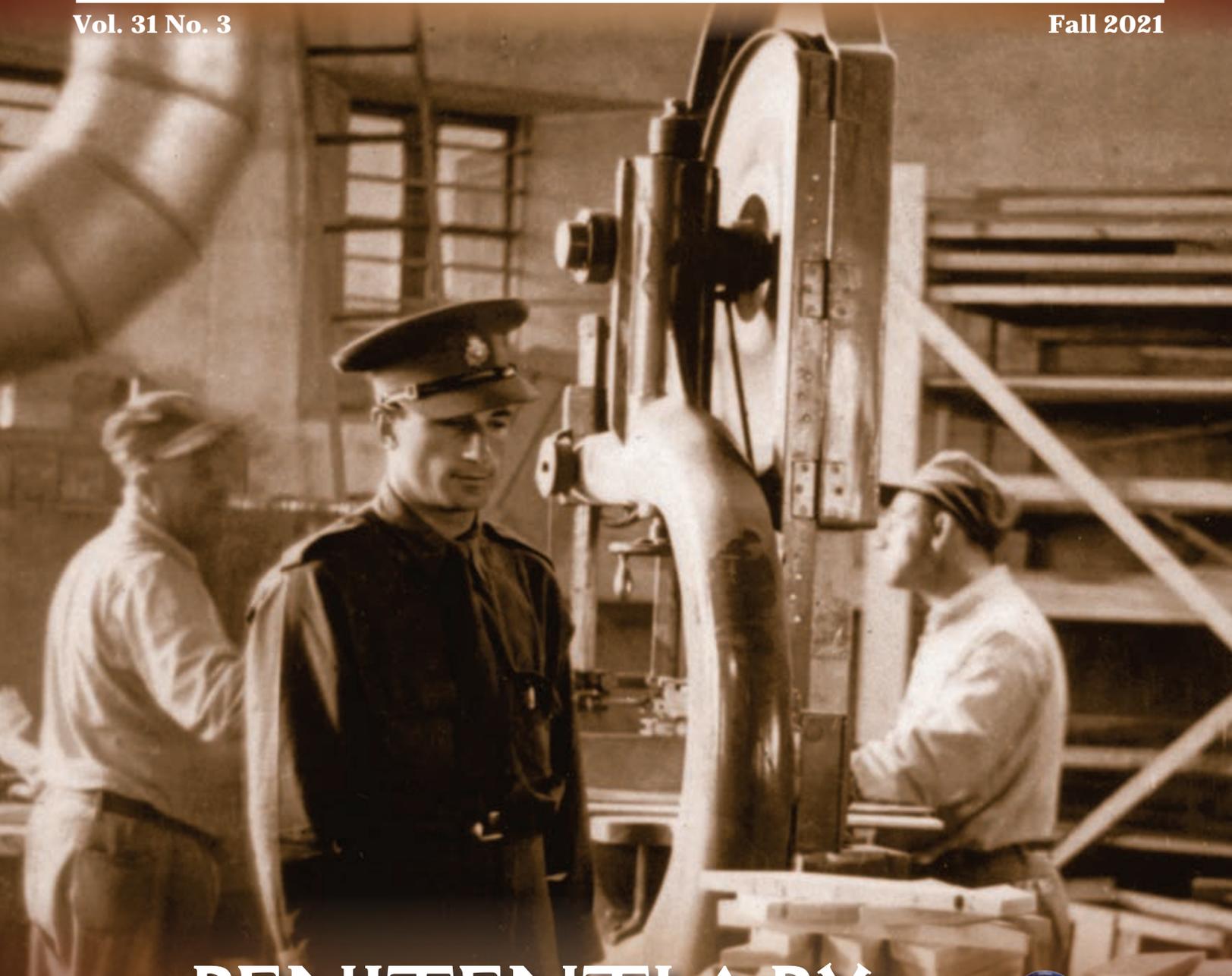


The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

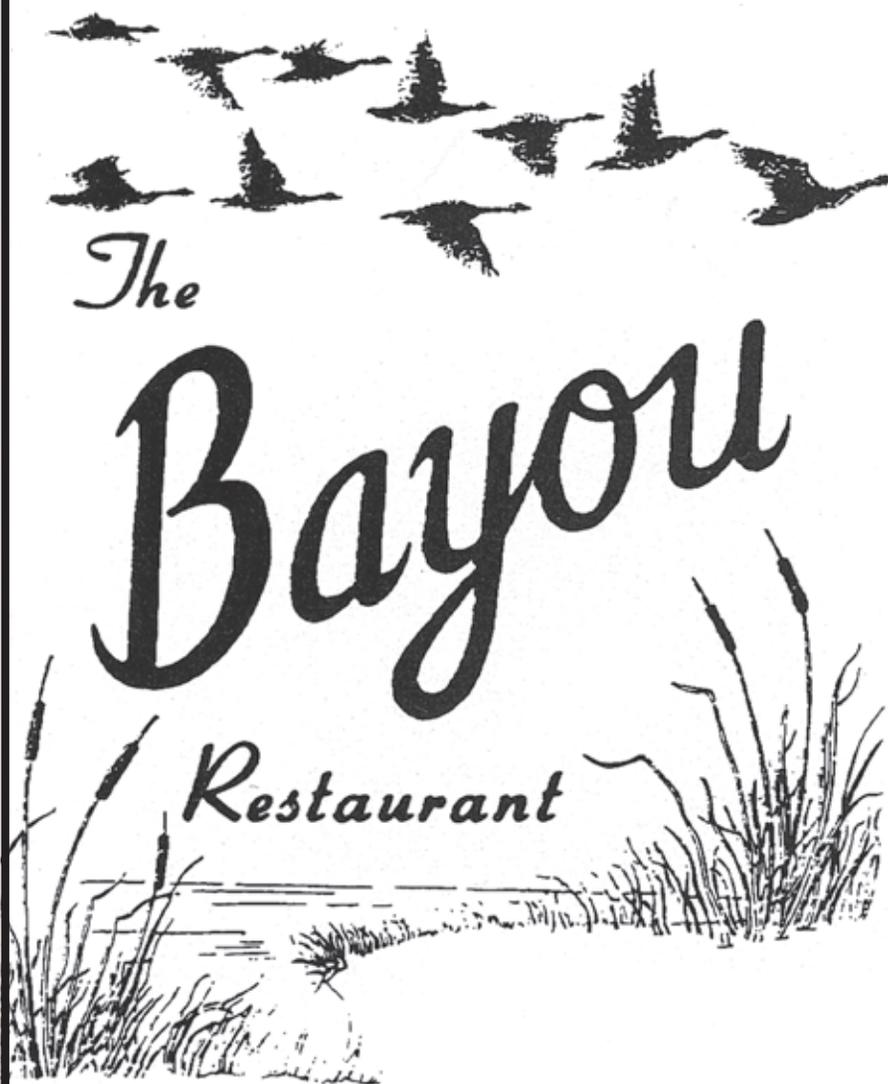
Vol. 31 No. 3

Fall 2021



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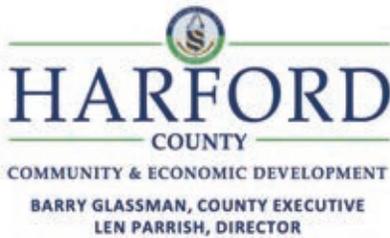
can•vas•back

(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.

FUNDED IN PART BY



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE maryland state arts council
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ON THE COVER

Officer Don Flynn supervising inmates in the carpentry shop (ca. 1953) at the Kingston Penitentiary (Kingston, Ontario). *Source: Kingston Penitentiary*

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From the President...



A key attribute to any non-profit group is having good people to support the mission of the organization. Most non-profit organizations have a limited staff of paid employees. Successful non-profits are bolstered by a healthy group of volunteers that take on many different roles and responsibilities. Good people come from a variety of sources. They come from those who share the passion relating to the group's mission, those who possess a special talent or skill, but oftentimes they come from those who just want to learn more about an organization's mission and apply their passion to volunteer to further the cause. At the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, we are fortunate to have a great paid staff that is supported by a strong network of volunteers.

The museum has an all-volunteer Board of Directors that set the strategic course for the organization. Our board is made up of a variety of skill sets but is always looking to consider a person that brings something special to our group. The museum board is a working board, and as such takes on special projects and sees them through to completion. Aside from the board, there are volunteers at every position within the museum.

We are grateful for Henry Krotee and Jim Cameron who volunteer at our reception desk supporting our paid reception staff, greeting the many visitors that enter our premises. Virginia Sanders is a long-time volunteer that acts as the museum registrar. Ginny, along with the Collections Committee, are responsible for the artifacts contained in the museum and all of the documentation that accompanies them. Ginny works with a variety of volunteers such as her husband Lloyd, Chad Tragakis (PDCA) and C. John Sullivan (local historian) to keep our exhibits fresh and informative. Aside from the volunteer roles inside the museum, there are numerous volunteers working behind the scenes to make our special events a success. An example is Cindy Currier and Jeannie Vincenti who have volunteered to assist with the upcoming Carve & Candy children's Halloween event.

The R. Madison Mitchell Decoy shop entertains visitors through a variety of guest decoy carvers that agree to work in the decoy shop during weekends throughout the warmer months. John Currier (board member) and John Eichelberger (local carver) have acted as coordinators for these guest carvers and have graciously donated their time in the spirit of educating those who stop by to take in the experience.

The Canvasback magazine enjoys good relationships with many talented authors that voluntarily submit articles for publication. Special thanks to Chad Tragakis, Jim Trimble, Jim Carroll (board member), Michael Daley, Dan Thanh Dang (board member), Ronnie Adams and C. John Sullivan for providing articles that serve to further educate our readers. John Hughes (board member) and Ralph Hockman (board member) have taken on responsibility for the *Canvasback Naturalist* and *Shots from the Wild* features in every edition.

Infrastructure is paramount to any organization. The museum is grateful for the efforts of Scott Moody who single handedly provides information technology support from email to complex software used to track our collections and gift shop revenues. Scott also serves as our webmaster for the museum website. Volunteers Jim Carroll (board member) and Rodney Swam (board member) are daily visitors to the museum taking on various infrastructure projects from simple cleaning and painting to electrical work. As the museum takes on a museum expansion and a project to increase our interactive presentations, we have tapped Jeff Thompson, Clark Turner and Dudley Campbell for their guidance. John Popowski, David Walker, and Butch Wagoner assisted the repair of the band saw in the Mitchell Shop.

In spite of all of these key volunteers, the museum is always in search of additional resources to help guide us from where we are to where we need to go. If you feel that you have a desire to become part of a fast-moving non-profit organization, please do not hesitate to contact us. There is always room for one more!

Mike Tarquini
Board President

40th Annual

Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival



Canvasback
Sleeper Pair
by Charlie Pierce



Honorary Chairman
Charlie Pierce

April 29, 30 & May 1 • 2022

April 29

Exhibition Set-up & Carvers Reception at Museum

April 30 & May 1

Decoy & Wildlife Exhibition
New Havre de Grace Middle/High School

49th Annual

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of Historic Havre de Grace

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is proud to again be a featured stop on this year's Candlelight Tour. A self-guided tour of the numerous participating homes, churches, and museums that showcase the diverse character of our historic, charming, & decorated City.

Saturday, December 11th • 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm

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The Morris Coulter Family

By: Ronnie Adams

THE COULTERS **A Market Gunning Tradition**

Many Upper Bay gunning history aficionados and decoy collectors alike are unfamiliar with the Coulter Family. There's good reason for that; they preferred it that way. For generations, the Coulter Family were engaged in certain practices that necessitated operating in the shadows and being furtive if they were to remain successful and out of jeopardy. They were raised to be discrete, not make waves and stay low on the water.

Since the early 1800s the Coulters were Maryland waterfowl gunners, a family pursuit that would continue generations even until today. The first known gunner was Henry Coulter who was born about 1780, served in the war of 1812, lived in Annapolis, and was buried there circa 1843. While no direct accounts of Henry's waterfowl gunning are known, there is ample evidence that he pursued ducks in the early 19th century. Shortly before his death some of his equipment passed and is accounted for in a court record list of personal effects he sold to his son Leonidas Lawrence Ludlow Coulter, including "one double barrel gun for ducks" and "one double barrel bird gun."

More is known about Henry's son Leonidas. He was born in 1811 and according to period writing, he was considered the handsomest man in Annapolis. Leonidas was called Lon by friends and was well liked around Annapolis. He married the young and attractive Martha Elizabeth Boone, a debutante from an elite Maryland family and together they had many children.

Annapolis is on the Severn River and features numerous creeks and back bays providing Lon with plenty of opportunities to fish, oyster, and hunt ducks. He did this for market and in the early 19th Century ran an Annapolis oyster house at the northern span of the Spa Creek Bridge on Jeffery's Point. An 1855 newspaper piece entitled "Oysters for All" exclaimed how he could deliver oysters to Washington and the surrounding area within 4 hours via rail and horse and cart. It went on to say he also supplied superior terrapins and wildfowl in all varieties having leased one of the most superior sites in the county to procure them. It is unknown if he used decoys or pass shot waterfowl, but it is known that his son Morris gunned along with him.



Morris Coulter



Morris Coulter, Jr.



Howard Coulter

Lon eventually sold that business and opened a confectionary establishment out of his Annapolis Church Street store front home. During the state capital's legislative session, Lon operated a "quietly kept" backroom game of chance there at his store that in those days was referred to as "Fighting the Tiger." Many members from the Maryland General Assembly would come to play and said to often be relieved of their session's pay before departing. Lon hired help at the business and occasionally went to Baltimore, where his wife had family. He operated a business there selling local seasonal items such as fish, oysters, terrapin, and waterfowl and likely also market gunned out of Baltimore as well. Upon their return to Annapolis, Lon would once again take up his confectionary establishment.

One of Lon's sons, Morris Mathew James Coulter, was born in 1863 and was raised in both Annapolis and Baltimore. Having lived around those city's waters and being well versed in waterman's culture through his father, Morris Coulter became an expert at these activities himself. In 1886 he married Emma Bunce in Baltimore and worked there as a roofer over the next several years. In early 1891 they picked up stakes and settled down in Harford County's Edgewood area at the end of Rail Road Avenue. Like his father, Morris worked the rivers as a waterman and market hunted from waterfront property near the confluence of Otter Point Creek and the Bush River where he owned several shanties. By 1910 they had 8 children including Morris Jr. and Howard Leonidas Coulter.

Throughout Morris's life in Edgewood he worked as a commercial waterman who pound and seine netted migrating shad, herring, and rockfish for market and was active with other notable area waterman such as T. Wysong Saunders and William Litchfield. During the

waning years of that century these men banded together to press influence upon the state's area fishing policies to help protect and further their livelihoods.

Morris vigorously market gunned waterfowl during migrations and gunned over decoys at blinds using a finely made 8-gauge double barrel waterfowling piece. Many well respected and prominent area men night gunned and Morris was another clandestine outlaw in this regard who not only used a big gun, but ardently trapped ducks with submerged nets. In 1900, he commissioned a boat made at Sassafras River's Georgetown and operated it on the Bush River to further enhance his bag's tally and sometimes worked with friend William Litchfield. He also recruited the help of his children for these endeavors, most notably sons Morris Jr. and Howard.

The area's ducking clubs ruled the rivers with an iron hand during duck season and a boat just traveling down the river might be shot upon by them. Their influence ensured only blind shooting was allowed by law on the rivers so Morris gunned from his shore as well as those of others. He solicited area waterfront owners to allow him to illegally net ducks and operate his big gun off their shores, offering thirty cents on the dollar from his take and was called out publicly for this in 1910.

Morris had bills to pay and mouths to feed and the water was a substantial source of his income. Morris Jr. and Howard were raised as waterman and gunners as youngsters and grew up fishing and gunning alongside their father. This included netting and punt gunning ducks at night. In the deep evening, when conditions were right Morris would take out his punt gun skiff to places such as the

back of Otter Point Creek or Lauderick Creek to gun rafted night feeding ducks. He would station Howard over at a place like Flying Point to look out and later help, and then using his hand paddles approached the rafted birds in a stealth like manner. Once at a proper distance and position, he would knock the side of the boat with the paddles. The birds would raise their heads at attention, Morris would release the paddles and he would let his big gun roar. Since the paddles were tethered together, once released, they just drifted alongside the skiff's sides. Morris gathered the birds and returned. They would pack up and seal their kills in sugar barrels and load them onto a horse drawn wagon. It was said that a full wagon of birds was a good haul. They would meet a freight conductor accomplice along his route on the adjacent tracks who would then take the barrels to be sold at markets in New York. Upon his trip south, they would meet again, and Morris collected his earnings. Never letting anything go to waste, the family saved a lot of down and feathers from their ducks and geese and their mattresses and pillows were stuffed full with new ticking added over the decades.

During those years, the rivers were dominated by many out-of-town ducking clubs who found these activities to be an affront to their sport. They stridently attempted to curtail the area's illegal hunting and ironically, Morris sometimes worked as a guide on the Bush River for the Cadwalader Club. They caught wind of his clandestine activities and despite fervid attempts, could never locate his big gun and made passionate pleas to convince him to turn it over. Of course, he feigned ignorance. In the off-season, Morris would take the gun, grease it up thick, place it in muslin wrappings, and bury it in a hidden place until it was again needed.

Following the principles practiced by his father, Morris knew to keep inconspicuous. The wealthy clubs were known to send hired detectives to harass and even ransack a suspect's home in search of big guns and if found arrest them. This happened to Morris's friend William Litchfield.

Litchfield was a known night gunner who lived on the Gunpowder River and in March 1897 while he was away fishing, detectives working for a gunning club broke into his home, assaulted his wife, and seized his big gun. Litchfield was arrested once he returned. This was not an isolated incident but an ongoing campaign at the behest of the wealthy ducking clubs.

Local sentiment was usually for the gunner since most locals felt their homelands were being subjugated by wealthy out of towners who were gunning ducks at the expense of the resident waterman's livelihood. Many felt raids such as Litchfield's were an outrage and unconstitutional. It was stated in a newspaper piece ". . . men come here from out of state and kill ten ducks to a market gunner's one. They are not molested because they are men of means." A Havre de Grace game merchant stated that the understanding of the big gun was misrepresented by these wealthy men and these guns were infrequently employed and rarely successful. A wealthy sportsman in a sink box can kill over 100 ducks a day and cripple hundreds more in an outing, thereby causing much more harm to the industry than the big gunner. A jury eventually acquitted Litchfield.



*Morris Coulter's Punt Gun Skiff
Upper Bay Museum Collection*

According to Morris's youngest daughter the Cadwalader Club finally convinced him to turn over his big gun. She recalled when she was a little girl that two Baltimore sports came and took his big gun away. The club filled its barrel with cement and hung it over their clubhouse's fireplace but unbeknownst to them Morris was fairing much better bagging ducks with nets and was now concentrating on that practice. Morris continued pursuing waterfowl up until the 1930s and kept his night gun skiff. It was used later for things such as a rail bird poling in the marshes of Otter Point Creek and the Bush Declaration. Morris passed away in 1954 but the skiff remained with the family until its subsequent donation. It, along with many appurtenances are now in the collection of the North East Upper Bay Museum.

Morris' son Morris Jr. married, built a home on a portion of his father's Bush River property and gunned the river from there. As a teenager he worked as a locomotive fireman and was later in hired (1930) at Edgewood Arsenal at the power and heating plant. He gave up hunting and selling birds outside of the law for fear he would lose his job if caught.

He still gunned legally, including baiting ducks (legal until 1935) in Monks Creek and in blinds at Bush River's Perry Bar and Chilbury Point. He occasionally took the night gun skiff out after dark to market hunt, but not for ducks. Like his father before him, he also used it for night frogging. On summer evenings his daughter quietly paddled it out in the backwaters and expansive marshes of Otter Point Creek or the Bush Declaration and Morris Jr. would lay up across the bow hanging off the front armed with a light to snatch up bullfrogs by hand. They were taken home and kept fresh in a large tub of water placed in the basement until it was time to cook up their legs or sold at market to earn extra cash. They made quite a racket down there croaking all night and the women of the house became pretty livid about it all.

Morris Jr. also used the night skiff to gun railbirds and come September when they arrived he would pole it back in the Otter Point Creek or Bush Declaration marshes. His prized bird was the Bobolink, the main ingredient used in his favorite dish. For this, his mother would hollow out baking potatoes, then place the dressed Bobolink inside along with butter and seasonings, wrap it up, bake and serve.

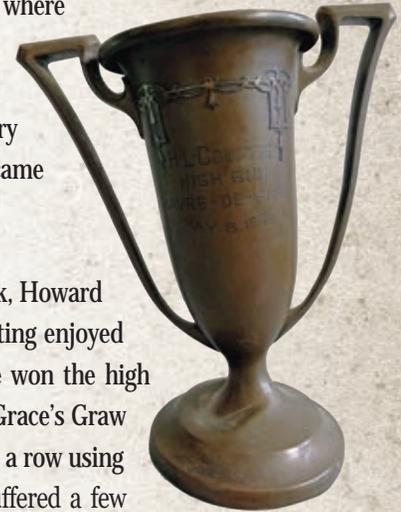
After sixth grade Morris' son Howard went to work fulltime alongside him. Like many area men, Howard's life was guided through plying the water in pursuit of the Upper Bay's bounty. He came to depend on that income to make ends meet and seized upon whatever situation the area's natural resource would present. That pursuit necessitated him not only to become a skillful fisherman and gunner, but also proficient at fashioning decoys and skirting the law.

Howard was a fairly large well-built man standing about 6 ft. tall and described by his family as being tough, quiet, and reserved, but still enjoyed reminiscing about his life growing up fishing, gunning and working on the railroad. He would help you in your times of need, but it was said you had better not cross him or he was through with you. He was very hardworking and often worked ten hours a day, seven days a week and was at the Pennsylvania Railroad for nearly 50 years retiring in 1963. Howard was friendly and had a good sense of humor. Once while out having a couple beers, someone asked

him if he still had live callers. Howard responded, "No, they drown." Dumfounded, the fellow asked, "How in the world can ducks drown?" Howard explained that he taught them to dive on command. One day while out gunning, a flock came in so he commanded "Dive" and they immediately went under. Howard further explained "Unfortunately I forgot to train them to come back up."

In 1917, Howard married notable decoy maker Lum Fletcher's niece, Beulah Bernice Fletcher. They lived in Havre de Grace and by the late 1920s had a daughter and three sons. In 1934 he and Beulah purchased 312 Lafayette Street, where they would live the rest of their lives. Of note, his neighbors were gunners and decoy makers Harry Moore and Dick Hipple who became good friends.

Having gunned since he could walk, Howard was a lethal shot and besides hunting enjoyed competition shooting. In 1926, he won the high gun competition cup at Havre de Grace's Graw race track by breaking 100 clays in a row using his pump gun. Although it has suffered a few bumps and has seen better days, that brass loving cup is still treasured by the family.



Dale Coulter Collection

Since Morris Sr. was still gunning when he moved to Havre de Grace, Howard had a boat built by childhood neighbor Ed Gantz and later commissioned Havre de Grace boat builder John Thompson to construct both a bushwhack boat and a small bateau. He would not only regularly fish and gun ducks during the season but actively night gunned birds to be sold on the black market. In fact, Howard operated as a night gunner into the 1950s.

In those days fisherman often baited areas for fish by casting corn out on the water to lure them into their nets. This also attracted waterfowl and on a calm night under the dim crescent moon light Howard would slip out and gun those night feeding birds. He didn't use a punt gun but instead an unplugged extension tube magazine equipped Winchester Model 12 pump 12-gauge shotgun. He also used a W.W. Greener

8-gauge double barrel shotgun. Howard said the birds looked like they were 5 feet tall out





Howard Marvin, Beulah & Howard Coulter

there the way they constantly dove and surfaced while feeding. They would work their way across the water celery beds about 100 yards in a line and then turn and work their way back. He quietly positioned the boat to catch them on their return and once in range, a knock with the gun stock on the boat gunnel got their heads raised and Howard would lay into them. Howard said that the flash of the first shot blinded him but he just kept firing and after it all cleared he'd pick up his carnage.

He also took live decoy callers he had raised into Monks Creek and gunned over them right up into the 1950s. He gunned over wooden lures at blinds on Chilbury Point and Perry Bar and often hired a person to help tender him. One time he was gunning at Chilbury Point with his W.W. Greener 8-gauge double barrel and the action was really hot and by the end of the day he not only came home with 94 canvasbacks but also had one terrible headache. He had a faithful Labrador retriever named King which was believed to be sometimes employed at his blinds. Besides blind shooting and night gunning Howard also body booted and bushwhacked on the Flats up until the early 1960s and was known to gun alongside Charlie McLhinny, Jack Hayes, and "Crabby" Armour.

*Howard Coulter's Gunning Bateau,
Pat Vincenti Collection*



Through many years of market gunning alongside his father Howard had come to know all the venues to sell ducks. Even during that time, there still existed a select black market for redheads and canvasbacks in certain city restaurants and Howard eagerly, but quietly, filled their pantry. Patrons in the know who had a taste for wild duck could go into these establishments and ask for the daily special by using a code such as requesting "Baked Chicken ala Edgewood."

For most of his life, Howard Coulter enjoyed fishing and continued gunning right up until 1964 when he went on his last hunt. He gunned with his family over at Oakington off Tydings' rock pile using 150 of his wooden lures. They had a spectacular shoot that day and it was a fitting end to cap off a lifelong seasoned gunner's career.

In his twilight years Howard relaxed and took it easy. In the mid-1960s and 70s he often hung around Pop Sampson's workshop and they chewed the fat and worked on their miniature decoys. Happy hour began at Pop's shop after 2 o'clock when they would have a couple of drinks and play some pool and unwind themselves for the rest of the afternoon. Like Pop, Howard sold many of his miniatures and half-size decoys to make extra pocket cash and it kept him from being idle during those years. Howard Leonidas Coulter lived to be 90 and passed away in 1986.



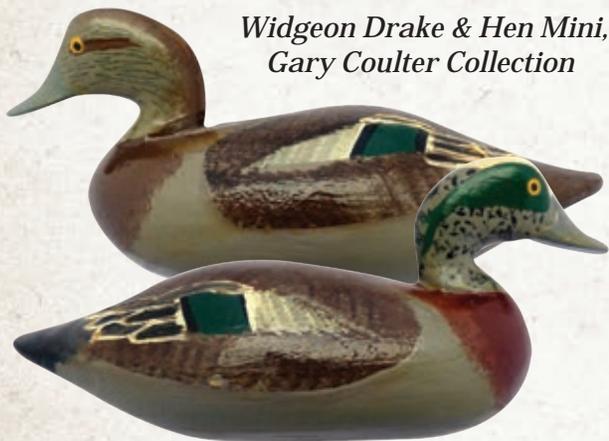
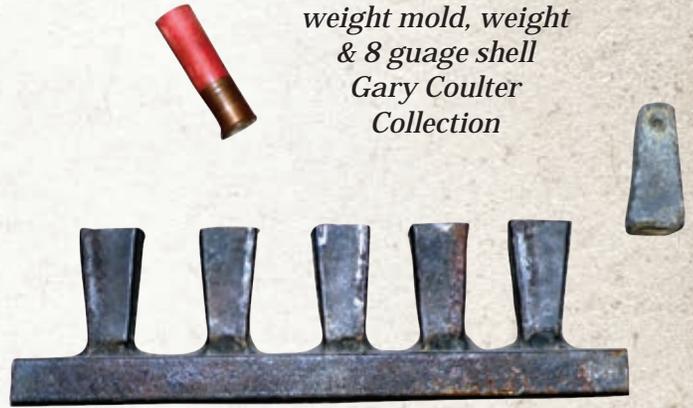
*Howard Coulter's
Night Skiff Paddles,
Gary Coulter
Collection*

It is uncertain if Howard was provided any tutelage but began making decoys out of necessity after he married and moved to Havre de Grace because he needed to outfit his hunting rig. He hand chopped earlier models but later took advantage of R. Madison Mitchell's duplicating lathe using Mitchell patterns to give his birds a Havre de Grace style. He used discarded cedar utility poles, old barn beams or any suitable wood he could scavenge. He mostly made gunning birds of the species that migrated through the area such as canvasbacks, bluebills, and redheads. His decoy production probably only totals a few hundred. It appears most of the birds Howard crafted were made for his own use but he may have given away or sold some.

His earlier hand-chopped bodies exhibited a Cecil County flavor. While his bodies turned by R. Madison Mitchell have rudimentary Havre de Grace School form, they are uniquely Howard's since he roughed these blanks out with a draw knife, spoke shave and finished them to his preferred final form. They are all well-crafted birds with rounded tops, chests and bottoms. He skillfully whittled heads out of white pine with notched delineated bills carved in relief, sometimes applying cut nostrils. The heads were finely finished from Howard's own pattern.

Leather thong or ring and staple were used for anchor line attachment, depending upon availability. Howard sand cast his own crude lead elongated ballasts secured with single nails at each end. He used his own designed steel flat top pyramidal anchor mold that could cast up to five weights at a time.

*Howard's anchor weight mold, weight & 8 gauge shell
Gary Coulter Collection*



*Widgeon Drake & Hen Mini,
Gary Coulter Collection*



*Bluebill Drake & Hen Half Size,
Lou Nolan Collection*

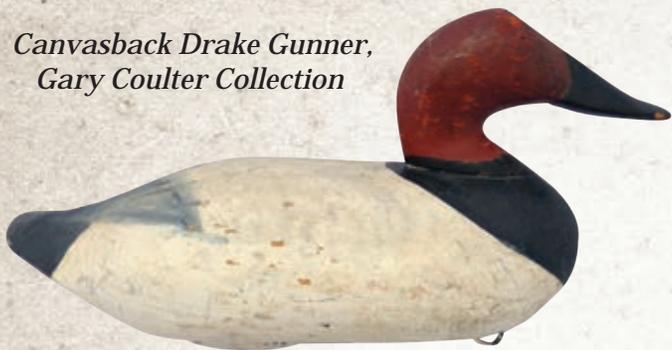


*Canada Goose Mini,
Gary Coulter Collection*



*Swan Mini,
Gary Coulter Collection*

*Canvasback Drake Gunner,
Gary Coulter Collection*



*Howard Coulter's
Brand*



Through years of experience Howard became a skillful painter and incorporated appropriate patterns and colors and embellished his birds with wings, wing bars and primaries. He often applied wet on wet primary feathers and a stippling paint technique for back texture and employed a dark strip up the backs of some birds. His style appears to have been influenced by Titbird Bauer and Jim Currier. The eyes were painted on, and Howard often marked his gunning birds by painting "HC" on the bottoms.

During the late 1950s through the early 1970s Howard mostly concentrated on making miniatures and half-size decoys, often at Pop Sampson's workshop, to keep himself busy, channel his artistic yearnings and to make a few extra dollars to help pad his pocket. Howard made a few dozen decoys a year. He kept them on his dining room table in case someone wanted to buy them. He often dated and signed them with H. L. Coulter. He placed a little more detail into these creations such as adding bill nails. He not only sold them out of his house but put them in Havre de Grace's hospital gift shop and at a couple stores in nearby Belair. These are delightfully well-made and painted birds (sometimes friend Clarence "Titbird" Bauer painted them). Any Howard Coulter decoy is not only a great addition to a collection but also a unique conversation piece that represents nearly one and one-half centuries of Coulter Family market gunning history.

Any Howard Coulter decoy is not only a great addition to a collection but also a unique conversation piece that represents nearly one and one-half centuries of Coulter Family market gunning history.

*Bluebill Drake Gunner,
John Currier Collection*



*Hand-chopped Redhead Gunner,
Ronnie Adams Collection*

*Hand-chopped Bluebill
Gunner, Ronnie Adams
Collection*



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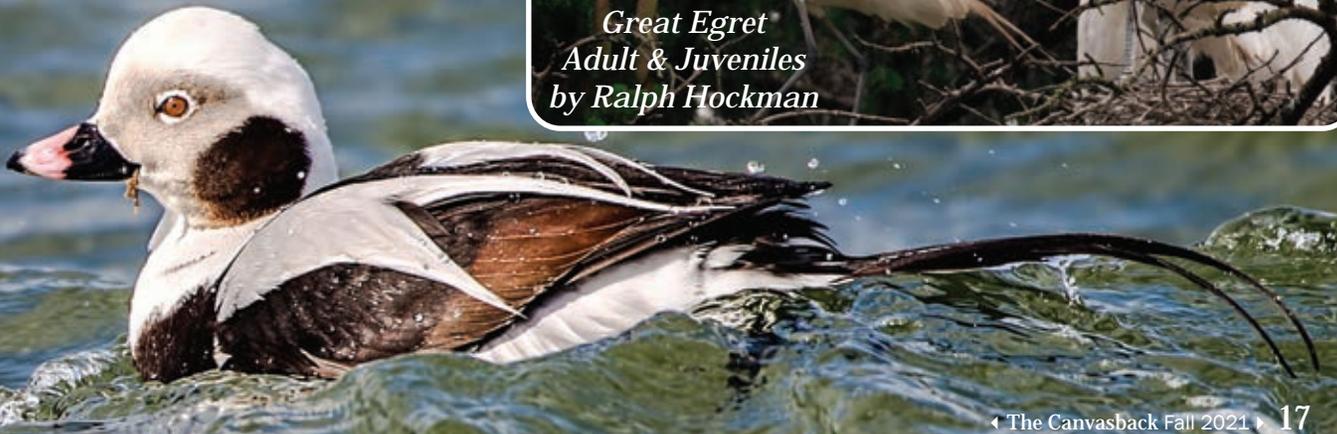
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*Scaup Drake
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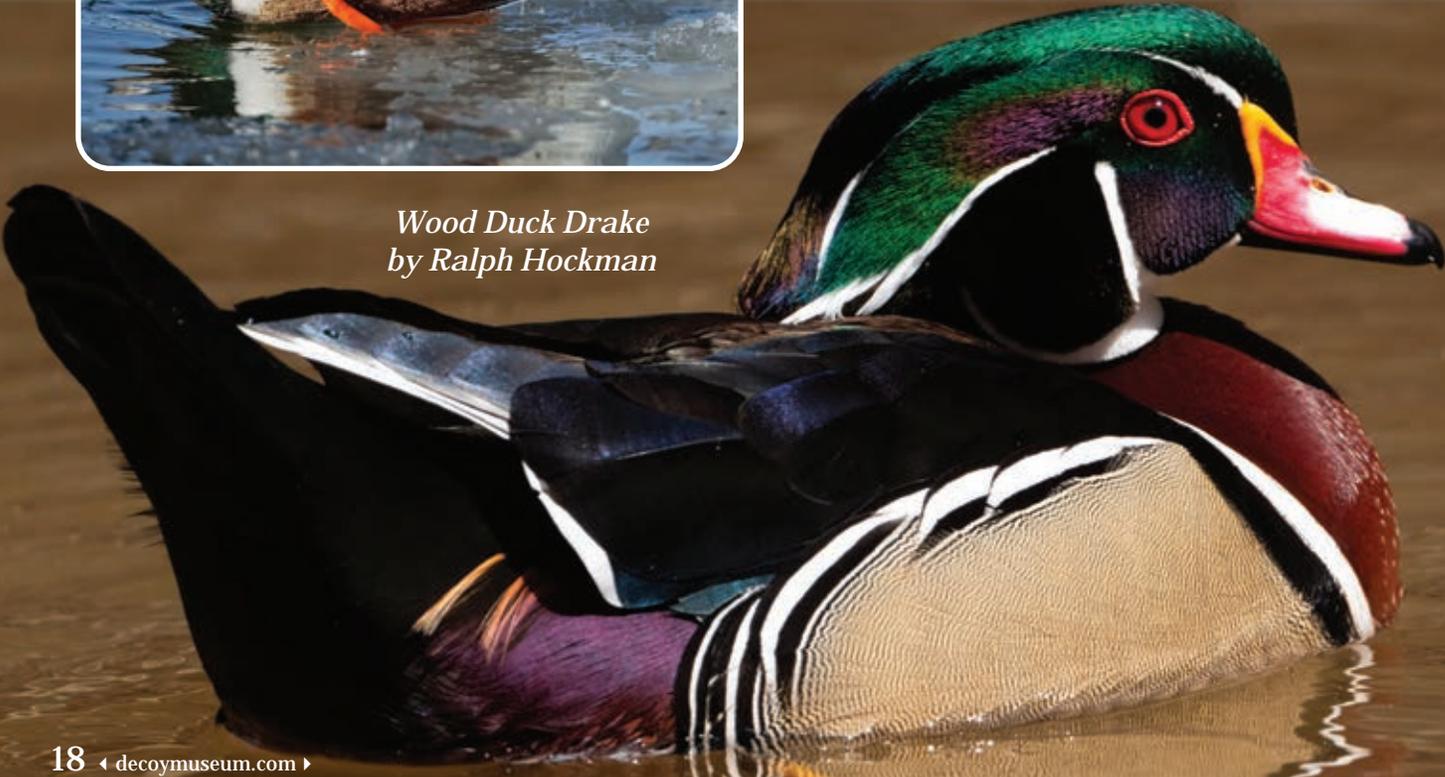


Roseate Spoonbill by Ralph Hockman



*Northern Shoveler Drake
by Steve Keller*

*Wood Duck Drake
by Ralph Hockman*



PDCA's "Bay Blackheads" Exhibit Opens

by Chad Tragakis

For the past 17 years, the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association has partnered with the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum to curate guest exhibits that showcase a rotating selection of decoys and artifacts from private collections that supplement the museum's permanent collection. On Sunday, September 12, members of the club gathered together with museum curator Ginny Sanders, her husband Lloyd, and some museum board members to install the latest exhibit in the series, "Bay Blackheads: A Celebration of Classic Bluebill Decoys from Maryland's Chesapeake Bay."

The display represents quite possibly the most comprehensive survey of bluebills from Maryland's Chesapeake Bay that has ever been assembled. From the Susquehanna Flats to Crisfield, every major gunning region is represented with at least one iconic piece.

Spanning a period of more than 100 years, this exhibit includes over 50 interpretations of the bluebill or "blackhead" gunning decoy, from every major gunning region on Maryland's Chesapeake Bay. While they are commonly known as bluebills, throughout the Chesapeake Bay, greater scaup (*Aythya marila*) and lesser scaup (*Aythya affinis*) have been known collectively as "blackheads" since at least the early nineteenth century. The nickname comes from the dark blue, almost black color of the ducks' prominent head. The exhibit features only drakes, which allows visitors to compare and contrast the different approaches to capturing the species in wood and paint, and to truly appreciate their striking, bold colors.

"Bay Blackheads" is the fourteenth guest exhibit that the PDCA has curated in conjunction with the museum. Bringing a rotating selection of top quality, rarely seen pieces to the public, these special displays have been extremely popular with Havre de Grace Decoy Museum visitors. Past exhibit themes have featured teal, high-heads, wood ducks, black ducks, branded decoys, coots, mallards, wing ducks, ruddy ducks, Potomac River decoys, buffleheads and redheads.

The club extends its thanks to Ginny, Lloyd and the museum board members from the Havre de Grace Decoy



PDCA Bluebill Exhibit in the Carvers Gallery (upstairs)

Museum for their partnership and tremendous support, and to the following members for loaning decoys and for their assistance with the exhibit installation: Steve Brown, David Farrow, Darrell Hagar, John Henry, Jim Lockard, Tom Mangels, George Meyer, Kevin Peel, Henry Stansbury, C. John Sullivan, Jr., and Chad Tragakis.

The Potomac Decoy Collectors Association is one of the most active collecting clubs in the country. Based in the Virginia/Maryland region, but with a national membership, the group is dedicated to preserving and celebrating decoys and their history, promoting public education and advancing scholarship. For more information on the PDCA, please visit the club's Facebook page. Bay Blackheads is scheduled to run through at least August 2022.



Construction of the PDCA Bluebill Exhibit



Ginny & Lloyd Sanders Registering the Decoys



2021 Decoy Museum Clay Shoot

Forty sporting clay enthusiasts descended upon the course at Schrader's Outdoors on Saturday, September 11 to compete in the Annual Sporting Clay Classic. Helping to raise funds to support the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, participants registered to shoot a 50-target main event. The competitor pool featured Lewis Class, Greenwing (youth) and Ladies, all competing for waterfowl decoy prizes. The competitors were split into decoy museum members and non-members.

The Top Score for decoy museum member was earned by **Mark Wells** of Milford, DE (48/50 targets). Mark was awarded a Bob & Charles Jobes (Havre de Grace, MD) Blue Goose. The winner for the non-member category was **Joe Phipps** of Cordova, MD (49/50 targets). Joe was awarded a Bob & Charles Jobes (Havre de Grace, MD) Snow Goose.

The Ladies Competition was won by **Karen Buckley** of Grasonville, MD (39/50 targets). **Orenda Love** of Edgewater, MD earned second place (29/50 targets). Karen was awarded a swan decoy. Orenda took home a snipe carving for her efforts.

The Greenwing (Youth) Division was won by **Ben Spurry** of Easton, MD (31/50 targets) earning him a miniature Canvasback decoy. Second place was awarded to **Thomas Kodala** of Annapolis, MD (10/50 targets). A miniature Wigeon decoy was won by Thomas. Both the Canvasback and Wigeon decoys were created and donated by carver Captain Bill Collins (Centreville, MD).

Shooters that yearned for additional competition participated in a side by side and pump gun skills test. **The Side-by-side Competition** was won by **Steve Lakey** (score of 25). Steve was awarded a teal decoy. **The Pump Gun Competition** was won by **Mike Machulski** of Elkton, MD (score of 27) and claimed a teal decoy prize.

We would like to thank our sponsors Bob Hockaday (Guilford & Co.), Gary Guyette (Guyette & Deeter) and Bob & Penny Haase for their generous support of this event.





THE KINGSTON PENITENTIARY:

Over a Century of Decoy Making

*This article was adapted from
Decoys of the Thousand Islands by
Jim Stewart and Larry Lunman
and has been reprinted with the kind
permission of the author.*

The Mason, Steven, and Peterborough Canoe Company factories are well known, but few people realize that a prolific and long-lasting decoy factory existed right on the banks of the St. Lawrence River – the Kingston Penitentiary. Over a century or so, prisoners at the Penitentiary turned out thousands of decoys. These decoys have been the source of much puzzlement to collectors. “Is this a Nichol, or isn’t it?” “This looks like a Chrysler, but it isn’t just right.”

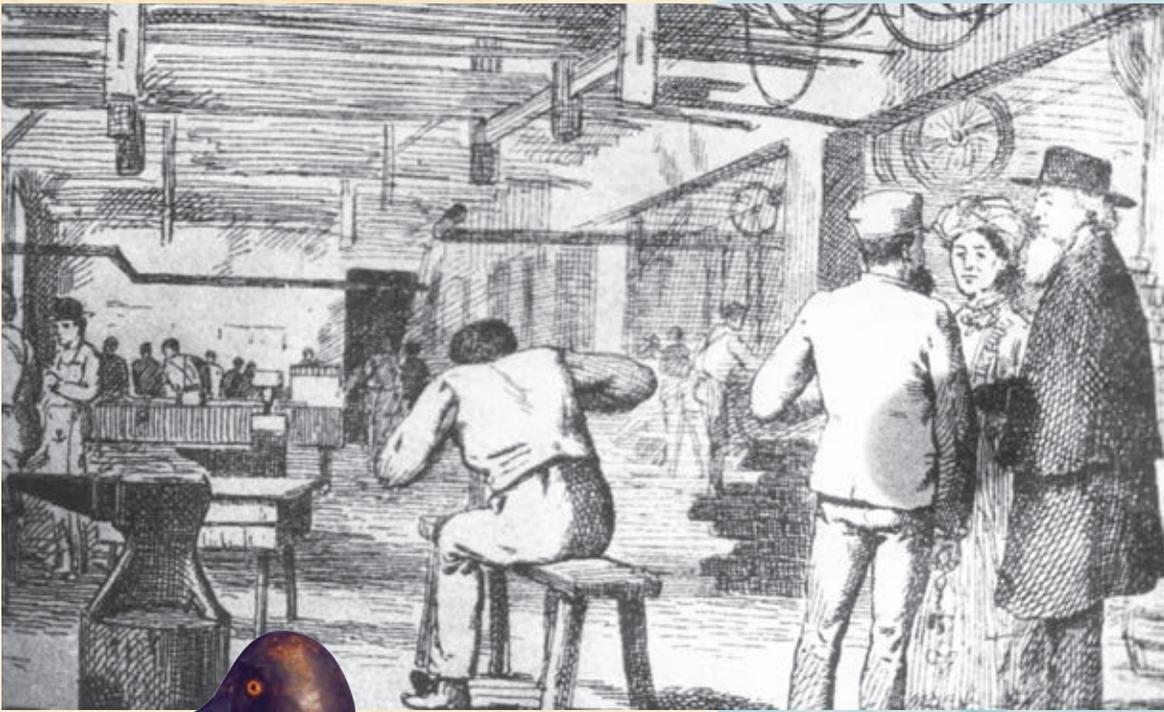
The Penitentiary had a carpenters’ shop since the institution first opened in the 1830s. It’s hard to reconstruct much about the decoy-making activity from the few records kept by the shop, but there are lots of “Pen” decoys and some can be clearly identified. Some of the anonymous carvers

were obviously novices; their decoys range from crude blocks to interesting folk art. Others were expert craftsmen. In some cases, the craftsman obviously had been in so long he had forgotten what a duck looked like – resulting in a unique style!

There are several peculiar characteristics common to many of the decoys. Some rigs were obviously made by several people, all using the same pattern but with differences in skill and subtlety of style. On some decoys, the heads appear to have been made by one person, the bodies by another! In most cases, decoys were provided as patterns and some copies are hard to tell from the originals (a rather ironic outcome, given the propensities of the makers).

Since a large number of inmates were involved over a long period of time under a variety of tutors, no coherent style developed. Perhaps that explains why few people, even at the Penitentiary, are aware of the extent of the carving. I personally have seen or have reliable information on six rigs made there from the late 1800s to the 1960s, each rig comprising from two dozen to over 100 decoys.

In 1946, when Jack Davidson returned from the war, he needed decoys. At the time, his father, Sid, the Deputy Warden of the Penitentiary, was trying to interest more inmates in working in the carpenters’ shop. The two needs came together, and Jack got 60 decoys – bluebills, goldeneyes, and blacks made in the Nichol style. These are often referred to as “the Warden’s decoys.”



The Kingston penitentiary carpenter's shop in the 1870s (from an etching in the Canadian Illustrated News, Sept. 25, 1875); courtesy of the Penitentiary Museum



Pair of goldeneyes; late 1890s; drake is a working repaint

Occasionally, the decoys were painted outside the Penitentiary, even sometimes by Davey Nichol! In 1955, Ron MacDonald and another Penitentiary employee commissioned the carpentry shop to make them 100 decoys (mallards, blacks, redheads, canvasbacks, goldeneyes, and

bluebills). They provided Nichol decoys as patterns, and later had the whole rig painted by Nichol. A casual observer could easily mistake them for the real thing – some of them are that good – and of course the authentic Nichol paint job adds to the impression.

Because of the many types, the long period over which they were made, and the very nature of their origins, it's difficult to give the collector much guidance in identifying "Pen" decoys. The somewhat informal arrangements that resulted in these decoys were sanctioned over the years by the Penitentiary administration. However, by the 1960s the practice was stopped.

The "Provincial Penitentiary of the Province of Upper Canada" opened on June 1, 1835 and was officially closed on September 30, 2013. It is now open to the public as part of the St. Lawrence Parks Commission.



A Riddle, Wrapped in a Mystery, Inside an Enigma: THE KINGSTON PENITENTIARY DECOYS

by Larry Lunman

This article originally appeared in the September-October 2005 issue of Hunting & Fishing Collectibles and has been reprinted with the kind permission of the author and Stan Van Etten, publisher. Photos by Larry Lunman unless otherwise credited.

I have to admit that I would find a mint Davey Nichol (1859–1949) or Chauncey Wheeler (1862–1937) decoy very appealing; however, some of my favorite decoys are those old blocks that have lured countless waterfowl into Sunday dinner range. Shot holes and battle scars frequently add to their charm, especially when enough original paint remains to give an accurate picture of how the carver perceived his prey.

One problem with these ancient relics is the lack of proper identification. Quite often after a lifetime of serving multiple owners, the current custodians are unable to provide accurate information as to when and where the decoy was created. Equally perplexing is their concept of who the carver was. A high percentage of the time ownership simply dictated that a deceased family member carved these old decoys.

On several occasions I have encountered rig owners that were 100% certain that their (a) father, (b) uncle, or (c) grandfather whittled these lures decades ago; they will proudly point to his name or initials carved, branded, or painted on the decoy bottoms. Yet in each instance the actual maker was a prominent local

carver who had passed away 50 or more years earlier and his work was easily identified by competent collectors.

Recently, I discovered on eBay a “Nova Scotia decoy” allegedly made in the “early 1900s” with the name, “Lunman,” crudely scratched on the bottom. “When I examined the photos, the decoy turned out to be a hen bluebill I had carved in the early 1960s when I lived in Brockville, Ontario. Thus, the seller’s information missed the mark by 60 years and 3 provinces.

Therefore, I have learned to tread carefully when it comes to identifying old decoys, especially those made many years ago. Such is the case with the century-old

Kingston Penitentiary decoys; and in this instance I was partially to blame for their misidentification. Now, I will attempt to rectify this error, and in this article I will present my evidence and let the reader come to his or her own conclusion.

Many years ago, when I was a novice collector, I was shown an exceptional hen bluebill decoy with a great deal of carving detail. This decoy had been found in Kingston, Ontario; and my first impression was that it had been carved by Buck Crawford (1857-1934) or a member of the Nichol family of Smith Falls, Ontario.

Rig mates: bluebill drake and hen (ca. late 1890s)



Carpentry Shop (ca. 1953) with Kingston Penitentiary Officer Don Flynn

*Hen golden-eye, early 1900s;
branded "H. Harold"*



"H. Harold" brand found on golden-eye decoys

At the 1979 Clayton, NY Decoy and Wildlife Art Show, Sid Fawcett of Kingston had two hen goldeneyes by the same unknown maker that also displayed extensive carving. He had discovered these decoys in a Wolfe Island (a large island at eastern end of Lake Ontario between Cape Vincent, NY and Kingston, ON) rig. Two years later one of these decoys was featured on page 16 of his 1981 booklet, *The History of Wolfe Island Decoys by Carvers Past and Present*. This decoy was shown under the title: "Some unknowns we would like to know more about."

In 1982, another nearly identical hen goldeneye appeared in Bernie Gates's *Ontario Decoys*. This decoy shown on page 125 was attributed to William McLaren (1880-1932) of Perth, Ontario. A second photo shows a brand found on the decoy with the caption, "A brand found on some of McLaren's birds."

At the time, I wondered why a man would create such exceptional decoys and only brand some of them. Equally puzzling was the brand itself: a "C" with a ">" running horizontally through the "C". I could not see how this brand could represent the name, "William," or "McLaren," or both. I felt that this brand was either that of a previous owner or someone other than McLaren. Indeed, I wondered if it was the maker's mark at all.

In 1990 when my co-author, Jim Stewart, and I were working on *Decoys of the Thousand Islands*, I acquired a drake goldeneye in Kingston that had

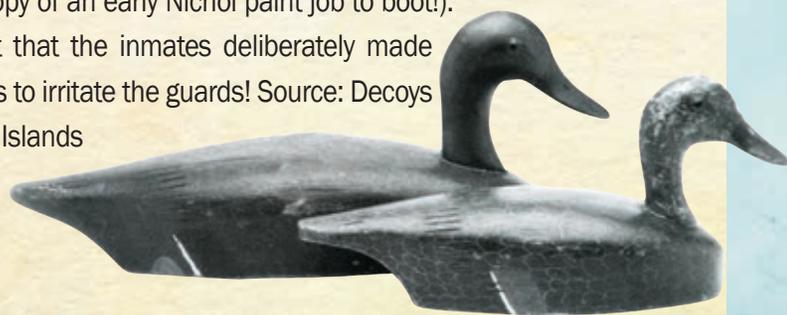
been taken down to the natural wood. I also borrowed an over-painted hen goldeneye with detailed carving by the same maker that was purchased at a Kingston estate auction.

At that time Jim was working on his Harry "Hank" Stratford (1890–1967) article. He had been told by a relative of Stratford that Hank had a rig of decoys similar to the finely detailed decoy I had borrowed, and it was implied that the rig (now unfortunately lost) was carved by Hank. I had no doubt that the two goldeneyes were made by the same hand. In this respect I was correct; unfortunately, as I was to discover later, the hand didn't belong to Hank Stratford. However, at the time, since many of these carvings (smooth or with wing and feather detail) were found in and around Kingston, it was felt that Stratford and not McLaren was the maker.

Shortly after the publication of *Decoys of the Thousand Islands*, I was shown a group of decoys that had been purchased directly from Hank Stratford. It was obvious that the two decoys that I had obtained were of a much older vintage, and it was apparent that Stratford had created his blocks based on their design. The heads on Hank's decoys had a smooth, pleasing roundness that was lacking in the more angular heads of the older models.

From 1992-1997, I discovered and examined several more of these turn-of-the-century decoys, and I also had the good fortune to acquire two hen bluebills with detailed carving and decent working repaint. In each case the decoy's origin was traced to the city of Kingston.

So-called "snake-head" decoys show up frequently in the Kingston area. They were made in the Penitentiary in the 1930s and 1940s. The carver had his own idea of what a duck looks like, but the decoys have their own folksy charm (and a faithful copy of an early Nichol paint job to boot!). One story has it that the inmates deliberately made these caricatures to irritate the guards! Source: *Decoys of the Thousand Islands*



"Snake-head" black duck and teal (ca. 1930s-1940s)



Close-up of individual feathers carved on hen bluebill



Close-up of texturing applied to hen goldeneye

At this point I was sure that neither Stratford nor McLaren had carved these unusual examples of floating art. Unfortunately, the identity of the actual carver remained unknown. Of the decoys I had examined, whether they were repainted, original paint, smooth or textured, it was apparent that the bodies of these bluebills and goldeneyes were formed from the same pattern. Each decoy's head possessed identical, but distinctive, head and bill detail with high quality glass eyes set in white lead. This trait is often found in area decoys, circa 1900.

The bottoms of these decoys were particularly interesting even though they came from different sources. Some had been branded or marked while others lacked any means of identification, and yet they shared many identical characteristics. Each one showed evidence of being balanced by the same size swing weight (long since removed).

A 1/16-inch groove, 2-inches wide ran across the center portion of the decoy bottom and each end was punctuated by 2 holes created by the "U" nails used to hold the weight in place. The head screw hole of each body was originally plugged with a cork, and in front of the cork were 3 more small nail holes. One pair was obviously created by a single "U" nail that was used to attach the decoy string. The third nail hole was usually found between the "U" nail holes and the cork. The area around this hole was slightly depressed; yet, there was nothing to indicate its purpose.

Finally, one phone call from a fellow collector was instrumental in shedding a great deal of light on these unusual creations. He was interested in some decoys that I owned, and he wondered if I would be interested in trading for some recently acquired "penitentiary decoys". In this manner I came into possession of a small rig of eleven bluebills with wing carving and texturing, plus one smooth-bodied hen goldeneye. All were identical to the previously mentioned Stratford/McLaren decoys.

This was an exciting acquisition as these were the first bluebills in original paint that I had come across, and nearly all of them retained their original swing weight. The rig of two drakes and nine hens also showed some variety in head positioning. One low-head hen had a hole drilled through the tail when it was made,

and I can only assume this was done for the purpose of attaching a jerk string to create movement on bluebird days. Later, I learned that the attached swing weights had been made in the Penitentiary.

When I asked my trading partner why he referred to the rig as "penitentiary decoys", he replied that he had recently bought them from an acquaintance who had purchased them in the 1940s, used them occasionally, and then stored them in his barn for over six decades. This gentleman told him that shortly after he came into possession of his flock, he took them to show Lloyd Nichol. When he walked into Lloyd's shop with his basket of decoys, Lloyd's first words were, "Where'd you get the penitentiary decoys?"



Bluebill hen and drake ready for the hunt



Underside of decoy showing line left by swing-weight and original nail used to attach leather line-tie tab



Close-up of swing-weights made in penitentiary

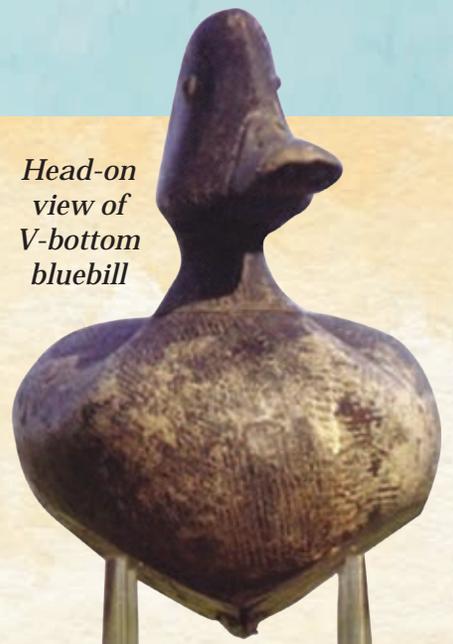
Lloyd was the son of the legendary Ontario carver, D. W. "Davey" Nichol. At that time, he operated a taxidermy and gun shop on the outskirts of Smith Falls, Ontario. In addition to his gun repair and taxidermy, Lloyd took orders for his father's decoys and handled requests by other carvers who wanted his father to paint their blocks. Some of these requests came from Kingston and the surrounding area, and one of their customers was the Kingston Penitentiary. The "Pen" frequently sent unpainted decoys fashioned by inmates to be completed by Davey Nichol. Davey also provided them with some of his renditions to use as models.

This reference to the Penitentiary was important. Within the last year I had purchased a hen goldeneye with detailed wing carving. This decoy had come from the estate of a gentleman who had served as a doctor in the Kingston area penal system. And of the decoys I had examined previously, there had been two occasions where the decoys had originated with family members who, generations earlier, had been guards at the Kingston Penitentiary.

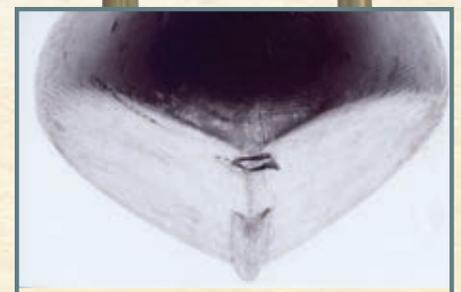
It was becoming quite apparent that there was a connection between these decoys and the Penitentiary. When I leafed through Decoys of the Thousand Islands to reread my co-author's article on decoy making at the Penitentiary, I was amazed at what I discovered. There on page 21 was a half-page color photograph of a pair of V-bottom bluebills made in the late 1800s. With the exception of the unusual bottom (and repaint) these bluebills were identical to the smooth decoys I found years earlier. Also, the heads and overall body patterns were a perfect match for the textured decoys Lloyd Nichol had identified as "Pen" decoys.

The close-up photo of the V-bottom on the same page also provided a clue as to the origin of the single nail hole centered in a slight depression. It was obvious that the original line-tie was a leather tab held in place by a single nail. As I read Jim Stewart's article and his accompanying piece on Guy Blomeley (1915-1995), it was

clear that the information Guy provided was quite accurate; I was now certain that the Stratford/McLaren decoys had in fact had their beginnings behind the imposing walls of the Kingston Penitentiary.



Head-on view of V-bottom bluebill



V-bottom showing inletting of triangular lead weight

Fine old V-bottom penitentiary decoys (ca. late 1800s)



Over the last five years I've had the opportunity to view and examine another twenty of these unique decoys. Most of these were in a rig of eight hen goldeneyes and three blacks (now retired from active duty) that belonged to a Kingston area family for at least four generations. The present owner (who wishes to remain anonymous) inherited them from his father, Doug. Doug also had acquired this rig from his dad. When I interviewed Doug several years ago, he recalled that his father obtained the decoys from an uncle, Hugh Harold, whose "H. Harold" brand adorns the bottoms of the goldeneye decoys. Doug, who started hunting ducks in the late 1930s, was certain that this rig, which originally numbered a dozen goldeneyes and five or six black ducks, was made around the turn of the century. He felt it was possible that the unbranded black ducks may have come from a source other than Hugh Harold.

Doug also recalled that when he hunted an area north of Kingston, Hank Stratford often frequented the same marsh; and it was not unusual for the two of them to call it a day at the same time. Doug recalled that they would sit on the dock, eat their

respective lunches, and discuss the day's shooting. When I asked him if any of Stratford's decoys were like his textured ones, he replied, "Look, Larry, I hunted that marsh with my decoys on a regular basis, and I would have certainly noticed if Hank had decoys like mine."

The other nine decoys that I examined included a variation of the V-bottom, repainted textured bluebills, smooth flat-bottomed decoys (one of which was a drake ringbill), and three goldeneyes with unusual glass eyes. In each case, the decoys were found in the city of Kingston and were produced in the "Pen."

The Kingston Penitentiary located at 555 King St. West is Canada's only waterfront penal institution. Designed by William Powers of Auburn and partially built with convict labor, the "Pen" opened its doors in 1835. From its inception, the Penitentiary had a carpenter's shop; later, a variety of other shops evolved to assist in training and rehabilitating inmates. Shop work also provided the inmates with an opportunity to earn some pocket money.



Close-up of black duck head; note reverse feathering scratched into paint as it dried



Undersides of bug-eyed and V-bottom decoys; note identical balance weights



Close-up of an original leather line-tie tab

Perhaps the finest examples of "Pen" decoys are old V-bottom bluebills with square nails on the anchor leathers that would place them in the late 1800s. They are well constructed and uniformly carved, with a consistent style that makes it likely that the carver had made many of them. The weight is neatly set into the bottom of the "V", making them unusually stable in the rough water of Lake Ontario in the late fall. *Source: Decoys of the Thousand Islands*

When I visited the Penitentiary Museum recently, the director, David St. Onge, showed me a variety of exceptional pieces that had been fashioned in the various shops. These creations included fine furniture and large paintings; however, two other items captured my attention. One was a photo of a violin made in 1950, and the other was a hobbyhorse made for a guard's daughter in 1860.

Unfortunately, with the few records available, there is very little in the way of documentation to determine who actually created a specific piece. When I examined the Penitentiary records from 1895-1912 and the corresponding census records, it was clear there was no shortage of skilled craftsmen among the incarcerated. However, even though the records revealed there were more than a few potential decoy carvers to be found among the carpenters and cabinetmakers serving time, nothing definite materialized from this search.



Rare ringbill (ring-necked) drake in excellent original paint; early 1900s.



Goldeneye rig mates; note differences in carving style suggesting two different carvers



Pretty good copies of Nichol black ducks made at the Pen (ca. 1955)

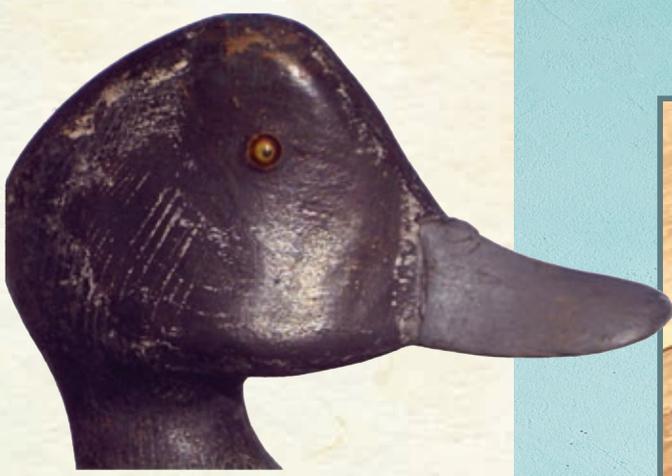
Likewise, an examination of prisoner surnames also failed to uncover anyone with a connection to known decoy makers.

One thing is certain, though! Decoys were made in the Kingston Penitentiary and a great deal of information has been discovered as to when this practice took place. Jim Stewart in his excellent article on the Kingston Penitentiary decoys in *Decoys of The Thousand Islands* states that decoys were “made there from the late 1880s to the 1960s.”

Many of the first Penitentiary rigs saw service on nearby Wolfe Island. This large 21-mile-long island is located at the eastern end of Lake Ontario where the lake flows into the St. Lawrence River. The island’s numerous sheltered bays and abundant aquatic vegetation created a natural staging area for countless thousands of migrating waterfowl. Thanks to the inmates’ production of decoys, island residents, duck-hunting clubs, Penitentiary employees, and other local sportsmen had had access to inexpensive, fully rigged, gunning decoys that were ideally suited for big water hunting.

The earliest documented “Pen” decoys were the V-bottoms whose patterns were also used to develop three flat bottom variations. Another early decoy that was quite likely made during the same time period was the flat-bottom “bug-eyed” models.

V-bottom decoys first appeared in the late 1800s. Their distinctive bottom was created in an attempt to make the blocks self-righting, thus eliminating the need to row out every time a decoy flipped over in rough water. A strip of triangular lead weight was inlet along the bottom of the decoy to balance it fore and aft and assist in the self-righting process. Square nails are occasionally found holding the lead and leather anchor line tab in place. Top quality glass eyes were used to finish the decoy head, and occasionally one may discover a specimen with an unusual “bug-eyed” appearance. These eyes are larger versions of the eyes found on early Heddon fishing lures.



Closeup of V-bottomed bluebill drake head

These decoys, like the other variations, appear to have been made by two or more individuals. Some carvings appear less refined than others; however, it is possible these differences represent an early phase on the learning curve for one unknown carver. In testing the floating qualities of these blocks, I was surprised at their stability in relatively calm waters. In larger waves they rolled a good deal and often failed to self-right quickly, but this may have been the result of testing in shallow water.

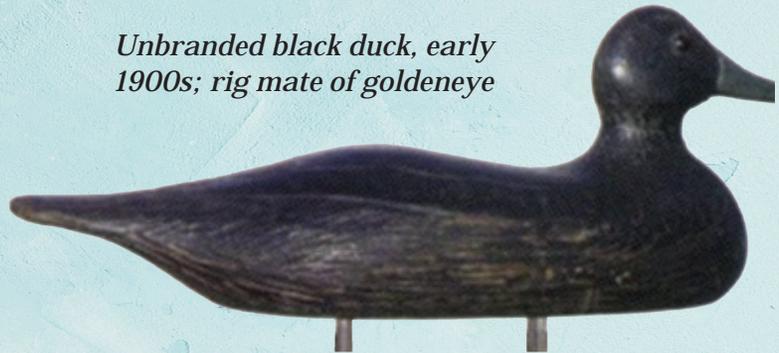
The flat bottom decoys were made from the same basic patterns as the V-bottoms but were a good inch less in depth. The elimination of the V-bottom created a lighter more compact block, and the addition of the swing weights provided excellent stability and balance. Three variations of this style have been found and they differ only in the amount of carving and texturing added by their creator.

Smooth flat-bottom decoys are completely smooth, with the exception of bill carving detail, and they are usually found with high quality glass eyes. A few tack-eye models have been discovered. Moderately-textured flat-bottom decoys have incised wing outlines and texturing found on both sides of the body, on the rump and tail, and between the wing outlines. All heads have the same quality glass eyes and bill carving detail that occurs on the smooth models. Flat-bottom decoys with detailed carving and texturing have raised wings with several feathers and 13-15 smaller feathers carved along each side of back



Close-up of carving detail on hen bluebill

Unbranded black duck, early 1900s; rig mate of goldeneye



Redhead drake on snow; note feathering detail



where it flows into the wing area. Like the moderately-textured decoys, a 45-degree parting tool was used to texture the wings, sides, rump, tail and individual feathers. The same tool was also used to texture the back of the decoy heads. The heads of these lures also display very fine bill carving and high-grade glass eyes. On a few bills, where the lower mandible meets the head, a small version of the Buck Crawford "grin" can be

found. This is just one of several features that makes you wonder if Crawford was inspired by the unknown carver, or if it was the other way around.

The bug-eyed decoys lack the typical swing weight usually found on Penitentiary decoys with flat bottoms. Instead, they are balanced with the same triangular weights found on the vintage V-bottom blocks.



Close-up of head of hen bluebill; "Crawford grin" just visible

However, their main identifying feature is their large bulbous "Heddon" style glass eyes. Variations in craftsmanship again suggest that more than one person was involved in their production.

Nearly all of the lures made by our anonymous makers have been found in and around the Kingston area, and on more than one occasion they have been attributed incorrectly. Many, especially those with extra detail, are found with a variety of brands and symbols carved or burned into their bottoms that indicate ownership and not craftsmanship. To date I have discovered three different surnames, two sets of initials, and two different symbols. Of the initials and surnames two came from rigs passed down by men who generations earlier had been guards at the Penitentiary.

One unusual stylistic brand was found on the bottom of a decoy that came from the estate of a doctor for the Kingston and area prison system. The second symbol – a "C" with a ">" running through it – is identical to the military symbol used to represent the Canadian Ordnance Depot.

Close-up of hen goldeneye; note unusual "Heddon-style" bug eyes



An unusual brand found on the prison doctor's decoy



Underside of hen goldeneye (above) with owner's mark – a "C" with ">" running through it (below). Perhaps a brand for the Canadian Ordnance Depot (ca. 1880-1920)



This insignia was in use from the 1880s to the 1920s and was used to mark a wide variety of items including saddles. With both Fort Henry and the Royal Military College located in Kingston, it is quite possible this brand identified decoys owned by hunters connected to the military during that time period. It is also possible this symbol was used by Commanding Officer of the Princess of Wales' Own Regiment, William St. Pierre Hughes. This former Inspector and Superintendent of Penitentiaries joined the Penitentiary staff as a Warden's Clerk in 1893 and was appointed Chief Keeper and Clerk of Industries in 1895.

Unfortunately, with the passage of so much time it is unlikely that we will ever discover the identity of the individual or persons who labored long and hard to create such wonderful examples of waterfowl sculpture. Today I am certain these decoys were carved in the City of Kingston behind the daunting walls of Canada's waterfront Penitentiary. How certain am I? If this article were a poker hand, I would be betting "all in!"

More information regarding Kingston Penitentiary decoys can be found in the book: Decoys of The Thousand Islands by Jim Stewart and Larry Lunman. Readers wishing to contact Mr. Lunman may do so via email at ironknees@sympatico.ca



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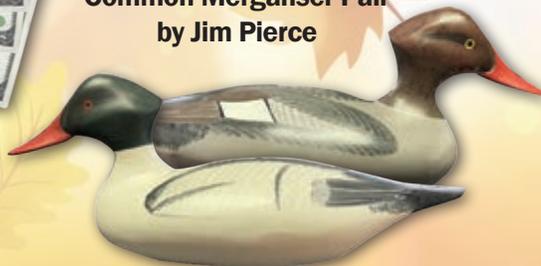
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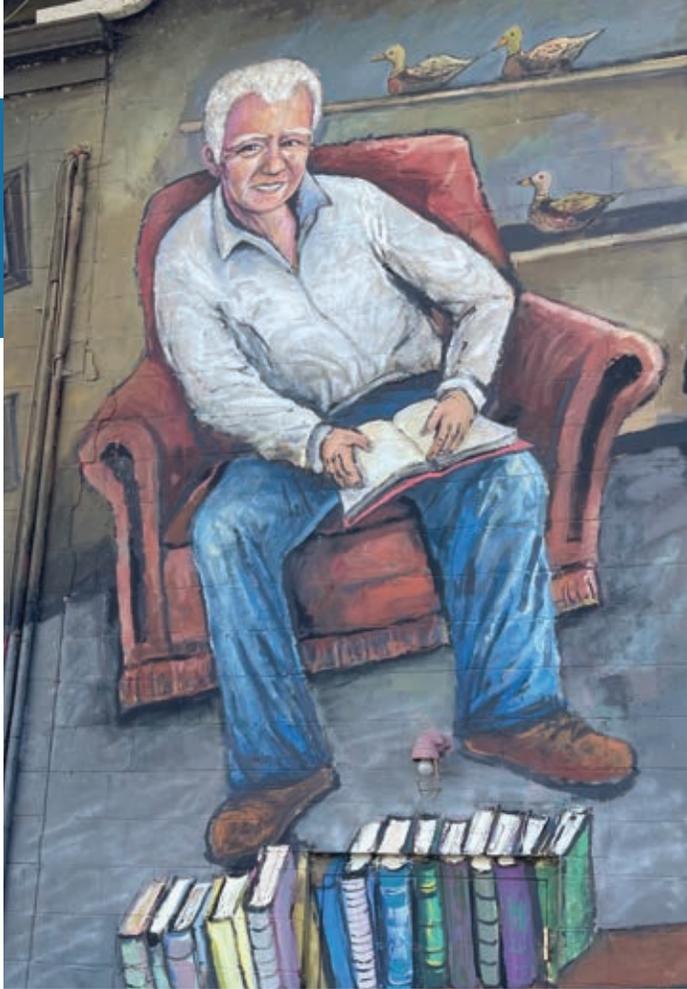
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Allen J. Fair

... a well-deserved tribute

Artwork by Ezra Berger

In 1952, Allen married, and by the time he was 25, had five children as well as five jobs: mail delivery, cleaning the church, hauling appliances, rehabbing buildings for apartments, and a moving business. Today at 87 years young, he is still working every day selling real-estate, promoting his beloved Havre de Grace, and overseeing numerous residential and commercial rental units that he owns ... with no signs of slowing down.

In 1981, Allen along with Mitchell Shank, Donald Asher and Jimmy Pierce founded the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. They set their sights on the rehabilitation of a rundown boiler plant that once served the former Bayou Hotel. It was felt that there was no more appropriate location (located at the head of the Chesapeake Bay overlooking the Susquehanna Flats) to feature a museum dedicated to the preservation of the historical and cultural legacy of waterfowling and decoy making on the Chesapeake Bay. They organized an annual decoy & wildlife art festival to raise funds in order to make their dream of a museum a reality. Finally, in 1986, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum opened its doors to the public. In 2021, the museum celebrates its 35th anniversary.

It was 1946, when a young Allen Fair, just 12 years old, moved to Havre de Grace with his parents and brother, Don. His parents relocated to take a job at “The Graw” thoroughbred racetrack. The racetrack would also serve as Allen’s first job, walking horses when he was 15 years old. From that day, a young and ambitious Allen never slowed down.



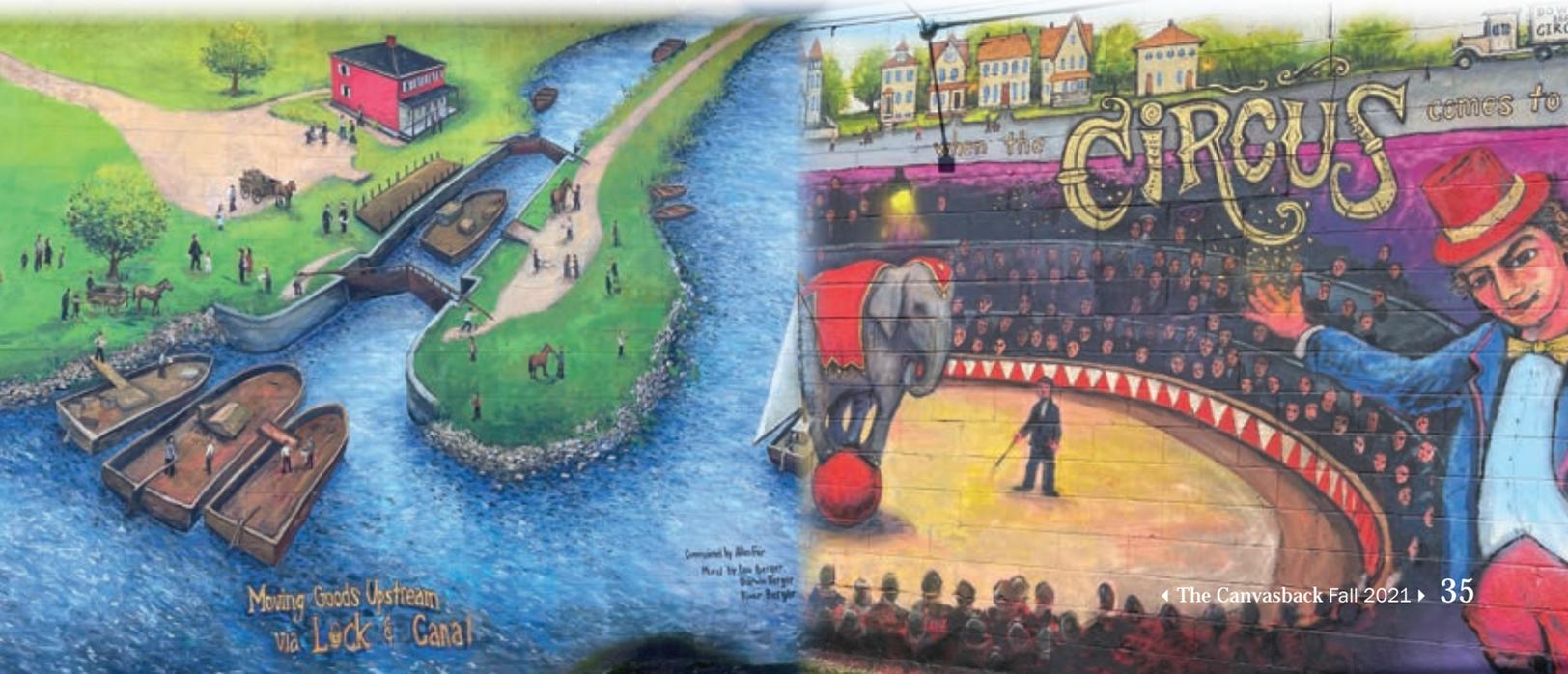
Allen accepts the Harford Living Treasure Award in 2021 at the Decoy Museum from Harford County Council President Pat Vincenti



Allen Fair is well known for his philanthropy throughout the City of Havre de Grace. He provided significant financial support for the Decoy and Maritime Museums, Havre de Grace Patriot Program, the Havre de Grace Jaycees Auctions, Chamber of Commerce Events, and is currently funding Outdoor Mural Projects at Graw Alley, located on the site of the future Harmer's Town Art Center. Allen was recognized as a Harford Living Treasure in 2020 by Harford County Government.

Harmer's Town Art Center will be a first of its kind in the region arts complex. While the complex is still in development, it is fully underway in research, planning, design, and initial implementation of property renovation. A nonprofit organization, Harmer's Town Art Center, Inc. has been formed to manage and oversee the vision and the complex. It is the mission of that organization to ensure Harmer's Town Art Center develops into and remains a safe, welcoming, and diverse environment that offers equal opportunity for artists and visitors of all backgrounds and walks of life. Harmer's Town Art Center will be a vibrant hub of creativity that will make visitors out of artists and artists out of visitors.

After serving as a Board member of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum since its inception, Allen Fair has elected to step down in order to focus his full attention to the Harmer's Town Project. We are extremely grateful for his vision and support over his forty-year association with the Decoy Museum Board and we wish him nothing but the best as he pursues yet another one of his passions.



CANVASBACK DUCK

Aythya valisineria

Aythya - Water Duck/Divers

Vallisneria americana -
Wild Celery



Photo by Scott Moody

CANVASBACK NATURALIST

Each edition will feature a natural history topic relating to the mission of the museum. The author, **John Hughes** is a retired science teacher from the John Carroll School (1972-2015). His subject areas included Chesapeake Bay Studies, Ecology (freshwater and marine) and Environmental Science. As a naturalist, John helped to develop natural history programs for a myriad of environmental organizations and schools. As a field educator and canoe guide, he led trips throughout the Eastern United States (especially the Southeast), Central America and the Caribbean. He presently serves as a member of the Museum's Board.

Diving ducks are a category of waterfowl which fall under the grouping known as "pochards." For our purpose, we will consider them to be Canvasbacks, Redheads, Greater and Lesser Scaup, and Ring-necked Ducks. They are closely related to the puddle or dabbling ducks such as Mallards, Black Ducks, Northern Shovelers, etc., from a taxonomical viewpoint, but differ in a variety of observable ways.



Photo by Steve Keller

Divers spend time underwater swimming to obtain food and escape predators. As a result, their feet have evolved to a very posterior body position giving them advantage in the water but making them poor walkers on the land. Whereas dabblers are excellent walkers on land grazing through grain fields, divers have difficulty. It also means that they take off from the water less as the vaulting of a puddle duck and more like a rumbling down the runway of a commercial jet. (Wing design differences also account for takeoff differences).

Diving ducks are also much faster and more dynamic fliers than puddle ducks. Canvasbacks, for example, have been clocked at over 70 miles per hour. Other observable differences of divers to puddlers are that Divers have larger, more powerful feet, longer toes, a lack of pronounced speculum pattern, and generally have iridescent head coloration. Eyes are red, yellow, or white specific to species.

Divers are considered more open water species than puddle ducks but there is much overlap between them. Divers have long seasonal migrations between wintering and nesting grounds. These movements lead them to geographically distinct areas. These birds are mostly associated with the Northern hemisphere and temperate zones. Their diets are largely composed of plant materials, especially underwater grasses. Depending on the species, as much as 80% of the dietary needs may come from these grasses.

VALLISNERIA - WILD CELERY

Wild celery is an aquatic form of submarine vegetation that belongs to a grouping known as Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAVs). Most people growing up in or living today in the Chesapeake Bay community would probably call them sea weeds. These SAVs formed huge underwater prairies and were critically important to the Chesapeake in general and diving ducks in particular. Their success was strongly determinant to the overall ecology and health of the Bay and the divers. Population and distribution patterns of these plants have varied significantly over time and place.

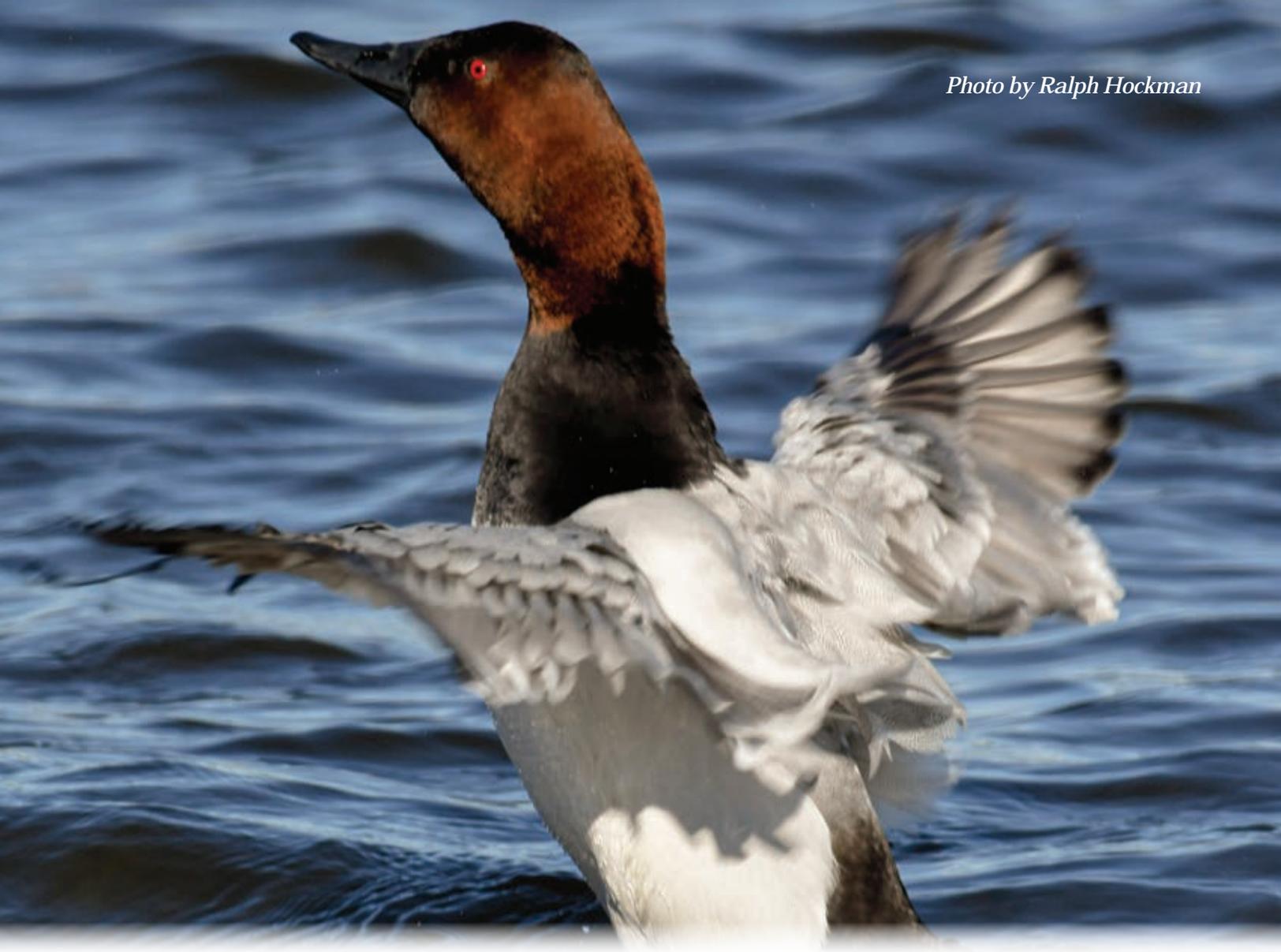
These plants usually have green leaves, flowering buds, a root or holdfast system, and seasonally-produced seeds. They can be spread by seeds as well as rhizomes. They are found in clear, non-turbid water less than 20 feet in depth but usually less than 10 feet. Light is key to their distribution as it is critical for photosynthesis. Other factors determining abundance and distribution are salinity, water temperature, turbidity, substrate, wind and wave action, and interspecies competition.

These submarine plants are always subtidal and dessicate quickly if exposed. The SAV beds have great value to the Bay and waterfowl serving as a direct food source, habitat, source of detritus, and underwater sinks for nutrients and sediment. These plants are crucial for a healthy Bay and wintering divers. Unfortunately, a well-documented decline of them has left bald conditions on the Bay's bottom and at times little food for our ducks. Recovery efforts have met with mixed success although recently improved patterns have emerged with wild celery. Hopefully, these efforts will continue in the future and productive SAV beds will help to reclaim a healthy Bay and good numbers of wintering divers.

Growing up in the eastern portion of Baltimore County between Gunpowder and Middle River, I can remember seeing groups of 50 to about 100 diving ducks rafting over SAVs on Dundee, Seneca, and Saltpeter Creeks, and near the mouth of Middle and Back Rivers. At that time, I could identify the Canvasbacks and Scaups but had no idea what that seaweed was, nor any understanding of it's significance. I saw grass beds as a place not to swim. If my friends were with me, it was a place to be cool by pulling the grasses out and throwing them at each other or stuffing them into someone's bathing suit. Fortunately for me over the years, I have had great teachers and mentors who taught the concepts of ecology and helped to foster in me a great appreciation for our natural world and the many creatures in it. From them I learned about interrelationships; that nothing exists in isolation and most everything impacts on everything else.

Today, I understand the bond between Canvasbacks and Wild Celery. I have used this interrelationship from local Harford County nature as a teaching tool in Chesapeake Bay studies to create a window opened by these two organisms into a greater view of the Bay as a functioning ecosystem. It has also led my students to understand waterfowl, their role in nature, and to see the development of human culture related to a living natural resource. Harford County and Havre de Grace have a unique history and culture in association with *Aythya valisineria*. That relationship of bird and grass was the reason to get permission from field-trip fearing administrators and take my students for the day to the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

I remember when I was about 16 years old, asking my grandfather and later my father about Canvasbacks and the Bay. My grandfather shared that he had seen tens of thousands of the ducks around Carroll Island and especially north to the Flats near Havre de Grace. He related how significant duck hunting had become and how the art of decoy carving



had developed. My father's memories were of thousands of birds coming to winter on the Bay and winding up on many kitchen and dining room tables as a special meal. Unfortunately for me until about the last 15 years, I can only say to have witnessed a raft of about 500 Canvasbacks off Gibson Island. Today, however, I can now match my dad's numbers. On the 2020 Harford County Audubon Christmas Bird Count, my birding partner, Tom Trafton, and I recorded several thousand divers, mostly Canvasbacks in Furnace Bay. Someday I want to match my grandfather's duck numbers and watch the Canvasbacks drop down from a winter gray sky into the crystal waters of the Bay over flourishing celery beds. It doesn't hurt to hope and work for that future.

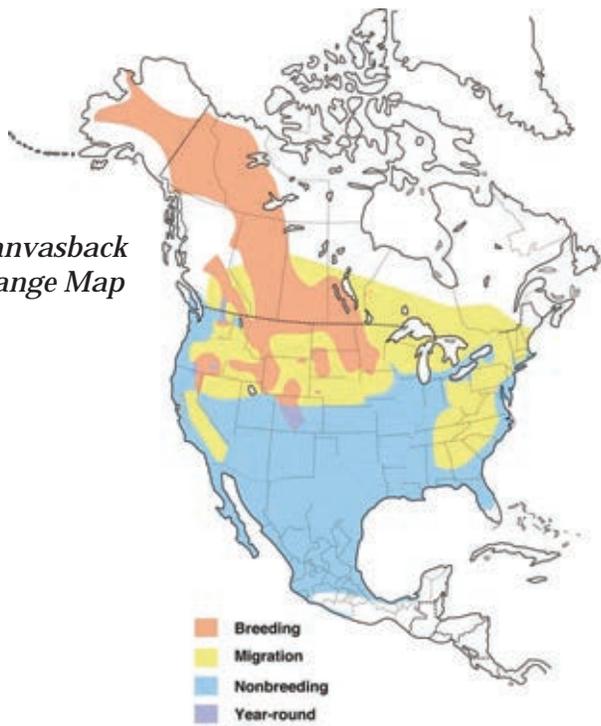
Canvasbacks are truly regal ducks. The beautiful wedge-shaped bright crimson head, black neck and rump, and white canvas back of the drake or bull offer an elegant sight on the water. The smaller hen has its own special beauty with a brownish- tan head and gray brown body.

Immature birds are very similar in description to the female. Canvasbacks are large ducks weighing about 2.8 lbs. on average, with females weighing less. They are approximately 21 inches in length and have a wingspan of about 3 1/2 to 4 feet. Most notable on the wedged head is a broad bill almost 2 inches long. Feet are also large with a blue gray color. Drakes have bright red eyes and females have brownish-red eyes.

Canvasbacks are a distinct North American species. They winter along all coastal areas of the United States and are also found south to areas in Mexico. The Pacific and Atlantic coasts have the most concentrated numbers with the Chesapeake Bay historically seeing as many as a quarter million birds. The northern section of the Chesapeake with its fresh to brackish water was a favorite area along with the Potomac River's freshwater sections. It is safe to say that wintering Canvasbacks can be found throughout the Delmarva and Bay region in general.

Nesting habitat is found throughout the northwestern portions of the United States and Canada. North central California, interior Oregon and Washington state, north into British Columbia, and central Alaska are prime areas for nesting. In Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, and parts of western Colorado nesting also occurs. By far the greatest nesting concentrations are found in the prairie pothole regions of the Great Plains. This area would include North and South Dakota, parts of Montana and Minnesota as well as south into the Nebraska sandhills. In Canada, the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba, and north to the Yukon and Northwest Territories are the areas of highest Canvasback nesting. In these prairies, pock-marked from past glaciation, Canvasbacks find ideal conditions for their nesting. Indeed, these areas have been labeled the "Duck Factories" of North America.

Canvasback Range Map



The open water areas of the fresh northern portion of the Chesapeake Bay is a preferred habitat for wintering Canvasbacks. Here the Canvasback can dive in water up to 30 feet deep, but generally it is much more shallow. The Canvasback is able to probe the SAV and clam beds as well as search for crabs and other underwater invertebrates. The open water also provides a drop in zone for Canvasbacks to enter from higher elevations of flight without circling down to the water's surface. In addition, open water serves as an adequate runway for takeoff.

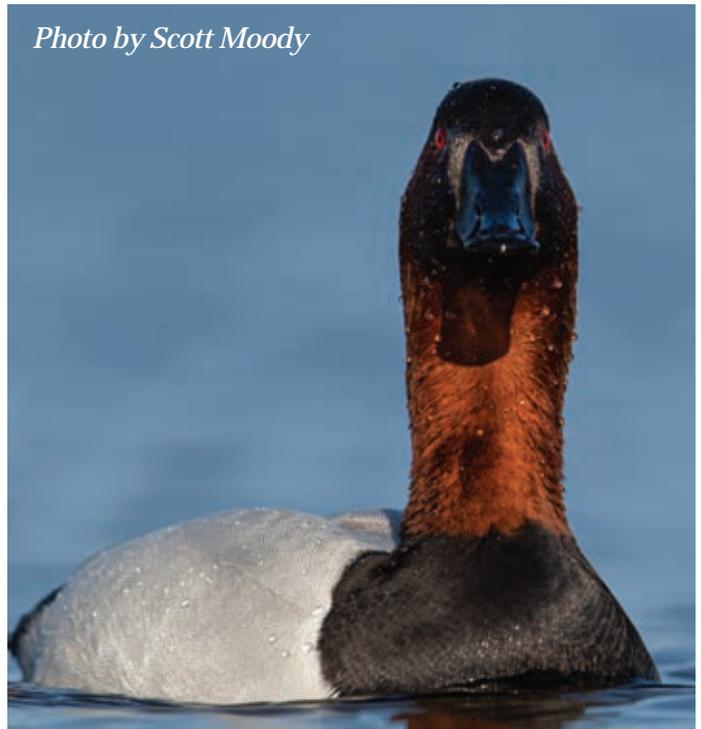
Spring nesting habitat in the potholes usually finds Canvasbacks undergoing courtship and bonding in larger and deeper ponds but nest building in small ponds of about an acre or less (Bellrose, p. 308). These small nesting ponds average about 24 inches in depth. The nests are built in heavy emergent vegetation such as cattails, bulrush, sedges and other grasses. This cover material allows them to usually nest within 10 meters of the water and also have a degree of nest security. Arrowhead and other shorter emergent vegetation, along with Duck weeds are significant plants in their nesting site choice.

Canvasbacks mature in about a year's time. The over abundant males provide competition for the females though courtship display leading to pair bond selection by the females. Drake birds initiate copulation leading to the eventual female deposition of 8 to 10 eggs (averaging 8.2) in the nest. Incubation is done by the female and the hatching occurs within 23 to 29 days. The young fledge in 56 to 68 days with success determined by factors such as food availability, predation, and weather conditions. Predation can be a significant problem with Striped skunks, mink, raccoon, crows, and magpies being chief consumers. Brood, sometimes called nest parasitism, is also a major problem to recruitment success. Redheads and other Canvasbacks are largely responsible for this parasitism. Nests are sometimes abandoned and second clutching does not occur. Drought and fire are also major considerations in nesting success. Spring nesting sees very limited socialization of birds with small groups of 10 to 15 birds, but as fall begins and migration nears, groups of thousands of birds form.

Canvasbacks consume mostly plant material in their diet. SAVs especially Wild celery and other grasses such as Widgeon grass, Sago pondweed, and Naiad grass were historically the dietary choices. Canvasbacks eat not only the lower leaf material of the grasses but also the rootstocks and rhizomes gaining carbohydrates from these starchy materials. The ducks also consume marsh grass seeds and other plant materials of the wetlands. Animal products consist of mollusks and crustaceans. Rangia and Macoma clams, aquatic crabs, amphipods, fish, and aquatic insects are supplemental to their diet. Today as a result of the decline of Bay grasses, Canvasbacks have adapted through a reversal of diet to animal products (especially clams) with grasses now being more supplemental to their nutritional needs. With an abundance of brackish to freshwater clams throughout the Bay's tidal fresh and oligohaline portions, Canvasbacks now find readily available food. A side note of interspecific competition is the relationship between the Baldpate (American Widgeon) and the Canvasback. Widgeons are noted for their food piracy. When Canvasbacks come to the surface after probing for their food, Widgeons are known to pull the food straight from their mouths thus saving themselves time and energy. Also of note is an article written by a fellow museum board member Jim Carroll in the winter edition of the Canvasback (2013) detailing the Canvasback's diet. It is a short, good read entitled "What's in a Name? Remarkable Connections".

Regarding the recent history of the Canvasback duck's population, since the 1950s there has been a major overall decline. In the last 20 years or so an upward growth of population size has occurred with overall numbers of 750,000 plus today. At the turn of the 20th century, Canvasback numbers were between 500,000 to 800,000 birds. Census techniques were much more primitive then, but today's methods are much more accurate. Canvasbacks were never the most numerous of the diving ducks. We know that in the 1950s, Canvasbacks wintering in the Chesapeake were as numerous as 250,000 which was probably close to half of the total count of birds in North America. By the middle of the 1960s, numbers had dropped to 65,000 plus/minus. In the 1980s, numbers were further reduced to about 50,000 ducks in the Bay.

Photo by Scott Moody



Canvasback population cycles are somewhat irruptive, even suggesting a boom/bust cycle relating primarily to weather factors. Through hunting and breeding management done by governmental and private programs, it is hoped that stabilization of numbers in the present range will continue. No one wants to see closed hunting seasons on the bird again, or numbers that are so reduced as to make it difficult to find Canvasbacks. Factors do exist today which could ultimately lead to the bird's listing as an endangered species.

Factors having detrimental impact on Canvasback numbers fall into three categories: 1) loss of habitat, both nesting and wintering, 2) overhunting of birds historically with present consideration of the number of females taken each year leading to a concerning gender ratio, and 3) weather conditions, especially drought and overall global warming. Prairie pothole nesting habitat is challenged both by family farming and modern industrial farming as more and more land is put into production to provide a favorable bottom line for the agricultural effort.

Draining of these critical wetland habitats has yielded a reduced availability of these prime nesting spots. Governmental wetland preservation and protection programs have certainly attempted to halt these losses. Private efforts of the same type have also met with success. A coordinated effort between the two should be able to offer greater stabilization of these areas and in some cases create new habitat for nesting. For wintering habitat, the same efforts are needed. Of utmost importance is the preservation of the SAV beds for feeding. Efforts are being made for restoration of the grasses and should be continued to hopefully achieve 100,00 acres of productive underwater prairie. Hunter education to minimize loss of females and their accidental shooting should be actively expanded and encouraged. Addressing drought is a difficult issue beyond the scope of this paper, along with the critical concern of global warming and overall climate change.

Today one can experience the thrill of the hunt and also the observation of this noble bird. These potential positive outcomes can be perpetuated as long as myriad factors are meshed together. Of greatest importance is public concern and education to the overall history of the past and present status of the Canvasback duck.

Citizens of Harford County and especially Havre de Grace are heirs to the tradition and presence of the Canvasback. A unique cultural response has developed between interrelationships of the people, land, waterscape, and bird. Anyone visiting the northern Bay region for the first time is quickly exposed to this unique cultural outcome through the menu-faire, artwork, and decoy carving traditions. During the 20th century, hunters came from around the country and world to hunt the Canvasback. Special hunting methods both legal and illegal evolved for



harvesting this bird. Sinkboxes, punt guns, batteries, sneak boats, etc. were deployed in an effort to maximize harvest of diving ducks, especially Canvasbacks. Five presidents of the United States came to hunt the Flats and adjacent waterways. Many hunters shot over large spreads of decoys leading to a demand for working decoys. Men such as Madison Mitchell, Charlie Joiner, Jim Currier, the Barnes, the Pierces and so many more subsidized their incomes by meeting the hunter's demand for these wooden ducks. These carvers perpetuated a style of duck known as the Havre de Grace form. In time, new carvers turned the tradition into a form of folk art with fancier decoys made in the traditional way but with an eye to collectability.

Pat Vincenti, Dan Carson, Bryon Bodt, and again so many others have their birds displayed in homes and in particular, on fireplace mantles throughout the county, state, and country. The traditions of the past elders have been passed onto the next generation. Jimmy Pierce, for example, has taught his sons and so many of his friends this local art form. In this we can see the definition of culture that is the non-genetic information passed on from one generation to the next. Many geographic areas have cultural traditions that develop in association with wildlife resources, but few seem to have such a deep permeation of a bird to its community as the Canvasback to ours. Havre de Grace even has a museum (Havre de Grace Decoy Museum) based on these traditions where one can walk the displays and learn and enjoy these unique cultural phenomena.

In conclusion, I don't know and I probably seriously doubt if I will ever see and feel what my grandfather experienced. However, I am grateful to have grown up in this area and had the opportunity to learn about the Canvasback duck first hand and to see the cultural traditions it led to in my own regional backyard.

Photo by
Scott Moody

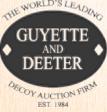


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Charlie “Speed” Joiner Continues to Support the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum



Eleven Sponsors Support the Third Annual Charlie “Speed” Joiner Decoy Show.

On a picture-perfect September day, the third edition of the Charlie Joiner Memorial Decoy Show took place in Galena, MD. Fifty exhibitors presented their offerings to a crowd of approximately two-hundred fifty attendees that came from as far away as Texas, Florida and Wisconsin. Waterfowl decoys, vintage and contemporary, adorned exhibition tables enticing patrons to add to their collections. Carvers, artists, and resellers comprised the exhibitor pool.

Organizer Allan Schauber (Chestertown, MD) was thrilled to see such an enthusiastic crowd taking in all that the show had to offer. The annual event honors the late legendary carver Charlie “Speed” Joiner (2021 – 2015). Joiner, a Chestertown resident at the time of his passing, was influenced by the late R. Madison Mitchell (Havre de Grace, MD) as well as Lem and Steve Ward (Crisfield, MD). He was a Charter member of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

Many established carvers could be seen greeting show goers as well as exhibitors, both of whom ventured out in spite of a stubborn COVID resurgence. Vendor sales appeared to be strong again this year as evidenced by departing patrons hauling out their purchases as they departed and a diminishing exhibitor inventory. Waterfowl

art enthusiasts seem still eager to add to their prized collections when the opportunities present themselves despite limited show opportunities over the last eighteen months.

In addition to private sales, a live auction was held for a few donated items. Auctioneer J.R. Russem challenged the crowd to place their bids for the few valuable items available. Although the auction was limited, it contributed \$1,600 towards the show’s overall financial success. Show organizer Allan Schauber was pleased with the day’s events and is already looking forward to next year’s event.



Susan Schauber and Judy Tarquini process registrations for the Third Annual Charlie “Speed” Joiner Decoy Show.

As in previous years, all proceeds (after expenses) benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum in honor of Charlie “Speed” Joiner. A special thank you to the many sponsors of this year’s show (Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home P.A., Angelica Nurseries Inc, Red Acres Hydroponics, Dr. Neil Brayton D.D.S., Valliant Wealth Strategies – Raymond James, David A. Bramble Inc, Dukes – Moore Insurance Agency Inc, Todd’s Body Shop, Hopkins Hunting and Sporting Clays, The Peoples Bank, Remax – Lori Leonardi).



Save the Date

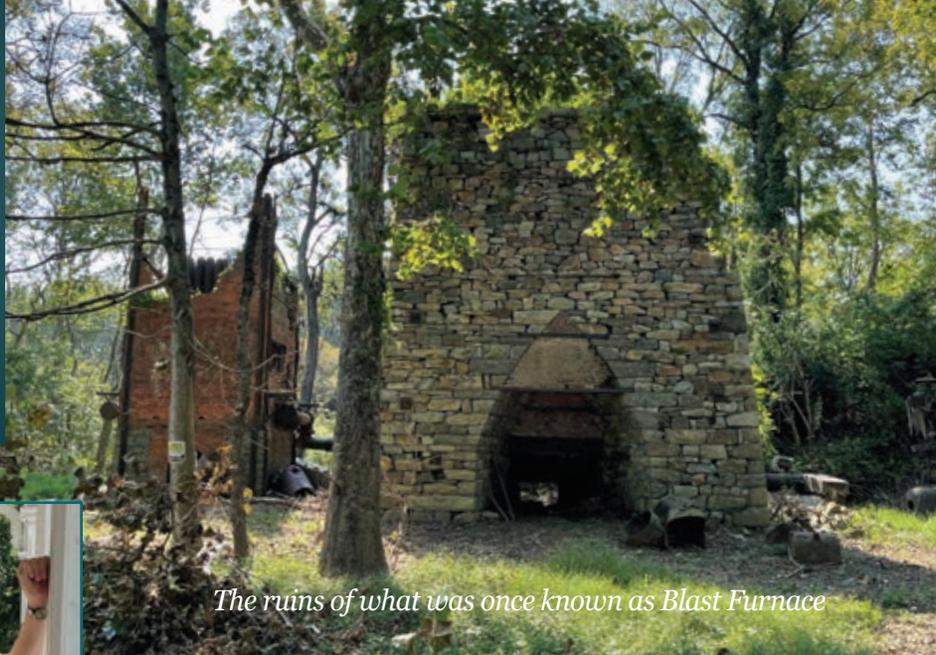
**4th Annual
Charlie “Speed”
Joiner Memorial
Decoy Show**

**Saturday
September 10, 2022**

Decoy Collectors Descend on Local Historic Site

Photos by Mike Tarquini

The Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club presented Chad Tragakis (Potomac Decoy Collectors Association) with an award of appreciation for his numerous contributions and achievements



The ruins of what was once known as Blast Furnace

The tour of the property allowed the group to see the ruins first-hand and enabled individual imaginations to run wild thinking about the history of the site. The highlight of the tour was getting a close up look of the actual charcoal blast furnace, known as furnace #3.

Although the site of the Whittaker Iron Works lies in ruins today, the forging of metal into decorative artwork continues to thrive at this historic location. The site is the home of The Matthew Harris Studio which operates in a building adjacent to the site of the original blacksmith shop. The business is owned by Matthew and Heidi Harris. In 2019, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum commissioned The Matthew Harris Studio to create an outdoor flying waterfowl sculpture that adorns our entrance. Whether the former Whittaker Iron Works ever produced iron for sink box decoys may be unclear, but this historic site has a solid connection with the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum that will live on for many years to come.

During the event, The Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club presented Chad Tragakis (Potomac Decoy Collectors Association) with an award of appreciation for his numerous contributions and achievements. Following the events at the former Whittaker Iron Works site, the group enjoyed a meal in fellowship at the historic Wellwood Club (Charlestown, MD).



Wellwood Fellowship: The three decoy collectors' clubs enjoy a meal in fellowship following the day's events at the former Whittaker Iron Works.

Twenty-five members of three neighboring waterfowl decoy collecting groups (Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club, Potomac Decoy Collectors Association and Delmarva Decoy Collectors Association) assembled in Perryville, MD in order to soak up knowledge about the site that was once the Whittaker Iron Works. Docent Susan Colenda treated the group to a presentation about the site inside what is now known as the Whittaker Mansion House (circa. 1877). Following the presentation, Susan led the group on a tour of the property.

The site began as the Principio Iron Works in the early 1700s financed by British capital. The Works were part of a larger operation known as the Principio Company. The Principio Iron Works site was very successful and produced pig iron which was largely sold in London. The site produced cannonballs for the Continental Army during the Revolution. The British destroyed the site in during the War of 1812.

In 1836, the destroyed site was purchased by a group led by Joseph Whittaker. The iron works was rebuilt, and iron production resumed. The Whittaker Iron Works site remained open until 1925. Once closed, the site began to deteriorate and now lies in ruins. It is unclear if this Maryland site ever produced iron for what would become sink box decoys for the thriving waterfowl gunning industry in the area, but the possibility seems likely.



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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Daniel Aherne
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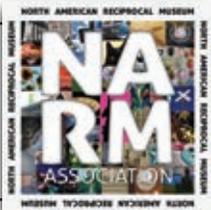
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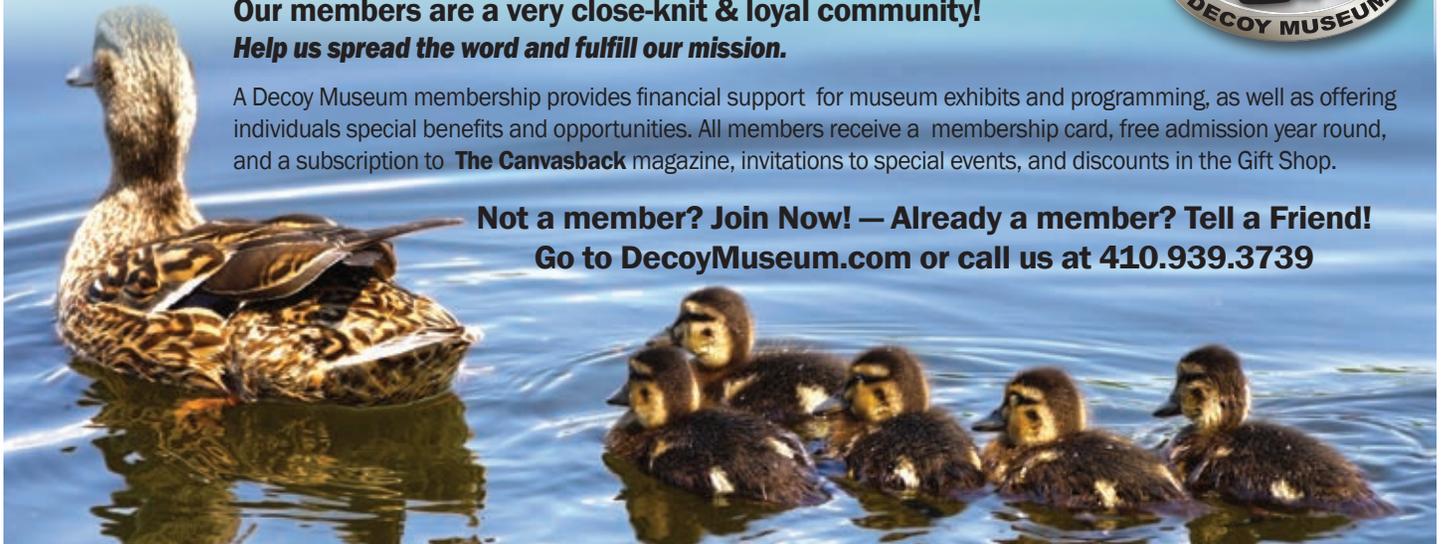
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**Our members are a very close-knit & loyal community!
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A Decoy Museum membership provides financial support for museum exhibits and programming, as well as offering individuals special benefits and opportunities. All members receive a membership card, free admission year round, and a subscription to **The Canvasback** magazine, invitations to special events, and discounts in the Gift Shop.

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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?



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