

Sahalie Historical Note #5: Party On! – The Early Years

The ski club's purpose is to "encourage skiing and the enjoyment of the outdoors by all of its members, and to promote good fellowship." The club has a long tradition of emphasizing the "good fellowship" part, snow or no snow, year-round. Read on...

An article in the October 20, 1931, *Seattle Daily Times* is headlined, "'Foamy Days' Recalled by German Club: Three Members of Seattle Turnverein Honored by 50 Years of Membership." The old-timers reminisced about "days when beer steins foamed to the brim; when hearty, happy drinking songs rang to the roof, and the cry was 'Prost!' when tables were loaded with cheeses and liverwursts and salty crackers and rye bread...."¹

Ah, the good ol' days. Even despite the hardships of Prohibition, the reminiscence rings true. Sahalie has its origins in fun-loving athletes (gymnasts and tumblers, no less), and continues to this day to debate whether it is a skiing club with a drinking problem or a drinking club with a skiing problem.

The Commonwealth Ski Club began running **tournaments** as soon as it established its lodge at Snoqualmie Pass in the 1931/'32 winter season. The program for the March, 1934 tournament started with a dance the night before and included not only ski jumping and races, but also a "fox chase" (with future Olympian and Ski Hall of Famer Don Fraser as the fox) and other festivities. It began at 9 a.m. with "muscle loosening and ski waxing."²

In February, 1934, newspapers included at least two references to the Commonwealth Ski Club's **annual stag party** to be held off-site at Stampede. "Commonwealth Ski Club leaves the gals at home...."³ "Commonwealth males were catching the 6 p.m. Northern Pacific from King Street Station."⁴

In its first weekend of the 1934/'35 winter season, notes the *Seattle Daily Times* on December 8, 1934, "**Commonwealth to Dance Tonight.**"⁵ And for New Year's 1934, the headline declares: "**Commonwealth and Alpiners to Party.**"⁶ "Commonwealth Ski Club and Washington Alpine Club... are planning New Year's parties – but pity the poor accordion player. One accordion player has been retained. He'll play at one dance one night and another the next – but the New Year's weekend runs from Saturday until Tuesday, so he'll be getting plenty of exercise. Just when the parties will be held doesn't matter. They may be Saturday, or they may be Sunday, or they may be Monday."⁷

A headline in the March 15, 1935 newspaper says, "**Commonwealth Plays.**"⁸ It notes the upcoming "**Carnival**" at Commonwealth Ski Club, the fourth annual event, which would put the

club's first Carnival in 1932! The next day's paper provided more details: "Commonwealth Ski Club's annual carnival in Snoqualmie Pass [will include]... jumping, slalom racing, cross-country, masquerade skiing, a big dinner, [and] a dance tonight...."^{9 10}

The very oldest reference to Sahalie Ski Club (once Commonwealth changed its name) in the local Seattle newspaper, on October 23, 1936, leads with a prophetic headline: "**Sahalie Skiers To Party Tomorrow.**"¹¹ When I first queried "Sahalie" in the digital goldmine of old *Seattle Times* newspapers at the Seattle Public Library, that was the first headline to appear. I thought, Wow, we're on to something here.

The top ski racers of those early days, some of whom started out at Commonwealth/Sahalie, moved on to form Washington Ski Club beginning in 1934, or on to Seattle Ski Club, which had a long tradition of sponsoring expert jumping, cross-country and, later, slalom competitions. While Sahalie continued to sponsor "friendly" races and tournaments, often with the other Snoqualmie ski clubs, and continued to produce some excellent racers, the hard-core racers of the early 1930s such as Don Fraser, Hans Grage and the like appear to have moved on to the more "serious" clubs that were focused on racing. Sahalie remained a club that promoted skiing while also promoting good fellowship – a not too serious group who enjoyed skiing and being in the mountains and having a good time among good friends.

In fact, from word of mouth as well as what I can read between the lines in old newspaper stories, Commonwealth/Sahalie appears to have been somewhat of a singles club in the 1930s. Many long-term member couples started out as singles at the club: Jim and Merle (Throssell) Patchell, Bill and Virginia (Burke) Smith, Bill and Elsa (Engstrom) Turner, Oscar and Phyllis (Whiteside) Maudslien and many others; there were a lot of Sahalie wedding bells ringing in the early 1940s. But back to partying...

Sahalie Ski Club held "**informal**" **dances** at the Sand Point Golf and Country Club at the end of each ski season in the spring, beginning in 1937 and extending into the war years.^{12 13 14} Members of other local ski clubs were invited. The second annual event was referred to as "one of the outstanding dances to top off the ski season."¹⁵ With a notice about a dance that Sahalie Ski Club would host at Sand Point during the war years came the observation, "it is

Sahalie Skiers To Party Tomorrow

The Sahalie Ski Club, formerly Commonwealth Ski Club, meets at the lodge at Summit, Snoqualmie Pass, tomorrow night for the annual Halloween party.

Reservations may be made tomorrow with Jack Oldershaw, Main 3563.

understood they [Sahalie Ski Club members] are as nimble on the dance floor as they are on their skis.”¹⁶

In early 1941, Sahalie was mentioned in the news as hosting a **card party** at the Rainier Chapter, D.A.R., “where cards and other games will be the order of entertainment.”¹⁷

In June, 1941, 50 Sahalie members showed up for the **third annual skiers’ golf tournament** at Mt. Si. Herb Lonseth from Sahalie, commenting on the number of participants, noted, “Maybe they won’t all play golf, but they’ll be there to heckle the rest of the boys and girls. There’s nothing like hearing a barber-shop quartet at the edge of the green while trying to sink a seven-foot putt for a birdie.”¹⁸

Sahalie joined hands with Seattle Ski Club to plan the **first annual Snow Ball** on December 12, 1941, at Highland Spanish Castle.¹⁹ Less than a week after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it became an early victim of the new war concerns and was cancelled.²⁰ This despite newspaper columnist Chick Garrett’s wartime humor, when he advised the day before that “all red-rose noses must be blackened out.”²¹

Jump ahead to 1956. The December *Sahalie Sentinel* includes this entry: “Lars reports that the **Nickelodian** is now at the lodge and all ready to play sweet music for us if only it had a few more records. Those of you who have any records to donate or know where we could get some with a playing speed of 78, please call Lars Nerland KC 5576.”

And in April, 1961 (the Carnival report): “[A] group of teen age boys... dug up the barrel of beer, hauled it over the bank, buried same and carefully erased tracks. Unfortunately they were

under the amused observation of Bud Healey watching from the 3rd floor while putting his young son to bed. Ah well – crime only pays occasionally.” Any confessions out there?

Jim Patchell, Jr., reminisced in a recent conversation that, back-in-the-day, there wasn’t a lot of beer drinking at the club, no kegs and things like that. Members drank hard liquor. The simple reason: the long walk in from the road (over by what is now I-90). It was a lot easier to carry in a fifth of bourbon than to lug glass bottles of 3.2 beer.

The February, 1966, *Sahalie Sentinel* notes: “The board was petitioned by Lynn Gunner and Tom Hopp to extend the teenagers’ curfew so they could stay and dance till twelve at the Summit. They now have until 12:30 to be in bed. All right, you kids, you can show your appreciation by being extra quiet when you come in.”

There are many more stories (not to mention pictures) to uncover of the old days, but it is clear that the founders of this club 81 years ago intended to emphasize the good fellowship part of its purpose statement along with the skiing. Sahalie produced some good skiers over the years; from the get-go the club also had a reputation for producing good times. Let the tradition continue. Maybe Doris and Gerd can help us renew the German drinking songs, the “Prost!” shouts and tables laden with liverwurst – we’ve managed to hang onto the foamy steins!

(I’ll follow later with “Party On - II” for notes about post ‘60s revelry. Share your stories. Plus Tom Hopp suggests that we develop a catalogue of all the Carnival themes, starting with the masquerade skiing and fox hunt of 1934....)

- Dave Galvin

[Updated 3/26/2012]

[As in all of these Historical Notes for the ski club, if something you read here triggers a memory or story, or if you have additions, corrections or comments, let me know at galvind53@gmail.com – I intend to keep updating these articles to make them as whole and accurate as possible.]

SKIS PUT UP FOR SEASON



One of the outstanding dances to top off the ski season is the party members of Sahalie Ski Club will give tomorrow evening at Sand Point Golf and country Club. On the committee for this affair are (pictured left to right): Mrs. Herbert C. Lonseth, Miss Blanche Tepley and Miss Gladys DeLong, chairman of the entertainment committee. These young women are about to put away their skis, for the season is virtually over at Snoqualmie Pass, where the club's lodge is located.

From *Seattle Daily Times*, April 28, 1938, p. 12. Mrs. Herbert C. Lonseth went by the first name, Aurelia.

¹ "'Foamy Days' Recalled by German Club: Three Members of Seattle Turnverein Honored by 50 Years of Membership," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 20, 1931, p. 3.

² "Legion Trying Paradise Snow; Two At Summit -- Ski Programs on Tap Today," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 18, 1934, pp. 23, 25.

³ "Skiing Goes On; Paradise Folk to Hold Slalom," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 15, 1934, p. 16.

⁴ "Cross-Country Skiing on Schedule; Paradise Offers Enlarged Program," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 17, 1934, p. 7.

⁵ "Commonwealth To Dance Tonight," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 8, 1934, p. 12.

⁶ "Commonwealth and Alpiners to Party," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 23, 1934, p. 22.

⁷ "Commonwealth and Alpiners..."

⁸ "Commonwealth Plays," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 15, 1935, p. 28.

⁹ "Ski Pulse Quick," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 16, 1935, p. 12.

¹⁰ "Seattle Sports Program Today: Skiing," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 17, 1935, p. 19.

¹¹ "Sahalie Skiers To Party Tomorrow," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 23, 1936, p. 34.

¹² "Novice Races, Then Dinners, Claim Skiers," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 25, 1937, p. 21.

¹³ "Tulip Garden Motif At Dancing Club Party," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 25, 1938, p. 8.

¹⁴ "Ski Dance," *Seattle Daily Times*, May 5, 1939, p. 13.

¹⁵ "Skis Put Up for Season," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 28, 1938, p. 12.

¹⁶ "Listening," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 3, 1943, p. 9.

¹⁷ "Card Party Tomorrow," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 6, 1941, p. 16.

¹⁸ "Ah! Snow Birdies: Skiers Prep for Golf Tourney," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 22, 1941, p. 8.

¹⁹ "Snow Ball Coming Up," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 12, 1941, p. 25.

²⁰ "Snowball Dance Cancelled," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 12, 1941, p. 14.

²¹ Chick Garrett, 1941, "Sitzmarks...and Remarks," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 11, 1941, p. 31.