

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 7, 2017

Charles W. Hymer (1880-1981): Since this week each year was the big trapshooting week on Gun Club Hill, I take the liberty of telling another trapshooting story. Soon after the Hercules Powder Company was spun off from DuPont before 1920, the new company established its Sporting Powder Division, and Charlie Hymer, a native of Indiana, became its first manager. From his office in the Delaware Trust Building in Wilmington, he oversaw the promotion of Hercules Powder to the trapshooting community nationwide. Across the country he had about 8 prominent trapshooters, hired by Hercules, reporting to him. Some, such as Johnny Jahn of Spirit Lake, Iowa, were hired because of their expertise at the traps. Some, such as Arthur Cuscaden of Tampa, Florida, were hired because they knew how to entertain the right people and thereby get them to use and promote Hercules Powder. Some, such as Henry Winchester of Wilmington, were hired to cashier many of the registered shoots in the East, a great service Hercules provided to the respective gun clubs. In addition, there were Norman Wright of Wilmington, J. R. "Hink" Hinkle of Corsicana, Texas, a man whose name I forget in Salt Lake City, and two or three others. All answered to Charlie Hymer, and most visited the home office in Wilmington at least once a year.

Everyone liked Charlie Hymer. He was equally popular with the trapshooting community and with those who worked for him. He took up trapshooting and attended many of the local shoots and tournaments. He enjoyed the sport but he was never a good shot, averaging about 85%. Like most shooters, however, he would occasionally have a good day, and I remember his breaking 50 straight to tie for high on opening day at the Atlantic Indians tournament at Shawnee-on-the-Delaware in the late 1930s.

When I started shooting, I averaged less than 80%, but by 1938 I was averaging 85%, and Mr. Hymer and I would enjoy competing against each other. We were both shooting in the "Auburn Special" at Yorklyn on August 5, 1938 (my father's 53rd birthday), a 200-target event, where the first 100 was completed before lunch and the second 100 in the afternoon. As I entered the dining room at the gun club for lunch with my father, Charlie Hymer was eating at one of the tables, and, with a smile on his face, he told me he had beaten me this time with a score of 94. I replied that I had also broken 94. To this, he said "Well, I would have beaten you, but I missed my 99th target." I told him I would have beaten him, but I missed my 100th. I broke 90 in the afternoon, and I think he did about the same.

With the sporting powder division being shut down during World War II, Mr. Hymer had responsible war-related jobs with Hercules at the home office. He retired at war's end in 1945 or '46, and returned to Indiana, where he lived until his death at age 101. The Hercules Sporting Powder Division continued under the leadership of Henry N. Marsh, until a non-branding rule in the early 1950s eliminated the requirement of manufacturers of ammunition to label the powder contained in their shells. Since purchasers of ammunition no longer knew what brand of powder they were using, there was no point in Hercules continuing a sporting powder division (DuPont had phased out its division earlier since it advertised through its ownership of the Remington Arms Company). Despite this, Hercules employed a long-time shooter, A. W. "Wes" Buchanan, into the 1980s, and Wes attended and assisted with many of the shoots in Delaware and neighboring states, as Henry Winchester and Norman Wright had done before him.

The Delaware Trapshooting Hall of Fame had been established in 1976, and five outstanding Delaware shooters, four of them deceased (my father was one), were inducted the first year. In 1979, the committee decided to induct several well-known Delaware Industry Representatives (previously called "professionals") into the Hall of Fame. This was especially important because the gun and ammunition manufacturers ran registered trapshooting until the amateurs took over in 1924, and Wilmington, because of DuPont and Hercules, was at the center of rules, records, and decisions regarding the sport. Charlie Hymer joined Ted Doremus, Lloyd Lewis, and Jack Guenveur of DuPont, John Otterson and E. S. Richards of Remington, and L. R. "Beach" Beauchamp of Winchester in this illustrious group. Four more "pros" had been inducted previously: Cap Grier, Henry Winchester, Norman Wright, and George Cottrell.

In 1979, Charlie Hymer was 99 years of age, and his daughter brought him from Indiana to attend the induction ceremonies at the Coral Reef Restaurant in Little Creek. He enjoyed visiting with his former trapshooting friends, and all of us very much enjoyed seeing him one last time.