

where the Colden Tubing Company stands today. Bill Jehle, a former Murray Hiller, remembers:

Murray Hill was founded in the mid-30s by Gene Thompson and Napp Pauley with Jim Felger, Bob Yeager, Bob Graff, Bob Crone (founder of Glenwood Acres), Bud Jehle, Bill Coward, Vince Bonerb and Neils Andersen as notable members. The Murray family had a barn that the club rented as its lodge. Mrs. Murray ran a snack bar in the back of the barn where skiers could get a great hot lunch and the best pie in Western New York. The skiers would change into their boots at the barn, put on their skis, and walk cross-country to the hill for that several hundred yards, mostly uphill. There was a small warming hut at the hill, but no electricity, no running water, and no indoor plumbing. The 900-foot-long rope tow was powered by an old, in-line, 12-cylinder, Pierce-Arrow automobile, with the stick-shift transmission, and the tow rope drive sheaves mounted where the back seat once existed.

Getting to Murray Hill was a challenge in those days, especially for those without cars or enough gas rations to spend on recreation. Skiers living in the suburbs had to catch the BTC bus to Shelton Square in Buffalo and walk about six blocks to the Nickel Plate Rail Road station to catch the "ski train" to the Glenwood Station. By the time you arrived at the barn on Murray Hill Road, walked to the hill, sidestepped the hill to pack it down for skiing, and got the engine started, you were lucky to get a few hours of skiing in before dark. The members stayed overnight in the barn haylofts – one at each end of the barn, with men at one end, and women at the other. There were two, wood-burning, pot-bellied, iron stoves that kept the barn a few degrees above freezing, and some volunteers had to take turns all night long to see that the fires remained blazing. Mrs. Murray would make breakfast Sunday morning, then it was back to the hill for another few hours of skiing, followed by a mad dash to the Glenwood Station to catch the last train back to Buffalo at about 4:00 p.m., which got you home at mid-

night. During the week we'd repair the steel edges broken off over the weekend and wax the skis so we could do it all over again the next weekend. People today complain because they cannot park right next to the club chalet.

In 1984 the tow motor failed and, as no parts were available, the club passed into history with many of the members joining Sitzmarker and Buffalo Ski Clubs.



(Photo courtesy of Larry Erb.)
Detail of skis, circa 1940.

The Ellicottville Story (1936 - present).

In Western New York the name Ellicottville is synonymous with skiing. "Going to Ellicottville this weekend?" really means, "Are you going skiing at Holiday Valley or Holimont?" But the original Ellicottville story began in Allegany State Park in the winter of 1936. Allegany in the '30s had become the center of alpine and nordic skiing for the region with its variety of pitched slopes and ski jumps. Two ski-crazy youngsters from Buffalo, William "Doc" Northrup and German Olympic skier Karl Fahrner, promoted skiing at the park and by 1936 had succeeded in luring the New York State Championship Races there. As the date for the competition neared, however, the snow disappeared. Cancellation of the races seemed all but assured.

Assured, that is, until Doc Northrup happened to notice that in Ellicottville at Fish Hill just outside the village, there was plenty of snow clinging to the protected slope. He sprang into action. From the

City Garage he got an ancient Studebaker engine and attached a grooved wooden pulley. Mr. Frazier of the hardware store donated some rope and New York Telephone found some poles they could spare. With this impromptu rope tow in place, the State Races went on as scheduled and Ellicottville has been a ski town ever since.

In 1938 the Ellicottville Ski Club was founded and Doc and Karl Fahrner went into the ski business, moving the area from Fish Hill to Greer Hill, which has a commanding view of the village. Soon skiers were arriving from Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Toronto. Edna Northrup, author with Lillian Congdon of *For the Love of Skiing: Our Story of Skiing in Ellicottville*, recalls taking the train from Buffalo before her marriage to Doc. It was fifty cents a day to ski and \$3 a night to stay at the hotel, dinner included. "It was a dynamic group," she says. "Everyone was thrilled with the newness of skiing and everyone got involved." She even remembers nights at the hotel where skiers gathered not only for song and cheer, but to splice frayed tow ropes, as well. For the next 20 years the club stayed at Greer Hill, skiing on weekends, although Doc Northrup, the town dentist, quite often would fire up the old tow on a lunch hour and take a few runs.

These sketches hardly tell the whole story of old-time skiing in Western New York. There were other clubs, such as the Red Jacket Ski Club (1935-1995) in Eden, the Lockport Ski Club on the escarpment in Niagara County and the Inter-State Ski Club in Allegany, to name a few. The colorful characters who skied and jumped at Allegany State Park deserve an article of their own. But with this little glimpse into those days, we begin to appreciate the dedicated folks who took a little technology and a lot of enthusiasm and turned our winter landscape into a playground. ■

W. Richard Ohler is a freelance writer and creative writing instructor from East Aurora, New York. His most recent article for Western New York Heritage was a history of professional baseball in Buffalo, which appeared in the Fall 2001 issue. He consistently turns in some of the slowest times of his age group (51 and over) in ski races at the Buffalo Ski Club.