

## Wilhelm Pfaender, A German Forty-Eighter and Turner Leader in Germany and America

By Don Heinrich Tolzmann

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### Introduction

Turnvereine (Turner societies) have played an important role in German and German-American history. Turners were involved in the War of Liberation during the Napoleonic Era and then participated in the 1848 Revolution.(1) Due to its failure, many of them immigrated to the U.S. One of them was Wilhelm Pfaender (1826-1905) who helped establish Turnvereine in Germany; Cincinnati, Ohio; and New Ulm, Minnesota. In 2009, a historical marker was erected in his honor in New Ulm, Minnesota.

The following article aims to provide a biographical survey of Pfaender's life by focusing on the historical marker erected in New Ulm. It consists, first, of remarks presented by the author at the dedication of the historical marker during a symposium of the Society for German-American Studies; second, of the text of the marker; and, finally, of a bibliographical essay on the life and times of Pfaender.

### Honoring Wilhelm Pfaender Presented in New Ulm, Minnesota 18 April 2009

Ten years ago, the Captain Jacob Nix Platz was dedicated in New Ulm together with a historical marker in honor of Captain Nix (1822-97), a German Forty-Eighter who the organized defense forces for the first Battle of New Ulm during the Sioux Uprising/Dakota War in 1862. He



Wilhelm Pfaender - photo courtesy of the Brown County Historical Society

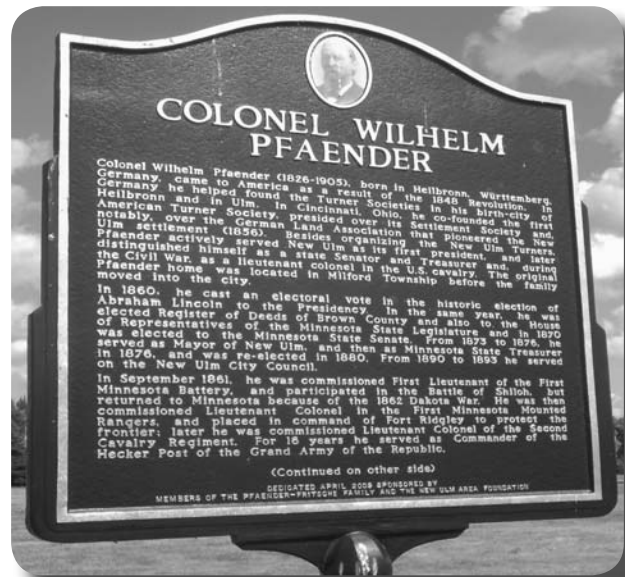
also wrote a history of that war in which he emphasized the point that honor is due to them that deserve it. (2) Wilhelm Pfaender certainly fits that definition, and New Ulm has shown that it is a city that honors its history and its German heritage. (3)

Wilhelm Pfaender is a name well known throughout the region, but also known on both sides of the Atlantic as well. (4) In Cincinnati, Ohio, reference was made to him during the recent celebration of the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cincinnati Turner Society, of which he was not only a founding member in 1848 and its first president, but also head of its Turner Settlement Society, which pioneered the City of New Ulm. (5) In Germany he is known in several cities as a co-founder of Turner societies there.

At a symposium of the Society of German-American Studies in New Ulm, Dr. Ted Fritsche, whose grandmother Amalie was a daughter of Col. Pfaender, gave me a copy of the history of Brown County that his father, Dr. L.A. Fritsche, had published in 1916. As it had long since gone out of print, I subsequently edited a reprint of the second volume, which consisted of a biographical directory of Brown County. This has a lengthy biography of Pfaender, which got me to thinking that he should be honored in some way. (6) This led to my discussing the topic with Denny Warta, who might best be called New Ulm's

“goodwill ambassador,” and the idea emerged that Pfaender be honored by means of a historical marker and a place named for him. (7)

We felt that such an honor was altogether fitting and appropriate given Pfaender's many contributions. This idea has now come to fruition with the dedication of a park in New Ulm, the Col. Wilhelm Pfaender Park, at the center of which is a historical marker in his honor. Thanks are due to all those who have made it possible, especially the New Ulm Area Foundation and the Pfaender-Fritsche family. And, a special word of thanks to Denny Warta for orchestrating efforts and plans to make this marker and park a reality. I would also like to express gratitude to the late Dr. Ted Fritsche for having given me a copy of his father's history of Brown County, which led me to the idea of honoring Pfaender.



The Pfaender Historical Marker. Photo from the author's collection

The text of the historical marker touches on various aspects of Pfaender's long and productive life, as it ranged from southwest Germany to Cincinnati, Ohio and on to New Ulm. Although it captures a sense of the major achievements of his life, each line would require much more to be said, such as with regard to his service in the American Civil War, especially at the Battle of Shiloh. (8) Nevertheless, this historical marker does highlight the major achievements and contributions of Wilhelm Pfaender. The text on the historical marker was a group effort completed by Denny Warta, Darla Gebhard (Brown County Historical Society), members of the Pfaender-Fritsche family, and myself.

### Text of the Historical Marker Colonel Wilhelm Pfaender

(side one)

Colonel Wilhelm Pfaender (1826-1905), born in Heilbronn, Württemberg, Germany, came to America as a result of the 1848 Revolution. In Germany, he helped found the Turner societies in his birth-city of Heilbronn and in Ulm. In Cincinnati, Ohio, he co-founded the first American Turner Society, presided over its Settlement Society and, notably, over the German Land Association that pioneered the New Ulm settlement

(1856). Besides organizing the New Ulm Turners, Pfaender actively served New Ulm as its first president, and later distinguished himself as a state Senator and Treasurer and during the Civil War, as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Cavalry. The original Pfaender home was located in Milford Township before the family moved to the city.

In 1860, he cast an electoral vote in the historic election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency. In the same year, he was elected Register of Deeds of Brown County and also to the House of Representatives of the Minnesota State Legislature and in 1870 was elected to the Minnesota State Senate. From 1873 to 1876, he served as Mayor of New Ulm, and then as Minnesota State Treasurer in 1876, and was re-elected in 1880. From 1890 to 1893 he served on the New Ulm City Council.

In September 1861, he was commissioned First Lieutenant of the First Minnesota Battery, and participated in the Battle of Shiloh, but returned to Minnesota because of the 1862 Dakota War. He was then commissioned Lieutenant Colonel in the First Minnesota Mounted Rangers, and placed in command of Fort Ridgley to protect the frontier; later he was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel of the Second Cavalry Regiment. For 16 years he served as Commander of the

Hecker Post of the Grand Army of the Republic.

(Side two)

In his *History of Brown County, Minnesota: Its People, Industries and Institutions* (1916), Dr. L.A. Fritsche wrote that Colonel Pfaender “always had at heart the interests of New Ulm and its people, and was ever a promoter of the locality and its inhabitants.”

He also wrote that Pfaender “was not only a public spirited citizen and busy man in civil life but a patriot of high type, as proven by his record in war. The corner stone of Mr. Pfaender’s character was a high sense of justice and honor, and whether in civil or military life, he was always a courteous gentleman.” He further notes that “While he was a firm believer in his convictions of his rules of life, he was always tolerant of differences of opinion; he was ever a peace-maker.”

As one of the founding fathers of New Ulm, Minnesota, Colonel Pfaender occupies an honored place in the annals of its history as one of its most admired citizens.

Dedicated April 2009  
Sponsored by  
Members of the Pfaender-Fritsche  
Family  
and  
New Ulm Area foundation

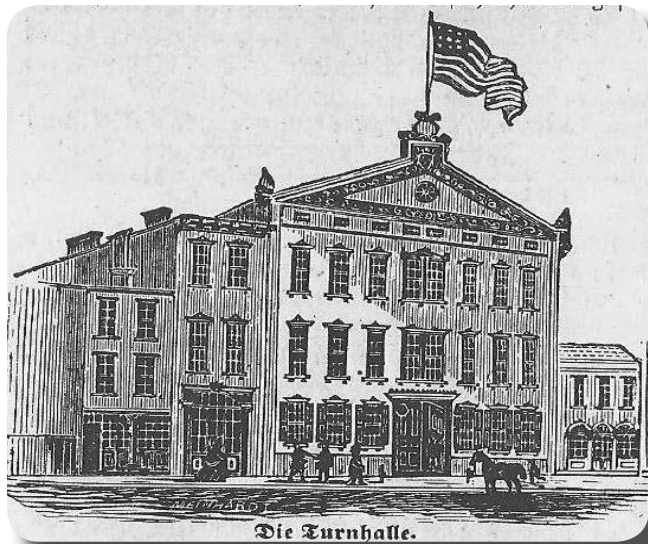
## Bibliographical Essay

This addendum consists of references to sources on the life and times of Wilhelm Pfaender and supplements the above remarks and the following footnotes. They were collected during the project that resulted in the creation of the historical marker for Pfaender and are presented here for further information.

One of the best sources for information on Pfaender and the Turners can be found in the yearbook of German-American Turner history, *Jahrbücher der deutsch-amerikanischen Turnerei*. The Turner yearbooks contain a number of articles by and about Pfaender and the Turner societies he co-founded, which help place Pfaender in the framework of the history of Turnerism in Germany and America.

A good starting place in the Turner yearbooks is a brief, but informative biographical article on Pfaender: Heinrich Metzner, “Wilhelm, Pfänder,” *Jahrbücher der deutsch-amerikanischen Turnerei* 3:1(1893): 45-47. Metzner was the chief Turner chronicler and historian of the time and provides a basic summary of Pfaender’s life and work.

Another informative article consists of the speech Pfaender presented in Cincinnati for the dedication of the Turner gymnastic grounds there in 1850. It was reprinted in the Turner yearbook as: Wilhelm Pfaender, “Rede zur Einweihung des ersten Turnplatzes der Cincinnati Turngemeinde am Neujahrestage 1850,” *Jahrbücher*



Turner Hall in Cincinnati. Photo from the author's collection



Turner Hall in New Ulm. Photo courtesy of the Brown County Historical Society

*der deutsch-amerikanischen Turnerei* 1:1(1890): 38-40. In his speech Pfaender emphasized that the purpose of Turnerism is to keep the individual not only physically, but also intellectually fit. He also explained that such principles are closely connected “with the struggle for freedom and the improvement of social conditions.” The point was that Turnerism was not merely a gymnastic organization and that its program had social-political implications.

Pfaender closed his 1850 address with the Turner motto: *Frisch, fromm, fröhlich, frei*, or: “*Fresh, pious, happy, free!*” This demonstrates that Pfaender maintained the Turner motto from Germany, which was created by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, better known as Turnvater Jahn. This slogan remained the official slogan of the Turners until 1880, when a new one was adopted at a national convention of the Turners: *Frisch und frei, stark und treu*, or *Fresh*

*and free, strong and true.*

The change of the Turner slogan reflected the transition from a German to a German-American perspective. By 1880, Turners were proud of their service in the Civil War and wanted to emphasize that they were “strong and true.” Having a slogan saying they were “pious” and “happy” probably struck them as not making much sense. They also wanted to emphasize that they were “fresh and free.” It is particularly interesting that in 1850 Pfaender used the original Jahn slogan, but that in 1880 he presided over the national convention of the Turners that voted to change the slogan to a more German-American version. It most likely was the Civil War experience that contributed to this transition and acceptance of the new slogan. For information on that national convention of the Turners, see: “Die 9. Tagsatzung in Indianapolis vom 30. Mai bis 2. Juni 1880,” *Jahrbücher der*

*deutsch-amerikanischen Turnerei* 3:1(1893): 260.

Other articles of interest in the Turner historical yearbooks cover the nativist hostilities of the Know-Nothing period of the 1850s. Two of them deal with events in Cincinnati and northern Kentucky, which contributed to the decision of many to join the Turner Settlement Society that Pfaender organized and led. Since Pfaender lived in Cincinnati and northern Kentucky at this time, these articles help us visualize the events of that time period, as Pfaender experienced them. One of these articles was by a fellow member of the Cincinnati Turnverein, Gustav Tafel, who succeeded Pfaender as its president, and describes the nativist clash that took place in Cincinnati. See: Gustav Tafel, “Die Tage vom 2. bis 4. April 1855 in Cincinnati,” *Jahrbücher der deutsch-amerikanischen Turnerei* 2:1(1892): 5-16.

Another article describes the nativist attack on Turners in northern Kentucky in 1856. See: "Die Vorgänge in Covington und Newport," *Jahrbücher der deutsch-amerikanischen Turnerei* 2:1(1892): 110-20. Also, see: Emil Klauprecht, *German Chronicle in the History of the Ohio Valley and its Capital City Cincinnati in Particular*. Translated by Dalve V. Lally, Jr. and edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1992), which goes into detail about the nativist events of the 1850s. The aforementioned works help place Pfaender within the framework of the history of the Turner movement in Germany and America. Taken together, the items listed here and in the notes indicate that although a marker has been established for Pfaender, there are more than enough sources available to put together a fully rounded story of his life and times. It is a story that embraces German, German-American, and American history, highlighting such topics as the 1848 Revolution, Turnerism, German immigration and settlement, the Civil War, the Sioux Uprising/Dakota War, and the latter decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

## Notes

1. For a general history of the German-American Turner movement, see: Horst Ueberhorst, *Turner unterm Sternenbanner: Der Kampf der deutsch-amerikanischen Turner für Einheit Freiheit und soziale Gerechtigkeit, 1848 bis 1918*. (München: Heinz Moos Verlag, 1978). He focuses on the social-political engagement and activities of the Turners up to 1918. For the subsequent history of Turnerism in the U.S., see: Annette R. Hoffmann, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des deutschen Turnens in den USA* (Schorndorf: Veag Karl Hoffmann, 2001). And, for a concise history of Turnerism in America, see: Heinrich Metzner, *History of the American Turners*. 4<sup>th</sup> revised edition. (Louisville: National Council of the American Turners, 1989).
2. See: Jacob Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota: Jacob Nix's Eyewitness History*, translated by Gretchen Steinhauser, Don Heinrich Tolzmann and Eberhard Reichmann and edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Indianapolis: Indiana University-Purdue University & Indiana German Heritage Society, 1994).
3. For a history of New Ulm, see: Daniel J. Hoisington, *A German Town: A History of New Ulm, Minnesota*. (Roseville, Minnesota: Edinborough Press, 2004). See also: J.H. Strasser, *New Ulm, Minnesota: J.H. Strasser's History & Chronology*. Translated and edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Pub. Co., 2003), which covers New Ulm history for the better part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For a concise article on the history of the Turner settlement of New Ulm, see: "Die Turneransiedlung New Ulm," *Jahrbücher der deutsch-amerikanischen Turnerei* 3:2(1893): 49-56.
4. For a survey of Pfaender's life and work, see: Grady Steele Parker, ed., *William Pfaender and the German-American Experience*. (Roseville, Minnesota: Edinborough Press, 2009), which contains essays by Hans Müller and Annette Hoffmann and two articles by Pfaender. Also, see: Grace Lovell May and Wilhelmina Pfaender Leonholdt, *Memory's Trail*. (New Ulm: New Ulm Daily Journal, 1954).
5. For a history of the Turner movement in Cincinnati, see: Dann Woellert, *Cincinnati Turner Societies: The Cradle of an American Movement*. (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2012).
6. See: L.A. Fritsche, *Brown County (New Ulm) Minnesota Pioneers and Their Families. Excerpted from Brown County, Minnesota: Its People, Industries and Institutions*, ed. With a new Introduction by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Baltimore, Maryland: Clearfield Co, Inc., 2001). For Pfaender's biography, see pp. 400-406. This volume consisted of a reprint edition of the second volume of Fritsche's history of Brown County. I also edited a volume with materials from the first volume of Fritsche's history that pertain to the Sioux Uprising/Dakota War. See: L.A. Fritsche, *Memories of the Battle of New Ulm: Personal Accounts*

of the Sioux Uprising: L.A. Fritsche's *History of Brown County, Minnesota (1916)*. (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2001).

- 7. For information on Denny Warta, see: *Heimatbrief: Stories of German-Bohemians*. (Roseville, Minnesota: German-Bohemian Heritage Society & Edinborough Press,

2013), pp. 403-405. Also, see: Denny Warta, *What is this All About?* (New Ulm, Minnesota: Sven and Ole's Books, 2013).

- 8. Regarding Pfaender's Civil War service, see: Wilhelm Kaufmann, *Germans in the American Civil War*, translated by Steven Rowan

and edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann with Werner Mueller and Robert E. Ward. (Carlisle, Pa.: John Kallmann Publishers, 1999), pp. 160-62, and 314.



Arches in Seiffen, Germany. Above larger than life size, left shown in a window.