

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.

Work Report: On Tuesday, August 1, Dave Leon was in charge, and Tim Ward worked on preparing the Model 71 for the Vermont Steam Car Tour, but the feature of the evening was the illustrated lecture in the museum by the Mitchell family on the history of the Mitchell farm and Woodside Farm Ice Cream, now in its 20th successful year. Lizzie Mitchell Marshall, Tom's grandmother and the first hostess of Auburn Heights, grew up in the house next to the present-day ice cream parlor, and we think she married Israel Marshall there. The museum lecture was attended by 67 interested people.

On Wednesday, August 2, five volunteers were on hand, viz: Larry Tennity (in charge), Jerry Lucas, Tom Marshall, Dave Leon, and Mark Hopkins.

Semi-final preparations were made on the Model 725, scheduled to go to the Vermont Steam Car Tour starting August 6. 6 of the 8 lock rings for the wheels of the Model 607 were painted black on the outside. The windshield from the Model 735 was removed for replacement of scratched glass. The Model H-5 was fired up, but about the time it was ready to test, rain prevented further operation.

On Thursday, August 3, eight volunteers attended, as follows: Jerry Novak (in charge), Tom Marshall, Steve Bryce, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Bob Jordan, Paul Kratunis, and Bob Stransky.

Final preparations for the Vermont Steam Car Tour continued, and the Model 76 was loaded onto our blue trailer. The hitch for the white trailer was mated to Tom's '03 Suburban. A new cable was fabricated for the speedometer drive on the Mountain Wagon, but it still does not operate well. A shorter and more flexible cable will be made up and tried. The windshield wiper motor from the '37 Packard was thoroughly examined and attempts to get it working with power from a vacuum pump failed.

On Friday, the Models 725 and 71 were loaded on our white trailer and Kelly Williams's trailer, respectively, in preparation for an early Saturday morning departure for Quechee, Vermont. Including wives, nine of our volunteers plan to attend: Steve and Ann Bryce, Kelly Williams, Tim Ward, John, Ellen, and Mark Hopkins, and Bob and Jane Jordan.

On Saturday, a minor repair was made to the 3-tube indicator on the Mountain Wagon, and Bob Wilhelm and Sam Gregg brought Bob's Model 735 for temporary display in the Museum. Steve Jensen had brought his Model 62 earlier in the week, and Jerry Novak brought his '31 Chevrolet roadster on Sunday. These cars replaced our 3 Stanleys temporarily in New England. A total of 489 visitors enjoyed our Steamin' Day on August 6, and 145 went through the mansion. Congratulations to all our volunteers who entertained our visitors so professionally.