

## **Skiing on Selborne Chase – The Evolution of a Hill**

In the last month, in partnership with the Perinton Historical Society, I have met with hundreds of local fourth grade students on visits to the Fairport Historical Museum on Perrin Street. During these field trips, I impress upon our young citizens that, for over two hundred years, people have lived their lives here. Pioneers and settlers, farmers and shopkeepers traveled many of the roads we share every day. And even in our newer neighborhoods, I tell the kids that “something happened here”. A good example was the subject of my most recent column, regarding a World War II observation post, located where the Hickory Ridge subdivision was subsequently built in the early 1970s. But these big hills had another life, after World War II, and before development as a residential community. The extraordinarily hilly former farm land was home to a skiing facility known as Hickory Ridge.

J.D. Whiting was born in Pittsford in 1918, and as a young man, helped build the original rope tow and ski jump at Powder Mills Park. In the late 1940s, he leased land along Pittsford Palmyra Road, the same land with an enormous hill, where just a few years earlier the Air Warning Service observation post was located. J.D. Whiting then set about building a ski slope. The skiing facilities included two rope tows, and illumination for night skiing, a novelty at the time. There was even a pond for ice skating. A small warming hut with a kerosene stove provided relief from the cold weather, where skiers could enjoy a cup of coffee or hot cocoa. Relief of a different sort was found in an ice-cold outhouse.



*The rope tow pulls skiers to the top of the Hickory Ridge slope, circa 1950s.*

Sue Boardman, the daughter of J.D. Whiting, shared with me her recollections of the ski facility her dad created. She recalled that the rope tows were put in motion by an old gasoline engine, salvaged from a wartime vehicle. It drove a continuous loop of one inch diameter rope strung on wheels. “To ride, you stepped into the tracks parallel to the rope and placed one hand ahead and one behind your back and gently squeezed until you started to move up the hill. It was possible to wring a great deal of water out of a length of rope by the end of the day.”



*Skiing at Hickory Ridge, circa 1950s.*

Sue recalls that the ski enthusiasts at Hickory Ridge had a special bond, and people pitched in to help in many ways. “Grooming the slope was a manual process and even paid patrons participated. You would ride to the top of the hill and side step down using your skis to pack the snow as you went. Far fewer people skied in those days so that those who did became a tight-knit community. Everyone felt a great affinity for those who shared our strange pastime.”

The property owner eventually sold the land on which the ski center was built to developers, who built a residential subdivision with the familiar name, Hickory Ridge. I’m sure many of the homeowners who travel up and down the enormous hill on a road named Selborne Chase often think to themselves, “What a great place this would be for a ski slope.”