

Russ Goldberger

Decoys and Folk Art in Original Paint



A Mint Mason Challenge
Hollow Broadbill Pair

See you at the July Auctions!

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

A Decoy Tradition

EVER SINCE WE'VE been involved in decoys, nearly 30 years now, the summer auctions in New England have been a tradition. Its roots go back to the early days, even before the Mackey auctions in 1973-1974, although those eight momentous auctions over a two-year period helped intensify that calling.

Back then the Richard Bourne auction company in Hyannis was the only game in town, and collectors from all over the country descended upon Cape Cod, staying at the nearby Craigville Motel, which became a hotspot for a buy, swap and sale meet. They came for the decoys, as well as for the food, drink and fun that accompanied those gatherings. Many friendships fostered there lasted for decades, many still ongoing.

By the mid-1980s more competing auction houses began to cater to this summer trend, and it grew into what the late Jackson Parker referred to as "Duckaramathon Week," with a myriad of sales and increased buying opportunities that required additional commitment - and travel - as the auctions were scattered throughout New England. Collectors responded, proving that no matter how many decoys they tried to "ram" down our throats, we'd show up to buy them. Over the years the names and places have changed, but the tradition has endured, which is why we'll be soon packing our bags to join the migration.

This year the party begins a week early on Sunday, July 12 in Hyannis for Decoys Unlimited's opening night preview followed by a two-day auction. There will be tailgating for dealers available on Sunday and Monday and a clam-bake Monday evening. It then moves just up the road to Plymouth for Copley's Tuesday night preview followed by a two-day decoy and sporting art sale, the lots of decoys to be sold on Wednesday. Dealer tables are available on Wednesday and Thursday, however we assume most of the vendors will head out on Thursday morning for Portland, Maine, where Guyette & Schmidt wrap up the week with their own two-day auction. Their opening night preview is on Friday and dealer's tables are available from Friday until Sunday. So there should be lots of opportunities for buyers, with just short of 2000 lots and a combined total low estimate of over \$6 million. And there's plenty of intrigue, particularly surrounding seven lots of Crowell decoys at the

(Continued on page 31)

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PUBLISHERS NOTE

(Continued from page 4)

Copley sale that could account for a third of the week's total.

And of course - just so you don't think it's all work and no play - midweek there's the party at Cap and Page Vinal's house in Duxbury, Massachusetts, which has become a very welcome addition to this summer tradition.

Which brings us to Joe French, who this year will be with us only in spirit. (See our tribute on page 24.) Joe loved a decoy auction, particularly the New England sales, and the thought of missing one wouldn't cross his mind. And he didn't come to watch, as he was always an active participant, no matter how much the market over his 50 plus years in decoys had continued to grow. He always showed up.

I'm reminded of a Decoys Unlimited auction early in this century, when it was held at the Best Western Hotel in Bourne on the Cape. It was an oppressively hot steamy July afternoon, quite unlike New England weather. The tar on the parking lot, where we all set up our exhibits, was literally bubbling.

As I walked across the lot, I noticed a white Cadillac with Florida plates pulling into the entrance. It was Joe and Arleen French. For all I know they might have just driven in, but as he parked and made his way through the crowd he looked cool as a cucumber, oblivious to the heat. As was often the case, he was quickly surrounded by well-wishers and old friends, all wanting to acknowledge his arrival. It was though a celebrity had arrived, and in many ways he was.

That was also the year he invited me to his room to discuss a series of articles that he wanted to publish on the early days of decoy collecting. Turns out he had hoped to publish it in Hal Sorenson's *Decoy Collectors Guide* over 20 years earlier, but it had ceased publication. The series was to retrace his footsteps along his journey as a decoy collector, and to acknowledge the many fellow enthusiasts he met along that path. It turned into a 15-part series that we published over a five-year period, a series he later continued in *Hunting & Fishing Collectibles*.

As noted in the tributes in this issue, Joe's contributions to decoy collecting have been many, from documenting the history of their makers, his generous contributions to many museums, his loyal participation in many shows and auctions and the mentoring and friendship he afforded to all.

Yet his greatest achievement was what he derived from decoys - sheer pleasure, total enjoyment and an intense appreciation of the efforts of those who created them. If the world were to better appreciate the beauty in decoys due to his efforts, I believe Joe would consider that his greatest contribution.



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