



Charles and Edna Perdew

Charles (1874 – 1963) Henry, Illinois

Edna (1882 – 1974) Henry, Illinois

No other name associated with vintage sporting collectibles is as recognizable as the name, Charles Perdew.

Charles and Edna Perdew of Henry, Illinois, combined their talents to become famous folk artists in Central Illinois and throughout the rest of the United States.

Charles Perdew was born to Moses and Nancy Perdew on April 30th, 1874, in Oxbow Prairie, a small community in Putnam County, Illinois just a few miles north of Henry. Edna was born in 1882 in Henry, Illinois.

Charles grew up and worked on the family farm on Dutchman's Hill. At the bottom of the hill sat Saw Mill Lake, a famous waterfowling lake along the Illinois River. As a young man, Perdew began to enjoy the hunting and fishing opportunities that the river offered. Perdew was a hard worker. He and his brothers built a cabin on the lake to house sports when they came to hunt. It is said that Charlie first made decoys and calls for himself to use during this time. Although he is probably best known for his decoy making, he was also a very accomplished duck call maker.

Charlie began carving at the age of 14. In 1889, at the age of 15, Charlie left the family farm and went to Chicago to work in the meatpacking market. He stayed in Chicago for six years before returning to the Putnam area to get away from the big city life. Upon returning, Perdew went to work as a carpenter and did many odd jobs.

His decoys were finely carved around the eyes and nostrils. The bottoms were the classic Illinois River design with a "V" shape to withstand the river's current. His duck and crow calls are among the most sought after of all Illinois calls. Thriving on the influx of seasonal hunters traveling down for the hunting seasons along the Illinois River, as well as local hunters, Charlie made decoys and even fixed the weapons of the hunters that came around.

Around 1900, Charlie opened a workshop in downtown Henry where he sold and worked on guns, built boats, made signs, decoys, duck, and crow calls. Along the way, he met a young lady in Henry by the name of Edna Haddon. She was an experienced painter and helped him out with painting jobs. Their relationship went from business to personal and in 1902, they got married on Thanksgiving Day forming an artistic partnership that lasted almost sixty years. For much of that time, Charlie carved, and Edna painted from their home and workshop in Henry.

Combining their talents, Charlie and Edna Perdew became famous folk artists in Central Illinois and throughout the rest of the United States. They produced thousands of examples of painted wildfowl sculpture, originally purchased mainly by hunters to attract ducks, geese and crows to within shooting range. Interestingly enough, Charlie would be the one to sculpt, while Edna would be the one who would finish the carvings, painting them with masterful technique. When Charlie painted, it was with a stiff brush and bold outline while Edna created a more feathery look with combing.

Edna painted the ducks on the calls until the early 1940s when she suffered a stroke. Charles was good with a paint brush but Edna was even better. Just like his decoys, the calls painted by Edna are the most desired by collectors.

In later years, due to illness, Edna stopped painting the decoys so Charlie painted them. Charlie died in 1963 and Edna survived him until 1974.

It has been said that Charlie was a ladies' man and couldn't pass up the pretty housewife that showed up at his door wanting to buy something for their husbands on the spot. Orders that customers had been waiting years for often ended up being bought by these ladies after they flirted and schmoozed up to him. Early on in his career, Charlie made a tandem bicycle that would hold up to three riders. It has been said by those that knew him that every woman in Henry except for Edna got a ride on the bike!

The world auction record for a Charles Perdew decoy is for a mallard hen that Guyette & Deeter, Inc. sold for \$252,00



VL&A company sold the calls for \$2.50. If a hunter wanted one of these calls, they could also buy them directly from Perdew and he would put their initials in them instead of VL&A.