

Ira D. Hudson and Family: Chincoteague Carvers

BY HENRY H. STANSBURY, FROM HIS BOOK *IRA D. HUDSON AND FAMILY: CHINCOTEAGUE CARVERS*,
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Ira Hudson is undoubtedly Chincoteague, Virginia's most famous decoy maker. During the first half of the 20th century, he made thousands of working decoys, never using a pattern; therefore, no two are completely alike. He also repaired and repainted untold numbers of decoys for hunters and gun clubs. Ira carved hundreds of wonderful miniature versions of his full-size decoys and made spectacular flying and standing decorative birds which he sold for a dollar or two or used as barter to provide food and clothing for his family. Although he was barely able to read or write and never drove a car, Ira could build any small boat you could show him, without ever drawing any plans.

Over his years as decoy maker and boat builder, Ira's large family provided ample assistance, creating a cottage

industry that modestly supported them for nearly 50 years. His oldest son, Norman, and his youngest son, Delbert, although 27 years apart in age, each achieved a measure of fame for their carving and painting abilities. Their collaborative efforts with their father, as well as their individual work, were included in this exhibit.

When Ira Hudson died in January, 1949, he was already well known and respected by the hunters who used his decoys as well as the emerging decoy collecting community. But no one in his family could have dreamed of the fame his carvings would achieve in the ensuing years. Although his talent can't be measured in the present-day prices of his work, it should be noted that the best pieces bring more money than Hudson likely earned in his lifetime.



Preparing to launch the exhibit "Ira D. Hudson and Family: Chincoteague Carvers": Henry Stansbury, Darrell Hagar and Sam Dyke outfit Ira Hudson's gunning skiff with decoys and other artifacts.

A rare pair of matched Hooded Mergansers, exhibiting Ira D. Hudson's finest scratch painting.



Exhibit Review

BY JIM TRIMBLE

The backbone of this year's Chesapeake Wildfowl Expo was the well-publicized "Ira D. Hudson and Family: Chincoteague Carvers" exhibit that curator Sam Dyke assembled and blended with a scholarly artistic hand. The display included decoys and artifacts from Dyke, Henry Stansbury, Jack Marsh and an anonymous West Coast collector. The LaMay Gallery was filled with over 125 decoys including gunners, flyers, stand-ups and wall-hangers. The creations, mostly Ira's, included birds by sons Norman and Delbert. There were guns, gunning lights, old photos, even a sculling skiff built by the senior Hudson, circa 1913, all supported with historical commentary. The gunning birds filled individual cases, mostly arranged by species. Dyke's presentation gave the collector a chance to examine and compare maybe eight or nine different style birds of the same species by this creative family of bird carvers. It is by far the best and most comprehensive display of decoys that this writer has seen.