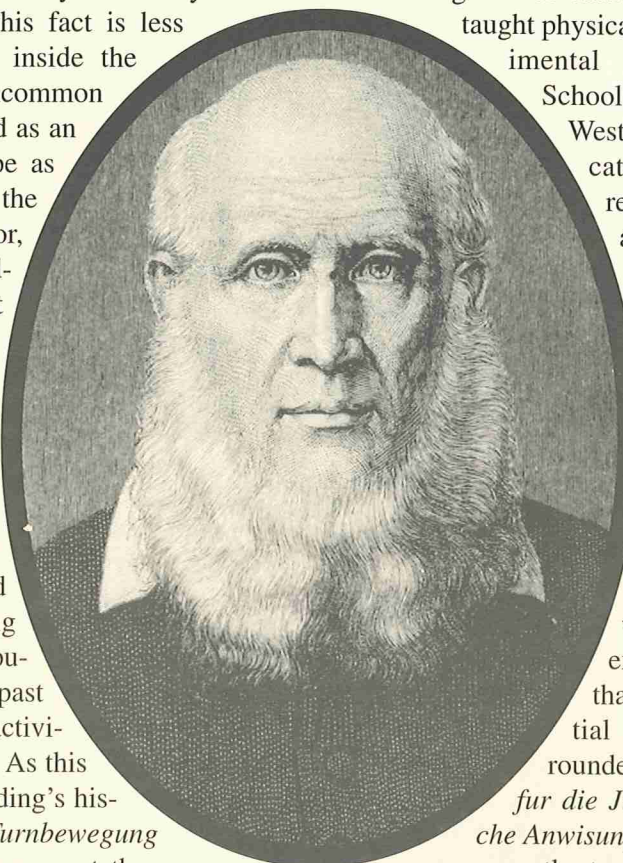


The Origins of German Bodybuilding: 1790-1970

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For readers of *Iron Game History* and those familiar with the history of strength sports it is no revelation to announce that the roots of modern bodybuilding reach back to nineteenth-century Germany. In today's Germany, however, this fact is less well known—even to those inside the sport. In Germany it is not uncommon to find bodybuilding described as an activity that arrived in Europe as part of the fitness boom of the 1980s. One physical educator, in fact, described bodybuilding—or recreational weight training—as a “new Californian kind of sport,” equating its arrival in Germany to that of jogging and aerobic dance and speculating that it would enjoy a brief public acceptance and then pass away.¹ However, bodybuilding and recreational weight training have certainly not faded in popularity in Germany over the past two decades. Nor are these activities “new” sport for Germans. As this article demonstrates, bodybuilding's history can be traced back to the *Turnbewegung* (gymnasts' movement) in Germany at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. What is more, in the nearly two hundred years since those early days, Germans have continued to play an important role in the shape and evolution of nearly all aspects of the iron game.

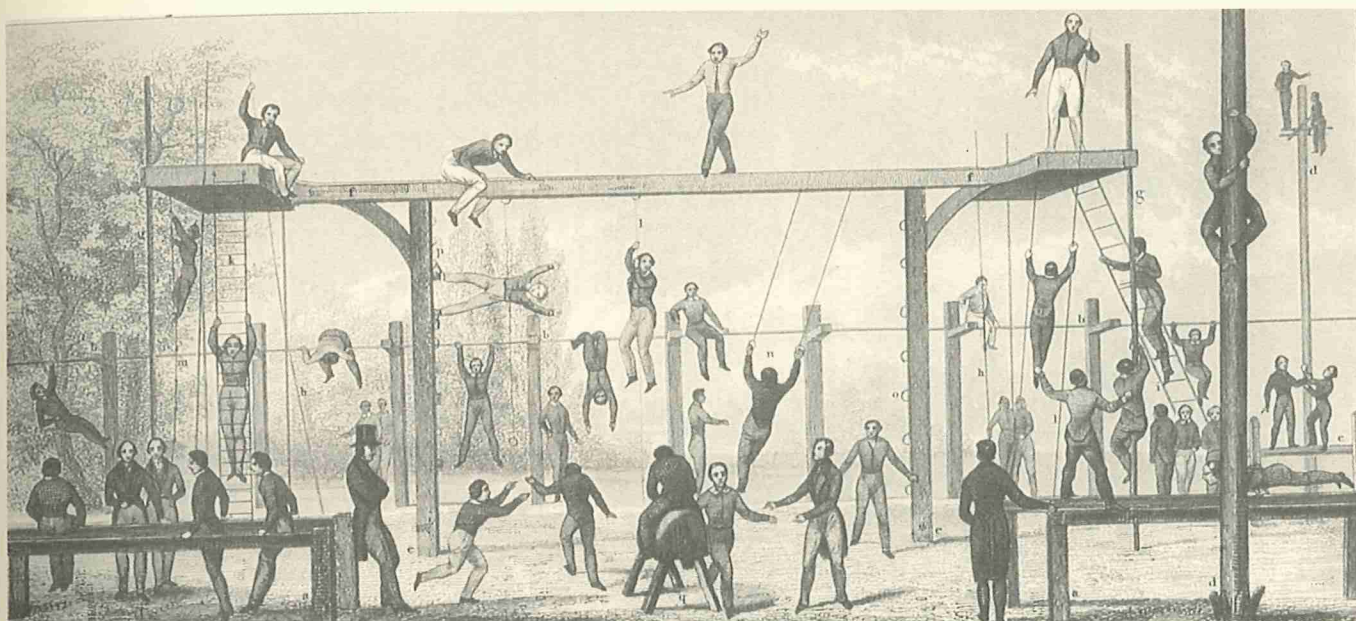


Friedrich Ludwig Jahn
1778 - 1852

German physical educator Johann Friedrich GutsMuths (1759-1839) emerged in the late Eighteenth Century as Europe's dominant theoretician on physical training.² For more than fifty years, GutsMuths taught physical education classes at the experimental Schnepfenthal Philanthropic School near Gotha, making him one of Western Europe's first physical educators. GutsMuths believed in reviving the training methods of ancient Greece, and also felt that hard physical labor was a valuable form of exercise. GutsMuths' system of exercises included rope climbing, throwing the discus, climbing poles, high jumping, and a variety of lifting and carrying exercises to develop the back muscles.³ In 1793, GutsMuths published his influential two-volume work detailing both his exercise regimen and his belief that sport and exercise was essential to the development of well-rounded German citizens. *Gymnastik für die Jugend: Enthaltend eine Praktische Anweisung zu Leibesübungen* was subsequently translated into both English and French which, of course, greatly broadened its influence.⁴ The English version, entitled *Gymnastics for Youth or a Practical Guide to Healthful and Amusing Exercises for the Use of Schools*, was published in London in 1800 and, two years later, an American edition appeared in Philadelphia.⁵

GutsMuths' book, and especially the chapter



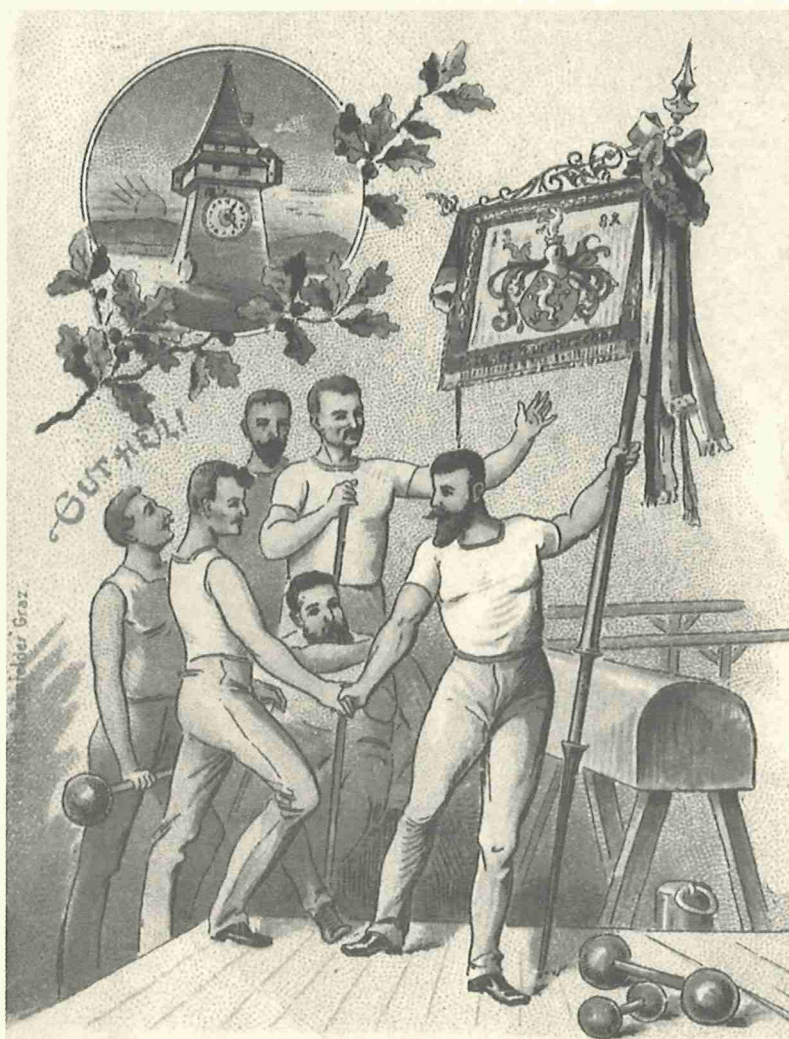


This early nineteenth-century engraving shows a typical outdoor *turnverein* of the 1820s. Note the primitive parallel bars and pommel horse and the many ropes and ladders for climbing and balancing. Prior to 1850 most illustrations of *turnvereins*—like this one—contain no dumbbells or barbells.

entitled, “We Are Weak because it Does Not Occur to Us that We Could Be Strong If We Would,” proved to be an inspiration for another German physical educator—Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852)—who would later be known as the *Turnvater* or “Father of German Gymnastics.”⁶ Jahn, the son of a clergyman, was born in Lanz, Germany, and attended the University of Göttingen around 1800 for a short period of time. Little else is known of Jahn’s early life until 1809, when he moved to Berlin.⁷ There, Jahn first did some teaching at what was known as the Friedrich Werdescher Gymnasium and then became a member of the Grauen Kloster Gymnasium. He was also hired to teach at Johann Ernst Plamann’s school, where on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons he taught his students gymnastics in an outdoor gym he created near the school.⁸

By this time, Jahn was also deeply concerned about his country’s political situation. Following Napoleon’s crowning as Emperor of France in 1804, sixteen German princes—who ruled individual states in Germany—split away from the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation” to support Napoleon. Their defection left the other German states much more vulnerable to French invasion, and in 1806 the state of Prussia—where Jahn lived—was invaded by Napoleon’s armies and placed under French rule.⁹ Jahn worried that his countrymen were losing their German identity under the French, and so he decided to turn his interest in exercise into a form of political action. He believed that he could

help men strengthen their bodies *and* build identity as Germans, and with two of his friends—Karl Friedrich Friesen and Wilhelm Harnich—Jahn established a secret political society known as the German League. The League’s aim was to resist the French invaders by using physical education as a means of spiritual renewal for Germans.¹⁰ In 1810, Jahn published *Deutsches Volksthum*, a plea for German nationalism that helped to attract followers to his cause.¹¹ In that book, Jahn decided *not* to evoke Ancient Greece by calling his system “gymnastics.” Instead, he called it *Turnen*, to give it a unique German identity.¹² In the spring of 1811, Jahn further widened his efforts by opening what he called a “turnplatz” or outdoor gymnasium on a slightly hilly stretch of land along the Spree River outside Berlin.¹³ He also directed what he called a *turnfest* or gymnastics festival on 19 June 1811 to give men a further reason for their training.¹⁴ Jahn’s ideas on exercise and nationalism proved to be particularly attractive to young Prussian men. Membership at the Hasenheide—the name of the outdoor gym he opened—reached eighty members by 1812, topped five hundred members by 1814 and totaled just over one thousand members by 1817.¹⁵ In 1816, Jahn published his gymnastics textbook, *Die Deutsche Turnkunst*, a long, rambling guidebook to German gymnastics and national unity that attracted still more men to his methods.¹⁶ In *Deutsche Turnkunst*, Jahn claimed that more than 150 *turnplatz*’s operated in German cities by 1815.¹⁷



By the late Nineteenth Century, barbell and dumbbell training played a significant role in the exercise regimens of many Turners. This image, on a postcard for the "Grazer Turnerschaft," was printed in Graz, Germany, in the early Twentieth Century.

In 1813, the war for the liberation of Prussia began, and Jahn and many of his students joined the fight against the French. Jahn returned from the war to find that his *Turnen* movement—now that the French were gone—was finding broad support throughout Germany.¹⁸ *Turnen* became part of most school physical education programs for men in the years following the victory over the French and Turner clubs and gymnastics competitions became common. However, rather than relinquishing German nationalism as a plank in his platform after the war, Jahn became even more German-centric, arguing that "the only true German was a Turner," and that those who did not belong were "false Germans."¹⁹ Jahn's radical politics and the large number of

supporters who followed him did not go unnoticed by the new German government that sought to control the growing "liberal" movement. The Carlsbad Decrees of 1814 largely suppressed the liberal movement in the universities and then, in 1819, *Turnen* was also officially banned because of its connections to radical politics. Jahn was arrested on unspecified charges on 13 July 1819, taken to the Spandau fortress, and then sent to Kustrin prison. On 22 May 1820 he was sent to the town of Kohlberg, where he lived under house arrest until 1825. A condition of his eventual release was that Jahn could not live in any city with a university and that he could not teach or take part in *Turnen*.²⁰ Although he could not participate in gymnastics any longer, Jahn's later life was not totally austere. In 1826, he was invited to join the faculty at Harvard to teach both gymnastics and German. In a letter to Harvard's president, Jahn explained that he would need to be paid at least two thousand dollars a year in order to make up for the guaranteed compensation he received from the German government and that, if he remained in Germany, the government had also promised to pay his wife three hundred dollars a year for life following his death.²¹ Harvard was not able to match his salary request and so Jahn stayed in Germany.

For the next two decades, although nationalistic attitudes were forced underground and the exercises could no longer be called *Turnen*, many men continued to find ways to train and even compete. During this era, competitions in what came to be called *Gymnastik* evolved in many parts of Germany. A typical competition tested twelve competitive events called the *Zwoelfkampf*, and consisted of exercises using horizontal and parallel bars, vaulting horses, pommel horses, flying rings, and other traditional gymnastics apparatus. The *Turnsperre* (or official ban on *Turnen*) lasted until 1842.²²

Once the government rescinded the *Turnsperre*, competitions and Turner societies again flourished in Germany. The *Hamburger Turnerschaft von 1816*, founded—as the name implies—in Hamburg, Germany, in 1816 was the first voluntary sport association formed to promote *Turnen*.²³ The Hamburg club, which is still

in existence in 2005, opened the *Hamburger Turnanstalt*, a public gymnasium where members paid a small fee in order to train.²⁴ Since “gyms” in these early years consisted primarily of horizontal and parallel bars, a few weights, and enough space to run, jump, and play games, it was not difficult for other cities to follow Hamburg’s lead.²⁵ The first *Damenturnverein*, or women’s gymnastics club, opened in 1845, suggesting that at least some women also participated; and in 1864, just two decades after the lifting of the ban, there were approximately two thousand *turnvereins* or gymnastic societies in Germany.²⁶

Precisely what role weight training played in the early years of the *Turnen* movement is difficult to discern. Although they were not common, dumbbells were in use in England, France and the United States by the end of the Eighteenth Century. However, when the first Germans trained with implements resembling dumbbells is unknown. Given the intellectual sharing that occurred in Europe at this time, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the implements would have been known to some physical educators in Germany by the early decades of the Nineteenth Century.²⁷ Although we don’t know when dumbbells were first used, other forms of resistance training were incorporated in *turnen* from the beginning. In addition to the back exercises mentioned earlier, GutsMuths’ *Gymnastics for Youth* included instructions for an arm and shoulder exercise using a pair of wooden staffs six feet in length that were notched at regular intervals so that one to two pound weights could be hung from the notches. GutsMuths wrote, “The person lifting is to stand upright, with his breast projecting forward; hold one of the instruments in each hand, with a straight arm; raise them slowly, both together, a little above the horizontal line; and let them down again in same manner.” GutsMuths’ exercise is, in reality, a deltoid raise using a modified Weaver stick. Standing with the arms down at the side, the athlete raised the sticks—with their attached weights—to shoulder height while keeping the arms straight and thus throwing the load on the deltoids. As the man grew stronger, the small weights would be placed further from the hand, as he put it “. . . as long as the strength of the arms will admit.”²⁸ GutsMuths also advised training with heavy sandbags to increase upper body strength. He described holding sandbags either at arms’ length in front of the shoulders, with the arms out to the sides in a crucifix position, or

with the arms down at the sides.²⁹

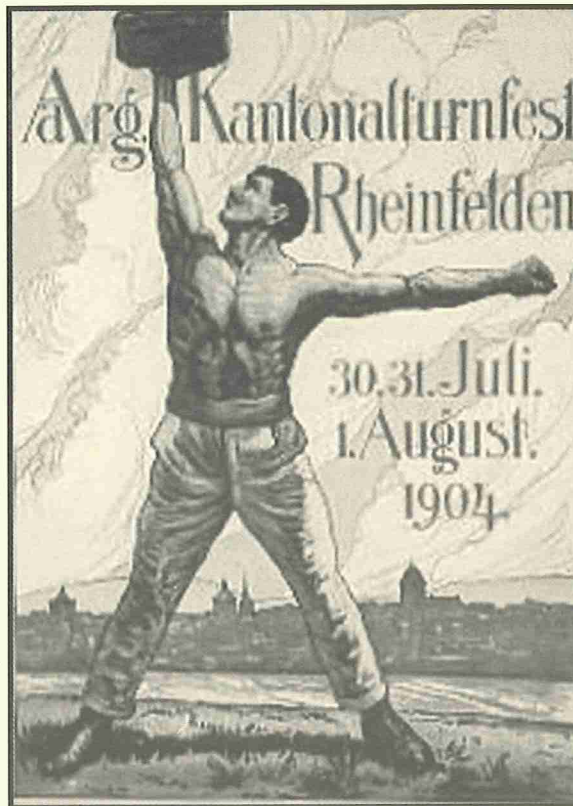
Other evidence of the connection between resistance training and *Turnen* can be found in Charles Beck’s *A Treatise on Gymnastics*, an 1828 book largely derived from Jahn’s *Die Deutsche Turnkunst*.³⁰ Beck, a follower of Jahn’s, had moved to Boston in 1824 to escape the unfriendly political climate of Prussia, and he was hired by the Round Hill School for Boys in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he introduced German gymnastics to America. In his somewhat free translation of Jahn’s book, Beck begins a section of dumbbell exercises with the statement that, “these [hand-held dumbbells] are too well known to require a particular description.”³¹ Following that revealing statement, Beck included directions for seventeen dumbbell exercises, descriptions of how to perform GutsMuths’ exercises using notched sticks and sand-bags, and described two new resistance exercises. The first of these new exercises used a pair of what Beck called “dynamometers.” The dynamometer was a wooden box, three inches high and approximately fifteen inches square inside of which were partitions creating 144 one-inch squares. Identical lead plugs were placed in the small squares of the dynamometer to vary the weight. In the center of these squares an eight-inch handle attached to the box which was grasped during the performance of the exercises—a fact which suggests that these may have been early precursors of the kettlebell.³² The other resistance exercise Beck described was the lifting of a heavy “beam” loaded with weights. A ring was bolted to the beam making this lift function like a one-handed partial deadlift, as the beam was placed on blocks at the beginning of the lift.³³

Another factor that undoubtedly helped weight training find a home in *Turnen* was the motivation shared by nearly all *Turners* to be better athletes. Since the gymnastics events of this era demanded significant upper body strength, the use of dumbbells to help increase upper body strength seems a logical progression. After all, boxer Tom Owens of Hampshire, England, had started using dumbbells as part of his training in approximately 1796, a practice that some other boxers copied.³⁴ And, as noted above, dumbbell use was fairly common by 1830. Although the exact origins are obscure, by the second half of the Nineteenth Century weight training was increasingly part of the training for *Turnen*. Two books gave instructions on weight training for *Turners*—Ernst Eiselen’s 1883 *Hantelübungen für Turner und*

Zimmerturner (*Dumbbell Exercises for Turners and Indoor Turners*) and Maurice Kloss's *Hantelbüchlein für Zimmerturner* (*Little Book for Turners Exercising Indoors*) published in 1886.³⁵ Other evidence of weightlifting's growing importance can be found in some of the posters, photographs and ephemera of the Turner movement that have survived from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The illustration on page ten, for example, is from an early Twentieth Century postcard published in Germany. Dozens of other postcards depicting Turners with barbells and dumbbells have also survived from the *fin de siècle* era. That the organizers of the Aargau Kanton Turnfest held in Rheinfelden, Switzerland (just across the border from Germany) chose to feature a visibly muscular man holding a heavy block-weight overhead in their 1904 poster suggests the strong links between *Turnen* and weightlifting.³⁶

As Allen Guttman points out in *Sports: The First Five Millennia*, one of the unique characteristics of *Turnen* in the Nineteenth Century was the keeping of records and statistics.³⁷ Since the lifting of weights is one of the most quantifiable of all activities, this fascination with records and measurements helps to explain why Germans would be so taken with the idea of lifting heavy weights and with the changes such lifting created in their physiques. Although many nineteenth-century Germans believed that "You were either strong or weak. Strength had not been recognized as something which could be systematically and methodologically improved. It was seen as a God-given or inherited gift," the Turner movement disagreed and showed men how to improve on their genetics through training.³⁸ Jahn's philosophy was, thus, tied to a belief in self-actualization. As the movement evolved in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea that strength and enhanced manhood could be attained through the effort of willpower and

discipline was widely acknowledged. The display of a manly physique became important in Germany in the late Nineteenth Century, being equated in the public's mind with both the resolve and strength of the nation as well as the individual's sexual potency and attractiveness.³⁹ As R.E. Kirchner explained it in *Mein Geheimsystem* (*My Secret System*): "Only the muscular man is irresistibly attractive to women. A shiver of admiration comes over her each time she sees how one of these strong beings lifts a heavy weight. She loves to see the hefty muscles bulge."⁴⁰

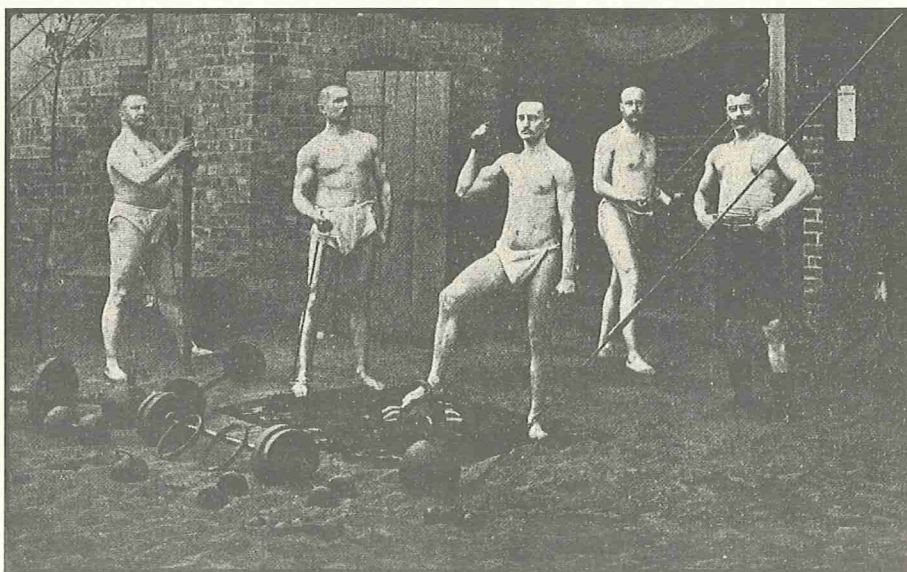


At the turn of the Twentieth Century, Theodore Siebert provided both systematic methods and philosophical rationale to lead Germany into a new era of strength training. Siebert, who was born in 1866 in Weißenfels, followed his father into the brewing business and had taken a job in 1886 in Vienna, Austria, when he first became aware of weight training.⁴¹ Wrote Siebert, "We had many Bavarians there among the 130 brewers, and the best of them performed and showed off all kinds of strength stunts."⁴² According to historian Bernd Wedemeyer, strength feats and heavy training were especially popular in the 1880s among craftsmen, laborers, and brewers, "and it was precisely

the brewing centers of Munich and Vienna that gradually became bastions of strength athletics."⁴³ Siebert left Vienna when his worker's visa expired, returned home, fulfilled his military obligations, and in 1892 opened his own brewery and restaurant with an attached beer hall.⁴⁴ That same year Siebert reportedly met Josef Haupt (1865-1935), the editor of Germany's first sport newspaper: *Munchner Illustrierte Athleten-Zeitung* (*Munich Illustrated Athletes' News*), a newspaper that would play an important role in the acceptance of heavy weight training in Germany.⁴⁵ Following his meeting with Haupt, Siebert began training systematically with weights, using himself as an experimental subject. "In a

lonely little village," he later wrote, "cut off from all sporting life, I procured for myself two old twenty-five kilogram (fifty-five pound) weights and was glad when I could press the same, one in each hand; then after several months, I could go five or six times with both arms."⁴⁶ By 1894 he began publishing articles on lifting in Haupt's *Munchner Illustrierte Athleten Zeitung* and then, in 1898, Siebert published his systematic analysis of strength training entitled *Katechismus der Athletik (Catechism of Athletics)*.⁴⁷ That same year, now increasingly involved with lifting, Siebert attended a heavy athletics

festival in Vienna where he met the Russian physician Dr. Vladislav von Krajewski, who was also a contributor to Haupt's newspaper. With von Krajewski was his famous protégé, the weightlifter and wrestler George Hackenschmidt, with whom Siebert would form a life-long friendship.⁴⁸ Seeing Hackenschmidt's remarkable physical condition intensified Siebert's enthusiasm for weight training. During 1897, Siebert's beer hall, located in the small town of Alsleben on the Saale River, had served as a meeting place for the town's athletes and as the headquarters for the town's athletic club. Following his return from Vienna, Siebert worked even more closely with those interested in weight training, and in 1901 opened what is considered the "first training school for athletics and physical culture in Germany."⁴⁹ As Siebert's enthusiasm for, and appreciation of, the benefits of weight training increased, he continued to find ways over the next several decades to promote the sport. For one thing he published a number of books: *Be Strong* (1905), *The Way to Strength* (1906-07), *The Strength Sports* (1907), *Under Which System Should I Train?* (1910), *Should I Become a Professional Athlete or Wrestler?* (1919), and, in 1923, *Training Methods: Be Strong!* and *The New Strength Sports*. He also started his own publishing company, sold mail-order courses, and moved his center of operations to the much larger city of Halle. Even so, Siebert was never able to make much money through his promotion of weight training.⁵⁰ He clearly inspired many



Although primitive by modern standards, Siebert's gym contained the necessary basics—barbells, dumbbells and kettlebells. Note the loose-dirt floor, useful for dropping kettlebells and barbells from overhead. Siebert is the second man from the left.

men to take up competitive weightlifting, but unlike several of his countrymen Siebert did not get rich off the muscle game.

Relatively speaking, the man who made the greatest fortune off of bodybuilding was Siebert's contemporary, Friedrich Karl Müller, better known as Eugen Sandow.⁵¹ Sandow's life and importance to the history of bodybuilding have been well documented by historians and will not be recounted in detail here.⁵² However, it needs to be understood that the authors' lack of discussion of Sandow is not meant as an indication that he is in any way unimportant to the story of German bodybuilding. Just the opposite is actually the case. Next to Jahn, Sandow is probably the most significant figure in the history of German physical culture. Sandow was not only an international celebrity whose body symbolized ideal male perfection, but his entrepreneurial and promotional skills brought weight training into wide acceptance, even to the highest ranks of society.⁵³

Sandow's impact was particularly felt in the United States and in the countries of the British Commonwealth, where he toured extensively. Although born in Germany, Sandow did not return to his homeland when he decided to retire from the stage. Instead, he settled in London and devoted himself to working with the British military, teaching the upper classes of British society, and promoting his books—all of which were



The young Siegmund Klein had this photo taken at the Aldene photographic studio in New York City, shortly after his arrival in 1924. It is inscribed, "To my friend Joe Lambert." Sig closed his salutation with the German phrase "Kraft Heil," meaning hail to strength. On the back, Sig wrote for posterity, "This photo was given to Joe Lambert in 1925. Only one I have of this pose."

first published in English. Sandow had good entrepreneurial instincts and made considerable money selling his signature products—spring grip dumbbells, Sandow's Cocoa, his training courses, and *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*.⁵⁴ No doubt part of Sandow's international celebrity came from the fact that in many instances Sandow was speaking to people who were somewhat familiar with weight training. This is because thousands of *Turners* left Germany in the Nineteenth Century to emigrate to the United States and other parts of the world, and many of them formed new *Turnvereins* once they were settled.⁵⁵

In Europe and the United States, the emergence of the circus and variety theater in the Nineteenth Century fostered the growth of professional strength performers to the point that no circus seemed complete without a strength act. Hans Steyrer, for instance—known as the Bavarian Hercules—worked in both the circus and variety theater during the last three decades of the Nineteenth Century and was featured on the cover of the *International Illustrierte Athleten Zeitung*

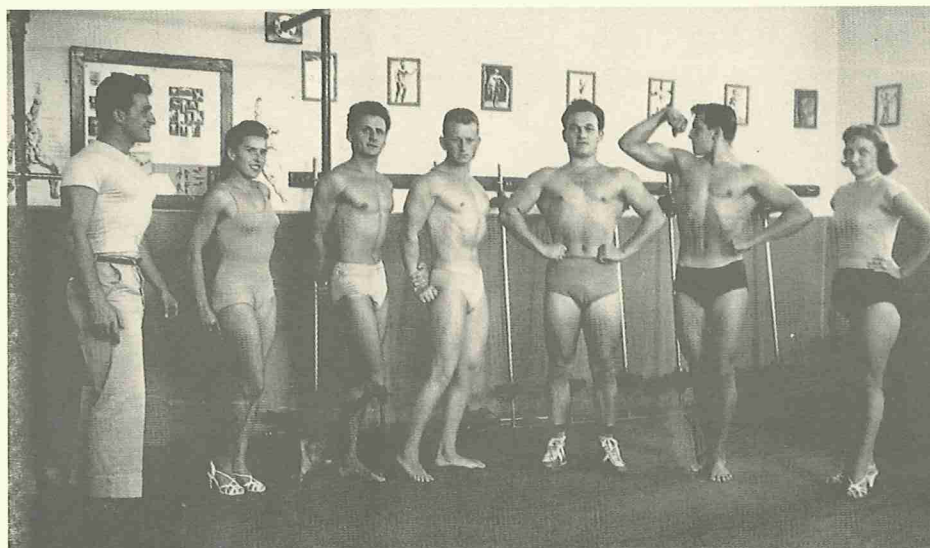
more times than any other athlete. Other German professionals from the late nineteenth, and first decades of the Twentieth Century included Louis Durlacher, known as Professor Attila; Carl Abs from Mecklenberg; Arthur, Hermann, and Kurt Saxon; Max Sick, known as Maxick; Kati Brumbach, known as Sandwina; Josephine Blatt, known as Minerva; Josef Strassberger; and, of course, Herman Goerner.⁵⁶

In the early Twentieth Century, as new waves of immigrants arrived in America from Germany, several men who'd learned about heavy lifting in the sport clubs of Germany would play influential roles in helping American weightlifting grow. For example, Karl Moerke, the 1920 world weightlifting champion, arrived in the United States in 1923 and garnered considerable publicity by leg pressing the front end of a fire engine—complete with crew—in an exhibition in Hoboken, New Jersey.⁵⁷ Moerke found the spotlight again in December of 1925 when he outlifted another recent German immigrant, Heinrich “Milo” Steinborn, in a contest sponsored by the newly formed American Continental Weightlifting Association.⁵⁸ Moerke, at 5'2" and 220 pounds, lacked the more graceful physique of his countryman, Steinborn, who can be credited for bringing heavy squat training to America. When Steinborn squatted, however, there were no racks to hold the bar at shoulder height. Instead, he began the lift by standing the bar on end and then rocking it over onto his back and shouldering it while he was in the full squat position. Steinborn's record of 553 pounds remains unbroken.⁵⁹

One of the most important German immigrants in America was Siegmund Klein, whose entire adult life was dedicated to the advancement of strength training. Klein was born in Thorn, Germany, on 12 April 1902. There has been some confusion about Klein's birthplace because in his training course, *Super Physique*, published during World War II, he claimed that he had been born in Cleveland. This piece of misinformation was then repeated by other authors who wrote about Klein's life.⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, Klein feared that his German heritage would adversely affect sales of the course during wartime. In 1947, when a new edition of the course appeared, Klein listed his birthplace as Thorn.⁶¹ So, although Klein wasn't born in Cleveland, he spent almost all of his childhood there as his parents left Germany when he was only a year old.⁶² As a teenager, Siegmund, or “Sig” as he was known, belonged to a *turnverein* in Cleveland where he began training at age

fifteen. He developed a close relationship with Carl Hein, a *turnverein* instructor, who helped him learn gymnastics and handbalancing. Sig took up barbell training at age seventeen. His interest deepened as he began reading *Physical Culture* and *Health and Strength* magazines, and by the time he reached young manhood, he possessed a remarkably muscular physique and an ardent love of the iron game.⁶³ Historian David Webster describes Klein as the “first advanced bodybuilding specialist.” Webster bases his claim on the fact that Klein's motivation for training—and what he later taught in his gym—was that training should create a shapely physique rather than simply focusing on performing specialized feats of strength or skill.⁶⁴ In 1924, Klein traveled to New York City hoping to meet Professor Attila, whose training methods and gymnasium had become famous through articles in the *Police Gazette* and the New York newspapers.⁶⁵ When Klein arrived, he found the gym closed and learned that the Professor had recently passed away. Deciding to pay his respects to Attila's widow, Klein stopped by the Professor's house where he met Attila's daughter, Grace—a young woman he subsequently married. Sig—with the blessing of Attila's wife—then re-opened the Professor's gym in 1927 and over the next half century built it into an elite center for serious bodybuilders and strongmen. Adopting the motto “train for shape and strength will follow,” Klein made no secret of his German roots. In the September 1931 issue of his new magazine, *Klein's Bell*, he claimed, “I am happy that I was born in Germany, the home of strong-men.”⁶⁶ In his short-lived magazine Klein featured dozens of bodybuilders and strongmen of German heritage.⁶⁷ Klein argued that the connections between *Turnen* and weightlifting were easy to understand. In an article on Friederich Ludwig Jahn, for example, Klein wrote,

Shortly after the *Turnvereins* became well established in Germany, it became evident that many of the members were unable physically to do some of the required feats. A number of the leaders resorted to the use of weights to build up their pupils' strength. It proved successful in almost all cases and to the surprise of many found an enthusiastic reception on the part of a large number of those who were so trained. These men found a



The founding members of the German Bodybuilding Union—*Deutscher Koerperbildungsbund*: Harry Gelbfarb, Elly Gelbfarb, Gustav Woerner, Lorenz Breier, Karlheinz Rued, Heinz Barth, and Ingrid Breier.

Photo courtesy Harry Gelbfarb.

fascination in this ancient sport and many of them drifted away entirely from the gymnastics which they had originally taken up. Thus weightlifting became one of the leading sports among the German physical culturists.⁶⁸

Although bodybuilding flourished in the United States and Great Britain during the 1920s and 1930s, it did not make much progress in Germany as new light-weight systems of exercise found greater favor. In 1905, J. P. Muller published *My System*, which advocated a light regimen that took less than fifteen minutes and could be done in the privacy of one's home.⁶⁹ The ease and simplicity of Muller's system was a great draw, and his book was eventually translated into twenty-four languages.⁷⁰ Unlike Siebert and his followers—who were interested in maximizing muscle—Muller advocated training to create a slender bodily ideal and even mocked those who trained with heavy weights and wanted large muscles.⁷¹ Historian Arnd Krüger argues that Muller's popularity came from the fact that “he was in complete concurrence with the ideals of neoclassicism and health reform,” both movements of importance in Germany in this time.⁷² Hans Surén continued this “aesthetic” approach to training in a series of books in the twenties and thirties that featured his slender and

heavily-oiled nude body. An ex-army officer, Surén published *Deutsche Gymnastik* in 1924, a book that advocated a light-weight exercise system and “air bathing” or nudity.⁷³ As with Muller's books, the German public was drawn to the apparent ease of Surén's system.⁷⁴

It is interesting that during this same era, competitive weightlifting grew steadily as the Olympic movement provided a focus for training and “world” championships were held on a yearly basis in Europe.⁷⁵ In 1891 the *Deutsche Athleten Bund* formed to help sponsor weightlifting contests and training and by 1900 Germany had three hundred registered clubs and more

than eleven thousand members.⁷⁶ During the 1920s, when German weightlifters broke eighty-six world records and frequently dominated the world championships, the newly named *Deutscher Schwerathletik Verband* had approximately 130,000 members.⁷⁷ Recreational weight training or bodybuilding, however, enjoyed no such growth. In fact, during the 1930s and 1940s—when America was holding its first Mr. America contests and Muscle Beach was in full swing, almost no one in Germany considered himself a bodybuilder, and there were no gyms specializing in physique training. Long-time bodybuilding and weightlifting official Oscar State wrote about Germany's lack of bodybuilding activity in 1961, arguing, “Although they must have had the material, Germany showed no inclination towards the bodybuilding field and physique contests. Only once in 1939 did I ever meet any German bodybuilders in a Mr. Europe contest. There were four on this occasion, and by 1939 standards they had great physiques.”⁷⁸

Bodybuilding's rebirth after World War II can be laid at the feet of a peripatetic Austrian, Harry Gelbfarb. Following the war, Gelbfarb immigrated to the United States, settling in New York City in 1947. There, he joined a boxing club and discovered a copy of a muscle magazine with Steve Reeves on its cover. Reeves' physique inspired Gelbfarb to become more serious about exercise, and so he added chin-ups, push-ups, and

dips between two chairs to his boxing workouts. On a walk in Manhattan one day, he discovered Sig Klein's gym. Gelbfarb met Klein that day and spent a considerable time talking about training with Klein who was happy to have a chance to practice his German. Gelbfarb was inspired by Klein and impressed with his gym: "I would have loved to train at Sig Klein's gym but I could not afford the fee."⁷⁹ A short while later, however, through a friendship with another man, Gelbfarb visited the Eastside Barbell Club—home to three of the top bodybuilders in America at the time: Artie Zeller, Marvin Eder, and Leroy Colbert. Gelbfarb was reportedly so thrilled with what he saw on his first visit that he became a member the very same day.⁸⁰

Gelbfarb's interest in bodybuilding was cut short, however, when he enlisted in the army and found himself stationed in Schweinfurt, Germany. As a Jew he had worried about living in Germany but found the after-War atmosphere completely different. There was only one problem: there was no place to train. After completing his tour of duty, Gelbfarb moved to California to study physiotherapy. There he discovered Muscle Beach—where he became a regular—and also took a job at the Beverly Hills Health Club.⁸¹ By this time Gelbfarb was convinced he wanted to own his own gym and he kept thinking about the lack of bodybuilding gyms in Germany. So, in 1955, he took his savings, went back across the Atlantic, and returned to Schweinfurt, where he'd been stationed during his Army days. He found a building and then set about the daunting task of having equipment made from scratch—as there were no equipment companies in Germany selling what he wanted.⁸² Gelbfarb's gym was a modest success and served to inspire Leopold "Poldi" Merc, another Austrian who had become acquainted with bodybuilding in the USA, to open a similar gym in Berlin. In 1958 Merc placed fourth in the NABBA Mr. Universe contest, which he eventually won six years later.⁸³ The third bodybuilding gym in Germany was opened by Peter Gottlob, who later won the Mr. Germany title in Stuttgart, in 1959.⁸⁴

In 1959, when the first Mr. Europe contest was announced, Gelbfarb and several of his gym members wanted to enter. Their entry was returned, however, because Germany didn't have a national governing body for bodybuilding that officially designated him as a representative for Germany. So Gelbfarb, his wife Elly and five members of his gym (Gustav Woerner, Lorenz

Breier, Karlheinz Rued, Heinz Barth and Ingrid Breier) founded the *Deutscher Körperbildungsbund* (German Bodybuilding Union), which enabled Gelbfarb and two of his gym members—Hans Glaab and Fritz Stephan—to enter the first Mr. Europe contest in Turin, Italy.⁸⁵ The next year, Gelbfarb and his new *Deutscher Körperbildungsbund* sponsored the first Mr. Germany contest. Although Gelbfarb worried that there wouldn't be enough bodybuilders, the contest, won by Reinhard Smolana, was a success and has been held every year since.⁸⁶

During the 1960s, bodybuilding continued to grow in Germany, helped by the advent of muscle magazines in German and an increasing number of bodybuilding gyms. The first of these contemporary muscle magazines appeared in 1960—*Der Muskelbilder*, a German edition of Joe Weider's *Muscle Builder*. Three years later, a German magazine, *Kraftsport Revue*, began publication.⁸⁷ By 1965, Germany had twenty-four bodybuilding gyms, according to Gelbfarb, who had moved his own base of operations to Nuremberg, and a second bodybuilding contest entered the annual calendar that year. The first *Bestgebauter Athlet* (Best Built Athlete) contest was held in Stuttgart with both open and junior divisions. Helmut Riedmeier, who also won that year's Mr. Germany contest, took the open title while the junior class was won by the very young Arnold Schwarzenegger.⁸⁸

Schwarzenegger, though an Austrian, was also one of the original eleven members of the *Deutscher Bodybuilding und Kraftsportverband* (German Bodybuilding and Strength Sport Union) founded in 1966, which replaced its predecessor—*Deutscher Körperbildungsbund*. The other original members were Gernulf Garbe, Peter Streich, Dieter Heiber, Franz Dischinger, Helmut Riedmeier, Jürgen Petrick, Wolfgang Simon, Erich Janner, Rolf Putzinger and Albert Busek.⁸⁹

Since 1970, the evolution of bodybuilding in Germany has closely paralleled developments in the United States and other parts of Europe.⁹⁰ Gyms continued to open throughout Germany and weight training became an accepted activity in the "average" person's fitness plans.⁹¹ The competitive aspects of bodybuilding also continued to grow. The first national women's championships were held in 1981 amid considerable skepticism that the sport would catch on with women.

Sponsored by the *Deutscher Bodybuilding und Kraftsportverband*, the women's contest has continued on an annual basis. The appearance of a German translation of *Pumping Iron* in 1984 also contributed to a rapid growth in both gym memberships and gym openings. By 2001, for example, Germany had more than five million gym members training at no less than six thousand clubs.⁹²

In looking at the modern German bodybuilding scene, it is not immediately apparent that IFBB professional champion Marcus Ruhl's many victories owed anything to an early Nineteenth Century physical educator known as *Turnvater* Jahn. However, if Jahn had not created *Turnen*; if *Turnen* had not embraced weightlifting; if Sig Klein had not become a *Turnverein* member and then gym owner; and if Harry Gelbfarb had not wandered into Klein's gym one day and begun to learn about bodybuilding; then Gelbfarb might never have returned to the Fatherland and launched the modern era of this sport in Germany.

Notes:

¹ Wolf-Dietrich Brettschneider, Wolf-Dietrich Miethling, "Entwicklungstendenzen im Sport-, Spiel- und Bewegungsalltag von Jugendlichen. Eine Herausforderung für den Schulsport" (*Tendencies of Development in Every-day Sport, Game and Activities of Juveniles. A Challenge for Physical Education*), *Sportpädagogik* 1(1989): 7-11.

² Richard Mandell, *Sport, A Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 157-161; Fred E. Leonard, "Johann Christopf Friedrich GutsMuths: Teacher of Gymnastics at Schnepfenthal, 1786-1835," *Mind and Body* 17(January 1911): 321-326; and Ellen Gerber, *Innovators and Institutions in Physical Education* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1971), 115-121.

³ Robert A. Mechikoff and Steven G. Estes, *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), 140-141.

⁴ J.C.F. GutsMuths, *Gymnastik für die Jugend: Enthaltend eine Praktische Anweisung zu Leibesübungen*. (Schnepfenthal: Buchhandlung der Erziehungsanstalt, 1793).

⁵ C.G. Salzmann [J.C.F. GutsMuths], *Gymnastics for Youth: Or a Practical Guide to Delightful and Amusing Exercises for the Use of Schools* (London: printed for J. Johnston, 1800). The Philadelphia edition had the same title and was published by William Duane in 1802.

⁶ Mechikoff and Estes, *History and Philosophy*, 156.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 156-157.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰ Horst Ueberhorst, *Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and his Time, 1778-1852* (Munich: Heinze Moos Verlag, 1978), 35-36.

¹¹ F.L. Jahn, *Deutsches Volksthum* (Lubeck, Germany, 1810).

¹² Allen Guttman, *Sports: The First Five Millennia* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 274. Interestingly, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 497, suggests that Jahn adapted "turner" from the French word, "tourner," which means "one who turns or makes a circuit," p. 191.

¹³ Hans Ballin, "Biographical Sketch of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn," *Mind and Body* 1(October 1894): 1-7; Fred Eugene Leonard, "Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and the Development of Popular Gymnastics (Vereinsturnen) in Germany, Part One," *American Physical Education Review* 12 (July 1905): 133-139.

¹⁴ Ueberhorst, *Jahn and His Time*, 103.

¹⁵ Christiane Eisenberg, "Charismatic Nationalist Leader," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 13(1) (March 1996): 14-27; and Metchikoff and Estes, *History and Philosophy*, 157.

¹⁶ Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and Ernst Eiselen, *Die Deutsche Turnkunst zur Einrichtung der Turnplätze* (Felbach: 1816), 2; and Fred Eugene Leonard, *Pioneers of Modern Physical Training* (New York: Association Press, 1915), 37.

¹⁷ Mechikoff and Estes, *A History and Philosophy of Sport*, 156-157; and Jahn and Eiselen, *Die Deutsche Turnkunst*, 2.

¹⁸ Ueberhorst, *Jahn and His Time*, 102-103.

¹⁹ Heinrich Von Treitschke, *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New York: Ams Press, 1968), 359.

²⁰ Ueberhorst, *Jahn and his Time*, 64; Leonard, *Pioneers*, 38; and Dieter Langewiesche, "Für Volk und Vaterland Kraeftig zu Wirken" *Zur Politischen und Gesellschaftlichen Rolle der Turner Zwischen 1811 und 1871*. Ommo Gruppe, ed. (Tuebingen: Kulturgut oder Koerperkult, 1990), 22-61.

²¹ Erich Geldbach, "The Beginning of German Gymnastics in America," *Journal of Sport History* 3(1976): 245.

²² Guttman, *Sport*, 274; Hans Langenfeld, "Wie Sich der Sport in Deutschland Seit 200 Jahren Organisatorisch Entwickelt Hat," in: Helmut Digel, ed., *Sport im Verein und im Verband*. (Schorndorf: 1988), 20.

²³ Helmut Digel, "Sportverein (sport clubs)," Hans Eberspächer ed., *Handlexikon Sportwissenschaft*. (Reinbek, 1992), 427-431.

²⁴ G. Seehase and H. Reip, "Anatomie eines Vereins. Hamburger Turnerschaft von 1816 – der Weg durch Fünf Generationen," *Hamburger Turnerschaft: Der Verein. Standort, Aufgabe und Funktion in Sport und Gesellschaft* (Schorndorf, 1966), 29-57.

²⁵ Jahn called the new exercises *Turnen*, and over time the words *Turners* (people who did gymnastics) and *Turnverein* (place for gymnastics or society for gymnastics) were also commonly used.

²⁶ By 1911 the *Turnverein* had more than one million members.

Edmund Neuendorf, "Geschichte der Neueren Deutschen Leibesübungen vom Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart." *Die Zeit von 1820 bis 1860*, vol. 3. (Dresden: 1930).

27 Jan Todd, "The Strength Builders: A History of Barbells Dumbbells, and Indian Clubs," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 20 (1) (March 2003): 65-90.

28 GutsMuths, *Gymnastics for Youth*, 316.

29 *Ibid.*, 317.

30 Charles Beck, *A Treatise on Gymnastics, Taken Chiefly from the German of FL Jahn* (Northampton, MA: Simeon Butler, 1828).

31 Beck, *Treatise on Gymnastics*, 123.

32 *Ibid.*, 121.

33 See Todd, "The Strength Builders," for a more complete description of this lift.

34 Joseph R. Svinth, "A Chronological History of the Martial Arts and Combative Sports: 1700-1859," viewed on 6 July 2005 at: <http://ejmas.com/kronos/NewHist1700-1859.htm>.

35 E. Eiselen, *Hantelübungen für Turner und Zimmerturner*. (Berlin 1883); M. Kloss, *Hantelbüchlein für Zimmerturner*. (Leipzig 1886).

36 "Aarg. Kantonaltturnfest, Rheinfelden, 30, 31 Juli, 1 August 1904." Poster, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

37 Guttman, *Sports*, 276-277.

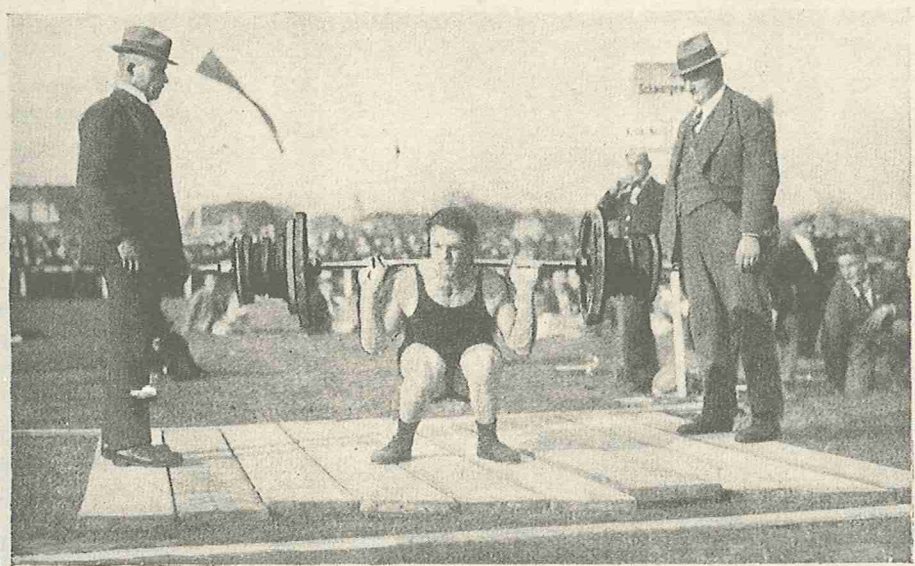
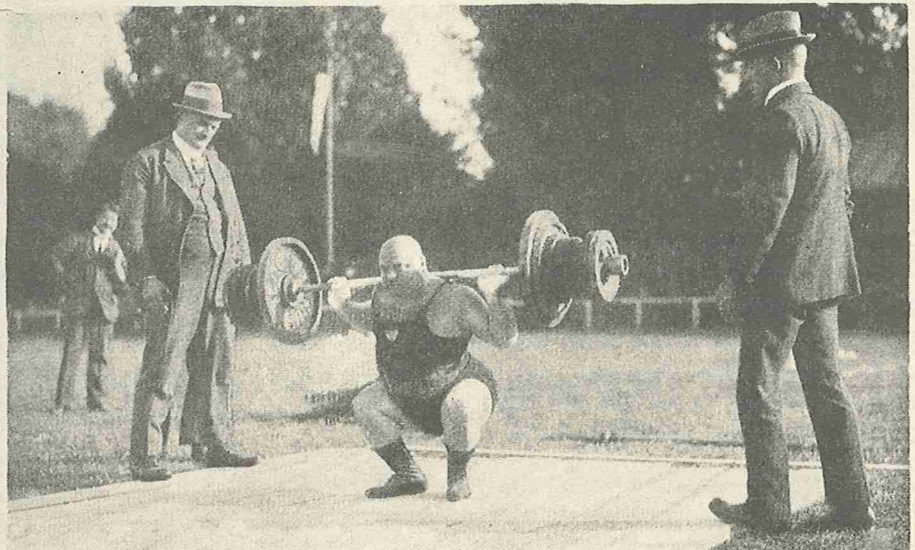
38 Eberhard Hildenbrandt, "Milo, Marx und Muskelpille—Anmerkungen zur Kulturgeschichte des sportlichen Trainings," in: Helmut Gabler/Ulrich Göhner (Ed.) *Für einen besseren Sport . . . Themen, Entwicklungen und Perspektiven aus Sport und Sportwissenschaft*. (Schorndorf, 1990), 267.

39 Arnd Krüger, "There Goes this Art of Manliness: Naturalism and Racial Hygiene in Germany," *Journal of Sport History* 18(1) (Spring 1991), 139.

40 Ralph Eugen Kirchner, *Mein Geheimsystem*. (Leipzig: Maximilian Wendsl, n.d), 8.

41 Bernd Wedemeyer and David Chapman, trans., "Theodor Siebert: A Biography," *Iron Game History* 6(3) (May/June 2000): 5-6.

Weight Lifting as a Sport in Germany



This double newspaper photograph shows Karl Moerke and Milo Steinborn competing in the German National Heavyweight Lifting Championships. Note how different this photograph looks from a modern squat photo. There are no squat racks, the spotters are dressed in business suits and wearing hats, and the setting is outdoors. Note also the differences in the style of squats done by the two men.

42 Theodor Siebert, "Wie ich 'Athletenvater' wurde," part 2, *Die Athletik: Illustrierte Monatsschrift für Volkstumlichen Sport* 9(2): (1921-1922), 17.

43 Wedemeyer and Chapman, "Theodor Siebert," 6.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 Quoted in Wedemeyer and Chapman, "Theodor Siebert," 8.

- 47 Ibid., and Theodor Siebert, *Katechismus der Athletik* (Chatechism of Athletics), (Leipzig: 1898).
- 48 Wedemeyer and Chapman, "Theodor Siebert," 8-10.
- 49 Ibid., 9.
- 50 Ibid., 9-10.
- 51 The best biography of Sandow's life is David Chapman's *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Modern Bodybuilding* (Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994).
- 52 For Sandow's importance see: Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*; John F. Kasson, *Houdini Tarzan and the Perfect Man* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); David P. Webster, *The Iron Game* (Irvine, Scotland: by the author, 1976), 16-24; David P. Webster, *Bodybuilding an Illustrated History* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1979), 29-39; and Josh Buck, Sandow: No Folly with Ziegfeld's First Glorification," *Iron Game History* 5(1), (May 1998): 29-33.
- 53 Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*. 11.
- 54 Books authored by Sandow include: *Sandow's System Of Physical Training* (London: Gale and Polden, 1894); *Strength and How to Obtain It* (London: Gale and Polden, 1897); *Body-Building: Man in the Making* (London: Gale and Polden, 1904); And *Life is Movement: The Physical Reconstruction and Regeneration of the People* (London: Gale and Polden, 1919).
- 55 Elliott J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1993), 77.
- 56 For information on Attila and professional strongmen in the late Nineteenth Century see: Kim Beckwith and Jan Todd, "Requiem for a Strongman: Reassessing the Career of Professor Louis Attila," *Iron Game History*, 2(3) (July, 2002): 42-55. See also: Webster, *The Iron Game*, 152-153.
- 57 Webster, *The Iron Game*, 35.
- 58 John D. Fair, "Father Figure or Phony? George Jowett. The ACWLA and the Milo Barbell Company, 1924-1927," *Iron Game History* 3(5) (December 1994), 17.
- 59 David P. Willoughby, *The Super Athletes* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1970), 219. See also: Siegmund Klein, "Word Picture of Henry Steinborn," *Klein's Bell* 1(1931) 9, 4.
- 60 Siegmund Klein, *Super Physique. Body-Building Bar-Bell Course* (New York: 1943).
- 61 Siegmund Klein, *Super Physique*. (London: 1947).
- 62 Vic Boff, "Sig Klein (1902-1987): A Legend Passes On," viewed at: <http://www.naturalstrength.com/history/detail.asp?ArticleID=314>.
- 63 David Webster, *Bodybuilding*, 67.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Beckwith and Todd, "Requiem for a Strongman, 44.
- 66 Siegmund Klein, "Did you know that ..." *Klein's Bell* 1(9)(1931) 9, 5.
- 67 See for example: Siegmund Klein, "Word Picture of Henry Steinborn," *Klein's Bell* 1(6) (1931): 4; Siegmund Klein, "Herbert Seelig Proves that Small Men Can Have Perfect Proportions" *Klein's Bell* 1(9) (1931):1-2; G. Jowett, "The Three Jolly Germans," *Klein's Bell* 2(9) (1932): 3-4; and Siegmund Klein, "Adolph Pitz. At Fifty Years Still a Strong Man." *Klein's Bell* 1(12) (1931): 8.
- 68 Siegmund Klein, "Friederich Ludwig Jahn. Founder of the Turnvereins," *Klein's Bell* 2(1932): 5, 6.
- 69 Jens P. Muller, *Mein System* (Copenhagen: Tilge, 1905).
- 70 Krüger, "Naturism and Racial Hygiene," 144.
- 71 Muller, *Mein System*, 86.
- 72 Krüger, "Naturism and Racial Hygiene," 144.
- 73 Hans Surén, *Deutsche Gymnastik* (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1924).
- 74 Krüger, "Naturism and Racial Hygiene," 144.
- 75 See Webster, *Iron Game*, pages 80-87 for a discussion of the various world championships held in the early Twentieth Century.
- 76 Webster, *Iron Game*, 152.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Oscar State, "Leopold Merc - Germany's Bodybuilding Ambassador," viewed at: http://www.classicbodybuilders.co.uk/bio_merc.shtml.
- 79 Harry Gelbfarb, personal communication. 2 February 2003.
- 80 Harry Gelbfarb, "Die Wurzeln des Bodybuilding in Deutschland," *Sportrevue* 31 (12) (1993): 140.
- 81 Ibid., 141.
- 82 Harry Gelbfarb, personal communication, 2 February 2003.
- 83 Classic Bodybuilders Collection, viewed online at: <http://www.classicbodybuilders.co.uk/m.shtml>.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Gelbfarb, "Bodybuilding in Deutschland," 142.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 In 1969, this magazine changed its name to *Sportrevue*. Andreas Krägermann, Florian Schneider, "Die Geschichte der Deutschen Kraftsportliteratur." *Sportrevue* 31 (1993) 12, 51-60.
- 88 Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Karriere eines Bodybuilders*. (Munich 1986).
- 89 Albert Busek, "Vom unbedeutenden Kleinverband zum erfolgreichsten nationalen Amateur-Bodybuilding-Verband der Welt," *Sportrevue* 29 (1991) 10, 4.
- 90 Deutscher Sportsudio-Verband. Personal Communication.
- 91 Gernulf Garbe, *Fit durch Bodybuilding*. Sportliche und medizinische Anleitung. (Bergisch Gladbach: 1977). This book was the first to use the term "bodybuilding" in Germany in the modern era.
- 92 Charles Gaines, George Butler, *Bodybuilding der Meisterklasse. Technik und Training der berühmten Champions*. (Munich: 1984).