

March 26, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

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 1930's and '40's", 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, OH, 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 1930's.

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 1930's and early '40's? As an example, while Pierre duPont 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. duPont, 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 female shooter, and her brother, Charles (III), worked for Hercules in the mid-west 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 "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.

A major improvement was made in the '32 Packard last week when Emil Christofano, Jerry Novak, and George Barczewski made a 14-hour day and took the car to Borla-East in Lebanon, NJ, for the installation of a new and correct stainless exhaust system. Rob and Chevonne Robison drove it to a Hospice benefit at Harry's Savoy Grille on Naamans Road yesterday and all went very well. Thanks to all! Our work projects moved along well with Art Sybell heading a painting crew to prime and paint the wooden railroad cars, both evenings and on Saturday. Steve Jensen and Anne Cleary have the locomotive painting about finished, too. Steve Bryce and Kelly Williams got their feet wet in firing the Model K with its 3-nozzle burner. It's doing better all the time. Richard Bernard and helpers Joe Boxler, Ted Simpkins, and Art Wallace worked on the dash-gauge glass and pulled off the rear aluminum case on the Model 78, in preparation for sealing some leaks, water and oil. We plan to put this car on our grease rack for easier access to the under-side. Dale Simpkins re-installed the water column and 3-tube indicator on the Mountain Wagon, and has almost completed the new insulation on boiler and hood. Jerry Lucas adjusted the reverse linkage on the 607, and Bill Schwoebel, Steve Bryce and Art Wallace installed the rebuilt "kidney gauge" on the 735, after Bill had re-magnetized the mechanism under the dial indicator. The Model 76 is piped up and the boiler insulated, Bill Rule rebuilt the safety valve, and it's ready to go except for the water tank, which was removed for a soldering repair. One-half the floor area in the garage has been painted, and we'll keep cars off until April 2 or thereabouts.

Last Wednesday, March 21, ten members attended the Friends Forum at the new Blue Ball Barn and found it interesting and informative. Richard Bernard used our 5 minutes to describe the activities of FAHP and did a very good job. Also in attendance were Art Wallace, Steve Bryce, Cam Yorkston, Rob Robison, Mark Hopkins, Mike Ciosek, John Iwasyk, Chazz Salkin and myself. Rose Ann intends to organize a preparation and painting crew to paint 2/3 of the museum floor, half of it at a time (we

don't plan to paint the side with the special exhibits this year). It is hoped that the preparation will begin this Thursday. Roughly a week's time must pass after painting before cars can be placed on the new surface. A "new" Stanley project can be to check the hydraulic brake system on the Stanleys so equipped: The H-5, the K, the 735, the 87, the 76, the 71, and the Mountain Wagon (Model 820) all have Barrett hydraulic brakes. Check reservoirs, hoses, and lines, making sure there are no leaks. Chevonne Robison wants to get the Ladies' Room painted within the next couple of weeks, and I should have the water on in about a week. It will soon be time for track work to prepare the Auburn Valley for its 2007 operation.

Membership renewals are rolling in; about half our members have already renewed. If you first joined after October 1, 2006, you were not solicited for membership, as yours is good for the remainder of this year (until March 31, 2008). If you were solicited and have not yet renewed, however, it is important that you do so, as a questionnaire accompanies your new membership card, asking if and to what extent you want to participate in the Eastern Steam Car Tour here June 17-22. Those 35 or so members who joined between October, 2006, and March, 2007, will also be receiving this questionnaire. It will be a great experience if you can take the time off to be a part of it, for one day, or for all five days.

Tomorrow night, March 27, at 5:30, the Steam Car Tour Committee meets over pizza in the front hall at Auburn Heights. It is hoped the meeting will terminate by 7:00. On Thursday, March 29, Peter Parlett has called a meeting of the Education Committee at 7:00 P.M., which will be in the FAHP office. The following Tuesday, April 3, the Events Committee will meet at 7:30, probably in the office. It is getting busy around Auburn Heights. Tom