

THE WILDFOWLER

JUNE 2025

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

Back Bay Wildfowl Guild Memories:

William Mason Walsh, Jr

William Mason Walsh, Jr., a beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and friend, passed away peacefully on May 13, 2025, at the age of 90. Bill was a man of remarkable talent, character, and passion, who left an indelible mark on his family, his community, and the wildfowl blinds he loved to hunt. His life's journey, from humble beginnings to a respected professional and cherished friend, reflects a legacy of dedication, service, and a deep appreciation for nature and tradition.

He was a proud graduate of Maury High School and later attended the University of Virginia School of Architecture, where he was an active member of Chi Phi. After graduating, Bill served in the U.S. Navy Reserves, exemplifying his commitment to both his country and his community.

For 33 years, Bill practiced architecture in Norfolk and Virginia Beach, eventually becoming the president of Walsh, Ashe Associates, Architects, Interior Designers, and Planners, a role he held for 25 years. His contributions to the field were widely respected, and he was an active member of several esteemed organizations, including the American Institute of Architects and the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. Bill's influence also extended into the community, where he served on numerous boards such as the DePaul Hospital Advisory Board, the Chrysler Museum Advisory Board, and the Historic Review Board.

A passionate advocate for the future of Virginia Beach, Bill was a key player in the Virginia Beach Tomorrow First Planning Conference and served as Chairman of the Mid-Atlantic Wildfowl Festival for a decade. His love of nature and the outdoors was reflected in his long-standing involvement with the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild and the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum, where he served as curator. He played a significant role in saving and preserving the DeWitt Cottage, home to the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. Bill was also a Trustee for the Whalehead Trust, saving the Whalehead Club in Corolla, North Carolina, preserving both the history of the region and its wildlife.

Beyond his professional achievements, Bill's true passion was his love of hunting, decoy collecting, and the camaraderie of the duck blinds. His friendship with fellow outdoors enthusiasts spanned decades, and his time spent hunting across multiple states remains one of his most treasured experiences. In his later years, Bill shared these moments with many friends and family, regaling them with stories of hunting exploits, especially those involving his beloved dogs.

Bill was a man who always told it like it was. Whether in business, personal matters, or his beloved hobby, Bill never hesitated to offer his honest advice. Those who knew him will remember his straightforwardness, his kindness, and his unwavering support during times of grief. It is in the quiet moments of reflection, especially in the presence of close friends, where Bill's true character shone. His ability to offer a comforting word, even in the most difficult of times, left a lasting impact on all who had the privilege of calling him a friend. In 2020, Bill



lost his beloved wife, Alice, the love of his life. Their shared bond was one of true partnership, and his grief at her passing was evident to all who knew him.

And now a word from Bill's Friend and fellow Board Member James Mehne.

I met Bill Walsh in 1990 at the Guild's Decoy Show at the Pavillion. We discussed decoys, labs, weather, the shortcomings of steel shot, and the sorry state of waterfowling in the closing years of the 20th Century. And not necessarily in that order. In the years that followed we started a museum, hunted across 3 states and travelled as far as Chicago to attend duck decoy auctions. Bill provided me with access to old hunting clubs, collectors, hunters, and property managers/owners. To spend any time with Bill was a wonderful experience but I will always treasure most our time together in duck blinds up and down the East Coast. Sharing time in a duck blind allows you to learn about a different side of a friend, no matter how well you think you know them. Bill loved to hear reports on my hunting experiences and especially any stories involving the exploits of my semi-trained dogs. He never missed an opportunity to brag on my dogs and would recall hunting exploits of dogs going back over 30 years. I regularly sought Bill's advice on matters both business and personal. He was one of those guys who would not hold back, if asked. If you didn't want to hear the answer it was best not to ask Bill, the question. Bill lost his wife Alice, a wonderful woman, in January of 2020. My wife passed in January of 2025. One of the most difficult calls I had to make was to Bill. He was fond of my wife, and he took the news hard. I'll never forget his advice: Life goes on, you'll get better, but life will not be the same. Hard to hear but it has proven to be valuable and helpful advice during my grieving process.

The following is an excerpt from a eulogy by outdoor writer Gene Hill for his hunting buddy Ralf Coykendall. It captures perfectly my feelings regarding Bill.

The Old Duck Hunter died the other day, (90) years old and suddenly he's gone like a black duck in full flight.

But the things he took with him! The stories that only he could tell - because only he remembered. The subtle inflection, the nicety of a turn of phrase, the eye lost to use for a minute while it turned backward.... 506070....80 years. Everything was different then in the times gone long ago. I'm sure the hay smelled sweeter in the fall, the air was crisper, the ducks wilder, and the shotguns threw better patterns. The clothes were tougher, the whiskey smoother, the weather sharper, and they shot bigger and smarter birds and more of them.

God! How I miss it. I could listen with closed eyes and see the fieldstone fireplaces in the legendary, long-lost duck clubs blazing with the crack of pine knots that talked back while busily sludging smoke into the spitting promise of tomorrow's squall.

I could tell you I miss him but that wouldn't be saying much. I can tell you that he's gone and things have changed. I hope you have an Old Duck Hunter in your life, and I hope he lives in your blind....and shares moments forever. I have a hollow space that only he can fill....in moments that we all have between flights...between life's little things.... between the distant promise in the call of geese and the sudden flare of setting wings.... between the point and the flush....and in the darkening moments between the end of the day and the start of tomorrow.

Rest in peace brother Bill.

As a testament to his lifelong love of nature and conservation, the family requests that memorial donations be made to the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum at 1113 Atlantic Ave, Virginia Beach, VA 23451, or online at [awhm.org] (<http://awhm.org>).





1976 Mid-Atlantic Waterfowl Festival organizational meeting. Sitting from left to right: Larry Lambert, Roy Bull, Bill Walsh. Standing from left to right: Alison Drescher, Fletcher Bryant, James Savin, Jimmy Bolten.

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY





Upcoming Guild Events:

de Witt Garden Club
9:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Monday
We are a hands-on Garden Club
So, bring your gloves and tools.

06/15/2025 Father's Day

06/24/2025: Board Meeting
In person at deWitt Cottage 6:00 pm

07/04/2022: Independence Day
Friday July 4th through Monday July 7th

Save these Dates:

Saturday, 09/20/2025 DEWITT COTTAGE HERITAGE DAY
Cocktails, Wine and Heavy hors d'oeuvres
McNair Decoys auctioned



Free Decoy Identification and Evaluation

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



EDMUND COGSWELL CONVERSE

(November 7, 1849 – April 4, 1921)



Edmund Cogswell Converse was a steel industry, banking and baseball executive. His name appears in the Lighthouse Club score (log) book as an active member of that organization. Associated with banker J. P. Morgan, he was the first president of Bankers Trust Company. He was born in Boston, but, perhaps notably, did not attend Harvard—unusual for a Lighthouse Club member. Instead, he rose through a steel company apprenticeship to develop several patents that ultimately led to his wealth and associations with Gilded Age elite. His relationship with J. P. Morgan led to his participation in Morgan-financed mergers of smaller steel firms, creating U. S. Steel. Converse then served on the board of directors of U. S. Steel.

As an entrepreneur, Converse was a major stockholder in the Pittsburgh Alleghenys during the very early years of professional baseball. Ultimately becoming the team's president, he employed innovative procedures to improve the team's performance. One such method involved the recruitment of other team's best players. At the time, baseball teams typically signed annual contracts with their players during the spring just before the season started. Converse realized he could approach the better players of other teams with contract offers during

winter, signing them for the Alleghenys before their previous teams knew what was happening. Those other teams objected to this "pirating" of their players and started referring to the Alleghenys as pirates. One of the players pirated from another team was the great Honus Wagner. Converse and the Alleghenys eventually embraced their nickname and changed the team's official name to the Pittsburgh Pirates!

Converse also invested in real estate. He lived in NYC, but acquired 20 separate, physically contiguous farms totaling 1,500 acres in the area of Greenwich, CT. The property was a working farm during Converse's lifetime. He called his acquisition 'Conyers' Farm, using the "old English" spelling of his last name. While he passed away in 1921, it wasn't until 1980 that real estate developer Peter Brant purchased Conyers Farm and converted it into a luxury home development. In 2004, an 80-acre property in the development sold for \$45 million. Homes in the community required a special permit if they were to exceed 15,000 sq ft. Notable celebrity residents have been Tom Cruise, Ron Howard, and Justin Timberlake.



Dear Back Bay Wildfowl Guild Members,

As dedicated members of the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild, you should be incredibly proud of all the wonderful progress happening at the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum.

The exhibits throughout the museum have been refreshed, our beautiful gardens are in full bloom thanks to the care of our volunteers and Evergreen Landscaping, and the newly completed gazebo is already attracting new events and visitors. Most excitingly, the museum has been honored with the **Bronze Award for Best Nature and Science Museum** by *Coastal Virginia Magazine* readers!

I warmly invite each of you to stop by and see firsthand the incredible impact your support has made. As we continue to grow and enhance the museum experience, I kindly ask for your help in two ways:

1. **Volunteer Your Talents** – Whether it's carving, gardening, leading tours, or offering new ideas, your time and talents help keep our museum vibrant and engaging for all.
2. **Grow Our Membership** – Please invite at least one friend to join the Guild. Expanding our community ensures the continued success and preservation of our shared mission.

Thank you for your continued support and passion for our museum and its legacy.

Warm regards,

Aimee Rhodes

President, Back Bay Wildfowl Guild

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.



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

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

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.

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

2023 MEMBERSHIP

\$35/YR INDIVIDUAL

\$50/YR FAMILY

\$100/YR BRONZE

\$200/YR SILVER

\$500/YR GOLD

\$1,000/YR PRESIDENTS CIRCLE

Back Bay Wildfowl Guild Membership Renewal Form

NAME: _____ AMOUNT PAID _____ ADDRESS: _____

_____ CITY: _____

_____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE _____ EMAIL _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: _____ [CELL] _____

January 1, 2025 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

Thank you for your support!

AWHM Board of Directors

President Aimee Rhodes

Vice-President Lynn Hightower

Secretary Parke Atkinson

Treasurer Larry Davenport

Mark Cromwell

Larry Lambert

Jim Mehne

Phil Davenport

Buzz Hayes



DEWITT COTTAGE HERITAGE

CELEBRATING THE DECOY LEGACY

130 Years overlooking the Virginia Beach Oceanfront
30 Years of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum



There will be an online/in-person auction for a decoy being carved now by Mark and Ian McNair each to help raise money for the cottage. Mark, Ian and Colin McNair will be in attendance onsite to meet and greet and conduct demonstrations of their art!



The event is on Saturday September 20th, 2025
3-7 PM at the DeWitt Cottage in Virginia Beach
The online auction notifications will go out approximately 2 weeks prior.

