

Guide to the German Relief Association Records

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Unknown

Title: German Relief Association Records

Dates: 1870-1941

Quantity: 10 linear feet

Abstract: Minutes, membership lists, correspondence, and other material.

Accession: 90-09-195 ; 195-1990

Organizational History:

On March 9, 1870, the Mobile Turner Verein founded the Mobile Turner Kranken Unterstützungs Verein (Mobile Gymnastics Medical Aid Society). The members of this organization then founded the Deutscher Kranken Unterstützungs Verein (German Medical Aid Society, or what came to be known as the German Relief Association) on January 1871. Both groups held meetings in the same building and occasionally held joint meetings to plan co-sponsored social events. During the 1870s the German Relief Association and the Turner Verein merged.

The primary purpose of the German Relief Association was to provide financial security for its members. The Association's income was derived from dues of fifty cents (later raised to one dollar and fifty cents). They also supported themselves by investing in bonds and saving accounts, and by the rental of the German Relief Hall to businesses and for social events. The German Relief Hall was a Mobile landmark with a unique onion-domed tower which culminated with a spire. The original hall was destroyed and a new one was built on the corner of Emanuel and Conceptions streets around 1891. It too was later destroyed and no longer exists.

Members who were one month late paying their dues were suspended; if their outstanding balanced reached three dollars they were dropped from the rolls. During times of sickness a member would receive a weekly stipend. When a member or his spouse died the survivor

received a single-payment death benefit. Initially, members had to be German or sons of Germans who spoke German and lived at the time of application in Mobile. Some exceptions were allowed. A few of the Association's attending physicians were not of German decent. Finally, in July 1916 the Association decreed that members could include non-Germans and non-German speakers.

The association's attending physician verified the health of the applicant before entry and certified if a member qualified for sick benefits and for how long. A member applying for sick benefits from outside of Mobile was required to have a notarized doctor's statement to qualify. Death benefits were seventy-five dollars for spouses and members with less than fifteen years of membership. Members with over fifteen years of membership recieved a benefit of one-hundred and fifty dollars increasing fifty dollars for every five years of continued membership thereafter.

The organization had an active social schedule with picnics, dances, fancy dress balls, dinners, and benefits where the proceeds were donated to charitable causes. The annual Orphan's Excursion sponsored by the L&N Railroad was supported by the Association with refreshments.

Many of the members were prominent in Mobile society. Julius Goldstein was a successful jeweler and diamond merchant. Goldstein's obituary in April 1929 describes him as one of Mobile's leading citizens with numerous civic and social affiliations, including the Masons. Goldstein was Jewish. Henry Forchheimer was a Yale graduate, successful businessman, and World War I Mobile Food Administrator. A Reverend Father Adam Heibel was a Catholic priest.

Another notable Jewish member and former President of the association was Abraham G. Levy born in Kirchnik, Germany in 1841, Levy emigrated to Enterprise, Mississippi, as a boy. During the Civil War he served in the 14th Mississippi Cavalry, was captured at the battle of Ft. Donalson in 1862, and was a prisoner till the end of the war. Moving to Mobile in the 1870s Levy ran a successful clothing store. Eventually Levy would amass several successful investments and serve as a director for two banks. Levy was a Mason, Elk, Oddfellow, Secretary of the Mobile Council of Masons, and Commander of the Raphael Semmes Camp U.C.V., just to name a few of his activities.

The German Relief Association was unique in many respects. The members represented all walks of life; judges, lawyers, cotton brokers, merchants, barbers, cigar makers, dyers, and skilled laborers, to name a few professions. Members were rich and poor, one a Yale graduate and others barely literate; they were Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic. Sick benefits were paid to members in California, Texas, Arkansas, and Illinois. Members who had left Mobile twenty years or more would have their remains returned to Mobile to be interred beside their brothers in plots belonging to the association in Magnolia Cemetery.

A major turning point for the organization, presaging its demise, was the First World War. The organization was subjected to threats, including mob action to remove the name "German" from the association's building. On April 30, 1918, members held a hurried meeting and voted to change the name of the association to the Mobile Relief Association.

After World War I the association's membership aged. Death and sick benefits began to exceed income. Compounding the financial crisis was the increasing maintenance costs of the Relief Hall. On November 24, 1940, the Hall was sold to Phillips Furniture for \$18,000. With those funds, the association paid off its mortgage and death benefits, and reimbursed members who had loaned the association money to meet costs. On June 1, 1941, the German Relief Association met for the last time. Phillip's Furniture occupied the ground floor of the German Relief Hall until it closed in 1981. The building was destroyed by fire in the 1990s.

Biographical Notes:

Sigmund Markstein was Secretary for the Mobile Turner Kranken Unterstützungs Verein (Mobile Gymnastics Medical Aid Society), founded in March 1870, and one of the founders of the German Relief Association, founded in January 1871. He served in various official capacities for both organizations and was the secretary for the Turner Verein and the Relief Association up to and after the Turner was absorbed by the Relief Association. Most records from 1870 until 1885 are in Sigmund Markstein's handwriting. Markstein's cultivated writing style and use of language indicates an upper level education and working knowledge of administrative practices and procedures. Markstein died in July 1904.

John Schiemann was also a founding member, belonging to the organization from January 1871 until his death in September 1878. He served as Secretary from January 1873 to December 1873. Schiemann signs earlier documents with Johann and later uses John.

Charles Wassmuth joined the Association in April 1875 and was a member until his death in 1886. He was Secretary from January 1877 to December 1877. He was elected secretary for 1878, but only served in January. He also uses a refined script indicating education.

Charles Brettel joined in August 1882 and died April 1913. He was secretary from January 1892 to December 1892.

Oscar E. Teichmann joined the Association in December 1889. He was a barber by profession. Teichmann would serve forty-six years as secretary (January 1893 to January 1939). He was devoted to the Association, and his life would reflect its growth and decline. Teichmann would draft the minutes of the meetings on tablet paper in pencil and then record them in ink in the minute books, financial ledgers, and membership registers. He compiled the membership registers, annual and cumulative reports from the minutes.

Charles G. Bitzer served as Secretary from January 1939 to June 1941.

Scope and Contents:

This benevolent organization was active in Mobile from 1866 to 1941. The collection is in both German and English, with English used after 1917. Included are minutes, membership lists, correspondence, and other material relating to the organization from 1866 to 1943. Three of the more notable Mobilians who belonged to the organization were Julius Goldstein, Henry Forchheimer, and Abraham Levy.

Access Restrictions:

This material is open to research.

Preferred Citation:

German Relief Association Records, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL.

Content List:**Boxes 1-22**

Leather bound books, registers, and ledgers. The binding and spines of these books are generally in poor condition. The paper in these books is of good quality and in fair to good condition. The entries are hand written in ink. Inserted between pages of the minute books are penciled drafts of the various committee and association minutes. Letters from beneficiaries, obituaries and press clippings are also posted on the pages of the minute books. Cumulative reports were compiled and members entry dates researched (to compute the death benefit).

1. English and German. Forms announcing meetings and dues owed.
2. English. Account book 1911. Detailed inventory of Relief Hall furniture, dishes, houseware, and miscellaneous household goods. Record of rental fees for the Hall, furniture, and other assets.
3. English. Teichmann's barbershop customer credit account book 1893-1920.
4. English. Account book, 1933-38.
5. English. Check book, April 3, 1926-October 19, 1931. Check stubs for all bills and sick benefits paid. The title on the book was Warrant Book. A warrant was a authorization to pay sick benefits.
6. English. Check book, October 19, 1931-March 18, 1936.
7. English. Check book, April 9, 1936 - May 29, 1941.
8. German. 1870 constitution and minutes of the Mobile Turner Society March 1870-November 1870. Minutes of the Mobile Turner Society and German Relief Association January 1871-December 1878. Meetings held jointly until mid 1870s when the Turner Society is dropped. Letters of appreciation and obituaries of members are posted.
9. German. Minute book, January 1879-December 1885. Letters and obituaries are posted.
10. German. Minute book, January 1886-December 1891. Letters posted are in English.
11. German. Minute book, January 1892-December 1900. Letters, receipts for death benefits are in English.
12. English. Minute book, March 1923-October 1939. Letters, receipts for death benefits and obituaries are posted.
13. German and English. Minute book, June 1900-March 1924. Letters, receipts for death benefits, and obituaries are posted. On April 30, 1918 the members voted to discontinue the use of German and strike German from the Association's name.
14. English. Account ledger, 1939-1941. Incomplete entries.
15. German and English. Membership record book. Contains membership applications from 1876 to 1922. Applications reveal name, age, occupation and address.
16. English. Odd-sized pages from different account ledgers in 1887 and 1927 maintained by S. J. Brettel, treasurer and hall manager.
17. Membership register 1875-91. Lists name, date of entry and sponsor. Note the use of Ausgestössen in red ink to indicate the member was kicked out with dishonor. The dates

under the Ausgeschlössen indicate members who were dropped for non-payment of dues or resigned.

18. Membership dues record book, 1926-40.

19. German. A history of the society, 1870-91, compiled from the minutes and recorded by Charles Brettel.

20. English. Building Certificate Shares, August 1901-April 1919. To pay for building the hall and repairs the association sold shares for ten dollars. When the treasury balance exceeded ten dollars the shares were paid off by lottery.

21. Some German. Membership register, 1870-1915.

22. English. Membership register, 1871-1938. The definitive listing of members entry, resignation or death. Originated in 1904 by O. Teichmann and Fred Graves.

Box 001

English and German.

- Constitution and by-laws with a typed English translation. Later amendments in German.
- Constitutional amendments from 1931.
- List of Secretaries duties in by S. Markstein.
- Black binder with the Association minutes from 1939 to 1941. The minutes are arranged in reverse order from 1 June 1941 to February 1939. Various committee notes and motions regarding amending the constitution in order to dissolve the association.
- Minutes from the governing committee meetings, 1879-1939.
- Resolutions dealing with selling the hall, commending the officers who served the last difficult years using their own money to meet the Association's obligations.

Box 002

English.

- Financial Reports of the Secretary, from 1892-1937.
- Reports of the Treasurer, 1935-1939.
- Reports of the Officer of the Sick, 1935-1939.

These reports detail sick and death benefits paid, income from the building rental, balls and dues.

Box 003

English.

- Membership lists and correspondence and forms sent dealing with membership and meetings.
- Various cumulative reports detailing sick and death benefits paid, salaries, finances, and other accomplishments.

As stipulated in the constitution annual reports were compiled by the respective committees and announced at the last meeting of the year in December. These reports covered sick and death benefits paid and the current financial status of the organization. Officers were elected for the following year at the December meeting. In January the *Mobile Register* would report the officers elected and state the benefits paid the previous year. Sometime in the 1920s the association began to compile reports of total benefits paid over the life of the association and included this information in the *Register* announcement, examples can be found in box 004.

Box 004

English.

- Correspondence files, 1899-1941. On the back of one letter is a receipt for tomato catsup.
- Newspaper clippings, including obituaries, officer elections, etc. An advertising campaign by a bank referred to noted Mobilians as customers. Two ads cite association members and include their pictures.

The correspondence consists primarily of requests for sick benefits and doctors' certification of illness or injury. By the 1920s many members lived throughout the United States. Some of the appeals for benefits can be very descriptive and moving. Of special significance in this file is a handwritten copy of a hostile letter dated April 25, 1918, that threatened the Association if it continued to use German in its name. At a special meeting held April 30, 1918, the Association moved to strike German from its name and insert Mobile and thereafter conduct all business in English. The original of the letter no longer exists.

Box 005

English.

- Documents related to Teichmann's barber shop and the building of his home.

Teichmann's recipes for after shave, hair tonic, and dandruff ointment are of interest. Teichmann planned the building of his home in detail with extensive notes, diagrams, estimates and brochures on materials.

- Records dealing with the sale of the hall and the dissolution of the organization.
- Receipts, estimates, and notes regarding the repair of the building.
- Miscellaneous correspondence dealing with the operation of the organization.

Box 006

English.

- Annual record of income and expenditures.
- Monthly expenditures, 1937-1938.
- Insurance policies, 1932-1939.
- Miscellaneous notes, receipts, and bills dealing with financial information from the mid to late 1930s.

The information from these documents was entered into the financial registers and used in the development of the annual, cumulative reports and possibly in calculating the final prorated shares of the associations funds at the time of dissolution.