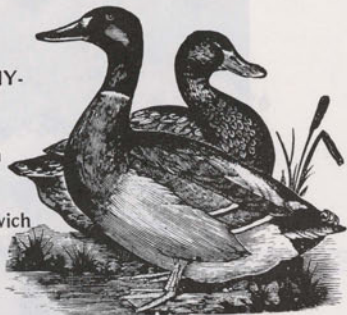


ONTARIO BAY
DECOY COMPANY-

Continuation of an
Old Tradition

by Thomas W. Nevich



The making of decoys has existed since hunters realized the advantage that imitation birds meant in capturing chosen waterfowl. Over 1,500 years ago, cave dwelling American Indians in Nevada made Canvasback decoys, using real feathers over reed bodies. In the latter part of the 1800's, American hunters began to mass produce decoys, often disregarding genuine detail and actual silhouettes, and sometimes even left off such essentials as the head. Carvers did this because they realized that birds, at that time, were nevertheless attracted to their primitive decoys by the hundreds.

Much has happened in decoy production since those blocky 1800's carvings. The evolution is attributed to the wariness that ducks have acquired toward man. This change in the waterfowl's attitude has made truer detail in decoys very important. For the working field decoy this means a simple, clear silhouette and basic colors and field marks.

The art of decoy carving is a true form of American art. Free access to hunting in North America was more prevalent than in Europe, where conditions of regulated hunting have existed since feudal times because of the private ownership of land.

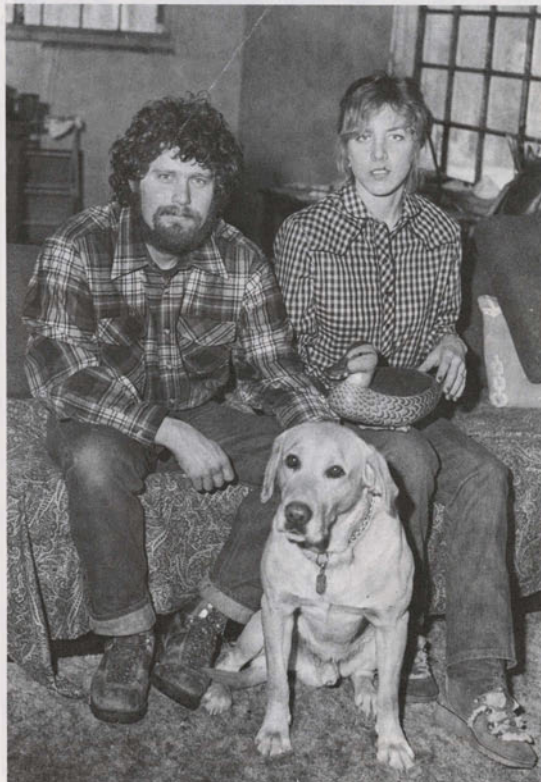
In Sandy Pond, New York, along the eastern shoreline of Lake Ontario, David and Nancy Warner have taken up an active participation in making decoys, and have joined ranks with perhaps a thousand decoy carvers nationally. Ontario Bay Decoy Company is the name of their business, which has sprung out of David's and Nancy's natural inclination toward making decoys. Ontario Bay Decoy Company produces both working decoys and decorative waterfowl pieces. In a collectible waterfowl piece, the detail is expanded more in the feather patterns with both carving and painting techniques.

David, an avid hunter, carved his first decoy fifteen years ago because he was unsatisfied with birds he found for the price on the market. After meeting Nancy in college at Oswego where she was a major in art and he a major in history, the two married and settled in Sandy Pond - a hot spot of hunting and fishing in Upstate New York.



Duck heads show different stages of carving.

Using the natural painting talents of Nancy and the experienced carving of David, the Ontario Bay Decoy Company has placed in every competition they have entered. Last year at the Clayton International Hunting Decoy Show, a contest was held for decoys in the many species of diving and puddle ducks, and geese. The decoys were placed on water and judged by three prominent carvers as to how they looked near and afar. David won three blue ribbons and one second place. Nancy also won a blue ribbon at last year's Clayton Show. This award was attained in their



THE ONTARIO BAY DECOY COMPANY

annual painting contest, where participants are given exactly one hour to completely paint a working decoy. These freshly fished birds are also judged on water, and Nancy's Mallard Drake was chosen best.

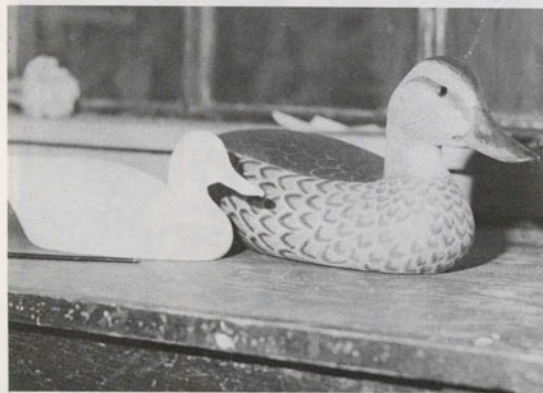
Hunting(working) decoys are made today from either cork or wood, both being traditional materials. Cork was especially popular near the sea, where often times it was found washed up on the shore in the form of floats from the fishing nets. Cork has the advantage today of being lighter than wood so that more decoys can be carried in a boat without overloading it.

'Basically all carvers use a block of wood or cork,' explained David. 'With a knife and drawshave you can do pretty well, but you have to have a few other tools to make it look well.'

Wood decoys, especially cedar carvings, which is a naturally preserved wood, have a longevity advantage over cork. The only problem with cedar is that it is hard to obtain in slabs four inches thick by six inches wide in lengths ranging from ten inches to thirty inches, depending on the bird to be carved.



Nancy details a Hen Mallard decoy.



A Blue Winged Teal (foreground) is primed with gesso and ready to be finished by Nancy with acrylic paints, soon to look like the finished Hen Mallard duck in the background.



David finishes a Gadwell head using a carving knife.

When David sits down to start a decoy, he starts on the bird's head. Using a two inch thick piece of pine, he draws a basic silhouette first then adapts the appearance with his own knowledge of waterfowl. After the head is nearly finished, the body is cut with a bandsaw. The head is mounted to the body in two different ways. If the body is wood, a simple gluing with epoxy will adhere the parts. If attaching to a cork body, a four inch screw and glue are necessary. Once the head is finished, the body is drawshaved down to a rough finish. A light rasp is then used - followed by light sandpaper to put the finishing touches on the decoy. The keel is then attached beneath and the decoy is balanced so that it is self-righting in the water. Eyes are set into the head and coats of primer are applied. The decoy is then ready for Nancy's brushes.

Nancy first textures the bird's characteristics, and then using a soft pencil, marks off sections of the bird that need to be basically a different color. Using acrylic paints, Nancy applies coats of light washes to build up the basic feature colors until the decoy is ready for detail. Nancy then uses a smaller brush and more opaque paint to detail the feather patterns. While painting decoys, she uses real birds as models and develops a pattern that is 'most simplistic, yet at the same time, most naturally representative of the species.'

The Ontario Bay Decoy Company is a relatively young enterprise, meeting with success in a centuries old tradition.

David and Nancy will carve any North American waterfowl, whether a hunting decoy or decorative waterfowl piece, and invite interested people to call them at (315) 387- 5418 to see their work.