

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

NEWSLETTER, JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 2011

FIRE AND WATER ISSUE:

Romantic Northwestern; In the Swim!; Stay in Touch

Warm Your Heart with Romantic Northwestern on February 14



This classic valentine, pasted into NU student Elizabeth Hobart's [scrapbook](#) around 1910, reminds us that some things don't change. On the other hand, a study of Northwestern students' dating habits does reveal many changes! Our student handbooks (in the 1940s they included dating tips!), Syllabus yearbooks, the Daily Northwestern, other student publications, and



photographs show how NU students have managed to balance academics and romance over the years as trends and attitudes have changed.

We've posted a selection of photos and artifacts on our [Facebook page](#), and put up a small exhibit in our Reading Room, but the Tales of True Romance can also be found in scrapbooks, diaries, letters, and many other resources in the archives.

Northwestern Takes the Plunge, January 1911



Brrr....it may seem a bit too cold outside to be writing about swimming (especially when NU has just installed its first on-campus ice-skating rink!). But 100 years ago, on Friday, January 27, 1911, Northwestern hosted the first meet in program history on Friday, Jan. 27, 1911. One hundred years later, NU has earned four team national championships, 28 individual national championships, 11 team Big Ten Championships and 110 individual Big Ten Championships. Here's the story of the beginning of NU's Intercollegiate Swim Team.

The history of Northwestern Varsity Swimming begins with Tom Robinson, the team's first coach. As the story goes, in 1901, he was a 19-year-old boatman in Wisconsin when he saw a car with a little boy inside careen down a hill and into the lake. But no sooner had the car disappeared beneath the water's surface than Robinson had plunged in as well. Moments later, he reappeared, clutching the boy.

The boy's grateful parents rewarded Robinson by helping him attend NU's prep school, the Evanston Academy. Robinson went on to become an instructor at the local Y.M.C.A. So when, in





1912 Roberts, Shepard, McPherrin, Blakely, Schloesser, Dewhirst, Green
Furness, Wood, Whiting, Robinson (Coach), Huzagh, Schwarz, Ennis
Milroy

1910, the brand new Patten Gymnasium was completed, providing Northwestern with its first swimming pool, Robinson was chosen as swim coach.

Robinson established a winning tradition at the university from the start. On Friday, January 27, 1911, NU hosted its first intercollegiate swimming contest against the University of Chicago Maroons, the previous year's conference champions. The final score-- Northwestern, 42, Chicago, 31—was a convincing victory for Northwestern's new team.

Robinson earned a reputation for building strong, winning programs by attracting and cultivating top-notch talent. That very first team in 1911 produced NU's first Olympian, Kenneth A. Huzagh, who earned a bronze medal in the 100-meter freestyle and silver in the 4x200-meter freestyle relay at the 1912 Stockholm

games. During the 1924 season, another pair of swimmers, Ralph Breyer and Dick Howell, broke all of the Big Ten and National Intercollegiate freestyle records from 40 and 440 yards. They went on to compete at that year's Olympic Games in Paris. Howell set ten Big Ten marks; one of these records, the plunge for distance, really will stand for all time, because the event was discontinued shortly after Howell set the mark.

Tom Robinson was at the center of anything that had to do with water at the university. One of his first acts as coach was to require that all students learn to swim before graduation. He may have taught more than 50,000 people how to swim by the end of his 35 years of service. Along the way, his teams won ten Big Ten championships, six National Collegiate titles, and 12 water polo championships. He even invented a sport, water basketball, in 1913, when the Conference dropped water polo. At a time when many of NU's sports teams were hitting low-water marks, Robinson's successful swimming program made a splash with the entire university community.

(Note: The original [Patten Gym](#) was torn down in 1939 to make room for the Technological Institute; the [new one](#) was built in 1940.)

STAY IN TOUCH



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