







At Last! The Annual Show is in the Books!

After three full years since the last North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show in 2019, we were finally able to reconnect in Lombard, Illinois in April. Coupled with a collective sigh of relief, the energy was absolutely palpable throughout the five-day event.

Everywhere one looked, members were seen happily reconnecting with old friends and making new ones as a record 50-plus new members joined the club to partake in the week's festivities. The week featured a full menu of events including robust room-to-room trading, fascinating educational seminars, a variety of collectible displays, silent auctions, member decoys contests, an active ballroom event, and a Guyette & Deeter auction.

All told, it was a very successful week with lots of items changing hands and many new friendships forged. Check out the full Show Report inside.

We look forward to hosting next year's show again in Lombard, April 25-29, 2023. It's not too early to block the dates and we hope to see you there!

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NORTH AMERICAN DECOY COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION

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WHO WE ARE

The North American 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 North American 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 North American 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 NADCA newsletter. Contact Jeff Seregny at jseregny@gmail.com or 586-530-6586 for rates and availability.

www.nadecoycollectors.org





Thank you for your trust and support. So much had to be different this year as we adapted to the environment and our new location.

The week began with the early birds on Sunday and the room-to-room activity built during the week as we occupied 210 rooms and over 700 room nights. Our seminars were well attended and resulted in excellent learning. Thank you to Jon Deeter, Pete Siggelko, and Steve O'Brien for their contributions to making this activity top-notch.

Guyette & Deeter extended their auction preview and reception which gave us time to network and examine the wide range of auction items. In addition, the ballroom show and auction ran in parallel allowing people to go back and forth as desired.

The ballroom show location created a welcoming environment and we filled 262 tables. Member displays were noteworthy as Hays decoys, antique powder tins/ kegs, Wisconsin gunning boxes, and the Contemporary Carver Corner all gave attendees the chance to learn. Traffic was steady on both days, and the silent auction ran continuously for the walk-in items. We generated great energy, and it was inspiring to see the exhibited joy.

We have been collaborating with Ducks Unlimited for a long time, and this year Katie Burke from the DU staff allowed me to share our event on their podcast. Here is the link for your listening: https://ducksunlimited.libsyn.com/ep-collectors-series-rick-sandstrom

We have used the past two years to update and refresh our brand and the tools we use to support the association. Our name has changed to reflect our North American reach and membership. We moved to a new location at the Westin Lombard, giving us more opportunities to grow and upgrade our event. The event schedule was revamped to allow more networking and content. Our web

presence is in the process of being refreshed and updated. I think that you will enjoy the new website.

COVID has limited our activity over the past few years, and we have been careful to manage our activity to control our costs in that uncertain environment. Our finances are in a strong position, and we are in good shape to rebuild and grow.

You will see that our new member efforts are working, and we signed up 50 new members at the show. We are reaching out to renew past members, as many lapsed in the COVID hiatus. We are sending a reminder solicitation to regain members before printing this year's Member Directory. Please remind your friends to renew, so they are listed. The directory is a great advertising opportunity, so communicate with Jeff Seregny to reserve your space.

We recently lost three long-time members Jack Wilkie, Lynn Woodworth, and Herb Desch. Our condolences to the families and friends of these member collectors.

Herb and Carolynn Desch have been exceptional mentors to Liz and me, and we are very grateful for their support. I appreciated Herb's patience in listening to everyone and his leadership in always doing the right thing for the right reason. Herb and Carolynn took the association to a higher level, and their service is an important reason for our success. Herb improved our world, and we are grateful he could share his class and style. He is undoubtedly greatly missed.

Our plans are finalizing for the 2023 show. Reserve the date and start your plans for attending.

Thank you for all the kind words and friendship. We are better together, which was demonstrated at this year's event. Happy collecting and pay attention as significant fresh items are becoming available.



































Summer 2022

Member News

Club Membership Soars



Clearly the absence of outlets Decoy Collectors for feeding our collecting habits has fueled a renewed

interest in connecting. Since last fall, the club has gained nearly 90 new members. Over 50 joined us at the annual show in April alone, an unprecedented number of first time members. In addition, we had nearly 20 collectors renew their memberships after being away for more than three years. Our new members continue to represent the geographic and collecting diversity that makes the NADCA unique. From Ontario to Florida, and New Hampshire to Oregon, these new members collect everything from sporting art and calls to powder tins and bear traps. Please welcome this large group of new members and check out their collecting interests (where available). They just might become trading partners someday.

2022 Directory to Mail in **3rd Quarter**

Since we have gained so many new members this year, we decided to wait to produce the 2022 Directory until after the show in order to make it as current as possible. We plan to have it ready to mail to members in good standing by the end of the 3rd quarter and it will be good for the

balance of 2022 and all of 2023. In the meantime, if you have any changes to your contact information (email address, phone #, etc.), please send them to jseregny@gmail.com or call Jeff at 586-530-6586.

Consider a Life Membership

In the last newsletter, we discussed the rapid increase in the number of members who have chosen to become Life Members to take full advantage of its many benefits.

While working at the registration table at Lombard in April, Joyce Hay laughingly commented that the job would be a lot easier if more people were life members. With her very next breath she asked if she could make herself and Jeff "Life Members," honoring her late husband's passion for collecting decoys, her own enthusiasm for researching their provenance, and the wonderful memories that they created as a family.

Please consider a life membership this year. Not only does it support the investment in decoys that you've made over the years, but it also serves as a permanent record of the positive impact that your presence has had on this community. Contact Matt Bryant at matt.bryant@wilsonco.com to explore the benefits of a Life Membership or to join this select group.

Facebook Group Passes 250 Members



Our Members-Only Facebook group keeps growing, having recently surpassed 250 active members. The social media site continues to be a place for members to share their collections, get help with ID, and even trade with other members. If you are not already participating, just go to the "North American Decoy Collectors Association (Members Only)" Facebook group and request to be added. We'll approve you right away and you'll be ready to join in on the fun.



Steve Johnston Assumes Club Treasurer Role

Director Steve Johnston has assumed the role of club Treasurer, taking the reins from Bill Dodge who served in the position for the past 12 years. Steve brings a broad range of financial management skills to the job which ensures that the club will remain on a strong financial footing. We congratulate Steve on his new role, and thank Bill for his years of service and look forward to his further contributions as he continues to serve on the club Board.

Welcome Member News

Dr. Michael Adams

Raceland, Louisiana Louisiana decoys

Daniel Atkinson

Chicago, Illinois Maryland decoys

John Barnes

Cutchogue, New York

Brett Berger

Murphysboro, Illinois *Illinois River decoys*

Bob Bowers

Tiskilwa, Illinois *Decoys*

Scott Carpenter

Iowa City, Iowa 1000 Island decoys

Samuel Chamberlain

Frisco, Texas

Brad Christiansen

Roca, Nebraska

Mark Coonan

Ransom, Illinois *Decoys*

Lee Dahlberg

Angels Camp, California West Coast decoys

Jarod Dainoviec

Petoskey, Michigan Advertising, Mason decoys

Bill Davis

Firebaugh, California West Coast decoys

Mike Delaney

West Bend, Wisconsin Decoys

Kenneth Depaul

Scotch Plains, New Jersey Cameron McIntyre, Mark McNair, Bob White decoys

Mark DeRemer

Glen Gardner, New Jersey Old & contemporary decoys

Mark Derhake

Payson, Illinois Waterfowl decoys

Dupage Birding Club

Glen Ellyn, Illinois

Dale Eggert

Minnetonka, Minnesota Minnesota, Wisconsin decoys, duck/turkey calls

Walt Ellis

St. Cloud, Minnesota

Bill Englund

West Dundee, Illinois

Matt Frank

Allegan, Michigan Carver; Unknown, used decoys

Andrew Gargagliano

Roseville, Michigan Lake St. Clair Flats, Eastern Ontario decoys

O.M. Gehlsen

Rockford, Illinois

Bill Grashoff

LaGrange Park, Illinois

Clifford Graycheck, Jr.

Munster, Indiana

Barbara Gutshall

Downers Grove, Illinois

Marvin Hart

Flint, Michigan

Patricia Hartmann

Elgin, Illinois Old/new folky duck/fish decoys, Native American artifacts, Americana

Zach Hawk

Marion, Illinois Calls & decoys

Matt Hepler

Emlenton, Pennsylvania Old decoys, duck calls, & curios

David Holland

Westover, Maryland Crisfield, Lawson, Ward, Briddell, Strunk decoys

Fred Hoppe

Columbus, Nebraska

Dennis Hruza

Brick, New Jersey
Carving & collecting decoys

James Jankowski

Downers Grove, Illinois

Scott Jones

Sherwood, Arkansas Duck calls & decoys

Mark Kakatsch

Neosho, Wisconsin Decoys & calls

Denise Kennedy

West Chicago, Illinois

Raymond Larson

Mercerburg, Pennsylvania General sporting collectibles

Raymond Lello

Bloomington, Illinois *Perdew decoys*

Lawrence Martin

Woodstock, Illinois Shorebird decoys

Dr. Brady McKaig

Cambridge, Maryland Canvasback decoys

Martin McNamara

Worcester, Massachusetts Illinois River, Mason, New England decoys

Michael McTiernan

Portland, Oregon Great grandfather was a carver

Richard Meister

Downers Grove, Illinois

Patrick Michalak

Fox Lake, Illinois

Chris Michaud

Westport, Massachusetts New England decoys

Doug Morrison

Markham, Ontario Ontario decoys

William Morrissey

Sun Prairie, Wisconsin Wisconsin decoys, history of waterfowling

Jeff Nelms

Arlington Heights, Illinois

Vince O'Neal

Ocracoke, North Carolina Shorebird decoys

Dan Papp

Nyssa, Oregon Everything

Russell Papp

Boise, Idaho Sporting magazines, ammo posters, Peters pinbacks, punt guns, sink boxes, hunting memorabilia

Robert Parks

Havana, Illinois
Illinois River decoys

Michael Peacos

Princeton, New Jersey
Duck decoys, early hunting/
fishing product advertising

Gary Pec

Shorewood, Illinois Goose calls

Steve Peddicord

Arlington, Texas
Vintage duck decoys

Tom Piatek

Harsens Island, Michigan Duck & fish decoys

Allen Pope

Edgerton, Wisconsin Decoys & bear traps

Welcome Member News

Larry Porzondek

Pierson, Michigan Duck decoys

Fred Raymon

Ticonderoga, New York Ward, Lincoln, Crowell, Perdew, Cobb, Blair, Laing, Tax decoys

Tom Riley

Fife Lake, Michigan

Schuyler Ritter

Richmond, Virginia Pre-1960 New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina working decoys

Ryan Roosa

Berlin Center, Ohio Calls

Michael Rortvedt

Deforest, Wisconsin Mason decoys, gun powder tins

James Rose

Salina, Kansas Decorative decoys

William Roth

Alger, Michigan
Duck decoys, sporting
collectibles

Frank Safford

Waterloo, Nebraska *All decoys*

Matt Schmidt

Morton, Illinois

Curtis Sharff

Lexington, Kentucky

Michael Smith

Lowell, Indiana

Ross Smoker

Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania Susquehanna River decoys

Gerald Stanke

Janesville, Minnesota
Decoys & hunting items
(Herters)

James Szeliga

Newmarket, New Hampshire Decoy & calls

Al Thorenson

Apple Valley, Minnesota

Andrew Thorenson

Orono, Minnesota

Landon Thome

Sheldon, South Carolina Long Island duck & shorebird decoys

Barry Tilley

Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota Nice decoy pairs

Richard Troumbly

Grand Rapids, Minnesota Fish decoys

Kurt Ulrich

Pekin, Illinois Illinois River decoys

Jim Van Ness

Easton, Maryland Bluebill, buffleheads, Delaware River decoys

David Vance

Millington, Illinois
Illinois River decoys

Case Vendel

Bella Vista, Arkansas Duck decoys

Andrew Watson

New Tripoli, Pennsylvania All wood birds & ducks

Gary Williams

Depauw, Indiana

Judith Winstel

Cincinnati, Ohio Wildfowl artifacts

Harry Wolf

Warrenville, Illinois

John Wood

Venice, Florida Contemporary decoys

John Zielinski

Ingleside, Illinois *Decoys*



In Memoriam



Herb Desch May 1, 2022 – Herb will be remembered as a huge contributor to our hobby, serving as our club president and Board member for over 20 years. In addition to his passion for Wisconsin decoys, he was an avid duck, pheasant, goose and deer hunter. Some of his favorite moments were spent in the duck blind with his best hunting buddy, his yellow Labrador retriever, Spud.

Jack Wilkie March 31, 2022 – Jack was a long time member of the club and a fixture at our annual show. He was an avid hunter and collector of duck and fish decoys and was well known throughout the Midwest for his knowledge of old duck decoys, especially Ed "One Arm" Kellie decoys from his hometown of Monroe, Michigan.



Lynn Woodworth April 11, 2022 – Another long-time member, Lynn loved collecting duck decoys, sporting collectibles, and other oddities. Every April you could find him in Chicago for our annual decoy show, swapping stories with lifelong friends and sharing his love of collecting with son and member Kurt. Lynn was an avid bird hunter early in life, but as he grew older he enjoyed watching the birds on the window feeder even more.

2022 Show Report

The 55th North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show kicked off during the last week in April after a two-year, pandemic driven hiatus. Participants were clearly anxious to return to some sense of normalcy and the week did not disappoint.

Room-to-room trading actually began on Monday before the show had "officially" started, and most reports are that those early birds enjoyed brisk sales despite there being a limited number of folks on site. One fish dealer told us that he took in \$6,000 before the day was over.

As more members arrived on Tuesday and Wednesday the trading activity only got stronger. While the floors weren't necessarily bustling with people, it's clear that those who did participate had money in their pockets and buying on their minds. One dealer opened his room at 4pm on Wednesday, and sold seven waterfowl decoys netting over \$5000 in the first hour and half.

Thursday featured two educational seminars – one on the life and work of famed Michigan folk artist Oscar Peterson and the other discussing the legendary Elmer Crowell of Massachusetts. Both programs displayed a number of beautiful examples of each maker's work.

On Friday and Saturday, both the ballroom show and the Guyette & Deeter auction took place simultaneously. The close proximity of each venue allowed attendees to easily move between and enjoy the two events. In the ballroom, displays of antique powder tins and kegs, Hay's factory decoys, and Wisconsin gunning boxes offered attendees the chance to see a variety of excellent examples that reside in private collections. And the Member decoy contest featuring Blue-Winged Teal offered a look at some real beauties in both vintage and contemporary categories.

Details on all of the show activities are on the following pages.





Jeanette Kneebone of Muddy Water Decoys setting up shop



Steve Handevidt gets ready for the show

Ken Cole & Marty Hanson put the finishing touches on their display

Summer 2022

Member Displays

2022 featured three major sporting collectible displays: Hays Factory decoys, antique powder tins and related items, and what are known as Lake Poygan gunning boxes.

All three included a number of unique and seldom seen items.

Hays "True to Life" Decoys Take Center Stage

Led by club member Greg Renner, members of the Jefferson City Decoy Study Group displayed a large selection of J.M. Hays Wood Products Company decoys that told the fascinating story of the evolution of Hay's products from Mason "look-a-likes" to later unique forms and paint patterns. The display included a number of Mason decoys that demonstrated the key characteristic differ ences between these early Hays and later Mason products. The display also featured a Hays "Hickory Hitter," a wooden bumper the company supplied to the early automobile industry. Hays was so confident in this product, that in 1923 they promoted that if your Hickory Hitter broke, you'd get a new one for free!

Study Group members were on hand both Friday and Saturday to answer attendee questions and to discuss the specific phases in the evolution of the Hays product line over time. In addition to Renner, the following collectors also contributed pieces for the display: Jim Goodman, Randy Crawford, Frank Fiske, Ken Trayer, Jack Looney, Rod Smith. Many thanks to Greg and the group for sharing their knowledge and their spectacular collections.

Interesting to note that a contingent of the Study



Ken Trayer/Frank Fiske tour Hays/ Gundelfinger factory

Group made a stop in Jefferson City on their way home to visit the Missouri State Penitentiary, the site of the original Sullivan Saddle Tree Company factory building which preceded the Hays factory. They also got a look inside of the Hays/Gundelfinger factory complex and the Benz decoy factory building as part of the trip.



Hays Display



Greg Renner with Hays Display

Wisconsin Gunning Boxes Return

Once again club Director Emeritus Roger Ludwig and some friends brought a selection of what are often referred to as Lake Poygan gunning boxes. These inventive tools of the hunting trade represent folk art at its finest. Both useful and creative, these boxes often had a number of cubbies to house all kinds of hunting paraphernalia from shot shells to thermoses. Most have a cradle on top to help keep one's gun out of the water when not in use. The designs

themselves are as varied as the makers. Some are quite utilitarian while others carry artistic designs that were expressions of the marker's creative talents. One particularly remarkable box this year featured a beautifully carved duck on its hinged lid.

Thanks to Roger, Joe LeRoy, Kristin Lehmkuhl and Bill Claussen for lending pieces from their collections to this display.











Powder Tins and Kegs Debut

Board member Matt Bryant orchestrated a first-ever display of antique powder tins, kegs and related items dating from the mid 1800's to the early 1900's. Like their early shell box counterparts, powder companies such as Austin, Hazard, Laflin & Rand, American, Robin Hood and DuPont de Nemours all used colorful graphics and unique shapes to attract shoppers to their products on retailers' shelves. This one-of-a-kind display featured over 80 pieces, a number of which are among the rarest powder related items known. They certainly attracted the attention of many enthusiastic show goers throughout the two-day ballroom event.

Thanks to Matt Bryant, and to Joe & Donna Tonelli, Bill & Julie Rigsbee for sharing their impressive collections.

Summer 2022

Member Decoy Blue-Winged Teal Contests Feature a Flock of Amazing Entries

This year's Member Decoy Contest featured some great Blue-Winged Teal in both vintage and contemporary categories. Members could submit one entry, including pairs, in each group, and the quality and variety of the entries did not disappoint. Judges Phil Jones, Matt Bryant and Dave Kneebone had such a tough time choosing just one from among so many quality entries that they decided to select the top three submissions in each category.

Congratulations to all the winners and thanks to all show submitted entries for all to enjoy.



The Vintage Competition

was fierce as members entered birds from across North America including Ontario, Wisconsin, Illinois, New York and Connecticut. The results are as follows:



First Place:

Charles Schoenheider, Peoria, Illinois Owners: Joe and Donna Tonelli



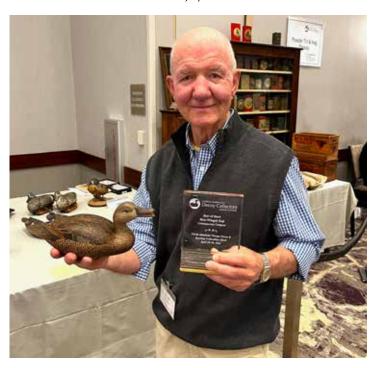
Second Place:

William Bowman (Bunn), Lawrence, Long Island, New York



Owner: Rusty Johnson

Third Place:George Warin, Toronto, Ontario
Owner: Marty Hanson



The Contemporary Contest

also featured a broad range of entries from the likes of Bill Gibian, Dick LeMaster, as well as carvings by club members Pat Gregory and Marty Hanson. Top decoys in this category:



First Place:

Harold Haertel, Dundee, Illinois Owner: Bob Bradley



Second Place:

Marty Hanson pair, Hayward, Wisconsin Owner: Dr. John Baillie



Third Place:

Bob White Pair,
Tullytown, Pennsylvania

Owner: Jim Baker

Seminars Provide Insight into Creative Icons





Oscar Peterson:

Michigan's Master Folk Artist

Jon Deeter, co-owner of auction firm Guyette and Deeter, and collector Pete Siggelko, a long-time student of Oscar Peterson's work, teamed up to talk about the history and identifying characteristics of the remarkable carvings of Cadillac, Michigan's most famous fish decoy maker and folk artist. The prolific Peterson is believed to have created more that 15,000 works of art that included not just fish decoys, but also duck decoys, lures, plaques, vases and other decorative items.

The presenters showed several previously unknown photos of the reclusive and diminutive (he was barely five feet tall) maker and displayed a number of his fish decoys and a beautiful fish plaque for attendees to view and discuss. Cadillac native and Peterson collector Jim Szabo was in the audience and added some local knowledge to the discussion.

The seminar also included an important discussion of Peterson "fakes" that have cropped up as prices for Peterson fish decoys climbed over the years. This display included a number of very well-done Peterson knock-offs that helped those in attendance better understand the identifying characteristics of authentic Peterson fish.

Thanks to Jon and Pete for sharing their knowledge. Pete was kind enough to provide the lion's share of the Peterson examples from his personal collection.

Elmer Crowell:

Legendary Maker Without Peer

Steve O'Brien, owner of Copley Fine Art Auctions, presented an entertaining and informative look at the life and times of decoy maker A.E. Crowell from East Harwich, Massachusetts. The seminar featured a display of beautiful examples of Crowell's work for attentive show goers to view. Steve's presentation covered Crowell's early fascination with ornithology and his career as a market gunner in the late 1800s. As the co-author of the book, "Elmer Crowell: Father of American Bird Carving," he brought a unique perspective to Crowell's work as a master carver.

There was a good deal of give and take as attendees were anxious to learn as much as possible about this iconic maker. This included a number of questions about the involvement of Elmer's son Cleon and how many pieces were likely by his hand rather than Elmer's. While the depth of Cleon's involvement is unclear, given the total volume of output over the years, one would conclude that Cleon did indeed have his hand in a number of pieces that came out of the Crowell shop. As questions in this area persisted, Steve eventually quipped, "Cleon who?" much to the delight of the audience.

Many thanks to Steve for giving his time to deliver this important and informative seminar. It certainly was appreciated by those in attendance.

Contemporary Carvers Show off their Talents

This year's Contemporary Corner in the Westin ballroom featured a number of today's master carvers who demonstrated the tricks of the trade to a group of attentive would-be decoy makers anxious to learn more. Thanks to Pat Gregory, Brian Ballard and Matt Frank for showing us all how it's really done.

While this activity is always a special treat at the show, these craftsmen also offered their working and decorative pieces for sale. There were many happy buyers who left with treasures under their arms.





Guyette & Deeter Auction Grosses \$3.5 Million

For the first time, Guyette & Deeter's spring auction was held on the same days as the club's ballroom show. A television monitor in the ballroom allowed attendees to track the auction in real time, so they could make the short walk to the auction venue to make their bids. This was the auction firm's first spring sale with a live audience since the April 2019 auction. The sale grossed \$3.5 million, 10% over the high estimate, with 92 lots selling for over \$10,000, 29 of which brought over \$25,000, and 7 over \$50,000. The top lot in the sale was an excellent black bellied plover from the Parker Whittimore rig carved by Elmer Crowell that brought \$69,000. Following closely behind the plover was a rare fish spearing decoy by Hans Janner that sold for \$66,000 and a rigmate pair of 1936 Ward Brothers mallards for the

same price.









John Munson (r) congratulates Dave Woldman (l) on his purchase

2019 Drawing Winner Returns To Claim Credit

At our last show in 2019, we conducted a drawing among show walk-ins as a way to generate show traffic and to capture their names and addresses for future follow-up. The winner received a \$100 credit to be used toward purchase of any item at the show the following year. Despite the long gap between shows, winner Dave Woldman of Lombard, Illinois returned this year and used his credit toward a special Barrows Goldeneye made by Iowa carver Jack Musgrove. The decoy was pictured on the cover of the March/April 2019 issue of Decoy Magazine as part of an article written by member John Munson. Jack's decoys were always individually bagged for transport to and from their hunts, resulting in the almost pristine condition of this block. Woldman, a relatively new collector, was just thrilled with his purchase and vowed to return next year to add to his flock.

MEMBER PROFILE:

Steve Peddicord:



Midwest Transplant Stays Close to his Roots



While he has lived in Arlington,
Texas since the early 80's, Steve
Peddicord's collecting interests
lie firmly in the Midwest. He was
born in small southern Illinois town
about 60 miles from St. Louis, and it
was his time there that had a huge
influence on his passion for all things
related to outdoors and history.

At the age of 9 or ten, his neighbor took him on his first duck hunting on the Kaskaskia River, a significant tributary to the Mississippi River. He immediately caught the bug, and found himself on the river chasing ducks and fishing for crappie and bass every chance he got. Steve loved living in the country and relishes the experiences he had there, where he learned to live by the tenet – "Eat what you shoot." The Kaskaskia River continues to be a major hunting and fishing resource in the area today.





Bert Stranz Mallards, Illinois River



Charles Perdew w/ Edna Paint, Peoria, IL, ca. 1930s



Robert Elliston Redhead, Bureau, IL, ca. 1890s

An Early Start

Steve bought his first decoy in 1976 at a small flea market in Champaign, Illinois. It was an unremarkable mallard drake in original paint made by the Pascagoula Decoy Co., but was missing an eye and the paint was pretty worn. He recalls that he bought it because he "just liked it." While his taste in decoys has certainly evolved since then, the decoy remains in his collection today, no doubt connecting him to the enjoyment of those early days hunting on the Kaskaskia.

This early purchase spawned a curiosity about decoys and their history that would become the norm for his future collecting. After the acquisition he searched for information about decoys that might help to unlock the mysteries of this early bird. Ever since then he has been fascinated by the stories about decoys and their makers, reading collector books, searching the internet and tapping

the knowledge of other collectors to understand what he refers to as the "when, how, where" of every bird he considers.

After this initial purchase, Steve did buy a few decoys in subsequent years. However, the demands of his business, an active family, and limited resources meant that he would not begin collecting seriously for almost 40 years – just five or six years ago.

His Decoy Education

When Steve was able to finally become more active, he took a very pragmatic approach, following his desire to learn as much as he could about these old relics. In addition to devouring information available online and in various collector books, Steve smiles as he admits that he has been blessed to have had several important mentors who have helped him greatly along the way. He credits these knowledgeable collectors with teaching him how to recognize repairs and to assess form and overall quality. In addition, they have helped him with what he refers to as his biggest challenge - recognizing original paint. In particular, he has taken to heart one important piece of advice - "focus on quality rather than quantity and buy the very best that you can afford."

Surprisingly, Steve has been able to assemble a terrific collection without going to many shows. Living in Texas simply does not



Skippy Bartow Decoys, Putnam, IL, ca. 1940s

Christie Brothers w/ WJC Brand, Au Gres, Michigan, ca. 1920s

provide many opportunities. However, he came to understand the value of shows and had intended to attend our first show in Lombard. As we all know, COVID prevented that from happening and he was shut out for two years. He was finally able to attend NADCA Board member Dave Kneebone's show in Utica, Illinois last year and followed that up with his very first trip to our show this past April. He was blown away by the experience and now has an even greater appreciation for the value of handling a variety of decoys and interacting with dealers and other collectors to learn as much as he can.

Steve greatly appreciates the help he has gotten along the way. He strongly believes in the importance of knowledge sharing and the kind of mentorship he has received as a way to bring newer collectors along and to grow the collecting hobby.

The Collection: Getting Back to his Roots

Like him, Steve's collection has its roots firmly in the Midwest, built primarily around decoys from Michigan, and the Illinois River area. It also includes a good selection of Mason factory decoys that he has found along the way.

The Illinois River group spans a wide range including the works of Robert Elliston, George "Skippy" Bartow, Charles Perdew, George Kessler, Wendell Smith, Fred Mott, Robert Weeks and others. In Steve's words, some of these have just "fallen in my





Otto Misch Black Duck, Weale, MI, ca. 1930s



Otto Misch Preening Black Duck, Weale, MI, ca. 1930s



Ben Schmidt Can Drake, Detroit, MI, ca. 1940s



Ben Schmidt Can, Detroit, MI, ca. 1940s



Bill Finkle Can, Saginaw Bay, MI, ca. 1920s



Garnet DeCou Hen Redhead, Marine City, MI, ca. 1930s



Mason Premier Mallard, Detroit, MI, ca. 1920s



Mason Bayback Model Bluebill, Detroit, MI, ca. 1915



Mason Painted Eye Black Duck, Detroit, MI, ca. 1915

lap." Not long ago, Steve bought a decoy from a man at a local flea market. During the transaction the seller told Steve about a friend of his who wanted to sell his entire collection. Steve jumped at the opportunity, made contact and eventually was able to buy a number of fine Illinois River birds. The two men now get together quite frequently and have become good friends.

His Michigan decoys include works by Ben Schmidt and highly regarded Saginaw Bay area makers such as Bill Finkle, Bill Finch, Otto Misch, and the Christie Brothers from Au Gres, Michigan. Steve says the work of Bernard, Henry and William Christie is among his favorites. His collection includes nine examples, five of which carry the "WJC" brand for William Christie, stamped on the bottom. Steve points out that in Bill Stout's book, "Saginaw Bay Waterfowl Hunting and Decoy Carvers," the author stated that he knew of only one decoy with this brand (see pg. 259). Now, with Steve's find, we know there are now at least six of these. Steve is particularly attracted to the story of the brothers, survivors who lived off the land and water like so many of our ancestors.

Steve recalls a number of years ago when he found another Michigan decoy, a hollow Goldeneye by Dannie Scriven from the "downriver" area near Detroit. While he liked it a lot, he put it on the shelf and really didn't think about it very much about it for a long time. Recently, he found himself perusing

through Lowell Jackson's and Clune Walsh's book "Waterfowl Decoys of Michigan and the Lake St. Clair Region" (page 135; Plate 178). To his delight, he discovered that his was the exact decoy pictured in the book. In talking to other Michigan collectors he has since learned that that Scriven would often sign and date a small piece of paper, fold it and place it in a plug beneath the keel of his decoys as a lasting record of his work. While he has not removed the keel on his Goldeneye to find out, he is intrigued by the possibility that his carries this little piece of decoy history as well.

A Collector at Heart

While finding decoys for his collection is his primary focus, Steve has also been a long time collector of Native American and related artifacts including stone arrowheads and scrappers used for separating meat and fat from animal hides. Steve reports that he began collecting arrowheads in his teenage years. Most of the pieces were found while quail and deer hunting throughout Texas. Among his most prized possessions is a Colt barrel likely lost by a soldier during the Indian Wars of the 1800s. Also included is a buffalo hunter's knife that likely dates to the early 1800s.

Just Getting Started

Steve has assembled quite a collection in a relatively short amount of time. He's anxious for more. His continuing study and growing network of collectors has exposed him to other areas that are beginning to pique his interest. In particular, he is now looking to expand into Louisiana decoys and decoys from Texas made by Charles "Red" Meitzen who carved in the 1950s and 60s. You can reach Steve at alwaysathomesteve@gmail.com.



Comanche arrowheads, scrapers



Colt barrel, buffalo hunter's knife, Native American scrappers, arrowheads

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