

(Photo courtesy of Gerry Stransky)



Roald Amundsen Club House, circa 1948.

On this site members built a chalet and outfitted it with a wood stove for heating and meal preparation. They rigged a rope tow with a 1927 Buick engine (crank start, of course) that ran without benefit of anti-freeze and had to be drained every night. From local lumber they erected a ski jump, which by varying accounts was fifteen to thirty meters and was the site of spirited competitions such as the Finnish Relief Meet. As the hill faced west into the afternoon sun, snow did not hold up well so a brigade of members with bushel baskets kept the landing area under the jump snow-covered. While some of the skiers arrived by car, not all were that affluent in the days of the Depression and World War II rationing. Many came by train or bus from Buffalo, arriving in Colden and walking the mile or so to the hill on snowshoes. Fifty cents bought a tow pass for the day. The club owned a few sets of gigantic jumping skis the members shared, and ski equipment cost under \$25.00 for boots and skis. The cost of skiing has definitely succumbed to the pressures of inflation!

Names of the Norwegian organizers of the club have faded into the hills, but later RoAm members whose names might ring a bell were: Jim Felger, May Kendall, Florian, Sue, Terry and Jean Dzimian, Brunhilde Grasmoen, Jack O'Brian, Kelly brothers Paul and Bill, Bob Burleigh, Dick Barlow and – perhaps the most well known of all – Olympic ski jumper Andy Hengsteller.

Andy Hengsteller emigrated from the Black Forest after World War I and developed Buffalo's best ski

store upstairs at the Flint & Kent department store on Main Street downtown. Andy was not only the president, but the patriarch of Roald Amundsen. The rope tow started when he gave the say-so. When Andy blew his whistle, everyone ate lunch. When Andy signed you up for duties, such as fire tender or rope tow mechanic, you did them, and when Andy put your name down as a ski jumper, you jumped, regardless of how scared you were. Larry Erb and Gerry Stransky will tell you that although Andy was a likeable guy, his style of leadership irritated many members – especially WWII vets who'd had enough of taking orders – and the disgruntled, among them John Doyle, left to form Sitzmarker. Andy moved to



Jim Felger mid-jump, circa 1940.

(Photo courtesy of Larry Erb.)



(Photo courtesy of Sylvia Millett.)

Buffalo Ski Club members Karl Hill (on ladder) and Cyril Freudlsperger installing club sign in Holland, New York 1936.

Vermont, near Mad River Glen, and a few years later the club disbanded.

**Buffalo Ski Club (193?-present).**

Buffalo Ski Club today sits proudly, albeit not ostentatiously, overlooking the Colden Valley from its perch on Lower East Hill Road. The 500 families on its roster no longer carry in five-gallon cans of gas for the rope tow, nor do they load food and infants on sleds for the 200-yard walk to the chalet or spend hours shoveling snow onto the rope tow track. Today they drive to the chalet and experience the luxury of a chairlift ride after their run down a groomed hill of manmade snow. The birth of this club, however, did not occur here in Colden as many believe, but to the east in Holland, New York.

In the early 1930s a group of friends, mostly Germans from Bavaria who had skied in the old country, began to spend weekends skiing together, often traveling by bus from Buffalo to Allegany State Park where downhill skiing and jumping were already underway. In 1934 nine members of the club cast their lots together and made a bold move. Otto Lorenz, Willy Weinreich, Otto Giedl, Karl Hill, Cyril Freudlsperger, Hank Eisenmann, Ernie Garlow, Hans Fehm and Joe Hautmann bought 130 acres and an