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Part Two: The Influence of Education. Chapter 9, Innovation at Wellesley: A Uniform for Crew.

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INNOVATION AT *Wellesley*

A Uniform for Crew

THE YEARS BETWEEN DIO LEWIS'S *NEW GYMNASTICS* AND SENDA BERENSON'S introduction of basketball for women in the early 1890s saw a continuation of the interest in sporting activities and exercise. They also witnessed a slowly growing acceptance of the notion of women's higher education. Schools for women, some of them connected to existing men's colleges (Barnard and Columbia, Radcliffe and Harvard, Sophie Newcomb and Tulane) and founded during the last thirty or so years of the nineteenth century, offered girls an education supposedly comparable to their brothers'. Most of the schools appeared in the 1880s and later, and all of them profited from the pioneers: Mount Holyoke (1837), Vassar (1865), and Wellesley and Smith (both 1875). All of these early schools for women encouraged physical exercise from the start, but only Vassar stipulated a specific uniform—and that disappeared soon after. But between the new exercise dress worn at Mount Holyoke in the 1860s, based on Dio Lewis's model, and the skirtless basketball outfit adopted at Smith in the 1890s, another sort of non-fashionable informal dress appeared. Evidence of it still exists in photographs from Wellesley and Mount Holyoke, the earliest dating from 1879. It consisted of a bloused shirt reminiscent of Dio Lewis's exercise dress, worn with a long skirt. I can find no evidence of it in *The Delineator*, that invaluable magazine published by Butterick to sell its paper patterns, until 1883, but clearly the style existed before then, since



Crew of the *Argo*, 1879. Note the bloused shirts. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, photo by Seaver.

we see it here. *The Delineator's* winter catalogue (1888–89), in showing a ladies' yachting blouse, informs us that the style was “first published in June, 1883.” In the catalogue for autumn (1889), four pattern illustrations for sports blouses appear: two sailor blouses, another nautical-style blouse, and a “tennis shirt.”¹ Two have the corsetted silhouette of high fashion, but the other two are the baggy, unfitted “blouse shirt,” as *The Delineator* calls them. It is these “sport blouses” that form the basis of the outfits that I focus on in this chapter—the crew uniforms at Wellesley from the 1870s to 1892.

The outfit was unusual for its time in that it was decidedly different from the fashionable look of those tightly corseted and bustled years. It seems to have appeared in response to need. In the photographs, it stands out for its originality. I can find no specific references to it anywhere, no explanations other than what follows in this chapter for its appearance and the date when it was introduced. If it resembles anything else from the time, it is the sailor suit of little boys, except paired here with a skirt instead of the knee-length stovepipe pants boy children wore. It was used for crew at Wellesley as early as the late 1870s, just a few years after Welles-



FIGURE No. 372 K.

FIGURES Nos. 372 K, 373 K, 374 K AND 375 K.—LADIES' GARMENTS FOR OUT-DOOR SPORTS.

FIGURE No. 372 K.—This illustrates Pattern No. 3125 (copyright), price 1s. 3d. or 30 cents.

FIGURE No. 373 K.—This consists of Ladies' Blouse Shirt No. 3112 (copyright), price 1s. 3d. or 30 cents; and Cap No. 2176, price 5d. or 19 cents.

FIGURE No. 374 K.—This consists of Ladies' Shirt No. 3125 (copyright), price 1s. 3d. or 30 cents; Jacket No. 2618 (copyright), price 1s. 3d. or 30 cents; and Cap No. 3166 (copyright), price 5d. or 10 cents.

FIGURE No. 375 K.—This consists of Ladies' Blouse Shirt No. 3112 (copyright), price 1s. 3d. or 30 cents; and Cap No. 3167 (copyright), price 5d. or 10 cents.

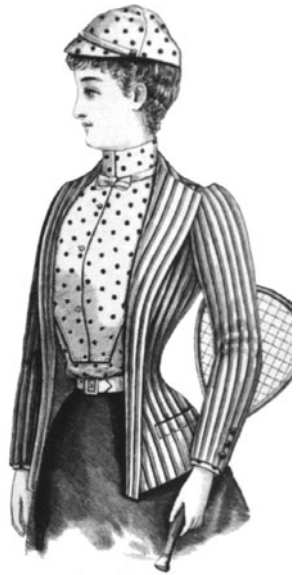


FIGURE No. 374 K.





Wellesley College tennis players, Spring 1887. The two women center front wear loose bloused tops that contrast sharply with the tight basque bodices of the others. Note particularly the girl at the lower right: she forecasts the twentieth century—bare-headed, though clutching her tam, loose-sleeved, easy and relaxed—and the only one of the seven who does not wear a corset. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.

ley opened. It appeared at approximately the same time at Mount Holyoke, not for crew but for other outdoor activities. Clearly, it was an outfit for exercise, a gymnastic dress. It deserves mention here because it plays a twofold role. First, if it was a skirted dress with no trousers underneath, it sits somewhat precariously between the fashionable dress worn for sporting activities outdoors at the time and the truly athletic dress with trousers that women devised for gymnastic exercise indoors. Even though its loose top reflected Lewis's dictum, it really is neither one nor the other. Or it may have had trousers hidden underneath (see Cornelia Clapp's instructions for making a gymnastic suit in chapter 10). From this distance in time, we have no way of knowing for sure. Second, it provides the missing link that carries Lewis's unconfining baggy-topped dress into the twentieth century, to the new idea of sportswear. So the question is, why this dress, and why at Wellesley?

Wellesley College was founded by Henry Fowle Durant, a wealthy Boston lawyer turned evangelist, who, with his wife, wanted to build a memorial to their two dead children. Durant was a man of his time. He expressed his evangelical spirit in more than purely religious ways: he put great faith in the benefits of good health, believing it one of “five great essentials for a higher education for womanhood.” Speaking at the new college in 1877, he declared: “Our war-cry here is the old proverb, *Mens sana in corpore sano*. We seek freedom from the physical chains which enslave women.” Furthermore, he believed that health was not just desirable but a religious duty. “Trample in the dust forever,” he thundered, “the old loathesome ideal of the gushing story paper and silly novel, with the baby face and the small waist and the small brain and the small sentimentalism. . . . Shake off those poisonous, false ideas which make girls destroy health for show, and be reformers and preachers of the new evangel of health.”² To help the college do just that, he had found an idyllic country location fifteen miles from Boston on the shores of Lake Waban, a retreat for the wealthy from the heat of the summer.³ The campus still retains its idyllic setting, reflecting Durant’s careful attention to location over a hundred years later. It is regarded by many as the most beautiful campus in America. From the very beginning, Wellesley encouraged students “to row on the lake, to take long brisk walks, and to exercise in the gymnasium.”⁴

To get the girls out on the lake, Durant supplied the school with three boats. Their broad, heavy mass ensured the safety of the rowers. Christened the *Mayflower*, the *Argo*, and the *Evangeline* (after a visit to the college by Henry W. Longfellow), these cumbersome floating structures could hold six to ten people at a time.⁵ They were known familiarly as “the tubs.” The girls sat side by side, each pulling on her own oar, usually in groups of eight with a coxswain.⁶ The earliest extant photograph is from 1879, the end of the fourth year the school was in operation.

Rowing at Wellesley started as pastime exercise but proved popular enough that the school purchased more boats. The girls would float around on Lake Waban in the early evening, singing while they rowed, their voices serenading those on the shore. Thus, both rowing and singing ability became the necessary skills for the early crews, but as everyone agreed, what mattered most was that the girls sing well and be attractive. Athleticism and the strength needed to row well were not primary considerations in the



Crew of the *Evangeline*, one of the "tubs," 1884. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, photo by Seaver.

early years. Each year, the rowing activity culminated in Float Day (or Night), which led to a tradition at the college that lasted until 1948. A major annual event, it drew spectators from far and wide, with a special train bringing Bostonians to the campus as many as six or seven thousand at a time.⁷ All visitors were invited personally, with hand-signed tickets to prevent the gate-crashing that proved to be a problem on occasion.

Because the event became a sort of theatrical presentation, a concert on the water, it was essential that the girls wear good-looking clothes. Each of the three upper classes had its own crew, with its own individual uniform and colors to distinguish one class from the others. These outfits, inspired and planned by the students themselves, changed with every entering freshman class but became formalized in the sophomore year when a class crew was chosen. They were attractive, sometimes nautical in style, loose and comfortable, and startlingly different from fashion wear. The anticipation prior to the unveiling of the sophomore suit, planned and executed in secrecy each year, built suspense and excitement. After its initiation, the sophomore uniform continued to be worn throughout junior and senior years until graduation—three years in all. The number of freshman crews, sometimes as many as nine a year, depended on the number of boats left. They, too, concocted their own costumes, but these, especially in the early years, were sometimes less



Crew of 1881. Hats, each with its identifying '81 on the band, and blouse shirts match, skirts do not. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.

impressive, less complete, and very likely less expensive than the upperclassmen's. They would consist of the same tops and hats, for example, but different skirts (depending on each girl's wardrobe), which barely showed below the gunwales of the boat when the wearer was seated to row.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, Float Day had taken on the character of a pageant, with all the participants' costumes following a single theme. The tradition finally died, a casualty of World War II austerity and a run of bad weather in the immediate postwar years. By the time it might have been revived, no one was left who remembered the character of the tradition.⁸

Of all the institutions of higher learning that began to educate women in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, Wellesley was unique in having a rowing program from the very beginning. Attractive clothing played an important role from the start. I believe that these crew outfits are the earliest team uniforms for American collegiate women—possibly for any

women in the United States—for a specific sport. In some measure following the fashion of their day, they form not only a record of the subtle changes in styles at the end of the nineteenth century but also a record of the increasing influence of physical education and its clothing on other activities, and of women's growing involvement and interest in the sport that became known as crew. These garments sharply point up the disparity, too, between fashion for sporting events out-of-doors and the sensible and comfortable clothing used for indoor exercise, hovering as they did between the two.

So what did the crew uniform at Wellesley look like? Anyone who has seen Dio Lewis's gymnastics dress will recognize its origins. It consisted of, in 1880s parlance, a "blouse," meaning any blouson-style, loose-fitted top that draped over the waistband or onto the hip. As fashion, it was approved more for children than for adult women.⁹ It was, however, a style encouraged at that time by advocates of physical education for gymnasium dresses. From the 1860s to the 1890s, all descriptions of the gymnastic dress stressed the need for enough material in the waist, or bodice, to provide room to move the arms and upper body; for example, in this 1885 description: "The waist is quite loose, and long enough under the arms to enable the wearer to thrust the arms directly up without drawing upon the waist and belt at all. There should be plenty of room across the chest. . . . The sleeve is what is commonly known as a shirt sleeve, being perfectly straight. . . . It is prettiest when finished with a deep turned-over cuff. . . . A sailor or any large collar is used."¹⁰ Just the kind of top a girl needed to pull those oars. To judge from this description and the pictures, it was the gymnastic dress that provided the model for the crew outfits in the early years at Wellesley. The difference lay in the lower half of the suit. Whereas the gymnastic dress was shortened to mid-calf, with Turkish trousers worn underneath, the crew suit had a full-length skirt and no trousers. After all, this outfit was worn in public, where men could see it. The attractive *Prydwen* crew wore the blouse costume in 1883, as did the crew of the *Evangeline*, manfully laboring to beach their boat even though virtually hidden under bulky sunbonnets in June 1884, and so did the crew of the class of '86.

The differences in the uniforms lay not in the style of the blouse waists but in the colors, the collars, the decoration, and the hats. The colors ranged from mid-tone to pale, but also with heavy emphasis on nautical navy; the collars were for the most part spread or, to use nineteenth-century term-



Class of '86 crew. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, photo by Pach Bros.

nology, “rolling collars”; the decoration depended on braid patterns and contrasting buttons, even, as in the class of '86 uniform, in the subtle positioning of the pockets. In the team photo, four members have pockets with a graphic “86” on the right breast and five have them on the left, a concession to the pairing of rowers on the boat’s wide seats. The embroidered pocket would be on the side most visible to the spectators. It was the hats,

though, that set the character of each crew. Ranging from an early coolie hat in the 1870s to a cap somewhere between a French Canadian toque and a Revolutionary Phrygian cap, they seem to struggle for appropriateness, not always succeeding. Perhaps the least appropriate from a sports point of view was the neck-swathing sunbonnet, and the most was the small rolled-brim sailor's hat of the class of '86. An amusing if incongruous though certainly status-conscious hat adopted by the senior crew of 1885, identifying them at a glance, was an adaptation of the mortarboard. Their dress, incidentally, was very plain, with a shirt-like top (not as bloused as in the previous years) and a straight, full, softly-pleated and gathered short skirt, falling just to the ankle—very unlike the fashionable ideal of the time.

The mid-1880s seem to have been a turning point in the orientation of the crew costume. With these years we see the same ambivalence already noted in outdoor sports clothing. Fashion generally prevailed, but a few holdouts opted for comfort. The gymnastic dress-inspired outfits of the early 1880s fell out of favor, to be replaced by much more fashionable outfits, however impractical they were. Their clearly corsetted, tight basque bodices topped elaborately swathed bustle skirts. Photographs show the overlap of old and new over a couple of years' time. The most graphically symbolic is of the class of '87 crew in their boat, facing to the right, countered by the "Specials" rowing in the opposite direction.¹¹ The "Specials" wear the sport blouse costume topped by a Rough Rider—sort of hat while the '87s wear their dark, form-fitting, height-of-fashion basque outfits, distinguished by light militaristic horizontal stripes accenting the front panel. Only their hats, dashing and sporty, echo those of the "Specials." Several other pictures of individual teams, all dating from these years, show the two separate styles coexisting: both the seniors (who trimmed theirs with elegant scrolled embroidery) and the "Specials" of 1888 opted for comfort and agility, with their bloused shirts and gathered skirts, while the junior crew of '89 preferred fashionable elegance, choosing long, torso-conforming jerseys draped at the hip with a bustled polonaise over a broad-striped, bi-colored, box-pleated skirt. The freshman crew of '91 perhaps best exemplify the equivocation of those years: they wore the blouse top but paired it with a straight, swagged, ungathered skirt, very probably bustled in back.

The first appearance of the jersey top in 1887 reflects an awareness not just of current fashion but of fashion for sport. It was similar in style to



The Specials and Class of '87 crew. Note the corsetted basque bodices and the ensuing straight backs of the Class of '87, foreground, contrasting with the bloused tops and easier postures of the Specials behind them. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives.



Class of '89 Senior crew succumbs to fashion. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, photo by Partridge.

men's athletic jerseys, mostly worn for baseball at that time, with its laced placket-front opening and small spreading collar; the idea was very likely borrowed from brothers at nearby schools.¹² A writeup of Float Day the following year mentions the Specials' "striking costume of broad blue and white striped, pleated skirt, [and] blue jersey with rolling collar."¹³ Another style entering at this time was the turtleneck, already worn by male athletes but only then beginning to be adopted by women. None of the accounts name it as such, however; it was generally referred to as part of regulation gymnasium costume. Not for another five years would the term "sweater" be commonplace in the writeups of Float.

Two *Wellesley (Mass.) Courant* articles on the 1889 Float Day provide a wealth of information about the event and the costumes that year. The first, written for the May 24 issue by Clara T. Barker, Wellesley '89, displays a critical bent befitting a senior (and, indeed, makes one wonder whether she had some personal axe to grind). Her disgruntled report informs us that the class crews were still being chosen "more for their ability to sing and to be ornamental than useful." "Here . . . we have no races," she added, so "singing is a thing to be considered." But she didn't think it should be considered very much: "Strength should be taken into account also. Those girls should be chosen who are strong, muscular and energetic; girls who exercise for exercise's sake and not because they must; girls who have life and vitality enough enough to undergo such a training as would enable them to row in good form; the singing and comeliness should be a secondary consideration." She sounds aggrieved, but hers turns out to be a prophetic voice.

The second article, dated June 21 of that year, describes Float Day itself. Here we get the first real glimpse of the color of the class suits, complete with reporting as judgmental as anything in the fashion press of the time. The junior crew's "heliotrope . . . trimmed with gold" was "not so effective as other suits, because of its darker shade, yet [was] the most strictly nautical, and in its double sense, 'ship-shape.' The banner [was] an artistic and beautiful one of rich heliotrope silk, embroidered in gold." The "Specials" followed the juniors "in a striking costume of broad blue and white striped, pleated skirt, blue jersey with rolling collar, and edged with stripes of blue and white, and blue and white jersey caps. The banner is of white satin and blue ribbon, embroidered with blue, bearing the name of the crew boat, *Undine*."¹⁴

Of the nine freshman crews who marched and rowed that day, three surviving photographs remain; they support the observation that “all the costumes were pretty and some particularly original.” Stripes were popular during the last half of the 1880s, as borne out by the number of times they appear in the uniforms: blue and white, red and white, some even with matching blazers. Without a doubt, though, the most unusual was a crew who wore “a true Scotch costume throughout,” complete with glengarry caps and, in at least one case, a cairngorm brooch holding the plaid at the shoulder. Attractive, but not exactly the perfect outfit for rowing. The wave of the future, in fact, appeared with the sophomores, who made their “*debut* with great success.” Their costume was “a simple but noteworthy one. The pleated skirt and jersey [was] of dark green and in front, in the usual crew, uniform style, the jersey bears, in larger numbers of lighter green, ’91. The caps are round and stiff, finished with a visor and with black cord.” The 1890s bore out their vision towards simplicity, as we shall see.

Attractive as the crew members all may have been, their prowess at the oars that year left something to be desired. “Almost all of them rowed evenly and with a strong pull, though not with the speed which might secure the Mott-Haven cup, even were Wellesley to excel in all other games.” (Clearly, in the view of the writer, such a thing was not remotely possible.) Even “the singing did not prove so successful as heretofore, both on account of the wind and of an unhappy choice of tunes. For such an occasion it would be wiser to choose a . . . simple, and especially, since the high notes sound much thinner on the water, a *low* air.” Not all observers were so disenchanted: that was the year Chauncey Depew, a Republican senator from New York who had lost his party’s nomination for the presidency, attended Float as an honorary junior.¹⁵ He even wore the juniors’ heliotrope and gold pin to identify his allegiance, and was overheard to exclaim, “How charming!”—letting those who were near know that “his heart was won for Wellesley.”

In more than one article on Float Day hints of something other than pure delight had started appearing by this time. Indeed, the forthright commentary of the period highlights the main weaknesses of the event, foreshadowing the changes that would occur in the following years. To understand better why these changes came about, some mention must be made of Lucille Eaton Hill and her influence on crew at Wellesley.



Freshman crew, wearing the popular stripes of the 1880s, 1889. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, photo by Partridge.



Miss Davidson's Freshman crew, resplendent in highland dress, 1889. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, photo by Partridge.

Until the time she arrived in 1882, “the boat crews at Wellesley were entirely in the hands of the students,”¹⁶ and the tradition of rowing was well established. But there is no doubt that over the next twenty years she brought significant change. By the 1890s, she was training at least one hundred girls each year for crew. To prepare herself for the task—it must be remembered that no other program like this for women existed anywhere else in the country—she traveled to several men’s colleges that offered crew, including Yale and Harvard, and learned everything they could teach her.¹⁷ The earliest visible result of her research was in the introduction of spoon oars in 1883, used by the official class crews only. Freshmen and “Specials” still had to make do with the old-fashioned flat oars.

As the years went on, Hill trained her girls in a much more rigorous fashion, starting them as early as February indoors in the gymnasium on rowing machines. But since no racing was allowed at Wellesley, the advantage of the new design and training was moot. In this refusal to compete, Wellesley followed the pattern of the time at women’s colleges, joining Mount Holyoke, Vassar, and Smith, which unanimously and strenuously discouraged any intercollegiate rivalry whatsoever, even though the question arose every now and then. They believed that the “sporting” element was masculine, rough, and unbecoming to young ladies.¹⁸ Health and fitness were the *raison d’être* behind the programs in physical education, never competition. That was the official policy.¹⁹ However, a *Boston Daily Globe* article of June 8, 1894, reported, “Racing was once the practice [at Wellesley], when the girls organized their crews at pleasure. But at the first of it one of the crew members was injured in an exciting race. This accident put an end to racing at Wellesley.” Instead, the crews were trained to work together, maintaining form and dignity as they rowed gracefully over the lake. They would row in formation, creating stars and W’s with their boats.

The 1880s saw an escalation in the emphasis on the costumes. Popular newspapers and magazines, fascinated by the new women’s colleges generally, delighted in describing the outfits to their readers, probably stimulating even greater planning, time involvement, secrecy, and expense on the part of the sophomores. But by the 1890s, after at least a decade under Miss Hill’s guidance, the program changed in several ways. The clothing simplified, paralleling what was happening in the gymnasium because of the introduction at that time of indoor sports. Furthermore, the 1890s saw the

increased involvement of women in sports in general, with an accompanying fashion for fitness. Clara Barker's pointed remarks demanding more attention to athleticism and less to beauty were indicative of that new spirit.

Wellesley responded to the mood of the time, deciding "that the students were getting a one-sided development. There was too much brain work and too little physical strength developed to support the brain." The college took such "wonderful strides in the perfection of all its physical training, that its outdoor athletic work is now carried further than in any other college for women."²⁰ One result of this decision was to bring the best rowers from all classes together into an all-college team in 1891 to create the beginnings of a varsity crew. Eventually they became known as "the college eight." But the most influential change came the following year, when four new cedar shells, light and with sliding seats designed for crew, were purchased by the individual classes. These new boats brought not only a new quality of rowing but also a seriousness of intent that had not been there before; by the next year, singing ability was no longer a requisite for crew.²¹ Within two years, all the rowers at Wellesley were using the new boats.²²

The sliding seats had one other significant effect. The voluminous skirts of the rowing uniforms did not allow the crews to perform well. Thus, in 1893 they devised a solution: they wore their gymnasium turkish trousers instead of their skirts to row. At Float Day that year the rowers appeared as usual, but as they approached their boats, they calmly removed their outer skirts and climbed in, ready for action. "The effect of this change, however, was scarcely perceptible from the bank," reported the Wellesley College magazine, *Legenda*, "and most on-lookers were unaware that it had taken place."²³ A photograph exists of the class of '94 crew rowing their sleek new boat, dressed in turtlenecked sweaters and, barely visible but discernible nonetheless, bloomers instead of skirts. By 1895 the *Boston Herald* was moved to comment, one imagines with some regret, that "the costumes had not the variety of some years."²⁴ Although the attractive uniforms lasted throughout the decade, for the 1897 Float Day the *Herald* reported: "The class of '99 is the first to take the lead in abolishing the expensive crew suit, a relic of the days when the crew girls were chosen for their pretty faces and good voices and rowed in the college tubs. They wore, therefore, the regulation gymnasium suit, with white jerseys bearing their class numeral in green. Their caps were black, with green band, embroi-



Class of '95 Freshman crew, 1892. Not only the new boats were streamlined, so were the uniforms by 1892. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, photo by Pach Bros.

dered with the name of the boat, *Narcissus*.” All three freshman crews went hatless, another first. Miss Hill “was heard to say that ‘they were the best freshman crew that had ever appeared on the lake.’”²⁵ In 1898 the clothing was not even mentioned in the newspaper accounts, and by the turn of the century, all the teams were wearing the regulation gym trousers and turtleneck or laced-front sweater.

The outfits of the mid-1890s had reflected the balloon sleeves and tailor-mades that were high fashion then. But sport overtook fashion, and function won the day. It is significant that the clothing finally adopted for this particular outdoor sport was a version of the gym suit, the first loose and bifurcated garment acceptable for women—and, it may be added, the earliest example of the comfortable clothing that eventually developed into what we now consider sportswear. Crew uniforms evolved from the loose gymnastic dress of the 1870s; then an ever-increasing awareness of fashion led to constriction; finally, the pendulum swung back again to the gymnasium outfit



The Mount Holyoke Nines, about 1886. The uniform for baseball at Mount Holyoke echoes the crew blouse and skirt at Wellesley. Courtesy of Mount Holyoke College Special Collections and Archive.

of the day. They represent the earliest continuous use of uniforms for a single sport worn by collegiate women in the United States. Mount Holyoke College students had formed a baseball team sometime around 1886 or 1887 (and, interestingly, wore a costume, complete with laced jersey sport top and striped skirt, very similar to the crew outfits at Wellesley in those same years).²⁶ Other colleges also formed baseball teams for women at that time, quite likely also adopting a simple gathered skirt and loose top. As early as the 1860s, Vassar had designed its own gymnastic dress in gray with red trim, but it was used for exercise in the gymnasium only, not as a sport uniform.

That the outfits for rowing were successful may be seen in their use for other activities. Photographs depict girls in other settings wearing their crew suits, recognizable from the rest of the clothing worn in the pictures because of the hats, decoration, and very different, looser silhouette, usually based on the bloused top. The photograph of tennis players in spring 1887 is a good example. Of the seven young ladies, five are encased in the tight, bustled fashion of the day (two are even draped in polonaises made

of tennis nets), but the two in front wear their crew uniforms. The one seated at the left wears her striped-skirted suit, so popular in the 1880s, while the other wears the laced-front jersey under her jacket. Only the one on the right is uncorseted, unlike the fashionable rest. The look of this clothing is startlingly modern, in sharp contrast to the 1880s signature look of the others. One is struck by its acceptance until one remembers that to row in a class crew was a mark of achievement at Wellesley. Thus, to wear this functional clothing was a mark of status on campus.

If Wellesley was the first school for women to use a common outfit for a single sport, it was the students themselves who generated the idea, thus laying the foundations of team uniforms for women.²⁷ One is amused at the detail and volume of the early outfits, even as one is amazed that the activity could be performed at all. Even if the thread of common sense in designing a blouse top with room in the sleeves, shoulders, and ribcage prevailed through the excesses of tight sleeves and bodices in the 1880s, one is sobered by the realization that it took twenty years to arrive at a uniform that allowed the rowers to do their job well.