

## FAR WEST SKI ASSOCIATION

### TOWARD A SKI CENTER IN THE SIERRA

By Bill Berry

It was difficult during January of 1869, to find a more beautiful winter setting in the Sierra Nevada than the railroad town of Truckee on a moonlit night. Cheery lights gleamed from houses dotting the snowy landscape against a background of hills with pine trees in fantastic winter dress, sleighs running to the merry jingle of bells, mountain men poling along on skis they called "snow-shoes" and the young folk playing with sled-like contrivances known as "Yankee jumpers."

Central Pacific trains were maintaining as regular schedules as possible through the snows of Donner Pass. The tracks linked Sacramento to a newly established railhead several hundred miles eastward in Nevada.

Truckee's interminable engine serenades heralded that days of stage travel and freighting over toll roads was fast drawing to a close for the Sierra. Mountain roadways, however, would have another day. Truckee, from a rail center in 1869 would in years ahead emerge as the hub for the greatest winter sports recreational developments of the North American continent. And another 30 years would see Truckee snow sports pioneers playing a leading role when the California Ski Association was organized at San Francisco on October 25, 1930, and seven weeks later admitted to the National Ski Association of America. But none at the time foresaw that the California Ski Association and National Ski Association designations would be changed to the Far West Ski Association and the United States Ski Association.

Perhaps some railroad officials were more visionary. Before, during and following the construction project which put iron track across the Sierra, there had been promoters who recognized that new-fangled ski sport could be developed into a travel promotion attraction. Ski racing already was commonplace at the time, with the formally organized Alturas Snow-Shoe Club at LaPorte having led the way in 1869. That same winter the Southern Pacific ran its first snow-ball special train to Cisco, later to become the headquarters of the Auburn Ski Club and in 1939 the locale of an officially sanctioned Federation of International Skiing alpine tournament.

By the winter of 1928, many California businessmen were thoroughly aroused to the economic expansion inherent in snow sports promotion. Truckee had its Hilltop, where 200 imported Norwegian hickories were for rent and the "pull-back" operated whenever customers showed up.

But the major stirring was 14 miles away at Tahoe City, near Tahoe Tavern was a pine-sheltered slope soon to be named Olympic Hill. Here a toboggan run with a return saucer full of thrills was completed for the 1929 season and construction of a 60 - meter ski jump begun for 1930. The project was supervised by Lars Haugen, seven times national champion from St. Paul, Minn. Simultaneously in Yosemite National Park several ice rinks were placed in operation, a ski jump constructed, and highland ski courses for mountaineers were laid out.

The Yosemite program was directed by Ernest Des Baillels, a French-Swiss snow sports expert previously connected with the Sno Bird Club of Lake Placid, New York, and the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec.

The professional guidance of Haugen at Lake Tahoe and Des Baillels in Yosemite had the whole-hearted backing of the Winter Sports Committees of the California State Chamber of Commerce. Jerry Carpenter was the principal coordinator of organizational work from which would come the California Ski Association. Leadership in the mountains was provided by Wilbur L. Maynard of Truckee. He operated the Southern Pacific Hotel. Wendell T. Robie of Auburn, a lumber man and outdoors enthusiast, was soon to be tabbed as the first president of the California Ski Association.

These men, along with others, turned their energies toward obtaining the winter events of the 1932 Olympic Games, which had been awarded to the United States, the summer events scheduled for Los Angeles. But the Olympic Winter sports promotion ran into stiff opposition from the state's sunshine lovers. This also was at a time when Sierra skiers were not affiliated with the National Ski Association. This lack of ski sport organization was believed to have played a major role when the International Olympic Committee in 1929 turned down California's claim to snow during a meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland.

But the lost Olympic cause produced the California Ski Association on October 25, 1930. Meeting in San Francisco, the ski sport advocates elected Wendell T. Robie of Auburn as the Association's first president. The day, perhaps, is best remembered for celebrating Auburn Blue Sweaters spinning a cable car on its Powell Street turntable.

The new California Ski Association was admitted to the National Ski Association on December 14th by delegates attending the national convention in Chicago. Simultaneously the 1932 national ski tournament was awarded to California's Olympic Hill at Tahoe City.

Others attending the CSA organizational meeting included F. H. Dueprey of San Francisco, Cecil Edmunds and Tim O'Hanrahan of Truckee, E. Des Baillels of Yosemite, Dr. William Durfee of Auburn, Oscar Jones, Dennis Jones and Scotty Allen of Soda Springs. All the names are famous in winter sports history.

Edmunds' son, Earl, became the national class C champion in 1932, and continues active in ski sport; Scotty Allen was Alaska's world famous dog team driver; Oscar Jones owned the Soda Springs Hotel, pioneer winter sports gathering place in the Donner Summit region, while his son, Dennis, became the Sierra's first native-born ski instructor. Too, Oscar Jones was destined to become the grandfather of an Olympian -- Starr Walton of the 1964 ski team and daughter of FWSA President Stanley Walton of Sacramento's California Kandahar Ski Club.

First snows of the 1930-31 winter saw ski sport development in all directions. Formal organization had turned the trick and skiing interest spread from Los Angeles to the Oregon state line. Clubs mushroomed and ski jumps were constructed all along the mountain ridges. It was a way of life often envisioned by Otto Schniebs of Hanover, New Hampshire -- and often referred to as such.

Olympic Hill in 1931 saw the first divisional ski championships hosted by the Lake Tahoe Ski Club. And in 1932, the NSA nationals were staged on Olympic Hill following the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid. By 1960, the Lake Tahoe Ski Club was among the official hosts for the Olympic Winter Games in Squaw Valley -- and ski sport had come full circle for the ski association founders.