

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 4, 2014

**The End of the Yorklyn Gun Club:** Traditionally, the week ahead was the “big week” at Yorklyn, when my father’s gun club was host to the East’s largest trapshooting tournament during the 1930s and ‘40s. After annual maintenance, heavy house cleaning, and mowing and trimming of the grounds the week before, only last minute details remained as the week began. By Monday afternoon, shooters from a distance would start to arrive, make themselves known, and find a lodging place for the week ahead. A few camped on the grounds with tiny house trailers or lean-to tents that fastened to one side of their car. My father pitched a large tent near the practice trap with about 20 iron cots available without charge. The first clay targets would be thrown on Tuesday afternoon. We could usually expect very hot weather in early August.

As the Depression eased in the late 1930s, more trapshooters could afford to take part, and just three times the number of targets were thrown in 1941 as at the first Marshall shoot in 1921. The 1942 shoot, the last until after World War II, was slightly smaller with wartime conditions starting to be felt. After the war, my father had a declining interest in shooting, as he was deeply involved in the antique car hobby, especially in restoring and operating his growing collection of Stanley steamers. Nonetheless, he was happy to continue the tradition of the annual Yorklyn tournament and turned many of the responsibilities of the shoots’ operations over to me. We not only had a major tournament at the regular time in early August but attempted to “catch up” with extra spring and summer shoots to make up for those not held during the war. I was very active in registered shooting, not only at Yorklyn, but all over the East in the late 1940s.

The emphasis during this post-war period was to entice more people into the sport of trapshooting. To accomplish this, many clubs, including Yorklyn, shortened their programs to make it more affordable. While the “Marshall Marathon” remained at 500 targets, the Doubles championship changed from 75 pairs in 1934 to 25 pairs by 1950, the “Brandywine” from 200 targets (1938–1948) to 150 in 1950, the “Auburn Special” from 200 to 100, and the Handicap from 150 to 100. This resulted in more local people taking part, but attendance from shooters from a distance, many of whom wanted to shoot as many registered targets as possible, dropped off. This change also meant lower attendance by the top shooters in the country and therefore less reporting of the Yorklyn tournament by the sports writers. Even though the number of entries was up, the fewer targets on the program made for less targets thrown (88,000 in 1950, down from 164,000 in 1946, the largest tournament).

Despite the decline that most certainly could have been reversed in the 1950s, Alex Burton and I had established a new travel agency in Wilmington in 1949, and to make this successful, I could not take the time to run and promote the Yorklyn tournament. While it was very enjoyable, traveling and participating in the big shoots in neighboring states was both expensive and time consuming. In the spring of 1951, my father and I decided we should not have a tournament “for a year or two,” and Yorklyn also dropped out of the Penn-Del Twilight League. Although we had spent a considerable sum on new traphouses and shooting walks in 1948, a “year or two” turned into forever.

A few antique auto meets were held at the Gun Club through the 1950s, and in 1959, the property was leased to Harold E. Thomforde, who established chicken barbecues and later Sunday smorgasbords using the club house building and the surrounding grounds. The property was turned back to the NVF Company in 1971. However, back in the “glory days” of the Gun Club, in early August each year, about 2,000 people would be on the grounds, participating in or observing clay targets being smashed by the best trapshooters in the world. (Other articles on the Yorklyn Gun Club can be found as *Weekly News* stories, the most recent of which are from 8/24/09, 8/2/10, 4/18/11, 8/15/11, and 6/24/13.)