

MASTHEAD of the *Schützen-Zeitung*, a newspaper published in Philadelphia from 1871 to 1876 for members of the U.S. Eastern Sharpshooters Union. The logo motto "Concord" alludes to the English ship that brought the first German immigrants to America in 1683. This design was carved on the stock of a schützen rifle made by John Meunier of Milwaukee, and exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. Ron Peterson collection.

Schützenfest: a German-American Tradition

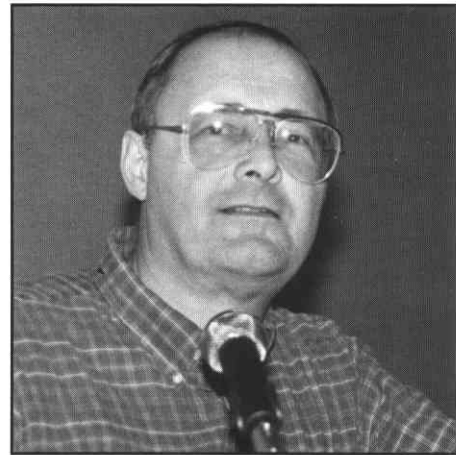
John D. Hamilton

The United States is an ethnic melting pot that hosts folk traditions from many lands, some of which achieve extensive popularity with the general populace, while others fail to become integrated into the mainstream of our culture. One such folk tradition that successfully migrated from the Germanic countries of central Europe, to take firm root in America, was the Schützenfest, or target shooting festival. As a convivial leisure activity enjoyed in nearly all German-American communities in the second half of the 19th century, the Schützenfest offered harmless recreation for many. As a popular organized competitive sport initiated among German-American "Vereine" (clubs) in the 1840s, its universal appeal rapidly transcended ethnic, economic, and social boundaries to become an accepted American pastime. The special demands of Schützen competition were also instrumental in promoting post-Civil War growth of the American firearms industry. Target rifles specifically designed and manufactured for the Schützenfest supported a distinct field of firearms technology in which America excelled. Let us then look at the European origins of the Schützenfest and its Americanized versions.

The Schützenfest originated in 14th century Germany as a lighthearted spring festival that provided citizens with an opportunity to exercise their ability to defend their towns from invaders. The term "Schützen" originally meant defender.

First conducted as crossbow contests, shooters took aim at a bird effigy, or popinjay, placed atop a high pole. In the 16th century circular targets having a central black disc augmented the popinjay as a shooting mark. By 1600, firearms became generally available to ordinary burghers who formed themselves into societies for the purpose of promoting marksmanship as a leisure activity and regulating these contests. Ratified by municipal councils, their charters included extremely detailed provisions about behaviour and the handling of weapons at the shooting ground, and the powers of officials.

Each society prided itself in maintaining a club house and shooting grounds having covered firing positions. Target butts were provided with backstops to halt stray projectiles and scores were indicated by attendants, who used long wands from behind protective barriers to mark where each shot landed. Pavilions were also available where shooters could prepare their weapons, officials retire to verify and record results, and vendors dispense food and drink to spectators.



In overall charge of the festival and responsible for scoring was the "Schützenmeister" (Shooting Master). This much respected and honored official was assisted by the "Pritschenmeister" (Master of Fools) who played a popular role as master of ceremonies, announcer, joker, and master-at-arms. Dressed in burlesque or harlequin costume, the "Pritschenmeister" employed ribald yet good-natured slapstick humor to punish shooters for minor rule infractions. Booby prizes for the lowest score, and attending slapstick ridicule at the hands of the Pritschenmeister were traditional parts of the festivities. The festivals also included other prize contests such as skittles, foot races and jumping contests, stone-tossing, dancing, blanket-tossing and other rowdy entertainments.

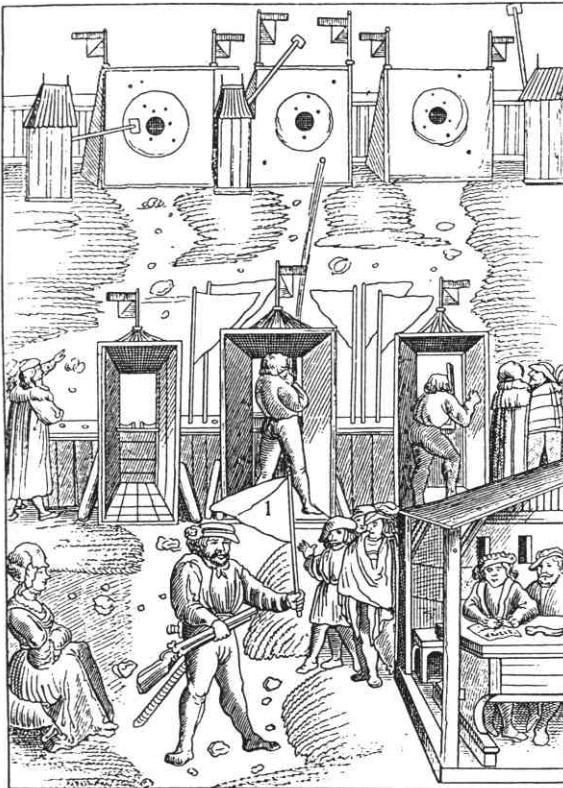
Prizes for the best marksmen were lavish: gold, silver, tin (pewter), rich textiles, livestock, and other coveted awards. The manner in which the competitions were staged earned as much honor for the cities and towns that hosted them, as for the individuals who won them. The festivals usually took place between the first day in May and St. Martin's Day (November 11th), which marked the end of good weather for outdoor shooting. Dates selected on which to hold these secular festivals varied from region to region, but in many cases they were conveniently merged with church festival fairs such as Kirmes. The festival would commence with ceremonies at the main church or town hall square where officials, marksmen, musicians, standard bearers, and lovely maidens would form a "Zug" (procession) that wended its way to the shooting grounds where the competition would follow.

One particular shooting event was reserved for designation of the "Schützenkönig" (Shooting King), a



title considered the highest distinction among marksmen, and valid until the next festival. The King was crowned with a green wreath symbolic of spring and regeneration, bestowed with prizes and special privileges, encouraged to choose a Queen, and expected to treat his fellow competitors to a toast or banquet. Among the King's prerogatives was the right to wear the shooting society's sacred regalia, the "Königskette" (King's Chain), a silver collar chain to which was affixed medallions commemorating past Schützen Kings. However, only a citizen of the town could aspire to win and wear the King's Chain.

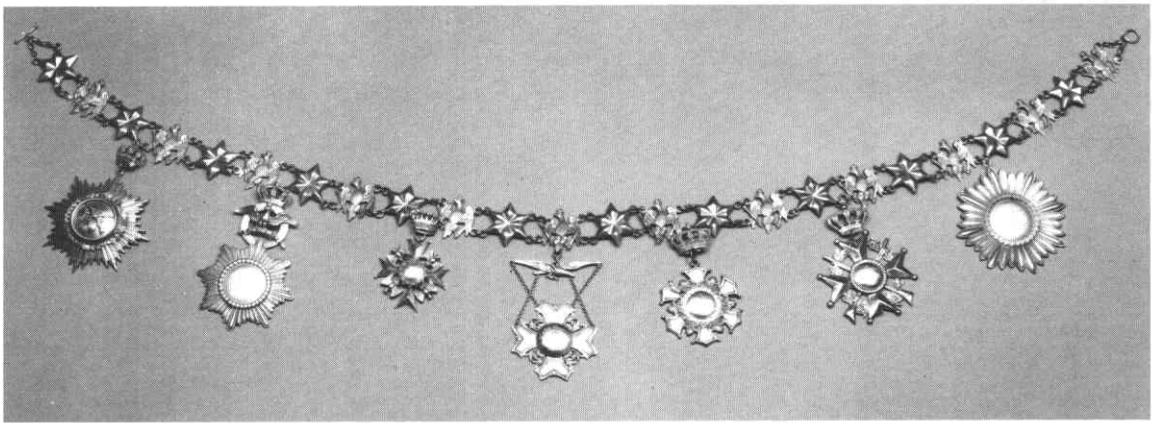
By the 17th century, variety and an element of chance had been introduced to target design. A custom was established of donating a painted pictorial target or "Ehrenscheibe" (honor target) as an added prize for the Schützenfest's main event, the King or Honor match. Each schützen King was accorded the honor of selecting the symbolical, allegorical, historical, or satirical theme to be painted on a wooden board for the next King target. Four concentric scoring rings were indistinctly inscribed over the painted scene, usually in a minor area of the image. At a range of one or two hundred meters, marksmen could only estimate where within the scene the center might lie. Artists commissioned to paint these targets also added a bit of relevant or irreverent doggerel verse, the date and location of the contest, and names of the new King and the donor. Allowed only one shot, each marksman's bullet hole was plugged and identified.



(Open Competition) 15th and 16th c. Crossbow and rifle competitions held at Zurich and Pforzheim, where marksmen shot from covered stalls. Markers used long wands from behind protective huts to indicate scores. Note that an hourglass limits shooting time for the crossbowmen. A rifle competitor turns in a score pennant to the Schützenmeister for recording. (Germann) Ron Peterson collection.



RIFLESHOOTING AT THE ZURICH SCHUETZEN HOUSE. Sharpshooters in shooting stands. At left, the Pritschenmeister punishes two competitors for their transgression of the rules. A stained glass panel of ca. 1625. Swiss National Museum.



SILVER SCHÜTZEN KING'S CHAIN, St. Sebastian Schützen Gesellschaft of Straelen, Westphalia c. 1888-1935. Dated medallions engraved with the new King's name were added to the sacred regalia chain each year. Alan R. Wonson collection, Robert Fitch photo.

Within the Hapsburg Empire the "Adler" (eagle) or "Vogel" (bird) target replaced the popinjay in schützen competition. Various wooden parts of the imperial heraldic eagle's anatomy, crest, and external ornaments were fired at in strict sequence by contestants taking turns in a rotation drawn by lottery. The shooter knocking down the last remaining fragment won the match.

It was inevitable that such a popular pastime as the schützenfest be elevated to the status of a national sport. Following an example set by the Swiss, the first pan-Germanic shooting festival took place at Gotha in 1861. A year later, under the liberal patronage of Ernst II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1818-1893), a federated union of German schützen organizations was formed. Thereafter, successive and well attended "Bundesschiessen" (federal schützenfests) were held every two years.

At the 7th Bundesschiessen at Munich in 1881,

sharpshooters were introduced to their pin-up girl, "Die Schützenliesl" (beer tent waitress). Born in Bavaria in 1860, this attractive Munich beer hall waitress was immortalized on canvas by artist Fredrich A. Kalbach, who presented the painting to the festival's Executive Committee to display at the Bundesfest. Schützenliesl's beauty beguiled sharpshooters for over half a century and she was often depicted on steins and rifles, clad in her native Bavarian costume, with a target-shaped cap on her head, foaming beer steins in either hand, about to skip off a beer barrel. The painting was presented to the City Council after the festival, and it now hangs in the Munich "Schiesstätte" (shooting place building).

By 1886, there were 712 participating shooting societies in the German empire, having a combined membership of more than 58,000 marksmen. Although local shooting societies continued to maintain their own quaint shooting



SCHÜTZEN RIFLE made by Ad. Frohn of Suhl, Germany, c. 1920-1925. The receiver is engraved with allegorical target shooting nymphs. The carved stock depicts a baroque marksman in classic shooting stance aiming at a suspended target, while Cupid holds a scoring paddle and awaits the outcome. Alan R. Wonson collection.



“DIE SCHÜTZENLIESL”, painting by Friedrich A. Kaulbach (1850-1920), Munich, 1881.

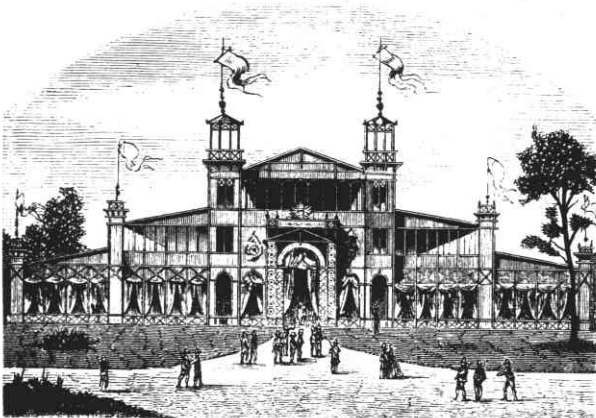
A Munich beer hall waitress immortalized by artist Kaulbach. The attractive young lady is posed in her native Bavarian Folk costume, a target-shaped cap on her head, foaming beer steins in each hand, in the act of skipping off a rolling beer barrel. The painting was titled “Die Schützenliesl” and exhibited as the logo for the 7th Deutsches Bundesschiessen (German Federal Sharpshooting Festival) held at Munich in 1881. The painting made Liesl famous (her real name was Colletta), and adored among sharpshooters. (Germann) Photo courtesy of Ron Peterson.



SCHÜTZENLIESL CARVED STOCK. An exquisite Aydt-System rifle made by Ad. Frohn of Suhl, Germany c. 1920-25. Schützenliesl became a favorite decorative motif on target rifles. Alan R. Wonson collection.

customs, such as ricochet shooting across the waters of the Prebersee at Tamsweg, Austria, the large shooting federations moved to standardize rules and regulations. Attracting marksmen from afar, even America, facilities at federal schützenfests were imposing and honors for the winners were exalted. It also followed that winning the federal schützenfests became a point of national pride and honor.

Beginning in 1683, when the first German settlers to America arrived at Philadelphia aboard the vessel CONCORD, German immigration in the colonial period was comprised mainly of pietist and separatist groups who maintained strict scruples against bearing arms. The remainder of the German influx also included worldly Lutherans and followers of the Reformed Church who numbered many gunsmiths among their congregations, but who also failed to revive old world schützenfest traditions. The communes and communities of both segments lacked the essential secular social organizations that had nurtured ritualized sharpshooting in Europe. It would appear that this was the main reason why no schützen societies were formed in America until the late 1840s.



SCHÜTZEN PAVILION, VIENNA C. 1881, Where the East Austrian Bundesschiessen took place in 1880. The competition was open only to members of East Austrian schützen unions and their guests. (Brandeis) Photo courtesy St. Louis Mercantile Library.

In the 1830s, a wave of cosmopolitan political refugees enlarged existing Germanic enclaves on the eastern seaboard and founded new ones in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri. To the newcomers of the 1830s were added a fresh wave of liberal political refugees in 1848, who were referred to as the “Forty-Eighters”, and who gave a new impetus to German-American institutions promoting leisure and cultural activities. Germanic immigration to the United States reached peak numbers during the 1850-54 period, as yet another wave of refugees sought to escape famine and deteriorating economic conditions in their homelands.

For these immigrants, the shock of assimilation into American society was eased by “Vereine” (clubs) and “Gesellschaft” (societies) where members might share enjoyment of cultural and recreational pursuits. It was under such circumstances that for the first time in America, Turner (gymnastics), Sanger (choral), and Schützen (shooting) clubs were formed. It is also significant that in the records of the 1840s and early 1850s will be found initial data pertaining to many German-American gunsmiths who became identified with the production of schützen rifles.

The first schützen club in America was founded at Philadelphia in 1846 by gunsmith Andraeus Wurfflein



RICOCHET SHOOTING ON THE PREBERSEE AT TAMSWEG, AUSTRIA. A 200-year old schützenfest custom of shooting at target reflections on water, causing bullets to ricochet into the bulls-eye. Targets are mounted in pairs (high-direct aim) and (low-ricochet). Floating log booms create calm water and smooth reflections. This was a skill used by early artillerists. Photo courtesy Austrian National Tourist Office.

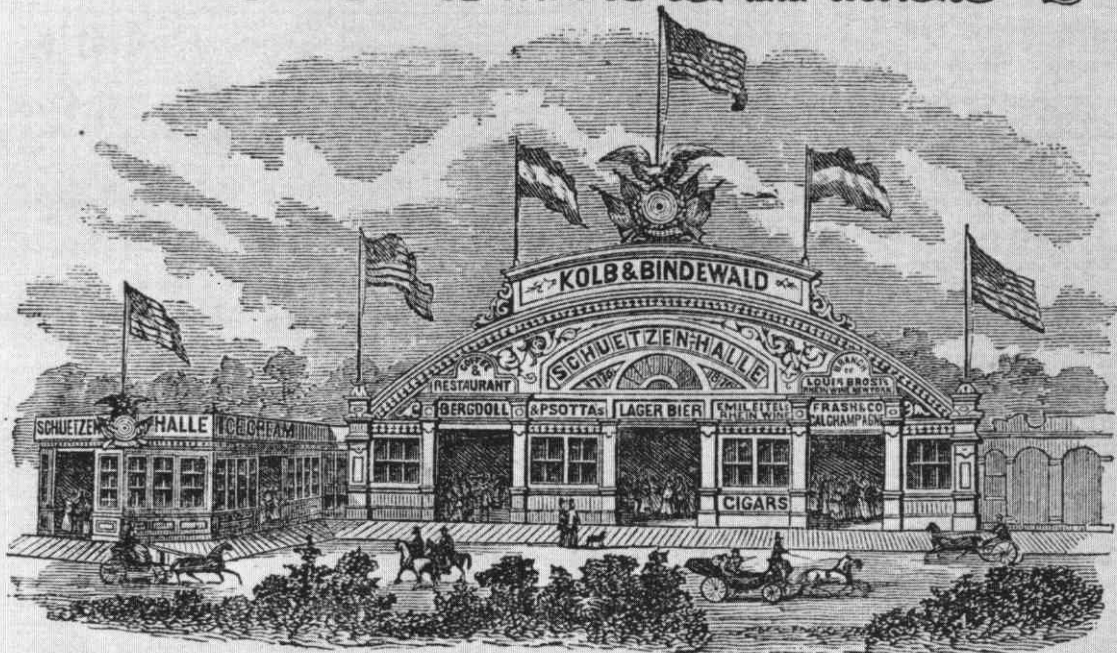


Grounds of the Chicago Sharpshooters Association
Chicago Lithograph Co. 1866

“Grounds of the Chicago Sharpshooters Association on the Occasion of the 2nd Festival of the American Sharpshooters Association, June 1866”. Chicago Lithograph Co. Situated on the lake front, in what is now Lincoln Park, the 300 yard shooting range is in the background. At far left the festival hall and shooting house; at far right a triumphal arch through which march processions of bandmen and sharpshooters enroute to the range. Family picnic tables abound throughout the grounds. Photo courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

PHILADELPHIA.

KOLB & BINDEWALD'S



Centennial Schützen-Halle,
Elm-Avenue, gegenüber dem mittleren Eingange des
Haupt-Ausstellungs-Gebäudes.

CENTENNIAL SCHÜTZEN HALL, PHILADELPHIA 1876. An advertisement for Kolb & Bindewald's commercial rifle range where marksmen might also obtain a variety of refreshments. (Schützen-Zeitung). Ron Peterson collection.



"Hall and Shooting Grounds of the Schützenbund at Jones's Wood, New York City" July 30, 1868. Erected at a cost of \$40,000, the facility included a 300 foot long shooting stand that accommodated 56 firing positions. (Harper's Weekly) Boston Public Library.

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THE SCHÜTZENFEST—THE PROCESSION PASSING THROUGH UNION SQUARE.—[SEE PAGE 453.]

“Procession of the Sharpshooter’s Carnival”. Parade scene of the 3rd Annual Schützenfest of the North American Schützen Bund on June 29, 1868. The procession passed through New York’s Union Square enroute to the matches held at Jones’s Wood. (Harper’s Weekly) Boston Public Library.

(d.1872) and others. It was soon followed by many more Vereins whose operations were funded from a variety of revenues, including the sale of shares that permitted the acquisition of shooting grounds and club facilities. Not all were as grandiose and park-like as those at Chicago or Baltimore. Rural Vereins such as that at New Glarus, Wisconsin, literally hacked their facilities out of the woodlands. Some Vereins found it more convenient and economical to hire meeting halls and commercial shooting facilities or use ranges erected at many public recreational parks. Membership was usually reserved for those of German descent, although similar sharpshooting organizations came into existence among other ethnic groups such as the Swiss, Danes, and Norwegians. In any event, the nomenclature of the schützenfest remained in the German language.

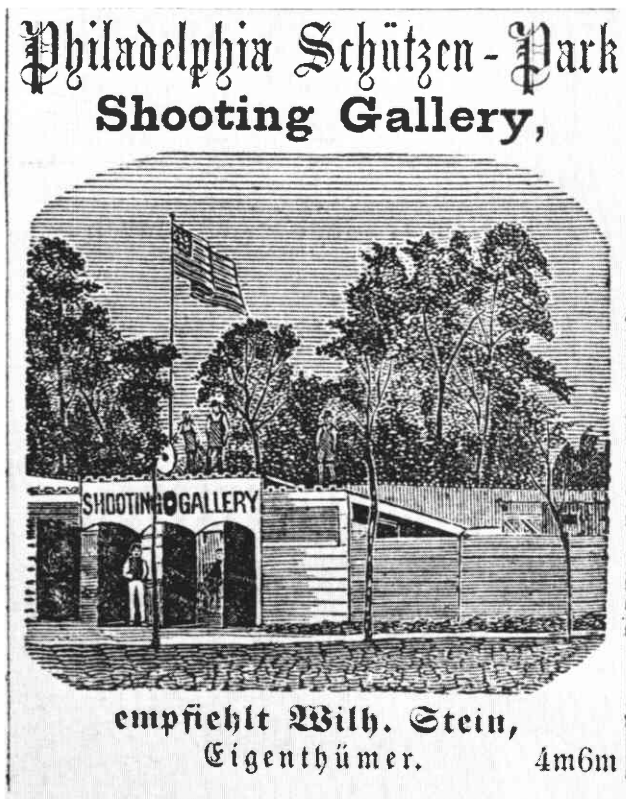
Verein members attended rounds of invitational schützenfests following banners that provided a rallying point during ceremonial parades and festival revels. Presented to the clubs by member's wives, Verein banners were often painted or embroidered with symbolic figures of the Goddess Germania, or Germanic folk heroes such as Hermann or Wilhelm Tell. They also formed musical bands to perform stirring parade marches and provide festival entertainment.

Most impressive were the distinctive costumes they adopted that evolved from the Tyrolean rifleman's uniform worn during the "War of Liberation" from Napoleonic oppression. In 1816, Tyrolean sharpshooters had been garbed in gray tunics with green trim and braid, and black felt hats with green feather plumes. Decades later, the plumed headgear was associated with Bohemians in general and popularized by Hungarian political activist Lajos Kossuth (1802-94). The Bohemian hat became a symbol during the 1840s and 50s of the bourgeois struggle for political reform in Europe. As an honored political refugee in the United States, Kossuth was instrumental in popularizing the bohemian headgear at all levels of American society, but particularly among fraternal organizations and the military.

In 1858, the Kossuth-style hat found favor in the U.S. War Department, where it was adopted into Uniform Regulations by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. After the war and during the 1870s and 80s, many schützen clubs adopted a combination of what had become eccentric headgear for American military marksmen, and the traditional gray rifleman's tunic. Sharpshooters embellished their uniforms with green velvet collars and cuffs, and aiguillets or hanging cords. Verein officials also wore epauletts denoting their office, and sabers or "hirschfänger" (hunting knives) while attending ceremonies and public parades. Not to be outdone, the ladies, too, created similar shooting costumes. Bedecked with gold and silver shooting medals they all made an impressive show at festival functions.

The 1890s produced a more dapper-appearing sharpshooter who tended to replace the floppy Kossuth hat with a snappy Homburg. During the 1920s and 30s, however, the wearing of schützen costumes disappeared altogether, probably as much for economic reasons as from World War I-related anti-German reaction. Contemporary photographs reveal that shooting garb at schützenfests had been reduced to a simple work apron and straw boater.

In 1866, following Germany's example, a federation of American Schützen Vereins was formed, styling itself the North American Sharp-Shooting Union. Organized to promote and regulate Schützen competition on a national scale, its administration was controlled by a board of directors drawn from clubs located in the mid-west, where four out of the first five biennial schützenfests were held. These mid-west venues were regarded as placing eastern competitors at a disadvantage and provided a source of dissension within the organization. This petty sectionalism gave rise, early in the 1870s, to the formation of regional unions in the southern, eastern, and New England states; each operating under its own set of by-laws, range regulations, and match schedules. By 1890, the number



SHOOTING GALLERY, PHILADELPHIA 1876. A commercial shooting gallery located in Philadelphia's Schützen-Park, operated by William Stein, a rifle maker from Camden, New Jersey, who taught marksmanship. (Schützen-Zeitung) Photo courtesy Ron Peterson.

of regional unions had risen to eleven, and the number of Verein affiliates to well over eighty.

At this point the Bunds began to devote considerable effort in promoting indoor gallery shooting with rifles adapted to fire the economical .22 caliber rimfire cartridge that had been introduced in 1885. Saloon (or parlor) shooting with miniature or sub-caliber rifles was popular as a diversion, but the accurate .22 was considered best suited for competitive use, especially by ladies and youngsters. Cadet schützen corps were formed to encourage marksmanship among adolescent members of Verein families, thus involving the entire family. Indoor gallery matches fired at distances of 50 to 75 feet helped sustain shooting interest throughout months of inclement winter weather, and scores could be exchanged with distant clubs by telegraph.

As the schützenfest experienced this shift in emphasis, the National Rifle Association's marksmanship programs began to expand. Until then, the NRA had shown little interest in any form of competition other than military-oriented prone position long-range matches. At the turn of the century, however, NRA programs expanded to encompass three-position shooting, interscholastic league competition, and postal matches by which team scores were exchanged via mail. Within a decade, the convivial schützen format had been upstaged by better organized, all-encompassing, highly competitive NRA programs. By 1915, it would appear as though only stubborn die-hards continued the schützen game.

The typical Schützenfest program was not much different in America than in Europe. Festival programs still commenced with a parade of costumed marksmen through the center of town to the shooting grounds. There, the Schützenmeister would ceremonially fire the first shot honoring the President of the United States. Once begun, the matches would cease at the firing of a signal cannon announcing an end to the day's shooting. During the course of the festival, refreshment stands dispensed food and drink, and idle shooters were free to enjoy picnics, concerts and dancing with their families. Festivities might be highlighted by ballon ascensions during the day and fireworks illuminations at night. Once

competition decided the winners, the prizes were awarded, and the King and Queen crowned, a final banquet concluded the program. Noted writer Jack London, reporting for the *San Francisco Examiner* in July, 1901, described the various activities that occurred at Oakland's Shell Mound Park during the Third National Schützen Bundesfest. London's ten detailed articles explored the mechanics of conducting a major Schützenfest and the psychology of marksmanship as well as recreated the convivial ambience of the festivities.

All over the big grounds is frolicking and merrymaking of young and old . . . there is dancing going on at both pavilions . . . the floors are crowded with whirling couples. Everywhere is the clink of glasses to genial laughter, while over all, ringing and reverberating throughout the place, are the rifles.

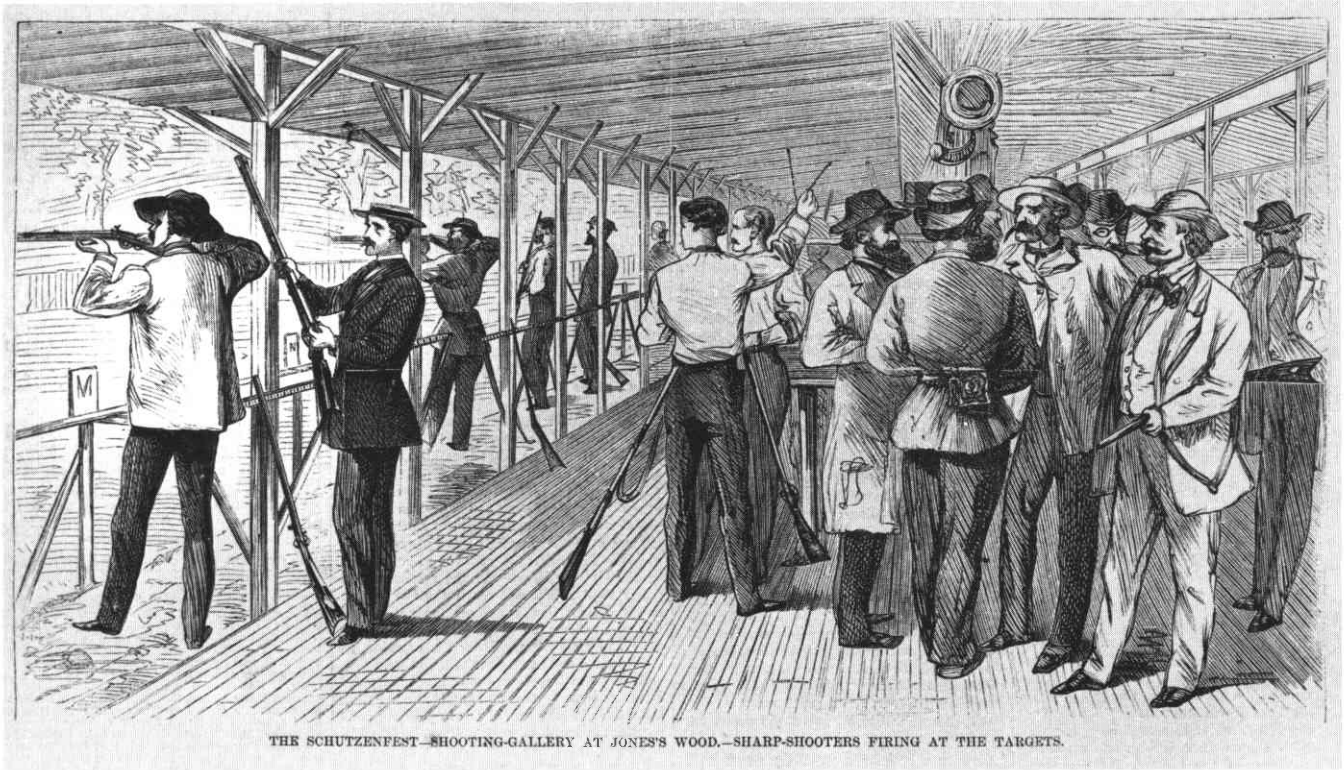
Jack London, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 15, 1901

Festival calendars announced schedules of the shooting events, fees, rules, prizes, and recreational programs. The matches were normally conducted outdoors under all weather conditions at distances of about 200 yards. Competitors were obliged to shoot from an offhand or standing position that required a high degree of self-discipline and experienced judgement. Marksmen were forced to contend with the effects of nature: how heat mirage and changing light conditions might alter the target's image; and how wind, temperature, and air density might effect the bullet's flight. Schützen competition was considered the ultimate challenge in marksmanship.

The shooting programs were generally divided into two categories; "Bundesscheiben" or those targets to be shot at only by members of the association, and "Allgemeine Festscheiben" or those available to the general public. These events might require only one shot or as many as one hundred. Closed association events followed several forms: one shot at the pictorial "Ehrenscheibe" (Honor target); three shots at the "German" 25-ring target (which was designed and used in America, not Germany); shooting in rotation at the Eagle target; and ten shots at the "Stichscheibe" (Measured target) on which only bull's-eyes counted. Competitors would come from Europe to attend major American Schützenfests where 800 or more shooters might register. It was normal courtesy to extend the privilege of shooting at the Honor target to visiting members of foreign sharpshooting unions. Although the

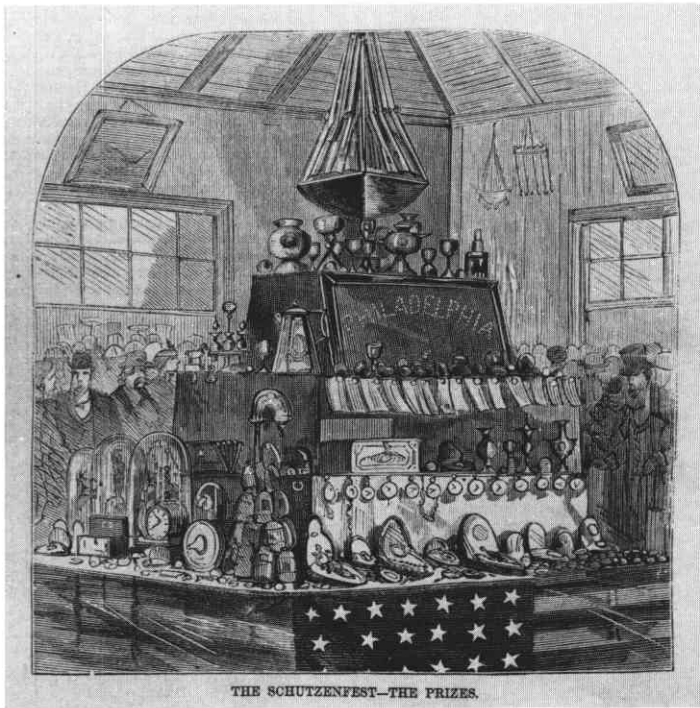


PERCUSSION SCHÜTZEN RIFLE C. 1850-1860. The barrel marked "Beutter Bros. Maker Meriden Conn." (John Beutter and his brother Henry.) Later a resident of Hartford, John served as Secretary of the Hartford Schützen Verein in 1874. Meriden also had an active Schützen Verein and both organizations belonged to the Southern New England Schützen Bund. Burton Kellerstedt collection.



THE SCHUTZENFEST—SHOOTING-GALLERY AT JONES'S WOOD.—SHARP-SHOOTERS FIRING AT THE TARGETS.

“Shooting Gallery at Jones’s Wood”, July 1868. (Harper’s Weekly) Boston Public Library.



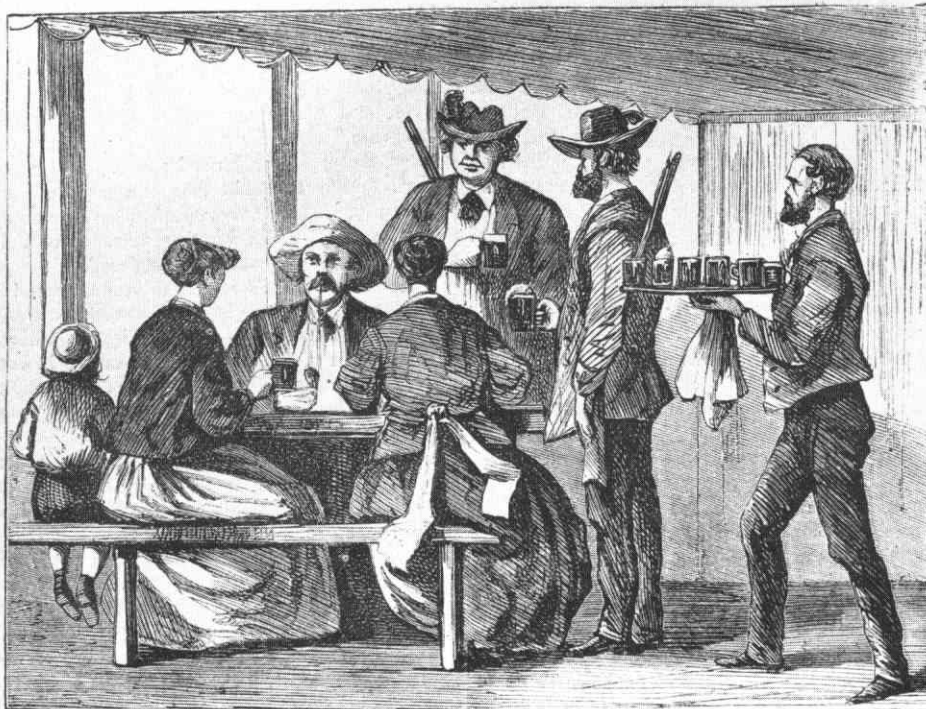
THE SCHUTZENFEST—THE PRIZES.

“The Prizes,” Jones’s Wood, July 1868. The \$30,000 in prizes ranged from gold and silver coins, watches, tea sets, goblets and rifles, to more mundane sewing machines, telescopes, meerschaum pipes, cooking stoves, pianos, and suits of clothing. (Harper’s Weekly) Boston Public Library.



THE SCHUTZENFEST—THE DANCE.

“The Dance,” Schützenfest at Jones’s Wood, July 1868. (Harper’s Weekly) Boston Public Library.



THE SCHUTZENFEST—THE CONVIVIAL SHARP-SHOOTER.

“The Convivial Sharpshooter,” Jones’s Wood, 1868. Schutzenfest refreshment stands traditionally did a brisk trade in lager and wine. (Harper’s Weekly) Boston Public Library.



THE SCHUTZENFEST—THE DOMESTIC SHARP-SHOOTER.

“The Domestic Sharpshooter,” Jones’s Wood, 1868. Schutzenfests offered opportunities for family outings and recreational activities for all ages (and occasionally less than domestic bliss if conviviality is excessive?) (Harper’s Weekly). Boston Public Library.

Honor target remained the big money event of the festival, offering the most valuable donated prizes, the winner of either the Honor target or the Eagle target might be designated Schützen König at the discretion of the festival sponsors.

Prize distribution for Stickscheibe events was determined by the distance of shots from the center, as determined by the Schützenmeister and his scoring committee. Cash prizes were also awarded for the first, last, and most bull's-eyes of the day. In America, the Stich event was conducted as a re-entry match, in which a shooter whose shot failed to land within the 6-inch bull's-eye, could purchase an opportunity to re-enter the contest and fire another shot. Shooters were permitted, upon paying the required fee, to re-enter as many times as they desired until they at last made a qualifying bull's-eye. In this match, where the honor of winning weighed heavily, some spent as much in re-entry fees as was given out in prize money. Competitors purchased a shooting ticket for each event. Upon stepping into the shooting stall to fire, the ticket was presented to an official who punched the score on the ticket, as indicated by the target marker. Completed tickets were turned into the Schützenmeister's scoring committee for recording. All disputed shots were settled before the shooter was allowed to leave the stall, and if he had somehow forgotten to insert a bullet in his rifle, the blank shot was scored as a disastrous miss.

Events open to the general public were shot on the "Mannscheibe" (Man-silhouette target), the oval Becherscheibe (Goblet target), and the 10-ring "Kerscheibe" (Point target). All shooters, affiliated or not, were eligible to compete for the title of Festival Champion, which was fired as a 100-shot event.

Targets varied in size and shape, from the traditional wooden eagle and pictorial targets, to paper cards whose center ring lay deeply buried within a conventional 12-inch black disc. On the "German" 25-ring target, the center ring was no larger than a silver dollar. From the target pits, markers signified a center hit by waving a red flag. A perfect hit in the exact center was joyfully noted to all by waving the red flag with a hat placed atop the staff. In Schützenfest parlance, to wish one well one only need say "Fünf und Zwanzig mit den Hut" (a 25 with the hat).

Events on shooting programs were assigned distinguishing names. At Baltimore in 1874, the Honor target was dubbed "America", while at San Francisco in 1901, it became "Eureka" (the State motto). During the Centennial celebration festival at Philadelphia in 1876, the Honor target was styled "Liberty". Man-silhouettes received such names as Washington, Humbolt, Lincoln and Gutenberg, alternating American with German folk heroes. Bull's-eye target events were given the names of regional rivers or cities.

In the 18th century, Pennsylvania-German gunsmiths developed a long, slender, and graceful rifle well suited to hunting, but which was also quite accurate. With these rifles, American marksmen were often given to testing their sharpshooting skills and their rifles against one another in informal matches. The basic form of the American longrifle remained relatively unchanged until about 1840, when English arms design traditions merged with the German to produce a class of American half-stocked muzzle-loading target rifle that has seldom been surpassed for accuracy, especially at its designed distance of 40 rods (220 yards).

In a heyday of the percussion era that extended from about 1840 until the 1870s, certain American gunsmiths such as Edwin Wesson of Worcester, Massachusetts; Morgan James and G.H. Ferriss of Utica, and William Billingham of Rochester, New York (among others) gained renown for producing fine accurate target rifles. A number of these targetsmiths, particularly those of German ancestry such as the lesser-known Beutter Brothers of Meriden, Connecticut, and better-known John Meunier of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, George Schalk of Pottsville, Pennsylvania, and John Happoldt of Charleston, South Carolina mounted their work in a distinctive Germanic style that included Swiss-style buttplates having an acorn finial, double-set triggers, trigger guards with multiple finger ridges, and triple sight systems. For all of them, and they were dispersed across the country, the period of their best efforts and most productive years happily coincided with the rise of America's schützen societies.

He was the last crack shot to give up the old style muzzle-loading weapon, and he only gave up then and purchased a Winchester because the progressive men were overtaking him.

Jack London, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 23, 1901

Development during the Civil War of improved breechloading mechanisms intended for use with self-contained metallic cartridges also spurred post-war growth of the American firearms industry. Arms manufacturers turned from a suddenly depressed military market to meet a growing and diverse popular demand for sporting and target rifles. Their manufacture employed many of America's most highly skilled machinists, who often added refinements of their own inventive genius.

In the hey-day of a machine age, when we are accustomed to the finest mechanisms, these target rifles are, nevertheless, marvelous creations . . . for to the exquisite article turned out by the gunmaker we must add the personal equation of the owner. Each marksman makes his gun over to suit himself, recreates it, so to say.

Jack London, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 16, 1901

In striving to produce a rifle best suited to the demands of offhand shooting, a number of special features were added to promote steadiness of aim. Heavy barrels increased the total weight of a Schützen rifle to nearly thirteen pounds. Although a heavy barrel also helped absorb recoil, that effect was further diminished by reducing caliber and weight of the bullet, and the amount

of powder needed consistent with optimum ballistics. By reducing recoil, the devastating tendency to flinch when pulling the trigger, in anticipation of the impact of the butt against one's shoulder, was greatly lessened. The trigger itself was made infinitely sensitive to the slightest pressure, discharging the rifle at the precise instant of perfect sight alignment.

A pronged buttplate hooked under the biceps to act as a lever in helping control and counterbalance the barrel and to more comfortably re-direct the force of recoil to the arm instead of the shoulder. A palm-held handle was introduced as a fulcrum on which to poise the rifle. In Europe, the palm-rest was scorned and considered as unwholesome as a manure-fork. Sights were refined to afford precise vernier adjustment and enhance acute vision of the target. Optical telescopic sights, developed prior to the Civil War by such specialists as Lawson C. Cummings of Montpelier, Vermont; L.N. Moog of Marcellus, New York, and John W. Sidle of Philadelphia, were brought to the height of perfection by William Malcolm of Syracuse, New York. Purists of 1,000 yard long-range shooting decried the use of telescopic sights, and they were forbidden in early NRA-sponsored matches; but by the 1890s they had been accepted by most Schützen societies. In Europe, however, telescopic sights on Schützen rifles remained illegal artificial aids, tolerated only in the form of an optical insert for the rear sight to correct faulty vision.

Early metallic cartridges met most military and general purpose demands, but sharpshooters in their quest for ultimate accuracy were not satisfied with factory-loaded ammunition for target work. Innovative scientific experiments conducted about 1900 by Dr. Franklin W. Mann, identified many causes of why a well-aimed bullet does not strike precisely the same place every time. Dr. Mann's book, *The Bullet's Flight*, became the fundamental source of information in the field of ballistics. Understanding and eliminating the variable factors identified by Dr. Mann helped sharpshooters attain consistent ballistic performance with their rifles, if they troubled themselves to read the book.

All the sharpshooters load their own shells, and load them on the spot . . . so fine have they got it down, there is little variation in the weights of their charges.

Defly capping the shell, the sharpshooter slips it beneath the aperture in the powder-measure. A couple of twists of a thumbscrew and it is filled with the precise charge of powder desired. A thin wad completes the process, and with the rifle in one hand and the shell in the other, he goes to his shooting box and takes his first whang at the target. Then he must return and go over the whole performance again.

Jack London, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 16, 1901'



PHILO JACOBY, SAN FRANCISCO c. 1910. A successful West Coast sharpshooter, active from 1868 until 1917, Jacoby wears the typical schützen garb of plumed Kossuth hat, belted frock coat, and impressive chest full of medals. Photo courtesy Thomas N. Trevor.

America's entry into a world war against Germany in 1917 released highly charged emotional reactions against all things German. Many social pressures were brought to bear on the German community to erase their unpopular ethnic identity. Reaction effecting the Schützenfest was not limited to "Americanizing" the German sounding names of Vereins and schützen parks. Many carefully nurtured shooting grounds were reluctantly relinquished. Typical of social pressures prevailing at that time, the Schützenplatz in Charleston, South Carolina was renamed Ashley Park, and the Deutsche Schützen-Gesellschaft of Covington, Kentucky found it expedient to disband entirely and donate their shooting facilities to the Red Cross.

Germanophobia did not subside immediately after the Armistice was signed in 1918. Remnants of the phobia continued during the Prohibition era when German breweries became equated with the "evils of alcohol". Economic pressures during the Great depression further reduced competitive target shooting. The few remaining schützen societies experienced serious declines in membership, but even the Great Depression failed to stifle dedicated sharpshooters in the mid-west. Although they managed to survive hard times of the 1930s, expanding

1. Why did he have to do it again? Read the note carefully. He forgot the bullet!! Ed.



GEORGE H. WEHREBERG, SCHÜTZEN KING, NEW YORK SCHÜTZEN CORPS, 1899. The title of Schützen King was won in 1899 by George H. Wehrenberg at New Jersey's Union Hill Park. Wehrenberg won his title over 150 competitors, including such well-known marksmen as Gus Zimmerman, Dr. W.G. Hudson, and John Rebhan, by shooting down the Eagle target. The event was reported in the June 22, 1899, issue of *Shooting and Fishing* magazine. Photo courtesy Museum of Our National Heritage.

populations surrounded once remote rural schützen ranges with residential development, and imposed restrictive zoning laws against shooting.

Material shortages caused by World War II temporarily halted civilian shooting, but after the war competitive marksmanship programs experienced a strong revival as did related interest in the connoisseurship of antiquated firearms. Removed from social and economic pressures of the past, a nostalgia for the convivial Schützenfest spurred formation of associations dedicated to its revival.

And now that it is over, let us make confession. There are things our German-American brother can teach us. We can, among other things, sit at his knee and learn how to be sociable. We understand democracy, but our democracy is Anglo-Saxon in its traditions and there is an aloofness and an aggressiveness about it.

But while we understand democracy in its political sense, the German understands it better in its social sense. We have much to learn from him in democratic good-fellowship, for in that he excels.

Jack London, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 24, 1901

**Mein Schützen Bruder, Mein Schützen Schwester:
FUNF UND ZWANZIG MIT DEN HUT!**

★★★★★★★

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PROGRAM FOR THE 6TH TRI-ANNUAL SCHÜTZENFEST, 1910. Sponsored by the National Schützen Bund of the USA, and held 29 May - 6 June, 1910, at Union Hill, New Jersey. The N.S.B. was formed in 1882. Ron Peterson collection.