

At another level, *The Stairway* is important as the historical account of one woman's coming of age, for Alice might as aptly have called her book "Life Begins at Forty." When the story opens, Alice's mother has just died. Alice, now forty, has spent the past twenty years of her life caring for her semi-invalid mother, but life is far from over for Alice. That day, she wrote: "Today I am free. My first day of freedom! It is my new birth!" (p. 5) New birth for Alice meant testing her radical ideas and, as she did so, she found herself estranged from the established Kingston and Toronto societies to which her family belonged. Thus it seems particularly appropriate that her great-great niece had the opportunity to research and write the introduction to this new edition of *The Stairway*. Diana remarks that her aunt Alice was labelled as eccentric by the family. She says it was only through her own research in Canadian reform history that she became interested in her aunt's contributions to Canadian society.

As one reads *The Stairway*, Alice's idealism and her efforts at creating a better society stand out. During those years, she threw off what she perceived to be the fetters of tradition, including her relationship with the Methodist church in which her family was active, and the trappings of the Canadian society where she was born and raised. Her beliefs developed outside of the church's teaching, to a belief in the human spirit and a mysticism close to the Theosophist idealists of that time. She spent much time in the eastern United States and Britain with friends who shared her non-traditional feminist, pacifist and socialist views.

Alice was particularly delighted to find male friends who shared her feminist ideals. True to herself, though, Alice refused to tie herself to a marriage relationship. Perhaps because she spent so many years caring for others, including her ailing mother, she came to view marriage as oppressive. When she was forty-five, she forfeited a romantic attachment in favour of her own autonomy. Her beau proposed marriage and, although she "wanted his love," she feared that marital ties would result in her becoming subject to him. After much "torture" and "uncertainty," she "sent him word" that the marriage was off (p. 89).

Alice's ideals and independence of spirit were at the root of her varied career. Alice worked at various points as a settlement worker, a suffragist, a writer, a home economics advocate, a journalist, a labour activist, a labour college teacher and a peace activist. She marched with the British suffragists in 1910 and joined the Canadian Suffrage Association in 1911. Alice believed that education was the key for women to escape their subordinate role in society and

family life and it was her emphasis on women's right to economic and social independence that separates her from the majority of Canadian reform women of that period. Even though she had severed her formal ties with the church, Alice wrote in the Methodist *Christian Guardian*, criticizing the inadequate education and low wages of the deaconesses in 1911. Five years later, she set out her beliefs on pacifism in the *Guardian*, suggesting that women, especially, should work for pacifism. In the 1920s, Alice was active in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the League of Nations Society. Her interests were not limited to political and organizational activities, however. She loved people and hosted many dinner parties and teas for her friends and was interested in the plight of the less fortunate as well. She became involved with workers involved in labour disputes, immigrants who were trying to make better lives for themselves, and lived for a period in a cooperative arrangement.

Alice continued to live her ideals and promote her beliefs in feminism, pacifism and socialism until she died in her seventies. The story of this woman's life, its significance largely unrecognized until recently, is a welcome addition to biographies of other reform women like Flora MacDonald Denison and Nellie McClung. It also provides inspiration for women and men today who, like the reformers of the early twentieth century, are working for peace, justice and a better world.

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Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914. Kathleen E. McCrone, *Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988, Pp. 310 hardcover.*

In 1913, enraged English suffragists vented their fury on the prominent male sporting establishments and sportsmen of the day. They vandalized race courses and bowling greens, tennis, croquet and golf clubs, as well as cricket and football grounds. One combative woman was apprehended on the centre court at Wimbledon carrying explosives and a note that read, "No peace till women have the vote." Another more spectacular martyr killed herself under the hooves of the king's horse at the running of the Derby.

The relationship between feminism on the one hand, and sport on the other, has always been tenuous, disturbing, and contradictory. For some of the most militant of

the early twentieth-century feminists, sport was a symbol of virulent male exclusivity to be attacked as an institution and destroyed as a reality. Nearly a century later, sport still represents a challenge to feminists, characterized as it is by distinctly non-feminist values: fierce competition, a hierarchy of authority, an overemphasis on winning, the dominance of the highly skilled, and unbridled aggression sometimes erupting into violence. Today, most feminists ignore sport, and fail to see it as one of the most pronounced and institutionalized aspects of our culture maintaining male hegemony.

In contrast, sport has also been an important site of positive feminist intervention. For middle-class women of the Victorian era, "sporting activities made a substantial contribution to emancipating [them] from physical and psychological bondage and to altering the image of ideal womanhood." This argument is the central theme of Kathleen McCrone's highly readable account of the struggle mounted by Victorian English women to escape the strictures of corsets and crinolines, and the ridiculous "limited energy theory" of the male medical establishment.

Through meticulous research and with refreshing clarity, McCrone writes about several distinct yet related topics, any one of which could be developed into a book itself. After a few introductory and insightful remarks about sport as an excellent monitor of how far women have travelled along the road to equality, she begins with an examination of sport and exercise at the Oxbridge women's college, specifically Girton and Newnham at Cambridge, and Lady Margaret and Somerville Halls at Oxford. To begin at Oxbridge is significant because Victorian women's entry into sport was directly related to the late-nineteenth-century campaign for female higher education. Women, claimed the pundits of the time, were too weak to withstand the rigours of higher education. Exercise and sport (primarily tennis and hockey at Cambridge; boating at Oxford), argued the women educators who headed the colleges, would make them stronger. So too argued the female educational reformers who headed the growing number of girls' "public" (in Canadian terms "private") schools. Here, McCrone utilizes a case study approach to examine athleticism in both the day and boarding public schools, making the important point that the games movement never acquired anything like the same hold on the girls' schools as it did on the boys'.

Her next topic concerns the rise of the "physical training mistress," the forerunner of the modern physical education teacher. This is McCrone's weakest chapter because, although it is clear that she has done her own archival

research here, the story has already been superbly told by Sheila Fletcher in *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880-1980*.

Two chapters are devoted to the rise of team sports (hockey, lacrosse and cricket) and individual sports (tennis, golf and cycling) outside of the educational institutions. There is a massive amount of fascinating detail here, especially about the never-ending disapproval and outright hostility sportswomen faced. For their part, they fought back by forming separate sporting organizations, which gave them the autonomy to demonstrate athletic achievement without being compared to or ridiculed by their male counterparts, but, at the same time, left men's sport intact as a male preserve.

Men's sport was deeply divided along class lines, and it was the more "respectable" elements of the working class who were attracted to bourgeois sport. Their participation enforced the traditional, rigid sex segregation so that working-class women, prohibited from participating with their husbands and unwelcome in the exclusive clubs of their middle- and upper-class counterparts, were visibly absent from sport. McCrone is certainly aware of these divisions but, by her own admission, has not dug deeply enough to provide anything but a passing reference to this lack of working-class women's participation in sport. Future work could, for example, compare her limited insights with those of John Hargreaves in *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sport in Britain*, in which he examines the relationship between sport and hegemony along with the more general themes of class, gender, and ethnicity.

The remaining topics in *Playing the Game* include an analysis of the medical and scientific debates that engaged physicians, Social Darwinists, eugenicists, anti-feminists, and health reformers; an examination of the relationship between women's sport and dress reform; and, finally, a look at the surprisingly large volume of Victorian literature about women's sport in books, magazines, periodicals, and the daily press. These are among her best chapters because they place discussions about women's sport in a broader context, and they attempt to explain the relationship between culturally appropriate uses of a woman's body, her oppression and her emancipation.

Throughout the book, McCrone returns to her central theme: sport as a site of feminist intervention. She notes cautiously many times that women athletes had little feminist consciousness and that "active" feminism played a minimal role in their struggles for greater freedom.

Women saw in sport a chance to have fun, to be fashionable, and to emulate their brothers, but their physical (and mental) emancipation was to be achieved without endangering their femininity. The women who played sport, asserts McCrone, were uninterested in feminism and “lacked an expansive vision of the emancipation of women through sport or themselves as soldiers of ‘the cause.’” Prominent women’s sport organizations remained out of the suffragists’ campaign to gain the vote.

As someone who has worked hard for many years not only to put sport and physical education on the feminist agenda, but also to convince my sport and physical education colleagues of the necessity of a feminist perspective, I found reading *Playing the Game* both instructive and disturbing. Women may have achieved enormous physical emancipation since Victorian times, but there is still little recognition among either feminist theorists and activists, or female physical educators and sport leaders, that understanding the historical and social construction of our bodily oppression, and the subordination of our physicality, is paramount to envisioning our total emancipation. Although *Playing the Game* is not a book that utilizes feminist theory, it nonetheless provides an excellent historical reconstruction of an earlier period when the issues surrounding women’s physical and bodily emancipation were simpler but no less controversial.

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Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster (eds.), *Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989, Pp. 332 paperback.*

My first reaction to this book is to think how wonderfully useful it is — all those classes on women’s political participation in Canada that have had to jump nervously from the period of getting the vote to the second wave of feminism. There had to be something more to say than that women simply vanished from the political scene but that, for a long time, we had almost no material available. This is now beginning to change, and Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster’s collection makes a major contribution to our ability to think about women and politics in Canada in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The title of the book, *Beyond the Vote*, captures nicely the double aim of the collection. It wants to look at Canadian women and politics in the period after the suffrage movement. It also wants to look beyond the traditional

definition of political participation (electoral politics and, particularly, being elected), and women’s political participation as including not only traditional politics, but also a wider range of activities.

The book is divided into sections that focus on the arenas of women’s political participation — particularly a division by the kinds of political parties in which women participated. After an introductory section, the book looks at participation in the traditional parties, the CCF, and parties and organizations left of the CCF, before turning to a section on participation in community, non-party politics. With the exception of the introductory text by Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, and Jill Vicker’s contribution on feminist approaches to women in politics, the articles are all detailed pieces of historical investigation. In most cases, the articles cover very precise time periods, or geographical settings, or a limited number of people. The texts give the sense of real discovery — of work done in archives that is bringing to light parts of our past that had been lost to our collective memory.

It is satisfying to know that concern about the role of women in politics did not just simply vanish after women obtained the vote. These essays indicate a great number of places where questions were asked, debates were raised and organizing was taking place. They also indicate — and this is one of the greatest strengths of the collection — how complex these issues became through the interrelation of questions of gender, race, class and ethnicity. There are texts that look at Finnish Socialist women, Jewish Communist women, and Ukrainian women. These texts help to make concrete the ways in which ethnicity, race, and class factors affected the articulation of issues touching on women’s political participation. As Varpv Lindström-Best says in her analysis of Finnish Socialist women,

Finnish immigrant women's actions were motivated by gender, class, and cultural consciousness.... Literate Finnish women were receptive and willing to make their contribution to the Canadian labour movement.... Furthermore, Finnish women activists made attempts to reach out to their Canadian sisters.... Understandably, the Finnish women were more comfortable among those who shared the same culture and, above all, among those who spoke their own language. (p. 213)

This analysis gives a good sense of the complexity and the richness of the political translations of ethnicity, class and sex.

Although the collection does include chapters by Barbara Roberts on peace activism and by Pauline Rankin on