

# WOMEN LIFE SAVERS GETTING READY FOR WORK

### Popularity of Swimming Greatly on Increase Among Women—Life Savers Have Been Practising All Winter for Duty This Summer—National Women's Life Saving League Has More Than 600 Members



SPORT IN THE BREAKERS.



**S**WIMMING—by this is not meant merely bathing—has all of a sudden climbed to a high place among the pastimes popular with women. Its popularity began last year and manifested itself all through the winter. As many women and girls as could be accommodated used the swimming pools provided by the city.

Many of these were beginners who wanted to learn to swim in preparation for the coming summer. Therefore it may be said that more women than ever will be found among the swimmers at the beaches. But this popularity of the art quickly demonstrated one fact, that there are not accommodations enough in this city for women and girls who want to learn to swim but cannot afford to pay for private lessons.

Evidence of the popularity of swimming among women so situated is afforded by the National Women's Life Saving League. It was incorporated last June by some women who were expert swimmers and who wanted to help other women to become expert. Well, the membership of the league has already jumped to 612.

Schools Athletic League. Whether or not the league's example spurred them on I don't know. When the league was organized we announced as one of our objects. To stimulate public opinion in favor of the general adoption of swimming and life saving as a branch of elementary education.

"A score or more of our members are public school teachers and they have never lost a chance to talk up the need of girls learning to swim. I believe that almost ever since the Slocum disaster a land swimming drill has been included in the public school gymnasium work but that was as far as the Board of Education got till this winter.

"The high school girls, like all of our members, have to take their coaching and practising in the municipal bath-houses at East Twenty-third and West Sixtieth streets, Manhattan, and President street, Brooklyn. The schoolgirls

Maybe 10 per cent. of the members are young married women, while the rest are girls from 16 to 23, who with half a dozen exceptions are self-supporting. Most of them when they applied for admission knew only the elementary principles of swimming, just enough to keep them from being rejected by the admission committee.

At the present time, to put the estimate very low, the league has 100 members capable of saving life in the water according to approved professional methods, and by the time the rocking the boat season is here thirty or forty more graduates of this winter's work will be added to the roll of the league's accomplished swimmers. Besides these there are as many more members who are capable of giving a helping hand to persons in trouble in the water.

A remarkable thing about this new organization is that the older it gets the faster the applicants keep coming. The other day Miss Katherine Mehrtens, its president, said:

#### Pool for Women Needed.

"Probably our membership would be nearer 6,000 than 600 had we tried to attract members and if we could take care of that many. Even now to arrange a programme which will give all the newcomers a chance to practice regularly with a coach requires a good deal of careful planning.

"If our object was anything less than to make a life saver out of every member we should not need to plan so carefully. The trouble is that New York has not adequate means for teaching swimming to women who can't afford to pay for private lessons and probably it never will have until there is at least one swimming pool built for the use of women only. Even the Young Women's Christian Association has no swimming pool. The league hopes to see one before a great while.

"Some of our members were laughed at when they got up a Phoebe Snow subscription dance last month and salted down the receipts as the nucleus of a fund to build the league a tank of its own. To build a swimming tank costs a lot of money and it takes several thousand dollars a year to maintain one; therefore a couple of hundred dollars applied to such a purpose does seem hardly worth while; but everything needs a beginning. The league was started by just fifteen young women, all crack swimmers. It was incorporated a year later with a hundred members and now we have over six hundred on the roll. What the membership will be a year from now there is no telling. Neither is there any telling how soon we may have a tank of our own.

"The importance of girls learning how to swim is beginning to be pretty well understood by the public. In addition as a means of exercise and pleasure for girls employed in stores and factories it is unequalled. Girls who are too tired to do gymnastic stunts at night say that an hour's exercise in the tank puts new life into them. Then the idea of perfecting themselves in something which will enable them to help save life appeals to their imagination. The public, as I have said, is beginning to understand this; consequently it is not unlikely that there are rich women with money to give away who may decide to use some of it in building extra swimming pools for women.

"Look how the Board of Education has grasped the situation," Miss Mehrtens continued with enthusiasm. "Last winter for the first time it included swimming lessons in the girls' branch of the Public

use these baths from 4 to 5 o'clock three afternoons a week

#### Members Do the Teaching.

"The officers of the league decided from the first to divide the members into three classes—active, allied, auxiliary. The first class consists of the swimmers familiar with the rudiments of lifesaving from drowning, the second class consists of first aid students familiar with the rudiments of Red Cross work and possessing a certificate to that effect and who can also swim a little. The third class includes those who desire to advance the cause of swimming and life saving by learning to do both.

"It is on the active members that the real work of the organization falls. All the coaching and teaching allied and auxiliary members get is given free by active members.

"Whenever a beginner graduates into an active member," said Miss Mehrtens, "she is told, 'Now you were glad to have somebody teach you, so you must turn around and teach some one else,' and no one ever dreams of trying to evade this responsibility.

"When the league was incorporated it had twenty-three members who had just been graduated from a course of life saving lessons given under the coaching of a member of the Royal Life Saving Society of England and who were entitled to bronze medals as tokens of their skill. These girls also were graduated from a first aid to the injured course taken under the supervision of a New York physician.

"In addition to these twenty-three who qualified as life savers, there were the fifteen founders and a few others who had worn medals for life saving and for long distance swimming in amateur matches. As a result when the league began its season last fall it was well equipped within itself to give expert instruction and to plan and supervise contests for members in various stages of advancement.

"So far as clubs go this plan is unique and the proof that this is a first rate plan is the continued growth of the organization. The graduate life saving examinations and tests which wind up the winter's work and which are conducted according to the tests prescribed by standard authorities will probably add twenty-five more life saving experts to the league's active members.

"There was one of these tests the other night at the Twenty-third street bath,

one two weeks ago at the Sixtieth street bath and the final one took place last week in the President street tank

#### Plans for the Summer.

"Yes, it is perfectly possible to learn to swim in the municipal tanks if one has the right sort of coach, but I must say that it did require a lot of study to map out a programme which would arrange our visits so as to avoid the populous hours and at the same time suit the convenience of members," the president explained. "Women have the use of the swimming tanks only three days a week and here is the schedule we followed:

"For general instruction members could go Monday nights to the Twenty-third street bath, Tuesday nights to Sixtieth street, Wednesday nights to President street, from 6.30 to 7.30 o'clock. On each

occasion two of our expert members were on hand, none being asked to serve oftener than once a month

"Improvers' nights, as we call them, when only life saving is taught to advanced swimmers, were held once a month at each of the three baths from 6.15 to 7 o'clock, so that the girls practically could have the tank to themselves. No, a little thing like going without the dinner till an hour or so later than usual didn't bother them at all. Most of the members who got as far as that would rather swim than eat any time.

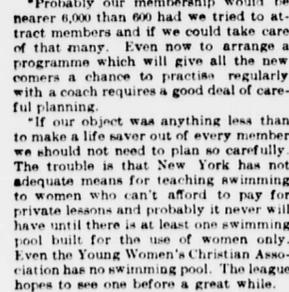
"But this is not all. To relieve the strain on the evening classes we organized a Wednesday morning class from 9.30 to 10.30 at the Twenty-third street bath for

married women and a few others who could snatch that time for practice, and there was also a Wednesday afternoon class from 2 to 3 o'clock.

"We got a good many recruits to the league from sightseers at the baths who got all stirred up at the idea of being able to do stunts such as some of our members were doing."

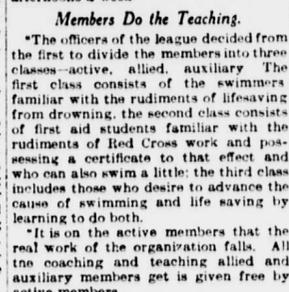
"Just now the executive committee of the league is considering summer plans and a summer headquarters. During the last year the official headquarters of the league has been at Studio Hall in East Fifty-ninth street, where office hours were held every Friday and where a small library of standard books on swimming, life saving, how to aid the injured and so

#### THE BACK SOMERSAULT DIVE.



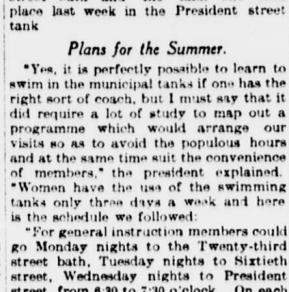
STARTING IN

#### MANY WOMEN ARE GOOD DIVERS.



PLEASED BECAUSE SHE HAS FINISHED A LONG SWIM

#### POOL FOR WOMEN NEEDED.



on it all summer in Sheephead Bay. Two sisters who joined the league last fall and have since become first rate swimmers have tried a houseboat for their summer headquarters and will keep it most of the time in Sheephead Bay, and five more have each bought or hired for the season a rowboat and will spend most of their leisure time near the league's pavilion.

"Miss Florence West, vice-president; Miss Sarah Marrin, treasurer, and Miss Adeline Trapp, secretary, who are among our most noted swimmers, will probably help in giving instruction to newer members during the summer. The initiation fee is only \$1 and the annual dues only 50 cents, therefore the league's treasury is not in a position yet to arrange for a permanent summer headquarters. Plans are under way though to hire, if we can't build, a house at or near the seashore which shall include living accommodations for from twenty to sixty women. Here members of the league would be able to put up while they are practising swimming and life saving."

Commodore Opper said that the league

#### SUCKER FISHING COSTLY FOR THE STATE.

"I see by the local papers from up old home way," said a Sullivan county man now domiciled in New York, "that the State of New York has been called on again to chip in another \$5,000 in a renewed effort toward reclaiming the drowned lands of the Bashaskill, but the papers don't say anything about its being because the people who live along the Pinekill are bound not to have their spring sucker fishing interfered with.

"Four thousand acres of swamped land in that valley might have been drained and maintained as richly tillable soil years ago if Pinekill hadn't kept on insisting that it was more important to them that suckers should run up that stream in the spring. They don't own any Bashaskill drowned lands.

"The drowned lands of the Bashaskill, between Westbrookeville and Haven, in Sullivan county, are six miles in length and of an average width of three-quarters of a mile. Through that level stretch of country the Bashaskill flows with scarcely any fall for a distance of five miles, when the descent of the stream becomes suddenly rapid and continues so during the rest of its course. This fall in the stream would be sufficient to relieve the level stretch above it of the accumulation of water in time of freshets if it were not for the Pinekill.

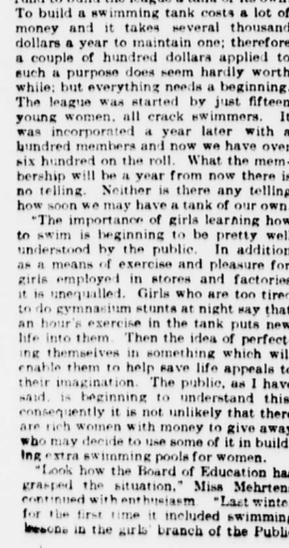
"The Pinekill is a mountain stream that has a rapid flow and rushes into the

spring, but no suckers appeared. Investigation revealed the fact that the crib built at the mouth of the Pinekill by the drowned land proprietors turned the suckers out of their course and very few journeyed up the Pinekill.

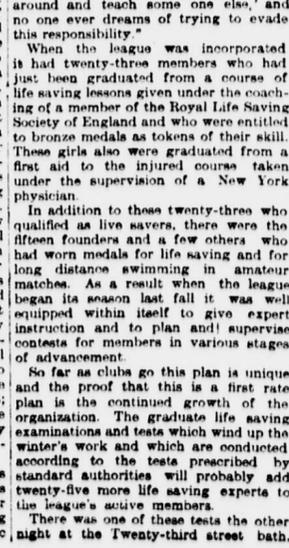
"If suckers were a marketable fish they might be worth perhaps \$10 a ton, and that would be a liberal estimate of the quantity of suckers that were caught in the upper waters of the Pinekill during the season. The draining of the Bashaskill swamp lands would add many thousands of dollars to the valuation and income of the valley. But the sucker fishers refused to give up their sport and one night they blew up the crib with dynamite.

"Consequently the State was asked to step in and do something so the lands might be drained and the Pinekill sucker fishery be left intact. An appropriation of \$5,000 was made by the Legislature and it was used in an effort to change the channels of the Pinekill and to remove the dam. But the effort does not seem to have been an entire success for the sucker crop in the Pinekill has not been anywhere near up to the mark since the drainage work was done and so the State was solicited to chip in \$5,000 more to carry out additional improvements which will at once conserve the sucker fishing and drain the farm lands. The Legislature granted the request."

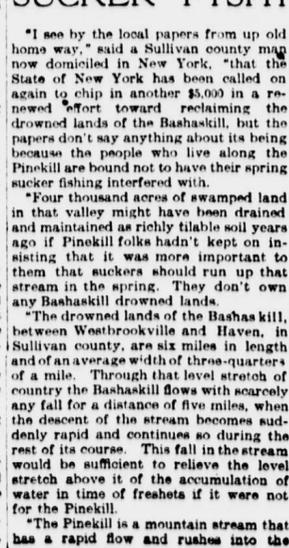
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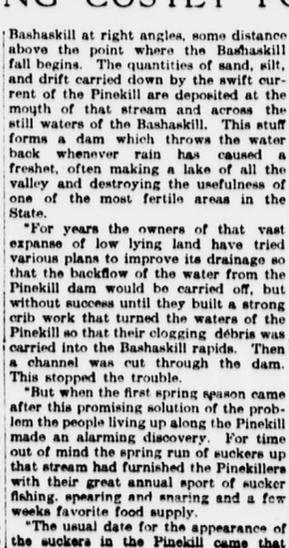
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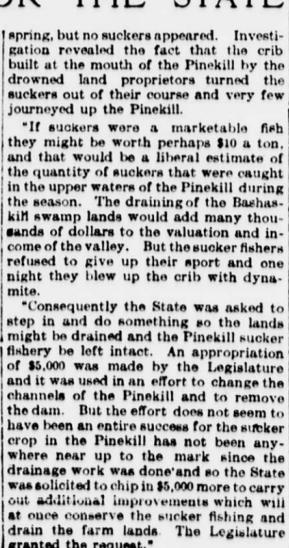
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