

Swimming in America – One Hundred Years Ago

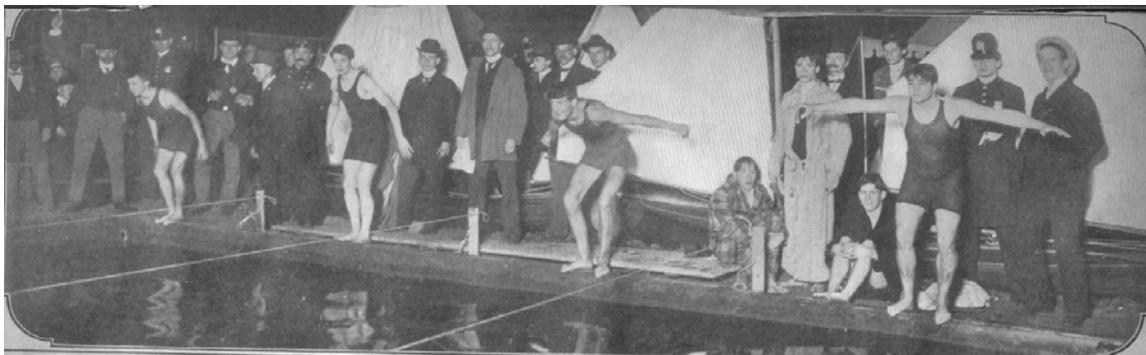
Last week, while cataloguing some old files in the Henning Library, Marion Washburn, ISHOF's librarian of nearly 40 years, discovered two meet programs from the 1916 intercollegiate swimming season. On the eve of the 2016 NCAA Conference and National Championships, these programs provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how far swimming has progressed as a sport in the last 100 years.

In 1916, collegiate swimming was in its infancy. It was just 20 years earlier that the University of Pennsylvania became the first American college to make a swimming pool available to its students. The pool stretched 10 feet in width by 30 feet in length. To supervise the activities at the pool, the University hired George Kistler, an Englishman who had won the one-mile professional “championship of the world”, in London, in 1887. He had traveled to the US in



1891 hoping to find a position as a swimming instructor at a private athletic club. Unable to find a job in swimming, he found work as a coal miner until some Penn alumni saw him swim, learned his background and the rest is history. He became America's first college swimming coach and in the fall of 1897, he organized the first intercollegiate swimming meet, at Houston Hall, pitting his Penn swimmers against swimmers from the New York Athletic Club who attended Columbia.

The next year, Kistler joined forces with James Sullivan (President of the AAU and namesake of the Sullivan Award) to organize the first “National” collegiate championship as part of the 1898 AAU Championships at the Sportsmen's Show. Like the 2016 Olympic Trials, a temporary tank was constructed in Boston's Mechanics Hall and 14,000 spectators watched Penn beat Columbia in both swimming and water polo for the “National” titles. The next year the Championship was contested again at the Sportsmen's Show, this time in New York's Madison Square Garden before another huge crowd.



Collegiate swimming was off to a great start. Yale and Harvard formed teams in 1900, while Cornell, the University of Chicago, the Armour Institute and Wisconsin formed teams in 1901. Princeton, Brown, and Washington University of St. Louis were next take up swimming as a sport. But it wasn't until 1906 that Penn, Princeton and Columbia formed the first swimming league: the "Intercollegiate Swimming Association." By then, the pools built for the sportsmen's shows were being used for motor boats and the Championships moved to the exhibition pools at the schools, like Penn's Weightman Hall, which replaced Houston Hall in 1904, and measured 30 feet wide x 100 feet in length. Weightman Hall hosted the first ISA Championships in 1912.



Intercollegiate Swimming in 1916

By 1916, the Western Intercollegiate Conference had been established (consisting of Chicago, Northwestern, Wisconsin and Illinois). While Berkeley formed its first swimming team in 1909, it was only in 1915 that Stanford formed a team, with the first Stanford – Cal dual meet taking place in 1916. A Pacific Coast Intercollegiate Conference, including Stanford, Cal, Oregon, Nevada, USC and Washington was organized the following year.

It was possibly because the ISA had been the first to organize, and because their swimmers recorded the fast times in "collegiate" competitions, that their championship meet that was recognized as the "National" championship in 1916.

EVENTS		EVENTS	
Relay, 800 Feet Columbia: LEE, Captain 3; HERBERT 2; WALKER 3; VOLLMER 2; KUNHARDT 3; PETERS 3 Pennsylvania: J. N. SHRYOCK, Captain; J. A. RUSSELL; F. H. SIMONTON; C. S. WATTS; J. R. KEISER Won by 2d 3d Time		Plunge for Distance Columbia: ROY 2; LEVIE 4 Pennsylvania: C. G. LEHMAN; J. H. SCHOLZ Won by 2d 3d Distance	
Fancy Diving Columbia: MOELLER 4; MILLS 3; BURGHARDT 2 Pennsylvania: G. H. EVANS; C. L. COONS Won by 2d 3d Points		100 Yards Swim Columbia: VOLLMER 1 Pennsylvania: J. N. SHRYOCK, Captain; C. S. WATTS PETERS 2; KUNHARDT 3; HERBERT 3 Won by 2d 3d Time 6:23	
Fifty Yards Dash Columbia: HERBERT 4; KUNHARDT 2; WALKER 3; VOLLMER 1; PETERS 1 Pennsylvania: N. SHRYOCK, Captain; C. S. WATTS; F. H. SIMONTON; J. R. KEISER Won by 2d 3d Time 25.4		Water Polo Game Columbia: MOQUIN; GIBSON; COOPER; WALLACK; VAN DE WATER; NOBLE; LEVINSON; CLEVELAND Pennsylvania: J. A. RUSSELL, Center; H. A. COLLINS, Left Forward; J. A. WALSH, Right Forward BACKS: J. N. SHRYOCK, Cap., Left Back; R. P. SWAN, Goal; ABNER RATNER, Right Back SUBSTITUTES: ROSEN; HERSHFIELD; PALMER; CONAN; NEWMAN; C. A. SNOW; H. M. OSGOOD; J. W. BORDEN	
220 Yards Swim Columbia: LEE, Captain 109; VOLLMER 1; COHN 1 Pennsylvania: J. N. SHRYOCK, Captain; J. A. RUSSELL; J. R. KEISER Won by 2d 3d Time 2:46		34-13	

Under the ISA, there were seven events held in dual meets. A relay of 800 feet or 4 x 2 lengths of the pool; fancy diving, fifty yard dash; 200 yards swim, plunge for distance, 100 yards swim and the last event was a water polo or water basketball game.

The scoring in individual events was 5 points for first, 3 for second and 1 for third. The relay and game were 5 to the winner, zero to the loser.

The winner of the conference was based on the home and away dual meet season. In 1916 the winner was Yale, coached by

Matt Mann, who would later become famous at Michigan. At the conclusion of the dual meet season, an individual championship was held – with no team title awarded. Team scoring would not come into play until 1924 and it would be 1937 before the NCAA formally recognized a National Championship for swimming.

In 1916, only seven teams were entered in the meet, which was held at Columbia's Pool in New York City. This meet marked the first time that the ISA permitted athletes from teams not in the ISA to participate in the Championships, so joining Yale, Princeton, the City College of New York, Penn and Columbia were Wesleyan and Amherst. In time, the ISA would become a truly national meet. At these individual championships there were only five events: 50 yards swim, Fancy Dive, 220 yards swim, 100 yards swim and the Plunge for Distance – plus a Freshman Relay.



1, D. V. Garstin, Mgr.; 2, Badger; 3, Schnelder; 4, M. Mann, Coach; 5, Thomas; 6, Mayer; 7, Ferguson; 8, Schlaet; 9, Alexander; 10, Benjamin; 11, Hopkins; 12, Scooby.

YALE UNIVERSITY SWIMMING TEAM.
Eastern Intercollegiate Champions.

Women Swimmers in 1916

Of course there were no collegiate championships for women in 1916, as competitions between teams of feminine athletes were forbidden by the rules of most high school and college athletic associations. But women swimmers did have opportunities to compete in some of the forward thinking AAU associations (the AAU being the governing body for amateur athletics at the time), and in 1916, Olga Dorfner, the Philadelphia Mermaid, and other women swimmers took one giant stroke forward when the AAU recognized a national championship for women. It was the first sport so recognized by the AAU – because our culture recognized women had to be able to swim when men were not there to save them.



OLGA DORFNER,
Philadelphia Mermaid; American Champion Sprint Swimmer and
Record holder.

The General Slocum

The dawn of the 20th Century was when sea bathing and swimming were just coming into vogue. The beach was where men and women could mingle and take a “moral holiday” from the sexual repression of the Victorian Era. But as people flocked to the beach to enjoy the pleasures of the sea, drowning rates soared. By 1900, over 9,000 Americans were drowning each year – a rate of over 14 per 100,000.



AWFUL SCENES—SHOWING WOMEN AND CHILDREN JUMPING OFF THE STEAMBOAT BEFORE SHE WAS BEACHED ON THE ISLAND. THEY FLED FROM THE FIRE TO CERTAIN DEATH.

Then, on June 15, 1904, the excursion steamship, *General Slocum*, was taking a group of 1,342 passengers, mostly women and children on a trip up New York City's East River to a picnic on Long Island. It caught fire shortly after leaving dock and an estimated 1,021 of the 1,342 people on board died, most from drowning.

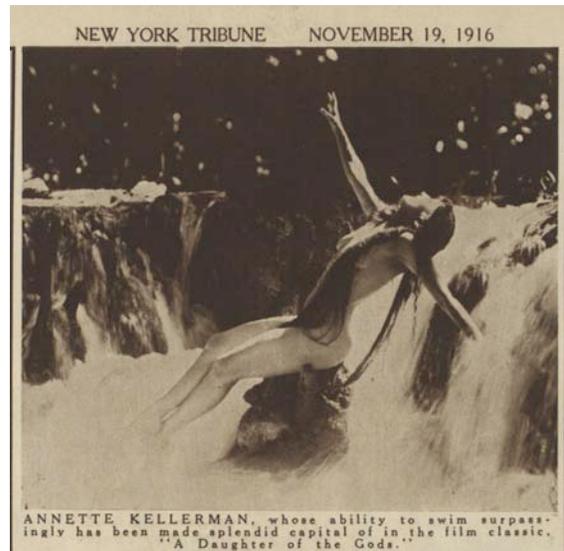
The lesson from the Slocum wasn't lost on the nation: "Learn to swim," commanded an editorial in the New York Herald that was repeated throughout the country. "That should be the resolve of every intelligent woman who does not already know how, upon reading the pitiful story of how woman after woman on that fateful June 15 was drowned within a few feet of the shore, in a few feet of water. The ability to swim a few strokes or even to keep themselves afloat for a few minutes would have saved their lives."

As a consequence of the Slocum disaster all of the colleges with pools required all students under the age of 21 to pass a swimming test. The incident also prompted many high schools and prep schools to build pool and also require the passing of a swim test before graduating.



Annette Kellerman

The year 1916 also marked the pinnacle of Annette Kellerman's career. Kellerman was already a famous swimmer in Australia and Europe before she brought her swimming and diving act to America. Upon her arrival, she became the most visible activist for changing Victorian attitudes about modesty and promoting practical swimming costumes for women. Through her stage act, films, books and appearances, she did more to popularize swimming (especially among women) than any person in history. In 1914 she wrote and starred in a movie called *Neptune's Daughter*, which became the first film in history to gross a million dollars in box office sales. Nothing when compared to Star Wars, but a record in its day. Then in 1916, she starred in *A Daughter of the Gods*, which was the first film in history to cost a million dollars. In both films, her swimming played a prominent role. She was beautiful, daring, rich and every girl wanted to be like her – a swimmer.



The YMCA

The YMCA was an evangelical movement founded after the Civil War whose core task was to save young men from the traps of immorality awaiting them in the big cities. The first Y "swimming bath" was built at the Brooklyn (NY) Central YMCA in 1885. But the big boom in building pools at Ys followed the Slocum tragedy. By 1914, the year the American Red Cross initiated their water safety programs, there were 450



YMCAs with pools, and by using George Corson's mass lesson system the Y taught nearly 500,000 men, women, boys and girls how to swim. The Y's also formed swimming teams and leagues and was certifying over 2,500 lifeguards a year. By 1916, the collaboration between the Red Cross, Boy Scouts, the US Volunteer Lifesaving Corps and the YWCA had reduced the number of annual, accidental drowning victims by nearly 2,000, in spite of a 30% increase in population and a greater proportion of the population enjoying the beach and pools.

How Fast (or how slow)

The chart below compares the records of the AAU and the various conferences or leagues in the three events swum in collegiate competitions. In 1916, collegiate swimmers were still well behind those competing for the major athletic clubs in the AAU, like Olympic champions Charles Daniels (1904 and 1908), who still held the 100 and 220-yard records and Duke Kahanamoku (1912) who held the 50 yard record in 1916. Neither Daniels nor Duke attended college. On the women's side, Olga Dorfner held all three records in 1916. By today's standards, these times are incredibly slow, but it is really impossible to compare the periods. These athletes were the best in their day against all comers.

Event	AAU MEN	AAU WOMEN	Eastern Collegiate	Western Collegiate	Pacific Collegiate	High School	YMCA
50 yard swim	23.4	29.0	25.1	*	27.4 #	25.4	25.0
100 yard swim	54.8	1:08.8	56.4	59.2	1:02.2	56.4	57.4
220 yard swim	2:25.4	3:05.2	2:31.0	2:33.8	2:48.6 +	2:29.6	2:55.2

* The Western Colleges, because of their 20 yard pools, swam 40 or 60 yards.

Stanford's Norman Ross, a freshman at Stanford, and the star of the 1920 Olympic Games, swam the 50 in 25.0 at an AAU meet, which if recognized would have bested the ISA record.

+ Cal's Ludy Langer swam a 2:29.0 in an AAU meet and would have a hall of fame career.



Above, Annette Kellerman with Charles Daniels.
At right, Duke Kahanamoku.

