Residential schools during the period were often struck by epidemic diseases that infected their students and could impact their ability to attract future students. ISNS frequently boasted in its catalogs about its healthy location and the vitality of its students. In an effort to promote the health of the students, from the beginning they searched for ways to build physical activity into the student’s day. In November of 1881, the faculty voted that 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes each afternoon be “devoted to the practice of gymnastics” in the chapel. Faculty was instructed to “encourage the students to take exercise and to otherwise care for their health.” Later, they required physical education during the winter term and a half an hour of outdoor activity each day of the other term.

Within two years of the creation of the school, in response to petitions they began work on a gymnasium in the basement of Sutton for student use. This was followed by the construction of a larger gymnasium and the acquisition and design of fields for golf, football and baseball.

By 1885-86 the Catalog would announce “while the purposes of this institution are work and solid attainment, still a necessity of helpful amusement has by no means been ignored. Ample arrangements for
recreation include lawn tennis, croquet and base ball, while indoors a gymnasium has been filled with the best of modern apparatus.”

Female students golfed, played tennis, croquet and basketball, and formed a walking and bicycle club (even Jane Leonard learned to ride). The *Clionian* 1888 yearbook noted the presence of three co-ed tennis clubs and stated that “The young ladies spend a great deal of their idle time on the lawn tennis courts. Several organized clubs serve to keep up the interest in this exceedingly healthful exercise... More interest is taken in this than in any other out-door sport.” The 1897 *Empanada* yearbook noted that “tennis is popular particularly with female students.”

Basketball was also popular among female students. The *Normal Herald* notes that female students were wild about basketball in the fall of 1897, finding the game “very good exercise and plenty of fun.” In the fall of 1898, the same source reported the
female students were playing basketball on the front campus until it got too cold, and then moved their games into the gymnasium. They developed teams and there was enough interest that they could charge $.10 admission for the games that helped play for equipment.

Disproving the theories of some scholars who argued that women’s health would break down under the rigors of college life, the 1888 Clinoian yearbook could boast that visitors said of ISNS students "Your girls are the pictures of perfect health." They could even claim that the school was actually good for them, “Delicate girls coming here almost always grow stronger. This comes partly from our good fortune and partly from our earnest effort... we require regular habits, and gymnastics, and out-door exercise, and last but not least, plenty of hard work. “