

The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Winter 2007
Vol. 16 No. 1

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What is a Decoy?

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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

*The 'What is a Decoy' opening.
See page 10.*



FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Friends of the Museum:

Well, the new exhibit is open. If you haven't visited, you owe it to yourself to see it in person. The pictures in this issue are meant to pique your interest, but no photographs can begin to do this very professionally done display justice. No matter what your level of interest or expertise, it is sure to broaden your knowledge, deepen your interest, and/or open up a new avenue to explore in your mind. Once again I have to congratulate the staff and all the volunteers who brought this exhibit into existence.

My remarks here should not be construed to detract from a couple more fine articles from Jim Trimble; this time concerning the lives and works of Doug and Charles Jester. As usual, you are sure to find them extremely interesting and informative.

Once again let me say, "Visit the Museum and view the new Exhibit." You are sure to want to come back to see it again. Maybe we'll run into one another there.

John T. Case
Interim Editor

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From the President

Dear Museum Member,

On the 13th of January, 2007, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum opened the doors to show off its new exhibit *What is a Decoy?* We had 100 plus people for the opening and the Mayor of Havre de Grace, John Corrieri, cut the ribbon. John Quarstein, our consultant, spoke for a few minutes on the history and development of the exhibit. Pat Vincenti gave thanks to all the major contributors, volunteers, designer and the contractor for making *What is a Decoy?* possible.



Before the evening was over, John Quarstein pulled me aside and said "Ed, our next re-building will be the 'Gunning the Flats' exhibit." I must tell you, I begged for a little time off!

There are many people I want to thank for their efforts, time, and hard work. Chris White, our designer, took our main gallery and totally changed the configuration to what you now see when visiting the Museum.

John Quarstein spent many hours and trips to the Museum to write the text, collecting photographs, organizing documents, and putting everything together.

Pat Vincenti took John's list of artifacts, checked our collection decoys and assembled the above.

Many artifacts were in the Museum's possession, but some had to be found or purchased.

The Paul Gibson lathe and band saw had been stored in a metal container behind the Museum for 20 years. Capt. Bobby Jobes volunteered to clean them up. The metal container was delivered to Bobby's yard in late summer. Early January the lathe and band saw were delivered back to the Museum by Collette's Service Center on a tow truck and with two pallet jacks. I watched the placement of the 4,000 lb lathe and was amazed by the ingenuity and hard work to lift the lathe up 8" to its new location.

During the week of January 8, the Museum was shut down. Pat Vincenti and John Ingoglia worked with Capital Exhibits to install the Exhibit pieces. Pat and John spent many long days and evenings at the Museum.

Saturday morning, 13th of January, a final vacuuming was done and we were ready for our Grand Opening.

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum still has to raise \$70,000 to complete paying for the exhibit, *What is a Decoy*. I know with your support we will get this done.

What is next? Re-working *Gunning the Flats*, getting re-accredited and acquiring a new case for the Honorary Chairmen Exhibit are a few things on the horizon for the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

Be sure to visit the Museum soon.

Sincerely,



Ed Watts
President

Funded in Part By:

Maryland State Arts Council • City of Havre De Grace • Harford County

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 decoys as this art form applies to the social and economic life of the upper Chesapeake Bay region.



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— In Memoriam —

The Board and Staff of the Museum regret the passing of several Museum members. These members have been long time supporters, volunteering and offering assistance when we have needed extra hands.

IN MEMORY OF Norma Montgomery

Norma J. Montgomery of Havre de Grace died on December 15, 2006, at the age of 87. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, she came to Havre de Grace in 1941 as the wife of Charles D. Montgomery. She was a member of the Havre de Grace Presbyterian Church for 60 years.



She served on many boards: St. John's Towers, Director of Susquehanna Museum. She and her husband devoted many hours helping with the restoration of the Lockett's House. Norma's husband served as Mayor of Havre de Grace for 8 years.

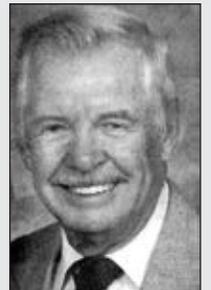
Norma, Virginia Colburn and Madelyn Shank coordinated the annual Candlelight Tour of Historic Havre de Grace for 30 years. Norma and Charles volunteered at many Decoy Festivals as ticket sellers.

Services were held December 20th. Interment was in Angel Hill Cemetery.

Despite our best efforts at proofing *The Canvasback* magazine, it was noted that pictures in the last issue were inadvertently switched on the memorials for Byron Bratcher and Leonard Abrams. The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum sincerely apologizes for this error. They are reprinted correctly below.

IN MEMORY OF Byron "Barney" Bratcher

Byron "Barney" Bratcher passed away at the end of June. Mr. Bratcher served the community in many ways. He is best remembered for volunteering with his wife Nancy at the Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Festival every Saturday since 1992 at the High School admission table from 9 am – 1 pm. Barney and his wife greeted many people with smiles while collecting admissions and handing out tickets. Nancy will continue with the traditional Saturday mornings at the Festival and will be joined by her daughter Lisa Altland.



IN MEMORY OF Leonard Abrams

Leonard Abrams passed away in August. He supported youth sports and enjoyed mentoring and coaching children. Mr. Abrams and his wife Carol could be found walking the Havre de Grace Promenade bird watching. They often stopped in the Museum to say hello to whoever was working or volunteering and to just "check out" what was going on. Leonard was a regular volunteer at the Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival. He routinely manned the admission table at the Middle School on Sundays.



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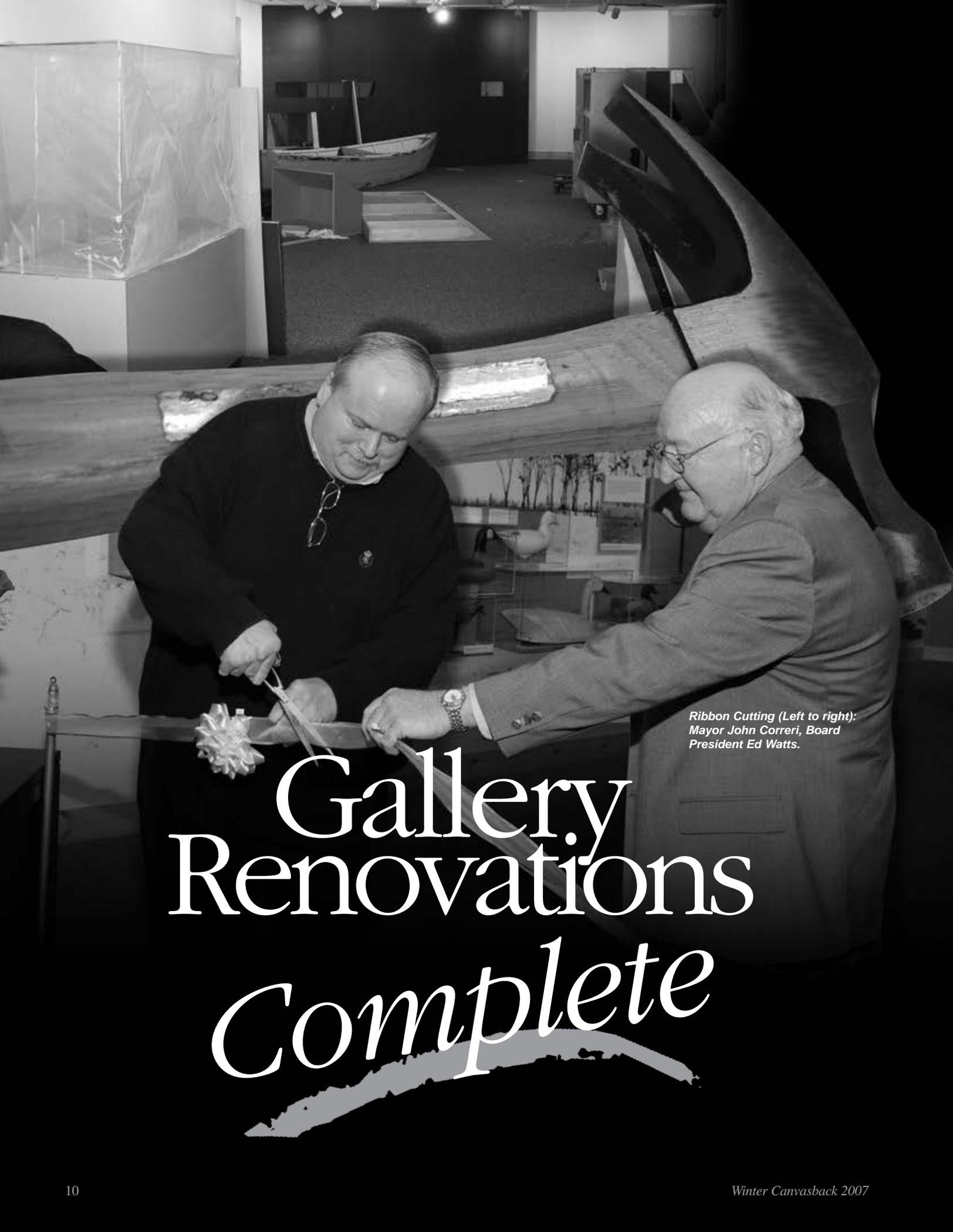
*during the 26th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival
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Ticket Cost: \$5.00 each or 3 for \$10.00

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For more information call 410-939-3739

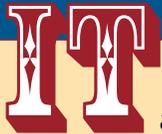
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*Ribbon Cutting (Left to right):
Mayor John Correr, Board
President Ed Watts.*

Gallery Renovations *Complete*

Getting the lathe into the gallery.



all started several years ago with an idea and a few grants. More ideas were added, people built on those and finally on Friday, January 5, 2007, pieces of the past came into the Museum.

Collette's Service Center pulled a truck up to the front doors. On the back of the truck sat a very old band saw and Paul Gibson's lathe. It took seven people, two pallet jacks and a lot of grunting to get these things into place. They were carefully set on the platform that once held the Mitchell diorama. The Gibson lathe set the stage for what was to come.



Decoys being added to the "Home Run Baker" gunning rig.

Photos by Leo Heppner, Terri Shepke, & Museum Staff

The last of the wall murals going up.



Thanks to Capt. Bobby Jobes, Casey Jobes, S. R. Smith, Zack Blum, Joe Smith, Patrick Vincenti, Collette's Service Center, Bart Brandon, Steve Kinsey, and John Ingoglia for cleaning, restoring and moving this equipment.

Early on January 8th the delivery trucks began to arrive with the makings of the new gallery. When the back of the truck was opened it was evident there was not a square inch inside that wasn't filled with cases, pedestals or glass.

No time was wasted unloading and setting everything where it had to go. The next few days were filled with hanging, trimming and hammering. By Thursday night, artifacts were being dusted, cleaned and put in place. Many items were moved from one gallery to another or were brought out of storage. Some artifacts from storage are on display for the first time. Finishing touches were worked on until late Friday night.

Manikins for the Store diorama getting cleaned by John Quarstein.



*Gallery Dedication (Left to Right):
Mayor John Corrieri, Board President Ed Watts,
Board Vice President Patrick Vincenti,
Consultant John Quarstein.*

THE

Grand Re-Opening took place Saturday night. Havre de Grace City Mayor, John Corrieri, Museum Board President Ed Watts, Museum Board Vice President Pat Vincenti, and Museum consultant John Quarstein cut the ribbon allowing for the long awaited gallery to be viewed. Many past Board Members, long time supporters of the Museum, local business owners, City Council Members, and representatives from the Chesapeake Bay Gateways network were on hand to tour the new room. Many people commented on how different the gallery looked from before, others were amazed at how large the new exhibit appeared, but everyone was impressed and pleased with the long awaited changes. MacGregor's Restaurant

catered light refreshments in the second floor gallery creating a festive and pleasant evening that everyone enjoyed.

Thank you to all the generous donors and supporters who made the gallery renovations possible. A special "thank you" to Jimmy Pierce and Dave Walker for assisting with placing artifacts in the *How to Make a Decoy* exhibit. Their personal insights about Paul Gibson and R. Madison Mitchell made a difference in the presentation of the exhibit.

Make plans now to come and see the new *What is a Decoy* Gallery and see what everyone who has seen it is talking about.

---Margaret Jones

Charles Edward Jester (1876-1952) never achieved the fame of his first cousin, Doug Jester, as his decoy production was largely for personal usage. His decoys, especially his buffleheads, are extremely well-crafted, some consider them the finest produced on Chincoteague, and easily identified, as they have graceful, rounded, hollow-carved bodies that support slightly tilted cheeky heads, many without eyes. Black ducks, buffleheads, bluebills, redheads and brant are the only known species.

Charles Jester

By James L. Trimble

WATERMAN, GAME WARDEN AND DECOY MAKER

As a young waterman, Jester worked as a market hunter, then a guide. His only child, Eugene Jester (b. 1904, now deceased), an oysterman and fishing boat captain, was interviewed for the Berkey's 1981 book, "Chincoteague Carvers and Their Decoys." "Every stool he made was hollow," he said. "He used a curved piece of metal to hollow them out. I don't know what the tool was called, but it wasn't a chisel." On his father's life as a market hunter and guide, Eugene remembered, "My father used a sink box when he gunned for a living. Later, he and I at one time had about 500 decoys that we used when we took out gunning parties. But when the law changed the limit to four ducks a day, it didn't pay to guide anymore."

Due to these restricted limits, which resulted in less profits, Jester joined the "other side" and became a state game warden. But his work as a game warden provided a smaller paycheck, so he continued to work the water, oystering in the winter and crabbing in the summer.

Full-bodied hollow-carved black duck with a fine scratch painting on the body and detailed paint on the head.

GARY CAMPBELL
COLLECTION



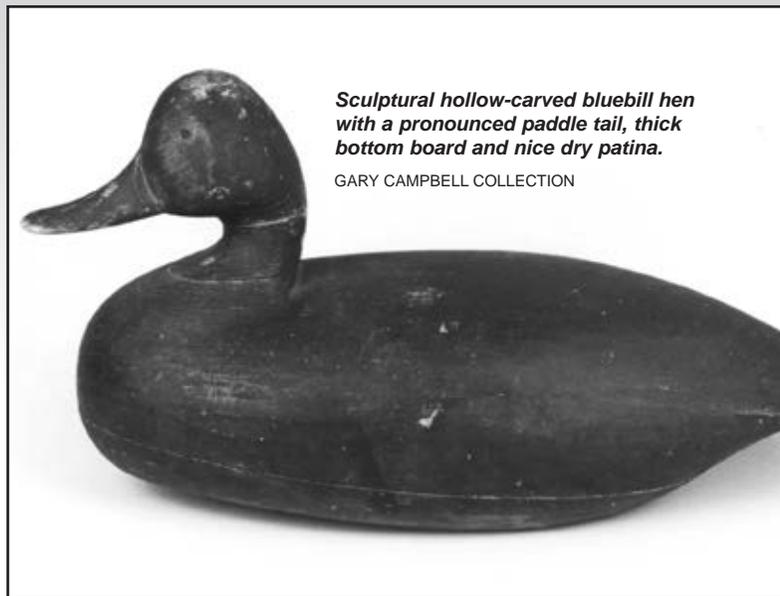
Jester's granddaughter, Joan Jester Drewer (b. 1932), says it was around 1940, when her grandmother died, that her father moved the family into her grandfather's home, which was located on Main Street, just south of the present-day bridge. She's not sure whether her grandfather's father or grandfather built the old wood-frame house. While she has memories from those two or three years that they lived with her grandfather, she qualifies those memories as being from a childhood perspective, as she was only eight or nine years old. But she remembers a quiet, dignified man, and a loving grandfather, who enjoyed hunting and working in his garden. She also remembers an old workboat, modified to little girl requirements, which served as her backyard playhouse.

When asked about his decoy production, Drewer responded, "I remember him working on or building boats in the backyard, but I have no recollection of him making or carving decoys." Yet she remembered family stories that her grandfather, as a young man, in addition to his life as a waterman, had worked in the shipyards at Newport News, Virginia. She also remembers stories of him taking out fishing parties. But one of her memories, recounted from a story her father told her, is priceless. One evening her grandfather, in his capacity as a game warden, observed from afar a local waterman emptying traps. A waterway chase ensued for hours, but to no avail. The following morning, over breakfast, Jester shared the frustration of the night's chase with his wife and son Eugene. Joan's not sure how long it took, but eventually her dad owned up that "he was the one being chased."

And Eugene, evidently, wasn't the only family member who had a run-in with the game warden. Doug Jester's son, "Sawdy," a waterman himself, was stopped in the wee hours of the morning at the water's edge and searched with a flashlight for corn. "My cousin Charles knew the underside of a waterman's life, and that his main quarry were trappers," Sawdy remarked. "My intent was trapping, but my gear, including license, shotgun and burlap bags full of decoys, indicated an early morning hunt." Sawdy got a break, as the corn in the bottom of the sacks was not found. However, his cousin hung around to keep an eye on him. He also remembers that his cousin was "a particular and methodical man in everything he did. It was reflected in the way he pursued trappers, even in the way he built boats and made decoys."

Another waterman related a story that "sometimes at night, Jester hid among the offshore pods of watermen's boats, tied together for safety and socializing, waiting for the night time trapper to make his rounds, or the report from gunfire out of season."

Grayson Chesser, an Eastern Shore of Virginia decoy carver and historian, shared a story told to him by Miles Hancock, another well-known Chincoteague carver and waterfowler. Migratory brant, Chesser explained, are hard to kill, and sometime in the early 1920s Hancock and his gunning party "hit them just right," and it wasn't long before they were over the limit. When all of a sudden they saw game warden Jester arrive in a small sailboat to check their licenses, they knew, or at least assumed, they were in trouble. After surveying the situation, he handed back the licenses and departing said, "better make use of this day, you will never see another one like it." Hancock and his gunning party ended the day with 92 kills. A May 29, 1952 obituary in the Accomac Peninsula Enterprise memorialized Charles Jester as a retired



Sculptural hollow-carved bluebill hen with a pronounced paddle tail, thick bottom board and nice dry patina.

GARY CAMPBELL COLLECTION

game warden and highly esteemed citizen of Chincoteague, noting that Miles Hancock was one of the pallbearers.

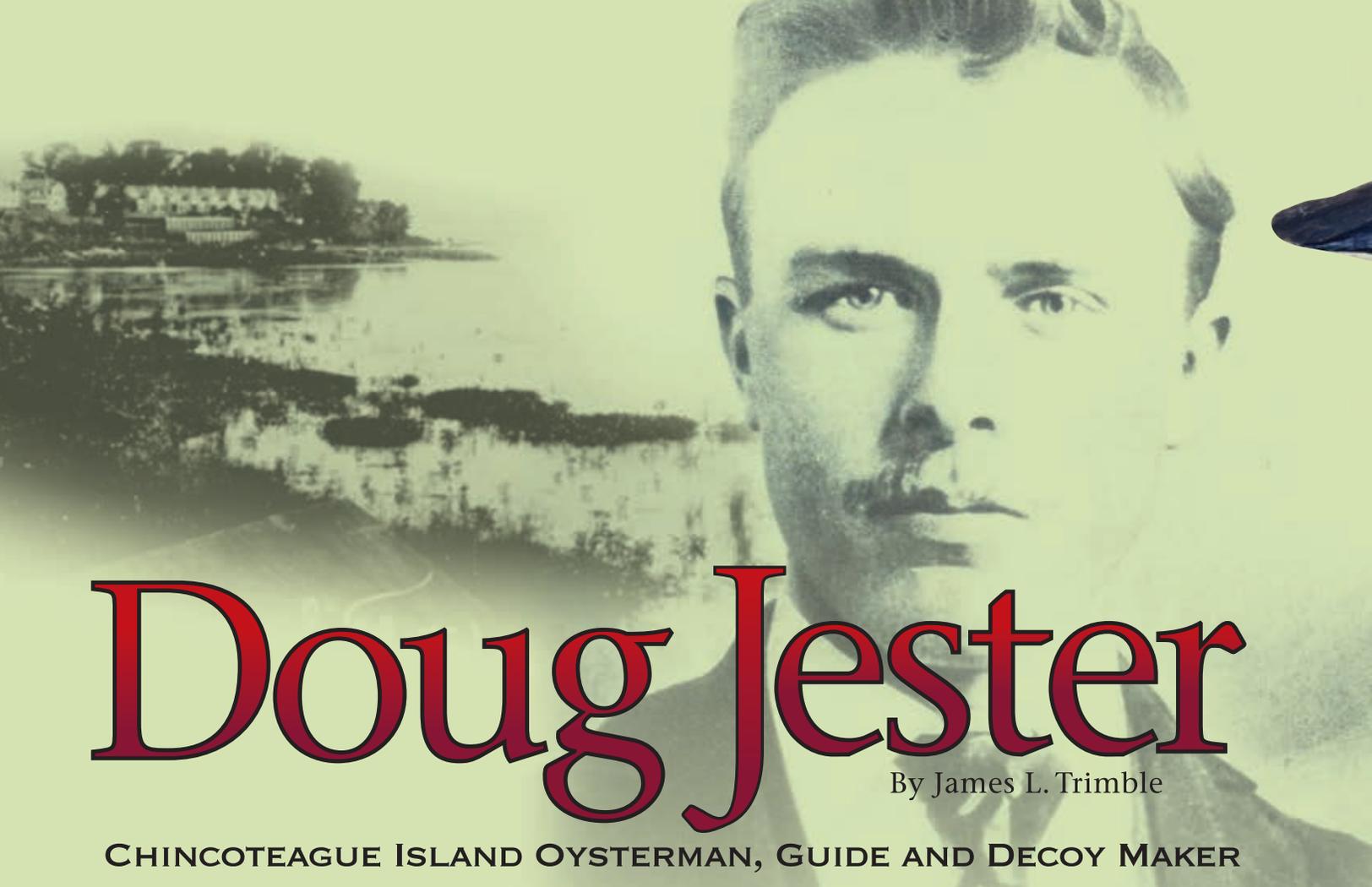
In Chesser's opinion, Jester made a fine decoy with okay paint, and considers his carvings among the best made on the Eastern Shore. He is partial to the buffleheads, feeling they are second only to those produced by his Nathan Cobb Jr. He said that every original paint brant he has seen are in Ira Hudson paint, and he concludes that Hudson must have respected Jester's ability to carve as the paint patterns are identical to those found on Hudson's finest decoys. He also pointed out a peculiarity of some of Jester's hollow birds. Instead of the usual method of two-piece construction, Jester hollowed his after the solid body was shaped. He would first saw down just behind the neck shelf, then start sawing from the tail section forward until the cuts met. Removing the top section, he would scoop it out and reattach it, leaving the bottom solid for added stability in the water.

With due respect to the carving talents of Ira Hudson and Dave "Umbrella" Watson, the limited production and skilled craftsmanship of Charles Jester's carvings have made them among the most desirable and sought after of any Chincoteague decoy.

A special thanks to Leonard Jester, "Sawdy" Jester, Joan Jester Drewer, Grayson Chesser, Rick Kellum, Dr. Bagley Walker and Officer Lee Walker for their assistance.

Jim Trimble is a regular contributor to *Decoy Magazine* and an occasional writer for the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum's *The Canvasback magazine*, who combines his love of history with his interest in Chesapeake Bay and Chincoteague area decoys, through the numerous waterfowl related articles that he has written. If you have information of early decoy makers from that area, contact him at (703) 768-7264 or potomacduck@cox.net.

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Doug Jester

By James L. Trimble

CHINCOTEAGUE ISLAND OYSTERMAN, GUIDE AND DECOY MAKER

You came across the last bridge of the causeway and turned right on the main street of Chincoteague town and looked for a small shop about a quarter-mile down the road. The proprietor was Mr. Samuel D. (M). Jester, who was more than willing to greet a visitor and talk decoys and gunning.

I found him outside the shop sitting astride a sawbuck bench, the stub of a cigar clamped in his teeth, putting the finishing touches to a goose body with a spokeshave. We became acquainted and gabbled along for quite a time when he suggested we go in and see the shop. The building itself is a one-room affair about

fifteen by twenty-five feet, with shelves along one long side and a bench the full length of the other. My visit occurred just before gunning season, and the shop was literally loaded with hundreds of brand-new decoys. These had been made to individual order and were about to be shipped to eager gunners who were counting the days until the season opened. All of the shelves were filled, most of the floor was piled with cartons, and the loft above was equally stuffed . . . The main species represented were Canada geese, blacks, redheads, mergansers, whistlers, buffleheads, and ruddy ducks.

~Decoys of the Atlantic Flyway~

by George Ross Starr Jr.



◀ *Rare hooded merganser with solid crest.*

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION



▼ *Red breasted merganser still rigged for hunting. It's likely that Jester had seen Harry Shourds mergansers before making his.*

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION



▼ *Rare pair of goldeneye decoys with Jester's traditional perky heads.*

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION

Dr. Starr, whose book was published in 1974, states that this was his “first trip” to Chincoteague, yet makes no reference to the year, number of trips or point in time. Are we talking about the 1940s, 1950s or 1961, the year that Jester died and 13 years prior to the publication of his book? He describes Jester, quite accurately, as a “professional maker” who “was carrying on here in a traditional way.” He then goes on to say that Jester’s “elimination of detail” and “simplicity of design” give his decoys a “real ruggedness” that was “of more value to the hunter than fancy paint jobs and easily broken tails and bills.” Starr concludes “this elimination of all nonessential detail enabled Mr. Jester to produce more good working decoys in less time than anyone else in the business.” Today’s collectors can only dream of this acquisition opportunity.

William J. Mackey’s 1965 book, “American Bird Decoys,” features a pair

of Jester hooded mergansers with a notation that they are extremely collectible, a fact that has been born out over and over, as Jester mergansers today, both hooded and red-breasted, with their delicately carved crests and whimsical paint patterns, are favorites of decoy collectors worldwide.

But honestly, it took years for Jesters to “catch on” with early decoy collectors, a phenomenon that with time corrected itself. Perhaps it was because he used the same head and same body for most species of his ducks, with variations in size, bill carving and paint patterns. Maybe they were simply too rugged. By contrast, the early gunners using Jester decoys, with few exceptions, never had a complaint as to sturdiness, quality or their ability to deceive and attract.

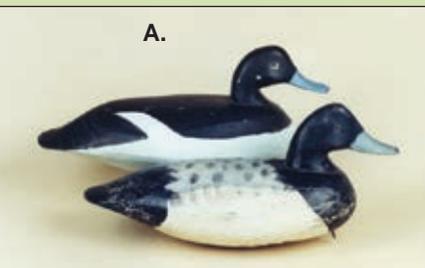
Chincoteague Island, located in Accomac County on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, is seven miles long, three miles wide at its extremity, and about four miles from the mainland. To the East, the long

string bean-shaped Assateague Island buffers the Atlantic Ocean. Chincoteague is surrounded by Chincoteague Bay, the Chincoteague Inlet and the Assateague Channel.

Early island inhabitants lived a primitive life, with no running water or electricity, and were virtually isolated from the outside world, as the only mode of transportation to and from the island was by boat. The surrounding bay waters provided sustenance; many islanders also raised vegetables and maintained livestock. Many derived their income from the water’s plentiful harvest of oysters, clams, crabs, terrapins and fish, selling their catch to the seafood houses that had sprouted along Chincoteague’s vast shorelines.

Commercial vessels plied the waters between Chincoteague’s docks and the railroad terminus at Franklin City on the mainland, which connected to East Coast cities, delivering Chincoteague’s seafood delicacies, as well as fall harvests of waterfowl, to appreciative gourmands. Franklin City was also the end of the line for arriving sportsmen, who were picked up by boat to gun Chincoteague and Assateague with local guides.

A. Unmatched pair of bluebills, the drake with a polka-dot paint pattern and the near-mint hen nearly impossible to find. BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION **B. Hooded merganser pair with carved crests and wonderful paint patterns.** BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION **C. Oversized redhead with whimsical paint swirls decorating the back.** GARY CAMPBELL COLLECTION **D. Folky skinny-necked curlew with scratch feathers added to the swirl paint design.** BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION



A bridge to the mainland was not completed until 1927, when Doug Jester was 51 years old.

Samuel Douglas Melvin Jester (1876-1961), who was named after a preacher and friend of his father, spent his entire life on Chincoteague, doing what two generations of Jesters did before him, deriving his livelihood from the surrounding waters. Born in 1876 and dying in 1961, his lifetime spanned 18 U.S. presidents from Ulysses S. Grant to John F. Kennedy. The 1870 census reflects that his grandfather, Charles S. Jester, and his grandfather's 16-year-old son, Charles T. (Doug's father) were oystermen, with the elder Jester's place of birth listed as Delaware. He was no doubt part of the continuing Delaware migration, which later included a young Ira Hudson and Miles Hancock, who saw Chincoteague's growing oyster industry as an excellent opportunity to earn a living.

Doug Jester lived in a two-story land-locked frame house with his wife and seven children on the south side of

Chincoteague Island in an area known as "snotty-ridge." A two-story barn containing his workshop was located across the road. Water for cooking and bathing had to be pumped and carried daily. The family maintained a vegetable garden for personal consumption; they also raised melons and peanuts and housed a few chickens. There was also an outbuilding for curing meat. The early roads on Chincoteague were made of a sand base covered with shells. Doug Jester never owned an automobile.

For most of his adult life, Jester kept a stabilized houseboat in the Queenstown marsh on the west side of the island, where he stayed all week, commuting to and from home on the weekends via bicycle. Smaller workboats, which he built, were tied to the houseboat, allowing him easy access to area waters. Like many local oystermen, Jester leased from the state several hundred acres of shallow tidal waters, in several different locations, and built numerous oyster rocks, or mounds, from discarded (shucked) oyster

shells to foster growth of oyster colonies. Some of the larger mounds measured up to 30 feet long by five feet wide, but most were smaller. Rain or shine, he harvested oysters seven to eight months a year twice a day on the low tide. Prior to the availability of outboard engines, oystermen pushed (pole), pulled (oar), sculled (a long solitary oar inserted through the transom that was worked back and forth) or sailed to get to and from the oyster beds. As the tide was going out and the rocks broke the surface, Jester got out of his boat and waded into the water to retrieve them. On good days his workboat was piled high, and at day's end he sold them to buy-boats or the shucking houses that dotted the shoreline.

A short, small-boned, wiry man, Jester also tonged oysters in Chincoteague's Selby Bay with long, balanced scissors-handles that he made. The Oyster Museum in Chincoteague has a collage of licenses and permits of area watermen, including a permit issued to S.D.M. Jester with an expiration date of 12-31-28 for the purpose

Stick-up Canada goose field decoy with bold form and stylish presence.

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION



Pintail drake exhibiting an elongated tail.

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION



Doug Jester paints a decoy outside his shop in Chincoteague, circa 1950.

Oversized 17-inch-long red-breasted merganser with an overall folksy attractiveness.

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION



Dainty pair of bufflehead decoys; the drake without eyes.

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION



Deep-bodied black duck with Jester's finest scratch feather painting.

GARY CAMPBELL COLLECTION



Winter Canvaspack, 2007

Turned head hissing Canada goose with distinct tail separation.

GARY CAMPBELL COLLECTION



Two black-bellied plover decoys, two feeding, with wonderful Eastern Shore of Virginia paint patterns. BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION

of “shipping shellfish into New York for human consumption purposes.” The permit further qualifies the source of the shellfish as “harvested from natural beds off Chincoteague and Assateague, Virginia.”

Clamming was another source of income for many Chincoteague watermen. Jester often headed “down bay,” sometimes as far south as the waters below Hog Island, all in pursuit of this seasonal saltwater bounty. Often these clamming trips were for a week at a time, living onboard a shallow draft round stern “down-the-bay” boat, dealing and adjusting to the harsh weather conditions of these mid-Atlantic waters. Fridays were anxious days for family members, who awaited Jester’s expected arrival. He generally sold the week’s load to Burton’s Seafood, one of the island’s seafood distributors, but he was also remembered as a small distributor himself, shipping barrels of oysters, clams and terrapins to East Coast restaurants and private clubs.

Jester was an avid waterfowler who, like other watermen in his community, looked to the skies for a seasonal harvest that augmented sustenance and income.

Barry and Velma Berkey’s book, “Chincoteague Carvers and their Decoys,” published in 1981, includes an insightful interview with Wallace Jester, Doug’s youngest brother, who then, at the age of 92, was working full time as a barber in his shop on Chincoteague. “Doug hunted for the market around the turn of the (previous) century, more or less,” he recalled. “At one time he used an old gun—a muzzle loader—it might have been our father’s,” he continued. “They’d load ‘em—it looked kinda like a big horn that you put in the muzzle, not the breach, of the gun. Later he had a ten gauge and a twelve gauge gun—one was a Baker—and he also had an eight gauge that he’d use real heavy shot in.”

Wallace also remembered that his brother Doug hunted at night with the aid of a light. “They would use a gun with three barrels—one, two, three,” he said, gesturing with his hands to help explain what he meant. “You could get ‘em sitting—and if they came out of the water—boom—you get the idea.” He also noted that Doug used a skiff that he built himself. When asked if Doug served as a guide, he replied affirmatively, adding that his brother Dan and cousin

Charles Jester (see accompanying story) also took out gunning parties.

The Berkeys also interviewed Roland Jester (b. 1908), one of Jester’s seven children. Roland indicated that his father was indeed a good hunter and gunner, although he insisted that he hunted primarily for the table, not the market gunner that his Uncle Wallace had portrayed. Roland acknowledged that his father hunted at night with a grass-covered sneak-skiff, but did not know whether he night-lighted. “I know he was a guide,” he stated, “but that was when he was younger.” Roland described his father’s occupation as “primarily a waterman,” although he remembered him building houses and boats in addition to decoys. “He built larger boats, sailboats—scows. He could build a boat by hand in three to four days. He made some boat models too, and he gave one to each of his children,” he said. He also said that his father started making decoys commercially around 1912. “I was the one son who worked most with did—I sanded, sharpened his tools, and sawed out heads by head,” he said.

Continues on page 23



Anniversary Dinner

by Margaret Jones — Photos by Terry Shepke/Terilyn Artworks

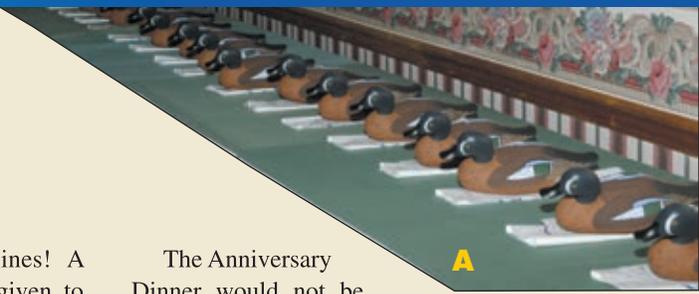
This very special 20th Anniversary Dinner was held at the Bayou Restaurant on Route 40 in Havre de Grace. Old and new friends shared good food and laughs this night, all in support of the Decoy Museum.

The evening program included several special awards and announcements. The Volunteer of the Year was awarded to John Case for all his hard work on *The Canvasback* magazine. This is a time-consuming job that John handles for us on a volunteer basis and only complains

when people miss their deadlines! A Special President's Award was given to 11 year-old Morgan Jones for her work at the Festival and Duck Fair. Morgan can usually be found moving tables, chairs, dumping trash and running children's crafts at both of these events. Her efforts are appreciated by all. Captain Harry Jobs celebrated his 70th birthday and was surprised with a giant card signed by everyone at the dinner and a birthday pie complete with a candle in it. Happy Birthday Captain Harry!

The Anniversary Dinner would not be complete without the auction. The 2006 Museum decoy was a blue wing teal by Charles Jobs. The number one decoy went home with Don Young with the remaining finding good homes with other attendees. A very lively auction followed for items by Charles Joiner and Charlie Bryan.

It was a wonderful evening spent among friends. Mark your calendars and make plans to join us November 3, 2007.



A. 2006 Museum decoy, Blue Wing Teal by Charles Jobs. B. Madelyn Shank giving Capt. Harry Jobs his birthday card. C. Board President Ed Watts saying a few words. D. Rev. John Elledge receiving his oyster can raffle prize. E. Board President Ed Watts with Morgan Jones recipient of the Special President's Award.



PRESENTING THE 2007 HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Left to right are: (seated) Madelyn Shank, Rod Wittstadt, Mert Street, John Ingoglia, Ken Stevenson, Ed Watts, Charles Packard; (standing) Kevin Peel, April Brown (Board reporter), Mitch Shank, Bob Bendler, Warren Saunders, Paul Howshall, Pat Vincenti, Allen Fair, John Case, and John Quarstein (Museum consultant). Not pictured: Griff Evans and Mike Affleck.



20th Anniversary Surprise for 20th Visitor!

by Margaret Jones — Photo by staff

November 6, 2006, was the 20th Anniversary of the Museum's opening. The 20th visitor on the 20th Anniversary was Loren Elchik. Ms. Elchik was surprised to find herself surrounded by Museum staff and Board Member, Mitch Shank. Ms. Elchik was awarded a family membership and enjoyed a tour. Congratulations to Ms. Elchik, we know she and her family will enjoy the year.

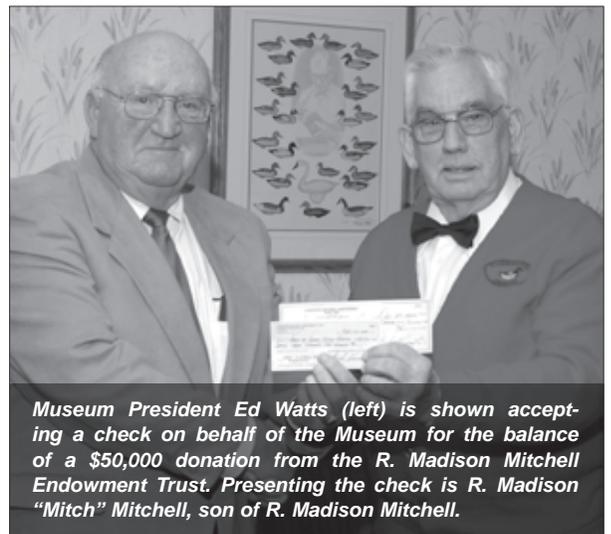


Mitchell Shank awards membership to Loren Elchik, the 20th visitor to the Museum. Staff member Margaret Jones looks on.

MUSEUM DONATIONS



Board of Directors Member Allen Fair (right) presents President Ed Watts with a check for the balance of a \$25,000 personal donation for the new What is a Decoy Exhibit.



Museum President Ed Watts (left) is shown accepting a check on behalf of the Museum for the balance of a \$50,000 donation from the R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Trust. Presenting the check is R. Madison "Mitch" Mitchell, son of R. Madison Mitchell.

The 14th Annual R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Trust Dinner

Friday, March 9, 2007 at the Bayou Restaurant

Route 40, Havre de Grace, Maryland

Cocktails at 6:00pm • Dinner at 7pm

The evening program will include a lottery drawing, option to purchase one of twenty-five pintail drakes by Bill Schaubert and also 25 pairs of miniature swans in the style of R. Madison Mitchell made and painted by John O. Mitchell, III (cousin of Madison) and Bill Collins. In addition, there will be a live auction with the opportunity to bid on many other special items.

Donations are \$40.00 per person and tickets are available at the Decoy Museum, Vincenti Decoys, or by calling (410) 939-3947. All proceeds benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum for the purchase of artifacts, decoys representing all levels of decoy makers, and other appropriate projects.



National Historic Trail Links John Smith Explorations with Bay Restoration

The National Park Service and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network announced the establishment of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail as the first national water trail in the United States. President George W. Bush signed the legislation December 19, 2006.

The trail will commemorate the voyages of Captain Smith on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries in 1607-1609. There will be a series of "talking buoys" developed by the National Oceanic Administration along the trail system. The buoys will offer informative narratives and directions as well as collect information about the Bay's health. The system will continually transmit a series of scientific and educational information, via the internet.

The trail system involves Captain Smith's two major voyages around the Chesapeake Bay. Both trails begin at Jamestown and will travel along the James River and into the Bay. The first trail will go north along the Western Shore to Baltimore City and the Patapsco River then south along the Western Shore to the Potomac River and Washington D.C. before returning to Jamestown.

The second trail will begin in Jamestown then go straight up the Bay to the mouth of the Susquehanna River to Havre de Grace, then turn south with stops along the Patuxent and Rappahannock rivers.

This summer, the voyages of Captain John Smith will be recreated. The ship will make ports all along the trail and will include stops in Perryville, Port Deposit and Havre de Grace the weekend of July 19-21. The Decoy Museum and the Concord Point Lighthouse will be participating in the Havre de Grace Maritime Museum's Mari-Time Fest that weekend. There will be exhibitors, demonstrations, children's activities and entertainment.

If you would like to learn more about the Captain John Smith water trail go to www.baygateways.net. Over twenty-five Gateway sites will be involved in cultural, historical and natural projects in anticipation of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown and the explorations of Captain Smith.

Candlelight Tour and Carver Celebration

by Margaret Jones

December 10th was the annual Candlelight Tour and Carver celebration. Several carvers and artists enjoyed a wonderful day and evening of fun and food.

Visitors came throughout the day and early evening. The weather was very warm for December and is credited for the large number of people who visited during the day and the larger than normal crowds enjoying the Promenade.

Downtown Havre de Grace was a sight at night with luminaries decorating Union Avenue and along Market Street. The merchants and home owners outdid themselves this year by lighting everything up. The evening ended with the Fall raffle drawing. This year's raffle winner was Museum member, Wilbur Brown of Bailey, Colorado.

Thanks to all the exhibitors who took time from their busy holiday schedules to spend the day with us. Make your plans next year to join in the walking tour of Havre de Grace and stop in to see us!



Do you recognize this famous politician?

Yes, that is Vice President Dick Cheney (back to camera) at the Easton Waterfowl Festival last November. And, yes, that is our own Pat Vincenti standing behind the young boy. It seems Pat sold the VP a 3/4 size antique swan. Pat and Jeannie donated the sale proceeds to the Easton Waterfowl Festival Committee.

Another son, Floyd “Sawdy” Jester (b. 1910), a retired waterman and gunner, lives with his daughter on Chincoteague’s Main Street, where he makes and sells a few decoys. In a recent interview he explained that he is the only survivor of Jester’s seven children. “Sawdy” distinctly remembers his dad hunting Willis marsh and Chincoteague Bay at night with a light and a large-bore long-barreled gun with a pivotal set-up. “There were numerous family stories told about a light in the front end and sculling up,” he says. And he agreed with his Uncle Wallace that his father had done some market hunting. While he remembered that his dad “did some guiding” and had two blinds in Chincoteague Bay, he said he was primarily a marsh gunner. He showed off some of his father’s decoys and one of his father’s guns, and noted with pride a 1991 Chincoteague Decoy Festival poster that honored his father and his decoys. He noted that numerous people stopped by the family home over the years to purchase decoys, and remembered that one of the last orders his father filled was for over 500 decoys, mostly black ducks, for a local gun club.

Roland’s son Leonard Jester (b. 1932), a retired carpenter, cabinet-maker and hardware store owner, lived next door to his grandfather for almost 30 years. A skilled craftsman who makes decoys indistinguishable from his grandfather’s, Leonard has a passion for his native island and Jester family history. He remembered that family members were relieved when “Pop Pop” gave up the houseboat and trips “down-bay” to stay home, sometime during or shortly after World War II when he began making decoys full time. At this time Jester had already been making decoys for over 30 years, at first for himself, then for area gunners, and finally for local gun clubs who had a constant demand. Like other area decoy makers, Jester also repaired and refurbished decoy rigs on a regular basis.

Growing up, Leonard spent hours next door with his grandfather, lending a helping hand on everything from house additions to roof shingles to boat building and



Mallards are among the rarest of all Jester decoys, and they may be the only species that features tack eyes. BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION

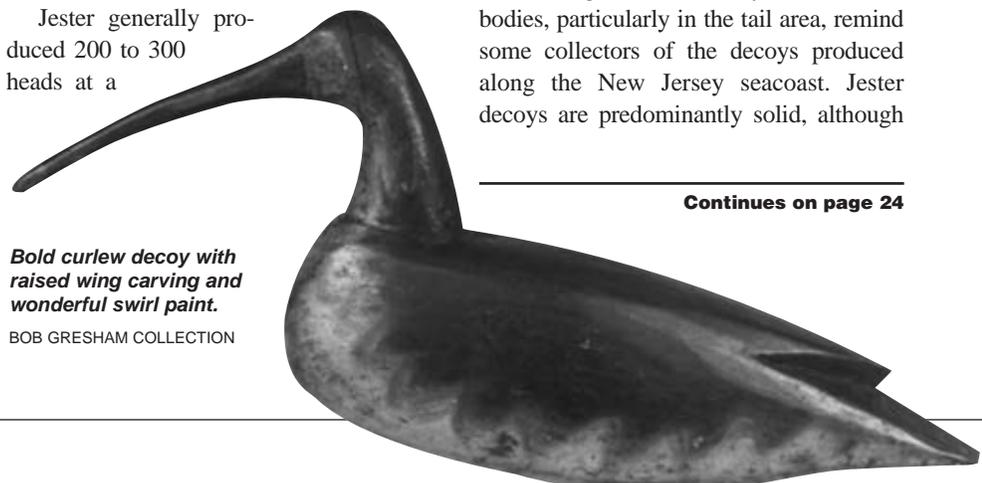
decoy production. He speaks with pride of helping “Pop Pop” build him a 13-foot scow in the mid-1940s that he used for many years.

Leonard spent countless hours in the workshop and remembers shelving stacked full of finished decoys as well as piles of hand-chopped bodies, mostly made of cedar and cottonwood, awaiting head attachment and finishing. He also remembers the process of building decoys. Seasoned logs were placed in x-shaped trusses, then cut to body length, a chore he often undertook. The bodies were then shaped on a chopping block with a broad-ax, hatchet and spokeshave—and very little sandpaper—all without benefit of body patterns. “When “Pop Pop” started chopping, wood chips flew, cluttering his work area,” Leonard recalled. “When he chopped cedar, you could smell the pleasant aroma that permeated the shop. I can still smell it.”

Jester generally produced 200 to 300 heads at a

time, storing them in burlap or onion sacks hung from the rafters. Head slugs, mostly made of pine, were cut into a pie wedge or triangle shape then carved from the back of the neck forward to the bill. He then used a drill to create the curvature at the throat of the neck. A band saw, his only power tool, wasn’t acquired until 1947. With ducks, other than mergansers, bills could be reshaped later to accommodate the desired species. Most heads, which have a wide neck base, have carved nostrils and upper and lower bill delineation.

The heads were attached to the bodies without benefit of glue, using a long center nail, a 3 ½-inch 16-penny nail whose head had been beaten and reshaped as a finish nail, driven in through the top of the head and into the body, and two smaller nails driven up front to secure the attachment. On his earlier decoys a neck shelf was cut into the body; on later decoys the head is attached right onto the body. The rounded bodies, particularly in the tail area, remind some collectors of the decoys produced along the New Jersey seacoast. Jester decoys are predominantly solid, although



Bold curlew decoy with raised wing carving and wonderful swirl paint. BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION

Continues on page 24

a few hollow black ducks, probably made to order, have survived. Balsa and cork decoys were also produced.

Jester used whatever paint was available for his decoys. An orange primer base was used on the black ducks and the feathering was scratch-painted with a hard rubber pick fashioned from an old tire. While his paint patterns would never be considered fancy, in fact the colors on his hens are quite drab, the squiggles that he fashioned onto the backs of his drake mergansers and some of his divers is incredibly whimsical. It was possibly an admission of his difficulty in painting a straight line, but this possible shortcoming is a reward to those who collect his decoys. The eyes were applied with a small rubber hose that had been dipped in paint. A few tack-eye mallards, a rare species for Jester, were likely special-ordered. If ordered, the decoys were weighted and balanced with lead cut from sheeting.

Jester's total decoy production is estimated in the tens of thousands, with most ducks of the Atlantic Flyway, including brant and Canada geese, represented. Jester also made shorebird decoys, including curlews, plovers and peep, which were likely used on Chincoteague long after shooting them was prohibited. In his later years he made miniatures modeled after his gunning decoys.

Of the many decoys that his grandfather made, Leonard remembered one small batch of problem birds that generated complaints in the late 1940s. "Finding suitable wood was always a problem," he said. In need of material, his grandfather purchased seasoned surplus blocks of cedar used for shingle production from Guildford Lumber to fill an order. "Apparently there was a problem with the seasoning, as with time the bodies tended to split," Leonard recalled, and after a reflective pause, he continued, "Of the thousands and thousands of stools made, those are probably the only problem birds that "Pop Pop" ever produced."

Leonard remembers his grandfather, often with a familiar pipe in his mouth, as a fun-filled man, who always took time with those who stopped by to place an order or just visit him at the shop. In his later years he hung a hammock in his shop for an afternoon nap.

Of the boat models that Jester made for his grandchildren, Leonard has a model of a four-masted schooner, a copy of a boat



Rare brant decoy in Ira Hudson paint, a fine example of the efficient simplicity in some of the best Virginia decoys.

BOB GRESHAM COLLECTION

that his grandfather saw in Tom's Cove and replicated for him. He also is the proud owner of his grandfather's woodworking tools, which he continues to employ.

Early collectors and writers, such as Mackey and Starr, recognized the efforts of Jester, as well as other early makers, and their ability to produce by hand a waterfowl decoy that both deceived and attracted. It was their recording of waterfowling history and their respect for the artifacts that fueled the collecting passion that grows stronger yet today. Although Starr's memorialized visit, likely in the 1940s or 50s, was probably only one of many by this new breed of hunter/collectors, in no way could Doug Jester have known that his rugged designs, which served hunters so well, would now have an additional guarantee of everlasting survival.

Jim Trimble is a regular contributor to *Decoy Magazine* and an occasional writer for the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum's *The Canvasback magazine*, who combines his love of history with his interest in Chesapeake Bay and Chincoteague area decoys, through the numerous waterfowl related articles that he has written. If you have information of early decoy makers from that area, contact him at (703) 768-7264 or potomacduck@cox.net.

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HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2007

Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

Friday, Saturday & Sunday
May 4, 5, & 6

Opening of Joseph Coudon of H Temporary Exhibit

Saturday, May 5

Sporting Clays Classic

Pintail Point, Queenstown, MD
Sunday, May 27

Pat Vincenti Roast Dinner • Auction

Friday, June 15

J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest Exhibit

June thru August

20th Annual Duck Fair

Saturday, September 8

21st Annual Anniversary Dinner

Saturday, November 3

Candlelight Tour & Carver Demonstration

Sunday, December 9

www.decoymuseum.com

26th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival



May 4th, 5th & 6th, 2007

Friday: 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Saturday: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Sunday: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

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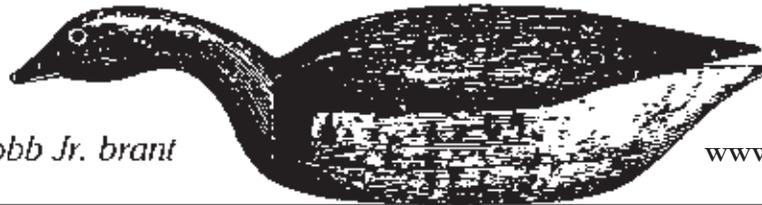
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J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest

2007 COMPETITION

The 5th Annual **J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest** to be held in conjunction with the 2007 Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival will be on Saturday, May 5th in the Middle School Gym. Entries will be accepted at the stage area from 10:00 a.m. until judging at noon. Joe Engers, Editor & Publisher of *Decoy Magazine* will head up a three-member judge's panel. Participants must make a good faith effort to assure that all decoy entries were made prior to 1950. Each decoy will be limited to one category competition only. Matched pairs entered in other than a Matched Pair category will be considered as one entry. There is a competition ban, regardless of category, on last year's winning birds. Competition decoys will be kept in a highly visible roped-off secure area and will not be handled by the public. At approximately 1:00 p.m., the public will be invited to review the roped off and secured tables once the judges have made their selections. A blue ribbon will be awarded for each of the following ten category winners. The three-judge panel will also select a best in show winner. Winners will be requested to display their decoys and ribbons at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum for a three month period.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Best Upper Bay
Preening or Unusual
Head position decoy 2. Best Henry Davis/Ace
Owens decoy 3. Best Charles Nelson
Barnard decoy 4. Best Jim Pierce decoy 5. Best Rock Hall decoy | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Best New Jersey
Coastal Diving Duck
decoy 7. Best Virginia
Puddleduck decoy 8. Best Factory
Puddleduck decoy 9. Best Branded decoy 10. Best unknown |
|---|--|

There will be no restrictions as to those who can participate or number of categories entered, however participants are restricted to no more than three birds per category. Competition issues will be resolved at the sole discretion of the competition chairman and/or competition chief judge. Any questions, please contact contest chairman Jim Trimble at 703-768-7264 or potomacduck@cox.net

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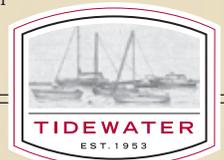
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Calendar of Events

The Ward Foundation Education Series

Call the Ward Foundation for a complete listing of this year's seminars, classes and workshops, programs and exhibits. Call Salisbury University Education Department at (410) 742-4988 ext. 110 or visit their website at www.wardmuseum.org

The Decoy Museum's Exhibits

*The Magnificent Michael Bequest, An extraordinary pair of "Daddy" Holly canvasbacks.
Completion of the "What is a Decoy" main gallery exhibit.*

Tour Reservations

Book your tours early. Talk to your children's or grandchildren's teachers now about signing up for educational programs and tours of the Decoy Museum. Harford County school system classes are free and we have several different tours to offer different age or grade levels. Programs for scouts and home schooled children are also available.

MAY 4, 5, 6, 2007	SEPTEMBER 8, 2007
26th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival. Friday, 6pm–9pm; Saturday, 9am–5pm; and Sunday, 10am–4pm. Live Auction, Saturday, 5:30pm at the Havre de Grace Recreation Center. Visit exhibitors at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, Havre de Grace Middle School and NEW this year, the Havre de Grace Recreation Center located adjacent to the Middle School. (No activities will be held at the High School this year.) Activities for everyone include retriever dog demonstrations, silent auctions, decoy painting session, carving competitions, antique decoy displays and MORE! Admission is \$6/day, \$10/weekend, children 12 years and under free with accompanied adult. Call 410-939-3739 for more information.	20th Annual Duck Fair. Come and spend the day enjoying the view of the Susquehanna River while strolling among the Duck Fair exhibitors. Decoy painting session, silent auctions, bake sale and a live auction will round out the day. Admission is Free. Call 410-939-3739 for more information.
MAY 27, 2007	
Sporting Clays Classic at Pintail Point, Queenstown, Maryland. Join us for this 75 target, 4 Lewis Class sporting clay event. Prizes will include quality collector decoys. A special vintage side-by-side event will take place. All proceeds benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Call 410-939-6474 for more information.	
JUNE THROUGH AUGUST 2007	
J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest Winner Exhibit. Come see the decoys selected as "Best" of the old birds at this year's Festival.	
JUNE 15, 2007	
Dinner—Pat Vincenti Roast. Come and take a light-hearted look at Patrick Vincenti and his carving career. The dinner will take place at the Bayou Restaurant. Tickets are \$40. Reservations required. Call 410-939-3739 for more information.	

Auction Items Wanted

by March 21st, 2007

for the

Live Auction

Saturday, May 5, 2007 at 5:30 pm
during the

**26th Annual
Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival**

Held at the
Havre de Grace Recreation Center
located behind the Middle School
at 401 Lewis Lane.

The Festival Committee is accepting consignments of quality decoys to 100 lots. The commission rate will be 10% from the buyer and 10% from the seller.

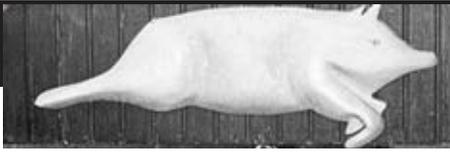
All proceeds will benefit the
Havre de Grace Museum.

Consignments *must* be received by
March 21st, 2007 to be included in
Festival catalog.

CLASSIFIED AD LISTING

FOR SALE: Decoy Wood:
*Kiln Dried, Bass Wood, White
Pine & Cedar.*
Call 410-287-8548 for more information.

If you have something you would like to sell that would be of interest to our readers and museum patrons contact us about placing it in our Classified section, 410-939-3739



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