

The Appleseed Project: Saving America, One Rifleman at a Time

By Lee Arten

In October 2007, I heard that an Appleseed Project Shooting Event was scheduled at Shiocton, Wisconsin. I tried to get there, but the family schedule wouldn't bend. In 2008 we'd decided to make a trip to Appleton for a Memorial Day weekend event when I discovered that another Appleseed Event was scheduled on the Lake Park Rifle Range in Shiocton. Doing two events on one trip was too good a deal to pass up.

The Appleseed Project is a mix of marksmanship and history. The name comes from John Chapman; the early American pioneer nicknamed Johnny Appleseed. Chapman traveled the American frontier planting apple trees for future settlers to find. Appleseed Events also connect to the events of April 19, 1775, in Lexington and Concord. Without "the shot heard round the world," fired that morning, we'd probably still be speaking with funny English accents.

The project is the brainchild of Fred of Fred's M14 Rifle Stocks and More (www.fredsm14stocks.com). A long-time advertiser in *Shotgun News*, and a high-power rifle shooter, Fred decided he didn't like the way the country was going. He'd come to believe that too many citizens were more interested in a couch to sit on than American principles to stand on. Fred thought our Founding Fathers would have done something about that, so he figured he should do something. Teaching marksmanship was something he could do, and it would reinforce – or teach – self-reliance and citizenship. Fred believes enough of those two things can save the country. I like that idea a lot better than many I've heard from politicians!

The Appleseed Program got going at Fred's home range in Ramseur, North Carolina. Soon it spread across the country. The event in Wisconsin was the nearest to me.

There were 39 shooters at the Shiocton Appleseed. The event was held at the Lake Park Rifle Range on the edge of town. Eight boys, below the age of 20, shot for free. (Military personnel also shoot for free.) Fathers and sons shot together, and an uncle and his nephew were also on the line. Costs for the adult shooters were \$45 for one day of instruction and \$70 for

two. That's a bargain for the amount of information presented and shooting done.

Appleseed Shooting Events begin with the basics of good rifle marksmanship. Shooting starts at 25 meters with a "Redcoat" target. A redcoat has "head and shoulders" targets like those used for sighting in military M16s. They are printed in red and sized to simulate shots at 100, 200, 300 and 400 yards. Shooters load 13 rounds, sling up, and fire three shots on each target. Most shoot from prone.

Groups on the different head-and-shoulders targets indicate whether the shooter is competent at 100 yards, or farther. There is one shot of the 13 left for a red, one-inch-square target. This square simulates a 250-yard headshot. Tim Murphy – a sharpshooter with the American Army at the Battle of Saratoga – made such a shot, killing British Brigadier General Simon Fraser.

I used my M1A for this target. My troubles began almost immediately. Although I've used peep sights for years, and have shot accurately with them, I had trouble seeing the smaller marks on the Redcoat target. Several other shooters did well. Some, including my son, made the Tim Murphy shot.

Almost the whole rest of the first day was spent on a target with six one-inch black squares. My 16-year-old son, Ethan, shot this one well, although he had to adjust the zero of my AR. I had trouble seeing the black squares, too. One of the instructors suggested it was time for me to "move up to a scope."

I'd have done so immediately, but I hadn't brought a scoped rifle along.

The Appleseed Project's program is based on the use of iron sights like those on the M1 rifle, or M1A. I saw several shooters with aftermarket peeps made by Tech Sights installed on Ruger 10/22s. (The manufacturer describes these sights as "GI Type" Aperture Sights.) However, the Appleseed Project aims to make good shooters out of people using the rifles they have. I saw scoped .22s made by Marlin, Savage and Ruger, and some scoped centerfire rifles – including one FN/FAL – on the line. Among the iron-sighted rifles present, the M1A was well represented, as

was the M1 Garand. I also saw one AK clone and a couple of SKSs. When I go again, I'll be shooting a scoped 10/22 to start.

Proper use of the rifle sling is taught at Appleseed Shooting Events. As a former High Power match shooter, I figured I knew the sling – I was wrong. Guy, one of the instructors, demonstrated a way to use a "hasty sling" that I'd never seen before. Prone, sitting and kneeling positions were also demonstrated, along with the Natural Point Of Aim (NPOA). Safety is also heavily stressed.

I was out of shape before the Appleseed Event, and knew it. Attempting to remedy that, I walked, rode a stationary bike and lifted weights for two months before the shoot. What I neglected was practicing the rifle positions, despite suggestions to do so on the Appleseed website.

That oversight – and some health problems – took a toll, and I didn't shoot all of the exercises.

Instead, I watched my son shoot and listened to the instructors discuss results on the targets and Revolutionary War history. Late in the day, I was able to step up and shoot the offhand part of the second Redcoat target. I'd put away the M1A by then and was shooting a Winchester 52. A target rifle made in the 1930s, the 52 has peep sights similar to those on the 1903 Springfield and a sweet trigger. It fits me and shoots almost any 40-grain .22 bullet well. Although I had to concentrate hard to beat fatigue, I got five hits in each of the two head-and-shoulders offhand targets shot at 25 meters. Nothing hurts when I shoot offhand, but I will practice position shooting before attending another Appleseed.

Marksmanship is important, but the history presented at an Appleseed Event may be more so. The historical portions of the Shiocton Appleseed Event began with the explanation of the headshot on the Redcoat target. It went on to cover the signal from The Old North Church, the Revere and Dawes rides that roused the American populace, and the shots fired at Lexington and Concord.

Some of the information presented had the hair standing up on the back of my neck. I'm pretty sure the 11- and 12-year-olds on the firing line do not hear this history in their public-

school classes. Then, history took a break for more shooting and lunch. After lunch there was more shooting. Late in the afternoon the instructors covered Meriam's Corner, "Where the Revolutionary War really began..."

Before that, the instructors said some of those who fought the British on the morning of April 19 would have hung, and some would have gone to prison. Those who only defended their homes might have been excused, because even under English law, "An Englishman's home was his castle. He could defend it against anyone."

At Meriam's corner, things changed. Americans, who had no direct connection to towns that had just been invaded, fired, and looted, opened fire on British troops in support of other American militiamen. Then the die was really cast. (At some Appleseed Events, reenactors – or buckskinners – have demonstrated firing Brown Bess muskets or replicas of Revolutionary War-era cannon.)

An Appleseed Event is a two-day affair. The first day can be shot exclusively with a .22 rifle. The second usually involves longer-range shooting – if the range can handle it. Riflemen shoot and qualify as far out as 300 or 400 yards. I was unable to attend the Shiocton Appleseed on Sunday. I'm sure I would have gotten a lot out of it.

On April 19, 2008, Appleseed Events were held simultaneously in 14 states. There were 527 shooters, and 54 of them qualified as rifleman by shooting 210 or better on "Fred's Quick 'N Dirty AQT" target. Plans are already in progress for more shoots on April 19, 2009. In the meantime, Appleseed Events are being held throughout the year all around the country.

The Appleseed Project's goals for 2009 are 200-plus events and 8,000 total shooters. Goals for 2010 are more than 400 shoots and over 16,000 shooters. Fred said on the website he hopes to see the program double each year.

I'm impressed with what the Appleseed Project has done so far, and hope Fred's goals will be reached.

Schedules and other information about the Appleseed Project can be found at the project's website, www.rwva.org.

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