

FAHP News, August 8, 2016

The Week Just Past on Gun Club Hill: As I write this (on Saturday, 8/6), it has occurred to me that this would have been the final day of my father's annual trapshooting tournament at the Yorklyn Gun Club. Almost always held during the first full week of August from 1921 to 1950, the "shoot" began on Tuesday afternoon and finished on Saturday. For the years between 1934 and 1950, my recollections of these fun times are much more vivid than the events of the current summer, a sure sign of senility. Other stories describing the Yorklyn tournaments, with some duplication, can be found in Weekly News stories of 8/24/09, 8/2/10, and 8/4/14.

As the trapshooting week began, the clubhouse was spotlessly clean, the grounds were mowed and manicured, and the supplies needed to run a first-class tournament were on hand and unpacked. Twelve-gauge shotgun ammunition was handled by the supplier who furnished it, originally E. K. Tryon Co. in Philadelphia, then Murta Appleton Company in the same city, and finally from the mid-1930s until the end, by R. F. Willis & Brother of Penns Grove, New Jersey. Ralph Willis (the "brother") manned the ammunition counter for the week, and he and his wife, Florence, stayed with us at Auburn Heights, usually occupying the North Bedroom.

The office -- where entries were taken, shooters were "squared," winnings were calculated, and cashier, squad, and bulletin sheets were prepared -- was manned by employees of the powder companies, as a courtesy to the Gun Club. In the 1920s, it was Tom Chalfant, Lloyd Lewis and Jack Guenveur of the DuPont Company's Sporting Powder Division, joined by Henry Winchester of Hercules. After 1935, DuPont phased out its Sporting Powder Division, and Norman Wright of Hercules joined Winchester, with Wright's wife, Helen, preparing most of the squad sheets. The Bulletin Board was manned over the years by L. R. "Beach" Beauchamp, John Otterson, and Fred Tomlin of the Remington Arms Co., Arthur Cuscaden of Hercules, and Leo Shaab of the Western Cartridge Company. The Western traps were under the care of Shaab, and Arthur Fink was hired to report the daily shoot results to the Wilmington and Philadelphia newspapers.

Palmer "Pete" Guest, who lived next to the Gun Club, was my father's right hand man in running the shoot and took charge of finding and hiring the scorerkeepers, trap loaders, and pullers. After Guest's untimely death in 1941, S. Cooper Gregg took on this job, constantly running back and forth between the Gun Club and his father's general store, where he was also expected. Clifford Murray, who worked at Auburn Heights for 50 years, kept the clubhouse clean, set up and took down cots for shooters who slept in the clubhouse, and ran errands for shooters with special needs and for the ladies in the kitchen.

The food operation during the "shoot" was also a major endeavor. Before World War II, it was run by my mother and the women of the Kennett New Century Club, the profit from which helped reduce the mortgage on their clubhouse. For four days, three meals a day were offered in the dining room, and the screened-in store at the end of the long porch offered sandwiches, sodas, and ice cream. Cooking was done on two wood stoves, and all the dishes and utensils were washed by hand. There was a ceiling fan in the kitchen, but the hanging fly paper was soon covered with flies.

A major cleanup behind the shooting positions was required daily, as few shooters in this time period saved their used shells for reloading. Also the empty clay target cartons had to be cleaned up in front of the eight trap houses. Saturday morning, these were cleaned up for the last time, as was the interior of the clubhouse. With Saturday's Handicap event being the final one on the week's program, shooters from a distance said good-bye and started to leave by early afternoon, except those who had a high score and were likely to face a shoot-off. This was a sad time for me. By 5 o'clock, the only ones left were the cashiers, finishing the week's financial work and reconciling the cash, which was, with the exception of a few personal checks, the only means of entry income and pay-out winnings. (It is no wonder that my father made a few trips to the bank in Kennett Square during the week.) Before 6 P.M. the doors and windows were closed and locked, and everyone was gone.

I remember going back on Sunday morning, mostly to retrieve the cashier and bulletin sheets from the week's shooting, so the scores could be sent on "Onion Skins" to the Amateur Trapshooting Association for recording.

Originally, my father did this, but starting about 1938, it was my job. The clubhouse was hot, smelly, and flies were prevalent. To a young lad, it seemed it would be forever until cleanup for another tournament would repeat such a week of fun.

Work Report: On Tuesday, August 2, 13 volunteers were at the work session, plus eight more Board of Directors members who attended the advance opening of the “Letting Off Steam” exhibit in the museum. Those at work were as follows: Ted Kamen (in charge), John Bacino, Mark Bodestab, Mike Ciosek, Bob Jordan, Bob Koury, Dave Leon, Jerry Lucas, Brent McDougall, Neal Sobocinski, Dennis Tiley, Mark Russell, and Bill Rule. More work was done in cleaning, repairing, and adjusting the car trucks on the Auburn Valley R.R. The track was also cleaned leading up to “Diesel” operations on August 3 and the Steamin’ Day on August 7. Cleaning of the holes in the burner grate for the Model 87 was completed. The speedometer cable housing for the Mountain Wagon was cleaned and painted, and all made ready for reassembly.

The copper cylinder case was installed on the engine for the Model H-5, and the engine is ready to go in the car. On the 1937 Packard, most of the work was done on the dimmer switch and installation of new light bulbs.

Along with many from our membership and general public, the following directors attended the museum event: Jerry Novak (bartender), Steve Bryce, Richard Bernard, Chazz Salkin, Kathy Dugan, Jenn Green, Ruth Marshall and Tom Marshall. Like many things we do, Susan and Jesse are responsible for the success of this affair and for our new museum exhibit.

On Wednesday, August 3, five volunteers attended the afternoon session: Tom Marshall (in charge), Jeff Kennard, Richard Bernard, Dave Leon, and Jerry Novak. We were also visited by our distant member from Minneapolis, Leon Brewer. Richard, Dave, and Jerry operated the Auburn Valley for two summer school groups in the afternoon, which also visited the museum. The newly fabricated copper pipe that runs from the throttle to the superheater on the Model 740 was successfully installed. The Model 87 burner, with its holes all cleaned, was put back together and properly insulated. The Mountain Wagon was fired up to about 300#, and all fittings connected to the new low-water shut-off appear to be tight with no restriction in flow of fuel to the burner.

On Thursday, August 4, the following 13 volunteers were on hand: Tim Ward (in charge), Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Steve Bryce, Tom Marshall, Jerry Lucas, Neal Sobocinski, Devon Hall, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Paul Blau, Nate Blau, and Leon Brewer. Paul and Nate, father and son, are new volunteers, and Leon visited from his home in New Hope, Minnesota.

Wiring continued on the ’37 Packard, with original light bulbs installed in new sockets and a pigtail attached for trickle-charging the battery. The dimmer switch still gives trouble and needs further attention. With a huge accumulation of oil in the boiler and water tank of the Model 725, work began to clean both. The tank was drained, rinsed, and refilled, with an extra absorbent sock being added. The boiler was drained, washed with about two gallons of kerosene, and drained again. Fresh kerosene was left in the boiler, hoping the soaking action will dissolve more of the oil. The cylinder oil pump was set back (again).

The Mountain Wagon was fired up to full pressure and driven around the “loop” on the grounds several times. All appeared to be good and ready for use on Sunday, 8/7. A final brake shoe was attached to Locomotive 402; it was thoroughly oiled and deemed ready for use on 8/7. The Model H-5 engine was installed, but the clearance at the rear axle is still not correct, so it was removed for the installation of longer spacers on the frame rods.

(All mechanical machines worked well on Sunday, 8/7, but a disconnected water line on the Mountain Wagon, not previously discovered, prevented water from entering the boiler. The problem was discovered in time, the line was connected, and all was well for the rest of the day. On the railroad, both steam locomotives, #401 and newly rebuilt #402, double-headed on a few trips carrying happy passengers. Those involved with the 402 were highly pleased with its operation. The “Diesel” continues to perform yeoman duty.)