



LAKE PLACID-NORTH ELBA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Placid Pioneer

December 2006

Skiing in Lake Placid and North Elba

By Beverley Pratt Reid, Town and Village Historian

One has to wonder what Mr. Melvil Dewey would think if he could come back to Lake Placid to see what his winter sport dreams have expanded to. When he ordered the first skis from Switzerland for his eight adventurous friends in 1905, did he ever dream that skiing would become what it is today?

The grooming of the Lake Placid golf club course areas were the first ski hills to be developed. The building of the "ski jumps" on Lake Placid Club and the Lake Placid Central School properties appeared to be the next venture. Many also were attempting to ski Whiteface, Marcy and MacIntyre, and some ski trails were established.

The first local ski hill with a lift was erected in the mid-thirties on the golf course at the Stevens House. The hill was centrally located and very popular with the locals. The Town opened a slope in the area of the Craig Wood Golf Course in 1938 called "Scotts Cobble". They also catered to the local students and by 1959 upgraded their rope tow to a new, modern Poma Lift. Scotts Cobble continued to be a favorite ski hill until 1973 when the Town ceased operation.

During these years, the development of the Fawn Ridge Ski Center and the Ruissement Golf Course Hill with tows,

were opened. Only the Fawn Ridge Ski Center proved to be successful. It continued on for over forty-seven years.

The original rope tow was replaced with the modern Poma Lift in the late 1960's.

With the growing interest in downhill skiing, the Lake Placid Club established



the Mt. Whitney Ski Area, exclusively for their members. The rope tow was built in 1940 but by 1947 the new invention, "T-Bar Lift", was installed. In the 1970's, the hill was opened to the public and students along with a second T-Bar. A beautiful club house had been opened and it became a popular ski-school training hill. After the 1980 Olympics and the demise of the Lake Placid Club, the hill was closed and in 1995 the lodge burned down.

In 1956 a group of men formed a cor-

poration to develop a ski center of double chair lifts on what is known as Cobble Mountain. It was to be called "Kobl Mt". However, due to the lack of interest and funds the project was never completed and another dream ended.

Old MacDonald's Farm was opened on a property off Saranac Avenue in the winter of 1955-56 and only continued until winter of 1957. Night skiing was its biggest venture. The hill had a short history but its Poma Lift was the one that was installed at Scotts Cobble and was used for years.

Other short-lived hills were located at the Mirror Lake Inn, run by "Happy Jack", Fawn Ridge Lodge on Saranac Avenue and on the mountain behind Whiteface Inn that Dr. Jim Perkins tried unsuccessfully to develop.

These are some of the ski hills that have come and gone but Whiteface Mountain has become the place to ski. Mr. Dewey would, I am sure, stand in awe today to see not only the breathtaking trails but all the differences in equipment from grooming the hill to the skis themselves.



Need a great way to beat cabin fever this winter? Volunteer for the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society!

This winter, thanks to the Village of Lake Placid, we have been granted permission to use the Beach House on Mirror Lake to continue with our Collections Cataloging project. But having a warm, well-lit and spacious work area is only the beginning—we can't do it without you! If you enjoy looking at and working with historical photographs and papers, please contact Jennifer VanBenschoten, Museum Director, at (518) 523-1608 or thehistorymuseum@verizon.net. **No experience is necessary**, and you can volunteer for as little as one hour a week or as many as twenty. Please consider helping us to care for our valuable collections of historic archives!

A Message from the President

by Peter Roland, Jr.

2006 saw a number of "firsts" for the Historical Society and The History Museum! For the first time our new Director, Jennifer VanBenschoten, has been able to devote significant effort to grant writing for the Society. This should pay off in additional funding for new exhibits and to support the cataloging and collections management program.

The Museum's Waiting Room was reconfigured for the first time in many years to do a better job telling the "stories" of Hotels, Founding Families, Mining, Agriculture and Transportation. We were not able to fully complete the exhibits this year, but should finish most of this work in the newly repainted main room prior to opening in 2007.

Another first was the adoption of a Strategic Plan for the Historical Society. This culminated an 18 month process by the Board of Trustees, and has allowed us to define our goals for the short and long term and the strategies and actions that will be necessary to achieve those goals. This plan will not only better position us for receiving funding for our activities but will serve as a valuable "roadmap" as we move forward.

The first Antique Appraisal Day in September was a resounding success. Our thanks go to Ted Comstock, who donated his expertise for this fundraiser. Ted has expressed his willingness to do it again next year, so watch for the date!

The museum was also used for the first time by Chuck Damp and the staff of Wilkins Agency for a reception. If you need an "exciting old place" for your next party, event or wedding in 2007 we would be happy to provide a new and interesting venue for your event.

For the first time in several years the Adirondack Scenic Railroad saw an increase in their ridership, which also meant an increase in Museum visitors. We plan to continue joint marketing efforts in the future which will benefit both organizations in their operations.

Another first is that collections cataloging will be continuing this winter in the Village Beach House. This will not be possible without volunteer help. Please let us know if you are interested in volunteering a few hours to do very interesting work with some very nice people!

It is clear that the ability to continue our current operations and expand programming in the future is totally dependent on the support of our membership and other organizations which support our efforts. If you have not renewed your membership this year, or would like to make an additional end of the year donation, please use the form enclosed to show your support. Your financial contribution, along with a dedicated corps of volunteers, will allow the Historical Society to continue providing service to the Lake Placid-North Elba community.

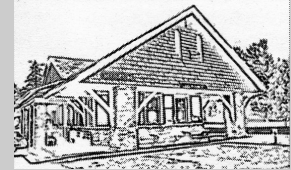
We thank you for your support and wish you a fine Holiday Season!



**KING FOR A
DAY!**

Do you recognize this famous King and his Queen?

Answer: It's Jack Shea & Lucille Hickey!



**Lake Placid-North Elba
Historical Society**

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(518) 523-1608

Thehistorymuseum@verizon.net

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What a bright idea! Want to save some money on your electric bill and help the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society? We have energy efficient fluorescent light bulbs for sale for only \$1 each! Bulbs come in 60 and 75 watts. To arrange pickup, please call Jennifer at (518) 523-1608 or thehistorymuseum@verizon.net.

From the Director's Desk

by Jennifer VanBenschoten

I would argue that wintertime is the only time in Lake Placid that anything gets done. Summertime, as you all know, is fleeting here in the mountains, and most days, the temptation to take the canoe for a paddle, go swimming at the local swimming hole, or just take a walk in the woods far outweighs the pile of papers sitting on the desk. Despite what many people think, winter in Lake Placid is, more often than not, when things HAPPEN. When the weather makes you cringe at the thought of venturing outside, you begin to tackle those indoor projects that sat and collected dust all summer long: the piles of papers on your desk and the re-organization of home offices and bookshelves.

In the winter of 1905, Melvil Dewey took a chance and ordered winter sports equipment for a few hardy souls who decided that they wanted to spend the long, cold winter much as they had the summer – taking advantage of outdoor recreation opportunities. It soon became apparent that Lake Placid was the ideal place to spend a

very enjoyable winter ice skating, skiing, and snowshoeing. If Lake Placid was the perfect summer vacation spot, it was also the perfect winter vacation getaway. Dewey's gamble paid off, and soon, people from all walks of life were traveling to Lake Placid to enjoy the beauty of an Adirondack winter. Years later, the Vil-



lage earned the honor of hosting the Olympic Winter Games, and it's reputation as a winter resort became world-renowned.

I would like to think that this winter, we at the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society are also embarking on the

first part of a beneficial journey. With the permission of the Village of Lake Placid, we have set up a small winter office in the Beach House where we will be able to continue the important work cataloging our archival collection and continue operations. A big thank-you to Mayor Jamie Rogers and the Board of Trustees is in order here, and I would like to take this opportunity to let them all know that we appreciate everything they have done for us.

So this winter, please consider becoming a part of our history. We are always looking for volunteers to help with mailings and office work as well as to help us catalog our collections, and if you need to get out and about and beat that cabin fever when it sets in, the Beach House is a warm and inviting place to spend some time! If you have an hour or two to give to us to help us move forward with our goals, please contact me at (518) 523-1608 or at the-historymuseum@verizon.net.

The Museum Wish List...

Fax machine
Flat storage files for maps and documents
12' Stepladder
Digital camera
Legal size file cabinet
Desk lamps
Hand tools & tool box
Folding chairs
Lightweight banquet tables

If you wish to donate any of these items to the museum, please let us know! A tax deductible receipt can be provided for the value of each item. Thank you!

Antique Appraisal Day Fundraiser!



Ted Comstock examines a 19th century canoe

This past September, Ted Comstock of Saranac Lake volunteered several hours of his time and his considerable knowledge and expertise to help the LPNEHS hold an Antique Appraisal Day. Members and non-members came with their treasures from attic and basement to hear a little bit about the origin of the item and get an estimated value.

Among some of the more interesting items seen were a nineteenth century canoe, a children's miniature tea set, and original cover art from the Ladies' Home Journal. For those of you who couldn't make it this year, we'll keep you posted for next year's date!

Bev's Bits... A report from the Town Historian

By Beverly Pratt Reid

The Village of Lake Placid was incorporated on October 15th, 1900. Mr. John Shea was appointed "President", Mr. Albert Billings and Frank Durgan were appointed Trustees, and Charles Forbes was appointed Village Clerk at a salary of \$75.00 per year.

On November 2nd, 1923 the Methodist Church building was sold to a Mr. D.W. Jennings and moved to School Street to become a restaurant and garage. The building is still there, with many, many changes and is now known as "Wise Guys". The replacement stone and granite Methodist Church was dedicated in 1925.

On November 9th, 1900 the area was hit with an eighteen inch snow storm. This was the start of one hundred and fifty days of winter.

The electricity was turned on in the Village on November 19th, 1906 for the first time.



Join us for our 2007 Winter Lecture Series!

January 24:

"Ski Hills of Lake Placid and North Elba"

February 21:

"Churches of Lake Placid and North Elba"

March 21:

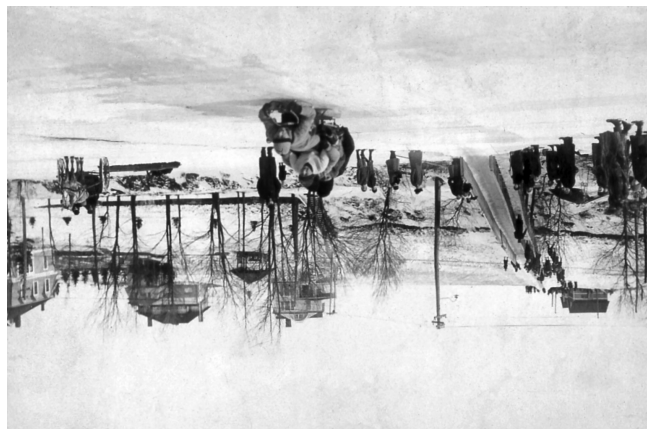
"Anna Newmann and Heaven Hill Farm"

April 18:

"Work in the Grand Hotels"

All lectures are held at Howard Johnson's, Lake Placid. Dinner begins at 6:00 followed by the program at 7:00. If you can't join us for dinner, please join us for the program! For more information and/or reservations, please contact Jennifer at (518) 523-1608 or thehistory-museum@verizon.net.

Signal Hill Toboggan run circa 1911



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