



Ferdinand Bach

(1888 - 1967) Detroit, MI

Ferdinand Bach (1888-1967) was a Swiss-American carver of wooden duck decoys and is considered one of the most distinguished carvers of decoys in the US.

He was born in Eschenz in Switzerland and emigrated in 1916 to the USA. He settled in St. Clair Shores where he worked as a craftsman and designer for auto manufacturing. He is best known for his wooden duck decoys.

Ferdinand carved in the classic Michigan style. His oversized decoys are solid and serviceable; they exemplify the finest of the twentieth century Detroit area decoys. Carvers from Bach's era made oversized decoys with broad backs, short tails, wide flat bottoms and rounded contours throughout the construction of the decoy. He converted old telephone poles of cedar into oval-shaped bodies and topped them with sugar pine heads. His decoys were wide to offer greater visibility to flying birds and rode low on the water to prevent tipping. Using a drawknife, spoke shave, pocketknife and rasps, he carved his decoys by hand. Contrary to Michigan tradition, he relief-carved the wings and covered them with elaborate carved feathers. Before painting the surface, he coated the entire decoy with a sealer of half marine varnish and half linseed oil. From there, he painted the decoy in blended colors that truly represent the plumage patterns of the actual bird.

He never sold any decoys and only used them "for his own pleasure".

Misfortune befell Bach's first full rig of seventy-two decoys he carved between 1916 -1930 when fire destroyed it and his houseboat in 1925 (Engers 211). Within a year however, Bach rebuilt the houseboat and created a new rig of 47 in total of bluebills, canvasbacks, redheads and at least one merganser between 1942-1951. Bach took care of these decoys and cleaned and stored them in bags at the end of every season until he died in a boat drowning accident in his own canal in 1967.