

NMLRA Fall Shoot Report for 2015

by Tom Schiffer

The NMLRA 2015 National Fall Shoot started with a bang on the Friday "before" the shoot on the Double Rifle Range up Caesar Creek; across from the NMLRA Sporting Clays Range. Ike Leggett won in a shoot off at the elephant silhouette in a three-way tie for first place (Bill Irons got second; Bob Conrad, third). Yours Truly was in a three way tie for sixth place (sigh, no shoot-off)! But the BIG event late that week was the long range shoot at Camp Butner, North Carolina, where the US hosted the International shooters from around the world. Our own Pete Terpstra ran the shoot and it was a success in spite of wilting heat and the fact that many international participants were from south of the equator where it was currently winter! Staffing the pits was a problem too but Pete 'pulled it off'.

Registration was 890 this year compared to 939 in September of last year. There were 112 names called on the Last Relay roll. If you noted some of your friends were missing at the shoot, there were major gun shows on BOTH weekends of our shoot (Louisville and Wilmington). In spite of that and the fact that our long range shooters were off to Camp Butner in North Carolina, we had a pretty good crowd the first weekend. Sometimes we are victims of our own success. The oldest gun show in the country is the Ohio Gun Collector's Association, which sprang from the NMLRA's loins in 1937, and in-turn spawned many- another gun show in the country. You could make a case that ALL OF THEM sprang from the NMLRA in 1937. We had an outreach by 1941 that showed California having exactly FOUR-TIMES the NMLRA members that Kentucky had (64 to 16). Folks came from California to the NMLRA's Turkey Shoot. Now there are so many turkey shoots in most states alone for muzzleloaders you would be hard pressed to shoot all of them. And, yes, we certainly still have them on our Walter Cline Range.

The weather was much better than usual in my estimate. Light rain set in for the shoot-off on the Double Rifle Range on Friday and hard rain off and on the first Friday night, but most days were dry except for very light rain on the last Saturday. We had warm days, enough breeze to move the powder smoke away most of the time and cool nights. It was delightful in the shade. The dead-flat light made for some fine shooting conditions on the rain days. Evidence of the good shooting conditions is in the fact that nearly thirty new records were set on the rifle line alone. These include existing records equaled. To me it was a successful shoot although I did very little shooting. The bottom line is, **you don't have to shoot at Friendship to have fun on the Walter Cline Range.**

Here are a few happenings on the rifle scene: On our Main Range, Joseph Shepherd won the Crosley with a 49-2x. In Aggregate OO, Bernd Salamon edged out Tyler Burchfiel's 213 record of last year with a 214. In the H. V. Perry 200 yard Slug Gun Match, two men, Branch Meanley and Wayne Wadington tied the old record of 100-9x, but Don Warner posted 100-10 x to set a new record. In Match 343 for In-Line Rifles (200 meters at chicken silhouettes), Blake Hamilton, Jason Day and Todd Fisk all tied Tim Marsh's record score of 10 (highest possible score) in 2014. In Match 344 (300 meter pig silhouettes), Rick Weber, Jason Day and Blake Hamilton all tied Bob Wetzler's record score of 10 (highest possible score) of last year. In Match 240, the old Gilbert Angel Match Chunk Gun Match, Page Carr broke Lowell Gard's record of .701 inch string measure set in 2001 with a .6740 inch.

There were a number of Education Courses offered including Barn Quilt painting, Brain Tanning and more. There was activity on the back porch of Gunmaker's Hall where you might say Gunmaking 101 to advanced courses in barrel-rifling, carving and engraving were available to those interested at no extra charge. There were church services offered both Sundays by Rev. M. J. Longstreth.

The first Saturday for me was spent with Kip Carter in the Exhibit Hall of the Education Building. Kip was my Parliamentarian when I was NMLRA President (and long before and after) and we had a grand time reminiscing about the old days. We had an exhibit of Walter Cline long guns I obtained for the NMLRA on September 4, 2015 from Walter Cline Junior's widow. A wheellock of unknown (to me) origin but I'd guess German, a flint fowler of 14 gauge made by James Poyas, Jr. of Charlotte ca 1830 and a .31 caliber percussion Swiss target rifle made by Carl Napp in what is now Bern. The .56 caliber wheellock and the Swiss appear to be relined. I doubt we'll ever know for sure, but I'd guess Walter Cline Senior did it and rifled them. One is left-hand twist (wheellock) and the other right. Walter Madson Cline Senior was the fifth member to join the NMLRA in 1933 and was NMLRA's second president. His family published his book *Muzzle Loading Rifle Then and Now* after his untimely death in 1941. His family was pivotal (biggest single donor) in our acquisition of 53.5 acres of land west of Friendship, Indiana in 1942. This became the Walter Cline Range and the three Walter Cline guns have come home to it. My thanks to Gill Morgan, who sat with the exhibit for most of the week.

This is my last column as author of the *Shoot Report*. I've done it since Max Vickery's death and it is time for someone else to do it. I am in mid-stride writing the history of the NMLRA and it is not easy to get the essence and details of the organization between two book covers. Statistics and facts can be organized and recorded, BUT, that does not really tell who we were and are. Fortunately I have some excellent help, many of them long dead. Red Farris, Bull Ramsay, Boss Johnson, Polecat Porter, John Barsotti, Walter Cline, Merrill Deer, 'Dolf Neidner, and many, many others will have more than a little to say in it and if I do my part, you will not be bored with the details. They left their stories on the range, in the minutes of the NMLRA, in books and magazine articles they authored and in *Muzzle Blasts*. I find they all had something in common in that they wanted you, your children, and grandchildren to have a place to enjoy the sport they came to love so well.

That having been said, if we continue as we are doing, running a 25,000 member organization with 15,000 member revenue, it has been estimated the NMLRA will be gone in a half-dozen years. We are not broke, but spending down our assets to maintain position. The Board is coming to grips with the facts and will be dealing with the issues. With the NRA having five million members and probably a third of them with muzzleloaders in the closet, is that a resource? With primitive firearm seasons rampant in the US now as a result of NMLRA's actions (it wasn't anybody else) and all those muzzleloaders out there, is that a resource? With thousands of strangers, many of them driving and thousands just walking past our gate at the range on Route 62 during the shoots, is that a resource?

As a member, would you be interested in an ice-cream (home-made) social at the Main Range on the last Saturday night at the National Shoots? How about ice cream machines run by a hit-and-miss engine chugging away. How about Shooters Night being celebrated later in the week to get vendors to stay longer. If you are a serious shooter, you can come down on Wednesday and have plenty of room on the firing line. The Field Reps man our gate during the shoot and I bet their business would pick up if they had something like that of general interest within sight of the gate. Let our Managing Director, Chris Gergeni know your feelings.

The following is from a verbal shoot report harking back nearly a half-century. At that time, a fellow came to Friendship the day after his high-school graduation. Finally finding the range, 'way over a hundred miles later, he was faced with a stern-faced gate keeper and a demand for money. He declined and, as kids will do, later sneaked around and crawled under the fence. Wandering around, he was watching with interest a rifle shooter. Said shooter asked if he wanted to take a shot and he did. He took two or three. This was getting interesting. Wandering on, he came to the Pistol Range where he asked someone shooting a match a question. He was snapped at, but at the end of that relay, that same shooter called to him and told him of his serious competitiveness and not to bother *any* shooters when so engaged. The Pistol Range was breaking for lunch and after lunch did he want to shoot a pistol? And, oh, would he like something to eat and drink? After being hosted to lunch, a refreshing drink and shooting a ten-shot practice match, he sneaked back out under the fence, went around front and paid the entry fee, joined the NMLRA and has been a member ever since. I'd like to say he stuck around and eventually became president of the NMLRA, but he'd probably shoot me if I did. So I won't. But do you see any lessons for us here in 2015?

The firing line has been the focus for many of us but our survey shows that there are interests in several other things than shooting that attract folks to Friendship. The Rand House, Commercial Row, special exhibits and Museum rank high with members. Indeed, there are many who join the NMLRA who have never come to Friendship. NMLRA Charter Clubs, Territorials, and *Muzzle Blasts* are enough for some. Indeed, some do it for *Muzzle Blasts* alone and the information it contains. Some simple math shows that less than one in fifteen NMLRA members shot at the NMLRA Fall Shoot.

While my mobility was limited during the shoot, due to illness, it was obvious the shooting programs remained alive and well. There was plenty of activity wherever I went. Some Main Range youth matches had no entry and while the Youth Range activity was down due to schools being universally in session, there was activity there under Scott Mings.

In September, your Board of Directors elected the following list of officers: Alan Shourds, President; Jerry Middendorf, Vice President; Mike Yazel, Treasurer and Annie Dean, Secretary. Theirs is a big job and responsibility and they will need your support.



Dick Miller demonstrates some fine points of rifle building on the back porch of Gunmaker's Hall.



"Honest, if you buy another strip of tickets it will increase your chances of winning something." Mike Blazer gets sage advice from Rick Repovich.



Auctioneer Russ Combs searching for yet another victim during the auction. Your author "accidentally" bid on a mystery box but was "accidentally" outbid by Bill Foy.



Lots of Sparks on the Skeet Range. Here you see Harry Sparks' gun blossoming sparks fore and aft at Station 1.



Bill Foy is the winning bidder for the Mystery Box. He did not reveal the contents, but donated it back to the auction. Bill and his wife Vicky were the high bidders for Betty Boitnott's pie. Betty's pie brought \$425.00.



JoAnn Freeman, perennial shooter on the Trap Range caught here "Black Handed". She is the mother of Past President of the NMLRA Becky Waterman.



Tom Hart and Trap Range Committee Chair, Will Elliott testing a load of 2 drams; 1 ¼ ounce of shot in a 14 gauge gun on the Trap Range. Will noted the mild recoil, and the fact that it broke birds reliably when the shooter was "on them".



Delicate adjustment on the rifle line.