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for Special Collections
The University of Toledo

Finding Aid

➤ Toledo Turners Collection, 1858-1987 ◀

MSS-103

Size: 3 Linear Feet

Provenance: Received from Mike Mohler on June 27, 1994.

Access: open

Collection Summary: This collection contains news clippings related to sporting events, correspondence, fliers, programs, newsletters, minutes books, inventory books, ledgers, and scrapbooks.

Subjects: [Ethnic Culture](#), [Social Life and Customs](#)

Related Collections:

Processing Note: Some materials have been sampled

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Completed by: Barbara A. Shirk, June 1996

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**Toledo Turners
Collection, 1858-1987**

Introduction

The materials in the Toledo Turners Collection document the activities of the Toledo Turners. Some of these include clippings related to sports tournaments and festivals, correspondence, documents and historical items, fliers and programs, newsletters, minute books, inventory books, expenditure ledgers, receivable and payable ledgers, and scrapbooks. The items in the collection date from 1858-1987.

The Toledo Turners had its beginnings in Toledo in the late 1800s and the organization is still in existence today. The club is involved with a variety of activities including gymnastics and competition, folk dancing, and social events of various kinds.

Additional Toledo Turners papers can be found in the Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives of University Libraries (Indiana University/Purdue University), Indianapolis, Indiana. In addition, there are also some items in the Local History Department of the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library, Toledo, Ohio.

There are no restrictions on the use of the Toledo Turners Collection.

Historical Background

A large number of Germans began emigrating to the United States in 1848 and many of them settled in the Midwest. The first of their gymnastic institutions (Turnverein) was the Cincinnati Turngemeinde, established in November 1848. Some of the twenty-two groups formed by 1851 took political stances advocating socialism, whereas others argued for apolitical institutions. Their outings which consisted of picnics, games, gymnastics, and much beer drinking, provoked suspicion among Anglo-Americans. The gatherings were celebrations of German culture. The participants were intent on keeping their own language, and they often dressed in military uniforms and almost always carried arms. Confrontations often occurred with Anglo-American men, and they politicized the Turnverein. In 1855, the central committee of the groups, the Turnerbund announced its opposition to slavery, to the prohibition of alcohol, and to the racist and hostile Know-Nothing Party. The Civil War and changing American educational ideas helped change the Turnverein into a less aggressive organization for the preservation of German culture. Many German soldiers fought in the war, mostly on the Union side; thus, assimilation increased and the fear of alien insurrection declined. Finally, American schools began to adopt the German system of gymnastics. Some wealthy families adopted the system for use in the indoor gymnasiums of their homes.

For adults and children who did not get enough physical education in the schools, there were gymnasiums of all sorts by the mid-1850s. There were two in New York City in 1855, and there were seven by 1860.

The Toledo School Turners Chapter began on November 6, 1858 under the direction of Professor E. W. E. Roch and was subject to the special supervision of the Toledo Board of Education. On December 1, 1858, Professor Roch wrote: "The object of our present institution is to make strong and healthy youths easy and graceful in their motions, decent and gentlemenlike in their behavior, who shall be in later years a support of the feeble and weak, able to endure hardship and courageous in the confidence of their strength -- fit members of our republic."

In a letter written by Emil C. Konopka of Livonia, Michigan on May 2, 1974 (the original can be found in the Documents and Historical Materials section of this collection), he states that the Toledo Vorwaerts got its start in a frame building called a wigwam at Division and Belmont. It was also used as a Sunday School on Sundays. In March of 1895, the New Turner Hall (Toledo Turnverein Vorwaerts) was dedicated. It was a two-story and basement structure designed by L. G. Welker and located on Ottawa near Lafayette Street. Mr. Konopka took part in the Turner program here as a very young boy and he describes the hall as a "beautiful place, but a poor location" as the Germans of Lenko Hill had to go through the red light district to get there." With the new building there were two bowling alleys and a bowling league was soon organized. The Socialer was organized about 1904 in Germania Hall. After a year or two there, they moved to the old quarters of the Toledo Yacht Club in the Calvin Building which contained a bowling alley, a dance hall, stage, two large rooms and a small two-story gym. A short time later, a move was made to Harmonia Hall. The Toledo Turnverein began in Liberty Hall and Robert Fiedler was the teacher.

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The club was organized in March of 1926 and was affiliated with the national organization, The American Turners, in May. It was incorporated under the laws of the State of Ohio on August 7, 1926 as the German-American Athletic Association. In 1940, the name was changed to Toledo Turners, and again in 1954 to American Turners-Toledo.

After a short period of club activities in the Swiss Hall, the Turners moved to a location above Kables Restaurant on Summit Street. In 1934 a site at 3304 Collingwood Avenue was purchased. It remained there until April 22, 1991 when the property was sold. The physical education program consisting of gymnastics for boys and girls was moved to the Rossford Community Recreation Center in Rossford, Ohio. Social activities were held at the G.A.F. Society on Seaman Road, Oregon, Ohio. In July 1995, ten acres of land were purchased on Seaman Road, just East of the G.A.F. property where a new Turner Hall is currently being constructed.

The organization is still known as American Turners-Toledo. Due to lack of interest or facilities, activities such as tennis, bowling, dramatics, volleyball, sewing, and singing have either been put on hold or cancelled. The organization, however, is still involved in folk dancing, gymnastics and competition, and social affairs such as dinners, dances, picnics, and festivals.

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Scope and Content

The Toledo Turners Collection dates from 1858-1987. Some of the materials contain items written either entirely in German or English or a combination of both. It is organized into fourteen record groups and several series within these groups. Record groups include clippings, general correspondence, documents and historical materials, expenditure ledgers, fliers, inventory books (bar revenue/expenses), minute books, miscellaneous items, newsletters, photographs, programs, receipt books (membership dues), receivable and payable ledgers, and scrapbooks (Toledo Turners history).

The largest record groups in this collection are the various ledgers, receipt books, minute books, inventory books and scrapbooks:

Expenditure ledgers (1927-1953)
Bar revenue/expenses inventory books (1936-1939)
Minute books (1931-1981)
Membership dues receipt books (1927-1956), and
Receivable and Payable Ledgers (1926-1973).

Clippings, newsletters, programs, photographs, etc. contained in the three scrapbooks (1895-1976) document many of the activities of the organization.

The clippings and miscellaneous materials record group covers the Toledo bowling team and the National Turners Bowling Tournaments (1974-1986) and activities in connection with the International Festival and the German-American Festival (1966-1986). Also included are Turnfest and Turn-und Sport Verein news.

The general correspondence is very sparse and contains a total of four letters, including two from the National Turners organization (1948-1949).

The record group entitled Documents, Historical Materials, etc. (1958-1982) deals mostly with the Turners mortgage papers, insurance policies, blueprints, and plat survey of the Collingwood location. There are also some other miscellaneous legal documents and historical items relating to the Toledo club, including the dedication program for the new Turner Hall (1895).

The fliers in the collection announce various festivals, dinners, etc. planned by the club. (1975-1986). The Miscellaneous record group includes a variety of items such as tennis tournament certificates. Newsletters (1935-1987) include the "Monthly Review of the Toledo Turn und Sport Verein" and "The Toledo Turner". There is also a copy of "I News" (International Institute) newsletter. Photographs consists of three snapshots of the organization's Collingwood Avenue location (no date). Programs for various athletic festivals and tournaments, concerts, dinners and shows cover the period from 1936-1985).

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Folder List

Box	Folder	Description
1		Clippings and Misc. Materials
	1	Bowling, 1974-1986
	2	Festivals, 1966-1986
	3	Turnfest and Turn-und Sport Verein
	4	Correspondence - General, 1948-1949
	5	Documents, Historical Materials, etc., 1858-1982
		Expenditure Ledgers
	6	1927-1935
	7	1935-1953
	8	1951-1953
	9	Fliers, 1975-1986
		Inventory Books - Bar Revenue/Expenses
	10	1936-1938
	11	1937-1939
		Minute Books
	12	Bowling Green Section of the Toledo Turnverein Meeting, 1946-1981
	13	General Membership Meeting, 1931-1933
	14	Monthly Board Meeting, 1934-1939
	15	Senior Ladies Group, 1936-1979
	16	Miscellaneous, 1870-1983
	17	Newsletters, 1935-1987
	18	Photographs, n.d.
	19	Programs, 1936-1985
2		Receipt Books - Membership Dues
	1	1927-1938
	2	1950-1953
	3	1953-1956
		Receivable and Payable Ledgers
	4	1926-1936
	5	1930-1937
	6	1934-1938
	7	1936-1943
	8	1938-1955
	9	1943-1955
	10	1955

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Scrapbooks - Toledo Turners History

12 Vol. 1, 1895-1933

13^ Vol. 2, 1933-1943

14^ Vol. 3, 1944-1976