

Perfect Timing: The North American Trap Collectors Association

By Scot H. Dahms

On Saturday, March 23, 2013, I walked into the building where the North American Trap Collectors Association (NATCA) was holding its convention. The building was on the Shelby County Fairgrounds at Sydney, Ohio. This was the first NATCA event I had attended, and little did I know how much this event would impact my future involvement in the Association.

After seeing all the antique traps and talking to some of the members, I knew this was where I should have been years before I actually joined. In 1986, I started trapping when I was fourteen years old, and the first animal

I ever caught during a trapping season was a raccoon. As I grew older, I knew that there were antique traps, and I collected the ones that came with the "user" traps I purchased. These antique traps were in poor condition and really had no collector value, but I didn't know that then.

After I became a member of the NATCA, I called a person in Canada about a trap he was selling. I told him that I had an interest in Triumph traps, and he asked me if I had ever read *The Rise and Fall of a Dynasty: The Triumph Trap Company*. I had not, and he sent me a copy. Once I read it, I knew that I had picked the right traps to collect. I love "underdog" stories, and Triumph's history, compet-



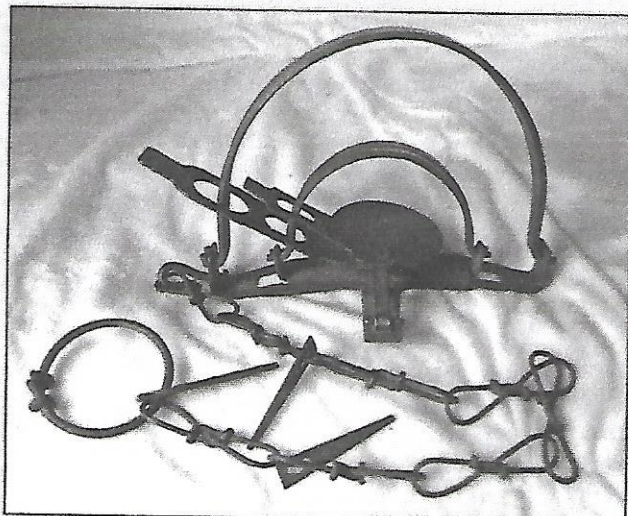
Gibbs Live Trap and Pan –

The Gibbs Live Trap, or more commonly known as the "Armadillo Trap," was made to catch muskrats alive. In the early 1900s trapping pressure was so high that Gibbs started selling muskrats alive to restock depleted areas. In the front, the trap

is set and ready to catch a muskrat. It was placed underwater to hide it. The trap in the background is what it looks like when set off. The trap raised up out of the water to make sure the muskrat did not drown. Note that the set-off trap resembles an armadillo, hence the nickname. This trap is very heavily sought after by trap collectors. Ones in very good shape can sell for \$2,000.



The 111 was manufactured by the Animal Trap Company for Gibbs. It was one of the first double-jawed traps. Only 1,200 were ever made. This trap in excellent condition can go for \$1,000.





Gibbs Dope Trap, Pan and Poison Capsule -

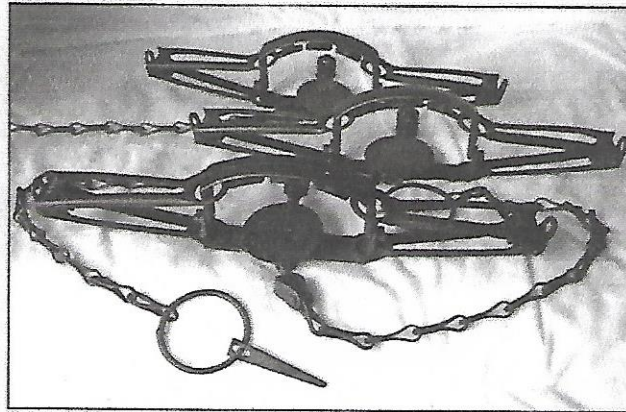
Gibbs wanted a trap that would kill the animal quickly. When set, the auxiliary bail is held level with the ground. When an animal gets caught, the bail springs upward close to the animal. The animal bites the capsule and dies immediately. This trap was used in the early 1900s and trapping laws were more liberal then. Today, the

use of a poison capsule with a trap would not be legal. The trap was only manufactured for a short time, again increasing the value because of a limited number. Ones in good shape can go for close to \$1,000 and the poison capsule can reach \$150.



Triumph 2A and Pan -

The manufacture of this trap by Triumph actually came about from the company losing a court case to Gibbs. The unique part of this trap is the coil spring powered long spring. The court case said that Triumph could not produce their Three Jaw trap anymore. The coil-spring operated long springs were specifically made for the Three Jaw trap, so they made the #2 sized trap and used the remaining springs for them. This trap in good shape can go for \$1,000.



ing with the Oneida Community (OC) that made Newhouse traps, was surely an "underdog" story. A few employees even left OC to work for Triumph.

I continued to purchase Triumph traps through the NATCA magazine. I found some other members who lived close to me and ended up buying two Triumph collections that they had. I had such a deep interest in the trap company that I started to research it and write articles for the Association's magazine. I found other material about trapping history and continued to write articles for various magazines. Besides *TRAPS*, I have also had articles published in the *Trapper and Predator Caller* and *Fur Fish Game*.

With the amount of material I found, I wrote two books about employees of Triumph. The first book was called *Adirondack Dick: The Illustrated Life of Richard K. "Dick" Wood* and the second was *E.J. Dailey: The Last Adirondack Trapper*. I continue to research and have plans for future books.

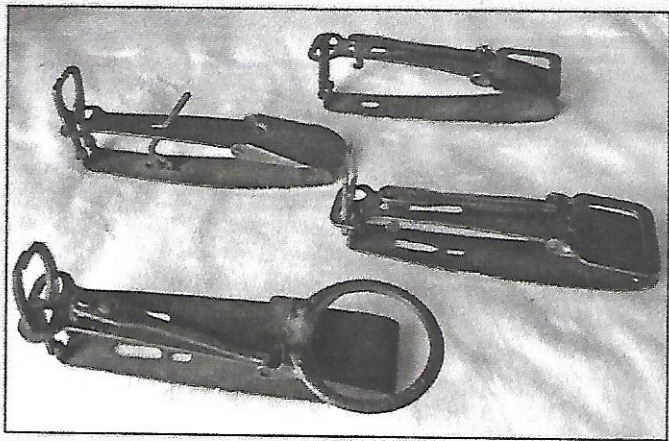
As you can see, a person with limited collecting experience can gain knowledge quickly if they learn from current members, research the published information that is out there, and research areas where others have not looked. A couple of books I recommend for the beginning collector is the *Trap Collectors Guide* by Blaise Andreski and Tom

Parr. Tom is the current President of the Association and runs the Trap Museum in Galloway, Ohio. The other book is titled *The Steel Trap in North America*, by Dick Gerstell.

Newhouse traps are the most sought after and collected traps, but they are also the most expensive, with some selling for tens of thousands of dollars. A person can collect a certain brand, like I do, or can collect a type of trap, like only mouse traps, or only #0 sized traps, or just bear traps. Most trap collectors are opportunistic, collecting what they can find for reasonable prices. Some collectors just focus on really hard to get traps and items. Others focus on only inexpensive traps. Everyone has their own little niche.

The two most important factors in trap collecting are: the clearness of the pan stamp, and the completeness of the trap. If a rare trap has these characteristics, it has the best chances for selling at a higher price. If the pan cannot be completely read or the trap is missing parts, its worth drops substantially.

Another important feature is the trap's patina. Patina is the result of the aging of the metal which covers the trap with a thin rust-like coating. Trap collectors prefer this kind of surface compared to a trap shined up with a wire brush. Taking the patina off can actually reduce the value. Some antique traps may have never been set outside and still have factory oil making them an old- new stock item.



Triumph Gopher Traps –
 These traps are very rare because of their small size and limited numbers produced. As noted in the photograph, there are many versions, with some being rarer than others. These traps can go for between \$250 to \$1,000.



Standing Bears –
 Although a poor representation of the Standing Bears stamp, this usually \$50 trap setter is now in the \$300 range just because of the stamp.



Triumph Master Grip Traps are very sought after because of their unique jaw configuration. The Triple Clutch feature was added to some of the traps. They are the added grippers below the jaws. Only about 1,000 of these traps were ever made, and they can sell for \$500.



Collectors can easily see the difference between a wire brushed trap and old-new stock.

Like anything else that potentially involves large sums of money, the buyer should be aware that high-dollar traps have been faked. Some are poor fakes and easily identifiable as such, but others are very well done and can fool even the seasoned collector.

Traps can be stamped in other locations than the pan, including on the spring, under the pan, on the base, or on the jaws. Depending on where the stamping is located and what it is can increase the value dramatically. The best example of this is for Newhouse traps – the “Standing Bears” on traps made in the U.S. and the “Dancing Bears” on traps made in Canada.

Members of the Association receive a magazine every two months. The magazine is called TRAPS (Trading, Researching and Preserving Steel traps). Every issue includes articles authored by collectors, traps and other items for sale, and dates of trapping events including state conventions and other NATCA events.

The main annual NATCA event is held in Sydney, Ohio in March. Other regional events are held throughout the year, including one in the Western U.S., Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Southeastern U.S., and one in Canada. If you

have never attended one of these get-togethers, I encourage you to do so. You will see some unique traps and learn something about trapping history that you did not know.

If you want more information about the North American Trap Collectors Association and events, please go to www.northamericantraps.com. If you want more information on the trap museum, or to possibly purchase *The Trap Collectors Guide*, please go to www.traphistorymuseum.com. If you are interested in purchasing one of my books or want more information about the NATCA, please contact me at ranger1971@comcast.net.

The Triumph Trap Company was incorporated on March 25, 1913. One hundred years later, almost to the day, I walked through the doors to attend my first NATCA event and quickly realized that I should have been a member of this group long before I was. Sometimes fate is part of finding your proper place in the world. Visit an event, maybe you will find something you have been missing all along, just like I did. □

(Editor's note: Readers wishing to contact the author of this article, Scot H. Dahms, may do so by calling: 765-327-1531 or eMailing: ranger1971@comcast.net.)