

SAN ANTONIO GUN CLUB HISTORY

The San Antonio Gun Club was officially chartered in 1921.

However, the roots of the organization can be traced back almost one hundred and fifty years ago to local rifle shooting clubs formed by German immigrants. One such club was the San Antonio Schuetzen Verin.



Founded in 1857, the San Antonio Schuetzen Verin, or San Antonio Shooting Club, held target shooting matches in the rural areas around town. The first clubhouse was located on Austin St, just east of down town. One of the initial locations that matches were held was on River Ave., better known today as Broadway, near the present location of Mahncke Park. The club's early membership included Ferdinand Toepperwein, father of world famous shooting legend Ad Toepperwein.

Later in the century, with the advent of clay targets, trap shooting matches were started by area gun clubs. One of the first clubs to form was the San Antonio Gun Club. These early trap shoots were held at the San Antonio Exhibition and Fair Grounds, which were located near present day Joe and Harry Freeman Coliseum. Several photographs of these early shoots involving the San Antonio Gun Club are proudly displayed in their club house. One photograph is dated July 4th, 1895!

The San Antonio Schuetzen Verin was officially disbanded in 1919. One can only speculate that with the horrors of World War I being played out, a rifle club of German heritage was not a popular organization with which to be associated. It might be more than a coincidence that the San Antonio Gun Club was officially chartered a short time later, with the purpose of shotgun shooting as its foundation.

In 1928, John J. Dury of Potchernick's Sporting Goods formed an alliance with the City of San Antonio to create the country's first municipal skeet field! Located in the Olmos Basin, on an area then known as Olmos Field, the first skeet houses were constructed. The club was originally named Potchernick's Skeet Club, and it soon boasted 75 members. The official opening of the new facility was May 6, 1928 and the first registered skeet shoot took place May 30, 1928.

Some time around 1930 the new skeet field became home of the San Antonio Gun Club. The club grew and flourished as the new sport of skeet shooting became ever increasingly popular. The club shot over 8,000 rounds in its very first month!

In 1934 the club took advantage of the Texas Civil Works Administration Program and constructed four entirely new skeet fields along with covered grandstands for viewing. Native stone and architecture designs were used. Their finished forms followed that of the Olmos Dam and were later seen in the San Antonio River Walk project, Alamo Stadium, and the Zoo. You can even see this same architectural design used on the sound dampening walls on McAllister Freeway across from the club!

These new fields were dedicated with a ceremonial shoot on March 18, 1935. This event drew a large number of participants and many spectators. It also made bold headlines in the local papers of the day!

It was during these early years that John J. Dury shot the club's first ever twenty-five straight round of skeet. He was also the first Texan to do it twice! Not only was Mr. Dury a founding member of our club, but he was also a charter board member of the National Skeet Shooting Association. He served on that first board with such shooting notables of the day as Ad Toepperwein and Nash Buckingham. Mr. Dury's shooting legacy continues today through his son and grandsons. They are owners of Dury's Gun Shop here in San Antonio. All San Antonio Gun Club Members owe John J. Dury a debt of gratitude for his pioneering vision, tireless efforts, and promotion of the shotgun shooting sports!

Many years and untold thousands of shot targets later, the club again undertook plans for expansion. Fields five and six were added during the 1960's, and the present day clubhouse was dedicated in 1977. The final field was dedicated in 1984, bringing a total of eight fields available for either trap or skeet shooting.

During the 1970's the San Antonio Gun Club faced its most challenging threat ever. A freeway named McAllister!

As plans of this freeway were being mapped out it became apparent that its route would take it in front of the gun club. City and highway officials were soon telling the club its days were numbered and the premises would be taken by eminent domain.

However, the club was not going to give up without a fight! So, after numerous phone calls to city hall failed to garner a response, a group of club members led by President Bill Southwell, Tom Frost Sr., Leo Dubinski and Porter Loring arrived at City Hall unannounced. They proceeded to have a "sit-to" right then and there with the city officials. Although I'm sure they were unarmed, those city officials knew a group of "dead eye straight shooters" from the San Antonio Gun Club were a force with which to be reckoned!

President Southwell convinced city and highway officials to come out to the club and view a "live fire" demonstration to prove the safety zone between the club and proposed freeway. And, in an act that could only be titled true Texas Bravado, president Southwell walked out into the proposed freeway path and faced the club. He then signaled a group of shooters to fire volley after volley of shells at him from the shooting stations. Of course, as an experienced shooter he knew the distance was too great to pose a threat to him. However, what better way to demonstrate to city and highway officials that the club was more than a safe distance away from the motorists traveling on the freeway. Thanks to Bill Southwell and a small but dedicated group of club members the freeway came, and the San Antonio Gun Club stayed.

While president Southwell had the attention of the city officials, he was also able to negotiate for the club to become a City Park. This meant that such benefits as water, electricity and sewer services, as well as basic grounds maintenance, would be provided by the city at no cost to the club.

The 1990's brought construction of a new storage facility, additional restrooms and a covered pavilion. The Education and Conference Room, as well as additional office space were also added to the original clubhouse. They were dedicated in January of 1993 in honor and memory of long time managers Bill and Maxine Tanner.

On October 17, 1998, the City of San Antonio suffered the worst flooding in recorded history. Many areas of town received over twenty inches of rain! The Olmos Basin filled past its capacity and the clubhouse was flooded by several feet of water. Many of the traps were destroyed, along with extensive damage to the clubhouse and other equipment. Unfortunately, many of the club's historical documents, records and memorabilia were also destroyed. However, through many hours of

volunteering efforts, the club members cleaned up and repaired all damages. Through these efforts the club was back in business and shooting targets again within a few weeks!

In the fall of 1999, the club was awarded a grant by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission to help pay for flood damage and purchase new equipment. From that grant money the club was able to purchase and set up the new Five Stand Sporting Clays field. New state of the art traps, including a forty foot tower were added giving the club a world class operation! New trap equipment was also purchased and installed on several fields allowing them to become dedicated trap shooting fields. With these additions, club members were now able to choose any form of clay target.

Through a generous gift field 1 was totally rebuilt into a premier 5-stand field including a uniquely designed shade cover.

During 2007, field 8 was converted to a world class bunker trap field. A sound dampening covered pavilion was also built allowing shooting to be done rain or shine!

Fields 3 & 4 were totally refurbished in 2007-8. Great care was used in rebuilding the houses; including recycling the rock and maintaining the architectural design from its original 1934 construction. All new concrete stations to accommodate our wheelchair shooters were also installed. Fields 4 and 5 were rebuilt in 2009.

As we now move into a new millennium, and span the club's third century of existence, the San Antonio Gun Club stands poised to continue to grow and expand to offer its members one of the finest shotgun shooting facilities in the country. It is now the oldest active shooting club in the country and the only shotgun shooting facility located in the heart of a metropolitan city. The Junior and Ladies Shooting Programs are some of the largest and best in the country. The San Antonio Gun Club currently host numerous hunter education and gun safety classes throughout the year..

With more of same efforts, vision and dedication as that of the previous generations, the San Antonio Gun Club will continue to be writing in the pages of history for years to come.

Long live the San Antonio Gun Club!

By:

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