

“Bats, Balls and Books: Baseball and Higher Education for Women at Three Eastern Women’s Colleges, 1866-1891”¹

Capt. Debra A. Shattuck
Department of History
USAF Academy

“They are getting up various clubs now for out-of-door exercise,” Vassar student, Annie Glidden informed her brother, John, on April 20th, 1866. “They have a floral society, boat clubs, and base-ball clubs. I belong to one of the latter, and enjoy it highly I can assure you.”² Glidden’s letter may well have startled her brother, who must have wondered how school could have corrupted his sister so quickly. Annie had not even completed her first year of college and baseball was hardly an approved sport for mid-nineteenth century women. Annie, apparently enjoying the bewilderment she was causing John, announced that she and her teammates were considering playing men’s teams: “We think after we have practiced a little, we will let the Atlantic Club play a match with us. Or, it may be, we will consent to play a match with the students from College Hill, [a local boys’ preparatory school] but we have not decided yet.”³ Whether she realized it or not, Annie Glidden and her twenty-two classmates on the Laurel and Abenakis Base Ball Clubs at Vassar College were among the first women baseball players in the United States. Glidden’s letter was written just over 20 years after Alexander Cartwright codified rules for his New York Knickerbockers, and just seven years after Amherst and Williams held the first men’s intercollegiate baseball match in June 1859.

Until recently, scholars paid little serious attention to women baseball players. Traditional histories of baseball, like Harold Seymour’s pathbreaking studies, *Baseball: The Early Years* and *Baseball: The Golden Age*, and David Voigt’s *American Baseball* trilogy, rarely contained more than brief mention of women players.⁴ Women players were generally dismissed as baseball oddities

1. Research for this article was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Frank J. Seiler Research Laboratory, -United States Air Force Academy.

2. Annie Glidden to John Glidden, 20 April 1866, Annie Glidden papers, Vassar College Special Collections, Poughkeepsie, New York (hereafter cited as VCSC).

3. Ibid.

4. Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Quentin Voigt, *American Baseball*, 3 vols. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966-1971; University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1983).

whose appearance on the diamond was an anomaly that did not deserve serious scrutiny. Accounts of nineteenth century women players generally consisted of little more than reprints of derogatory comments made about them in the newspapers. This trivialization of the experiences of women baseball players was fairly typical in baseball literature. That began to change in the 1970s and 1980s as scholars realized that women's involvement with the national game was much more extensive, numerically, geographically, and chronologically, than previously believed. From the twenty-three young collegians who played baseball at Vassar in 1866, to the more than five hundred athletes who played in Philip Wrigley's All-American Girls Baseball League (AAGBL) between 1943 and 1954, to the uncounted women who still play today despite resistance to their actions, women across the country have found ways to play what social custom decreed, and still considers, a man's game.⁵

Much of the new interest in women baseball players has been focused on the All-American Girls Baseball League. In 1987, a group of former players organized a players association and began efforts to track down all their former teammates, coaches, and chaperones. They also began lobbying to have their league inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame—a dream that became a reality in October 1988 when the league was inducted into the Hall of Fame and a permanent display of league memorabilia was opened. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, hundreds of articles about the league were published in the popular media. Most were “local color” pieces for newspapers written by journalists who had discovered a former player living in their community. Some were more scholarly efforts.⁶ None documents the history of the league and its players as thoroughly as is warranted. The most thorough account of the AAGBL is Merrie Fidler's unpublished masters thesis, “The Development and Decline of the All-American Girls Baseball League, 1943-1954.”⁷ Fidler's study is a valuable resource for scholars interested primarily in the organization and structure of the league and its teams. The thesis does not delve into social issues, such as the class and background of players and, as yet, there are no

5. It should be noted that this article focuses exclusively on women who played baseball, not softball. The experiences of the two groups are different. When various versions of baseball, such as indoor baseball and softball, appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women physical educators quickly adopted the games as suitable for their students. Consequently, these games never developed baseball's masculine reputation; girls and women could play them freely, adhering to the same social guidelines they followed when playing games like tennis and basketball. Women baseball players faced a different set of circumstances since their activity was considered outside the bounds of social propriety. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to distinguish between women who played what they knew to be a socially acceptable sport and those who played what they knew to be outside the bounds of social propriety because many women baseball players did not use official men's rules—balls were larger, basepaths were shorter, rules were modified. Nonetheless, these women (and/or observers of the activity) labelled the sport being played “baseball.” Even the All-American Girls Baseball League (1943-1954) used modified basepaths and larger baseballs during much of its existence. Yet, the players considered themselves baseball players, not softball players. For the purposes of this article, women baseball players either played by official men's rules or perceived that they were playing a “man's” game.

6. A few of the better articles in this category are: Susan M. Cahn, “No Freaks, No Amazons, No Boyish Bobs,” *Chicago History* 18 (Spring 1989): 26-39; Jay Feldman, “Glamour Ball,” *Sports Heritage* (May/June 1987): 59-69; Sue Macy, “War, Women, and Pro Baseball,” *Scholastic Search* 14 (30 April 1982): 8-11; W.G. Nicholson, “Women's Pro Baseball Packed the Stands Then Johnny Came Marching Home,” *womenSports* 3 (April 1976): 22-24.

7. Merrie A. Fidler, “The Development and Decline of the All-American Girls Baseball League, 1943-1954” (M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1976).

published studies addressing these issues. At least three film documentaries have been done on the league and, in July 1992, Penny Marshall's feature film, *A League of Their Own*, opened in theaters throughout the country.⁸ The latter film, starring Tom Hanks, Geena Davis, and Madonna, among others, will doubtless generate even more public interest in the league. Despite growing popular interest in the AAGBL, there is a dearth of quality scholarship on women baseball players in general. This may be changing. The Society for American Baseball Research has established a committee devoted to documenting the history of women's involvement with the game. Historian Debra Shattuck and sociologist Gai Berlage have spent several years researching women baseball players and both continue to publish articles on the subject.⁹

The history of women baseball players offers scholars an opportunity to more accurately portray the role of baseball in American culture. Baseball was being touted as the national pastime as early as the mid-nineteenth century. Since then, the game has been analyzed, glorified, and mythified by scholars, players, fans, poets, writers, philosophers, etc. Through the years, the one consistent omission in the literature of baseball has been any assessment of what the game means to women. Women represent half of the American population and yet little is known about their perceptions of the great "American" pastime. Researchers have begun to add women to the historical record of baseball but must move beyond that if they are ever to understand the ramifications of women's involvement with a game so closely associated with American culture and the male ethos.

In 1979, in her essay, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," Gerda Lerner urged historians to move beyond writing "compensatory history"-history in which a few notable women are inserted into the record to atone for years of historical scholarship that virtually ignored women.¹⁰ In a separate essay, she noted that the history of women tends to be distorted because women's experiences are often "refracted through the lens of men's observa-

8. In 1986, the documentary "A League of Their Own" appeared on Public Broadcast Stations throughout the country. Penny Marshall later purchased the rights to that documentary and produced a feature film by the same title. The documentary is available at the official league archives currently housed at the Northern Indiana Historical Society in South Bend, Indiana. Two other documentaries available at the archives are "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend," (1986) and "When Dreams Come True," (1988).

9. See Debra A. Shattuck, "Playing a Man's Game: Women and Baseball in the United States, 1866-1954," *Baseball History 2: An Annual of Original Baseball Research*, ed. Peter Levine (Westbury, CT: Meckler Inc., 1989), 57-77; "Women in Baseball," *Total Baseball*, ed. John Thorn and Pete Palmer (New York: Warner Books, 1989). Both of these articles are chronological surveys of the history of women baseball players; they do not address broader social issues. Two papers presented by this author at conferences of the North American Society for Sport History do address these issues. These papers, available from the author are: "True Womanhood on the Baseball Diamond: The All-American Girls Baseball League," paper presented to the North American Society for Sport History, Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 1990 and "Striking Out For a New Tradition: Baseball at Vassar College, 1866-1900," paper presented to the North American Society for Sport History, Loyola University, Chicago, 1991. Gail Berlage's publications are "The Socio-Cultural History of the Origin of Women's Baseball at the Women's Colleges During the Victorian Period," *Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and the American Culture: 1989*, ed. Alvin Hall, (Westport, CT: The Meckler Corp., 1991); "Five Forgotten Women in American Baseball History," *Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and the American Culture: 1990*, ed. Alvin Hall, (Westport, CT: The Meckler Corp., 1991); "The All American Girls Professional Baseball League," *Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and the American Culture: 1991*, (forthcoming 1992).

10. Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 145-147.

tions.”¹¹ (This has been a common deficiency in previous treatments of women baseball players). According to Lerner the true history of women must chronicle “their ongoing functioning in [a] male defined world *on their own terms*.”¹² The history of women baseball players is at the “compensatory” stage. Even Harold Seymour’s most recent work, *Baseball: The People’s Game*, which contains several chapters on women players, fails to adequately address the social issues relevant to this subject. The study ends in the 1920s and does little more than chronicle the existence of women players.¹³ Using Lerner’s model, the “true history” of women players requires establishing what baseball meant or represented to the women playing it. By shifting the focus of women’s baseball history from the spectators to the players, historians can determine how women players functioned in the “male defined world” of baseball. They will then better understand how women have functioned in a society traditionally defined in terms of male attributes and aspirations.

The true history of women baseball players is based on two broad historical questions: Who played baseball, and what did the game mean to the women who played it? Answering these questions involves assessing how factors, such as social class, ethnicity, and family background, have influenced the meaning of baseball for various groups of women. It also means analyzing the extent of this influence and determining what, if any, similarities existed among groups of women players separated by time, geography and circumstance. Did baseball mean the same to collegians as it meant to noncollegians? Did it mean the same to women in the 1860s as it did to women in the 1920s? Were women players at coeducational institutions motivated by different factors to play baseball than their contemporaries at women’s colleges? Did women players in the south feel differently about the game than those in New England or the mid-west? Is it possible to create a profile of the “typical” woman baseball player? These questions and others await the careful scrutiny of scholars.

This article focuses on a particular subset of women who played baseball at three of the eastern women’s colleges between 1866 and 1891.¹⁴ These women organized a number of teams at Vassar, Smith, and Mount Holyoke colleges and left firsthand accounts of the experience in diaries, letters, Class books, and school newspapers. Though separated through time and geography, these women displayed similar attitudes toward baseball that were influenced in large part by shared social circumstances. This article explains why these women played what they knew to be a “man’s game” and analyzes what the experience meant to them.

Baseball’s reputation as a “man’s game” was firmly established by the mid-

11. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past*,” in *ibid.*, 160.

12. Lerner, “Placing Women in History,” 148.

13. Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The People’s Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Students of the subject will likely be disappointed by the book’s lack of documentation.

14. This article is not intended to draw general conclusions about baseball at all women’s colleges or at coeducational colleges. Women played baseball at colleges throughout the country and it is likely that the experiences of these women differed depending on when and where they played the game. Preliminary research does indicate, however, that the experiences of women baseball players at other eastern women’s colleges, like Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, and Wellesley, mirrored those of the players at Vassar, Smith, and Mount Holyoke.

nineteenth century. The game was a sweaty, no-holds barred, celebration of strength, speed, and finesse. In 1865, one year before Glidden's revelation to her brother, *Harpers Weekly* proclaimed: "There is no nobler or manlier game than baseball."¹⁵ Women who challenged this definition of baseball by playing it publicly on noncollegiate teams that barnstormed the country in the latter half of the nineteenth century, endured a steady stream of verbal and written insults from spectators and journalists.¹⁶ Women collegians could not be unaware of baseball's masculine reputation. What motivated them to risk the censure of both the general public and school administrators by playing the game?

One might surmise that women collegians did not face the same dilemma as noncollegians concerning baseball since they could play on relatively secluded school grounds, hidden from public view. One might also assume that school administrators would be anxious for their charges to expand women's sphere as much as possible. Such was not the case. Women's colleges were under a veritable microscope in nineteenth century America. Critics of higher education for women sought to prove that women's colleges were destroying students' health and threatening the moral foundations of society by encouraging women to seek opportunity and fulfillment outside the home. Administrators at the women's colleges countered by creating model physical training programs to improve students' health even as they reinforced many traditional standards of feminine decorum. Women collegians found themselves in the middle of a raging debate over the appropriateness of higher education for women. They were acutely aware that everything they did was subjected to close public scrutiny. One student at Bryn Mawr in 1897 lamented: "As women, and at a woman's college, the criticism to which our every act lies exposed, is invariably severe, and might even with justice be called unfriendly."¹⁷

The issue of how much education was too much education for women was an old one. Plato, once commented that "the female sex must share with the male, to the greatest extent possible, both in education and in all else."¹⁸ Such open-mindedness was rare prior to the late nineteenth century, however. It was more common for individuals, both male and female, to argue that women had no need for higher education, since their duties were limited to the care of their spouses and children. Women in colonial America could expect little beyond grade school education in reading and writing. While advocates of this status quo argued that women had no need for additional education, reformers like Lydia Sigourney, Abigail Adams, Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, and Mary Lyon countered that because women were entrusted with the nurture and education of the nation's children, they had to be well educated. By emphasize-

15. Reprinted in Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 210.

16. There were several noncollegiate women's teams playing publicly during the period covered in this article. New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Springfield, Illinois each had at least one women's team prior to 1885. Their exploits were covered in local papers and widely read publications like *The New York Times* and *Harpers Weekly*. See Debra A. Shattuck, "Playing a Man's Game," 57-77.

17. "Editorial," *The [Bryn Mawr] Lantern* (1897), 11.

18. Quoted in Shirley Nelson Kersey, *Classics in the Education of Girls and Women* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 314.

ing the argument that education would make women better wives, mothers and, later, teachers, educational reformers succeeded in establishing hundreds of high schools, normal schools and colleges for women by the end of the nineteenth century.

Early criticism of higher education for women centered on its pointlessness. Reformers addressed these concerns by designing curricula for girls and women that emphasized domestic skills and social graces rather than mathematics, science and philosophy. By mid-century, however, critics were alarmed to see a proliferation of coeducational institutions and women's colleges that offered women the same course of study pursued by men.¹⁹ Mary Sharp College, established in 1851 in Winchester, Tennessee as the Tennessee and Alabama Female Institute, was an early example of a new shift in women's educational goals. The founder, Vermont native, Z. C. Graves, promised to create a 'school for young ladies of a higher grade than any previously known to exist . . . a college where ladies may have the privilege of a classical education.'²⁰ Many educators shared Graves's goals and founded women's colleges that increasingly copied the curricula at men's colleges.

Having initially supported education for women as preparation for their proper sphere, critics hastened to stave off this new threat to the social order. It was one thing to teach women to be better mothers and teachers; it was quite another to expose them to knowledge that, once learned, might induce women to enter men's sphere. '[G]irls are being prepared daily, by superior education,' to engage, not in child bearing and house work, but in clerkships, telegraphy, newspaper writing, school teaching, etc.," complained Charles Eliot, President of Harvard College, in 1882. "And many are learning to believe that, if they can but have their rights,' they will be enabled to compete with men at the bar, in the pulpit, the Senate, the bench," he added.²¹ Anxious to preserve the social status quo, critics began arguing that higher education was dangerous for women. The notion that higher education would physically and mentally destroy women was perhaps given its widest dissemination in Dr. Edward H. Clarke's bestseller, *Sex in Education; or a Fair Chance for The Girls*, first published in 1873 and reprinted over a dozen times.

Sex in Education was a scathing attack on educational programs for women that attempted to duplicate those for men. Clarke asserted that girls could not pursue all the studies boys pursue and "retain uninjured health and a future secure from neuralgia, uterine disease, hysteria, and other derangements of the nervous system . . ." He called the educational methods of schools and colleges "one of the most important causes" of "the thousand ills" he believed plagued women. To emphasize his point, Clarke described the "crowds of pale, bloodless female faces, that suggest consumption, scrofula, anemia, and neu-

19. Thomas Woody notes in *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, vol. 2 (New York: The Science Press, 1929) that 60 percent of the 107 women's schools operating between 1830 and 1870 taught logic, 80 percent taught psychology and ethics, and 90 percent taught chemistry and physics. See Barbara M. Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 23.

20. Quoted in Woody, *A History of Women's Education*, 2: 141-142.

21. Quoted in Woody, *A History of Women's Education*, 1: 122.

ralgia” he saw around him daily and concluded that “our present system of educating girls is the cause of this pallor and weakness.”²² Clarke’s treatise was an immediate bestseller and intensified the debate over higher education for women.

The administrators at the women’s colleges took criticisms like Clarke’s very seriously and did everything in their power to motivate students to exercise.²³ This was an interesting contrast to the situation at men’s colleges where, according to Ronald A. Smith in *Sports and Freedom*, administrators often resisted student efforts to expand extracurricular activities like sports. School officials felt they had to regulate student behavior and keep academics foremost in students’ minds.²⁴ At the women’s colleges, administrators were more likely to echo Smith College president, L. Clarke Seelye’s concern that women students “are more disposed to study and less inclined to exercise.”²⁵ From the early nineteenth century on, advocates of women’s education, like Willard, Beecher, and Lyon, had consistently promoted physical education as an imperative adjunct to better academic curricula for women. “[T]here is something radically wrong in the present system of education among young ladies,” editorialized a contributor to the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* in December 1837. “Their physical condition does not receive from parents and teachers that consideration which it deserves.”²⁶ Nineteen years later, in her *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, Catharine Beecher observed that the “standard of health among American women is so low that few have a correct idea of what a healthy woman is.”²⁷ Beecher blamed parents’ lack of concern for the physical education of their daughters as a leading contributor to the problem. Nonetheless, parents continued to neglect the physical needs of their daughters during their formative years. “The freshman comes to college utterly ignorant of the fundamental laws of hygiene,” observed Vassar alumna, Sophia Foster Richardson, in 1897. “It is exceptional when the physical examination does not reveal marked defects of the nature of weak backs, poor chests, round shoulders and anemia. She is unskilled and unpracticed in any athletic exercise, even in that of walking.”²⁸ To reverse this disturbing trend, virtually every eastern women’s college developed a formal physical training program that encouraged, or ordered, students to exercise.

22. Edward H. Clarke, *Sex in Education; or a Fair Chance For The Girls*, 2d ed. (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1873), 18, 22.

23. For a case study of how administrators at one women’s college (Wellesley) responded to charges that higher education would destroy women’s health, see Martha H. Verbrugge’s *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 139-161.

24. The tension between administrators and students at the men’s colleges over appropriate behavior and use of free time is a major theme of Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

25. “Annual Report of the President of Smith College to the Trustees, 1875-76,” p. 2, Smith College Archives, Northampton, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as SCA).

26. Quoted in Woody, *History of Women’s Education*, 2: 99.

27. Reprinted in Willystine Goodsell, ed., *Pioneers of Women’s Education in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1931), 3-4.

28. Sophia Foster Richardson, “Tendencies in Athletics for Women in Colleges & Universities.” A Paper Presented to the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, October 31, 1896, *Appleton’s Popular Science Monthly* 50 (February 1897): 526.

Young women arriving at college during this period found themselves in a bewildering, and even frightening, situation. Many were away from home for the first time in their lives. Most had lived an overwhelmingly sedentary lifestyle since doctors and parents had warned them that vigorous exercise would permanently damage their reproductive organs; long dresses and tightly cinched corsets further deterred them from all but the most moderate exercise.²⁹ Now they were at college and trained physical educators and resident physicians were urging them to lay aside their corsets (and their inhibitions) and exercise as they never had before. Gradually, apprehension gave way to understanding and these women learned to enjoy, rather than fear, physical exertion. Some of these women gained enough confidence in their physical abilities to test them at a sport generally played only by men—a sport one player termed, “contraband pleasure”—baseball.³⁰

Vassar College, where Annie Glidden and her teammates played baseball in the spring of 1866, boasted one of the most elaborate physical training programs for women then in existence. “[E]xtensive arrangements are to be made on the grounds for various gymnastics and athletic exercise, healthful recreation and physical accomplishments suitable for young ladies,” Vassar College benefactor, Matthew Vassar promised in April 1865. True to his word, the *First Annual Catalogue* advertised instruction in calisthenics, “Riding, Boating, Swimming, Skating and Gardening, with such a variety of feminine sports and games as will tend to diversify the physical exercises and make them . . . attractive and beneficial to the students.”³¹ One of the first three buildings constructed at Vassar was a gymnasium and by 1869 administrators required students to exercise for one hour per day, every other day of which had to be spent in the gymnasium performing prescribed calisthenics.³²

Matthew Vassar undoubtedly would not have included baseball in his list of activities “suitable for young ladies,” and school officials did not publicize the existence of the Laurel and Abenakis teams on their campus. When President John H. Raymond delivered his first annual report to the trustees, he noted “an unusual proportion of our students’ time has been spent in healthful out-door exercises,” but stopped short of specifically mentioning baseball. Instead he identified, “Skating, Boating, Gardening, besides athletic games in the play-

29. There is a growing body of literature devoted to assessing how medical advice to women influenced exercise and sport for women in the nineteenth century. One of the best articles on the subject is ‘Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, “The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of American History*, 60 (September 1973): 332-56. See also Patricia Vertinsky’s *The Eternally Wounded Woman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), ch. 7, esp. 46-59, and Patricia Vertinsky, “Body Shapes: The Role of the Medical Establishment in Informing Female Exercise and Physical Education in Nineteenth-Century North America,” in *From “Fair Sex” To Feminism: Sport & the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Era*, ed. J. A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park (Great Britain: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1987), 256-281 for a discussion of professional medical advice to young women in the late nineteenth century.

30. Richardson, “Tendencies in Athletics,” 521.

31. Quoted in Harriet Isabel Ballintine, *The History of Physical Training at Vassar College 1865-1915* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Lansing & Broas, [1915], 17, and Dorothy S. Ainsworth, *The History of Physical Education in Colleges for Women* (New York: Barnes, 1930), 14.

32. E. M. Powell, “Physical Culture at Vassar College,” *The Herald of Health and Journal of Physical Culture* 13 (March 1869): 133-134.

ground.”³³ Other sources indicate that baseball was one of the “athletic games” played on the playground or “circle” as students referred to it. While Vassar administrators did not openly acknowledge that their students were playing baseball, they, apparently, did not specifically ban the sport. In the spring of 1867, thirteen students (none of whom had played the previous year on the Laurel and Abenakis teams) organized the “Precocious Ball Club.” The team’s name may well have reflected students’ perceptions of how their activity was viewed by others.³⁴

None of Vassar’s first three baseball teams survived more than a single season. Beginning in 1875, however, baseball experienced something of a resurgence there—this time with the support of at least two school officials. “Could baseball be called improvements or the reverse?” asked the editors of *The Vassar-Miscellany* in October 1875. “As mankind is divided on that subject, we will not enlarge on our advancement in that respect.”³⁵ If the editors (one of whom was a baseball player herself)³⁶ had “enlarged” on the subject, they would have mentioned that Vassar students had organized at least seven baseball clubs in the Fall of 1875. Sophia Foster Richardson, (Vassar, Class of 1879) was one of the students on those teams. Richardson attributed the creation of the teams her freshman year to “a few quiet suggestions from a resident physician, wise beyond her generation.”³⁷

The resident physician was Dr. Helen Webster who, according to Richardson, encouraged students to continue playing ball even after one of the players was injured in a game. Another Vassar official who played a role in baseball’s reappearance at the school was Lilian Tappan, the Director of the Department of Physical Training. In June 1876, in her annual report to the college president, Tappan noted that, beginning in May, exercise in the gymnasium was abandoned and students were given the choice of either walking, gardening, boating, or playing croquet or “ball” to fulfill their one hour daily requirement for exercise.³⁸ The reference to “ball” in Tappan’s report was clarified in July when the *Vassar Miscellany* reported that physical training instructors were teaching baseball to students. According to the newspaper, instructors had decided to teach games to students to better motivate them to exercise. “Our manner of treading down the gravel walks could scarcely be called exercise even by a rigorous effort of the imagination,” noted one student.

33. “Report of the President of Vassar College to the Trustees, 1865-66,” n.p., VCSC.

34. The initial issue of *The Transcript* (June 1867), which replaced *The Vassariana* as the school newspaper, listed the names of the members of the Precocious Ball Club. It should be noted that, unlike the Laurel and Abenakis clubs, this baseball club may have been strictly a social club. In the second issue of *The Transcript* (May 1868), the editors write: “Once, too, we had a Base Ball Club.’ We fancy that the Editors of last summer’s *Transcript* contemplated with satisfaction the list of its officers; but only the memory of departed days’ reminds us of it now. We are assured by those well versed in such matters, that not a fun’ has been made under its jurisdiction during the College year.”

35. “Home Matters,” *The Vassar Miscellany* 5 (October 1875): 593.

36. Sarah Sheppard, who appears in the photograph of the “Resolutes,” served on the editorial staff of *The Vassar Miscellany* from June 1875 through April 1877. Her role on the paper may be one reason why baseball received so much coverage in that publication during 1875 and 1876 when several teams were playing on campus.

37. Richardson, “Tendencies in Athletics,” 521.

38. “Annual Report of the Department of Physical Training 1875-76,” Lilian Tappan to President John H. Raymond, 7 June 1876, Vassar College, VCSC.

Instructors gave the most physically fit students the choice of baseball, boating or quoits (a game similar to horseshoes) to fulfill their one hour daily requirement for exercise. Less fit students could choose from archery, croquet or graces (a game in which two players tossed hoops to one another and caught them on sticks).³⁹

It should be noted that students did not flock to play baseball even when it was offered as an approved elective. Statistics compiled by the Department of Physical Training for April 23 to June 27, 1877 indicate that only 25 of 338 students selected baseball as their optional form of exercise. Only gardening, with 24 students, attracted fewer. The other options in their order of popularity were: Walking (116), Croquet (108) and Boating (94).⁴⁰ There are a number of factors that explain students' hesitation to play baseball. Many students were concerned with how the activity would be viewed by outsiders. One student explained the difficulty recruiting players:

After hesitation on the part of some,
Who feared it really couldn't be done
With the prudence and propriety due
From ladies, in Miss Terry's view;
And some who feared the "cold world's" sneer,
That is, the part of it which is here,
and some who thought the Pokeysie papers
Would bristle all over with scandalous tapers.
Our energetic captain succeeded
In getting all the recruits she needed.⁴¹

The "cold world" was indeed looking on as Vassar students played baseball. "The public, so far as it knew of our playing, was shocked," recalled Richardson.⁴² Not all public opinion was as negative as the students feared, however. In February 1876, *The Syracuse Journal* observed: "The Vassar College girls are organizing base-ball clubs for the coming season." Four years later the same paper reprinted a poem from *The Princetonian* entitled, "After the Game," in which a Princeton senior teases a "Vassar maiden":

Quoth he to chaff her, I've heard they row.
Play base ball, swim and bend the bow,
But, really now, I'd like to know-
If they play foot-ball at Vassar?⁴³

Peer pressure was another factor deterring women collegians from playing baseball. "The garden of late has become the centre of attraction," observed a student in July 1876. "Round it cluster the croquet sets: Upon its circle the much condemned base ball clubs flourish and there the mighty [are] brought low." Another student wrote: "After a senior class has indulged in base ball clubs, and

39. The Vassar Miscellany 5 (July 1876): 774.

40. "Annual Report of the Department of Physical Training 1876-1877," Lilian Tappan to President John H. Raymond, June 1877, Vassar College, VCSC.

41. "Poem, Prophecy and History," 1878 Class Book, 23, VCSC.

42. Richardson, "Tendencies in Athletics," 522.

43. "College News," *The Syracuse Journal*, 10 February 1876, n.p.; "After the Game," reprinted from *The Princetonian* in *The Syracuse Journal* 11 February 1880.

spent the autumn in displaying its Gym suits and powers of running at match games,-after that, its reputation for dignity among the under graduates may be regarded as a minus quantity.”⁴⁴ Despite the negative connotations associated with playing baseball, a number of students did choose to risk their dignity on the baseball diamond. One group of students was so enthralled with the game and their association with it that they posed for a team photograph in the summer of 1876 to immortalize their initiative.

The women at Vassar who played baseball represented a fair cross-section of the student body as a whole. Of the thirty-six students whose names appear on the rosters of the Laurel, Abenakis and Precocious ball clubs, fourteen left school before the end of their second year. Eleven players eventually graduated, eight of those in 1869-fully 24 percent of the class! Eighteen of the twenty-five non-graduates were “special” or “preparatory” students.⁴⁵ Six of the nine players who posed for their team photograph in 1876 graduated; the other three were preparatory students who never graduated. The large number of special and preparatory students on these teams was consistent with student demographics. For example, 69 percent of the 386 women attending Vassar during the 1866-67 school year were either special or preparatory students, and exactly 69 percent of the players on the Precocious Ball Club, organized in the spring of 1867, fell into those categories.⁴⁶

The relatively high number of players on Vassar’s baseball teams who stayed in school less than two years was not unusual for the period. “It is very difficult to induce many parents to consent to their daughter’s absence from home during so long a period as is required to gain a collegiate education,” lamented President Seelye of Smith College in 1883. “They are much more inclined to send them for one or two years instead of four; and if sent for a short period they prefer the line of work arranged for special students.”⁴⁷ Even with the support of parents, however, many students simply could not cope, either physically or intellectually, with the rigors of higher education and withdrew after a few semesters. Others arrived on campus with no intention of staying the entire four years. Laura Arnzen, who played for the Laurel Club, informed her friends Caroline and Abigail Slade in November 1865: “And as for my staying four years, I don’t intend to stay but one although I know my father is anxious for me to do so but I’ll talk him out of that notion at Christmas.”⁴⁸ Arnzen’s desire to leave school may have been related to her observation the previous month that there were over thirty teachers and professors at Vassar but no “marriageable man.”⁴⁹

44. “Home Matters,” *The Vassar Miscellany* 5 (July 1876): 769; “Home Matters,” *The Vassar Miscellany* 5 (January 1876): 647.

45. Special students were those pursuing studies in music or art primarily. They were not required to follow the same curriculum designed for students in the regular academic program. Preparatory students were studying to qualify for enrollment in the regular program.

46. Information on students was compiled from the *Alumnae Register*. VCSC. See also “Statistics of Attendance and Graduation,” *The Vassar Miscellany* 7 [c. 1877], n.p.

47. Report of the president of Smith College to the trustees, 1882-1883, [n.p.], SCA.

48. Letter from Laura Arnzen, Vassar College, to Caroline and Abigail Slade, 14 November, 1865, VCSC.

49. Letter from Laura Arnzen, Vassar College, to Caroline and Abigail Slade, 22 October 1865, VCA



This photograph, taken in June 1876, depicts the members of one of several baseball clubs organized at Vassar College in early 1876. (Back row, left to right: May Gardner, Italia McKeague, Mollie Woodward, Ada Thurston. Front row, left to right: Sarah Sheppard, Gertie Crane, Mollie Dickey, Maude Gould, May Bryan). Vassar College Special Collections.

For many nineteenth century women, college was merely a transitional period between childhood and the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood. In her award winning *In the Company of Educated Women*, Barbara M. Solomon contends that the majority of women who attended college from the 1860s to the 1880s considered themselves “true” women even though they were expanding women’s sphere by attending college. These women had every

intention of marrying or pursuing traditional career paths for women, yet they relished the opportunity to expand intellectual and social horizons before voluntarily submitting to the “bonds of womanhood.”⁵⁰ Solomon believes that most young collegians in this era empathized with the heroine in Caroline Hentz’s fictional *Marcus Warland* (1852) when she pled: “Let me follow my own volitions, for at least three or four years to come. . . . Let my mind soar unfettered to the heights where I wish to stand” before being “tempted to wear those bonds which, though covered with roses and seemingly light as air, must be stronger than steel, and heavier than iron.”⁵¹

For many of the reasons just noted, it was not unusual for women to leave college prior to graduation. The high turnover of students during this period is just one reason why so many collegiate women’s baseball teams were short-lived. Richardson notes that of the seven or eight teams formed her freshman year, only two teams remained by her senior year. She attributed the sport’s decline to “too much pressure against it from disapproving mothers” and from growing interest in tennis.⁵² It is more likely that student attitudes toward baseball were more to blame. Baseball was a man’s game—“contraband pleasure” to be briefly enjoyed before devoting attention to more serious pursuits. By the spring of 1880, baseball at Vassar was a fading memory as students increasingly embraced tennis as their sport of choice. There is no evidence that Vassar students organized baseball teams again until 1909, although the baseball throw was added as an event at Field Day competitions beginning in 1895.

Just as baseball was fading from the scene at Vassar, students at Smith College were beginning to organize their own teams—teams that were as shortlived as those preceding them at Vassar. “Way back in Seventy Nine [1879], I was more or less active and full of fun,” wrote Minnie Stephens to her former school chums years later. “It seemed to me that we ought to have some lively games in the way of wholesome exercise so I got a few friends together and we organized a base ball club.”⁵³ Stephens and her teammates faced many of the same dilemmas Vassar students had as they arrived on campus amidst threats that their health and future happiness would be ruined by college.

Smith College, named for its founder and chief benefactress, Sophia Smith, opened exactly ten years after Vassar. The school, located in Northampton, Massachusetts, promised to raise academic standards for women to new heights and offered a curriculum equivalent to the best men’s colleges. At a time when over 80 percent of women’s colleges offered preparatory programs, to help

50. According to Nancy F. Cott in *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), Introduction, the salutation, “Thine in the bonds of womanhood” was composed by feminist pioneer Sarah M. Grimke in the 1830s to symbolize women bound together as women even as they were bound down by an increasingly pervasive “cult of domesticity.”

51. Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 31,95. Solomon’s book won the 1985 American Educational Studies Association Award.

52. Richardson, “Tendencies in Athletics,” 552.

53. Minnie Stephens [Allen] to her former classmates at Smith College, n.d., Minnie Stephens 1883 papers, SCA. [Note: The team Stephens helped organize actually debuted in 1880, not 1879.]

women meet collegiate academic entrance requirements, Smith did not. The difficulty finding women adequately prepared for collegiate level studies in 1875 was evinced by the fact that only 14 women qualified to begin the inaugural 1875-1876 school year at Smith.

With tomes like Clarke's *Sex in Education* predicting all manner of infirmities for women collegians, Smith College administrators, understandably, took every precaution to preserve the health of their students. In his annual report for the 1884-1885 school year, President L. Clark Seelye demonstrated his concern for this matter when he wrote: "I am told by insurance agents that the ordinary percentage of deaths among young ladies from sixteen to twenty-five is two in ninety-eight." Seelye was relieved that none of Smith's alumnae, and only one student, had died. The latter had drowned during summer vacation, Seelye related and, hence, her death could not be attributed to the college.⁵⁴

Like Vassar before it, Smith College had a physical education program designed to encourage students to exercise and guard their health. In 1883, in an article published in the *Le Roy, [NY] Times*, senior Mira Hall noted that the "favorite amusements" of the Smith students were "lawn tennis, bowling, horseback riding, and such exercise as they find in the gymnasium."⁵⁵ Interestingly, Hall chose not to mention that just three years earlier, she and a number of classmates had been playing baseball at Smith. As had been the case at Vassar, Smith's first baseball teams were organized by students-influenced by physical training programs and anxious to expand athletic horizons even as they expanded intellectual horizons.

"We have formed two Base Ball nines," Evelyn Jean Forman confided to her journal on April 27, 1880. "Ella Flynt, Minnie Stephens, Florence Harrison, Ella Stetson, Mame Clarke, Anna Morse, Mame Van Ausdal, Mira [Hall] and I are the members of one nine. And the 'other set' have a nine. We are going to play match games after we have practiced longer. We have heaps of fun playing nights after supper."⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that, as was the case with many of the early men's baseball teams, these teams grew out of social ties that prefigured athletic ties. The "other set" Forman referred to were fellow residents of Hubbard House, led by team captain Mary P. Winsor, who became their chief opponents on the baseball diamond. Few of these women had any experience playing baseball. Mary H. A. Mather, a member of Winsor's team, described the creation of the team in her Memory Book. Mather related that only four of the "nine unsophisticated maidens" who first met behind Hatfield Hall "knew anything about the mysteries of Base Ball." "It was not long, however, before their "revered captain" had "initiated them into the secrets of batting' + bases' and the playing began in earnest [sic]," she wrote.⁵⁷

54. "Report of the President of Smith College to the Trustees, 1884-85," SCA.

55. [Mira H. Hall, Class of 1883] Smith College: A Sketch of a Notable Institution, Popular With the Young Women Students of Le Roy," *Le Roy Times*, 24 January 1883.

56. Journal of Evelyn Jean Forman, 27 April 1880, Evelyn Jean Forman 1883 papers, SCA.

57. "Our Nine," Mary H. A. Mather Memory Book, 8 May 1880 entry, Mary H. A. Mather 1883 papers, SCA.

Mather's narrative, and Forman's comment about the "heaps of fun" she and her teammates had playing baseball, makes it clear that these women revelled in their "mysterious" sport and were delighted with the new feelings they experienced as they played. "Ah! What tales could be told of hands' and stiffness'," Mather noted gleefully. "[A]t the breakfast table a prevailing remark was-'Are you stiff today?' But the nine played on and the stiffer they became, the more they played. Soon hines' became the fashion."⁵⁸ Minnie Stephens's recollection of her playing days confirms Mather's contention that competition between teams could be fierce despite the absence of well-honed playing skills. "One vicious batter drove a ball directly into the belt line of her opponent," Stephens wrote, "and had it not been for the rigid steel corset clasp worn in those days, she would have been knocked out completely."⁵⁹

Thoroughly enjoying their brief foray into the male sphere, Smith's ball players seemed rather proud of the attention they were attracting. Despite the fact that the Smith campus was fairly secluded from the surrounding community, word of the baseball teams got out. Mather noted that during a match between her team and Stephens's team, "the neighbors were much edified-and tramp[s], carriages, and small boys also appreciated it." She further recorded: "The paper of Springfield noticed the fact that the Smith students had invested in numerous balls and bats and would soon enter the field of national competition. So much has our club done. Long may it wave and may its acts be worthy of mention."⁶⁰

Not surprisingly, "the field of national competition" was not to be for Smith's pioneer ball players. Mather's glowing accounts of her team notwithstanding, the reality of the situation was much different. Baseball was not an approved sport for women. The most Mather and her teammates could hope for was to be allowed to continue playing on campus. Even that was not to be. Smith administrators apparently looked the other way as long as the players were being discreet about their activity. At some point, however, (possibly after the Springfield paper publicized the team) school officials banned the sport on campus. Stephens recalled: "We were told . . . the game was too violent, and also there was great danger in breaking the windows in the Hubbard House, so we were politely ordered to give it all up."⁶¹ According to Stephens, "the fire of the base ball club still smouldered" within the former players but the twelve players who returned to Smith the following year did not challenge school authorities by reorganizing the teams. Baseball did not reappear again at Smith College until 1891 when a new generation of collegians enthusiastically embraced the sport with the support of physical educators. In the meantime, just down the road from Smith, the players of the "Mount Holyoke Nine" posed for a team photograph in the spring of 1884.

Mary Lyon was one of the pioneers of higher education for women. In 1836

58. *Ibid.*

59. Stephens letter, SCA.

60. Mather Memory Book.

61. Stephens letter, SCA.



The Mount Holyoke Nine (1884). Players were in the classes of 1885, 1886 and 1887. Standing left to right: Evelyn Church, Harriet Prescott, Anna Fitch, Louisa Cutler, Helen Brainerd. Seated left to right: Sophia Ayer, Carrie Bronson, Mary Goodnough, Kate Beardsley. Courtesy Mount Holyoke College Library/Archives.

she founded a seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts to “prepare young ladies of mature minds for active usefulness, especially to become teachers.” She also desired to create an institution where “souls shall be born of God, and where much shall be done for maturing and elevating the Christian character.”⁶² From the moment Mount Holyoke Female Seminary⁶³ opened its doors, Lyon made the health of her students “an object of special regard.” She believed good health was of “inestimable” value to women whose myriad duties and responsibilities could not wait on a sick bed.⁶⁴ Lyon determined to teach her students the value of health and how to maintain it. “The young ladies are to be required to walk one mile per day till the snow renders it desirable to specify time instead of distance, then three quarters of an hour is the time required,” Lyons directed.⁶⁵ The requirement for a one mile walk per day remained in effect until 1862 when it was increased to two miles per day. In addition to walking, Mount Holyoke students performed calisthenics and learned the principles of good diet and sound sleeping habits. They also did their own chores such as washing, carrying wood, and housecleaning-exercises Lyon believed “peculiarly fitted to the constitution of females.”⁶⁶

The emphasis on physical recreation at Mount Holyoke led to the introduc-

62. Quoted in Sol Cohen, ed., *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, 5 vols. (New York: Random House, n.d.), 3: 1585.

63. In March 1888 the institution was renamed Mount Holyoke College and Seminary. Five years later, the word “seminary” was dropped and the school awarded its first baccalaureate degree.

64. Quoted in Cohen, *Education*, 3: 1588.

65. Quoted in Mildred S. Howard, “A Century of Physical Education,” *Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly*, (February 1936): 213.

66. *Ibid.*

tion of sports like croquet, tennis, and rowing at the school in the 1860s and 1870s. Students organized their first baseball team in 1884.⁶⁷ Little is known about the “Mount Holyoke Nine” other than the names of the players. The players ranged in age from 17 to 21 and came from Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Maine and Massachusetts. Two of the nine were in their first year of school; only one had been there more than two years. Seven of the players, eventually graduated.⁶⁸ With only nine players on the team and opponents scarce, at best, it is unlikely the women did anything more than practice a few times. The *Class Book* for the class of 1886 mentions that some class members had played baseball but does not specify how often, or who, the women played.⁶⁹

In 1891, another group of students at Mount Holyoke tried their hand at baseball. The first issue of *The Mount Holyoke* reported, “Our first base ball club, organized during the spring term, has flavored the average conversation with ‘strikes,’ ‘innings,’ ‘home runs,’ etc.”⁷⁰ Evidently unaware that the Mount Holyoke Nine had preceded them by seven years as the school’s first baseball team, the players were pleased with themselves for their initiative. In its *Class Book*, the graduates of 1891 claimed many firsts, like founding a school newspaper and choosing muslin gowns for commencement. They were also proud of their exploits, somewhat hampered by lack of practice, on the baseball diamond. “Baseball has had its victories, and several stock companies have been formed,” proclaimed the students, “and the skillful way in which eyes are blackened and fingers bruised is only one more additional evidence as to the inability of a woman to throw.”⁷¹ As had been the case with most of the teams at Vassar and Smith College, Mount Holyoke’s two baseball teams were short-lived. It wasn’t until 1899 that students again took the game up in earnest, organizing house teams for friendly competition.

The “first generation” baseball players at Vassar, Smith and Mount Holyoke shared a number of things in common. The vast majority played during their first or second years of college.⁷² This is not surprising considering the social hierarchy of the classes during that period. While “frivolous” behavior was sometimes overlooked in freshmen, students were expected to cultivate and

67. It is difficult to say why students at Mount Holyoke did not organize baseball teams earlier; it was certainly not for lack of students. By 1851 over 250 women were enrolled at the school; by 1884 that number had risen to 289. By comparison, while Vassar College had 353 students in 1865-1866 when 23 women played on the Laurel and Abenakis teams, Smith College had only 202 students in 1879-1880 when Mather’s and Stephens’s teams played. It is possible that the added emphasis on religion at Mount Holyoke reinforced traditional roles for women to the point that students there were less inclined to step outside those roles, even temporarily.

68. Information on the players is from the Mount Holyoke College *Alumnae Register*.

69. *Class Book Containing Class Day and Woodbine Exercises, Mt. Holyoke. 86* (Springfield, MA: Cyrus W. Atwood, 1886): 24-25, Mount Holyoke College library/archives (hereafter cited as MHCLA).

70. *The Mount Holyoke* (Commencement Issue) 1 (June 1891): n.p., MHCLA.

71. *Class Book* [1891], 16, MHCLA.

72. All of the 36 players on Vassar’s first three baseball teams were in their first or second year of school as were six of the nine players on the “Resolutes” team. The other three were in their third year of school. Of the nineteen players on Stephens’s and Mather’s teams, all but one were in their first year of school. The other was in her second year of school. As mentioned earlier, eight of the nine members of the Mount Holyoke Nine were in their first two years of school. Statistics on attendance were compiled from the *Alumnae Registers* at the respective schools.

increasingly display the attributes of mature womanhood-skill on a baseball diamond was not one of them. Another common characteristic shared by these women baseball players was initiative. They organized their own teams, acquired their own equipment, and posed for team photographs similar to those depicting male college baseball teams. A final similarity among the women players in this study was their apparent commitment to traditional social values. Even as they experimented with the masculine game, players tried to maintain a semblance of femininity. As evidenced by the photographs of Vassar's "Resolutes" and the Mount Holyoke Nine, players did not adopt more functional clothing styles like the bloomer, which had been available since the mid-nineteenth century but shunned by many women due to its association with women's activism. Indeed, if Stephens was not exaggerating in her account of baseball at Smith College, it appears that some students actually wore corsets while playing-the ultimate obeisance to "True Womanhood" at a time when physical educators were trying desperately to liberate their charges from the debilitating custom.⁷³ By and large, after leaving college, baseball players followed traditional life patterns for women in nineteenth century America-that is to say, they either married or went into teaching or social work. A handful of the women pursued graduate degrees.⁷⁴

Prior to the turn-of-the-century, student-organized baseball teams at Vassar, Smith, and Mount Holyoke colleges were influenced by the debate over higher education for women that persisted for much of the nineteenth century. Young women, who often arrived at college unpracticed in even the basics of physical exercise, found themselves being ordered to exercise as a requirement for graduation. Once enamored with the benefits of physical fitness, some students experimented with activities, like baseball, that they had only watched growing up. Baseball was "heaps of fun," "contraband pleasure," and a "mysterious" sport to these women. They perceived very little significance, from a women's rights standpoint, in what they were doing. No particular type of student showed a propensity to play baseball, although most were in their first or second year of college when they did so. Some graduated with Phi Beta Kappa honors; some never got beyond the preparatory course. Baseball may or may not have significantly changed the women who played it, but judging from their own accounts, some written decades after they had played the game, baseball had given women players a common heritage-a shared sense of pride at having attempted the unconventional. At the very least baseball had given players an increased understanding of their own physical abilities. They had proven to

73. The attempt of women baseball players to retain their identity as women even while playing baseball is a common pattern I have discovered with virtually every team or player I have studied from the nineteenth century on. AAGBL rules were especially strict concerning players' appearance, insisting they wear make-up during games and never appear in public wearing shorts.

74. Sixteen of the 36 players on Vassar's first three baseball teams (44 percent) married-10 of the 11 graduates married, a statistically significant deviation from the school and national average which was closer to 50 percent. Of the 16 players on Mather's and Stephens's teams for whom marital status can be determined, 12 married (75 percent). Five of nine members (55.5 percent) of the Mount Holyoke Nine eventually married. See Solomon, *In the Company*, 119 for statistics on marriage rates for nineteenth century women collegians. The *Alumnae Register* at each school provides information on post-graduate pursuits of students.

themselves that, despite what anyone said or wrote, the “weaker sex” could pitch a ball and swing a bat without suffering permanent ill-effects.

As for why some students had chosen to play a sport society deemed was a “man’s game” in the first place, M. Carey Thomas, president of Bryn Mawr College from 1894 to 1922, may have provided the best explanation. In an address at the school in 1899, Thomas denounced critics of women’s education who seemed to expect women to invent “new symphonies and operas, a new Beethoven and Wagner, new statues and pictures, a new Phidias and a new Titian, new tennis, new golf, a new way to swim, skate and run, new food and drink.” If women’s education and athletics aped men’s, concluded Thomas, it was only because it was easier than creating “a new intellectual heaven and earth.”⁷⁵ If women aped men on the baseball diamond, so the reasoning goes, it was only because that was much easier than inventing a whole new ball game.

75. Quoted in Roberta Frankfort, *Collegiate Women: Domesticity and Career in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 28.