

# Point Comfort's research on the South Side Turnverein Hall

## Credits for photos:

Ratio Architects:

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<https://iuidigital.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/SSTurners/search>

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Indiana Landmarks Historic Archive

<https://iuidigital.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/IHAS>

Indiana Landmarks Article/Evan Hale:

<https://www.indianalandmarks.org/2019/01/south-side-turnverein-enters-new-chapter/>

Nuvo/Dan Grossman:

[https://www.nuvo.net/arts/southside-turnverein-reopens-after-renovation/article\\_9da09cf8-e6ec-11e8-9f26-2b1b3c1df371.html](https://www.nuvo.net/arts/southside-turnverein-reopens-after-renovation/article_9da09cf8-e6ec-11e8-9f26-2b1b3c1df371.html)

Indianapolis Star/Matt Detrich

<https://www.indystar.com/story/entertainment/music/2017/04/21/indianapolis-metal-taps-live-mona-demaggio-shannon-wood-bombshell-lyfestile/100697442/>

Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Side\\_Turnverein\\_Hall#/media/File:South\\_Side\\_Turnverein\\_Hall.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Side_Turnverein_Hall#/media/File:South_Side_Turnverein_Hall.jpg)

Getty Images

<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/scene-in-a-turner-gymnasium-news-photo/517453848>

Drawing Depicting Patrons of a Turner Gymnasium

## **Indiana Landmarks article about Turnverein unveiling:**

<https://www.indianalandmarks.org/2019/01/south-side-turnverein-enters-new-chapter/>

### **Headline: South Side Turnverein Enters New Chapter**

#### **Stunning Turnaround:**

In November, 2018, a crowd celebrated the grand opening of Indianapolis's South Side Turnverein, a former 10 Most Endangered entry, as the headquarters for Point Comfort Underwriters, a medical claims management organization and international travel insurance company. The adaptive use of the German social club and gym is exactly what we aim for when we put landmarks on our 10 Most Endangered list.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Indianapolis's German-American community hired architects Vonnegut & Bohn to create a clubhouse where they could practice the "sound bodies and sound mind" principles of Friedrich Jahn, who believed physical exercise and cultural activities led to a healthy life. The firm led by Bernard Vonnegut and Arthur Bohn, both sons of athletic and German immigrants, had already designed Das Deutsche Haus (later known as The Athenaeum), a downtown turnverein.

Built in 1900 at 306 Prospect Street, the red brick building contained a gym bordered by a proscenium stage usable for athletics and suitable for performances and social gatherings, with a bowling alley and pub on the level below. The firm recruited Austrian Rudolf Schwarz, who had created the limestone sculptural groups for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, to produce an allegorical sculpture group for the west gable.

The South Side Turnverein served its intended purpose for decades, until membership dropped off and the club sold the building in 1977. While a tavern operated in the lower level and the gym rented to basketball leagues, the slim revenue led to slow demolition by neglect.

Point Comfort Underwriters owners William Atkins and Betsy Brougher have a serial adaptive use track record. They previously located their businesses in historic venues, rehabilitating the former Harry Wood Vocational Training School and Indianapolis Public School No. 9 for their enterprises. Most recently located at the Stutz Business Center in the historic Stutz automobile factory, the pair was on the hunt for a building to accommodate their growing company when the South Side Turnverein caught their eye. The appeal came from the club's historic character and its easy access to interstates, parking, walking distance to restaurants, and proximity to the revitalizing Bates-Hendricks neighborhood.

“The bones of this building were so strong and sturdy, its architectural elements and quality of craftsmanship so incredibly enduring that it was amazing,” says Atkins. “I always felt somewhat stifled in traditional work environments. Here, the environment creates a workplace where people can see room for expanding and advancement, where they can be passionate about their work.”

Indianapolis architecture firm RATIO worked with Point Comfort Underwriters on the comprehensive rehabilitation, which qualified for the federal Historic Tax Credit, pursued by the company at Indiana Landmarks' recommendation. After added walls and dropped ceilings came down, original features were revealed, including a pressed metal ceiling and historic windows that brought daylight to the center of the building.

They rebuilt a grand staircase disassembled by previous owners, installed an energy-efficient heating and cooling system, and reopened the stage, boxed in for a racquetball court in the '80s. They restored the building's historic windows, more than 150 in all, and the character-defining cupola that hadn't seen attention for 117 years. Original blueprints from Vonnegut & Bohn, along with physical clues uncovered along the way, guided the rehabilitation.

Conservators declared the crumbling stucco sculpture by Schwarz, with metal bars protruding from headless figures, too damaged to save. In its studio in the historic laundry building at Indianapolis's Central State Hospital, Ignition Arts used the remnants and historic photographs to replicate the sculpture in fiberglass—much lighter and therefore friendlier than the original to the historic brick wall. The owner plans to display fragments of the original as artwork inside the building.

The South Side Turnverein merges the best of old and new. The former gymnastics hall with its 33-foot ceiling and abundance of daylight provides a space for collaboration among Point Comfort Underwriters' workforce. The owners expect the landmark to remain a gathering space, hosting community events in underutilized spaces after business hours.

“The spatial environment had to work and at the same time, the history was of equal importance to us,” says Atkins. “It's always great to have the opportunity to save something in a way that allows you to have a conversation with the past.”

It's a 10 Most turnaround worth celebrating. See the rejuvenated space for yourself when Indiana Landmarks hosts a Landmark Look on March 2 from 3-5 p.m.

## **Ignition Arts website (info on how they redid the facade):**

<https://www.ignitionarts.com/projects/southside-turnverein-facade>

Designed by Bernard Vonnegut Sr, the Indianapolis Southside Turnverein building was listed as one of Indiana's most endangered architectural works. The building was purchased by Betsy Brougher and William Atkins, owners of Point Comfort Underwriters for use as their business headquarters. They successfully advocated to have the building placed on the National Historic Register. A crucial component of the building's rehabilitation was a complete restoration of the Rudolph Schwarz relief on the building facade. After inspection it was determined that the sculpture could not be saved. Ignition Arts was given permission from the National Parks to create a replica of the sculpture, working from the remains of the relief and just a few photographs of the original facade. Ignition Arts worked with preservationists from Ratio Architects to recreate the work in clay and cast in fiberglass and resin composite with a stainless-steel frame.

## **Nuvo article about Turnverein reopening:**

[https://www.nuvo.net/arts/southside-turnverein-reopens-after-renovation/article\\_9da09cf8-e6ec-11e8-9f26-2b1b3c1df371.html](https://www.nuvo.net/arts/southside-turnverein-reopens-after-renovation/article_9da09cf8-e6ec-11e8-9f26-2b1b3c1df371.html)

### **Headline: Southside Turnverein Reopens After Renovation**

#### **Sub-headline:**

Historic Vonnegut building saved from historic site "most endangered" list

On Nov. 9, 2018, a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Southside Turnverein building at 306 Prospect inaugurated the 118-year-old building for use as the new headquarters as Point Comfort Underwriters.

The company, which specializes in health-care management products and international insurance, was previously located in the Stutz Business and Arts Center.

But the company owners saw an opportunity in undertaking a multi-million dollar renovation of the 21,000 sq. ft., three-story building that had originally served as a gymnastics club for the large German-American community in Indianapolis at the outset of the 20th century.

In recent years the building had fallen into serious disrepair, and had made Indiana Landmarks' 10 most endangered list.

Betsy Brougher, who owns Point Comfort Underwriters with her husband Will Atkins, introduced Indianapolis mayor Joe Hogsett who gave brief remarks, but not before talking at some length about the history of the building. She also noted that Bernard Vonnegut—grandfather of Indianapolis-born writer Kurt Vonnegut—designed the building.

"In 1900 the Southside Turnverein [gymnastics club] purchased this parcel for \$5,000," said Brougher. "And they retained the firm of Vonnegut and Bohn and construction began in June 1900 and construction was completed in November of the same year. The first opening of this building was held on January 21, 1901, and it was reported in the daily news, I think it was still the Indianapolis News. They reported that 3,000 people attended this event, which seems kind of crazy."

Vonnegut and Bohn also designed the better-known Athenaeum, which was originally known as Das Deutsche Haus, and also served as a German social club.

The Southside Turnverein building, Brougher said, had a colorful history.

'It was designed to seat about 800 people," Brougher said. "Clearly that was before the Board of Health. It was frequently full for dance theatrical performances and of course gymnastics. Downstairs was a social gathering place with meals political speeches and, of course, beer."

World War I dealt a body blow to the Turnverein movement in Indianapolis, and elsewhere in the United States.

"By 1918, anti-German sentiment in the United States became very intense and the Turnverein organization began to decline during this period," she said. "German-Americans were trying to distance themselves from their heritage and reaffirm their Americanization. But this building remained a major community landmark."

On Oct. 4, 1960, then senator, and future president, John F. Kennedy made a campaign speech in the building.

It was "on the stage where our break room is today, to multiple standing ovations," she said. "John F. Kennedy spoke about the affordability of college; he talked about the high cost of medical care; he talked about the consequences of illness caused by drinking polluted water. And I thought that was so interesting because it's so close to what we're still working on today."

The building remained in Turnverein hands until it was sold to Tony Elrod in 1977, who turned part of the second floor into a basketball court. From that point on it was known as the Madison Avenue Athletic Club Inc.

The lower floor operated as Fifth Quarter Lounge, which from 2014 operated as a heavy metal club.

It "featured bands such as Five Finger Death Punch, Dead Horse Trauma, and my favorite lounge, and my favorite, Johnny Vomit," said Brougher. "In 2015 the Fifth Quarter Lounge was voted best small venue for live music by NUVO Magazine."

According to the Indianapolis Business Journal, Atkins and Brougher's Comfort Properties LLC bought the property in July, 2016 for \$950,000. The operators of Fifth Quarter Lounge were given notice to vacate before renovations began.

One person who recalls imbibing in the Fifth Quarter Lounge, is Mayor Joe Hogsett, who injected a humorous note into the ceremonials.

"This building has housed many enterprises, a German cultural center [and] the two bowling alleys that Betsy referred to," he said. "The only thing that she referred to in her recitation of the history that even mildly offended me was the fact that she recalled how many people had approached her about their uncle or their father played basketball at the Madison Ave athletic club," he said. "Well, I played basketball at the Madison Avenue Athletic Club and I am a father and I am an uncle," he said emphatically.

But he mostly sounded a more serious tone talking about how the acquisition of the building and its renovation, led by Ratio Architects, was a milestone of revitalization for the city of Indianapolis.

"We are in a very intentional and purposeful way trying to leverage the success and amenities of downtown back into own neighborhoods, particularly those neighborhoods that are contiguous and are readily and easily accessible to the downtown area," he said.

Brougher also introduced Bates-Hendricks Association Neighborhood Association president Laura Giffel, who Brougher said, welcomed the renovation "with open arms." The association, said Giffel, was actively involved in projects to improve the neighborhood.

"We're working on a dog park, close to here," Giffel said. "We're working on a community park, We're low on parks with the massive amount of young children moving into our neighborhood."

It was Brougher, however, who seemed to speak most eloquently and passionately about the renovation project and what it means in Bates-Hendricks and beyond.

"Preservation merges art with craftsmanship; it combines progressive ideas with cultural heritage; it balances capitalism with tradition and authenticity," she said. "It's a way of celebrating local customs while conserving taxpayer dollars protecting our natural environment, preserving an historic building and using existing infrastructure to serve today's demand is where commercial responsibility intersects with environmental responsibility. Preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present."

Dan Grossman  
Updated Dec 18, 2022

## **Indy Star op-ed about Turnverein building rehab:**

<https://www.indystar.com/story/opinion/2018/05/04/historic-landmark-reborn-indys-southside/581752002/>

### **Headline: Historic landmark reborn on Indy's Southside**

One of the Southside's most imposing landmarks is undergoing a rebirth, thanks to Point Comfort Underwriters, a company specializing in international insurance and health-care management products.

The former Southside Turnverein, 306 E. Prospect St., is being rehabilitated and adapted for use as Point Comfort's headquarters.

In 1890, 18% of the population of Indianapolis were German immigrants or descendants, and German Americans in the city organized societies that preserved the culture, traditions and language of the mother country. Among the most valued organizations were turnverein (gymnastic clubs), which constructed halls in which the philosophy of Friedrich Jahn could be practiced.

Jahn promoted "sound bodies and sound minds," and the clubs cultivated sound bodies through extensive gymnastics and physical fitness exercises and games. They promoted sound minds through cultural activities, including drama, music, lectures and discussions. The principal turnverein organization in Indianapolis constructed Das Deutsche Haus (now Athenaeum) on East Michigan Street during the 1890s. The Southside Germans, many of whom lived in the neighborhoods immediately south of Downtown, desired their own club. Under the determined leadership of Henry Victor, the Southside Turnverein constructed their hall in 1900 on Prospect Street, designed by architects Bernard Vonnegut and Arthur Bohn.

The new building was constructed of pressed brick on a limestone foundation and contained on the main floor a large gymnasium that also functioned as an auditorium with a stage. In the first floor below, bowling alleys and several kneipe, or dining rooms, were housed. On the west gable outside was a Baroque-style sculpture honoring Friedrich Jahn by Austrian sculptor Rudolf Schwarz. The Southside club offered classes in gymnastics and sponsored periodic gymnastic contests.

From a high point in the 1930s of 400 members, the Southside Turnverein declined in membership as the old German families left the neighborhoods, and expressways were built around the building. In 1978, the club sold the building, and it was converted into an athletic club. In recent years, the building had deteriorated and needed major repairs. Indiana Landmarks placed the Southside Turnverein on its "10 Most Endangered List."



To the rescue came Betsy Brougher and William Atkins, owners of Point Comfort Underwriters. Brougher and Atkins are using the federal historic rehabilitation tax credit as part of the financing for the project and are taking care to preserve features of the exterior and interior, including repair of the 200 wooden windows. On the exterior, they plan to create a replica of the Schwarz sculpture, which had badly deteriorated.

Why did they pick an old building for their corporate home? Atkins says that he does not like new buildings — they feel too confining. The turnverein building has history and character. In addition, the open spaces in the building are perfect in providing flexible work areas for their 42 employees and can easily be modified for the company's future needs. The building's location near the interstate make recruiting easier in a tight labor market. Point Comfort will be able to draw workers from both Downtown and suburban counties and reduce commuting time and costs for employees.

## **Wikipedia entry on South Side Turnverein:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Side\\_Turnverein\\_Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Side_Turnverein_Hall)

South Side Turnverein Hall is a historic social club and gymnasium in the Bates-Hendricks neighborhood of Indianapolis, Indiana, affiliated with the city's German-American community. It was built in 1900 by prominent architects Vonnegut & Bohn, whose managing partners Bernard Vonnegut, Sr. and Arthur Bohn were members of the burgeoning German-American community in Indianapolis. The architects were also known for designing the Athenaeum (previously called Das Deutsche Haus), another German-American social club in the city. The South Side Turnverein was an important gathering place for Indianapolis' south side German community until its decline in the 1940s. It was sold to investors in 1978 to be used as an athletic club.

The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2019.

### **History**

Indianapolis was a major destination for German immigrants in the 19th century, spurred by political refugees leaving Europe after the failed Revolutions of 1848. By 1850, people of German heritage constituted over 12 percent of the city's population. The growing German community desired to retain their heritage and did so through the creation of social clubs.

The Turner movement was one of the largest German-American cultural groups of the time, promoting German ideals through education and physical fitness. The Turner movement created Turnvereins (or gymnastics clubs), where members gathered for both social and athletic activities. The Turner movement arrived in Indianapolis in the 1850s with the establishment of a Turnverein organization, the Socialer Turnverein. By 1893, a growing German population on the southside of the city sought to form their own Turnverein. That year a group of around 200 German-Americans broke away from the Socialer Turnverein to establish the South Side Turnverein (Südseite Turnverein).

The group first rented a space in the Phoenix Garden, but as the organization grew it began to look for a permanent home. They selected a site near the intersection of Madison Avenue and Prospect Street. Construction began in June 1900 and was completed in November of that year. In the beginning, the South Side Turnverein Hall hosted eight turning classes with 300 students between the ages of 6 and 25. The building contained two bowling alleys, a reception and dining room, kitchen, barroom, and the gymnasium. The gymnasium could also serve as an auditorium, with space for over 800 people.

Sporting History

As an organization dedicated to physical education, the South Side Turnverein hosted many athletic events during its history. These included gymnastics expositions, basketball games, bowling leagues, and boxing matches. It hosted an annual exhibition each April, which included gymnastics performances, folk dances, and orchestral performances. It also served as a host location for many regional Turner events, bringing up to 500 athletes and large crowds from cities such as Chicago, Louisville, Fort Wayne, and Evansville.

The Turnverein fielded a basketball team and played teams from the Christamore House, Crawfordsville High School, and other local organizations. It hosted several basketball leagues, and was reported to have held more than 18,000 refereed basketball games between 1904 and 2014.

### **Social History**

From its completion into the late-1930s the South Side Turnverein served as a fixture in the area's German community, but also the southside at large. It hosted musical performances, dances, plays, festivals, and other events. Some were focused on celebrating German heritage, while others were related to the city or other social clubs. Local chapters of the Knights of Pythias and the Young Men's Institute were among the many groups to host events at the Turnverein.

The building also hosted many labor union and political events. Local labor unions including the United German Trade Unions of Indianapolis, Printing Pressman's Union No. 17, Central Labor Union, and the State Federation of Labor used the building. It also served as a meeting place for labor negotiations in the 1940s and 1950s. A political rally for the Progressive Party was held at the Turnverein in 1912. The building even hosted a campaign appearance by John F. Kennedy during his 1960 presidential run.

### **Decline**

Anti-German sentiment, fostered by World War I and World War II, spread throughout the United States in the first half of the 20th century. German-American organizations were forced to respond. In 1918, the South Side Turnverein hosted a meeting of "persons of German blood" where resolutions were passed supporting the United States in its war against Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. The building's name was Anglicized around the same time and was commonly referred to as the South Side Turner Hall or South Side Turners' Gymnasium throughout the inter-war and post-war years.

In the late-1930s, the South Side Turnverein's membership was around 400 people. By 1977, that number had dropped to 62 members. The surrounding neighborhood had changed since the building's completion, and many former members relocated to the Indianapolis suburbs. White flight and the construction of Interstate 70 immediately to

the north of the building in the 1970s contributed to the demise of the organization. In December 1978, the Turnverein building was sold to investors and the organization's operations were moved.

After the sale of the building, it was used at various times as an athletic club, bar, and music venue. Most recently it was converted into office space.

## **Architecture**

The German Renaissance Revival structure is a two-story building with a raised basement on a limestone foundation. Its exterior consists of red brick with limestone trim. It has a hipped roof with gabled pavilions. There are brick pilasters on its south façade, which extend through the roof. An octagonal cupola sits on the ridge of the roof.

A prominent feature of the building is the arched windows and panels on its north and south façades. At the center are five groups of single one-over-one windows on the first floor aligned with a three-part arched window on the second floor. The arches feature distinctive limestone voussoirs and springers. The pavilions have a similar arched panel on their north and south façades. These panels consist of half-timbering and stucco with a pair of 15-over-15 windows in their center. They share the same arched design as the windows in the central section of the façades.

The west-facing gable features a relief portrait of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, the father of the Turner Movement, by noted sculptor Rudolf Schwarz. Schwarz was also known for his work on the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in downtown Indianapolis. The original relief suffered extensive damage over its lifetime and was replaced by a reconstruction during the building's renovations in 2019. The remaining components of the original relief are on display inside the building.

## **Wikipedia entry on Turners:**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turners>

The Turners are members of German-American gymnastic clubs called Turnvereine (also Turnverein). They promoted German culture, physical culture, and liberal politics. Turners, especially Francis Lieber (1798–1872), were the leading sponsors of gymnastics as an American sport and the field of academic study.

In Germany, a major gymnastic movement was started by Turnvater ("father of gymnastics") and nationalist Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in the early 19th century when Germany was occupied by Napoleon. The Turnvereine ("gymnastic unions"; from German 'turnen' meaning "to practice gymnastics," and 'Verein' or 'Vereine' meaning "club, union") were not only athletic but also political, reflecting their origin in similar ethnocentric "national gymnastic" organizations in Europe (such as the Czech Sokol), who were participants in various national movements for independence. The Turner movement in Germany was generally liberal in nature, and many Turners took part in the Revolutions of 1848.

After the failure of the 1848 Revolution in Germany, the Turner movement was suppressed, and many Turners left Germany, some emigrating to the United States, especially to the Ohio Valley region, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Texas. Several of these Forty-Eighters went on to become Union soldiers, and some became Republican politicians. Besides serving as physical education, social, political, and cultural organizations for German immigrants, Turners were also active in public education and labor movements. They were leading promoters of gymnastics in the United States as a sport and as a school subject. In the United States, the movement declined after 1900, and especially after 1917.

## **Turnverein Definition**

<https://www.britannica.com/sports/turnverein>

### **to practice gymnastics**

Turnverein (alt spelling turnvereine): (from German 'turnen', "to practice gymnastics," and 'Verein', "club, union"), association of gymnasts founded by the German teacher and patriot Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in Berlin in 1811.

## **Wikipedia entry on Bates-Hendricks Neighborhood:**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bates-Hendricks>

The Bates–Hendricks neighborhood is situated just south and east of the downtown commercial district of Indianapolis, Indiana. The Fountain Square business district is just to the east.

Access to the neighborhood from the north is by way of East Street, while Terrace Street off of Madison Avenue enters the neighborhood from the west and Prospect Street offers access from Fountain Square.

The neighborhood takes its name from the historic Bates–Hendricks House, first built in 1830 by Richard Keene and located at 1526 S. New Jersey Street in the neighborhood's western part. The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The house takes its name from two prominent previous owners of the house: Hervey Bates, who built the largest portions of the home in 1851 and 1858; and Thomas A. Hendricks, who resided there from 1865-1872 until becoming Governor of Indiana and later serving as Vice President under Grover Cleveland.

### **Neighborhood history**

Madison Avenue, the western boundary of the neighborhood, is the old Mauxferry Road. This was the first road built into Indian territory to service the new capital of Indianapolis. It was surveyed in 1822 and completed in 1824. It was the road used to move the tools of government from Corydon (the old state capital) to Indianapolis. It also served as the stagecoach road to reach the steamboats on the Ohio River before the railroad era.

James O. Woodruff built the Victorian neighborhood around the Bates–Hendricks House in 1872, calling it Hendricks Place. He would later develop Woodruff Place on the east side of Indianapolis.

In October 1900, pharmacist John A. Hook opened the first Hook's Drug Store at the corner of Prospect and East Streets. Although that building no longer exists, Hook's grew to be a chain of over 160 stores throughout Indiana, and after several mergers, became part of the CVS Pharmacy chain.[3]

The Sanders-Childers House at 1020 E. Palmer Street is the oldest house in Indianapolis. It is a two-story brick farmhouse constructed around 1820 by William Sanders. The original portion of the house sits at an angle to Palmer and Barth streets because those streets were not laid out until later. Alterations were made at various times, including a

modernization in the 1920s by Frank R. Childers, who was the Marion County Recorder from 1927 to 1930.[4] The former Abraham Lincoln School #18 across the street at 1001 E. Palmer Street was built in 1901 and is on the site where a group of Delaware Indians had a sugar camp until 1820.[5]

#### Southside Turners building in 1900

The South Side Turnverein Hall at 306 E. Prospect Street in the northwest corner of the neighborhood was constructed in 1900 by the Southside Turnverein, a German-American gymnastics club. The architects were Vonnegut and Bohn, who earlier had designed Das Deutsche Haus, now known as the Athenaeum, in downtown Indianapolis. Anti-German sentiment resulting from World War I led to the German-American community distancing itself from German culture and a decline in the Turners movement, but the building remained a center for the community. On October 4, 1960, for example, it was the site of a campaign speech by Senator John F. Kennedy. In 1977, the Turnverein sold it to Tony Elrod. He turned the second floor into a basketball court and the building became known as the Madison Avenue Athletic Club. However, the deterioration of the building led to its being placed on the Indiana Landmarks' Ten Most Endangered list. The owners of Point Comfort Underwriters purchased the building in July 2016 for \$950,000 and undertook a complete renovation of the building; the project was led by Ratio Architects. The building reopened on November 9, 2018, and now serves as the headquarters for Point Comfort.[6] The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2019.

#### Redevelopment

In 2008–2009, the 1400 and 1500 blocks of S. New Jersey Street saw a major redevelopment of the housing along the street. New landscaping was also provided to the Woodruff-built esplanade that runs down the center of the street. A similar project was undertaken in 2010 for the 1500 block of S. Alabama Street one block to the west, which contains the only other Woodruff-built esplanade in the neighborhood.

In 2010 the New Jersey Street project was awarded third-place in the 'Physical Revitalization Beautification – Single Neighborhood' division of the 'Neighborhood of the Year Awards' awarded by Neighborhoods USA (NUSA).[7]

The neighborhood has seen a significant amount of renovation and house-flipping since 2010. Several of the house renovations have been aired on the Good Bones television show. In 2018, the median price of the 149 homes sold was \$189,900, ranging from \$41,000 for a "fixer-upper" to \$409,000 for a completely renovated one. Median household income in 2016 was \$24,748, lower than the \$43,369 for all of Marion County, but up from 2015, when it was only \$19,567.[8]

In 2018 the neighborhood association developed a plan to encourage commercial development of S. East Street, which bisects the neighborhood. The plan seeks to maintain the mixed-income character of the neighborhood, focusing on attracting businesses wanted by local residents but avoiding the chain and expensive restaurants, liquor stores, and nightclubs that have proliferated in Fountain Square and Broad Ripple Village.[8]

Karen E. Laine and Mina Starsiak Hawk of the Good Bones television series opened a home furnishings store named Two Chicks District Co. at 1531 S. East Street on June 20, 2020. The building was originally the Lincoln Theatre, a silent movie house. Most recently it had housed a countertop laminate fabrication firm. Two Chicks and a Hammer had purchased the building in 2015 for use as a warehouse.[9]



## Excerpts from IndyStar article profiling the building in 2014

<https://www.indystar.com/story/sports/columnists/gregg-doyel/2014/12/12/doyel-downtown-gym-with-a-history-hides-in-plain-sight/20310947/>

### Headline: Downtown gym with a history hides in plain sight

It was built in 1901 just south of I-70, between I-65 and Meridian Street, as an athletic club for German-Americans known as Turners, a somewhat misleading name because turner in German means gymnastics – and the Turner movement wasn't all about sports. It was political as well, and after the European revolutions of 1848 when the liberal Turners were squashed by the German aristocracy, many left. The American Turners stayed political, even providing bodyguard protection for Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in 1861.

Did I know any of that history my first time up the steps to 306 E. Prospect? Nope. I walked past an upright and unopened can of Lite beer to a padlocked door and cloudy windows. At the other end of the building is a garish sign, plastic and red, that says "5th Quarter Lounge" and promises "food – drinks." It's on top of a white wooden entrance that sticks out from the beautiful brick like a broken toe. Down the steps is another door.

My building, the one at 306 E. Prospect, held Golden Gloves boxing tournaments and was the site of a 1960 presidential candidate's campaign appearance. Guy named Kennedy. The Star has written repeatedly about the Southside Turners, as this building was called, though nothing much since the 1970s. It held more than 18,000 refereed basketball games, some starring Martinsville's Jerry Sichting after he left Purdue in spring 1979 but before he joined the Pacers in fall 1980. Josh Mc Roberts' dad Tim, a 1,000-point scorer at Butler, played here. So did Eric Gordon's father.

There was a bowling alley in the basement. German immigrants relaxed here – they came for fencing, followed by a fish fry – but membership waned until it closed in 1977. The property is surrounded by highways built in the 1960s and '70s and progress did a number on the athletic club, eating into its parking and accessibility and forcing some members to sell their homes and move away.

It's owned by a former contractor named Tony Elrod, who bought it with a few partners for \$28,500 in 1979, fixed the heat and air and replaced more than 240 broken windows, and reopened it as the Madison Avenue Athletic Club.

At some point in the last year, Elrod hung the "gym rental" sign outside. Workers from places like Allison and Rolls-Royce, Angie's List and Lilly come to play ball. There's also a racquetball court. Workers from places like Allison and Rolls-Royce, Angie's List and Lilly

come to play ball. There's also a racquetball court, and Tim Heider, 57, steps out and locks the door behind him.

"This place used to rock," says Heider, a lab director for United Water. "In the '70s, there'd be 200 guys playing basketball – lot of talent. I used to play, but now it's just racquetball. There's some water damage, but the court's OK. Tony's a good guy and he has an office downstairs, and if he's not here, I just put some money in an envelope and slip it under the door."

Downstairs are locked doors, locker rooms, band posters – the death metal band Acheron has played the 5th Quarter – and a vending machine offering Tom's Snacks for 15 cents. Probably been empty for years.

But this building, my building, isn't empty. After three weeks of trying, I get Elrod on the phone Friday and he tells me his gym is struggling – "hard to make money in the gym business," he says – but staying afloat on \$35 hourly rentals and the leasing agreement he has "with the gal who runs the 5th Quarter." He worries about the YMCA opening next year at the corner of South and Alabama. He feels good about this month, maybe the next, but doesn't know what happens after that. Hard to make money in the gym business, especially for a gym that's hiding in plain sight.

"People drive right by and don't pay any attention to it," Elrod says. "They think it's a church or a library. I hung up that banner you saw, and I've probably had more business in the last year than I've had in the previous four or five. But that new 'Y' will probably suck out everything that we came up with in the last year. We'll see."

We will. I'll be back to check on my gym. For now, I'm leaving the balcony, smelling wood and paint and age, and stepping outside and looking again at that sculpture on the west side of 306 E. Prospect. There are two figures up there, one with a spike where its head should be and another with a curved stick of rebar poking out of a ruined right shoulder. They are battered but they are not beaten, and they are standing sentry over downtown Indianapolis.

## Encyclopedia Indianapolis on history of South Side Turnverein

<https://indyencyclopedia.org/southside-turnverein/>

The South Side Turnverein Hall was built in 1900 at 306 Prospect Street, located in the Babe Denny neighborhood, as a gymnastics and social club for German Americans. Brought to the United States by the German-speaking immigrants during the 1840s and 1850s, the Turnverein (gymnastics association) movement emphasized the concept of "sound body, sound mind" and brought together Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Freethinkers, united by their common heritage, language, culture, and identity as German Americans. In the early 1850s, recent German immigrants to the city founded the Indianapolis Turngemeinde and Socialistische Turnverein.

In 1892, the Socialer Turnverein Aktien Gesellschaft (Social Gymnastic Society Stock Association) organized to raise money to build a home for the Socialer Turnverein and other liberal German societies of Indianapolis, which led to construction of the Athenaeum. About 200 German Americans living on the south side of Indianapolis broke away from the Socialer Turnverein Aktien Gesellschaft to establish the South Side Turnverein (Südseite Turnverein) in 1893. By 1900, Indianapolis had three thriving Turnvereins: Socialer Turnverein, Unabhängiger/Independent Turnverein, and Südseite/South Side Turnverein.

The prominent architecture firm Vonnegut and Bohn designed the clubhouse for the South Side Turnverein with an allegorical sculpture created by Rudolf Schwarz, who had come to Indianapolis from Vienna in 1897 to create important sculptures for the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Bernard Vonnegut, one of the principal architects for Vonnegut and Bohn, had been the designer of the Athenaeum (1893-1894, 1897-1898), and his father Clemens Vonnegut Sr. had been one of the founders of the original Indianapolis Turnverein in 1851.

When it opened in 1900, the South Side Turnverein Hall contained a large turnhalle (gymnastics hall) and auditorium with seating for up to 1,000, along with a bowling alley, dining room, parlor, and kneipe (pub) in the basement. In addition to gymnastics, the building hosted basketball, boxing, charity balls, euchre parties, wedding receptions, and political rallies, including a 1959 speech by John F. Kennedy.

Anti-German sentiment during the World Wars led to increasing assimilation of German Americans and the decline of organizations that celebrated this identity. Much of the surrounding neighborhood was destroyed to make way for the Madison Avenue Expressway and I-70. The South Side Turners closed the building in 1977, and it later operated as the Madison Avenue Athletic Club. Rehabilitated as a corporate headquarters in 2019, the South Side Turnverein Hall remains an enduring symbol of German American culture on the near south side of Indianapolis.

BENJAMIN L. ROSS (2022)  
Revised June 2023

## IN.gov blog about Henry Victor, founder of South Side Turners

<https://blog.history.in.gov/tag/south-side-turnverein/>

### Heading: Henry Victor: The Father of the South Side Turnverein

*Excerpt related to the club and building:*

As his stature in the community grew, so did his involvement in a variety of organizations, the most important of which was the South Side Turnverein. Turnvereins, or Turner Clubs, were a mainstay of German American life during the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries. Founded on the principle of "sound body and mind," the Turnverein movement was spearheaded by German educator Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, who believed physical exercise and cultural activities led to a healthy life. The South Side Turnverein in Indianapolis, founded on September 24, 1893, began as an offshoot of another organization when about 200 German Americans left the Socialer Turnverein to form their own gymnastics club on the south side. During its first few months, the South Side Turnverein and its members experienced challenges growing the group. That all changed when the membership elected Henry Victor as President, or "First Speaker," of the organization in September of 1894. He threw himself into the role, rapidly expanding the club's memberships and activities.

In the next few years, the South Side Turnverein participated in a wide variety of athletic and cultural events. In 1894 alone, the Turnverein hosted a "gymnastic entertainment" at English's Opera House, produced a "two-act play" called "He Lost His Gloves," and participated in Indianapolis "Wald-Fest" or "forest festival." The club was also heavily involved in the larger German community, supporting other Turnvereins and social clubs. In 1898, members of the South Side Turnverein attended a "kommers," or "students' entertainment" at the newly opened German House in Indianapolis and some of its members served on the leadership committee of the North American Turnerbund, which decided to move its national headquarters from St. Louis to Indianapolis. Leading by example, Victor's energy and dedication to the club galvanized the South Side Turnverein and its members.

Arguably his greatest accomplishment as South Side Turnverein president was overseeing the building of its hall, serving as one of the South Side Turnverein Hall Association's directors. Leading such a large financial endeavor proved natural to Victor, as his experience with Mozart Hall as well as the German Mutual Insurance Company prepared him for the task. Plans to build the hall started on February 20, 1900, when the South Side Turnverein decided to purchase 150 feet of property on Prospect Street at a cost of \$5,000. On March 7, Victor and others filed articles of incorporation for the South Side Turnverein Hall Association, whose charge was to "purchase real

estate and to sell the same and particularly to construct and erect for the South Side Turnverein a suitable gymnasium."

The Association chose Vonnegut & Bohn, one of Indianapolis's best architecture firms, to design and build their hall, and by June 1900, the Association held the groundbreaking ceremony. Victor, the man responsible for so much of the organization's success, "dug the first spade of full of dirt and in his speech wished the building progress," according to the Indianapolis Journal. An illustration of the prospective building appeared in the Indianapolis News on June 7, 1900, with further details on its facilities:

"The interior will be arranged with all the appointments of a modern club house. The basement, which will be a full story in height [sic], will contain the kneipe [bar], bowling alleys, dining-room, women's parlor, women's and men's dressing rooms and shower baths. The main floor will be almost entirely taken up by the large hall, which is also to be used as a gymnasium. This hall will seat, together with gallery, about 700 people. At the east end of the hall there will be a large and well equipped stage. Stretching along the other end of the hall will be a large foyer, with stairways leading to the basement and gallery."

After months of intense work, the South Side Turnverein Hall was completed, and on December 2, the club opened its hall to the public, on the organization's eight-year anniversary. "In the afternoon the new building was thrown open to the public," the News reported, "and it was inspected by a large number of visitors."

The South Side Turnverein formally dedicated its new hall on January 20, 1901, with 3,000 people in attendance. Victor christened the new building along with Fred Mark, chairman of the building committee, Herman Lieber, president of the North American Turnerbund, and Charles E. Emmerich, superintendent of the Manual Training School, among others. The building and grounds had a cumulative cost of \$25,000, raised through its members by the association. A banquet for around 400 people was held the night after the dedication, with the News writing, "Henry Victor, as master of ceremonies, welcomed the representatives of the various German societies at the 'kommers,' [or students' entertainment] with which the South Side Turnverein last night closed the dedicatory services of its new hall. Many women were among the 400 guests and the evening was enjoyable." In only a few years, Henry Victor transformed the South Side Turnverein from a small but promising organization into one of Indianapolis' leading social clubs for the German American community.

## IN.gov blog post about Turnverein clubs

<https://blog.library.in.gov/turnverein-clubs-of-indianapolis/>

### Turnverein Clubs of Indianapolis

While exploring the Bates-Hendricks neighborhood district on the Southside of Indianapolis recently, I noticed a beautiful old building at 306 Prospect Street. I wanted to find out about its history. After conducting an internet search for the address, I found out that the structure was built in around 1900 for the Southside Turnverein Club. I then looked in the Indiana State Library catalog to see what types of materials were available about Turnverein Clubs.

From the mid-19th to the beginning of the 20th century, German-American Turnverein Clubs were spreading across North America. Indianapolis had several of these Turnverein, or Turners, clubs, which were athletic clubs for German-American immigrants.

According to the "Indianapolis Turnverein 1851-1926 Seventy-Fifth Anniversary" pamphlet (ISLO 977.201 M341 no. 40), the Indianapolis Turnverein was started in 1851 by August Hoffmeister, a "zealous agitator for the founding..." of the club. Below is a rendering from the program of some of the "turnhalls" in Indianapolis included in the pamphlet.

These Turner Clubs were social clubs as well as for physical fitness and gymnastics. The best-known Turnverein Club in Indianapolis is the Athenaeum, which was built from 1893-1898 and was originally called Das Deutsche Haus.

The Turnverein Clubs helped German-Americans preserve their German culture and philosophies, while also honoring their new homeland, the United States. The Turners' philosophy was that mind and body wellness and fitness were of great importance and integral to a healthy life.

Among several German-language titles in the Indiana State Library's newspaper microfilm collection, we have one geared specifically to Turnverein Clubs. This newspaper was called Die Zukunft. Organ des Nord-Amerikanischen Turner-Bundes, which roughly translates to The Future. Organ of the North American Turner Foundation. This Indianapolis newspaper was printed using the Indianapolis Telegraph's press on a weekly basis from about 1867-82. If you read German, you may be interested in seeing this title on microfilm. Here is the front page of the Oct. 29, 1868 edition of the newspaper:

Turnverein Clubs flourished in the United States until after the start of World War I, when growing anti-German sentiment caused the clubs' membership and funding to dwindle. Despite efforts to revitalize Turners Clubs during the second half of the 20th century, most of the buildings here in Indianapolis were sold or used for other purposes. Fortunately, the Southside Turnverein building is in the process of being remodeled and reopened as a corporate headquarters later this spring.



## Historic Indianapolis Answer to Question About the Turners:

<https://historicindianapolis.com/hi-mailbag-indianapolis-turnvereins/>

### Reader's Question:

When I was growing up, we were members of a gym called (I think) the Lincoln Turners. My dad's side of the family was German, and I remember being told something about German prejudice in Indianapolis during the war. The gym used to be called Turnverein (sp??), but it was changed as a way to make it sound more American. Does this strike a bell? ~ Esther Shir, Albuquerque, New Mexico

### HI's Answer:

The German immigrants who came to the United States of American in the mid-1800s established organizations in their adopted country that were similar to the ones to which they had belonged in their native homeland. These groups served as social, athletic, musical, and political centers in newly established German-American communities. The associations and clubs helped ease their homesickness and preserve their German culture.

The German word for gymnast is "Turner." As physical fitness was an important component of many German-American societies, the word "Turn" or "Turner" became a part of some organizations' names. The German word for association or club is "verein," so "verein" also became a part of some German-American organizations' names. The clubs were called by their German names and their English names interchangeably.

The first American Turners Club or Turnverein was founded in Cincinnati in 1848. Soon after, societies began to spring up in many U.S. cities to which Germans had immigrated. In 1851, two Turners clubs were founded in Indianapolis, the Indianapolis Turngemeinde and the Indianapolis Socialistischer Turnverein. They merged with one another a year later, and after the Civil War the club renamed itself Indianapolis Socialer Turnverein. The club was housed in different downtown locations from its inception until Das Deutsche Haus was built in 1894, at which time the group found a permanent home at 401 E. Michigan Street. Das Deutsche Haus has been featured in a number of HistoricIndianapolis.com pieces, including this Indianapolis Then and Now feature.

In 1879, the Independent Turnverein was founded in Mozart Hall, which was located in the first block of South Delaware Street and is today the site of the Marion County Jail. In 1885, the Independent Turnverein moved into the building formerly occupied by the Third Presbyterian Church, on the northeast corner of W. Ohio and N. Illinois Streets,

where the club operated for almost thirty years. In 1914, the Independent Verein built a new facility at 902 N. Meridian Street.

The club changed its name to the Independent Athletic Club in the 1920s and then to the Hoosier Athletic Club in the 1930s. Experiencing financial hardship in the 1940s, it was sold at auction and donated to Purdue University in 1943. The building provided classrooms and office space for IUPUI for more than three decades. In the 1980s, an investment group bought the property and converted it into apartments. Despite alterations to the original building, the Turnverein Apartments was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Carved into the stonework above two sets of front-facing windows is the Turnvereins' motto, in Latin: "Mens sana in corpore sano" ("A healthy mind in a healthy body") and "Dum vivimus vivamus" ("While we live, let us live").

In 1893, German-Americans living on the south side of town broke away from the Indianapolis Socialer Turnverein and formed the Süd Seite Turnverein. In 1900, the South Side Turners built their own hall at 306 Prospect Street, which served the southside German-American community for more than 75 years. The rising cost of maintenance and the declining number of members resulted in the club's selling the building in 1977. It is now owned by the Madison Avenue Athletic Club and was the subject of a Sunday Prayers article at [HistoricIndianapolis.com](http://HistoricIndianapolis.com) in 2012. The South Side Turners relocated to German Park, a private, outdoor recreational facility situated on 25 acres at 8600 S. Meridian Street. Several annual festivals are held in German Park, including a 4-day-long Oktoberfest every September.

From the final decade of the nineteenth century through the first decade of the twentieth century, the Turners clubs in Indianapolis experienced an unprecedented period of popularity. As time went on, however, the German-American community became increasingly assimilated into American life. Those who had immigrated from Germany in the 1800s were well-established in this country by the 1900s, and their American-born children and grandchildren were not as attached to the customs of the old country as their forebears were. At the outbreak of World War I, Das Deutsche Haus was renamed the Athenaeum, due to anti-German sentiment. German-Americans downplayed their roots, and the German-American organizations housed in the Athenaeum suffered from their attempts to distance themselves from their origins.

There were several Turnvereins in Indianapolis over the years, and most were known by more than one name, so I'm not sure which group was the one to which your family belonged. None of the Indianapolis societies was named Lincoln Turners. Lincoln Turners (as in Lincoln Park) is the name of a Chicago verein. Possibly you traveled to Chicago for a gymnastics meet when you were growing up, or maybe the Chicago

club came to Indianapolis for an athletic event, and its name made an impression on you?

The Athenaeum Turners Club did experience a revival in the 1950s and 1960s, although its activities became more social and less athletic. My best guess is that your family belonged to the Athenaeum Turners Club, and you went to the gym at 401 East Michigan Street. The YMCA currently occupies that space in the Athenaeum. Below is a more recent color photo of the Athenaeum than the early black and white photo depicted at the top of the article. Perhaps you recognize this facility as the location of the gym where you went?

According to my search of the Internet, there are only a few dozen Turnvereins still in existence in the United States today. The Athenaeum Turners is no longer a club for physical fitness, but is now a group committed to preserving the last traces of German culture that still remain in Indianapolis.

Posted on: March 19, 2013

Posted by: Sharon Butsch Freeland

## **Historic Indianapolis article before building was renovated:**

<https://historicindianapolis.com/sunday-prayers-southside-turnverein-now-madison-avenue-athletic-club/>

Headline: Sunday Prayers: Southside Turnverein, now Madison Avenue Athletic Club

You have surely seen this one from the highway and wondered about it. If you have any interest or curiosity when it comes to old buildings. (Photo hint: If you see Lilly coming up on the north, look at the gorgeous old brick building on the south.)

This building stands at 306 Prospect Street and was designed by the architectural firm of Vonnegut & Bohn around the turn of the 20th century for the Southside Turnverein, a German Social Club (like the Athenaeum's former purpose). IUPUI has a collection of materials relating to the Turnverein— including vintage photos at this site. The 'Turner' movement was all about creating a healthy mind in a healthy body—offering a variety of sports and athletics to help realize that goal.

This is one of those buildings that evokes curiosity in all passers-by—and it would be nice if it evoked someone to care for the deteriorating parts of it. It currently houses some kind of athletic club, and who knows what the inside looks like, but the west side is looking especially challenged.

The pediment sculpture is said to have been created by Rudolph Schwarz—if you don't recognize the name, you will certainly recognize the location of his most famous work: it's at the epicenter of our city and graces all sides of our beloved Monument on the Circle. And as you can see here, time and the elements have not been friendly to this sculpture.

Posted on: February 5, 2012

Posted by: Tiffany Benedict Browne