

Portland-Seattle Turnverein Special Train

By Hans Niklas

The Portland *Turnverein* was the local chapter of the German American athletic (gymnastic) association. *Turnverein*, coined after the German word *turnen*, or physical exercise, was the name given to physical education clubs in Germany and the United States and members were subsequently referred to as *Turners*. This 1913 photograph shows the Portland/Seattle *Turnverein* (P.S.T.V.) decorated railcar bound for the Denver *Turnfest*, the celebrated national gymnastics competition that hosted *Turnverein* gymnasts from across the United States and Germany to compete.

In addition to their focus on physical education and gymnastics, Turners served as a civic and social association and were involved deeply in liberal thought and a range of social issues. The *turnverein* movement was brought to the United States by German political refugees in the late 1840s and Portland's *Turnverein* opened in 1872 on the third floor of the New Market Theatre. Here, *Turners* sometimes hosted events such as a post-parade Thanksgiving dinner for volunteer firefighters as they did in 1878. The Portland *Turnverein* also supported Portland's *Gesangverein*, or singing associations, which promoted the cultivation of German music, song, and culture among Portland's German immigrant community.

Further Reading: Snyder, Eugene E. *Skidmore's Portland*. Portland, Oreg., 1973.

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