

The Wildfowler

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

JULY 2025

Announcing The Arrival of A New Exhibit.

A Tribute to Craftsmanship: The Cromwell McNair Collection on Display at the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum is proud to showcase a remarkable tribute to one of America's most celebrated decoy carvers, Mark McNair, thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Mark and Margie Cromwell. The Cromwell's have graciously loaned their personal McNair collection to the museum for a rotating exhibit now featured in our downstairs gallery.

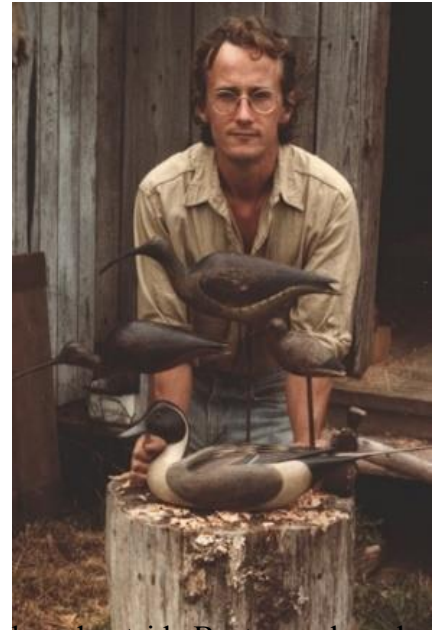
This exhibit is more than just a collection of carvings; it is the result of decades of admiration, personal friendship, and dedication to preserving American folk art. With 266 unique pieces on display, along with contributions of their own time, resources, and even furniture to help stage the exhibit, the Cromwell's have ensured that visitors will experience one of the most comprehensive displays of McNair's work ever assembled.

About the Artist

Mark McNair, born in 1950, has spent the last half-century

perfecting the craft of decoy carving. A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, McNair began his creative career in Connecticut, where he worked with antiques and hand-carved wooden signs. His life took a defining turn in the 1970s when he was introduced to antique decoys by the Voorhees family. What started as an interest quickly blossomed into a lifelong passion.

Today, McNair lives and works on Virginia's Eastern Shore, nestled between Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. His pieces ranging from waterfowl and shorebird decoys to weathervanes and folk art—are widely regarded for their authenticity, craftsmanship, and unique character. His work is represented in numerous distinguished collections, including those at the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, The Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art in Salisbury, Maryland, and right here at the deWitt Cottage in Virginia Beach. McNair's legacy continues through his family's legacy. Of his three children, Sons Ian and Colin followed in his footsteps. Ian carves in Exmore, Virginia, and co-owns High 'N Dry, a company producing rugged chest waders. Colin is based outside Boston and works with Copley Fine Art Auctions, where he plays a key role in bringing fine sporting art to collectors across the country.



A Friendship Carved in Time

The story behind the Cromwell's' collection is just as meaningful as the art itself. Mark Cromwell first met Mark McNair in 1978 while helping his parents move furniture for their antique business on the Eastern Shore. It was during this visit that Mark Cromwell laid eyes on one of McNair's decoys and instantly knew he wanted

to start a collection. There was only one obstacle; he didn't have the money to buy one. Thinking creatively, Cromwell struck a deal with his parents: instead of being paid for his help, they would





purchase McNair decoys for him. That simple exchange sparked not just a collection, but a friendship and mutual respect that has lasted nearly 50 years.

An Invitation to Experience Art and History

Thanks to the Cromwell's' enduring relationship with Mark and Martha McNair and their commitment to sharing this art with the public, the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum now houses an unparalleled showcase of American craftsmanship. Whether you're a seasoned collector, an admirer of folk art, or simply curious about waterfowl heritage, this exhibit offers something exceptional.

We invite you to visit the museum, explore the Mark McNair exhibit, and immerse yourself in the artistry, history, and stories behind these extraordinary works.

Upcoming Guild Events:

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.

07/15/2025: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

Save these Dates

Saturday, 09/20/2025
A celebration of 130 years of Wildfowl Heritage
At de Witt Cottage – 3:00pm
1113 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, VA



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



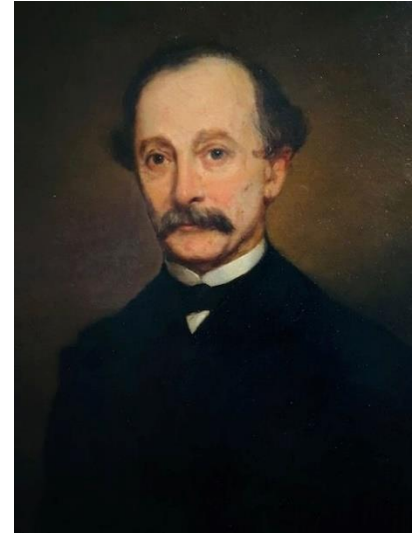


Collector's Shelf

By Larry Davenport and Mark Cromwell

JOHN TREAT IRVING, Jr. (1812-1906)

The Currituck Shooting Club (the 'Currituck Club') was founded by wealthy New Yorkers on the Outer Banks in 1854, in the budding years of the Gilded Age. It was the first recorded club of its type on Currituck Sound. Obviously, the club had to take a hiatus during the Civil War (1861-65), when these gentlemen would have been 'persona non grata' in the South. However, the founding members did get to enjoy the excellent waterfowling on Currituck Sound during those few early years. One of the club's founding members was John Treat Irving, Jr., the namesake son of a successful lawyer, judge, and New York State Assemblyman. John, Jr.'s father was also the brother of well-known American author Washington Irving (*Rip Van Winkle*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, etc.), who first popularized the writing of short stories in our country's early years.



Our John, Jr. followed in his father's footsteps in studying law and in his uncle's footsteps as a prolific author. In 1828 at the age of 16, he graduated from Columbia College (now University) with interests in law, real estate, and stockbroking. He became actively engaged and successful in each of these professional endeavors. However, his true interests were in writing and adventure traveling. In 1833 at age 21, he joined a party led by Indian Treaty Commissioner Henry L. Ellsworth to visit the 'wild Indian tribes of the prairie.' (His uncle, Washington Irving, had accompanied Ellsworth on a similar trip the previous year.) Their objective was to forge a treaty with the Pawnee Indians who inhabited what is now northern Kansas and Nebraska. This adventure led to John, Jr.'s first book, *Indian Sketches* (1835). His second novel, *The Hunters of The Prairie, or The Hawk Chief: A Tale of Indian Country*, followed two years later. Each of these works were said to express his uncle Washington Irving's 'gentlemanly concern for the frontier.' These early writings were followed by additional publications, leading to John, Jr.'s membership in the Authors Club and other prominent New York clubs.

Of equal interest, John, Jr. was married to Helen (Schermerhorn) Irving (1829-1893). Helen was the sister of Caroline (Schermerhorn) Astor (1830-1908), the "Lady Astor" and matriarch of New York's Gilded Age society. One presumes this would have automatically included John, Jr. and Helen in our previously mentioned Ward McAllister's "400," the exclusive level of New York socialites able to comfortably fit in the ballroom of Lady Astor's 5th Avenue chateau. For those even having a chance, acceptance into the "400" was an aspiration actively sought. For those aspiring to be included, failure to receive an invitation to one of Lady Astor's balls was devastating. Those left out would routinely manufacture excuses such as having to, instead, attend a grandparent's funeral (some grandparents passed multiple times) or travel to the Catskills for health reasons.

I find it nothing short of amazing that these scions of the Gilded Age were drawn away from their comfortable lifestyles to what must have been at the time the wild and remote sportsman's paradise of the Outer Banks. It remains a rich history left largely untold.

From the President



Dear Board Members and Friends of the Museum,

We are just over two months away from our highly anticipated *DeWitt Cottage Heritage & Celebrating the Decoy Legacy* event, taking place on **September 20, 2025**. This signature evening will celebrate our wildfowling heritage and honor the craftsmanship that defines our museum's mission.

I'm proud to announce that the **Mark McNair exhibit** is now complete and open to the public. This extraordinary display features **266 pieces from Mark and Margie Cromwell's personal collection**, along with select period furniture, creating a remarkable and immersive gallery experience. I warmly invite you and your family to visit the exhibit ahead of our September event.

To ensure the success of this celebration, we are offering **corporate sponsorships of \$2,500**.

Sponsorship includes:

- **Recognition** throughout the event,
- **Six complimentary tickets** to attend, and
- **An exclusive one-hour meet-and-greet** with Mark, Ian, and Colin McNair prior to the start of the event, a unique opportunity to engage with three generations of master carvers.

Your sponsorship helps us not only celebrate the rich history of decoy carving but also supports the **continuation of this timeless craft for generations to come**. Together, we can inspire new artists, preserve treasured traditions, and ensure the legacy of water fowling lives on.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. I look forward to celebrating this unforgettable evening with you.

Respectfully,

Aimee Rhodes

President, Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum

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.

Join Us

Join us at our next event!

Your presence is more than participation; it's an investment in the tapestry of our community's future.



Get Involved

If you can't wait until the next event, there are plenty of ways to get involved today:

- **Become a Member:** Explore different membership levels and find yourself fit within our growing family.
- **Donate:** Every contribution helps us advance our mission and protect our natural resources. [Make a donation](#)
- **Volunteer:** Join us behind the scenes and experience the joy of service within our community. Volunteers interested in helping with outreach and education-- [sign up here](#) or helping here at the museum -- [Sign up here](#)
- **Shop:** Visit our gift shop for unique finds, including stunningly crafted local art, jewelry, decoys and more!

Contact Us

Questions or suggestions? Reach out to us at the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. We're more than happy to hear from you.

Visit Us In Person:

1113 Atlantic Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Or Online at:

[Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum Website](#)

Donate

With your support, we can continue to work to protect our natural resources, preserve the legacy of wildfowling, promote environmental education, history, and the arts through a variety of events and community partnerships.

Renew your membership online at www.awhm.org or, text WILDFOWL to 44-321

Memberships run for 12 consecutive months from the date annual dues are paid.

BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2025 MEMBERSHIP

or renew online: www.awhm.org



☒ **Membership Level (please check one):**

- ☐ \$35 / Individual
- ☐ \$50 / Family
- ☐ \$100 / Bronze
- ☐ \$200 / Silver
- ☐ \$500 / Gold
- ☐ \$1,000 / Presidents Circle

MEMBER INFORMATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

☐ Cell ☐ Home

Please pass this newsletter on to any potential new member. Thank you for your support!

Mail this form and payment to:

Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum

1113 Atlantic Avenue,

Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Questions? Email: director@awhm.org



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