

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 7, 2016

Doc and Ned: A well-known father-and-son trapshooting duo in the 1930s was Dr. I. S. Lilly (ca. 1885-1970) of Stanton, Michigan, and his son John E. "Ned" Lilly. Members of the greater Lilly pharmaceutical family, "Doc" elected to become a small-town country doctor and delivered most of two generations of babies in Stanton and the surrounding countryside. He also served as coroner of Montcalm County, Michigan.

Doc Lilly loved trapshooting, and he taught his son Ned (1916- ca.1990) to shoot at an early age. Doc could average between 94% and 95% each year (considered a good Class "A" shooter), but Ned soon became one of the top trapshooters in the country, consistently averaging 98%. From the time he was 12, no one else had much of a chance to win the sub-Junior (age 14 and younger) and the Junior (ages 15 through 17) Championships at the annual Grand American Trapshooting Tournament.

Both Doc and Ned liked to come to Yorklyn, and I think they attended the Marshall Trapshooting Tournament for six consecutive years, 1933-38. We have movies of them shooting in the Michigan squad on Gun Club Hill in 1933 when Ned was 17. Although his friend Joe Hiestand won the "Marathon" with 497 out of 500 that year, Ned won almost everything else, including the Handicap with 147 out of 150 from 23 yards. Less than two weeks later, he tied with Walter Beaver for the most coveted prize in trapshooting, the Grand American Handicap, after both men had broken 98. Ned Lilly, shooting from 24 yards, missed his last target in the 25-target shoot-off, giving Beaver the win. Beaver was at the 25-yard line, the maximum distance in handicap shooting at that time.

In 1935, Ned had a bad day in the "Marshall Marathon," breaking only 486. His dad broke 488 to win Class A (AA was the top classification) and was exuberant because he had beaten his son. Doc and Ned sometimes had a small lean-to tent that attached to the side of their car, where they slept during the shoot. Other times they slept in the Club House and at least once at Auburn Heights. Like all medical men experienced in those days, if there was an emergency, someone would call: "Is there a doctor around?" It was usually hot in Yorklyn in August, and heat prostration was common among older people. More than once, Doc Lilly came to the rescue.

Ned did win the Marathon in 1936 with 496, after a three-way shoot-off. In 1935, at the age of 19, he had become a member of the "World Championship Squad," assembled by Hercules employee Arthur Cuscaden to promote Hercules Powder. In the squad's first visit to Yorklyn that year, they broke the 19-year-old squad record by smashing 498 (five shooters each shooting at 100 consecutive targets), only to break their own record in 1936, also at Yorklyn, with 499. In addition to Cuscaden and Ned Lilly, other members of the squad were Hale Jones from Illinois and Joe Hiestand and Bill Eldred, both from southwestern Ohio.

Unfortunately, in his early 20s, Ned enjoyed carousing, which sometimes, but not always, affected his scores. Once, the night before the Michigan State Championship, Ned made a short night of it, although he was cautioned by several older shooters. The next day, however, he broke 199 out of 200 to tie with Curt Heide and another 225 straight in the shoot-off to win.

Unlike many top shooters, Ned did not shoot a lot during his lifetime. He would usually come to the Grand American, however, and made top scores. He always shot a pump gun, probably a Winchester Model 12. After the gun discharged with each shot, no one ejected the empty shell faster -- Ned pulled the trigger and the forearm back simultaneously (or so it appeared). He made shooting look easy, and for him, it was.

In 1987, Ruth and I stopped at the Post Office in Stanton to inquire about the Lillys. Doc had passed away (they told us about all the babies he had delivered during his lifetime), and Ned was living on a lake in northern Michigan. Ned had a son who was occupying the old Lilly property in Stanton, but we did not attempt to make contact. A couple of years later, Ned passed away.