

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, April 18, 2011

Mining the Lead from Gun Club Hill: In 1948, my father calculated the amount of lead shot that should be laying on top of the ground about 400 feet in front of the eight clay target traps that lined the crest of Gun Club Hill (old-timers called this Poplar Hill). Roughly 100,000 shots per year for 25 years equated to about 85 tons of lead. Those who had attempted to mine it (scratch it off the surface) at other locations said nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of it could be reclaimed. Unlike today, lead was a valued commodity, used in the best paint, for solder, for roof flashing, and for electrical batteries and components.

Many gun clubs had had the lead extracted from the ground in front of their traps, not the least of which was the Amateur Trapshooting of America home grounds at Vandalia, Ohio, where, in 1948, 22 traps were in a straight line. Richard Kerr of West Milton, Ohio, had done recent lead reclamation at Vandalia, and he and his wife came to Yorklyn to look at our project. While they were here, and since he expressed more than a passing interest in our steam cars, they rode with me in my Stanley Model 607 to Oxford, Pennsylvania, and back on a cold October evening to participate in that community's Halloween parade.

A man named Iamurri from Coatesville finally got the job to extract the lead, and he did so in the fall of 1948. With a backhoe, about 2–3 inches of top soil was scooped off, hopefully containing a lot of lead, and was then dumped onto a large screen with holes smaller than the #7½ or #8 shot pellets. The screen was affixed on top of a dump truck body, and water under pressure was sprayed over it, whereby the dirt washed through and the lead shot stayed on the screen. The screen was then dumped onto another truck, and relatively pure lead was driven to a scrapyard to reclaim its value. The dirt, mostly top soil minus almost all of its lead, was spread back over the field from whence it came. Warren Marshall, my father's brother, who was president of National Fibre ("NVF" was not used to describe the company until 1965), complained to his brother that the top soil was not conducive to the restoration of good sod, as the soil seemed to be slow recovering to its prior state. Where the lead was mined was partially on the 10 acres my father leased from National Fibre for the Yorklyn Gun Club and partially outside the gun club's boundary. The family disagreement was not serious and was resolved amicably. Three quarters of what we thought was there was slightly optimistic, but it was not off by much, and roughly 60 tons of lead was recovered.

When it came tax time, my father worried about how to report this income. The lead really did not belong to him, but it would have been impossible to spread the proceeds among perhaps 500 shooters with a widely varying range of participation. So, he paid income tax on the profit, and hopefully the hill was less contaminated.

We didn't know it in 1948, but the gun club ceased operation after the annual tournament in August 1950, so only two years of shooting supplied the lead that may still be there hidden in the sod about 400 feet in front of the old traps. The property in question is presently owned by Brandywine Realty Management, Ahmad E. Amer, and Warren E. Reynolds, with accurate subdivision unknown to me. It is all covered by conservation easements.