

A very short history of the Federal Shooting Festivals

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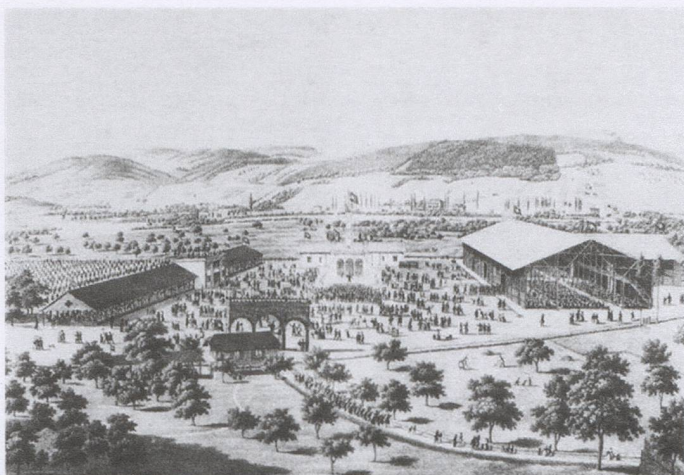
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A Very Short History of the Federal Shooting Festivals



The history of shooting finds its origin well before the invention of gunpowder and the rifle – just think of stone throwing, the bow and arrow, or even the historical crossbow! The Swiss shooting movement has an important place in this history and continues to this very day.

Long before the foundation of shooting clubs in Switzerland, the Catholic Church had a shooting-brotherhood movement (4th century). Their patron was St. Sebastian, known as "Shooting-Baschi". According to the legend, he was martyred by being shot with arrows.

The old Swiss rifle clubs emerged mainly between the 15th and 16th centuries. However, there is evidence to show that the "Lucern Shooting Society" (Luzerner Schützengesellschaft) already existed in 1353, and that similar societies were founded in Aarau in about 1446, in Rheinfelden in 1460 and in Mellingen in 1485.

From the beginning, Swiss shooting clubs and 'Shooting Societies' enjoyed significant societal and political status. For example, after the Old Zürich War, Zürich invited the Swiss Confederates to a feast of reconciliation and a shooting competition in 1447. Similarly, the journeyman shooting festival of 1485 in St. Gallen served a political purpose to seek the friendship of the neighbouring Appenzell and help solve a lengthy dispute with Abbot Ulrich VIII.

The subsequent religious reformation and the separation of faith in Switzerland had a very negative impact on the shooting movement. However, with the transformation of public life during the French revolution in the 18th century, Swiss shooting clubs and Shooting Societies enjoyed a complete revival.

The foundation of the Swiss Shooting Federation in Aarau in 1824 is considered a significant milestone in raising national awareness and formalising the Swiss shooting movement. Current party leaders met and spoke with verve and passion on the speaker's stands. Swiss foreign policy was made there and then, and the Swiss Confederation itself was the main topic of conversation.

Over time, federal shooting festivals increasingly became celebrations of politically radical party movements. When the Federal Constitution was introduced in 1848, this changed and the federal shooting festivals became more politically neutral. The modern rifle clubs as we know them today have their origin in Aarau in 1824, when the Swiss Shooting Federation was formed. In the ensuing years, more and more shooting clubs were formed throughout Switzerland.

Shooting distances at the time ranged between 120m-150m. With the introduction of the "Feldstutzen" (first built in 1849, they became the first military rifles in Europe), the shooting distances were increased to 300-360m. The innovation nearly caused the demise of the new young shooters association. The followers of the old "Standstutzen" (considered to be very heavy, unpractical and complicated to handle with a large caliber) wanted to retain the old distances.

Overall, the handling of the newly introduced "Feldstutzen" was easier and reloading not as complicated. After some heated discussions, a compromise was agreed on and two sections were formed: The "Standschützen" and the "Field and Military" shooters. Their slogan was: "March separately, strike together".

Currently, the SSV (Swiss Shooting Federation) organises the "Eidgenössische Schützenfeste" (Federal Shooting Festival) every five years. Today, they are major sporting festivals. Shooting is performed only on a designated and recognized military firing range. All scores are marked by electronic targets only. To keep these major events free of incidents, numerous rules and regulations apply.

In 2005, some 70,000 people visited the Eidgenössisches Schützenfest in Frauenfeld. 50,000 shooters participated in pistol shooting over 25m and 50m, as well as in sport shooting and in the army rifle category. The 2010 event was attended by some 70,000 people and 42,000 participants took part in shooting.

Many New Zealand Swiss club members and their friends have participated in past Eidgenössische Schützenfeste:

1979, Luzern: Hans Enzler, Joe Hangartner and Fritz Battig
1985, Chur: Simi Hartmann, Peter Arnold, Louis Holzgang and Seffi Holzgang

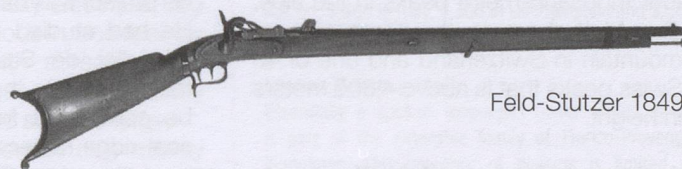
1990, Winterthur: Hans, Sylvia and Ronny Enzler, Arthur and Heidi Mueller, Hans Fitzi,

1995, Thun: Hans Enzler and Henry Werffeli

2000, Bierre: Terry and Valerie Mason, Michael Bunter and Henry Werffeli

2005, Frauenfeld: Heinz and Heidi Leuenberger, Hans Vetsch, Hans Fitzi and Orlando, Isabelle and Henry Werffeli

2010, Aarau: Hans and Ronny Enzler, Marcel Ruedi, Ernst Lanz, Othmar Storchenegger and Henry Werffeli



Feld-Stutzer 1849



Stand-Stutzer

Please note:

If I have forgotten to mention anyone, please accept my apologies and let me know so I can fill any remaining gaps.

I would like to thank Heidi Müller, and Sylvia and Hans Enzler for helping me find all the participants from Auckland or from further afar.

By Henry Werffeli