



Harry M. Shourds Heritage Award

The Harry M. Shourds Heritage Award can be viewed as essentially the posthumous Hurley Conklin Award, which is presented to people who have lived in the Barnegat Bay tradition. The Conklin award was named in honor of one of the last of the Great Old Time Barnegat Bay Carvers still living at the time of the first Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy and Gunning Show, Hurley Conklin. The Shourds Heritage Award has been created to honor and promote the legacy of individuals who would qualify for a Hurley Conklin Award but who died before the award was introduced or before they were able to accept the award.

Harry M. Shourds was the son of the prolific carver Harry V. Shourds and father of the famed carver and Hurley Conklin Awardee Harry V. Shourds III. The Decoy Show Committee decided to name this Heritage Award in honor of the late Harry Mitchell Shourds of Ocean City, New Jersey for his contributions as a decoy carver and for carrying on the traditions of the Barnegat Bay and New Jersey decoy carving through the generations.



Harry Mitchell Shourds, 1919.
Photo Credit: Tuckerton Seaport

HARRY M. SHOURDS:

Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show **THE HARRY M. SHOURDS HERITAGE AWARD**

by J.P. Hand

The name Shourds has been a household word in the decoy collecting community for as long as Americans have been collecting and preserving the painted wooden gunning decoys of the early carvers.

Harry Vinuckson Shourds of Tuckerton N. J. was likely the first of that family to carve lightweight, hollow “stool ducks” of the native Atlantic White Cedar, (also known as swamp cedar or Jersey cedar).

Harry V. is known not just for the artistic merit and quality of construction of his decoys, but also for the large numbers of decoys he produced. He was one of the few if not the only maker who shipped his decoys up and down the east coast as far south as the Carolinas.

A carpenter by trade, H. V. Shourds and his wife, Mary Bartholomew Shourds had three daughters and one son. That son, Harry Mitchell Shourds would follow in his father’s footsteps when it came to carving decoys, though he worked as a house painter and painting contractor for most of his life.

Harry Mitchell Shourds holds the distinction of being a native son of Tuckerton but also the best-known carver of Cape May County. He learned to carve with his father on Water Street down on Tuckerton Creek and used his father’s carving patterns throughout his life. The 1910 Federal Census for Tuckerton lists 48-year-old H V Shourds as a house carpenter and Harry M. age 19 as a house painter.

Ten years later, H. M. Shourds was living in Ocean City down in Cape May County and was married to Lenneta Loder Shourds, he owned his own home and was working as a house painter in that Cape May County beach town, (1920 Fed Census). Sadly, his wife Lenneta passed away, childless and in 1923 the widower would marry Martha Clemenson, a South Jersey girl from over on the mainland, whose father had emigrated from Sweden, her mother from Denmark. The couple would have four children, Virginia, Alvin, my friend and mentor Harry V. and the youngest, Ray.

H. M. would spend the rest of his life in Cape May County running his painting contracting business and like his father, carving decoys and shipping them to eager customers locally and out of state. Like his father and many men of that time, he would die at a relatively young age; towards the end of WWII in 1944 at the age of 52. During the decades he lived in Ocean City, Harry M. made lots of friends both on the mainland and the island where he likely

Continued on page 23

knew many of the local Cape May County carvers of his time, such as Clark Madara, the Godfreys of the Upper Township, and Cleave Daebler to the south, who lived on the road into Stone Harbor. And like his father, he surely influenced a lot of other men of the county who made their own gunning decoys.

It isn't known at this time as to which East coast waterfowler first thought to make a decoy with a hollow two-piece body made of light weight softwood. That method was common on both the Delaware River and the Jersey coast by the mid 1800s. H. V. Shourds likely didn't come up with that construction technique, as quite a few South Jersey carvers predate him. What he did do was create a carving style of light weight, well-constructed gunning decoys with stylized paint patterns that were pleasing to the eye.



Rare Canada Goose by Harry M. Shourds.
Photo Credit: Guyette & Deeter

Harry M. Shourds carried on the family tradition, using his father's patterns, his tools and painting techniques. To the untrained eye, the decoys of both the father and the son appear the same, but a knowledgeable collector can tell the difference. Harry M. decoys are usually a little "daintier" in form. Both men made decoys of the typical species of ducks used along the Atlantic coast, mostly Black Ducks, Broadbills, Brant, but also some Red Breasted Mergansers, Goldeneyes, Buffleheads and Old Squaws. Only Harry M. is known to have carved Pintails and Hooded Mergansers. While Harry V. likely made hundreds of shorebird decoys a various species, very few are known to have been made by Harry M. That may be explained by the fact that hunting shorebirds was outlawed in the United States right in the middle of his carving career.

The number decoys by both Harry V. and Harry M. Shourds that survive to this day stands as a testament to the skill and artistry of both men. Not to mention the innumerable other carvers up and down the East coast who copied their work in varying degrees.

One historical and genealogical note: It appears that all the Shourds of South Jersey descend from one Cornelius Shoyerde, (later anglicized to Shourds) who in 1684 left Holland for Philadelphia, bought a plantation in Bordentown, N. J. and with his wife raised a large family. Their descendants would spread out across South Jersey with some settling in Tuckerton, (when it was in Burlington County) and others settling near the Delaware River in Salem County.

Visit Presentation Tent
Continuous Programs During Both Days
(Check easel outside tent)
Documentaries, Demonstrations & Displays

Special Exhibits:
Saturday: Harry M. Shourds
Sunday: Ruben C. Corlies



Ruben Claude Corlies.
Photo Credit: Grove Conrad

RUBEN C. CORLIES:

Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show **THE HARRY M. SHOURDS HERITAGE AWARD**

by Grove Conrad and Doug Lynch

There are in every generation people who define their era – such a man was Ruben C. Corlies. Ruben had stories and his stories had stories; “Rube” the central character of those stories.

There are quite a few spellings of Corlis (iss) (ies) in Manahawkin but most agree that Ruben Claude’s family name was Corlies. Ruben’s Corlies ancestors were well-to-do landowners in Shrewsbury,

Monmouth County as early as 1680. Generations later found Ruben’s father, Amos, working at various sawmills in Chatsworth, Warren Grove and Barnegat, finally moving to Manahawkin with his wife Rachael about 1880. Rube was born in Manahawkin in 1882. Rube’s father died in 1892 of typhoid fever leaving Ruben, age 10, with his mother and seven brothers and sisters. Rube would remain in Manahawkin until his death in 1976 at age 94. School ended for Ruben in the 8th grade working for 25 cents a day helping to support his family. He worked six days a week clamming, oystering and as a carpenter’s apprentice. Then he would walk on Saturdays to Perrine’s Boat Works in Barnegat building sneakboxes under the watchful eye of a Perrine foreman, Levi Cranmer. Seventy years later Rube was still building his improved design sneakboxes and made, by his own account, “at least a hundred.” Those boats were used by a score of bay gunning clubs, some still in use today.

The Lifesaving Service became a major part of the Rube’s life. He served many years with stations Brigantine, Barnegat City, Cedar Creek and Loveladies. In a 1974 interview at age 92 Rube recalled as if it were yesterday the names of his Loveladies 1912 crew – Wes Peterson, James Mills, Howard Falkinburg, the Ridgway brothers and Captain Cooper Predmore. He left the Life Saving Service about 1917 during the First World War to build barracks for the Army at Fort Dix.

Ruben married Ella Bodine Lear in 1906, their only son Beverly Earl was born in 1907; the family moved to a house and carriage barn on Manahawkin’s Stafford Avenue and there Ruben remained until his death. As a first rate carpenter he built the Carvel Island Gun Club, made hundreds of the club’s decoys and built the club’s many sneakboxes. Ruben was the guide for that club for almost twenty years.

Good friends and neighbors would call him “Uncle Rube” and on any given day they could be found in his shop, converted from an old carriage house, listening to his stories as he made decoys and boats. Those stories and that work would make him the legend that this award honors.

Continued on page 25

Favorite and often repeated tales would be the story of the sea serpent; an account of Rube and his brother-in-law John Inman encountering a sea creature offshore fishing in 1906– that story has often been written and also reenacted in Beach Haven’s Surfflight Theater a dozen years ago.

Then there were the gunning stories; including the days that Rube took “The Babe” duck shooting...in his own words:

“I, as guide of Carvel Island Gunning Club, will class Mr. Hunt and the Babe Ruth as gunners and good shots, and Mr. Johnny Vandermeer is very good with his aim on a duck as well as on home plate – Party Killed 32 head - Ruben Corlies” Oct. 1942

Mr. Hunt was the famous artist Lynn Bogue Hunt and Vandermeer the Cincinnati pitcher who still holds major league records.

“Uncle Rube” left a legacy of goodness. We remember another legendary bayman and decoy maker, Bill Cranmer (1917-2008), saying of Rueben: “He would talk to you even up as a peer and that’s why I liked going to his shop.” Ruben C. Corlies is buried in the Old Baptist Cemetery; with a simple headstone – no epitaph - but it would be fitting to imagine on that stone the Rudyard Kipling epitaph of “***’E Done It All.***”



*Ruben Corlies and Sneakbox.
Photo Credit: Ocean County*