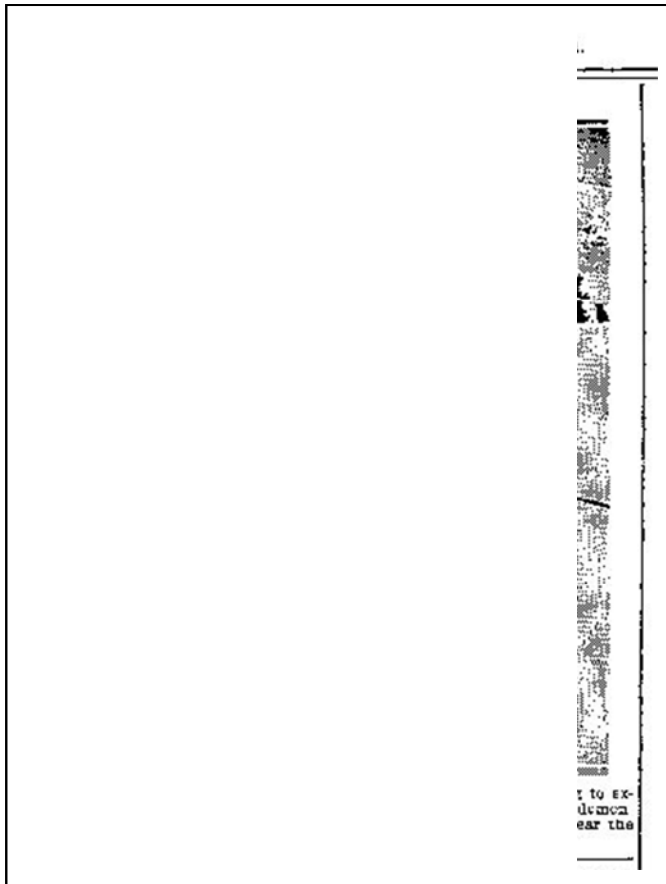


## Sahalie Historical Note #2: Early Skiers with a Connection to Sahalie's Origins

While few records remain from the early days of the Sahalie Ski Club, I've been able to piece together a few interesting tidbits from around the time the club was formed, gleaned from old newspaper accounts and from the great work of Northwest ski historian Lowell Skoog. Our ski club originated as an offshoot of the German gymnastics and social club known as the Seattle Turn Verein. A subset of these gymnasts were interested in skiing and ski jumping, and began forging their way to Snoqualmie Pass in the late 1920s, either by train or by the rough road as far as it was plowed (the auto road was not kept open until the winter of 1931-32). This "Ski Section" of the Turn Verein was able to purchase a chunk of land at the Pass in the early '30s and build a lodge there; they called themselves the Commonwealth Ski Club (named for the Creek that runs through the property, I assume).

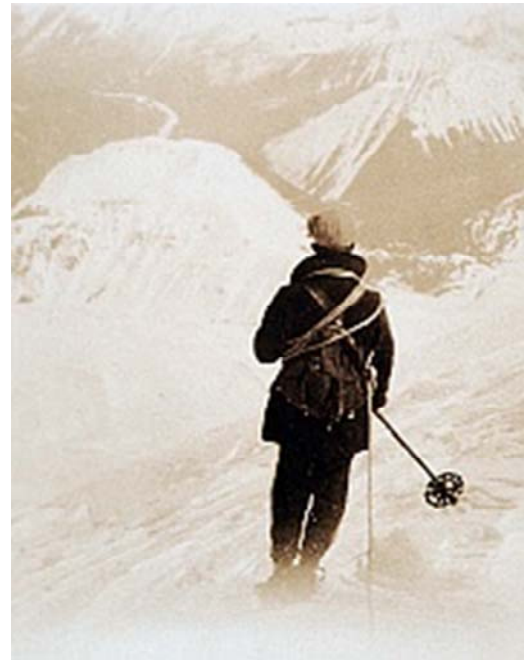
One "pillar of the [Seattle] German community"<sup>1</sup> at that time was a fascinating guy by the name of **Hans Otto Giese**. I can't find any reference that definitively links him to Commonwealth or Sahalie, but he must have been in the thick of this early movement to establish a lodge at the



Pass. Hans Otto was born in Germany and competed in the 1922 German Olympics (precursor to the first full winter Olympics held in Chamonix two years later). He emigrated to the U.S. in 1923, settling in Seattle where he worked at the German consulate and earned his law degree from U.W. in 1932. Lowell Skoog notes that Hans Otto "was regarded by many as the best skier in the Northwest" in the late 1920s.<sup>2</sup> There is a great story about his naturalization hearing, at which "an immigration official named Smith arrogantly suggested that a young German candidate for citizenship adopt a more American-sounding name. To which the young German stubbornly replied, 'Aren't there enough Smiths already?'"<sup>3</sup> He quickly immersed himself in skiing and ski-



Hans Otto Giese (r) with Otto Strizek, “the fathers of ski mountaineering in Washington”; from the Giese family archives, borrowed from Lowell Skoog, 2010c.



Hans Otto Giese on first ski ascent of Mt. Rainier, April 8, 1928; from the Giese family archives, borrowed from Lowell Skoog, 2010a.

mountaineering, including being in the small group that is credited with the first ski ascent of Mt. Rainier in 1928,<sup>4</sup> the first ski ascent of Mt. Adams in 1932<sup>5</sup> and the first ski ascent of Mt. St. Helens in 1933.<sup>6</sup> He was also well regarded as a ski jumper, which was one of the major early ski activities at Snoqualmie Pass. He skied for Seattle Ski Club in many of the early races in the 1930s.

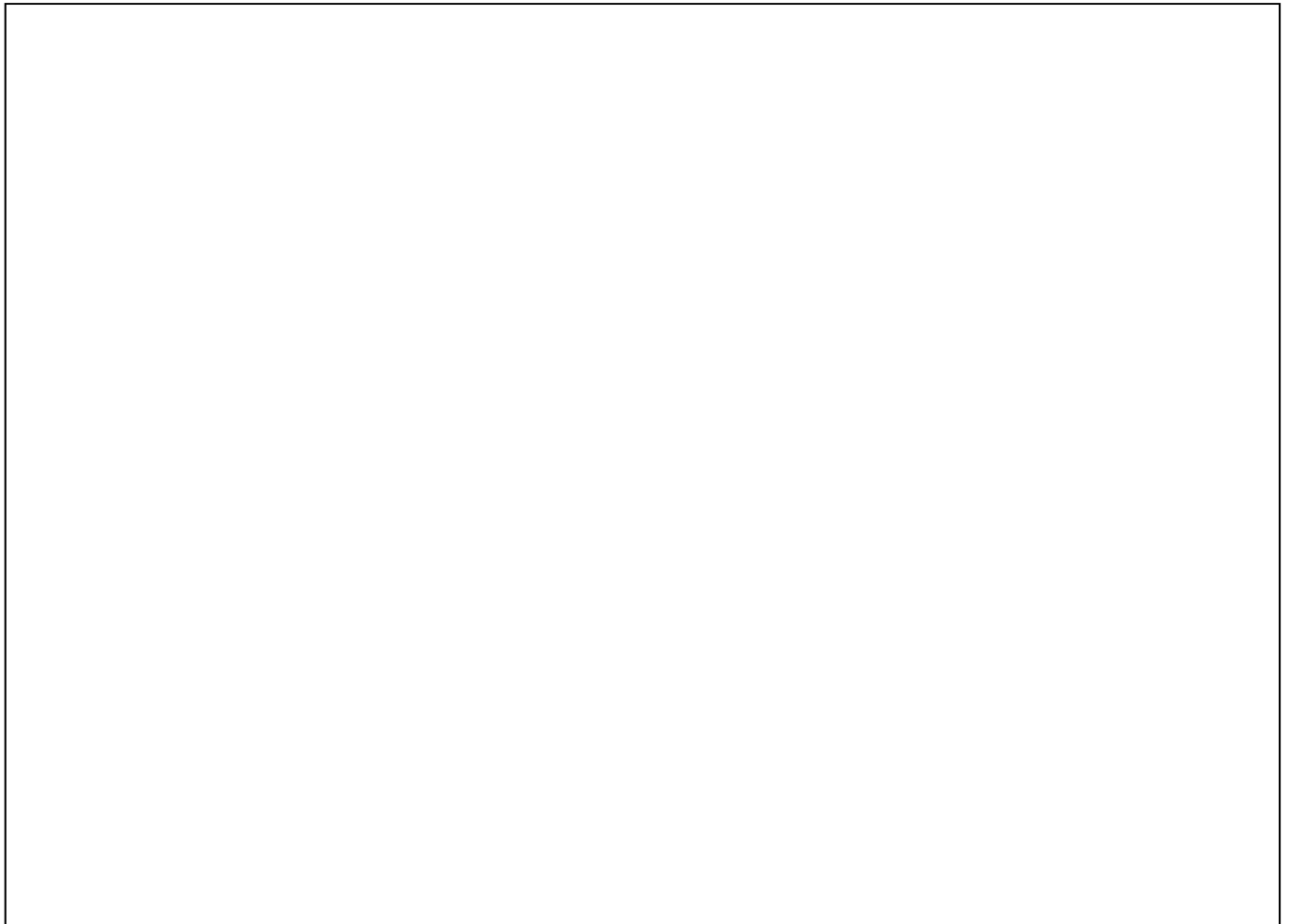
Hans Otto was a founder and chairman of the Seattle Ski Council and, beginning in 1934, organized all-city high school skiing tournaments at Snoqualmie Pass, which continued for ten years. A photo of Giese appeared in the February 2, 1934 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* with a caption, “Ski Booster.”

He was a buddy of Wolf Bauer, famous Mountaineers’ skier/climber, and was a regular participant in the Mountaineers’ “Patrol Race” which ran 18-20 miles from the old Mountaineers lodge on the west side of Snoqualmie Pass to its Meany Lodge near Stampede Pass; the race was held annually from 1930 to 1942. Geise was part of the winning team in the first race run in March, 1930 (see photo).<sup>7</sup> In interviews about these races over the ‘30s, Wolf reminisced about adding rocks to Hans Otto’s pack to slow him down, since Hans Otto “couldn’t take a joke.”<sup>8 9</sup>

In 1934 Hans Otto was one of the core organizers of the first, infamous “Silver Skis” race from Camp Muir to Paradise, a three-mile course with almost a full vertical mile of downhill craziness which I describe in a separate historical note (#11). The first of these races was run in April, 1934; Giese came in sixth.

In 1943, Hans Otto was accused of being a Nazi sympathizer. "A shocked Giese found himself hauled before a government tribunal to determine if he should be denaturalized and deported. Friends rallied to his side. He was stubborn, and he was outspoken, they admitted. But he also was a good citizen who had left Germany back in 1923 to escape just this sort of bureaucratic red tape and foolishness."<sup>10</sup> The U.S. government dropped its case.

Hans Otto was very active in the Corinthian Yacht Club, helping to found it in 1945 and serving as one of its first Commodores. He won the Sir Thomas Lipton Trophy (Pacific Coast Inter-Club sailing competition) in '46, '47 and '48. He was friends with Anchor Jensen, Stan Sayres and others, and helped to develop the Slo-Mo-Shun hydroplanes in the late '40s and early '50s. To this day, the CYC bestows annually the Hans Otto Giese Inspirational Trophy: *“Awarded to an individual who has consistently provided leadership, inspiration, and contributed to the promotion, advancement, and encouragement of amateur sailing.”*<sup>11</sup>



Another early skier with connections to Sahalie was **Don Fraser**. Lowell Skoog notes that Don “skied at Snoqualmie Pass with Seattle, Sahalie and Washington ski clubs.”<sup>12</sup> Don was a close ski buddy with Hans Otto Giese, and their names are linked in many early ski-mountaineering feats in the Cascades. “At a time when most skiers there [the Pacific Northwest] competed in ski jumping and cross country he became a highly polished alpine skier.”<sup>13</sup> Don taught ski lessons for Commonwealth Ski Club members in 1933/’34<sup>14</sup> and participated in Sahalie’s third annual Carnival in 1934. Don won the first Silver Skis race on Mt. Rainier in 1934 (while still an undergraduate student at U.W.), was Pacific Northwest Ski Association champion in the slalom from 1935 to 1938, and won Silver Skis again in 1938. He raced for the U.S. Ski Team at the 1936 Olympics and was named to the U.S. Ski Team again in 1940 (when the Olympics were cancelled because of the war). Don moved to Sun Valley in the late 1930s and worked as SV’s sports director and public relations director.<sup>15</sup> He was referred to by ski historian Nick Howe as “...a protean figure of the old school. He’d prevailed in the epic Mt. Rainier downhill with their infamous geschmozzel starts.... He was named to both the 1936 Olympic Nordic and alpine teams; he made his own skis, poles and boots.”<sup>16</sup> In 1939 he married **Gretchen Kunigk** after meeting her on Mt. Rainier (she had grown up in Tacoma).<sup>17</sup> Gretchen Fraser went on to become the first American Olympic skiing champion, winning gold and silver medals at St. Moritz in 1948. Both Don and Gretchen were inducted into the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame.



Another early name in Snoqualmie Pass skiers was **Otto Sanford**, who is referenced in the February 2, 1934 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* as being affiliated with the Commonwealth Ski Club. He helped to organize the Silver Skis race on Mt. Rainier, and was the head starter for the first race in 1934. He was also among the original group that organized the Washington Ski Club later that year and served as its first president; WSC took on a major role to advance ski racing throughout the Northwest.

One other early skier whose name pops up regularly is **Hans Grage**. He is one of the early Northwest star skiers with a clear connection to the beginnings of Sahalie Ski Club. He started



his own ski-making company in Seattle in 1931 (see photo).<sup>18</sup> He is credited as part of the group including Hans Otto Giese that achieved the first ski ascent of Mount Adams in 1932. He also is listed in the February 2, 1934 *Seattle P.I.* as affiliated with the Commonwealth Ski Club. He taught skiing at the club beginning in 1933,<sup>19</sup> set some of the first slalom courses on behalf of the club in 1934,<sup>20</sup> and raced for the club in the early, serious competitions that began in 1934.<sup>21</sup> Racing for Commonwealth, Hans came in second among 53 entrants at the Paradise Valley slalom race on Mt. Rainier on February 18, 1934.<sup>22</sup> "Hans Grage of the Commonwealth Club" is referred to again in the April 21, 1934 *Seattle P.I.* as "one of the top competitors...,"<sup>23</sup> as speculation mounted about this wild new race called Silver Skis to be held on Mt. Rainier that spring. Hans came in tenth. John Woodward, a very interesting early skier at Snoqualmie Pass, first U.W. ski racer and famous Tenth Mountain

Division ski trainer on Mt. Rainier, credited Hans Grage with teaching him the stem-christie/Arlberg technique at Snoqualmie Pass in the early 1930s, which allowed him to go faster than using the telemark turn that he had learned from the Norwegians at Seattle Ski Club.<sup>24</sup> Later Hans raced for Washington Ski Club (formed in 1934), Seattle Ski Club and Penguin Ski Club; he eventually settled in with the Penguin Ski Club at Stevens Pass, where he died tragically at age 46 while shoveling snow off the Penguin lodge.<sup>25</sup>

**Wolf Bauer**, mentioned above, was another early German-immigrant skier in the area, and the only one of this group who is still alive as I write this. He appears to have settled in early with the Mountaineers rather than with the Turn Verein/Sahalie group; the Mountaineers had the very first lodge at Snoqualmie Pass, active when Wolf came to Seattle in 1925. He immediately



Wolf Bauer, age 98, in 2010 (photo by Glen Drosendahl)

began skiing at the Pass as well as Mt. Rainier. He won the first slalom race on the West Coast, which was set by the Mountaineers at the Meany Lodge in the winter of 1929-30; he used linked telemark turns at that time.<sup>26 27</sup> Wolf finished in fifth place in the first Silver Skis race on Rainier in 1934. He was active in the Mountaineers' Patrol Race between Snoqualmie and Stampede passes, although he claimed that he was too young to compete in the first one run in 1930. While there is no direct written link for Wolf Bauer to Commonwealth or Sahalie ski clubs, he hung out with Giese, Grage and Sanford and must have had some connection to the "German's lodge" at the edge of Commonwealth Creek.

And then there were Teutonic names such as **Turner** and **Throssell**, and non-German names like **Patchell**, **Smith**, **Almaas**, **Nerland** and **Greenway**. But that's another story....

If anyone reading this can fill in any more details or links to information about these early Snoqualmie Pass skiers, please let me know at [galvind53@gmail.com](mailto:galvind53@gmail.com) .

- Dave Galvin

Last updated 3/25/2012



## He Built a Ski



It brought Hans Grage some joy to build a ski. It was a suave thing of hickory. It slid down snow-packed hills, smooth as lard. Since Hans built it, and got joy from the making, it proved his trade. He makes them now, in a factory built by Grage, who is young. Ski builders no older than Hans are rare—in America.

# HANS LIKED SKIING

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*Only 21 Years Old, but He Had Real Ideas*

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# OWNS FACTORY, NOW

**B**EING a bow to Hans Grage, aged 21 years, who determined what he wished to do, then did it, though it necessitated rod-riding, a few rebuffs, and quite a lot of intelligence, Hans is one of the youngest ski manufacturers in the world, but he makes it go.

Hans was born in Weitma, Saxony, September 7, 1910. That establishes his age.

He was requested by Sven Utterstrom, Swedish champion cross-country skier, to build him a pair of skis. That established his ski-making ability.

Five years ago Hans, then a student at Roosevelt High, went to Snoqualmie Pass with the High Y's. He tried skiing, liked it. He returned to Snoqualmie Pass again and again. He's a weekly visitor at the Pass now. He belongs to the Seattle Ski Club.

Wally Burr, veteran ski building expert, taught him to fashion skis.

Then he began building skis . . . by hand. But that was slow work. He decided something should be done about it. Then,

with German resourcefulness, he set out to do it.

He had no money, so he hit the brakeroads on those genteel caravans of freight cars crossing the Rockies. He landed in St. Paul, home of the largest ski factory in the United States.

They had no work for Grage. But he wasn't to be denied. He prowled about the factory, wrote innumerable notes on equipment, planers, trick items designed to whorl out grooves. Then he returned to Seattle and the public library.

Having read every book they had to offer, he sank every dime he had in the purchase of equipment. And then he started making skis.

He's doing it daily now, at 110 E. Boston Street. He has arrived.

*Seattle Daily Times, December 13, 1931, p. 24.*

<sup>1</sup> Don Duncan, 1985, "Naturalized Son - Germany's Loss Was Our Gain in the Case of Hans-Otto Giese," *Seattle Times*, 27 Jan 1985 (obituary) [referenced at <http://www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/notes/ms/mhc-bios.html>].

<sup>2</sup> Lowell Skoog, 2010, *Written in the Snows - The Ski Climbers* (an on-line narrative of Northwest skiing history), <http://written-in-the-snows.net/>.

<sup>3</sup> Duncan, 1985.



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- <sup>4</sup> Lowell Skoog, 2010b, "The Ski Climbers, Part 2," in *Written in the Snows: Across Time on Skis in the Pacific Northwest*, on-line history of Northwest ski mountaineering at: <http://written-in-the-snows.net/ski-climbers.html> .
- <sup>5</sup> Lowell Skoog, 2010b.
- <sup>6</sup> Lowell Skoog, 2010c, "The Ski Climbers – Part 4," in *Written in the Snows: Across Time on Skis in the Pacific Northwest*, on-line history of Northwest ski mountaineering, at: <http://written-in-the-snows.net/ski-climbers4.html> .
- <sup>7</sup> "Ski Team Makes New Trip Record," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 26, 1930, p. 21.
- <sup>8</sup> Lowell Skoog, 2004, Chasing History: Snoqualmie to Stampede Pass – The Mountaineers Patrol Race, on-line history published at: <http://www.alpenglow.org/skiing/patrol-race-2004/index.html> .
- <sup>9</sup> Lowell Skoog, 1992, Taped Interviews with Wolf Bauer, on-line history published at: <http://www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/notes/comm/bauer-wolf.html> .
- <sup>10</sup> Duncan, 1985.
- <sup>11</sup> Corinthian Yacht Club website: [http://www.cycseattle.org/2010\\_specific/awards.html](http://www.cycseattle.org/2010_specific/awards.html) .
- <sup>12</sup> Lowell Skoog, 1984, Ancient Skiers 1904-1984, on-line history published at: <http://www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/notes/misc/ancient-skiers-1984.html> .
- <sup>13</sup> "Donald Fraser" bio, U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame and Museum, referenced at: <http://www.skihall.org/index.php?act=viewDoc&docId=11&id=110> .
- <sup>14</sup> "Snow Piles Up, Skiers Prepare for Long Trips: Instruction Pending," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 28, 1933, p. 18.
- <sup>15</sup> Lowell Skoog, 1984.
- <sup>16</sup> Luanne Pfeiffer, 1994, "The One and Only Gretchen," *Skiing Heritage* Autumn 1994, pages 4-13, on-line at: [http://books.google.com/books?id=ilgEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA9&lpg=PA9&dq=don+fraser+sun+valley&source=bl&ots=VFfhLNeSnw&sig=NOhKSfE49k\\_xaB2SmFiO3mPK75g&hl=en&ei=IW7cTOi1E5O0sAPHucDIaw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=don%20fraser%20sun%20valley&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=ilgEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA9&lpg=PA9&dq=don+fraser+sun+valley&source=bl&ots=VFfhLNeSnw&sig=NOhKSfE49k_xaB2SmFiO3mPK75g&hl=en&ei=IW7cTOi1E5O0sAPHucDIaw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=don%20fraser%20sun%20valley&f=false) .
- <sup>17</sup> For example, in 1937 they each won the McClure Rock to Paradise downhill race; "Don Fraser In Downhill Race Win at Rainier," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 1, 1937, p. 11. In 1938, Don won the men's slalom race at the Tacoma Day championship at Mount Rainier while Gretchen, fifth in the women's slalom, served as queen of the festivities; "Tacoma Day Sees Local Star in Win," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 14, 1938, p. 17.
- <sup>18</sup> "He Built A Ski: Hans Liked Skiing; Owns Factory, Now: Only 21 Years Old, But He Had Real Ideas," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 13, 1931, p. 24.
- <sup>19</sup> "Snow Piles Up, Skiers Prepare for Long Trips: Instruction Pending," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 28, 1933, p. 18.
- <sup>20</sup> "Commonwealth to Stage Slalom," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 25, 1934, p. 14.
- <sup>21</sup> "Cross-Country Runners Ready: They'll Compete Next Sunday in Mount Rainier Spring Snow Sports Carnival; So Will University," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 27, 1932, p. 21.
- <sup>22</sup> "Wiegel Victor in Slalom Race," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 19, 1934, p. 12.
- <sup>23</sup> Lowell Skoog, 2002, Seattle Post-Intelligencer -- Silver Skis Championships, notes from reviewing archived editions of the newspaper, posted at: <http://www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/notes/news/spi/spi-silver-skis.html> .
- <sup>24</sup> Morten Lund, 2008, "John Woodward, An Extraordinary Life," in *Skiing Heritage*, September 2008, pages 31-34, found on-line at: [http://books.google.com/books?id=W1gEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA34&lpg=PA34&dq=john+woodward+skiing+heritage&source=bl&ots=nCQOdThwn2&sig=hCoxFPys6D02y7FYdQKShDmz\\_8w&hl=en&ei=gWncTOydFZP0tgOF2dTIaw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=john%20woodward%20skiing%20heritage&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=W1gEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA34&lpg=PA34&dq=john+woodward+skiing+heritage&source=bl&ots=nCQOdThwn2&sig=hCoxFPys6D02y7FYdQKShDmz_8w&hl=en&ei=gWncTOydFZP0tgOF2dTIaw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=john%20woodward%20skiing%20heritage&f=false) .
- <sup>25</sup> "15 Seattle Skiers Named for National Meet," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 2, 1956, p. 22.
- <sup>26</sup> Lowell Skoog, 1984.
- <sup>27</sup> Glenn Drosendahl, 2010, "Bauer, Wolf G. (b. 1912)," HistoryLink essay, on-line at: [http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.historylink.org/db\\_images/Wolf-Bauer-Winning-Ski-Race-1933.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm%3FDisplayPage%3Doutput.cfm%26file\\_id%3D9440&h=391&w=260&sz=28&tbnid=YNqbRSdFfBqhwm:&tbnh=123&tbnw=82&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwolf%2Bbauer&zoom](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.historylink.org/db_images/Wolf-Bauer-Winning-Ski-Race-1933.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm%3FDisplayPage%3Doutput.cfm%26file_id%3D9440&h=391&w=260&sz=28&tbnid=YNqbRSdFfBqhwm:&tbnh=123&tbnw=82&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwolf%2Bbauer&zoom)

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