

Birds Of A Feather

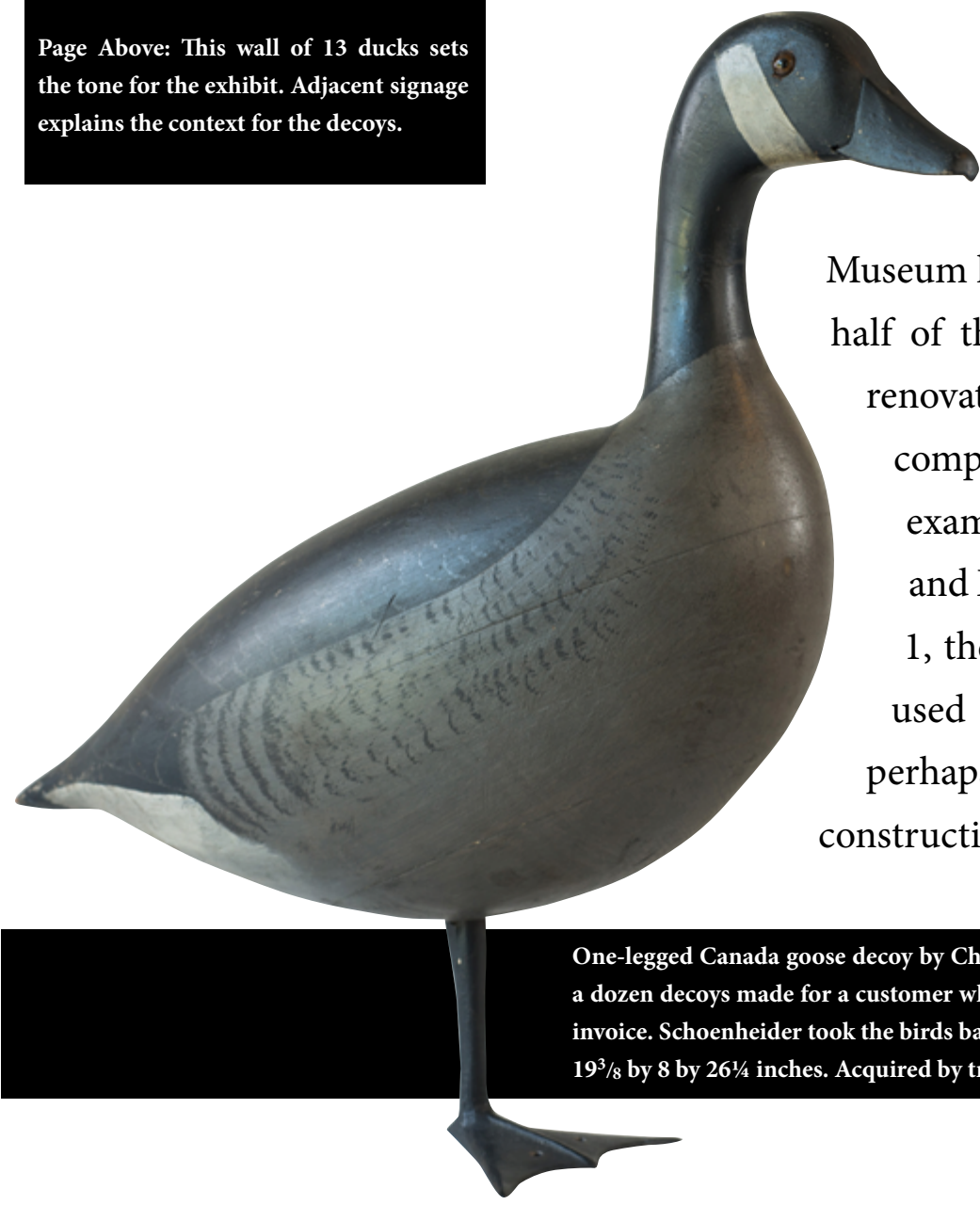


Page Above: This wall of 13 ducks sets the tone for the exhibit. Adjacent signage explains the context for the decoys.

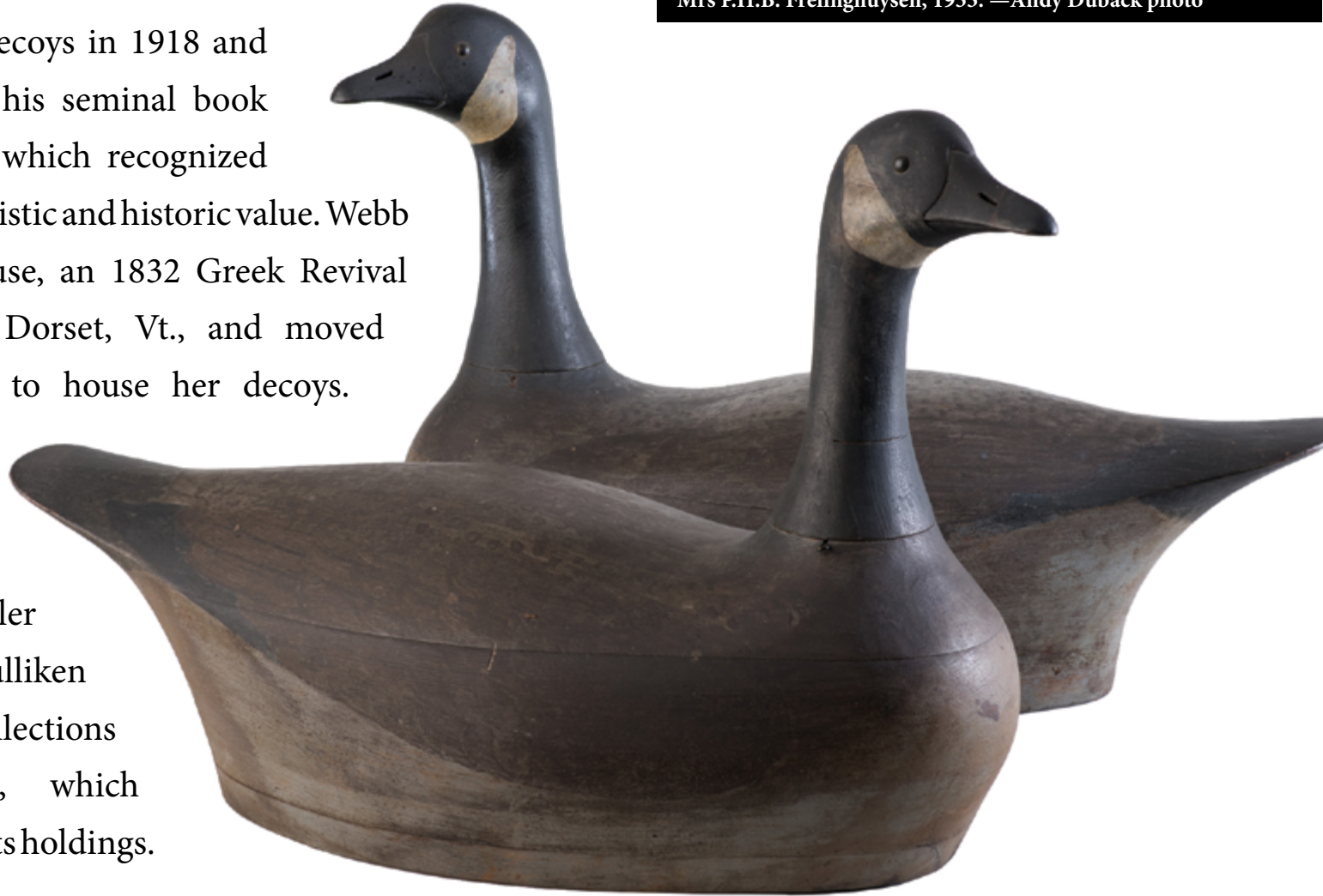
By Rick Russack

SHELBURNE, VT. — The Shelburne Museum has a collection of more than 1,400 decoys. About half of them have never been on public display. When renovations to Dorset House, their longtime home, are complete, they will all be on view. Meanwhile, 85 choice examples may be seen in the Pizzagalli Center for Art and Education in “Birds of a Feather.” Up through May 1, the well-designed presentation includes equipment used by market gunners and, in an innovative and perhaps unprecedented approach, x-ray photos of the construction details of three decoys in the show.

One-legged Canada goose decoy by Charles Schoenheider Sr, 1918. This goose with a single, cast iron leg is one of a dozen decoys made for a customer who refused to pay Schoenheider after receiving the Peoria, Ill., carver's \$125 invoice. Schoenheider took the birds back and stored them, unused, in his attic. Wood, paint, glass, metal and iron; 19³/₈ by 8 by 26¹/₄ inches. Acquired by trade from Charles Schoenheider Jr; Adele Earnest and Donal O'Brien.



Four hundred birds acquired by Shelburne Museum founder Electra Havemeyer Webb from Joel Barber in 1952 form the core of the collection. Barber started collecting decoys in 1918 and in 1934 published his seminal book *Wild Fowl Decoys*, which recognized carvings for their artistic and historic value. Webb bought Dorset House, an 1832 Greek Revival residence in East Dorset, Vt., and moved it to Shelburne to house her decoys. Her acquisition of the Barber objects inspired Richard H. Moeller and Edward H. Mulliken to bequeath their collections to the museum, which continues to add to its holdings.



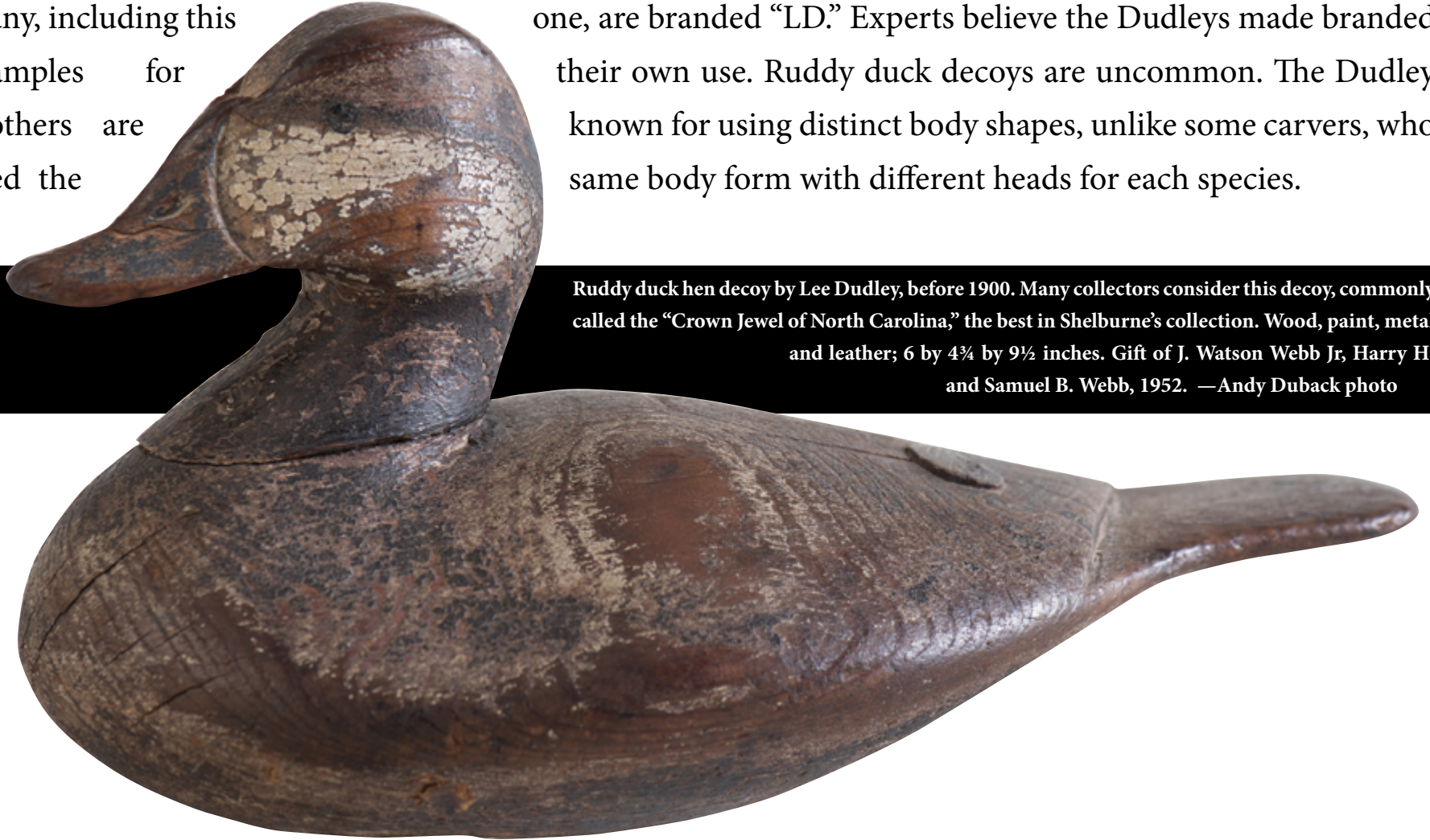
Canada goose decoys by Captain Charles Osgood, circa 1849. Wood, paint, metal and leather; 16¾ by 11½ by 24 inches. Gift of Mrs P.H.B. Frelinghuysen, 1953. —Andy Duback photo

Upon entering “Birds of a Feather,” one immediately faces a wall of 13 outstanding duck decoys. In the center is a gem of the collection, a ruddy hen decoy by Lee Dudley. Lee and his twin brother, Lem, were market gunners. They lived on

Many, including this examples for brothers are used the

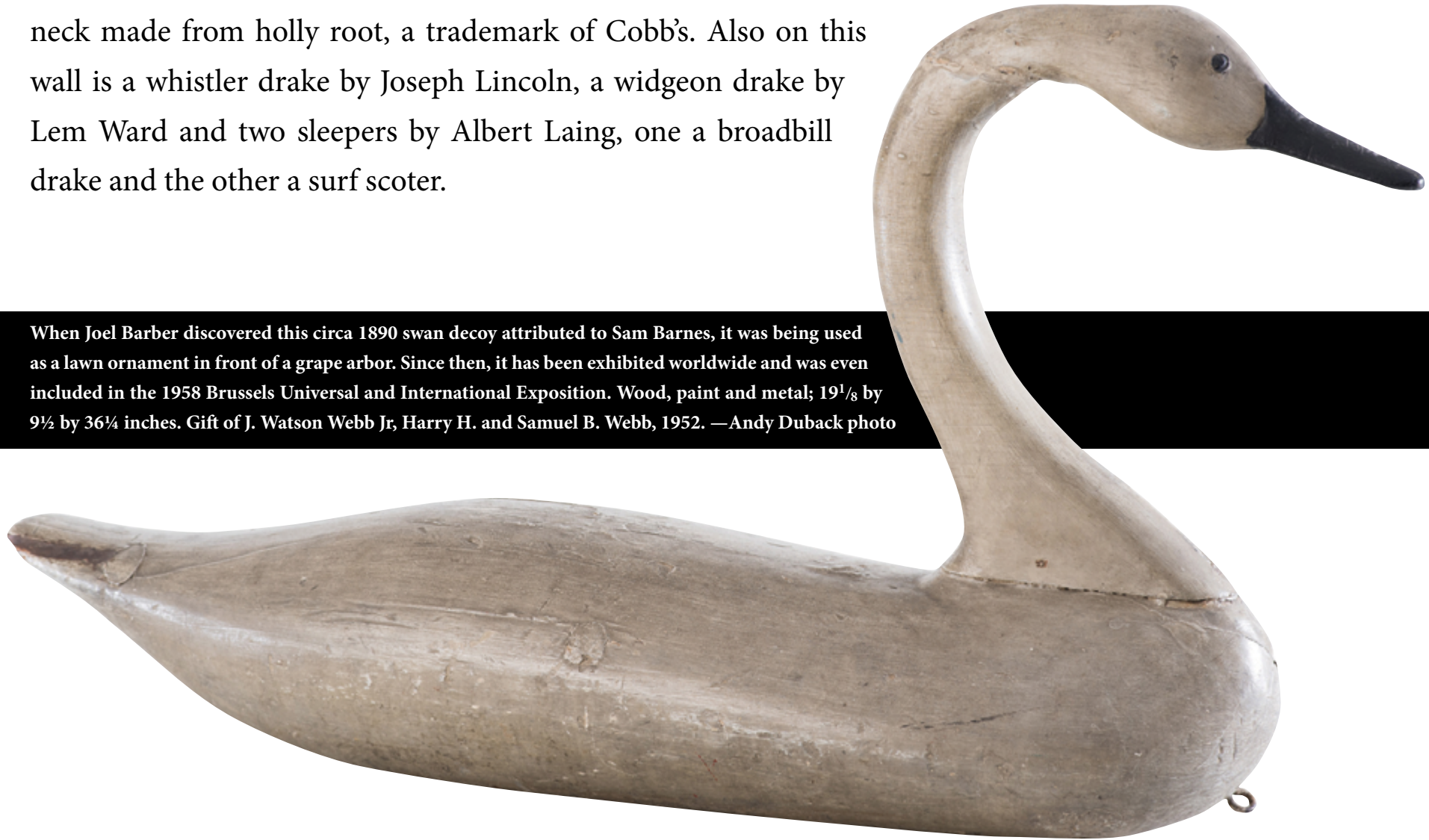
Knott’s Island, N.C., and both carved. Their first birds date to about 1892. one, are branded “LD.” Experts believe the Dudleys made branded their own use. Ruddy duck decoys are uncommon. The Dudley known for using distinct body shapes, unlike some carvers, who same body form with different heads for each species.

Ruddy duck hen decoy by Lee Dudley, before 1900. Many collectors consider this decoy, commonly called the “Crown Jewel of North Carolina,” the best in Shelburne’s collection. Wood, paint, metal and leather; 6 by 4¾ by 9½ inches. Gift of J. Watson Webb Jr, Harry H. and Samuel B. Webb, 1952. —Andy Duback photo



Displayed near the ruddy hen is a brant decoy made by Nathan Cobb Jr, a market gunner from Cobb Island, Va. This decoy has glass eyes and a head and neck made from holly root, a trademark of Cobb's. Also on this wall is a whistler drake by Joseph Lincoln, a widgeon drake by Lem Ward and two sleepers by Albert Laing, one a broadbill drake and the other a surf scoter.

When Joel Barber discovered this circa 1890 swan decoy attributed to Sam Barnes, it was being used as a lawn ornament in front of a grape arbor. Since then, it has been exhibited worldwide and was even included in the 1958 Brussels Universal and International Exposition. Wood, paint and metal; 19¹/₈ by 9¹/₂ by 36¹/₄ inches. Gift of J. Watson Webb Jr, Harry H. and Samuel B. Webb, 1952. —Andy Duback photo



Most of the decoys are displayed in related groups, aiding in making comparisons between carvers and styles. Four mallards, including a drake and a hen by Shang Wheeler, are in one group. The influential Stratford, Conn., carver was a dedicated conservationist who, as a member of the state legislature, helped pass laws protecting wildlife...

(Continued on page 8C inside the E-Edition)

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Black duck by A. Elmer Crowell, 1920. Crowell received his first shotgun when he was 12. By 14, he was using wooden decoys to hunt. This preening duck decoy is similar to one auctioned by Copley Fine Arts for \$210,000 in July 2015. Wood and paint; 7½ by 16½ by 5¾ inches.



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