

## A VISIT WITH JOHNNY HUNDLEY, VTA'S FIRST PRESIDENT



As the Virginia Trappers Association celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I think it's important to reflect on our beginnings. Recently, Linvol Webb and I had the privilege to talk with Johnny Hundley about the formation of the VTA. Johnny was the VTA's first President, but we learned that his role in starting the VTA went well beyond just being its first executive.

In 1965, Johnny communicated with and visited Don Rouanzion of Tennessee. Some folks might remember Don as a trapping supply dealer and Question and Answer Editor of FUR-FISH-GAME Magazine from 1978 when EJ Dailey passed until the early 1980's, when he was succeeded by Tom Miranda. Johnny credits the idea to organize to Don, although at the time Don's idea was to form a Tri-State Trappers Association made up of Virginia, West Virginia, and Tennessee. Don Hunter, who later became a dedicated supporter and director of the West Virginia Trappers Association when it was later formed, was the representative for West Virginia.

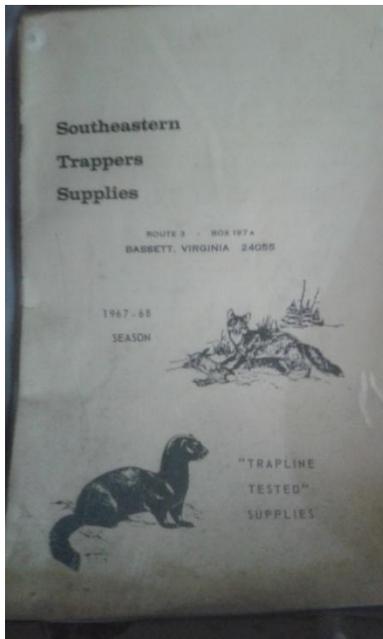
Johnny began his career as a trapper when he was a youngster. He remembers using some of his father's traps in an attempt to catch the varmint that was raiding his family's bee hives. His father wasn't a trapper, but most barns of the day had a few traps hanging in them to take care of barnyard pests. Johnny's first catch was a possum, and he later trapped rabbits and more possums to make money for school and such. By the time he was a junior in high school, Johnny was running longer lines. A first cousin of his had showed him how to trap mink, and by the early 60's, Johnny was running a 100-mile long line for mink, rats, and coons. During this era, Johnny was trapping 40+ mink per season while working a full-time job; and one season he and his brother, Robert, caught over 800 muskrats. It was a different time though, he said; gas was \$.29 a gallon, and a trapper could road trap the bridges un-encumbered. Johnny also trapped foxes for bounty and for fur during season. The bounty during this time was \$1.50/tail. Fur buyers balked at the tail-less skins, but bought them anyway at a reduced price, which was already cheap.

Johnny's involvement in trappers associations began before the VTA came into existence. In 1959, the National Trappers Association was organized. Johnny was an early supporter of the NTA and began attending its meetings and conventions. Earl Renshaw, the founder of the NTA, asked Johnny to help with the elections process. Although he had no official title, Johnny served in the NTA elections as custodian of the returned ballots. A few other states, such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland, had already organized trapper associations. Over the next decade, associations in several other states would be formed.

Surprisingly, the threat of anti-trap legislation proffered by animal-rightist organizations was not a primary motivating factor to form the VTA, as there was very little of that sort of activity during the 1960's. But, there seemed to be a want for better representation amongst trappers nation-wide. As trappers organized themselves into associations, they found they had better influence with their state game commissions. Trappers sought equal standing among other outdoor groups, and to promote trapping and conserve furbearers for future generations. As the animal rights organizations gained momentum in the 1970's, it was indeed fortunate for us that we already some level of trapper organization in the U.S. and several states.

During their visit in 1965, Don Rouanzion and Johnny planned to have an organizational meeting in 1966. They selected Hungry Mother State Park as the location, as it was fairly central to the three states. Johnny had a contact at the VA game commission who provided him a list of the trappers who had bought a license previously. He wrote letters to each of the persons on the list, inviting them to the meeting. On September 4, 1966, about 20 Virginia trappers attended, with only a few from Tennessee and West Virginia being present. Gene Morgan served as the emcee. After some discussion, the attendees decided to forego starting a Tri-State Association, and instead formed the Virginia Trappers Association. The group elected Johnny as the first President, with Gene Morgan elected as Vice President, and Bill Kindervater elected as Secretary/Treasurer. This first crop of officers served one-year terms. Johnny served one term, but both Morgan and Kindervater served the VTA in various capacities for several years to come.

As Johnny's service as the first VTA President came to a close, he launched his trapping supply and fur buying business, Southeastern Trapper Supplies. He had his first catalog printed in 1967. Operating out of his basement at first, Johnny's business grew steadily. As the wild fur market increased, so did his operation. Through the 70's and 80's, he upsized his facilities three times and employed up to 11 people. For a time, he kept foxes for urine collection. During the state's fox trapping program for rabies containment, Johnny sold urine and other supplies to the state trappers, including the noted trapper, Charles Dobbins.



Johnny's first catalog, 1967-68

In addition to urine, some of the products Johnny offered early on included Johnny Thorpe's lures and Virginia trapper DeCasper Harris's lures. Stanley Hawbaker required a substantial minimum order that, at the time, was not feasible for Johnny to place. In 1968, Johnny introduced Blue Ridge Lures, formulated by legendary Virginia trapper Bill Kindervater. By his fourth year, his volume of sales had increased to the point that he was able to stock Hawbaker's lures. Today, he still sells the Blue Ridge and Hawbaker's lures and several other lure brands, his special formula trap waxes, and his Dixietan tanning products which have been on the market for 45 years now. At age 76, Johnny still traps some each year and continues to hunt and dig ginseng.

Johnny has seen the fur business boom and bust several times over the years, but his support for the VTA has never wavered. His donations to the VTA's annual convention auctions have included everything from lures, baits, and urine to guns and bows. Johnny says he is still proud to be a VTA Life member, and he thinks the VTA is going in the right direction. He is especially pleased with the kid's programs, trapper training efforts, and the fur handling demonstrations.

So as you take in the convention and celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I encourage you to take a moment to visit Johnny at his booth and say "Thank you" for his initiative in getting the VTA organized and for his continuous support for 50 years.

~Submitted by Norm Mullins