

Ontario decoys must have been pleased to get the pair of Rankin canvasbacks with just the right working wear for \$1,725, below estimate of \$2,300 to \$2,800.



Hollow Humphry whistler, late 19th century.



Adam Brown bluebill, circa 1925, \$1,850.



Pair of Rankin canvasbacks, \$1,725..

At the auction preview, a collector looking for a reasonably-priced decoy for an absent Louisiana friend, asked my opinion of the "pair" of Hutcheson mallards, estimated at \$1,700 to \$2,300. Hutcheson was a Barcovan, Ontario carver who made decoys in the early 20th century. It was obvious that one decoy was a black duck and the other a mallard. I have always liked Hutcheson's decoys and the mallard was a good one although the black was quite worn. My opinion apparently reinforced the bidder's own inclination and he got a bargain, buying both for his friend at \$1,325.



Two Scott Hutcheson decoys, a bargain at \$1,325.

Canadian collectors are anticipating a book on Nichol decoys being written by Bernie Gates, Jeff Mewburn and William Reeve, expected to come out this fall. There were several Nichol decoys in the auction, including a near-mint pair of teal that sold for \$2,000.



Davey Nichol teal, near mint condition, sold for \$2,000.

The higher-priced Canadian decoys, including the Hart merganser and the Reeves goose, went to American bidders. The goose ended up in a new museum in Tennessee. Unfortunately, there are no Canadian museums with significant collections of decoys or that seem much interested in these singular Canadian artifacts. A few of the decoys in this auction did go to Canadian collectors, including the Loney black duck decoy. William Loney (Milford, Ontario, 1878-1956), one of Canada's finest folk artists, made some decoys as well.



This Loney black duck decoy came back to Canada for \$3,450.

The only Canadian shorebird, a black-bellied plover from Toronto, circa 1900, sold for \$9,200, just within its



Black-bellied plover from Toronto, \$9,200.

estimate.

There were some fine decorative decoys by well-known Canadian carvers in the auction. A brant made in the 1960s by Al Glassford (Scarborough, Ontario) sold for \$1,725 and a pair of widgeon by John Garton (Smiths Falls,



Brant decorative carving by Al Glassford, Scarborough, \$1,725.



John Garton made these widgeon, \$4,300.

Ontario, 1970s) for \$4,300.

A personal note: I purchased just one item, a Canadian fish carving, attributed to an Anderson family from the Tweed area of Ontario. It has the smooth lines that only a skilled craftsman could create, inset metal fins and sharp teeth. Its undershot jaw bespeaks its fierce personality! Interesting Canadian folk art.

Now to decide what it was intended to represent – a walleye, probably – and to try to trace its provenance!



Fish from Anderson Family, Tweed area, 1930s.

### The Display of Great Canadian Decoys at the Show

The Show featured a display of some of the very best Canadian decoys, brought together from two dozen collections across the continent.

This was the first time such a comprehensive display of Canadian decoys had been seen in Canada or in the USA. It is hard to think of any collecting genre where so many of the very best examples have been brought together in one place. It was a landmark effort, organized by Paul Brisco.

It wowed the audience! (An article on the display is being prepared for a future issue of *The Upper Canadian Showcase*.)

Decoy aficionados are reminded that the annual auction and show of the Canadian Decoy and Outdoor Collectibles Association will be held at the Oshawa Holiday Inn on October 18 & 19, 2008. See [www.canadiandecoy.com](http://www.canadiandecoy.com)



Midge Jones (Michigan), Betsy Martin (Florida) & Marilyn Stewart (Toronto). Over the years at the Mega Centre tables, these three have become fast friends.



Ron Swanson, Michigan, displayed some of the wonderful fish models from his collection. He is finishing a book on the subject.



Conrad Clippert (Colorado), Paul Brisco (London, Ontario), Mark Taylor (New York State) & Laurin Garland (Ottawa) brought decoys for the Canadian display, organized by Paul.



Canadian Decoy Association Directors Preston Lowe, Robin Craig, Dave Dauphinais, Jim Stewart & Blair Ledingham.

#### TOP 25 AUCTION RECORDS FOR CANADIAN DECOYS

This table lists the top 25 auction prices for Canadian decoys. Most are from American auctions, including the buyer's premium. The two sold in Canadian auctions are in Canadian dollars. The prices should be kept in context. These are the exceptions, for unusually fine decoys, sold in competitive auctions. Some of the records are from auctions held several years ago and those decoys would likely sell for more in today's market.

Of the top ten prices, six were for decoys from eastern Ontario, one was for a decoy from Toronto, one for a Hamilton decoy (and a second attributed to a Hamilton carver) and one for a decoy from Central Ontario. 11 of the top 25 decoys were by Toronto carvers, demonstrating the depth of quality of decoys from that area. Surprisingly, three of the top ten were by unknown makers. Four of the top ten were hooded mergansers, a strange outcome given that this species was disparaged by most waterfowl hunters and hunted by few – it shows the fascination that merganser decoys hold for folk art collectors.

Canadian decoys have continued to escalate in price. Nine of the top 25 listings are for decoys sold in the last year and seven represent new records for their makers. The Fernlund pintail sold in Guyette and Schmidt's July 2007 auction was the third Canadian decoy to yield more than \$100,000. Decoys 5 and 10 were sold in Tim Potter's Canadian (Price) auction for \$83,600 and \$51,700 (Canadian \$), the first time that such prices have been achieved in Canada.

Rank	Maker	Decoy	Price	Notes
1	William Hart	HC hooded merganser drake	\$203,000	2005
2	Thomas Chambers	HC wood duck drake	\$187,000	2004
3	Ivor Fernlund	HC pintail drake	\$126,000	2007 NR
4	Unknown Central Ontario	hooded merganser drake	\$ 88,250	2007 NR
5	Samuel Hutchings	hooded merganser hen	\$ 83,600	2007 NR
6	Unknown (James Harper?)	HC canvasback hen	\$ 80,500	2007 NR
7	William Hart	HC green-winged teal hen	\$ 63,250	2005
8	Unknown Ontario (Perth)	wood duck pair	\$110,500	2004 PR
9	Bob J. Jones	HC redhead drake	\$ 51,750	2006
10	Samuel Hutchings	hooded merganser drake	\$ 51,700	2007
11	Thomas Chambers	HC Canada goose	\$ 46,000	2007 NR
12	Phineas Reeves	HC Canada goose	\$ 37,375	2008 NR
13	William Hart	HC hooded merganser drake	\$ 35,650	2008
14	Samuel Hutchings	hooded merganser drake	\$ 34,100	2004
15	Thomas Chambers	HC Canada goose	\$ 33,000	2002
16	Unknown Toronto School	HC pintail drake	\$ 31,900	2001
17-18	William Humphrey	black-bellied plover	\$ 28,750	2005
17-18	George Warin	HC canvasback drake	\$ 28,750	2007
19-20	Unknown St. Clair Flats	HC Canada goose	\$ 27,600	2004
19-20	George Warin	blue-winged teal hen	\$ 27,600	2006
21	Thomas Chambers	HC pintail drake	\$ 27,500	2001
22	John R. Wells	HC canvasback drake	\$ 26,950	2004
23	Phineas Reeves	HC Canada goose	\$ 26,450	2005
24	Orel LeBoeuf	wood duck drake	\$ 25,300	2007 NR
25	John R. Wells	HC canvasback hen	\$ 25,300	2000

HC = hollow carved NR = new record for carver, since May 1, 2007 PR = pair with price halved for listing order

Photographs of decoys by Guyette & Schmidt. Others by Blair Ledingham, Jim Stewart & Laurin Garland.

Jim Stewart is a Toronto decoy and antique collector and writer on business and antique subjects. He is co-author of *The Decoys of the Thousand Islands* (1992) and author of *The County Decoys* (2004). He is a director of the Canadian Decoy and Outdoor Collectibles Association.