

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 29, 2018

**January 20, 1938:** Just over 80 years ago during the first winter for my father's new shop, two things in the shop stick in my memory. Built on the end of the carriage house in the summer of 1937, two lathes, a bench grinder, a heavy vise, and a drill press were quickly installed, and the drawers and cupboards were beginning to fill with tools. On a cold, dreary winter weekday, Paul J. Buxton, chief engineer of the Western Cartridge Company of East Alton, Illinois, was due to visit. The occasion was the demonstration of a new clay target trap my father had designed and set up in the new shop, based on earlier models of Western traps, both somewhat obsolete. My father sent Clifford Murray to the railroad station in Wilmington to meet Mr. Buxton, who had taken the night train from St. Louis.

The Western traps used at the Yorklyn Gun Club from 1921 through 1937 had been very satisfactory, and scores of 499 out of 500 had been made by Steve Crothers (1931) and Joe Hiestand (1935) over these traps. Like most clay target traps of that time, they were spring-loaded, and had an arm to which was connected a cup or hand on which to place the clay target. This hand had wrist action, which gave the target extra spin as it flew into the air to be shot at. The trap was cocked and released by a "puller" who stood behind the shooters. One problem was that it was hard to set this trap to throw doubles (two targets at a time), as a second arm was required with major tightening of the trap's spring. About 1935, Western had come out with what they called the McCrea Trap, greatly simplified but incapable of throwing even targets as it had no swivel to change the target's angle. Instead of the arm and cup, this trap had a cast aluminum carrier with a rubber-lined rail along one side. To change angles, the human loader simply placed the target in a different position against the rail, and to throw doubles, two targets were placed next to each other on this single carrier. Unfortunately, this geometry produced left-angle targets that went much farther than right-angle ones, as they were on the carrier longer as the trap was released. Being mechanically inclined, my father knew he could build a better trap, and his experiments were conducted privately but not completely without the knowledge of Western employees such as Leo Shaab, who took care of the Yorklyn traps during the big tournament each year.

My father's experimental trap utilized the best features of Western's earlier traps while eliminating some of the problems. Like the McCrea trap, it had an aluminum carrier (somewhat longer), and like the earlier traps, it had a swivel base. A second carrier was attached to throw doubles. He set this new device on the floor in his new shop, and by opening the big door, clay targets could be thrown over the rose arbor and onto the lawn beyond (there was no Auburn Valley Railroad in those days). Most of the targets could be reclaimed.

Mr. Buxton arrived and observed the trap's operation before I got home from school. As I arrived, "Cliffey" was loading him in the car for return to Wilmington and his train trip home. He was impressed and thought that his company might like to manufacture a trap very similar to the prototype my father had made. My dad told Western officials he didn't want any money; he would settle for 10 new traps for the Yorklyn Gun Club.

On a beautiful spring day in May 1938, my dad's trap was demonstrated again, this time at the gun club with Leo Shaab and Fletcher H. Woodcock, an up-and-coming Western-Winchester "trade man" from Ithaca, New York. The company decided it would definitely manufacture a trap very similar to the one demonstrated. At the New York State Shoot held at Johnsonville (near Troy) in late June, Woodcock had one of the first new Western traps about to go on the market, which he demonstrated to interested shooters. The only change from my father's trap was that the second carrier for throwing doubles was eliminated, and both targets were placed on the same carrier, as with the former McCrea trap. Before the Marshall tournament at Yorklyn in early August, seven *new* Western traps were installed, and three more were on hand, which were used later. These were in service until the Yorklyn Gun Club ceased operations in 1950.

In competition with Western traps, the Remington Arms Company came out with a new trap about the same time. These traps, built at Findlay, Ohio, were based on the old Chamberlin Trap, and were twice as heavy as

those built by Western. My father, having many friends with DuPont and Remington, didn't want to offend them altogether, so the trap immediately in front of the club house was a new Remington trap. Both new traps threw beautiful targets to shoot at, but Remington traps were harder to maintain, and Western traps outnumbered those built by Remington, probably four to one, at gun clubs across the country.

Within two years from the introduction of the new Western trap in 1938, an automatic-angle base attachment was recommended and furnished with most new traps. Ten such attachments were sent to my father, but he never installed them. Jake Hughes was given four of them when he built his four-trap Darlington Gun Club in nearby Maryland in 1947. By the late 1940s, demand for electric pullers was increasing, which resulted in faster "pulls" and one less employee at each trap. Napier Electric Traps had been available since the mid-1930s, but they were troublesome and marginally successful. After World War II, the Cline brothers of Camp Troy, Ohio, invented an electric puller for Western traps, which were very satisfactory, and they sold a lot of them.

My knowledge of trapshooting after 1950 is severely limited, but automatic improvements include the elimination of a loader. The scorekeeper is the only person required to operate a trap for clay-target shooting, whereas it used to take three. One of the 1938 traps from the Yorklyn Gun Club is still a part of the F.A.H.P. collection.

The other special occasion during that first winter for the shop was the day I came home from school in November 1937 and found a brand new Packard Twelve backed in over the pit in the middle of the floor. That car has been housed, owned, and operated by those at Auburn Heights for more than 80 years.