

The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECoy MUSEUM

Vol. 35 No. 2

Spring 2025

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43rd Annual Decoy
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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

Honorary Chairman John Eichelberger, Jr. (Willow Street, PA) puts the finishing touches on a black duck hen. The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is proud to have John Eichelberger, Jr. serve as the Honorary Chairman for the 43rd Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival. Photo by Kyle Presnell.

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HAVRE DE GRACE • MARYLAND

43RD ANNUAL

Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

May 3-4, 2025

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Photo by Eric Dusenbery



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All correspondence should be sent as above.

From the President...

Since emerging from the tumultuous times that we all faced during, and immediately following COVID, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum has embraced a very ambitious agenda to pursue a transition from a local to a super-regional waterfowling history and decoy making museum. This transition is due in part to opportunities that have arisen as a result of the untimely closures of some prominent super-regional museums within our geography.



The founders of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum established it in 1986 in order to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit artifacts from the rich cultural history of waterfowling and decoy making in the Lower Susquehanna River and Upper Chesapeake Bay. Nearly 40 years since its opening, the museum remains true to its mission.

The museum landscape is driving institutions to make use of ever-changing electronic technologies, develop offerings that are more interactive and immersive, and feature a variety of new exhibits in order to keep things “fresh.” Said another way, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum cannot afford to rest on its laurels, rather, must continually reinvent itself order to remain relevant for the coming 40 years.

To that end, we have made it a priority to become more active, strengthen old relationships, and build new relationships with as many decoy collecting clubs as practical within our geography. This effort has already paid significant dividends to both the museum and the clubs, as our new partnerships have resulted in the museum’s display of remarkable exhibits. These collaborative efforts have also advanced our strategies and strengthened the preservation of waterfowl history.

Building on the success we have had bringing in high-value exhibits, the museum finds itself in need of additional exhibit space. To that end, we have embarked on perhaps the most ambitious capital project in the museum’s history. After spending more than 2-years researching the many factors associated with a significant capital expansion, it was concluded that the museum should be doubled in size (from 12,000 – 24,000sf). Construction costs are estimated to exceed \$5M, for which fundraising efforts are actively underway.

We are mindful that everyone is being bombarded with requests for funds. That said, we embrace the mission of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum and will continue to advance our future by any means available to us. We thank those who have supported us in the past and encourage those who haven’t to consider doing so.

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Louder B. Phillips

Hard-working farmer, churchman
and firefighter who lived a simple
life and made a few decoys

By Bill Waibel

Millions of people flock to Ocean City, Maryland each summer to enjoy the warm sun, sandy beaches, boardwalk, amusement parks and fine dining. Thrasher's fries and Fisher's popcorn, the smell of salt air and sunscreen combined with the chatter of gulls completes the scene. Most vacationers, however, have no idea about life on the mainland side, once they cross bridges and into the hustle and bustle of the beach resort. The northern part of Worcester County is a most pleasant area if one enjoys large farms and expansive forests. Fields of corn, soybeans and winter wheat are numerous, while houses are scarce. Many forests are mature in just second growth, while others are in their relative infancy, planted after prior clear cutting left the ground bare. The primary commercial tree is the statuesque loblolly pine, while the red maple, called locally "swamp maple" is the most common species. White oak, American holly, sweet gum are also present along with a host of others that frequent the rich loam of the Atlantic Coastal Plain. There is one thing that even the most casual visitor will notice, and that is how flat the area is. Also in abundance are numerous large chicken houses as the poultry industry is very prominent on the lower Eastern Shore.

Between the mainland and Ocean City lies the St. Martins River and the Isle of Wight, Assawoman and Sinepuxent Bays and numerous salt marshes with wavering spartina grass, known locally as saltwater cord grass. Towards its headwaters, the St. Martins splits into two prongs with one going slightly northwest past the town of Bishopville, while the



Louder standing in front of Rainy Day Sporting Goods Store on Racetrack Road, holding a nice flounder taken from the nearby Route 50 bridge. Circa 1987.

other continues due west and terminates at Shingle Landing. Along the road leading to Shingle Landing, a scant couple of hundred yards from the river and less than five miles from the Atlantic Ocean, is where Louder B. Phillips owned a farm. Phillips was born November 28, 1912, in Gumboro, Delaware on a farm along Pittsville Road, a few miles north of the Maryland-Delaware border. His parents, Thomas B. Phillips (born 1883), and Annie M. Elliott (born 1893) were both natives of Sussex County, Delaware. Louder's paternal grandparents, Benjamin Phillips, Sr., and Sarah Hester Phillips shared the same birth year (1843) and birthplace, Lower Sussex County, Delaware, along with his maternal grandfather, John Elliott (born 1852), while his maternal grandmother, Mary Nibbett Elliott was born in Worcester County, Maryland in 1857. All were involved in farming.

Louder was one of six children, having three sisters and two brothers, all of whom could read and write. Growing up on a farm had the advantage of self-sustainability during lean times and a large family provided the workforce to do so.



Showell United Methodist Church where Louder and Viola Phillips were members for almost 60 years.



Lane leading to where Phillips' farm once stood, Shingle Landing Road, Showell, MD.

Phillips' entire family were farmers going back generations. The crops of corn, rye, soybeans, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, and strawberries were the staples grown by farmers in the first half of the twentieth century. Poultry and lumber also grew to be important industries, and Phillips engaged in all of it. His entire clan lived and farmed within a five-mile radius, encompassing Lower Sussex County, Delaware and Northern Worcester and Wicomico Counties in Maryland.

By 1930, Louder was 17 years old and the family had moved to the outskirts of Pittsville, Maryland, where they rented a farm. Being a typical farm lad, Louder was handy with a pocketknife, hatchet, shotgun and wrench. Phillips made it through the seventh grade, and had been assisting his father with farming activities, according to census reports. Plowing, planting, fertilizing, harvesting, tending to livestock, vaccinating chickens were just some of the endless jobs that needed doing. In addition, farm folk had to repair equipment, weld, install and repair fencing, clear fence rows in addition to normal activities like chopping wood and feeding pets. This on-the-job training provided Louder with a framework of knowledge, experience and the work ethic that would stay with him for the rest of his life, and he loved every minute of it.

In 1931, Louder became smitten with Viola Jones, a girl he met at church, and they married in January 1932. They were married for over 60 years. Viola came from a local family who were also farmers and was deeply engrained in the farming lifestyle. The couple never had any children. After renting a home for several years and saving their money, they bought their first house in August 1938 along with 1.45 acres.

Life during the Depression era in those rural communities was simple by today's standards. There were very few strangers as most farm families had kin throughout the area. Neighbors got along and lent a helping hand to those in need. Louder and Viola were well liked and considered solid citizens, whose counsel was sought by many members of the community. Social events were usually centered around the church and the Phillips' were longtime members of the Showell United Methodist Church, just a mile down the road. In addition to services, the congregation held picnics, seasonal festivals, and relief efforts to help those in need.

Being near the river, coastal bays and marshes provided an opportunity for Louder to pursue his favorite pastimes, hunting and fishing. Phillips hunted ducks and was known to pursue rabbits and bobwhite quail on several farms in the surrounding area. The game he killed supplemented the family food coffers during the lean times and fish provided a pleasant change of pace during the spring and summer months. Louder was very enthusiastic about gunning for ducks and pursued them whenever his busy schedule would allow. He gunned with his brothers on occasion and fished with older brother Clarence quite frequently, especially when they were young men.

By 1940, Louder and Viola were living in a house that they owned in the Berlin area. Louder also registered for the draft in October of 1940 where he was listed at 5 feet 11 inches tall and 143 pounds but never drafted. They purchased their farm on Shingle Landing Road, near Showell, Maryland in November of 1944. Like many folks of that generation, each held a job or two in addition to their farming responsibilities. Louder worked as a truck driver for a lumber company, while Viola was an inspector at a chicken processing plant. Imagine working a full day and coming home to do all the



Showell Volunteer Fire Department, where Louder served for 47 years.



Phillips black duck decoy from his original, late 30s rig, at home with the marsh and St. Martins River in the background.

farm chores. Folks were resilient in those days and did not have the distractions that hamper many people today.

The rest of the decade was prosperous as the couple successfully farmed and expanded their farming practice to include a large-scale chicken operation. Roland Beauchamp (1902-1966) operated a sawmill and sold lumber starting around 1930. Phillips drove lumber trucks for Beauchamp during the mid-thirties into the mid-40s. Around 1934, Beauchamp, a very industrious man, started a business raising chickens (broilers) and became one of the largest producers in the nation. He contracted local farmers and formed a partnership on a fifty-fifty profit basis. Beauchamp furnished all the chickens and feed, while the profits were divided equally. His chicken raising was done in a very technical manner, and he demanded the most sanitary conditions possible. He provided training for the farmers and was a good man to work for and a pillar of the community. He also started selling feed around the same time, as well. Louder drove for Beauchamp in the lumber business and became one of the many local farmers who partnered with him to raise broilers soon after purchasing their farm. In addition to farming, Phillips, a man of great patience, was a school bus contractor for Worcester County Public Schools starting in 1946 and driving for 31 years.

By 1950, Louder was 37 years of age and farmed and drove the school bus. In addition to raising broilers, he was growing corn and soybeans, selling to Beauchamp for his feed business. Viola was 36 years old and working as a vaccinator of chicks in the broiler industry. The use of vaccines prevented large scale loss and helped produce larger and healthier broilers. Louder was also a self-employed carpenter who built many chicken houses throughout the area.

In addition, Louder and Viola built a butcher shop/ deli by 1950. Unfortunately, they had to sell the building and all the accoutrements in January 1951. The classified ad stated, “sold at absolute cost” and cited “bad health” as the reason for selling. On April 25, 1951, The Salisbury Times wrote, “Louder Phillips has returned to his home after undergoing treatment in the St. Luke’s Hospital, Baltimore”. This medical event certainly coincides with the selling of the business. The unidentified illness was likely cured as Louder lived another 42 years. The Phillips’ prospered and by the end of the decade, they paid off their mortgage and owned their farm free and clear.

In addition to their heavy vocational load, Louder and Viola were life members of the Showell Volunteer Fire Department, Louder serving 47 years fighting fires and being elected to the board of directors in 1970, while Viola offered support in the Ladies Auxiliary. The Phillips’ were also members of the Worcester County Farm Bureau.

During the 60s and 70s, the Phillips’ bought some smaller properties around the area and sold some to young families they knew from church and the fire hall. Louder and Viola were very benevolent people. They held several mortgages for these folks at an interest rate less than local banks. Records indicate that all loans were repaid in a timely manner. They were good money managers, industrious and had built a comfortable life together.

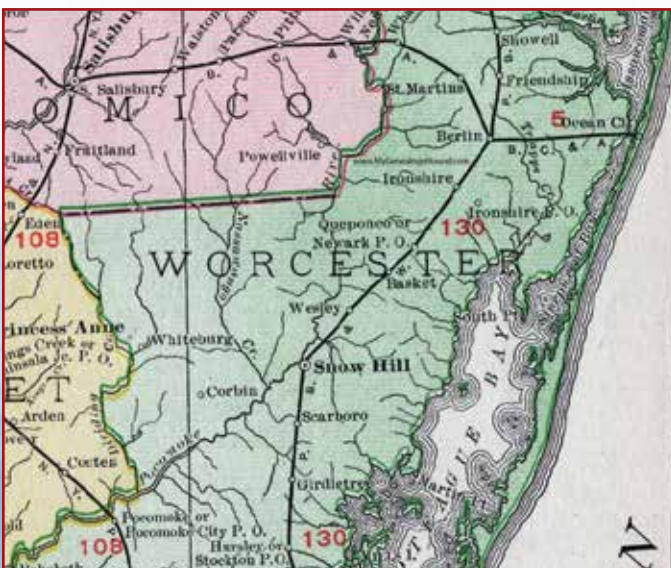
The couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in January of 1982 with a fine “open house” party at the Showell Fire Hall. Many friends and relatives attended this happy occasion.



Phillips black duck made as a part of a second, later rig or as a replacement, circa 1950s, demonstrating flatter profile than the older model.



Another example of a Phillips black duck decoy from the 1950s. The two later models are outfitted with line attachments both fore and aft, suggesting that Phillips may have strung some decoys together to make setting out and picking up easier.



Early map of Worcester County.

With Louder's proximity to the river, salt marshes and Isle of Wight and Assawoman Bays, it was natural for him and his friends to pursue ducks. At that time, black ducks were the primary target of the local gunners as they were big and good on the table. In addition, brant, blackheads, redheads were also sought and provided some variation to the daily bag. Geese and mallards were occasionally killed but were the exciting exception. Phillips shot at various locations and built sparse driftwood blinds or just hid inside of the marsh grass and kept very still. Black ducks are the wariest of all and took a skilled gunner to kill them in substantial numbers or with any frequency. Louder preferred the iconic Winchester Model 12 shotgun, a fowling piece known for being well built and ultra-dependable.

Louder needed decoys and there were few commercial makers in area. Capt. John Smith lived about 5 miles away in West Ocean City and Norman Hudson was in Ocean City after moving up from Chincoteague and would have been good resources as these men likely knew Phillips. However, Phillips decided to make his own rig of decoys in the spirit of independence evident in most farmers. As a carpenter, he certainly had the skills, the tools, and the desire to complete this job.

The writer acquired his first Phillips decoy about twenty years ago and was excited as he has many ties to that area. The seller had provenance as someone who knew Phillips in his last years. In addition, there was the promise of a pair of Phillips mallards that were "in boxes somewhere." Despite more than a dozen polite inquiries over a span of several years, the mallards were never located. I assumed this decoy was part of a "one and done" rig and was happy to own it. Fortunately, the writer's assumption was wrong, and another black duck surfaced in an online auction. Each was obviously made by the same hand, with similar head patterns, although the second bird's body style was somewhat different. Since that discovery, another has joined the flock with the new third member being a rig mate to the second.

Upon examining this trio of decoys, the writer was able to tell a few things about the maker and the build. There is compelling evidence showing that there were two separate rigs or possibly replacements made years after the original rig. The earlier bird is more rounded both on top and bottom and has a more abrupt tail rise, not unlike a premiere Mason decoy. The heads on each are cut from the same pattern, although the later models had a slight modification making the crown a bit longer and less abrupt. Each example sports

roofing nail eyes, with the newer versions painted yellow and the older one is worn and rusty. There is no bill delineation, mandibles, or nostrils, except on one of the later models, but the heads, made from white pine, are competent, albeit extremely basic and a bit higher than on average decoys. The head attachment was typical with a large 60-penny nail driven down through the top of the head in a predrilled, countersunk hole and two or three smaller common nails securing the front of each side of the throat.

The bodies, made of Atlantic white cedar, were cut out on a bandsaw, and finished with a drawknife and spokeshave with the later additions being a little thinner and having a flat bottom with a tail that flares upward at a more subtle angle than the earlier model. Louder appears to have used sandpaper as the birds are finished. Being a resourceful man, Phillips found a reliable source of lead for ballast weights. He used the egg-shaped weights that were strung along the bottom of gill nets to hold the net along the bottom. Louder simply struck the weights with a hammer until they were flat and then attached with several nails. This ballasting technique was also used by Capt. John Smith, who lived a half dozen miles down the road. Anchor line attachments were typical fence staples with each of the younger birds being rigged fore and aft, indicating the possibility that Phillips strung together a few decoys or decided to rig out couple facing backwards to give the rig some variety.

The paint application on Phillips's decoys is interesting. Louder employed a scratch painting technique that was originally introduced by James T. Holly of Havre de Grace, in the 1880s and later used on Chincoteague by Ira Hudson, Doug and Charles Jester and Miles Hancock to name a few. After the decoy was sanded, a grayish primer was applied and allowed to dry hard. The topcoat of raw umber was applied and while still wet, Phillips scratched feathers in with a sharpened stick, exposing the light undercoat. The scratch paint is competent, although it looks as if Louder was in a hurry as feathers vary in size and shape and overall neatness. The heads were scratched in a similar manner with the back of the neck and crown being left alone which is consistent with a black duck. The bills are painted in the typical olive drab consistent with many early black duck decoys. The bottoms of the bills were left unpainted. The speculums are green and flanked with a white stripe on each side. Louder even scratched in linear tail feathers. One can only wonder if Phillips was influenced by Capt. Smith, who employed a similar scratch painting technique.



Bottom view of a later model Phillips black duck showing ballast and fore and aft anchor line attachment staples



Bottom view of earlier Phillips black duck

Louder's decoy output was exceedingly small, probably two or three dozen. He certainly was not in the business of selling decoys commercially and just chopped out enough for him and his gunning partners to shoot over. The three I have located included one found locally, one at an online sale on the Upper Eastern Shore and one from an online auction in North Carolina. I would venture to say it is likely there are at least a few more out there and they will be easy to identify after reading this article.

Phillips also enjoyed fishing in the bays behind Ocean City and frequented the commercial harbor in West Ocean City. He also spent a good deal of time at Rainy Day Sporting Goods on Racetrack Road where bait, tackle, beer, and conversation could be had. Louder fished from a small boat and in his later years spent a good deal of time wetting a line on the route 50 bridge that leads into Ocean City and at nearby Stinky Beach, just southwest of the bridge. His weapon of choice



Winchester Model 12 pump action shotgun, shown with a Montegue rod and Ocean City rod along with a couple of Louder Phillips's black ducks.

was a bamboo Montague boat rod fitted with an Ocean City "Bay City" reel, featuring a star drag. The primary target was flounder, although bluefish, black wills (seabass), hardhead (Atlantic croaker) and rock (striped bass) added variety to the stringer. The writer has fished that very bridge since 1968 when his father and grandfather carried him along and tolerated his frequent reeling in to "see if I had anything." I have often wondered if we ever fished the bridge at the same time as Louder Phillips.

Louder passed away on March 18, 1993, due to respiratory failure. He was 80 years old. Viola followed on August 24, 2009, at the age of ninety-six. They are interred together at Evergreen Cemetery in Berlin, Maryland.

As a decoy maker, Phillips will never be compared with an Ira Hudson or the Ward Brothers. His work is scarce and quite rudimentary by most standards. However, it represents

utilitarian American folk art, made by a hardworking, regular guy, which helped its maker kill good bags of black ducks out in the marshes and bays of Worcester County. By pure luck, the writer found a Phillips decoy and the provenance that went along with it and can chronicle Louder, helping him escape the heap of thousands of unknown decoy makers out there and gain the notoriety he deserves.

Louder B. Phillips was a fixture in his community. He was a kind and empathetic man who was always available to lend a hand to someone in need. In addition to being a successful farmer, carpenter, truck, and school bus driver, Louder was a solid member of his church and a long-time volunteer firefighter. He was also a devoted husband to the love of his life, Viola. He certainly lived a well spent life.

The writer is a long-time decoy collector and can be reached at: coachbillwaibel@gmail.com

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Saving Bits & Pieces of our Waterfowling History:

Decoy Roundtables and the Bartlett & Hayward Company

By C. John Sullivan, Jr.

I well remember having many decoy discussions with my late friend and decoy historian Henry A. Fleckenstein, Jr. We would have talks about life, love, and of course decoys. We talked of what we knew and what we didn't know. Looking back, as we sat at each other's kitchen tables or in one of Henry's various sheds, those conversations were the beginning of what we named "Decoy Roundtables."

I'm sure that others had done it before us, but whatever knowledge we had, we shared it and made other collectors aware of our conclusions. Those roundtables continued with Henry and a few others right until the end of Henry's days. They are ongoing and now are regular occurrences with other collectors at decoys shows and gatherings.

One of those early discussions, perhaps our very first roundtable, took place inside a shed of Henry's East New Market home. Henry reached up to a beam above the shed's door and pulled down several Upper Bay decoys. Each of those decoys was different than others that we handled that day. These decoys had inletted cast iron pads fastened to their undersides. Each of the iron pads that served as the decoy's ballast weight were raised letters, some reading E.L.B. and others reading T.J.H. A discussion of what those letters signified became an ongoing talking point to see if we could find some little fact that would put an end to those mysterious letters. Sometime after those initial discussions, I rescued 16 wooden biscuit boxes from the attic of the historic Harford County Circuit Court House. Those boxes were scheduled to go to the county's landfill in anticipation of the remodeling



*The Bartlett & Hayward Company
Baltimore, Maryland*

of the old court house. They contained the Harford County tax assessments from 1896 and 1902. I placed them in a storage closet for a time, and then one cold winter night, I sat down in front of the fireplace in our historic home with one of the boxes. The first little book that I took out of the dusty old crate was the Assessor's Field Book of 1896. The book recorded the assessor's notes from his field visits. Just by some curious fate, the first book that I had selected was for those properties located on the Bush River Neck. Those parcels became a part of the Aberdeen Proving Ground by order of a Presidential Proclamation in 1917.

Of all of my collecting memories, the one moment that stays with me always is the day that I opened up that little book and written on the inside of the book's cover were the words "Bartlett and Hayward Company 500 decoys." That single moment and that image changed the early decoy collector's thoughts of who were the owners of those early Susquehanna Flats decoys. The letters E.L. B. and T.J.H. were the initials of Edward L. Bartlett and Thomas J. Hayward. Bartlett and Hayward owned four farms on the Bush River Neck comprising 1,300 acres. The two had become partners in 1848 in the iron foundry business. They

*Employee
Identification
Badge*



*C. John Sullivan, Jr. (L) and Henry Fleckenstein (R) holding
an early roundtable at the decoy shed.*



Bronze Plaques



Bartlett & Hayward Envelope from 1885



*Circa 1848 Hayward & Bartlett
Cast Iron Parlor Stove*

manufactured stoves, architectural iron works, locomotives, and heating apparatus. The foundry produced cast iron pads with the owners' initials. These iron pads were attached to the underside of their duck decoys to serve as ballast weights. Most of Bartlett's decoys were carved by Benjamin Dye, while Hayward's were carved by the Holly family. Aside from the decoys, the best known works by Bartlett and Hayward are the cast iron garden ornaments of their dogs. A pair, *Sailor* and *Canton*, which once stood on either side of the entrance to their offices, now resides at the Maryland Center of History and Culture on West Monument Street in Baltimore City. A third one can be visited at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels.

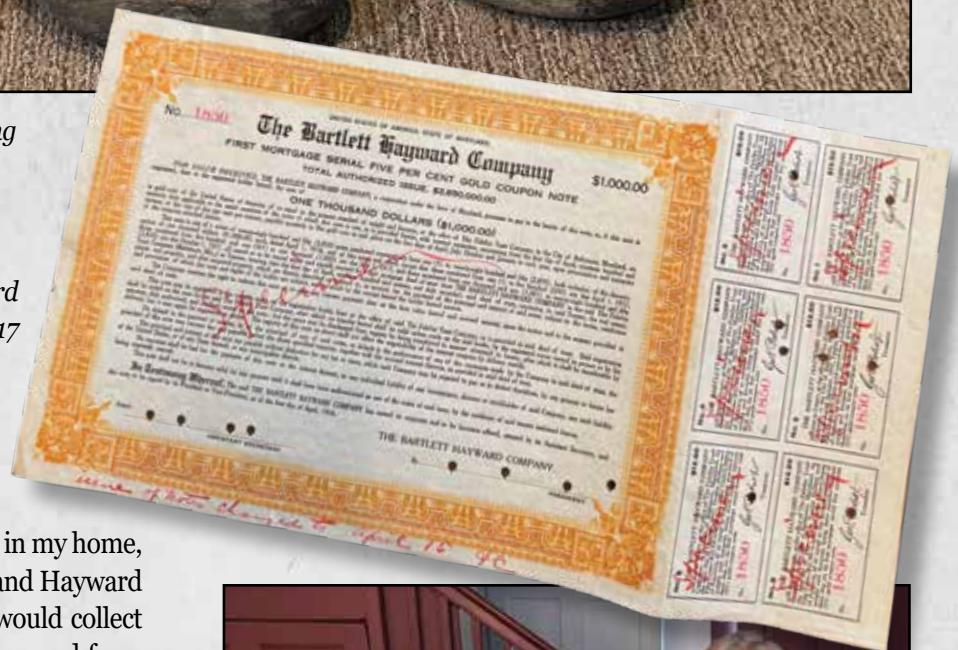
As the years have gone by, I have found myself gathering other pieces of the Bartlett and Hayward enterprises. Every piece that I have found from their businesses has become a part of my collection. Both iron and brass plaques from

buildings and locomotives were added to the list. Pieces of ephemera wearing their names joined in. Most recently, an identification badge for an employee was mailed to me from a fellow collector from North Dakota. But then, literally out of nowhere, an opportunity presented itself to me. The Boyer family of Harford County saved and preserved items from their waterfront estate on the Bush River. Their property was the site where Henry Boyer and his father-in-law, Columbus Watts, captured the massive gun of night hunter John Payhill. Inside the Boyers' riverside home, one of the sources of heat had been a circa 1848 Hayward and Bartlett cast iron parlor stove. When the waterfront estate was lost to progress, the next generation of Boyers had the foresight to save that historic heat source. The family let the ornate stove serve as a conversation piece in their colonial era house outside of the town of Bel Air. When the time arrived for the Boyer heirs to move on, once again for the sake of progress, various items were offered to the auctioneer to disburse. I was lucky



*Bartlett & Hayward Decoys Wearing
Iron Pad Ballast Weights*

*Bartlett & Hayward
Stock Certificate of 1917*



enough to win that historic stove. It now resides in my home, accompanying other bits and pieces of Bartlett and Hayward memorabilia. Some may wonder why anyone would collect these various and sundry objects that are far removed from the E.L.B. and T.J.H. decoys, but for me, they complete the story.

Decades before collectors referred to decoy discussions and conversations as “decoy roundtables,” earlier collectors were talking about the various carving styles. As my friend Bobby Richardson often tells me, “In our early days of collecting, what the hell did we know? We just tried to figure it out.” So to this day, we do the same. We attempt to figure out something that makes sense to this wonderful passion we share. So now, when we study a feature that doesn’t fit in the category of what we think we know about the various carvers, we use the term “because they could.” Going forward, let us continue discussions and conversations about these wonderful pieces of wood that we collect and let us try to “figure it out.”



*Bobby Richardson (L) and C. John Sullivan, Jr. (R) Holding
a Decoy Roundtable*

Workshop Window

By Cindy Currier

Jode Hillman
Mullica Hill, New Jersey

In this issue of Workshop Window, we feature the workshop of carver, Jode Hillman. Jode is an avid outdoorsman, evidenced by all the mementos displayed throughout his shop. He built his 16' x 24' workshop himself 12 years ago. He is self-taught and makes different types of decoys, duck calls and oysters. Jode's birds are all hollow and are generally made in the Delaware River Style. In 2007, he began carving full time and has earned a collection of awards and accolades. Please enjoy this visual tour!





JOHN EICHELBERGER, JR.

EXHIBIT

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John Eichelberger, Jr.

*By Mike Tarquini
Photos by Kyle Presnell*

Lancaster County, sometimes nicknamed Pennsylvania Dutch Country, is a rural county in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Within Southern Lancaster County is a small unincorporated community known as Refton, a part of Strasburg Township. This community, with a population well under 1,000 people, has a postal address of nearby Willow Street, PA.

Strasburg Township is best known for the Strasburg Railroad, the Railroad Museum of PA, the Choo Choo Barn with its 1,700-sf custom model train display, and the Toy Train Museum. Aside from its railroad themed attractions and beautiful rolling hills landscape, the area is home to decoy carver John R. Eichelberger, Jr.

In 1956 John was born the oldest of six children to parents John R. Eichelberger, Sr. and Patricia Rudy in Cabbage Hill, one of Lancaster, PA's oldest neighborhoods. "The Hill" experienced rapid growth in the late nineteenth century with the arrival of several waves of German immigrants. The residents were predominantly working-class people. John Sr. worked for Hubley Manufacturing Company, an American producer of a wide range of cast-iron toys, doorstops, and bookends. Patricia worked at what was known as Armstrong World Industries while also working for the Lancaster County newspaper. John's Roman Catholic upbringing as a member of Sacred Heart Parish saw him attending Sacred Heart Elementary School and Lancaster Catholic High School where he played football. Growing up, John hunted with his four brothers often in pursuit of small game such as rabbits and pheasants in the local area. Their pursuit of waterfowl came later. All of the Eichelberger boys played football.

In 1981, John married Susan Nixdorf. For fifteen years (1981–1996), John and Susan made West Willow Street, PA their home. It was there that they began to raise their three children Michael, Ryan, and Kegan. In 1996, the family moved to their present location in Refton, PA. John worked a career that spanned 39 years at Case-New Holland, an agricultural equipment company, retiring in 2016. At one time or another, all of John's 4 brothers worked for Case-New Holland.

While visiting Vincenti Decoys in Havre de Grace, MD in 2011, John learned of Willie McDonald & the Duck Blind's "how to" kits for making cork decoys from Jeannie Vincenti. The "how to" kits came complete with a DVD from master carver Willy McDonald, Hickory Corners, MI. Willy is a consistent blue ribbon winner on the competition show circuit with many Best in Show awards to his credit in the Ohio Decoy Carving and Collecting Show, North American Decoy Championship, North Western Michigan Decoy Show, The New Orleans "Best in the Gulf" Championship and the Ward



*Susan and John
Eichelberger*



*John's first decoy, a
Bluebill Drake in cork*



Foundation's "Chesapeake Challenge." John credits these "how to" kits for shaving years off of learning by trial and error as he honed his decoy making skills. John's first carving projects consisted of a bluebill drake followed by a mallard drake, both made from cork. To this day, John proudly shows both of these beauties to visitors to his shop.

After crafting waterfowl decoys from cork for about 4 years, John transitioned to wood. John's peers in the decoy world told him "if you want decoys to last, you need to make them from wood." Since 2015, John has made most of his decoys from wood, shaping the bodies from Paulownia wood which given its straight grain and light weight, is extremely easy to work. Paulownia also takes a wide variety of glues, stains, and finishes well. This type of wood is often used in applications where a lightweight (yet strong) wood is required. The use of Paulownia wood negates the need to hollow out the decoy bodies in order to make the decoy lighter. With all of the advantages of Paulownia, John points out that it does not hold detail like cedar and basswood. Basswood is the material of choice for the decoy heads. Basswood is easy to work with, being very soft and light. It is considered one of the most suitable wood species for hand carving. John sources his Paulownia from Amish saw mills in the Lancaster, PA area and his Basswood from Groff & Groff Lumber in nearby Quarryville, PA.

John's decoy-making shop is a former chicken house and is located adjacent to his home. The shop is adorned with large windows on one side which once allowed sunlight to keep the chickens warmer during the winter months and a series of wall vents on the opposite wall to encourage air flow. The shop contains minimal power equipment but is home to a variety of hand tools. Blocks of Paulownia (5" X 9") are stacked within the shop. The process begins with John roughing out the shape of the subject decoy with a bandsaw, removing larger pieces of excess wood. Once rough shaped, John uses a variety of hand tools such as wood gouges, draw knives, spoke shaves, rasps, and finally a bow sander to complete the body making process. The decoy heads are shaped using a power tool such as a Foredom tool, with the bills being carved exclusively by hand with a carving knife. Once the bodies and heads are attached and finished sanded, the project is off to the paint bench.



Green-winged teal dead hang

Mallard Drake in cork, John's second decoy



The paint shop is located in the basement of John Eichelberger's house where it is remote from the dust that accompanies the shaping of the bodies and heads. The basement paint area also is a heated space allowing for more efficient drying and painter comfort.

John uses artist tube oils to finish his creations. Finally, a protective coating of varnish is applied to the entire carving.

*Uncle Freddy's
peach stone
carvings*



Since beginning his carving in 2011, John's body of work has moved from producing corks (2011-2015) to transitioning to wood in 2015. Gunning decoys were the early focus of his work. John creates puddle ducks such as mallards, wigeons, teal, and black ducks. His diving ducks include canvasbacks, redheads, and bluebills. Aside from the traditional gunning decoys, more decorative types of projects emerged as John gained confidence in his ability. His progression has led him to produce standing birds as well as those with raised wings. In an effort to broaden his customer base and provide options for the those who want to collect carvings other than traditional waterfowl decoys, John has produced a red-tailed hawk and "tweeties" such as cardinals, blue-birds, and a variety of song birds. John says, "he offers a greater variety in an effort to keep his women customers happy." In all, John estimates that he completes about 25 to 30 carving projects each year.

John shared that carving had some roots within his extended family. Freddie Rudy, his great uncle on his mother's side, carved umbrella handles for an Umbrella company after World War II. John produced an example of his work for our viewing. Perhaps a more fascinating example of Uncle Freddie's talent was shared when John showed us a small wooden box filled with peach stone carvings. Peach stone carvings are a Chinese folk art form that involves intricate designs carved into peach pits. The carvings are said to ward off evil spirits and are often used as jewelry or decorations.

John and Susan Eichelberger have been very generous with their time by supporting non-profit organizations such as Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, Schreiber Center for Pediatric Development and Hospice, and the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. John donates his creations to these organizations for use in their fundraising efforts.

Both John and Susan have been stalwart volunteers at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. They have been an integral part of almost every community outreach program that the Museum has hosted over the last several years. Whether carving a pumpkin with a young child at the Museum's annual Carve N' Candy Halloween event or demonstrating how to hand carve a decoy for local Scout groups they have used their abilities to demonstrate the folk art to a variety of audiences. John has been a guest carver in the R. Madison Mitchell Decoy Shop numerous times throughout the warmer months entertaining Museum visitors and demonstrating his craft. Susan has always been at his side supporting him.

During our visit to John Eichelberger's decoy shop, we perhaps uncovered a secret to his success. Susan Eichelberger enjoys baking all sorts of goods. As our time with John drew to a close, we entered the house to photograph some of John's creations. We were pleasantly greeted with the smell of freshly baked goods. Soon after, we were treated to freshly baked bread and soft pretzels. We couldn't help but notice that John provides the quality control function for these finished products. As we left Lancaster County with a goodie bag full of soft pretzels, Kyle Presnell (our photographer) and I reflected on a great visit with the Eichelbergers and salivated over our precious cargo of Susan's soft pretzels.

*Examples of
what John
refers to as
"Tweety" birds*





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

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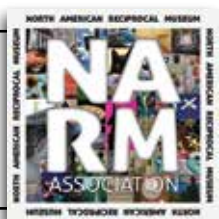
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CHESAPEAKE SMORGASBORD

by John Hughes

"It is so known through the length and breadth of its watershed. The Bay. There is no possible confusion with any other body of water, no need for more precise description. It is, after all, the continent's largest estuary. Its waters are rich..."

- William Warner, *Beautiful Swimmers: Waterman, Crabs and the Chesapeake Bay*



CANVASBACK NATURALIST

Each edition will feature a natural history topic relating to the mission of the museum. The author, **John E. Hughes, Jr.** 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.



Freshwater Marsh and Swamp by Tom Trafton



Saltwater Marsh by Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Food: Any substance consumed by an organism for nutritional support that provides energy to the organism, helps to maintain its life, and stimulates its growth. Food contains essential nutrients such as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals, etc., that are digested and assimilated by the organism in its life experience. Without adequate food and its processing, the organism becomes weakened and eventually will die. Organisms have varying requirements for time periods between food acquisition, quality of food, energy spent to acquire food, and energy obtained through consumption. Different species have different strategies for fulfilling their nutritional needs. In any biological system, consumers (heterotrophs), seek the habitat which most easily provides them with the ability to meet their food needs as well as exhibiting the least competitive challenge for it. Food is a limited resource, and all consumers are ultimately in competition for it. Natural selection results and species evolve or become extinct.

Efforts at gaining nutrition can take many forms. Filtering, grazing, predation (hunting), browsing, scavenging, depositional feeding (soil, sediment), fluid feeding, parasitic feeding, and saprophytic (detritivorous) feeding. Each species has evolved physical and behavioral traits that enable it to meet their food needs. The serrated edge of a merganser's bill designed to grab and hold a fish or the more centralized foot location of Canada geese for enhancing walking in grain fields, the partitioning of feeding activity to diurnal, crepuscular, or nocturnal times, the tipping behavior of puddle ducks, etc., are all examples of physical and behavioral adaptations evolved to enhance survivability in the efforts to acquire food. Most waterfowl tend to be very opportunistic in their food habits, being more than willing "to try something new." Some have become very specific (specialized) in feeding choices such as the brant goose to eelgrass (88% of its diet) as compared to a more general (nonspecific) selection of food such as the wood duck to almost any vegetation or insect. Whatever the styles or choices, all are designed to facilitate food acquisition and minimize competition with other species.

Consumers are generally assigned to a specific food niche. They are herbivores, carnivores, omnivores, and detritivores. Each category is fit into a level (trophic level) within a food chain (a system of energy transferal). Herbivores feed directly on plant material and achieve a high efficiency use of energy obtained through their plant food. An example of herbivorous waterfowl are puddle ducks in general. Carnivores are meat eaters and feed on herbivores and are less energy efficient in their food choices because of the energy lost by feeding on a higher trophic level. Mergansers are an example of carnivorous waterfowl. Omnivores feed on both plant and animal materials. Canvasbacks are a classic example. Keep in mind that almost all waterfowl are extremely opportunistic feeders and could stray from rigid classification on a temporal or geographical basis. Detritivores gain their nutrition by feeding on decomposing plant and animal material. Many waterfowl species may indirectly gain their energy through a detrital pathway. For example a merganser may feed on a tidewater silverside (fish) which met its food needs by consuming decomposing phytoplankton (microscopic plants) and/or zooplankton (microscopic animals).

The Chesapeake Bay is an incredible estuarine (place of fresh and saltwater mixing), food factory. Estuaries as a natural system produce two and a half to three times as much plant biomass (crop) as does the best farmer's field. The sun provides the energy and plant producers (autotrophs) fix that energy through photosynthesis for their own existence as well as providing consumption opportunities for heterotrophs. Photosynthesis occurs when plants use sunlight, water, CO₂, and inorganic (non-living) nutrients in the presence of chlorophyll to produce glucose (C₆H₁₂O₆), the most simple of all organic compounds from which all of the other building blocks for life are manufactured. Through the process of photosynthesis solar energy is changed into chemical energy which can then be used by consumers. An immense cornucopia awaits for the taking by our resident or migratory ducks, geese, and swans. Without this incredible productive capacity, our association of the Chesapeake Bay to waterfowl would not exist.

Waterfowl come to the Chesapeake because it has the food they need to survive particularly after a long distance migration. Their table is set by three "natural" plant communities which either partially or completely make available their services at creating a wide range of menu options. Macro-phytoplankton are ubiquitous throughout the water of the bay and can be consumed directly by some surface strainers such as teal and shovellers or indirectly by diving ducks such as canvasbacks and scoters which feed on filter-feeding clams. Underwater grass beds, also known as subaquatic vegetation or SAVs, yield extensive submerged prairies for diving duck consumers such as bluebills and redheads in many shallow regions of the bay. Wetlands growing on the edge of the bay between land and water, generate seeds, stems, roots, and rhizomes in diverse marsh plants for consumption of a great variety of puddle ducks, swans, and geese. Diets of certain waterfowl like Canada geese and mallards can be fully met or supplemented by agricultural field crops and their harvested remains (fallow). The bounty of the bay as well as its accessibility may vary from year to year, but few birds should go hungry except in extreme anomalies such as ice, habitat loss or modification, etc. The bay truly is one of the world's most ideal food-producing habitats for waterfowl.

Phytoplankton

Phytoplankton are tiny green, free-drifting, uni or multicellular autotrophic units found throughout the bay's waters. Some are



Shovelers straining by Ralph Hockman

microscopic, others are easily seen especially during periods of bloom (population explosions). Species distribution is determined by salinity, water temperature, nutrient availability, herbivore presence, turbidity, depth, etc. Densities vary seasonally, but at almost no time is water anywhere in the bay without their presence. Examples of phytoplankton range from single cell algae, diatoms, and cyanobacteria to huge mats of green filamentous algae and floating duckweeds. The massive floating mats of “thread” algae also provide ideal habitat for a great variety of small animal life which probably serves as quite an added relish to duck dining. Waterfowl known to consume species of phytoplankton are brant, black duck, baldpate, bufflehead, canvasback, gadwall, goldeneye, mallard, pintail, redhead, ring-necked, scoters, shoveller, and teal. (American Wildlife and Plants: A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits. Martin, Zim, and Nelson. Org. 1951, 2023.)

Subaquatic Vegetation

Submerged grasses are the underwater, rooted (or fixed with a holdfast) plants that form extensive grasslands found in the shallow water shoulders of the bay and its tributaries. These plants are multicellular and always submarine. Looking down upon them in clear water from the surface, they appear as dense “jungle” habitats. Individual species distribution is a result of salinity, depth, turbidity, substrate, sunlight availability, weed competition, herbivore presence, chemical and especially herbicide contamination, etc. These grasses are seasonal. Almost all parts of these grasses are consumed with some pronounced favoritism given to the starchy rootstocks and seedy tips by divers such as canvasbacks and bluebills and the stems or leaves of the plant that are desired by swans and other divers. Some noted examples of valuable SAVs that waterfowl consume are wild celery, naiad grasses, bushy coontail, widgeon grass, horned pondweed, and eelgrass. Many other species can and do grow on the bay’s floor, but they are too numerous to mention and not as often eaten. Populations of Chesapeake grasses are known to fluctuate wildly from year to year and geographic place to place. Major declines in overall bay grass populations occurred in the latter half of the 20th century for a variety of reasons with many birds bypassing or leaving the area or modifying their eating habits to feed on fallow or winter wheat fields in the agricultural portions of the Delmarva or western shore. In the last 50+ years, SAVs populations in the bay have slightly improved, but are nowhere near historic levels and times.

Three examples of note with regard to waterfowl consumption of submerged grasses are the canvasback duck, the brant goose, and the tundra swan. The canvasback duck is often cited for its historic links to wild celery consumption on the Susquehanna flats and the northern bay region. It was considered for years the “king of ducks” and the most delicious of all waterfowl fare. This was largely a result of its exclusive dining habits on wild celery and other grasses. An appropriate analogy today would be American’s desire for corn fed beef. This prized duck led to the evolution of an entire culture of hunting, dining, and art in the northern bay region, especially centered in Havre de Grace, Maryland. With the disappearance of much of the grasses, the canvasback diet became more dependent on animal materials such as certain varieties of clams. Although canvasbacks almost always appear on our Christmas bird counts, never do the numbers come close to those of historic accounts of the first half of the 20th century.

Brant geese are another example of an underwater grass feeder. This smaller goose is found in the saltier, southern portion of the bay as well as along the Atlantic coastal region. Here is also found their favorite food stock, eelgrass. Brants had and have a very specific (specialized) association with eelgrass consumption. The brant feeds in shallow waters at ebb tide consuming the stems and rootstocks of the grass. In the early 1930s, an accidentally introduced parasitic organism led to the nearly complete devastation of the eelgrass beds and the subsequently plummeting numbers of brant geese. Brant diet was highly specialized with at least 88% of its diet being eelgrass. Second food choices never really fulfilled the brants’ nutritional needs or apparent desire and their east coast populations were nearly extirpated. With the eventual recovery of the eelgrass, brant numbers have stabilized and recovered. Specialized feeding behavior, although considered highly successful, can lead to serious population challenges when food chain linkage is threatened.

Tundra swans are a classic example of a feeding strategy modification. These birds were shallow water feeders in and around the fresher portions of the bay. The swans fed on a variety of submarine grasses, particularly wild celery, pond weeds, and widgeon grass as well as animal matter, especially clams. With the widespread disappearance of most species of SAVs, swans switched to feeding on fallow and planted grasses on agricultural fields. Farmers’ winter wheat fields were a favorite with the swans. Their behavior of pulling up and



Pintails dabbling by Ralph Hockman



A fish-eating duck? by Scott Moody



"I'll take that!" by Joe Subolefsky

feeding on the entire plant led to the total devastation of the crops in "eat-out" areas. The swan, being a fairly capable walker because of its feet/body location, found the fields to its liking, but the farmers did not feel the same. Tundra swans can still be found field grazing, but there seems to be a more balanced style to their food acquisition today.

While on the subject of SAVs, wigeon and coots are two birds noted for exhibiting somewhat parasitic behavior or thievery. When other diving ducks and swans expend their energy, rooting underwater and surfacing to feed on the succulent grasses, these birds often steal the food when they surface. They will take the grass right out from the victim's mouth. It doesn't seem fair, but if eagles can steal fish from osprey, this type of niche has precedence, and it saves the thief energy in acquiring food. This would seem more supplemental than a basic mode of food acquisition.

Wetlands

Wetlands are the final, "natural" food factory in the bay. In particular, the highly productive marsh and swamp ecosystems found on the edges of the bay's 8,100 miles of shoreline are huge "food courts" providing diverse dining opportunities for waterfowl. These wetlands can be tidal and non-tidal, and are found along the shallows where land and water interface with specific types of soils and vegetative cover. Their type and distribution are determined by salinity, tidal range, wind and wave action, erosion, etc. In general, marshes and swamps are systems that build on deposition and decline on erosion. These areas create a wide variety of ecological services beyond direct and detrital feeding grounds for waterfowl, such as nesting habitat and cover, layover areas during migration, etc. An incredible diversity of plant species exists in these systems, making them "critical habitats" for preservation. A sampling through four species of plants and their linkage to specific waterfowl and their habitat, will hopefully give a sense of the significance of the feeding possibilities wetlands provide in the bay.

Freshwater marshes have an extreme variety of plants offering wide economic food availability. Almost no plant isn't a potential food source. For example, the starchy tubers of cattails for Canada geese, the large seeds of arrow arum for wood ducks, the amazing seed crop of tidewater marsh waterhemp to puddle ducks, etc. suggest almost unlimited feeding within the freshwater marsh. It is fairly safe to say every plant can provide a direct meal and that when the plant dies at the end of the season, the unconsumed portions will form a delectable detrital soup for other consumers such as macroinvertebrates, mollusk, crustaceans, zooplankton, and fish. Mallards are noted for their association to freshwater marshes and their eating habits explain why. They will eat nearly any plant food in the marsh such as wild rice, smartweeds, softstem bulrush, pickerelweed, broadleaf arrowhead, cattails, waterhemp, SAVs, etc. They also feed on animal matter associated with freshwater marshes such as aquatic beetles, damselflies, dragonfly nymphs, aquatic worms, clams, snails, minnows, etc. They are truly opportunistic, generalized feeders and would consume just about anything within their visual parameters. They have also grown attached to the fallow and grain of agricultural fields and gorge themselves on a regular basis. Is it any wonder that mallards are fat and abundant?

Brackish water marshes exhibit less plant diversity than freshwater systems because the presence of salt is a limiting factor, but the abundance of each particular species is greater. These wetlands are found in the middle portion of the bay (over 5 parts per thousand of salt) and its major tributaries. They have the same basic functions and values as all marsh systems. Plants found in this system range from salt grasses such as the spartinas, to three-square sedges such as olneyi and chairmakers, and certain rushes. Canada geese tend to thrive on the feeding opportunities in Dorchester County, Maryland, particularly in the Blackwater region. Here they feed on farm crops and the plants of the brackish marsh. One plant favored by the geese is olney three-square which is abundant and consumed to the problematic extent that the "eat-out" of the sedge leads to open ponds and erosion of the marsh itself. Throw muskrats into the mix and the supposedly eradicated nutria and the classic "Golden Goose" scenario becomes more than a fable.

Salt marshes are found in the southern portion of the Chesapeake and in temperate oceanic regions. Huge expanses of salt grasses (spartinas) dominate these wetlands that provide grazing experience to a variety of waterfowl. The amount of detrital material obtained through these systems is amazing and forms the basis of many human fisheries. For ducks and geese, all parts of the live grasses can be consumed but the rootstock seems most of value. Snow geese have a preference for this saltier vegetation than most other species. Spike rush and salt grass and occasionally saltwort are also browsed. Since salt plants in general have less nutritive value, much more must be consumed. Today snow geese can be found in agricultural fields, grazing on human-based crops.



Wood duck with an acorn by Iowa Wildlife Federation

Swamps

Swamps are the final type of wetland to be considered and differ from marshes because of the presence of trees and other woody vegetation. They are an extremely valuable habitat to their associated residents and are generally found in freshwater, upstream areas of the bay's tributaries. The nuts and fruits of the various trees provide an excellent food source for wood ducks which also enjoy crayfish from the swamp waters as well as insect larvae. An added advantage of swamps for wood ducks, goldeneyes, and certain mergansers is the location of many tree cavities for nesting by these species. When mature swamps and their trees disappeared in the past for a variety of reasons, wood duck populations plummeted. Thankfully, wood duck nesting boxes have helped to contribute to recovery.

Upland Areas

The upland areas around the bay have been used for agricultural production since colonial times so that original colonies could pay for themselves. Forests were cleared and wetlands were drained for farming. Original diversified farming techniques have given way to modern monocultural, industrialized production. This has all occurred since the middle of the 20th century. With a cause-and-effect relationship, modern agricultural methods happened and were partially responsible for the major decline in the Chesapeake underwater grasses and the loss of the bay's wetlands. Luckily, modern grain harvest left a small amount of grain in the combine's wake (well below 6%). Thus some birds which were experiencing loss of feeding habitats at that time were able to adapt to unintentional grains being left in the fields. Corn, soybean, millet, etc. now provide an especially important food source. Some folks believe that Canada and snow geese, tundra swans, mallards and other puddle ducks

have always fed in the fields. This is not the case and food necessity and behavioral adjustment to its acquisition are the real reasons behind it.

The Chesapeake Bay's waterfowl smorgasbord is apparent in the many habitats and species reviewed in this article. One of the major reasons the birds are here and not somewhere else is because the bounty of the bay meets their food needs. Autotrophs in the bay fix the sun's energy into consumable matter that allows the ducks, geese, and swans to live, grow, and at times, reproduce. This is made possible through photosynthesis and energy movement between levels of a food chain. Their chosen niches become the birds' biographical experience and help to provide for their ultimate survival both as an individual and a species. They are here because of the bay's food resources. This article is a mere introduction to that reality.

"Baltimore lay very near the immense protein factory of Chesapeake Bay" - H. L. Mencken

On a personal level, this article has been an enjoyment to write for two reasons. First, it helped me to realize how much I knew and shared about waterfowl ecology while working in the field for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and later, at the John Carroll School. Besides canoe trips, waterfowl study tours were one of my favorite activities to lead with students. Secondly, this review has reminded me of my own efforts at food acquisition and consumption and some of the behavioral strategies I have employed over the years. If waterfowl and I are really a result of what we have eaten, then I think the ducks, geese, and swans have fared much better than I have. I'm still an individual *Homo sapien* in an epicurean universe of desire searching for hunger fulfillment!

Reflecting on my role as a consumer, I can see why I am a big man. Over the years, I have gained a stature of 6'1" and a standing biomass of several hundred pounds. My first feeding habitat was in my mother's womb where I guess you could say I "parasitized" over 7 pounds and 11 ounces of mass from her. Since entering the biosphere of mother earth. I have proved to be very efficient (or inefficient depending on your point of view) at food acquisition and processing. I consider myself a highly non-selective, highly opportunistic omnivore ready for some food consumption whether night or day or here or there. Unfortunately, my food gathering behaviors and choices have really been a challenge to my overall survivability and longevity as an individual organism. Except for humans and captive animals, obesity is rare in the natural world. I do try to eat well with lettuce, tomato, onion, pickles, and hot peppers on my cheese steak sub or peppers and mushrooms on my extra cheese and sausage pizza and when it comes to crab, well, I am just the best detritivore you will ever meet! My "overconsumption" of food has left me with a potential bank account of stored calories for the future (fat) and my original feast or famine lifestyle has largely become feast. For waterfowl, their feasting is to be found in the bay.

Canada geese on grain by the US Fish and Wildlife Service



Dive & Dine:

A Waterfowl Feast!



Green Heron
Jerome Mitchener

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)

Black Ducks
Rob Bruch



Canvasback
Earl Blansfield



Common Merganser
Deborah Moehlmann



Cormorant
Scott Krieger



Brant Goose
Earl Blansfield

Horned Grebe
Rob Bruch



American Avocet
Scott Krieger



Long-tailed
Earl Blansfield



Surf Scoter
Rob Bruch



Loon
Rob Bruch



Osprey
Ralph Hockman



Turkey
Ralph Hockman



Sand Hill Cranes
Ralph Hockman



Eagle
Scott Krieger



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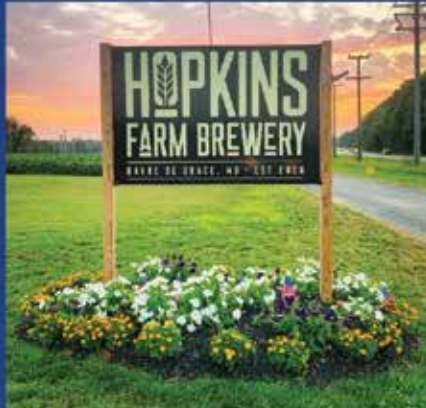
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Decoy Club News

Cape Charles, VA Welcomes the Eastern Shore of Virginia Decoy Show

By Mike Tarquini

For the last three years, the first weekend in February has been a time to venture to the Southern part of the Delmarva Peninsula to Northampton County and the historic town of Cape Charles, VA to experience the Eastern Shore of Virginia Decoy Show. In just a short time, show organizer Tommy O'Connor and his volunteers have done a fantastic job of developing this event into one of the premier events along the decoy show circuit. The event takes place at The Oyster Farm at Kings Creek.

As show attendees navigated through aisles of the Pearl Event Center they experienced a smorgasbord of the most storied decoy makers of the Delmarva Peninsula as well as from outside the Peninsula to the North and South. Exhibits from local decoy legends Grayson Chesser (Sanford, VA), Pete Peterson (Cape Charles, VA), Bill Gibian (Onancock, VA) and Mark McNair (Craddockville, VA) joined the likes of master carvers J.P. Hand (Goshen, NJ), Josh Brewer (Little Deer Isle, ME), Eddie Wozny (Cambridge, MD), and John Meredith (Worton, MD). Joining those who craft decoys, shorebirds, and other collectibles were respected artifact resellers such as Tom Reed (Mt. Pleasant, SC), Dick McIntyre (Seabrook, SC), Lloyd Newberry (Darien, GA), and John Collier (Severna Park, MD). Decoy industry auction houses such as Guyette & Deeter (St. Michaels, MD), Copley Fine Art Auctions (Pembroke, MA), and American Sporting Auctions (Syracuse, NY) exhibited artifacts from their upcoming sales. The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum was fortunate enough to be invited to participate in this event to promote the museum's efforts.

This year's show introduced a two-day format. Attendance was good on both days. The staff at the Oyster Farm at Kings Creek did a fantastic job of keeping things moving along on both days. The 4th Eastern Shore of Virginia Decoy Show will again have a two-day format with dates already set for February 6 & 7, 2026.



3rd Generation McNairs



Bill Gibian



Mark McNair



*The Oyster Farm at
Kings Creek*



Roe "Duc Man" Terry



Pete Peterson



Great Decoys, Great People & a Historic Mansion

By Chad Tragakis



The beautiful and historic Saegmuller Mansion

PDCA members were treated to a special day of outstanding decoys, the fun and camaraderie of fellow collectors, and lots of fascinating decoy and local history at the January 18 gathering of the club. Thanks to our host for the day, longtime member and Decoy Magazine's graphic designer, Drew Hawkins, we were able to meet at one of the coolest locations in our club's long history – a historic late 19th/early 20th century mansion in Arlington, Virginia.

Upon entering the beautiful castle-like estate, members were transported back in time. For many of us, it felt as if we were entering one of the historic ducking clubs of old, with 21 rooms of fine wood paneling, ornate windows, crystal chandeliers, winding staircases and 10 fireplaces. The George N. Saegmuller House dates back to 1894, was completed in 1903, and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It was the summer residence for inventor and industrialist Saegmuller and his family until his retirement in 1926, when he lived there year-round.



The famous water tower, or Wasserturm, in Nuremberg, Germany that inspired the mansion

Saegmuller immigrated to the U.S. from Germany in 1870 when he was 23. He lived and worked in Washington, D.C. and soon developed a reputation as one of the leading inventors and innovators of optical, astronomical, and surveying instruments. He next worked for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in charge of precision instruments. In 1905, he formed a partnership with the Bausch & Lomb Optical Company, who would later buy out his share, making him incredibly wealthy. Saegmuller continued to invent and innovate and his firm supplied scientific equipment for observatories and various departments of the U.S. government. He held patents for numerous optical military instruments, including telescopic sights and range-finders that were critical to the U.S. Navy during WWI, and his innovations benefitted the U.S. military for decades.

The Saegmuller mansion is located on Reserve Hill farm, named for the reserve Union Army troops who camped there during the Civil War. It is the second highest point in all of Arlington, and so was a coveted spot for Union commanders, Signal Corps officers and other troops. The Saegmuller farm spanned more than 240 acres by 1911. The family raised livestock, including cows, horses, pigs, and chickens, kept a large pond for ducks, geese, and guineafowl, and maintained a vineyard, an orchard, and grew crops including corn and hay.



After his original wooden house burned down, Saegmuller built a replacement from locally quarried bluestone. It was constructed in the style of the Nuremberg Castle that he remembered from his youth, but with touches of traditional Southern architecture, such as the portico and tall white columns. Saegmuller had an old German beer stein showing the Nuremberg city wall, and he actually showed this to the architect and builders and asked them to base the estate's new water tower on one of the medieval city's towers pictured on the stein. The mansion was the first home in Arlington County to have a telephone installed, the first to have running water, and featured state-of-the-art technologies for the time including gas lighting and four indoor bathrooms, one with a shower.

Successful in business, Saegmuller was also civically minded, providing early funding for the county's infrastructure and a new school building for its growing community. Saegmuller died in the home on February 13, 1934, his 87th birthday. The mansion was a private home until 1951, when it was bought by the then-named Columbus Club of Clarendon. Today it is the headquarters of the Columbus Club of Arlington, the home corporation of the local council of the Knights of Columbus. And this takes us back to the club's January meeting.

After some mingling and catching up, members enjoyed inspecting the decoys and folk art items that had been brought to the meeting for the four display contests. In honor of Drew's longtime focus, as a collector, researcher and writer, Potomac River decoys was the theme of the day. Several tables held nearly 30 decoys that were either made or used on the river, and this provided those in attendance with a unique opportunity to hold, examine and compare the wide variety of styles, species, and makers who each contributed to waterfowling history on our nation's river.

Drew welcomed the group and then provided an overview of waterfowling and decoy-making history on the Potomac, explaining the many connections between the decoy makers and gunning clubs there with makers on the Susquehanna Flats. He also spoke about the decoys and decoy-making influences from Long Island and Back Bay, Virginia/North Carolina that played a significant role on the Potomac. Drew and Chad Tragakis then convened a Potomac River decoy roundtable for the group, going into detail on some of the most notable and prolific makers from each part of the river.

Among the Southern Maryland decoy makers represented and discussed during the roundtable were: James Baines of Morgantown, Albert Campbell of La Plata, Tommy Deagle of Tall Timbers, John Graves and Frank Goldsborough of Leonardtown, Charles Herbert of Hughesville, Charlie and Butsie Moore of St. George Island, along with Corb Reed of Washington, D.C., the Tolson family of Stafford, Virginia, and William Wiley of Lorton, Virginia.



One of the Saegmuller Mansion's winding staircases



Decorative & Contemporary Decoy category winners



Folk Art category winners



Old Working Decoy category winners



Theme Bird category winners

After more catching up and discussions about the decoys, the group took a break for lunch. The setting was the mansion's old dining room, now converted into a comfortable and attractive pub-like atmosphere for the Knights of Columbus club members. After a casual and delicious meal with plenty of good conversation, one of the chapter board members and local historian, Myles McMorrow, took the group on a special tour of the mansion. The group was able to see every part of the impressive structure, from the huge attic, to the snooker room, to the old tower, to the massive basement. It was fun to imagine we were walking through the place in 1905 or 1925, instead of 2025.

After the tour, members returned to the large parlor where the decoys were displayed on several long tables, and voted for their favorites. A canvasback drake made circa 1900 by Perryville's Taylor Boyd, used at the Gunston Cove Club on the Potomac River's Mason Neck and branded G.C.C., earned top honors for Chad Tragakis. He also brought the second-place winners, a pair of flat-bottomed widgeon made by James E. Baines (1915-1971) of Morgantown, Maryland in Charles County, in original paint by Madison Mitchell of Havre de Grace. A very different bird from the Gunston Cove Club rig earned third for Drew Hawkins, this one being a rare and stylish swimming black duck with a cork body, made by George Robert of Bellport, Long Island, New York. Drew's black duck also featured the G.C.C. brand, now familiar to both Potomac River and Susquehanna Flats decoy collectors.

David Farrow took a resounding first place in the Old Working Decoy category for his stellar pair of canvasbacks by Capt. Harry Moore, made circa 1900. This pair was part of a small group recently discovered, having once been part of the rig of Harry Hipple. They are outstanding decoys in every respect – paint, form, condition, and provenance. Perhaps not surprisingly then, they are featured on the cover of the November/December 2024 issue of Decoy Magazine, in an article on the Moore family.

Tom Rogers earned second and third place in the category with two excellent but very different old gunners. His second-place winner was a circa 1900 hooded merganser hen by an unknown Ontario, Canada maker, with beautiful form and delicate carving. His third-place winner, also a hen, was a canvasback by Madison Mitchell made circa 1954-1956, with a slightly turned head, and still in outstanding condition. This decoy came out of a rig gunned by former Maryland state delegate, senator, and Secretary of State Fred Wineland. Tom knew Senator Wineland and was friends with his son, and actually hunted over the bird on an outing with the Winelands as a young man on the lower Potomac River near Nanjemoy Creek. It is a fine decoy, and one that nicely fit the day's theme as well.

Mike Tarquini won the Decorative/Contemporary category with a stunning black duck in swimming position made by Worton, Maryland master John Meredith. It is a fairly recent addition to Mike's collection (and a fairly recent piece to have left John's bench, toward the end of last year). It was the definite fan favorite of the day. Just behind in second place was David Farrow, who brought a redhead drake made in 2001 by world champion



carver Dick Rhode of Port Clinton, Ohio. Rhode's award-winning decoys are so realistic, that his wooden originals have been used to create molds for several lines of plastic waterfowl hunting decoys including Avery Pro Grade, Flextone, and Avian X. At the meeting David shared pictures of the mallard decoys from his current hunting rig, modeled off of Rhode's award-winning carvings, exhibiting extremely lifelike postures, detailed surfaces, and highly realistic feather patterns. If the redhead we saw is any indication, it's no wonder his pieces serve as such effective templates.

There was a three-way tie for third place in the category, between three outstanding entries. Drew Hawkins displayed a dove carving so realistic, you could almost hear it cooing. It was made in 2022 by Des Moines, Iowa carver Barry Kenney, who gunned with and studied under the famed carver Jack Musgrove. Chuck Dilla shared a unique piece made by Dave Rhodes of Absecon and Ocean City, New Jersey – a bluebill drake, but with a twist. Dave (1933-2019) is remembered as a kind and friendly gentlemen and he was perhaps best known for his outstanding shorebirds. This diver incorporates shorebirds in the form of painted illustrations (along with a calling Canada goose) around the border of a four-stanza poem about hunting, painted onto the decoy's back. It makes for a very cool and very different decorative carving, and something most of us hadn't seen the likes of before. Tom Rogers showed an excellent carving fresh from his bench, a canvasback wooden wing duck fashioned in the famous "Cleveland Can" style, which is his first attempt at this iconic decoy. Tom has been carving on and off for years, but with his recent retirement after decades as an educator and school administrator, he finally has quality time to dedicate to his craft. He has been studying the work of many current and past master carvers, and has also spent time with PDCA member Bruce Eppard in his workshop. It's always great to see the talent in our midst, and Tom's work is no exception.

Once again, we invited members to bring along folk art items to show and share that were not a decoy, and once again, we saw some very nice things. Chuck Dilla earned top honors for his Alaska native hand carved walrus made from fossilized walrus ivory with inlaid baleen eyes made in 2002 by a Yup'ik artist named Oleek. Tom Rogers was just behind with a group of three incredible folk art canes made and found in Pennsylvania. Dating to the early 1900s, the canes feature carvings of a horse's head, a horse's leg (complete with horseshoe, even showing the tiny nails), and a human foot. They were all wonderful, folky and oh so cool! Phylis Krochmal earned third place for a pair of small ceramic plates featuring two different mallard decorations made by Stangl Pottery of Trenton, New Jersey.

Again, we want to give a very hearty thank you to Drew for making the arrangements for such an outstanding location for a PDCA gathering – thank you Drew! And special thanks to everyone who was able to attend the meeting and enjoy the fellowship and celebration of decoys, old and new. After the club's February meeting at the Upper Bay Museum and annual banquet in Annapolis in March, there are more exciting events coming up. The club will meet on the evening of Friday April 4, during ECDC to host special guest speaker C. John Sullivan, Jr., PDCA and Decoy Magazine will coordinate the Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest at the annual Havre de Grace Decoy show on Saturday May 3, and don't miss the club's 9th Annual Annapolis Decoy Show on Sunday June 1.



Discussing Havre de Grace decoys used on the Potomac River



Potomac River decoy-making and waterfowling lore



NJDCA Partners with the Decoy Museum to Host Bob White Event

By Mike Tarquini

With a snowy beginning to the day, the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association (NJDCA) partnered with the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum to host an event honoring Bob White on January 11, 2025. Despite the weather, NJDCA members came out in numbers as an estimated 35 members traveled from the Garden State to support Bob and share this special day with him. Another 45 visitors from the local area joined in to participate in the day's activities filling the room with 80 guests. It was quite a turnout for this legendary carver of Delaware River style waterfowl decoys.

Most guests toured the Museum prior to making their way to the Carvers Gallery in order to pay homage to Bob White. Visitors were treated to a light lunch and were given plenty of time to socialize with Bob and the other guests. Once everyone had mingled throughout the Carvers Gallery and viewed the many exhibits, they took their seat and readied themselves for a very entertaining discussion.

A distinguished panel of moderators consisting of Grove Conrad (2024 Virginia E. Haines Historic Advocate Award recipient), Jaim Lloyd (President of NJDCA), and Jim Allen (Decoy Collector) guided the discussion with Bob White and treated the crowd to a very memorable experience. The moderators prompted Bob to discuss many topics about his decoy making history as well as his hunting experiences. In all, the discussion lasted well over an hour, but time seemed to pass quickly as the crowd immersed themselves in the many fascinating stories.

The Museum is making a sincere effort to partner with organizations such as the NJDCA going forward to host similar moderated discussions with "legends of the decoy world." It is our position that there are many insightful stories that need to be heard by others including the future generations who will carry on the heritage of decoy making and collecting.

Please support us as we search for additional legendary carvers and collectors within our decoy community who are willing to share their priceless stories and pass on their knowledge to the rest of us who need to hear it first-hand.



The crowd listens intently to Bob White.



Bob White engages visitors in front of his exhibit.



Guests were treated to a light lunch.

UPCOMING DECOY SHOW INFORMATION

April 3 – 5, 2025

East Coast Decoy Collectors Buy – Sell – Swap Event

St. Michaels Inn, St. Michaels, MD

Info: Kevin Peel (410) 937-2218

April 11 – 12, 2025

7th Annual Ocracoke Island Waterfowl Festival

Ocracoke School Gymnasium

120 Schoolhouse Road, Ocracoke Island, NC

Info: Ocracoke Island Decoy Carvers Guild

April 22-26, 2025

**58th North American Vintage Decoy
& Sporting Collectibles Show (sponsored by NADC)**

The Westin Chicago Lombard, Lombard, IL

Info: (586) 530-6586

www.nadecoycollectors.org

April 25-27, 2025

**Ward World Championship Wildfowl Carving
Competition & Art Festival**

Rowland E. Powell Convention Center, Ocean City, MD

Info: (410) 339-0668

kclattenburg@wardfdn.org

May 3 – May 4, 2025

**43rd Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival
Benefitting the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum**

STAR Centre, Havre de Grace, MD

Info: Mike Tarquini (410) 459-8487

www.decoymuseum.com

June 1, 2025

Annapolis Decoy Show (sponsored by PDCA)

Annapolis Elks Lodge, Edgewater, MD

Info: Chad Tragakis (703) 593-3024



2025

Annapolis Decoy Show

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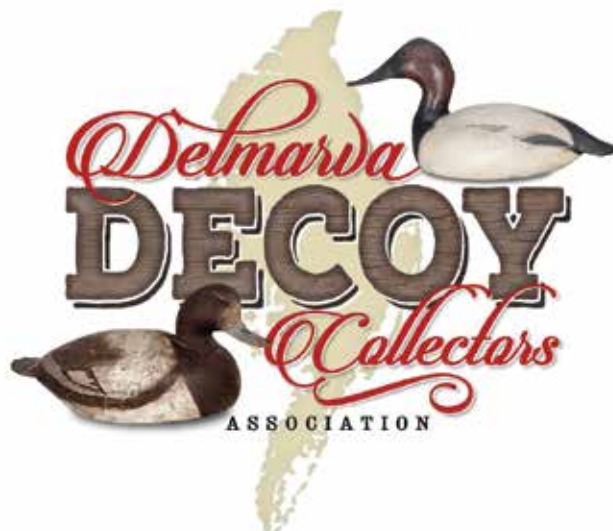
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