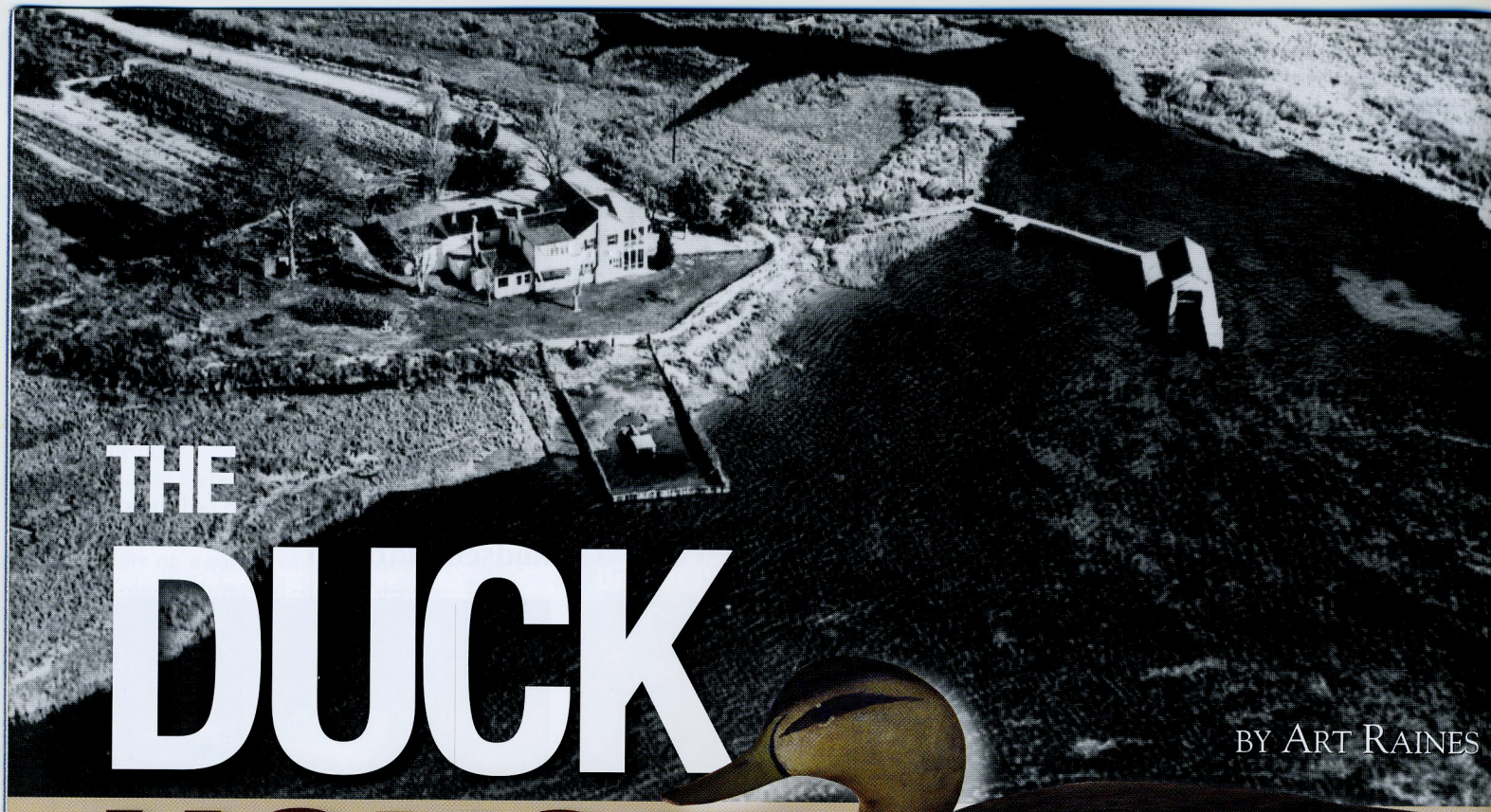
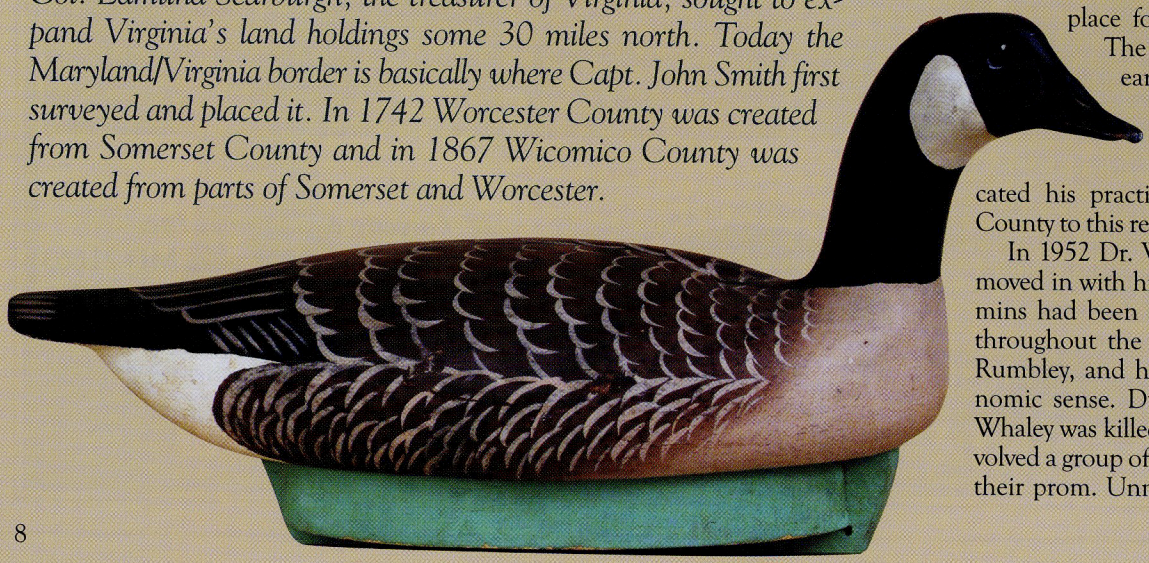


THE DUCK HOUSE

BY ART RAINES

An early trading center on Maryland's Eastern Shore

The remote village of Rumbley, Maryland, with a population of about 100, encompasses 4.2 square miles in southwest Somerset County, bordered on the north by the Manokin River and Tangier Sound to the south. The county, named for Mary, Lady Somerset, was created in 1666 by Lord Baltimore, who desired permanent settlers to protect his interests. In 1660 the governor of Virginia outlawed the Quakers, many of whom moved north to Maryland, and armed conflicts erupted along the boundary when Col. Edmund Scarburgh, the treasurer of Virginia, sought to expand Virginia's land holdings some 30 miles north. Today the Maryland/Virginia border is basically where Capt. John Smith first surveyed and placed it. In 1742 Worcester County was created from Somerset County and in 1867 Wicomico County was created from parts of Somerset and Worcester.



THE "DUCK HOUSE" of Rumbley, Maryland is a name familiar to many Chesapeake Bay area collectors. A jelly label with that moniker was applied on the bottom of many decoys and decoratives from the Crisfield area in the 1950s and 60s, indicating its origin of sale. But who exactly was the proprietor of the business and what was the history of its operation?

The Duck House was a home as well as a decoy collecting showplace. And as described by Oliver Lawson of Crisfield, it was considered a place for commerce for area carvers. The original house was built in the early 1900s by the Blake family, who sold their beautiful property in the 1940s to Dr. Bernard Whaley, who relocated his practice from northern Worcester County to this remote part of the Eastern Shore.

In 1952 Dr. Whaley's sister Kitty Cummins moved in with him after her divorce. Ms. Cummins had been selling soft crabs and seafood throughout the lower shore, so this move to Rumbley, and her brother's home, made economic sense. During the spring of 1955 Dr. Whaley was killed in a head-on accident that involved a group of local high school youth leaving their prom. Unmarried and without children,