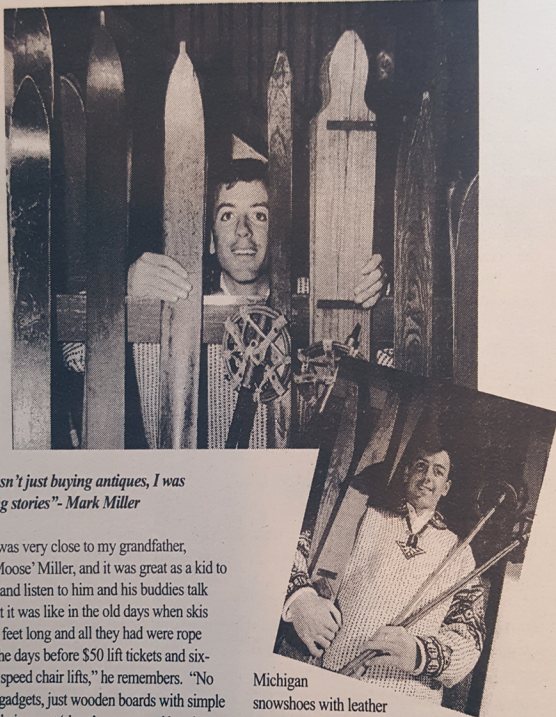


mark miller's got A FEW GOOD OL' TIPS

by Corinne Humphrey



"I wasn't just buying antiques, I was buying stories" - Mark Miller

"I was very close to my grandfather, Gordon 'Moose' Miller, and it was great as a kid to sit around and listen to him and his buddies talk about what it was like in the old days when skis were 8-10 feet long and all they had were rope bows. In the days before \$50 lift tickets and six-pack high speed chair lifts," he remembers. "No high-tech gadgets, just wooden boards with simple bindings, their secret 'dope' or wax, and bamboo poles. Skiing was very pure in those days. It was just becoming popular as a sport when the idea of using skis and snowshoes for something other than basic winter transportation was a new concept."

Growing up in New England, Mark Miller's introduction to winter sports came at an early age. He joined the rest of the family in their love of the outdoors, and by age six, he had strapped on his first pair of boards. He was well on his way to becoming an expert skier and eventually began to spend his winters in Park City, Utah as a ski instructor for the Park City Mountain Resort.

An original pair of hand-crafted wooden skis from pre-chairlift days, an heirloom from his grandfather, sparked his interest in antique skis and snowshoes. Mark educated himself on ski history and early ski and snowshoe manufacturing with frequent trips to the New England Ski Museum in Franconia, NH. He also dug deep into the annals of old outdoor catalogues, and was particularly intrigued by the 10th Mountain Division troops, a special fighting unit trained in "ski warfare" during World War II. The Scandinavian's introduced the sport of

Michigan snowshoes with leather laces found a new home over Mark's fireplace, and hand carved wooden skis, some with just a leather strap for the binding, adorned a blank wall. When house guests kept admiring his collection of winter sports memorabilia, the idea formed to start a business.

"I wasn't just buying antiques, I was buying stories," Mark says. "Some of the people I met were the original owners of the equipment like a Swede in northern Maine who had performed his game warden duties on skis before the era of 4WD vehicles. Or another who schussed a few miles through the woods late at night to get a doctor for his pregnant wife. Many times I was invited inside for a cup of cider and a glance at worn old photo albums with black and white images of local winter carnivals and races."

That fall, Mark took a truckload of the skis and snowshoes back with him to Park City. Since skiing and snowshoeing were both introduced as sports in the eastern part of the United States, these relics were harder to find out West and were more expensive. His first

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The Scandinavian's introduced the sport of skiing to the United States in the 1800s, and in 1888 the Excelsior Ski Company sold its first 50 pair of skis. Eventually Martin Strand became the most prolific manufacturer of skis, most of which in 1896 were made of Norway pine. Soaked, steamed, and bent into shape, the skis were hand trimmed and dipped in varnish before leaving what was then the largest ski factory on earth.

By 1912 many smaller companies had jumped into the act, some as a sideline to their other products such as pianos and canoe oars. Over time, as skis were made from numerous varieties of wood, it became clear that those made from the straightest grain allowed the fastest skiing.

Keeping the skier and the ski together in the beginning, early bindings were simple leather straps tacked to the boards. Oh how things have changed. Experiments with pickle jar parts and old tires eventually evolved into the 'Breakaway' or 'Beartrap' binding, similar to today's telemark binding. Boots and poles also made similar progressions from the early days of simplicity with leather and bamboo to the molded thermoplastics and high-tech alloys of today.

Mark started out as a collector, driving the backroads of New Hampshire and Vermont in the summer, stopping at antique fairs and country stores to find items to decorate his home. Old

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As so many of the antique skis were shaped from various woods, they also became experiments in longevity, always searching for a means to keep the grain from splitting down the middle. In the photos you can see skis possessed an 'apple' or 'square' tip, which was first used with maple skis to prevent them from splitting as often happened with a 'broad tip' design. The apple tip became a fad for all skis. Another design that leaves its mark on modern skis is the 'ridge top' or raised top design employed to shed snow off of boots and for stability.

In the following years, Mark traveled in ever-widening circles and up into Canada, amassing one of the largest collections of wooden skis in the country. Some of Mark's unusual items include the aluminum ski briefly manufactured in the 1940's, and even a pair of skis made from a picket fence. The Mark Miller Collection also contains a wide variety of snowshoes, including Alaskan, Beavertail and Ojibwa styles.

"It's definitely been a great history lesson."

For more information on the Mark Miller Collection, contact Mark Miller: info@antiqueskis.com or www.antiqueskis.com, or phone (888) 753-7807.



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