



*A studio photo of Simon Everitt as a young man, probably around the time of his marriage. Courtesy Harry "Coop" Cooper.*

CHAPTER TWO  
*Simon Everitt*  
*(1858-1935)*

**T**urkey hunting produces delightful and endearing eccentrics. Think about diehard devotees of the sport you have known. Most of them, similar to many of the individuals covered in these pages, must be reckoned as oddballs or men who richly merit the description “he was quite a character.” My paternal grandfather, Grandpa Joe, was a great teller of tales and perceptive commentator on the human spirit. He summed the situation up quite nicely long before I ever enjoyed the privilege of seeing a wild turkey, much less hunting the grand bird. Looking back with longing to his youth (the 1880s and 1890s), a time when turkeys were still reasonably plentiful in his highland homeland of North Carolina’s Great Smoky Mountains, he reminisced: “I knew several great turkey men, and every one of them was passin’ quair.”

Mountain vernacular renders the word queer into “quair,” and the term connotes someone who is different—not in a sexual sense but, rather, in terms of marching to the beat of a different drummer. Often this description was applied to someone whose eccentricity was praiseworthy, and that was what Grandpa Joe had in mind when he suggested that certain turkey hunters he had known were “the quairest of the quair.”

It’s too bad Grandpa never met a contemporary and fellow Tar Heel, as well as a consummate turkey hunter, Simon Everitt. There seems little doubt that had he done so, Grandpa would have reckoned him to be one of “those quair turkey hunters” and would have accorded the

man who styled himself the "Kurnel" his ultimate accolade: "There's a man to take to the woods with."

Until a few years back, Simon Willis Everitt was pretty much a man of mystery in the world of turkey hunting. He is not even mentioned by Earl Mickel in his trilogy of books on callmakers and receives only passing mention as a fan of suction yelpers in Howard Harlan's book *Turkey Calls: An Enduring American Folk Art*. All of that changed when, thanks to decades of determined detective work by Parker Whedon, my longtime friend and hunting mentor, there was a momentous breakthrough. After assiduous work in courthouse records, searches in graveyards, reading obituary notices, and countless inquiries, Parker finally established contact with Harry "Coop" Cooper, a grandson of Everitt's. Coop had memories and mementoes aplenty, thanks in part to being raised by his grandparents (he lived with them from 1918 to 1930) and also to having inherited most of what survived in the way of the Kurnel's turkey hunting memorabilia. In an incredible act of generosity, he gave Whedon and me each box calls which had belonged to and been used by Everitt. Of all the many hundreds of collectibles connected with the sport which I own, the Everitt box in my possession is the most cherished.

Everitt was born in 1858 in a railway shanty car at a railroad siding near Halifax, North Carolina. According to Everitt's grandson, the family, which hailed from Massachusetts, was there in connection with construction work on the Raleigh & Gaston Railroad, which ran from the capitol city of North Carolina to the Roanoke River. Both the father and paternal grandfather of the future turkey hunting legend were involved in the project.

The humble circumstances of Everitt's birth notwithstanding, anyone who looks closely at his career must reckon that he was, in many senses, a Renaissance man. In the course of his wonderfully varied career he wrote poetry, ran a guide service for turkeys and waterfowl, was a keen and accomplished gardener, trained hunting dogs, served as mayor of the town of Oriental, NC, operated a boarding house, exhibited considerable talent as a woodcarver, painted Coca-Cola signs and repaired old Singer sewing machines, designed and made an original turkey call, served as a newspaper reporter, wrote novels (none of them were published), was the author of material which appeared in women's magazines using a female *nom de plume*, loved fishing, wrote one of the classic turkey hunting books, and was present for a portion of Wilbur and Orville Wright's experiments in powered flight at Kill Devil Hill. According to his grandson, the Kurnel helped a photographer from a New York newspaper as an escort and

SIMON EVERITT (1858-1935)

assistant during the flights, and the family still has a set of the original photographs. These were on display at the 100th anniversary of the first powered flight in 2003 at Kitty Hawk. Most of all though, Everitt was a consummate turkey hunter.

His literary leanings found fullest expression in one of the cornerstones of the literature of turkey hunting, *Tales of Wild Turkey Hunting*, published in 1928 by William C. Hazelton in Chicago. Hazelton published a number of sporting books over the years, most of them dealing with some aspect of waterfowling. Everitt contributed to at least one of these books, *Supreme Duck Shooting Stories*, and interestingly enough, that book is dedicated to another individual profiled in these pages, Edward A. McIlhenny. It seems likely that Everitt's initial contact with Hazelton came out of their shared interest in waterfowling, and that may well have led to the publication of *Tales of Wild Turkey Hunting*. We know precious little about Hazelton, other than the fact all of the books he published are now treasured collectibles, but one thing which stands out clearly is his ability to convince fellow sportsmen to share their hunting tales. Among the notables who contributed to his publications or wrote entire works for Hazelton were Nash Buckingham, Horatio Bigelow, Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., and Theodore S. Van Dyke.

Whatever the exact origins of *Tales of Wild Turkey Hunting*, it was the third book ever published which focused exclusively on the sport. It came out in 1928, just before the onset of the Great Depression, and that consideration, together with the fact that it came from an obscure publisher and dealt with subject matter beyond the ken of most hunters of the time, made for small sales. Today copies of the original are extremely difficult to find, and as a lark I checked on line for listings. A single copy, with some problems, including a darkened spine, was available for \$969. A fine copy, whether the binding boards are blue or maroon in color (it comes in both formats) would be worth somewhere in the area of \$1500. Fortunately the book was reprinted in 1984 as part of the Old Masters trio (the other reprints being books by McIlhenny and Davis) and is available at much more affordable prices.

Two days after Christmas, 1888, Simon Everitt married Margaret Lane in the small town of Roxobel. The couple would spend virtually all of their lives together living in small towns along the Roanoke River in eastern North Carolina. His grandson, who was raised by Everitt and his wife, recalls him with great fondness and suggests he could do pretty much anything to which he turned his hands and mind. One noteworthy exception was driving an automobile. "The Kurnel," as he

was widely known, never learned to drive. He and his wife owned a Ford coupe, but she did all the driving.

For all his many and varied talents though, according to his grandson "guiding was his way and what he loved best." According to Harry Cooper's recollections from childhood, "He made duck decoys, turkey callers, and hat racks for sale." Interestingly, Everitt used castor bean plants to craft the latter items. "He had a small workshop with all sorts of hand tools and was always carving things—cow horns, turkey callers, [and] box callers, some of which he carved figures on. He used a knife, which I still have, and pieces of glass to carve the horns." Apparently Everitt was also an amateur taxidermist, because his grandson recalls that he "had stuffed turkeys, ducks, and squirrels in his house all the time and all over the place, and hunting horns and callers were always on display in the dining room."

During most of the prime years of his adulthood, Everitt and his wife operated boarding houses in small towns along the Roanoke River in what was then a prime part of the Atlantic Flyway for ducks and geese. The boarding houses produced predictable income from long-term residents as well as being lodging places of choice for visiting sportsmen during the fall and winter months. The nature of the business left Everitt free to pursue his passion of hunting and guiding other hunters. The fact that he could, thanks to the boarding houses, offer a one-stop service for visiting sportsmen suited him perfectly. The Kurnel was one of those individuals born for a life of freedom in the woods and wilds as opposed to the confines of regular work hours or a job which kept him indoors.

Apparently he began hunting turkeys when still a young man, and certainly there can be no doubt concerning his mastery of the sport in the days when fall hunting was the standard approach. Horatio Bigelow, an affluent sportsman and writer of some renown who knew pretty much everyone who was anyone in the world of sport in the 1930s and 1940s, and who wrote several dandy books (*Gunnerman*, *Gunnerman's Gold*, *Flying Feathers*, and *Scatter-Gun Sketches*), hunted with Everitt during the venerable Kurnel's heyday. In the pages of those books he left us delightful word portraits of the man and a useful summation of his abilities as a turkey hunter which were an outgrowth of a turkey-taking trip with Everitt sometime during the second decade of the 20th century. His recollections are worth quoting at some length, thanks both to the depiction of the man and the manner in which Everitt approached calling.

"Twenty-five years ago 'Kurnel' Everitt, along the Neuse River near Oriental, North Carolina, gave me my first demonstration on

*SIMON EVERITT (1858-1935)*



Simon Everitt (left) and a client. They were likely involved in turkey hunting although the Kurnel offered other sporting opportunities. Courtesy Harry "Coop" Cooper.

one of these pipes of Pan (his description for a suction yelper). Uncle Simon was my first preceptor in the art of turkey calling. I can see him now, a small man with regular features, a bushy chestnut beard and sleepy blue eyes who could yelp a turkey out of the atmosphere. [He called] with his blue eyes half closed as, in seeming rapture, like a great virtuoso regaling his audience. And Uncle Simon *was* a virtuoso with a turkey yelper. He produced a series of weird sounds on a contrivance fashioned from the smallest bone of a wild turkey's second wing joint, a piece of reed or cane such as is used for pipe stems in many parts of the South, an old spool and a piece of wood shaped like a horn. He had lived a long life in or near turkey woods and knew those grand birds as few men ever learn to know them. Later I was to realize that I had been privileged to listen to a past master of the art."

Everitt's advice on dealing with fall turkeys, as recounted by Bigelow, is fascinating. Presumably it was in reference to turkeys which had not been scattered, although this is not made clear (and the Kurnel was a great one for hunting them with dogs). According to Bigelow, this is what Everitt had to say on the matter: "Mek the kee-kee-kee with jes' yo' lips, suckin' in yo' bref. Many's the turkey I've called up jes' thataway. Yu' mek it with one long bref. Then yu' use yo yelp. The hen yelp should be smart and snappy, like yu' was a'kissin' the caller. The gobbler yelp is longer an' mo time between yelps. Cup yo' han's over the caller to control th' tone and volume. Don't call too much, and only three, fo' yelps each time." To Bigelow's way of thinking his calling skills were nothing short of incredible. Obviously this advice from Everitt involved use of a suction yelper such as the one described in the previous paragraph. No doubt the call used in the Kurnel's demonstration was one of those of his own design and making (full details on his Roanoke River yelper and the manner in which it remained a mystery for three quarters of a century appear below). These instructions, rendered in the regional dialect of a son of the swamps and sandy soil of the eastern portion of the Old North State, and accurately captured by Bigelow, ring so true that they might almost be considered a primer for those desirous of getting a sound start on the use of a wingbone call, or suction yelper.

As is the case with Bigelow's depiction of the old Kurnel working his calling wizardry, there are pleasures and insights aplenty to be found in *Tales of Wild Turkey Hunting*. You cannot fail to be enchanted by Everitt, and for those who enjoy a tale well told or who want to learn more about fall hunting methods, especially using dogs, the book is a jewel. The author recognized the aura of wonder surrounding the totality of the turkey-hunting experience, and he hints at the way the sport had captured his soul when he dedicates the book "to those

*SIMON EVERITT (1858-1935)*



Simon Everitt (left) and a cline after a successful fall hunt with one of the turkey dogs the old Kurnel always had in his kennels. Courtesy Harry "Coop" Cooper.



*REMEMBERING THE GREATS: PROFILES OF TURKEY HUNTING'S OLD MASTERS*

sportsmen and nature-lovers of rare quality who have waited with me in the turkey blind."

Everitt was a man greatly given to deep thinking and long periods of contemplation. His grandson, Coop, says that when he was indoors he invariably had a pencil in his hand and paper handy to record whatever thoughts coursed through his mind. He also was an avid correspondent and wrote to folks all across the social spectrum. Noted call collector Bill Henkel graciously shared a letter with me which attests to this. It was written to A. B. Moncure of Petersburg, VA, the owner of the 'Coon and 'Possum Hunt Club. One of Moncure's employees was Jeremiah Stevens, the individual whom Henkel and other students of callmaking history consider the father of the scratch box call. Yet the erstwhile Kurnel could also be a reclusive soul given to deep thoughts and inner reflection. A poem, "Poor and Be Thankful," from his papers offers a succinct and moving summation of his philosophy of life.

If the banks are closed,  
Why need we cry?  
They probably will open, by and by.  
We have our sorrows and our pains.  
And we have sunshine, and our rains.  
If our rations are getting lower,  
Let us live a little slower.  
Let us remember you and I,  
Better to live and be thankful,  
Than to die.

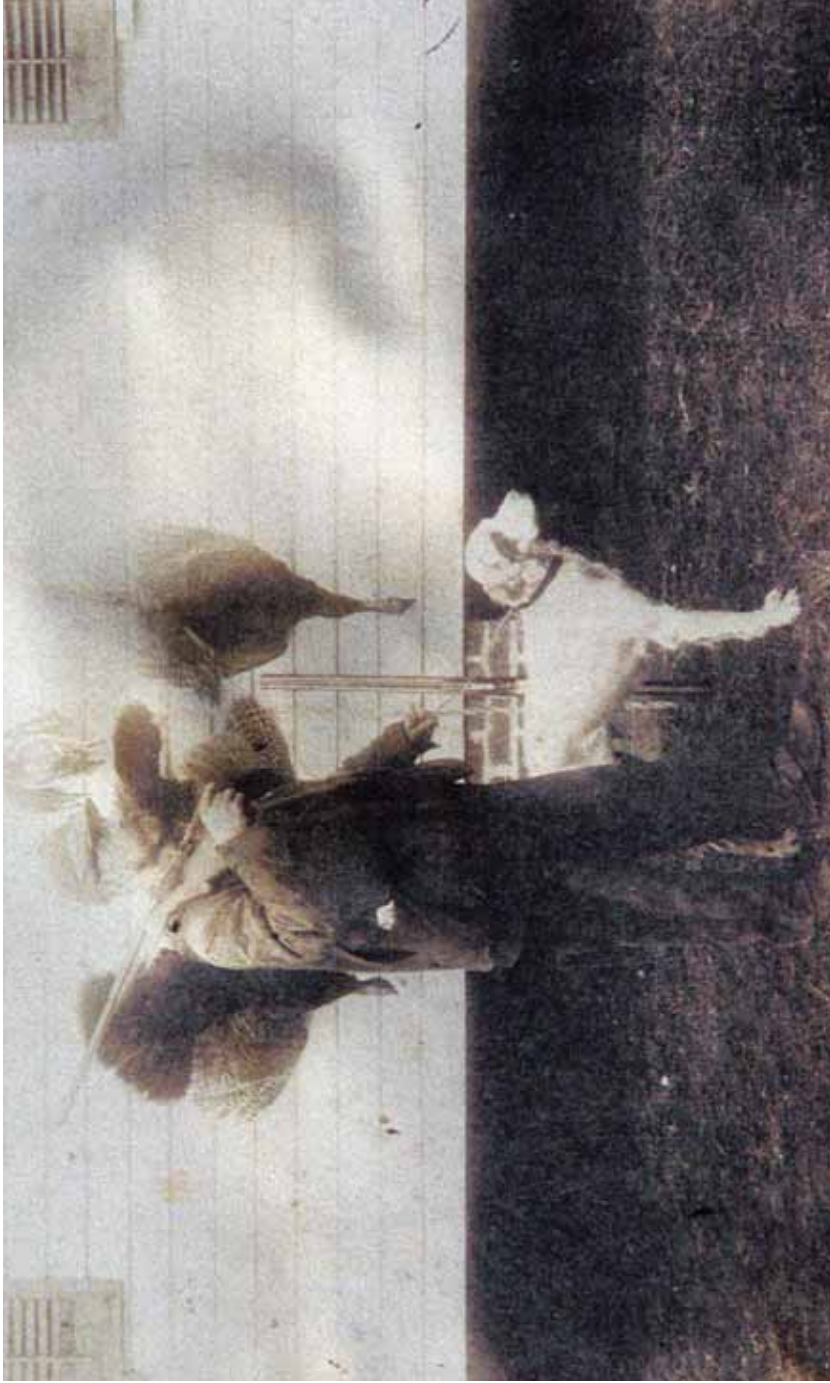
Even more appealing, to a fellow sportsman's way of thinking, is "Game Galore."

Quail in the stubble,  
Turkeys in the pine;  
Fish in the brook,  
And I a hook and line.

A creel of nice trout,  
A mind of content;  
What more can man ask for?  
With a day thus spent.

Out in the woods,  
And I give a few calls;  
Just one shot,  
And a big gobbler falls.

*SIMON EVERITT (1858-1935)*



Simon Everitt and a canine companion at the end of what was obviously, from the proof in the photographic pudding, a highly successful outing. Courtesy Harry "Coop" Cooper.

REMEMBERING THE GREATS: PROFILES OF TURKEY HUNTING'S OLD MASTERS

With my quail dogs,  
And old Betsy my trusty gun;  
A point, a rise,  
And thus starts the fun.

A half dozen brown beauties,  
Enough for a day;  
The dogs had their run,  
My wife will be happy, safe to say.

With such sport,  
Who could get blue?  
Not a real sportsman.  
Like me and you.

Additional evidence of the fact that Everitt was a thinking man's turkey hunter comes from a piece, "Is the Wild Turkey Doomed?," in his literary remains. The compulsion to write never faded, and I find it somewhat surprising more of his material didn't make it into the magazines of the day. It was an era when stories of the sort Everitt shared in *Tales of Wild Turkey Hunting* found a welcome reception in national magazines, and in reading his unpublished material authenticity of the sort which can only come from first-hand experience runs as a consistent thread through the manuscripts. Turkeys were his greatest passion but he also left tales of his quest for a ten-pound bass, fishing for pickerel, saltwater angling, and hunting of all sorts—for ducks, geese, snipe, woodcock, yellowlegs, deer, bear, and squirrels, as well as turkeys—in his papers.

Everitt's wife, Margaret, who was affectionately known to the family as Madge or Mame, came from affluent roots. She was a decade younger than her husband, just out of her teens when they married, and family tradition has it that she was a direct descendant of a family who came to America on the *Mayflower*. Still, she seems to have accepted the humble circumstances of life with the Kurnel in good grace, never mind their peripatetic existence, moving from one hamlet to another, or that none of their five children was born in the same town.

Yet there were elements of stability. Home for the Everitts was always somewhere in the vast Carolina coastal plain, with its foreboding swamps, blackwater rivers, cypress bays, and vast stretches of untamed terrain where the wild turkey still held dominion. For decades, through the heart of a life one can only envy, no matter what the weather or season, the Kurnel frequented the backwoods and black waters seldom disturbed by the tracks of man. According to his grandson, he never

*SIMON EVERITT (1858-1935)*



*Homeward bound after a joyous day. Simon Everitt is the hunter in the background, with the other individual probably being a client. Courtesy Harry "Coop" Cooper.*

left the area until near the end, and there is an element of tragedy in the fact that Everitt died in a suburb of Philadelphia and is buried in Baltimore. It is a saddening, sobering thought to realize that this man of wild places who loved wild turkeys ended up in a location dominated by avenues of asphalt rather than the scream of a hawk or the lordly voice of an old gobbler declaring his whereabouts deep down in a Roanoke River swamp.

Still, he left behind much for posterity to appreciate. Everitt deserves a special place in the hearts and minds of all those who treasure turkey hunting's roots. His enduring little book, his innovative and recently resurrected work as a callmaker (see below), his quaint and endearing character, and the manner in which his career typifies the eccentricities of personality integral to the sport, all combine to remind us that the venerable Kurnel must be reckoned a turkey hunter for the ages.

#### *THE KURNEL'S TURKEY GUNS*

We seldom find much information about favorite guns in the accounts or records of the old masters, although Henry Edwards Davis was a noteworthy exception and Archibald Rutledge used a beloved Parker, given to him by students at Mercersburg Academy, for many years until he finally “shot the barrels out.” Simon Everitt, in one of his unpublished stories, does leave us a full account of his favorite turkey gun. He writes of his “new 12 gauge U. S. Arms Company gun. It was made by the U. S. Arms Co. of Mass., and I have never seen a closer and harder shooting gun than this for a 12 gauge—30-inch barrels, 8 ½ lbs. weight, left full choke, right modified.”

A second gun, this one still in the family, was an Ithaca Model F 20, Serial #398300. Most of the surviving hunting photographs of Everitt show him with this gun. It originally had 30-inch barrels but in 1917 a friend took it back to the factory and had them shortened.

#### *REBIRTH OF A CLASSIC: THE ROANOKE RIVER YELPER*

On pages 28-30 of *Tales of Wild Turkey Hunting*, Simon Everitt provides a “recipe” for constructing a nifty suction call that can be broken down into a more compact form for carrying. This also means the call is less likely to be lost while the hunter is moving through the woods or broken in an awkward or untoward act such as setting up hastily when a gobbler is nearby. The yelper developed by the Kurnel consisted of three parts—a mouthpiece made using the small bone from a hen's wing, a cane or bamboo midsection, and a hollowed-out

*SIMON EVERITT (1858-1935)*

piece of elderberry as the trumpet end or amplifier. Much as was the case with his quest for biographical information on Everitt, Parker Whedon had long been stymied in his efforts to craft one of these calls.

One problem was locating wooden spools of the proper size to duplicate Everitt's description. The other, and it was the real problem, involved a misspelled word. Everitt refers to making use of a five-inch section of "alder" stalk. It should have read "elder" stalk. The pith can be readily removed from the middle of elderberry shoots, and this produces the trumpet end of a Roanoke River yelper. While finding the proper-size section of elder can pose problems, once the proper piece has been selected it does double duty as a storage container when the two-piece call is broken down. As Whedon stated soon after he made his breakthrough discovery, "what makes Simon's yelper absolutely unique among yelpers is that it is designed to be assembled in two different ways; one way for carrying in the pocket (serving as its own carrying case) and another way for calling."

In the course of what was pretty much a lifelong quest for all available details on the yelper, Whedon did establish some interesting links stretching straight back to Everitt. In Whedon's younger years he hunted a couple of times in the Roanoke River area with an old timer who was known to everyone simply as "Gov'nor" Roan. Gov'nor had been raised by his uncle, Will Harrell, who was a frequent hunting partner of Everitt. While Roan used a yelper which was a part of the Roanoke River callmaking tradition, apparently it was not fashioned like the one which can be broken down and become its own storage unit. While Roan did not provide Whedon all the answers he sought regarding the call Everitt described, he did produce an irresistibly delightful moment.

One day Roan and Whedon were rambling through an extensive area of sand hills in eastern North Carolina, a region where, in sharp contrast to Roanoke River swamps, there was no water. Roan had mentioned to Whedon, on more than one occasion, that a yelper with a wingbone mouthpiece or one made entirely of wingbone sounded better when damp. Since there was no available water to run through the yelper to moisten it, Whedon innocently asked: "How do you get a yelper wet in this dry country?" Roan answered, completely in earnest: "I've pissed through it many a time." Now there was a man who was serious about his sport!

*A NOTE ON SOURCES*

*ARTICLES ABOUT EVERITT*

Rich Barry, "Harry Everett (sic): He Was There Even If in the

REMEMBERING THE GREATS: PROFILES OF TURKEY HUNTING'S OLD MASTERS

Way," *The Tampa Tribune*, Feb. 27, 1973, Section E, pages 1, 5.

Horatio Bigelow, "Talkin' Turkey," *The American Rifleman*, Nov., 1943, pages 14-16, 37.

Jim Casada, "Favorite Calls: The Kurnel's Box Call," *Turkey & Turkey Hunting*, Mar., 2006, pages 60-61.

Jim Casada, "Lessons Learned from Old-Time Callmakers," *Turkey & Turkey Hunting*, Feb., 2012, pages 46-47.

Jim Casada, "The Old Masters and Their Calls," *Turkey Country*, Sept./Oct., 2010, pages 98-100.

Jim Casada, "An Old Mystery Solved," *Turkey & Turkey Hunting*, Winter, 2006, pages 60-61. On the Roanoke River yelper described by Everitt and eventually figured out by Parker Whedon.

Jim Casada, "Probing the Hazy Origins of Spring Gobbler Hunting," *Turkey & Turkey Hunting*, Spring, 2012, pages 60-61.

Jim Casada, "Remembering the Greats: Simon Everitt," *Turkey & Turkey Hunting*, Winter, 2005, pages 26-29.

Jim Casada, "Revisiting Turkey Hunting's Classic Literature," *Turkey & Turkey Hunting*, Apr., 2004, pages 78-79.

Jim Casada, "Talkin' Turkey with the Old Masters," *Buckmasters Beards & Spurs Turkey Magazine*, 1999, pages 62-67.

Gene Whitman, "Wright Brothers' Helper May Debunk N. C. History," *Twin City Sentinel* (Winston-Salem, N. C.), Nov. 17, 1971, page 14.

*BOOK WITH MATERIAL ON EVERITT*

Horatio Bigelow, *Gunnerman*. NY: The Derrydale Press, 1939. There is a useful account of a hunting experience he had with Everitt.

OTHER

Everitt's grandson, Harry "Coop" Cooper, graciously shared with me a wide variety of materials from the family archives—unpublished Everitt stories, newspaper clippings, photos, and more. It is a treasure trove of material and suggests, at least to a mind such as mine which has a distinct orientation towards the past, that the NWTF or perhaps the National Sporting Library would do well to think of establishing a central archive for materials relating to the old masters.

For a nice synopsis of the Roanoke River yelper and Parker Whedon's work in resurrecting it, visit [www.oldmasterscustomcallmakers.com](http://www.oldmasterscustomcallmakers.com). Also, see Chapter 27 below.

*SIMON EVERITT (1858-1935)*



*Three calls from Simon Everitt's personal collection. These were, according to his grandson, the calls he regularly used when hunting. They are pictured with a specially-bound copy of the first edition of Tales of Wild Turkey Hunting.*



*A box call used by Simon Everitt featuring his exquisite carvings on its side.*