
Setting the Foundation and Governance of the American Olympic Association: The Efforts of Robert Means Thompson, 1911-1919 and 1922-1926

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THE UNITED STATES OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (USOC) began in 1908 as the American Olympic Committee (AOC). Its main function was to select a team of elite male athletes to represent the United States of America at the summer Olympic Games. A much more complex administrative organization, the American Olympic Association (AOA), was created in 1919, and the two functioned as separate but related entities as the AOA-AOC.

The USA participated in the 1896 Games of the First Olympiad without organizational assistance and as a small group of American citizens. The 1900, 1904, and unofficial 1906 Olympic Games were dominated by American athletes organized and financially supported by the American Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Caspar Whitney (1861-1929), journalist and former member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), was first to organize an AOC in December of 1907.¹ Whitney served as AOC leader from 1908 through 1910, when he was succeeded by Frederic Bayley Pratt (1865-1945), a prominent New York City industrialist-educator. He served for forty days and was succeeded by Colonel Robert Means Thompson (1849-1930) on January 23, 1911.

Colonel Thompson's eventful life of eighty-one years was a kind of quadrilateral career with overlap. He was a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Class of 1868, and Harvard Law School in 1874. He became extremely wealthy during his two decades (1890-1910) as owner of North American copper and nickel mines. At the same time, he served as director of the Naval Academy Alumni Association. He was also president of the Navy League, a powerful lobby group intent upon strengthening the United States Navy. Thompson served as president of the New York Athletic Club and the AOC.

Robert Means Thompson was born in Corsica, Jefferson County, Pennsylvania, on March 2, 1849, the son of John J. Y. and Agnes Susan (Kennedy) Thompson. He was of Scottish descent, the youngest son and eighth of ten children. In 1864, at age fifteen, Robert was appointed midshipman to the Naval Academy, then at Newport, Rhode Island. He was commissioned ensign and master in 1869 and 1870, respectively. He resigned from the Navy in 1871, graduated from Harvard Law School in 1874, became a practicing attorney in Massachusetts and then in New York City, where he also served as chairman of those states' Young Republican Committees. During the 1880s, his role as legal counsel led him into the mining business, and in 1902 to a directorship in the International Nickel Company, a consolidation of various American and foreign nickel and copper companies, of which Thompson became chairman of the board of directors. He also served as a special partner in the brokerage firm of S. H. Pell and Co. Thompson accumulated a fortune and thus was able "to give unsparingly both money and time to numerous public activities."²

Multimillionaire Leader of the Navy League and Early Involvement with the Nation's Olympic Committee

In just about every enterprise with which Thompson became involved during the decades before his first Olympic committee presidency, he met with men of wealth, position and power. Those leaders in the worlds of international law, the United States military, high levels of government as well as the hierarchy of amateur athletics were known to Thompson, and many came to support him in his Olympic committee leadership. Following his Boston law practice, Thompson assumed management of the Oxford Copper Company near Capelton, Quebec, in 1879. His improvements in the metallurgy of copper and nickel and his close connections with the U.S. Navy as Director of the Naval Academy Alumni Association helped Thompson in his business. Thompson's leadership at the NYAC, as organizer of the International Nickel Corporation, and as president of the New York Metal Exchange resulted in his associations with some of the nation's most influential citizens.

Thompson joined the Navy League Society in 1899 and remained an officer and then president until his election to AOC leadership in late 1921. The Society's brochure "What the Navy League Is" states that it was "to help insure the United States against war . . . and believed that the surest way to do so is to maintain a navy so strong that no nation can get across the sea to attack us."³ Several of the most prominent Americans supported Thompson's persistent efforts to build a "super" Navy, among them William G. McAdoo, Charles Curtis, Elihu Root, Franklin Roosevelt, and former President Theodore Roosevelt.⁴

Armin Rappaport, author of the definitive *Navy League of the United States*, lists as strong League supporters: J. P. Morgan; "other millionaire industrialists"; the Guggenheim Family; Ambassador to Germany David J. Hill; General Horace Porter; Rear Admiral Bradley Fisk; clergyman Lyman Abbotts; the famed Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer, and many others.⁵ Thompson wrote President William Howard Taft on January 29, 1913, "May I remind you," he stated, "the Navy League has fast friends: General Horace Porter; John Wanamaker; John B. Casterman; Arthur T. Hadley of Yale University; McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune*; ex Navy Secretary Benjamin F. Tracy, and J. P. Morgan."⁶ Clearly, some of these like-minded friends would become valuable resources in Thompson's next "assignment"—a long commitment as his nation's Olympic committee president. His conciliatory nature, his growing network of influential friends and his immense wealth constituted a powerful mix and the key to Thompson's ability to bring what Robert Lehr called "order out of chaos" from within the AOC.⁷

Thompson immediately recognized the two central problems facing his administration: the tension between his new AOC and the twenty-three-year-old AAU, managed by one of its founders, James Edward Sullivan (1860-1914), and the awful fact that the AOC had no money. Thompson addressed both formidable problems, drawing immediately from the AAU hierarchy their most influential members and inviting them onto his executive board.

They all served without salary and frequently for many years. The AOC being indigent challenged Thompson, but he understood money, how to make it and where to find it. His familiar nature and administrative skill addressed the first issue of AAU-AOC mistrust, while his financial generosity helped keep the committee alive and financially viable during his fifteen years in office.

The intent of this research paper is to trace the early period of the national Olympic committee—the R. M. Thompson era, the only meaningful AOC years following the inactive Whitney and Pratt presidencies. Thompson's personal aura, a kind of aristocratic but "warm" patriarchal presence, was effective as were his great financial donations to the AOC and in his second term, the AOA-AOC. He probably saved these committees from early demise, and yet no meaningful research exists on Thompson. Next to Avery Brundage (1887-1975), Thompson was probably the most important Olympic committee president in its nearly one-hundred-year history.

Efforts as Chief Administrator of the AOA-AOC

Colonel Thompson⁸ was elected AOC president on January 23, 1911, at the sumptuous home of Gustavus Town Kirby (1874-1956).⁹ Forty men, representing the hierarchy of the AAU and the AOC, voted by acclamation that Thompson would be their leader, concurrent with the sixty-two-year-old's presidency of the New York Athletic Club.¹⁰ Thompson showed his appreciation by hosting an extraordinary dinner at "his" New York Athletic Club on December 7, 1911. Preparations for the Games of the Fifth Olympiad in Stockholm 1912 was the business topic amidst three hours of "good times" by several score of the nation's amateur athletic and business leaders.¹¹ Of course, James E. Sullivan was there and later that year he wrote:

The general trend of the talk was that America could not lay back on the laurels already won in international games, as rival countries had already been greatly

stirred by the Yankee victories and were putting forth efforts more strongly than ever before to overthrow the prestige of the United States in sports.¹²

The social, financial and sporting elite gathered about a giant dining table shaped like the new Olympic stadium in Stockholm. It was exactly what Colonel Thompson had hoped would take place. In his controlled patrician way, Col. Thompson was every bit the American athletic super-patriot so ably described by historians Mark Dyreson and Steven W. Pope.

Dyreson's book *Making the American Team* is a skillful and nearly unique perspective, as he states, "for thinking about the relationship between sport and nationalism."¹³ In a section titled "Eagle Screams and American Athletic Hegemony," the author portrays Thompson and Sullivan as "Americas Athletic Missionaries." Following amazing success by "Thompsons" team at the 1912 Olympic Games, Dyreson quotes him, who argued "that America has gained more through the games than could be obtained through a dozen other mediums which might argue for the continuance of good-will between the nations of the world."¹⁴ In a similar vein, S.W. Pope's book *Patriotic Games* underscores the successful efforts of Thompson, Sullivan, and the AAU-AOC leadership to present their American Olympic champions as super athletes, super citizens as well as heirs of the Games's founder Pierre de Coubertin's "amateur ethos."¹⁵ While returning from Stockholm aboard his private and colossal yacht S.Y. *Catania*, Thompson wrote his official report to the president of the United States, William Howard Taft, and said, in part:

The athletes sent over to Sweden under the supervision of the Committee [AOC], of which you are Honorary President, have conferred honor upon the country they represented, not only by winning a vast majority of the athletic events, but, as well, by the manner of their winning and the gallant way they lost, when they did lose.¹⁶

It was vintage Thompson, the privileged millionaire, who took upon himself the mantle of "noble" patriot in his presidential, non-coercive first AOC leadership. He retired in 1919 at age seventy, allowed Kirby a brief presidency, and returned as AOA and AOC leader on November 25, 1921.¹⁷

Thompsons new AOA was exciting "stuff" and in a hand-written letter, Palmer Pierce of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) wrote his friend on the AOA, R. Tait McKenzie:

The fate of this real, representative Olympic Association hangs in the balance. Now is our chance to influence its correct formation, but we need help from AAU president Weaver, from Breckenridge, McCurdy, Dr. John Brown, Elwood Brown and Dr. George Fisher.¹⁸

To strengthen preparations for the First Olympic Winter Games and the summer games in Paris, both in 1924, Thompson was successful in recruiting the President Warren G. Harding and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, William Howard Taft, to accept, respectively, the positions of honorary president and honorary vice-president of the AOC.¹⁹ IOC charter member W.M. Sloane wrote to Baron de Coubertin on March 21, 1922: "I have just received a letter from Col. Robert Thompson absolutely declining to stand as an [IOC] candidate because of his AOC responsibilities."²⁰ The colonel was wholly focused on a great 1924 Olympic Games, especially for the U.S.

President Thompson rented a luxury steamship, the *America* to carry the young men and women across the sea and on to the 1924 games in Paris. Thompson paid for every-

thing and was quoted as saying, "I feel it is quite appropriate for the athletes representing the United States in the Olympic Games to make the trip on a ship flying the American flag, owned by the U.S. government and manned by American seamen."²¹ The USA won more medals—gold, silver and bronze—in Paris than any other nation. In flowery and exaggerated language, Thompson made his *Report* to "His Excellency Calvin Coolidge, President of the USA and honorary AOA-AOC president":

Sir: More important than the actual competitive success in the games themselves, I have to report that the Americans worthily represented the best traditions of American chivalry and sportsmanship. Cheerfulness in defeat, fair play, courtesy and courage characterized the conduct of the American team.²²

Historian Mark Dyreson, reading this *Report*, was correct in stating that the "Olympic Games had become an international advertisement of American power and progress."²³ The "old man" Thompson served until 1926 and awaited the inevitable accolades from his domestic colleagues and from the new IOC president, Count Henri Baillet-Latour. He offered the American an honorary lifetime membership on the IOC, "but only if you come in person to our meeting in Lisbon." Thompson replied, "I am in Florida, too ill to make the trip. Thank you."²⁴ The colonel died on September 5, 1930, and dozens of major newspapers wrote lengthy obituaries.²⁵ The *Times* of London, for September 8, 1930, spoke of "Colonel Thompson's many financial friends in London" and of his "great love of England and her institutions and traditions."²⁶

Fund-Raising On Behalf of His Olympic Committee

Thompson was partially successful in helping to bring some degree of orderliness and professional administrative efficiency onto his Olympic committee. All during his years in office, he and associates dealt with the awful specter of a growing organization without funds, without income. Monies from the federal government had never been a reality nor were ticket sales profits possible. Vigorous public fundraising was sought by AOC subcommittees, as were solicitations to universities, athletic clubs and corporations. Mostly, Thompson looked in the direction of rich men like himself for large donations. At the well-publicized NYAC dinner in December of 1911, President Thompson announced that only \$400 remained in the AOA-AOC treasury, and so he started the proceedings by writing a check for a thousand dollars. IOC member Allison Vinent Armour did the same, followed by a similar sum from Sullivan and his AAU. The Chicago Athletic Club Association contributed still another thousand dollars. The NYAC, the New York City Metropolitan AAU, the New England AAU each gave a \$500 donation, and still another \$500 contribution from banker J. P. Morgan.²⁷

Thompson wrote to President Taft: "Please come to our fund-raising banquet in order to establish the supremacy of the American athletes in Stockholm." Thompson's letter was dated January 3, 1912. Five months earlier, he sent a "circular letter" to the members of the AOC and the New York City media that "\$50,000 is needed to send a team to Stockholm." He elaborated on this theme: "This money must be subscribed by public-spirited citizens, who believe in American representation in these games, and also appreciate what it means for the American athletes to show supremacy."²⁸

Monies continued to come into the AOC treasury: Yale University responded with \$300, "and other Ivy League schools will follow," wrote the university administrator to

Thompson. The Boston Athletic Association (BAA) gave \$500, while a certain George Gould gave the same amount. Thompson pushed all aside, financially speaking, and gave an additional \$30,000 on May 7, 1912.²⁹ Carnegie (\$500); Walter Camp (\$300) and the American Cyclists Association (\$700) came on at the last moment, enabling the AOC to meet its expenses and send the team across the Atlantic.³⁰ Exact figures are elusive, but in Thompson's first term in office, 1911-1919, he may have donated more than \$45,000—close to a million dollars in today's equivalency.

The Games of the Sixth Olympiad (1916) never took place in Berlin and the so-called "Great War" delayed any Olympic Games activity until Antwerp in 1920. "Gus" Kirby served as AOA-AOC president from 1919-1921. The post-war years were chaotic for everyone, and the Kirby-led team did relatively poor work in Antwerp.³¹ Thompson seemed resilient at age seventy-three as he resumed his national Olympic committee leadership. This time they needed \$350,000 to send a full team of 350 men and women to Paris. There was but \$12,000 in their treasury.³² Immediately, a total of \$5,500 was found from the AAU, the Intercollegiate Amateur Athletic Association of America (IC4A), and Thompson's Navy League.³³ Thompson responded: "You can consider it certain that our team will be taken care of in a way worthy of the nation they represent."³⁴ Fundraiser Kirby stood on the steps of the Wall Street Treasury, pleading for money. Thompson wrote an editorial in the *New York Times* asking for citizen largess in order that "we might send to Paris the most perfect specimens of manhood and womanhood that America can produce."³⁵

Several European nations were beginning to catch up to the United States in the race to win Olympic gold, silver, and bronze. The USA's slightly smaller percentage of medals won did not prevent President Thompson from writing an 1800-word summation of the 1924 games. The first function of the AOC, he wrote President Calvin Coolidge, is

. . . to finance the Games . . . to put into operation a plan which will insure the provisions of ample funds before the time comes for the sailing of the team. . . . [W]e should know beforehand exactly what money we can depend upon and knowing that, we should be careful not to arrange a program which will cost more than the money in hand.³⁶

Nothing appeared in Thompson's report, implicit or veiled, that the nation's Olympic committee wished monies from the federal government. When our team goes to these festivals, he concluded in his letter to Mr. Coolidge:

they should be filled with the spirit of the Games . . . in a great and solemn international event. They are there in uniform, representing their country. . . . [C]are should be taken . . . to indoctrinate them with the idea that they are at all times under observation and therefore should conduct themselves like men representing the United States.³⁷

Thompson was incapable of escaping his life-long heritage of Naval Academy—American patriot, mega-businessman and effective corporate manager. It is how he conducted his Olympic leadership.

On the edge of Thompson's retirement, he donated \$5,000 to preparations for the winter and summer Olympic Games of 1928, adding to the committee balance of \$30,000.³⁸ It was not nearly enough. Only weeks before departure, the Metropolitan New York City AAU came up with \$65,000, reported Olympic fundraiser, Joseph A. Reilly.³⁹ The new

AOC president, Major General Douglas MacArthur, took the team overseas on the U.S.S. *President Roosevelt* and, upon his return, sent his *Report to President Coolidge* in the White House and never once mentioned the enormous difficulty of finding monies. Rather, his rambling and exotic 2,800-word essay is all about "passages in Plutarch . . . Themistocles [sic] . . . Achilles . . . Homer . . . that indomitable will for victory . . . Artemis herself on the heights of Olympus . . . the best traditions of American sportsmanship and chivalry . . . fair play, courtesy and courage." There's much more, on the "troubled years of the [Hellenic] Achaean and Aetolian Leagues . . . and the athletic code [that] embraces the highest moral laws." MacArthur's astonishing report probably surprised Mr. Coolidge, especially its ending: "'Athletic America' is a telling phrase. It is talismanic. It suggests health and happiness. It arouses national pride and kindles anew the national spirit."⁴⁰

Money and patriotism conjoined in a heady mix in these last months of Thompson's leadership. Thousands of individuals, rich and poor, donated monies for the Olympic team. Millionaires and corporations gave exceptionally large sums. Every single contributor is listed in the *1928 Report*, from thousand-dollar checks written by Murray Guggenheim and William Randolph Hearst to one-dollar donations from "Miss Stewart" and "Billy Kearns," both from New Jersey.⁴¹ R. M. Thompson was swept up in the nation's preoccupation with business, prosperity, and national identity. He made a successful effort in transferring these elements onto his Olympic committee.

"Conciliator-Healer" between the Contentious National Amateur Organizations, 1911-1926

In large measure, Robert Thompson's AOC and then AOA-AOC leadership was about the business of winning friends as well as his nation's athletes winning glory at the Olympic Games. For him the two were inextricably bound. He seemed a pleasantly strong man, with several life-missions, all accomplished. "Olympic men happy at sea and Col. Thompson is the good angel," wrote a journalist on board the *Finland* while crossing the Atlantic in late spring 1912. Thompson paid for the rental of the ship, and "he stands to pay about \$20,000 for his fun at well worth the price."⁴² Col. Thompson arrived in the Stockholm harbor aboard his private yacht *S. Y. Catania*. Journalist G. W. Axelson of the *New York Herald* arrived about the same time but with the team on the chartered steamship *Finland*. He spoke of America's brave leader, Colonel Thompson, and his "bunch of young and lusty men."⁴³ There seemed to be an air of affability as well as authoritative strength about Thompson that was recognized by many, two qualities needed in these early years of the Olympic Committee.

Thompson never stopped giving banquets aboard his yacht anchored in the Stockholm harbor. Sullivan remembered: "He was the friendly host almost every afternoon and evening," and the Royal Family, Baron de Coubertin, IOC and AOC members, and newspaper correspondents, enjoyed themselves.⁴⁴ Of course, Thompson hosted a giant victory celebration banquet upon returning home. The "American way" had emerged triumphant. Mark Dyreson describes the grand affair as an outpouring of American patriotism.⁴⁵ Thompson wrote the king of Sweden and thanked him and his people "for both hospitality and perfection of detail." The compliment was returned.⁴⁶ Thompson's extroverted nature and his money made it possible to bring together, if only for a moment,

many people with dissimilar views. The American Olympic leader was about the business of winning friends along the way to capturing Olympic Games honors.

Following the ultimate ugly years of World War I, the "old man" Thompson resumed his Olympic leadership in the same vein of conciliation and practical suggestions for national-international leadership. Thompson asked President Warren G. Harding if he might help the nation's Olympic success by accepting the title "Honorary President of the AOC." The international games "is a true League of Nations," he informed Mr. Harding, who accepted the title.⁴⁷ Harding was no longer president as the Olympic Games approached in the summer of 1924, so Thompson began a correspondence with Calvin Coolidge. Having received Coolidge's support, he wrote the president a glowing report of America's medal count and, more importantly, he stated that "the great tradition of American chivalry and sportsmanship" had been displayed.⁴⁸ Thompson was the unabashedly American patriot and, in many ways, the urbane Olympic leader.

Another Look at Thompson and His Olympic Committee Leadership

In the year before his retirement, Thompson made a speech at the "Eighth IOC Congress" in Prague. He was not an IOC member, but Coubertin and his committee gave the nearly eighty-year-old American the opportunity to say, in the year 1925: "Sport without the great Olympic idea is nothing. . . . The moral tone is what has to be upheld . . . [l]ess [*sic*] the games go out like a light."⁴⁹

Thompson's nearly sixty years of active participation as a Navy officer, lawyer, mega-industrialist, the most important Navy League activist and, for fifteen years, the Olympic committee president makes for difficult evaluation. In each of these five enterprises, he was prominent. At the end of his life, for example, he was called "the Naval Academy's best friend."⁵⁰ Although Mark Dyreson was talking in general terms, he might well have had a Thompson-like person in mind when he wrote: "When Americans played, they conceived of their recreations not simply as a respite from toil but as a form of recreating a national identity."⁵¹

Thompson was, his whole life, fiercely loyal to the U.S. Navy, to the law profession, to the local and national Republican Party, to his International Nickel and Copper Company, to his beloved New York Athletic Club and to his country's burgeoning Olympic movement. A friend of Thompson, Andrew Carnegie, wrote in his *The Empire of Business* that surplus wealth can be disposed in three ways: the corporation can give away monies, or it can be left to the family, or "it can be bequeathed for public purposes."⁵² Thompson was very much in the third category, supporting the always-bankrupt Olympic Committee and in so doing, preserving its future. In Thompson's business career of forty years, he belonged to a small cadre of multimillionaires that historian Harold Underwood Faulkner said created "a class more powerful than the people and, indeed, more powerful than the government."⁵³ Of course, R. M. Thompson must not have led a blameless life, but so much of his personal energies and business profits, his quite special leadership abilities, went into the Olympic committee of the United States, that he was perhaps its most important leaders, second only to the USOC's Avery Brundage. While he still lived, a Thompson biographer said of him:

. . . [H]e has held and used his wealth as one who acknowledges that the ownership carries with it a duty. He has often said that he hoped to so live that when he died many would regret him, and none be glad that he was gone.⁵⁴

The USOC remains today, in this first decade of the twenty-first century, the largest national Olympic committee in the world. The reasons for this billion-dollar enterprise are manifold, but the man Thompson must always be included in any historical recapitulation of this American committee.



¹See *New York Times*, 4 December 1907, p. 7; 7 December 1907, p. 7; *Outing* 51 (1908): 632; Walter Camp Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, microfilm, reel 1, folder 22, 1908. Also John A. Lucas, "Caspar Whitney—The Imperial Advocate of Athletic Amateurism and His Involvement with the International Olympic Committee and the American Olympic Committee 1899-1912," *Journal of Olympic History* 8 (2000): 30-38.

²*Dictionary of American Biography*, 1944 Supplement (New York: Scribner's, 1928-) 21: 687 (QUOTATION). See also *The National Cyclopædia of American Biography* (hereafter *NCAB*) (New York: J. T. White & Co., 1916), 15: 202-203; *NCAB* (New York: J.T. White & Co., 1948), 371-372; Albert Nelson Marquis, ed., *Who's Who in America* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis & Co., 1922), 12: 3048. There's a Thompson biography on page 225 of James Edward Sullivan, ed., *The Olympic Games: Stockholm 1912*, Spalding "Red Cover" Series of Athletic Handbooks No. 17R (New York: American Sports Publishing, 1912). *The Olympic* magazine (June 1927) has an article entitled "Col. Robert M. Thompson, President Emeritus" and is reproduced in Robert E. Lehr, "The American Olympic Committee, 1896-1940: From Chaos to Order" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1985), 5.

³Thompson sent the president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, a brochure titled "What the Navy League Is." See Woodrow Wilson, Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter LC), Washington, D.C., microfilm, 1917, series 4, reel 364, case number 4252. The papers of Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson contain more than 300 references to the Navy League Society, while the *New York Times Index* contains another 250 references to the Navy League. *The New York Times Personal Name Index*, under "Colonel Robert Means Thompson," lists twenty-seven references to his involvement with the League.

⁴W. G. McAdoo was secretary of the treasury during the Wilson administration. Curtis was a powerful conservative Republican politician and vice president under Herbert Hoover 1929-1932. Franklin Roosevelt was assistant secretary of the navy and later, president of his country. Theodore Roosevelt was president from 1901 through 1908, and while he supported Thompson and the Navy League, he wrote an angry and cautionary note to Thompson on August 3, 1907: "You are too zealous about the Navy League," he wrote, "and your *New York Post* editorial is foolish exaggeration and does more harm than good." See Theodore Roosevelt, Papers, LC, microfilm, reel 346, vol. 74, 198.

⁵Armin Rappaport, *The Navy League of the United States* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1962). See "Index" for more League supporters. Both Thompson and Rappaport speak about Sir Archibald Spicer Hurd's 1916 book *Sea Power* and its thesis that "[t]he position which the English-speaking peoples occupy in the world . . . is drawn from the sea. . . . The destiny of the United States has been dominated by sea power." This eighty-page document, on microfilm, is located in the Preservation Department, Library, Yale University.

⁶R. W. Thompson to William H. Taft, William H. Taft, Papers, LC, microfilm, series 6, reel 374, case study 206.

⁷The subtitle of his dissertation listed in endnote 2.

⁸"His military title dates back to his service on the staff of Governor Voorhies of New Jersey in 1899." See obituary, *New York Herald Tribune*, 6 September 1930, p. 15.

⁹Kirby was an engineer, inventor, lawyer, real estate developer, and millionaire art dealer whose "hobby" for sixty years was amateur athletic administration. See John Lucas, "Gustavus Town Kirby: Doyen of American Amateur Athletics," *Stadion* 21-22 (1995-1996): 171-192.

¹⁰"Col. Thompson named President of American Committee," *New York Times*, 24 January 1911, p. 11. One of those at the banquet was IOC member William Milligan Sloane (1850-1928), who wrote

his president, Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937): "We had a big party at Kirby's home and chose him [Thompson] President of the American Olympic Committee." See Sloane-Coubertin Correspondences 1896-1924, 23 January 1911, *Le Comité International Olympique* Archives (hereafter IOC Archives), Lausanne, Switzerland. Coubertin wrote in his *Olympic Review* for February of 1911:

With the 1912 Olympic Games in mind, Mr. W. M. Sloane has taken the necessary steps to establish a very powerful American Olympic Committee, which comprises at least 100 members. He has asked Colonel Thompson to become President. The President of the U.S. [William Howard Taft] has accepted the honorary presidency of the new Committee.

¹¹Leaders of business, industry, city, state and national politics as well as the chiefs of the AAU, AOC, American IOC members, the Intercollegiate Amateur Athletic Association of America (IC4A), and many more were there. Their names were published in the *New York Times*, 8 December 1911, p. 19; *New York Herald*, 8 December 1911, p. 15; *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 December 1911, p. 8; Sullivan, ed., *The Olympic Games*, 10-11. It was the biggest party ever held at the nation's premier athletic club.

¹²Sullivan, ed., *The Olympic Games*, 10.

¹³Mark Dyreson, *Making the Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 170. The original article appeared in the *New York Times*, 25 August 1912, p. 4 under the rubric "Olympic Champions Cheered and Dined."

¹⁵S. W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination 1876-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31.

¹⁶R.W. Thompson to W.H. Taft, 19 July 1912, Taft Papers, series 6, reel 401, case number 576. These papers contain seventy letters to and from Thompson and Taft. Another 300 letters from Thompson or to him are located in the papers of William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding, and Calvin Coolidge. See the "Index" of these U.S. presidents on microfilm.

¹⁷The brilliant, confrontational Kirby created the American Olympic Association in 1921, a permanent and full-time organization that strengthened the AOC which was formed eighteen months prior to each Olympic Games in order to recruit athletes, raise money and take the team to the games. See endnote 9 for Kirby biography. Also see "Thompson to lead new Olympic Body [AOA]," *New York Tribune*, 26 November 1921, p. 13. The *New York Times* called the meeting at the New York Athletic Club "a stormy session" (26 November 1921, p. 16).

¹⁸Palmer Pierce to R. Tait McKenzie, October 1921, McKenzie Archives, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The McKenzie Archives were founded by Andrew Kozar, Ph.D.

¹⁹*New York Times*, 7 June 1922, p. 17.

²⁰W.M. Sloane to Baron de Coubertin, 21 March 1922, "USA-NOC", IOC Archives.

²¹*New York Times*, 7 June 1923, p. 17.

²²*Report on VIII Olympiad—Paris, France 1924* (New York: AOA, 1924), p. 5.

²³Mark Dyreson, "Selling American Civilization: The Olympic Games of 1920 and American Culture," *Olympika* 8 (1999): 30.

²⁴See "Commission Executive du CIO: Proces verbal de la Reunion de Paris: 3-6 Novembre 1925," IOC Archives; also "1926 May Lisbon 24th IOC Session," in *Le Comité International Olympique* (Lausanne, Switzerland: CIO, 1990), 49. "For health reasons, Colonel Thompson never turned up at the Session in Lisbon and thus never became a [IOC] member," wrote Patrice Cholley, IOC Documentation specialist, Patrice Cholley to John A. Lucas, 2 November 1998, in possession of the author. R. W. Thompson to Henri Baillet-Latour, 31 January 1926, "Baillet-Latour", IOC Archives. American IOC member, Charles H. Sherrill, wrote Baillet-Latour on December 7, 1926: "Colonel Thompson has missed all AOC-AOA meetings due to ill health." See "Sherrill", IOC Archives. There exists more correspondence on this subject: Frederick Rubien to Henri Baillet-Latour, 30 November 1925, IOC Archives, and Henri Baillet-Latour to R. W. Thompson, 10 January 1926, IOC Archives. IOC Executive Board Meetings of "3-6 Novembre 1925" and "7-8 Mars 1926" speak of Thompson's inability to accept IOC membership.

Lastly, the matter is addressed in the *New York Times*, 10 March 1926, p. 17, in a release titled "Olympic Body Plans Honor for Thompson."

²⁵See *New York Herald Tribune*, 6 September 1930, p. 15; *New York Times*, 6 September 1930, p. 15; *Washington Post*, 6 September 1930, pp. 1, 5; *Times* (London), 8 September 1930, p. 7. The AOA's *Olympic News*, September 1930, p. 1 has an informative biography of their "President Emeritus." See Avery Brundage Collection, University Archives, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, microfilm, reel 145a, box 261.

²⁶*Times* (London), 8 September 1930, p. 7.

²⁷Sullivan, ed., *The Olympic Games*, 10-11. See also *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 December 1911, p. 8; *New York Times*, 8 December 1911, p. 19.

²⁸R. W. Thompson to W. H. Taft, 3 January 1912, Taft Papers, series 6, reel 401, case file 572B, 576. Thompson's "circular" is located in the *New York Times*, 8 August 1911, p. 6 under the rubric "Start Olympic Fund." Earlier, the AOC secretary, Sullivan, stated that "\$50,000 will be needed to send a USA team to Stockholm." See "Sailors may see Olympic Games," *New York Herald*, 11 December 1910, p. 16.

²⁹For Yale and Boston contributions, see *New York Times*, 17 March 1912, sec. 4, p. 7. "George Gould gives \$500 as does Brown University \$250," was an item in the *New York Times*, 8 June 1912, p. 14. For Thompson's huge gift of \$30,000, see Sullivan's announcement in a *New York Times* headline "Col. Thompson's big outlay," 8 May 1912, p. 12.

³⁰See *New York Times*, 4 October 1911, p. 11; 17 March 1912, sec. 4, p. 7; 8 May 1912, p. 12. The prominent English coach, F. A. M. Webster, was astonished that "Colonel R. M. Thompson gave \$13,500 to the AOC." See his *The Evolution of the Olympic Games 1829 B.C.-1914 A.D.* (London: Heath, Cranston and Ouseley Ltd., 1914), 221.

³¹See John Lucas, "American Preparations for the First Post War Olympic Games 1919-1920," *Journal of Sport History* 10(1983): 30-44.

³²See *New York Times*, 5 December 1920, sec. 9, p. 2.

³³*New York Times*, 23 November 1922, p. 27.

³⁴*New York Times*, 26 October 1923, p. 20. Frederick Rubien, AOA treasurer, wrote that "\$300,000 will be needed to send our team to Paris." See *New York Times*, 19 June 1923, p. 15.

³⁵The Kirby fund-raising effort is described in the *New York Times*, 20 May 1924, p. 15, while Thompson's classic comment came earlier in the *New York Times*, 22 March 1924, p. 14.

³⁶*Report on VIII Olympiad*, 5.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸At an April 18, 1925, AOC meeting in New York City's Hotel Astor, President Thompson announced the balance and had plenty more to say. No wives allowed on the 1928 overseas trips to St. Moritz, Switzerland, and Amsterdam, Holland. "Our team must function as a unit." No social functions allowed for athletes, he ordered. At this "great and solemn international event," all must understand that "they are there . . . representing their country." See the *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 April 1925, p. 6. "No wives," said Thompson. Fifty years after this ocean voyage, Professor Emeritus Ray Conger of Penn State University and 1500-meter Olympian that year of 1928, told this researcher: "My wife was on that ship 'President Roosevelt,' but she was chaperone to the first American women to compete in Olympic track and field."

³⁹*Report of the AOC Ninth Olympic Games 1928* (New York: AOC, 1928), 63.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 1, 7, 6.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 359-455. Nearly one hundred pages of this *Report* list every single donation and the name of the donor.

⁴²*Boston Globe*, 15 June 1912, p. 6.

⁴³See "Coming of American athletes was real sensation of Olympic Games," *New York Herald*, 21 July 1912, sport sec, p. 17.

⁴⁴Sullivan, ed., *The Olympic Games*, 576.

⁴⁵Dyreson, *Making the American Team*, 170, 239n73.

⁴⁶See Erik Bergvall, ed., *The Fifth Olympic Games of Stockholm 1912* (Stockholm: Swedish Olympic Committee, 1912), 1103-1116. Davis Edwards lengthy article in the Sunday *New York Times*, 25 August 1912, pt. 5, p. 10, stated, "Colonel Thompson is the ideal man for the position." Our country has "won a great victory at the Stockholm Olympic Games," wrote Thompson to President Taft. See R.W. Thompson to W.H. Taft, Taft Papers, 19 July 1912, reel 401, series 6, case study 576. These papers contain dozens of letters between the two friends.

⁴⁷See R.W. Thompson to Warren G. Harding, 18 November 1922, 23 April 1923, Warren G. Harding, Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio, microfilm, reel 198, box 631, file 390.

⁴⁸See *Report on VIII Olympiad*, 5. Thompson wrote Warren G. Harding, on April 23, 1923: The AOA was formed amidst misunderstandings and disputes. The AAU, some universities and Army-Navy fight one another. I tried to make a settlement. I need your permission to request Federal Bank presidents to join our Olympic organizations. You can help us in your capacity as Honorary President of the American Olympic Association.

See R.W. Thompson to W.G. Harding, 23 April 1923, Harding Papers, reel 198, file 390. Ten more letters, all Thompson to Harding are located here—all on the same subject.

⁴⁹Speech reproduced in an article written by IOC member from Czechoslovakia, Dr. Frantisek Kroutil. See the *Olympic Review*, 95-96 (1975): 341-344.

⁵⁰*New York Times*, 29 September 1930, p. 18.

⁵¹Mark Dyreson, "Playing for a National Identity: Sport, Immigration, and the Quest for a National Culture in American Social Thought, 1880-1919," *Proteus* 11 (1994): 43.

⁵²Carnegie is quoted in Edward Chase Kirkland, *Dream and Thought in the Business Community 1860-1900* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), 146.

⁵³Harold Underwood Faulkner, *The Quest for Social Justice 1898-1914* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 51.

⁵⁴*NCAB* (1916), 202-203.