

DECOYS DECOYS DECOYS

A \$2 Million Display

By Bruce Williams

To honor the grand opening of the new Tuckerton Seaport, a half-dozen New Jersey collectors were asked to display some of their favorite old wood hunting decoys for this special event. We are talking about nicely-turned wood carvings with well-painted surfaces ... serious decoys! Now on view in the Tucker's Island Lighthouse are about 80 of the finest that you will ever be able to see. Just think, the most rare and best ever completed by master carvers Harry V. Shourds, Rowley Horner, Joe King, Lloyd Parker, Lloyd Johnson, John Blair, Ward Bros. and more. All original and in excellent condition. Wow!

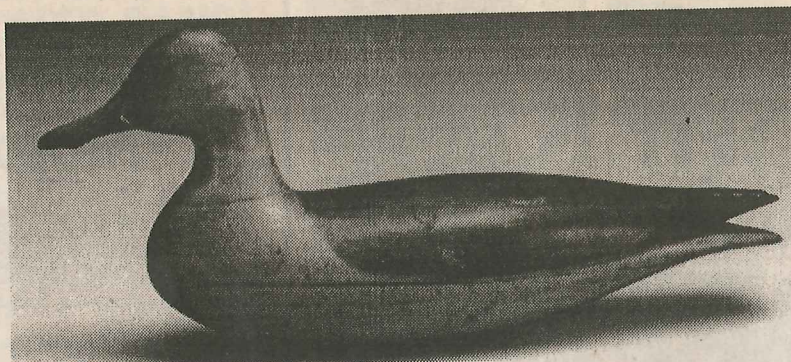
Don't miss this unusual opportunity. New Jersey history and decoys, perfect together.

Over the past 8 years, from the start, the Baymen's Museum has had three or four fresh decoy displays each year. The Baymen's has displayed well over 500 different old (pre-1950) hunting decoys and over 200 pre-1920's shorebirds. The objective at the Baymen's was to show the best examples we could find by the widest number of carvers from New Jersey.

These shows have displayed examples of most of the duck decoy species ever carved by H.V. Shourds, H.M. Shourds, Gene Hendrickson, Jay Parker, Bill Cranmer, Lloyd Parker, Ellis Parker, Lloyd Johnson, Rowley Horner, Henry and Stanley Grant, various members of the Birdsall and Lippincott family, also Jack Updike, Hurley Conklin, Bill Quinn, and many more.

At various times, the Baymen's have even had special shows of about 60 different mergansers, 60 different geese decoys, over 50 different black ducks and a dozen different styles of black ducks by Bill Cranmer. Also, there was a display of 80 different decoys from the N.J. Wildfowler Decoy Company. The Baymen's Museum even had a show featuring about 400 miniature decoy whittlings! Decoys from two of the country's most important collections were on view prior to their being shipped to auction, i.e.: John A. Hillman and James M. McCleery.

The purpose of the museum has been to educate the viewers of the historic significance of the wooden decoy used for hunting in days of old.



Harry V. Shourds
1861-1920,
Tuckerton, NJ

Seagull

These decoys were tools used by professional hunters (and sportsmen), which provided livelihood for carvers and "market gunners" resulting in an important source of food supplies for the masses. Decoys were legitimate "breadwinners" in their active days 100 years ago. This was back when the skies were dark during bird migration periods when millions were in flight. The coasts of N.J. were major migration routes: north in the spring and south in the fall.

Wide-open hunting ended in the 1920's and has been increasingly controlled since. These old hunting decoys fondly remind many people of olden-times when life was different--more difficult, perhaps, but in many ways better.

Decoys are significant as tangible keepsakes for passionate collectors interested in the earlier days and are increasingly sought by collectors for this fact and also their beauty. The supply of pre-1950 decoys is not increasing but interest in them is, and an expanding number of collectors enjoy the hunt for the decoy, now that the birds themselves are not as plentiful. Interest in these fine old decoys has been mainly restricted to hardy sportsmen who have enjoyed the outdoor life and know of the role decoys have played in our past. Recently, a major new dimension of interest has developed from the folk art community in these "aesthetically-pleasing-polychromed-carvings" for their beauty, form, and paint. What was once a casual fun hobby has become serious pursuit.

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The present display of decoys now in the Lighthouse are such an extraordinary visual feast it is difficult to select favorites to discuss in this preview.

From a private collection, there are about a dozen very fine carvings by Harry V. Shourds (Tuckerton) and Nathan Rowley Horner (West Creek): among the favorites seem to be the unique mallard drake and the seagull by Shourds. Collector Cam Troilo displayed a half-dozen of the most rare carvings by Horner--note especially the pair of mallards and the pair of mergansers -- and don't miss the mega-rare Lloyd Parker (Parkertown) merganser pair. Speaking of mergansers, collector Russ Allen displays a dozen from various N.J. master carvers -- one is as desirable as the next.

Collector Dick Gove brought in a dozen from various regions. His Ward Bros. (Crisfield, MD) decoys are really great but my favorite has to be the most extraordinary turned-head black duck carving by William Cranmer (Beach Haven). Amongst those from the collection of George Strunk, be sure to view the fabulous pair of raised-wing hooded mergansers from the Ward Bros. Art Birdsall has on display a great mint-condition Eugene Birdsall (Barnegat) broadbill. And note the rare canvasback drake by Joe King (Parkertown) from the Dr. James Thompson collection. Tom Van Nostrand displays six perfect shorebirds by Lloyd Johnson (Bay Head). Collector Bruce Williams displays a dozen decoys from the Delaware River regions, most notable may be the very early three decoys by John Blair (Philadelphia) and five by John and Dan English (Florence). The 1900 blue heron, unknown carver (contributed by Dr. Robert Irvin), may be as nice as you will ever see.

Also, don't forget that in the Jay C. Parker carving shop there are two dozen colorful decoys carved by Parker and in the Hurley Conklin carving shack are two dozen of his finest (note the two pair of wood ducks and the rare loon).

Clearly, the museum has had the most prominent continuing display of old hunting decoys in N.J. and also one of the best displays of decoys, hunting and fishing artifacts, plus vintage photos (more than 4,000) along the entire East coast. The Trustees and the decoy committee are dedicated to continue this tradition, and as the facilities and display program continue to unfold an even more prominent role is in view. Please keep in mind that the museum is very interested in expanding its own collection of old wood decoys: contributions will be appreciated (contact: John Gormley).

Why not drop in to the beautiful Tucker's Island Lighthouse (and adjoining buildings) and give a supportive nod to history - our history. Take a look at this special display of over 130 decoys before the final curtain comes down and they return to the shelves of private collectors homes.

The decoy committee of the museum currently includes Executive Director John R. Gormley, Vice President Jim Allen, and volunteers Art Birdsall, Gary Giberson, Dick Gove, Russ Allen, George Strunk and Bruce Williams.