

THE WILDFOWLER

FEBRUARY 2021

A PUBLICATION OF THE ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM AND THE BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD

In May of 1991 Lawrence Maddry wrote a newspaper column in the *Virginian-Pilot* about the deWitt Cottage and the House Matriarch, Julia C. deWitt. Here is that column:

When Julia C. deWitt of Virginia Beach died last week at the age of 88, the loss of her spirit and grace in the community was widely mourned. And even those who barely knew her felt that a thread tied to something special in the past had been severed. She was raised in the eyrie DeWitt cottage at 12th St and Atlantic Ave a home that comes about as close to a sailing ship as a cottage constructed a Brit can get. It is a reminder to all who see it of gentle people and more graceful times.



The three-story gray cottage, with its wide porches, yawning windows and distinctive cupola, was built in 1895 by B. P. Holland, Virginia Beach's first mayor. A national landmark, it is the only remaining private residence on the resort strip and soon will become the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Center. Julia deWitt's father, Cornelius deWitt, bought the cottage with 22 rooms as a sanctuary for his wife, Cecile, and their large brood of children in 1909. Cornelius deWitt was a prominent Norfolk banker and cotton broker. A genial man, he summoned children to meals by blowing a bugle on the beach. And he dressed his ten children alike for their outings on streetcars or trips to church. A Hunter, like Bernard Holland, he used the cupola as a lookout for ducks and geese on Lake Holly at 12 St and Pacific Ave.

Author Louisa Kyle said that she and Julia de Witt first greeted each other from baby carriages on Freemason St in Norfolk. As a fourth grader she visited Julia by taking a forty-five-minute streetcar ride to their beach home. "The deWitt's owned a whole city block that was catty corner to the house. They kept a cow over there with chickens and gardens," she said. "Each of the children had their own garden with their own seeds. I think of Julia now with those yellow California poppies; so lovely."

"It was a wonderful cottage. Everyone laughing and interested in something. Julia organized the first lunchroom in a Norfolk school at the Boush St School. My recollection is that Julia spoke French during meals in the cottage dining room. The deWitt's had so many friends that the cottage became a second home for hundreds of their family friends, and, in time, for the children and grandchildren of their friends."

"Anyone in trouble could go there to find tea and sympathy," Louisa Kyle recalled. "But it was mainly a place for fun. They had an autograph book that you were required to sign. And they must have had a dozen replicas of the autograph book they had collected over the years. It was called the pig book. It was custom for the person signing the book to be blindfolded, first. Then, while blindfolded, they had to draw a pig before signing their autograph."

The parents had little time to enjoy their home and children both had passed away by 1923, and Julia and her older sister, Elizabeth, raised their younger siblings. "Julia became the hub around which the whole house



revolved,” Kyle recalled , “and she mothered so many children that were not her own.” Julia never married or had any children of her own,

Like other families, the dewitt’s were almost ruined by the Great Depression and took in boarders to earn extra money. Elizabeth deWitt and Julia baby sat for the children of their friends to earn extra money. The sisters would carry bags of books to the children's homes and read stories to them until they were old enough to read the books themselves. Elizabeth who died in 1971, helped establish the city's first lending library. That library became the first Virginia Beach Public Library. The children's wing of the library at Galilee Episcopal Church is named for Elizabeth deWitt.

Sometimes the children being cared for by the deWitt sisters were brought to the cottage and could prowl about the attic or peer out to sea from the cupola. One was Craig Slingluff, now a doctor at Duke University Hospital. He described the cottage, “with the wide hallways where summer breezes flowed through the front door straight through to the back door, as a place almost lost in a time that was very special!” Slingluff’s Mother, Emily, remembers the cottage as a home, “where materialism was never considered. Kind thoughts and gentleness were all that mattered.”

Boy, with all that has happened over the past few months in our country; we sure could use some more kindness and gentleness!

Upcoming Guild Events:

02/01, 08, 15, 22, 2021: de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Monday
Bring your work gloves and tools

02/02/2021 Back Bay Wildfowl Guild
Membership Meeting 7:00pm, Virtual
Program: Show and Tell

02/16/2020: Board Meeting
7:00pm Virtual

03/01, 08, 15, 22, 29, 2021: de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Monday
Bring your work gloves and tools

03/16/2021: Board Meeting
7:00 pm Virtual

Save these Dates

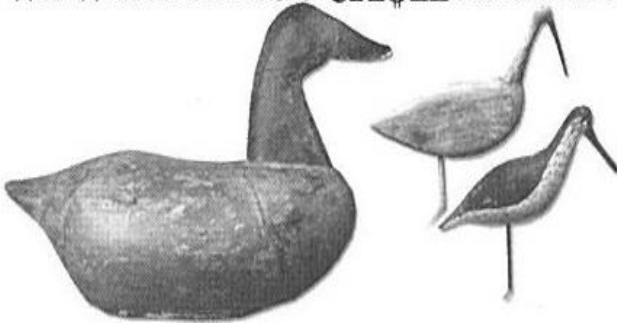
Tuesday May 4, 2021 Lucky Oyster Virginia Beach, VA 5:30pm-8:00pm



DECOYS WANTED

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BY MARK CROMWELL

(757) 721-2746

Member North Carolina Decoy Collectors Assoc.

COLLECTOR' SHELF



Rare Canada goose, James Best, Kittyhawk, North Carolina. 23.75" long. Exceptionally fine form. *Repainted a long time ago for use as a swan; much of the paint has flaked off showing the original goose paint; two cracks through neck; thin cracks in lower side and underside.*

Literature: "Gunnin birds," Kroghie Andresen.
"North American decoys," Oct-Dec 1964 issue.

(15,000 - 20,000)



James R. Best Swan/Goose

By Mark & Margie Cromwell
(Pictures on previous page)

James Best (1866-1933) Born and raised in Kitty Hawk, N.C.

The goose is from the famous stand of eighteen geese carved from the mast of the schooner, William H. Davidson.

Mr. Best made this stand of decoys for his friend, A. B. Love Tillet around 1910. The goose had several layers of paint applied by the Twiford family from Elizabeth City, N. C. after they inherited the goose and used it for many hunting seasons.

The stately form sets this goose decoy apart from any other North Carolina decoys. The decoys simply have the best form and style of any old working goose or swan decoys made in North Carolina.

My personal story about this goose took place at the Guyette & Deeter, Inc. auction November 21, 2020. I purchased the goose with swan overpaint for \$30,000.00. As a collector I knew that the form was great but I had to question whether there was good, old paint left under the swan white surface paint.

I went back and forth trying to decide whether or not to take a chance on the goose. My wife, Margie, said - You've lost your mind spending that much money on a repainted decoy.

After sending photos to the restorer and discussing the paint we felt like the decoy could be brought back to its original purpose as a goose decoy.

The decision was made to bid and purchase the decoy. Please see photos of before and after the restoration and you be the judge.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Friends of the AWHM,

I hope my note finds you well as we continue to navigate COVID-19 and its impact on our lives. The month of January has come and gone, and just like that, we only have 11 months left in 2021.

As we quickly move through the year, unfortunately and fortunately, little has changed at the museum. We continue to keep everyone's health and safety as our top priority. We are currently closed and will remain closed until the vaccinations become more readily accessible. I have asked Lynn and Martha Davenport to collaborate on a re-open plan that will allow us to hit the ground running once we give the green light. While we look forward to doing what we do best, there are many challenges ahead. Many businesses, city officials, and nonprofits are extremely concerned that this could be yet another sub-par summer for the Virginia Beach oceanfront. With this in mind, our re-open plan must be an aggressive one that looks for additional revenue streams and other unique opportunities.

We continue with the process of adding a gazebo to the main lawn which will be a worthy addition to the museum from not only for aesthetics but for special event and wedding rentals. We have received preliminary drawings and are currently waiting on cost analysis before moving ahead to next steps. I look forward to sharing its design with you in the near future. We continue to work with the city on several other updates and upgrades. More to come on these as well.

As I have shared with you before, we have/are weathering this storm well. We look forward to returning to some kind of normal in the near future and are strategically planning to again make up the most ground we possibly can once we are able to return to normal operations.

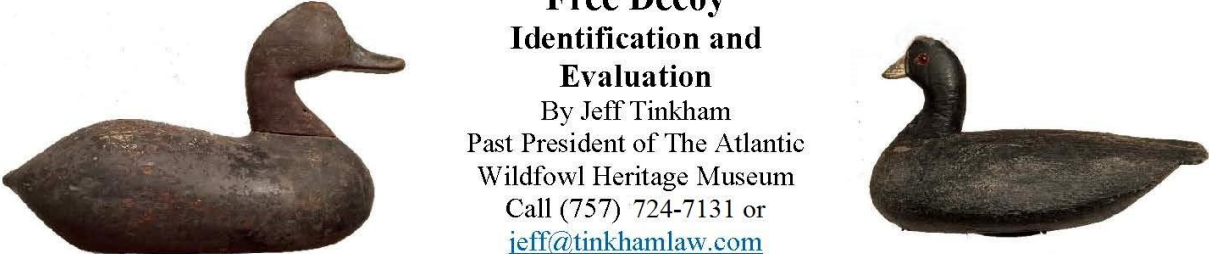
I thank you for your continued support of the AWHM. Stay healthy!

Cheers.

Jason Seward

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**Free Decoy
Identification and
Evaluation**
By Jeff Tinkham
Past President of The Atlantic
Wildfowl Heritage Museum
Call (757) 724-7131 or
jeff@tinkhamlaw.com

Happy Valentine's Day

From Good House Keeping by LIZZ SCHUMER Dec 22, 2020

We don't really know which St. Valentine the holiday technically celebrates, according to History.com. The Catholic church has records of at least three different martyrs named Valentine or Valentinus. One of them, a priest in third century Rome, defied the emperor Claudius when he decided to outlaw marriage for young men. Valentine continued performing marriage ceremonies for the lovers in secret, and Claudius had him killed for it when he found out.

Another Valentine supposedly helped Christians escape from prison, and was also martyred for it. Yet another one is said to have sent the first "Valentine" letter from prison, allegedly to the jailor's daughter. Legend has it, he signed the note, "from your Valentine," a greeting we still use today. Whichever saint the holiday memorializes, we generally agree he was kind, heroic and most importantly, very much pro-love.

Much like Christmas, Easter and other Christian holidays, we may have first begun celebrating Valentine's Day in February in an effort to draw attention from a Pagan holiday set at the same time. In this case, that's Lupercalia, a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. During the festival, Roman priests visited the cave where Romulus and Remus were said to have been raised by a she-wolf, and sacrifice a goat for fertility and a dog for purification, according to Encyclopedia Britannica. They then dipped the hide in the blood and went around town smacking women and crop fields with it, to encourage fertility in the new year.

Women also placed strips of paper with their names in a giant urn, as part of the celebration. Eligible bachelors drew names out of the urn, and those they chose would become their partner for the year. Many of those matches ended up married. At the end of the fifth century, the pope declared the holiday un-Christian, and replaced it with St. Valentine's Day instead.

Like many Christian feast days, Valentine's didn't become associated with secular practices until later. In the Middle Ages, people thought the feast day also symbolized the beginning of birds' mating season and so they began to associate it with becoming, as *Bambi* so charmingly calls it, "twitterpated." English poet Geoffrey Chaucer recorded the day as a romantic celebration for the first time in his 1375 poem "Parliament of Fowles." According to Poetry in Translation, he wrote, "For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day / When every foul cometh there to choose his mate."

And from the very beginning, people took issue with how Valentine's Day was celebrated. "People love the idea that there were these wonderful eras before our own time when people celebrated Valentine's Day in the most authentic way," Elizabeth Nelson, a 19th-century pop culture expert who wrote the book on marketing the holiday told the University of Nevada. "But there was always this long and complicated history about Valentine's Day and people actually thought that it was too commercial and insincere from the very beginning."



While people did share Valentine’s Day greetings with one another as early as the Middle Ages, written notes weren’t as popular, probably because the literacy rate wasn’t high, either. The oldest known valentine that still exists today was a poem written in 1415 by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London following his capture at the Battle of Agincourt. People who need some throwback love letter advice can still view it at the British Library in London.

Exchanging cards between lovers, family members and friends didn’t become widely popular until the 18th century. In the 1900s, improvements in printing technology made exchanging cards even easier (albeit a little less personal), with the advent of pre-printed cards. Postage got more affordable around that time too, which also contributed. At that time, Nelson says, cards were often a little off-color, frequently including sexual innuendo that might even make grandma blush today.

FROM THE MUSEUM DIRECTOR

I know it seems like the entire world has just stopped. Businesses are closing, travel (except for the holidays) is almost non-existent, no open movie houses, no concerts, and even schools are struggling to remain open. It has been over an entire year since we have had a Back Bay Wildfowl Guild gathering; December 3, 2019. Here at the deWitt Cottage, your Board of Directors have used this time to shore up our finances to ensure we are able to survive the pandemic and the economic disaster. We are also planning for the future, when we will be beyond the pandemic and we can open for business again.

In December, the City put new flooring down in the gift shop area that matches the rest of the museum. We have replaced the 25 year old handicap chairlift with a brand spanking new chairlift. The chairlift was the idea of Alice Walsh; so we named the new chairlift in her honor, **ALICE**. When we are back to operating at regular hours, you will want to come in and ride **ALICE** up and down the stairs. We have also hired a contractor to add new surveillance equipment to the museum, so we are able to monitor the entire museum grounds. We are also working with the City Planning Department to reconstruct a Gazebo on the museum grounds that the deWitt family had on the grounds between 1915 and 1925. Here is a picture of Harriet deWitt with her bicycle in front of the Gazebo around 1915.



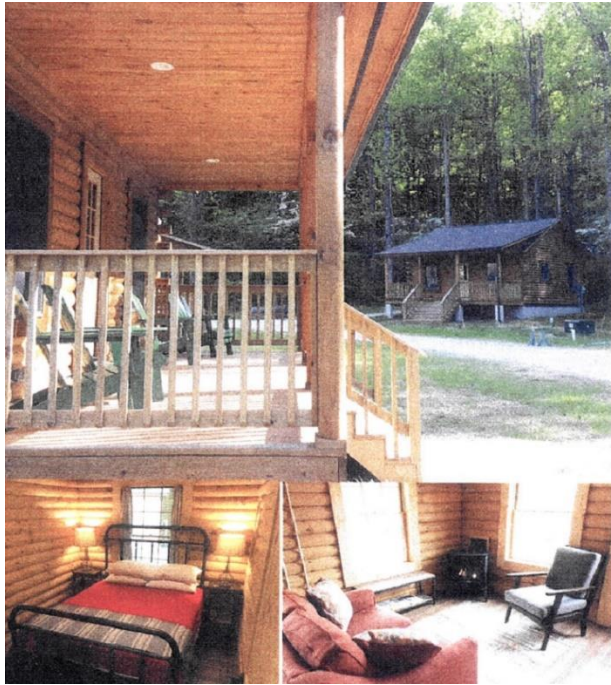
We are planning to celebrate Spring at the Lucky Oyster on May 4, 2021; if we are able to do it **safely**. Let’s pray all is well by then. We will attempt to have our second Virtual General Membership Meeting on Tuesday, February 2, 2021 at 7:00pm. Our first one, back in September only had six participants. In order to participate you must have the ZOOM app on your computer, phone or other device. You can download the app free at your PC or MAC app store online. Once you have installed the app you can simply click on the link below.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84519019546?pwd=ZHhxejQ3RitMSU9ueVJLYjcwaXBjZz09>

and you will be able to join the meeting. I look forward to seeing everyone on February 2nd.

Lynn Hightower
Director





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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 Phil Davenport
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 & Tom Richards, Martha Davenport

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: 757.437.9055
Website: www.awhm.org
Email: director@atwildfowl.org

Please understand that we depend on every dollar to operate the museum. If you have not yet paid your 2021 dues, please give serious consideration to sending them into the museum right away. Beginning January 1, 2021, Membership cards will have an expiration date. Each member will receive an invoice from the museum director requesting payment of their annual dues after the expiration date. Memberships run for 12 consecutive months from the date annual dues are paid.

2021 DUES

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

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



BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2021 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

NAME: _____ AMOUNT PAID _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: _____ [CELL] _____

January 1, 2021 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!

