

THE WILDFOWLER

OCTOBER 2025

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

Back Bay Wildfowl Guild Memories

Thomas Russell Richards

September 1947 – September 2025

The world has lost a true American Hero

Rear Admiral Thomas R. Richards had a distinguished 30-year career in the U.S. Navy, specializing in naval special warfare and SEAL operations. His service included combat deployments, leadership roles, and significant contributions to special operations forces.

- **Early career and combat experience:** Tom graduated from Villanova University in 1969 and completed BUD/S training (Class 55) in 1970. He deployed to South Vietnam with SEAL Team One's Zulu Platoon from August 1970 to February 1971, where he was wounded in action and initially awarded the Bronze Star, later upgraded to the Silver Star and Purple Heart.
- **Leadership and command roles:** Throughout his career, Tom held numerous key positions including Operations Officer at Naval Special Warfare Group 1 and SEAL Team Two, Executive Officer of Underwater Demolition Team-12, Commanding Officer of Special Boat Unit Thirteen, SEAL Team One, and the Naval Special Warfare Center. He also served as the Senior U.S. Naval representative in El Salvador and as Programs Officer with Naval Sea Systems Command.
- **Final command and retirement:** Tom led naval special operations forces during Operation Prime Chance and Operation Praying Mantis in the Persian Gulf and served as Commanding Officer of the Naval Special Warfare Command from 1996 to 1999, retiring after three decades of service. His valor and leadership were notably demonstrated during a 1971 helicopter insertion under heavy fire, where he rescued multiple injured teammates despite being wounded himself.
- **In retirement:** Tom and his wife, Jacky, were members of the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild where they served together in the deWitt Cottage Garden Club and Tom was a member of the Board of Directors. For more information about Tom, google Rear Admiral Thomas R. Richards.





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.

10/16/2025: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

11/21/2025: Board Meeting
6:00 pm at the Museum

MUSEUM HOURS CHANGING

THE ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM WILL ONLY BE OPEN WEDNESDAY THROUGH SUNDAY 10:00AM-5:00PM UNTIL MONDAY MAY 25, 2026 WHEN WE WILL RE-OPEN SEVEN DAYS A WEEK 10:00AM UNTIL 5:00PM.

**Need to book a venue for your holiday celebration?
Book the historic deWitt Cottage. Call (757) 437-8432
Or email: director@awhm.org**

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



Wildfowl Heritage

Henry Osborne Havemeyer

(1847-1907)

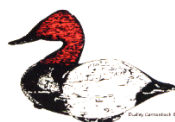
(Author's note: It's been noted by one of our astute readers that the name of these columns has traditionally been "Collector's Corner," suggesting the topic should be about a decoy or other wildfowl-related collectible. However, we have found many interesting narratives within the realm of wildfowl heritage that extend beyond just decoys. While we endeavor to include decoys in these writings whenever possible, sometimes a compelling piece of our heritage does not include a related decoy or other collectible. For that reason, we are implementing a change to the name of these columns—henceforth, we will call them "Wildfowl Heritage." This new name is taken directly from the name of our museum—Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum—and we believe is more relative to our mission. At the same time, it does not exclude narratives about decoys, which we will continue to write about when the occasion arises.)

The first subject of our newly-named Wildfowl Heritage column: Henry Osborne Havemeyer. Our Mr. Havemeyer joined the Currituck Club in 1876. In addition, his brother (Theodore Augustus Havemeyer), his son (Henry, Jr.), and his son-in-law (J. Watson Webb) were Currituck Club members. J. Watson Webb's mother was Eliza (Vanderbilt) Webb, a granddaughter of "the" Cornelius (Commodore) Vanderbilt and sister of William Kissam Vanderbilt, another Currituck Club member about whom we recently read. Like other Currituck Club members, these families were among NYC's wealthy Gilded Age elites.



While the Webbs and the Vanderbilts made their fortunes in the railroad industry, our Havemeyers took a different path to fortune. Their ancestors came to this country, via London, from a family of bakers in Germany. Around 1800, William Havemeyer was brought from London to NYC under contract to run a sugar bakery. His brother Frederick (our Henry's grandfather) followed in 1802. In 1807, they opened their own sugar bakery. In 1828, their sons (one of whom was Frederick, Jr., Henry's father) took over the family business. (Frederick Jr's cousin, also a William, left active participation in the family business for politics, serving three terms as mayor of NYC.) In 1856, Frederick, Jr. established a steam sugar refinery. In 1863, our Henry became an apprentice in that refinery. The business grew exponentially, and Henry eventually became the principal partner. After a disastrous fire in 1882, the Havemeyer family pledged its entire fortune to rebuild a state-of-the-art sugar refinery facility. A time of intense competition, mergers, and "sugar trust" formations emerged and resulted in trust-buster lawsuits and testifying in

front of Congressional committees. Through all of these trials and tribulations, our Henry survived as head of what eventually became the American Sugar Refining Company. Anybody who visits a



grocery store today walks by bags of Henry Osborne Havemeyer's legacy and principal product—i.e., Domino Sugar!

Having presented Domino Sugar as our main course, let's now turn our attention to dessert. Henry's daughter was Electra (Havemeyer) Webb. Electra married the aforementioned wealthy polo champion J. Watson Webb. The Webb's made their fortune in the railroad business. (We will learn more about the Webb's in a subsequent installment of Wildfowl Heritage.) One of their railroad interests was the New York to Rutland (Vermont) Railroad. Near Rutland is the smaller community of Shelburne, VT. Here, the Webb's large land holdings were named Shelburne Farms. Electra, herself, was an avid collector of both art and Americana artifacts. Her interests in Americana, particularly, inspired her to found the now legendary Shelburne Museum. Electra encouraged her father—our Henry Osborne Havemeyer—to donate the decoys he used at the Currituck Club as one of the founding exhibits at the Shelburne. While their carver is unknown, the decoys are believed to be of Long Island origin. (Author's note: I have been told that a decoy in my personal collection formerly owned by an 1874 founder of the nearby Lighthouse Club may also be of Long Island origin. The Currituck Club was immediately south of the Lighthouse Club. Members of both clubs traveled in the same social circles and no doubt knew each other.) Our Henry's decoys survive as an exhibit at the Shelburne today. Supporters of our Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum and readers of these pages already know that our own Mark McNair is honored to be the only living carver to have his work displayed at the Shelburne, alongside other such legendary carvers as Elmer Crowell and Shang Wheeler, both of whom have passed. Who among us knew that early roots of the nationally known Shelburne Museum began with a rig of decoys used on what was the remote marshes of Currituck Sound just south of where most of us are today?

I am constantly amazed by the connections between our local wildfowl heritage and the larger, more well-known stage of the Gilded Age sportsman.

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.



FROM THE GUILD PRESIDENT

Dear Board Member and Members

I am truly saddened by the loss of our past board member, **Thomas Richards**, who passed away on September 20, 2025. Our deepest sympathy and heartfelt thoughts go out to his wife, **Jacky, our Garden Club President**, during this difficult time.

On a lighter note, I am thrilled to share that we raised **\$43,500** from our Celebration Auction! We are so grateful to **Mark, Colin, and Ian McNair** for their generosity, as well as to all our board members who worked tirelessly to make this event a success. A very special thank you goes out to **Mark and Margie Cromwell, Parke Atkinson, Jim Menhe, Larry and Martha Davenport, and Chris Ludford** for their extraordinary efforts.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to our sponsors and ticket holders: **College Hunks, Evergreen Property Management, Vigor, Land and Coats, VB Truf, Garcia Companies, Rutter Mills, SET Inc., VB Law Group, COVA Insurance, and The Select Group**. Your support makes our mission possible.

Additional thanks to the **Back Bay Delta Waterfowl Chapter and Steve Conrad**, along with **Delta Waterfowl Magazine** and **Decoy Magazine**, for their wonderful coverage and support of our Celebration Event. We also want to recognize **Copley Fine Art Auctions** for the advertising and outreach to collectors interested in Mark McNair's craftsmanship; your efforts truly made a difference in the success of our fundraising auction.

A heartfelt thank you as well to **Chelsea and her staff at People's Auction Company** and to **Marianne, Dan, and the team at Il Giardino's** for their exceptional service and dedication in helping us create such a memorable evening.

I am excited to announce that **Lynn Hightower** will be returning as the museum director. Lynn has been an active member of the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild and Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum since 1976. He previously served as director from August 2015 to December 2023. He has served on our board of directors for the past two years.

Museum Hours:

We are open **Wednesday–Sunday, 10 AM to 5 PM**. Stop by and check out our **new exhibits in our galleries**. Joe and Alexis are looking forward to welcoming you and showing you around!

With deepest gratitude,

Aimee Rhodes

President, Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum



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

MEMBER INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

☐ Cell ☐ Home

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

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

Back Bay Guild Inc t/a AWHM

Board of Directors:

Aimee Rhodes, President

Parke Atkinson, Secretary

Larry Davenport, Treasurer

Larry Lambert

Chris Ludford

Jim Mehne

Mark Cromwell

Patrick (Buzz) Hayes

Philip Davenport

