

The Wildfowler

December 2025

A Publication of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum

Back Bay Wildfowl Guild

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

As we close out another remarkable year, I am pleased to share the many accomplishments made possible through your support, enthusiasm, and belief in our mission. This past year was one of growth, renewed focus, and strengthened community connections. Together, we continued to elevate our museum, our programs, and our role in the region.

Our Curatorial Committee created a phenomenal exhibit of carvings celebrating the talents of Mark McNair and his two sons, Colin and Ian. Their work was showcased during an outstanding gallery opening that celebrated the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum's 30th Anniversary and the 130th Anniversary of the DeWitt Cottage. We invite you to come and visit your museum and explore this fine exhibit which will be here until Spring of 2026.

This year we also strengthened the organization through leadership. We welcomed new board members Patrick "Buzz" Hayes, Gordon Harrison, and Austin Rutter, building on last year's addition of Chris Ludford.

Community engagement and environmental stewardship remained at the heart of our mission. We hosted several local businesses for information sessions, welcomed school groups and community organizations, and formed meaningful new partnerships with the Surfrider Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, Biz Connect Hampton Roads, and Alton's Keep wildfowl rescue.

Educational enrichment remained strong. We hosted a decoy painting workshop in conjunction with Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation during the city's annual Winter Wildlife Festival. We also hosted a Wood Duck Box Building Workshop with our partner Ducks Unlimited, Virginia Beach Chapter. We facilitated a large grant that provided the opportunity for Virginia Beach Middle School Students to grow and learn about the benefits of wild celery and other grasses to our eco system in Virginia Beach's own Back Bay.



Our monthly newsletter continued to deliver timely updates and educational stories about our community's history.

Finally, even in what felt like a slower year, we welcomed more than 17,000 visitors through our doors—an encouraging reflection of the museum's regional presence, reputation, and appeal.

None of these achievements would have been possible without your continued dedication and support. You are the backbone of our organization, and your commitment allows us to grow, improve, and preserve the treasured stories and traditions we represent.

Thank you for being part of our community and for helping make this year one of meaningful progress. We look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.

Thankful for You,

Aimee Rhodes, President

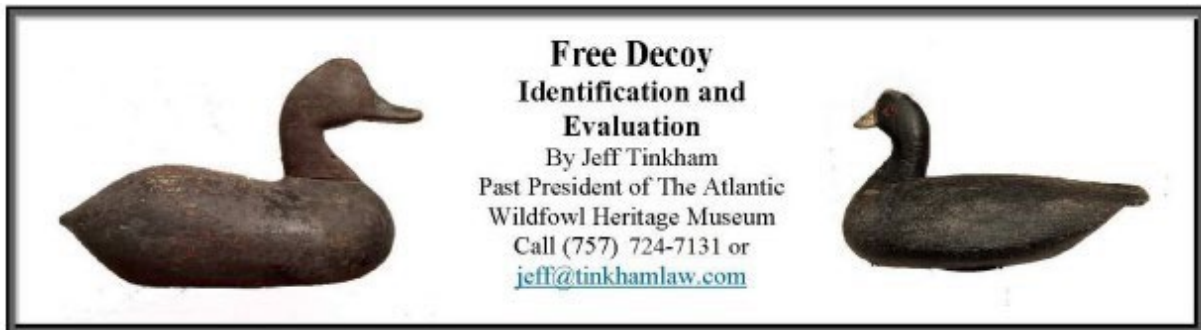


Happy Hanukkah!



Upcoming Guild Events

- **Holiday Parade at the Beach** Saturday, December 6th 5:30pm - 7:30pm Atlantic Avenue from 15th-25th Streets
- **Gingerbread House Extravaganza** - December 3rd – December 31st Wed. thru Sunday 10am-5pm
- **AWHM Christmas Open House** Saturday, December 20th 10:00am - 2:00pm
- **Photos with Santa and the Red Truck** Saturday, December 20th 10:00am - 2:00pm
- **AWHM Board Meeting** Tuesday, January 20th 6:00pm at the museum or on Zoom
- **Winter Wildlife Festival Decoy Painting Workshop** Wednesday, January 21, 2026 , from 7 to 9 PM in the historic deWitt Cottage
- **Winter Wildlife Festival** Saturday, January 24th 10:00am-3:00pm Princess Anne Recreation Center 1400 Nimmo Parkway, Virginia Beach



WILDFOWL HERITAGE

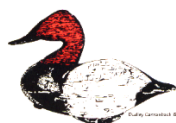
George Stephenson Brewster (1868-1936)



George Stephenson Brewster was born September 15, 1868 in Cazenovia, NY and died March 11, 1936 of a heart attack at the Jekyll Island Club on the Georgia coast. At the time of his death, he was Secretary of the Jekyll Island Club. He was also a member of the Currituck Club, which he joined in 1905.

George's parents were Benjamin Brewster (1828-1897) and Elmina Hersey Dows Brewster. Benjamin Brewster was a prominent American industrialist and financier, and one of the original trustees of Standard Oil. Benjamin was incredibly wealthy, which led to George becoming wealthy as well—a prime example of the rich getting richer.

George graduated from Yale in 1891, where he was captain of the crew team. After college, he became involved with a number of successful industrial and real estate ventures. Through his father, he became one of the largest shareholders of Standard Oil. (Standard Oil became ESSO—Eastern Standard Oil Company—and then today's EXXON.)



He was also a prominent civic-minded philanthropist, involved in public health, social welfare, and charitable institutions. He and his wife lived in NYC in a Park Avenue mansion on the Upper East Side, reflecting their high social standing.

George sought relief from tuberculosis in the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. In 1906, he built Camp Longwood on Spitfire Lake in the historic Saranac Lake area. In 1871, his father, Benjamin, had built “Brewsters,” the first hotel in Lake Placid. Our more tenured guild members may recall the “Miracle on Ice” at the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Olympics, when the U.S. men’s hockey team, consisting of amateur and college players, dealt a crushing defeat to the heavily favored Soviet Union’s team. The U.S. team then went on to win the gold medal. Previously, Lake Placid hosted the 1932 Winter Olympics. With both Benjamin’s first hotel and George’s recreational development projects attracting tourism to the area, the Brewsters are credited as having been a key early element in bringing the Winter Olympics to Lake Placid. Today, Lake Placid is a popular winter resort with Olympic training facilities.

Readers are familiar with the legendary Jekyll Island Club and its exclusive Gilded Age membership. Having been a member there and at the Currituck Club (with its own Gilded scions), it is obvious our George had a keen interest in waterfowl hunting. The quality of the hunting on both the Georgia coast and Currituck Sound must have been well beyond what we can imagine today if it could attract these super-wealthy scions of New York and New England to those remote areas in the late 1800s to early 1900s. It is in fact written that the original members of the Swan Island club were on their way in their yacht for a hunting trip to the Georgia coast when a storm forced them into an inlet on Currituck Sound that the storm had created. When the storm passed, the inlet had closed and the hunters’ yacht became the first lodging for their club. But that’s another story, perhaps for another day.

Larry Davenport and Mark Cromwell

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.

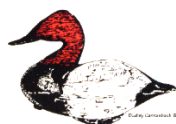


Holiday Open House and Free Photos With Santa

December 20, 2026 · 10:00am-2:00pm

deWitt Cottage, 1113 Atlantic Avenue

Join us for a magical gathering filled with holiday cheer, cozy traditions, and joyful memories. This custom holiday gathering is all about warmth, laughter, and the special people who make the season bright.





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



Paint Your Own Miniature Dudley Canvasback Decoy

Just like this one!

Join us for a special learning opportunity during the 2025 Winter Wildlife Festival! The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum will host a hands-on workshop at the historic deWitt Cottage.

Attendees will have the exclusive chance to paint their own miniature Dudley-style decoy while learning about the rich history of the Dudley Hunt Club and the Dudley Brothers,



renowned for their contributions to wildfowl decoy carving. With only 15 spots available, this intimate session is perfect for history buffs, art lovers, and wildlife enthusiasts alike.

Secure your spot early (only 11 seats remain) for this unique evening of art, history, and wildlife education by clicking the Link below and buying your ticket. The ticket is \$25.00

ON Wednesday, JANUARY 21, 2026 FROM 7:00 pm TO 9:00 pm

1113 Atlantic Avenue (12th Street and AtlanticAve.)

[AWHM Winter Wildlife Workshop](#)



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

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

Austin Rutter

Gordon Harrison

Questions?

Email the Director at director@awhm.org

