

# MORETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

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### THIS ISSUE- WINTER TIME FUN IN MORETOWN

With winter finally here, snow arrived a couple of days after Christmas, it seems appropriate to write about some of the winter activities that folks in Moretown enjoyed. Talking with some Moretown residents we found that there were many things to keep people busy during the winter months. One person told us that his father built a travis, it was quite an elaborate affair with a steering wheel instead of the usual ropes to steer with and cut outs for your feet to fit into. Some of the local boys in town would take the travis, and if they were lucky they could hitch a ride, actually “hitch” a ride, since the travis could be hitched to the rear bumper of a car and pulled along. They could hitch a ride up the Moretown Mountain Road to the intersection of what is now Howes Road and the Mountain Road and coast all the way to the village. If they could catch Amos McManus on his way home from the mill and he had the time, he has been known to hitch them up to his Hudson Terraplane and take them to Waitsfield, around the “dummy” at the entrance to Bridge Street and back to Moretown. The traffic on Route 100 then must have been quite a bit less than it is today.

Snowmobiling came into vogue in Moretown in the 1960’s -70’s and many people caught the snowmobiling bug. Tracks could be seen in many fields and wood lands. This was before VAST came along and folks mostly rode wherever they could make a trail. Once a trail was established it was used just because it was easier than breaking new trail. One of the main trails went from the village behind the store, up through the fields at the top of the village hill, then through the woods up around ‘Pepsi Corner’ so named for the Pepsi soda bottle wedged into a fork in the tree at a bend in the trail, near Dean’s Mountain Road. Then on up to the Common and Hathaway Road, crossing onto South Hill Road and the School property and coming back down along the ridge behind the School. Of course there were off shoot trails and trails leading to other sections of the Common which you could access from this main trail. There was a group of men and also a group of women who would get together and ride. The men would sometimes ride into Waitsfield and it wouldn’t be unusual to meet up with other riders from Waitsfield/ Fayston in their travels. It could get mighty cold while riding some nights and it would not be unusual to find a bottle or two of whiskey or brandy stashed in the storage compartments of the snowmobiles. Just to ward off the possibility of frost bite or hypothermia.

Skating was a popular pastime and there were several rinks for kids and adults alike to use. For a number of years, the lawn area of Donald and Norma Kingsbury, the area between their house and Hurdle Road was flooded and most of the Village kids could be seen there after school and on week- ends skating. The Fire Department also flooded the

area across from the Fire Station in the Shultz's field for skating. Many farms had ponds that froze over in winter and the children from the farms and neighbor kids skated there.

Sliding or sledding was something that most folks could do with little or no effort. All that was needed was a hill, a sled, toboggan, or a piece of cardboard or a box and you were set to have some fun. We have been told that someone even fashioned an old car hood as a sliding implement. The school has had sliding hills for many years and kids could be seen out on the hills during recess and after school.

If you were especially agile and had a keen sense of balance, a jack jumper was another mode of transportation to get from the top of a hill to the bottom. A jack jumper was a contraption that consisted of a wooden seat mounted onto an old ski or runner. Most jack jumpers were homemade but you could buy a manufactured model. You sat on the seat and straddled the ski, then down the hill you would go, balancing and leaning to keep upright. There were some who could maneuver the jumper and ride all the way to the bottom of a hill without getting a face full of snow. How about jack jumping at night? There are those who would soak cattail heads in gasoline or kerosene, stick the stems in the snow, light the cattails and you would have a lighted jack jumper run.

Kids could always find something to do in the snow and for some reason they didn't seem to mind the cold. I believe that is something that children are born with but wears off as we age. I know that the older I get the more I mind the cold. You could see kids building snowmen, making snow angels, playing Fox and Geese and building snow forts to take shelter in when the snowball fights would begin. Who hasn't been pelted by a snowball from the opposing "army" during the heat of a snowball battle? After an afternoon of fun in the snow, you could usually count on a mug of hot cocoa and a cookie or two.

Sleigh riding was also a popular winter activity. Young people would often hitch up the horse to the sleigh and go for a ride. Wrapped in a fur robe to keep warm you could glide along the roads and if the moon happened to be full it could turn into quite a romantic affair. You might ride over to friend's houses where you would be treated to hot cider or mulled wine.

With the opening of Mad River Glen Ski Area in 1948, skiing as a winter sport became possible for people in the Mad River Valley. Moretown had its own rope tow behind the school in the early 1970's. It was constructed by the Moretown Couples Club and was used for several seasons. Another rope tow was erected after the Couples Club tow, but was in a slightly different location on the hill behind the present baseball field and tennis courts. This rope tow was built for and by the Mad River Valley School, which became the Green Mountain Valley School around 1973. The Mad River Valley School was started by three Mad River Glen Ski Coaches, Al Hobart, Bill Moore, and John Schultz and Ashley Cadwell, who was a Vermont elementary school teacher. Also on staff were Jane Hobart and Annette Shultz. The students would receive intense instruction in skiing

techniques as well as personal tutoring in lesson plans from their home high schools. The school was originally located in Fayston, but after the first year, it was moved to the Schultz residence in Moretown, where the barn provided extra classroom and dormitory space. As a fully accredited secondary school it would continue in Moretown until 1980 when it would move back to Fayston, on land which was part of the former Brothers farm, where it continues today. Graduates of the Green Mountain Valley School have skied on the US Olympic Ski Teams. Many colleges from Albertson to Yale University have welcomed graduates of GMVS.

Harwood Union High School also provided some ski training for its students. The first year coach for Harwood, which opened in the fall of 1966, was Bill Heise, who was also an art teacher. During the summer of 1967, Stu Campbell came to Harwood as an English teacher, and also became the new ski coach. Campbell oversaw the construction of a 15 meter ski jump which was used in conjunction with a 5km cross country course. The jump was located on the steep slope immediately behind the rear parking lot of the school. A rope tow was installed on the same slope in the 1970's-80's. The dates at this time are unclear nor is it known how long the tow was in operation. Research is still being done on the history of this ski area. In the early 1990's the rope tow was dismantled and bought by a Moretown resident who moved it to his house, where it is believed to still be operating as a private backyard ski area.

If you were not a fan of outdoor activities, or even if you were, Vermont winters could be long and cold. What could you do when the temperature dropped and it became dark at 4:00 p.m? Of course, there were duties that had to be done no matter what the weather, bringing in the fire wood, shoveling a path to get in and out of the house, and if you had animals they certainly needed to be fed, watered and cared for. The women would spend time mending clothes, knitting, quilting or other indoor chores. The men would mend harnesses, fix broken machinery or do woodworking. Kids might play with dolls, blocks, or curl up next to the fireplace or wood stove with a good book. I have been told that at times neighbors would get together at one another's home for a sort of impromptu party called a kitchen junket or kitchen tunk. We believe these took place summer or winter but I would imagine that after being cooped up in the house for days, these winter parties would be especially appealing. The concept of a kitchen tunk is that everyone brings something to eat, an instrument, if you played and after a meal the musicians would play and sing. If the music was especially lively, the kitchen table and chairs would be pushed back and there would be dancing. These parties were an opportunity to share news with neighbors and friends and have an evening of fun and entertainment.

These are just some winter activities that people engaged in. If anyone has photos of winter activities or the ski tows behind the school that they would be willing to share please contact the Historical Society.

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Are you doing some local research? Give us a call or drop a line, perhaps we can help!

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