

The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Vol. 36 No. 3

Summer 2026



CELEBRATING CARVER

OLIVER "Tuts" Lawson



Carver-Restorer-Historian

Robert Seabrook




guyette & deeter

auctions since 1984

Decoys | Art | Fine Sporting Arms

Proud to be a Founders Circle sponsor of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

April Auction Highlights : Sold Prices



*The first two decoys to ever
break \$1,000,000*



Bluebill, Ben Dye



Canvasbacks, James T. Holly



Pintail, James T. Holly

July 24 & 25, 2026 Decoy & Sporting Art Auction | Easton, Maryland



guyetteanddeeter.com | 410-745-0485 | 1210 S Talbot St. Unit A | St. Michaels, MD 21663



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)



Contents

Features

- 5 It's Not For Sale – C. John Sullivan Jr.
- 9 A Look at Unknown Canvasback Decoys of the Susquehanna Flats – Bill Waibel
- 14 Workshop Window John Richardson – Cindy Currier
- 16 44th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival Recap – Heather Hollenbeck
- 19 Oliver "Tuts" Lawson – Mike Tarquini
- 26 Robert Seabrook – Mike Tarquini
- 34 Canvasback Naturalist – Shorebirds John E. Hughes, Jr.
- 39 Shots from the Wild – Shorebirds

ON THE COVER

A one of a kind carving of a leopard by Oliver "Tuts" Lawson. Tuts carved this masterpiece for Alonzo and Virginia Decker in 1991 to commemorate their many trips to South Africa. This carving currently resides in the collection of Tom Reed.

Departments

- 4 From the President
- 32 Museum Members



Tickets & Sponsorships
are now available at decoymuseum.com

Saturday, December 5, 2026

2nd Annual

& Decoy Carvers
& Collectors Banquet

at the historic Wellwood Club Charlestown, MD

*Celebrating the
40th Anniversary*

of the opening of the
Havre de Grace Decoy Museum
1986 - 2026



John "Daddy" Holly Canvasback Drake from the "Reckless" rig (circa 1860s-1870s)

PRESERVING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE OF WATERFOWLING & DECOY MAKING

All proceeds directly benefit operational expenses at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

Ed Henry Memorial 3 Bird/99 Target Sporting Clays Fun Shoot

Sunday, October 4, 2026 • 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Registration begins @ 8:30AM • Last shooters on course by 12 noon
Schrader's Outdoors • 16090 Oakland Road • Henderson, MD

\$120 Adult Registration • \$90 Youth Registration

Lunch Included! • 3 CASH Lewis Classes, 3 Deep

Side Games • Additional Options/Classes
Collector Decoys Awarded for HOA, SxS & Pump Categories

All proceeds benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum &
Billy Comegys/Queen Anne's County Ducks Unlimited

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE:

Emerald Level: \$150
(1 station sign)

Diamond Level: \$500
(1 station sign & logo on banner)

**Waterfowling Heritage
Elite Level: \$1,500**
(1 station sign, logo on banner
& 2 shooters at the event)

Platinum Level: \$3,000
(6 station signs, logo on banner
& 4 shooters at the event)



To Sponsor or For More Information
Please Contact:
Mike Tarquini at **410-459-8487** or
president@decoymuseum.com





215 Giles Street
Havre de Grace, MD 21078
410.939.3739

www.decoymuseum.com

OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

Michael E. Tarquini • *President*
George S. Robinson IV • *Vice-President*
John Henry • *Secretary*
John Graf • *Treasurer*
Pat Vincenti • *Member-at-Large*
Allen J. Fair • *President Emeritus*

John Currier
Michael Daley
David Farrow
John E. Hughes Jr.
George Nitzel
Chad Tragakis
Bill Waibel

CONSULTANTS

Kevin Peel
Lloyd Sanders Jr.
C. John Sullivan Jr.

ADVISORY DIRECTORS

Mindy Elledge
Ralph Hockman
John Hostetter
Charles E. Packard
Todd Pauliny
Jim Pierce

The Canvasback

EDITOR

Mike Tarquini

CONTRIBUTORS

Cindy Currier
Michael Daley
Darrell Hagar
Ralph Hockman
John E. Hughes Jr.
Dr. Lloyd Newberry
Kevin Peel
C. John Sullivan Jr.

Chad Tragakis
Bill Waibel

GRAPHICS

Anne Fullem Design

PRINTING

Prestige Color, Lancaster, PA

The Canvasback is a quarterly publication of The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, Inc. All rights are reserved, and no material may be reprinted without prior written permission of the Museum.

All correspondence should be sent as above.

From the President...

I hope this note finds everyone enjoying their long awaited summer activities and forgetting about the snow, ice and lower temperatures of this past winter. Despite the chilly temperatures in early May, the 44th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival was a huge success. The event experienced an uptick in exhibitors as well as attendees. Judging from feedback received after the event, most of our exhibitors had a great weekend of healthy sales and patronage at their exhibits. Special thanks to our event partner Delta Waterfowl -Susquehanna Flats Chapter for their assistance in making this year's festival one to remember. Thanks go out to Harford County for again sponsoring our event through funding generated through tourism dollars from hotel stays. Data collected through Harford County indicates this year's Decoy Festival experienced significant participation from patrons outside a fifty-mile radius and created the potential for numerous overnight hotel stays which generate the funds to support these types of activities. Lastly, a huge thank you for Chad Tragakis who served as this year's Honorary Chairman.

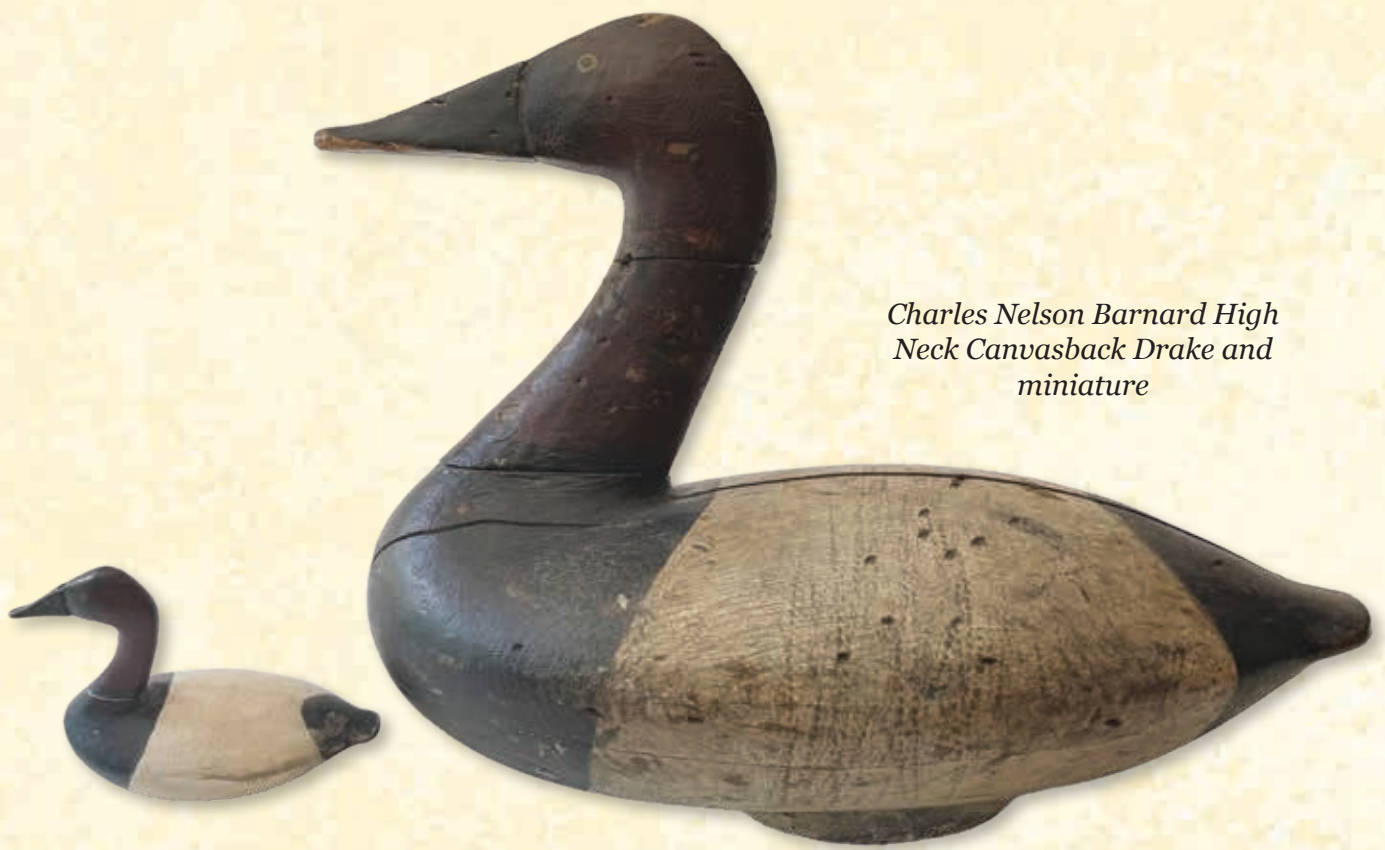


During the coming months, the Museum will present an exhibit of American Bald Eagle carvings to commemorate our nation's 250th Anniversary. Highlighting the exhibit will be a colossal bald eagle carved by the Ward Brothers (Crisfield, MD) and painted by Bill Gibian (Cape Charles, VA). Be sure to stop by museum and take in this special commemorative exhibit.

Plans are well underway for the 2nd Annual Decoy Carvers & Collectors Banquet that will be held on Saturday, December 5, 2026. We will again hold this year's event at the historic Wellwood Club which is steeped in waterfowling heritage. Banquet tickets and sponsorships are now available through the museum's website. Please be sure to mark your calendar to join us as we celebrate 40 years of preserving our waterfowling and decoy making heritage at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

Lastly, I would like to update our readers of our effort to expand the museum's footprint in order to make room for new exhibits and the technologies needed to enhance our current offerings. After three years of planning, data collection, and design work, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum formally provided a select group of potential contractors our plans and requirements and solicited preliminary quotations in order to define the financial magnitude of the project and prepare ourselves for fundraising efforts. We have received the submitted proposals and will evaluate them over the next few weeks with guidance from our architect, Architectural Design Works (Towson, MD). Stay tuned as our museum expansion project enters a critical phase of development.

Have a great summer and be sure to stop by the museum to see what we have to offer.



*Charles Nelson Barnard High
Neck Canvasback Drake and
miniature*

It's Not For Sale

By C. John Sullivan Jr.

It has happened to me once again. On April 9, 2026, I arrived at the St. Michael's Motor Inn for the annual East Coast Decoy Collectors gathering. My typical routine is to arrive at the show late morning on Thursday to peruse the merchandise. I've been in and out of only two rooms when my long-time friend Bob Hockaday calls to tell me I best check out big Chuck Usilton's room. Bob suggests that there is a great-looking gun shop trade sign there. As I head in the direction of Chuck's room, another old friend stops me to suggest I better check out the exact same piece. I should hurry he says, it won't last long. I head straight to Chuck's room and rather quickly reach an agreeable price. I allow the great wooden gun to rest awhile as I visit some of the other rooms. I visit Pat Vincenti; he has been a great friend for decades, and I have obtained some truly wonderful objects from him.

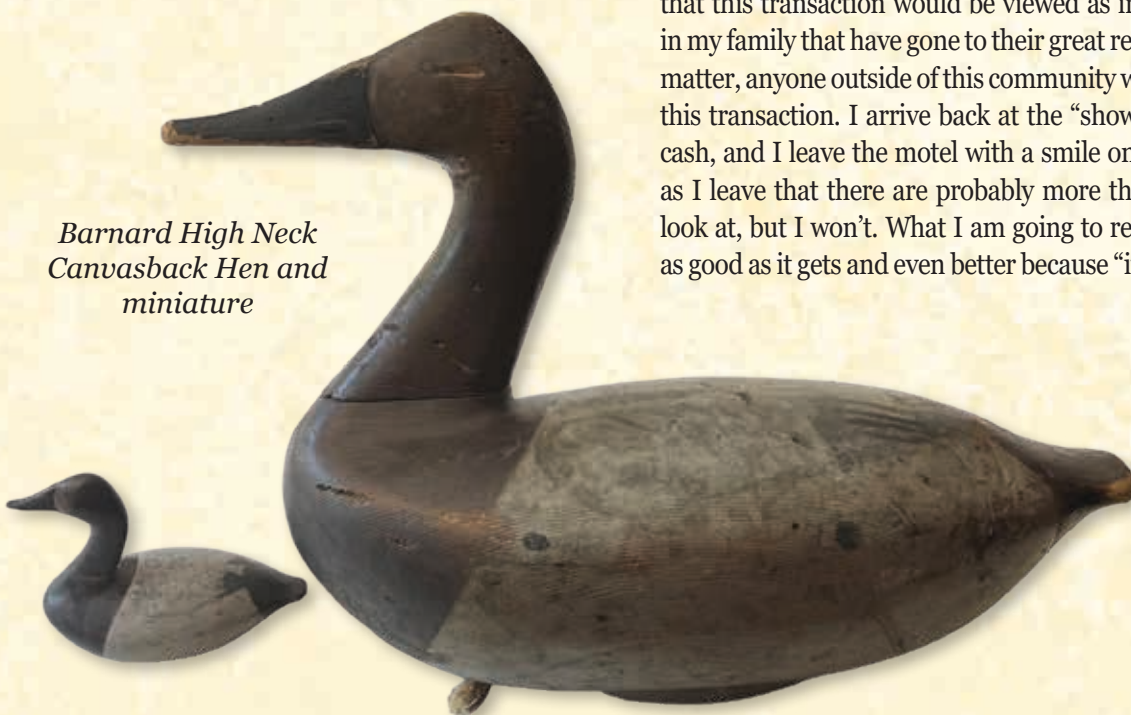
I leave Pat's room and stop by to visit Bill Cordrey. I have bought things from Bill for years, and I hold the record for being the single largest buyer of carved wooden clam shell decoys. Bill is always cordial, and he makes visitors to his room feel at home. As I walk into his room, we joke about the wooden clams. I wonder how many folks he has shared that story with? Bill says "I brought a few things along to show you BUT they are not for sale." Bill pulls a box out of the motel room dresser. He says "take a look at these." In an instant I am awestruck. He shows me, wrapped up in paper towels, Thomas Barnard miniature canvasbacks, Wally Algard high-neck miniature canvasbacks, Charles Nelson Barnard miniature high-neck canvasbacks, and then in the bottom of the box ensconced in a purple Royal Crown liquor bag is a one-of-a-kind John B. Graham ruddy duck in original paint. This

Barnard miniatures



magnificent little decoy has never been rigged or weighted; it is not quite small enough to be a miniature and not quite large enough to be a working decoy. It is truly wonderful, one of the best objects that I've had the pleasure of viewing for a very long time. I hold it, I covet it, and I plead to own it. But alas, I am once again reminded that it is not for sale. I shake hands with Bill, and he tells me what he has been offered for the little gem. He tells me that maybe someday he will sell it. I make my offer, and the little ruddy is returned to its colorful little bag. I load my only purchase of the day into the car and head back for some yard work at our historic house in Easton. The next day of the motel show, I am filled with anticipation as I head to St. Michael's. I rarely admit such things, but my first stop of the day is at the Amish Market in Easton. The freshly made donuts have just hit the rack and are ready for my friends in St. Michael's. I load up all that I can carry to the register and head off to the motel. I drive just a bit slower than normal as I am savoring the still warm cronut from the bakery. My heart doctor has placed me on a rather strict diet, and I allow myself one of these sinful calorie-packed fat pills once or twice a year. I make the first stop in Ronnie Newcomb's room, and then I am off to Pat Vincenti's room to deliver some baked goods. I am focused on one particular little ruddy duck. I visit a few rooms looking at other offerings BUT I am laser focused on that diminutive little duck. I head back to Bill Cordrey's room; he is standing just outside the door. I plead with him to just let me have another look. Bill agrees, and I shut the door to prevent any interruptions. I hold the little bird in my hand, I plead once again just shy of shedding tears, and Bill agrees! I cradle the tiny decoy in my hand and head off to the bank to return to Bill with a pile of cash. As I'm driving back with the cash next to the little bird on the front seat, it strikes me that this transaction would be viewed as insanity to any one in my family that have gone to their great reward. And for that matter, anyone outside of this community would be baffled by this transaction. I arrive back at the "show" to hand Bill the cash, and I leave the motel with a smile on my face. I realize as I leave that there are probably more things that I should look at, but I won't. What I am going to return home with is as good as it gets and even better because "it was not for sale!"

*Barnard High Neck
Canvasback Hen and
miniature*





Charles Nelson Barnard miniatures

A few weeks pass, and I am now focused on the upcoming Havre de Grace Decoy Show. I call my friend Bill and ask “are you bringing any of the miniature decoys to the show?” He tells me he is bringing some things along basically just to show them to me first and perhaps to a few others, but once again they are not for sale unless someone is willing to buy a “box lot.” This offering makes me anxious; I wonder what will be offered and what does Bill mean by a “box lot?”

I am anxious and way too excited as I wait for the show. We set up at 12 noon at the STAR Center in Havre de Grace. Now, at the ripe age of 80, I find myself setting up three full tables of decoys, my books, a couple of 4-bore market guns, and a punt gun. There’s nothing better for a bad back than to tote in seafood boxes filled with decoys and a 90-pound gun. As I am setting up my tables, I see my friend Bill Cordrey arrive. I don’t want to be overly anxious, but I check a few times to see if the box lot has appeared. I continue to watch him ever so slowly

setting up his display. The next time I glance in his direction, he has unboxed the miniatures, and my friend Kevin Peel is carefully removing their paper towel wrappings. I move as quickly as I can and sit down close to these tiny works of art. Before I have a chance to question what is taking place, Kevin hands me the tiny pair of Charles Nelson Barnard high-head canvasbacks. They exhibit every feature that an Upper Bay collector would want to see: good old paint, perfect form, a tiny bit of shelf wear, and great detail to their tiny necks and heads. They both wear the exact paddle tail of the full-sized Barnards. The hen shows the paint pattern of the very best Barnard hen. These tiny decoys measure 4 inches in length with their necks reaching 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches high. Their tiny bills are but $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch wide. The price established for a box lot is comparable to what a collector would expect to pay for a really good Upper Bay decoy. All this is relative to what a hard-core collector is willing to pay. With Bill, there is never a debate about the price. As we use an overly recited expression: “it



John B. Graham 3/4 size Ruddy Duck decoy



Graham Ruddy Duck decoys



*Barnard High Neck Canvasback Hen
and pair of high neck miniatures*

is what it is." No negotiations; just one price. The group of miniatures in the box lot includes the Barnard miniature pair, the tiniest pair of Barnes/Holly canvasbacks, and a great pair of Carroll (Wally) Algard miniature canvasbacks. The sale is quickly done. I return to my table to examine these little birds. They are wonderful, truly magnificent. When I get home in the evening, I immediately place the mini highheads next to their full-size counterparts. They look magnificent resting side by side. I go to bed worrying about this unnecessary expense. I take pictures of the grouping and send them off to my artist/collector friend in England, Guy Taplin. I pay no attention to the time difference from our continent to his. I send a brief note along with the pictures: "Why did I get these? Have I lost my mind?" Guy replies within a matter of a few minutes: "You had no choice. You had to get them."

So the question is why do I do this? I push my passion to the limit. I keep my collection in the best order that my space allows. Yes, I enjoy viewing and living surrounded by these objects. I enjoy sharing the collection by setting up displays. I enjoy speaking about these old wooden objects. But again, WHY? I do it to protect and preserve our wonderful waterfowling heritage. Assembling collections by a specific carver provides the observer an opportunity to see a time capsule of what the carver was doing with his creativity. It allows the carver's talent to be enjoyed in real time. Another question arises: why would a carver create these tiny masterpieces? The Barnards actually used and displayed these little gems under their Christmas tree on their shelves, but why such painstaking detail? The answer is right in front of my eyes as they sit on my shelves. Because they could!

A Look At Unknown Canvasback Decoys of the Susquehanna Flats

By Bill Waibel



Cecil County canvasback showing some general characteristics of Ben Dye and George Chauncey Reynolds. This decoy has intricate bill, nostril, and mandible carving in addition to carved eyes made with the help of an empty rifle cartridge. It represents one of the finest unknowns from the Flats. Collection of Dick McIntyre.

No place on earth has a deeper and richer waterfowl hunting history than the Chesapeake Bay, particularly, the Susquehanna Flats. Starting in the late 1830s, market gunning took off as men based in towns like Havre de Grace, Charlestown, North East and Perryville, killed large numbers of canvasback, redhead and scaup to help feed a young nation. Not long after, wealthy men with a desire for sport, came to the area to shoot canvasbacks out of a sinkbox, often guided by the same men who did the market shooting. More ducks were killed, over a longer period, than any other area...and it's not even close.

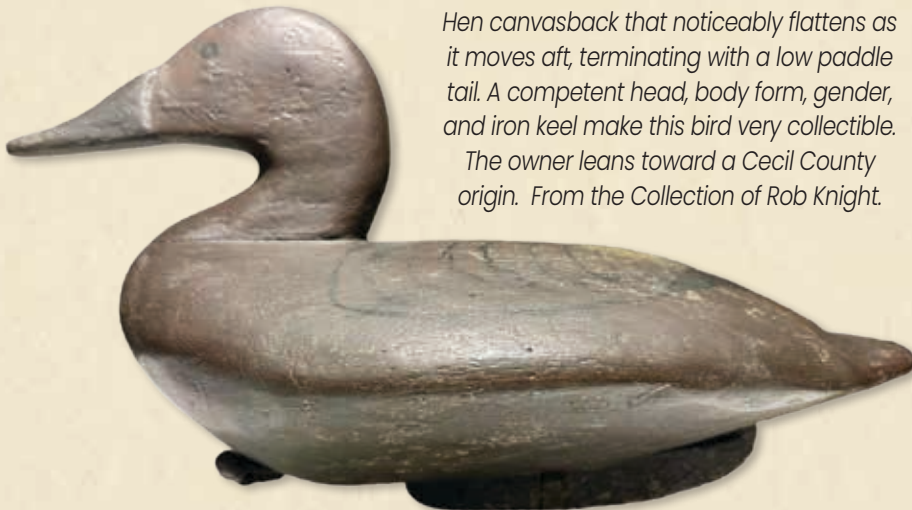
Clearly a Cecil County bird, this decoy has a sharp chine, neck shelf and wears an iron keel, indicating a pre-1900 decoy. The downward angle of the chine, shelf and head, are all parallel, creating a most pleasing profile. Collection of Kevin Peel.



Havre de Grace unknown with a pleasing, compact profile and a competent head that has a bit of a Sam Barnes look to it. The boat-hull design strongly indicates that the maker spent much time in the boatyard.



Hen canvasback that noticeably flattens as it moves aft, terminating with a low paddle tail. A competent head, body form, gender, and iron keel make this bird very collectible. The owner leans toward a Cecil County origin. From the Collection of Rob Knight.



The sinkbox was such a deadly device for duck killing, that it was outlawed in 1935. The device was simply a "winged" rectangular box, not unlike a coffin, where the gunner would lie below the water's surface. Flat-bottomed decoys cast from iron were placed on the deck to sink the box to the correct depth, depending on the weight of the gunner. The rig was typically 300 to 700 decoys and from a very short distance away, looked like a large raft of ducks. Many times, decoys with a high head were placed close to the box to further hide the gunner. There were dozens of sinkbox rigs at any one time operating on the Flats.

Another method of gunning was bushwhacking, where a specialized boat was used to scull down on ducks that landed in decoys a couple hundred yards away. These rigs typically used between 100 and 150 decoys and there were many such outfits gunning the Susquehanna Flats.

Additionally, there were many blinds, where one hundred decoys or more would be set out, all along the bay and adjacent river shores. While not as effective as the sinkbox or bushwhack boat, these gunners had some good days if the weather made up and the wind was right.

With so many gunning rigs, over such an extended period, it's not difficult to believe that, conservatively, over a half million decoys were crafted within a 10-mile radius of the Flats. Decoys were simply tools in those days and were frequently lost due to tide, ice, or a poorly tied knot. Additionally, the rig was rarely handled with "kid gloves" and would many times just be tossed in the boat after a long, frigid day of gunning, creating wear and breakage. The decoy makers had a brisk business for most of one hundred years, as new rigs and replacements were ordered year after year.

While there are many makers whose decoys are well documented and widely accepted, many more are unknown. Early writers, such as Joel Barber, Bill Mackey and Kemp Bartlett chronicled some of the decoys made in the area, but there were some misattributions and unidentified decoys that have since been identified. Later, J. Evans McKinney and Henry Fleckenstein wrote more comprehensive books on Susquehanna Flats decoys and their makers. These important works answered many questions and considering they were written at a time when research was more difficult, the collecting community owes these men a great deal of gratitude. More recently, the works of C. John Sullivan, Jr. and Micheal Daley have cleared the water even more regarding many makers,

but as Sullivan, despite his historical prowess and willingness to disseminate information, frequently states, "we just don't know," referencing so much decoy history that has been lost to time.

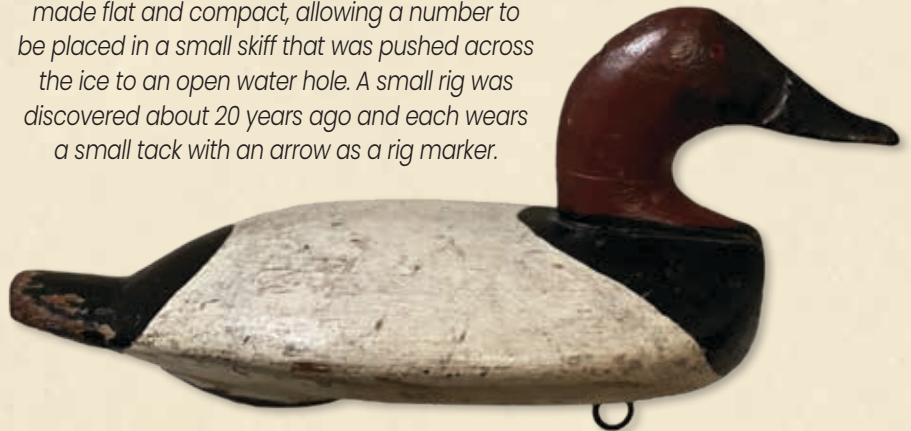
Dick McIntyre, of Seabrook, South Carolina, has collected decoys for more than a half century. When asked about the state of unknown decoys in today's collecting world, he stated, "American decoys have been 'collected' for close to one hundred years. In that span of time, much has been learned about the authorship of the objects of our desire. Misinformation, misidentifications, and abject myths have been corrected. Much solid, historical research has been conducted, and we are improving our knowledge base every day. Today's unknown is possibly tomorrow's most respected name maker decoy. Never stop exploring the past."

What we do know, however, is the earliest "documented" makers come from either side of the Susquehanna Flats. The Cecil County side can boast the works of John B. Graham of Charlestown, who, along with a shop full of kin and neighbors assisting, started making decoys sometime in the 1830s. His contemporary across the Flats in Havre de Grace, John Holly, Sr., known as "Daddy," started around the same time. These men set the precedent and created a "blueprint" for most decoys made in the area for the next 185 years.

While thousands of unknown decoys grace collections today we can many times determine, with a reasonable degree of certainty, which side of the Flats they were made and even which "known" maker may have provided the influence. Of course there are no absolutes in characteristics, but it is generally accepted that decoys made in Cecil County, particularly along the North East River, have a neck shelf on which to mount the head and a paddle tail that extends from the center of the body. The Havre de Grace style was usually made without the shelf and a tail that is upswept. Again, there are many exceptions to these generalizations.

Another factor in the subject of unknown decoys is the that many were made by "known" makers but vary in style enough from the accepted norm that a solid attribution is difficult to make. Additionally, many unknowns were made by makers that we know made decoys, but since early identification was never made, the guessing game continues. A couple such examples from either side of the Susquehanna Flats, include the famous wingshooter, William Dobson, of Havre de Grace and Livingstone T. "Bud" Bennett, of Elk

Flat body of this decoy suggests that it may have been made as an "ice duck." These decoys were made flat and compact, allowing a number to be placed in a small skiff that was pushed across the ice to an open water hole. A small rig was discovered about 20 years ago and each wears a small tack with an arrow as a rig marker.



From the rig of an old, Charlestown gunner, this canvasback exhibits Cecil County attributes excepting the neck shelf. The slender profile, high head, and extensive bill carving, along with tack eyes, make for a nice, collectible decoy.



This mammoth-sized canvasback has attributes from both sides of the Flats. This maker was a master craftsman who knew the birds well. The writer believes this bird is from late nineteenth century and some experienced collectors have suggested that it was made on the Susquehanna River, a bit above the Mason-Dixon line.



Very sleek duck with sharp chine and a general boat-shaped body. The squared-off tail and general lines give a Henry Davis/Ace Owens vibe, although not quite there. The writer believes this duck was made somewhere along the Perryville river shore.



Large drake that was sold as a "possible John Graham." While there are some definite Graham attributes, there are several other factors that point in different directions. In hand, the bird is a bit "heavy" but sports an interesting slope-down tail. Some have suggested Scott Jackson, but the refinement is not there. A solid Flats unknown.



Utilitarian decoy, likely from Harford County, represents unknowns made by makers who didn't go the extra mile in refinement. Possibly a member of a "one time only" rig a gunner made. Despite a more rudimentary appearance this sturdily built duck proved highly effective for decoying canvasbacks.



Landing. According to a Baltimore Sun article from November 9, 1883, "He (Dobson) has lived on the water for 50-odd years gunning in season and spending the rest of the year making decoys." The Cecil Whig (4/1/1882) paid homage to the life-like appearance of one of Bud Bennett's decoys by saying, "A decoy duck so natural that it can almost be heard to quack was displayed..."

Dobson's record as a Captain running a sinkbox outfit is well documented, as is his incredible handiness with a shotgun killing large numbers of ducks, yet a decoy made by him has never been positively identified to the writer's knowledge, despite the likelihood that he made several thousand. Most experienced Upper Bay collectors have likely handled several of Dobson's birds over the years yet had no idea of the maker.

Bennett was a waterman and duck shooter, spending much time on the wharf of Elk Landing and was widely considered the "guru" of all things gunning and fishing in that community. We know he made decoys, but how many and what they looked like has faded away with time. Interesting to collectors is Bennett may have been related Alexander Bennett who made a limited number of unique and fine teal and black duck decoys.

Many other names are frequently mentioned when sinkbox gunning is discussed. Jess Poplar, John Poplar, Bennett Keen, William Chesney, John Simpers, William Fadely, William Keen, Will Pennington and many more were boat captains, and were all operating sinkbox outfits before 1900. The likelihood that some of these men or members of their crews, made some decoys along the way, is high, in this writer's opinion. We will likely never know for sure. The same could be said for the carpenters and cabinet makers of the day, especially if they gunned. They certainly had the tools; knowledge of wood working and need to make, at least, a personal rig of decoys.

Many collectors look at unknown decoys as both a blessing and a curse. Unknowns are great conversation starters that allow collectors to share, engage in meaningful dialogue, think both critically and imaginatively, and display a great decoy on their shelf. The writer has collected unknown decoys, initially, based on the form, paint, and surface, but has come to enjoy the challenge of breaking down the bird and trying to identify it, using a modified scientific methodological approach, as well as visceral "feel" and discussion with fellow collectors.

It has been said, in a most critical manner, that all Susquehanna Flats decoys look alike. Differences, both subtle and extreme, can be found in side-by-side comparisons with most decoys from the region, as the decoys shown in this article unequivocally prove. Unknowns greatly vary in aesthetic quality due to skill and artistic differentiation of the maker, giving the most discerning collectors a chance to own a great, sculptural bird, while decoys without all the bells and whistles may have a lower price, providing young, novice collectors an opportunity to add a nice bird to their collection.

Some collectors are satisfied with the unknown title on a particular decoy and simply enjoy the bird for its physical attributes, while others need to know, "The rest of the story," fueling a desire to uncover the maker and all associated history. The writer feels that the study of these decoys with an eye towards making an attribution, becomes a positive educational experience for the collector, whether the projected outcome is achieved or not. Simply put, analyzing physical attributes of an unknown decoy, including ballast, anchor line attachment, head attachment technique, neck shelf, mandible, nostril and bill carving, and X-ray, is interesting, enjoyable and will make the collector a better decoy "student."

McIntyre, added, "of the 'unknown' maker decoys I have retained, sculptural refinement is my primary criteria. If the surface patina is commensurate with the form, historical attachments complete the final package." In other words, a great decoy becomes even better if the maker and history are discovered.

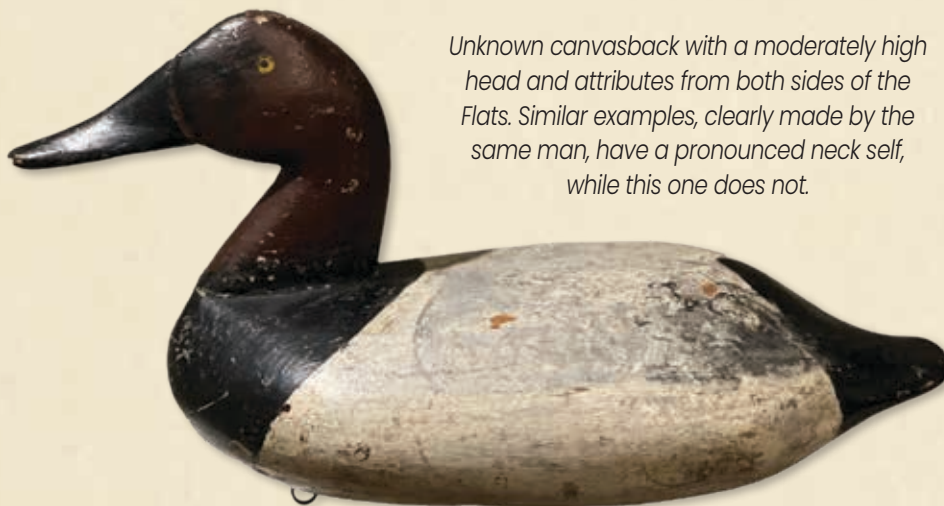
Unidentified decoys will always be part of decoy collecting, yet occasionally one is identified after communication among collectors, comparing various physical traits, or some piece of research or family artifact suggests that positive attribution can be made with a reasonable degree of certainty. Enjoy your unknowns, but don't lose sleep over them if you can't figure them out. Most will never be positively identified. Consider doing an unknown decoy "roundtable" with some collecting friends. You may be surprised what you find when twenty or thirty decoys are placed side by side. Great conversation generally ensues. It will prove to be an enjoyable and worthwhile endeavor.

The writer would like to thank Kevin Peel, Rob Knight, Dick McIntyre and C. John Sullivan, Jr., and Steve Brown for their assistance. Bill Waibel has made and collected decoys for almost 40 years. He can be reached at coachbillwaibel@gmail.com

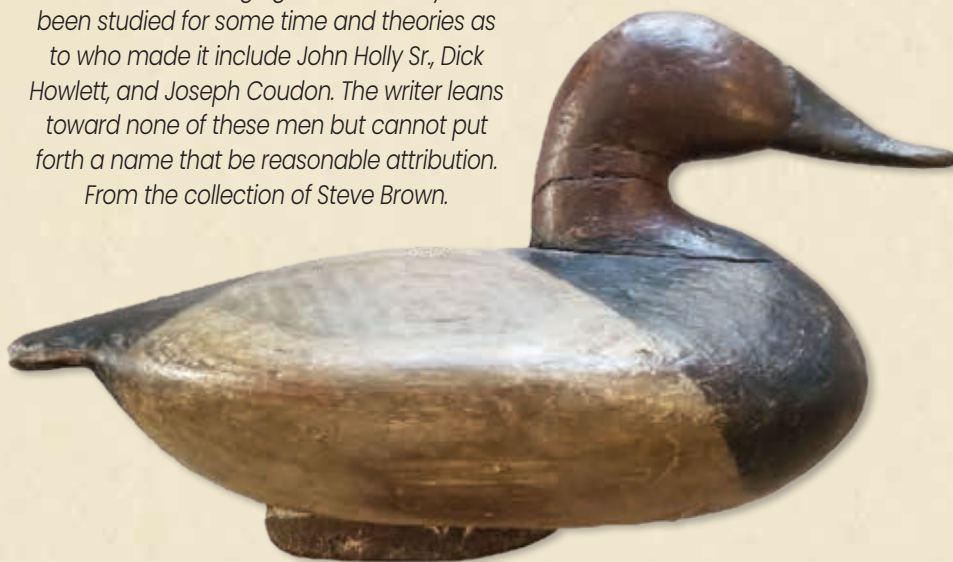
This Harford County canvasback wears original paint and is a good representation of the influence Jim Holly had on the other decoy makers. While the lines are somewhat like Holly, the decoy was made a bit heavier and with less refinement in the head. Maybe one of Jim's brothers made this duck, but the writer does not feel very strongly about that attribution..



Unknown canvasback with a moderately high head and attributes from both sides of the Flats. Similar examples, clearly made by the same man, have a pronounced neck self, while this one does not.



Outstanding drake with intricately whittled head and overhanging tail. This decoy has been studied for some time and theories as to who made it include John Holly Sr., Dick Howlett, and Joseph Coudon. The writer leans toward none of these men but cannot put forth a name that be reasonable attribution. From the collection of Steve Brown.



Workshop Window

By Cindy Currier

John "Johnny" Richardson
New Oxford, Pennsylvania

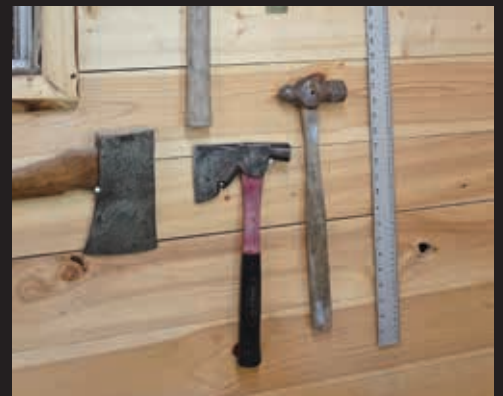
In this installment of Workshop Window, we take a peek into the workshop of John "Johnny" Richardson. John's workshop sits behind his home in a dedicated space which is divided into multiple rooms, each having its own purpose.

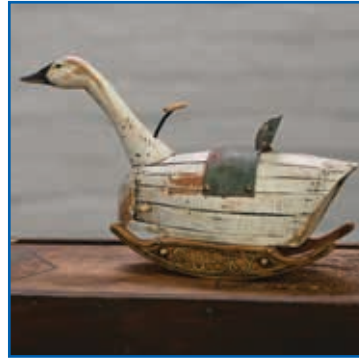
John started carving at the age of nine to outfit his own hunting rig. He is self-taught and learned to paint at the Pierce Shop. As more people saw his work, his carving gained momentum and the orders started coming in. He carves singles, pairs and entire rigs for hunters and collectors. He uses basswood for heads and pine for bodies.

John has entered his decoys in several competitions, earning him winning ribbons.

Please enjoy this visual tour!







44th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

By Heather Hollenbeck

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum's 44th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival once again proved why it remains one of the Upper Chesapeake Bay region's premier cultural events. As the museum's largest annual fundraiser, the festival supports the museum's mission to preserve and celebrate the rich history of waterfowling, decoy making, and folk-art traditions that have defined the Chesapeake Bay for generations.

Held in the beautiful waterfront community of Havre de Grace along the banks of the Susquehanna River and Upper Chesapeake Bay, this year's festival welcomed approximately 1,200 visitors over the two-day event. Notably, nearly 38 percent of attendees traveled more than 30 miles to experience the festival, demonstrating its growing regional appeal and economic impact.

To better serve the growing number of visitors traveling to Havre de Grace for the festival, the museum partnered with the **Hilton Garden Inn Aberdeen** to offer discounted room rates for exhibitors, artists, collectors, sponsors, and attendees. The partnership provided convenient accommodations for guests visiting from throughout the Mid-Atlantic region and helped enhance the overall festival experience while encouraging visitors to spend additional time exploring Havre de Grace and Harford County.

The festival featured 58 exhibitors representing both returning favorites and new participants. This year's theme, **Decoy and Wildlife Art**, showcased the incredible craftsmanship and artistic talent that continue to make the event a destination for collectors, artists, and outdoor enthusiasts alike. Among the exhibitors were nine nonprofit organizations, including two new participants, **The Nature Collaborative** and **The Gunpowder Gobblers**, whose missions complement the museum's commitment to conservation, education, and community engagement.

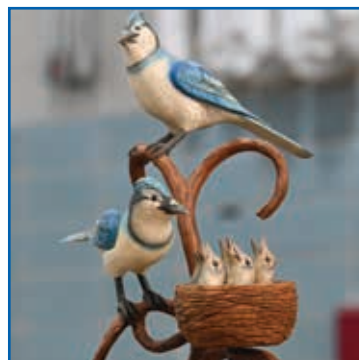
Festival activities began with the popular Carvers' Reception, which welcomed more than 100 artists, sponsors, patrons, exhibitors, and honored guests. The evening celebrated the traditions of decoy carving while recognizing the many individuals and organizations that support the museum throughout the year.

During the reception, the museum was honored to receive two generous contributions. Representatives of the Charlie Joiner Memorial Show, held on September 6, 2025, presented a check in support of the museum's educational and preservation efforts. A second contribution was presented by organizers of the **Susquehanna Vintage Hunting & Fishing Collectibles Show**, held on January 31, 2026. These gifts underscore the strong partnerships that exist among organizations dedicated to preserving Chesapeake Bay sporting heritage.

Guests enjoyed an exciting silent auction featuring several exceptional pieces. Auction highlights included a handcrafted vintage replica of a double sink box by Jimmy Autin, a pair of canvasbacks carved by the late Charlie Joiner, a pair of teal carved by Bill Wibel, and a highly sought-after R. Madison Mitchell Blue Bill Drake. Additional silent auctions held throughout both days of the festival generated important revenue through donated and consigned items, helping to ensure the museum's continued success.

This year's Honorary Chairman, **Chad Tragakis**, helped welcome visitors and participants to the event while celebrating the traditions and community spirit that have sustained the festival for more than four decades.

One of the most exciting additions to this year's festival was a new interactive event app developed and implemented in partnership with **Hello Harford**. Designed to strengthen connections among attendees, exhibitors, and competition participants, the app enhanced the visitor experience through a variety of interactive features.



Draws Visitors from Across the Region

Attendees received welcome messages, competition reminders, silent auction updates, raffle notifications, and food service announcements throughout the weekend. The app included an interactive festival map, a scavenger hunt, voting opportunities for the Fan Favorite and Still Turning Heads decoy competitions, and recognition of the many sponsors and patrons whose support makes the event possible.

Competition has long been a cornerstone of the festival, and this year was no exception. Three major competitions drew participation from some of the nation's finest carvers and collectors. The **Atlantic Flyway Competition's Decorative Carving Division** attracted many competitors who had recently participated in the Ward Foundation's World Championship Wildfowl Carving Competition the previous weekend. Their presence elevated the quality of competition and provided visitors with an opportunity to view some of the finest contemporary decorative carving in the country.

The **Atlantic Flyway Competition's Gunning Division** celebrated the working traditions of decoy carving, emphasizing craftsmanship, authenticity, and functionality. Competitors demonstrated the enduring skills that have been passed down through generations of Chesapeake Bay watermen and carvers.

Collectors and historians gathered for the **J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest**, which showcased historic decoys and highlighted their significance within the region's cultural heritage. Winning entries from this year's contest are currently on display at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum and will remain on exhibit until next year's festival, providing visitors with an opportunity to appreciate these remarkable artifacts firsthand.

No festival would be complete without great food, and once again the **Susquehanna Flats Chapter of Delta Waterfowl** delivered a memorable culinary experience. Festival attendees were treated to pit beef, ham, turkey, and the ever-popular quarter-pound hot dog. The aroma

of freshly prepared sandwiches filled the air throughout the weekend, drawing both festival attendees and passersby to the food area. Many visitors returned for seconds or purchased additional meals to enjoy later.

Another anticipated tradition was the drawing of the museum's **Spring 2026 Raffle**, held Sunday afternoon at 2:30 p.m. Winning ticket numbers belonging to Blake Graff, William Cox Jr., Karen Becker, and Louann Swam were announced before an enthusiastic crowd of supporters.

The success of the 44th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival would not have been possible without the tremendous support of many dedicated partners. The museum extends its gratitude to **Harford County**, the **City of Havre de Grace**, the **Susquehanna Flats Chapter of Delta Waterfowl**, the museum's Board of Directors, staff members, sponsors, patrons, exhibitors, and the many volunteers who generously donated their time from Wednesday through Monday to ensure the event's success.

Their combined efforts continue to make the festival one of the region's most anticipated annual events while supporting the museum's mission to preserve the history, artistry, and traditions of Chesapeake Bay waterfowling and decoy carving.

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum looks forward to welcoming visitors back for the **45th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival**, scheduled for the first weekend of May 2027 at the STAR Centre on Congress Avenue. Friday, April 30, is designated for exhibitor move-in and the Carvers' Banquet. The festival will be open to the public Saturday, May 1, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday, May 2, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

We hope you will join us as we continue celebrating the artistry, heritage, and traditions that make Havre de Grace and the Upper Chesapeake Bay a truly special place.

Fall 2026

Raffle

A chance to win ONE of four valuable prizes.
Four tickets will be drawn.

**Tickets are \$5.00 each
6 for \$25.00 • 10 for \$40.00**



1st Prize:
\$500

3rd Prize:
**"Wetland Woodies"
by Les McDonald**



2nd Prize:
Ruddy Duck Pair by J. Pierce



4th Prize:
**"Wings of Wonder"
by Dr. S. Lloyd Newberry**



Drawing will be held on **December 12, 2026 at 3 PM** at the **Havre de Grace Decoy Museum**

For tickets call **410.939.3739** or email: information@DecoyMuseum.com

Purchase online at <https://decoymuseum.com/shop/>.

Additional tickets will be available at the Museum • Tickets will be available in August.

GUILFORD & COMPANY



FINE JEWELRY
ANTIQUE & ESTATE

ROBERT N HOCKADAY
410.745.5544
CELL 410.340.2587

101 N. TALBOT STREET
P.O. Box 1076
ST. MICHAELS, MD 21663

BOBHOCKADAY@VERIZON.NET • GUILFORDANDCOMPANY.COM



HVAC Contractors

7915 Philadelphia Road
Rosedale, MD 21237

(410) 3866-6200

Andrew Zimmer - Vice President

VINCENTI DECOYS



Store - Jeannie

353 Penington Ave.
Havre de Grace, MD 21078
410-734-7709

Decoy Shop - Pat

303 West lane
Churchville, MD 21208
410-734-6238

www.vincentidecoys.com



George H. Nitzel III - President

G.H. Nitzel, Inc.
11300 Pulaski Highway
White Marsh, MD 21162
(410) 335-0200



Oliver "Tuts" Lawson

CRISFIELD, MARYLAND

By Mike Tarquini

Throughout their time of making world-class decoys, Lem & Steve Ward were always concerned that the days of wooden decoys and decoy makers would come to an end.

Little did they realize that Lem's artistic hand, or maybe long shadow, would engulf a young local boy with talent who would continue their legacy, ensuring that the tradition of handmade Crisfield decoys would be practiced by another generation.

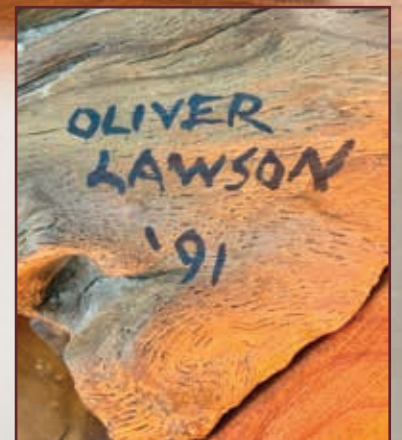
-Jim Trimble



*South African leopard carved for Alonso & Virginia Decker
Courtesy of Tom Reed*

Nestled along the Chesapeake Bay in Somerset County, Crisfield is Maryland's southernmost town—a charming waterside community rich in history, natural beauty, and a deep connection to the water. Known as the “Seafood Capital of the World,” Crisfield is famous for its fresh Maryland blue crabs, oysters, hardworking watermen, and breathtaking waterfront views.

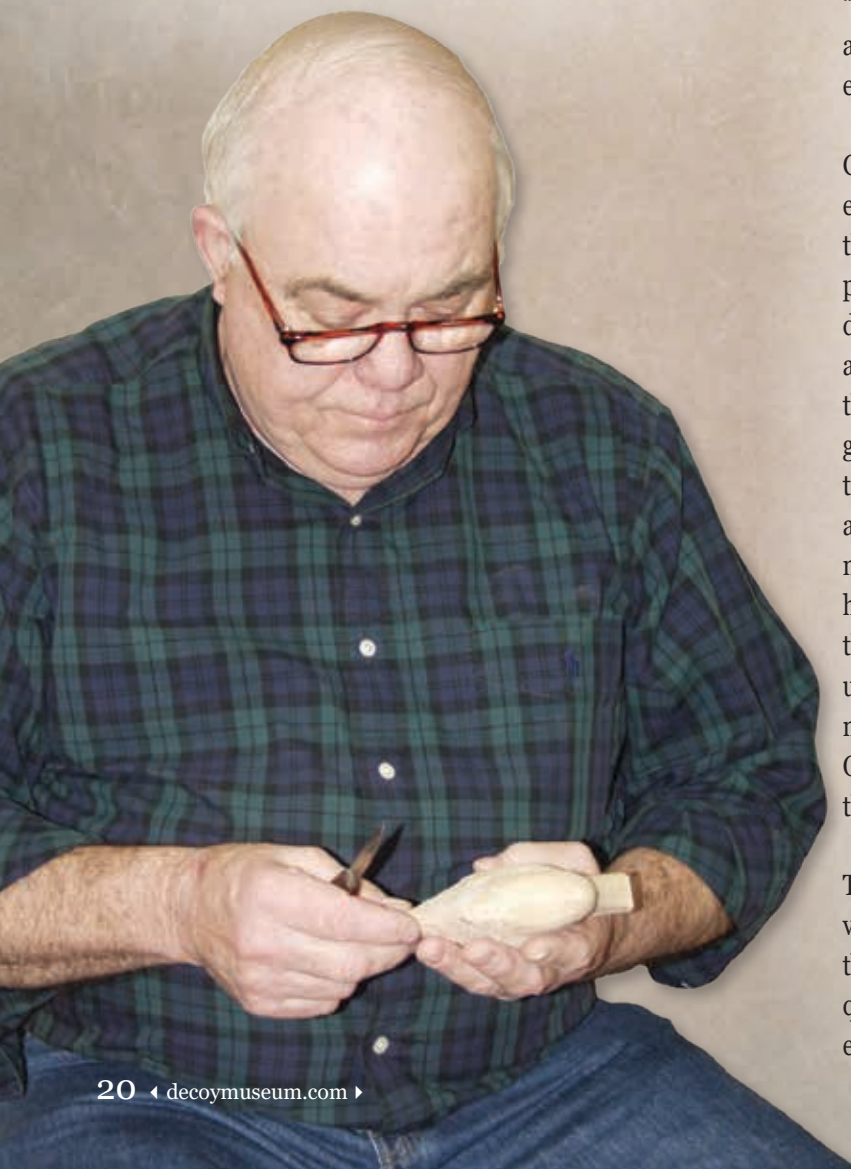
Originally a small fishing village called Annemessex Neck (named after the indigenous American tribe who once dwelled there), then Somers Cove (named after European settler Benjamin Summers), Crisfield got its permanent name after John W. Crisfield decided to



Base of leopard statue

bring the Pennsylvania Railroad to the area to take advantage of the vast potential for its seafood industry and shipped its seafood throughout the eastern United States and points west. As the success of the city's seafood industry grew, train soot and oyster shells became so plentiful that they were discarded in the nearby salt marshes. The shell midden grew to become a peninsula one-half mile long, where downtown Crisfield was built, leading to the common statement that Crisfield was so prosperous that it is "literally built on top of oyster shells."

Crisfield's prosperity declined with the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Oyster populations diminished to the point where local watermen were challenged to support themselves from their harvests. Although Crisfield is best known for its seafood, it was once known as the "Wildfowl Capital" where market hunting once flourished. Crisfield's decoy carving history transformed utilitarian duck hunting tools into celebrated American folk art. This evolution was pioneered by humble town barbers, Lemuel and Steve Ward. The Ward Brothers started carving decoys in 1918 in their Crisfield barbershop between haircuts to make ends meet.



The region's shallow tidal marshy landscape required a specialized, light weight, flat-bottomed decoy style, unlike the heavier round-bottomed style used in the open waters of the Upper Bay.

Of the numerous carvers and collectors who have graced the doorway of the Ward Brothers' decoy shop was Crisfield native Oliver "Tuts" Lawson. Born on May 1, 1938, Oliver and his older brother Tommy were raised by their mother, Deatrice Harrison Lawson, as their father separated from the family when Oliver was only nine-months old. The Lawson boys were heavily influenced by their grandparents who lived next door. According to Oliver: "my values in life were shaped by my close interactions with my grandparents."

Oliver shared that everyone in Crisfield had a nickname. During the 1940s, Crisfield had an old man who served as a drawbridge operator who walked with a limp and was always falling down. That drawbridge operator was known as "Tutsy." During his early years, Oliver was known to be a bit clumsy. During a visit to his grandparents' house, young Oliver ran through a doorway and tripped over the sill falling to the ground. His grandfather told him that he was clumsier than the old man who ran the drawbridge and bestowed to him the nickname "Tutsy." Over the years Tutsy was shortened to Tuts. Both nicknames are used interchangeably. That nickname has stuck for the last eighty-six years.

Growing up, Oliver lived close to the creek and played around it. He enjoyed playing in boats, fishing, crabbing, oystering, hunting, and all things water related. When Oliver was eight, his brother Tommy was playing in the marsh with a friend and discovered two abandoned duck decoys. Tommy brought one home and showed it to Tuts. That abandoned marsh decoy fascinated Oliver. It was at that early age that Oliver applied his acquired woodworking skills learned from his grandfather, took out his pocket knife and began whittling what was to be a pair of mallard miniatures in the Ward Brothers style from a piece of white pine obtained from an old window sash. Oliver's mother was so proud of his first carvings that she carried them with her to work at the Crisfield Sportswear Sewing Factory and showed them to her close friend Thelma. Oliver's mom's pride in his work unknowingly shaped what was about to come for him. Thelma was none other than the wife of Lemuel Ward. Thelma's reaction to Oliver's carving was: "you tell Oliver to take these carvings and show them to Lem."

Taking the advice his mom received from Thelma Ward, Oliver ventured off and visited the decoy shop of Lem & Steve Ward to show them his miniature decoy carving. Being the inquisitive type, Oliver questioned both Lem & Steve Ward extensively, trying to soak up every bit of knowledge that they were willing to offer. The Wards were

extremely welcoming and made young Oliver feel comfortable. After this initial encounter, Oliver visited the Ward decoy shop nearly every day after school trying to learn every bit he could about carving duck decoys. At nine-years old, Oliver had questions galore, and the Ward Brothers welcomed each and every one of them. Oliver says with a passion: “they were good people and when you were around them you never felt as if you met a stranger.” Oliver visited the Wards with such frequency that he was treated as part of the family. He shared meals, participated in sing-alongs, and recited poetry with them.

By the early 1950s, Oliver was crafting things for family members in order to hone his carving skills. He began selling his work by the age of thirteen. In 1952, Oliver carved his first full-size decoy that he affixed to a lamp and gave to his mother. Lawson’s mother kept that lamp until her passing. As Lawson’s hunting trips became more numerous so was his need to have his own duck decoys. Decoys sold for \$0.50 each from Lloyd Tyler or Lloyd Sterling and \$5.00 each from Lem and Steve Ward. With limited funds available, Oliver began making his own decoys to support his growing habit. He started with black ducks, wigeons, pintails, and mallards eventually moving into canvasbacks, red heads, and black heads. On average, a duck hunter required about two-dozen decoys.

Oliver Lawson’s early decoys emulated those of the Ward brothers. Lawson often used a lighter balsa as he tailored his offerings to his potential customers who wanted to replace the heavier cedar ones. He chopped the bodies using a hatchet and worked them up with traditional hand tools that included a spoke shave and wood chisels. Eventually, Oliver learned to make his own hand tools.

Oliver Lawson learned various painting techniques and how to mix paint colors from Lem Ward. He used oil paints which he felt looked better with age and presented a soft finish. Lem taught Oliver that he only needed six or seven tubes of primary paint colors and could mix all of the other required colors from them. Lawson always primed his carvings prior to painting them and used marine paint which he felt was a higher quality coating. Lawson never embraced acrylics and refrained from using them. In the earlier days of his carving career, Oliver Lawson’s work was so close the Ward style that many of his carvings were taken to Lem Ward for his signature and many of them were actually signed by him.

“True happiness is not getting what you want, but liking what you have”

-Lem Ward



Oliver signs a goose for a collector.



A pair of geese handcrafted and painted by Oliver Lawson.

At the ripe age of seventeen, Oliver entered into his first business arrangement with Miss Elizabeth Hall a Crisfield native who worked for the Health Department and also sold antiques. Hall purchased miniatures from Lawson and resold them. Elizabeth Hall was the first to suggest that Oliver make his carvings on a full-time basis. Oliver Lawson had known Elizabeth Hall for many years as she was from Crisfield. At the early age of sixteen, Oliver had just married Joan (his high-school sweetheart), carved miniature decoys, and was working 60 hours/ week at a local grocery store earning a salary of \$35. Elizabeth introduced Oliver to one of her customers, Katherine “Kitty” Cummings who requested Oliver carve his miniature decoys for her as well. Kitty was a seafood broker who sold to area hotels and restaurants. She guaranteed him at least \$35/ week to entice him away from the grocery store. Oliver thought about it and realized that he could make the same amount of money with Kitty Cummings, working less hours, doing what he loved to do. Most guys in the Crisfield area worked at Carvel Hall Cutlery factory making \$35-\$45/ week. Working for Kitty Cummings, I could make that sitting in the shop whittling miniature decoys and go fishing or hunting every day. It seemed like a dream opportunity to me” recalls Oliver. Cummings

started a business called “The Duck House” in Rumbley, MD. At “The Duck House” Kitty sold seafood, decoys, and waterfowl carvings. Lawson accepted Cummings’ offer, signed a contract, and made miniatures for her during the day and supplemented his income by working some evenings at the Carvel Hall Cutlery factory. Outside of “The Duck House”, Kitty sold Lawson’s carvings to Baltimore businesses as well as national stores such as Abercrombie & Fitch. With his work being marketed outside of Crisfield, Oliver was gaining notoriety and was contacted directly by many interested customers.

By 1963, Oliver had developed enough business to go out on his own carving his miniatures. The relationship that he fostered with Lem and Steve Ward over a fifteen-year period led them to introduce Oliver to many of their customers as well, who eventually purchased carvings directly from him. The Ward Brothers were very simple people. They did not drive, did not have a checking account, and ran a business where everyone visited them. By his close affiliation with the Wards, Oliver had the opportunity to meet the “Who’s Who” of the decoy business, most of whom were very well to do types who were well-heeled. Through continued interaction with the Wards, Oliver met collectors that included Somers Headley, George Starr, Bill Mackey and Dr. Morton Kramer. As the Ward Brothers got busier, they referred their repair work to Oliver Lawson.

*Early miniature mallard pair made
in 1956 by Oliver Lawson.
Chad & Christy Trajakis collection*



Among the most famous collectors Oliver met through his affiliation with the Ward Brothers was Alonzo G. Decker Jr. Decker converted an old eighty-three foot Coast Guard cutter into a sporting yacht. Every summer he would take a cruise on the Chesapeake Bay and always stopped in Crisfield. Once in town, Al always visited Lem & Steve Ward. Decker once wanted Lem to make him a quail. Lem promptly told him to get Oliver Lawson to make it for him if he wanted a good one. Scorchy Tawes, a Crisfield photographer, introduced Al Decker to Oliver Lawson in 1964. Lawson made numerous carvings for Decker after the introduction and they became good friends and hunted together on Decker’s 300-acre Money Point Farm in Earleville, MD along the Sassafras River. The hunting lodge eventually became decorated with many of Oliver’s prized carvings. Lawson was a frequent guest of Al Decker to participate in hunting adventures. During a dove hunt on Money Point Farm, a dove decoy carved by Oliver was being used to attract their prey when unexpectedly, a hawk



swoped down and snatched it right off of the line to which it was mounted. Perhaps this was a testimony to the accuracy of Oliver's portrayal of the wildlife he carved. Decker used Money Point Farm to entertain many of his friends and business acquaintances and as such, became a marketing opportunity for Oliver Lawson's carving work. Al Decker became Tut's best salesperson. Lawson's hunting relationship with Al Decker lasted for years.

As Board President of Black & Decker, Al made it his mission to visit each Black & Decker manufacturing site on an annual basis. On a trip to a plant in Johannesburg, South Africa, Decker's wife Virginia brought home a piece of driftwood. Upon their return, the Deckers contacted Oliver Lawson and requested that he carve a leopard, indigenous to the region, and mount it to the driftwood

as a memory of their trips to Kruger National Park in the South African nation. Oliver skeptically took on the project and produced a world-class one-of-a-kind carving for the Deckers. Since the passing of the Deckers, the carving has been obtained by Tom Reed, a well known collector of fine art. Virginia also encouraged Oliver to carve songbirds. Lawson took on the challenge and quickly learned that songbirds were more difficult than carving waterfowl decoys. As Lawson refined his songbird carvings, he began to incorporate bits of natural habitat within the work and is believed to be an early adopter of this practice.

During the same time period, Oliver met Dr. Linwood Harrington. Dr. Harrington was a successful surgeon from Nashville, TN. Harrington was a big fan of Lawson's work and consistently reordered carvings from him.



Living Legend Award Class of 2018. Presented by the Ward Foundation. Oliver Lawson (L), Robert Kerr (C), and David Turner (R).



Oliver "Tuts" Lawson proudly displays his Living Legend Award presented to him in 2018 by the Ward Foundation.

"When carving a decoy, never think about what you are going to sell it for, because if you do, you will never get any better, because you will always be thinking about what you will get for it. Just do the best that you can and focus on how you can make it better."

-Lem Ward

Oliver recalls a letter received by Lem and Steve Ward from Dr. Daniel Gibson, President of Washington College (Chestertown, MD) inviting them to participate in an art exhibit being planned at the college. The Exhibit was sponsored by the Kent County Ornithological Society and first took place in 1965. Lem Ward encouraged Oliver to go as well. Oliver first thought that the Wards wanted him to go only because they needed a ride. Through Lem's connections, Oliver received his own invitation from Dr. Daniel Gibson. The Chestertown Exhibition was held every other year.

Two gentlemen Dan Brown and Paul Nock attended the Chestertown exhibit and wanted to establish a similar event in Salisbury, MD on the year that the Washington College event was not held. The Salisbury exhibit was started in 1968 and was named the "Atlantic Flyway Wildfowl Carving and Art Exhibit" and became the precursor to the Ward Foundation's World Carving Competition some years later.

The Chestertown Exhibit gave Oliver an opportunity to meet collectors and showcase his carving talent outside of Crisfield to a more diversified group of collectors. He also exhibited his work at the Inaugural Easton Waterfowl Festival (Easton, MD) in 1971. Notoriety set in for Oliver Lawson and he began to receive requests to do more exhibits that included The Academy of Natural Sciences (Philadelphia, PA), The National Audubon Society, Kodak Gallery (New York, NY), and the "International Wildlife Exhibit at Guild Hall" (London, England). Lawson was showcased on NBC's "The Today Show" and his carvings have toured major cities in Japan as part of the "World Bird Carving Exhibition." In 1999, Oliver "Tuts" Lawson was named the Honorary Chairman of the 18th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival hosted by the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

Aside from working with the Ward Brothers, Oliver Lawson spent time working in other decoy shops in Crisfield. He frequently speaks of his experiences working with Lloyd Tyler. Tyler lived two

doors down from Lawson's grandparents and his shop was readily accessible to him. Oliver states: "Lloyd Tyler always referred to himself as a poor man's decoy maker" offering his works for much less than the Ward Brothers and others around him. Tyler hand-chopped his decoys and they were made in a folksier style. According to Lawson: "Lloyd Tyler made his carvings fast and sold them cheap." Tyler did a good deal of repaints and decoy repairs. Rumor has it that he cut his paint with gasoline which diminished its ability to adhere to the wood, necessitating a repaint after a shorter period of time. Oliver describes Lloyd as a "smoker and a joker who consumed coffee all day long." According to Lawson, Tyler made beautiful fish carvings. Oliver says: "Lloyd Tyler had the ability be as talented as he wanted to be."

While working with Lloyd Tyler, Oliver had the experience of working alongside Sherman Jones, one of the few documented African American carvers. Sherman was the son of Pied Jones another documented African American carver. Both Pied and Sherman had skills as carpenters and parlayed those skills into making decoys. Pied mostly made decoys for himself, but Sherman through his relationship with Lloyd Tyler was much more prolific. Lawson validated the notion that the relationship between Lloyd Tyler and Sherman Jones enabled Jones to market his carvings not under his name, but through Tyler. Sherman sold the carvings to Tyler who resold them under his name. The decoy market was not readily accessible to Sherman Jones in the racially charged Crisfield area. The Tyler/Jones relationship was good for both parties enabling both parties to make money.

It goes without saying that Oliver "Tuts" Lawson is a wonderful man who is enjoyable with which to spend time. His story should be an inspiration to every youngster who may have a desire to embrace carving. Tuts represents a wealth of knowledge and is eager to pass it along to those who will invest the time to listen. When he attends decoy events, he is like a rock star identified by being the guy in the middle of a gathering of his groupies. It can only be hoped that Tuts has influenced the next generation of decoy carvers as much as the Ward Brothers and others have influenced him. He truly represents the last of "Old Crisfield." Writing his story has been an honor and a most worthwhile experience for the author.

An exquisite collection of Oliver "Tuts" Lawson's decoys is currently on exhibit at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum courtesy of David Holland. The exhibit is sponsored by the Delmarva Decoy Collectors Association, and will run through September.

The author wishes to acknowledge podcasts, recorded interviews, and published articles of Oliver "Tuts" Lawson conducted by Katie Burke (Ducks Unlimited) in 2026, Art Raine (Delmarva Decoy Collectors Association) in 2024, Casey Foltz (Delmarva Decoy Collectors Association) in 2018, Oliver "Tuts" Lawson -Continuing the legacy of Crisfield decoys by Jim Trimble in 2006 (Decoy Magazine), and Oliver "Tutsy" Lawson by M. E. Affleck in 1999 (the Canvasback). The author has excepted information to present and corroborate the facts presented in many of these sources and used it to supplement information obtained through in-person conversations.



**"I enjoy talking about my past.
I have met a lot of people and made a lot of
good friends"**

-Oliver "Tuts" Lawson

Robert Elwell “Bob” Seabrook

Absecon, New Jersey



By Mike Tarquini



Guest Room Display Featuring Joe King, Lloyd Parker, and Rowly Horner decoys.

Absecon is a city in Atlantic County, in the State of New Jersey. According to the 2020 census information, Absecon boasts a little over 9,100 residents and demonstrates a growing population increasing +8.6% from the data collected in 2010. Absecon may be best known as the first city on the mainland off of Highway 30 (Absecon Boulevard) as you exit Atlantic City, NJ. It is home to Robert Elwell “Bob” Seabrook and his wife of fifty-years Sheila.

Although Bob and Sheila have made Absecon their home for the last forty-seven years, they are not native to the area. Bob was born on May 30, 1951 in Camden, NJ as one of Robert and Ruth Seabrook’s two children. He was raised in Merchantville, NJ, a borough of about 3,800 residents in Camden County. Seabrook studied biology and ultimately earned a degree from Virginia Wesleyan College (Norfolk, VA). Bob was hired by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection where he monitored shellfish growing waters in coastal waters from Sandy Hook to Delaware Bay. Bob Seabrook worked there until his retirement.

Bob wed Sheila Stephenson in 1976. They originally lived Somers Point, NJ, a city in Atlantic County of about 10,500 residents. After a short time working for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Bob and Sheila purchased a home in Absecon. The laboratory in Leeds Point where Bob worked is a short distance from Absecon which made his commute much more tolerable. Bob and Sheila have made Absecon their home since 1979. They have raised three children there, two sons and a daughter.



After shooting mud hens & various shore birds, Great grandfather of Bob Seabrook, Jacob Elwell & his nephew Joe walk back to their home at 56th Street in Ocean City, New Jersey circa 1910.

Bob Seabrook spent a good deal of time visiting and staying with his grandparents on his paternal side in Ocean City, NJ. Seabrook’s great grandfather purchased a home in Ocean City in the late 1800s. He hunted ducks, shorebirds, and mud hens (rail birds). Bob’s grandmother was formerly an Elwell whose family made Bridgeton, NJ their home. Their summer home was in Ocean City, NJ. Seabrook’s grandfather inherited the property and passed it on to Bob’s parents after his death. After the passing of Bob’s father in 1978, his mother rebuilt the home in 1989 in an effort to modernize it. Bob and his sister inherited the property upon his mother’s passing. The property has been in the

Shore Birds on Driftwood
(the missing shorebirds from this piece were removed and used in the current Havre de Grace Decoy Museum exhibit)



Restored Canvasback Drake
-Harry V. Shourds



Family Room Display



Manahawkin Decoy Show 2015

Seabrook family for five generations as Bob and Sheila recently sold the property to their son, Nick in February, 2025. During his numerous trips to Ocean City, NJ, Bob enjoyed all things beach, the ocean, the bay, collecting shells, and taking an interest in the wildlife that inhabited the area. Surprisingly, Bob never hunted that wildlife as did his great grandfather, in his youth nor as an adult.

Bob Seabrook took an interest in waterfowl decoys after learning that one of his neighbors carved them. After this initial exposure to carving Bob decided that he wanted to make one himself. In 1975, his fiancé gifted him with a New Jersey Broadbill from Barnegat Bay which served as his first decoy. In New Jersey, "broadbill" is the traditional local nickname for Greater and Lesser Scaup. Bob, a natural born collector of sorts, was now determined to acquire more waterfowl decoys. Seabrook states, "there may be some collector genes within my DNA, for once I gain an interest in something, I generally jump in with both feet." In addition to decoys, Bob has amassed a train collection and a variety of oyster and clam cans. Since catching the decoy bug, Bob has put together a sizable collection most of which he proudly displays throughout his home.

Bob took an early interest in decorative decoys and carved his first in 1977. It was after making several half-size decoratives and meeting Gary Gilbertson that he changed his direction and began making the traditional Barnegat Bay style working decoys. Later in the 1990s, he made half-size copies of well known decoys -like all species that Shourds made, William Bowman ducks, brant and shorebirds, John Blair decoys, John English decoys, and many others. Bob's earliest ones are branded with an "S" later changing to a "SEABROOK" brand. Bob also made full-size decoys. Bob produced his decoys in the hollow New Jersey style, out of white cedar, using hand tools to shape them. He painted with oil paints. Bob is proud that all of his decoys were made proportionally correct. A combination of six mallards and six black ducks comprised his first gunning rig which he made for Jon Frank in the late seventies.

Bob Seabrook has carved about 1,000 decoys. When he started selling decoys, Bob charged \$16 for a mallard and \$12 for a black duck. The New Jersey Decoy Collector's Association named him "Carver of the Year" in 2005. The same group inducted him into their "Hall of Fame" in 2021.



Parktown Decoy Show 2004



Seaview Country Club Decoy Show March 2023



Restored Bufflehead



*Bob Seabrook & Bob White
- DE River Classics Artifacts Exhibit*



*Bob Seabrook's Favorite Restoration,
a John Blair Green-winged Teal*



In 1980, Bob was approached by Dr. Jack Conover, a notable figure and founding member of the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association, to repair a bill on a Rhoades Truex black duck. Levi “Rhoades” Truex (1860-1934) was a notable New Jersey bayman and decoy carver who was based in Atlantic City. He was famous for his hollow-carved ducks, brant, geese and solid shorebirds. His work is highly prized by collectors. Bob admits that this initial repair job wasn’t all that good, but it represented the beginning of a new dimension of his engagement with decoys, namely, restoration.

Bob Seabrook defines “restoration” as “rescuing decoys that are in poor shape and turning them back into coveted possessions for his collection or the collections of others.” As a restorer, Bob would extensively research the bird in disrepair in an effort to learn what he could about the bird’s style and the carver who made it. As additional restoration projects came

his way, Bob found himself interacting with the likes of Mark McNair and Russ Allen, both accomplished at decoy restoration. These notable decoy restorers shared techniques with Bob and helped him build confidence in his restorations. Although Bob never met Frank Beckley, he refers to him as the “the father of decoy restoration.”

During our time together, Bob proudly retrieved a decoy from his family room shelf and showed me what he considers as his favorite restoration, a John Blair green-winged teal. Bob recalls finding this decoy while he was visiting the East Coast Decoy Collectors event in St. Michaels, MD. He immediately recognized it as a John Blair. The decoy was in poor shape, but Bob was determined to restore it for his collection. After a great deal of effort, the John Blair green-winged teal was brought back to life and rests in a prominent space within Bob’s home.



Seabrook recalls another favorite project involving an old canvasback body that he found along the way. After some research, Bob identified it as a Harry V. Shourds canvasback. As luck would have it, Bob happened to have a Harry V. Shourds canvasback head among his artifacts collection. Bob made it a point to keep a collection of heads and bodies that could potentially assist him in the restoration of a particular decoy. Again, with a great deal of effort, Bob headed the canvasback body and transformed an old beat up decoy body into a coveted artifact that every decoy collector would treasure.

A good deal of Bob's restorations are for himself, but he tackles projects for others as well. Seabrook shares that he is fully transparent about what he has done to restore a decoy. It is not his intention to mask imperfections or misrepresent that the decoy has been restored.

Bob Seabrook started attending shows around 1980, and these events helped to broaden his knowledge about decoys and meet others who had similar interests. In the earlier days, Bob hosted informal gatherings of collectors at his home. This eventually led to Seabrook being one of the early organizers of the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association. Bob frequented the Easton Waterfowl Festival and experienced the artifact exhibits there.

As a result of his exposure to the artifact exhibits at Easton, Bob patterned similar exhibits at the New Jersey decoy shows hosted by the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association. Bob has been furnishing artifact exhibits to his club's shows since 2004. In the time since, Seabrook has set up exhibits that focus on Absecon Decoys (2026), Delaware River Classics with Bob White (2025), Buffleheads (2024), Shorebirds (2024), Mergansers (2023), New Jersey Coast Traditions (2015), and Head of Barnegat Bay Decoys. It's Bob's contention that "information needs to be shared with others or it will remain with those who are fortunate to have it until they're gone and then it cannot be shared."

A collection of shorebirds curated by Bob Seabrook is currently on exhibit at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. This exhibit features both vintage and contemporary shorebirds and will remain open throughout the summer months. The exhibit is sponsored by the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association. Be sure to make the time to take in this wonderful example of Bob Seabrook's ability to share the history that he has amassed over his many years decoy collecting.

The author would like to recognize the article written by Allen Linkhorst titled, "Bob Seabrook, Letting his accomplishments do the talking" in the January/February 2021 edition of Decoy Magazine. Special thanks to Joe Engers for allowing use of the information found within this article to complement the information obtained from personal discussions with Bob Seabrook.



Museum Members

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

INDIVIDUAL

Glenn Blackwell
David Blevins
Mark Davis
John Day
Wade Dunning
Andrew Fabula
Ronald Felker
Kittie Hake
John Henry
Lee Higdon
Robert J. Krajewski
Rodney Lewicki
Rob Masten

Rich Moretz
Raymond C Nichols Jr
William Rzomp
John Shaw
Kirk Terrell
James Tolmie
Robert White

FAMILY

Ted Allen
Kenneth Becker
Steve & Donna Bird
Tom Bradshaw
Gerald W & Jean Dames Jr

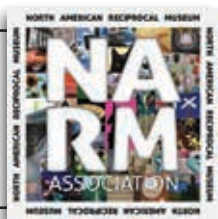
Rocco & Ann DiGiovanni
Daniel & Laurie Feldman
John Hilsinger
Roger & Patti Keller
Gregory Kuester
Rodney Lynn
Harold Mueller Jr
JoAnn Peed
Robyn Peterman
Christopher & Denise Pusey
Robert Stipceovich
Erik Wicklein

NARM - FAMILY

Robert & Anne Anderson
Mark Bice
Sara Brownschidle
Charlotte & Christopher Tragakis

STUDENT

Mason Porter



The North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Associationsm is one of the largest reciprocal membership programs in the world with 1,122 arts, cultural, and historical institutions along with botanical gardens, children's museums, science and technology centers that offer NARM-qualified members reciprocal benefits.

Join the Flock at the Decoy Museum!

By renewing your membership, you will continue to enjoy these valuable benefits:

A membership card • Free Admission to the museum all year
A one-year subscription (4 issues) to The Canvasback magazine
Advance notice of museum special events
A 10% Discount on purchases in the museum store

**New for members in 2026 is the
2026 Membership decal and a 10% discount when
renting the Carvers' Gallery (upstairs).**

Join at
decoymuseum.com





A ShopRite® BRAND
bowl & basket
ROLLED PIE CRUSTS
unroll, fill & bake
9 inch crusts
NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS
NO TRANS FAT PER SERVING
www.shoprite.com
NET WT 15.07 (425g)

KLEIN'S ShopRite®

2026 SPONSOR FESTIVAL

www.shoprite.com

Cody A. Bryant
DECOYS
(443) 553 8038
codybryant586@gmail.com
SUSQUEHANNA FLATS MD



Capt.
VERNON BRYANT



FISH
GUNNING DECOYS
DECOY SKIFF
REPLICA PUNT GUN

90 Greenbank Road
Perryville, MD 21903
410-287-8548
www.vernonbryantdecoys.com



BRYANT CRAB COMPANY
**CRABS TO GO BY THE
BUSHEL OR DOZEN**
443-206-5346
1747 W Pulaski Highway • Elkton, MD
In Weaver's Liquors Parking Lot
Open Thursday-Sunday • 11 AM - 7 PM

GET CATCH UPDATES:
facebook.com/bryantcrabco

THE INCREDIBLE COMMONALITY AND DIVERSITY OF SHOREBIRDS

*Male Dunlin Stretches
His Wings*

When we try to pick out
anything itself, we find it
hitched to everything else
in the Universe."

John Muir. Naturalist.



By John E Hughes Jr.
Photos: Ralph Hockman

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.



American Avocets

With growing anticipatory excitement to upcoming May's "Full Moon Fever", I always start my April review of the coming onslaught of migratory shorebirds to Port Mahon, Delaware and the other Delaware and Jersey beaches. The thrill of witnessing tens of thousands of these birds in a few days, along a limited stretch of fairly nearby beach gets my bird juices flowing. I'll call the other enthusiasts, set the time, and get ready for the "moment" that is close at hand!

I have always found shorebirds to be the ideal grouping of birds to get excited about both in the field and in the study. In the field, the challenge of identification exists throughout the year as they undergo their various plumage changes. Watching the various behavior mechanisms for food acquisition provides plenty of entertainment time on a morning outing. In the study, periods of reading and research reveal amazing evolutionary and ecological principles that can be explained by the shorebirds. The diverse adaptations of these birds alone could lead to a lifetime of study. I have also found shorebirds to be a great teaching tool for allowing students to learn key scientific ideas such as habitat partitioning and/or competitive exclusion.

There are just over 220 species of birds in the world which are considered shorebirds, of which 84 species can be found in North America. Of those, 56 species are more or less regular breeders or visitors to our continent. Most definitions of shorebirds consider them a grouping or category of birds associated with coastal or semi-aquatic habitats. However, there are several exceptions to these birds that are not found near coasts or water but instead in terrestrial or dryland environments (e.g., killdeer) or even in the Rocky Mountains (e.g., mountain plover). In England, these birds are considered "waders", but in America waders are our egrets and herons. Most Americans would probably call shorebirds - sandpipers, but not all shorebirds are sandpipers. Shorebird ancestry traces back to the Cretaceous about 79-102 mya. The oldest fossil remains are from 53 mya just before the great asteroid's collision causing the disappearance of the dinosaurs. Shorebirds fit into 1 of 4 related bird groupings. They are 1.) stilts and avocets, 2.) plovers, 3.) oystercatchers, and 4.) sandpipers. The diversity of form, appearance, and behavior of each of these groupings as well as each individual species is remarkable.

"The uniformity of the Earth's life, more astonishing than its diversity, is accountable, by the high probability that we derived originally from some single cell, fertilized in a bolt of lightning as the Earth cooled. It is from the progeny of this parent cell that we take our looks; we still share genes around, and the resemblance of the enzymes of grasses to those of a whales is a family resemblance." Lewis Thomas. *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*. Biologist.

However, before considering differences in these birds, it is important to realize they all possess many common traits and/or characteristics:

1 These birds are gregarious and can be found in mixed or species-specific flocks numbering in the thousands, especially during migrations.

2 These birds are carnivorous, eating animal material such as invertebrates like worms and aquatic insects, crustaceans like crabs, shrimp, amphipods, and isopods, mollusks like clams, mussels, snails, and oysters, and horseshoe crab eggs and tiny fish.

3 These birds are highly mobile and can migrate great distances in short periods of time. A bar-tailed godwit migrated from Alaska to Tasmania (8,425 miles) in 11 days, non-stop without eating, sleeping, or drinking. Red knots, in our hemisphere, travel from Tierra del Fuego to the Canada tundra stopping only to recharge their energy needs in the Delaware Bay region. Most long distance migrants practice hyperphagic feeding (gorging), sometimes doubling key energy supply. They shrink non-useful organs during migration up to 25 % while enlarging the heart and they shut down half their brain for sleep while in flight. These birds navigate by geomagnetism and the stars. They are also capable of reading barometric pressure differences. They migrate at 50-60 mph.

4 These birds have evolved specialized bills to allow them the greatest potential for successful feeding in their unique niche (role) within a somewhat generalized habitat thus avoiding competition with other species. Some bills are long and curved downward such as the whimbrel with others curved upward such as the American avocet. These probing bills have concentrated nerve cells at the tip for tactile feeding. Many have flex rather than rigid bills. Other shorebirds have short, stubby bills such as the black-bellied plover and use their visual acuity for stalking prey in their stop-go-stop motions to find food. A wide range of bill types can be found in shorebirds, enhancing their ability to limit energy wasted in competition with other species. These differences of bill type reveal that this diversity is a major consideration of commonality in shorebirds. Also this is a form of resource partitioning between species -an ecological principle which explains how so many different species can use the same feeding habitat without aggressive interaction. This specialization of bills proves shorebirds to be master adapters as natural selection has led to many different outcomes.

5 These birds in general have thin legs which range from long to short. Length limits their wading to certain water depths and short legs may leave them with only a terrestrial option. Certain bird's leg length make them excellent feeders in the intertidal zone such as sanderlings. Most shorebirds have long toes which enables them to walk on very soft, wet land.

6 These birds have stream-lined bodies and pointed wings which in flight reduces drag. This is very significant to long distance migration. They also exhibit an upright stance while on land for purposes such as feeding opportunities or predator spotting.

7 These birds are ground nesters. Oftentimes, no nesting material is used and a mere scraping in the sand provides a place for egg deposition. Many shorebirds prefer nesting on uninhabited islands and beaches far from potential human interaction.



Atlantic Willet in Salt Marsh



Horseshoe Crabs Spawning- Maryland Coastal Bays Program

8 These birds, both male and female, possess mottled plumage in grey, brown, black, and white to provide them with excellent camouflage. The woodcock and Wilson's snipe are so difficult to see, one can be standing right on top of them before they can be spotted. Young are precocial and blend right into their environment and synchronously enter the world with their nest mates. Also of note, the eggs of many of these shorebirds are so well camouflaged making them almost impossible to see. They often are accidentally crushed by beach walkers. Although this provides protection from avian predators like gulls, hawks, falcons, and crows and land hunters such as fox, skunk, weasel, etc. on their eggs, it creates the need for segregation of beach nesting areas from the human public during nesting season (e.g., piping plovers).

9 These birds often display distraction behaviors to threats. Examples are a broken wing or injury performance (e.g., killdeer), a "rodent run" (e.g., purple sandpiper), an ungulate display to cows, horses, and goats, and false brooding displays by many shorebirds in which they blend into their environment by being motionless. Elaborate courtship displays are often exhibited for pair bonding by new and old pairings alike - new for young, first time pairing birds and reinforcement for old pairs. Many species are monogamous for life and some are for at least the breeding season.

10 Threats to the population of these birds include habitat loss and degradation especially of coastal areas, beaches, and mudflats. Agricultural development of wetlands is also a major concern. Human visitation to "wild" beaches impacting nesting areas is a threat during nesting season. Climate change affecting sea level rise and severe weather conditions is more impacting as each year goes by. Loss of food resources endangers certain species. Pollution resulting from oil spills and other generalized chemical contamination can have major impacts. Historically, sport and market hunting led to a drastic disappearance and decline of shorebirds during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In certain areas of the world, these birds are still hunted for sustenance for the poor. Today, shorebird populations are on the decline worldwide with many species threatened with extirpation.

11 All shorebird species are considered to be "indicator" species. Healthy, stable populations of the birds suggest healthy, stable environments and vice/versa.

*"Uniformity is not nature's way;
diversity is nature's way."*

Vandana Shiva, Biologist

Although shorebirds exhibit many common traits and/or characteristics, they also reveal an incredible variety of differences. This diversity has resulted from evolutionary processes leading to specialization within individual species. In general, a commonality of traits in the grouping of

shorebirds exists, but unique specific adaptations of individual species is what sets them apart from one another. The following chart is a very limited consideration of some aspects of diversity in the shorebird world:

Size: Peeps- Sandpipers such as semipalmated, least, and western. 5.3 - 6 inches in length. long-billed curlews. 16 - 24 inches in length. American avocets. 17 - 19 inches in length. ruddy turnstones - 9 inches in length.

Leg coloring: Yellow - greater yellow legs. Pink - black-necked stilt. Red/Orange - ruddy turnstone. Black - marbled godwit. Gray - long-billed curlew.

Plumage color patterns: Ruddy/red - red knot, ruddy turnstone, red phalarope. Black and White - black-necked stilt, American oystercatcher, black-bellied plover. Brown/Tan: whimbrel, peeps. Purple - purple sandpiper. Gray/Silver - Sanderlings. White - piping plover. Note: These colors are seasonal and vary from wintering to summering grounds and breeding conditions. Migrations can render a "hodgepodge" of plumages. Generally a color dimorphism exists between sexes.

Leg length: Short (3+/- - up to 5 inches) - American woodcock, snowy plover, peeps. Medium (5+ - up to 9+/- inches) - willet, long-billed dowitcher, killdeer. Long (up to 10+ inches) - American avocet, godwit, whimbrel.

Bill shape: Flat - American oystercatcher. Straight - willet, spotted sandpiper. Upward curved - godwits, avocets. Downward curved - long-billed curlew, whimbrel.

Bill size: Stubby (less than 1 inch) - plovers. Small (1+ - 3 inches) - dunlins, peeps. Medium (3+ - 4+ inches) - dowitchers, yellowlegs. Long (5+ inches) - avocets, whimbrels, curlews.

Feeding techniques:

- Bobbing (Vertical up and down motion like a sewing machine bob) - dowitchers.
- Run-Stop-Run - plovers.
- Trembling foot - many species.
- Prying/Hammering - American oystercatcher.
- Turning debris - ruddy turnstone.
- Scythe sweeping - American avocet.
- Vortex surface tension transport (Spinning water to move tiny invertebrates) - phalaropes.
- Bill probing - almost all sandpipers.
- Remember feeding behavior is both visual and tactile among shorebirds.

Miscellaneous information: Brood parasitism is rare but can occur. Jacanas experience sexual role reversal; males caring for young and the females having many male mates (polyandry). Most species may live up to 10 years in the wild and much longer in captivity.



Contemplating Avocet



Dandy of the Marsh Black-necked Stilt

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

Charles Darwin. Naturalist/Biologist.

Shorebirds are a remarkable grouping of birds which some birders have a difficulty in identifying. With practice most species can be properly distinguished from others through careful observation, but it is true that certain species require special attention to detail for proper identification. This is what makes shorebirds so challenging for the birder and also brings a competitive factor to the task of ID. They really don't all look alike and each species has different plumages throughout the year to make the challenges of identification that much more arduous.

I have enjoyed watching and studying shorebirds throughout most of my life. I like the challenge of getting them right, but I find it more difficult to explain to others my reasons for identification compared with other bird types. Waterfowl, songbirds, warblers, etc. seem elementary in relation to shorebird study. Hawks, gulls, and sparrows come close to the same level of difficulty as shorebirds and especially for me, the sparrows. However, shorebirds seem more fun because of their adaptations and behaviors. Watching a group of American avocets herd their prey in as they scythe their large bills through the water or a male woodcock spiral to Earth during mating just doesn't get much more special. I'm sure birders with interest in other groupings of birds feel the same way about their favorite groupings. There is, however, one shorebird happening that I will never forget and it remains as vivid a memory today as it was the afternoon it happened. It is probably the reason for my excitement about shorebirds.

It was early May, the afternoon of the full moon to come that night. I think it was a Tuesday because the lacrosse season had ended unexpectedly with a semifinal upset at the hands of Archbishop Curley. This was my recovery day as the coach. It was warm, blue skies, with a moderate breeze blowing out of the south. I was with my "birding buddy", Tom Trafton, and we both had left school early to be at the Delaware coast. We had our binoculars and spotting scopes and were filled with hope. The place was Port Mahon on Delaware Bay, just north by yards of the small town of Little Creek, Delaware. As we turned left on the road, leading out to the beaches and bay, I think we both sensed this would be the time it happened. In those days the beaches were sand wedged between the salt marsh of the upland and the bay's crashing water. Broken bulkheads revealed the bay had won its battle against beach preservation. Today, huge boulders of rip-rap attempt to save what beach and marsh are left; but they too will ultimately fail. Unfortunately, beach stabilization attempts with boulders come with a harsh cost. There is little beach habitat left for



Yellowlegs

shorebirds for feeding or horseshoe crabs for spawning. Maybe, instead, the birds can recharge their energy at Slaughter or Pickering beaches to the south or Cape May, New Jersey beaches to the north. But on this afternoon, it was still the beaches at Port Mahon for Tom and me and the birds. As we left the paved road and marshes behind, we were now driving on the thin sand road of the upper beach, watching flock after flock of migrating shorebirds hit the beach as though they were landing crafts on the Normandy beaches during D-day that were instead coming by air, Dunlins, ruddy turnstones, peeps, whimbrels, dowitchers, and especially red knots covered every possible inch of the beach. Flock after flock glided down on the beach where they could find space and occasionally on the backs of other birds. An incredible cacophony of noise provided the backdrop to this amazing mosaic of frenetic life swarming the beach. Herring and black-backed gulls joined in as the whole beach seemed to be the kinetic energy of motion... But what were the birds doing and why were they here?

The answer can be found in an ancient "living fossil" arachnid - the horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*). This creature of many of the shallow, marginal coastlines of the world's oceans can be found breeding on this sandy beach in Delaware Bay. The large female crawls through the sand to just within the high tide limit of the spring beach. Here, usually with at least one male clinging to her back, often times many males, she will release hundreds if not thousands of eggs onto the wet beach with the "hope" that males will release sperm which will fertilize the eggs. This spawning orgy occurs during the first high tide of the full moon in May. Thousands of dead, contorted horseshoe crabs lay scattered all over the beach with their mission in life completed. The eggs in about a month's



Red Knot – Cornell Lab of Ornithology



Ruddy Turnstone – Cornell Lab of Ornithology

time will have developed into tiny horseshoe crabs that enter the bay or ocean during what is the next full moon, high tide. Before that departure, the highly nutritious eggs will be high energy meals for whatever carnivorous creature comes their way. Enter the shorebirds, after an energy consuming long migration, and the smorgasbord is set. This is particularly true for the red knot which has arrived on this beach from a challenging flight from Tierra del Fuego in Argentina. The bird may gain 3+ ounces (Delaware Bay: Horseshoe Crab-Shorebird Assessment Report and Peer Review. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.) of weight from its horseshoe crab egg consumption and now has renewed energy reserves to be able to complete its migration to the Arctic tundra for breeding. This cycle has been going on for tens of thousands of years. Tom and I sit amazed at what we're witnessing, realizing this is truly a "wonder of nature". We will observe other days with horseshoe crab spawning and shorebird feeding, but never like the intensity of that day.

Much has happened since that day to lessen the potential of another such day. Declines of both horseshoe crabs and shorebirds in general and the red knot in particular have occurred, but those details are outside the parameters of this paper. Much has been written on the topics of these declines, but the "big day" memories Tom and I possess bear witness to the fact that they did happen.

So I share with you, the reader, the catalyst to my love of shorebirds and the amazing events that have become a "synchronization" in nature. Was it the luck of that first red knot or the unlucky spawning of that horseshoe crab on that day which led to this natural happening in May at Port Mahon? Who really cares? I'm just glad it happened! After all these years, I'm still impressed by the common characteristics I see in shorebirds and the amazing diversity that exists within their varied species.

Further Reading:

- ***Shorebirds: The Birds, The Hunters, The Decoys.*** John M. Levinson and Somers G. Headley. 1991. Good information on shorebird hunting and shorebird decoys.
- ***The Shorebirds of North America: A Natural History and a Photographic Celebration.*** Peter Dunne and Kevin T. Karlson. 2024. Great information on shorebirds in general and fabulous biographies and photos of each species.
- ***Life Along the Delaware Bay: Cape May, Gateway to a Million Shorebirds.*** Lawrence Niles. Joanna Burger. Amanda Day. 2012. A visual and textual testament to Tom's and my "Big Day".

Also of Note: Presently the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is exhibiting an incredible display of New Jersey Shorebird Decoys. It will continue through September 2026.

The Great Fraternity of Peeps



Sandwich Tern and chick

Debbie Blair



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 Skimmer
Debbie Blair



Clapper Rails mating
Debbie Blair



Killdeer protective hen
Rob Bruch



Black-necked Stilt
Ralph Hockman



Ruddy Turnstone in flight
Debbie Blair

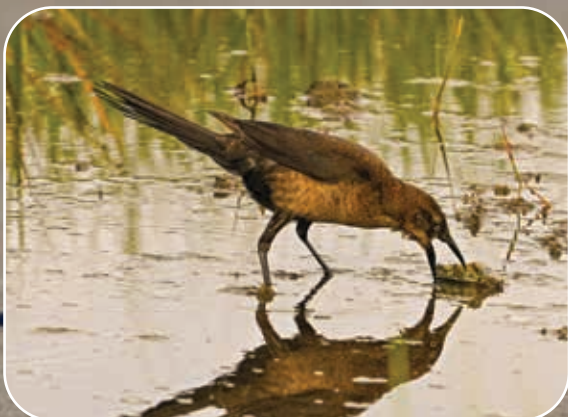
American Oystercatcher
Michael Vach



American Avocets
Pat Hockman



Black-bellied Plover
Earl Blansfield



Boat-tailed Grackle
Ralph Hockman



Sanderling
Michael Vach

Willet
Rob Bruch



Red Knot
Earl Blansfield



Dunlins
Rob Bruch



Spotted Sandpiper
Earl Blansfield

2026 Decoy & Collectibles Tailgate Event

\$50

a space per day
Space 20' X 20'

Friday, **November 13**
Saturday, **November 14**
Sunday, **November 15**
8 AM - 5 PM • (Set up time 7-8 AM)

The Country School
716 Goldsborough Street • Easton, MD 21601

Rain or Shine

For Additional Information contact: Butch Wagoner
(443) 307-3063 • decoywood@verizon.net



Proceeds benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum



We are a family owned and operated farm brewery off of 155 in Havre de Grace, MD. Our beers are hand-crafted using local ingredients grown right here on the farm.

Open year round Wednesday-Sunday
Live Music & Food Trucks
(410) 914-5727
www.hopkinsfarmbrewery.com
[@hopkinsfarmbrewery](https://www.instagram.com/hopkinsfarmbrewery)



EIGHTH ANNUAL
Charlie Joiner
MEMORIAL DECOY SHOW



Saturday, September 12, 2026
9am-3pm

Galena Volunteer Fire Company
Galena, MD 21635

ADMISSION: \$5

Featuring:

Decoys • Fishing Lures • Shell Boxes
Fishing & Hunting Licenses
Oyster Cans • Much More!

PROCEEDS BENEFIT:

"Charlie Joiner / Charlie Bryan Endowment Account"
at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

Inquiries: (410) 708-7011 • Allan Schaubert

FOOD AVAILABLE:
Galena Volunteer Fire Company & Auxiliary

UPCOMING DECOY SHOW INFORMATION

July 17 & 18, 2026

**57th Annual Clayton Decoy
& Sporting Collectibles Show**

Gordon Cerow Recreation Park Arena, Clayton, NY
Info: Thousand Island Museum (315) 686-5794
Info: timuseum.org

September 12, 2026

8th Annual Charlie Joiner Memorial Decoy Show

Galena Volunteer Fire Company, Galena, MD
Info: Allan Schaubert (410) 708-7011
Mddecoy12@hotmail.com

September 26, 2026

**7th Annual Delmarva Decoy
& Sporting Collectibles Show**

Talbot County Community Center, Easton, MD
Info: Burt Campbell (302) 750-0248

October 17, 2026

57th Upper Shore Decoy Show

Minker Banquet Hall
Community Fire Company of Perryville, Perryville, MD
Info: decoyshow@upperbaymuseum.org

November 7, 2026

4th Annual Eastern Shore of Virginia Decoy Show

Mason Avenue, Cape Charles, VA
Info: Andy Dunton deecoys@aol.com

November 13 – 15, 2026

Easton Waterfowl Festival

Easton, MD
Info: (410) 822-4567
Info: facts@waterfowlfestival.org

November 13 – 15, 2026

Guyette & Deeter Fall Auction Preview & Sale

Outdoor Tailgate (to benefit HDG Decoy Museum)
The Country School,
716 Goldsborough Street, Easton, MD
Tailgate Info: Butch Wagoner (443) 307-3063
Auction Info: Guyette & Deeter (410) 745-0485



OVER 100 TABLES!
**7TH ANNUAL
DELMARVA DECOY
& SPORTING COLLECTIBLES SHOW**

**SATURDAY, SEPT 26, 2026
8 AM - 3 PM**

ADMISSION: \$6
KIDS 12 AND UNDER FREE

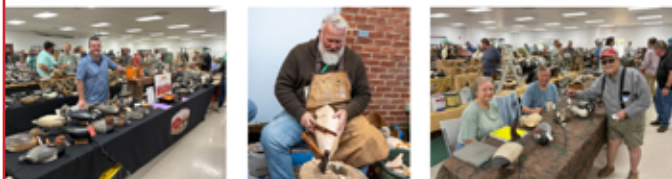


- VINTAGE & CONTEMPORARY DECOYS
- GUNS
- SHELL BOXES
- FISHING LURES
- RODS & REELS
- OYSTER CANS
- POWDER TINS
- HUNTING & FISHING ACCESSORIES
- KNIVES
- FOLK ART
- FLAT ART
- ADVERTISING
- AND MORE
- DON'T MISS THE SAM DYKE MEMORIAL "OLD BIRD" ANTIQUE DECOY CONTEST
- PLUS YOUTH SILHOUETTE PAINTING WITH THE WARD FOUNDATION

**TO RESERVE A TABLE, CONTACT
BURT CAMPBELL AT
302-750-0248**

**New Location!
TALBOT COUNTY COMMUNITY CENTER
10028 Ocean Gateway
Easton, MD 21601**

**CAPT ART LEONARD
FEATURED CARVER!**



DELMARVADECOYCOLLECTORS.COM

ADVERTISING SPONSORED BY
HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Upper Shore Decoy Show



Celebrating 57 Years

Saturday October 17, 2026

Minker Banquet Hall • Perryville, MD

**Early Bird: 8 AM • \$10
Show Open: 9 AM - 3 PM**

Admission \$5

Food available for purchase from the
Perryville Ladies' Auxiliary



Hosted by the Upper Bay Museum

For additional information,
find us on Facebook or
check out our website:

www.upperbaymuseum.org

HOSTETTER AGENCY, INC.

206 West Bel Air Avenue
Aberdeen, MD 21001

Hostetter Agency, Inc.
provides dependable service
& fair, comparably priced
insurance coverage.

**Home
Life
Auto
Business
Health
Disability
Long Term Care**

For a friendly consultation
about your insurance needs
please call, fax or email us.

410.272.6110
Fax: 410.272.3057

Email:
insure@hostetteragency.com



**Havre de Grace
Decoy Museum**
215 Giles Street
Havre de Grace, MD 21078
www.decoymuseum.com



Many Thanks

TO THE
HOSTETTER AGENCY –
THE PRINCIPAL SPONSOR
OF THE HAVRE DE GRACE
DECOY & WILDLIFE ART FESTIVAL.



www.hostetteragency.com