

THE WILDFOWLER

JULY 2026

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

Save the Date!

Celebrate the McNair Decoy Legacy at Our Annual Fall Fundraiser

ATLANTIC WILDFOWL
HERITAGE MUSEUM
de Witt Cottage

HIGHLIGHTING THE MCNAIR
DECOY LEGACY
FALL CELEBRATION 2026

MCNAIR & SONS DECOYS
A SPECIAL EXHIBITION
INCLUDING THE MARK AND
MARGIE CROMWELL COLLECTION

MEET THE CARVERS
MARK, IAN, AND COLIN AND
EXPERIENCE A LIVE CARVING
DEMONSTRATION. 200 OF THEIR
CARVINGS WILL BE ON DISPLAY
IN THE MUSEUM.

There will be an auction with live and online bidding for a pintail by Mark, a black duck by Ian and a carving by Colin created especially for this fundraiser event.
Opening Reception Saturday September 19th, 2026, 3pm VIP, 4pm general admission at the Dewitt Cottage, Virginia Beach
CONTACT DIRECTOR@AWHM.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION
AND TO REGISTER TO BID ON MCNAIR DECOYS. AWHM.ORG | 1113 ATLANTIC AVENUE, VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23451

Sponsored by Copley Fine Art Auctions
COPLEY FINE ART AUCTIONS

Join us for one of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum's most anticipated events of the year! On Saturday, September 19, 2026, friends, members, collectors, and supporters are invited to the historic de Witt Cottage for an unforgettable afternoon celebrating the artistry, tradition, and heritage of the legendary McNair family of decoy carvers.

It was such an honor to have the McNair family support our Fall Fundraiser and Auction last year, and we are thrilled to welcome them back for this year's celebration. Their generosity, talent, and commitment to preserving the tradition of decoy carving helped make last year's event a tremendous success, and we are grateful to once again partner with this extraordinary family.



This year's Annual Fall Fundraiser will feature the McNair & Sons Decoys exhibition, showcasing extraordinary carvings by Mark, Ian, and Colin McNair, including pieces from the renowned Mark and Margie Cromwell Collection. Guests will also enjoy an exclusive live carving demonstration and can meet the artists whose work is admired by collectors around the world.

The excitement continues with an in-person live and online auction featuring original carvings created especially for this event by the McNair family. Whether you're an avid collector or simply appreciate exceptional craftsmanship, this is a rare opportunity to own a unique work of art while supporting the museum's mission. Every dollar raised helps preserve Virginia Beach's rich coastal heritage, expand educational programming, and care for the historic de Witt Cottage for generations to come.

The festivities begin with a VIP Reception at 3:00 p.m., followed by General Ticket Admission at 4:00 p.m. Tickets will be available for purchase soon, and the online auction registration link will be announced in the coming weeks. Be sure to watch your email, our website, and our social media pages for ticket information and event updates.

Want to Become an Event Sponsor for this event

Show your support for one of Virginia Beach's most treasured cultural institutions by becoming an event sponsor. Sponsorship offers valuable recognition while helping preserve the history, art, and traditions that make our museum unique. If your company or organization would like information about sponsorship opportunities, please contact Aimee Rhodes at director@awhm.org.

We look forward to celebrating with you on September 19th for an afternoon of exceptional decoy artistry, great company, and a shared commitment to preserving our coastal heritage. We look forward to having you there.

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





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

**FREE DECOY IDENTIFICATION & EVALUATIONS
OF SINGLE DECOYS OR ENTIRE COLLECTIONS
BY MARK CROMWELL 757-721-2746**
Member North Carolina Decoy Collectors Assoc.



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Members, Friends, and Supporters,

It has been an incredible honor to serve as President of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum Board of Directors for the past two and half years. During that time, I have had the privilege of working alongside an outstanding Board, dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and a community that is deeply committed to preserving our coastal heritage.

As the museum continues to grow, I am excited to share that I have stepped down as President of the Board to accept the position of Executive Director of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. I am grateful for the confidence placed in me, and I look forward to serving the museum in this new capacity while continuing to build on the strong foundation we have created together.

I would also like to recognize Lynn Hightower for his dedicated years of service as Executive Director. Lynn has made many meaningful contributions to the museum, and I am pleased that he will continue to serve as a member of our Board of Directors. His experience and passion for our mission will remain a tremendous asset to our organization.

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum is entering an exciting new chapter. We have wonderful programs, special events, and new opportunities ahead, and I am eager to work with our Board, staff, volunteers, members, and supporters to continue preserving and sharing the rich history of Virginia's coastal heritage.

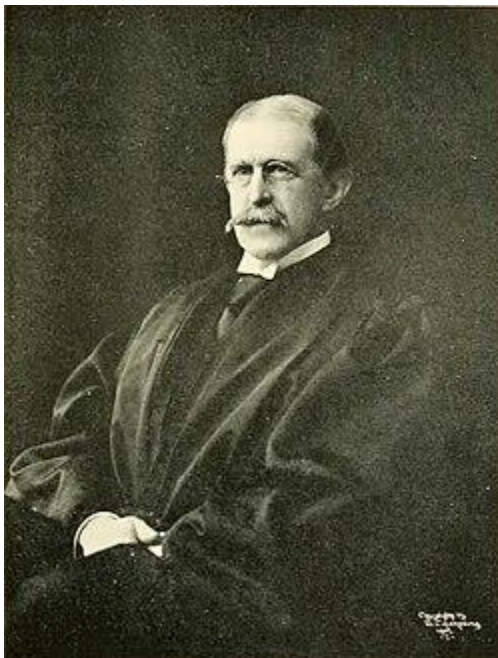
Thank you for your continued encouragement, generosity, and belief in our mission. Your support makes everything we do possible, and I look forward to seeing you at the Museum in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

Aimee Rhodes
Executive Director

	Free Decoy Identification and Evaluation By Jeff Tinkham Past President of The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum Call (757) 724-7131 or jeff@tinkhamlaw.com	
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William Caleb Loring
(And A Tale of Divided Loyalties)
(1851-1930)

This month, we will revisit the Lighthouse Club. It being the 250th Anniversary of our nation's Declaration of Independence, we'll also trace our Lighthouse Club member's ancestry back to the Revolutionary War, revealing a very interesting and perhaps little-known story of divided loyalties during the earliest days of our fight for independence. (Note: American patriots never referred to the battle with Britain as the 'War for Independence.' Patriots already considered themselves independent of Britain, a condition and state of being that King George III and his supporters wanted to change. Instead, Patriots referred to the conflict as 'The Cause,' and, if queried, would say they were fighting for 'The Cause.')

William Caleb Loring was a member of the Lighthouse Club on Currituck Sound. He hunted waterfowl there during the late 1800s to early 1900s. Like all members of Boston's Loring family, he traced his lineage back to Thomas Loring of Axminster in Devonshire England who arrived in Hingham, Massachusetts in 1634 as one of the earliest members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Like most other Lighthouse Club members (who also traced their lineages back to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony), he was a native of Boston (yes, another Boston Brahmin) and attended Harvard. After graduating from Harvard Law, he worked in his family's law firm, where he provided legal services to other Lighthouse Club members (notably, the Amorys and Hammonds). He also served as an Assistant Attorney General for Massachusetts and was appointed a Justice for the state's Supreme Court, filling the vacancy created by the elevation of famous jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes to Chief Justice.

While what we know about Loring's life and career is certainly notable, I find the story of the Loring family's history during the Revolutionary War significantly more remarkable. William Caleb Loring's father (and law partner) was Caleb William Loring (1819-1897). Caleb was the son of Charles Greely Loring (1794-1867). Caleb and Charles were also law partners. Charles was the son of Caleb Loring III (1764-1850). Caleb was a namesake of the firm of Loring & Curtis. (Readers may recall an earlier Wildfowl Heritage installment on Lighthouse Club member, African big-game hunter, and lawyer Charles Pelham Curtis.) Caleb's father was also named Caleb (1736-1787), and this is where our story of 'divided loyalties' during the Revolutionary War begins. This Caleb was both a wealthy distiller and owner of several sea vessels. He was also a staunch patriot during the Revolutionary War. For that reason, his vessels were the object of depredations by the British navy. Caleb's *Rising Sun* was captured and scuttled by a British frigate. His *Neptune* was captured by the British privateer *Penobscot*, sometime later recaptured by the American schooner *Jackal*, taken again on the same day by the British privateer *Experiment*, but then retaken eight hours later by the *Jackal* and sailed into Salem, Massachusetts. Lest one presumes all was then well and the ship's ownership was restored to Caleb Loring, admiralty law allowed the prize to go to the last captor, since the papers and commissions of the British were found on board Caleb's *Neptune* when it was last captured (for the second time) by the *Jackal*. (I believe our AWHM museum has a new board member schooled in the complexities of admiralty law!) So we see that our patriot, Caleb Loring, was treated roughly and suffered significant personal loss for his patriotism.

Let's now compare Caleb's circumstances to those of a related branch of the Loring family, which also traces its lineage back to Thomas Loring of the Massachusetts Bay Colony—i.e., father and son Joshua Loring and Joshua Jr. Rather than being patriots supporting the American cause, these Lorings were Loyalists—i.e., supporters of

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the British and King George III. Joshua Loring (1716-1781) was a Commodore in the British Navy, which he joined as a young Massachusetts colonist in the 1730s. His son, Joshua, Jr. (1744-1789), however, was arguably the most prominent Revolutionary-era member of the Loring clan. A veteran of the French and Indian War, Joshua, Jr. had served as a British provincial officer and developed close relationships with senior British military leaders. His and his father's unwavering loyalty to the Crown placed them at odds with the growing revolutionary movement in Massachusetts. When tensions escalated during the early 1770s leading to the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, both father and son remained firmly aligned with the British government. During the British occupation of Boston, Joshua, Jr. served as Commissary General of Prisoners under British General Sir William Howe. This difficult and controversial post placed him in charge of administering American prisoners of war. Patriot writers frequently criticized him, accusing him of neglect and harsh treatment, although modern historians generally recognize that prison conditions on both sides of the conflict were often deplorable and largely beyond the control of individual administrators.

Joshua, Jr.'s wife, Mary Curtis Loring, became almost as famous—if not notorious—as her husband because of one of the Revolution's best-known scandals. While Joshua was absent on official duties, she began an affair with British General Howe during the occupation of Boston. According to contemporary accounts, Joshua, Jr. was aware of the relationship but chose discretion over confrontation, recognizing Howe's influence over his career. The episode entered Revolutionary folklore and later became the subject of numerous books and dramatic retellings, although many colorful details cannot be verified with certainty.

When the British evacuated Boston on March 17, 1776, the Lorings, retired Commodore Joshua and Joshua, Jr., departed with the fleet, joining thousands of Loyalist refugees who abandoned homes, businesses, and property rather than submit to the revolutionary government. Their estates in Massachusetts were confiscated under state confiscation acts, as were those of many prominent Loyalists.

Joshua Loring, Jr. continued to serve the British during the remainder of the war, accompanying the army first from Boston to Halifax, Nova Scotia and later to New York. After the war he settled in England, where he died in 1789. Like many Loyalists, he never returned to Massachusetts. (Commodore Joshua went from Halifax directly to England, where he died in 1781.)

The Loring family's experience reflected that of thousands of American Loyalists. While later generations often celebrated the Patriots, roughly one-fifth of the colonial population is believed to have remained loyal to Great Britain during the conflict. Like the Lorings, Loyalists were often educated, prosperous, and deeply committed to what they believed was the constitutional relationship between the colonies and the Crown. Their defeat frequently resulted in exile, financial ruin, and the permanent loss of ancestral homes.

(Note: Many Loyalists emigrated to The Bahamas after the war's end. Anyone visiting Spanish Wells and the out-islands of the Abacos will note the many Caucasian Bahamain residents. Additionally, anyone visiting Hopetown on Elbow Cay—and other of the Abaco out-islands—will be struck by the quaint, English-style cottages built by those Loyalist immigrants in the late 1700s and still lived in today by their descendants.)

Not every member of the extended Loring family shared Joshua Sr.'s and Jr.'s political views. As was true in many New England families, opinions differed from one branch to another, illustrating how the Revolution divided not only colonies but also households and generations. Today, historians view the Loring family's story as a reminder that the American Revolution was, in many respects, a civil war among neighbors and relatives. The Lorings were neither villains nor merely bystanders; they were individuals who made principled choices based on their understanding of duty and allegiance. The subsequent exile of some of the Loring family underscores the profound personal cost of political conviction during one of the most transformative periods in American history.





The history of the Loring family illustrates that the Revolution was not simply a struggle between Americans and Britons but a conflict in which Americans themselves were deeply divided. Their story provides valuable insight into the complexities of loyalty, honor, and sacrifice that shaped the founding of our country. One presumes that pulling a thread on the family histories of other of our Gilded Age waterfowl hunters would reveal similar interesting stories.

By Board Member Larry Davenport

Upcoming Guild Events:

Meets every Monday
de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Bring your work gloves and tools

07/21/2026: Board Meeting
6:00pm in-person and Virtual

PLEASE CHECK OUT WWW.AWHM.ORG FOR MORE EVENTS



Become a Member – Help Preserve Our Legacy and Heritage

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum exists because of the generosity and dedication of people like you. Every membership directly supports our mission to preserve, protect, and share the rich history, art, and traditions of Virginia's coastal and wildfowl heritage for future generations.

If you are not yet a member, we invite you to become part of our museum family by purchasing membership at the level that best suits your commitment. Your support helps us care for our historic collections, present educational programs, maintain our beautiful museum, and create meaningful experiences for visitors of all ages.

If you are already a member, thank you! We encourage you to take a moment to verify that your membership is current. Renewing your membership ensures that your support continues uninterrupted and allows us to plan confidently for the future.

Every membership, whether new, renewed, or upgraded, makes a meaningful difference. Together, we are preserving an important piece of our community's history while inspiring future generations to appreciate and celebrate our unique maritime heritage.

Thank you for believing in our mission and for helping the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum continue to thrive. We couldn't do it without you.

BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2026 MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

☒ Membership Level (please check one):

☐ \$35 / Individual

☐ \$200 / Silver

☐ \$50 / Family

☐ \$500 / Gold

☐ \$100 / Bronze

☐ \$1,000 / Presidents Circle

Renew your membership online at www.awhm.org or, text WILDFOWL to 44321

MEMBER INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT)

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☐ Cell ☐ Home



Please pass this newsletter on to any potential new member.

Thank you for your support!

Mail this form and payment to:
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Virginia Beach, VA 23451

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[Questions?](#)

[Email the Director at director@awhm.org](mailto:director@awhm.org)

