

LOUISVILLE TURNERS.

History of the Society, With a
Successful Record in War
and in Peace.

The Local Turngemeinde, Organized in
1850 By Wm. Voss, Charles
Franke and Wm. Staengel.

Louisville has the distinction of furnishing one of the oldest societies for the National Turnfest which begins at Cincinnati to-morrow. The Louisville Turngemeinde, as now constituted, was organized September 2, 1850, at a time when a large and healthy influx of immigration added materially to the population of the city, then only in the first stages of its infancy compared with its growth during the last two decades. The revolution of 1848 had virtually destroyed the flower of Germany. Those not killed in action, executed or imprisoned, fled to France, Switzerland or the United States, where, especially in the latter country, they have found homes and proved themselves citizens worthy of that liberty which they attempted to obtain for their own fatherland. A great many of those immigrants from the revolutionary period referred to began organizing Turner societies and propagating their principles. William Voss, one of the most prominent German citizens of Louisville and who was the originator of the plan for the erection of a marble monument to the memory of Kentucky's fallen Union soldiers in Cave Hill Cemetery, for which a fund has been subscribed, for a time acted as instructor for the new society. Equally energetic in the matter of assisting the new organization to success were Mr. Charles Franke and William Staengel, both yet enthusiastic Turners. On the evening of September 2, 1850, the Society was formally organized, and at a banquet given in honor of the Turners at Mrs. Fruihofer's, on Market street, near Third, Mr. Staengel made an eloquent address setting forth the principles of the new Turngemeinde. Of course money was not very plentiful, but Mrs. Fruihofer was liberal enough to have a suitable hall erected at her own expense for the use of the gymnasts. The Society grew steadily, notwithstanding the fact that it had to contend with a great many reverses. Some of the German citizens called the Turners sneeringly, the "Men of '48," while Americans dubbed them "White Jackets," but the Society had come to stay.

The first Turn Festival took place June 28, 1852, on Stein & Zink's farm, and it was a great success. Delegates had come from Cincinnati and other cities, and the daring feats of the German gymnasts proved a matter of agreeable surprise to those who had thus far been moved by prejudice in sneering at their undertaking. A second fest was held May 29, 1853, at the same place, and everybody was greatly pleased. During August of the same year fourteen members of the society undertook a tramp to Madison, Ind., a distance of forty-five miles, and this is described by those who participated in it as one of the most enjoyable as well as adventurous trips ever made in this part of the country under similar conditions. In 1854 a new hall with permanent quarters was erected on Floyd street, between Market and Main, and here a great many of the most renowned German-American citizens have, for a time at least, departed themselves as regular gymnasts. There was Carl Heintzen, the celebrated free-thinker, Has-sannek, who did not even dream that he would some day be appointed Minister by President Lincoln, and many others. Two years later this hall was destroyed by fire, and in 1858 the society purchased the ground on which its present hall is located, on Jefferson street, near Preston. A Catholic church was erected on it at that time, and this edifice was remodeled into a suitable hall by Architect Schoen. Up to this time the Turners had not taken part in any political canvass, but when the Republican party was called into existence they supported Van Buren and Lincoln for President. At the breaking out of the war thirty-five members of the society enlisted, and from 1861 to 1864 the society had really ceased to exist. The hall was used for a hospital, and hundreds of wounded soldiers have there been nursed back to health.

At the close of the war the National Confederation of Turn Societies was effected at a meeting held in the city of Washington for the purpose of having annual contests, and under the auspices of this Confederation the coming National Festival will be had. At present the Confederation consists of 250 societies, with an aggregate membership of 30,000. In its schools are being educated 25,000 children, and they, too, participate in gymnastic exercises. The motto of the Turnerbund is, "Meno sana in corpore sano."

A large delegation from each of the Turner societies, the Louisville Turngemeinde and the Turnverein Vorwarts, leaves for Cincinnati to-day, to take part in the annual festival of the Turners' Union of the United States, which begins in that city to-morrow. Eighteen men from the former society, and fifteen from the latter, will contest for the prizes that will be offered on the occasion.