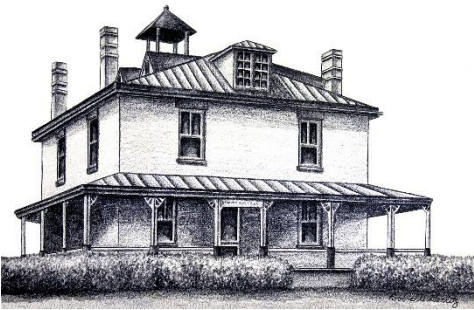


THE WILDFOWLER

JULY 2021

A PUBLICATION OF THE ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM

Back Bay Wildfowl Memories *deWitt Cottage History*



The de Witt Cottage, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1895 by Bernard P. Holland, the *Town* of Virginia Beach's first postmaster and mayor, for his bride as a year round home. It is the oldest remaining structure on the City's oceanfront built during the City's initial development period. It still has its integrity of location, design and workmanship. The oceanfront's first significant development period was between its foundation in 1883 and its incorporation as the Town of Virginia Beach in 1906. Mrs. Holland did not like the sound of the pounding surf nor was she fond of the cottage's "small" size. She asked her husband to relocate. He built a new and larger home directly across what is now Atlantic Avenue. They subsequently sold the Cottage to the de Witt family in 1909. The de Witts moved into their new home that same year. Cornelius de Witt, a Norfolk banker and cotton broker, initially intended for the property to be a summer home, but his wife, Cecile, had other ideas. They settled into the home on a permanent basis and eventually raised ten children at the Cottage. During their stay, family members would affectionately refer to the Cottage as "Wittensand", or "white sand". When Cornelius bought the home, he also bought a block of land across the street. He kept 200 chickens, 2 cows and numerous rabbit hutches. They also maintained vegetable gardens for each child on his tract of land. That lot, now vacant, was where the Raven Restaurant once was located.

Mr. de Witt died in 1913 and his wife died in 1923. When the mother passed, the oldest daughter, who was twenty-two years old at the time, assumed the chores of parenting. Most of the children came and went as the years passed, but Julia, Harriet and Katrine lived in their childhood home until the Cottage was purchased from the de Witt Family in 1988. With the older children "in charge", the elder daughters operated the Cottage as a guesthouse during the Great Depression. Boarders, who were frequently friends and acquaintances of the de Witts, were accepted on a limited basis in the early years. They typically paid \$7 a week or \$1.50 a day to live in the Cottage. The de Witt Cottage became a popular place to stay and remained so until the 1970s and was among the last to represent the grand old oceanfront cottages – a testament to a bygone age and vanished way of life. The de Witt Cottage is the oldest standing oceanfront cottage in the City and second oldest oceanfront structure. Only the Cape Henry Lighthouse is an older oceanfront structure.



In mid-1987, the elder daughters who were living in the home, put the Cottage up for sale. Fortunately for the larger community of Virginia Beach, the house was not purchased by a private corporation, leveled, and the oceanfront lot commercially “re-designed”. Wanting to preserve part of its early history and example of heritage, the City, with the fundraising efforts of the Virginia Beach Foundation, entered into negotiations with the family and subsequently purchased the Cottage. Purchased under the condition that the Cottage would be perpetually called the de Witt Cottage, the City began a two year effort to restore the home to its turn-of-the-century appearance and material condition befitting its historical significance.



The restoration of the Victorian era structure on the Virginia Beach oceanfront was a unique public-private venture between the de Witt family, the City of Virginia Beach, the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild, the Princess Anne Garden Club and the Virginia Beach Foundation. The late Victorian architecture, original wood paneling, spacious attic and basement, coal burning furnace and open cupola on the roof are some of the many features that typify the cottages built along the beach-front during the resort’s early years. Interestingly, Mr. Holland, the first owner, was an avid wildfowl hunter and would use the cupola as a lookout for ducks and geese on Lake Holly (one block west of the Cottage).

Restoration efforts began in 1991 and were supplemented by community volunteers. The combined efforts culminated in the restoration of the Cottage to the soundness of earlier days. During the restoration, the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild approached the City’s leadership with its long range goal, a credible way to preserve and promote, perpetuate and exhibit historical wildfowl artifacts, the wildfowling history of the region, and actively promote interest in the wildfowling arts. Complementing the City’s goal of converting the Cottage into a resort area cultural and education center, a lease agreement was established between the City and the Guild, that resulted in the establishment of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum in 1995. By its occupancy of the Cottage, the Museum adopted a second mission which also complements the City’s goal: the Museum adds a very important site to the City’s efforts to preserve the early history of Virginia Beach.



Today, inside the Museum, the visitor will view examples representing the evolution of the art of decoy carving using primitive tools to more elaborate and expressive contemporary carvings and art work of today. Memorabilia of the old hunt clubs can be viewed throughout the Museum and provides an opportunity for both memory and education. The museum has an excellent variety of original oil and watercolor paintings along with its award winning contemporary carvings by nationally known artists. On the second floor, the Edgar T. Brown Virginia Beach Yesterday Gallery is a photo and artifact gallery documenting some of early Virginia Beach history as a resort. Photos of the de Witt family along with a 1930’s era surfboard made by Buddy Cox for Peter de Witt are located in the upstairs hallway. An art gallery occupies the remainder of the second floor. The Museum’s exhibits are supported by a well-stocked gift shop featuring works by carvers and artists from the local area.





Upcoming Guild Events:

07/04/2021: July 4th Holiday

07/12, 19, 26/2021: 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.

08/17/2021: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

08/02, 09, 16, 23, 30,/ 2021: 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.

09/06/2021: Labor Day

09/07/2021 Back Bay Wildfowl Guild
Membership Meeting 7:00pm, Social 6:00pm
Speaker: TBA

09/13, 20, 27/2021: de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Monday
No meeting Monday, September 6th
We are a hands-on Garden Club
So, bring your gloves and tools.

09/21/2021: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

Save these Dates

10/17/2021 Fall BBQ & Oyster Roast

11/19/21 - Gingerbread House Exhibit - Preview Party

11/20/21 - 12/18/21 - Gingerbread House Exhibit open to the public

12/07/2021 Christmas Party

12/11/21 - Photos with Santa & the Red Truck,
and Holiday Craft Fair - Time: TBA



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

John W. Austin July 11, 1891 – April 11, 1981

Born on Hatteras Island, NC where his father William Riley was the lighthouse keeper. At an early age of 6 months John's father was transferred to the Corolla lighthouse.

John grew up in Corolla Village and became a waterman and market hunter. During his market hunting days John sold waterfowl to the owner of a steamboat named "Comet" who would buy ducks and geese for the market. After the war John became a waterfowling guide in the 1920's and 1930's. John made his own decoys and became an accomplished decoy carver. His decoys were durable and sturdy and had a very appealing look. John made decoys for various clubs that he guided for near Corolla, NC such as the Lighthouse Club, the Whalehead club and the O'Neal Lodge in Seagull. John Austin made several styles of decoys in his lifetime. This canvasback is one of the larger decoys he made.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Friends of the AWHM,

Well....

It finally appears that Virginia is emerging from the worst pandemic in the world since the 1918 Spanish Flu. Air travel has resumed, and people are hitting the road in record numbers for the 4th of July weekend. I hope each of you can gather with family and friends over the holiday

This also means tourists are returning to the resort. Our museum had a record number of visitors in June since the beginning of the pandemic. We also set a record for museum gift shop sales in June. Martha Davenport, our Events Coordinator has booked 8 events for the next six months; that coupled with our own museum sponsored events means we will host a dozen events on our grounds before Christmas. This is all very good news for the sustainability of our Guild and Museum. 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 18 months. We will continue to operate very cautiously.



LAST year was the **125th** anniversary of the de Witt cottage, **45th** anniversary of our guild and **25th** anniversary of our museum. We had planned to celebrate these milestones at our annual oyster roast in October; however, that event was cancelled. So, I am looking forward to our grand celebration on October 17, 2021. This event is also a homecoming. We want everyone who has ever been associated with this organization to come back home and reestablish old relationships. I want our museum and its grounds to again be filled with activity and fellowship.

We are also planning to have a great Christmas party this year. We will gather at the Virginia Beach Wedding Company's new venue located at 2014 Atlantic Avenue. Rose CiConta, The Owner, is a lovely person. She and her staff frequently partner with the museum to provide services to couples at the de Witt Cottage. They get great reviews; for more information about the venue visit: VirginiaBeachvenue.com

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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On Sale now in the Museum Gift Shop



Sunrise Over The de Witt Cottage

Photograph mounted on a Canvas Wrap

Retail 8X10 \$40.00	Museum Members \$20.00
Retail 11X14 \$50.00	Museum Members \$30.00
Retail 16X20 \$100.00	Museum Members \$50.00

Great Blue Heron

Photograph mounted on a Canvas Wrap

Retail 8X10 \$40.00	Museum Members \$20.00
Retail 11X14 \$50.00	Museum Members \$30.00
Retail 16X20 \$100.00	Museum Members \$50.00





Golf Club Head Covers
All Animals and wildfowl
Come visit or go to awhm.org/shop
To see our wide selection
\$30.00 each

FROM THE MUSEUM DIRECTOR

First of all, I want to invite everyone back to the museum on September 7th 2021 for our first in person Guild Membership Meeting in more than two years! Hallelujah! Please plan to attend. The social starts at 6:00pm with hors d'oeuvres and beverages; followed by a business meeting and a guest speaker. We are trying to get Rich Smoker from Marion Station, MD, near Crisfield, MD. Rich is currently the Vice-Chairman of the Ward Foundation in Salisbury, MD.

We have now been operating the museum and its grounds as a venue for weddings, concerts, parties, reunions, or business retreats. Please be ready to recommend the museum as a venue for any event. For more information you may visit the de Witt Cottage Website at thedewittcottage.org or the museum website at awhm.org. You may also contact Martha Davenport at thedewittcottage@gmail.com or Lynn Hightower at director@atwildfowl.org. Martha has done a wonderful job of booking up our venue for the rest of the 2021. Please check out the save the date section of the upcoming events in this newsletter.

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum's online gift shop is three years old! Please visit awhm.org 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 Museum Gift Shop. Please support your museum.

The museum gardens are in full bloom and absolutely gorgeous; please come by and visit with us soon! Our garden club has worked diligently to rearrange and build new gardens all winter long. Special thanks to Jacky and Tom Richards and Martha and Larry Davenport.

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 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

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

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 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

