

APRIL 27, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Philadelphia's Two Gun Clubs (Trapshooting) and Stevenson M. Crothers: In the years leading up to World War II, and for many years thereafter, the Philadelphia area had two well-run Gun Clubs, Roxborough and Quaker City. The Roxborough club was just off Ridge Avenue near the Water Works, probably 8 miles east of Norristown, and Quaker City was next to a prison near Holmesburg Junction, about two miles upstream from the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge over the Delaware River. On average, my father and I would attend a shoot at Roxborough about 3 times annually, and at Quaker City about twice annually. Through a cooperative arrangement, one club would have shoots on the first and third Saturdays of each month, and the other on the second and fourth. About once a month one or the other would hold a "Registered" shoot, which meant that the scores would be included in the official records of the Amateur Trapshooting Association of America.

Clubs all over Pennsylvania would bid for the State Championship Tournament; Quaker City hosted it in 1934 and Roxborough in 1940. I was too young to attend the first, but I remember well the '40 tournament at Roxborough. My father and I attended for 3 of the 4 days. On a windy preliminary day, I won Class B with 139 x 150, and the next day broke 190 x 200 in the State Championship event (anyone could shoot, but only Pennsylvania residents were eligible to win the State championship). The wind kept the scores low, and Steve Crothers of Chestnut Hill, who won the State Championship 14 out of 21 times between 1921 and 1941, prevailed with a score of 194, winning a shoot-off with Howard Nice of Abington.

My father shot over 60,000 registered targets between 1924 and 1950, but he had only a few winning scores. About 1935 at Roxborough, however, he won a 50-target handicap event with 50 straight from 20 yards, and at Quaker City in 1939, he won the handicap with 25 straight from 21 yards and the doubles with 24 x 24, being perfect in both short races. Most Wilmington-area shooters, going to Roxborough or Quaker City, would go through Philadelphia to get there, but not my father. He hated to drive in cities. For our Roxborough trip, we would take Route 202 to Norristown, then work our way east to pick up Ridge Avenue and continue to the vicinity of the Club. To get to Quaker City, we would usually cross the Chester-Bridgeport Ferry, drive up the New Jersey side of the river past the "Airport Circle" outside Camden, and cross back over the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge.

What brought all this to mind was my remembrance of April 26, 1941, a Saturday when my father and I went to a registered shoot at Quaker City. The great Steve Crothers, standing behind our squad as we shot the third 25-target event, congratulated me on my 25 straight as we finished that round (I broke 96 x 100). Less than 2 months later Steve won his 14th and last State Championship at Bradford with 199 x 200, and 175 straight in seven shoot-offs with Walter Beaver of Conshohocken. Somewhat beyond his prime, he shot in my squad at the Delaware State Shoot in 1947, when I broke 100 straight for the win (Steve broke 95 but would not have been eligible for the Delaware championship, anyway). When top shooters missed a target, they often blamed the trappers, the ammunition, or something other than themselves, but never Steve Crothers. When he missed a target, and he didn't miss many, he was disgusted with himself. He was one of trapshooting's greatest sportsmen, and he loved the sport.

This week is the final countdown for getting many of our cars ready for the operating season. We hope to have 2 cars at Old Dover Days on Saturday, May 2, and 9 Stanleys at Point-to-Point on Sunday, May 3. The 725 and the 735 will be used both days. On Saturday, rides are given in our Stanleys around Dover's historic Green. On Sunday, all our cars should be at Winterthur not later than 9:45 A.M. The drivers will know at what times they need to start getting ready for departure by 9:15 to 9:30, and other riders should be at Auburn Heights by 9:00. The following Sunday, May 10, the Willowdale Steeplechase, 2 miles north of Kennett Square, takes place, and Lou Mandich is in charge of the antique cars that will be displayed there. They want all cars on the grounds by 11:00 A.M., and BRAACA members have been urged to have breakfast on Mothers' Day at the Hockessin Fire Hall starting at 8:30. Some of our FAHP volunteers may want to participate.

Last week, the cars were re-arranged in the Museum, and final plans are being made for our 2009 special exhibits. Of the 9 cars going to Point-to-Point, the Models CX, K, 71, 820, 725, 735, and 740 have been checked out and driven on the road, with the H-5 and the 87 to follow early this week. More track work is planned, and a special railroad lecture is tentatively scheduled for those involved in the operation for Thursday, May 14, at 7:00 P.M. On May 16, we will go to Bellevue with at least two cars (giving rides in one), and on the 17th, the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania holds its annual Linvilla Orchards Spring Meet. On Monday, May 25, Kennett Square holds its annual Memorial Day parade, very popular with FAHP volunteers.

Art Sybell, assisted by Dan Citron, has taken the miniature R.R. stations, in storage at A.H. for many years, to his shop for restoration. It's planned to place these stations at trackside along the Auburn Valley R.R. They are scale models (1/8 size) of the original Wilmington & Western R.R. stations built in the early 1870's. Speaking of the Wilmington & Western, the 100th-birthday celebration of its flagship Locomotive #98 will be held at Greenbank Station on Saturday, May 16. The only full-sized 4-4-0 American-type locomotive still operating in the eastern U.S., it was built by the American Locomotive Company at Schenectady, NY, in February, 1909. My father and I purchased it from Paulsen Spence of Baton Rouge, LA, in 1960 for future use on the W & W.

Back to our work projects, several volunteers continued cleaning the frame and mechanical parts of our '14 Stanley Model 607, and one of the R.R. cars is ready for lettering by Jim Sank. Auburn Valley volunteers are considering a disc brake for Jim's diesel locomotive, as this brake is only used to hold the train while it is stopped. We are hoping the turntable ring, being fabricated by outside contract, will be forthcoming soon. One of our flat cars may be designed to carry heavy people who don't fit well in our present coaches. Jim Personti has the Model 78's water tank nearly finished, but it turned out to be a very labor-intensive job. The Events and Scheduling Committee will meet on Tuesday, May 12, at 7:00 P.M.

Art Wallace leaves on Thursday for his month's stay on New Zealand's North Island (at Auckland). His son and daughter-in-law are now living there permanently. If it works out, he expects his second trip to be for a 4-month sojourn. We'll miss you, Art, but we wish you well. Stay tuned for more happenings in our busy month of May!

Tom

