## The Salt Lake Tribune

Park City
resident built a
trade selling
antique skis after
inheriting a set
from his grandfather



PARK CITY - As tourists walk into Southwest Indian Traders, a popular stop on Main Street, they are bombarded by jewelry display cases dripping with silver and turquoise, scenic Western photographs and rustic mountain furniture.

Discerning a single item is no easy task. Yet visitors clad in the newest winter clothing and carrying shopping bags full of the latest high-tech gear immediately gravitate to the oldest merchandise in the shop-Park City resident Mark Miller's antique ski collection.

Miller, whose collection began as a hobby 12 years ago in the White Mountains of New Hampshire with a pair of his grandfather's skis, now owns one of the largest collections in the country. He has amassed more than 1,000 pieces, including skis, snowshoes, sleds and Dutch wooden skates. the 35-year-old Park City ski instructor sells items to customers as far away as Australia and Germany.

"I never thought about making a living off of this, just because it was a hobby and a passion," Miller says. "But then I found out that people were not just decorating their second homes and condos with them, they were decorating their primary homes."

Growing up, Miller's favorite activity, aside from skiing, snow-shoeing in the mountains and ice skating across frozen lakes, was listening to his grandfather talk about the old days of skiing.

"I remember he would tell stories around the dining room table about collecting maple syrup and skiing and snowshoeing, or about village races where they only had one pair of skis for everyone to use," Miller recalls. "I was just fascinated by all the stories."

So when Gordon "Moose" Miller passed away in 1989, and Mark inherited his grandfather's wooden skis and his snowshoes (used by the 10th Mountain Division in World War II), he proudly hung them in his home.

"My neighbors saw that I had them displayed," Miller says, "and they ended up bringing me their antiques that were sitting in their closet collecting dust."

Often better than the antiques themselves were the tales that accompanied them. Miller, then 23, set out to find more stories, and hopefully, through collecting them, keep the history of skiing alive. He scoured the New England countryside, going to flea markets, yard sales, and auctions collecting equipment and simultaneously becoming a ski history buff.

Although he moved to Park City in 1990, he still spent summers in New Hampshire helping at the family summer camp and adding to his ever-growing collection. In 1994, Miller reluctantly sold his first pair of skis, not because he needed the money, but because with 50 pairs in his collection, his garage was overflowing.

Soon, he couldn't keep up with the orders.

Being a part-time ski instructor, full time manager of a burger joint and part-time antique dealer only worked for so long.

"Something had to give," Miller says. "I'm glad it was [the burger joint]."

Eight years later, with his skis selling in five different stores in Park City plus a few in Colorado and California, the trend is still hot. Mike Conti, owner of Mountain Timber Furnishings, has been selling Miller's collection for the past three years.

"They've been popular since the day we got them," Conti says. "We sell almost a piece a day. Their is a lot of junk out there in the market, but Mark's quality is incredible."

Having exhausted much of the supply in New England, most of Miller's antiques now come from Europe. His latest find? Two hundred and fifty pairs of 10th Mountain Division snowshoes that had been sitting in a barn in Turkey since World War II.

One part businessman and two parts collector, Miller is just as interested in passing on the stories he has heard from "old-timers" that have accompanied most of the skis he has found in New England as he is in selling them. When he can, he attaches a plaque to the ski with the original owners name and writes the owner's story on the card.

He is thrilled to tell customers about past technological experiments such as the square tips on some of the skis, fashioned to keep the Maple wood from splitting, or the ski tips made from a wooden cheese wheel cut in half, bear-trap bindings used in the 1930s and whatever other makeshift equipment he has come across.

"New Englanders recycle everything," he chuckles as he holds up a pair of bindings made out of a horse bridle, and another pair held together with bailing twine.

Just like any other collector, though, "There are skis that I will never part with," Miller says, such as the pair of skis that are essentially fence slats made in the 1800s, or the metal skis made by TEY manufacturing in 1948, one of the first 1,000 ever made.

Pieces that are for sale range in price from \$80 to \$350. Miller also has a website, www.antiqueskis.com.

His collection has evolved into a sizable commodity.

"It gets harder and harder every year [to find antiques]," he says. "and eventually it's going to dry up."

In that sense, this may be a dead-end job, but Miller's goal will carry him far into the future.

"I just want to have people appreciate the history of skiing and to keep that history alive."