

# A Century of Rowing at Wellesley, 1875-1975

by  
LINDA VAUGHAN  
Wellesley College

Between 1875 and 1975, a tradition in women's sport was in the making at Wellesley College. At that time the sport was referred to as rowing; it is now known as crew. There were several major components associated with the development of the crew tradition: a boating pageant known as "Float Night", a "scientific" instructional program, and intramural and intercollegiate competition. During the formative years two people strongly influenced the development of crew and its component parts; the founder of the college, Henry Fowle Durant, and the first director of the department of hygiene and physical training, Lucille Eaton Hill.

While at the time of the opening of the college in 1875 Victorian women were assumed by most people to be frail creatures whose health might be impaired by the rigors of academic life, Mr. Durant was a strong advocate of vigorous exercise in the fresh air and sunshine. He therefore provided an opportunity for the students to exercise and enjoy the outdoors by purchasing three boats for rowing on the lake. More boats were purchased and eventually the rowers established a practice of serenading the campus while drifting in their boats on the lake at sunset. This spontaneous gathering evolved into a campus event known as Float Night which for a period of time was one of the major components of the crew tradition. Eventually it became an elaborate panorama of parades, singing, rowing demonstrations with star and W formations, processions of tableaux in the form of floats and fireworks displays. Because of gasoline shortages and blackouts, this pageant was not held during the war years, and after several attempts to revive Float Night after the war, it was totally abandoned in 1948. It had become too costly and the existing student body had never witnessed the event, so that the thread of at least one part of the crew tradition had been lost.

A second aspect of the tradition began in 1882 with the arrival of Lucille Eaton Hill who was keenly interested in organized sports. Under her direction a more scientific approach was instituted in the crew program. This was also made possible by the purchase of new 8-oared barges. The crews began to be selected on the basis of health, discipline and technical skill so that by 1900 the original rower-singers had become athletes. Miss Hill relied heavily on the advice and expertise of oarsmen and crew coaches from Yale and Harvard and frequently invited them to Wellesley. She also traveled to other schools to become better trained in the finer techniques of rowing. As a result of her efforts, a strong instructional program was established in crew which was faithfully carried on by crew instructors after her resignation in 1909. Since then daughters and granddaughters of generations of alumnae have come to try their hand at a sport which was originally unique to Wellesley, and which has been maintained as an established tradition of student life on campus.

A final component of the tradition was competition which has been in evidence in some form from the very beginning. Interdorm crew competition occurred each fall while the classes vied with one another in the spring. Originally competition for the classes was based on singing ability, but other factors entered in later so that costumes, rowing form, creativity in the design of the floats and eventually speed and endurance were criteria used to judge the winning class each spring. Beginning much later but quickly attaining equal

status, intercollegiate competition became an official part of the program in 1970. At the present time students are continuing to support the interdorm, interclass and intercollegiate programs with great enthusiasm.

Various people and events have had varying degrees of influence on the crew program at Wellesley. but even with the collapse of the boathouse and the total destruction of all the equipment in 1962, crew was reinstated due to the resounding support of the alumnae and students. Although individual components were modified or eventually dropped entirely, the basic tradition of crew itself appears to have generated its own impetus for the continuation of crew as a tradition at the college. As of 1975, the strong heritage of one hundred years of rowing will enter a new century of tradition.

---

# The Beginnings and Directions of Ms. Basketball in North America

JOHN DEWAR  
Laurentian University

“If basketball did not do anything else than relieve womankind from that condition, their great lack of sportsmanship due to no experience in team games, it was well worth putting it into existence.” (Speech given at Forum, Springfield College, January 5, 1932, p. 5)

“Although basketball was originated in a men’s institution, it was scarcely a month old when it was taken up by girls.”

Both of the above statements made by Dr. James Naismith give us some insight as to how the inventor of the game perceived the function of the female in relationship to basketball. This paper will look at the early beginnings of the women’s game; the role of Ms. Senda Berenson Abbot in its development at Smith College and on the national level; and the evolution of the game in Western Canada using the Edmonton Commercial Grads team as a case study. These beginnings and the two examples of widely divergent directions taken early in the history of the game, may be compared as to merit if the observer so desires, and may also serve to indicate who might be responsible for the present position of women in basketball.

In the summer and fall of 1970 and throughout 1971 correspondence and forms were exchanged between Dorothy S. Ainsworth, professor emeritus of Smith College, and Lee Williams, the executive director of the Basketball Hall of Fame or Naismith Memorial. This relatively lengthy correspondence dealt with the possibility of Senda Berenson being considered for induction into the Hall of Fame.

Born in Lithuania in 1868, she came with her family to the Boston area seven years later. After receiving her elementary education she studied at the new Boston Normal School of Gymnastics, the first gymnastic school in the United States to place emphasis on the Swedish system of exercise. During her second year at the gymnastic school she was persuaded to accept a temporary position directing the physical education program at Smith.