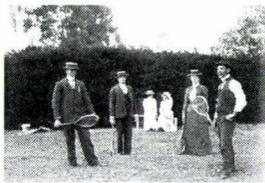


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An Investigation of European Women's Dress in New Zealand for Selected Sports 1880-1912:

A negotiated position of appearance for increased freedom
and social acceptance



Alexander Turnbull Library

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Abstract

New Zealand women increasingly participated in sport towards the end of the nineteenth century. Extended physical opportunities occurred in alignment with progressive social changes reflecting greater public participation and social freedom. An overriding concern of nineteenth century middle class women was to portray outward signs of respectability in public. Consequently, special attention to dress and appearance was instrumental in modifying acceptance for new codes of behaviour.

This investigation of dress worn for selected sports consists of the visual content analysis of photographs, integrated with social historical research. Dress characteristics were recorded in the form of nominal and ordinal measurements of styles and descriptors, with semantic differential scales to measure various aesthetic qualities of fabric and design. These characteristics were derived from garment types and components visible in fashionable dress.

This research contributes to filling a void in detailed photographic analysis of dress for sport within New Zealand, and extends and validates interpretations of social relevance from other literature. Analysis of dress for sport during this period has revealed elements of continuity and change sympathetic to the social circumstances of the period. Consistently, women displayed restraint and respectability to confirm their social identity and to legitimise their involvement in sport. Towards the end of the century, the evidence suggests the majority of women wore dress for sporting activity which borrowed from the dress of the 'new woman', an aesthetic already presented in the public arena. The dress of the 'new woman' for sport signified a redefinition of femininity, an acceptance of combined aesthetics and gendered symbolism, denoting a progressive change to greater physical and social freedom.

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