

PAHQUIOQUE ROD & GUN CLUB DANBURY, CONNECTICUT

Organization and Founding

1899

Pahquioque Rod and Gun Club was organized on Friday, August 4, 1899, when John and Frederick Hill invited a number of sportsmen to their home in Redding, Connecticut, to participate in a clay pigeon shoot. A committee was appointed to arrange a second shoot on a more elaborate scale, and so, on Friday August 25, 1899, twenty-five shooters were invited to a combination clambake and trap shoot in the rear of Tamarack Woods in Danbury. On September 8, it was agreed to form the Pahquioque Rod and Gun Club and solicit a total of 30 members.

Pahquioque is the Native American name for Danbury, Connecticut and was a term common to the residents of this small New England town at the turn of the twentieth century. The club leased property in the Tamarack section of Danbury on grounds currently occupied by the maintenance buildings for Wooster Cemetery, just north of Danbury Hospital. Shooting into a perfect skyline, the club began to run many of the largest and most successful trap shoots in the East. Famous shooters participating in Pahquioque events included Ad Topperwein of Texas, Rollo Heikes of Ohio (the winner of the first Grand American) and the legendary Annie Oakley. Famous personalities included John Philip Sousa, Grover Cleveland Alexander, and Christy Mathewson of baseball fame.

Pahquioque members were among the first to realize that something had to be done to preserve the wildlife that was left, for they had watched as the turkey and white tail deer nearly disappeared from the area. The club and its members were frequently recognized in news articles as being active in influencing the role of emerging Connecticut state regulatory bodies and the fish and game regulations of the state. These efforts were the beginnings of the return of native fish and game which was to take almost 100 years.

1900-1910

At the Tamarack location, Pahquioque quickly gained a reputation as a “gun club’s gun club” and was recognized in news articles as having a reputation for hosting the best and largest shoots in the state. In July, 1908, 88 shooters shot 12,000 “glass pigeons” (probably clay targets with some glass balls thrown for nostalgia since clay targets had become common by this time) at what was “probably the largest and best shoot ever held in the state.” Each member of the Danbury Team received a “pretty little silver loving cup. The five man team race was won by the Danbury team (Pahquioque). Four teams were entered in the race, Danbury, New Haven, Hartford, and Waterbury.”

Other Pahquioque prizes receiving mention in articles included “a \$70 Ithaca gun ... a sole leather gun case ... a Bristol bass rod ... a gold watch ... a ham.”

In July, 1909, the “Topperwein Handicap” was run by Pahquioque in honor of the great husband and wife trick shooting team, Ad and Plinky Topperwein. They worked for Winchester and toured the world giving shooting demonstrations. They were great friends of many Pahquioque members and the personalities of the time, including Annie Oakley. The Topperwein Cup was won by C. Howard Daley of Danbury and is now in Dick Baldwin’s collection of trap shooting and Pahquioque memorabilia.

At the Pahquioque shoots it was common to find shooters, families, and guests camping on the grounds the night before a shoot. The annual clam bake, a feature at the formation of the club, continued to be held in conjunction with Pahquioque events and helped to attract large numbers of families and spectators.

1910-1920

The headline of the Danbury Evening News on Monday, July 11, 1911 read “Thousands Witness Country’s Best Shooters at Local Club.” Similar headlines appeared often as many spectators and shooters from throughout the region continued to travel by auto and train to attend the popular Pahquioque events. In 1912, Pahquioque was instrumental in forming the Western Connecticut Trapshooting Association with E. H. “Eddie” Baily, Pahquioque founding member and club secretary, as its first president. In 1915, the WCTA expanded to become the current CTA with Baily as secretary and W. E. Day, another Pahquioque member, as the first CTA president.

The first published report of hats as Pahquioque tournament prizes was in the August 5, 1911 edition of American Field magazine. However, it is believed that hats were part of earlier Pahquioque events, including the very first Pahquioque tournament. In the 1890’s over 5 million hats were being made annually by 33 Danbury hat companies.

The club’s 15th annual banquet was held in 1915 at the Green Hotel in Danbury and was attended by over 200 people, including the Lieutenant Governor, senators, and other state and local officials. It was joked that Sterling H. Fanton had been made the club’s first president and Eddie Bailey the secretary because the former had failed to hit any quail on a shoot and the latter had gone hunting, forgetting to take his gun, on more than one occasion. The toastmaster commented that “Pahquioque Rod and Gun Club represents all the interests of the city. The manufacturer and journeyman hatter are both found in its ranks.”

Pahquioque was awarded the “Master Trophy for the United States” given annually by the DuPont Powder Company, for the club having the largest attendance at beginner day shoots. It was not uncommon to see women of all ages shooting at the clay pigeons and all seemed to find in the new sport something that perhaps other sports lacked, a certain thrill and novelty in handling of firearms, and self-reliance and self-control engendered by the special requirements of the sport.” One hundred thirty nine beginners shot in a special beginner’s event in 1915. Although the number of women participants was not noted, women who participated in beginner’s day were automatically voted into the club. Women shot at Pahquioque events in sufficient numbers that there was a special women’s trophy in the form of a silver spoon with a woman’s figure at one end—probably Annie Oakley who had shot at numerous Pahquioque events.

1920-1930

In 1922, Pahquioque moved to a new location, The Berkshire Gate Lodge. Membership of the club was 150, some of whom were not shooters but were outdoorsmen and fishermen. Four fields and a new clubhouse were built on what is now the east to west runway of the Danbury Airport. The announcement of the opening of the new club stated “The ground is as level as can be; we shoot to the Northeast, a perfect skyline; three Ideal Leggett and one Blue Rock trap. Bring your wife or sweetheart along. If they get tired they can go and have a game of cards or sit in the shade of the beautiful grounds of Berkshire Gate Lodge.” The Berkshire Gate Lodge was also the site of a small golf course and was owned by Pahquioque member Jack Devine.

The traditional beginner shoots, in which the club provided guns and ammunition to new shooters, had been suspended during World War I due to the cost of shells being driven to prohibitive levels. However, the traditional Clambake was reinstated on opening day at the new grounds. This shoot featured Danbury hats, made to order, for the members of the winning team.

In 1927, the club chartered a train to bring shooters from New York City to Pahquioque for the Hat Shoot. Baseball greats including Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Bill Dickey shot as guests of club member Harry Mallory, owner of the Mallory Hat Company.

Eddie Baily, who at one time also served as game warden and post master, was elected state senator. He also served as the head of the State Fish and Game Commission and sponsored numerous initiatives related to the oversight and the regulation of Connecticut hunting and fishing activities.

1930-1940

The decade opened with what is now popularly referred to as "The Hat Shoot." It was held at the Berkshire Gate location on June 22, 1930. Class winners received gold as a prize and hats were given to all shooters present.

The Pahquioque shoots remain popular with 100 or more shooters typically attending the clubs shoots. Pahquioque also ran an annual turkey shoot on Thanksgiving Day morning. However, "The shooters did not enthuse much over this stationary target event as this was shooting at forty yards at a playing card, the shooter having the most shot in the card winning. The high count was nine made by Fred Beers." Despite this lack of enthusiasm, photographs exist of the smiling shooters holding their plucked turkeys.

Pahquioque shooters and teams were regular winners of competitions throughout the region. The club had frequently hosted the state championship and did so again at the 1935 Hat Shoot, promoting the event with the slogan "Danbury Crowns Them All." The club won the team trophy, "breaking the record for the last 20 years. After the money prizes were distributed, the fun began with the distribution of the Danbury hats. Those winning the money prizes were not eligible for a hat, but those that did not win a money prize were either fitted to a Danbury hat or had one made. Many women's hats were given; the wives of the shooters getting their husbands to pick a hat, which they will have made up to suit themselves. Shooters come to Danbury who do not attend any other shoot but at their own club." W. C. Capwell, a Pahquioque member, won the state title with a score of 195.

1940-1950

The final shoot at the Berkshire Gate range was held in 1941 after the grounds were purchased by the town of Danbury for expansion of the airport. This final shoot was attended by teams including the New York Athletic Club, the North Jersey Club, and delegations from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and as far away as Nova Scotia. The team championship was won by Pahquioque with a score of 489. Clayton L. Banks, a Pahquioque member, won the shoot with a lone 100 straight. The event was attended by a 4 year old Dick Baldwin, and his father Cliff. Cliff was a professional shooter working for Remington Arms. Had professionals been eligible to win amateur competitions, Cliff would have tied or won 5 Connecticut all-around state championships. The 1972 State Shoot was dedicated to him. Pahquioque's shoots continued and held their popularity with registered shoots being run at Remington's famous Lordship Gun Club. Eight years would pass before the club established itself at Wooster Mountain.

Eddie Bailey was named "secretary-treasurer emeritus" of the CTA upon his retirement in 1942 and Ernest I. "Ernie" Fuchs, a Pahquioque member who was instrumental in the establishment of Wooster Mountain, was elected to succeed Mr. Bailey. An "Eddie Bailey Testimonial Shoot" was hosted by the Fairfield County Club, with the governor and other area officials in attendance.

In July, 1949, Wooster Mountain State Park was dedicated as "the first known enterprise of its kind nationwide, with shooting made available to state residents." Pahquioque was one of 9 sponsoring gun clubs for the new range and is the only one remaining today. Over 100 people attended the dedication with both skeet and trap programs shot during the day.

That same year, Pahquioque's Dick Baldwin, age 12 and nicknamed the "Southpaw Slicker", received national recognition after winning the ATA Junior Title at the Amateur Championship Tournament of America and finishing 4th overall at a 5 day shoot at Franconia, New Hampshire.

Today

For over 100 years trap shooters have come to Danbury from all over New England in hopes of winning a hat and they still do! Danbury is no longer The Hat Capitol, but the annual "Hat Shoot" still awards hats as prizes. We added the Paul Garofalo Memorial shoot to our ATA schedule in 1985 to honor the memory of our past president. Admired by all that knew him, this quiet gentleman built the club into one of the most active shooting clubs in Connecticut and the Wooster Mountain venue became what it is today due to his leadership. These two CTA/ATA events are always among the best attended in the state, keeping intact the long standing Pahquioque tradition of running the shoots that shooters like to attend.

Our first banquet was held at the formation of our club in 1899 and has been held every year since. Today the banquet is also the culmination of the club's Winter League. Pahquioque members still look forward to the dinner, the speakers, the awards, and the camaraderie, just as they did over 100 years ago.

Throughout the 20th century, Pahquioque was recognized nationally and locally for promoting trap shooting to the general public. Today, the unique public trap shooting program run by Pahquioque at Connecticut's Wooster Mountain State Park is available to the public every Tuesday, year round, and used by as many as 100 shooters a day. Many of the public shooters come into the program as novices. All shooters new to the Wooster Mountain program receive a free, comprehensive, safety and trap shooting orientation. Usually this is one-on-one and also contains enough coaching to help them begin to break targets. Junior shooters, through High School age, shoot at a significant discount. Pahquioque funds and promotes a Spring Open House; a July 4th Celebration; and a Fall Family Day, all with free food and drink for everyone attending. These programs are possible only because Pahquioque Club members continue, as they have for over 100 years, to volunteer their time, effort, and funds to promote our sport.

Pahquioque is proud to have seen countless top shooters get their start through our club. M. D. Clark and Al Riehl, the only two New England residents in the Trap Shooting Hall of Fame, were Pahquioque members. Since 1915, 40 of the 90 Connecticut State singles champions have been members of our club. Pahquioque shooters continue to promote the club's 100 year reputation as a "shooters club" by winning competitions throughout the state and the nation.

Despite the pressures of an increasingly anti-gun environment, Pahquioque's membership and its shooting programs continue to grow and even run at capacity. As in the past, today we have a number of active families and second generation members on our roster, adding to the friendly atmosphere experienced by our members, their families, and guests. While names on that Pahquioque roster change from decade to decade, Pahquioque members remain committed to preserving the reputation of the club and honoring the values and traditions established by our predecessors and handed down to us from 1899.

Members who have won the Connecticut State Singles Championship

1915 Chas Van Stone

1916 A. L. Chamberlain

1919, 1923, 1924 H. C. Barstow

1927 W. G. Beswick

1929, 1930, 1931 E. H. Raymond

1935, 1936, 1938 W. C. Capewell

1937, 1941, 1947, 1948, M. D. Clark

1949.1950.1952.1953,

1955, 1957 1958, 1961 Roy Mason

1962, 1964 Reverdy D. Smith
1967, 1968, 1970, 1974 John J Malloy
1976 Floyd Cochran
1980 Frances MacDonald
1983 Bob Edmonds
1984 Richard Dechello
1986, 1989, 1994 Joe Cimino
1993 Ray Wrinn
2003 Amerigo Pagliaroli
2004 Joe Piskura

Members who have won National Championships at the Grand American

1951, 1953 M. D. Clark - National Doubles Champion
1951 Dick Baldwin - National Sub-Junior Champion

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Dick Baldwin, a third generation Pahquioque member and Director of the American Trap Shooting Association's Hall of Fame for his contributions to this document, his dedication in maintaining his Pahquioque archives that are represented here, his willingness to share his knowledge and his marvelous stories with others, and for his life long commitment to our sport and our club.

Editor: Larry Cabler

Photo Reproduction: Chuck Mittelstadt

Compiled 2005

Graphic Design: Tony Nacinovich