

Schnitzing and Shooting

By: Edgar Kern



Saturday evenings were reserved for frolics.

1735 German Settlers of Upper Lehigh County:

Character & Customs

The German settlers were religious, honest, sober and industrious and were thus well fitted for settling a new country. As a whole, they were very sober and moral until after the Revolutionary War. After the return of the soldiers, their condition greatly changed. Many of those who had served in the war lost their habits of steady toil; and after the "excitements of a soldier's life" did not feel like farming or working at the bench or anvil.

Many had also become habituated to the excessive use of strong drink. Whiskey then was in plenty, nearly every farmer distilling his own apple-jack and selling to all who wanted to buy. This caused much drunkenness among the people for a long time. Hotels also became more numerous and every Saturday evening the locals used to have frolic (dances). It was seldom that a frolic was held without several fights.

Schnitzing

It was customary for a long time, for the farmers to make "corn matches" to husk corn in the day and frolic in the evening. "Schnitzing" parties were also held. People who wanted to cook apple butter invited their friends to come and help make the "schnitz." After the "schnitzing" was done a frolic was held and dancing often kept up until near daybreak.

Editor's note:

During the process of making apple butter, the apples were cored and quartered in a process called snitting, (from the Pennsylvania Dutch word, "snitz" which is a dried chunk of apple-it comes from the German word "schnitzen" meaning to carve or slice). The snits or apple chunks are then ready for the kettle. Cutting up the bushels of apples could take a long time and the Pennsylvania Dutch turned this time into "Schnitzing parties," gathering to socialize, and making the repetitive work fun.

"Schnitzen," etymologically considered, illustrates very well the way in which many German verbs turn up in Pennsylvania Dutch "schnitzing," pronounced without sounding the "g." But socially it denotes the harvest-home, a combination of easy work and pleasure, the time when all the pent-up gaiety of the year is turned loose. Games and dancing turn into a general romp continuing until long after midnight. The green schnitz are afterward strung

on stout cords with a darning needle and hung in great loops and festoons about the kitchen walls to dry.

Shooting in the New Year



Shooting in the New Year by Gladys Lutz

The painting is on display at the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center

Shooting in the New Year

The last day of the year, all the people went "to shoot in New Year." Sometimes there were crowds of twenty or thirty together, starting at midnight and going from house to house, shooting the old year out and New Year in. On all these occasions, it was customary to have plenty of apple-jack and to give as much as people wanted to drink.

Editor's note:

The shooting was not all of it; beautiful verses of the scriptures and hymns were committed to memory, and repeated under the windows of those who were visited by them. They went through storm and snow. "En glickselig nei yohr" was heard on all sides, each vying with each other to be first in the greeting among friends, or strangers.

"The New Year Wishers" party, Neuyohr Wunschers, usually consisted of the reciter (wunscher) and several shooters. The party assembled at the home of the leader and at midnight set out for the homes of friends and neighbors. The Wunschers would arrange themselves beneath the window where the master was sleeping. The leader called out the

farmer's name and asked permission for them to give the wish. If this was agreeable, the wunscher would unroll his broadside and chant the wish. After the chant then they fired the guns and were invited into the house to a warm stove. Refreshments such as hot mince pies and brandy or rum were added to the customary cakes, apples and cider. After the treat, the party continued their way through storm and snow to the next farm house.

"Frolics" (dances), "Corn matches," "schnitzing" parties and "shooting in the new year" seldom happen in today's society.

While drunkenness is still a great evil, it is not nearly as great as it was 200 years ago.

During the long winter evenings, and especially in times of good sleighing, it was always the custom for social gathering, consisting of relatives and friends and perhaps three or more families, to gather together at each other's homes. The large wooden sleighs were hitched up and loaded to their utmost capacity and driven to the designated place, where already many of the invited were gathered. Then the evening was passed in enjoying the hospitalities of the host and in festivities extending often into the early hours of the morning. Driving and visiting were among the established customs of the area.

It is not wonderful that long and numerous harvest-time festivities often required several hogs and on occasion, an ox; and old John Wiekel, the butcher, said, "When I have butchered the hogs and made the sausage, I get nothing for it but the devil's thanks."