

## Sahalie Historical Note #1: Our German Origins in the Turn Verein

Sahalie Ski Club, with a lodge located at Snoqualmie Pass, Washington, has its origins in the German gymnastics movement of the 1800s. Current club members have only a hazy understanding about why there is a separate Gymnastics Society that owns the land and the building at Snoqualmie Pass and how that relates to the ski club. Here is a short summary.

A German by the name of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn is considered the father of modern gymnastics and the originator of the gymnasiums found in schools and colleges, YMCAs and health clubs throughout Europe and North America. Back around 1811 he expounded his theories that “a sound body is a prime requisite for the abode of a sound mind,” and developed a system of physical and mental exercises called, in German, “turnen,” which means exercise or, specifically, gymnastics. The Turn Verein was established as an organization that promoted physical fitness, both outdoors in parks (turnplatz) and in buildings that are now called gyms. Turn Vereins (“gymnastics unions” or “athletic clubs”) were brought to America with German immigrants, especially around the 1850s, and spread West with the pioneers.<sup>1</sup>

The Seattle Turn Verein was organized in 1885 by local German-Americans for the “absolute necessity for physical exercise and social activities....”<sup>2</sup> The Verein had its first headquarters’ building, known as Turnhalle, at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. and Jefferson St. in Seattle. It was the only large hall to survive the great 1889 fire, so became the main venue for visiting music and theater shows in the 1890s. The Seattle Turn Verein Chorus sang during “German Day” at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in 1909.<sup>3</sup> The Turn Verein was commonly referred to as the “Turners.”



No logo from Seattle Turn Verein survives. Here are a few examples from other Vereins.

During World War I there were significant anti-German sentiments: “rabid war hysteria” in the words of one chronicler of the times.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the Seattle Turn Verein reorganized and changed its name to the Seattle Gymnastics Society in 1918. In the 1920s the Society had a headquarters building and gymnasium at a new Turnhalle located at 8<sup>th</sup> and Olive in downtown Seattle (just south of the current Greyhound terminal).<sup>5</sup> The Society appears to have been an all-male club; the women’s auxiliary was known as Turnschwestern.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to gymnastics, a subset of Society members were interested in skiing and made their way to Snoqualmie Pass either by train or, beginning in 1931, by the old road (U.S. route 10) when it began being plowed regularly. Many of these early skiers were actually ski jumpers, which was the first focus of skiing at the Pass. They cut a deal with the Northern Pacific Railway Company to purchase part of the “checkerboard” land given to the railroad as part of the U.S. government’s promotion of Western development.<sup>7</sup> (As an aside, Northern Pacific sold 900,000 acres of its checkerboard lands to a guy named Weyerhaeuser in 1900 for \$6 an acre! I wonder if Frederick W. was a member of a Turn Verein back in his then-home-town of St. Paul, Minnesota?)

They built the first portion of a lodge on this property in time for the 1931/’32 winter season, and finished it in the summer of ’32. The original deed to the land at the Pass was signed on July 15, 1932. Interestingly, the land was deeded to the Seattle Turn Verein at that time, even though it hadn’t officially gone by that name since 1918. It wasn’t until 1959 that the deed was corrected (or updated) to convey the land to the Seattle Gymnastics Society (newly reorganized based on long-time members of Sahalie); Northern Pacific Railway re-signed the deed in 1959 to ensure that the title and ownership were clearly transferred. I suspect that Stan Atwood Sr. was behind this move to ensure proper title.<sup>8</sup>

The ski club came out of the Ski Section of the Turners and was called the Commonwealth Ski Club (probably named after Commonwealth Creek which ran through the new property). Merle Throssell Patchell talks in her brief summary of Sahalie’s history (written in 1981)<sup>9</sup> about how she came up with the idea to rename the club Sahalie, using the Chinook Indian jargon word meaning high places, above, sky, top or uppermost. This name-change happened in 1936.<sup>10</sup> The Turnverein was noted in the newspapers in 1927 as “disposing of its own hall,”<sup>11</sup> which might explain how it was able to hire a prominent architect and build a ski lodge in 1931. The Turnverein Hall in Seattle was razed in 1930<sup>12</sup> and the “father” organization of the ski club seems to have gone into steep decline thereafter; it sponsored a soccer team through 1935 and still appeared in a list of German clubs in 1937, but its heyday had passed and it disappeared completely from further record.<sup>13</sup> Memory still lingered, at least through 1940, when Bill Smith’s membership card referred to “Sahalie Ski Club of the Seattle Turnverein.” That is the final reference to the old German organization that I can find.

The original lodge at the Pass burned to the foundation in 1943; it was rebuilt after the war. The ski club carried on, to this day.

Now back to the Turners. Turn Verein clubs abound today, especially in Germany where they are the dominant health club or equivalent of YMCAs or special gymnastics clubs; Google “turnverein” to see a ton of links and images from modern gymnastics clubs throughout Germany. In the U.S., the heyday of the Turn Vereins appears to have been from 1880 through the 1920s. A U.S. postage stamp was issued in 1948 commemorating the centennial of the Turners in this country (see photos at end of this article). Quite a few Turn Vereins are still well established, most often now going by the name Turners;



examples include the clubs in Milwaukee, WI (<http://www.milwaukeeeturners.org/>), Sacramento, CA (<http://www.sacramentoturnverein.com/>), Denver, CO (<http://www.denvertturnverein.org/>) and Springfield, MA (<http://rhb.110mb.com/>). The American Turners, based in Louisville, Kentucky, is the official national organization, coordinating tournaments and other events among 54 member clubs (see: <http://www.americanturners.com>). Both in Germany and in the States, many of these clubs are serious gymnastics promoters, boasting members who have gone on to compete in the Olympics. Many of them also are clearly social clubs as well as promoters of athletics. Sahalie fits well into this mosaic. Even though Rick Swanson tried to hijack its origins to fit a Scandinavian story in the late 1990s, Sahalie Ski Club and, even more, the Seattle Gymnastics Society are deeply rooted in Deutschland.

A good history of the Turn Vereins both in Germany and America appears in the Sacramento club's library: <http://www.sacramentoturnverein.com/history/history1.asp>.

For history of the Seattle Turn Verein, go to:  
<http://depts.washington.edu/heritage/Organizations/Clubs/turnverein.pdf>.

A list of German societies in Seattle in 1924 can be found at:  
<http://depts.washington.edu/heritage/Organizations/Clubs/gersoc.htm>.

- Dave Galvin

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[If you have any comments, corrections or additions to this historical note or if it brings back any old stories, please let me know, at [galvind53@gmail.com](mailto:galvind53@gmail.com) . I intend to keep updating and improving this record of our club and the history around us.]



The huge influx of German immigrants following the revolutions of 1848 in the German states marked the beginning of the American Turn Vereins or Turners. A U.S. postage stamp was issued in 1948 commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## DANCERS IN TURNVEREIN EXHIBITION TONIGHT



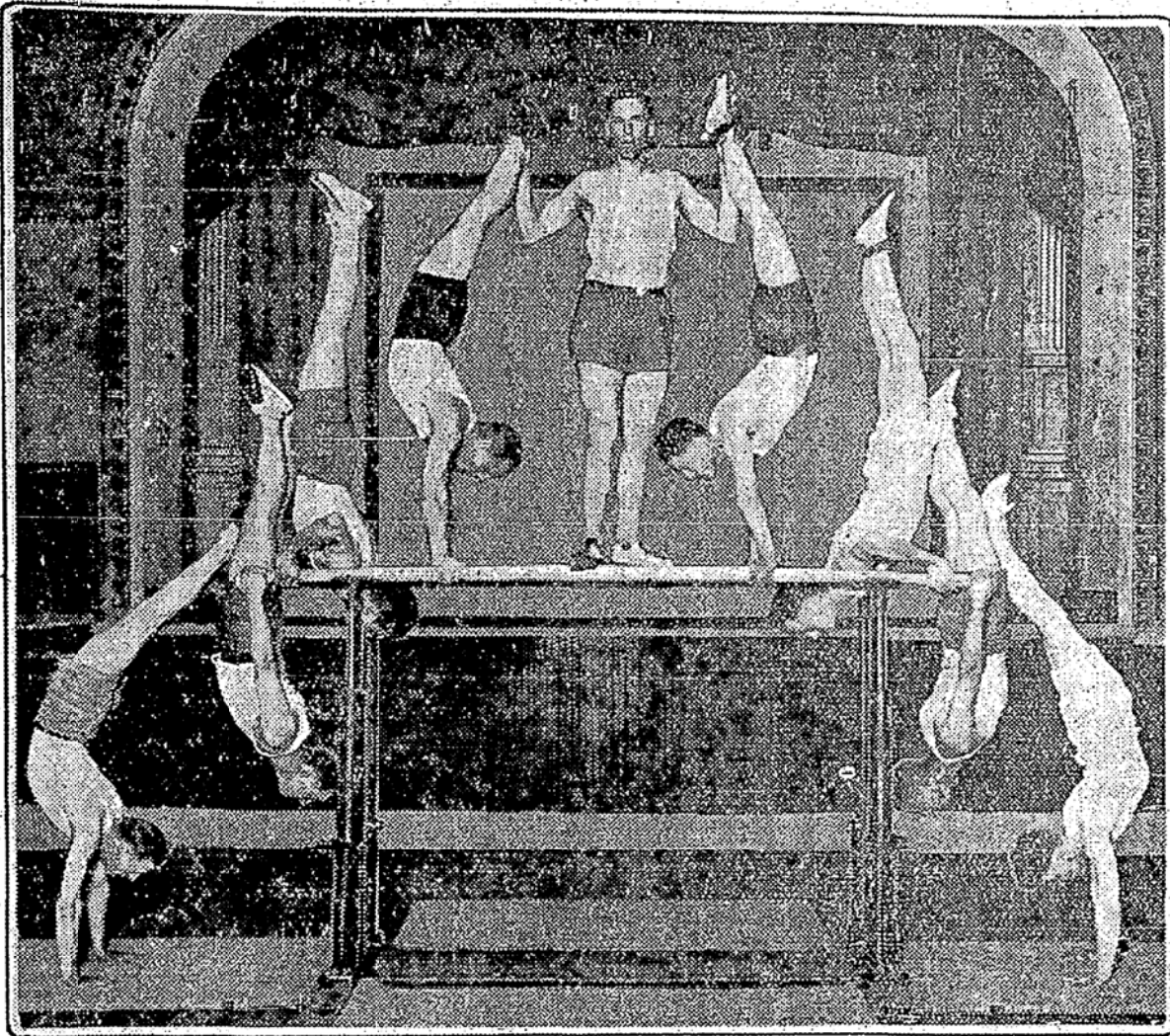
### Will Interpret "Peach Blossom Time."

A feature of the fortieth anniversary of the Seattle Turnverein, to be seen in its annual exhibition in the Masonic Temple this evening, will be a ballet number, "Peach Blossom Time," arranged to music from Johann Strauss' "Tales From a Vienna Wood." Among the dancers who will take part in it are (left to right) Marion Flagler, Herta Albrecht and Dora Vorwerk.

The Seattle Turners even did skits back in the day! (*Seattle Daily Times*, April 25, 1925, p. 2)



## TURNVEREIN TO PERFORM TONIGHT



Pyramid Group in Demonstration.

The Seattle Turnverein will give its annual demonstration at the Masonic Temple tonight. Calisthenics, drills, apparatus work and interpretative May dances are on the program. The photograph shows one of the pyramid groups.

Just think – these were the people who formed our ski club! (*Seattle Daily Times*, May 8, 1926, p. 5)

Just Cogitating:

# When Old Turner Hall Was Seattle's Only Theatre

By C. T. CONOVER

MY young friend, J. H. Newberger, vice president of the Seattle-First National Bank, was



clearing out his desk the other day, preparatory to retiring after 50 years of service, when he came across some old securities that recall historic memories. They are before me as I write.

There are three stock certificates for one share each in

C. T. CONOVER, the Seattle Turnverein, made out to Frauenthal Brothers, a pioneer merchandising firm whose partners were, incidentally, uncles of Joe Newberger. They are dated June 1, 1886, at Seattle, Washington Territory. They are signed by E. Steinie, president, and V. Hugo Smith, secretary, and are redeemable without interest "any time stock may be called in." There is also a promissory note, as follows:

\$50. Ellensburg, Yakima Co., W. T.

August 18, 1883

For value received the Seattle and Walla Walla Trail and Wagon Road Co. promises to pay the bearer, in tolls over its wagon road at regular tariff rates, the sum of fifty dollars.

Walter A. Bull, President

George H. Smith, Secretary

Attached to this document are 50 coupons good for \$1 each, in payment for tolls over the company's roads.

In the '80s the Seattle Turnverein, a German social and musical organization, was housed in an old frame building at the southwest corner of Fourth and Jefferson, where the park now is. When Frye's Opera House was destroyed in the great fire of 1889, Turnverein Hall was remodeled quickly to take care of the many touring attractions that made Seattle a one-night stand in those days. It reopened July 1, 1889, 24 days after the fire, as Turner Hall. J. Willis Sayre, veteran drama critic of the Post Intelligencer, worked there as a youngster folding programs to get to see the show. Charlie Thorndike was the head usher and Herbert Schoenfeld sold opera glasses.

LOOKING BACKWARD, that seems the golden era of the

theatre in Seattle. Seattle was noted as a good show town. No major attraction coming to the coast side-stepped us. I seem to remember among other stars at Turner Hall, Richard Mansfield, Joe Jefferson and others of equal distinction. Willis Sayre says I am mistaken about Mansfield and Jefferson and of course he knows, but he agrees that Turner Hall housed a constant succession of world-renowned artists, in fact, all the big names in the theatrical world. Emma Abbott, James A. Herne, Patti Rosa, Maggie Mitchell, Col. Smith Russell, E. H. Sothern, Katie Putnam, Clara Morris, Thomas W. Keene, Lotta Crabtree and many more played here. Incidentally, for several decades a marble fountain in memory of Lotta has stood at Third and Market in San Francisco.

Despite the fact that old Turner Hall was terrible as a theatre, it ran for ten years. The narrow balcony ran lengthwise of the hall and Charlie Thorndike used to call it the cigar box.

THE SEATTLE & WALLA WALLA Trail and Wagon Company was one step in the long struggle to keep a passable road open over Snoqualmie Pass. It was organized in 1883 with headquarters in Ellensburg, and it solved a problem that had perplexed the territory since early days. Then came the automobile and the Good Roads movement, and now we ride over the pass on high.

The Frauenthal brothers played their part in the early life of Seattle and I shall have something to say about them soon. They established one of the first general merchandise stores in Seattle.

I know of no place name with so many spelling variations as Enatai, a charming little community across the Sound near Bremerton. These authorities differ: Horatio Hale, explorer, 1841; Alexander C. Anderson, Hudson's Bay authority, 1857; James G. Swan, author and anthropologist, 1857; the book "Fraser River Gold Rush," 1858; Dr. George Gibbs, noted ethnologist, 1854; Theodore Winthrop in "Canoe and Saddle," 1863; J. K. Gill, 1852, and George C. Shaw, whose lexicon is a standard work. Incidentally, Enatai means across, beyond, outside or opposite to. Here are variants: Inatai, Eenatai, Enatie, Inite, Inati, Enetee, Inahtie and Enati.

(Seattle Daily Times, August 8, 1949, p. 13)

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<sup>1</sup> Shirley Reimer, (no date), "The Turn Verein Movement, Beginning in Germany," historical article posted by the Sacramento Turn Verein on-line at: <http://www.sacramentoturnverein.com/history/history1.asp> .

<sup>2</sup> Udo Hesse, (no date), "Seattle Turn Verein – A Branch of the American Turnerbund," historical article posted on-line by the University of Washington German Department at:  
<http://depts.washington.edu/heritage/Organizations/Clubs/turnverein.pdf> .

<sup>3</sup> Peter Blecha, 2008, "Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle Celebrates German Day on August 18, 2009," HistoryLink article, on-line at:  
[http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.historylink.org/db\\_images/Wolf-Bauer-Winning-Ski-Race-1933.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm%3FDisplayPage%3Doutput.cfm%26file\\_id%3D9440&h=391&w=260&sz=28&tbnid=YNqbRSdFfbqhwM:&tbnh=123&tbnw=82&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwolf%2Bbauer&zoom=1&q=wolf+bauer&hl=en&usq=tDr-W3y\\_OUmn4MRW0l0koBu7CYY=&sa=X&ei=437tTKnTBIf6swOgluS4Dw&ved=0CCYQ9QEwBQ](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.historylink.org/db_images/Wolf-Bauer-Winning-Ski-Race-1933.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm%3FDisplayPage%3Doutput.cfm%26file_id%3D9440&h=391&w=260&sz=28&tbnid=YNqbRSdFfbqhwM:&tbnh=123&tbnw=82&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwolf%2Bbauer&zoom=1&q=wolf+bauer&hl=en&usq=tDr-W3y_OUmn4MRW0l0koBu7CYY=&sa=X&ei=437tTKnTBIf6swOgluS4Dw&ved=0CCYQ9QEwBQ)

<sup>4</sup> Udo Hesse.

<sup>5</sup> Udo Hesse.

<sup>6</sup> "The Aims of the German Societies in Seattle," *Know Your Citizens: Pastorius Day Oct. 12, 1924, Souvenir Album & Program*, posted on-line by the University of Washington German Department, at:  
<http://depts.washington.edu/heritage/Organizations/Clubs/gersoc.htm> .

<sup>7</sup> Seattle Turn Verein purchased roughly two quarters of a quarter section, each parcel being approximately 40 acres; the lodge was built on the lower parcel, which included the valley floor as well as the first slope to the east.

<sup>8</sup> The original deed conveying the lower 45.3 acre parcel of land from the Northern Pacific Railway Company to the Seattle Turn Verein was dated July 15, 1932. It is recorded in Vol. 1839, Page 342 of the Records of King County. This deed mentions that a previous contract to convey the land was made between the parties on May 13, 1931. This explains how the original lodge was partially constructed and opened even before the official deed was signed. The price for the transaction was a grand total of \$250 – that's \$5.52 per acre, a better deal than Frederick Weyerhaeuser got in 1900! Times must have been tough for the railroad in 1931/'32. In order to ensure that the title was clear for the property, a "correction" deed was signed on March 27, 1959, and recorded in Vol. 3909, Page 287 of the Records of King County. This correction, signed once again by the Northern Pacific Railway Company, conveyed the land to the Seattle Gymnastic Society, for a sum of \$25, which ups the original cost to \$6 per acre.

<sup>9</sup> Merle Throssell Patchell, 1981, "A Capsule History of Sahalie," included in the November 1981 issue of the *Sahalie Sentinel*.

<sup>10</sup> The last mention of Commonwealth Ski Club in the *Seattle Daily Times* was July 11, 1936. The first mention of Sahalie Ski Club ("formerly known as Commonwealth Ski Club") appears on October 23, 1936.

<sup>11</sup> "Eagles and Turnverein Unite in Use of Hall," *Seattle Daily Times*, September 9, 1927, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> "Turnverein to Save Cornerstone Papers," *Seattle Daily Times*, August 12, 1930, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> There was mention of building a clubhouse in the city for the Ski Section in 1933, but nothing seems to have come of the proposal, and the Turn Verein completely disappeared by the late 1930s; "Clubhouse Plans Before Ski Group," *Seattle Daily Times*, May 14, 1933, p. 15.