

Clara G. Baer: Pioneer in Sport for Southern Women

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Clara Gregory Baer, born August 27, 1863 in New Orleans, Louisiana, was a Southern pioneer in the promotion of physical education and sport for women. Educated in Boston at the Posse Normal School of Physical Education, the Emerson College of Oratory, and the Boston School of Expression, Baer returned to New Orleans in 1891 to establish a department of physical education at the four-year old Sophie Newcomb College. She remained at Newcomb until her retirement in 1929, becoming a leader in Louisiana public school physical education, and the promotion of teacher preparation throughout the South. In her thirty-eight years in Louisiana she introduced to the South the first physical education certification program (1892-93), the first degree program in physical education leading to a bachelor's degree (1907-08), and the game of basketball (1893). Baer also invented the game of "Newcomb" (1895), and was a foremost leader in greater freedom for women in sport and dress. Although Baer was a "formalist" in much of her teaching methodology, she believed in the benefits derived from "playful" activities. Senda Berenson is usually credited with the first rules for women's basketball, but Baer published the first women's rules in 1895 under the name "Basquette." Her influence in basketball was felt throughout the South and obviously nationally, as many of her early rules appear in the Spalding Rules printed by Berenson and her committee in 1901. An analysis is made of this first set of basketball rules by Baer showing the influence of Posse's principles of physiology, the attempt to avoid recognition of "star players," and the influence of the period on "lady-like" behavior.



Joan Paul speaking with NAASH's president-elect Tom Jable