

Bohemian Turners of United States Gather in Omaha



Jos J. Mik
President Omaha
Tel Jed Sokol



Frank Riha
Chairman Com.



Omaha Tel Jed Sokol Team



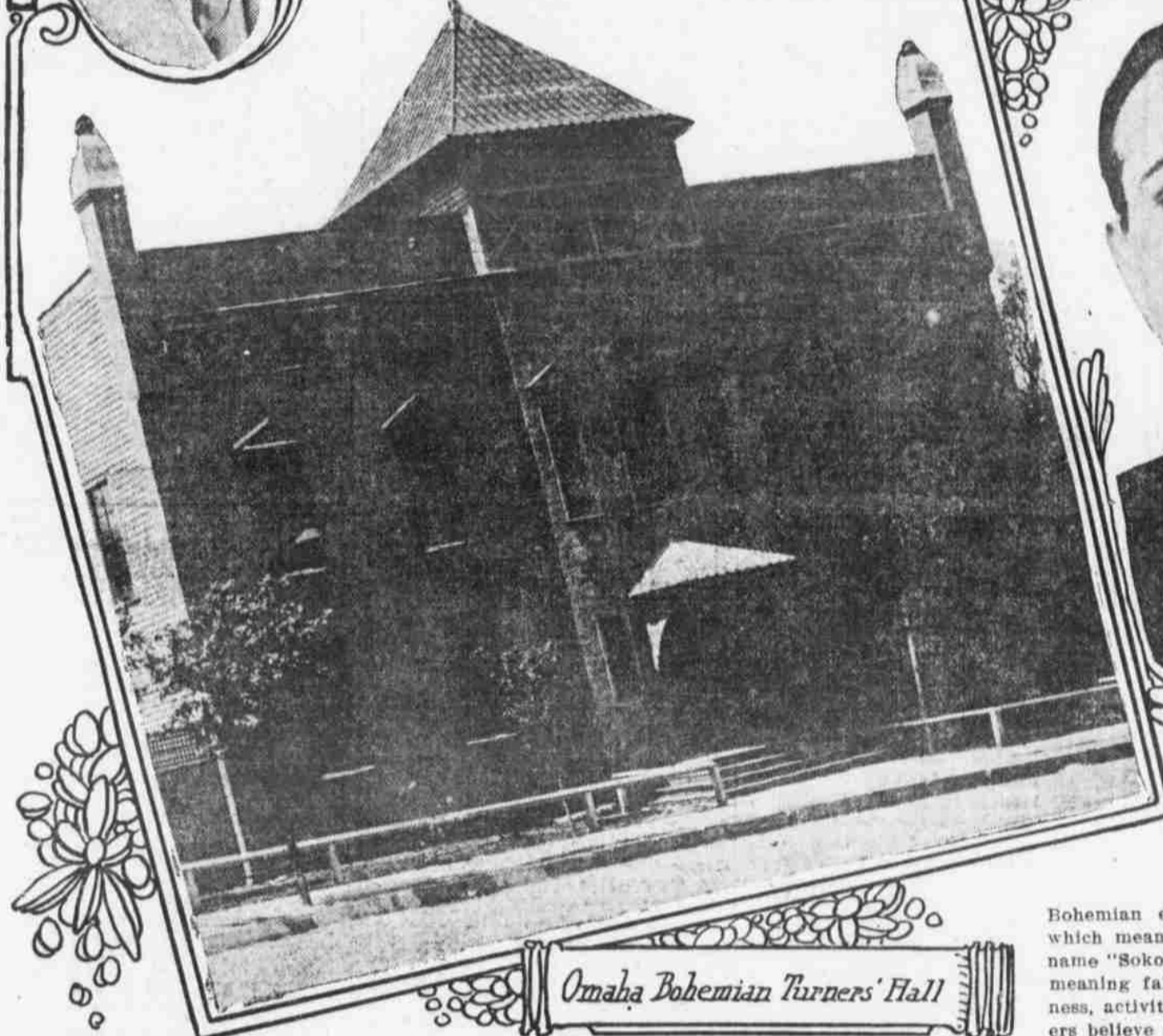
Miss Mamie Kment
Leader and Director
Omaha Turner Girls



Jennie
Zikmund
Member Gen. Com.
Representing Omaha
Turner Girls



Chas. Kautsky
Treas. Gen. Com. and
of Local Tel Jed Sokol



Omaha Bohemian Turners' Hall



Chas. Spalek
Sec. - Committee



Chas.
Fryzek
Vice-Pres. Gen.
Com. and Vice Pres.
Tel Jed Sokol



F. J.
Kutak
Chairman
Publicity
Committee



Mrs. J. Janek
Member, General Committee

Bohemian expression, Telocvicna Jednota Sokol, which means a union of physical culturists. The name "Sokol" is from the Bohemian word literally meaning falcon, a bird which symbolizes swiftness, activity and freedom, for the sokols or turners believe in education, progress and the perfect maintenance of individual health. A motto of theirs is: "Free thought, freedom for all and special privilege to none."

History of the Sokol movement goes back many years, and in fact the earliest traces of an idea of physical culture similar to that of the Sokols are found in medieval times and even as far back as the ancient Greeks, for physical training is as old as civilization itself. All the ancient European countries fostered systematic training, not only for the body but also for its effect on the mind and soul.

Along those lines, progress has been slowly made through the medieval ages to modern times. As early as the middle of the seventeenth century the world renowned Bohemian teacher and writer, Jan Amos Komensky, pointed out the advantages of training the body, especially among boys and girls. By 1659 there were several institutions for such training, and progress was made, although only slowly.

In 1860 Dr. Miroslav Tyrs, together with J. Fuesner, founded in Bohemia the first real, active and extensive organization for physical training, which was called Ceska Obec Sokolska, and had headquarters in Prague, with six divisions in the country. The training was and still is in accordance with the Tyrs system of gymnastic and physical culture, based upon scientific foundations and calculated to meet all requirements for thorough, sound and harmonious development of all participants.

All one-sidedness is avoided, their contests showing a success due to all-round development, and not to one special branch of physical culture. Regular lessons of sokols always begin with a series of free-hand exercises, with the occasional use of light hand apparatus, such as wands, dumb bells or Indian clubs. Later, heavier work is taken up, according to age, strength and condition of health. Every six years a great festival, with gymnastic exhibitions and contests, is held at Prague. In the United States the general tournament is held every five years, and that is what will occur this week in Omaha.

Turners of Prague have won every contest of general athletics held in any country where they have competed. In Bohemia at present there are over 70,000 men and women turners. At the last general contest at Prague, in 1912, there were over

10,000 turner men and over 6,000 turner women and girls on the field at one time.

The first Sokol organization in America started at St. Louis in 1865, and the idea spread quickly to New York, Chicago and other cities. A sokol was organized in Omaha on September 3, 1877, and from a very meager beginning has grown until now the local organization has over 200 members, owns its own hall and gardens, and has taken part in all national tournaments since its founding. At Cleveland in 1900 Omaha won the second prize for teams of the first class, and one of the Omaha Turners, Peter Drozda, took first prize in apparatus work of the first division, by which he gained the championship of the United States.

In the last tournament, at Chicago in 1909, over 500 turners competed. Although the tournament in Omaha this week will not be as largely attended as the one previously held, because of being held in the west, it will be the second largest and one of the best ever held, with plenty of entertaining exhibitions and lively contests. Omaha had the western division tournament in 1898, when a successful and largely attended Bohemian day was also held in connection with the Transmississippi exposition.

During each year preceding a national Sokol tournament a national convention of turners is held, when the place for holding the next tournament is chosen. At the convention at Baltimore last year Omaha's representatives were Joe J. Mik and Charles Spalek, through whose efforts the national tournament was brought to the Gate City this summer.

In addition to the Tel Jed Sokols throughout the country, there are similar organizations known as Sokol Tyrs, named after the founder of the

Turners. The regular Sokols and the Tyrs have recently become affiliated, both nationally and locally, so that both will be represented in the tournament to be held this week. A general invitation has also been extended to all other Slavic organizations by the Sokols.

Officers of the Omaha Sokol are: Joe J. Mik, president; Charles Fryzek, vice president; J. F. Prachensky, secretary; Charles Kautsky, treasurer; Louis Hunacek, financial secretary; Anton Treska, leader and director; Rudolph Zikmund, assistant.

Of the local Sokol Tyrs, these men are officers: Frank Svojtka, president; George Pitha, vice president; August Serpan, secretary; Anton Novak, treasurer; Simon Rokusek, leader and director.

Both the Omaha Sokol and the Omaha Sokol Tyrs belong to the western division of the national association, the division officers being as follows: President, Simon Rokusek, Omaha; vice president, Frank Radil, South Omaha; secretary, leader and director, Joseph Sterba, South Omaha; treasurer, Joseph Vonasek, South Omaha.

Plans for entertaining the visitors, whether they engage in the athletic competitions or not, are most elaborate and provide for a very generous amount of amusement outside of Rourke park, where the serious work of the convention will be held. The public is expected to crowd the grandstands and the ball park will be crowded each day while the tests of skill and strength are being made. And this feature of the show ought to get a great deal of attention from the public. People go to the circus in the summer and to the vaudeville houses in the winter to see highly trained gymnasts perform their special feats, and give warm approval to their efforts, not thinking, perhaps, that at the same time in the turner halls members of Tel Jed Sokol are accomplishing the same feats in the same way, merely as a matter of physical development and training. But it is so. No circus that ever traveled was able to carry as many skilled and trained athletes and expert gymnasts as will take part in the exhibitions at Rourke park this week, and the best part of this show is that the performers are doing it merely because they love the exercise and delight in the performance.

A great street parade will wind up the convention, in which the strength of the Bohemian population will be shown by reason of the thousands who will take part in the display. At Bohemian Turner hall on South Thirteenth street the evenings will be made merry by social reunions of various kinds, in which dancing, amateur plays, speaking by the mayor and the governor of the state and other similar events will make up the program.

WHEN folks gather at Rourke park or any other place of large assemblage, to witness athletic exhibitions or games, it is usually a case of the masses watching a selected few in a highly specialized physical contest. Generally, thousands of people sit in a grandstand while two teams of nine men each run, bat or pitch a ball in a lively struggle for a pennant, or twenty-two men on opposing teams struggle fiercely for supremacy in foot ball.

But when Omahans by the thousands gather at Rourke park this week for the exhibitions and competitions of the national quinquennial tournament of Tel Jed Sokol, beginning Wednesday and lasting until Sunday, they will see and learn to appreciate an entirely different system of athletic contests. It is a system that neither sacrifices the masses for a select few, nor stresses one particular form of physical effort above another. It is all-round and general in character, with the ultimate object of improving the lives of all men, women and children participating, by thorough development of both mind and body.

Omaha is especially interested in the entertainment of the national convention of the Bohemian athletes, for the reason that the local members of the guild have achieved considerable distinction in the competitions that have been held elsewhere, having furnished at least one champion, while second honors have been taken on a number of occasions. At the great world's gathering of Bohemian turners, held at Prague two years ago, Omaha men were right up at the front when the prizes for the competition were given out. Therefore it is eminently fit that these capable athletes should have the privilege of entertaining their brothers on this occasion. Frank J. Riha, one of the local champions, who has won great distinction on the athletic field, will not participate in the competitions because of his capacity as chairman of the general committee. He will endeavor to restrict his activities to those of an hospitable host.

Nor is it the men alone who have brought honor and credit to the prowess of Omaha Bohemians as athletes. The women and girls of the Gate City have also acquitted themselves nobly on the field and have won many prizes because of their

agility and skill. Miss Kment who is the head of the woman's committee for the present gathering, comes of an athletic family, and has made her own mark as an athlete in competition, while her sister has not only won a championship medal, but has established a high jump record for women that compares very favorably with the best performance on record for men. The women are putting quite as much enthusiastic effort into their share of the preparations as are the men, and will be disappointed if their guests do not have the time of their lives while in Omaha.

It will be a novel and interesting affair. At least 5,000 people are expected from all parts of the United States to attend. The participants alone will number over 250 men and 150 women from other cities, besides the Omaha and South Omaha teams of adults and children.

For months, and in fact since last summer, when the convention of Tel Jed Sokol decided to hold its next tournament in the Gate city, local Bohemian Turners have been preparing for the big event. A score or more of men and women have labored to make it a grand success, and only now, when the first delegations are almost due to arrive, have the details of arrangement been completed.

Welcome to Omaha, the convention city, will be twice spelled in big electric letters, which the visiting Bohemians will see as they glance up Farnam street to the municipal arch upon their arrival, and again as they approach Turner hall, Thirteenth and Martha streets, where they will make their headquarters. Both the city hall welcome sign and a special one on South Thirteenth street will emphasize the Gate City's pleasure at entertaining the Sokols.

Hundreds of rooms for the temporary accommodation of the visitors have been provided. Special plans for furnishing meals to the 400 contestants at Turner hall have been made, with many wagonloads of provisions necessary to appease the appetites of husky athletes. Even a big hospital tent, with doctors and nurses for the care of any who may be hurt or overcome by their exertions, will be pitched on the exhibition grounds at Rourke park.

"Tel Jed Sokol" is an abbreviation of the