Jean Luce, First Lady of Maine Skiing

By Leigh Breidenbach

“...For the next few years [the] main proponent [of freestyle] was to be someone completely unaware of the large part she was to play” - Morten Lund

Let’s be clear right from the start, Jean Luce will most likely disagree with the title of this piece; however if you read Dave Irons brief but spectacular 2004 Hall of Fame bio on Jean’s contributions to skiing and competitive skiing in particular, the title of “First Lady of Maine Skiing” is spot on. Jean has officiated at every level of ski racing: World Cup, World Championship, and Olympic. In 1969, she wrote the Eastern Freestyle Rule Book, which would became the first official USSA Freestyle Rule Book. Jean’s willingness to say yes to a challenge is well know in the racing world and at Sugarloaf in particular.

In the fall of 1968, Jean and her husband Norton, members of the Sugarloaf Ski Club received a phone call from Roger Peabody, executive director of the United States Eastern Amateur Ski Association, asking if the Ski Club and Sugarloaf Ski resort would be interested in hosting a World Cup race. At the time the only U.S. area east of the Rockies that had been a World Cup host was Cannon Mountain in New Hampshire. Jean and Roger then contacted Sugarloaf’s general manager, John Christie whose answer was an enthusiastic “yes.” With a World Cup race scheduled for March of 1969 at Waterville Valley in New Hampshire, Jean and Norton decided to take a trip and get a good look at the challenges facing the Sugarloaf Ski Club. The race was officially named the Tall Timber Classic as a tribute to the logging traditions of the Carrabassett Valley. With plans for a World Cup now in progress, 1969 must have been a rather busy time for Jean.
Maine Skiing Heritage Society

The mission of the Ski Museum of Maine (SMOM) is to collect, preserve and celebrate the history and heritage of Maine skiing. SMOM was founded in 1995 by a small group of friends from the Sugarloaf Ski Club. Within a decade the museum became a nonprofit corporation and obtained a grant to begin accessioning an initial collection of artifacts and documents. In 2006 the Board of Directors hired the museum’s first Executive Director and rented an exhibit space in downtown Farmington. In 2009 the museum moved to its current location in Kingfield, above the Sugarloaf Outlet Store.

You can help to preserve Maine’s skiing history and heritage beyond your lifetime by becoming a member of the Maine Skiing Heritage Society and including a financial bequest to the museum in your estate plan.

For more information contact
Ski Museum of Maine
P.O. Box 369, Kingfield, Maine, 04947
207-265-2023
e-mail: info@skimuseumofmaine.org

From Jockey Cap to Jordan Bowl
Oxford County Historic Ski Sites

The inaugural exhibit in the “Western Mountains Gallery” traces the roots of Alpine and Nordic skiing and ski manufacturing at sites located within or near the borders of Oxford County. Through images, artifacts, and vintage film, the new exhibit presents the fascinating story of early skiing in the famed highlands of western Maine.

Western Mountains Gallery
New SMOM Permanent Satellite Exhibit Space
Robinson House, 10 Broad Street
Museums of Bethel Historical Society
May 29th through October 19, 2018
For more information call 800 – 824 – 2910
Or visit www.bethelhistorical.org
Last month was officially Women’s History Month. In 1987 Congress designated March as Women’s History Month. In 2016 The Ski Museum collaborated with the Bethel Historical Society’s annual Women’s History Lecture to present “The Sisters of Skade, Women in Maine Skiing from 1870-2016”. The program, originally developed by historian and journalist Scott Andrews, featured a Power Point presentation and a panel discussion with influential women representing Maine’s ski industry and ski competition. In 2017, ski museum board member, Leigh Breidenbach, updated the Sisters of Skade for a presentation at the Carrabassett Valley Public Library.

The Sisters of Skade features many women in the Maine Ski Hall of Fame. Seventeen “sisters” have been inducted into the Maine Hall of Fame. Competitors include Alpine Olympians Julie Parisien, Anna Parisien-Levins and Kirsten Clark-Rickenbach; US Team member, Gail Blackburn; Nordic Olympians, Leslie Bancroft and Nancy Ingersoll Fiddler; Freestyle Champions, Joan McWilliams Dolan and Karen Hunter Korn; Nikki Pilavakis-Davoren, Snowboard Cross World Champion and US Disabled Ski Team medalists Sara Billmeier and Luba Lowery. Natalie Terry received the honor after 42 years of teaching skiing and named one of the PSIA’s top 100 instructors. Jill Sickels Matlock, an extreme skiing champion, was named one of Ski Magazine’s top 100 ski instructors. Carla Marcus founded Maine’s pioneering WinterKids Program. Megan Roberts was the first female General Manager at Titcomb Mountain and Executive Director of the Ski Museum. Mary Kendall, mother of eight children, four of whom went on to be national ski champions, created the children’s instructional program for the Auburn Rec Department. Jean Luce, the first female inductee in the Maine Ski Hall of Fame, has been a race organizer and official at every level of competition. She wrote the first Freestyle Competition Rule Book and was a founding mother of the Carrabassett Valley Academy. For more information on our Hall of Fame women, please go to our website: www.skimuseumofmaine.org and click on Hall of Fame. (See the sidebar on page 11 for the induction class year).

The Class of 2018 Maine Ski Hall of Fame Inductees include three women, Anne Dowling and Karen Colburn, champion freestyle skiers and Kristina Sabasteanski, Olympic biathlete.

If you are like me, I’m sure that your mom belongs in your personal Ski Hall of Fame. She was there to make sure you had all the proper equipment, warm clothes and warm meals. Maybe she even taught you to ski or occasionally wrote you a “get-out-of-school-free” note explaining to your teacher why you missed school on those rare powder days.
With this winter’s foul weather – be it wind or rain – the museum has had some very interesting guests. A young couple, first timers up at Sugarloaf took a day off the slopes to come visit. As it turned out, he was in the Army, and is in the current “Mountain Division”. They watched our video – Fire on the Mountain, and he was overwhelmed by the conditions those men endured. A family from Gardner with their 4 daughters that only spoke Russian, spent their time in the children’s corner ogling the ski toys in our collection. It is always a pleasure to share the museum and to hear the stories and memories from guests.

Thank you to all that have renewed your membership. Your membership donations help us as we plan for the future of the museum. Currently, the exhibit at the Bethel Historical Society is being catalogued as it will be moving to Camden in the fall. This exhibit will be dedicated to John Christie, and located in the Camden Library. We are now planning the next exhibit that we will show in Bethel.

This year we have updated our membership levels. All our membership levels receive a 10% discount at our museum store, and our quarterly newsletter. Membership levels above Individual will receive a one year digital subscription to ISHA’s (International Skiing History Association) colorful bimonthly journal Skiing History. ISHA is a community of skiers and dedicated volunteers that are devoted to the sport of skiing and its legacy.

Blue Hill Consolidated School 8th Grade Class Trip

In January, I received an email from Kat Hudson, a teacher from the Blue Hill Consolidated School district asking about the possibility of an 8th grade class trip visit to the museum. We planned for a visit and tour of the museum, and on the morning of February 7th. Board member Dave Stonebraker and I met the group of 30 students and chaperones who were excited about their first impressions of the new exhibits. Dave and I shared ideas about the history and evolution of skiing from the very early skis to the wooden skis manufactured in Maine. We offered them the opportunity to actually handle some of the artifacts in the museum, and they were intrigued by bear trap bindings, climbing skins and grass skis. They particularly enjoyed the ‘Children’s Corner’ and the 10th Mountain mannequin. The students were very engaged and asked many questions. Although they were anxious to get to the mountain prior to the snowstorm that day, they showed great enthusiasm for learning about skiing on the first leg of their class trip.
Tip Kimball of Cumberland Center won the Inaugural Ski Museum Legends of Maine GS Race for men and women ages 50 and over held at Sunday River on March 6th. Kimball, the youngest in the field at age 58 clocked a time of 36.66 seconds. First place in the Women’s Age 50-59 went to Jill Gray of Farmington. The second place, Laurie Gilbert of Greenwood. Winners in the Men’s 60-69 division were Michael Becker of Winthrop (1st); Mike Ham of Bowdoin (2nd); and Greg Sweetser of Cumberland (3rd). The gold medal in the women’s age 60+ division went to Leigh Breidenbach of Turner; silver to Beth Hodgkins of Newry, and bronze to Wende Gray of Bethel. Paul Rogers of Camden won first place in the Men 70+ division followed by Tom LaHaise of Springfield, Ohio and Bill Hayes of Gloucester, MA. Bill was the oldest racer at age 82. Ginny Bousum of Kingfield was the gold medal winner in the women’s 70+ division.

Thanks to the volunteer staff that helped make the first Legends Race a success: Greg Towle for setting a great course, Kevin Rosenberg - starter, Scott Hendrick, Tim Hutchisen and Jim Bell – course maintenance, Russ Murley – announcer, Dave Irons – photographer, David Eden – assistant starter and photographer, Cheri Thurston and Eileen Whynot – racer registration, Bill Orr for suggesting a 50+ race and special thanks to our board president, Wende Grey for creating, organizing and promoting the Legends Race. Plans for the 2019 Legends Race have already begun.
Among the items displayed in the Ski Museum’s new exhibit are several ‘classic’ ski bindings which document the evolution of methods to fix the boot to the ski for touring, climbing and modern downhill sport. For decades, one nearly universal model was the Dovre Kabel, a Norwegian binding, originally designed for jumping and touring but used widely in the 1930’s and 1940’s for downhill skiing.

The foundation of the Dovre was the metal plate and adjustable wings that could be positioned to hold the toe of the boot firmly. A cable and spring secured the heel; but the key to the binding was the clamp at the toe which could add additional diagonal pressure downward and forward, pulling the boot securely into the toe-irons. The spring cable in the toe clamp could be moved easily to allow the skier to adjust the tension on the cable, thereby allowing less or more lift to the heel as the situation required - more lift for the flexibility of climbing or leaning into the jump; less lift to pull the heel down to more firmly to control the ski for downhill running.

Charles Proctor’s 1936 book, Skiing, mentions a third type of spring which adapted a touring binding for downhill running by a spring clipped “six or eight inches behind the heel, while the other end is fastened to the ankle with straps.” Such a spring might have helped somewhat, but the adjustable tension and firm hold down of the Dovre or “Kandahar” binding became the norm. But, clearly, there was virtually no releasing factor to this binding, hence the familiar and descriptive name, “The Bear Trap Binding.”
Equipped for Spring Skiing Tuckerman’s Ravine, 1940

Hebron Academy skiers at Tuckerman’s Ravine equipped with the ‘beartrap’ bindings of the day, and three in the group also sport the ‘Amstutz’ spring which attached to the ankle and the rear of their skis. (photograph, courtesy Herbron Academy)
In 1959, George Ouellette introduced the first television program in the country devoted exclusively to skiing. “Ski Trails” was a half hour program than ran for 18 weeks each winter on WMTW TV for 11 seasons. Ouellette produced and hosted other local programs including, “Let’s Play Golf” and “The Fun Afloat Show.” For 30 minutes a day he was also Chief Sparks, presenting cartoons, games, interviews, special guests and other safety tips on the show “Engine House 8.” “Ski Trails” included footage of major ski races in the Northeast, interviews with local, national, and international skiers and introduced viewers to the latest in ski equipment and apparel. John Thurston fondly recalls as a budding Sunday River skier in the 60’s rushing to the television set on Thursday nights to watch “Ski Trails,” and follow George on ski tours through out New England, the U.S and Europe. (For more on George Ouellette go to www.skimuseumofmaine.org and click on Hall of Fame, class of 2006) (Ad from Skier, Jan 1964)
The original weekly weather reports began as a means of getting around the Appalachian Mountain Club’s rule prohibiting Sunday ski trips. Frank Head, an AMC member from Bangor, Maine organized the Sunday ski trips while another group of AMC members formed a committee to collect snow reports from around New England. A mimeographed postcard was sent out every Thursday with current weather conditions. The weather reporters grew every winter and by the mid 1930’s the mimeographed postcard became The Ski Bulletin; it’s various successors would became the nationally recognized, Eastern Ski Bulletin and Skier (Weather Map, Skier 1950)

1966: Frank Head skier since 1911 refuses to wear stretch pants

“(Francis ) Frank Head, a skier since 1911, the early rotation days when nobody worried about keeping his feet together, last winter at 68 started worrying ... and took lessons from his daughter ... ‘I’ve skied all these years with my feet from three to six inches apart. Now I’m gong to learn to ski parallel,’ he said. ... Frank is willing to learn modern ski methods, but refuses to buy stretch pants. ‘I can’t see spending 50 percent more for personal beauty.’” Skier, February, 1966 (To read the entire article “Old-Timer On Skis,” go to our website www.skimuseumofmaine.org, click on our newest feature, The Rest of The Story.)

1974: Budweiser puts up $10,000 prize money for Women’s Freestyle

“This year, the women showed tremendous improvement-so much so that at least one person felt their talents were ready to be organized into competitions of their own. An ambitious Canadian, Cindy Scott, teamed up with Debbie Mead (an outstanding aerialist) to persuade Budweiser to put up $10,000 prize money for a women-only event at Cooper Mountain, Colo. There were no aerials. ... Women’s freestyle is on its way; next year, it could be as financially rewarding as the men’s.” Skiing, September 1974 (Debbie Mead Howe, now resides in Waterford, Maine with her husband, John Howe (inventor of the Claw ski.) According to John, Debbie is the real skiing story in their household. Look for more on Debbie in the newly updated Sisters of Skade, The Women of Maine Skiing coming in Fall 2018.)
Left to Right: Karen Colburn (Bangor, ME.), Vandy Ellis (Dover, N.H.), Margaret Oerrish (Dover, N.H.), Mark Greenquist (Brewer, ME.)

1972 Squaw Mountain Jr. Masters Team

During each of the four competitions for the 1972 season, the Squaw Mtn. Jr’s won the team demonstration competition. Team demonstrations were held at the end of each meet to judge “overall quality and precision.” Karen Colburn won the first ever USSA Women’s National Amateur Freestyle Championship at Killington in 1975. Karen will be inducted into the Maine Ski Hall of Fame, Class of 2018, October 27th at Sunday River.
Maine Ski Hall of Fame
Women’s Honor Roll

U.S. Alpine Ski Team and Olympic Team
Julie Parisien (2008)
Kirsten Clark-Rickenbach (2010)
Anna Parisien Levins (2014)

U.S. Alpine Ski Team and World Cup
Gail Blackburn (2013)

U.S. Nordic Ski Team, Olympic
Nordic World Championship Teams
Leslie Bancroft (2008)
Nancy Ingersoll Fiddler (2016)

U.S. Freestyle Team
Karen Hunter Korn (2017)

U.S. National Freestyle Championship
Joan McWilliams Dolan (2010)

ISF Snowboard World Championship
Nikki Pilavakis-Davoren (2014)

US Disabled Paralympic Team
Sara Billmeier (2009)
Luba Lowery (2015)

Extreme skiing champion
Jill Sickels Matlock (2015)

Winter Kids, Founder
Carla Marcus (2011)

General Manager Titcomb
Megan Roberts (2015)

Sugarloaf Ski School (40+ years)
Natalie Terry (2012)

Auburn Recreation Children’s
Program Founder
Mary Kendall (2005)

Freestyle Competition Rules, Author
Jean Luce (2004)
4th Annual Skee Spree
April 21, 2018
Sunday River, Maine

April 21, 2018
Barker Mountain
Base Lodge
10 am to 2 pm
Ski Memorabilia
Display &
Silent Auction

www.skimuseumofmaine.org
(207) 265-2023
Various versions of the “It’s Spring in Maine” ad ran in several national and local publications throughout the 1960’s. The mountains featured in the ad would change depending on their marketing budget that particular year.
between her duties as Chairman of United States Eastern Amateur Ski Association (USEASA), and teaching skiing at Sugarloaf. Which begs the question what possessed her to write the Eastern Freestyle Rule Book that same year.

Morten Lund in his three part series, “The roots of an Olympic sport: freestyle,” suggests, the Luce children made their mother do it, “...Luce came home one day the winter of 1966 to find her kids, six and eight had something going on in the back of the house which [looked] a bit scary. What the Luce kids were doing were spread-eagle jumps — going off a sizable kicker they had shored up with boards from their tree house; Luce thought to herself, ‘oh, oh, we need safety rules’” (Skiing Heritage March 1998.) During the summer of 1969 Jean took over the chairmanship of USEASA, from Peter Pinkham who had first organized “style” contests for kids in New Hampshire, called the Ski Masters. Jean’s experience with her own back yard safety rules lead to proposal for additional rules to the Ski Masters competitions to make skiing bumps and jumping safer. She then went on to lobby USEASA to form a Jr. Masters Committee and proposed a first draft of new rules she had written using the U.S. Figure Skating International Rulebook and the FIS Ski Jumping Rulebook.

Thanks to Jean’s careful preservation of original documents from USEASA Jr. Masters Committee work including proposed rules drafts, judging specifications, letters and notes, the SMOM is fortunate to have a very complete picture of New England’s significant contributes to freestyle. One document in our collection is a letter sent by Jean to the editor of Ski Magazine in March of 1997. In February of that year Peter Pinkham had written the editor to clarify misinformation in an earlier article “Six Decades of SKI,” which had stated the first organized freestyle competition had been held at Waterville Valley, N.H. in 1971. Jean’s letter takes the editor to task a bit, “Your response to him [Peter Pinkham] should have had more clarification of that event at Waterville Valley. It was a ‘pro’ event, national in scope, which utilized the rules the USEASA committee had adopted in the Fall of 1969. Several Eastern states had held events in 1969-70 using these rules, as well as the winter of 1970-71 prior to the Waterville Valley event. It was the ‘pro’ event that attracted media attention.” The second paragraph begins with, “For your information and reference in the future,...” and the last paragraph ends with, “Hopefully this information can help make your articles and responses more complete about Freestyle skiing’s early history. — Most sincerely, Jean Luce.”

In the two paragraphs between “For your information,” and “Most sincerely, Jean Luce” is a simple, clear and concise summary of early organized freestyle skiing. And yes, Jean your letter to the editor and all the materials you so carefully accessioned for the SMOM has been key in preserving the history, the heritage and the stories of early freestyle.
Memberships are an important part of our ability to sustain the Ski Museum. Please support generously. Please either go to our website at www.skimuseumofmaine.org or use the application below and send to: Ski Museum of Maine, P.O. Box 359, Kingfield, ME 04947

Name: __________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________

City: ____________________________________________

State: ___ Zip: _________________________________

Phone: _________________________________________

Email: __________________________________________

Would you like to become a Ski Museum Volunteer? Let us know how you would like to help:

☐ at events
☐ be a Saturday host at the museum
☐ with museum projects/exhibits
☐ with data entry and/or cataloging
☐ clean museum pieces
☐ other ________________________________

Please check membership level:

☐ Individual $25
☐ Family $50
☐ Supporting $100 + Lapel Pin
☐ Sustaining $250 + SMOM Mug
☐ Lifetime $1000 + SMOM black logo fleece
☐ Business Partner $100 includes listings on website and newsletter
☐ Additional Donation:
$ ___________

Mission Statement

“To celebrate and preserve the history and heritage of Maine skiing.”
Circa 1930 Rumford, Maine Ski Runner – From the Sisters of Skade, The Women of Maine Skiing Collection