

Union College

Union | Digital Works

Summer Research Fellowships

Adirondack Research Library

2021

The History of Skiing in the Adirondack Park

Sebastian Czechowski

Union College - Schenectady, NY, czechows@union.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalworks.union.edu/summerfellowships>

Recommended Citation

Czechowski, Sebastian, "The History of Skiing in the Adirondack Park" (2021). *Summer Research Fellowships*. 9.

<https://digitalworks.union.edu/summerfellowships/9>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Adirondack Research Library at Union | Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Summer Research Fellowships by an authorized administrator of Union | Digital Works. For more information, please contact digitalworks@union.edu.

Sebastian Czechowski

Summer Research Project

Professor Morris

August 22nd, 2021

The History of Skiing in the Adirondack Park

Throughout the world, there aren't many places with as much pristine beauty as the Adirondack Park. The Adirondack Park is a 6 million acre combination of privately and publicly held lands in the northern part of New York State, in the northerneastern part of the Western Hemisphere. Throughout time, people of all kinds have called the Adirondacks home making the land susceptible towards all kinds of uses, laying the groundwork for a switch from a resource based economy through logging and mining towards one that relies heavily on recreation based tourism. Because mountains dominate the Adirondack landscape and snow dominates Park winters, the Adirondacks became a prime location for recreational winter sports. Although ice fishing, snowmobiling, ice hockey, and snowshoeing are common recreational activities - among many others - to do during an Adirondack winter, over the last century, none have had quite as extraordinary of a history throughout the Park as skiing. Skiing is both a mode of transportation and a winter sport where two skinny, aerodynamic planks - originally made of wood, evolving to the combinations of compressed plastic, metal, and wood seen on the hill today - are strapped to a person's feet to glide over snow. Skiing has been around for thousands of years, making the activity a fundamental aspect of Adirondack life.

Secondary Source Literary Review:

Because skiing dates back to antiquity and the literature pertaining to it has both scholarly and non scholarly intended audiences, sources give a broad understanding of the sport of skiing and its history throughout the Adirondack park. There has been a recent uptick in the chronicling of the sport of skiing throughout secondary sources over the last few years allowing readers to understand a broader history of skiing and of skiing in the Park before locating the primary sources used to piece the information together.

Starting with skiing from antiquity, the book, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing: From Antiquity to World War 2*,¹ by John B. Allen published in 2007 shows the first steps the sport took from becoming a necessity to a leisure activity. Allen's book begins by talking about the history of skiing in general, starting in Europe, and then goes on to display the spread of early skiing throughout the world. Allen concludes that the earliest recordings of skiing were from the Northern countries of Norway and Russia and that skiing was originally needed as a form of transportation. Skiing spread from northern countries to the snowy places on Earth where an easier form of getting from place to place for survival, securing food, making economic progress, or military organization was needed. With these uses of skiing as a stepping stone, Allen goes on to explain the growth of skiing as a recreational sport in Europe, attributing this to the creation of elite alpine clubs at the turn of the 20th century where the wealthy began to take ski vacations, turning skiing from a necessity for outdoorsmen to a sport for the wealthy throughout the future. Recreational Skiing in America grew the same way.

The story of the rise of skiing in America is similar to that of Europe as argued by Allen's aforementioned book and John Fry's, *The Story of Modern Skiing*.² Each of these authors

¹ E. John B Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing: From Antiquity to World War 2* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

² John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2017).

conclude that after being introduced to America by Europeans during the late 1800's, skiing began as a necessity throughout the United States turning into a sport for the wealthy, who partook in leisurely activities such as week long ski vacations or gained access to elitist clubs such as the Lake Placid Club. This occurred throughout all of the mountainous regions in the United States including the Rocky Mountain areas out west, the midwest, and the mountainous regions in the north east, including the Adirondack Park.

Skiing in the Adirondack Park began similarly as it did elsewhere else; through necessity first and then recreation for the wealthy second. The rise of recreational skiing in the Adirondacks is chronicled in the 1976 book, *Lake Placid, the Olympic Years, 1932-1980 : a Portrait of America's Premier Winter Resort*,³ by the Ortloff's where the authors argue that the beginning of recreational skiing in the Adirondacks began with a push from the wealthy elite in 1905 until the Great Depression. They became members of ski clubs such as Melvil Dewey's Lake Placid Club with whom they could take time out of their lives to go cross country skiing or on mountaineering trips in the high peaks during the start of the 20th century. Authors continue to highlight the Lake Placid Club in the rise of recreational skiing in the Adirondack Park as the 1930's rolled around.

In the aforementioned book by the Ortloffs, the Lake Placid Club and the son of Melvil Dewey, Dr. Godfrey Dewey, are highlighted in detail as catalyst for bringing the 1932 Olympics into Lake Placid, spurring the sport of skiing on a national scale by injecting it into the minds of Americans. These scholars say that the 1932 Olympics are what brought skiing onto a national scale making it more accessible for those throughout the Great Depression as the Olympics brought recreational skiing into the public eye. Afterwards, ski hills began opening throughout

³ George Christian Ortloff and Stephen C. Ortloff, *Lake Placid, the Olympic Years, 1932-1980 : A Portrait of America's Premier Winter Resort* (Lake Placid, N.Y: Macromedia, 1976).

the Adirondacks as more people began to partake in the sport. They display the hard work of Dr. Godfrey Dewey who went overseas to the St. Moritz Olympics to study how the process worked and fought for Lake Placid to win the bid, eventually bringing the Olympics to Lake Placid in 1932 with help from the Lake Placid Club's already developed snowsports infrastructure for ski jumping. This leads skiing into its next chapter of Adirondack history which has more already written about it due to the emergence of a new kind of skiing on the scene; downhill.

The beginning of downhill skiing throughout the Adirondack Park is told throughout Jeremy Davis's two books *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*,⁴ and *Lost Ski Areas of the Northern Adirondacks*,⁵ published in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Throughout these two books Davis chronicles the rise of downhill skiing specifically, after the Lake Placid Club brought about the rise of cross country skiing and ski jumping and the 1932 Olympics. Downhill skiing began as an Adirondack wintersport with the contributions of Carl and Vincent Schaefer, the Schenectady Winter Sports Club - a middle class sports club, and employees at General Electric Schenectady, who organized the first snow train to North Creek in 1934. For a few years afterwards snow trains brought masses of people to ski the influx of mountains popping up throughout the Adirondack region creating the first form of a ski vacation. These two books also argue that the Adirondack ski mountains were on the forefront of technological advancements for skiing developed throughout the thirties such as one of the first rope tows, J-bars, and electricity used for night skiing as well as on the hill advancements such as the first ski patrol.

Davis also argues that the sport grew with governmental help throughout the Great Depression, as do the books *Sports in North America: A Documentary History, Volume 8: Sports*

⁴ Jeremy K. Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012).

⁵ Jeremy K. Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Northern Adirondacks* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014).

in the Depression 1930 - 1940,⁶ and *Adirondack Civilian Conservation Corps Camps: History, Memories and Legacy of the CCC*.⁷ The first book demonstrates that throughout the height of the Great Depression downhill skiing was on the rise due to the increasing amount of ski equipment being sold while the second book goes into detail about how New Deal Era governmental programs helped build skiing infrastructure giving first hand accounts from some of the people who did so. The books argue that the New Deal Era programs were influential in helping provide manpower to create the infrastructure for ski mountains throughout the Park.

The story of downhill skiing in the Adirondacks continues on Whiteface Mountain with the conflict between keeping the Adirondack Park “Forever Wild,” or putting ski trails on public land. These arguments are not mentioned in more general books on the history of skiing and are first chronicled in Philip Terrie’s, book *Contested Terrain : a New History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks*,⁸ from 2008 where he slightly mentions this debate and how the influx of people into the Adirondacks created a need for more recreational activity locations, and whether or not the state had the constitutional ability to put them in on their land. In 2018, *Battles of the North Country: Wilderness Politics and Recreational Development in the Adirondack State Park, 1920-1980*,⁹ was published which devoted a whole chapter on this issue, and historian Tony Anzalone argues that although the passing of the amendment was done by slim margins, once passed, the surrounding towns looked positively towards the construction of the ski trails. They both argue that the land usage of the Adirondacks will always be fought over by both those who

⁶ *Sports in North America: A Documentary History, Volume 8: Sports in the Depression 1930 - 1940*, Douglas Owen Baldwin, Ed., (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 2000).

⁷ Martin Podskoch, *Adirondack Civilian Conservation Corps Camps: History, Memories and Legacy of the CCC* (East Hampton, CT: Podskoch Press, 2011).

⁸ Philip G. Terrie, *Contested Terrain : a New History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks* (Blue Mountain Lake, N.Y: Adirondack Museum, 2008).

⁹ Jonathan D. Anzalone, *Battles of the North Country: Wilderness Politics and Recreational Development in the Adirondack State Park, 1920-1980* (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 2018).

live inside the park and those who live outside it, for the land to be used in whichever way they want it used for better or for worse.

Lastly, the Adirondack Park was used to select and train ski troops before they went overseas to fight against the Axis Powers throughout the Second World War. This has been written about throughout the books, *Climb to Conquer: The Untold Story of World War 2's Ski Troops*,¹⁰ from 2003 and, *The Winter Army: the World War II Odyssey of the 10th Mountain Division, America's Elite Alpine Warriors*,¹¹ published in 2019. These books argue that the soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division were both effective and suave on the battlefield, by taking out Nazi positions and making skiing look cool while on leave. These troops have Adirondack connections before becoming the official 10th Mountain Division as they trained in Old Forge and Wilmington, with many of these soldiers coming from within the park itself. Upon returning from the Second World War as heroes, these books argue that as members of the 10th Mountain Division returned home, they wanted to continue their skiing lifestyle by working at ski mountains and sharing the sport they loved with their growing families, turning downhill skiing into the sport we know it as today.

Early Human History in the Adirondack Park:

As the country of America began to grow, Adirondack pioneers made their way deep into the heart of the region after years of settlement and resource usage from Native Americans such as the Iriqouis and Abanakees and Colonial Europeans such as the English and the French. These pioneers went to the Adirondacks in search of resources to turn for a profit and in doing so they looked to the trees. Lumber became the biggest resource in the Adirondacks as river drives

¹⁰ Peter Shelton, *Climb to Conquer: The Untold Story of World War II's Ski Troops* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2003).

¹¹ Maurice Isserman, *The Winter Army: the World War II Odyssey of the 10th Mountain Division, America's Elite Alpine Warriors* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019).

became commonplace and tanneries opened up throughout the park founding hamlets such as North Creek, which eventually became ski towns decades later. Aside from creating numerous towns and hamlets throughout the area, the logging industry also became the basis for creating the Adirondack Park, with “millions of acres of land stripped of its wood, an environmental movement to protect the Adirondack Park began in earnest in the 1870s and reached a landmark decision in 1885 when the Adirondack Forest preserve was established. In 1892, the Adirondack Park was created”. To go even further in protecting the Adirondack Park, state legislators added Article 14 to the State Constitution, known as the “Forever Wild” clause in 1894. This clause states that, “The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed”.¹² The “Forever Wild” clause inserted into the state constitution was the first attempt to preserve public land for sustainable use throughout the United States creating the legislative backbone for the Adirondack Park.

Today the Adirondack Park is a 6 million acre mecca consisting of both public and private land, available for usage to people with all kinds of life, recreational, and working interests. The Adirondacks are, “within a day’s drive of 84 million people . . . According to the APA’s 2018 Annual report, there were about 132,000 year round residents living in the Adirondack park at the time”.¹³ With all these people coming to and living in the park it only makes sense that they have different reasons for being in the Adirondacks throughout all seasons. During the winter, one of, if not, the most prominent reason is that of recreational Skiing. This

¹² *Forever Wild Clause*, (Albany, NY: State Senate, 1894) Article 14.

¹³ Andy Flynn, *New York’s Adirondack Park: A User’s Guide* (Saranac Lake, NY: Hungry Bear Publishing, 2019) 8.

winter sport is an important part of Adirondack history, which has been intertwined within the Park for over a hundred years.

Skiing's Origins; From Europe to the Adirondack Park:

Although skiing as a recreational sport is a more recent development, skiing has been a necessity for people for thousands of years. Skiing was first developed in the Northern European countries where long snowy winters are common; Scandinavia and Russia. This was discovered throughout archaeological findings of skis in bogs of these countries which “dated from 4700 BC to 1000 AD, that came from a period when a tribesman knew only which type of ski was best for hunting, and which for going into the forest to cut wood”.¹⁴ Skiing was a necessity back then as humans needed to sustain themselves via hunting and cutting wood, which fed them and kept them warm. Because skis were quicker and required less energy when compared to the other modes of transportation of the time, such as trudging through the snow with snowshoes, it gave humans a higher chance of survival during the cold winters, where many began to see the benefits of skiing. Rather than just using skiing for an easier time in transportation for daily survival, throughout the 17th to 19th centuries, skis became used for surviving economically as resource based industries such as logging and mining operated during the winter. Skis and ski troops were also important for national survival through military success because war “required armies to live off the land. That being impossible in winter, they had to carry much of what they needed . . . sometimes only those on skis could maneuver at all . . . there are many reports of local efforts to raise ski formations before and after Sweden’s Charles XII’s(1697 - 1719) attempt to put himself on the northern and eastern European stage”,¹⁵ and a century later, “Norwegian

¹⁴ Allen, 9.

¹⁵ Allen, 31.

troops on skis proved themselves in the war of 1808 against Sweden, particularly against . . . 2,200 men”.¹⁶ With a heavy reliance on skiing in the military due to its successes, skis became an important part of military equipment. During downtime soldiers looked for ways to keep busy and their skiing skills sharp so they held skiing competitions, and without knowing it, they introduced the world to skiing as a recreational sport.

The Norwegian ski troops of the 18th century turned skiing into a sport rather than just a necessity, by holding competitive ski events. This is evident as author E. John B. Allen writes, “reports of ski competitions followed, with detailed regulations and budgeted prize money: cross-country running, downhill races, slalom, jumping, and firing at a target while going down hill. Prizes were awarded according to the military value of the event . . . These races were organized and timed, with rules and regulations”.¹⁷ Because the Norwegian military organized and timed these races, putting them on with official prizes, they became the first group in the world to see skiing as a competitive sport. Norwegian civilians saw this, as well as the beneficial health effects of skiing, and partook. This concept soon expanded across Europe.

Thanks to the Norwegian military, skiing was able to spread throughout Europe in the same way it did in Norway, starting with other countries' militaries allowing more people to become accustomed and gain access to the sport. Because of this, skiing as a recreational sport took off over the continent throughout the mid 19th century and into the beginning of the twentieth. This was especially prevalent throughout the regions of Europe dominated by the Alps as, “In France, the government and the military as well as the controlling influence wielded by the *Club Alpin Francais* and the *Touring Club de France* played major roles in the development of skiing”.¹⁸ Meanwhile, “A number of Austrian” regions of the Alpine chain . . . took to skiing

¹⁶ Allen, 32.

¹⁷ Allen, 31.

¹⁸ Allen, 77.

early on . . . German skiers in many and varied clubs enjoyed their new found sport . . . Cities spawned ski clubs that journeyed to their favored grounds by train”.¹⁹ With the astounding number of ski clubs popping up, the number of recreational skiers increased rapidly during the latter half of the 1800’s. Many of those who were in the clubs and could afford to take ski vacations were all members of the upper class who brought money into the ski towns they visited which went to continued development of European recreational skiing. Eventually, recreational skiing spread from the mountains of Europe, to the mountains of America.

The rise of skiing in America is similar to that in Europe but without the early military aspect. Skiing was brought over by Europeans and was used as a more accessible way to get around in the deep winter snow throughout mountainous areas for survival and attempts at economic prosperity. Because of skiing's ease, “in Californian gold mining days, men specifically chose skis over snowshoes simply because snowshoes proved useless in the deep powder of the Sierra Nevada”.²⁰ In the latter half of the 19th century, recreational skiing grew as ski clubs began to pop up throughout the United States with competing claims to where the first ski club in America originated. Wherever the first club was from however, isn’t as important as the number of members partaking in ski running, or cross country skiing, who are, “engaging in the sport for the sake of the sport . . . are rapidly growing in the northland region of America”,²¹ as described in an 1893 *Outing* article. As people began skiing throughout the United States at the of the 18th century, ski clubs began popping up, and recreational skiing made its way to the Adirondack Park.

¹⁹ Allen, 77.

²⁰ Allen, 31.

²¹ “Ski Running,” in *Outing* (February, 1893), *Sports in North America: A Documentary History, Volume 5: Sports Organized 1880 - 1900*, Gerald R. Gems, Ed., (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1996) 479.

Skiing in the Adirondack Park; Early Beginnings and the Lake Placid Club:

Skiing in the Adirondacks began with a similar story to skiing in Europe and the United States, as humans used them as tools of survival. Eventually skiing became the wealthy person's recreational sport in the Adirondack Park, which is what allowed recreational skiing to sew its roots in the region. The first evidence of recreational skiing in the Adirondack Park is from a Hooper family photo taken in 1903,²² where the lady on the right of the photograph is holding skis and the other four people have snowshoes. Frank Hooper was the owner of Barton Mines in North River which made him wealthy, giving him and his wealthy family and friends the flexibility to try skiing recreationally.

Recreational skiing in the Adirondack Park began in the early 1900's due to the influential and aristocratic Lake Placid Club. The Lake Placid Club was founded by Melvil Dewey,²³ (the creator of the Dewey Decimal System used in libraries around the country), in 1895 as an Adirondack summer resort for the wealthy (throughout multiple publications, Dewey says that the Club was for all wealth classes, however, he highly contradicts himself by those actually allowed or who could afford club membership) to “giv the greatest possibl new health and strength for time and money spent”.²⁴ Now, people with money could come up to the Adirondacks and enjoy time off, partaking in outdoor recreation. This includes cross country skiing, as evidenced by three photos from 1906 - 1907, displaying multiple parties holding skis at the Forest Towers Club House, and another from the same time period of three gentlemen on

²² “Hooper Family on Skis,” (1903), The Frank Hooper Collection, The Adirondack Experience; The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake, Blue Mountain Lake (Hereafter ADKX), NY.

²³ Please Note: The misspellings in the quotes from Melvil Dewey are taken directly from the source, as Dewey attempted to get the United States to adhere to “Simpler Spelling”. According to Dewey, unnecessarily long words should be shortened and this was how he published much of The Lake Placid Club's literature)

²⁴ “Lake Placid Club in Adirondaks Outline,” (1906 - 1907), Box 3, Folder 13, The Lake Placid Club Collection (hereafter LPCC), Adirondack Research Library, Kelly Adirondack Center, Union College, Niskayuna, NY (hereafter ARL).

nordic skis riding down the golf course while four ladies accompany them on a toboggan.²⁵²⁶

These photos were published in a marketing pamphlet highlighting the amenities of the Lake Placid Club, and in a separate pamphlet, Dewey highlights the Winter Sports amenities by saying, “Usually 4 months Dec. 1 to April 1, far finer than summer . . . ideal skiing slopes, 40ft ski and toboggan-jump tower on golf links, 20 miles of ski trails”.²⁷ Starting at this time, The Lake Placid Club became a major influence on winter sports in the Adirondacks.

While the Lake Placid Club began making cross country skiing a recreational sport, the Adirondack High Peaks region featuring the tallest mountains in New York became a site for recreational skiing as well. This was done via backcountry skiing or ski mountaineering where Adirondack Mountains, and the High Peaks specifically (the 46 Mountains in New York State above 4000 feet in elevation) were climbed up with skis and then skied down during the winter. This first occurred in 1911, when Schenectady General Electric Employee John Apperson “was the first known person to summit Mt. Marcy on skis. In (the winter of)1917, he summited Whiteface Mountain . . . In (the winter of) 1912, he summited Haystack Mountain, a feat which Harold White of the Adirondack Mountain Club called impossible”,²⁸ after being introduced to skiing by the Nobel Prize winning Dr. Irving Langmuir a year prior. Once at the top they put their skis on and shredded down the mountain enjoying the backcountry slopes. John Apperson became the first of many who winter mountaineered the difficult high peaks with skis, as he shared this form of recreation with others including Lake Placid Club member Herman Smith “Jackrabbit” Johannsen. As they winter mountaineered Mount Haystack to ski down sometime after Apperson’s initial summit, Johannsen said, “We stood there together on the top of Haystack

²⁵ “Lake Placid Club; Adirondacks NY, Pamphlet,” (1906 - 1907), Box 3, Folder 13, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

²⁶ “Views; Lake Placid Club on Adirondack Lakes; Placid, Mirror and Heart; Pamphlet,” (1906 - 1907), Box 3, Folder 13, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

²⁷ “Lake Placid Club in Adirondaks Outline,” (1906 - 1907), Box 3, Folder 13, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

²⁸ India Spartz, *Grassroots Activism and the American Wilderness: Pioneers in the 21st Century Adirondack Park Conservation Movement* (Niskayuna, NY: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center, 2016).

and looked over here towards the setting sun. The sky was a wonderful rose. To the north west trailed the peaks of the Great Range, with Giant in the far distance. All the intervening peaks were basking in the sunset glow.”²⁹ According to Johannsen this, “was a sight neither of us would ever forget for in that moment we saw the world below us as though it were frozen in time. There was no past, no future, just the present. And it was unspeakably beautiful.”³⁰

Johannsen enjoyed skiing in the high peaks region with Apperson, because he fully appreciated the Adirondack beauty and they were able to get lost in the moment while at the summit before skiing down. While these gentlemen were exploring the High Peaks region on skis, The Lake Placid Club continued its development of recreational cross country skiing.

Recreational skiing in the Adirondack Park reached a milestone in 1920 with the creation of the Sno Birds Ski Club. Upon signing up for the Sno Birds Ski Club, each member had to attest that (in Dewey’s “simplified” English) “As a Sno Bird I wil do what I can to encouraj winter sports at Club and gain for myself and frends the ‘care free life which is buoyant, clean, courageous and frendly”.³¹ In 1920, a club member could sign up for the Sno Bird’s Ski Club for \$2 (\$27.00 in 2021) and a family was able to do so for \$5 (\$68.00 in 2021) which was a substantial amount of money at the time with the average American income throughout the 1920’s falling around \$1,000 - \$2,000 per year. Organizing cross country skiing trips as early as 1920 open to both men and women, the Sno Birds were very organized when it came to winter sports recreation and skiing, evident in a 1925 seasonal pamphlet it is written that, “more ski and snowshoe trips wil be pland than in former years. These wil be graduated in distance and difficulty to meet varying degrees of skil and endurance”,³² so all members, of different skiing

²⁹ Alice E. Johannsen, *The Legendary Jackrabbit Johannsen* (Montreal, QC: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1993) 161 - 162.

³⁰ Alice E. Johannsen, 161 - 162.

³¹ “Sno Birds, Lake Placid Club, Membership Card,” (1920), Box 3, Folder 6, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

³² “Lake Placid Club Winter Pamphlet,” (1925), p. 1355, Box 3, Folder 40, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

skill levels, could enjoy the ample cross country skiing activities throughout the club's property and surrounding area. The Lake Placid Club Sno Birds also partook in ski jumping at Intervales and ski joring - being pulled directly behind a horse while on skis - directly on Lake Placid.

There was even a section of the Sno Bird's Ski Club specifically for children where kids partook in skiing activities at young ages. Skiing with the Sno Birds at the Lake Placid Club was so popular that in 1925, the Forest Hall Clubhouse (built in 1906 specifically for winter sports purposes) had "500 individual lockers, 600 pairs of skis, . . . ski poles",³³ as well as a ski shop where, "wax, straps, thongs, laces, repairing . . . and advice on every possible winter sport subject are available. Ski and skate equipment is for rent by day, week or season".³⁴ Forest Hall was a precursor to the modern ski lodge. A large ski lodge and enthusiasm for skiing by all members - men, women, and children - was not the only thing the Lake Placid Club's Sno Bird Ski Club did to continue developing recreational skiing in the Adirondack Park.

As skiing became more popular, more club members wanted to try it, as well as perfect it, and in order to meet this request, in 1927 The Lake Placid Club set up a ski school where club members could come and take lessons. In a Lake Placid Club Newspaper, from December 23, 1927, it is written that,

Erling Strom early this week began his season as instructor in the sturdy art of skiing. Classes will be held for beginning skiers each morning. The 9:30 hour will be for those who hav never been on skis before, while the 10,45 o'clock clas wil instruct beginners who are learning their first turns. 3 other classes, turns for more advanst skiers, cros-country skiing and racing and in the last group, jumping will be taught as requests merit classes.³⁵

Strom himself stated that "Teaching skiing at the Lake Placid Club became great fun, possibly because I could not take it too seriously . . . My idea was to teach people enough so they could

³³ "Lake Placid Club Winter Pamphlet," (1925), p. 1376, Box 3, Folder 40, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

³⁴ "Lake Placid Club Winter Pamphlet," (1925), p. 1376, Box 3, Folder 40, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

³⁵ *Lake Placid Club News*, Vol 1, Number 9, (1927), p. 4, Box 3, Folder 26, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

have fun on skis . . . I rarely gave one person more than six to eight lessons then they had the basic principles and could build from there”.³⁶ With lessons available for both beginners and experts, Lake Placid Club members had easier access to recreational skiing with the end goal of becoming better skiers. For those who kept at taking lessons, and “bought skies from Rolf Monsen, the well-known skier who ran a shop . . . in the lobby of the main building or they had rented skies”,³⁷ we can safely assume those patrons enjoyed skiing as they became more invested in the sport. Because Lake Placid Club members enjoyed skiing, wanting to perfect it, it inspired the Sno Bird’s to take skiing in the Adirondack Park one step further from just a recreational activity.

Rather than skiing for fun, The Lake Placid Club, and the Sno Birds Ski Club took recreational skiing to the next level by hosting competitive events for members to partake in and college events for members’ viewing pleasure. In the same 1925 winter pamphlet, as well as in years prior, skiing competitions were described for members who wanted to partake in them. One of the biggest was the International Ski Meet which took place on Presidents Day Weekend, as the 1925 pamphlet states that the

6th annual Washington’s Birthday Tournament; Events ar 25 and 10-mile ski races on Feb. 20 and the Ski Jump Feb. 22 . . . Trophies ar provided for leading contestants in each event, with special trophy for longest standing jump. This event last year drew a larj field of skiers from 12 of the leading ski clubs of North America. As far as known by Sno Birds officials the 25-mile cros-country ski race is the only one run in the United States. The course is laid out in 10 and 15 - mile sections, with entrants for the longer race running also against those of the shorter race. Every type of terrain likely to be encountered in cros-country work is included in the course.³⁸

These events have occurred since the foundation of the Sno Bird’s Club giving members a place

³⁶ Erling Strom, *Pioneers on Skis* (Central Valley, NY: Smith Clove Press, 1977) 51.

³⁷ Strom, 53.

³⁸ “Lake Placid Club Winter Pamphlet,” (1925), p. 1369, Box 3, Folder 40, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

to compete and perfect their craft against members of the 12 other ski clubs, in the spirit of competition. This includes the 25 mile cross country races, originating at the Lake Placid Club. There were competitions open to both Men and Women, as a photo in the pamphlet of ladies in racing bids is captioned, “ski races and other events for women ar a regular part of winter sports program”,³⁹ as well as competitions for children with, “the 1st annual children’s competition . . . held on golfhouse hil on Monday, Jan. 2 at 10 a.m. Events will be open to both boys and girls under 12 . . . the events will be (1) test of skiing down a short hill with 4 turns; (2) downhill from golfhouse toward Wilmington Road for speed”.⁴⁰ The Lake Placid Club also hosted College Events where “Teams of winter sports athletes wil be present from a dozen collejes; a guarantee that enjoyments of former college weeks wil be exceded”,⁴¹ where they partook in events including but not limited to, 7-mile and 3 mile cross country ski races, ski efficiency races, and ski jumping. This way members could spectate and enjoy seeing younger athletes participate in a sport they love.

As well as cross country skiing, the Lake Placid Club was also influential in bringing the sport of ski jumping into the Adirondack Park. This was done through the introduction of ski jumping infrastructure which began on, “February 21, 1921 when the Lake Placid Club held its first jumping meet on the original Intervales hill southeast of the village . . . 3000 people attended this first meet . . . the original Intervales hill, completed in 1921, was about 35-meter jump. It was built at a cost of \$1,500 (\$22,800 as of 2021)”.⁴² With all these spectators coming to view the ski jumping events, The Lake Placid Club hosted them each winter season thereafter, repairing the ski jumps when needed. In 1927, the “Intervales jump rebilt this summer and

³⁹ “Lake Placid Club Winter Pamphlet,” (1925) p. 1379, Box 3, Folder 40, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁴⁰ *Lake Placid Club News*, Vol 1, Number 9, (1927), p. 7, Box 3, Folder 26, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁴¹ “Lake Placid Club Winter Pamphlet,” (1925) p. 1359, Box 3, Folder 40, LPCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁴² *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, George M. Lattimer, Comp., (Lake Placid, NY: The IIIrd Olympic Winter Games Committee, 1932) 39.

greatly improved, received a wet christening at the Collej Week contest held there Dec. 31".⁴³

Because the jump was a, "60 meter jump, generally recognized as one of the technically perfect hills of the world",⁴⁴ it not only helped the Dewey family make their club a premier winter sports resort by hosting ski jumping events, but it played a major role in Melvil and his son Godfrey's Olympic-sized aspirations to host the biggest event of them all.

Skiing in the Adirondack Park Becomes Olympic:

As the Lake Placid Club became one of the most prominent ski clubs and winter sports destinations in America, let alone the Adirondacks, Dr. Godfrey Dewey, (Melvil's son), wanted his club, and the Town of Lake Placid, to be the host of the recently emerging biggest winter sports event in the world: the Winter Olympic Games. Because the Second Winter Olympic Games were already awarded to St. Moritz in 1928, this meant that Godfrey Dewey had four years to prepare Lake Placid for the 1932 Olympics which he hoped to get the bid for. This started in 1928, when he, "went to St. Moritz that same year as the leader of the United States Olympic Ski team at the II Olympic games. In addition to performing his official duties, Dr. Dewey made a careful study of the entire Games program at the Swiss resort".⁴⁵ This included looking at the recreational facilities, accommodation services, and the economics of such a large event. Upon returning to Lake Placid, Godfrey Dewey began to market his idea to the surrounding communities and formed committees to look into the logistical issues of holding the Olympics which needed to be solved. Because the skiing infrastructure was already in place, Dewey used this as a big selling point to the people of Lake Placid, who at a "meeting held by the Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce on April 3, 1928, voted to pledge its efforts and

⁴³ *Lake Placid Club News*, Vol 2, Number 1, (1927), p. 7, Box 3, Folder 27, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁴⁴ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 39.

⁴⁵ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 43.

resources to securing the III Olympic Winter Games of 1932".⁴⁶ Once the people of Lake Placid were convinced that Lake Placid could host such a large event, Godfrey Dewey had to put his ideas into action, and actually win the bid.

Because Lake Placid already had the facilities for winter sports recreation, especially those for skiing, it gave Godfrey Dewey a leg up on his competitors while challenging for the bid to host the 1932 Winter Olympic Games. In the bid for the 1932 Olympics, Dewey wrote,

The Lake Placid ski-jumping hill offered for the Olympic Winter Games is the product of years of careful engineering study, proved by repeated practical use for major competitions, and perfected in every possible detail regardless of expense. It has been specially designed for championship in accord with . . . the International Ski Association.⁴⁷

Because the jumps themselves were already built for large competitive events, they also had large grandstands for spectators, as Dewey explains that

the stands already built on this hill are of a unique design accommodating 1,000 people, and so planned that 100 on either side can see the entire hill almost as well as from the usual judges stand, while 400 on either side can see the lower hill from the most comfortable and advantageous location. In addition to these stands there is ample room along the sides and end of the outrun to construct for the Olympic Wiands accommodating at least 2,000 more people with a complete view of the hill.⁴⁸

Because Dewey could accommodate 1,500 people on the ski jumps on the already built ski jumps, it could save the town and the International Olympic Committee both time and money because they didn't have to build new ones elsewhere. Dewey also highlighted the cross country ski trails in the bid,

which have been used for short and long ski races as well as for cross-country ski touring for many years. Differences of elevation of from 100 to 300 meters are readily obtainable along these trails, and if a downhill race is desired there is at least one excellent trail giving a drop of 1,000 meters. Lake Placid Club is perhaps the only place in this country which has held regularly over

⁴⁶ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 45.

⁴⁷ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 49.

⁴⁸ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 49-50.

a series of years long ski races of 40 kilometers or more.⁴⁹

With this information in their minds, the International Olympic Committee voted unanimously to award the Third Olympic Games to Lake Placid on April 10, 1929 with Godfrey Dewey becoming the president of the Olympic Organizing Committee.

After a few years of building up the infrastructure, bringing various organizational, political, sporting, and construction groups together, as well as a long fight between state groups and conservationists to allow for the cutting of a bobsled track (a story which is worthy of a whole paper in itself . . .), the III Winter Olympic Games had almost arrived in January of 1932. Even a few weeks before beginning, the Olympics were almost unable to happen because of uncooperative weather, where, “skiers of Norway, Japan, and Sweden, eager for practice, can’t find enough snow to make a snowball”.⁵⁰ But, over the coming weeks between January 15, and February 3rd, the weather got colder and the snow fell, setting the scene for the opening ceremonies on February 4th, 1920, where, as the *Chicago Tribune* noted, “Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt will deliver an oration, the pageant will dissolve, and the winter games . . . will begin. . . there will be 354 athletes”,⁵¹ walking in the parade from the 364 athletes who were nominated to compete from 17 different countries. Although Godfrey Dewey had suggested a downhill skiing event to the International Olympic Committee which was not yet an olympic sport, downhill skiing only began as an Olympic sport in the 1936 Winter Olympics four years later. Thus, the skiing events which took place at the Third Winter Olympics in Lake Placid were, the 18 km(11.18 miles) ski race, the 50 km ski race, the combined ski event - 18 km race and jump, and the ski jump. The 18 km ski race was held on the morning of Feb, 10 with 42 contestants

⁴⁹ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 50.

⁵⁰ “Lake Placid Awaits Rain, Cold Needed for Winter Olympics,” *The Washington Post* (Jan 15, 1932) 15.

⁵¹ Westbrook Pegler, “Olympic Winter Games Open Today at Lake Placid; Speed Skaters, Hockey Teams, Begin Program; Gov. Roosevelt to Make Speech,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Feb 4, 1932) 21.

from 11 nations entered who started at one minute intervals. The Gold went to Sven Utterstrom of Sweden who finished in an hour and 23 min and 07 seconds with the first American, Olle Zetterstom coming in 23rd. The 50 Km ski race took place on the morning of Feb, 13 with 32 contestants from 9 nations. Veli Saarinen, of Finland took Gold and the first finishing American, Richard E. Parsons came in 15th. For the combined ski event, the 18 Km race took place the morning of Feb, 10 and the jump took place the afternoon of Feb, 11 with 33 contestants from 11 nations. The Gold Medal went to Johan Grøttumsbraaten of Norway and the highest placing American was Lake Placid Club ski shop operator Rolf Monsen who finished 9th. Lastly, the ski jump took place the afternoon of Feb 12, with 34 contestants from 10 nations entered. The Norwegian Birger Ruud got the Gold Medal while Capar Oimen came in 4th place for the United States.⁵² All of the Olympic events - skiing included - went spectacularly making the IIIrd Winter Olympics a success. This was expressed in a statement by Count De Baillet-Latour, the President of the Olympic Committee who wrote to Godfrey Dewey on March 11, 1932, saying,

nations that participated in the III Olympic Winter Games were more than pleased at the plans made for staging the Games in Lake Placid, facilities for the conduct of the sports, and other arrangements such as housing, feeding, and transportation that made the stay of your international visitors one that they will long remember. The Games themselves brought out the most spirited competition in all the events on the Olympic program. This made the Games that much more enjoyable for both spectators and participants.⁵³

It is interesting to note that Count de Baillet-Latour specifically mentions how the games were enjoyable for the spectators, because the 1932 Olympic Games, and a few of their spectators, changed skiing in the Adirondacks forever.

Because The IIIrd Olympic Games were an international event of high prestige, they brought people from all over the world into the Adirondacks to enjoy festivities. Like all

⁵² *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 181 - 203.

⁵³ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 9.

Olympic Games, the press - like cross country skiers competing for the Gold - raced between events, sending the news from one side of the world to the other via radio, newspapers, and the fairly new technology of motion pictures. This included, “last-minute changes in the day-by-day program and weather conditions for the day . . . broadcast every morning . . . from Station WGY in Schenectady”.⁵⁴ All this press created a massive explosion of people around the United States who took an interest in winter recreation. One writer noted that it “has been estimated that 30,000 pairs of skis were sold in New York City last year (1935). Since the stores were sold out last year they are doubling their stock this year”.⁵⁵ This includes three spectators from the Mohawk Valley Hiking Club based out of Schenectady - Vincent Schaefer, Carl Schaefer, and Bill Gluesing - who, for the 1932 Olympic Games, “camped out in lean-tos for two weeks at Adirondack Loj. This group did it all . . . checking out events, skating on Mirror Lake, and skiing into Avalanche Pass. In exchange for tickets, they even emptied train loads of snow from rail cars when a warm spell hit and melted the snow. This group also returned home very enthusiastic about . . . skiing”.⁵⁶ Because these three men had such a great time enjoying the Winter Olympic festivities, as well as skiing, they decided to bring the sport back home to Schenectady, but in doing so, changed skiing in the Adirondacks forever!

Downhill Skiing in the Adirondack Park; “Ride up, Slide Down”:

The next era of Adirondack Skiing began with the end of the 1932 Winter Olympic Games. Although Olympians didn’t take part in downhill skiing in 1932, the rest of the

⁵⁴ *Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932*, 105.

⁵⁵ “Skiing: A Healthful Outdoor Sport Grows in Popularity and Becomes Big Business for Hotel Keepers, Railroads, Apparel, and Sporting-Goods Makers,” (1936), in *Sports in North America: A Documentary History, Volume 8: Sports in the Depression 1930 - 1940*, Douglas Owen Baldwin, ed., (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 2000) 448.

⁵⁶ Greg Schaefer, “A History of Gore Mountain Skiing,” (North Creek NY: New York Ski Blog, 2021), 4.

Adirondack Park did shortly afterwards. This was done by The Schenectady Winter Sports Club, where “the purpose of this club shall be to encourage winter sports activities”.⁵⁷ In an effort to do this, plans were first made on December 28th, 1932, at a “Snow Train Committee Meeting” to look for suitable locations for the first snow train and in the “Weather Bureau Report” it is written that “a period of three years, 1930, 1931, and 1932, indicates that the ratio of snowfall between Schenectady and various points such as Speculator, Old Forge, and North Creek, is about uniform. That is, for every inch of snow at Schenectady, Speculator has 6 times as much, Old Forge 8 times, North Creek 4 times”.⁵⁸ In the data compiled from 140 questionnaires for a Snow Train interest report, when asked what sport people were most interested in 127 said skiing, and when asked what kind of skiing activity in particular, 95 said “a single good hill”,⁵⁹ for downhill skiing. With the Adirondacks already in the field of vision for the Schenectady Winter Sports Club, more important steps were taken a few months later during, “The General Meeting - April 13, 1933,” where officers of the Schenectady Wintersports Club were nominated with Vincent Schaeffer becoming the President, Dr. Hosmer Norris as Vice President, Lois Perret as Treasurer, Gertrude M. Schaeffer as secretary, and the Directors were Dr. Irving Langmuir, J.S Apperson, and H.R Summerhayes.⁶⁰ This group of people were instrumental in bringing downhill skiing to the Adirondack Park.

The Schenectady Winter Sports Club was the driving force behind bringing downhill skiing to the Adirondack Park, for weekends of fun at Gore Mountain in North Creek, New York. As Vincent Schaefer describes, “On March 4, 1934, skiers’ prayers were answered and the first ski train headed to North Creek from Schenectady. The age of the ski train became a reality in

⁵⁷ “The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Constitution,” (1934), Box 1, Folder 20, The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collection (Hereafter SWSCC) , Niskayuna: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center (Hereafter ARL), NY.

⁵⁸ “Snow Train Committee Meeting,” (1932), Box 1, Folder 17, SWSCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁵⁹ “Snow Train Committee Meeting,” Box 1, Folder 17, SWSCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁶⁰ “General Meeting,” (1933), Box 1, Folder 17, SWSCC, The ARL at UC’s KAC, Niskayuna, NY.

New York State”.⁶¹ This was the first time a mass amount of people, totaling 378, came to North Creek via train to ski for the winter, beginning the downhill skiing recreation boom in the Adirondacks. Because of all the people coming up who needed a place to stay, accommodation lists were created for North Creek, where hotels and locals rented out rooms for skiers to stay in overnight ranging from \$2 to \$8 and up,⁶² so homeowners could make money throughout the Great Depression. Because there were no chairlifts to the top of the mountain in the 1930’s this was the, “ride up, slide down” era as Bill Gluesing coined it, where, “in the back of a flatbed truck, skiers paid climbed on back and placed their skis in an improvised rack”,⁶³ riding up close to the top of Gore. From there, as depicted by maps from the Gore Mountain Ski Club sometime after 1936, skiers had to hike a small bit to the summit and from there they took trails of different difficulties, such as but not limited too, Cloud, Roaring Brook, Rabbit Pond, and Pete Gay.⁶⁴ Because Gore Mountain was the beginning of downhill skiing in the Adirondack Park they were also the home mountain for the beginning of many of skiing's modern amenities throughout the park and in some cases, the United States.

One of the biggest advancements to skiing to originate in North Creek was the creation of the first Ski Patrol in the United States, who were a precursor to the National Ski Patrol. Lois Perret-Schaefer was the founder of the the “first aid committee” in order to, “render first aid in case of accident, compile list of qualified first aid experts among group, have first aid equipment along on outings, and devise ways and means of transporting injured to basecamp”.⁶⁵ Her ideas were put into action as evident by a slip of paper titled, “First Aid for Snow Train,” dated March

⁶¹ Norman Dibelius, *Winter Sports: A Collection of Historical Short Stories About Skiing From 1932 Through Present Times* (Schenectady, NY: The Schenectady Winter Sports Club, 1995) 17.

⁶² “North Creek Accomodations,” (1934), The North Creek Depot Museum Skiing Collection (Hereafter NCDMSC), The North Creek Depot Museum (Hereafter NCDM), North Creek, NY.

⁶³ Dibelius, 23.

⁶⁴ “Compliments of Gore Mountain Ski Club, North Creek NY - Map,” (1936 - 1937), NCDMSC, NCDM, North Creek, NY.

⁶⁵ “First Aid Committee, Lois Peret Schaefer,” (1933- 1934), Box 1, Folder 25, SWSCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

4th, 1934 which is the same date as the first snow train pulled into North Creek. This paper listed all the supplies needed for the 10 individual kits for patrollers to have on the hill and the larger first aid kit for the snow train itself, such as bandages, adhesives, cotton, aspirins, etc.⁶⁶ One of the chairmen (or chairwoman) and people carrying one of the 10 patrol first aid kits was Dotty Hoyt who became a member of the 1940 United States national ski team.⁶⁷ Dr. Dan O’Keefe II, a North Creek skiing pioneer, recounted his time on the ski patrol while in high school by saying, “we would station first aid sleighs on the trails, and if any skier hurt himself we’d place them on the sleigh and bring them to the bowl. There were always two members of the patrol assigned to each trail. At 4pm on Sunday, we would close the trails and the two patrol members would sweep the trails”.⁶⁸ This group began the safety protocols which ski patrols around the United States use today, ensuring the safety of those who skied at Gore.

In 1935, Skiing was changed forever in the Adirondack Park. Carl Schaefer, the brother of Vincent who ran The Schenectady Winter Sports Club, was

credited with building the first ski tow in the Southern Adirondacks and, indeed, in New York State . . . located on what was called ‘Over the Ridge,’ on property previously owned by Reverend McMahon of St. James Roman Catholic Church. The property was then purchased by Butler Cunningham and donated to North Creek to be used as a park. Permission was obtained by Schaefer to construct a tow”.⁶⁹

Schaefer’s rope tow became the precursor to today’s North Creek Ski Bowl because it was located in the same location. The rope tow was 700 feet long and powered from a 1929 Buick Engine that cost \$25.⁷⁰ Now, more people could ski as, “tickets for the tow were quite affordable, at only twenty-five cents for ten rides. Many runs could be made in a day and the tow was a huge

⁶⁶ “First Aid for Snow Trains,” (Mar 4, 1934), Box 1, Folder 25, SWSCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁶⁷ “First Aid for Snow Trains,” (Mar 4, 1934), Box 1, Folder 25, SWSCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

⁶⁸ Dan O’Keefe II, *Halfway to Heaven: Livin’ in the “Crick”, North Creek, NY, 1920 - 1950* (Glens Falls, NY: Glens Falls Printing, 2001) 67.

⁶⁹ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 17.

⁷⁰ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 17.

success”.⁷¹ Instead of riding trucks and hiking up the mountain, people could take multiple runs, closer to the bottom of the hill. Schaefer has also stated that he allowed local kids free access to the rope tow, which gave them the opportunity to try a form of recreation which only park outsiders had been able to do for so long.⁷² Because of the easy access to ski mountains this new technology gave people, not only did they begin to spring up throughout the Adirondack Park, but they also brought more people to North Creek keeping the area on the forefront of skiing advancements.

North Creek was also the home to two other skiing institutions in the Adirondack Park; the first ski school and nearby ski shop for the public, rather than just for members as was common at The Lake Placid Club. After a year of having his Rope Tow at ‘Over the Hill Slopes’ Carl Schaefer moved it to ‘Ski Land’ and it was here where Schaefer had the first public ski school, with the slogan, “If you can walk, we can teach you to ski”.⁷³ Dr. Dan O’Keefe II writes, “We had the best ski instructors in the world at North Creek. Otto Schneibs . . . taught us high school kids . . . Other instructors were Mort Amsden, Dot Hoyt, and Nebel and Heinrich Kan from Austria . . . Carl Schaefer had the first ski school and once he hired Dan Baroudi and me as instructors. Our students were a group of girls from Skidmore. Not bad duty!”⁷⁴ With all these spectacular ski instructors from both The United States and Europe, more people began learning how to ski and needed equipment to partake in the activity, which meant the area needed a ski shop. The first public Adirondack ski shop was Cunningham’s Ski Barn in North Creek, opened in 1934 after being converted from a general store during downhill skiing’s rise of popularity in the region. The store, originally purchased by P.J Cunningham in 1909, turned into the ski shop

⁷¹ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 18.

⁷² Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 17.

⁷³ Schaefer, 7.

⁷⁴ O’Keefe II, 67.

by Butler Cunningham, is still operating as of 2021 on Main Street in North Creek, under the ownership of Tyler Cunningham.⁷⁵ With these two developments people were able to learn and grow with downhill skiing throughout North Creek.

Downhill ski racing was also an important development at Gore Mountain. Here, similar to the Olympics, members of the Gore Mountain Ski Club were able to compete against one another at a sport they loved. This is evident in an article from *The Warrensburg News*, published Thursday February 2, 1939, where, “The downhill slalom team of the Gore Mountain Ski Club defeated a group from the New York chapter of the Gore Mountain Ski Club in a vigorously contested race here Sunday . . . each contestant participating in two races, which are, naturally, a downhill race and a slalom race . . . Racing against time, his speed for each course is clocked and then . . . the results of the two races are combined”.⁷⁶ Now people could not only downhill ski at Gore for fun, but put their skills to the test against others in competitive racing events which are commonplace in the downhill skiing world today.

Another development of downhill skiing that started at Gore was that of the Apres Ski, creating a subculture which grew among skiing enthusiasts. Apres ski or ‘after ski’ were the activities which happened after everyone returned from the mountain, tired, hungry, and content with a full day of skiing. Today everyone comes down to the lodge and joins each other for food, beer, and companionship, and back in the 1930’s things weren’t much different. As Dr. Dan O’Keefe II explains, “The nights were on fire! Every Saturday night we would have a dance over my fathers drug store and the ‘city slickers’ would have a great time square dancing to Guy Lapell and Jimmy Casey. All the taverns and night spots were crowded and business boomed.

⁷⁵ “Cunningham’s Ski Barn; About Us” <https://www.cunninghamsskibarn.com/> (2021).

⁷⁶ Arthur G. Draper, “Racing is Begun in North Creek, 1939” *The Warrensburg News*, NCDMSC, The NCDM, North Creek, NY.

Thankfully, Prohibition had ended!”⁷⁷ Not only did apres ski activities occur in North Creek but they even happened on snow train rides home on Sunday evenings,

as the ski train returned to Schenectady, hip flasks materialized out of rucksacks and the din in the train became louder and louder . . . slipping a harmonica out of a shirt pocket, a skier started to play old favorite campfire songs . . . Bud Hunt’s older brother Lee walked the full length of the train announcing that there would be square dancing in the baggage car . . . The train lurched sideways. Dancers shrieked as they were flung toward one wall . . . noise and heat increased as even more people swarmed in. After a while it became too crowded to dance . . . Hip flasks were passed from one to another between each song. Even people who didn’t like whisky raised the flask to their lips for a sip.⁷⁸

The people who brought the party lifestyle to downhill skiing kept it going for generations, allowing those who came to ski to fully enjoy their weekend on and off the mountains.

Because people enjoyed their time at Gore, spending full weekends skiing, using Carl Schaefer’s rope tows, and partaking in ski races and apres ski activities, many more people began to join the Schenectady Winter Sports Club from other places on the East Coast such as New York City or Boston for Adirondack skiing. After seeing the first Adirondack rope tows at Gore,

rope tows sprouted across the Southern Adirondacks for the rest of the 1930’s, as more snow trains brought skiers to destinations in Ticonderoga, North Creek, and Old Forge . . . The growth potential seemed unlimited as more and more towns and private enterprise built lifts, cleared slopes and trails and became destinations. Ski clubs were founded in almost every town and worked hard to promote their own individual areas.⁷⁹

A few of these areas had skiing significance throughout the park such as Cobble Mountain in Lake George, which was on the forefront of ski innovation in New York. In the winter of 1937-38, “The lift - what is now referred to as a J-bar but was then called just an ‘overhead cable tramway’ was installed by Fred Warner, the owner of Ski Tow Incorporated . . . was 2,400 feet long and served a vertical drop of 500 feet . . . The ski lift was so novel that numerous articles

⁷⁷ O’Keefe II, 65.

⁷⁸ Dibelius, 26 - 28.

⁷⁹ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 13.

had to describe how to use it, as skiers at that time were simply used to either rope tows or simply hiking to the summit”.⁸⁰ Not only was Cobble Mountain significant because it had the first J - bar in New York State but because its owner, Fred Pabst Jr of Pabst Brewing, also, “owned or operated ski areas in such diverse locations as Iron Mountain, Michigan; Wausau, Wisconsin; and Plymouth, New Hampshire”,⁸¹ making him the first person to own multiple ski areas similar to today's multi million dollar organizations such as Vail Co. who own multiple ski areas throughout the world. Many of these small ski hills such as Hull’s Slope in Warrensburg and The Pinnacle in Northville set up electric lights to be turned on in the evenings for night skiing,⁸² and even held racing events, such as Sisto Farm in South Corinth where, “a slalom featuring Union, Dartmouth, and Saratoga Ski Teams was held in January 1936”.⁸³ Lastly, some of these smaller ski hills were built to cater towards the surrounding community rather than park outsiders like Hull’s Slope where the goal was, “not to rival North Creek or even Lake George . . . Rather, the goal was to provide a local slope for local skiers without the need of having to drive on icy roads. Most skiers could even walk to Hull’s Slope, as it was very close to town”.⁸⁴ Now each of these mountains, and many more, gave visitors and residents alike, different options as to where they could spend their weekends skiing.

All of this was done during a time where skiing was taking off throughout the United States. As John Allen writes,

By 1940 trains were leaving all cities in the East for New Hampshire and Vermont, from New York to the Poconos of Pennsylvania, from Chicago to the Cascades, from San Francisco to the Sierra, and from Los Angeles and New York to Sun Valley, Idaho . . . These new-to-skiing people were not the healthy outdoor types . . . but people who wanted a day or maybe a weekend of fun and

⁸⁰ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 38.

⁸¹ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 38.

⁸² Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 55, 89.

⁸³ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 75.

⁸⁴ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 54.

amusement that, if combined with a spring suntan, would insure you were special back at work, Monday morning.⁸⁵

Because skiing turned into a fun weekend getaway, it allowed people such as Fred Pabst Jr, the ability to own multiple ski areas throughout the United States and make money off them, including those in the Adirondack Park. The market change of those who went skiing from outdoorsmen to vacationers are what sustained snow trains in the Adirondack Park and the United States, making downhill skiing a viable sport here in the first place.

Because of the large influx of people skiing in the Adirondack Park, and the lack of money throughout the midst of the Great Depression, many towns sought monetary help from the federal government in order to help create skiing infrastructure in their area giving their economies a boost. This plea for help was answered by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal programs, who only a few years prior, spoke at the opening ceremony of the 1932 Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid. Members of the Civilian Conservation Corp and the Works Progress Administration were sent to camps throughout the Adirondacks with part of their duties being the construction of downhill skiing infrastructure. When talking about his father's work, Richard Stewart, the son of John Stewart, a member of the Indian Lake and Blue Mountain Lake CCC camp, explains his father, "worked as a foreman for the WPA on projects like . . . the North Creek Ski Hut. It was a place for skiers to warm up and buy food".⁸⁶ Members of Newcomb camps built, "ski trails in Newcomb and near North Creek",⁸⁷ in 1937. Historian Jim Davis says that, "in the summer and fall of 1940, the Works Progress Administration(WPA) invested \$35,000 in North Creek. A ski hut was built - really a base lodge - which had been on the wishlist of many local skiers since North Creek became a ski destination".⁸⁸ The WPA was

⁸⁵ Allen, 227.

⁸⁶ Podskoch, 160.

⁸⁷ Podskoch, 182.

⁸⁸ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 54.

not just in North Creek however as, “The Speculator Winter Sports Club developed a series of trails and slopes around the village in the mid - 1930’s. For the 1937 - 1938 ski season, \$50,000 in funding was received from the WPA, and an 800-foot-long tow was installed”,⁸⁹ becoming Scribner Slope in Speculator. The WPA and CCC also maintained nordic skiing trails in the Adirondacks, “during the summer and fall of 1935 . . . They maintained the five Heart Lake and Sentinel Range loops. They also constructed the new loop trail over Mount Pisgah near Saranac Lake . . . In the fall of 1936 the CCC built the Mt. Marcy and Mt. Van Hoevenberg ski trails”,⁹⁰ which were very popular during the 1936 - 1937 ski season. All the help from the federal government allowed skiing in the Adirondacks to continue.

One last major development during this time was the American Ski School which began in 1937. After leaving Europe and coaching skiing at Dartmouth College, Otto Schniebs created his business just as recreational downhill skiing began to pick up steam throughout the Park. His ski school, based in Wilmington, operated out of many different mountains throughout the Adirondack Park sending instructors to North Creek’s different ski hills including Gore Mountain and The Village Slopes as well as Barton Slopes and the Log House in North Hudson,⁹¹ teaching those throughout the Adirondacks to “bend ze kneez”. Aside from teaching quality skiing throughout the Park, Schniebs was heavily involved with selling skiing to the capital region with the Schenectady Winter Sports Club. This is evident in the *Schenectady Gazette* which reports that Schniebs,

entertained a small audience at Union College Memorial Chapel with an illustrated lecture on the leading winter sport, skiing . . . Otto insists that here in America one can find the world’s outstanding ski terrain and proves his argument with colored photographs of towering mountain peaks, snow without obstacles

⁸⁹ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 109.

⁹⁰ Podskoch, 168.

⁹¹ Davis, *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*, 19, 23.

and natural wooded trails unsurpassed by anything hacked out by man.⁹²

Schniebs gave many other events like this throughout the Capital Region of New York. Without the hard work of Otto Schniebs, teaching and selling skiing, there are many who might not have become as invested in the sport as they would have.

Conclusion:

Throughout time, skiing has been an important tool for survival everywhere in the world, especially throughout the Adirondack Park. As wealthy folks entered the park they turned skiing into a recreational activity that was on the forefront of the eyes of the nation. From there downhill skiing took off as many small ski mountains were formed and infrastructural advancements began. Without these important people and organizations forming the steps in the story, recreational skiing in the Adirondack Park could not have become the sport it is today, allowing many to enjoy skiing in the Adirondacks for exercise, work, and enjoyment.

⁹² "Otto Schniebs Gives Ski Lecture For Fans," in *The Schenectady Gazette*, (1933), Box 1, Folder 25, SWSCC, ARL, Niskayuna, NY.

Footnote Acronyms:

The Adirondack Experience; The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake - ADKX

The Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center - ARL

The Lake Placid Club Collection - LPCC

The North Creek Depot Museum - NCDM

The North Creek Depot Museum Skiing Collections - NCDMSC

The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collections -SWSCS

Works Cited:

Anzalone, Jonathan D. *Battles of the North Country: Wilderness Politics and Recreational Development in the Adirondack State Park, 1920-1980*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018.

Allen, E. John B. *The Culture and Sport of Skiing: From Antiquity to World War 2*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.

“Compliments of Gore Mountain Ski Club, North Creek NY - Map,” (1936 - 1937). The North Creek Depot Museum Skiing Collection. The Depot Museum, North Creek, NY.

Davis, Jeremy K. *Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012.

Davis, Jeremy K. *Lost Ski Areas of the Northern Adirondacks*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014.

Dibelius, Norman. *Winter Sports: A Collection of Historical Short Stories About Skiing From 1932 Through Present Times*. Schenectady, NY: The Schenectady Winter Sports Club. 1995.

Draper, Arthur G. "Racing is Begun in North Creek, 1939." *The Warrensburg News*. The North Creek Depot Museum Skiing Collection. The Depot Museum, North Creek, NY.

"First Aid Committee, Lois Peret Schaefer," (1933 - 1934). Box 1, Folder 25, The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collection. Niskayuna: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center, NY.

"First Aid for Snow Trains," (Mar 4, 1934). Box 1, Folder 25, The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collection. Niskayuna: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center, NY.

Flynn, Andy. *New York's Adirondack Park: A User's Guide*. Saranac Lake, NY: Hungry Bear Publishing. 2019.

Forever Wild Clause. Albany, NY: State Senate, 1894.

Fry, John. *The Story of Modern Skiing*. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2017.

"General Meeting," (1933). Box 1, Folder 17, The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collection. Niskayuna: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center, NY.

"Hooper Family on Skis," (1903). The Frank Hooper Collection. The Adirondack Experience; The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake, Blue Mountain Lake, NY.

Isserman, Maurice. *The Winter Army: the World War II Odyssey of the 10th Mountain Division, America's Elite Alpine Warriors*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2019.

Johannsen, Alice E. *The Legendary Jackrabbit Johannsen*. Montreal, QC: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1993.

"Lake Placid Awaits Rain, Cold Needed for Winter Olympics." *The Washington Post*. Jan 15, 1932.

"Lake Placid Club; Adirondacks NY, Pamphlet," (1906 - 1907). Box 3, Folder 13, The Lake

Placid Club Collection. The Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center, Niskayuna, NY.

"Lake Placid Club in Adirondaks Outline," (1906 - 1907). Box 3, Folder 13, The Lake Placid Club Collection. The Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center, Niskayuna, NY.

Lake Placid Club News, Vol 1, Number 9, (1927), p. 4, Box 3, Folder 26. The Lake Placid Club Collection. The Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center, Niskayuna, NY.

Lake Placid Club News, Vol 2, Number 1, (1927). p. 7, Box 3, Folder 27, The Lake Placid Club Collection. The Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center, Niskayuna, NY.

"Lake Placid Club Winter Pamphlet," (1925). p. 1355, Box 3, Folder 40, The Lake Placid Club Collection. The Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center, Niskayuna, NY.

"North Creek Accommodations," (1934). The North Creek Depot Museum Skiing Collection. The Depot Museum, North Creek, NY.

Official Report: III Olympic Games, Lake Placid, 1932. Lattimer, George M. Comp., Lake Placid, NY: The IIIrd Olympic Winter Games Committee. 1932.

O'Keefe, Dan. *Halfway to Heaven: Livin' in the "Crick", North Creek, NY, 1920 - 1950*. Glens Falls, NY: Glens Falls Printing. 2001.

Ortloff, George Christian., and Stephen C. Ortloff. *Lake Placid, the Olympic Years, 1932-1980 : a Portrait of America's Premier Winter Resort*. Lake Placid, NY: Macromedia, 1976.

“Otto Schniebs Gives Ski Lecture For Fans,” in *The Schenectady Gazette* (1933). Box 1, Folder 25, The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collection. Niskayuna: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center, NY. e

Pegler, Westbrook. “Olympic Winter Games Open Today at Lake Placid; Speed Skaters, Hockey Teams, Begin Program; Gov. Roosevelt to Make Speech.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Feb 4, 1932.

Podskoch Martin. *Adirondack Civilian Conservation Corps Camps: History, Memories and Legacy of the CCC*. East Hampton, CT: Podskoch Press. 2011.

Schaefer, Greg. “A History of Gore Mountain Skiing.” North Creek NY: New York Ski Blog, 2021.

“The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Constitution,” (1934). Box 1, Folder 20, The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collection. Niskayuna: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center, NY.

Shelton, Peter. *Climb to Conquer: The Untold Story of World War 2's Ski Troops*. New York, NY: Scribner. 2003.

“Skiing: A Healthful Outdoor Sport Grows in Popularity and Becomes Big Business for Hotel Keepers, Railroads, Apparel, and Sporting-Goods Makers,” (1936), *Sports in North America: A Documentary History, Volume 8: Sports in the Depression 1930 - 1940*. Owen Baldwin, Douglas, Ed.,. Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press. 2000.

“Ski Running,” in *Outing*, (February, 1893), *Sports in North America: A Documentary History, Volume 5: Sports Organized 1880 - 1900*. Gems, Gerald R, Ed., Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press. 1996.

“Sno Birds, Lake Placid Club, Membership Card,” (1920). Box 3, Folder 6, The Lake Placid Club Collection, Niskayuna, NY: The Adirondack Research Library at Union College’s Kelly Adirondack Center.

“Snow Train Committee Meeting,” (1932). Box 1, Folder 17, The Schenectady Winter Sports Club Collection. Niskayuna: The Adirondack Research Library at the Kelly Adirondack Center, NY.

Spartz, India. *Grassroots Activism and the American Wilderness: Pioneers in the 21st Century Adirondack Park Conservation Movement*. Niskayuna, NY: The Adirondack Research Library at Union College’s Kelly Adirondack Center. 2016.

Sports in North America: A Documentary History, Volume 8: Sports in the Depression 1930 - 1940. Owen Baldwin, Douglas, Ed.,. Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press. 2000.

Strom, Erling. *Pioneers on Skis*. Central Valley, NY: Smith Clove Press, 1977.

Terrie, Philip G. *Contested Terrain : a New History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks*. Blue Mountain Lake, NY: Adirondack Museum, 2008.

“Views; Lake Placid Club on Adirondack Lakes; Placid, Mirror and Heart; Pamphlet,” (1906 - 1907). Box 3, Folder 13. The Lake Placid Club Collection, Niskayuna, NY: The Adirondack Research Library at Union College’s Kelly Adirondack Center.