



Richard “Fresh Air Dick” Janson

(1872 - 1951) Sonoma Creek, CA

Richard Janson was born near Riga, Estonia to Swedish parents. Friends and co-workers often called him “Dirty Dick” and “Fisher Dick,” but most used his sailor name “Fresh Air” because of his habit of sleeping on the deck of the boat. Janson worked for Alaskan Packers as a ship’s carpenter. Between fishing seasons, he lived on a barge at the mouth of Sonoma Creek and rented boats to fishermen. He also fished and hunted for the market and carved decoys. It was not until 1920 or so that Janson started carving commercially, supplying local hunters and gun clubs with thousands of decoys.

Janson’s handmade decoys were solid and hollow with rounded chests and slightly arched backs. Detailed carving accents the wingtips, tails and bills. Puffy cheeks and glass eyes appear on all of his decoys and most of them have an aft keel. With blended oil-base paints, Janson created stylized plumage patterns and painted the feathers on the puddle duck hens. He produced bluebills, canvasbacks, green-winged teal, mallards, pintails or sprig and at least one rig of brant. His best work is represented by the decoys he made between 1920 and the mid 1930’s (Engers 267). After World War II, Janson put out heavier decoys that had lost their rich coloration. For whatever reason, the overall quality of Janson’s decoys degraded, and all the birds began to resemble mallards. Many of Janson’s decoys were burned as well when plastic decoys became available. (Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art)

