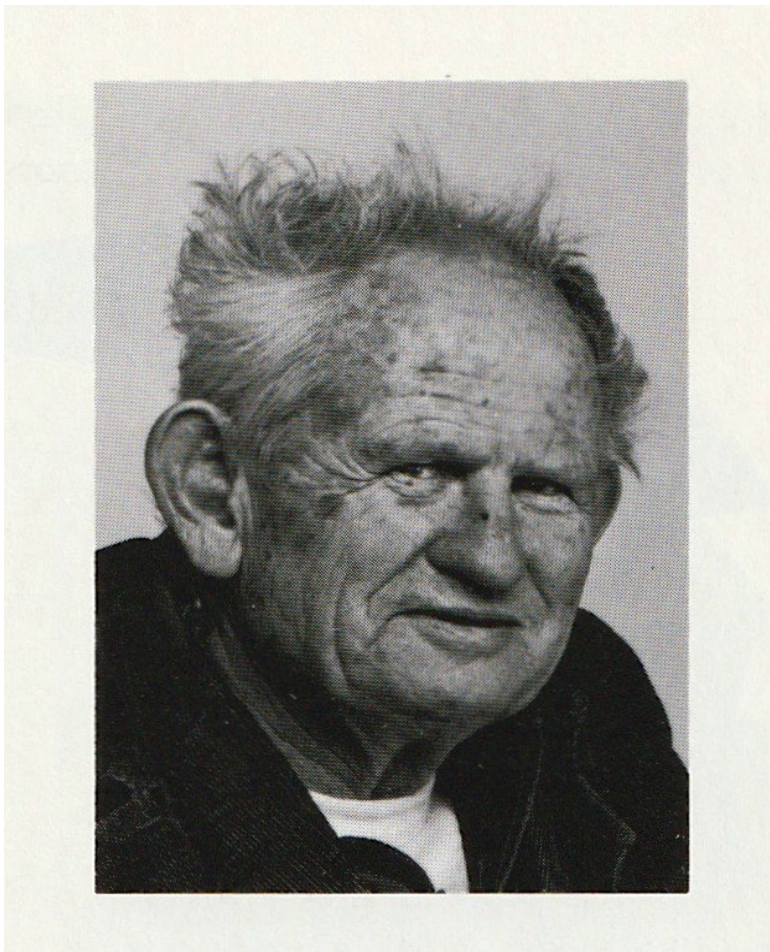


## 1. Introduction

# Chippy Chase Bird Sculptor 1908 – 1998

by

Nancy Fenton and Hank Tyler



(LYWAM photo)

“Chippy” Chase is North America’s most outstanding sculptor of birds in wood with a natural finish. He was the pioneer in creating a niche for bird sculptures in the art world. He was self-taught and created over 380 numbered and signed sculptures during his lifetime. In 1984, the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wisconsin honored Chippy with its Master Wildlife Artist award. In the 1990s, Yankee Magazine recognized him as one of the most influential people in New England.

Chippy's artistic style was to create each bird sculpture from a single piece of wood, sanding the wood smooth, and applying a clear finish to highlight the wood's grain pattern and color. Black Walnut was Chippy's favorite. His sculptures were realistic, as close to life size as possible, and the composition of bases incorporated characteristics of the bird's habitat. Oceanic birds, waterbirds, and waterfowl were his most frequent subjects. Vultures picking on a skull were his personal favorite.

Chase was a unique Maine character. Short in stature with large ears, a dark tan, and a broad smile — he resembled a chipmunk. He was a very happy man, with a magnetic personality. Robert Phinney, a bird artist from Arrowsic, said "Chippy always greeted you with a big smile."

His enthusiasm for nature and birds was infectious. He enjoyed being with people and loved to organize hunting trips, birding trips and fishing trips. An active supporter of the Brunswick Summer Music Theater, he enjoyed partying with the directors and actors. He had a sharp eye for women. Whether skating, fishing or birding, he always was accompanied by friendly women. Chippy enjoyed travelling and visiting national parks and birding hotspots around the world, and was very proud of his life list of birds.

21 Chase sculptures are held by museums as well as public and private institutions:

Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, Wausau, WI, 13 sculptures

Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, MA, #322 and #357

Portland Museum of Art, Maine, Mockingbird, #175

Everhart Museum, Scranton, PA Flamingo #153

Northeast Harbor Library, Maine, Eagle #180

Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, Great Blue Heron, #207; Ruffed Grouse Pair, #270

Milton Academy, Milton, MA, Shearwater #237

The balance, hundreds of pieces, are privately held. The majority were commissioned works and many have been passed down through families to subsequent generations. Occasionally, sculptures come up for sale through reputable auction houses.

Chippy's story is organized into the following Chapters:

1. Introduction
2. Early Years
3. Exhibitions
4. Living in Maine
5. Bird Sculpture

6. Artistic Style
7. LYWAM
8. Travel
9. Art Career Overview
10. The Last Decade

## References

- A. Listing of Numbered Sculptures
- B. Listing of Sculpture Without Known Dates
- C. Known Exhibitions
- D. Chronology
- E. Chippy in His Own Words
- F. Bibliography
- G. Woods Used For Sculptures
- H. Bird Species in Sculptures
- I. Museum Holdings

## **Background on Research and Drafting Documents**

In 2012–2013, several friends of Chippy convened to strategize how best to convince a Maine museum to host a retrospective exhibition of his work. Research began, phone calls were made, emails and snail mail letters were sent — to as many people who knew Chippy as we could identify. The goal was to generate interest and enthusiasm for such an exhibit, gather information about specific sculptures, hear stories and recollections about the man, and pull together information for a comprehensive proposal. The group amassed much important information, created an appropriate proposal and approached a few museums, but were unsuccessful in convincing any of them to consider our proposal. After 18 months of collective research, the project team lost momentum and we unofficially disbanded.

Hank Tyler and Nancy Fenton had been part of that original group. Hank subsequently moved to Australia, but the desire to honor Chippy’s legacy and contribution to the wildlife art world remained strong. In 2021, Hank contacted Nancy inquiring if she still had the proposal binder that the group had put together. Nancy had been the unofficial keeper of files and had generated a spreadsheet listing all the known birds with pertinent details as to number, date completed, wood used, and anything noteworthy. She also organized scans of Tom Jones’ and others’ studio photos, various notecards, and other ephemera including information on exhibitions and copies of various articles where Chippy’s work was featured.

For the past 18 months Hank and Nancy have been collaborating to draft narrative text covering his background, early work life, approach to sculpting, artistic style, travels, and exhibitions. Research has continued in many areas, as have interviews and email exchanges with individual owners. We have uncovered even more information and woven it into the text. The efforts will continue in the years ahead, but the text and supporting images are ready.

The Wendell Gilley Museum has stepped forward and offered to host space on the Museum's website dedicated to the life and work of Charles Greenough Chase.

We are indebted to many individuals who loaned their personal collections for scanning so that a comprehensive visual record could be made of Chippy's life's work. Photos and cards were scanned and pertinent information noted. Anecdotal recollections have been recorded and transcribed. Our special thanks to those original Chippy friends who did so much to get the project rolling back in 2012: Ruth Appleyard, Joan Hooker, Deezie Flower, Becky Hotelling, Lucy LaCasse and, in our latest efforts, Katie Pratt, as well as all the owners who shared images of their birds and the details scribed on the base.

Several of the photographs of Chippy's 1940s and 1950s sculptures can be attributed to specific photographers and studios. Information stamped on the back of some black-and-white prints indicate local individuals that Chippy employed at various stages of his career. Photos were made by Ivan Flye of Newcastle, Douglas Photo Shop of Bath, and CORNEL. At some point, Chippy engaged Tom Jones of Brunswick to photograph each new sculpture. It is possible that Jones' earlier shots were black-and-white images; by the later 1960s, everything was shot in color. Where specific information is known, appropriate credit is provided. In those cases where owners have provided images and wish to retain anonymity, we have suggested "Courtesy photograph" be used.

The preparation of this document is a collaboration between Nancy Fenton and Hank Tyler, both of whom knew Chippy very well. Nancy took the lead in research and editing, while Hank focused on drafting text. Our research and writing were undertaken from July 2021 to March 2023.

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1.2

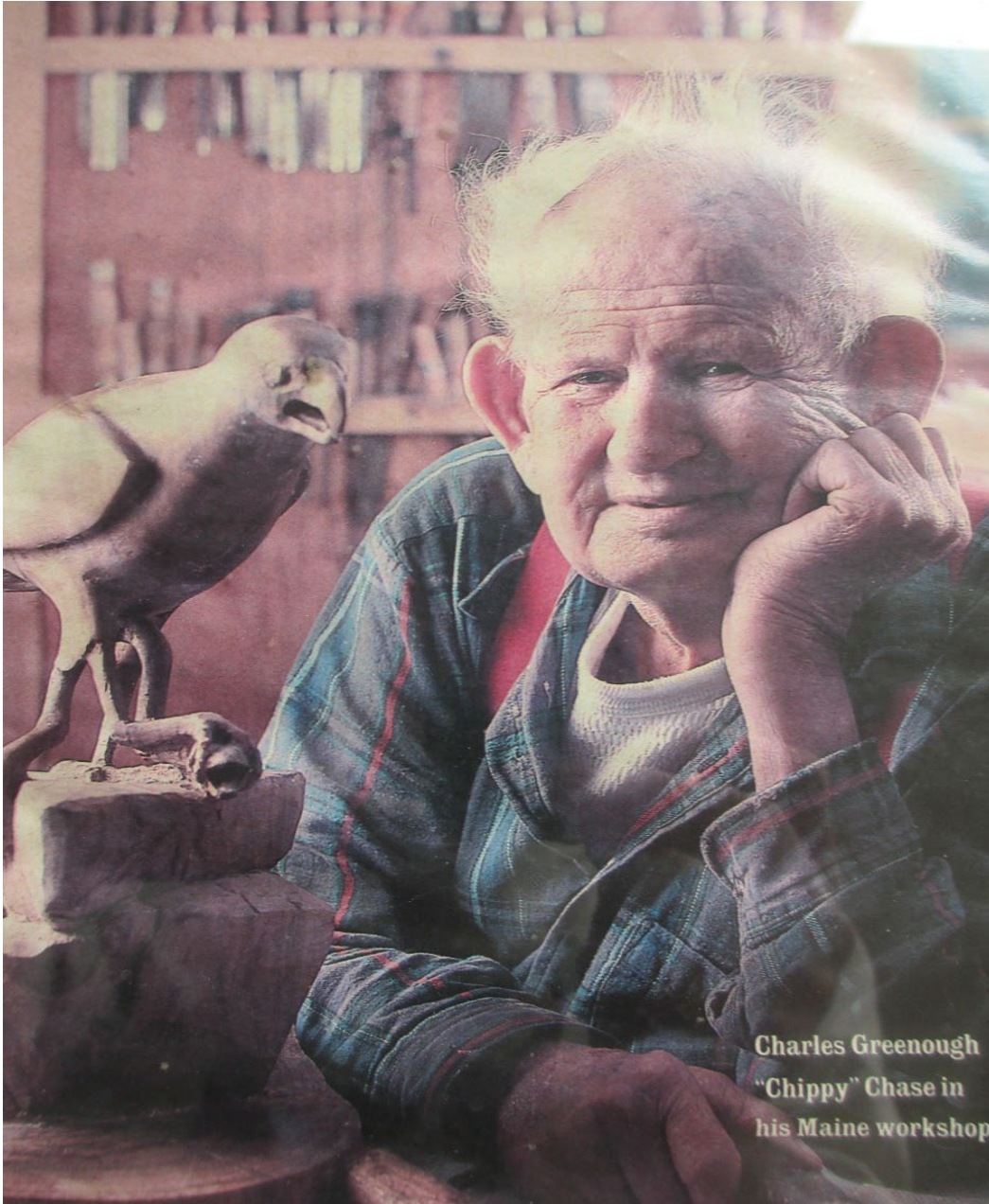
Vulture #342, Black Walnut, 1984 (Tom Jones Photo)



1.3

Great Blue Heron #295, Walnut, 1974

(Courtesy of Robert Stock)



1.4

Chippy Chase at age 85, photographed in his Merepoint workshop in 1995. The hawk sculpture he is working on, Broad-winged Hawk #383, is the last numbered sculpture for which we have a photograph. (Yankee Magazine, September 1995, page 43.)