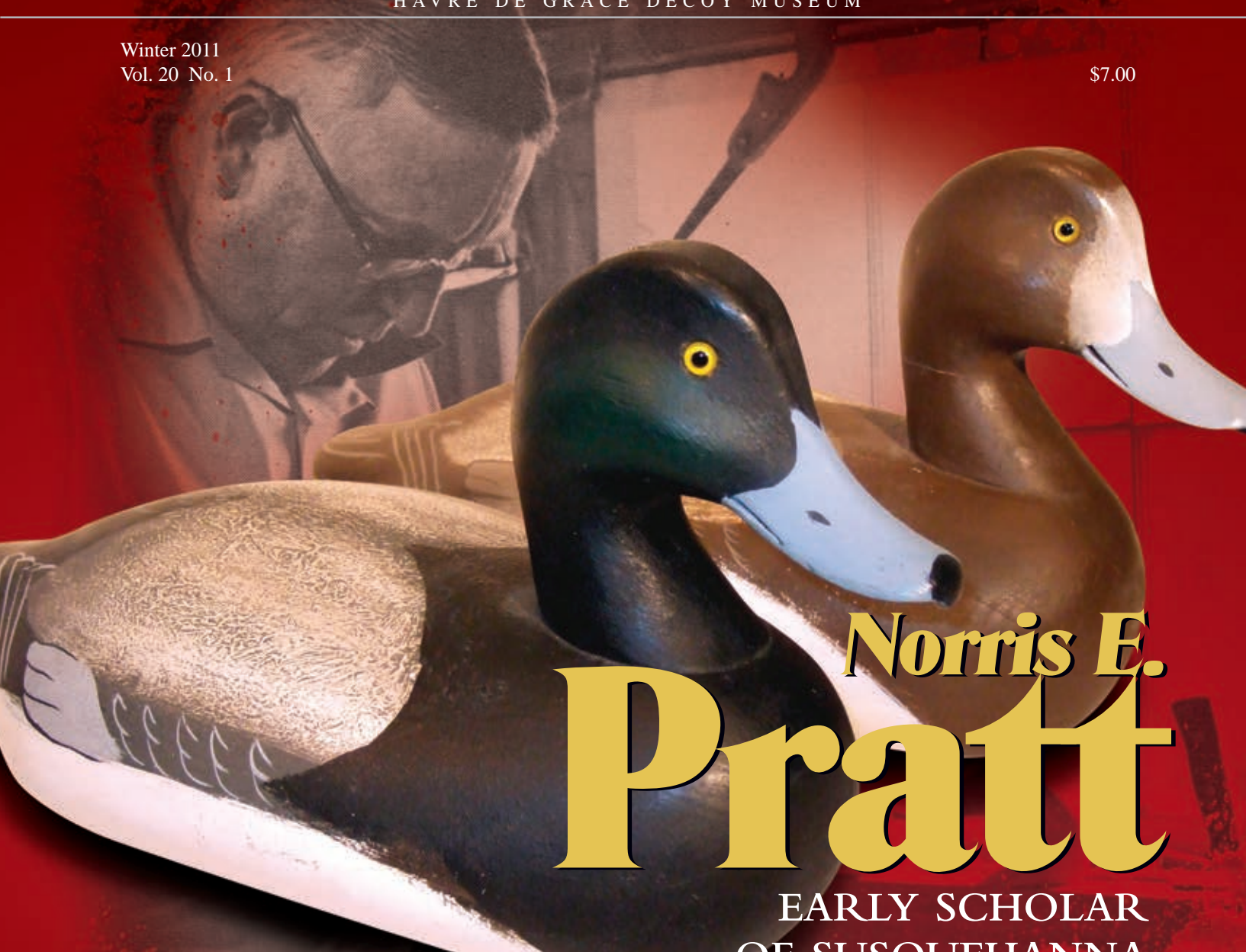


# *The Canvasback*

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Winter 2011  
Vol. 20 No. 1

\$7.00



*Norris E.*  
**Pratt**

EARLY SCHOLAR  
OF SUSQUEHANNA  
FLATS DECOYS





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Remember the spirit of Havre de Grace's race-track. The Graw, as it is captured on a mural in our banquet room.

We have three banquet rooms with seating for 30-200 guests. Our staff will tailor a menu to make your banquet memorable.



**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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Norris E. Pratt, early scholar of Susquehanna Flats decoys, shown with blue bill pair. Carved by Pratt and painted by Bob Coleman.

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## From the President

Dear Museum Member,

Hope all of you had a great holiday season and we wish all of you a healthy and prosperous new year.



Here at the Museum we are busy working on several upcoming events that help generate funds for the General Operating Budget. The Annual Appeal, SFVCS hunting and fishing show, and the Decoy and Wildlife Art Festival all need your support to be successful. Hope to see you there. Also, this year's Mitchell Endowment Trust Banquet actually falls on what would be Mr. Mitchell's 110th Birthday and it is coming together nicely. Come celebrate with us.

On a more somber note, it is with great sadness we inform the membership that in early December Ed Watts lost his battle with heart disease. Ed was truly the high water mark for what we are all looking for in a volunteer. He supported many non-profit and volunteer organizations both local and across the country. Ed supported Ducks Unlimited, The Wild Turkey Federation, Delta Waterfowl,

**Photo by Leo Hepner**

Havre de Grace Maritime Museum, and The Mitchell Trust just to name a few. At Ed's memorial service his son Michael and his grandson commented on the check book Ed carried in his shirt pocket and how he was quick to pull it out to support whatever the cause was that day. There is no doubt or question about his dedication and loyalty to The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Ed spent hours upon hours working for the Museum. On behalf of the staff, volunteers, and Directors we express our deepest sympathy and gratitude to the entire Watts family. Ed will be truly missed.

Sincerely,

Patrick Vincent

## Pat Vincenti

## CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Bob Bendler  
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C. John Sullivan  
Jim Trimble

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Havre de Grace Decoy Museum  
215 Giles Street  
Havre de Grace, MD 21078  
(410) 939-3739

**www.decoymuseum.com**

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

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is funded by an operating grant from the Maryland State Arts Council, an agency dedicated to cultivating a vibrant cultural community where the arts thrive.

Funding for the Maryland State Arts Council is also provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

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.



# Make Plans Now for the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

Make sure you mark your calendars and join us for another exciting event with many decoy & wildlife artists, carving competitions, hunting and fishing suppliers/dealers/guide services, retriever dog demonstrations, live auction, silent auctions, food and more.

**May 6th, 7th & 8th, 2011**

Friday: 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Saturday: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Sunday: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

**★ LIVE AUCTION ★**

Saturday: 5:30 pm

**ACTIVITIES WILL BE HELD AT**

**Havre de Grace Middle School**

401 Lewis Lane

**Decoy Museum**

Market & Giles Streets

**Havre de Grace Activity Center**

401 Lewis Lane (*behind Middle School*)

**ADMISSION**

**\$8.00**

*Good for the whole weekend*

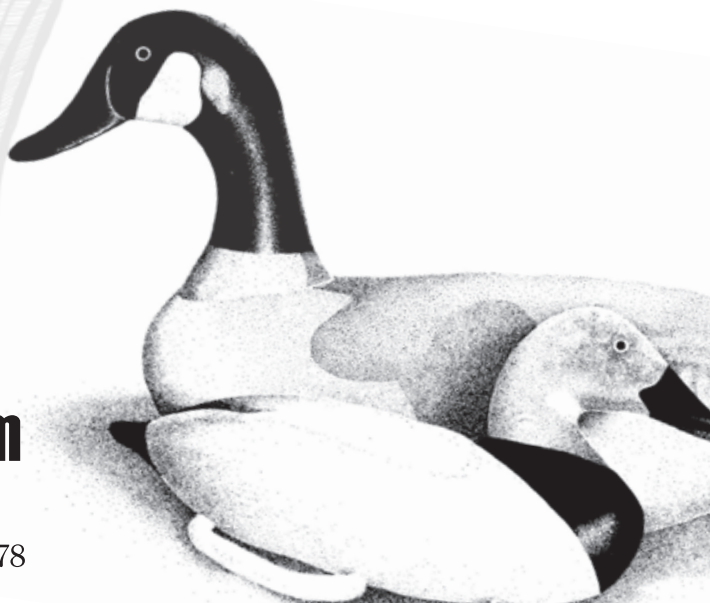
*call for more information*

**410-939-3739**

*or visit us online*

**[www.decoymuseum.com](http://www.decoymuseum.com)**

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM  
215 Giles Street • Havre de Grace, MD 21078



# Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

# ANNUAL REPORT

## JULY 1, 2009 — JUNE 30, 2010

### MISSION

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum exists to collect, document, preserve, and interpret waterfowl decoys as this art form applies to the heritage of the Chesapeake Bay. Within this context, the Museum will strive to study styles of decoys, seeking to understand the decoys' artistic and social values and to pass on this heritage to our future generations. The Museum will also educate, present, and document the influence that the surrounding environment, the Susquehanna Flats and the Chesapeake Bay, has had on decoy history.

## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

**TOTAL ASSETS ..... \$1,267,022**

*Includes cash, investments, inventory, land and leasehold improvements, furniture and equipment, accumulated depreciation, and the value of the Museum collection.*

**TOTAL LIABILITIES  
AND CAPITAL ..... \$1,267,022**

**TOTAL LIABILITIES: \$5,083**

*Includes line of credit, accrued expenses, and sales tax payable.*

**TOTAL CAPITAL: \$1,261,939**

*Includes unrestricted net assets, restricted net assets, and net income.*

### ENDOWMENT FUND BALANCES

Bryan/Joiner ..... \$43,343

C. J. Sullivan ..... \$15,271

**TOTAL REVENUE ..... \$299,067**

Earned Revenue

Program ..... \$110,758

Non-program ..... \$39,478

Investment. .... \$950

Contributed ..... \$147,881

**TOTAL EXPENSES ..... \$290,948**

Program ..... \$145,572

Fundraising ..... \$0

General & Administration. .... \$145,376

## STATISTICAL SUMMARY

**GENERAL VISITATION ..... 11,319**

Paid: ..... 7,546

Free: ..... 3,773

Total School Children: ..... 445

Number of Groups: ..... 9

Number of Other Groups: ..... 13

Classes/Workshops: ..... 91

**MEMBERSHIP ..... 913**

### EXHIBITIONS & CLASSES/WORKSHOPS

Permanet Exhibitions: ..... 4

Temporary Exhibitions: ..... 5

Classes/Workshops: ..... 9

# Tom Humberstone

## **Honorary Chairman**

*2011 Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival*

**I**t is a pleasure to introduce Tom Humberstone as the Honorary Chairman of the 30th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy Museum's "Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival" which will be held next May 6th, 7th, & 8th.

Tom is a carver who enjoys exhibiting his work. He has about 18 years of exhibiting, although he has been carving since 1975. Tom works from his home and shop in Skaneateles, New York, in the Finger Lakes region. His carving preferences are Black Ducks and Canvasbacks. November 12 through the 14th, Tom exhibited at the Easton Waterfowl Festival on the Eastern Shore.

**Let's welcome Tom Humberstone and wish him continued success!**

# Carvers... It's time!

*for the 30th Annual  
Decoy & Wildlife  
Art Festival's*

## **CARVING COMPETITION**

May 6th 7th & 8th, 2011

If you have works that you would like to enter in the competitions, call the Museum at **410-939-3739** and we will send you a copy of the rules and divisions.



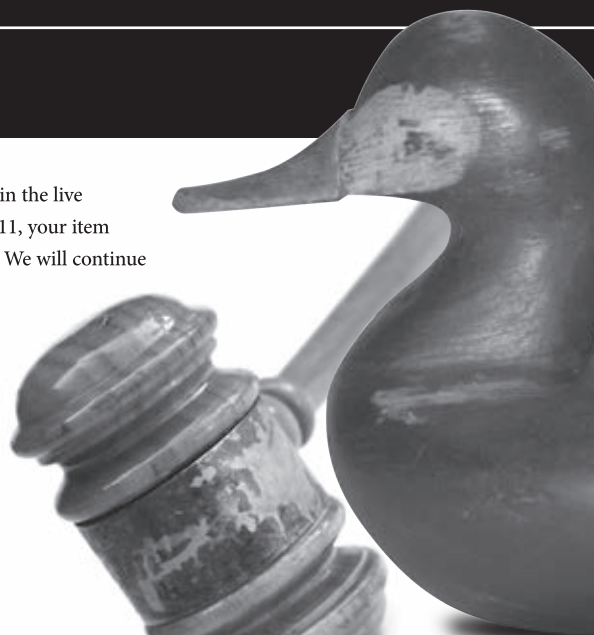
# Wanted

auction items for the Live Auction  
to be held Saturday, May 7, 2011  
at 5:30pm during the 30th Annual  
Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival.

If you have decoys that you would like to sell or donate to the museum for inclusion in the live auction, please contact the Museum. If we receive the item BEFORE February 15, 2011, your item will be photographed and included in the Festival issue of the *Canvasback* magazine. We will continue to take consignments and donations for the auction until we have reached the 100 lot limit. Any items received AFTER February 15th will not be included in the festival issue of the *Canvasback* magazine but, will be listed on the AMENDED list that will be made available as soon as the 100 lots are filled.

*The commission rate will be 10% from the buyer and 25% from the seller. All proceeds will benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Consignments must be received by February 15, 2011, in order for photographs to be included in the Festival catalog.*

If you have any questions or have an item to consign or donate to the auction, please do not hesitate to call the Museum Monday — Friday between 10am and 4pm at 410-939-3739 or email [decoymuseum@yahoo.com](mailto:decoymuseum@yahoo.com).



## DECOY MAGAZINE

- ✦ Carver profiles
- ✦ Features on carving regions, fish decoys, sporting art
- ✦ Complete auction coverage
- ✦ Classified section for buying, selling, trading
- ✦ National calendar of all decoy shows
- ✦ Photographs of over eighty decoys, many in full color

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- ☐ CANADA, TWO YEARS (U.S. FUNDS) . . . . . \$100.00
- ☐ FOREIGN SUBSCRIBERS, PER YEAR (AIRMAIL) . . . . . \$75.00
- ☐ SAMPLE . . . . . \$9.95

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*Norris Pratt carves a head in his Kemblesville, Pennsylvania workshop, 1960s.*

*Pair of bluebills in Bob Coleman paint. John Cox Collection*



# NORRIS E.

## Early scholar of Susquehanna Flats decoys

BY JAMES L. TRIMBLE

Those familiar with Norris Pratt recognize him as one of the early collectors, dealers and scholars of Upper Chesapeake Bay decoys. His creative mind, inquisitive nature, and attention to detail are all evident in the Susquehanna Flats chapter that he wrote for Robert H. Richardson's 1972 book, *"Chesapeake Bay Decoys, The Men Who Made and Used Them."* But other than the familiar picture of him in that book, leaning on a fence in his white undershirt and holding an Upper Bay canvasback, many have little knowledge of the man.

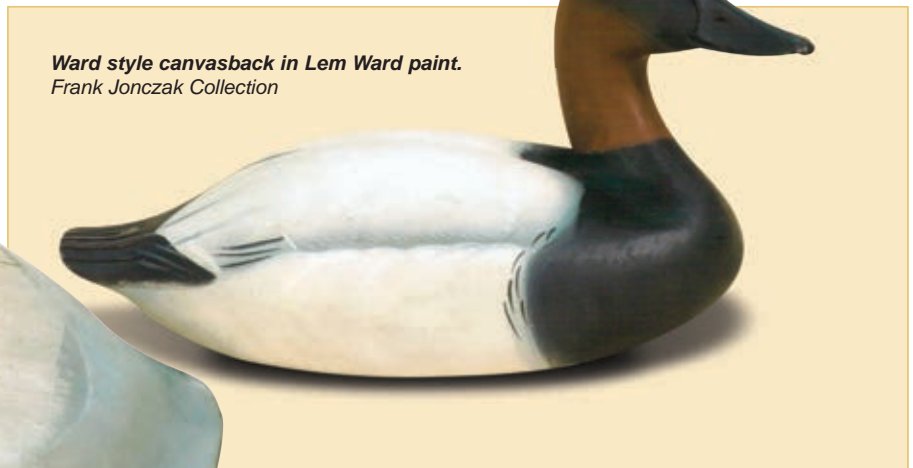
Pratt was a talented and creative carver, who in addition to making his own decoys, many for gunning use, could replicate decoys by many early Chesapeake Bay carvers with incredible accuracy. Yet despite his superior woodworking abilities, he called on well-known decoy makers of the day—including Lem Ward, Charlie Joiner, "Cigar" Daisey, "Corb" Reed, Jim Pierce and Bob Coleman, his favorite collaborator—to paint his decoys, noting his limited abilities with a brush.

Norris E. Pratt (1904-1975) was born, raised and lived his entire life in Kemblesville, Pennsylvania, a small village in southeast Chester County not far from the Maryland and Delaware borders, barely 20 miles north of the Susquehanna Flats. The only son of a carpenter and master barn-builder, while growing up he learned the use of woodworking tools, as well as knowledge of the woods on which they were used. After graduating from high school, he went to work for his father, eventually evolving into a union journeyman carpenter working in nearby Wilmington, Delaware.

Pratt wrote about his introduction to the Susquehanna Flats in Richardson's book: "My personal connection with the

party rose at 2 a.m. and an hour later set out for the legal limit of the Flats, ready to cross the imaginary line they were permitted to cross at 3:15 a.m. After setting out 350 decoys, they were ready to shoot ducks. "As daylight came, I had the chance to observe the shape and action of the various makers' decoys," he wrote. "Some rode the waves like real ducks; others rolled and pitched as the seas hit them." Pratt gunned only one season with

on Cecil County's Wild Duck Cove, just outside the legal limit of the Flats, where they built a small cabin. They purchased an 18-foot bushwhack boat built in North East and rowed it south on the North East River, around Carpenter's Point and onto Wild Duck Cove, about eight or nine miles. They also bought 50 second-hand decoys and acquired 10-12 live callers. They hunted from a stationary mudbox (similar to a sinkbox) with the wings positioned on the



# PRATT

Flats began in 1922 while I was in high school in Oxford, Pennsylvania. I kept my car parked in the Adams Brothers garage during the day and became interested in the piles of decoys stored there. I learned that the brothers operated a sink box on the flats, barely 25 miles away. As I had acquired a love of gunning from my grandfather, I arranged to go with them."

He went on to list the expenses as \$15.50 for a non-resident license and a \$100 fee for a party of four, which included overnight lodging and food. The

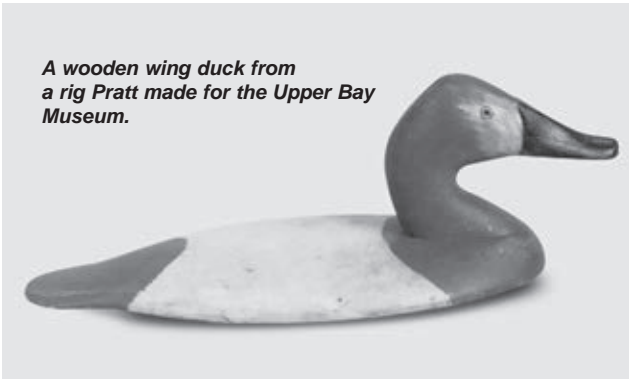
the Adams brothers, thereafter striking out on his own, and as time passed learned to recognize the decoys of the various makers of the region and the characteristics of their decoys.

Pratt was hooked and began frequenting the Flats, as Upper Bay watermen in small Maryland communities like Havre de Grace, Perryville, North East and Charlestown were bagging great numbers of waterfowl with huge rigs of decoys. He and a young neighbor decided to get their own rig together and leased property for \$7 a year

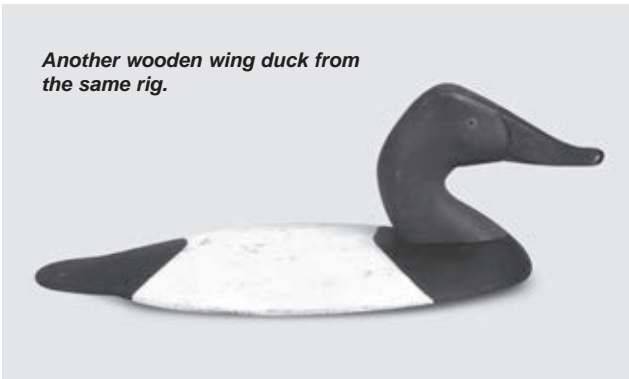
point of a nearby island, having to move the box when the tide quickly rose. "We didn't mind the mud as we had plenty of shooting," he wrote.

The next year Pratt started to make his own decoys, taking six of them to Buddy Reynolds, a North East outfitter who reportedly paid a dollar apiece for new unpainted decoys. "Boy, those are no good," Reynolds said, "but I will buy them anyway. If you want to make decoys come out on the wharf and I will show you some good ones." There were

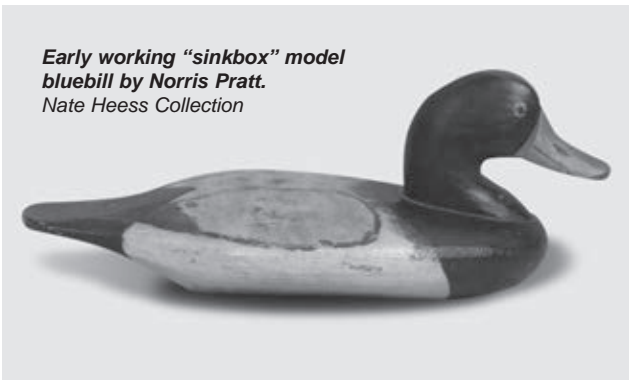
**A wooden wing duck from a rig Pratt made for the Upper Bay Museum.**



**Another wooden wing duck from the same rig.**



**Early working "sinkbox" model bluebill by Norris Pratt.**  
Nate Heess Collection



**Finely carved & finely painted "racy" canvasback.**  
Frank Jonczak Collection



hundreds of decoys in the building, and Reynolds selected one for him to copy, which he did, making top and side patterns on an old shoebox. With youthful exuberance, Pratt decided to make 1000 canvasback decoys, getting a dollar each from Reynolds, intending to use the money to buy a new Model T.

Pratt found some white pine that he had trimmed into suitable blocks for cut out on a band saw. But by the time he had 600 made the gunning laws changed, severely restricting the shooting of canvasbacks. Then, in the midst of The Depression, the State of Maryland, in a conservation mood, outlawed sinkbox shooting, which effectively eliminated the need for large rigs of decoys. Pratt decided to store the 600 decoys in his father's barn, where most languished for years, until a hunter from Delaware inquired about them, eventually agreeing to pay 40 cents apiece, but not until Pratt repainted them as black ducks. He sold others at a discount to local hunters, even selling some roadside from the trunk of his car for 35 to 40 cents apiece. A sporting goods store in Wilmington purchased a number and made lamps of them.

Yet by the time the 600 decoys were made, Pratt's woodworking and decoy making skills had been honed, and he was indeed producing a fine decoy. He did recognize, however, that he had limited talent to paint them.

Although Pratt continued to gun the Flats, in the 1950s he began hunting nearby Octoraro Lake Reservoir, a man-made lake at the confluence of the east and west branches of Octoraro Creek, a significant tributary of the Susquehanna River. It is thought that Pennsylvania's gunning laws weren't as restrictive as Maryland's, just a few short miles to the south. Art Boxleitner, a decoy maker and collector from Pennsylvania, also gunned the reservoir at that time, and remembers meeting and establishing a camaraderie with the veteran waterfowler, even shooting canvasbacks with him. Pratt had a small rig of Will Heverin style decoys, many with a "NEP" brand under the tail, one of which he was able to obtain. They look like the real McCoy, but it's likely that the rig was by the hand of Norris Pratt.

Pratt built a woodworking shop behind his home equal in square footage—or maybe larger—than his house. It was a woodworkers dream, and would have made his master barn-building father proud. His tools were that of a journeyman carpenter and master woodworker. After hand chopping out a decoy body, the finish work was completed with a chisel, drawknife, spoke-shave, wood rasps and a pocketknife. Rather than sandpaper, the smoothing was done with a small piece of sharply edged windowpane glass.

Working on area construction jobs presented an opportunity for Pratt to salvage wood from old building sites, and there was plenty of space to store large quantities of cedar and white pine, some for seasoning, in his shop. Old downed cedar telephone poles, another source of wood for many decoy makers, were cut into portable lengths and hauled home. There were floor to ceiling racks in the shop where up to 400-500 decoys were stored; others were stacked in the loft. There was a sense of order and neatness to the place, and fresh smells of pine and cedar permeated the air. As decoys were completed, they were wrapped, sacked and stored. Pratt also repaired damaged decoys, but as with his own, he left the painting for others to finish.

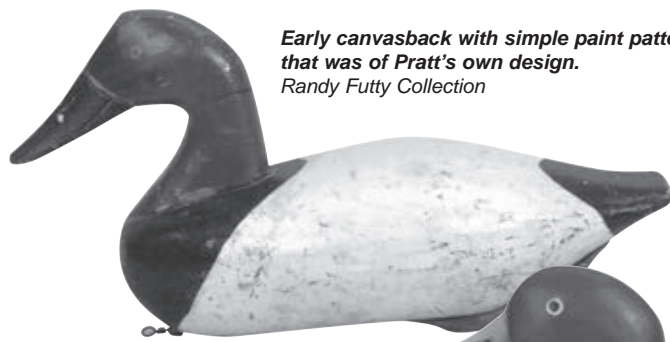
Although other area decoy makers, such as Bob McGaw, Madison Mitchell and Paul Gibson, were producing lathe-turned bodies, Pratt continued to hand chop his decoys. But it's unlikely that it limited his production, as Upper Bay historian and decoy maker J. Evans McKinney once described him as the "best and quickest hatchet man among all upper bay makers."

Pratt was also featured in an article in the fall 1968 issue of *North American Decoys*, entitled "Norris Pratt, an Artist in Wood," by John Leavens. It tells of a neighbor's tree falling down that had lain and seasoned for several years. Pratt acquired the tree, cut it into large sections then took them to Madison Mitchell's shop in Havre de Grace to have them lathe-turned into swan bodies. Mitchell would often swap one turned body for two ready blocks of wood. Pratt finished the swans with long graceful necks and heads. According to Leavens, since the painting is relatively simple, Pratt actually did it himself.

In the article Leavens marvels at Pratt's craftsmanship, particularly his ability at reproducing another maker's decoy. He describes a woodworking artist who in molding and shaping a piece of wood could feel the curves and lines of what he was copying, often producing perfect reproductions of the original. He also pointed out his hesitancy at creating an original piece or work, with Pratt replying, "I don't get the set right. It is easier for me to get the pattern from somebody else, and copy that!" But from time to time Pratt would occasionally introduce subtle changes. "Some of his copy work can and does fool experts," Leavens wrote, "a fact that is both flattering and distressing to someone of Pratt's innate honesty."

In a story attributed to Michelangelo, the artist is said to have commented, "See that block of marble. There is a beautiful woman in it, and I am going to bring her out!" Leavens concludes, "That's also Pratt, only he brings handsome decoys out of blocks of wood."

Havre de Grace decoy maker Jim Pierce, who also attests to Pratt's ability to replicate a decoy, remembers him



**Early canvasback with simple paint patterns that was of Pratt's own design.**  
*Randy Fuddy Collection*



**Holly style redhead gunning decoy that was rigged fore and aft.**  
*Upper Bay Museum Collection*

making three or four swans in the style of Sam Barnes about 40 or so years ago. They were based on the Barnes swan in the Shelburne Museum collection. "It would be interesting to know where those birds are today, the collectors' hands they have passed through and the attribution of the maker," he said. He remembers him as a likable fellow with a passion for local decoys and waterfowling history. Pierce insists that Pratt never misrepresented any of his reproductions. "The problems came later, as his finely replicated birds changed hands," he said.

Bob Biddle, a decoy maker and collector from Media, Pennsylvania, visited his shop often in the 1960s and 70s. He remembers an affable man who enjoyed

"talking ducks," pulling old birds from the racks for show and tell. "He enjoyed talking and sharing woodworking techniques," Biddle said, and "as a young carver I felt like I was watching an artist at work." As he worked, Pratt would offer tips, particularly on tool care. He once told his young protégé that union carpenters in the early days before power tools always sharpened

**Continues on page 14**

**Art Boxleitner holds a Heverin style canvasback from Norris Pratt's gunning rig.**





**Charles Nelson  
Barnard style  
wing duck.**  
John Cox Collection

their tools at lunchtime, including their handsaws. Afterwards a mini competition was held to see how many strokes it took to cut through a two by four. Pratt held the record – four strokes!

And Biddle acknowledged he was a great copier. “Early on, we made several

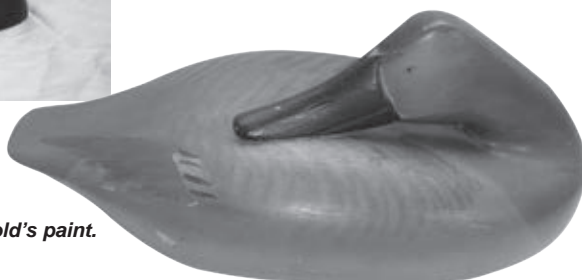
a bygone era. “He was a master at holding your attention,” he said. One of his favorites involved the acquisition of a 165-decoy gunning rig by a local well-known outfitter, who suspected that a need for drink was behind a local guide’s motivation to sell them so cheap. The outfitter purchased the rig and refurbished them prior to the start of hunting season, when a local judge stopped by to announce that his gunning rig had been stolen. When shown the group the judge responded, “Those are my decoys. I can identify them, even painted!” When he was told who sold them, the judge realized that it was his guide and sculler, and by putting him to jail he would have to find another, most likely one not nearly as skilled. The judge opted to buy back the decoys, and on the first day of gunning season handed them over to the guide without comment, knowing the guide realized he was aware of the theft.

Pratt was a regular visitor to the Ward brothers shop in Crisfield, Maryland, and a long time friendship ensued among the carvers. Several times Biddle drove Pratt to Crisfield, providing him an opportunity to meet the brothers and discuss their decoys. Often Pratt left with another of their creations, now mostly decoratives, and he acquired quite a collection of them. They were stored, Biddle remembered, in plastic bags on the shelving in the shop, and according to Pratt he had accumulated close to 150 of their finished pieces. Lem painted many of Pratt’s decoys, so it was only natural that Pratt made reproductions and interpretations of their work.

Larry Cook, a collector and gunner from Tennessee, stopped by to visit the Wards in the fall of 1973, overlapping a visit by Pratt, who presented himself as a collector of Ward decoys and a carver of Chesapeake Bay decoys, many made in the style of carvers he had known. But Pratt admitted that he couldn’t paint, turning to Lem and saying, “Isn’t that so?” Lem responded, “Yep, he can carve a pretty decent decoy, but his painting isn’t worth a flip.”

Pratt’s relationship with the Wards is detailed in Glen Lawson’s 1984 book, “The Story of Lem Ward, as told by Ida

**Harford County style sleeping  
canvasback hen in Buddy Reynold’s paint.**  
Lou Nolan Collection



**Pair of black ducks in  
Bob Coleman paint.**  
Grant McLoughlin Collection

**Close up of black duck pair in  
Coleman paint.**  
Grant McLoughlin Collection



Mason Premier mallard heads, measuring precisely with a millimeter, as we cut and shaped” them. “He was exacting,” he said, “Whatever he replicated, it looked like the real thing. Biddle also commented that Pratt never misrepresented his work. “He was a straight forward and honest person,” he insisted. Biddle painted many of Pratt’s decoys during those years.

Biddle remembered many of Pratt’s stories, which he told in a high-pitched voice, many involving duck hunting from

Ward Linton." She recalled, "Norris Pratt, a dealer from Pennsylvania, bought a lot of ducks from Daddy and Steve. He kept many for his own collection, and the ones he resold were priced only a little above what he paid for them. He didn't make much money; he just seemed to enjoy handling the birds. Whenever Mother heard that Norris and Mary Pratt were coming, she always loaded the table, and we'd sit around and talk for hours after the meal. The subject of prices frequently came up. Norris insisted, 'You're selling your birds too cheap, you need to charge more.' Daddy replied, 'I'd not be treating my customers fair if I raised the prices.' Norris retorted, 'You're not treating yourself and your family fair if you don't. Those ducks are worth a lot more than you're asking for them.'

"Steve agreed with Norris. 'Listen to him, Lem. I've been telling you

for a long time that we should raise our prices.'

"'We can't do it,' Daddy replied. 'People just aren't going to pay any more. If we raise price, we won't sell any birds.'

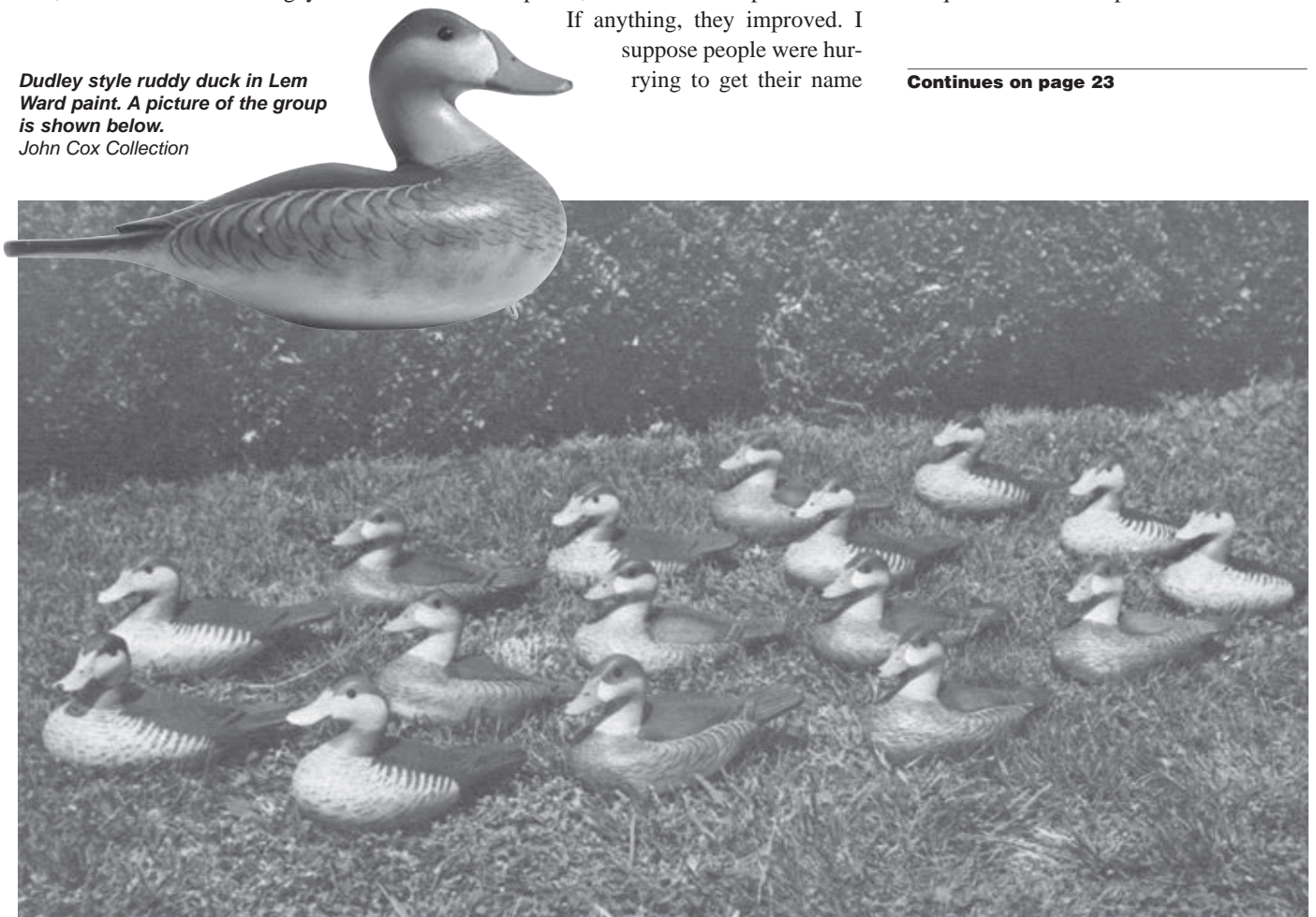
"'Sure you will,' Norris said, and to prove he was sincere in what he was telling Daddy, he ordered a duck right then and set the price at fifty dollars more than he paid for the one he picked up that day. Daddy thought Norris was either joking or had gone out of his mind, but when we wrote to tell him that his bird was ready, Norris came that next weekend to pick it up and paid them the price he had charged himself. He then told them that they weren't being fair to him now if they charged others any less. And to compound Daddy's surprise, he ordered another duck and raised the price another fifty dollars. Even with the dramatically higher prices, sales didn't drop off a bit.

If anything, they improved. I suppose people were hurrying to get their name

on the list before Norris decided to raise the price again."

A lifetime member of the National Rifle Association (NRA), Pratt was an avid collector of Winchester guns and related items, building what many thought was the finest collection in the country. His personal letterhead carried the Winchester logo. Mort Kramer, a former gun collector from Baltimore who now collects decoys, visited him many times. He remembers that Pratt, who was steeped in Winchester knowledge, went out of his way coaching him on gun acquisitions. "He was a regular at the East Coast gun show," Kramer said, and he "tracked Winchester items all over the country," always adding to his collection. Every wall in Pratt's house was covered in guns, and others were stored in closets and under the bed. In discussing them, Pratt was able to point out the uniqueness of each piece. Kramer also

**Dudley style ruddy duck in Lem Ward paint. A picture of the group is shown below.**  
John Cox Collection



**Ruddy Ducks—Paint by Lem Ward.**

Continues on page 23

# J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest

## 2011 COMPETITION

The 9th annual J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest to be held in conjunction with the 2011 Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival will be held Saturday, May 7th at 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 best 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 1:00p.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.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Best Cecil County Decoy<br>with Iron Weight   | 6. Best Eastern Shore<br>Maryland Decoy<br>(non-Ward) |
| 2. Best Harford County<br>Decoy with Iron Weight | 7. Best Ward Bros. Decoy                              |
| 3. Best Wally Algard Decoy                       | 8. Best Ira Hudson Diver                              |
| 4. Best Lum Fletcher Decoy                       | 9. Best Shorebird<br>(non-factory)                    |
| 5. Best Rock Hall Diver<br>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 @ 703-768-7264 or [potomacduck@cox.net](mailto:potomacduck@cox.net).

# EAST COAST DECOY COLLECTORS



## 12th Annual Buy, Sell & Swap

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## Free Decoy Appraisals

## PUBLIC WELCOME

# Collector's corner

BY C. JOHN SULLIVAN

## Does It Still “Do It” for You?



Our lives can be driven by our passions. Whatever “turns you on,” as the old saying goes.

What was it in our childhood — a new bicycle, a new toy gun, a Barbie doll, an RC Cola, or a moon pie? I can remember as a young boy dreaming one night of a shiny new cowboy six-shooter. The dream was so incredibly realistic that I got out of bed in the middle of the night and looked for that brand new shiny six-shooter. I can still recall the sense of loss, realizing that it was but a dream.

What a disappointment that was, so much so that I often recall the sense of loss that rushed over me. I can vividly recall the anticipation of Christmas and Easter mornings many long years ago. The thoughts of what wonderful thing Santa or the Easter bunny would bring filled my senses.

My sister and I would run down the steps to look in the living room to see what treasures awaited us. Santa was sure to have brought us just what we had dreamed of. The Easter bunny always built a nest with pieces of roofing slate and straw

to gently nestle our baskets. Years have flown by, but the anticipation of those childhood memories and dreams still travel with me.

Today those feelings lead in different directions, yet I still long for those days of yore. BUT it still does happen, the excitement, the thrill, the rush of adrenaline still raise my pulse. No, it is not for a new six-shooter or the orange and walnut in the toe of my Christmas stocking. Show me that next decoy and don't let me have it instantly; make me wait a week or two for it and then let the stars and moon align and let it go home with me and there that feeling is. It is Christmas morning, it is Easter morning, or it is as good as that surprise kiss on the lips from that beauty that I so longed for many years ago.

It woke me last night as it has since the first time my eyes fell upon it, since I held it in my hands for the first time and felt the rise to the tail and that ever so fine ridge down its back. It is an old piece of wood finely shaped and carved and hollowed out. It wears old black paint worn from over 100 years of life. It has a patch in the

neck finely fitted by the artisan who created this magnificent sculpture. It is a Captain Benjamin Dye hollow-carved blackduck decoy. A simple block of wood that once saw life as a water-fowler's tool for luring the elusive blackduck now rests on top of the chest in my living room. A humble tool for a hunter to use and carved by a humble craftsman who never thought of himself as an artist.

Today this folk art creation gently resides adjacent to a few of its wooden brothers. Is it any kind of reunion for a decoy to be brought back to the fold with similar creations carved by the same hands? I kind of hope it is. But for me, it wakes me at night; it gets me out of bed to examine it before first light. Is it Christmas morning, is it Easter? No, it is one man's passion and it keeps him going, it drives him, it encourages him to remain focused for that next great old decoy.

Trust me; there is still great stuff out there. Believe me the feeling is still that good when you find it. It still does it for me, and I hope that it does the same for you. ■

**Captain Benjamin Dye Black Duck,**  
circa 1879.



## IN MEMORIAM

# Mrs. Doris M. Peach

Born October 4, 1942

On September 28, Doris M. Peach passed away after a strong battle with cancer. Doris and her husband Scott H. Peach, Sr., celebrated their 47th wedding Anniversary on August 31, 2010. Doris was retired from Honeywell in Hopewell and AT&T in Chesterfield Co., Virginia.

She was a loving wife and devoted mother of two sons. Her love of decoys and collecting grew through her husband's love of duck hunting and the outdoors. She loved to surprise her husband with a decoy at Christmas, birthdays or Father's Day. She loved going to the Decoy Festivals in Maryland, North Carolina, and her home state of Virginia since their beginnings in 1971. She made sure our Havre de Grace Museum dues were paid and always sent back the raffle tickets with hopes of winning another treasure for our collection.

She enjoyed attending the various decoy shows & auctions and staying at different B&B's in our travels. Her devotion to her husband and his sport was shown in many ways, including on some occasions the cleaning of the waterfowl when hubby had to go to work or helping when a large bag of geese were harvested.

She was an unbelievable person and her beautiful smile will be missed by family, friends and the people she met in our 40 years of decoy collecting. Her favorite duck was the little Ruddy Duck and we bought her many over the years. A pair of Bill Schauber Ruddy Ducks will rest with her for eternity.

From her loving family  
Scott H. Peach, Sr., Scott Jr.,  
and Michael Coy Peach. ■



With sadness we announce the death of  
**EDWARD LEROY WATTS**  
On November 29, 2010

A formal Memoriam will appear in a future issue of *The Canvasback*.



**Mark your calendars now for the  
Havre de Grace Decoy Museum's**



*Annual Sporting Clay Shoot*

to be held on

*Saturday, June 18, 2011 at 9am  
at Pintail Point in Queenstown, Maryland.*

**Pintail Point** would be a wonderful way to spend the day. The shooting course is along the Wye River. The air-conditioned club house has a great view, nice gift shop and a friendly atmosphere. Visit their website at **[www.THERIVERPLANTATION.com](http://www.THERIVERPLANTATION.com)** for directions and further information about their other facilities.

**Registration begins at 9am** and the last shooter is allowed on the course at noon. **Registration is \$75** and includes lunch. You can register that day or pre-register by filling out the form in an upcoming issue of the magazine.

**Contact the Museum for additional information by calling 410-939-3739 or email [decoymuseum@yahoo.com](mailto:decoymuseum@yahoo.com).**



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Thank you and welcome to the following members and businesses that recently renewed their membership or newly joined us. Your continued support and contributions are essential to the overall success of the Decoy Museum:

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## 30th Havre de Grace Decoy Festival Coming Up

story by Bob Bendler

**I**t all started back in 1982. As a youthful Cal Ripken was beginning his rookie year with the Baltimore Orioles, R. Madison Mitchell was serving as the honorary Chairman of the first Havre de Grace Decoy Festival. Now three decades later, Ripken has a first class stadium and Mitchell has a first class Museum. Two of the biggest names/figures in recent Harford County, Maryland history created legacies for the future.

In May 2011, the 30th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy Festival will be held and is expected to be bigger and better than ever.

Over the last 3 decades, some areas finest decoy makers have followed Mr. Mitchell's lead. Legends the likes of Gibson, Litzenberg, Bryan, Joiner, Ward, Pierce, and McGaw have served as Honorary Chairmen and their decoys have been given a place of honor on the second floor of the Decoy museum.

**Mark your calendar** and make plans now to participate in this milestone event on May 6, 7 and 8, 2011. Allocate some extra time for visiting the Museum's second floor gallery and reflect upon the Master Decoy Makers and their works. ■

## BAKER/RUTH New Book on the Horizon

story by Bob Bendler

**W**hat do Frank Baker and George Herman Ruth have in common? Both have interesting nicknames...“Home Run” and “Babe;” played baseball; lead the major league in home runs several times; are in the Hall of Fame; are from Maryland; started their big league careers with the Baltimore Orioles; and once played together for the New York Yankees.

But that's not all. Both were avid duck hunters! Babe Ruth frequently hunted the Western shore of the Chesapeake Bay, while Home Run Baker mostly hunted on the Eastern Shore. Babe was recently pictured in an edition of the *Canvasback Magazine* hunting at Marshy Point on the Weiskettle property on Dundee and Saltpeter Creeks. Home Run Baker's decoy rig, recently donated to the Decoy Museum, was also featured in a recent *Canvasback Magazine*.

Before Mr. John Cole generously donated Mr. Baker's gunning rig, an awesome array of early working decoys, he did extensive research and documentation on each of the individual decoys in the spread. This documentation has formed the foundation for a Home Run Baker Decoys Book now being produced under the auspices of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. The extensive work done by Mr. Cole is being edited and supplemented by C. John Sullivan, who currently serves as the Museum's volunteer curator.

We are truly fortunate to have Mr. Sullivan undertaking this effort. As most are aware, he is not only a well recognized author and authority on decoys, but also a renowned historian. ■



Left Madelyn Shank, right Virginia Sanders Receiving Volunteer of the Year Award at the Anniversary Dinner 2010

## Volunteer of the Year 2010 — *Virginia Sanders*

Story by Margaret Jones — Photos by Terri Shepke

**W**hen visitors come to the Museum, they walk around and explore the exhibits and exclaim over the artifacts and the decoys. Many times the volunteers and staff who handle the collection paperwork and displays take great pride in hearing the wonderful comments.

When the calls come in from people who would like to donate items to the Museum or who are bringing in items for auctions or loans, they come face to face with paperwork. Most of our visitors and museum members are unaware of

the documentation that is maintained on the items currently on display or in the collections room. Every item is assigned a catalog number, its location is documented and a report on the condition of the item is kept.

Every few months or so, loan papers have to be renewed or items are returned to their owners. For every item there is paperwork. It can be overwhelming at times keeping track of everything in the Museum coming in and going out.

This is why Virginia “Ginny” Sanders is Volunteer of the Year for 2011. Ginny

came to us a year ago offering her services as registrar for collections. Ginny stepped right up and began the task of keeping everything in order and records maintained.

Ginny helps wherever she can and has become a real asset to the Museum. The collection department is in safe hands. All her hard work is greatly appreciated. The Museum Board of Directors and the Staff are proud to announce Virginia Sanders as Volunteer of the Year. ■

remembered that Tom Hall, Winchester's historian at the time, often referred questions to Pratt about Winchester items.

Trey Martin, a Delaware gun dealer who visited Pratt often, was one of many who attempted to acquire his finest guns. He remembered the collection numbering around 150, all top-notch, and it included carbines, rifles and muskets, the lever action models the best. Pratt also had sealed boxes of ammunition to use in them all. "They were the best of the best," Martin said. But there was a downside to keeping such a valuable collection at home. One day in the late 1960s or early 1970s, not feeling well, Pratt returned home early, only to find an intruder in his home. He was down on the floor rolling up a gun in a carpet-like material, with two or three already rolled up beside him. Confronted, the man pulled a single action colt pistol—Pratt's no less—from his waistband, aimed and fired. Fortunately it was not cocked, and Pratt charged the intruder, who knocked him in the head with the pistol and escaped. Shortly thereafter the Pratts decided to liquidate their gun collection, which demanded premium prices.

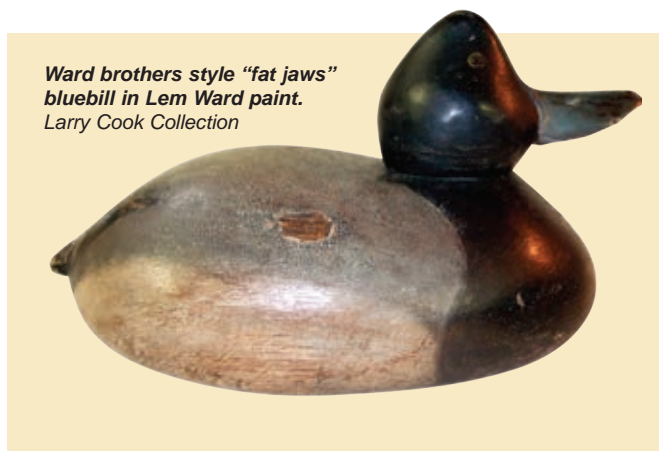
Others remember Pratt as a "picker" who found old decoys and unique guns for early collectors. One of those early collectors was a DuPont heir from Wilmington, who often had Pratt do his buying. He often felt the locals ran up prices on him, whether he was buying direct or bidding at auction. One of the items Pratt bought for him was gunner Ralph Murphy's 1½-inch bore punt gun that sold at a September 1970 auction for \$2000. He once confided that the large sums of money given him to make those purchases made him nervous, as on occasion the amounts were significantly larger than the salary he earned annually as a carpenter.

Pratt was an exhibitor at the early Chestertown Waterfowl Shows, possibly because of his close friendship with Bob Coleman, a decoy maker and collector from that town. He also painted many of Pratt's decoys. Those who attended the show in the mid-1960s will recall Pratt's displays, which included guns and antique decoys as a backdrop for his own carvings. A loquacious man, he could hold the crowd in the palm of his hand, offering in-depth conversations of collectible guns, antique decoys, waterfowling history and carving techniques. He also displayed at the early North East, Maryland decoy shows sponsored by the Cecil County Hunters Association, of which he was a member. This organization lobbied Annapolis, the state capital, on hunting and related issues. It eventually evolved into the Upper Bay Waterfowl Museum. When the museum opened Pratt made a pair of wooden wing duck decoys that he donated for an old rigged sinkbox display.

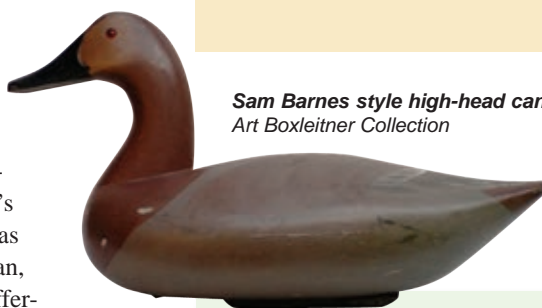
After Pratt's death in 1975, his decoy collection was sold in two sessions the following year by the Richard Bourne auction gallery in Hyannis, Massachusetts. (Mary Pratt generously donated one of Lem Ward's paintings from her late husband's col-



*Sleeping Canada goose in Lem Ward paint.  
Courtesy Guyette & Schmidt*

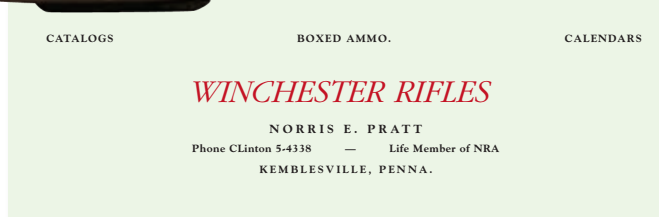


*Ward brothers style "fat jaws" bluebill in Lem Ward paint.  
Larry Cook Collection*



*Sam Barnes style high-head canvasback hen.  
Art Boxleitner Collection*

**BELOW: Pratt used the Winchester logo on his personal letterhead.**  
*Courtesy Mort Kramer*



lection to the Ward Museum in Salisbury, Maryland.) The April catalog featured a photo of Pratt with the Ward brothers and paid tribute to his contribution of the decoy collecting community. The stars of the collection were Wards, but there were also birds by a



# Museum Donors

The board of directors of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum wishes to extend sincere thanks to the many contributors during this fiscal year and extend a special thanks to the R. Madison Mitchell Endowment for allowing us to retire our line of credit and enter the current fiscal year debt free. Thanks, also, to the City of Havre de Grace, Harford County and the Maryland State Arts Council for their continued support.

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# ANNIVERSARY DINNER

*Story by Margaret Jones   Photos by Terri Shepke*

**THIS YEAR'S** Anniversary Dinner was attended by good friends, new friends and people new to the Museum. There was great food and fun auctions. The Bayou Restaurant once again provided an excellent meal and great atmosphere.

The 2010 Museum decoys were available for sale. This year's decoy is actually a pair of Canvasbacks made by this year's Honorary Festival Chairman Tom Humberstone. The number one pair of decoys were bought by Gary Sargable.

The Board of Directors and the Festival staff are proud to announce Thom Humberstone as the Honorary Chairman for the 2011 Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival. We are fortunate to have Mr. Humberstone. Tom is a New York carver and a good friend of the Decoy Museum.

The Board and the staff would like to thank everyone who donated items to either the live or silent auction. I would like to offer my personal thanks to those Board members and staff that assisted with the evening, especially to Bill Veasey who took over as Chairman

for the Anniversary Dinner. The Decoy Museum is always appreciative of everyone's continued support. As you view the pictures from the night's event, you will see some of the wonderful items that were available for auction, and candid shots of those who attended. Look and see if you can find yourself or recognize friends.

The continued health and well being of the Decoy Museum is celebrated every year with excellent food, good company

and fun. If you have not attended the Anniversary Dinner in the past or have not attended recently, mark your calendar now for November 5, 2011. ■

**Tom Humberstone (right) with friend and fellow carver Bill Schaub.**



*Winter Canvasback 2011*



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Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, 215 Giles St., Havre de Grace, MD 21078

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variety of Chesapeake Bay makers as well as Pratt's own decoys. In a review of the July session, written by Jackson Parker for the fall 1976 issue of *North American Decoys*, he described the Pratt consignment as follows: "Most of the Ward decoratives came from the collection of Mary T. Pratt and the late Norris E. Pratt ... The Pratts foresight in collecting the best of the Ward decoratives was exceeded only by the care they took of them, often wrapping each bird in a plastic bag, only to be taken out for show. Pratt's decoratives and working decoys in almost perfect condition brought the highest prices (seven of the top ten items)." The top seller in the auction was a rare and unique preening goose by Lem Ward that brought \$5200. A Ward greater snow goose topped out at only \$500.

But the Pratt auctions were not without incident. Mrs. Pratt questioned the whereabouts of a Ward decorative yellowlegs that was included in the collection but not either catalog. An insurance claim was eventually filed and paid. Years later, the shorebird surfaced at an Eastern Shore auction. The insurance company was notified and they successfully claimed the item.

Barry and Velma Berkey's 1977 book, "Pioneer Decoy Carvers, A Biography of Lemuel and Stephen Ward," mentions another incident under the heading of "A Cause for Caution." A reputable New England auction house, so it claims, sold what was described as a Ward goldeneye, late 1930s, with a Ward signature for \$472.50 at a 1976 sale. The new owner, after close examination, discovered Pratt's signature under a thin layer of paint. The money was refunded, accompanied by a letter explaining that, "the bird was not correctly catalogued." They did not cast aspersions on Pratt, but simply reported the incident under the heading of "caveat emptor" when buying Ward decoys. It was likely the consignment of an unsavory collector trying to market a knock-off.

It is these decoys carved in the likeness of others, now with a 40 to 50 year old patina, that present a problem for present day collectors, as no one knows how many Pratt decoys are sitting on their shelves with an attribution to another. Decoys replicated in the styles of the Wards, Lee Dudley, Bob McGaw, Heverin and Charles Nelson Barnard are just a few of the makers he copied, although Pratt never described them as other than his own. (A set of 15 unpainted heads replicated by Pratt, each a copy by a famous decoy maker, were sold at the November 2007 Guyette

& Schmidt auction, offering collectors a chance to examine his exacting work.) And his manner of hiring painters to finish his birds made them truly unique, an attempt to fool no one, certainly not a student of collectable old decoys.

Many Chesapeake Bay collectors have a Norris Pratt decoy, although it's usually one of his finely replicated decoys in someone else's paint. It's his early Cecil County paddle tail style decoys, with carved nostrils, comically carved bill delineation and simple gunning patterns that's tough to find. One of his early canvasbacks is featured with examples by 32 other area decoy makers on Paul Shertz's popular 1977 print, "Decoy Makers of the Susquehanna Flats." Many Upper Bay collectors have used this print as a road map for their collections.

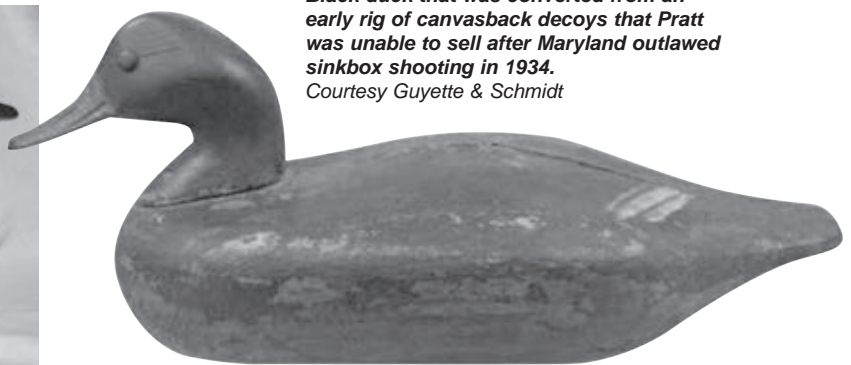
In many ways Pratt is a collection of stories. He was one of the Chesapeake Bay's early goodwill ambassadors, introducing many to the decoy collecting fraternity. He personally hunted over decoys many now collect, decoys made by people he knew or met, or others about whom he had first-hand knowledge. He was steeped in a crossover-knowledge of antique decoys, waterfowling history, collectible guns and carving techniques, which he was willing to share with those who expressed an interest. And he was driven to collect only the best, whether they were Winchester guns or Ward brothers decoys.

This enthusiasm prompted this skilled woodworker to make wooden waterfowl creations. He felt he couldn't design the perfect decoy, and he certainly couldn't paint it, but he could sure replicate it, or at least copy it in an interpretive style. Some were for hunting, some were for sale, and others were strictly for show. But all were entirely the creation of Norris E. Pratt. ■

*A special thanks to Bob Biddle, Art Boxleitner, Trey Martin, Larry Cook, John Cox, Jim Pierce, Mort Kramer, Jack Manning, Marshall Purner and Bill Cordrey for their assistance with this story. Jim Trimble is a regular contributor to **Decoy Magazine** who combines his love of history with his interest in Chesapeake Bay and Chincoteague area decoys. If you have information on early decoy makers from those areas, contact him at (703) 768-7264 or [potomacduck@cox.net](mailto:potomacduck@cox.net). This article was reprinted with the permission of **Decoy Magazine**, P.O. Box 787, Lewis, DE 19958. 302-644-9001.*



**McGaw style decoy with tack eyes in working repaint.**  
Larry Cook Collection



**Black duck that was converted from an early rig of canvasback decoys that Pratt was unable to sell after Maryland outlawed sinkbox shooting in 1934.**  
Courtesy Guyette & Schmidt



# Fourth Annual Susquehanna Flats Vintage Hunting & Fishing Collectibles Show



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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](http://www.wardmuseum.org)

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## The Decoy Museum's Exhibits

*"Tools of the Market Gunner" Exhibit featuring a number of punt and battery guns, on loan from the R. Madison Mitchell Endowment Trust, in the Library*

*Potomac Decoy Collector's Association High Head Decoys exhibit, second floor gallery*

*An exhibit of Factory Decoys, donated by Dr. M. Kramer, second floor gallery*

*Louisiana Decoys, Library gallery*

*The Magnificent Michael Bequest, An extraordinary pair of "Daddy" Holly canvasbacks, First floor near the "Gunning the Flats" exhibit*

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## 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.

JANUARY 29, 2011	MAY 6, 7, 8, 2011
<b>4th Annual Vintage Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Show.</b> 9am–4pm admission is \$6. The show features decoys, oyster cans, gunpowder tins, rods, reels, fishing lures, ephemera, hunting and fishing licenses and more. Located at Level Fire Hall, 3633 Level Village Road, Havre de Grace, MD. For more information contact: Patrick Vincenti 410-734-6238 or Chuck Usilton 410-378-3528. Proceeds benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum and Level Fire Company.	<b>30th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy &amp; Wildlife Art Festival.</b> Friday 6pm – 9pm, Saturday 9am–5pm, Sunday 10am–4pm. Admission is \$8 for the weekend. Join us for our annual festival. Carvers & Wildlife Artists will be joined by hunting outfitters, suppliers and merchants. Retrieving dog demonstrations, Carving Competitions, a live auction and silent auctions included. For more information contact the Decoy Museum at 410-939-3739.
APRIL 9, 2011	JUNE 18, 2011
<b>Annual Membership Meeting.</b> 2–4pm. Annual Membership Meeting; Come and learn about the state of the museum. Lite refreshments will be available. Invitations will be sent. For more information contact the Decoy Museum at 410-939-3739.	<b>Annual Sporting Clay Classic.</b> 9am Registration, last shooter on the line at 12pm. Come join us for our annual clay shoot. Located at beautiful Pintail Point, Queenstown, MD, this 75 target 3 Lewis Class shoot is a wonderful way to spend the day. Lunch is included in the registration fee, vintage shotgun category available. For more information contact the Decoy Museum at 410-939-3739.

## members:

You can help promote the Decoy Museum by sending the name and contact information of your local newspaper to The Canvasback. With this information we can reach out and send our news releases to the papers in your area! Please mail this information to the Decoy Museum, 215 Giles St., Havre de Grace, MD 21078, attn: Margaret Jones or email to [decoymuseum@yahoo.com](mailto:decoymuseum@yahoo.com)

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*Do you have a few hours a week you could give to the museum?  
How about a few hours a year for the Festival or the Duck Fair?  
Do you enjoy early morning bird walks and would you like to  
share your knowledge with others? If you have the time, we have  
the need.*

The Museum is dedicated to offering a wide variety of activities to its members and to the public. We are looking for volunteers who would like to assist with leading adult group tours, and/or answer phones. Can you help with large mailings or assist with special events like the Festival and Duck Fair? We would like to expand our activities and programs, but we need your help.

Volunteers are a great asset to any organization. We would love to have you come aboard.

### Contact Margaret Jones

at the Museum 410-939-3739 or email us at [decoymuseum@yahoo.com](mailto:decoymuseum@yahoo.com)  
to see how you can become a part of our volunteer staff.





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