

Shooting in the New Year ^[1]

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by Kevin Cherry, 2006

Shooting in the New Year, although thought to have been more widespread in North Carolina during the [colonial](#) ^[2] and [antebellum](#) ^[3] eras (the [Moravians](#) ^[4] complained about the observance), is a ritual that by 2006 had died out completely except in portions of [Lincoln](#) ^[5] and [Gaston Counties](#) ^[6]. In this ritual, descendants of German settlers welcome the New Year by traveling from house to house, chanting and firing black powder muskets. The "shooters" begin their annual tradition at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Day. One man, designated the crier, calls "Halloo" three times to alert those in the house, and then gives a rhyming chant. Of uncertain origin, the chant is part sermon and part good wishes for the coming year. It has been said to resemble speeches in [English mummer plays](#) ^[7]. Following the chant, the shooters step forward one at a time to fire their muskets. Loaded to make the most smoke and noise possible, the guns are fired from the hip at knee level. Once all have fired, the shooters are ushered into the home for coffee and food. The practice became somewhat institutionalized in 1963 when the "[Cherryville New Year's Shooters](#) ^[8]" were federally chartered.

As it is practiced in modern times, the New Year's shoot is thought to be a combination of English and German folk customs, but it primarily grew out of the German tradition of shooting guns to ward off evil spirits. In one incarnation of the tradition, the "Shooting of Witches," boys in certain parts of Germany would stand in a circle on New Year's Eve and fire three times into the air. The Pennsylvania Dutch, at one time, shot among their fruit trees on New Year's Eve to ensure a good harvest.

References:

Bill Sharpe, "The New Year Shooters: The Oddest Holiday Custom in North Carolina Was Brought to the Hills of Gaston County by German Immigrants 200 Years Ago,"*The State* 22 (January 1955).

Kay Valentine, "Shooting in the New Year: The Roar of Old Muskets Echoing over the Gaston Hills Marks a Tradition Unchanged by the Centuries,"*The State* 41 (January 1974).

Additional Resources:

Rita Wehunt-Black, "[Gaston County, North Carolina: A Brief History](#) ^[9]".

Subjects:

[Antebellum \(1820-1861\)](#) ^[10]

[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) ^[11]

[Culture](#) ^[12]

Authors:

[Cherry, Kevin](#) ^[13]

Origin - location:

[Gaston County](#) ^[14]

[Lincoln County](#) ^[15]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[16]

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^[10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/antebellum-1820-1> ^[11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/colonial-period> ^[12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/culture> ^[13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/cherry-kevin>

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