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Louise Pound: Scholar, Athlete, Feminist Pioneer

Robert Cochran

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Louise Pound (1872–1958) was a distinguished literary scholar, renowned athlete, accomplished musician, and devoted women's sports advocate. She is perhaps best remembered for her groundbreaking work in the field of linguistics and folklore and for her role as the first woman president of the Modern Language Association. A member of a distinguished Nebraska family that included her brother, the prominent legal scholar Roscoe Pound, Louise completed her undergraduate education at the University of Nebraska. When American universities wouldn't admit her for graduate study, she went on to obtain a PhD in Heidelberg, Germany. She returned to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln to teach in the English department for the next forty-five years.

As a scholar Louise crusaded for the serious study of American English and founded the field's leading journal, demolished a powerfully defended approach to the study of American folk song, and fought tirelessly to open athletic and professional opportunities for women. She was, in short, what one admirer called a "universal wonder." She befriended and played an influential role in the life of the young Willa Cather during Cather's years at the University of Nebraska; H. L. Mencken praised her extravagantly; and scholars of literature, folklore, and dialect studies elevated her to the presidency of their professional societies. Readers of varied interests will find her story compelling.

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