

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 16, 2011

Henry McComb Winchester (1891–1966): Colonel Henry McComb was a railroad magnate who held forth in the 1880s and 1890s. Perhaps he had been a colonel in the Civil War or even in the Mexican War 15 years earlier. His estate occupied a city block between Market, King, 11th, and 12th streets in Wilmington, later occupied by the Wilmington Post Office and finally by Wilmington Trust Company. Because of his prominent position, he held railroad passes for most of the major railroads in the United States in the late 19th century.

The colonel's daughter married James P. Winchester of Delaware City. They had three sons: James Jr., Henry, and George, the last a prominent Wilmington banker. The Winchester estate was along the Delaware River, and part of it was later the home of Kings College, before the campus plus all of the remaining Winchester land was bought by the Tidewater Oil Company for a new refinery in the late 1940s. This is the Valero Refinery that has made the news in recent years. Winchester Sr., owned a 1910 Pierce Arrow 48, a seven-passenger touring car, that was rolled over by his teenage son George, destroying the top and wheels and damaging the rear of the aluminum body. The damaged car was rescued from scrap by Frank V. du Pont, then owned for a few years by my father, and finally owned by the Ball family of Whitford, Chester County, Pennsylvania. Whitman Ball, the present owner, has had it magnificently restored, and it often appears at Winterthur and Hagley car shows.

Henry Winchester, a handsome man who was an excellent shotgun marksman, went to work for Hercules Powder Company in its sporting powder division soon after the company was formed before World War I. Serving briefly in the army during the war, he returned to Hercules, where he worked for the rest of his career, retiring about 1956. During his time with the company, Hercules was big in the world of trapshooting, and to many shooters, Henry Winchester *was* Hercules, as he cashiered shoots all over the East and was one of several cashiers each year at the Grand American Tournament at Vandalia, Ohio. This was one of the services, and perhaps the most important, that Hercules provided to gun clubs at their major shoots. Henry was a fixture at Yorklyn. He and Jack Guenveur of the DuPont Company handled the office until the mid-1930s, after which Norman Wright, also of Hercules, was Henry's assistant. Five long days in a row were put in. On the two days where night shoots were also scheduled, Henry and Norman would start about 9 A.M., go home to clean up (if time permitted) in late afternoon, and come back to the gun club with their wives for dinner before opening the office for signing up shooters for the night program. It was between 11 P.M. and midnight, when the winners were tabulated and the prizes awarded.

Henry and his wife, Anne, lived in Brandywine Hills off Washington Street Extension in Wilmington and raised a daughter and three sons. The Winchesters were stalwarts in Delaware's Democratic party, and in 1950, Henry Winchester ran against J. Caleb Boggs for a seat in the U.S. Congress. Boggs won reelection, and went on to two terms as Delaware's Governor and two in the U.S. Senate, before being taken down in 1972 by a political upstart named Joe Biden.