Article Title: Physical Education for Women at Nebraska University, 1879-1923

Full Citation: Phyllis Kay Wilke, “Physical Education for Women at Nebraska University, 1879-1923,” Nebraska History 56 (1975): 192-220


Date: 1/29/2016

Article Summary: The University of Nebraska includes among its achievements one of the earliest programs of physical education for women in the United States. The supporters of physical education were confronted with the problems of inadequate funds, limited facilities and personnel, and prejudice against female participation.

Cataloging Information:


Keywords: Keys & Bullock; Infantry Tactics; Grant Hall; University Soldiers’ Memorial Hall; Bessey Hall; Social Science building

Photographs / Images: Hockey Club of 1915-1916 [names listed above]; Freshman Girls’ basketball team of 1901-1902 [names listed above]; Nebraska University gym class runners “on their marks” about 1900; Ruth Woodsmall and Alice Towne, 1905; Louise Pound in women’s tennis 1897; Gym students drilling with wands in grant Hall gymnasium before 1900; Alberta Spurck, class of 1900; Anne Louis Barr
The University of Nebraska includes among its achievements one of the earliest programs of physical education for women in the United States. Though physical education courses were initiated largely due to student action, the university was also fortunate to have men and women who recognized the need for and support of such programs. Through the efforts of faculty and students, a strong, nationally recognized curriculum has emerged. Then, as now, the supporters of physical education were confronted with the problems of inadequate funds, limited facilities and personnel, and in the case of women, prejudice against female participation.

In the earliest years no provision was made for women’s physical education. The first organized physical activity came from an Army source in 1879, when Lieutenant Isaac T. Webster, professor of military science, instructed dormitory girls in close-order drill. The date facilities for physical activity were first provided for students is not clear. However, it is known that quite early a room was provided for both men and women on the top floor of Nebraska Hall, the only building on the campus at that time. Later an association, evidently for men, was organized and incorporated with a capital of $2.69. A room in the basement was equipped with two turning poles, four or five car couplings donated by the Burlington and Missouri Railroad to be used as jumping weights, straw-stuffed boxing gloves, fencing foils, and Indian clubs.

In 1883 approximately seventy women petitioned the Regents for instruction in gymnastics equal to the amount of mili-
tary drill men received in compliance with the terms of a Land Grant College:

We the undersigned, lady students of the University of Nebraska, most respectfully petition your Honorable Body for the following: That you will make provision in the University for giving the lady students an amount of gymnastic training that will be an equivalent for the military drill that is provided for gentlemen. We desire that this training should be in the form of calisthenics, that it should be given three hours a week, and that a room should be provided for that purpose. Feeling the great need of some such provision we hope Your Honorable Body will grant our prayers.  

In response the Board of Regents in 1884 granted $15 to Chancellor Irving J. Manatt to prepare and equip such a room. Evidently women received instruction because the regents’ minutes show $150 was paid to Miss Minnie Cochran of the “Conservatory of Music and Calisthenics” for the second quarter of 1885.

A year later regents requested funds of the Legislature to construct a third building to be used for an armory-gymnasium and asked that it be named for President Ulysses S. Grant:

In view of the fact that no memorial has so far been erected to the late President . . . Ulysses S. Grant, the Regents beg leave to suggest the construction of . . . Grant Memorial Hall [as] . . . an armory and gymnasium, and to make it an appropriate monument to the illustrious soldier and statesman, whose name shall be thereby commemorated and honored.  

An inadequate sum of $20,000 was allotted, part of it from state funds and part from university funds. Hence, a decision was made to build as “large, substantial, and well appointed building as possible, deferring a large portion of the interior finish of the building, equipment of gymnasium, etc., until later.” In September, 1887, Keys & Bullock, stone contractors, bid in the job at $19,100, leaving only $900 for expenses and furnishing.

In the spring of 1888, with the armory-gymnasium under construction, Lieutenant Edgar Dudley, military science instructor, formed a women’s drill team known as Company D. They practiced the men’s manual of arms, elected officers, and using men’s muskets, took part in dress parade in specially designed blue uniforms trimmed with white braid. A cap, decorated with two buttons and a gilt cord, completed the costume. When Lieutenant Thomas Griffith, 18th U.S. Infantry, assumed command in the fall, the unit became Company D’ (D Prime) or Company E to distinguish it from a men’s Company D of the 18th. The women continued to drill twice a week through the fall and then disbanded.
The 60x120-foot Grant Memorial Hall, of common red brick, sandstone foundation and trimmings, and slate roof, was to "furnish full accommodations for the Military Department and adequate facilities for Physical Culture." There was a delay in its completion due to a scarcity of bricks, but it was finally occupied by the military on November 1, 1888; the gymnasium had no equipment and was heated by a "primitive stove." On December 17, 1889, the steward, a university official, reported on the paucity of gymnasium equipment and recommended that special provisions be made for women:

Owing to the limited appropriation and the fact that the Board has no means of providing an instructor in physical training, it has been my judgment that no more could be done during the present biennium than to equip the bowling alley and supply some of the light pieces of apparatus such as clubs, dumb-bells, wands, travelling rings, horizontal bars, &c. and some of the simpler forms of lifting apparatus. The contract for the work in the building now being executed will leave available some $700.00 of the legislative appropriation for equipment.

I would recommend that... provisions be made for the young ladies, and that if possible the room which was originally designed for their use be so assigned.

The regents made an agreement with Lieutenant Griffith to take charge of the gymnasium and exercises for the remainder of the year at a salary not to exceed $100 and recommended similar arrangements for the academic year beginning July 1, 1890. The first evidence of the faculty's consideration of the importance of physical education occurred in June, 1890, when a committee recommended that physical culture be included in the curriculum. It also advised making arrangements with Griffith to provide instruction. Excerpts from the steward's report of June 10, 1890, follow:

The Gymnasium

In pursuance of the instructions of the Executive committee, I have proceeded with the equipment of the Gymnasium and have purchased apparatus, including horizontal bars, parallel bars, ladders, rings, trapeze, striking bags, bowling alley balls and pins, gloves, Indian clubs, dumb-bells, and fencing goods, and also calisthenic apparatus for ladies use, including wands, rings, dumb-bells and clubs. ...

I also made a temporary arrangement with Lieut. Griffith to assume charge of the Gymnasium organization and exercises, in accordance with the directions of the Executive committee.

The report also raised these points: (1) Should the "work of the gymnasium have a place in the course of study? (2) Were non-university groups to be permitted use of Grant Hall? (3) Was a gym fee to be charged? (4) What provision could be made "in the armory for... the young ladies?" On the same day, Griffith made known his views:
There is no evading the fact that the strain on the mental fibre of the average student who makes an honest effort to master the comprehensive curricula of the colleges and universities of the present day, is calculated to undermine the strongest constitution. The remedy is a simple one, and most easy of application. The University is now possessed of a commodious and partially well equipped gymnasium.

A gymnasium is like any other complicated machine, one must be taught how to use it. It may be asked, “Why don’t the Military Department accomplish all that is necessary to develop health and vigor?” The answer is that the primary object of a course of military training at colleges, as conducted under the auspices of the War Department, is not to attain this end. Of course, it should and does accomplish a great deal toward the production of a manly and erect bodily deportment, but it can not be expected to produce the proper healthful condition of the student and class.

In the second place, the Government in giving to colleges throughout the country grants of public lands... did not contemplate the creation simply of departments for the physical training of the young men thereof. What the Government had in mind was the instruction of the more advanced and intelligent young men of the country in a course of Military Science and tactics.... If, while accomplishing this object, the Government can contribute anything toward the making of strong, healthy men, it finds cause for felicitatation; but this is not what at first it set out to do.

Only three (3) hours a week are given to the Military Department in which to work out its ends; therefore as an agent in bringing about the proper healthful condition of our students, the Military Department must not be regarded as deficient, or even approximately so. A glance at the average student of the University is sufficient to proclaim the necessity of reinforcing or recruiting the body to stand the strain that is made upon it. The University must see to it that the future is not storing up against her the accusation that, in her eagerness to cultivate the mind, she has made a wreck of the bodies of the young men of Nebraska.

Lieutenant Griffith then set out five cardinal points he believed necessary for the accomplishment of his program: (1) An instructor would be hired for the program. (2) His duties would be the care of the gymnasium and the physical development of students. (3) Freshmen would be required to have physical education instruction thirty minutes daily—“Saturday and Sunday excepted.” (4) Instruction would come from Upton’s Infantry Tactics (calisthenics, Indian clubs, parallel bars, fencing, etc.) “Regular attendance, orderly behavior, and proper attention” would be required. Gym shoes and jackets would be worn. (5) “Some hours” would be set aside for voluntary exercise for upperclassmen.

As can be seen, physical training was advocated for health of body with little attempt to make the experience enjoyable. Most personnel responsible for the initiation of physical training in this country possessed a medical background and based their programs upon exercises designed to strengthen the body. No action was taken on Griffith’s request, and the gymnasium was opened for the fall term in 1890. The catalogue for the aca-
Academic year 1890-1891 stated: "The Gymnasium has been opened to the young men and women of the University, under the supervision of a competent director. It affords good facilities for regular and systematic exercise in various lines to all students who elect gymnasium work." 9

A fee of $1.00 per term or $3.00 per year was charged for the wear and breakage of apparatus. 10 That term 305 men and 208 women were enrolled in the University of Nebraska and the Preparatory School. Of that number seventy-one males and twenty-three female students registered for gymnasium work. In his report of December 17, 1890, Griffith described student interest and participation:

The general interest manifested by students, both male and female, in the gymnasium so far insures its ultimate success, and the close attention and persistence with which those who have registered in the gymnasium have pursued their class work this term is highly gratifying and indicates that the gymnasium is already recognized by students as a source of great physical benefit.

This term we have had 94 students (71 male and 23 female), registered and doing class work. The young gentlemen have had from one and one-half (1½) to two (2) hours systematic instruction each week in fencing, boxing, and in general exercise on the different machines at their disposal while the young ladies have had exclusive use of the gymnasium from 2 to 4 P.M. Tuesday and Thursday of each week. 11

However, there were complaints regarding the fee charged for gymnasium privileges, and in his report Griffith requested the fee be reduced so that more participation would be encouraged:

From what I know of the average student's finances I am convinced that the payment of three dollars per year will prove a great hardship for many. . . . Since we already have as much as $60 or $70 of a gymnasium fund collected in this way, therefore, I would urge that this gymnasium fee be reduced to one (1) dollar a year or for any fraction of the year. 12

The steward also indicated some alteration should be made of the gymnasium fee for women: "I am sure that some ladies have deferred entering the gymnasium entirely for the present term, owing to existing circumstances." 13 In December, 1890, the fee was reduced to $1.00 per year, and, evidently, within a short time was dropped entirely. In June, 1891, Griffith again requested that a gymnasium director be employed to teach physical culture classes, and reported:

During the year there were thirty (30) female and one hundred and twelve (112) male students registered and doing work in the Gymnasium. Of these, all the young ladies, and a majority of the young men received systematic instruction. The young ladies were instructed in Calisthenics, free standing gymnastics, and fencing. 14
Acting Chancellor Charles E. Bessey recognized the increased student interest in physical activity designed for pleasure and commented on the need for more space to encourage such participation. He suggested that some portion of the college farm, now East Campus, be allotted for this purpose:

Outside of class-work I record with pleasure an increased interest in out of door exercises and athletic sports. This is doubtless due in part to the impetus given to athletics by the opening of the gymnasium. . . . Our campus is [al] ready too small to furnish room for athletic grounds, and the question ought to be considered early as to the best method of providing adequate grounds. . . . It might be well to set apart a few acres for this purpose upon the College Farm, and I am inclined to think the suggestion a good one, provided that a suitable plot can be found convenient to the electric car line.15

However, it was some time before athletic fields were provided.

In the summer of 1891, James Canfield assumed duties as chancellor. His support in developing a physical training program did much towards the establishment of one of the earliest state university professional physical education programs. In his first report to the regents he suggested all women be required to take physical training and that an instructor in physical training be hired.16 Wilber P. Bowen was engaged as instructor in 1891. Lieutenant Griffith’s detail expired September 29, 1891, and Lieutenant John J. Pershing replaced him as head of the military science department. Chancellor Canfield’s observations of work done in the gymnasium under Bowen caused him to comment favorably:

The greatest departure from old and established lines is to be seen in the work in Grant Memorial Hall. . . . The work in Physical Training has sprung suddenly into great importance, and is certainly being carried very wisely and very vigorously. It is difficult for those who are not on the ground to appreciate the great change that has taken place in the attitude of our students towards all this work, which tends so continually to the development of sound alert bodies, under stern self-control.17

Finally, the first official preparation of grounds for outside physical activity was accomplished in 1892 when the northwest quarter of the university grounds was cleared of trees for drill and athletic purposes. On April 12, the regents ruled that all women take physical training two hours a week for two years. This new requirement remained in effect, virtually unchanged, for over sixty years. In less than a year after Bowen’s appointment, Chancellor Canfield recognized the need for a woman instructor to give examinations and lecture in physiology and hygiene to young women:
Hockey Club of 1915-1916. (Seated, from left) Reisland, Brown, Pearl Castile, Cornelia Frazier, Irene Fleck, Mary Priest, Grace Metcalf; (standing) Florence Sandy, Marguerite Leyden, Green, Ward, Ora Neff, Ida Roane.

The Freshman Girls' basketball team of 1901-1902 (class of 1905) won the NU tournament. From left are Olive States, Ruth Bryan (daughter of William Jennings Bryan), Minna Jansa, Alice Towne (1905 graduate, professor-director of women's gymnasium, 1908-1909), Pearl Archibald, Edna King, and Lorraine Comstock.
To one item in the salaries budget I wish to call especial attention—that of $1000 for an instructor in Physiology and Hygiene for women. The Faculty have very wisely withdrawn Physiology from its position among the electives, and made it a required study....

For this instruction to our young women in hygiene and general sanitation, for the examination and measurements which form the necessary conditions of their wise and safe physical training, and as a general medical counsellor, we need a woman of special training and of special kindliness, grace, and strength of character.... The number of those willing to send their daughters to the University would undoubtedly be largely increased; and the institution would again give proof of its leadership in the educational world.18

Bowen recommended extensive gym repairs in 1892, significantly for "rooms for physical examinations and dressing rooms for young women." He said "the most urgent and immediate need...is a lady instructor." In order to better prepare himself for his duties he spent "two months of the summer learning methods of [physical education] work used in eastern colleges."19

In 1892 Kate Wilder was employed as instructor and an office built for her in the basement of Grant Hall. Her duties included giving two lectures per week in physiology and hygiene to eighty-five students in each class, plus thirty-five hours of office work which included giving physical examinations to women. Evidently the popularity of the gymnasium was so high that music students were requesting permission to participate. Chancellor Canfield explained why he denied their request: "To throw this privilege open to those who are taking music only would, I think, bring in a large number of students from the city who would carry their Music work here largely for the sake of practice in Physical Training."20 (At that time the School of Music was not an integral part of the university.)

A description of hygiene classes that students were required to take appeared for the first time in a school catalogue for 1893-1894. No explanation was made of the work which was done in gymnasium classes:

First Semester

1. Mental Hygiene — System and Method in Mental Work — General Personal Hygiene — Physiology of Bodily Exercise — Animal Mechanics. Lectures; With two hours (per week) practice in the gymnasium. — 1 hour

Second Semester

1. Digestion — Respiration — Sanitation, Chemistry of Foods — Heating and Ventilation — Drains and Sewers. Care of the Sick — Accidents and Emergencies. Lectures; With two hours (per week) practice in the gymnasium. — 1 hour21
To assist with gymnasium classes, students were hired hourly or by the month as needed. In 1893-1894 three such class leaders were listed: Anne Barr, who was to become director of women's physical education, Anne Wilder, and May Whiting. In April, 1894, Professor Bowen resigned. He subsequently researched effects of exercise on the heart, wrote texts on anatomy and kinesiology, established the course in physical education at Michigan Normal School, was a charter member of the American Academy of Physical Education and was recognized in *Who's Who in America*. M. Douglas Flattery, an assistant in the Boston Young Men's Christian Association Gymnasium, was engaged to complete the school term.

Courses in physical training were first offered during summer school in 1894 in order that educators in high schools could gain a basic knowledge of physical training. The three courses were "free gymnastics, light gymnastics, and heavy gymnastics." The first was primarily physical exercise with no facilities needed; the second required gym facilities; and the third combined academic work with muscular endeavor.\(^2\)\(^2\)

In 1894 Robert A. Clark, M.D., was appointed professor of physiology and director of the gymnasium. Clark was a graduate of Williams College in Massachusetts and a graduate of the University of Vermont Medical School. Prior to coming to Nebraska he taught at the International YMCA Training School (now Springfield College) in Massachusetts under Luther Halsey Gulick, M.D., early physical education leader in the United States. While at the University of Nebraska, Clark used the camera to identify defects in a student's physique and also began anthropometric studies of students. The practice of taking measurements of the body, prescribing exercises based on those measurements, and comparing increases or decreases was a part of existing physical culture programs. Beginning in 1895 all students were given physical examinations and remedial instructions were given if needed.\(^2\)\(^3\)

Miss Anne Barr was added in 1894 to the physical training faculty at a salary of $450. On June 30, 1895, Miss Wilder resigned and Miss Barr assumed her duties. To qualify for this responsibility, she had taken YMCA training in Indian clubs swinging wands, and dumbbells. When the gymnasium was opened to students in 1890, she was also enrolled as a special
student in the academic college and took a limited number of classes. The following year Miss Barr assisted as a class leader in the physical training, and in 1893 attended the summer school of gymnastics at Chautauqua, New York, where pioneer educator Dr. W. G. Anderson was director.

Described for the first time in the catalogue for 1895-1896 were courses in physical training and hygiene:

First Semester

1. The Value of Exercise: Education and habit; general hints as to student (physical) life; the skin; bathing and clothing; the eye and its care; alcohol and narcotics; drainage; heating; ventilation. One lecture each week (with Physical Training). 1 hour

Second Semester

2. Digestion-Respiration: Foods, their nutritive value, and best method of cooking; first aid in accident and emergency; care of the sick; and other practical topics. Lectures in Special Physiology. One lecture each week (with Physical Training). The order of the lectures is subject to change. 1 hour

Work done within the gymnasium appeared in another section of the catalogue:

During the first semester the floor work will be mainly mass-class work with dumb-bells, bar-bells, clubs, wands, and similar apparatus. Examinations will be held with a view to choosing members of the Leaders' Corps to assist in apparatus work during the second semester.

Attention will be given to athletic events. If practicable, a class in advanced gymnastics will be formed. During the second semester special attention will be given to apparatus work. Gymnastic games will be freely used throughout the year. Time required, two hours each week of the first two University years.

Also included was a statement defining goals of physical training: “The object of the gymnasium work is to provide muscular exercise and recreation for brain-workers; to keep body and mind in the best condition for work and for resisting disease; and to bring the muscular system under control.” This was apparently the first published indication of a philosophy of physical education at the University of Nebraska.

In 1896-1897 physical training and hygiene courses were listed together in one section:

First Year

1. Free movements without apparatus. Light gymnastics with dumb-bells, bar-bells, wands, etc., marching, and Swedish work. Hygiene Lecture. First semester, Dr. Clark and Miss Barr, G.

2. Continuation of Course 1. Second semester.

Second Year

Continuation of First Year's work, adding heavy gymnastics. Miss Barr, G.
HYGIENE

1. Advantages of Regular Exercise. Education and habit; habit in daily life; general hints as to student physical life; the skin, bathing, clothing; the eye and its care; alcohol and tobacco... First semester, Dr. Clark and Miss Barr.

2. Drainage and Plumbing. Ventilation; heating; foods, values, sources, digestibility, etc.; first aid in accident and emergency; young men, special physiology and personal purity; young women, special physiology, dress, care of the sick... Second semester, Dr. Clark and Miss Barr.27

An interesting sentence of the section describing women's courses read, "Gymnastic games will be freely used, and basket ball will be introduced." This was the first mention of a game, then innovative, which has become a national pastime.28

By 1896 facilities for women included showers and a locker room for one hundred, but a bowling alley had to be converted to a dressing room; tennis courts were completed in the spring by the student Tennis Association. Finally in 1897 permission to use campus areas for athletic events was granted. Clark expressed appreciation to the regents "for their generous sympathy with athletic interests... in setting aside the north-west corner of the campus as a definite athletic ground." He believed "athletics had entered upon a better day."29 A track was constructed there the following spring. Additional ground was obtained in 1908.

Clark resigned in 1897 and William W. Hastings replaced him as director of the gymnasium and professor of physiology and hygiene. Hastings had received bachelor and master degrees from Maryville College of Tennessee, master and doctor of philosophy degrees from Haverford College of Pennsylvania, and was a graduate of the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts. That fall Hastings wrote to Chancellor George E. MacLean and requested funds to hire assistants to meet the increased work load due to larger enrollment and for new programs:

$100 was the appropriation this year for student assistance in the Department of Physical Training. At the opening of this school year $53.04 had been used, leaving a balance on hand of $56.96. $180 was appropriated last year... The following is an itemized statement of the amount absolutely essential:

28 wks leading Gymn. Classes by assistant 8 hrs per wk @ 20¢ ................................. ........ 44.80
36 wks student assistance making out anthropometrical charts, Handbooks, correcting notebooks, etc. 10 hrs. per wk. @ 15¢ $1.50 ................................. .54.00 $98.80
Am't needed by Miss Barr ................................. .$145.00
Total amount necessary for remainder of year ... $243.80
Amount on hand ... 46.96
Amount requested ... $196.84

Unless this additional amount is appropriated our department is at a standstill.  

Recognizing the need for teachers of physical education a professional course for prospective instructors was first offered in 1898-1899 and this explanation given:

**COURSE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

This course may be elected by Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors pursuing regular courses in the Colleges of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and the Industrial College. Students expecting later to elect this course should follow the suggested order of University Courses outlined for the General Scientific Group. This course is open also to graduates of other colleges, to all graduates of the advanced course of the State Normal School, and under special circumstances, to a limited number of unclassified students.

The course is designed to meet the need of students who wish to prepare for the work of Physical Director in colleges, secondary schools, Young Men's Christian Associations, and Young Women's Christian Associations. It is intended also to prepare teachers desiring Physical Training as an accessory subject to their equipment for preparatory schools and public schools, including high, grammar, and primary school grades.

Two options were available to the students: (1) Work toward a college degree and a physical education certificate. (2) Earn a physical education certificate without a degree. The latter appealed to unclassified students.

During this era teachers in physical education, home economics, and music were often employed who lacked degrees but who had earned certificates in their area of specialization. With the beginning of professional courses, the department title was changed from Physical Training and Hygiene to Physical Education and Hygiene. Physical education certificates were awarded in 1900 to Alberta Spurck, who also received a bachelor of arts degree, and to Ada Gertrude Heaton. Miss Spurck was the first woman in the United States to receive a college degree and a physical education certificate from a state university. Until the late 1920's virtually all students graduating from the University of Nebraska in physical education received AB degrees from the College of Arts and Sciences. Thereafter, most received degrees from the Teachers College. Following are descriptions of women's physical education courses from the 1898-1899 catalogue:

**HYGIENE**

1. Natural, public and personal... Young men, special physiology and personal purity. Young women, special physiology, dress, and care of the sick. Young men:
N.U. PHYSICAL EDUCATION

1., W., and F., at 11:20; Young women: II., W., and F., at 9:00. First semester, Dr. Hastings and Miss Barr. 2 hours credit.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION-THEORY

1. Measurements and charts. . . . First semester, Mr. Fryce or Miss Barr. (Three hours practice.) One hour credit.
2. Continuation of Course 1, with the addition of Elements of Prescription of Exercise. . . . One hour credit.
3. Physiology of Bodily Exercise. . . . First semester, Dr. Hastings. Lectures, reading course, and experimental work. Three hours credit.
4. Physical Examinations and use of Instruments, including both theory and practice. . . . First semester, Dr. Hastings or Miss Barr. Six hours work. Credit two hours.
5. Continuation of Course 5 with the addition of Prescription of Exercise. . . . Credit two hours.
6. Lectures to young women on Pelvic Anatomy and Physiology. . . . First semester, Miss Barr. Credit one hour.
7. Training. . . . Second semester, Dr. Hastings. One hour credit.
8. Methods and Equipment of a Physical Department. . . . Dr. Hastings or assistant. One hour credit.
10. History and Philosophy of Physical Education. . . . First semester, Dr. Hastings. Three hours credit.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION-PRACTICE

Young Women

First Year

1. Instruction in walking and standing positions, military drill, setting up exercises. Free hand work, marching, calisthenics (1st series) fancy steps. Light gymnastics, long and short wands, clubs, dumb-bells, bar-bells, Swedish gymnastics, mat drill. Gymnastic games. . . . First semester, Miss Barr, G. One hour credit.
2. Continuation of Course 1, adding elementary work on spring board, ropes, poles, ladders, and horse. Second semester, Miss Barr, G. One hour credit.

Second Year

3. Military marching, figure marching, advanced work with dumb-bells, bar-bells, clubs. Marching calisthenics (2nd) series, fancy steps, bounding balls, mat drill, Swedish work on apparatus. Heavy gymnastics: Horse, parallel bars, vaulting bars, ladders, flying and traveling rings, buck, jumping, etc. Athletic and gymnastic games, Basket Ball. . . . First semester, Miss Barr, G. One hour credit.
4. Continuation of Course 3, adding foil fencing. Class instruction in position, lines of engagement, attacks and parries according to the French School. Besides regular class Basket Ball teams, a Varsity and substitute team will be formed during first semester. Tennis, bicycling, and as much outdoor work as possible will be encouraged during fall and spring months. . . . Second semester, Miss Barr. First Semester, Miss Barr. One hour credit.
5. Leaders' Corps Practice in Educational Gymnastics. . . . Second semester, Miss Barr. One hour credit.

The woman physical education major had few textbooks
Nebraska University gym class runners “on their marks,” about 1900. Student runners are unidentified, but the starter at right is Ina Estelle Giddings. Woman at left is thought to be Louise Pound.
available during these early years. Among those used were Claes Enebuske's Progressive Gymnastic Day's Order According to the Principles of the Ling System and Spaulding's book on team games. Instruction in activity classes was given by command; the teacher did not participate. As part of methods training, older majors taught activity classes. The sixty to eighty students in each class were divided into squads under a "major" who taught work on the apparatus. In 1901-1902 practice teaching outside the university was initiated, with senior women physical education majors practicing at Lincoln High School, Nebraska Wesleyan University at Lincoln, and Doane College at Crete. Students also taught at nearby Bancroft Elementary School.

Benefits from and the need for physical activity were continually acknowledged throughout the university. The domestic science section of the 1898-1899 catalogue slid: "Every woman should have a knowledge of the wonderful mechanism of the human body and know how to take proper care of it. She needs also definite, systematic physical training." The catalog emphasized again the need of the academic student for physical endeavor:

The object of physical education... is to provide suitable forms of muscular activity and recreation for brain workers, to cultivate physical judgment and self-control, and to keep mind and body in the best condition for work and for resisting disease. To these ends preference is given to "hygienic work" characterized by quickness and vigor rather than by complexity of action.

The regents in 1902 lauded physical training in their report to Governor Ezra P. Savage: "Our students' excellent health is, in good part, due to military drill and to earnest and systematic athletic exercise in the gymnasium and out of doors." In 1907 the administration decided that students were allowed too many electives and adopted a regulated system while still maintaining the physical training requirement:

Rhetoric is absolutely required of all candidates, also military drill for men and physical training for women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absolute requirements</th>
<th>8 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required electives</td>
<td>50 or 54 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free electives</td>
<td>67 or 63 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

125 hours

In addition to two years of physical education courses required of "general" students, a third year was elective. The all-inclusive doctrine of two years of physical education for women was kept until 1920, when women over 25 were excused.
In addition to the required physical examination, the student could have another at the end of the year if she desired. To aid in examinations, a universal dynamometer to test muscle strength was procured. Special corrective-exercise prescriptions were given if necessary and photographs taken of abnormal development. The student could have a plotted chart of her measurements and strength tests if she paid for it. Physical examinations of a woman included forty to fifty measurements, personal history, heart and lungs tests, and checking spinal curvature. Beginning in 1908 through the efforts of Alice Towne, director of the department, physical examinations were given by women doctors.

The development of the department of physical education for women, after the establishment of the professional program, was accomplished under the guidance of three women: Ann Barr Clapp, Alice Towne, and Ina Estelle Gittings. Mrs. Clapp had instruction from the YMCA, the University of Nebraska, and the gymnastics school at Chautauqua, New York. After she assumed Miss Wilder's responsibilities, she studied at Harvard Summer School of Physical Training in 1896 under Dr. Dudley A. Sargent, leader of early physical education in the United States. Miss Barr, on leave from the university in 1898, examined physical training schools in Europe, visited schools in Denmark, and became the second woman educator from the U.S. to observe the Royal gymnastic Institute in Sweden.

Miss Barr collected Swedish folk dances and acquired folk dance costumes for use in demonstrations. She had several dances published in sheet-music form, "the first publication in the United States of folk dances of other lands." She included the dances in her classes and introduced them at the Chautauqua, New York, summer school when a member of its staff in 1899. For the next ten years, in addition to her university responsibilities, Miss Barr taught anthropometry, Swedish gymnastics, and folk dances at Chautauqua. In 1899 on appointment as director of the women's gymnasium at the University of Nebraska, she copyrighted an anthropometric chart comparing measurements based upon height instead of traditional comparisons based on age.

On August 19, 1903, Miss Barr was married to Dr. Raymond Clapp at Jamestown, New York. Dr. Clapp became associated
with men's physical education at the University of Nebraska and remained on the faculty until retirement in 1946. Mrs. Clapp continued to teach physical education until her retirement in 1908 at the age of 40, at which time she was appointed emeritus professor. In 1908 a second collection of Swedish dances was published by her. Mrs. Clapp returned to the university as director of the women's gymnasium from 1918 to 1920. In 1940 she was honored for her contributions to the physical education field at a banquet celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the granting of the first physical education certificate.

When Mrs. Clapp retired in 1908, Miss Towne became head of women's physical education. Following her predecessor's advice, she also received her education from several sources. As a student at the University of Nebraska she had majored in physical education and served as student assistant at a starting salary of $10 a month. In 1903 she had accompanied Miss Barr to Chautauqua, where she earned a physical education certificate; the following two summers she taught there. In 1905 she received a BA degree and physical education certificate from Nebraska and was appointed an instructor at $50 a month with primary responsibility for activity courses.

Before Mrs. Clapp retired she encouraged Miss Towne to study other systems of physical education which might improve instruction at the university. In 1907 Miss Towne toured England, attended classes at the Royal Institute of Gymnastics at Stockholm, and went to Copenhagen and Berlin to observe the turnvereins; she also visited several eastern colleges in the United States. In 1908 Miss Towne was appointed professor and director of the women's gymnasium at $900 yearly. She resigned in 1909 to be married to Fred DeWeese.

Miss Gittings, succeeding to the women's directorship, followed the pattern established by Miss Towne. While a Nebraska student she had attended sessions at Chautauqua and received a physical education certificate in 1904. She was a student assistant as an undergraduate and received a BA degree and physical education certificate in 1906. Miss Gittings taught physical education as instructor and professor before appointment as director. She resigned in 1916 to teach at the University of Montana. She subsequently served in the Army Medical Corps during World War I and in the Near East with the Red Cross. In 1920 she helped establish the physical education de-
department at the University of Arizona in Tucson and was director until retirement in 1951.

The staff of the Nebraska department of physical education during the early years was small and consisted primarily of its graduates. Following Mrs. Clapp’s resignation the department experienced a series of brief appointments of women as directors and acting directors. During those years – in addition to Miss Towne and Miss Gittings – Bessie Park, Marion Luella Young, Della Marie Clark, and, for two years, Mrs. Clapp were a part of this succession. In the late 1910’s and early 1920’s several Lincoln residents with specialties such as dance were listed as part-time members of the department.

Need for increased space was a persistent problem. By 1899 the growth of student population was overcrowding facilities. The administration pointed out that when women were first required to take physical training in 1892, 102 women were enrolled. Near the end of the decade over 300 women were using the same facilities—rooms and baths—in addition to the men. The requirement of four hours a week for 300 women meant sixty to seventy students per class; reportedly, 450 more wanted gymnasium work. Dressing rooms and lockers designed for twenty were being used by sixty. The Legislature responded by appropriating $20,000 for an addition to Grant Hall to be called University Soldiers’ Memorial Hall. It was to extend west about fifty feet and provide large locker rooms, bathrooms, and dressing rooms for women on the ground floor. The addition
was to house temporarily a pipe organ (a gift of the alumni) and serve as an auditorium and chapel. The addition was constructed in 1899-1900 of materials similar to those used in Grant Hall.

Even so, the building was inadequate. Swimming classes were held at the Lincoln High School pool, at the YMCA, and at the Lincoln Sanitorium Sulfo-Saline Baths at 14th and M Streets. Women's locker room space was doubled in 1921 by remodeling a classroom. Facilities were summarized in the 1924 catalogue:

The University has two Gymnasiums, Grant Memorial Hall and Solders' Memorial Hall. On the ground floor are offices, locker-rooms, bathrooms and storerooms. On the second floor are two halls used for purposes of military drill, calisthenics and games.38

When professional courses were first offered, fields were not designated for women's use. Virtually all women's activities with the exception of tennis were indoors, even track meets. Gradually women were granted occasional use of the campus athletic field. One and one-half blocks of land north of the old campus at 10th and T Streets were acquired for athletic use in 1908. Women were allotted the football field for a portion of each day in 1915, although a 1919-1920 university statement did not mention women:

An Athletic field is provided for the use of men students and all inter-collegiate and other games and meets are held there. The field is equipped with two large grandstands, a running track, tennis courts, baseball diamond, football field and other necessary features.39

Provisions for participation were made elsewhere, however, for the general student body: “A portion of the new campus provides twenty-five additional tennis courts and space for other recreative activities for the general student body.”40 The courts were located south of Bessey Hall. By 1921 two additional half blocks north of the athletic field, were purchased, and women were provided a field east of the Social Science building (now the College of Business Administration). In 1923 additional facilities were provided by the construction of Memorial Stadium.

Just like their modern counterparts, students of an earlier day organized, developed, and participated in extracurricular activities. Clubs of the 1890's reflected a variety of students interests: a Tennis Association, a Walking Club, a Co-Ed Skating Club, and a Wheel Club, a bicycling organization. Louise
Pound, who later gained prominence in English literature, as an undergraduate was active in each of these organizations. She was the women's tennis champion in singles and doubles in 1890-1891 and was second in the men's singles. Beginning in 1892, annual exhibitions were presented by women to demonstrate work done in gymnasium classes. That the exhibition covered all phases of class instruction is shown in the program of 1896:

Fifth Annual Exhibition of the Young Women of the Department of Physical Training University of Nebraska, May 9th, 1896

PROGRAM

Music.
1. Dumb Bell Drill ........................................ Leader, Miss Spurck
2. Indian Club Drill ........................................
   Music.
3. Figure Marching and Circle Work ........................
4. Apparatus Work ........................................
   Music.
5. Bar Bell Drill ........................................ Leader, Miss Elliott
6. Marching ........................................
   Music.
7. Bag passing contest. Advanced and 1st year classes ........................................
8. Mass Drill ........................................

Miss Charlotte Clark, Accompanist.
Music furnished by courtesy of Univ. Cadet Band.
Advanced Class – White Ties.
First year Classes – Colored Ties.  

Since it was considered improper for a woman to appear in a gymnasium costume before a mixed crowd, guests at demonstrations were closely scrutinized to insure that men did not intrude. To make such events socially acceptable, faculty members and women in Lincoln became sponsors. For many years extracurricular activities of the physical education department were accompanied by pageantry and social functions. Teas and luncheons were considered part of these affairs. Games and exhibitions were preceded by marching bands with teams and mascots parading in fancy costumes, some as "pseudo-wild animals."  

In 1894 Senda Berenson, director of physical education at Smith College in Massachusetts, modified the newly invented game of basketball for participation by women. It was introduced to sophomore gymnasium classes in 1896. A varsity team played high schools and Young Women's Christian Associations
Louise Pound won the women’s tennis “championship of the West” in Chicago in 1897 (Leslie’s Weekly, October 7, 1897). She was winner in singles and doubles at NU in 1890-1891. Gym students exercising with swords in Grant Hall gymnasium before 1900.
in the vicinity, and a game was played at the Sixth Annual Gymnasium Exhibition in the spring of 1897. The first game played outside the state was with a Council Bluffs, Iowa, team in 1897. Miss Pound, then a graduate student, captained the team. The varsity schedule included these teams over the next ten years: Council Bluffs, Wahoo High School, Omaha High School, Lincoln High School, Omaha YWCA, Lincoln YWCA, Haskell (Kansas) Indian Institute, University of Missouri, University of Minnesota, and University of Kansas. Officials for games included Mrs. Clapp; Miss Pound, who was at times manager, co-captain, and player; physical education teachers of the area; and, on at least one occasion, two men. Visiting teams were hosted in homes of faculty members and patronesses of the games, and guests were entertained at teas, luncheons, and dinners.

In explaining the value of basketball, Mrs. Clapp said, “Winning of a game implies training of body and mind, and self-control, and capacity for self-sacrifice.” She also urged increased opportunities for women’s athletic teams:

The varsity basketball team, composed of girls who have had at least two years practice, is always in great favor. An effort is being made to bring about more of an inter-collegiate interest in athletics for women, and it is to be hoped that before many years college women enjoy the privilege of friendly contests with each other.

The first women’s state tournament in 1900 attracted five entries. The first inter-collegiate game between women’s teams in the Midwest was played between the Universities of Nebraska and Missouri in 1901. During ten years of competition the Nebraska varsity team lost only once – to the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis. Two weeks later the victorious Minnesota team came to Nebraska and lost. A traveling prize (a Russian brass samovar brought from Europe by Miss Barr, a seven-branched candelabrum, and a flagon) was offered to tournament winners. The physical education department still owns the samovar. Admission was charged to games and the girls’ teams were successful enough to aid financially the men’s athletic program.

A varsity team was not organized in 1907, but in 1908 a team was again organized with Miss Gittings as trainer and Miss Pound as acting manager. The team played two schools – the University of Minnesota and Nebraska Wesleyan – before the
Nebraska dean of women requested that games be stopped on the grounds of “hindrance to health” and that they “made for less womanly conduct by the girls.” Mrs. Clapp explained that it was the girls without proper coaching or gymnastic training were those who were usually injured, and these injuries most often occurred in high schools. She concluded:

A woman rather than a man should coach and supervise such sports. . . . A woman, if guided by proper training and intelligence, can better estimate a girl's strength and endurance than a man, and consequently can better curb a woman’s desire to overwork."

On April 24, 1908, the regents denied women students the right to participate in interstate athletic contests. This ruling seriously constricted women’s athletics for over sixty years and only recently has the value of athletics for women been supported by the public and by governmental legislation. Women educators now advocate, as did Mrs. Clapp in the early 1900’s, control of programs by properly educated women to ensure that all activities contribute to the well-being of participants. Annual women’s interclass basketball games began in 1901, with a pennant being awarded to the winning team. These games were of such interest that women were excused from academic classes to attend. The tournament in 1907 drew one hundred participants and though admittance was free, only women were allowed to watch. Interclass tournaments in basketball and other sports continued for many years.

Because of the taboo against men watching women in gym costumes — though bloomers were almost as cumbrous as the everyday fashions — track meets were at first held indoors. In 1903 the university girls’ inter-collegiate record for the high jump was set at 4’4” by Eva Scott. In second place at 4’3” was Nebraska U. coed Ruth Bryan, daughter of William Jennings Bryan, the statesman. The outdoor track meet, first held in 1904, became an annual tradition, and more events were gradually added. The contest in May, 1906, included the 25-yard dash, running high jump, shot put, and fence vault. Each event had six contestants except the hurdles and the 25-yard dash which had more. Gold, silver, and bronze medals were awarded to winners of first, second and third places. By 1914 more events had been added, and these records by Nebraska coeds were posted:
### Nebraska History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time/Distance</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 yard dash</td>
<td>3 4/5 seconds</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shot put</td>
<td>19'9&quot;</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 yard dash</td>
<td>7 1/5 seconds</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball throw</td>
<td>71'8&quot;</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 yard Hurdles</td>
<td>7 1/5 seconds</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Jump</td>
<td>4'</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball throw</td>
<td>168'3&quot;</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pole Vault</td>
<td>5'6&quot;</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other activities for coeds included field hockey, a game recently brought to the United States from England. A Hockey Club promoted interest in the game, and annual interclass meets were played until World War I intervened in 1917. Indoor baseball became an annual spring contest between upper and lower classes. Tennis, soccer, swimming and gymnastics were added to the growing list of activities. Events in the swimming meet of 1916-1917 at the Lincoln High pool were "fancy swimming," diving, and life saving. To recognize achievement in physical activity, "N" awards for women were begun in 1912. Requirements included an "E" in gymnasium (presumably an E for excellence); a place on a class team; or a first, second, or third in a track or field event. By 1915 thirty-five N's had been awarded.

In 1917 Dorothy Baldwin, physical education instructor was in Madison, Wisconsin, for a national meeting of the Women's Athletic Association (WAA), to promote participating of women in athletics. Thereafter Miss Baldwin and Jessie Beghtol Lee, another instructor, formed the university WAA, which assumed responsibility for extra-curricular activities of women. The WAA's intent, as reported in the 1917 *Comhusker*, was to gain recognized sports for women as "essential in the college curriculum." Athletics for women at the University of Nebraska, the yearbook said, would henceforth be "placed on a firm business-like basis and all forms of sports...officially recognized." Two life members were elected, Mrs. Lee and Professor Louise Pound. Sports leaders were elected each spring to organize activities.

A point system to screen individual and group awards, honors, and prizes was instituted. The system changed many times throughout its existence. Points could be earned for membership on class teams or a winning team for individual honors in track events, dance, swimming, hiking, and for exemplary work in gym classes. At one time a required number of points had to
be earned to gain WAA membership, and a girl acquiring more points was awarded an N. Another time a cup was awarded the girl accumulating the most points in four years. Interest in participation was evident by the varied activities the WAA conducted. At first several basketball tournaments were sponsored: The Rainbow Tournament consisting of six teams (thirty girls); the Inter-sorority Tournament involving sixty girls on ten teams; and the Inter-class Tournament. Prizes of bracelets and loving cups were awarded, and nearly two hundred girls competed.

The next year only two tournaments were sponsored: The Monte Carlo, a preliminary event, and a class tournament. Seventy-nine girls were involved in the tournaments of 1922. In 1923 there were fourteen teams in a “basketball color tournament.”

Even with limited facilities, swimming meets became an annual event. A Water Sports Day was held, and one year a city-wide meet was part of the program. In 1924 the WAA sponsored a telegraphic swim meet. Each participating school competed in its own pool and the results were exchanged. Track meets continued as part of the program with still more events added in 1919: the 60-yard hurdles, broad jump, shot put, and relays. In 1920 two new awards were granted to winners: a gold
and silver-winged medal. Also in 1920 a world record time of 1 minute, 15.6 seconds for the women's 440 yards was set by freshman Jean Shuster. The WAA reinstated field hockey and over one hundred girls participated in 1921.

Other activities sponsored were inter-class baseball tournaments; inter-class soccer tournaments — eighty-eight girls were involved in the tournament in 1921; and singles and doubles tennis meets — forty girls entered the spring tournament of 1919 and eighty-two entered the tournament in the fall of 1919. In 1922 rifle marksmanship was added and in 1923-1924 the team won twenty-seven of thirty-three matches, usually telegraphic events with other universities.

Several activities were designated as minor sports: hiking, camping, Indian club swinging, and dancing. During 1920-21 girls hiked 957 miles the first semester with a total of 2,089 miles for the year. The WAA-sponsored camping session between 1920 and 1922 at Crete, where a cabin was available, activities included softball, cooking, singing, swimming, and boating on the Blue River. An annual minor-sports contest was sponsored with competition in Indian club swinging and in dancing. Modern dance, then becoming popular, was sponsored by the WAA with financial aid given to it, and eventually it was classified as a minor sport. Instead of competing against each other, the girls produced dances for points toward an N. In 1922 two ballets were presented, one named "The Courtier's Return"; in 1923 the ballet was "All in a Garden Fair"; and in 1924 dancers presented their third annual "Fete Dansant." The Modern Dance Club eventually evolved into Orchesis, which today presents concerts as well as dance demonstrations.

More than a club formed solely to sponsor athletic events, the WAA has always included social events and charitable works in its activities. To support its activities, the WAA derived a major source of its income from selling candy and hamburgers at football and basketball games. In 1923 its code was re-emphasized in the *Cornhusker*:

Women's athletics, unlike the men's athletics, are not carried on for the purpose of creating competition between the girls in the various sports, but are used more for recreative purposes and the physical development which should go along with the mental training they are receiving.
NOTES

1. *The Sombrero* (1883-1884), University of Nebraska Yearbook, 63.
2. Petition by the women students to the Board of Regents, December 17, 1883 (MS, University of Nebraska [hereafter U of N] Library, Lincoln).
5. *The University of Nebraska Catalogue, 1886-87*, 81.
6. Report of the University of Nebraska steward to the Board of Regents, December 17, 1889 (MS, U of N Library).
7. Report of the steward to the Board of Regents, June 10, 1890 (MS, U of N Library).
8. Letter from Thomas W. Griffith to Board of Regents, June 10, 1890 (MS, U of N Library).
10. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Report of the steward to the Board of Regents, May 13, 1890, to November 30, 1890 (MS, U of N Library).
16. Report of Chancellor Edward Canfield to the Board of Regents, August 18, 1891 (MS, U of N Library).
18. Report of chancellor to the Board of Regents, April 12, 1892 (MS, U of N Library).
19. Report of director of gymnasium to the Board of Regents, June 1892 (MS, U of N Library).
20. Report of the chancellor to the Board of Regents, November 28, 1892 (MS, U of N Library): See Margaret R. Seymour, "The University of Nebraska Music School of Music, 1876-1894" *Nebraska History*, 54 (1973), 399-418.
22. *University of Nebraska, The Colleges, Courses of Study, Departments of Instruction*, 1894-1895 (July, 1894).
23. *University of Nebraska, The Colleges, Course of Study, Departments of Instruction*, 1895-1896 (May, 1895), 42.
24. Ibid., 33.
25. Ibid., 42.
26. Ibid., 42.
27. The University of Nebraska Calendar, 1895-1896 (June, 1896), 135.
28. Ibid., 10-11.
29. Letter from R. A. Clark to the chancellor and the Board of Regents, May 22, 1897 (MS, U of N Library).
30. Letter from William M. Hastings to the chancellor, October 15, 1897 (MS, U of N Library).
31. The University of Nebraska Calendar, 1897-1898 (June, 1898), 250-251.
32. Ibid., 163-166.
33. Ibid., 239.
34. Ibid., 160-161.
35. The University of Nebraska Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Board of Regents to the Governor (December, 1902), 9.
36. The University of Nebraska Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Board of Regents to the Governor (January, 1907), 13.
41. Program of the Fifth Annual Exhibition, May 9, 1896 (MS, U of N Library).
42. Alice Towne DeWeese, “Life and Times of a Physical Education Major 1897-1909” (MS, U of N Library, 1972), 117.
43. The Sombrero (1903, 1904), 126.
44. The Sombrero (1902), 176.
45. Scrapbook, newspaper clipping, n.d. (Souvenir the Department of Physical Education for Women, U of N).
47. The Cornhusker (1917), 174.
Soldier's Memorial addition to Grant Memorial Hall (west entrance), 1924. Built as an armory-gymnasium in 1887-1888, Grant underwent several remodelings and expansions before being razed in 1965. It stood on a site just north of today's Sheldon Art Gallery.