

# Decoy Contests In the Mid-Atlantic *A Quick History*

## **1876 INTERNATIONAL CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION IN PHILADELPHIA**

This first contest focused on how well the decoys worked as animal lures. Ben Holmes of Stratford, Connecticut, won the contest. His bluebill decoys are in the collection of the Smithsonian.

## **1923 ANTI-DUSKERS SOCIETY OF BELLPORT, LONG ISLAND**

The 1923 Bellport show is considered the first real decoy show. The Anti-Duskers were a conservation group of hunters opposed to hunting ducks after dark. The contests changed from focusing on hunting to conservation. Shang Wheeler of Stratford, Connecticut, a student of Ben Holmes, won, with a Black duck decoy.

## **1924 SECOND ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF WILDFOWL DECOYS BY AMERICAN SPORTSMEN, NEW YORK CITY**

The emphasis of this contest was conservation. Miniature bird carvings were a part of the 1923 and 1924 contests.

## **1925-1949 INTERNATIONAL DECOY MAKERS CONTEST AND EXHIBITIONS**

Contests continued to be held in New York City, attracting a growing number of decoy makers. These contests helped form a network of carvers throughout the Mid-Atlantic. The first decorative bird carvings were exhibited at these contests. Sam Barnes of Havre de Grace, MD won this contest with a pair of canvasback decoys.

## **1960-PRESENT DECOY CONTESTS ARE HELD THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES**

Ward World Championship and other regional contests incorporate the decorative carvings style, while continuing to judge working decoys on form and function. The main emphasis is now on waterfowl conservation and preservation of this American art form.