adults - \$4, Seniors (over 65) - \$2, Children
(over 8) - \$2, Tours - \$1.

As always, Decoy Museum members are free and
children 8 and under.

Duck Blind China

Bring America's proud heritage of decoy-making to your table. This elegant, yet sturdy, china is microwave and dishwasher safe.

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