"What Do You Do with Your Leisure Time?"

Women's Athletic Cultures at St. Olaf College, 1900–1970

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There is an 1888 photograph in the St. Olaf College archives that seems to reinforce many stereotypes about the athletic lives of the first generations of college women. As described by Georgina Dieson Hegland, class of 1904, the photo features "young ladies standing sedately . . . in their long full skirts, with heavily trimmed hats on their heads, and gloves on their hands," playing croquet, a sport the student newspaper, the *Manitou Messenger*, described as one in which the "weak find relaxation." Yet that same newspaper later noted that the women were out as soon as the snows melted, eagerly prepping the croquet court, and Hegland thought aspects of the women's genteel apparel were more "a matter of posing" than what they actually wore to indulge in the sport. Indeed, one woman holds a bicycle and several women minus hats and finery stand in the background, suggesting perhaps less modesty, more activity, and, potentially, a spirited game once the photographer—Professor Ole Felland—disappeared.[1]

Upon closer examination, female students' active leisure experiences at St. Olaf College weren't always what we might imagine them to have been, given the contexts of time and place. Women, as the seven female members of the St. Olaf class of 1906 said of themselves, felt "entitled to the hospitality" of their college, including the growing array of "things outside of books" that colleges came to represent. But they also often found they had little power or status within the larger student community. "Men," historian of collegiate life Helen Leftkowitz Horowitz writes, generally "dominate[d] the all-important life outside the classroom" in 1900, and "women were kept out of key activities on campus." One way in, at

FACING: *Students playing croquet outside Ladies' Hall, as documented by Professor Ole Felland, 1888.*

least at St. Olaf College, turned out to be athletics. Resources in the St. Olaf College archives give us a vivid indication of both the determination demonstrated and the challenges faced by female students to gain some control over their extracurricular college experience through athletic endeavors.[2]

St. Olaf College, located in the small southeastern Minnesota town of Northfield, was founded in 1874 by Norwegian American Lutherans to educate their children, connect them to that culture and faith, and prepare them for meaningful vocations. These goals ensured that the atmosphere was strict, serious, and tinged with old-country ideals. Even its first few generations of students, however, were raised in the United States and came to St. Olaf anticipating a more Americanized and secularized set of experiences. There would be no fraternities or sororities, no on-campus drinking, and no recreational dancing at the college. At a time when big universities built their extracurricular year around intercollegiate sports (1890s), St. Olaf students participated in only the informal outdoor activities college elders remembered from their youth: skiing, sledding, and ice skating.[3]

Not surprisingly, there was a gendered dimension to the early St. Olaf education as well. Administrators assumed women to be moral, high-minded, obedient, deferential, and domestic. The earliest female students generally met these expectations, but sometimes lamented, as Hegland did, that college elders "to a considerable extent favored a school for men only." Male students established student government, student publications, and literary, ethnic, and missionary societies—all endorsed by administrators as preparation for their vocations. They got a brand-new dormitory in 1905 (Ytterboe Hall), while women had to make do with the cramped quarters of "Ladies' Hall" or off-campus boardinghouses. The men's dormitory had a gym in the basement, yet another arena where women's access was either outright denied or regulated by men.[4]

St. Olaf's founders, most of them ministers, believed that "fresh air and exercise" were part of the college's "moral and spiritual" training. Not everyone, however, favored physical education classes, and some thought organized sports "out of harmony with education in a Christian school." The first generations of St. Olaf students were carefully monitored, even during their free hours in the late afternoon, and male students' obsession with baseball caused "acrimonious disagreement" among the faculty. It took nearly 30 years for college administrators to establish a regular physical education program for men. Meanwhile, male students took matters into their own hands, organizing interclass tournaments and baseball games against their crosstown rival, Carleton College, and creating an Athletic Union to fund and regulate competitive sports.[5]

Athletic life was different for women, who did not have much access to the gymnasium in the basement of Ytterboe Hall. They gained no regular physical education program until 1916, more than a decade after men did. They were, however, assessed the same annual Athletic Union fee as men, in effect helping to pay for men's uniforms and competitions. The construction in 1912 of Old Mohn Hall, the first real dormitory for women, gave female students a makeshift gym space in its basement.

Athletics was a key way St. Olaf women students staked a claim to campus life.

There, in their "white middies and full black bloomers," the college's dean of women students, Gertrude Hilleboe, recalled, female students dodged around "many obtrusive pillars" to perform "calisthenics . . . [with] Indian clubs and dumb-bells." In this regard, the school followed the conventional academic wisdom of the era about how best to balance protecting young women's reproductive function with ensuring they got exercise. But even with required classes and a gym space, college historian Joseph Shaw concluded in 1974, "the girls . . . continued to be slighted."[6]

In response, some of them reacted like their male classmates had previously upon being told playing baseball was somehow unchristian; they took action. As early as 1905, the *Manitou Messenger* recorded "the

Co-eds'" dismay at "contributing money to the salary of the coach" via student fees assessed by the Athletic Union. In 1908 some women organized a basketball competition, class against class, negotiating with the Athletic Union for the "rare privilege" of access to the Ytterboe basketball court. During winter, these young women used the college ice rink; during spring they kept college croquet and tennis sets "in constant use." As organized athletics started to gain a foothold for men at St. Olaf College, some women also wanted to have active lives.[7]

That some St. Olaf women might also want to play basketball or have access to a gym reflected young women's sense of themselves in a changing society. The public sphere—a world less governed by notions of uplift and recreation and more by consumerism, leisure, physicality, and fun—beckoned increasingly to them. Maud Hart Lovelace, the children's author who grew up in Mankato, 50 miles away, wrote of spending her adolescence in the 1900s engaged in mixed-gender activities such as picnics, skating parties, swimming, parlor sings, and dances—experiences that many Oles likely had had while in high school as well. The so-called "new" woman of the 1910s emerged from what Joan Jacobs Brumberg calls the "protective umbrella" of an all-female adolescent world centered on moral education and into a peer culture filled with parties, games, dances, and movies. Such a culture, however, was difficult to come by at St. Olaf College.[8]

As women became interested in the types of physical endeavors that filled men's leisure hours, experts pondered how much and what types of exercise were appropriate for them. Female physical educators had strong opinions about the weaknesses of men's college athletics and developed their own model for women's endeavors. In 1923, the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Union argued that to avoid the intensity, competitiveness, and exclusivity of men's intercollegiate athletics, women's programs should be recreational, noncompetitive, and inclusive. At St. Olaf, a new instructor, Julia Post, arrived in 1919, bringing women's physical education into the new era. "The days of meaningless wands and Indians clubs were past," declared an undated history of the women's physical education department, replaced by an emphasis on the "balanced development of participants."[9]

Calisthenics using Indian clubs was considered a safe way for early twentieth century women to get exercise, as demonstrated by these 1949 Oles celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of physical education at the college.

"The days of meaningless wands and Indians clubs were past."

In 1920, Post helped to give those female students interested in athletics a venue that resembled what other colleges were beginning to offer, a Women's Athletic Association (WAA) branch. Nationally, the WAA provided both a professional advocacy group for those pursuing teaching careers in physical education and a venue for female students to organize team sports. At St. Olaf, women's organizing efforts had to conform to administrators' sense of the college's mission; thus, the local WAA remained independent of the national organization for a number of years. That independence gave student members unusual authority over their creation. They drafted a constitution, negotiated with the Athletic Union, named 50 charter members—nearly a quarter of all female students—in the spring of 1921, and designed awards and honors for athleticism. Although Ole women had their own extracurricular female literary and honor societies and could partake in a mixed-gender Luther league and choirs, the WAA was the first, and for a long time the only, female space that was purely recreational in nature. Consequently, many Ole women got involved, paying dues, competing in class-against-class tournaments, and tracking their points toward tangible "emblems of athletic success."[10]

The victors in a 1909 inter-class basketball tournament, the class of 1913.

The WAA organized what the student paper called the "posture police" in 1924. Ribbons were awarded to male and female students.

But while the female faculty and WAA student leaders imagined some version of parity with the burgeoning male sports program, the college's Athletic Union wanted "no confusion" between what they regarded as the "girls'" activities and the men's intercollegiate and intramural competitions. The Athletic Union initially refused to grant the new group any portion of the athletic fees it assessed of all students, forcing the WAA to charge additional dues. Beginning in 1926, the Athletic Union provided an annual allotment ($25), a sum so inadequate that it necessitated an endless round of fundraising raffles and sales. Each male team had representation in the union; not so for female teams, whose single promised representative never materialized. Moreover, the Athletic Union seemed determined to block WAA access to the kind of peer recognition that male athletes received. A male St. Olaf athlete earned a monogram (letter)

for playing on a team. That letter broadcast his status as a "big man" on campus, just as it would at virtually any other college in the United States. The Athletic Union opposed women's monograms, fearing that, as one of the WAA's founders explained, "a boy's letter be cheapened by a girl's." It took a year before the union finally agreed to women's monograms, provided they were a different color to distinguish them from the men's.[11]

"Coeds," noted a 1929 *Manitou Messenger* article, were no longer "satisfied with their evening gowns" so some "[took] up athletics." Yearbook spreads featured photos of letterwomen, and both the yearbook and a regular column in the *Manitou Messenger* chronicled WAA tournaments, suggesting that athletic endeavors organized through the WAA gave many Ole women status, community, and recognition. Team sports at St. Olaf symbolized modern womanhood to those who played them, challenging their elders' assumptions about female fragility without violating the student community's gender norms. Athletics gave Ole women a safe way to be flappers, the 1920s collegiate ideal, defined by their independence, "pep," and loyalty to the school, minus the overt sexuality and louche quality of more rebellious flappers. The WAA represented an important milestone in the development of a St. Olaf student culture, a way for Ole women to forge identities with local and national resonance, to participate actively in their student community, and to feel that this community valued them as more than spectators.[12]

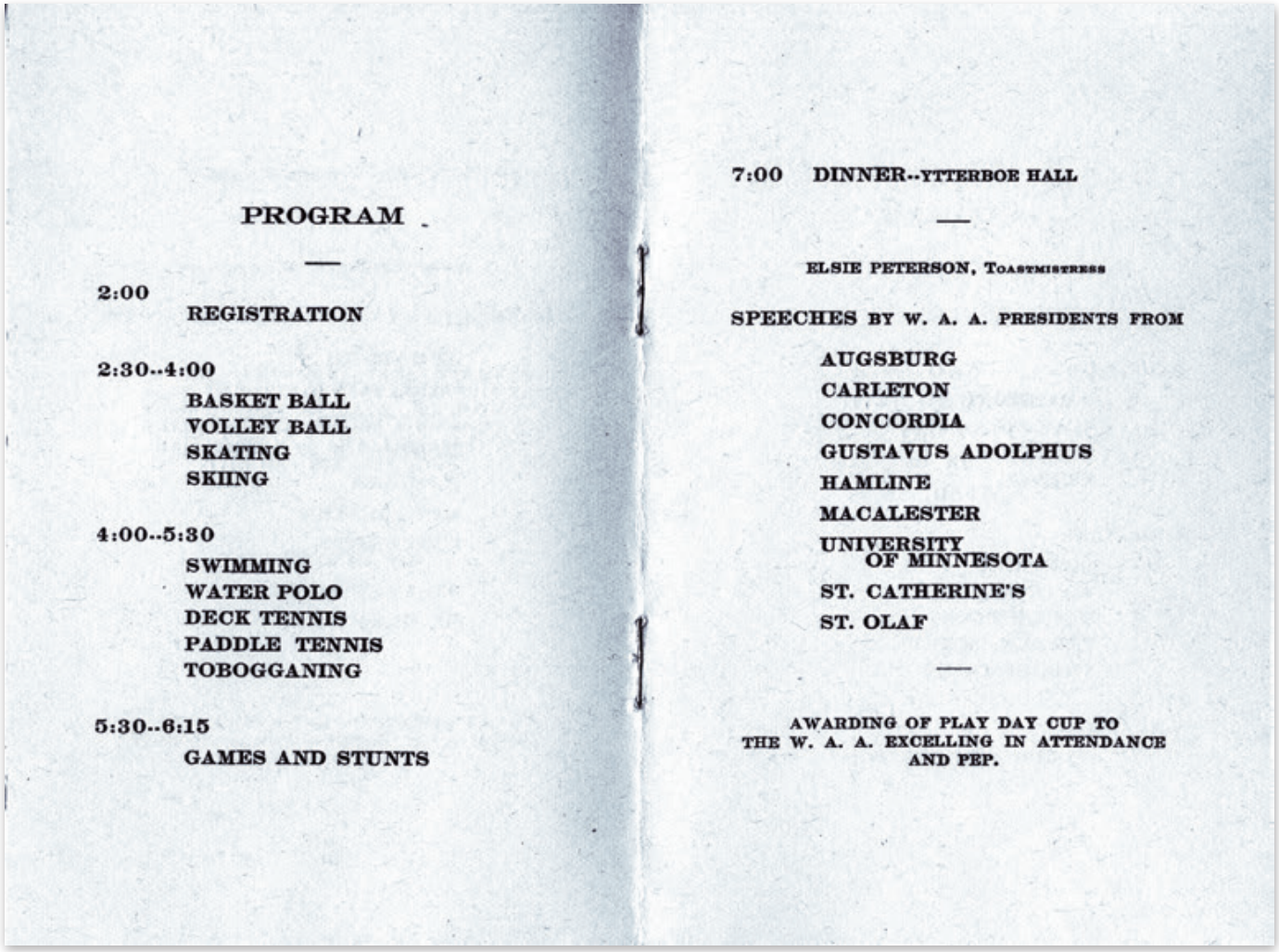
The Women's Athletic Association represented an important milestone in the development of a St. Olaf student culture.

At most American colleges, the 1920s marked the moment administrators came to accept student culture as a normal, desirable, and significant part of college. At St. Olaf, though, having retained the ban on dancing, drinking, and the Greek system, administrators did their best to keep students focused on their Norwegian heritage, pursuit of vocation, and single-gender activities. Men's sports were part of the college's 1920s compromise with student desires for an Americanized social realm. Athletic activities had a "surprisingly prominent place on the extra-curricular program," one of the college's historians has noted, compensating for some of the other social mechanisms that were lacking. Athletic success enriched the college experience for many St. Olaf men. The WAA provided similar possibilities for Ole women; however, as football games expanded gradually to encompass homecoming weekends with queens, parades, and dates, St. Olaf's student culture started to look more like the national collegiate culture in which women's roles were often passive, decorous, and celebratory of male athletes.[13]

Still, the WAA offered members a subculture they defined. Leaders gained organizational skills their predecessors had gotten from suffrage societies and the YMCA. WAA members kept records, organized fundraisers, created recruitment events, wrote and rewrote a constitution, and devised and monitored a point system that quantified female athletic attainment. They not only executed these tasks ably, but also with what peers perceived as a "feministic" élan, hosting theme luncheons and teas, composing WAA songs, staging pageants, and decorating programs. In short, more than athletic competition bonded the group; members gained confidence, leadership, and community while challenging national stereotypes of collegiate flappers as frivolous, man-crazy, and objectified.[14]

In 1927, the women in St. Olaf's WAA branch finally joined the national Women's Athletic Association, yet another sign that administrators had started to concede ground to national collegiate trends. Suddenly Ole women had access to a circuit of other Minnesota WAA branches that, together, met for an annual "play day"—the national WAA's signature event. As the practical expression of the organization's philosophy, play day brought together

The WAA fought for a year to be able to award letters to senior women who earned them.



PROGRAM

—

2:00
REGISTRATION

2:30--4:00
BASKET BALL
VOLLEY BALL
SKATING
SKIING

4:00--5:30
SWIMMING
WATER POLO
DECK TENNIS
PADDLE TENNIS
TOBOGGANING

5:30--6:15
GAMES AND STUNTS

7:00 DINNER--YTTERBOE HALL

—

ELSIE PETERSON, Toastmistress

SPEECHES BY W. A. A. PRESIDENTS FROM
AUGSBURG
CARLETON
CONCORDIA
GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS
HAMLINE
MACALESTER
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
ST. CATHERINE'S
ST. OLAF

—

AWARDING OF PLAY DAY CUP TO THE W. A. A. EXCELLING IN ATTENDANCE AND PEP.

Program from the 1929 Minnesota collegiate play day hosted by St. Olaf's WAA.

women from different colleges on a noncompetitive basis to demonstrate their skill with familiar sports and to try new ones. Mainly male historians of sports have long written off play days as "dull" and unimportant, "fun and games . . . followed by tea and cookies," as one scholar put it. More recent female scholars have challenged this point, arguing that just because play days did not follow the male intercollegiate sports model doesn't mean they weren't empowering and meaningful to the many women who participated.[15]

Certainly St. Olaf's staging of Minnesota's 1929 play day represented the apex of its WAA branch. Members hosted 175 women for skating, skiing, basketball, tennis, volleyball, and swimming, followed by a banquet emceed by the St. Olaf chapter's student president. Following national WAA policy, the teams were mixed rather than representing the colleges involved individually, but participants knew who the experts and all-stars were. The day ended with the awarding of the play day cup to the WAA branch from the College of St. Catherine "for being highest in pep and attendance." The day's activities "brought much desirable publicity to the organization on the campus and throughout state college circles," Julia Post noted, including coverage in Twin Cities newspapers. Although the WAA records do not reveal how many Ole women participated in play days, nationally 70 percent did, suggesting that those Ole women who participated in the rite could feel part of a national trend. That year the *Viking* yearbook included a seven-page section called Women's Sports.[16]

The St. Olaf WAA empowered its leaders to challenge male sports dominance and authority on campus. They argued before the Athletic Union for more money to cover uniforms and equipment, "protest[ed] against the men using the women's color for men's class monograms," and complained that the men got "better facilities" than they did. They asked the bookstore to stop selling women's monograms to anyone who wanted

them. They lobbied to have pictures of women who earned monograms hung in the same space "where the men athletes' pictures are," in the gym. They fought for sports equality and to make sure the members of their subculture felt supported and recognized by the larger college community.[17]

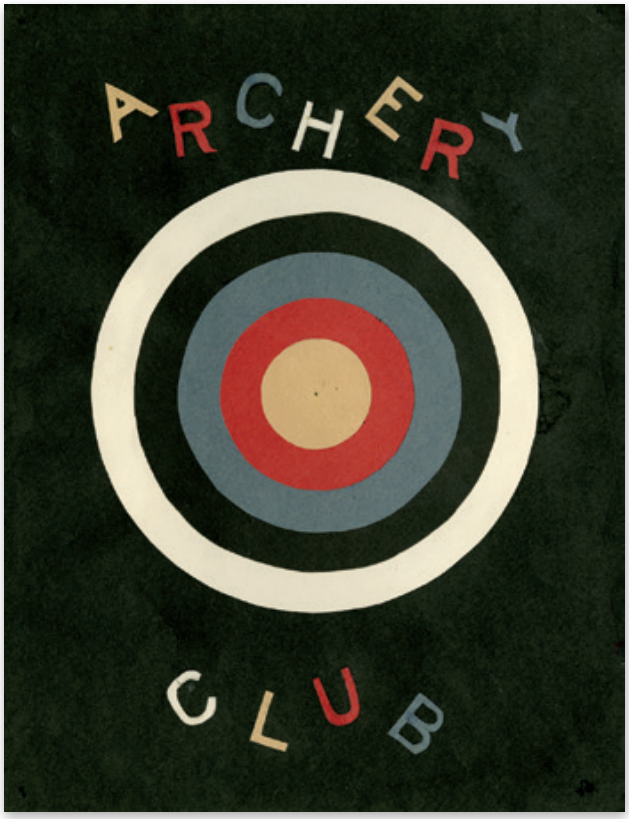
Important though these battles were to the women who waged them after 1929, the WAA became a less important aspect of female Oles' college experience. Physical education instructor Julia Post, so instrumental to the WAA's development at St. Olaf, left the college in 1930. Further, the Great Depression made even the small dues the WAA asked of participants too dear for some. What hurt the WAA the most, though, was the sheer number of other ways female students could spend their leisure time by the 1930s: amateur theatricals, literary magazine, radio plays, and a myriad of sanctioned—*co-educational*—extracurriculars. Having gained entrée into the college culture, Ole women no longer had to rely on the WAA to be "important participants in all college activities."[18]

In the 1930s, WAA stalwarts discovered that not all female students shared their vision of women's athletics. The emergence of dating as a college pastime changed everything. While men could gain peer status through athletic achievement, "college women," Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz argues, "gained their positions . . . by being asked out by the right man." By the 1930s, the Ole student culture was less Norwegian and Lutheran and offered ample opportunities for women as well as men to participate. While college authorities still might not allow proms or a swing band on campus, they accepted "Coke dates" and "dutch dates" as student-initiated alternatives to such college-sanctioned activities as the famed St. Olaf choir, the Idun Edda (Norwegian heritage) Society, or the student congregation. The Depression made students anxious about their futures, which for most women included worrying about making a good marriage. Under the circumstances, as historian Susan Cahn has observed, "appropriate female athleticism" had to conform to "a middle-class concept of womanhood characterized by refinement, dignity, and self-control."[19]

Thus, WAA leaders found the enticement of monograms less effective for recruiting purposes

As the variety of clothing and athletic equipment suggests, members of the 1930-31 WAA Council varied in their athletic interests.

Although women could, and did, compete in this 1931 Winter Sports Day downhill ski tournament, popularity determined who might become the queen.



WAA members brought their creative and artistic skills to the promotion of their organization, as these early 1930s posters demonstrate.

than asking potential members to think about their images. "What do you do with your leisure time?" one WAA flyer asked, urging Ole women to expand their "bag of tricks," so that after college, "you will be able to join the party in any activity." The WAA still offered "strenuous or team sports"; however, it added to its roster individual sports that encouraged female students to anticipate futures like the women they saw in the movies or read about in newspapers and magazines—married, wealthy, and genteel. A 1938 *Manitou Messenger* article, for instance, reported on "an early-morning canter" of 30 Ole horsewomen through the Carleton Arboretum. At the 1935 Minnesota play day, participants played table tennis, badminton, darts, and shuffleboard—the latter, as an article in the student newspaper promised, being good preparation for travel on an ocean liner. There had always been

a gap between the most athletically gung-ho WAA members and those who were less engaged. In the 1930s, the gap widened.[20]

To maintain or attempt to grow the WAA membership during the 1930s required more than interclass field hockey competitions or play days. An elaborate "gypsy trail" recruited first-year women students to the organization, selling recreational possibilities via a campfire, singalong, and wiener roast. In 1937, the group tried a "bad taste" party with prizes for the most inappropriate costume. Other years featured leisure fashion shows, waffle breakfasts, and similar endeavors that emphasized single-gender fun and community more than sport or competition.[21]

The WAA's most successful activities, however, were the "co-recreational" evenings it organized beginning in the spring of 1940. These answered what college historian Joe Shaw described as the college's "notorious 'social problem'": it still didn't allow dancing. At most other schools, historian Beth Bailey notes, "dances were an important part of college life." At Olaf, "co-recs" offered almost literally the only opportunities to dance on campus—even if it was only folk or square dancing—as well as the wide variety of activities that fell under the play rubric: bowling, hayrides, swimming, hikes, and parties. Co-recs were convenient and free and as close to what other schools did on Saturday evenings as Oles could get. Ole women controlled these social occasions, offering activities at which women could shine. In the fall of 1940, the St. Olaf WAA became the Women's Recreation Association (WRA), following the dictates of the national organization. The name change reflected the national trend of recreation supplanting athletics as the desirable leisure-time activity for women.[22]

Phy ed instructors Gertrude Sovik (top left) and Mabel Shirley (top right) with WAA seniors, including one wearing her St. O, early 1930s.

In some ways, the WRA was no different from the WAA it replaced. One could still earn a monogram, although there was no public acknowledgment of the women who won them. Interested students continued to vie for class ascendancy in basketball or volleyball and competed against women at other Minnesota colleges, but with less visibility than before. The majority of Ole women, however, attended the co-recs without paying WRA dues or competing in its tournaments. The group's relocation in the yearbook from the sports section to clubs suggests how most students regarded it. Just as at any other school, there was no single way to be female and active at St. Olaf College. Still, by the end of the 1930s, the average Ole woman preferred the mixed-gender activities college administrators increasingly allowed rather than single-gender competition and chose recreation over competitive sports. This shift was bound to affect the ways the community itself understood femininity.[23]

Femininity was a complicated concept for the St. Olaf community, as a 1938 offshoot of the WAA, the Dolphins, demonstrated. The group provided "practice in distance swimming and in perfecting strokes" to the "best female swimmers" who had passed "qualification tests." In no time at all, however, the Dolphins' year revolved around what had been an annual "water pageant" organized by the WAA. The group generally played to full houses at the campus's indoor pool, a space where male swimmers competed but women performed. Mastering the strokes and coordinating synchronized movements required practice and skill and built female community. Yet, from the outside it seemed like "entertainment is the sole objective of this fluid flock," as a yearbook entry put it. Male and female students alike distinguished implicitly between the

chance to be "pleasant to look at in [a] bathing suit" and competing with other women in "all the sports commonly considered masculine" that the WRA sponsored. The pendulum had swung from emphasizing "health and vigor" to what female physical education instructors once decried: the "spectacular and audience appeal." The Dolphins' performances drew far more spectators than did any WRA activity, suggesting that while athleticism and womanliness were not mutually exclusive, the majority of Ole women and men understood female athleticism to be different from male athleticism.[24]

World War II further weakened the idea of competitive women's sports at St. Olaf by encouraging activities and behaviors the culture deemed more "feminine." Cultural attitudes pushed young women to play active roles in the war effort while also reinforcing gender roles: women were to be helpful, nurturing, and pleasing to the male eye. The WRA became one of many student service groups that organized blood drives and raised money. With enrollment declining as young men went off to war, the college offered facilities for preflight training to naval and marine cadets, who commandeered the gym and the pool, excluding the WRA and the Dolphins alike. The WRA made do with bowling while the Dolphins' 1943 season was "short-lived," with only a scaled-back pageant whose title was "Our Armed Forces." Women ventured into new realms at the college, including student body president, but greater athletic competition was not one of them. The men who remained on campus, by contrast,

"Ring by spring" of senior year became a yardstick for female achievement.

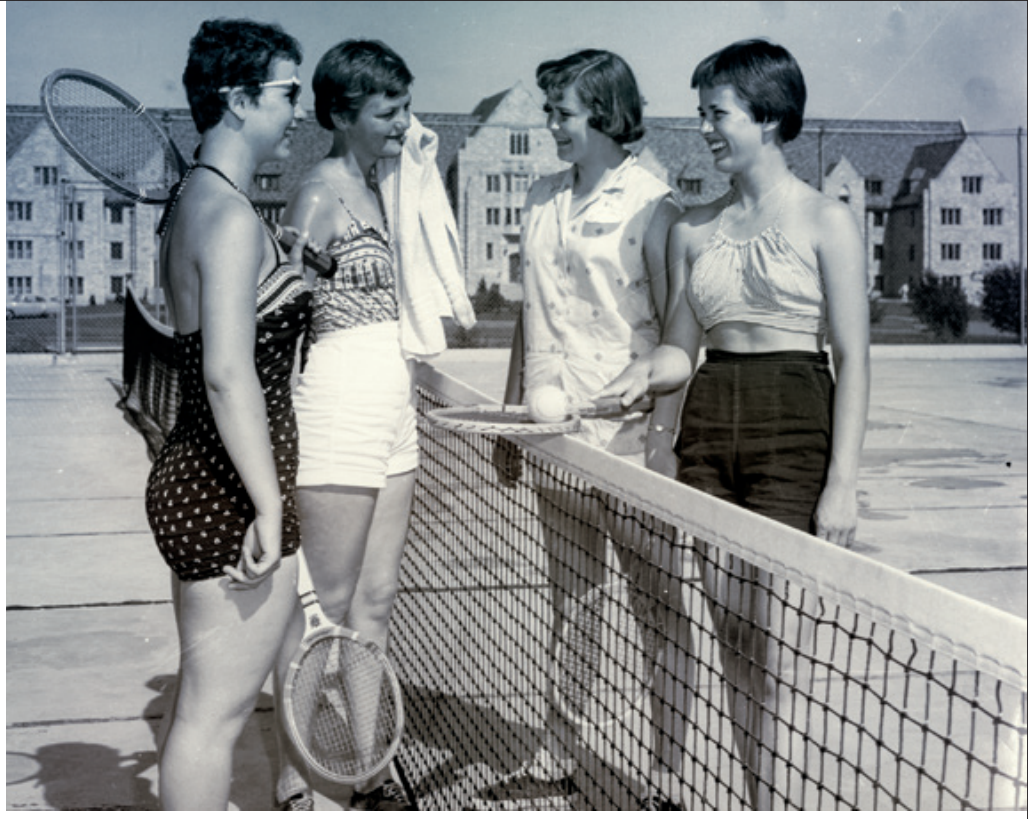
successfully asked for and got a "balanced intercollegiate schedule" of 26 sports despite the war emergency. College sports became a symbol of the sort of society for which the nation fought—a world in which female independence and strength were traits of temporary utility to be quickly banished once the young men returned.[25]

The same wartime culture that reminded St. Olaf women that service and nurture were key parts of their wartime role also warned them of their constricting futures. Any wartime jobs they took were temporary, to be given up to returning soldiers, especially as they married. Women's magazines anticipated a gender imbalance because of wartime casualties and soldiers returning with foreign brides. Modern men, those same magazines suggested, did not want masculine or bossy women, but feminine ones. The hallmarks of a postwar culture that emphasized gender difference, early marriage, and a man shortage were already beginning to form.[26]

Even when the St. Olaf yearbook editor was female, captions under photographs of gym-suited women with flexed bows or tennis rackets joked that "co-eds" needed to "hold a beau" or "court him." In such an environment, the WRA had to pro-

The Dolphins were a popular offshoot of the WAA.

mote itself as bettering women's lives in ways only tangential to athletics or even recreation: "to absorb the sun, lose some pounds, and maybe make some new acquaintances." The presence of soldiers on the St. Olaf campus led to more WRA-organized mixed-gender activities that emphasized women's roles as hostesses, including an all-school picnic. The "Amazons" playing field hockey might have reason to worry about how that scarce commodity, a St. Olaf man, perceived them; at least the popular culture suggested such was the case. The relative dearth of men on campus gave them disproportionate power, not just to shape campus athletics, but to define gender ideals. In such an environment, the average woman became less willing to challenge gender norms with her extracurricular choices.[27]



In the postwar era, the WAA promoted itself as a way "to absorb the sun, lose some pounds, and maybe make some new acquaintances."

War's end merely intensified the cultural pressures for women to meet the expectations of men who might marry and support them. "Ring by spring" of senior year became a yardstick for female achievement; "the popular media," Bailey observed, "began to celebrate American marriage—for *youth*." At St. Olaf, women students staged an annual spring bridal fashion show and the home economics major required fewer science classes and more cooking and sewing. Meanwhile, little changed for men, who still sought and were provided experiences and opportunities that would facilitate careers. For female collegians, however, college became a place for meeting a husband, a goal that shaped one's extracurricular activities as well as one's major.[28]

Fewer and fewer Ole women paid WRA dues, signed up for its competitions, or tracked their athletic points. Other organizations—like the Dolphins and the very popular mixed-gender skating and ski clubs that supplanted the WRA's ski and skating groups—siphoned off potential WRA members. A separate "phy ed club" served Ole men and women interested in careers as physical education teachers or coaches. As the college added recreational facilities like a bowling alley and more tennis courts, those who wanted to play tennis or bowl with friends could arrange their own endeavors. "The part[ies] . . . built around the scheme of co-recreation" were the only WRA activities that really drew a crowd. These gatherings offered "athletic events that the men and the women could play together," whether bowling, skating, tennis, skiing, archery, or "the grand old Midwestern custom of the folk frolic." WRA co-recs encouraged coupling-up, which in turn provided women with "a secure niche in a competitive and uncertain world." By the 1950s, co-recs included food, plays, and movies, hardly athletic in nature and decidedly work for the shrinking WRA membership to stage. Little overlap existed between what the larger student community identified with the WRA and what its core membership wanted to do with their leisure. With dancing allowed in 1960, growing off-campus options for peer interaction, and the national trend toward more rebellious and politically active student cultures, the co-recs seemed quaint and dated. Most female students could find the "recreation, enjoyment, good health and comradeship" the WRA promised elsewhere.[29]

At fall retreats in the 1950s, WRA councils often focused on "the lack of participation in the WRA by St. Olaf women students." By the early 1960s, WRA leaders searched in vain for a panacea to generate interest in their club: trampolines, team trophies in dorm lounges, an "avant-garde" modern dance group, and securing a cabin "for camp-outs and for other organization activities." Nothing worked. The organization had significant trouble raising

enough dues to cover its remaining competitive sports, swimming and basketball. With hopes of better addressing student desires, WRA leaders surveyed the female student body in 1967. Ninety percent of respondents thought physical activity valuable for "releasing tension," but 95 percent favored "sports where both men and women are involved." In the end, the survey revealed "no great enthusiasm" for the WRA or its activities. Two years later, on the eve of a far-reaching national feminist movement, the council of the Women's Recreation Association at St. Olaf College officially disbanded, conceding "poor attendance," even among its leaders.[30]

The survey revealed a lack of commitment to the WRA but did not explain why. In fact, Ole women liked to be active during their leisure hours, but they no longer needed the WRA to do so. In 1925, a variety of women could come together under the WAA's auspices, whether they wanted to compete in sports, find camaraderie, practice their leadership skills, or blow off some steam. The organization helped many Ole women feel modern, celebrated, and part of a college culture while still meeting administrators' expectations and fitting into the college's distinctive identity. By 1945, St. Olaf's extracurricular activities looked considerably like those at other colleges, minus the dancing, which meant women had entrée to a variety of leisure activities, albeit within a national cultural context of narrowing gender norms. With declining success, the WRA tried to accommodate these changes while still offering an outlet for competitive female athletics.

By 1965, cultural notions of women's primary identity as wife and mother began to unravel, leaving Ole women considerable freedom to explore who they wanted to be. Most chose identities other than physical educator or athlete, which was also true of Ole men; sports no longer sat at the center of college cultures, allowing students with diverse interests the chance to construct identities and find sympathetic peer communities. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 gave women access to intercollegiate sports, one option among many for a new generation of Ole women. Even though it outlived its usefulness, the Women's Athletic Association and its successor Women's Recreation Association played important roles in helping St. Olaf women stake a claim on a student culture they could define for themselves, that expressed their values and expectations, one over which they had some control. ⊡

By the 1950s, the student community imagined women supporting men's athletic prowess rather than their own. St. Olaf cheerleaders, 1956.

Notes

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1. Georgina Dieson Hegland, *As It Was in the Beginning* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College Press, 1950), 103; *Manitou Messenger*, May 1887 and Mar. 1889.

2. Helen Leftkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 42, 202; Pandora Society constitution, quoted in Hegland, *As It Was in the Beginning*, 98; 1906 St. Olaf College promotional bulletin, quoted in Hegland, 101.

3. William C. Benson, *High on Manitou: A History of St. Olaf College, 1874–1949* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College Press, 1949).

4. Hegland, *As It Was in the Beginning*, 7.

5. Hegland, *As It Was in the Beginning*, 103; Benson, *High on Manitou*, 24, 88.

6. Gertrude Hilleboe, "Manitou Analecta," Shaw-Olson Center for College History, St. Olaf College; Joseph M. Shaw, *History of St. Olaf College, 1874–1974* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College Press, 1974), 220. On calisthenics for women, see Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 184–91; Lynn Peril, *College Girls: Bluestockings, Sex Kittens, and Coeds, Then and Now* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), 236.

7. "Locals," *Manitou Messenger*, May 1905, 51; Julia Post, "A History of the Women's Athletic Association," May 24, 1930, Women's Recreational Association files, Shaw-Olson Center for College History, St. Olaf College (hereafter WRA); *Manitou Messenger*, May 1892. On the rise of women's basketball, see Allen Guttmann, *Women's Sports: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 115–16.

8. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997), 16. See also Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). On Lovelace, see Julie A. Schrader, *Maud Hart Lovelace's Deep Valley* (Mankato: Minnesota Heritage Publishing, 2002).

WAA members enjoying an early morning ride.

9. "Physical Education for St. Olaf Women," undated history, c. 1960, Department of Women's Physical Education collection, box 3, Shaw-Olson Center for College History, Special Collections, St. Olaf College (hereafter WPH). On national developments, see Diane LeBlanc and Allys Swanson, *Playing for Equality: Oral Histories of Women Leaders in the Early Years of Title IX* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), 4; Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sports*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 7–30.

10. Post, "History of WAA."

11. Post, "History of WAA"; Cora Hjertaas Stavik, "Memoirs of a Charter Member," WRA. On big men on campus, see Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 50–51.

12. Almeda L. Anderson, "Coeds Not Satisfied with Their Evening Gowns: They too, Take up Athletics," *Manitou Messenger*, May 21, 1929, 4. On 1920s student cultures, see Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

13. Benson, *High on Manitou*, 196; Anderson, "Coeds Not Satisfied"; Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 108.

14. "Feministic," *Viking* yearbook (1922), 253. The group's notes, drawings, and decorations from the 1920s may be found in scrapbooks in both WRA and WPH, box 3.

15. Guttmann, *Women's Sports*, 137; Sarah Jane Eikleberry, "More Than Milk and Cookies: Reconsidering the College Play Day," *Journal of Sport History* 41 (fall 2014): 467–86; Post, "History of WAA."

16. Program, photographs, and some handmade nametags from 1929 play day, WAA scrapbook, WRA; clippings from Twin Cities papers, scrapbook, WPH, box 3; *Messenger*, Feb. 12, 1929; Post, "History of WAA"; Ellen Gerber, "The Controlled Development of Collegiate Sport for Women, 1923–1936," *Journal of Sports History* 2 (spring 1975): 3; *Viking* yearbook (1929), 201–8.

17. WAA minutes, Oct. 3, 1927, Apr. 8, 1929, and May 25, 1941, WRA; Post, "History of WAA."

18. *Manitou Messenger*, Apr. 3, 1917, 6.

19. Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 208; Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 75. On popularity, see Bailey, *From Front Porch*, 29. On Coke and "dutch" dates, see "The Lifted Eyebrow," *Manitou Messenger*, Nov. 4, 1938.

20. Undated WAA promotional statement, WRA files; *Manitou Messenger*, Oct. 25, 1927, 3; *Viking* yearbook (1935), 180–82. See also *Manitou Messenger*, Sept. 29, 1931, and Oct. 4, 1938, 2 .

21. *Manitou Messenger*, Dec. 7, 1938, 3; "WAA Sponsors 'Gypsy Trail' Hike; Songs, Games Are Features of Event," *Manitou Messenger*, Oct. 6, 1931, 4; "WAA Organizes Sport Clubs," *Manitou Messenger*, Oct. 4, 1938, 2.

22. Shaw, *History of St. Olaf College*, 407; Bailey, *From Front Porch*, 63; *Manitou Messenger*, Sept. 28, 1926, 1, and Dec. 13, 1940, 6; Mabel Shirley, "WAA Becomes Women's Recreation Association," *Manitou Messenger*, Aug. 30, 1940.

23. *Viking* yearbook (1941), 155.

24. *Viking* yearbook (1947), 87, and (1951), 201, 203; "Physical Education for St. Olaf Women." On the Dolphins' founding, see *Manitou Messenger*, June 7, 1938; Dolphins' records, Shaw-Olson Center for College History, Special Collections, St. Olaf College.

25. *Viking* yearbook (1943), 53; Benson, *High on Manitou*, 289–311, quotation, 294; "Physical Education for St. Olaf Women."

26. Bailey, *From Front Porch*, 38–41.

27. *Viking* yearbook (1945), 150.

28. Bailey, *From Front Porch*, 43.

29. *Viking* yearbook (1947), 88–89, and (1950), 53; Bailey, *From Front Porch*, 53. On the decline of dating cultures more generally, see Bailey, *From Front Porch*, 141–43.

30. "WRA Retreats for Annual Parley to Plan and Play," *Manitou Messenger*, Oct. 21, 1955, 3; Carol Woster, "Free Expression Finds New Footing," *Manitou Messenger*, Oct. 11, 1953; *Manitou Messenger*, Feb. 6, 1959, 5. Survey described in *Manitou Messenger*, May 5, 1967, 6. On disbanding, WRA minutes, Apr. 14 and 28, 1969, WRA.

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