

**BRIDGEPORT MARKSMEN HAVE LONG
AND INTERESTING HISTORY**

March 3, 1929

One Group used Cellar Range 22 years ago. Present Bridgeport Rifle Club organized 12 years ago at University Club, acted as Home Guard Unit during War and continued thereafter to promote sport.

BY GRANVILLE L. EDWARDS

Bridgeport has some of the most enthusiastic rifle supporters in the country and their interest in this sport has persisted over many years despite the lack of publicity and other aids to maintaining a lively interest in any kind of sport.

Some 22 years ago Robert J. Thompson now with the Bridgeport Trust Company, lived in the Armstrong Block on William St. He fixed up a 50 foot range in his cellar and invited a few friends in one evening to try it.

The evening shoot was so satisfactory that the group arranged for more such evenings and many good times were had on this home-made range. Mr. Thompson recalls the names of Messrs. Dietrich, Graffin, Nairn, Gully, Leach and Halpin as among those present.

PEQUONNOCK CLUB FORMS

Later the Pequonnock Club was formed by interested shooters. This group had a range for a while at the Armory. Later they moved to various other places after putting up with a great deal of inconvenience for the sake of indulging in their favorite sport. Among these places were the basement of Sammis Sporting Goods Store, where the First National Bank now stands, Joseph Wilkinson's Blacksmith Shop, on the site of the present Caesar Mische store, Sailor's Hall basement where they shot over the coal bins and boilers and

several other similar places.

All this shooting was done at 50 ft. off hand. Joseph W. Wilkinson the blacksmith, was a famous old time shot and his son George inherits his love of fire arms, particularly fine target rifles. The younger Wilkinson is at present owner of one of the best target rifles in Connecticut and is an expert shot with it.

Another group lead by A. B. Gully, who by the way, is still and has been continuously very active in the promotion of rifle shooting, made a range in the cellar of Harry Dietrich.

Later they moved to the cellar of Harry Vickers. This cellar was not long enough, so they dug a tunnel out into the yard and contrived a well in which in which lights were placed to shine on the targets.

Here the group used to meet and bring their wives while the men practiced shooting and the ladies enjoyed a social evening which closed with refreshments. Mr. Gully said he particularly enjoyed the "pumpkin" pies which frequently formed a part of the collation.

The fame of these affairs spread and more were clamoring for admission to the group than could be accommodated, so larger quarters were sought. The Roof Tree Club with quarters over Hamilton Drug Store was at the time in financial difficulties.

The two groups combined and formed the Park Club taking the whole top of the building. The room was not long enough for a rifle range so an extention was built out over the yard. Here some fine shooting was done. Through Mr. Gully, the U. M. C. Co. gave the Club much assistance and while the club flourished, its teams were among the top ranks.

Many world records were made or broken by the Park Club teams

which included such famous riflemen as Louis Schwertle, Mr. Barton, George Quintmeyer, J. W. Wilkinson, Arch Wheeler, Sam Taylor, Ed. Webster, C. W. Vanstone, W. W. Naramore, Sr., W. W. Naramore, Jr., Clarence Naramore, A. B. Gully, Charles Bradly, William Glenn, John Beers and others. This club finally disbanded and shooting died out for a while.

The Remington Arms Company, successor to the U. M. C. Co., offered to such of the members as were employed by the company, quarters and equipment in the Remington Club and a new group was formed there.

WAR INTERFERES

In 1914 Mr. Newett, an engineer connected with the Remington Arms Company, started a project for an out door range. Land was leased and plans were formed, but three days after the lease was signed it was cancelled and the prime movers were notified that the land was to be used for something else. That something else was the large factory building of the General Electric Company.

At a meeting held at the University Club March 21, 1917, the Bridgeport Rifle Club was organized.

The first officers were Samuel P. Senior, President, Frank G. Hunt, Vice President, Harris L. O'Brien, Secretary, Horace B. Merwin, Treasurer, David S. Day, Executive Officer, Advisory Board, Norman Leeds, William R. Webster and Clinton B. Seeley.

This club was formed to act as a Home Guard Unit as the war had taken the National Guard Unit and there was no military organization in Bridgeport. The members were to be uniformed and equipped with rifles and machine guns.

One purpose of the club was to act as a military police force and arrangements were made to have each member sworn in as a deputy sheriff, so that in case of riot or other civil disturbance they could act promptly.

The members drilled twice each week and each man was expected to put in one night each week at target practice. The drilling had such good effect that later when two military companies were formed from members of the club these companies won high rating for their excellence in drill and marksmanship.

A list of the club members at this time includes such names as C. W. Areson, W. R. Bassick, Samuel F. Beardsley, Charles W. Bitzer,

Robert Blackwood, Warren D. Blatz, Wm. B. Boardman, Arthur Brewer, Clarence Hall, F. Glendon Hall, Samuel M. Hawley, Wm. D. Horne, Jr., John A. Kingman, Frank Roger, James G. Ludlum, W. W. Naramore, R. I. Nethercut, A. J. Palmer, A. L. Riker, Walter Scott, Andrew R. Smith, Howard A. Smith, Noble E. Vincent, Wilbur S. Warner, Charles E. Weeks, Arthur M. Wilson, Dorland Smith, F. W. Pyle, F. R. Hickman, James T. Roche, Ralph M. Paine, E. B. Caldwell, Jr., George L. Catlin, Alvin Breul, Stiles B. Goodsell, Wm. T. Hinks, Harry B. Curtiss, Wm. S. Teel, Jr., Arthur I. Platt, Paul L. Miller, Wm. J. Grippen, Lester A. Nothnagle, W. B. Waldo, J. R. Wakeman, Earl Naramore, Richard T. Staples, Frank T. Staples, Russell D. Cate, D. H. Hall, Robert H. Hubbell, E. A. Travis, C. R. Beardsley and J. C. Griffin.

After the war this outfit disbanded as a military unit, but a number of the members decided to keep on under the club name and organization for the purpose of practicing and promoting rifle and revolver shooting.

In June 1920 the club acquired a lease of property on Sport Hill, Easton for an outdoor rifle range and later in that year bought the range property. Since then this property has been improved each year till now the club has facilities for shooting both rifle and revolver at ranges from 25 to 1000 yards. The 25 yards pistol and the 50 - 100 and 200 yards are most popular. Two storage houses for targets and range equipment have been built, telephones installed for getting prompt reports between the firing points and targets. Benches and tables have been placed under the trees.

Picnic lunches are popular, many members bring their families for an all day outing when going there to practice or shoot in matches.

RUNNING DEER TARGET

Plans are under way and partly carried out for equipping and operating one of the popular running deer targets, also a machine rest for testing rifles and ammunition.

The Bridgeport naval reserve unit also uses the Easton range for practise and in shooting the qualification course required by the War Department.

For winter use, the club has a fine indoor range at the Armory. This range was equipped by the Bridgeport Rifle Club. Later when more room was needed for additional National Guard Units, the range used by the military companies was made into a store room and arrangements were made whereby the National Guard and the Naval Reserve Units shared the range of the Bridgeport Rifle Club.

It speaks well for the unity existing between these various organizations and there is practically no friction in the arrangements, each outfit doing its part in caring for the equipment. The rifle team of the Central High School uses this range for its practice and home matches. Various members have given their time at coaching the high school boys and the revolver practice of the Bridgeport Police Department.

The club has been aided financially by the state in regard to the rent, heating and lighting the indoor range.

The Bridgeport Rifle Club is affiliated with the National Rifle Association, the Connecticut State Rifle Association, the New England Rifle Association and the South Western Connecticut Rifle League.

Through its membership in the National Rifle Association and

the United States Revolver Association, the club members are eligible to compete for the valuable medals and prizes offered in the many matches conducted by these organizations, also by joining individually they have the privilege of buying new and used military equipment at greatly reduced prices.

The following well known men have served as president of the club:

Samuel P. Senior	3/21/17 - 5/13/20
Frank T. Staples	5/13/20 - 2/16/23
A. J. Palmer	2/16/23 - 1/30/25
Gordon Z. Smith	1/30/25 - 2/21/27
George C. Thomas	2/21/27 - 8/10/27
Wm. J. Mealia	8/10/27 - -

The present officers are Wm. J. Mealia, President; Treasurer, C. W. Kuhne; Secretary, Edw. F. Held; Executive Officer, George E. Wilkinson; Executive Committee, A. J. Palmer, George C. Thomas, and Brad. Hawley.

LEADS THE LEAGUE

At present the Bridgeport Rifle Club is leading the South West Connecticut Rifle League with a clean score.

One of its members, George E. Wilkinson, is making history in the Metropolitan Rifle League matches held at New York. Mr. Wilkinson won the first Re-entry match with a clean score.

He made possibles also in the second Re-entry and the Grand Aggregate but was out-ranked getting third place, the Re-entry and second place in the Grand Aggregate.

These wins netted Mr. Wilkinson valuable prizes. These matches are contested by the best shooters in the country.