



Photo Credit: Grove Conrad

Bob Seabrook:

The Sorcerer's Apprentice - A Forger's Spell

by Grove Conrad

If talent is inherited, Robert Elwell Seabrook's maternal great grandfather Frank X. Ferg (1867- 1950) contributed greatly to Bob's DNA. Frank Xavier Ferg's works as a woodcarver and artist were well known to Philadelphians – his work being found in the Franklin Institute and the Philadelphia Academy of Music. Among Mr. Bob Seabrook's vast collection(s) are several Ferg wood sculptures each with identifiable Ferg/Seabrook similarities.

Regardless of shared DNA, Mr. Seabrook describes himself as self-taught; his combination of sculpture, painting tones and patina make him arguably the grand-

master of the three or four folk-art replicators in the country. He accomplishes his work the old-fashioned way using only hand tools and blended paints while working in the basement studio of his home. That studio space shares his decoy workspace with his vast collection(s) of oyster tins, oyster ephemera and other implements of the Jersey oyster trade. His restoration work is historically accurate as evidenced by binders and documents of the works of long-ago craftsmen and folk artists he happens to be reconstructing.

Insofar as his own collection and collecting interests, in addition to oysters, Bob favors old-time decoy makers between Absecon and Cape May, more specifically the decoys of Harry Mitchell Shourds (1890-1943). The interest stems from his Great-grandfather Jacob Elwell's home on 56th Street in Ocean City where Bob and family visited frequently, the H.M. Shourds home just a few blocks away. Bob is a storyteller and his tales of the Life Saving Service; old-time decoys and their makers are classic and if you happen to catch Bob in a yarn spinning moment – listen.

Mr. Seabrook is described as a humble, quiet and unassuming man hesitant to tell you of his many blue ribbons and accolades. He is, however, understandably proud of being an inductee of two New Jersey Halls of Fame. The Jersey Shore Rugby HOF and the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association Hall of Fame. Retired from a career as a biologist for the NJ Department of Environmental Protection he resides in Absecon with his wife Shelia and Lincoln the retriever.

Bob's decoys, shorebirds and oyster collectibles have been displayed in special exhibits over the past quarter-century. A 2011 exhibit at The Tuckerton Seaport displayed over 100 pieces of "SEABROOK." Mr. Seabrook was a founding father of the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association (NJDCA) and he presents a "pop-up" exhibit at NJDCA's April show each year with his one man exhibits receiving national recognition. Bob has judged for the Ocean County Old Time Decoy and Gunning show and he will be featured in this September's 2024 show.