

The history of Granlibakken Tahoe continued:

The organization of the Lake Tahoe Ski Club in 1929 firmly established skiing in the area. It was started by such great skiers as Jack Starratt, Carl Bechdolt, Joe Henry, and Doug Smith. (To the present day, the club has had more National Champions and Olympians than any other ski club in America. Today, the club's Kristin Krone and Bob Ormsby are both Olympians and World Cup participants.)

"The first meeting of the club was held at the Tahoe Tavern," recalls Squaw Valley resident Patricia Fox, who was six years old at that time. Her mother, Marie Henry, was elected secretary. "It was quite a big deal. Everyone brought homemade refreshments. There were around 30 people there, and they elected officers. Norman Mayfield was elected president, and Robert Watsin Vice President."

With the Olympic Hill Ski Jump established and the support of the Lake Tahoe Ski Club insured, the Tahoe Chamber of Commerce bid for the 1931 National Jumping and Cross-country Races. Support for the bid also came from the newly formed California Ski Association (now the Far West Ski Association) directed by Auburn Ski Club founder Wendell Robie. The Chamber's bid was accepted. But within a year, the Tahoe Tavern owners found themselves bankrupt, and they asked the Lake Tahoe Ski Club to take over preparations for the championships.

The newly formed club responded, and the meet was a success. Local skiers Carl Bechdolt, Bob Mandeville, and Joe Henry participated. Marie Henry came in fourth in a field of 17 in cross-country. In one race, called a "Dauerlauf", covering 30 miles, from Truckee to Brockway Ridge to the Tahoe Tavern, Bob Mandeville came in third, with a time of six hours, 16 minutes, 45 seconds. Alf Engen set the jump record on Olympic Hill with a jump of 210 feet. Sig Ulland jumped 218 feet but fell. First place, however, went to Sig Vettestad of the Auburn Ski Club. Vettestad became California's first Ski Jumping Champion.

Also held on the hill during the winter of 1931 were tryouts for California and Nevada skiers competing for the 1932 Winter Olympic Team. The next year on February 26, 27 and 28, 1932, the United States Championships were held at Olympic Hill, under the auspices of the Lake Tahoe Area Council, which included Lake Tahoe and Auburn Ski Clubs. Many in the council served as officials for the championships, including Tim O' Hanrahan, Dr. R.S. Emer, Bert A. Cassidy, Wendell, Robie, Harold, Lee and Alex Laing - all working under the direction of council resident Norman R. Mayfield of Tahoe City.

Throughout the '30s, the ski hill, under the direction of the Lake Tahoe Ski Club, was often chosen as the site for contests and exhibitions - among them the 1936 California State Championships and the 1939 National Ski Association meet. During this period, the ski area attracted attention in the West for the challenge of its 60-meter jump and the beauty and solitude of its setting. Not until after World War II, though, did the hill become a popular recreational ski resort, through the efforts of a retired sea captain and Norwegian ski jumper Kjell "Rusty" Rustad. Rustad had resigned from his job in the Maritime Commission in San Francisco and moved to the Tahoe area because it reminded him of his home in Norway.

At this time, the only operating ski areas were Soda Springs and Sugar Bowl on Donner Summit, and White Hills, atop Spooner Summit on Highway 50. Hoping to establish a new ski area, Rustad settled on the Olympic Hill area, although he realized it would take much work to develop.

"My husband saw his dream come true when he first explored the pretty canyon where Granlibakken is now located", remembers Jeannette Rustad, who spent two decades with her husband at the small ski resort. "By choosing that spot, Rusty made a dream come true for the community - he offered Tahoe City residents skiing, in their own back yard."

After securing a land use permit from the Forest Service and leasing the top portion of the ski hill, Rustad cleared the hill he had staked out for his ski slope, and then installed a 450-foot rope to the top of it. The original warming hut, known as the Roundhouse, built by Tahoe Tavern, had collapsed in 1938 under heavy snow, so with the help of his Finnish friend, Bert Brolund, Rustad built three log quarters for overnight guests, and a day lodge.

"As the hill was cleared of trees, the bark had to be peeled off them before they could be used for building the log hut," recalls Jeannette. "Much credit is due to Bert for this; he had earned this trade in his native Finland. The original idea was to use logs for the other two buildings, but it became too arduous task. They used ship-lap siding for those, the easier way out". The only road leading toward the resort went north of Rustad's property and connected with Highway 89 at the site of Spitsen Lumber. Rustad turned for help to Wayne Poulsen, who was pursuing his own dream of establishing a ski area at Squaw Valley. "Rusty was quite a character," says Poulsen. Both men had worked for Pan American Airways, Poulsen as a pilot and instructor; Rustad as a navigator. He had a lot of personality, that fellow; I liked him. He decided he was going to build a ski area and nothing was going to stop him. He cleared that hill himself, built a log cabin, and a bridge to get over the creek."

"I had bought several World War II landing crafts called weasels. They had been used in the Pacific theatre on the beaches, but were great for land use over snow. I was using them to bring friends and possible investors into Squaw Valley from the highway. Rusty had the same problem getting people into his ski hill, so I rented him one of my weasels."

In the winter of 1947, Rustad began running skiers to his resort, which he had named "Granlibakken" in honor of a ski area where he had skied as a boy in Norway. Granlibakken soon became a popular ski spot and remained so even after Squaw Valley opened in 1949. Protected from heavy winds and strong sun, the resort was the first place receiving enough snow for skiing in the fall and the last place to lose its good snow in the spring. Home to the Lake Tahoe Ski Club and many local residents, it became known as a friendly and fun resort.

"When I was growing up, everybody, it seemed, had learned to ski there," remembers Dick Nielsen, an alumni of the Lake Tahoe Ski Club and member of the U.S. Ski Team in downhill in the late '60s. "It wasn't the easiest of slopes for a beginner to learn on, but it got you going on skis right away. Everybody ski jumped as much as raced back then, and the jump was just as popular as the ski hill. A lot of really good skiers and racers came out of Granlibakken."

With the help of the Lake Tahoe Ski Club, a small jump was constructed alongside the wide slope, and in 1952, Rustad and the Lake Tahoe Ski Club hosted the Junior National Jumping and Cross-Country Races.

Granlibakken continued to change. In 1953, Rustad relinquished acreage across the road from the ski hill to UC Berkeley's International House, whose volunteers built a lodge there. In 1958, this area was sold to UC Alumni for use as a year-round education and recreation center, and the alumni enlarged the original building to sleep 150 people, and added a dining room and swimming pool. In 1968 the property was sold to Hugh Miller, a New York publisher who christened his new resort the Four Seasons at Lake Tahoe. He enlarged the area and built its first condos, but, in 1976, went bankrupt. What had not changed through the years of success and hardship was the small ski hill and the friendly camaraderie found in the great outdoors. "We made up our minds to operate the ski hill when we took over, partly, I suppose, for historic reasons," explains current owner Bill Parson. "We purchased grooming machines and provide rentals, lessons, and a snowplay area. Though small, it remains a secluded and beautiful surrounding."

Granlibakken's snowplay area is open every day; the ski hill, on weekends and holidays. One Poma and rope tow transport skiers to the large ski slope that continues to survive, evoking historic and treasured memories.