

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 26, 2007

Trapshooting as a Social Sport: By social, I do not mean accepted by high society but rather a prevalent and popular pastime, much as golf is today. In the 1930s and 1940s, it is true that it was considered an expensive sport, and only the affluent could afford to shoot as much as they would like. Today there are far more registered trapshooters than in the first half of the 20th century, as evidenced by the fact that the national championships, now held annually in southern Illinois, require 100 traps or fields, compared to 22 at Vandalia, Ohio, in the earlier period. In this area, however, many don't even know what trapshooting is; some have heard of skeet, which is very slightly similar. As has been mentioned in earlier editions of the *Weekly News*, the annual tournaments at Yorklyn Gun Club were the largest in the country next to the national championships in the 1930s.

Anything occupying our leisure time in this country is highly contagious. If our friends and neighbors like something, we like the same thing. Spectator sports have become a huge pastime, promoted by our addiction to television. Tailgating at football games has a little to do with the love of football but not to the extent that it is a popular social occasion. So it was with the rise and fall of trapshooting as a socially popular thing to do.

The spectacular shooting of Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley in the late 19th century brought glass ball and clay target shooting to the attention of many. The DuPont Company and its junior competitor, the Hercules Powder Company, put Wilmington on the map as the headquarters for the manufacture of sporting gunpowder. DuPont expanded in the purchase of the Parker Gun Company and the Remington Arms Company, which soon acquired the Peters Cartridge Company. The DuPont-Remington professionals who worked for some branch of their large guns-and-ammunition empire were indispensable to gun clubs everywhere. Hercules also had perhaps 20 men from its Sporting Powder Division in all sections of the country, helping gun clubs manage their shoots and demonstrating the superiority of Hercules E.C. and Hercules Red Dot powder. A shooter could buy any brand of ammunition loaded with either DuPont or Hercules powder. He always favored that represented by his friendly professional (now referred to as an Industry Rep). Although the Yorklyn Gun Club, owned by my father, had no direct connection with either DuPont or Hercules, its close proximity to Wilmington, the trapshooting capital of the world, was very convenient.

Who were those who liked trapshooting as a social activity in the 1930s and early '40s? As an example, while Pierre du Pont was not a shooter, many of his high-level personnel at Longwood were. He allowed them to establish the Longwood Gun Club on the west side of the gardens property, where there were two traps. Longwood was one of the teams in the Penn-Del Twilight League for many years. Charles Mason, head chauffeur, and Douglas Gilpin, who managed all the farming operations for Mr. du Pont, were serious registered trapshooters seen at all the big eastern tournaments. Then there were Malcolm Farquhar, Ben Myers, Johnny Johnson, Jack Shoemaker, and Jack Griel, all Longwood senior employees. Mason had a daughter Ann who became an excellent shooter, and her brother, Charles (III), worked for Hercules in the Midwest and was one of the best professionals in the country. To show how contagious trapshooting was (although it did not all start with Longwood), the shooting community around Kennett Square included William S. Worrall, the undertaker; William N. Worrall, the builder; Walter M. Grace, Burgess of Kennett Square; Ted Nilan; Tom Riale; Bill Swayne; Bill Seal; State Senator George B. Scarlett; Ralph Schuibbeo, Sr. and Jr.; Joe Whiteside; Edgar Carozzo; Harry Meredith; Dave Burton; Frank M. Palmer; and F. Graff Sinclair, to name some of them. West Chester had an active shooting community, as did Avondale, West Grove and Oxford, and there were even several shooters in tiny Yorklyn and Hockessin, each with a population of about 400. The Yorklyn Gun Club (my father and later myself) played no small part in promoting the sport in this area.

In the few trapshooting articles appearing in earlier editions of the *Weekly News*, I've skirted around the prowess of my father and me as competitive shooters. I remember the good scores and forget the poor ones. It will sound like an ego trip, but I'll touch on it someday, telling you just how good and how bad we were.