

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 3, 2014

The Avondale Squad: The Avondale Squad was a group of five trapshooters who shot together during the period 1915–24. My father, who became a serious trapshooter in 1914, was a member of this squad. The other four members were William B. Cochran, a house painter from Kennett Square, Paul H. Way, a wholesale florist also from Kennett, Mike Conner, a blacksmith (I think) from Avondale, and Pat Morris, a meat cutter who had his own store in Avondale. Connor and Cochran were Class A shooters, my father would have an occasional good score, and Way and Morris were Class C or D. They always shot together in the Philadelphia Trapshooters' League, which flourished during the winter months in the 1910s and '20s. In addition to Philadelphia clubs, there was one at Lansdale, at Camden, and the Wilmington Trapshooting Association, with its club at Bellevue shooting into the railroad bank of the Pennsylvania Railroad, with steam trains going by continuously. Shooting contests between the teams circulated among all the clubs. All in the squad except my father had stopped shooting before I started in 1934. (Paul Way died with cancer in 1928, and Bill Cochran was killed in a car crash about 1934.)

In the 35 years that my father was an active shooter, he had an average of about 90%, which put him sometimes in Class B and sometimes in C. Once in a while he had an outstanding score. In the mid-1920s at a registered shoot at Sharpless Park just outside Avondale, he broke 149 out of 150, far outdistancing his nearest competitor, who broke something like 141. Although he never won the Delaware State 16-yard Championship, he won the State Handicap at Yorklyn in 1930 with 95 out of 100 from 20 yards. In 1934, he won a 50-target handicap at the Roxborough Gun Club near Philadelphia with 50 straight, also from 20 yards. In 1938 at the Atlantic Indians, he tied with Walter Beaver for the Doubles title but lost the shoot-off, 24 to 22 out of 12 pairs. In 1939 at Quaker City Gun Club, he won the handicap and doubles, breaking 25 straight in the handicap and all 12 pairs in the doubles. In 1940, he *almost* won the Delaware State Championship at the Wilmington Trapshooting Association (Basin Road near New Castle), breaking 194 out of 200 (Isadore Keil won with 195).

Back to the Avondale Squad: Mike Connor always shot well, and he won an important shoot operated by Bill Reybold at Delaware City, where they shot over the old C & D Canal. In 1930, although all members of the squad were not there, Bill Cochran won the Pennsylvania State Championship at Conneaut Lake, where he missed his first target and then broke 199. The borough of Avondale had a population of about 700, but it did have a gun club, mentioned above, and the squad adopted Avondale as its nickname. Kennett Square had clubs at two locations in the 1920s and early '30s, and a small club behind the Sons of Italy Lodge west of Kennett in the 1960s and '70s. As mentioned in a recent Weekly News story about Jim Luke and his Lukehurst Gun Club, Pierre S. du Pont allowed Charlie Mason and Doug Gilpin to establish the Longwood Gun Club on Longwood property in the late 1920s.

Pat Morris had a meat market in Avondale, and his son Frank carried this on in a building still standing along Pennsylvania Avenue. Watson's Restaurant, quite good before and after World War II, was in the same building. One of the two trap guns still at Auburn Heights is the Baker single-barrel that was new when my father started shooting in 1914. He did quite well with this gun, but a few years later he sold it to Mike Connor. Connor was still living on a side street in Avondale in 1940, and my father bought it back and tried to shoot it again. I was with him when we called on Connor, but I never saw the latter shoot. My father tried, but he liked other guns better during the last 10 years of his active shooting.