

Studies of the Turner System by an American: Fred E. Leonard's Visits to Germany: 1896, 1901, 1913

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Fred Eugene Leonard (1866-1922) was one of the early American pioneers who helped the field of Physical Education gain its academic recognition at colleges and universities around the turn of the century. In his standard work, "A Guide to the History of Physical Education" (Philadelphia 1923), he described the P.E. system in Germany very well but without any evaluation of the Turner System. Fred knew a lot about P.E. teaching in Germany because he visited the country during his

thirty year career as a professor at Oberlin College from 1892-1922 three times: July 10-August 29, 1896 (Cologne, Gottingen, Berlin, Leipsic, Bayreuth, Dresden, Nuremberg, Munich, Innsbruck, Constance, Strasbourg, Heidelberg, Frankfurt, Cologne); Dec. 22, 1900-April 29, 1901 (Berlin, Dresden, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Munich); and March 1-March 29, 1913 (Munich, Nuremberg, Dresden, Berlin). His diaries stored at Oberlin College Archives, have the details of Leonard's studies. He visited different local schools and their P.E. facilities; participated as a visitor in boys and girls P.E. classes; attended gymnastic lessons in Turner clubs; as well as attended lectures at the Normal Schools of P.E. teacher training in Berlin, Dresden and Munich.

Leonard was mostly interested in German History of P.E. and lectures about gymnastic apparatus when he stayed for 6 weeks at Berlin Normal School in 1901. Educated as a medical doctor, Leonard differentiated in his diaries between the kinds of German gymnastic exercises he was introduced to. For example:

1. Fred was impressed with order exercises including marching, military drill and iron wand exercises and adapted this element of German gymnastics for his own teaching at Oberlin College.

2. He was sceptical of free exercises, however, as long as they did not explicitly include the whole body with the trunk. He did not favour mechanical arm and leg exercises because of their deficient physiological value. This position shows the influence of his training as a physician and his knowledge of Swedish gymnastics.

3. Leonard was probably very critical of apparatus exercises. "Most of apparatus work is a blank in memory," he told the assistant teacher at Berlin Normal School in 1901. Later he regarded the strong Swedish influence at the Munich Normal School (1913) as an enrichment of German gymnastics and commented favourably upon it.

4. Fred Leonard regarded games and sports as integral elements of any good physical education teacher program. But in the P.E. teachers' training schools, there were only a few tentative steps in this direction to be noticed in 1913.