

Roy Conklin

Roy Conklin's work is well known locally. He carved duck and goose decoys representing many different species, some with cork bodies. Most of his decoys were decorative, but he did make some hunting decoys.

Roy produced many paintings, most with miniature flying birds applied. He carved many different species of birds, in a variety of poses and sizes. Many were designed to be attached directly to a wall. Roy also produced some novelty items.



Black duck by Roy Conklin from his personal hunting rig, c. 1935-1940.



Roy Conklin drake wood duck

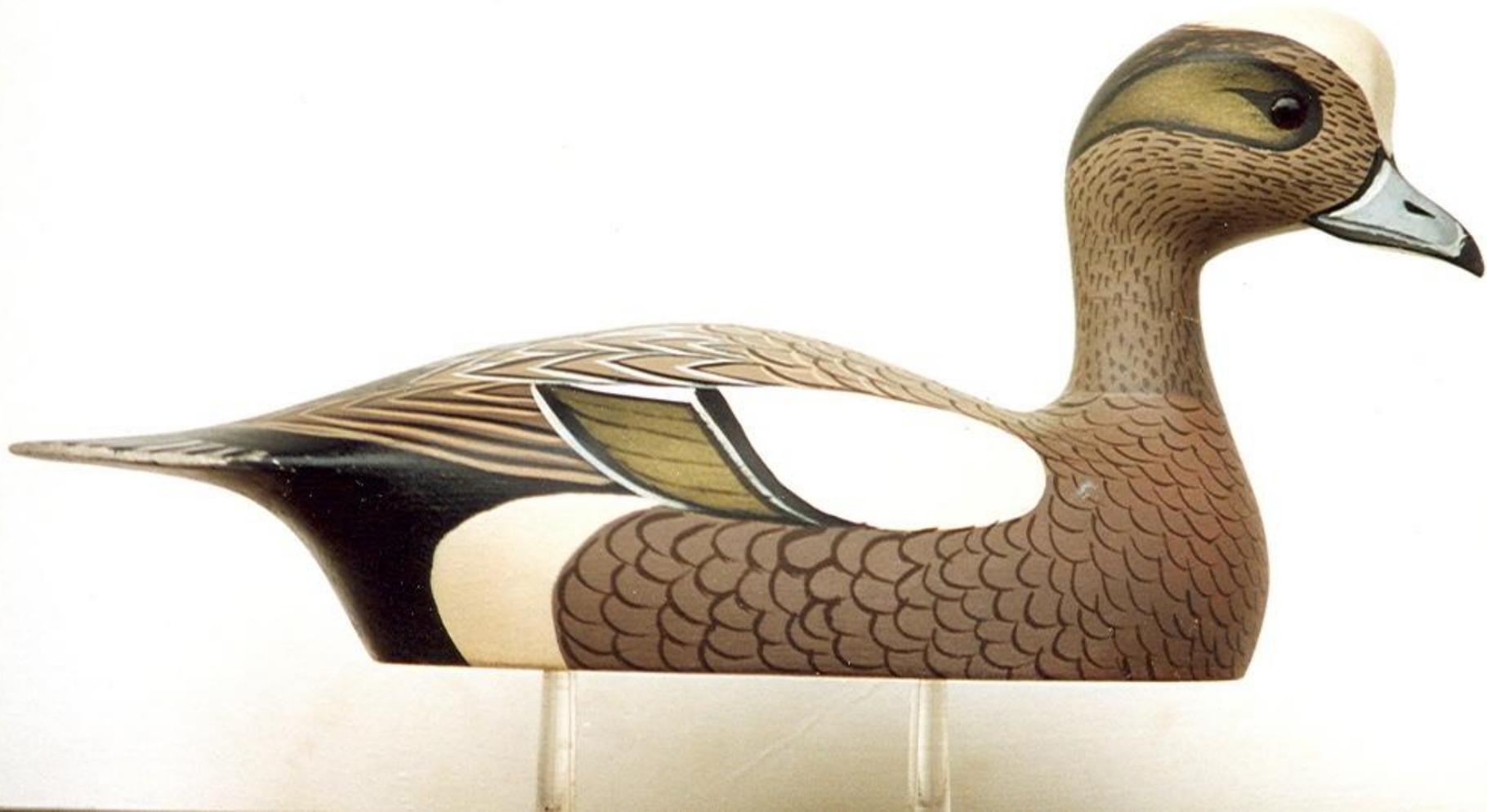
close-up Conklin drake wood duck





Roy Conklin drake redhead, hawkish look

Roy Conklin drake wigeon





Roy Conklin drake bufflehead



Roy Conklin black duck (cork body)

Roy Conklin Canadian goose (hollow)

[Blanchard's Auction 8/26/05]





Roy Conklin great blue heron
(approx. 42 inches high)

[Blanchard's Auction 8/26/05]



Roy Conklin saw-whet owl
[Blanchard's Auction 8/26/05]



Roy Conklin painting with
applied pheasant c. 1965

[Blanchard's Auction 11/16/05]



Roy Conklin painting with 3 applied ducks
c. 1945-1955

[Blanchard's Auction 6/24/06]



oval breadboard with painted marsh scene by Roy
Conklin c. 1935-1945

[Blanchard's Auction 11/16/05]



Painting by Roy Conklin with 9 applied flying ducks, 4 drake mallards, 1 black duck, 3 drake blue-winged teal and 1 hen blue-winged teal. 48 inches wide, c. 1934, signed in lower left corner, stamps on back.



**Close-up of applied ducks and
marsh scene from Roy Conklin
painting, c. 1934.**



Roy Conklin painting with 3 applied ducks c. 1965

[Blanchard's Auction 11/16/05]

Roy Conklin
flyers – drake
canvasback and
pheasant



Information Sources:

- Article October 1968 by Keith Norton in “The Quarterly: Official Publication of the St. Lawrence Co. Historical Association.”
- Article spring 1969 by Harold Evans in “North American Decoys.”
- Decoys of the Thousand Islands by Stewart and Lunman, 1992.
- Newspaper articles (Watertown Daily Times 3/06/34 and 11/28/53), internet sources, interviews.

Roy Allen Conklin “Jr.”

January 10, 1909 – July 2, 1967

(58 years old)

father: Roy Charles Conklin (1879-1957)

- Born on Pillar Point
- Moved to TI Park and then Alex Bay
- Worked as a carpenter, caretaker, and designed and built boats, both at home and in association with several different companies.

mother: Ella Pearl Conklin
(1882-1970)

- Born and raised in Alexandria Bay.
- Family name was Comstock.
- Married Roy C. Conklin October 8, 1906 in Brockville, Ontario.
- Two sons: Roy A. and Louis K.
- Worked locally as a dressmaker.

“Louis K.” Conklin (1914-1988)

- 5 years younger than his brother.
- Attended Alexandria Bay High School, Niagara University and Cazenovia College, receiving a degree in civil engineering.
- Specialized in waste water treatment plant construction. He was employed on the St. Lawrence Seaway and Niagara Falls Power Project, and oversaw construction of the Ogdensburg and Watertown treatment plants.
- Lived mostly in Ogdensburg with his wife Bessie.

Roy A. Conklin

- Born and raised in Alexandria Bay.
- Played varsity football and hockey.
- Was drawing birds in pencil in the margins of his school books.
- Took a quick art course at Columbia Univ. in the evenings, working days at the New York Sun, but returned to the River just prior the great depression of 1929.
- Worked at a variety of jobs including boat captain, fishing guide, and carpenter.

- Due to the seasonal nature of his work, Roy began carving small decorative ducks (“similar to decoys”) in winter 1932, to earn a little extra money and to amuse himself.
- He was encouraged by local island resident Julius Breitenbach, who purchased a number of the models for his home and house-boat.
- “A little bit later the thought came to Mr. Conklin that the model ducks could be fastened to the wall of a home more realistically if the ducks were cut from bill to tail and the halves placed directly on the wall.” (article 3/06/34) (Evans noted in his article that Wheeler originated the half decoys)

- Orders from locals quickly followed, while examples in the local bank building attracted the attention of visitors and tourists.
- A little later Abercrombie & Fitch wrote for samples, quickly followed by orders.
- “Bombarded” with more orders than he could take care of, Roy’s father and brother were employed in the enterprise, and power machinery was installed.
- “During the past winter Mr. Conklin has kept his small factory running overtime to meet the orders that keep coming in” (article 3/06/34) .

- In addition to the orders from Abercrombie & Fitch, by March 1934, Roy had received orders from a dealer in St. Louis Missouri, and a sporting goods store in Chicago.
- “Mr. Conklin’s instinct for reproduction of animal life is now leading him into the painting field and he is turning out a number of large wall plaques with scenes typical of hunting and fishing as the motif.” (Watertown Daily Times article 3/06/34)
- Regardless of who originated the half decoy concept, Roy was certainly the first of the Alex Bay carvers to embrace the decorative market.

Roy A. Conklin: Jan. 10, 1909 – July 2, 1967

Years of birth, death, and age in 1909 for other Alex Bay decoy carvers as follows:

Name	Year Born	Age in 1909	Year Died
C. LeFebvre	1850	58	1933
C. Wheeler	1862	46	1937
G. Blevins	1867	41	1928
F. Capron	1868	40	1933
F. Coombs	1882	26	1958
F. Davis	1884	25	1953
A. Rogers	1892	17	1938
C. Heath	1901	7	1962

Thousand Islands Sun newspaper article: August 26, 1934

“Charles Becker, member of the local legal firm of Delaney and Becker has received word from the federal government that a patent has been granted by the government to Roy Conklin covering his manufacture of miniature ducks.”

“Mr. Conklin has been engaged in the manufacture of miniature ducks as wall decorations for the past two years and in the past year he has worked up an extensive business in their manufacture and sale.”

Stencils and writing on Roy Conklin plaque

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by

ROY CONKLIN, JR.
ALEXANDRIA BAY, N.Y.

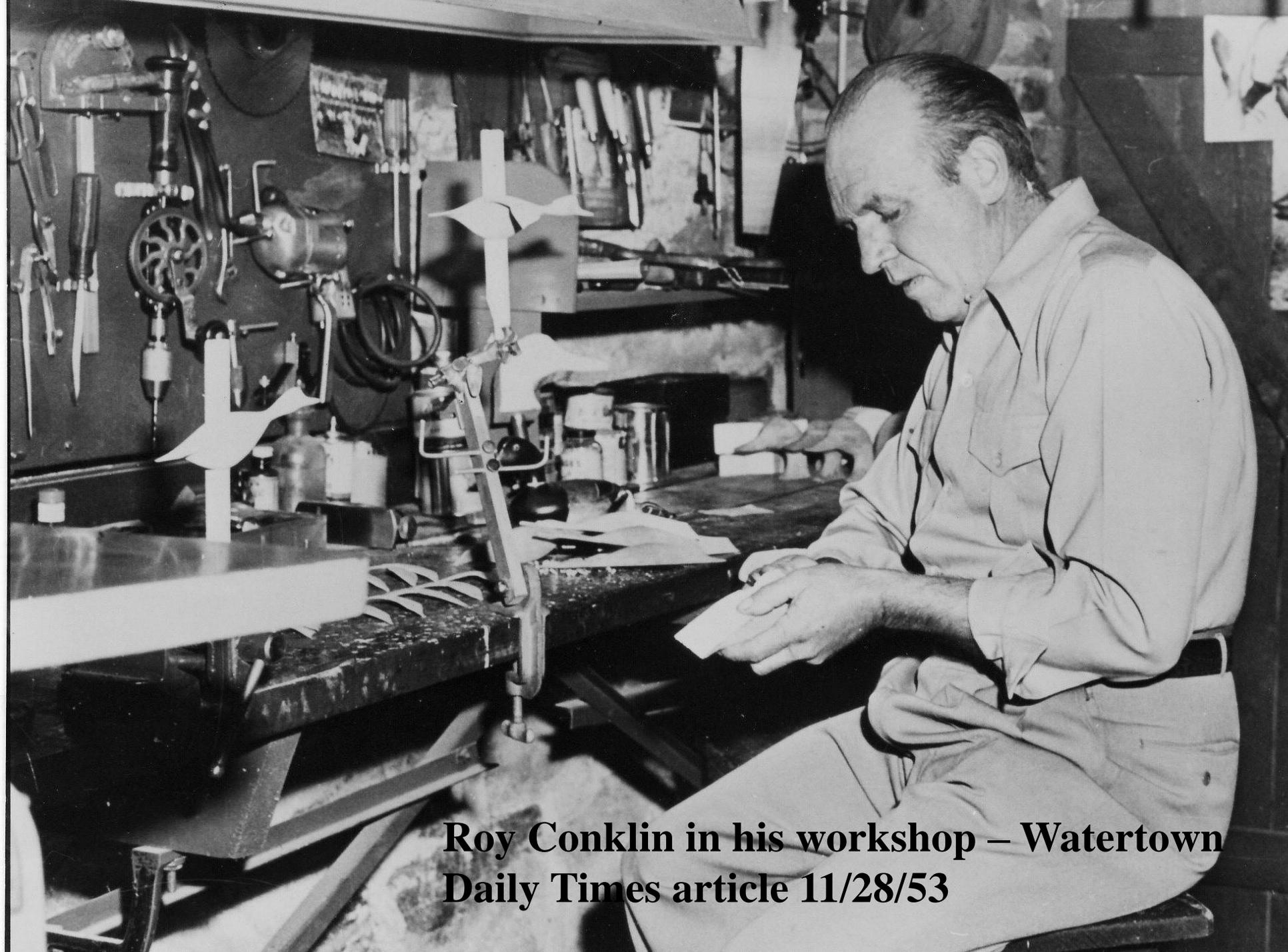
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- On August 1, 1936 Roy married Miss Margaret Sullivan, a Potsdam school teacher.
- Roy described her as “a bug, just like me about hunting and fishing.”
- The couple lived in Alexandria Bay for the next 8 years, as Roy pursued his carving and painting.
- They had one daughter, Ann.
- Margaret moved to Schenectady after Roy’s death, and died July 1985.

- A price schedule dated Jan. 16, 1939 lists a variety of items ranging from \$3.00 for an 8-inch half flyer, to \$65.00 for a large (25" X 48") plaque with 10 ducks.
- Included on the schedule are standing yellow leg snipe and curlew, life sized duck ash tray, book ends, and a 9" full rolling duck (rolling pin or decoy with wheels ?).
- A line at the bottom of the page states, "Prices Quoted on Miniature Fish Reproductions."

- When World War II came, Roy closed his business in Alexandria Bay, and joined defense work. Shortly after he moved with Margaret to Ogdensburg.
- Roy worked as a carpenter foreman on both the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Prescott-Ogdensburg bridge.
- The 11/28/53 article states that Roy hunted every chance he got, or, “he was downstairs cutting out ducks, mounting them against a river sunset, shaping decoys and reaming out fishing tackle for deepsea fishermen.”

- Roy's work was sold through a number of outlets. Mentioned in the 11/28/53 article were: Castle and Cooke, Honolulu
Abercrombie and Fitch, New York
Marshall-Field, Chicago
Harrods, Ltd., London
- The Sportsmen's Club of Chicago named him an honorary member.
- Lynn Bogue Hunt complimented Roy on the authentic expressions he managed to get on his birds (a casual remark made to him not long ago).



**Roy Conklin in his workshop – Watertown
Daily Times article 11/28/53**

Roy Conklin drawing/pattern for ruddy duck (heavy paper)



Roy Conklin head pattern for
shoveler (1/8 inch wood)



Roy Conklin head
pattern for Atlantic
brant (3/16 inch wood)



Roy Conklin pheasant pattern (1/8 inch wood)



- In 1959, Roy and Margaret moved back to Alexandria Bay, living on Otter Street above a boat house on Otter Creek.
- Roy continued to work construction, and to carve and paint in his spare time.
- Sampie Sutton observed Roy painting a goose on an ice boat, and learned that Roy made decoys and was willing to give lessons.
- For three winters, Sampie was instructed by Roy.

- Sampie reported that Roy was an excellent teacher. He stressed patience, both when carving and painting; sharp tools (they should shave your arm); good brushes; and the need to put enough paint on the brush (don't dry brush).
- Painting and carving were separate operations, and the shop needed a thorough cleaning before painting began.
- Plaques and other flat work were painted outside during the warmer months.

- Roy was an accomplished painter. He worked fast, confidently, and often painted a number of items in rapid succession.
- Larger decoys were usually carved during the winter.
- Roy was still supplying decoys to Abercrombie and Fitch in the 1960s.
- Power tools in Roy's Otter Street shop were limited to hand held tools, and a small band saw. Larger power tools were available at Ira Bruce's home.

- Roy's painting and carving style (especially the head carving) were unique, and his work is readily separated from the better known early decoy carvers.
- As Roy's work became better known and appreciated, others began to copy his style, some with Roy's assistance.
- Roy would paint other peoples decoys.
- Separating Roy's later work, especially the duck and goose decoys, from those who copied his style, can be problematic.

Identifying Roy Conklin decoys:

1. The carving and painting style, especially the head carving.
2. Stencils and signatures.
3. Tracing the provenance.
4. Body plugs.



1/2 inch diameter plug in decoy bottom

Made by

Roy A. Conklin Jr

Alexandria Bay

N.Y.

Cinnamon leaf
female

Ray Cookson

Alex. Gray

N.Y.



Signature on Roy Conklin painting.

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ROY CONKLIN, JR.
ALEXANDRIA BAY, N.Y.

stencils on Roy Conklin plaque

William B. (Bill) Aiken (1910-1998)

- Born and raised in Alexandria Bay.
- Attended school and played sports with Roy Conklin.
- Moved to Chippewa Bay in 1933; caretaker Oak Island.
- Began carving decoys in early 1940s. In the late 1940s began carving Conklin style decoys with Roy's assistance.
- Most of Bill's later decoys were painted by Roy Conklin.

- Separating Bill Aiken and Roy Conklin decoys could be difficult, except virtually all of Bill's Conklin style decoys were branded with his name.

Information on Bill Aiken can be found in:

- Decoys of the Thousand Islands by Stewart and Lunman, pages 201-202.
- Article by Larry Lunman in *Hunting & Fishing Collectibles Magazine*, March-April 2006, Volume 6, Number 2: pages 6-11.



W B (William B.) Aiken brands (3) on bottom of hen mallard. Note small dowel plugs on either side of the middle brand, about 5 inches apart.



Black Duck carved by Bill Aiken and painted by Roy Conklin.



Drake American merganser carved by Bill Aiken and painted by Roy Conklin



Drake wood duck carved by Bill Aiken and painted by Roy Conklin.



Flying drake wood duck
carved by Bill Aiken and
painted by Roy Conklin.

[Blanchard's Auction 6/24/06]

Ernest (Ernie) Fox (1925-1988)

- Brockville, Ontario carver.
- Lost his legs in WW II, but was not “disabled”.
- Primarily made hunting decoys from early 1950s through 1960s, decorative decoys in the 1970s, using a variety of patterns.
- Obtained Roy Conklin patterns in the late 1950s from Shirley Prosser, and carved quite a few Roy Conklin style decoys.
- Some of the Fox decoys were branded; E. Fox in 1/2- inch letters, or E. Fox, Brockville in 3/4-inch letters.

Information on Ernie Fox can be found in:

- Decoys of the Thousand Islands by Stewart and Lunman, pages 142-144.
- Article by Larry Lunman in *Hunting & Fishing Collectibles Magazine*, Nov-Dec 2006, Volume 6, Number 6: pages 28-33.



Atlantic brant carved and painted by Ernie Fox in the style of Roy Conklin, c. 1960.



Drake American merganser carved and painted by Ernie Fox in the style of Roy Conklin, c. 1960.

Larry Lunman mentions the possibility of confusing Ernie Fox and Roy Conklin decoys and states, “One can easily distinguish the Fox decoys from their American counterparts by their sturdier bill and tails and less hawkish appearance.” [Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Magazine, 6 (6): page 31]

Shirley Prosser, a transplanted Canadian living in Alexandria Bay, ordered a “large” number of decoys from Ernie Fox, carved in the Roy Conklin style. The decoys were delivered with glass eyes, but were unpainted. Shirley had the decoys painted by “Alexandria Bay Artisans”, and sold them locally (see Ernie Fox article in Hunt&Fish Collectibles Magazine 6 (6): p. 31).

Sampie Sutton is certain that Roy Conklin was one of, and perhaps the main, “Alexandria Bay Artisan.”



Drake wood duck carved by Ernie Fox in the style of Roy Conklin, and painted by Alexandria Bay Artisans, c, 1960.

Upper – Right: carved
by Ernie Fox and
painted by Alex Bay
Artisans.



Lower – Left: Carved
and painted by Roy
Conklin.

Edward J. Sweet (1907-1978)

- Lighthouse keeper at Cross Over Island, Sunken Rock, and Tibbets Point.
- Carved decoys in winter after seaway closed.
- Retired to Alexandria Bay and continued carving decoys, often in the style of other area makers.
- Ed, and his son Jimmy, may have been involved with the Alex Bay Artisans.
- Carved some decoys in the Roy Conklin style, but differences were usually obvious.
- Reviewed in Decoys of the Thousand Islands.

Ed Sweet drake bufflehead -
metal tag on bottom
[Blanchard's Auction 11/25/06]



CONKLIN

ROY A.

1909 — 1967

ARTIST



MARGARET S.

1910 — 1985

TEACHER



Monument for Roy A. and Margaret S. Conklin at St. Cyril's Highland Park cemetery, Alexandria Bay, NY.

ROY A.

1909 — 1967

ARTIST

Photographs of the Roy
Conklin displays at the
March 2007 TIDCA
meeting in Clayton, NY.



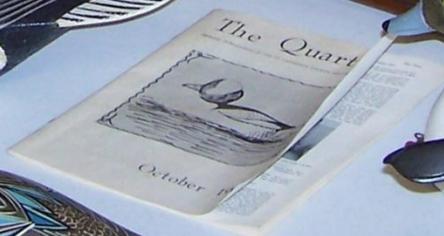








Bill Allen's
Classic
Thousand Island
Decoys





The Quarterly



1965



Quarter
October 1900

