

# EAGLE

## BRAND

### You can't have too many eagles

An interview with Preston Cook

Eileen Hanson, Director of Public Relations

Right now, the National Eagle Center has a unique opportunity to expand our educational themes and enhance the visitor experience. We're currently planning an expansion to accommodate the arrival and permanent exhibition of the Preston Cook Collection.

This fascinating collection includes eagles in military and government uses, fine art, ornithological art, US history and pop culture; everything from an original Andy Warhol to US military uniform buttons featuring an eagle.

America has a special relationship with this majestic bird and this collection will help the National Eagle Center to explore the eagle in imagery and

symbolism. To learn more about the collection and its importance, we sat down with collector Preston Cook.

***"Eagles are bold, independent and strong, just like the nation they represent."***

**How did you start collecting eagles?**

Six words, "you can't have too many eagles", in the 1965 movie, *A Thousand Clowns* were the start of it all. I was already a collector, but when I heard those words I decided to focus my collecting on eagles. In the 40+ years I have been collecting,



The Eagle Brand fruit box label (top) is just one example of the thousands of commercial uses of the eagle. Bellamy Eagle (inset) Images courtesy of Preston Cook.

I've amassed more than 20,000 items ranging from art, military and government uses, pop culture, commercial uses, and fine art. It documents the history of the use of the eagle as an American symbol.

**What are some of the most prominent pieces in your collection?**

Maybe the most recognizable piece in popular culture would be the

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1983 Andy Warhol print of a bald eagle from his Endangered Species series. In the art world, one of the most prominent pieces would be the Bellamy eagle. Originally a carver of decorative items for ships, John Haley Bellamy became well-known for his eagle carvings. (see photo, front page) I also recently acquired the painting, *Death of a Warrior*, by Robert Havell Jr., a painter of the Hudson River School, who engraved much of [naturalist and artist John James] Audubon's work.

My collection is probably the most comprehensive collection of ornithological art featuring eagles. I have the original 1830's Audubon prints of both the bald eagle and the golden eagle.

### Why do you think eagles are such an important symbol?

From the first time the eagle appeared on the Great Seal in 1782, they have held an important place in American culture. Early on, eagles were used more commonly than the flag. The eagle is easily identifiable and represents who we are as a country. Eagles are bold, independent and strong, just like the nation they represent.

### What's one story your collection can tell?

Probably the biggest category in my collection is eagles in military history. From pre-Civil War uniform buttons to war posters from World War II, the eagle is a very prominent symbol in American military culture.

But there are so many areas of interest. My collection includes items in 65 categories. For example, I have a whole collection of children's books featuring the eagle. I also have a collection of maps featuring eagle place names. More than 2,000 places in the U.S. have 'eagle' in the name. The eagle has been widely used in commerce and advertising, on

historic cigar labels, fruit labels, brands and logos.

### Why did you choose the National Eagle Center?

I first visited here more than twelve years ago. I heard there was an 'eagle place' in Minnesota, so I came out for visit. At that time, the National Eagle Center was just a tiny storefront on Main St. And over the years, I've stayed in touch. I've visited almost every year since then, and I've seen [the National Eagle Center] grow.

I knew that eventually I wanted the collection to have a home some place where people could see it and learn more about the eagle in American history.

I realized there was no museum dedicated to the eagle. There's the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia, telling the story of the American flag. But, there's

no place focused on the eagle as an American symbol.

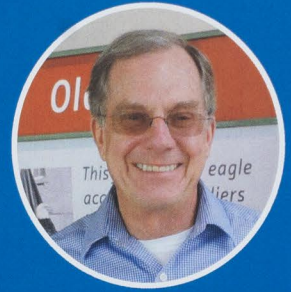
When I would hear about an 'eagle place', I'd get on a plane and go visit. I was on the Board of an eagle organization in Alaska, and I considered the American Eagle Foundation at Dollywood in Tennessee. But neither of these places had the visitors or the educational focus that the National Eagle Center has. I even considered starting a museum in Philadelphia or Washington DC.

Ultimately, I saw that at the National Eagle Center was the right fit. I'm originally from the Midwest and I felt welcomed and comfortable in Wabasha. This is the place that people can see and appreciate this collection, and learn about eagles.



Preston Cook (at left), Jim Stokes and former NEC Director Marybeth Garrigan with Harriet and Angel at the beach. NEC photo, circa 2005

## Preston Cook



An avid collector of all things American "eagle," Preston Cook has assembled an unparalleled and inspiring collection of more than 20,000 items in sixty-five categories relating to the eagle in American history and culture.

Cook has served on the Board of Directors of the American Bald Eagle Foundation (Haines, AK), the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and numerous governmental, non-profit and civic organizations.

Preston Cook and his wife Donna are members of the National Eagle Center's Primary Feather Circle. He is a lifetime member of the International Federation of Fly Fishers and Trout Unlimited. He is also a member of the Sons of the American Revolution.

Originally from the Chicago area, Preston spent much of the last 45 years in the San Francisco Bay area. He and his wife Donna recently moved to Wabasha, MN.



The Preston Cook Collection recently moved from California to Minnesota. Image provided by Preston Cook



# Eagles are everywhere!

Rolf Thompson, Executive Director



Every day visitors to the National Eagle Center are inspired and educated by the exhibits, programs, and of course, by our live eagle “ambassadors.”

And, every day, we can be treated to amazing displays in the wild right out our windows. Just today, an excited employee burst into the office to call us to the windows to see a juvenile bald eagle in the river that had latched onto a fish too big to fly off with. After a few minutes of “swimming” and wrestling with the fish, we watched the young bird release its grasp (and give up its catch!), and fly to a tree to recover. Simply thrilling!

Look around you. Depictions of eagles are everywhere. Look at the dollar bill in your wallet, at US corporate logos, at high school, college and professional sports mascots, at the names of lakes, rivers, streets and towns. The American Great Seal, the Presidential Seal, flags of the US Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force. Once you look, you can’t stop finding eagles.

Why are eagles so endlessly interesting and inspiring? In addition to

the excitement of seeing live eagles, Americans continue to depict eagles in art, memorabilia, and decoration. Why are eagles such a powerful symbol for Americans?

The Preston Cook Collection offers incredible opportunities for National Eagle Center visitors to learn about and be inspired by the eagle in American life, history, and culture. We envision the Collection allowing us to educate about eagles in new and unprecedented ways. For example, an exhibit exploring how the eagle has been used by the US military to inspire, motivate and unify. Or, how the image of the eagle has been used in commercial advertising and brands. The opportunities for engaging exhibits and experiences are almost limitless.

We are excited by the potential of the Preston Cook Collection to expand the National Eagle Center experience and mission impact.

And we are grateful to Preston Cook for his generosity, passion for eagles, and his desire to share the Collection with National Eagle Center visitors.



The newest member of the team!

## The newest member of the team!

Since arriving here in December, the newest eagle ambassador has been busy learning! He mastered some of the necessary early steps; he now receives daily eyedrops as part of his care and management. (A malformation of his eye sockets means that he will require on-going care and cannot be released to the wild.) He’s learned how to step on the scale to get weighed, also something we need him to be able to do to provide him the care he needs.

In the next few months, he’ll continue to work on getting comfortable working with our handlers and meeting new people. So far he’s doing great and we’re still hoping for a debut sometime this year. We’ll keep you posted!

### What’s his name?

In January, we asked members, visitors and friends to submit suggestions to name the newest member of the team. We received more than 250 suggestions!

We’ve narrowed the field down to five choices that meet our criteria and that we think would be a great fit. But we’d like **you** to help choose his name!

Starting during **Bald Eagle Days** (June 16 -18, see back), we’ll give you the chance to vote for your favorite! If you visit in person, you’ll be able to cast your vote here at the National Eagle Center.

As members, you’ll also have the opportunity to vote online. Look for a members-only email in June with details on how you can cast your vote!

Eagles were a common symbol on early American cigar box labels like this one (below). Many companies still use the image of the eagle to identify their brand. Image provided by Preston Cook

