

George Leonard Herter

(1911 – 1994) Waseca, Minnesota

Some may regard him as the P.T. Barnum of the game call industry, but George Herter was a heavy hitter. While he did not personally build each and every call offered in his voluminous sporting goods catalogs, his company emerged as a call-manufacturing leader, due to its commitment to innovation.



Herter recognized early on that new call designs—usually accompanied by glowing advertising text—helped ensure a hefty bottom line. He was a sportsman as well as a businessman, and his interests melded into a booming success.



Among Herter's extensive duck call line was his version of the Glodo call, which he later renamed the Vit Glodo. OK, so he used a bit of poetic license. None of the Glodo family members actually made these Herter's calls, but Herter utilized a similar design and then, in his words, "improved it."

Herter, or Herter's call makers, were constantly tinkering, or making subtle changes to their game calls. Perhaps the most controversial, because some felt it infringed on Tom Turpin's Glodo-style design, was the development of a one-piece reed and wedge block device.

(Gary Koehler)



Herter's Decoys



Herter's Mallard Cork Decoy, photo: back-n-time-antiques.com

Well before the big box sporting food stores of Cabela's, Sportsman's Warehouse, or Bass Pro Shops, the sporting goods business was dominated by Herter's Sporting Goods Co., of Waseca, Minnesota. George Herter started his sporting good business in 1936 from his parents' garage. Herter began to manufacture cork decoys for their customers from 1936-1939. A redesign in 1939 covered the cork bodies with a "plastic ink" printed cloth attached at the bottom with a metal ring and wood head. These were their earliest decoys.

George was called to military service in 1942 and returned to the business in 1946. Decoy production never ceased during this time but new models did not come out until after his return.



Herter's Balsa Wood Duck Decoy, photo: liveauctioneers.com

The first wooden Herter's decoys were produced in 1946 and were hollow. They were advertised as the "model perfect" decoy. Plastic heads were added to the wood bodies from 1953-1956. Santa Malta balsa decoys began to be produced in the late 1940's through 1950 in an effort to reduce weight for hunters in the field. Hundreds of thousands of balsa decoys were produced and distributed nationwide. Herter's model 72 (oversized) balsa decoys are still popular for collectors and waterfowlers to this day.

Herter's was the largest mail order sporting goods store for years. Many sportsmen looked forward to receiving their yearly advertising catalogs that were 1-2 inches thick!

In the 1950's-1960's, Herter's met customer's demands by producing a lighter decoy made from styrofoam under the trade name of "durlon".

Herter's Foam Decoy

They also produced a line of field shells and fiberboard silhouette decoys during this time. Decoys were also made out of plastic, trade named "tenite", during this period as well. Model 50's tenite decoys were considered as superb decoys at the time!



Needless to say, numerous models and series of decoys were produced by Herter's for their ever-demanding customers. George Herter was considered a marketing genius at the time and personally wrote most of the advertising in his catalogs. Currently, old Herter catalogs are highly sought after by collectors of sporting memorabilia.

In 1977, Herter's was sold to Cabela's. While some decoy production was continued by Cabela's of the Herter's line of decoys, most decoy production was discontinued by 1990.

Herter decoys were produced in a variety of species including crow, owls and even rabbit decoys. Herter owls are considered quite rare and very collectible and can exceed \$2,000 – \$3000 in value!



Old Herter decoys are in high demand today by collectors. The most common today have balsa bodies and heads. The tenite (plastic) model 50's are slowly taking over sales numbers however. Herter's introduced a decorative decoy in the late 1960's and labeled them with a (Herter's Inc. 1893) stamp on the bottom which were produced until 1977.

Many waterfowlers currently use older Herter's "styrofoam" (durlon) decoys and modify them with a "restle" coating or a burlap to provide a very realistic and durable decoy today.

Minnesota entrepreneur, outdoorsman and author. In 1939 Herter (d. 1994) began running his family business dry-goods store in Waseca, MN. Opened an additional store in Mitchell, SD and by the 1950s he began a mail-order supply business, eventually producing **the world-famous Herter's catalog** of outdoors equipment and sporting goods supplies — from duck calls and fishing lures, knives and ammo, rifle dies, cleaning supplies and clothing to snowmobiles and fiberglass boats — an eclectic catalogue that soon included Herter's self-published wildly eccentric (and basically insane) books, from a famous cookbook to books on winemaking, guns, and other survivalist topics.

