



What Did You Do on July 4?

(I thought about target balls. Doesn't everyone?)

By Ralph Finch

What a blast! There was nothing more American on the Fourth of July than shooting at target balls

Bottle collecting is important and exciting every month of the year, but some glass has specific ties to specific seasons. The Summer/Summer and Summer/Winter flasks are two seasonal examples, but I'm looking for specific month references.

For July, the most famous flask, perhaps, is the so-called "firecracker" flask. The bottle is referred to so because the names of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson are embossed on the medial ridge of the flask, along with the date of 1776. Adams

and Jefferson both died on the Fourth of July, 1826. This flask, a GI-14, is in commemoration of that event. A blue example went out with a bang when it was auctioned in 2010 for \$100,620.

But I'd like to talk about target balls. (I know, surprise!) Let's go blasting some target balls, and I'll tell you why so many others did.

Since its introduction, target ball shooting quickly became as American as apple pie and the Fourth of July.

Many early newspaper accounts from across the country painted this standard scene. Out at the county fairgrounds or over at the town's park, the mayor and other officials would give long-winded speeches. There might be a dance, certainly games for the kids, lots of old-fashioned picnic food, and then the contests: target ball shooting, maybe a three-legged race, and a baseball game.

Here's a sampling of some small town newspaper reports around the country:

The Weekly Fitchburg (Mass.) Sentinel
Friday, July 6, 1877:

It is the design of the club to hold its first public shooting tournaments at the fair grounds on the 4th of July, the public generally being invited to participate and compete for the prizes offered on equal terms with members of the club. The glass ball shooting is a novelty in this city and furnishes fine practice for wing-shooting. Stationary targets will also be provided for those who wish to test the accuracy and power of their guns at long range.

From the *Journal*, Willimantic, Conn.
Tuesday, May 14, 1878:

Tuesday, July 2, 1878. Pleasant Valley Driving Park offers an extensive and varied programme for the Fourth of July. The grove adjoining the track has been fitted up with seats, tables, etc., for the occasion, and refreshments will be served, consisting of ice cream, lemonade, soda water, tonic beer, sarsaparilla, etc., will be sold, but no intoxicating drinks will be allowed on the grounds. A clam chowder will be served at 1 o'clock and a clam bake at 3. At 1 o'clock a game of base ball for \$25, between the Willimantics and Mansfields of Middletown, will be played, to be followed by a glass ball shooting tournament for a silver badge by the Willimantic game club.

FYI: Also on the same date, a notice in the paper said: "The sexton of the M.E. Church particularly requests that tobacco chewers leave their quids outside the church and avoid spewing on the floor. The ladies, no doubt, second the motion."

Winfield (Kansas) Courier
June 26, 1879:

Plans for the Fourth of July: The order of exercises at the grounds will be: First, Reading of the Declaration of Independence by Mr. D.C. Beach, orations by Hon. J.H. Richey of Lawrence, and of J. Wade McDonald of Winfield.

Match game of baseball; glass ball shooting tournament.

Fourth of July was a Target Ball Blast
Winfield (Kansas) Courier
June 7, 1883.

The citizen committees on 4th of July celebration have most all reported and the program is being made up. A large amount of money has been raised to defray the expenses of music, fireworks, speakers, etc. Special trains will be run from as far east as Cherryvale, and every indication is that Winfield will see the largest crowd on that day ever congregated within her limits. The speaking and celebration will be held in Riverside Park, and the races and games on the new Fair Grounds adjoining. A committee is now in the Territory arranging for an Indian war dance in which several noted chiefs will participate.

One of the features will be a glass ball shoot for a purse of \$100.

Program of the Day's Doings.

At sunrise on the morning of the Fourth, the artillery will inaugurate the festivities of the day by a salute.

The procession will form on Main Street, right resting on 10th Avenue, at 10 o'clock a.m., in the following order.

Mayor and City officers; Courier Cornet Band; Posts of Grand Army of the Republic; St. John's Battery; Societies in Regalia; Citizens in wagons and on horseback.

The procession will enter Riverside Park at the east gate, drive to the center, unload, and then drive on to the open ground in the west of the Park, where they can be quartered. Such as desire can drive on through the west Park gate, across the road into the Fair Ground Park, where teams may be placed. Persons must carefully avoid damages to trees in either park.

There will be addresses and a basket picnic dinner at the park, which will be followed by trotting, pacing, and running races, games, etc., on the fair grounds, as follows.

1st. Mixed pacing and trotting race, free for all county horses, best two in three mile heats — 10 percent entrance. Four to enter, three to start. 1st, \$45; 2nd, \$22.50; 3rd, \$7. 2nd. Running race, free for all, half mile dash — 10 percent entrance. 1st, \$15; 2nd, \$10.50. 3rd. Slow mule race, free for all, half mile dash, change riders, last mule out gets \$5. 4th. Tub race, winner takes \$3. 5th. Sack race, \$2.50 to boss runner. 6th. Base ball Tournament for a premium ball and bat, \$5. 7th. Potato race, 1st, \$3; 2nd, \$2. 8th. Apple string; the one who bites the apple gets \$1. 9th. Wheelbarrow race, blindfolded; one who wheels closest to stake gets \$1. 10th. Greased pole; he who climbs it gets the \$5 gold piece on top. 11th. Glass ball shoot, \$5. Premium. \$1 entrance fee. Best shot takes 50 percent of premium and entrance money; second best, 25 percent; third 15 percent; fourth, 10 percent.

At 4 o'clock the sham battle will take place on the fair grounds under the direction of Col. Whiting, marshal of the day, participated in by the 1st Kansas light artillery and several posts of the G.A.R.

The Courier Band will furnish music during the day.

In the evening there will be a grand flambeaux procession of 200 men, bearing Roman candles and accompanied by illuminated balloon ascensions.

A week later, the paper reported: "It is estimated that ten thousand people were in attendance."

Egyptian Press, (Marion, Illinois)
July 6, 1882

The Fourth at Marion — Independence day was celebrated at Marion under the auspices of the Old Settlers' Association of Williamson county. The number present, considering the gloomy looking morning, and the fact that celebrations were held in various other places adjacent to Marion, was large. In the early morning and forenoon many guns were fired, the church



Target balls were a big part of Fourth of July celebrations in years past.

bells were rung, and there was a general glee and hilarious, patriotic aspect on the part of the people. The exercises were held at the fair grounds. Order was called at 11 a.m. by Eld. A.T. Benson, president of the association. Rev. Ambrose Seay offered prayer. The Declaration of Independence was read. Rev. G.W. Lamaster made a short address, after which an adjournment for dinner was made. In the afternoon Eld. Benson made a well worded address of about 20 minutes, when glass ball shooting was engaged in by the Marion Gun Club.

Lowell (Mass.) Weekly
Sun, July 8, 1882

The festivities on the fourth in Lowell were impressive, extensive, and day long, ending with an estimated 20,000 people watching that Tuesday evening.

Throughout the day were parades, speeches, bands, tableaux featuring Washington, sporting events, and a balloon ascension with aeronaut "Mr. Allen" (it lifted off at 5 p.m. and landed three hours later in Gardner, Mass., about 40 miles away).

The highlight of the day — well, for some of us — was the (edited):

GLASS BALL SHOOT

This feature of the day's programme afforded its share of pleasure both to participants and spectators. The shoot came off on the grounds of the Lowell Gun Club, on Swan's farm at 2 o'clock.

Thirty contestants, mainly composed of members of the club, appeared upon the grounds with breech-loaders and cartridges. Twenty shots in five rounds were given to each marksman. The scores, as may be seen from the subjoined summary, were decidedly mean.

A Holden trap, set at 18 yards rise, was used to send the balls "straight away." The balls were thick as an ordinary beer bottle. With 18 yards rise and a fast driving trap, this ball of almost solid glass had got away at least 45 yards before the most "snap-pish" marksman could "get on to it."

Few guns loaded with No. 8 shot could break the glass ball used at that range, and as the summary shows, the hard driving guns were not many.

The prizes were \$25, \$22, \$18, \$15, \$12, \$10, \$8, \$7, \$5 and \$2, and the score stood as follows ... (deleted; the top shooter was Mr. Smith, with 13 balls).

From the *Fairfield (Iowa) Weekly Journal*
Late June, 1884

The glass ball shooting match on the Fourth of July is for any team of eight members against the same number selected from the Fairfield Gun Club,

Each gun or team to pay for all balls broken, giving 10 shots to each man. Entries must be made by July 1st. Price for the winning team \$15. See M.A. Repass."

