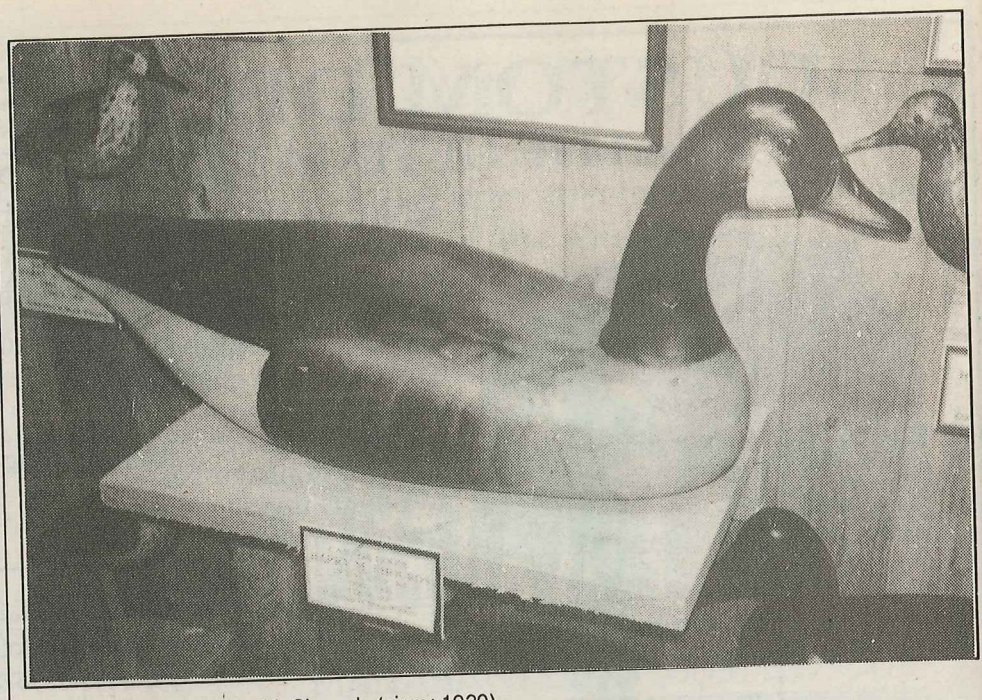
Decoys, Decoys, Decoys

By BRUCE WILLIAMS



Canada Goose by Harry M. Shourds (circa: 1920)

The Barnegat Bay Decoy & Baymen's Museum has on continuous display 150 — 200 of the finest old wood hunting decoys from New Jersey, including geese, ducks and shorebirds.

The decoys represent the work of dozens of New Jersey master carvers. Geographically, these decoys represent all coastal areas, from the head of the Barnegat Bay, down through Tuckerton and Atlantic City to Cape May and up the Delaware River. Displays are changed several times a year so that there are always fresh exhibits to view.

Clearly, the Museum has the most prominent continuing display of historic hunting decoys in this state, and also one of the best displays of decoys, hunting and fishing artifacts and antique photos (more than 4,000) along the entire East Coast.

Because of great prominence in their field, there are separate display cases featuring decoy carvings of Harry V. Shourds and Nathan Rowley Horner. Also, there is a "Feature Carver" display case which presents for study a body of work by one individual master carver. Past feature carvers have been Lloyd Parker, Jay Parker, Lloyd Johnson, Rhodes Truex, Gene Hendrickson, Bill Cranmer and the Birdsall family.

The Baymen's Museum continually attempts to develop supplemental displays noted for their uniqueness. As an example, the Baymen's Museum was honored and delighted this year to display the highly regarded collection of New Jersey decoys of the late John A. Hillman of Spring Lake before they went off to register multiple high sale records and decoy auction history in April, 1996.

During the past year, the Museum had an exhibit of particular interest — a display of 150 rare shorebirds, all predating the 1920s when shorebird gunning was banned.

Most recently, the museum had a special treat, a display of more than 50 rare Mergansers from the collection of Russ and Kim Allen of Port Republic, NJ.

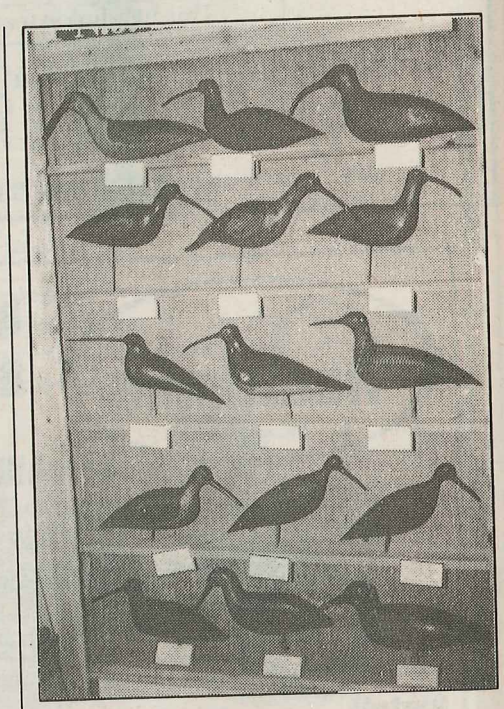
Currently, for comparative study and enjoyment, there are more than a dozen decoys each of elegant black ducks, buffleheads, mallards, goldeneyes and broadbills by noted New Jersey craftsmen. The "Feature Carver" display has an excellent grouping of decoys by Stanley Grant of Barnegat. Stanley, who died in 1960, was the son of the noted Barnegat carver Henry Grant (1860 — 1924). Stanley's decoys resemble those of his father and are highly rated by collectors.

In addition to the 200 decoys on display, there are approximately 50 shorebirds interspersed, including more than 15 rare ruddy turnstones, favored for their predominance of red and varied shapes and paint patterns.

The Museum also has a display case reserved for revolving exhibits of a dozen or so decoys from the best contemporary carvers.

The Baymen's Museum currently has a unique collection of memorabilia of the "South Jersey Oyster Industry." This includes many colorful, rare and valuable oyster cans from the turn of the century and also many vintage oyster industry photographs, and oystering tools (for harvesting and shucking). This special exhibit has been generously loaned to the Museum by Bob Seabrook of Absecon.

Historically, the decoys on display have been on loan from interested collectors and Museum members willing to share some of their best examples of carvings from their private collections. However, Dr. and Mrs. Robert Irvin of Manahawkin recently donated more than 90 decoys to the museum, so that having a permanent collection is well under way. The Irvin gifts include carvings by Horner, Shourds, Grant and others, including an extraordinary, early great blue heron and a marvelous ruddy turnstone, both by unknown carvers.



15 NJ Curlew Shorebirds (circa: 1865 - 1910)

Need it be said? The Museum is always interested in receiving old hunting decoys from yesteryear's master artisans, to be safely displayed behind glass with donor credit listed.

The museum welcomes your visit for a visual feast and a tasty bit of history.

The decoy committee of the Museum currently includes Executive Director John Gormley, Trustee Jim Allen, and volunteers John Cavileer, Art Birdsall, Gary Giberson and Bruce Williams.