

Germans Construct Original Turner Hall in Monroe

The cornerstone for the first Turner Hall in Monroe was laid at 2:00 p.m. on April 27, 1868 with a large crowd present. H. Medberry made a short speech explaining the objectives of the organization, the purpose of the new hall, and the prospects of its early completion. He praised the German Turners for their enterprise and urged all citizens to aid in pushing the good work ahead. People were then invited to deposit their mementos in the box; many stepped forward with coins, silver, copper, specimens of currency, papers belonging to the organization, copies of the Sentinel, and more. Three cheers of "Gut Heil" were given before the American Cornet Band played some excellent music. The ball that evening was a large gathering.

The editor complimented this project by writing, "The Turners have manifested a great degree of enterprise in the project now under way, and the monied men of this village owe it to themselves, to the town, and to the Society named, to lay a hand to the superstructure upon the foundation already made. And when this new, and to be elegant Hall is completed, our citizens will acknowledge the utility and the fullest supply of one of Monroe's greatest needs."

The only update on construction was on May 27 when it stated that the hall "was progressing finely, the foundation being nearly completed, and the timbers and considerable of the lumber is upon the ground. From indications, the building will be a splendid one."

It was announced on July 8 that they expected more than 1,000 Turners to come to Monroe the next month for a German National Festival, dedicated to science, gymnastics, and song. Although not as large as anticipated, the fourth annual session of the Wisconsin Turners' Association was held here for three days, August 19 - 21, with more than 400 in attendance. Another full column could be written about this event.

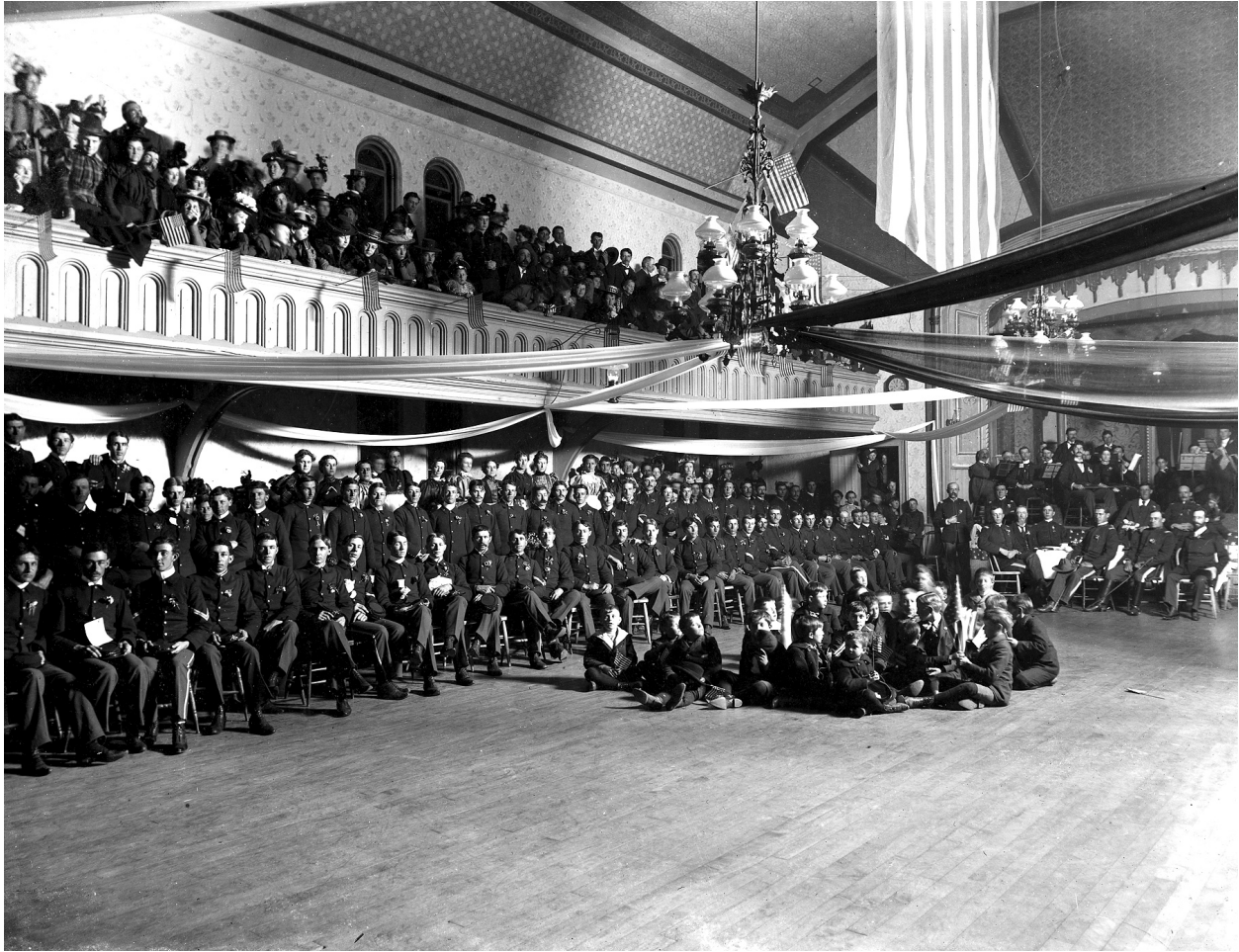
While the members were planning for that large event, work continued on their building. The hall was "so far completed as to be fit for the purpose" of a dedication ball, which was held on July 27. The editor, again, commented, "Our Turner friends are persevering and industrious in devising and carrying out their plans, and to their endeavors will Monroe be indebted for one of the largest and best public halls in the State." The hall was not crowded for the Monday night dedication, "but there was a fair attendance, good music, and as pleasant a dance as could have been expected [with] this warm weather." The hall was tastefully fitted up and couples paid two dollars for the evening.

The plasterers were still "putting the finishing touches to their part of the work" inside the building in late November. The hall was open to the public for a lecture by a Mr. Abbott on Saturday, November 28. The editor gave us an idea of how uncomfortable life had been for residents by adding, "It is furnished with comfortable chairs, and an audience can sit through the evening without suffering the excruciating torture which should be inflicted only upon great criminals."

The "first ball of the season" was held at the new hall on December 9 under the management of the Turnverein. Music was provided by the Monroe String Band with the public being invited. The work inside the hall was still not completed as a scenic painter was to arrive in Monroe on December 12 to "fit up the stage of that splendid Hall in good style."

Two scenic artists from Chicago, Chambers and Gunning, had almost completed the work two days before Christmas. "The Proscenium is beautifully frescoed with appropriate designs - a figure of Tragedy on one side and Comedy on the other, with a group representing Music, Fame, etc., in the center." The work was to be finished by the end of the month. The public would be able to see it for the first time when the Dramatic Association gave their opening performance on New Year's Night.

As with all buildings, maintenance and changes need to be made often. A new drop curtain with a landscape view was being painted by Professor Burgachardt in May 1879. "Radical improvements in the hall" were planned for the spring of 1882. The stage was to be made wider and longer and the dressing rooms were to be arranged on the side of the stage. New scenery was also to be added. The Turnverein was again busy in July 1884 attempting to sell subscriptions to do some more decorating of the walls and repaint the woodwork. By the middle of August, the work was progressing favorably; Mr. Stearns had the contract and Ed Faubel was doing the work. The hall was "newly shingled so as to prevent any soiling of the ceilings. The colors are warm and very pretty and the designs artistic." The hall was re-opened on September 24 with a grand concert and social dance.



This photo of the Monroe's Company H was taken in April 1898 and shows how beautiful the inside of the original Turner Hall was. This was at a farewell event for the men before they left for the Spanish-American War, where they had been "treated to a feast of music and a fine spread of good things to eat at their armory in Turner hall."

By October 1885 the Turners had "expended considerable money on their Hall and fitted up the basement in fine style, with an elegant dining hall, kitchen, restaurant, ladies toilet room, etc.; new floors have been put down. The dining hall is very convenient and is nicely papered and painted." Three years later they had their hall lighted with "a complete outfit of incandescent electric lamps with separate cut-offs for foot-lights," making a decided improvement to be appreciated by all patrons.

Water service pipes were being installed into the hall by Mr. C. B. Churchill in February 1891. The 1891 city directory stated, "the building had been improved and re-modeled at various times, involving a total outlay of about \$15,000, and is now one of the best public halls in Southern Wisconsin."

The building described here served the community, helping to make memories for a large number of community members, until it was destroyed by fire on September 6, 1936. Plans to build the current building started almost immediately with the dedication being held on February 17, 1938.