

Waterfowl Decoys

Carved wooden decoys were used by the American settlers along the east coast as early as 1796. In 1918 a federal law was passed that made the sale of all migratory wildfowl illegal, so this ended the age of market hunting and the beginning of sport hunting with a defined season, licenses and bag limits. But many of the decoys survived and the local watermen continued to produce more for their sporting customers.

Decoys are a unique form of American Folk Art that have been widely researched by many collectors and scholars. Two museums with large decoy collections are the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum, Williamsburg and the Shelbourne Museum in Vermont.

*The hunter crouches in his blind
'Neath camouflage of every kind,
And conjures up a quacking noise
To lend allure to his decoys.
This grown-up man, with pluck
and luck,
Is hoping to outwit a duck.*
Ogden Nash

My small collection of decoys was assembled in the late seventies and early eighties on excursions up and down the East Coast from North Carolina to Maine. Plus some pieces were purchased at well-known antique auctions. Some of the makers signed or marked their work, but most did not. So the provenance depends on the sellers knowledge and/or the buyer's research. In my case I have an extensive library of well-illustrated books on decoys from all regions, plus I have numerous catalogues from decoy auctions of major collections. (All of these reference materials are For Sale too, and will be listed separately soon.)

The prices shown in this document represent the Suggested Retail Price based on the original purchase price, the condition, and what's known about the decoy's origin, and an examination of recent sales prices.

If you're interested in purchasing any of these items contact:
Jack McBride at 209-577-1464 or jackmcbride@sbcglobal.net.

Madison Mitchell Redhead Drake Decoy (DCOY-011).



Background:
R. Madison Mitchell was the last of the great upper Chesapeake Bay master carvers (1901-1993).

Mitchell was an undertaker by profession and made decoys behind his funeral home in Havre de Grace, Maryland.

Although he used a duplicating lathe to turn the bodies, it's the painting detail that distinguished his work.

Madison Mitchell Redhead Hen Decoy (DCOY-012).



This pair of Redhead Ducks was created in the early sixties.

They have strong original paint with some minor "gunning" wear. These are "shot-over" working decoys, not decorative facsimiles.

Size:
Body Length roughly 12".

Price: \$500 for the Pair

Miles Hancock Merganser Drake Decoy (DCOY-003).



Left Side



Right Side

Background:

Miles Hancock was a famous waterfowl market hunter who lived on Chincoteague Island, Virginia from 1888-1974. He reportedly could bring down multiple ducks with a single shot.

To lure them into range, he created large rigs of decoys. His decoys were characterized by their functionality: simple graphic painting, tack eyes, and flat-bottoms with long tails for stability. A great example are these two Red-Breasted Mergansers which were probably made in the 1930's.

They have good original paint, and the hen still shows the "scratch painting" on its back.

Miles Hancock Merganser Hen Decoy (DCOY-004).



Both decoys are structurally sound, but show in use wear and shot damage: particularly on the drake around the head and bill. The Drake has the original leather anchor thong and the weight is initialed MH.

Size:

Body Length "13 1/2".

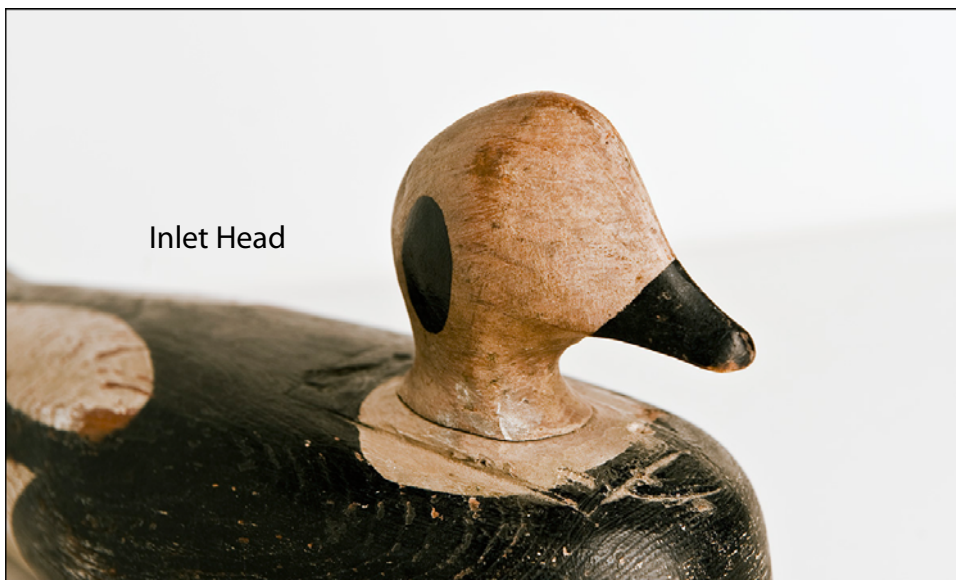
Price: \$600 for the Pair

Old Squaw Drake Decoy from Maine (DCOY-008).



Background:
This is a 19th Century decoy from Beal's Island, Maine. It features the characteristic inlet head that was used by the carvers there.

Still in its original paint the Old Squaw is a North Atlantic sea duck that you don't find in decoy form often. The body is sound with no cracks.

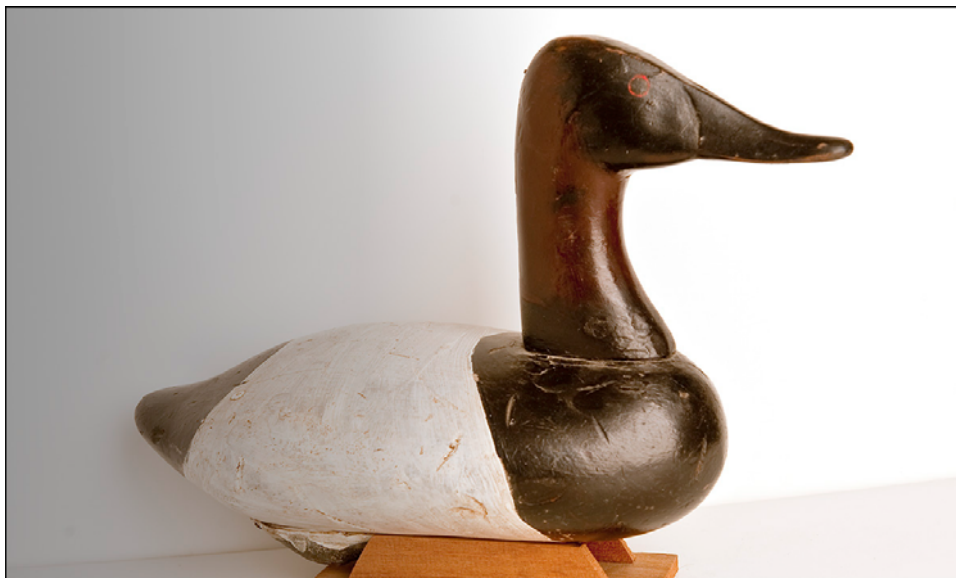


Inlet Head

Size:
Base Length 11 1/2"
Body Length 13"
Head Height 6"
Lead weight in body.
Leather anchor thong.

Price: \$300

Chesapeake Bay Canvasback Drake Decoy (DCOY-001).



Background:
Canvasback from Cecil County, Maryland. Alert high-head style with paint eyes in old gunning paint. Has initials G.D.S. on base. Structurally sound, some in use scars.

Size:
Body Length "12 1/4"
Head Height "9"
Price: \$175

Richard Orcutt Snipe Decoy (DCOY-014).



Background:
Richard Orcutt(1924-2004)
was a Waldoboro Maine
painter and carver. His
name is burned into the
bottom under the tail.

This Snipe is nicely carved
and painted. Shows some
in use wear, but the bill is
sound and paint original.

Size;
Body Length 9" ex. bill.
Bill 2" long.
Height 6"
Price: \$175

H. V. Shourds Long-Billed Curlew Decoy (DCOY-017).



Background:
This H.V. Shourds (b.1930)
lives in Seaville, NJ and is
the grandson of the famed
Tuckerton, NJ carver of the
same name.

This curlew has an alert
look in his eye and is very
nicely shaped and painted.
Has no signs of in-use
wear. Signed on the base:
H. V. Shourds.

Size:
Body Length 11" ex bill.
Bill 4 1/2" long.
Price: \$200

Stick-Up Brant Decoy Standing (DCOY-016).



Background:
Brants are small-black necked coastal geese. There were once millions of them but today they are a "concerned" species. They breed in the arctic regions and winter in U.S. coastal bays such as Currituck Sound on the Northern end of Carolina's Outer Banks.

In 1984 I found this beautifully carved decoy in Bea Berle's Antique store in Duck, North Carolina.

Stick-Up Brant Decoy Sitting (DCOY-016).



It has a root-head which is typical for decoy's of this species, and is in original paint. There is some mild scuffing on the back, and minor damage to the tail feathers. Otherwise it's in excellent condition.

It can be displayed either as a stick-up or as a floater. The origin is known, but the maker is not.

Size:

Standing Height 18".

Overall Length 21 1/2".

Body Height 8".

Price: \$350

Canadian Goose Stick-Up Decoy (DCOY-019).



This is a large, heavy decoy carved from a log with some chisled feather detail. It's from the Detroit area and was probably used along the St. Clair River. Holes in the base indicate it was an onshore stick-up. The head and neck are nicely carved and painted. The maker is unknown.

Size:

Base 17" Long

Overall Length 23"

Height 15"

Price: \$200

Black Duck Drake Decoy (DCOY-005).



This Black Duck from the Detroit area features the scalloped wing styling of Ben Schmidt (1884-1968).

The keel has been removed, but the bill painting matches Ben Schmidt's style.

Shows some in use wear, but the paint is original.

Size:

Base 11" Long

Overall Length 16"

Price: \$250

Reference: Clune Walsh, Jr. and Lowell G. Jackson, "Waterfowl Decoys of Michigan and the St. Clair Region", Gale Graphics, Detroit Michigan 1983. See photo on page 87.

Cape Cod Slat Goose (DCOY-018).



In Eastern Massachusetts hunting clubs placed oversize slat geese far out on the bays to catch the attention of flocks and then used live geese from pens to lure them into range. The slat geese were made out of siding attached to three frame boards. The bottom is open to save weight except for a centerboard. They attached the centerboards to 6 to 8 foot long triangular frames: one at each apex. These decoy frames were left in place throughout the hunting season.

In 1980 I found this working decoy in an antique store in Dennis, Mass on Cape Cod. It's in the style of Joseph Lincoln the famed carver from Accord.

It's size and simplicity make it an ideal decorative piece for the top of an antique cabinet. It was probably made in the late 40's or early 50's on Cape Cod. The paint and rust on the breast and tail is original.

For reference see Plate 77 in Joel Barber's, "Wild Fowl Decoys" originally published in 1934, re-issued as a Dover Paperback in 1954.

Size:

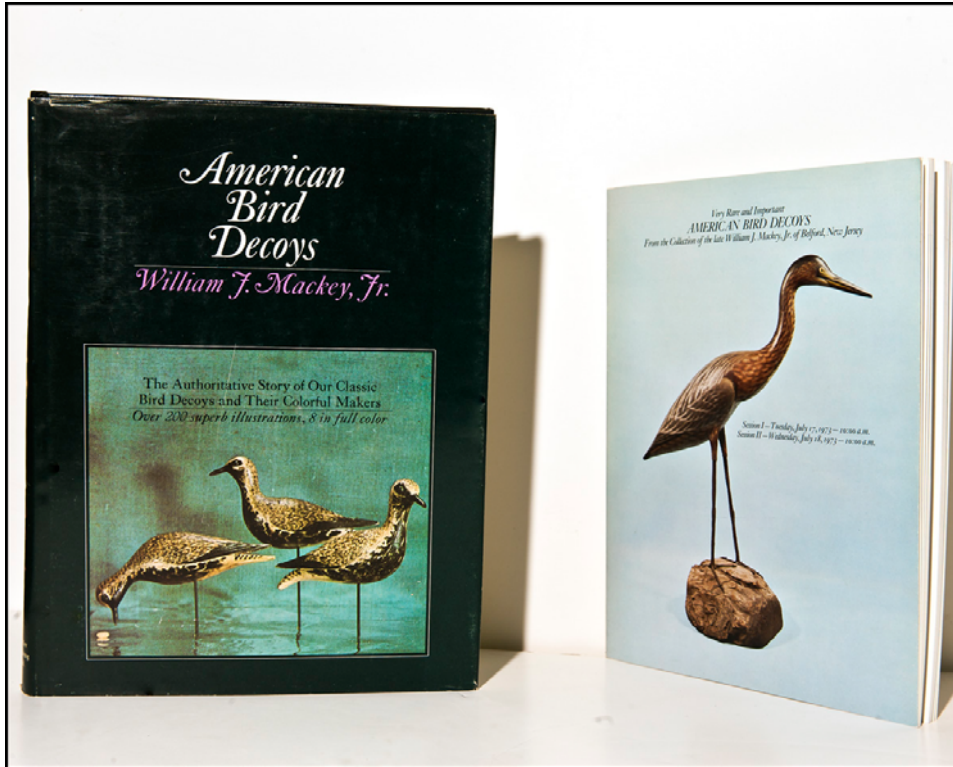
Overall Length 32" incl. 4" tail.

Body Height 21 1/2".

Width 10 1/2"

Price: \$350

Mackey Decoy Book & Auction Sales Guides (DCOY-020).



William J. Mackey, Jr. was a pioneer decoy collector in the 50's and 60's. His collection was sold at eight auction sessions at the Richard Bourne Galleries in 1973 and 1974.

Here is a copy of Mackey's 1965 book, illustrated with 200 photographs from his collection, plus all five auction catalogs from the sales.

Hard Cover Book:
Mackey, William J., Jr.
"American Bird Decoys";
Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.,
Exton, PA. 1965.

Condition:
Cover scuffed slightly,
but binding and contents
are clean & unmarked;
255 pages with 200
photographs, 8 in color.

Size:
8" w. 10 1/2" h.

Five Auction Catalogs including Price Keys:
Richard A. Bourne, Hyannis, Massachusetts
"Very Rare and Important American Bird Decoys from
the Collection of William J. Mackey, Jr. of Belford, New Jersey"

Session I and Session II, July 17 & 18, 1973. (600 items)
Session III August 21, 1973. (326 items)
Session IV October 20, 1973. (325 items)
Session V and Session VII, July 9 & 10, 1974. (600 items)
Session VII and Session VIII, August 20 & 21, 1974. (602 items:
incl. some carvings by Elmer Crowell from other collections.)

Size:
7" w. 9 1/2" h. Most examples shown in photographs.

This is a unique historical record of more than 2,400 of the finest American Decoys ever produced. There were only 2,000 copies printed. These ones are all in excellent condition. And the Mackey book has been out of print for many years.

Price:
\$120 for all six items.