



NORTH AMERICAN
Decoy Collectors
ASSOCIATION
Summer 2024 Newsletter

Annual Gathering Another Big Success

Every year in late April collectors from across North America come to the North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show to reconnect with old friends and with hopes of picking up a thing or two for their collections. This year, attendees were treated to a number of special experiences that will likely not be matched any time soon. From sale of the first round of the spectacular Alan and Elaine Haid collection to the immense talents of Josh Brewer, and Adam Grimm along with his daughter Madison, this year's show was truly a celebration of artistry and the history of uniquely American folk art.

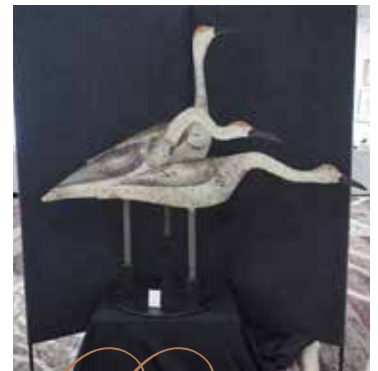
In addition, showgoers were treated to an entertaining seminar, multiple sporting collectible

displays, and seemingly endless opportunities to add pieces to their collections, regardless of their particular area of interest.

If you missed the show this year, it's not too early to start making plans to attend the 2025 show in Lombard, scheduled for April 22-26. In the meantime, you'll find a complete report on this year's show in the pages that follow here.

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Discover • Preserve • Celebrate

NORTH AMERICAN DECOY COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION

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WHO WE ARE

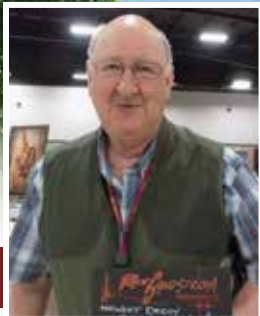
The **North American Decoy Collectors Association** is a nonprofit, educational organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. It invites membership to all persons. The purpose of North American Decoy Collectors is to foster the hobby of decoy collecting by attracting new collectors, 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 all the support that allowed us to enjoy a splendid gathering in 2024. It was a great combination of fun and success, and your unique contributions and perspectives were instrumental in creating an event that was truly appreciated by all.

Several things created the exceptional quality our attendees appreciated.

First, we have figured out how to work with the hotel more efficiently, allowing for better room placements and density. Every room from floors two through six was filled with our members. Many rooms had three different occupants during the week. It takes a lot of work to build the puzzle that is the room plan because of so many variables, but it is worth the effort. Our hotel relationship is maturing, and we can now balance and leverage all of the activities during the week, allowing us to control expenses.

Next was the Guyette & Deeter auction preview, which set a new standard as they created a museum-quality environment with great display design and lighting. Everyone who attended this commented on the outstanding environment that this produced. Jon and Zac deserve our deepest gratitude for this accomplishment. It was a hit! We have all wondered how the internet would impact our activities, but this environment demonstrated that there is no substitute for seeing and handling a decoy in person and being able to look at it from different perspectives.

Our educational opportunities were the best we have been able to produce to date. It began with the seminar discussion of the Haid collection journey and continued throughout the event as we created various displays at the show.

Room-to-room activity was active by Monday, and the week produced outstanding results. The hotel restaurant was busy every night as members took the opportunity to enjoy the social environment.

I must express my deepest gratitude to Katie Burke and the DU team. Their on-site presence and dedication to capturing content for our outreach programs were invaluable. Our collaboration with them has been a true pleasure, and we are grateful for the opportunity to share in their mission to engage a wider audience.

Our club is positioned for long-term success. Our financial position is solid, we are attracting new members, and our value is building and being appreciated. We have adapted to the post-COVID market, and beautiful collections are becoming available. It's a great time to be a collector, as I know of many items that have been in private collections for over 50 years, and will soon come to market.

Many work hard to create our success. Thank you! Please continue to engage more people and think of ways to improve. Membership, communication, and attendance all help immensely. Support your local shows, as they are critical to engaging new people.

We have proven we are better together. Our 2024 event was a clear demonstration of that. Everyone is welcome; it does not matter what decoy brings you joy! This great American Folk Art is a real treasure; we are just beginning to understand its value. It's a joy that these things bring us together to celebrate.

My Best to all of you. Stay strong!

Rick



Showtime is Always a Great Time





Membership Continues to Grow

Again this year, we have enjoyed a surge in our member rolls that is both good for our organization and underscores the strength in the decoy and sporting collectibles market. Since our last newsletter, we've added 67 new members to the club. They come from all over America and Canada, and bring with them a broad range of collecting interests, from fish decoys and lures to eel spears and sporting art, and everything in between. Please welcome our new members listed on the next page.

Treasurer's Report: Club is Healthy as Ever

\$ With the 2024 NADCA Show in the books, club Treasurer Kurt Woodworth is happy to report that the club is on very solid financial footing. The last few years have been particularly challenging, as we've gone through a pandemic, transitioned to a new event location, and experienced inflation in the cost of our services. Despite these headwinds, we are doing very well as we've successfully balanced revenues with expenses.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- › Membership remains strong & we are attracting new members
- › Annual show participation has normalized post-pandemic
- › Completed a special project to update and modernize our website
- › Cash position has increased slightly over the prior year

As we look to the future, your Board will continue to explore methods to attract new members and drive traffic to our annual show, while ensuring that we maintain our strong financial position as we enter the planning period for the show next April, and for years to come.

Your dues are essential in running the organization, producing newsletters, our member directory, and promoting and hosting our annual show. Thank you for your membership and continued support.

Directory Update to Mail Early 2025

All members in good standing should have received their 2024-25 Member Directory earlier this year. It's a great tool for networking with other members, as well as providing valuable collector information.

We will be issuing an update in early 2025, adding members who have joined the club since the current Directory was printed this past March. Now is the time to make sure that your listing is still correct. As part of our 2025 update, we will include any current member updates that we receive by the end of this year. So, if you have any changes, please send them to Jeff Seregny at jseregny@gmail.com and we'll be sure to include them in the update.

Katie Burke Hosts NADCA Members in DU Podcast Series



Member Katie Burke, Curator of the Ducks Unlimited Waterfowling Heritage Center in Memphis, Tennessee, has been hosting a continuing series of podcasts, during which she explores a variety of topics including decoy and call collecting, duck hunting, decoy making, wildlife art and more. This ongoing series has featured a number of our members including Board member and Illinois River decoy collector Dave Kneebone, Wisconsin collector John Fandrey, Louisiana collector Bruce Lowe, as well as call and decoy collector Rick Milligan, who has loaned a part of his call collection for display at the Pyramid in Memphis. She also recently hosted podcasts with carver Josh Brewer and artist Adam Grimm who were both featured artists at our show in April.

These far-ranging interviews are fascinating looks at how and why these folks became so passionate about their particular areas of interest and are really worth a listen. Click here to check them out:

<https://dupodcast.transistor.fm/people/katie-burke>

Welcome New Members

Dale Anderson

Mora, MN
Fish decoys

Jakob Arnold

Rockford, IL

Brian Ballard

Hopkins, MI
Decoy maker

Judd Baskfield

Winnetka, IL
Illinois flyway

Peter Bergeron

Evanston, IL

Bart Bonazinga

West Rutland, VT
Decoys

Noel Braseth

Gainesville, FL
*Mt. Clemens School
Decoys: Kelson, Reghi,
Purdo, Johnston, Fox,
Began; Balsa decoys
used on Lake St. Clair.*

Mark Brightbill

Red Bank, NJ

Tyler Bryan

Lewes, DE
Good old decoys

LeeRoy Burrell

Crown Point, IN
Decoys

Brad Busscher

Delray Beach, FL

Sharon Carlson

Green Oaks, IL

Robert Chase

Loleta, CA
West Coast decoys

Duane Coblentz

Wakarusa, IN

Chuck Crawford

Union Mills, IN

Tom Delach

Columbus, OH

Ken Depaul

Scotch Plains, NJ
*Cameron McIntyre, Bob
White, & Mark McNair*

Don Dubin

Lincolnwood, IL
Fish & wildlife carvings

Trey Fettes

East Dundee, IL

Dennis Forsberg

Mendota Heights, MN
Mason decoys

Ernie Fox

Poplar Point, MB
Duck decoys

Lindsay Fuller

Medford, NJ
*Delaware River & New
Jersey coastal decoys*

Monroe Gaskill

Ocracoke, NC
*Mason, Herters, Long
Island, geese, brant,
merganser, loons*

Grover Gillespie

Orr, MN
*Old working decoys –
long tails*

Mike Grossman

Fredericksburg, TX

Wally Hallbauer

Hormell, NY
Miniatures

Brian Hannon

Etters, PA
Duck decoys

John Hathcock

Springfield, MO
Benz decoys

Don Havel

Montgomery, MN
Factory decoys

Walter Hayes

Hombeak, TN

David Ingram

Plymouth, MI
*Tom Chambers & St. Clair
Flats decoys*

David Jones

Beaver Creek, OH
Duck decoys & calls

Michael Jones

Godfrey, IL

Jeff Kieny

Ozark, MO
*Fish & duck decoys;
fly reels*

William Krause

North Aurora, IL
Duck decoys

Jeff Laschen

Chilmark, MA
*Fish decoys, ice fishing
& eel spears*

Marvin Levinsky

Dekalb, IL
*Illinois River decoys;
certain carvers, odd decoys*

David Lloyd

Beahaven, NJ
Barnegat Bay, NY decoys

Ryan Londrigan

Grand Blanc, MI
Michigan items

Daniel Maloof

Peoria, IL
Like it all

Gene Marshall

Forked River, NJ
*Barkalow - west coastal
New Jersey decoys*

Todd Morton

St. Louis, MO
Decoys and calls

Paul Moss

Brockville, ON
Duck decoys

Russell Owen

Denmark, SC

Linda Tolley Parker

Edmond, OK
*New England shorebirds,
fish decoys & mergansers
(VA)*

Brian Paul

Elysian, MN
Duck decoys

Michael Pehanich

Poplar Grove, IL
*Fish & wildlife carvings;
outdoor art*

Justin Penn

Chicago, IL

Art Pietraszewski

Depew, NY
*Julius Mittlestadt, Seymour
Smith, Ken Harris*

Robert Renfro

Glen Ellyn, IL
Illinois decoys

Douglas Richmond

Westfield, NY
*Hunting and fishing
memorabilia*

Philip Riggs

Cincinnati, OH
Book & decoys

Terry Roe

Chincoteague, VA
*Chincoteague decoys,
especially "Cigar" Daisey*

Carson Runge

Longview, TX
Factory decoys

Russ Seton

London, ON
Ontario decoys

Stephen Seward

Lopez Island, WA

Ken Sharpe

Kanata, ONT
*Ontario decoys, particularly
by Ken Anger and eastern
Ontario carvers*

Robert Smith

Glen Ellyn, IL

Daniel Stocker

Newcomerstown, OH
*Duck decoys, making duck
stands, making duck call
boxes*

John Summerfield

Cobourg, ON
Ontario decoys

Jeff Teeter

Livonia, MI

Dennis Trasz

Pink Hill, NC
Gunners

Francis Valez, Jr.

Stafford Springs, CT
*Old fishing tackle, wood
lures with glass eyes*

John Van

Slambrouck, Sr.

Hudsonville, MI
Fish decoys

Cody Walker

Hamburg, AR
Pascagoula factory birds

Paul Weachter

Chambersburg, PA
*Decoys and all sporting
collectibles*

Cole Wheeler

Ransom, IL

Jim Wisniewski

Chicago, IL



In Memoriam – Don Vulcani

June 18, 2024, LaSalle, IL. Age 86. Don was an active and energetic member of the NADCA for many years. In addition to collecting old decoys, he was an extremely gifted bird carver, specializing in mourning doves, songbirds and waterfowl. He greatly enjoyed the outdoors, and was an avid fisherman and hunter. He will be missed by many and we offer our condolences to his family including his son, John, who is a club member as well.

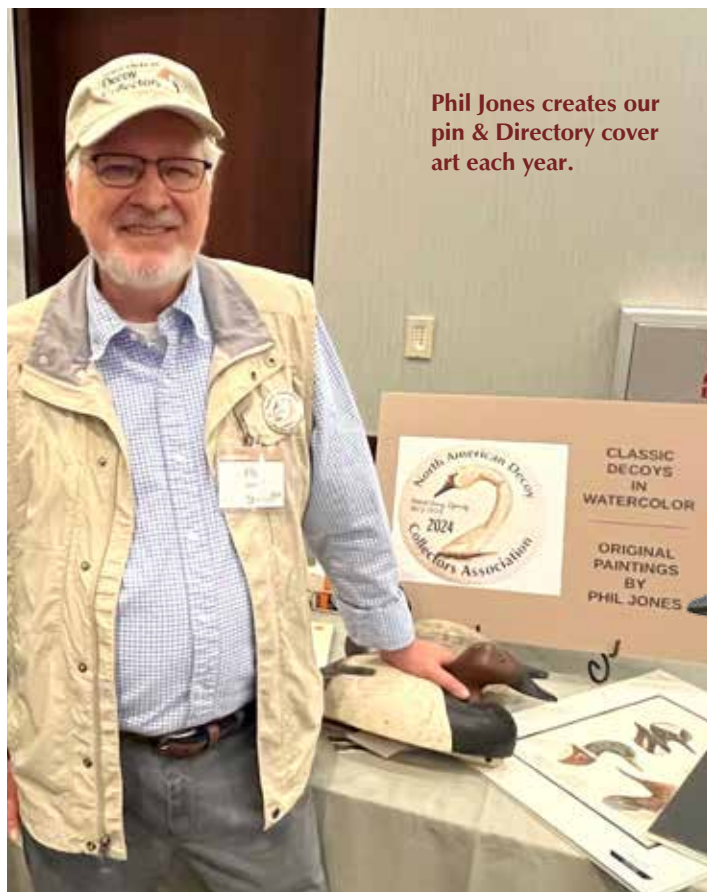


2024 Show Report

The 57th North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show was held at the Westin Chicago Lombard Hotel in Lombard, Illinois, April 23-27, 2024. By all accounts it was a great show.

Attendees enjoyed the many opportunities to reconnect, learn, and find new things for their collections. The show offered something for everyone with room-to-room trading, a ballroom show with displays and exhibits, an educational seminar, and a premiere Guyette & Deeter auction. In general, dealers were very pleased with the results, with many reporting "best ever" sales and good additions to their inventories.

The week featured a number of events that attracted many to Lombard. These included a seminar focused on the Alan and Elain Haid collection, displays of Detroit factory decoys, Reynolds, Poitevin, Benz factory decoys, shotshell reloaders, Wisconsin gunning boxes, member decoy contests, carving demonstrations, and exhibits by our featured carver and wildlife artists. The following pages provide a full recap of all of the show activities.



Phil Jones creates our pin & Directory cover art each year.



Seminar:

Discussion of Haid collection draws a big crowd



On Wednesday morning, a large crowd came to hear Jon Deeter and Joe Tonelli discuss the iconic collection of Alan and Elaine Haid, and how the couple was able to amass such a formidable grouping over many years of collecting, often on a limited budget. Jon provided an overview of the collection, including a video of the Haid's in their Connecticut home in which they talked about their love for decoys and the pieces they had been fortunate enough to acquire over the years. Their early decision to shift their investment strategy from the financial markets to collecting decoys was certainly a risky one, but as the auction results would later affirm, this was a very smart move indeed.

Joe Tonelli shared many colorful stories about how the Haid's had acquired many of the decoys in their collection, much to the delight of the audience. Tonelli insisted that Haid knew more about decoys than anyone regardless of where they came from. He said, "Alan was the most knowledgeable and aggressive collector I have ever known. If he saw something good, he was going to get it. He was like a beagle on the trail of a rabbit. He was going to get the job done." Click here to watch this fascinating seminar on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY7e6Gh1IQM>

Thanks to Donna Tonelli for capturing this wonderful event.





“Detroit Decoy Dynasty” aids in distinguishing among the three factories

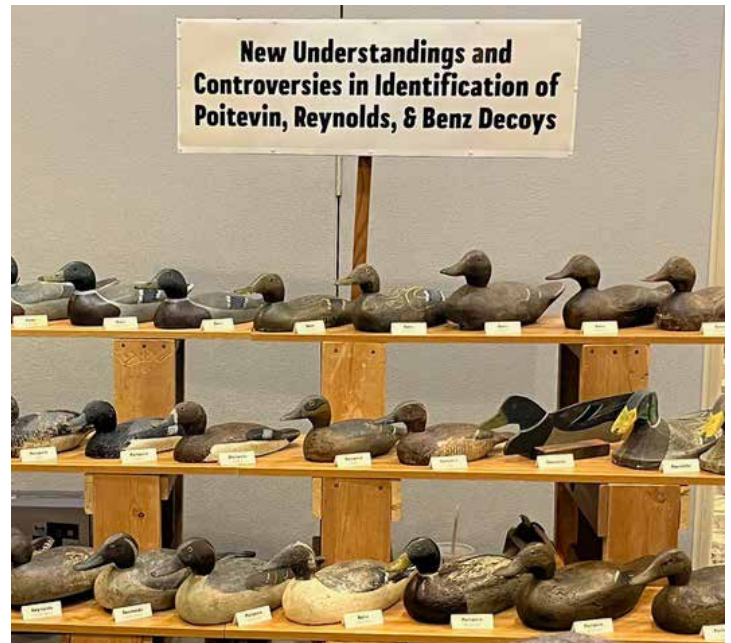
Board member and Detroit factory decoy collector Bill Dodge assembled an instructive display designed to illustrate the key characteristics that differentiate Petersen, Dodge and Mason decoys. To facilitate learning, he displayed various models/styles using only drake mallards, all grouped by maker. This allowed attendees to more clearly understand the differences among the three factories' output, without the potentially confusing addition of attributes unique to other species. Bill was on hand to walk showgoers through the display, pointing out the distinguishing characteristics of each. Attendees appreciated the chance to better understand the work of these three factories, and no doubt left with greater confidence in their ability to correctly identify the decoys made by each of them. Many thanks to Bill for his willingness to put this display together and share his knowledge.



Poitevin, Reynolds, Benz exhibit works to clear up common mis-attributions

In a display entitled, “New Understanding and Controversies in Identification of Poitevin, Reynolds & Benz Decoys,” members Greg Renner and Cody Walker explored the challenges associated with correctly identifying the work of these factory decoys. The display featured a number of examples from each factory, organized on three separate shelves, which allowed Renner and Walker to illustrate the unique identifying characteristics of each factory’s output. Based on the number of folks huddled around this display throughout the 2-day ballroom show, there was clearly an appetite to learn more. We owe our appreciation to Greg and Cody for bringing this display to Lombard.

Greg Renner (right) describes unique characteristics of Poitevin, Reynolds and Benz decoys to interested attendees





Wisconsin gunning box ingenuity returns to Lombard

Always a popular feature at the show, once again this year attendees were invited to examine a wonderful selection of Lake Poygan (Wisconsin) gunning or shooting boxes. These boxes are as much practical tools as they are ingenious examples of American folk art. They are designed to house a wide variety of hunting necessities such as shotshells, gloves, thermoses, and typically have a rack on the top in which a shotgun can rest. Attendees were able to closely examine these unique items, and marveled at their makers' clever and varied designs, customized to their individual needs. For years, Board Member Emeritus Roger Ludwig spearheaded this display. Sadly, Roger passed away last year. We have to thank member, Joe LeRoy for jumping in to fill the void to ensure that attendees could continue to enjoy these old hunting tools.



“Pop-up” exhibit of shotshell tools grace member’s table

Underscoring the passion and enthusiasm that our members bring to our hobby, Greg and Marsha Meissner brought their own display of shotshell reloading tools to the show as an adjunct to the items they had for sale. These fascinating, pre-1900 items are not widely understood and we appreciated the Meissners' interest in helping us all learn about another interesting collectible area. You can read more about these tools and the Meissners' collection in the Member Profile at the end of this newsletter.

CONTEMPORARY CORNER

celebrates today's skilled craftsmen



ABOVE: Pat Gregory teaching his technique

LEFT: Brian Ballard shares his talent



Every year our show includes a gathering of today's most talented decoy makers, with some even sharing their skills with attendees as they demonstrate their carving and painting techniques. This year, members Pat Gregory and Brian Ballard generously spent much of the show chatting with fledgling carvers and providing advice and sharing the "how to's" of decoy making much to the delight of the appreciative audience. As always, the work of today's decoy makers proves that the future of this important folk art is very secure!



Russell Owen displays his work



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Featured Artists

Stunning talent on exhibit

The 2024 show featured exhibits of not one, but three, super talented artists. Josh Brewer, a decoy and wildlife carver from Maine, exhibited a broad range of his work including decoys, dead mounts, bird carvings and more. His journey from carver to physician and back again to full-time carver is a remarkable story, one that was featured in the club's Winter newsletter (click here to read more – <https://nadecoycollectors.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/FINAL2024-WINTER-NA-Decoy-v5-1.pdf>). In addition to showcasing his immense talent, Josh reported that this was his most successful show ever in terms of sales and consignments.



Josh Brewer/Canvasback



Josh Brewer "Flying Kestrel & Luna Moth"

For the first time, this year's show included a wildlife artist exhibit as well, featuring Adam Grimm and his 17 year old daughter Madison. Adam has won two Federal Duck Stamp Contests while Madison has won two Junior Duck Stamp Contests. It's particularly remarkable that her first win was when she was only six years old! Simply amazing talent was on display by both artists.



Adam & Madison Grimm with NADCA President Rick Sandstrom



Adam Grimm "Today, Tomorrow, and Forever"



Josh Brewer with NADCA President Rick Sandstrom



Madison Grimm Canvasback painted at age 6

Member Decoy Contest

Competition attracts a great group of decoys

Mergansers were the featured species in this year's Member Decoy Contest, and members turned out with some remarkable examples in both the vintage and contemporary categories. With so many worthy entries, judges Keith Buchert, Joe Engers and Bill Claussen had a very tough job, but eventually came to a consensus on the top three entries in each category. The top place finisher in the Vintage category was a rare and outstanding Hooded Merganser by Ontario's William Hart, owned by Rusty and Dianna Johnson. The top contemporary entry was a pair of Red Breasted Mergansers made by Marty Hanson, entered by the maker himself.

The Vintage Category



First Place:

William Hart Hooded Merganser
(Belleville, Ontario)

Owners: Rusty & Dianna Johnson



Second Place:

Edwin Bachman Red
Breasted Merganser
(Lunenburg, Nova Scotia)
Owner: Tim Sieger



Third Place:

Ben Schmidt
Hooded Merganser
(Detroit, Michigan)
Owner: Ken Cole

The Contemporary Category



First Place:

Marty Hanson Red Breasted Merganser Pair
(Hayward, Wisconsin)

Owner: Marty Hanson



Second Place:

Marty Hanson
Hooded Merganser Pair
(Hayward, Wisconsin)
Owner: Ken Cole



Third Place:

Tommy Rogers
Hooded Merganser
(Snow Hill, North
Carolina)
Owner: Jerry Martin

Dave Spengler bids farewell to show



As one of only two remaining attendees at our very first show in 1966, Dave Spengler has been a fixture at the show ever since and has been instrumental in the show's vitality and longevity. However, Dave was unable to attend this year's show, simply claiming that "age has finally caught up to me." His son Erik brought a framed note that Dave wanted to share with his many friends and acquaintances in which he wrote about his many collecting experiences and, in particular, expressing thanks for the many great friendships he has made along the way. We will certainly all miss Dave's presence and engaging smile at future shows.

Ken Cole/Marty Hanson celebrate Ben Schmidt/honor Jim Aikin

In honor of their close friend, Jim Aikin, and his amazing Ben Schmidt decoy collection (and other great birds), Ken Cole and Marty Hanson hosted a cocktail reception on Wednesday evening of show week in their room at Lombard. They were on hand to discuss the outstanding group of Ben Schmidt decoys about to be offered in the Guyette & Deeter sale and what made them so desirable. They also had on hand a display of unique Schmidt decoys from their own collections for comparison. Their willingness to share their knowledge of Schmidt and his work was much appreciated by all who stopped by to visit.



Auction Report:

\$102,000



Haid collection brings extraordinary prices

Guyette & Deeter once again held their spring sale at the show. This was a special one, featuring the first installment of the Alan and Elain Haid collection. While most anticipated strong prices for the 60 lots in this initial group, few forecasted the heady numbers that were realized. All told, the Haid pieces alone brought \$3.8 million with 15 lots hammering at over \$100,000. Complemented by rare Oscar Peterson

pieces from the Dave Fannon collection, and Ben Schmidt decoys and other Michigan birds from the Jim and Patti Aikin collection, the entire auction brought in \$6.8 million, the highest grossing auction since the McCleary sale in 2000. Clearly the decoy market remains very strong with more great offerings coming in the near future.

\$480,000



\$198,000



MEMBER PROFILE:

Greg & Marsha Meissner:

**A TASTE FOR OLD THINGS DRIVES
THESE WISCONSIN COLLECTORS**



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Greg with loading tools

Greg and Marsha Meissner come by their intense interest in hunting related collectibles honestly. If you were born and raised in rural Wisconsin, hunting and fishing were just part of everyday life. As a boy, Greg spent his days hunting rabbits and squirrels with his dad and uncle near his Sturgeon Bay home in Door County, Wisconsin. As such, he was no stranger to the tools of the hunting trade from shotguns to shotshells and everything in between.

The Beginning – A Singular Focus

Shortly after their marriage in 1975, Greg and Marsha bought a farm complete with an old farmhouse that was built in 1892. As they set about making it their own, they wanted to decorate it with period furnishings in keeping with the home's unique character. Over the ensuing years, they scoured antique shops and estate sales searching for pieces that would fit their home's early charm.

In the early 80s, a trip to visit friends in Mon-

tana turned this ongoing "nesting" process into a collecting passion that would consume them for years to come. Knowing the Meissner's interest in antiques, their friends took them antique shopping. During one stop, Greg found an old shot-shell reloading tool that captured his imagination. Perhaps it was his career as a landscape architect that fueled an interest in how things work, but he was just fascinated by the inventiveness of this early tool that allowed hunters to efficiently re-use their shotshells.



Unusual Westphal revolving shot case



Collection of various guage shotshell closers



Bridgeport Gun Implement gun cleaning kit



Collection of shotshell extractors



Display of Kleenbore shotshell boxes and corresponding advertising die cuts

Greg was anxious to have more, but quickly realized that finding these reloading tools at antique shops was a bit like searching for a needle in a haystack. He eventually found his way to gun shows which proved to be a much more productive way to find these old pieces. Through this experience, he learned about decoy shows and wondered if they might also provide

some opportunity. In the mid 80s, he attended his first show at Pheasant Run where he met Ed Austin, a dealer who had a number of vintage reloading tools on his tables. This proved to be a fruitful relationship as Austin would provide many items for the Meissner's growing shotshell tool collection in the years that followed.

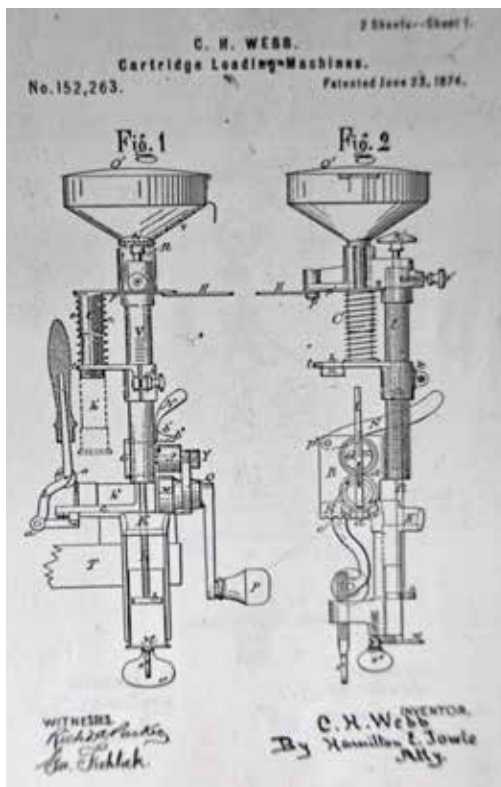


Shotshell reloading "blocks" or machines along with 100 count new primed empty shotshells

Another Interest Emerges

By the mid-90s, fewer and fewer tools were showing up at the decoy shows. Despite having attended these shows for over 10 years, the Meissners knew precious little about decoys themselves. They had long admired these birds and given the increasing difficulty of finding reloading tools, they thought that just maybe they should start collecting some old decoys as well.

At the next decoy show their search began in earnest. However,



Remington cartridge loading machine patent drawing, 1874



Remington cartridge loading machine



Powder Tin collection

it got off to a bit of a rocky start. Greg chuckles as he recalls Marsha picking up a nice wood duck she liked from a dealer's table, and watching the astonishment on her face as she read the price tag. Forty thousand dollars!! Nobody ever said she didn't have good taste! As she very carefully laid the decoy back down, they realized that they needed to get a whole lot smarter about decoys before venturing too deeply into this new area.

They started by doing a lot of reading, including Decoy Magazine, auction catalogs, Sporting Collectibles magazine, and an assortment of books written about sporting collectibles. They continued to go to decoy shows including St. Charles, Minnesota, Oshkosh, Milwaukee and others, using these opportunities to meet more seasoned collectors from all over the country and to learn as much as they could from them. While certainly not an exhaustive list, they credit collectors Dr. John Baillie, Bob Sauer, and Vaughn Walters with helping them understand what to look for and how to assess quality, paint, and value. They also recognize the

Evans Decoy Collectors Society group as having been very helpful in helping them learn about Evans decoys.

With all of this knowledge in hand, by the early 2000s they decided to focus their decoy collecting on Evans and Mason factory decoys. They really liked their form, and recognized that these birds were relatively abundant and somewhat easier on the pocketbook. Since their interest in reloading and related tools was still strong, they opted to limit their decoy collecting to canvasbacks, which made for a manageable and displayable collection in a limited amount of space. Specifically, they wanted to collect pairs, preferring rigmate pairs as much as possible. They bought their first pair of Evans cans from Dr. Baillie, and their first pair of Mason cans (Challenge grade) from Vaughn and Roxanna Walters. They were now officially "decoy collectors."

The Meissner Collections

Greg has worked to assemble groups of products that tie closely to their

reloader collection. He likes to display related items such as guns, shell boxes, wooden ammo crates, along with a variety of reloading tools to tell a more complete story of early American ingenuity. The variety of related tools include shot dispensers, shotshell closers, cleaning tools, reloading "blocks," and shotshell extractors. Most of these are pre-1900. These fascinating artifacts represent ingenious engineering, all designed to extend the life of the shotshell. Greg says that he gets great joy in finding these old tools and preserving the history for others to enjoy. He has been fortunate to find some very rare pieces including an unusual cast iron Westphal shot dispenser which he claims to be among their favorite pieces.

On the decoy side, the Meissners ultimately became particularly intrigued with Mason decoys. Their original vision was to acquire canvasback pairs of each of the five Mason grades – just ten decoys in all. However, they soon learned



Various versions of Mason, Premier, Challenge, and Standard, Grade canvasbacks



Featured Mason cans - flat bottom Chesapeake Bay, glass eye Standard grade, undersized and low head models



Ca. 1900 "snakey head" Mason Canvasbacks



Near mint, later Evans Canvasbacks



Very early Premier grade Mason Canvasbacks made prior to factory production



Early, oversized Premier grade canvasback



One of several garden sprinklers

about the numerous permutations produced by this factory – undersized, oversized, low heads, regional models, "snakey heads," etc. So, they shifted their focus to assembling representative pairs of as many of each style as possible, including special orders, greatly expanding the potential number of decoys in their collection.

Greg and Marsha delight in the experiences they've had collecting and the people they have met along the way. Greg recounts the story of visiting Mason collector Len Carnaghi in Michigan. During a tour of the Carnaghi home, a pair of very early looking Mason

canvasbacks caught his eye. Len explained that they were early pre-factory, hand-made decoys and went on to tell the story of finding them in a glass case in a grocery store during a 1970's trip with his wife Marilyn to buy food for the family. They only had \$40 with them for the provisions, but ended up buying the drake along with two other Masons, and coming home with no groceries! Many years later Len was able to pair up the drake with a hen of the same era & style and eventually agreed to sell the decoys to the Meissners which ranks as Marsha's favorite pair in their collection.

Branching Out

While still pursuing items for their primary collections, the couple has not shied away from acquiring other sporting collectibles that have grabbed their attention along the way. They have accumulated a good selection of vintage powder tins, many of which are very hard to come by. These include early pieces from Austin Powder Co., DuPont and Hercules Powder. They like the way the tins complement the tools, having been such an integral part of the hunter's reloading essentials, along with wads, shot, hulls & primers.

As a fifty-year volunteer and current Regional Vice President of Ducks Unlimited, Greg has a particular interest in older DU ephemera and related items. During one trip to Pheasant Run, he found a "homemade" piece of art featuring a flying mallard that closely resembled the commonly recognized flying mallard logo introduced by Ducks Unlimited in the early 1960's and is still being used today. He just had to buy it. After doing some research, he



discovered that it had previously sold at auction and was attributed to the Bluepoint, Long Island estate of Arthur M. Bartley, one of the original founders of DU. Greg suspects that this very piece of art may have been used to create the flying mallard DU logo. After enjoying it for a few more years he plans to donate it to the DU Waterfowling Heritage Center, located at the Bass Pro Shop Pyramid in Memphis. This will ensure that this piece of waterfowling and DU history is preserved for future generations.

In yet another related area, Greg tells the story of a neighbor who

wanted to get rid of some Kleen-bore shotshell boxes he had. Glad to take these off the neighbor's hands, the Meissners used them as a start to creating a beautiful display of Kleenbore shotshell and related Remington gun items featuring a variety of boxes and early advertising items.

And just for fun, the Meissners have also assembled a small flock of duck lawn sprinklers that they have placed throughout their gardens on the farm. They first encountered one of these in St. Charles years ago and have picked up a few more over the years. Some of the sprinklers are made of cast iron while others are made of aluminum or brass.

Giving Back

In addition to his lifelong work with Ducks Unlimited, Greg has graciously shared his expertise by giving presentations at the Door County Historical Society. He has also set up displays at various waterfowling shows throughout Wisconsin, covering both shotshell tools as well as Mason and Evans decoys.

We truly appreciate the Meissner's willingness to share their collecting story with us. You can reach Greg at greg@meissnerlandscape.com.



Early Premier and later standard grade glass eye models