

# Recollections of Things I Forgot to Remember!

by Joanie Ingraham

*This is a continuation of the saga from Puckaway Lake So good! - Joanie*

**Louis Zellmer's  
Puckaway Lake Duck Camp  
1898-1938  
by Harlan Doering**

The duck camp was prospering. More skiffs and decoys had to be fabricated. The three eldest sons now reasonably proficient in these skills, helped Louis increase his small fleet of skiffs and decoy numbers. The sawed strips for skiff construction were purchased at the lumberyard but the building and assembling was all done by hand. Hammers, chisels, hand saws, planes, spoke shaves, and draw shaves were the tools of choice.

Decoys were rough-shaped with a hatchet then rasped, knife carved, and sanded to final finish. The better ones had glass eyes installed but many were made with tack eyes or painted eyes. They were primed with white lead paint. The finish coat of paint was more than likely white lead tinted with lamp black or oil pigment dyes. House paint was also used or any other surplus paints that could be incorporated into a decent color combo.

Many factory decoys such as Mason, Dodge and Stevens were accrued through the years, some gifts from guests and some just left by the hunters. (How I would like to have one hour to pick out a dozen decoys from the Zellmer storage bins of 1915!)

Skiffs were painted with white house paint tinted with lamp black to a medium gray color. Tan marsh colors were just not used at that time. I began to see marsh grass colors emerge after WWII.

Around this time Louis was extended an offer to buy Ne Pee Nauk Club for \$10,000.00. This included many buildings: horse barns, boat houses, sheds, about forty skiffs, roughly a thousand decoys, a concrete fish pond, etc. Also close to a thousand acres of marsh. He had just expanded the homestead so he declined the offer.

The camp could now handle fifteen to twenty hunters, more if anybody wanted to sleep in the hayloft. Many prominent Wisconsinites came here to hunt. Bill Harley and Walter Davidson, the founders of the Harley-Davidson Motorcycle Company in 1903, were regular customers for years. Numerous contractors, realtors, auto dealers, and various executive types frequented Zellmer's Duck Camp partaking in the fabulous waterfowl hunting in this age of incredible duck numbers.

Louis would build about fifteen double blinds on the rush lines of the open lake – four or five on the north shore and ten or so on the west shore. Blinds were constructed of cut willows, shoved in the soft bottom and retained by bailing wire strung

between 4" to 5" diameter posts. Water depth in these areas was four to five feet.

My Uncle Harry told me how he was hired at age 14 in 1913 to guide a prominent Ford dealer from Milwaukee named Bodenhagen. Mr. Bodenhagen would bring up over a case of shells (500) for a week's hunt. This scenario continued for six years until my uncle moved to Milwaukee.

My uncle also told me a sad and nefarious tale of some duck shoots in those days of endless flocks, where N Pee Nauk would take a wagon load of dead waterfowl up the old marsh road a few miles and dump them. There they would remain to decompose or be consumed by the many birds and animals partaking of this unforeseen bonanza. The stench, depending on wind direction, could be smelled miles away only to be dissipated by eventual decay or the impending cold weather.

In 1919 Congress passed laws on migratory birds, eliminating spring hunting and setting daily bag limits on waterfowl. This eliminated market hunting but duck hunting within the confines of a lengthy season and generous bag limits was still fantastic.

The two eldest sons, Walter and Art, were drafted in 1917 and served in France during World War I. The youngest son Erwin was drafted in 1943 during World War II and served overseas in Germany, Louis and Emma were one of the few parents

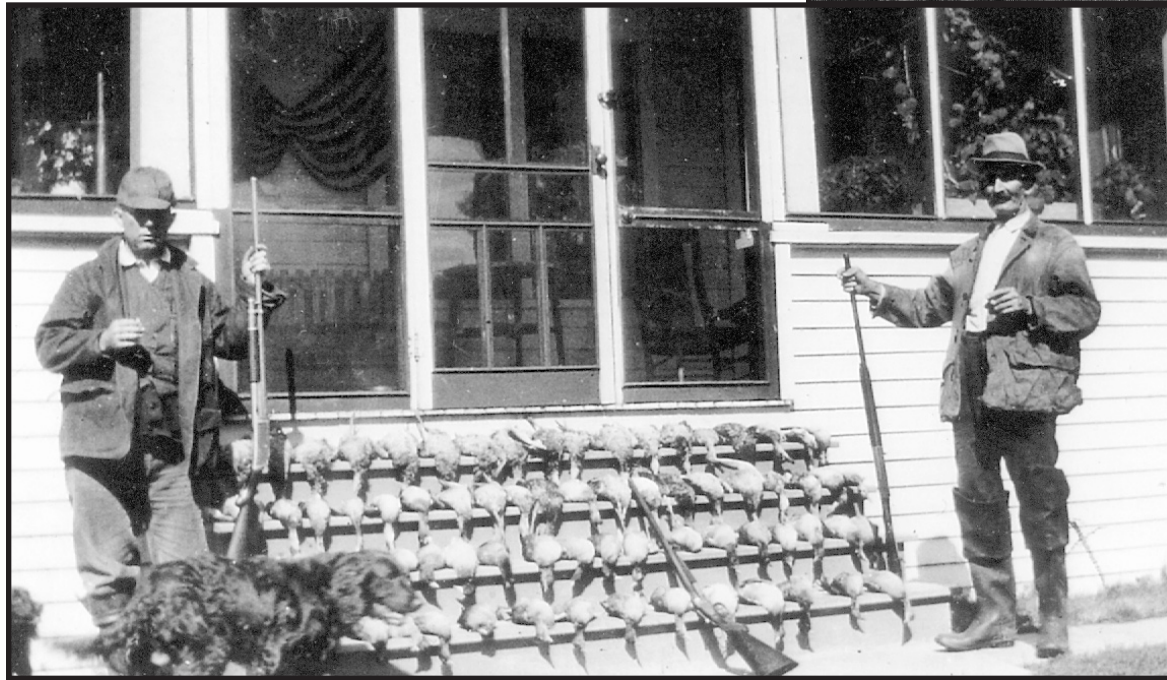
and skiffs were built. There was a three-foot high, maybe 30" diameter, piece of oak where Louie or sons would chop out the rudimentary shape of decoy bodies with a hatchet. My Dad told me Grandpa would let me pound small nails into this coping block. That could not have been very helpful to hatchet sharpness.

The boathouse was about forty feet long containing two sets of racks on each side, three high with a single skiff on each rack. The far end had three more on racks with a couple on the ground waiting for repairs. I just cannot remember where the vast number of decoys were stored but there were always dozens laying around on shelves, benches or in skiffs, many were waiting for repair or repainting. Decoy anchors were mostly made of lead but I saw many fabricated with a 3"-4" ball of concrete formed over a wire loop.

In the 1913 expansion a small pantry and washroom were walled off on the east side within the confines of the original one-room home. Emma now received a state of the art kerosene kitchen range. This stove still remains in the milkhouse. It had four burners and an oven much the same configuration that "city people" had with their natural gas ranges. A gallon container held the kerosene fuel and a small pint can with a narrow spout was used to prime the burners. The name plate on the back of the stove denotes "The Detroit Vapor



**Harlan Doering with a string of bass (7 years old). Louis Zellmer walking across County Trunk C. Barn and granary on left, ice house, tool shed, and boat house on right. Circa: 1937.**



**William Menge, Louis' brother-in-law, on right. Ducks and prairie chickens. About 1925. Menge guided a lot in the area. Note – American Water Spaniels.**

that had sons serve in both World Wars.

The Zellmer Camp hired some extra help during this period of World War I but business continued.

I can remember all of the buildings when I was nine in 1938. I was fascinated by the work shed where decoys

Stove Company" with patent dates from 1908 to 1916.

With this new appliance Grandma made many a fine meal for family and boarders. Just imagine this undertaking, up long before the hunters to pack lunches, make coffee, and then

feed the group breakfast. During the day bread, cookies, and cakes would have to be baked – no instant box goods – all mixing from scratch and by hand. No electricity for toasters or mixers. Then come evening a large

meal had to be served to the party of hunters, no doubt famished from an active day out in the elements.

Not only food but the house had to be kept clean, dishes washed, and beds made. The daughters helped considerably and later girls from the area were hired to help in peak times. My mother was married in 1923, lived in Milwaukee over a hundred miles away, and would come home in fall for many years to help in these heightened times.

Among the new amenities in this period Emma was given a 1918 model Montgomery Ward peddle driven sewing machine. This helped considerably in making pillows and featherbeds, and in making and repairing clothing. Both of these bed items were filled with the feathers saved from hand picking the multitude of ducks harvested in season. Feathers were washed in cheesecloth bags and hung in the wind to dry, then stuffed into pillows and featherbed mattresses and covers.



**Louis Zellmer Duck Camp 1898-1938 – artifacts: Hen canvas back on left carved by Louis Zellmer, decoy behind can see L.Z. & Co./PRD, to right can see A.L.Z. & Co. Bottom right Evans mammoth & Mason Senaca Lake canvas backs, kerosene lamp, Ford Model "T" coil, brass shot gun shells, skiff chair & paddle, L.C. Smith hammer 12-ga.**



**Original house at Duck Camp before any additions – about 1897. Art, Minnie (my mother), Walter, Alma – Emma (their mother) in the doorway.**