

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 4, 2010

Clarence L. Walker (1875–1964): Clarence Walker was born to a farm family on Limestone Road near present-day Mendenhall Village in a house that was later occupied by the Jarrell family (it was razed to widen Delaware Route 7). In 1905, he tired of farming and bought a livery stable in Wilmington at 906 North Jackson Street (the building of I-95 eventually condemned this property). As buggies and carriages disappeared from common use, he converted the stable into a city storage garage for automobiles, with three floors and wooden ramps to drive up and down. He was married, and he and his wife raised two daughters and two sons.

A spare man about 6 feet tall, Clarence Walker was a prominent trapshooter and became a close friend of my father. A good “Class B” shot (average 91% to 94%), he never won the Delaware State Singles Championship but won or was close to the top in many shooting events. In 1932, he suffered a massive heart attack and was advised by his physician that if he were to live very long, he must pace himself and rest between times of strenuous activity. He heeded the advice well, continued to operate his garage with his son Jimmy, and pursued his love of trapshooting.

As I came on the scene as a 12-year-old shooter in 1936, I accompanied my father and Clarence Walker to the Grand American Trapshooting Championships in late August that year. We stayed at the Dayton Biltmore Hotel in downtown Dayton, Ohio, 10 miles from the shooting grounds at Vandalia. On that trip, we saw our first trackless trolleys and experienced our first air-conditioned room. The restaurant in the hotel had a four-piece band, a female singer dressed like Frances Langford, a five-course prime rib dinner for \$1.25, and it was air conditioned! That was the first of many fun trips I enjoyed in Walker's company. My father and I kidded him mercilessly, and he seemed to thrive on that. We made five more Grand American trips with him from then until World War II curtailed shooting.

At the shooting grounds, Clarence Walker would usually shoot every second day, pacing himself as mentioned above. On many of the days, the program called for 200 targets, and there would be a two- or three-hour break between hundreds. A few of the Dayton hotels would have courtesy tents on the grounds with many cots where shooters could rest if they needed to. He made liberal use of these cots between his more strenuous activity while shooting. On August 22, 1939, he won Class B in the North American Clay Target Championship with 198 out of 200 and 49 out of 50 in the shoot-off with Dr. D. H. Stewart of Hamilton, Ontario.

Clarence Walker's second daughter, Anna Blest, was widowed early, and her father moved in with her and her young son, Dawson. She was the head dietitian at the new Pierre S. du Pont High School in Wilmington. Many years later, Anna became one of the first residents of Cokesbury Village, where Ruth and I reside.

Walker's youngest child, John Aubrey Walker (1910–ca.1994), married my first cousin, Peggy Shallcross, in 1935, and they moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he worked for the Remington Arms Company. “Aub” continued to work for Remington until retirement, and he managed plants in Findlay, Ohio, and Toronto, Ontario. Like his father, he was a great duck shooter and would seldom miss a season on the Delaware marshes. Clarence had a summer cottage on Shallcross Lake, northwest of Odessa, and a duck blind in the marsh east of Taylor's Bridge. I was treated to a visit to the “marsh” in 1947, but we saw more crows than ducks.

In my first remembrance, Clarence Walker had a 1929 seven-passenger Packard Standard Eight sedan and a 1925 Dodge coupe. Later he bought a 1936 Packard 120 club sedan and finally a 1947 Packard Clipper sedan. His license number was 38100. He never lost his love of trapshooting and continued to make good scores almost until his death at age 88, many years after my father and I had dropped out of the sport.