

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



An activity for life. One of the progressive ideas that took hold in northern Europe during the 19th century was the idea of "a healthy mind in a healthy body." This philosophy resulted in the formation of the *German Turnverein* or Turners' Associations, and was incorporated into the Danish folk high school movement and brought to America by former pupils and teachers of these schools. Gymnastics often became part of the cultural curriculum taught in Danish-American communities and schools. In the 1920s Alfred C. Andreasen, a member of the Danish Federation of Gymnastics Instructors, toured Danish settlements in America to evaluate the state of gymnastics education in this country and reported his findings in a small booklet entitled *Gymnastikken*. His illustrations included the above photograph of a group of young female gymnasts from Kimballton, Iowa. Here and in Elk Horn groups of adults and children were taught by instructor Einar Christensen, who taught 'primitive' or the Bukh system of less formal gymnastic exercises, which allowed each individual to progress according to his/her own ability. Andreasen also wrote of gymnastics activities in Chicago; Nysted, Nebraska; Solvang, California; and at Grand View College in Des Moines.

In Andreasen's opinion gymnastics was not merely an activity for young people, but one that could be carried out as long as one lived, like somewhat like t'ai chi is thought of today. As well as developing a sense of teamwork, doing gymnastics enabled people to remain strong, supple, and vigorous, qualities which would stand them in good stead in their other life activities.