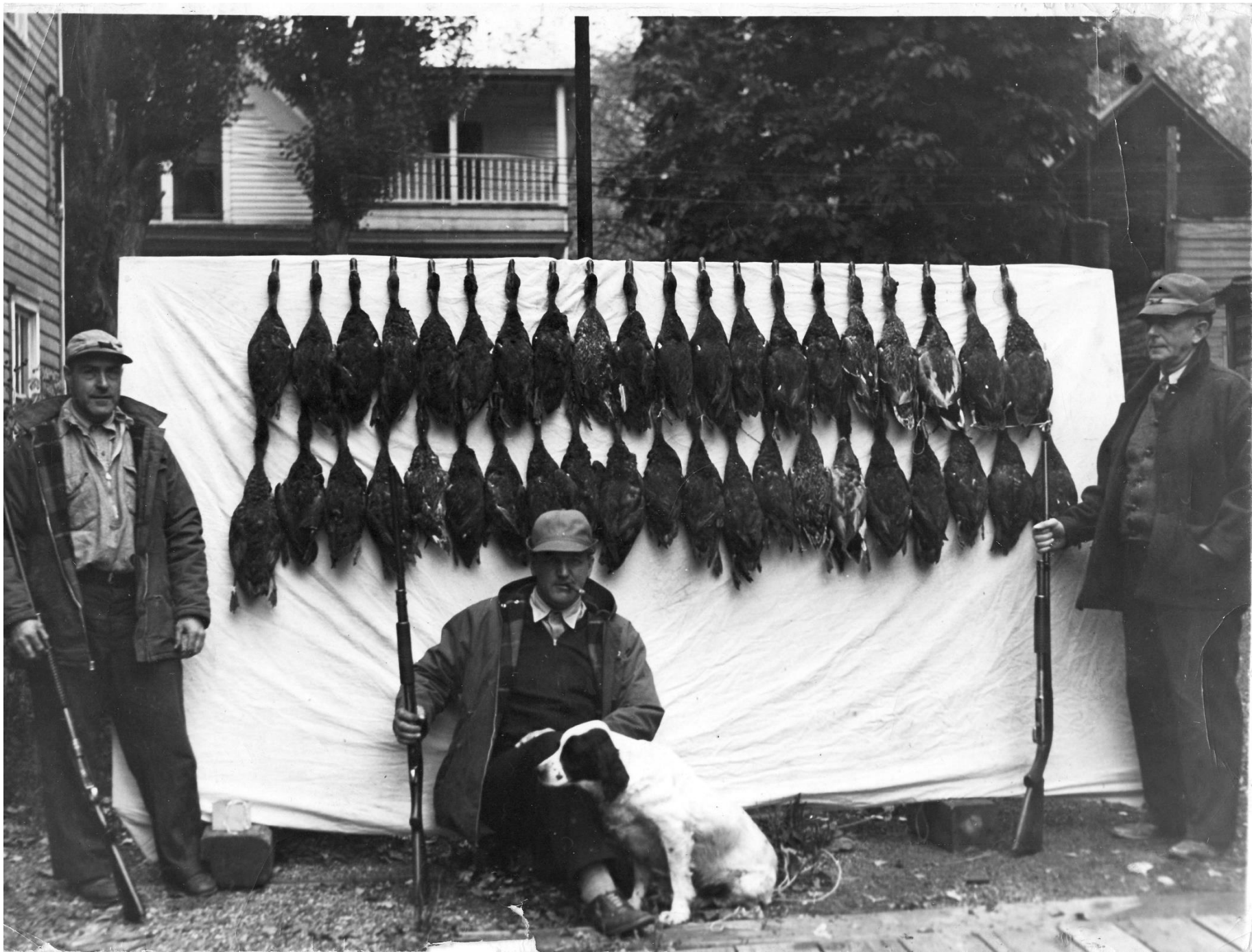


Vintage Mallard & Black Duck Decoys of the Thousand Islands





Cyriel Heath (left), Ray Rogers (center), and Bert Hutchinson with a nice bag of black ducks plus 3 or 4 mallards, c. 1937.



from an untitled watercolor by Allan Brooks, 1936



from an untitled watercolor by Allan Brooks

Black ducks and mallards are the largest of the marsh or puddle ducks, and have always been a favorite quarry of duck hunters. However, prior to the early 1940s mallards were quite rare in the Thousand Islands area of the St. Lawrence River. Black ducks were the only species of marsh duck that the earliest local carvers made significant numbers of decoys for. Mallards were rare, and wood ducks and teal were much smaller and would usually decoy readily to black duck decoys.

Although plumage patterns of hen and drake mallards are very different, the patterns of hen and drake black ducks are nearly identical. When making hunting decoys, the local carvers typically didn't bother to differentiate between hen and drake black ducks.

Photographs of the black duck and mallard decoys featured in the TIDCA display at the 2019 Clayton Decoy Show; arranged by alphabetic order of the carvers last name:



Black duck by William B. (Bill) Aiken [1910-1998], Chippewa Bay, NY. Branded W.B. AIKEN twice on the bottom. Most of Bill Aiken's decoys were painted by his friend Roy Conklin, but this decoy was painted by Dale Leeson. Dale Leeson was another friend and hunting companion of Bill's. Dale gave Bill some blocks of cedar and in return was given 6 unpainted black duck decoys. Dale painted the decoys with Herter's paint but only used them a few times.



Black duck by Raymond L. (Ray) Andress [1890-1955], Gananoque, ON. Typical Andress scratch paint.



Black duck by Byron E. Bates [1891-1964], Three Mile Bay, NY. Hollow carved with a bottom board. This is the exact decoy pictured on page 217 of Decoys of the Thousand Islands.



Black Duck by Adam D. (Ad) Brown [1864-1952], Gananoque, ON. Nice scratch painting.



Black duck by William E. (Bill) Burtch [1881-1960], Alexandria Bay, NY, with an inset tail piece to help avoid tail chips. Very fine combing over the body.



Drake mallard by Roy A. Conklin Jr. [1909-1967], Alexandria Bay, NY. Highly detailed paint, and with a single metal tail curl. Made for a friend of Roy's who drove with him to their jobs on various St. Lawrence Seaway construction projects.



Black duck by Roy A. Conklin Jr. [1909-1967], Alexandria Bay, NY. An early hunting decoy in very good used original paint.



Black duck by Frank E. (Goldie) Coombs [1882-1958], Alexandria Bay, NY. A hunting decoy in generally very good condition and original paint with a few shot holes and dings in the paint. Interestingly, although Coombs is well known for his high head decoys, he carved a number of his black ducks in a low-head style.



Black duck by Ivan H. (Blackie) Delair [1899-1962], Morristown, NY. Hollow-carved hunting decoy in good used condition except for the bill which has been repainted. Nice scratch feathering over the body. Body hollowed from below and then covered with a sheet metal plate. Keel attached.



Scratch feathering on the Delair black.

Bottom of the Delair black duck showing the keel and sheet metal bottom cover.





Drake mallard by Samuel J. (Sam) Denny [1874-1953], Clayton, NY. Hunting decoy in very good condition and original paint, except for the two metal tail curls which were broken off and lost.



Black duck by Samuel J. (Sam) Denny [1874-1953], Clayton, NY. A low or tucked head hunting decoy in very good used condition; nice original scratch paint on both the head and body. Nearly all Denny black ducks had scratch painting on their heads, and while some also had scratch paint on the bodies others had brush painted feathering. Denny made some low or tucked head examples for most of the species for which he carved hunting decoys.



Hen mallard by Rosh V. (Cappy) Douglas [1878-1962], Ogdensburg, NY. A rather darkly painted decoy, but the white strip along the side of the tail, the double white wing bars on the speculum, and the bill color, all suggest a hen mallard rather than a black duck. Mallards were a rather rare species for Douglas.



Black duck by Ferman R. Eyre [1882-1969], Brockville, ON. Painted tack eyes with nice original scratch painting on both the head and body.



Drake mallard by Kenneth I. (Ken) Harris [1905-1981], Woodville, NY. An early decoy in nearly mint condition and paint; never used for hunting.



Hen mallard by Kenneth I. (Ken) Harris [1905-1981], Woodville, NY. A fairly early decoy in nearly mint condition and paint; never used for hunting. Scratch painting on both the head and body.



Black duck by Cyriel D. Heath [1901-1962], Alexandria Bay, NY. Hollow carved hunting decoy with a thin bottom board. Although some of Heath's decoys were painted by his friend Frank Coombs, this decoy has rather plain paint believed to be by Heath. It has been reported that Heath did not carve black duck decoys, but a few other black ducks with similar carving are known, some painted by Coombs, and as shown by the photo on page 2 Cyriel Heath certainly did hunt black ducks.



Black duck by David L. (Dave) Kavanaugh [1875-1966], Athens, ON. Hunting decoy in very good condition and original paint. Nice wing carving, with wide hips typical of Kavanaugh decoys.



Black duck by Edgar L. (Ed) McNeil [1869-1954], Lansdowne, ON. Combing on the head, with reverse feather scratch paint on the neck and body. Typical of McNeil black ducks the head is secured with a fastener through the top of the head, with the hole plugged by a dowel. Very high neck seat carved from the body block.



Drake mallard by Agustus A. (Gus) Rogers [1892-1938], Alexandria Bay, NY. Never used for hunting and therefore in very good condition and original paint; single metal tail curl.



Black duck stick-up decoy by Francis C. (Roy) Stanley [1886-1960], Cape Vincent, NY. Nicely carved but rather plainly painted. This particular decoy is carved from five separate pieces of wood; head, two pieces that form the neck and back of the neck and upper body, the main body section, and a rather thin bottom piece.

Close-up of the head and neck showing in more detail the three separate wood pieces that comprise that area. Roy's father, James E. Stanley [1855-1927] also carved a number of stick-up decoys, including a seagull confidence decoy.





Black duck by Chauncey Wheeler [1862-1937], Alexandria Bay, NY. A graceful snaky neck decoy with beveled lower sides. Very good original paint.



Drake mallard by Donald F. (Don) Wolfe [1912-1990], Clayton and Cape Vincent, NY. An early hunting decoy with wooden keel, in fine original paint.