



**A DECENT AND PROPER  
EXERTION**

**THE RISE OF WOMEN'S COMPETITIVE  
SWIMMING IN SYDNEY TO 1912.**

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**ASSH STUDIES IN SPORTS HISTORY NO. 9**

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**THE RISE OF WOMEN'S COMPETITIVE  
SWIMMING IN SYDNEY TO 1912**

**Veronica Raszeja**

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## **EDITORS NOTE**

With this ASSH Studies in Sports History volume the Australian Society for Sports History continues its programme of publishing theses of particular merit in the field of Australian Sports History. Veronica Raszeja's thesis was originally submitted (under the name 'Veronica Raszeja Wood') as part of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) at the University of New South Wales, in 1990. Subsequently it was awarded the 1991 ASSH prize for the best dissertation of the year.

It is particularly pleasing for the society to publish this thesis because it provides a significant contribution to the historical analysis of the relatively neglected women's sports experience and because it concentrates on the development of a sport which has been particularly relevant to Australia's international sporting image. Through this volume Veronica's work will be circulated more widely and will stimulate further study of both swimming and Australian Women's Sports history.

**JOHN O'HARA**

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
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Editor

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	1
SYNOPSIS .....	2
ABBREVIATIONS .....	3
INTRODUCTION .....	4
THE CHARM OF REFINED WOMANHOOD ....	14
THE NATATORIAL ART .....	23
AN ACCEPTABLE AMBITION .....	52
CONCLUSION .....	81
APPENDIX A Comparative Swimming Times, 1902-1992 .....	87
APPENDIX B Australian Representation At The Olympic Games, 1896-1984 .....	88
APPENDIX C The Introduction Of Events For Women To The Olympic Games, 1896-1928 .....	90
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	92

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## SYNOPSIS

Women's swimming, the graceful, "respectable" sport, was the first acceptable - and indeed recommended - urban sport for women. By virtue of its long association with health, by virtue of its "hidden" effort and by virtue of its "hidden" dress, women's swimming avoided censure and was free of the constraints placed upon the more public women's sports. With its wide acceptance and approval, women's competitive swimming was allowed to develop unhampered throughout the 19th century. Its emergence as a fully fledged competitive sport in the 20th century, with its practitioners exhibiting grit, determination, ambition, and battling for honours with no holds barred - and yet remaining socially sanctioned - epitomised the contradictions and ambivalences surrounding the development of female physical emancipation.

Throughout the early years of the 20th century, women's competitive swimming in Sydney would both reflect and challenge the prevailing definitions of "ideal" womanhood. By 1912, with a public ready to support what would have been previously unacceptable for women, the sport entered a new phase. Sydney's champion "lady" swimmers fought, and won, a bitter struggle to test their mettle against the world's best at the Stockholm Olympic Games. As Sydney's women champions emerged from the battle as Australia's first international sporting heroines, this sport of swimming had pushed further the boundaries which defined the physical and mental capabilities of "ideal" womanhood: it had expanded women's "social space".

## **Abbreviations**

NSW ..... New South Wales

NSWASA ..... New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association

NSWLASA ..... New South Wales Ladies' Amateur  
Swimming Association

SLSC ..... Sydney Ladies' Swimming Club

SMH ..... Sydney Morning Herald

## INTRODUCTION

The hoisting of the Australian flag on the first and second flagpoles was received with loud cheers, which could certainly not have been given by the small contingent of Australasians present, and as the girls walked along the platform in front of the stand to their dressing room accompanied by Miss Mary Durack, their chaperone, and Captain Vicary Horniman, the president of the Australasian team, round after round of applause followed their progress ultimately breaking into an ovation.<sup>1</sup>

In 1912 Australia's first international sporting heroines were greeted with standing ovations, flowers, world press coverage, and rounds of international exhibition bookings. They returned to Australia hailed as "heroines", as the best "ambassadors Australia ever had", and as "fine examples of their sex". But although the acclaim was wide and seemingly universal, the path to recognition for Australian women in the field of physical competitiveness had been neither smooth nor straight forward.<sup>1</sup>

In the words of Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "the relationships between social change and social stress are dismayingly complex and recalcitrant",<sup>2</sup> and so it has proved with this work examining the rise of women's competitive swimming. Complex firstly, because of the many contradictory and ambivalent issues surrounding the gradual - and often controversial - rise of women's sport when examined within the broader context of the 19th century redefinitions of a woman's ideal image and role. Issues arise concerning science, health, education, the 19th century cult of the family and the accompanying ideal of womanhood, fashion, commercialism, the popular press, nationalism, climate. . . the list is long. Complex secondly, because of the often mystifyingly smooth acceptance and approval bestowed upon women's participation in this earliest of 19th century competitive sports - but an

approval not without glimpses of the familiar conflicts facing all women of this period who threatened to transgress the social boundaries dividing male and female.

The majority of the women involved in swimming, and indeed in virtually all organised sports during this period, were largely middle or upper class, and this work reflects that bias. Although swimming was certainly one of the first sports incorporated into the state school curriculum during the first decade of the 20th century, to begin with there was little leisure time for most working class women to become involved with the competitive aspects of the sport - clubs, training, competitions. And also, the conflicts generated over the emergence of the feminine sporting competitive spirit were largely concerned with the perceived threats made to the physical frailty and the image of "respectability" of ideal womanhood - both middle class constructs of femininity.

There is no fixed starting date for this examination, as women's practice of the natatorial art in general has itself a rather unfixed beginning; although for white, middle class Sydney women, their first forays into recreational swimming can probably be set around the early 1830s. However, the year chosen as a closing point has a special significance. It is 1912, the year when two Sydney swimmers, Sarah "Fanny" Durack, and Wilhelmina "Mina" Wylie, overcoming the organisational and financial obstructions of conservatism, became Australia's first international sporting heroines. The fact that these first two Olympic champion women swimmers were from Sydney also serves to set the location.

The subject itself - the rise of women's competitive swimming - has been chosen for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, within a broad area of sad neglect - the history of women's sporting endeavours and physical emancipation - it supplied the challenge of an uncharted path. No other investigations have been undertaken of the development of a sport which not only provided the world's first female racing champions, but which has also since provided Australia - a nation which for long has clung to

its image as a sporting nation - with a goodly proportion of its Olympic medal winners. Despite a disproportionate representation - only eighteen percent of Australia's Olympic representatives have been women-between 1912 and 1980, women won twenty-one of the fifty-one gold medals, with women swimmers taking thirteen.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons behind the rise of this most successful of women's sports also pose questions whose answers highlight the ambiguities of this transitory phase of readjustment of the ideals of a women's place. There were other competitive sports for women emerging later in the 19th century: the individual sports of croquet, tennis, golf, cycling, and the team sports of cricket, hockey, lacrosse and rowing. However, none of these had the same level of accessibility, acceptability and encouragement as did swimming. The sports of croquet, tennis and golf were to remain largely elite, fashionable pastimes, pleasant adjuncts to the suburban matrimonial merry-go-round, and would remain constrained by the conventional ideas of "proper" behaviour and attire until well into the next century. Cycling, a popular sport of the 1890s, plagued by controversy over its infringements of the established border marking appropriate male and female behaviour, would never really become established as a competitive sport - largely because a good proportion of its female participants were purely fashionable, "Sunday" riders, leaving few serious ("cyclistes") to brave the censure and disapproval.

As for the team sports, although historically cricket had early beginnings with the peasant women of Britain, when it reappeared in the 1880s played by middle class women it was met with considerable ridicule and scorn, and subsequently never managed to acquire a large following. Hockey and lacrosse were to largely remain within the confines of the schoolgrounds until the turn of the century - and it is also debatable how seriously they were actually pursued, their practitioners being hampered by the long skirts and corsets of current street fashion well into the 1900s. And as for rowing, it started its life as a minority, non-competitive sport, and even when competitions were introduced in

the last decade of the 19th century, they were very small scale, and would remain so.

Swimming, in the midst of the tide of controversy - and compromise - over the emergence of the female competitive spirit, was the women's sport which stood out on its own. Apart from walking, it was the first acceptable - and indeed, even recommended - physically active recreation for women. It developed into the first women's competitive sport both to be undertaken seriously, and to be encouraged in this serious approach. It would be the first sport to approve a sporting dress as rational as the sporting dress of its male counterparts. It would be the first sport not to be caricatured as an adjunct to the marriage market, as merely a frivolous pastime, or as a masculinising activity which threatened the very future of the race. With its participants training and racing for prizes and world records, it would be the first sport to incorporate, without censure, skills and attitudes previously considered not only unacceptable for, but unnatural to, "respectable" females - those of competition and striving for excellence.

It would achieve this extraordinary acceptance by avoiding from its very inception the infringement of some of the more overt boundaries defining the separate spheres of Victorian masculinity and femininity. Swimming, given early medical blessings for its mild, beneficial exercise and conducted in a closeted environment, would be free from many of the constraints put on the public behaviour of women. Initially, its participants would be free to develop the sport as they saw fit, thereby allowing the adoption of rational dress and the development of the "competitive spirit", unhampered by the traditional, deferential male/female relations imposed upon other more public sports. However, within its development there would also be occasions of tension and controversy - most notably when the practice of the sport threatened the dominant image of femininity, either by putting stress on the ideal of "modest and moral" as happened in 1906, or by impinging upon a traditionally masculine area, as in the debates over the 1912 Olympics issue.

To set the rise of this unique sport in the wider context of the general move towards women's physical emancipation, this work will explore, initially, the various ideologies which defined sport as male and restricted women's participation. The predominantly body-centred arguments - such as the scientific theories of "conservation of energy" - used to prevent women from engaging in any serious activity which threatened the established order - whether the activity was intellectual, political or physical - will be examined. As will the counter arguments used in favour of women's physical recreational development, those arguments whose ultimate aim - that of best fitting women to be childbearers and rearers of the race - was paradoxically the same as that of those who opposed them.

Following on from these early questions of the efficacy of mild, therapeutic exercises and the beginnings of the acceptance of women's physical recreations, the early interest shown in the sport of swimming will be discussed. Against the background of the evolution of medical and scientific theory, the changing morals of a Victorian society, the shifting patterns of work and leisure, the increasing commercialisation of an industrial society, the changing priorities of the press, this work will examine the development of women's swimming into a fully fledged, internationally-sanctioned, competitive sport. It will address the questions which must be raised as to why swimming was a more acceptable woman's competitive sport than any other in this early stage. And whether, if its acceptability was largely due to its congruence with, rather than challenge to, the established social order and the place of women within it, the achievements made by women swimmers were ultimately of any consequence.

There are no studies examining the rise of women's competitive swimming in Australia, and any knowledge of the issues surrounding the emergence - or even the chronological and organisational development - of this sport must be pieced together from a widely scattered variety of sources. Occasional references in books, articles and theses covering related topics and issues, popular sporting manuals, newspapers, maps,

private papers, have all had to be searched out and consulted to obtain a composite picture of the beginnings of this sport. And, as an additional bonus, invaluable insights into the culture of early swimming have been yielded by fortunate and timely personal interviews.

Covering the development of women's sports in Britain and North America there is quite a large body of academic material - although very little of it addressed areas touching on women's swimming. However, works such as Mangan and Park's *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialisation of Women in Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, and Kathleen McCrone's *Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914*, deal with women's sporting achievements in the context of world political, social and economic conditions, the changing medical and scientific theories, and the changing cultural image of women. Also, overseas journals, such as the *American Journal of Sport History* and the British-based *International Journal of the History of Sport* have yielded a large array of particularly useful articles on the issues and questions surrounding the movements towards women's physical emancipation.

Of the academic works addressing the emergence of women's sport in Australia, among the most relevant include a chapter by Helen King entitled "The Sexual Politics of Sport: an Australian Perspective" in R. Cashman and M. McKernan's *Sport in History: The Making of Modern Sporting History*. In this chapter King discusses the emergence and early achievements of a broad range of Australian women's sporting endeavours in relation to the prevailing cultural images of women. Other material includes John Daly's *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia, 1836-1890*, which concentrates on the 19th century rise of both men's and women's organised sport in South Australia, and J.W.C. Cumes' *Their Chastity was not too Rigid: Leisure Times in Early Australia*, which provides considerable insights into the recreations of women in early colonial Australia. Of the many non-academic books, the factual recitations such as Pat Beresford's *Encyclopedia of Swimming*, and the "popular" histories, such as Reet

and Max Howell's *A History of Australian Sport*, and Alan Clarkson's *Lanes of Gold: 100 Years of the NSW Amateur Swimming Association*, provide some important details of times, dates and places, and also some useful leads.

These few works touching on the subject of Australian women's sporting achievements are supplemented by a handful of articles in the Australian sporting journals, and a few unpublished theses. However, apart from Reet Howell's "Australia's First Female Olympians", published in the 1984 Olympic Scientific Congress Papers, and Dennis Phillips' "Australian Women at the Olympics" in *Sporting Traditions*, the women's sports concentrated on are largely tennis, cycling or the team games. And on the introduction of sport and its development in girls' schools, Sonia Lillianthorne's thesis covering the early days of women's sport at the University of Sydney, and two articles by Ray Crawford, appear to be the only readily accessible substantive works to shed light on this area.

Given this dearth of literature on the matter under discussion - the rise of women's competitive swimming in Sydney - this thesis has essentially been constructed from primary sources. Sources which, due to the combined factors of neglect, disinterest in women's achievements, plus the natural disasters of fire and flood, are to be found rather scattered and isolated. However, these fragments have, when pieced together, revealed a wealth of information and insight into the subject at hand.

The discovery at the resting place of Annette Kellerman's papers at the Sydney Opera House, while throwing some light on the early days of women's swimming in Australia, England and America, also yielded an address scribbled on a piece of paper. Following up that address resulted in a series of interviews with a generation of swimmers who, learning to swim in the first decade of the century, also remembered some of the achievements, and difficulties, of the early women pioneers. Swimmers such as Frank "Blade" Griffiths, four years old when Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie took Gold and Silver at the Olympics, whose

father was the first manager of the Ladies Baths in the Domain, and whose mother was the first vice-president of the Metropolitan Ladies' Swimming Club formed in 1908. And Bill and May Williams, both veterans of pre-1910 school swimming lessons, eleven and twelve years old respectively when the 1912 Olympics were held, and long-serving officials with the NSW Amateur Swimming Association (NSWASA) and the NSW Ladies' Amateur Swimming Association (NSWLASA).

These contacts led in turn to further discoveries. One of the "old swimmers"<sup>4</sup> had maps of early Sydney which supplemented the illuminating collection held by the Water Board and helped clarify the often hazy, contradictory details surrounding the names, locations and dates of Sydney's early swimming pools. A tip-off from another veteran led, after long and persistent inquiries, to the discovery of records held at the NSWASA Offices, from which eventually came some of the most enlightening information of the whole search. For besides the early NSWASA minute books, there was also discovered a cupboard full of unsorted, uncatalogued, miscellaneous clippings, swimming carnival handbooks, records and photographs - a collection perhaps long forgotten or overlooked by the staff.

The Mitchell Library has also proved to be a most valuable source. Besides providing a wide selection of early books concerned with women's health and physical exercise, the Mitchell also provided access to the recently received and catalogued Mina Wylie papers and photographs - saved from the Randwick municipal tip by a stroke of good luck and a concerned citizen. And the E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, containing handbooks, annual reports and photographs of the early days of swimming, filled in many blank spaces. Judy Nelson of the Mitchell Library also supplied some of her own interesting research into the unsung professional swimmer Beatrice Kerr, and Alan Davies, Curator of Photographs at the State Library, provided some very interesting leads into the extraordinary and revealing collection of Edwardian photographer C.Y. Caird.

And of course, a great deal of primary information has come from the 19th century and early 20th century press, both sporting and regular. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was extremely useful for general bathing and health information issues and debates and also to some extent for its factual recording of swimming events. Regarding the sporting press, it was the *Sydney Sportsman* which offered by far the best commentary on women's competitive swimming with its early encouragement and continual, interested coverage in the events and debates surrounding its development. Insights into the often fashionable priorities assigned to certain women's sports were gleaned from women's pages in newspapers and journals, and from specific magazines such as the *Woman's Voice*, the *New Idea*, and even the Women's Christian Temperance Union's Journal, the *White Ribbon Signal*, also carried a memorable article on the saving of a soul from drink by a young woman's swimming feats - but unfortunately, that story will have to be told at a later date.

In charting the unmapped waters of the rise of women's competitive swimming, the issues raised have proved to be more complex than first thought. The creation of the first women's sporting heroines in 1912 seemed, at first sight, to indicate a sport breaking through the boundaries which defined women as weak and frail creatures, incapable of the determination, stamina and will to win, unable to be successful in a competitive physical endeavour. Yet, on the examination of discovered evidence, assessed in the light of an understanding of the dominant cultural constructs of femininity of the 19th and early 20th centuries, neither the answers nor the questions can remain so straightforward. Why was the emergence of the female competitive spirit so acceptable in this sport of swimming? Why were women swimmers who broke world records in 1902 hailed as "plucky Australians", while those attempting to run races, jump higher than one another - or to even cycle fast - were condemned as masculinised "abominations"? And, in the final analysis, what did the rise of women's competitive swimming contribute to the overall push for women's physical emancipation? This analysis besides undertaking a long

overdue task in the discovery of the details of this unusual sport, attempts to answer these questions.

## NOTES:

1. *Referee*, 28 August 1912. p.8.
2. C. Smith-Rosenberg and C. Rosenberg. “The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Women and Their Role in Nineteenth-century America”, in J.A. Mangan and R.J. Park, *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialisation of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, Frank Cass London, 1987. p.13.
3. Information compiled from Reet Howell, *Aussie Gold; the Story of Australia at the Olympics*, Brooks Waterloo, Qld., 1988. See Appendix B for further details of Australia's male and female representation at the Olympic Games.
4. V. Grant, a member of the Union of Old Swimmers.

## THE CHARM OF REFINED WOMANHOOD

The usual and purely arbitrary notion of only certain games and certain bodily motions being decorous for the female sex is a miserable restriction on the “individuality” of the individual. It is a cruel thing to maim the fair forms and cripple the light limbs of one generation of women after another in deference to a false ideal and a corrupted eye.<sup>1</sup>

Every girl should be encouraged - in some cases required - to equip herself for the duties and responsibilities and pleasures of womanhood, by the systematic culture of her body. Regular exercise will give an added zest to life, will make her healthier, and consequently happier, and draw towards her all the eligible and discerning young men of her acquaintance. Could aught else be desired?<sup>2</sup>

In the pre-industrial era, women had been able to indulge in various recreational sports -such as village cricket and foot races for the labouring classes, and hunting, archery and riding for those of the aristocracy - but when sport in general was redefined in the urban context during the period 1700-1850,<sup>3</sup> women’s participation, always more restricted than men’s, virtually ceased. The complex social and economic developments accompanying the rise of industrial capitalism, factors which contributed to this recession in sporting activity, were also to permanently change the boundaries of permissible and possible in women’s sport and games. The rise of the middle classes, and the emergence of the working classes, would serve to totally restructure the leisure activities of all.

For the 19th century working class woman, industrialisation and urbanisation had left her with little space or time for outdoor recreations, and the bourgeois ideologies attendant on the rise of industrial capitalism had also restrained her middle class sister. As

Jennifer Hargreaves argues, the 19th century construction of the cult of family - with its demand that man and woman played complementary, but strictly defined roles - effectively curtailed middle class women's physical freedoms<sup>4</sup>. Male and female now inhabited rigidly demarcated spheres - each, in opposition, serving to define the other. Man was the provider, the competitor, the inhabitant of the "public sphere". Woman was the producer and caretaker of the next generation, her realm was the "private sphere", the "domestic". Within this strict demarcation of roles both intellectual and physical characteristics were assigned and lines drawn. Men needed intellectual and physical robustness to succeed in the public arena, and women needed good reproductive potential, and moral rectitude, to be able to reproduce not only more of the "British stock", but also the social and moral values so necessary to the continuation of the society.

Both schools and the scientific/medical professions were the great reinforcers of the physical differences between men and women. To prepare young boys for their life in the public domain, early 19th century educators determined that the qualities of leadership, responsibility and teamwork were needed. To this end, new, formally codified and disciplined sports - adopted and reworked from the spontaneous and disorganised folk sports of the common classes - were introduced to middle and upper class boys of both Britain and Australia. A later quote from a future headmaster of Eton highlights well the primary aims of these sports:

A boy is disciplined by athletics in two ways: by being forced to put the welfare of the common cause before selfish interests, to obey implicitly the word of command and act in concert with the heterogeneous elements of the company he belongs to; and secondly, should it so turn out, he is disciplined by being raised to a post of command, where he feels the gravity of the responsible office and the difficulty of making prompt decisions and securing obedience.

For young middle class women, such “masculine” qualities as those imbued by sports were certainly not required. To be fitted for her life in the private sphere, and her role as “mother of men”, a woman needed qualities of gentleness, patience, moral uprightness, “respectability”. These “feminine” qualities were cultivated by her education in needlework, French, deportment, dancing. Apart from a little dancing and an occasional stroll, no other physical exercise was encouraged, for not only were the character traits manifest in sport inimical to the prevailing ideal of femininity, but so too were the physical manifestation of “rude” health. Firm muscles, tanned faces - in an early 19th century woman, these were all sign of either “abnormal” or “common” behaviour.

Besides the careful avoidance of physical exertion, fashion was also a tool in the creation of the ideal image of “femininity”. Designed to emphasise both her total opposition to the “masculine type”, and her far removal from those women of the labouring classes, early 19th century “respectable” womanhood was encased in tight corsets which emphasised tiny waists and ample bosoms, and hobbled with long skirts and narrow, high-heeled boots which restricted movement to small dainty steps.

Paradoxically, these fashions, while contrived to highlight the “typical feminine characteristics” of smallness, weakness and frailty, actually helped cause and perpetuate them. Held to be biological rather than behavioural, “nervous disorders”, fainting fits, and the inability to move very far or vigorously without fatigue or breathlessness - all conditions induced by tight lacing and lack of exercise - were used as evidence of her obvious unsuitability for any physically demanding activity.

Although there were voices against the practices which perpetuated women’s weakness and frailty, throughout the early 19th century adherence to these concepts was the norm, and indeed even into the 20th century, many of the unfounded beliefs of women’s physiology persisted, and continued to prevent women from exercising

their true potential. The major support for the continuation of these beliefs was medical science, and the rising faith in its omnipotence. In the 19th century, science was used to justify and explain most social phenomena, and in the case of the obvious physical manifestation of the “inherent” frailty of woman it was not lacking in theories.

The medical theory which lent most weight to the continuing exclusion of women from physical activity was the theory of “finite energy”. Alternatively called the “compensation” or “conservation of energy” theory, it was based on the idea that body energy expended in one direction would have to be withdrawn from another. When the experts decreed that women, because of the constant physical drain of their reproductive systems, were too fragile to participate in any activity which exacted more energy from them - such as “excessive” or “inappropriate” physical or mental exercise - their advice was followed. The experts threatened that any violation of these “true” feminine characteristics would result in acute disruption of the very essence and purpose of femininity - motherhood. A woman indulging in aberrant non-feminine habits - such as physical or mental prowess - would be endangering the future of the race by either tempting infertility or transmitting her unnatural characteristics to her offspring.

But conditions, ideas and restraints did not remain static. By the second decade of the 19th century, the problems wrought on women by the increasing lack of physical activity and the dire effects of prevailing fashion were beginning to be noticed. Arguments in favour of increased activity were put forward using the same theories of inheritance <sup>6</sup> which underlay the arguments against bourgeois women’s activity. It was now contended that women were unhealthy through lack of exercise, and, it was this unhealthiness which would imperil the future of the race. During this period, a wave of books and articles advocating moderate exercise for women as an aid to health, beauty and deportment appeared. Among these works were Priscilla Wakefield’s 1817 *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex; With Suggestions for its Improvement*, Donald Walker’s 1837 book, *Exercises for*

*Ladies; Calculated to Preserve and Improve Beauty, and to Prevent and Correct Personal Defects, Inseparable from Constrained or Careless Habits*, and Sarah Stickney Ellis' 1843 *The Mothers of England*.<sup>7</sup> All works promoting women's exercise, but none leaving in any doubt the primary aims of such exercise.

However, misguided notions of "proper" middle class femininity, with its image of small, swooning, pale and frail invalids, continued to prevail over these voices of somewhat better sense, and through the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s the bulk of middle class women indulged in nothing much more than an occasional gentle stroll. Although, by the 1830s, there was on offer an acceptable outdoor recreation for "respectable" Sydney women - "ducking and gambolling" in the waters of Mrs. Bigges' bathing establishment in the Domain.<sup>10</sup> This new sport of swimming combined the popular notions of the health-giving properties of salt-water bathing with the accepted need for women's exercise, and staged it in segregated, secluded surroundings. A suitable recreation for "proper" women, swimming was to grow in popularity with the "ladies" of Sydney.

Apart from this new "respectable" alternative, in keeping with the general depressed nature of sporting activity during this period there was little further advance made in the world of women's sport until the early 1850s, when gentle recreational sports and therapeutic gymnastics began to be increasingly recommended to perk up the health of middle class women. They were especially prescribed to counteract the predicted deleterious effects that serious academic study would have on the health of young women. However, these new physical activities were still restrained by the tenacious theories of women's physical inadequacies, for the proponents of these new exercises - aware that the simultaneous onslaught posed by intellectual activity plus strenuous physical exercise on the ideal image of Victorian femininity could prove too much for nervous parents and medical experts - had to tread carefully.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, although gymnastics and callisthenics were being introduced into English girl's schools in the 1850s,<sup>10</sup> and into Australian

schools certainly by the mid-1860s,<sup>11</sup> vigorous sports for women were as yet impossible to even contemplate.

Although the introduction of these largely therapeutic exercises accompanied the social phenomenon of the rise of male organised sports, they were not intended to take woman to the same standard of robust health and muscular development as her male counterpart. Nor were they designed to inculcate the qualities of leadership and self-reliance. These were masculine qualities, and Victorian womanhood had no call for them; she was to be physically fit and healthy, but only to that degree where it would be beneficial for her primary purpose-reproduction. Therefore, at this very beginning of woman's movement into sport, a separate path was set for her to follow. The exercises permitted her were by their very nature decorous, non-strenuous, and designed for the perpetuation of the British race and its morals, and thus served to further confirm the existing physical definitions of woman and her social standing and purpose. By defining women's physical activities as something qualitatively different from that of men's - with different aims, practices and results - the established order, the demarcation of male and female, remained unthreatened. However, by introducing to women at an early age the idea that female participation in physical activity was not only acceptable but desirable, these activities did serve to lay the foundations for the later participation of women in sport.

Besides gentle gymnastics, the 1850s also saw the introduction of another recreation for women - croquet, a fashionable pastime which was followed up in the 1860s and 1870s by the arrival of the equally fashionable recreations, golf and tennis.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the fact that these new activities were conducted outdoors - thereby permitting some fresh air and sunshine to reach the participants - the physical benefits afforded the women who practised these new sports was debatable. Croquet, golf, and tennis would all remain fashionable, social games until well into the 20th century. And, as these games often served the additional purpose of functioning as a matrimonial introduction venue, the

participants were constrained to retain a “ladylike” demeanour, dress and manners. To avoid censure, and perhaps appear as good marriage prospects, they had to play the game within the limits of the prevailing acceptable definitions of womanhood - decorous, non-strenuous, and non-serious.

Following the ground broken by gym and drill, with the increasing social acceptance of croquet, tennis, golf - and of course with segregated recreational swimming continuing in the background - in the last three decades of the 19th century slightly more strenuous and competitive sports began to emerge, and a few of the existing recreations began to adopt a more competitive mood. In the 1870s the first recorded women’s swimming competitions were held in Adelaide,<sup>13</sup> in 1884 the first recorded Australian women’s tennis competitions were played in Victoria,<sup>14</sup> and 1896 saw the first Australian women’s national golf tournament.<sup>15</sup> During this period competitive sports also began to be introduced into the girls’ schools. However, at this early stage the school sports were often just theoretically competitive, and tended to be largely restricted to the more social recreations such as tennis and croquet - although there were some mentions of swimming races, roller-skating, occasional cricket matches, and games of hockey and lacrosse.<sup>16</sup> But even with the intrinsically competitive team sports of hockey and lacrosse, it is debatable how seriously they were pursued. Especially as there are records of some young women hockey team members hiding the ball under their petticoats as they played.<sup>17</sup>

Although not yet seriously competitive, these new, sports represented the beginnings of the redefinition of the attitudes and types of behaviour appropriate for Victorian women. They represented, in comparison with what was permissible just twenty years earlier, quite definite adjustments in the images - if not ultimate purposes - of ideal womanhood. These forays into the traditionally masculine precincts of physical competition were reflections of other changes taking place during this last quarter of the 19th century. In the areas of higher

education, politics and medicine, women were also challenging the traditional ideals of femininity, and of masculinity.

Not surprisingly, these challenges to the established order met with opposition from the medical profession, from the religious hierarchy, and from ordinary men and women. Most of the arguments were based on the same single, central premise that woman's innate biological characteristics decided her place in life - the gentle, nurturing, modest and moral role set within the confines of the sphere of home and family. The physiological functioning of her reproductive system left her totally unsuited for any activity demanding sustained concentration, strenuous activity, or striving for excellence. Thus, when Dr Henry Maudsley railed against the move by women into higher education, his argument could be equally well applied to women's move into politics or competitive sport:

The stimulus of competition will act more powerfully on girls than on boys; not only because they are more susceptible by nature, but because it will produce more effect upon their constitutions when it is at all in excess. Their nerve-centres being in a state of greater instability, by reason of the development of their reproductive functions, they will be the more easily and the more seriously deranged.<sup>18</sup>

Although the debates on these issues raged thick and fast, the fundamental aims and purpose of womanhood still remained largely unchallenged and unchanged. Those who disagreed with Maudsley and his ilk were nonetheless calling for women's physical, educational and political emancipation on the grounds that it would better equip women as mothers of the nation. At the 1884 International Health Exhibition held in London a paper, in favour of both girls' and women's participation in running, tennis, la crosse [sic], swimming and rowing, put forward this view:

The generations to be born, however healthy and active their fathers may have been by reason of good physical exercise and healthy training, will not be otherwise than

beneficially affected by their mothers having had similar advantages in pastimes suitable to their sex.

And even more to the point was Madame Bergman-Osterberg, principal of the Dartford College of Physical Education, and creator of the new profession of gymnastics mistress,<sup>20</sup> who wrote that “the outdoor exercise and the training” offered at her Dartford College would tit a girl “to become the organiser of the perfect home, or the trainer of a vigorous and beautiful new generation”.<sup>21</sup> For most progressives of this time, physical emancipation, equality of education, and womanhood suffrage were not incompatible with the central belief that women’s ultimate concerns remained those of home and family.

Despite the opposition continuing into the late 1890s, women nonetheless moved into higher education - Sydney University admitted women to study for full degrees in 1881;<sup>22</sup> into political life - South Australian women led the way with female enfranchisement in 1894;<sup>23</sup> and into organised sport - in Sydney, the University Ladies’ Tennis Club was functioning by the mid-1880s and its women’s rowing club was established in 1897.<sup>24</sup> These advances into the world of sport were reflected in the literature of the late 1890s. There were numerous anthologies on sport published, among the best known being Lady Greville’s *The Gentlewoman’s Book of Sports*<sup>25</sup> and Frances Slaughter’s *Sportswoman’s Library*,<sup>26</sup> both collections of articles by women detailing the background and practice of a wide variety of outdoor sports - including tennis, swimming, cycling and riding. Besides various other factual books and journals catering for those interested in specific women’s sports, novels also began to appear, featuring sporting women in positive roles. H.G. Wells’ Ann Veronica, the symbol of the “New Woman”, rode a bike, wore trousers and got arrested for suffragette activities<sup>27</sup> and schoolgirl novels such as those of L.T. Meade and Angela Brazil invariably featured young girls with hockey sticks, cricket bats, or battling for honours in lacrosse.<sup>28</sup> As more women became involved in sports, the market for such sporting literature grew, and

women's sports gradually became a more acceptable, integrated feature of late Victorian society.

The press was also paying attention to the "New Sporting Woman". With the fundamental issues underlying the controversy over women's emancipation - whether intellectual, political or physical - being body centred, images of sporting woman were often chosen by the caricaturists of the popular press to personify the progression of - and threats posed by - the "New Woman". Sheila Fletcher considered this to be so when she wrote that "one of the most vivid images of female emancipation at the turn of the century - one that recurred there in the illustrated journals and lodged itself in the popular mind was that of the New Woman engaged in Sport".<sup>29</sup> The newspaper cartoonists and caricaturists, needing to find a single image to sum up women's attempts to transgress the dividing line between the sexes, had latched onto the sportswoman. Competitive sport, with its combination of overt ambition, striving for excellence, free movement, team spirit, independence, decision-making, and display of physical stamina, was the most syncretic image of the "New Woman's" attack on the status quo.

The cartoonists featured both positive and negative images of sportswomen. Often, to signify approval of the general progress of female emancipation, positive images of sportswomen were used, such as the *Melbourne Punch's* 1897 New Year cartoon, which featured a tired old man wearing the number "1896", being bowled by a member of the "1897" women's cricket team. The ball was labelled "Time".<sup>30</sup> However, when passing comment on sport itself, the caricatures were often ridiculing - and sometimes hostile. The light ridicule was often reserved for the more frivolous, "feminine" sport such as tennis and croquet, with jokes about fashion and matrimonial stakes being the favourite theme. Rather more unpleasant text and images were constructed of those sportswomen who were bordering on the margin of contemporary notions of appropriate male and female behaviour. The women who wore bloomers or trousers on their cycles were often

depicted as large, ugly, or masculine, as were those who dared practise athletics, and a favourite tack was to point out how, if they continued their “sporting” ways, men would find them so unattractive that they would not have a hope of achieving true womanhood’s ultimate ambition. Such as was threatened in this 1870s song:

She rises with the lark and scorches in the park  
She’s a lady there’s a lot of wear and tear about;  
Her shoes are number nine, and her foot’s as big as mine;  
So I don’t think she’s the kind of girl I’d care about.<sup>31</sup>

These more active sports were unacceptable because they threatened the very definitions of what constituted acceptable male and female behaviour. Their drastic modifications, or outright rejections, of the two interdependent symbols of femininity: fashion - long skirts, tiny corseted waists, tapered, high-heeled boots; and behaviour - modesty, frailty, dependence, had to be censured. “Number-nine-shoed” cyclists could not go streaking through the streets in their “rational” bloomers and divided skirts, self-propelled, all red faces and free-moving limbs without comments such as that passed by the specialists cycling magazine *Australian Cyclist* in 1898, which declared that “women racing is a degrading spectacle”.<sup>32</sup> Nor could women team sport players wield the weaponry of the game, and run, perspiring, around a pitch without incurring serious charges such as the condemnation of the sport of hockey which appeared as late as 1913:

[hockey] produces angularities, hardens sinews, abnormally develops certain parts of the body, causes abrasions, and at times disfigurement. It thus destroys the symmetry of mould and beauty of form, produces large feet and coarse hands. Its fierce excitement destroys the serene, tranquil beauty of the features, and its spasmodic climax is most injurious to the fine, keen nervous temperament of women.<sup>33</sup>

A charge which, combined with quotes such as “only the few square, squat and burly outdoor porter types of girls should play

[hockey]“, <sup>34</sup> provided fine fodder indeed for the cartoonists and caricaturists.

The female competitive swimmer however, escaped this sort of treatment. Her sport was neither fashionable nor frivolous, nor did it present a threat to the established order, or to the “charm of refined womanhood”. <sup>35</sup> The woman swimmer neither stirred the hostility and outrage of the general public, nor invited ready ridicule. Thus there were rarely grounds for the serious competitive woman swimmer to feature in caricature.

By the first decade of the new century women had made advances in all their targetted areas for emancipation - education, employment, politics, physical freedoms - and the fundamentals of the established order were still intact. In the physical realm of endeavour there was now far greater social acceptance of the desirability of games and sports for women. However, only a limited number of sports qualified as acceptable. To fall within the range of acceptability these women’s games had to exhibit an outward appearance of “femininity”, whether that be the wearing of corsets and petticoats, pursuing the sport with minimal effort, or as in the case of swimming, merely maintaining the outward appearance of minimal effort. While the acceptance of these new sports in the late 19th and early 20th centuries certainly represented an expansion of the physical boundaries of womanhood, by their co-operation with the prevailing images of “ideal” female behaviour, as yet, these permissible activities served to reinforce, rather than challenge, the fundamental perceptions of the character, capacities and ultimate concerns of “ideal” womanhood.

## NOTES:

1. Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Remarks on the Education of Girls*, London, 1854, pp. 11-12, quoted in Kathleen McCrone, *Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women 1870- 1914*, University Press of Kentucky, USA, 1988, p. 15.

2. Reg. ("Snowy") Baker, *General Physical Culture*, George Robertson & Co., Sydney, 1911, p. 118.
3. Kathleen McCrone, *op.cit.*, (1988), p.6.
4. Jennifer Hargreaves, "Playing Like Gentlemen While Behaving Like Ladies", *British Journal of Sport History*, Vol.2, No. 1, May, 1985.
5. Hon. Edward Lyttleton, future headmaster of Eton, quoted from an 1893 book, in Richard Holt, *Sport and the British*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 5.
6. Most notably those theories of Jean Baptiste de Lamarck (1744-1829) which - preceding those of Darwin by forty years - held that characteristics acquired by an individual during its lifetime can be transmitted to its offspring. William Keeton, *Biological Science*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1967, p. 653, and C.Bacchi "Evolution, Eugenics and Women: The impact of Scientific Theories on Attitudes towards Women, 1870 - 1920", in E. Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Class and History*, Fontana, Melbourne, 1980.
7. K. McCrone, "PlayUp! Play Up! and Play the Game! Sport at the late Victorian Girls' Public Schools" in J.A. Mangan & R.J. Park, *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialisation of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, Frank Cass, London, 1987, pp. 100 and 123.
8. John Hood, writing in 1842, quoted in J.W.C. Cumes, *Their Chastity was not too Rigid*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1979, p. 296.
9. In 1850 the educator Frances Buss of the North London Collegiate School had to appear before a board to justify her introduction of even mild callisthenics. A firm believer in the merits of physical exercise and sport for girls, she began to introduce competitive sports to her school in the early 1870s. Ray Crawford, "Sport for Young Ladies: The Victorian Independent Schools 1875-1925" in *Sporting Traditions*, Vol.1, No. 1, November 1984, p.64, and K. McCrone, *op.cit.*, (1988), pp. 63-67.
10. K. McCrone, *ibid.*, pp. 60 and 63.
11. R. Crawford, *op.cit.*, p 63.
12. Croquet emerged in England in the 1850s, and tennis in the 1870s. K. McCrone *op.cit.*, (1988) pp. 155-156.
13. John Daly, *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia, 1836 -1890*, Published by the author, Adelaide, 1982, p. 79.
14. Helen King. "The Sexual Politics of Sport: an Australian Perspective", in R. Cashman and M. McKernan, *Sport in History: The Making of Modern Sporting History*, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, 1979, p. 73.
15. *ibid.*
16. R. Crawford, *op.cit.*, pp. 69 and 73, and Sonia Lillianthorne, "Tea, Talk and Tennis: An Early History of Women's Sport at the University of Sydney, 1882 -1918", B.Ed. Thesis, University of Sydney, p. 76.
17. J. Hargreaves, *op.cit.*, p. 50
18. Henry Maudsley, "Sex in Mind and in Education", first published June 1874, reprinted in Louise Newman (ed.), *Men's Ideas/Women's Realities: Popular Science, 1870 -1915*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1985, p.83.
19. *The Health Exhibition Literature*, William Clowes and Sons Ltd., London, 1884. Volume X, p.95.
20. Sheila Fletcher, "The Making and Breaking of a Female Tradition: Women's Physical Education in England, 1880-1980" in *British Journal of Sports History*, Volume 2, No.1, May, 1985, pp 30 & 33.
21. J. Harvgreaves, *op cit.*, p. 48.
22. S. Lillianthorne, *op. cit.*, p.12.

23. Women obtained voting rights in: Western Australia - 1899, NSW and Federally - 1902, Tasmania - 1903, Queensland - 1905, Victoria - 1908. Jonathan King, *Stop Laughing, This is Serious!*, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1978. p. 82.
24. S. Lillianthorne, *op. cit.* pp 37 and 42.
25. Lady Greville, *The Gentlewomen's Book of Sports*, Vol.1, Henry & Co., London, 1892.
26. Frances Slaughter, *Sportswomen's Library*, Archibald, Constable & Co., Westminster, 1898.
27. Jihang Park, "Sport, Dress Reform and the Emancipation of Women in Victorian England: A Reappraisal", *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 6, No. 1 May 1989, p. 10.
28. K. McCrone, *op. cit.*, (1987), pp 256 -257.
29. S. Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
30. J. King, *op. cit.*, p.73.
31. A popular song dated c. 1870, quoted in Elizabeth Coles (consultant). *Sport in Schools: the participation of girls: a discussion paper*, Social Development Unit, Ministry of Education, c. 1979 p.13.
32. *Australian Cyclist*, 27 October, 1898, pp 27-38, quoted in R. Madden, "How Delightful the Sensation: Women and Cycling in the 1890s", B.A. (Hons.) thesis, UNSW, p. 104.
33. From the journal *Hockey* (13 March , 1913) quoted in K. McCrone, *op. cit.*, (1988), p. 135.
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35. The PLC Pymble *Advance Prospectus*, 1915, quoted in H. King, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

## THE NATATORIAL ART

If physic be worthy of commendations in respect of the nature in purging poisoned humours, driving away contagious diseases and by this means adding longer date unto the life of man, well then may this art of swimming come within the number of other sciences, which preserveth the precious life of man amidst the furious billows of the lawless waters, whether neither riches nor friends, neither birth nor kindred, neither liberal sciences nor other arts, only itself excepted, can rid him from the danger of death. Nor is it only to be respected for this great help in extremity of death, but it is also a thing necessary for every man to use, even in the pleasantest and securest time of this life, especially as the fittest thing to purge the skin from all external pollutions or uncleanness whatsoever, as sweat and such like, as also it helpeth to temperate the extreme heat of the body in the burning time of the year. And if we respect thoroughly the nature of this art, we may easily perceive and see that it doth not much differ from the rest of the liberal sciences proceeding from a free mind.<sup>1</sup>

The sport which in the 19th century escaped the constraints imposed upon the new female “social” recreations, and bypassed the furore over the emergence of the female competitive spirit, was that of the ancient “natatorial art”. Although in pre-modern times alternatively a necessity, a military prerequisite, a pleasant pastime, or a healthful exercise, the art of swimming was, like most sports, an activity in which female participants were the subject of ridicule and censure. As a masculine activity, mentioned in the Old Testament, mythologised in the legend of Beowulf, widely practised as a leisure activity in Roman Britain, and instituted as an organised sport in 36 BC Japan,<sup>2</sup> the few references made to women’s swimming during these ages were largely disapproving or lampooning. Women were able to *bathe* in rivers, ponds

or in the spa pools, that is, they were permitted the hygienic aspects of bathing, but to swim, to “plei”<sup>3</sup> to be “sportive” in the water was considered girlish and immature.

The turning point came in the 16th century, when for the first time swimming was linked with health.<sup>4</sup> By the 17th century this idea was well entrenched, with works such as John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) recommending the “natorial art” to men and boys as an excellent means of achieving and maintaining good health.<sup>5</sup> William Percey’s notable treatise, *The Compleat Swimmer* (1658), took the prescription one step further, advising, “I could very well wish every man and woman were perfect in swimming likewise, which with a little practice they easily may attain to.”<sup>6</sup> Percey considered that women were not only capable of practising the art, but that they should indeed endeavour to partake of it.

In the England of the early 19th century these ideas of swimming as a health giving exercise for both men and women continued - but they were now given the added impetus of the newly proclaimed medicinal values of salt-water bathing. Immersing oneself in the sea became an increasingly popular activity amongst all classes - and for both sexes. Setting the trend, royalty frequented the seaside resorts as they had once patronised the spa towns, and in their wake came:

Crowds of poor people from the manufacturing towns, who have a high opinion of the efficacy of bathing, maintaining that in the months of August and September there is physic in the sea - physic of a most comprehensive description, combining all the virtues of all the drugs in the doctor’s shop and of course a cure for all the varieties of diseases.<sup>7</sup>

This notion of the “physic” properties of sea water was also prevalent in the young colony of Australia, where the ill would not only take a salt-water bath, they would also drink the salt water, this “being their chief doctor”.<sup>8</sup> Besides following the lead of “Home” regarding the fashionable belief in the health benefits of sea-water bathing, added

impetus was given to the aquatic recreation in Australia by the warm climate - in the Antipodes the health-giving properties of salt water could be expanded to the full. As the *Colonial Times* of Hobart commented in January 1849 on swimming's successful combination of recreation and health, "a more delightful exercise cannot be found, and it is well known that many diseases, particularly of a cutaneous nature, have been removed by the frequency of salt- water ablutions." <sup>9</sup>

However, this delightful exercise was not always pursued in a carefree atmosphere. In the early days of the young colony, swimming was subject to both natural and man-made restrictions. A combination of current social mores and the threat of sharks inspired the Marines to construct swimming enclosures on the Harbour as early as 1788. The first, constructed of palings hammered into the mud, was in Darling Harbour at the bottom of Erskine Street, and the second was built at Dawes Point Battery. <sup>10</sup> But despite these facilities, not all the soldiers and sailors bathed within the enclosures, nor were they the only ones who indulged in this cooling activity in the midst of the heat and dust of the early colony. In 1810, Governor Macquarie protested about the current manner of practising the "natatorial art", announcing that:

A very indecent and improper Custom having lately prevailed, of Soldiers, Sailors and Inhabitants of the Town bathing themselves at all Hours of the Day at the Government Wharf, and also in the Dockyard, His Excellency the Governor directs and commands, that no Person shall Bathe at either of those Places, in future, at any Hour of the Day, and the Sentinels posted at the Government Wharf and in the Dockyard are to receive strict Orders to apprehend and confine any person transgressing this Order.<sup>11</sup>

As the proclamation proscribed bathing in only these two very public areas, it seems likely that Macquarie's statement was not an edict against the act of swimming itself, but was inspired by the practice of naked male bathing in places in places where "respectable" persons, chiefly non-convict women and young girls, could be offended.

Nonetheless, unclad swimming in the middle of the town continued into the mid-1820s, when, with the population expanding - due to the birth of the “Currency lads and lasses” and the inflow of free emigrants - the authorities were inspired to take some positive action. In 1828 a government subsidy of £22 Os 5d <sup>12</sup> was given to develop a swimming enclosure next to the Domain in Woolloomooloo Bay. Probably the “Fig Tree Baths” <sup>13</sup> - a construction also known as “Centipede Rock” - the enclosure was constructed from the hulk of a disused trading vessel moored about fifty metres out into the bay, and then joined from both bow and stern to the shore by wooden picket fences. <sup>14</sup> Changing facilities were provided on the old hulk - perhaps the origin of the name “Centipede Rock”. The enclosure was for men and boys only.

The new facility notwithstanding, it seems that the “menace” of male bathers offending the gaze of “respectable females” was not yet ended. In 1829 the *Sydney Gazette* called the authorities to notice:

We have again to call the attention of the Police, to the shameful practice of persons bathing contiguous to the public walk leading from Macquarie Place to the Domain by the water side. It were needless, we should think, to expiate on the impropriety of such conduct, and the necessity for putting a stop to it in future. Not only children but adults are constantly in the habit of bathing in the place to which we allude and that in the open day, and in the presence of respectable females who use the adjacent bank as a promenade. <sup>15</sup>

Besides naked cavorting in the Domain, it was also recorded that there were unclad bathers- male of course - in the pond at Grose Farm, <sup>16</sup> and in the swimming holes of the Annandale Estate (encompassing parts of Stanmore and Annandale) and Moore Park (between Cleveland and Dowling Streets). <sup>17</sup> In response to these “licentious” practices, the New South Wales Government passed an Act (4 William IV, No.2) in 1833 that prohibited bathing “near to or within view of any public wharf, quay or bridge, street, road or other public resort within the limits of the

towns... between the hours of six in the morning and eight o'clock in the evening.<sup>18</sup>

The punishment for transgressing this edict was the imposition of a £1 fine, quite a sum in days when the average wage was around three shillings a day for labourers, and between five and eight shillings for tradesmen.<sup>19</sup> However, as at this time Sydney's population was rapidly increasing - it rose from 11,500 in 1830 to 136,000 in 1870<sup>20</sup> - and a large proportion of these new citizens were members of the rising "respectable" middle classes, such sanctions were perhaps necessary. And no doubt the 1833 Act - an Act it seems that was largely heeded<sup>21</sup> - provided a considerable impetus for the establishment of more formalised swimming enclosures.

Accompanying Sydney's boom in population was a vast expansion of trade and a corresponding surge in urban development. As business flourished, the growing population increasingly partook of the benefits in the form of both better wages and shorter working hours. The campaigns for the eight-hour day began in the mid-1850s, being granted piecemeal throughout the state during the following decades, and wages - although fluctuating - were in real terms relatively high.<sup>22</sup> With the rise in real incomes, easy access to open spaces, and a favourable climate, as chroniclers of the time noted, the Sydney population appeared to spend more time at play than did their British counterparts.<sup>23</sup> Much of this "play" time was spent pursuing the burgeoning "delightful" and "healthful" natatorial art.

Besides Sydney's expansion of a leisured, and increasingly "respectable" population, there was another factor prompting the building of more swimming baths - the prevalence of sharks in the open waters of the Harbour. As Robert "Rex" Roberts reminisced of Port Jackson in the mid-1850s:

Sharks were very prevalent at certain times of year in those days. A.W. Davis who resides in Palmer St Woolloomooloo was being taught to swim by Mr George Lee a woodturner and was present one morning when a shark bit a Soldiers leg off. He and a man named Biggs

went to his assistance and brought him in, but he bled to death.<sup>24</sup>

With the threat of “finny fiends”,<sup>25</sup> a hot climate, the growing influence of the “respectable” middle classes, a wider enjoyment of spare money and leisure time, plus a widespread belief in the efficacy of salt-water bathing and the virtues of exercise, the construction of swimming pools increased apace.

For technological and economic reasons, until 1888 when the indoor, inland “Natatorium” was open in Pitt Street, all the pools in Sydney were sited directly on the water fronts. They were also situated within walking distance of large population centres - a necessity if they were to pay their way before the expansion of the public transport system. Other important factors which had a considerable influence on the location of Sydney’s tidal pools were the increasing urban population and the corresponding growth of trade and industry.

As trade expanded, the old bathing enclosures in Darling Harbour gave way to the new finger wharfs, and the encroachment of industry saw the closure of the baths in Pyrmont.<sup>26</sup> This growth of industry, along with the rapidly expanding population, was also responsible for the increasing amounts of effluent flowing unchecked into the Harbour. When a formal Commission of Inquiry reported on the problem in 1854, it recommended not only the construction of an effective, centralised drainage and sewerage system, but also the immediate closure of all the swimming enclosures in the Harbour.<sup>27</sup> This latter measure was however not adopted, and swimmers continued to bathe in Port Jackson. Even when the former measure was implemented, and the new centralised city sewerage system came into operation during 1857, raw sewage still flowed totally untreated from the main outlet at Fort Macquarie, and would continue to do so until the Bondi sewerage system was opened in 1890.<sup>28</sup>

The effluent factor no doubt helped the development of Woolloomooloo Bay, with its natural sand bar entrance acting as a barrier

against the tide of excrementitious matter,<sup>29</sup> as the major site for Sydney's Harbour baths in the 19th century. Besides providing relatively clean waters, the Woolloomooloo side of the Domain also had another feature in its favour: it was the most secluded bathing place within walking distance of the city. From the first financial aid given to construct a bathing enclosure in Woolloomooloo Bay - probably the Fig Tree Baths - government interest in the provision of enclosed bathing facilities continued with Governor Darling's announcement in 1829 of "his readiness to grant a piece of ground on the shore, within the Government Domain, for the site of a public bath".<sup>30</sup> Although there is no clear record as to which baths were which in these early days, it seems likely that the Fig Tree bathing enclosure continued as a separate entity until the Sydney Municipal Council built a new Bathing House on the site in 1858,<sup>31</sup> and that the next baths to open was Mrs Bigges' establishment around 1830, catering for both men and women, and later to achieve reknown as Robinson's Baths.<sup>32</sup> However, regardless of the nomenclature, Sydney's public swimming baths were immensely popular,<sup>33</sup> and in 1834, the Sydney Gazette recorded swimming as being "now the favourite recreation in Sydney".<sup>34</sup>

This recreation certainly seemed to be a favourite with the women of Sydney. As early as 1828, Cunningham wrote that the "Currency lasses" were "all fond of frolicking in the water, and those living near the sea can usually swim and dive like water-hens".<sup>35</sup> With the establishment of Mrs Bigges' baths in the early 1830s, the "respectable" Sydney "ladies" could also partake of "the greatest possible luxury in this climate".<sup>36</sup> As John Hood noted in 1842 of the Ladies' baths in Woolloomooloo Bay, the "ladies are safely secured from all intrusion, and they can duck and gambol unseen and unmolested".<sup>37</sup> "Ducking and gambolling", the "ladies" of Sydney - although not yet practising a sport demanding serious physical exertion - were establishing early the acceptability of the practise of the "natatorial art" by "respectable" women.

Women's swimming in the 1830s and 1840s was a well controlled, non-threatening recreation. Controlled by both venue - segregated "ladies' establishments" were closeted away from the outside world, and by costume - to begin with the women were hatted, skirted, panted, socked and shod, women's swimming was an exercise which posed no threat to either established social mores or the ideals of "modest" and "moral" womanhood. In this era of rising concern over the health of middle class women, swimming - combining the contemporary notions of the benefits of salt-water bathing and the increasingly acknowledged advantages of mild, "suitable" exercise for women, with the bonus of its segregated, secluded pursuit - seemed the ideal recommendation for "respectable" women. With the moral authorities bestowing their early - and continued - approval, the sport of women's swimming would be free to develop uncensored - and within its segregated enclosures, unrestricted - throughout the 19th century.

However, in the early 19th century it was only upper and middle class women who had the time and the money to enjoy the permitted pleasures offered in such closeted environs as Mrs Bigges' "accommodations" in the Domain.<sup>38</sup> If the entrance charges did not prevent working class women from entering these bathing establishments, then their lack of leisure time would. Having to pay entry fees before the advent of the free municipal baths most certainly served to discriminate in general against the poorer sections of the community, both men and women,<sup>39</sup> a fact which would later be noted by the pro-bathing movement in their push for free bathing facilities.<sup>40</sup> Although of course, if they had the time, men had the option of bathing - without necessarily incurring the expense of outfitting themselves with a swimming costume - directly in the bays, the sea, the rivers or the swimming holes around Sydney.

After the passing of the general Municipalities Act in 1858,<sup>41</sup> the increasingly populated new suburbs quickly took advantage of its provisions, and from this time on bathing facilities became the target for considerable municipal attention and investment. The re-formed

Sydney Municipal Council was one of the first to demonstrate the growing popularity of the sport of swimming, with its construction in the late 1850s of the separate Corporation Ladies' Baths in Woolloomooloo Bay.<sup>42</sup> As there were already two other "ladies'"bathing establishments in the Bay at that time, the provision of an extra pool certainly seems to indicate that there was a growing demand for women's facilities.

By the early 1880s, besides the Woolloomooloo Bay establishments, there were fenced-in enclosures on Sydney's harbours and rivers at Watson's Bay, Lavender Bay, Balmain and Parramatta. There was also a pile baths constructed at Lavender Bay, and sea baths in existence at Coogee and Bronte. In 1883 the Balmain council constructed a 30-yard tidal pool at "White Horse Point".<sup>43</sup> 1886 saw a bathing complex opened at Lady Robinson's Beach in the St George area,<sup>44</sup> and in 1888 Sydney's first non-tidal pool, the Natatorium in Pitt Street, was constructed by the Sydney Municipal Authority.<sup>45</sup> The Natatorium, tilled with salt water pumped up from the Harbour almost two miles away, would later become the administrative centre for Sydney's swimming fraternity. By 1900, most harbour and coastal suburbs had their own pools - indicative of the boom swimming was enjoying in the conducive social and physical climate of late 19th century Australia.

Accompanying this boom was a corresponding surge in entrepreneurial activity. From the 1840s to the 1880s the most noted names in commercial swimming. were the Bastards in Adelaide, the Riddles and Fords in Melbourne, and in Sydney - the most populous city - the Robinsons of the early Domain Baths, the Wylies of Coogee and Bronte Baths, the sporting entrepreneur Saywell of Lady Robinson's Beach baths, and of course, the famous Cavill family. Health was one prominent theme used by the entrepreneurs in the promotion of their establishments. The Bastards included the phrase- "Under the distinguished patronage of. . . the leading Physicians of the Colony" on their 1865 advertisements.<sup>46</sup> The "Prof" Cavill, proprietor of the Lavender Bay baths, in his booklet, *How to Learn to Swim*,<sup>47</sup>

emphasised swimming as a health-giving exercise, especially for the “ladies”:

Nothing I could say would sufficiently urge the necessity of their learning the art. Their mode of dressing and sedentary habits, with the very few exercises of a strengthening nature they can indulge in, makes this art of the greatest importance to them. Not only does it expand the chest, and so strengthen the lungs and heart by giving them room to act, but the exercise gives all the muscles an amount of exercise which keeps the frame in a healthy condition, preventing headache and languor, which many ladies, owing to the want of such exercise, frequently suffer from.<sup>48</sup>

The “Prof”, an endurance swimmer of some reknown in his native England, conducted swimming courses at his Lavender Bay baths, promising to teach anyone to swim for one guinea. The Professor must have done quite well out of the swimming business, for by the turn of the century, he had his own floating baths moored in Farm Cove<sup>49</sup> - one would hope after the new Bondi sewerage system was open in 1890.<sup>50</sup> The “Prof” advertised this swimming bath in verse.

Come everyone, each mother’s son and every bonnie  
daughter  
And learn to swim with sturdy limb and sport amid the  
water  
For should you wish to swim like fish, you have not far to  
travel  
To Farm Cove go and soon you’ll know the famous  
teacher, Cavill  
His baths secure, the water pure, no fear of monsters finny  
For Cavill’s there, his charge is fair, he’ll teach you for a  
guinea.<sup>51</sup>

Further south, in Rockdale, the entrepreneur Thomas Saywell constructed a hotel and public baths resort at Lady Robinson’s Beach.<sup>52</sup> With the aid of a new tramway constructed from Rockdale Station to the resort, by courtesy of the specially passed Saywell Tramway Act of

1884; the later help of Annette Kellerman's "Learn to Swim" classes; the patronage of the sporting heroes "Snowy" Baker and Freddy Lane - Australia's first Olympic swimming champion; and, not the least, the introduction of combined rail, tram and races and baths tickets, Saywell was yet another contributor to, and exploiter of, the aquatic boom.

The entrepreneurs did not neglect women as consumers of their natatorial commodities. "Ladies" baths had been provided in Sydney since the advent of Mrs Bigges' establishment, and both the larger municipal councils and some of the private interests continued that trend. Where separate "ladies" pools could not be built, there were specific times allocated for women. For instance, at Lady Robinson's Beach Baths these times were between 10am and 2pm Monday to Friday.<sup>53</sup> At Wylie's Coogee pool, "ladies' days" were Monday, Wednesday and Friday between the hours of 10am and 4pm, and Saturdays between 10am and noon.<sup>54</sup> Obviously, with leases running at around £100 to £150 a year in the last decade of the century,<sup>55</sup> the entrepreneurs were making the most of their establishments - women were allocated the times when patronage by men was sure to be minimal. Although women's interests in the sport were being catered for, their swimming hours were not only limited, but their daytime scheduling also served to discriminate against women of the working classes. Thus, in these early days, the sport remained predominantly geared towards its male and middle-class participants.

Not surprisingly, it was the male participants who led the way in the competitive aspects of the natatorial sport. In 1837 England held the first men's organised swimming meet in the Western world.<sup>56</sup> Nine years later, in 1846, Australia staged the first modern, all male, swimming championships at Robinson's Baths in the Domain.<sup>57</sup> Melbourne's first official carnival was recorded in 1877, with the spectators as well as the competitors restricted to members of the male gender - most likely because of the virtually non-existent costumes. When women were admitted to later Melbourne carnivals it was decreed that competitors should wear "football costume . . . minus boots and socks".<sup>58</sup> Indeed, in

Australia it was not universally compulsory for men to wear swimming costumes at all the pools until the formalisation of the various state amateur swimming associations in the last decade of the 19th century, and even then, it would take a few years of costume debate before the issue was finally under control.

Costumes aside, Sydney men's swimming competitions, having begun in a rather *ad hoc* manner, continued in that way until the early 1880s, when, as swimming clubs formed around the newly constructed baths, more formal organisation began to enter the game. The clubs were established primarily for the purposes of organising and controlling competitions. Prize money pools were set up at the start, and at each inaugural meeting the first club carnival was organised. In March 1884, just after the new Baths had been constructed by the local council, the Balmain Swimming Club was officially inaugurated, with its first resolution being that a "number of swimming matches be held at the baths, White Horse Point, Balmain on 5th April."<sup>59</sup>

By the turn of the century, as almost every swimming bath had its own club, these "swimming matches" developed into annual club carnivals, which were to become a regular and very popular feature of Sydney life. Displaying the Victorian love of spectacle and entertainment, the carnivals not only included serious competitive events - sprints, long-distance swims, diving, underwater distance swimming - but also plenty of novelty and exhibition events. Events such as the "50 yards Egg and Spoon Race", the "Fancy Costume Race", and the "Apple-Snapping Contest" - where competitors had to dive into the pool, catch floating apples in their mouths, and swim back to the side. There were also "Farces" and exhibitions such as "High and Fancy Diving" or Trick Swimming".<sup>60</sup> Although the participants in both the races and the novelty events were usually male, by the mid-1890s women's names were beginning to appear in carnival handbooks - for events such as the "50 Yards Ladies' Race", and exhibitions of high diving and fancy swimming.<sup>61</sup>

However, it was not until the NSW Amateur Swimming Association (NSWASA) was formed in Sydney in 1892 to control and codify the amateur nature of this increasingly popular sport, that men's competitive swimming became properly organised. Starting off with just six clubs in 1892, by 1901 there were twenty-nine clubs belonging to the association, with a total of 1119 members.<sup>62</sup> When the school clubs began to affiliate with the NSWASA in 1904-5 the membership of the association jumped to 12,000.<sup>63</sup> From the inception of the NSWASA and the subsequent increase in formally organised competition, the club carnivals would grow in spectacle and spectator numbers. The number of events on programs increased, and crowds packed the venues to overflowing, with newspaper articles constantly reiterating the theme: "standing room at a premium". From the early 1900s, whenever new baths were built, catering for spectators featured as a prime consideration.

The press - both sporting and popular - in the spirit of "new journalism" anxious to sell the people news "of the people", were responsive to the public interest in this new spectator sport. Swimming events were reported, world records recorded, likely developments speculated on. And in the first years of the new century, both the popular press - for reasons of expanded sales figures, and the NSWASA - for reasons of control, would have major roles to play in the promotion of women's competitive swimming and in the formation of the NSW Ladies' Amateur Swimming Association (NSWLASA). However, before there was any call to formalise and organise women's competitive swimming, there had to be a sufficient groundswell of interest arising from the women themselves.

Interest in, and approval of, women's recreational swimming had certainly been evident since the early 1800s, but it was following on from the successes of the first women's "learn-to-swim" classes - conducted most notably in Sydney by Cavill and Saywell, in Adelaide by the Bastards,<sup>64</sup> and by Miss Elphinstone Dick in Melbourne<sup>65</sup> - that competitions began to gradually work their way into becoming an

accepted part of this approved recreation. In the mid-1870s the first recorded competitive women's swimming events were held at the Adelaide City Baths, and certainly by the 1880s, the crowds were packing in to the City Baths to see the "ladies" compete.<sup>66</sup> In Queensland, the first "Ladies' Race" was staged in Brisbane in the mid-1890s,<sup>67</sup> and the world's first national women's swimming championship was held in Scotland - not a country with a climate one would associate with early swimming - in 1892.<sup>68</sup>

Although somewhat behind the men in the stirrings of the competitive spirit, the 1870s were early for an official display of female sporting competitiveness. The other contemporary women's sports, the "genteel" and "gentle" sports of tennis and golf, although holding small-scale "social" matches in the 1870s, appear not to have organised anything approaching a serious competition in Australia until 1884 and 1894 respectively.<sup>69</sup> And even then, with the competitors' physical exertions restricted by long skirts and tight lacing, there was not too much activity beyond that congruent with acceptable levels of "lady like" exertion. Maybe there was a mild "glow", but certainly no sweat; maybe there were small strides to reach the ball, but certainly no running.<sup>70</sup> Until well into the 20th century, the "competitors" in the "respectable" public sports would remain restrained by the interdependent factors of socially acceptable behaviour and fashion.

Women's swimming, by virtue of its initial separateness, had avoided both the constraints of behaviour and dress placed upon the more fashionable, public sports. Unlike the "matrimonial market" sports - such as tennis and croquet - swimming had never been a part of the general social intercourse between men and women. And thus it escaped the social and psychological patterns of deferential, feminine behaviour that the acceptable sports on public view had adopted. With its participants on a socially equal level the competitive spirit was able to develop unhampered by the behavioural rules of mixed society.

Besides serious competition not being held back by the need to maintain "proper" behaviour, women's swimming was also free from the

restrictive dress required by the more public sports. From the 1870s cotton, non-skirted, short-legged costumes were being worn - a "rational" mode of dress which enabled the free movement of limbs necessary for fast swimming. In the 1890s women's costumes would become even more streamlined, and by the first few years of the 20th century they would be virtually as "rational" as the men's. Yet even when by the latter decade of the century women were racing in front of men dressed in costumes far more revealing than the "abominable" knickerbockers and bloomers associated with the censured sports of cycling and athletics, women's swimming dress escaped adverse comment. A seeming contradiction, yet explicable in terms of the nature, and the long acceptance, of the sport.

From the very beginnings of women's recreational interest in the "natatorial art" it was accepted that a somewhat different mode of dress was required - even though the early swimming costumes were still extraordinarily cumbersome. This early acceptance of the need for a specialised dress, a dress designed to remain within "special" closeted situation, ensured that by the time women's costumes developed their racing style and were seen in public, the public was used to the idea. Therefore, women competitive swimmers posed no threat to the established definitions of appropriate female behaviour as they discarded the symbols which signified "respectable" womanhood - the corseted waist and long skirts which constrained movement and exertion.

With psychological and physical freedoms nurturing the emerging competitive natatorial spirit, this spirit was also given social sanction. Sanction freely conferred because women's competitive swimming had one other very important advantage over all the other available sports - the effort required to be seriously competitive, to strive for the win, was hidden. No matter how hard the competitors pushed themselves, the watery medium minimised the outward appearance of effort and exertion. And no matter how seriously they trained, no obvious "undesirable" side effects resulted. This was a sport in which

no “masculine” muscles were developed, no body contact was involved, no “weaponry” - such as sticks, bats, or balls -was used, and, no unsightly perspiration was evident. These were all ideological impediments deplored and censured in athletics and seriously pursued team sports, and overcome in tennis, golf and croquet by circumscription of effort. In women’s competitive swimming, the speed, power and endurance required were hidden, thus ensuring that the late Victorian image of ideal womanhood remained unthreatened.

Demonstrating the uncontroversial aspects of this sport, when the first major Australian swimming competition for women - the NSW State Ladies’ Swimming Championships<sup>71</sup> - was held at the end of the 1901/02 swimming season, the venue was not only packed, but the event received wide, and approving, coverage in both the regular and the sporting press. The success of this first carnival - introducing some of the names which would later bring Australian women to world notice - Fanny Durack, Mina Wylie, and Annette Kellerman - would lead a few months later to the establishment of the first NSW women’s swimming club. Australian women’s competitive swimming had taken its first, confident step.

From its pre-modern prohibition, through its early 17th century recommendation as a mild, healthful exercise, and its development in the early 19th century as a popular recreation, women’s swimming emerged in the 20th century as a fully fledged competitive sport. By virtue of its long association with health, by virtue of its “hidden” qualities, and by virtue of the lack of obvious physical demands it made upon its participants, women’s competitive swimming escaped the constraints put upon the newer, more “public”, sports such as tennis, golf, croquet, athletics, hockey and cycling. It was a sport which epitomised the contradictions and ambivalences surrounding the development of women’s physical liberation. It involved the incorporation of the masculine qualities of stamina, endurance, striving for physical excellence, yet, conducted in a cool, aquatic environment, it retained a feminine image of gracefulness and non-exertion. It required the wearing of costumes often skimpier than those in penny

peep-shows, yet because they were for a specific purpose, a purpose with long-standing medical and scientific sanction, they raised few eyebrows. As it posed no threat to the image and ideals of “respectable” womanhood, women’s competitive swimming would, in its early years, be allowed to develop virtually unhampered.

## NOTES:

1. C.Middleton, *A short introduction for to learne to Swimme*, James Roberts, London, 1595, quoted in Nicholas Orme, *Early British Swimming 55 BC-AD 1719*, University of Exeter, 1983, p. 117.
2. “Swimming Milestones since 3000 BC”. An unattributed paper from the miscellaneous collection held uncatalogued by the NSW Amateur Swimming Association (NSWASA), and N. Orme, *op.cit.*, p.3.
3. “plei” = play. A quote from a fourteenth century satirical poem, *The Land of Cockayne*, which describes a group of nuns taking a ‘swimme’ as a form of ‘plei’ in a river. N. Orme, *op.cit.*, p. 37.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
7. An account of the seaside resort of Blackpool written in 1813, in J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830- 1950*, Longman, London, 1978, p.14.
8. Robert Roberts, “Seventy Years Reminiscences, Old Fig Tree Baths”, unpublished mss., ML
9. J.W.C. Cumes, *Their Chastity was not too Rigid: Lesure Times in Early Australia*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1979, p. 298.
10. Mapsheld by the Historical Information Unit, Sydney Water Board, show the Erskine Street Baths and other records. And for the Dawes Point Baths, see G.B. Philip, *Sixty years Recollections of Swimming and Surfing the Eastern Suburbs*, George B. Philip & Son, Sydney 1940, p. 15.
11. J.T. Campbell, Secretary, in the *Sydney Gazette*, 6 October, 1810.
12. R. Darling, *Government Despatches*, 17 March 1828, pp. 206 and 208.
13. Probably given this name “on account of the tine native tree of that description which overhangs the rock where the bathers undress themselves”. A. Birch and D.S. Macmillan (eds.), *The Sydney Scene 1788-1960*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1962, p.146.
14. Sourvenir program in connection with the opening of the Sydney municipal baths, Outer Domain, 17 October 1908. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, ML).
15. *Sydney Gazette*, 11 April 1829.
16. W. Longworth, “Swimming in Australia” in *The Etruscan*, Volume 9, No.2, September 1959, p.9.
17. G.B. Philip, *op.cit.*, p.12.
18. J. Kent Pearson, *Surfing Subcultures of Australia and New Zealand*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1979, pp.35 and 36.

19. T.A., Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia: From the First Settlement in 1788 to the Establishment of the Commonwealth in 1901*, Macmillan of Australia, 1969. Volume 1, pp. 201-203. The average wages of working women during this period were about two shillings a day for taking in sewing and laundry, or £7- 10 a year for domestic work (*ibid*, p. 205), however, there is no mention of women transgressing this order in 1833.
20. A. Birch and D. S. Macmillan, *op.cit.*, p. 92 and 105.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
22. T.A. Coghlan, *op.cit.*, Volume 1, pp. 425-427, Vol.2, pp. 711-712; K.S. Inglis, *The Australian Colonists: An exploration of social history 1788-1870*, Melbourne University Press, 1974, pp. 118- 121; and J. A. Daly, *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia 1836-1890*, Published by the author, Adelaide, 1982, p. 190.
23. K.S. Inglis, *op.cit.*, pp. 125 -126.
24. R. Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 2-3.
25. Popular contemporary slang for sharks.
26. Maps of Sydney, 1836-1903, held by the Historical Information Unit, Sydney Water Board.
27. After the Select Committee issued its final report on this matter in 1854, the Bennelong Point Sewerage System was subsequently constructed during the period 1854 -1857. The Historical Information Unit, Sydney Water Board, and interview with Mr V. Grant, former Town Planner, City of Sydney Council.
28. B.T. Dowd, *History of the Waverley Municipal District*, Published by the Council of the Municipality of Waverley, 1959. p. 112, and interview with Mr. V. Grant, former Town Planner, City of Sydney Council.
29. W. Longworth, *op.cit.*, p.12.
30. *Sydney Gazette*, 17 December, 1829, quoted in J.W.C. Cumes, *op.cit.*, p. 295.
31. Souvenir program in connection with the opening of the Sydney Municipal baths, Outer Domain, 17 October 1908. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, ML).
32. R. Roberts, *op.cit.* Although according to "Rex" Roberts, Mrs Bigges was the original proprietor of the Fig Tree Baths, he also writes that these baths later became known as Robinson's baths. This is not the case according to the official maps of Sydney during the period, which show quite clearly that the Fig Tree Baths, the site later being taken over by the Corporation Baths, occupied a different location to the baths run by Robinson. However, such confusion and inaccuracy seems to be a feature of all records concerning these early bathing establishments.
33. John Hood, writing in 1842, quoted in J.W.C. Cumes, *op.cit.*, p. 296.
34. *Sydney Gazette* 18 February 1834, quoted in J.W.C. Cumes, *op.cit.*, p. 156.
35. A. Birch and D.S. Macmillan, *op.cit.*, p. 57.
36. John Hood, writing in 1842, quoted in J.W.C. Cumes, *op.cit.*, p. 296.
37. *Ibid.*
38. There appears to be no definite information concerning the entrance charges to Mrs Bigges' Baths, but according to an unreferenced item in Alan Clarkson, *Lanes of Gold*, Lester Townsend Publishing, 1990, p. ll., the charge to take a cold sea bath at the early Fig Tree Baths was 1s; in the 1870s the Adelaide proprietor P.T. Bastard was charging 3d to swim in the "2nd Class Swimming Bath", J. Daly, *op.cit.*, pp. 73 and 81; and in 1886 Saywell was charging 1d for his Lady Robinsons Beach Baths, Philip

- Gregory, "Recreation and Community: A Study of the Development of the St George Area to 1914.", M.A. (Pass) Thesis, UNSW, 1981, p.11.
39. At least in Sydney there appeared to be no such overt distinctions made -such as first and second class pools - as there were in England and in the early Melbourne and Adelaide bathing establishments. Interview with Bill and May Williams, and J.W.C. Cumes, *op.cit.*, pp. 296 and 297.
  40. The pro-bathing movement, or lobby, is mentioned in various issues of the *SMH* especially throughout 1900 when much was written about the movement's deputations to the NSW Government for an increase in swimming facilities.
  41. T.A. Coghlan, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 544.
  42. Maps of Sydney, 1836-1863, held by the Historical Information Unit, Sydney Water Board.
  43. A. Hamill, *1884-1984 Celebrating a Centenary - Balmain Swimming Club* (no publisher. no date), p.6.
  44. P. Gregory, *op.cit.*, p. 34.
  45. Gordon Inglis, *Sports & Pastimes in Australia*, Methuen, London, 1912, p. 241.
  46. J. Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
  47. Professor Fred Cavill, *How to Learn to Swim*, H. Solomon, Caxton Printing office, Pitt St., Sydney., no date.
  48. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
  49. Cavill's floating baths did not remain in Farm Cover permanently, however, being moved to Woolloomooloo Bay by 1903. Maps of Sydney 1836-1903 held by the Historical Information Unit, the Sydney Water Board.
  50. B.T. Dowd, *op.cit.*, p. 112.
  51. A. Clarkson, *op.cit.*, p. 24.
  52. P. Gregory, *op.cit.*, p. 33.
  53. *Ibid*, p. 34
  54. *The Australasian*, 2 April, 1904, (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
  55. *SMH*, 25 January 1900 and B.T. Dowd *op.cit.*, p. 150.
  56. "Swimming Milestones since 3000 BC". An unattributed paper from the miscellaneous collection held uncatalogued at the NSWASA. The qualifier "Western world" is added as Japan had started the first national swimming organisation in 1603, with its first three-day meet being held in 1810.
  57. A. Clarkson, *op.cit.*, p.11.
  58. V.A.S.A.A *Brief history of the V.A.S.A.* Melbourne, 1968.
  59. A. Hamill, *op.cit.*, p. 6.
  60. Various swimming carnival handbooks and programs between 1893 and 1904. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, and the Mina Wylie Papers. ML).
  61. *Ibid*.
  62. NSWASA annual reports and minutes - 1892 to 1905. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, ML, and NSWASA State Council Minutes, 1892-1910 held at the NSWASA).
  63. *Ibid*.
  64. The young Miss Bastard - daughter of the swimming entrepreneur - ran swimming classes for "young ladies" as early as 1870. J. Daly *op.cit.*, p. 79.

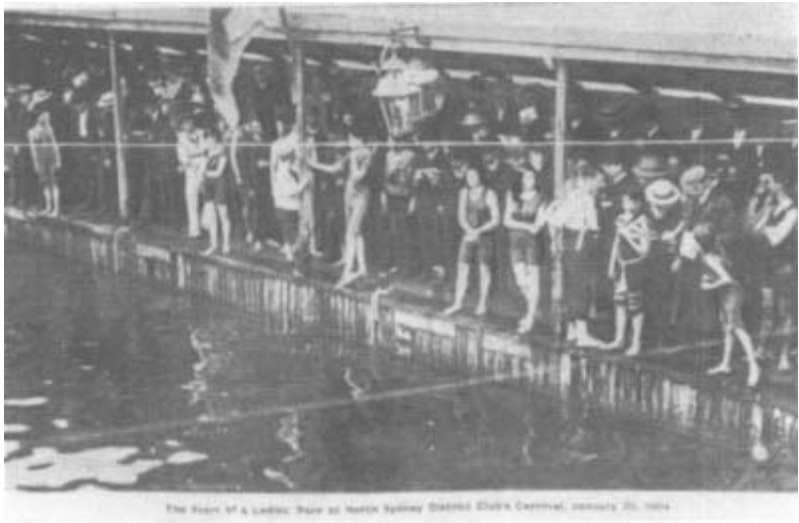
65. W. Longworth, *op.cit.*, p. 11. Miss Dick was brought out from England in 1876 by private interests to teach young Melbourne girls to swim. Displaying considerable entrepreneurial activity herself. Elphinstone Dick later set up her own highly successful gymnasium for young women.
66. J. Daly, *op.cit.*, p. 79.
67. E. Wetzel, 'The Early History of Swimming in Queensland', in Commercial Amateur Swimming Club - 1st Annual Aquatic Gala, 1914, p. 2.
68. P. Beresford, *Encyclopaedia of Swimming*, Robert Hale, London, 1976, p. 115.
69. Helen King, 'The Sexual Politics of Sport: an Australian Perspective', in R. Cashman and M. Mckernan (eds.), *Sport in History: The Making of Modern Sporting History*, University of Queensland Press, 1979, p.73.
70. Sonia Lillianthorne, "Tea, Talk and Tennis: An Early History of Women's sport at the University of Sydney, 1882 -1918", B.Ed. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1987, p. 40.
71. The meet was held at the St. George Baths, Redfern.



The march past of the Australasian team at Stockholm. The woman in white is probably Mary Durack, and it is certainly Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie behind, wearing the cloaks of the NSWLASA. (M.L. ref E.S. Marks Collection, Q86).

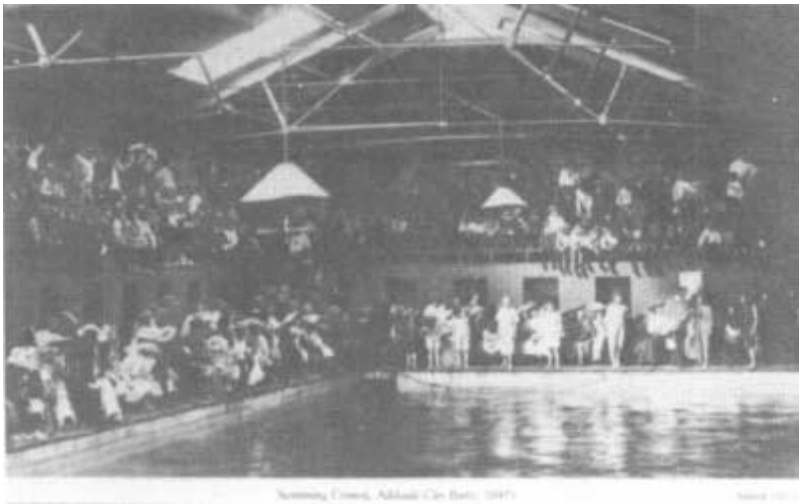
Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie after a training swim at Stockholm. There appear to be no photographs of the two women directly after or before any of their races, so it is not known if they wore silk racing costumes as did the English team, or stayed with wool. (M.L. ref E.S. Marks Collection, Q86).





The Swim of 4 Ladies, Race at North Sydney District Club's Carnival, January 20, 1904.

The photograph above appeared in various Carnival handbook, Farmers Baths March 12, 1914, p141. (M.L. ref E.S. Marks Collection, Octavo 737).



Swimming Contest, Ashland City Park, 1907.

Source 11001



**The new Domain Baths was constructed in 1908 to cater for 3500 seated spectators. From the NSWASA Carnival Program, 1914, p21. (M.L. ref ES. Marks Collection, Q56, Box 11).**



**The Ladies Domain baths c.1908. The baths were previously occupied by the men until their own new facilities were built. The one man standing in the photograph is C.E. Griffiths, the first manager of the Ladies Domain Baths.**



**“Prof” Fred Cavill looking down on his first baths at Lavender Bay. (n.d.) These baths were first opened in 1881. From a booklet entitled “The Cradle of Swimming on Sydney’s North Side”, from the miscellaneous collection held by the NSWASA**



**The English women’s relay team (Australia could not enter the 400 m relay event, even though Durack and Wylie offered to swim twice each). (M.L. ref E.S. Marks Collection, Q86).**

## AN ACCEPTABLE AMBITION

I believe swimming to be the best sport in the world for women. Swimming is a graceful art and women can swim more gracefully than men. What is more they can swim with almost as much strength, and, at least in distance swims, very nearly equal men's records. I am not trying to shut men out of swimming. There is enough water in the world for all of us. But as men can indulge in so many other sports where women make a poor showing or cannot compete at all, swimming may well be called the woman's sport.<sup>1</sup>

On 22 March 1897, the Monday evening *Australian Star* listed the winners of the 50 Yards Ladies' Handicap event at the Mortlake Swimming Club's 5th Annual Carnival.<sup>2</sup> There was no comment on anything unusual, no fanfare, no novelty value attached to the appearance of women racing in public, dressed only in skimpy attire. The Mortlake event was one of the earliest public swimming competitions for Sydney women to be reported in the press - although some Sydney clubs had held occasional events for women as early as 1893.<sup>3</sup> At the turn of the century, it seemed that women's competitive swimming would enter Sydney sporting life as easily and uncontroversially as women's recreational swimming had seven decades earlier. However, it was not to be all as smooth and straightforward as early events appeared to indicate.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, swimming was one of the many sports experiencing a boom. Besides enjoying a high participation rate - both recreational and competitive - swimming also had a very wide appeal as a spectator sport. There were no complicated rules to understand, no violent scenes to witness, costs to both participants and spectators were low, and the entertainment factor was high. Swimming

also had a high empathy factor, for unlike many of the other spectator sports in which participation was exclusive either by class, gender, or age, the natatorial art was one of the few sports where it was possible for all the spectators to have had direct experience of the activity.

Reflecting this growth in popularity, and helped by the promotion of the idea that it “was essential that every man and woman should be taught to swim, and it ought to be the duty of the Government to encourage this”,<sup>4</sup> throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries the construction of swimming pools - both private and public - increased apace.<sup>5</sup> Existing facilities were also expanded - pools lengthened and widened, and extra spectator accommodation was provided.<sup>6</sup> And this spectator accommodation was invariably full.

At the East Sydney Seventh Annual Carnival, held in 1900 for male competitors only, almost a thousand people packed into Farmer’s Domain Baths, with standing room at a premium.<sup>7</sup> Around this time women must have started to attend the carnivals in far greater numbers than previously, for special mention began to be made of their attendance. On Boxing Day, 1900, the Bondi baths were packed for a carnival - “ladies being in the majority”;<sup>8</sup> at Waverley Swimming Club’s fourth annual carnival in 1901 the baths were filled to capacity with 690 people - “fully half who were ladies”.<sup>9</sup> These “ladies” who were often “predominant in the matter of numbers, and [who] keenly followed and criticised every event”<sup>10</sup> - were certainly voting their approval with their patronage of the events. Especially the rather more impromptu events, such as the race between two young men - one rather underclad - at the Gosford regatta in April 1902. As “Trudge”<sup>11</sup> reported: “The wharf was crowded with interested spectators, including a large sprinkling of the fair sex who apparently did not see any wrong with the costume, or want of costume, of one of the competitors”.<sup>12</sup>

The interest factor of scantily clad, athletic young men aside, having been welcomed to the sport of swimming for health and recreational purposes and therefore understanding the rules and the conditions of the game, the “fair sex” were now keen to know the thrill

of the race themselves. In this, they were given ready encouragement by the late 19th century bathing entrepreneurs, for the businessmen - not slow to introduce swimming classes and separate swimming times for women - also saw the possibilities of providing women's competitive events. "Ladies' races" would be certain to increase the patronage of their establishments, for not only would the competing women bring their friends and families to watch, they would also no doubt attract more male spectators who, in turn, would be keen to view breathless young women dressed in wet, skimpy costumes.

In Sydney, one of the earliest examples of this entrepreneurial intent was at the Palace Emporium Swimming Club's 2nd Annual Championship held at the Pitt Street Natatorium at 8 pm on 8 February 1897.<sup>13</sup> The Natatorium's "Ladies' Event" was clearly intended to be more of a drawcard than a serious competition. For although there were eight starters in the "66-Yards Ladies' Race", none of the women's names featured in the official list of competitors - this would not be the case just a few years later. The women competitors were also awarded a prize for the best costume - one wonders whether this was awarded pre- or post- 66 yards in the water. However, it was the first NSW State Ladies' Swimming Carnival, held early in 1902 - an entrepreneurial feat par excellence - which would be the event to mark the birth of modern women's competitive swimming.

Organised at the instigation of Annette Kellerman's father<sup>14</sup> this carnival, although quite a publicity launch for Miss Kellerman, served much more than this one purpose. As the first major Australian women's competitive swimming meet, it brought general public attention to focus on women's swimming capabilities, and the eight events organised at the St George Baths in Cleveland Street, Redfern in March 1902<sup>15</sup> received wide and approving press coverage. The *Sydney Sportsman* predicted that "judging by the large number that turned up to witness the Ladies' Swimming Carnival, there should be very little difficulty in making these gatherings a prominent feature of our swimming season".<sup>16</sup> The same reporter, recording approvingly that the

ladies swam “in the presence of the trousered sex”, applauded the fact that at his first carnival,

thank heaven, mock modesty is being sent right about, and the day is not far distant when ladies will have as little objection to doing a mermaid act as they have to attending a ball or the theatre in a low-necked dress.<sup>17</sup>

All this was a far cry from the words of the press on the subject of women’s participation in other sports. When the more practical, and yet certainly modest apparel necessary to pursue the sport of cycling appeared, it was labelled variously as “unbecoming”, “immoral”, or “ridiculous”.<sup>18</sup> When the tennis champion Suzanne Lenglen played, uncorseted, in a mid-calf-length simple dress at Wimbledon as late as 1919, waves of shock and horror greeted her appearance.<sup>19</sup> These more public sports, in their attempts to arrive at a more practical dress, threatened the outward symbols of Victorian femininity with their abandonment of corsets and long skirts. But with swimming, its “rational”, streamlined costumes not only bore no relation to the everyday dress which outwardly defined the two sexes, but were also designed for a single purpose, practised only within special, enclosed places.

Besides giving a nod to the “rational” dress worn by the swimming competitors, the press also extended its approval to the emerging feminine aquatic competitive spirit, while either ignoring or ridiculing women’s other competitive sports. This was largely because many of these other games remained primarily social fripperies - such as tennis, golf, and croquet, or else were still just school sports - such as hockey and lacrosse. The unreported sport of rowing was very much a minority sport, limited to the University rowing club and a few suburban teams.<sup>20</sup> And, of course, both the budding sport of pedestrianism<sup>21</sup> and the fading one of cycling, with their red faces, perspiration, muscular development, and “masculinisation” of women’s clothing, threatened too much a

complete overhaul of the prevailing ideals of femininity, and thus were generally ill-favoured by the reading public.

And it was the reading public with which the late 19th/early 20th century press was concerned. Needing to maintain and increase circulation, advertising and sales income had to be courted. To achieve this end, the widest possible market had to be targetted - the literate and leisured expanding middle classes. In matters of women's sport, swimming, with its wide appeal and high acceptability rating, was a sport enjoyed by a sizeable section of the target audience. It could be competitive without threatening the status quo, and thus had the sanction of the medical profession and the upholders of social propriety. There were no outraged letters to the editor regarding women's competitive swimming - although there were about women's attire and behaviour on the public beaches. For women it was the most acceptable and accessible sport, both to participate in and to read about. Therefore the press, even the notoriously misogynist *Bulletin*<sup>22</sup> ever conscious of the need to reach the widest possible audience, was always ready to give coverage to this widely practised and popular sport.

Besides the press, another factor which reflected the wide acceptance of, and in turn contributed to, the boom in this women's sport was the teaching of children to swim. Some of these children were natatorial experts at an extremely tender age, and it became a regular feature at carnivals to have some of the precocious youngsters - especially little girls - giving exhibitions of trick swimming and fancy diving.<sup>23</sup> The Olympic swimmer Mina Wylie was performing before scores of admiring adults and envious youngsters when she was only five,<sup>24</sup> and at the combined Balmain and Morts' Dock carnival held in 1900:

Two little mites, Ivy and Doris, billed as aged 9 and 5 years respectively (daughters of Mr Sid Davis, the bath proprietor) gave an exhibition of swimming, including many tricks. Their performance might well arouse envy in many a full grown man. It certainly aroused great enthusiasm in the breasts of a score of small boys

(evidently admirers), who applauded vigorously every turn of the performance.<sup>25</sup>

Although most of these performing nymphs were the children of bath proprietors, and therefore were probably taught to swim by their parents, swimming for both boys and girls had been introduced to the NSW State school curriculum in the latter years of the 19th century.<sup>26</sup> This move was to be one of the most important factors affecting the growth of women's competitive swimming in the 20th century. A whole generation of children was to grow up with the idea that competitive swimming for women was not only just acceptable, but a part of life. In NSW the first State school girls' carnival was held at Davis' Baths, Balmain on a Wednesday afternoon, 14 February 1900. The *Sydney Morning Herald* gave the event approving coverage:

A carnival, in which girls of the Public schools of the western suburbs took part drew a large number of spectators.... The handicapping was good, many close finishes were witnessed, and the races came off well to time. The 200 entries received give practical illustration of the success of the teaching of swimming in the Public schools.<sup>27</sup>

All ages of the girls who attended the Birchgrove, Forest Lodge, Gladstone Park, Nicholson Street, Smith Street, Fort Street and Darlington public schools were catered for, as were the "Lady Teachers" themselves - a Miss Creswick won their race.

The same year as this first girls' carnival, there were moves to make teaching children to swim a free service. The *Sydney Morning Herald* gave its support to the intention:

The proposal now addressed to borough councils is that they should provide the free use of the baths under their control on a fixed afternoon in the week to children who would be under the supervision of their teachers... Of the many thousands who attend the State schools there are now about 13,000 children in regular attendance at the swimming classes; but the luxury costs money, in tram fares

and bath charges and so forth, which some parents cannot afford. In view of the importance of the matter from every point of view, it may be hoped that some better and cheaper arrangement will be established before next summer for the instruction in swimming of children of all ages, whether they attend Public or private schools.<sup>28</sup>

But perhaps this egalitarian nature of the sport served to keep the private school children away from it, for although some private girls schools were provided with swimming facilities,<sup>29</sup> the favoured sports for privileged girls during this period remained largely croquet and tennis.<sup>30</sup> Both rather more expensive, and therefore more exclusive sports.

Despite its limited early following in the private schools, for the bulk of the population in the early 20th century, swimming was emerging as the most widely acceptable competitive sport for women. It was promoted by the press, encouraged by the schools, and given continuing sanction by the medical and moral guardians. However, it was still a woman's sport, and therefore still subject to the prevailing attitudes towards Victorian womanhood - her propriety and her place. These attitudes would eventually create problems for the sport - problems which would be solved in ways which both conformed to and reinforced the established order.

Although by and large the press was favourable, especially early in the sport's development, patronising or disparaging comments were occasionally passed on the physical appearance of the competitors.<sup>31</sup> These comments would eventually be used to aid the argument for the re-segregation of the sport in 1906, on the grounds that they signified a threat to the Victorian image of the inherent modesty and moral sanctity of womanhood. Also, as the sport became more established and moved towards its own organisation, administrative tussles with the NSW Amateur Swimming Association (NSWASA) over matters of final authority began. These tussles would continue well past the foundation of the separate - and theoretically autonomous - women's central

governing body, the NSW Ladies' Amateur Swimming Association (NSWLASA) in 1906.

The first signs that the welcome was cooling came when the first Sydney women's swimming club was formed. Following the successful first State Ladies' Championship at the close of the 1901/02 swimming season<sup>32</sup> in October 1902, the "lady students of the Civil Ambulance and Life Saving Society" announced the inauguration of the Sydney Ladies' Swimming Club (SLSC), and immediately made a formal application to the NSWASA for affiliation.<sup>33</sup> The *Sydney Sportsman*, commenting that while it was "almost certain that the ladies will be received by the delegates [of the NSWASA] with open arms",<sup>34</sup> hinted that it was another question whether a "lady delegate" from the new club would be permitted to sit on the council of the NSWASA.

On 6 November 1902 the matter of the new "ladies' club" was discussed at a meeting of the NSWASA. The minutes of the meeting only briefly mention the proceedings: "The Hon Sec announced that he had just received a written application from the Hon Sec (Miss K. Loftus) of Sydney Ladies' Swimming Club asking for affiliation. Affiliation granted conditionally."<sup>35</sup> The meaning of the word "conditionally" was not spelled out in the minutes, but the *Sydney Sportsman*, in true popular journalistic spirit, was not quite so reticent:

The counsellors were somewhat in a dilemma, as the rules and regulations only deal with clubs whose members comprise the sterner(?) sex. But the benedicts [a newly married man, after a long period of bachelorhood] of the council soon got over the difficulty and the ladies were brought under the aegis of the council on the understanding that rules and regulations be formed to meet the altered circumstances.

Jim Taylor gravely announced from the chair that one of the conditions attached to the admission of the ladies' club, was that they would not be represented by a lady delegate. Several of the bachelors disapproved of the ruling, but the chairman (who, by the way, is a benedict)

stuck to his decision so that, for the present, ladies will not sit in the parliament of swimmers.<sup>36</sup>

The *Sydney Sportsman* was rather optimistic with its inclusion of the phrase “for the present”, for delegates of the Ladies’ Clubs were never to sit in the “parliament of swimmers”. Although women had been admitted to the serious business of competitive sport, and were permitted to organise themselves at local level, final decision and policy making were to remain firmly within the masculine province. Women might be in the process of expanding their boundaries, but they had not broken through. The old divisions of public/private sphere, although slightly shifted, were still intact.

The NSWASA’s denial of representation for women swimmers was consistent with the mainstream view of a woman’s place, so not much further coverage was given to this issue; and until the formation of the NSWLASA in 1906, the women’s clubs continued virtually voiceless under the control of the NSWASA. The men’s Association held the power of final decision over all women’s club issues, carnival events, and official swimming times.<sup>37</sup> There was only one recorded rebellion against this situation, and that was in December 1902, when the SLSC issued an unclarified threat to withdraw from the NSWASA “because they do not wish the Association to have any control in the management of their club or carnivals”.<sup>38</sup>

But the SLSC did not withdraw from the Association, and the organisation of women’s competitive swimming continued to grow. Several other women’s clubs formed in subsequent years, all under the auspices of the NSWASA, and by the time the NSWLASA was formed in 1906, there were six women’s swimming clubs operating in Sydney - two branches of the Sydney Ladies’ Swimming Club, the East Sydney Ladies’ Club, the Balmain Ladies’ Club, the Public School Lady Teachers and the Watson’s Bay Club, with a combined approximate membership of 339.<sup>39</sup> For the same period, the total number of members in the twenty metropolitan men’s clubs was 943 - although, with

country clubs, schools clubs and other affiliates, the total NSWASA membership was counted as approximately 12,000.<sup>40</sup>

For a small subscription - in 1904 the annual membership fee of the East Sydney Club Ladies' Branch was 2s 6d<sup>41</sup> - the women's clubs provided their members with the opportunity for competition in a wide variety of events - not just the one 50 or 66-yard swim allotted to women in a combined men's and women's carnival. There were competition dives, team relays, a variety of distance races ranging from 33 to 440 yards, and the ubiquitous "novelty" and "farce" events.<sup>42</sup> And of course, there was also the social side of club life. The "ladies" swimming clubs provided an important social venue, often serving as a valuable means of meeting other women. It was for just such a reason that Mrs Mary Chambers - a later NSWLASA supporter of Rose Scott in the bitter 1912 debate - joined a local swimming club when she moved to Sydney from Adelaide.<sup>43</sup> The women's clubs, with their weekly swimming and administrative gatherings, frequent social lunches and teas, and annual balls,<sup>44</sup> served, as did the men's clubs, to fulfil needs beyond those of simply providing organised sporting competition.

Many of the swimmers and officials involved with the first "ladies" swimming clubs were women who were already connected with the sport of swimming. Their husbands, fathers or children were club swimmers, or else had commercial interests in the sport. For instance, it seems likely that two of the starters in the 1897 "ladies' race" at the Natatorium were daughters of baths proprietors - Miss E. Robinson and Miss F. Cavill,<sup>45</sup> and later races saw the entry of swimmers such as Mina Wylie and Dorothy Davis, also daughters of bath lessees. Some of the club officials involved in the commercial aspects of swimming were Miss Loftus, Honorary Treasure and Captain of the SLSC; Mrs Farmer, Vice-President of the East Sydney Swimming Club Ladies' Branch; Mrs Griffiths, Vice-President of the Metropolitan Ladies' Club, and Mrs Hugh McIntosh - wife of a prominent Sydney sporting entrepreneur - later President of the NSWLASA. There were also other interests presiding over the beginnings of the formalisation of women's swimming.

Miss Rose Scott, one of the most prominent members of the women's movement, was appointed Vice- President of the SLSC in 1903.<sup>46</sup> Rose Scott was not the only leading feminist to be involved in the infant stages of women's competitive sport. Overseas, influential feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman propounded the doctrine of *mens sana in corpore sano*, holding that the combined effects of physical freedom, self-control and feelings of self-esteem bestowed by sporting activities had important ramifications for the whole emancipation of women.<sup>47</sup> In Australia, besides Rose Scott, Vida Goldstein - the Victorian political activist - was the President of the Victorian Ladies' Cricket Association during the period 1905 to 1912.<sup>48</sup> And at Sydney University, Miss Evelyn Dickinson, who cycled, wore rational dress, believed in political equality, and who, it was rumoured, smoked,<sup>49</sup> was the founder of the Sydney University Women's Boat Club - perhaps one of the first sporting clubs to actually bear the name "women" rather than "ladies".<sup>50</sup>

However, Rose Scott's feminism was of a more conservative kind than that of the young women of the Sydney University Boat Club. Scott's brand of feminism, termed "expediency" feminism by Allen,<sup>51</sup> promoted the continuation of the division of society into two separate spheres on the basis of sex - the public sphere, where men were to remain dominant, and the private sphere, the domestic, which was the female domain. However, the expediency feminists realised that to maintain women's status and rights in the private sphere, women would have to achieve an economic and political voice, and to this end they promoted educational and political equality for women. That is, they advocated an expansion of women's spheres of influence, not an overhaul of the basic definitions. In Rose Scott's case, she also promoted the right of women to physical freedom of movement. But in keeping with her belief in the separateness of the sexes, and worried that the public competition of women posed a threat to the desirable images of femininity - modesty and moral inviolability, Scott would call, successfully, for the exercise of these physical freedoms to be returned to the private sphere.

Despite the early threats made by the SLSC to quit the NSWASA over unexplained issues of control and organisation, no move was made by women towards establishing a central controlling body for their sport. The move was to come from the men's association which felt that women's affairs were beginning to take up too much of its time. Obviously, as the number of women's clubs and membership grew, their requests - for carnival approvals, for settlement of disputes, for ratification of records, for prize donations<sup>52</sup> - were increasing too. In 1904 the "Sydney Amateur Ladies' Club"<sup>53</sup> applied for affiliation with the NSWASA. In response, a meeting of the men's association on 17 November 1904 recommended that rather than grant affiliation to yet another women's club, a separate Ladies Swimming Association be formed. However, the suggestion was rejected by the women's club concerned,<sup>54</sup> and it would be another year before the motion came up for consideration again.

On 16 February 1905, the NSWASA finally decided that the Executive would "take steps to form a Ladies' Assoc. on similar lines to this Association",<sup>55</sup> and after two preliminary meetings, on 8 February 1906 the NSW Ladies' Amateur Swimming Association came into being. Addressing this first meeting of the NSWLASA, the new Honorary Secretary, Miss Kathleen Durack, made it quite clear that the impetus for the formation of the Ladies' Association had indeed come from the NSWASA, and that it was due to the increasing activity of the women's clubs:

The New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association, having in view the increased interest displayed by Ladies' Swimming Clubs, deemed it advisable that some provision should be made for the proper administration and control of sport among these clubs. With this object in view a preliminary meeting was convened on December 9, 1905, at which delegates attended from all the Ladies' Clubs then existent in Sydney, and unanimously resolved that the formation of a Ladies' Association was desirable. A public meeting of all interested was then held, and by

resolution, the N.S. Wales Ladies' Amateur Swimming Association was formed on 8th February, 1906.<sup>56</sup>

The formation of this new Association caused a bitter division within the largest and oldest of the women's swimming clubs, the SLSC. The majority of members voted to join the NSWLASA, but a small conservative minority, headed by the founder of the SLSC, Mrs Loftus, declared itself totally opposed to the move on the grounds that there was not need for the women to become "like the men", that is, to become seriously competitive.<sup>57</sup> As far as the Loftus contingent were concerned, swimming for women should be but a pastime, not a "pot-hunt".<sup>58</sup> But as the *Sydney Sportsman* astutely observed, in those modern times, "many of the fair swimmers are as keen after a gew-gaw as any of the perfidious males."<sup>59</sup>

The "gew-gaws" in this game were of course just of the commemorative medal, silver cup, coffee pot and pin-tray variety. Within the definition of amateur, "value" prizes - that is money or vouchers for goods or services - were forbidden, and any prize with a value of £10 or over had to be engraved with the name of the contest and date of the meeting.<sup>60</sup> In 1914 the total prize winnings of Australia's "champion lady swimmer", Fanny Durack, were listed as including two silver cups; 150 gold and silver medals; 2 entree dishes; 3 biscuit barrels; 12 vases; 4 smelling-bottles; 3 toasts racks; and numerous salt-cellars, tea-pots, jam-spoons, pin-trays, etc.<sup>61</sup> This low level of financial incentive in women's sport, as compared to men's, would later be cited as one of the prime reasons for the re-admission of men - excluded from NSWLASA events in 1906 - to women's carnivals. It would be argued that if male spectators were allowed, then, with attendance figures up - and perhaps more donations - there would be increased income for better prizes.

One of the first rules instituted by the newly formed NSWLASA concerned the regulation of costume. Pre-NSWLASA, costume had been largely left to the discretion of the individual women themselves.

The regulations concerning costume of the East Sydney Ladies' Club for the season 1904-5 had simply specified that: "The club costume shall be navy blue with black and white badge on left breast, viz., E.S.S.C. (L.B.) The costume must be worn at all public contests and inter-club races".<sup>62</sup> And as is evident from the early pictures of women's races, the costumes were virtually as brief as the men's. Skirtless, sleeveless, and "shockingly" short, they were made of wool, cotton - and may even have been made of the same transparent, washable silk approved by the NSWASA for use in men's costumes.<sup>63</sup>

The NSWLASA dress rules did not do much to alter the streamlined women's racing dress, indeed, they were virtually the same as those of the NSWASA. These new rules stipulated that:

17. In all events under the jurisdiction of the Association all persons taking part must wear the combination costume (to be known as the Association costume) in accordance with the following regulations:-

- a. Only dark blue or black costumes shall be worn.
- b. Trimmings may be used *ad lib*.
- c. The shoulder straps of costumes shall not be less than two inches wide.
- e.[sic] In the front the top of the costume shall reach not lower than two inches below the pit of the neck.
- d. [sic] At the back the costume shall be cut straight from the top of shoulder to top of shoulder.
- f. The costumes shall extend not less than eight (8) inches from the inside measurement of the leg downwards, and shall be cut in a straight line around the circumference of the leg.
- g. The costumes shall be buttoned on the shoulders and the armhole shall be cut to fit closely round the shoulder.<sup>64</sup>

There were only three differences between the regulations for women's costumes and for men's. The men had two additional regulations specifying that "Trunks must be worn outside the costumes",<sup>65</sup> and that "the armhole shall be cut no lower than three inches from the armpit."; and for the women there was an extra rule

requiring competitors to go “cloaked to the starting post”, and to “resume their cloaks on the conclusion of the heat in which they were engaged”.<sup>66</sup> But it should be noted that although costume was now codified, Regulation 17 did not greatly increase the coverage area of the racing costumes, and silk remains a light and transparent material when wet, no matter the length of the leg.

Nevertheless, even complying with these strict regulations would have revealed a good deal more of the Edwardian female form than was usually seen, and on these grounds, accompanied by prompting from the conservative elements in the NSWASA, a further stipulation also came into effect - the banning of male spectators from all the Ladies’ Association events, and conversely, the forbidding of all Ladies’ Association members from competition in front of men.<sup>67</sup> And it is this rule, rather than the rule defining costume, which embodies the conservative response to the threat women’s swimming was beginning to pose.

For many of the conservative elements involved in swimming in 1906, this rule on male attendance was long overdue. Shortly after the inauguration of the NSWLASA, the men’s Association began to make official noises about “improperly clad” women competing at carnivals - and threatening action along the lines of forbidding women from public competition.<sup>68</sup> Regulation 17 had obviously not solved the perceived threat to the images of the ideal “modest and moral” woman. Even the *Sydney Sportsman* took an unusually conservative stance, commenting that “the costumes worn by lady swimmers at men’s carnivals were not at all what they should be”.<sup>69</sup> Rose Scott, prime mover in the resegregation of the sport, clearly laid the blame for the move at the door of lascivious interests commenting that women swimming in front of men “would be alright if the men would behave themselves properly, but a lot of bad men are attracted who would make all sorts of nasty remarks and who would rather go for the spectacle than the skill”.<sup>70</sup> But for Scott, the onus of responsibility for a solution fell upon the women.

Although the NSWLASA regulations can be seen as a backward step by making women's swimming once again something "hidden" and separate, there were certainly some positive, and generally overlooked, ramifications of the decisions. In 1906, the concept of women competing seriously for the honour of coming first in a sport was still very new, and yet to be grasped by many members of both sexes. For many spectators, and no doubt quite a few participants, woman's prime physical competition with fellow woman remained the one which had as first prize a husband, not a silver cup (or pin-tray). And it was their ratings in these physical stakes which sometimes featured in women's competitive swimming commentary. For these reasons, women who might have previously avoided competitive swimming due to fear of ridicule by spectators or the press regarding their lack of "physical charms", could now, thanks to the moves of the NSWLASA, join in the sport without embarrassment.

But perhaps one of the most important benefits of these restrictions was not that they saved women's competitive swimming from degenerating into a peep-show event, but that they prevented the new women's sport from falling prey to the controlling strictures of the more conservative elements in the NSWASA. The focal point was the skimpy costumes worn by the young women, but the central issue was the perceived threat made to the prevailing images of womanhood. The wearing of serious, streamlined racing costumes at public meetings was doing more than just expanding women's physical horizons; the supposed intentions and comments of male spectators about these brief costumes were seen as threatening one of the most fundamental images of middle class femininity - the modest and impeccably moral "angel".

However, for serious, record-breaking swimming these controversial costumes were exactly what they needed to be - and, as was made obvious by Regulation 17, even Rose Scott saw that. But if some move had not been made by the women, the NSWASA - the only body permitted to ratify swimming records - would no doubt have stepped in and enforced their own rules, either on costumes or on competitions, as

it had hinted. By excluding men from women's races, the NSWLASA allowed the women to retain their aquatic freedom, and their competitive edge. The alternatives of no competition - for it must be noted that some of the members of the NSWASA were influential figures in the Sydney sporting scene<sup>71</sup> - or the adoption of cumbersome skirted costumes, were thus astutely avoided.

Granted in their eagerness to restore decorum and maintain control, the NSWLASA perhaps went too far - and for too long. Unfortunately their regulations inspired some initial sarcastic remarks from a rejected sporting press, such as the report on the SLSC carnival held on 31 March 1906:

As the water had been fenced in, the bold, bad man was kept out. If the fence had not been there, the ladies, both affiliated and non-affiliated, would have joyfully posed for the edification of the trousered bipeds, as is done at the beach.<sup>72</sup>

And this from a newspaper which had previously given women's swimming reasonably serious coverage, and which only two months earlier had applauded the proposals to exclude men.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps "Trudge" did not realise at the time that the "no men" rule would also extend to male reporters.

Despite its initial canning by a disgruntled press - and the creation of apocryphal stories, such as the stipulation made by the women when hiring a brass band to play at one of their carnivals, that the members must all be blind<sup>74</sup> - the inauguration of the NSWLASA proved a timely boon to women's competitive swimming in NSW. Centralising control in a single body - whose prime concern was with issues of women's swimming, enabled the extension and consolidation of women's competition. Competition became increasingly serious and organised. The field was now wider, with competitors racing against members from other clubs, from other cities, from other states. And there was a single coordinated body to deal with the executive of the NSWASA - for the

men's Association could not yet countenance a totally autonomous female body, and therefore still retained the option of final authority.<sup>75</sup>

For the first four years of its existence the NSWLASA flourished. Membership expanded from 339 to 700 in its first year,<sup>76</sup> and once the novelty of rejection had worn off, the press reports soon returned to serious, if second-hand, coverage. Another, perhaps unforeseen, benefit of the exclusion of all men from Ladies' Carnivals, was that all handicapping and timekeeping were now solely under the control of the women themselves. As Fanny Durack commented on the matter,

since the ladies have had charge of the handicapping and timekeeping they do it better than the men did before the forming of the association. I think the men used to favour some of girls, but you don't catch a girl favouring another girl.<sup>77</sup>

However, although the NSWLASA's sudden withdrawal of women's swimming from the public domain might have been a timely move in 1906, by 1910 there were signs of discontent.

In 1910 a rival body to the Association, the NSW League of Swimmers, a body which featured both women's and men's events on the same bill - and gave money prizes - was formed. Prominent women swimmers such as the Misses Alice Pearce and Gladys Tait were involved with the movement, and the effects were immediate on the NSWLASA. At the Annual General Meeting of the NSWLASA held on 21 November 1910, it was announced that three clubs were not to affiliate that year - Pyrmont, Watson's Bay and Leichhardt<sup>78</sup> - and would therefore be exempt from the NSWLASA regulations. On 1 November 1910, membership of the Ladies' Association had stood at around 900,<sup>79</sup> by 21 November it was down to 211.<sup>80</sup>

Women were attracted to the league largely because, by bringing women's swimming back into the general sporting arena, two of the major causes of dissatisfaction with women's competitive swimming were resolved. The League generated higher financial interest in the form of value prizes, and allowed the swimmer's male family members,

friends and the press to see and appreciate the women's style and abilities. As it happened, the apportionment of prize money was commensurate with Edwardian ideas of a woman's relative worth,<sup>81</sup> and some of the appreciation the women received was not concerned with their sporting performance. Nevertheless, a large section of Sydney's women swimmers were obviously keen for less restrictive competition, and had voted with their feet. But despite the defections, the NSWLASA was not to waver on its no-men strictures until the grand debate over the 1912 Olympic Games.

From the start of the 1911/12 swimming season, the men of the NSWASA were gearing up for the 5th Olympic Games to be held in Stockholm in July 1912. At a NSWASA council meeting held on 16 November 1911, it was announced that the NSW Amateur Sporting Federation had granted permission to the NSWASA to open a special fund for Olympic swimming representation. Given the likelihood of limited government financial assistance for Australia's Olympic contingent, this fund was to cover the expenses of four or five swimmers who would be nominated by the NSWASA over the following few months.

At this stage there was no mention of the possibility of Australian women attending the games - although it had been announced in April 1911 that "for the first time in the history of these classic events, [swimming] items for ladies are included".<sup>82</sup> In January 1912, the NSWASA decided to allot the profits from the State Championship carnivals to the Olympic Fund, and to also send a circular letter to the public appealing for donations.<sup>83</sup> By 7 February 1912, the *Referee* announced that the amount in the Olympic swimming fund had reached £400, and the three swimmers Longworth, Hardwick and Healy would definitely be going to Stockholm. The same reporter pondered on who the other two swimmers might be: "whether two of Miss Fanny Durack, Les Boardman or Alick Wickham may be included... depends on the condition of the exchequer".<sup>84</sup> According to the *Referee's* estimate, £600 would be the amount needed to send five representatives to Stockholm.

And indeed, over the next two weeks the required amount was raised and five representatives were selected by the NSWASA to represent Australia in Stockholm - but Fanny Durack, world record breaker and champion swimmer of the NSWLASA, was not one of them.

Fanny Durack had first made her mark in Australian swimming with a win in the 54 yards Under 12s Handicap at the first women's NSW State Carnival held in 1902.<sup>85</sup> Since that auspicious start, she had gone on to break national and international records at a steady rate, and had a high profile in the sport of swimming - featuring as a special star at various carnival events (before the inauguration of the NSWLASA), and receiving constant press attention both for her steadily improving swimming times, and, with her regular resetting of world records, for her contributions to the national image. In 1912 Fanny Durack was the fastest recorded female swimmer in the world.

During the two months February and March 1912, Fanny Durack broke all world women's swimming records. On 9 March she won the 50 yards championship at the Metropolitan Ladies' Club Carnival in 31 seconds, and one week later set an extraordinary pace for the 100 yards race - 66 seconds.<sup>86</sup> On 9 March 1912, the Australian champion swimmer Alick Wickham had swum the 100 yards final of the men's inter-club handicap in just under 61 seconds, and the only woman close to Durack's record was England's Daisy Curwen with a time of 72 seconds.<sup>87</sup> It was certainly clear that Fanny Durack could 'be depended upon to assist materially in causing the world to talk a good deal of a country which can produce such great athletes - particular swimmers of both sexes',<sup>88</sup> and within the women's clubs - and echoed by the Sydney press - there was much talk about the desirability of sending this champion swimmer to the Games.

At a special general meeting of the SLSC on 6 March 1912 - the first of a series of special meetings of the women's clubs called to vote on the same matters - it was decided unanimously that Fanny Durack should indeed go to the Olympic Games. The second motion tabled - that Sydney's second-best swimmer, Mina Wylie, should accompany

Durack to the Games - was also carried. The third and final motion, the most controversial of the meeting, was the proposal to permit NSWLASA members to officially swim in front of men - a NSWLASA regulation which would have to be rescinded before its two members could swim in public in Stockholm. After much heated debate, and a secret ballot, the motion was carried 14 for, and 8 against.<sup>89</sup> With the result in, Rose Scott, who besides being President of the NSWLASA had retained her presidency of the SLSC, announced that as the motions passed were completely against her principles, she had no choice but to resign from the SLSC.

Although the Sydney press supported virtually unanimously the proposal to send Durack and Wylie to the Games, the issue of men attending NSWLASA events drew a mixed reaction - as indeed had the original restrictions on male attendance when they were introduced. The *Referee* considered that:

If at ladies' galas the doors are open to men it will certainly kill the fine progress women are making as swimmers, for where one would not mind there are half a dozen who would. The well-shaped girl might easily get over her qualms, no matter how modest she may be, but her less favored [sic] sister is altogether differently placed. Men who have attended swimming shows where the other sex took part, could not help but notice the quizzing and guying girl contestants were frequently subjected to.<sup>90</sup>

And echoing Rose Scott's earlier sentiments, "Natator" of the *Referee* concluded, "I believe in the mingling of the sexes on our beaches and under proper supervision; but the cad is much more in evidence at a swimming meeting where women figure than he is in the surf."<sup>91</sup>

A.C.W. Hill, secretary of the NSWASA, agreed wholeheartedly with this opinion. Invited by Rose Scott to the meeting of the Ladies' Association where the final ballots on the three motions were to take place, Hill held up the immodest behaviour of men and women swimmers at League carnivals as being an example of what Sydney could

expect if the Ladies' Association voted to tread the same lewd path. "Balderdash", wrote "Trudge" of the *Sydney Sportsman*, A.C.W. Hill "should be compelled to either prove his words or eat them".<sup>92</sup> The women of the NSWLASA, obviously sharing the sentiments of "Trudge", endorsed the motion to send their two champions to Stockholm and rescinded the rule forbidding the members of the Ladies' Association to swim in public. The *Bulletin*, commenting on the "wildly humorous gathering", ridiculed Hill's "amazing statements" and applauded the members of the NSWLASA for disregarding the threats and fibs of "the old lady and the young man" and carrying their motion regardless.<sup>93</sup>

Although Hill had warned the Ladies' Association meeting that there was little hope of the men's Association sanctioning the Misses Durack and Wylie for the Olympic Games, at the NSWASA council meeting held on 21 March 1912, the applications of the women to go to Stockholm were approved - subject to the conditions that the sum of £150 be paid to the men's Association to cover the expenses of each person nominated by the NSWLASA, and that each competitor be properly chaperoned.<sup>94</sup> There was to be no financial assistance forthcoming for Durack and Wylie, and they would also have the additional expense of funding travel and accommodation expenses for a "suitable" chaperone.

Appeals for funds were launched immediately - there was little time to spare. Rose Scott had repeated her earlier act with the SLSC and resigned from the Presidency of the NSWLASA when it voted to send the two women to Stockholm, as she considered Durack and Wylie's competing at the Olympics to be "opposed to the ideas of the association that men should not be allowed to witness the events we conducted. I think it is disgusting that men should be allowed to attend."<sup>95</sup> The sanctioning of Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie's move out of woman's proper, private realm into the public, male domain was too much for Miss Scott. The younger Mrs Hugh McIntosh, Vice-President of the NSWLASA, and wife of the Sydney entrepreneur who had

contributed to the fund to send Australia's one athletics representative to the Games,<sup>96</sup> stepped into the breach.

Under the organisation of Mrs McIntosh, money came in from various quarters - £5 here, £10 there - and although the full £150 for each was finally raised, Mina Wylie's final donations only amounted to £42 and her father had to fund the rest.<sup>97</sup> Neither was the final sum received in time to make the concessional fares that the boat carrying the other members of Australia's Olympic contingent - the *HMS Osterly* - was offering.<sup>98</sup>

Fanny Durack, with her sister Mary as chaperone, sailed for Europe on the French mail steamer *Armand Behie*, a few days after the April 10th departure of the *Osterley*. Mina Wylie set sail from Circular Quay for London on the *RMS Malwa* on 4 May 1912.<sup>99</sup> Both women were to compete in events especially organised for them along the way, events which they would win. Events that would receive admiring and generous coverage in the English papers, but, displaying an extraordinary lack of interest once the team had departed, events that would rate scarcely a mention in the Australian sporting tomes. That is, until 9 July 1912, when Sarah "Fanny" Durack and Mina Wylie took Gold and Silver in the 100 yards finals, and were hailed as Australia's first international Olympic sporting heroines.

The Stockholm affair of 1912 marked the beginning of a new phase. The sport of swimming, for Australian women, once again moved into the public arena, this time with champions lauded and praised by the press and public for their contributions to the image of the nation. However, like the events of 1902 and 1906, the 1912 controversy also served to raise the contradictions and ambivalences surrounding women's sport, and to highlight the transitions in the changing perceptions of a woman's social place.

In early 20th century Sydney, swimming emerged as the most widely accepted, seriously considered, competitive sport for women. Hardly surprising, for as its widespread praise early in 1902 indicated, it was not an activity which threatened the status quo. Nevertheless, to

retain its acceptability the sport had to remain within the prevailing definitions of ideal feminine behaviour - definitions which were changing, and definitions which this sport served to both challenge and reflect.

In 1902 women's competitive swimming, demonstrating the increasing interest taken by women in physical activity, took its first organisational steps. The "lady" swimmers gained official sanction to organise their own affairs, but, reflecting the contemporary status of women, were barred from any executive, public-province decision making. Between 1902 and 1906 the new women's clubs would remain dependent upon the NSWASA for ratification of their carnival timetables, for physically and figuratively recording their times - and for passing on these times to the record-holding bodies of other nations. However, although the women had sufficient impetus to form their own local level organisations, the move for centralised control of women's swimming would not come until 1905/06, and this move arose for reasons other than women being ready to control their own affairs.

By 1906 women's competitive swimming had become virtually as competitive as the men's - its costumes were streamlined, and its competition serious. However, while the level and intent of competitiveness involved did not seem to threaten the image of "ideal" womanhood, the current public practice of the sport was seen as posing a threat to the lingering image of the "modest and moral" "lady". A conservative order was sent out for the re-segregation of the sport, and in line with that order, women's swimming withdrew into a protective, closeted, and ultimately subordinate "respectability". A purdah behind which it would remain for the next six years.

In 1912, reflecting the advances in the aspirations and expectations of women, the sport gave rise to another challenge. The Sydney clubs had raised the fastest women swimmers in the world, women who for the first time demanded equal rights in sporting representation. Although the established order put organisational and financial obstacles in their way, by 1912 the "old guard" were fading.

The climate of majority opinion - whether for reasons of women's rights, for the promise of a boost to nationalistic pride, or simply because the requests were well in line with the current image and status of women - was with the women's bid for sporting excellence and international success, a success they brilliantly achieved.

1902 represented a sporting breakthrough for women, but it also represented an unquestioned acceptance of the status quo. 1906 represented a push by women into a new level of serious public sporting competition, but its advances were too early and resulted in retreat. But by 1912, with a public ready to support what had been previously unacceptable, the move was undoubtably forward. Even if the successes achieved by the swimmers in 1912 did not totally revolutionise perceptions of the limitations of women, they - like the achievements of 1902 and 1906 before them - without doubt, extended considerably the image of the range and capacities of early 20th century womanhood.

#### NOTES:

1. Annette Kellerman, *How to Swim*, George H. Doran, New York, 1918, p.38
2. *Australian Star*, 22 March 1897. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML)
3. Reet Howell, "Australia's First Female Olympians", in N. Muller, and J. Ruhl, *Olympic Scientific Congress 1984* Official Report, 1984.
4. *SMH*, 12 January 1900.
5. Various *SMH* dates - including specifically 25 October, 1904, when it was reported that the residents of St Leonards paid for the construction of a baths at a cost of £300, and the Vaucluse council constructed a baths in 1904 at a cost between £1500 and £2000.
6. viz. the Balmain baths, and the extension of facilities at Coogee. *SMH*, 12 January 1900, 23 February 1900, 31 October 1901, 25 October 1904; and A. Hamill, *1884-1894 Celebrating a Centenary - Balmain Swimming Club*, no publisher, no date cited, pp.6, 11 and 16.
7. *Sydney Sportsman*, 19 December 1900.
8. *Ibid*, 26 December 1900.
9. *Ibid*, 23 January 1901.
10. *Ibid*, 19 December 1900.
11. "Trudge" was the pseudonym for the *Sydney Sportsman* swimming commentator.
12. *Sydney Sportsman*, 9 April 1902. There would be numerous further mentions of "ladies" having "no compunction in gazing upon the male form when partially hidden

- under a silk costumes” throughout this period, especially during the 1906 and 1912 “no men” debates.
13. Palace Emporium Swimming Club’s Second Annual Championship program. (ES. Marks Sporting Collection, ML).
  14. *SMH*, 15 April 1902. This is the only mention of the organiser of this event found in any of the newspapers and documents consulted.
  15. *Sydney Sportsman*, 2 April 1902.
  16. *Ibid.*
  17. *Ibid.*
  18. Raymond Madden, “How Delightful the Sensation: Women and Cycling in the 1890’s”. B.A. (Hons) thesis, UNSW, 1983, pp. 88-104.
  19. Adrienne Blue, *Grace Under Pressure*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1987, pp. 3-4.
  20. Telephone interview with and letter from Norm Cason. His grandmother, Isabella Hughes, was a Balmain rower in the late 19th century.
  21. “Pedestrianism” was the early name for the sport of running.
  22. *The Bulletin*, although later supporting women in their bid for the Olympics, was not averse to parody or patronisation of women swimmers.
  23. Various carnival handbooks between 1899 and 1912 (ES. Marks Sporting Collection, ML).
  24. Transcript of Interview with Mina Wylie by Neil Bennetts, National Library, Canberra. p.1.
  25. *Sydney Sportsman*, 21 October, 1900.
  26. Although the NSW Government did not appoint a permanent swimming instructor - a Miss Kilminster- until 1907, swimming was certainly featuring in the school curriculum by the late 1890s. NSW Department of Education Annual Reports, 1858-1961, p.42:1907, and NSWASA Reports, (E.S.Marks Sporting Collection, ML).
  27. *SMH*, 16 February 1900.
  28. *SMH*, 15 March 1900.
  29. Ray Crawford, “Sport for Young Ladies: The Victorian Independent Schools 1875-1925” in *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 1., No.1, November, 1984, p.9; and Sonia Lillianthorne, “Tea, Talk and Tennis: An Early History of Women’s Sport at the University of Sydney, 1882-1918”, B.Ed. thesis, University of Sydney, 1987, p.76.
  30. S. Lillianthorne, *op.cit.*, pp. 74-82.
  31. Occasional articles in *The Bulletin* pass comment on the physical appearance of “lady swimmers”, and some commentary found in various issues of the *Sydney Sportman* surrounding the League “lady” swimmers of 1910 runs along the same lines.
  32. Swimming seasons in NSW began on 1 October each year, and concluded on 31 March.
  33. *Sydney Sportsman*, 8 October, 1902.
  34. *Ibid.*
  35. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 6 November 1902.
  36. *Sydney Sportsman*, 12 November 1902.
  37. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 1902-1906.
  38. *Sydney Sportsman*, 24 December 1902
  39. First Annual Report of the NSWLASA, 1905-06, 26 October 1906. (Mina Wylie papers, ML).
  40. NSWASA 14th Annual Report, 9 October 1905, pp. 3 and 4 (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, ML).

41. East Sydney Swimming Club Ladies' Branch Rules and Regulation and Fixtures Listing, 1904. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, ML).
42. Various swimming carnival programs. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection and Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
43. *The Sun*, 2 September 1959. (Uncatalogued collection of papers held by the NSWASA).
44. Invitations, programs and annual Reports of NSWLASA. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
45. Palace Emporium Swimming Club Second Annual Championship program. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection). Fredda Cavill was the daughter of the "Prof" Fred Cavill, Elsie the daughter of the proprietor of Robinson's baths in the Domain.
46. *Sydney Sportsman*, 14 January 1903.
47. Patricia Vertinsky, "Feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Pursuit of Health and Physical Fitness as a Strategy for Emancipation", *Journal of Sport History*, Vol.16, No. 1, (Spring 1989).
48. Helen King, "The Sexual Politics of Sport: an Australian Perspective" in R. Cashman and M. McKernan, *Sport in History; The Making of Modern Sporting History*, University of Queensland Press, 1979, p.77.
49. S. Lillianthorne, *op. cit.*, pp.42 and 45.
50. *Ibid*, p.42.
51. J. Allen, "The Feminisms of the Early Women's Movements 1950-1920", in *Refractory Girl*, March 1979, p.11.
52. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 1902-1906.
53. There could be some doubt as to the name of this club. There appears to be no other mention of any women's club going by this exact name, and the SLSC was already affiliated with the NSWASA by this date. However the East Sydney Swimming Club Ladies' Branch was formed on 14 November 1904 (the East Sydney Swimming Club Report of the 11th Annual Meeting, 12 October 1905), therefore this could well be the club making the application for affiliation.
54. NSWASA State Council Minutes 17 November 1904.
55. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 16 February 1905.
56. First Annual Report of the NSWLASA, 26 October, 1906. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
57. These two factions formally split over this issue, and both clubs continued operating under the same name until an unspecified date. As the non-competitive SLSC of course did not feature any longer in the sporting columns - being now only a recreational association, or, as the *Bulletin* so described them: "the older section ...[who]... prefer a quiet paddle, and a pleasant chat over a cup of hot tea afterwards" (*Bulletin* 8 February 1906, p.24) - there is little further mention of them after their secession in February 1906.
58. *Sydney Sportsman* 7 February 1906.
59. *Ibid*.
60. The NSWLASA Rule Book, Constitutional Rules and By Laws and Regulations for Competitors, 1908-9. (Mina Wylie papers, ML).
61. Newspaper clipping (no name cited) dated 18 March 1914, from the miscellaneous material held in the NSWASA offices.
62. E.S.S.C.(L.B.) - East Sydney Swimming Club, Ladies' Branch. The ESSC annual report, 1904-05. (E.S. Marks Sporting Collection, ML).
63. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 1901-1910.
64. The NSWLASA Rule Book, Constitutional Rules and By Laws and Regulations for Competitors, 1908-9. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).

65. NSWASA Handbook 1906-7 (ES. Marks Spotting Collection, ML).
66. The NSWLASA Rule Book. Constitutional Rules and By Laws and Regulations for Competitors, 1908-9, Rule 1.8. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
67. There are no records for the date of this rule becoming effective, but the NSWASA Council Minutes of 20 March 1906 record the receipt of notification from the NSWLASA to this effect.
68. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 15 February 1906.
69. *Sydney Sportsman*, 14 February 1906.
70. R. Howell, *op. cit.*, p.24. There is some evidence in support of Scott's opinion, but this is mainly found in unsubstantiated comments in later newspapers harking back to the days when apparently men would not like their "sisters or daughters" to be appearing at the carnivals. However, at the League Carnivals from 1910 to 1912, there is some evidence of press reporters concentrating considerably more on the physical charms of the contestants (or lack thereof) than on their physical prowess.
71. Among them, prominent public men such as E.S. Marks and A.W. Griffiths.
72. *Sydney Sportsman*, 4 April 1900.
73. *Ibid.*, 14 February 1906.
74. A myth current with the members of the NSWASA.
75. Although this is not actually spelled out in any records of meetings, by-laws or notices of motion, the requests made to the NSWASA from the NSWLASA over the 1912 issue, and the fact that the final say over whether women should attend the Olympic Games or not rested with the NSWASA, Seem to indicate that this statement is probably accurate.
76. Second Annual Report of the NSWLASA, 29 October 1907. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
77. *Sun*, 1 November 1910, (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
78. Fifth Annual Report of the NSWLASA, 21 November 1910. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
79. *Sun*, 1 November, 1910 (from Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
80. Fifth Annual Report of the NSWLASA, 21 November 1910. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML).
81. Although women were given cash prizes for winning League events, the value of the prizes was far below that of the men's. For instance, at a League Carnival held in January, 1911, for the 50 yards Inter-Club handicap the prizes for the men were: £7, £2 and £1 for 1st, 2nd and 3rd places. For the women's 50 yards Inter-Club handicap held on the same bill, there was only one prize - £1 for first place. (*Sydney Sportsman*, 25 January 1911).
82. Unnamed newspaper clipping &ted 26 April 1911. (Mina Papers, ML).
83. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 16 November 1911 and 18 January 1912.
84. *Referee*, 7 February 1912.
85. *Sydney Sportsman*, 2 April 1902.
86. *Sydney Sportsman*, 13 March 1912 and 20 March 1912.
87. *Referee*, 28 February 1912.
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Evening News*, 7 March 1912.
90. *Referee*, 13 March 1912.
91. *Ibid.*

92. *Sydney Sportsman*, 20 March 1912.
93. *Bulletin*, 14 March 1912.
94. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 21 March 1912.
95. R. Howell, *op. cit.*, p.23.
96. *Sydney Sportsman*, 24 July 1912.
97. *Ibid.*
98. NSWASA State Council Minutes, 15 February 1912.
99. *Referee*, 22 April 1912 and Mina Wylie's Diary of the journey to Stockholm. (Mina Wylie Papers, ML). In both sources, the name of the boat Mina Wylie sailed on is given as the *Malwa*. In secondary records of this event, the name of the boat usually appears as the *Malvia*.

## CONCLUSION

Miss Fanny Durack is the first Australian petticoat to represent this continent (officially) in great sporting events in the Old World... She's a fine, understanding miss, with the clear eye of perfect health, and a figure that shows no symptoms of ropes and athletic muscles, abnormal development, or any other nightmare that threatens the Fat.<sup>1</sup>

Sport is a complex phenomenon which acts as an important agent of both social change and social control and modifies and defines female roles in society at large. Sport creates and reflects tensions surrounding definitions of sex and gender roles, and perhaps more clearly than any other institution reveals how status, functions and power are assigned on the basis of biological differences.

Women's swimming, the graceful, "no sweat" sport, crept up on the conservative arbiters of 19th century behaviour. By virtue of its long association with health, its "hidden" effort and its "hidden" dress, women's swimming avoided the censure and outrage heaped upon the more overtly threatening sports of athletics and cycling - those sports which threatened to transgress the bounds of acceptable women's behaviour. Women's swimming remained free of the constraints of fashion and "respectable" behaviour which restricted the more public, fashionable "hit-and-giggle" pastimes. Offering the promise of a healthy and vigorous race, without sullyng the "charm of refined womanhood", women's practice of the natatorial art was the acceptable face of female physical activity.

Approved by the public, the experts, the press, and certainly by the entrepreneurs, women's competitive swimming was allowed to develop unhampered throughout the 19th century. Its emergence as a fully fledged competitive sport in the 20th century with its practitioners

exhibiting grit, determination, ambition, and battling for honours with no holds barred - and yet socially sanctioned - epitomises the contradictions and ambivalences surrounding the development of female physical emancipation. Women's competitive swimming incorporated the masculine qualities of stamina, endurance, striving for physical excellence; yet conducted in a cool, aquatic environment, it retained an image of "feminine" gracefulness and non- exertion. It was only by its retention of these outward signs of "ideal femininity" that the real effort behind the practice of the sport escaped censure.

As McCrone has said, sport reflects as well as creates tensions surrounding gender roles, and in 1902, 1906 and again in 1912, societal perceptions of the place and aims of womanhood were reflected both in the challenges made by this woman's sport and in the responses to them. In 1902, women's reclamation of the right to pursue physical activities at a more serious level led to the first organisational moves within Sydney women's competitive swimming - moves which were met by the male branch of the sport at first with concern, and then conditional approval. Women were to be permitted to organise themselves at local level, within the domestic sphere, but they were not permitted to have a voice in the executive policy and decision-making affairs of men.

In 1906, with this women's competitive sport flourishing openly, there were two further challenges made and met. The first was caused by the increasing popularity of this sport - as shown in the growing number of women's clubs - posing an administrative burden to the NSW Amateur Swimming Association (NSWASA). The solution arrived at reflected the established order of the time. Rather than admit female representatives to the supreme body, which would have been a conferring of equality, the NSWASA made a proposal to the women's swimming clubs to form a separate women's controlling body. A "mother" body which, although given charge of its "daughter" clubs, was chosen by - and would remain subordinate to - the head of the competitive swimming family, the NSWASA.

The second challenge of 1906 was posed by a combination of the dress modifications made by the women taking the sport more seriously and the non-serious intentions of some members of the male public who were allowed to view these young women. This was a more direct threat to the established order, to the “modest” and “moral” ideals of womanhood. In response, the doyennes of the NSWLASA took the action of a conservative, essentially Victorian mother in an Edwardian age, and removed the women from the threat. This retreat into a defensive, segregated, non-threatening mode of respectability was a protective move, and the seriousness of the women’s competition was in no way hampered. But the response once again reflected the tensions surrounding the prevailing images of ideal womanhood.

By 1912, a good proportion of Australian middle class society - whether fired by progressive, feminist or nationalistic ideas - was ready for the proposal for international female sporting representation. When two women dared threaten not only to appear in public dressed in their streamlined racing costumes, but also to break into that hitherto Australian male-only domain - competition in the international arena, the support from the public, given voice by the press, carried the move. The outcome of the struggles of 1912 was the lauding of Australia’s first national sporting heroines, and a redefinition of the character and capabilities of women.

Women’s competitive swimming reflected the changes in contemporary society both in the challenges it posed, and in the levels of public support and censure those challenges elicited. Now it had also served to create a new acceptable option for women - that of striving for physical excellence. But did this women’s sport which had “crept in the back way”, the sport which allowed the development of the female competitive spirit within the confines of an outwardly acceptable activity, have any real ramifications for women’s emancipation? In the final analysis was it a “big splash” or a “minor ripple” in the movement toward greater equality - both sporting and otherwise?

The answer to these questions remains somewhat ambivalent. Women's competitive swimming had been, like all women's emancipations, caught in a cleft stick. To be able to grow, it had to operate from within the established order, an order in which many of its participants believed. Therefore its every challenge to the boundaries of the basic biological definitions which underlay this social order had to be accompanied by a reassurance of overriding femininity, by behaviour, dress or ultimate aims. This constant reinforcement of the acceptable feminine aspects of the sport - grace, smoothness, hidden effort - ultimately served to define its competitiveness, and consequently its achievements, as something qualitatively different from, and thus secondary to, those of men's.

To date, there had been little investigation of, or speculation on, how the Durack and Wylie successes of 1912 contributed to the development of women's competitive swimming, or on the links between the advances of this sport and the subsequent opening up of public sporting options for women? Apart from a few hints that the achievements of 1912 were not really consolidated until the 1950s - other than a subsequent, successful round of international appearances by the two champions themselves - as with all other fields of women's sporting endeavour, substantial research on the further development and ramifications of women's competitive swimming still waits to be done.

Even if it was only countenanced by the established order due to its non-confronting essential "femininity", and even if the advances made were not immediately acted upon or needed further consolidation, the early development and successes of women's competitive swimming without doubt helped wrest for women the option to be physically competitive. The rise of women's competitive swimming in Sydney pushed further the boundaries which defined the physical and mental capabilities of "ideal" womanhood. This, the acceptable face of women's sport, had brought about an expansion of women's "social space".

## NOTES:

1. Alan Clarkson papers, (unreferenced quote from the *Bulletin*).
2. Kathleen McCrone, *Playing the Game; Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women 1807- 1914*, The University Press of Kentucky, USA, 1988, p.1.
3. See Appendix C for further details of the introduction of women's sporting events to the Olympic Games.

## APPENDICES

All information in the following appendices has been compiled from:

Adrienne Blue, *Grace Under Pressure; The Emergence of Women in Sport*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1987.

Andrew Dettre, *Australia at the Olympics*, Paul Hamlyn, Sydney, 1980.

Reet Howell, *Aussie Gold the story of Australia at the Olympics*, Books Waterloo, Qld., 1988.

## APPENDIX A

### WOMEN

#### Comparative Swimming Times for 100 metres Freestyle 1902-1992

1902	.....	Annette Kellerman (AUS)	... 86:5	.....	Sydney
1912	.....	Fanny Durack (AUS)	.....66.0	.....	Sydney
1912	.....	Fanny Durack (AUS)	.....82.15	...	Stockholm Olympics*
1956	.....	Dawn Fraser (AUS)	.....61.2	.....	Melbourne Olympics
1964	.....	Dawn Fraser (AUS)	.....59.5	.....	Tokyo Olympics
1980	.....	Barbara Krause (GDR)	.....54.79	...	Moscow Olympics
1992	.....	Yong Zhung (China)	.....54.64	....	Barcelona Olympics

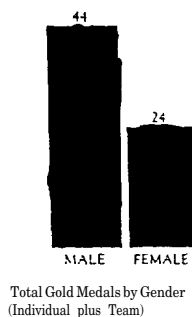
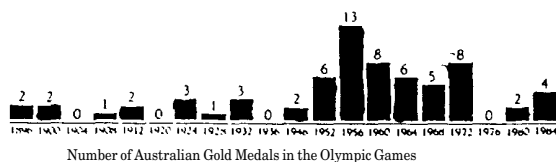
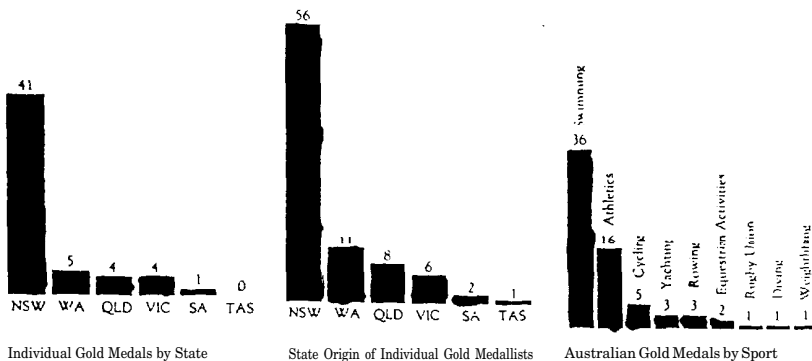
### MEN

1896	.....	Alfred Hajos (HUN)	.....82.2	.....	Athens Olympics
1906	.....	Charles Daniels (USA)	.....73.4	.....	USA
1912	.....	Duke Kahanamoku (USA)	..63.4	.....	Stockholm Olympics
1956	.....	Jon Henricks (AUS)	.....55.4	.....	Melbourne Olympics
1980	.....	Jorg Wothe (GDR)	.....50.4	.....	Moscow Olympics
1992	.....	Alexandre Popov (United Team)	49.02		Barcelona Olympics

\* This time was slow because Durack swam into the side of the baths during the race

## APPENDIX B

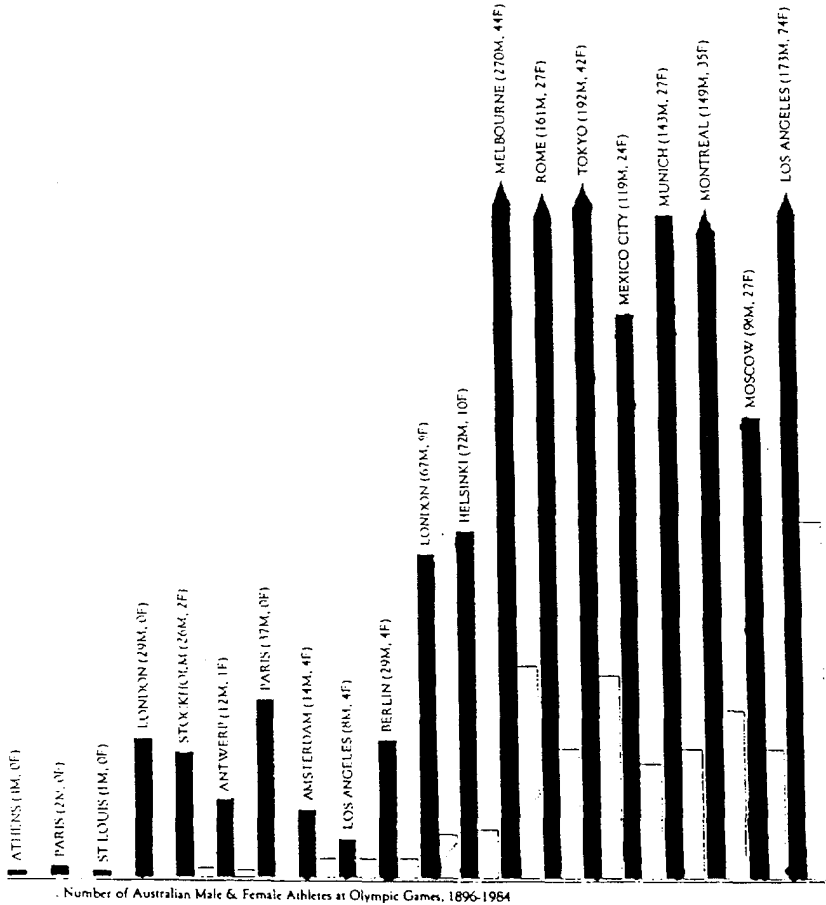
### AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATION AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES 1896-1984



Reproduced from R. Howell. Aussie Gold: the story of Australia at the Olympics. Brooks Waterloo, Qld., 1988, pp. 357 & 358.

## APPENDIX B

### AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATION AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES 1896-1984



Reproduced from R Howell, Aussie Gold: the story of Australia at the Olympics, Brooks Waterloo, Qld., 1988, p. 359.

## APPENDIX C

### THE INTRODUCTION OF EVENTS FOR WOMEN TO THE OLYMPIC GAMES

1896-1928

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Events</b>
1896	None	None
1900	Tennis	Singles Mixed
	Golf	
1904	Archery	
	Tennis	Singles Mixed
	Figure Skating	Singles Pairs
1912	Swimming	100m Freestyle 4 x 100 Freestyle Relay Platform Diving
	Tennis	Singles Mixed
1920	Swimming	100 Freestyle 4 x 100m Freestyle Relay 400m Freestyle Platform Diving Springboard Diving
	Tennis	Singles Doubles

## APPENDIX C

### THE INTRODUCTION OF EVENTS FOR WOMEN TO THE OLYMPIC GAMES

1896-1928

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Events</b>	
1924	Swimming	100m Freestyle	
		4 x 100m Freestyle Relay	
		400m Freestyle	
		100m Backstroke	
		200m Breaststroke	
		Platform Diving	
Tennis	Tennis	Springboard Diving	
		Singles	
		Doubles	
Fencing	Fencing	Individual Foils	
1928	Swimming	100m Freestyle	
		4 x 100m Freestyle Relay	
		400m Freestyle	
		100m Backstroke	
		200m Breaststroke	
		Platform Diving	
	Tennis	Tennis	Springboard Diving
			Singles
			Doubles
	Fencing	Fencing	Individual Foils
	Athletics	Athletics	100m
			800m
400m Relay			
High Jump			
Discuss Throw			

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Grant, Vic, Member of the Union of Old Swimmers, Former Planning Officer with Sydney Water Board.

Griffith, Frank, Champion swimmer. Father lessee of Domain Ladies' Baths, 1908-1938. Mother Vice- President of Metropolitan Ladies' Club (formed 1908).

Hyde, Doris, Champion Swimmer. Official with the NSW Ladies' Amateur Swimming Association (NSWLASA), 1920 -1964. Family took over the lease of McGyver's Baths at Coogee from the Wylie family in 1918. Mother founder of the Coogee Ladies' Swimming Club in 1920.

Johnston, Philomena (nee Mealing), Swam for Australia at 1928 and 1932 Olympics. Silver Medal winner at 1932 Olympics.

Knight, Ken, Secretary and Founder Member of the Union of Old Swimmers.

Williams, May, Official with the NSWLASA 1930 -1964, Official with the NSWASA 1964 -1963. Olympic and Commonwealth Games Official, 1930 - 1968.

Williams, Bill, Champion swimmer and Water Polo Player. Official of the NSWASA 1926-1968 Olympic and Commonwealth Games Official, 1926-1968. Life Member of the NSWASA.

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the  $\mathbb{R}^n$ -valued function  $\mathbf{f}$  is a solution of the system (1) if and only if  $\mathbf{f}$  is a solution of the system (2). The system (2) is called the *variational system* of (1) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ . The matrix  $\mathbf{A}(t, \mathbf{x})$  is called the *variational matrix* of (1) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ .

Let  $\mathbf{f}$  be a solution of (1) and let  $\mathbf{v}$  be a vector in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . Then  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the variational system (2) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$  if and only if  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the system

$$\mathbf{v}' = \mathbf{A}(t, \mathbf{x})\mathbf{v} \quad (3)$$

at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ . The system (3) is called the *linearized system* of (1) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ .

Let  $\mathbf{f}$  be a solution of (1) and let  $\mathbf{v}$  be a vector in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . Then  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the variational system (2) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$  if and only if  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the system

$$\mathbf{v}' = \mathbf{A}(t, \mathbf{x})\mathbf{v} \quad (4)$$

at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ . The system (4) is called the *linearized system* of (1) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ .

Let  $\mathbf{f}$  be a solution of (1) and let  $\mathbf{v}$  be a vector in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . Then  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the variational system (2) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$  if and only if  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the system

$$\mathbf{v}' = \mathbf{A}(t, \mathbf{x})\mathbf{v} \quad (5)$$

at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ . The system (5) is called the *linearized system* of (1) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ .

Let  $\mathbf{f}$  be a solution of (1) and let  $\mathbf{v}$  be a vector in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . Then  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the variational system (2) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$  if and only if  $\mathbf{v}$  is a solution of the system

$$\mathbf{v}' = \mathbf{A}(t, \mathbf{x})\mathbf{v} \quad (6)$$

at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ . The system (6) is called the *linearized system* of (1) at the point  $(t, \mathbf{x})$ .