



NORTH AMERICAN
Decoy Collectors
ASSOCIATION

Summer 2023 Newsletter

Another Successful Show in Lombard

As assuredly as spring follows winter, the North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles show takes place during the last full week in April. This year one of the most ambitious agendas ever was packed full of activities every day. In addition to brisk room-to-room activity, a premier auction and ballroom sales event, multiple decoy displays, educational seminars, and silent auctions meant that there was truly something to satisfy the interests of virtually every collector.

A significant promotion plan designed to drive more walk-in traffic to the ballroom on Friday and Saturday resulted in a year-over-year increase in attendance both days. Most dealers reported brisk sales and many attendees left with new prizes under their arms.

If you weren't able to attend this year, this newsletter provides a look at the entire event. We hope you enjoy it. And it's not too soon to start planning to attend next year's show taking place April 23-27, 2024, once again at the Westin Chicago Lombard hotel.

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Discover • Preserve • Celebrate

NORTH AMERICAN DECOY COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION

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WHO WE ARE

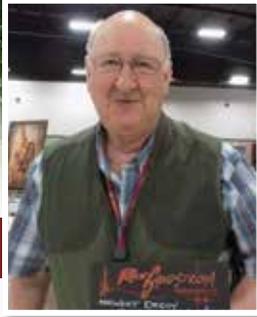
The **North American Decoy Collectors Association** is a nonprofit, educational organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. It invites membership to all persons. The purpose of North American Decoy Collectors is to foster the hobby of decoy collecting by attracting new collectors, 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



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Thank you for your tremendous support for our 2023 event. The energy was great as we all appreciated the opportunity to gather and celebrate.

We all recognized that the hotel struggled a bit getting us into our rooms. Post - COVID staffing is challenging, and we experienced that as room cleaning was slower than we expected. Regardless, we occupied over 200 rooms and more than 700 room nights. By Tuesday afternoon the activity in the rooms was strong and it built through the week.

My post-show calls showed a tremendous result, as most went home with new items in their collections. One of my favorite conversations included this quote, "If you didn't have fun at Lombard, you just don't know how to have fun!" Our membership was engaged from early breakfast rendezvous to late-night discussions about the duck season and favorite decoys. The auction room was full, something we haven't seen since COVID. People were happy to see their friends and get reconnected. The opportunity to learn set a new standard, as demonstrated by the three educational seminars and multiple collectibles displays.

Our financial status is strong, and membership is rebuilding after the lull from the COVID environment. We are continuing our post-show analysis and outreach as we know we must keep adapting and improving. Your perspective is important, and we

appreciate your input to help us create more success. The market is strong and growing as we see the increased activity on the internet. We aim to help educate and network the collecting community to develop more informed collectors.

Membership has to be our top priority, and we will review all of our activities to ensure that we continue to provide top-notch value to engage more collectors. We need the many regional activities to succeed, but we know we can do more together to build collaboration. Matt Bryant and Dave Kneebone are leading our efforts to refocus and grow our membership. Please contact one of them if you have ideas or to volunteer to help the effort.

Our society and the collecting community have recently lost several knowledgeable and dedicated collectors. Dave Fannon, Ted Harmon, and Roger Ludwig are sorely missed. Our condolences go out to the families and friends of these talented collectors. We are grateful for their contributions and spirit.

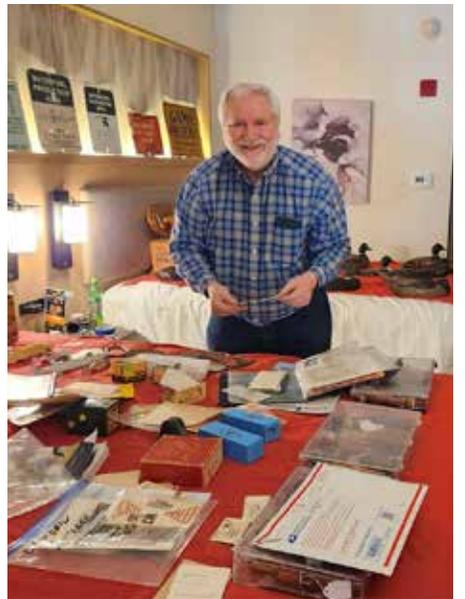
We enjoyed a wonderful gathering this year, and it was fun to see everyone again. It was very busy, but the interest was strong. I know as I am still sending items headed to new homes and getting calls from people excited about new discoveries.

Have a great summer, and best wishes for Happy Collecting!-

Rick



It's All Smiles in Lombard



Member News

Membership Continues to Grow

The decoy collecting community seems to be experiencing robust growth if our growing roster of members is any indication. Since we last published a list of new members in the fall, we've had over 40 members join the club. It's remarkable that the diversity in terms of collecting interests and geographic scope continues to expand as we grow.

You'll see that our most recent members hail from Maine to California. We even had three new members come

down from Manitoba to attend our show. And you'll see that their collecting interests are as varied as their geography including sporting art, shotguns, advertising, Native American artifacts, contemporary decoys, and so much more. Please welcome these new members and be sure to reach out to them if they share your passion for a particular collectible area.

Welcome Member News

Tom Behr

Linden, MI
Shot shell boxes

James Beers

Eagan, MN
Illinois River, Eastern shore; Rare species ducks, geese, shorebirds

Bradley Bomkamp

Loves Park, IL
Trapshooting and shotgun/ammunition collectibles

Patricia Bowers

Gainesville, FL
Upper Chesapeake Bay, Eastern Shore MD & VA decoys

Tony Cappozo

Sun Prairie, WI
Old wooden duck decoys

Salvatore Cardinale

Cameron Park, CA
Decoys

Chris Creger

Chicago, IL
Bluebills, diving ducks

Andrew Cummings

Clinton, MO
Woodson Roddy, Missouri factory, Chincoteague, Upper Bay decoys

Bill Deoudes

N. Potomac, MD
Chesapeake Bay, Maryland decoys

Scott Dowdakin

Sleepy Hollow, IL
Lacon, IL area carvers

Chris Edwards

Florence, SC
Primarily Cameron McIntyre contemporary birds

Raymond Egan

Boothbay, ME
Decoys and camp accessories

Jim Erickson

Janesville, WI
Koshkonong decoys

Stewart Funderburg

Springfield, IL

Francis Giuliani

Traverse City, MI

Dennis Hays

Jackson, TN

Brad Hill

Huntsville, AL
Canvasback decoys

Walter Hartsfield

Fruithurst, AL
Carving, collecting, shows

Allan Hunter

Redwood, NY
St. Lawrence River, New York and Ontario decoys

Frederick Kopshinsky

Malone, WI

Steve Kovatch

Avon, OH
Canadian decoys – Lake St. Clair to Long Point; Michigan decoys – Lake St. Clair

John Johnson, III

Virginia Beach, VA
Mason, Dodge, Petersen & Back Bay, Currituck Sound battery decoys, ESVA, McIntyre, McNair, and Pete Peterson decoys

Don Lagimodiere

Winnipeg, MB
Decoys

Julian Marsh

Marianna, FL
Sporting art, all forms; Decoys, calls, etc.

Karl Marx, Jr.

Quakertown, PA
Decoys, vintage sporting art & collectibles

Charles McKelly, Jr.

Hershey, PA
Wildlife mounts, ship models

Ben Mense

Poplar Bluff, MO
Jefferson City, MO decoys – Gundelfinger, Benz, Hays

Carl Felix Miller

St. Louis, MO
Jefferson City, MO and Illinois River decoys

Terry Neufeld

Portage La Prairie, MB

Merle North

Beloit, WI
Old duck decoys; Redwing stoneware

Randy Orme

Red Oak, IA

Larry Pavlou

Wheaton, IL

Tim Reeves

Dongola, IL

Todd Reid

Houston, TX
Working decoys, Duck calls

Stephen Rich

N. Easton, MA
New England, New Jersey, Canadian Maritimes decoys; Contemporary & vintage decoys; miniatures; Fish decoys; Hunting & fishing accessories

S. Richardson

Winnipeg, MB
Canadian decoys

Woody Rue

Cambridge, MD
Investment and enjoyment of the skill of the carver

Cooper Rossner

St. Michaels, MD
Decoys and sporting art

Steve Schindler

Bartonville, IL
Mike Borrett decoys

Dan Scollins

Lincolndale, NY

Albert Seeno, Jr.

Concord, CA

Rob Simpson

Winnipeg, MB

Bob Stewart

Dalton, GA
Old working duck decoys

Gary Tate

Kankakee, IL

Tom Trychta

Chicago, IL
Colt single action; Early western leather; Western art & antiques; American Indian items

David Wahl

Sterling, IL
Side by sides; Decoys, Advertising, Bronze's; Artwork

Robert Wilson

Willoughby, OH
Working duck and fish decoys

Matt Zulz

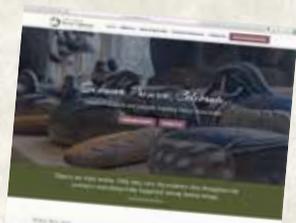
Wenona, IL

Michael Zelkowski

Essexville, MI

New Club Website Promotes Easy Engagement

After just several months since its launch the Club's new website is already providing easy access to current and new members alike. Over 100 collectors have used the new online dues payment tool to renew their membership or have joined for the first time, using a credit card just like any other online purchase. The new design provides easy navigation allowing members and other visitors, regardless of their experience level, to quickly find content that is of interest to them. In addition to "must read" show news, it includes a raft of information to help enhance every collector's enjoyment of the hobby. We will be adding new content and additional capabilities to the site in the coming months, so check in often to see what's new at www.nadecoycollectors.org.



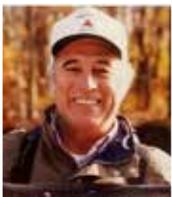
Facebook Group Flourishes

Membership in the club's Facebook group has now grown to 300. 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.



In Memoriam:

We are saddened to report that the decoy community lost of three of the "greats" this year. The loss of their deep involvement and consistent presence in our hobby will certainly leave a void that cannot be filled. R.I.P. gentlemen.



Dave Fannon: Dave passed away in March at the age of 87. He was a fixture at our show for years and was a passionate collector of and dealer in a variety of wonderful items, in recent years focusing on Oscar Peterson fish decoys and plaques. His collection was believed by many to be the finest group of Peterson carvings anywhere. Always a pleasure to be around, Dave will surely be missed.



Ted Harmon: Ted passed away in May of this year. Since 1986, Ted and his wife Judy have owned Decoys Unlimited, one of the pioneering auction houses dealing in decoys and related collectibles, bringing many iconic pieces to market over the years. Ted started collecting at 14 years of age, and was considered by many to be the hobby's leading expert on Elmer Crowell decoys. He has owned some of the very best decoys made by the East Harwich, MA master decoy maker. We all send Judy and the family our sincere condolences.



Roger Ludwig: Roger passed away in June. He was a long-time member of the club and a member of the Board of Directors for many years, and continued to provide counsel as a Director Emeritus after leaving the Board several years ago. Roger was an avid collector of old Wisconsin decoys and organized a display of Lake Poygan shooting boxes at the show for a number of years. He was a great ambassador for our hobby including hosting the annual Oshkosh show for over 30 years. Always a gentleman and a calm voice of reason, Roger will be sorely missed by the NADCA Board and the many friends in the collecting community he met along the way.

2023 Show Report

This year's 56th North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show was held for the second time at the Westin Chicago Lombard Hotel in Lombard, Illinois, April 25-29, 2023.

By all accounts, it was a great success with well over 110 dealers selling out of their rooms and in the ballroom on Friday and Saturday. While the event doesn't "officially" start until Tuesday, some arrived as early as Sunday to make sure that they didn't miss any opportunity to buy and sell. Most dealers reported "good" to "great" sales. While some said they sold more out of their rooms, many told us that their mix was about 50-50 room vs. ballroom. A good trend as the general feeling was that traffic in the ballroom was up from prior years.

The week was filled with a variety of activities that included three seminars (the most ever at one show), featuring Koshkonong and Sibley waterfowl decoys, as well as Lake St. Clair fish decoys. Complementary displays of Koshkonong and Sibley decoys allowed for even more exposure and understanding of these

fascinating pieces. A display of Wisconsin gunning boxes was also featured.

This year's decoy contest featured vintage and contemporary Bufflehead decoys and members entered some terrific pieces. As usual, contemporary carvers offered their work and demonstrated their carving and painting techniques during the ballroom show.

Also, for the first time ever we conducted a door prize drawing on Friday and Saturday. Hourly drawings were conducted both days with winners receiving \$50 to be applied to any show purchase. This certainly added to the excitement and energy in the ballroom, and provided contact information for future marketing efforts.

What follows is a more detailed look at the week's key happenings as a reminder to those who were there as well as for all of those who weren't able to attend. If you weren't there, you missed a good one! It's never too late to start planning for next year's show at the Westin, April 23-27, 2024.



Displays & Seminars Enlighten Show Attendees

This year's featured displays and educational seminars offered an in-depth look into three fascinating areas of collectible decoys. Two involved waterfowl decoys with origins that have long been shrouded in mystery. The third subject area featured a unique group of fish decoys, some of which have become the most sought after pieces in the entire fish decoy category. Many thanks to all of those who contributed to furthering our collective knowledge about these important collectibles.

Lake St. Clair Fish Decoys

On Wednesday morning, Jon Deeter, Co-Owner of Guyette & Deeter, Inc, discussed the incredible fish decoys of southeast Michigan's Lake St. Clair. This well-attended seminar included a review of significant makers along with biographies and many excellent examples of their work. This included Hans Janner, Andy Trombly, Ken Bruning, Ted Vandenbosche, Abe DeHate, Percore Fox and more. These pieces came from the collection of George and Mariam Van Wallegghem as well as several other prominent collectors. Many of the Van Wallegghem fish were subsequently sold in Guyette & Deeter's Thursday-Friday sale, bringing prices that demonstrated their enormous appeal (see our auction report later in this newsletter).

In addition to discussion of the makers, Jon also spoke briefly about some of the early Michigan pickers who "discovered" these beautiful fish and brought them to collectors' attention. These included well-known collectors such as Gerry Adams, Jerry Catana, Ron Swanson, Ed De Navarre, Jim Foote and Frank Baron.

The seminar offered a good deal of give and take with experienced fish decoy collectors and novices alike joining in.



Presenter Jon Deeter discusses remarkable Hans Janner decoy.



Fish decoy collector/dealer Pete Siggelko takes a closer look.

Lake Koshkonong Decoys

The history associated with decoys from the area around Wisconsin's Lake Koshkonong has been one of continuing discovery. Thanks to the tireless work of early collectors such as Bob Lehmkuhl, and this year's seminar presenters, Board member Al Steffen, and Bill and Alyssa Sands, today we know a good deal more about these enigmatic birds that ever before.

The seminar on Thursday morning was truly a team effort. Steffen started by providing an overview of the history of hunting and decoy use on the lake. Alyssa Sands spoke about the area Clubs and some of the famous members who once belonged in the mid to late 19th century. Bill Sands then offered a "look under the hood" of Koshkonong decoys, including a discussion of X-rays revealing their unique construction. Bill explained how

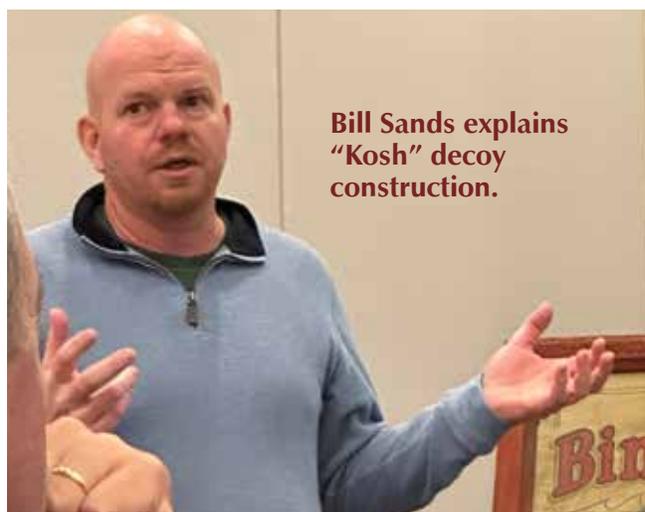
to date these birds from the type of hardware used, then compared and contrasted "Kosh" decoys to Maryland decoys, which clearly influenced their Wisconsin brethren.

The Lake Koshkonong display in the ballroom was made up of decoys from the collections of the presenters along with representative decoys from the Kristin Lehmkuhl, Danny Coombs and John Fandrey collections. Beautifully designed period signage was provided by another Koshkonong enthusiast and talented artist, Janesville's own Kurt Buggs. This display was truly a sight to behold.

Alyssa Sands is currently compiling material from collectors and various historical societies about hunting activity in the area, which she hopes to develop into a book in the future. Be sure to watch for it.



Al Steffen orients the audience to waterfowling on Lake Koshkonong



Bill Sands explains "Kosh" decoy construction.



Beautiful signage created by Kurt Buggs

Sibley Decoys

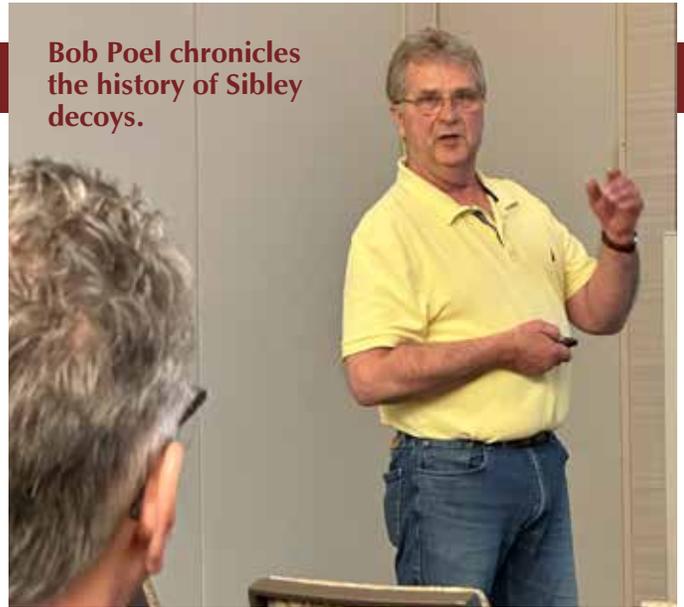
In a Thursday afternoon seminar, member Bob Poel delighted the crowd with a deep dive into the history and evolution of Sibley factory decoys. For many years the Sibley decoy was attributed to a "Mr. X," a moniker given to these unique birds by early collector Joe French in the 1950s. The only decoy known to be made with a hardwood inserted bill, the Sibley decoys were eventually found to have been manufactured by Sibley & Co. of Whitehall, Michigan. Production began in 1899 and only continued for about a decade.

Poel chronicled the story of Sibley decoys from beginning when John Sibley first made "pre-factory" birds utilizing various inserted bills, and lead paint which was used as an interior. These early birds were followed by George Sibley's factory decoys produced in Whitehall, Michigan. Bob also used two halves of a decoy to demonstrate the terraced routing use to hollow out the decoys along with the iron weight placed inside.

The ballroom display presented the history of the Sibley decoy in a graphic and easy to understand way. Each period was supported by a well-crafted poster that explained the significance of each example on display from John B. Sibley's work through George Sibley's factory pieces. The display also showed examples of early Sibley advertising as well as decoys from George and John's personal hunting rig complete with the bell-shaped Sibley anchor.

All in all, this informative discussion and follow-up display surely shed new light on these unique decoys for all who attended the show.

Bob Poel chronicles the history of Sibley decoys.



Contemporary

THE CONTEMPORARY CORNER IS ALWAYS A HIT



Brian Ballard explains the finer points of decoy making to an attentive fan.

CORNER

As every year, the talents of today's master decoy makers were on full display at this year's show. Many contemporary carvers offered their latest creations for sale at the show, including accomplished makers such as Ben Heinemann, Marty Hanson, Cameron McIntyre and Josh Brewer. Several were kind enough to share their artistic talents with the appreciative crowd in attendance. Brian Ballard, Mike Zelkowski and Pat Gregory all graciously spent time demonstrating their individual carving and painting techniques much to the delight of an avid group of fledgling decoy makers. They surely learned a thing or two to take back to their carving benches. Many thanks to all who shared their knowledge.

BELOW: Pat Gregory explains his painting technique to Dean Dashner



LEFT: Mike Zelkowski shows off his carving skills



Member Decoy Contest Features a Great Group of “Butterballs”

This year’s Member Contest featured Bufflehead decoys. These diminutive birds are always a treat to see, and this year’s contest was a feast for the eyes as these vintage and contemporary examples delighted the attendees. The competition featured a number of great entries, giving contest judges Dan Coombes, Ken Cole and Dennis Entwistle a tough task ahead.

In the vintage category, there were a variety of very worthy entries. In the end it was an Elmer Crowell bird owned by Rusty and Dianna Johnson that took the first place prize, followed by a rare Bufflehead with applied wings made by Frank Buchner owned by Dick McIntyre. Marty Hanson’s unknown Ontario decoy took third place.

In the contemporary category, the first two places were both taken by decoys made by Marty Hanson. Dr. John Ballie’s pair of Hanson decoys nosed out another pair owned by Carter Stenberg. Third place went to a neat little bird by an unknown maker.

Congratulations to all of the winners and thanks to all who brought their favorite Buffleheads to the competition.

The Vintage Category

The Contemporary Category



First Place:
Elmer Crowell
East Harwick, MD



First Place:
Marty Hanson
Hayward, WI



Second Place:
Frank Buchner
Erie, PA



Second Place:
Marty Hason
Hayward, WI



Third Place:
Unknown
Ontario



Third Place:
Unknown

Guyette & Deeter Auction Report



The Guyette & Deeter annual sale at our show was a strong one, grossing over \$3.5 million and setting 10 new world carver records. The sale was headlined by duck and fish decoys from the George and Miriam Van Wallegem collection. The auction also featured the fine collection of Wisconsin decoys from Herb Desch, long time active member and past president of the NADCA. A rare black duck by the Caines Brothers sold for \$102,000.”

The top lot was a large fish by Michigan’s Hans Janner out of the Van Wallegem collection that sold for \$168,000, surpassing the previous world record for the maker by over \$50,000. Also out of the Van Wallegem collection, an extremely rare pair of Nate Quillen teal sold for \$81,000, also a world record. The Desch collection also resulted in four world records — for decoys made by Joseph Sieger (\$40,800), Walter Lowery (\$27,000), Gus Moak (\$26,400) and Russell Barry (\$10,200). A rare black duck by the Caines Brothers sold for \$102,000.

\$168,000



\$102,000



\$81,000



\$26,400



MEMBER PROFILE:

Scott Whittington

NORTH AMERICAN
Decoy Collectors
ASSOCIATION

DECOYS ARE SIMPLY PART OF HIS DNA



Scott Whittington holding an early Mallard drake attributed to Charles Schoenheider, or by an unknown Illinois River maker; Jen Whittington with a dove that Scott made for her as a Valentine's Day gift, and a Mason shorebird that carried an engagement ring in a leather satchel around its neck during his marriage proposal.

Growing up in central Illinois, Scott Whittington did what seemingly every young boy in that part of the country did.

He spent most of his time in the outdoors. At an early age he learned to fish on the canal across the street from his house, and hunted pheasant with his dad and his pals, almost before he could even lift a gun. This eventually led to bow hunting for deer and elk, and then duck and turkey hunting with Jen. While this certainly helped feed Scott's eventual interest in collecting, it was his early encounters with decoys and decoy making during visits to his great aunt and great uncle's home that planted the seed for what would become a passion that would blossom much later in life.

After all, that great uncle was none other than Hector "Heck" Whittington, one of the Illinois River area's highly regarded master decoy makers of the 20th century. Scott recalls going over to Uncle Heck and Aunt Marie's house, spending all of his time in their basement looking at decoys in various stages of finish.



Art Levernier Sr. Mallard, Northbrook, IL



Henry Holmes Mallards, Bureau, IL, ca. early 20th cent.



Perry Wilcoxen, Liverpool, IL, ca. 1920s



David and George Barnhart Bluebills, Canton, IL, ca. late 19th cent.



Scott with Great Uncle Heck

Heck emigrated from England in 1907 to Ogelsby, Illinois as a child. He would later meet several local decoy makers including the Koehler brothers and Herman Rietgraf. Heck learned the craft from them, initially making decoys for his own use and later selling them commercially. Stylistically, it's likely that Heck would have

looked at a Charles Walker decoy along the way, but his best decoys were the ones he carved based on communications with and patterns from Charles "Shang" Wheeler of Stratford, Connecticut. Click on this link for a terrific article about Heck written by collector/historian Donna Tonelli.

<https://edecoy.org/whit.html>.

Early Collecting

Growing up, Scott remembers that his grandparents had some of Heck's later model decoys around the house, but it wasn't until he was in his 30's that he got a few as gifts, along with some of the maker's patterns. While he appreciated these gifts, he says that he didn't fully appreciate what he had. It did, however, spark an interest in collecting old working decoys. He started with old paper-mache birds. He didn't really know much about wooden working decoys and the paper birds were inexpensive and relatively easy to find. He eventually amassed a group of about 40 paper decoys, including a number of near mint examples of very rare species. However, the demands of starting his own real estate com-



Jacob Keefer, Bath, IL (front); John Warren, Liverpool, IL (back), both ca. late 1800s



Unknown Illinois River Blue-Winged Teal.



Henry Ruggles Mallards, Henry, IL, ca. 1890s



John Warren Canvasback, Liverpool, IL, ca. late 1800s



Otto Garren, Canton, IL, ca. 1940s

pany specializing in rural land sales took him away from collecting for almost 15 years.

Starting Again

During his "time out" Scott stayed connected by reading about decoys in available books, catalogs and magazines. This would eventually spark a keen interest in old, wood decoys rather than the paper pieces he had started to collect year prior. In particular, he remembers that when he first saw a photo of an Elmer Crowell decoy in a Guyette & Deeter auction

catalog he was struck by the rich history and value associated with birds like this. He was captivated by the artistic talent evident in these hand-made relics relative to the paper decoys that were still sitting on his shelves.

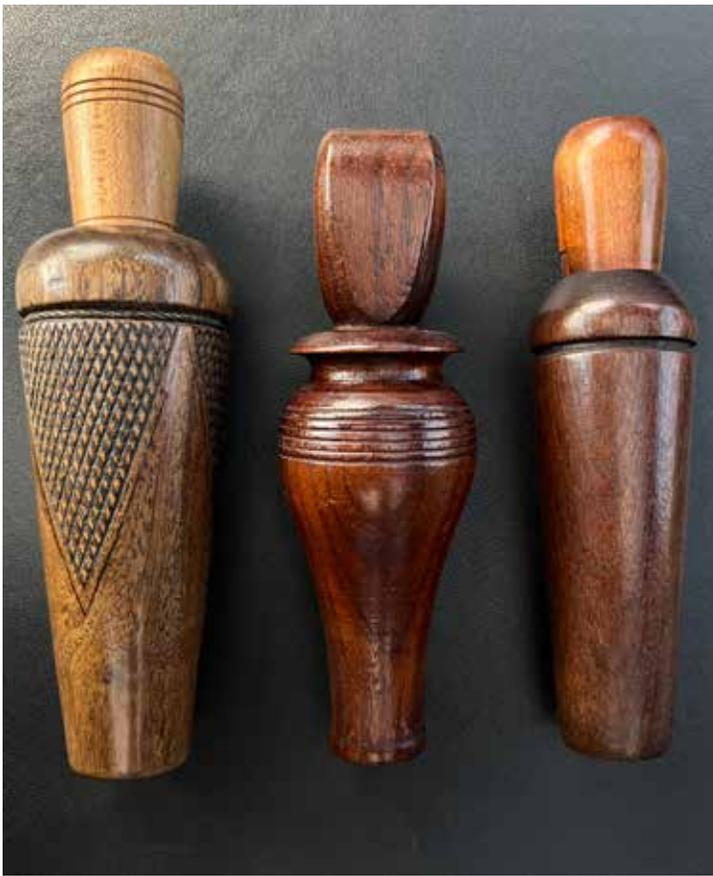
With this new insight in hand, Scott went to his first decoy show in 2018 at Pheasant Run. He started modestly with factory makers. His first acquisition was a "beat up" Victor canvasback, and he eventually assembled a group that included decoys made by Sperry, Gundelfinger, Poitevin,



Call Collection



Joseph Victor Glodo call, ca. late 1800s



(l-r) Johnny Marsh (TN), John Morrow (TN), Rexroat Brothers (IL)



Jen's Wall: Various owls, crows, doves, pigeons, coots

and various Pascagoula makers. Like so many "new" collectors, he was all about buying quantity over quality, although he was able to acquire a number of rarer species by these factories.

Education Leads to Evolution

As he continued to rabidly consume information through books and internet searches, he also relied heavily upon contacts he

made at shows, taking full advantage of their willingness to share their collections and make introductions to other collectors throughout the Midwest. Scott is quick to acknowledge the many

collectors who helped him along the way. However, he credits Heck Whittington collector Richard Ellis with “opening his eyes to better decoys.” He met Ellis at the grand opening of the decoy exhibit at the Peoria Riverfront Museum and, because of his interest in his great uncle’s decoys, the connection with Ellis was a natural one. Ellis was very gracious in his willingness to share his collection and broad knowledge about working decoys with Scott. As a result, it didn’t take Scott long to migrate from factory decoys to collecting hand-carved birds made by individual carvers.

The Collection Takes Form

Like so many less experienced collectors, Scott initially bought whatever wood decoys that caught his eye regardless of their origin. This included an early redhead drake made by John “Daddy” Holly of Havre de Grace, Maryland. As his collecting continued to evolve, he quickly began to focus more narrowly on decoys from the Illinois River area, which connected him to his Midwest roots and his time hunting and fishing on the Illinois River. Today, the collection includes a number of great examples from the likes of Charles Perdew, Robert Elliston, Henry Ruggles, John Warren, Henry Holmes, Otto Garren, the Wilcoxins and Barnhart brothers and, of course, a few made by his great uncle, Heck. He did keep that Daddy Holly redhead, insisting that he “just had to because of the depth of the rich



Chas. Perdew Crows, Henry, IL, ca. 1930s



Mason Black-bellied Plovers, Detroit, MI, ca. 1910s

waterfowling history out east.”

While Scott admits that he’s “still trying to figure out what he likes” (aren’t we all?), he now gravitates toward the earliest Illinois makers. As such, he considers his pair of turn-of-the-century Henry Ruggles mallards as a “favorite” in his flock. He admires Ruggles paint and form, noting that he carved specifically to mimic each individual species, rather than creating a standard block, only delineating the type of duck through paint patterns.

In addition to waterfowl decoys, Scott has assembled a considerable

collection of duck calls as well.

These include examples made by Illinois River area makers such as Tom Rosberry, H.A. Mansker, Morgan Leader, Rexroat Brothers, and George Singley. He also has a few non-Illinois calls by the likes of Oscar Quam from Minneapolis, and Johnny Marsh and John Morrow from Tennessee.

Scott’s favorite among these is a pre-1900 piece made by Victor Glodo of Jackson County, Illinois. He says it has the best checkering on the barrel that he has ever seen. It was this call that really got him started on that facet of his col-



Miniature Collection including Heck Whittington, Perry Wilcoxin, Otto Garren



Mr Z for George G. Bussey & Co., Ltd., London

lecting journey. He recalls that it was just a couple years ago that he ran across the Glodo call that an acquaintance was wanting to sell. He hadn't really planned to collect calls at that point but he recalls being blown away by its beauty and the artistic talent it must have taken to create such a piece. But alas, he wasn't quite ready to make the leap into collecting calls.

That said, he had read articles by Ryan Graves discussing Glodo and his calls so Scott reached out to him to see if he would be interested in it. Ryan and the seller came to terms. After that, Scott stayed in touch with Ryan and

learned more about these early pieces. About a year later, Ryan reached out to see if Scott would be interested in the Glodo, and he just couldn't resist. Scott remains very appreciative of that opportunity, and it fueled the desire for a more of like caliber on his shelf.

A Family Affair

Having accompanied Scott to shows and on visits to other collectors in his quest to build his collection, his wife Jen caught the bug along the way. Initially she was attracted to minis, which she playfully referred to as "babies," and her own collection began to take form. From there she added shorebirds, English pigeons, crows, doves, owls and sporting art to the mix, in addition to Mason factory shorebirds and teal decoys. Her current collection features crows by Charles Perdew, miniatures by Otto Garren, Perdew and the Bush family, as well as English pigeons from variety if well-known makers including Trulock & Harriss,

Robert Lange, William Jaggard, and Mr. "Z" from George G. Bussey & Co., Ltd. in London. All are displayed beautifully in their home alongside Scott's collection.

Just the Beginning

It is remarkable that the Whittington's have assembled such significant collections in such a short period of time -- just over five years! In addition to the birds, a selection of 6 & 8 gauge percussion waterfowling shotguns, and a rare skiff, one of only six made by Virgil Lashbrook, are also in the fold. Scott continues to look for early Illinois River decoys as well as an Edward "Doll" Emerick call to add to his collection. Jen is always looking to add more Mason shorebirds and blue-winged teal, and any other unique items that catch her eye. If they continue to add pieces to their collections at their current pace, it won't be long before they'll be looking for more space!

Scott and Jen can be reached at scott@landguys.com.



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