

Francis Muehlstein

(1885 – 1954) St. Paul, Minnesota

Francis Muehlstein was a tinker and a duck hunter. During the early 1930s, while working in a brass-bed factory, the St. Paul inventor broke the mold and invented the perfect duck call with a "natural" sound.

Or so the advertising said.

Francis J. Muehlstein maker of the "The Natural Duck Call" was granted a US patent, 1855527, on April 26, 1932. It was Mr. Muehlsteins' intention to provide a simple and highly efficient duck call where extensive experience and extraordinary skill are not required to produce successful results. Mr. Muehlstein contended that it took skill in manipulating your hand to make a traditional duck call sound good. His new duck call imitated a real duck's vocal system so you wouldn't have to manipulate your hand. The call was carved from cedar and shaped like a Mallard drake head and neck with glass eyes and a hinged two piece of aluminum and brass, and when you blew into the duck call, the two metal halves flapped open and shut like a real duck bill.

When you blow through the neck the red in the head vibrates producing a duck call sound while the hinged bill flaps with passage of air and sound.

On June 9, 1948, Mr. Muehlstein revised his original patent and received United States Patent 2555240. Mr. Muehlstein discovered, after experimentation and research, that the functions of his original duck call could be substantially improved by expanding the discharge area of sound and air. Another improvement was the reconfiguration of the spout-shaped distributor that directs the major portion of the air stream upwardly against the swingable bill raising this bill section proportionately with the amount of air being discharged. This would cause swinging and reciprocating of the bill to move more accurately resemble the opening and closing of a duck's bill during calling.

These calls were made in the 1930's -1940's. Muehlstein advertised the duck call as "natural" because it simulated a duck's mouth, tongue and bill. He sold hundreds for \$2.50 between 1932 and the 1950s, advertising them in Outdoor Life and Sports Afield magazines.

Fast forwarding and man named Doug Lodermeier of Minneapolis sat at his kitchen table with one of Muehlstein's calls pressed to his lips. When he blew into it, a tinny quack echoed through the house. The duck call's lips flapped perfectly, even after 60 years. Lodermeier smiled.

"There isn't any other duck call like this out there, before or since," Lodermeier said of Muehlstein's call, which today fetches \$400 to \$500. "What's amazing is the expert work Muehlstein did on them. He was quite a craftsman."