

America's First Women Olympians: A Reflection of Sport

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(John R. Betts Address)

The seven American women who played tennis and golf at the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris reflected the status of sport and high society in America. They belonged to clubs studied art, music, literature, language, and enhanced their studies in Europe. The social registers of Santa Monica, New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Boston listed their names. Mary and Margaret Abbott, Polly Whittier, Daria Pratt, Ellen Ridgway, and Marion and Georgina Jones, America's first generation of female Olympic participants were known for their stylish wardrobes and aristocratic associates.

While the American participants in the women's Olympic events conformed to the expectations of their sex, they also symbolized a transformation of women's role in society. More women were earning their own living, traveling freely, visiting public places unescorted, and participating in sports. These freedoms "seemed better than . . . (spending) their lives painting china buttons, embroidering silk pansies, tracing wood-burning designs, and playing 'The Robin's Return,'" wrote Arthur Losser in **Men, Women, and Pianos**.

All of the American women who played golf at the Paris Olympics belonged to French Golf clubs or frequented the links in that country. It is probable that most of their social activities centered at the various French resorts.

The debut of seven American women in the Second Olympiad was coincidental with their presence in Europe. The Olympics were an aside. Their status as women, social prominence, and talents were reflected in their sports participation. They represented what money could buy at the turn-of-the century.



Paula Welch discussed the participation of American women athletes at the 1900 Olympic Games in her John Betts Lecture.