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Article Summary: Known for her pioneering work in the study of American folklore and linguistics, Professor Louise Pound also excelled in athletics. She participated with great success in several sports played chiefly by men in her time.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Louise Pound, Stephen Bosworth Pound, Laura Biddlecomb Pound, Roscoe Pound, Olivia Pound, Jane Craven, E O "Jumbo" Stiehm, Mrs Ross P Curtice, Mary Levings, Dorothy Canfield Fisher

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Photographs / Images of Louise Pound: as a doctoral student at the University of Heidelberg, dressed for tennis, dressed for golf, on skis, with her first bicycle, with Lena Deweese on horseback, with golfer Patty Berg in 1954, at 1956 Country Club golf luncheon, playing golf



Louise Pound as doctoral candidate at the University of Heidelberg.

Nebraska's Scholarly Athlete: Louise Pound, 1872-1958

By Nellie Snyder Yost

On a pleasant day in the fall of 1897, Chicago Kenwood Country Club members and visitors were stunned by the victory of an unknown Nebraska woman over their own prestigious Jane Craven of Evanston in the Western Tennis Tournament. *Leslie's Weekly* of New York, in its issue of October 7 reported:

Miss Louise Pound, of Lincoln, Nebraska, who, by her defeat of Miss Craven, of Evanston, in the recent tournament on the courts of the Kenwood Country Club, became the woman tennis champion of the West, was, until that event, unknown in Chicago. She had won many honors at home, however. As early as 1890 she held the championship of her state. Miss Craven, who had defended the silver cup for one season, was regarded by her friends as the sure winner, and they considered the trophy practically hers.

When, however, they saw this unknown girl from the West defeat Miss Atkinson, holder of the triple championship, they began to fear that their favorite would have to struggle desperately to retain her honors. Their fears were well grounded, as the event proved. Whether Miss Craven did her best is not certain, but certain it is that she was fairly outplayed at every stage of the game, with the exception of a brief interval at the beginning of the last set. Miss Pound has hardly a rival in her native place in the art of skating and has won many prizes in bicycling.

The last two sentences in the report seem patronizing. Why wouldn't Miss Craven play her best in defending her title? And the allusion to Miss Pound's "native place" probably indicates that in those days Nebraska seemed to be barely heard of, or from, in sophisticated circles. No wonder Chicagoans found it hard to comprehend that they had been bested by an "unknown." In her native place, however, Miss Pound had been making sports history for several years.

Louise began making tennis news in Nebraska by 1890, a

period when leisurely games of lawn croquet were considered the ultimate in active sports for women—who had to play games clad in the voluminous ankle length skirts and petticoats assigned them by the fashions of the time. A photo of Louise Pound in an 1890s tennis costume was published in the October 7, 1897, *Leslie's Weekly*.¹

Croquet, however, was much too tame for Louise, who, by the time she was 14, was a master of the mallet-and-ball game. She turned to tennis, a game of much greater difficulty which challenged her athletic abilities. She never took lessons and did not usually enter tournaments, “unless they happened to be in progress near where she was and at a time convenient to her.”² But by the time she was 18 in 1890, Louise held the championship in her home town of Lincoln.³

She was Nebraska women's state singles champion in 1891 and 1892, the only years she entered, and University of Nebraska men's champion in singles and doubles for 1891.⁴ As second place winner in men's intercollegiate singles, she was awarded a men's “N.”⁵ In 1894 Miss Pound won an intercollegiate championship in mixed doubles with Charles Foster Kent, professor of religion at Yale University.⁶

By invitation she played in three men's state tennis tournaments, once at Hastings in 1891 and twice at Lincoln. Each time she was beaten only by the winner of the tournament—Sidney Cullingham Sr., Omaha; E. O. (Jumbo) Stiehm, former Wisconsin champion and football coach at NU and Ralph Powell of Omaha.⁷ Of her loss to Stiehm, she remarked, “He was too big. I couldn't hit the ball over his head and I couldn't wear him out.”⁸

Miss Pound was the only woman member of the Lincoln Tennis Club during the 1890s and was considered almost unbeatable in the singles. In 1897, while a summer student at the University of Chicago, she won the Chicago city tennis championship, and defeated Jane Craven to win the Women's Western singles crown. In the latter contest she defeated both the national singles champion and the national doubles champions and the Canadian singles titleholder. “Thus, for that season, Miss Pound was ranking player of the United States, even though she had not entered—and never did enter—a national tournament.”⁹

Born in Lincoln to Stephen Bosworth Pound and Laura

Biddlecomb Pound in 1872, Louise was the middle child of three, Roscoe older and Olivia younger. Both parents, college educated teachers who came to Lincoln in 1869, were of Quaker ancestry. Stephen Pound later practiced law in Lincoln and served as a district court judge.¹⁰ He also served in the Nebraska state Senate in 1873 and was a member of the constitutional convention.

Since there was then no adequate school in the village of Lincoln, Mrs. Pound undertook to teach her children at home. Her qualities as a teacher were apparent in the progress of her pupils. Louise, who learned to read at age three, was admitted by examination at the age of 14 to the Lincoln Latin School, preparatory to matriculating at the state university in 1888. Brought up among books, for her father had a splendid library for that time and place, and in a family interested in science and letters, she maintained so high an average that she had earned her Phi Beta Kappa key and bachelor's degree at age 19 in 1892. She received her diploma in music (piano) from the university that same year, then went on to earn the MA degree in 1895.

In those Victorian days before 1900, the Pound home was a lively, happy place, where young people were busy with studies, music, sports, and social affairs. The capital city's young people naturally gravitated there for recreational activities, with the older Pounds overseeing and frequently joining in. It was also a period when ambitious Americans, seeking academic distinction, sought their doctorates from German universities.

Louise Pound was no exception. In 1899 she journeyed to the prestigious University of Heidelberg, Germany, for hers—at a time when the authorities were still dubious about accepting women students. The young Nebraskan was admitted, completed her dissertation, and passed the examination for a doctorate *magna cum laude* in two instead of the usual seven semesters.¹¹

While in Heidelberg, she was a fixture on its tennis courts, winning the women's singles and doubles championships of the university in 1899 and 1900. Her game was good enough that she gave competition to the winner of the Olympic men's singles title, who was then in Heidelberg.¹² During her years in the German city, she found time to participate in cricket



Louise Pound was skilled in tennis (above left) and golf (above right). She was also among the first in the Lincoln area to ski.

matches between American and English students.

Back in the United States, she teamed with well-known columnist Guy (Rolling Along) Williams to win the men's doubles in Lincoln in 1913. With Carrie Neely she was a winner in women's doubles in the Central Western Championships at Kansas City in 1915. She and Miss Neely also won the Western Women's Tournament doubles at Chicago in 1915. Several years later Miss Pound gave up tennis, recalling regretfully in 1956: "[I] gave up tennis in the second decade of the century. Bi-focal glasses wrecked my ground strokes. Whatever I hit went into the net."¹³

During the near half century of her athletic pleasures and achievements, Louise was also a distinguished scholar and teacher. After completing her special courses in Chicago, she returned to Lincoln in 1897 to become a regular instructor on the University of Nebraska faculty. Then came her studies at Heidelberg under English professor Johannes Hoops (to whom she dedicated her *Selected Writings*), after which she came home to Lincoln in 1900 to fill the position of adjunct professor at the university. By 1912 she was a full professor, a position she held until her retirement with emeritus standing in 1945. Interspersed in her 50-year teaching career at Nebraska University were summers spent as visiting professor at such colleges as Yale, Columbia, Stanford, and the University of Chicago.¹⁴

Dr. Pound's literary accomplishments were many and varied. A pioneer in teaching American literature, she wrote much of the material used for her class instruction and saw it published in scholarly journals. She taught Old English, Middle English, English literature, and phonetics, and did pioneering work in the study of American folklore and linguistics. In a long foreword to Miss Pound's *Selected Writings*, Arthur G. Kennedy of Stanford University wrote, in part, "Her courses moved along with a clarity and finish that gave to the earnest seeker after philological learning a real satisfaction."¹⁵

But even during the busiest years of her academic and scholarly pursuits, Louise Pound excelled in sports. Golf was played chiefly by men in the last decade of the 19th century, but, in spite of her long skirts, she took it up with zest and blazed down the fairways. Although she never had extensive



Louise Pound and her first "Rambler" bicycle. . . . (Right) Lena Deweese (left) and Miss Pound at Summit, Colorado.

lessons,¹⁶ Louise was the ranking woman golfer in Lincoln from about 1900 through 1927.¹⁷ She won the state golf championship in 1916¹⁸ and served as vice-president of the Nebraska Woman's Golf Association, 1916-1917.¹⁹

Decades later in 1955, Louise recalled, "I played for a long time without a set of matched clubs. Most women at that time would use their husband's clubs cut off. When I got a set of matched clubs in 1931 I cut six strokes off my game."²⁰

After Miss Pound won the women's city golf tournament in 1926, the *Sunday Lincoln Star* reported on her friendly rivalry with another early sports enthusiast, Mrs. Ross P. Curtice of Lincoln:

Mrs. Ross P. Curtice and Miss Louise Pound have a little joke all their own: . . . The number of times they have met as opponents in women's sports events in Lincoln. Whereas masculine champions rise and fall as readily as flowers bloom and wilt, these two women . . . [are] outstanding every year in which they take part in a tournament, beginning some years ago with tennis, and continuing into the days of golf.²¹

Miss Pound later recalled another early golfing opponent: "I often played Mary Levings (many times state champion) outside state tournaments. She was a better player, but she never beat me. It seems as though whenever I could get sufficiently excited and interested to concentrate on my game, my few peculiar unmatched clubs did well by me."²²

The sports page of Lincoln newspapers continued as the years went by to feature Louise Pound as a leader in women's golf. In October of 1929 she was pictured at a reunion of "'patriarch' women golfers who played in the days when the [Lincoln Country] club was located at Washington and Seventh streets." The reunion luncheon featured "Mrs. Curtis and Miss Pound as the 'ultra-patriarchs' in the places of honor at the ends of the table."²³ In September of 1935, the "first annual women's golf powwow was held . . . at [the] Lincoln Country Club."²⁴ Guests were invited to appear in costume, and, as a *Journal-Star* photo attests, "Miss Louise Pound in a Nebraska football suit and a plumed hat made a dashing figure."²⁵

Miss Pound abandoned golf in the 1930s to finish a book to which she was committed, and "for no particular reason did not take it up again."²⁶ Perhaps it no longer challenged her as it once had, for she remarked, "Golf seems to be getting sissier.

I see them riding around the course in electric carts now.”²⁷

Miss Pound was also active in promoting women's sports at the University of Nebraska during her long teaching career there. She organized a girl's military company and equipped its members with 1880 Springfield rifles. First introduced to Nebraska University sophomore gymnasium classes in 1896, the new sport of basketball was adopted by Miss Pound with characteristic enthusiasm. A varsity team from Nebraska played at the Sixth Annual Gymnasium Exhibition in the spring of 1897. Later that year Louise, then a graduate student, captained the Nebraska women's team against a Council Bluffs, Iowa team.²⁸

With Miss Pound acting at various times as manager, co-captain, and player, the basketball team participated in various intercollegiate and other matches from 1897 through 1907. The Nebraska women won games with Missouri University; Minnesota University; the Omaha YWCA; Peru, Nebraska, Normal; and the Haskell Institute Indian women from Lawrence, Kansas. Recalled Miss Pound, “Those events were great fun. . . . The last game we played was with Minnesota in 1910. In the audience of five thousand people were the governor of Minnesota and the University band. Yes, we won!”²⁹ Regretfully, she continued, “We had to stop them [basketball games], finally because the Dean of Women thought such activity inadvisable for the girls' health.”³⁰

But Miss Pound believed throughout her scholastic and teaching career that women's athletics and women's scholarship were compatible: “When I coached the girls' basketball team for Nebraska I had three Phi Beta Kappas on the team. They kept their heads better.”³¹

Cycling, popular in the 1890s, saw almost “everybody” taking to wheels. Although Louise owned one of the first bicycles in Lincoln, hers was not used only for leisurely rides in shady streets and parks. Instead, it helped her to get about faster to private tennis courts to organize and supervise tournaments.

As the bicycling fad spread, so did the organization of Century Clubs—groups of cyclists who had ridden 100 continuous miles in a single day. Louise earned her first Century Road Club bar in 1895 and her second in 1896, along with a Rambler Gold Medal for riding 5,000 miles in one year.³² The



Louise Pound (center) with golfer Patty Berg (left) in 1954 at Hillcrest Country Club, Lincoln. . . (Below) Miss Pound (standing) at Country Club "Has Beens" golf luncheon, 1956.



latter feat entitled her to membership in the Century Road Club of America.

Louise also enjoyed roller skating. The Pound papers at the Nebraska State Archives include a whimsical "contract" dated August 19, 1908, between Louise Pound "expert of the first part" and university rhetoric instructor Marguerite McPhee, "inexpert of the second part" which attests to Miss Pound's prowess. The contract stipulates that Louise

travel on roller skates, seeking assistance . . . neither from wheelbarrows, infant carriages, or street cars, from 1632 L Street [the Pound home] to 1801 South Seventeenth Street, during the month of August, on one of the following days, Aug. 17th-Sept. 1 inclusive between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. having made the whole trip on roller skates, skating neither behind nor in nor being seated nor standing in any sort of vehicle, carriage or automobile, whether run by gasoline or electricity, or by hand or foot . . . and in token of good faith, the party of the first part, Louise Pound . . . expert shall give to one of the witnesses of this document, possession of the key of the above mentioned skates from the moment of departure from 1632 L Street until her arrival at 1802 South Seventeenth Street; and the said party of the second part, Marguerite McPhee, inexpert, in consideration of the prompt fulfillment on the part of the party of the first part, contracts and agrees with said Louise Pound . . . expert to pay into her hands one seven-layer cake that shall contain at least three eggs, one-half cup of milk, one-half cup of butter, one and one half cups of sugar, one and one half cups of flour, one heaping teaspoonful of baking powder. It shall be baked in an oven until done. It shall be neither burned nor soggy. The layers shall be at least nine inches in diameter, and three-fourths of an inch in thickness. Between the layers there will be a filling of chocolate. This cake is to be made by the said Marguerite McPhee inexpert without the aid of any person or persons.³³

A skilled figure skater, Louise was one of the first women to swish her long skirts on Lincoln rinks and ponds. Area ponds were too small for distance skating, but she learned the "Maltese Cross backwards, the double Philadelphia grapevine, the On-to-Richmond, knitting, waltz, and two-steps, mostly out of a book. Racing was impossible on such tiny areas so I had to cut figures."³⁴ She was encouraged in her skating by college football player Orley Thorp and J. D. Lau of Lincoln. Thomas Mickay, manager of the Lincoln ball club and an expert roller skater, demonstrated dance steps.³⁵

In a 1945 interview granted to former student Evelyn Simpson, she was still able to demonstrate the moves of the "On-to-Richmond": "You skate on the outside of the blade. The left foot comes around here in back like this, a sort of reverse

Dutch Roll, and there you are. I remember when Dorothy Canfield Fisher was just a little girl in prep school she sometimes skated with me.”³⁶ (James A. Canfield, Dorothy’s father, was an early chancellor of the University of Nebraska. Miss Pound’s first teaching assignment at NU—“Anglo-Saxon to 80 sophomore students”—came under Chancellor Canfield.)

With another woman enthusiast, Louise introduced skiing to the Lincoln area with a pair of skis imported from Sweden. “There were a few hills in the city,” she recalled, “and we tried them all.”³⁷ Louise also enjoyed coaching softball, bowling, horseback riding, and swimming. She “at one time held the high diving record,” presumably a Lincoln record.³⁸

In February of 1955, at the age of 82, Miss Pound was elected the 14th member of the *Lincoln Journal’s* Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame—the first woman to be so honored. Preceding Miss Pound in the *Journal’s* Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame were Grover Cleveland Alexander, Ed Weir, Johnny Goodman, Sam Crawford, Roland Locke, Johnny Bender, Clarence Mitchell, Vic Halligan, Joe Stecher, Walter Dobbins



Louise Pound engaged in one of her favorite sports.

(honorary), and others.³⁹ She was chosen by a committee of Keith Neville of North Platte, Dr. Ted Riddell of Scottsbluff, Don Maclay of Fairbury, Jerry Lee of Lincoln, and Dick Becker of Lincoln. The *Journal* noted that Miss Pound was still an avid sports fan, "who saw all the Husker football games for over 30 years" and "has her own ideas on all sports."⁴⁰

Roscoe Pound, internationally known legal expert and dean of the Harvard Law School, once said of his sister, "I should explain that in my native state [Nebraska] I am best known as Louise Pound's brother." His splendid tribute to "My Sister Louise" appeared on the front page of the *Boston Sunday Globe* on June 30, 1957, her 85th birthday. Of her athletic accomplishments he wrote that she had excelled in all active outdoor sports due to an "inherited skill at games." Their father, he explained, had played baseball in college and was a fine athlete. He continued:

Louise could pitch a good curve ball (and) could bat, throw and field with the best of us. But this [athletics] was only one side She excelled as a student, graduating at the head of her class (and) making Phi Beta Kappa, so that when she was inducted in the newly formed chapter at Nebraska I was moved to translate the S. P. on her key *sedeant pueri*: "Let the boys go back and sit down."

From the beginning she has always taken first place in everything she has ever undertaken; and she has undertaken about everything worthwhile which an active, ambitious and talented woman could try her hand at. Following the pattern of her mother, she has been zealous in furthering college education of women and the position of women in American universities and institutions of learning. She has devoted followers in generations of women students. With all she has taken a leading part in the life of the community in social and public activities of every sort and has long been recognized as a champion of every worthy educational enterprise. At 85 she is still active in good works on every hand.

With her sister Olivia, retired Lincoln High School principal for girls, she continued to attend meetings of various societies and clubs, and to lecture and write as always. At a meeting of the Nebraska Writers Guild, the sisters were urged by an out-of-town friend to make an overnight visit to her home. "We'll come," Louise promised, "if Alexander's sitter is free to stay with him." Alexander, she explained, was their cat, and there was only one woman he would tolerate as a sitter. "So we do not accept invitations unless she can come to sit with him. She is so special that we spell her title with an 'o!' 'Sittor.' "

Dr. Pound died at her home on June 28, 1958, two days before her 86th birthday. Letters and messages inundated the old home at 1632 L Street in Lincoln, where the elderly Roscoe and Olivia were seeing to the final arrangements. One of her former students best expressed the sentiments of all when she wrote, "For all of us, her students and her friends, she is truly immortal. Every day for as long as we live we will see her influence expressed in innumerable ways and the ideas that she implanted in us reflected in turn by our children and students."⁴¹ Her colleagues remembered her as the great teacher who always took more pride in the accomplishments of her students than in her own; and who saw many of them go on to fill high places in scholastic, academic, and literary circles.

In the spring of 1966, a \$17,000 fellowship fund was established at the University of Nebraska in memory of Louise through the estates of the recently deceased Roscoe and Olivia. Grants from the fund were to be awarded annually to deserving women students. By 1973 the fund, administered by the American Association of University Women, had grown through outside donations to \$65,000. Yearly stipends of \$3,000 are awarded women from foreign countries studying for advanced degrees.

To further perpetuate the memory of this amazing Nebraskan, beautiful Pound Hall, a dormitory, has been erected on the campus, where Louise in her voluminous long skirts used to spin about on her bicycle.

NOTES

1. This photo and others of women in early athletic dress appeared in an article by Phyllis Kay Wilke, "Physical Education for Women at Nebraska University, 1879-1923," *Nebraska History*, 56 (Lincoln; Summer, 1975), 193-220.

2. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.

3. Letter from Louise Pound, dated 1956, Manuscript Collection 912, Nebraska State Archives, Nebraska State Historical Society. The State Archives is the repository for the Louise Pound papers and memorabilia and for papers of family members: parents Stephen Bosworth Pound and Laura Biddlecomb Pound; brother Roscoe; and sister Olivia.

4. *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.

5. Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives; *World-Herald Magazine*.

6. *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.

7. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.

8. *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.
9. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
10. Anne Polk Diffendal, "A Centennial History of the Nebraska State Historical Society, 1878-1978," *Nebraska History*, 59 (Lincoln; Fall, 1978), 320-321.
11. Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives.
12. *Ibid.*; *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.
13. Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives.
14. "In Memorium Louise Pound, 1872-1958," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, XXIII (Jacksonville; June, 1959), 133.
15. Louise Pound, *Selected Writings of Louise Pound* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1949), x.
16. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
17. *Ibid.*; Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives.
18. Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives; *Lincoln Sunday Star*, October 3, 1926.
19. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
20. *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.
21. *Lincoln Sunday Star*, October 3, 1926.
22. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
23. *Lincoln State Journal*, October 27, 1929.
24. *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, September 15, 1935.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
27. *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.
28. Wilke, "Physical Education for Women," 212, 214.
29. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives.
34. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
35. Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives.
36. *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, May 27, 1945.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Pound papers, Nebraska State Archives.
39. *Lincoln Journal*, February 1, 1955.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Louise Pound, *Names*, Volume 7, Number 1, March, 1959.