

THE WILDFOWLER

JULY 2020

A PUBLICATION OF THE ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM

Back Bay Wildfowl Memories

Miles Hancock (1887-1974)

Miles Hancock led an amazing life that could never have unfolded the way it did if he had lived anywhere else in the world. Born in Williamsville, Delaware in 1887, he was one of four children in a very hard-working farming family. When he was seven, his parents moved to Chincoteague.

The family had hoped by making the move to Chincoteague, they would be able to make a better living on a new farm. Hard luck seemed to follow them to their new home. Miles' mother passed away suddenly, and his father was unable to care for the children and make the farm productive. His father placed the four children into Foster Care so that he could work every day. Out of this bleak backdrop, Hancock built a life-long string of entrepreneurial success stories.

By age 12, he had begun catching and raising terrapin. This salt-water-loving turtle had been a staple in human diets on the Shore since Native American times, but Hancock got into the business at just the right time. In the early years of the 20th century, rich folks up and down the East Coast decided that terrapin prepared in sherry and cream sauce ranked among life's premier delicacies. Prices skyrocketed. Where the turtles had once sold for \$6 a dozen, they were now going for as high as \$128 a dozen.

Terrapins hibernate in winter, so Hancock started a side business for the colder months in "market gunning." This is basically the mass slaughter of ducks and other birds, which were then shipped in barrels of salt to restaurants and markets in big cities, where recent influxes of immigrants meant skyrocketing demand for food. Market gunners had a lot of tricks up their sleeves. Sometimes they used multiple barrel guns. Other times they loaded up gigantic "punt" guns with up to a pound of shot and nails that would scatter through a flock with deadly force.



There were no limits on the treachery of "market gunners." They would hunt in fleets of row boats all equipped with punt guns. Night hunting was big, too. They would sneak up on rafts of ducks in the middle of the night; with their "sneak boats," and slaughter hundreds of ducks at time. Later in life Hancock boasted of killing 50 redheads with five shots and 100 birds in just two hours. One of the biggest challenges market gunners faced out in the field was coming up with a way to move hundreds of dead birds through the marsh and back to town. Over time, market hunting devastated the populations of migratory birds. In 1918, Congress passed The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which turned Hancock's hunting business into a federal crime.

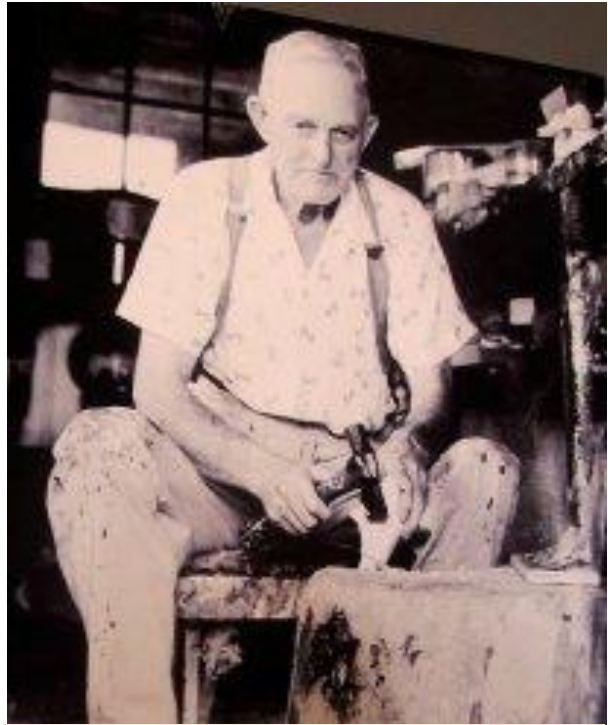


Then Prohibition arrived in 1920, and the demand for terrapin plummeted in the absence of cooking sherry. Some ecologists credit the sinking demand caused by Prohibition with saving the terrapin from extinction.

If things weren't bad enough; the Great Depression hit the economy. But as we've seen, Miles Hancock was nothing if not resourceful. He outfitted a big houseboat, christened it *Tarry Awhile*, and became a very popular guide serving wealthy, big-city hunters. He also began helping a prolific Chincoteague decoy carver named Ira Hudson whenever Hudson was overwhelmed with too many orders.

In time, Hancock became quite the carver himself. Collectors say what makes his work distinctive is the way he gave his ducks a broad, flat-bottomed body and flat, paddle-shaped tails. Overall, modern experts say his style tended toward the primitive, folk-art end of the decoy spectrum. Online recently we found Hancock decoys selling for lows of around \$200 to highs of around \$800.

One dealer in his online comments put it this way: Hancock "didn't make the prettiest decoy ever, but he probably forgot more about killing ducks than 90 percent" of his decoy-making contemporaries ever knew. One of his Miniature Black Ducks is pictured here.



Hancock lived to the age of 87, dying in 1974. It is estimated that he made an astounding 20,000 decoys by the time he was done.

I am happy to announce that our museum now has, perhaps the most complete Miles Hancock Collection of life size and miniature decoys on display until May 2021. I want to thank Bill Hall of Bloxom, VA for allowing us to put them on display.

The picture on the left was taken during the filming of the movie, [Misty Of Chincoteague](#). It is Miles Hancock with actor David Ladd.

Happy Fourth of July!





Upcoming Guild Events:

07/04/2020: July 4th Holiday

07/21/2020: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

07/6, 13, 20, 27/2020: de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Monday
We are a hands-on Garden Club
So, bring your gloves and tools.

08/18/2020: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

08/03, 10, 17, 24,/ 2020: de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Tuesday
We are a hands-on Garden Club
So, bring your gloves and tools.

09/01/2020 Back Bay Wildfowl Guild
Membership Meeting 7:00pm, Social 6:00pm
Speaker: TBA

09/07/2020: Labor Day

09/ 14, 21, 28/2020: de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Monday
No meeting Monday, September 7th
We are a hands-on Garden Club
So, bring your gloves and tools.

09/22/2020: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

Save these Dates

10/11/2020 Fall BBQ & Oyster Roast

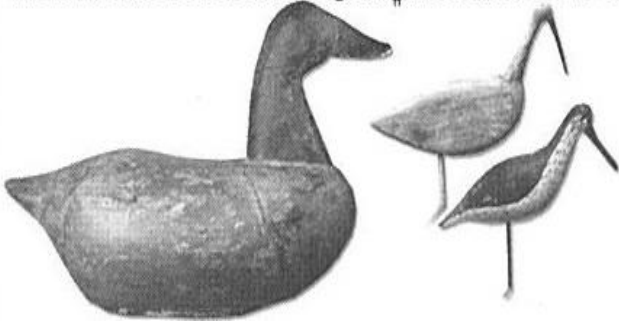
12/01/2020 Christmas Party



DECOYS WANTED

WE BUY WOODEN OR CANVAS DUCKS, GEESE, SWANS & SHOREBIRDS...
WHAT IS YOUR DECOY WORTH? IT COULD BE WORTH THOUSANDS!

WE WILL PAY YOU **CASH** FOR ANY OLD DECOYS AND HUNTING ITEMS



FREE DECOY IDENTIFICATION
AND EVALUATIONS
of Single Decoys or Entire Collections

BY MARK CROMWELL

(757) 721-2746

Member North Carolina Decoy Collectors Assoc.

COLLECTOR'S SHELF

Ira Hudson 1873-1949

Ira Hudson was born in 1873 in Maryland but he grew up in Delaware. He later moved to Chincoteague, Virginia and raised his large family of nine children with his wife, Eva. Hudson built his own home and started carving decoys in 1897.

Using white pine, balsa, cedar or any other wood he could procure (from driftwood or old ships masts for example), Hudson carved both hollow and solid birds that have a life-like appearance. He made all species of geese, shorebirds and ducks that sold for varied prices according to the grade of the decoy. Hudson was an innovative carver and portrayed his birds in a variety of positions. His flying ducks, hissing geese and crooked neck brant stand out among his works. He did not adhere to any particular style, carving some decoys with extensive head detailing and others without. The tails flow or jut from the bodies, and some have been fluted. Iron upholstery tacks serve as eyes, and neck shelves appear on every decoy, but in various positions. It seems Hudson did not weight his decoys unless a customer requested him to do so. Some of his paint patterns exhibit elaborate details and scratch painting techniques, though others remain quite simple.



Ira Hudson Bluebill Decoy

It is estimated that Hudson carved over 60,000 decoys in his lifetime, most of which were shorebirds, Buffleheads and Hooded Mergansers, along with a few other species. Along with his decoys, most of which are solid, as opposed to hollow decoys, he made quite miniatures and flying birds and fish. Hudson also spent part of his time carving and building boats. He sold his decoys for four dollars per dozen to hunters, but he did not hunt.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Friends of the AWHM,

Well....this has been fun. July 1st, for many, signifies summertime. Days and nights filled with beach time, concerts and festivals, backyard BBQ's, and plenty of relaxation. That would be nice. Now July 1st signifies Virginia entering Phase 3 of the reconstitution plan towards a new normal.

Our beloved museum is open and accepting locals and visitors. We are following guidelines and recommendations from the CDC, WHO, and State that allow us to operate while minimizing the spread of COVID-19. I use the word minimizing as we cannot guarantee safety. All of us must commit to a new culture of greater personal responsibility and compliance to slow the spread. We continue to monitor the situation closely and will make adjustments as necessary.

Our museum and guild have weathered the storm thus far and are in a stable position, strategically and financially, as we look to regain the ground we have lost over the last several months. We will continue to operate very cautiously. Things remain uncertain but we are pushing forward in our planning efforts for the future.



This year signifies the 125th anniversary of the de Witt cottage and 25th anniversary of our guild. We plan to celebrate these milestones at our annual oyster roast in October. I look forward to our museum and its grounds again filled with activity and fellowship.

I am happy to report that our grant funding from the City of Virginia Beach has been restored to its full capacity for this upcoming year. Yes....FULL funding. This grant is vital to our operations. I appreciate the leadership and support from our City officials in this time of trouble. They remain committed to our community, and they appreciate the value our organizations adds to Virginia Beach.

As always, I value each and every one of you. We are all in this together. I welcome your questions, feedback, and comments. Should you wish to connect, my email is HUDSONOUTDOORS@GMAIL.COM.

Until we are together again, cheers!

Jason Seward

	<p>Free Decoy Identification and Evaluation By Jeff Tinkham Past President of The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum Call (757) 724-7131 or JEFF@TINKHAMLAW.COM</p>	
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School Yard Toy Cannon

By Jim Mehne

My Grandfather was in elementary school at the time of this story. I will guess fourth or fifth grade, that would make it about 1916. The Winchester Repeating Arms company made and patented a fully functional toy cannon in 1901. The original design was a black powder muzzleloader just like a real cannon. Now they're manufactured to fire 10 gauge shotgun shells, blanks. You can still buy them as another company now holds the patent. Marketed as blast cannons or signal cannons. In any event, they made a lot of noise and were considered superior to common fireworks in 1916. One came up for auction recently at a decoy auction here on the Shore. That is what prompted this recollection.

The year is 1916, Scottsville, Indiana is the location, and for exciting background information: the local sheriff wore a double-gun rig consisting of a matched pair of single-action 1873 Colt Army revolvers chambered for the .45 Long Colt cartridge, exactly what the Lone Ranger carried all through 1950's TV. It was also the weapon of choice for Matt Dillon on Gunsmoke, my Grandfather's favorite TV show. Known as the Peacemaker, it was manufactured up until World War 2, I believe. Sorry, could not resist.

One of the boys at school received a canon as a birthday gift. At the time anyone with ten cents could buy a dime bag of black powder down at the hardware store. This was a small bag that would fit in your shirt pocket. I believe you could also buy a dime bag of tobacco. In any event, the cannon could be loaded and fired about five times on ten cents worth of black powder. As opposed to smokeless powder, black powder produced a large amount of stinky (white) smoke which added immeasurably to the overall excitement.

The boys would gather in the school yard at recess and shoot the cannon. Apparently, in 1916, there was no supervision for the children. Standard procedure involved pouring a healthy measure of powder down the barrel, inserting a fuse, and then, utilizing a ramrod, packing it with a piece of rag. The tighter the wad, the more back pressure, resulting in more noise. In a real cannon a cannon ball was inserted at this time. That would create a lot of back pressure too.

The story became a little hazy at this point, but as the fuse was lit, an unnamed boy inserted a steel ball bearing which rolled down the barrel nicely. In the excitement of the moment, as the boys ran for cover, the cannon was kicked around and now faced toward the school house. Hey, this is how the story was told to me in the late 1950's, when I was about the same age; I share it as accurately as possible with no editorial comment.

The cannon went off with a loud report. The ball bearing pierced the exterior wall of the two- room schoolhouse, blew a neat hole just under the chalk tray, and crossed the empty classroom. It then pierced the back wall on an upward trajectory. The teacher was writing the weekly vocabulary words on the blackboard in the second room. The ball bearing crashed through the blackboard not more than 10" from the last letter written by the teacher. It made a large hole in the blackboard which, as the story went, a boy could stick his fist through!! The errant projectile continued on across the otherwise empty room and lodged in the far wall. The velocity of the ball bearing became the subject of considerable conjecture in the days following the incident. Fast as a rifle bullet, that was for sure!!

An inquisition of sorts was conducted by the teacher after he regained some sense of composure. It was reported he was quite frightened by the incident and saw no humor in it. No humor at all, to be accurate. In any event, the boys were lined up and no one knew exactly what had happened, but all agreed it was an accident and certainly would not happen again. Since no one came forward, all were punished. They each received ten "licks" with a large hickory switch, which was described as more like a small tree limb by one recipient of this brutal punishment. This individual also stated emphatically they never did that again!



Ah yes. The year was 1916, men were men back then, and little boys left to their own devices frequently got into trouble, but most miraculously survived to regale their grandchildren with stories from the good old days. And little boys received cannons for their birthday. Although my wife enjoyed the story, she was not eager for me to bid on the cannon. Following considerable whining and a very favorable response from all the other grandchildren, my wife relented, a bid was placed, and she is now the reluctant owner of a 15 pound, fully functional, cast iron cannon. Victory at auction!! I can almost smell the black powder.



FROM THE MUSEUM DIRECTOR

I would like to begin by acknowledging your Back Bay Wildfowl Guild Board of Directors. It is because of their hard work and leadership that we are still able to operate our museum. Like all non-profits, we depend on the generosity of our members and visitors to be able to sustain our operation. Your Board has been able to weather several threats to our existence recently through strong political influence and well-grounded imagination in the events we produce. Please look on the last page of this newsletter, make note of the members of your Board of Directors and thank them for their hard work. I am grateful to have them as partners in the operation of the museum.

I also want to acknowledge a couple of Virginia Beach City Council Members who have been unwavering in their strong support for the museum, Rosemary Wilson and Michael Berlucchi. They are both running for re- election this year and now will need our support. Please support them in any way possible.

After almost an entire year of permits and hearings, we have been granted a Conditional Use Permit by the City Council to use the museum and its grounds as a venue for weddings, concerts, parties, reunions or business retreats. This opens the door for us to generate a large amount of revenue. Please be ready to recommend the museum as a venue for any event. For more information you may visit the deWitt Cottage Website at thedewittcottage.org or the museum website at awhm.org. You may also contact Martha Davenport at thedewittcottage@awhm.org or Lynn Hightower at director@atwildfowl.org.

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum's online gift shop is two years old! Please visit awhm.org/giftshop and browse our collection of items for sale. We will be adding new items daily throughout the summer. Ten Percent of every online purchase goes to help rescue injured wildfowl or protect environmentally sensitive wetlands. Shipping on every purchase is **FREE!** You can also come shop in person at the Shore Gallery Seaside Gift Shop. Please support your museum.

The museum gardens are in full bloom and absolutely gorgeous; please come by and visit with us soon!

Thanks, Lynn Hightower



BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jason Seward, President Parke Atkinson, Vice President
Jim Mehne, Secretary Larry Davenport, Treasurer
Jim Briggs Mark Cromwell
George Powell Tom Richards
Jeff Tinkham William Walsh, Jr., Curator
Fletcher Bryant, President Emeritus

MUSEUM CARVERS

Monday Elaine Polizos
Tuesday: Open
Wednesday: Roy Carlson & Ed Morrison
Thursday: Open
"The Boathouse Boys" Carving Club: Al, Jamie, John, Pete
Friday: Susan Moritz
Saturday: Open
Sunday: Open

Carvers are not demonstrating due to Covid-19

MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS

Tuesday: OPEN
Wednesday: OPEN
Thursday OPEN
Friday: OPEN
Saturday: OPEN
Sunday: OPEN
Museum Grounds: Jacky Richards, Martha Davenport, Cheryl Garvey, Jan McGuire, Evie Fetterolf, Mary Ann Biagetti

MUSEUM STAFF

Lynn Hightower, Director Joe Leo, Operations Mgr.

MUSEUM CONTACT INFORMATION

ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM
1113 Atlantic Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Telephone: 757.437.8432
Facsimile: 757.437.9950
Website: www.awhm.org
Email: director@atwildfowl.org

You can now pay your dues online at awhm.org !

Please understand that we depend on every dollar to operate the museum. If you have not paid your 2020 dues, please give serious consideration to sending them into the museum right away. Beginning May 1, 2020, any listed member who has not paid their dues will receive an invoice from the museum director requesting payment of their annual dues

2020 DUES

\$35/YR INDIVIDUAL
\$100/YR BRONZE
\$500/YR GOLD

\$50/FAMILY
\$200/YR SILVER
\$1,000/YR PRESIDENTS CIRCLE



**BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD
2020 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM**

NAME: _____ AMOUNT PAID _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: _____ [CELL] _____

January 1, 2020 kicked off our Annual Membership Campaign. Each member is encouraged to find one new member to join the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild. Our very existence depends on growing the membership of the Guild. Please encourage everyone you know to become a member!

Please pass this newsletter on to any potential new member!

