

# Community Rootedness: Galveston Turners and Southern Principle, 1840-1865

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Despite antebellum America's differing political and social environment, its economic and moral conflict, and regional disparity between northern and southern states, the picture of the German-American Turners painted by historians is romanticized, and essentially universal for Germans across the United States. Historians advanced the proposition that all Turners in the United States adopted the abolitionist stance on slavery, supported Lincoln in 1860, and fought for the Union army in the Civil War, in accord with National Turnerbund dictates. This universality thesis proclaims that there was German-American solidarity on these issues, regardless of northern or southern state residence.

The Deep South state of Texas, during the early and mid 1800s, became the new residence for thousands of German immigrants. Texas-based colonization companies utilized cheap land as an immigration incentive enticing German families living in undesirable European conditions. The port city of Galveston, Texas was a major harbor for immigrant people arriving in the Southern United States. As a result of the large number of Germans arriving in Galveston during the 1850s, the total population of the city was one-third to one-half German in ethnic origin.

It was because of the large German population and existence of a Turnverein that the city of Galveston was chosen for this study. The study examines and explains some of the postures adopted by Galveston Turners relative to demands of the National Turnerbund regarding various antebellum and Civil War issues. Primary sources included Galveston newspapers (1838-1865), United States Manuscript Census (1850 and 1860), materials from the collection at the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, and a list of 82 Turners registered as members of the Galveston Turnverein in 1860.

Evidence supports the finding that Galveston Turners adhered to National Turnerbund policy in the following respects only: maintenance of physical fitness through apparatus gymnastics, military efficiency through drilling and weapons training, political participation and consciousness, and opposition to nativism. By the same token, evidence supports that the Galveston Turners did not adhere to the following Turnerbund principles: opposition to slavery, support of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican party, and allegiance to the Union in the Civil War.

The subsequent explanation illustrates why the Galveston Turners disregarded orders to adopt and fight for all National Turnerbund ideals. Upon immigrating to Galveston, Turners established businesses, trades, homes, and raised families. As merchants, tradesmen, and laborers, Turners were successful in gaining wealth. As a result of economic establishment, the Turners gained a personal "stake" in Galveston. An improvement in wealth-holding tendencies and the accumulation of real estate would indicate that the

Turners were successful in business and functioned efficiently in the Galveston community. In this sense, economic success reflected rootedness in the community and explains why the Turners adhered to ideals that were fundamental to their best interests in Galveston. Assuming that holding real and personal wealth is, in part, indicative of community rootedness, it is necessary to examine the wealth-holding of Turners relative to other citizens in Galveston during the antebellum period.

A list of 82 Turners was matched to the Manuscript Census of 1850 and 1860. Fourteen Turners, those with occupations, were found in the 1850 Census. The real estate holding of the Turners was compared to a random Adult Male Workforce Sample of 100. Analysis of the data indicated that being a Turner and holding wealth were not related in 1850. According to the data, applied to the original hypothesis, the Turners were not rooted in the Galveston community by 1850 with respect to real estate holding.

Utilizing the same methodology and list of Turners as in the survey for 1850, 29 Turners with occupations were matched with the 1860 Census. A random Adult Male Workforce Sample was taken from the 1860 Census. A comparison of total wealth holding (real plus personal) between the two groups was conducted with data arranged in various numerical wealth categories. The data illustrated that the amount of wealth-holding observed in the Turner group was greater than the amount expected. Being a Turner and holding wealth were related at a significance level of .02 to .01. The Turners, as a group, were likely to own real estate and personal wealth. If wealth and property-holding increase one's personal stake in a settlement or reflect rootedness in a city, then the Galveston Turners were rooted in the community of Galveston by 1860. Hence, the Turners adhered to principles that served their best interests as members of the Galveston community.