

Rifle Shooting Becoming A Popular National Sport

Its Unique Advantages For Either City or Country--How to Start a Club, as Told by an Expert Rifleman--An Inexpensive Sport For Outdoors or Indoors, Day or Evening--Men, Boys, Women and Girls Participate--A Common Recreation In Europe and the Orient.

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POPULAR interest in small bore rifle shooting is so rapidly increasing that there can be little question but that within a very short time it will have taken a leading place among the favorite sports of America. There are a good many reasons for this remarkable growth. As a sport, rifle shooting possesses several unique advantages, in addition to the general benefits to those practicing it, which it shares with other forms of recreation. It is a sport for evening as well as the daytime, for winter as well as summer. Its inexpensiveness has helped make it attractive to people both in city and in country. In this, as in many other respects, small bore rifle shooting is exceedingly democratic.

The present interest in this fascinating sport, which develops skill and character, endures the globe. However far one may travel one is sure to encounter frequently the rifle club. The interest is not merely local or national, but international. The small bore (22 caliber) rifle is used, as best adapted to short range target shooting purposes.

Shooting Around the World.

Across the water—meaning both the Atlantic and the Pacific—this kind of rifle shooting has attained a remarkable and constantly increasing popularity in the different civilized countries. Having as loyal a following in the Orient as in Europe. The Japanese have taken it up with the seriousness that might be expected from that nation. In the British Isles there are now at least 700 clubs, sporting organizations, not military—the membership figures reaching half a million. Switzerland has 3,000 shooting clubs, with a total membership of 214,000. Other continental countries, like Germany, France and Austria, have also shared largely in the results of this worldwide sporting movement, and throughout Europe in summer or winter, day or night, the crack of the 22 caliber is heard at the ranges. Beyond the equator conditions are the same. South Africa and Australia are equally interested in the sport, and the distance between their rifle ranges is short. Go down to that wonderful country, Argentina, and you will find there that rifle shooting is esteemed in the front rank among the national sports.

Here in our own country it is finding favor all the way from coast to coast. Four thousand lads in the high schools of New York city are now shooting enthusiastically under equally enthusiastic instruction. The young men's Christian Association in many places has made rifle shooting a part of the training which it gives to boys in the formative period of their lives. This has not been a difficult step, especially as a first class range can be installed for \$150 and after the small initial expense has been provided can be made to do considerably more than pay its own way. Especially in the smaller towns the idea has developed and borne fruit.

In country communities it is usually very easy to secure, at hardly any cost, a suitable location for an outdoor range, and where, as is the case in most of such places, the opportunities of recreation are limited the young people in more than one instance have taken up the game almost as a matter of social self protection. We hear a good deal nowadays about "social engineering." The social engineer—the man who helps a community to regenerate itself—has learned that he can make valuable use in this direction by organizing a rifle club. But, of course, the real reason of the popularity of rifle shooting lies in its inherent attractiveness as a sport, pure and simple.

How a Discovery Was Made.

It is much easier to organize such a club than is generally supposed to be the case. This is illustrated by the following incident: Something like a year ago, on a Saturday afternoon, a company of young men were lounging at their club. The town afforded scant opportunity in the way of recreational amusement. There really seemed to be little else to do but to idle and play cards. One of the young men at the card table finally tired of a listless game and said, "Come on, fellows; let's do some shooting." The shot was pulled off in an open field behind a barn, with a target tacked to a fence which ran along the foot of a hill, and the half dozen competitors took turns using the only two rifles available.

These young men made a discovery. They discovered the fun of rifle shooting, its possibilities as an amusement, a recreation, a sport. That Saturday's extemporized contest was the beginning of a rifle club which now numbers 400 members.

Eventually every town in the country will have its rifle club—in many towns, indeed, there will be several clubs, representing the different fraternal organiza-

tions and similar bodies. For rifle shooting makes an appeal to virile, red blooded men, and such are its peculiar characteristics that no other sport can be substituted for it.

Where the "Dub" Is Never a "Dub."

Shooting is not confined to persons who have more leisure than they know what to do with, as those who cannot use the range in the daytime can do so in the evening. A simple illuminating device solves the problem, and artificial light is no hindrance to good marksmanship. The workers in the stores, shops and offices, therefore, are not excluded from this alluring pastime, which is another reason for its growing popularity. Rifle shooting, moreover, is possible at all seasons of the year, for even an outdoor range can be protected in winter so that its use need not be interrupted.

One of its principal advantages as a sport is the fact that by the employment of a system of handicapping the beginner competes on equal terms with the expert, though everybody gets full credit for his proficiency, a thing which is difficult to arrange in other sports.

Rifle shooting does not call for physical strength or prowess like athletic sports. But it does demand mental and physical control in marked degree and develops these qualities; hence its great value to boys and young men. Learning to hold a rifle without letting it wobble and to pull the trigger without jerking it means self-discipline. It is discipline in itself. Rifle shooting requires a great deal of practice all the year around. This develops will power, determination and stick-to-it-iveness. It also more than almost any other sport develops concentration, self control and "cold nerve." Many are the matches where victory or defeat depends on the man shooting, and he must be able to keep his hand steady and his judgment cool under the hard strain of an exciting competition. There is more individual work in this sport than in any other. In baseball or football it is teamwork that counts. One man may have an off day and not make much difference to the team, but this is not true in shooting. Rifle practice develops clean living and temperance. The rifleman has to say goodbye to bad habits if he has them.

A Change of Opinion.

The old idea that it is dangerous to let Son Johnny have a rifle is fast disappearing. Once every mother firmly believed that Johnny, if he were allowed to handle firearms, would shoot himself or somebody else, perhaps with "the gun that wasn't loaded." The newspapers every little while print accounts of such accidents. But that is an argument in favor of organized rifle shooting, not against it. How do firearms accidents usually occur? Through the carelessness of somebody who does not know how to handle firearms, somebody who has had no instruction and training in their care and use. Johnny may be forbidden to have a rifle, but he is allowed to go camping with other boys. Somebody sneaks a cheap firearm into camp. None of them know how it should be used, and one after the other proceeds to "fool with it." Then the accident.

A small bore rifle club usually starts with one man. This man owns a rifle, and, though he enjoys shooting for its own sake, he feels that there would be much more pleasure and profit in it if he could get some other riflemen together and thus provide for all the zest of competition. Or this prime mover may be the good citizen who sees in the establishment of a rifle club a means of helping the boys or of supplying a need in the general social life of the community. The purpose behind the project may also be incident to the development of one or more of the existing local organizations, like a fraternal order, the grange, the Y. M. C. A., the churches. Reasons for starting a rifle club thus extend all the way from the sheer fun that shooting affords to the good it may do the town and to the individuals in it. You yourself may see an opportunity for a gun club in your community.

How to Organize.

You can start a good rifle club with as few as two dozen members, but the interest will be greater and the financing easier if you can get fifty. That is not difficult. There are probably several dozen persons scattered around your locality who like to shoot, even though you yourself know but a few. You have only to bring them together. And even if there are not many shooters every small town and city neighborhood has fifty young people who will like shooting when they get acquainted with it. You can find that many in your town. It is only necessary to put the proposition before them in an interesting way and bring them together for organization. When you issue the invitation to the first meeting be sure to extend it to everybody—men and women, boys and girls, old and young, rich and poor. The more people brought out the better the club

will start off. Put the proposition on a platform of neighborhood pride and court newspaper publicity.

Finance, organization and management of the club are simple enough if one keeps in mind certain principles that bring success. To provide money for ranges, rent and equipment the club usually issues bonds in small denominations and should have little difficulty in selling them to members. These bonds carry interest at 5 or 6 per cent and are to be bought back by the club as funds accumulate. With good management, providing constant interest for members by matches and other events, it is a simple matter to have a club out of debt in a year with fine quarters and equipment. With a fairly large membership the difficulties of raising capital and maintaining an income are relatively small. Let us suppose that you have secured fifty members at the start (not a large number to get together in a small town or a city neighborhood). Fifty \$5 bonds will

serve to an energetic management. If the proposed system of financing is adopted an annual subscription of \$2.50, collected by half yearly or quarterly installments, should suffice.

A small bore rifle of good design and construction is as effective as any for target shooting up to 100 yards. In designing a range, therefore, you are not necessarily limited to seventy-five feet. In fact, ranges which admit of shooting at several longer distances, such as 50 and 100 yards, afford more variety and are on many grounds preferable. While, however, seventy-five foot ranges can often be built in some existing building at relatively little cost, longer distances mean outdoor shooting and specially constructed ranges for making such shooting possible all the seasons. For this reason, though clubs are strongly advised to make such arrangements at the beginning that they can eventually provide sufficient target accommodation for a large membership and expand their range to 100 yards, many will prefer to start with an indoor range of seventy-five feet or less, for, be it observed, very good practice can be had on a range as short as forty feet. Seventy-five feet is generally recognized as the standard distance for indoor ranges.

The Outdoor Range.

Though in a sparsely populated country it is often a simple matter to improve an outdoor rifle range suitable for .22 ammunition, improvised ranges almost invariably lack that comfort and convenience so essential to the permanent prosperity of a rifle club and, of course, can only be used for a few months in the year. The fact is that while the present clubs consist mainly of enthusiasts prepared to submit to almost any inconveniences in the pursuit of their hobby, the gener-

ally in summer and none in winter. While in summer baseball, trips to the woods, etc., constitute counter attractions, in winter the want of something with which to employ the idle hour is often strongly felt; hence the club will be wise that constructs its range so as to permit shooting by night as well as by day and in winter as well as in summer. This implies illuminated targets and a sheltered firing point, of which at least a portion can be warmed in winter. The whole firing point should be roofed so as to afford shelter from sun and wet, but as the attendance of members is usually less in winter than summer it will not be necessary entirely to inclose the whole, but a portion sufficient to allow of say 5 per cent of the members shooting at one time should be so constructed that it can be warmed, and the inclosing medium should be removable in summer.

Something in the nature of a clubhouse or a pavilion is desirable. The most successful club is generally that which, while steadily prosecuting its primary objects, does not entirely ignore the social aspect. For this reason it is impossible to emphasize too strongly the desirability of a comfortable, attractive pavilion in conjunction with a comfortable, pleasant and easily accessible range.

In addition to butts and clubhouse the club should provide a few club rifles and telescopes for the general use of members. A small charge of say 5 cents per day for the loan of these will provide a fund which will eventually pay their original cost and subsequent repairs and renewals.

Points on Handicapping.

One of the most important items of successful club management is handicapping. Nature has failed to endow

one club to shoot every week for nine years might be adopted with advantage. The basis of this is a weekly handicap sweepstakes in which the entry fees, 10 cents per competitor, are divided in the ratio of one prize for about every five competitors. Ammunition entries in any week the entry fee would provide first, second, third and fourth prizes, value \$1, 50 cents, 30 cents and 20 cents. Club vouchers for these amounts are given to the respective winners, and at the end of each year the amount due to each member on his accumulated vouchers is used to purchase a more or less substantial prize to serve as a memento of his prowess. The weekly handicap, the round robin tournament and the club championship matches are other suggestions for a varied shooting program which will foster interest among the club members.

Capital sport for holidays or when a good number of members are present is a team shoot at breakable clay disks two inches in diameter and colored white at 100 yards. Several teams, say, of four men each are selected and drawn to shoot in pairs. The team breaking all its opponents' disks first wins, the losing team is knocked out and the last team in wins the match. This is not only exciting fun, but splendid practice, and affords interest for spectators. The latter is important, as an ordinary target match is not attractive to a gallery. It is otherwise when the progress of the match is made visible by the breaking of the targets.

Prizes and "Pot Hunters."

Competitions imply prizes and prize cost money. A very few club funds will admit of devoting more than a very nominal sum to this purpose. Fortunately large sums are unnecessary, and an entry fee of 5 or 10 cents will generally provide a fund out of which a few inexpensive prizes, more as mementoes of the event than as rewards, can be awarded, and these should be sufficient. If money and valuable prizes are shot for the crack marksmen are apt to degenerate into what they call "pot hunters" in England—that is, experts who seldom shoot unless there is a rich stake to be won. These are objectionable, not only as opposed to the principles of amateur sport, but because such people deter others from competing. But that danger can be easily obviated. Skill and democracy are the keystones as rifle shooting is organized today. Prizes are kept down to inexpensive trinkets. In England the standard prize seems to be a silver spoon, worth perhaps a dollar. In cases where wealthy men have offered valuable prizes to encourage competition among clubs the riflemen have said that they would much rather have improved ranges and facilities for practice.

Special matches, particularly shoulder to shoulder matches with neighboring clubs, are interesting and furnish an indirect motive for practice, inasmuch as the honor of shooting for one's club is generally coveted. Telegraphic and mail matches are a somewhat less interesting substitute for shoulder to shoulder matches.

Match teams are usually selected and controlled by the club captain, who should be elected annually. Unselfish enthusiasm and a suave temperament are more essential qualifications in a captain than great skill in shooting. Indeed, it is on many grounds preferable that the captain himself should not shoot in matches. In selecting a team he should give preference to consistent shots rather than to those who are in the habit of alternating more brilliant performances with bad breaks, and when meeting weak opponents should take the opportunity of encouraging the more promising of his improving members by including them in his team.

Hate Off to the Ladies.

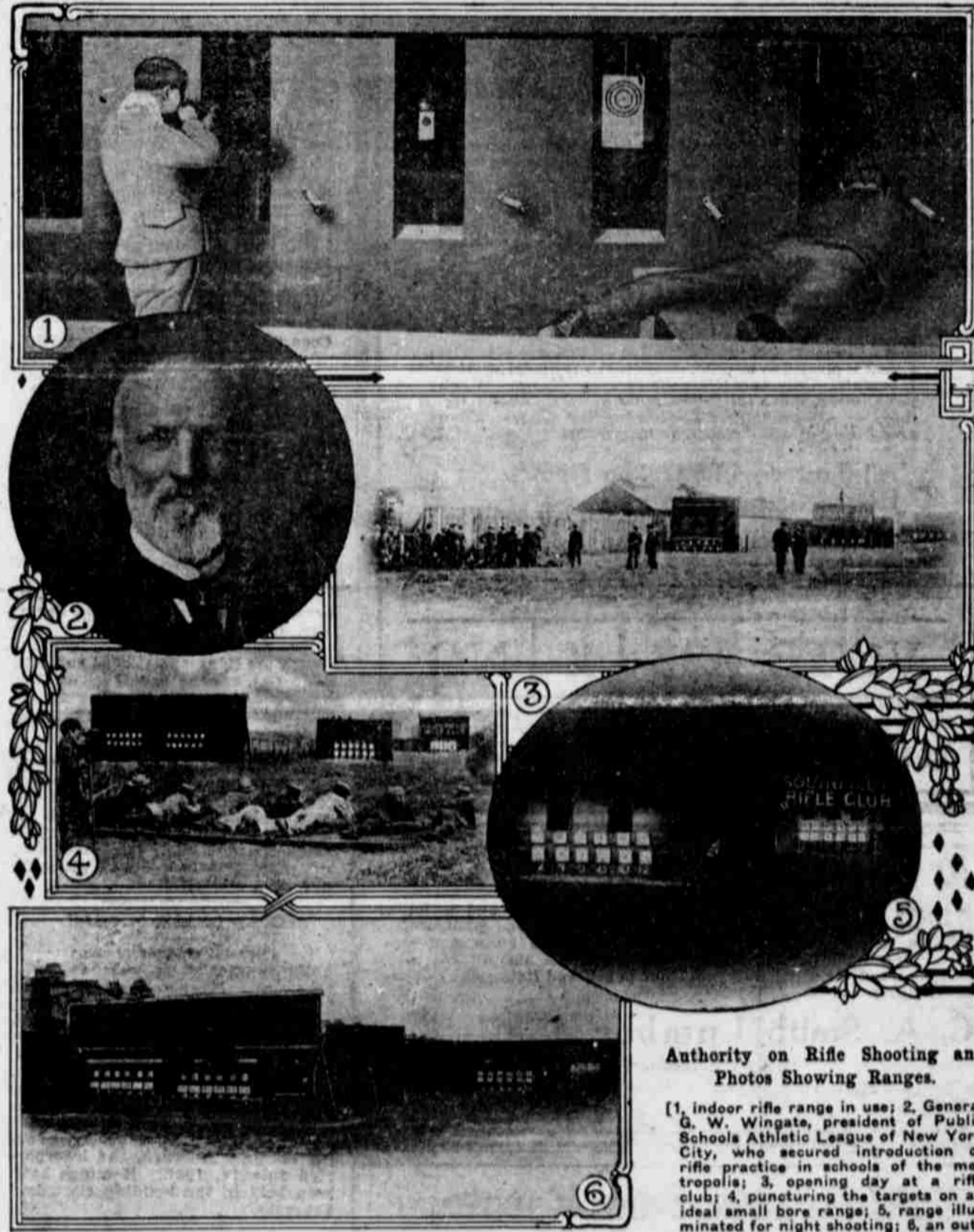
Your club should be conducted for all classes and give everybody ample scope, according to his skill. The women and girls can give tone to the club by their presence, even though they are on the range but one night a week. They are splendid organizers, too, and the club that has their co-operation and interest is fortunate.

Women and girls now participate in bowling everywhere, and rifle shooting calls for far less physical exertion and undoubtedly gives greater scope for skill based on good nerves and good thinking. Women's work in sewing and similar feminine occupations makes their eyes truer than those of most men. With a little practice they learn to shoot very well in the New York high schools many of the girls qualify as "marksmen." Make your appeal remembering that women are proud of their achievements as women. Man is individualistic. What men as a sex are doing in the world doesn't interest him very keenly because he has pride chiefly in what one man is doing, and that is himself, or what a group of fellows do who make up his crowd. But women will join the organization as women and work for it on that basis.

Community Life.

A good rifle club should be something more than an organization for the benefit of its members alone. It can be made a very fine influence in its community, an encouragement to clean living and the abandonment of bad habits, the best possible training for both the body and mind, a center for men and women, boys and girls, an outlet for energies that might otherwise be expended so healthily if it were not in existence and something upon which the community can often be united as a basis of community spirit.

I foresee the rapid extended spread of the rifle club idea in America.



Authority on Rifle Shooting and Photos Showing Ranges.

[1, indoor rifle range in use; 2, General G. W. Wingate, president of Public Schools Athletic League of New York City, who secured introduction of rifle practice in schools of the metropolis; 3, opening day at a rifle club; 4, puncturing the targets on an ideal small bore range; 5, range illuminated for night shooting; 6, an outdoor range within city limits.]

ns all with equal ability, and no amount of effort on the part of some men will enable them to equal the performance of others in all kinds of sports. This is the case in rifle shooting, although steady, careful practice will work wonders with many of those who at first think they can never become good shots. Consequently to make it possible for these to compete with any hope of success it is necessary to establish equality artificially. This may be accomplished by a process known as handicapping.

With the decimal system of scoring with ten points as the highest value of a hit, a good method of allotting handicaps is to regard the member's ability as expressed by the average value per hit of his shots and allot him the difference between this average and ten as handicap per shot, multiplying this handicap by the number of shots in the competition. For example, if A in a few targets scores 282 points in thirty shots, the average value per shot is 9.4. This is A's figure of ability, and his handicap will be 0.6 per shot, or six points in a ten shot competition and eighteen in a thirty shot competition. An absolute novice should average between six and seven per shot, he usually improves very rapidly, and it is not safe to award him more than 1.5 per shot, or fifteen points in ten shots, to start with.

Varieties of Shooting Contests. A shooting program which has proved

ality of mankind neither possesses exceptional enthusiasm for anything nor can be induced for very long to tolerate even a moderate amount of discomfort and inconvenience. Yet it is mainly upon its success in attracting these that the future development of the rifle club movement depends.

Consequently the first consideration is the choice of a range site upon which shooting can be conducted with due regard to the safety of the public and which is conveniently accessible and served if possible by train or trolley car. The ground should be inexpensive, with pleasant surroundings, and if possible, should have such natural features as would dispense with the erection of large, costly butts and firing points.

To give variety to the shooting the site should be wide enough to admit of firing at three butts—25 yards, 50 yards and 100 yards distant—simultaneously. Each butt must be large enough to accommodate an ample number of targets. Members do not like waiting, and, as the earning capacity of the range upon which the income of the club is largely dependent is exactly proportioned to the number of hours in which they are available for use, target accommodation sufficient for at least 10 per cent of the club to shoot at one time will never be found too much nor add materially to the cost of the range.

Day or Night, Summer or Winter. Target shooters have not, as a rule,

provide a working capital of \$250, and these can be easily sold to members.

The Self-Supporting Club.

In addition to capital a club must have income to meet its current working expenses. Heretofore under the system on which clubs have been managed practically the only source of income has been the members' subscriptions. The effect of this system is to impose an equal expense on all members irrespective of the amount of shooting they do, and this expense has been such as to deter the less well-to-do members of the community from joining the club. A far more preferable system is to impose a light annual subscription and to derive the greatest source of income from the sale of ammunition used in the club to the members at a profit. This can be done without unduly adding to the cost of shooting and is more equitable, inasmuch as the member who does the most shooting and thereby uses the club facilities the most contributes the most toward the club's expenses.

At a conservative estimate the average member will shoot 2,000 shots a year. With fifty members the club will consume 100,000 rounds. This will cost the members 50 cents per hundred, while the club will derive a net profit of \$250 a year. These figures are very conservative and with an economical management will go a long way toward covering expenses and provide for taking up bonds. The sale of old copper and lead, special matches and other