

**Between Pints and Performances: The Work of George Brosius in the 19th Century Turner
Stronghold of Milwaukee**

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Abstract

The wave of German immigrants to the United States in the late 1840s faced isolation and a cultural vacuum. Pockets of community could be found in the traditional German *turnvereins* (gymnastic clubs or societies) that offered the new German immigrants a warm, but culturally insulated haven. The work of George Brosius, one of the leading gymnastic instructors in the American Turner movement and director of the Turner's Normal School in Milwaukee, rarely discussed in previous research, contributed to the elevation of the German American turner societies from a bastion of German culture to a prominent part of American physical culture. This will be shown through his contribution as a gymnastics instructor and later director of the American Turner Union's Normal School in Milwaukee and his work as a coach. We aim to solidify the American-born George Brosius' place among the pantheon of nineteenth century figures of physical culture.

Keywords: Turnen, turnfest, gymnastics, turnlehrerseminar, cultural assimilation, Milwaukee

Introduction

In the German *Meyer's Konversationslexikon* of 1897 one can read under the entry "Turnkunst" (Art of Turnen) the name Georg[e] Brosius, who supposedly was a pre-eminent representative of German Turnen in the United States. Who was this American with a German name, mentioned not only in German encyclopaedias, but also holding honorary diplomas from Harvard University and the Hemingway Gymnasium, whom the German Turner Union, *Deutsche Turnerschaft (DT)*, welcomed at the 1908 German gymnastics festival (*Deutsche*

Turnfest) in Frankfurt as a guest of honor and who received a certificate of honor from the *DT* in 1914.ⁱ

In the history of the German American Turner movement Brosius has been recorded as the father of the American Turners. His designation as “father of the Turners” positioned him alongside other pioneering figures in the German Turner movement, notably Christoph Johann Friedrich GutsMuths (1759-1839), the so-called *Großvater* (grandfather) of German Gymnastics, and the later *Turnvater* and initiator of *Turnen*, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852), who set up the first public *Turnplatz*, an outdoor gymnastic ground on the Berlin Hasenheide in 1811. Jahn’s goal was not only to educate German boys and young men, but also to strengthen their bodies for the combat against the French oppressors of that time. The turner societies (*turnvereins*) which were founded by his students and rapidly spread all over the German states became places for physical exercises, but also for education and political discussions.

Jahn’s turnen arrived in the United States in the mid-1820s, guided by the triumvirate of Karl Beck, Charles Follen, and Francis Lieber. Their collective legacy, from establishing the first Turnplatz and gymnastics courses to providing the English translation of Jahn’s famous book “Turnkunst”, has been widely recognized.ⁱⁱ However, the development of the turner societies would not start until the late 1840s.ⁱⁱⁱ It is in this wave of the spread of the turner movement in the U.S. that George Brosius took center stage. His efforts to streamline the pedagogical curriculum and garner international competitive recognition have to this point been insufficiently addressed in the history of late nineteenth century American sports.

The following elaborations give insight into Brosius’ life and describe the establishment of the gymnastics instructors’ courses (*Turnlehrerseminar*) of the North American Turner Union in Milwaukee, which he directed for several years. Further sections will be devoted to Brosius’

tenures as a competitor, instructor, and administrator, as well as his turner squad's successful visit at the *Deutsche Turnfest* in 1880 in Frankfurt, where they won several prizes. We will also discuss the role of turnen in Milwaukee; a city that became increasingly dominated by German culture over the 19th century. It was not only the breweries that were predominated by Germans, but the German population also had a strong influence on the rise and political work of the Social Democrats in Milwaukee.^{iv}

Milwaukee's Turners

The train pulled into the station at the Northwestern Depot, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at half past two in September of 1880.^v Emerging to a raucous crowd were eight local German American gymnasts. Having spent the previous several weeks as invited guests at so-called turner societies or *Turnvereins* across the United States and Europe, the men were finally home, among friends and family. The eight members of the *Milwaukee Turnverein* had returned from the Fifth German Gymnastics Festival (*V. Deutsche Turnfest*) in Frankfurt, Germany, where they posted the best American finish in the event's history. Rest would have to be postponed for another few hours. Torchlit processions, a full slate of speeches by all manner of local and national dignitaries, and ultimately a feast at the Northside Turner Hall awaited the representatives of the finest gymnastics society in the United States.^{vi}

Just six years earlier, as the umbrella organization of the American turner societies, the *North American Turner Union*, relocated to Milwaukee, such a scene was unimaginable. Today's *Milwaukee Turners*, founded as the *Milwaukee Socialer Turn Verein* and changed to the *Milwaukee Turners*, founded as the *Milwaukee Socialer Turn Verein* and changed names to the *Milwaukee Turnverein* by the mid-1850s, were barely thirty years into their existence as both a social and athletic club by this time.

The turners embraced their adopted home with a fierce passion following a mass emigration to the United States following the failed 1848 revolution in their native Germany. Now, thirty years later, those who found refuge in the United States and their families went back to visit the homeland, since 1871 a united a German State, the *Deutsche Reich*, and triumphed in turnen, the national form of physical culture in Germany.

George Brosius – Biographical Notes

Reports from Milwaukee newspapers from the 1850s on, when hundreds of thousands of German immigrants hoped to find a new home in the U.S. each decade, revealed in some areas with a large German population an American audience skeptical of their new German neighbors. In particular, the Turners bore the brunt of the passionate xenophobia. One of the significant factors in changing this impression was a noted German American gymnast, soldier, and educator, George Brosius. Born in 1839 to German parents in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, his family relocated three years later to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he grew up and spent most of his life. During the second half of the nineteenth century Wisconsin was the American state with the largest German population. With almost thirty percent German inhabitants, Milwaukee, the state's largest city, was one of the strongholds of German culture, as is demonstrated by the fact that many German clubs, including the *turnvereine*, existed there. Alone in Milwaukee, twelve turner societies were founded between 1852 and 1880.^{vii} Surrounded by this proliferation of turner activity, an area referred to as a *Turnerhochburg*, a gymnastics stronghold, it is not surprising that the young Brosius devoted his free time to *Turnen*. Before he became a lifetime member of the *Milwaukee Turnverein* in 1854, he had already experienced the German system of exercises at the private gymnastics school (*Turnschule*) of the political refugee, Eduard Schulz.^{viii} His efforts proved to be successful: in 1857, the eighteen-year-old Brosius won the student

prize (*Zöglingspreis*) at the turnfest of the American Turner Union which was held in Milwaukee.^{ix}

However, to become educated as a painter and decorator, Brosius left his hometown to spend the years between 1857 and 1861 in St. Louis, Missouri. But his devotion to Milwaukee could not be repressed. At the outbreak of the Civil War he returned home to fight together with his fellow turners from Milwaukee in the 9th Wisconsin Regiment, which consisted of 100 members from the various Milwaukee's turner societies.^x During the conflict, Sergeant Brosius was taken as a prisoner of war. The silver watch that he had been awarded for his success at the above-mentioned *Turnfest* was taken away from him during his imprisonment, a period that he remembered as the most horrible in his life. He recorded later that he had the impression that the Southerners had a special hatred against the Germans, because many of them had fought against them. After six weeks of imprisonment and – supposedly – a weight loss of sixty pounds, he was released in an exchange of prisoners. Undeterred, Brosius went on to fight. After a short break he returned for some months to New Orleans as a Second Lieutenant of the 35th Wisconsin regiment until his health forced him to leave the battlefield and return to Milwaukee.^{xi}

Following his role in the war, Brosius returned to gymnastics and physical culture as an instructor (*Turnlehrer*) and coach, a role he would hold continuously for fifty years, from 1864 to 1914, until the age of 75. In the fall of 1864, for instance, he taught Turnen at the *Milwaukee Turnverein* and in 1866 he also took over the leadership of the gymnastic lessons at the German American *Engelmann Schule*, the school where he had been a student himself.^{xii} At various times during the late 1860s Brosius contributed his teaching talents to the Milwaukee Gymnasium, which was “frequented chiefly by native Americans.”^{xiii} Aside from his responsibilities within the Turner movement, Brosius saw fit to provide broader community outreach, including

accepting the role of Superintendent of physical training for the Milwaukee Public School system from 1875 to 1883. His interest in the development of youth was followed up with a striking advertising and promotional campaign for the adult crowd.^{xiv} In 1878, he also was responsible for the exercise classes through the National German-American Teachers' Program (*Nationale Deutsch-Amerikanische Lehrerseminar*). For some time, he even had his own gymnastics academy, the "Brosius Gymnasium." However, it is not known how long this institution survived.^{xv}

To educate instructors of *turnen* in 1875 Brosius took over the directorship the *Turnlehrerseminar* of the North American Turner Union in Milwaukee after having worked as an instructor at the *Seminar* in Chicago where it was located before. Brosius was the director of this institution from 1875 to 1898, except for a one-year break that he spent as a turner instructor in New York. In recognition of his work at the *Turnlehrerseminar* he was awarded the title "Master h.c." in 1912.^{xvi}

The Era 'Brosius' at the Normal School of the North American Turner Union

Already by 1856, the first plans for the establishment of a training facility for aspiring turner instructors were discussed by the national Turner Union. Further discussions and the Civil War delayed the implementation of the plan until 1866, when the *Turnlehrer Seminar* was established in New York City. Because the cities that accommodated the seminar in the early years alternated, this period became known as the *Wanderjahre* (travel years). In 1875 the base for the *Turnlehrer Seminar* became Milwaukee. Here it remained 32 years until 1907, when the board of the North American Turner Union decided to transfer it to Indianapolis, where it later became a part of the university. The P.E. department at today's Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) goes back to the Turner Normal School.^{xvii xviii}

The period between 1875 and 1907, when the *Normal School* was located in Milwaukee, was shaped by Georg Brosius. Because of his dedicated work, the importance of the *Seminar*, as well as the social esteem of the Turners in Milwaukee, increased. He also succeeded in bringing together the *Normal School*, the *German-American Teachers' Seminary* and the *German-American Academy* in Milwaukee.

In the first year that instruction was held in Milwaukee, forty students registered, thirty-five of which participated in the course. For the training of its students, the seminar was able to share the Turner hall and the equipment of the *Milwaukee Turnverein*. The training took place in evening courses because the students generally worked during the daytime. However, this soon changed: the second course in Milwaukee was no longer a night school of six months' duration, but rather an all-day school for three months. Also, requirements for admission were introduced: among them a medical certificate and a letter of recommendation from the Turner society in which the applicant was a member. This letter had to certify that he was able to speak and write German well, that he was of "moral character" and that he possessed the physical and mental requirements for his participation in the courses. In addition, a hands-on admissions test was administered.^{xix} Students who were not members of the North American Turner Union were admitted for a surcharge. Later, when the directors of the school and the Turner Union realized that it was possible to introduce *Turnen* in the public schools of the country, English became a requirement for admission to the *Turnlehrerseminar*, which was an insurmountable hurdle for many applicants.^{xx}

In the 1890s, the directors of the seminary subdivided the applicants, mostly with a German background, into various groups: those who only had few years of grammar school and poor knowledge of English, and barely met the admission standards in both languages (German

nor English); those who had continued their education or attended a college; and the group of applicants who had been born in Germany and who, as a rule, could prove they had a higher education, but were lacking knowledge of English. This classification pointed out the difficulties of teaching theory classes because of different language skills and academic requirements.^{xxi}

Education and the daily schedule were very strictly organized. E.G. Rathmann, a superintendent from St. Louis, stated at a meeting of the “American Association for the Advancement of Physical Culture” in 1887.^{xxii}

From early in the morning until late in the evening the young people are busy with mental and physical work. From the swimming place to the *Turnplatz*, from the *Turnplatz* to the lecture hall, from the lecture hall to the study room.^{xxiii}

During the summer months, classes started with swimming at five in the morning. After breakfast, which followed, the students met on the *Turnplatz*. In German tradition, which the Turners in the United States continued, they sang Turner and marching songs. Then Brosius started the gymnastic exercises (both free and ordered movements [*Frei- und Ordnungsübungen*]), which lasted until lunch time, and again in the afternoon until four p.m., when the students, boys and girls, from the public schools came and were instructed in Turnen by the students of the Turner Seminary. After dinner the P.E. students had to listen to lectures again.

The curriculum of the *Normal School*, in addition to practical instruction in physical exercises – primarily based on German Turnen – also included fencing, swimming, and boxing – was subdivided into “Turner sciences” and “general sciences.” In 1897, the Turner sciences curriculum listed the science of Turnen, the methodology, the history of Turnen, an introduction to the basic principles, tasks and goals of the Turner Union, as well as health, physiology of physical exercises and first aid for injuries. The general sciences included English and German

instruction, cultural history, pedagogy, anatomy and physiology, as well as singing classes.^{xxiv},

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Number of Participants

Thirty-five students took part in the first course in 1875, and eight earned a diploma. In the second course held in the same year, six participants were registered; the same number participated in the following course in 1876. In a circulated letter, the school committee asked the Turner societies to also send women for training as physical education instructors. This presumably was aimed at achieving a higher number of enrollments. Thus, for the first time, in 1877, a woman was among the five registered students at the *Normal School*. Laura Gerlach was the first woman to pass the final exam, and thus was authorized to teach physical education. After graduation she worked for the *Milwaukee Turnverein*, and in 1883, the Milwaukee School Board employed her as a physical education instructor^{xxvi} In the next course, held in 1878, two women participated. In the training year 1878/79, there were eight men and two women. In 1879 no course was held. During 1880/81 there was another course with thirteen participants; in 1881/82 there were nine, and in 1882/83 eight participants. The numbers increased to eighteen students in 1883/84, and nineteen in 1887/88.^{xxvii}

By the 1890s, the number of participants in the training courses had decreased to four or five students. Presumably, this drop in enrollment followed the decision in 1895 to extend the training period from twelve to twenty-four months. There were also disagreements among the instructors and within the seminar management as well as a decline in the total number of Turner Union members after 1895. The latter contributed to a financial weakening of the Union. All of these points were named as reasons for the decline in the *Turnlehrseminar*. There were also frequent student drop-outs, which the German sport historian Ueberhorst attributes to the burden

on the students' time and finances and the economic crises that forced the societies to rarely employ new *Turnlehrer*.^{xxviii} Accordingly, in 1898, a course was cancelled due to the lack of student participants.^{xxix} By 1904, a total of 220 students had earned their diploma at the *Turnlehrerseminar*, also a few Americans between them.^{xxx}

With the move of the seminary to Indianapolis, another famous turner stronghold, in 1907, the demands on the students and the terms of admission were elevated. The training facility in Indianapolis received a college status, although there were few students and, thus, a four-year high school education became a requirement for admission to the seminar that was completed with a Bachelor's degree and a teaching certificate.^{xxxi} The relocation also resulted in a name change. Designated as "The Normal College of the North American Gymnastics Union," the American Turners had performed another step into Americanization and accepting a wider American public in their ranks.

Comparisons between here and there - "Vergleiche zwischen Hüben und Drüben"

Various sources mention Brosius' practical work as a turner instructor; however, he himself did not publish many articles. No textbook describes his exercises, so we do not know whether he developed his own physical exercise system. He wrote only a few articles, like those published in the physical education journal, *Mind and Body*. In one of these he gives insight into a Turner instructor meeting in 1888: "Vergleiche zwischen Hüben und Drüben," translated to "Comparisons between Here and There," Brosius compares physical education instructor training institutions of the American turners with the German ones. He concluded that although the training in the United States was more extensive, "over there" – in Germany – the training program is more professional. Furthermore, the German physical education instructor training

institutions are state institutions, equipped by the government. As a result of this governmental affiliation, so Brosius' criticism, the graduated turner instructor becomes dependent on the state, unlike in the United States.^{xxxii}

Brosius Breeds Competitive Success

By the late 1870s Brosius' turners of Milwaukee began to win gymnastic competitions and do so in dominating fashion. Over four-thousand German American of Milwaukee flocked to the streets to witness and celebrate with those victorious men returning from the National Festival in New York City in 1875.^{xxxiii} With more prizes increasingly being collected across the greater Milwaukee *turnvereins*, the local press doled out high praise for Brosius and his efforts.^{xxxiv}

A defining competitive moment of the *turnverein* movement in the United States occurred under Brosius' leadership in Milwaukee. Besides his professional work at the *Normal School* of the Turner Union, Brosius also worked as a coach at the *Milwaukee Turnverein*. Two competitions, one domestic and one abroad, served notice that the turners from Milwaukee were not only among the best in the world but represented an integral aspect of their communities in their adopted home nation. The year 1879 marked the beginning of a dominating stretch for the Milwaukee Turners. Winning competitions domestically and overseas, the local press began to celebrate and lavish praise upon their ethnic neighbors.^{xxxv} Full recaps of the state competition earned the turners a half column of recognition in the *Milwaukee Daily*, one of the largest contemporaneous news reports about the organization.^{xxxvi} A by-product of the increased press coverage came a broader acceptance of the German people, who after nearly a quarter century were finally earning status as equals among the Milwaukee citizenry. Perhaps the most striking example of this was the coverage afforded to the turner's 1879 celebration of the one-hundred

and first anniversary of the birth of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, founder of the turner movement in Germany. The first city-wide celebration of its kind, the press provided a full overview of the day's affairs – a far cry from the local German-American press' demonization of the same man twenty-five years earlier.^{xxxvii}

Prior to their first major national victory in Philadelphia in the summer, the Milwaukee press lauded the students and members of Brosius' turnverein as "model citizens."^{xxxviii} In the same article, making an effort to secure support for a new gymnasium, the columnist claimed "There is, perhaps, no institution in the country that combines in such perfect form and under such perfect arrangements that make up the Club."^{xxxix} The local support remained equally as enthusiastic when the victorious Turners returned from the national festival in Philadelphia sporting the chief prize winner Herman Koehler, who was Brosius' nephew.^{xl}

The 1880 Frankfurt Squad

On the heels of a dominating domestic campaign in 1879, Brosius looked abroad. The *V. Deutsche Turnfest* was to be held in Frankfurt. It was not unusual for American turners to attend German Turnfest. It was always a nice occasion to participate in the huge athletic festival and also visit the fatherland and family. The 1880 *Turnfest* became the new goal for the Milwaukee gymnastics elite. Brosius settled on a team of eight, which included himself and his champion nephew Koehler.^{xli}

More than 400 German Americans attended this *Turnfest* that was held from July 24 to 29, 1880.^{xlii} Altogether, this gymnastics festival played host to roughly 3,000 Turners.^{xliii} This number of visitors, that exceeded all previous ones, may also be linked to the new political order in Germany. Due the founding of the German *Reich* in 1871, many German emigrants saw their hopes for a national unity as being fulfilled.^{xliv}

The German American journalist Hermann Boppe, editor of the *Amerikanische Turnzeitung* since 1878 and active member of the *Milwaukee Turnverein*, documented this trip extensively. He wrote that the American turners decided on this overseas trip to find out “whether the tree here already bears golden fruit, or whether we still needed grafting from the mother land,” as it was expressed in the parting words of the president of the “Arrangement Committee.” They were to enter the “fight,” however not a “bloody fight,” in order “to show the German Turner comrades, how far the seed had born Turner fruit in the distant land (...).”^{xlv} The German Americans were less interested in demonstrating their athletic skills than in sharing experiences in the practice and theory of *Turnen*.^{xlvi}

The results spoke for themselves. The victories of the Americans surpassed all expectations. The eight-man Turner squad from Milwaukee won six of the twenty-two general prizes, including placing second, third, fifth, and sixth, as well as a first place in wrestling.^{xlvii} In the ranking of the societies, they took third place behind the *Frankfurter Turnverein* and another local turner society, the *Frankfurter Turngesellschaft* despite the fact that turners from Milwaukee had started under poor conditions.^{xlviii} For example, they reached their assigned gymnasium only after a great delay caused by the heavy rainfalls that had descended on Frankfurt during the *Turnfest*. The hall was overcrowded with spectators. Just like at the show performances prior to the competition, the Americans were the last team to compete. The competition included the horizontal bar, parallel bars and vaulting-horse. In addition, there were so-called “folk exercises” such as broad jumping, pole-vaulting and shot-putting.^{xlix}

These successes strengthened the self-confidence of the German American turners. A reporter wrote that due to these victories, the Germans, “the drowsy Michel(s),” received a small ‘rap on the nose,’ a ‘rough and shaking awakening.’” In his opinion, the German press had

portrayed America as a “half-barbaric country,” “a kind of penal colony” that could not produce anything “good.” However, the achievements of the Americans proved the opposite.¹ Boppe, stated in the German American Journal *Der Deutsche Pioneer* that in the United States a “more beautiful Turnen” was shown at the *Turnfests* and that the majority of the German squads participating in Frankfurt.^{li}

Of course, the success of the American turners caused some jealousy. The *Berliner Börsen-Courier* wrote that it was opposed to the participation of foreigners in such a *Turnfest*. As a reason he stated that the American squad had allegedly brought “professional gymnasts” with them who were being paid for their efforts. In the article it was demanded that in such competitive contests only turners – not actors – should be permitted to compete.^{liii} Also Alfred Boettcher from Bremen took a stand on rumors that the German American *Turnfest* participants had allegedly brought along “circus performers” in order to win the “laurel wreaths (...) for America.” However, he defended the American guests and praised their control “on any apparatus and in all kind of exercises which can only be viewed as a product of the careful instructions in *Turnen* and which is a glowing testimony for the teaching abilities of the *Turnlehrer*.” He felt the German turners could learn from the Americans ones especially “in toughness and stamina to reach a goal once it was set.”^{liiii}

Returning home to the U.S. with four top-ten places in their luggage, the Milwaukee *Turnverein* proudly laid claim to the finest overseas performance by an American team to date. Led by the best finish ever by an American, Herman Koehler placed second at the German *Turnfest*. The team’s adventures, movements, and thoughts were enthusiastically captured by local journalists who had made the overseas trip alongside the athletes.^{liv} Celebrations within the hometown were plentiful both before and after the international competition.

Upon the return of the triumphant turners, both a victory parade and a grand reception were planned. The tour would take the victors through long-established strongholds of the American Turner movement such as New York, Boston, and Chicago before finishing in front of a raucous crowd in Milwaukee.^{lv} The grand reception was no less enthusiastic with serenades from their fellow Turners, a torchlit procession through the streets, and finally a recitation of speeches by all forms of Milwaukee dignitaries.^{lvi} Comprising second, third, fifth, sixth, thirteenth, and twenty-first place, the turners from Milwaukee had well earned their moment of celebration in their home city.^{lvii} Further, at the time of his unprecedented performance, the champion Koehler was the acting captain and director of physical training at the West Point Military Academy, the latest in a storied history connecting the turners with the interests of national and militaristic pride. Following his international success, he went on to complete the Milwaukee Normal School training in 1882.^{lviii}

The athletic success of Milwaukee's turners was built from a foundation of steady growth in local *turnvereins*.^{lix} Mirroring the national rise of turner societies, by the late nineteenth century it is estimated that one in twelve Milwaukeeans lived in a family associated with the organization.^{lx} The crown jewel of the eight active chapters operating in the city – as well as the six societies catering to Milwaukee's northern counties – was the opening of the grand hall on 4th street in 1883. Designed by the German-born architect Henry C. Koch, the hall reflected the emergence of the local turners as a cultural and historical bastion of the city in addition to the athletic accomplishments.^{lxi} The popularity of the turners and their societies was evident from the start. A little over a decade after the first society convened, there were already cries in the public press demanding an increase in turner-style facilities. The local columnist claimed the “absence of a good gymnasium is much felt,” continuing, “some late amateur performance proves talent is

in our midst.”^{lxii} As the local press increased their lavish praise upon the talent of the German gymnasts over that twenty-year span, the nation took notice.^{lxiii}

Civic Responsibility

Beyond the competitions, the over 50 *turnverein* which were founded in the course of time in Wisconsin secured themselves in the hearts of their local midwestern communities by opposing the rising tide of the Temperance movement. As the Eastern seaboard of the United States grappled with the emerging Temperance-based physical education of the YMCA, the Midwest – specifically Milwaukee – became a turner stronghold. Marked by a staunch refusal to adhere to the guidelines of the Temperance movement, the turners from Wisconsin embraced their role in the community as both an outlet for physical education as well as a hub for local celebration and festivities often in the own beer garden or bar attached to their turner hall, some of them are still in existence

Milwaukee has long been considered the Beer Capital of the United States. Beer always played an important role in its history, many breweries were established by the early 1860s, six of which tied their lineage directly to German immigrants.^{lxiv} Thus, it is not unusual that even from the earliest days of the turners in Milwaukee, the legend of their penchant for beer flowed almost as smooth as the pints being poured. Writing on the fifth anniversary celebration of the *Milwaukee Turnverein* in 1859, the *Milwaukee Daily News* added a final segment after reciting how wonderful the turners were, dryly concluding “the whole day was commemorated by speech-making, athletic exercise, and beer drinking – principally the latter.”^{lxv} A decade later, it was widely understood that one did not get in between a turner and his drink, as another columnist exclaimed one “has no business whatever to enter into a lager beer match with a turner.”^{lxvi} One *Weekly Wisconsin* reporter proclaimed a Cincinnati turner “drank lager as one

would drink milk – only more so – and has little effect on him.”^{lxvii} The drinks were not just revered, but also connected to the heart of freedom for the turners.

The reverence for the freedom in drink evoked memories of how many turners became American citizens, by fighting in the Civil War. Despite their bravery, turners were repeatedly criticized by the general public both in the lead up to the war and in its aftermath.^{lxviii} This was due, in part, to their ‘free-thinking’ views and by their defiance of temperance and Sabbath Day laws. They viewed these laws as an attack on Germans as a national group and not as a protection of the population against the consequences of alcohol abuse, as turner and writer Ernst Anton Zündt stated:

Therefore the temperance effort is an anti-German activity, although one shoves liquor in the foreground, it is primarily aimed at the production of beer; and even not against the beer itself, but mainly because the German efforts and the German spirit of enterprise have earned it with wealth (...). While hating the Germans, and everything that is successful about them, all other nationalities are very willing, at the same time, to reach out their hands as if they all felt that one day it would be realized that German spirit, German industriousness and perseverance may win victory over all adversaries.^{lxix}

In 1872, a collection of turners met in Watertown, Wisconsin – halfway between Milwaukee and Madison – to fiercely oppose the imposition of Temperance legislation in their community.^{lxx} A ban on beer and liquor around the Fourth of July forced some turner organizations to abandon the cause, but many stayed the course and fought for their rights – via beer. By the late 1870s – as their athletic accomplishments were nearing second to none – the Milwaukee Turners took to campaigning on the behalf of “honest beer.” Their efforts were lauded by the press, who noted that no organization in the city was as large, committed, or well organized for the cause of drinking beer.^{lxxi} Turner civic efforts extended beyond that of the

Temperance movement. The Turner Union's first official voice was the Turner newspaper, *Turnerzeitung*, which was published from 1851-61 by the editorial staff of the respective executive board.^{lxxii} This newspaper aimed to counteract the “mental laziness and selfishness” of its readers.^{lxxiii} In its first two years, the newspaper was published monthly and thereafter weekly. In addition to Turner Union updates, district and society news, there were articles on physical education and health. The paper also took a stand on social matters where slavery, nativism and temperance laws came under attack.^{lxxiv} Ueberhorst describes the *Turnerzeitung* as a political “feud sheet” (*Kampfblatt*) because of its increasing politicization.^{lxxv}

The efforts of Brosius' Turners of Milwaukee – in the taverns, in the press, and in competition – enabled them, over the second half of the nineteenth century to become, in the words of a local columnist, “decidedly American... with no class of citizen evidence a deeper devotion to liberal principles.”^{lxxvi}

Conclusion

The turners are as much a part of Milwaukee today as they were in the past. The turners' influences on the political life of the city from 1870 until the 1960s resulted in a number of their members holding office as mayors of Wisconsin's largest city. Although with much less influence, today's Milwaukee Turners are still located in the old Turner Hall, built in 1833. Downtown, roughly half a mile north of the Marquette University campus and less than a mile west of Lake Michigan, the Turner Hall stands tall, stoic, and elegant. However, the original paintings that relate to the American Civil War cannot be seen anymore. Just like in its history, the Milwaukee Turner Hall serves as a cultural site, it retains the capacity to bring those in the city of Milwaukee together, especially after renovations to the lavish ballroom were completed in 2007. Before the time of the renovations it included a German Restaurant, since then it

functioned as the bar/tavern where hundreds of thirsty Marquette University undergraduates would ready themselves for a game, then either celebrate or commiserate together afterwards during the collegiate basketball season. Physical culture memorabilia line the walls of the hall, representative of its continued presence in the city. Brosius' legacy also carries on, embodying the spirit of his life as an educator and coach of *turnen* in/through body and soul. For these efforts he became famous not only in the United States but also in Germany. In 1920, the year of his death, the *North American Turner Union* mentioned that Brosius was able “through his quiet, but insistent way to transfer the enthusiasm for his profession, which he himself harboured, to his students.”^{lxxvii}

Brosius was in contact with many German Turner societies and Turner pedagogues, such as J. C. Lion. Due to the success of his turner teams and his work, the *Turnlehrerseminar* reached fame and the German system of physical education gained recognition in the United States.^{lxxviii} Brosius also was a strong supporter of women's *Turnen*, which became more and more popular after the turn of the century.^{lxxix}

Congratulating Brosius for his fifty-year membership in the *Milwaukee Turnverein*, his former student Henry Hartung, a turner instructor from Chicago, underlined his “faithful and tireless devotion” to his work, his “German thoroughness and mental conscientiousness” and his “kindness and heartiness” when working with students or adults.^{lxxx} Moreover turner instructor Maximillian Großmann called him a “genius in teaching” whose “creative ideas” were innovative.^{lxxxi}

Reading these praises, it is surprising that Brosius' name is hardly ever mentioned in overview publications on American sport history, such as Spears/Swanson (1988), Guttman (1988), Rader (1999), or Borish/Gems/Pfister (2008/2017). Exceptions are Leonard (1923/1947)

and some German publications such as Gasch (1920) and *Meyers Konversationslexikon* (1897), in which Brosius is called the American *Turnvater*. Brosius never had his own institution for a longer period of time, nor did he publish many articles. However, for almost twenty-five years he was director of the American *Turnlehrerseminar* and at least 200 students graduated under him. A possible explanation for the exclusion of Brosius from more recent publications could be the practical orientation of his work or the fact that he was not considered important by non-German academics.

Nevertheless, it was probably due to Brosius' efforts that in 1885, that the Commissioner of the American Bureau of Education, Hartwell, who had a comprehensive perspective of the status of physical education in American schools, praised the *Normal School* of the Turners as the best training facility for physical educators in the United States.^{lxxxii}

In 1921 the *Turnlehrerseminar* built "Camp Brosius" in Wisconsin along Lake Elkhart, which is still used by today's School of Physical Education of the IUPUI under the leadership of the IU School of Health and Human Sciences. Also, families can spend their vacations there.^{lxxxiii} This camp commemorates the "self-made man," as Brosius was called in a funeral speech.^{lxxxiv} Although disregarded by American sport history, the American *Turnvater* is still remembered here.

ⁱ See Gasch, *Handbuch des gesamten Turnwesens und der verwandten Leibesübungen*, (Wien/Leipzig: Pichlers Witwe & Sohn, 1920), 80; George Brosius, *Fifty Years Devoted to the Cause of Physical Culture*, (Milwaukee: Germania Publishing Company, 1914), 68.

ⁱⁱ See Fred E. Leonard, *A Guide to the History of Physical Education* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1923), 227-40; Eric Geldbach, "Die Verspflanzung das deutschen Turnens nach Amerika: Beck, Follen, Lieber," *Stadion* (1975): 360-370; Allen Guttmann, *Sports: The First Five Millennia* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 278-79; and Gertrud Pfister, "The Role of German *Turnen* in American Physical Education," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no.13 (2009): 1897-98.

- ⁱⁱⁱ See Annette R. Hofmann, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des deutschen Turnens in den USA* (Schorndorf: Hofmann Verlag, 2001), 99-106, and Annette R. Hofmann, *The American Turner Movement: A History from its Beginning to 2000*, (Indianapolis: Max Kade Center, 2010), 64-69, and Gerald R. Gems, Linda J. Borisch, and Gertrud Pfister, *Sports in American History* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2017), 88..
- ^{iv} Horst Ueberhorst, *Turners and Social Democrats in Milwaukee. Five Decades of Cooperations (1910-1960)*. Lecture to the discussion group “Politics and Science” at the research institute of the Friedrich Ebert Endowment in Bonn. March 26, 1980. Translated by Joseph Rahn.
- ^v “Wilkommen: Return of the Victorious Turners from Faderland Yesterday,” *The Daily Milwaukee News*, Sep. 12 1880, 4.
- ^{vi} “The Victorious Milwaukeeans,” *The Daily Milwaukee News*, Sep. 2, 1880, 1.
- ^{vii} Eric L. Pumroy and Katja Rampelmann, *Research Guide to the Turner Movement in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut/London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 326f.
- ^{viii} Founded as Socialer Turnverein Milwaukee in 1852. In the 1850s it changed its name to Milwaukee Turnverein, in the 1950s to Milwaukee Turners and in the 1990s to Milwaukee Turner Foundation.
- ^{ix} The competition comprised the Turnverein of the “western societies.” This refers to what is currently understood as the upper mid-west of the United States, encompassing cities such as Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, and Cincinnati.; “Programme of the Seventh Annual Festival of the Turner League of North America,” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, Sep. 2, 1857, 2.
- ^x Leonard, *History of Physical Education*, 298., Hofmann, *The American Turner Movement*, 106f.
- ^{xi} Hofmann, 2001, p.155 and Hofmann, 2010, p.105; Brosius, 1914, p.14
- ^{xii} In 1917, during the First World War when there were many anti-German sentiments in the U.S. this school changed its name in Milwaukee University School which is still in existence today, see <https://www.usmk12.org/about/history-of-usmk>, accessed October 11, 2020.
- ^{xiii} Leonard, *History of Physical Education*, 299.
- ^{xiv} “Juvenile Classes of the Turnverein ‘Milwaukee,’” *Milwaukee Daily News*, Aug. 30, 1874, 1.
- ^{xv} Brosius, *Fifty Years*, 10-18.
- ^{xvi} Horst Ueberhorst devotes a chapter (pp. 136-141) to the American *Turnvater* in his *Turner unterm Sternenbanner*. (München: Heinz Moos Verlag, 1978). *Amerikanische Turnzeitung*, March 28, 1920, “In Memoriam für Georg Brosius”; Rinsch, E., *History of the Normal College of the American Gymnastic Union Indiana University*, 1966, 44.
- ^{xvii} See Socialist Turnerbund of North America: *The Convention of the Socialist Turnerbund of North America* at Indianapolis, Ind. from September 4th to 8th, 1858; Leonard, F.E. “German-American Gymnastic Societies and the North American Turnerbund,” *American Physical Education Review*. Vol XV (Dec. 1910): 9, 625; Rinsch, *History of the Normal College*, 7-32; Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund: *Jahresbericht des Vororts*. 1907, XXIX f.
- ^{xviii} In the following, *Turnlehrerseminar* will be shortened to “Normal School”. It was not limited to students of German origin and therefore also became known by English names such as “North American Normal School of Gymnastics” or simply “Turner Seminary” and, from 1907 on, as the “Normal College of the American Turnerbund” (see Zeigler, E. F.: “Professional Preparation Concerns of the Normal College of the American Gymnastic Union (1866-1919),” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education* 18 (1987): 19-35, 22
- ^{xix} See Rinsch, *History of the Normal College*, 17 f.
- ^{xx} See Normal School of the North-American Gymnastic Union 1897, 8; Ueberhorst, *Turner unterm Sternenbanner*, 133; Brosius, G.: *Das Turnlehrerseminar*. In: *Erinnerungsschrift des Nordamerikanischen Turner-Bundes gewidmet von dessen Vertretern bei der Weltausstellung den Freunden und Förderern des deutschen Turnwesens in den Vereinigten Staaten*. (Chicago, 1893), 30
- ^{xxi} See Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund: *Jahresbericht des Vororts*. 1894, XXXVII. The annual reports of the Turner Union, contained a list of participants in the *Turnlehrerseminar* and information as to their birthplace, one can see that a large number were born in Germany or Switzerland. Another group consisted of German-Americans. Only rarely can one find an “American” in these listings. In the 1890s, an American student, although his knowledge of German was poor, was admitted to the seminary. In spite of passing the final exam, this student did not receive his diploma until he could show sufficient knowledge of German after his studies (see Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund: *Jahresbericht des Vororts*. 1894, XXXVIII).
- ^{xxii} Gertrud Pfister, “The Role of German Turners in American Physical Education,” in *Gymnastics: A Transatlantic Movement*, ed. By Gertrud Pfister (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2011).
- ^{xxiii} Quoted in Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund: *Jahresbericht des Vororts* 1887, 33f.
- ^{xxiv} In the annual report of the Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund of 1906/07, the importance of anatomy for *Turnlehrer* was pointed out and emphasized that anatomy “instructions using a cadaver” were essential. Because the *Normal*

School was not equipped with a dissecting room in the seminar building, anatomy was taught in the human anatomy lab of the *Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons* (see Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund 1907, XXII)

^{xxv} See Normal School of the North-American Gymnastic Union: *Lehrplan des Turnlehrer-Seminars des Nordamerikanischen Turnerbundes*. Milwaukee 1897, 35-41.

^{xxvi} Rinsch, *History of the Normal College*, 22.

^{xxvii} See Rinsch, *History of the Normal College*, 21 f.; Brosius, *Erinnerungsschrift*, 30.

^{xxviii} See Ueberhorst, *Turner unterm Sternenbanner*, 134, 227; Rinsch, *History of the Normal College*, 43.

^{xxix} See Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund: *Jahresbericht des Vororts*, XXIV f..

^{xxx} In this year *Turnlehrer* Hartung from Chicago criticized the seminar: "The fact remains that our *Turnlehrerseminar* at this time does not meet its goal of educating *Turnlehrer* for Turner societies, grammar schools and schools of higher learning, that our courses do not meet modern demands, that we are being outstripped by rival institutions, and our influence in the development of Turnen at elementary schools and schools of higher education is being suppressed—perhaps totally destroyed. In: *Amerikanische Turnzeitung*, May 8 and May 15, 1904, "Unsere Turnlehrerausbildung und die Zukunft des Turnlehrerseminars".

^{xxxi} See Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund: *Jahresbericht des Vororts*. 1907, XXXIf. In 1911/12 the *Normal College* offered the following courses: A four-year course of studies, culminating in the degree of *Bachelor of Science in Gymnastics* and a teaching qualification for colleges and universities, in addition to the opportunity of attaining a Master's degree after graduation; a two-year course of studies with the diploma *Graduate in Gymnastics* and the teaching qualification for grammar school and high schools. The one-year course qualified the graduate to be a *Turnlehrer* for Turner societies. (see *Normal College* 1911, 15).

^{xxxii} In Wilhelm Fleck,: *Die Turnlehrerversammlung in Cleveland, Ohio am 27., 28., 2., 3., 4. und 5. August 1888. Bericht über die Vorträge und Verhandlungen* (Milwaukee, 1888), 25-28.

^{xxxiii} "Triumphal Return of the Milwaukee Turners," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Aug. 31, 1875, 4.

^{xxxiv} "Wisconsin State News," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Jul. 29, 1877; "Town Talk," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Jul. 18, 1876.

^{xxxv} "Town Talk," *The Daily Milwaukee News*, Jul. 21, 1877, 4.

^{xxxvi} "Turner Prizes," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Jul. 15, 1879, 4.

^{xxxvii} "The Jahn Anniversary," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Jul. 24, 1878, 4.

^{xxxviii} "The Proposed Gymnasium," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Jan. 26, 1879, 2.

^{xxxix} "The Proposed Gymnasium," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Jan. 26, 1879, 2.

^{xl} "The Triumphant Turners," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Aug. 13, 1879, 4.

^{xli} "Town Talk," *Milwaukee Daily News*, Nov. 14, 1878, 4.

^{xlii} See Neumann, *Deutsche Turnfeste, Spiegelbild der deutschen Turnbewegung* (Wiesbaden: Limpert, 1987), 103.

^{xliii} See Neumann 1987, 103.

^{xliv} See Ralf Wagner,: *Zwischen Tradition und Fortschritt: Zur gesellschaftspolitischen Entwicklung der deutschamerikanischen Turnbewegung am Beispiel Milwaukees und Chicagos, 1850-1920* (Dissertation. München, 1988), 247.

^{lv} Boppe, „Die Turnfahrt übers Meer,“, in *Turner-Kalender* 1881, 82.

^{lvi} See *Deutsche Turnzeitung* Nr. 32 from August 5, 1880, 182.

^{lvii} The squad from Milwaukee included Friedrich Kasten, Hermann Köhler, Carl Paul, Otto Wagner, Karl Friedrich Müller, Anton Schäfer, and Wilhelm Lademeyer. In addition, Heinrich Rathke from the *Turnverein Nordseite* in Milwaukee, earned the 13th place (see *Deutsche Turnzeitung*, 1880, 344). Besides these general prizes, the American Turners Kasten and Müller were the best Turners on the horizontal bar at this festival (see Brosius, G, *Fifty Years*, 38).

^{lviii} See *Deutsche Turnzeitung*, 1880, 369.

^{lix} See Boppe, „Die Turnfahrt übers Meer“, 96.

ⁱ *Der Deutsche Pionier* 1880, 281 f.

ⁱⁱ *Der Deutsche Pionier* 1880, 282.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Der Deutsche Pionier* 1880, 283. The Börsen-Couriers also stated that the English and the Americans "were no match" for the Germans. One could see that the English and Americans came off badly in the folk contests (*Der Deutsche Pionier* 1880: 283).

^{liii} A. Boettcher, „Die amerikanischen Sieger in Frankfurt,“ *Erinnerungen an das V. Deutsche Turnfest zu Frankfurt a. M. vom 25. bis 29. Juli, 1880*: 402.

^{liv} "The Victorious Milwaukeean," *Milwaukee Daily News*, 2 Sep. 1880; "The Turners Abroad," *Milwaukee Daily News*, 25 Jul. 1880; "Revisiting the Fatherland" *Milwaukee Daily News*, 10 Jun 1880; "German Roundabout," *Milwaukee Daily News*, 12 Aug. 1880.

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- ^{lv} *Milwaukee Daily News*, 3 Sep. 1880.
- ^{lvi} “The Turners Reach Chicago,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, Sep. 11, 1880, 1.
- ^{lvii} Leonard, *Pioneers*, 111.
- ^{lviii} Leonard, *Pioneers*, 112.
- ^{lix} “Milwaukee Turners.” Encyclopedia of Milwaukee. Last updated, 2016. <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/milwaukee-turners/>.
- ^{lx} Leonard, *Pioneers*, 104-105.
- ^{lxi} Dawn Schumann and James H. Charleton. *National Historic Landmark Nomination: Turner Hall*. National Parks Service, May 1995.
- ^{lxii} “Field and Aquatic Sports,” *Daily Milwaukee News*, Sep. 8, 1866, 4.
- ^{lxiii} “The Reception to the Turners,” *Daily Milwaukee News*, Aug. 13, 1869; *Daily Milwaukee News*, Nov. 28, 1868 – highlight a six-year-old performer from Milwaukee; “Evolution of the Turners,” *Daily Milwaukee News*, Aug. 21, 1867; “The Milwaukee Gymnasium,” *Daily Milwaukee News*, Jan. 28, 1868.
- ^{lxiv} Brenda Magee, *Brewing in Milwaukee* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014). 13.
- ^{lxv} “Anniversary of the Turners,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, 20 Jan. 1858.
- ^{lxvi} “Visitors from Chicago: Intoxication,” *Semi Weekly Wisconsin*, Jun. 16, 1869, 3.
- ^{lxvii} “The Reception to the Turners,” *The Daily Milwaukee News*, Aug. 13, 1869, 5.
- ^{lxviii} M.M. Pomeroy, “City Facts and Fancies,” *The Daily Milwaukee News*, Dec. 30, 1858, 1.
- ^{lix} Ernst Anton Zündt, „Geistiges Turnen,“ *Amerikaner Turner-Kalendar*. Milwaukee: 1883: 24-27.
- ^{lxx} “Location of the Normal School,” *Daily Milwaukee News*, Feb. 2, 1872, 1.
- ^{lxxi} “The Turners and Honest Beer,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, Oct. 19, 1878, 1.
- ^{lxxii} see Socialistic Turner-Bund 1855, Metzner 1874, 11.
- ^{lxxiii} *Turnerzeitung No. 1, January 1851*.
- ^{lxxiv} Three principles are found in the Turner Union statutes: 1. “The Turners do not give their vote to any man in any office who belongs to the Order of the Know-nothings or any nativistic-minded corporation or party, or anyone who does not publicly speak out against them. 2. The Turners are against slavery, primarily because of the expansion of it into free territories. They see slavery as unworthy of a republic, as it runs quickly counter to free principles. 3. The Turners are against any temperance law as it is undemocratic in principle, unjust and impractical in its application” (Metzner JB I, 269).
- ^{lxxv} Ueberhorst, 1978, 46.
- ^{lxxvi} “The Turners,” *Milwaukee News*, May 15, 1856.
- ^{lxxvii} See Nordamerikanischer Turnerbund 1920.
- ^{lxxviii} See Annette R. Hofmann, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des deutschen Turnens in den USA*, (Schorndorf: Hofmann Verlag, 2001), 210-214.
- ^{lxxix} Annette R. Hofmann, “Lady Turners in the United States: German-American Identity, Gender Concerns and Turnerism,” *Journal for Sport History*. (2000) 3: 383-404.
- ^{lxxx} Brosius, *Fifty Years*, 98.
- ^{lxxxi} Ueberhorst, *Turner unterm Sternenbanner*, 140.
- ^{lxxxii} Edward Mossey Hartwell, “Physical Training in American Colleges and Universities”, *Circulars of Information of the Bureau of Education*, 1885: 182.
- ^{lxxxiii} Activities & Programs: Camp Brosius: Indiana University.
- ^{lxxxiv} *Amerikanische Turnzeitung*, April 25, 1920; for the history of Camp Brosius, see Rinsch, *History of the Normal College*, 101-115.