

AUGUST 3, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Leo H. Shaab (c.1884-c.1959): Leo Shaab was a real Maryland “down-homer” who thrived on extravagant amounts of fried chicken, corn-on-the-cob, and watermelon during the abundant harvests of late summer. A native of Elk Ridge, about 8 miles s.w. of Baltimore, he worked for the Western Cartridge Company of East Alton, IL, for much of his adult life. Western acquired Winchester in the mid-1930’s, and the combined company was prominent in the world of trapshooting, manufacturing shotguns, ammunition, clay targets, and the traps that threw them.

Through clippings found in the basement of Auburn Heights, I learned that Leo Shaab had been an auto dealer in Baltimore in the years before 1915, and was quite a well-known racing car driver who had won many local track races and endurance tests in and around his native Maryland. Dealers in those days often sold several makes of early automobiles, and Leo sold at least four such makes, some of which were of European manufacture.

Beginning his career with Western Cartridge Company before my father opened the Yorklyn Gun Club and held the first of 30 annual trapshooting tournaments there in 1921, Leo was assigned to Yorklyn to service the Western traps during the “shoot” in early August that year. It turned out to be the first of the 30 years he came to Yorklyn in that capacity, still handling the job at the last tournament in August, 1950. He was devoted to my parents, and in addition to his official job of keeping the ten traps working flawlessly, he acted as caretaker during the 5-day tournament, sleeping on a cot in the clubhouse, checking the refrigerators and freezer, and starting an early-morning fire in one of the cook stoves, so hot water would flow from the spigots in the kitchen and the rest rooms. He was often joined on cots in the club room by about 10 shooters plus Arthur A. Fink, a sports writer from Reading, PA, hired by my father to cover the tournament. Traditionally, this first week of August was the time of the big Yorklyn “shoot”.

When trapshooting was shut down in the early days of World War II, Leo was sent to New Haven, CT, headquarters of Winchester, for war work. With his family still in Maryland, he was unhappy at Winchester, but he stuck it out for over a year, after which he got a more favorable assignment. In early 1943 while he was at New Haven, however, I was stationed at Providence, RI, attending pre-meteorology school at Brown University. Once I went by train to New Haven to spend part of a day with Leo, and once he came to Providence and spent several hours with me. On the Saturday in New Haven, we walked outside the Winchester plant and a war bond rally, featuring the singer Paul Robeson, was going on in the square.

After World War II, Leo resumed his trap work with Western-Winchester, but his arthritis made it difficult for him to climb in and out of a trap house, which was necessary for lubrication and the setting of the traps at least twice daily. My father hired a local carpenter, Sam Massey, who liked trapshooting himself, to do the climbing in-and-out, and Leo would supervise. He retired shortly after the final Yorklyn tournament in 1950. I saw him last in June, 1957, at his home in Elk Ridge, where he was propped up in his favorite chair listening to a ball game on the radio.

Our “Steamin’ Sunday” yesterday was canceled at 11 A.M. when a severe electrical storm knocked out our electricity, and the dire forecast of more during the afternoon did not bode well for a successful day. Power was not restored until about 4 P.M. (although it did not rain during the afternoon) and without it we have no lights in the Museum or House, no air to activate our locomotive stack blowers, and no running water for our rest rooms or to fill the water tanks on our steamers. How we moderns depend on electricity! Most volunteers were dressed and on hand when the cancelation was made, and we thank them for their understanding. Three volunteers remained at the front gate until after 3 P.M., advising potential customers that we were closed and giving each a half-price ticket for any future “Steamin’ Sunday” this year. Thanks to Richard Bernard and Catherine Coin for effecting this last-minute change.

Last Tuesday, July 28, the “Tracks Ahead” crew of three were on the property from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M., interviewing and filming our operation for a future segment to be aired on public TV, probably in 2011. This small Milwaukee company has been doing “Tracks Ahead” for 8 or 9 years, and has covered many of the unusual railroads in the U.S. We ran #401 and our 5 “red cars” on the Auburn Valley, the Mountain Wagon and the Model CX, and Ed Hoffmeister made popcorn from our Cretors popper. In addition to 12 or more FAHP volunteers, we had about ten young families who availed themselves of the free rides for the benefit of the photographer. Thanks to J. Harry Feldman and Catherine Coin for arranging this visit.

Our visit to Irene and Barbara duPont’s estate “Granogue” will not take place this week. Instead we will have more time there on Sunday afternoon, September 27, from 2:00 to 4:00. Our hosts assure us that all are welcome, both for a tour of the house including the Aeolian Organ, and the water tower for those who wish to climb the steps for an outstanding view. I hope at least 8 or 10 of our cars will make the easy trip. Please let me know (or advise the FAHP office) by Monday, Sept. 21, if you can attend and how many will be in your party.

On Sunday, August 16, our annual volunteers’ picnic will take place at Auburn Heights, along with a fun auction staged by Rose Ann Hoover. The time is 1:00 to 4:00 P.M. Active volunteers are asked to bring a side dish or a dessert, with FAHP supplying the hamburgers, hot dogs, drinks, buns and condiments. No alcoholic beverages, please. If you have something you don’t need that we can auction off, please bring it and the proceeds will go to FAHP.

The annual Threshermen’s Reunion at Kinzers, PA, takes place Wednesday through Saturday, August 12-15. Several of our members plan to take Stanleys and we encourage others to go. Not only is it a very pleasant 60-mile round-trip drive, but a wonderful experience with good home cookin’ while you are there. Thursday 8/13 is the preferred day for most of us, but those qualified can drive one of our cars the day of their choosing.

The Events and Scheduling Committee will meet at 7 P.M. on Tuesday, August 11, in the FAHP office. Work sessions will take place on Tuesday and Thursday evenings this week at the regular time, and individual driving-lesson sessions can be scheduled with me for these evenings or for next Saturday or Sunday, August 8-9.

Tom