

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF
THE NORTH AMERICAN
GYMNASTIC UNION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649320639

A Brief History of the North American Gymnastic Union by Theodor Stempfel & Henry Christian Anton Metzner

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

THEODOR STEMPFEL & HENRY CHRISTIAN ANTON METZNER

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF
THE NORTH AMERICAN
GYMNASTIC UNION**

KF 1335

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE LIBRARY OF
HUGO MÜNSTERBERG
MARCH 15, 1917

Copyright, 1911
By The National Executive Committee of the
North American Gymnastic Union.

FOREWORD

IT HAS been justly said that the North American Gymnastic Union, although it has been in existence for over sixty years and has always taken an active interest in public affairs, as a national organization has kept its light under a bushel. The reason for this may chiefly be found in the fact that the official language of the Turners is the German language, the furtherance of which has always been one of their aims.

The Executive Committee of the Gymnastic Union is of the opinion that the history of the *Turnerbund* is of sufficient interest to warrant its publication in book form. The history was written by Henry Metzner of North Branch, New Jersey, who has been identified for over half a century with the Turner organization. The translation from the German was made by Theo. Stempfel, Jr., of Indianapolis. The article on the influence of the Turners on Gymnastics in public schools was contributed by Wm. A. Stecher, director of physical training in the public schools of Philadelphia.

It seems appropriate to publish the book at this time as the year 1911 marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the opening of the first gymnastic field in Berlin. This may well be regarded as the real beginning of the playground movement which in late years has also taken root in this country.

THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
NORTH AMERICAN GYMNASTIC UNION

Indianapolis, Indiana, June, 1911.

CONTENTS

	Page
Friedrich Ludwig Jahn - - - - -	5
Three Pioneers of German-American Gymnastics	12
A Brief History of the North American Gymnastic Union - - - - -	22
The Establishment of the Turnerbund - - -	22
The Civil War Period - - - - -	36
The Turnerbund After the Civil War - - -	43
The Influence of the North American Gymnastic Union on Gymnastics in the Public Schools - - - - -	54
History of the Normal College of the North American Gymnastic Union - - -	59
Conclusion - - - - -	61

FRIEDRICH LUDWIG JAHN

IN THE spring of the year 1811, on the Hasenheide, near Berlin, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn established the first *Tumplatz*,* an open field for the practice of physical training. This incident has acquired special significance, for it marked the introduction of that type of physical training, based upon Jahn's ideals, which has met with so much success and has found so many loyal followers at the present time. It is indeed appropriate that the centennial anniversary of such an important event in the history of physical education should be elaborately celebrated, not only abroad, but also in the United States.

Jahn was prompted to undertake the practical application of his theories for immediate reasons. Napoleon, the political oppressor, had reduced Germany to a state of servile humiliation. By encouraging bodily exercise and fostering patriotic ideals in his students, Jahn hoped to supply his country with a body of young men inspired with patriotism and a love for freedom who, at the call to arms, would willingly sacrifice their lives to liberate Germany from the tyranny of a foreign state.

This was perhaps the period of the deepest humiliation in the history of Germany. After the disastrous battle of Jena, October 14, 1806, it was not alone the iron rule of the seemingly unconquerable French dictator which contributed toward the national gloom. Even the most inspired patriots among the people,

*A term coined by Jahn. The verb *tunzen* (to perform gymnastic exercises) is of foreign origin, although Jahn considered it a genuine German word. *Turner*=gymnast; *Turnerbund*=gymnastic union; *Turnfest*=gymnastic festival; *Turnverein* or *Turngemeinde*=gymnastic society.

A Brief History of the

upon taking cognizance of the fact that the German princes themselves were in the service of Napoleon, and were waging war against their fellow-countrymen in order to earn the clemency of the French emperor and to gain a shred of land from some one of the tattered German kingdoms as a reward for their treachery, began to despair of the ultimate freedom of Germany.

The youthful enthusiasts who had been prepared by Jahn for a war of liberation, fulfilled in a glorious fashion the hopes and the confidence that had been placed in them. When the call to arms resounded, Jahn and his Turners joined the ranks of the champions of liberty with glad hearts brimming with enthusiasm, and their example aided in no small way in kindling the glowing ember of patriotism. The baptism of fire administered to German gymnastics in the sad days of the Napoleonic regime has bequeathed to the Turners a sacred heritage, the love for freedom, which has been faithfully revered in whatever locality Turning has found a home.

However, on the occasion of the present writing, the political situation in Germany at the time of Napoleonism, is of importance only in so far as it helps to point out the motive which inspired Jahn, and gave an importance to his efforts which, under normal conditions, might not have brought his work into immediate popularity with those members of the community who were dissatisfied with the dandified militarism of the regular army, and ached under the yoke of the foreign tyrant.

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn was born August 11, 1778, in the small village of Lanz, in the province of Brandenburg, Prussia. His mother gave him his first lessons in

North American Gymnastic Union

reading and writing, and his father, the minister of the village, instructed him in the elementary branches of education. The boy was thus enabled to lead a free, untrammelled life, and to disport himself in the practice of various bodily exercises, which enabled him to attain a certain mastery in this field at a very early age.

At the age of thirteen he was sent to the gymnasium at Salzwedel, and in 1794 he moved to Berlin, where he continued his studies in the *Gymnasium Zum Grauen Kloster*. It is significant to note that it was difficult for a boy of his temperament to submit to the strict discipline of either school. Several years later, after secretly leaving Berlin, he went to Halle in order to study theology, although he felt no urgent call in this direction.

As a student Jahn pursued an unfettered life. The universal temptation to go roaming out into the world, happily termed *Wanderlust*, manifesting itself to an acute degree in his veins, he wandered about Germany with an observing eye, taking note of the country and its people, of their customs and manners, and of the various folk dialects and peculiarities. All this fostered a patriotic idealism in him which found expression in various pamphlets he issued at this period.

When the war between Prussia and France was renewed in 1806, Jahn hastened to join the army, but before he could realize his purpose, his Prussian compatriots had suffered a decisive defeat at the battle of Jena. This unhappy event had a crushing effect on the spirit of Jahn, whose hair turned gray over night in mental anguish over the terrible calamity. However, his optimism and faith in the ultimate success of Prussian arms reasserted itself in this period of gloom, for he

A Brief History of the

wrote with confidence of the time when all his hopes for a new, free and unified Germany would be realized.

In 1810 we find him teaching at the school which he himself had attended in his youth, the *Gymnasium Zum Grauen Kloster*, and later, in the same year, at the *Plamann Institute*. His most important book, "*Deutsches Volkthum*" (German Nationality), appeared at this time, and his plea for the unity of Germany was universally commented upon and heartily applauded. Furthermore, this year marks the beginning of his first practical attempts to introduce gymnastic exercises among his students, to infuse them with a patriotic love for freedom, to make them capable of bearing arms for their oppressed country, and to prepare them for the imminent war of liberation.

As noted above, the first public *Turnplatz* was opened by Jahn in the spring of the year 1811. The boys and young men of Berlin, five hundred strong, responded to his call and followed him to the *Hasenheide*, where they indulged in gymnastic exercises under his direction. In spite of the freedom which he accorded to his scholars, Jahn was a stern disciplinarian in many respects, and compelled them to maintain good order and to observe good manners.

On November 14th of that year, Jahn, Friesen and other men of like sympathies founded the *Deutschen Bund*, an organization with the purpose of defying the domination of their country by an alien power. The personnel of its membership was to be drawn from the German universities. This *Bund* inspired the founding of the *Deutsche Burschenhaft*, an association of students