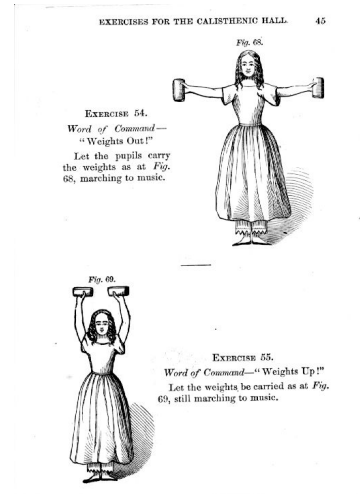


Evolution of Women's Athletic Wear: Historical Thinking Skills Activity

By: Brian Sheehy History Department Coordinator North Andover High School



BY BURN'S CALISTHENICUM



1

at Mount Holyoke College in 1856.

The calisthenics were taught in a room in the second story not yet arranged for recitations, and came first in the middle of the forenoon. Afterward, they came in the afternoon also. The time was not less than twenty minutes nor more than thirty. No change was made in the dress, and no suggestion was made concerning the removal of 'stays' (McCurdy, 1980).



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Turkish pantaloons with a knee length skirt. 1850s.

1

1858 gymnastics costume from Godey's Magazine



2



III

A blouse-waist and a divided bloomer. 1884.



GYMNASTIC FOR GIRLS.

1880s

2

An observer at Oberlin College in 1884 reported that at first women wore blouses with very full bloomers for the exercise period. The dean “would not all the students to go without a shirt, and the result was a scanty skirt and scanty bloomers, a suit that was anything but becoming. We had a woman make these suits at the gymnasium”. (Aldrich, 1930)

1890's



3

Gym suit worn by Edith Hall Plimpton for basketball and gymnastics, 1896–97, Radcliffe College Archives, SC 13, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

1900

4



Abbot Academy 1905, Andover, MA.

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THE skin, when its 2,300,000 pores are opened by exercise, becomes extremely sensitive; still, at such times there is the greatest necessity for thorough cleansing with soap.

It will be noticed that there is no irritation from the abundant lather of Ivory Soap well rubbed in—the lather can be instantly washed off. Other soaps, greasy and not so well made, irritate and require repeated washings. Ivory Soap leaves only a feeling of perfect cleanness.

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★ MAY 20, 1922

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AND THEY CALL IT A FINISHING SCHOOL



1910-1920's

5

5



Lucy Thomas
Piffard, N.Y.



Knickerbockers made shorter with elastic in the hems. 1925.



Women basketball players, 1924, E. Eicha.

Eddie Eicha photographed black life in New York in the early decades of the 1900s. He focused especially on the nightclubs, chorus lines, and entertainers of Harlem.

Courtesy of the Interstate Tattler Collection, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Early Black Photographers 1840-1940, Edited by Deborah Willis. © 1992, The New Press, NY

6

Mid
1920's-1930's

6



Radcliffe College varsity field hockey uniform, ca.1925.

Change Over Time

Looking at the sources of women's sportswear from the mid 19th century to the 1930's, how have what women wore changed over time? Has anything stayed the same?

Comparing and Contrasting

1. Looking at each set of sources list three ways in which they are similar and three ways in which they are different.
2. In what ways does the sportswear in source 1 differ from source 6?
3. How did sportswear change from source 1 to source 2?
4. How did the field hockey uniform in source 3 change from source 6?
5. What set of sportswear would be the easiest to play a sport in? Support your answer.

Contextualization

Using your background knowledge of women's position in society and societal norms during the time period, does women's sportswear reflect the feelings of the time periods? If so, how?

Argumentation

In many ways women participating in sports served as a way to break free from the constraints of society that women faced day in and day out. Develop a thesis statement in which you argue whether or not this liberation is reflected in the athletic wear women wore.