

The Black Hole of Philadelphia

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During the early 20th Century the epicenter of sport in America was Philadelphia.

From the Civil War to World War I, Philadelphia and its surrounding countryside contained more packs of fox hounds and more hunts, private or organized, outlaw or official, than any other section of America. Of the really large American cities, Philadelphia is still and always has been the most fox-conscious. Baltimore would be the only other possible contender. Since Philadelphia's beginnings even the founder, William Penn himself, fox-hunted in his newly formed city.

Most of the Philadelphia sportsmen I will reference in my paper tonight were products of the Gilded Age. They were fox hunters, equestrian enthusiasts, carriage driving men, pioneers of early automobile racing, and even the nation's most famous rower. Finally I will touch upon the A.H. Fox Shotgun Company of Philadelphia which supplied Philadelphia sportsmen for their shooting excursions and produced the finest shotgun ever made – a gun worthy of a United States President's safari.

In 1866, work began on a new section of land in Philadelphia that was to become known as the "Main Line." Country estates developed in this region with large lawns with their fair share of livestock roaming the grounds. Bemused visitors to the industrial city of Philadelphia raised more than a few eyebrows at such untrammelled Anglophilia. One wonders what Dr. Franklin would have said of this city, the cradle of independence, that a century after him preferred the English lifestyle to the American.

The Main Line is home of the Radnor Fox Hunt and the Devon Horse Show. Although the area lacks the open space of the Brandywine region which lies further west, horse shows and fox hunts still take place on the Main Line despite the fact it is now actually the western edge of downtown Philadelphia. At first, the Pennsylvania Railroad had plans of making the Main Line a resort area for the summer season with cricket clubs and golf clubs. Eventually social clubs sprang up along the Main Line including the Merion Cricket Club in 1865 and the Radnor Hunt Club in 1883, followed by the Bryn Mawr Polo Club and the Philadelphia Country Club.

Main Line resident, Alexander J. Cassatt, was the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad and was both a horse enthusiast and fox hunter. He helped to found the National Steeplechase Association and was a founding member of the Merion Cricket Club located on the Main Line. Cassatt was responsible for the introduction of the Hackney pony to the United States and founded the American Hackney Horse Society. Another Main Line notable of Cassatt lineage was the famous painter and equestrian, Ellen Mary Cassatt who was the niece of American born painter, Mary Cassatt (Alexander's sister). Both Cassatt women were ardent horsewomen. Ellen Mary Cassatt was likely the first female member of the Radnor Hunt to ride astride as opposed to sidesaddle.

Master of the Radnor Hunt's Foxhounds, J. Stanley Reeve kept a detailed diary for twenty-two seasons of hunting, racing and social exploits. He delighted in the social intrigue. Reeve also wrote of Plunkett Stewart's Cheshire Hounds in the Brandywine region which lies 10 miles west of the Main Line. Mr. Reeve was chair of the Bryn Mawr Hound Show which is the oldest hound show in America

with its inception date of 1914. The show is held on the grounds of the Radnor Hunt Club.

The Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Dorothy Stock captured the essence of a day at the Radnor Hunt's races:

We are savoring champagne and strawberries under a yellow and white striped awning, while far below us on the gentle slopes, tiny horsemen ride their tiny mounts into fair hunting country. We are a still life in languid motion; we are a Currier and Ives. We are perfect in our time and place. We are charming. We are the Radnor Hunt Club races. There may be pestilence, there may be poverty. There may be brutality, blasphemy and bad manners. Not here. Not ever here.

The Devon Horse Show on the Main Line began in 1896, when a dozen local gentlemen met to discuss the need to have better horses for their carriages. The railroads took families out to the mainline, but a need was growing for horses to pull buggies and carts to their homes from the station. Less than two months after this initial meeting the first annual Devon Horse show was held in 1896. By

1914 the Devon Horse Show, with 1,000 entries, was the largest outdoor horse show in American and probably in the world. The horse show's board has remained *the* social club of the Main Line and over 100,000 patrons attended the show each year. In 1939 the Wanamaker Oval at the Devon Horse Show fairgrounds was the largest show ring in the world. It was named for one of the horse show founders, William H. Wanamaker. In 1990 the name was changed from "Wanamaker" to "Dixon" in honor of Eugene 'Fitz' Dixon who helped grow the show to what it is today.

During the Second World War, the Devon horse show boasted the first night time session in horse show history. In 1941 President Roosevelt attended and his speech was amplified to the audience. The British flag flew side by side the American flag during World War II and a recruitment station was set up on the grounds of the Devon Horse Show for the US Army and Air Force.

Hope Montgomery Scott (1904-1995) was the grand dame of the Main Line and she competed in the show over six decades during her lifetime. Mrs. Scott was the inspiration for the character Tracy Lord in the Broadway play and Hollywood

film, *The Philadelphia Story* played to the hilt by Katherine Hepburn. In acts of showmanship over the years at the Devon Horse Show she rode a Texas Longhorn, an ostrich and a buffalo around the Wanamaker Oval.

Ten miles west of the Main Line, there is a wondrous absence of barb wire, just hundreds of miles of post and rail fences. Even today in the 21st century in large cities where the population brings on the production of more structures, to have airline passengers question a black hole in urban sprawl is quite extraordinary. This feat is more astounding given that the mammoth city of Philadelphia has undeveloped land such as the Brandywine as well as the largest municipal park in the country, Fairmount Park.

“From an airplane at night, you can see the “black hole” very clearly. In the center of a triangle formed by the glowing metropolitan areas of Wilmington, Delaware, Lancaster, and Philadelphia it looks like a vast power failure – mile after mile of pure black darkness. But if you were to fly in closer, skimming the treetops, you would see there is nothing wrong with the electricity. Picking out the occasional home of farmhouse twinkling in the dark, you would see that this place is

inhabited after all, however sparsely. You would see in other words, the work of the Brandywine Conservancy”

The “Black Hole” region in western Philadelphia is where the Fox Hunters of the Cheshire Fox Hunt and the Brandywine Hunts meet. The Master of Foxhounds, Plunkett Stewart founded the Cheshire Hunt in 1912. Mr. Stewart was a securities broker from Baltimore who staked out this territory to preserve and to hunt across. One author described this land by saying: *“It is a most beautiful and beautifully kept landscape, groomed and curried, and a powerful argument for ownership of the land by fox hunting gentry. This is certainly the way God and nature meant a cultivated countryside to look.”*

In 1948 Mr. Stewart’s daughter, Nancy Hannum, inherited Mr. Stewart’s Cheshire Hunt and about 2,300 acres of land. Mrs. Hannum is the granddaughter of Edward Henry Harriman, the noted Wall Street genius and railroad baron. The boundaries of her personally acquired fiefdom have allowed her to become a lord of this domain. Mrs. Hannum was notorious for ‘encouraging’ new landowners to comply with her notions of what is ‘proper use’ of the land. Her foxhunting

friends have observed that *“She traded land parcels like baseball cards – purchasing at risk properties and selling them back to conservation sympathetic people.”*

One of the earliest landholders in the Brandywine region was DuPont dynasty heir, Lammont DuPont. In the mid 1940’s Mr. DuPont decided that showing his prize cattle, hogs, sheep (and chickens) was too expensive and thus decided to sell his 5,200 acres in the Brandywine. Plunkett Stewart was concerned about housing development that could occur as a consequence and hurt the locals fox hunting ways.

Around this same time, Mr. DuPont and his wife Carol were visiting with Robert Kleberg at his Kings Ranch in Texas. Mr. DuPont convinced the Kings Ranch that the rich land in western Philadelphia would be perfect for fattening up their cattle for the eastern markets. Plunkett’s two daughters, Nancy Hannum and Averell Walker, were instructed by their father to help tend to the new tenant’s cattle in the Brandywine and to assist in persuading the Klebergs of the plan to purchase this land for their cattle enterprise.

When Kleberg visited a few months later in the Fall of 1946 and saw all of the plump cattle, he committed to purchasing the land. For the next thirty years the dark red Santa Gertrudis cattle became part of the Chester County, Pennsylvania landscape. The region became an interesting mix of the foxhunters who hunted this land three times a week along side the wide brimmed cowboy hats and western saddles. Local residents have heard stories passed down from their families that several times the two daughters lost control of the cattle and turned the streets of rural downtown Unionville, Pennsylvania into a Wild West stampede.

However, by 1984 with increasing railroad rates it became more difficult for the Kleberg's to make a profit by fattening up yearling cattle in the Brandywine. The Kings Ranch of Philadelphia went up for sale - all 6,500 acres of prime land. Corporate giant Disney was one of the potential acquirer's of this property. This foxhunting haven came frighteningly close to becoming a Disneyworld theme park.

The unofficial successor to the Stewarts and the Hannums was George Weymouth. In 1967 George A. 'Frolic' Weymouth founded the *Brandywine Conservancy*. The goal was to slow down growth in western Philadelphia as well as forming a watershed area for nearby Wilmington, Delaware. The organization was headquartered in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania in the heart of the Brandywine region and has been recognized for its pioneering efforts in preservation of open space. In addition to its sporting heritage, this area has inspired its own school of painting, The Brandywine School, consists primarily of Howard Pyle, George Schoonover and three generations of the Wyeth family.

The *Brandywine Conservancy* group acquired 5,367 acres of land for \$13 million in 1984. This region has become the 'poster child' of land conservancy. After thwarting off this potential threat of development, more conservation societies were formed including the *Piedmont Land Conservation* organization in Northern Virginia.

Closer to the town of Philadelphia, another form of racing for sportsmen was developing in Fairmont Park. In 1855 the idea of creating a large municipal park

began to evolve. By 1867 Fairmount Park was over 3,000 acres, making it the largest public park in the world. Fairmount Park hosted the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition and drew a large volume of people.

However, until recently, historians have overlooked the biggest accumulation of crowds inside Fairmount Park – the Fairmount Park automobile races from 1908-1911. The city of Philadelphia can lay claim to having some historically significant automobile races in the formative years of the sport. The races took place in Philadelphia's Fairmont Park which is adjacent to the eastern edge of the city. The number of people at the Fairmount Park Motor Races exceeded any single day of the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876 by hundreds of thousands of people.

The race evolved from the 225th anniversary of Philadelphia's founding by William Penn. A group of gentlemen proposed that for 'Founder's Week' there should be a 200-mile road race which would take place in Fairmount Park. Permission would be needed from the park's board for drivers to practice a week before the event. The park board agreed to this request. Once it was approved the *Philadelphia*

Record Newspaper declared, *“The fact that an automobile race of 200-miles is to be held in a pleasure park right in the heart of the city has called attention once more to the fact that Philadelphia is the greatest sporting city in the world.”*

At the same time the popular Vanderbilt Motor races were taking place on the 13-mile course on Long Island, NY. The editor of the Philadelphia Record further noted, *“Of one thing there is a certainty, and that is that never again, in the automobile world anyhow, will Philadelphia be classed as a sleepy town or a city of the dead.”* This quote was directed towards the patrons of the Vanderbilt automobile races on Long Island.

There were two unusual regulations for the Philadelphia automobile races. The officials created a controversial rule banning foreign cars from participating in the race. At this point in automotive history an American sports car had not won an international race and this rule would put an end to that embarrassment. Another reason for the exclusion of foreign cars is that it would be embarrassing for Philadelphia to have a foreign car win during the official celebration of ‘Founder’s Week.’ A second unusual controversial regulation relating to the race was a

restriction by the *Automobile Association of America* that there could be only two entries for every mile of the course. Since the length of the track was shortened from 10 to 8 miles, sixteen was the maximum number of participants allowed.

The inaugural race started at 7:00am on Saturday October 10, 1908. It is estimated that 400,000-500,000 people were on hand for the races. The papers reported that it was the largest crowd to ever attend an automobile race. This course was 5 miles shorter than the Vanderbilt course in Long Island, but this allowed for spectators to witness cars coming by at a quicker pace. There were more dramatic curves in the Philadelphia course and the incomparable Fairmount Park setting added to the primacy of the race in the Keystone state.

The second year of the races, police estimated the attendance to be 500,000 spectators. To control these crowds 1,800 policemen, 70 park guards, 200 men of Co. B. Engineers Corps of the Pennsylvania Guard were brought in. In 1876, exactly thirty-five years ago of this very date of October 9, 1909, a mere 185,000 people came for the opening ceremony of the International Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. In 1909 and 1910 Cincinnati Literary Club member William

Howard Taft was President of the country and was invited to attend the automobile races – and unfortunately missed both occasions.

In 1910, the third year of the races, over 600,000 spectators attended. Of the 20 entrants in the race this year, two were from Cincinnati, Ohio. The Ohio Motor Company of Carthage, Ohio had the two representatives, Harry S. Matthews and George P. Parker. Unfortunately neither of these two Cincinnati gentlemen placed in the top three.

In 1911 the fourth and final year, things began to change for the worse. The races were called off on Saturday due to the rain. Sunday was out of the question because people objected to racing on the Sabbath. Monday was a work day, but still 300,000 people attended the races on that day. In this same year the Vanderbilt Motor Races on Long Island were discontinued due to safety concerns. The other famous American automobile race, the national Grand Prize Race, was slated for Philadelphia and at the last minute a controversial vote came to change the venue to Savannah, Georgia. Dr. William J. White of the Fairmont Park Board announced that the races were unsafe for spectators and participants - and that

the race could not take place here. In short, one man single handedly shut down the event for good.

In response, the Philadelphia Motor Speedway was under construction in nearby Bucks County, Pennsylvania. This was eventually to become a national playground for all sports. However, with World War I approaching, building supplies were eliminated and the project went under. Author Agnes Repplier said it best of the Fairmont Park Races, *“the press dropped the matter, the public forgot it, and the world moved unconcernedly on.”*

Fairman Rogers was the first to introduce four-in-hand driving as a pastime in Philadelphia. Rogers was the founder of the Philadelphia Coaching Club as well as one of the first people to introduce polo to America. Old guard Philadelphian, Isaac Clothier's, annual Christmas card calendar bore pictures of Rogers in his coach and four driving along the “Main Line” of Philadelphia.

Fairman Rogers was born in Philadelphia on November 15, 1833 and was a professor of Civil Engineering from 1855-1871 at the University of Pennsylvania. His interest ranged from engineering, education, military science, horticulture, horsemanship, to yachting, photography and fine arts. Mr. Rogers was very much at the center of invention and discovery in his day. History tells us that a machine that may have been the first typewriter was set up by its inventor in Professor Rogers' library. Mr. Rogers may also have contributed greatly to the typewriters final design, for we have the word of a contemporary writer that Rogers enjoyed the gratitude of the inventor.

The walls of the *Philadelphia Club* are hung with a mosaic of photographs of the great inaugural coach run between New York and Philadelphia in 1878 hosted by Fairman Rogers. The first New York to Philadelphia coaching run was a 12-hour weekend trip on May 4, 5 and 6, 1878. Members of the prestigious New York Coaching Club, the top sporting gentlemen of the period, furnished teams for nine stages which were each 7.5 to 13 miles long. The eleven gentlemen were dressed in the New York Coaching Club's uniform – bottle green cutaway, yellow striped waistcoat, white linen ascot and grey top hat. Arthur Fownes had double duty for

the event acting as a guard as well as a mechanic from the Brewster Carriage Co.

He rode inside the coach equipped with tools to make any necessary repairs along the way.

At 6:25 AM on May 4th several hundred enthusiasts stood outside the Hotel Brunswick in New York to witness the departure of the coaches towards Philadelphia. Mr. Fownes sounded the horn and the “Tally-Ho” carriage came rumbling up to the hotel. The first team of four horses was composed of a gray, a chestnut, a skewbald and a brown. Fairman Rogers and Frederick Bronson did one last close inspection of the horses, coach and harness. Since the Tally Ho coach was owned by Col. DeLancey Kane, he was the first to take the ribbons and head towards Newark, New Jersey. At 6:30am sharp the coach departed from Fifth Avenue, New York headed to Philadelphia. Colonel Kane responded to the applause and raised his whip while the other passengers raised their white hats. Mr. Fownes sounded a merry note on his horn announcing the departure.

Thomas W Edison, the father of electricity, had a small laboratory near New Brunswick and he and his assistants took time out to watch the Tally Ho coach go

by. Later, the coach stopped at the University Hotel at Princeton and the passengers had a quick 30 minute lunch. Princeton University President McCosh invited the group to visit college buildings, but there was no time to spare since the sport of coaching prided itself on keeping on schedule.

Within minutes of the arrival in Philadelphia later that afternoon at the end of the first day of the journey, Arthur Fownes sounded out the *Post Horn Gallup*. When the coach arrived at their destination at the St. Georges Hotel on Broad Street in Philadelphia, the streets were jammed with onlookers and newspapermen. There had not been this much excitement in Philadelphia since the Fourth of July in 1776. The prestigious *Rabbit Club* of Philadelphia as well as the *Germantown Hare and Hound Club* and over a hundred mounted men and women of the Philadelphia riding schools provided a mounted escort for the coaches final few miles. A squad of eight policemen arranged themselves on each side of the main door of the St. George Hotel to prepare for the members on the coach to enter. The 12 men on the coach waved their white hats and all pulled out their watches at the same time. Amazingly the coach had arrived within seconds of its planned schedule – six o'clock PM – a testament to Mr. Roger's precision.

For a first trip of this magnitude there were amazingly no mishaps. Mr. Rogers entertained the fellow coaching participants at his Philadelphia home on Rittenhouse Square. New York Coaching Club member A. J. Cassatt joined in at the meeting at Fariman Roger's home. Members again wore the New York Coaching Club uniforms to the gathering.

On Monday, May 6th, the return trip from Philadelphia to New York City was underway. This time when the coach arrived at Princeton for lunch, the members agreed to a five minute tour of the campus. President McCosh told the men "Gentlemen, coaching must be a healthy amusement, judging from your appearance." The coach arrived at the Brunswick Hotel in New York City at 5:49pm, eleven minutes ahead of schedule. Again, for blocks, the streets were lined with people who came to watch the arrival. The inaugural trip was so successful that from 1879 to 1916 the run from New York to Philadelphia was scheduled twice annually for the spring and autumn.

Photography was one of Mr. Roger's other keen interests. He and his good friend Philadelphia painter, Thomas Eakins, studied the concept of movement. Rogers is said to have applied the principle of zootrope, a mechanical device for giving an illusion of motion, that made it possible for the celebrated photographer Eadweard Muybridge to take photographs of the horse's legs in motion. Rogers was instrumental in the development of motion picture photography as well.

In the late 1870's Rogers proposed that Philadelphia artist Thomas Eakins paint his famous carriage in motion as it really was – a daring innovation for the time. On a lovely spring morning on a site near Horticultural Hall in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, the famous painting was staged. Rogers drove his four-in-hand with his wife and their friends George Gilpins (Mrs. Roger's brother) and Franklin Dicks.

Eakins masterpiece, *A May Morning in the Park* was completed in 1879 and Rogers paid \$500 for it. The painting can be seen today in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It was later renamed *The Fairman Roger's Four-in-Hand*. This historic painting was the first to show the actual movement of a horse's stride in motion. Three out of the four horses are portrayed in rapid motion while a fourth

horse is stationary. The painting was very controversial in Philadelphia's social circles for this new depiction of motion. Another bout of controversy was over the two black grooms depicted on rear of the carriage.

Fairman Roger's literary masterpiece was *A Manual of Coaching* which was and is a classic work in the coaching and driving field written in 1899. Even today coaching enthusiasts refer to this book for its scientific attention to every detail – it is a work that would be difficult to praise too highly. One critic praised the book in this manner:

By maintaining no standard lower than perfection in the humblest details of coach, of harness, of driving, it elevates what is perhaps supposed to be merely the pastime of luxurious ease into the dignity of an art worthy of respect. A terret or a splinter bar may be an insignificant thing, but perfection is not: and in this manual nothing is overlooked, from the position of a screw to the mathematical formula for computing the centrifugal force in turning a heavy coach round a sharp corner.

Fairman Roger's obituary in 1900 noted:

His horses were not only superb specimens from the best stock farms of the country, possessing faultless style and strength, but his traps were among the most handsomely appointed ever turned out by a coach maker. Every detail from silver trace chains to the cut and color of the livery worn by his footmen, was beyond criticism, from the horseman's point of view. Mr. Rogers was never so happily occupied as when driving four-in-hand with a party of friends.

Next to hunting, Philadelphia's indigenous upper class sport is rowing. Along the Schuylkill river in Philadelphia are several 'Barge Clubs' which are easily identified by the Victorian designed boathouses. These clubs are often humorously referred to as the 'Schuylkill Navy.' Images of Philadelphia rowers were immortalized by Thomas Eakins. One of Eakins most famous paintings is entitled "Max Schmitt in a Single Scull." The picture hangs today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

John Brendan Kelly, also known as 'Jack' (1889-1960) was one of the most accomplished oarsmen in the sport of rowing. His sporting exploits were well covered by the press and his popularity rivaled Babe Ruth and Jack Dempsey. He

was also the boxing champion of the US Infantry and by pure accident he missed an opportunity to fight the future heavy weight champion boxer of the world, Gene Tunney, in a match for the championship of the US Army.

In 1908 Kelly began his professional working career as a bricklayer in Philadelphia. He went on to become the biggest bricklaying contractor in America. At the same time he began his sporting career of rowing on the Schuylkill River as a member of the Vesper Barge Club. By 1916 he was the number one rower in the United States.

In 1920 Kelly applied to race in the Diamond Sculls at the Henley Royal Regatta. This annual event which took place on the Thames in England was the pinnacle of rowing. His application was rejected because of his engaging in manual labor early in his career as a bricklayer. The regatta rules excluded anyone “who is or ever has been...by trade or employment for wages a mechanic, artisan or labourer.” This issuance became worldwide news. One theory on this ruling is

thought to come about because the English feared that Kelly could win the Diamonds event. Later these 'Gentleman Labor' rules were rescinded. Ironically this first controversial ruling actually helped Mr. Kelly's brick business back home.

At the 1920 Belgian Olympics, Kelly defeated the winner of the Diamond Sculls event from earlier that same year, British Sculler Jack Beresford. After this victory Kelly purportedly mailed his racing cap to King George V of England with the note "Greetings from a bricklayer."

Four years later in the 1924 Olympics Kelly was successful again. Kelly was the first rower to win three Olympic gold medals. During the years of 1919-1920 he had won 126 consecutive rowing races.

Jack Kelly Senior's other revenge was raising a son, Jack Kelly, Jr., who became a champion rower himself. His son won the Henley Regatta in 1947 while wearing his father's green sculling cap. To gain even more revenge Kelly Jr. won the Henley Diamond race again in 1949.

In Fairmont Park there is a statue of Kelly with a profile of him in the rowing position. The statue is located near the finish line of the Schuylkill River just off of the “Kelly Drive” – the main thoroughfare along the park. In Philip Barry’s 1939 Broadway comedy, *The Philadelphia Story*, Kelly was the model for the character of George Kittredge, ---Tracy Lord’s brash, up-and-coming, man-of-the-people fiancée. Jack Kelly’s daughter, Grace Kelly, played Tracy Lord in the 1956 Cole Porter movie musical version, *High Society*.

In addition to fox hunting numerous Philadelphia sportsmen were engaged in hunting with firearm and shooting for sport. It is thus logical that one of the premiere sporting gun makers of the Gilded Age flourished in Philadelphia and can lay claim to creating the most expensive and famous sporting gun in American history.

Ansley H. Fox, the owner of the A.H. Fox Company, called his guns “*The Finest Gun in the World.*” He came up with a clever marketing scheme to beat out all his

American firearms rivals including Winchester and Remington Arms Company to become the most celebrated firearms company in the years 1908-1909 in the United States.

In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt did not wish to seek re-election. He had become the most popular United States President since Abraham Lincoln.

However, he was tired of public life and what he wanted to do most was to head off to Africa and do some hunting. This excursion was to become the most famous safari of the twentieth Century and the Fox shotgun that was presented to him would share equally in his glory.

Theodore Roosevelt was known for his large volume of letters he wrote. For this expedition he wrote letters to sculptors, photographers, taxidermists, zoologists, other hunters, and of course the Winchester Arms Company to obtain suitable firearms for the trip. This safari was supported by a \$50,000 grant from the Smithsonian Institute and by publisher, Charles Scribner's Sons in the form of a \$50,000 guarantee for the forthcoming book, *African Game Trails*. Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie also contributed \$55,000 towards the excursion.

Mr. Fox, as well as other firearms company's owners, caught on to the media frenzy of the trip and on August 13, 1908 Fox wrote a letter to the President. *"The directors of this company, having read your proposed hunting trip, have instructed me to offer to make to order for you the finest gun this company can produce."* At first President Roosevelt declined this offer. Then almost a month later on September 10, 1908 the President wrote to Mr. Fox stating:

"When I wrote you, I did not intend to take a shotgun to Africa. I find, however, that I would like to take such a gun, provided that at close quarters I could use it with a ball also. In other words, I shall like in case of an emergency to have it loaded with a ball and use it for a spare gun for a lion. Now I have rather a pride in taking American rifles on this trip, and in the same way I would like to take an American gun; but of course you may have by this time decided that you do not care to repeat your very kind offer, in that event will you tell me what the cost of such a gun as I have described, twelve bore and plain finish, would be?"

After reading this letter Mr. Fox immediately agreed to create a complimentary gun, but he was now in quite a predicament. Roosevelt would be leaving in less

than six months and the gun would have to be delivered to the President well in advance of his trip. Ansley Fox may have been in such a rush to beat out another competing firearms maker to 'cash in' on this opportunity that it is rumored he sent this firearm to Teddy Roosevelt before it was officially complete. One Fox craftsman noted, *"The barrels aren't engraved at all nor are they treated with the gold lightning bolts typical of the "Grade F" Fox shotgun."*

Immediately after receiving this prized shotgun Teddy Roosevelt wrote a letter to

Mr. Fox:

My Dear Mr. Fox, The double-barreled shotgun has come, and I really think it is the most beautiful gun I have ever seen. I am exceedingly proud of it. I am almost ashamed to take it to Africa and expose it to the rough usage it will receive. But now that I have it, I could not possibly make up my mind to leave it behind. I am extremely proud that I am to have such a beautiful bit of American workmanship with me. Sincerely Yours, Teddy Roosevelt.

Five days later the President wrote to Fox again:

“Do let me thank you warmly again for that beautiful gun. It is so beautiful that I take pleasure in just looking at it. I shall keep it as long as I live and when I die it shall go to my son Kermit who accompanies me on my Africa trip.”

Roosevelt left the Presidential office on March 4, 1909 and by March 24 he and his son Kermit steamed out of New York harbor towards Mombasa, Africa.

Among the hundreds of crates, cartons and cases of the expedition gear, there were 20 cases of firearms, ammunition and accoutrements. The safari lasted for 11 months. Roosevelt wrote monthly essays for *Scribner’s Magazine* by dispatching the manuscripts from camp to Nairobi via a runner. In one of these essays dated October 1909, he said, *“I had a Fox No. 12 shotgun; no better gun was ever made.”*

Roosevelt’s second major expedition in 1913-1914 was known as the “River of Doubt”. This excursion was an ill-fated trip in the Amazon whereupon he took this same 12 gauge gun with him. Roosevelt contracted ‘Jungle Fever’ and suffered a serious leg wound. He was ready to abandon the equipment and leave everything behind including the Fox shotgun, but Kermit persuaded his father to press on.

On October 5, 2010 James Julia Auctions in Maine offered this very shotgun for sale. The catalogue stated, *“This exciting shotgun is considered to be the most historic and valuable shotgun known to exist.”* The firearm sold at auction for \$862,500 making it the most expensive shotgun ever to be sold at auction.

During my frequent travels to Philadelphia, I have had the opportunity to spend time in these Philadelphia sporting destinations and attend sporting events at Devon Horse Show as well as the Cheshire and Radnor Fox Hunts. I have had the privilege to meet with sportsman and philanthropist, Frolic Weymouth, and historian Gerald Francis, the Director of The Lower Merion County Historical Society on the Main Line. Philadelphia certainly has a rich heritage in sport and it is good to see these traditions thriving today because of the sportsmen of the past.