

THE WILDFOWLER

NOVEMBER 2025

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

30 years of Museum Operation 130 years of deWitt Cottage Heritage



Mark and his two sons, Colin and Ian. The auction drew national attention, with spirited bidding taking place in person, online, and over the phone. Both the auction results and the incredible support from our sponsors far exceeded our expectations, making the evening truly unforgettable.

Guests then enjoyed the rare opportunity to browse through the impressive display of hundreds of McNair decoys showcased throughout the museum. These exquisite works are on loan from Mark and Margie Cromwell until May 31, 2026, offering visitors a unique chance to experience the artistry and legacy of the McNair family up close.

On Saturday, September 20, 2025, the historic deWitt Cottage came alive with celebration as guests gathered to honor 130 years of history since Bernard P. Holland first built the beloved oceanfront landmark, and to recognize the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild, Inc., which has proudly operated the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum for the past 30 years.

The evening began on the museum lawn with beverages and delicious heavy appetizers generously provided by Il' Giardino Ristorante. At 5:00 p.m., excitement filled the air as an auction commenced featuring three extraordinary pieces of art carved by the renowned McNair family,





The evening even included a surprise appearance by the Navy's Blue Angels flying overhead, adding to the festive atmosphere. As the night concluded, President Aimee Rhodes expressed her heartfelt appreciation and pride for the remarkable success of the event, celebrating not only the museum's 30 years of stewardship but also the deWitt Cottage's 130 years of heritage and history along the Virginia Beach oceanfront.

Event photos captured by **Robbie Hickman Photography**

at <https://www.robbehickman.com/Events/DeWitt-Cottage-2025>

Upcoming Guild Events:

: de Witt Garden Club

10:00 am, at the museum

Meets every Monday

Bring your work gloves and tools

11/18/2025: Board Meeting

6:00 pm Hybrid

In-person and on Zoom

12/01/2022-12/22/2025: Gingerbread House Exhibit

12/16/2025 Board Meeting

6:00 pm Hybrid

In-person and on Zoom

Save this Date

12/20/2025 –Christmas Open House

10:00am-5:00pm

At the Museum

Photos with Santa & the Red Truck

10:00am-2:00pm

1113 Atlantic Avenue



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.

WILDFOWL HERITAGE

Clinton Ledyard Blair
(1867-1949)

This month's edition of Wildfowl Heritage began with a mystery requiring a bit of detective work. Readers will recall that decoys bearing brands have been the subject of many of our editions. Generally, the brand simplifies the identification of who owned and used the decoy. Occasionally, however, we see brands of initials only, making it a challenge, if not sometimes impossible, to determine an identifiable name. Such a situation presented itself this month. Using a recently acquired publication entitled Decoy Brands: an Identification Guide, edited by Robert T. Wollens, we noticed the following entry for a decoy: brand "C. L. B."—Widgeon drake by Stephen Verity, Seaford, LI, NY." The entry went on to note that this Verity-carved decoy had been sold by Guyette at auction in July 1996, and that it was also branded "H. O. Havemeyer." By itself, C. L. B. would have been perhaps one of those unsolvable mysteries. However, the accompanying brand H. O. Havemeyer provided the solution. Readers will recall the Currituck Club's Henry Osborne Havemeyer from last month's edition—specifically, that Mr. Havemeyer was the patriarch of the American Sugar Refining Co. (Domino Sugar) and was related by marriage to the Currituck Club's Webb family who made their fortune in the railroad industry and, of interest to us, founded the Shelburne Museum in Vermont. Knowing that decoys were often passed down within clubs to surviving members, the logical approach was to see if the C. L. B. initials might represent another Currituck Club member. Voila! The club's roster identifies one C. (Clinton) Ledyard Blair, who was no doubt the subsequent owner of the Verity decoy. Ledyard also had a brother who was a Currituck Club member.

Ledyard Blair was born in New Jersey to a family of immense wealth. His grandfather, John Insley Blair (1802-1899) built the first four railroads out of Chicago, founded the community of Blairstown, New Jersey, and died with a fortune of \$70 million (in 1899, mind you) making him the equivalent of a multi-billionaire today. (Commodore Vanderbilt, who also made his fortune in railroads, was judged the world's wealthiest man with a fortune of just a few \$million more during almost the same time period.) Ledyard Blair attended Princeton. While still a senior there, he joined his father and grandfather in establishing the banking firm Blair & Co., with the objective of providing investment banking services to the oil and railroad industries, to include Standard Oil and, along with their own, the Gould family's railroad interests. (Gilded Age elites involved with Standard Oil also hunted at the Currituck Club, as well as a number of others with railroad interests.) One can only



presume that Blair & Co. also provided investment banking services to Havemeyer's Webb in-laws in support of their railroad interests. Blair's reputation as a financier led to his election as a Governor of the New York Stock Exchange.



In his personal life, Mr. Blair owned lavish homes in his native (Somerset) New Jersey; New York City; Newport, RI; Bar Harbor, ME; and the island of Bermuda. He was an avid horseman and coaching enthusiast, who ably drove a four-in-hand (four-horse) carriage. He was also an ardent yachtsman and in 1910 was named Commodore of the New York Yacht Club. His personal yacht was the 254-foot Diana, which he no doubt sailed to his Bermuda estate. He had four daughters, one of whom married Pierpont Morgan Hamilton, a grandson of financier and banker J. P. Morgan and descendant of Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. The Morgan family also hunted at the Currituck Club.

One can only imagine these Gilded Age sportsmen traveling in their private rail cars all the way to Munden Point (where the rail line ended back in Bernard Holland's day) in what is now the far southern part of Virginia Beach. (Or perhaps Ledyard Blair traveled to Norfolk on Diana.) From there, they were ferried to their clubhouse on the Outer Banks. But that's not all to say about Ledyard Blair's sporting interests...in addition to the Currituck Club, he was also among that exclusive group of Gilded Age sportsmen that were members of the Jekyll Island Club on the Georgia shore. In any case, the numbers of waterfowl on Currituck Sound back in that time must have been quite the draw to these sportsmen who could have well afforded to hunt anywhere in the world.

(Sidenote: In addition to museum friends Ian and Colin McNair, three of our museum's board members were scholastic wrestlers—an interesting bit of anomaly for such a small group. Of particular interest to them, the aforementioned family patriarch John Insley Blair in 1846 founded Blair Academy in Blairstown, NJ. Since then, Blair Academy has been widely recognized as the best boarding high/prep school in New Jersey and today is the pre-eminent pre-college scholastic wrestling program in the United States, producing collegiate champions...yet another fascinating connection of these Gilded Age elites to our lives today.)

MUSEUM HOURS HAVE CHANGED

AFTER SEPTEMBER 30, 2025 THE ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM

WILL ONLY BE OPEN WEDNESDAY THROUGH SUNDAY 10:00AM - 5:00PM

UNTIL MONDAY MAY 25, 2026 WHEN WE OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK.

PRIVATE TOURS CAN BE ARRANGED AT ANY TIME BY

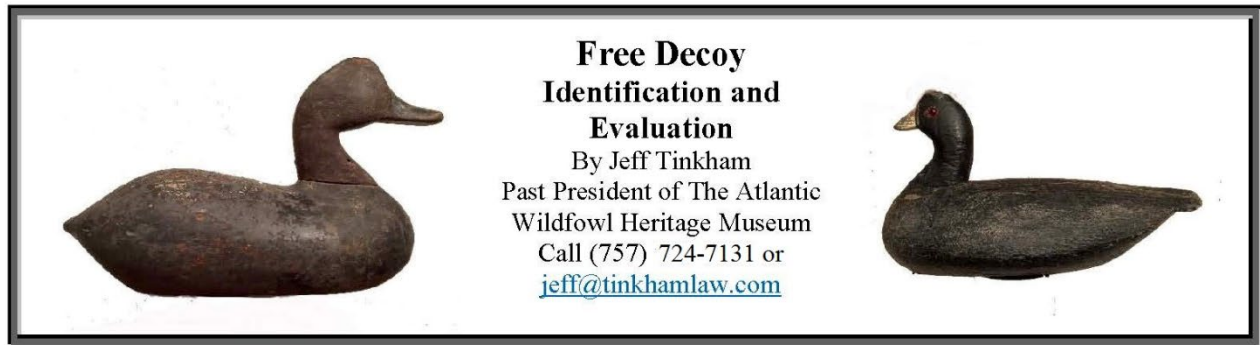
CONTACTING THE DIRECTOR, AT director@atwildfowl.org.

Need to book a venue for your holiday celebration?

Book the historic deWitt Cottage.

Call (757) 639-1223 or email: thedewittcottage@gmail.com





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum,

As the holiday season approaches, we'd like to invite you to join us for a Holiday Open House on Friday, December 20th, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Bring the whole family and enjoy a festive day at the museum! We'll have activities for the kids, free photos with Santa, and plenty of hot chocolate, apple cider, and cookies for everyone. It's a wonderful way to celebrate the season together and share in the warmth of our community.

We are also looking for skilled carvers who are interested in teaching classes to both teens and adults. If you—or someone you know—would like to help keep the art of wildfowl carving alive by sharing your skills, please reach out to us. Your talents could help inspire the next generation of artists and enthusiasts.

Don't forget to stop by our museum gift shop for some unique holiday shopping! From hand-carved decoys to local art and maritime treasures, you'll find one-of-a-kind gifts that support the museum and celebrate our coastal heritage.

Finally, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Martha, Mark, Ian and Colin McNair, Mark and Margie Cromwell, People's Auction, and Il' Giardino for their tremendous help in making our 30th Anniversary Celebration such a success. We would also like to thank our sponsors: Evergreen, Garcia and Company, College Hunks Hauling Junk and Moving, SET, Rutter Mills, COVA Insurance, Land and Coates, VIGOR, VBT Turf Management, and Virginia Beach Law Group. The funds raised through the celebration will help support our operations for several months to come. We are deeply grateful for your generosity and community spirit.

Thank you all for your continued support of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. We wish you and your families a joyful holiday season and look forward to celebrating with you on December 20th!

With deepest gratitude,

Aimee Rhodes

President, Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum





EVERGREEN
PROPERTY MANAGEMENT



REGISTER NOW!



Calling all Gingerbread devotees! Time to get your gingerbread jingle on. Entries for the 4th Annual Virginia Beach Gingerbread House Competition and Exhibit are now being accepted! All ages, backgrounds, and professionals are invited to compete in the competition. No experience required. Free to participate.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE

November 28, 2025

ENTRY DELIVERY DATES

December 1-2, 2025

CATEGORIES

Child • Youth • Teen • Adult
Restaurant/Business • Baking/Pastry
Student, Professional or Bakery

FREE & Open to the Public

DECEMBER 3 - DECEMBER 31

at The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum located inside the historic de Witt Cottage

PRESENTED BY THE VIRGINIA BEACH RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COASTAL VIRGINIA MAGAZINE, THE ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM, AND THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF VIRGINIA



For more information or to register, scan the QR code or visit
www.dineinva.com/events/gingerbread-house



BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2025 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)

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

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Questions?

Email the Director at director@awhm.org

