

Life in 1923 as Told by Books Currently in the Public Domain

ALISON HALL

On January 1, any work from 1923 that had still been protected by copyright entered the public domain. More than 500 books from the [Library's collection from 1923](#) are already online, with more being added as they are digitized. These books—free to use and share—offer a glimpse at what life was like in 1923.

The Book of Sports and Games by Walter Camp gives a “general brief view of all the popular outdoor pastimes, together with certain indoor games which provide physical exercise during the shut in months.” Camp starts off talking about ethics and sportsmanship. He states that nothing counts more than playing fair, and the game should be made so everyone has a chance. Unlike the participation trophy phenomenon that he rather accurately predicts for this century, he encourages players to make the most for themselves, stating “Don’t be deluded, moreover, by the people who tell you to ‘play only for sport, never mind who wins.’ That spirit might come with the millennium, but I doubt it. A good, live American boy or girl has a right to win and to play to win, and if he is on a team or crew or nine, or if she be on a basketball team or golf team, or anything else, where upon individual effort depends somewhat the success of others, then that boy or girl must play to win.” He then overviews sixteen sports, including the relatively new sport of

basketball and new to the United States sports of hockey, soccer, and golf.

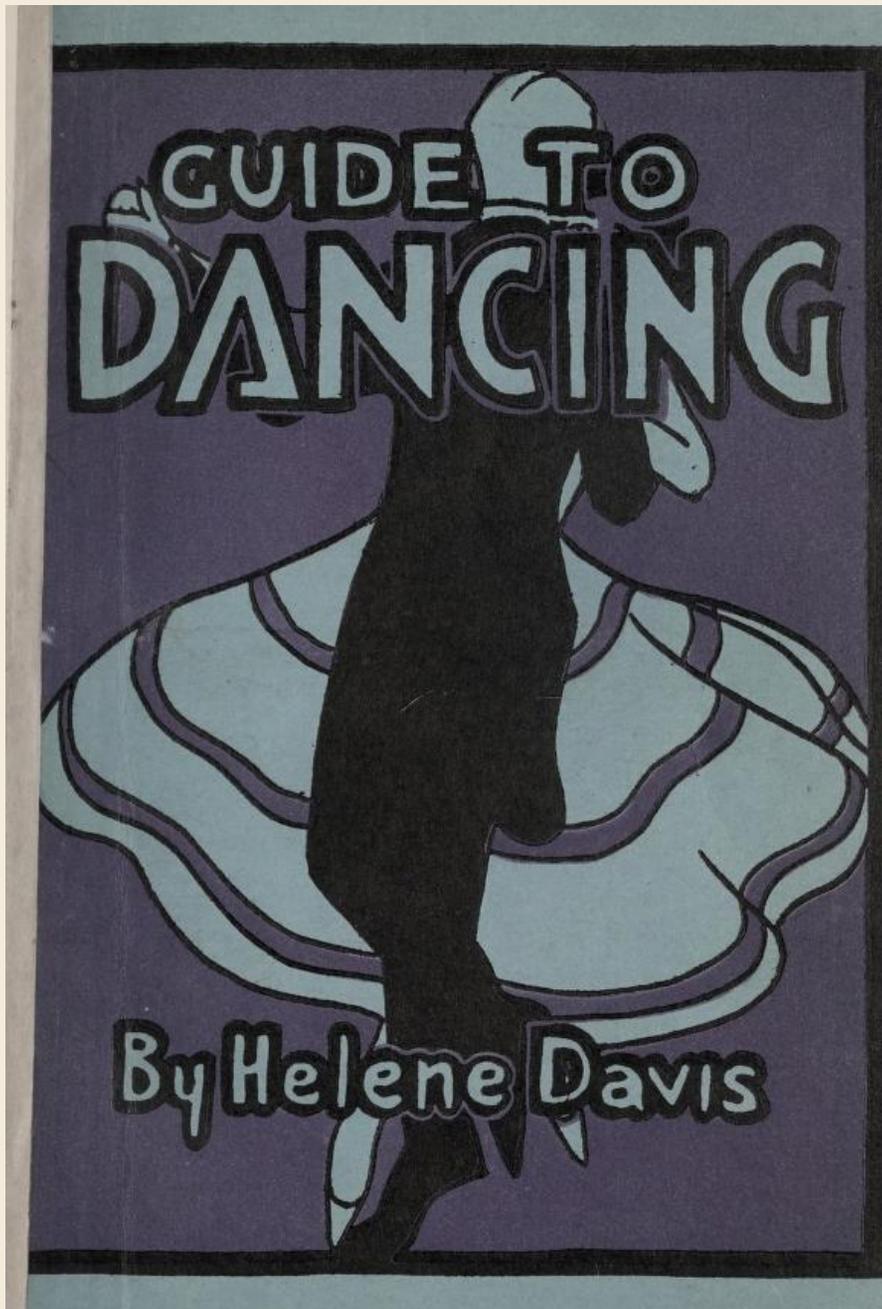
The Rational Diet by Otto Carqué, reminds us that sugar intake was an issue even back then. The author considered cane sugar an artificial sweetener, as opposed to natural sweeteners in fruits. He outlined how sugar intake is on the increase, up to an alarming ninety pounds per year per individual (data on today’s intake varies, but it’s estimated between 125 and 150 pounds per year). The book also warns to avoid drinking water colder than 50 degrees, although it did not say why.

In *S.O.S. Call of Youth*, author Nellie E. Friend states: “I have worked for and with children for sixteen years... I have, during that time, been constantly impressed with this fact: that parents, in the majority of cases, do not understand their children. Just about the time they think they do, the child changes and the parents say, ‘We can’t understand her—she never was like that before,’ and to her they say, ‘What ails you anyway?’” Not much has changed nearly a century later.



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Illustration from the book *Bettina's Best Desserts* by Louise Bennett Weaver and Helen Cowles LeCron.



Friend wrote the book not long after the end of World War I, and included the insight “This is an age when we must (more than ever before) become universally informed, universally interested, universally sympathetic, and we can show that we are, by training and developing our children and young people into world citizens. The world war has proved that many had before known to be true—that no community, state, or nation any more than an individual can live unto itself exempt to the detriment of all.”

1923 was a time when women were expected to keep the household and always be ready for entertaining. For example, *Bettina's Best Desserts* by Louise Bennett Weaver and Helen Cowles LeCron starts out saying “Desserts are dreadful things to plan. Besides, you never know just what is going to please a man.” The Lady Baltimore Cake recipe notes that it’s a “food with which any Eve may tempt any Adam. And he simply can’t resist,” and the Plain Vanilla Ice Cream recipe is “a dish that every housewife ought to know how to make well.”

If interested in attending a ball, the *Complete Guide to Dancing* by Helene Davis offers “a complete guide to all modern dancing steps—Also to the dances of the past generation.” The guide contains ballroom etiquette, quadrille calls, and complete explanations of the various steps used in the old as well as new dances.

It includes such etiquette as “A lady should never promenade the ballroom alone nor enter it unaccompanied” and “if a gentleman wishes to dance with a lady with whom he is not acquainted, he should politely ask the hostess or the master of ceremonies for an introduction. Should a gentleman request a dance from a lady prior to an introduction, the correct answer would be ‘I would be much pleased to accept your kind invitation if you would procure an introduction.’”

Finally, in 1923, the United States was in the early stages of prohibition—the nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages. While many books of the time talk about the perils of alcohol, the September 1923 edition of the American Academy of Political and Social Science’s publication *The Annals* was titled *Prohibition and Its Enforcement*, and all articles discussed alcohol and prohibition. This publication, which claimed to not take sides upon controverted questions but sought to secure and present reliable information to assist the public in forming an intelligent and accurate opinion, included articles about state rights, international liquor trade, laborers and alcohol use, and difficulties in enforcing prohibition laws. ©

Inside cover illustration used in the book *Complete Guide to Dancing* by Helene Davis.