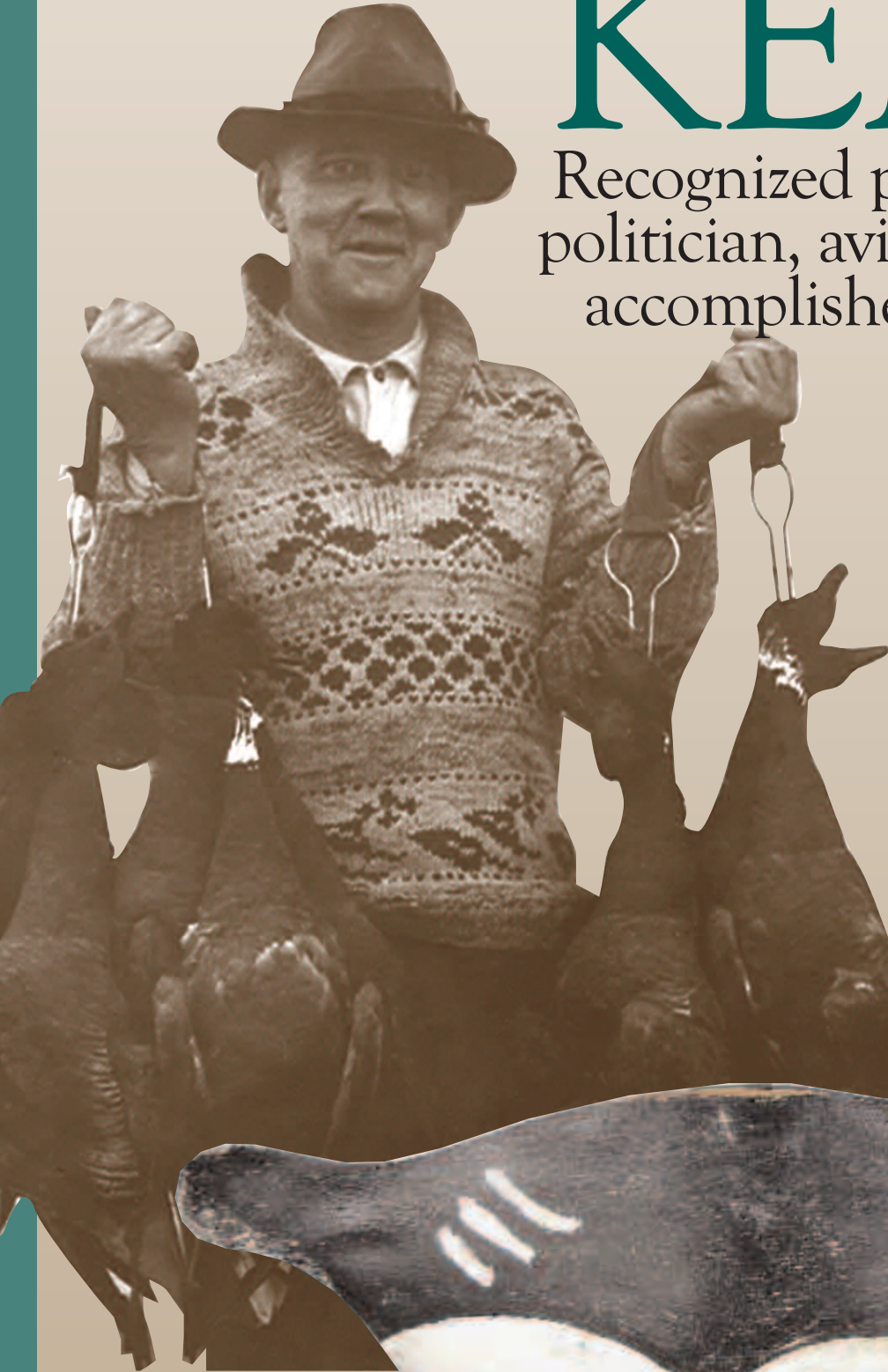


Marshal Aubrey KENT


Recognized patriot, respected politician, avid sportsman and accomplished decoy maker

BY GENE & LINDA KANGAS

MARSHALL AUBREY KENT'S obituary from the February 23, 1978 Victoria Times offers the following information: "Former City Alderman Dies (in Oak Bay near Victoria). Marshall Aubrey Kent, a former Victorian alderman, past President of the Union Club ('Home to generations of leaders since 1879') and President of the Chamber of Commerce died today at the age of 87. Kent was born in Victoria on September 8, 1891 and lived most of his life here, establishing himself as a businessman, and rising to the rank of lieutenant-colonel during two world wars. He also spent years in civic politics. He at-



Aubrey Kent arriving home with a bag of brant, ca. 1953.



Swimming tuck-eyed brant decoy with Kent's signature "razor back" design.



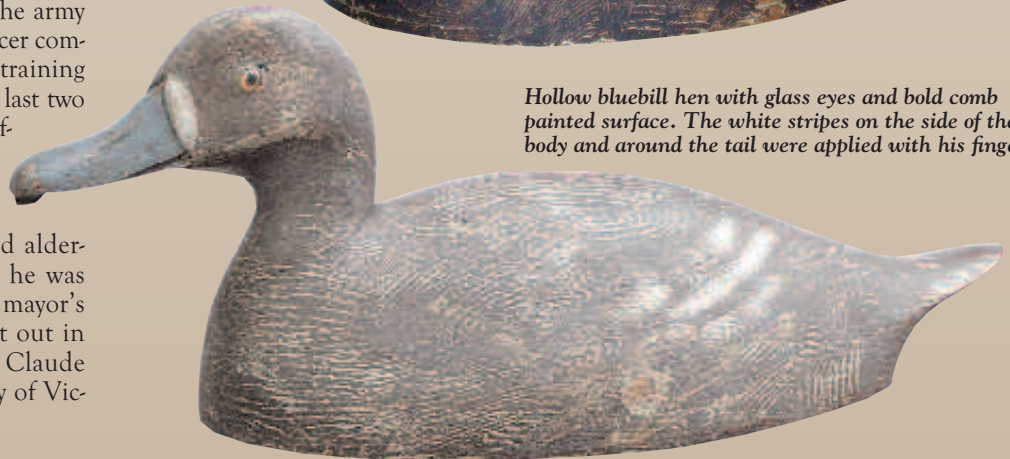
Lt. Aubrey Kent (second from left) with his militia unit in Whitney, England, ca. 1914.

tended Victoria high school and was paid \$15 a month during school holidays to act as a trumpeter on early “Tally-Ho” wagons. A keen athletic sportsman (handball, basketball and sculling), in 1921 he led the junior and senior James Bay Athletic Association doubles rowing teams to a series of trophies. In 1914 Kent received commission in the militia and served three years in France with the 39th Lethbridge Battalion. From 1934 to 1938 he commanded the 5th B.C. Coast Brigade. In 1941 the army called him up and he served as officer commanding the artillery officers’ training cent(er) at Gordon Head...For the last two years of the war he served on the officers’ survey board of Western Canada.

“He began a career in civil politics in 1947 when he was elected alderman, leading the polls. In 1949 he was barely edged out in a race for the mayor’s seat by Percy George, and he lost out in another mayoralty challenge to Claude Harrison in 1951. Kent was a City of Vic-



Hollow bluebill hen with glass eyes, distinctive bill carving and grain-painted surface embellishments.



Hollow bluebill hen with glass eyes and bold comb painted surface. The white stripes on the side of the body and around the tail were applied with his fingers.





Two early bluebills with varied paint patterns.



Early solid-bodied wigeon pair.

toria Alderman/Councilor in 1948, 1949 and 1951 and was later honored by the city in 1973 for his years of dedicated civic service. He was president of the Victoria Chamber of Commerce from 1960-61. An alderman, Kent is included in Council photographs dated from 1948 to 1951.”

M. Aubrey Kent, a true Victoria pioneer and resident for over 85 years, was also a multi-talented sportsman who loved the outdoors. He was also a prolific duck hunter and decoy maker. Victoria City Council records confirm he was born in

Victoria, British Columbia on September 8, 1891. As noted in the article quoted above, in 1914 he was awarded a commission in the local militia and later joined the 39th Lethbridge Battalion as Lieutenant. Kent served three years in France, taking part in the successful 1917 Vimy Ridge Battle that involved four divisions of Canadian Corps against three divisions of the German Sixth Army. He also served admirably during World War II and concluded an outstanding military career by achieving the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Because he was such a well-respected and highly visible person and businessman – and a true patriot – Kent was encouraged to enter municipal politics, and he was successfully elected to the Victoria City Council in 1948. His popular “for the people” policy was well received during his years as City Alderman, despite his two unsuccessful runs for mayor.

After his stint as the President of Victoria’s Chamber of Commerce, Kent revealed another facet of his personality, giving the following critical report to the membership as he prepared to leave office: “There is one matter which has concerned me...and that is the deplorable condition of parts of our downtown area...The harbor and the Gorge, an original setting of great natural beauty even in my younger days, have been despoiled by the march of progress. I am not saying this should have been avoided as we needed industry to provide employment, but it is a pity we could not at least have developed industry together with some preservation of our natural heritage...Fifty years have passed and we have added nothing of an aesthetic value...Maybe our vision has been clouded by cupidity (greed) but surely we should hope to do better in the future.”

Kent married Doris Harriett Kenning on June 23, 1923. She was the daughter of Flitcroft Evans, City Editor of the “Colonist” newspaper in the 1880s. The 1964 city directory listed Aubrey as the president of Kent’s Ltd., a store that sold pianos, bicycles, Edison phonographs, televisions, stereo equipment, musical records and household appliances. He and Doris retired from that business in 1972. An amateur actor following in his father’s passion, Kent had a role in “The Beauty Shop,” a 1923 play also starring Fred Bartholomew, Eva Christie, Betty Hether-

Aubrey Kent (R) with his hunting body, Pat Dunn, on the Sidney Spit, ca. 1956



ington, Art Kerr and Myrtle Steenson.

Kent's career as a decoy maker began around 1910 and ended in the 1950s, nearly half a century of his life. Known species include brant, canvasback, mallard, redhead, wigeon, bluebill and bufflehead. His later decoys tend to be hollow, feature a distinguishing ridge along the back; they are finished with his signature scratch painting technique. They evolved from earlier efforts that have less pronounced ridges, solid bodies and lack of scratch paint. The number of decoys produced throughout his lifetime was limited - most estimate his output at about 100 - as they were primarily for personal use.

Kent began hunting brant at the Sidney Spit on northern Sidney Island in the 1920s, using full-bodied floating decoys and a complimentary set of at least 30 tin silhouette stick-ups. The Spit forms a large tranquil saltwater lagoon that attracted a mixture of birds to its eel grass and many crabs. His puddle duck decoys were used on the small quiet lakes and tributaries along the east coast of the island.

Both Patsy Fleming's "Traditions in Wood" (1987) and "Wildfowl Decoys of the Pacific Coast" by Miller and Hanson (1989) briefly mention Colonel Aubrey Kent and each illustrate a single black brant decoy. According to the Pacific Coast book, "He made a rig of 80 solid black brant decoys beginning in the 1920s. These birds are beautifully stylized with a 'razor back' to shed water and weight." If that number is accurate, they represent the vast majority of his output.

Fleming wrote, "...the high backs of Aubrey Kent's decoys represent a very clever design feature. Instead of being plump and rounded, the bodies taper to pronounced ridges along the backs; as a consequence, the lures are both tall when floating on the water and light enough to carry easily."

Both books report that he was born in England and immigrated to Canada after World War 1. However, recent research revealed that he was actually born and raised in British Columbia and lived there his entire life. His father, Herbert Kent (1859-1958) arrived in Victoria from England in 1861, eventually becoming Victoria's "Mr. Music" and enjoying an active role in numerous musicals as a singer, actor, conductor and director.

Kent's grandson provided fond personal insights into his grandfather's character. "There was a 'right way and a wrong way' to do something...He thought hard work solved just about everything and expected others to work as hard as he did. He was devoted to tasks...He fished for



Aubrey Kent (L) after a hunt on Nitinat Lake, ca. 1912.



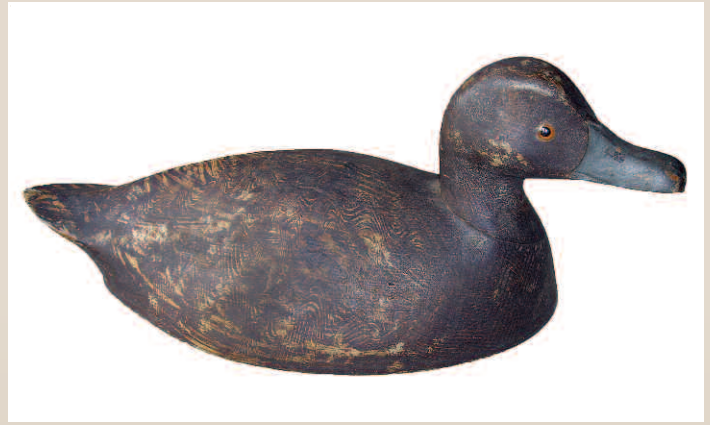
Hollow bufflehead repainted by Kent.



Pair of mallards, the hen with a swimming posture.



Rare hollow canvasback hen.



Rare redhead.

cod and salmon, and caught crabs (usually by hand while wading) and harvested oysters. He was always careful to take only what he/we could use, and was always watchful for those that did not." The daughter of his hunting partner, Pat Dunn, remembered him as a very caring and thoughtful person.

Meticulousness and determination were two of Kent's many life virtues, and he applied those qualities when making his decoys. He hollowed his decoys from the bottom to an eggshell thickness then a 1/4-inch bottom board was secured water tight with dozens of small nails. They are so light and well balanced that only a few required weights. Almost all have straight forward facing heads. Some are of normal length and position while others reach slightly forward, suggesting a swimming attitude. A few rare ones are missing heads

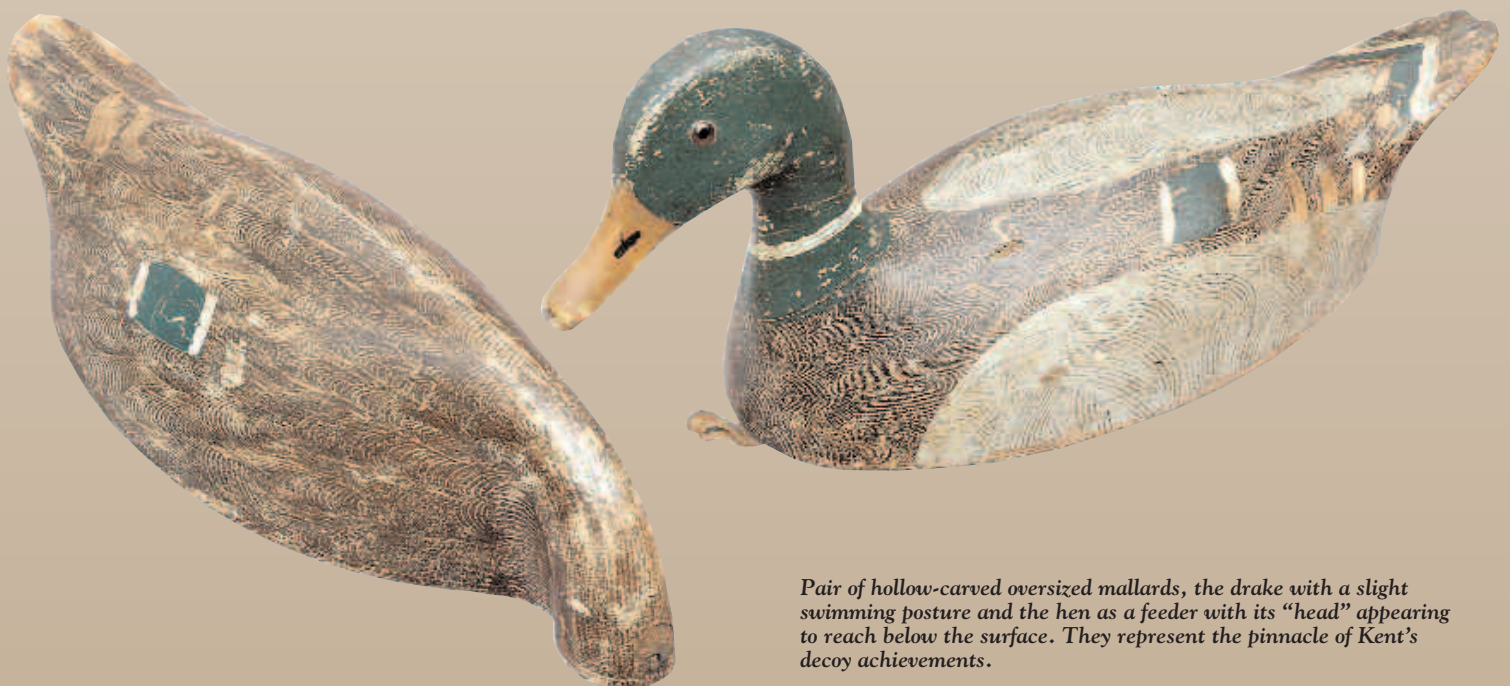
in imitation of feeding ducks. Kent utilized paint, metal tacks or glass taxidermy eyes for his decoys.

Flamboyant grain painted feathering on his mallard and bluebill decoys is a particularly commanding trait identifiable to him. Following the application of various color coats, boldly aggressive graining was scratched into the wet paint with a sharp multi-pronged tool, producing elaborate surface ornamentation somewhat reminiscent of faux decorated country furniture, which simulated specific high end wood grains. Graining was applied to the bodies but not the heads. Another unusual and distinctive characteristic are the casually "smeared" finger painted designs directly rubbed on when the bodies were freshly painted. The unique combination of brushing, finger painting and combing resulted in surface treatments not ex-

plored by his British Columbia peers.

The bills details feature simply painted nostrils juxtaposed against pronounced carved nails on the bottom side. Bills were relief carved into the head at the bill/head junction and the foreheads tend to be slightly flattened. A signature "razor back" ridge line emerges subtly behind the neck and gradually proceeds towards the spade-like tail, becoming increasingly defined as it delineates the decoy's profile.

Kent's oversized hollow mallards certainly rank as the pinnacle of his artistic achievements. Measuring between 18 and 19 inches in length, they are considerably larger in scale than, for example, his normal size bluebills. The drake's head is raised and positioned in a somewhat forward swimming posture. By contrast the hen's head appears to be reaching below the water's surface in search of nourish-



Pair of hollow-carved oversized mallards, the drake with a slight swimming posture and the hen as a feeder with its "head" appearing to reach below the surface. They represent the pinnacle of Kent's decoy achievements.



Aubrey Kent at the Rivers Inlet in 1964 with a 60 1/2 pound Chinook (spring salmon).

ment. But it's a carefully planned illusion, as her head is, actually, non-existent; the body and neck is sensitively sculpted from single piece of wood, hollowed and fitted with a water tight bottom board. Her fluid organic form elegantly portrays the act of feeding as the prominent ridge line progressively transitions from a smooth curvilinear and downward shaped neck to a perceptibly upswept and slightly pointed tail.

Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall Aubrey Kent was a recognized Canadian patriot, history student, respected politician, successful businessman, avid sportsman and fisherman and an accomplished decoy carver. Superior qualities inherent in both his sculptural form concepts and matchless surface embellishments rank him as one of British Columbia's premier decoy makers

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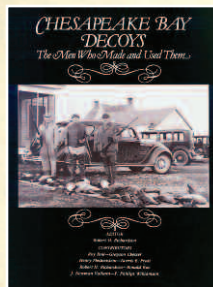
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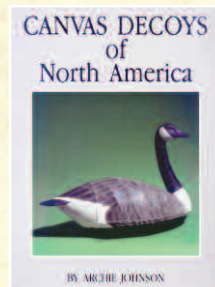
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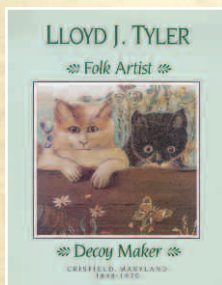
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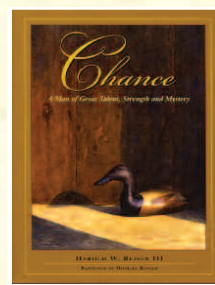
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