

# Eleonora Randolph Sears, Pioneer in Women's Sports

by  
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Eleonora Randolph Sears was not only one of our country's most versatile woman athletes but is considered to have been the trailblazer for women's entrance into sports. She was born into an affluent Boston Brahmin family on September 28, 1881. Her heritage included being the great great granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson and the niece of the first national tennis champion, Richard Sears. Eleo, as she was called, became the Belle of Boston, but it was in the area of sports that she devoted her enthusiastic energies. She was publicized so much in the newspapers for her sporting and social activities that it is reported that only President Theodore Roosevelt outgained her in coverage. She was a perfect subject for a reporter what with her dazzling good looks, her flair for the unusual and her constant mingling with the social set wherever it gathered. Whether it be a wedding in Philadelphia, a tennis tournament at Bar Harbor, or a horse show or yachting race in Newport, Eleo was sure to be there. Usually surrounded by adoring male companions, she was unlike many of her female counterparts of the day who demurely watched sporting contests without a thought of participation. Eleo was constantly excited by the thought of trying and doing activities whether they be "men's sports" or not.

Combining her affluence with her interests, she participated in all sorts of athletics that ranged from tennis, squash, riding, sailing and swimming to polo, trapshooting and walking. It is estimated that she won 240 trophies during her sporting career. She is credited with many firsts during her lifetime: one of the first women to ride a horse astride, first National women's squash champion, and one of the first women to fly in a plane and drive a car. Horses were her most enduring passion and at one time she owned the best breeds in the United States.

An avid sportswoman, a leader in society, a controversial figure due to her independent ways, an anonymous supporter of potential champions and struggling sports organizations - a living legend ceased when Eleonora Sears died on March 26, 1968 at the age of 87. Her years had been exciting ones and she deserved the title given to her by the New York Times, "Pioneer in Women's Sports."



Eleonora Sears would have liked Oregon's tennis facility