

Theresa Weld Blanchard: America's First Queen of the Ice

MARY LOU LeCOMPTE

The University of Texas at Austin

Theresa Weld Blanchard was the first American to win an Olympic medal in figure skating, capturing the bronze in singles at the 1920 Antwerp Games where she also competed in the pairs. Blanchard also skated in both events at the Olympic Games of 1924 and 1928, and was the premier American skater of the 1920's. Although she won over twenty national and North American championships in singles, pairs and several dancing events, this versatile skater remains virtually unknown outside the skating fraternity where she is remembered as "America's best known and best loved amateur skater."

Today, as amateur regulations are fast disappearing and the very concept of the amateur athlete is under fire from many directions, it is important to recognize the vital role played by wealthy amateurs like Blanchard in building the foundations of American Olympic sports. The daughter of stockbroker Alfred Windsor Weld, Theresa learned figure skating at the exclusive Country Club of Brookline. Following her 1920 marriage to publisher Charles B. Blanchard she continued to compete, winning her last amateur title at age forty-two, long after she had begun her volunteer work for the United States Figure Skating Association (USFSA).

In 1923, Blanchard and partner Nathaniel Niles launched **Skating** magazine, the official publication of the USFSA. Blanchard continued as unpaid editor for forty years, and was also throughout the 1930's, Figure Skating Editor of the **Sportswoman** magazine. During World War II she began a whereby servicemen could obtain free skating privileges at clubs near their bases, and prior to the establishment of the Professional Skaters Guild, acted as an unofficial placement bureau for amateur skaters seeking professional employment.

Blanchard was among the first women members of the USFSA, serving on the Executive Committee for thirteen years and chairing numerous committees. She was instrumental in organizing the first American schools to train figure skating judges, and rose to the rank of World Judge herself. When the USFSA Hall of Fame was established in 1976. Theresa Weld Blanchard was among the first members elected.