

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 29, 2016

Alden B. Richardson (1871–1916): When he died 100 years ago this month, Alden “Doll” Richardson of Dover, Delaware, was one of the top trapshooters in the United States. In the first half of the 20th century, only two other shooters from Delaware could claim this distinction: William M. “Billy” Foord (ca. 1880-ca.1960), and John B. “Cap” Grier (1901–1991). Foord, originally from Wilmington who later operated a quail farm near Broadkill Beach, won the Delaware State Championship numerous times between 1910 and 1936, and Grier, who lived on the hill in Rockland, won in 1934 and 1935 before turning “pro” when he was employed by Western-Winchester starting the next year.

Richardson, owner/operator of Richardson and Robbins, a very successful canning operation in Dover, killed himself accidentally when a loaded shotgun discharged as he was taking it out of his big Pierce Arrow near his home on State Street in Dover. He was 45 years of age and died immediately. A few weeks before, he was a member of the World Championship Squad (five shooters who shot together) that collectively broke 497 out of 500 at the annual tournament at Maplewood, New Hampshire. Richardson broke 100 straight. My father knew him slightly, as my dad had taken up trapshooting seriously in 1914. This squad record stood until 1935, when the squad of Arthur Cuscaden, Ned Lilly, Hale Jones, Joe Hiestand, and Bill Eldred broke it at Yorklyn with 498.

The large Richardson Hotel, which stood for many years at the intersection of King’s Highway and State Street in Dover, was undoubtedly owned by the family or by Richardson and Robbins. It was a top hostelry when T. Coleman du Pont was often a guest while supervising the building of the DuPont Highway from Wilmington to Selbyville about 1918. In the 1930s, it was still a hotel where the bus from Wilmington to Rehoboth stopped, but it had fallen on hard times. Today the site has been cleared and has more modern uses. The home office building of Richardson and Robbins on King’s Highway, however, has been renovated and is the home office of the Division of Parks and Recreation of the State of Delaware, which oversees the operation of Auburn Heights.

I remember Mrs. Richardson, a most gracious lady who had an attractive flower garden around her State Street home. She enjoyed sharing it with those walking by, whether she knew them or not. The Richardsons had two sons, Harry and William, and I think both were involved in running Richardson and Robbins at least until World War II. They both had beach homes at Rehoboth, close to my parents’ place on Queen Street in Rehoboth Heights.

William bought an ocean-front lot and built a small beach house on Norfolk Street at the boardwalk. Harry and his attractive wife bought Reese Layton’s beach home on Queen Street, three doors from our property. Harry had Parkinson’s disease, but despite his shaking, he went to the beach daily when in Rehoboth. I never saw his wife in a bathing suit, which was not that unusual for women of the 1930s. They had Delaware license numbers 156 (we had 154 and 155), 199, and 200. Often they rented their Rehoboth property for part of the season, sometimes to Norris Wright and his family from Newark.

Harry Richardson must have died about 1960, but his widow continued to own the house on Queen Street into the 1980s. Seldom did she use it in her later years. I think it is still standing, but I have not visited the area for many years. With the canning business in Delaware in a steep decline, the Richardson & Robbins building in Dover was unoccupied for some time before the state bought and renovated it for state offices.