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When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear

1-1-2006

Part One: The Influence of Fashion. Introduction: Public Clothing for Outdoor Play. Chapter 1, Factors of Change.

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Warner, Patricia Campbell, "Part One: The Influence of Fashion. Introduction: Public Clothing for Outdoor Play. Chapter 1, Factors of Change." (2006). *When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear.* Paper 3.
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PART ONE

THE INFLUENCE OF *Fashion*

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INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC CLOTHING FOR *Outdoor Play*

SPORT HAS MORE TO DO THAN ANYTHING ELSE WITH THE EVOLUTION OF THE MODERN MODE; . . . THERE IS ONLY ONE THING OF WHICH EVERYONE IS CONVINCED . . . AND THAT IS THE PERFECTION OF THE ADAPTATION TO THE NEEDS OF THE GAME WHICH MODERN DRESS HAS EVOLVED.

British Vogue, *1926*

This book is about the origins of American sportswear, the most important clothing of the twentieth century and beyond. It is comfortable, easy, inexpensive, practical, and wearable by both men and women. It is undeniably American, yet it is worn by most people all over the world. We take it for granted. Yet this is the first time that such universality has existed in clothing, and it has lasted now for well over a half century—in itself a marvel, considering the speed of fashion change in this era of instant messages and images. Its pieces for women are readily understood and are so basic that they have lasted with very little fundamental change since the late 1920s: sweaters, pants, shirts, skirts, blazers. For men, the continuity in dress has lasted much longer, dating to the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, men's styles gave their look to women's. Yet up to World War II, without either preconception or

reflection, clothing was sharply divided into men's wear on the one hand and women's on the other. There was no interest, it seemed, in finding common ground in dress. Both men and women were happy to dress appropriately for their sex, and were aghast when the bohemian few tried to cross over. Yet when the war came, all the conditions that had existed before vanished in the face of new need, new usage, and new attitudes about dress. After World War II, the pants and the easy, carefree pieces worn with them that women had donned during the war years were a permanent part of their wardrobes, and became the casual clothes they preferred, far from the elegant designer models and the polished Hollywood styles of the 1930s. Ever since then, although designers have kept alive the glamour of haute couture (indeed, in recent decades they have built an entire industry on glamorous showmanship and promotion rather than creativity), it is sportswear that fills the need, takes precedence, and has become the clothing of choice today.

Such enormous shifts of cultural understanding don't just happen overnight, even when projected into acceptance by something as devastating as a world war. Major upheavals had occurred before—the revolutionary wars of the eighteenth century and the Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth come to mind—but even though they influenced dress, they never came close to bringing a change of such magnitude as came about in the twentieth century. For women to wear trousers, the symbol of masculinity for five hundred years, openly, acceptably, unthinkingly, accomplished what had never been done before in Western history. It gave women freedom in their dress, unbound from the societal and physical restrictions of the past. When we realize that only in the twentieth century did such a change in clothing occur, we have to

ask, how did this happen? What created the conditions that World War II brought into focus?

The answer is the growing interest in sports and exercise that first came into public awareness some one hundred years before. It was sports that brought women out-of-doors into new activities that took them away from their housebound roles. It was sports that encouraged their latent competitive instincts. It was sports and exercise that changed their way of thinking about themselves. And when sport was mixed into the potent broth of higher education, the heady brew changed women, and certainly their clothing, forever.

Women's involvement in sports and exercise is a two-pronged history that begins in the early nineteenth century and ends a hundred years later when the two parts finally merge. The two parallel paths represent the wide range of games and sports that both men and women played together out-of-doors, and the exercises and gymnastics that eventually became known as physical education, performed by men and women separately, alone and generally indoors. When women first undertook these activities, they quite literally had nothing to wear. Over a period of decades, they cautiously devised new clothes for them, or modified the ones they had to serve the needs that active movement demanded. The breakthrough that shook off the restrictions of the Victorian age came with the new indoor sports of the 1890s, most specifically basketball for girls. From then on, comfort and common sense played an increasing role, finally overwhelming the conservatism and societal limitations that had kept women covered, compressed and usually in skirts. The result of the long, slow process is today's comfortable, practical clothing that the world recognizes as American sportswear.

Although the two types of activities for women developed at about the same time, each remained essentially separate from the other. Sport took place in the public sphere, exercise in the private. In public, women were expected to be modest and demure and to wear, to the best of their ability, the fashion of the time. Women's clothing for sport, then, was almost by definition clothing for interaction with men. Because it was social, fashion-oriented dress following the norms of the day, and worn out-of-doors in concept, it changed relatively slowly. It had to adhere to the constraints of "women's place" on women's behavior, including their clothing choices.

In contrast, the private sphere depended on the separation of the sexes, usually in an educational setting. Whereas young men had been educated together in their elite institutions for centuries, young women had not. It was a whole new idea to offer girls equal education. Therefore, this segregation of young women came into its own with the establishment of schools of higher learning for women. It was here, comfortably apart from the pressures of mixed-sex interaction, that clothing for physical education developed. It sprang from a burgeoning interest in exercise from the very beginning, with the founding of Mount Holyoke Seminary, later College, in the 1830s.[1] *Unlike the clothing for sport, it was not hampered by the social constraints that operated when men were present. It depended instead on ideas of comfort and freedom of movement to guide its new forms. Both types of clothing took several decades to find their stride, but each had a separate origin and therefore evolved in a different way and at a different rate.*

In Part One I tell the story of sport dress—public dress. This was the accepted clothing for women of the day, happily worn in mixed

company, modified slightly for the new games and sports that emerged in the nineteenth century. Gymnastic dress, or private dress, will be dealt with in Part Two. But the double thrust—that is, activity undertaken with men on the one hand and single-sex activity within cloistered grounds on the other—together provided the seeds for the new ideas about clothing that took until the 1930s to come into full bloom. Only then, after each began borrowing from the other, did they merge indivisibly into the sensible, practical, and comfortable clothing of the twentieth century.

In simplest terms, the history of women's involvement in athletics in general and the foundations of sportswear in particular is in large measure the story of the long, slow adoption of trousers for women. It is a story that interweaves many different threads of a social history that has its beginnings in the eighteenth century. If trousers play an important role in this story, why, then, did women insist on retaining their fashionable outfits that included hats, gloves, corsets, crinolines, petticoats, and long full skirts as they eagerly participated in the many new games and activities that arose during the nineteenth century? Their look was calculated and unvarying—pert, active, and very, very feminine. The reason was simple. These were the clothes for courting. Sports represented a whole new arena for young men and women to meet and interact, usually for the first time without the eagle-eyed chaperon who had been a fixture of the past. And courting demanded the most attractive clothes one owned. In an age when marrying well was the goal of every woman, young ladies and young men too embraced with delight any new, socially acceptable way to engage with the opposite sex. Indeed, more often than not, a woman's entire future depended on marrying well since

little else was open to her. No wonder, then, that "proper" clothing, that is, clothing that was both attractive and fashionable, became a significant consideration for both men and women as they participated in the new games and sports. The earliest of these were croquet and skating. Following hard on their heels came tennis, golf, swimming, and bicycling. All provided arenas for meeting and mating. The phenomenon of sport, any sport, as an opportunity for courting lasted through the century and well into the next. As an Outlook *magazine article from June 1899 titled "The Golfing Woman" put it, a man could learn as much in two hours in a mixed foursome as he could previously have learned in six weeks on a voyage with a prospective wife.*[2]

By the time that article was written at the end of the century, new outlets provided suitable settings and opportunities for members to meet and play games, mostly golf and tennis. The first American country club was established in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1882, and soon every major city had one or more.[3] *The country club appealed to families of similar background, offered a host of activities that brought young people together, and in the process encouraged a new version of class consciousness, even class structure in America.*[4] *Small wonder that fashionable clothing played a significant role.*

But the clubs were not limited to the upper classes only. The growing middle classes, as represented by clerks or office workers and their peers, established clubs of their own at about the same time, usually for golf. The earliest of these in North America was the Montreal (later Royal Montreal) Golf Club, founded by an immigrant Scot, Alexander Dennistoun, in 1873. It is no surprise that the nineteenth-century invasion of Scots into Canada brought

the game to the American continent, since the Royal and Ancient Game had been played in Scotland from at least the fifteenth century.[5] *Soon after the Montreal club was founded, another appeared in Quebec City and still others in Ontario at Toronto, Brantford, Kingston, and Niagara. The first interprovincial matches between Ontario and Quebec were already being held by 1882, the same year that the Country Club of Brookline was opening its doors.*[6]

The real boom for golf, though, came in the 1890s. The reasons were many, besides the growing population of Scots in North America. With the infusion of immigrants came new social and working conditions, each of which touched on the rising interest in sports. The newcomers settled not in the farmlands that had lured their predecessors but rather in the cities, feeding the burgeoning urban population at the end of the century. The influx of newcomers changed the nature of work at this time as well. The sheer volume of immigrants, combined with a new awareness of working conditions, led to reform in the guise of a shorter work week. With increased leisure time came the growing desire for more leisure activities. In addition, the improvement of public transportation solved the problem of getting to the major sites of leisure activity, whether the beach or tennis courts or golf links. Interestingly, perhaps the greatest influence on the rising popularity of golf in the 1890s was the bicycle. It, possibly more than any other single innovation, eased the restrictions that had hampered the middle-class Victorian woman. It gave her a new, simple, and relatively inexpensive form of transportation and offered her freedom as well. Simultaneously, a "tremendous number of women" took up golf in the 1890s. They even formed their own clubs: the first, again, in Montreal with another in Toronto in 1891. Women "joined in droves."[7]

Clearly, then, the activities and expectations that were in place by the beginning of the twentieth century had broadened tremendously over the preceding few decades. And the dress the participants wore cannot be ignored. This section on "public clothing," then, will reveal its close relationship to fashion wear, with its mere nod to the demands of active movement. To track this history, I look at the most influential sports: tennis, swimming, and bicycling. But I begin with croquet and skating, since these two represented the introduction of women into sporting activities. Golf, though an important new sport in the 1890s, failed to generate new ideas in clothing (and in fact has remained heroically staid as far as dress is concerned throughout the entire ensuing century) so will not be a part of this study. Neither will riding and the equestrian sports, which have a tradition of their own, founded primarily on upper-class lifestyles.[8] *As golf clothing remained outside the trends that propelled the change in clothing for other sports, so too did riding gear. After about 1910 to 1915, jodhpurs, hacking jacket, and splendid boots became codified as the uniform of choice for men and women riders alike. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, riding dress tradition remains intact, based now on a style that is almost a century old. These sports are the exceptions. As for all the rest, the American middle class wholeheartedly embraced them with joy and fervor. Each presented its own set of problems in the matter of dress.*

The clothing of any period reflects its cultural environment. To appreciate how long this journey has been, we must understand the societal factors that led to the acceptance of sports in the first place.

CHAPTER ONE

FACTORS OF *Change*

As with most movements that revolutionize a nation, the impulses that led to the sports craze of the nineteenth century came from many different sources rather than developing in a clear, linear fashion. As for the clothing that was deemed suitable for the new activities, we have seen that there were decided societal reasons for it to remain closely tied in style and form to the fashions of the period. The clothes themselves, as all clothes do, sprang from the circumstances and the mood of the time and reflected the dominant cultural environment, so it is to those we must turn. Studying the clothing lets us study the period.

Throughout the twentieth century, scholars and commentators wrote about the rise of the middle class and about the subsequent rise in the notions of leisure and recreation. The shift away from the eighteenth century's practices of democracy and partnership between men and women to the nineteenth century's recognition of "women's role" polarized the sexes into separate spheres of public and private. Men, of course, were "public," and women were "private." In tandem with the development of this concept was the growth of leisure time and the ways in which it was spent by each sex. Visitors to the United States in the 1830s and 1840s frequently reported a doleful lack of amusements or indeed any form of activity other than moneymaking among the men they met in their travels throughout the country. Even then they could readily identify the upward mobility, the

overwork, and the constant push towards financial success that has become so typical of American life, so much a part of the American character. And though they may seem strange bedfellows, this concern for money existed hand in hand with a sturdy revivalist religion that puritanically denounced any sort of pleasure. With this combination generating a national mood, the "new" pastimes had an uphill battle. The famous preacher Henry Ward Beecher, member of the great New England Beecher family and brother of Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, helped lead the charge. In 1844 he vilified the theater, the concert hall, and the circus, promising everlasting damnation to any who partook of the siren charms of those benign amusements.[1] This repressed New England viewpoint was shared in many other parts of the country. It was not until the growing middle class came to realize that the evangelists were actually pandering to a narrow segment of the population that people began to recognize that simple pleasures might after all be both healthy and morally acceptable.[2]

Many other factors helped bring about the great changes the United States underwent during the first half of the nineteenth century. Not least of these was the urbanization of America, which in turn affected sports. The influx of immigrants certainly helped to build and democratize private clubs for golf and other sports at the end of the century, but even in the early years the changes were significant. Between 1800 and 1850, the population living in urban centers of eight thousand or more tripled. Of course, in comparison to the astonishing growth of the late nineteenth century, these numbers were small. But they were sufficently impressive to bring to light the emerging problems of crowding and the lack of opportunities for leisure pastimes that existed in America's cities. As one foreign visitor, Michael Chevalier, somewhat patronizingly observed in 1833: "Democracy is too new a comer upon the earth to have been able as yet to organize its pleasures and amusements. In Europe, our pleasures are essentially exclusive, they are aristocratic like Europe itself. In this matter, then, as in politics, the American democracy has yet to create every thing fresh."[3] Slowly, however, America did just that. Its response was a gradual introduction of the commercial amusements that would ultimately explode into the vast entertainment industry we know today. By and large, though, organized sports did not find their way into the American social fabric until after the Civil War.[4]

Not all of the innovations were directed towards play. The United States in the mid-nineteenth century was ripe for an explosion in the cultural arena as well. Here the money, leisure time, and earnest attention were focused instead on elevating the gentility of the population at large. As John F. Kasson stated in his history of leisure activity in America, *Amusing the Millions*, "a self-conscious elite of critics, ministers, educators, and reformers" living primarily in the urban Northeast flowed into the vacuum to assume cultural leadership. These "genteel reformers" sought to instruct the turbulent and rough-edged democracy, to bring to it a semblance of refinement and discipline. The "American apostles of culture" strenuously labored to inculcate the Victorian virtues of "character—moral integrity, self-control, sober earnestness, industriousness—among the citizenry at large." Their seriousness of purpose dictated that all activities, whether work or leisure, were to be constructive. In the process, they legitimized poetry, fiction, the visual arts, serious music, and other cultural pursuits, not "for art's sake" but, in Kasson's words, "for their moral and social utility." Their work in turn inspired those who followed them to endow the nation with the museums, art galleries, libraries, symphony orchestras, and other institutions that set the tone and the cultural goals for the century to come, in terms of both quality and philanthropy. Indeed, only in the past decade or so has the 150-year-old mold been broken, as cultural institutions are moving away from the paternalistic goals they represented towards a more truly recognizable democratic focus.[5]

The rise of the genteel reformers intersected in three ways with the rise of sports and athletic activity for women. The first was through their farsighted donations of land to develop urban parks, to create peaceful green areas for the otherwise city-bound. The second, which will be discussed in Part Two, was to found colleges for women. The third, which took a slightly different shape from the other two because it was promoted by women, for women, was the dress reform movement. It will be discussed briefly in chapter 6.

Of course, the idea of greens and commons was not new to nineteenth-century America. These had been an integral part of colonial towns from the beginning. But the first planned public park, designed to enhance nature and to counteract the relentless pressure of an overcrowded commercial environment, was New York's Central Park. Frederick Law Olmsted, little known at that time, submitted a design with architect Calvert

Vaux. They placed first in the 1858 competition. Olmsted was put in charge of the project. It was so successful and so widely admired that it inspired the creation of many city parks around the country. Olmsted worked on most of the similar projects in America, among them Prospect Park in Brooklyn; Fairmount Park in Philadelphia; South Park in Chicago; Riverside and Morningside Parks, also in New York City; Mount Royal Park in Montreal; the Capitol grounds in Washington, D.C.; the park system of Buffalo, New York; the "Emerald Necklace" linking the Boston Common and the Public Garden with the Fenway and other greenways along the Charles River; and the campus of Stanford University in Palo Alto. He is regarded as the father of American landscape architecture.[6]

In Central Park, Olmsted sought to meld a democratic recreational setting with "an artfully natural landscape." He planned for horseback riding, boating on the pond in the summer, and skating in the winter. But he was careful to keep the louder and rougher, more boisterous sports and games of the working class out of his park. A true representative of his gentleman class, he wanted his park to project instead a calming, restorative interaction with nature. Central Park was popular in spite of its uptown location, which required considerable planning and expenditure for most people to get there. Statistics bear this out: in 1871 an average of 30,000 people visited it every day, for a total of 10 million over the entire year.[7] This was at a time when the population of the city stood at 942,000, and of the entire state of New York at 4.382 million.[8] Clearly, the park was an idea whose time had come, the first of many throughout the country.

At the same time that green areas were being developed to give urban dwellers a place to escape and to pursue healthier living, several influential groups were becoming aware of what they regarded as the general unhealthiness of middle-class American women. These complaints ranged widely, from sources as varied as the vocal foreigners who came to America and criticized what they found, to educators such as Catharine Beecher, to medical practitioners, among them the pioneering women in the field. Among the targets of their attacks were the various "cures" of the time, including the popular water cures that Beecher, for one, periodically indulged in, or the rest cure that kept a woman flat on her back, immobile, for as much as six weeks at a time to rid her of "hysteria." It began to dawn

on the critics as they recognized the drawbacks of these cures that, by contrast, gentle exercise might actually be beneficial to good health.[9]

At just about this time the medical profession had fallen into disrepute, with justifiable cause. Standards of schooling in many cases were minimal at best, and either scarcely addressed or entirely ignored basic scientific knowledge. A case in point was the Geneva Medical College, where Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman in America to be trained as a doctor, received her education. It had been founded in 1835, and by 1847, the year of Blackwell's entry, had seven faculty.[10] A medical degree there required two sixteen-week courses of lectures (two semesters of work, by today's standards), a thesis, and an oral exam to graduate. Granted, each student had to have some background in science and classical languages, at that time taught only to young men in schools, and some prior medical experience upon entry—though under the circumstances, one wonders where they were to get it. Even so, although the requirements seem woefully meager by today's standards, they were enough to keep women out of the profession. Blackwell's prior education lacked all the pre-admission requirements, and so she was forced to learn the science and languages on her own. In addition, she spent a year living in the home of a sympathetic doctor, who gave her access to his medical books and to the breadth of his knowledge. Her road was not an easy one. Even though she became a favorite at the school and graduated first in her class, the initial reaction to her was hostile and remained uneasy throughout her stay. Indeed, after she graduated, the dean of the college stated that although he personally admired her very much, the "inconvenience attending the admission of all qualified females" was so great that he was "compelled on all future occasions to oppose such a practice."

Perhaps because of her own ordeal while being trained alongside men and then striving to be recognized in the profession, or perhaps simply because she was a woman of her time, Blackwell was ever mindful of the decorum that existed between the sexes. But precisely because it was "unnatural" for women patients "to have no resort but to men" in those diseases "peculiar to themselves . . . no woman of sensibility" could allow herself to be examined by a male physician "without great reluctance."[11] She therefore encouraged other women to come into the field. Dr. Ann Preston agreed. In 1851 she was one of eight members of the first graduating

class (and later the dean) of the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, which had been founded by male Quakers the year before. She too believed that teaching women medicine was "a step not *from* but *towards* decency and decorum."[12] Before long, not only medical schools but teaching hospitals as well were founded by women, for women, as Blackwell and her followers broke down the barriers, bringing a new awareness of women's concerns into medical practice, not just in the United States but in Great Britain, too. *Godey's Lady's Book*, ever proud of the women who were among its readers, reported in 1866:

> We do things better in America. Medical colleges for women have been founded here during the last fifteen years; there are, probably, from three to four hundred graduates, who hold the full degree of "Doctress of Medicine," now in successful practice in our Republic. Here is the announcement of the one *British Doctress*:——
>
> "Miss Elizabeth Garrett has passed her final examination at Apothecaries' Hall, London, and received a license as a general practitioner of medicine. This is the first instance that has occurred in England, but several other ladies are pursuing their medical studies, and there is a growing feeling among medical men, as well as among the general public, in favor of women practitioners. It is admitted here that to Philadelphia is due the credit of first inaugurating this movement."[13]

Blackwell herself, though, perhaps with a certain sense of inevitability but more likely a deep and compelling desire to work with needy women, turned from the male area of "doctoring" to the promotion of hygiene and what was then termed physical education—literally, education about the body and its health and well-being. With this, she directed her attention to an area that was virtually ignored at the time, the public health needs of the urban poor. As part of her effort, she published a series of "Lectures on the Laws of Life" in 1852, arguing the need for "physical education" and exercise.[14] Interestingly, she tied the body to its clothing, in a sense foreshadowing the developments of the late twentieth century: "We need developed muscles that shall make the human body really a divine image,

a perfect form rendering all dress graceful, and not requiring to be patched and filled up and weighed down with clumsy contrivances for hiding its deformities."[15] She also was an early advocate of "equally balanced bodies, minds, hearts and souls,"[16] later reshaped into the clarion call for a sound mind in a sound body, *mens sana in corpore sano.*

Parenthetically, as sexual barriers were being broken, so were color barriers. One of the early medical pioneers was Rebecca J. Cole, the first African American physician in the United States, who graduated in 1867 from the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. She spent the years 1872 to 1881 as a resident physician at the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, a hospital owned and operated by women physicians, and later worked with Blackwell as a "sanitary visitor," a traveling physician who visited slum families in their homes and instructed them in family hygiene and prenatal and infant care.[17] By the 1870s and 1880s, in the post–Civil War years, women were increasingly being trained as doctors in schools such as Philadelphia's.[18] Nevertheless, the control of the profession remained firmly in men's hands.

Despite women's entry into the medical field, it was the overall failure to cure that led to the rise of the health reform movement. Stimulated in part by the few women in medicine, but even more so by men and women outside the medical profession who wished to educate the population about the virtues of a healthful diet, public hygiene, and physical exercise, as well as basic physiology (the "physical education" addressed in Blackwell's tract), it developed quite separately from the mainstream medical profession. Many of the women active in these groups were women's rights advocates and dress reformers.[19] Their desire to lift the veil of ignorance from Victorian women by teaching them about their own bodies was a radical notion, but it became increasingly widespread. Articles on health and hygiene, women's education in general, and women's medical education in particular, appeared in the popular press. For example, a single 1864 issue of the influential *Godey's Lady's Book* reported "Vassar College To Be Opened This Year!"; advocated "Free National Normal Schools For Young Women"; and discussed "The Medical Profession: What Women Have Done In It."[20] But even as *Godey's*, in the person of Sarah Josepha Hale, advocated medical training for women, it was careful to maintain Victorian propriety. In a July article from that same year, we finally glimpse the social constraints

and expectations for women, even if seen through the eyes of an ardent supporter:

> We hope, for the honor of our sex, that these gentle *M.D.'s* will insist on retaining their womanhood in their profession, and never assume the style and title of man as *Doctor*, when their own *Doctress* is better and more elegant, being delicate, definite, and dignified. . . . We do not want *female* physicians, that compound term signifying an *animal man*; we want cultivated, refined feminine physicians, known as *Doctresses* for their own sex and children, and conservers of domestic health and happiness. . . .
>
> One truth is sure; a lady can never elevate herself by becoming manlike or making pretenses to be so. She must keep her own place, cultivate her own garden of home.[21]

Fortunately for women's health, even some of the male leaders in the medical profession, such as S. Weir Mitchell, the quintessential Victorian doctor, joined in the demand for more exercise for women. "To run, to climb, to swim, to ride, to play violent games, ought to be as natural to the girl as to the boy."[22] Or, in Mrs. Hale's florid prose, "I can see before me a long line of puny, sickly children that have been recommended by physicians to the exercise of gymnastics, in order to restore health and vigor to their feeble frames."[23]

With mention of *Godey's*, it is time to consider another factor that changed the countenance of America—the popular press. Many historians have commented on its enormous impact from the early nineteenth century on in influencing the growth of trends, fads, and passions in the United States.[24] Advances in technology created new presses that improved both printing and engraving, and developed a new kind of paper, made from wood rather than rags. These inventions cut costs in the process, yielding a cheap product available to everybody, as with, for example, the "pulps" of the end of the century. Artists leaped to the task of capturing American life in their illustrations, sending swift visual messages across the country with the help of a burgeoning railway system, helping to draw together the vast expanses with their sparse but growing settlements. The twenty-two-year-

old Winslow Homer was one of these illustrators, projecting the spirit of mid-century America when he began working for *Harper's Weekly* in 1857. His graphic representations, a feature of the magazine until 1875, gave his generation views of everything from skating in a still-barren Central Park in 1860 to Civil War battles in Virginia, to bathing at Newport.[25] For the first time, then, a communications medium showed its power to disseminate fashion, trends, and events.

Women provided a new and rapidly growing readership—what today we would call a target audience—for the barrage of magazines created to address all aspects of their daily lives and interests. For the first time, because of a new broader literacy, women formed a vital, even avid audience for the swelling numbers of female authors, many of whom wrote not just for the new magazines but books, too, that resonated with the morality of the day. Indeed, these authors, through magazines such as *Godey's*, helped to establish the parameters of women's sphere.

The Industrial Revolution had jolted society out of its comfortable pastoral quietude. As we have seen, stunning changes followed in its wake: technological advances, a burgeoning urban population and its attendant problems, new kinds of wealth and a distinctive leisure class, and mass production, to name a few. Hand in hand with this last came the department store. It provided a new kind of outlet for the manufactured goods, often textile products, that attempted to satisfy the demands of the moneyed and leisured. The sewing machine made it all possible.

The idea for a sewing machine had been around since the late eighteenth century, but most attempts to produce one had failed. The key to success came only when inventors broke away from trying to imitate traditional hand-sewing methods and introduced two completely innovative concepts: a new type of needle and a double, looped thread combination. Baltasar Krems of Mayern, Germany, provided the first in 1810. His crank-operated chain stitch machine for sewing nightcaps had a continuous material feed and, significantly, a needle with the eye at its point. A series of tinkerers and inventors continued to tackle the problem in the early nineteenth century. Among the more successful was the French tailor Barthelemy Thimonnier, in 1830. Alas, his success was also his downfall. Traditional tailors, afraid for their livelihood, attacked and destroyed his eighty-machine factory, forcing him to escape with his life. Four years later, Walter Hunt built America's

first sewing machine but, fearing that his invention would destroy jobs, backed away. It was Elias Howe, working in Boston for a man who repaired precision instruments, who hit on the process of using two threads from different sources: a Krems-style needle with its eye at the point pushed through the cloth to form a loop on the underside that was anchored by another thread slipped through the loop with a shuttle, to create the lock stitch. He received a patent in 1846, but his machine cost $300, more than any householder could easily afford.[26] A series of disasters followed, and bad business moves hampered his progress and his ultimate financial success.

Even though Howe never made a success of his invention, the sewing machine business took off. By the 1850s, many manufacturers had stolen his idea, and found eager sewers to use their machines. The best of these was designed by Isaac Merritt Singer, a flamboyant actor, machinist, and ladies' man whose genius lay more in marketing than in invention. Singer's was the first really practical sewing machine; as long as it had thread, it sewed and maintained an even and balanced stitch on both the right and wrong sides. Patented in 1851, Singer's machine kept Howe's lock stitch process and needle but it improved the ease of use. It did away with Howe's old hand crank in favor of a treadle and used a "perpendicular action" (it was marketed under the name Perpendicular Action Sewing Machine) in which the needle moved up and down rather than sideways. Its patent claims were threefold: it regulated the cloth feed, it controlled the tension on the needle thread, and it lubricated the needle thread to allow it to sew leather. Its main claim to fame, though, apart from the relief it gave women who had been chained to unending hand-sewing, was that it was the first domestic appliance to be mass-manufactured on an assembly line, using interchangeable parts. As a result, the Singer sewing machines could be produced in quantity and sold for a much lower price than earlier models.

With this innovation, marketing followed. Singer introduced several techniques that are still in use today, now so much a part of our modern way of doing business that we never stop to wonder where they began. Singer, the unfailing ladies' man, was the first to display his product in a well-appointed showroom, using comely young women to demonstrate the machine. They taught buyers how to operate them as well. He devised the installment plan, five dollars down and the remainder, with interest, in monthly payments. He offered half-price deals to church sewing circles,

which would buy one machine for the group—a brilliant double play that lent respectability to his machine as it built up individual appetites among the members, who would each want her own. And he offered a fifty-dollar buy-back on an old machine to anyone buying a new one.[27] *Godey's* gave its stamp of approval in February 1863: "The benefits of this wonderful invention increase with every year of its trial. . . . The Sewing-Machine comes into the heart of the home; it helps in the domestic circle; it has an important influence on family comfort and social happiness."[28] The next month, as if to seal the blessing, a charming engraving, "The New Sewing Machine," portrayed two beautifully dressed young ladies seated in the parlor using their machine, with a copy of *Godey's* open on a stool beside it.[29]

This marvelous machine was to revolutionize the manufacture of clothing. By the late 1850s, the *New York News* pointed out that "men are not only being fed, and transported from point to point by the aid of machinery, but they are also clothed by it. The increasing millions of civilized men and women are no longer exclusively dependent for comfort and tasteful garments upon the slow operations of mere manual labor." By the mid-1850s, the sewing machine provided the backbone for the ready-made clothing industry, manufacturing shirts, collars, and other furnishings. And for women, in a miracle of timing that one suspects was causal rather than coincidental, the necessary crinolines and hoops of the later 1850s and 1860s, both hard to sew by hand, became much easier to produce with the sewing machine.[30]

All these developments notwithstanding, the idea of mass-manufacturing clothing in America was not new. It had begun with army uniforms during the War of 1812, though this had been accomplished by coordinating hand-sewers. The sewing machine took over that role with the demands of the Civil War. The Union Army needed over 1.5 million uniforms a year; the sewing machine answered the call and demonstrated to a postwar industry what could be accomplished. Happily, or, more likely, even because of the speedy construction the sewing machine allowed, men's styles in the 1850s introduced a new relaxed fit and a simpler line. The lounge or sack jacket, precursor to the modern-day suit, straight-cut and clean in line, required far less tailoring to the body, and therefore lent itself more easily to mass production and ready-to-wear than older styles. In the post–Civil War years, for the same reasons, women's outerwear (cloaks,

wraps, and the wide-skirted semi-coat styles of mid-century) as well as underwear (hoops, drawers and petticoats) were also machine-made and sold in retail stores, in particular the department store, which had emerged from its more tentative beginnings in the 1850s.

Many of the great retail establishments opened in the 1850s and 1860s: Jordan Marsh in Boston (1851); Marshall Field's (1852) and Carson Pirie Scott (1854) in Chicago; Macy's (1858) and A. T. Stewart's (1861) in New York; John Wanamaker's in Philadelphia (1862). The majority of them directly and deliberately targeted the growing company of middle-class customers with discretionary money to spend, rather than appealing to the working class, who came mainly to rub shoulders and look. The idea of the department store grew out of the older general stores as well as the new specialty shops that catered to women. The 1870s saw the introduction of almost every service that a twentieth-century department store shopper would come to expect: refreshment facilities, whether a soda fountain, a lunch counter, or a lady's luncheon court or tearoom; ladies' lounges complete with comfortable chairs, even writing desks with stationery and newspapers; sparkling lavatories; delivery service; and, by the 1880s, even telephone and telegraph stations, lost and founds, post offices, and other services. Macy's and Wanamaker's had electric lights as well by the late 1870s. Catalogue shopping was first introduced by Montgomery Ward in 1872, made possible by the expanding web of railroads that now linked the country. The only thing lacking was the charge account, a twentieth-century lure. Even the "event" sales and specials so familiar to today's shoppers were in place by the late 1880s: seasonal clearances and events for Christmas, Valentine's Day, and the like spurred sales. Early on, the stores learned the draw of special programming. In 1887, for example, Wanamaker's hosted a period costume extravaganza, complete with an 1880s version of 1780s styles, to celebrate the centennial of the U.S. Constitution. And, in the spirit of the day, capitalizing on the infatuation for sports, Macy's held an archery contest. The success was stunning: within just five years after the Civil War, in 1870, Macy's sales totaled over $1 million and continued to rise by 80 percent each of the next seven years. Thus the selling of goods became a partnership with the selling of class, of trendy activities, even of sports. [31]

Although women's clothing was slower to be mass-produced than men's, by the 1870s much of women's requisite (and plentiful) underwear was fac-

tory-made and available both in stores and by mail order. By 1887, Jordan Marsh took note of this: "Only a few years ago, [ready-made clothing] was in its infancy; and what then was a spasmodic beginning is now a giant enterprise."[32] The process was slow but steady, helped in great measure by the introduction of Montgomery Ward's catalogue and others that followed, including those of the T. Eaton Company, centered in Toronto, whose earliest catalogue dated to 1881, and Sears Roebuck, which entered the catalogue business in 1888. By century's end, clothing not only could be made in quantity, it could be shipped in quantity anywhere in the United States and Canada. With a central source of dissemination of goods advertised widely through the ever-expanding print media, manufacturers and designers had stronger and more immediate control over what the country would wear.

All these interwoven factors, together with the broader availability and tolerance of higher education for women, helped set the scene for the acceptance of sports and exercise for women. Advances in technology changed not just the manufacture and merchandising of clothing but the textiles used in it. Not only could a huge quantity of cloth be turned out, dropping prices considerably, but also new kinds of machine-made cloth appeared. Knitting machines introduced a more flexible textile that "gave" on the body when it was in motion. Called "jersey," it was adopted for tennis dress as early as 1879.[33] And with the growth of the sport movement, the demand for suitable clothing—*fashionable* suitable clothing—grew too.

The technical advances of the Industrial Revolution also encouraged the production and distribution of more sophisticated and cheaper sports equipment to a wider audience—often through the catalogues. As we will see with the bicycle, these goods stimulated a universal craze that swept the land, gathering all segments of society in every part of the United States and Canada.