

THE WILDFOWLER

MAY 2026

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

Back Bay Wildfowl Memories Bernard Peabody Holland (March 13, 1867-January 1960)

The “Brickhouse” was built in 1895 by Bernard P. Holland, the Town of Virginia Beach’s first postmaster and mayor, for his bride (Emily) as a wedding present and year round home. The structure was the only oceanfront cottage constructed with brick. It is the oldest remaining private structure on the City’s oceanfront built during the City’s initial development period.

Bernard Holland was the son of John Lytleton Tazewell Holland and Emma Alice Walton. John and Emma resided on the Walton Family Plantation “Osceola” with Emma’s parents in Fluvanna County, Virginia. John was a circuit riding preacher, traveling each week to a different church for Sunday services. Shortly after Bernard was born in 1867; the Walton Family plantation was taken by carpetbaggers for unpaid taxes owed on the property. The Hollands were forced to move to more modest accommodations in Goochland County, Virginia. In 1885 Bernard and his younger brother, Walton, moved to Virginia Beach where Bernard had been hired as a clerk by the Virginia Beach and Cape Henry Railroad.

Bernard’s first career assignment was as a clerk in the Princess Anne Hotel between 14th and 17th Streets on the oceanfront. The railroad owned 90% of Virginia Beach and the Princess Anne Hotel. Bernard and Walton both lived in the Princess Anne Hotel. Walton passed away at the age of 23 from a disease called “Galloping Consumption” (most likely Tuberculosis) he contracted from a maid at the Princess Anne Hotel.

It was customary for wealthy New Englanders to spend at least part of the winter season in Florida. Trains were the primary means of transportation in the late 1800’s. It was a very long trip from New York to St. Augustine; so the railroads owned several lavish stop overs on the trip South. The Princess Anne Hotel was one of these favored stops. It was during one of these stop overs that Bernard Holland met Emily Randall Gregory. They instantly fell in love.





Emily Gregory was born into wealth. Her father was a textile manufacturer in New York City. Her family lived a very lavish life-style. She had a personal maid to pick up after her. She hated her life-style finding it to be boring and superficial. She often commented, "We sat and sat and sat; then we sat some more!" She was well read and highly intellectual. A gifted musician playing the piano, violin, viola, and singing. Emily's Parents resisted the attraction between Emily and Bernard. They felt like she could do much better for a husband than a railroad clerk.

While Emily's Parents discouraged her relationship with Bernard they were not completely opposed; relenting after a two year engagement to allow Emily and Bernard to wed. They were married in 1895 in Cooperstown, NY with a lavish wedding and reception.

The house eventually became known as the "Holland" cottage. 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. The Hollands had four of their five children in the Holland cottage and resided in it for almost fourteen years. Mrs. Emily Holland did not like the sound of the pounding surf; she claimed that it prevented her from sleeping at night. She also was not 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 and called the new house "Ozone". They subsequently sold the Holland cottage to the de Witt family in 1909.



BERNARD P. HOLLAND-1945 AT 78 YRS OLD





Upcoming Guild Events:

de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Meets every Monday

05/10/2026 – Mother's Day

05/19/2026: Board Meeting 6:00 pm
In Person at the deWitt Cottage and on Zoom

05/22/2026: Bizconnect Open House
In Person at the deWitt Cottage
8:30am until 10:00pm

05/25/2026: Memorial Day
Museum Opens Seven Days a Week
10:00am until 5:00pm

06/16/2026: Board Meeting 6:00pm
In Person at the deWitt Cottage and on Zoom

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WATERFOWL HERITAGE

Robert Barnhill/Barnwell Roosevelt (1829-1906)



Robert Barnhill Roosevelt (pictured on the left) is noted in the score book (logbook) of the Lighthouse Club. We don't know if he was a member or guest, but his name in the book ensures us he hunted there. Who was this Gilded Age sportsman whose last name you readily recognize, but of whom you have likely never heard? As you might have guessed, he was related to President Teddy Roosevelt, Jr. (pictured on the right) More specifically, he was Teddy's uncle and had a significant influence on young 'Teedie' (Teddy's nickname) growing up. He was also the grand-uncle of Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of later President Franklin Roosevelt (yes, Franklin married his distant Roosevelt cousin). For our purposes, however, Robert hunted on Currituck Sound at the Lighthouse Club (perhaps other clubs, as well), and was a great advocate of the outstanding waterfowl hunting the Back Bay/Currituck Sound area had to offer.

Robert was born in New York City to wealthy businessman Cornelius Van Schaack Roosevelt and Margaret (Barnhill) Roosevelt. Cornelius was a descendant of the Dutch American Schuyler family, about whom we've read before. (Union Major Gen. Philip Schuyler also hunted at the Lighthouse Club and our AWHM members, the Cromwells, hold one of his decoys.) Robert studied law at Harvard, was admitted to the New York Bar in 1850, and began a lucrative law practice. During the Civil War, he was an active Democrat (Teddy was a Republican). When his father, Cornelius, died in 1871, Robert's inheritance allowed him to retire from practicing law. This enabled him to pursue political endeavors. His first experience in politics was in organizing active opposition to the Tweed Ring (led by William Marcy "Boss" Tweed) and Tammany Hall. From this beginning, he was elected U.S. Representative to Congress, serving 1871-1873. He then served as a Trustee for the Brooklyn Bridge and as a NYC Alderman. In 1888, President Grover Cleveland (who also hunted Back Bay and Currituck Sound) appointed him Minister to The Hague (Dutch Netherlands) and in 1893 appointed him to the U.S. embassy in London.

Cornelius Roosevelt had given each of his five sons a Manhattan brownstone. Robert's and Theodore, Sr.'s (Teedie's father) were adjacent at 26 and 28 East 20th Street, between Fifth Avenue and Grammercy Park. This enabled the young Teedie to grow up being heavily influenced by his uncle Robert. Students of history are aware of Teedie's lifetime interest in hunting and natural history. Teedie's early interest in this area is attributed to the influence of Robert, who was an avid naturalist and conservationist. Robert was also a prolific writer of both fiction and pieces on natural history. Our readers will find particularly interesting the following excerpt from Robert's *Florida and the Game Water-Birds of the Atlantic Coast and the Lakes of the United States*, in a chapter entitled 'Currituck Marshes:' "...the best place, one where the birds seem to exist in their original abundance, and where magnificent shooting is still to be had, is the eastern shore of North Carolina. Of this favored locality, Currituck is the most famous. So celebrated is this county that the entire marshes, the duck-haunted lowlands, have been purchased, and today there is absolutely no free shooting to be had. A stranger is as thoroughly debarred as if he were in the most barren portion of our land. No one is allowed to shoot from a battery unless he is a native, and to get a chance to go out at all after the innumerable flocks of wild-fowl that temptingly cover the water, the visitor must belong to one of the numerous sporting clubs which have so wisely and assiduously secured all the shooting grounds, and most of which are so particular that they exclude invited guests.

But if you are one of the favored shareholders, you can have a glorious time. Fifty ducks a day to each gun is no unusual average, and while a hundred is a large bag, a hundred and fifty is nothing uncommon,



and as many as two hundred and fifty have been taken by a sportsman and his gunner in a single day. Moreover, the birds are of the best possible kind; there are canvas-backs in the open water, red-heads in still greater abundance, and broad-bills or blue-bills so plenty that they are rarely shot at, while in the pond holes black-ducks, mallards, and widgeons abound. These are well-fed and fat, and such a thing as a poor duck is unknown. The law wisely forbids shooting before sunrise or after sunset, and the club members are wise enough to keep the law, knowing as they do that one gun fired after sunset is more injurious than a dozen during the day, so that the ducks do not seem to diminish but rather to increase and multiply, and as fine a day's sport has been had by the members of the club during the past few years as at any time in the history of the country. A result partly due to breech-loaders perhaps, while from a battery it is nothing unusual to kill a hundred brace of red-heads or canvas-backs, and some times twice as many.

This favored spot is, as it ought to be, of no easy access. The sportsmen must first go to Norfolk and thence take either the little steamboat *Cygnets*, endeared to so many of us by the memory of pleasant excursions in the past, or travel by a new railroad just finished which passes twenty miles from the traveler's destination, a place known from the name of the enterprising widow lady who formerly owned it, as Van Slyck's Landing. By boat the entire day is spent in the journey, and by rail it is not much shorter, but the boat arrives so late that it is not always possible to make the trip across from the landing to the club house the same night. Opposite Van Slyck's are the two most famous and successful sporting clubs in that section of the United States, the Currituck and the Palmer's Island* (later named Pine Island) clubs. They own or control immense tracts of land, and below them to the southward the bay widens out so that there is no chance to kill ducks to advantage. There are a few good stands at Kitty Hawk Bay, thirty miles further south, (shoutout again to AWHM members Mark and Margi Cromwell) and at the lower end of Roanoke Island raft ducks can be shot from batteries. Then again along the eastern shore of Pamlico Sound, at Hatteras and Ocracoke inlets and in the western part of Core Sound, to the south of Harker's Island, there is good duck, and in its season brant shooting, but these places can only be reached by the fortunate sportsman who has his own private conveyance. Therefore, it may practically be said that the Palmer Island (Pine Island) marshes are the ultima thule (the highest degree obtainable) of duck shooting..."

*The Palmer's Island name also applies to a location at the mouth of the Acushnet River at New Bedford, MA. We know the Palmer's Island club, like the Lighthouse Club, was founded and populated by wealthy Boston Brahmins.

Robert wrote the original of this piece in 1868, and an expanded edition in 1884. It is an entertaining read for those interested in the history and methods of waterfowling in the last half of the 19th century. The entire text (400+ pages) can be downloaded for free at gutenberg.org and then searching for the title, or purchased in print at abebooks.com. In the Gilded Age, wealthy males were preoccupied with the sporting life, to include equine pursuits, yachting, and, particularly, hunting. Given that the Roosevelts were firmly ensconced in New York Gilded Age society (they were members of Lady Astor's Four Hundred), it's a certainty that this publication by Robert would have been widely circulated and read by those Gilded Age sportsmen. It follows, then, that Robert's writing would have encouraged and attracted others of his means and social standing to the excellent waterfowl hunting in the Back Bay/Currituck Sound environs. We know that members of both Back Bay and Currituck Sound hunt clubs included many wealthy northerners.

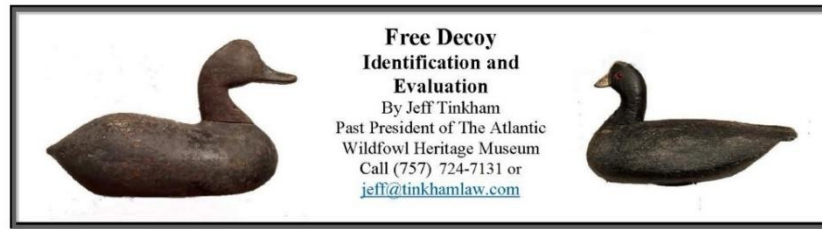
To be inclusive, we should say a word about Robert's secret life. He first married Elizabeth Ellis (1829-1887), a descendant of the Livingstons. Together, they had three children, all of whom bore the "Roosevelt" last name and enjoyed lives of Gilded Age comfort. After Elizabeth died, Robert married his mistress, Irish immigrant Marion "Minnie" O'Shea. Although they had three children together prior to



their marriage, they were always known as Robert's stepchildren and were listed as having a father named "Robert Francis Fortescue."

Throughout their lives, these biological children of Robert Roosevelt maintained their last name as "Fortescue." Nonetheless, all of these children, as well, enjoyed lives of comfort.

Finally, I don't want to leave you with the mystery regarding the two forms of Robert's middle name: "Barnhill" and "Barnwell." It's obvious that Robert's middle name at birth was taken from his mother's maiden name—i.e., "Barnhill." However, Robert was strongly moved to change his middle name to "Barnwell" once he embarked on his political career. It seems ad hominem attacks by one's political opponents are not unique to our current times. Robert was motivated to make the name change to preclude his political opponents from equating "Barnhill" with "manure hill," the latter being a naturally-occurring phenomena one must gingerly avoid when visiting a working barn!



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members and Supporters,

As we prepare for the upcoming summer season, I would like to thank each and every one of you for your continuous support of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum.

Following Memorial Day weekend, the museum will be open Monday through Sunday from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. We look forward to welcoming visitors throughout the summer and sharing the rich history, artistry, and heritage that make our museum so special.

Volunteer opportunities are also available. If you are interested in becoming involved with the museum, please email director@awhm.org for more information.

Please keep in mind that we also offer venue rental opportunities for celebrations, weddings, company meetings, and special events. For more information, please contact Hanna Jakubiak at thedewittcottage@gmail.com.

Thank you again for your dedication and support. We hope to see you at the museum this summer season.

Respectfully,
Aimee Rhodes
President
Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum



The Problem with Feeding Ducks

No crackers for quackers — help keep waterfowl healthy and wild!



Heading to the park to feed the ducks is a very old and popular family pastime; it's a fun, free activity and a great way for parents and children to see and appreciate wildlife and nature.

What many people don't realize is that bread, rolls, chips, and other human "snack food" items do not offer the proper nutrition that ducks and geese need — and that the act of feeding a diet heavy in bread and other empty carbohydrates can lead to severe health consequences and a variety of other problems.

Wild ducks and geese feed on a variety of grains and grasses, aquatic plants, and invertebrates, all naturally found in the wild. When eaten in combination, these foods are nutritionally balanced and provide everything a wild duck or goose needs to survive.

In contrast, foods commonly fed to waterfowl in public parks, such as bread, crackers, popcorn, and corn, are typically low in protein and essential nutrients and minerals (such as calcium and phosphorus). While a single feeding of these "junk foods" may not harm waterfowl, it adds up! If everyone visiting a park "only" gives a few pieces of bread or crackers to ducks and geese, it quickly becomes the bulk of what wild waterfowl consume, and results in a variety of nutritional disorders.

Waterfowl in public parks are often admitted to wildlife rehabilitation centers with metabolic bone disease (MBD). Birds with MBD have incredibly soft bones and joints that are often malformed and fractured; these injuries are caused by an overall calcium deficiency in the body, which is linked to an inappropriate diet. Calcium also plays a crucial role in the formation of eggs/offspring, clotting ability, cardiovascular and neuromuscular function, and a variety of other metabolic activities. Birds with MBD are often so malformed they cannot fly and become dependent on handouts, completing a vicious cycle. Affected birds are typically too weak to compete for food and defend themselves and are often the victims of aggressive attacks by other ducks and geese.

For more information about this subject, Please refer to the link below:

<https://wildlifecenter.org/help-advice/wildlife-issues/problem-feeding-ducks>



Please 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.

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

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\$1,000/YR PRESIDENTS CIRCLE

BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2026 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

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