

The Shooting Gallery

A Stimulating Good TimeRoger Ragland "Major"

They were found at most every circus side-show, carnival, and Boardwalk for years. **The Shooting Gallery** with its static gongs and reactionary targets to draw your aim with a gallery gun loaded with .22 shorts. It is hard to imagine that a kid could hand over a hard earned coin and in turn, be handed a real .22 caliber rifle to aim and fire. Yet, that's exactly what happened from the late 1800s into the 1960s all across the country.

In the late 1880's & 90's they were all the rage, often a fellow courting a young lady would attempt to demonstrate his marksmanship. All you and your sweetie had to do was head over to carnival midway, hand a coin to the cigar-puffing carny and pick out a loaded .22 pump. You'd point the rifle at the colorfully painted ducks and rabbits moving from side-to-side, the spinning disks or the clay pipes bobbing up and down, take aim, and fire!

If you hit enough of these pockmarked pieces of cast iron you won a prize, often enough if the game was rigged you missed. Bent sights & shaved bullets were all too common carny ruses. If you began to see how a certain rifle shot, the crooked attendant would hand you another freshly loaded gun after relieving you of further coins. Surely, the most pleasure derived was pulling the trigger. Winning some trinket of some sort however was in hope to gain you some special nod of admiration.

In those days it was considered perfectly normal to hand a rifle filled with live ammunition to anyone with some spare change in their pocket.

Galleries had steel targets, most of which moved in some way, such as ducks "rotating" from one side of the booth to the other moved by a chains and pulleys. Popular targets included spinners, steel gongs mounted in such a way, would spin around when hit, and playing card suit symbols with holes in the middle mounted in front of a bell, which would ding when hit. Vintage Galleries were made by William F. Mangels Co., C.W. Parker, William Wurfflein, and John T. Dickman.

To some extent, a few galleries hung on into the years between the World Wars.

Disneyland opened one on Main Street in July 1955.

Walt Disney World had four operating 22 cal. CB cap galleries when they opened in October 1, 1971! I recall shooting at the elaborate Frontier Land gallery myself.

Disney's last lead pellet western arcade closed in September 1984.

Today, only few of the early galleries are known to have survived intact.

All are being preserved by collectors, and one I have read is restored and reconditioned to entertain Cowboy Action Shooters at Founders' Ranch in New Mexico (see photo).

Those few remaining survivors are Mangels galleries and when found, their discovery is equally interesting. One shooting gallery in Ohio was found in full working order boarded up behind a wall during a restaurant remodel. Restoring it and setting it up for use in today's political atmosphere was out of the question. Another complete gallery was discovered at Coney Island, it too had been boarded up behind a wall. In 2009, an intact Mangels gallery that had been privately owned and used at parties was sold at auction for \$43,200. William Mangels & Co. held more than 50 patents aside from his shooting galleries designs.

His company was one of the first to mass produce rides for distribution to amusement parks at Coney Island. There is some interest in collecting the cast iron targets themselves. Many of the old individual case iron targets have become quite collectible..

The Guns

John Moses Browning developed a new Winchester Model 1890 slide-action .22 rim-fire rifle.

A simple pump-action rifle, it was fast, light, and accurate chambered in 22 Short. With a spatter-less lead bullet it was a perfect plinker for Shooting Galleries. This gun was modified in 1906 with a rounded barrel. The Models 1890 and 1906 combined proved wildly successful with over 1.6-million of the handy shooters made by 1932. This gun would become one of the most widely used gallery guns at carnivals and boardwalks.

Gallery guns typically were chambered for .22 short only, the breech unable to feed longer rounds. A triangular cartridge-shaped cutout in the top of the tube ensured the rounds were loaded facing the right direction, making them great gallery guns. In 1932 the Model 62 was sold in a standard commercial and a 'gallery' version. Six generations of the Model 62 & 62A were made from 1932 until 1958. Most of these models, Gallery, Commercial and Takedowns, 1890's, 06 and 62's unless completely beat beyond service, are highly collectable. They are great shooters and gobs of fun.

Most of the .22 caliber rifles used in the galleries were pump action. Other manufacturers made special gallery versions, including the Remington Model 12 and the Marlin Number 18. The Marlin and Winchester gallery guns, as well as some others, had octagonal, instead of round, barrels.

Winchester Model 1890



Winchester Model 62



Remington Model 12



Marlin Model 18



Imagine if you will, NCOWS offer a Stage for Gallery style shooting or perhaps a side match. Simple guide lines, just two classifications Men & Woman's Pump Action or Men & Woman's Lever action, Tube Magazines only. Gender or age would not factor in, a full tube of 22 CB Short only (no extra power or hi power, 22 Longs or long Rifle rounds). I believe it would add to an already stimulating good time.

Some versions of existing Galleries follow in photos....

(I include photos of my modest collection of self-made gallery targets.)





Original wood cut published in Harper's Weekly dated July 1873

