

## O'Brien's decoys set multiple records at Copley's annual summer "Sporting Sale"

**A** HOLLOW-CARVED wood duck by Thomas Chambers of Toronto, Ontario sold to a phone bidder for \$270,000, over double the estimate, at Copley Fine Art Auctions annual summer "Sporting Sale" on July 27, 2017 at Hotel 1620 in Plymouth, Massachusetts. From the renowned collection of Donal C. O'Brien Jr., it was the top lot in the auction, an auction price record for its maker and the highest price ever paid for a Canadian decoy at auction.

The sale of the O'Brien collection was much anticipated in the decoy market, as it contained some of the finest decoys from multiple regions and by many of the top makers. Copley offered the decoys and sporting art from his collection on day one of the two-day auction, producing a separate catalog for each day of the sale. And even though just a part of his collection was sold in this auction, it still produced auction price records for seven of the top 25 lots, including three of the top four.

A hollow-carved pintail by John English of Florence, New Jersey sold to a New Jersey collector for \$246,000, more than double its estimate and an auction price record for its maker. Formerly in the Lloyd Johnson collection, it was the highest price ever paid for a Delaware River decoy at auction. A hollow-carved "classic" wigeon by John Blair Sr. of Philadelphia sold to a phone bidder over estimate at \$102,000.

A ruddy duck by Lee Dudley of Knotts Island, North Carolina, originally col-

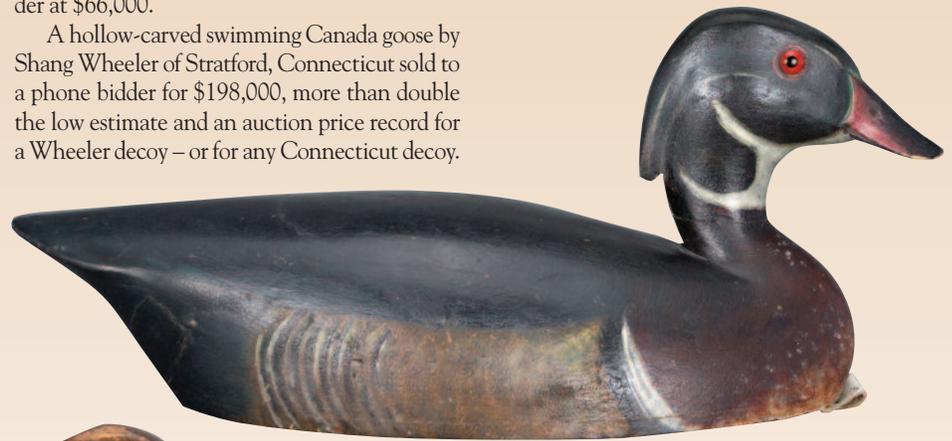
By Decoy Magazine  
Photos courtesy Copley Fine Art Auctions

lected by Joel Barber in the 1920s, sold to a veteran South Carolina collector/dealer for \$234,000, nearly double the estimate; it was purchased it for a long-time Virginia collector who specializes in Southern decoys. A Dudley red-head nearly doubled its estimate to a phone bidder at \$66,000.

A hollow-carved swimming Canada goose by Shang Wheeler of Stratford, Connecticut sold to a phone bidder for \$198,000, more than double the low estimate and an auction price record for a Wheeler decoy – or for any Connecticut decoy.

It was purchased at the Mackey auction in 1974 and was pictured on the cover of the catalog. A hollow Wheeler black duck also sold to a phone bidder, under estimate at \$26,400.

A turned-head "dust jacket" style black-bellied plover by A.E. Crowell of East Harwich, Massachusetts sold to a phone bidder within estimate for \$174,000; it was one of three rigmates that were pictured on the dust jacket of Mackey's "American Bird Decoys." A Crowell peep sold to a New Jersey collector for \$39,000, over dou-



*Hollow-carved wood duck by Tom Chambers of Toronto, Ontario (est. \$96,000/144,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$270,000, the top lot in the auction and an auction price record for its maker.*



*Ruddy duck by Lee Dudley of Knotts Island, North Carolina (est. 96,000/144,000) sold to a veteran South Carolina dealer for \$234,000.*



*Hollow-carved pintail by John English of Florence, New Jersey (est. \$96,000/144,000) sold to a New Jersey collector for \$246,000, an auction price record for its maker.*

*Hollow-carved wigeon by John Blair Sr. of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (est. \$60,000/84,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$102,000.*



*"Dust jacket" black-bellied plover by A.E. Crowell of East Harwich, Massachusetts (est. \$150,000/210,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$174,000.*



ble the high estimate, and a black-bellied plover sold below estimate for \$33,000. A Crowell flying tern made estimate at \$25,200.

A ruddy turnstone by Lothrop Holmes of Kingston, Massachusetts sold to a phone bidder over double the low estimate at \$102,000. A canvas-covered old squaw by Holmes also went to a phone bidder, selling within estimate at \$51,000.

A pair of 1936 model canvasbacks by the Ward brothers of Crisfield, Maryland, signed and dated 1932, sold separately, and both to phone bidders: the hen for \$84,000, over double the high estimate, and the drake at \$72,000, exactly double the high estimate. A 1936 model green-winged teal sold to a phone bidder at its high estimate \$28,800.

A rare willet with relief-wing carving by John Dilley of Quogue, Long Island, New York sold to a phone bidder for \$66,000, over double the low estimate. A red knot with relief-wing carving and in breeding plumage sold to a Tennessee collector for \$27,600, nearly double the low estimate.

A tern by Obediah Verity of Seaford, Long Island brought \$42,000, nearly double the low estimate.

A hollow-carved pintail by Charles Walker of Princeton, Illinois, the only Illinois River decoy offered on day one, sold to a Maryland collector over estimate at \$58,800.

Lou Rathmell of Stratford, Connecticut arguably made the finest



*Ruddy turnstone by Lothrop Holmes of Kingston, Massachusetts (est. \$48,000/72,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$102,000.*

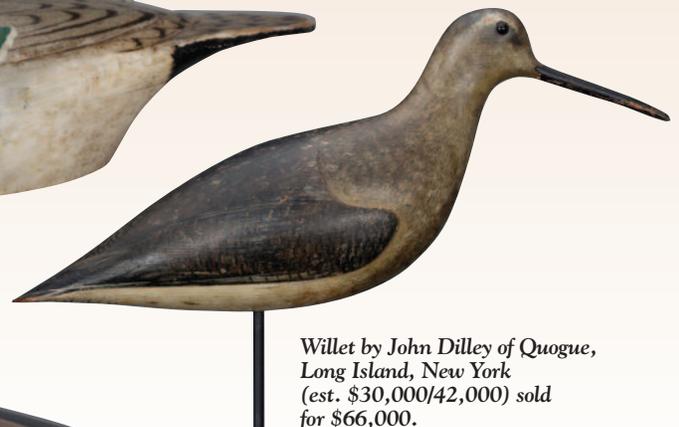
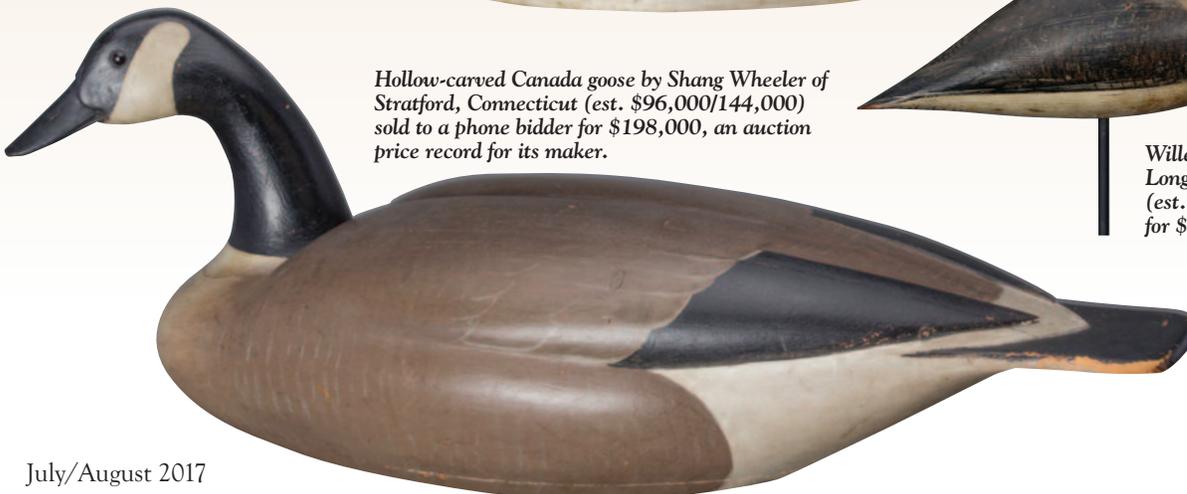
*Canvasback hen, signed and dated 1932, by the Ward brothers of Crisfield, Maryland (est. \$24,000/36,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$84,000.*



*Hollow-carved pintail by Charles Walker of Princeton, Illinois (est. \$36,000/48,000) sold to a Maryland collector for \$58,800.*



*Hollow-carved Canada goose by Shang Wheeler of Stratford, Connecticut (est. \$96,000/144,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$198,000, an auction price record for its maker.*



*Willet by John Dilley of Quogue, Long Island, New York (est. \$30,000/42,000) sold for \$66,000.*

## Top 25 Lots at the Copley "Sporting Sale" Plymouth, Massachusetts, July 27-28, 2017

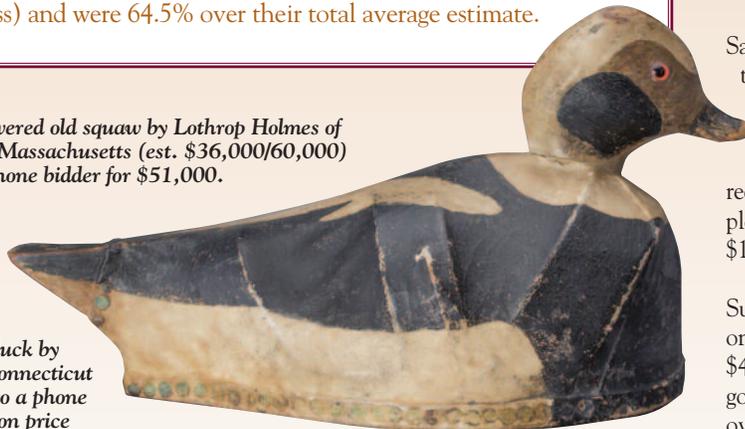
Rank	Description (catalog no.)	Av. Est.	Price
*1.	Tom Chambers (ONT) HC wood duck (6)	\$120,000	\$270,000
*2.	John English (NJ) HC pintail (13)	120,000	246,000
3.	Lee Dudley (NC) ruddy duck (34)	120,000	234,000
*4.	Shang Wheeler (CT) HC Canada goose (28)	120,000	198,000
5.	A.E. Crowell (MA) black-bellied plover, dust jacket (16)	180,000	174,000
6.	John Blair Sr. (PA) HC wigeon (14)	72,000	102,000
6.	Lothrop Holmes (MA) ruddy turnstone (45)	60,000	102,000
8.	A.E. Crowell (MA) preening goldeneye (177)	90,000	90,000
9.	Ward Bros. (MD) canvasback hen, 1936 model (41)	30,000	84,000
10.	Ward Bros. (MD) canvasback, 1936 model (42)	30,000	72,000
11.	John Dilley (NY) willet (21)	36,000	66,000
11.	Lee Dudley (NC) redhead (35)	36,000	66,000
13.	Charles Walker (IL) HC pintail (1)	42,000	58,800
*14.	Lou Rathmell (CT) cork-bodied preening black duck (30)	18,000	51,000
14.	Lothrop Holmes (CT) canvas-covered old squaw (50)	48,000	51,000
16.	Charles S. Bunn (NY) black-bellied plover (198)	30,000	48,000
17.	Lou Rathmell (CT) cork-bodied black duck (31)	18,000	45,000
*18.	George Warin (ONT) HC Canada goose (7)	24,000	43,200
19.	Obediah Verity (NY) tern (25)	25,200	42,000
20.	A.E. Crowell (MA) peep (19)	15,000	39,000
21.	Joe Lincoln (MA) goldeneye hen (52)	12,000	36,000
21.	Charles Perdew (IL) HC pintail (206)	42,000	36,000
23.	Phineas Reeves (ONT) HC Canada goose (90)	36,000	34,800
24.	A.E. Crowell (MA) black-bellied plover (47)	39,000	33,000
*25.	Allen Stuart (MA) goldeneye hen (51)	5,400	30,000

TOTALS \$1,368,800 \$2,251,800

**Key:** HC- hollow-carved \* - auction price record for this maker

The top 25 lots (8.3% of the 303 sold) sold for \$2,251,800 (62.9% of the \$3,580,770 gross) and were 64.5% over their total average estimate.

*Canvas-covered old squaw by Lothrop Holmes of Kingston, Massachusetts (est. \$36,000/60,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$51,000.*



*Preening cork-bodied black duck by Lou Rathmell of Stratford, Connecticut (est. \$15,000/21,600) sold to a phone bidder for \$51,000, an auction price record for its maker.*



cork-bodied decoys by any maker. Two of his black ducks sold separately to a phone bidder at over double the high estimate: the preener at \$51,000, an auction price record for its maker, and the high head at \$45,000.

A hollow-carved Canada goose by George Warin of Toronto, Ontario sold to a phone bidder well over estimate at \$43,200, an auction price record for its maker. A hollow-carved Canada goose by Phineas Reeves of Long Point, Ontario sold within estimate at \$34,800. Two hollow-carved decoys by John R. Wells of Toronto, a swimming pintail and canvasback hen, each topped estimate at \$25,200 and \$20,400.

There were two goldeneye hens by Massachusetts makers of note. One by Joe Lincoln of Accord sold for \$36,000, triple the estimate, and another by Allen Stuart of Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard brought \$30,000, five times the high estimate and an auction price record for its maker.

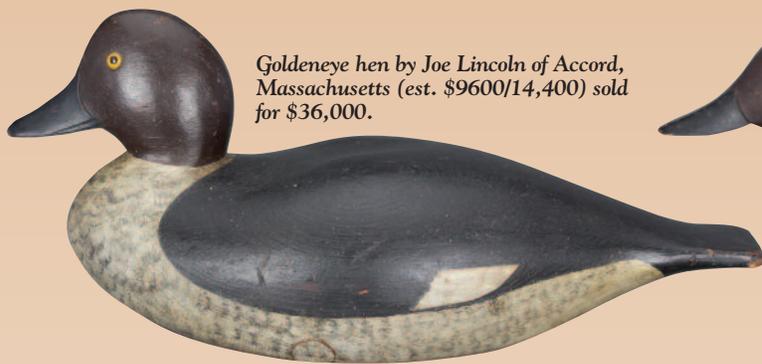
A turned head dowitcher from the Matthews rig used on Chincoteague, Virginia sold to a Maryland collector for \$27,600. It was the only decoy on the top 25 list that sold below estimate. A rare hollow-carved bufflehead by Charles Jester of Chincoteague sold to a Georgia collector for \$27,600, more than triple the low estimate and an auction price record for its maker. A Cobb Island red knot missed estimate at \$15,600.

There was a rig of eight shorebirds by Harry V. Shourds of Tuckerton, New Jersey, and they all sold to a phone bidder, from a high of \$18,000 for a curlew to a low of \$4800 for a plover in winter plumage. A canvasback by Joe Sieger of Tustin, Wisconsin missed estimate at \$15,600.

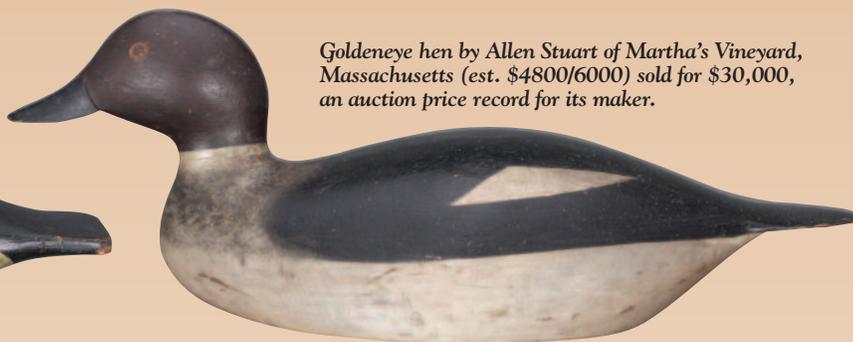
The top decoy lot on day two of the Sporting Sale was a Crowell preening goldeneye that sold to a phone bidder at \$90,000, exactly as estimated. A flying green-winged teal decorative by Crowell fell short of estimate at \$45,000. Others of note include a pair of early redheads at \$16,200, a decorative black-bellied plover at \$15,600 and a golden plover at \$13,200.

A running black-bellied plover by Charles Sumner Bunn of the Shinnecock Reservation on Long Island sold to a phone bidder for \$48,000, double the low estimate. A pair of golden plovers by Joe Lincoln brought \$14,400, over double the low estimate, and a golden plover by George Boyd of Seabrook, New Hampshire just missed estimate at \$11,400. A feeding dowitcher by Ira Hudson of Chincoteague, Virginia also fell short, selling for \$10,800.

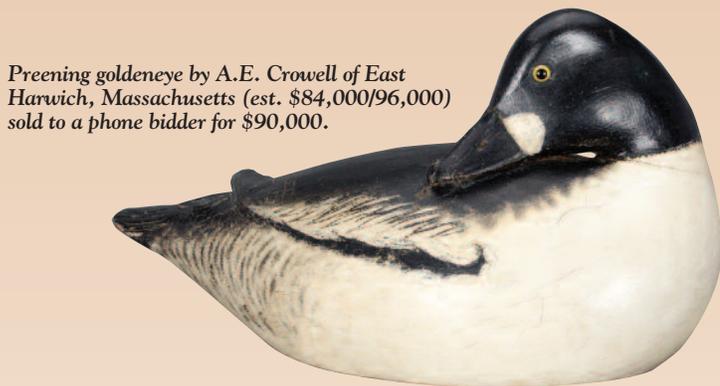
A hollow-carved pintail by Charles Perdew of Henry, Illinois, branded "G.K. Schmidt," sold for its low estimate \$36,000. A preening black duck by Samuel Toothaker of Brunswick, Maine, branded "J.K. Coffin," topped estimate at \$15,600, an auction price record for its maker. A life-size hanging game carving of a Canada goose by John Sharp of Kent, Ohio was the top



Goldeneye hen by Joe Lincoln of Accord, Massachusetts (est. \$9600/14,400) sold for \$36,000.



Goldeneye hen by Allen Stuart of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts (est. \$4800/6000) sold for \$30,000, an auction price record for its maker.



Preening goldeneye by A.E. Crowell of East Harwich, Massachusetts (est. \$84,000/96,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$90,000.



Running black-bellied plover by Charles Sumner Bunn of Shinnecock, New York (est. \$24,000/36,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$48,000.

contemporary lot in the auction, falling well short of estimate at \$16,800.

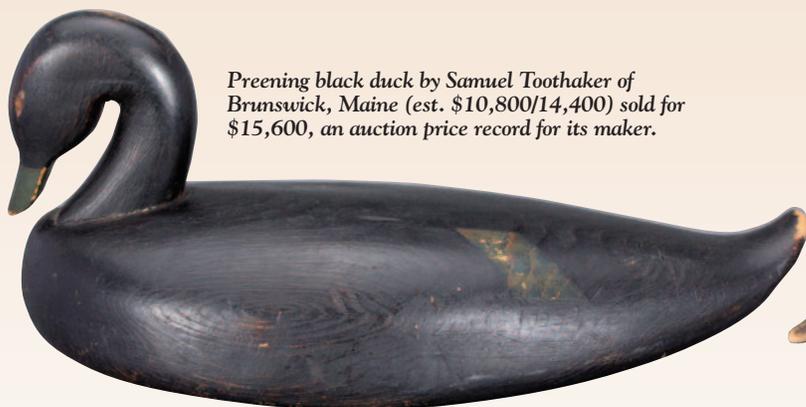
The results of the O'Brien collection decoys sold in session one were truly impressive. Of the 104 lots offered, exactly half sold for \$10,000 or more - including seven that brought six figures - and the average price per lots was \$27,229, a lofty figure. There were 15 lots that sold for \$10,000 or more on day two of the Sporting Sale, including three decoys that made the top 25 list. There were no buy-ins on day one of the auction, and only 27 lots with a total low estimate of \$102,420

bought in on day two.

In summary, of 330 lots offered 27 failed to sell, leaving 303 lots that sold for \$3,580,770 for an average of \$11,840 per lot and were 61.5% over the total low estimate after deducting the low estimate of the unsold lots. The top 25 lots (8.3% of those sold) accounted for \$2,251,800 (62.9% of the gross) and were 64.5% over their total average estimate. All prices include a 20% buyer's premium. Peter J. Cocoluto served as auctioneer.



Turned-head dowitcher from the Matthews rig of Chincoteague, Virginia (est. \$30,000/42,000) sold to a Maryland collector for \$27,600.



Preening black duck by Samuel Toothaker of Brunswick, Maine (est. \$10,800/14,400) sold for \$15,600, an auction price record for its maker.



Hollow-carved bufflehead by Charles Jester of Chincoteague, Virginia (est. \$8400/12,000) sold to a Georgia collector for \$27,600, an auction price record for its maker.



Hollow-carved Canada goose by George Warin of Toronto, Ontario (est. \$18,000/30,000) sold to a phone bidder for \$43,200, an auction price record for its maker.