

# Women in the 1800s

When we read *Little Women*, we learn a lot about life in America in the 1800s. Things were different then for everyone, but they were very different for girls and women.



The man was the head of the family.

## Life for women ...

In the 1800s, women usually stayed at home. They cleaned the house and cooked and sewed. They didn't often go out to work and many girls didn't go to school.



Women from very poor families worked as servants. Women from families like the March family in *Little Women* sometimes worked as governesses. There weren't any other jobs for women! The Civil War started to change things. Hospitals needed women. For the first time men saw that women were useful! Later, there were women doctors. Slowly, other jobs were possible too.

## ... and life for men

The man was the head of the family in those days. It was his job to give his family a home, food and clothes. His wife and children belonged to him. His wife's money and all her things belonged to him too!

# the 1800s

## Tennis and skating

Women had big, long dresses in the 1800s so it was difficult to play sports. It wasn't possible for them to wear trousers in those days. Some women skated or played tennis in their long skirts, but it wasn't easy.

There were no sports for women at the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. In 1900, there were just two sports open to women: tennis and golf.



## No school for girls!

Girls in the 1800s didn't need to learn important things because women stayed at home. Not many girls went to school. No women went to university. Universities were for men only. The University of Iowa was the first American university to open its doors to women in 1855. The first English university was the University of London in 1878.

## The vote

At the time of *Little Women*, women didn't vote. The first country to give women the vote was New Zealand, in 1893. In the United States, it was 1920. In Britain, it was 1928. And in Switzerland, it was only in 1971.

When did women first vote in your country? What do you think was the best thing about living in the 1800s? What was the worst?



What do these words mean?

You can use a dictionary.

belong golf servant tennis  
university vote