

Million Dollar Mallards Top Guyette & Deeter's Decoy Sale

Auction Action In Portsmouth, N.H.

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. — On July 23–24, Gary Guyette and Jon Deeter conducted their annual sale of decoys and sporting art. Simply put, it was a barn-burner. Two mallard decoys made by the Caines Brothers of South Carolina, unknown to the decoy world, sold for \$1.1 million. The sale grossed \$3.4 million, with four decoys bringing more than \$100,000 each. There was strength in every category: birds

by the regional masters, miniatures, fish decoys, contemporary carvings, shorebirds, factory-made birds, sporting art and duck calls. The crowd was large, the salesroom was full, as many as nine phone lines were in use, internet bidding was available, and the atmosphere was congenial, as many of the collectors and their wives have known each other for years. As usual, Jim Julia was at the podium, running a fast-paced sale with

several new Down East jokes to entertain the crowd. Catalog descriptions were comprehensive, including condition, provenance and citations to published literature. Prior to, and during the sale, there were about 40 dealers set up in rooms adjacent to the auction offering more decoys, sporting art and some folk art.

The Caines Brothers mallards were expected to be the stars of the sale and they were. The Caines brothers, commercial fishermen, market gunners and occasional poachers lived in Georgetown, S.C. They worked

on the South Island plantation, which itself has a colorful history, including visits by US presidents and other political leaders. It was first purchased around 1868 by Confederate General Edward Porter Alexander and significantly enlarged by later owners, including the enormously wealthy Bernard Baruch, eventually coming into the ownership of Tom Yawkey, owner of the Red Sox. These decoys were consigned by his daughter.

Each of the mallards, a hen and a “snaky” neck drake, were probably made in the late Nine-

teenth Century. They were mates to a pair sold in 1992 by Richard Oliver, Kennebunk, Maine, for \$258,000 to folk art dealer Frank Maresca for a client, who later changed his mind. Well-known decoy collector and serious student of the Caines Brothers decoys, owning more than a dozen, Dick McIntyre, Seabrook, S.C., bought them from Maresca. McIntyre and Jon Deeter both said that only about a half dozen Caines decoys of this quality are known to exist. The oversized, preening hen has exceptional deep relief wing carving, a fluted tail, with line and notch carving on the wings and neck. It was estimated \$300/400,000. McIntyre said that he would like to own it as it was the mate to the drake he bought from Maresca. Bidding opened at about \$250,000 and quickly progressed to \$767,000, and McIntyre owned the bird. The snaky neck drake, estimated \$200/300,000, sold later in the sale for \$377,600 to a different buyer.

The sale included more than 500 lots. Several sold for more than \$50,000, four sold for more than \$100,000, and dozens sold for under \$500. In addition to the two Caines Brothers mallards, a “belligerent”-style, hollow-carved Canada goose made by Nathan Cobb Jr, Cobb Island, Va., sold for \$118,000, well over its estimate. Bringing \$153,400, also well over its estimate, was a hollow-carved Canada goose in a resting pose with a slightly turned head and carved, crossed wingtips by Enoch Reindahl, Stoughton, Wis.

Prior to the sale, Jon Deeter was asked about the current state of the decoy market. It was, he said, like other collecting fields, in that the market for the top-quality decoys is strong. “Let’s see what happens with the Reindahl goose. The last time that bird sold at auction was in 2000 and it brought about \$60,000. Its price here will give you a pretty good answer to that question.”

Choice decoys made by other master carvers did well. A feeding yellowlegs by Lothrop Holmes, Kingston, Mass., sold for \$82,600. Decoys by other Cape Cod carvers did well. An old squaw hen by Joseph Lincoln, Accord, Mass., earned \$59,590. An exceptional sander-



Gary Guyette with the Caines Brothers “snaky neck” mallard drake that sold for \$377,600.



Jon Deeter smiles during the preview, as he holds the \$767,000 Caines Brothers mallard hen, which was the top selling decoy.



One of the four decoys to bring more than \$100,000 was this “belligerent”-style, hollow-carved Canada goose made by Nathan Cobb Jr, Cobb Island, Va. It realized \$118,000.



It sold for about \$60,000 in 2000 and brought \$153,400 at this auction. An indication of the strength of the market for exceptional decoys? It is a hollow-carved Canada goose in a resting pose, with a slightly turned head, and carved, crossed wingtips by Enoch Reindahl, Stoughton, Wis.



Not all were decoys. A 48-inch Old Town canoe model sold for \$11,180.



There were more than 500 decoys in the sale. They were neatly displayed.



Dick McIntyre, Seabrook, S.C., has collected and studied Caines Brothers decoys for years and owns a dozen. He wanted this mallard hen to go with the drake he bought years ago and he paid \$767,000 for it. He said there were only about six decoys of this quality known to exist.



Review and Onsite Photos
by Rick Russack, Contributing Editor
Additional Photos Courtesy
Guyette & Deeter, Inc.



Circa 1890, an exceptional sanderling by Elmer Crowell, East Harwich, Mass., went for \$44,250. It had shoe-button eyes and fine paint detail.



A well documented willet by William Bowman, Lawrence, N.Y., brought \$23,600. Some believe this decoy and others attributed to Bowman may have been made by C.S. Bunn.



Selling for \$25,960, this pintail drake was carved by Elmer Crowell. It was approximately 19 inches long with feather carving on the tail.



Leading the shorebirds was a feeding yellowlegs by Lothrop Holmes, Kingston, Mass., which sold for \$82,600. It had fine feather paint detail and shoe-button eyes.



Starting the second day of the sale was this decorative carving of a full-sized pair of wood ducks on a branch with carved honeysuckle. It was done in 1972 by Crisfield, Md., carver Oliver Lawson. Standing 24 inches tall, it is one of the best known examples of Lawson's work and it reached \$12,980.



The well-carved pilot house eagle was more than 43 inches wide and dated to about 1900. It had a second coat of paint and an old repair to its beak. It sold under the estimate, finishing at \$3,540.



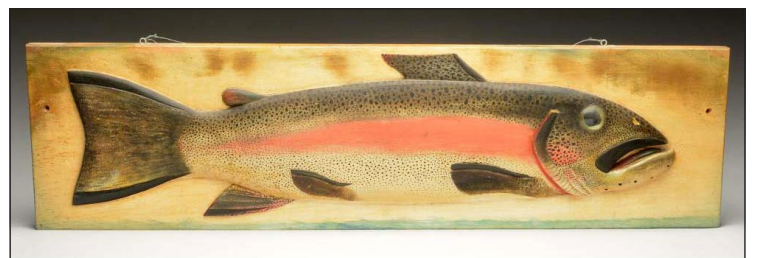
Selling for \$59,590 was an old squaw hen by Joseph Lincoln. It is discussed in three books and came from the Colodny collection.



There were a number of miniatures by Elmer Crowell. A loon with Crowell's blue paper label sold for \$6,490.



This flying brant decoy by William McClellan, Eureka, Calif., was designed so that its detachable canvas over wood-frame wings would flap in the wind, imitating birds coming in to land. It is a rare example and it sold for \$20,650.



Oscar Peterson is well known for his fish decoys. The 42-inch plaque with a rainbow or cutthroat trout earned \$33,400.

ling by Elmer Crowell, East Harwich, Mass., went for \$44,250. A pintail drake by the same carver earned \$25,960. There were several Crowell miniatures. A rare loon with a paper label reached \$6,490, and a spotted sandpiper, marked in pencil, realized \$3,422. Staying with New England decoys, a pair of hollow-carved mergansers with horse hair crests by Oscar Bibber, South Portland, Maine, realized \$47,200. A hollow-carved black duck with a slightly turned head by Shang Wheeler, Stratford, Conn., earned \$66,080. An exceptional eider hen in a side preening pose by Gus Wilson, South Portland, Maine, was bid to \$23,600. It was, according to the catalog, an example of "Wilson's earlier, coveted 'Monhegan Island' style."

Decoys from other regions did well. A black duck with extra fine painted detail by the Ward Brothers, Crisfield, Md., finished at \$41,300, and a pair of their mallards brought \$37,760. An exceptionally fine Canada goose by Harry Mitchell Shourds, Ocean City, N.J., went out at \$47,200, and a merganser drake with painted eyes by the same carver finished at \$41,300.

The selection of fish decoys included an outstanding 42-inch plaque with a large, colorful rainbow or cutthroat trout carved by Oscar Peterson, Cadillac, Mich. It sold well over its estimate, finishing at \$33,400.

An 8½-inch brook trout decoy by Peterson, with painted eyes and deeply carved gills, sold for \$11,200. Factory decoys also were popular with bidders. A rare dunlin, made by the Dodge Decoy Factory, Detroit, Mich., brought \$18,290. A circa 1910 Mason's salesman's sample dowitcher in fall plumage realized \$9,735. It was marked "dowitcher \$7.50 a dozen." A robin snipe, also by the Mason factory, attained \$8,260.

Although "retired," it's the same Jim Julia at the podium. "Right now, I'm winding down some family stuff after Sandy's passing and dealing with the real estate, selling the gallery location," he said. "I'll be continuing to buy and sell but no auctions other than these for Gary and Jon. I won't be doing business under the name 'James D. Julia.' The name, the old phone number and mailing address now belong to Dan Morphy and incoming inquiries go directly there. Those restrictions are part of my contract with Dan and it's all been very smooth. I'll be doing business under the name 'Fly Fishing Only Antiques' and will be selling through some of the antiques malls and maybe directly to dealers."

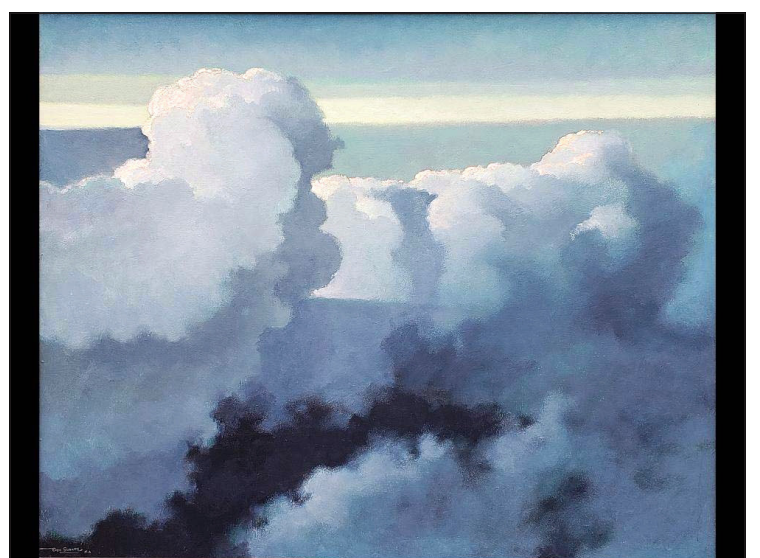
Prices are given with buyer's premium, as reported by the auction house. For information, www.guyetteanddeeter.com or 410-745-0485.



The sale included several duck calls. Topping the group was this one by Charles Perdue, Henry, Ill. It had three carved ducks with glass eyes on the barrel. It included the original "Christmas box" that holds an additional reed and it went out for \$3,835.



This Canada goose by Harry Mitchell Shourds, Ocean City, N.J., went out at \$47,200.



Several paintings and sculptures were included in the sale. "Clouds," an oil on board by Eric Sloane, earned \$8,260.