

SHUETZENVEREIN, THE ALMA SHOOTING SOCIETY

Eleventh In A Series Of Articles On The 19th Century Photography Of Gerhard Gesell

The Alma *Schuetzenverein* was a target shooting society organized on the same basis as those found in Switzerland at the time. It was established in May of 1863 in anticipation of the first annual Buffalo County *Schuetzenverein* to be held in Fountain City that following August. Some of its original members were Christian Lehman, John Hemrich and John Tester.

Weekly practices called "shoots" were held during which the marksmen worked at improving their accuracy. Their shooting area was located on the present site of the Alma Cemetery, directly beneath Twelve Mile Bluff. At that place they constructed a bullet parapet as well as a hall from which spectators could view the shoot. When the prominent rock outcropping tumbled from Twelve Mile Bluff in 1881 both the parapet and hall were severely damaged. The joke at the time was that Tony Braun, considered one of the best shots in town, had caused it to fall by having missed the target a few days earlier. Another location they later used for their practice was located east of the corner of Second and Cedar Streets.

The *schuetzenfest* was really a festive gathering. A picnic, complete with a barrel of "barley water", followed the shooting matches and after that a lively dance was held. The man attaining the highest score for accuracy was crowned *Schuetzenkoening* (shooting king) and received a metal and often a gold coin. The runners-up received either cash or merchandise prizes. Local members, such as Christian Patt, would often travel to St. Paul, Chicago and Milwaukee to participate in shooting festivals there. The sport was not always limited to men, there were also special shots for the ladies. One such occurred in June of 1888 when Fannie Bube, Julia & Emma Protz, Clara Tester, Dora Valaer, Louisa Biron, Julia Laue, Louisa Menrich and a Mill Dillman shot at targets especially set up for them.



Christian Patt is remembered as a jack-of-all trades who repaired guns at his home and for the breech loader target rifle he developed for the Alma *Schuetzenverein*. Martini actions from Switzerland were used in Patt's guns. They were, at the time, the standard actions of the army rifles of Switzerland and England. Patt made the stock, choosing different kinds of wood and probably made the barrels. It would be unusual for a Patt gun to still have an original barrel because the black powder and mutton tallow used to grease the bullets in the early days soon destroyed the barrels and they had to be replaced. A Patt gun has a deep and somewhat ornate shoulder rest, cheek rest, palm rest, and a hair trigger characteristic of target guns. It also has the target gun weight – 15 pounds.

The original *Schuetzenverein* disbanded around the turn of the century. Another shooting society was later organized with Ulrich Dierauer, William Duerkop, Henry George Ulrich, Gottlieb Ryffel, John Baer and Chris Heldstab among its members. They found the society's flag, which had been missing for a number of years, and used it for their banner at *schuetzenfests*. When they disbanded in 1927 the flag was donated to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

By Katherine Goodman, Alma Historical Society

505 South 2nd Street, Alma, Wisconsin 54610

Email: society@almahistory.org

Website: www.almahistory.org

Photo: Women's Shooting Society (WHS Image 9831)