

Women in Sports and Games in the Colonial Period

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What is obvious from an analysis of the various journals, letters, diaries, writings and memoirs, and memoirs written by both females and males during the colonial period, is that the activities pursued by women were different than those of the men. Whereas men were heavily engaged in bowling, shooting, animal baiting, fox hunting and so on, it appears from the various primary sources, that women were much more restricted in the sports and games in which they engaged.

In summary, the activities of colonial women were by no means extensive. The role of women in Europe and the British Isles tended to be the model in the colonies. There was, however, some variability in physical activities depending on the particular colony, the middle colonies and the southern colonies allowing for more diversification of physical activities and the social class and the heritage played a strong part in the activities that were pursued. Country folk had different forms of dancing, the jigs and square dancing, whereas the upper class participated in the minuet and court dances of Europe, though not exclusively. Dancing was beginning to be "Americanized." The quilting bees, the activities following corn husking and barn raising, the activities of the country fairs such as ladies' races, were strictly for the country women. And as for heritage, the freedom of the activities of Dutch women, such as ice skating, was somewhat in contrast to the activities of women in New England, though the activities of the Puritan in opposition to dancing have been somewhat exaggerated.

Looking at the colonies as a whole, women in the colonial period participated in ice skating, horseback riding, dancing and foot racing at colonial fairs. Less strenuous activities that were indulged in were such as cards, quilting parties, pleasure excursions and swimming (bathing). As spectators women were permitted to view horse races and boat races.