

# The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Fall 2017  
Vol. 27 No. 4

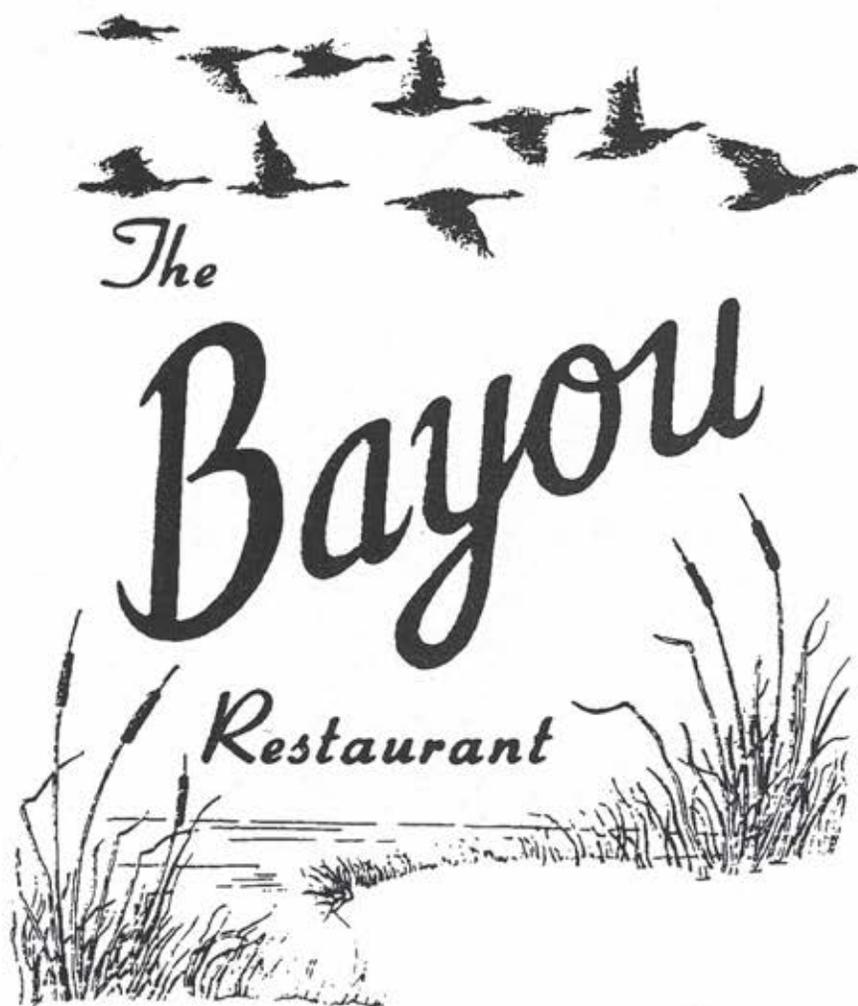
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**can•vas•back**

(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.

THE MUSEUM WAS INCORPORATED IN 1981 AS A 501(c)(3) TAX-EXEMPT ORGANIZATION TO COLLECT, DOCUMENT, PRESERVE, AND INTERPRET WATERFOWL DECOYS AS A UNIQUE FORM OF FOLK ART.

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Maryland State Arts Council Part of the Maryland Department of Commerce

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.

**ON THE COVER**

The cover of this issue shows three decorative northern pintail drakes by (top to bottom): Lloyd Tyler (ca. 1940), Bob McGaw (ca. 1950), and contemporary Havre de Grace carver Dan Carson.

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Havre de Grace, MD  
*Decoy Museum Collection*

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**Northern Pintail Drake**  
*Collection of Dan & Tina Carson*



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# The Canvasback

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## From the President...

Dear Museum Member:

We have finished another great summer here at the Decoy Museum. June brought the welcome news that the Harford County Office of Economic Development had renewed our grant. We thank all who had a role in it, especially County Executive Barry Glassman. We are an important contributor to Harford County tourism, and we continue to draw visitors from all over the world. We give a good as we get, because many of our visitors stay overnight, eat here, shop here, and visit other attractions.



We also have the much-needed support of Mayor Bill Martin and the Havre de Grace City Council as well as the Maryland State Arts Council, each of whom provide us with generous annual grants. And the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority has helped us greatly this year with our new exhibit cases and stunning new motion-activated LED lighting.

This issue closes our 26th full year of continual publication of this wonderful quarterly journal. Our website now has an archive of The Canvasback starting with the first issue in 1991. Seeing every issue online will give you an appreciation for the enormity of the effort that has gone into maintaining it. Check it out.

July 25th brought sad news – New Jersey carver Harry Shourds had passed away at the age of 87. He, his father, and his grandfather were decoy carving legends. It is an inevitable but very significant loss.

Our Collections Committee refreshed our new exhibit cases with an awesome display of northern pintails that C. John Sullivan, Jr. and Henry Stansbury generously provided from their extensive collections. Some of these very special birds richly illustrate Chad Tragakis' thorough study of this species in these pages. Please come see this important exhibition of pintail decoys.

In this issue, we also showcase Dan Carson, a very talented local carver who has dropped below the radar – sidelined by an old neck injury and the priorities of his business and his family. We hope to see more of Dan and his artistry.

Coming soon... Collections Committee chairman Steve Smith has obtained a long-term loan of a collection of Carteret County (NC) decoys. This will be different from our usual Upper Bay carvers, so we think you will find it interesting and exciting.

Once again, we have four great prizes for the fall raffle, so watch for your tickets in the mail. The drawing will be at 6:00 on the night of the Candlelight Tour – Saturday, December 9th. You have to play to win, and four lucky people always win. Give generously!

We keep the Museum's doors open 360 days every year, provide an unforgettable experience for our visitors, and keep the Museum relevant and growing. We accomplish a lot with slim resources, but we also have an ever-growing list of maintenance items, great ideas, and capital projects that sorely needs attention.

The state, county, and city grants help, but they only cover a small portion of our operating budget. The rest come from our members and other supporters. The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is a special place that we are all passionate about, and we value your loyalty and support. Keep us in mind as this year draws to a close and you are considering your 2017 charitable giving. No amount is too small. Thank you all.

Sincerely,

Pat Vincenti

45th Annual

# Candlelight Tour

*of Historic Havre de Grace*

A self-guided tour of the numerous participating homes, churches, and museums that showcase the diverse character of our historic, charming, and decorated City.

See the Christmas decorations downtown and the festive luminary candles along Union Avenue. Some restaurants will be offering special Candlelight Tour promotions, and some stores will be open late.

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# DECOY MAGAZINE

- Carver profiles
- Features on carving regions, fish decoys, and sporting art
- Complete auction coverage
- Classified sections for buying, selling, and trading
- National calendar of all decoy shows
- Full-color photographs of over 80 decoys

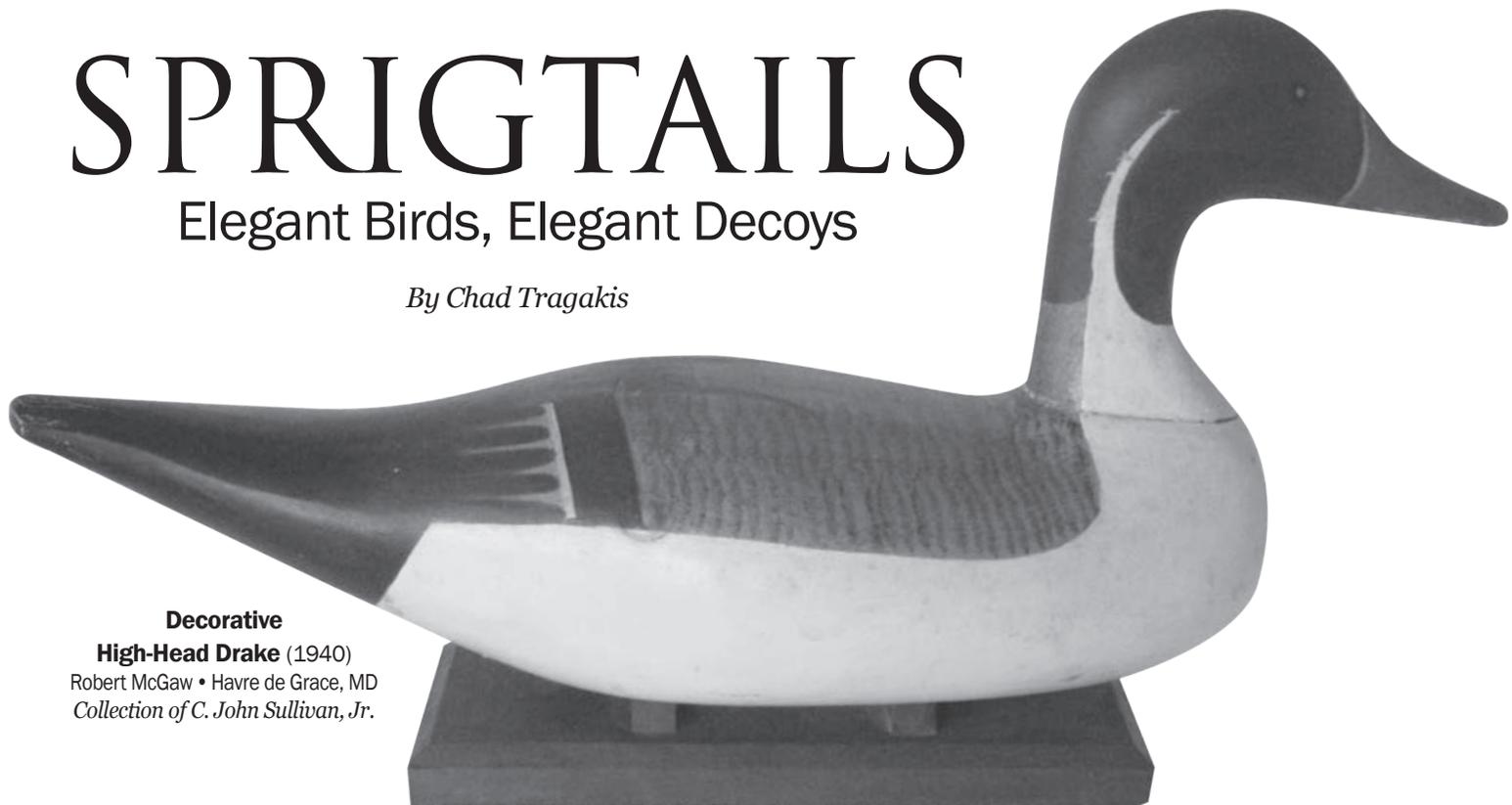
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# SPRIGTAILS

## Elegant Birds, Elegant Decoys

By Chad Tragakis



### Decorative

#### High-Head Drake (1940)

Robert McGaw • Havre de Grace, MD  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.

“There are few more graceful species than this. The long pointed wings, the slender form, terminating in a long neck and tail, and the swift flight, make the bird a very beautiful one.”

🦆 George Bird Grinnell, 1901

**L**ong, elegant and breathtaking. This is the sleek, beautiful pintail duck in nature and the description is equally fitting when admiring the best of this species replicated in wooden waterfowl decoys. The work of many of America’s finest decoy makers truly does justice to the gorgeous bird – from Cape Cod’s Elmer Crowell and Connecticut’s Charles “Shang” Wheeler, to California’s Dick “Fresh Air” Jansen, to Illinois’ Charles Perdew and Charles Schoenheider, to Louisiana’s Mitchell LaFrance, and to the Wards and Sterlings of Crisfield, Maryland. And, this is especially true for the pintail decoys made at the head of the Chesapeake Bay, where early and original examples are prized by collectors. Taking a close look at these beautiful ducks, one can easily understand why their wooden counterparts are usually so spectacular. In his 1901 classic, *American Duck Shooting*, George Bird Grinnell describes the species this way:

“The male pintail has the head and upper neck wood brown, darkest on the crown, often with greenish, reddish and purple reflections. A part of the hind neck is black; lower down it becomes grayish, finely barred with dusky, gray and white. The front of back and sides are waved with very fine cross bars of white and black. Most of the wing is gray or brownish. The speculum is green, in some lights coppery, margined with white, tawny and black, and with a cinnamon-colored bar in front. A line beginning at the back of the head and passing down the side of neck is white, running into the white of the fore-neck and under parts. The long feathers growing from the third bone

of the wing are pale gray, with a black strip down the middle. The long scapulars, or shoulder feathers, are black, edged with whitish. The upper and under tail-coverts are black, touched with white on the outside, forming a line of white. The tail feathers are mostly gray and brown, but the long central pair, which are narrow and pointed, and extend far beyond the others, are black. The bill is bluish-gray, eyes brown, and the legs and feet gray. Length, 26-30 inches; wing, over 10 inches. The female is one of the plain grayish ducks, resembling in a general way the female mallard, or the female green-winged teal. The ground color of the upper parts is rusty or whitish, streaked with dusky or brownish. The chin and throat are whitish; the wing-coverts brownish-gray, edged with white. The under parts are white, streaked with dusky. The bird is always to be distinguished by its bill and its feet.”

The pintail or northern pintail (*Anas acuta*), has been known to hunters by many colloquial names, most making reference to the long pointed tail of the drake’s breeding plumage. Among these nicknames are: pied gray duck, gray widgeon, sea widgeon, split-tail, sprig, sprig-tail, spiketail, picket-tail, sea pheasant, water pheasant, long neck, sharp-tail and spindle-tail. The scientific name also makes reference to the male’s long, pointed tail; *Anas* for the genus of dabbling ducks and *acuta* from the Latin word *acuere*, which means “to sharpen.” On the Chesapeake Bay, the duck was most commonly referred to as the sprigtail.

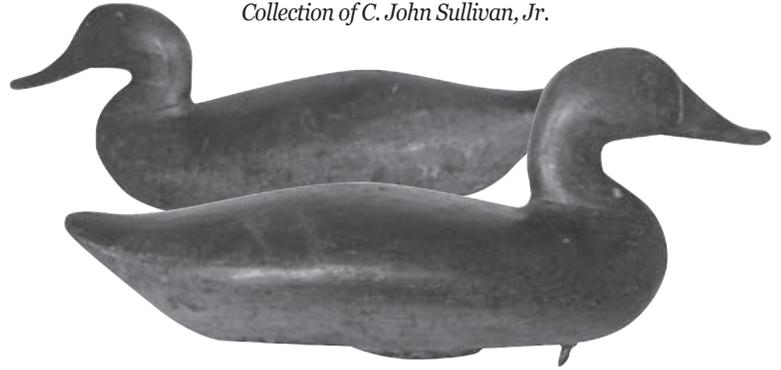
Pintails are exceptionally wary and always alert – perhaps not as much so as the famously suspicious black ducks, but many hunters have argued that they are a close second to the title of our wariest fowl. Old-time gunners swore that to take them successfully, one must use a rig of pintail decoys, carefully and expertly placed downwind. As Grinnell writes: “The pintail is quite a shy bird; its usual flight is high in the air, which gives it an opportunity to inspect the country for signs of danger. Often, however, if the weather is favorable, these birds come well to decoys, and are easily killed.”

In terms of distribution, pintails are found all across North America. As Grinnell notes, “The pintail is not very abundant in autumn on the New England coast, though it is found occasionally in Maine and Massachusetts, and in somewhat greater abundance in Connecticut, where it is known as pheasant. On Long Island it is more common during the migrations, and when we reach the coast of Virginia and North Carolina it is one of the abundant ducks. Here it often associates with the mallard and black duck, and when the birds fly to and fro from their feeding grounds, a small bunch may contain four or five mallards, two or three black ducks and an equal number of pintails. On the other hand, little flocks made up only of pintails are often seen.”

In his 1888 classic, *Wild Fowl Shooting*, William Bruce Leffingwell writes of pintails that: “They are a particularly handsome duck, and their graceful proportions are admired more than any other of the duck species. They are swift flyers, when inclined to be so, and their long, rakish contour leads one to instantly decide that they have the requisite embodiments of all that is necessary for great speed. As they stand on some grassy knoll, with their long necks stretched up, showing the perfect proportions of their long, oval-shaped bodies, terminating at a sharp point at the end of their tails, they have the wild, restless appearance of a race-horse, and seem as if they only waited the opportunity to show the speed that in them lies. It is not possessed of the many brilliant and variegated colors of some other ducks, notably the mallard, and the summer duck, the latter being a bird of most brilliant plumage. Its variegated feathers, conspicuous by their lustre, blend so prettily together. We have often been lost in admiration, as we have watched a pair of these beauties swimming around some muskrat house, or on the verge of an old drift pile, calling so softly, so melodiously to each other, or whistling absentmindedly as they skim off bugs, seeds and larvae, or nip off the sprouting buds, as they glide so easily through the calm waters. The male pin-tail is much more pleasing to the eye than its mate, being larger and finer looking in every way. The soft gray of the female is leaden in color when brought into strong comparison with the dusky slate, purple and white of her majestic companion, as he stands so alertly at her side, his tall head reaching far above that of the largest mallard. Her slight, trim form, slender neck and long wings denote that while she may be his inferior in beauty, she is his equal, if not superior in speed. And yet with all the power that nature has given them to make them among the swiftest of wild fowl, it is very seldom indeed that their swiftness of flight is brought into action. They much prefer depending on their bright, sharp eyes, and their selection of open and exposed places to insure them safety and protection.”

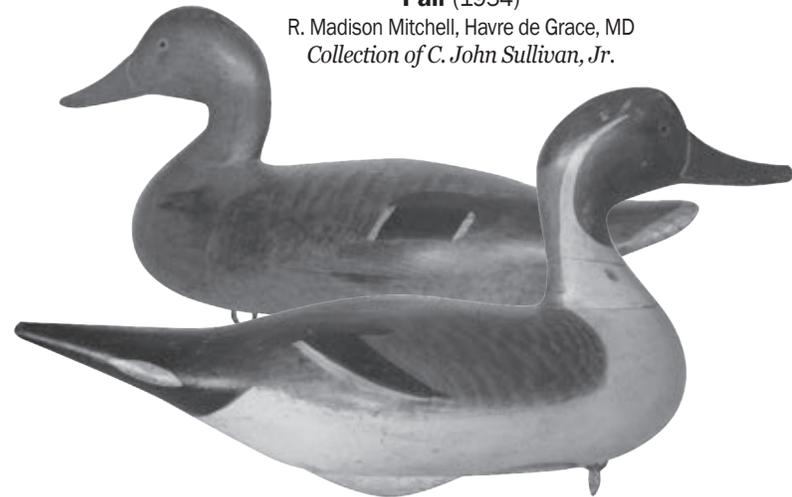
**Pair (1880)**

James Holly, Havre de Grace, MD  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.



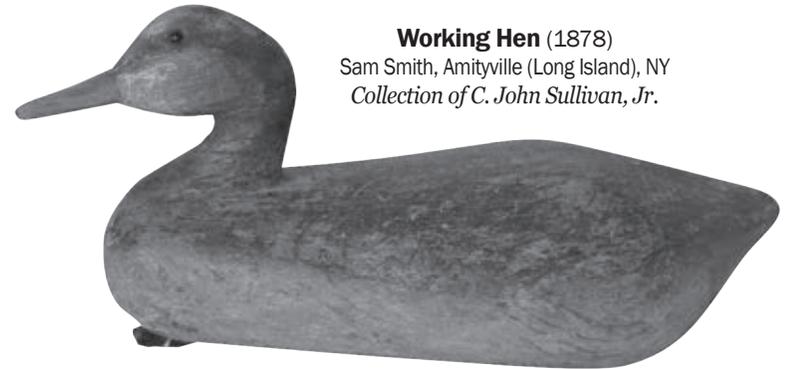
**Pair (1954)**

R. Madison Mitchell, Havre de Grace, MD  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.



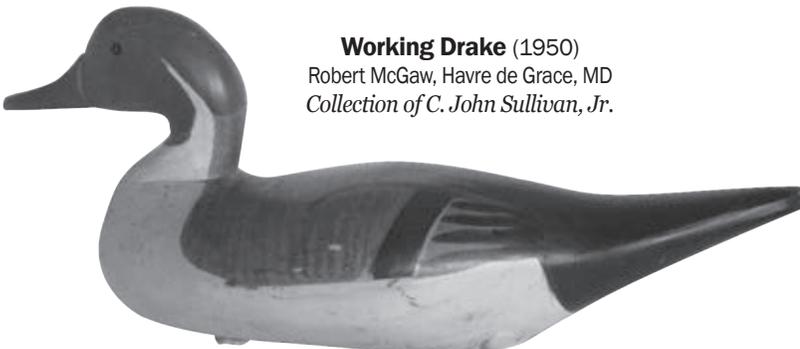
**Working Hen (1878)**

Sam Smith, Amityville (Long Island), NY  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.



**Working Drake (1950)**

Robert McGaw, Havre de Grace, MD  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.



**Beavertail Drake** (1925)  
Lloyd Sterling, Crisfield, MD  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



**Drake** (1935)  
Ira Hudson, Chincoteague, VA  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



**Mini Pair** (1967)  
Norman Hudson, Ocean City, MD  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



**Cork Drake** (1950)  
Factory Decoy  
Collection of Dr. Mort Kramer



**Decorative Drake** (1954)  
R. Madison Mitchell, Havre de Grace, MD  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.

**Drake** (1928)  
Ward brothers, Crisfield, MD  
Collection of Henry Stansbury

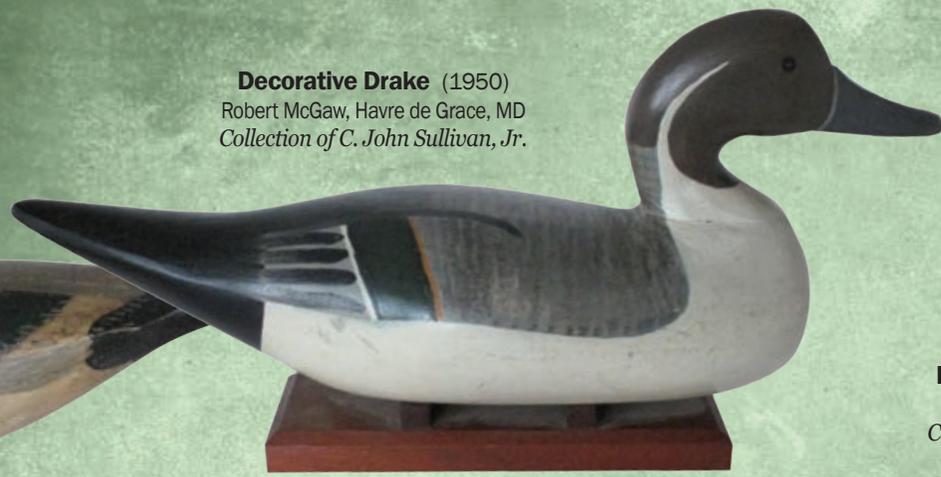
**Pinch Breast Hen**  
(1936)  
Ward brothers, Crisfield, MD  
From Glenn L. Martin's Rig  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



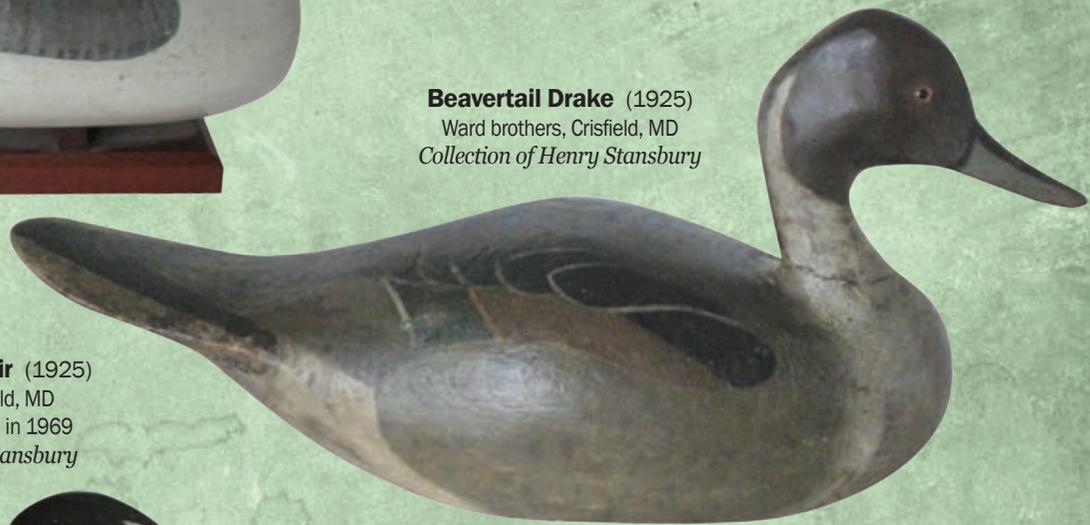
**Preening Drake** (1940)  
Lloyd Tyler, Crisfield, MD  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



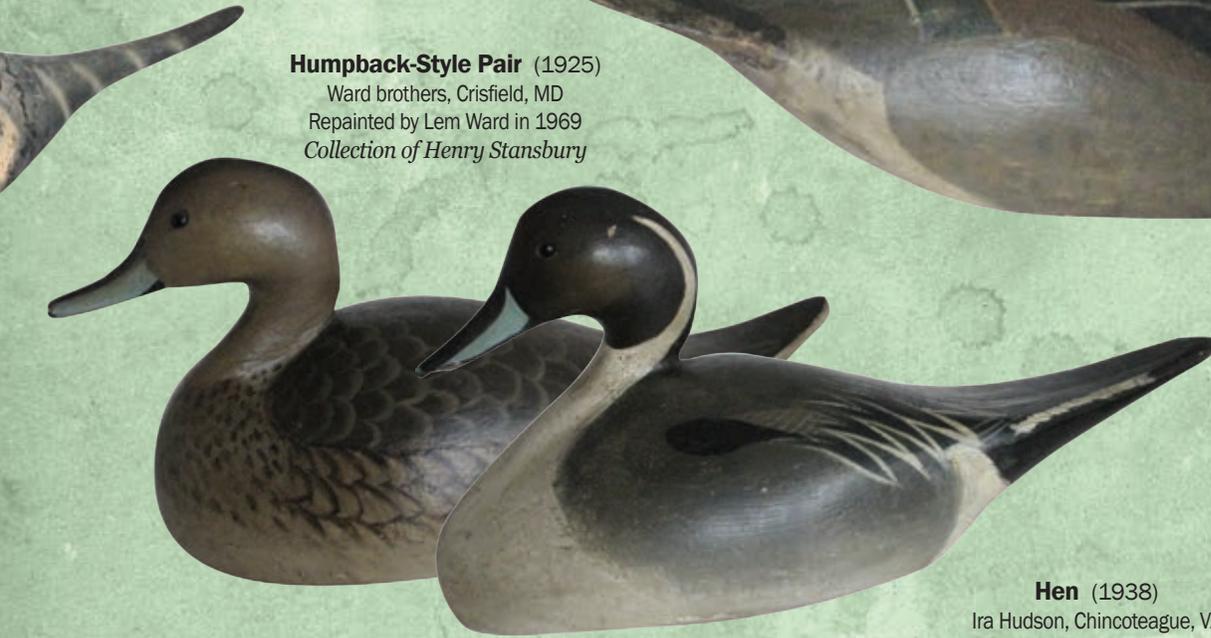
**Decorative Drake** (1950)  
Robert McGaw, Havre de Grace, MD  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.



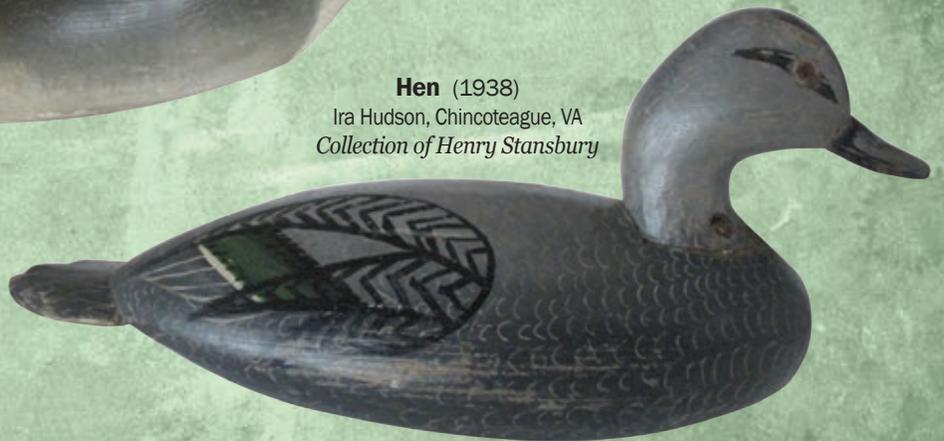
**Beavertail Drake** (1925)  
Ward brothers, Crisfield, MD  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



**Humpback-Style Pair** (1925)  
Ward brothers, Crisfield, MD  
Repainted by Lem Ward in 1969  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



**Hen** (1938)  
Ira Hudson, Chincoteague, VA  
Collection of Henry Stansbury



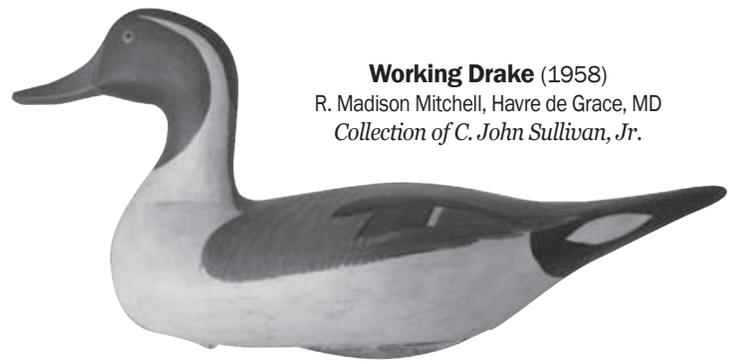
**Mini Pair** (1972)  
Ed "Pop" Sampson, Havre de Grace, MD  
Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.



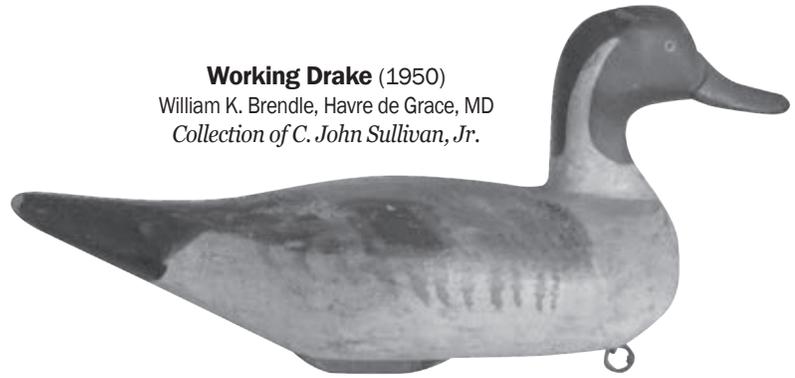
During the golden age of American waterfowling, pintails were a regular though not a frequent visitor to the Susquehanna Flats. In Maryland, they were more commonly found on the great marshes and open waters of the lower shore and in the middle Bay region. In his 1895 book, *A List of the Birds of Maryland*, Frank C. Kirkwood writes that the ducks are: "Common during fall and spring flights, I believe some stay with us during mild winters. Mr. N. S. Bogle of Eastern Neck Island, writes me, that 'a flock of 15 Sprigtails arrived in Chester River, on September 13 ('93), these were the first ducks.' They are noted from that on to October 28 ('93). On March 4 ('94, Fisher), about 20 were in a bunch on Bird River, and several were taken on Choptank River on April 7 ('94)." So, perhaps it isn't surprising then that some of the earliest examples of the species fashioned in Havre de Grace were actually made for use elsewhere.

Pintails by Jim Holly have been found in gunning rigs from the Assateague Rod and Gun Club in Virginia, the Ottawa Shooting Club in Ohio and on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River. Bob McGaw made both standard and high head model pintails and they are also known to have been gunned at Ohio's Ottawa Shooting Club, as well as in rigs used on Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod. Madison Mitchell also made both standard and high-head pintails. Some of the earliest examples known were gunned in the late 1930s on the Delaware River. By the 1940s, Paul Gibson and Charlie Joiner were producing pintails and by the 1950s and 1960s, most of the commercial makers in Harford County had added them to their output, including Jim Currier, Charlie Bryan, Jim Pierce, Harry Jobs and the generation of carvers who worked with and followed them.

Few early makers on the Cecil County side of the Flats made pintails. Some wonderful and very early examples by unknown makers, however, have surfaced there – Joel Barber collected one and pictures it in *Wild Fowl Decoys*. It may be the work of the Blair family of Elkton. Leonard Pryor, also of Elkton and later Chesapeake City, made some of the earliest pintails in the region, working in a few different styles over the years beginning around 1910-1915. With bodies constructed from two carefully attached pieces of wood and showing exceptional carving and paint details, they are some of the finest pintails ever to float on Upper Chesapeake waters. Joseph Coudon of Aiken offered folding "V-board" silhouette decoys to hunters across the nation beginning in the early 1900s, and pintails were one of the puddle duck species he made. Perryville's Taylor Boyd never made pintails, but some of his sleek, torpedo-like canvasbacks and black ducks are sometimes found repainted as sprigtails and their sleek shape and elegant styling come together perfectly leaving collectors today with some exceptional decoys. Additionally, there are some wonderfully long, circa 1920s Cecil County pintails that have been attributed to Chauncey Reynolds of Northeast. Clarence Webb and Horace Graham continued the tradition by producing them in the 1950s and 1960s followed by Milt Watson, Bob Litzenberg, Evans McKinney and Allen Purner some years later. A bit farther down the Bay, John Glenn of Rock Hall captured the essence of the *Anas acuta* as well as any decoy carver anywhere.



**Working Drake (1958)**  
R. Madison Mitchell, Havre de Grace, MD  
*Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.*



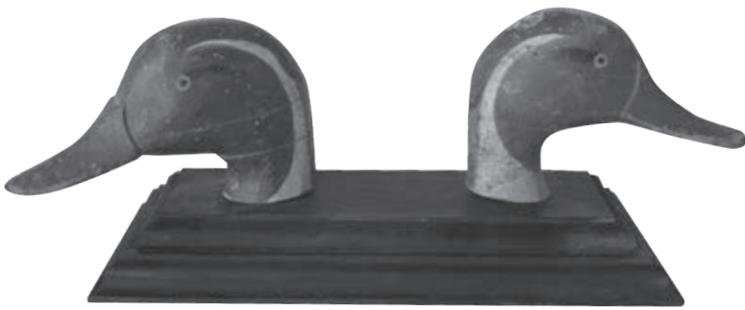
**Working Drake (1950)**  
William K. Brendle, Havre de Grace, MD  
*Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.*



**Pair (1935)**  
Norman Hudson, Ocean City, MD  
*Collection of Henry Stansbury*



**Pair (1930)**  
Capt. John Glenn, Rock Hall, MD  
*Collection of S. R. Smith*



**Drake Heads** (1945)

R. Madison Mitchell, Havre de Grace, MD  
*Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.*

**Drake** (1936)

R. Madison Mitchell, Havre de Grace, MD  
*Decoy Museum Collection*



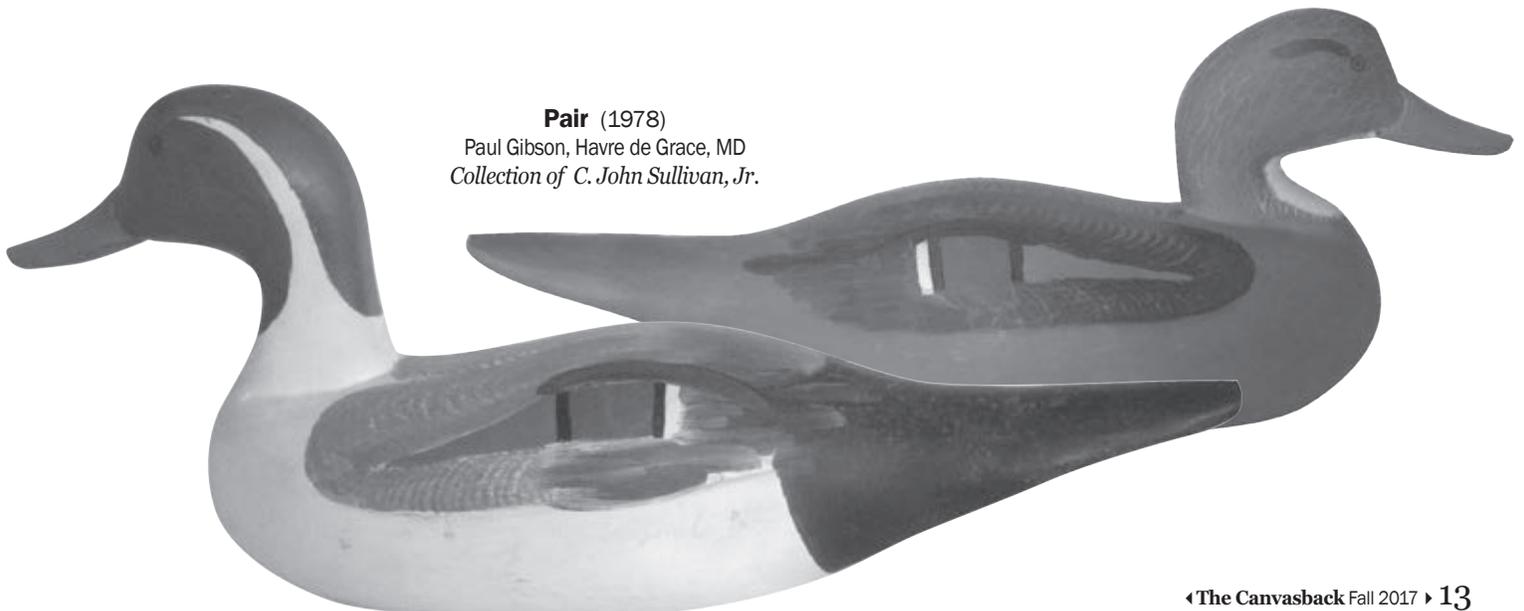
**Pair** (1940)

Unknown Carver  
*Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.*



**Pair** (1978)

Paul Gibson, Havre de Grace, MD  
*Collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.*



In the 1857 printing of his classic, *The American Sportsman*, Elisha J. Lewis writes that: “This handsome-looking duck is known to our shooters indifferently as the pintail or sprigtail. The latter appellation is perhaps the most common. They frequent the fresh-water streams of almost every section of our country, both inland and on the seaboard. They are not very partial to salt water. Sprigtails are shy and vigilant; when aroused, they fly confusedly together, so that the shooter has always a fine opportunity to rake the flock when on the wing. They remain with us all winter and breed in the North; their flesh is sweet and often delicious.” He concludes with an observation of the species’ beauty, noting that: “The sprigtail is an elegantly-formed, long-bodied duck, the neck longer and more slender than most others.”

In *Wild Fowl Shooting*, Leffingwell cautions his readers wishing to pursue pintails that: “It takes strategy to kill them, and after one has become proficient in finding, decoying and shooting them, he feels that his utmost skill will be taxed to make a good day’s ‘bag.’ Just before flying from land or water, they walk or swim together, and raking shots, doing great execution, may be had. This is also the case when they fly up. They then huddle together, and several may be killed at one discharge of the gun. Should the hunter attempt flight-shooting at ‘travelers,’ his gun will be thoroughly tested. He should use nothing smaller than a tenbore,—that should be heavy, full choked, loaded with 6 dms. powder, 1 oz. No. 2 or 3 shot, and he should hold from 10 to 20 feet ahead of them. They afford delicious eating, feeding as they do on rich, nutritious and substantial food, and are invariably in excellent condition for the table.”

Lewis insisted that pintails were “elegantly-formed.” Leffingwell called them “particularly handsome” and noted that “their graceful proportions are admired more than any other of the duck species.” To Grinnell, among all ducks, there were “few more graceful species than this.” For the collectors fortunate enough to have a classic sprigtail decoy displayed proudly on the shelf, they can only agree with these early and expert observations. Like their wild counterparts, the best of the wooden pintails are elegant, graceful, and beautiful.

# “NO TELLING WHEN THEY MAY DROP DOWN...”

*In his 1888 classic, Wild Fowl Shooting, William Bruce Leffingwell provides a vivid, detailed and memorable passage on the propensities of the pintail duck and tips to those gunners hoping to bag them. Interestingly, in spite of many other early sporting writers advocating for rigs exclusively of pintail decoys he advises against them, favoring instead the more colorful and, in his opinion, more durable mallard lures.*

“When the hunter, with the sky in the background, looms up plainly to view, they see him; he may try to get near them, but it is useless, for they fly long before he can get within gunshot of them. Their food consists of seed, acorns, corn and waste materials that the spring freshets float over the low lands. They are high-flyers, indeed the greatest sky-scrappers of the duck species. When they are frightened while feeding or resting, they rise to a height of from 80 to 100 yards, and then fly over the low lands and timber, just out of gun range. I have seen them flying this way for hours. How tantalizing they are! The hunter may stand in his blind, or lie concealed in some grassy spot; flock after flock will pass over him, just so high that he cannot reach them. They are not silent company, for they keep up an incessant chattering and whistling. It is not possible to illustrate on paper just how this chattering is done, but a faint conception of it may be had by saying as fast as one can, “Chuck-a-chuck-a-chuck,” repeating at least three times, the tongue must be glib, and it must run under 160 pounds pressure, as the velocity to be acquired is very great. After practicing a while, so he feels he can do it with rapidity, let his wife try it, and her first attempt will convince him how exceedingly slow he is. As the hunter sees them flying over him, a variety of conflicting emotions flit through his mind, he believes patience is a monument of virtue, and is patient. He weakens as time passes, and not one comes near enough to kill; still they go over him, chattering and whistling, or turn their heads slightly and look down on him, as he feels, in derision. Getting desperate he begins shooting at them; shot after shot is fired, but without effect. He gets mad, and wishes he had a gun that would kill a mile—no difference what it weighed. But his desperation and disgust nerve him to greater deeds of valor, and by shooting from 16 to 20 feet ahead of a flock, he scratches one down, wing tipped. No sooner does the bird start to leave the flock, than the hunter starts for it like a race-horse. When he gets where the bird fell, he finds feathers but no bird. About this time the air becomes blue, and a heavy sulphuric vapor permeates the surroundings. He is out of breath from running. Accidentally looking back, he sees a large flock of pin-tails swoop right over his blind, not fifty feet high, the best opportunity of the day. He feels he could have killed half a dozen had he been there. Such luck! How he wishes he had not chased this crawling cripple. He sees the grass move slightly, pounces down upon it, and drags out the lost bird; clutches it around the neck, gives it a preliminary squeeze, while the poor bird makes a choking quack, then gazes at him in astonishment and affright. The hunter feels the impossibility of wreaking all his pent up revenge on this lone bird, so deliberately wrings its neck, and then throws it at his feet in the blind.

“In spite of their extreme wariness and their propensity to fly so high, they decoy nicely. They are on the best of terms with the mallard family, and at times travel with them, feed with them and roost with them. The pin-tail decoys are so neutral in appearance that it is not advisable to use them; besides, they must be natural, and to create that naturalness their necks must be slim. This means constant accidents by breaking necks off. As they associate so much with mallards, mallard decoys are the best to use, and as one will usually be shooting in shallow waters, it is better to stick up some of the dead pin-tails for decoys. How this is done is fully shown in the article entitled ‘Shooting Mallards in a Snow Storm.’ Don’t be in too great a hurry to shoot, for they love dearly to

circle around before lighting, and will stay up high in the air, fifty to seventy-five yards. When they do this, be calm, and reserve your fire, for unless they see you they will come down. All this time they will be whistling. Imitate their whistle; it is very simple, and always do it immediately after they do, as near like theirs as you can. Whistle often, throw feeling and expression in your tone; you want them to come, so be very solicitous in your call. Don’t move in your blind, for their eyes are very sharp, and they will see you. When you fire the first barrel, look sharp, for they will be about thirty feet higher before you are aware and ready for the second. They are noted for being high jumpers, and will jump perpendicularly from twenty to thirty feet when frightened at the report of a gun. They are not hard to capture on the water, as when wounded they usually swim with heads high up, or will tire themselves out by making one or two long dives. It is best to shoot them as soon as you see they are crippled. Try at all times to drop them into the water,—it is the surest way to get them, for if dropped in the wild rice or high rushes you cannot find them without a good dog, and it will test a dog’s endurance and strength unnecessarily,—hence if you can shoot them so that they will fall into the open water it is decidedly the better way.

“Always be on the alert, watching for them, for there is no telling when they may drop down, as if from the clouds, or what direction they will come from. If your blind is in the timber, your view will be obstructed for low-flying birds, so whistle their call occasionally, whether or not birds are in sight. You will find them quite erratic at times. Some will approach your decoys, circle and sail around, then when perhaps seventy five yards away, jump back in mid air twenty to thirty feet, as if thrown by a spring, fly away, come back again, and finally light outside your decoys, just out of range; when they do this rout them out, for swimming around as they will be, they will call other ducks away from your stationary decoys. At other times, they will decoy so nicely that they just won’t keep away — down they will come from extreme heights, with a waving, rocking motion, first the tip of one wing pointing vertically, then the other, as the duck reverses its position. This motion is nearly similar to a boy’s pointing his right hand and arm up, his left to the ground, then reversing his position backward and forward, giving a peculiar swinging motion to his head and body, all the time pumping one arm up, while the other must at the same time go down. The time to shoot at them is just as they are fluttering to light. They are then stationary and easy to hit; but after your first barrel is fired, look out for high and lofty tumbling, for they will rise with a jump. So be prepared, and hold high over them, and give them the second barrel as soon as you can get aim. Use strong powder, and 1 1-8 oz. No. 6 chilled shot, and if you hold right, they can be killed forty and fifty yards with chokebored guns.”



**Balsa Pair** (1940's)  
Ira Hudson, Chincoteague, VA  
Collection of Henry Stansbury

# Downsizing? Changing your collection?

If you have decoys, wildlife art, and waterfowling memorabilia packed away in closets, attics, garages, and basements that you just do not know what to do with — please consider donating these items to the Museum.

The Decoy Museum can turn your unwanted items into much-needed operating revenue. In-kind gifts will be gratefully received by the Museum and will help preserve history for generations to come.

Call us at 410.939.3739

We will be happy to make any necessary arrangements.



*You may be able to take a tax deduction for the charitable donation. IRS regulations prohibit us from appraising donated items.*

## Got time to spare... time to share?

*Get involved with the Decoy Museum.*

We are grateful for the generous support of our volunteers.

### What do you like to do?

Can you lead tours, explain decoy making and the history of the Flats, present programs for school children, greet visitors at the information desk, assist in the museum store, help our curator on special projects, provide carving demonstrations, plan events, maintain IT systems, do exhibit signage and creative work, assist with fundraising and membership, organize chaos?



Contact the Decoy Museum Today to Join the Flock

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# Museum News

## From the Desk of...

Summer was very busy here at the Museum, with guests visiting us from near and far! I am reminded daily of how grateful I am for the time I get to spend conversing with our guests from around the world, sharing a piece of Havre de Grace history and, of course, learning from each of them. We also had quite a few large tour groups visit throughout the season and hosted several meetings on our 2nd floor gallery.



In July, we completed our site review associated with our participation in the American Alliance of Museum's (AAM) Museum Assessment Program. Just as we found the self-study to be rewarding, this too was a positive experience. We have just received our final report and look forward to implementing some action steps to improve our processes and your experience!

Thanks to the efforts of several dedicated volunteers who spent hours cleaning and making minor repairs, we were thrilled to re-open the R Madison Mitchell shop to guest carvers on July 16th. We were blessed to have carvers, some seasoned veterans and others newer faces, on site on most, but not all, weekends from July through October. Visitors had the opportunity to see the original Mitchell shop and hear tales from the golden days, witness a carver in action, and in a few cases, even try their hand at a few skills. Visitation has been high throughout and we look forward to re-opening in Spring of 2018!

Best,  
  
 Kerri Kneisley, *Executive Director*

## Current Exhibits @ the Museum

- **Our new display cases in the Carvers' Gallery now contain an exhibit of rare northern pintails from the collections of Henry Stansbury and C. John Sullivan, Jr. (See page 8)**

- The Potomac Decoy Collectors Assoc. stunning collection of nearly seven-dozen colorful and elegant wood ducks in the Carvers' Gallery.



- The extraordinary collection of winning decoys from the 2017 J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest.

- John Collier's collection of Bill Gibian carvings with three breathtaking new additions – a full size swan and a pair each of mallards and wigeons rising.



- The Home Run Baker rig and bushwhack boat.

- The "What is a Decoy?" and "Gunning the Flats" exhibits

- Two displays of Susquehanna Flats wing ducks and miniature carvings by Capt. Jimmy Wright of Massey Md. from the collection of C. John Sullivan, Jr.

- A traditional tule decoy in the centuries-old "Lovelock style" by Paiute decoy maker Joe Allen.



- A teal carved in the 1930s by Joseph Coudon of H, a gift from Pat Doherty.

- A beautiful decorative canvasback family made by master carver J. Noble Mentzer

- A beautiful decorative eastern blue bird carved by master carver Barb Wachter

- A lifelike rockfish (striped bass) carved by master carver Lee Tate, Sr.

- The extraordinary pair of "Daddy" Holly canvasbacks, a gift from the Michael family.



# Carve & Candy at the Decoy Museum!

Carve or paint a  
pumpkin with a  
decoy carver!

Explore the Museum  
while trick or treating  
and enjoy other  
children's activities.

**Sunday**  
**October 29th**  
**4 - 7 pm**

Nominal fee.

Call or go to  
**DecoyMuseum.com**  
for details.



# Museum News



## New!



## Weekend Guest Carvers

On Sunday July 16th, we kicked off a new initiative and re-opened the historic R. Madison Mitchell shop behind the main Museum building to what we intend to be an ongoing series of weekend guest carvers during the warm months. Several dedicated volunteers spent hours cleaning the shop and making minor repairs in preparation, including a new sign.

Visitors loved it! They could interact with the decoy carvers in action and listen to their tales. Some even tried their hand with the carving tools, and others were able to buy a signed decoy to take home.

Visitation has been high throughout, and we will have the shop open most weekends until the end of October. We are excited that this has been so well received and already look forward to the Spring of 2018!



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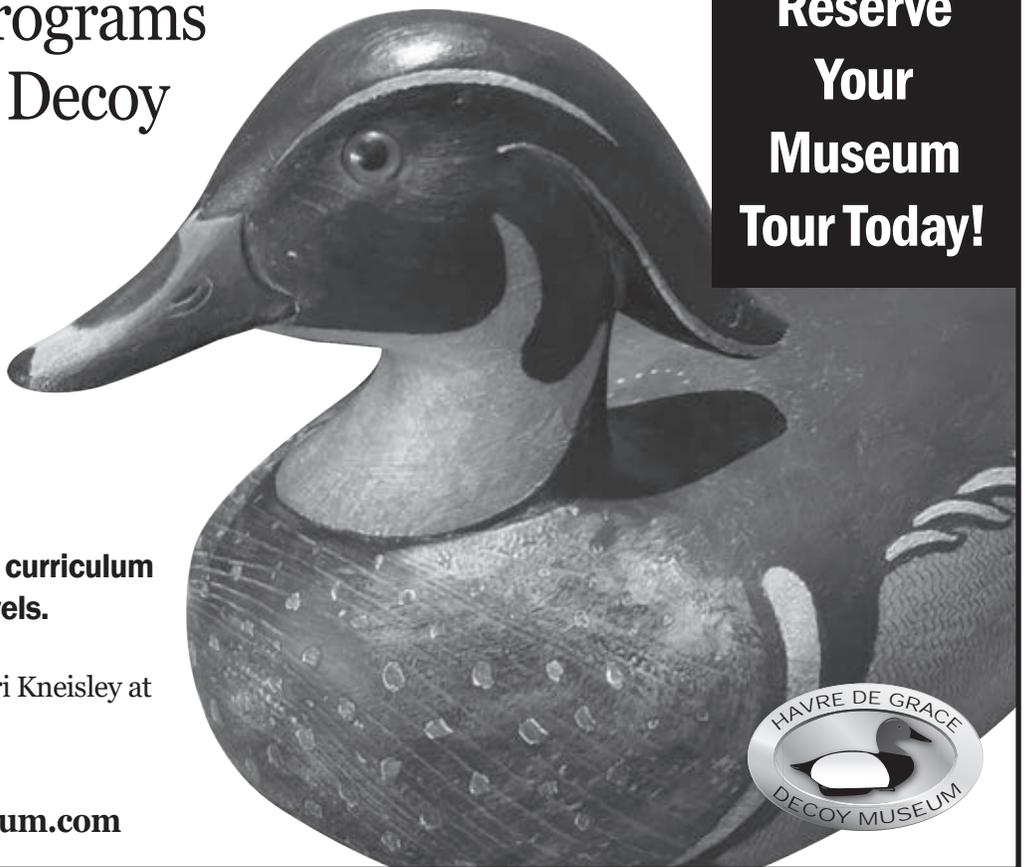
**Tours can be tailored to the curriculum  
and different age/grade levels.**

Book your tours early, call Kerri Kneisley at

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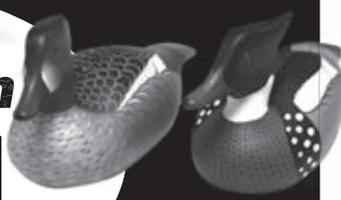
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The readers of Harford Magazine have  
voted the Decoy Museum the **“Best  
Museum of 2016”**. Thanks to all of our  
staff, members, and other supporters who  
helped make this possible!

★ DAN CARSON ★

GUNNING DECOYS

SHOOTING OLD WAY  
Md.

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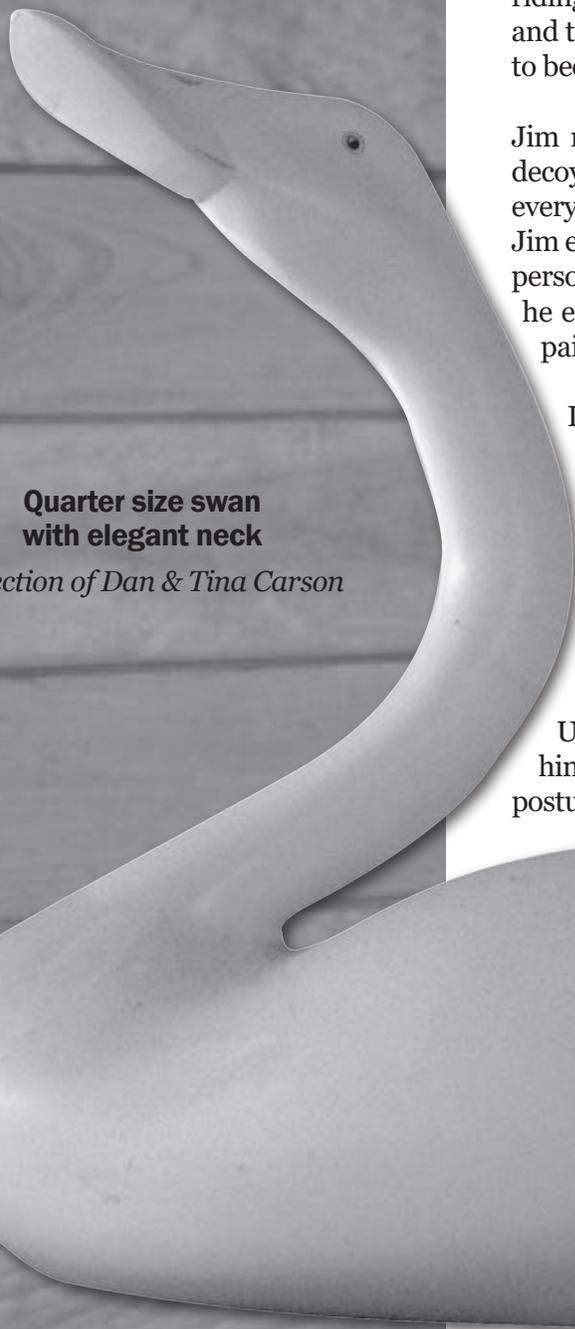
# Dan Carson

*By James W. Carroll, jr.*



**Quarter-size swan**

*Collection of Dan & Tina Carson*



**Quarter size swan  
with elegant neck**

*Collection of Dan & Tina Carson*

It is always interesting to learn what set of circumstances or events have led decoy carvers into a lifetime of creating “counterfeit ducks”, as the legendary Ward brothers described it. Some are waterfowlers compelled by necessity. Others find an outlet for latent artistic skills. But the thing that first opened the door for Dan Carson to begin carving decoys – horseback riding – established a linkage that has persisted for forty years. But that is getting ahead of the story.

Dan began riding horses at an early age, and by 1977 he was working for Bonnie Watts at her stables on Golden Vein Farm located just north of Havre de Grace along the Susquehanna River. Golden Vein is on the opposite side of Lapidum Road from the home of renowned decoy carver and Decoy Museum cofounder Jim Pierce and his family. Dan was no stranger to the Pierce household – Dan and Charlie Pierce grew up together and were classmates in high school – but the proximity of the riding stables enabled him to spend time with Jim in the shop and to begin a transition from being an apprentice equestrian to becoming an apprentice decoy carver.

Jim mentored Dan and encouraged his growing interest in decoys. He worked in the Pierce shop for ten years learning everything from wood selection to finely-rendered painting. Jim expresses great affection and admiration for Dan – “a fine person, very kind-hearted” – as well as for his artistry. He says he encouraged Dan to develop his own style of carving and painting, which Jim describes as “very clean looking.”

In 1990, at the age of 24, Dan moved on from the Pierce’s shop and spent about nine years on his own, primarily carving and giving demonstrations at the nearby Steppingstone Farm Museum, as decoy carving grew to become his trade and livelihood. Dan’s skill in both carving and painting developed to the point where he began turning out truly incredible carvings like the ones that grace these pages.

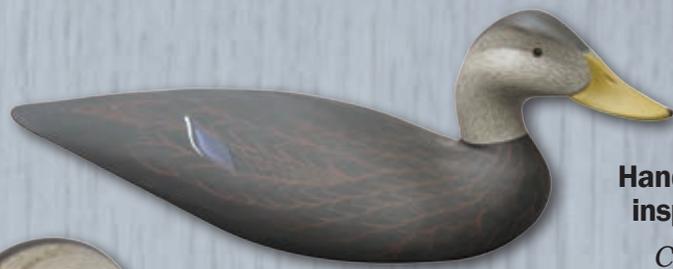
Unfortunately, carving and especially painting required him to spend countless hours immobile in a head-down posture, and that began to aggravate an old neck injury – Dan had fallen from a tree in boyhood and had broken his

neck. Surgical options were risky, so after twenty years as a decoy carver, Dan had to severely restrict his carving activities. It will come as no surprise that Dan was very distraught to be forced to leave decoys behind and find a new direction in life.

But another twist of fate also threw the Carson family into the fight of their lives. Dan and Tina's son Mark (16) was born with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Affecting males only, Duchenne is marked by a loss of muscle function that starts in the lower limbs and gradually spreads and worsens.

The Carsons threw themselves into fundraising to support research and find therapies for Duchenne, and over the intervening years they have joined with other families who have been touched by this cruel disease. Starting locally, their first fundraiser was at MacGregor's Restaurant in Havre de Grace, which was hosted by owners Dan & Cindy Lee. The Lees are passionate supporters of the Decoy Museum, they were also passionate collectors of Dan's wonderful creations in wood during his carving years, and they became passionate supporters of the Carsons' fundraising efforts to find a cure.

Dan and Tina are quick to point out that, "many local carvers and businesses in the incredible town of Havre de Grace have contributed generously to this important cause." During the course of 11 years, their efforts and those of their many supporters raised over \$1 million dollars. They add that, "We are humbled and grateful to all who have given and continue to give." All funds raised by the Carsons have been donated to The Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne (FED).



**Hand-Chopped, Ward-inspired black duck**

*Collection of Dan & Tina Carson*



**Black duck**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*

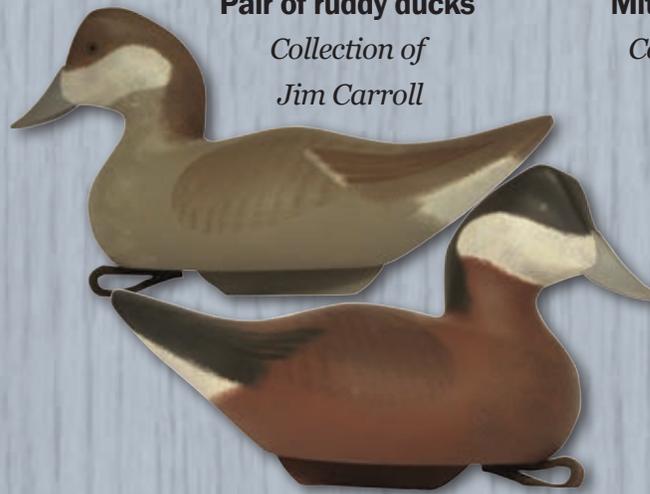


**Mitchell-style black duck**

*Collection of Jim Carroll*

**Pair of ruddy ducks**

*Collection of Jim Carroll*



**Black swan**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*

**Redhead drake**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*

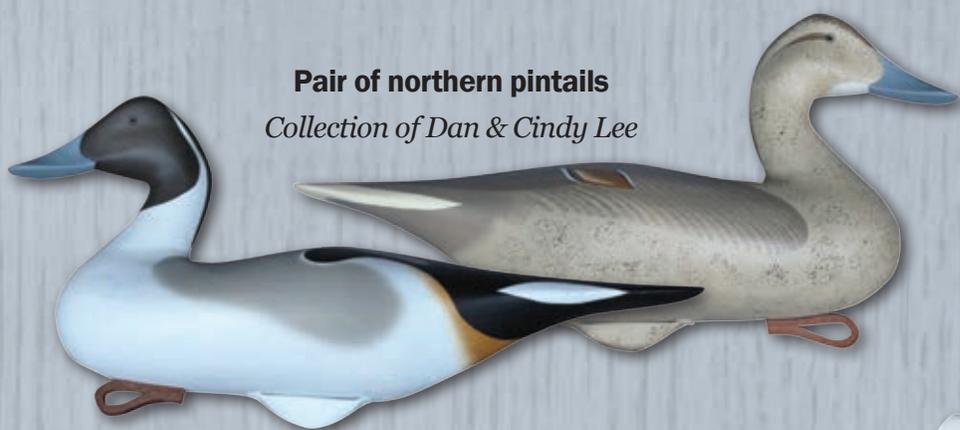


**Pair of wood ducks**

*Collection of Dan & Tina Carson*

**Pair of northern pintails**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*



**A pair of wood ducks**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*



**Driftwood swan**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*

**Canada goose**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*



**Traditional Havre de Grace swan lamp**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*



**Mallard Drake**

*Collection of Dan & Cindy Lee*



**Pair of wigeons**

*Collection of Dan & Tina Carson*



So far, FED's efforts in conjunction with the Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC have made possible one promising gene therapy drug. Mark Carson is currently enrolled in the gene therapy trial at The Kennedy Krieger Institute, a Johns Hopkins affiliate in Baltimore. FED is also working on a new steroid drug with virtually no side effects. While there is still no cure for Duchenne, progress is being made. The Carsons are determined to fight for their son and for all other boys afflicted with Duchenne.

So, since hanging up his drawknife in 1999, Dan has focused on the needs of his family and on growing his real estate business. When approaching the rustic Carson farmette just off Lapidum Road not far from the Pierce family, the first thing you notice is their purpose-built barn and workshop. The next thing you notice is the large handmade sign next to the shop's front door: "Dan Carson - Gunning Decoys". Obviously, decoys are still very much on Dan's mind.

The spacious barn is on three levels and serves as a working barn for his daughter Sarah, whom Dan says, "...inherited my love of horses and is an amazing rider. She always wanted a small farm, and I finally gave in." Dan built the barn with the idea that it would also serve as his carving shop in the future. Sarah convinced him to acquire six chickens and three goats - a population that is almost certain to grow. Dan was very apprehensive about adding "farmer" to his resume, he says, "But starting this small farm has been truly a blessing for the family. Tina and Mark both love helping out and interacting with the animals, too."



The ground level of the barn opens out onto the enclosures for the animals and provides space for storage and a workroom for his duplicating lathe. That room alone is the first clue that this is a very serious decoy shop. Shelves hold patterns for every kind of waterfowl body you can imagine. Some are copies of timeless patterns designed by R. Madison Mitchell nearly a century ago. Some are patterns that Dan developed himself for uncommon species and for special postures of decorative carvings.

The second level of the workshop is the primary woodworking area with a separate room dedicated to the dust-producing machinery such as the jointer, saws, and sanders. The paint room on the top level will stop you in your tracks because your first impression is that you have suddenly left Dan's workshop

and walked into Jim Pierce's. Dan admits with a laugh that he measured Jim's painting table to make sure that he recreated the workspace where he had learned so much from Jim more than three decades ago. Dan clearly reveres Jim and expresses enormous gratitude for the opportunity to learn to carve and paint under Jim's guidance. He says, "I loved working in Jim's shop and will always treasure those years and the people I met there."

As Dan takes down some decoys and runs his hands over them he mentions other well-known names that have inspired his style and techniques: R. Madison Mitchell, Lem and Steve Ward, Charlie Bryan, and Mike Affleck. While Dan – who is now only 51 – may be inactive for the present, he still carves a few swans each year to support fundraising for Mark's cause. Swans are his favorite to make, especially with complex and elegant double curves in their necks. Swans also do not require tedious detailed painting with one's head down for hours to recreate the colorful feathering patterns of other species of waterfowl. Maybe, just maybe, swans represent the reentry point for an exceptionally talented folk artist to resume turning out more of his incredible carvings. ***Stay tuned.***





# Museum Members

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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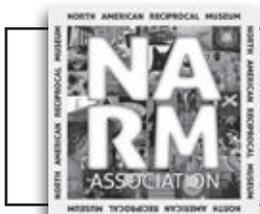
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Stephen Swanson



The North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association<sup>sm</sup> is one of the largest reciprocal membership programs in the world with 924 arts, cultural, and historical institutions along with botanical gardens, children's museums, science and technology centers that offer NARM-qualified members reciprocal benefits.

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**Help us spread the word and fulfill our mission.**

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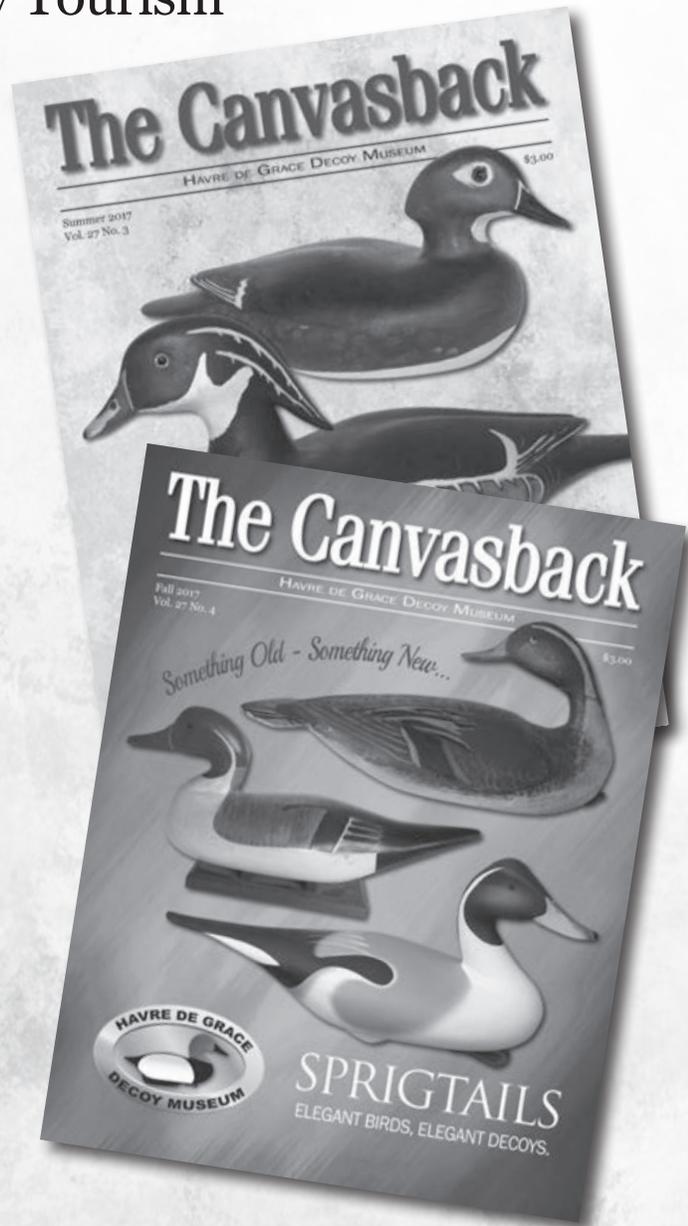
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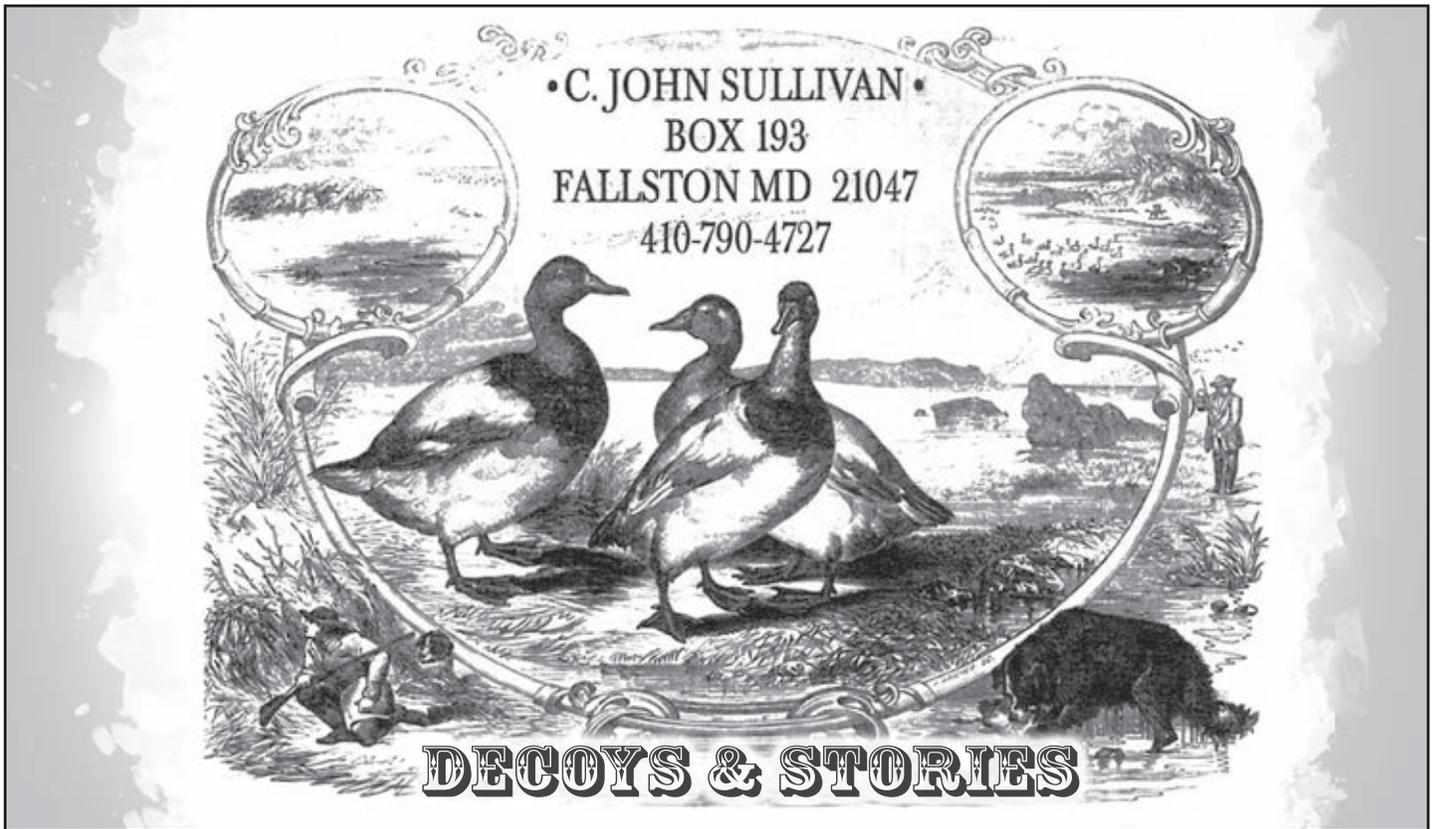
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**\$500 Cash**



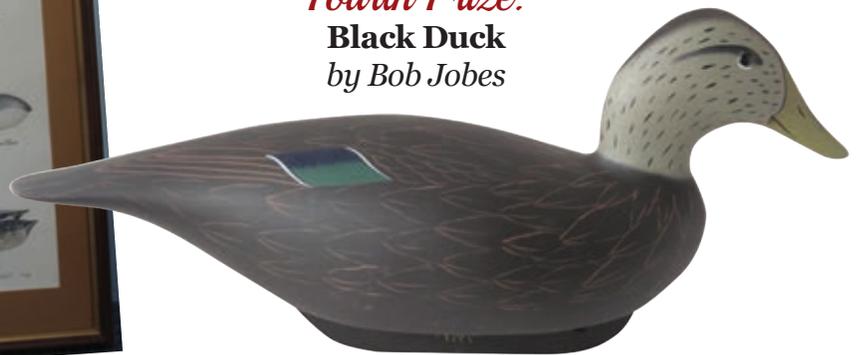
*Second Prize:*  
**A Pair of Canvasbacks**  
*by Charlie Bryan*



*Third Prize:*  
**Framed Print of the Ward Brothers**



*Fourth Prize:*  
**Black Duck**  
*by Bob Jobs*

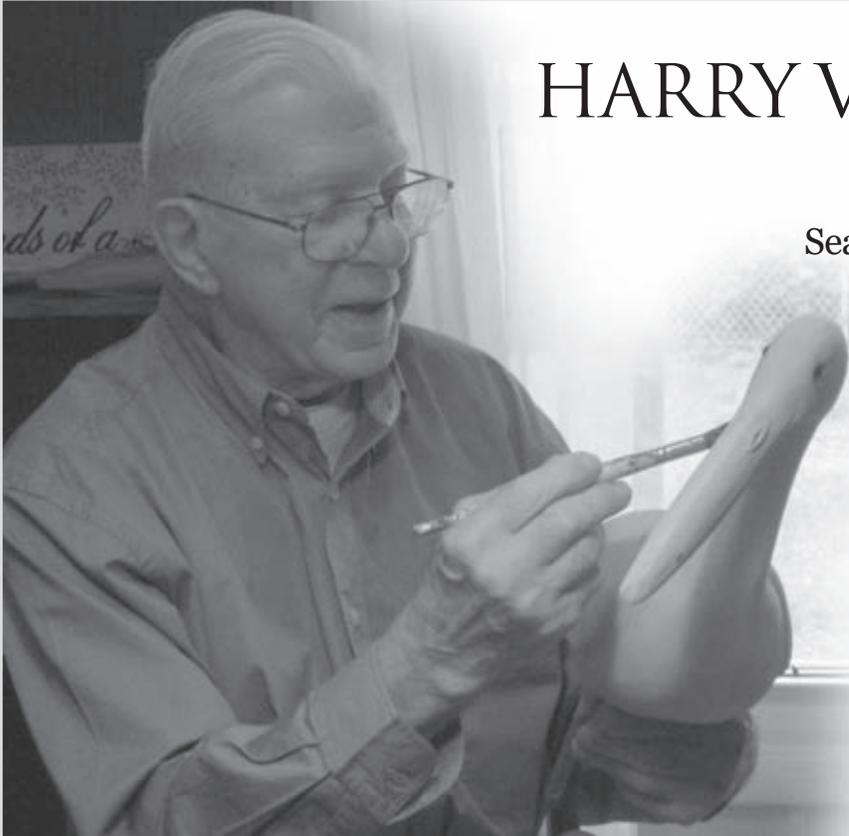


Drawing December 9th at 6pm during Candlelight Tour

For tickets call **410.939.3739**

or email [information@DecoyMuseum.com](mailto:information@DecoyMuseum.com)

*(additional tickets will be available at the Museum)*



# HARRY V. SHOURDS, II

1930-2017

Seaville, New Jersey

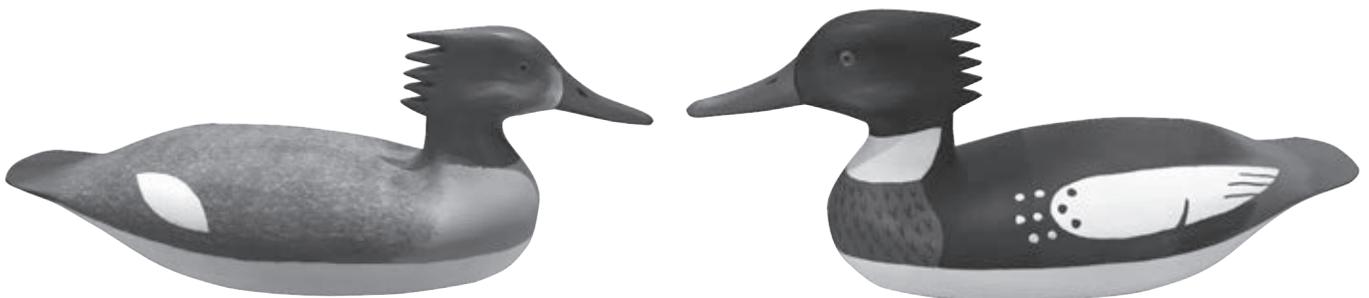
**H**arry Vinuckson Shourds, II of Seaville, NJ, passed away on July 25, 2017, the day following his 87th birthday. Harry Shourds was born into a decoy carving tradition – both his father, Harry Mitchell. Shourds, and grandfather, Harry Vinuckson Shourds, were famous New Jersey decoy carvers. Harry never knew his grandfather (1861-1920), who was a market gunner, and his father (1890-1943) died when he was 12. So, despite that proud family history, he was largely self-taught as a carver.

Harry's decoys are classic Barnegat Bay working decoy with his own distinctive flair. He once said, "I guess there's something different about my ducks. I hate to copy anyone, even if it's my grandfather or father. I make my own ducks." His have softly rounded bottoms with inset weights. The bodies are hollowed out and finished to seamless perfection. Shourds carved primarily with New Jersey white cedar, which grows in the swamps of Cape May and Cumberland counties. It's a durable wood that's perfect for outdoor uses such as boats and shingles.

A versatile artist, Harry created a wide variety of popular carvings. The majority of his decoys are greater scaup (bluebills), black ducks, brant and Canada geese, some of which now command six-figure prices from high-end collectors. His shorebirds are classics and the miniature decoys are perfect replicas of his full-size working decoys. His decoy carving shop also doubled as an antique store catering to the summer tourists.

Harry's love of waterfowl and nature in general inspired him throughout his life, and his work was the subject of numerous articles and documentaries over the years. In 1989, Harry was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship award from the National Endowment for the Arts by President George H.W. Bush in a White House ceremony. This NEA fellowship honors traditional artists and recognizes lifetime achievement, artistic excellence, and contributions to our nation's traditional arts heritage.

In addition to the Carvers' Gallery at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, Harry Shourds' decoys have been widely exhibited. He has been featured in publications such as the Audubon Society Magazine, Birdwatchers Digest, and New Jersey Outdoors, as well as in the film "In the Barnegat Bay Tradition."



# *A Room with A View*



*Host Your Next Event at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum!*



**The Carver's Gallery at the Decoy Museum  
can accommodate up to 200 people, and the deck  
offers one of the best views in Harford County.**



**For more information contact the museum [410.939.3739](tel:410.939.3739)**



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