

The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Vol. 32 No. 2

Summer 2022

Black Ducks



40TH ANNUAL DECOY & WILDLIFE ART FESTIVAL RECAP



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can•vas•back

(kan'ves bak'), n., pl. -backs, (esp. collectively) — back.

1. a north american wild duck, the male of which has a whitish back and a reddish-brown head and neck.
2. a style of decoy made famous by carvers of the Susquehanna Flats region.
3. a quarterly publication of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

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

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ON THE COVER

Scott Moody's photo presents a drake black duck vaulting from the water with his dark brown head and greenish-yellow bill. Scott's shot captures the dark bluish-purple iridescent speculum framed in black making this a truly stunning photo.

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From the President...

The roller coaster ride of COVID continues, with new variants and positivity rates that ebb and flow. Although with each variant, it seems like the severity of the virus diminishes, but the aggravation is omnipresent in each of our lives as we navigate through each version. Fortunately, many of us are vaccinated and boosted giving us the best protection available.



The museum was very fortunate to be able to host our annual decoy & wildlife art festival April 30 and May 1 as COVID cases began to resurge. This year's event marked the 40th anniversary of the show. Charlie Pierce served as Honorary Chairman. The festival returned to the gymnasium of the former Havre de Grace High School where the inaugural event was held in 1982. The City of Havre de Grace recently obtained the facility from the Harford County Board of Education and has named the venue the STAR Centre. The two-day event drew well over 900 visitors.

In speaking to attendees and exhibitors, it seemed that everyone enjoyed the new location. Every exhibitor that I spoke to commented how strong their sales were throughout the weekend. The logistics of the new venue seemed to suit all in attendance. The parking lot across the street from the gymnasium afforded more than adequate parking. The grassy area behind the gym provided an opportunity for a food court and beer garden.

The adjacent smaller gymnasium proved to have ample space to host three simultaneous decoy competitions. The Decorative Carving Contest, Susquehanna Flats Floating Contest, and the J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest were all held on Saturday without incident. Special thanks to the City of Havre de Grace for their cooperation throughout the set up and execution of the festival weekend. We hope to make this location our new home for the Decoy Festival. Next year's 41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife Arts Festival will be held on May 6 & 7, 2023.

Visitation at the museum has experienced an uptick over the last two-months as the weather has improved and everyone is again venturing out of their homes. Perhaps the most welcomed guests have been over a hundred middle schoolers who toured the museum in early June. It sure is good to see the school groups begin to come back after essentially a two-year hiatus. Boy Scout Troop 238 (Hickory, MD) camped on the museum grounds in mid-May and toured the Maritime Museum, Concord Point Light House, and the Decoy Museum as part of their weekend's activities. The Scouts took in some fishing in the morning on Saturday, experienced a demonstration of hand chopping a decoy by John Eichelberger in the afternoon and were treated by Harford County Council President Pat Vincenti and Board member John Currier to an educational discussion of the history of waterfowl hunting on the famed Susquehanna Flats and its influence on decoy making in the region around a campfire that evening. About fifty Scouts and adult leaders participated in the weekend's events.

Internally, the museum has been focused on progressing a building expansion effort as well as the creation of electronic presentations in all of our galleries. Board member Rodney Swam is spearheading the building expansion project while Board members Jim Carroll and Mike Tarquini focus on the electronic presentations. As both of these initiatives progress, the museum is positioning itself for the future.



WILLIAM ELLSWORTH VEASEY

March 22, 1932 ~ May 11, 2022 (age 90)

Son of William Wright Veasey and Alberta Clark Murphy.

Predeceased by loving wife; Dorothy Biddle Veasey.

Survived by children; Roxayne Veasey, Michael Veasey (Susan), Darcy Jacobs (Ed), Tricia Veasey (Charles), 11 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren.

He was a world-renowned decoy and bird carver and teacher of carving with 14 books published in the field of carving which have been added to the Special Collections section of the University of Delaware Library.

He was a veteran of the armed forces and a member of the elite Air Force Experimental Band.

He was a life-long supporter of Ducks Unlimited, raising multiple thousands of dollars for conservation in partnership with the organization, holding the following offices with D.U.; Chapter chairman, zone chairman, state chairman, regional vice president, national board of directors, national membership committee, state and national trustee, national delegate.

He was commissioned to make a carving for President George H.W. Bush, as well as for several Governors and Congressmen.

Inducted into The Easton Waterfowl Festival Hall of Fame in 1994.

Declared a Living Legend by the Ward Foundation Museum in 2015.

He was proud to be a Mason, at the time of his passing he was a 'Master Mason in good standing of Armstrong Lodge' in Wilmington, DE.

He had a profound impact on the field of carving and on countless people within the field and in the lives of his friends and family.

He left a definitive mark on this world; it will not see his likeness again.

Obituary lovingly written by family.

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum wishes to recognize Bill for all his service to the Museum as a past Board member, instructor, and friend. He will be missed.



GEORGE RUSSELL STRUNK

When any discussion about New Jersey waterfowl decoy makers takes place, George Russell Strunk has earned the right to be in that conversation.

As a life-long resident of Glendora in Gloucester Township, NJ, George lives in a modest neighborhood, a stone's throw from nearby Timber Creek. Gloucester Township is a 24 square mile suburban community with pre-revolutionary roots in Camden County, NJ (circa 1685). Just eight miles east of Philadelphia and 50 miles west of Atlantic City, Gloucester Township is made up of a cluster of neighborhoods (including Glendora) in Southern New Jersey. The area was once a transportation corridor for goods of commerce being shipped to Philadelphia by means of Timber Creek which feeds the nearby Delaware River.

George R. Strunk, born December 4, 1958, is one of two siblings born to George M. Strunk (a shipyard welder in Philadelphia) and Pearl Strunk (a housewife and homemaker). Glenn Strunk (George's younger brother) also lives in Gloucester Township in the nearby community of Blackwood. George's Glendora home is a short distance from the house in which he and Glenn were raised. In his words "I was born here and have stayed here for my entire 64 years". George has been married to his wife Anna for nearly forty-years and has two children, a son (George) and a daughter (Katie) both in their mid to late thirties. Both children live a short distance from

George and Anna in Barrington Borough (Camden County) and have provided them with three grandchildren. George states that with his family all around him, he and Anna have no plans to relocate anytime soon.

George's family owned a private cabin that backed up to the marshes in Goshen, NJ near the Jersey Shore where his entire family spent all of their vacations. While at the cabin, George and his brother Glenn spent their time hunting and fishing. George remembers the neighboring property being for sale at one point, eventually being purchased by a guy who erected a sign outside reading "Decoy Maker". Inquisitive George went on to meet and spend time with the new neighbor, who was none other than New Jersey master decoy carver J.P. "Jamie" Hand. According to George, "I was hooked from my very first visit."

George worked for a plastics business right out of high school until 1983, when at twenty-four years old, he became a union ironworker. Also, 1983 marked the time when George began to make his own waterfowl decoys. After ten years as a union ironworker, George changed course again deciding to make his decoys on a full-time basis (1993). George recalls "I kept my union card active for two years after leaving that career just in his case my decoy making adventure didn't work out." Nearly forty years later, George is comfortable that he made the right decision.

As far as outside interests are concerned, fishing and hunting continue to be the top two activities that George prefers to be doing outside of his decoy carving. He recalls having many fishing boats over the years. George prefers older wooden boats but says without hesitation "I love wooden boats, but they're just too much work." His boat of choice today is an aluminum Jon boat that requires much less effort to maintain. Aside from hunting and fishing, George recalls coaching little league baseball.



Common Eider



*Flying Canvasback
pair*





George pulled down an old dusty arch top guitar from his shop wall that awaits a repair job.

Before George's nimble hands were crafting waterfowl decoys, he played music in a number of local bands during his high school years. There was a time when he set his sights to be a guitar player in a studio band. George actually taught others to play guitar when he was younger. His love for music and playing the guitar intrigued him to the point where George actually built a few guitars (acoustic, electric, and arch top) in his workshop.

George carves his decoys in the "Jersey style" using Atlantic white cedar (regionally called Jersey cedar). Although he claims a Delaware River style, he also makes decoys in the Barnegat Bay style as well. The Barnegat Bay style is a slick (smooth back) decoy with a straight tail and no raised primary feathers. The Delaware River style has more of a textured body and has raised primary feathers. A trademark of both Barnegat Bay and Delaware River decoys is that they are both hollowed out to reduce the decoy's weight and allow the decoy to ride higher up in the water for greater visibility. George allows orders to dictate which style he makes.

George Strunk was heavily influenced by Jersey carvers, with J.P. "Jamie" Hand getting the credit for getting him started. George studied the styles of many of the classic New Jersey carvers such as Bob White, a Delaware River style maker from Tullytown, PA, as well as many other carvers of this style. Anthony Elmer Crowell of East Harwich, MA also influenced George's style. Although from New Jersey, George mentions that he learned some things from the studying the style of the Ward Brothers of Crisfield, MD.

Today, George Russell Strunk is a highly regarded maker of "Jersey style" waterfowl decoys. He creates his masterpieces in a two-hundred square foot decoy shop adjacent to his home. George prefers to hand chop all of his decoys with a hatchet. Hand held gouges are then used to remove unwanted wood and to hollow out the decoy. Various sized spoke shaves smooth out the hand chopped bodies giving them the smooth lines characteristic of a "Jersey style" decoy.



A hen sleeper Green-winged Teal carved in the Delaware River style.

Barnegat Bay style decoys



When asked to pick his favorite decoy to make, George hesitated a bit and then said, “black ducks, for they are what we needed for our hunts.” Although he doesn’t dislike any particular species, he clearly has less of a passion for the exotic birds that he is asked to make from time to time. As he puts it, “I like making the things that I know and am interested in.” George recalls making a penguin and a pumpkin during his tenure as a carver for friends who have requested them.

As difficult as it may be to learn, George was not exposed to nor influenced to any great extent by the style of Upper Chesapeake Bay decoys. In fact, he states that he has had very limited exposure to carvers of this region. George did say that he has visited a couple of shops in and around the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum area but doesn’t frequent the area all that often. He recalls being at the Grand Opening of the Museum in November 1986.

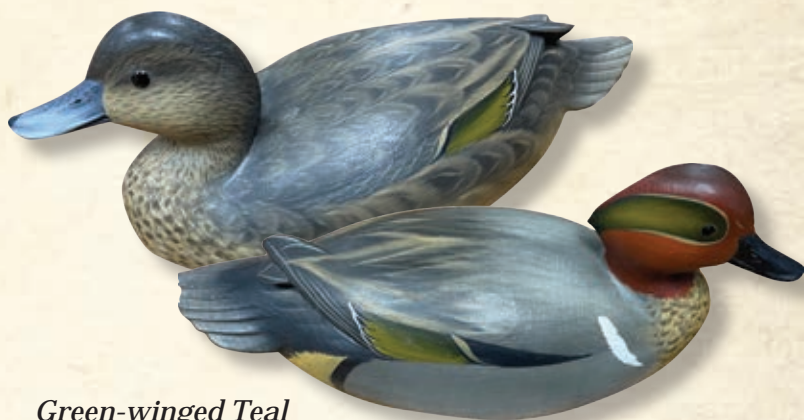
George Russell Strunk is a member of the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association and has been so for over thirty-five years. The group was formed for the continuous discussion of contemporary and vintage decoys focusing, but not limited to New Jersey decoys and carvers. A primary goal of the group is to promote an interest in the hobby of decoy collecting. George was inducted into their Hall of Fame in 2019.

In March 2022, George was invited to exhibit his decoys at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. The exhibit opened just prior to the 40th Annual Decoy and Wildlife Art Festival on April 18 and runs through September 30, 2022. Museum Board President Mike Tarquini states “We are honored to have such fine exhibit at the museum and hope to expose those in the Upper Chesapeake Bay region to the style of George Russell Strunk and his “Jersey” decoys made in the Delaware River style.” Tarquini adds “we have noticed an uptick in visitors to the museum with New Jersey license plates, and that is exactly our goal; to draw visitors from other regions to the museum and expose them to the Upper Bay style offerings as they come to support their regional carver.”

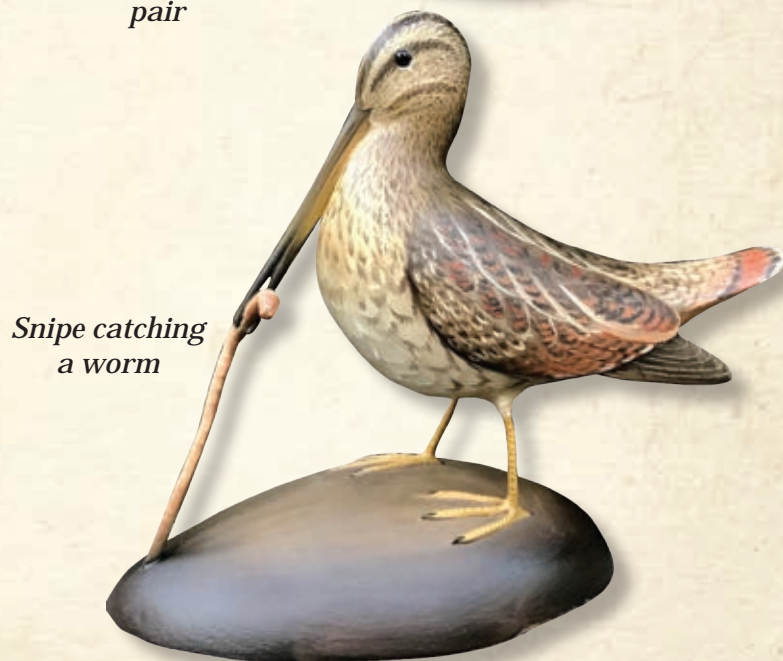
Waterfowl decoy carving and collecting has up until recently, been influenced by the local region of the carver and collector. As internet-based technology has made its way to the folk art of decoy collecting, carvers and collectors alike are readily exposed to offerings and opportunities to sell their creations outside of their region. Live auctions have gone the way of internet events, as practically all well respected auction companies now use this format. George Russell Strunk feels that “technology has served to blend all regional offerings, and that’s a good thing.”



George hand chops a decoy body.



*Green-winged Teal
pair*



*Snipe catching
a worm*

Museum Store Renovation

By Dena Cardwell



The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum kicked off its 2022 Annual Decoy and Wildlife Art Festival with a grand reopening of its renovated museum store. The 728-square-foot museum store received a complete overhaul and now boasts an open layout and a new selection of merchandise.

A team of staff and volunteers used its carpentry, painting, and design skills to improve the space - installing new flooring, painting walls and trim, and purchasing new displays. Updating the store was a labor of love, and new inventory was specifically chosen to reflect the history of the Chesapeake Bay area and its rich carving traditions.

The mission of the museum store is not just about selling things; it is about diversifying the museum experience of our visitors. The staff now proudly feels the upgraded space “enhances the overall experience of the museum.” It was important to remain true to the mission of the museum and the collection we cherish.

We have incorporated price points for everyone, and we have items for all budgets. We stock merchandise from a variety of local artists: soap made by Zinnia Virgo Soaps and dog treats by Bowman’s Butcher Shop. We have on display pottery, dip mixes and peanuts from The Blue Crab Company, and candles from Annapolis Candle Company. Our children’s section has been greatly enhanced, with items ranging from books to wooden toys and crafts. We offer a selection of decoys made by various carvers from all over the United States. (The decoy inventory is constantly changing per availability.)

The educational message and mission of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is dedicated to enhancing its treasured folk art. In most museums, the store is the last place a visitor stops before leaving. We are confident our new store will be a fun place to browse for people of all ages. In the last three months that the new store has been open, revenues have exceeded our expectations. We have been continuously restocking!

The next time you are in Havre de Grace, please make an effort to stop by our museum store and check out our labor of love. Admission to the museum store is always free. We hope in the near future to be able to offer select items on our website for those unable to make the visit.





Honorary Festival Chairman Charlie Pierce poses with a Paul Shertz original drawing commemorating 75 Years of Pierce Decoys. The drawing was commissioned by Charlie's brother Jim (JK) as a gift. From left to right, Captain Joey Jobs, Charlie Pierce, Jim Pierce and Paul Shertz. (Photo by Mike Tarquini)

40th Annual Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival in Review . . .

By Dan Thanh Dang

It was a momentous homecoming for this year's Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival.

Returning to its inaugural site in the former Havre de Grace High School gymnasium where it all began 40 years ago, the festival showcased 50 exhibitors and attracted more than 900 visitors over the three day event that started April 29.

The move back was a welcomed step after two tumultuous years in which the coronavirus

pandemic canceled all festivities in 2020 and then forced vendors outdoors for a truncated tailgate last year.

"The best part about the festival are the exhibitors and everyone who comes to the show," said Linda Amtmann of Middle River, who sells artwork she creates from driftwood. "We are so happy to see each other. It is a unique community of people who come back every year. I do a lot of shows, but this one in Havre de Grace is family. We are family."

No one could be blamed for feeling a bit nostalgic.

After all, the first night of the festival kicked off with the Carvers Reception introducing Honorary Chairman Charlie Pierce – a most fitting tribute as the youngest son of venerable carver Jim Pierce. It was the elder Pierce and three businessmen – Allen Fair, Mitch Shank and Donald Asher – who planned the very first festival and subsequent festivals to raise money to start the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum in 1986.

On the old school grounds, now called the STAR Centre, carver Bobby Jobes couldn't help thinking about how his father, mother and grandfather attended classes in the building.

Others recalled when decoys had its heyday in the 80s. Back then, men and women wore their best to the show, thousands of visitors had to be bussed into the city, and there was a wait list to snag an exhibitor table at the festival.

"There was a time when this show took over this high school and the whole middle school," said Jeff Troutman of Ridge, Md., who sells his wife's artwork at the festival. "The 70s and 80s were great. There was a lot of youth here. A lot of hunting. It was a way of life in this town at one time.



*Festival exhibitor Pat Vincenti looks out over the crowd from his table location inside the exhibit hall.
(Photo by Kyle Presnell)*

"I see that slipping away," Troutman said. "But it's still a good show to come to."

It was worth the drive, according to Tom and Missy Miller, who drove three and a half hours from Roaring Spring, Pa., to take in their first decoy festival.

"For a collector who doesn't see a whole lot of this, it's a little overwhelming," Tom Miller said. "I have these guys' decoys at home and to be able to talk to them here, that's kind of cool. Between the history and the artwork passed





*Exhibitor Flyway Decoys showcases their vast inventory of unfinished decoys aimed at those wanting to learn the art of decoy painting.
(Photo by Kyle Presnell)*



Festival exhibitors and guests share some fellowship at the annual carvers reception held on Friday evening after set up. (Photo by Judy Tarquini)

down through generations, that's what draws me to it."

Lawrence J. Konefal from Olney echoed the same thoughts.

"They have fun stories, experiences and knowledge," said Konefal, who was looking for a Redhead decoy. "I like to collect old things. We like the Eastern Shore and waterfowl and I like talking to the old timers."

Konefal and other spectators wandered the grounds and then watched as various decoys

bobbed up and down in water tanks behind the building this year. The decoy competitions went smoothly under sunny skies as judges and competitors were no longer contending under the mercy of Mother Nature and the Susquehanna River tides.

For some, it was a chance to reconnect with old friends.

"My husband did fish decoys," said Rita Brooks, who lives near Philadelphia. "I came to see all the beautiful carvings and the carvers. We got to know a lot of them over the years."



Photo by Kyle Presnell



(Photo by Kyle Presnell)

For others, it was an opportunity to find out if there was any value in their latest barn find.

Tommy Jones, an Aberdeen hunter, lugged four old decoys he rescued from a barn to see historian John Sullivan at his booth.

After an initial exam, Jones walked away satisfied that a couple of his discoveries could be worth \$100 and one decoy might even date back to the Civil War or earlier.

With each interaction, the hope is that more and more people learn about and appreciate an American folk art that is an essential part of the Upper Chesapeake Bay area's heritage. Not only does it continue to be the largest fundraising event for the Decoy Museum, but it also "provides an opportunity for decoy makers,

collectors, and those who are just curious about this folk art form to gather and enjoy each other's fellowship," said Mike Tarquini, president of the nonprofit museum's Board of Directors.

"Over the years, it's not surprising to know that visitors have come from all over the United States to gain a first-hand experience in the folk art of waterfowl decoy making and the collecting of the wooden art work that emerges," Tarquini said.

The experience was unlike anything Jeff Adams had ever seen before, having come all the way from Brigham City, Utah. As regional director of the Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Adams said Charlie Pierce has carved decoys for his organization's banquets for years.

When Adams found out the festival was going on at the same time he was scheduled to visit his son-in-law in Fort Meade, he jumped at the chance to attend the event and meet Pierce for the first time.

“I’ve never seen anything like this,” Adams said. “Tradition runs very, very deep in us waterfowlers. Some of these carvers, they’re a generation we’re about to lose. When you think about it, every table has a decoy that has probably floated in the Chesapeake Bay, and each of those decoys has a story behind it. That is really something.

“This should be on everyone’s bucket list,” Adams said.



Volunteer Jeff Wilson III assists the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club with the Susquehanna Flats Gunning Decoy Competition. (Photo by Kyle Presnell)

(Photo by Kyle Presnell)



**The 41st Annual Decoy and Wildlife Art Festival
will be held on May 6 & 7, 2023.**

Quality and Variety Abound in 2022 J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest

Story & Photos by Chad Tragakis



Contest judges Larry Ortt (left), Darrel Hagar (center) and Drew Hawkins (right) show off the “Best of Show” winners.

One of the highlights of the annual Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival is the old decoy contest, which was held on Saturday, April 30. Named to honor Susquehanna Flats decoy collector, historian and author, J. Evans McKinney, area collectors eagerly look forward to participating in the annual display competition, which was first held at the festival in 2003. The contest was once again sponsored by Decoy Magazine and coordinated by Havre de Grace Decoy Museum curator Ginny Sanders, her husband Lloyd, and members of the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association. This year’s panel of judges included Darrell Hagar, Drew Hawkins and Larry Ortt.

The contest featured ten competition categories, and 15 collectors entered 76 decoys overall. The Cecil County Canvasback category went to Ronnie Adams with a Taylor Boyd canvasback drake, which also won third best of show. David Farrow won the Crisfield Puddle Duck category with a Lloyd Tyler widgeon drake, and he won the Evans McKinney category with a sleeping mallard hen.

C. John Sullivan, Jr. won the Harford County Redhead category with a John “Daddy” Holly redhead drake, and he won the Wooden Wing Duck category with a Jim Holly bluebill drake. Henry and Judy Stansbury won the Turned Head Decoy category with a Richard Wistar Davids preening pintail drake.

Chad and Christy Tragakis won the Vintage Miniature category with a Jim Holly canvasback hen, that also won best in show. They won the Best Unknown category with a “Cleveland Canvasback” hen, which also took second best in show, and the Cork Decoy category with a Severn Hall Coot. Clarence and Paula Witman won the Midwestern category with a Walter “Tube” Dawson mallard drake. All of the winners are now on display at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.



Evans McKinney Decoy:
Sleeping Mallard Hen (David Farrow)



Midwestern Decoy:
Walter "Tube" Dawson Mallard Drake (Clarence & Paula Witman)



Cork Decoy:
Severn Hall Coot (Chad & Christy Tragakis)



Harford County Redhead:
John "Daddy" Holly Redhead Drake (C. John Sullivan, Jr.)



Wooden Wing Duck:
Jim Holly Bluebill Drake (C. John Sullivan, Jr.)



Turned Head Decoy:
Richard Wistar Davids Preening Pintail Drake (Henry & Judy Stansbury)



Vintage Miniature:
Jim Holly Canvasback Hen (Chad & Christy Tragakis)



Crisfield Puddle Duck Decoy:
Lloyd Tyler Widgeon Drake (David Farrow)



Cecil County Canvasback:
Taylor Boyd Canvasback Drake (Ronnie Adams)



Decoy by an Unknown Maker:
Cleveland Canvasback Hen (Chad & Christy Tragakis)



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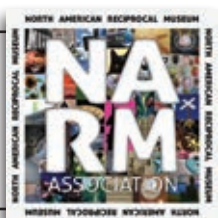
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Get in the **FORMATION!**

Our members are a very close-knit & loyal community!

Help us spread the word and fulfill our mission.

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.

Not a member? Join Now! — Already a member? Tell a Friend!

Go to DecoyMuseum.com or call us at 410.939.3739



2022 CHARLIE JOINER MEMORIAL DECOY SHOW

Saturday, September 10

Galena Volunteer Fire Department, Galena, MD

The 4th annual event honors the legendary carver Charlie "Speed" Joiner (1921-2015). Joiner was a renowned decoy carver from Kent County who came under the tutelage of R. Madison Mitchell (1901-1993), a highly regarded regional carver. In the late 1940s Joiner became well acquainted with Steve (1895-1976) and Lem (1896-1984) Ward. Show proceeds directly benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.



Call the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum
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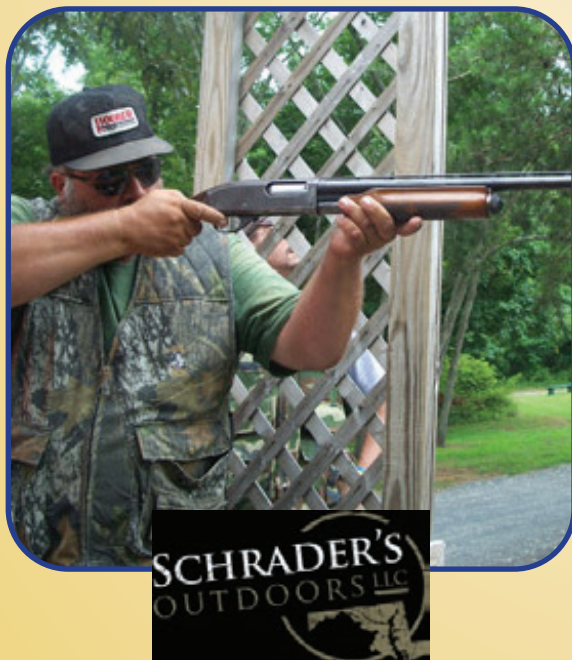
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2022 ANNUAL SPORTING CLAY CLASSIC

Sunday, September 11

Schrader's Outdoors, Henderson, MD

Each year, sporting clay enthusiasts descend in numbers upon the course at Schrader's Outdoors (Henderson) in September to compete in the Annual Sporting Clay Classic in direct support of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Competitors shoot a 50 - target main event. Competitions include Lewis Class, Greenwing (youth) and Ladies, all competing for waterfowl decoy prizes. Grab your shotguns and come showcase your talent.



Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club Host John B. Graham Event

Story & Photos by Mike Tarquini

It was a Sunday in early April and a time that has recently been reserved on many local waterfowl decoy enthusiasts' calendars to venture to the North East River waterfront in Charlestown, MD where the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club features some historical perspective on a local decoy maker. This year's event, held on April 3, featured the history, and works of Charlestown carver John Black Graham. Graham was arguably the earliest and most famous decoy maker from the Charlestown area.



The event kicked off inside the tent at the famed Wellwood Club, located across the street from the Charlestown waterfront. Local historian Rod Whittstadt treated those on hand to a presentation of artifacts from his private collection. Rod used several of these artifacts to shape his John B. Graham story. Rod shared photographs, decoys, and other collectible artifacts to support his presentation.

At the close of the presentation, the group ventured to the waterfront area where a collection of John B. Graham decoys were placed afloat. Jack Manning, local historian and Board member of the Upper Bay Decoy Museum, demonstrated the art of sculling a bushwhack boat, otherwise known to many as a “whack” boat. Using Jack’s skill, the bushwhack boat gracefully approached a rig of vintage John Graham decoys. As the “whack” boat silently drew within firing range, a gunner (Kevin Peel) emerged from behind the canvas curtains and discharged three shots into the air from his shotgun. The duo repeated their performance a second time treating the crowd of over sixty-five spectators to an encore. Visitors at the waterfront event were also treated to an open house at the adjacent Barnes Ice House hosted by Oliver “Sonny” Diamonte and Jennette Armour who have spent countless hours and resources restoring the local Charlestown landmark.

Once the program at the waterfront concluded, those in attendance filed back into the tent at the Wellwood Club where John B. Graham decoys from various collectors were put on display. Participants were asked to vote on their favorite John B. Graham decoy. A hand-full of exhibitors presented their wares and non-profits such as the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club, and the Barnes Ice House distributed information to those in attendance. A live auction of Graham reproduction decoys raised funds for the sponsoring club.

The event concluded with Upper Bay Decoy Club President Gary Armour thanking all in attendance and teasing the crowd by saying plans are underway to host a Scott Jackson event in 2023. Many participants chose to extend the fellowship of the event by sharing a meal together inside the Wellwood restaurant. For additional information concerning the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club contact Gary Armour at (302) 300-7027.



Preparing the Bushwhack Boat



Graham Decoys on Display

THE GRAHAMS OF CHARLESTOWN

by C. John Sullivan, Jr.



*Hollow-carved
black duck*

Much of the history of decoy carving is passed along orally. How does one accurately attribute the many styles of a single decoy maker? Unless patterns, descriptions, or actual photographs exist, the process is complicated. The signing of decoys did not begin until the first collector felt that it was important to establish an accurate attribution. We now know the importance of Joel Barber's recording of Charles T. Wilson as the maker of the teal decoys presented to him by Robert E McGaw. I immediately recognized the significance of attribution when I discovered the head patterns for James T. Holly's decoys; the heir to McGaw's estate had discovered the signed and dated Holly patterns during the emptying out of McGaw's shop in 1958. When a single maker executed various styles, assigning credit to that maker for particular decoys becomes complicated. Who is to say that the decoy makers of earlier days did not employ helpers in their shops, much as is done today? These apprentices could have changed styles and patterns out of personal preference or to simply ease the repetitive task of carving. Accurately assigning credit to a decoy maker becomes even more difficult when entire families were engaged in the business. In the case of the Graham family, decoy production spanned not just decades but several generations.

The earliest record of the Graham family in Maryland appears in the first census of the United States in 1790, in which William Graham appears as a resident of Charlestown. Charlestown had been laid out and developed as a town by an act of Assembly in 1742, "there being as yet no such place settled at or near the head of the Chesapeake Bay," and George Washington recorded visits to Charlestown in his diary on August 10 and September 9, 1795.

The Cecil County tax list of 1786 reveals that William Graham owned property in the "Village of Charlestown" with a total value of \$25. By 1795, the value of his holdings had grown to \$50, including a 3-acre lot. In 1845, Zachariah B. Graham, William's son, had accumulated property worth \$1,642. Business in the Graham family obviously was prospering. By 1867 Zachariah's son, John Black Graham, held property with a total value of \$2,353.

John Black Graham was born in Charlestown in 1822, one of twelve children born of Zachariah and Rebecca Lewis Graham. Like his father and grandfather before him, he became a cabinetmaker and undertaker. At the death of Zachariah, Graham took over his father's business and expanded it to include the sale of sand,



Canvasback drake in original paint with original iron ballast weight



Double-branded canvasback from J. B. Graham's personal rig



Turned head canvasback hen



Head close up

coal, and fish, as well as boat building and duck decoy carving. During the Civil War, he held the office of county tax collector for Cecil County.

John B. Graham was one of several major decoy makers from the Cecil County area. The others were Benjamin Dye (1821-1896), W. Scott Jackson (1852-1929), William Y. Heverin (1863-1951), George Washington "Wash" Barnes (1861-1915), Henry Lockard (1868-1944), and Carroll Cleveland "Wally" Algard (1883-1959). Early in Maryland's history, Charlestown, which is at the point where the North East River flows into the upper region of the Chesapeake Bay, was in competition with Baltimore as the leading port city of the Upper Chesapeake Bay. As history relates, Baltimore established itself as the major port, and Charlestown became a major site of duck hunting and prolific decoy producing. By 1871, Charlestown was listed in the Maryland State Gazette Merchants and Farmers Directory merely as a post village on the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad about 43 minutes from Baltimore City.

A unique carving style evolved in this area adjacent to the Susquehanna Flats. In general, decoys from the Flats have round, fat bottoms, balanced with ballast weights, to make them float realistically and right themselves in rough water. The earliest decoys produced on the Cecil County side of the Susquehanna exhibit a paddle tail and a distinct shelf on which the decoy's neck is attached. John B. Graham is generally considered to be the originator of this style of decoys. Although Holly initially made decoys with the distinct shelf and paddle tail that are associated with Cecil County, his style quickly developed into something very different.

For speed in carving, many years prior to the advent of the duplicating lathe, Holly must have reached the conclusion that he could spoke shave bodies more efficiently without the shelf and tail. Along with the elimination of the shelf, the paddle tail was changed to an upswept design. This change likely occurred early in Holly's carving career, early enough that it set the standard design for the Havre de Grace school of carving. The only three known holdouts or exceptions on the Havre de Grace side of the river were Charles Nelson Barnard, his brother Thomas, and Joseph E. Dye. All of their decoys exhibit well-defined shelves and tails.

The Graham decoys from Cecil County always exhibit the shelf and a well-rounded tail. The tail is subtler than on most Cecil County decoys and does not protrude as far from the body as many do. The decoys attributed to John B. Graham encompass many different styles, all close enough in characteristics to be identified as probably his but varied enough to raise some questions. Some variations are minor, such as those of tail length, tail shape, slope of forehead, width of head, slope of bill (Roman nose), fatness of body, and presence of carved mandibles. Other variations are not so understated, such as the replacement of a solid body with a hollow-carved one for black ducks. In addition to black ducks, John B. Graham carved canvasbacks, redheads, bluebills, and teal.

John B. Graham was recognized primarily as a cabinetmaker and boat builder, as is evidenced by the numerous references to him in publications. In 1871, his listing in the State Gazette indicated his principal occupation as cabinetmaker. In the Delaware State and Peninsula Directory of 1882, his occupation is shown as an undertaker, while his son, John Cooper Graham, appears as a cabinetmaker.

Given the many stylistic variations that appear on Graham decoys, is it reasonable to conclude that more than one Graham made decoys? It is certainly possible that John B. Graham made both solid and hollow-bodied decoys, but perhaps it was his son John who decided that hollowed versions were better for the black ducks and carved them himself. To carry the hypothesis of multiple Graham carvers an additional step, let us first acknowledge that handmade wooden decoys were in use on the Susquehanna Flats by very early in the nineteenth century. Is it not plausible that, if John B. Graham followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather as undertaker, cabinetmaker, and boat builder, an earlier Graham might well have been the originator of the Cecil County style, as manifested in the so-called Cleveland canvasbacks (reported to have been gunned over by Grover Cleveland), which some consider to be the earliest Susquehanna Flats decoys?

The comprehensive work *Portrait and Biographical Record of Harford and Cecil Counties, Maryland*, written and published in 1897, says this about John B. Graham: "It is worthy of special mention that on the site where he now engages in business, members of



Canvasback pair miniatures



Blue-winged teal in original paint



Blue-winged teal in ruddy duck paint



*Canvasback drake
fat-body style*

his family have followed the same occupation for 120 years, a record perhaps unequaled by any other family in Cecil County.” It would be a logical conclusion that the business referred to included decoy making. The Portrait continues: “In the possession of John Black Graham were the tools of cabinet making used by his father and grandfather, but they are so different from those now in vogue that the cabinet makers of today cannot tell for what they should be used.” We sometimes forget that technical advances existed prior to the twentieth century.

Certain advances in the development and design of various types of saws could well have led to minor changes in construction that resulted in subtle decoy style changes over a period of years.

The population of Charlestown in 1882 was 250. It was a close-knit community of families all living on or within sight of the North East River. The Delaware State and Peninsula Directory of 1882 lists only eight specialty professions in the town. Three are filled by Grahams John B., his son John C., and John B.’s brother, F. D. Lafayette Graham, all listed as cabinetmakers and undertakers.

In those days, generations of families were born, lived, and died in the same village, on the same street, even in the same house. Grandfathers, fathers, sons, and brothers worked in the same shop. The Grahams lived together, hunted together, built boats together, made caskets and furniture together, and, most certainly, made decoys together. It is inconceivable that John B. Graham was the only Graham making decoys in Charlestown, Maryland. The variety of styles evident in Graham decoys combined with the listed professions of generations of this family strongly suggests that the diversity evolved from one generation to the next.

Author’s note:

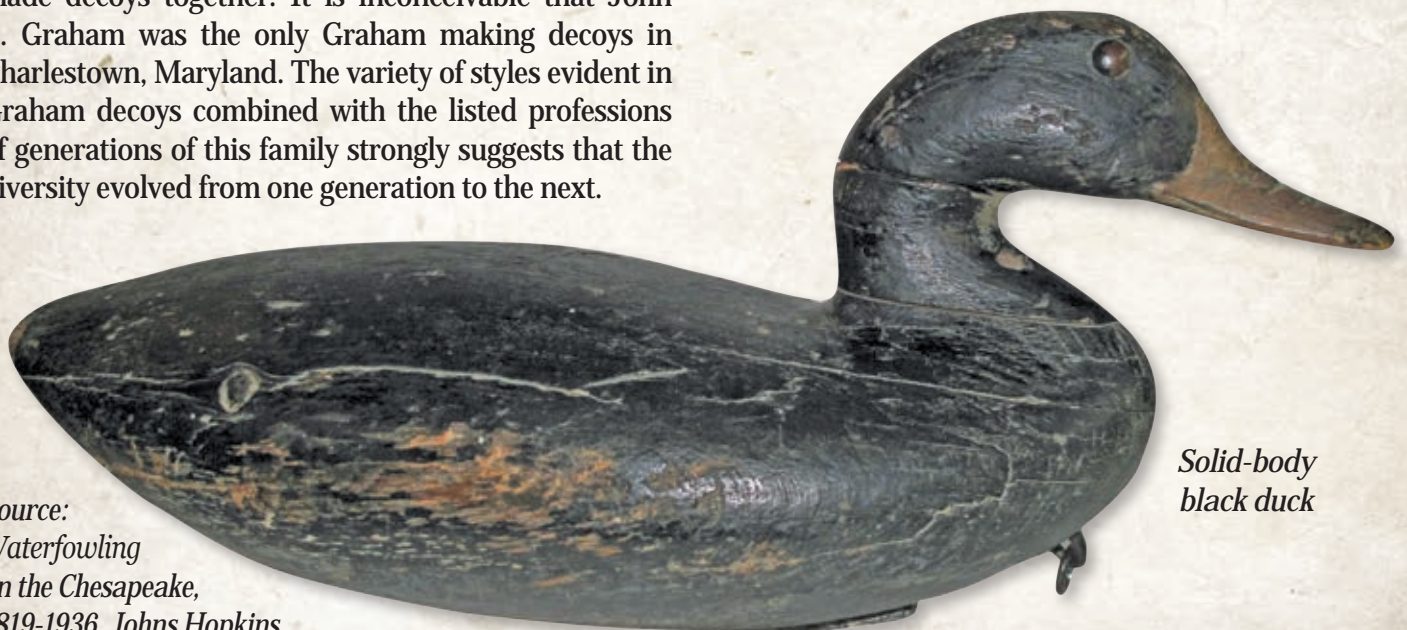
The decoys shown in this article are from the private collection of the author and all are believed to have been made by John Black Graham over a 20-year period from 1870-1890.



Canvasback drake wing duck



Blue-winged teal wearing bluebill drake paint.



*Solid-body
black duck*

*Source:
Waterfowling
on the Chesapeake,
1819-1936. Johns Hopkins
University Press (2003).*



Scoutmaster Rich Trznadel provides guidance to the Troop upon their arrival at the Decoy Museum.

Boy Scout Troop 238 Invades Havre de Grace's Museum District

Story & Photos by Mike Tarquini

Scouts and leaders from Boy Scout Troop 238 descended on the grounds behind the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum the weekend of May 13-15, 2022. Thirty-five Scouts and ten adult leaders participated in what was an educational and fun packed weekend. According to Scoutmaster Rich Trznadel, "the Troop last camped on the grounds behind the Decoy Museum in 2019 and had so much fun, those who attended as younger Scouts wanted to do it again this year."

Saturday morning began before sunrise as many Scouts and adult leaders embarked on a fishing expedition with some Scouts fishing from boats while others made use of the Havre de Grace Public Fishing Pier. The fish were stubborn that morning, with only two reported catches. Both fish were promptly returned to their natural habitat. All the fisherman returned to camp following their fishing experience to prepare and eat breakfast.

Following their meal, the group was divided into three groups of Scouts and leaders. The mission turned from fun to education as the groups set out to discover the three neighboring museums (Maritime, Concord Point Light House, and Decoy) to see what they had to offer. President Bruce Russell graciously led tours educating the groups on maritime history, local boat building projects, and environmental efforts underway at the Maritime Museum. Concord Point Light House employee Jeremy Stubbs discussed the role of the light house and its place in local history. Unfortunately, conditions were not favorable to allow the visitors to climb the tower that morning. Jeremy also treated visitors to a tour of the light house keeper's house located a few steps from the tower. Board member Jim Carroll presented the history of waterfowling and the art of decoy making on the famed Susquehanna Flats and Upper Chesapeake Bay as groups visited the Decoy Museum. Jim's presentation included a walk through

the carver's gallery which features exhibitions of the works of many of the "legends of the craft" in decoy making. The groups visited each museum for forty-five minutes and completed all three stops on the circuit in time for lunch.

The afternoon program also featured a combination of fun and education. Decoy maker John Eichelberger (Lancaster, PA) treated the group to a decoy carving exhibition in the guest carver shop of the R. Madison Mitchell Decoy Shop building where he hand chopped a block of wood in what is to become a full-sized canvasback decoy. The group was fascinated with John's skill level and bombarded him with many questions about the craft of decoy making. Later that afternoon, the Scouts were challenged to a scavenger hunt inside the Decoy Museum. Membership & Special Events Coordinator Dena Cardwell put together a list of items that participants needed to find within the museum and awarded prizes to those who successfully completed the task. The level of participation and energy from both Scouts and leaders pleasantly surprised our museum staff.

The aroma of grilled Bubba Burgers cooking on the grill forecasted what was to be a tasty dinner for all in attendance. Despite being a Troop dinner favorite, the burgers did not out shine what was to come next. While all Scouts and leaders were finishing up their dinner, Decoy Museum President Mike Tarquini and Board member Jim Carroll quietly slipped away from camp and returned shortly with six-gallons of ice cream from Bomboy's and treated the group to a tasty dessert. Havre de Grace City Council member Casi Boyer took time out of her busy schedule to visit the campsite and helped staff the service line as all members of the group filed by to get their share. Many returned for seconds.

As the sun set on this busy Saturday, the festivities were not over. The Troop conducted a campfire where all present were fascinated by an informative presentation from Harford County Council President Patrick Vincenti and Museum Board member John Currier who expanded their knowledge of waterfowling history and decoy making in our region. Patrick is a well known decoy carver who has made decoys since the 1970's and has worked with many of the local carvers including R. Madison Mitchell. John, as his surname indicates, is from the Currier family who has it's place in decoy making history. The famed Jim Currier is a member of John's family who made his decoys just a few short steps from where the Troop was camping.



Jim Carroll explaining the practice of sink box hunting to members of Troop 238.



Market hunting with punt and battery guns is explained to members of Troop 238.



Tools of the trade of decoy making are presented to our visitors.



Carver John Eichelberger demonstrates the technique of converting a block of wood by hand into a decoy.

As the fire died down, Council President Vincenti distributed Harford County Council President pins to all that participated. Decoy Museum Board members John Currier and Jim Carroll presented each camper with a commemorative pocket patch to be worn on their Scout uniform. The patch was designed by Decoy Museum Board member Louis Caputo and local graphic designer Anne Fullem.

Sunday morning started early for the Scouts as they broke down the campsite, gathered their belongings, and tried their luck one last time at fishing from the nearby fishing pier. Again, the fish were not fooled, and no fish were caught. The group returned to camp, policed the area, and loaded up for their return home from a very fun and education packed weekend.

Boy Scout Troop 238 is sponsored by St. Ignatius Church in Hickory, MD. The Troop has a history with the Decoy Museum where three of their Eagle Scout Projects have been carried out since 2018. Troop 238 has produced 150 Eagle Scouts in its 40 year history. Mr. Rich Trznadel has been Scoutmaster for over 30 years. They are registered in Harford District of the Baltimore Area Council.



Scouts and adult leaders participated in the scavenger hunt throughout the decoy museum in search of items on their list provided by the museum staff.



Havre de Grace City Council member Casi Boyer helps Troop leaders serve up Bomboy's ice cream to the Troop.



Harford County Council President and decoy carver Patrick Vincenti and Decoy Museum Board member John Currier share their knowledge of waterfowl hunting and decoy making in our region.

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(R. Madison Mitchell / Clarence Bauer)**



Drawing at 7:00 PM on Saturday, December 10, 2022

For tickets call **410.939.3739** or email: information@DecoyMuseum.com
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*Once upon a time
on a canoe trip...
A black duck
comes your way!!*



By John Hughes

Photos 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.

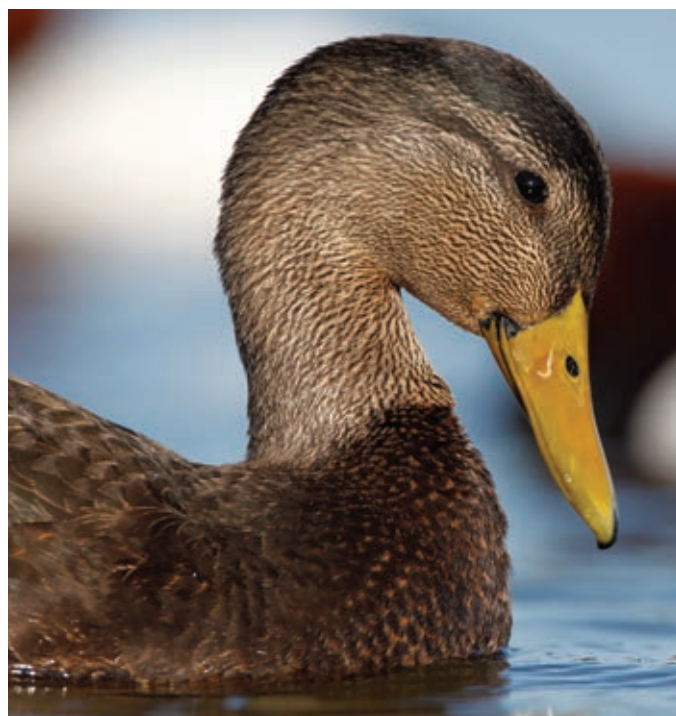


Canoe Trip

One of the most enjoyable aspects of being a canoe guide in the Chesapeake Bay watershed is the 8,100 miles of shoreline in the region. Throughout this incredible distance, the interaction of bay water, wetland, upland, and sky makes possible amazing opportunities for a plethora of wildlife observations and studies. The bay has countless “nooks and crannies” for a canoe (or kayak) to explore, especially in wetland areas. As your boat turns and maneuvers a creek’s meanders into deeper marsh or swamp, you are never sure what lies beyond the next point.

Maybe you will witness a scene of playful otters frolicking down a mud bank, a huge great blue heron snatching a fiddler crab as the tide drops, racoons pulling mussels off the bottom of exposed Spartina grass, minnows beaching themselves off the sides of your bow as they try to escape a giant predator chasing them, or puddle ducks swimming farther up the inlet to get away from you. The possibilities seem endless and that is why you sink your paddle in the water and feather it to turn around the bend. The surprises offered in this great lottery of life, both for you the individual observer and for the wildlife actors, can create such an adrenaline rush that you can become addicted.

Being the lead canoe of the armada, suggests the greatest potential for these kinds of experiential interactions by its very positioning. Your greatest challenge in the lead is to quiet the following canoes as quickly as possible, get as many boats as possible into observable position, and explain and interpret the scenario being witnessed. Occasionally you will even see or hear natural phenomena which you selfishly keep to yourself. Being the lead canoe is a responsibility that becomes more satisfying with each year of experience.



I enjoy being the lead canoe but there are other important positions to the success of a canoe trip. Sweep canoe is one of them. Although seemingly not as glamorous, the sweep canoe cannot let a boat fall behind them for safety reasons. Sweep canoeists carry first aid, extra drink, sun screen, and other essential items which could be needed on the trip. Because of their importance they cannot tip. There is always the chance of wildlife observation that was missed by the lead boat. Although the greatest potential for discovery is the lead, this does not always hold true!

Being the leader of a canoe trip also requires adequate selection of canoe spots which offer the greatest possibility

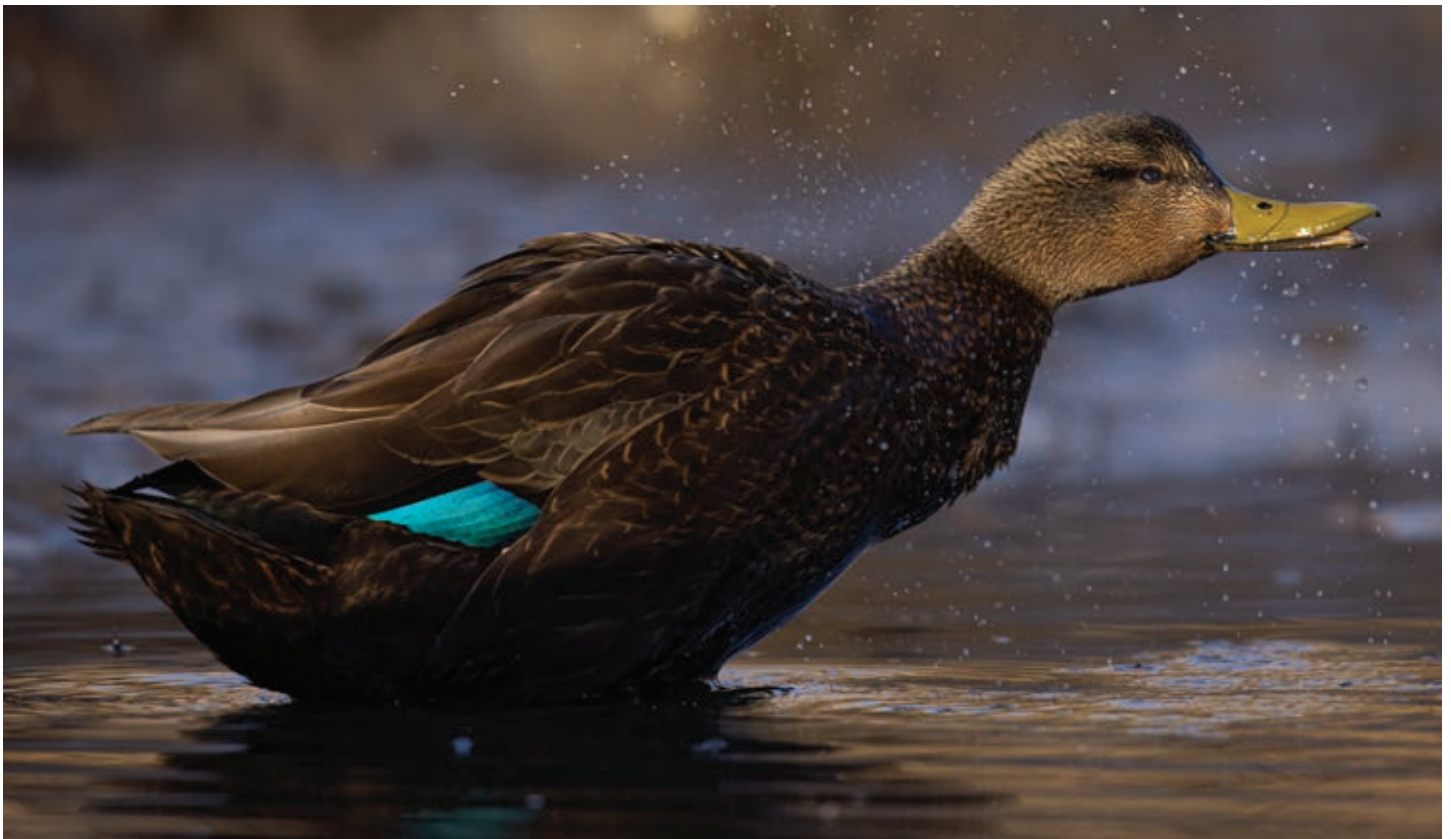
of safety for the participants and the greatest potential for wildlife observations. Not everyone will come on the trip with the same skill level, enthusiasm for the experience, and ability to apply common sense. I should add that for some, just the ability to hold the paddle correctly can be very problematic, let alone having the desire or endurance to travel comfortably on the water any distance. I have had to tow some boats for most of the trip. Hopefully in the end a meaningful experience has been had by all including the leader.

I think it was late May or early June in Worcester County, Maryland. We were just northwest of the Virginia state line on Swans Cut Creek at Big Mill Pond in Maryland, launching a group of 12 canoes filled with students and teachers from John Carroll School. This small and short paddle of about four miles was an ideal conclusion to a week of paddling in which we tried to teach the students about the Chesapeake Bay and estuarine ecology. In four miles, the students would experience the transition in salinity that would occur over two-hundred miles in the real bay. The trip would start in the freshwater (0 ppt salinity) of Big Mill Pond and end in the saline to hypersaline water (35-65 ppt salinity) of Chincoteague Bay, Virginia. What a perfect microcosm of the Chesapeake; from cypress and cattails to Spartinas and salt bush, from sunfish and bass to rays and mantis shrimp, from mallards and warblers to skimmers and red breasted mergansers, all in a four-mile paddle. The creek also offered a wide variety of all kinds of other wildlife. I should mention however, the real paddling distance was about six and one-

half miles when considering the meanders and its mouth was open to a southeast wind which always made working against a rising tide somewhat stressful to the paddler. The good thing was it was rarely over a couple of feet deep.

It was after lunch from under a huge tupelo tree that we paddled under the Route 12 bridge separating Maryland and Virginia. Fortunately, the tide gave us enough room to push the canoes down with our hands so we could just get under the bridge. As we came around the inside of the next meander, I saw a small group of puddle ducks pushing down stream away from my lead boat and some of the following canoes. The group of about fifteen ducks seemed to keep a good distance in front but I could see the strong southeast wind and rising tide were having their effects. As we entered the last stretch of creek before the open bay, I pulled in next to an old partially sunken barge which was used for transport across the bay prior to the causeway. This allowed the boats to gather and rest as we waited for the sweep canoe. Upon entering the bay, the ducks vaulted away, flying up to more northern reaches of water.

As we waited for the sweep boat, I pointed out a purple mud crab mixed in with the scuttling fiddler crabs. I offered a free dinner at Chincoteague that night for anyone who could catch that crab. There were no takers. Finally, the sweep canoe rounded the corner and they were all grinning ear to ear. The canoe was led by John Carroll's physics teacher, Lyle Brennen, and two students, senior Mike Cranston, and freshman Tom Woelper. At first, none of us could figure out the cause for their



elation edging on euphoria. Then Mr. Brennen spoke: “Well, Mr. Hughes, guess what we have to show the class”? Tom could no longer hold his enthusiasm and stood up in the canoe (A real, no, no for safety!!), caressing a young black duck. The group was ecstatic and I was speechless. The black duck is one of the most wily and shrewd of all waterfowl, always keeping their distance from danger, especially humans. I consider them to be the coyote of the waterfowl world. How had a sweep canoe led by a physics teacher been able to achieve such a feat? They had no explanation other than the bird seemed exhausted and nearly swam into their canoe before Tom gently grabbed him. My guess is that the young bird, which was not in any way injured, must have worn itself out playing cat and mouse with us down the creek.

I do not recommend wild duck capture on canoe trips (this was the only such duck capture in forty years of canoe trips.) However, it did prove to be an incredible learning opportunity for our students. They were amazed by its natural beauty even though its plumage was so dark. One student could not get over the vitality he saw in the duck’s eyes. I suggested how the student’s eyes might look if he had been held by such a non-wanted observer. That night, around the campfire, I taught the biology and ecology of the black duck. I pointed out how unlikely the capture was and how lucky they had been. The only time I had witnessed a less cautious duck was viewing one which followed a path of golden corn into a duck trap. On the creek when we let the bird go, as he jumped away, I could not help thinking how influenced our students had been by him and I hoped the duck’s encounter had not been too traumatic and that he had “learned” not to get too close to humans in the future. I can also tell you; I have never seen Mr. Brennen smile and enjoy himself so much on a trip. And oh, by the way, I still want to be the lead canoe, but you never know what can happen on any given trip even if you’re stuck in the sweep canoe. Just maybe that’s the place to be. It was that day!

Black Duck

Black ducks are magnificent birds of beauty and character. In the classic, *“Black Duck Spring”* by Bruce S. Wright, the duck is labeled as the “gold standard of the eastern waterfowler” (Wright, p.2). It is noted for its intelligence and is extremely wary of potential predators and man. The black duck has gained the respect of waterfowlers and duck observers in general as it continues to survive and hold its own in the densely populated and developed regions of eastern North America.

Black ducks belong to a category of waterfowl known as dabblers or surface feeding ducks. The genus, *Anas*, is represented by mallards, shovelers, pintails, gadwalls, and teal. The duck is closely similar to mallards in appearance, biology, and taxonomy. It is a large duck noted for vaulting out of the water directly into flight. Its scientific name is



Anas rubrides which loosely translates to “duck of red legs.” The black duck is about 21½ to 23 inches in length, has a wingspan of 35 - 37 inches, and weighs between 1½ and 3½ lbs. Lifespan varies from about a decade to one report of a black duck reaching an incredible twenty-six years. Mortality is naturally high among the young but also the females. These birds are robust and because of their close association with mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), often they hybridize.

Black ducks are the darkest of all types of mallard-like ducks. Their overall body is very dark brown to black with lighter heads. A narrow dark eyeline and cap are found on the head. Their underwings are pearly white and their speculum is a pronounced rich iridescent violet-blue with black framing. From a distance it appears purple. The male has a greenish yellow bill, while the female bill is olive in color. The legs of the male are a reddish-orange. Immatures look much more like a female. Black ducks are occasionally confused with female mallards and mottled ducks. Hybridization with mallards has led to a great variety of plumage patterns.

The black duck range throughout eastern North America, is largely found east of the Mississippi River. It is found north in Canada to the edge of the tree line and in the Maritime provinces and south to the Gulf coast including Texas and Florida. Eastern coastal areas are a preference during winter. The geography of breeding grounds are more generalized to specific climate and habitat demands of individual pairs of birds. Per se there is no association to a specific flyway and there is no evidence of westward expansion. Black ducks are hardy birds seeming to hold out until ice and have shorter migration distances than mallards. They are endemic to North America and also seem to have a homing instinct to both breeding and wintering grounds. Rather than mass migration there is a more gradual movement of groups of 5 - 25 ducks: blacks only.

Black duck habitat includes forested areas (either deciduous or coniferous), weeded and/or scrubby edges, wetlands

such as bogs, freshwater, brackish water or salt marshes, and islands with mixed covered conditions. In particular, the duck patronizes the margins between forest edge and wetlands. Proximity to areas of cultivated grain fields seems to be desired.

Pair bonding generally occurs in mid to late autumn. Competition amongst drakes ranges from head bobbing to active chase. Some hens prefer super rowdy male mallards to breed with over less responsive male blacks. Upon arriving at the breeding grounds, the pair will reinforce their bonds and the hen builds a nest usually on the ground, close to water without the male's help. Some blacks will nest in tree cavities. The home range of the pair can be as large as five square miles but the activity zone is much smaller. Active territorial defense by drakes occurs only during the first two weeks of nesting process and dissolves soon after as well as the bonding between the male and female. The nest is usually a simple scrape filled with plant material and down. One brood is the norm in which the hen lays 9.3 eggs on average between March and September, depending on geographic location. Incubation takes about 27 days and within 7.5 weeks the young are fully fledged. Nest location is the critical factor to success. About half of the nests produce positive outcomes with approximately six ducklings achieving recruitment to the population. Highest mortality is during nesting and the young's maturation. Nest flooding and predation are principal reasons for negative results.

Black duck diet is about 80% plant material and 20% animal material in the breeding season. During the wintering period the diet is as much as 85% animal material. Blacks are obviously omnivorous and they are very opportunistic

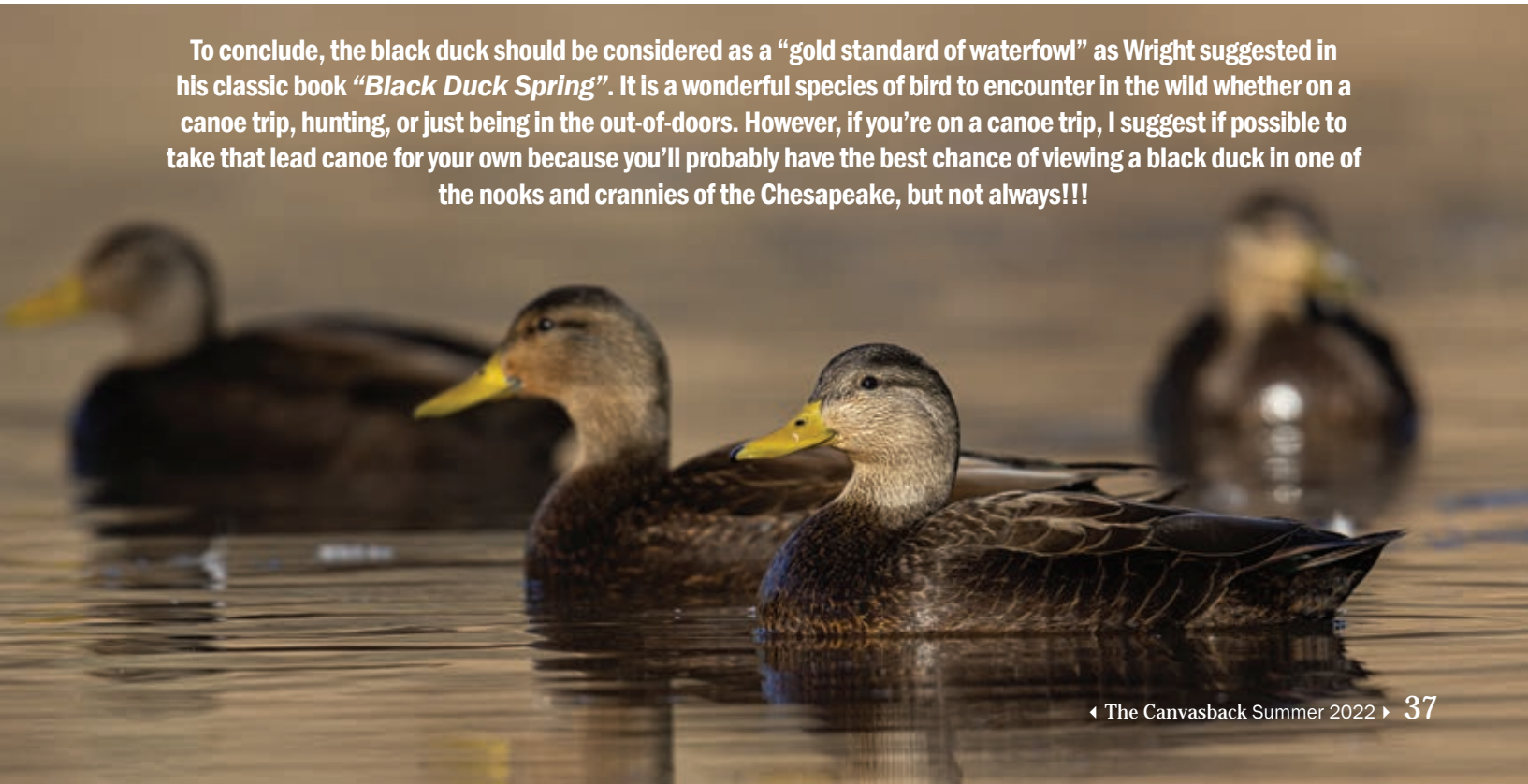
feeders. They will consume SAVs (Submerged Aquatic Vegetation) such as Widgeon grass and Eelgrass, floating vegetation like duckweeds, emerged wetland plants such as pickerelweed and wild rice, upland acorns and fruit, and cultivated grains- especially corn. They consume all the plant material - roots, stems, leaves, and seeds. Animal material consists of aquatic insects and their larvae, fish, amphibians, and mollusks (especially *Mya* and *macoma* clams), etc. The young depend on much more animal material in their diet until they gradually shift to plant materials. Coastal birds are significantly more dependent on bivalves for their high energy yields. Grazing for grains in harvested agricultural fields is another major source for nutrition where available.

Black duck drakes vocalize a reedy "raeb" call which usually occurs once or twice. Females quack like mallard hens. Black ducks are strong fliers with a fast but shallow regular beat.

Like so many of our waterfowl, black duck populations have experienced a gradual but consistent decline since the middle of the 20th century until today. Presently they number between 650,000 and a million birds. Pressures on the bird range from loss of habitat, trapping, hunting, climate change, weather conditions, to a wide spectrum of pollution challenges, etc.

Presently the black duck is listed as "of least concern" by the IUCN's Red List of species. After reading about the black duck's many challenges to survival, I feel lucky to have even seen one except as a wooden replica at the museum.

To conclude, the black duck should be considered as a "gold standard of waterfowl" as Wright suggested in his classic book *"Black Duck Spring"*. It is a wonderful species of bird to encounter in the wild whether on a canoe trip, hunting, or just being in the out-of-doors. However, if you're on a canoe trip, I suggest if possible to take that lead canoe for your own because you'll probably have the best chance of viewing a black duck in one of the nooks and crannies of the Chesapeake, but not always!!!



David Farrow honored as PDCA celebrates 25 years



On the afternoon of March 12, the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association honored the club's longtime vice president, David Farrow, with the 2021 Ralph Campbell Memorial Award for Goodwill and Ambassadorship in the Decoy Collecting Community. In addition to serving as a volunteer leader for PDCA, David has served as a board member for the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club and the

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Whatever the job, David is always the first to raise his hand.

David has built a fine collection of antique decoys, but as anyone who has seen his work can attest, he is also an extremely talented decoy maker and his work regularly receives top honors at shows and contests. Along with all of these accolades and distinctions, David truly embodies the best of what made Ralph Campbell so special — he is kind, always thinks of others before himself, he's humble, a gentleman, a model of integrity, and always shares what he knows with others. We commend the PDCA for recognizing one of our community's most ardent members, and we add our voice to the chorus of those thanking him for all he does.

The award ceremony was held during a special banquet in Annapolis, Maryland, celebrating the PDCA's 25th anniversary. On the evening of May 7, 1997, eleven collectors came together to form what would grow into one of the mid-Atlantic's largest and most active decoy clubs. The group meets throughout the year in person and virtually, and holds decoy display contests as a means of sharing, celebrating and learning about decoys. With a focus on scholarship, public education and promoting the hobby, the club sponsors a variety of special presentations, research and publications, and has donated thousands of dollars to east coast decoy museums.

In 2004, the club began curating a series of guest exhibits with the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, in 2007 they established a code of ethics for the hobby, in 2009 they launched the first of two awards given annually to recognize those giving back to the decoy collecting and carving community, and in 2016 they established the popular Annapolis Decoy Show. But the focus of the club has always been on having fun — enjoying the hobby, the decoys, and most of all, the friendships made through them. The club thanks everyone who has been a part of its journey over the years, and invites you to join them for the next 25. For more details and membership information, please contact chad.tragakis@gmail.com.

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Photo by Scott Moody



SHOTS

From the Wild

Are you a photography enthusiast who loves snapping pictures of the local wildlife?

If so, submit your shots from the wild to wildlifephotography@decoymuseum.com.

Only high resolution photos will be accepted. (i.e. at least 2,500 pixels wide and 300dpi)

Photo by Larry Keller

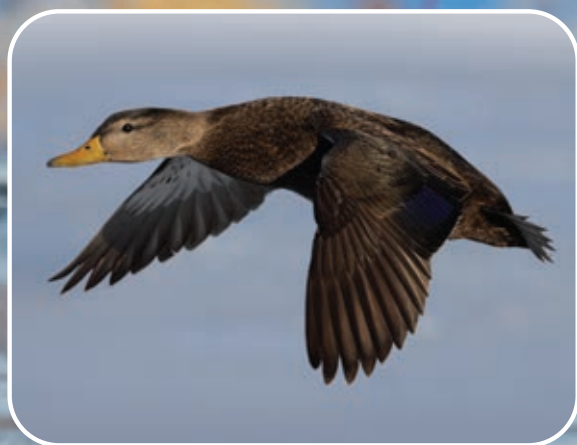


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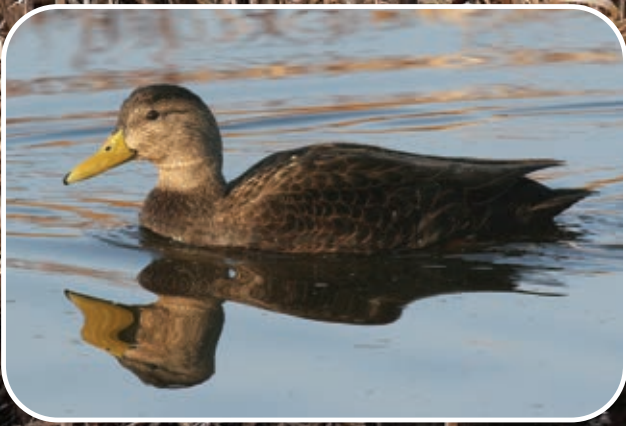


Photo by Earl Blansfield



Photo by Scott Moody



Photo by Scott Krieger



Photo by Larry Keller

Photo by Scott Moody



Decoy photos by Ralph Hockman



Photo by Debbie Blair



To Correct the Record on Perryville Waterman Elmer Potter (1922-1983)

By Michael Daley

History is important. Often, once a statement or fact goes into the historical record, it is difficult to disprove and even harder to undo. To historians, the most important goal of any historical record is the accuracy. If an error occurs, it is the nature of most historians to want to repair any history found to be erroneous.

Chad Tragakis is a widely regarded decoy history author with an enormous body of work. He is a powerhouse when it comes to Chesapeake Bay decoys and their makers. He immensely helped during the making of my book “Waterfowling on the Susquehanna Flats – Decoys, Decoy Makers and Duck Hunters of the Upper Chesapeake Bay”. Most importantly, he authored the book’s introduction.

Some 18 plus years ago, within the 2004 Winter edition of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum’s Canvasback Magazine, Chad authored an extensive article wherein he covered the history of decoy making in Perryville, MD. One of the sources of data Chad used for that magazine article was an interview with the Honorable Donaldson Craig Cole (1934-2013).

Mr. Cole was an avid Cecil County gunner and decoy collector who from 1961 to 1997 happened to be a lawyer, then a Cecil County State’s Attorney and finally, in 1980, he became a Cecil County Circuit Court Judge. Don Cole seemed to know everyone in Cecil County when he retired from the bench in 1997.

Being 70 years old myself, I know first-hand how often my mind fails me these days on a regular basis. Especially when it comes to names. Judge Cole was about my age back in 2004 when he talked to Chad. The result of the interview begot the following passage in Chad’s 2004 article. I also quoted this very passage in my book.

“Bill Weaver’s father-in-law, Harold Wettig (1899-1970), was another river shore regular. Wettig wore many hats over the years, working as a waterman, a carpenter, a foundryman, at one of the fish houses, and later as a contractor. He fished and gunned throughout

the 1920s and 30s with regular partner “Betty” Bourse. Bill notes that everybody on the river shore had a regular gunning partner and Judge Cole explains that nearly everyone in Perryville had a nickname.



Photo of Elmer Potter

Two gunners from the river shore whose nicknames he remembers well are “Preach” Bounds (son of a local clergyman) and “Rooster” Potter. The origins of the latter nickname remain a mystery. Judge Cole recalls that both men each made at least one rig of canvasback decoys on Ace and Hen’s pattern. He also remembers old Theodore Jackson (1891- 1966) a notable sinkbox gunner and his son, James “Ten Penny” Jackson (1916-1994) who made several rigs of decoys on his own patterns.

The decoys Ed Bines made were influenced more by Ten Penny’s birds than by those of Ace and Hen. Judge Cole also points out that Joe Coudon (1860- 1947), a wealthy gentleman farmer from nearby Aiken (now part of Perryville), was known to make his way down to the river shore from time to time in the 20s and 30s. Coudon, an avid gunner and talented decoy maker, crafted his own rig of canvasbacks but is best known for the folding silhouettes, fanciful reliefs and other decorative carvings he made.”

Recently, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum held their 40th Annual Decoy and Wildlife Art Festival. While



Elmer Potter, in the blue shirt, building a boat along the water in Perryville, MD within view of the Hatem Bridge over the Susquehanna River.

participating in that show, I met the one and only “Rooster” Potter during the second day of the show. The Perryville resident stopped by the table in Havre de Grace where my wife and I were selling our book and introduced himself. He was emotional and told me that he had been at the event with his wife on the previous day, but did not have the proper state of mind to speak with me. He was alone on this day.

Rooster was concerned that my book had not properly credited his father and a few other Perryville watermen with making Upper Bay gunning decoys. Now, I can tell you that Rooster Potter did not make decoys, his father did.

Rooster is not a man of many words. In fact, he gave me little information on his dad. Not even his name. So, here is what I found regarding the life of Perryville waterman, decoy maker, gunner and Rooster’s father, Elmer Mathew Potter (1922-1983).

Elmer Potter was born in Kentucky on March 24, 1922. Elmer’s parents were farmers. His father William “Billy” Potter (1896-1970) was born in Tennessee and his mother Vanie McCown (1900-1992) was born in Kentucky. Billy and Vanie were 24 and 19 respectively when they were married in 1920. When Elmer was born in 1922, he was the first child of five. The couple were blessed with three boys and two girls.

The Potters were Perryville, MD residents by 1940. The census that year shows the family of seven were renting their home. Billy Potter worked at the Perryville VA Hospital. Rooster’s father Elmer was now 18 years old and he worked as a sealer at a fireworks factory.

By 1942, Elmer was 20 years old. His draft card tells us he stood five feet and eight inches tall and weighed 192 pounds. He had hazel eyes and brown hair. Elmer now worked at the Aberdeen Proving Ground and still lived with his parents. He enlisted in the military during January of 1943 and was discharged two years later in 1945. Mr. Potter gained about 20 pounds while in the service.

Mr. Potter met and married a Virginia woman named Minnie Williams. Her parents were tenant farmers. In 1950, the Potters were Perryville residents living on Front Street. Elmer now was a civilian and operated a crane for the US Army. He lived two doors away from his parents.

Elmer and Minnie also had three children by 1950. Their oldest girl was 5 years old. She had a 2-year-old sister and her baby brother Gary Edward Potter AKA “Rooster” was about a year old at the time. Rooster’s baby sister was born later that year.

Gary “Rooster” Potter is now in his 70’s. He should be very proud. First, and foremost, he has taken care of his waterman father’s legacy. We have now cleaned up a bit of the historical record and documented that his dad “Elmer” Potter and his gunning partner Parcell “Peach” Bounds made Upper Chesapeake Bay gunning decoys.

Rooster recalls that like his dad, there were many good Perryville men who provided for their families via long watermen careers. In addition to his dad and “Peach”, Rooster mentioned Perryville watermen like Bill Weaver and Melvin “Moke” Boyd (his nickname came from his very young pronunciation of smoke) made their gunning rigs. Second, Gary Potter has the nickname “Rooster”. We know from Judge Cole that is a special Perryville gunning tradition.

Shortly after the decoy festival, I shared with Chad the conversation I had with Rooster and this update. He is perhaps the most delighted that this part of Judge Cole’s recollection, first published in his article, and the actual makers of gunning decoys, can be corrected for the historical record.

By the way, Rooster informed me his dad gave him the nickname. It appears the very young “Rooster” was a bit ornery as a boy. That moniker has lasted his entire life. Now, having met and gotten to know Rooster, I would submit that Mr. Potter was quite profound. His son’s nickname is spot on.

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

Events 2022

Wildlife Photography

Sunday, October 16 • 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

This evening's program will be a discussion between wildlife photographers Scott Moody, Joe Subolefsky, and the museum's own Ralph Hockman about waterfowl photography in particular and wildlife photography in general. They will talk about their cameras, techniques, challenges, and ethics when it comes to "shooting" ducks, geese, swans, and other wildlife. These photographers will tell how their interests began and evolved to their present level of excellence as well as give a visual sampling of their work. Questions from the audience will be entertained. Refreshments will be served. **Fee: \$10.00**

"The Outlaw Gunner"

Sunday, October 30 • 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Author Joe Walsh will discuss his recent book, "The Outlaw Gunner II". The book is an expansion on his father's book "The Outlaw Gunner". Joe will speak about waterfowl hunting and market gunning; both legal and illegal. The various individuals and their techniques of hunting will be discussed as well as his father's stories about the hunters. His discussion of the historic gunning efforts of so many former waterfowlers will hopefully bring a new vitality to many of the museum's exhibits. The author will be open to questions from the audience and will be prepared to autograph your copy of his book. Copies of the book will be available for purchase. Refreshments will be provided. **Fee: \$10.00**

Wetlands and Waterfowl

Monday, November 14 • 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM

Local educators and naturalists, Tom Trafton and John Hughes will give a presentation on Chesapeake Bay wetlands and their value to waterfowl. A two-part discussion will first consider the definition of wetlands, their distribution and types, their overall significance to the Bay's ecosystem, and special association to ducks, geese, and swans. Part II will examine specific case studies of individuals waterfowl and their interaction with various wetlands and their plant species. Audience participation will be encouraged and visuals will be used throughout the program. Refreshments will be provided. **Fee: \$10.00**

An Evening with Photographer Jay Fleming

Sunday, December 4 • 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Jay spent three years documenting all aspects of the Bay's rapidly changing seafood industry for his first book, "Working the Water", released in the fall of 2016. In the fall of 2017, amidst other photography and video projects, Jay committed to his second book, Island Life. Jay, after 10 years of making trips to Smith and Tangier Islands - the two only inhabited offshore islands in the Chesapeake Bay - Jay developed an affinity for the environment and the island communities. Whether it's a dramatic sunrise over the water or a fisherman hauling gear, the passion for his craft and for visual storytelling is obvious in every photograph. Jay's talent is undeniable, his photography is not only beautiful but purposeful. Refreshments will be provided. **Fee: \$10.00**

Gunning Clubs of the Northern Bay – Spesutie Island

Sunday, December 11 • 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Local author, historian, and collector C. John Sullivan Jr. will discuss two hunting clubs which were located on Spesutie Island near Aberdeen, Harford County, Maryland. He will tell of their history, traditions, and the men associated with them. A question and answer period will follow. Refreshments will be provided. **Fee: \$10.00**

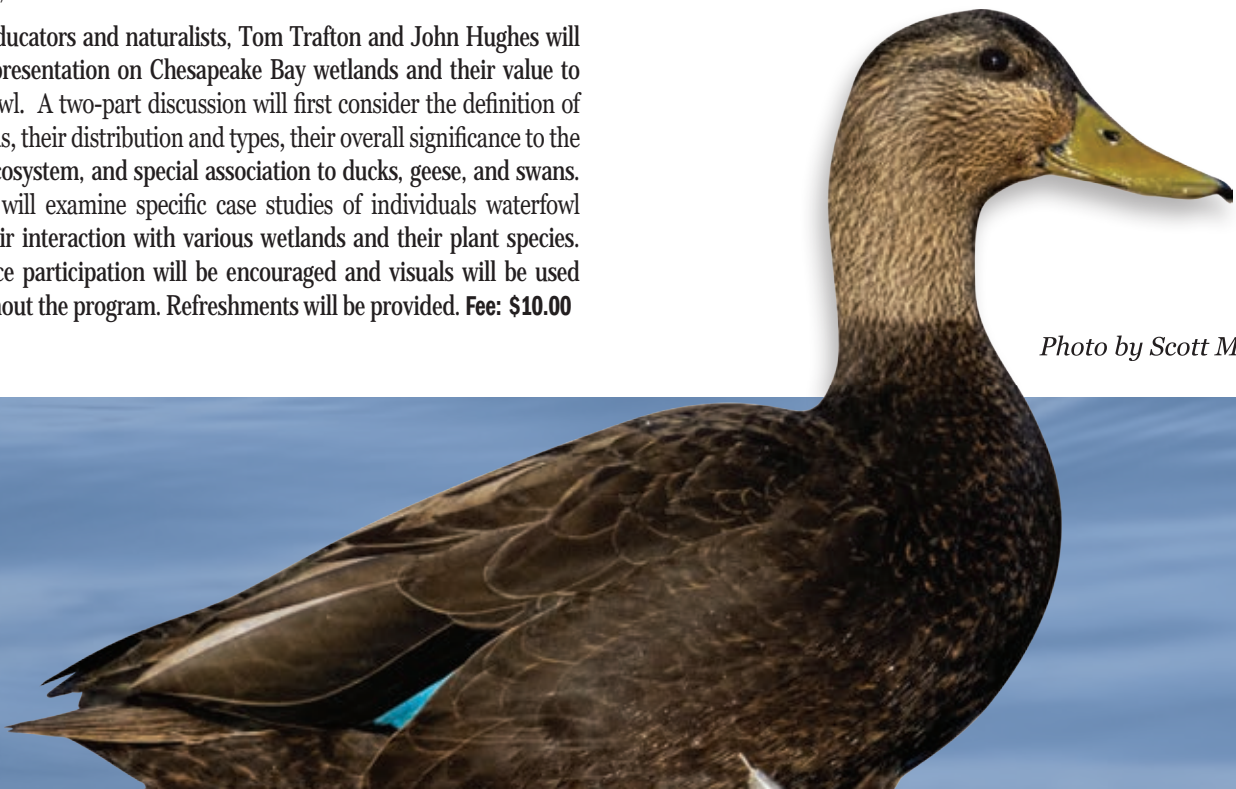


Photo by Scott Moody

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