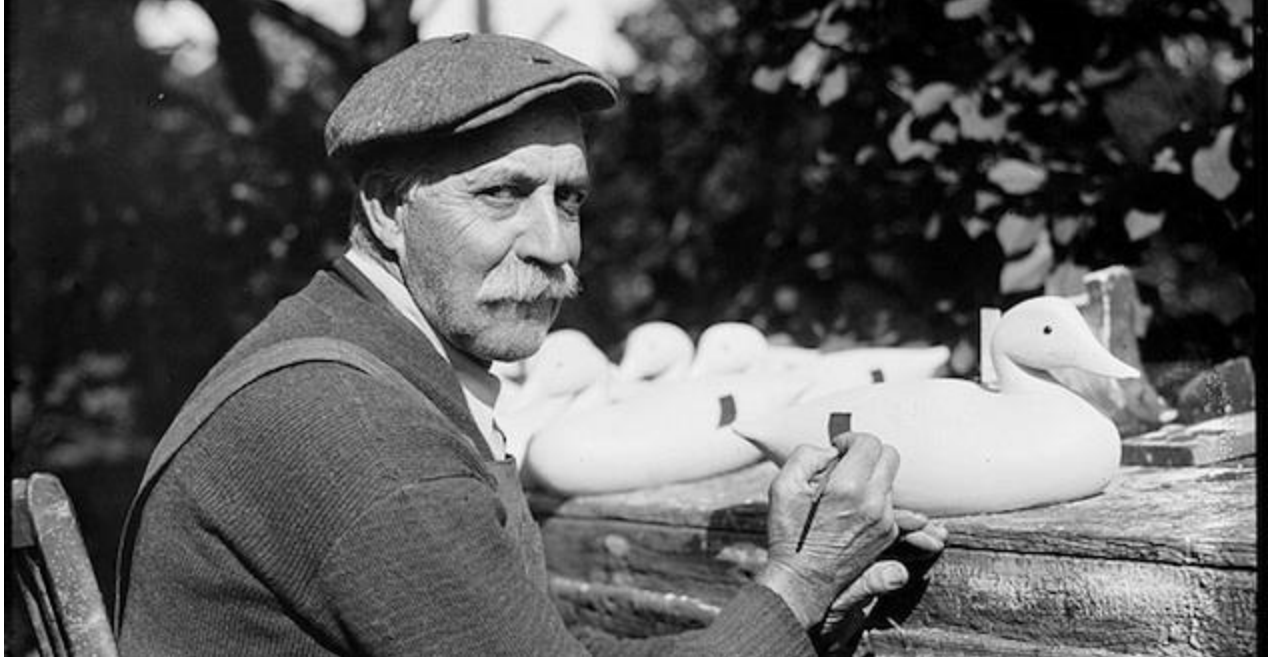


Joseph Whiting Lincoln

(1859 – 1938) Hingham, Massachusetts



1926, Courtesy Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection

Joseph Whiting Lincoln was born in 1859 in Hingham, Mass., and lived across from the Accord Pond. This is where he was fascinated by the waterfowl on it and, began carving miniature decoys as a boy. He grew up to be one of the greatest decoy carvers ever.

He started carving just for fun. As a teenager he sold his first decoy to a sportsman (they were actually used in hunting) and he was off to the races. He chopped the bodies by hand from cedar or pine and smoothed them with a drawknife. He refused to use power tools because he felt power tools were instruments too blunt for decoy carving.

The *New York Times* called Joe Lincoln ‘a talented Yankee tinkerer and craftsman who could make everything from a camera to a pair of shoes.’ He died in 1938 after spending his life carving decoys from a 10’ by 12’ shed in his yard.

Joseph Whiting Lincoln lived in the Accord section of Hingham, Massachusetts, on Boston’s South Shore. The son of a cooper, Lincoln was a shoe-factory worker until machinery phased out his job. He then took up a variety of part-time occupations, including clock repair, upholstery, horticulture, and, beginning in the 1870s, bird carving. Working at a chopping post in a corner of the tiny shop that had been his father’s cooperage, Joe Lincoln produced some of the finest decoys ever made.

“Decoy” derives from the Dutch article *de* and *kooi*, a cage or trap, and, by extension, a cove where netting devices were set up to entrap waterfowl—“decoy ducks” being domesticated birds used to lure their wild brethren into the nets. The noun decoy now specifies an artificial bird used to entice wildfowl to within shooting range.



Joe Lincoln’s birds are of exceptional quality, but his methods and materials were typical. The bodies of his ducks and geese are generally of white cedar; the heads, carved separately and doweled to the bodies, are pine. After sawing a block from a log, he would chop out the bird’s rough form with a hatchet, refine the shape with drawknife, or spokeshave, carve details with a jackknife, and finally smooth the flowing contours with rasp and sandpaper. In virtually all his duck and goose decoys the heart of the log is centered on the breast and runs through the bird to just below the tail. Thus, in the finished decoy the symmetrical pattern of the wood’s slightly raised grain is visible under the paint, suggesting the bird’s layered feathers. Joe Lincoln succeeded, as few others have, in capturing the essence of a wild bird in a piece of painted wood.



His shore birds, such as this yellowlegs, are cedar, with bills of hard maple.

This yellowlegs, with its graceful curves, undercut wings, incised, and tapered beak, glass eyes, and fine coloration, represents him at his best.

A characteristic Lincoln decoy has a gently raised neck seat that flows into a low rounded chest. Arched backs give way to horizontal tails above flat bottoms. The birds portray several attitudes; some are swimming or preening

while others are turned with their bills nestled under a wing. Lincoln's painting displays symmetrical lines, and plumage patterns are simplified to further complement the unadorned carving of the decoy. His style of painting is highly stylized and reflects both brushed and stippled feathers. Lincoln did not limit himself to carving just a few species, but carved brant, buffleheads, canvasbacks, goldeneyes, mallards, mergansers, old squaws, pintails, redheads, ruddy ducks, scaup, teal, whistlers, wigeon and wood ducks. He also produced a handful of other species for special orders.



Collectors prize his work. In 1986, a wood duck drake by Joe Lincoln sold at auction for \$205,000. His work can be seen at the **Ward Museum** in Salisbury, Md



Joseph Lincoln's

"Hisser" Canada Goose

A new record high was set in a summer auction of 2016 for the decoy above for a whopping \$299,000 for a Joseph Lincoln Decoy.

