

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, Marh 21, 2011

Stevenson Morris Crothers (ca. 1887–ca. 1978): In the trapshooting world of the 1920s and 1930s, there was no one better than Steve Crothers, especially on 16-yard (single) targets. He was not a “natural shot” but had to work at it. Even when young, he wore eyeglasses, but he dominated shooting in the East. Not only was he a top shot, but he *loved* to shoot, unlike some Class AA shooters of the period who competed for the money they could make (or thought they could). The “money shooters” participated only in the big tournaments, while Crothers, in addition to attending several large tournaments each year, shot every Saturday at either Roxborough or Quaker City, the two gun clubs in the Philadelphia area, where he almost always won the shoot with 99 or 100 straight in the main 16-yard event.

Steve's address was simply “Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania” or “Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia.” Although this sounds like a highly appealing suburban address, Steve was a gentleman farmer who liked farmwork, and pitching hay and other strenuous activities kept him in top physical condition. How large his farm was in Chestnut Hill I don't know, but I'm sure that land has been developed today.

Starting in 1921, Steve Crothers won the Pennsylvania State Championship 14 of the next 21 years. In his final win in 1941 at the Bradford Gun Club near the New York state line, he and his archrival, Walter Beaver of Berwyn (later Conshohocken), tied with a score of 199 out of 200. As everyone in attendance watched the shoot-off between the two, Steve broke a string of seven more 25-straights, with Beaver finally missing in the seventh frame.

At Yorklyn, Steve Crothers dominated at the shoots from the early 1920s until the mid-1930s. Starting in 1925, he won the Marshall Marathon 500-target championship five of eight years, with his string of wins ending in 1932. In 1931, he broke the unheard-of score of 499 to win the event and went on for the next two days (175 targets each day) to miss only two more, totaling 847 out of 850. The year before he had posted an average of well over 99% on the first 1,000 registered targets he shot that season. In later years, it was said that ammunition of the early 1930s was not that consistent, and the early clay target traps threw uneven targets, but these things presented a welcome challenge to Steve Crothers, and indeed he dominated.

Also unlike other shooters, he never had an excuse but always blamed himself for missing a target. In his later years with his eyesight failing, he still loved to shoot but seldom won. With every target he missed, and there were a few, you could see him burning up inside, mad at himself for letting the target get away. At the Delaware State Shoot in 1947, the first time I had shot in the Delaware championship since World War II, I was in the same five-man squad with Steve Crothers for the 100-target program. That in itself was an honor, but when I broke 100 straight to win the championship that day, there was no one more pleased to congratulate me than Steve Crothers (who broke 95). My father was not on the grounds when we shot, but he came in later, and Steve was the first to look him up and tell him of my big win. It was a great honor to know him and count him as a friend.