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## **A Strong Mind in a Strong Body: The Role of Libraries in the American Turner Organizations**

A major focus of the American Turners has always been physical education. This paper deals with another primary focus of the American Turners as is reflected in their motto: A Strong Mind in a Strong Body. Most of the early Turner organizations in North America were formed or led by liberal Germans who fled Germany after the failed Revolution of 1848. It was critical to them that the Turner members were rational-thinking, informed citizens as well as physically fit to defend their homeland, They saw the lands of North America as a place where Turners could practice these democratic principles. The early American Turner groups were very politically active; members strongly and vocally supported liberal causes such as anti-slavery platforms.

There has not been a great deal of information written in English about the political side of the American Turners, and definitely little was known about the role of the libraries within the organizations. Most of the primary documents are less accessible

to researchers because they are primarily in handwritten German script. Minutes of organizations, histories, library catalogs, remnants of libraries, and archival resources have been examined in addition to secondary literature. The primary focus is on American Turner organizations in the Mid-West, but a general overview is also given to provide context.

The role of libraries in these organizations is examined as one means of fulfilling their stated intellectual goals. Why did the American Turners form libraries? What groups had libraries, and what were their sizes? Why did other libraries not suffice? What kind of literature was purchased? What did they read? Did these book collections help them fulfill the duality of their mission? These are some of the questions that will be addressed. Often Turner societies were centers of social life for German-American communities. The early libraries were often the only ones offering literature in German or literature about physical fitness. The Turners were in a way a victim of their own success in getting German and physical education taught in the public curriculum. There became less of a reason to have separate facilities and libraries as the public libraries began to develop their German collections and serve this ethnic group. This paper helps the scholar have a better understanding of a unique aspect of the American Turners who were so important in shaping physical education in the United States.

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