



Gus Nelow

(1874 – 1962) Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Gus was born in 1874 and lived in Oshkosh half of

his life. He was a market hunter, decoy maker, trapper, and boat builder. In 1931 Gus moved to Rivermoor where the Fox river flows into Lake Butte des Morts in Winnebago County. After moving to Rivermoor his life centered entirely on hunting. Gus never married, did not drive, and depended on others for his supplies, including the excess cedar telephone poles he used for his decoys.

Gus's first decoys all have heads attached with a dowel driven through the top of the head and down into the body. Somewhere around 1952 he began to attach his heads with a 16-penny nail driven through the head and 4 small finishing nails through the sides of the neck. Most of his decoys were oversized, with high heads, long necks, and fully painted wing patches.

He preferred carving canvasbacks, bluebills, coot, and a few redheads. Very few mallards, snow geese, Canada geese and teal were carved, even though he reportedly carved over 8,000 decoys in his lifetime. Many of the local sport shops in Oshkosh sold his decoys. The Dunham-Fulton sport shop on Main St. in Oshkosh sold his Canvas back decoys for \$2, bluebills for \$1.50 and coots for \$1 in 1939.

Today, collectors have many examples of Nelow decoys and are valued from between \$200 to \$700 and up for less produced species. More ducks were killed over Nelow decoys on Lake Butte des Morts than all of the Winnebago land carvers combined! His long neck humped back style distinguishes his decoys from other Winnebago carvers.

August Nelow was truly a Wisconsin-original and are a beautiful addition to any collection. (Wisconsin waterfowl association)

