

The 2019 show will feature a display of decoys used on the Delta Marsh like this Canvasback by Duncan Ducharme, ca. 1940.



## Midwest Decoy Collectors Association NEWSLETTER

### Summer 2018



# Annual Show in St. Charles Continues to Surprise and Delight

Each year throngs of our members and other sporting collectibles enthusiasts descend upon Pheasant Run to network with old friends, learn even more about this great hobby, and maybe add a piece or two to the collection. The 2018 edition of the show certainly did not disappoint. Lots of new faces, and some old friends who had been gone for a while came back to share in the camaraderie and commerce while having a unique opportunity to become more knowledgeable. With more displays and more seminars than ever before, this year's show left attendees with an even deeper connection to these old relics.

Welcome to the "Post-Show" edition of your club newsletter. Inside you'll find a complete recap of the show as well as other content that you are sure to enjoy.

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April 23-27**



*Discover • Preserve • Celebrate*

# MIDWEST DECOY COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION

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## WHO WE ARE

The **Midwest Decoy Collectors Association** is a nonprofit, educational organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. It invites membership to all persons. The purpose of Midwest Decoy Collectors is to foster the hobby of decoy collecting by attracting new collectors, seeking out and preserving old decoys, gathering data about carvers and their methods, and holding an annual show for decoy collectors and carvers.

## OUR HISTORY

The **Midwest Decoy Collectors Association** was started in 1966 by a small group of dedicated decoy collectors as a gathering in Ottawa, Illinois to reconnect, share stories and trade decoys. Since then, the Club has grown to nearly 800 enthusiasts from all over North America and from all walks of life. They write books on collecting, manage auction companies, publish collector magazines, carve world class decoys, calls and collectibles, provide appraisal services, and form a core network of knowledge on sporting collectibles and their history. That humble gathering of collectors in 1966 has grown to become the **North American Vintage Decoy and Sporting Collectibles Show** – the largest show of its kind. The annual show features room-to-room trading, a tabled show and a major decoy auction in addition to a variety of networking events and educational activities including seminars, displays and carving demonstrations.

**DISPLAY ADVERTISING** is now being accepted in select issues of the MDCA newsletter. Contact Jeff Seregny at [jseregny@gmail.com](mailto:jseregny@gmail.com) or 586-530-6586 for rates and availability.

[www.midwestdecoy.org](http://www.midwestdecoy.org)



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Your association and our annual show are flourishing because of the wonderful energy that our membership continues to deliver to support our mission. Thank you!

We are adapting well to our membership's needs and it is clearly working as we are attracting new members, reengaging old members, and expanding the content and quality of everything we deliver at the show. Opportunity for networking, depth of seminars and displays, and the broadened diversity at this year's show all contributed to a nice surprise for all. It was hard to take it all in as we had more first floor rooms available to fill and 60% of the rooms had multiple occupants during the week. Fast steps and lots of smiles were abundant. We know that we are on track when we can deliver both fun and success. The 2018 show delivered at St. Charles as attendees were able to connect with serious collectors and find something to take home for their collections.

The quality of the seminars easily set a new standard as the material, dialogue and pace left almost everyone wanting more. An example of the magical content that occurred was when Tom Bosworth and Joe Tonelli told stories about visiting with Enoch Reindahl at his location off the grid. We are doing well to preserve the history associated with these special creations. These seminars and discussions are an important part of why we exist.

Pat Gregory and his team delivered a special display that allowed us a small peek at the passion that drives Pat's pursuit of carving. The connection to his great grandfather, Skippy Barto, and the Delta Marsh were neat to see and discuss with Pat. Pat has already started coaching Geoff Vine, the featured contemporary carver for next year's show.

I want to extend a special THANK YOU to the volunteers and board members for a terrific job this year.

2019 plans are set, and we will continue to enhance everything that we deliver. Look for a brief summary of the plan at the back of this newsletter. Our member displays of both waterfowl and fish will continue to be the bedrock of our education along with the seminars to support those activities. The Callmakers/Collectors will continue to enhance and expand their activities. If you want to volunteer or have new ideas, we want your support and input. And don't forget to make your reservations for the 2019 show soon.

We have had excellent discussions with our partners. With our help, Ducks Unlimited is continuing to communicate the history of decoy carving, the carvers and clubs at various venues including their ongoing presence at the Bass Pro Shops store in Memphis. In addition, we are looking at the potential for new events in the Midwest. A new show that has started in Des Moines is a nice fit for our joint vision of grass roots local events. We are looking at new events using this model in places like Omaha, Quad Cities, La Crosse and others. Expect more information later this year on this effort. Reaching out to new collectors is key to our future.

I'm happy to report that we are growing, our finances are sound, and the quality of our association is excellent. Have a great summer and let us know if you are looking for a special item as wonderful new things are becoming available weekly.

Happy Collecting!

*Rick*  
Rick Sandstrom





# Good Times at the 2018 Show!





# Member News

## Club Membership is Growing

Your club continues to flourish. As of this writing, total membership has increased to nearly 750, and our financial health is excellent. To date in 2018, we've had 57 collectors join our ranks and many others have rejoined after being away for some time. The geographic and collecting diversity of our membership make the MDCA a collecting organization like no other. Please welcome these folks below who have joined the MDCA since our last newsletter in February.

**Alan K Abraham**

Fitchburg, WI  
*Decoys, signs, boxes and waterfowl gear*

**George Bales**

Fisher, IL  
*Illinois River decoys*

**Gary R Bauer**

Edgerton, WI

**Bob Black**

Des Moines, IA  
*Decoys*

**Skip Boysen**

Urbandale, IA  
*Mason Decoys, unique creels, antler art, tramp art*

**Doug Bruck**

Ottawa, IL

**Ken A Bylo**

Milford Twp, MI  
*Gunning decoys and early fishing*

**David E Clark**

North Kingstown, RI  
*Selling decoy bags and boats*

**Randy Conlon**

Galesburg, IL  
*Calls*

**Delta Waterfowl Foundation**

Rockton, IL

**John M Dern**

Minocqua, WI  
*Mason and Evans factory and calls lots of calls*

**Erik J Descheemaeker**

St Charles, IL  
*Gunpowder tins and advertising*

**David Duranti**

Janesville, WI

**Billy R Edwards**

Castle Rock, WA  
*Antique working wood decoys, duck calls, vintage fishing collectibles*

**Greg Feron**

Stuart, VA

**Robert Fetterman**

Farmville, VA

**Jason Furlow**

Du Quoin, IL

**Dorsey Gardner**

Palm Beach, FL  
*Mason*

**Mike Green**

Scottsbluff, NE

**Scott Griffin**

Charlotte, NC  
*Sporting collectibles*

**Marvin Hart**

Flint, MI

**Don Hewson**

Ottawa, ON  
*Decoys*

**Lynn S Hofius**

Waterford, PA  
*Vintage decoys from St. Clair Flats, Long Point, Hamilton and Toronto*

**David Horn**

Decatur, IL

**Eric Hoschek**

Washington, IL  
*Calls, decoys*

**Bruce A Iverson**

Willmar, MN  
*Birds and calls*

**Wayne Johnson**

Janesville, WI  
*All*

**Albert R Kendrick**

Oxford, WI  
*Primitive decoys, primarily from northern New England*

**Dan J Martis**

Lockport, IL  
*Contemporary*

**Murray McMurray**

Grand Marais, MI  
*Michigan decoys*

**Bryan Muche**

Barrington Hills, IL

**Chris Olson**

West Bend, WI  
*Fishing related*

**Dean Opdycke**

Fremont, IN  
*Decoys, shell boxes*

**Andrew Pals**

Crown Point, IN  
*All*

**Terry Pease**

St. Stephen, MN  
*Old gunning blocks*

**Louis H Pedersen**

Walnut, IA  
*Decoys, anchors, duck calls, shell boxes*

**Molly Peltier-Balog**

Shelby Twp, MI

**Dennis Robertson**

Windsor, ON  
*Canadian decoys*

**Steve Seedorf**

Deshler, OH  
*Maryland and Ohio duck decoys*

**Pat Selquist**

Henry, IL  
*President of Perdw Museum*

**Patrick Shannahan**

Madison, WI

**Mark Sievert**

Edgerton, WI

**Gerald A Snyder**

Decatur, IL

**Phil Stanton**

Falmouth, MA  
*Dealer & Collector - Specializing in New England Decoys Licensed Auctioneer*

**Jeff Stone**

Janesville, WI

**Dennis E Tomaszewski**

Prospect Heights, IL

**Kevin Ward**

Fort Wayne, IN  
*Shell boxes*

**Mike Ward**

Hartland, WI

**Perry Weers**

Lacon, IL

**Chris Wirsbinski**

Mosinee, WI  
*Early Evans and Mason hunting decoys.*



## Facebook Participation Continues to Rise

Each month more members join our Members Only Facebook group. Here, nearly 150 club members share photos of their decoys, get expert help with identification and value, and buy and sell items in a secure environment where they know with whom they are dealing. If you are not already participating, be sure to ask to join the "Midwest Decoy Collectors Association (Members Only)" Facebook group today!



## TALES FROM THE TRAIL

# DISCOVERY OF KEN ANGER'S SHOTGUN

BY PETE MUNGER

Most decoy collectors, particularly here in Canada, are quite well acquainted with the work of the Dunnville, Ontario decoy maker Ken Anger. He carved approximately 3000 decoys in the years 1930 through 1960. His decoys were recognized for their quality as early as 1948 at the National Decoy Makers' contest in New York where five of his six entries won 1st place ribbons in the categories for decoys made outside the United States.

Since then, his work has been widely covered in various decoy collecting publications. In the Fall 1973 issue of *North American Decoys*, an article written by Myrl Smith, also of Dunnville, included a photo of Ken holding a brace of woodcock in his right hand and a double barrel shotgun crooked in his left arm.



Apparently, woodcock hunting was as much a favorite to Ken as duck hunting. Ken passed away in 1961 at the relatively early age of 56. But did you ever wonder what happened to that old double he used? I know I didn't really give it much thought at all.

Last spring, I got a text from a fellow duck hunter and retired fireman. He told of being at a retirement party where another senior member of their fraternity mentioned he was getting on in years and since no one in the family was inclined to have it asked him if he would be interested in buying an old shotgun. This gent was a fellow by the name of Garth Anger. My friend said he was not interested himself, but knew just the guy who would be! He texted me about this right after the party providing me with a name and phone number.

To be honest, the significance of this did not register right away. It "sank in" not long after and I gave the fellow a call and arranged to go out and see him at his riverside home.

When I arrived at his home I met a very amiable Garth Anger and his lovely wife Carmelle, and what appeared to be an undersized shotgun, nicely laid out for me on the living room couch. Garth explained that Ken Anger was very small of stature and, thus, the almost "youth" size of the gun. He went on to explain how he came to have it. Evidently

when Ken passed away with no direct heir (he never married) his closest male relations were his cousins Cecil and Olaf, and Olaf's son, 20-year-old Garth (making Garth Ken's second cousin). As all lived nearby (Olaf just across the street), they got together and as Garth put it they "kinda drew straws" for the items of his estate. When Garth had his turn, he chose the shotgun. Garth told me that although he hunted a bit when he was younger he never fired this gun, perhaps due to its dimensions. It has been carefully stored these past 56 years.

Ken Anger's shotgun is a L.C. Smith made by Hunter Arms, Fulton, N.Y. A 12 Gauge with 27" barrels, it sports a raised solid rib with ivory front bead and a centre bead. It has double triggers and auto-ejectors. The stock is short with a length of pull of only 12 1/2 inches to the forward trigger. Research garnered from the L.C. Smith Collectors Assoc. indicates it originally was made with 28" barrels and speculation is that it was cut down along with the stock by a gunsmith to accommodate Ken's stature and maintain its balance. Ken Anger was just about 5'4" according to Garth, a small man with an immense talent. It seems uncanny that Ken passed at 56 and another 56 years passed before his shotgun came to light. I'm thrilled to have it.

***This new column is where members can share their favorite collecting stories. These might be about a successful conquest or the one that got away. They can be funny or just plain interesting. We invite you to send us any story that you think other collectors might enjoy. Just email your story and photos (if available) to Jeff Seregny at [jseregny@gmail.com](mailto:jseregny@gmail.com).***



*The 2018 edition of the North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show in St. Charles was a success on virtually every measure.*

### Room-to-Room Trading Sees Strong Traffic

With Pheasant Run filled to capacity by our dealers and other attendees, traffic during the Tuesday – Thursday Room-to-Room trading was brisk each day. We saw many happy collectors walking the halls with freshly purchased items tucked firmly under their arms. And there were plenty of new and younger faces in attendance and they were buying, too.



Take 29-year old member Nick Amazzalorso from Crown Point, Indiana. He may have been the most excited guy in the Golf Wing on Wednesday after buying a terrific Blackduck by Michigan maker Ben Schmidt from dealer John Powilaites. Nick knew he would have to dig deep into the decoy budget, but he came to the show determined to buy a great Schmidt decoy if he could find one. Congratulations Nick! Mission accomplished!



*Nick Amazzalorso with his latest addition to his collection.*

### Seminars Excite and Inform

For the first time ever, the show featured three seminars that were all well-attended and much appreciated.

**Lake Chautauqua Fish Decoys:** On Wednesday morning, Jon Deeter of Guyette & Deeter shared his extensive knowledge of the fish decoys of Lake Chautauqua and what little is known about the makers of these classic, leather-tailed lures. In addition to providing an in-depth discussion of their key identifying characteristics, Jon had a selection of these pieces on hand that allowed attendees to closely examine the unique attributes of these great old decoys. This was a wonderful primer to the display of over 70 of these magnificent fish in the MegaCenter on Friday and Saturday.

**Decoy X-Rays:** Later that morning, Colin McNair of Copley Fine Art Auctions gave a fascinating presentation on decoy X-rays. He discussed how to read X-rays, and the value they serve in understanding decoy construction and what, if any, repairs or restorations may have been done. Having examined nearly 600 decoy X-rays in the past couple of years, Colin's ability to accurately read this film is likely unparalleled, and the large crowd came away with a real appreciation of the importance of this relatively new tool.

**Stoughton, WI Decoys:** On Thursday, Erik Spengler previewed the weekend's MegaCenter display of Stoughton, Wisconsin area decoys with his presentation, "The Stoughton, WI Carvers," which covered the spectacular work and lives of Enoch Reindahl, Mandt and Ferd Homme, as well as other area makers. Several collectors in the crowd knew and had spent time with Reindahl (who passed away in 2000) and shared some fascinating stories about this self-sufficient carver who lived life "off the grid."

For those who weren't able to attend these seminars, we plan to post the PowerPoint presentations on the club website as they become available.



*Jon Deeter*



*Colin McNair*



*Erik Spengler*

## 2018 Show Report



### MegaCenter Show

The Friday and Saturday show brought good weather in the Chicago area which always seems to keep the crowd down a bit as locals look to get outdoor chores done as they ready for the summer. This was particularly true given the very late arrival of spring in the Midwest this year. Despite that, the crowd was enthusiastic and those who came seemed ready to buy. Most dealers reported good sales.

The silent auction this year was one of our most successful in years due to the quality of the items offered. The top lot was a pair of miniatures by Illinois maker Heck Whittington which sold for \$2,500. Other items included a group of Michigan decoys that featured a very good blackduck by Zeke MacDonald. All told, the silent auctions grossed over \$7,000, netting the club a contribution of nearly \$700. This continues to be a good opportunity for members and walk-ins to sell their items and contribute to the success of the club.

The various displays are always a crowd favorite and this year was no exception. These included Lake Chautauqua fish decoys, Stoughton, WI decoys, Lake Poygan gunning boxes, shotgun shell boxes, and a unique display titled, "Hays Decoys: Controversies and Misattributions" brought by Missouri factory decoy collector Greg Renner. In addition, Pat Gregory's contemporary carver exhibit featured a variety of his rigs for all to view. The following pages provide lots of detail on all of these great displays and exhibits.



### Guyette & Deeter Auction

This year's auction was an exciting one that grossed \$2.2 million with 31 lots selling for over \$10,000 and four selling for over \$100,000. These included the top lot, a sleeping Hen Mallard by Robert Elliston, that sold for \$212,400. This piece is regarded by many as Elliston's finest work. Another Illinois sleeping Hen Mallard by Charles Perdew sold for \$135,700. A Goldeneye Drake by the Ward Brothers and a Sleeping Blackduck by Shang Wheeler sold for \$159,300 and \$153,400 respectively.

The auction company previewed some of their offerings in their upcoming summer auction highlighted by two stunning South Carolina decoys made by Hucks Caines. These are certain to create quite a buzz in Portsmouth, NH, July 23-24.





# Member Display



## Stoughton, Wisconsin Decoys

This year's Member Display featured the beautiful decoys made in and around the Stoughton, WI area. The display included the work of many area makers including Enoch Riehdahl, Ferd and Mandt Homme, Russell "Raz" Berry, and others. Much of the display focused on the work of the Reindahl and the Homme's as the most prolific and probably most admired of the area's makers. And for good reason...their exquisite carving and painting talents make the realism of their output unique to this rich hunting area. Thanks to Jim Wierzba for coordinating this display and to all those who shared their decoys for all to enjoy.



*Enoch Reindahl at work*



*Enoch Reindahl Pintail Drake, Stoughton, WI, ca. 1940s*



*Mandt Homme Canvasback Drake, McFarland, WI, ca. 1930s*



*Mandt Homme Canvasback Hen, McFarland, WI, 1930s*



*Rare Enoch Reindahl Goose, Stoughton, WI, ca. 1930s*





*Erik and Dave Spengler enjoy the display*



*Enoch Reindahl Mallard Drake, Stoughton, WI, ca. 1930s*



*Enoch Reindahl, Canvasback Drake, Stoughton, ca. 1940s (1 of 6 known)*



*Enoch Reindahl Snow Goose, Stoughton, WI, ca. 1930s*



*Ferd Homme Hen Mallard, Stoughton, WI, ca. 1930s*



# Lake Chautauqua Fish Decoys

In past years, our fish decoy displays have taken us across the northern Midwest and featured the work of many outstanding makers from Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan. This year we moved east to New York and the highly coveted decoys used on Lake Chautauqua. This display featured many of the iconic fish attributed to Harry Seymour of Bemus Point, as well as the output of Ed Irwin and the mysterious Mr. "Y." While the makers of many other Chautauqua fish are unknown, their obvious skill is still to be admired. Many thanks go to collector and MDCA Board member Jim Wierzba for organizing this display.







*Blue/Gray Trout, Harry Seymour, Bemus Point, 1880s*



*Carved Teeth Trout, Harry Seymour Bemus Point, 1880s*



*Chub, William Spooner, Blockville, 1890s*



*Cisco, Ed Irwin, Irwin's Bay, 1890s*



*Green/Yellow Trout, Harry Seymour, Bemus Point, 1890s*



*Sucker, Ed Irwin, Irwin's Bay, 1890s*



*Trout (Modified Tie line), Harry Seymour, Bemus Point, 1890s*



*Trout, Ed Irwin, Irwins Bay, 1890s*



*Trout, John Wells, New Harmony, 1890s*



*Trout, Mr. Y, 1890s*



*Unknown Brown Trout, 1880s*



*Unknown Perch, 1890s*



*Unknown Pink/White Shad, 1890s*



*Unknown, 1890s*

# Lake Poygan Gunning Boxes

Roger Ludwig, once again, brought together a unique collection of old gunning boxes typical of the Lake Poygan area. Each year these just keep getting better. The ingenuity and craftsmanship exhibited by the boxes is something to behold, as hunters made them to fit their very specific needs. Thanks again to Roger for pulling this together.



## Shotgun Shell Boxes



Rudy Ronning was kind enough to bring more of his collection of shot shell boxes again this year. His display included various gauge and ammunition manufacturer examples, all with their stunning graphics designed to attract the hunter's eye in the whatever retail setting in which they were sold. These early 20th century boxes are always a delight to examine up close. Thanks again Rudy. Well done!



# “My Favorite Canvasback” Contest Winner!



While we had a number of great entries, it was the Resting Head Hen Canvasback made by Mandt Homme of Stoughton, Wisconsin that took the prize in our first “My Favorite...” contest. We suppose that it’s only fitting given that decoys of the Stoughton area were the focus of our annual Member Display. Congratulations go out to the decoy’s owner, long-time member Kristin Lehmkuhl of Elm Grove, Wisconsin! She wins a free year’s membership in the club and the admiration of the entire club membership.

Thanks to all who participated this year.

We will announce next year’s contest category in a future newsletter.



Missouri factory decoy expert Greg Renner gathered other collectors interested in Gundelfinger, Benz and Hays factory output to further our collective knowledge of these often under-appreciated decoys. His “study group” is working to improve our understanding and ability to correctly identify these well-constructed birds. In addition, Greg brought together a selection of Hays decoys in a display titled, “Hays Decoys: Controversies and Misattributions,” to demonstrate the challenge of correctly identifying decoys made by this Jefferson City factory. Kudos to Greg and his study group for continuing to work on the important task of bringing some clarity to this area’s decoy output.

## Missouri Decoys On Display





# Contemporary

# CORNER

## PAT GREGORY

Each year, a highlight of the show is an exhibit of work by one of today's top contemporary decoy makers. This year Illinois carver Pat Gregory brought an outstanding group of birds that demonstrated his considerable and highly versatile talent. This exhibit included rigs used on Mud Lake and the Delta Marsh, as well as a selection of decoys made by Pat's great grandfather George "Skippy" Barto. The display also featured Pat's layout boat and a group of his decoys currently in the collection of Tim Speight. Thanks to Pat for sharing his great work with us.



"The Shop"



"Skippy" Barto Decoys



Layout Boat



## Other Contemporary Makers Show Their “Stuff”

A number of other decoy makers displayed their work and many provided demonstrations of their wonderful talents. These included Phil Babe, Gene Everett, Pat Gregory, Gregg Guthrie, Ben Heinemann, Tom Humberstone, Tim McEntire, Bill Thumm, and Geoff Vine. Many thanks to all who contributed.



*Mud Lake Rig*



*Delta Marsh Rig*



*Tim Speight Collection*



Cadillac Style fish decoy maker Al Nelson also demonstrated the techniques he uses to make his beautiful and functional decoys. Here he is providing hands-on guidance to a young show attendee.





## MEMBER PROFILE:

# Gary Zinn

## TEXAS COLLECTOR TAKES A SLOW AND STEADY PATH

Wisconsin native Gary Zinn took an unusually long road to becoming a serious collector. A journey that has taken him nearly 50 years and over 1200 miles.



It all started around 1970 when he was in his early 20's while living in Milwaukee. It was then that he took up duck hunting on the Theresa Marsh, north of the city not far from Lake Winnebago. This early experience led to an opportunity to buy his first decoys from a co-worker whose father, Don Siebel, Sr., had carved them years earlier. Gary bought a standing hen mallard and a pair of working mallards for the sum of \$35, which got him into some hot water at home. (We've all been there!) Gary recalls, "I just had to buy them. I thought they were cool!" Little did he know that this early interest would eventually grow into a passion many years later.

### An Opportunity Finally Emerges

Like most with a young family to provide for, Gary's limited resources prevented him from adding to his "collection." A transfer to Houston, Texas in 1978 was a good career move but the years were lean as the nation's economy struggled. However, in the early 1990s Gary decided to start his own business. Success came fast, and he found himself with some disposable income which he realized would allow him to rekindle that flame that had been lit many years earlier. He knew that business success can be fleeting so he wanted to be cautious in this revived pursuit of old decoys.

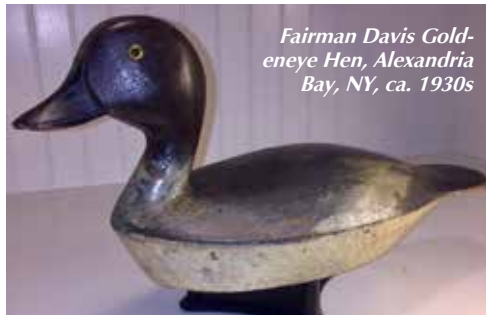


*Gary's  
First Decoy,  
Don Siebel, Sr.,  
Standing Mallard  
Hen, ca. 1950s*





*Bert Graves "Whiteside"  
Drake Mallard, Peoria, IL,  
ca. 1935*



*Fairman Davis Gold-  
eneye Hen, Alexandria  
Bay, NY, ca. 1930s*



*Mason  
"Snakey  
Head"  
Challenge Grade  
Mallard Hen, ca. 1910*

He began by buying his first collector book, Carl F. Luckey's, "Collecting Antique Bird Decoys and Duck Calls," which provided the basics and covered decoys from a wide range of makers and regions. After carefully examining decoys by makers from every part of the country, he found himself really attracted to the style of the birds made by the Mason decoy factory in Detroit. Given that this would be his first "serious" foray into collecting he was reassured by the security he saw in the fact that Mason decoys were so widely available and collected. This suggested that these were a wise place in which to invest his hard-earned money.

He began with Standard Grade decoys, choosing to pursue all three Mason models with painted, tack and glass eyes. Without convenient access to sporting collectibles shows and auctions in Texas, he rummaged through every antique store he could find and scoured eBay decoy listings to find birds to his liking. Like most beginning collectors, he bought everything he liked regardless of condition and without the knowledge to make educated value judgements about their relative worth.

Still, he was having great fun, but he knew he needed to learn more about collecting decoys and the Mason lures to which he was so attracted. He wisely bought more collector reference books and it didn't take long for the pages of Russ Goldberger and Alan Haid's seminal book, "Mason Decoys" to become dog-eared from heavy use. After seven more years, this essentially self-taught collector raised his sights.

## Mason Decoys, Part II

In 2000, with his passion and collecting budget growing, Gary decided to take his Mason decoy collecting to another level – choosing to now focus on the more refined and tougher-to-find Challenge and Premier Grade models. As his taste changed, he continued to shop antique stores and online auctions but was frustrated by his inability to find many of these higher-grade decoys in

the condition that he was now after. By 2004, he craved access to better birds, so he decided to make the trip from Texas to St. Charles and the National show, having read that John Delph's collection and its many good Mason decoys would be sold at auction there.

To say he was overwhelmed by the show would be an understatement. He felt like a fish out of water. He recalls thinking, "What am I doing here? All of these white-haired guys with all of this knowledge and experience. And I don't have either!" He used the opportunity to handle a lot of decoys and learn as much as he could. He left St. Charles both buoyed with knowledge and experience he had gained there. While he didn't throw his hat in the ring for any Mason decoys, he used some of the money that was burning a hole in his pocket to purchase a fine Mallard Drake made by Bert Graves. This was one of his first ventures outside of what, up to this point, had been a laser focus on Mason decoys.

## Getting the Help He Wanted

During this period, Gary was more than ever focused on building his business and didn't have a lot of time to devote to going to shows and finding decoys. It wasn't until a few years later that he would attend another decoy show. This time in Milwaukee, home to a neat little show in his home town that would allow him to



*Mason Shorebirds*

reconnect with family, do a little pheasant hunting, and renew, once again, his pursuit of higher-grade Mason decoys. It was at this show that he built the relationships that would ultimately re-energize his passion and shape his collecting philosophy.

First, he met Vaughn Walters, a Mason collector/dealer from Missouri whom Gary considers his first collecting mentor. Gary credits Vaughn with teaching him what to look for and what not to look for. Vaughn told him that he'd see lots of decoys that looked nice, but said, "you shouldn't buy a decoy unless you really love it." He also met Marty Hanson there, who similarly counseled Gary to resist the urge to buy every decoy that he liked. Marty advised him to save his money and have a goal to buy one really good bird each year. Gary



*Herters Owl  
& Crow Set,  
Wiseca, MN,  
ca. 1945*

took that to heart and started on this path right away - buying a very good Premier Grade Blue Wing Teal at the show. The Milwaukee show and the connections he made there truly formed the basis for the collection he has built since.

## The Collection: Mason...and More

First and foremost, Gary's collection today features nearly 40 Mason Challenge and Premier grade decoys in a variety of species, all in near mint condition. These include Mallards, a "snakey" head





*Mason Challenge Grade  
"Double Blues" Blue  
Wing Teal, ca. 1910*



*Oscar Peterson  
Perch/Pike Fish  
Decoys, Cadillac,  
MI, ca. 1935*

Common Merganser, a pair of Goldeneyes and Bluebills, and a pristine Black duck. While he has been slowly selling his Standard Grade birds off to help fund the higher-grade decoys, he still enjoys some of the special ones he was able to acquire early in his collecting days. These include a very good pair of painted eye Bluebills and a painted eye Redhead drake. He also has found a half-dozen very good Mason shorebirds in a variety of species that now adorn his shelves.

Like most collectors, over time he has expanded his collection beyond its core focus. Today, it includes a Herter's Owl and crow set with the rare dead crow, a 1936 model Ward Brothers drake Bluebill, an Elmer Crowell Black duck and a pair of Bert Graves Mallards, the drake being the one he purchased at his very first show in St. Charles. He is also starting to collect

hollow Wildfowler pine-body decoys in mint condition. One of his most recent purchases is a fine drake Canvasback.

He has even expanded his collection to include fish decoys, shot shell boxes, calls and more. He is particularly proud of a Pike by Oscar Peterson with its "Bear Claw" paint pattern and his four-panel VL&A call by Charles Perdew.

## Big Fun Along the Way

Gary cherishes the friends he's made and the experiences he's had while collecting, admitting that part of the fun is in the chase. He recalls buying his first "really expensive" decoy – a very early Premier Grade Drake Redhead. He had seen it on the dealer's website and started a nearly two-year back and forth negotiation that eventually landed him the bird. Paying more than he had before, buyer's remorse immediately set in once the deal was done. But he soon realized just how special this one was and counts it among his very favorites today.

He tells another story about coming upon a pair of Robert Elliston Mallards for sale on eBay. With the birds having been bid up to near \$2000 with several days to go in the auction, Gary saw that the seller was nearby in the Houston area, so he contacted the man to see if he could personally inspect the decoys. He jumped in the car and met the owner who told him about their history. Seems that they had been in this gentleman's family in Wisconsin near White Fish Bay for many years. When his parents passed on, the family met to divide the estate as



*Mason Challenge  
Grade Bluebill Pair,  
ca. 1915*

best they could. As they were leaving this gentleman noticed a couple of decoys up in the rafters of the garage and claimed them as well. The hen was all original while the drake had a bit of hunter's touch-up. Gary and this man hit it off reminiscing about their Wisconsin roots and, in the end, Gary was able to buy the birds directly and they still sit proudly on his shelf.

Never one to leave any stone unturned, Gary has continued to visit local antique stores in the hopes of finding another treasure. In 2005, while doing some antiquing with his wife, they happened on a really fine Charles Perdew crow priced at \$1000. He wanted it but thought it was a little pricey. Gary spent some time researching these crows and historical sales history of similar pieces and then, armed with this intelligence he went back to the shop at least four or five more times over the next few months to try to negotiate a better price. On the last visit he was he felt he was ready to close the deal but learned that the crow had just recently been sold. To say the least, he left there sorely disappointed. However, before long this disappointment turned to delight! His wife had snuck back to the shop to buy the crow as a Christmas gift for Gary. More proof that good things come to those who wait... and that it's great to have a partner who understands the addiction we all share.

Thanks to Gary for sharing his story with us. He can be reached at [garyzinn@ymail.com](mailto:garyzinn@ymail.com).



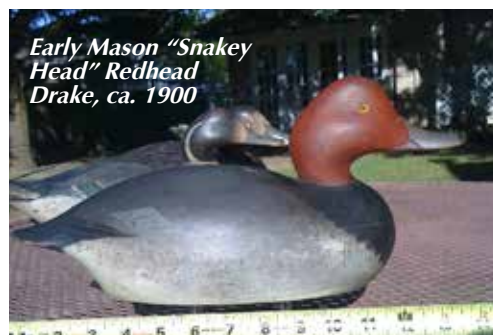
*Mason Seneca Lake  
Canvasback Drake,  
ca. 1915*



*Ward Brothers Bluebill,  
1936 Model*



*Mason Challenge Grade  
Common Merganser,  
ca. 1915*



*Early Mason "Snakey  
Head" Redhead  
Drake, ca. 1900*



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