



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection 3057

Progress Turnverein (Riverside, N.J.)
Records

1860-1976 (bulk 1860-1875)

1 box, 3 vols., 0.4 lin. feet

Contact: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania
1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107
Phone: (215) 732-6200 FAX: (215) 732-2680
<http://www.hsp.org>

Processed by: Laura Ruttum and Joanne Danifo

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Related Collections at American Turners, Wilmington, Records,

HSP: Collection MSS 172.

Roxborough Turners Records, Collection 3056

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Abstract

In Germany in 1811, Freidrich Jahn established the first Turnverein movement that advocated strengthening one's mind and body through gymnastics instruction. He believed that the discipline that young German men achieved at the Turnvereins would aid them in their opposition to the oppressive rule of the French. When the government restrictions were placed on the Turnvereins, followers fled to America around the middle of the nineteenth century seeking freedom from oppression. These refugees established the American Turnverein movement and eventually, most of the major American cities were homes to Turnvereins. The Progress Turnverein was founded in 1860 and perptuated the teachings of Jahn by offering gymnastics instruction. It was renamed the Riverside Turnverein, but soon ended in 1875. Another group appears around 1897 named the Riverside Turners. This group may be the same Turnverein from 1860, just reborn or the Riverside Turners may be a group distantly related to the Progress Turnverein.

The Progress Turnverein Records consists of a minute book, ledger, receipt book, financial papers, Philadelphia Turnbezirks convention records, and some miscellaneous papers, all of which relate directly to the Turverein. Issues of *Topics*, the official publication of the American Turners, an American Turners embroidered patch, six postcards, and a memo from the secretary of the American Turners also appear in this collection. This last group of materials does not have an obvious connection to the Progress Turnverein. The records span from 1860 to 1976 and a gap in the records occurs between 1875 and 1972.

Background note

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852) was born in the small village of Lanz in Germany to a father, who was a minister, and mother, who taught him to read and write. When he became a young man, Jahn left Lanz and pursued his education in both Salzwedel and, later, Berlin, where he studied theology. He later travelled throughout Germany observing culture, dialects, and, customs and this sparked a sense of German nationalism within him. He began to teach in 1811 at one of the schools he attended as a youth, Gymnasium zum graven Kloster. In the meantime, German soldiers were suffering many losses in their fight against the oppressive French regime of Napoleon. He would soon try to organize the young men of Germany in order to prepare them for war against France.

Jahn believed that it was important to teach young German men physical and intellectual education and at the same time instill in them a sense of German national pride. He believed that these traits would be necessary in order to rise up against the Napoleonic regime. This soon became known as the Turner movement and the clubs that were established were called Turnvereins. He opened a public gymnasium in Hasenheide in 1811, where the men engaged in gymnastic exercises supervised by Jahn. This same year, he founded the German Club (*Deutsche Bund*), which sought to end French domination and inspire national pride and political activism among the German youth. Between 1813 and 1819, the Turners joined many campaigns fighting the French and Jahn joined them while he was physically able. He also continued to write, penning the book *Deutsche Turnkunst*, a work that expressed his disappointment not only in French rule, but in the Germany leaders' inability to fulfill the promises made to the citizenry. His platform continued to fuel the activism of the Turners, who staged many protests throughout the country. Then in 1819, a student fanatic killed a journalist who was in employ of the Russian czar at the time.

Jahn and the Turners were suspected accomplices in the murder causing the government to place severe restrictions on the Turnvereins. Jahn was arrested for high treason and he defended himself in a published pamphlet, resulting in his release. He was still under strict surveillance and his home was burned to the ground in 1839. After this, things started to change for better for Jahn. Turners raised money to build him a new home, the new king ended the government's surveillance efforts, and the restrictions placed upon the Turnvereins were removed in 1842. Jahn pursued politics during the revolutions of 1848, but he, along with his followers, realized that the spirit of the revolution was beyond his understanding. In 1852, he passed away, ultimately estranged from his followers.

Although he had passed away by the middle of the century, Jahn's Turnverein movement found life in America when his students, Karl Beck and Karl Follen came to the United States. They arrived in 1824 escaping the religious and political persecution following the placement of restrictions on the Turnvereins in Germany. Franz Lieber arrived in 1827, and the three men brought Jahn's teachings to America when they opened the Round Hill School for boys in Northampton, Massachusetts. Several years later, while Follen and Beck were teaching at Harvard, Follen brought the Turner ideals to Harvard and opened a public outdoor gymnasium in Boston. Franz Lieber eventually became a gymnastics instructor at Follen's gymnasium. These organizations eventually faded away, although it was unclear why, and it would be almost twenty-five years until the Turnverein movement would reappear on America.

In the meantime, due to the radical nature of the German revolutions of the 1840s and the involvement of many Turners in these movements, many Turnvereins were disbanded, property confiscated, and leaders jailed or exiled. The groups were only able to resurface twenty years later with the revival of the drive for German unification. Political refugees, known as Forty-Eighters, fled to America and reintroduced Jahn's Turnvereins to a new generation of citizens. Among this group was Frederick Hecker, who established the first German American Turnverein in Cincinnati, Ohio in November 1848.

Turnvereins began to spring up in major cities all over America. In the span of two years, Turnvereins had been established in Cincinnati, New York, Philadelphia, Louisville, Brooklyn, and Baltimore. Most of these societies were incorporated, owned their property, and, in addition to offering physical education, also sponsored lecture courses and debating clubs. The leaders of the Turnvereins included many former teachers, journalists, and educated professionals from Germany; the majority of the societies' members were skilled craft workers. In 1850, the societies created a national association called the United Turner Societies of North America (*Nord-Amerikanische Turnerbund*).

The Turners were deeply committed to labor causes throughout the country and the organization sought to reflect these interests. At the Philadelphia national convention the group changed its name to the Socialist Turner Federation of North America (*Socialistische Turnerbund*), with the goal of advancing the cause of socialism. The Turnvereins became inactive during the American Civil War, but were reborn in 1864 under the leadership of the New York and Baltimore Turnvereins. At the national convention in Washington in April 1865, the national organization decided that it should promote political neutrality within the group and the name of the revived organization was changed to North American Gymnastic Union (*Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund*). After many years and conflicts, the name of the national organization was again changed to the American Turners in 1939, which remains to this day.

The establishment and life-span of the Progress Turnverein remain unclear, and this due, in a small part, to the history of the town's name. In 1850, Samuel Bechtold surveyed an undeveloped piece of land in New Jersey. He introduced plans for the town of Progress in a section of what is now present-day Riverside, New Jersey. Progress flourished as a resort town due to its proximity to the water. A year later, it was incorporated into the township of Cinnaminson. Eventually, Progress, along with some surrounding land, was incorporated on February 20, 1895 becoming the township of Riverside. With a population of just under 1,000 people, Riverside became a successful port and began specializing in glass manufacturing and canning. Riverside also benefited from its closeness to Camden and Philadelphia as many manufacturing businesses located to Riverside including Theophilus Zurbrugg's Keyston Watchcase Factory. Riverside entered the twentieth century as a burgeoning industrial town.

The Progress Turnverein began in 1860 and participated in gymnastics instruction and other activities, just like the other turnvereins throughout the United States. The Progress Turnverein also participated in the national conventions, including the Turnbezirk convention that was held in 1874. By the 1970s, it is evident in records that the turnverein was beginning to use the name Riverside Turnverein. It is unclear what happened to the Progress Turnverein (also known as the Riverside Turnverein), until about 1895. Around this year, two facts are known. First, Theophilus Zurbrugg, a leading citizen of Riverside at this time, joined other citizens to establish the Riverside Turners. Second, Daisy Leidy's father was original member of the Riverside Turners founded, according to Leidy, in 1997. Thus, the connection between the Progress Turnverein (1860-1875) and the Riverside Turners (1897-present) remains vague. These two groups could either be one turnverein or two, remotely related turnvereins.

As of 2002, the Riverside Turners (1997-present) had a membership of 250 people and they had general body meetings as well as ladies' auxiliary meetings on a monthly basis under the leadership members like Daisy Leidy. She, as well as other leaders of the turnverein, continued to instruct gymnastics and members participated in horseshoes, pitching, basketball, and golf programs offered by the turnverein. This same year, Leidy became the first female president of the American Turners, which is the national organization of Turnvereins.

Scope & content

The items in the Progress Turnverein (Riverside, NJ) records span from 1860 to 1976, with a significant gap in the records occurring between 1885 and 1971. Thus, the records can be divided into two groups according to both time period and content. The first group of papers is documents and volumes specific to the Progress Turners and date from 1860 to 1885. The second group is comprised of papers and publications produced by the larger national organization, the American Turners in the 1970s. Except for dealing with Turnverein movement, these two groups of materials have little else in common and their relationship is unclear.

The records in this collection offer limited information regarding the operations of a nineteenth century Turnverein located in a small American town. There is some financial information that sheds light on expenses, but the types of items purchased are often not included. The most information about the Progress Turnverein is contained in the minute book, which recorded the meetings of the group for about fifteen years. The American Turners' materials illustrate the continued activity and development of this athletic movement that began in the early nineteenth century. These papers also include information on national gymnastics competitions and the participation of the Turners' in the Olympic games.

In the first group of materials concerning the Progress Turnverein, there are three volumes dealing with both financials and meeting operations. A minute book written in German chronicles the meetings of the Progress Turnverein. The first meeting was on May 8, 1860, and from May to August 1860 the meetings were on a weekly basis. There are no minutes from August 1860 to January 1861; from January to April 1861 meetings were on a monthly basis. The absence of meeting minutes until September 1865 may be related to the eruption of the Civil War. Meetings resumed in 1865, but they became more irregular – sometimes meetings would be held weekly or sometimes monthly. The entries for each meeting are usually about the length of one paragraph and written in German *Fraktur* alphabet¹. This volume also includes the minutes from the 1874 convention of the Philadelphia *Turnbezirk*.

A volume entitled *Hauptbuch der Progress Turner Krankenkasse* is a ledger from the health insurance fund. The volume includes four sections, the first of which contains a membership list and dues from 1869 to 1872. This list shows that the Turnverein had

¹ The Fraktur alphabet was used for printed and written German from 16th century until 1940. The name Fraktur comes from Latin and means “broken script.”

somewhere between twelve to twenty members during this time and each member paid dues that ranged from \$0.25 to \$5.25. The next section in the ledger consists of a membership list for a singing group list and the cost of their dues. Weekly dues never exceeded \$0.35, and monthly dues never exceeded \$0.60 for each member. The third section of the volume contains minutes from the monthly health insurance fund meetings held from August 1869 to August 1870. Also written in German, these minutes have some financial data. The last part of the ledger has a list of the sixteen “passive” members from 1874. While it is unclear what it meant if someone was categorized as passive, the list shows that some of these members paid dues only in January of that year, others paid dues for two months; and only two members paid their dues more than for two months.

The third volume is a receipt book belonging to the Progress Turnverein that has about fifteen pages of receipt stubs dating from 1871 to 1875. Each receipt indicates the persons involved in the transaction and only a few specify the expense – “tax” or “refreshments.” Also one receipt names the president, treasurer, and secretary at this time in the Turnverein’s history. August Schneider served as president, Henry Garbe was the secretary, and Charles Muller was the treasurer, with his name appearing on each receipt. While fifteen pages of the receipt book have been used, the majority of the volume’s receipt pages remain unused.

In addition to three volumes, this collection also consists of seven folders of miscellaneous materials. The first folder contains various notes and scraps of papers that pertain to the Progress Turnverein and are written in German. Two printed items appear in this folder. The first is a bulletin from 1849 from the North-American Gymnast Alliance (Vereine des Nord-Amerikanischen Turnerbundes) to Turners across the country informing them of the group’s effort to build a monument commemorating slain German patriots of Rastatt, Germany. The North American Gymnast Alliance believed that this act would solidify German solidarity among the Turnvereins across the country. Another bulletin dating between 1873 and 1874 from the North American Gymnast Alliance lists members of Turnvereins in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, and Minnesota who had been ejected probably from the national organization. Both of these printed documents were approved by the secretary of the North American Gymnast Alliance, Carl Mener.

This folder also contains a letter written from the Trenton Turnverein written to the Progress Turnverein on May 16, 1875. It is too difficult to discern the message of the letter due to faded writing which was done with pencil. Similarly, there is a scrap of paper that has illegible German script on it. The last item in the folder, however, has been written in English and is a legal document. It is an “order to show cause” between Albert Foster, the complainant, and William and Reuben Scudder, Samuel Rudderow, A.C.Lamar, John Althouse, William McIlhenny, Joel Grant, Albert Grant, Louis Lowden, John Schemrief, Adolph Snow, Albert Walton, , Jacob Jones, and William, Albert, and Isaac Hewlings, the defendants. The document, dated December 14, 1885, ordered the defendants to appear in court and admit to the charges and to pay Foster the money that was owed him. The case seems to relate to a business transaction between Foster and the others, because the Scudders and the Hewlings are trading in firms called William C. Scudder and Son and J.W. Hewlings and Sons, respectively.

The next folder contains three pieces of papers concerning financials from 1870 to 1875. Two little pieces of papers seem to have been for writing notes about financials and the records on these papers are very informal; one does say "Progress Turnverein" at the top of the page. The last document is a receipt of payment for an order from June 2, 1875. Mr. Charles L. Miller purchased "parallel bars" from Charles Schaible, "cabinet-maker and manufacturer of gymnastic apparatus" in Philadelphia. The price of the parallel bars was \$5.50.

The last two folders in this collection relating directly to the Progress Turnverein consist of papers involving the activities of the Philadelphia Turnbezirk. There are two copies of the constitution of the Philadelphia Turnbezirks, which was the official title given to the group of Turnvereins from the Philadelphia area. The constitution hoped to strengthen the connection between the Turnvereins by electing a board to govern the clubs in the district, ensure regularly occurring meetings, and institute an festival for all of the Turnvereins to come together (Bezirksturnfest). There are eight key points to this printed document of the Philadelphia Turnbezirks, which include organization, representation, contributions, "intellectual gymnastics," and the Bezirksturnfest. These documents do not include a date. The next item relating to the Philadelphia Turnbezirks is a page of meeting minutes from the convention held in 1874. Much like the majority of this collection, the minutes have been recorded in German. Throughout the document several Turnvereins are mentioned including the ones in Trenton and Progress.

The last three folders fall into the second group of materials in the collection and do not seem to be directly connected to the Progress Turnverein. They pertain to the national turner organization founded in 1850, the American Turners and were produced at a much later date, mostly during the 1970s. The first document is titled "Our Contributions to the Sport of Gymnastics" and consists of a list of gymnasts who competed in the Olympics game and were also members of Turnvereins. While the document does not have a date, it lists athletes from 1904 until 1972. Thus, the list dates to sometime around 1972. The other two folders have six *Topics*, the official publication of the American Turners, a note from Gretchen Willer, the secretary of the organization to Ms. Hobbie, six postcards, and an embroidered patch bearing the official logo of the American Turners.

The issues of *Topics* offer a great deal of information related to the activities of the American Turners and they show how the club evolved from a gymnastics club into a club that participated not only in gymnastics, but also beauty pageants, German festivals, and numerous other interests. The magazine was published every two months and these issues span from 1972 until 1976. The six, identical postcards depict the Friedrich Ludwig Jahn memorial in Forest Park in St. Louis, Missouri, that was dedicated in 1913. Accompanying these items is a typed note directed to Ms. Hobbie on March 3, 1976 from Gretchen Willer regarding Hobbie's exhibit. Willer sent Hobbie the issues of *Topics*, the postcards, the patch, and perhaps the list of Olympic athletes to be included in Hobbie's exhibit.

Separation report

The following publications of the American Turners were accessioned with the Progress Turnverein Records. In 2004 these publications were separated from the collection and transferred to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Library:

American Turner Topics, May – Jun. 1972, Vol. 26, No. 10;
May – Jun. 1974, Vol. 27, No. 10;
Mar.– Apr. 1975, Vol. 28, No. 3;
Sep. – Oct. 1975, Vol. 28, No. 6;
Nov. – Dec. 1975, Vol. 28, No. 7;
Jan. – Feb. 1976, Vol. 28, No. 8.

Related materials

At the Historical Society of Pennsylvania with The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies:
American Turners, Wilmington, Records, Collection MSS 172.
Roxborough Turners Records, Collection 3056.

Bibliography

Nolte, Claire. "The German Turnverein,"
<http://www.ohiou.edu/~Chastain/rz/turnvere.html>. (Accessed November 10, 2004)

Long Island Turners
<http://liturners.org/> (Accessed July 25, 2005)

New Jersey Institute of Technology – Profile of Riverside
<http://architecture.njit.edu/MIP/home/rtvpone/ReportSec1.pdf> (Accessed July 27, 2005)

Riverside New Jersey Historical Society
<http://www.riversidenjhistory.com/Home.html> (Accessed July 27, 2005)

Subjects

Athletic clubs – United States – 19th century
Athletic clubs – United States – 20th century
Athletic clubs – United States – Membership
German Americans – New Jersey – Riverside – Societies, etc.
German Americans – Social life and customs
Gymnastics for men – United States – 19th century
Gymnastics for men – United States – 20th century
Gymnastics for women – United States – 19th century
Gymnastics for women – United States – 20th century
Olympics – 20th century
Riverside (N.J. : Township) – History – 19th century
Riverside (N.J. : Township) – History – 20th century
Riverside (N.J. : Township) – Social life and customs
Riverside (N.J. : Township) – Societies, etc.

United States – Social conditions – 19th century
United States – Social Conditions – 20th century

Jahn, Friedrich Ludwig, 1778-1852

American Turners (Organization) – History – 20th century
American Turners (Organization) – Membership
American Turnerbund – History – 20th century
American Turnerbund – Membership
North American Gymnastic Union – History – 20th century
North American Gymnastic Union – Membership
Socialistischer Turnerbund (U.S.) – History – 20th century

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

This collection was donated to the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies by Alice Devlin, Edward Devlin, Irene D'Ascendis, and Margaret Ovellett in 1994.

Accession number M94-18.

Alternative format

None.

Preferred citation

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Processing note

A full English translation of Volume 1, Minute Book, 1860-1875, is available in the library. Please see staff for further information.

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Box and folder listing

Folder title	Date	Box	Folder/Vol.
Minute Book	1860-1875	n/a	Vol. 1
Ledger (<i>Hauptbuch</i>) of health insurance fund (<i>Krankenkasse</i>)	1869-1875	n/a	Vol. 2
Treasurer's Receipt Book	1871-1875	n/a	Vol. 3
Miscellaneous papers of Progress Turners	1874-1875	1	1
Financial materials of Progress Turners	1870-1875	1	2
Philadelphia Turnbezirks, constitution	n.d.	1	3
Philadelphia Turnbezirks convention minutes	1874	1	4
"Our Contributions to the Sport of Gymnastics" by the American Turners	n.d. (~1972)	1	5
<i>Topics</i> , official publication of the American Turners & miscellaneous items	1972-1976	1	6
<i>Topics</i> , official publication of the American Turners	1975-1976	1	7