A BRIEF HISTORY OF GYMNASTICS IN THE
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN, TURNVEREIN

Seminar report
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A report submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Division of Graduate Studies Wisconsin State College, La Crosse August, 1960
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

It was the purpose of this study to trace the history of the gymnastic program in the La Crosse, Wisconsin, Turners, showing the background of the organization and the scope of its activities.

Needs

A comprehensive historical study of the Turner organization in La Crosse, Wisconsin, would be of value to students preparing for the profession of physical education. From history, we are able to obtain a background and understanding that applies to our present needs. Modern physical education was influenced by concepts pioneered by this organization. The Turnverein, with its many offerings, held an important place in American life, and the gymnastics of the Turners formed the accepted standard for school or college use. "Their philosophy and practice relating to exercise were to be reflected in the development of American physical education to an unparalleled degree."¹

A second, and very real need, is that much of the information available could only come from former active members of the La Crosse Turners. These members are still available, but time is rapidly reducing their ranks.

¹Norma Schwendener, A History of Physical Education in the United States, p. 51.
Definitions

Gymnastics. Exercise and competition with and without apparatus by individuals and groups. Activities include apparatus, calisthenics, marching, rhythmics, and tumbling.

Turnen. An exercise.

Turner. A gymnast and member of a Turnverein.

Turnfest. An exhibition by Turners.

Turnplatz. A playground.

Turntage. A district convention.

Turnverein. A gymnastic club.

Delimitations

This study was limited to the gymnastic program of the La Crosse, Wisconsin, Turnverein. No attempt was made to detail any of the other activities carried on by the La Crosse organization. The study was not concerned with other Turnvereins except where a direct influence on the La Crosse Turnverein could be shown.

Related Studies

Van Dalen states that schools can function effectively as agencies of social progress only if they adjust to changing civilization. The problems facing educators today are the result of a long historical evolution. How well we understand historical concepts determines

\[\text{Deobold B. Van Dalen, Elmer D. Mitchell, and Bruce L. Bennett,} \]
\[\text{A World History of Physical Education, pp. 1-4.}\]
the degree of success attained in meeting our problems. Students preparing to be teachers of physical education should have a well-integrated, over-all view of the professional studies in their field. The general structural organization of the book was based on a historical-philosophical approach. This study intends to be an aid to students preparing for their role of physical education teachers. To relate the above to the Turnverein, Stecher writes the following:

A turner is not simply an athlete or a gymnast. His training embraces activities that help to make him a better social being. A Turner society is not an athletic club, but an educational institution; an institution that has as its ideal the training of intelligent, self-willed citizens.3

Schwendener writes of the contributions made to the advancement of physical education by foreign groups.4 Of these contributions to physical education, the influence of the Turners played a large role. Other influences were felt and have influenced our present philosophy, but the work of Turnverein leaders can be considered outstanding.

Design of Study

The Turner movement had its beginning in Germany. To ascertain how this group got its start in La Crosse, the beginnings of the movement in Germany were studied. From this base, the Turners were traced to the United States. This was accomplished through a review of the historical literature. When and how the Turners started in La Crosse


4Schwendener, op. cit., pp. 45-51.
was the next major problem. The original records of the La Crosse society were the best source of information. Reference to the location of such records was found in an unpublished report.5

The main body of this report is concerned with the activities of the La Crosse Turners. The activities included organizational structure, program of gymnastics, practice and training procedure, type and method of instruction, and competition and exhibition. Interviews with former active members, the formal records of the organization, and newspaper accounts supplied the necessary information. The final area discussed in this paper, determines why there was a decline of the Turners. The combined consensus of opinions resulting from interviews formed the basis for conclusions.

5La Crosse County Historical Society, "Report on the Museum and Collection," p. 3. ( Mimeographed.)
CHAPTER II

INAUGURATION OF THE TURNER ORGANIZATION IN LA CROSSE

The Birth of the Turnverein

Germany was a collection of approximately three hundred independent states and free cities at the turn of the nineteenth century. The one thing that they shared in common was cultural sentiments. The rulers of these independent states were jealous of their powers and feared any union. Several forces were working toward this union and they resulted in a loose political confederation. The most notable factors were a fear of France under Napoleon, and strong feelings of nationalism and democratic aspirations of the common people.

Physical education paralleled the political patterns of Germany. During the early days, physical education was most active in periods of liberalism, and suppressed during reactionary periods.

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, the physical educational leader during this era, was hailed by his countrymen as the apostle of German unity, the champion of liberalism, the defender of the common man. He was honored as the father of German gymnastics and the Turner Societies.6

Jahn pleaded for a high standard of physical fitness. He wanted gymnastic exercise to be a part of the educational curriculum. Jahn felt that gymnastics was not only a method of achieving physical powers but that it was also a tool for achieving political goals. He encouraged the spirit of freedom which is found in the Turner movement. "The motto

6Van Dalen, op. cit., p. 218.
which Jahn coined, 'Frisch, Frei, Frehlich, Fromm,' connotes free in spirit, strong in body, cheerful, intelligent, and dependable."

Jahn started out as a teacher in a school for boys. The practice of the times was to have half holidays on Wednesdays and Saturdays, when teachers would occasionally take the boys on hikes into the country. Jahn soon was taking his boys on these expeditions and would encourage the boys to participate in vigorous physical activities. He built crude pieces of apparatus and soon formulated the idea of the Turnplatz. By June, 1811, Jahn opened his first Turnplatz near Berlin. The playground was an enclosed area. A small building was located on the playground for changing clothes. A few pieces of apparatus were provided. The activities included climbing ladders, high jumping, pole vaulting, running on a figure eight shaped track, broad jumping, horizontal bar, pole and rope climbing, and wrestling. To meet expenses, each member was charged a small fee. A common uniform was worn by all participants. The next year an enlarged Turnplatz was completed. This new area contained more elaborate equipment, including the first model of parallel bars. The Turnplatz soon became a very popular place with adults seeking membership. By this popular demand, Jahn set aside Sundays for adult participants. Spectators crowded around to watch participants engage in Turnen. When the war with France broke out in 1813, Jahn and most of his Turners joined the army. The Turnplatz remained open during this time under the leadership of Eiselen. After the war, Jahn returned to his Turnplatz and soon

7Van Dalen, op. cit., p.220.
wrote a book titled "German Gymnastics." All over Germany interested parties turned to this book for aid and guidance. In the years after the war, the whole nation became enthusiastic about gymnastics. Jahn was honored as a national hero.

Leaders in the Turners were active politically and this led to the organization being banned for a time. Jahn was arrested and placed under police surveillance. He was never to assume the leadership again. During periods when the organization was outlawed, a few continued to work in indoor meeting places. When bans were lifted, they immediately became active, staging Turnfests and Turntages. The members persisted in holding adverse political beliefs which repeatedly put the organization under restrictions. In 1860, they decided to remain completely away from all forms of politics and from that time on, they experienced a steady growth. In 1886, all the little local Turner groups united to form the National Union of German Gymnastic Societies, or the Deutsche Turnerschaft. This was composed of fifteen regions which were subdivided into districts, or Gauße, and each of these into societies, or Verein. Membership increased at a rapid rate. There were two thousand Verein in 1880, and there were nine thousand in 1910. The National Turnfest became an important part of national life. Germans emigrating from their homeland carried their skills and exercises to all parts of the world. In each new place, they organized new societies to carry on their activities.
The Turner Movement in the United States

Three men are given credit for first introducing Jahn's German gymnastics to the United States. They all arrived within three years of each other, between 1824 and 1827. They are Charles Follen, Charles Beck, and Francis Lieber. Charles Follen, a political refugee, received an appointment as the first teacher of German at Harvard College. Follen introduced Jahn's theories while at Harvard. Charles Beck, also a political refugee, went to the Round Hill School in Northampton. While there, he organized an outdoor gymnasium. This was the first school gymnasium in the United States and was patterned after a Turnplatz. His teaching was also very similar to that found in German Turner organizations. Francis Lieber followed the first two men and took over the position vacated by Follen. In addition to the gymnastic work, Leiber opened a swimming school. "The success of the work introduced by Follen, Beck, and Lieber, paved the way for the permanent establishment of the Turnverein and the Turnplatz in America."³ The Turnverein became not only a place for exercise, but also a social institution, a clearing house of ideas and policies.

The first introduction of German gymnastics died out in a few years. This parallels the events in Germany at that time. The rulers of German independent states, felt that it was not to their best interest to allow the organizations to continue. They passed laws to suppress the organizations. The Turners did not continue in the open, but enough

³Schwendener, op. cit., p. 49.
interest was kept alive to allow new clubs to spring up whenever there was a lessening of restrictions. This was the case in 1840. Soon there were district conventions which served to exhibit their work and to interest outsiders in joining their group. In 1848 and 1849, the groups were once again suppressed. Many immigrated to the United States and brought the Turner movement with them. "The Cincinnati Turngemeinde, the oldest German-American gymnastic society in this country, was organized November 21, 1848, and the New York Turngemeinde, a week later."9 Within the following three years, there were over twenty-five societies with two thousand members. In Philadelphia, on October 5, 1851, a convention was held to detail the formation of a permanent national organization. By 1853, there were sixty societies, and by 1860, there were about one hundred fifty Turner societies. La Crosse formed their society in 1855. The Civil War saw the enlistment of a large majority of the Turner membership forcing activities to be curtailed during that period.

During the Civil War, "Turners from Milwaukee and other Wisconsin societies were incorporated in the Fifth Wisconsin Regiment as Company C, known as the Turner Rifles."10

In 1865, delegates from fifty-eight societies met to reorganize the national body under the name Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund, or the North American Gymnastic Union. By 1886, there were two hundred thirty-nine.


one active societies with twenty-three thousand members. All of these societies were members of the national organization, the North American Gymnastic Union.

In 1856, the formation of a teacher training school was proposed. Ten years passed before such a school was started in New York City. The one year course included "lectures on the history and aims of German Turnen, anatomy and aesthetics in their relations to gymnastics, first aid, gymnastic nomenclature, the theory of the different systems, and practical instruction with special regards to the training of boys and girls." The school was held in New York for two years, moved to Chicago for one year and then back to New York, where it remained until 1875. It was then moved to Milwaukee. The school graduated over one hundred teachers in the next ten years. The graduates went out to the various Turnvereins as instructors and many went to important public school systems to direct physical training. The school was moved to Indianapolis and then back to Milwaukee in 1891. Between 1891 and 1899, sixty more men graduated from the school. A time lapse of three years when no courses were offered came along. Then in 1902, under a broadened program, the school was started again. In 1907, the school moved to Indianapolis and its name was changed to the Normal College of the North American Gymnastic Union. A noted leader of this school during its stay in Milwaukee was George Brosius.

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Ibid., p. 187.
The German Turnverein was an important non-school agency. The clubs served as social centers for the German immigrants who had come to the United States in 1848 and 1849. They tended to live together in the new cities that they moved to. They preserved their old customs to a large extent. "Every member of the family was a member of the Turnverein. They went for exercises, games, lectures, discussions, and social functions."12

About 1885, the public schools were experiencing a wave of interest in gymnastics. This marked the permanent acceptance of physical training in the public schools. At that time, the Turner leaders made a definite effort to promote the German system of gymnastics for public school children. Prominent Turners joined the newly-formed Association for the Advancement of Physical Education. Non-Turners that were interested in physical education were invited to Turnfests. Publications were printed in English. A monthly publication "Mind and Body" was begun in 1894. Turner instructors offered their services to public schools without charge in many areas. In La Crosse, however, some charge was made. It was a lack of funds that caused this city to discontinue using La Crosse Turner instructors in the public schools.

In May, 1879, a committee was appointed by the La Crosse Deutscher Verein to endeavor re-instatement of physical education in public schools.13

12Emmett A. Rice, A Brief History of Physical Education, p. 162.

13Deutscher Verein von La Crosse, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, May, 1897.
Mr. L. Mueller, Turner instructor, had been conducting classes in the public schools. When Mueller resigned his position and moved from La Crosse, a successor was not immediately available. Mr. C. F. Sutor, a graduate of the Turner Normal School in Milwaukee, had several positions offered to him. Through the influence of his instructor, George Brosius, he came to La Crosse. Mr. Brosius knew that La Crosse needed a man to re-introduce physical education in the public schools; therefore, he prevailed upon Mr. Sutor to come to La Crosse. The reasons that the program did not get re-started are not clear, but indications point to financial difficulties.

The result of the efforts made by the Turners was an introduction of German gymnastics into numerous city schools in the Midwest. Some of these cities included Kansas City, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Davenport, and Milwaukee. Some of the individuals who were active in district and national affairs around the turn of the century were George Brosius, Carl Betz, Henry Suder, William Reuter, Karl Zapp, Hans Ballin, Carl Ziegler, Robert Nohr, George Wittich, and Emil Rath. All were instructors in public school systems. George Wittich and William Reuter are the fathers of Walter Wittich and Hans Reuter, long associated with Wisconsin State College, La Crosse. William Stecher is well known for his work in developing curriculums by grade levels in Philadelphia.

\[\text{Statement by C. F. Sutor, personal interview, June 17, 1960.}\]
The Turners have been given credit for influencing state laws in physical education. They were of great influence in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. They enthusiastically promoted physical education as a school subject "because their organization had a traditional interest in gymnastics, games and sports, with a ready recognition of the educational and social as well as the physical benefits of planned exercise programs." \(^{15}\)

**The Turner Movement in La Crosse**

The first German Society in La Crosse, Wisconsin, was the La Crosse Turnverein, organized October 21, 1855. The first officers in this organization were Christian Koenig, Speaker; Herman Luithlen, First Turnwart; William Minor, Second Turnwart; William Krueger, Secretary; August Wehausen, Property Man.

No records were located showing where the first meeting of the society was held, but other early meetings were at a rented brick building owned by Mr. Hintgen. The first account available shows that new quarters were dedicated September 13, 1858. \(^{16}\)

The first property owned by the Turnverein, was purchased from Oepke Bomema on June 1, 1865. On June 12, the society purchased Lot 6 from Montz Geckman, Lots 7 and 8 from John M. Levy, and Lot 10 from

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\(^{16}\)Nord Stern (La Crosse, Wisconsin), 50th Anniversary Edition, June, 1908.
Theodore Rodolf. The society thus owned the entire east half of the block on which the Pioneer Labor Hall presently is located. Records from the Register of Deeds in La Crosse County show that the first hall built and owned by the Turners was located in the middle of the block on Fifth Street between Ferry and Market. This building was moved to the alley on Ferry Street sometime in 1876 and the remainder of the property was used as a summer garden. In the spring of 1866, the Turners dedicated a new hall with appropriate exercises. John C. Fuehr, who was then Speaker of the society, presided at the celebration.

In March, 1865, the Turnverein was granted a charter as a corporation by the state of Wisconsin. The incorporators were John C. Fuehr, Joseph Gutmen, George Metzer, Fred Tillman, and Gustav Carl.

Soon after the Turnverein was organized, there was dissension among the members. Some of the younger members who had formed a Singing Society, were attempting to control the society. The result being that the members belonging to the singing section withdrew from the Turnverein and organized the La Crosse Mannerchor. This occurred on August 11, 1856, and marks the date of the founding of the La Crosse Liederkranz.

In 1871, the leading members of the Liederkranz endeavored to prevail upon the Turnverein to amalgamate with the Liederkranz to form the Deutscher Verein. A constitution for the proposed combined societies was adopted December 3, 1871, when the Liederkranz changed the name of

17 Statement by Herman O. Klien, personal interview, June 23, 1960.
their organization to Deutscher Verein von La Crosse. John Ulrich was the first president of this organization. They were granted a charter as a corporation. It was not until 1874, that the Turnverein took action and amalgamated with the Liederkranz. On March 31, 1874, a joint committee of Turners and Singers adopted resolutions combining the two organizations. The founders of the new organization named Deutscher Verein von La Crosse, were John Ulrich, August Steinlein, John Michel, John Kutzborsky, Christian Koenig, C. F. Segelke, George B. Rose, John J. Cole, Jacob Kohlhaus, Henry Angelroth, and John Schultz. A united committee was appointed to represent the two societies in negotiating the amalgamation. The committee representing the Turners consisted of Henry Heil, John Pamperin, William Tillman, Peter Schintgen, and Gottlieb Heileman. The Liederkranz was represented by Charles Ottellie, the Turnverein by George F. Gund, and the United Committee by A. Steinlein. August 14, 1874, was the actual birth of the Deutscher Verein when the two societies turned all their property over to this group. The Deutscher Verein was the legal name of the organization. In 1875, plans were made for a new home for the combined societies. In 1876, the old Germania Hall was built on the west corner of Fifth and Ferry Street. The old Turner Hall was then moved to the alley between Fourth and Fifth on Ferry, where it was used by the Turners for their exercises.

On December 31, 1890, both the Germania Hall and Turner Hall were completely destroyed by fire. Immediately steps were taken to secure a new location. For two years, the society rented the building now known as Labor Hall. In 1892, the Society erected the Germania Hall, now known
as Pioneer Labor Hall, on the Northwest corner of Fifth and Market Street. Figure 1 is a recent photograph of this hall. The funds for the project were provided by donations from members and from the sale of $6,000.00 in bonds.

Figure 1. Germania Hall in 1959.

During the World War I, public feeling against the Deutscher Verein became intense. In 1918, a meeting was called to change the name of the society to Pioneer Club, and from that time the home of the club was known as Pioneer Hall. The name Germania Hall remains in the Fifth Street Wall of the building today.

The beginning of the end for "The Germania" was World War I. Those were trying days when neighbor was set against neighbor if one or the other happened to be of German decent. While the membership of the Germania was not confined to those of Teutonic
origin, the Germans far out numbered the other nationalities. The name changed to help but feeling of "old god fellowship" that made membership a pleasure was dying out.18

A gradual depletion in the ranks of the members made it impossible to keep up the building. It was decided in a meeting held in 1934 to sell the property for the amount necessary to liquidate the obligations of the organization. Acting under this resolution, the directors sold the property to the Pioneer Hall Labor Association on August 6, 1937, almost to the day sixty-three years after it was founded.

On August 16, 1937, the membership of the Pioneer Club met at the Linker Hotel for a farewell banquet. On this occasion, the members voted to disband and the officers were instructed to notify the Secretary of State that the corporation known as the Deutscher Verein von La Crosse surrendered its charter.19

18 *The La Crosse Tribune* (Wisconsin), June 21, 1959, p. 12.
19 *Deutscher Verein von La Crosse, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting*, August 16, 1937.
CHAPTER III

ACTIVITIES OF THE LA CROSSE TURNERS

Organizational Structure

In La Crosse, Wisconsin, the Turnverein through most of its existence, was a separate society banded together with other societies. The parent organization was named the "Deutscher Verein von La Crosse." The Deutscher Verein was a corporation without capital stock. It had the power and authority to acquire property, collect dues, enforce laws, and it was responsible for the management and direction of the affairs of the society. The subordinate sections received financial support and the use of facilities from the parent organization.

Any person eighteen years of age was eligible for membership in the Deutscher Verein or any subordinate section. Younger persons could become junior members of the subordinate sections. A member of the parent organization could be associated with any section or could simply remain a social member of the Deutscher Verein.

The management of the corporation affairs was conducted by a board of directors consisting of thirteen members who were elected at the annual meeting. The singing section and the Turner section each elected three members to represent their separate organizations. The remaining seven directors were elected from those not identified with

either the singing section or the Turner section. The directors chose from among themselves the following officers: a president, a vice-president, a recording secretary, a financial secretary, and a treasurer. The records, proceedings, debates, by-laws, and all business affairs were conducted in the German language.

The Turner section had its own organization with necessary officers entitled: speaker, second speaker, secretary, treasurer, turnwart, second turnwart, and custodian. The Turnwart was chosen for his ability as a gymnast and his regular attendance. The duty of the Turnwart was to act as a student leader. He assisted the instructor and it was his responsibility to call the group to order at the start of a class. Elmer Warninger, while holding the position of Turnwart, acted as an instructor for a period of three or four weeks when the instructor suddenly died. It was the position of the Turnwart to take over the class when the instructor could not attend. Warninger indicated that at one time he was very interested in becoming an instructor, but circumstances did not allow him to follow these lines.

The purpose of the Turnverein, as listed in their constitution, was to give active support to its members in the cultivation of music, for encouraging and advancing science, literature, and dramatic art. They also gave support for the development of the faculties of the body

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as well as the mind. It is the latter purpose that is best known by the general public. It was this part of the Turners program that was promoted for public view.

The Program of Gymnastics

The program of gymnastics of the La Crosse Turnverein was broad and extensive. There were classes for men and for women, for the boys and for the girls. They ranged in age from four and five in the kindergarten class to the seniors, who were active as long as they were physically fit and willing. The classes were all similar, being varied only by degree of difficulty and suitability to age and sex.

Girls' Kindergarten. The girls' kindergarten class was open to girls from four to six years of age. Girls of parents who were members of the Deutscher Verein could attend free of charge. Many children of non-members also were allowed to attend for a small fee. The class was held immediately after public school dismissed, starting around four o'clock in the afternoon.

The class started with the instructor lining the students up. For a period of six or seven minutes, he led the group through tactical marching. They ended up in an open formation. The next ten minutes were devoted to group calisthenics. They used wooden dumb-bells and wands. Care was taken to emphasize form and not to cause fatigue. All parts of the body were exercised at each class session. For the next half-hour there was work on the apparatus. The flying rings, ropes, and climbing poles were used for the swinging activities. Mounts and
dismounts were done on the various pieces of apparatus. Balance boards were used. "Great care was taken to fit the age and sex to the work." The remaining time in the class period was always devoted to the playing of games. Circle games that involved running and tagging were used for this age level.

Boys' Kindergarten. The boys of the kindergarten age group followed the same class pattern as the girls. The activities were the same with the addition of more apparatus, such as the horizontal bar, the horse, and the buck. Mounts and dismounts were practiced.

Girls, age six to nine. The next age division was from six to nine. There was an automatic promotion to the next age group. The activities of this class followed that of the kindergarten except the exercises became more complex and strenuous. Care was taken to prevent over-fatigue.

Boys, age six to nine. The class for boys, from age six to nine, followed the procedure recorded in the kindergarten group with a steady progress in complexity. An example of the type of apparatus exercise on the side horse for this age group would be: Approach, grasp pommels, spring to kneeling position in the saddle, knee spring to standing position on the mat. The proper form was always emphasized. This was the outstanding feature of the Turner apparatus work. The exercise did not

have to be complex but the grace and the ease of good form tended to make it a thing of beauty.

**Girls, age ten to fifteen.** The class for girls, from age ten to fifteen, follows the same pattern set up in the kindergarten age group. Only the complexity changed, becoming more difficult. Work with wooden dumb-bells and wands continued; also, Indian clubs and free exercise were introduced. The apparatus work always was suitable for young girls. To illustrate this, exercises on the parallel bars did not permit straddling the bars. Swings were done with the legs together and the weight kept on the arms. At the close of each class, games of low organization were played.

**Boys, age ten to fifteen.** The opening marching tactics and exercises became very precise in the boys' group, ages ten to fifteen. The Indian club and steel wand were introduced. Much emphasis was given to performing exercises on all apparatus. Games of low organization were played at the close of the period. The boys were given free choice as to the game that would be played.

**Women's class.** From the age of sixteen on, all women attended the women's classes. They would continue into their late twenties and beyond if they desired. Marriage was the main reason for becoming inactive members. The women were very active in group precision work. One piece of apparatus that interested all was the giant stride. Intricate dance steps were worked out to music.
Senior men's class. From the age of sixteen to eighteen, young men were accepted as junior members of the Turnverein. They participated with the senior men in their classes. This was the main group of active Turners. Classes were held in the evenings that lasted from an hour and a half to two hours. The development of skills on the heavy apparatus reached its highest point in this group. All members were expected to become proficient on all pieces of apparatus. Figure 2 shows a representative senior men's class on the various pieces of apparatus.

Figure 2. Representative senior men's class.

Emphasis was placed on the all-around development of the gymnast. Form and style were worked out to perfection with attention to detail taking precedence over all else. At the conclusion of the gym class, and after a period of games like basketball, a business meeting and social hour were held. This made the Turners a closely knit and smoothly working group.
Special Activities. The physical program of the Turners was not restricted to gymnasium work alone. They had other activities during special seasons or as extra activities. Track and field events were practiced during the summer months. High jumping, broad jumping, pole vaulting, and weight throwing were the most common. Running was restricted by a lack of proper facilities.

Swimming instruction was given on a voluntary basis. The Turners owned a barge on the Mississippi river and during good weather, instruction in swimming was given. It is interesting to note that at least one Turner instructor, Mr. Karl Joerschke, was employed by the city of La Crosse as director of swimming at the public bath house.

Fencing instruction was given to those interested. This activity was limited to small groups. Instruction was given in foil, broad sword, and staff. Mr. George Hintz, then fencing master at the Naval Academy, spent a thirty day period in La Crosse giving instruction in fencing.

Two other activities carried on were hiking and camping. The instructor would take small groups on hikes. It was nothing to cover fifteen miles on a Saturday and there was some kind of organized exercise along the way. Camping was held by entire groups. To serve as an example, the following was reported to the author by a former Turner member.

The senior men class marched from the hall to a place called Sunset Point. This was located across from Dresbach, Minnesota. The camp was run along military lines. The tents were set up and aligned. Guards were posted through the night. Everyone had to stand a three hour shift. Marching and maneuvers were practiced.

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25 Ibid.
**Equipment and Facilities.** The Turner gymnasium was a good sized area, well equipped with both hand apparatus and heavy apparatus. The normal heavy apparatus consisted of horizontal bars, parallel bars, side horse, long horse, vaulting bucks, flying rings, and mats. Other heavy apparatus included balance boards, climbing ropes, climbing poles, stall bars, horizontal ladders, balance ladders, inclined planes, beat boards, and a giant stride. The hand equipment consisted of wooden dumb-bells, Indian clubs, and wooden and steel wands. This hand equipment was stored in racks around the walls. Fencing equipment was provided for those interested. Figure 3 shows a typical Turner gymnasium with the described equipment displayed.

![A typical Turner gymnasium.](image)

The gymnasium was equipped with a basketball court and a basketball. This was the only provisions for ball games. No other balls or nets were
available for use. The limited outdoor space allowed areas for jumping, vaulting, and weight throwing. Running events were hampered by lack of space.

Dressing rooms were provided but they lacked shower facilities. An article in The La Crosse Tribune reported plans for remodeling the hall to provide a swimming pool, new locker rooms, and shower facilities. The only result of these plans was the installation of showers for the senior men in a loft above the gymnasium.

Costume. The children were not required to wear any special uniform during their classes. They did wear soft soled slippers. Special uniforms were worn by the older groups. This uniform can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4. A typical women's class.

26 The La Crosse Tribune (Wisconsin), April 23, 1907, p. 3.
Alice Warninger Lautz remembers the uniform consisted of full length black stockings, blue bloomers with a white braid, blouse, and soft soled slippers.\textsuperscript{27} By present day standards, this uniform was rather combersome.

The senior men's uniform was a white T-shirt and close fitting grey trousers held up by elastic bands. The trousers were kept down by an elastic band passing under the instep. They also wore the soft soled slippers.

Instructors and Instruction

The Instructors. The instructors of the Turnverein in La Crosse were men who had received their training at the Normal College of the American Gymnastic Union. They were hired under contract for a period of one year. The first physical director on record was Oskar Kneffel.\textsuperscript{28} He was followed by A. Weber, G. Eckstein, and O. L. Mueller. Mueller was the last instructor to teach gymnastics in the La Crosse public schools. C. F. Sutor, who still resides in La Crosse, was then contracted to become the new instructor. Figure 5 is a group picture of the 1897 graduating class, North American Gymnastic Union. C. F. Sutor appears in the group. When Sutor resigned to go into private business, E. W. Guenther came to La Crosse. He was followed by Anton Drews, Hans Lehrman, and Karl Joerschke. Joerschke was the last instructor for the La Crosse Turnverein.

\textsuperscript{27}Statement by Alice Warninger Lautz, personal interview, June 28, 1960.

\textsuperscript{28}Deutscher Verein von La Crosse, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, November 2, 1885.
Instructors received a salary for their services. The average monthly income of an instructor was sixty dollars a month. The working hours for instructors was from the time public school dismissed at four o'clock in the afternoon until late in the evening. Classes started for the younger groups and there was a succession of classes until the senior men's class concluded the day of activities.

Figure 5. 1897 graduating class, North American Gymnastic Union.

Instruction. The methods of instruction were very carefully planned. Attention was given to the all-around development of the student. The type of activity was always fitted to the age, sex, and ability of the group. Over-fatigue was avoided.

Discipline was of the highest order. The Turners were in the class to learn all they could. By present day standards, class order was severe.
The students would stand in lines while waiting their turns on the apparatus. No talking was allowed.

Much time was spent in the perfection of form and style. The philosophy of the instructors was to learn an activity correctly before going on to the next one. The classes were organized so the best performed an exercise first and then acted as spotters. Each took his turn and then received criticism from the instructor before the next had his chance. All members of a class were given equal opportunities to perform.

**Competition and Exhibition**

Exhibition. The Turners presented a program once each year. The purpose of these programs was to present to the public a sample of the year's work. The program served to aid the society financially and also helped to induce new members to join the Turnverein. To open an exhibition given on December 8, 1897, Alphonse Hussa, First Speaker of the Turnverein stated:

>This is an entertainment of the Turners and for the Turners of the Germania Society, gotten up for the purpose of raising funds with which to maintain an instructor for the Turn section. We are here to prove that we have an instructor who is thoroughly competent to do all we are entitled to ask of him.29

A typical program presented to the public included all sections, covering all phases of work done in the past year. Such a program started with calisthenic exercises by the young boy's group. The young girls followed with group wand exercises. The women presented an Indian club

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swinging demonstration with musical accompaniment. Junior men then presented marching tactics and wand drill. The senior men concluded the program with exercises on the heavy apparatus. A dance and social hour followed the formal program.

**Competition.** Due to travel conditions, competition among societies was restricted to yearly district Turnfests and the periodic national Turnfests. The Wisconsin District Turnfests were held in a different city each year. La Crosse had a Wisconsin District Turnfest in June, 1904. Six hundred Turners from three states arrived in La Crosse on Friday, June 24, 1904. The main competition was held at the fairgrounds. An estimated 10,000 persons were on hand to watch the program each day. The four day program that follows is presented to show the broad scope of activities.

**Friday, June 24, 1904**

**Arrival of Turners in La Crosse**

**Evening:** Reception at Germania Hall

**Saturday, June 25, 1904**

6:00 A.M. Roll call
7:00 Assembly for apparatus work
7:30 Individual prize Turning
11:00 Assembly for field work
1:30 P.M. Grand Parade - 1,000 members with six bands and three drum corps parade through downtown.
5:00 Grand club swinging. 500 members swinging Indian clubs in unison.

**Evening:** Declamation contest at Hall

**Sunday, June 26, 1904**

6:00 A.M. Roll call
8:00 Continue prize apparatus work
9:30 Prize turning for passive members
10:00 Interstate team tournament, six man teams.

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30 *La Crosse Leader-Press* (Wisconsin), June 24-28, 1904.
1:30 P.M. Special prize Turning
2:00 Grand display of calisthenics using hand apparatus, all members present.
5:00 Repeat grand club swinging
Evening: Award prizes, grand ball at Germania Hall.

Monday, June 27, 1904

Mississippi River excursion

The merchants of La Crosse enthusiastically welcomed the Turners to the Wisconsin District Turnfest. Most business places displayed the United States flag and the German flag side by side. The Turners were welcomed into the homes of the community when hotels could not accommodate all of them. Excursions were arranged from many communities around La Crosse to see the Turnfest. Railroads allowed special reduced rates for travelers.

Judges were brought to La Crosse for the Wisconsin District Turnfest from all over the United States to tabulate the scores for the various events. On Sunday evening, after the final tabulation of these scores, prizes were awarded to both individual Turners and groups. Milwaukee took the majority of Prizes in the events. La Crosse Turners placed second in the six man team events. The Turnfest was labeled a success by the Turner officials.
CHAPTER IV

THE DECLINE OF THE TURNVEREIN

From the time of the organization of the La Crosse Turnverein in 1855 to 1910, the society was very strong and active. By 1911, however, the Turners as an organized society ceased to exist. The parent organization, the Deutscher Verein, continued for another twenty-seven years. Conclusion as to what caused the collapse must be based on the opinions of former members.

Factors of the Decline

The most common statement made to the author during interviews was "I'm not sure, but it must have been the changing times." By this, they meant many things. The younger members had different interests. They no longer had the time to devote to the Turnverein.

The increasing ease of transportation made other forms of entertainment more accessible. There were more forms of other interests obtainable to cause a steady flow away from the Turner society for the younger generation.

The public schools began providing physical education in their curriculum so that parents no longer found it necessary to send their children to the Turnverein for exercise. Previously, the Turnverein had been the only available place for physical training under expert supervision. The Young Men's Christian Association in La Crosse began a vigorous program at about this same time. Their program was appealing to young men because
they were offered team games and a swimming pool was available.

Members of the Turnverein were getting older and becoming inactive. Without a steady supply for new members to carry on the program, funds to pay for an instructor were in short supply.

The last factor mentioned by former members was no further need for a German society. When the parents of former members immigrated to the United States and settled around La Crosse, they wanted to preserve their old culture and language. The immigration stopped, the people settled down, and their children did not have any desire to cultivate old world customs.

Conclusions

The Turnverein in La Crosse was the first social organization in the city. During the fifty-five years of its existence, it served a very beneficial purpose. It is the conclusion of the writer that the decline of the La Crosse Turnverein was indeed the direct result of "changing times." It had served its purpose and then quietly passed out of the picture. For a time the newly arrived immigrants had felt a need for a place to go, a place that was familiar, a place to keep alive old world customs. Second and third generation Germans felt no need to cling to these old customs. They had been assimilated with other nationalities.

When you provide better methods of transportation and varied forms of entertainment, the young people will want to go to them. To be an active member of the Turnverein took a considerable amount of time. Senior men, the real backbone of the society, would spend two to three
hours twice a week attending their classes. This was a large amount of
time to devote to one activity.

The need for physical education was being met by other organizations.
The Young Men's Christian Association was mentioned as one, the public
schools as another. The appeal of these groups was centered around the
varied program they offered. They took much less time and offered more
forms of activity. The methods of instruction employed in the Turnverein
followed military lines. Discipline was strict and attention to detail
was emphasized. While these methods have merit, the writer concludes
that this is one more factor leading to the gradual decline of the Turnverein.

With a depletion in numbers, the burden of keeping the society on
a sound financial basis became too much. The instructor could not be
retained and this marked the end of the Turnverein. Out of many former
active members interviewed, not one could remember just when the Turner
section of the Deutscher Verein ceased to exist. The La Crosse Turnverein
played a very useful role during its existence, then when that need no
longer prevailed, the organization folded its doors and passed quietly out
of the picture.

Summary

The history of the gymnastic program as it existed in La Crosse,
Wisconsin, Turnverein was developed to show the background of the organ-
ization, the scope of its activities, and the decline of the organization.
Modern physical education was influenced by concepts pioneered by the Turners.
A student of physical education has much to gain through the study of Turner history.

The Turner movement started in Germany. This movement was brought to the United States with German immigrants. They formed strong, active societies whenever there was a concentration of Germans in an area. Such was the case in La Crosse, Wisconsin, when in 1855, a Turner society was formed.

The gymnastic program was directed by trained professionals. Members of all ages and both sexes attended classes. The classes included marching tactics, calisthenics, apparatus work, and recreational games. Emphasis was placed on apparatus work. Track and field, swimming, fencing, and hiking were included in the program during the summer months.

Exhibitions were given each year by the society to show the public what was accomplished during the past year. Selected members competed with members from other societies in district Turnfests. La Crosse was host to the Wisconsin District Turnfest in 1904.

The La Crosse Turnverein was strong and active until shortly after 1908. Loss of membership forced the discontinuation of the society. By 1911, all activities had halted.

The society was formed during a time when it was needed as a social institution, after this need had been fulfilled, but not before it had left its mark on the development of physical education, the La Crosse Turnverein ceased to exist.


La Crosse (Wisconsin) Leader-Press, June 24, 1904-June 28, 1904.


The La Crosse (Wisconsin) Daily Republican and Leader, July 8, 1896.

The La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune, April, 1907-June, 1959.