

AUGUST 24, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

A Summer Evening on Gun Club Hill: In the years before World War II, the first or second week in August was the week of the Yorklyn "Shoot". My father would set the dates based on the moon cycle, as he wanted it as dark as possible for the night shoots- the illuminated clay targets showed up better without moonlight. The tournament began with a short program on Tuesday, the "Marathon" (500 target championship) was on Wednesday, 150 or 200 regular (16-yard) targets were on Thursday and Friday each with the Doubles Championship thrown in somewhere, and the 100 or 150-target handicap was on Saturday. Never was there any shooting at Yorklyn on Sunday. Wednesday and Friday nights would be the 50-target night shoots and they were increasingly popular, with six of the eight traps being illuminated by 1941. 1,000-candlepower flood lights, one on each side of each trap house, beamed light from the top of the hill toward the valley below, and through these beams the flight of the targets took place. A 40-watt bulb with a pool-table shade was hung on a wire above each shooter, so he could see to align his gun. As the target left the trap it looked like a light itself, and when it was broken by a blast of shot, it was like fireworks without the color. Some smoke from the gunpowder was also illuminated. Flying bugs looked like tiny lights and there were millions of them, but they really didn't bother anyone; some did not even survive.

The day shooters from afar- regular tournament shooters they were- sometimes did not come to the night shoots. Other times they did. Local shooters came by the dozens, however. Many worked during the day, and they would shoot at night and often on Saturday. From Oxford, West Grove, West Chester, Newark, all around Wilmington, Chester, Elkton, and the suburbs of Philadelphia they came. The entry window would open about 7:30, and it was dark enough to begin shooting just after 8:30. While waiting for the main attraction to start, the store at the end of the long porch was a popular spot for the shooters, their families, and for spectators. Breyers' fresh peach ice cream was a best seller. Sara Bowers ran the store for the Kennett New Century Club that served the meals in the dining room for the week. When the shooting began, spectators were often 3 or 4 rows deep behind the traps to witness the spectacle.

Yorklyn is hot and humid in August. Next to the club house at the very top of the hill (old timers called it "Poplar Hill"), under a huge shade tree that was felled by lightning about 1980, there was usually a good breeze. Behind the club house was the "ice barrel". A 50-pound cake of ice was put in this barrel each morning, and then it was filled with water. A small spigot at the bottom allowed thirsty people to draw ice water into one of two tin cups that hung on chains from the barrel stand. Some shooters would carry a terry-cloth towel under their belt, and from this barrel they could dampen it before going to the firing line. It would help keep their gun barrel cool and their hands dry.

As shooting concluded before midnight, the trophy winners would be decided on a system called "Lewis Class" (ties were decided by drawing names from a hat), the trophies distributed to the winners, and the lights turned off. Everyone went home tired and happy.

On Wednesday past, the Collections Committee, chaired by Greg Landrey and Mike May, met to refine the implementation of the Ethics Policy as it affects members of FAHP. It is hoped that everyone will be happy with this policy and can “sign off” in approval before the November Board Meeting. Final drafts will be circulated before that time. The Board of Directors met on Thursday with only two directors absent. Matt Chesser, attorney with the Division of Parks and Recreation, explained the plan of distribution of the remaining NVF properties and the mills themselves. A proposal developed between the State of Delaware and CCS Developers was expected to be accepted by the Bankruptcy Trustee no later than today. It calls for most of the NVF mill buildings to be torn down and the sites cleaned up, and very limited development on the 80 plus acres of open land. The Marshall Brothers Paper Mill next to Auburn Heights will remain, and the mill office will become a part of the Auburn Heights Preserve. In the future, it is hoped that horse, bicycle, and steam car trails can be built across these lands, and connect the main Preserve with the 100-acre Oversee property one mile away.

Our Florida member Walter O'Rourke gifted us a small steam engine possibly from a steam launch. It is very clean and should make a nice educational display for the museum, contrasting to Stanley engines of about the same size. Mike May brought us a real treat, and several of our members lost no time in cleaning it up Thursday evening. It is a 1909 Model O White steamer, owned by the estate of the late Harmon Andrews of Warren, Ohio. Through Mike's efforts, Harmon Andrews, Jr., has agreed to have it remain at Auburn Heights for the foreseeable future. It is a beautiful display piece for the Museum, and Mike is working out details of the lease. It is possible the owner may be pleased if we get it running, which will be a very interesting project. Dick Wells of Groton, MA, the successful owner/operator of a 1910 White Model OO, and the author of the White article in the spring edition of the “Herald”, has offered to help us.

Carol Bernard agreed to be our interim Executive Director, and will work about 20 hours per week, usually mornings, Monday through Friday. Marcie Williams will continue to work 10 hours a week in the office, usually 5 hours a day on Monday and Tuesday, as she has been doing. Steve Bryce and Bob Reilly spent a lot of time with both of them this week, and the transition is going smoothly. Kevin Worsh also spent time with Bob Reilly and with Carol, as well as with Dee Durham, the new chair of our Development Committee. We hope Kevin will be able to take over the treasurer's job from Bob some time soon. We are asking a few local volunteers if they can man the telephone on afternoons when a staff person is not available. Steve has appointed a small Search Committee to find a permanent replacement for Catherine Coin. Thanks to all for helping us bridge the gap between full-time Executive Directors.

Anne Cleary and Steve Jensen ran a locomotive and train course on Saturday, mostly for prospective engineers, and they reported a very good session. They also tested the diesel locomotive and the special heavy-duty car. On Tuesday, I am giving driving lessons to Jay and Dan Williams (father and son), who own a 1911 Model 62 Stanley in West Chester, PA. I should have some time this week and next if some of you, who are progressing through these lessons, would like another session. It is best one-on-one or one-on-two. Please call me, 239-6379, or E-mail TCMarshallJr@comcast.net. Bill Schwoebel NEEDS TO KNOW by mid-week if you can go to a “Day on the Farm” on Sunday, August 30. Please get in touch with him: Cell Phone (484) 433-8742, E-mail: 07autocar@comcast.net. Tom