



Left Early Canvasback circa 1840-1850



Right Mid Canvasback circa 1870

John “Daddy” Holly

(1818-1892), Havre de Grace, MD

John “Daddy” Holly lived in Havre de Grace, Hartford County, Maryland. Although it is unknown the exact date that Holly arrived in Havre de Grace, the classic 1853 book *Sporting Anecdotes* by John Krider list John Holly as one of the most highly respected duck hunters from Havre de Grace. On the day Krider went to Havre de Grace to hunt ducks, he reported that Holly had one of his better shooting days near Devil’s Island and killed 119 Canvasbacks! Daddy Holly was a market hunter and apparently gunned out of a sinkbox on the Susquehanna Flats from the time it was first introduced sometime during the 1830’s by New York market hunters.

Daddy Holly is credited for being the originator of the Have de Grace or Harford County style of decoys around the mid-1830’s, whereas John B. Graham is considered to be the originator of the style of decoys that emerged from the Cecil County side of the Susquehanna Flats. It is suggested that he made decoys for his own use during this time, but also sold decoys to fellow gunners.

Historians agree that he was making decoys by the early 1850’s and continued to produce decoys up until his death. Because of the age of Daddy Holly decoys, the majority of them originally had iron ballast weights, while sometimes reveal that the two holes for the original iron weight have been filled with putty. Some of his decoys displayed finely carved detail on the bill face, and tail feathers areas, while other decoys were more basic. Like John Graham, Daddy Holly produced different styles of decoys through the years.

For example, some early decoys by Holly were made with shelf carving for the head that was similar to the Cecil County style. The typical Havre de Grace style lacks shelf carving for the head and exhibits an upward tail as opposed to the paddle tail of the Cecil County style - although some exceptions exist.

Daddy Holly made mostly Canvasbacks, but also Redheads, and blackheads. Some of Daddy Holly’s earliest decoys have brands such as Reckless, Carrolls Island, and Widgon. Despite all being deceased,

Daddy Holly had his three sons James, John Jr., and William were selected as the honorary chairman for the 2000 Havre de Grace Decoy Festival. The Holly family are without a doubt the true innovators of the "Havre de Grace style" of decoy making. Decoys produced by the Holly family remain among the most historically and artistically important to Upper Chesapeake Bay decoy collectors.