

# Unusual Antiques Mystify the Experts at the Canadian Decoy & Outdoor Collectibles Show

by Jim Stewart

## Introduction

Collectors expected to see lots of decoys and other outdoor antiques for sale at the annual show of the Canadian Decoy and Outdoor Collectibles Association (Oct. 27-28, Oshawa, Ontario). They knew that there would also be fine displays and interesting contests, since the Canadian Show has become known for excelling in these areas. But this year there was an unexpected feature – a “Mystery Antiques Challenge” – a display of unusual outdoor collectibles for the attendees to try to identify. Even the most experienced collectors were stumped by some of those unique things.

The Mystery Antiques contest added variety to a busy two-day agenda. Saturday included an auction conducted by John Simpson, a cocktail party and buffet dinner, and room-to-room trading. The well-attended auction sold over 200 lots – books, fishing collectibles, outdoor art and artifacts, and of course, decoys. A pair of Ken Anger hollow redheads, used but in good condition, brought \$2,640, the top price at the auction.

The Show on Sunday had contests for decoys and outdoor collectibles, displays and table sales. The contest for the best bluebill was won by Don Blyth’s fine Freeborn decoy. Paul Brisco won the contest for the best combination of a puddle duck and a diver decoy by the same maker with a canvasback and a green-winged teal made by Harper. The Other Outdoor Collectibles contest had a wide variety of exceptional entries, from posters to pins to powder horns.

The main decoy display featured the carvers of Southwestern Ontario, a region rich in waterfowl hunting history. It was organized by Jim Grochowski with the assistance of Pat Langlois and Paul Brisco. Jim gave a talk on the display and prepared the accompanying article on the decoys of that region.

## The Mystery Antiques Challenge

When people arrived at the Show, they were given a sheet with a list of questions referring to the display of mystery antiques. Included were about 30 items — decoys, wildlife art, and all manner of antique objects relating to hunting, fishing and the outdoors. The idea was to identify the maker, the origin and the use for the item.

## Some Unusual Outdoor Collectibles

Some of the objects are shown in the first photograph. At the front left in the photograph is a hollow copper float, shaped to fit in the bow or stern of a canoe to provide flotation in an upset. Presumably such “sponsons” would work best in pairs. It was found in the Ottawa Valley and dates to the early 1900s.



## Some of the articles in the Mystery Antiques Challenge

The tubular object next to the canoe float is a home-made fish finder. Technology has come a long way from this antique fish finder to the present-day electronic versions. But the old ones worked pretty well. This fish finder was made by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Quebec craftsman from a maple log, carefully hollowed out, the top formed to fit the forehead, the bottom fitted with a glass pane. From a boat, the fisherman would hold the fish finder a foot or so under the water and peer down. He would get a good view of the (presumably plentiful) fish in the clear waters of those days.

To the immediate right of the fish finder are three net needles (described later). At the far right is a pitch bucket, used to heat pine tar for sealing the seams of birch bark canoes. It was made in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by a Quebec Aboriginal craftsman. Contestants received bonus points if they knew that these pitch buckets were called “Chatanoogas.” Not many got the bonus!