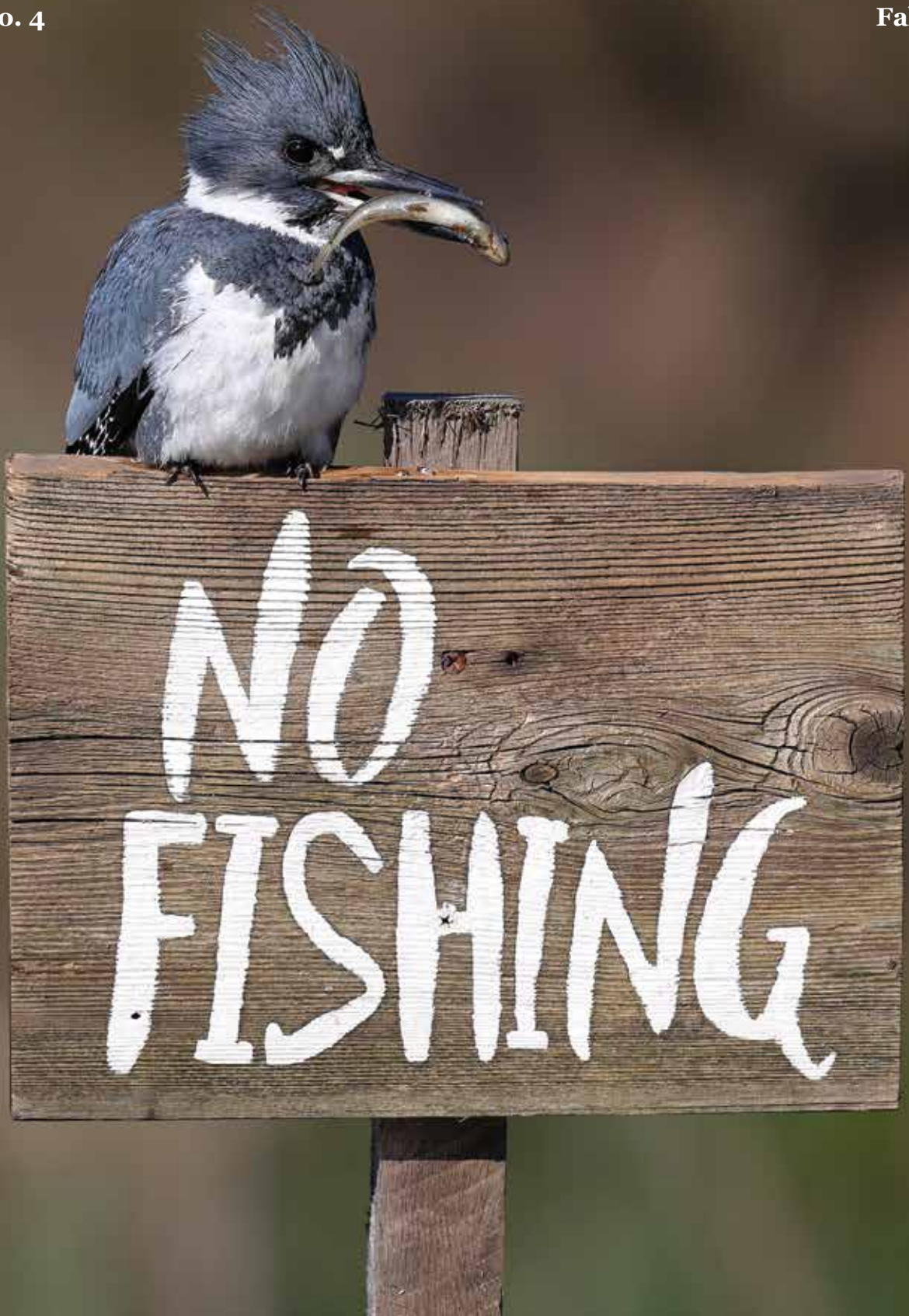


The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Vol. 35 No. 4

Fall 2025





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*Pair of mergansers by John Dawson.
Ex Mackey collection.*



*Pair of hollow carved mergansers from
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Ex David Rockefeller collection.*



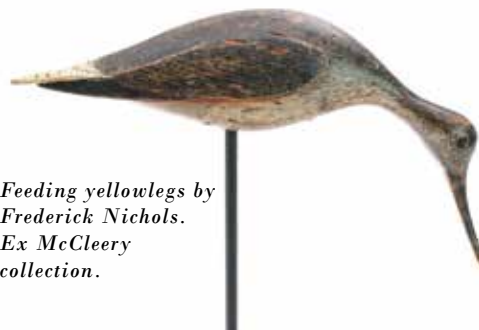
*Outstanding, fresh to the market
greenwing teal by John Blair, Sr.*



*Fresh to the market
bufflehead by
Nathan Cobb*



*Feeding yellowlegs by
Frederick Nichols.
Ex McCleery
collection.*



*Fresh to the market
redhead by Nathan Cobb*





can•vas•back

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

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

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

FUNDED IN PART BY



The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is supported in part by the Maryland State Arts Council (msac.org)



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ON THE COVER

A belted kingfisher enjoys a meal in defiance of a posted "No Fishing" directive. Photo by Scott Moody.

44TH ANNUAL

Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

May 2 & 3, 2026

STAR Centre
700 Congress Avenue
Havre de Grace, Maryland 21078

Saturday, May 2
9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Sunday, May 3
9:00 am - 3:00 pm

Honorary Chairman
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From the President...

With the Summer of 2025 behind us, the management of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is maintaining its focus to transition from a local to a super-regional museum that presents and preserves the rich heritage of waterfowling and decoy making. The Fall season finds us refreshing many of our temporary exhibits. New offerings include "Half the Sky" featuring hen decoys exclusively from all over in what is believed to be the first of its kind. Thanks to the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association (PDCA) for sponsoring this exhibit. Complementing this fascinating hen exhibit is a special presentation of the works of Delmarva Peninsula Legends Pete Peterson and Grayson Chesser presented by the Delmarva Decoy Collectors Association (DDCA). A special program was hosted by the museum on September 20 where Pete and Grayson shared many stories of their pasts to a very attentive audience. Once again, our partners from Guyette and Deeter have provided the museum with a fantastic opportunity to exhibit world-class decoys. The Museum has opened an exhibit of the Jim Cook Collection, perhaps the finest decoy collection in the United States. A special event is being planned for January where this one of a kind collection will be presented by Joe Tonelli. The museum is wrapping up fundraising efforts to establish a new permanent exhibit that will be dedicated to John "Daddy" Holly and the Holly Family decoys, John "Daddy" Holly is regarded as the pioneer of the Havre de Grace style of decoy making. This effort is being championed by Collections Committee member Kevin Peel. Kevin has been working closely with Chad Tragakis and C. John Sullivan Jr to make this long overdue exhibit a reality. We are all extremely grateful for the assistance from our many donors and partners to bring these opportunities to the museum.



As the museum navigates from a local to a super-regional museum, we must not lose our focus on raising operational funds to fuel our growth. Although we have been very fortunate to receive grant support for many of our special projects, funding from grant agencies and endowments preclude the use of these funds for museum operations. To that end we have had to hold special events and appeal to our membership for their support. In addition to our annual Decoy Festival (May), we hold a Sporting Clays Shoot (October), Annual Appeal (November), and this year will host our first Annual Decoy Carvers & Collectors Banquet (December) in order to raise the required funds to keep our museum going forward. We hesitate to continue to bombard our membership for support of these fundraising events, but our opportunities are limited. We need all of our members to rededicate themselves to the preservation of our waterfowling and decoy making heritage.

Aside from refreshing our temporary exhibits and raising funds for operations, the museum is strengthening our leadership team. The museum has recently welcomed Heather Hollenbeck as our new Executive Director. We have also added George Nitzel and Chad Tragakis to our Board of Directors. We will continue to keep an open eye for opportunities to add talent to our leadership team to guide us as we pursue some very ambitious goals.

*Reserve Your
Table Now!*



Decoy Carvers & Collectors

INAUGURAL BANQUET

Saturday, December 6, 2025

6:00 - 10:00 PM



at the historic Wellwood Club
523 Water Street
Charlestown, MD 21914

\$100/person

Tables of 8 (\$800)

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*Proceeds directly benefit operational
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PRESERVING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE OF WATERFOWLING & DECOY MAKING

The Mission of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is a 501 (c)(3) public museum organized and operated to collect, document, preserve, and interpret waterfowl decoys as a unique form of folk art that is a distinctive element in the cultural heritage of the Lower Susquehanna River and the Upper Chesapeake Bay.

The Museum will engage and educate visitors with exceptional exhibits that describe the centuries-old history of waterfowling as well as the interplay among this region, its people, the environment, and the folk art of decoy making.

By so doing, the Museum will preserve knowledge of these cultural traditions, encourage comprehensive understanding of the history of decoy folk art, and transmit this rich heritage to future generations.

The Museum has operated for 39 years since its opening in 1986. In the current challenging times, it has been increasingly more difficult to keep pace with operational expenses given the restrictions of available grant and endowment funding. *We appreciate your support!*



**TICKETS &
SPONSORSHIP
OPPORTUNITIES**

Decoy Carvers & Collectors INAUGURAL BANQUET

Purchase Inaugural Banquet Tickets at **decoymuseum.com**

\$100/ticket

\$800/table of 8

The purchaser of a full table of 8, will be entered into a special drawing prior to the event for a **chance to win \$250 in "Quack Cash"** which must be used at the event for auctions, raffles, and other games. A "Quack Cash" voucher will be given to the winner at time of check in at the event.

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Fine coot decoy Duffy made in the Upper Bay style.

Edward Harry Duffy

By Bill Waibel

For every known decoy maker on the Upper Chesapeake Bay there are a dozen or more that we know little to nothing about. Some are men who were written about in period newspapers as being a decoy maker, yet no one can positively identify a bird made by them. Many made decoys for personal use only and unless the entire rig was uncovered, few examples are available for collectors to discover. Others may have been mentioned once or twice in literature, but with little additional information. This article will look at the life and work of Ed Duffy, a little-known decoy man from Town Point Neck, along the Bohemia River.

Edward H. Duffy had a rough start in life, especially in the early going. Born to James Thomas Duffy (b. 1862) and Ella Grace James Duffy (b. 1866) in their native Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on 30 January 1895. Duffy's paternal grandparents were from Ireland as was his maternal grandfather, while his maternal grandmother was a native Philadelphian.

Duffy had five brothers and four sisters and each of them, both older and younger, were born and lived in Colorado. James Duffy was employed as a railroad engineer and spent a short stint in

Philadelphia around 1894-95 when Ed was born. Apparently, Edward was left behind when the entire family moved back to Golden, Colorado where his father was employed by Colorado and Southern Railroad starting in 1888.

Edward was listed in the 1900 census living with Elizabeth Duffy, age 22, in an Elkton, Maryland hotel owned by John Armstrong and Ezekiel Sparks. Lizzie, as she was known, worked as a servant and 5-year-old Edward was a boarder at the establishment. Lizzie was born in Philadelphia in July 1877 as were her parents. She was listed as married, but no information could be found about who her husband was or what became of him.

What we can ascertain is that young Edward was left in the care of Lizzie, who raised him as her own. Perhaps, she or her first husband was related to Duffy's father, and it was decided to leave him behind with Lizzie, when the family moved back to Colorado. While this is a bit cruel by today's societal standards, it was far more common and acceptable at that time. We may never know the whole story.

Around 1904, a local fellow named Hooper Freeman (1870-1925) started to court Lizzie. Lizzie and Hooper were married in Elkton on May 30, 1905. Freeman had a major influence on the direction that Ed's life would take, raising him as his own son. They lived along RD 1, just on the outskirts of Elkton.

Freeman was a well-known citizen who was popular around town. In 1902, Hooper rescued and revived a small boy who was drowning in Elk Creek after being alerted by some other youngsters. The boy was fully submerged when Freeman got to him and was thought dead by all the bystanders, but Hooper continued to administer first aid until the boy coughed up a good bit of creek water and regained consciousness.

Freeman fished the Elk and North East rivers, employing nets to harvest the endless supply of shad, herring, rockfish, sturgeon, and perch. Like most other watermen of the day, Hooper had other professions he was involved with, including ship and general carpentry. In 1900, Hooper and his younger brother, William, were working as painters, while working the water seasonally and in off hours. Freeman engaged in market gunning to supplement the family income and like most everyone he knew, employed bait, night gunning and any means necessary to make some extra cash during the lean times. While some men of the era market gunned regularly from October to March, Hooper was more of an opportunist, who would only set out when conditions were perfect, and the birds were there in vast numbers. He started carrying young Ed along towards the middle of the decade and indoctrinating him into duck shooting-an activity that Ed enjoyed for the rest of his life.

As we will learn later, education was important to Edward Duffy and that focus was apparent even as a young lad. In 1906, at Elkton School No. 11, young Edward was one of the top students in fifth grade, boasting a 95.2 percent for his final grade average.

By 1910, Hooper was 40 years of age and listed his employment as gardener at a clubhouse which in all probability influenced Duffy's future employment. Lizzie was 32 years old and kept the house, raising Edward, now 15 years old. The family lived in a rural section of Elkton Road in a rented house. Hooper continued fishing and teaching Ed the life of a waterman and young Duffy was a quick study. Ed was a skilled carpenter and mechanic, who had a knack for designing, building, and repairing. Duffy was blessed with this skill set by a combination of nature and nurture, genetically from his train engineer father and the daily tutelage of his multitasking stepfather.

The decade started well enough, but by 1914, the seeds of war were deeply sown in the fertile fields of Europe. By 1917, the United States severed diplomatic ties with Germany and soon entered World War I. Ed Duffy was already in the Naval Coastal Reserve, when he registered for the draft in June. He was a tall, medium built young man and listed his profession as "fisherman" and his employer as his stepfather, Hooper Freeman.

Form 1 1182 REGISTRATION CARD No. 28

1 Name in full *Edward Harry Duffy* Age in yrs. *22*

2 Home address (No.) *RD 1* (City) *Elkton* (State) *MD*

3 Date of birth *Jan 30 1895*

4 Are you (1) natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? *natural born*

5 Where were you born? *Philadelphia Pa.* (Town) (State) (Nation) *U.S.A.*

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject? *✓*

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? *Fisherman* (12)

8 By whom employed? *Hooper Freeman* Where employed? *Elkton RD 1 MD*

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? *no*

10 Married or single (which)? *single* Race (specify which)? *Caucasian*

11 What military service have you had? Rank *none* branch *none* years *none* Nation or State *none*

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? *no member of Naval Coastal Reserve*

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Edward Harry Duffy (Signature)

If person is alien, alien must be naturalized

Duffy's World War One draft card.

19-2-1A REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? *tall* Slender, medium, or stout (which)? *Medium*

2 Color of eyes? *Gray* Color of hair? *light brown* Bald? *no*

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? *no*

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

J. Franklin Kipp (Signature of Registrar)

5d10 Precinct *1*

City or County *Cecil*

State *MD*

June 5-17 (Date of registration)

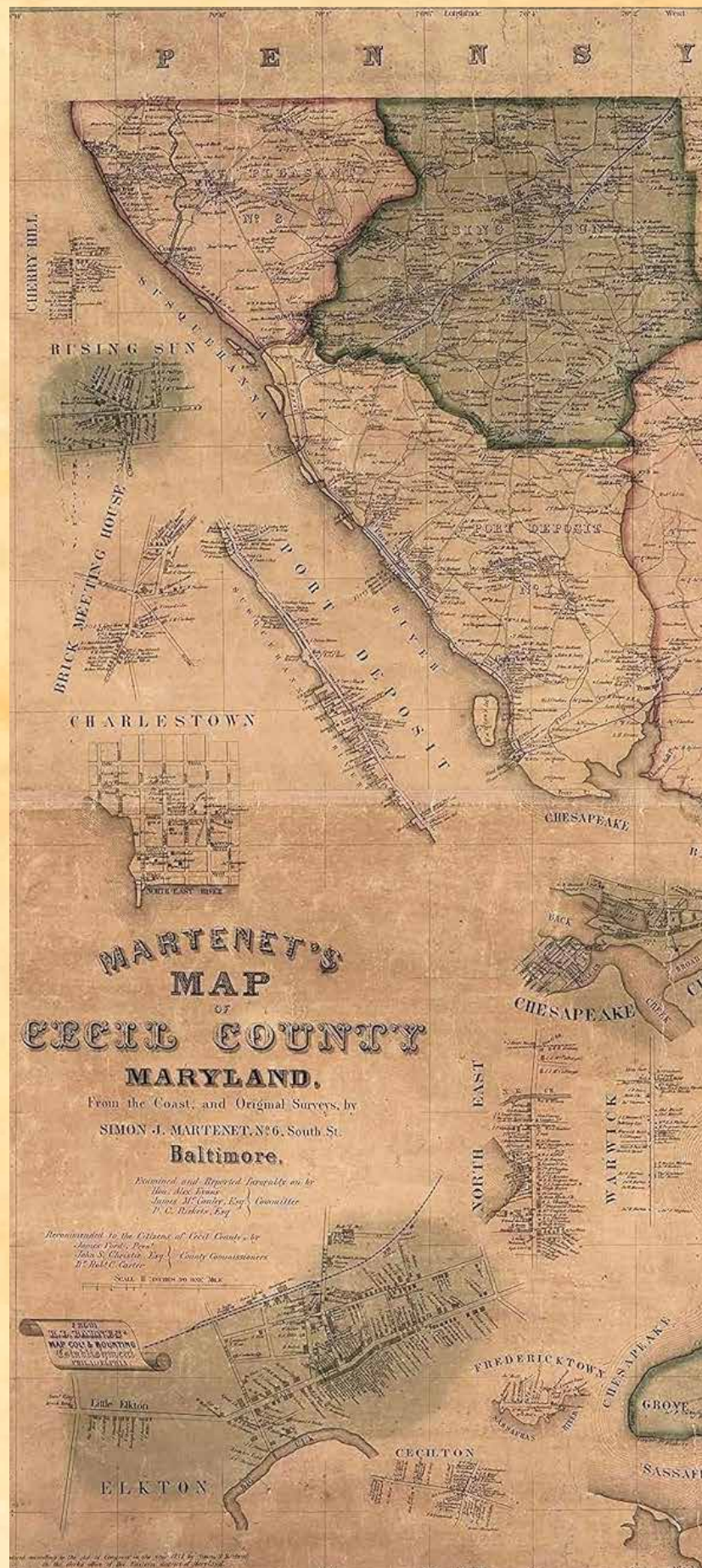
Duffy started his service in 1917 as a cook, but was quickly promoted to machinist mate, first class, a testament to his mechanical intellect and strong work ethic. He served on SC 71, which was one of the original, wooden hulled sub chasers. These vessels patrolled the Atlantic looking for German U Boats and were the inspiration for the PT boats that were used heavily during World War II. Duffy's ship was based out of the naval base in Cape May, New Jersey. Ed gained valuable experience with the mechanical side of boat engines, while his waterman work had prepared him to be a top-notch sailor. He was honorably discharged in October of 1919 and headed back to Elkton.

By 1920, Ed was still living with Hooper and Lizzie on Elk Landing Lane, right above the Scotland Marsh. Freeman listed his occupation as a ship's carpenter while Ed was working as a mariner in the transport business, a profession for which he was vastly qualified, considering his naval service and years spent working the water with his stepfather.

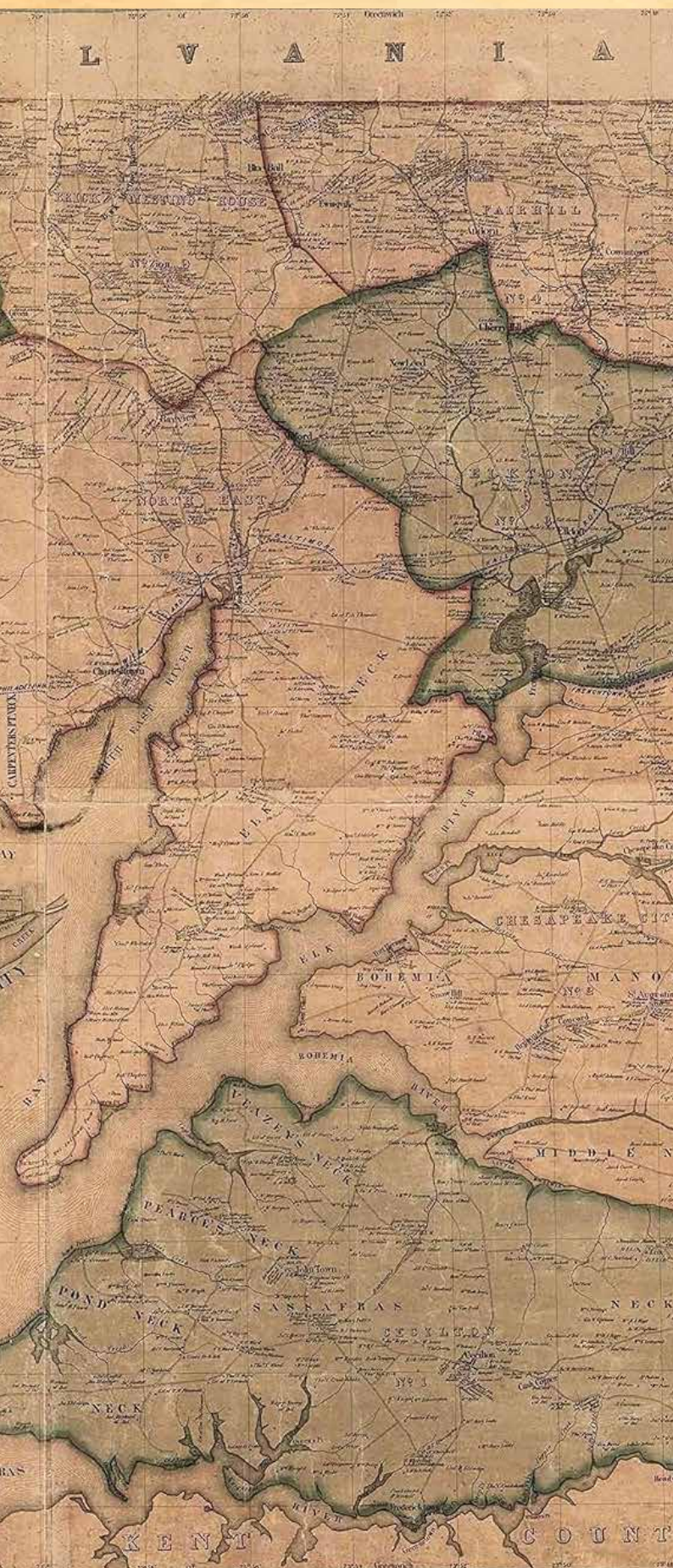
Meanwhile, Ed started courting a young lady named Sara N. Whitlock (1900-1985) who was 21 years old. Sara was working as a nurse at Union Hospital in Elkton, taking advantage of a program Union started in 1911 to address the nursing shortage that plagued the area. The three-year program was free, and students received room and board, lectures, practical experience in addition to a monthly stipend.

Sara was from Port Herman and the daughter of Charles and Pearl Whitlock. Charles worked as a carpenter and Pearl kept their house. Sara and Ed were married in 1921 and moved to Town Point, next to Sara's parents. Sara continued to work as a nurse and at some point, early in the decade, Ed started working as a caretaker on a farm. Several of his neighbors listed a similar occupation and employer, RMM Carpenter, a DuPont executive who owned several farms in the area. One of these men, Cap'n Bill Broadwater, worked for Carpenter for near 50 years and was a locally famous guide, fisherman, boat mechanic and the like. Broadwater also made decoys. He and Ed were good friends and occasionally gunned together.

On May 1, 1923, the Duffy's were blessed with their first son, James Edward. We know that Duffy was working as a "caretaker of private property" and started his employment for Mr. H Rodney Sharp who owned a beautiful estate along the Bohemia River, right off Town Point Road. Sharp, an executive at E.I. du Pont Nemours and Company in Wilmington, Delaware, owned several homes and hired Duffy to take care of all aspects of the Bohemia River estate. Mr. Sharp was a sporting man who enjoyed fishing and gunning for ducks. An integral part of Ed's job description was to captain Mr. Sharp's boats whether to fish, day trip or just take a sunset cruise down the Bohemia. A more capable skipper would have been difficult for Sharp to find. Additionally, Duffy was required to build and maintain an offshore blind as well as a couple shore blinds. When Mr. Sharp gave notice that he would like to gun, Ed would be ready, transporting Sharp to and from



Antique Cecil County map showing Town Point.



the blind, retrieving downed birds, making decoys, and managing the rig. Mr. Sharp also enjoyed bushwhacking, and Ed was a good sculler who had an intimate knowledge of the ducks and their movements, feeding grounds and the like. In fact, Sharp owned a Holly-built bushwhack boat that he acquired from Jim Holly in 1923. In later years, he donated the boat to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Maryland, but not before Duffy fully restored it.

On June 9th, 1925, Hooper died due to “going into the water while extremely overheated”. He was 54 years old, and his death had a profound effect on Ed.

The next two decades were good times for the Duffy family, as their second son, Allen H. Duffy was born in 1931. As mentioned earlier, Ed and Sara understood the importance of education. The writer eventually uncovered why the sons were noticeably absent in most census reports. The boys were attending St. Andrews Episcopal School, in Middletown, Delaware. This very exclusive boarding school was made famous by the 1989 blockbuster film, “Dead Poets Society”, starring Robin Williams. St. Andrews is known for educating the best and brightest students from all over the United States and beyond.

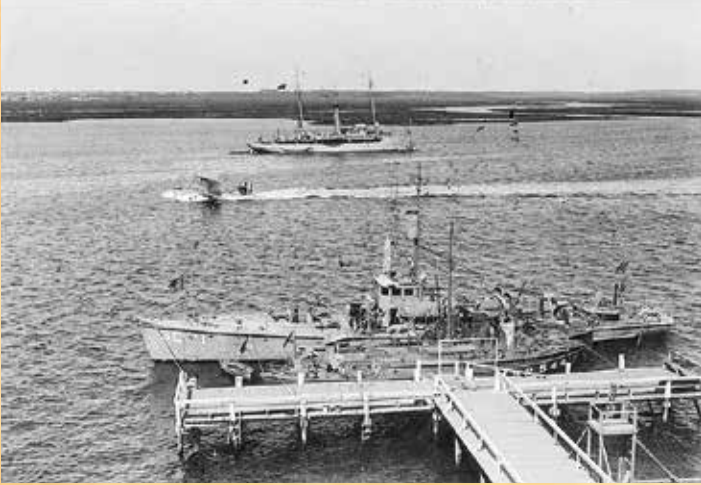
James attended the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, earning an undergraduate degree in Spanish and eventually a doctorate in Romance Languages. He was married in October 1944 to Lillian Chase Johnson, of Goldsboro, North Carolina. The couple later moved to Massachusetts where James was a professor at Brandeis College, doing intensive study on Portuguese colonization of Africa. In addition, he wrote several children’s books and in 1990 he won the Scott O’Dell Award for fictional literature. James died in 1999.

Allen attended University of Delaware as an undergraduate and received a Juris Doctor from Yale and was a founding partner for Susman, Duffy and Segaloff, a successful law firm in New Haven. Allen died in 1986.

The writer speculates that Mr. H Rodney Sharp, Ed Duffy’s employer and closest friend, may have subsidized the boys’ education cost as he was a staunch supporter of higher education as well.

According to Larry Ortt (b. 1944), a native of Chesapeake City, the Duffy family lived in the large house that belonged to Sharp. The home was modeled in the Southwestern style complete with terra cotta tile roof. The spacious home was large enough to house the Duffy family as well as the Sharp family, who were rarely there. Ortt was there frequently as a youngster, where he accompanied his aunt who played bridge with several ladies, including Sara Duffy.

Sara was an extremely friendly and gregarious person, beloved by all in the area. She was active in affairs at Union Hospital and frequently helped others in the area with all manner of assistance. Quite conversely, Ed, while friendly, was a much quieter soul who



SC 71 – US Navy sub chaser based at naval base in Cape May, N.J. Duffy served on this vessel during WWI and is likely one of the sailors seen standing on the deck.

Mr. H. Rodney Sharp, Sr., DuPont executive and longtime employer and friend to Ed Duffy.



Unusual floating canvasback silhouette decoy manufactured by Duffy in 1957. Photo courtesy of David and Joan Hagan.

preferred to be working in the woods or in the garden and orchard. RK Fears III (b.1947), a native of Port Herman on Town Point Neck, knew Duffy well. The area was sparsely populated in those days so there were no strangers. On September 9, 1956, RK and his father, RK Fears Jr., were visiting with Duffy. Not everyone had television at Town Point in those days, but Duffy had a good one furnished by Mr. Sharp. They were watching the Ed Sullivan Show and the premiere of Elvis Presley. After watching the “King” perform, Ed Duffy turned to the elder Fears and said, “I don’t think that Elvis Presley is ever going to amount to much..... just standing there and wiggling around like that.”

The Sharp Estate was wooded with marshes, a creek, and a good deal of shoreline on the Bohemia River. Since Duffy had care of the property, he had discretion and allowed RK Fears to hunt squirrel on the property with the condition that no deer would be taken. RK, still a kid at the time, may or may not have been tempted by a large buck and may or may not have killed it and dragged it over to the fence and into the back of his truck. Old Ed Duffy may or may not have been a little angry with RK, cutting off future squirrel hunting for Fears.

The writer’s initial exposure to Duffy was one photograph in the book, “Decoys of the Upper Chesapeake Bay”, written by David and Joan Hagan. The photo is of an interesting and quite oversized canvasback decoy, signed and dated, 1957, which is a floating silhouette, mounted on a board that is cut out with a top-down view of a duck. The bottom sports a one” x 2” pine keel and a leather loop line tie. For ballast, a heavy wire swing weight was affixed on either side of the edge of the bottom board about halfway back. A four-ounce lead weight was attached to the wire. This allowed the decoy to lay flat when not in use. This style of weight was popular in Michigan. Why Duffy used this method is interesting as I know of no other Upper Bay maker who employed this technique.

The writer had been looking for an example by Duffy for over 30 years and finally located one recently at the ECDC decoy show in St. Michaels. This bird is a coot that Mr. Duffy signed and dated, 1950. The coot is much more reminiscent of an Upper Bay decoy. The bird is a solid, laminated two-piece body with a small neck shelf and competently carved, high head. The bottom is more round than flat and the body tapers to a small, rounded tail when viewed from above. The head has carved cheeks and a visible eye channel and a bill that is very accurately portrayed, showing Ed’s intimate knowledge of the species. Red painted eyes and a reddish forehead dot, along with small painted nostrils complete the look. The hardware is typical with a sand casted ballast that was hammered a bit flat where a single nail at each end was driven in. A staple and barrel swivel were used to attach the anchor line. Bill Broadwater occasionally used this technique, which is understandable as each man took their boss fishing frequently and would have this hardware available at any time.

The third example recently came to auction and is signed and

dated, 1939. This blackhead, or scaup, decoy is quite interesting as it has a general Upper Bay look, along with some bells and whistles. The duck is hand chopped, broad, and round bottomed with a nicely rounded breast and a tail that flairs up much in the manner that August Heinefield employed down in Skinner's Neck, outside of Rock Hall. The head is an excellent rendition of the scaup and has carved cheeks and eye channel. Taxidermy quality yellow glass eyes are original to the make, an unusual amenity for an Upper Bay decoy. An extra-long "bib" sits on a downward angled neck shelf. A sand cast ballast weight, secured on each end with a roofing nail, shares the bottom with a brass swivel attached with a small fence staple. The paint on this bird was competent but not fancy. White lead was used for the body and while still wet, the black breast and tail paint was applied. Ed then took a stiff brush and did some subtle blending. A white speculum stripe was added along with a few black feather slashes. The bill was painted blue with a black painted nostril.

With the three known examples signed and dated we can get some parameters for Duffy's decoy making career. The blackhead, dated 1939, is the earliest documented example and the canvasback floating silhouette is dated 1957. The coot was made in 1950. Since Duffy was employed by Sharp back in the early 1920s, I would venture to say that he was making decoys by then and continued making them through the late 1960s. They are obviously scarce, but certainly part of the rig is somewhere in a shed, barn, or basement. The known examples are signed and were taken to Duffy in his later years to be identified and signed. There is no evidence that Ed was making decoys for sale and just made them for use on the Sharp Estate. When decoys would drift away with the tide or ice, get shot too much or simply get old, Duffy would sit down and make replacements to bring the rig back up to optimal numbers.

At that time, the Bohemia River was clean and filled with quality submerged aquatic vegetation. Ice, wind and various conditions would drive the birds off the Flats and up the Elk and Bohemia rivers to feed on the rich grass beds. There was likely a rig of canvasback full bodies made early on for Mr. Sharp's bushwhack rig. The blackhead was part of a rig that was used at the offshore blind and the shore blinds that Ed built for Mr. Sharp. Duffy's skiff hangs in Ortt's home and was used for accessing the offshore blind, setting out and retrieving decoys, transporting Sharp and any guest to the blinds and chasing crippled ducks.

Duffy's legacy as a decoy maker would likely never have been discovered had he not signed the few known examples and if the Hagan's had not published a photo and lifespan dates in their book. According to RK Fears, many men along the Town Point Neck and surrounding areas made decoys for their own use. Broadwater, Robert Biddle, Sr., RK's grandfather, Robert Knox Fears, Sr., Ralph Pyle among many others made decoys and it was no big deal, as it was considered no different than manufacturing an axe handle or building a doghouse. Decoys were nothing more than tools and these men made them themselves, because that's the way salt of the earth folks did things back then.



Bottom view of floating silhouette signed and dated by Duffy, 1957. Photo courtesy of David and Joan Hagan.



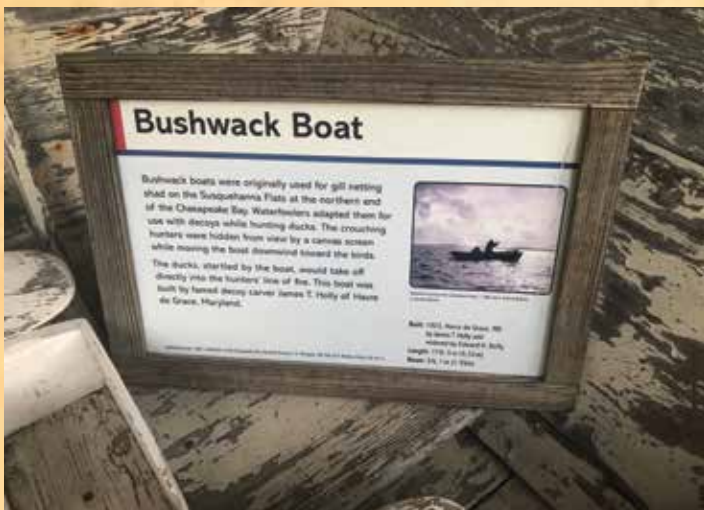
Bottom view of the coot that Ed made in 1950



Outstanding blackhead (scaup) decoy showing Duffy's intimate knowledge of the species as well as his wood working prowess. Photo courtesy of Josh Barfield of Zeb Barfield Auctions.



Bottom view of the blackhead decoy showing typical Upper Bay rigging and Ed's signature and date made. Photo courtesy of Josh Barfield of Zeb Barfield Auctions.



Holly built bushwhack boat owned by Mr. Sharp and donated to Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum after Ed Duffy fully restored it



Ed Duffy's personal skiff used to transport Mr. Sharp to and from the blind, tie out and take up decoys and retrieve dead fowl. From the collection of Mr. Larry Ortt.

The Sharp Estate was a fascinating and beautiful property with mature hardwoods, fields, gardens, and an orchard. In addition, the frontage on the Bohemia made it one of the best locations on the Upper Bay. Duffy, a skilled forest manager, was constantly working in the woods, always improving the habitat. Ed cut firewood for the house and sold the excess as a side hustle.

Duffy was also known as a top-notch nurseryman, maintaining Sharp's orchard with the greenest of thumbs. Both Ortt and Fears remember vividly how good the apples and peaches were, and Duffy gave away many more bushels than he ever sold. Imagine a fresh, warm peach pie with a big scoop of vanilla ice cream on a pleasant summer evening. Such was life on Town Point Neck.

Along the lane to the house, stood a large, bronze statue of a Lenape Indian warrior. Larry Ortt recalls that everyone referred to the statue as "Lenny" and it was locally famous, especially among children. Unfortunately, the statue was stolen in the early sixties, which really upset Mr. Sharp. Sharp decided to have several facsimiles made and distributed them to his family to display at their homes.

The Duffys continued to take care of Sharp's estate through the 1960s and 1970s. Things started to slow down, but Ed kept himself busy keeping the grounds looking beautiful as Sarah always had the house spotless. Mr. Sharp died in 1968, but the estate stayed in the family and the Duffys were permitted to stay as long as they lived. H Rodney Sharp, Jr. and his extended family had grown up with Duffys and considered them to be part of the family.

Ed passed away at home on 3 November 1983, at 88 years of age. After his death, Sarah moved to Connecticut to live with her son, Allen. She died on 2 February 1985 at 85 years of age. The couple were interred together at Bethel Cemetery in Chesapeake City.

As a decoy man, Ed Duffy is unknown to most collectors as his output was small and scant few examples have surfaced. The search for an example for the collection took almost 35 years. Fortunately, a mention of Ed in a late eighty's publication put him on the writer's radar. Also fortunate is a few of the writer's friends knew Duffy and helped put the story together. The hope is that more examples will come forth because of this article. If Ed Duffy had made even a thousand decoys and lived in a town like North East or Perryville, he would be a well-known maker whose birds would be highly sought after, considering the quality of the known examples.

Ed and Sarah Duffy lived an idyllic life on a beautiful, waterfront estate. They raised two sons, each of whom rose to the top of their respective professions. They were hardworking, honest folks who enjoyed family and friends and the simpler life along the Bohemia River.

Special thanks to Larry Ortt and RK Fears III for their assistance. The writer is a longtime collector and can be reached at coachbillwaibel@gmail.com.

INTRODUCING

Heather Hollenbeck

It is with great excitement that I introduce myself to you as Executive Director of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. I am honored to join an institution with such a rich legacy of celebrating and preserving the artistry, history, and cultural traditions of decoy carving and the Chesapeake Bay.

The Decoy Museum is more than a collection of artifacts—it is a living story of our community, our heritage, and the remarkable craftsmanship of generations who made waterfowling and carving an integral part of life along the Susquehanna Flats. I am deeply committed to building upon this foundation and ensuring that the Museum continues to thrive as a place of education, inspiration, and pride for Havre de Grace and beyond.

As I begin my work here, my goals are threefold:

1. Preservation and Growth

to safeguard our collection while finding new ways to share it with broader audiences.

2. Community Engagement

to strengthen our connections with members, supporters, artists, and educators so that the Museum reflects the voices and talents of the community it represents.

3. Sustainability and Vision

to develop programs and partnerships that ensure the Museum's long-term vitality for future generations.

I look forward to meeting many of you in the months ahead, whether at our upcoming events, during a visit to the galleries, or through volunteer opportunities. Your membership and support make everything we do possible, and I am eager to hear your stories, ideas, and hopes for the future of the Museum.

Together, we will continue to honor the legacy of the past while shaping an exciting path forward. Thank you for welcoming me to this remarkable community. I am proud to be part of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum family and look forward to working alongside you.



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Ducking Club" Book
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Drawing will be held on December 13, 2025 @ 8:00 PM at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

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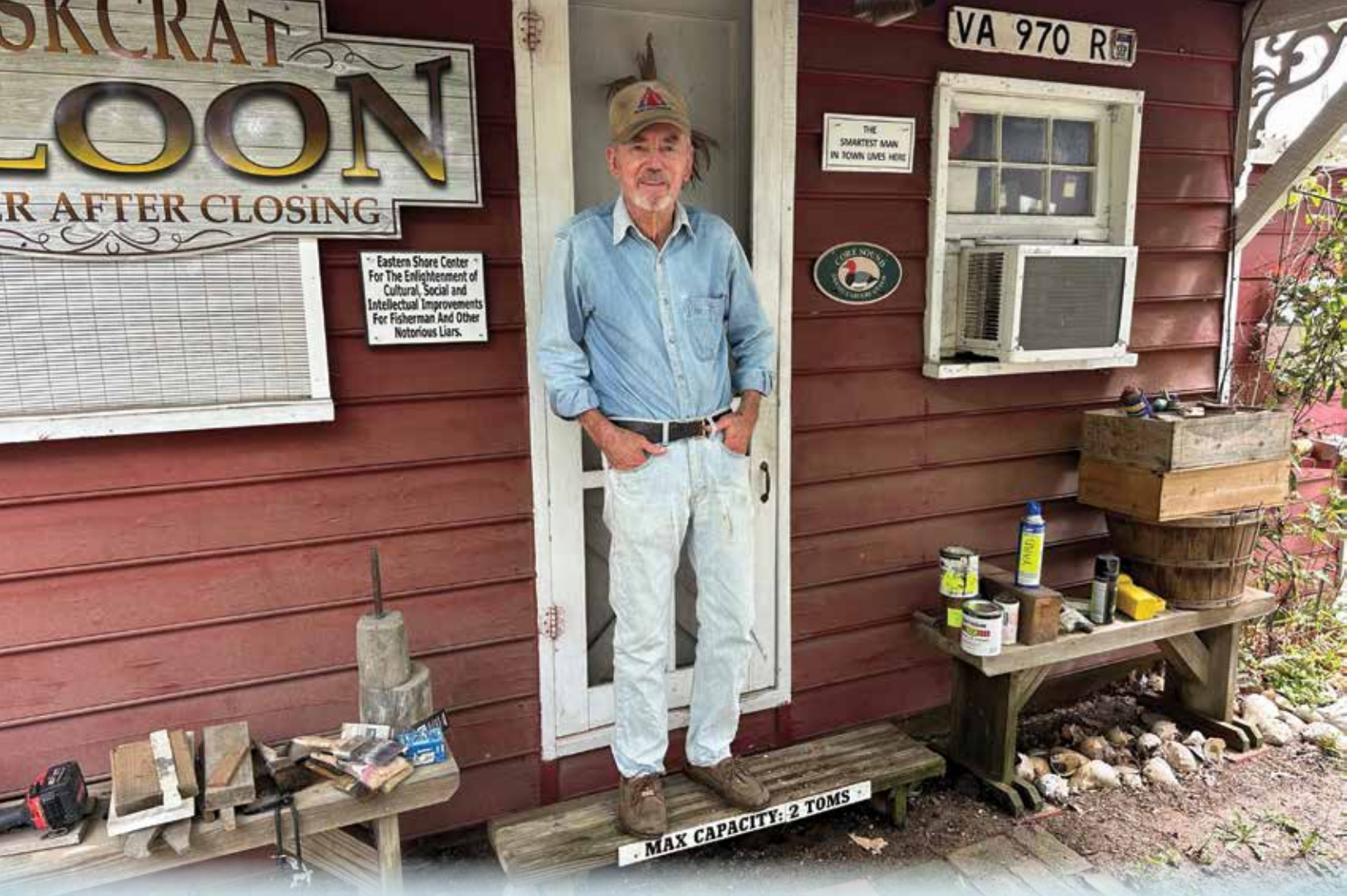
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Two Prominent Decoy Makers Carry On the Rich Tradition of Legendary Carvers from the Delmarva Peninsula

By Mike Tarquini

The Delmarva Peninsula has a rich history of decoy making with many carving legends spanning from Cecil County, MD all the way down to Cape Charles, VA. The Eastern Shore of Virginia (ESVA) has served as home to legendary carvers such as Ira Hudson, David "Umbrella" Watson, Miles Hancock, and Delbert "Cigar" Daisey (all from Chincoteague Island). A new generation of ESVA contemporary carvers are represented by Bill Gibian (Onancock, VA), Frank Finney (Cape Charles, VA), Mark McNair (Craddockville, VA) and Cameron McIntyre (New Church, VA). Joining this prominent list of contemporary carvers from ESVA, are legends Pete Peterson (Cape Charles, VA) and Grayson Chesser (Sanford, VA).



Eric John “Pete” Peterson (Cape Charles, VA)

“There are plenty of carvers out there, but none of them are having a better time carving than I am.”

✿ *Pete Peterson*



Hooded Merganser Pair

Living comfortably in the backwoods of life without a TV or a computer, one finds Eric John “Pete” Peterson . . .

Born in Prince Georges County, MD as the oldest of three children to Minnesota bred Henry and Elenor Branch Peterson, Pete Peterson spent his early days along the Potomac River where he watched the many sportsmen who hunted waterfowl there. During his frequent visits to the river, Pete and his early childhood friends would often find wooden decoys that had become separated from their owners and washed up on the shore. The very first decoy that Pete found along the river was a canvasback drake carved by none other than Havre de Grace carver R. Madison Mitchell.

Being ornery like most kids at that age, Pete and his friends would toss the wooden decoys back in the river and throw rocks at them trying to separate the head from the body. It was then that Pete learned his first lesson in decoy construction. After striking the decoy’s head numerous times, the decoy would flip over, the neck would crack, but the group became frustrated that the head refused to separate from the body. Upon retrieval of the decoy, they discovered that the head was attached by means of a long nail driven down through the head and into the body. At the early age of 12, Pete realized that hunting and making decoys to support it would be his aspiration.

After high school, Pete enrolled at Montana State University (Missoula, MT) where he studied biology. He settled on biology because there was not a foreign language requirement. Once he earned his degree (1965), Pete returned east where he enlisted in the United States Coast Guard. During the next 3-years (1966-1969), Pete spent most of his time aboard a US Coast Guard weather ship. Long periods aboard the ship were challenging, but Pete shares, “at least there wasn’t anyone shooting at me.” These were the years when the Vietnam War was intensifying. Although many of his shipmates remained on the ship when they returned from sea, Pete chose to stay in Virginia Beach when they were in port.

Once his service with the Coast Guard concluded, Pete remained in Virginia Beach where he was employed by locally-based Herbert & Lucy, a testing laboratory for concrete and asphalt. One of his early assignments was to work on-site with Bayshore Concrete in nearby Cape Charles, VA. Pete adamantly shares that he was not in Cape Charles for fifteen minutes when he realized that that’s where he would make his home. Once the Herbert & Lucy contract expired, Pete remained at Bayshore, eventually taking a position with the Virginia Department of Transportation, who was Bayshore Concrete’s largest customer. Pete’s principle duty was to set specifications for the concrete they purchased. He retired from the concrete industry in 2005.

In 1971, Pete married Thelma Jarvis and started a family. Pete and Thelma had two children: a daughter (Erika b.1976) and a son (Charles b.1980). They have three grandchildren. Thelma is a flat artist that paints landscapes, florals, and decoy portraits. Although Pete and Thelma are legally and happily separated, he is quick to say that she remains his best friend.

In the late 1970s, Pete hosted a visit from a Norfolk television station reporter who, after touring his property, said that the layout of all of the out-buildings reminded him of a little town. It was after that interview that “Petetown” was born.

Pete shares that Bill Purnell (Ocean City, MD), Bobby Richardson (Cambridge, MD), and Somers Headley (Wilmington, DE) were his “drill instructors of decoy making.” Pete says: “these fellas told me what I was doing wrong or what my decoys were lacking.” Roy Bull, a farmer, seafood dealer, and pioneering decoy collector from Townsend, a community on Virginia’s eastern shore, possessed an extensive decoy collection, and often loaned Pete different pieces that enabled him to study shapes, sizes, and paint patterns. Decoy making peer Kenny Marshall (Hog Island, VA) shared his vast decoy making knowledge as well.

According to master carver Jamie Hand: “some decoy carvers develop a distinct style that is easily identified such as Bob White



Wood Duck Pair





Curlew

(Tullytown, PA), George Strunk (Glendora, NJ), and Hurley Conklin (Manahawkin, NJ).” Hand goes on to say: “Pete Peterson’s decoys have sleek lines and heavily stylized paint patterns.” When asked about his style, Pete quickly points out that: “decoy carving styles are much like handwriting styles, early on in school every student learns how to write each letter of the alphabet the very same way. It’s only later on that individuals develop their own distinct handwriting style. Decoy making works the very same way.”

Asked about what carving means to him, Pete states: “decoy carving to me is having a good ole time, doing what I want to do.” Pete loves making a mess in his shop. He cleans it up from time to time when he needs to, but having juniper (Atlantic White Cedar) shavings

throughout doesn’t bother him at all. Pete shares: “most decoys are made for collectors, but I still make them because I love it, have a good time doing it, and it helps with my beer money.” Pete is quick to tell you: “I don’t look at myself as an artist, but a craftsman, for decoy carving is not an art, but a craft.”

Pete Peterson is a traditional decoy carver in that he works exclusively with hand tools. He roughs out bodies with a hatchet, uses a draw knife to do most of the shaping, and employs a spokeshave for finishing up. The shop features a tree stump for hatchet work. Pete has built a shaving horse (cabinet maker’s pattern) inside his shop where he sits and uses his draw knife and spoke shave. Pete adds: “I like working with good sharp tools, that hold an edge, dull tools are dangerous.”

When asked about his favorite decoy to make, Pete shares: “my favorite is what I am making at the time.” Pete certainly appreciates those who have purchased decoys from him, but he openly admits that he is unreliable with respect to accepting orders. In fact, he despises them, often throwing them into his cast iron stove within his shop. He prefers making what he wants to make as opposed to having to make what others want him to make. Having to work under the burden of fulfilling orders under a deadline takes some of the enjoyment of making decoys out of carving. Carving decoys has become second nature to Pete. While working with his hands, Pete

allows his mind to wander for some creative thinking. Pete describes carving decoys as “the best sport in the world. I have a good time working with wood.”

Now in his eighties, Pete has given up hunting and fishing. In his own words: “the buffalo are gone.” When asked why he gave up hunting, he became very emotional, puffed up his cheeks with air, slowly discharging it and recounts a story about his two pet geese. A friend of Pete’s was a crabber and trapped an entire group of goslings while out on the water one day. Pete offered to take two of them home and raised them for several years. Pete was the only person that these geese trusted. The geese named Tiger and Fang would stand guard besides his daughter’s sandbox and protect her from any approaching people or animals. Pete shares that when Thelma went to get their daughter out of the sandbox she would have to take a broom to shoo the geese away from their guard stations. In the early eighties, both of the geese died tragically, breaking Pete’s heart. He hasn’t hunted since that time. Pete became so emotional during the depiction of the story, that he never shared how the geese died, and the author was perceptive enough to move on with the interview.

By most accounts, the characteristics of a true master carver is that they possess a sense of humor, demonstrate endless hospitality, and show a strong willingness to take the time to share with others. For those who have had the good fortune of meeting Pete Peterson, it’s clear that he possess all of these traits. Pete is quick to share his knowledge with all those who visit Petetown. In the preparation of this story, I had the opportunity to visit this Cape Charles landmark and I am certainly richer for it.



The “Petersonian Museum”. Pete has the entire interior of his home decorated with his creations for all visitors to admire.



Green Winged Teal Pair

“To say that Pete Peterson is a master carver is an understatement.”

✂ J.P. “Jamie” Hand



Grayson Chesser

(Sanford, VA)

“It is awesome to take decoys that you have carved, hunt over them, and have a flock of birds come into you, that is hard to beat”

✿ Grayson Chesser



Root Head Brant

Early descendants of the Chesser family settled in the Assawoman region of Accomack County, Virginia in the mid-1600s. Grayson Chesser Jr. was born there as the only child of Grayson Sr. and Pauline Mason Chesser centuries later in 1947. Grayson’s father was a farmer on Virginia’s Eastern Shore but worked in the winter months as a game warden.

Grayson can trace his ancestry all the way back to the first European, William Anderson, to live on Holdens Creek. There has always been a part of that property owned by a descendent of William Anderson. In 1912, Grayson’s great grandfather, Jesse Mason, purchased fifty acres of land from William Anderson’s original land grant. Grayson’s grandfather lived on that property until the 1960s. In 1918, Grayson’s great great grandfather, John Cullen, bought the neighboring farm of 108 acres. Grayson bought this plot from John Cullen’s granddaughter. Grayson split the original 50 acres with his first cousin. The combination of these two tracts of land is what is now known as Holden Creek Gun Club. Today, Holden Creek Gun Club is comprised of 137 acres with 3,700 feet of waterfront on Holdens Creek.

Grayson’s father was an avid hunter who would often hunt black ducks as a youth with his father on Wallops Island at night with live decoys and corn. Grayson Jr. explains that back in those days you

pretty much did what you wanted. As a youngster, Grayson wanted to duck hunt. He recalls fondly a day during the 1959-1960 season when his father's friend Milton Doughty, Captain of a State owned forty-two foot vessel named "John B. West" took him hunting. Sitting in the marsh upon three life jackets, armed with a Remington 1148 28 gauge shotgun, Grayson Jr. hunted using three old decoys. After a while, a hen old squaw came within range and Grayson Jr. brought her down. Shortly afterwards, a hen golden eye met her fate as she passed through his range. After bagging his first two ducks at age 12, Grayson Jr. was ecstatic. After his successful day duck hunting, he confirmed his passion for hunting and spent much of his childhood hunting the marshes. According to Grayson: "I was hooked from the git go."

Grayson Chesser accompanied members of his family on a trip to New England in 1961. During that trip he visited the Dorset House at the Shelburne Museum of Art, Design, and Americana. He was greeted by an elderly lady (Mrs. Field) who was happy showing him around and educating him on waterfowl decoys. As a result of Grayson's enthusiasm, Mrs. Field allowed Grayson to view areas of the museum that were not open to the public. After his visit to Shelburne, VT, Grayson was absolutely certain of his decision to be a decoy carver.

Grayson attended the Wallops Branch of the University of Virginia where he met his wife Dawn. She was an Oyster, VA native and related to decoy makers Charles and Doug Jester. Grayson went on to Old Dominion University and earned a B.S. degree in business administration in 1970. Dawn shortly followed Grayson to Old Dominion. Grayson shares: "taking business courses were boring, and about as much fun as eating saltine crackers without a drink." When he left college, he continued farming with his father. He realized that he belonged on the farm guiding hunters, trapping, and carving decoys.

Grayson Sr. died in 1970 and Grayson Jr. and Dawn were married that same year and purchased the house that his grandfather lived in as well as an adjoining barn. Grayson became a game warden after his father's death. They raised one daughter, Elizabeth. Grayson and Dawn have two grandchildren. Dawn spent time as a special education teacher and loves the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

Grayson loves a great storyteller. He shares that his father's family were all good storytellers, recalling details of family history and adventures at their annual hog killings. The value of communication is especially important to Grayson. In today's world, most communication is done through email, the internet, or Facebook. Grayson feels strongly that it is not the same thing and not as valuable as sitting with folks in person and sharing good stories. Those who have had the pleasure to know Grayson can attest that he is carrying on the tradition of the Chesser family because he enjoys sharing stories with all those with whom he spends time.



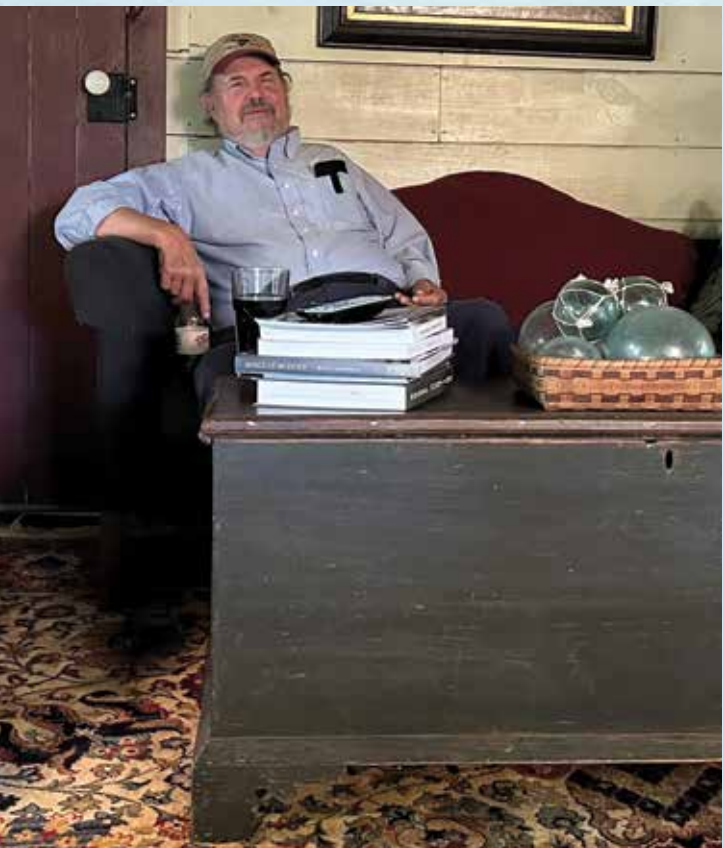


Blue Winged Teal Pair

During his youth, Grayson always had an interest in art. He dreamed of being a decoy carver and a hunting guide. He began carving decoys in 1960. The combination of art and hunting provided Grayson the opportunity to fulfill his dream. At that time, the lower Delmarva peninsula had some very prominent decoy makers that included Delbert Cigar Daisey and Miles Hancock (both from Chincoteague Island, VA) and Lloyd Tyler and the Ward brothers (all from Crisfield, MD). These experienced carvers were very willing to share their knowledge with an aspiring young man like Grayson Chesser. Grayson recalled: “the old timers were tickled to death to see a youngster take an interest in carving. All of them could not have been nicer to me.” Grayson feels the way that you pay them back is by passing on your knowledge to others. It is very meaningful to Grayson to pass the knowledge on to others.



Grayson was always close to Miles Hancock. According to Grayson: “there may be better carvers than Miles Hancock but no carver was a better man.” Grayson shares: “Miles was a Christian man who didn’t talk religion, his life was his testimony.” Miles’ mother died when he was very young. Miles’ father, unable to care for Miles, gave young Miles to Asbury Williams and his wife to raise. Miles only went to school for less than one year. Grayson shares that: “Miles not only taught me how to carve, but how to live.” Grayson was perhaps most influenced by the style of Nathan Cobb Jr. Grayson says his painting was simple but correct. His decoys had so much motion.” Cobb used yaupon limbs (a holly found in the southeastern United States) that possessed natural curves. These natural curves created the illusion of motion which made the decoys seem more realistic.



Grayson speaks highly of David “Umbrella” Watson (Chincoteague Island, VA), whose name reflects the fact that he always carried an umbrella, rain or shine. Grayson shared that: “his black ducks were stunning.” Watson painted with a flight feather from a bird, probably a shore bird. This unusual way to apply paint allowed Watson to cut sharper lines. Watson was also known to keep live birds in order to use them as references for his decoys. Watson’s style was the same as that of Nathan Cobb, Jr. He hunted the same areas as Nathan Cobb, Jr. and probably picked up this painting method from him.

Grayson shares that while hunting, he is always watching the birds, trying to observe their essence or spirit. He adds that his focus is always on the whole bird, and not just one detail. He believes: “that one doesn’t see a forest if the focus is only on a single tree.”

In addition to hunting and carving decoys, Grayson farmed for a while. He says: I liked farming, but I never loved it like carving and hunting.” Grayson eventually gave up farming in 1982 and focused on his carving and guiding hunting parties. After 1979, most of Grayson’s income came from carving

Grayson recalls his first decoy show (Chincoteague Decoy Show) where he shared a table with Mark McNair. Grayson sold \$500 worth of decoys that day. His second show was in Ocean City, MD where he realized \$2,000 in sales. In addition to these early shows, Grayson's marketed his creations at Peace Token, a small variety store that also sells firearms located at the Chincoteague Island turn off (Route 175) from Route 13.

Dawn assisted Grayson at decoy shows by designing his table to attract prospective customers. Dawn staged the show tables using antiques that included paintings, hand-made baskets, rugs, primitive furniture and of course, Grayson's decoys. Grayson shares that Dawn was an excellent salesperson while at those shows.

Grayson Chesser is one of the most respected carvers in his generation. To that end, his decoys maintain high value in the marketplace. He carves hollow decoys mostly from kiln-dried white pine and paints exclusively with oils. All of Grayson's decoys have flat bottoms and float high in the water. He uses a unique lead weight cast from a muffin tin bottom. All Grayson Chesser decoys show his classic expression in the head and neck.

Grayson Chesser likes to illustrate movement in his decoys. Grayson says: "Nathan Cobb Jr. mastered that skill." Grayson uses red cedar limbs to capture the illusion of head movement whereas Nathan Cobb Jr. used yaupon holly limbs which were plentiful during his time on Virginia's barrier islands. It is Grayson's belief that capturing movement is easier when making a single decoy but is much more challenging when making a complete rig of decoys. Grayson shares: "making a single decoy that has the illusion of motion is like an artist painting a vignette, but making a rig of decoys that creates an illusion of motion is like an artist painting the Last Supper in the Sistine Chapel." Black ducks and brant are Grayson's favorite species to carve.

A tour of Grayson Chesser's decoy shop finds a collection of hand tools with very few mechanical accessories. He does not utilize a hatchet to rough out his decoy bodies. Instead, he employs a band saw. He finishes up the shaping process with a draw knife, rasps, and spoke shaves. All sanding is done with a bow sander.

Just as Grayson Chesser was welcomed by the masters of the craft of decoy making when he was a novice, he has an eagerness to give back to younger carvers or those who want to learn the history. Perhaps, his most notable student was Cameron McIntyre, who spent countless hours working in his shop. Grayson was amazed with Cameron's strong sense of initiative. Grayson recalls: "at times when I paused my carving and took a nap, Cameron would impatiently wander in and out of the house asking Dawn when I was going to awake." His eagerness to learn has made him the carver that he is today.

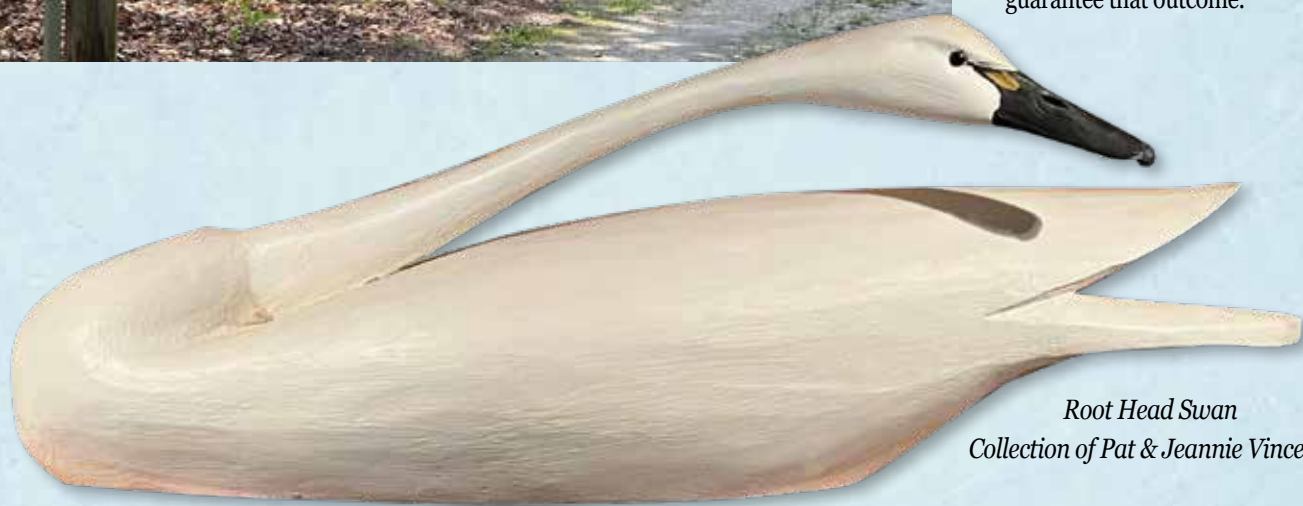


Root Head Brant





Grayson and Dawn have spent fifty-five years taking care of the land of Grayson's ancestors. Holden Creek Gun Club serves as a shelter for many species of birds. It has served as a hunting venue and a tranquil place for Scout camping and birding. Grayson treasures that the land has been in his family for generations and seeks to preserve it for future generations to enjoy. To that end, Grayson and Dawn placed a conservation easement on the property in 2006 held by Virginia Eastern Shore (VES) Land Trust to guarantee that outcome.



*Root Head Swan
Collection of Pat & Jeannie Vincenti*

Grayson's close friends say that he never had job in his life.

"My job is being me, 365 days/year. I get no holidays and have no retirement plan. I enjoy being my own master, if not, I would shrivel up and die."

✦ Grayson Chesser

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum would like to extend our appreciation to both Pete Peterson and Grayson Chesser for welcoming us into their spaces and taking the time to share their stories. It was a great experience for us and we hope you enjoyed reading their stories.

We also extend our gratitude to the Delmarva Decoy Collectors Association for furnishing a great exhibit of the works of both Pete Peterson and Grayson Chesser. The exhibit is a must see and will remain at the museum until mid-December 2025.

Show Me Your License

By C. John Sullivan Jr.



Henry Sonberg's Duck Blind License and Al Thomas drake canvasback from his rig.

We can never be positive of a date in our life when a lust or passion occurs, but I do recall the precise image of two objects that brought about that feeling. I've mentioned this in other writings, but the passion never left. In the late 1950s, there was a wonderful old-time stationery store on Main Street in Bel Air, Maryland, with a long rack of magazines on display. On the occasion that I would walk from school "uptown" to have a soda or a bag of chips at the soda fountain in one of the drug stores with my school friends, I would enter the stationery store to look at the variety of mechanical pencils and then stroll past the magazines, where there on a rack were *Hot Rod Magazine*, *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and then tightly wrapped in cellophane *Playboy* magazine. I knew that within the pages of *Playboy* there would be images of beautiful young ladies scantily clad. I was in the seventh grade, and I knew that someday I would own one of those magazines and finally see those lovely ladies.

At the same time as I became aware of those magazines, another unquenchable thirst came over me. My sporting aunt lived next to my family's farmhouse in Fallston. My aunt and uncle never had children of their own, so my sister and I spent wonderful days with them. My aunt guided me as I learned to shoot, first with my BB gun, then my grandfather's 22 Winchester, and finally her 410 shotgun. She was a sport-loving lady, and our target practices were great fun.

My aunt had a schoolmaster's desk that was placed at one end of the great country kitchen. On the right side of the desk's gallery, placed ever so neatly, was her 1941 hunting license; it was a bright yellow cloth, Harford County number 503. Her name was neatly inscribed on the back of the cloth. All Maryland hunting licenses from that time period were made from canvas impregnated with something that allowed them to be displayed on the back of a hunting coat. They could be stitched to the jacket or placed in a flexible case and then pinned to the jacket.

Her license rested in that exact location for decades. It teased me as a youngster each time I walked past it. It stirred a passion in me then that became more focused as the years passed. I never asked my aunt if I could have that license. I now know that it was important to her and reminded her of younger days afield. As that yellow number 503 sat beside her, a drive was sparked in me to search for others. That license became a part of my collection when my dear aunt passed away in 1983. It rests on my shelves close to some of my favorite decoys. I enjoy seeing it there; I know where it came from and where it sat for decades.

As the years passed and my passion for the wooden fowl grew, I was fortunate to have access to several historically significant



Licenses from John M. M. Pusey and his cousin Calvin Michael.

William Greenfield's license and a miniature from his collection.

decoy rigs. Each rig presented the opportunity to ask the owner if he had kept his old licenses. Much like my aunt, most of the early waterfowlers had saved their licenses. One group of licenses that I appreciate came with the rig of Donald Hayes. Hayes had been a family friend for many years. He had gunned the shores of the Chesapeake Bay in front of two historic properties. His rig consisted mostly of decoys by Madison Mitchell, with a few much older decoys. Donald's earliest license was for the 1925-1926 season; he was 14 years old and listed his occupation as "scholar."

When I visited William Greenfield of Abingdon, Maryland, to purchase his early shotgun shells, included in the purchase were his hunting license from 1970 and an early canvasback miniature. Willard E. Anderson was born in 1894 and was an active waterfowler his entire life. In addition to his hunting licenses and his hunting and fishing magazines, he shared with me wonderful stories. His decoys were gone when I visited him, but the stories made my time with him significant. I remember well when he handed me his hunting license collection and how proud he was of his 1942-1943 Harford County resident hunting license: number 9. In 1931-1932, he indicated that his occupation was cannery inspector.

The decoy rig of Henry A. Sonberg had the largest group of Al Thomas canvasbacks that I have ever had access to. Each of his Thomas decoys was in near perfect original paint. The remainder

of the rig was comprised of very early Susquehanna Flats decoys. His Duck Blind License of 1948-1949 is an interesting piece of waterfowling history and only one of three I own. He gunned in a cove reaching the Dual Highway adjacent to Otter Creek and the Bush River.

I have many decoys from the once extensive rig of the Pusey family. John M. M. Pusey's license of 1935-1936 lists his age as 20 years. John was shooting his limit from a sinkbox at age 14. Along with the John Pusey license archives, I am the proud custodian of licenses from Pusey's cousin, J. Calvin Michael. Michael was the recipient of many awards for his trap shooting skills, having been the Maryland State Champion for several years.

Among the historic ephemera from the Walker's family home in Berlin, Maryland, I uncovered Robert Walker's game warden certificate. My old friend Thomas Brooks provided me with his rig of Paul Gibson, Madison Mitchell, and early Robert F. McGaw decoys. Tom had preserved all of his hunting licenses and duck stamps. I was also fortunate in obtaining a few Canada goose decoys from the Chief of Police of the Town of Bel Air, along with his licenses and a photo of a successful day in the blind.

My mother's college roommate was a native of Crisfield in Somerset County, Maryland. Her husband, John Tawes, arranged

for my first introduction to the Ward brothers, and following that visit, John presented me with a perfect pair of miniature Ward brother mallards and his hunting coat and hat. Attached to the back side of his coat was his 1950 Somerset County hunting license.

Robert S. Fletcher of Magnolia, Maryland, lived right outside the gate to the Edgewood Arsenal. His wife's family were direct descendants of Benjamin Jeffers, shoreman and keeper of the fowl at the San Domingo Farm Club on the Gunpowder Neck. Along with his hunting license, I received a commemorative booklet presented to Jeffers by the Club members in 1897.

One of the Harford County licenses in my collection became the place for the hunter to remark on the success of his year afield. Just above the lettering "1960 Maryland," the hunter inscribed "over" and on the reverse wrote "Got 2 quail this season. First for 5 yrs or so. Missed several shooting in South Carolina in Jan. rough going there!"

In addition to my own Harford County licenses, I kept a few of the decoys from the small rig of Mitchell and Gibson decoys I had used while hunting, each of them wearing my "CJS" brand, the half circle C wrapping around the JS. Looking back on that small rig, I wish that I had kept them all.

Like so many parts of our material culture, the quality of "stuff" has declined. The hunting licenses of the 1920s and 1930s, which were made of impregnated canvas (oil cloth), transitioned to a stiff heavy paper and then to a much thinner paper but one still rigid enough to be worn in a plastic cover on the back side of a hunting jacket. The hunting licenses today are now printed on copy machine paper, 8 1/2 by 11 inches. The paper is folded up and carried in the hunter's jacket pocket. It is hard to imagine that anyone would consider today's license collectible. Saving those licenses was saving a piece of our material culture and an important slice of our waterfowling heritage. I well recall many of those men who passed their licenses on to me saying "why do you want those old things – they are no good to anyone!" My response then and today is that they are our material history and they tie us to a certain place and time. They are part of our past.

Some of my license receipts and an R. M. Mitchell coot from my rig, branded CJS.



R. M. Mitchell miniature canvasback and 1941 Harford County license from my aunt, Lauretta Sullivan.

Workshop Window

By Cindy Currier

Michael Braun

Blackwood, New Jersey

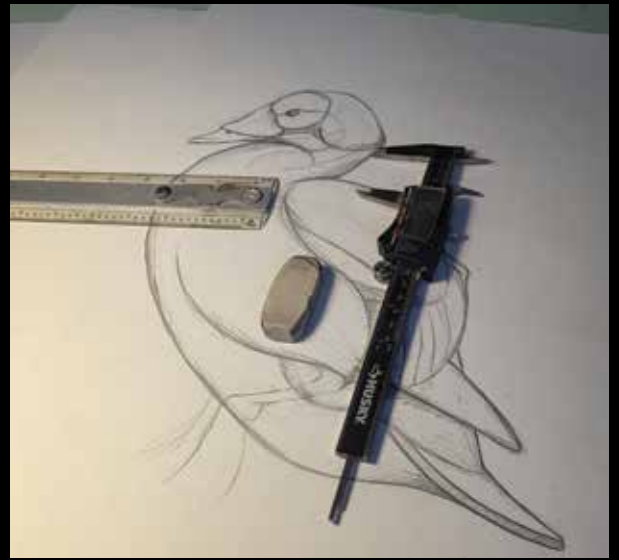
In this installment of Workshop Window, we take a peek into the workshop of World Class carver, Mike Braun. Mike's workshop sits behind his home in a 20' x 25' converted two-car garage.

Mike began carving at the young age of nine, having learned from his decoy carving father, Ed, who often took him to Ocean City's Ward World competitions. His attention to detail and natural artistic talent quickly earned him many awards and accolades. He most recently earned himself his first World Championship win at the 2024 Wards.

Mike currently carves decoys for a living and he even makes his own glass eyes for the birds. He continues to make rigs and individual commissioned decoys and enters competitions across the country.

Please enjoy this visual tour!







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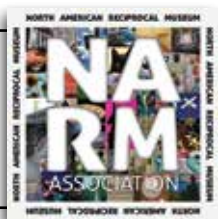
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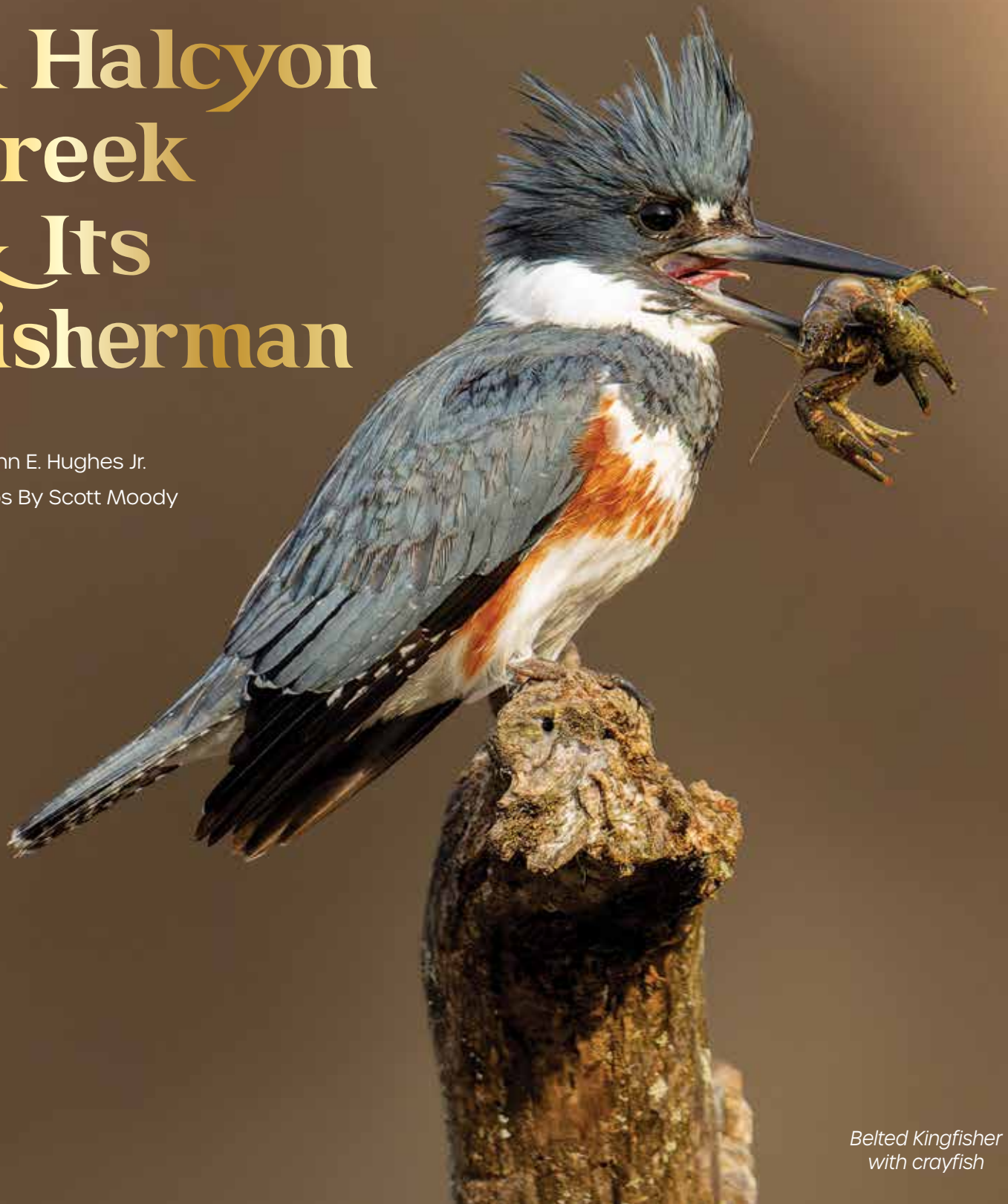
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A Halcyon Creek & Its Fisherman

By John E. Hughes Jr.
Photos By Scott Moody



*Belted Kingfisher
with crayfish*

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.



Deer Creek • Frank Marsden

The Creek

Deer Creek is a natural treasure among Harford County's many wild resources. Its origins are found in the northwestern corner of the county, near northeastern Baltimore County and southern Pennsylvania's Fawn Grove area. It flows in nearly a straight line across Harford County until it achieves its fall line near its mouth, just before it enters the Susquehanna River above Lapidum Landing. The rivershed that it transverses is composed of forested, agricultural, and suburban riverscape. In many areas it seems quite wild. The Piedmont topography of the creek allows for the water to gently drop in a series of riffles and pools until it becomes flat near the Susquehanna. During high water conditions, the riffles may become minor rapids and the pools become churning sediment traps. Hundreds, if not thousands of people cross the creek each day on the many roadways and bridges that allow traffic to travel over it, but few really observe it closely except in flood stage. However, this creek truly warrants greater inspection and notoriety than just a casual passing glimpse. Few know that Deer Creek is designated a "Wild and Scenic River" and as such is nationally and regionally noted for its special natural values.

Except after hurricanes, thunderstorms with downpours, or longer periods of heavy rainfall, Deer Creek is a stream that runs crystal clear in many spots. Narrow, rarely more than 50-60 feet wide, and shallow, seldom deeper than 1-3 feet with occasional exceptions, the creek's cold freshwater is slowly working its way to the Susquehanna. The bottom (substrate) material is composed of exposed bedrock, rocks, cobble, gravel, sand, and mud depending on where you are on the creek. It is a changing mosaic of pattern modified by changes in current due to falling land elevation. Its waters are generally well oxygenated especially in shaded riffle runs throughout much of the year. This provides for a plethora of wildlife. Although no primary forest habitat remains along the stream, healthy secondary growth is abundant with mountain laurel understory in areas where sunlight penetrates the canopy or along its edge. Erosion and surface runoff are problematic due to land usage and other pollution is of a secondary nature.

Deer Creek serves as the primary drainage basin for the central portion of Harford County. Water that falls in its watershed either percolates into groundwater reserves, is absorbed at the surface for immediate biological usage, or forms runoff into the creek. Beyond these hydrologic uses, the creek offers ideal habitat for us to observe and interact with wildlife both in and out



Adult Dobson Fly • Chesapeake.net



Hellgrammite • Ohio State University



Belted Kingfisher with Golden Shiner

of the water. Fish swim, birds fly, mammals wander and so many other lifeforms are to be discovered through their interaction with the stream. Hunting, fishing, tubing, swimming, rope-swinging, etc., all offer exciting recreational opportunities that the creek can provide. For me, the creek also allowed for a casual canoe paddle which afforded time for reflection on nature, a setting for personal introspection, and an ideal classroom to study nature.

For nearly 2 years, I studied Deer Creek, every other weekend of every season, canoeing to 6 different sampling sites which I had established between Grier Nursery Road and Walters Mill. At each site, I collected physical, chemical, and biological data about the stream. By choosing a temporal period of multi-year length, I hoped to eliminate any unusual impact factors out of the norm. Whether collecting information during the ice and snow of winter, the blistering heat of summer, or the beauty of fall and spring, Deer Creek revealed to me much about itself in particular and myself in general. I chose one particular species, the larvae of Dobson flies which are known as hellgrammites, as my target species and collected as much data as possible that might

reveal its distribution and abundance in the stream. My graduate masters thesis was ultimately entitled "Dobson Fly larvae distribution on a Piedmont stream in various riverscape habitats over a two year temporal cycle." By choosing 2 sampling sites for each type of riverscape habitat, I was able to discover that hellgrammite distribution and density was strongly associated with highly oxygenated riffle bars in forested portions of the creek. It also became obvious that the greater the overall human impact from the "edges" of the creek, the more negative the impacts on water quality, and the fewer hellgrammites to be found.

Most visitors to Deer Creek are not looking for the larvae of a giant fly that as an adult lives for only a few days, but if they had been they could have learned that the presence or absence of these flies were a bioindication of the overall health and well-being of the creek. My study showed that by evaluating the abundance and density of an individual species of organism, it was possible to assess the relative strength of an entire ecosystem. Going from the parts of a system to its whole is the essence of ecological thinking. One further note on the experience is that over the two years of my efforts, I was able to take my John Carroll environmental students with me so that they could be a part of real field science and see an ecological undertaking first hand. It was also a cruel form of fun to witness a hellgrammite, the T-rex of the stream, give a nip to a finger of a student and see their reaction. The larvae were a good teacher and the students proved to be quick learners.

Aldo Leopold

"A Sand County Almanac"

"To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering"

Today when I paddle or cross Deer Creek, I think of those times with joy and a smile. Many portions of the creek are still wild and healthy and reveal diverse forms of wildlife. One such member of the stream's community, which always proved exciting and fun to watch was and is the belted kingfisher. This remarkable fisherman's presence is dependent on Deer Creek being able to provide a healthy and sustainable habitat for its energy demands (food) and nesting opportunities.

The Fisherman

The belted kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*) is a stocky, medium-sized bird which is native to North America. It can be found quite commonly in the United States, Canada, and Central America wherever healthy aquatic systems can offer adequate feeding and breeding possibilities. Fossil remains of its ancestors have been found in Florida deposits dating over 2 million years ago. The bird is between 11-14 inches in length with a wingspan of 19-23 inches and weighing in at 4-6.3 ounces. It is noted for its rather large head and crest, speed in flight, rattling call, and headfirst plunging dives for fish. The female is a bit larger than the male and possesses a rufous belt across its mid-chest. Both sexes have a beautiful blue, gray, and white plumage with some black coloring. Its large, heavy bill and rather small feet are black to dark gray. It appears extremely rapid in flight, leading me to consider it the "blue dart". Except when breeding and nesting, the belted kingfisher is a solitary bird.



Female Belted Kingfisher Perched

Belted kingfishers pair bond every nesting season at which time the birds become a monogamous pair. Courtship is noted for its noisy aerial chases and the male will feed the female during this time. The pair work together over a 3-7 day period, digging a chamber 3-6 feet deep and 4-6 inches in diameter, in a bank. They take turns digging with a specialized long flat toe with sharpened, pointed claws. The site is usually high in the bank to avoid potential flooding and the burrow usually has an incline to a higher nesting chamber. These nests can be found along streams and rivers, ditches, road cuts, landfills, and even sand/gravel quarries. The key factor in nest location is its proximity to water.

Belted kingfishers produce 1-2 broods per season. The female lays 5-8 eggs which are incubated by both birds over a 22-24 day period. Fledging of the young is between 27-29 days and both adults are extremely busy providing almost constant food. The precocial young are born naked with pink skin and closed eyes but mature rapidly. The young have a highly acidic digestive system which allows them almost total food absorption. As they age, belted kingfishers are known to regurgitate pellets of indigestible food materials. Predators include mammals and snakes which feed on the young and hawks which consume adults. Bank swallows sometimes attempt to nest near the

entrance of a burrow, but they are usually chased away. If you were a small fish about 4-5 inches in length or a minnow in a stream or river, you would probably consider the belted kingfisher to be an ambush predator in your one and only encounter with them. Belted kingfishers are noted for their patient perching in trees and shrubs, along a stream or river, until the prey enters their visual parameters. At that point they launch, like a thrown dart, adjust their dive angle, close their eyes which are protected by a nictitating membrane, and plunge headfirst into the water seizing their prize with their bill. Fish caught, they return to their perch, beat their prey to death, and consume it whole, headfirst. It is truly amazing to watch these birds "take the plunge" and not injure themselves. They remind me of terns, gannets, and other divers that exhibit the same hunting styles. However, their launch into the dive is what makes them appear as a "blue dart". Occasionally they will also hover almost motionless above the water, like a sparrow hawk over a mouse in a field, waiting until conditions are what they choose, and then finally take the plunge. These birds are remarkable fishermen.



Male Belted Kingfisher Perched

Belted kingfishers will usually consume small nektonic prey, less than 6 inches, such as mummichugs, sticklebacks, silversides, young trout, etc. They should be considered opportunistic generalists. Other food sources are amphibians, mollusks, crustaceans, insects, small mammals, birds, reptiles, and occasionally berries. A key to their success as fishermen is clear, non-turbid water which allows them to see their prey. The cloudier the water, the less potential for successful fishing. Sight is the most critical factor for their success in meeting their nutritional needs. Belted kingfishers can be found throughout North America, always close to water. Their migrations are dependent on finding open water away from ice-covered conditions.

Nictitating Membrane: Nictitating membranes are adaptations found in many vertebrates such as birds, reptiles, and some mammals. Latin for to blink, these translucent or transparent structures are protective and form a "third Eyelid". It is a thin layer or fold of tissue which protects the eye from potential injury and shields it from debris, dust, and penetration. It also keeps the eye lubricated and moist. Its location is in the inner corners of the eye between the eyelid and

eyeball. It is visible when the eye blinks. It is especially significant to predaceous species by protecting them against struggling prey, intraspecies competition and challenges, and water plunging behaviors. Hence it is quite important to the belted kingfisher's survival.

The term was first described by American naturalist Elliot Coues in an article entitled "Birds Eye Views" in 1898. He compared the membrane to a windshield protecting the eye. The human use of protective goggles for a variety of activities would be a comparable situation.

Belted kingfishers are common and widespread throughout their range. The population is estimated to be approximately 1,800,000 birds today, but it should be noted that this is a 38% decline since 1966. Historically, these birds were shot because of their supposed impact on young gamefish. This has proven not to be the reality and the practice has been outlawed. Decline of nesting sites due to habitat modification and loss is the most significant factor relating to their population's

sustainability. Also, these birds are extremely sensitive to disturbance by humans and their activities. The IUCN lists them as a species of least concern.

Personal Observations: Having known of and about belted kingfishers most of my life, I found them to be a very fascinating bird. They usually revealed themselves to me most times when visiting a waterway, shoreline, or body of water. Belted kingfishers were fun to watch, study and identify and provided a teaching moment for my students. However, it was while studying hellgrammites on Deer Creek for those two years that I can say my understanding of the birds became much more intimate.

As I paddled or drifted from test site to test site and finally to the takeout, I observed that there were usually two pairs of belted kingfishers present. I would find the first pair of birds around a slight meander in the stream which was landscaped by a cornfield on the north shore and mixed secondary growth forest on the south side. At this point the creek had a riffle run with two deeper pools at each end. The nest burrow was about 3-4 feet above stream level in the eroding bank of the cornfield. Drifting upon the perching birds often led to a sort of "cat and mouse" interaction with them. They would fly

downstream, beyond my visual range, only to take flight again as I approached them on the moving current. This scenario might play out several times until they reached a point known only to them, where they would turn around and jet back upstream, rattling all the way. This is when the observation was right in my face. On a sunny, blue-sky day, the beautiful blue hue of the bird along with its rapid flight back upstream to its "home" waters was quite an event to witness. Also watching the young birds come out of their hole into their adult world environment was always a thrill. I, however, only observed two young birds generated by this pair.

The second pair was located farther downstream, near the canoe takeout. I was never able to find their nest and this may have just been a fishing spot for them. I would note that oftentimes, human fishermen were present in this area as well and it was an ideal takeout spot for canoes at Walters Mill. This pair was interesting to observe because here the water was much shallower and the birds' dives were at a narrower angle of plunge. Regardless, the birds were still very successful in their fishing. It must have been a favored spot for them because they were there more times than not. I also observed this pair of birds throughout the year even when snow fell and the edges of the creek were iced. Deer Creek never iced over completely during those two study years. These birds proved to be an excellent distraction from the labor of the nets, traps, and Surber samplers which all aided in my efforts to qualify and quantify the hellgrammites at each test site.

Belted kingfishers' efforts at fishing yielded for them survival; my efforts at collecting provided data for research and reflection and ultimately academic survival. The birds had picked a wonderful creek to live on with ideal fishing conditions most of the time, good nesting possibilities in season, and places with limited exposure to humans when they needed it. By the end of my study, I hoped that my visits had not impacted on their lives too often. Maybe they were able to study and reflect upon the comings and goings of that strange biped, his boat, and his unusual activities.

Deer Creek and its community of life had become the quintessential place for my study of hellgrammites but it proved to be overall so much more in my personal



Male Belted Kingfisher with Golden Shiner

growth and development as a naturalist and Harford County citizen. This was now a place for me of love and respect and the origins of my land ethic. Aldo Leopold in the preface to his "Sand County Almanac" stated that "there are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot". I am one who cannot live without wild things and Deer Creek provided me with the proof. The belted kingfisher, whether perched on a branch, barbed wire, or pole, hovering almost motionless above the stream's surface, launching into a plunge like a dart, or rattling past me is a member in good standing in that community and place. This delightful bird brings joy and memories my way; every time I see or hear one it reminds me of my two years of nurturing by the creek.

Final note:

I have been fortunate enough to observe in the field every species of kingfisher (6) in this hemisphere. I've noticed that the naturalists who have helped me observe these birds always seem to wear a smile in pointing them out and they all seem to feel that the bird has special significance to whatever wet place that they are a part of at that moment. I think I know how and why they feel that way.

Brown Hooded Kingfisher
Dave Lychenheim



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)



Belted Kingfisher
Rob Bruch



Belted Kingfisher
Earl Blansfield



Belted Kingfisher
Earl Blansfield

Belted Kingfisher
Earl Blansfield



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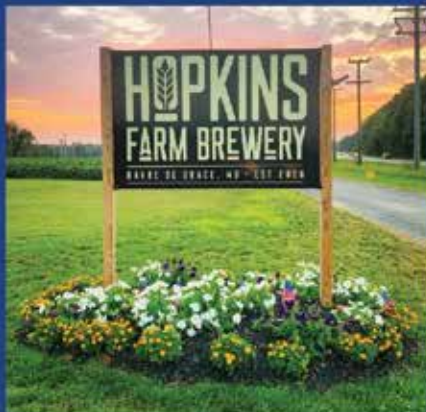
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Decoy Club News

Museum Hosts Decoy Clubs for Fun-filled Day

By Chad Tragakis

On Sunday, August 17, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum hosted a group of 50+ members of the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association, the Upper Bay Club and the Delmarva Decoy Collectors for an outstanding day of decoys, scholarship, fellowship and fun.

After welcoming the group, PDCA president Chad Tragakis reminded everyone why they should join all the regional decoy clubs and support all the museums and institutions dedicated to preserving and celebrating waterfowl decoys. We said a very fond farewell to PDCA's historic John "Daddy" Holly exhibit, but Chad and Kevin Peel shared news that a permanent display case is being established on the museum's first floor as a living legacy of that effort, and a fitting, long-overdue and lasting tribute to "Daddy" Holly. PDCA treasurer Bruce Eppard and others from the club presented a \$5,000 donation to museum leadership to put toward the new "Daddy" Holly exhibit case, followed by another \$2,000 donation from the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club. Fundraising is off to a great start but we still have a lot of work to do. To learn more about this important effort or to make a donation, contact the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.



Part of the PDCA's new exhibit, "Half the Sky" celebrating hen decoys.



PDCA leaders present a check to the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum for the new John "Daddy" Holly exhibit case.

Chad turned things over to Kevin Peel, who shared an outstanding presentation on the life and decoys of Al Bell, which he carefully researched and expertly presented in a recent Decoy Magazine feature story. At Kevin's invitation, five descendants of Bell (two great-grandchildren and their spouses and one great-great granddaughter) were on hand to be a part of this very special day. A highlight was seeing the family enjoying the museum's new Al Bell exhibit that Kevin and C. John Sullivan Jr. installed. It was wonderful to see the family learning so much about their talented ancestor.



Kevin Peel and C. John Sullivan Jr. with Al Bell family descendants.

David Farrow and John Henry coordinated the excellent luncheon that was served just before Noon, which once again featured catered gourmet sandwiches and homemade chips. After lunch, people enjoyed mixing and mingling throughout the museum, catching up with friends, and checking out the museum's various exhibits. In addition to the permanent galleries and the Al Bell display, they included the stellar display of PDCA member Jeff Van Brookhoven's Sellers Family decoys from the Upper Susquehanna River, an outstanding display of decoys and carvings by Eastern Shore legends Pete Peterson and Grayson Chesser organized by the Delmarva Club, and an impressive display of Pennsylvania carver John Eichelberger's work.

At the same time, another group gathered for an informal roundtable on Jim Holly blue-winged teal decoys. Seven outstanding examples were brought in from member collections, each one a rare and valuable treasure. A highlight of the day was PDCA's decoy display contest, featuring three decoy categories plus a Folk Art category. In keeping with tradition when meeting at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, PDCA selects the work of a different Harford County, Maryland decoy maker as the theme. This year, the group celebrated the work of Columbus Paxton "Lum" Fletcher (1867-1942) of Swan Creek and later Havre de Grace.

As the meeting wrapped up, a few club members and museum staff turned their attention to the John "Daddy" Holly case on the back wall of the upstairs gallery. The final Holly decoys were carefully

removed, and PDCA then spent the next few hours installing a brand-new special exhibit – the first-ever display dedicated exclusively to working hen decoys, "Half the Sky." We will share much more on this incredible new display in a future issue of The Canvasback but make plans now to visit the museum to see it for yourself. Half the Sky will run through Summer of 2026.

The fun, friendly and casual atmosphere carried throughout the day and late into the afternoon. All told, it was another outstanding day! The PDCA again extends its sincere thanks to our wonderful friends at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. We are honored and thrilled to have such a special and longstanding relationship with one of the best places in the entire world for decoys.



Comparing and discussing Jim Holly blue-winged teal decoys.

UPCOMING DECOY SHOW INFORMATION

October 18, 2025

56th Annual Upper Shore Decoy Show

Minker Banquet Hall, Perryville VFC • Perryville, MD

Info: decoyshow@upperbaymuseum.org

November 14-16, 2025

2025 Easton Waterfowl Festival

Easton, MD

Info: (410) 822-4567 • facts@waterfowlfestival.org

December 6, 2025

Inaugural Decoy Carvers & Collectors Banquet

The Historic Wellwood Club

523 Water Street, Charlestown, MD

Info: www.decoymuseum.com

January 31, 2026

Level Vintage Decoy & Collectibles Show

Level Volunteer Fire Company, Havre de Grace, MD

Info: Chuck Usilton (443) 252-0685

February 6 & 7, 2026

The Eastern Shore of Virginia Decoy Show

Pearl Events Center, Cape Charles, VA

Info: Tommy O'Connor (757) 620-8520

February 21, 2026

**5th Annual Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club
Sportsman & Decoy Show honoring Jim Pierce**

Minker Banquet Hall, Perryville, MD

Info: Gary Armour (667) 365-0268

April 9-11, 2026

**East Coast Decoy
Collectors Club Event**

St. Michaels Inn, St. Michaels, MD

Info: Kevin Peel (410) 937-2218

May 2 & 3, 2026

**44th Annual Decoy
& Wildlife Art Festival**

STAR Centre

Havre de Grace, MD

Info: Mike Tarquini

(410) 459-8487

www.decoymuseum.com



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