

Palma Moratz (1872-1911)

Palma Moratz was born on April 6, 1879, in Bloomington, Illinois, to German-born parents, Hermann and Emilie (Eisner) Moratz. Her father, Hermann, came to the United States in 1867, and her mother, Emilie, followed in 1869 with their son, Paul. It's unclear exactly why the Moratz family left Germany, but they may have been looking for better opportunities. Hermann had fought in a war against Austria in 1866, which might have influenced his decision to move. In Bloomington, he worked as a carpenter in a shop across from their home at 1106 S. Main Street.

Like many German immigrants, Palma and her family stayed close to their German heritage. By 1870, around 13% of Bloomington's population was German. The city had German-language schools, a German-language newspaper (*The Bloomington Journal*), German churches, and social clubs. Palma's family probably spoke German at home and in their community.

It's not clear which German clubs the Moratz family joined, but they were likely part of the Turnverein. The Turnverein was started in Germany in 1811 to promote physical fitness, like gymnastics. The club also had libraries, lectures, and places for people to gather and socialize. It was also known for hosting family picnics and celebrations. The Turnverein came to Bloomington in 1855, and to join, a person had to be from Germany or have German ancestry. Women were considered associate members. Palma and her six brothers—Paul, Richard, Max, Theodor, Clemens, and Arthur—probably attended Turnverein picnics and events, which were held at the Turner Hall on South Main Street.

Palma was active in many clubs and organizations. Her obituary mentions that she was a member of the Order of the Eastern Star chapter #50, Judea White Shrine #10, and the First Baptist Church of Bloomington.

A big moment for Palma came on October 6, 1891. She was chosen to represent Miss Germania at Bloomington's first German Day festival. This event celebrated German immigrants and their contributions to America. Palma wore traditional German clothes and held a German flag while standing next to Miss Columbia, who held an American flag. Together, they symbolized the friendship between Germany and the United States. This event became an annual tradition in Bloomington, involving both Germans and non-Germans.

Palma received her education in Bloomington and also studied Elocution (public speaking) at the Emerson School of Oratory and Elocution (today known as Emerson College). By 1905, she was teaching Elocution at the Marie Litta Conservatory, where students paid \$3 for a 60-minute class or \$10 for a private lesson. By 1909, Palma worked as a saleslady at Charles J. Northrup's dry goods store, though it's unclear if she still taught classes at the conservatory.

In the spring of 1911, Palma became very ill. She was hospitalized at St. Joseph's Hospital for the last seven weeks of her life, and on May 12, 1911, she passed away from pneumonia. Her funeral was held at her brother Paul's house, and she was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, near her mother. Four days later, her father, Hermann, passed away and was buried next to her.