

Target Balls

By Mike O'Malley



Glass balls are found throughout the world. They have been used to ward off evil spirits, float fishing nets, predict the future, contain liquids and decorate homes. The glass balls in my collection were not intended for any of these purposes. They were made that people might destroy them. To help in this effort they were called "target balls."

The glass target ball was introduced into the United States by Charles Portlock of Boston, Mass., about 1866. The significant role the target ball played in the history of shooting should not go unnoticed.

The target ball was undeniably a colorful and dramatic target. Colorful glass balls were filled with powder, feathers, soot and sawdust. Annie Oakley was said to have filled balls with little ribbon streamers to add a feminine touch to her performances. With the help of the glass target ball, exhibition shooting would reach its zenith. The glass target ball would also become the first successful inanimate target integrated into the sport of competitive trapshooting.

The sport of trapshooting began in England and the first reference we are able to find was in an English publication,

Flying Clay Pigeon.
LIGOWSKY & CO., 33 Vine Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

THREE ANNUAL PRIZES TO CLAYERS: 1st, \$100; 2d, \$25; 3d, one trap and 1000 pigeons. THE CLAYERS OF GREAT BRITAIN IN 1872.
(Extract from FOREST AND STREAM, July 7, 1881, page 48.)
 This illustration depicts the actual location of birds that the Clay Pigeons
 To fit excellent practice for wing shooting.

Ligowsky & Co. advertisement.

"The Sporting Magazine or Monthly Calendar of the Transactions of the Turf, The Chace And every other Diversion Interefting to The Man of Pleasure and Enterpriz." (sic) Volume The First, February, 1793.

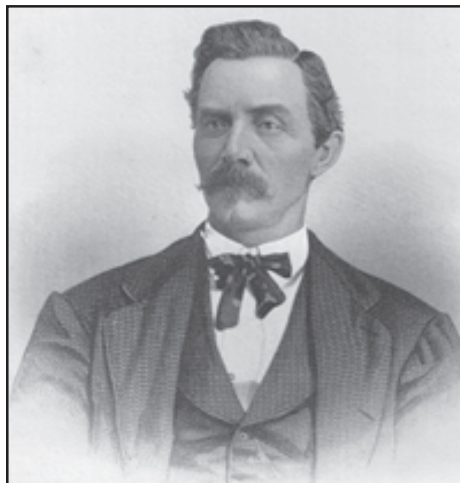
All competitive trapshooting up to the time of the target ball was done with live birds. The birds were released from traps and had to be shot and killed within a prescribed boundary. Many types of birds

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST.
CONGRESS, ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD.

MISS ANNIE OAKLEY.
THE PEERLESS LADY WING-SHOT.



Doc Carver



A.H. Bogardus

Bogardus' Patent Glass Ball Trap.
The Best Trap for Practice in the World.

Send for circular and rules to:
W. HOLBERTON, Agent,
102 Nassau St., New York.

Single Trap, \$12.
Set of Three Traps, \$30.
Balls, per 100, \$7.50

LIBERAL DISCOUNT TO THE TRADE.

were used; the preferred bird was the pigeon. Popular among the shooters was the Blue Rock Pigeon, known for its wild and erratic flight. To this day you will hear the term blue rock and clay pigeon used to describe the composite target used in modern trapshooting.

Glass target balls were at first thrown by hand or from primitive launching devices. They offered little challenge to trap shooters accustomed to the erratic flight of live birds. Captain A. H. Bogardus invented the first practical glass ball trap in 1877. With the advent of the "Bogardus Trap" and the many others that followed, the glass target ball became more accepted in trapshooting competition. It could be argued that Captain A. H. Bogardus was the founding father of modern trapshooting.

In the time of the target ball, Captain A.H. Bogardus, Ira Paine, Dr. Carver and Annie Oakley were household names. They toured the United States and Europe, appearing before thousands of enthusiastic spectators. With shotgun rifle and pistol they destroyed countless thousands of colorful target balls. Royalty sought their company. Kings, czars and princes rewarded them with medals and expensive gifts. It was truly the golden age of exhibition shooting and they were its super stars.

Using a glass ball as a target, however, presented some challenges. It could not be thrown the distance or speed to challenge a good shooter and left glass shards that could be dangerous to humans and livestock. The search for a replacement was both vigorous and productive.

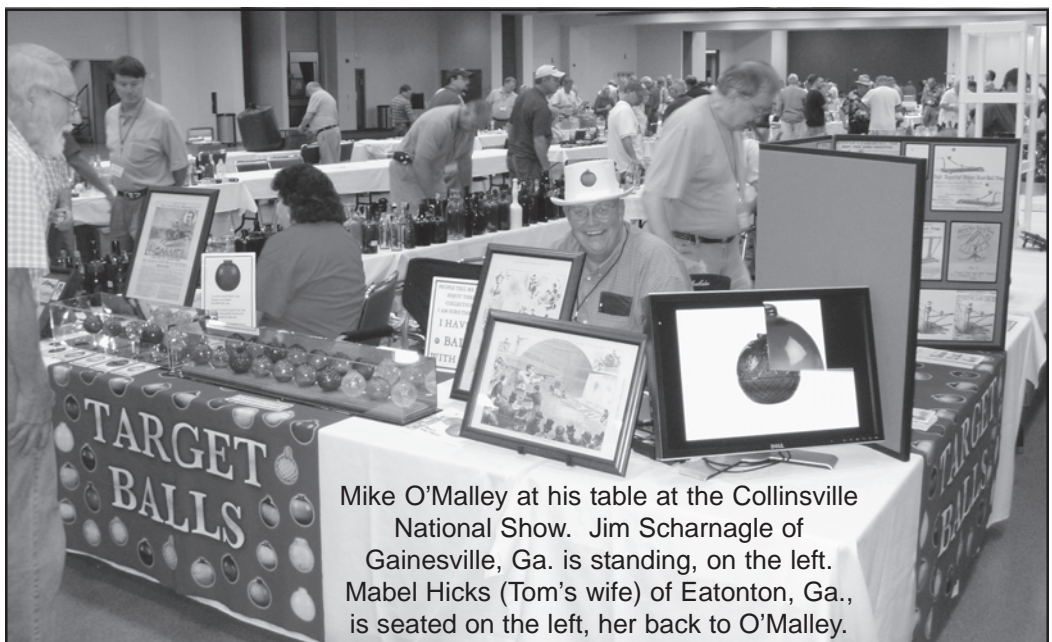
The Ligowsky target, a terra cotta clay target invented in 1880 by George Ligowsky, was not the first target invented in an attempt to replace the glass target ball, but it was the most successful. Ligowsky hired two of the best-known shooters of the period to promote his target. In 1883,



Ira Paine

Captain A. H. Bogardus and W. F. (Doc) Carver met in a series of twenty-five shooting competitions using the Ligowsky target and held in major cities across the United States. Out of these twenty-five, Dr. Carver won nineteen. Captain Bogardus won only three, and the final three of the matches ended in a tie.

The colorful period of the target ball was coming to an end. The terra cotta clay and the composite targets that followed would mean its demise. That it was an esteemed era can be witnessed in target ball collections throughout the world.



Mike O'Malley at his table at the Collinsville National Show. Jim Scharnagle of Gainesville, Ga. is standing, on the left. Mabel Hicks (Tom's wife) of Eatonton, Ga., is seated on the left, her back to O'Malley.