

HISTORIC PRESERVATION STUDY REPORT

TURNER HALL

(Written Winter 1986)

I. NAME

Historic: Turnverein Milwaukee

Common: Turner Hall

II. LOCATION

1034 North Fourth Street

Tax Key Number: 361-0520-000

Legal Description: Original plat of the town of Milwaukee West of the river in Section (20 & 29)-7-22, Block 47, Lots 6 & 7.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Milwaukee Turner Society
1034 North Fourth Street
Milwaukee, WI 53203

V. YEAR BUILT

1882; 1899

Architect: Henry C. Koch (1882)
Henry G. Lotter & Henry Mollerus (1899)

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Turner Hall is a three-story, deck-on-hip roofed, rectangular, cream brick clubhouse in the High Victorian Romanesque Style. The massive 100 x 150 structure occupies almost its entire lot. The only architecturally articulated elevation faces North Fourth Street. The other three sides are utilitarian in character. They are constructed of common brick, devoid of ornamental features and have segmentally arched fenestration unsymmetrical arranged to correspond with floor plan requirements.

The principal west façade is imposing and symmetrical in character. The cream-colored brick walls are enlivened with red brick banding and accents and extensive limestone banding and trim. It is composed of three projecting pavilions including a pair of identical gabled ones flanking a massive central entrance pavilion that terminates in a pyramidal-roofed, dormered

tower above the roofline. The numerous tall, narrow, one-over-one, wooden windows sash with transoms are variously accented with stone and red brick banding and ornamental spandrel panels. The fenestration on the first and third floors has arched +, while the rest has massive stone lintels. The building has been little altered from its original state except for the main entrance, which had the original arched portal removed and replaced with plain Lannon stone facing in 1958. The first floor windows were filled with glass block at the same time.

To the north is the one-bay wide, 2-story, flat roofed addition made in 1899. It was designed to imitate the design of the original south bay.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

Turner Hall is architecturally significant as an excellent and rare surviving example of a High Victorian Romanesque Style clubhouse by leading Milwaukee architect Henry C. Koch. It is primarily of historical significance as the home of Milwaukee Turners since January of 1883. The Milwaukee Turner Society was an important force in the intellectual and social life of Milwaukee from the time of its founding in 1853 into the twentieth century. It is one of the oldest still active Turner Societies in the country.

VIII. HISTORY

In 1848 the first Turner Societies were founded in the United States in Cincinnati by German immigrants who believed in the concept of training the mind and body together. The name Turner is shortened from the German word "Turnverein" which is derived from "Turnkunst" which means the "art of gymnastics." The Turner movement traces its origins to Berlin, Germany, where liberal thinker Frederick Jahn established Germany's first modern gymnastics union in 1811. His method incorporated a program of systematic physical training in tandem with rigorous intellectual stimulation. The creed of the Turners was based on concepts of liberty, reason and tolerance formally stated as, "Free speech, free press, free assembly for discussion of all questions so that men and woman may think unfettered and order their lives by the dictates of conscience." In addition to physical training and purely intellectual pursuits, the Turner's promoted music, literature, drama and the principles of freedom. Originally known as "Sozialer Turnverein," the Milwaukee Turner Society was organized in 1853. This was preceded by two earlier attempts to establish a Turner Society, the first in 1850 by Edward Schultz whose group disbanded with the same year, and the second in 1852 by a group called Teutonia that was also short lived. Other organizations founded about the same time as the Milwaukee Turners were the Frei Gemeinde (Free Congregation) established in 1851 and the Verein Freier Manner (Society of Free Men) established in 1853. These were the three major local "free thinker" organizations, which largely drew their initial memberships from the exiles of the 1848 German Revolution.

In July of 1853 these three organizations formed an umbrella union call the "Bund Freier Menschen" or the Federation of Free People. Because of apparent duplication of functions between the union and the individual organizations, and the obstructionist tendencies on the part of some union members, it disbanded quietly in the winter of 1854. Also in that year, the Free Congregation (Frei Gemeinde) merged with the Society of Free Men. Many prominent members of both organizations left to join the Turners. The Frei Gemeinde Society existed well into the twentieth century, but the Turners are the only one of these three original freethinker societies to survive to the present. The original Frei Gemeinde Society Hall (razed) was also located on North Fourth Street, a block south of Turner Hall. At that time, the neighborhood was the center of Milwaukee's German community.

The original membership of the Turners was exclusively German. Their first meeting was held on July 18, 1853 in Phillips Hall on Market Square. Twenty-one men, all exiles from the 1848 Revolution, signed the first charter. The first gymnastics tournament was held in August with the Mequon Turner Society, and by the end of 1853 the membership had grown to over 100. Gymnastic exercises were conducted on a regular basis at Bielfeld's Beer Garden, present site of the Abbot Row Houses on East Ogden Avenue, and later at Mozart Hall. In 1857 Milwaukee hosted the National Turnfest of the American Turnerbund. The first permanent Turner Hall was constructed in 1864 two lots south of the present building. The 1864 building has been razed.

The Civil War years interrupted the Turner's growing momentum. They were against slavery, considering it "unworthy of a republic and not in accord with the principles of freedom." In keeping with these principles, the Milwaukee Turnverein organized a battalion of forty sharpshooters that was augmented to 105 by Turners from other Wisconsin Turner Societies and formed part of the 5th Wisconsin Regiment as Company C, Turner Rifles.

After the Civil War, the Turners entered their golden era as an organization and branches were set up in other parts of the city, although none survive today. In 1868 a woman's auxiliary was founded. The Turners also succeeded in getting physical education incorporated as a part of local public school education in 1874. The Milwaukee Turners provided the headquarters for the National Turnlehrer Seminar, or gymnastics teacher-training institute from 1875 to 1888 and again from 1892 to 1907, with actual instruction carried out at the nearby German-English Academy where teachers were trained to work for Turner societies nationwide. The Milwaukee Turners also participated in international turnfests as well as national meets and distinguished themselves as prizewinners. They received first place awards in 1873 at Cincinnati; in 1875 at New York; in 1879 at Philadelphia; and in 1880 at the International Festival held at Frankfurt-on-Main, Germany. It was during this period that the Turners constructed the present hall at 1034 North Fourth Street. Of High Victorian Romanesque design, the new hall formally opened on January 21, 1883. In addition to gymnastic activities, Turner Hall also housed a large singing society and a dramatic section, both expressions of the Turners' love of music, poetry, literature and drama.

In this century, World Wars I and II and the resultant anti-German sentiment did much to diminish the importance of the Milwaukee Turner Society. However, prior to World War I, the Turners were regarded as a force for social and political reform. In the wake of Milwaukee's era of political corruption during the administration of Mayor David S. Rose, the Turners led the reform movement and had an important role in the investigation into corrupt government practices. In 1903 the Turners called a mass meeting of reformers which led to the appointment of a "Citizen's Committee of Ten." It was this group, largely constituted of Turner members, that prepared the way for the grand jury indictments of officials in the Rose administration.

Between the wars, the Turners enjoyed a brief revival in popularity after the anti-German sentiment of the World War I era subsided. The fabulous third floor "gold" ballroom of Turner Hall, that took its name from the shimmering gold leaf used in its decoration, was an important city social institution of the late teens and twenties. A disastrous fire in December 26, 1934 destroyed Turner Hall's roof, and to some extent, the ballroom. The advent of World War II and the renewed anti-German sentiment almost put an end to the Turners. Politics, particularly socialism, which played a major role in the Turner organization in the nineteenth century, is no longer an important activity. With the renewed national emphasis on physical fitness in recent years, the gymnastics instruction offered by the Turners has significantly increased membership over the last decade.

The architect of Turner Hall, Henry C. Koch, was a leading Milwaukee architect in the nineteenth century. Koch designed some of the city's most notable buildings for German-American clients, including many costly residences and commercial buildings for wealthy merchants and industrialists. The Pfister Hotel, Milwaukee City Hall and Gesu Church are some of his better-known works.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that Turner Hall appears to satisfy criteria 1, 3, 5 and 6 of the Ordinance, 2-335(2)(e).

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to Turner Hall. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural stone and unpainted brick. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintain the building's character and appearance.
- b. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds, sills, doors, and hardware, except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate material such as glass block or the installation of plastic or metal awnings or shutters. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of double hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There shall be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance.

E. Additions

The west elevation is integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principle elevations.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

The installation of any permanent exterior sign or light fixture shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building.