

# Something's Hatchin', Hans Find Plaster Model of Ugly Duckling

By MICHAEL McGOVERN

Holden Caulfield wondered 22 years ago, in J. D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," where a duck goes when the lake freezes in Central Park.

Park personnel and one assigned police detective have been tramping along the violent, vandalized paths of the old park wondering the same thing and have all but given up their search for Hans Christian Andersen's Ugly Duckling, taken from its granite base last week for the third and last time in its 17 years of existence.

Vandals in two earlier thefts in the last eight years merely yanked free the cast-bronze duckling, about 2 feet high and about 80 pounds, and abandoned it under a nearby bush or tree.

"This time it's really gone," Joseph Bresnan, Parks Department director of monuments, said ruefully. "I searched for it myself and I couldn't find it."

So the Parks Department, with a bit of assistance, found Nellie Lober, widow of the duckling's sculptor, Georg Lober, who died in 1961.

## She Has Original Model

"I have the original plaster model," Mrs. Lober said with excitement in a phone interview yesterday from her Fair Haven, N.J., home. "and I can arrange to have it done again when I'm told (by the Parks Department) to do so."

Mrs. Lober noted that she holds the copyright on the duckling and the nine-foot-tall statue of Andersen, both of which were done jointly by her husband and the late architect Otto F. Langmann.

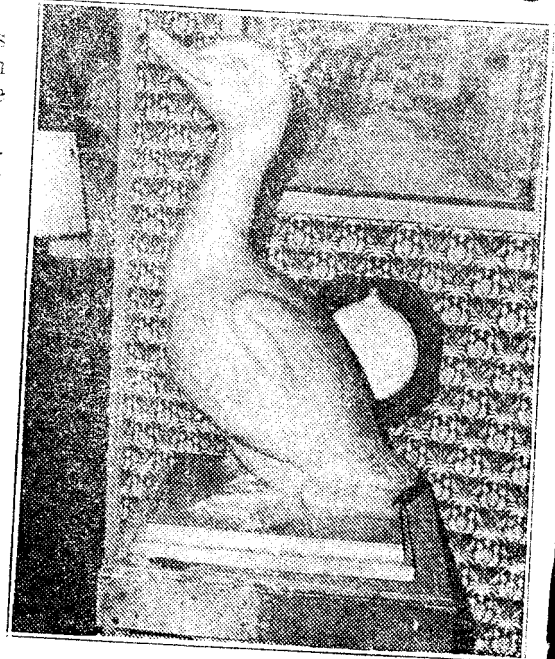
The statue of the Danish storyteller, with the duckling at its feet, was installed in 1956 on the west bank of Conservatory Water, the model-sailboat lake near Fifth Ave. and 74th St. Since then, thousands of little hands and knees polished the duckling to a coppery shine, especially on Saturdays when children gathered there to hear one of the city's official storytellers read Andersen's fairy tales.

## Would Pay for Replacement

Since its disappearance Aug. 16, a Fifth Ave. socialite volunteered to pay for the duckling's replacement, and a sculptor offered to replace the duck.

Mrs. Dorothy Strelsin, whose Fifth Ave. apartment overlooks the Andersen statue, said "My living room faces the little pool. I watch the children playing near the statue and I want to see that dear little duck back where it belongs. I know the kids miss it, and it just has to be replaced. We'll see that it gets back."

Mattie Berhang, a sculptor with a studio in Long Island City, made the offer to create a



NEWS photo by Harry Hamburg  
Original plaster model of duckling from which new statue can be cast.

new duckling, but that was before the parks officials found that the original sculptor's widow had the cast.

Mrs. Lober said she would have the duckling recast by the original makers, the Modern Art Foundry, operated in Long Island City by the brothers, Robert and John Spring.

Like the park authorities, Mrs. Lober wondered why anyone should steal the duckling.

"I don't like it being thrown around," she said in a hurt tone. "What do they do with it after they take it? Sell it for bronze scrap? Do you suppose they'd do that? Isn't that ridiculous?"

## Made to Be Climbed Over

Speaking of her husband, she added "He made the duckling and the statue for children to climb all over—there's not a single piece of the statue that would harm a child, not one sharp place on it. He did it with children in mind."

The Andersen story is about a little boy, raised as a duckling and persecuted for his ugliness. It grows to be not a duck but a beautiful swan. Andersen had an unhappy childhood and was a tall, awkward, poor man. He was a child's prophet that he was destined to become.