



Historic Gloucester

Newsletter of the

**GLOUCESTER
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

www.gloucesterhistory.com

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Rockcliffe Ski Jump (likely from 1915)

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President's Report

By Glenn Clark

In this winter edition of Historic Gloucester, we appropriately tell the story of a long disappeared winter sports facility that was once in Gloucester Township, located in one of the first City of Ottawa parks and now part of the federal parkway network. This is the story of Suicide Hill and the Rockcliffe Ski Jump. One has to ask whether there is any historic evidence at the site and a field trip to the location is in order. I will report back with photographs in a future edition of this newsletter.

2018 will end our centennial remembrance of World War I with a final post card, the fifth in the series. We still have copies available of all but the first post card that can be picked up at any public event that the GHS participates at or at our Leitrim office. All the post cards include someone who originated in Gloucester.

We have also recently been contacted by Jennifer Halsall, a history student at Carleton University and a NCC employee. She is conducting an oral history project titled "Voices of the Greenbelt", which will record the memories of those impacted by the Greenbelt expropriations. If you or your neighbours were affected by the expropriations, we encourage you to participate so that your experiences are recorded and not forgotten. You may reach Jennifer at 1-905-808-3554 or by e-mail at jchalsall@gmail.com. An on-line exhibition of these stories will be launched in April 2018. The Gloucester Historical Society will benefit by receiving a copy of the end product for permanent storage and availability.

I wish all of you a wonderful Christmas season, and happiness and good health in 2018.

THE GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
HISTORY ROOM WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
BY APPOINTMENT ONLY DURING THE WINTER MONTHS

LOCATION: 4550B BANK STREET (AT LEITRIM ROAD)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact

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Historic Gloucester is published by The Gloucester Historical Society. It is intended as a Newsletter to members of the Society to provide interesting articles on Gloucester's past and to keep them informed of new acquisitions by the Museum, publications available, upcoming events and other items of general interest. Comments and suggestions regarding the Newsletter are always welcome.



Gloucester Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the City of Ottawa.

Getting Started on Searching Your Ancestry - A Summary

By Joan Scott

Michael More, a Program Coordinator with the Ontario Genealogy Society, was the guest speaker at our event held at the Gloucester Senior Adults Centre on November 5, 2017. His advice was enthusiastically received by those present and there were frequent comments of "I wish I had known that before."

He said you should always work backwards from yourself. Start by getting what information you can on your parents and their parents. Siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles may be able to contribute to the family story. Record everything – hobbies, religions, occupations, schools, military service, jobs, trophies, letters, documents, scrapbooks, clippings, where they lived, stories about them. Check all references and record all sources; this is very important.

Sources of data are everywhere. Birth, marriage and death records are available from church archives and some are available on line. Health records, tax assessments and township records are useful. The Canadian Expeditionary Force and other military papers are available from the Library and Archives Canada on line. Volunteers at the City Archives will assist you in searching their files. The Morman's website is a wealth of information as are many other family search websites such as ancestry.ca. A great place to do research is Canada Library and Archives on Wellington Street as well as the Ottawa Room at the main library on Metcalfe Street. The latest census available is for 1921 and the earliest is for 1851 with parts of earlier ones sometimes available.

Michael recommends that you talk to other groups with genealogical interests. All information should be recorded in full, not just bits and pieces. He also emphasized that sources should be cited. It is important to know whether information sources are original or derivative, primary or secondary. It is also important to leave tracks for other researchers who may be doing similar searches. RFPO is a society for Franco-Ontarians and is located on St. Laurent Boulevard, Ottawa. There is also a Society of Genealogy in Quebec located in Hull Quebec, and Ontario has The Ontario Name Index (TONI).

Most people like to computerize their valuable records and selecting a software program to record your findings is a matter of personal preference. For this purpose there are many programs available. If you wish to move to a new genealogy program or to update, GEDCOM is the standard for transferring information from one program to another.

Remember when doing your research to check with local historical societies. They have a wealth of information available that is often not on the Internet and sometimes their members can be of help as well. Such

societies also collect family histories and have many files and books on individuals or specific locations. Michael did mention that he would be happy to answer any inquiries you might have on genealogical matters.

Blood on the Rapids - A Summary

By Joan Scott

On October 15, 2017, Terence Currie gave a presentation at the Gloucester South Seniors Centre entitled "*Blood on the Rapids: The Violent History of the Ottawa River in the Early Days.*" This was a very engaging and enlightening tale stretching back to the time the first indigenous populations made Canada their home.

It was said that the aboriginal people were in the Ottawa Valley at least 8000 years before the Europeans arrived. The three major aboriginal nations in this part of Ontario were the Algonquins, the Hurons and the Iroquois. The Algonquin nation had many tribes including the Mississauga, Ojibwe, Cree, Abenaki, Micmac, Malécite, Montagnais, and Blackfoot. While Algonquian was the root language, many tribes spoke different dialects.

Samuel de Champlain first made contact with natives in 1603 and earned their trust and assistance in the fur trade. In 1610 Algonquin guides accompanied Etienne Brule on his voyages in the interior of Canada.

Terry outlined where each of the Indian nations were headquartered, where they had come from (many from the United States) and why some of them took up residence where they did. For instance, while most Indian villages were in close proximity to the rivers, the Algonquins often went to live more inland or along the tributaries of the larger rivers, particularly the Ottawa River. As a result of this, they were attacked less often by other tribes. The Algonquins were able to travel further than other tribes and to make war on their enemies who lived along the major rivers further south. This was due to some extent to the fact that the Algonquins had birch bark canoes. These canoes were much lighter than the dugouts used by most tribes, were easier to portage and swifter than their enemies' heavier crafts. Birch bark was often used to cover their teepees as well. Paper birch trees do not grow in more southern forests and consequently birch bark canoes were a valuable commodity.

As semi-nomadic people, there was great rivalry among the various tribes and Indian Nations and wars were very common occurrences. The Iroquois who were aligned with the British were hostile to the Hurons and Algonquins who were friendly with the French. For a time the Hurons and Algonquins were allies but as European diseases like smallpox decimated the Hurons, they were eventually attacked by the Iroquois and almost completely wiped out.

Terry told many fascinating stories of the violent actions of the various tribes and the bloody conflicts which indeed did leave "Blood on the Rapids."

Would you Ski Down Suicide Hill?

By Glenn Clark

Hidden amongst the forest along the Rockcliffe Driveway between the traffic circle and the Rockcliffe Pavilion and just east of Governor Bay was once one of Ottawa's most famous sports venues that could attract thousands of paying spectators. That was the popularity of ski jumping in the early twentieth century.

On February 13, 1919, the Ottawa Journal explained: *"Ski jumping is looked upon by many as some sort of acrobatic performance, a side-line to skiing, or a break-neck stunt, wholly unnecessary. Not so, however, experts all agree in saying that the ability to take a fair jump on skis is a necessary accomplishment, and that no man can hope to become really proficient in cross country skiing until he has mastered the art of jumping. A skier who has never practiced jumping can never hope to have the skill and the confidence that are required in mountaineering."*

It further added: *"It is a mistake also to think that jumping is a dangerous sport. With a well-built take off and a good slope kept well covered with loose snow there is perhaps no safer pastime than ski jumping, when performed gradually. Any accidents that may have happened were due to the neglect of one or the other of these precautions."*

Skiing at Rockcliffe has a rich history. Lord Frederick Hamilton first demonstrated skiing in Canada at Rideau Hall in 1887 with his Russian made skis. By the turn of the twentieth century, skiing had gained popularity and Rockcliffe was an ideal location with its variety of hills and slopes and convenient streetcar access.

But another important event jump-started the modern popularity of skiing in the Ottawa area and started a ski jumping craze. This occurred on April 23, 1905 when Norwegian immigrant Sigurd Lockeberg (July 16, 1886 – April 11, 1971) landed at Saint John, New Brunswick. He then accompanied a shipmate to Ottawa to begin a new life. Within a few years, Sigurd had gained sufficient success that he returned to Norway to bring his brother Hans to Ottawa. [Ottawa Journal, July 19, 1968 p.15]

In addition to business success, Sigurd had an interest in ski jumping and by 1910, he, Joe Morin,

Frank Bedard and a few others gathered at the Carnegie Library to found the Ottawa Ski Club. [Ottawa Journal, February 5, 1910 p.5] In the early days, skiing mainly covered cross-country and jumping traditions. Already, ski trails were being laid out and a small ski jump made of logs was constructed at what later became known as 'Suicide Hill' in Rockcliffe Park. [Ottawa Journal, February 9, 1939 p. 19]

Ski jumping almost immediately became popular. A ski jumping exhibition took place on March 2, 1912. [Ottawa Journal, March 4, 1912 p.4] and over 5,000 spectators witnessed the city's first competition one week later. The longest jump was 73 feet. [Ottawa Journal, March 11, 1912 p.4] By the next year, plans were being drawn up to build a bigger and better ski jump and in 1914, it was decided to increase the take off track by 15 feet in hope that local skiers could break the Canadian record. [Ottawa Journal, February 25, 1914 p. 4] The Canadian championships followed and were held at Rockcliffe on February 28th. [Ottawa Journal, February 28, 1914 p.5]

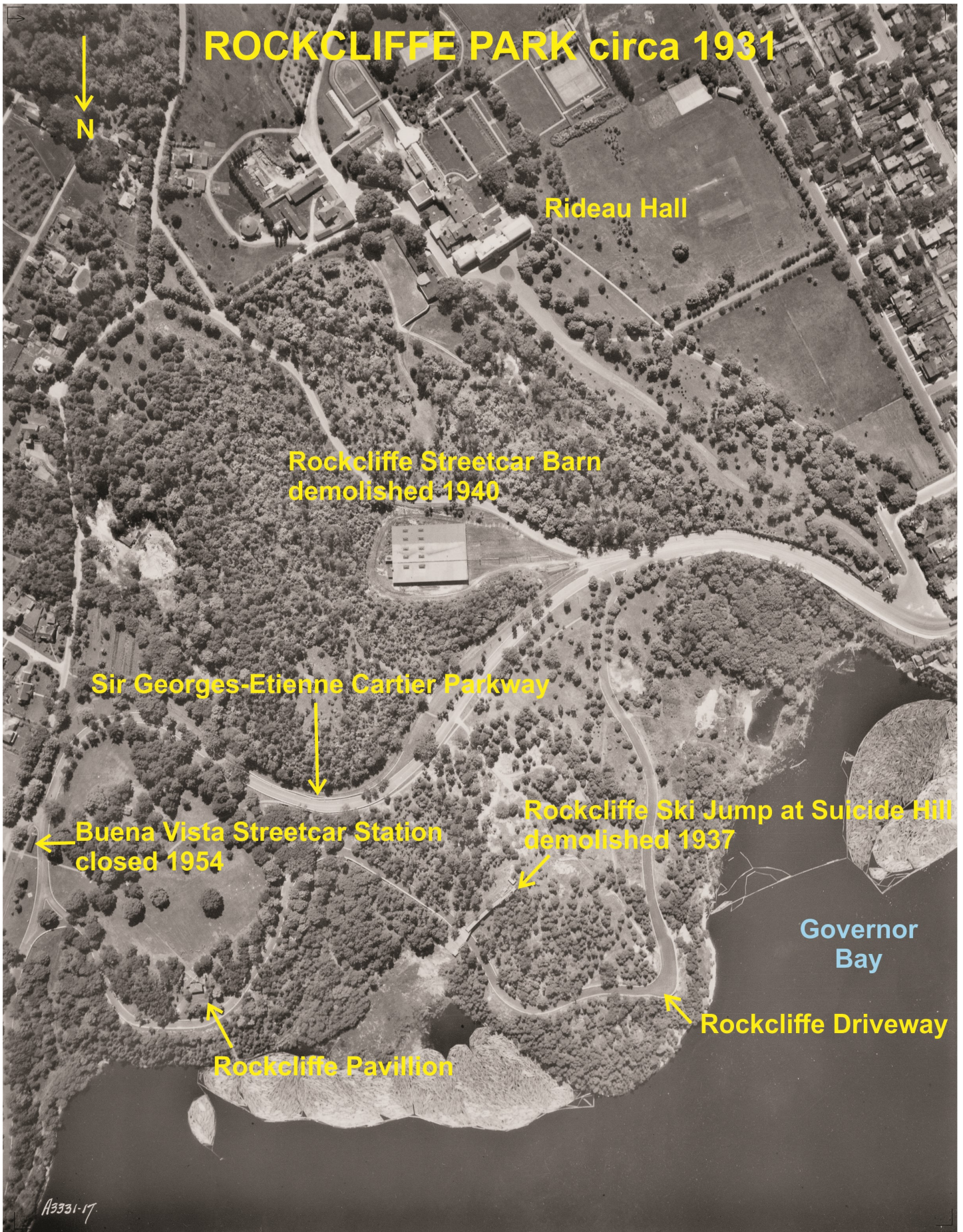
Plans for a new jump came to fruition and opened on January 23, 1915. The new tower was 50 feet over the crest of the surrounding trees. The goal was to give jumpers an opportunity to break the 113 foot Canadian record and possibly by as long as 140 feet. [Ottawa Journal, January 7, 1915 p.5, January 23, 1915 p.6]

On Sunday, January 31, 1915, over 1,500 spectators watched the Ottawa Ski Club championship and raised a substantial sum for the Red Cross and overseas soldiers. [Ottawa Journal, February 1, 1915 p.5].

In a 1939 interview, Frank Bedard recalled: *"And a few months after that (the building of the new jumping tower), I came as close to finding myself inside a jail as I have ever come. It all happened because we tried to help out the Red Cross."*

"We decided to hold a jumping meet and give the proceeds to the Red Cross. It was to take place on a Sunday and was advertised in the papers. Twenty-five cents was the admission."

"A few days before the meet, four gentlemen from Toronto, who said they were representing the Lord's Day Alliance, called on me and said if the meet was held and admission was charged, I would



be arrested. I argued that it was for the Red Cross but didn't get anywhere with them. It was against the law, and if I persisted, I would be punished. More than that, the meet would not be held."

"Well Sunday came and Joe Morin and I took a streetcar to Rockcliffe early in the afternoon armed with tickets and a ballot box for the (ticket) takers. And up front as soon as we got on the street car, we spot the chief of the county police. This was going to be swell."

"When we got off, I spoke to him and he asked me if I knew a fellow named Bedard. I admitted being the party he was looking for and he hauled out a summons or a warrant. He said that if I went ahead with this meet, I was on my way to jail. It was against the law. "

"It didn't do any good to tell him that all the money was for the troops. I had invited the Mounted Rifles, who were stationed at the Exhibition Grounds, and they were ranked all about the place. I pointed them out, gave him a real sob story, but duty was duty."

"I sent Joe Morin for Alex Olsen, the giant ski jumper from Berlin Mills, and amateur champion of America at the time. I told him to bring Sigurd Lockeberg, too, and I tipped him off that when they shook hands with the chief they were to give him everything they had."

"Well, Olsen came up and the chief let a yell out at him and when they were introduced he got his hand back. And when Sigurd stuck out his maul of a fist he wouldn't have any part of it."

"But he was still determined that there wasn't going to be any paid admissions, so finally I took him underneath the jump, where we had a shack with our gear stored. Part of it was a lot of rope and I said, 'Chief, I'm sorry, but if you insist on stopping us we'll tie you up and leave you here until the meet is over. I may go to jail afterwards, but first we're going to hold the jumps'."

"He decided that it was seriously meant and he didn't interfere with us anymore. We went on with the meet and we made a substantial sum for the Red Cross. This was a novelty and there were thousands in the crowd. All I ever heard of it after was when Chief Ross called me in and submitted a paper for me to sign. It was an agreement that I wouldn't

hold any more Sunday jumping exhibitions and charge admissions. That was all right with me. I figured that if we decided to stage another, somebody else could put it on." [Ottawa Journal, February 9, 1939 p.19]

The Lord's Day Act was enacted in 1906 and was struck down by a Constitutional challenge in 1985.

The massive 160 foot tower did not last long as it was blown down in a gale on May 10th. The structure that many considered an eyesore had no foundation or footings and was only held in place by guy ropes. The Ottawa Improvement Commission had already considered ordering it to be demolished. The \$2,000 cost paid by the Ottawa Ski Club was an almost complete loss. Due to unfavourable weather conditions, little of the cost was recovered from gate receipts. [Ottawa Journal, May 11, 1915 p.2] With this calamity, the Ottawa Ski Club ceased operations for the duration of the war.

The site of the ski jump was re-used as a toboggan slide, which opened on January 8, 1916. [Ottawa Journal, January 7, 1916 p.2]. The slide maintained by the Ottawa Improvement Commission remained in place until 1919.



Looking Down the Rockcliffe Ski Jump

Very quickly after the end of hostilities, on January 16, 1919, a meeting was held to resume the activities of the Ottawa Ski Club with cross-country competitions to take place in February. [*Ottawa Journal*, January 18, 1919 p.20]. C.E. "Mort" Mortureux was a major propellant for re-establishing the club and despite a \$1,200 debt leftover from the collapse of the previous jumping tower the club quickly repaid what it owed. "Mort" was President until 1946. [*Ottawa Journal*, December 11, 1946 p.16]

On February 15th, a beginner's jumping competition was held on the 'Dome Hill' at Ironsides. [*Ottawa Journal*, February 12, 1919 p.10] Extensive ski trails were also established on the Quebec side in several locations [*Ottawa Journal*, November 19, 1919 p. 17 notes locations].

The post war era also founded a second club, the Cliffside Ski Club, and it was noted that a new ski jump was under construction for an outdoor meeting planned on December 13, 1919, when skiing was to be filmed. [*Ottawa Journal*, December 10, 1919 p. 17] The new ski jump, which included junior, intermediate and senior runs, opened by January 25, 1920. March 6th saw a major competition at the new jump. A second jump was also built at Fairy Lake (now Lac-des-fées in Gatineau Park), which is where the Cliffside Club was based. [*Ottawa Journal*, January 10, 1920 p.24, January 23, 1920 p.14, March 5, 1920 p.18]

By November, the Ottawa Ski Club had acquired land near Fortune Lake in what is now Gatineau Park and began clearing the hill slopes and building a rustic lodge. This was the beginning of the Camp Fortune ski resort and was a superior location compared with Rockcliffe because of the higher hills and elevation, which extended the ski season by as much as a month. According to C.E. Mortureux, the lake was actually named Fortin after the previous owner of the land but had become Fortune because of a mispronunciation. [*Ottawa Journal*, November 23, 1920 p.12, November 30, 1920 p.16, December 11, 1946 p.16]

Each Rockcliffe ski tower never lasted very long and on January 28, 1922, yet another structure was nearing completion. This one rivaled the largest of the earlier structures when Canadian records were broken. This one rose 200 feet above the icy Ottawa River shore. The city championships were scheduled for Saturday, February 25th when the Duke of

Devonshire's Trophy was awarded. [*Ottawa Journal*, January 28, 1922 p.23]

The Ottawa Ski Club had an awkward arrangement for the site of the ski jump. Rockcliffe Park was a City of Ottawa park but was leased to the federal Ottawa Improvement Commission. As a consequence, the commission closed the jump for the 1923 season due to liability concerns. So much for the previously reputed safety of the sport. The Ottawa Ski Club appealed to the city in hope of having a direct lease with the city but instead the city suggested that the club obtain a bond to protect the Commission from liability. [*Ottawa Journal*, January 31, 1923, p.7]

Ski Jumping transferred to the Cliffside Ski Club facility at Fairy Lake for the 1923, 1924 and 1925 seasons before the matter of a new and more permanent Rockcliffe tower received federal attention. Support was growing at the Ottawa Improvement Commission provided that it did not bear the cost of its construction, maintenance and particularly was absolved from liability in the event of accidents or injuries. It was suggested that the Fairy Lake jump be closed and that both the Ottawa and Cliffside clubs share a new Rockcliffe facility. It could make the Ottawa area the premiere training location for young emerging ski jumpers. [*Ottawa Journal*, January 23, 1925 p.2].

At a meeting on January 24th, the Commission received a delegation from several businesses and local associations. Ambitious plans for a world class steel jumping tower were presented that would make Ottawa a major winter tourist destination comparable to St. Moritz, Switzerland. The plan would attract world class competitors and the Rockcliffe location was easily accessible and close to the city centre. [*Ottawa Journal*, January 23, 1925 p.5]

By July, city engineers were staking out the site for the new tower and the Cliffside Ski Club formally pledged its support for the project. [*Ottawa Journal*, July 10, 1925 p.2] Plans for a steel tower were ready on August 1st, and was to be constructed by the Dominion Bridge Company. The cost was expected to be \$12,000, which was to be raised by local ski organizations and led by the Ottawa Ski Club. The proposal including a formal cost estimate was to be presented at the next meeting of the



Suicide Hill (likely around 1910)

Ottawa Improvement Commission. Mayor Balharrie suggested that significant land surrounding the tower be acquired so that the location could become the centre of winter sports for the city. [*Ottawa Journal*, August 1, 1925 p 3]

Concerns were expressed about the steel design as explained by G.E.Roberts in an October 6th letter to the editor: *I cannot conceive of the public growing enthusiastic over a mere iron framework.* Mr. Roberts preferred a concrete design that rivalled the Mount Royal toboggan slide in Montreal [*Ottawa Journal*, October 7, 1925, p.6] Board of Control approved the erection of the tower on December 4th. [*Ottawa Journal*, December 5, 1925 p.14]

In preparation for the Dominion championships to be held in Ottawa in 1926, Board of Control set up a commission on December 8th to move forward immediately with the construction of a temporary tower to be shared by both the Ottawa and Cliffside Ski Clubs. In time and when funds became available, the permanent tower would replace it. [*Ottawa Journal*, December 9, 1925 p.18]

On February 2, 1926, the commission reported that the temporary tower was being altered in order to allow for longer jumps for a competition tak-

ing place on February 6th. The Dominion championships took place on February 27th and 28th. [*Ottawa Journal*, February 2, 1926 p.13 and February 20, 1926 p.15]

The novelty of ski jumping may have already begun to wane. In an article published in the *Ottawa Journal* on February 11, 1926, the Ottawa Ski Club appealed to the public for more support. This was necessary in order to recoup the cost of building the temporary tower. The permanent tower was never built.

Instead, the temporary tower was maintained for a number of years and in 1929 a three run toboggan slide was built near the tower to be ready for New Year's 1930. A winter carnival to take place in early February was proposed to be centred at Rockcliffe with horse racing on the Ottawa River and several other events taking place in the area surrounding the ski jump. [*Ottawa Journal*, December 21, 1929 p.9]. Ski Jumping competitions continued at Rockcliffe through the late 1920s and early 1930s.

By July 1934, the City Commissioner of Works reported the tower unsafe with an insecure foundation, rot had set in, rods were loose and several flooring planks were missing. The tower rocked in the wind. He recommended that the tower be removed and if replaced, it should be a more permanent structure with a proper foundation. [*Ottawa Journal*, July 10, 1934 p.19]

On March 24th 1937, the tower was finally demolished. The Ottawa Ski Club under criticism reported that the cost of maintenance and insurance was no longer sustainable. The ski jumping sport had lost favour with the public. No longer were champions emerging from the local program and the number of spectators had fallen from the thousands in the 1920s to just a few hundred. [*Ottawa Journal*, March 24, 1937 p.19, March 27, 1937 p.29]

The lease for the site had provisions for the Ottawa Ski Club in the event of Dominion or Olympic championships taking place. But it was decided to relinquish it and return control back to the Ottawa Improvement Commission who planned to reforest the slope. The Ottawa Ski Club had turned its attention to its main facility at Camp Fortune. [*Ottawa Journal*, April 23, 1937 p. 3]

The dream of Ottawa becoming a ski jumping mecca seemed to die but not quite. In 1953, a Norwegian engineer and skier, Odd Michaelson designed a more modest steel tower accommodating jumps of up to 80 feet at the same location. The tower was sufficiently portable that it could be erected and disassembled each year in just hours. They would do so for the 1954 and 1955 seasons before this important part of Ottawa Sports History finally and permanently passed into memory. [*Ottawa Journal*, November 12, 1953 p.3, December 22, 1953, p.3, October 13, 1954 p.20]

Even late in life, Sigurd Lockeberg continued to dream of resuscitating the Rockcliffe ski jump. In an interview with Ottawa Journal sports editor Eddie MacCabe on July 16, 1968, Sigurd said *"I want to re-establish the Rockcliffe ski jump (jump), and I was wondering who I should see. Maybe I should see Prime Minister Trudeau, do you think?"* [*Ottawa Journal*, July 19, 1968 p.15]

As explained, liability was a concern almost from the beginning. There were sprains and broken bones from less than perfectly executed jumps but there were other accidents as well. You had to climb up the tower and there were no safety railings.

"But the weirdest happening of all was the day that Hans Lockeberg fell off the Rockcliffe tower. It had snowed during the morning and I had warned the fellows that only two jumpers were to be allowed on the top of the trestle at a time. There was no guard rail to it and the new snow had been packed down and was very slippery."

"I was climbing up the back of the tower and was near the top when I saw three jumpers there together. There was Hans Lockeberg, Ryan, and someone else. Lockeberg had his left ski on and was kneeling down buckling the right one when one of the others touched him and he lost his balance."

"He spilled over the side and twisted, end over end, three or four times, before he struck the ground. He hit on one ski and one foot, spun into a tree and then somersaulted over a pine stump."

"I shot down the chute, met Sigurd at the bottom of the landing hill and said to him, 'Hans has fallen off the tower'."

"We started up and I was so weak I could hardly carry my ski. I hated to think of what we were going to see. Suddenly there was Hans standing at the side of the take-off."

"Sigurd called up to him. 'Are you hurt, Hans?'"

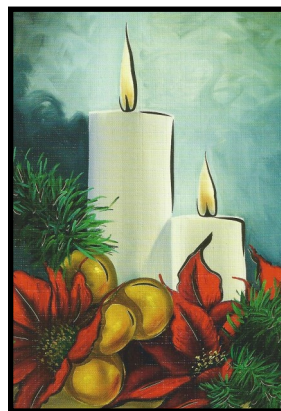
"He spit out a little blood. 'No'. And then after a second, 'I think I will go home, Sigurd' "

"And he walked over, picked up his ski, lifted them on his shoulder and walked off to the street car. Sigurd and the rest of us followed him in a few minutes. We had all we wanted for that afternoon." [*Ottawa Journal*, February 9, 1939 p.19]

So, would you have skied down Suicide Hill?

From a not always steady wooden tower that stood 200 feet above the Ottawa River, that had a slope of up to 30 degrees, that had a take-off that would leave you suspended in air for over 100 feet before crashing back to earth along the shore of the river with thousands of spectators watching and perhaps hoping for a spectacular wipe out.

Would you ski down Suicide Hill?



*Merry
Christmas
and a
Happy
New Year
To All!*



Suicide Hill looking out over the Ottawa River

IF YOU HAVE NOT YET RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP, OR IF YOU WISH TO BECOME A NEW MEMBER, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW AND SEND IT WITH YOUR CHEQUE. (Membership year runs from April 1 to March 31.)

Membership Form—Gloucester Historical Society/Société historique de Gloucester

Membership/Adhésion - \$20.00 for one year..... \$150.00 for life membership.....

NAME:_____Email Address:_____

ADDRESS:_____

CITY:_____ PROV _____ POSTAL CODE _____

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