

The Sporting Life of the Rugby, Tennessee Colony, 1880-1890

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This paper examines the sporting life of the last English colony to settle in the United States. The colony was founded on the plateau of the Tennessee Cumberland Mountains by Thomas Hughes of Tom Brown's School Days. His dream was to create a workable Christian socialistic community that would provide an acceptable lifestyle for the second sons of the British aristocracy. These second sons were referred to as "Will Wimbles" in England, and they were most often doomed to a life of dissipation and/or poverty because of the laws allowing only first sons to inherit. Sport was a dominant part of life in the Rugby Colony as demonstrated by the building of tennis courts before most houses were constructed. Sports clubs were organized in tennis,

football, baseball, archery, cricket, quoits, billiards, and shooting. They had social clubs, dramatic clubs, and engaged in social activities such as dancing, picnics, and skating parties. Their holidays as well as other occasions were celebrated with sporting activities. This paper takes a comprehensive look at the Rugby colony -- its education, religion, governance, and elitist ethics -- but it focuses on the colonists' sporting practices to see what role they played in sustaining the colony as well as contributing to the colony's failure. It examines gender roles in Rugby's sporting activities, and determines whether the Muscular Christianity ideas postulated by Thomas Hughes were evident within the colony.

The evidence used in the study is from the newspapers published by the Rugby Colony (such as The Rugbeian and The Plateau Gazette) from 1881-1896; the correspondence of Thomas Hughes; his brother Hastings Hughes; Hasting's daughter, Emily; and his mother, Margaret Hughes; the financial and land records from the colony; many photographs made in Rugby between 1880 and 1890; the Historic Rugby Colony Archives, the Hoskins Archives on the UTK campus, and the microfilm on the Rugby Colony from the State Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee; and secondary sources on Rugby, Thomas Hughes, and the **Muscular Christianity Movement**.

This research shows that sports were a dominant part of the colonists' life. They served both as an outlet for the problems they faced in their bleak and unfamiliar surroundings as well as having a detrimental effect in taking time from their work. Women played an active part in sport, often joining the men in the formation of sport clubs such as tennis and archery. They were also cast in traditional roles as observers and supporters of men in the "masculine" sports of football, baseball, and track and field. References in sporting terms that promote "manliness" and good character through sport are subtly consistent with the notions of Muscular Christianity.

Rugby was the last English Colony to settle on U.S. soil, a colony founded for an entirely different purpose than other colonies. Founded by Thomas Hughes, organized sport was a central part of its daily life. Although there has been much written about the Rugby, Tennessee Colony, no account has focused on this important sporting life of the colony.