

1932-1980

Lake Placid revives its past

by C. Robert Paul



C. Robert Paul, Jr. has been a member of the United States Olympic Committee staff for eight years, particularly responsible for communications and publications.

We are extremely grateful for his constant and helpful collaboration, and especially for this history of Lake Placid which is an Olympic town for the second time.

Promptly at ten o'clock on the morning of 4th February 1932, members of the International Olympic Committee and the Lake Placid Organizing Committee were presented to Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, representing the President of the United States, outside the Olympic Stadium which was also the scene of the speed skating contests. Thirteen months later to the day, Franklin D. Roosevelt was to be inaugurated President of the United States.

Thus a group of dedicated sportsmen and sportswomen climaxed an effort that dated back to 1905 when the officials of the private Lake Placid Club decided to keep open one small clubhouse all winter. At that time a few hardy souls tried the snow in the Adirondack Mountains and were initiated into the thrills and excitement of winter sports. Thus started the annual winter hegira to the snow-covered and forest peaks.

In his address, Governor Roosevelt said: "We are glad to welcome to this nation our sister nations as guests of the American people and of the State of New York and I proclaim open the 11th Olympic Winter Games, celebrating the Xth Olympiad of the modern era."

John A. (Jack) Shea played a prominent role on Opening Day in 1932 and for the XIIIth Olympic Winter Games he is a member of the Organizing Committee as the Supervisor for the Town of North Elba, within which lies the Village of Lake Placid.

For Opening Day 1932 everything was in readiness and even the weather, which had been anything but favorable in the days immediately preceding the opening, dawned bright and cold.

Lake Placid Village was gaily decked out, befitting a host to the world and 17 nations participating in the programme. The flags of the competing nations ringed the stadium. Great hotels and clubs, cottages, private homes and business houses reflected the theme of the day.

After Governor Roosevelt proclaimed open the Games, Mr. Shea, who had been selected to take the Olympic oath, stepped in front of the massed flags of nations, accompanied by the USA standard bearer, William Fiske of the bobsleigh team. Shea raised his right hand and repeated the Olympic oath as the other 363 athletes raised their right hands in token of assent.

The entire opening ceremony lasted a little more than thirty minutes. Following a short intermission, the speed skaters were drawn for the heats of the 500 metres and Shea was assigned to the first heat. In deference to the USA, the International Skating Union acceded to the request of the Organizing Committee to conduct the speed skating contests in conformity with North American rules in which skaters raced "pack style" inasmuch as the world speed skating championships were to be conducted several weeks later on the same ice under international rules where the skaters race against the clock.

In the first heat, Shea finished second to Stack of Canada. The first two in each of the three heats were advanced to the finals. And in the final Shea, who had grown up in Lake Placid, skated to victory over Evensen. This was the second time in three Winter Olympic Games competitions that the USA produced the champion. In the 1st Olympic Winter



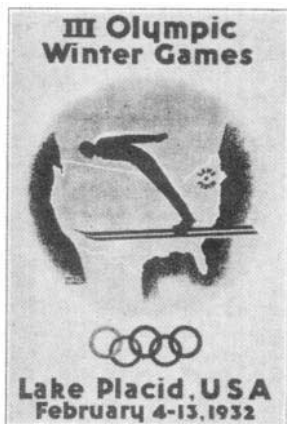
John A. Jack Shea



Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt (centre) declares the IIIrd Winter Games open. On the left are Comte Henri de Baillet-Latour, President of the IOC, and William May Garland, IOC member for the United States.



Olympic Poster



Irving Jaffee



Games the winner was Charles Jewtraw, also a native of the Village of Lake Placid.

Mr. Shea was not finished with competition. The following morning he reported to the Stadium for the heats of the 1,500 metres where he was drawn for the second heat. Although Mr. Shea's time in winning the second heat was the slowest of the three heat winners, in the final that same day he skated to his second gold medal by defeating Hurd of Canada. This final consisted of a six-man field with three each from the United States and Canada.

Suffice to say, the United States made a clean sweep of the speed skating contests as Irving Jaffee sped over the glistening ice to record victories in both the 5,000 and 10,000 metres races.

Lake Placid was proud to have been selected by the International Olympic Committee at Lausanne on 10th April 1929. The selection was made unanimously after presentations had been made by seven American cities, Montreal and Oslo. The award was made to Lake Placid because of its pre-eminent standing as a winter sports resort, its climate and terrain, its existing sports facilities, and its experience in staging winter sports. The Village of Lake Placid had been the focal point in the eastern part of the United States as a winter sports capital since 1905.

While winter sports had been accepted in Europe for almost half a century before the turn of the century, America knew little or nothing about the games and contests until Lake Placid launched its programme shortly after the turn of the century.

Significantly, although Lake Placid was favored by nature with a climate and terrain ideally suited for winter sports, it was several decades after this area had won world renown as a summer resort that anyone thought of inaugurating a winter sports programme. Actually, in the United States, outdoor sports from Christmas to March were unheard of in this area.

The villagers of Lake Placid almost literally had to teach winter visitors how to enjoy these special sports—and they had to be given specially constructed facilities to make their enjoyment complete. In the quarter of a century between the introduction of winter

sports and the opening of the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games, almost three quarters of a million dollars had been invested in facilities.

With two lakes in the village, it was natural that speed skating should enjoy early success with winter visitors. Both Mirror Lake and Lake Placid were the scene of ice skating and speed skating races. The first sanctioned speed skating programme in the eastern part of the United States was conducted at Lake Placid in 1918.

Organized skiing competition at the Lake Placid Club dates from 1921. While ski-running had been enjoyed for several years, the first cross-country ski race was held on 22nd February 1921.

Ice hockey was also an important team sport here. But until the 1930-1931 season, all games were played outdoors. Then with the completion of the Olympic Arena, the games moved indoors and gained added popularity.

The two- and four-man bobsleigh events brought new thrills to America. The first bobsled run was constructed in 1919 and was a prototype for the Olympic bobsleigh run at Mt. Van Hoevenberg. The largest crowds of the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games were attracted to the bobsleigh events with 14,000 watching the morning run in the four-man event. The run had been opened on Christmas Day, 1930.

Mention must be made of the four organizations which played prominent roles in the development of winter sports in this area: the Lake Placid Club, dating back to 1905; the Lake Placid Skating Association; its successor, the Lake Placid Athletic Club; and the Snow Birds of the Lake Placid Club.

Perhaps the driving force behind the organization of the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games was Dr. Godfrey Dewey, himself an ardent and capable winter sportsman. As early as 1928 Dr. Dewey made a trip to Europe to inspect and assess the winter sports facilities in France and Switzerland. Also at the IInd Olympic Winter Games in St. Moritz, Dr. Dewey (he was leader of the USA skiing team) studied every detail in the organization of the Games with the thought of interesting the Village of Lake Placid as a possible host for the Winter Olympic Games

in 1932. It was his conclusion that Lake Placid possessed the climate, the terrain and the requisite experience in staging winter sports and could match the highest standards established by European winter sports resorts.

Quite naturally when Dr. Dewey presented his ideas, many residents were skeptical that there was more than a remote possibility that a village of fewer than 4,000 could entertain the world four years hence. Dr. Dewey opened his drive to secure the backing of the community in a speech before the Kiwanis Club in March 1928. Less than two weeks later Dr. Dewey had secured the approval of the Chamber of Commerce. From then on it was hard work.

The legislature of the State of New York, by unanimous vote in January 1929, supported the bid of Lake Placid to seek the Games. The legislature of the State of New York played a key role in underwriting the finances for the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games.

A review of the finances of the Games indicates a total expenditure of \$1,189,635.59 with offsetting appropriations of \$600,000 from the State of New York, \$50,000 from the County of Essex and a bond issue of \$200,000. Net gate receipts for the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games were \$93,415.

In the four-man bobsleigh races, the gold medal no. 1 USA team which clocked the fastest time in three of the four heats for the seven bobsleds contained Edward P. Eagan, a student at Yale University, who had been the 1920 Olympic light heavyweight boxing champion at Antwerp.

Sonja Henie of Norway captivated the figure skating patrons with a superb performance in winning the second of her three Olympic gold medals. She secured a first place rating from each of the seven judges. In the men's individual competition the victor was Karl Schafer, Austria, by a convincing margin over Gillis Grafstrom, Sweden, Olympic champion in the first two Olympic Winter Games.

Andrée and Pierre Brunet of France won the gold medals in the pairs competition. They moved to the United States and Mr. Brunet is still actively engaged as a trainer in the sport. He also served one term as President

of the New York Chapter of the US Olympians.

If there was any disappointment in the competitions at Lake Placid it would have been in the ice hockey competition. Early information indicated that there would be a record entry vieing for honors. However, unprecedented economic conditions all over the world cut the number of entries to four: Canada, Germany, Poland and the United States. Two "invited" teams were added to spread out the programme: McGill University of Canada and Lake Placid. Six of the games were played in the Olympic Arena and six outdoors. Actually the gold medal was decided shortly after the conclusion of the Opening Ceremony. Canada scored a 2-1 victory in extra time over the United States and by that margin won the gold medal since the teams later battled to a 2-2 draw on the final day. This game was played immediately following the Closing Ceremony.

At a dinner in honor of the Governor of New York on the eve of the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games, Dr. Dewey had said: "Fundamentally the effect of the Olympic Winter Games is changing the psychological attitudes of the general public of the United States towards winter sports. Until very recently, the term "winter sports" in the metropolitan press of this country had meant chiefly indoor sports.

"Surely the term "winter sports" should stand first of all for the sports which only winter makes possible, including especially the invigorating sports of the Olympic programme."

In the official report of the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games Organizing Committee the following concluding statements appear:

"The Lake Placid Games have given a tremendous impetus to winter sports in the United States. Other communities are finding that snow and ice are among their greatest assets for sport and recreation.

"It is our hope that through the holding of the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games in the United States the general interest of participation in winter sports on this side of the Atlantic will be set ahead by at least a decade, if not a generation!"

Hosting the IIIrd Olympic Games proved to be the catalyst for winter sports in the

United States in general, and spurred the villagers of Lake Placid on to an expanded programme. No community in the United States, perhaps in the world, has conducted more national and international championships in the intervening half century.

Lake Placid has nursed fond hopes that the International Olympic Committee would look favorably upon its facilities and would one day give its assent to rekindle the Olympic flame in the centre of the Village yet again. Thus when the Session of the International Olympic Committee at Vienna selected Lake Placid as the host for the XIIIth Olympic Winter Games these hopes and dreams were realized.

Still a village, not a large sprawling resort catering to hordes of skiers and other recreational winter sports devotees, Lake Placid has remained the focal point of international competitions, including the site for several world bobsleigh championships, as well as important national competitions. As recently as 1972 Lake Placid hosted the Winter Universiad following the XIth Olympic Winter Games.

The federal, state and local governments are solidly behind the Village of Lake Placid in planning for the XIIIth Olympic Winter Games. The citizens of the area are enthusiastic about an opportunity to host the world's finest athletes. But those who may have attended the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games simply won't recognize the new and improved facilities being developed for 1980:

The alpine skiing events will be held in the Whiteface Mountain area.

Mount van Hoevenberg Park will be the centre of bobsleigh and luge races, the cross-country races and the biathlon event.

A refrigerated 400 metres speed skating rink will be the site of the 1977 world speed skating championships.

A new field house (8,000 to 10,000 capacity) will have two ice rinks.

The 70 metres and 90 metres jumps will be designed to meet the specifications of the International Ski Federation.

A modern Olympic village, consisting of 12 separate buildings, will be erected on a site near the centre of the Village of Lake Placid.

The Organizing Committee has promised living accommodation for up to 100,000 persons in the Lake Placid area with an additional 50,000 persons to be accommodated within one hour's driving time of the Olympic Games' site.

The International Olympic Committee is highly desirous of having the Games staged within a relatively small area. Never before has a more "compact" area been offered. All skating and ice hockey events will take place in the village centre. The ski jumping hills are within walking distance of the village centre (1 1/2 miles or approximately 3 km.). The facilities for bobsleigh, luge, cross-country skiing and biathlon in Mount van Hoevenberg Park are a short 5 1/2 miles or 9 km. from the village centre.

In the last half century the Olympic Winter Games have "come of age". How well this saying will be illustrated when the winter sportsmen and sportswomen of the world gather in the Village of Lake Placid in the heart of the Adirondack Mountains, only a short distance from Montreal, the site of the Games of the XXIst Olympiad, and the largest city of the United States, New York City.

For those who may have been unable to attend the IIIrd Olympic Winter Games, they won't want to miss the Olympic Winter Games in 1980 as the most experienced winter sports leaders in all the world bid a cordial welcome to one and all.

C.R.P.



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