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NEWS RELEASE

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CBMM presents *Sharpshooters of the Chesapeake* exhibit at Waterfowl Festival

The Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum (CBMM) in St. Michaels is once again participating in the Waterfowl Festival with a new *Sharpshooters of the Chesapeake* exhibit. As part of the Waterfowl Festival's Artifacts Exhibit at Easton High School, *Sharpshooters of the Chesapeake* features the history and heritage of railbird shooting to show how small birds were historically hunted from Chesapeake marshes. The Waterfowl Festival takes place in Easton November 12 – 14.

Summer Duck, a 15 ½ foot railbird skiff, will serve as a centerpiece of the exhibit. This simple but well-built boat was built around 1900 by John B. Graham of Charlestown, MD, who is better known as one of the finest and most prolific Cecil County decoy carvers of his day. Joseph Heisler, a local guide, would offer himself and his boat for hire to a sportsman in pursuit of the elusive rail bird – particularly sora rail, who migrate through Chesapeake marshes over several weeks each autumn.

Heisler would stand in the stern, pushing the sharp-ended boat through the marsh grasses on a high tide with a long, crow-footed pole braced against the muddy bottom. As railbirds flushed out of the marsh by the approach of the boat, he would call “Mark left!” or “Mark right!” to call the attention of the gunner perched farther forward in the boat. The sportsman acted fast and took aim before the bird finished its short flight and dropped abruptly back into the marsh.

“The day was all that could be desired, and the water promised to be unusually high, thus leaving very little shelter for the birds and making good poling. A short walk brought us to the boat, a light flat-bottomed affair kept at the mouth of the creek. ... Jim was to take the first whack at the birds while I shoved the boat and gathered in the dead. This being the first really good tide of the season the sora were plenty. The boat had barely entered the wild rice, before the birds began to rise on all sides. It was bang, bang, right and left as fast as you could shove in the shells. A few misses at the start, and then Jim settled down to business and dropped them with commendable regularity....”

—“James River Tales,” signed by OLD MAN, *Forest and Stream* (16 May 1889)

In addition to the boat and stories like the one recounted above, the exhibit will feature railbird decoys, delicate models of other railbird and reedbird gunning boats, fowling guns, and old prints and photographs of railbird gunning.

CBMM also has a permanent Waterfowling Exhibit at its 18-acre, waterfront campus in St. Michaels. The exhibit features several decoys, antique guns, boats and more. For more information, visit www.cbmm.org or visit the Museum from 10am to 5pm any day of the week. For more information on Waterfowl Festival, visit www.waterfowlfestival.org.

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PHOTO:

“CBMM_Sharpshooter_Courtesy of Nelson McCall.jpg”

Photo Courtesy of Nelson McCall