

Museum Notes

By Carol Krogan

For the week of January 8th, 2023

Winter in Vernon County provides lots of outdoor activities. One event that has taken place for almost one hundred years is the Westby Ski Jump. There is a strong Norwegian heritage in the town of Christiana where Westby is located and skiing was a natural part of their lives. Some of those Norwegians travelled to Chippewa Falls in 1922 to see a ski jumping tournament. This brought about an idea. Why not build a slide and host an annual ski jumping tournament in Westby? So, that same year, the first ski club was formed by Carl Gronland, Oscar Villand, Henry Nerison, Nordahl Nelson and August Gorder. The first slide was built on the Martin Holte farm, 3 miles east of Westby on County Road P. Work on the slide began at the beginning of January, 1923 and the first tournament was held on February 8, 1923. 2,000 spectators watched Lars Haugen of Steamboat Springs, CO win the contest with a jump of 110 feet. Proceeds from the tournament paid all the club's debts and expenses. In 1925, the club's name became official – the Snowflake Ski Club.

The first three tournaments were held at the above location. In 1926, a 72-foot slide was built east of County P, near the present ski hill. Due to the depression, the ski club disbanded after the 1930 tournament. In 1939, area businessmen and farmers revived the tournament, held at Seas Branch that year. In 1940, a new slide, call the Anderson hill, was erected in section 15. Howard Johnson resurrected the Snowflake Ski Club in 1946 with the first meet held at Seas Branch. Meets were held at Seas Branch and on the Anderson Hill until 1961 when a new hill was built on the present site. At the tournament that year, 18,000 people attended and governor Gaylord Nelson arrived by helicopter to crown Linda Heal of Readstown, Snowflake Queen. The first Snowflake Queen was Toni (Lunde) Early, crowned in 1947, who was also Miss Wisconsin in 1946.

The current hill, at 387' high, is the 7th longest in North America, has been used for training by the United States Olympic team and has hosted National Ski Championships in 1968, 1990 and 1993. The hill is considered one of the best in the United States. This is one of the two remaining all-volunteer ski jumping clubs in the Northern hemisphere.

In 1989, a nine-hole golf course was developed on the site of the 90-meter jump and is known as Snowflake Ski and Golf. There is also a Club House on the property offering daily food specials.

This year's tournament will be held Friday evening, February 3rd and Saturday, February 4th.

Please join us for our monthly genealogy class on Thursday, February 10. Moderator Karen Sherry will present the program "Fun Special Features of Family Search". This free website, familysearch.com, is a treasure trove of documents and records to support your genealogy research and Karen will show you how to navigate it more easily. As always, the class is free to members. There is a \$5.00 one-time fee but we encourage you to become a member. Members receive a quarterly newsletter and voting privileges. The class begins at 10:00 a.m. in our handicapped accessible meeting room. Call 608-637-7396 with any questions. Hope to see you there!