

2021 Hurley Conklin Awards

Presented at the Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show

September 25th and 26th, 2021

Presented to people who have lived in the Barnegat Bay tradition. This award has been named in honor of the last of the Great Old Time Barnegat Bay Carvers, Hurley Conklin (1913-1998).

For a more in-depth look at the featured artists, please see their full profiles with the provided links at the end of the article.

Kris Anderson

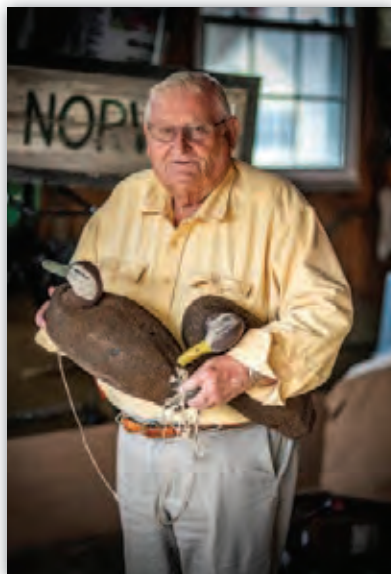


Photo credit: Karl Anderson
Kris Anderson.

Kris Anderson's father came to America from Norway after sailing the world as crewman on a three-masted Barkentine to work in the pound fishing industry at Lavallette. He came to L.B.I. in 1916 and started a pound fishing company called the *Crest Fishery* in Beach Haven Terrace which was one of the last operating pounds on the New Jersey coast after WWII. Kris and his family were the driving force in creating the replica of the *Crest Fishery* at the Tuckerton Seaport.

He was born in 1933 and attended the Beach Haven Elementary School and Barnegat High School. Kris was able to start going to sea on the pound boats launching and landing from the surf at age 5 and as he grew up, he worked intermittently building the fish boxes, lifting the pounds, changing the nets, pumping the

poles into the ocean bottom among all the other chores to operate the fishery daily. We believe he is the last person around that actually went to sea on the pounds boats from the surf.

At 13 years old he began fishing on charter boats from the once famous Beach Haven Yacht Club, which had the largest charter fleet in the world in the 30's leading up to WWII. As a mate he began working for Capt. Fred Nichterlein on the *Sea Spray*, Capt. Walter Voss on the *Pompano*, Capt. Bill Howe on the *Augusta* and several others during the summers through high school and college where he attended the East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. He had many days with great bluefin tuna catches from the Barnegat Ridge and then the bluefish came in and became the targeted catch were on one day while mating for Capt. Dick Johnson on the *Four Sisters* they caught and incredible 602 bluefish for the charter, making them the high catch boat for the day and the summer.

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At age 14 he began duck hunting on the Little Egg Bay from his sneakbox, getting towed out to the marsh and back in by friends as he did not have a boat of his own. He made his own black duck decoys from cork that came out of the old Beach Haven Freezer Co. which was the insulation for the large ice freezers. He used whatever he could find for his decoy heads using commercial heads and some of his own carved heads. Those decoys are still ready to go today. He has enjoyed water fowling on the Barnegat, Little Egg and Great Bays as well as goose hunting in the corn field blinds of west Jersey to this day when the opportunity arises.

After college he served in the U.S. Army during the Cold War, stationed in Frankfurt, Germany. He returned to Beach Haven and built his family home next to the bay providing the gateway to his lifetime of fishing, clamming, crabbing, scallop dredging, gunning and teaching his family about the importance of a healthy bay to be able to enjoy all these pursuits.

He has held a commercial crab pot license since mandated by the state of New Jersey and continues to crab during the summers for family and friends and hosts regular crab feasts on the deck of his home in Beach Haven with his wife of 61 years Marjorie. He has taken a great pleasure to teach his children and grandchildren about the bay and how to put the pots out and retrieve them, shake them out, pick the pots clean then cook the crabs as well as how to correctly pick and eat the crabs.

During the summers in the 1960's and '70's he clammed the bay selling to various purveyors and also captained several private boats out of Beach Haven into the '80's. An avid big game fisherman, he has also had the opportunity to travel to many of the top fishing destinations in the world. In 1969 he traveled with his regular fishing crew to Lewisport, Newfoundland to fish for Giant Bluefin Tuna. In later years he fished for giants in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, Canada. In 1979 he had the opportunity to fish the first Hemingway Invitational Marlin Tournament held in Havana, Cuba. He has fished the Atlantic from Beach Haven, Hatteras, Cape May, Ocean City, Maryland, Cape Cod, Florida, The Bahamas, Cuba, St. Thomas, Mexico and has also fished Panama in the Pacific Ocean.

He was an integral part of the crew on the "Anthracite" with owner Dick Ryon that were featured in the Marlin Magazine story, "Canyon Pioneers". In 1959 they were the first to reach the canyons off the New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia coasts fishing for tuna, White and Blue Marlin.

During the 1970's he was Chairman of the Southern Ocean County Ducks Unlimited Chapter committee where they raised the most dollars in the State of New Jersey for the ten years he was chapter chairman. These were sell out events to raise "bucks for ducks".

He has been a life member of the Beach Haven Volunteer Fire Company, life member of the Beach Haven Marlin & Tuna Club as well as having been a longtime member of the Barnegat Baymen's Museum and the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association. He has enjoyed collecting birds from many of the local Barnegat Bay style carvers. His collection is focused on the Brant as the local bays were the major wintering grounds for the once great flocks that arrived here.

As the Tuckerton Seaport was expanding he was able to provide the seed money then organize and sponsor a fund raiser to contribute to the building of the replica of his father's business, the "Crest Fishery" which is on display at the Seaport today. Pound fishing was the first major industry in the area and played a huge part in the development and growth of the local area. Fish from the nets were shipped via rail and truck to markets in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and beyond. Many of his private collection artifacts including photographs, movies, codfish gear and the like are on loan to the Seaport.

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Over the years his garage has served as a workshop of sorts where he has repaired and rebuilt his sneakboxes, built pond boxes, built two garveys – the last one which was built in 1974. Using Jersey cedar from Abbotts Saw Mill and glassing with epoxy which was a very “new” technology at the time proving to be a good process as he continues to crab, clam, harvest mussels and fish from that boat. Today epoxy is the preferred material for custom boatbuilders worldwide.

Kris is upbeat about the future of the bays health having witnessed a degradation over the years in water quality and biomass abundance of many species. Now there is a rebirth with cleaner water and an uptick in eel grass growth. He believes this is due to the burgeoning oyster farms, clam leases and young baymen working these businesses and caring for the bays. He sees this as one of the great hopes for the health and sustainability of the entire watershed offering future generations the gratification and bounty that he and his family have enjoyed for his lifetime.

<http://www.co.ocean.nj.us/OC/ch/frmBarnegatBayDocs.aspx>.

Clarence Fennimore



Clarence Fennimore.
Photo credit: Linda Hollins

Clarence Fennimore is a bird carver and long-time active member of the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association. He is being awarded the 2021 Hurley Conklin Award at this year’s Old-Time Barnegat Bay Decoy and Gunning Show.

He was born in 1935 in the Delaware River town of Bordentown and now lives in Wrightstown, in Burlington County.

“Our thing was to work on the farm, when farm work was available, and as much as possible we would be on the river with a canoe, fishing,” he said. “That’s what we loved to do, all the guys, go down to the river and fish. And we hunted on the river when we got old enough. Those days, you could walk from my house, we could walk right through town with our shotguns – no cases. Nobody

even would bat an eye.”

Well-known decoy carver Harry Fennimore was Clarence’s bachelor uncle who lived at his house, too. “I learned a lot from just watching what he did,” Clarence said. Harry had a lease on the Rancocas River, and knew the proper way to trim out the duck boat, and had built a few himself.

“We had a busy lifestyle at that time,” Clarence recalled.

As soon as he got his driver’s license, he and his friends headed for the shore, where there were a lot more ducks and fish, especially in the ’50s.

Later on, Fennimore started tonging for clams – for pleasure and to give them away, never to sell them. He had an 18-foot wooden Grant skiff, made in Forked River. “That was ideal for tonging, because I could stand right on the edge of it,” he said.

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When he needed money, he would pick on the farms or harvest/bale hay – “neither of which I would recommend.” His dad at one point worked for the railroad at Whiting Station, originally called Whiting’s Crossing; drove trucks for a living; and worked as a hunting guide for a time.

In high school, Fennimore was a cloth cutter at a clothing factory in Bordentown. After he came home from the service, a neighbor got him a job at Verizon, so he embarked on a 36-year career.

Fennimore’s renewed interest in carving took hold when he was in his 50s. At his office in Freehold was where he met Bill Doggart. The two men bonded over decoys and started hunting together, and then Doggart asked Fennimore to help him make decoys.

“If I hadn’t ever run into Billy, I don’t know if I’d ever have gotten back into it. He made a big impact on my life.”

Fennimore had dabbled in carving as a younger man, but the demands of his job, kids, and farm (complete with sheep, Christmas trees and 4-H) didn’t leave much time for hobbies. The successful carvers he knew either carved full-time, or were bachelors.

When he started actively carving again, he made bay-style rigs because that’s what Doggart made, but when he started making his own he switched to Delaware River-style. He likes the raised wing tips. He uses white cedar, which he used to get from Maine but now gets out of New York. The key is to get it kiln-dried, he said – “It just weeps, otherwise.”

For his own hunting, Fennimore at first had used his uncle’s decoys; he later preferred L.L. Bean’s cork models.

He was an avid hunter up until the ’80s – mainly black ducks, maybe a pintail or a mallard – for which he used a Heinrichs sneak box. But as regulatory agencies kept cutting limits, he felt the recreational activity became less worthwhile.

According to Fennimore, over the years he’s made a couple thousand individual birds. “I write down every one, so I know,” he said.

Pre-COVID, he would do seven or eight shows a year. Last year he did one in New York before everything was shut down. His sales have suffered in the absence of live shows, so he’s adjusted his carving accordingly, taking commissions and branching out. Recent works include a three-foot-tall penguin, hawks, and other bird species such as crows and ravens.

In the time he’s been collecting, carving and selling decoys, the market has changed, and he’s changed with it.

“Could sell ’em faster 20 years ago,” he said. “One year at Easton I sold 96 decoys (at a three-day show). That’s a lot of birds.” Nowadays there’s a lot of competition and a lot of young carvers, contrary to the public perception. It’s not the “lost art” people think of it as, according to Fennimore.

For about the last 15 summers he’s demonstrated decoy carving at Tuckerton Seaport, and he still does, “if they call me, like for a school or visiting group. It’s fun to do that.” He has a bench and a full display that shows every step from a block of wood to a finished bird.

“It’s a pretty straightforward process,” he said. It involves a hatchet, a draw knife, and a spokeshave to get it nice and round; then split it, hollow it out, glue the edge and put it back together. Fennimore uses a bench – similar to what some refer to as a chair maker’s bench – with a horseshoe-shaped block at the end that he pushes against.

While neither of Fennimore’s sons inherited the carving gene, his grandson has tried his hand at it – and took a first place in the first contest he entered. “He got a better trophy than I ever got,” Fennimore said with a laugh.

Just as some older carvers taught Fennimore certain techniques, Fennimore has passed on his knowledge to other carvers, to an extent, but he believes some things an artist has to learn the hard way, by doing, by making mistakes and solving problems.

<http://www.co.ocean.nj.us/OC/ch/frmBarneгатBayDocs.aspx>.