

Eastern Ontario Waterfowl Decoys

Condensed from *"The Rivermen"-Echoes of Lake St. Francis* by Lefebvre & Seymour.

For as long as men have hunted, it is likely that they've used trickery to lure their quarry within range. Nowhere is this deception more apparent than in waterfowl hunting where the use of decoys has long been part of the hunt. The duck decoy is widely regarded as unique to North America, with aboriginal designs dating back 2000 years or more. However it was in the eastern parts of Canada and the United States that the working decoy reached its pinnacle. From the primitive ephemeral pieces made by native craftsmen to the utilitarian works of market hunters and the highly detailed decorative show pieces of today, waterfowl decoys are widely recognized for their artistic value. Decoys are legitimate folk art and have become highly sought, often very pricey collectibles.

The history of Lake St. Francis decoys is as rich, colourful and exciting as any region in North America. Although there is little recorded of either their use or production on Lake St. Francis before the last quarter of the 19th century it is likely that the Lake's rivermen were making them several decades earlier. The famed Algonquin Hotel on Stanley Island opposite Summerstown was well known for hosting waterfowl hunts. A few decoys used at this resort remain in the area including some dating from the late 1800's when the hotel flourished.

The best known and most celebrated decoy makers of most regions were those who produced in quantity, usually for sale to other hunters. The Senecal's and Dufresne's of Lancaster were known for their naïve but functional carvings, whereas Clarence White, also of Lancaster, developed a more refined and appealing "folky" style. Together they produced thousands of working decoys. White continued to carve decorative birds long after wooden decoys lost their appeal to hunters. Knud Hansen was a well-known Summerstown area riverman who made attractive decoys in two distinct styles from the 1930's thru the 50's. Zan Ruest of East End Cornwall made some of the area's finest decoys in the 1950's and 60's, many of which were sold to clients in the United States and were locally offered for sale at Dalbec's Sporting Goods in Cornwall. The decoys of Rod Preece from L'original Ont. often found their way to the St. Lawrence River. He produced fine decoys, often in the style of the Smith's falls carvers, thus adding a new and attractive style to the area.

Are you interested in collecting waterfowl decoys? Send us an e-mail and let us know. We'll try and keep an eye out for you. In the meantime, you can **search for decoy** in all of our current auction items.

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