

April 10, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

99% of registered trapshooters used 12-gauge "trap guns", and corresponding ammunition. The guns changed little while I was in the sport, 1934-1950, but rules for ammunition changed slightly. By 1934, no black powder was used for sporting powder; it was all "smokeless" powder. The gun club at Yorklyn, like all such clubs, needed to cater to the shooters' needs.

Trap guns varied from field guns in that most trap guns had ventilated ribs which were supposed to eliminate heat waves from the barrel distracting the shooter on a hot day, larger wooden grips surrounding the barrel to prevent burned fingers, and straighter stocks (the straighter a stock was, the less distance there was from the top or "comb" of the stock to a straight line drawn along the rib backward from the sights). Field guns, on the other hand, usually had crookeder stocks (or more "drop"), no ventilated ribs, and a smaller grip around the barrel or barrels. Double barreled trap guns (either side-by-side or over-and-under) were equipped with single triggers for doubles shooting (a shooter shot at two targets at a time). Single guns (breach loaded with one barrel), double guns (side-by-side barrels), over and unders (one barrel on top of the other), and pump guns (a single barrel that could be used for one or two shots, the latter needed for double target shooting) were equally popular. Although most large tournaments allowed gun salesmen, gunsmiths, and engravers to operate on the grounds, the club assumed no responsibility for the guns used.

At most tournaments or "shoots", competitors could bring their own ammunition or buy it at the club. To satisfy most needs, several brands were offered. In the mid-1930's, most brands had a "standard shell" and a "superior shell". Remington had Shur Shot and Nitro Club, Peters had Trap Load and Target, Winchester had Ranger and Repeater, Western had Xpert and Field, and there were the lesser-used brands, Federal and U.S. Climax being among them. The higher-priced shells sold for 65 cents, and the standard for 50 cents (for 25 shells). The standard trap load was 3 drams of powder and 1-1/4 ounces of shot, usually #7-1/2 shot, although #8 was becoming popular. For handicap shooting, where the best shooters stood farthest from the trap, heavier loads were allowed, and copperized shot was popular for a short time until it was outlawed. Some shooters who were bothered by the gun's recoil preferred "light loads", usually 2-3/4 drams of powder and 1-1/8 ounces of shot. On a calm day, nothing more was needed. A shooter also had his choice of gunpowder, the main manufacturers being duPont and Hercules, and most ammunition brands were loaded with both. The choice was not so much which powder you liked, but which shooting salesman you liked. Both powder and the companies' representatives were of top quality, in my opinion.

By 1937, ammunition manufacturers had eliminated two grades of trap shells, and sought to make their ammunition more reliable with new crimps to hold in the shot which supposedly eliminated the sealing wad that would occasionally distort the shot's path to the target (both Steve Crothers in 1931 and Joe Hiestand in 1935 won the "Marathon" at Yorklyn with 499 out of 500 with the old wads!). In 1939, the Amateur Trapshooting Association mandated that a maximum of 1-1/8 ounces of shot could be used for registered trapshooting. From that time on, shells were loaded with either 3 drams or 2-3/4 drams of powder. Back-yardage shooters complained that they could not win handicap events with this limit, but they soon got much better, and in the 1950's the maximum distance from the trap was increased from 25 yards to 27 yards, and the best shooters are still winning. (This story may have a sequel in a few weeks).

Bill Schwoebel is calling a general volunteers' meeting for this Thursday, April 13, at 7:30 in the Museum. We hope all of you can attend. The main purpose is to bring all volunteers up-to-date on activities of the Board of Directors and its committees, and to entertain questions you may have which we hope can be answered. We can also explain what Bob Reilly, our Executive Director, has accomplished during his first two months on the job. We want to know how he can help you more and where you think he should concentrate his efforts. Bob is away this week and will not be present, so feel free to express yourselves. He has worked with my computer in the house, not ideal for either of us, but a new computer is ordered at a

bargain price from Hewlett-Packard (through Stan Wilcox and a client of his who works for H-P), and the new office over the garage should be available by early May. Several Board members will be with us to give brief reports.

The two Packards and the Popcorn Machine that went to Hagley last Wednesday were a big hit with Hagley volunteers on their appreciation day. Thanks to Jerry Novak, Alan Berry, Emil Christofano, Ed Hoffmeister, Dan Muir, John McCoy, Mike Downs and Carol Bernard for making this possible. On April 22, our '22 Stanley Model 740 is due to go to Winterthur for the first of several "Cars on a famous American Estate" days. On Sunday, the 23rd, a small group from the Chester Springs Antique Auto Club plans to visit Auburn Heights, but it will be "museum only" with no rides operating. A week later (April 30), our first 2006 charter event takes place with a visit from the Wilmington Friends School Alumni Association, the third or fourth time they have been with us in as many years. About 100 people are expected and we will run one train, the Mountain Wagon, the electric trains, and the museum will be open.

The Events Committee is concentrating on our June 3-4 weekend, and Dale and Ted Simpkins have agreed to chair the event with advice and assistance from Chuck Erikson. Of utmost importance is our promotion of this event, and we hope to get a team of 4 or 5 volunteers who will spend time in the two weeks prior to the weekend distributing literature, making news contacts, and promoting our special theme "Old Fashioned Fun". We hope to have a hands-on play area for small children, appropriate to our attractions here. Bob Reilly has prepared a flyer to be circulated for group business on our public weekends; it offers a 20% discount for groups of 25 or more. We need a list or lists of appropriate places or clubs where we can send these flyers.

Rob Robison reports that work is progressing on the Model 735, and the boiler is ready to be placed in the car. The burner is finished, thanks mostly to Walter Higgins, but there are still many holes in the grate that need to be poked out. The Model 725 is ready to be fired up, as Jerry Lucas, Butch Cannard, and others put the burner in place last Thursday and plastered it up. I must get busy and order the new insulation we will need for both cars. M & P metal fabricators in Kennett Square think they can solder the tank from the Model 71 and make a good job, so it is at their shop. We should hear this week from Bob Barrett that the brake "kits" are ready for the 735 and the Model EX, and we may have to send a currier part way to Buffalo to pick them up. Using Dale Simpkins' pressure washer, Anne Cleary has cleaned up the R.R. trestle and made a big improvement. Track workers, led by Bill Schwoebel and Steve Jensen, have had good help in cleaning up, repairing, and leveling the track. Thanks, all! Willard Robinson and Chuck Erikson continue their plodding work in the shop, repairing needle valves and sorting tools, parts and supplies respectively. Rob Robison is now assembling material for the April "Herald" and most of his writers have submitted their articles. It is due out by the end of the month.

Things are about to get much busier- it is an exciting time of year- so look for developments. Tom